Mass Self-Expression Texts as a Promising Research Field: Interdisciplinary Perspective

Maria Anikina

Viktor Khroul

The paper presents a study of collective memories about precise historic period reflected respectively in public opinion polls and in mass self-expression texts. Authors prove the hypothesis about compatibility of two research techniques for the particular case and confirm that both the opinion polls and the method of multidimensional analysis of mass consciousness texts are suitable for research of historical consciousness. Therefore authors consider the method of multidimensional analysis of mass consciousness texts to be applicable to mass communications studies in social sciences.

Key words: public opinion, mass self-expression texts, multidimensional analysis, historical memory, comparative study

Audience studies: the challenge of the Internet

Media require full and reliable knowledge about readers/listeners/viewers. Although the theorists never came to an agreement about the notion of audience's consciousness (in the field of research usually referred to as mass consciousness), its value (especially the value of its content) is usually regarded as beyond doubt.

The traditional, proved and dominant methods of acquiring such a knowledge are sociological studies which use the methods of mass survey, expert survey, content analysis, focus groups etc. The value of such work cannot be overestimated, as it becomes the basis on which the directors of print periodicals, radio stations, TV channels and online media to take the strategic and tactical decisions who try to take into account the interests and needs of their potential audience.

Meanwhile this research paradigm (as the technologies develop, it constantly broadens its field of application and usage of its mainly quantitative methods) is not the only possible in the study of mass conscience and its separate segments or fields.

One of the alternative methods of gaining information about the audience is based on the analysis of texts existing on a large scale. Development of the proposed research approach began in the mid-1980s by B. Grushin and then adopted in about fifteen scientific works, produced by participants of a seminar held in 1984-89; but for some reason it was not developed further. We will try to show the potential fruitfulness of its application through studying one of the areas (or sub-structures) of mass consciousness - historical consciousness.

When public opinion "boils over" around some case, the sociological centers and research institutions respond with a poll while the Internet erupts with user texts. In particular, both public opinion polls and "eruptions" of mass consciousness texts were called forth by such stories of the recent past as M. Khodorkovsky's conviction, the military conflict in South Ossetia, the accident at the Sayano- Shushenskaya electric power station, an appeal to Putin by militia major Aleksey Dymovsky, the "School" TV series, Moscow traffic jams, the Rechnik dacha settlement story, the accident on Leninsky Prospect in Moscow, the terrorist acts in the Moscow underground, etc. As we have found, of the Big Three of sociological centers, i.e. FOM, VTsIOM and Levada Center, the

latter is the most dynamic in its response to the subjects of the growing interest to mass consciousness (Obshchestvennoe, 2010).

Despite of mass media audience studies since the times of George Gallup (Gallup, 1939) have been traditionally based on public opinion polls methodology and techniques, in Russia as well (see Grushin, Onikov, 1980). But there is another promising approach to mass consciousness studies proposed in 1980-s by Soviet and Russian sociologist professor Grushin: "Text analysis will help answer the question of mass consciousness far more completely and reliably that this can be done using the traditional public opinion polls" - this is the essence of "Grushin hypothesis" (Grushin, 2010: 70).

Reflections on previous studies and further development of Grushin's method let us suggest that if there is a content area well-studied with the help of representative polls and, at the same time, rich in mass self-expression texts generated on some concrete occasion, then, theoretically, it may be suitable for making comparisons in a particular case. The same audience attitude or perception could be reflected and explicitly fixed in two ways: in responses to the sociological questionnaire and in spontaneous mass consciousness texts.

It was also difficult to offer a proper tool for a survey effective for the analysis of such pieces of texts as jokes, riddles, proverbs and other self-expression texts of mass consciousness. But such a tool was finally elaborated. Studies conducted at the Journalism Faculty of MSU in 2007-2011 brought interesting results concerning the phenomenon of structural and substantive inconsistency of mass consciousness, various models of its manifestation etc. (Khroul, 2009; Anikina, Khroul, 2011).

Thus we chose the content-oriented approach to analyze mass consciousness texts since such an approach can best help to trace likenesses and differences of results obtained with the method of text analysis - on the one hand and with traditional sociological polls - on the other. We were interested in subject matters of mass consciousness, attitude of the population towards its own society, cognitive abilities of the population etc.

