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Celebration as a Socio-Cultural Phenomenon and a Communicative Technology

Elena A. Kaverina*

*Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia
48 Moyka River Embankment, St. Petersburg, 191186 Russia ¹*

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The article is devoted to the philosophic-aesthetical analysis of a «special event» phenomenon. It reveals cultural, historical, and aesthetical basics of a celebration and its social functions. The celebration is approached as a communicative technology. A big part of the article is devoted to the corporate celebrations – it reveals the goals of such celebrations, principles of their organization, and specifics of conduct. Corporate celebration is presented as a communicative technology used for building positive relations within the internal audiences (employees) of the company, for developing corporate culture, and forming corporate identity.

Keywords: celebration, corporate celebration, special event, aesthetics of celebration, functions of celebration.

Introduction

Approaching the research of the phenomenon of celebration today is very essential as celebration is the most important component of socio-cultural reality in XXI century. Studying the celebration today is very interesting and relevant in several dimensions. The first one is a celebration as a social phenomenon. The second one is a celebration as an aesthetic phenomenon. And the third dimension is a celebration as a communicative technology used to achieve certain corporate aims. Today, the term «corporation» is actively used in professional vocabulary and there are multiple terms derived from this word: «corporate culture», «corporate relations», «corporate space». The term «corporation» means a company, an organization united by economic, social, political and other interests. Most of all,

«corporation» describes a commercial structure, however, it can also be used as a state corporation or a public corporation (Chumikov, Bocharov, 2006, p.130).

Celebrations are used as a communicative technology aimed at building relations with various audiences of public. A celebration can be initiated and organized by state, commercial or non-profit organizations in other words by any corporation.

A celebration organized to achieve corporate objectives is called «a special event». Today this term is also actively used. Special event is an event, which specially conducted to communicate ideas, values, messages that represent and serve to achieve certain philosophical, informational, reputation, image, commercial or non-commercial goals of some

* Corresponding author E-mail address: kaverina_elena@mail.ru

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community united by some axiological basis, social, confessional, corporative principles and views. Special event is a phenomenon, which has been created by mass-media culture and has not been studied enough.

In the modern times creating special events is becoming a branch of professional activity – there are specialists so called event-managers, and there are agencies that offer wide range of «celebration» services. Modern activities of organizing celebrations have to base on knowledge of cultural-historical and aesthetical basics. Specialists who work in the field of event-activities need to have a broad background in humanitarian studies. It is important to understand that while creating a celebration you have to fill it with certain spiritual content – otherwise it will be just profanation of celebration (Yudin, 2006). Therefore, in this article the phenomenon of celebration is explained in three specified significant dimensions. Close attention in the article is paid to studying a corporate celebration as a corporate celebration is a communicative technology used for building positive relations with internal target audiences (employees) of the company, for developing corporate culture and forming corporate identity.

Point of view

Celebration is a unique phenomenon of culture. Historical roots of celebration date back to the most ancient times. Celebration has various social functions, which first of all include forming a community, ideology, moral principles, and aesthetical preferences. Celebration is one of the most widely spread form to storage and communicate socially important experience. Being «the form of aesthetical and artistic activity included in the material of the socio-cultural reality» (Aesthetics: Dictionary, 1989, p.269), celebration reflects the world view and the model of society, in which it exists.

Celebration is always a period of time that has a structure-forming idea. It is always an action devoted to somebody or something. The most critical feature of celebration is its connection with a sacral, in other words a sacred sphere, or a sphere that has a special meaning. Scenario and attributes of celebration are symbols of its sacral idea as «each celebration is connected with a certain value, sometimes a higher level, which is a sacrum of the celebrating group» (Zhigulskiy, 1985, p.63). The time of celebration is not leised – it is predestinate. Celebration assigns roles to the participants limiting freedom of each of them by the margin of the common idea.

Celebration is social and demonstrative as it represents a socially meaningful idea or approves a new social status. Celebration creates and maintains the feeling of unity – participating in it means to be the part of the whole, find your identity. Ceremonial of the celebration contributes to that idea – words, music, moves, light, and colors, all artistically bringing the idea to life, create a special atmosphere, in which everything that has not got an image is saved in images. In such way celebration builds the space of myth.

