



The Flow of Nostalgia: Experiencing Television from the Past

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This article investigates the Nostal'giia channel, a channel reproducing the daily schedule of Soviet Tsentralnoe Televidenie (Central Television) of the 1970s–1980s. The broadcast day comprises a flow of program reruns and a number of newly produced talk shows and documentaries. Reruns provide content flow that creates a particular experience of time passing while viewers can relive the experience of watching television in the 1980s. Meanwhile, new productions serve as commentaries on this content and connect bits and pieces into a complete picture by interpreting and providing contextual information. By doing so, the producers of the channel aim to create the feeling of historical continuity. By applying autoethnography, I investigate the experience of watching the channel and the flow of nostalgic sentiments that emerge while experiencing mediated narrations of the past. The aim is to not only explore the channel content, but also come to terms with nostalgia as a subjective experience and the difficulties that appear in the process of researching it.

Keywords: Soviet television, media nostalgia, mediated nostalgia, liveness, temporality, autoethnography

An important function of television is to connect us “live” to important events so that we can follow them as they unfold in real time (Kaplan, 1983). Live broadcasting helps “to conquer time and distance” to enable groups of people to access events and experiences happening elsewhere and is therefore essential for national identity building (Bourdon, 2000, p. 183). Apart from broadcasting live events, television is also increasingly filled with the “recycling of stored material,” which is an effective way to fill in available time slots (Ericson, 2011, p. 139). By combining live broadcasts with reruns, documentaries, and docudramas, television claims a monopoly on broadcasting historical events and producing historical narratives, as well framing political agendas. Television serves as the “supreme locus for the negotiation of control over cultural meaning” (Hutchings & Rulyova, 2009, pp. 219–220), as well as “one of the principal means through which people learn about history and on the basis of which they shape their understanding of its contemporary political relevance” (Wijermars, 2016, p. 1).

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Watching history on television might contribute to nostalgia for the past. Göran Bolin (2014) argued that media function as a trigger for two types of nostalgic experience: *media nostalgia* and *mediated nostalgia*. The difference between these can be attributed to the role each medium plays. Media nostalgia is nostalgia toward specific media and media formats, and mediated nostalgia is a form of nostalgic practice in which media serve to mediate non-media-related experiences of the past (Lizardi, 2015; Menke, 2015; Niemeyer, 2014). Television satisfies both types of nostalgia by providing media content whose aesthetics and substance appeal to the particular interests of viewers. A flow of archived television content combined with historical docudramas and documentaries affects the viewing experience and can cause and/or satisfy a nostalgic longing for the past. Watching reruns and docudramas can also be an educational experience that allows viewers to temporarily dive into a specific moment in the past.

The Russian Nostal'giia channel that I analyze in this article provides a variety of programs that can potentially induce a handful of different nostalgic experiences: "from inducing nostalgia to curing nostalgia" (Ananich, 2013). The producer-in-chief claimed that the channel challenges persistent nostalgic sentiments in Russian society by providing viewers with an objective picture of the Soviet period as "it really was" (Ananich, 2013). According to him, through the broadcast of archived television content, the channel is supposed to re-enact the atmosphere of the past and re-establish the feeling of a unified community, which was believed to have been lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The question is whether Nostal'giia indeed draws such a complex image of the Soviet past as part of the Russian media landscape. In a country where the recycling of history as a "rhetorical toolbox for framing and justifying policy decisions" (Vázquez Liñán, 2010, cited in Wijermars, 2016, p. 1) is a key feature of Vladimir Putin's presidency, and federal channels typically permit only official historical and political discourses to be broadcast, seldom leaving room for alternative interpretations of history and present-day reality, it is essential to be wary when media claim to provide an objective picture of historical representation.

Moreover, the complex nature of nostalgia challenges the research process, especially when it comes to the study of media content. Often, researchers themselves become agents of nostalgia, labeling some productions nostalgic, although they might in fact work against nostalgic sentiments. This raises questions about the individual experiences of researchers and reactions to the various stimuli that induce nostalgic narrations. Thus, my goal is to become more aware of my own role in and relationship to my research on nostalgia. Hence, in this article, I analyze the daily broadcasts of the Russian cable channel Nostal'giia and apply autoethnography as a method of inquiry. The choice of the method is explained by its high level of self-reflexivity that allows researchers to be aware of their own role in the process of interpreting media content.

The Channel

The Russian niche channel Nostal'giia (Vladimir Ananich, producer; Michael Galich, first editor-in-chief) is the only channel in the Eastern hemisphere dedicated to reruns of Soviet television content, including televised concerts, news programs, and weather forecasts. Nostal'giia debuted November 14, 2004, and is broadcast in several former Soviet republics with a large Russian diaspora as well as in the

United States and Canada. The channel is available for subscription via cable networks and satellite TV (NTV Plus in Russia, Russkiy Mir worldwide).

