

Visual Post-Folklore in Post-Soviet Space-Time

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The following investigation¹ is an attempt to inscribe new media forms of mass communication into a historical and cultural context. Or, perhaps, vice versa, to observe how the new media is conquered by and stuffed with traditional, even archaic, content, how this newest technical milieu represents itself through the most rigid cultural devices.

This work is part of a continuing research project that is studying how general patterns of ideological persuasion and propaganda are absorbed and transformed in mass culture, and primarily in mass visual culture, in the modern Russian-speaking world. In this perspective it was important to concentrate first on considering totalitarian propaganda mechanisms and strategies from the point of view of their structure, working algorithms and typology, and then apply these schemes to observe them in new Russian media (primarily advertising and web culture). The proposed set of tasks is closely connected to the theme of my spring 2005 Fulbright research project *Mnemonic and Persuasive Mechanisms in Avant-garde Art* and my more enduring scholarly interest that can be formulated as *Visual Culture of Socialism, Authentic and Reinterpreted*, which is planned to result in a vocabulary of the visual culture (chiefly of the children's subculture) of Leonid Brezhnev's time. The formula *Visual Culture of Socialism, Authentic and Reinterpreted* was also used for the session name within the *Place and Location* conference in September 2004.

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1. The school textbook as an emblematic mnemonic device

The existence and survival of each society is impossible without certain mechanisms which underlie its memory, communication and interpretation processes. One of the most basic mechanisms is the emblem, a specific unit of semiotic translation which contains both visual and verbal elements. The emblem phenomenon and its social, and more general cultural functions have been investigated elsewhere (Grigorjeva 1997a, 1997b, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2000d). The main theoretical conclusion of the investigation is that the emblem forms a mnemonic unit, a ready-made block for storing information. Thus we can consider the emblem as a form of machinery for persuasive, educational and propaganda purposes. The emblem has a strong tendency to replace 'reality' with its ready-made mnemonic blocks and to replace human mentality with a combinative, sometimes even ritual, game using these blocks. The functional structure of the emblem determines its paramount usage in societies where the gap between a 'real' state of affairs and its interpretation tends to be treated as a point of criminality. The Soviet Union provides the best example of this kind of semiotic situation, in which emblematisation gains its totality, and totalitarianism itself becomes a sort of emblem. The obliteration of the visual component in this situation leads to a misinterpretation of the cultural mentality of the period.

The main interest of the present study is the post-Soviet period, which I believe to be determined (sometimes apparently, sometimes implicitly) by an emblematic mentality formed earlier. We start by considering a more distant historic period, because this mentality or mass consciousness was directed and formed in Soviet secondary schools through specific multilateral emblematic media, i.e. school textbooks. This mnemonic and persuasive tool was used across the entire country and it is responsible for a particular configuration of the collective emblematic memory of several generations.

In Soviet textbooks, illustration was one of the most important instruments of the total emblematisation. Illustrations seem to be facultative, not obligatory, in comparison with the official primacy of verbal text. Still they constitute the very basis of the mechanism of persuasion and verification (or falsification), and thus create an inevitable, natural part of the consciousness, and especially unconsciousness, of all inhabitants of the Soviet Empire. My particular interest lies in studying works of classical visual art used for illustration in textbooks, because they explicate the most essential falsifying function of the emblem mechanism.

Classical art is so authoritative that it is supposed to be beyond any criticism, and this is what makes it so advantageous for persuasion. 'Big' names and works of art were used as a guarantee of quality and truth of verbal statements, as well as for verification of the whole system of Soviet education. On the other hand, each visual piece placed in the textbook context automatically obtained the status of a classic. So it was evidently a system of self-authorisation that was inserted, in an automatic regime, into the minds of children and teenagers. It is well known that childhood memory is the most absorbing and stable, in respect to visual objects in particular.

