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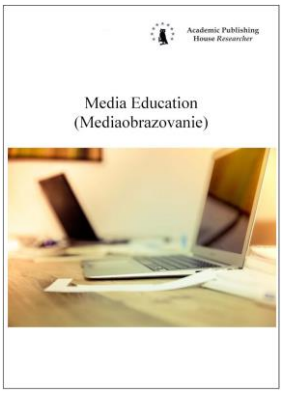

Hermeneutic Analysis of a Psychotherapist's Representation in Russian Film Series

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Abstract

The focus of this study is the analysis of psychotherapists' representation in films. The material is two most recent Russian film series featuring a psychotherapist as the main character – *Trigger* (Russia, 2018) and *Psycho* (Russia, 2020). The dominant representations include non-observance of the ethical principles of the psychotherapist's work, the use of risky methods of work and a constant psycho-emotional stress, anxiety and fear, which can form the image of a psychotherapist as a person who himself desperately needs the help of a specialist to solve his/her own psychological problems.

After watching film representations of the psychotherapists' practice, and the social roles expected of them, several roles or categories, can be identified. The generalized film image of a psychotherapist in contemporary Russian cinema can be characterised as follows:

1. He is the antipode of the traditional image of the psychotherapist who deliberately and outrageously violates the established rules and ethics codes; moreover, he prefers to use his own innovative method of treatment or therapy which is based on provocation and manipulation.
2. He is presented ambivalently, although his behaviour is outwardly negative, his motives and goals are positive, for despite acting as a manipulator, provocateur, and a violator of ethics principles, he is genuinely devoted to his profession and is a decent personality.
3. He is a dynamic image, in some aspects resembling a detective whose life is dangerous and full of risk and adventure, associated with solving riddles. In a way this image may popularize the profession of psychologist, especially it may seem rather attractive to a youth audience, since the protagonist is young, creative, smart and daring, his actions are unpredictable and unconventional, he is a man of character and very purposeful, possesses leadership qualities.
4. The dominant mental and emotional disorders that the psychotherapist has to deal with in Russian films can be identified as mainly individual, marital and family psychotherapy and counselling: the generation gap, childhood traumas, addictions, manipulations or abuses, grief and depression, eating disorders, etc.
5. The psychotherapist himself needs professional psychological support and supervision since he suffers from a serious psychological trauma. Besides he is constantly in a conflict situation, external or internal, personal and professional. He is obviously a dramatic image, for all his professional success, he is not able to solve his own problems in interpersonal relationships with his close people; sometimes he exhibits sociopathic inclinations.

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6. The image leaves a contradictory impression on the viewer, though his methods of treatment may seem to some audiences quite unacceptable or even dangerous for both the psychologist and the patient, still, they turn out to be effective in the long run according to the film.

7. Such film image may discredit the psychology-related professions in the eyes of the audience since it allows the psychologist to violate the key ethics principles and professional standards of conduct for the counselling professions such as privacy and confidentiality, human relations (avoiding sexual harassment, physical or mental harm).

Keywords: media text, film series, hermeneutic analysis, psychotherapist, psychologist, representation.

1. Introduction

Films and TV series about psychologists and psychotherapists have gained particular popularity in Russian cinematography since the 2000s. By genre, they are mainly psychological dramas (*Ward No. 6, 2009; No Witness, 2012; New Life, 2016*; *Psycho*, 2020; *Trigger*, 2018, etc.), melodramas (*Problem Solving, 2005; Helpline, 2007; Pure Psychology, 2019; Happy Group, 2011, etc.*) and detective or crime dramas (*Sinitchka*, 2018; *Freud's Method*, 2012; *The Mentalist, 2017; The Flowers of Evil, 2013, etc.*). These Russian feature films and TV/film series represent varied psychological challenges of modern life, i.e. personal, family and professional problems. Very often the on-screen psychologists themselves urgently need professional psychological support and therapy. Some of them develop innovative treatment methods or approaches and put them into practice. As a rule, the main characters are practising psychologists and manipulators, who have a lively mind, phenomenal observation, as well as outstanding abilities in solving different psychological disorders. As for their clients, – they are people of different social strata, age-groups, cultural and educational levels, professions, material wealth, tastes, world outlooks and aspirations.