By the time the channel first aired in 2004, Russian television had already been broadcasting talk shows and documentaries about the Soviet past—*Namedni: Nasha Era 1961–1991*, *Starii Televisor*, *Staraia Kwartira*, *Starie Pesni o Glavnom*—on central Russian television channels such as Channel 1, Rossiia, and NTV between 1995 and 2002 (Kalinina, 2014). Retro, another channel broadcasting “nostalgic” content, is mainly known for being filled with reruns of Soviet entertainment: films, television shows, and concerts.

According to Nostal’giia’s official website, it has an audience of approximately 8 million people, 55% of whom are female and 45% male. A small percentage of viewers are young people interested in the aesthetics of the old media and curious about Soviet history, whereas older people who watch the channel “go back to the past and relive it again” (Ananich, 2013).

Nostal’giia’s daily programming consists of several reruns of daily television broadcasts produced in the 1970s–1990s as well as original television productions, such as talk shows and documentaries. Programs filmed during the last 30 years of the Soviet Union, which compose the majority of daily broadcasts, come from the State Archive of Radio and Television and private donors, who often had been the anchors, directors, or producers of the programs. The main feature of this niche channel is its daily programming schedule, which imitates the daily programming of the Soviet Tsentralnoe Televidenie (Central Television). In practice, this means that morning slots are filled with talk shows or animated films, followed by news, films, and dramas during the afternoon hours, and then talk shows and documentaries during the evening and night.

As Table 1 shows, the daily broadcast schedule includes old news programs broadcast under the name *Past Tense*, animated films (*Parasol’ka*), music programs (*Music Nostalgia*), and relatively recently produced talk shows, such as *Born in the USSR* and *The Tube of Time*. This mix of different programs reflects the profile of the channel: infotainment in a nostalgic mood—a combination of informative, analytical shows presented in an entertaining manner, including documentaries, concerts, news reports, and shows. Some examples of the channel’s original productions are *There Was a Time*, *Born in the USSR*, and *Past Tense*. *There Was a Time* is a weekly, informative, analytical talk show that scrutinizes the last 30 years of the USSR. Historical events are discussed by famous TV anchors and celebrities: politicians, athletes, scientists, and creative elites of the Soviet Union. *Born in the USSR* is a daily, interactive, live program that provides viewers with a platform to express their opinions about historical events and communicate live with guests on the show. *Past Tense* presents an array of archival footage—mainly newsreels and interviews—that portrays everyday life during the last 30 years of the Soviet Union.

Table 1. Broadcast Schedule for July 27, 2015 (Monday).

04:00	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
04:30	<i>Press-Express</i>	Пресс-экспресс	News program
04:35	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
05:00	<i>Press-Express</i>	Пресс-экспресс	News program
05:05	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
06:00	<i>Every Day of Life</i>	Каждый день жизни	Fiction film, 1973
07:40	<i>Wizard of Okh</i>	Волшебник Ох	Animated film, 1971
08:00	<i>Past Tense</i>	Прошедшее время	News program
08:40	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
09:00	<i>Born in the USSR</i>	Рожденные в СССР	Talk show
10:00	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
10:20	<i>That Was Recently, It Was a Long Time Ago</i>	Это было недавно, это было давно...	Documentary
11:00	<i>Before and After With Vladimir Molchanov</i>	До и после...	Talk show
11:45	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
12:00	<i>Step From the Roof</i>	Шаг с крыши	Fiction film, 1970
13:20	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
13:40	<i>How Hedgehog and Little Bear Were Celebrating New Year's Eve</i>	Как ежик и медвежонок встречали новый год	Animated short film, 1975
13:45	<i>How the Table Was Carried</i>	Как несли стол	Animated film, 1979

14:00	<i>Past Tense</i>	Прошедшее время	News program
14:40	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
15:00	<i>The Tube of Time</i>	Колба времени	Talk show
16:00	<i>Televised concert of B. Grebentschikov and his band Aquarium</i>	Фильм-концерт Б. Гребенщикова и его группы "Аквариум"	Music program
17:00	<i>Before and After With Vladimir Molchanov</i>	До и после...	Talk show
17:45	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
18:00	<i>That Was Recently, It Was a Long Time Ago</i>	Это было недавно, это было давно...	Documentary
18:50	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
19:50	<i>Music Tales</i>	Музыкальные сказки	Music program
20:00	<i>There Was a Time</i>	А Было время	Talk show
21:00	<i>And We Go to Hell!</i>	И черт с нами!	Fiction film, 1991
22:40	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
23:00	<i>That Was Recently, It Was a Long Time Ago</i>	Это было недавно, это было давно...	Documentary
00:10	<i>Gambrinus</i>	Гамбринус	Televised theater play, 1988
01:40	<i>Parasol'ka Becomes Druzhinnik</i>	Парасолька становится дружинником	Animated short film, 1976
01:45	<i>Parasol'ka in Circus</i>	Парасолька в цирке	Animated short film, 1980
02:00	<i>Past Tense</i>	Прошедшее время	News program

02:40	<i>Music Nostalgia</i>	Музыкальная ностальгия	Music program
03:00	<i>Born in the USSR</i>	Рожденные в СССР	Talk show

What Is Nostalgia?

