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ОСОБЕННОСТИ ВОСПРИЯТИЯ КОНЦЕПТА «МОСКВА» И МОСКОВСКОЙ ГОРОДСКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ АМЕРИКАНСКИМИ СТУДЕНТАМИ-МАГИСТРАНТАМИ

Particularities of American graduate students' perception of the "Moscow" concept and its urban culture.

Ключевые слова: восприятие культуры, Москва, культурные коды, понятие «русской души», осознание культурной близости, американские студенты-магистранты.

Keywords: perception of culture, Moscow, cultural codes, the concept of the "Russian soul", realization of cultural affinity, American graduate students'.

Аннотация. В статье дается анализ результатов опросов, оценивается процесс изменений восприятия культурных кодов российской столицы американскими магистрантами. Авторы статьи, студенты-магистранты Гарвардского университета и колледжа Свит Брайр в Вирджинии (Фрэнки ди Чиаччио, Лорен Нолл, Джозеф Доннелли, Лиланд Франкел, Филипп Джеймс Монтано, Бен Ройер, Клэр Фредериксен, Брайан Эванс, обучающиеся в магистерской программе Школы-студии МХАТ и Института высшего театрального образования при Гарвардском университете; Танил Уильямс, обучающаяся в магистерской программе колледжа Свит Брайр, Вирджиния, студентка бакалаврской программы изящных искусств Стивенса Колледжа), описывают свои впечатления от встречи с московской культурой. Делается вывод о значимости гибкого и открытого к новым впечатлениям восприятия для развития диалога культур.

Abstract. The results of surveys are analyzed and the process of the perception of changing of the Russian capital's cultural codes are estimated in this article. The authors of the article are graduate students of Harvard University and Sweet Briar College in Virginia (Frankie di Ciaccio, Lauren Noll, Joseph Donnelly, Leland Frankel, Phillip James Montano, Ben Royer, Claire Frederiksen, Brian Evans, attending the master's programme of School-Studio of the Moscow Art Academic Theater and the Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University; Taneal Williams, attending the master's programme of Sweet briar college, Virginia, undergraduate bachelor of Fine Arts programme of Stephens College), describe their impressions of the knowledge of Moscow culture. The report concluded about the importance of a flexible and open to fresh experiences' perception for the development of intercultural dialogue.

What is it you seek of me, oh Russia? What is the hidden bond which subsists between us?
N.Gogol

Russians are quivering and sensitive about what other nations think of them, their country, and its history and traditions. Though we feel habituated for blaming the foreigners for their ignorance and lacking knowledge of Rakhmaninov, Lermontov and Serov, we somehow can't get used to them being proud of our culture. Well, not proud...but simply not ashamed of our culture. We cling to originality, to something that Europeans and Americans "can't even taste".

Well, maybe, I wouldn't be so hasty. What Americans definitely can do is taste, and most importantly, explore through taste. Claire confesses that she became a big fan of «grechka» and Leland claims that dinner with me and my family was the most positive experience he had during his 3-month stay in Russia.

"We had the chance to experience the hospitality and culture of another nation first hand. In an act of great generosity and kindness. I had a great time. Seeing how people really live. Not only make believe of theater"

Of course, shows and rehearsals took the highest priority, but it's safe to say that 'blinis' were a pleasant addition to all the sophisticated observations. Leland admits, "Smaller stuff like eating homemade meals mattered more emotionally". -

From my own experience, I would never forget the day my friends first tried «pierogis». This image stays in my mind. It was the early spring in the Novospassky monastery. On a bench between two huge melting snow mountains there are my fair Americans, sitting silently side by side. They were eating lean «pierogis» with pink salmon and enjoying their gastronomic pilgrimage.

You might be wondering why I am spending time describing people tasting food. The point is I strongly believe cuisine is the first step in introducing our culture. It is also the most simple and understanding one. Historian journalist and the author of numerous culinary books William Pokhlyobkin once wrote, "food is rather the matter of heart, than stomach... revival of the national soul". [2, 6].

From my point of view, pink salmon represents the mysterious Russian soul with humble dignity.

Not taking into consideration all the jokes, culture is a way of learning about others through each other's experiences. In turn, knowledge and understanding come to only those who are open to it. We must be open to new views, acquaintances, tastes, skills, and impressions.

"Russian food was as vast as the country and I enjoyed a great range of it that wasn't just fish and cabbage. I imagined that I'd only be eating a lot of cabbage and fish...Experiencing the food and the joy of Russian culture, made me acknowledge that some of my prejudices were wrong", shares James.

Miracles happen when we stop waiting for any hints and gifts from life and make them ourselves (like miracles of getting home safely and without any notorious adventures after cultural acquaintance with Russian beverages).

"One time I was walking through back-streets to get home, staying of Tverskaya, and puddle-jumping across car-parks...And I suddenly realized I'd found my way in the city. Like, even though it was just a back-alley path home, the city was a little more mine. I knew something about it few others knew," writes Brian.

