

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

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*SOCIETY OF BOREDOM: LITHUANIA IN THE LATE SOVIET PERIOD*  
(1964-1984)

Summary of doctoral dissertation  
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*NUOBODULIO VISUOMENĖ: VĖLYVOJO SOVIETMEČIO LIETUVA*  
(1964-1984)

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The vocabulary of boredom has been used extensively in the discourse of remembering and reflecting on the late Soviet period. Even the architects of *Perestroika* legitimized themselves by employing a rhetoric about stagnation (*zastoi* in Russian) of the previous period. Back in the Soviet times, even before *Perestroika*, the topic of a certain freeze of the society's spirit, poverty of its surroundings was raised by a specific group of the population, namely, by emigrants, former Soviet citizens. They would often explain the reasons of their departure by invoking the vocabulary of boredom. Publication of personal notes and diaries of people who belonged to the Soviet cultural intelligentsia has provided us with evidence suggesting that even those who stayed on this side of the so-called Iron Curtain had similar experiences. Three of the best-known diaries by members of the cultural intelligentsia (Vytautas Kubilius, Marcelijus Martinaitis, Romualdas Ozolas) share similar recurring themes: failure to see any perspective, claustrophobic sense of imprisonment, alienation, emptiness, greyness and eeriness of everyday life, intellectual stagnation, all-pervading feeling of suspicion and uncertainty. Scholars of Soviet art note that works by artists who allowed themselves some degree of freedom and defiance for officially accepted art forms show attempts to capture conditions of stagnation and decline, allusions to the aesthetic of boredom, banality, and the everyday. Fictional writing that appeared after the independence and reflected back on the Soviet (essentially autobiographical) experience no longer had to hide these motifs under Aesopian figures. Finally, in the fifth group of boredom sources are experiences from a different cultural perspective, i.e., reflections of Western European or American visitors on the reality characterized by constraint, greyness, sometimes pure surrealist dullness.

Therefore “boredom” as a way of describing Soviet realities emerges in writings with incredibly diverse origins and intensions – political, fictional, (auto)biographical – and cannot be dismissed as merely a certain construct devised for particular purposes: the political construct of “stagnation” could be seen as an attempt to discredit Brezhnevism; the “expatriate” construct as a self-justification; the “cultural” and “artistic” one as an expression of discontent by an exclusive social group; the “comparativist” one as a product of Cold War propaganda. However, what all the texts in the corpus share is that they take the vocabulary of “boredom” for granted: either the

phenomena they describe are so well-known that they hardly deserve any in-depth scrutiny, or they are seen as a mere historical patina, not worthy anything more than a fleeting mention and to be easily scratched off in order to analyze other processes. In both cases, “boredom” is but a narrative trope, a collection of labels, a metaphor for the period and nothing more. Up until now, therefore, the vocabulary of “boredom” is used merely to put labels on a past period, while actual witnesses, depending on their personal experiences, can either accept or reject the proposition of the “boring” Brezhnev epoch. Meanwhile, various phrases fossilize into clichés and banalities, spreading from one text to another undisturbed by critical reflection. That is not to say they do not refer to any historical reality. Rather, common usage wears them out and obscures their meaning so much as to preclude insights of any profundity. For example, what was the meaning of “stagnation” not on the macro-level of politics or economy, but rather on the micro-level of a person's everyday experience? Does it have anything to do with the sense of time? If so, how would this “slowing down” or “halting” of time come about? What frameworks allow one to talk about it? Obviously, clocks would continue ticking at the same pace as before. Perhaps “stagnation” is better discussed in terms of a freeze in spiritual life? Fossilization of thought? In that case, what is an observer of the late Soviet period saying? If he hadn't given up on thinking altogether, under what circumstances would this thinking begin to stagnate or, to be more precise, where and when would a person feel as if something was making his thinking stagnant? What occasioned such experiences and how would they affect a person's behaviours?

The ambition of this paper is therefore to see if the vocabulary of “boredom” could become a critical historical instrument, allowing to progress from disputes over memory to a notion that does not suppress different subjective experiences but rather synthesizes them into one general picture. One can, therefore, problematize “boredom” in two ways. Firstly, is there a common denominator that unifies and lends universality to motifs recurring in chronologically and socioculturally diverse sources? If so, then, secondly, does this denominator only serve to name things, as a metaphor for a historic phase, or can it be conceptualized and made into an analytical category, a universal key to interpreting historical situations?

***Object, purpose, tasks.*** The term “boredom” is used here as an umbrella term,

containing within itself a number of qualities (apathy, eeriness, monotony, routine, repetition, unification, lack of variety and choice, etc.). The notion seems suitable, since it offers a definition that can bring together all the qualities above: ***a loss of meaning in certain situations***. This way, one can move from a metaphorical description of an historic period to a cultural study of the emergence, change, and confrontation of meanings. The model thus developed can be called cultural, since culture is taken in its wide anthropological sense – as a process of investing the world with meaning and a structure of meaning that motivates human behaviour.

***The object of this paper are ideological situations and people's practices therein.*** By analysing situations where people would directly confront ideology, ideological field of action, and with their practices hint at its meaninglessness, we attempt to offer an interpretative “reading” of the late Soviet period. ***The purpose of this paper is to construct a model of the society of boredom and to demonstrate the extent and limits of its application.*** One can see that we use the notion of the *society of boredom* rather conditionally, in an attempt to find a suitable keyword in order to focus, group, and structure phenomena of Soviet everyday life. The model makes no claim to be an exhaustive representation of the Soviet society, but merely a cross-section at a certain angle. The *society of boredom* is used as a cultural-analytical category to help analyse Soviet everyday life from a sociocultural perspective. At the same time, the category, rather than tackling the Soviet past in its entirety, limits the present study to certain aspects approached through qualities pertaining to this category.

***In order to come up with a model of the society of boredom, the following tasks were put forward:***

1. Conceptualization of the notion of boredom and its application to sociocultural analysis of Soviet everyday life.

2. Sketching out theoretical outlines of the *society of boredom* model. Since the ambition is to substantiate an original theoretical model, it does not suffice to merely present a method of approaching its object, describe its constituent parts and structure – one must also find conceptually adequate definitions, i.e., a vocabulary that defines model components.

