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ФЕНОМЕН МАСКИ КАК МЕДИУМА В ИСТОРИИ КУЛЬТУРЫ

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Объектом исследования выступает феномен маски как уникального явления культуры, предметом – символика маски как медиума и мифологического кода в разные исторические эпохи, что обусловлено определенными социально-культурными тенденциями. Отмечается, что, зародившись в первобытном обществе, маска прошла свой путь развития. Доказывается, что одна из главных социальных функций маски – быть медиумом, посредником между человеком и обществом, а также между реальным и мифологическим мирами. На основе исследования генезиса и эволюции маски, анализа взаимодействия маски и мифотворчества в истории ритуальной и театральной культуры делается вывод об актуальности данной проблемы в контексте новой социокультурной реальности, включая период пандемии, когда маска стала символом защиты.

Ключевые слова: маска; история культуры; феномен маски; медиум; миф; ритуал; мифологическая реальность; мифологическое сознание.

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ФЕНОМЕН МАСКІ ЯК МЕДЫУМА Ў ГІСТОРЫІ КУЛЬТУРЫ

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вул. Міра, 19, 620002, г. Екацярынбург, Расія

Аб'ектам даследавання выступае феномен маскі як унікальнай з'явы культуры, прадметам – сімволіка маскі як медыума і міфалагічнага кода ў розных гістарычных эпохі, што абумоўлена пэўнымі сацыяльна-культурнымі тэндэнцыямі. Адзначаецца, што, зарадзіўшыся ў першабытным грамадстве, маска прайшла свой шлях развіцця. Дакладаецца, што адна з галоўных сацыяльных функцый маскі – быць медыумам, пасярэднікам паміж чалавекам і грамадствам, а таксама паміж рэальным і міфалагічным светам. На аснове даследавання генезісу і эвалюцыі маскі, аналізу ўзаемадзеяння маскі і міфатворчасці ў гісторыі рытуальнай і тэатральнай культуры робіцца выснова аб актуальнасці дадзенай праблемы ў кантэксце новай сацыякультурнай рэальнасці, уключаючы перыяд пандэміі, калі маска стала сімвалам абароны.

Ключавыя словы: маска; гісторыя культуры; феномен маскі; медыум; міф; рытуал; міфалагічная рэальнасць; міфалагічная свядомасць.

PHENOMENON OF THE MASK AS MEDIUM IN HISTORY CULTURAL

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The object of research is the phenomenon of the mask as a unique phenomenon of culture. The subject of analysis is the symbolism of the mask as a medium and a mythological code in different historical eras determined by certain socio-cultural trends. Having originated in primitive society, the mask has been developing throughout the history of human civilisation. In the study it was proved that one of the main social functions of the mask, which has arisen historically, is to be a medium, that is, an intermediary between man and society, the real and mythological worlds. Taking the genesis and evolution of the mask as a basis for the study, analysis of the interaction of the mask and myth-making in the history of ritual and theatrical culture, the authors proceed from the relevance of this problem in the context of the new social and cultural reality, including the pandemic, when the mask becomes a symbol of protection.

Keywords: mythological consciousness; cultural history; phenomenon of the mask; magic; mythological reality; ritual; myth.

Introduction

In the 21st century which marks the era of globalisation and digitalisation, the interest of researchers in the eternal questions of human existence, the spiritual and practical activities, the problems of the meaning of life, and the prospects of civilisation has increased. This interest has doubled during the pandemic, in which humanity is literally faced with a dilemma – life and death. At the same time, the mask ceased to be only the subject of a festive ritual but became a symbol of protection and salvation.

In view of this, we are particularly interested in the study of the cultivation of the mask in different historical eras, which is also conditioned and actualised with the modern trends. Based on the above, the object of the study is the phenomenon of the mask in the history of culture, and the subject of research is the functions of the mask as a medium and cultural (mythological) code.

The analysis of sources and literature indicates that representatives of various humanities are studying the symbolism of the mask: anthropologists and ethnographers, historians, culturologists and theater critics, which indicates the relevance and inexhaustibility of this topic. The origins of the mask are in the folklore and mythology of different countries. Thus, the researcher of the culture of the peoples of Eurasia B. N. Putilov proved that it is in folklore that the elements of mythology are formed in rituals, social acts, customs and etiquette, typical everyday situations [1, p. 35]. M. Bakhtin asserted the «folk-carnival nature of the mask», which «functions in the organic whole of folk culture» [2, p. 59]. C. Lévi-Strauss studied the mask in the aggregate of three facets of culture: 1) as a material object; 2) in the context of its connections with the semantics of the worlds; 3) its social and religious features [3].