In our comparative study of collective memories about precise historic period reflected in public opinion polls and gathered in mass consciousness texts the hypothesis about compatibility of two research techniques is confirmed for the particular case. It appeared that both the opinion polls and the method of multidimensional analysis of mass consciousness texts are equally suitable for research of historical consciousness what means that the method of multidimensional analysis of mass consciousness texts is applicable to mass communications studies in social sciences.

The main goal of the new approach is to distinguish and to analyze the important characteristics of historical consciousness, which obviously cannot be studied directly. This is why the most promising analysis will be the analysis of the forms of its manifestation in which it can be found and explicated. The possible objects of such analysis are: a) mass behavior; b) texts produced by the masses (for example, spontaneously spoken words of people).

The study of behavior is of little efficacy, though it may be possible, and it will definitely require more resources. This is why it seems sensible to focus on texts available in many media.

Within the framework of the seminar which was held 20 years ago at the MSU Department of Journalism Prof. B.A. Grushin offered the typology of mass tests, which could be used for studying historical consciousness as well. It distinguishes different classes of texts depending on the type of subjects who produce these texts and their 'position' with regard to the public: texts created by the public itself; texts created by professionals (journalists, other writers, etc.), which are consumed by the public and become a part of their consciousness; texts created by analysts (philosophers, sociologists, etc.) where the public is an object of research described in the texts.

This classification also categorized different types of text depending on the 'objectivity' of the expression and the presentation of true characteristics of mass consciousness; mass texts, pure or

modified by external intervention; mass culture texts, fully or partly penetrating in public consciousness; scientific texts, empirically or theoretically describing the characteristics of public consciousness. Moreover, the seminar described types of texts in terms of the particular characteristics of their creators, the methods of expression and the historical and cultural modes of the texts.

Summing up the seminar outcome in the early 2000s, Grushin emphasized two of its main achievements: a) definition and classification of mass consciousness texts, and b) construction and first approbation of the MATEMC method.

In our opinion, as regards specific goals the most interesting for research into historical consciousness will be auto-texts - texts of the mass self-expression. Normally they are spontaneous and their content and general characteristics are uninfluenced by external impact, so their analysis may be most fruitful.

New means of translating mass auto-texts, primarily from the Internet, and new methods of fixation of materials unlimited in quality and quantity make research projects related to analysis of these texts very attractive. Choice of analytic methodology will be most important in this approach.

One wise man named the Internet 'a gold mine' with regard to its content and 'a landfill' because of its organization. But within the framework of this research it will be more precise to use a metaphor of an infinite fence, on which the masses can write and historical knowledge leaves its traces. Our aim is to read these traces, these texts on the 'fence', to reconstruct fully and correctly the characteristics and features of the consciousness of people who have left their autograph there.

Of course it would be arrogant to claim that this approach will give more reliable data about the historical conscience than other research methods (on the issue of representativeness it is certainly inferior to sociological surveys). But the potential value of a new qualitative approach lies in its ability access the new and uninvestigated characteristics of the consciousness of former times and above all its content.

Strictly speaking, however, these results cannot serve as some formal proof of the "Grushin hypothesis" since the field data represented by a set of auto texts of the mass as forms of its self-expression was never accompanied by a classical public opinion poll with the same subject of inquiry.

Moreover, it appears to be extremely difficult to work out a tool for a survey that would be as effective as analysis of jokes, riddles, proverbs, sayings, conversations of fellow-travelers in a train, inscriptions on classroom desks, school essays, and other auto texts of mass consciousness.

Besides, far from all content areas, semantic "fields" of mass consciousness, are suitable for obtaining comparable results through the use of tools so different as public opinion polls and analysis of spontaneous mass self-expression. This is why, as far as we know, no attempts have been made to conduct a comparative study of this kind. Accordingly, mass consciousness research has been conducted on two tracks, involving the mainstream surveys using the increasingly fine methodology and the increasingly sophisticated questions in parallel with the comparatively small stream of text analysis.

The obvious issues of representative sample, in the latter case especially, and comparability of results, are the two *stumbling blocks* obstructing the "Grushin hypothesis" verification, and they would scare off any researchers, provided it occurred to one to carry out a comparative analysis at all.

However it may be difficult to prove this theorem in the general form, some particular cases of verification appear possible with different tools producing the results which could be comparable by a number of parameters.