3. Explaining the “fate” of ideology in the late Soviet period. In other words,

answering the question of why and how one can still analyse the problem of ideology (ideological situations); in what sense can it be said to have remained effective, even though people had long ceased “believing” in it?

4. By theoretically adapting the concept of *constative* and *performative* dimensions, offered by Alexei Yurchak, to move from discourse analysis to the sociocultural (circulation-of-meaning) model. Moving on from theoretical consideration of the meaning of ideology to people's everyday actions, one notes two-fold practices. Yurchak's notion is useful in capturing these, yet our aim is to point out some essential structural factors that he neglects.

5. Consistently analysing distinct “ideological situations”, emphasizing practices within and structuring them around categories offered by the *society of boredom* model. Presenting interpretations of these “ideological situations” and practices within the framework of the *society of boredom* model, trying to find a common denominator.

**Theories and methodology.** By describing the late Soviet society through situations of *boredom*, one risks giving the impression that all people's lives were defined by experiences of boredom and nothing else. Such a view would be lacking in something essential and would probably contradict the live memory: not only did people lead their normal lives (characterized by happiness, laughter, adventures, love, marriage, having kids, enjoying work and leisure, sorrow, anger, jealousy, divorce, hatred, etc.), but political control, economic shortages, and social poverty often induced so much creativity and inventiveness, everyday balancing and search for compensation mechanisms, that these lives were anything but boring. Putinaite rightly sums up everyday strategies of the Soviet life as “ingenuity.” When it comes to discussing the Soviet period, a popular term to use is “double consciousness,” yet one can equally speak of a person's “double practices.” This becomes manifest when approaching the object of this paper, ideological situations. In order to analyse them and construct the *society of boredom* model, we draw on previous sociological and anthropological theories:

(1) *Sociopsychological mechanism of boredom.* According to Brisset and Snow, boredom is “a most powerful definition of the situation as well as an indictment of the people found therein.” It means that a person not just experiences the state of boredom



by himself, but also communicates to others that a situation is insignificant. That is a way how the expression of boredom by an individual could be understood as an expression of self and also could implicate the selves of others in the situation. By being bored, individuals convey to others what they feel, and what they value, who they are, and what they intend to do. Brissett and Snow state that “the communication of boredom is often used as a protection, avoidance, or defense against what an individual defines as unacceptable to self,” and it could be defined as “a way of disqualifying oneself from participation in the situation.”

Barbalet adds that “boredom, in its irritability and restlessness <...>, is not a feeling of acceptance of or resignation toward a state of indifference <...>. Boredom, therefore, is not a passive surrender to those conditions that provoke it.” So it could be an impetus for the process leading to curiosity, invention, and associated activities. By these activities an individual, first of all, seeks not variety or novelty, but meaningfulness. So for the Barbalet, the meaning is a product of social interaction, and an individual, who feels that his action or circumstances are without purpose or meaning, experiences the emotional feeling of anxiety – boredom. It means that boredom plays a double role – detects meaninglessness and at the same time does stimulate a search for the meaning. The latter function is realized by practices.

(2) *From situations toward ideological situations.* The theoretical conception of situation and practices within is clarified by the classical concept of *structure of social action* by Talcott Parsons. Each social situation is determined by social structure, yet a person still attempts to act according to his own meanings. This paper deals with one group of social situations – ideological situations – and therefore when we refer to structural conditioning of a person's actions, we do not mean all “objective” social structures but only ideological structures. However, when we study ideological situations, we come to notice two kinds of actions or practices: those that completely submit to structural conditioning and those that try to circumvent it.

(3) *Constative and performative dimensions.* Yurchak gives the explanation for the “double practices” of soviet persons by suggesting the concept of *constative* and *performative* dimensions. That is when analyzing speech acts (such as slogans, party speeches, and addresses) and ritualized acts (such as votes and meetings), he speaks of

their coexisting *constative* and *performative* dimensions. From this perspective, “the act of voting in the conventional context of a meeting does two things at once: it states one's opinion (the constative dimension) and binds the vote within the system of rules and norms where it is recognized as a legitimate vote (the performative dimension).” Individual participated in the ritualized acts because it was the way how to reproduce oneself as a “normal” Soviet person within the system of relations, collectivities, and subject positions, with all the constraints and possibilities that position entailed. It means that persons by *constative* dimension did state facts and describes opinions, but only because they sought possibilities that had been opened by *performative* dimensions, and included the engaging in interests, pursuits, and meanings that ran against those that were stated in the resolutions one had voted for.

(4) *Constative and performative practices*. By translating discursive analysis into the language of practices, we can account for the duplicity found in practices within ideological situations: ***some practices are constative, a person's actions submit to and uphold structures that define an ideological situation; other practices reflect the performative dimension, they attempt to circumvent these ideological situations, while the person himself often remains within them.*** *Performative* practices embody the voluntarist side of social action, characterised by creativity and the power of social interpretation. They clearly relate to Michel de Certeau's tactics, “an art of the weak” which manifests itself through manoeuvring within set boundaries.

Practices carried out on the *performative* dimension can only very generally be called “circumventing” ideological situations, since in fact their variety falls into three categories that we use for further analysis:

- *a*-structural: they attempt (directly or indirectly) to circumvent and escape ideological situation;
- *para*-structural: ideological situations concurrently give rise to compensation and surrogate mechanisms;
- *anti*-structural: they operate in the opposite direction, contradict, misuse, or deconstruct ideological situations from within.

(5) *Structurization*. The “destructive” role of *performative* dimension requires further clarification, since it is not, in our view, one-sided. As we show in the paper, it is

crucial to avoid underestimating the commitment to various obligations, norms, and rules made on the *constative* dimension, i.e., the fact of socialization itself. “Normalizing” oneself as a Soviet man does not only open up possibilities of the *performative* dimension, but also limits the scale of choice, i.e., inevitably structures the variety and character of potential practices. Invoking de Certeau's metaphor, we can speak of actions by individuals “caught in the nets of discipline,” where the range of choice increases the further one moves from the power centre (yarns of the net become scarcer), even though some degree of structural determination remains. In other words, this impact of the *constative* dimension upon *performative* practices is just as important for understanding the Soviet society as the spilling of unexpected meanings and behaviours themselves.