As soon as man can change his view on circumstances, they start to change themselves. Little by little, Moscow starts embracing you, getting into the whirlpool of new faces and places, concerns and obsessions, desires and wishes. You absorb all the endless miles of images that pass by until your eyes ache. Brian also explains:

“Well, there are a lot of the things I found in Moscow while I was there...The safety and secret comfort of Tsiferblat (the anti-cafe), the beauty of cafe Pushkin, the magic of the theatre, and just how much I loved working and learning at MXAT”.

Ben confesses that, “Moscow is not the dreary, melancholy place that I once imaged. Yes, it rains. Yes, it sucks in the winter (never again), but one special indigenous person, who is forever apart of my life, opened my eyes and heart to this place. She said, ‘Open your heart to Moscow, Ben. If you do, the city will do the same.’ This past month or so I did just that and had the polar opposite experience when I walked through one of the most beautiful parks and botanical garden I have ever seen”. For me, being acquainted with culture is not only being aware of literature and history, but finding out the factors for certain behaviors, and looking for the original nooks. The culture of casualness is experiencing life face to face: watching, talking and tasting. For example Ben got to ring Russian Orthodox Church Bells and it is an experience he “will never forget”. Of course, as a young girl and a guide, I feel a pang of pity, that this is bell ringing experience (not my little face) not to be forgotten, but I’m cordially happy for my friends to observe, try, notice analyze and grow.

“After three months in Moscow, I’ve developed some theories about the cultural forces that have shaped the character of the people. Of course I’m no historian, so these are just theories based on my own experiences. It seems to me that turbulent events in the country’s recent history have forced and continue to force the average Russian into survival mode. I got a sense that many Russians expend so much energy on navigating a potentially hazardous socio-political landscape that interactions with strangers are not always seen as opportunities for new friendship but rather as threats to be monitored. Additionally, I realized the extent to which many Americans, myself included, mistake the straightforward Russian attitude for rudeness when in fact it isn’t intended as such” (Frankie).

Though it would be unfair to say that everything ran smoothly from the beginning, there was enough room for fear, disappointment and misunderstanding.

“Before coming to Russia, I felt uneasy about how I would be received. I had heard many negative stereotypes about Russians being cold, unaccepting, skeptical, and brainwashed by a severe propaganda machine. I certainly hoped to see those stereotypes disproven, but it would be a lie to say I didn’t worry about them,” Frankie admits. Brian adds to his comments,

“I expected Moscow to be freezing when I arrived. I expected Alaska, and what I found was something more like New York City...People told us we should expect to see a lot of grey, different shades, but grey everywhere. I thought no one would smile at me, and I felt like everyone would be able to pin me as an American in an instant. (Which kind of scared me. I also thought people would be somehow more hostile towards US Citizens.)...I found the walk down Tverskaya really intimidating, and I missed home a lot for the first few weeks. I’m from Vermont, a small state in the northern mountains, so

real city life in Moscow was somewhat jarring. I thought all the people were much nicer than I expected, or at least the people in the theatre community were very kind. I noticed people seemed to keep to themselves more in public, but that was also probably a skewed reality as a result of me not knowing the language. Things did feel somewhat European, but everything was somehow also so different from cities farther west. It felt like all of the streets, the tall buildings, were towering obstacles to overcome. (I don't know if that makes sense. It just felt like a city a person has to put work into to understand and love)".

"I would say, before coming to Russia, our overall impression was pretty negative: We study a lot of the great pre-Revolution artists and writers (Chekhov, Pushkin, etc.) but not too much that came after. Our focus is on the genocide enacted by the government, the oppression, and then the slow collapse of the Soviet Union into the present. So many of us were pretty nervous coming over: There are reports of rampant homophobia, sexism, and crime. Not to mention our worries that we wouldn't like or understand the theatre scene," says Leland.

We get the opposite reaction from Taneal.

"Before traveling to Moscow, I was fortunate enough to have established a strong mentorship with my choir's accompanist Anna. Anna was born in Donetsk and her family currently resides in Crimea. It's safe to say that Anna instilled very strong Russian values in me during the three years prior to my study abroad program. Actually, if it weren't for her, my mother would have never let me apply to the Moscow Art Theatre Semester. I was excited, nervous - because I never left the country - and eager to hit the ground running. My family had a lot of doubts. I am an African American woman after all. 'Are there any people of color in Russia?' 'What if they abduct you?' 'What if you never return home?' My favorite was, 'Russian people are not nice and very controlling...and terrifying!'"

But not everybody was fortunate as Taneal was, to have a person nearby to break the mold.

In ancient Rome, when a general came back victorious from battle, there would be a triumphant parade. While he received honors from the crown of citizens, there was a slave behind him to say "You can't live forever". Oh, if only there was someone next to all of us to whisper from time to time "You can't live in a shell forever".

Yes, we can't. And we didn't after all. We strolled and danced and laughed and watched shows and visited exhibitions and studied and learned to communicate in the unusual circumstances. And due to constant change of impressions the head is spinning: "Our first impressions were mostly, I wouldn't say 'shock' necessarily, but we were taken aback. We were also surprised at how hospitable the Russian people that we met were, which changed my impression of them greatly. We were worried that our being American, because of the tense history and current state of Russia's government/economy, would make people hostile to us. But I really only experienced it as a positive experience: Lots of people seemed interested in America, and appreciated my being from there, which was nice" states Leland.

