

## Media Strategies in the Age of Information Wars

December 14 – 15, 2023

### ABSTRACTS

#### December 14, Thursday:

Galina Miazhevich

Keynote: *Communicating conflict: norms of reporting, contested imagery and polarization*

This keynote charts the role of visual aspects of war coverage in Ukraine and Palestine. It explores three components nested in the intersection of the citizen vs professional reporting, visual data accumulation and its utilization for various ends (reportage and affective management; manipulation, misperception and misinformation; justice, and human rights abuses) and long-term effects of managing traumatic visual imagery such as compassion fatigue, segmentation of discursive architecture and the limits of solidarity.

**Galina Miazhevich** is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Journalism, Media, and Culture at Cardiff University, UK. Previously Galina taught at several UK Universities and was the Gorbachev Media Research Fellow at the University of Oxford, UK (2008-2012). At present Galina is engaged at FEMCORUS—an Academy of Finland funded project on the Mediated Feminism in Russia at Tampere University (Finland). Galina has an extensive publication record in the field of media, culture and area studies. Galina led the Leadership grant on media representations of LGBTQ+ in Russia (2018-2020) funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK. Currently Galina is a Visiting Scholar at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies (Fall 2023), Harvard University, USA.

#### Panel 1: Social media: between conflict and solidarity

Andrii Kostyriev

##### *Effectiveness of social media: general rules and Ukrainian experience*

The purpose of using social media, especially during wartime, is to expand the circle of interaction and mobilization of supporters. Therefore, they perform three functions: (1) dissemination of information (ideas), (2) search for supporters, (3) their mobilization and organization of interaction. Accordingly, social media has three levels: (1) periphery (passive consumers), (2) subperiphery (active users - from likes / dislikes to comments), (3) core (closed groups). At the peripheral level, the effectiveness of social media is measured by quantitative indicators. Therefore, it is important that as many people as possible learn the truth about the war in Ukraine. At the level of the subperiphery, qualitative - value - indicators are added to the case, because the circle of supporters is formed on the basis of common values. And their structure has the character of open networks. Exactly at this level social media produces heated debates. And this is a very important stage in the organization of support for Ukraine. These discussions cannot change the beliefs of their participants.

Therefore, there is no need to worry about Russian haters and botfarms. It is more important to identify supporters and increase their activity. Because discussions contribute to the fact that, as a result, groups of like-minded people are formed. This group are value motivated. And exactly at this level the main goal of communication - interaction - is realized. These groups have the nature of closed networks. They isolate themselves and form so-called echo chambers, or bubbles. Inside these bubbles, unanimity of opinion prevails. War exacerbates these processes. Clustering of society leads to the fact that it becomes bubbly, that is, composed of individual bubbles. At the same time, as practice has shown, during the war, these bubbles did not merge into one ball, but stuck tightly together. That is, contradictions remained, but solidarity began to dominate.

In this way, the effect indicated by the classics of the network society concept, Wellman and Castells, is manifested - glocalization. And we see this on the example of the war in Ukraine. Support has a global character, but is implemented at the local level through closed groups.

Therefore, the regularity of the functioning of social media consists in the combination of two tendencies - the desire for openness and the attraction to closedness. The effectiveness of social media is determined by (1) the expansion of the periphery, (2) the activity of the subperiphery, and (3) the cohesion of the core.

Like any tool, social media can also be used in the opposite direction - to disorganize interaction in the camp of the enemy / competitor. Then fakes (disinformation) are launched through them. In addition, unlike the structures of traditional media, in the space of social media, each participant can produce his own information, which he believes or passes off as truth. In this way, a post-truth world is formed in the space of social media. This effect became a feature of the war in Ukraine.

Analysis of empirical research data shows that the perception of post-truth is a natural process due to the fact that in a situation of stress caused by information overload, people rely more on experiences associated with internal beliefs rather than on rational arguments. Under these conditions, personal moral values have become an influential force in the selection of sources, as well as in the interactive processes of reaction and production of information. By gaining a greater degree of freedom in the information space and becoming a subject of the communication process, the individual assumes a greater degree of responsibility for making political decisions. Moral values become the basis of political communication and structuring in social media space. And the Ukrainian example confirmed this, as evidenced by the data of sociological surveys.

At the same time, the configuration of the communication space and the functional characteristics of social media depend on the level of trust and the strength of communication ties between participants. The derivative of the number and strength of communication connections, which the author calls "valuency", determines the level of value attraction of a social network node. Actors with the highest valuency receive a resource of influence, which turns out as communication power. The President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Valery Zaluzhnyi, the Commander of the Ground Forces Alexander Syrskyi and other heroes became

such high-value nodes around which the communication power was concentrated.

**Andrii Kostyriev** is a Candidate of Political Sciences (Ph. D.), (the theme of doctoral thesis is 'Mass Media's Role in the Process of Democratic Development of Society), Associate Professor of the Department of Law, Philosophy and Political Science of T. G. Shevchenko National University "Chernihiv Collegium" (Chernihiv, Ukraine). Published a monograph and about 30 articles in the field of political communication and geopolitics.

*Anastasiia Tormakhova*

***Social Media Reflections: Tracking the Dynamics of the Russian-Ukrainian War***

The Russian-Ukrainian war in its active phase from the full-scale invasion continues. Social media show the reflection of Internet users on its events. The content of posts about the war reflects the changing mood in Ukrainian society, the level of interest in learning about the events taking place in the country and the stages of hostilities. However, an equally important indicator is the frequency of posts and the number of shares.

The following statistics can be seen on the activity on various telegram channels and social media, including Facebook and Instagram. All events related to the war were covered in the official telegram channels, where it was actually duplicated. Among the telegram and viber channels that cover confirmed information are the following: Real Ukraine | Radar Alert, Real Kyiv | Ukraine, My Kyiv. The respective pages of these telegram channels also exist on Instagram and Facebook, but with a smaller number of followers.

The most horrific events related to war crimes were covered not only in the Telegram channels, but also on the personal pages of users. The number of posts on them from 22 February 2022 was the highest from March to November. Instead, in the second half of 2023, the number of posts on personal pages devoted to military events decreased significantly. While the number of posts on official channels did not decrease, they were supplemented by current news events in the region.

Information messages have a significant impact on society, as they serve not only to inform recipients but also to interpret events. The decline in the level of activity of ordinary citizens demonstrates the effect of "war fatigue", which is typical not only for Ukrainians, but even more so for those who are citizens of EU countries.

In terms of the role of these social networks, they illustrate a change in the mood of society, a decrease in the level of shock from the war, especially in regions where there are no street battles or artillery shelling. The study of social media can be carried out to highlight the specifics of information warfare, propaganda and agitation, etc.

**Anastasiia Tormakhova** - Ph.D. in Philosophy, Associate Professor, Department of Ethics, Aesthetics and Cultural Studies, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine. Published more than 100 articles in Ukrainian and international

academic periodicals. Research area: Aesthetics, Cultural Studies, Visual Studies, Cultural History.

