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## **Historical memory and oblivion in the cultural space as a representation of the past in the present**

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**Abstract**

The correlation of tradition and innovation in the culture space of Russia is an actual problem of socio-cultural practice. However the ways of transfer of positive experience are not found still. The decision of this global problem depends on the existence of Historical memory and its connection with its able to turn into the factor of evolution and development. In another hand, when new people reproduce something new in new conditions it is the creation of something new. Memory it is not only something that we remember but and that what we forget. The social aspect of this problem is that with help of legacy are over come which prevent to be a new form of life. The historical memory is a necessary condition of spiritual self-definition without which the life of impossible anyway.

**Keywords**

Culture, tradition, innovation, memory, oblivion, legacy, past, present.

**Introduction**

There is some kind of magical power in Space that allures us to its diversity, beckons us to enter its treasury of

countless secrets and "white spots", learn more, in detail, about the "matter of life" filling it. In short, to see and understand what is happening, something important, secret, happening "here and now", in the

invisible networks of parallels and meridians, verticals and horizontals, boundaries and directions – all those spatial characteristics that facilitate or impede our earthly existence.

Belonging, along with the time, to the main feature of matter, the main condition of our being, the Space, as its fundamental geographic reality, is filled with a great sense.

In the everyday routine of life it throws off the categorical philosophical clothes. Without losing its natural identity it is completely filled with the flesh of life, exists in the concepts, symbols and directions, with us staying behind – modern people with their concerns, hopes, sorrows and joys. People driven by their goals move in space, find something, lose something... It is the Space that creates in us something that noticed in his time Zh. Zhores, speaking of Russian as widely and scatteredly living people.

### **Historical past in the cultural context of the present**

N.A. Berdyaev wrote about the "power of space over the Russian soul": "Vast Russian lands, and greatheartedness of Russian soul pressed the Russian energy, negated the opportunity to move towards extensiveness. This greatheart-

edness did not require intense energy and culture. Vast Russian space required humility and sacrifice from the Russian soul, but they also guarded a Russian man and gave him a sense of security"<sup>1</sup>. The power of space over the "Russian soul" in the context of search for innovative development of Russia was described by A.S. Homyakov, P.Y. Chaadayev, F.M. Dostoevsky, V.S. Solovyov, K.N. Leontiev and many other Russian thinkers who were genuinely interested in fate of Russia, its power and bloom in all areas of human activity. And, taking into account all private disagreements most Russian philosophers still linked the issues of Russian development with preservation and strengthening of national and cultural traditions.

The issue on interrelation between the **traditional** and the **innovative** in cultural space of Russia remains to be the most important problem of scientific research today, especially by means of cultural discourse. However, deepening processes of globalization, ethnic conflicts allow us to conclude that the mechanism for transfer of positive cultural experience – both in terms of the traditions' development and within the frameworks of the search for optimal innovation, is not worked out yet.

<sup>1</sup> Berdyaev, N.A. (1990), *The fate of Russia [Sud'ba Rossii]*, MGU, Moscow, p. 67.

The solution to this global and overarching objectives largely depends on the fact that the relationship of the traditional and the innovative in Russian cultural space is concentrated around issues of *historical memory* and, consequently, the *historical oblivion* too, for the memory is the second aspect of oblivion, which, fortunately, is never dark. I fully admit that the past can become even the ideal<sup>2</sup> and benchmark for actions of modern society, but only after being thoroughly forgotten in its historical specifics, often as a kind of "white spots" in history. At the same time the past is more often reflected in presence already in an idealized form. Each generation of Russian people will always have their own Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Alexander Nevsky.

"In a context of historical memory oblivion – as rightly pointed V.I. Markov – is usually perceived as a kind of loss, deprivation. However oblivion is a multifaceted and multifunctional phenomenon, always capable of turning into an element of evolution, both of history and culture in general. Culture never outlives its time"<sup>3</sup>. Deep, archetypal lay-

ers of cultural memory usually emerge during the crisis and begin to re-define the orientation of human activity. "In this sense, oblivion has never been dark. There are situations typical of the history when social communities are moving forward to something new, with the idealized past being their benchmark"<sup>4</sup>. This is understandable, since the crisis is a cease of succession, way into the void, the unknown and the chaos. Psychologically, these moments need any support allowing to find the lost soil.