Celebration deals with people's emotions. The way a celebration goes is oriented on development and even on heating the emotions – during the celebration participants have to go through clean, light, positive emotions that can give him a feeling of «cleaning» of the soul. In this perspective aesthetics and logic of celebration development is close to the cathartic affect of art.

Aesthetics of celebration, special form of celebration space organization and art based celebration scenarios come from the archaic cultures. Mysteries used to be the only way to explore the world, life, set the value reference points. «Action of celebration seems to an invalid some other world where he is carried to and transformed by some superior powers,

... celebration turns out to be both the time of intense excitement and transformation of his whole existence» (Kayua, 2003, p.219). Osmosis of the truth was done by the emotional sphere and was firmly secured in conscience. A ritual of action, its development, audio and visually figured construction was clear to all participants of mysteries – it was some peculiar «parade of sign systems».

Celebration has its features, which make it different from other events. Celebration creates a special universe of game. Celebration pushes everyday life aside, «lifts a person (and the society) up above the workdays and praises celebratory freedom» (Mazayev, 1978, p.175). The must have feeling of happiness, positive emotional attitude, good mood – all that we mean by «celebratory» is what we can call the most important trait of celebration. This is what differentiates celebrations from ceremonies, because ceremonies can be devoted to some morning occasions. Ceremonials are more reserved and colder emotionally. Following strict predefined scenario is more important and ceremonials are mainly protocol events, where participants follow certain ceremony.

Celebration publically postulates some social idea. By using tools of celebration the new social idea acquires legitimacy. Celebration is in other words so called public mass approval of the new idea. Participants, who came to celebrate, express recognition of the idea by the fact of participation, by coming and therefore joining the celebration. This phenomenon is documented in history multiple times.

Changing of historical times and political systems is accompanied by the change of social mythology, symbols, oftentimes the change of chronology (calendar), and also by the change of celebrations calendar. It can be called some sort of creation of a «new» socio-historical time and a new social space with its symbols and attributes.

So, for instance, the reforms of Peter the Great were marked by the decree of 1699 about shifting New Year's celebration from the 1st of September to the 1st of January. Peter by far extended the calendar: secular celebrations appeared in addition to religious holidays that had existed before. We can say that the emperor Peter conducted a grand communicative revolution: he did not just create a concept of a new ideology but also enrooted it; he did not just build a new image and reputation of Russia but also created channels of public communication. The first secular celebrations – Assemblies, were conducted with some didactic purpose. This range of celebrations can be continued by ball dances, palace festivities, masquerades, fireworks, carrousel, and street theaters. Such diversity of variants shows that all the special events targeted audiences of different social level. Celebration in such circumstances is a communicative technology for carrying out an idea – it is a tool to incorporate a socio-political conception.

The next significant change in the national calendar occurred in the period of the next high-powered socio-political crisis of 1917. Changes in holidays in that period were radical – aggressive destruction of the old holiday system and creating a new one was obvious. The state holidays were introduced instead of religious and secular celebrations. Sacral matter, existential component of celebration was eliminated, and the political concept became the point to celebrate. In the 20s of the twentieth century, «playing in myth begins... communism and Marxism in Russia obtained the features of a new religion, with no connection to the Absolute. A new neo-mythical complex is being created: myths about the nation, the country, the government... all of them are tailored in accordance with the rules of mythology, but with an artificial content. ... Party and class replace clan and tribe» (Apinyan, 2003, p.324). Soviet holidays are bright examples of

special events in the state perspective, commonly spread in totalitarian cultures.

State holidays, that communicate the governing political ideology, played the most significant role during the entire 20th century in history of Russia. During that time period the celebration of the change in the political system, anniversary of the Great October Revolution, became the main holiday. In this perspective, it is interesting to note that revolutionary process was considered and communicated to the public as a celebration. In circulation of public information the main emphasis was put on heroic pathos. Religious and existential dominants were substituted by ideological, political and professional ones. That process was reflected in creation of new holidays – Day of Soviet Army and Navy (23 February) appeared along with a big number of professional holidays, a special meaning was given to Labor Day (Day of International Laboring Solidarity – 1 May), some holidays worshipping the leader came into the stage, such as, for example, Anniversary of V.I. Lenin's birthday (22 April), and so on.