Claire comments, "Moscow is beautiful, but feels overbearing and a little bit scary at first. All of the women are beautiful and wear lots of furs and makeup. Acting and the theater and art is highly revered and respected".

“I will say, arriving at MXAT was my actual first impression. Day 1 was overwhelming and terrifying. What if Russia wasn't what I made it up to be for the past 12 years? So upon arriving at MXAT - with a camera crew, no less - I proceeded to hug the doors of the Moscow Art Theatre. I just went for it. I was excited. As an actor, this is where it all started. This is the place that inspired the modern acting technique. I was humbled and equally as frightened. It was the calm before the storm,” explains Taneal.

The fact that guys started the acquaintance with Russian culture through theatre is worth mentioning. Theatre in Russia reflects reality and at the same time is a self-sufficient organism. You learn a lot about national values, prejudices and a system of axes: hopes, opinions and humor. For me, however, this is less necessary than feeling the powerful force of Russian theatre with its great history and intensity and finding yourself part of it.

Brian calls it “good theatre. Really really good theatre. Fantastic theatre”.

“The theatre is much more playful and innovative than American Theatre. (Not performances- but the theatre itself. The direction is much more imaginative). Seagull- WOW. Midsummer- INCREDIBLE. The Raven- best thing I've ever seen,” exclaims Joey.

“Russians are incredibly kind, passionate and hard working. They bring fervor and intensity to most things that they do (specifically in the arts) because they care” (Claire).

Here we come to the main reason of an unexplainable bond between foreigners and Russia, that I fetch out: People. People, through whose eyes we keep perceiving the country with its freaks and odd customs, who are the reason of our longing to return, whose hospitality and warmth becomes a weight off the mind in the unfamiliar place. Frankie states, “Finally, it's most important to note that I was incredibly fortunate to spend time with members of the Russian arts and theatre community. They showed me compassion, humor, hospitality and warmth. I choose to recall them first whenever describing Russia to Americans; it is a complicated place with complex history and a vast array of people—many of whom treated me incredibly well. I made wonderful friends there, for whom I am very grateful”.

“I am going to miss the friends I have made along the way here. Thank you for opening up your home to me. To us. I will be forever grateful to your hospitality and kindness. You changed me, helped me grow, helped me learn about Russia in a way that surpassed any expectation” (Ben).

“Honestly, becoming friends with you and Nastya (student of Moscow Art Theatre School, production faculty, stage manager of a show «Christmas at the Ivanovs» within a joint program of the Moscow Art Theatre School and the Institute For Advanced Training at Harvard University) and meeting different students at MXAT and people with whom I interacted daily was how I came to enjoy my experience in Moscow. It was incredibly challenging, and the language barrier was challenging, but I think becoming close with individual people made me see how caring people can really be” (Claire).

This can be a friend to bring you harmony and observational attention to details: “the moment you handed me Master and Margarita. I would read that book in the huge windows of the 3rd floor shower-room in the Dormitory at night, and it was lonely and romantic at the same time” (Brian).

<...> or just a stranger on the street. As it's wisely mentioned in Tarkovsky's «Andrey Rublev: "You know yourself. You're tired and discouraged and suddenly in the crowd you meet a human glance...and everything's lighter".

"After a few days, however, once I became a bit more confident, I ventured to a small cafe where the barista was engaging and warm. Between her broken English and my broken Russian, we were able to find common ground and have a lovely conversation about art. From that experience I felt emboldened to branch out and explore more, and I quickly realized that, like the people of all cities around the world, Muscovites come in all temperaments," says Frankie.

He adds, "the key to all of my positive experiences and impressions was communication. I worked hard to learn to speak the language because I really believed it would help put the Russians I met at ease and break through the barrier of being a foreigner. I also tried to see Russian peers outside of school in order to dig deeper and hear about their perspectives and values. I spoke to cab drivers and waiters and sales people about weather, art, family, international politics—constantly learning new vocabulary and viewpoints along the way. I had some negative experiences with strangers, but almost without fail, when I had the time to speak to someone, it revealed the potential for a friendly, human encounter".

"I'm not going to pretend this hasn't been difficult in certain moments, but I am most certainly leaving a part of myself in Moscow and taking a piece of it with me. I do love it, and I hope I will return someday. I hate politics. I like people. And I love so many of these incredible Russian people that I have met. What a ride. Time flies, my friends" says Lauren.

"There is great color and life in the food, the music, and the language of Russia".

I'm sincerely thankful for my dear friends for the frank impressions they shared with me, for the love and respect they showed to Russian culture and Moscow, for being curious and open-minded.

I leave you with words of Virginia Woolf: "But Sasha was from Russia, where the sunsets are longer, the dawns less sudden and sentences are often left unfinished from doubt as how to best end them" [4].

In a search of a great end, it's best to leave my thoughts unfinished.

ЛИТЕРАТУРА

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