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HISTORICAL TEMPORALITY IN CONDITIONS OF MULTIPLE
PUBLICITY

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Abstract

Historical temporality is seen in this paper as an aggregate of characteristics of historical time that guides the features of public historical discourses and representations of history, including historical prospects and retrospects, experience of historical duration, perception of temporal distance between the actual reality and loci of the past or the future. The author describes features of the historical temporality in conditions of multiple publicity that is formed under the influence of society globalization and media digitalization. The study is based upon analysis of public historical discourses and a series of focus groups. Interpretation of the focus group results includes three group of attributes allowing for a description of historical temporality. These attributes are reflective of, first, experience of the historical time; second, temporal characteristics of a balance between things existent and proper, reality and ideal; third, features of temporality related to the change in dominating forms of the historical knowledge. The author comes to a conclusion about a reduced role of historical retrospects and prospects under the new temporality regime that is formed in conditions of multiple publicity. As a result of changes, the reconstruction of a sequence of events, characteristic of historicism is substituted with orientation to actual communications and an aspiration to foresee trends that may create random streams of events that propagate like viral epidemics.

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Keywords: Public history, historical policy, multiple publicity, historical temporality, time, retrospects.



1. Introduction

Recently, a large number of studies appeared dedicated to historical consciousness and discourse (Koselleck, 2002; Wrzosek, 2009), historical policy (Pocock, 2009; Kaposov, 2011; historical policy, 2012), historical culture (History and memory, 2006), historical memory (Assman, 2004). However, most of the studies, especially those based upon surveys, place the emphasis on reconstructing the perception of historical facts, images, plots, eras. Of course, such an approach is justified, as it is oriented to studying the reference points of mass vision of history. However, social and mental foundations of functioning of history in public discourses, mass culture or mundane consciousness require further studies. Timeliness of the stated problematics is related to the fact that in conditions of globalization of social relations and digitalization of media, the foundational premises of public historical discourse undergo significant transformations. It manifests, in particular, in the processes of establishment of multiple publicity and its characteristic new mode of historical temporality. The latter significantly differs from the mode of historical temporality that until recently supported historicism characteristic of the Modern age society and serving as a foundation for historical grand narratives and national identities. Public representations of history of the last decades combine two obvious trends: opening of a great number of museums and historical theme parks on the one hand and creation of historical simulacra and invented stories on the other hand. In the new Memory Wars, previously habitual criteria of significance and rationality of knowledge of the past are blurred, there are trends to simulation and mythologization of history, reduction of influence of scientific argumentation. Historical significance is sacrificed to propaganda, populism, nostalgia and fundamentalism that require from their adepts not knowledge, but a sense of belonging. Transformation of historical temporality serving as a foundation of public historical discourses leads to a loss of integral images of the past, devolving into a loss of consistent social prospects and images of the future. Due to this, there is a need to identify the parameters allowing for a description of transformation of the historical consciousness in the new conditions.

2. Problem Statement

In the modern conditions of globalization of social interactions and digitalization of media, the study of social and mental premises of historical consciousness and historical identities becomes topical, as there are obvious attributes of a significant transformation of the historical temporality. The mode of historical temporality that prevailed in the culture of modern societies starting from the second half of the 18th century and supporting historical grand narratives serving as foundations for national identities ceases to be dominating, while the public forms of the historical consciousness acquire attributes of the new temporality. A shift to a new mode of historical temporality manifests, in particular, in freeing the public forms of thought of historicism and historicism, substituted with presentism and consumerism in relation to the past. These changes, in particular, are manifested in possibilities of virtual representations of history and decay of integral social prospects and retrospects. Correspondingly, there are fundamental transformations of the functions of history in support of identity of imaginary communities, those of including national identities. Thus, a problem appears with description of frameworks determining changes in the mode of the historical temporality in conditions of the modern public sphere that becomes digital, interactive and multiple.