For the present research, the recent Russian film series representing a psychotherapist as the main character – *Trigger* (Russia, 2018) and *Psycho* (Russia, 2020) are chosen. These media texts have some common features:

– they both break the prevailing stereotype about the profession of a psychotherapist as a tedious job which consists in long boring psychotherapeutic sessions where people discuss their personal problems with a psychologist;

– they represent the actual social challenges of modern society and man (family conflicts, psychological complexes, childhood traumas and their consequences in adultery, depression, addictions, loyalty and treachery, loneliness, etc.);

– they have thrilling and unpredictable plots built round a complex and ambivalent personality of the protagonist, who despite his high professionalism, rich life experience and obvious career progress, himself suffers and needs professional psychological supervision or therapy;

– they show the solutions to serious life problems of characters in the genre of a detective thriller or drama when the psychotherapist reveals someone's secret as if solving a riddle.

The relevance of the topic of our research is associated with the ambivalence of the screen image of a modern psychologist represented on the Russian television, and the need to identify the impact of films on this topic on the image of a modern professional psychologist formed in the individual consciousness of the viewer and public consciousness in general.

According to A. Levitskaya, it is "a postmodern narrative device – to turn traditional heroes into villains, and villains into heroes. This gives the viewer the opportunity to take a fresh look at the characters – heroes whom we have considered to be good are capable of evil, and antagonists, on the contrary, can do good" (Levitskaya, 2019: 416). Moreover, it is interesting to correlate this image with the basic ethics principles and professional standards of conduct for psychotherapists.

2. Materials and methods

The research material comprises contemporary Russian television series about psychologists and psychotherapists: *Trigger* (Russia, 2018) and *Psycho* (Russia, 2020).

Basic research methods include a comparative hermeneutic analysis of Russian film series about psychotherapy. The hermeneutic analysis of a media text involves "a study of the media text interpretation process, cultural and historical factors, affecting the point of view of media texts agency/author and the audience view. The hermeneutic analysis suggests comprehension of a

media text by comparison with the cultural tradition and reality; penetration into the logic of a media text; media text analysis based on artistic images comparison in the historical and cultural contexts" (Fedorov, 2017: 11). The semiotic conceptions of U. Eco (Eco, 1987) and R. Barthes (Barthes, 1977) have also been referred to, a cognitive approach to media literacy and television violence studies by W.J. Potter (Potter, 2004), the media representation theory developed by S. Hall (Hall, 1997), media literacy and media education approaches to interpreting media texts by A. Silverblatt (Silverblatt et al., 2014) and F. Baker (Baker, 2017).

The research objective is to reveal the characteristic features of the film image of a psychotherapist in modern Russian film on the basis of a comparative hermeneutic analysis of film series, including analysis of stereotypes, ethic analysis, plot analysis, analysis of characters. As a result, a generalized structural and narrative model of films focused on the character of a present-day professional psychotherapist is going to be built. The study's target audience is researchers in the field of film studies, pedagogy, media culture, sociology, as well as university teachers and students.

3. Discussion

The screen image of a psychologist and psychotherapist has been widely discussed (Arehart-Triechel, 2010; Dremova, Belobrykina, 2016; Dudley, 1994; Gabbard, 2001; Izotov, 2018; Pirkis et al., 2006; Pooja, 2014) in research projects over the last twenty years. Such keen interest in this topic, in my opinion, is caused by a number of objective reasons. Firstly, the profession of a psychologist in modern times is becoming more and more popular due to the fact that various social issues are aggravated in the world and get reflected in the psychological condition and well-being of people belonging to different generations. Among such social challenges it is necessary to mention the problems of a small person in a big metropolis in personal and business relationships, family dramas and the generation gap, ostracism and loneliness, discrimination and others. On the other hand, the individuals' need for self-development and knowledge of themselves and their capabilities, sometimes with the help of a professional psychologist, has also increased. This new-fangled tendency to search for oneself and one's place in life is sometimes associated with personal development, but sometimes it has a completely pragmatic basis – achieving career success.