Often spending time in China I was convinced that the craze of modern Chinese for Confucianism "from top to bottom" is nothing but nostalgia for the bygone "golden age" with "wise emperors" and "ministers", "children honoring their parents" and ancestors in general. The whole story, the whole philosophy of modern China, humanities in general are permeated by concepts of Confucius, that are extrapolated to different spheres of reality. China, like no other, demonstrates today loyalty to the thesis that there is no complete oblivion in the history and moreover, it should not exist.

2 Cf. Aleeva, L.M. (2011), "Ponyatie ideal'nogo v smene kul'turnykh paradigm", ["Concept of the ideal in cultural paradigms changing"], *Language. Philology. Culture*, No 3, pp. 27-47.

3 Markov, V.I. (2008), "Oblivion like a catharsis", *The Second Russian Congress. Cultural diversity: from past to future*.

*Program. Abstracts* ["Zabvenie kak katarsis", *Vtoroi Rossiiskii kul'turologicheskii kongress. Kul'turnoe mnogoobrazie: ot proshlogo k budushchemu. Programma. Tezisy dokladov*], St. Petersburg, p. 202.

4 Ibid.

It is in times of crisis, especially the crises of the global order, when acts of "fathers'" generations start to be denied and appeal to the experience and achievements of the "grandfathers" takes place. An ostensible return "to the roots" turns into paving ways to the future. Especially, because *recreating the old* by new people in new conditions can not be anything but actually *the creation of the new*. (Incidentally, this is one version of Hegel's "cunning of reason" which leads people to alienated ways of history). But the past can become the ideal and the action reference only by being thoroughly forgotten in its historical specifics, being presented only in an idealized form. Otherwise, for the new generations it could look quite repulsive in terms of modern ideas about life.

It is widely believed that "a tradition, understood as historical memory, is not only a legacy, but also includes the transfer of cultural experiences, i.e. its perception in a new context, including oblivion"<sup>5</sup>. The question is how to think

of this context, first of all, how to understand the category of "historical oblivion"? In my opinion, promising are the model of history philosophy developed in hermeneutics by G. Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, as well as a communication theory of Jürgen Habermas<sup>6</sup>. The hermeneutical category of "using" historical memory and tradition is successfully developed by P. Ricoeur in his study on the interrelation between memory and oblivion. His motto – "to be able to remember, but not to become a hostage to one's own memory"<sup>7</sup>. In other words, P. Ricoeur posits the idea of "fair memory", which is located between the memory that forgets everything, and the memory that remembers everything. Thus the "commensurate memory" implicitly means "oblivion". P. Ricoeur considered two basic types of oblivion: oblivion as "eras-

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*Kul'turnoe mnogoobrazie: ot proshlogo k budushchemu. Programma. Tezisy dokladov*], St. Petersburg, p. 203.

5 Linchenko, A.A. (2008), "The dialectics of memory and oblivion in the understanding of relationships in traditional and new culture", *The Second Russian Congress. Cultural diversity: from past to future. Program. Abstracts* ["Dialektika pamyati i zabveniya v ponimaniy sootnosheniya traditsionnogo i novogo v kul'ture", *Vtoroi Rossiiskii kul'turologicheskii kongress*.

6 Gadamer, H.G. (1988), *Truth and method: Fundamentals of philosophical hermeneutics* [*Istina i metod: osnovy filosofskoi germeneyvtiki*], Progress, Moscow, 704 p.; *Modern social theory: Bourdieu, Gidens, Habermas* [*Sovremennaya sotsial'naya teoriya: Burd'e, Gidens, Khabermas*], NGU, Novosibirsk, 1995, 120 p.

7 Ricoeur, P. (2002), "The dialectics of memory and oblivion", *Cultural studies: digest* ["Dialektika pamyati i zabveniya", *Kul'turologiya: Daidzhest*], Moscow, p. 57.

ing traces" and oblivion as a "memory reserve". However, the 'commensurate memory', according to Ricoeur, must turn around "peaceful memory". Within its frames "ethical concepts of guilt, forgiveness and repentance should acquire special significance"<sup>8</sup>. Such a question means that the central concept along with the "*historical truth*" is the concept of "*historical justice*". However, it seems to me, that the achievement of historical justice and peaceful memory is only possible through social justice in general.