These art texts set up the collective visual memory (visual culture) of several generations, and the historical picture of Soviet mentality will never be complete without considering this material in its wholeness. My research interest concentrates especially on the period 1964–1982, the 'Brezhnev time' or 'the time of stagnation'. This 22-year period was the school time for people who nowadays constitute the most active part of post-Soviet society. Childhood memories of this generation form the key to images and mental complexes of today's culture. The main feature of this memory is its complexity or its intertextuality. It cannot be divided into separate texts and codes but must always be considered within the process of constant translation and transfer from one context to another. This particularity creates a certain precondition for similarity with a folklore-type discourse functioning.

2. Mechanisms of recollecting the visual

The specifics of assimilation of visual material at an early age, from an *a priori* didactic source, lead, in a stable manner, to taking illustration (or visual fiction) for documentary evidence. Thus, compositions illustrating different events of Russian history, such as Vasily Surikov's *Morning of the Streletsy's Execution* (*Утро стрелецкой казни*, 1881, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow) and *Boyarynya Morozova* (*Боярыня Морозова*, 1887, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow), Ilya Repin's *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to Sultan Mahmoud IV* (*Запорожцы пишут письмо турецкому султану*, 1880–1891, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg) and *Pushkin on the Lyceum Examination in Tsarskoye Selo on January 8, 1815* (*Пушкин на лицейском экзамене в Царском Селе 8 января 1815 года*, 1911, All Russian Museum of A. S. Pushkin) formed the most primary images of 'what it was like at that time'. The reproduction of *Pushkin on the Lyceum*

Examination was one of the illustrations in the biography of Aleksandr Pushkin included in 8th grade literature textbooks. It was always in black and white, which evidently transmitted the feeling of documentality. This phenomenon can be compared with a widespread aberration in spectators' minds which led to the interpretation of the 'Storming of the Winter Palace' scene from Eisenstein's and Aleksandrov's movie *October: Ten Days That Shook the World* (Октябрь²) as documentary evidence. Visual or emblematic context determines the production of new visual, as well as verbal, texts. Creative activity as such, working out new images and metaphors, is also subjected to this basic set of common knowledge. The very understanding and communication, and, hence, reception, interpretation and analysis are made possible due to this set. It can be used as much directly and positively as secretly or negatively in the form of parody or caricature. In any case it constitutes a very important part of communal life.

Often these boring school patterns are played out in ironic and obscene contexts. This kind of parody exploits the regularity of meaning formation within the emblem. The mechanism of building such a parody can be compared with a wide-spread salon game, which in the Soviet time had a flavor of resistance. This game placed together official newspaper headings (e.g. 'Leonid Iljich Brezhnev visited Cuba on a friendly mission') with an imaginary erotic picture of a naked couple. It is important to stress here the regularity of the emblem mechanism: in such a random combination of semiotically heterogeneous elements, meaning was formed automatically. On the Internet one can find a kind of reversed procedure, in which an obscene statement leads through a hyperlink to a boring textbook illustration that gains in this procedure its *vita nova*.³ Some examples:

– a caption states 'Look what a big, red and wet thing he has between his legs' (Посмотрите какой большой красный и влажный у него между ног!), which connects to a copy of Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin's *Bathing of a Red Horse* (Купание красного коня, 1912, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow);

– the caption 'Sweet peaches of young girls' (Сладкие персики молодых девочек) leads to Valentin Serov's *Girl with Peaches* (Девочка с персиками, Portrait of Vera Mamontova, 1887, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow);

– 'They are naked, all above, one beneath!' (Без одежды: все сверху, один

² *Октябрь* (Десять дней, которые потрясли мир), dir. Sergei Eisenstein, Grigori Aleksandrov, Sovkino, 1927.

³ See <http://leo.aba.ru/xix/index.shtml>.

снизу!) leads to Alexey Savrasov *The Rooks Have Come* (*Грачи прилетели*, 1871, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow).

In this way, according to an ingenuous pre-pubertal and psychoanalytic logic, sexual hints and manifestations are seen everywhere. These are perhaps the most primitive examples but they reveal the capability of the Internet of intensifying these games. The hyperlink in the given example is used as an expressive device for retardation of spectators' expectations.