The issues under discussion are varied. For instance, S.D. Young analysed the effects of viewing films by using a range of psychological approaches to explore movies, the people who make them, and the people who watch them. The monograph *Psychology at the Movies* by S.D. Young is an interdisciplinary research including psychology, film studies, mass communication, and cultural studies (Young, 2012).

H.T. Schultz studies the portrayal of psychologists and psychiatrists in Hollywood movies (Schultz, 2005). She is interested in the impact of the traditional stereotyped screen image of a psychologist on the viewers. She also underlines the fact that Hollywood film makers very often present psychologists and psychiatrists as deliberate violators of professional laws and ethics. Moreover, some researchers found out that, according to popular films representing mental health professionals, the latter are motivated mostly by money, power, or a concern for others (Young et al., 2008). Some researchers investigated the representation of male and female psychologists in popular movies released in the 1980-1990s in the USA (Bischoff, Reiter, 1999) and came to the conclusion that male mental health clinicians in the analysed movies were incompetent and female psychotherapists were deliberately sexualized. Unfortunately, such negative portrayals of psychotherapy may create a distorted image of a psychologist in the public perception (Orchowski et al., 2006; Pirkis et al., 2006).

T.A. Robison attempted to analyse the impact of on-screen portrayals of psychological therapy on the audience's attitudes to psychologists' behaviour and treatment (Robison, 2008), and found out that film portrayals of psychotherapy produce a slightly negative impression on viewers' perception and attitudes to the character and conduct of the psychologist. J.S. Herndon examined the motion picture and television portrayal of professional police psychologists and focused on media stereotypes and type casting leading to misinformation (Herndon, 2000).

P. Byrne analysed more than three hundred films about psychological treatment to find out that, though media representations of psychotherapists are mixed, their methods of treatment are rarely depicted positively in movies (Byrne, 2009). He also defined the following three dominant and essential spheres of mental illness presented in the analysed movies: addictions, bereavement and personality disorder.

S. Macfarlane analysed a movie image of the psychotherapist in the film *Antwone Fisher* (Macfarlane, 2014), and found out that, though the image may be perceived by the audience as positive, it is really ambiguous, since the psychotherapist often allows himself some therapeutic boundary violations, and the viewers may consider such behaviour normal and acceptable for conventional psychotherapy.

The objective of the present research was to analyze film series about psychologists and psychotherapists, including their methods of treatment and therapy, in correlation with the psychological ethics, and to define the contemporary on-screen image of a psychologist and how it satisfies or represents the professional requirements and standards.

4. Results

Trigger (Russia, 2018)

Historical context (dominant concepts: media agencies, media categories, media representations and media audiences).

a) features of the historical period of media texts' production, market conditions that contributed to the idea, the process of creating media texts, the degree of influence of political and social events on the media text.

Trigger (2018) is a Russian drama television series directed by Dmitriy Tyurin, starring Maksim Matveyev as a practicing psychotherapist. Actually, *Trigger* (Russia, 2018) is a combination of several genre modifications: melodrama, family drama, psychological thriller, action, detective or crime drama. The idea of the film was created by Alexandra Remizova in collaboration with Russian psychologist Sergei Nasibyan who is an adherent of the provocative method and a prototype of the protagonist. The film-script was written by Andrey Zolotarev and Lev Murzenko. The working title of the film series was "Provocateur". It is noteworthy that the pre-premiere of the television series which could be watched on VK.com had tremendous success with the viewers. The international pre-premiere by *Sreda Production* company occurred in 2018 in Cannes. It was premiered on Channel One Russia on February 10th, 2020.