*Alina Mozolevska*

***War of Visuals: Popular Culture in the Face of Russia's aggression against Ukraine***

Full-scale Russia's invasion of Ukraine that started on February 24, 2022 leads not only to the shift of real and mental borders in Europe, but also drives profound changes of Ukrainian mentality and national identity. The fight with the aggressor generates the reshaping of the image of the other, new narratives are being created and new national heroes are being constructed in hybrid media space. At the same time, in Russian social media we can observe similar processes of mythologization of the self and demonetization of the other. Together with the flows of disinformation and anti-Ukrainian propaganda, they recirculate their own vision of the geopolitical future and past of Ukraine, denying its agency and the right for independence. Masking its true motifs under the slogans of "liberation" and "denazification", Russia aims to resurrect the phantom borders of USSR and propagate its aggressive imperialism beyond the real borders of the state. This paper seeks to explore the weaponization of popular culture in the discourses of the Russo-Ukrainian war as means of reflecting the new reality of the country, and to study the role of visual means in conceptualization of main narratives as well as their potential to provide alternative interpretation of these narratives in Russian and Ukrainian social media. We will study how the visual and textual elements of popular culture are used for mobilization of the society and the construction of the image of the self and the other. The data set is composed of more than 1500 visuals since February 24 in Ukrainian groups on Facebook and Russian groups on V Kontakte.

**Alina Mozolevska** is an Associate Professor of Faculty of Philology at Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University in Mykolaiv, Ukraine. She has a PhD in Linguistics with a major in Romance Languages from Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv, Ukraine (2015) and she is a doctoral student since September 2021 at Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University. Her doctoral project is focused on the analysis of conceptualization of national identity and borders in populist discourse. She is currently Visiting Professor at Center for Border Studies at Saarland University, Germany. She is a member of research projects The Bio-Politics of Borders in Times of Crisis (2018-2020, PMBSNU and Saarland University) and Bridging Borders: Future Challenges and Cultural Dynamics (2021-2023, PMBSNU and Saarland University). She was also an academic coordinator of the international project Borderland Stories funded by EVZ MEET UP (Ukraine-Germany, 2021, <https://borderland.online/>). Her research interests include Border Studies, Critical Discourse Analysis and Media Studies.

**Panel 2: Digital strategies of anti-war resistance**

*Olena Pavlova, Mariya Rohozha*

### ***Transformation of the Ukrainian media landscape in the context of war***

Before Russia's full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian media landscape was characterized by the general trend of smartphones replacing other media and thus by the logic of de-differentiation of work and entertainment. There was a trend toward the dominance of online publics as the main information resource. However, new trends emerged after February 2022.

The "United News" telethon emerged in the first days of the war—this content was produced by several media studios and was broadcast to the entire nation. Other national channels due to restrictions on media consumption began to function as regional programs. At the beginning of the invasion, the telethon's products were the main source of official information designed to counter Russian aggression and coordinate the position of domestic media channels.

The marathon played a major stabilizing role during the first six months of the war. Almost all citizens of Ukraine continuously had it on in the background—even those who watched it through YouTube. The incessant attention to the official information then decreased especially after it became clear that the state had withstood the first strike. Interest in alternative sources began to grow, but it is clear that this has its own peculiarities in wartime, i.e., the development of a culture of vigilance.

In times of war, a "reverse perspective" is formed in the functioning of the media. The prospect of influencing public opinion is impossible without access to big media. Television has the tools of "big media," which allow it to form a national majority and a political majority. First of all, it provides free access to information that is so important in a situation of infrastructure destruction. The monopoly on television in Ukraine is not a monopoly on media in general. Various online media channels significantly complement the national media landscape.

Various media platforms, primarily telegram channels, are now complementing and competing with the telethon, but only professional channels. Text-based forms of communication are dominant in these professional channels because they take on the burden of analytical work and help form public opinion space. This occurs by "deliberation sense of community" (Joseph Bessette) as well as in the form of systematic presentation of the material. The forms of "vernacular writing on the Web" (A. Barton), which is the basic trend of contemporary social networks, have become more strictly limited due to the reasons above—especially because the main form of the comments is textual.

Therefore, the search for forms of civic engagement and the lack of visual representation of material in telegram channels lead to the need for self-expression in other forms of visual communication. This helps explain the intensification of meme flows in Ukrainian media. Largely thanks to memes, Ukraine has created a successful image of its participation in the war. Indeed, the combatants have even complained that the country's mobilization potential is being lost because the citizens are convinced that everything will be fine. Elements of the current media landscape of Ukraine thus fluctuate in this amplitude.

**Olena Pavlova** - Dr. habil. (Philosophy), Professor, Department of Ethics, Aesthetics and Cultural Studies, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Humboldt-University of Berlin.

**Mariya Rohozha** - Dr. habil. (Philosophy), Professor, Department of Ethics, Aesthetics and Cultural Studies, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

*Konstantin Fomin*

***The transformative dynamics of media strategies employed by prominent Russian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) following the invasion of Ukraine***

This research investigates the transformative dynamics of media strategies employed by prominent Russian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) following the invasion of Ukraine. Over the years, the authoritarian regime in Russia has systematically constricted the operational space for civil society, including media outlets, political activists, and NGOs, utilizing legislative restrictions and overt repression. Despite this, until recently, NGOs, except those directly involved in political processes like election monitoring, could operate relatively unhindered, unlike independent media and politicians, many of whom were compelled to leave the country or face criminal persecution.

Within this context, several major Russian NGOs, encompassing environmental, human rights, and charitable sectors, assumed roles as influential media actors, shaping the values of a substantial portion of the citizenry and influencing the political landscape. Their social media followers numbered in the tens, and in some cases, hundreds of thousands. Additionally, these organizations actively leveraged mass mobilization tools to engage their supporters.

However, with the onset of the invasion of Ukraine, governmental pressure on Russian NGOs intensified significantly. Non-governmental organizations wishing to persist in their missions were compelled to adapt to the new circumstances. In contrast to media entities, many NGOs could not simply stop their field operations and continue their media work from abroad.

This study focuses on Greenpeace Russia, OVD-Info, and the "Help Needed" foundation, examining how these major Russian NGOs adjusted their media strategies after February 2022 and assessing the outcomes of these adaptive measures.

Methodologically, a content analysis of the NGOs' social media posts before and after the invasion was conducted, complemented by an examination of their mentions in leading Russian media outlets. Financial reports were studied to analyze the dynamics of private donations, and the growth of social media followers was quantitatively assessed. To provide context and explain the motives behind the media strategy changes, interviews with former NGOs staff were also conducted.

The findings of this research contribute to a nuanced understanding of the extent to which NGOs can maintain resilience and continue their missions amidst the pressures of an authoritarian regime. In an environment where independent politicians and traditional media outlets are suppressed, the role of NGOs as media actors may be pivotal for the preservation and potential rejuvenation of civil society in Russia.

**Konstantin Fomin** - MA in Political Science and International Relations (graduated with distinction from the University of Manchester), currently serves as the media coordinator for the team involved in the first Russian climate lawsuit. Since 2010, he has been actively involved with environmental and human rights NGOs, including Greenpeace Russia, Climate Action Network - Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, OVD-Info, and The First Department. In 2022, he co-founded the resource center ReForum Space Vilnius, aimed at supporting Russian and Belarusian media and NGOs in exile. His research into the media strategies of the largest Russian independent NGOs after the invasion of Ukraine was initiated through a fellowship from the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga. Additionally, he is actively engaged in the project "Multinational Migrants: Ways of Adaptation in the Nordic and Baltic Countries," conducted by the Centre for Nordic Studies at the University of Helsinki.