The concept of *nostalgia* has usually been applied to practices and moods that involve some sort of sentimental longing for a past that has been irreversibly lost. Initially, nostalgia was defined as a mental disorder resulting from traumatic experiences of the recent past. Increasingly, nostalgia has come to be regarded as a sociological phenomenon that helps individuals adapt during major life transitions (Davis, 1979; Pickering & Keightley, 2006; Sedikides et al., 2015). Recent writings have investigated nostalgia's political economy, focusing on emotional response to product management, advertising, and music (Holak, Matveev, & Havlena, 2007).

My theoretical starting point is that nostalgia both produces and is produced by emotional and affective experiences: Our minds react to nostalgic stimuli perceived through our bodies—tastes, smells, appearances, and so on. Nostalgic effects can be voluntary or involuntary depending on their preconditions. For example, a television program is not itself nostalgic but can be experienced as such by its viewers or provoke nostalgic sentiments within them—an involuntary nostalgic effect. When the producer of a television program intends for it to have a nostalgic effect, one can say that the program has an intentional or voluntary nostalgic purpose.

Hence, nostalgia is not a pre-existing, immanent state, but is instead a response to a temporal and spatial displacement. This displacement and the responses to it are constructed discursively in the process of narration (Hutcheon, 2000, p. 22). Thus, when it comes to nostalgia, we are faced with an act of interpretation, which is a subjective practice influenced by a number of external and internal factors.

Nostalgic narratives can simultaneously mediate psychological traumas and constitute various ways of working through them. Similar to nostalgic experiences, these narratives are inherently polysemic and can express a wide range of different attitudes toward the past, sometimes becoming conflated or mutually contradictory. What unites them is the tendency of establishing continuity of time and space and causality between time periods on both the individual and collective level. As Fred Davis (1979) observed, societies tend to become nostalgic in times of "disruption" when "fundamental, taken-for-granted convictions" are shaken (p. 421). During such periods, nostalgic narratives can reinstate a feeling of continuity and meaning in life via a sentimental longing for a comforting past (Davis, 1979; Sedikides et al., 2015). Hence, nostalgia is a critical factor when it comes to identity building.

There is a downside to nostalgia: A romanticized past filled with positive connotations might breed aggressive nationalism. The selectivity in perception that is part of a nostalgic episode potentially neglects unfavorable events charged with negative affect. Thereby, nostalgic narratives have the tendency for working around undesired historical moments to create a more appealing, romantic notion of the past,

rather than working through collective traumas and negative historical experiences. When faced with mediated nostalgic narratives of the past, people often assume that these narratives produce amnesia rather than remembering, often forgetting that nostalgia can in fact stimulate acts of remembering and preserve memory.

Nostalgia also possesses a critical component that provides the basis for a reflective assessment of both the past and present (Pickering & Keightley, 2006). Emotional longing for irreversibly lost moments triggers increased interest in the past, which can in turn result in a more critical reflection of historical periods and the potential to contribute to the shaping of individual and collective identity.

One could also say that the nostalgic experience is a perfect example of a hermeneutic circle, where thoughts constantly travel back and forth between particular nostalgic triggers or memories and overarching tendencies and cultural contexts. Hence, nostalgic experience becomes deeply rooted in local cultural landscapes and global cultural developments, as well as in personal experiences and emotional states of being. When approaching both media nostalgia and mediated nostalgia, the process of interpretation becomes a very complex matter. First, we must face the issue of multiple authorship: We deal with the agents who have initially produced the media content; second, we must take into account those who have combined existing video material and presented it to an audience; third, we must account for viewers' interpretations of media content. Every agent belongs to a particular cultural context and must be considered in light of it. To be able to capture the inherent diversity of nostalgia, researchers should be more cautious about labeling experiences and moods as nostalgic, let alone acknowledging their own role in the process. They must always keep in mind the polysemic character of nostalgia as well as recognize that what some may initially identify as nostalgia might not be interpreted as such by others. Such a heavy emphasis on the interpretative nature of nostalgia should make us more cautious about the agency of those who interpret nostalgic experiences, and it is here where I believe autoethnographic methods could be helpful.