At this point it is important to note the following circumstances: a) choice of an *object, the semantic field* of mass consciousness; b) choice of only one approach - semantic - of Grushin's out of three,

i.e. the formal, semantic and structural-logical ones for mass consciousness texts analysis (See Sovremennyi, 2003; Minaeva, Panchenko, 2010). This choice involves identification of the subject area which is done best through a regular survey.

In other words, if there is a content area well-studied with the help of representative polls and, at the same time, rich in mass self-expression texts generated on some concrete occasion, then, theoretically, it may be suitable for proving the "Grushin hypothesis" as a particular case. At that, the problem can be solved in two models, that is, the *panel* study (regular repeat surveys, longitudinal observation) and *single, not repeated* study.

Let us consider the former case. On the one hand, there is no lack of sociological monitoring of many years' standing in various spheres of social life. Sociological services undertaking such monitoring conduct it basing on the standard method and the established indices and indicators. On the other hand, the rapid growth in the number of Internet users in Russia makes it possible to find, to identify, to record, and to analyze dynamic, yet basically well-defined semantic fields of auto texts of the mass such as websites, forums, blogs, etc., that are similar to the subjects of monitorings.

Professional sociologists regularly probe for diverse *attitudes* with regard to various phenomena, personalities, fragments of reality, processes and issues. The Foundation "Obshchestvennoye mnenie" ("Public Opinion") (further - FOM) is a research center which gives several examples of this kind such as the project called "The Prevailing Opinions Field" (Dominants. The field of opinions. 2012). It reflects at attitudes to political leaders (e.g. D. Medvedev: Two Years of Presidency, and such indicators as V. Putin's Electoral Field and D. Medvedev's Electoral Field, etc.), or the credibility of social institutions (Confidence in the Institutes of Power, Edinaya Rossiya Party Image), forecasts the development of problem situations and the list of the most topical events. It is not difficult to find the corresponding segments of "auto texts" of mass consciousness on the Internet. Political forums and blogs providing the field material are well-known.

As we consider the same subject could be reflected and explicitly fixed in two ways: in responses to the sociological questionnaire and in spontaneous mass consciousness texts (possibly, latently provoked, but this is hard to trace). And the sequence of research tasks appears principal and the most significant point for both modes of the "Grushin hypothesis" proving.

Since people who worked out questionnaires did not presume that anybody would work on comparing their results with the content analysis data on auto texts of the mass, they design their questionnaire in strict correspondence with the research program. So we have to follow suit and, using the poll results (even with the account of conceptualization of responses to open-ended questions), to develop a document for content analysis of auto texts in the maximum possible correspondence with a pollster's field document to ensure at least the minimum comparability.

Brezhnev time: retrieving collective memory

The Brezhnev era as a historical memory segment was taken up as the subject of analysis.

In recent years the past historical experience, be it social, cultural or political, has, generally speaking, become the subject of growing interest both in this country and beyond (see Confino and Fritzsch, 2002).

Interest in the recent past is expressed by both a man in the street and by representatives of various expert communities, groups of intellectuals and power elites. In the former case this interest can be seen as a comeback to certain elements of everyday Soviet life, incorporation of elements of the Soviet times into the subcultures' communication, in the youth's fashion for the Soviet, and in the growing popularity of the Soviet symbols. In the latter case, interest in the past, the Soviet past in particular, is seen in a wider scope and is actualized in various social, political and scientific

projects and initiatives, like a search for the so-called "national idea" in the historical past.

In the research domain, the issues of the Soviet past, of living through and understanding it, gradually move from the historical research area to the social research sphere. Historical memory often becomes the subject of discussions and conferences on nostalgia and historical consciousness in some countries and whole regions of the world, e.g. National Identity, Historical Memory and the Humanities (Italy, 2008), World War II and the (Re)Creation of Historical Memory in Contemporary Ukraine (Ukraine, 2009), WIDER Conference on Reflections on Transition: Twenty Years After The Fall of The Berlin Wall (Finland, 2009), Fascism and Communism: History and Memories Compared and Beyond Cold War Linearities: Entangled Histories and Interactive Ideas (Hungary, 2009) etc.

Relevant studies of various nature and scale are carried out before numerous anniversaries, in memory of prominent political figures and notable events, enriching the present-day discourse with new ideas.