*Vasily Zharkov*

### ***Forms and narratives of anti-war activities in Russia (2022-2023)***

The massive invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 has caused moral paralysis in Russian society. Although the majority of Russians demonstrate loyalty to state policy, a critical minority of citizens are struggling to oppose Putin's military adventure. Anti-war activism is severely limited by repressive legislation and criminalization of activists and citizens who openly oppose the war. Nevertheless, anti-war activism survives and continues to operate both in Russia and in exile. Contemporary forms of anti-war activism in Russia 2022-2023 can be divided into three main parts: 1) direct-action protests, mostly occurring in the first days and months of the invasion; 2) anonymous protests that continue despite increased repression; and 3) propaganda of the anti-war agenda by emigrants in Russian-language media and social networks. The emigrant narrative on the war demonstrates full loyalty to the official position of Ukraine, which is not quite acceptable to a significant part of the audience inside the country. At the same time, a movement of wives of mobilized men is gaining momentum in Russia, becoming part of Russian civil society and demanding the return of their husbands home without directly calling for an end to the war. Whether the movement of wives of soldiers becomes a mass movement and assumes a more pronounced anti-war stance depends both on the authorities' response to them and on the actions and narratives of anti-war campaigners.

As an effect of the joint efforts of various independent anti-war forces and organizations data of relevant polls shows the number of active opponents of the war in Russian society is about 10%, with up to 40% expressing doubts in one way or another about the need for continued military action. With such a significant potential for resistance, the Kremlin has to constantly balance and cannot decide to mobilize more people to the front at least until the presidential elections in 2024. At the same time, anti-war propaganda should find new forms and narratives to move beyond the "bubble" of 10% of active supporters. To my mind, the narrative of anti-war propaganda would preferably be based on the idea of a return to peace and normality, rather than in terms of total defeat and the disintegration of Russia.

**Vasily Zharkov** is currently a visiting scholar and lecturer PhD at European Humanities University in Vilnius. In 1997 he graduated from Historical faculty at the Moscow Pedagogical State University. His primary field of studies was focused on the Russian political history, he defended the dissertation in 2001. In 2000-s he worked as associated professor of the Applied Political Science faculty at the State University – Higher School of Economics and at other state and private universities in Moscow. In 2010 he was invited to the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (Shaninka) as a chair of the Political Science department and director of “Political Science and International Relations” MA-program validated by the University of Manchester. In 2018 Dr. Vasily Zharkov became a dean of Political Science faculty at Shaninka but after the beginning of Russian invasion of Ukraine he resigned and moved to Lithuania.

### **Panel 3: Cinema as a political media**

*Alyona Tymoshenko*

#### ***Cinema as a strategy of war propaganda and anti-military resistance***

Today, Ukraine is fighting a war with Russia on two fronts simultaneously: the real battlefield and the information space. And neither of these sides can be less important, because both are vital. Every day, we experience the consequences of the enemy's information propaganda on our own example. And every day we find ways to fight it.

In my report, I would like to draw attention to such an effective way of conveying information as cinema. After all, cinema is one of the most influential media that can affect the depth of our emotions, the formation of opinions and perspectives. Cinema is an important means of communication for spreading ideas. Films can express social, political, cultural, and moral narratives, as well as visualize issues and topics that are relevant to society. They can make viewers think, stimulate debate, and change their worldview.

The Soviet propaganda machine has always used cinema as one of the main ways to influence public opinion. The USSR used the so-called method of socialist realism to form "correct" cultural narratives. Since then, nothing has changed in the country of our enemy neighbor, they continue to use this fiction of art as propaganda, namely propaganda for Russia's war against Ukraine.

In the given paper I analyze the most famous three films of Russian and Ukrainian cinema, produced in the period of Russia's war against Ukraine, 2014-2023, focusing on the messages of war propaganda in Russian cinema and of anti-military resistance in Ukrainian films. I conduct a comparative analysis of the generalized image of the hero of a Ukrainian and Russian film. I find the differences and explain how this image of the hero affects the viewer, what thoughts and actions it encourages.

I also identify the ethical aspects associated with the use of cinema as a tool for war propaganda: the question of objectivity and truthfulness of information; the impact of films on the minds and behavior of viewers, emotion management, in particular, the possibility of manipulation and indoctrination; the question of ethical boundaries in the use of cinema for propaganda, in terms

of depicting violence, inciting hatred or supporting terrorism; attracting financial/human resources for military operations.

**Alyona Tymoshenko** is a Ukrainian producer, Founder and Head of the Ukrainian Film School, Founder of GoodMedia, Production, Expert of the Council of the Ukrainian Stage Film Agency (2020-2021).

*Boris Stepanov*

***Come and see? Russian official film criticism of the era of the “Special Military Operation”***

The phenomenon of criticism has traditionally played an important role in research on the functioning of various fields of cultural production (P. Bourdieu) and, in particular, the film industry (S. Baumann). This approach acquires specific relevance in the context of the current military conflict. The task of the paper will be to record the transformations that the field of Russian film criticism has undergone since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The starting point for this analysis will be the conclusions about the structure of the field and the key strategies of Russian film criticism, which were drawn from an analysis of the corpus of critical responses to the film *Stalingrad* (2013). Building on these findings, we will attempt to document the changes in this field caused by the shrinking of public space in Russian media, the intensification of ideological dictates and censorship, restrictions on access to the global film process, and other trends that have shaped the state of film criticism after 24 February 2022. Our task will be to describe the discourses of film criticism concerning the information agenda of certain periodicals. I will focus on the signs of the continued autonomy of the field of criticism or the forms of rejection that certain authors and media outlets exhibit. In describing the shrinking space of film criticism, it will be necessary to find out how the boundaries of discursive communities and the differences between the strategies of publications and film critics are defined, what approaches to the characterization of the film process, and what forms of approaching and rejecting the dominant ideological agenda are practiced by different participants in this field. In this context, it is of interest to define the official and analyse the phenomenon of populist film criticism, which emerges as a factor of support for the existing ideological regime.

**Boris Stepanov** is a Researcher at the Centre for Central and Eastern European Studies (Eur'Orbem), University of Paris IV Sorbonne, PhD in Cultural Studies. He published several dozen works on Soviet and post-Soviet historical culture, the history of humanities and film studies. He is a co-editor of the collections “Tsaritsyno: An Attraction with History” (with Natalia Samutina) (2014) and “Historicity: Urban Studies and the History of Modernity” (with Oksana Zaporozhets and Kirill Levinson) (forthcoming). His research interests lie at the intersection of cultural sociology, cultural studies, and the history of knowledge. He is currently carrying out a project on the history of Russian local studies and urban studies.

*Barys Paulau*

***Sergei Loznitsa's films as a means of anti-military resistance***

Sergei Loznitsa is a Ukrainian filmmaker renowned for his politically charged films. These films expose the devastating consequences of war, question the glorification of military actions, and emphasize the importance of memory and historical reflection.

In Loznitsa's "Blockade" the siege of Leningrad during World War II is depicted, highlighting the suffering of the civilian population and the collective efforts to survive amidst destruction. "Blockade" is a brilliant attempt to estrange our vision of the Siege by showing us "the real as thing of trauma" without sentimentality and heroic appeal.

Similarly, "In the Fog", based on a highly regarded novel by Vasil Bykov, explores the moral complexities and psychological toll of war during World War II. The film presents the human cost and moral ambiguity of war, challenging the glorification of military actions and exposing the devastating consequences for both soldiers and civilians.

Loznitsa's film "Austerlitz" examines the effects of war through the lens of historical memory. By focusing on tourists visiting concentration camps, the film highlights the commodification and trivialization of historical atrocities. "Austerlitz" prompts viewers to reflect on the dangers of forgetting the lessons of the past by emphasizing the importance of memory and historical reflection.

