

INTRODUCTION

Discovered on the back staircase of one of the side wings of House No. 13 on the 24th Line of Vasil'evsky Island in St Petersburg, these dishevelled notes and partially time-yellowed photographs by an unknown author - who evidently must once have lived in this half-derelict building - for a long time found no useful application, due to the inexplicable inertia which arises with regard to things which arouse no interest at the given moment but which have in some way invaded one's field of vision.

The discussions that have now flared up concerning the past and the universal asking of the sacramental question 'WHAT IS TO BE DONE?' have prompted the thought that this epic story involving a rather strange character - a story which has lain around unwanted and is utterly incapable of inspiring sympathy - might be interesting to someone and, once its individual parts have been analyzed, put together, and numbered to form a single whole, i.e. 'tidied up' to a certain extent and given a 'civilized' appearance, will free up storage space for property that is more important and less burdensome.

A.T.

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Nomenclature of signs

(A posthumous tribute to the art of Simeon Petrov, the outstanding creator of the NOMENCLATURE OF SIGNS, the supreme artist of our province, from his unsightly and humble follower, who desires to remain in modest obscurity.)

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The turbulent period which has elapsed since the death of the brilliant ARTIST, APHORIST, POET, AND SCULPTOR Simeon Petrov has been a stern warning of the imminent danger of oblivion which so often awaits both works of art that have been placed on a pedestal by the perceptions of ordinary mortals and the authors of these works when society stands on the threshold of times of trouble and cascading social shocks.

This is what provoked me, without waiting for the situation to become irremediable, to search out and save that little which has remained in our hands which is accessible and has not been destroyed in haste by the coming new age. I am a poor draughtsman and have no skill with the artist's brush, so, to attain the goal I had set myself, I used the humble photographic process so as to, in the same way that it was once the practice to make casts of the visages of the 'great dead' - differing greatly from the originals in terms of internal content, but close in form - and so to preserve for future generations the illusion of contemplating the face of a GENIUS, preserve also the FRUITS OF HIS WORK. My complete lack of skill did not deter me and, drawn of necessity into what might seem to outsiders to be a technically simple process of recording reality - and, moreover, a process aimed at the masses - I found myself producing photographs in which one frame was superimposed on another (and in some cases as many as three were placed together). The need to exhibit the awkward inaccuracies of the camera arises from the fact that either immediately or several days after that they had been photographed the original masterpieces were barbarically destroyed (broken in pieces or torn from the walls) or, in some cases, suddenly and unexpectedly disappeared without trace.

In short, the NOMENCLATURE OF SIGNS, which, like Ariadne's thread, has led us through life from the earliest years, was the fruit of intense labour and prolonged abstract reflection, of which the following is a summary.

I

Henceforward, the impression made by a work of art should depend neither on that which is depicted nor on the perceiver, but only on the internal emotional and spiritual state of its Brilliant Creator at the moment of its creation. Regardless of how the MIRACULOUS has been embodied and what form it takes, the viewer (especially if he or she is not educated and ignorant of the creative and always contradictory aims of the author) should feel aesthetic pleasure - otherwise the charge of enormous educative energy will be wasted. This undoubtedly necessitated special preparation. Special institutions were immediately created where from the earliest years children were instilled with standards of beauty that would not forsake them later on, when they grew up and became uninvolved observers of the masterpieces all around them. For the older generation explications were held at the workplace and in a natural landscape - in the forest or the steppe, in the touching proximity of life-giving nature. To simplify things, during such conversations Simeon would give orders for any image that was open to question to be called a 'sign', since its significance could not be perceived SIMPLY. Such images took on meaning only as a result of explication in accordance with the author's intentions. Subsequently, fertilized in this way, the signs/masterpieces would draw upon the indications seething in the perceiver's memory to provoke an appropriate aesthetic orgasm.

Depending upon the strength of the impression they made, all the signs were categorized in accordance with a hierarchy which Petrov called a NOMENCLATURE. When the NOMENCLATURE OF SIGNS was employed to give different sequences and variations, it was possible to induce an entire range of different stages of pathetic ecstasy, manly austerity, lyrical anxiety, sexual exultation, gentle thoughtfulness, and quiet and heartfelt meditation.

II

Why the miracle-working luminary Simeon Petrov appeared in our part of the world is something that is not entirely comprehensible, and as a result his origins are obscure and a subject of controversy. Petrov himself - who all his life fought racial and social prejudice - was inexorable in dismissing all suppositions and questioning on this account. Some have said that he was an alien (a hypothesis fuelled by his sometimes gigantic metal compositions resembling space rockets and by the especially exotic appearance of certain fragmentary notations) or that, while being a native of these parts, he nevertheless lived in another dimension to which we have no access. Due to the poor state of development of science at the time, however, the latter judgments and interpretations were never followed through in a fitting manner. It was then that people began seeing the mystery of his birth as encoded in the assemblage 3-50/100/200 (the catalogues call this 'the assemblage with wood bark').





As a result, this work of art gained great popularity and began attracting crowds of pilgrims each year, an unexpected turn of events that aroused a degree of envy in the inhabitants of other places. In order to calm these passions, feverish efforts were made to find another revelation by the CREATOR. The result was the discovery of the triptych T-100/1000/ ___-100/1300 _-100/1400, evidently finished before just Petrov's death. This undoubtedly contains flashes of greater perfection in the inspired humanity of its design and an enchanting magical mysticism of tender memories of childhood. The pleasing triadic formula of letters and digits immediately and deservedly found its way into the majority of textbooks on the NOMENCLATURE.