The structure of parody may be even more multi-component and may involve several different visual sources simultaneously. Not only verbal addition but also iconic graphic supplement or distortion of already existing components can function as a meaning-changing tool.

In Figures 1–4 we encounter the variations of one of the most molesting compositions by Fiodor Reshetnikov, *Two again!* (*Опять двойка!*, 1952, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow). We can see it overplayed in actual political caricature (the Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky is recognisable in one of the pictures), in cartoon style (Andrei Biljo; on his site <http://www.petrovich.ru/copy/> there can be found several classical textbook parodies) and in advertisement variants. Figures 5 and 6 give the original by Vasily Pukirev, *The Unequal Marriage* (*Неравный брак*, 1862, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow) and the actual parody by Gleb Androsov, *The Equal Marriage* (*Равный брак*). Figures 7–11 demonstrate three (of four, the fourth being Rembrandt's *Danaya*) original paintings – Ilya Repin's *Unexpected Return* (*Не ждали*, 1884–1888, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow), *Barge Haulers on the Volga* (*Бурлаки на Волге*, 1870–1873, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg), and Ivan Kramskoy's *Nikolay Nekrasov in the Period of 'Last Songs'* (*Некрасов в период "Последних песен"*, 1877–1878, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow), and four different parodies based on these original texts.

Remarkably, this obscene parody uses mainly 'old textbook' visual materials. This phenomenon is widespread. When we begin to recollect visual representations from textbooks of Brezhnev's time we discover nearly the entire collection of the State Tretyakov Gallery and the State Russian Museum reprinted there. The basic scheme of how a replaying of tradition takes place is apparent here: an easily recognisable visual text is further supplied with various additional elements, either verbal or iconic. In other words, this mechanism can be described as a reproduction with distortion. We will see further on that this is the main principle

of producing new interactive discourse of a folklore nature, which dominates in Russian mass communicative media nowadays.

A special department within this virtual visual collection should be reserved for the visual 'Leniniana'. Of course, the representation of Vladimir Lenin during Soviet times was not restricted to textbooks, but it is also evident that in textbooks the image of the world proletarian leader occupied one of the most significant places. In this respect, our topic intersects with the more general problem of visual propaganda, which tends to replace 'reality' with ideologically charged discourse. Visual propaganda was odious and even hated in the Soviet times, but now it can still be found in the most progressive means of communication. This sounds like a paradox to Soviet-born generations: nobody forces us to look at these dull pictures any more, but still the same people collect and admire them. It can even be accepted as a banner of new forms of art, as the Russian artists Komar and Melamid employed it earlier.

A similar trend is observed in the whole heritage of Soviet visual propaganda, particularly in the case of Soviet posters. In the last few years several huge web collections of vintage posters, formed with a distinct accent on the totalitarian or military theme, were compiled.⁶ Parodies emerged immediately. An original poster and its mock counterpart, composed by a virtual author nicknamed 'pustoshi' (lj user=pustoshi) in the Russian part of the 'Live journal' collective blog, differ from each other in only a few verbal statements (see Figs. 14 and 15).

3. Visual culture and folklore

This visual heritage is not only stored and perceived passively, but it also actively participates in contemporary visual cultural turnover. The dominance here belongs to all kinds of parodies similar to the ones demonstrated above – to a traditional manipulating of moustaches and horns, which is typical of street and school subcultures, but also to more sophisticated, but still non-formal, artistic or academic skits, e.g. *KVN* (a popular student TV show). The function of the parody is not only to negate and mock the tradition but also to learn and adapt it to the contemporary context.

⁶ See, e.g. <http://www.davno.ru/>; <http://sovietart.narod.ru/main.htm>; <http://posters.nce.butobi.net/russ1.htm>.

The character of the functioning of this material can be described as a sort of folklore, although this term is used here not in its traditional sense. Still why does it seem legitimate to define it in this way? The main distinctive feature that allows us to compare folklore and pop visual culture is the collective nature of the process of absorbing and transmitting visual clusters. To stress that we must not mix or equate totally these phenomena, I will use the term 'post-folklore'. So the subject of our study can be formulated as 'visual post-Soviet post-folklore'.