Of course, deterministic structures do not eliminate subjectivity as such. After all, the very assertion of the *performative* dimension and practices that it enables implies that ideological structures of the regime did not totalise individuals' thoughts and behaviours. The development of these practices and their growth in importance testify to the fact that structures gradually yield to subjective influences and confirm the assertion by Anthony Giddens that a person is not a passive entity shaped by external influences, but also contributes to and directly generates social change. In other words, we subscribe to the view that fossilized structures and subjects were caught in dialectical relations, where initial predominance of structural factors was gradually outweighed by subjects' power. Giddens refers to this phenomenon in a wider context as *structurization* – active formation and reformation of structures. We could call this, in fact, victory of “the weak” over “the strong.”

(6) *The everyday*. We have chosen *everyday life* as the setting where Soviet realities unravel and as the most pertinent aspect to the ideological situations analysis, ***since this is where we can reconcile micro-level requirements with the ordinariness and universality of these situations.*** In the late Soviet period, ordinary people could afford to take no interest in theoretical thought and art, (self-)trained apolitical attitudes could condition indifference towards gerontocratic political stagnation, yet they would still passively confront ideology and ideological meanings on this level of everyday life. The everyday is taken in the same sense as intended in the following statement that a person might utter even when he enters the sacred dimension or when an outside

observer perceives an extraordinary event: “Nothing special, it's my everyday life.” For instance, Soviet holidays, even though they did carry the aura of ideological “sacredness” and punctuate the routine calendar as “events,” were still part of the everyday, since they came to be taken as ordinary and familiar. This kind of everyday is occupied by regularity, developed in the long terms, and it is what is called “ordinary,” the sphere of habits by Ben Highmore.

***Theoretical model of Soviet society of boredom.*** At the core of the Soviet *society of boredom* model is vacuity of meaning. In the Soviet Union, ideology was supposed to be the force that created, assigned, and hierarchised goals for the entire society. Ideology was therefore charged with conferring meaning on the past, present, and future of this society. It made unilateral claim at monopolizing this role and, presenting itself as science, declared these meanings to be unquestionable and pertaining to the society as a whole and each individual separately. We analyse those everyday situations where people would – directly or through secondary forms – confront ideology and bare the relationship between individuals and ideology. In other words, ideological situations were those ordinary everyday situations that were ideologically defined by the regime and invested with ideological meanings compulsory for any actor or group.

One peculiarity of the Soviet boredom is that in order to assign it to a particular situation, it is not necessary to assume that everyone involved in the situation experiences boredom *per se*. States of being bored or similar sensations in subjective experiences – captured in memoirs, diaries, letters, or stories – were our primary pointers to Soviet everyday phenomena that interested us. It must be noted, however, that the link between *Soviet boredom* and personal experience of boredom is not absolute. In order to assign individual behaviours under certain circumstances to the category of *boredom*, it is not necessary that the individual feels “situational” or “existential” boredom at that particular moment, since (1) what were a talking about is the process of evaporation of meaning, not the facts of its absence – different people can find different “amounts” of meaning; (2) the discrepancy between internal attitudes and social environment depends, among other things, on innate personal differences (diverse reactions to external stimuli); and (3) situations of *boredom* in the late Soviet period were easily recognisable, so individuals developed practices aimed at circumventing *boredom* while remaining in the

situation. That means that, in some cases, we can talk about boredom without boredom, i.e., situations assigned to the *Soviet boredom*, even though the person did not experience psychological boredom. For instance, people in a party conference can exhibit various reactions to a speech from the tribune: someone might be bored to death, yet afraid to leave or do something else; someone else might take out a newspaper and avoid boredom before it even threatens; a third listener can follow the speaker attentively (while considering the speech completely useless) in order to advance his or her political career. Even though the three experience highly divergent psychological states, the situation they are in meets all criteria to be assigned to the category of *Soviet boredom*.

In order to explain this ambiguous relationship between subjective experiences and boredom, we suggest the notion of *meaninglessness nearby*: boredom without boredom is possible because boredom practices include not only behaviours under felt boredom, but also those aimed at avoiding boredom before it comes, i.e., situations that are judged meaningless *a priori*. Thus boredom in the late Soviet period should be understood not only and not so much as a perpetually-felt internal state, but as an external phenomenon that can be recognized and circumvented, usually by constructing new meanings in meaningless situations. On the other hand, it must be added that the circumvention is highly conditional, since meaninglessness is what initiates and influences these avoidance methods in the first place and it is impossible to escape it completely – it is always nearby, it can be recognized in many everyday episodes.

What are the attributes of the *society of boredom*? We have classified them according to three dimensions: (1) space (unification, standardization, lack of variety and poverty of choice, enclosure, constraint and control); (2) time (monotony, slowdown, eventless time flow, meaningless passage and loss of time, stagnation); (3) mind (repetition, clichés, platitude, formalism, ritualisation, templates, dogmatism, vacuity, stiffening of language). Thus attributes of the *society of boredom* can be defined as sociocultural phenomena that are perceived as, on the one hand, destroying meaning and, on the other hand, reflecting on this destruction. The phenomena are not related to universal everyday (e.g., work routine or lack of things to do in one's free time) or existential (e.g., feeling of existential meaninglessness) experiences, but rather to specific structures of Soviet ideology and corresponding regime, even though the

distinction is not always clear-cut.

The *Soviet boredom* is not merely an instance of *modern boredom* that resurfaces in various incarnations throughout Western sociological writing – in best case, we can talk about a very specific version of it, its specificity being determined by an exceptionally active role of ideology, allowing to call the entire regime an ideocracy. We rebrand various processes of *turbomodernization* in the Soviet Union as *socmodernization* precisely because many of its aspects – in particular, counter-modern phenomena and the sheer intensity of these processes – were highly dependant on ideological (socialist) requirements. The primacy of ideology is what prompts us to analyse Soviet “situations of boredom” as “ideological situations” – and for that end we need to solve the puzzle of how ideology functioned in the late Soviet society. The main question confronted by all historians – and one we attempt to give our own answer to – is the problem of “ideological faith.” We raise the question whether faith(lessness) is the only way to approach the issue of ideology.

