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## THE UKRAINIAN PRODUCTION NOVEL AS A PRODUCT OF SOCIALIST REALIST MASS CULTURE. A POST-MODERN PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

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**Key words:** Ukrainian literature, socialist realism, production novel, popular culture, kitsch

**Słowa kluczowe:** literatura ukraińska, socrealizm, powieść produkcyjna, kultura masowa, kicz

**Abstract:** Matusiak, UKRAINIAN PRODUCTION NOVEL AS A PRODUCT OF SOCIALIST REALIST MASS CULTURE. POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE. "PORÓWNANIA" 7, 2010, Vol. VII, p. 179-196, ISSN 1733-165X. After the Soviet Empire had collapsed, 1990s has begotten in the field of Ukrainian Studies – both foreign as well as in Ukraine – a number of factors which should be conducive to scientific display and simultaneously reassessment of the achievements of socialist realism – the phenomenon, which set the tone of all fields of Soviet Ukrainian culture for more than half a century. Unfortunately, at the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, socialist realism still remains the least explored link of Ukrainian culture and generates unsatisfactory scientific interest among Ukrainian Studies scholars. Author believes that the best exemplification material to initiate re-overview of literature of socialist realism is the production novel – the flagship genre of socialist realism, the genre which peak period of popularity emerged during the first half of the 1930s, the time of consolidation of socialist realism as the aesthetics and the system of rules and regulations of cultural policy of the state. As the subject of observations in the novels chosen for examination (including works by such writers as: I. Le, V. Kuz'mych, P. Panch, I. Kachura, O. Kopylenko, S. Sklarenko, O. Dosvitnyi), author intends to make the presented world of the novels with its dominant socialist realist pan-aestheticism, whose essence was socialist realist mythology of kitsch / simulacrum. Subsequently, author desires to give an overview of the hero of socialist realism and the strategies of arranging reception of production novels, particularly the performed input/output techniques, determined by the essential quality of both socialist realism and popular culture, such as persuasion, emphasizing the truth that the discourse of socialist realism is a discourse of power.

**Abstrakt:** Agnieszka Matusiak, UKRAIŃSKA POWIEŚĆ PRODUKCYJNA JAKO PRODUKT SOCREALISTYCZNEJ KULTURY MASOWEJ. PERSPEKTYWA POSTMODERNISTYCZNA. „PORÓWNANIA” 7, 2010, Vol. VII, s. 179-196, ISSN 1733-165X. Lata 90. XX wieku po rozpadzie imperium radzieckiego zrodziły na gruncie ukraïnozawstwa, zarówno zagranicznego, jak i na Ukrainie, szereg okoliczności, które powinny sprzyjać naukowemu wyświetleniu i jednocześnie przewartościowaniu dorobku socrealizmu, fenomenowi, nadającemu ton wszystkim dziedzinom radzieckiej kultury ukraińskiej przez ponad pół wieku. Niestety, dziś pod koniec pierwszego dziesięciolecia XXI wieku, socrealizm wciąż pozostaje najsłabiej zbadanym ogniwem kultury ukraińskiej, wzbudzając w dalszym ciągu mało satysfakcjonujące naukowo zainteresowanie wśród ukraïnozawców. Autorka uważa, iż najlepszym materiałem egzemplifikacyjnym do zapoczątkowania re-oglądu literatury socrealizmu będzie powieść produkcyjna jako sztandarowy gatunek realizmu socjalistycznego, gatunek,

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którego szczytowy okres popularności przypada na pierwszą połowę lat 30. XX wieku, a więc na czas umacniania się socrealizmu jako estetyki i systemu reguł oraz nakazów państwowej polityki kulturalnej. W wybranych do analizy powieściach (m. in. takich autorów, jak: I. Le, W. Kuz'mycz, P. Pancz, J. Kaczura, O. Kopylenko, S. Sklarenko, O. Doswitnyj) autorka przedmiotem swoich obserwacji zamierza uczynić ich świat przedstawiony, z dominującym w nim socrealistycznym panestetyzmem, którego istotę określała socrealistyczna mitologia kiczu/symulakrum. W dalszej kolejności autorka proponuje poddać oglądowi socrealistycznego bohatera oraz strategię projektowania odbioru powieści produkcyjnej, a zwłaszcza stosowane tam techniki nadawczo-odbiorcze, zdeterminowane przez kluczową jakość zarówno socrealizmu, jak i kultury masowej, tj. perswazyjność, uwypuklając tym samym prawdę, iż dyskurs socrealizmu jest dyskursem władzy.