Autoethnography

Calling someone or something nostalgic is an active practice often linked to processes of political, social, and cultural identification (Kalinina, 2014). Hence, I believe that there is a prerequisite for a different methodological approach to nostalgia research whereby scholars themselves become the focus, critically and reflectively assessing their own processes of interpretation. Such is the motivation for the methodology I use in this study—*autoethnography*.

When it comes to autoethnography, one must reconsider traditional ideas about objectivity and entertain the possibility of embracing and foregrounding the researcher's subjectivity rather than attempting to limit it. Interpretation is always done from a subjective position, where personal, social, cultural, and political contexts influence the interpretive process as well as its outcome. Such a position reflects an epistemological worldview according to which reality is ever changing and is largely based on individual reflexivity. From this perspective, autoethnography is a suitable method as it is "a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing" (Maréchal, 2010, p. 43).

Autoethnography has often been criticized for placing too much emphasis on personal accounts and personalized creative attitudes, which makes it difficult to recognize it as a well-defined method (Wall, 2006). Furthermore, it has been criticized for the lack of objectivity and validity of results. Opponents have particularly dismissed its evocative and emotional character for being too personal and emotional (Maréchal, 2010). However, the type of autoethnography I perform is analytic autoethnography, which focuses on furthering theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena in comparison to evocative autoethnography, which focuses on narrative representations that open a dialogue and evoke emotional responses (Ellingson & Carolyn, 2008, p. 445). This method allows conducting an analytical study of the content while keeping an eye on the researcher's own perceptions and emotional work. I follow Ellis' (1999) guidelines for autoethnographic writing, which recommend telling a story that allows readers to sense the details of personal experiences to examine their meanings.

More specifically, I tell a story of my own experience of watching the Nostal'giia channel during the period of January 2013–June 2015. It is possible to watch the channel online through websites that stream Russian television networks. However, the programs are not stored online; hence, it is not possible to rewatch certain shows or programming days. Some shows are uploaded on YouTube, but the majority of the programs are not available after they have been aired. I would usually check the daily schedule and then try to time the viewing of a specific program. Besides the focused watching, I also had the channel running in the background while engaging in other activities. I watched the channel on a weekly basis for several hours. However, the watching was sometimes interrupted by telephone calls, household activities, and work and leisure routines. To document my viewing experience, I kept a diary while watching the channel, wherein I reflected on my viewing experiences.

At first, I reacted strongly to the name of the channel, fearing that it would be a stream of mediated nostalgia, which would take me back to the perfect USSR, a land of prosperity and stability as it was shown before by Soviet propaganda. Moreover, as I started watching the channel in 2013, I expected it to be a subject of control over historical narrations by the political elites and hence a sanitized image of the Soviet past. This expectation of mine can be explained by the political and cultural context I was raised in and the attitudes toward Soviet heritage that have been transforming in Russia over the past decades.

Starting from the early 1990s, Russian society has been going through turbulent changes accompanied by struggles for the legacy of the communist past. No real trial of the party nomenclature and secret police officers ever took place (Smith, 2002). Over the years, nostalgic voices became more prominent, while Soviet material and visual culture slowly started to re-emerge. It began as grassroots initiatives characterized by attempts to understand and evaluate the historical era in question and to preserve memories about it. Appearing first in the artistic and creative circles, post-Soviet nostalgia has slowly become a totalizing phenomenon. It changed dramatically with Vladimir Putin coming into power in parallel with the generational change and the change of political climate. The Soviet Union became the historical backdrop for the new ideology of patriotism, which was built on an emotional relationship with the idealized Soviet past. TV channels started to broadcast documentaries with a more explicit patriotic and political subtext devoid of open critical evaluation of the Soviet system. Meanwhile, critical readings of the past were moved to the margins of the national cultural fabric (Kalinina, 2014).

Hence, in analyzing media productions claiming to portray a rightful picture of the Soviet Union, a researcher faces many difficulties that emerge from the complex interaction of social and political, aesthetic and commercial dimensions. Commercial and aesthetic uses of nostalgic sentiments often bare strong political messages that might not be visible at first glance, and often can be even contradictory in terms of their belonging. Meanwhile, in certain cultural and political contexts, such as in a Russian one, political appropriations of nostalgic narratives might emerge in unintended contexts. At the same time, certain uses of the past have little to do with nostalgic narratives, as well as any reference to the past does not necessarily mean an attempt to restore that past.

Against this background, Nostal'giia seems to be a fascinating case to explore as its name claims to bring nostalgic experiences and yet it is not immediately clear what these experiences are.