The starting point for constructing a model for the late Soviet “society of boredom” is a shift in the role of ideology that emerged during this time. Oral histories and archive materials suggest that declarations of “death” of ideology were premature, i.e., even though some people ceased believing in the final goal (building communism), they could still regard favourably and support values offered or absorbed by ideology, the “social welfare model” it created, so ideology did not hit “zero mark” (“total opposition” to it). However, ideology, which entered a “posthumous” stage (one of decommunization), was mainly supported not by individual faith, but by inclusion into socialization processes. This point is clarified by discourse theories.

As Joseph Schull noticed, a discourse is not located in people's minds, but "it is a set of linguistic events and the conventions they embody, which exist in a social space shared by the members of an ideological community". Propositions do not become part of the discourse because they are "in the head" of each of the ideology's adherents, rather they exist "out there" as part of the social world that the adherents share. When we understand an ideology as a belief system, we presume that the actions of individuals are motivated by this belief. In the case of discourse, ideology shapes the actions because one must conform to its conventions. In order to be taken seriously as a participant in

this discourse, individuals do not need to "believe" in the ideology, but must be committed to it. In other words, the request is to respect, not to believe. But the most important remark, made by J. Schull, is that commitment cannot be just *pro forma*: "An act must conform to its description at least in so far as those to whom it is being described and legitimated must take it seriously as an act of the proffered kind <...>". As a result, the respect of conventions "always" has an impact on further commitments for actual pattern of action.

So what the late Soviet period demanded from citizens was not belief but social commitment to ideological norms. The purest examples of it concern social status – individuals who wished to advance their careers inevitably had to join the party. The rule applied even to professions as technical as production engineers – their pragmatic attitudes translated into scepticism regarding ideology, yet by no means did this prevent them from joining the party, since membership secured certain guarantees in social relations and opened possibilities. Therefore, ideology, having become an inescapable and crucial element of socialization, had a double function in social life: to discipline and to mobilize. They would engender many ideological situations every day that touched the absolute majority of people.

The two processes of socialization determined the structure of this paper, since we focus on episodes of everyday life that exhibit "acting" ideology, i.e., cases of discipline and mobilization. Following the previously discerned groupings of *society of boredom* attributes, we conclude that the field of discipline is where *boredom of mind* would unfold, while *temporal boredom* takes place in the field of mobilization; the paper thus proceeds along these lines.

**Results and conclusions.** Ideological disciplining within the process of socialization operated on different levels, yet we have chosen to look into situations revealing attributes of *boredom of mind*. Free thought and disciplinary mechanisms would firstly clash in the public sphere – it was in public life that a person experienced restrictions of thought, fossilization of ideas, and dogmatic repetition. The public sphere is here defined as circulation of meanings among unfamiliar subjects in the process where they authentically get to know the world and invest it with meaning. In an autonomous, pluralist public sphere free of government control, that would mean *world-*

*disclosing*, but Soviet mechanisms of supervision and censorship precludes any discussion of the public sphere as *democratic public*, but rather as a *structure of communication* subjected to the *culture of secret* and thus engendering the opposite, *world-closing*, process.

Analysis of the structure of *secret* through practices of satirical speech has demonstrated that all practices of public thought was more or less shaped by this *culture of secret*: criticism could only be one-directional and had a finite list of issues available for criticism; it was directed at “occasional flaws” but could not question the system as such. The hierarchy of *secret* can be construed as four concentric circles: the centre is occupied by *ideal power*; it is then encircled by *nominal power*; then *real power*, and the biggest circle that dots around the previous three is one of *hyperreal power*. Satire, *constative* practice, dubbed the “fire of criticism,” in fact contributed to constructing authoritarian discourse, it spread through groups and workplaces as punishment, since public sneer at a person who committed a transgression was encouraged and rewarded. But this structural speech practice also contributed to forming *anti*-structural practices – for some time, irony would accompany satire, it was a sort of a younger sister who grew imperceptibly to become a rhetorical tool for deconstructing discourse.

Under this *culture of secret*, one could hardly build authentic knowledge of the world, of other members of society, true communality was impossible via official structures of public communication. Lithuanian historiography speculates that this lack of meaningful exchange could be compensated for within alternative local counter-public or associative spaces. In order to complement these versions – which do not fully convince that exchanges of meanings within these spaces ever reached “outside” audiences – we put forward the *public sphere of emotions* hypothesis. In the public sphere, people could experience commonality, solidarity, authentic communication with other (un)familiar people – with whom they did not share previously-established confidence – not through verbal communication, which would only serve as an initial impulse, but through non-verbal exchanges. By no means was it a fully-adequate alternative for the communication structure of the public sphere, but rather a *here-and-now* substitute, a surrogate or *para*-structural practice.

Access to information provides a glimpse into how protection of *secret* operated



in practice. Libraries had come to serve as information repositories with the basic goal of not serving readers' needs, but rather protecting them from one kind of information and directing towards another. On the political level, there was a disconnection from the context and tradition, some books were rendered *invisible*, while on the level of ideology, other books were made *too visible*. To make information hierarchy infrastructure more effective, libraries carried out a centralization reform that was aimed not at servicing readers more effectively, but at concentrating power and ensuring smooth operation and reliability of the system. By analysing reading habits, we have noted that, in addition to this hierarchy of protection, other factors, too, shaped reading habits (publishing policy, structure of leisure, economic situation, etc.). Some of these factors (e.g., publishing) are part of the *culture of secret* formation, while the latter undoubtedly influenced reading practices, most of which could be called *para-* or *a-*structural: with shortage of uncensored and reliable information of any kind, a book, especially of fictional writing, would be viewed by many as a “fresher” source; its appeal was also augmented by the “forbidden fruit” phenomenon. Hence reading of prohibited and secretly-circulated literature became a form of *anti*-structural practice. However, the “social aura” of reading far exceeded actual reading levels, so we put snobbish choices of literature and buying books under the heading of *a*-structural practices too.