"Victory Day" captures the annual celebrations commemorating the Soviet Union's victory in World War II. By observing the rituals, parades, and public displays of patriotism, the film questions the glorification of war and the ways in which it can be manipulated for political purposes.

Loznitsa's films "Donbass" and "Babi Yar. Context" continue to challenge militarism by documenting ongoing conflicts and revisiting historical events. "Donbass" portrays the violence of the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, forcing viewers to confront the senselessness and futility of armed conflict. "Babi Yar. Context" delves into the historical context surrounding the Babi Yar massacre during World War II, confronting historical amnesia and emphasizing the importance of remembering and learning from the past. In Loznitsa's works documents appear not so much as objects of a historical archive but as a way of understanding the present society's memory process.

"The Natural History of Destruction" critically examines the aftermath of World War II and the destruction of German cities by Allied bombing. By exposing the destructive consequences of armed conflict and questioning the moral justifications for such actions. It sheds light on the devastating impact of war on civilian populations and challenges the glorification of military actions.

Through their portrayal of the human cost of conflict, encouragement of critical reflection, and reminders of the dangers of forgetting the past, these films offer a powerful means of resistance against the glorification of war and the perpetuation of violence.

***Barys Paulau*** is an independent scholar, affiliated with the programme "Scholars without borders". Former University Lecturer of the Department of

Social & Pedagogical Psychology, Gomel State University (Belarus) and the Department of Public Health, Gomel State Medical University (Belarus).

*Egor Isaev*

***State cultural expansion, (self-)censorship and forms of resistance in contemporary Russian cinema***

The report explores the practices of cultural and economic politics implemented by the Russian authorities over the past 15 years; state expansion and regulatory practices in Russian cinema; describes the phenomenon of censorship and self-censorship in Russian cinema in the context of Russian war in Ukraine; and provides examples of contemporary forms of resistance in Russian cinema, drawing parallels with cinema communities that have had similar experiences in their past.

**Egor Isaev** is an independent filmmaker, visiting lecturer at the European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania), working on his Phd thesis at the Media Institute, Ruhr University Bochum (Bochum, Germany).

*Elena Prokhorova, Alexander Prokhorov*

***Our Serial Killers, Ourselves: Russian Neo-Noir TV Series as a Symptom and Self-Incrimination***

Nina Auerbach, to whose seminal study *Our Vampires, Ourselves* we owe the title of this article, famously said that "... every age embraces the vampire it needs, and gets the vampire it deserves" (145). As a popular culture obsession, serial killers are not as old as vampires, and neither are they as versatile, malleable or erotic. Nevertheless, in the past thirty years serial killers have made their appearance in a variety of film and TV genres: from serial killer crime dramas (*Se7en*, *Hannibal*) to serial killer comedies (*So I Married an Axe-Murderer*, *Scary Movie*); from the vigilante killer in the sunny *Dexter* (Showtime, 2006-13) to the noirish *Mindhunter* (Netflix, 2017-19) and *True Detective* (HBO, 2014-present).

As popular culture figures, serial killers are transplants to Russia. Serial murders were carefully hidden in Soviet times and did not become prominent even during perestroika, perhaps overshadowed in their narrative potential by other real-life horrors, such as Stalin-era mass terror. The cinematic and streaming popularity of domestic serial killers has erupted in the past 8-10 years. The breakthrough was Iurii Bykov's *The Method* (2015, 2020-21), which initiated the trend of this sub-genre of neo-noir TV series but was different from subsequent productions.

We want to suggest that the growing number of serial(ized) homicidal maniacs on Russian screens is closely linked--symbolically and symptomatically--to the war that Russia unleashed on Ukraine in 2014 and that for ten years has been soaking Russian society in the language and images of aggression and hatred. The appearance of this cluster of serial killer TV series is especially symptomatic in the context of a virtual taboo on the topics of mass political terror, as well as mass loss of lives in the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine. In other words, we see this wave of crime shows as a symptom of the social urge

to speak about mass murders inside and, by now, outside of the Russian Federation. Normalized and addictive violence became “a collective spectacle, one of the crucial sites where private desire and public fantasy cross” (Seltzer 253).

As our case study we chose one of the most recent TV series about a late Soviet-era serial killer, the eight-episode mini-series *Fisher*. The series is based on the investigation of multiple rapes and murders of boys in the suburbs of Moscow from 1986 to the early 1990s by Sergei Golovkin. The nickname of the serial killer is *Fisher*, evoking the famous American chess master. Golovkin was convicted for the killing of eleven teenagers (although most likely he committed many more murders) and was executed on August 2, 1996--the last death penalty sentence in Russia before the moratorium on capital punishment.

**Elena Prokhorova** teaches Russian and Film and Media Studies at the College of William and Mary. Her research focuses on identity discourses in late Soviet and post-Soviet media. She is co-editor (with Rimgaila Salys) of *Russian TV Series in the Era of Transition: Genres, Technologies, Identities* (2022) and (with Nancy Condee and Alexander Prokhorov) of *Cinemasaurus: Russian Film in Contemporary Context* (2020) and co-author (with Alexander Prokhorov) of the *Film and Television Genres of the Late Soviet Era* (2017). Her publications have also appeared in *Slavic Review*, *Slavic and East European Journal*, *Kinokultura*, *Russian Journal of Communication*, and in edited volumes.

**Alexander Prokhorov** is a co-author (with Elena Prokhorova) of *Film and Television Genres of the Late Soviet Era* (2017) and co-editor (with Nancy Condee and Elena Prokhorova) of *Cinemasaurus: Russian Film in Contemporary Context* (2020). His articles and reviews have been published in *Journal of Film and Video*, *Kinokultura*, *Russian Review*, *Slavic Review*, *Slavic and East European Journal*, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, *Art of Cinema (Iskusstvo kino)*, and *Wiener Slawistische Almanach*.

**December 15, Friday:**

**Panel 4: Networked affectivity in the war times**

*Hleb Koran*

***From “post-ironic” Left YouTube to Russian TV channel – case of Stas Vasilyev as “affective agent”***

After the Maidan in Ukraine and the War in Donbass in 2014 in Russian YouTube emerged a specific political genre which can be described as “Left YouTube”. These occurrences were the main subjects for Russian TV and state-owned media – stories about fascism in Ukraine were circulated 24/7. At the same time firstly on Russian Youtube emerged different political channels, which try to present themselves as “different” from TV in their appearance. For example, the first big movie of Navalny's team appeared on YouTube in 2015. The genre of Russian Left YouTube was quite ambiguous from the beginning - it differentiated itself from TV (as was much more youth-oriented in montage and using informal language) as from Russian “Liberal YouTube” (criticizing the last all the time). It seems that the popularity of these Left YouTube channels was

based on the new embodiment of “post-soviet resentment’ – the collapse of the Soviet Union and shock therapy of the 1990s left an imprint on some people for understanding “liberalism” or “democracy” more as swearing words than political positions. The Left Youtube channels had done a great job of continuing to criticize liberals not touching (or touching slightly) the policies of the Russian state itself.

