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RECONSTRUCTION OF CELEBRATORY CANON: METAMORPHOSES AND RELICS

Реконструкция праздничного канона: метаморфозы и рудименты

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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, централизованной структуры к дискретной, двоичной, с выраженной театрально-декорационной доминантой, использующей симулякры (декорации, реквизит, костюм) и исторически чуждые контексты, позволяющие эксплуатировать нарратив Победы для легитимации современных социально-политических установок и практик.

The period from 1985 to 1990 was accompanied by a series of social, and cultural and political metamorphoses having undoubtedly affected the festive culture and, therefore, this period requires some specifications.

Firstly, it should be noted that the start of radical economic and political transformations closely related to the new term of “perestroika” emerged, being put forward by M. Gorbachev, who had assumed power, has been set since 1985. Democratization and liberalization of political system and state institutions were aimed at mechanical improvement of that system.

Secondly, in summer 1985 the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU has made a decision on unilateral cessation of nuclear weapons tests. The political elite of the country has initiated the refocusing in foreign policy, as well as generation of peace-building guidelines in contrast to the militarist ones.

Thirdly, that year the policy of restoring the political dialogue between the USSR and the United States of America was proclaimed. Such an agenda has affected the discourse and semantics of the celebration.

On May 09, 1985, in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary from the date of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, the Victory Parade was held in the Red Square in Moscow. In its content, the setting of the festive space was similar to the previous anniversaries of celebration. V. Lenin traditionally portrayed the central part of the State Department Store’s wall. The image was inscribed in the dates: 1945-1985. There was the slogan “We have defended the world, and we will preserve peace!” on one of the panels. The people of various generations were depicted thereon as well, and the Order of Victory was at the centre of the figure. The linen containing the following inscription: “The nation and the party are united!” was set nearby. The Kremlin walls were decorated with the coats of arms of the Soviet Union and the Union republics. A huge Order of Victory was also set on the building of the Historical Museum.

The solemn parade started immediately after the congratulatory address of the Minister of Defence of the USSR, the marshal of the Soviet Union, S. Sokolov, and played Anthem.

The Banner of Victory was brought in the Red Square to the drum-roll of Moscow Military Music College cadets. The banner group and the standards of the fronts of the Great Patriotic War have marched with that Banner. Following them, the veterans of the Great Patriotic War have taken part in the parade. Many of them were the participants of the first Victory Parade. The orchestra performed the march song “The Sacred War” and march “Farewell of Slavianka”. Just as in the parade of 1945, the military personnel of the Polish People’s Army have marched in the square. The military personnel and the veterans of the Armed Forces of Czechoslovakia have marched to take their place [Мир отстояли – мир защитим!]. The processes of democratization have been reflected in the

fact that apart from the active military personnel, the members of the armies of other countries, the veterans of the Great Patriotic War, the Heroes of the Soviet Union and the full cavaliers of the Order of Glory were integrated into the parade of 1985. Later, the column of rear workers, the Heroes of Socialist Labour, being evidence of consolidation of the feat both among the combatants and among the workers during the Great Patriotic War, has passed in the parade to the orchestra setting of the song “Victory Day” to the march. It should be noted that the representatives of the peaceful feat have appeared in the column of the Victory Parade for the first time.

The march of the composite regiment consisting of the military personnel in uniform of the Soviet soldiers of the Great Patriotic War concluded the historical part of the parade. The people, who were not the participants in the events, have worn the military uniform for the first time, and, thereby, it (the uniform) has acquired the function of costume importing the aspect of theatricality into the context of the parade.

The second part of the parade was the march of the Acting army of the Soviet Union; it was represented by the columns of the military personnel of Moscow and Leningrad garrisons, the cadets of military academies and colleges.

At the end of the parade, the Soviet military equipment of the Second World War: T-34, SU-100, Katyusha multiple rocket launchers, antiaircraft emplacements and artillery have passed along the Red Square. The modern military equipment was also presented to the audience to take the place of the Second World War equipment. The march of combined orchestra traditionally concluded the Victory Parade in 1985.

Turning from consideration of the parade of 1985 to the last parade in the history of the USSR timed to celebration of the Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War, which was held on May 09, 1990, we may establish the radical transformations in some staging techniques. Domestic political and social transformations would be reflected therein, with which the country enters into the last decade of the twentieth century. It has become apparent in setting, semantic accents and structure of the episodes.

Now, a big poster declaring the vital and anti-war pathos containing the slogan: “In the name of life on Earth” and depicting the red flag bordered only by the inscription: “Victory”, without the traditional order, was set on the building of the Historical Museum. In contrast to the Victory parades of the previous years, the State Department Store building was also demilitarized and deprived of authoritarian portraits, which is the evidence of dissolution of the cult of personality in a flow of democratic transformations. More generalized and deideologized panel depicting the Order of the Patriotic War replaced the portraits of the leaders across the Mausoleum. The flagstaves and flags of the Union republics were also symptomatically absent, reflecting the break in bonds of the Soviet centre and peripheries. The Kremlin walls have been already freed from the images of coat of arms. The forthcoming collapse of the Soviet state would be already presented by the absence of emblems of the Soviet republics in the semantics of the festive space¹.