Many researchers associate the mask phenomenon with gaming culture, that is, in the sense that A. D. Avdeev defined as a special image of a creature, put on or worn in order to transform into this creature [4, p. 81]. Dutch cultural studies scholar J. Huizinga noted that «the sight of a person in a mask takes us, even at the level of purely aesthetic perception... from the everyday life around us to another world. To the sphere of savages, children, and poets, in the sphere of the game» [5, p. 40]. The main feature of the mask, according to the French theater expert P. Pavis, «disrupts the character's normal connections with reality, introduces a foreign body into the viewer's self-identification with the performer» [6, p. 171].

One can agree with the opinion of the cultural studies scholar and theatrical figure A. Tolshin that the mask, «having been born in the depths of mythology and folklore as their organic component, bears the cultural code, the seal of the time and the society that created it» [7, p. 7]. Moreover, the creation of an image with the help of a mask can be considered as «a special kind of spiritual creativity, as a game discourse that reflects the characteristics of a separate ethnic group» [8, p. 115]. About the specifics of the gaming potential of the mask wrote researchers of the history of the Western European theater G. N. Boyadzhiev [9] and S. S. Mokulsky [10], M. M. Molodtsova – the author of works on the features of the commedia dell'arte [11], E. G. Tikhomirova, who analysed the cultural forms of the mask [12].

The relevance and scientific novelty of the raised in this study problem lie in the fact that, by revealing the social functions of the mask, one proves that the main function is the ability of the mask to be a me-

dium – an communicative intermediary between man and society, between the real and mythological worlds, helping the individual to comprehend reality.

In Ancient times, the mask was used in a wide variety of rituals for both practical and aesthetic purposes. The masks of the Ancient East are known among the surviving relics. For example, the golden mask from Ur – the bull's head found among the treasures of the royal tomb in Mesopotamia (the area of present-day Iraq), dates back to about 2800 BC. Among the iconic ones is the golden mask of Agamemnon, found in Crete and dating back to about 1500 BC. The death mask of the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun, dating back to 1352 BC, is also well-known. The history of the origin of these unique masks is interestingly analysed by N. Fyson [13, p. 10–17].

In European culture, the mask was widely represented in the visual and stage art of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. Laughing and crying masks, as a kind of symbol of the theater, appeared on the Greek stage in the 5th century BC. In the Middle Ages, wearing masks was first associated with a miracle-play – a religious drama based on scenes from the Bible and the Gospel, then with the morality play [8]. The demand for mask-making rose during the Renaissance when the folk culture of the carnival began to flourish, freeing people from religious tenets, lifting many class and sexual prohibitions.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to substantiate that the mask is a polyfunctional cultural phenomenon that was formed at the dawn of human civilisation. We proceed from the fact that the mask in culture has multiple meanings and can be used not only in a literal but also in a figurative, metaphorical sense.

Methodology

Since the research is interdisciplinary, we combined general scientific (analysis, synthesis, generalisation) methods as well as culturological, historical, and philosophical methods.

The cultural-historical approach allowed us to consider the mask as a source of social evolution, in the process of which the society assimilates cultural experience, starting from the primeval period during which such a phenomenon as the mask arose.

The historical-comparative method of research made it possible to conduct a comparative analysis of the functions of the mask in different historical periods: from primitive rituals of Urgesellschaft (hunting, farming, burial) to a cultural code and an intermediary between the real and mythological worlds.

The philosophical-analytical method helps to trace the process of the transition of the mask from the

function of a material object into the phenomenon of human civilisation and the factor in the formation of mythological consciousness. The cultural-semiotic method allows one to understand the specific features and the language of the mask as a medium, that is, an intermediary between a person and the world around them.

The methodological apparatus of modern theory and history of culture is quite wide, thanks to the principle of consistency, based on the combination of effective application of different methods used in related fields of knowledge. Since the purpose of the work was to analyse the phenomenon of the mask, the method of phenomenological reduction for the author has become an effective way to comprehend the symbolism of the mask both in its origins and in the process of evolution, thereby determining the prospects for its further research.

The origin of the phenomenon of the mask

Art historians often start the history of the mask with an analysis of the theatrical traditions of the Ancient world. However, anthropologists and ethnographers have proven that even in the history of primitive

culture, one can find various examples when a person, for a certain purpose, transformed into another being, influencing other people. Therefore, the genesis of the mask lies in primeval culture [14].