Let us consider the content of these notions. What does 'post-Soviet' mean? The word evidently indicates the period after the crash of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Bloc. It also involves connotations of geographic and ethnic character that do not coincide completely. Let us affirm that 'post-Soviet' means, principally, a certain kind of mentality. This mentality cannot be reduced to a certain geographic area or even to a single language; still we will concentrate on the Russian-speaking, and especially Russian-writing, post-Soviet communicative space. It must be stressed here that one of the most important structural distinctions between Soviet and post-Soviet Russian communicative space is the fact that the latter is not at all limited by geographic or political division. A post-Soviet mentality is inherent in all people who consider Russian to be their first language, and these people are spread all over the world as a consequence of the abolishment of the USSR, simply *after* (i.e. *post-*) this abolishment. For a large number of people emigration happened to be a quite passive kind of activity: they stayed in their places but nevertheless found themselves emigrating, and here I am mainly referring to the former Soviet republics that gained their independence. But furthermore, even Russian citizens today can be considered as emigrants from the Russian SFSR to Russia. In this sense, the post-Soviet mentality is a mentality of the emigrant, either forced or freely willed. Thus, nostalgia, including nostalgia for visual environment, is one of the most natural features of this consciousness. Another important characteristic of this mentality is that, while very diverse in political, geographic and multiple social parameters, it still has a tendency to maintain one and the same communicative field. And this is primarily due to the Internet, which itself, in turn, determines and deforms this consciousness.

The term 'post-folklore' was introduced by the Russian scholar Sergei Neklyudov (Neklyudov 1995, see also <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/postfolk.htm>) to distinguish the traditional, archaic, village verbal culture from the later city oral production deformed through written culture and authorship. I find this term

very felicitous to embrace all cultural phenomena that have a tendency to lose their authorship (while initially possessing it) and function as migrating texts or such texts the production and existence of which obligatorily require collective participation. I also include visual texts in this definition, although traditionally folklore is considered mainly as a verbal form. I find this logocentricity to be a rough reduction, because visual, graphic forms of ethnic and popular representation have seemed to precede and dominate verbal ones throughout the history of human culture. At least in a fixed form, we have a lot of evidence of visual practice starting from the Palaeolithic Age. There are also quite academically legitimate visual folklore forms such as *lubok* – Russian folk pictures or folk theatre. The similarity of *lubok* and new art circulating forms sometimes is apparent. The contemporary artist and professional cartoonist Andrei Kuznetsov, nicknamed ‘akuaku’ (lj user=akuaku), displays his new works on the web in *lubok* style. The point of his work consists of combining the old manner of Russian folk pictures with the modern recognisable mass cultural content through which the archaic form is regenerated.

4. Collective nature of the new media content

At this point let us discuss the question of why socialist or post-socialist popular creativity seems to be so similar to folklore production. First of all, we must stress again the collective nature of both phenomena. Socialism proclaimed collectivity as the supreme blessing and benefit. The ideology of socialist totalitarianism was the ideology of mass actions, collective responsibility and equal (at least it was so proclaimed) distribution of spiritual and material bonuses. Both the supreme power and all the strata of its subjects were represented through collective bodies. Both communists and non-Party members embraced the whole nation. Secondary school played a crucial role in the process of unification of the Soviet people. As mentioned earlier, this ‘school memory’ is a matter of nostalgia for the post-Soviet population.

This principle of collectivity was also prescribed and accepted as the main task and characteristic of socialist art. Boris Groys affirms that Russian avant-garde artists collaborated with the socialist power mainly at the point of its ‘mass’ nature (Groys 2003: 10). ‘Mass spectator’ and ‘mass reader’ were common and positive terms in the critical and journalistic discourse of that time. Although there were popular authors whose names were known in Soviet art and literature,

their status was considerably different from those in the capitalist world. Artists and writers were legitimate only under the roof of the so-called 'Creative Units': the Writers' Union (*Союз Писателей*) and the Artists' Union (*Союз Художников*). Members were elected by special committees, which consisted exclusively of Party members, and after this they got their salaries independent of the quality and quantity of their creative production. That was the problem for Joseph Brodsky, who was considered to be a 'sponger' simply because he did not get any salary from such a Union. Not to mention the constant control and verification of this production by Party-guided censorship, which approved the compatibility of a piece of art with the mass consciousness of the ideal, and at the same time an average, 'Soviet man'. The responsibility for a mistake and deviation from the general line of the Soviet ideology was also collective and shared by the whole team: censor, publisher, editor and author.