Subjects would be forced to participate in the public sphere through public critique and self-critique, yet these socialization functions of ideology cannot be classified as exclusively disciplinary or exclusively mobilising, since they have qualities of both: voicing critique and self-critique operated as a means of disciplining a collective or an individual, while the ritual itself had to include as many people as possible. But in general, the (self-)critique, as the *constative* practices, eventually succumbed to the overall logic of the *culture of secret*, i.e., *world closing* which asserted itself through pronounced ritualization of these procedures. Following the proposed model, ritualization occurs if a procedure meets three criteria: *demarcation*, *fixation*, and *canonized result*. Because of this ritualization, (self-)critique lost touch with its original purpose and became increasingly meaningless for people participating in it. So if, from a functionalist perspective, ritual is what integrates community members, in this case one can talk of the opposite phenomenon – disintegration that manifests itself through

various practices, both *a*-structural and *anti*-structural. Meanwhile, some part of complaints should be seen as *para*-structural practices in relation to critique. This sounds somewhat paradoxical, since complaints could also be seen as a purely structural – thus *constative* – practice supported and encouraged by the regime. Complaints functioned as a semi-secret public sphere – the communication was not public and took the form of private letters, yet it followed public-sphere principles. However, scrutiny of various complaints has revealed that some part of that, although it was effected by structurization, could be understood as a compensation for paralyzed critique, *the closed world*, i.e., people, unable to fight failings, neglect, and injustice with tools of public critique, looked for alternatives and wrote directly to government officials, usually hoping that barriers to critique were only raised locally and if they managed bypassing these, they would hear genuine response. In other words, we have shown that, in addition to other motives, various practices of complaining were directly conditioned by ritualization of (self-)critique and can therefore be classed as *para*-structural – as compensating for lost opportunities to criticize.

Moving on to mobilizing ideological situations, we have noted that these are best described according to attributes of *temporal boredom*. Within ideological discourse, labour was the main mobilization method. A worker's discipline, concentration on work would testify to his devotion to the highest common goal – building communism. However, under centrally-planned economy and full employment, work lost its ideological relevance and, concurrently, work ethics and discipline withered. Subjects in workplace would indulge in all three kinds of *performative* practices that we have termed, collectively, *work time expropriation*. These depended on the specific kind of work performed, yet expropriation itself would be manifested everywhere – its trajectory spanned virtually all professions. This could happen because conditions allowed to abuse working hours and simply because, under full employment, everyone had a job but not everyone had what to do. In general, however, this form of sabotaging work would not have been possible without a sense that a worker retained certain power *vis-a-vis* the administration based on the perennial shortage of labour, especially skilled labour. Archive data suggest that many Soviet factories operated under constant stress, with workers quite often showing discontent and opposition. In principle,

however, workers would only gain upper hand in *normative* conflicts, i.e., as long as they obeyed and reinforced paternalist operational logic of the factory: a worker could directly press his superiors, but not question their authority openly, let alone publicly, outside factory walls. While the authorities proclaimed victory over unemployment, these conflicts, quarrels, and discontent generated massive workers' migration from one job to another with short periods of employment in one place and extended “pauses” in between – all this was hidden under the euphemism “staff volatility.” Work-avoiding individuals – derogatorily termed “parasites” – would easily disgorge into such flows of volatile labour. They were the ones who exploited *labour time expropriation* practices most widely, so one could think they managed to escape mobilizing socialization altogether. In legal terms, idling unified a group of “déclassés,” but in practice this definition was not aimed at expelling and letting them be on the margins of society, but at incorporating them into the system, since the regime could not afford to tolerate citizens who could freely decide to not do “socially useful work.” Only in extreme cases would “parasites” be discredited, but still structured in a roundabout way, through mental institutions.

The regime, which played the role of *allocator of time*, would mobilize people not only by deciding when to work, but also when to celebrate. Social calendar, ideologically-impregnate and rearranged on a new social rhythm, created a novel *sociotemporal* order. Certain holidays – even those that were not universally celebrated – were occasions for mass mobilization with participation made compulsory. Such organization showed that the regime did not trust its own citizens and, at the same time, knew perfectly well their attitudes towards holidays. Each year, local authority agents had to put together a celebration as if for the first time, *ex nihilo*, and thus implicitly confirmed its anti-celebratory character: in lieu of a natural cycle, i.e., tradition, there was only a conscious effort to “manufacture” it quickly and temporarily, while the absence of festive feeling was compensated by artificial and equally temporary enthusiasm. We analysed the most important holidays – 1 May and 7 November – and looked into what was the purpose of this compulsory mobilization. Using the anthropological theory of “universal procession,” we have shown that mass rallies could be interpreted as recreations of the ideal image of society in “sacred time,” while

participants instituted this ideological situation with their presence. This way, celebration rallies directed each member of the society towards the future, provided a normative “life recipe,” since they prevented from having doubts that all was still going in the same direction and suggested a place for an individual within the structure.

The *society of boredom* model allows looking at the Lithuanian society in the late Soviet period through practices of its members – where, when, how people behaved in their everyday lives. Amid spontaneity of people's lives, their chaotic movement in space and time, we have isolated recurring two-dimensional practices that originate from participation in ideological situations and that run across different professions, various social origins and classes, age and interest groups. *Boredom*, metaphor re-qualified as analytical model, helps explain the duplicity of such practices: a person, who finds himself in a “boring” situation stripped of meaning, raises a shield against “social poison,” looks for ways of returning to meaningful action. The paper does not attempt to pass a normative judgement on what meanings guided subjects out of *meaningless* situations, to what extent they belonged to normality and to what extent – “normality,” even though it is clear that certain actions could be classed as bad faith even outside the framework of Soviet ideology.

In order to construct the *boredom* model, one does not need to get inside every subject's head; their actions speak eloquently enough. In general, a subject does not have to experience actual boredom in order for us to assert the *Soviet boredom* – ideology would reproduce *nearby boredom* every day, people recognized and learned how to bypass it. The abundance of *performative* practices speaks to the fact that a great deal of effort was spent on this. Therefore, for individual Soviet citizens who were immersed into such practices, the perennial sense of meaninglessness could *subjectively* seem like a negligible fact of life. However, as the analysis suggests, it was nevertheless of great consequence.

