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CELEBRATING THE VICTORY DAY IN THE USSR: SEMIOLOGIC ANALYSIS

Празднование Дня Победы в СССР: семиологический анализ

Keywords: Victory Day, Soviet festivals, Red Square, performance practices of the USSR, Soviet myth, performance studies, visual representation.

Ключевые слова: День Победы, праздники СССР, Красная площадь, зрелищные практики СССР, советский миф, визуальная репрезентация.

Abstract. This paper is concerned with the semiotics of celebrating the Victory Day in the USSR. This paper is aimed at revealing the transformation of representative sign system and staging practices of the Victory Day in the USSR. The authors have considered the visuals and sound of celebrating the Victory Day in the Red Square in Moscow within the period from 1965 till the last Victory Day in the Soviet history in 1990. The paper is based on the sources of the Russian State Film and Photo Archive. The authors reconstruct the multicomposite staging practice, among which the category of heroic, narrative of threats and the script of the “fortress besieged” legalizing the Soviet militarist pretensions bulk large. Performance texture becomes more heterogeneous and undergoes a number of metamorphoses: from regulated hierarchical centred structure to discrete binary one with prominent scenic dominant, which uses simulacra (scenery, props, costume) and historically alien contexts, which make it possible to exploit the Victory narrative to legalize the modern socio-political guidelines and practices.

Аннотация. Статья посвящена семиотике празднования Дня Победы в СССР. Цель работы – раскрыть трансформацию репрезентативной знаковой системы и инсценирующих практик Дня Победы в СССР. Авторами статьи рассмотрен визуальный и акустический ряды празднования Дня Победы на Красной площади в Москве в период с 1965 года до последнего Праздника Победы в советской истории в 1990 году. Статья базируется на источниках Российского государственного архива кинофотодокументов. Авторы осуществляют реконструкцию многокомпонентной инсценирующей практики, где важное место занимают категории героического, нарратив угроз и сценарий «осажденной крепости», легитимирующий советские милитаристские претензии. Нарастающие противоречия между актуальной

политической повесткой и идеологическим дискурсом приводят к изменениям в форме репрезентации мифа. Зрелищная фактура становится более гетерогенной и претерпевает ряд метаморфоз: от регламентированной, иерархичной, центрированной структуры к дискретной, двоичной, с выраженной театрално-декорационной доминантой, использующей симулякры (декорации, реквизит, костюм) и исторически чуждые контексты, позволяющие эксплуатировать нарратив Победы для легитимации современных социально-политических установок и практик.

The Great Patriotic War, which has become one of the bloodiest wars in the human history, was over on May 09, 1945; according to the data of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation as of 2015, the total human casualties (civilian and military) of the country (USSR) have amounted to 26,600,000 people [Минобороны уточнило потери СССР в Великой Отечественной войне].

The Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR as of May 08, 1945 “On declaring the 9th of May the Victory Day”, first published in the Gazette of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR [Сборник законов СССР и указов Президиума Верховного Совета СССР], declared the Victory Day not only the holiday, but also entered it into the register of the holidays. Firstly, in the text of the decree, the status of victory is marked as that of historical event. Secondly, performance practices of its celebration should have been carried out through the processes of self-identification in the society and elaboration of identity guidelines of the Soviet self-consciousness and involvement in the great Soviet history [Парад победы (1945). Российский государственный архив кинофотодокументов. арх. № 5547].

However, the history of celebrating the Victory Day in the USSR is marked by the extended breaks. Thus, in December 1947, May 09 became the working day again in accordance with the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR as of December 23, and it was not until 1965 that May 09 returned its status of holiday, at the twentieth anniversary of celebrating the Great Victory [Воронцова]. However, despite the lack of state attention to May 09, generally speaking, it did not stop being the holiday, although it remained beyond the performance forms.

Within the period from 1945 till 1964, on May 09, the Red Square as many other title spaces (central streets, squares, parks) of the Soviet Union were artistically settled. Concerts, meetings, and demonstrations were arranged, a military salute was fired in the evening [Приказы Министра Обороны СССР 1954-1964 гг.]. It is remarkable that no military parades in honour of the Victory Day have been held in the Red Square for these twenty years. That is, regulated performance practices were not carried out, and the holiday left a gap for less arranged and demilitarized performance forms. However, the semantic elements of the Victory Parade have migrated to the area of other festivals and have been embedded in their semantic field. Thus, for example, the demonstrations of the troops were traditionally held on the days of celebrating the Great October Revolution on November 07 and on the Day of Workers Solidarity on May 01. Still the same front-line soldiers, war veterans and combatants have constituted the parade crew. Thus, integration of commemorative practices assumed as a basis for celebrating the Victory Day into the celebratory canon of other festivals may be noted.