Since the mid-1990s the debate has been far from exhausted, becoming increasingly widespread and lively. A wealth of available data is particularly noticeable in public opinion research because numerous studies are conducted following the standard techniques, data processing does not take much time, and poll results are covered in the mass media and discussed in the public space. Here are some of the studies on historical memory and memory of the Soviet past carried out by Russia's pollsters in 2009-2010: "M. Gorbachev's Era and Personality as Seen by Russians", "Russians' opinion about Stalin", "Russians on Stalin's role", "The October Revolution: Great and Terrible?", "Perestroika Revisited: Historical Perspective", "Soviet and Antisoviet: What's Good and What's Bad?" etc.

In a number of cases studies outgrow the habitual poll status and transform into full-scale research projects on certain periods of domestic history. One example is the project "L. I. Brezhnev and His Time", the report on which was published by the FOM in December 2009. The project results are quite suitable to be used in an attempt to prove the "Grushin hypothesis".

As has already been mentioned above, we chose the content-oriented approach (or semantic study) to analyze mass consciousness texts since such an approach can best help to trace likenesses and differences of results obtained with the method of text analysis - on the one hand and with traditional sociological polls - on the other.

Besides, the content-oriented approach to the mass consciousness texts enabled us, among other things, to find out the preferred subjects, i.e. which spheres of the Soviet past people recollect more often and more willingly, and to build the associative series the texts contain as well as to determine the character of the arising associations and the texts authors' attitude to the subject.

In Grushin's stead, we also speak not about all kinds of mass consciousness but only about those that coincide with the verbally expressed public opinion. Meanwhile it would be relevant to put two points more precisely.

We study recollections of our contemporaries about the past, speak about historical memory as the mass consciousness segment, and do not undertake reconstruction of "the portrait of the age" in the public opinion of that age.

Furthermore, unlike the material at Grushin's disposal, - utterances of the mass *inspired* by the researcher's interest, i.e. brought to life using various polls, our object of study was formed naturally (or almost naturally), having been *inspired* from inside the mass, although here, too, there were "initiators", or "centers of crystallization" whose remarks caused a "snow ball" of utterances to form spontaneously.

Having no chance to ask questions and not intending to study "the population", we have turned to "texts of the population".

Thanks to new information and communication technologies sociologists now have at their disposal

the unique tools enabling them to search for empirical data which are necessary and sufficient for their research. Mass information accessible on the Internet (personal pages, forums, chats, blogs, network communities, etc.) provides the researcher with resources that are valuable and attractive by a whole number of criteria including the amount of stored information, its openness and extent of subject specificity, the number of discussion participants, and prolonged time of existence (which, in a sense, guarantees the source quality), etc.

Our choice was the file conventionally called *"Not Brezhnev's Body but my Youth..."* in the Live Journal (Not Brezhnev's Body but my Youth, 2003-2012). It has been open since April 2003 and up to the present moment gathered over 700 comments. The number of texts, i.e. units of analysis, exceeds the number of comments due to the file specificity in terms of structure and content, for one user comment may consist of several microtexts and be analyzed as independent elements of mass consciousness expression. By the beginning of our study (February 2011) there had been 644 texts, which have made up the set.

The chosen massive of the texts represents users, collective work the starting point of which was, according to the initiators, "a short, around 20 points, list found on the humor pages of the Web". It lists "signs" of the specific period of history. The introduction is: *"You belong to the '70s or '80s if... ".* It appears a kind of an invitation for users to continue the list.

In the attempt to confirm the "Grushin hypothesis" of comparability of results obtained in public opinion polls and those obtained by means of auto texts analysis we dare name the introduction which was called to engage users in the discussion of *an open-ended question* in a questionnaire, and, on the whole, comparing the texts with the totality of respondents' answers to a set of open-ended questions. Let us note the obvious advantages of such a way of data gathering, these being an independent form of expressing opinion, and a convenient mode of "filling in" (the attributes known from the time when open-ended questions were included into questionnaires). Another important advantage characteristic of mass consciousness texts on the Internet is participation of the a priori active people who have something to say on the subject. Active participants of Internet communication accepted the invitation and generally added to the store of recollections about the Brezhnev era thus extending the content area of the research. The example, no doubt, hardly boasts the strict observance of the representativeness requirement, yet the resource itself is quite suitable for our task.