This kind of creative process and its social results are not identical but rather similar to the spheres of mass art-like production in liberal societies as well. Cinema and advertising are the clearest examples of collaborative creativity. Although these spheres have their celebrities with 'names', still the very mechanism of making 'things', pieces of art, is marked with such collectivism that the majority of creators remain anonymous. This functional similarity is supported by an important structural, constructive cognation. It seems that the visual advertisement replaced visual Soviet propaganda in post-socialist states quite organically, since structurally they were completely alike.

What are the most important constructive features of the visual folklore form? The folklore form, either verbal or visual, is a result of a combinative activity. It operates with ready blocks and clusters and combines them according to a few constant rules into a text that has an infinite, open (or agglutinative) nature. This mechanism was perfectly described by Vladimir Propp regarding the material of Russian fairy tales (Propp 1928). Such a mode of generating texts was practiced over the course of centuries and was broken, for a comparatively short period and reduced category of recipients, by intellectuals of the Renaissance for a narrow circle of the educated public. Already avant-garde artists proclaimed the return to the tradition of non-individualistic art. Vladimir Mayakovsky wrote about his poem '150,000,000', 'Everyone can continue writing it' (Mayakovsky 1987: 1:37).

The folklore method of generating new texts is dialectically characterised by both an extreme rigidity and flexibility. It is based on the constant and apparent

reproduction of identical ready-made elements, and simultaneously this process of reproduction is characterised by deformation and distortion of original components, so that the very idea of originality loses its meaning. I have already given some examples that perfectly fit this principle. Remarkably, exactly the same constructive principle is used in producing texts in art-industrial spheres – soap operas, all kinds of serials, and advertisements. Sometimes it is absolutely impossible to distinguish between an ‘official’ (i.e. ‘authorised’) production of this kind and its mock counterpart, i.e. a parody. On the official Absolute Vodka site (<http://www.absolutgallery.com/>) the gallery of the Absolute Vodka ads is located. The principle of constructing a visual message in this serial is stereotypical and can be described as filling a stable graphic pattern with a slightly new content. On the Internet site <http://www.dirty.ru/>, one can find a community of designers and programmers mocking different occasions. One of their best games was modification of the standard design of an ordinary toilet paper roll.⁵ The scheme of producing new variants is identical.

The combination of a stable nucleus maintaining its meaning and at the same time changing it to some degree corresponds precisely to the principle of the emblem equaling production. Components of the emblem stand in the relation of mutual inevitable and impossible translation (in the semiotic sense of this word). Meaning in this case is produced automatically and is supposed to be perceived automatically, and that is why this unit is widely used for mnemonic and persuasive purposes. At the same time, we can observe that this mechanism of meaning production and meaning storage is identical to that of folklore.

The Internet is especially convenient for such a combinatory game containing already existing blocks of elements. The computer makes it possible to create copy-paste procedures easily, so that operating with ready-made blocks becomes available to everybody. In a paradoxical way (but paradox, being an authentic manifestation of dialectics, is the main moving power of culture) it leads not to a precise repetition and reproduction of texts and their parts, but to a more active playing with it and deforming it.

There is nothing new in this process. Pre-Renaissance and Renaissance artists widely used models of their predecessors and contemporaries and felt free to make changes in them. In the late 17th–early 18th centuries, in Italy and England, this procedure became a point of reflection. So caricature, and later

⁵ See <http://deforum.ru/forum/viewtopic.php?t=19589&start=0&postdays=0&postorder=asc&highlight=>.

cartoons,⁶ appeared and have established their position in visual culture up to the present. Parody in the form of agglutination of attributes, often supplied with subscriptions (i.e. the verbal component providing the intersemiotic translation), is the main principle of the cartoon effect.