The case of Stas Vasilyev is one of the most interesting for Russian Left YouTube. He started his career in this service as a techno-blogger by reviewing different gadgets. The most special in his reviews was using a lot of smearing words and abusive language that differentiate him from other bloggers. Because of that specific style, he became some kind of star on Russian YouTube and was a guest on different entertainment channels. There was some specific notion of “post-irony” that many Russian YouTube bloggers applied to their style (the same could be applied to Vasilyev). It means some kind of mocking everything around, pretending to save some serious position to particular values. Basically, it was not so easy to understand which thing is still “sacred” to this or that blogger, as mocking can be applied to everything. The most educated bloggers connected this concept with the “metamodern” turn in cultural studies.

For me, it seems that we connect such a mocking attitude to the notion of affect as the last is also working in the field of the pure immanency of the body. Constant having fun on everything could be seen as a constant reproduction of affect between YouTube bloggers and his/her public. But there still was a “sacred spot” for Vasilyev – the Soviet Union and its legacy. This was revealed with time when he started to devote his movies not to reviewing technical gadgets but to questioning the history and politics. But even in these movies he constantly mocked his opponents, mostly “liberals”. Obviously, he supported the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the end of 2022, he released the movie “Donbas Diary. How I was on the War” with a length of 3 hours. After that, he got banned from YouTube, but his career took an unpredictable twist. He got an offer from famous Russian state journalist and propagandist Vladimir Solovyov to release his own show on the TV channel of Solovyov. In my paper, I want to show with means of discourse-analysis how the movies of Vasilyev were made and why it can be seen as a continuation of affect with means of constant mocking.

**Gleb Koran** is PhD-student of Cultural Studies of Gothenburg University. He’s also part of Graduate school FUEM (The Future of Democracy: Cultural Analyses of Illiberal Populism in Times of Crises). He finished his BA and MA in Cultural studies at EHU (Vilnius). He also been a guest researcher on Department of Politics and Government of Ben Gurion University of Negev (Beersheba, Israel). His research project devoted to a specific genre of Russian Political Left YouTube as embodiment of post-soviet resentment. His research interests include Marxism and Post-Marxism, subcultures and countercultures, digital media, post-soviet politics.

*Denis Petrina*

***Blood: power, war, media***

This paper considers blood as a transitive mediating figure, used as a conceptual link to connect the heterogeneous elements of the assemblage of the Russian-Ukrainian war. I will offer three philosophical readings of blood, presented in duplets:

(i) Blood and power: Following Foucault, I will uncover the homological relation between blood and sovereignty based on its two political functions - positive, biopolitical, that of progeny (translated as "self-referentiality") and negative, necropolitical, that of punishment (translated as "self-realization"). This section will also emphasize the aporetic nature of resistance within the "vampiric" regime, which reads as follows: the possibility of resistance arises only when the other party is willing to sacrifice more blood to the regime.

(ii) Blood and war: This section is structured around the notion of "same-bloodness," of brotherhood, which in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine has taken the form of fratricide. I refer to the biblical story of Cain's murder of Abel to frame the military actions as "revenge sacrifice" (necropolitical punishment, as outlined in the first section). To elaborate on this metaphor, I offer the conceptualization of the USSR as a "blood pact" and argue that the war was the result of breaking the pact that "must never be broken" because it was reinforced by the power of blood.

(iii) Blood and media: Ultimately, due to the hybrid nature of war, in which media infrastructures are used for the "distribution of the sensible" (J. Rancière), I employ two theories to highlight the critical role of the media in the "spectacle of bloodshed" that is an integral part of "gore capitalism" (S. Valencia). First, the theory of "haunted media" (J. Sconce) allows me to rethink the hypermediated presence of blood. Second, the theory of the "agency of the drone" (G. Chamayou) allows me to argue that the emergence of the drone as a military technology radically reshapes the categorical apparatus of the notion of war by reinforcing the machinic optic that leads to the quantification and objectification of death.

**Denis Petrina** is a researcher at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute's Department of Contemporary Philosophy. He completed his doctoral degree in philosophy at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute in Vilnius, Lithuania in 2022. His doctoral dissertation explores the philosophical interpretations and (bio)political implications of the notion of affect. His publications focus mostly on affect theory in the contexts of both classical and contemporary philosophy, as well as (re)interpretations of biopolitics in the context of cybercapitalism. His research interests include affect theory, theory of subjectivity, biopolitics, media studies, sexuality, and queer studies, as well as non-classical epistemologies.

*Viktor Levchenko, Kostiantyn Raikher*

### ***The Shaman's action as a pure social affect***

In November 2023, an excerpt of the video record of the concert of the Russian singer Shaman started circulating in the Russian and Ukrainian segments of the Internet. The Ukrainians assessed this excerpt as a yet another confirmation of Russian society's failure to show signs of being civilized and its lunacy with violence and malice.

It is particularly interesting to learn how the Russians perceive Shaman's "action" and what role the media play in this.

On 4 November 2023, as part of the celebrations of the National Unity Day in Russia, the Russian federal channel "Channel One" broadcast the concert of the singer Shaman, known for his patriotism(ultra-nationalism?)-oriented and propaganda of Russian aggression against Ukraine among Russian youth.

During the performance of his most popular song "I am a Russian" when Shaman sings "I am a Russian", he presses the red button in the suitcase brought to him on the stage. This is followed by fire shows. This whole situation can be read very clearly: the suitcase with the red button is the so-called "nuclear suitcase", which in common belief and popular culture is a device that is placed in a special case and which can be used to launch nuclear warfare (i.e., to start a nuclear war). The subsequent fireworks show is a symbolic launching and explosion of nuclear missiles. All this action in conjunction with the words "Such as I am, and I cannot be broken, / And all because / I am a Russian" should emphasize that the Russians by virtue of their unbrokenness and Russianness (!) were able to initiate a nuclear war. Basically, Shaman has played up the constant threats by Russian politicians, among them is Putin, to use nuclear weapons against their opponents in case of extreme necessity.

Yet threats to use nuclear weapons have been made so often by Russian politicians that they themselves have lost their threatening power. In the context of this, Shaman's "action" could well be regarded as a kind of mockery. However, it should be noted that after the fire show starts, Shaman performs the chorus of the song, the words of which are as follows: "I am a Russian, / I go to the very end. / I am a Russian, / I have my blood from my father. / I'm a Russian, / And I'm fortunate, / I'm a Russian, / All the world's spite". Shaman accentuates the alleged national specificity of the Russians, namely "to go to the end" and act "to the world's spite". In other words, the message of the Shaman is that the Russians are ready to start a nuclear war to spite the world and thereby destroy all life on Earth. This "action" of Shaman can be considered as an artistic manifestation of the Russians' threat of using nuclear weapons against their enemies.

In understanding the Shaman's "action", though, we can go further and suggest that it is not simply a matter of threat, but of pleasure. The thinking of the potential destruction of the world and the articulation of this thinking permits the pleasure of suppressing the instinct of self-preservation and unleashing one's social exasperation. The Shaman's "action" is a pure social affect. And this social affect is mediated by television and the Internet. And it is quite puzzling to understand why this is done: to reduce the affect (the fear of total annihilation) or to contaminate the masses (primarily Russian youth) with this very affect. The latter involves that the masses should pleasure at the possibility of total annihilation.

**Viktor Levchenko** - Ph.D. in Philosophy, Associate Professor, Department of Culture Studies, Odesa I. I. Mechnykov National University.

**Raikhert Kostiantyn** - Ph.D. in Philosophy, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Odesa I. I. Mechnykov National University.