Going by the nature of our material, we had to somewhat modify the list of the "mass mentality" characteristics as compared to that proposed by Grushin in his reconstruction of mass consciousness in the Brezhnev era within the "Four Lives of Russia" Project (Grushin, 2001, 2003, 2006).

Like Grushin, we were interested in the subject matters of mass consciousness, attitude of the population towards its own society (in our case, towards society of the definite historical period), cognitive abilities of the population and its general emotional and psychological condition. Nevertheless, such important characteristics as reactive abilities and level of knowledge of the population, not difficult to find out in a poll, are beyond the scope of this study due to the specifics of the methodology.

Analysis of historical memory, as the case is, involves impressions and perceptions rather than knowledge, because it is hard to judge about real knowledge by texts produced spontaneously by the mass and based on recollections, although the amount and quality of information available to the population were also studied.

Coming back to the characteristics of consciousness, we should say that the present-day availability of mass consciousness texts paves the way to research into the general structure (segments) of mass consciousness, enriching such research with new potentialities of studying, this particularly referring to mass consciousness integrity or lack of it, mass consciousness harmony. The examination of the texts' macrostructure needs further processing and interpreting, and this is to be the next step in the given study. What is already clear, however, is that the typology of mass

consciousness texts developed by Grushin will continue to be discernible under the new conditions of information dissemination.

When analyzing mass consciousness texts, the first thing that can be done is to define their subject series and, going by content, to identify the most obvious features of historical memory about the Brezhnev era. The series by subject is presented in Table 1.

The analysis of the topics of mass consciousness texts indicates that the "official" side of Soviet history and the specific features of the economic, social and political aspects in the life of society practically do not figure in the recollections of the '70s and '80s. What is discussed is connected with everyday life of the authors. One third of the texts deals with things, goods and services, the salespeople-buyers relationship, and lack of variety of goods in the Soviet shops. Art and culture as well as the mass media are sufficiently prominent, and recollections on the media are supplemented with the texts on diversity of the USSR's information space and on advertising or, rather, lack of it in broadcasting. The picture of the Soviet past is padded with stories from school and student life, recollections about fashions and styles, the area of specific appeal in Brezhnev's times.

Table 1.

The most popular subjects of the mass consciousness texts about the Brezhnev era

(in % of the total number of texts, N=644)

Subject	Abs.	%
Consumption of goods and services	207	32
Culture, art	156	24
Mass media and information	124	19
Studies, education	82	13
Style, way of life, fashion	71	11
Leisure	70	11
Upbringing	57	9
Politics	41	6
Family, everyday life	30	5
Economics	23	3
Sex, eroticism	23	3
Sport and physical culture	19	3
Interpersonal relations	14	2
Work and professional activity	6	<1
Rights and laws	6	<1
Asocial lifestyles	3	<1
Health care	2	<1
Army	2	<1
Social sphere	1	<1
Other	25	4

Interpretation of the results will require further study but some curious points are already obvious. To illustrate, an attempt to explain scant attention to the subject of sex and eroticism in the

Brezhnev period of domestic history brings back the famous phrase "There is no sex in the USSR". It turned into a certain stereotype of thinking and a language cliche, the characteristic feature of a more protracted time segment. Considering the method used in our study, it is noteworthy that, unlike other private areas and the personal experience of the Soviet life, this sphere is indeed represented in the recollections almost as sparsely as the "publicly significant" spheres of health care, law, labor (as has been shown above), etc.

The content of the texts shows that even if the subjects are very much connected with individual life, the perspective is often far from being in the strictly private sphere. The texts relate not only to the communicator oneself but also to various social groups and society on the whole. Along with the statements relating to the personal space, the authors touch upon the problems and situations of greater magnitude. The analysis of the auto texts perspectives indirectly confirms also that the statements more often than not unfold in the national space, going beyond the narrow and familiar neighborhood or city space

When the research program was being worked out, the document for the mass consciousness texts analysis was complemented by the "author's position" category. The study of this characteristic helped elucidate the extent and nature of the author's personal involvement in the events and processes that gave food for the recollections.