The era of Soviet Union Imperia demonstrated an implementation of a grandiose communicative project. And if the Emperor Peter performed the first communicative revolution then this can be called the second communicative revolution. Celebrations played a titanic role there – the grandiosity of them were meant to appoint the enormosity of new socio-political ideas and to confirm the feeling of nationwide happiness and pride for the country by their spirit and general visual entourage.

The birth of new Russia in the end of the 1990s also provides examples of inventing new holidays. A key celebration postulating the new paradigm of development of Russia has become the Day of Russia celebration (12 June). An interesting fact is that the celebration has had different names in such a short period of existence

(the first variant of the name for this holiday was Day of Independence of Russia). A name, which accurately reflects the idea of the celebration, is the most important condition of adequate broadcasting of the key idea of the event, peculiar positioning of the signification and meaning of the celebration. The holiday was renamed from Day of Independence of Russia into Day of Russia. It is worth to mention that in order for holiday to become truly popular, understandable and involving for all public, a certain amount of time and a series of communicative events have to take place to promote the idea and the name of the holiday. Public understanding of what is celebrated, why and what it is supported with is very important (in times of economic and political chaos, in difficult conditions, in which most Russian citizens live in, it is hard to celebrate and share or support the declared ideas). On the other hand, postulating and promoting the ideas has to go ahead and define the development course, declare values of corporation of Russia.

Nowadays, we can observe the process of some celebrations' return – primarily religious holidays. When a celebration comes back, it becomes a symbol of reviving values. Modern calendar of holidays is more tolerant than ever – it provides a person with a right of individual choice at the same time remaining to be a form and possibility of searching human community, a way to storage and broadcast of meaningful ideas. In national culture celebrations have an important meaning as Russia belongs to the type of non-pragmatic, emotionally sensitive societies (Malkovskaya, 2008).

These days, the process of creating celebrations can be observed. Celebrations are being developed and organized on purpose to achieve certain commercial and non-commercial goals in social, cultural, political and business sectors. Specially organized celebrations can serve to increase recognition of the company,

benefit improvement of its image and reputation, form loyalty of external and internal audiences. Corporate celebration is a communicative technology, which is actively used in practice of corporate relations. Therefore, it makes sense to examine a corporate celebration as a communicative technology in the example.

Example

Corporate celebration is a specially organized event for internal publics (employees) of a company aimed at achieving a cascade of goals. Strategic goals: transmitting a corporate myth and strengthening traditions; developing corporate culture; promoting corporate values; public acknowledgment of company's achievements by its personnel. Motivation goals: having celebrations to show appreciation of the personnel so that the level of loyalty of the staff increases; developing friendly relationships, informal relations; leisure time for employees. Teambuilding goals: forming/rallying the team; developing skills of team work; finding latent professional and personal resources of the employees; determining the informal leaders. Format of a celebration and the pool of creative ideas depend on goals that are prioritized in the particular company.

Corporate celebrations have their mission in creating the unity, transmitting corporate philosophy and developing corporate culture of the company. Corporate celebrations contribute to forming corporate identity, forming loyalty, feeling of respect for and belongingness to the company.

A corporate celebration has communicative, organizational and motivating resources. Conducting a corporate celebration should be approached as an investment into development of corporate culture and the company in general. A well set corporate culture is one of the factors that makes the company stable and successful in the competitive markets.

Corporate celebrations became an essential part of most companies' life regardless of the field they operate in, professional specifics and the number of employees. Nowadays, a calendar of events of any company includes at least three or four corporate celebrations: corporate New Year; company's birthday celebration; professional branch holiday; «men's» (23 February) and «women's» (8 March) days, which are more often celebrated in a combined format of «23+8» these days; Family Days (summer picnics or winter days outside for staff members and their families).

Corporate celebration is an effective way to exercise corporate culture. Corporate culture does not exist by itself, out of corporate community – it is always itemized and materialized as well as it lives spiritually. Development of corporate culture is not possible without corporate communication. It is reflected in words, images, items, atmosphere. Each employee of the company is a carrier of corporate culture and that is why it is important to involve him into the corporate environment.