*Oleg Reut*

***The Curtained Mirror of Media Representation. A Case of Obituary Notes in Russian Social Media***

This paper deals with the representations of death in the obituaries appearing in Russian social media from the point of view of memorial discourse analysis. It aims to point out how death is told and expressed in the obituaries: death is showed as a split between the dead and the living. The analysis highlights a number of discursive processes and schemata of interpretation that characterize the discourse of glorification. It demonstrates that this subject is situated between the staging of a notice of a death on the one hand, and a comprehensive reflection on heroism on the other, the latter notably concerning the issue of the tanatopolitics and, in particular, that of collective grief.

**Oleg Reut** is a Project Researcher at the Karelian Institute of the University of Eastern Finland participating in the joint research project on Transnational Death: Practices of Death and Remembrance in the Transnational Everyday on the Finnish-Russian Border (TraDeBo), supported by the Academy of Finland. He is also a Non-Resident Fellow at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University. He has developed a multidisciplinary profile in transnational death studies by successfully completing research on politics of commemoration, cultural diversity policies, globalization, and media representation of death.

**Panel 5 : New Challenges for Media Studies**

*Rostyslav Fanahei*

***Media studies through spatial optics***

Widespread way of formatting methodological perspective via attention to the contemporary mass media, despite the actualization of the sociogenetic impact of media in general, remains in a classical way narrowed by the signification. But media theory in its origins is the integration of the approaches that tend to overcome this modern adjustment of self-sufficient meaning in general. It is based on revealing the fact that the media as outsideness and corporeal materialities of communication are not just the means of storage and transition but the models of the production of knowledge, basic sensorial perception, and their interconnections.

From the perspective of technological development of media apparatuses last two centuries were the period of the replacement of symbol-based textual media by the electric and then digital one. According to F.Kittler, first technological media of the electric era, such as gramophone and film, ruined the dominance of the symbolic order that kept senses together under the domain of interpretative practices. Media got the first opportunity to reflect the reality “as it is” in the grasping of the continuity of the time flow. On the other side, it was a radical autonomization of senses according to the different technological channels of transition.

Digitalization leads to specific dedifferentiation in two of these dimensions: digital media became a means of not only storage and mass

transition but also of its computing of the most simple and omnipotent symbolic order beyond human involvement, binary code combined different channels of information in one flow that again tends to lead to the visual interfaces. But the digitalized transition of visual data in near-real time in the context of late modern warfare shows the new step in psychogenetic history of media outlined by Kittler. According to such implementation of Lacan's theory visual experience mediated by cinematography lay in the imaginative register, meanwhile all the chaotic and insignificant reality can be grasped only by audio channel. It seems that the "baroque scopic regime" (M. Jay) of the drone on the battlefield changes it.

The main point of the thesis is that the best way to integrate and enforce insights of media theory, especially in the context of warfare, is through wider spatial optics – to pay attention to the historically changeable media formatting of the practices of representation of space: in interconnections of technical producing of knowledge- and power-full representations of space and corporeal involvement into lived and unconceived representational spaces (A.Lefevbre).

**Rostyslav Fanahei** - Master of Cultural Studies, PhD student, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine.

*Viktoriya Kanstantsiuk*

### ***Generative Media from the Perspective of Critical Theory***

Critical theory is more relevant today than ever in connection with digitalization, algorithmization, and automation of life and the subject. Using critical theory (A. Bown, M. Andrejevic, S. Zizek) and some psychoanalytic ideas, we will try to consider the trends and trajectories of automated media (algorithms, neural networks, AI) and how they influence the mental and social.

As Alfie Bown suggests, we are in the midst of a "revolution of desire" – a fundamental and political transformation of what we desire as human beings. Our impulses, aspirations and motivations are "gamified" according to specific economic and political objectives, changing the way we think about everything. Desires are embedded within the framework of digital capitalism. Digital technologies transform the subject at the level of desire – reconstructing its libidinal economy – in ways that were not previously possible. For example, gamification is a way of thinking about how we program and reprogram to become capitalist subjects at this particular moment in history. This "programming" occurs primarily through reward systems built into gamified systems designed to edit people's habit patterns. We need to recognize that desire is necessarily and always controlled by both politics and technology.

Jean Baudrillard believed that the desires of modern man are mediated by the abstraction of exchange value, but today digital media play an important role. Digital media today offers great opportunities for the further development of capitalism: speed, ubiquity, automation. The reach and acceleration of information dissemination is outpacing human capabilities, so automation is becoming important for companies operating on a global scale, such as Facebook, Google, etc., and social media in general.

However, pervasive digital monitoring, combined with algorithmic decision-making and machine learning, creates new forms of power and control. Digitalization, automation, neural networks, AI are not only liberation, but also

control. In addition, there is a reconfiguration of subjectivity under the influence of automated communication and information processing.

AI is changing how automated knowledge is formed and also how desire is formed. And the key concept here is prediction. Networks are moving from documenting social life to predicting and anticipating it. Mark Andrejevic calls this the triumph of brute-force crunching of numbers over hypothesis testing, understanding and explanation. Whatever the prediction: future job performance, student achievement, potential threat, the approach is to mix as many variables as possible and see what pops up. However, automated media and AI does not show how knowledge is born. How do we know what we know? What is it to know? (personal aspect).

There is a post-social bias in automation: an attempt to replace social processes such as political deliberation with machine ones, as if sorting and matching are the same thing as judgment. Such an attempt is aimed at addressing the undeniable shortcomings of human decision-making and people themselves. Essentially, the platforms and their data claim to know us better than we know ourselves. YouTube is one of the first social networks, which began to predict the desires of subjects. And today AI is already changing the way user desire is formed.

We are now at the start of a new revolution – the AI Revolution. The broad impacts on society will be felt in 1 to 3 years. Most view this technology as a means of creating human-quality content, but generative AI is much more – it’s an entirely new form of media that we’ve never confronted before. “New digital media externalize our unconscious into AI, so that those who interact with AI are no longer split subjects, that is, subjects who have undergone a symbolic castration that makes their unconscious inaccessible to them”. The more important issue is that generative AI will unleash an entirely new form of media that is highly personalized, fully interactive, and potentially far more manipulative than any form of targeted content we have faced to date. The most dangerous feature of generative AI is not that it can crank out fake articles and videos at scale, but that it can produce interactive and adaptive content that is customized for individual users to maximize persuasive impact.

**Viktoriya Kanstantsiuk** is a lecturer at the Department of Social Sciences (Media and Communication program) of the European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania). Research interests: digital media, game studies, digital anthropology, critical theory. Head of the international project/ research seminar and conferences on Game Studies at EHU (2017-2019). Author of articles and publications on digital media and communication. Teaching Courses: Genealogy of Media; Introduction to Game Studies, Introduction to the Specialty: Media Professions.

*Almira Ousmanova*

***Rethinking the ‘Immediacy’ as a space-time concept: on the effects of mediatization of war***

In this paper I address the issue of the perception of war in the information age through the prism of the notion of “immediacy”. This concept was elaborated by philosophers and media scholars long before the arrival of

digital technologies, however, I find it useful for analyzing the temporal and spatial regimes of the war, along with the modes of its mediatization, in the present context. In relation to this subject matter I aim to discuss two main questions. Firstly, how is the effect of the immediacy of the war been constructed in the current political, media, cultural and technological contexts? And secondly, what regimes of mediatization and what factors define the sense of distancing to or of the proximity to the war?