The above described data indicate that in the situation of mass consciousness texts there are practically no individuals who are indifferent or detached. There are very few statements in the file that are abstract or removed from the reality. People to an equal degree shared the recollections of what they had either witnessed or taken part in. In our view, this indicator is closely connected with the subject scope of the mass consciousness texts. The "ordinary" people as they were (often very young at the time), they took virtually no part in the political life of the country as well as in the social and economic processes that were under way in the USSR. They are more willing to speak about their personal feelings and impressions. When speaking about the 1970s and 1980s, they more often share the emotions and the accumulated experience rather than discuss less personally significant problems that, however, are more important on the national scale. This finds its expression in the subject scope.

Evaluating the method for analysis of mass consciousness texts in the given context, one may emphasize once again that it actually allows for more reliable statements on everyday practices and is based on broader empirical material than a study of some or other subjects and issues by an opinion poll.

The attitude of society to the Brezhnev era, to the reality of the particular historical period is remarkably neutral, bordering on the slightly positive. There are few texts that view those times negatively (Table 2). It is not excluded that the temporal estrangement from the object of discussion helps one make a balanced description, objectively telling about the past, while the recollections about the happy times of childhood, adolescence and youth add to the positive attitude. The nostalgic character of the texts on the whole may, in part, explain *the dominance of the emotional associations over the rational ones and the prevalence of appeal to feelings, personal recollections and images rather than to facts and judgments* (Table 3).

*Table 2. **Author's attitude to the subject***

(in % of the total number of statements, N=644)

Sign of attitude	Abs.	%
positive	132	20
neutral	487	76
negative	25	4

Table 3. **Character of associations in the mass consciousness texts on the Brezhnev era**

(in % of the total number of statements, N=644)

Character of associations	Abs.	%
emotional	498	77
rational	111	17
mixed	35	5

The "portrait of the epoch" obtained in our study is the maximum close to the reality. The analysis yields the detailed picture of personal perception of the whole country, of the certain period in its history. Naturally enough, the picture is not without some "blind spots". The study of the *"Not Brezhnev's Body..."* file shows that not all spheres of social life are sufficiently fully represented in the auto texts. Yet such lacunae are quite expected, considering the specificity of appearance of the texts and of the Internet space. Nonetheless, the wealth and diversity of empirical material and the research prospects are striking and inspiring.

Polls vs Texts analysis

It is evident that carrying out the comparative analysis of the results of a traditional sociological study and a study of a body of texts, the list of themes may be revised to be either reduced (when similar or close variants are combined to form one group) or to be expanded (when there is a need for a more detailed analysis). Nevertheless the list of 12 words and phrases denoting the phenomena which people recollect most of all when it comes to the Brezhnev era appears to be the most adequate tool for comparing the data obtained using different research techniques.

The results are presented in Tables 4a and 4b, showing both the share of statements by theme relative to the total number of texts/all answers of the respondents, and the rank ofan attribute among others. The theme formulations correspond to those of the FOM project "L. I. Brezhnev and His Time".

Results' coincidence area

The coincidence of indicators in these two studies by a number of attributes may serve as a proof of the "Grushin hypothesis".

Table 4a.

Themes of statements on the Brezhnev era

(in % of the total number of statements, N=644)

Main theme	FOM	MATEMC
Good life, prosperity, work	14	1
Positive feelings, positive emotions	*8*	*39*
Order, stability, peace	7	4
Lack of freedoms	*6*	*6*
Stagnation	6	1
Negative feelings, negative emotions	5	3
Personal recollections	4	19
Nostalgia for the past	3	8
Levelling	2	1
Country's disintegration, shortage of goods, queues	1	12
Strong, great power, our country's golden age	*1*	*2*
Strong collective farms, low prices, quality goods	*1*	*2*

For instance, the high rank of "positive feelings, positive emotions" associated with the Brezhnev era and the same "mean" rank of "negative feelings, negative emotions" with respect to the 1970s-1980s show the coincidence of the results in the mass consciousness texts analysis and in the poll *(italics in Tables 4a shows coinciding and close positions).*

The hypothesis is supported by the same rank of negative emotions and evaluations characteristic of historical memory and the low ranks of our contemporaries' recollections about the Soviet Union as *"a strong, great power",* about *"strong, collective farms, low prices and quality goods".* Not many remembered these realities of life both in the poll and in the texts on the Net.

Of note is the precise coincidence of the indicators with regard to certain attributes, e.g. the same (though small) share of references in the two studies to the lack of freedoms as the characteristic of the period.