3. Research Questions

The subject of this research is the historical temporality and its transformation in conditions of multiple publicity. The problematic historical temporality is actively developed in the modern scholarly literature (Artog, 2015; Assman, 2013). Of special topicality is an analysis of multiple temporality and multiple publicity (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2011). In modern studies, an idea start to float, that temporality is intimately related with semantic features of the category of time that are determined by social and cultural factors, the paradigm of the era, as well as by historical memory and a historical discourse (Repina, 2007). Of significant interest in the study of temporality of the ontical and ontological order in the “postmetaphysical era” (Konacheva, 2016). A societal transformation in the logic of networked individualism brings up a multifaceted individual temporality as a characteristic of personal existence. In these conditions, memory inversion is interesting for research, as it may undergo multiple interpretations, creating a possibility to look at life from any temporal point, including the moments that go beyond the limits of the historical identity subject’s own life (Yarskaya, 2015). A study in experience of the historical time on behalf of an individual in their concrete practices of approaching history becomes more topical, including the studies of the phenomenon of nostalgia (Nikolai, 2015). Significance of the stated problematic is determined by a link of the historical thought and historiography with national identities (Wrzosek, 2010), which recently also undergo significant transformations.

In this paper, the historical temporality mode is seen as an aggregate of characteristics and codes of historical time that guides the features of historical thought and consciousness, including historical prospects and retrospects, experience of historical duration, perception of temporal distance between the actual reality on the one hand and events of the past or loci of the future on the other hand. The study of transformation of the historical temporality is attempted on the basis of analysis of a number of parameters, including: forms of influence that the sphere of sacral has over the experience of historical time and methods of interconnection between the timeless meanings and the historical time; pursuance of differentiation or universalization of rhythms of time; cyclic or linear experience of the historical time; fixation of the culture on past, present or future; preference for stability or transformations; forms of appearance and alternation of mobilization and stagnation periods.

In the context of the statements of the sociology of knowledge, the historical temporality is reconstructed on the basis of analysis of social transformations that reflect changes in the public sphere, modes of access to the symbolic resource of history, reformatting of social frames of memory in the conditions of globalization.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study is aimed at identifying the features of the historical temporality manifestations in conditions of multiple publicity to describe the attributes of the transformation that the historical consciousness undergo being one of the major sources of national identity formation.

5. Research Methods

Notwithstanding the conceptual and stylistic diversity of public approach to history in various societies and cultures, one may identify some relatively universal features reflecting the fundamental level

of a thought process characteristic of a certain era. Due to variance in manifestation of these universals, a certain level of abstraction is required for their model description. One of prospective directions for such abstraction is considering the historical temporality in an intimate link with a public sphere transformation, whose social and structural features determine the content and peculiarities of functioning of public historical discourses in conditions of various institutional modes of access to the symbolic resource of history. In conditions of multiple publicity, the historical grand narratives are blurred, as there is a significant increase in competition between various histories that previously, in condition of a limited access to interpretations of the past, were forced out of the public sphere. It relates to various alternative histories, loser histories, minority histories, personal and family histories, local histories of cities and provinces, histories of those communities, strata or groups that were previously deprived of their voice. In this connection, a question arises, how the historical temporality reflects a relatively recent situation of competition between a multitude of historical narratives.

The historical temporality and historical consciousness are considered on the basis of analysis of historical discourses and representations of history that reflect the trend for public functioning of history in the context of public sphere transformation. In 2016-2018, for the purpose of the study into certain attributes of the historical temporality, 7 focus group sessions were conducted with students of Moscow institutions of higher education majoring in social sciences and humanities (82 participants in total, aged from 17 to 22, 43% male, 57% female). The students majoring in history were intentionally excluded from the focus groups; 32% of participants stated their interest in history.

6. Findings

Analysis of results from a series of focus group sessions allowed identifying the following features of the historical consciousness and historical temporality. The students participating in the studies pointed to various sources for obtaining knowledge of history: historical studies, literary works, films, video blogs, excursions, museums, facts of the urban environment. However, a clear domination of audiovisual sources was established, at least in formation of the background historical knowledge. Resorting to textual sources is primarily linked to a special interest in a certain topic or an author. Presence of the past in the urban environment is mainly perceived in a positive way. However, the largest interest is caused by locations and facts of the urban environment where the resort to the past is oriented towards the density of communications and creation of experiences (historical expositions in the streets, reconstructions during city celebrations). The participants also showed interest to locations and facts of the urban environment that kept traces of the past (architectural monuments, memorial houses, unofficial sites of commemoration). The least interest was caused by the monument-messages, oriented towards translation of a symbolic content that supports historical grand narratives. Thus, expectations from appealing to history are related, first, to experience, and second, to genuineness. The didactic function of history is perceived with less enthusiasm.