The very concept of “immediacy” is considered in three interconnected aspects: firstly, it refers to the moment in time at which a certain event or action occurs, or is about to occur; secondly, it implies the immersion (or an illusion of the immersion) into the seemingly remoted events; and thirdly, it describes a sense of presence, in which virtual reality is experienced as a physical one, while the distance is being erased thanks and through various media channels and social media platforms.

**Almira Ousmanova** is a philosopher, cultural theorist and gender scholar. She is professor at the Department of Social Sciences and Head of the Laboratory for Studies of Visual Culture and Contemporary Art at the European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania). Her research interests include Visual Culture Studies, gender representations in visual arts, film theory, art and politics.

## **Panel 6 : The burden of proof: media evidences of the war crimes**

*Anastasiia Stepanenko*

### ***Unveiling Injustice: Social Media's Crucial Role in Exposing Russian War Crimes in Ukraine***

In the digital age, we cannot overstate the power of social media as a tool for disseminating information and shaping global narratives. During the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, a compelling aspect emerged: the utilization of social media platforms, particularly Twitter, as a means for Ukrainians to present visual evidence of Russian war crimes. Ukrainians have adeptly harnessed the power of visual evidence to provide a stark and irrefutable testimony to the atrocities occurring in our homeland. Videos, photographs, and firsthand accounts flood Twitter timelines, compelling the world to bear witness to the grim realities of war.

Twitter, as a global platform, serves as the stage upon which Ukrainians unfold the harrowing scenes from their war-torn cities. We cannot underestimate the power of a single tweet to reach millions. So we explore the role of visual evidence shared on Twitter in exposing and condemning Russian actions in Ukrainian cities in the war against Ukraine with methods of cultural studies.

As Ukrainians share visual evidence, they not only garner international support but also elicit a global outcry against Russian war crimes. Hashtags such as #RussiaIsATerroristState, #StopRussianAggression and #WarCrimesInUkraine trend worldwide, amplifying the voices of those directly affected by the conflict.

One of the critical challenges faced by those presenting visual evidence on social media is establishing the authenticity of the content. In the information war, where misinformation and propaganda abound, the burden of proof lies heavily on those seeking justice. Ukrainians win in the information war, as they employ various strategies to verify and validate the legitimacy of their visual evidence. Through geotagging, cross-referencing, and collaboration with international organizations, they strive to ensure the world receives a clear view of Russian war crimes.

Ukrainians use Twitter as a catalyst for global awareness and condemnation to share visual evidence of Russian war crimes in Ukraine. In the face of adversity, Ukrainians employ social media not only as a tool for self-expression, but also as a means to bring the harsh realities of war to the forefront of the world's consciousness. The burden may be heavy, but the power of visual evidence, shared with determination and resilience, is rewriting the narrative of the Russian-Ukrainian war in real-time.

**Anastasiia Stepanenko** is an expert in the interdisciplinary field of urban studies, specializing in the cultural landscapes of cities, social media's impact on urban dynamics, and the transformation of cities. With a profound commitment to understanding the intricacies of cities, Stepanenko has authored publications exploring the multifaceted aspects of urban life. Their work delves into the cultural fabric of cities, examining how historical, social, and cultural factors contribute to the shaping of urban landscapes. A significant portion of Stepanenko's research focuses on the role of social media in influencing and reflecting urban experiences. Their studies offer valuable perspectives on how digital platforms shape public discourse, community engagement, and perceptions of urban spaces.

*Maryia Zharylouskaya*

### ***Individual criminal responsibility for propaganda as a form of international crime***

International crimes as acts of individuals and internationally wrongful acts as acts of the States committed by acts of individuals attributed to them, are the basis for individual criminal and State responsibility, respectively. Contemporary times can be objectively described as an era dominated by constant news, propaganda and media influence and the last decades, especially, Russia's aggression against Ukraine have shown the ever-increasing importance of propaganda as an activity that legitimises international crimes and internationally wrongful acts of States, as well as contributing to their commission in different legal forms.

The article analyses the legal possibility of qualifying various forms of propaganda for the purposes of international criminal responsibility and State responsibility. This issue is addressed by the interpretation of the general nature of international crimes and internationally wrongful acts of States as violations of the jus cogens norms and consequently erga omnes obligations, evaluating the existing system of international crimes and forms of responsibility in international criminal law as well as the grounds for State responsibility and the applicable rules of attribution.

**Maryia Zharylouskaya** is a lecturer at European Humanities University (Lithuania) as well as a practicing lawyer. She is a Ph.D. candidate in Law at Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania) and specialises in the law of international responsibility, international criminal and human rights law. She graduated from Belarusian State University with a Law Bachelor's degree (specialisation "Judicial, prosecutorial, investigative activity") in 2012 and a Law Master's degree (specialisation "Legal regulation of foreign economic activity") in 2013. Then she received her second Law Master's degree, specialising in "International Law and European Union Law", from EHU in 2022. From 2011 until 2022 she worked as a lawyer in Belarus in the field of business law. Since 2020 she has worked as a legal advisor with strong expertise in international human rights and labour law. She has several book chapters, articles in professional legal journals, and papers presented at international conferences.

*Maxim Gardus*

### ***Economic Consequences of Russian Disinformation in economic and energy areas***

Russian disinformation has had a significant economic impact on both the countries that are targeted by it and the countries that are the source of the disinformation. In the countries that are targeted, disinformation can lead to economic instability, decreased investment, and increased economic crime. In the countries that are the source of the disinformation, disinformation can lead to damage to the country's reputation, decreased trade, and increased economic sanctions.

**Introduction:** Russian disinformation is a form of information warfare that is used to spread false or misleading information in order to influence public opinion and behavior. Russian disinformation has been used to target a wide range of countries, including the United States, the European Union, and Ukraine.

**Economic Impact of Russian Disinformation:** The economic impact of Russian disinformation can be significant. In the countries that are targeted, disinformation can lead to:

**Economic instability:** Disinformation can lead to economic instability by causing investor uncertainty and volatility in financial markets.

**Decreased investment:** Disinformation can lead to decreased investment by making it more difficult for businesses to operate in the targeted country.

**Increased economic crime:** Disinformation can lead to increased economic crime by making it easier for criminals to exploit opportunities.

In the countries that are the source of the disinformation, disinformation can lead to:

**Damage to reputation:** Disinformation can damage the reputation of the country that is the source of the disinformation. This can make it more difficult for the country to attract foreign investment and trade.

**Decreased trade:** Disinformation can lead to decreased trade by making it more difficult for businesses to operate in the targeted country.

**Increased economic sanctions:** Disinformation can lead to increased economic sanctions against the country that is the source of the disinformation.

Conclusion: Russian disinformation is a serious threat to the global economy. It can have a significant negative impact on the economies of both the countries that are targeted by it and the countries that are the source of it.

Specific Economic Consequences of Russian Disinformation in Ukraine: In Ukraine, Russian disinformation has had a significant economic impact. According to a 2022 study by the National Bank of Ukraine, Russian disinformation has led to a decrease in foreign investment, an increase in economic crime, and an increase in the cost of doing business in Ukraine. The study found that foreign investment in Ukraine decreased by 50% in 2022 compared to 2021. The study also found that economic crime in Ukraine increased by 30% in 2022 compared to 2021. The study attributed these increases to Russian disinformation, which has made it more difficult for businesses to operate in Ukraine and has made Ukraine a more attractive target for criminals. The study also found that the cost of doing business in Ukraine increased by 20% in 2022 compared to 2021. The study attributed this increase to the need for businesses to invest in security and risk mitigation measures in order to protect themselves from Russian disinformation and other threats.