The political state rehabilitation of the Victory Day was effected in 1965. According to the Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR as of April 26, 1965, May 09 was declared the holiday again [Указ Президиума Верховного Совета СССР № 3478]. A number of cultural and political prerequisites have contributed thereto.

Firstly, by that time the geopolitical situation in the world has been developing in such a way that the course chosen by the Soviet Union for building and maintaining the Soviet Bloc met with resistance of part of the world and polarized it. The Minister of Defence of the USSR, R. Malinovskii, has included the exacerbating factors in his congratulatory discourse in the Red Square [Из поздравительной речи Министра обороны СССР Р.Я. Малиновского]. In the Minister's opinion, it is those factors that provoked the Soviet government to increase the strength of the army and navy, and, generally, the defence capacity of the country.

Secondly, one cannot but note that even twenty years after the end of the war, the emotional bond with the events of those days remained strong and required commemorative practices [Романовская, Фоменко].

Thirdly, in 1964 the very authority changed, which has changed the vector of the political will. The former front-line soldier, fighter for the "Small Land", L. Brezhnev, has headed the Soviet government. However, not only that has induced the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to return the official status to the holiday. One cannot but agree with the chief specialist of the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, N. Pivovarov, that the new government had realized the necessity to create new ideological guidelines [Пивоваров]. The government of the country began to treat the Victory as the symbol of the triumph of socialism and declared communist ideologemes.

As A. Popov notes, it is from Brezhnev's time that the memorial canon around the memory of the Great Patriotic War, which would be secured up to the collapse of the USSR, has been forming [Попов]. The Victory Day has become the main national holiday, gradually forcing out the October Revolution Day in popularity. That is, the chief declared value became the representation of victory and saving the world, for they (realized beyond the Soviet state) have entirely corresponded to the hegemonic foreign policy strategies of the USSR, rather than the consolidation of the social and ideological practice in the festival represented by celebrating the October Revolution Day.

Keynote speech, which has changed the status and approach to celebrating the Victory Day, became L. Brezhnev's speech at the solemn meeting in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses devoted to the twentieth anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War. A number of guidelines should be noted in the address, subsequently assumed as a basis for celebrating anniversaries. Firstly, canonization of the heroic feat of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War, where there is an image of the enemy without and the victory over it. Secondly, the merits of the Soviet people in rebuilding the country during the post-war years. Thirdly, intergenerational continuity and rest upon the existing traditions set up during the war and directly on the Victory Day.

The military parade became the central event within the scope of celebrating the Victory Day in the Red Square in 1965. Both in 1965 and in the subsequent anniversary years of celebrating the Victory in the Soviet Union, the form of parade has been secured

in the structure of the festival. In the Victory Day regulations, the parade has most clearly demonstrated the militarist capabilities and military preparedness of the country. Thus, the demonstrative nature of the festivals devoted to celebrating the Victory Day was focused on the military capabilities in the present rather than the reception of the events of the past. The Parade had no historical and reconstruction tasks; the results of activities of the contemporary military-industrial complex rather than the equipment and attributes of the war times have prevailed in the parade. The war events of the past have just served as the historical pretext to the contemporary political agenda and demonstrated the present merits like in the showcase.