Thus, the memory – it is not only what we remember; it is what we forget as well. By transforming reality, oblivion allows developing a personality. This is *therapeutic function* of oblivion. The social aspect of the problem is that with the help of oblivion those elements of heritage preventing a new form of life are overcome.

For example, in his essay Zh. Baudrillard encourages to forget Foucault. The essay is called – "Forget Foucault." But forgetting Foucault means to forget Freud, and to forget Freud means pushing a layer of certain philosophical views out of European identity. But this is the relevance of Freudian program's oblivion, which is based on the fact that Baudrillard sees the roots of today's

world anthropological catastrophe in "apologetics of withdrawing any human experience into oneself". And these older, according to Baudrillard, views of the Enlightenment "are killing philosophical thought in Europe"<sup>9</sup>.

Diachronic nature of history and culture in whole inevitably involves the transformation of their core values, traditional forms and views. Oblivion in this context serves as a kind of "container" where, in frames of the figurative language, "some (for various reasons not relevant at the moment) elements of the historic and cultural experiences are temporarily put into for the purpose of preservation and reactualization in future when they will again be necessary for its development "at a new stage" of the historical and cultural dynamics. In brief, this is dialectic of memory and oblivion in the context of interrelation between the traditional and the innovative in culture.

However, before we further develop the idea, given in the theme of the pub-

9 Makarov, A.I. (2008), "Damned memory. On the functions of oblivion in the culture", *The Second Russian Congress. Cultural diversity: from past to future. Program. Abstracts* ["Proklyataya pamyat'. O funktsiyakh zabveniya v kul'ture", *Vtoroi Rossiiskii kul'turologicheskii kongress. Kul'turnoe mnogoobrazie: ot proshlogo k budushchemu. Programma. Tezisy dokladov*], St. Petersburg, p. 203.

8 Ibid. P. 62.

lication, it would be necessary to explain the nature of category for *tradition*, *innovation* and *historical memory*. The concept of *tradition* it is more or less clear – it is the experience of generations inherent in the meaning and value of a particular culture at a particular time and space<sup>10</sup>. The concept of *innovation* is more complicated, for even many knowledgeable people often associate the category of innovation with any novelty. Is it true? No, it isn't!

The French word *innovation* comes from the Latin *innovatio* (update, change). Back in the 80s of the last century there was no abstract word innovation in the dictionaries of the Russian literary language. But in the "Explanatory dictionary of foreign words" by Leonid Krygina, published in 2006, the word innovation has been interpreted as a *novelty*, a *change*. The word "innovation" is understood as "*the new rule, the newly established order*" in the dictionary of Ozhegov – Shvedova<sup>11</sup>.

Naturally, the question arises whether the innovation is one of the un-

necessary borrowings duplicating the words that already exist in the Russian language? This issue needs a deeper look, for today politicians and economists, heads of universities and institutions of science – all require innovation, and no one really explains what it is. The thing is that the borrowed word often denotes the meaning different from the close meaning of the search word.

For example, the word "killer" means not just a "murderer", but a "secret assassin." And the fact that he is "secret", in turn, differentiates him from the word "executioner." Or let us take the today's fashionable word "image": this is, of course, an "image", but not any image, rather "specially created." A similar picture is observed in juxtaposition of the words "novelty", "change" and "innovation".

Moving furniture or replacing portraits in the director's office – this is, of course, a change. And registering time of arrival and departure of employees, if it was not practiced earlier – of course, a novelty. However, neither the first one nor the second one can be called innovation because these changes do not lead to major, serious *systemic consequences*. Therefore, the word "*innovation*" refers to the novelty or change, which, firstly, makes appropriate system sig-

10 Cf. 11. Zakharchuk, T.V. (2012), "Traditsii kak sposob realizatsii vospitatel'noi funktsii nauchnoi shkoly" ["Tradition as a way to implement the educational function of the scientific school"], Pedagogical Journal, No 4, pp. 74-85.