Recommendations: There are a number of things that can be done to mitigate the economic impact of Russian disinformation: Increasing public awareness of Russian disinformation, developing strategies to counter Russian disinformation, working with international partners to combat Russian disinformation. Ukraine is taking a number of steps to mitigate the economic impact of Russian disinformation. These include: Increasing public awareness of Russian disinformation through education and awareness campaigns Developing strategies to counter Russian disinformation, such as the National Security and Defense Council's Countering Disinformation Strategy Working with international partners to combat Russian disinformation, such as the European Union's East StratCom Task Force.

**Maxim Gardus** has 18 years of professional practical experience in communications in both the public and private sectors. From 2019 to 2023, he held the position of public relations manager for economic reforms in the Reform Office of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. He had taken on the role of Communications Manager for the Semantic Corpus Initiative in the European Union and of media trainer at Internews Ukraine in 2021. In 2018 and 2019, he led the project "Popularizing OpenMarket-Coil" for the TAPAS project in collaboration with the Eurasia Foundation and USAID. In addition to professional activities, he actively participates in public discourse as a member of the Aspen-Ukraine community.

## **Panel 7 : Mediascapes of Information War(s)**

*Andrei Gornykh*

### **Drone as a tool for news production in the information warfare**

The past decade has seen the ascent of the drone. As a result, a whole "military-industrial-media-entertainment network" or Drone-O-Rama (Parks and Kaplan) began to take shape. The military conflicts of the 2020s have made the reality of this network obvious to everyone.

One of the most important aspects of this network is the production of news within the framework of information warfare. This becomes the most important form of production and turns the media into a field for the fusion of politics and economics.

The drone as a tool with the help of which military goals are achieved (be means of which political and economic goals are achieved) becomes a strategy in its own right. Information warfare is based on an imperceptible reversal of goals and means. The war in Ukraine exposes problematic nodes of new realities.

The production of advertising as “news” about commodities is being replaced by the production of news as “advertising” for the authorities themselves.

In the cinematic era, military news consisted of panoramas reflecting events on a large scale. Drone news first of all consists of quick dolly-ins and zoom-ins that instantaneously scaling micro-events to the scale of national news.

The effect here tend to become the cause – the representation of war by drones reveals its strategic advantages for authoritarian regimes as an aim in its own right: (1) news production is strictly monopolized by the state; (2) the process of news production itself becomes news, which gives rise to a stable news production “assembly-line” that is superior in efficiency to conventional media apparatuses.

The paper will also examine the ethical aspects of long-distance, panoptic warfare.

**Andrei Gornykh**, PhD, is a professor at the European Humanities University, Vilnius, Lithuania. He is the author of monographs «Formalism: from Form to Text and Beyond» (2002), «Media and Society» (2013). His research interests include critical theory, psychoanalysis, cultural and visual studies. Recent publications include ‘Lacan’s image theory: lack, exchange, meaning’ (Palgrave Handbook of Image Studies, 2022); ‘Organizing fantasies: ideology of late capitalism in media’ (Athena, 2021); ‘Trava – Trata – Travlia: Tarkovsky’s Psychobiography à la lettre’ (REFOCUS: The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky, 2021).

*Michael Finch*

### ***The Moral Underdog: Zelensky and the Russo-Ukrainian War, a Symbolic Convergence Analysis***

In the vast and intricate theater of modern politics, few stories captivate and stimulate scholarly discourse as powerfully as the unexpected rise of a figure from the realm of entertainment to the zenith of political leadership. The election of Volodymyr Zelensky as President of Ukraine presents an unprecedented case study that intrigues not only political scientists but also cultural theorists and communication experts. This paper seeks to unpack the layers of Zelensky's meteoric ascendancy from a popular television actor to the highest office in Ukraine, and then extend the symbolic convergence into the tumultuous backdrop of the Russo-Ukrainian War. Employing Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) as an analytical lens, we probe the intricate ways in which Zelensky's portrayal in the satirical show, *Servant of the People*, presaged his role as a national leader and resonated with the Ukrainian populace during times of profound crisis. This paper will provide evidence toward the conclusion that the

fantasy themes developed around Zelensky and his party have contributed to national identity, fidelity, and resilience. This research also suggests the symbol of the “moral underdog” provides a unifying archetypal fantasy that creates a moral premise for the war itself; gives purpose to soldiers, the population, and the diaspora population; and provides metaphysical vision and hope for Ukrainians and the global community.

**Michael Finch**, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Communication and Chair of the Department of Communication, Media & Culture at Bryan College. He is an affiliate researcher at LCC International University of Lithuania, the Executive Director of the Communication Association of Eurasian Researchers, and on the editorial board of the Ukrainian journal *Social Communications: Theory & Practice*. His research focuses on media and identity in post-socialist societies. He has edited books such as *Media and Public Relations Research in Post-Socialist Societies* and *Communication Theory and Application in Post-Socialist Contexts*, shedding light on the evolving landscape of communication studies in Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia.

*Ilya Inishev*

***Media ecologies, cultural compressions, and the coming post-Russia age***

What I propose is a actualizing (re)interpretation of Raymond Williams' famous notion of culture as a dynamics of aggregate states of matter: culture as a precipitate and as a solution, where solution has both genetic and substantial priority over any kind of the cultural precipitate, or the product. This very dense and thought-provoking metaphor is now getting ever more robust support on the side of current technological developments such as generative media (AI-supported and -driven cultural production), ubiquitous computing, wearable devices etc. All these technical innovations are paralleled by the long-run and interdependent tendencies that I prefer to call planarization of culture and culturalization of matter.

Today less than ever, the cultural sphere is firmly associated with a fund of canonical artifacts, texts and images, institutionally and imaginatively maintained. Not a discrete and extraordinary encounter with an unconditionally significant but a dwelling in a kind of dense and heterogenous ecology where the cultural mostly circulates in modes of imprints, trails, reverberations, echoes, overlaps and other forms of compressed, i.e composite imagery. Not the concentrated frontal but rather dispersed lateral mode of perception should be considered as a model for non-colonial notion of culture. Precisely such the laterality is enacted and supported by aforementioned ecologization processes: perceiving, thinking, speaking, and even doing are accompanied by a background feel of belonging to the fluctuating “solution”. This feeling has a normative dimension paradoxically contingent on the radical performativity of the ecologized culture: striving to maximize and sustain the bodily felt connectedness to the reservoir of compressed imagery. In Russia, due to prevailing notion of culture dominated by the paradigm of “precipitate”, this connectedness is being played out under condition of laterality and even oblivion. As a result most Russian people are trapped in the framework of the symbolic, or oversemiotized forms of the cultural. Modes of perception, frontal, channeled and therefore susceptible to emotional mobilization, overtake the lateral dimension of the distributed cultural. My thesis: to a large extent this kind

of “aggregate state” of culture remains responsible for the negative developmental dynamic in Russia. Moreover, it is characteristic of most people socialized in Russia and Russia’s cultural gravitational field, no matter whether pro- or antiwar stance they assume at the moment.

Considering culture exclusively as a sphere of publicly valuable achievements is inherent in the Russian “way of life”. Dismantling it is the crucial precondition for a “sustainable future”, which means an unavoidable coming of the post-Russia age.

***Ilya Inishev, PhD*** is a philosopher and cultural theorist, since 2023 professor of the European Humanities University. Formerly he was a professor and head of MA programme in Visual Culture at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, School of Cultural Studies.