## Disertacijos reziumė

"Nuobodulio" žodynas, kaip vėlyvojo sovietmečio tikrovės aprašymo būdas, išskyla labai skirtingos prigimties ir paskirties tekstuose. Bet šiam tekstų masyvui būdinga tai, kad jis "nuobodulį" priima kaip aksiomą: arba įvardinti reiškiniai gerai žinomi, todėl neverti didesnio dėmesio, arba vertinami kaip paviršutiniški, tik kaip savotiška istorinė patina, kuri paminima probėgšmais ir kurią lengvai pašalinus gilinamasi į kitus procesus. Abiem atvejais "nuobodulys" virsta tik naratyviniu tropu, epitetų rinkiniu, epochos metafora, ir niekuo daugiau. Todėl iki šiol "nuobodulio" žodynas vartojamas vien kaip etikečių lipinimas praėjusiam laikotarpiui, o to meto liudininkas priklausomai nuo asmeninės patirties gali sutikti arba nesutikti su teiginiu apie "nuobodžią" brežnevinę epochą. Tuo tarpu įvairios šablonais ir banalybėmis virstančios frazės netrikdamos kritiško žvilgsnio keliauja iš teksto į tekstą. Tai nereiškia, kad jos neapeliuoja į istorinę tikrovę. Greičiau nuo vartojimo jos taip susidėvi, kad jų reikšmė išblunka ir užveria kelią gilesnėms išvalgoms.

Todėl šiame darbe mėginome aiškintis, ar "nuobodulio" žodynas galėtų tapti kritišku istoriniu instrumentu, kai nuo ginčų dėl atminties refleksijų pereinama prie koncepcijos, neneigiančios skirtingų subjektyvių patirčių, bet sintetinančios jas į visuminį vaizdinį. Tad "nuobodulį" suprobleminome dvejopai: pirma, ar skirtingų chronologinių ir sociokultūrinių kontekstų šaltiniuose pasikartojantys jo motyvai turi bendrą, juos vienijantį ir universalizuojantį vardiklį? Antra, jei taip, ar šis vardiklis pasitarnauja tik kaip kalbinė įvardijimo priemonė, istorinio tarpsnio metafora, ar gali būti konceptualizuotas iki analitinės kategorijos, kultūrologinio visrakčio, padedančio interpretuoti istorines situacijas?

"Nuobodulys" šiam darbe vartojamas kaip skėtinė sąvoka, po kuria talpinami įvairūs požymiai (stingulys, nykuma, monotonija, rutina, kartotės, unifikacija, įvairovės ir pasirinkimų stoka, etc.). Ši sąvoka mums atrodo tinkama, nes ji pasiūlo visus požymius galintį suvienyti aiškinimą - tai prasmės praradimas tam tikrose situacijose. Tokiu būdu mes nuo istorinio laikotarpio aprašymo metaforomis galime pereiti prie kultūrologinio prasmių atsiradimo, kaitos, mainų ir konfrontacijos tyrimo. Todėl kuriamą modelį galime vadinti kultūriniu, nes kultūrą suprantame plačiąja antropologine prasme

kaip pasaulio įprasminimą ir prasmių sistemą, motyvuojančią žmonių elgesį.

Šio darbo tyrimo objektas - tai ideologinės situacijos ir žmonių praktikos jose. Nagrinėdami tokias situacijas, kuriose žmonės tiesiogiai susidurdavo su ideologija, ideologizuotu veiklos lauku, ir savo praktikomis sugestijuoja apie jos beprasmiškumą, mes ieškujome vėlyvojo sovietmečio interpretacinio "perskaitymo būdo". Darbo tikslas buvo sukurti *nuobodulio visuomenės* modelį ir parodyti jo taikymo galimybes ir ribas.

Konceptualizavus nuobodulio sampratą ir suformavus teorinius *nuobodulio visuomenės* modelio apmatius, siekta paaiškinti ideologijos "likimą" vėlyvuju sovietmečiu. Išanalizavus atskiras "ideologines situacijas" ir jas susisteminus pagal *nuobodulio visuomenės* modelio pasiūlytą kategorizaciją, buvo pateikti šių "ideologinių situacijų" ir praktikų jose interpretacijos, ieškant bendrojo vardiklio.

Teoriniam modeliui sukurti buvo remtasi Alexei Yurchako pasiūlyta *steigiamojo* ir *atliekamojo* matmens koncepcija, taip pat nuobodulio sociopsichologinėmis analizėmis, Talcotto Parsonso *referentine veiksmo struktūra*, Michelio de Certeau ir Pierre'o Bourdieu praktikų teorijomis, Anthony Giddenso *struktūrizacija*. Tad mūsų teorinė prieiga yra tarpdisciplininė - naudojamės sociologijos, socialinės istorijos, antropologijos ir komunikacijos teorijų įdirbiu. Darbe svarbi tiek sovietinės praeities teorinė *dekonstrukcija*, tiek ir jos empirinė *rekonstrukcija*, todėl siekiame ne tik sukurti teorinį modelį, bet ir atskleisdami jo interpretacinio taikymo galimybes, teorinį modelį bent iš dalies papildyti *klasikiniu istorijos pasakojimu*, teisingiau - pasakojimų pavyzdžiais, fragmentais, todėl taip pat naudotas istorinis aprašomasis ir "vieno atvejo" tyrimo metodai, o medžiagos rinkimui ir atrankai taikyti pusiau struktūruotas interviu ir kritinė dokumentų analizė. Empirinei medžiagai rinkti ir nagrinėti pasitelkti penki šaltiniai: archyviniai dokumentai (pirminių partinių organizacijų protokolai iš Lietuvos ypatingojo archyvo, Lietuvos literatūros ir meno archyvas, Vilniaus apskrities archyvas, Lietuvos nacionalinės bibliotekos archyvas ir Vilniaus Viešosios A.Mickevičiaus bibliotekos archyvas), interviu (21 pateikėjas), publikuoti atsiminimai, publikuoti laišakai ir dienoraščiai bei sovietmečio publikacijos.

Darbą sudaro įvadas, teoriniam modeliui aptarti skirta teorinė dalis, trys praktinio jo taikymo dalys, išvados, literatūros ir šaltinių sąrašas.

Pirmoji dalis skirta nuosekliai atskleisti tą kelią, kuriuo einant nuo pirminio

poreikio suprasti atsiminimus apie "nuobodžias situacijas" atminties ir refleksijų diskurse buvo pereita prie sukūrimo tokio teorinio *nuobodulio visuomenės* modelio, kuriuo būtų galima interpretuoti sovietmečio visuomenės gyvenimą. Taigi šioje dalyje kuriamas teorinis modelis ir aprašomi pagrindiniai jo dėmenys.