Mask as magic and ritual

The entire life, including the communication system, of the primitive people was spent performing numerous ritual procedures and rites. A significant part of them had a rationally inexplicable, magical nature. However, for ancient people, such magical rituals seemed to be as necessary and efficient as any labour acts, because they were acts of communication. Primitive beliefs and actions were reduced to ideas about the souls of the dead, about spirits, to the cult of ancestors. During the Upper Paleolithic, the emergence of the technique of drawing, construction, sculpture, as well as dance and music, the use of masks for symbolic rituals, the complication of the structure of society are recorded; there are first instances of using magic aimed at increasing fertility, of private property.

In the Paleolithic era, there were already hunting rituals, the cult of animals (which can be established by anthropologists from rock paintings), fortune-telling by animal bones, ritual dances in masks and animal costumes, making amulets from animal bones and claws [15, p. 502].

The world of meanings, in which a person lived at the dawn of his history, was determined by rituals. Ritualistic acts served as symbols, the knowledge of which determines the level of knowing the culture and the social significance of an individual. The imitateness of ritualistic behaviour demanded that each individual followed patterns and precluded creative independence. At this stage, the spiritual foundation of primitive culture, according to A. Flier, is the mythological consciousness [15, p. 403], which gives rise to new magical rituals. Myths and mythmaking permeate all forms of human life and act as the main texts of primitive culture.

The earliest form of human transformation is hunting camouflage which emerges in the era of barbarism, which is at the highest stage of savagery in accordance with the periodisation by the 19th century American historian and ethnographer L. Morgan [16].

Hunting disguise, despite the appearance of a mask, is still not a sign of a game action, which in primitive society manifests itself primarily in dances: first hunting, then totem (totem in Indian – kind). This was pointed out at the end of the 19th century by the famous English researcher E. Taylor, who noted that in hunting, but to a greater extent in totem dances, one can see both the birth of an object of art and the appearance of a public capable of enjoying beauty. Moreover, totem dances reveal attempts to create an artistic image, not only of an animal, but also of people, including the mythical ancestor in a variety of guises [17].

The number of roles played by a person at the stage of the tribal development of society was not too great,

and the desire to realise one's place in the world was not sufficiently formed. Meanwhile, with the development of social consciousness, the mask-image started develop and became more complex. Although its appearance is often kept unchanged, the internal content of the image changes significantly. Thus, for example, the Canadian Indians had special double masks with very complex and ingenious designs. First, the masks represent one kind of creature, and then, with the help of a special device, the masks unfold, and there is another mask that portrays a different character.

Meanwhile, in Paleolithic art (the Stone Age), there are such fantastic images that are incompatible with any of the known living creatures. The images are of two types: some are animal-like but in shape and appearance they are noticeably different from animals known to science, others could be mistaken for people, if not for many animalistic features. Such figures are usually called sorcerers or shamanic masks.

For example, in the Tuc d'Audoubert Cave (France), there is an engraving of a creature with a hump on its back, a wide muzzle resembling one of a moose, with horns curving forward and wide ears. Even more famous is the sorcerer from the cave of the Three Brothers. It is a figure depicted in an erect position, with a long tail and human legs. The forelimbs look like animal paws, and the head is decorated with antlers [18, p. 181].

To understand these examples, there is not enough reliable knowledge about the mythology and religious beliefs of Paleolithic man. However, the art of the end of the Early Stone Age (engravings and drawings) can be described from the standpoint of a culture of human society.

It should be noted that the collections of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg (the *Kunstkamera*) also feature several unusual masks: one has the upper half of a person's face and the lower half of a beaver's muzzle; the other, despite its human appearance, has a beak-shaped nose¹. The process of anthropomorphising masks continues until the mask becomes completely humanoid, and its animal nature is preserved only in certain details of the costume. It should be emphasised that this process is typical for the European regions of the world, while zoomorphic masks are preserved in many territories of Asia, the countries of the East, and Latin America.

A mask depicting a person goes through the same evolution as the mask of an animal: initially, a genuine skull is placed on the head, then the skull is lowered onto the face in the form of a mask, then it is replaced by an artificially made mask that naturally conveys the

¹Маски в коллекции Музея антропологии и этнографии имени Петра Великого (Кунсткамера) РАН [Электронный ресурс]. URL: https://www.kunstkamera.ru/museums_structure/sluzhby_i_podrazdeleniya/exhibitions_dep/exhibitions_archive/virtualnye_vystavki1/maski (дата обращения: 17.10.2021).

features of the deceased, and finally, there is a mask that depicts the face of the ancestor.

Despite the proliferation of masks and their various types, the word *mask*, as ethnographers note, does not exist in many languages. Moreover, the origin of the word *mask* itself is also completely unclear. This view is held by American ethnographers J. Nunley and K. McCarthy who believe that the word originated from the Arabic word *maskhara*, which meant to transform into an animal. In Ancient Egypt, the word *msk* 'second skin' was used. In Latin, the mask is designated both as *maska* and as *larva* «devilish creature», and as *persona*. In Italy the word *maskera* was established, in France – *masque*, in England – *mask*, in Romania, Serbia and Croatia – *maskara*, in Poland – *maskara* [7, p. 159].