The participants of the focus groups linked their interest in historical plots to emotions that may result from immersion in other eras and worlds. However, a question of genuineness of such worlds is not problematized: they may be based upon valid scientific facts or imagined. A significant part of research participants see no threat in the fact that historical knowledge loses its genuineness and is replaced with

imagination. Necessity for rigorous scientific reconstruction of the historical past is assessed by the participants as certainly important, but does not stir personal interest in most of them. In their opinion, the main criterion of the value of the historical knowledge is its practicality. It may be consumerist (history creating a new experience) or symbolic (history of country, city, university creating reputation). One of the significant expressions of usefulness of history, in the opinion of the focus group participants are communications that allow involving people into public history projects. Such projects, based on a possibility to integrate one's private and familial history into the history of the country are usually getting positive feedback.

The highest interest was stirred by personal histories or separate images, heroes and stories of which are actualized randomly (walks through the city, visiting excursions, museums, city parks). At the same time, resorting to history is sometimes linked by the participants to a consistent chronological narrative. For example, most participants do not correlate historical monuments that reflect problematic and controversial aspects of history with grand narratives and current public discussions appealing to them. Contradictory interpretations of historical topics and subjects are not perceived and unsurmountable. Many participants of the research expressed an idea that the view of history may differ depending on personal experience, culture, political preferences and other differences. Correspondingly, an idea of a necessity of a tolerant attitude to different opinions and creeds was widely supported.

Experience from reading the historical literature or watching historical films is not linked to opposition of the past and the present. Similar to characters in many modern films about time travel to the past, the participants of the research understand that in the past there were different conceptualizations and practices, but they do not see the difference between the present and the past as irreducible. There are clear trends for modernizing the past and its interpretation exclusively from the position of today.

As a whole, the results of the focus groups work conform to the hypothesis of model transformation of the historical temporality in conditions of multiple publicity. Interpretation of the focus group results was based upon identification of three groups of attributes allowing for a description of historical temporality: first, the attributes reflective of experience and perception of the historical time; second, temporal characteristics of a balance between an ideal and the reality; third, features of temporality related to the change in dominating forms of the historical knowledge.

The first group of attributes reflects changes in coding of the historical time. History, unlike myth, is based upon the idea of irreversibility of time: the past passes and never comes back, while the horizon of expectations is determined by perception of the experience. A type of coding the historical time that prevailed until recently allowed supporting the principle of historicism in political and social thought. A mode of temporality based on such coding of the historical time was formed in European societies during the era that R. Koselleck called a "crucial time", a time between 1750 and 1850, when reasoning about society reoriented from a range of experience to the horizon of expectations (Koselleck, 2010). Intellectual trends of mid-18th century, and especially those of 19th and 20th centuries are linked to a gradual expansion of historicism, and in some cases that of historicism. It reflected reorientation of thought from representing attributes of order to identifying series of states that certain entity go through in their development. Historicism gets wide circulation under the influence of new discoveries in the history of ancient civilizations, as well as the ideal of biological evolution, where description is based on a sequential and incremental

nature of processes. During this period, there was a significant rise of interest to history of not only society, but of natural systems as well. Outside the studies of history, there appear a history of Earth, a history of the Solar System, a history of cosmos, a history of life, a history of ocean, etc. A public approach to history within this paradigm is determined not only by the interest to the past, but by a necessity to support the very nature of thought concerning dynamic and non-permanent systems, be they social, political or natural. History becomes necessary for self-description of the constantly changing modernity that turns its focus towards the future.