*“Everything which is or was art can become kitsch”.*

T.W. Adorno<sup>3</sup>

Today, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is clear that socialist realism constitutes the least researched part of literature – or even of Ukrainian culture as such. Although in the 90s after the fall of the Soviet empire there appeared several circumstances in Ukrainian literature that should have made the socialist realist output stand out and be re-evaluated, it has not attracted interest within researchers of Ukrainian studies abroad and in Ukraine<sup>4</sup> (whereas in Poland or Russia research on socialist realism has been intensified<sup>5</sup>). This has resulted in treating socialist realism as a taboo enhanced by the mass and popular negativity towards the Soviet era in history and all it brought about.

Ernst Renan in the classical essay, *What is a Nation* (1882) wrote that the basis of a nation is created not only by a common cultural memory but also by the ability to forget and “rewrite” the history together. Forgetting is thus a process that is absolutely crucial in the process of shaping national identity. However, Renan also says that the core of the mechanism of forgetting is a “constant dialogue” between non-memory and memory; it is this

<sup>3</sup> Cf.: T. W. Adorno, *Teoria estetyczna*. Transl. by K. Krzemieniowa. Warszawa 1994, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> The first international conference on the totalitarian output in Ukrainian culture took place in 2005 in Ukraine. One of the main organizers, George Grabowicz, claimed that there is a need for a critical analysis of the socialist realist output and it should become a priority for the scientific institute of independent Ukraine. The challenge brought on by Grabowicz was taken by Solomiia Pavlychko (*Kanon z pogliadu borot'by centru i marginsu*, 1999) and Tamara Gundorova, who published *Literature and Kitsch* in 2008. In reaction to research started by Gundorova Tetiana Sverblova and Ludmyla Skoryna published *Ukrajins'ka drama 30-ch rokov jak model masovoi kultury ta istorija dramaturgiji u postatiakh*. Kyjiv 2007. Also the work by Valentyna Kharkhun *Socrealistychnyj kanon v ukrajins'kij literaturi: geneza, rozvytok, modyfikacii* (2009) and Iryna Zakharchuk, *Vijna i slovo. Militarna paradygma literatury socialistychnogo realizmu*, Luck, 2008 should be taken into consideration.

<sup>5</sup> On the state of research: H. Günter, *Puti i tupiki izuchenija iskusstva i literatury stalinskoj epokhi*, «NLO» 2009, № 95; J. Dobrenko, *Stalinskaja kultura: dvadcat' let spustia*, «NLO» 2009, № 95.

dialogue that creates the framework for national identity. A contemporary authority on nation and nationalism, Anthony D. Smith, in *Cultural Foundations of Nations* (2008) proves claims that mass culture is of great significance for the determination and fostering of the cultural identity of a nation. Taking into consideration those opinions, it seems that in the broadly understood Ukrainian culture studies, including literary studies, in which the remnants of the cultural identity crisis in Ukraine are visible, it may be so that the time has come to recall the texts with traumatic cultural content – i.e. the national model of the socialist realist canon – that were consciously denied by the Ukrainians in the 1990s. This type of debates can constitute a starting point for a wider debate on Ukrainian socialist realism *sensu stricto*, but also be a stimulus for rethinking the values that make up Ukrainian cultural identity at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ukrainian compatriots residing abroad and in Ukraine had often pointed towards this path before regaining independence. I am thinking about figures such as Juri Sherekh, Juriy Luckyj, George Grabowicz, Myroslav Shkandrij, Ivan Dziuba, Mykola Riabchuk, and in the mid 1990s – Juri Andrukhovych and Oksana Zabuzhko, but also Solomiia Pavlychko and today's follower of her thoughts – Tamara Gundorova, in Poland – Ola Gnatiuk. These authors basically unanimously thought that the real farewell with the totalitarian heritage of the Soviet empire and a definition of one's own national identity can only take place when the “demons of the past” will be brought into light, named and described in accordance with contemporary methodologies, i.e. in the process of consciously and responsibly re-evaluating the attitude towards heritage. They also pointed to the fact that it would be a painful process because the Ukrainians have to carry out a re-evaluation of myths, symbols, stereotypes and ideology that regard the communist empire but also those that regard their own nation (particularly those that pertain to the Ukrainian literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with its strong romantic tradition with a tint of colonialism and the Narodniks which the Ukrainian socialist realist canon took over and then ideologized and formalized thanks to which its transformation into mass culture was so effective and long-term, and Ukrainian literature as such became a medium for the Soviet colonial policy). According to the above mentioned intellectuals and myself, only then can we talk about the decolonization of Ukrainian culture as a done deal.