Corporate celebration is an opportunity for employees of the company to relax, shake off emotional pressure and exhaustion. It is an opportunity to bring positive emotions and good impressions, and to create a balance of impressions against an everyday professional routine. Working for a company should not be associated with pressure and stress. Corporate celebration gives an opportunity for positive informal socializing.

A celebration can become a good starting point for also creating or/and development of corporate traditions. It has certain communicative resources for correction, improving an image of governing persons, or structures/departments of the company.

Corporate celebration is not yet a communicatory matter. Employees should be aware of all news and achievements of the company, should feel that the company has

an intense professional and corporate life. A quality prepared celebration allows to achieve a condition of corporate unity, gladness from communication, joy of going through and feeling the same willingness to work and pass leisure time together; to create psychological and emotional comfort so any person is able to open himself to others and actualize his professional, personal and creative potential.

In corporate culture a celebration is not a do-nothing activity – it is full of very pragmatic objectives. It represents a corporate idea and inducts people in it. In this perspective a corporate celebration is identical to a «classical» one as it is also connected to a sacral area where a conscious building of a myth takes place following a concept or/and a philosophy of the corporation. Moreover, vitality of the corporate myth is regularly diagnosed, there is a constant check for correspondence to the current condition of business environment (both internal and external) and its correlation depending on changes in policies. Corporate myth should not lose its competitive ability. More than that, it has to provide a competitive advantage to the company. In such manner, celebrations have a special conceptual, informative and communicative meaning, and are being consciously used as a communicative technology.

Creative activity of making up a celebration is essential for internal corporate public relations. Creativity is necessary but it is also vital to consider the practicability of presumptive celebratory activities. Ideally, a corporate celebration even being a fun event has certain contexts, subtexts and connotations, which are made and well-thought-out by «the insiders». Specialists of corporate communications create corporate mythology and put it into the language of images, preserve it in the form of traditions and pass it one in a «celebratory» way.

By using «celebratory» technologies a new pragmatic result can be achieved when

friendship, sincere relations within the team of employees turn into their materialized equivalent because they help to achieve harmonious team work, decrease the amount of work needed to find solutions, increase the level of loyalty to the company through dedication to the team. Carnival playing body of celebration also allows overcoming borders of procedure rules, subordination of people in business life and following strict principles of protocol and etiquette. Accepting these rules of the game sets new margins in interpersonal communication so necessary in everyday routine work.

Their own special principles make basis of corporate celebrations even though general rules of organizing a mass event still have to be taken into account.

Basic principles of preparing a corporate celebration:

1. *Script of the celebration is what the company is.* The plot of the «play» will not be interesting if it does not reflect specifics of the company, if it does not coincide with it. Corporate celebration manager's main goal is to build up a narrative and act out «the play» where a relative story and style of relations in the company would be specified and artistically presented. A subjective author's abstractive vision is not important here but what helps to understand existing roles in the company, characters, heroes, intrigues is essential. All of that needs to be seen, felt, recognized and formed into a play plot. Afterwards, the play should be handled as a drama performance – all the details of the plot and an artistic embodiment have to be determined. While preparing corporate celebrations authors intentions come second – they have to originate from the company, its style of the corporate life, people who work there.

2. *Exclusive approach.* The door to each company cannot be opened with the same key. Something that was taken well in one company

might not suit a different one. Some modular aspects of spectacles certainly exist but they are just bricks in a building of corporate celebration as a whole.

3. *The budget has to serve the fulfillment of goals.* The main objective of preparing a celebration is not an appropriate budget distribution but is in a search of new ideas and tools to strengthen the corporate spirit. Quality sound, light, actors' play is not valuable just by itself but they need to empower the mutual idea, to embody the artistic concept of celebration, to achieve celebratory atmosphere and sense of corporate unity.