The Flow of Television

To understand the process of viewing, I suggest using Raymond Williams' (1974/2003) concept of the *flow* proposed in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. According to Williams, programmed flow represents the mediation between television technology, institutional terms of programming, textuality, and the viewer's experience thereof. Williams writes that television programming is a set of sequences that are "available in a single dimension and in a single operation" (p. 87). Technically, television still consists of a series of timed and intentionally programmed units, which can be followed in the information about the broadcasting services and checked for specific times of a particular show. The intervals between the timed units are filled with commercial advertising and trailers of upcoming programs, which come in place of "true" intervals between the programs previously marked by special sounds or images filling the time slots. Williams suggests that the planned broadcasting flow includes the sequences of programmed items and another kind of sequences of commercials and trailers for later programs, making it "real" broadcasting: "a single irresponsible flow of images and feelings" because the "natural breaks" come at "any moment of convenient insertion" even during the programs and films (p. 90ff).

The channel in question here to a large extent reconstructs the daily programming of the Soviet Tsentralnoe Televidenie, aiming to re-enact the experience of watching Soviet-era television. In other words, the channel reproduces the flow of the daily schedule. Archived television content is scheduled according to a typical daily broadcast: morning shows, followed by news programs, prime-time entertainment shows, advertisements, and weather forecasts. However, there is a difference: First, the channel broadcasts recently produced talk shows and documentaries about the Soviet Union; second, the gaps in the sequences of reruns of the old TV shows, films, concerts, and televised theater plays are filled with short segments recently assembled from various sources and time periods music and news programs, as well as Soviet commercials and trailers of the shows that will be broadcast later in the day, week, or month. It should also be mentioned that modern commercials are not allowed on the channel as it is being financed through subscription.

When watching the channel, viewers experience a flow of various television segments that are seamlessly interconnected with each other. There are three sequences in the flow: the old television programs previously broadcast on the Soviet television; short news programs, weather forecasts, and

documentary chronicles—short videos with no commentaries showing the viewers what happened on the same date years ago—all composed of archived video material and reassembled to represent a day in history; and the channel's own productions—talk shows and documentaries about certain aspects of life in the Soviet Union. These three sequences have their own functions and compose the flow of the channel, which I define as the televised flow of time.

The Flow of Reruns

Reruns of Soviet films, animated films for children, televised concerts, and theater plays are broadcast throughout the whole day starting early in the morning. July 27—a typical broadcasting day—started at 4 a.m., with a series of music programs followed by the film *Every Day of Life* (director Timur Zaloev, 1973), a black-and-white drama about the lives of Donetsk miners. The film begins with an engineer Marat coming to Donetsk with the task to dissolve one of the most team-minded work brigades in town. With time, Marat changes his mind and, to save the collective, suggests a more technologically advanced way of mining and convinces the head of the mine that the brigade should remain as it is. Hence, the story reproduces Soviet ideas of the strength of human bonds and dedication to one's work place and comrades.

For me personally, the broadcast of the film in 2015 was strongly linked to the current developments in Ukraine. The film evoked nostalgia for peace in the Ukrainian region of Donetsk and Luhansk and for a unified community where people put collective goals above their personal needs. This old Soviet film takes one back to a peaceful life in the 1970s right before the economic decline of the 1980s–1990s, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the loss of Ukraine as one of the Union's republics, and Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea in 2014 that led to the escalation of the Russian–Ukrainian military conflict in Donetsk and Luhansk. The conflict has resulted in political, social, and economic destabilization of the region, civilian deaths, and refugees fleeing Ukraine (Vikhrov & Butchenko, 2016). By showing the miners' life and their struggle to keep the collective together, the channel touched on the loss I personally felt with the start of the undeclared Russian–Ukrainian war and hostility some of my acquaintances expressed toward the Ukrainians. Simultaneously, I knew that the channel broadcasts over large territories, including several former Soviet republics, and hoped for a larger audience similarly experiencing the nostalgia for a peaceful time in Ukraine.

A sequence of animated and fiction films produced in the 1970s followed the movie, filling the morning schedule, lunchtime, and afternoon program slots catering to both children and adults, and was interrupted with music programs and talk shows.

I found viewing the reruns to be very educative: The channel turned into an archive that provided both video and audio documentation of Soviet culture. Indeed, "reruns preserve the culture of a specific time and place for those who lived in that culture, but they can also disseminate that culture to other areas and other generations" (Weispfenning, 2003, p. 168). By so doing, they enhance shared experiences of generations and, in the case of the channel, the shared cultural experience of people living in different countries after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This cross-generational informing function

had both cross-cultural and cross-spatial components: They transmitted information about life in the USSR across cultural and spatial borders.