The series was acknowledged by critics – this provocative and dramatic project became a finalist of the best international TV series MIPDrama Screenings 2018. The authors of the film series ware awarded the Golden Eagle Award for the "Best TV Series – 2021". Maksim Matveyev, the leading actor, received the Golden Eagle Award for the "Best Actor in a TV-series – 2021".

b) the way the knowledge of real historical events of a particular period enhances the understanding of the given media text, examples of historical references in the media text.

Private psychotherapists appeared in Russia in the post-Soviet period. Russian psychologists actively borrowed foreign theories and practices of psychotherapeutic treatment. In the country that was undergoing significant changes, many citizens needed the help of a specialist of this kind in order to get accustomed to a new way of life and psychologically accept the realities of the new epoch. After the collapse of the USSR the indicators of social well-being turned into the anxiety mode: the psychological shock and disorders caused by Russia's transition to a market economy led to higher rates of suicide, alcoholism, early death and divorce, as well as unstable living conditions. In other words, the whole society went through a post-traumatic stress disorder. It is not surprising that the profession of a practicing psychotherapist finally turned out to be in demand in our country, mostly in big cities. Till the 2000s, the post-Soviet Russia faced a real boom in psychotherapeutic practices: psychological television talk shows, family counselling, mass media columns, self-help books, educational services, and personal growth coaching seminars. Very often, such kind of psychotherapy did more harm than good…

The Russian Code of Ethics (Code, 2012) was adopted on February 14, 2012 by the members of the fifth Congress of the Russian Psychological Society established in 1994. Its principles are also used by members of the Russian Psychotherapeutic Association (Code, 2019).

In short, the basic ethical principles for psychologists and psychotherapists proposed by the Russian Psychological Society are the following:

- respect for the dignity, rights and freedoms of the individual; confidentiality, informed consent of the client; respect for the client's autonomy;
- competence, observance of professional ethics, competence in choice of means, maintaining competence in ethics;
- responsibility and nonmaleficence;
- integrity, honesty, accuracy, professional duties and responsibilities.

The sanctions on psychologists for violating the standards of the Ethics Code may include public warning, suspension or loss of Certificate of Professional Psychologist with the subsequent notification of general public, potential clients and other psychological associations (Code, 2012).

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, a *trigger* stands for a stimulus eliciting a reaction, i.e., an event could be a trigger for a memory of some past experience and an accompanying state of emotional arousal. Artem Streletsky – the main character of the film, is a professional psychologist who chooses to provoke his clients to lose their temper by forcing them to remember and relive the negative traumatic experience of the past, thus using some sort of shock therapy. Though provocative therapy as an approach in psychotherapy was developed by American psychotherapist Frank Farrelly in the previous century, it has become popular in Russia relatively recently, as well as other foreign approaches and methods of psychological therapy: "In provocative therapy you play devil's advocate with the client. It's like the affectionate teasing banter between close friends" (Farrelly, Brandsma, 1974). Nowadays this approach has become a common practice in personal and professional business coaching, especially abroad…

Working as a self-employed practising psychotherapist Artem Streletsky repeatedly violates the principles of the Code of Ethics for psychologists: he provokes the clients, insults them, laughs at them, puts them in awkward situations and deliberately pushes them out of the zone of psychological comfort. Moreover, the film begins with the episode when he is out of prison on parole. Artem Streletsky spent four years in prison for inciting his client to commit suicide, and who had died allegedly through Artem's fault. His father – Alexander Streletsky, also a practising psychotherapist, initiates a procedure in collaboration with the Ethics Committee against his son to forbid him to use this "dangerous" provocative method of psychological therapy.

Socio-cultural, ideological, religious context (dominant concepts: media agencies, media categories, media representations and media audience).

a) ideology, directions, goals, objectives, world outlook, the concepts of the authors of these media texts in the socio-cultural context; ideology, culture of the world, depicted in the media text.