11 Ozhegov, S.I. (1975), *Dictionary of Russian language* [*Slovar' russkogo yazyka*], Moscow, p. 381.

nificantly more efficient, and, secondly, as a consequence, has a positive evaluation. Therefore, looking at the word "innovation" one should understand that it denotes quite a radical improvement in something, such as improved health, increased productivity, improved quality of education, increasing research intensity of production, etc.

In the following arguments we will pay attention to the concept of "*historical memory*." Many researchers fully realize that this concept is quite multi-valued, uncertain if you want – not even a strict and scientific and, nevertheless, everyone uses it, believing that it still raises a veil over the secrets of human being and his culture.

What is "historical memory" then? As for me, I designate *historical memory* as *the mysterious ability to experience the story as the own spiritual biography, with this ability being potentially inherent to every person*. This ability is implemented in the twofold act of identifying the history in oneself and oneself in history.

We can add the following information to this definition. As the spiritual capacity historical memory is active, which means it is not indifferent to the subject contents. That's why terms such as "sins of the fathers" are not meaning-

less for us, they are perceived by us as our own terms. In addition, historical memory is a necessary condition of spiritual self-determination, without which life in culture is impossible or, at least, extremely flawed.

Desiccation or extinction of this ability would mean the end of spiritual culture, inevitably would lead (and already leads!) to pathetic, always flat and tasteless attempts of cultural self-activity. Depriving a person of historical memory means to deprive a person of his spiritual certainty that is to kill the person in it. Depriving a person of historical memory, finally, from my point of view is to deprive it of culture as the most important form of human existence, without which he will disappear as a species.

Historical memory is a universal phenomenon; it is potentially inherent to every person and, therefore, to every people. But I will have enough courage to say that in Russia, Russian culture there is a very special state of historical memory. Relations with historical memory are very special in Russia, different from, let us say, European ones. You can say this: we have the historical memory performing very different functions. I'm not talking about the fact that we often fall into oblivion, forgetting, at times, even things that are sacred for the whole Russian history.

Assuming that, let us say, the study of history, speculation around the story, the falsification of history are invented maybe not by us. But by itself love of history is not typical of us alone. However, my thought, if expressed briefly, is that we (in our cultural space, at least in culture developed from the time of Pushkin) developed our own special approach to history. We are entirely focused on the events of our history, and they – most importantly – are considered by us not just as a matter of abstract, historiographical and academic interest and not as an object of admiration, respect, worship, but as the embodiment of some actual, life problems, requiring involvement of every personality in solving them.

So the point is not that the historical memory is developed by us, let us say, better or worse than by other people, and that we have it in condition different from their one. Its "storage units" are not so much the individual events, the acts of one or another historical drama, but rather problems, questions, puzzles being not of historiographical but existential nature.

In other words, the operation of our historical memory is not limited to the execution of tasks of informative or, say, epic – narrative character, on the contrary – it is always burdened with problems of evaluating, tasks to clarify

values, sense of what happened to our present existence. That is: *the past* for us – it is the *otherness* of our current problems, that is why we don't consider it, by the way, as a kind of completion, as a given. No, though it is the past, but it has not finished yet, it could have been otherwise, you can still change everything; you can still go back that way! – These are our characteristic reasoning.

Think yourself: the first word of Russian literature, and the social, philosophical, cultural thought as well – the word *HISTORY*. But how is it said? And it is told so that nothing has been really told yet, written, our language is still groping its way, but immediately, right off the bat – questions, questions, and even more questions!

Do we have our story or not? If we do, why is it so? Could it have been different? What would happen if Russia had taken a different path? Peter's reforms led to the benefit or detriment of Russia? And what meant the reign of Ivan the Terrible? The Tatar invasion? And what would be if we would have adopted not Orthodoxy but Catholicism or Islam? And why we invited Vikings to rule Russia? What would happen if Napoleon conquered Russia? ... How many questions! And how many answers? Everyone has one's own ... And then the



first differences appear, mutual misunderstanding, disputes...