Figure 16 shows the work of Boris Efimov, *Chained Apollo* (*Прикованный Аполлон*, 1947), which provides a perfect example of the ironic furnishing a piece of classical art with modern advertising garments. The picture produces an ironic effect but also reveals the inner deep relationship of the notion and the phenomenon of 'classic art' (that is, very close to 'school-learned' art) and consumer pop culture. *Mona Lisa* was subjected to multiple cartoon variations long before the invention of the Internet. The computer makes the process of agglutination more dynamic and efficient because of the principles of databases that contain all necessary material for such play. The Internet makes this game more immediate and interactive⁷.

5. The problem of the author in new media

The ease and interactivity of producing text variants on the Internet changes the very essence of the creator, art-maker or image-maker. Anonymity is not inherent exclusively on the Internet, but the Internet spreads this anonymous authorship into all strata of previously divided people, merging all kinds of specialists and professionals with non-professionals. Nobody is sufficiently privileged on the web to hold an exclusive license for producing texts of all kinds and exposing them to public perception. This situation reminds me of that described by Roland Barthes in his famous essay *The Death of the Author* (Barthes 1977: 142–148). The Internet simply provides the most advantageous toolbox for this author-dissolving tendency.

Of course this anonymity on the Internet is not equal to that of traditional folklore culture. We have a lot of 'authors', but this 'authorship' differs consider-

⁶ In England in 1843 a series of drawings appeared in *Punch* magazine that parodied the fresco cartoons submitted in a competition for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament. In this way *cartoon*, in journalistic parlance, came to mean any single humorous or satirical drawing employing distortion for emphasis, often accompanied by a caption or a legend. Cartoons, particularly editorial or political cartoons, make use of the elements of caricature.' (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia 2006: <http://www.factmonster.com/ce6/ent/A0857199.html>.)

⁷ On this site the mobile interactive cartoon of *Mona Lisa* is located: http://www.cite-sciences.fr/francais/ala_cite/expo/explora/image/mona/en.php.

ably from the post-Renaissance European idea of the 'author'. The difference lies mainly in the attitude of an author and of a recipient of his/her work. Authoritative consciousness follows its creations even when they are already given to the public, i.e. alienated. Copyright is based on this kind of mentality. It presupposes that text is equal to material private property in all aspects. It can even be inherited by family members. In the communal space of the Internet, every piece of text evidently has its author, but in some circumstances it is important to keep this authorship and in some it is not important at all or even impossible. Copyright loses its obligation.

This is the reason for the constant battle between free sources and open databases on the web, and copyright law regulation. On the Internet all kinds of texts gain certain distinctive features of immediate performance, access to which also makes it possible to appropriate this product, by means of a copy-paste, immediately. As we can reconstruct it, the same thing happened with the traditional folklore performance: once produced, a piece of such work was accessible to everybody. The problem was how to remember, keep and use it. It cannot be said that all creators on the Internet are anonymous (as was true with folk creators), but entering this space one must be ready at any time for one's work to become alienated and deprived of the author's name.

This situation creates an absolutely new kind of authorial identity. Of course, the author was never identical to the writer, the text-maker. There was always a certain gap between them. Sometimes this gap became a point of reflection, and due to this we have such rhetorical methods as the 'narrator's mask', the *skaz* ('narration in first person'), analysed by Russian Formalists (Eichenbaum 1924: 156). But still, it was important to a writer, as well as to his/her audience, that both belonged to the same person, unless it was a forgery.

What happens on the web? On the one hand, authorship, the narrator's mask and persona are radically separated from each other. For the majority of communicative cases on the Internet, it does not matter whether one author exists for several narrators or, vice versa, one avatar has several authors. If you communicate with this mask virtually, there is absolutely no difference except for a playful, *ludicrous* distinction. This free play with masks and identities as a form of expression follows directly from the Internet's neglecting of copyright laws. There is no economic reason to keep one's authorship and control one's identity. Even those journalists who write for paid Internet magazines cannot control further migra-

tion of their texts, so they get money once and cannot keep their rights forever. There, of course, is a certain non-formal code of web behavior, and it is much more flexible and variable in different strata.