Another cultural function of reruns—"a recurrent pleasure" (Burke, 1931/1968, p. 35)—was less obvious to me as I had watched these reruns for the first time. However, some of them, such as the televised concert of the music band Aquarium and animated films for children *Wizard of Okh* and *How Hedgehog and Little Bear Were Celebrating New Year's Eve* became a pleasurable experience because I knew them in advance. Watching these cartoons felt like travelling back to my childhood, to the times of innocence and predictability. With Russian society and media undergoing profound changes in the past 15 years—commercialization, changing patterns of ownership, and increasing governmental control—the reruns of children's animated films provide the stability of the transmission of cultural values from one generation to another. At the same time, being fixed cultural forms, "the reruns serve to stop time for the short period of watching as well as allow viewers to travel to a familiar past and recapture their youth and children presented as they were originally" (Weispfenning, 2003, p. 173).

Rewatching familiar animated films became another moment when I experienced nostalgia for my own childhood. More precisely, I got engaged in an interplay between what I saw on the screen and my own past that triggered a chain of autobiographical associations that affects the process of interpretation. Barbara Klinger (2006) called this "nostalgic engagement" (p. 177). Reruns are perfect stimuli for nostalgic longing as they are "structurally incapable of satisfying the desire that it stirs, for the simple reason of this desire being self-referential" (Nadkarni & Shevchenko, 2004, p. 491). Despite the curiosity about past media and their historical period, I was immersed in my own individual "memory of past desire" and the awareness of the impossibility of bringing that time back (Nadkarni & Shevchenko, 2004). The sadness that remained after the absence of the object of desire was overwhelming.

By watching the Nostal'giia channel, I realized what nostalgia really meant: a perpetual longing, a flow of reoccurring nostalgic sentiments triggered by various stimuli and provided incentive to "longing for longing." What captivated me was the process of longing itself: that bittersweet reliving of moments of happiness in my memory stimulated by media I watched. I could return to them repeatedly, replaying the same episode in my mind and looking for new details or signs that I, perhaps, had not noticed earlier. It was my own secure world that I was coming back to: past sensations and the people I experienced them with. It was a joy getting to know myself better and recognizing what other people meant to me at that particular moment of time.

The Flow of Music Shows and News Programs

Alongside reruns of old films and broadcasts of the Communist Party congresses and hockey matches, Nostal'giia airs a variety of music programs, such as *Music Nostalgia*, a short program that consists of several music video clips of various Soviet and Western artists (the program's length is 20–25 minutes; see Table 1). Such programs usually fill in the time slots between reruns and talk shows on the channel.

In the sequential montage of music videos, I recognized some bands, but others were new to me.

Watching the singers I was never particularly a fan of, I could not evaluate my experience as anything special because I had little autobiographical association with their music. Listening to the songs and the voice of a familiar artist triggered memories about my life.

Previous research has pointed out that people often develop this type of sentimental intimate relationship with music and media personalities and content from a “formative youth period” (Bolin, 2014, p. 109) that provides a strong link between people’s past and the music. Lingering in my own past full of sweet memories of the preuniversity time period, I all of a sudden found myself traveling to another memory that hardly had any direct connection to my own personal life. Following the music, I arrived at one critical event of the 1980s that all Soviet citizens were a part of, namely, the Afghan War (December 24, 1979–February 15, 1989).

This association was initiated by a song “Waltz Boston” by a Soviet and Russian bard and an interpreter of the *blatnaya pesnya* (criminals’ songs) genre from Saint Petersburg, Alexander Rosenbaum. As I learned from the talk show *Staraiia Kvartira* that I watched previously, Rosenbaum had travelled to Afghanistan in the early 1980s to symbolically support the fighting Soviet soldiers on several occasions. What triggered my memory was the same song he sang while invited to the studio of *Staraiia Kvartira*, where other guests and anchors of the show discussed the end of the war and the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The episode about 1986 (the program was structured chronologically, one program highlighting events that happened during a chosen year), where the song was performed, included a discussion about the Soviet military pullout from Afghanistan. The history and scale of the war were narrated from the perspective of grieving mothers who sought justice, assistance, and an apology from the Soviet state. Rosenbaum’s musical performance during the show played a reconciliatory role, smoothing the devastating moment when the crying mothers demanded answers from one of the Soviet generals. When played on Nostal’giia, the song reminded me of this particular moment in the show *Staraiia Kvartira* and diverted my autobiographical memories toward recollections about another television program and then to the war.

This experience illustrated that the demarcation between individual and collective memory is a fragile one. Indeed, taken together, individual memories both compose collective memory and are shaped by it (Ricoeur, 2004). The process of remembering is not merely an individual practice but a collective one as well, with society providing both the substance for remembering and a commemorative context (Halbwachs, 1925/1992). The program *Staraiia Kvartira* and the music program on Nostal’giia provided context and stimuli that formed my memory. Television has created a bridge to shared memories of the Afghan War, of which I have no direct personal memories. Rather, I do have what Assmann and Czaplicka (1995, p. 128) called *cultural memory*: the objectified, remembered past to which one no longer has a direct relation to but is based in shared culture and media. Because I was born in 1983 and have no direct memory of the war, I relied on media references and school history lessons. I remembered the history lessons vaguely, and my understanding of the Afghan War as a meaningless conflict initiated by the Soviet Union that resulted in many deaths, regional instability, and the collapse of the Soviet state was shaped by Nostal’giia’s documentary programs as well as shows such as *Staraya Kvartira*.