I will not express here my point of view on these and other issues. For me the important thing is: to fix the mere fact of the need's appearing in the culture to constantly refer to the history, *argue about our past*. The foregoing, of course, does not mean that we have never did something else than that. No, of course, the Russian thought was worried about other topics, other problems as well. But, nevertheless, the reference to history, type of relationship with the latter, a way to participate in the debate about it – if it is not the cornerstone, then, at least, it is a required element of our writers', philosophers', historians' and cultural studies 'worldview that establishes the whole structure of the thought. And not only for them alone.

Debates about the history, dialogue with it, reflections on the themes of history, whether they are reasonable or not, has long ceased to be the property for only a thin layer of highly educated elite or larger intelligentsia class with still a quite specifically thinking. They have captured into their orbit strongly all classes and strata of society and have become one of the major factors that shape our culture in general.

Look around: how much is our culture pillared by its history, how is it

loaded by historical memory. It is immediately reflected in our speech, in our official language. "Compared with 1913 ...", "In the terrible years of tsarist...", when a church was standing in place of the today's House of Culture..." etc. Words that seemed to be deceased a long time ago (since 1917) quite quickly returned in our modern speech: "Governor", "Lyceum", "gymnasium", "Duma", "police", "mayor", "minister" and others.

Of course, externally the opposition of the new to the old dominates here, one culture to another culture, the new statement on the ruins of the old one. But it also serves as a type of dispute, dialogue, a keen, coarse-grained, but nevertheless a dispute. All this happens because in spite of all conditions there are both parts, winning song of one opponent does not sound on the bones of another, there is no way to rupture tradition and innovation. There is always, rather, an imitation of the gap, for a new culture declaring its strong contrast to the old, in fact, has never aimed to bring the matter to a complete rupture from the moment of its birth. Without dialectically denying its roots, the culture thought of oneself not only as the antithesis of the old one, but also the synthesis of the old and the new. In practice, this instruction led to the fact that the dispute would be of

indefinite, half-hearted and ambivalent nature, ranging from the vulgar shouting to almost gentle, loving babble.

Historical memory of the past manifests itself most clearly in the crucial moments, in dramatic periods of our history. Let us recall how naive people who believed in a linear relationship with the old culture, the history, were largely surprised and thrown of their strides when, during the Great Patriotic War, Stalin brought to life shadows of the great ancestors at first – up to the St. Alexander Nevsky, introduced the Order of Suvorov, Kutuzov, Ushakov and Nakhimov, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, then restored the almost completely destroyed Church, contributed to the creation of mass movies about our generals of the past, and finally introduced in the Army the same golden epaulettes that for twenty years had been considered an essential attribute of a hostile world. The "golden epaulettes" (white army officers) who did not flee abroad – almost all were executed or rot in Stalin's camps.

However, long before the war sagacious A. Tolstoy started writing a novel about Peter the First, and Stalin immediately distinguished him from other literary fraternity, was keenly interested in progress, customized and encouraged the writer. In essence, nothing has changed

today as well – in the post-Soviet period of our history.

And in general, as far as our domestic literature, visual arts, theater, cinema is concerned? In a combination, do they represent one gigantic overgrown dialogue with history in terms of its breadth and depth? Do they not reflect the aspirations to somehow evaluate the past, often – to denigrate it, but not rare, to exalt it, to find common ground with the present, to comprehend all that had happened, to prove that "all that is real – is reasonable," for it is caused by historical process?

It is clear from the foregoing that the dialogue or dispute between the past and the present always implies the presence of at least two dimensions: *firstly*, the attitude to the present state of the country and its culture and, *secondly*, to its past. We'll try to make a simple formalized matrix for typical attitude of our people towards their history in frameworks of a common cultural space:

1. Absolutely full acceptance both of "history" and "modernity", i.e. *refusal to see* any kind of cons *in the history* or *in the present* gives you the opportunity to evaluate it as a kind of "jingoism." This case, of course, is degenerative, but it happens nevertheless. One should agree that, for the sake of optimism, such an attitude is very convenient. (Every-

thing has always been good, and now it is well, and will be even better).

2. Absolute rejection of "modernity" and the similar absolute *idealization of "history"* results in an idea of a "golden age", the heavenly life of our ancestors, and in relation to the future – restorative mood.