However, in conditions of multiple publicity, time is shrunk to a point. History becomes a consumer object, while the consumption is taking place here and now. Perception of time in the multiple publicity is formed out of point moments of here-and-now, each of which is relatively autonomous. Short-term consumption becomes more important than orientation towards the links between the past, the present and the future. Thus, recoding of historical time leads to history losing its public functions of supporting relatively stable specimens of social and political order and its legitimization. Production of experience becomes the main function of history. Reorientation of perception of the historical time from experience of the past and horizons of expectation towards presentism also manifests in history being displaced by historical memory. Memory reflects the past that presents here-and-now and in the form in which it presents in the here-and-now.

The second group of attributes is related to the temporal features of turning to ideal and corresponding the ideal with the actual reality. Starting from the crucial time of 1750-1850s, postulating an ideal becomes the foundation of political ideologies that created mental possibilities for correlating the existing reality with an ideal. By postulating their ideal, certain political ideology correlated this ideal not to the reality, but to time: according to N. Luhmann, “temporalization and ideologization to a certain degree help each other in situations of compensating the loss of reality” (Luhmann, 1991). For example, during the modern era, the metaphysical principle of world duplication was formed: an ideal world was postulated to create a possibility to describe the real world. As a result, ideal concepts expressed in the myths of the Golden Age moved from the mythological and artistic imagination into historical consciousness. That is why the ideal characteristics of the Golden Age were thought of as if they already happened in history or would be possible in a future. As R. Koselleck showed, the main political concepts in which the actual social and political reality is described starting from the crucial time, reflect a strain between the present realia and ideal project of the future, between the space of experience and horizon of expectations. In the content of the political concepts thus a historical temporarily presents that is linked to a historiosophic justification of attaining a political goal. In particular, it is true to appearance of such concepts as republicanism and liberalism, reflecting the strain between the present realia and the ideal project of the future (or, in some cases, the ideal image of the past).

However, in the modern conditions of multiple publicity, postulating an ideal and appealing to ideal undergo significant transformations. The ideal ceases being singularly exclusive or common for large imagined communities, but becomes plural. First of all, it refers to a change in the addressee of the ideal's influence. Under multiple publicity, the ideal applies neither to spiritual, nor rational, but to sensual and emotional. In constant fluctuations between the effects of meaning and effects of presence characteristic of culture, the center of gravity shifts towards the effects of presence (Gumbrecht, 2004). The social ideal may

no longer be described as singular or universal, as the reality itself becomes plural. Virtualization of the plural, multiple publicity allows reproducing the participation effects, thus providing plurality of ideal.

Domination of historicism was ensured for several recent centuries exactly by history performing the function of connecting (or disconnecting) the reality and the ideal, the existent and the proper. It was the foundation of appeal to history, starting from the second half of the 18th century: the historical process was understood as ingress of ideal into the reality, while the historical identities were oriented towards the horizons of expectation. Replacement of ideal with virtual frees the public sphere of a dictate of historicism. As actualization of virtual, unlike establishment of ideal, happens instantly, the virtual has no need for historicism as a special coding of temporal duration.

In the modern multiple publicity, there is a crisis of genuineness, which to a certain degree is a result of individualism and authenticity. Appearance may reproduce only surface effects, and looking for depth behind these effects becomes meaningless. Ideals requiring prolonged efforts to approach them are perceived as illusory. However, renunciation of these illusions is accompanied with abandoning depth and leads to blurring the images of the future.

The third group of attributes that allows describing peculiarities of the historical temporality in conditions of multiple publicity is related to changes in the forms of historical knowledge dominating in the public sphere. These attributes include changing concepts of the source of knowledge, its validity and forms of expression. Multiple publicity is characterized with shifting the accents to imagination and those affects of perception of history that are capable of bringing emotions and feelings. The criterion of validity of knowledge is no longer its authenticity, but rather the number of references. Forms of representation of historical knowledge change as well: now it is expressed not through epic texts or grand historical narratives, but rather through telling stories: personal, familial, urban, corporate. The main function of these stories is not to reproduce genuineness nor to support broad identities, but to create links and make contacts. Nowadays, publicly narrated stories are assessed from the point of view of their usefulness in reproducing relatively stable links and management of streams of customers, tourists, voters, subscribers and users.

Identified changes in the mode of historical temporality in conditions of multiple publicity are related to social transformation, primarily with globalization and the digital revolution. In conditions of globalization, orientation of public representations of history onto national language and national identities ceases being exclusive and self-sufficient. Significant aspects and levels of social relations require being expressed in the language of audiovisual images that may easily transgress national and cultural boundaries. A multitude of audiences arise that create their own discourses and their own public spheres.