Tolesnę darbo struktūrą nulėmė du socializaciniai ideologijos veiksniai - drausminimas ir mobilizacija. Pirmoje dalyje išskyrėme tris *nuobodulio visuomenės* požymių grupes - erdvės, laiko ir minties. Ideologijos drausminimo laukui aprašyti užtenka su *mintinio nuobodulio* požymiais susijusių kasdienybės situacijų, o mobilizacijos laukui - su *laiko nuobodulio* požymiais, todėl darbas buvo plėtojamas pagal šią logiką ir *erdvės nuobodulys* plačiau nenagrinėtas.

Antroje dalyje ideologinis išsprasmėjimas, *mintinio nuobodulio* sanklodos, nagrinėtos kaip socialinio drausminimo pasekmė. Vėlyvuoju sovietmečiu mintis pirmiausia buvo drausminama viešojoje erdvėje, todėl šioje dalyje telktasi ties jos problematika. Čia pateikėme bendrąją sovietinės viešumos charakteristiką ir parodėme, kaip jai suprasti padeda įvesta *paslapties kultūros* kategorija. Pastarąją nagrinėjome keliais etapais: *paslapties* kūrimas ir *paslapties* saugojimas. Bet režimas siekė, kad ideologines situacijas subjektai steigtų ne tik pasyviai pasiduodami drausminimui, bet ir prisidėtų aktyviai. Todėl visa trečia dalis skirta dar vienai *paslapties kultūros* pakopai - žmonių įtraukimui į jos palaikymą. Čia ideologijos drausminimo funkcijas papildė mobilizacinės, vykdytos per sovietinės kritikos ir savikritikos procedūras. Be to, sovietmečio (savi)kritikos procedūrose ištraukia papildomas veiksnys - tai skundai, nes tikros kritikos deficito sąlygomis formavosi kompensaciniai mechanizmai ir alternatyvų paieškos, kurias suprasti padeda daugiaprasmė skundų rašymo motyvacija.

Ketvirtoje dalyje perėjome prie ideologijos mobilizacinės paskirties, kurią *nuobodulio visuomenės* kontekste nagrinėjome per *laiko nuobodulio* reiškinius. *Sociolaikinės* tvarkos požiūriu pagrindinė skirtis eina tarp darbo laiko ir laisvalaikio, todėl šioje dalyje gvildenome, kaip režimas per ideologiją mobilizuoja žmones ir darbui, ir ypatingoms (šventinėms) laisvalaikio formoms.

Sovietų Sąjungos modernizacijos specifiškumo neįmanoma suprasti be ideologijos vaidmens. Joje vykusius įvairius *turbomodernizacijos* procesus vadiname *socmodernizacija* dėl to, kad įvairūs jų aspektai, ypač kontrmodernūs fenomenai, pats

procesų intensyvumas stipriai priklausė nuo ideologinių (socialistinių) reikalavimų. Tokiu būdu sovietų režimas susiformavo kaip ideokratinis, t.y. jo tikslus hierarchizavo ideologinė programa. Tad ideologija neturėtų būti nurašyta kaip nieko nelemianti net vėlyvuojū sovietmečio periodu, kai atrodė, kad jos funkcionavimas - grynai formalus ir fasadinis.

Ideokratinė režimo prigimtis reiškė, kad valstybė ne tik ideologiškai prioretizuoja valdymo tikslus, bet ir siekia, kad šiuos tikslus internalizuotų kiekvienas subjektas, t.y. kad jie teiktų prasmę kiekvieno asmens veiklai. Tam buvo kuriamos ideologinės situacijos, kurios lyg tarpininkės turėjo iš režimo pusės diegti vertybines nuostatas bei normas, o iš subjektų pusės sulauktų grįžtamojo ryšio, išreiškiančio jų pritarimą ir atsidavimą šiems tikslams bei jų prasmingumo patvirtinimą. Bet būtent šiose situacijose buvo fiksuojamos įvairios *nuobodulio* būsenos ir jas atspindinčios praktikos.

Vėlyvojo sovietmečio *nuobodulio visuomenės* modelio atramos tašku laikome šiuo periodu išryškėjusią ideologijos vaidmens kaitą. Sakytinės istorijos ir archyviniai šaltiniai byloja, kad teiginiai apie ideologijos "mirtį" yra kiek perdėti, t.y. dalis žmonių, jei ir liovėsi tikėję galutiniu tikslu, vis dar galėjo palankiai žiūrėti ir remti ideologijos teikiamas ar jos absorbuotas vertybes, sukurtą "socialinės gerovės modelį", todėl ideologija nenukrito iki "nulinės padalos". Vis dėlto perėjusios į savo "pomirtinę" fazę ideologijos reikšmę labiausiai palaikė ne atskirų žmonių tikėjimas, o išitraukimas į socializacijos procesus. Iš gyventojų buvo reikalaujama ne tikėjimo, o socialinio įsipareigojimo ideologinėms nuostatoms. Tapusi neišvengiamu ir svariu socializacijos komponentu ji atliko dvejopas funkcijas socialiniame gyvenime - drausminimo ir mobilizavimo. Būtent šios ideologinės funkcijos kasdien kurdavo gausybę ideologinių situacijų, į kurias patekdavo absoliuti dauguma gyventojų.