3. Absolute *rejection of "history"* plus absolute *acceptance of "modernity"* gives birth to a monster, a man of "pseudoculture". Unfortunately, this type exists in reality as well. This is he who diligently destroys monuments, explodes Church, exults: "The End of Dzerzhinsky Square!" Without asking the question to himself: "Well, okay, Dzerzhinsky ... And what Lermontov did bad to you? The Lermontov underground stop in the Moscow downtown was also eliminated on the sly for some reason. "This is he who with sadistic pleasure cynically destroys nature, forests, rivers, ostensibly in the name of progress, but in reality because he hears in them an echo of the sacred, native matter – the hated historical national soul.

4. The fourth exemplar arises from the absolute *negation* both of "*modernity*", and "*history*". This is a type of a "rabid Westerner". His credo is: "There has never been, is not, and will not be anything good in Russia. There is no civilization in Russia. In Russia, if there is

a culture, it is only of barbarian nature. But the West is a different story! On the other hand, this exemplar is a vivid expression of slavery, when, for the sake of the West, thoughts and actions gain an ugly form. This is especially noticeable in the current trend of the Russian language development, as English-language words flooded today almost the whole modern Russian cultural space.

Let us open our today's newspapers and magazines. Their pages are literally riddled with "confrontations in Parliament", "racket in marketing", "business management". Look at the names of radio and television programs: "Telemikst", "Beau Monde", "Tinko", "Euromix", "Teletype", "Military Review" ... The monkey's syndrome of imitation spilled on the streets of our cities: daubed "shops", "nonstops", "Little bars", but simply put – stalls, stands and eateries look like tradeswomen who donned colorful skirts and imagine themselves as the Queen of England. I will not argue that the word "store" is more appropriate than the word "shop" or "boutique". We are talking about something else; you can take into your vocabulary any foreign word on the condition that it does not exist in Russian. And if there is, should it pass into oblivion? Someone has to keep the purity of the Russian literary language by using historical memory?

I know from my experience how it is useful to tell all the words about approximation of such a matrix, coarseness and conventionality of these four types of entities mentioned above, for they do not reflect the true diversity, complex, life-weave of dispute and dialogue with the history.

### Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to refer to the opinion of a prominent British historian Arnold J. Toynbee, who never excluded Russia from the frameworks of civilized history. In his famous book, "A Study of History" he pointed out its specifics related to the Orthodox and Byzantine roots, particularly analyzed its attempts of Westernization, which always put Russia to a historic challenge: "to escape from the danger of forced and complete Westernization the Russian prefer to learn something from the West selectively, and here they had to take the initiative, to make this unpleasant process be on time and kept in the right frameworks. The fateful question for Russia does arise: Can someone borrow the foreign civilization partially without risking to be absorbed by it entirely?"<sup>12</sup>.

12 Toynbee, A.J. (2001), *Study of History. Selected works* [Postizhenie istorii. Izbrannoe], Moscow, p. 7.

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## **Историческая память и забвение в культурном пространстве как репрезентация прошлого в настоящем**

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### **Аннотация**

Соотношение традиционного и инновационного в культурном пространстве России остается актуальной проблемой социо-культурной практики. Од-

нако механизм передачи позитивного опыта, как в аспекте традиции, так и в рамках поиска оптимальных инноваций, до сих пор не найден. Решение этой глобальной проблемы во многом зависит от наличия исторической памяти и ее связи с забвением. При этом забвение – это не утрата, а феномен, способный превращаться в фактор эволюции и развития. С другой стороны, воссоздание традиционного новыми людьми и в новых условиях не может быть ничем иным, как творением нового. Память – это не только то, что мы помним, но и то, что забываем. Социальный аспект этой проблемы состоит в том, что с помощью забвения преодолеваются те элементы наследия, которые мешают состояться новой форме жизни. Историческая память есть необходимое условие духовного самоопределения, без которого невозможна или, во всяком случае, ущербна жизнь в культуре.

### **Ключевые слова**

Культура, традиция, инновация, память, забвение, наследие, прошлое, настоящее.

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