While immersed in thought, a new program had begun: *Past Tense* (the program’s length is 20–

40 minutes; see Table 1), a news program that presents a montage of edited, manipulated sequences of archived news segments from the 1980s.

Past Tense has the following program structure: headlines, followed by domestic news, foreign news, culture, sports, and lastly, the weather forecast. The domestic news segment resembled propaganda material: images of happy farmers, the latest agricultural technologies, and new sorts of vegetation introduced in Uzbekistan and then relocated to Ukraine. The foreign news segment reported on Afghanistan, a thaw in Soviet–French political relations, and cooperation in various spheres of life, and then provided criticism on American imperialism. The anchor discussed U.S. involvement in European politics, in particular, Portuguese attempts to resist the Pentagon’s influence in 1986. Closer to the end of the sequence, the anchor addressed the Ramstein Air Show Disaster.² The culture section included an ecstatic review of the 1979 premiere of Sergei Prokofiev’s ballet version of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and the First International Ballet Competition, which undoubtedly put deliberate focus on Russian, Japanese, and Arab dancers, neglecting those from the West. The sports segment focused on the results of the 1988 chess match between Garry Kasparov and Ulf Andersson. The weather forecast rounded up the news.

The news item on the war in Afghanistan illustrates the typical modeling of news sequences of *Past Tense*. It was September 1980. The voiceover hummed on about Afghanistan’s alleged amazing transformation since the Saur Revolution in 1978 when the socialist People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan came to power. The party introduced several reforms, the most known being equal rights to women, universal education, and land reform. The anchor discussed the role taken by the Soviets in establishing civil society. The image on the screen depicted cheerful Afghan adults and children going to school. The next news segment showed Afghanistan in 1988, the year the Soviets began to withdraw their forces from the country.

The program left out that the Soviet war in Afghanistan lasted nine years, from December 1979 until February 1989. During the war, insurgent groups, the Mujahedeen, fought against the Soviet Army and allied Afghan forces. Several parts of the country became involved in an ongoing military conflict, which resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties and millions of refugees who fled into the neighboring countries.

Instead of narrating the whole story, these two news segments were combined to fit thematically and show the beginning and the end of the conflict. This type of montage compressed time and created the feeling of confusion: In a matter of a few minutes, I received only partial information about one of the most controversial conflicts in Soviet history. Such fast-moving news sequences hardly left any time to reflect on what I had just seen on the screen.

² The tragedy happened on August 28, 1988, when, during the Flugtag '88 airshow at the U.S. Ramstein Air Base, close to Kaiserslautern, in the Federal Republic of Germany, three Italian aircrafts collided; one crashed into the audience, killing more than 50 people and injuring around 350.

On the one hand, this montage generated a connection between two different historical moments: the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets and their later withdrawal. On the other hand, it did not explain what happened during the nine years of the Soviet presence. The reasons why the events between the start and the end of the conflict were not present can be manifold. This assemblage of different news segments, which fit together to create the experience of watching a daily news program but might not match in terms of chronological development, could be explained by the irregular availability of archived material; not all programs were archived, and others are not available for use. Such programming also could have been done purposefully to create this state of confusion about the events of the past and make viewers to start doing their own research to understand the course of the events.

However, the flow of archived material alone cannot provide a coherent narrative of the past. Interpretation and witness testimonies are also needed. A number of talk shows fulfill this function, not only helping viewers make sense of the archival material they frequently watch, but also serving as analytical, journalistic programs that were absent in Soviet-era television; such shows provide expert opinions and analysis of topical situations, relating each to present-day situations.

The Flow of Talk Shows

One such program that provides witness testimonies and discussions about the Soviet past is the talk show *Before and After With Vladimir Molchanov*, which, like other analytical shows, is aired several times a day. The program has the following structure: a short introduction in which the anchor presents the year the episode's discussion will be about; the main segment, which consists of a guest interview and a short introduction to the focal year's main events by month; and short video and audio clips from theater plays and films, which the anchor and guest discuss. The program features a variety of visual elements alluding to the main idea of the program. The program begins with video footage and photographs showing smiling children, views of Moscow, and clips from famous Soviet films. The studio in which the interview takes place is decorated to be reminiscent of a private room in a communal flat, with simple furnishings and old newspapers instead of wallpaper.