Contemporary Russian television is going through hard times, since most of the viewers, especially the representatives of the younger generation, prefer the Internet over television and watch films mainly on streaming online platforms, the production of television series in its quest to retain and expand the audiences is forced to change the broadcasting policy and take into account the new modern realities and needs of the consumer audience… And it is not a coincidence that the television series *Trigger* (Russia, 2018) was originally shown on the social network – that was its international premiere, and only two years later it was shown on the central television channel in Russia.

Although the initial idea of creating a film series about psychotherapy did not arouse interest among potential producers, since this topic has never been particularly popular with the Russian viewer, an action-drama TV-series about an extreme psychologist, touching upon the problems of the contemporary generation of Russians, was eagerly accepted by the viewers and surprisingly turned out to be a box-office success. Alexandra Remizova, the author of the idea of the television series or the showrunner of the project, confessed in one of her interviews that "*Trigger* is a film series about us, probably that's why the audience has received it so warmly. Everyone can recognize themselves in the film characters, see problems similar to their own, feel pain and rage, and experience them together with the heroes". In other words, to make the film more audience-oriented and in demand, the creators tried to represent a whole range of socio-cultural problems of modern society on the screen: children's traumas, divorces and unhappy families, the generation gap, misunderstanding of friends, betrayal. During an interview in the radio program "Telekhranitel" (*Echo of Moscow*) on February 18, 2020 with Elena Afanasyeva, A. Remizova emphasized that the film series is about "why we destroy relationships with children, why we do not move at work or go to work that we do not like and we don't want to do this, why, for example, we sit at home and don't go anywhere and do nothing. That is, this is a series about how we were once traumatized, in childhood, in youth, maybe in adolescence. And then we live with these injuries all our lives and without realizing them. It seems to me that 99.9% of people live this way".

b) the world outlook of the characters, depicted in the media text. The characters value personal and professional freedom and independence; they strive for family and job satisfaction, though they may have conflicts with their relatives or/and colleagues. The dominating stereotype of success is being a smart, talented, prosperous, successful and efficient specialist who is in demand and well-paid.

Structure and methods of narration in the media text (dominant concepts: media categories, media technologies, media languages, media representations)

a) location and action time of a media text

Location – Moscow, Russia. The settings are varied depending on the character's story and the psychologist's method of therapy – it can be an office, a mall, a country house, the theatre, the forest, the roof of a high-storeyed building, a cemetery, a plane, the prison, etc.; time – our days, but sometimes there occur flashbacks representing the characters' reminiscences concerning some former events that conditioned their present state and life situation.

b) the environment typical for the media text, everyday items:

Moscow streets, Artem's office, his father's flat, his ex-wife's flat, etc. The psychologist's office is transparent, quite bare and poorly furnished, though located in a prestigious and luxurious business-centre.

c) (stereotypical) methods of depicting reality, typology of characters (character traits, clothing, physique, vocabulary, facial expressions, gestures, the presence or absence of a stereotypical manner of characters in the media text). The characters are presented more or less realistically; they belong to different age-groups, different social strata, have different professions and hobbies. The main character is rather idealized, especially it refers to his unique professional skills. The age-range of supporting characters, for instance, the clients – is not limited – from early childhood to the retiring age; the level of education of the characters is different and depends on their social status. The majority of the psychotherapist's clients are educated people and qualified specialists who can afford to hire a highly paid psychotherapist. They have different professions, i.e., a vet, a boxer, businessmen, teachers, a builder, a prison guard, etc. The characters' appearance and clothes are realistic; their speech characteristics depend on their education, culture, age and upbringing.

The main character Artem Streletsky is a professional psychotherapist who uses his own provocative method of treatment that is not approved of or supported by traditional psychotherapists. His method is a deliberate provocation of the client, bringing him or her to the very situation that hurt them in the past. Re-experiencing this traumatic situation should play the role of a trigger, necessary to launch a chain of mental reactions leading to recovery.