4. *Creating an atmosphere of a common corporate game.* Organizers of the corporate celebration should not entertain the guests but should help them to entertain themselves. It is very difficult and delicate to bring everybody to the status of common game. Activeness and action should prevail over passiveness and meditateness. It is difficult to make everybody willing to participate but quite necessary since the most interesting thing is to reveal an artistic personal potential unexpectedly for others and sometimes even to the person's own surprise. Each employee guest of the corporate celebration is interested to watch «their people», get to know «their stories»; to see that there are people with their weaknesses, issues and happiness around them and not just the hierarchy status positions. One of the most complicated creative objectives is to involve the maximum number of people into the course of celebration scenario, and it has to be done not in a passive way but on an active level of participation. It is important to overcome the opposition of «us» vs. «them», «spectators» vs. «actors» between those who entertain and those who are being entertained. In a corporate celebration everybody should become «actors-spectators» at the same time. The effect from the celebration and its effectiveness

depend on whether or not the machine of «self entertainment» starts working; whether or not the condition of corporate game is reached.

5. *Celebration itself is the point of culmination but the calendar time of celebration has to be prolonged.* Celebration has to begin a few weeks before the official start and finish a few days after the end of the celebration stated in the scenario. An intrigue of the celebration should be created so the personnel become interested and start preparing for it all together. This is the way a creative spirit of competition appears along with willingness not to «fall behind» and not to «miss out» on something interesting. Preparation for celebration itself is the beginning of celebration – expectation brings a celebrative mood. If employees are involved in the preparation process and put an effort in it the celebration cannot let them down because it is their conjoint affair and art. For example, one of the companies was offered a creative idea of «Dances with no rules». Each of the departments was asked to come up with a dance. The company's management paid for the rent of dancing rooms and coaches. Of course, the main goal was not to put together a high class dancing event but to create a bright event, give the employees an opportunity to do something they had never tried before. Two months of practices, impassioned discussions of the project, intriguing, interest filled with emotional and exciting expectation and as a result – a bright unforgettable corporate celebration and desire of all employees to participate in and create interesting corporate events in the future.

Effectiveness of corporate events can be measured when commitment to the company's ideas becomes an individual choice and the style of personal business and, moreover, individual life, when a sense of belongingness to the firm does not finish in the end of a working day, and when productive work is not based on material

enforcement but on a feeling of respect for the corporation.

A feeling of involvement into the corporation, a sense of belongingness to a professional community gives a person an opportunity to obtain his identity. A phrase «This is my company» said with the pride is a formula of completed conversation between the company and an individuality of an employee and it provides the means of success of working with clients and publics.

Resume

1. The celebration today is considered to be a communicative technology, as a technique to consolidate different communities and a way to communicate various social and commercial ideas. Celebration as a communicative technology serves to creating and enlarging the «symbolical capital» (Bodriyar, 2000) of companies, brands, persons. Aesthetical principles of creating a celebration today are used as tools to influence a person in order to turn him to the ideas and values of a certain corporation, community.

2. In current era there is a situation of ideological polycentrism, in which corporate culture that forms beliefs and values and has its rituals and traditions is turning into an alternative to the cultures that are built on the basis of confessional, national and socio-political idea. In this regard, corporate celebrations are vital as a way of socialization by person's inclusion into the corporate community and corporate culture.

Corporate celebration appears to be an efficient communicative technology aimed at reaching a whole cascade of corporate goals.

3. It is important to point out another special feature of the modern celebratory culture. Today, celebrations can be created. The culture of postmodern, which has all the prerequisites of the free artistic game, contributes to this fact. Generating an idea for celebration becomes a creative and even a heuristic process. Destroying the connection between the celebratory action and sacral sphere presents to the «creators» of celebration an absolute freedom in choosing the origins, plot and the variety of event in the celebration.

4. Today, the fact of creating an artistic matter and a plot for celebration can be acknowledged just as well as the fact of promoting a new holiday, using various communicative channels and techniques to boost attention of target audiences. After the holiday has been acknowledged and celebrated by target audiences, a widely promoted matter for celebration is being used for corporate purposes. Nowadays, celebration is becoming a tool of achieving commercial success. In this regard the aesthetics of a celebration is no longer measured by ontological basis but by a corporate or marketing expediency.

5. Presently, creating a celebration is a communicative technology and a communicative phenomenon; it is an essential part of a socio-cultural practice and with no doubt a subject of current concern in socio-cultural knowledge.

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