¹ In 1991, the collapse of the USSR took place, and, consequently, the process of system disintegration in social culture of the country took place as well.

In 1990, the metamorphoses of artistic and staging techniques in celebrating the Victory Day have applied not only to the exterior visual and performance forms. Thus, the episode standing out of the traditional musical and acoustic pattern of the celebratory canon was included in the traditional riding around of the Soviet forces. When the Minister of Defence of the USSR, the Marshal of the Soviet Union, D. Yazov, inspecting the parade, was returning to the Mausoleum, the tolling of bells from the Ivan the Great Bell Tower was dialogically embedded in the march performed by the combined orchestra and blended with it. A new active object in the semantic geometry of the festival has supplemented the ceremonial. The clerical status of the included object (the Ivan the Great Bell Tower), traditionally uniting with the melodic pattern referring to the orthodox background, has not only provided the Victory Day with new religious connotations, but has also symbolically demonstrated the processes of coalescence of the church and state.

In the address of the Minister of Defence of the USSR to the parade, the markers of changes were distinctly heard: “perestroika”, “dialogue comes to take the confrontation’s place”, “military reform”. The country was changing, and the political priorities, social norms and processes of collective identity were changing together with the country. The anthem of the USSR and the military salute have completed the speech of the Minister of Defence.

While being guided by the preservation of the traditional model of celebrating the Victory Day in Moscow, the organizers have attempted to broaden the means of expression and performance of the demonstrated act. At the beginning of the parade columns, the copy of the Banner of Victory was carried along the Red Square, thereby costuming one of the main symbols of the Great Victory. By continuing the parade procession, following the Banner of Victory, the monumental decoration in the form of the Soviet War Memorial has passed by placed on the base of the truck (the original of the memorial is set in Berlin’s Treptower Park) [День Победы: история военных парадов]. As in 1985, the episode was used, where the military personnel robed in military uniform costume of the Great Patriotic War have passed along the Red Square. Thus, the texture and panoramic horizontal line of the festive space were broadening due to inclusion of new dynamic figures theatricalizing and dynamicizing this space. The substitution of authentic texture of costume and decoration elements (military uniform costume, decorative mobile panels of the monument, copy of the banner) has reflected the crisis of the very system, the process of dethronement of the Soviet performance and uncovering of its decorative frame. The banner was turning into its copy, the war heroes in uniform in the military personnel in the costumes of wartime, and the living witnesses in the decoration of the monument. Thus, the matrix of the festival has inexorably revealed the essence of the Soviet myth: its obvious decorativeness regarding the reality of 1990 [Празднуя день Победы. Российский государственный архив кинофотодокументов. арх.№ 28507].

Summarizing the dynamics of the festival, let us say that the Victory Day originated on May 09, 1945 as the Day of nation-wide celebration and the spontaneous public festival. The Victory Day festival has lost the status of holiday since 1947, and the celebrations were held informally. However, in 1965 the festival acquired new life in

consequence of social necessity to hold the events aimed at realization of collective identity and preservation of the historical memory. Furthermore, this revival became a basis for appearance of new ritual practices canonizing the festival in the culture of the country. Apart from the Red Square, the parades and other forms of celebrating the Victory Day have started to be held in full in other Russian cities as well since then.

Year 1975 has imported new social and political tasks into the structure of the festival. The festival was used as the form of representation of the relevant political agenda; the contexts and content of the festival have expanded. Its historical impermeability was disturbed. Now, it served as the form of representation of the relevant political agenda reflecting not only the past, but it also served as the performance practice constructing the futurological project and correcting the “us-them” identification system setting up the ideological guidelines to the youth.

The Victory Day of 1985 has entered the elements of theatricalization into the artistic and staging solution of the festival. The Victory parade on May 09, 1990 in the Red Square in Moscow, which became the last one in the history of the USSR, has corrected some ritual and ceremonial practices of celebrating the Victory Day by grasping these metamorphoses. One more theatricalized element was introduced: demonstration passage of the monumental movable decoration made in the form of the Soviet War Memorial [Айрапетян и др.]. The contemporary democratic socio-political agenda of the state was communicated to the audience through the setting and the content of the welcoming speech.

With each new historical turn, the Victory Day was a mediator of sociocultural and axiological agenda. The festival overcomes its closed historical semantic borders, where the basic binary oppositions of this historical structure such as: hero-enemy, space-ours-space-theirs, attack-defence are taken out of the organic historical narrative and put into the contemporary contexts and agendas.

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