Studying Visual Political Irony: The Case of Russia

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Patriotism is a clear, well-reasoned explanation of why we have to live worse than the others.

Патриотизм - это четкое, ясное, хорошо аргументированное объяснение того, почему мы должны жить хуже других.

Types of identity
- Legitimizing
- Resistance
- Project


Patriotism
- Blind
- Constructive

Internet underground of the Russian identity

Digital media have democratizing potential, and the use of mediated political communication is being widely cited as transformative for state-society relations in the globalization times (Blumler, Gurevitch, 2001; Papacharissi, 2002; Mummery, Rodan, 2013).
Political irony in digital media (1)

1. Caricatures

http://ellustrator.livejournal.com
Political irony in digital media (2)

2. (De)Motivational posters (Demotivators)

http://demotivators.ru

«Life is getting better»
Political irony in digital media (3)

3. Gifs
Political irony in digital media (4)

4. Vernacular photos
Visual political irony: a dialog

(1) emotional reflection of political issues,
(2) fixation of this reflection in the picture,
(3) sharing and broadcasting

http://potsreotizm.livejournal.com/1747252.html
• Theories of verbal irony (Sperber and Wilson 1981; Haverkate, 1990; Hutcheson, 1995)
• Theories of situational irony (Littman and Mey, 1991; Lucariello, 1994; Shelley 2001)
• Theories of visual interaction (Kozin, 2009; Philipsen, 1992)
• Visual features of political irony (Müller and Özcan, 2007; Lægaard, 2007; Lewis, 2008; Lindelkilde, 2009)
• Analysis of Russian political discourse (Shturman and Tiktin, 1985; Shmeleva and Shmelev, 2005)

Shared context
Research methodology

What *meaning* is put by creators / producers and consumers of visual active political irony into their actions? (MAXQDA)

Visual analysis was carried out through solving three tasks:

(1) objective (defining what the images reflect; n=1783);

(2) subjective (exploring the intentions of the images creators; n=316);

(3) interpretative (understanding how ironic images are connected with the individuals’ broader social perceptions, their political positions and actions outside the digital media; n=56 (interview)).
Event-oriented images
Routine-oriented images (1)
Routine-oriented images (2)
Routine-oriented images (3)
Routine-oriented images (4)

Моя жизнь до Путина

Моя жизнь при Путине

"В 90-е страна пережила настоящий шок распада и деградации, огромных социальных издевательств и потерь."

"Нам потребовалось огромное напряжение сил, мобилизация всех ресурсов — чтобы выбраться из ямы."

"За последние годы мы все, народ России — многое добились в решении первоочередных, самых неотложных задач, страна выстояла перед ударами глобального кризиса."

solange — пока; до тех пор пока — длительность
z.B. Solange ich lebe, hoffe ich. — Пока живу, надеюсь.
Solange es warm war, badeten wir jeden Tag. — Пока было тепло, мы купались каждый день.

Переведите:
1. Пока у власти Путин, у нас все будет хорошо.
2. Люди будут жить, пока он

15
Routine-oriented images (5)
Meanings of visual political irony: the problem of “translation”
Code theory model in MAXQDA
(M1) Patriotism in Russia has a flashy character and therefore cannot lead to a constructive perception of the state as one’s own state;

(M2) In the same way, ostentatious religiosity cannot be considered as the true religiosity, especially if it is associated with the affairs of the secular nature (e.g. a broadcast by state politicians, who were radical atheists just a few years ago);

(M3) The disproportion of earnings of the political elite and the general population, as well as the voluntarism of power in the financial and political sphere, is primarily a consequence of the civil passivity of people. Yet, it is also due to the personal characteristics of those who are in power;

(M4) The official media knowingly present false information, though most people perceive this information as true;

(M5) Civil and political passivity together with the government’s voluntarism leads to real tragedies: wars, murder and poverty;

(M6) Isolation from the rest of the world and a return to the Soviet past is quite a real prospect for Russia.
Evidence from the interview (1)

• 41 of the 56 interviewees at least once took part in the actual protest actions;

• “revolutionaries on the sofa”, as opposed to “revolutionary in life”, did not agree with the third maxim (that civic passivity in Russia is the cause of voluntarism power). They associated the last one with the personal characteristics of those in power

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<th>Participation = yes</th>
<th>Participation = no</th>
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<td>M3</td>
<td>People are not responsible for what is happening in their backyard, but they love their country. But their state begins with this backyard. When there is responsibility for the yard, then it will not be allowed to spoil. (Man, 30 y.o., Moscow, teacher)</td>
<td>The people organized, they could do it and that happened, and the people won. But then people immediately lost and it was getting no better. Historically, someone is at the trough, and some does not. And who at the trough, they can’t not to live decently, it is their essence. (Man, 29 y.o., St. Petersburg, programmer)</td>
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Evidence from the interview (2)

- Strengthening of emotions was associated with talking about events that are taboo for ironic images
no plans to take any real political action

It was, yes, inspiring, when the people came (in December 2011 – A.S.), it smelled of unity, it was ... I can’t say that there was hope. No, there wasn’t, just as it happens in any crowd, there was a contamination of delight. But then, we came home, and there were those anti-protests, and they were shown on TV. But there was no any result. Those who came to that anti-protests, they actually do not care, Putin or Navalniy?.. Everybody knows they were paid. But it is offensive for me, if I go there by my will, and they are paid. So I will not go. Here (in the Internet – A.S.) I see what happens, and I do understand everything right. And it does not even matter for me that I get ‘likes’. No, it is important for self-esteem and sometimes it ‘made my day’ (laughs).

(Man, 29 years old, Moscow, programmer).
Thank you for your attention!

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