It is thus obvious that no basic differences are found in the general attitude to the specific period in the life of the country, which means that both methods are suitable for examination of historical memory and mass consciousness. Incidentally, a great share of texts on the positive side of the past may be related to the emotional character of the texts and the nostalgic nature of the file in general due to "the mechanism of displacement of the negative appraisals and actualization of the positively assessed experience" as has been put by the researchers of the interregional project "Nostalgia for the Soviet in the Socio-Cultural Context of Today's Russia".

Looking at the mass consciousness texts and comparing the results with those of the mass poll of Russians one could group all "positive" recollections together basing on the common "attitude sign". Then the agreement of positive appraisal ranks would be even more eloquent. Yet interest in the detailed comparison of the methods led us to the separate general emotions and estimations of economic parameters into different groups. The differentiation uncovered the diametrically opposite results - it became obvious that in their own texts people much less frequently recollect prosperity and work of Brezhnev's times than in the poll conducted by professional sociologists. One

explanation is the age and status of the authors of *"Not Brezhnev's Body..."*. It may be assumed that most of them could not remember anything about professional activity and employment because they were too young to accumulate experience and observations in this field. There are also other reasons. But such significant differences provoked the further examination of their nature and specificity.

Divergence areas

Careful examination and the subsequent comparison of the results of the two studies showed that different and, in some cases, opposite data relate to "personal memories", which proved important to the texts and secondary to the polls (see in italics in the Table 4b). The diverging memories also concerned "the country's disintegration, shortages of goods and queues": the texts of the mass often mentioned these while the poll revealed few recollections of this kind.

Table 4b.

Themes of statements on the Brezhnev era

(in % of the total number of statements, N=644)

Main theme	FOM	MATEMC
Good life, prosperity, work	14	1
Positive feelings, positive emotions	8	39
Order, stability, peace	7	4
Lack of freedoms	6	6
Stagnation	6	1
Negative feelings, negative emotions	5	3
Personal recollections	*4*	*19*
Nostalgia for the past	3	8
Levelling	2	1
Country's disintegration, shortage of goods, queues	*1*	*12*
Strong, great power, our country's golden age	1	2
Strong collective farms, low prices, quality goods	1	2

In this brief review of the results we should also pay attention to those phenomena, constructs, realities and personalities of the past that are not mentioned in the texts. No mention was made of the neutral and abstract expression "this is our past, the history of our country" with regard to the Brezhnev era, while according to the FOM this variant was mentioned by 3% of the respondents. The texts contained no memories of the political system whereas "communism" was mentioned by 1% of the poll respondents. Historical memory retained no compassion for the political leader - the perception of L .I. Brezhnev as "an old, sick man" (1% by the FOM data) did not at all figure in the auto texts.

The figure of Brezhnev requires some special commentary. He himself is "uncharacteristic" for the texts of today's mass consciousness (though the jokes on the General Secretary abounded during his rule). It is remarkable that Brezhnev as a personality does not appear in the file statements, being but a "seed", the core for text crystallization *("Not Brezhnev's Body...")*. The examination of the texts shows that the General Secretary's name is part of the background. Brezhnev, his books and even the day of his death serve as time frames for important personal events, memorable "reference

points" at which the events in the texts authors' lives begin or end. In rare cases he is perceived as a character from some jokes, no more than that. In this connection we would like to underline the accuracy of the file's heading for it not only attracts the user's attention but also very precisely conveys the auto texts content.

The explanation appears to consist not so much in the nature and content parameters of auto texts as in the potentialities offered by the method which is "a spontaneous response to a big open-ended question" and therefore allows for a more subtle and detailed picture of historical memory of Russia's population, enriched by the personal memories which are more open, complete and independent than those obtained by the professional sociologists in a representative poll. This assumption, however, is as yet to be validated by showing through the auto texts characteristics the advantages of the method worked out by B. A. Grushin for data analysis in order to identify the meaningful specific features impossible to study using a traditional opinion poll based mostly on closed rather than open-ended questions.

In our view, the "Grushin hypothesis" is confirmed for the particular case since both the opinion polls and the method of multidimensional analysis of mass consciousness texts are equally suitable for research of historical consciousness. With some reservations we may conclude that the results of the two studies are comparable and each method has its own advantages in specific problem-solving, which was to be demonstrated.

We believe that studies of this kind should be continued, since they would help to improve the MATEMC as a research tool and to uncover the essential characteristics of mass self-expression.

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