

GLAMOUR AS RUSSIAN TELEVISION MAGIC

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glamour &
tv

'Bolshe, bolshe glamura! I makiyazha, i manikyura! Litso super i super figura!'¹ warbles the Russian girl group *Shpilki* (High Heels) in their newest video 'Glamur'.² Singing and dancing alongside them is the superstar hairdresser Sergei Zveryev, known in Russian show business for his mastery of androgynous theatrics. Beneath the song's inane lyrics one can see the elusive essence of Russian glamour, which seeks to create the maximum impact through an exaggerated emphasis on external allure. This has nothing to do with a dramatic catharsis, but rather the short-term enchantment of the audience. Glamour is, therefore, essentially an illusion which admittedly arouses, but does not lead to an aesthetic experience. This definition is supported by the word's etymology: according to the Oxford English Dictionary, glamour is a corruption of the word 'grammar', used in Scotland in the sense of spell or bewitchment ('to cast the glamour over someone').

The phenomenon of glamour is rife with the potential for addiction. The spell is only effective while the glittering surface remains intact. For this reason, glamour always demands more glitter, furs and jewels. The NTV series *Rublyovka live!* depicted this aspect of glamour in a season entitled *Glamurnyi manyak* (2006) in the form of a thriller: a killer is at large in Rublyovka, the Moscow district inhabited by the nouveaux riches; the murderer kills women, dresses their corpses up as Marilyn Monroe, Cleopatra or Ophelia and covers them in flowers. At the end of the season, it turns out that the killer is a woman who had experienced rejection in her love life and decorated her victims to reflect herself.

This plot device demonstrates the central moment of self-reflection at the centre of the series *Rublyovka*

live!: by means of this morbid amplification, the audience's own addiction to glamour is flung back at them in the form of a perverse crime. In the end, the murderer is nothing other than a victim of glamour's enchantment, which she seeks to perpetuate through the lustrous beauty of the female corpses.

The theme of revenge was not only evident in the interaction of the characters, but also in the media of communication employed in the production of *Rublyovka live!*. Every episode began with a scripted starting point. The protagonists then had to find a solution to the dilemma created by the scriptwriters. At important junctures, the audience could influence the progress of the plot via the internet or text messages. The programme appeared under the telling catchphrase 'This is not a fairy story; it is life, reality style'. Through this concept, the makers of *Rublyovka live!* were able to satisfy several of their viewers' desires. The audience received permission to be voyeurs; at the same time, they found themselves in the pleasant position of being able to direct the glamorous lives of the B-list celebrities with their mobile phones. The TV-viewer took on, as it were, the role of fate via remote control and could avenge himself upon the rich for his own lack of privilege.

The starlet Anfisa Chekhova (born 1977) also emits glamour in carefully measured doses. The buxom presenter of the midnight TNT programme *Sex with Anfisa Chekhova* plays a cunning game with appearance and reality. She claims that her onscreen persona is a genuine reflection of her character, and she goes so far as to suggest that she has a moral mission to fulfil. In one interview she saucily asserted, 'I am flirtatious; I am capricious; I am stubborn. However, I am also an independent, strong woman. It is good to have an image, but I am also worth something without an image. I have my own view of things, and I accept myself as I am. I

1 'More, more glamour! And makeup, and manicures! A super face and a super figure!'.
2 http://www.russian-imperial.de/video_6896.html

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love life, friends, travelling, sex. If I have experience of all that, why shouldn't I pass it on? Maybe I will help someone to develop a relationship'.³ Here, the claim to authenticity is, in fact, an affectation – part of the stylised mask that creates the glamorous persona.

The same split between reality and fiction is displayed by Masha Malinovskaya (born 1981), who presented the hit parade *10 Sexy* on Mus-TV until 2005. In 2007, she published a book called 'Men as Machines'. In contrast to Anfisa Chekhova, she does not make any claims to authenticity in order to strengthen her glamorous image; instead, in an interview she made it clear that she transforms her real self in front of the camera into a fictional persona which has nothing to do with her true identity. Every week in front of the camera she pretends to be a 'worldly-wise, ironic, sometimes slightly scandalous person with a sharp tongue'.⁴

³ <http://rasklad.info/tv/woman/chehova/>

⁴ <http://www.maybe.ru/celebs/index.php?id=37>

Thus Malinovskaya broke one of the basic rules of glamour: the difference between the beaming starlet and the tired mundanity of her everyday life must not be mentioned; otherwise, the magical world of beautiful appearance falls apart. Television creates a powerful reality in which the female presenters are in a sense reflections of the audience's fantasy. Glamorous people seem to present their inner selves for everyone to see. However, the glittering appearance of the glamorous star does not truly reflect what is going on inside them, but rather the lurid desires of the viewers.

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THE GLAMOROUS HEROINES OF OKSANA ROBSKI

Larissa Rudova

glamour & fiction

'Glamour is something you can wrap up very beautifully and sell as the national dream' (Oksana Robski)

A member of the new Russian elite, Oksana Robski (b. 1968) was catapulted to fame when her first novel, *Casual* (2005), became a national bestseller. *Casual* provided the first detailed record of the new elite's lifestyle and introduced to Russian literature a new character type, *chelovek glamurnyi* (*homo glamourosus*), who expressed the ideology of affluence, conspicuous consumption, narcissism and indifference to social and political problems. In capturing the spirit of Putin's Russia, *Casual* accomplished at least three tasks: it responded to the public's curiosity about the lives of the rich; it

created a desirable fantasy world filled with luxury objects, exotic tourism and self-indulgence, and it used wealth and glamour as sources of entertainment. After a decade and a half of *chernukha*, or bleak literature emphasising social misery and violence, the public was ready for entertaining, pleasurable and accessible reading matter, and *Casual*, as well as Robski's subsequent books, offered glamour as a panacea for all of life's drama.

To date, Robski has published seven glamour novels, one of which she co-authored with the celebrity socialite Kseniya Sobchak, a cookbook, a collection of short stories and a manual on upscale interior decorating. Her fiction has been translated into eighteen languages and has a domestic circula-