The psychotherapist's manner of speaking is straightforward, categorical and very often provocative or even aggressive; his dominant traits of character are dedication, perseverance, self-confidence, truth-seeking, non-recognition of authorities, achieving goals at any cost, courage bordering on recklessness, loneliness, tactlessness, self-centeredness, insolence and brutality, cynicism. Actually, his negative traits are just a mask or the armour behind which a weak and vulnerable, traumatized and a heavily stressed person hides.

d) a significant change in the life of characters and the arising challenge (a violation of the usual life), the solution to the problem. Every episode is a separate story of psychotherapy within the major life story of the main character – the psychotherapist. Thus, the plot structure of the media text includes both vertical and horizontal storylines. The main plotlines directly related to the main character can be designated as professional and personal. Every episode is a story of a broken man that the viewers feel as if their own pain when following the character and watching his or her suffering. Generally speaking, the model of conceptual plot construction is stereotyped: a patient turns to a psychologist with a problem – the specialist offers a solution – the patient gets healed.

Psycho (Russia, 2020)

Historical context (dominant concepts: media agencies, media categories, media representations and media audiences).

Undoubtedly, "Storytelling, especially in film, changes in response to the social, cultural and political concerns and interests of the time, as it also shapes that environment. The most powerful films reflect the world back to us and therefore they can become a battleground over interpretations of the social world" (Brown, 2015).

a) features of the historical period of media texts' production, market conditions that contributed to the idea, the process of creating media texts, the degree of influence of political and social events on the media text.

Market conditions that contributed to the production of the film is the so called "streaming revolution". Streaming has quickly changed the way media texts (especially film series) are bought, consumed, and who profits from them. It frees audiences from TV network schedules, giving rise to binge watching — viewing several (or all) episodes of a TV series/season in a single sitting. *Psycho*

(Russia, 2020) is one of the projects of *More Originals* company which is both online film theatre and a producer of its original content. The premiere of the series was on November 5th, 2020 on online service More TV.

The film is directed by Fedor Bondarchuk and the script is written by his wife, an actress and a debut scriptwriter Paulina Andreeva, starring Konstantin Bogomolov, known as a theater and film director. The series was noticed by critics – leading actors K. Bogomolov, R. Khayrullina, and E. Lyadova were nominated for their roles in APKiT awards (Association of Producers of Film and Television) and the film got the White Elephant Award (Russian Guild of Film Critics) as the best television series – 2021.

b) the way the knowledge of real historical events of a particular period enhances the understanding of the given media text, examples of historical references in the media text.

In the article devoted to the analysis of the state of the Russian society in modern conditions, a post-graduate researcher D. Afanasieva supports the idea that modern Russian society is not only a society of knowledge, high technologies, services, but also a society of risk. In her article, the author identifies and examines in detail the main factors that determine the classification of Russia as a risk society: lag in the modernization of the country; the absence of a unified ideological and political component of Russian society; the threat of undermining sovereignty countries in the international arena; a high level of socio-economic stratification of the Russian population (Afanasieva, 2018: 48). The last phenomenon is of particular importance to the media text's context. According to data used by the researcher, income inequality in Russia is expressed in decile fund ratio (the ratio between average income levels 10 % of the population with the highest incomes and 10 % of the population with the lowest incomes), which is 15.5; and the Gini coefficient (the indicator takes values from zero in the case of absolute equality to one in the case of absolute inequality), which is equal to 0.410. Moreover, in Russia there is a strong gap in the level of development (including in terms of profitability) of the subjects. The largest differences in incomes of the population are in the capital and regions with a high level of development: in Moscow, the coefficient Gini is equal to 0.419, for example (Afanasieva, 2018: 49).