On May 09, 1965, the decorated Red Square met residents and visitors of the capital. The flagstaves with the flags of the Union republics were placed along the State Department Store, repeating the pattern of the first parade. The red linen featuring V. Lenin (without I. Stalin) was also fixed at the centre of the façade wall. The following slogans were stretched on either side of the portrait: “Long live the glorious communist party of the Soviet Union founded by Lenin” and “Ahead, to the victory of the communism!”. The visual discourse of the festival was represented by two dominants: retrospective and historical, where Lenin acted as the symbol of the past, the axis of the source and will to win. And the second one is futuristic, which was aimed at achieving new accomplishments in constructing and forming ideological narratives. Next to the inscriptions, the wall-height artistic posters were fixed. The first one has depicted the Soviet soldier with the red banner against the background of smoking Reichstag. The second one has depicted the Soviet soldier next to a woman holding a baby, behind whom the industrial view might be seen [Лукьянов, Фролкин, Швецов]. The discourses of slogans and posters have dialogically resonated with one another. Two orientations may be also traced in the plot of the posters: towards the actualization of the memory space and towards the present and future industrialization, where the future world belongs to the next generations. Other visuals of the festive space have articulated still the same vector of the past and future. The numerals “1945” and “1965” contouring the images enclosed attention to twenty years of peaceful productive life. And the following slogan on the State Department Store building only reinforced the status of feat and memory: “Let the heroic feat of the Soviet soldiers, partisans, workers, collective farmers, and intellectuals, who have gained a Great Victory over the German fascism, live for all eternity in the memory of the people!”. As Trud newspaper as of May 10, 1965 notes, the same inscription but in foreign languages might be found in other festive posters located on the walls of the neighbouring buildings. This message was addressed to the foreign visitors of the capital, among whom the military and civil delegations from the countries of Europe, Asia and North America were. Techniques of exporting ideologemes, where the visitors served as addressees, were visually and textually represented at the first Victory parade of 1945. However, here we may observe the extension of message addressees: the messages were aimed at the foreign audience.

The building of the Historical Museum has also fitted in the artistic space of the festival. The decorative panel containing Roman numerals “XX” was at the centre, the images of the medals “For the Victory Over Germany in the Great Patriotic War” and “For Valiant Labour in the Great Patriotic War” were on either side of it. The organizers

have emphasized the contribution of both the soldiers of the Red Army and those, who forged the victory in rear, to the common goal of the Victory. The façade of the Historical Museum became the area that has symbolically united two war spaces: rear and front by means of the Roman twenty years.

After the tenth stroke of the Kremlin Chimes, the Minister of Defence, marshal R. Malinovskii, appeared from the Spasskaya Gate. Moscow garrison commander, General of the Army, A. Beloborodov, has been appointed a parade commander. Having mounted the platform of the Mausoleum, Malinovskii declared a congratulatory address. Emphasizing the exported nature of the Victory and, at the same time, dehumanizing the image of the enemy, he noted that “/.../Being loyal to the international duty, it (*the Red Army*¹) has helped the enslaved peoples of Europe to be released from the Hitlerite tyranny and has completely beaten the fascist beast in its den together with the armies of the Union states/.../”. In conclusion, having evaluated misinterpretation of the historic experience, he noted that “/...the facts testify that the lessons of the past have not much taught the chiefs of the imperialistic camp and, first of all, the United States of America. They threaten the humanity with a new war attempting to stop the movement of the peoples to the social progress” [Из поздравительной речи Министра обороны СССР Р.Я. Малиновского]. By including these lines in the formal address, the organizers have extended the tasks realized at the festival: except for celebration in honour of veterans and actualization of the historical memory of the victorious people, the ideas of patriotic education of society and solution of geopolitical and ideological tasks of the future, with specifying the contemporary figure of the enemy, have been included in the agenda [Материалы по фильму «Двадцатилетие великого подвига» (Празднование 20-летия Победы советского народа в Великой Отечественной войне 1941-1945 гг.). Российский государственный архив кинофотодокументов. арх. № 22594].

Passing of the Banner of Victory along the Red Square to the sound of the “Victorious March” became an important episode on a compositional level, which has realized the historical relation between the USSR and the Victory at the parade of 1965. The banner group consisted of the Hero of the Soviet Union, K. Samsonov, a battalion commander being in the Reichstag seizure; the Heroes of the Soviet Union, Sergeant Mikhail Egorov and Sergeant Meliton Kantariya, who have raised the Banner of Victory over defeated Berlin. The guard of honour and platoon of young drummers marched right behind the banner bearers. Thus, two axes of the festival appeared again: retrospective (war veterans) and futuristic (young drummers) united by the symbol of the Victory. The parade columns consisting of cadets of military academies as well as the military of the Red Army of Moscow military garrison marched right behind the Banner of Victory. Passing of military equipment, artillery, tanks and antiaircraft mountings as well as missile troops, within which the weapons of various calibres have been demonstrated, has enclosed the parade of 1965.