In the modern society, hierarchical relations are substituted with networked individualism. As a result, class, stratum, professional, ethnic, denominational and other boundaries are blurred. A society that was described by these differences is transformed into a multitude of individuals whose interactions are characterized by their chaotic nature. Interactive media environment allows avoiding hierarchy and recreating this chaotic multiple publicity at the cost of virtualizing the public sphere.

As the society is transformed into a multitude, it becomes fast-changing and unpredictable. Description models of the multitude may not proceed neither from reproduction of order, nor even from reproduction of a sequence of states of this order. Now we are talking about finding streams, their designation and following them. Reorientation of thought from description of a sequence to identification

of streams may be observed in various spheres. In the postnonclassical paradigm of science, the historical description of a sequence of state of developing systems is replaced with problem-oriented studies on streams reflecting change of states in complex open and dynamic systems characterized with nonlinear processes and self-organization. The historical sequence of the describing the changing states is displaced by a popular concept of black swans: unpredictable events that are capable of radically changing the direction of development. Ideas about peripheral factors that may exert decisive influence and randomness that prevails over regularity spread from one area of knowledge to another. In the multiple publicity a communicative mind is generated that integrates individualized and disconnected multitude into networked communities and communicative streams, whose influence grows and is not limited with digital media environment.

Under these conditions, customary functions of historicism become irrelevant. History appears in new formats, such as storytelling – telling stories with the aim of attracting attention to hold or amplify streams of voters, tourists, customers, users. Under conditions of the multiple publicity and interactive media environment, random and weakly connected events may be linked more rigidly by means of stories that play a role of connecting dissimilar trends in conditions when reality becomes dynamic.

Changes in the mode of historical temporality in conditions of multiple publicity facilitates development of projects in open participatory history: a history that is based not upon big ideas previously supporting the certainty in being capable to foresee the expected, but upon integration of multiple, plural and often contradictory knowledge that creates expectation of unpredictable. The open history is created in the modern societies by societal participation. This participation is based, first, upon an obvious willingness of social networking site users to tell the stories about themselves; second, upon interactive technologies allowing integrating and aggregating multiple knowledge, and; third, upon effects of communicative knowledge and crowd-sourcing based upon diverse local knowledge. As a result of transformations, regular people and communities become subjects of history, while successful historical projects usually has no obvious link to historical grand narratives.

7. Conclusion

Differences in the modes of historical temporality accumulate in the nature of time coding, appeal to ideal and fixation of prevailing forms of knowledge. All these aspects reflect significant changes in the historical consciousness, and public representations of history, which are related to changes in the public sphere. Until recently a type of historical temporality prevailed that supported communication on the topic of historical grand narrations, whose addressees were primarily imagined communities: nations, classes, political alliances. However, in the modern conditions of competition between multiple and often contradictory historical narratives, the grand narratives no longer integrate the society, but rather split it, creating risks of conflicting interpretation. As a result of changes, the historical retrospects and prospects reconstructing a sequence of states are substituted with an aspiration to foresee new trends capable of creating random streams of events that spread like viral epidemics and then dissolving without noticeable traces or consequences.

Features of public functioning of history in the modern society may be described in the context of establishment of the multiple publicity. Attributes of the new paradigm of public appeal to history are

obvious, however, the new forms of appeal to history have not yet acquired necessary social validity to provide them with enough persuasion. The conducted research allows refining a number of qualitative parameters of appealing to history in conditions of the multiple publicity. However, the question of a degree of incidence of the new trends and their quantitative ratio with the previous forms of appeal to history goes beyond the scope of this study.

Another important question that stays outside of this paper is that of a correlation between transformations of the national historical consciousness and global trends. The research described in the paper was primarily aimed at identifying the paradigmatic level of transformation of the historical consciousness and historical temporality that reflects manifestation of universal trends in various societies and cultures. Of course, a number of factors exist in each concrete society that facilitates specific manifestations of the global trends. However, special analysis of such factors necessitates a separate study.

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