The film series is set in Russian capital city, Moscow. It is emphasized by the location, interior design of his office and the charged fees, that the psychotherapist Oleg is a very expensive doctor for the elite circle of clients. The discrepancy between different layers of society is demonstrated by several characters in desperate need of money: Oleg's friend Vera (ex-wife of a rich man), Lyudmila (a potential surrogate mother for Oleg's baby), Nadenka (a middle-aged caretaker who aspires to stay in the house even after her client passes away).

Socio-cultural, ideological, religious context (dominant concepts: media agencies, media categories, media representations and media audience).

a) ideology, directions, goals, objectives, world outlook, the concepts of the authors of these media texts in the socio-cultural context; ideology, culture of the world, depicted in the media text.

As a film director, Fedor Bondarchuk is mostly known for his big budget action films such as *The 9th Company, Inhabited Island, Stalingrad, and Attraction*. Significantly, this is his first drama and his first film series. As E. Belikov points out in his article, the film is about "lies and unrighteousness of the today's world". "Why is this representation so important for today's Russia? There is a feeling that we all live in Oleg's head – we are actively absorbing the illusion of normality, dreaming about it, adapting the unpleasant truth to it. This is a multi-level process, stretching from general consumerism to the self-awareness of the entire country, which has long ceased to feel itself a single whole, divided by class, and even further. We are all disunited, frightened by the mere thought that this "norm" may be shaken – which happened in 2020" (Belikov, 2020).

b) the world outlook of the characters, depicted in the media text

Oleg's privileged upper-class clients are looking for "meaningfulness for themselves – or at least its illusion. All of them are related to psychology – as trainees, theorists, or users. At a minimum, they all try to comprehend their own life-being – however, outside of their endless Aligieri hellish circles, within which they are forced to repeat and multiply the mistakes of the past, all the characters of this fatalistic series are unable to leave" (Belikov, 2020).

Notably, Oleg is not the only psychotherapist in the film. There is also his mother, her partner, also a university professor, and Igor, Oleg's supervisor from the ethical committee. Oleg calls his mother by the first name, Kira, manifesting the distance and coldness between them. Kira teaches psychology at university, has an affair with her colleague, she admits that she had never

wanted children, and still cannot accept the "normal for her age" behaviour. Nikolai Stepanovich (her boyfriend), initially attracted by Kira's freedom and non-conformism, starts longing for down-to-earth domestic comfort – homemade meals and ability to relax. Igor, the psychotherapist who is supposed to treat and supervise Oleg, literally turns out to be a fake – one day Oleg finds him as a patient of a psychiatric hospital.

Structure and methods of narration in the media text (dominant concepts: media categories, media technologies, media languages, media representations)

a) location and action time of a media text

Location – Moscow, Russia. Time – our days.

b) the environment typical for the media text, everyday items:

Moscow streets, Oleg's office, Oleg's flat and his mother's flat, university, etc.

c) (stereotypical) methods of depicting reality, typology of characters (character traits, clothing, physique, vocabulary, facial expressions, gestures, the presence or absence of a stereotypical manner of characters in the media text).

The supporting characters are very colourful and represent different (stereo)types: on the one hand, there are Oleg's clients: an actress afraid of becoming old and unattractive, a top manager suffering and dreading to confess (even to himself) about being homosexual, and a friend: a careless ex-wife of a millionaire who dumps him for a poor artist but finds herself unhappy and unloved. On the other hand, there are people from a different "league": volunteers from a search and rescue organization looking for missing people, a potential surrogate mother of Oleg's child, finally, his missing wife.