There has long been intense argument among scholars concerning the enigmatic figure with a manly face with high cheekbones and neat beard. While unanimously accepting the outstanding spiritual strength of this artistic embodiment of man's iconic form, the critics nevertheless started deliberating and then hotly debating the question of why Simeon, who had fought so hard for artistic simplicity - even for maxi-simplicity - in creation of artistic allegories, had conceived such surprising complexity in an almost realistic copy of the physical appearance of the subject. Some (his enemies) lost no time in hinting that the cause of this universal embarrassment and bewilderment might be homosexually inclined (mainly in view of the bared legs of two types of male that he had created previously - the angel in shorts with a hammer and the bearded man in rolled-up sharovary). Others turned angrily on the first and advanced the counter theory of the so-called MUSHROOM, i.e. that Simeon, a fanatical mushroom-picker, had depicted not a human being, but a special type of mushroom. And it was indeed the case that the sculptures were preceded (as mushrooms by a mycelium) by a certain kind of basis or foundation - usually rectangular or oval, but sometimes of a shape that is more complex and more difficult to describe. Similar interpretations were put on the well-known sexuality of the given rare natural formations. These discussions reached a pitch of such bitter intensity and so divided our small society that legions of specialists from all kinds of different fields of knowledge were drawn into studying the matter. And it was then that, tired of this dispute, our region received Good Tidings that immediately united all in a burst of cleansing joy: the sculptures depicted their creator's FATHER! This flaring moment of ecstasy, these tears of effusive happiness as people hurried to touch one another and draw close to the Prophet's father had an entirely unexpected result. Almost all the sculptures were smashed to pieces or scattered among people's houses.

III

The final apotheosis and worthy crowning moment of the life of Simeon Petrov is considered to be his 3 GREAT INITIATIVES.

This inexorable and restless mind often reflected on the mighty power of the SIGN-WORD and on the mystery of one part of his NOMENCLATURA - the verbal.* Where is the line that divides the elementary component in a phrase, the term of speech that arises when letters are put together and written down in a rational way, as a visual symbol, from the same considered as a verbal and semantic symbol? Given that the visual, aesthetic effect of the SIGN-WORD is achieved through explication of its content, it is here that we find the identity of the magic force that it possesses. The explanation is immediately available, and the viewers themselves can read it. This is it, the TRUTH of truths! If different fluctuations of ordinary waves can coincide in a colossal amplitude of resonance that is miraculous but invisible to the human eye and capable of sweeping away everything in its path, then the two distinct symbolic amplitudes skilfully applied in the word to the unified whole can create an incredibly mighty wave of that healing divine poetry which alone is capable of tearing apart the skin of incomprehension and penetrating even the most hardened hearts with its enchanting melody.



Ever since, an integral part of any new opus by Simeon Petrov has been his literary inheritance; this is considered his FIRST great initiative. Whenever he created a new assemblage, collage, or archi-construction during the final and most fertile period of his career, he always left room if not for a quotation full of sparkling drops of splashy erudition or a merrily flowing couplet of victorious lyrical praise for working days, then at least for an unforgettable aphorism, a word of paternal advice to his prodigal sons, such as: SAVE ELECTRICITY; TURN OFF THE LIGHT WHEN YOU LEAVE; NO BEER; GLORY TO THE COMMUNIST PARTY; REINFORCE PEACE WITH HARD WORK; ENTRANCE NEARBY; etc. Feeling aesthetic pleasure and so rising above mere bread, conquering material reality through the spiritual, human beings for a long time rejected the need for food.

Or, to be more exact, the process of digestion occurred automatically through the conversion of spiritual into locomotive energy. Here the only important factors were a high artistic standard and the intellectual sustenance of the work of art that was swallowed. In this respect Simeon entertained no doubts.

This instantly gave rise to the SECOND initiative: FEED THE PEOPLE. A series of decorative graphic panels (BREAD, FOWL - EGG, MEAT - FISH, SAUSAGES, etc.) - followed in quick succession. The later introduction of richly coloured painted windows brought criticism of the AUTHOR, being interpreted as neglect of strictness of form. But Petrov easily destroyed his numbskull opponents by pointing out that the concept of 'strictness of form' was one he had introduced himself and had been specially modified prior to exhibiting the aforementioned panels and pictures. The hapless upstarts were dispatched post-haste to the countryside to be given fresh explications. And the awkward incident was soon forgotten.

Instead of routine performance of the ancient ritual by which a work of art is first hung up and then the public are given access to it, Petrov adopted a different approach. The work of art was created in a location that was full of people from the first and was made from materials that were to hand, such as the walls of a house, tree bark, metal structures, etc.

PUBLIC ACCESSIBILITY was the third in the harmonic chord of initiatives by the restless inspirer of the masses. In this way, the need for special museums (which, incidentally, were immediately closed down and their contents distributed throughout the city) and lighting was obverted. This led to a considerable saving of money, which met with popular approval. And it was this period of flourishing and transformation in our region that gave rise to the extraordinarily bright and happy memories of my childhood. The previously routine and grey procession of identical days flared with brilliance. Although he soon departed this world, the mutinous creator gave us melancholy inhabitants visual sustenance for long to come...