The rationale for research on socialist realism within the Ukrainian scientific discourse is enhanced by the most dynamically developing post-colonial studies that support colonized nations in the reconstruction of their own national identity. However, while undertaking the

deconstruction of the socialist realist discourse in Ukrainian literature, one should bear in mind the (frequently neglected, forgotten, consciously denied) fact that Russian as a language of the imperial discourse was not the only language of the propaganda and submission. Also Ukrainian was a language of the colonial discourse that maintained the imperial mentality. The task of the Ukrainian researcher of the socialist realist literary output, as was rightly said by Mykola Riabchuk, Marko Pavlyshyn and Myroslav Shkandrij, there is a need for capturing and scientifically describing the characteristics of the relationship between those two threads in the socialist realist discourse. In the context that I am interested in, the anti-colonial discourse should not be forgotten. It was built by means of the Ukrainian language which produced its own national myths and stereotypes. The postmodernist approach seems really helpful here as it allows not only for a different perspective than the one provided by the hitherto homogenous vision of reality within the perspective of the Soviet imperial *vel* colonial discourse where each individual who thought otherwise only deserved to be “decapitated” or at least alienated and forced into silence, but also a perspective different from the national Ukrainian “liberation discourse”. It should be remembered that the anti-colonial discourse which negated the legitimization of the imperial authority and all its ideological constructs that exposed the violence, craftiness and lawlessness of the colonizer, also demanded legalization of alternative, usually different hierarchies of values and basically became a specific ideological regime on its own which was even forced to use the strategies developed by the colonizer and paradoxically confirm and strengthen its discourse. Thus, by taking the post-colonial viewpoints on the basis of the postmodernist approach, there is hope for a constructive deconstruction and decolonization of Ukrainian culture and literature and also finishing the modernization processes initiated in the 1920s and thereafter undertaken by the generation of the so called *shistdesiatnyky*.

The post-colonial horizon is inscribed in the postmodern rule of pluralism (called by W. Welsch “the focal point of postmodernism”<sup>6</sup>) and legitimizes the possibility of carrying out a revision of the popular myth functioning in Slavic studies (particularly within Russian studies) that social realism constituted a cosmopolitical “supranational formation” of the broadly understood Soviet culture. In reality this standpoint boils down to the identification of socialist realism with the Russian cultural area and encourages us to resign from further

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<sup>6</sup> W. Welsch, *Estetyka poza estetyką. O nową postać estetyki*. Red. K. Wilkoszewska, transl. by. K. Guzalska. Kraków 2005.

studies of this phenomenon in national versions. Today, in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a staunch support for this approach only increases the attempts at perceiving Ukrainian culture and literature as being in the “iron grip” of the Soviet discourse of the “stronger brother” which still sees Ukraine at its side in the role of the “weaker” whose culture – a form of local exoticism usually promoted through the prism of an ethnographic character – is identified with a less valuable province. Such a viewpoint is not conducive to finishing the decolonization of Ukrainian culture. This is why from the perspective of theory there was undoubtedly “one” socialist realism. However, in practice (despite the careful unification policy led by the authorities, it is indubitable) – it functioned in many national variations<sup>7</sup>.

It is greatly tempting to compare the historical moment in which socialist realism strengthens in the Soviet culture, i.e. the 1930s, with the analogical period in the culture of Western Europe and North America, that is the time of the rise, the domination and the eradication of elite culture by mass culture, in those times represented by a mature modernism and avant-garde. In such a context there comes to mind one question: what are the differences and similarities between the socialist realist Soviet mass culture of a “closed society” that inevitably heads towards totalitarianism, and mass culture of a Western type “open society” of those days? Finding the answer to this question should be the chief research perspective within this field.