While the combatants, front-line soldiers most distinguished in the battle participated in the first Victory Parade on June 24, 1945, in 1965 the parade was marked by including the successors in the parade columns, who have maintained the tradition of

¹ Author's note

military glory of their fathers. Now, the motives of combat and battle were not perceived as exclusively historical ones. The plenty of various and contemporary demonstrated weapons and equipment began to act as the weapons to fight, as those, which only would have to become the Soviet youth's tool to combat for the futuristic project, the communism, rather than as those, by means of which the Victory has once been completed. The image of enemy appears here in a particularly different way now. It appears as the enemy being at the borders, the living enemy, the real enemy that would have yet to be defeated rather than the image of the enemy defeated in the past. The concept of the parade was aimed at the past, which acted in the festival agenda as the reminder to the present enemy, rather than at the past and its comprehension. Thus, during the parade of 1965 the modern achievements of defence industry and engineering have been demonstrated in the Red Square. While the first Victory Parade was the action of celebration in the veterans, combatants and soldiers-liberators' honour in content, the Parade of 1965 articulated a new discourse of festival to the forefront: the demonstration of relevant military achievements and readiness to overthrow the present enemy being at the borders. At the reception in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses, L. Brezhnev has commented the last parade as follows: "Today, in the Red Square, we have seen that our Armed Forces have everything, which is necessary to repulse the enemy. The cruellest retribution is waiting for that, who would try to disturb the inviolability of our borders, our peaceful labour" [Архипов, Репин]. Along with other parades held in the Red Square², the Parade of 1965 was an original form of Armed Forces' report to the people and government of the USSR about their preparedness to perform the military duty.

The basic vectors of celebrating the Victory Day on May 09, 1965 were as follows: canonization of the historical events in the paradigm of the present time; perpetuation of a Soviet soldier's feat through representation of such elements as bearing out the Banner of Victory; demonstrative nature in representing the modern military equipment and innovations of military engineering thought underscoring the contemporary technogenic and militarist nature of the festival aimed at implementation of futuristic project by subsequent generations.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the composition of celebrating the Victory Day in the Soviet period came not only to holding the military parades and mass celebrations. Thus, in 1975, within the framework of celebrating the Victory Day in the Red Square, the festive mass demonstration of Moscow youth took place [Дни всенародных торжеств]. Swearing the oaths, the young people have pledged allegiance to the communist party of the Soviet Union to the sound of "Internationale" [Андреев, Бордюгов]. As in the Victory parade, the exportation of the Victory ideas might be clearly traced here, which was implemented through the idea of Internationale as well as the futurological motives of the festival reflected in participation of the youth.

On May 09, 1975, the Red Square was filled with the thousands of the members of the Komsomol of the Soviet Union, who have brought the transparencies containing the slogans, red flags and banners with them. The young people became the direct

² Author's note. For example, annually, within the framework of celebrating October Revolution Day and May Day, the military parade was held.

participants of the action demonstrating their preparedness to immediately go to the front like the soldiers in 1941. The members of the Komsomol have shown their preparedness in front of those, who had been at war in person. The veterans of the Great Patriotic War, the Heroes of the Soviet Union and the Heroes of Socialist Labour, representatives of the party and the Komsomol organizations, and the visitors from abroad have stood in front of them at the platforms of the Mausoleum.

At 13 o'clock, after a chime of bells, the member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the First Secretary of the Moscow City Committee of the CPSU, V. Grishin; the First Secretary of the Moscow Committee of the CPSU, V. Konotop; the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Komsomol, E. Tyazhelnikov, and other members of the bureau have mounted the platform of the Mausoleum.

After the introductory speech of the First Secretary of the Moscow City Committee of the Komsomol, V. Shadrin, the veterans of the Great Patriotic War have appeared in the Red Square to the song "Veterans' Souls Do Not Age" (music by S. Tulikov and lyrics by Ya. Belinskii) and a great tornado of applause. By eroding the time gap, this song was constructing the axiological relation between the past and the present, where the veterans, the conquering heroes of the past battles, have demonstrated by their personal example their preparedness to the young generation. After the column of the veterans has come up to the members of mass demonstration, the melody of the song "May There Always Be Sunshine" began to play having called already new participants, who are ready to perform their duty after the members of the Komsomol. Now, the young pioneers have run out towards the veterans and presented the flowers to each of them. The semiotics of this episode demonstrates the dialogics and intergenerational continuity in the memory and confrontation to the enemy. A separate group of children has also mounted the platform of the Mausoleum and presented the flowers to the members of the government. The very appearance of the children at the platform has demonstrated the updated level of vertical relations at the festival, the platform belongs to the children, to the future, and it is being made now, with close relationship between the party and the nation. Applause was cut short by the command: "Attention to bearing out the battle banners of the units and formations of the Soviet Army and the Navy, the banners of the Komsomol organizations of Moscow and Moscow region!". Simultaneously with bearing out the banners in the Red Square, using the lexical markers of sacrality, the speaker's voice stated: "There are *holy relics* of our nation in the Red Square, which are *burnt* by the smoke of battles, the banners of the Great Patriotic [War] *stained* with blood of the Soviet soldiers...". After bearing out of the banners, V. Shadrin has delivered a congratulatory address. Following the phrase: "The flowers, which we have brought to the Mausoleum, are a symbol of our wholehearted devotion to Lenin's work, the work of the communist party founded by him", the members of the mass demonstration of youth have gone to the pedestal of Lenin's Mausoleum to lay the flowers to S. Tulikov and L. Oshanin's song "Lenin is Forever with You". The future soldiers, young "flowers of life" laid the flowers to the monument of the past. Now it is the gathered audience to whom the function of the mass hero was delegated, by whose actions the whole ceremonial of