The guest (in this case, journalist Vladimir Pozner) and the anchor (Vladimir Molchanov) discussed interrelations between private life and politics in the Soviet Union. The conversation loosely followed important events of different years, and short film clips mentioned in the conversation illustrated the discussion. An episode about political prosecution was illustrated by a clip from the play *Tribunal* (1985, by playwright Vladimir Voinovitch), in which the protagonist faces the court and addresses an invisible public on the matter of justice and defense. He calls for support and questions other citizens' silence as others were being detained by a totalitarian regime. Taking into consideration that the play was rewritten by Voinovitch after the infamous trials of Pussy Riot and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, it forms a reference to a **totalitarian purge** in contemporary Russia. The episode hence involuntarily forced me to make comparisons and question what has actually changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The anchor and his guest also discussed how people tend to behave when forced to speak out when confronted with unjust situations and how fear of prosecution destroys human relations. Again, thinking about modern Russia, this conversation seemed to be more relevant to present-time situations

than events that happened many years ago.

Some commentators believe that television fails to accurately represent history (Heath, 1990, p. 279; Postman, 1985, p. 136); others hold the conviction that television might induce “a wider vacuum within cultural memory resulting in historical amnesia” (Holdsworth, 2010, p. 130). My experience of watching the Nostal’giia channel speaks to the contrary. It shows that television is a site of renegotiation with the past that provides valuable and complex historical representations.

The channel’s talk shows and documentaries function as critical nodal points where the negotiation of the past takes place. They destroy the constructed by Russian modern political elite picture of the “Good Soviet Union”: political and economic order similar to the Soviet regime but devoid of its immanent defects (Gel’man, 2016). They pose and answer the questions that appear while watching the channel. They reveal previously unknown details about major political and social events and the individuals involved in them, and by so doing open the door to discussion and the articulation of conflicting viewpoints, thereby elucidating the complexity of the period.

Concluding Remarks: The Temporal Flow of Nostalgia

These three sequences of content on the Nostal’giia channel provide a somewhat contradictory but valuable experience. A new and complex narrative of the past is constructed through combining various sequences from different time periods, creating temporal incoherence. As a viewer, I sometimes wondered what time period the narration was responding to. Information about the year of the production being so neatly placed in the corner of the screen hardly helped as more often than not I missed the guiding year; consequently, the news sequences and my own reflections became conflated. Moreover, the events were narrated as if they just happened or were happening at the moment of broadcast. Linguistic markers strengthened this feeling: The anchors used such time indicators as *today*, *this morning*, and *this afternoon* to specify moments in time. Meanwhile, the visual qualities of the videos—their faded colors, old-fashioned clothes of the programs’ anchors and their guests, and slowness of the imagery—indicated archive material rather than live broadcast or contemporary production.

My question is why these temporal incoherencies nevertheless resulted in a feeling of historical continuity and, despite this confusing reception experience, watching the channel still made sense. The possible answer would be that the channel does not rely on linear temporality because it introduces an alternative temporality, which is that of narratives following their own temporality of suspense and entertainment. For example, the Nostal’giia channel also airs content that was forbidden on Soviet-era television, such as concerts by Western bands. In doing so, the channel also reveals the other, underground side of Soviet life that has hardly ever reached Soviet television. The channel mixes content that was available in the Soviet Union with material that was rarely accessible through legal channels, thus creating a simulation of Soviet television that many Soviet citizens would have likely wanted to watch and enjoy.

When faced with such a three-sequential television flow full of unexpected segments such as mentioned above, viewers first experience confusion that occurs when they compare their knowledge that

is based on history as a chronologically structured narrative with the seemingly random temporality of televised narratives produced by the channel. However, when viewers get transported into the narrative (which means that they stop comparing with external logics but believe in the internal logic of the narrative's temporality), they stop experiencing such contradictions and confusion and become absorbed by the story that is being told. In this process, viewers' own lives and knowledge about the past are nostalgically remembered, and thereby the temporal multiplicity that viewers experience as confusion is overcome by the narrative's temporality and being transported into the story. In this process, viewers' own nostalgia plays crucial role as it sparks curiosity and leads to active engagement with a story.

To conclude, by providing nostalgic stimuli, the channel has the power to break chronology for the benefit of suspense and entertainment to provide its viewers with a more engaging instrument of understanding the world and history. It allows viewers to connect memories and be more nostalgically stimulated to ask questions about the past as well as seek answers. By doing so and enabling a three-sequential television flow, the channel provides a multidimensional temporal experience that creates a flow of what Pirtim A. Sorokin (1964) called *cultural time*: time that is based on the channel viewers' subjective perceptions and linked to memory in terms of representation of past, present, and future.

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