On the other hand, it is much more difficult to maintain a distance between one's personality and the author's mask. On the Internet, because of its communicative interactivity, the process of stimulus-reaction happens immediately. It is really hard to keep the once-chosen mask, to remember it all the time, not to mix avatars and so on. In a traditional art context, the author is separated from the reaction of the audience much more radically. Theatre is closer to its audience than other forms, but still the tradition presupposes a strict and constant distinction between performers and spectators (the avant-garde made attempts to overcome this as well, but this breakthrough could be made only against a background of stable regularity). On the Internet there is no border between the author and the recipient. These are nothing more than functions of equally involved players. To maintain estrangement in the situation of an immediate exchange of functional creative roles is much more complicated. The virtual nature of this exchange makes both possibilities much safer than in 'real life'. The Internet provokes both kinds of extremes – extreme openness of one's true personality and extreme secrecy, even conspiracy, behind a set of masks and avatars. So this Internet actor is personalised but not authorised.

In conclusion we can describe the new post-Soviet mentality as 'nostalgic', primarily in the sense of recollecting the previous stable school forms, collective and agglutinative in a folklore way, anonymous, although personalised, and highly interactive. The question of whether nostalgia predetermined the collective folklore nature of the new media content, or, vice versa, the collective product could be filled with the only possible collective visual memory, is to be answered in a dialectic way.

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Figure 1] Fiodor Reshetnikov, Two Again! (Опять двойка!), 1952. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 2] Cybervantuz, Beer Picture Nine Again? (Опять девятка?). <http://www.pivchelo.spb.ru/?idr=1&id=282>

Figure 3] Andrei Biljo, Two Again! (Опять двойка!). <http://www.petrovich.ru/copy/>



Figure 4] Andrei Volkov, Zhirinovskiy, Two Again! (Жириновский, опять двойка), July 8, 2003. <http://www.anekdot.ru/an/an0307/e030708.html>





Figure 5] Vasily Pukirev, The Unequal Marriage (*Неравный брак*), 1862. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 6] Gleb Androsov, The Equal Marriage (*Равный брак*). <http://www.androsov.com/lwvranjo/ravnybrak.htm>



Figure 7] Илья Репин, Unexpected Return (*Не ждали*), 1884-1888. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 8] Ilya Repin, *Barge Haulers on the Volga* (*Бурлаки на Волге*), 1870–1873.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



Figure 9] Ivan Kramskoy, *Nikolay Nekrasov in the Period of 'Last Songs'* (*Некрасов в период 'Последних песен'*), 1877–1878.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 10] Gleb Androsov, Unexpected (Не ждали).
<http://www.androsov.com/lvovanyo/nezdaly.htm>



Figure 11] Gleb Androsov, idea by T. E. Yakovchuk, Unexpected Barge Haulers (Бурлаков не ждали).
<http://www.androsov.com/lvovanyo/nezdaly2.htm>

Figure 12] Andrei Biljo.
Unexpected Return (Не ждали).
<http://www.petrovich.ru/copy/big/?id=04>



Figure 13] Rembrandt's 'Danaya'.
<http://www.taksebe.narod.ru/pic/gallery/bed.jpg>





Figure 14] Soviet poster, Deputy Is a Servant of People (*Депутат – слуга народа*).
http://sovietart.narod.ru/gal9/1_1_s50-6.htm



Figure 15] pustoshi, Take Bribes! It Is an Additional Tax-Free Income! (*Берите взятки! Взятка – дополнительная прибыль, не облагаемая налогами!*).
<http://www.livejournal.com/users/pustoshi/19736.html>



Figure 16] Boris Efimov, Chained Apollo (*Прикованный Аполлон*), 1947. Советское искусство, November 15, 1947.