celebrating the Victory Day of 1975 was held. In other words, the members were given the greater volume of ceremonial operations.

The next episode was laying of the “garland of memory” to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier constructed in 1967 in the Alexander Garden as per the design of the architects D. Burdin, V. Klimov, Yu. Rabaev, and the sculptor N. Tomskii. Symphony No. 6 by P. Tchaikovskii accompanied by the speakers’ voices was the acoustic comment thereto. Rasul Gamzatov’s poems going on declaring the axis of fathers and children (past and present) were heard in a memorial manner, where already each attendee was considered as the part of a large army, whose relevant function was to be the soldier.

Later, the Hero of the Soviet Union, the military fighter pilot, Aleksey Maresyev, was given the floor to speak on behalf of the veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Inter alia, the following words were heard on behalf of him: “By the example of the fathers storming the ‘Winter [Palace]’, smashing the White Guards and foreign invaders, we have fought for the communism, for the happiness of our children and our children’s children thinking about the Homeland and the party”. Thus, the semantic turn to the civil war theme, and, thereby, integration of historical contexts of the civil war and the events of the Great Patriotic War into the united celebratory canon may be observed. He equalized the feats of arms of our fathers and the same feats of young workers constructing the Baikal-Amur Mainline and KAMAZ. It is clear that celebrating of the Victory Day does not come anymore only to celebration in victorious people’s honour and actualization of historical memory of the people. The concept of Victory, which is put to the celebratory canon, starts to perform the accumulative function, i.e. it acts as the collector of other merits and victories not being directly relevant to the Great Patriotic War. Thus, by transmitting the ideologemes, the Victory Day acted here as the structuring of relevant political and ideological public agenda [Наследники Победы. Российский государственный архив кинофотодокументов. арх.№ 24988].

The representatives of young workers of the country were the members of mass demonstration acting from the central platform. The markers of changed narratives of the festival were continued in the performances of young workers, where the feat still remained the subject of the heroic, however, the nature of this feat expanded, and now it (the feat) is not only military, but also civil, at the factories and in peaceful life. Furthermore, the preservation of futurological project being firmly present in the festival and aimed at achieving future accomplishments relying on the historic experience of the victories of older generation may be observed.

Following the performers, the speaker’s voice was religiously and ecstatically heard again like the liturgical appeal: “Homeland! Listen to the oath of allegiance of the youth to Lenin’s precepts, to the work of the communist party of the Soviet Union!”, continued, as is due to the religious practice, with oath taking and community initiatory singing of “Internationale”. Following the religious initiatory practices, the toasts to the Communist party and nation’s health concluded the ceremony.

It may be affirmed that in the context of celebrating the Victory Day of 1975 in Moscow, the futurological project became the subject of the festival, where the function of the soldier was given to the young generation, and the battle was transferred to the space of peaceful life, where by retaining the militant connotation the feat became the

labour and industrial accomplishment. In the content of the festival, the project of political policy of the state was offered to the youth. Thus, we can see the expanding tendency of the festive ceremony becoming apparent in admitting new narratives, attribution and axiological guidelines not being directly relevant to the events of the Great Patriotic War to the ceremony's semantic and semiologic range.

Celebration of the Victory Day throughout the history of the Soviet Union is marked by preservation of many traditional elements. However, having preserved the traditions set up as far back as by Brezhnev in the celebrations of 1965, the Victory Day of 1985 has undergone some artistic and staging transformations.

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