Ideologijos socializacijos konceptą mes papildėme A.Yurchako dviejų matmenų modeliu. Jo aprašytas *steigiamasis* matmuo atitinka asmens socialinio įsipareigojimo momentą, kai subjektas prisiriša prie ideologinių normų, nuostatų ir struktūrų. Šis savęs, kaip sovietinio piliečio, "normalizacijos" aktas atveria *atliekamąjį* matmenį, t.y. įgalina naudotis visomis iš socializacijos išplaukiančiomis galimybėmis ir privilegijomis, apskritai gyventi už-ideologinį gyvenimą. Tačiau A.Yurchakas neivertino socialinio įsipareigojimo ideologinėms struktūroms pasekmių: prisirišimas prie ideologijos ne tik



atvėrė galimybes, bet ir jas apibrėžė ir iš dalies determinavo subjekto elgesį. Kita vertus, nors individai judėjo po socialinį lauką tarsi įkliuvę į "disciplininį tinklą", o *atliekamojo* matmens praktikoms didelės įtakos turėjo ideologinis struktūravimas, tačiau *struktūrizacija* nebuvo vienpusis procesas. Akivaizdu, kad "stipriąsias struktūras" vis labiau klibino "silpnieji subjektai", kurie ne tik siekė ištrūkti ar apeiti ideologines situacijas (*a*-struktūrinės praktikos), bet ir ieško kompensacinių mechanizmų (*para*-struktūrinės praktikos), jomis naudojosi, piktnaudžiavo, veikė priešinga kryptimi (*anti*-struktūrinės praktikos). Visa ši itin marga, įvairialypė ir skirtingo pobūdžio praktikų suma prisidėjo prie socialinės dezintegracijos ir ardė ideologines struktūras. Pavyzdžiui, *paslapties* sandaros analizė per satyros kalbėjimo praktikas parodė, kad visos viešosios minties praktikos buvo daugiau ar mažiau nulemtos *paslapties kultūros*: kritika galėjo būti tik vienakryptė su baigtiniu kritikuotinų problemų sąrašu, nukreipta į "pasitaikančius trūkumus", bet ne kvestionuojanti pačią sistemą. Tačiau ši struktūrinė, *steigiančioji* kalbėjimo praktika prisidėjo prie *anti*-struktūrinės praktikos susiformavimo - ironija kuri laiką tarsi akomponavo satyrai, buvo jos jaunesnė sesuo, bet nepastebimai peraugo į *a*-struktūrinę praktiką, o paskui tapo diskurso dekonstravimo retoriniu instrumentu. Kita vertus, veltėdžiavimo pavyzdys rodo, kad visiškai ištrūkti iš *struktūrizacijos* buvo labai sunku ar faktiškai neįmanoma. Centralizuotos planinės ekonomikos ir visuotinio užimtumo sąlygomis darbas prarado ideologinį prasmingumą, kartu pašlijo darbo etika ir drausmė. Darbovietėse subjektai ėmėsi visų trijų rūšių *atliekančiųjų* praktikų, kurias bendrai įvardijome *darbo laiko nusavinimu*. Darbo vengiantys asmenys, sovietmečiu apibrėžti kaip veltėdžiai, plačiausiai išnaudodavo *darbo laiko nusavinimo* praktikas, todėl gali pasirodyti, kad jiems pavyko ištrūkti iš mobilizacinės socializacijos. Teisiškai veltėdystė reiškė "užklausinį" uniflikavimą, bet realiai tuo siekta ne juos išstumti ir palikti ramybėje socialiniuose pakraščiuose, o inkorporuoti į bendrą sistemą, nes režimas negalėjo sau leisti turėti tokių piliečių, kurie laisva valia apsisprendžia nedirbti "visuomenei naudingo darbo". Taigi per *struktūrizaciją* veltėdžiai bent nominaliai buvo priversti išlikti *steigiamajame* matmenyje, kai darbo turėjimo faktas liudija apie jų "normalumą".

*Nuobodulio* modeliui sukurti nereikėjo įsiskverbti į kiekvieno subjekto vidinį pasaulį, už jį daugiausia kalbėjo jo veiksmai. Apskritai, kad galėtume konstatuoti

*sovietinį nuobodulį*, veikėjui nereikėjo išgyventi realios nuobodžio būsenos - ideologija kasdien reprodukuodavo *beprasmybę, esančią šalia*, kurią žmonės atpažindavo ir mokydavosi apeiti. *Atliekančiųjų* praktikų gausa paliudija, kiek daug pastangų buvo sudėta. Todėl į šias praktikas įnikusiam sovietmečio gyventojui *steigiamajame* matmenyje nuolat persekiojanti beprasmybė *subjektyviai* galėjo atrodyti visai nereikšminga jo gyvenimo dalis. Bet kaip rodo atlikta analizė, vis tiek stipriai jį veikė, jo *atliekančiosios* praktikos dažnai buvo paveiktos *struktūrizacijos*, vadinasi, nebuvo subjektyviai laisva valia grįstas veiksmas, o sąlygotas išorinių, šiuo atveju ideologinių struktūrų.

## **Academical publications on the dissertation theme**

### **Paskelbti akademiniai straipsniai disertacijos tema**

- Vaiseta T., *Sovietinio veltėdžiavimo fenomenas kasdienybės praktikų ir jų trajektorijų požiūriu*. In: "Lietuvos istorijos studijos", 2012, t. 29, p. 111-126.
- Vaiseta T., *Informacijos hierarchija vėlyvuoju sovietmečiu: bibliotekų atvejis*. In: "Informacijos mokslai", 2012, t. 60, p. 116-134.
- Taip pat buvo parengtas straipsnis *On the Background, Stains, and Dry-chemical cleaning: Soviet Satire as the Practice of Speech*, kuris įtrauktas į planuojamą išleisti straipsnių rinkinį *Grotesque Revisited* (leidykla "Cambridge Scholars Publishing").

## **Papers in the academical conferences**

### **Pranešimai mokslinėse konferencijose**

- 2010 11 12 Tarptautiniame Vilniaus simpoziume "Being in the soviet network: embracing, interpreting or escaping from the system": pranešimas *Hard not to see: are postsoviet signs still linked to soviet?*.
- 2011 05 21 Lietuvos socialinių mokslų forume: pranešimas *Sovietinis bangladešas: kas suprivatėję ir kas išviešėję - sovietinio veltėdžiavimo patirtys*.
- 2011 06 18 Vilniaus simpoziumo vėlyvojo sovietmečio ir posovietmečio klausimais vasaros seminare (Asmenybė, sistema ir nacionaliniai procesai vėlyvajame sovietmetyje): pranešimas *'Rimas Burokas kenčia už visus brodo valkatas': asmenybė ir jos legenda sovietinės kasdienybės paribiuose*.
- 2011 11 25 Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos instituto tarptautinėje konferencijoje „Satyra ir groteskas post/moderniojoje Vidurio ir Rytų Europos literatūroje“: pranešimas *On the Background, Stains, and Spec-chemical cleaning: Soviet Satire as the Practice of Speech*.
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