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Theodor W. Adorno’s citation at the beginning of the text, that “all that is or was art, can become kitsch”, brings to mind the dialectics of art and kitsch<sup>8</sup>, provoking and calling for taking a particular stand<sup>9</sup>. In today’s reality that promotes fundamental pluralism of values, fluid identity of the subject, the cult of the object, the domination of image, simulation of unreality and, first and foremost, the universal aesthetics; a reality based on a vision of a consumer society that prefers a democratized cultural paragon and, consequently – the

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<sup>7</sup> Cf.: T. Sverbilova, *Sovetskij socrealizm 1930-gg. i vopros o identychnosti ukrajinskoj literatury w aspekcie komparativistiki (k postonovke problemy)*, in: *Studia Sovietica*. Red. V. Kharkhun, Kyjiv 2010, vyp. 1, p. 37-45.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. interesting thoughts on this issue in the book by P. Beylin, *Autentyczność i kicz*. Warszawa 1975 and M. Poprzęcka. *O złej sztuce*. Warszawa, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> A nearly kaleidoscopic survey of points of view on kitsch within different disciplines of high art is given in the comprehensive volume entitled *Kicz, tandeta, jarmarczność w kulturze masowej XX wieku*. Red. L. Rożek. Częstochowa 2000.

primacy of low/ mass culture (that brings together stereotypical, ideological, folk, sentimental and moral motifs, images and texts) over high/ elite culture (that compiles forms and means of expression), taking a look at the former through the prism of scientific reflection seems most relevant. Even more so as it becomes more and more absurd to contrast high culture with popular culture at all as the border between the two has become so blurred that a definite demarcation line is practically not possible<sup>10</sup>.

Kitsch is one of the most basic cultural categories used frequently by the consumer society in order to satisfy this need. It is probably so because kitsch contains a direct, concrete and irresistible temptation of an instant infantile-narcissistic satisfaction; satisfaction that is maintained within the cult of beauty and in a sentimental-romantic mood which facilitates the acquisition of cultural products. Today, in the post-modernity era which negates the traditional understanding of kitsch as a phenomenon that stirs negative aesthetical associations, kitsch has become a primary category of culture and practically none of the disciplines in the world (politics, religion, medicine, science, sports, fashion, intimate relations, etc.) is impervious to its influence. Literature is no exception here. The expert on kitsch, Jean Baudrillard, defines it as a certain general cultural category which is difficult to define but should definitely not be mistaken with concrete real objects. He claims it is rather a *pseudoobject*, simulacrum, copy, imitation, stereotype, shortage of real significance and excess of signs, allegorical references, conflicting connotations which contrast the aesthetics of beauty and originality with their own aesthetics of simulation. This is, on the other hand, strictly connected with the social function ascribed to kitsch, which consists in expressing social aspirations, class expectations, the magical sense of belonging to culture, and knowing the forms, customs and symbols of higher classes.

It is worth remembering that kitsch is not the invention of our times as claims Hermann Broch. A bit of kitsch has always existed in each type of art waiting for the proper circumstances to be brought to light with premeditation. “Kitsch could not appear or be maintained – writes Broch – if the person who likes kitsch did not exist and as a consumer of art was not willing to buy it [...]: art in its broadest sense is always a reflection of the particular person and if kitsch is a lie [...], then this accusation is directed at the person who

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<sup>10</sup> Cf.: F. Jamerson, *Postmodernizm i społeczeństwo konsumpcyjne*. Transl. by P. Czapliński, in: *Postmodernizm. Antologia przekładów*. Red. R. Nycz. Kraków 1996, p. 192. Also cf.: *Kiczofery współczesności*. Red. W. J. Burszta, E. A. Sekuła. Warszawa 2008 (especially the chapter by E.A. Sekuła and Kangur, *Kicz jako źródło radości*, p. 35-47); U. Eco, *Apokaliptycy i dostosowani. Komunikacja masowa a teoria kultury masowej*. Transl. by P. Salwa. Warszawa 2010.

needs such a lying and beautifying mirror in order to find themselves in it and with ingenious pleasure admit to their own lies”<sup>11</sup>. An even more radical opinion is presented by Abraham Moles who claims that kitsch is within each of us; it is as stable a feature of our nature as sin<sup>12</sup>.