The role of objects in this film series cannot be overestimated. "In films, objects can translate the characters' interior state of mind in a concomitant way that is both revealing/dissimulating, explicit/implicit; a game whose rules are based on the ethical-esthetical commitment to a conceptual narrative. Objects are signs that represent ideas, ideals and translate intended meaning in a film. The audience is in front of the idea of this object that is visually transmuted and transposed to the screen. Therefore, the object-sign on the screen is often only partially an object of reality. Often times it carries with itself data that goes beyond the aesthetics of reality; data that are formed inside the infrastructure of the fictional image" (Gambarato, 2010: 106). Though object interpretation, as the starting point of film analysis, is not a new approach, the researcher R. Gambarato proposes an interesting methodology for film analysis which focuses on the objects which involves both quantitative and qualitative analysis; together with the criteria of relevance and expressiveness, the author also "analyzes the functionality of an object by exploring details and specifying the role various objects play in films" (Gambarato, 2010: 113). Some of the objects that call for the viewers' interpretation (apart from the most obvious sign in the series – the rubber doll which sometimes turns into the main character's lost wife, who he talks to, dresses up, dances with and makes love to) include his sunglasses and his vehicle – a scooter. The sunglasses he wears have red lenses, thus everything that he looks at turns red – the colour of blood, very disturbing, indeed.

Oleg rides his electric scooter to work, which is, on the one hand, objectively convenient in the city center, and on the other hand, might be interpreted as another sign of his insecurity and precariousness – there's nothing to protect the rider except for a helmet and thus he stands no chance against a much larger vehicle or an obstacle. In one episode, Oleg actually crashes into the barrier and falls.

d) a significant change in the life of characters and the arising challenge (a violation of the usual life).

Each of the characters goes through a life-changing challenge. As for the main character, a psychotherapist Oleg, the film audience witnesses him being tortured not only by the horrible fear that his missing wife might be dead, but also by his questioning his own sanity and self-harming attempts of escaping the reality.

5. Conclusion

The structural and narrative model of contemporaneous Russian film series devoted to psychotherapy focuses on representing the interrelated storylines of the protagonist's personal and professional lives. At the same time, the protagonist of the media text acts as a certain anti-hero of our time who is defiantly and without regret destroying the prevailing stereotypes and conventions when helping people in difficult life situations, thereby appealing to the audience.

After watching film representations of the psychotherapists' practice, and the social roles expected of them, several roles or categories, can be identified. The generalized film image of a psychotherapist in contemporary Russian cinema can be characterised as follows:

1. He is the antipode of the traditional image of the psychotherapist who deliberately and outrageously violates the established rules and ethics codes; moreover, he prefers to use his own innovative method of treatment or therapy which is based on provocation and manipulation.

2. He is presented ambivalently, although his behaviour is outwardly negative, his motives and goals are positive, for despite acting as a manipulator, provocateur, and a violator of ethics principles, he is genuinely devoted to his profession and is a decent personality.

3. He is a dynamic image, in some aspects resembling a detective whose life is dangerous and full of risk and adventure, associated with solving riddles. In a way this image may popularize the profession of psychologist, especially it may seem rather attractive to a youth audience, since the protagonist is young, creative, smart and daring, his actions are unpredictable and unconventional, he is a man of character and very purposeful, possesses leadership qualities.

4. The dominant mental and emotional disorders that the psychotherapist has to deal with in Russian films can be identified as mainly individual, marital and family psychotherapy and counselling: the generation gap, childhood traumas, addictions, manipulations or abuses, grief and depression, eating disorders, etc.

5. The psychotherapist himself needs professional psychological support and supervision since he suffers from a serious psychological trauma. Besides he is constantly in a conflict situation, external or internal, personal and professional. He is obviously a dramatic image, for all his professional success, he is not able to solve his own problems in interpersonal relationships with his close people; sometimes he exhibits sociopathic inclinations.

6. The image leaves a contradictory impression on the viewer, though his methods of treatment may seem to some audiences quite unacceptable or even dangerous for both the psychologist and the patient, still, they turn out to be effective in the long run according to the film.

7. Such film image may discredit the psychology-related professions in the eyes of the audience since it allows the psychologist to violate the key ethics principles and professional standards of conduct for the counselling professions such as privacy and confidentiality, human relations (avoiding sexual harassment, physical or mental harm).

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