Kitsch strengthens its role and significance together with the development and assumption of a leading role in Europe and North America in the 1920-1930s within mass culture. Urbanization, industrialization and mass industrial production connected with it were most conducive to it. Also, the popularization of the cinema and the radio which together with the press constituted modern archetypical means of mass media and raised fears not only as to the commercialism of art but also as to the possibilities that were created for them by political regimes: in the West – fascism, in the East – communism by means of mass propaganda. The existence of efficient and easy ways of reaching great numbers of people in a totalitarian political system was perceived already in the 1930s by many researchers as yet another means, apart from coercion, of consolidating these systems and suppressing all alternative solutions. Mass media gave and instilled the official ideology of the totalitarian state because they could be – and *de facto* were – centrally controlled and could reach the entire population. According to Dominick Strinati, it could be assumed that mass-media equaled mass propaganda which equaled mass repressions (both physical as well as spiritual and mental). In the Soviet Union such possibilities were enhanced in the 1930s by declaring socialist realism as binding in every area of culture and art which equaled, as we know, eradication of all alternative aesthetical ideologies. Thus the constructed culture favored strengthening of the Soviet mass society, whose members were atomized both socially and morally<sup>13</sup>. Consequently mass culture in totalitarian societies turned out to be a moral placebo. The ruling elite shaped the tastes of the majority, the mass, and thus persuaded and manipulated. However, in order to effectively seduce the masses to their own aims, mass culture had to use standard formulas that could appeal to all. For the manipulation to be effective, mass culture had to resort to emotional manipulation<sup>14</sup>. This is where kitsch helps with its own mechanisms of infantilisation, stereotypisation, formalization, recurrence, superficiality. Kitsch awards

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<sup>11</sup> H. Broch, *Kilka uwag o kiczu i inne eseje*. Transl. by D. Borkowska. Warszawa 1998, s. 103.

<sup>12</sup> A. Moles, *Kicz, czyli sztuka szczęścia. Studium o psychologii kiczu*. Transl. by A. Szczepańska i E. Wende, wstęp A. Osęka. Warszawa 1978, s. 31.

<sup>13</sup> A. Kłoskowska, *Kultura masowa. Krytyka i obrona*. Warszawa 2005, p. 119-137.

<sup>14</sup> Cf.: H. Arendt, *Ruch totalitarny*. Transl. by D. Grinberg, v. 2, in: eadem, *Korzenie totalitaryzmu*. Transl. by D. Grinberg and M. Szawiel. Warszawa 2008, v. 1-2, p. 75-135.

inauthentic values with authenticity and reality. It was in reference to this way of understanding kitsch that Clement Greenberg in 1939 in a well-publicized essay *Avant-garde and Kitsch* claimed: “If kitsch constitutes the official tendency in the art of Germany, Italy and Russia, then it is not due to the fact that the authorities of those countries are townsmen but because kitsch represents mass culture in these countries [...]. Kitsch is a cheap instrument of seducing the masses. [...] Kitsch keeps the dictator in close contact with the ‘spirit of the nation’”<sup>15</sup>.

It seems that the best exemplifying material to carry out a review of the socialist realist literature in Ukraine should be the production novel as a leading genre of socialist realism. Its peak of popularity was in the 1930s which were times of the strengthening of the socialist realist aesthetics and system of rules and orders of the state cultural policy. Bearing in mind all the above mentioned the following works from 1931-1935/7 should be the object of research: Ivan Le’s *Roman Mizhgirja* (1929-1933), Volodymyr Kuz’mych’s *Kryla* (1930) and *Turbiny* (1932), Petro Panch’s *Sliusar z depo* (1931), Jakov Kachura’s *Ol’ha* (1931), Volodymyr Hzhychki’s *U tvorczi budni* (1931), Natalia Zabyla’s *Traktorbud* (1931-1933), Oleksandra Kopylenka’s *Narozhdujet’sia misto* (1932), Heo Epik’s *Petro Romen* (1932), Semen Sklarenko’s *Burun* (1932), Ivan Kyrylenko’s *Pereszychtowka* (1932), Oles’ Dosvitny’s *Kvarcyt* (1932), Oles’ Donchenko’s *Zoriana fortetsia* (1933), Hordij Kociuba’s *Novi berehgy* (1932-1937), Anatolij Shyjan’s *Magistral’* (1934), and Jurij Shovkoplas’s *Inzhenery* (part I – 1934, part II – 1937). The proposed texts are not only representative examples of the production novel as a literary genre but also – what is more important – they created the socialist realist framework of the literary canon and were totally forgotten after 1991.

The production novel is for me also of interest because it naturally includes determinants and content that reflect, strengthen and promote the basic categories of mass culture, i.e. urbanization, industrialization, taking over the rules of mass production into culture, including literature, democratization of all social spheres, development of the means of mass communication, etc. I propose that the presented world in the texts chosen for analysis become the object of observation – *Socrealistyczny Disneyland* (Disneyland is

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<sup>15</sup> C. Greenberg *Awangarda i kicz*, in: *Kultura masowa*. Choice, transl., foreword by Cz. Milosz, commentary by J. Szacki. Kraków 202, p. 44 (ed. I 1959). Cf. also: P. Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*. Cambridge 1985 and *Agitatsija za schast’ie. Sovetskoje iskusstwo stalinskoj epokhi*. Düsseldorf-Bremen 1994.



understood as the prototype of all the intertwined orders of simulation, after Baudrillard). Owing to such a definition of the area of observation it will be possible to show the strategies and schematization techniques used in those novels. They use clichés of events and constructs whose aim is to create such an image of the reality which provokes the similar reactions from the entire readership and beyond doubt guarantees a correct understanding of the ideological message. Next, it would be worth looking at the socialist realist pan-aestheticism which imbued with an appropriate degree of pathos was promoted by the leading party activist of the 1930s and the accompanying press. The sense of this “cult of beauty” consisted in creating the surrounding world as “a complete work of art” in the framework of theatricalization, sacralization and monumentalism. Thus constructed socialist realist works became ideological texts-commentaries all of whose components were ideal and given in the form of ultimate perfection in a carefully planned whole – the socialist ideal. What follows is that “the socialist realist mythology of kitsch” should undergo a careful and multifaceted review. The core of the reconstruction of “the socialist realist recipe for happiness” that the writers had to realize in their text in such a way that they reflected the specific Soviet hierarchy of values for which the normative outlook consisted in the socialist realist optimism which very quickly transformed into ideological terror and was symbolically sealed with the following words by Stalin in 1935: “Life has become more beautiful, comrades, it has become more cheerful”.

I think that a detailed grasp of the structural stereotypization of the world of the production novel as a product of the socialist realist mass culture (I mean the Marxist metaphor of base and superstructure in whose light culture constitutes the consequence of the historically conditioned way of production and Adorn and Horkheimer’s treatise *Culture Industry*) is so important mostly because this is a means of revealing its cunningly hidden ideological nature, i.e. based on lies and not the truth, offering pretenses and not reality, fictitious problem solving as a substitute for actual problem solving. The cultural content that underwent effective standardization and homogenization perfectly numbed, desensitized and lulled into bliss the awareness of the mass recipients who did not have to exert themselves intellectually because they were handed the ready-made models to follow in life and a way to self-perfection. The reader who reached for such concocted works confirmed the conventions they were accustomed to and the customs they developed and, as a result, was able to see life in something that was only a mystification. Kitsch revealed here with premeditation its “hallucinatory power” that provoked quite a priori the promise of easy catharsis. Matei

Calinescu called this characteristic of kitsch “the aesthetics of lies and self-deception”. From this side kitsch constituted a perfect *instrumentarium* by means of which the ruling elite, called by Dwight Macdonald “the lords of kitsch” took over control of awareness of the masses<sup>16</sup>. This is why the next scientific step should be the analysis of the (multifaceted) protagonist – *the socialist realist kitschman*, who with such a conception vividly ingrained in the anthropological project aimed at creating “the new human being of our times” so fundamental for the totalitarian Soviet state. *The strategies of reception design* are also worth analyzing. This could be followed by an analysis of broadcast and reception techniques that were determined by the key quality both of socialist realism and mass culture, i.e. persuasiveness, which makes it distinctly clear that in the socialist realist discourse the ways of constructing the language of literary expression are fundamental to the socialist realist text in which the outlook of the party ideologist, author, narrator, protagonist and reader are confounded into one making them hypostases of the totalitarian human being who controls but also is controlled. I share Jevgenij Dobrenko’s view on this matter that socialist realism is not only an aesthetic doctrine of the totalitarian culture but also, or even more so, a realm where authority meets the language<sup>17</sup>. This is the mechanism of kitsch which most vividly reveals that its function does not limit itself only to the world of impressions and aesthetic reflections but also reaches deeper into the society, uniting mass culture and power. Kitsch – as is claimed by Svetlana Boym – is not a (bad) art style but a way of thinking. It is “an aesthetic act, an act of manipulation, mass hypnosis and temptation”; it is “an omnipresent paradise of mass production, a paradise with all comforts and without hell”<sup>18</sup>. This is why due to its nature, kitsch found favorable conditions for its development and long-term vitality in the Soviet totalitarian system, which aimed at stabilizing the world by means of stabilizing the vision of the world. As a consequence, kitsch as a natural ally of the totalitarian authority’s games was promoted by them in every aspect of life and laboriously protected, together with the entire regime, as one of its crucial ideological components.

I would like to propose that due to the specificity of the postulated issues, the sociology of culture should constitute the methodological framework (devoid of any ideological prejudice). This implies also the thoughts of those who developed the theory of

<sup>16</sup> Cf.: J. Plamper, *The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power*. Ithaca 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Cf.: Je. Dobrenko, *Ampir vo vremia chumy, ili Lavka vnevremennosti (metafizicheskiye predposylki socrealizma)*, „Obshchestvenye nauki i sovremennost’” 1992, № 1, p. 161-172.

<sup>18</sup> S. Boym, «*Za khoroshyj vkus nado borot'sia*». *Socrealizm i kitch*, in: *Socrealisticheskij kanon*. Red. Ch. Günter, J. Dobrenko. Sankt Peterburg 2000, p. 89 and others.

mass culture and the terminology and tools for its research, in other words, those who created the now classical approach to this culture, i.e. the founders of the Frankfurt School: Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse. The concept of “culture industry” developed by the Frankfurt School is of particular importance. Thus, the research has to be supplemented by references to Marxism. Because of such abstract methodological horizon it would be crucial to use Walter Benjamin’s, an atypical representative of the School, cultural analyses and his famous essay from 1936, *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Benjamin’s thoughts on mass culture – particularly the ones on mechanisms of reproduction which cause the disappearance of the authenticity of cultural products, i.e. the disappearance of the so called “aura” – lead straight to the postmodernist theory of simulacra by Jean Baudrillard. I claim that it is the research attitude represented by the author of *Consumer Society* that to the greatest extent delivers the promise of reading the socialist realist texts with a fresh and intellectually satisfying attitude. I include here Baudrillard’s concept of mass culture as kitsch/simulacrum; kitsch not only as imitation, mere copying but also kitsch as a category which takes control over the original and, simultaneously, even questions its existence as such. This is a view in which mass culture is a hyper-reality which “is protected against [...] all possibility of discerning what is real from what is imagined, leaving space only for [...] simulating generation of difference”<sup>19</sup>. The socialist realist kitsch in such a perspective is “the gray eminence” of the totalitarian mechanism of seducing mass awareness of Soviet society, including Ukrainian society, by the authorities.

Bearing in mind the fact that mass culture is a type of discourse which is a particular way of organizing the knowledge that serves the particular types of power relations, the analysis has to be enriched by the post-structuralist thoughts of Michel Foucault. His works could help decipher the practice of the functional use of language and the production of meaning encoded in the production novels. It is those discursive practices in which the elusive areas of reality are transformed into separate objects which can be recognized and also controlled. I think that this new perspective can constitute the key to approach socialist realism (and its cultural products) within Ukrainian studies not only in the context of mass culture but also in the official, elite and high culture.

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<sup>19</sup> J. Baudrillard, *Symulakry i symulacja*. Transl. by S. Królak. Warszawa 2005, p. 7.

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These are not the only methods that I propose to use in reading production novels within socialist realist mass culture. It would also be relevant to use structuralist methods of culture research including concepts from, i.a. Umberto Eco's *Superman in Mass Literature* and Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* in the methodological framework.

The use of such a wide variety of research techniques that complete one another results from the conviction that the issue of the Ukrainian production novel and its contextualization in mass culture requires a comprehensive methodological approach. Using such a methodological strategy is a way to uncover new values in the analyzed works but also a marvelous possibility to legitimize new styles of reception of these texts contributing all the while to deepening the knowledge on socialist realism as an era and the cultural mechanisms and impact on the fate of Ukrainian literature at present.