Mask and myth. Mythological codes of the mask

With the emergence of a religious worldview – animism (from the Latin word *animus*, which meant 'soul'), the primitive person began to believe in spirits, in the animateness of all objects. According to E. B. Tylor, over time, the image of the spirit is more and more detached from reality, moving into the field of imaginary, fantastic. Moreover, in the religion of primitive societies, a mask, especially a funerary mask, becomes an expression of supernatural power, thus being a kind of pass into the mysterious world of spirits [17].

Thus, the mask appears in Ancient culture in a variety of contexts with different purposes and meanings. The mask is an essential element of the ceremony, the participants of which, portraying mythological or real characters, appeared in masks. This proves that the mask was a way of representing various ideas and notions that exist in the culture of different peoples. A special merit of C. Levi-Strauss in the ethnological study of the mask is that the scholar was the first to prove that «the plasticity, graphics, and color of the masks themselves as material objects» were involved in the system of transformation of masks [3, p. 25].

Due to the increasing role of the individual in the disintegrating primitive community and the formation of the power of the leader, a new image of the man is emerging – an individual hero. In honor of this or that character, plays begin to be performed, and myths and legends about heroes serve as dramatic material. This is how myths and legends of Ancient Greece arise, as well as Roman mythology and later biblical plots.

In the structure of mythological consciousness, the magic of the mask takes on a special meaning. This becomes apparent during the emergence and development of the Ancient Greek theater, which peaked in the 5th century BC. Having combined mythology with performing arts, Ancient Greek theater possessed several specific features associated with his magical ef-

fect. One way or another, this concept is associated with the concept of a human skull or face. For example, among the Northern peoples the Khanty and the Mansi, the mask is referred to as «birch bark face», among the coastal Chukchi – «hairy face», among the Nenets – «leather face», and among the American Indians – «alien face» [19]. In Russian culture, the mask (in accordance with V. Dahl's explanatory dictionary) is referred to as a «lichina». At the same time, it can be a false face for fun but it can also be an expression of pretense, the duplicity of a person, that is, a disguise of their true actions and intentions². In general, in popular superstition, the mask is perceived as a dangerous object, since dressing up in Ancient Russia was regarded as the basis for contact with the inhuman, other world [20].

Since Ancient times, the concept of magic has been used as a synonym for magic, sorcery in various types of human practices. The Ancient Greek theater, born in Athens as a large-scale folk spectacle, possessed a certain magical power.

The ancient theater had several specific features, both distinguishing it from the theaters of subsequent eras, and bringing it closer to them. The main feature was that the actors performed in masks. Why was not a single theatrical performance held without masks? «The mask», wrote G. N. Boyadzhiev, «...made the character's face especially expressive, sculpturally majestic and proud... The mythological heroes of the tragedy are dressed in robes that increase their height, give movements and gestures monumentality» [9, p. 12].

There are countless cultural monuments depicting the masks of the Ancient Greek theater: painted vases, figurines, bas-reliefs, mosaics, etc. Greek sculpture gives one a certain idea of the masks of this period as it captures their features.

Masks were made from wood or linen. In the latter case, the canvas was stretched over a frame, covered with plaster, and painted. The masks covered not only the face but the entire head so that the hair of the hairstyle was fixed on the mask, to which, if necessary, a beard was also attached. Although the mask made the face immobile, the performance was complemented by the richness and expressiveness of the plasticity and the declamatory abilities of the actor.

The magical impact of the Ancient Greek and then the Ancient Roman theater as a factor in the formation of mythological consciousness confirms the typology of magic on its various grounds, as evidenced by various studies. Thus, the concept of J. Frazer is based on the principle of cause-and-effect relationship [21]. Meanwhile, L. Lévy-Bruhl deduces the belief in the direct magical influence of man on a natural object or a group

²Маска // Толковый словарь живого великорус. языка В. И. Даля [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://dal.slovaronline.com/15636-MASKA> (дата обращения: 17.10.2021).

of natural objects from a sense of human involvement with nature, particularly inherent in primitive consciousness [22, p. 264].

As a sacred object, the mask has been used since Antiquity in different cultures as a magical means to transform its wearer; with its help, a person could become the embodiment of the divine or demonic principle, join the world of animals, shadows, or spirits. In many cultures, the mask is credited with the ability to live an independent life, possess a person, and even replace or destroy them.

Another important factor: throughout the history of mankind, including primitive society, the mask was somehow associated with the mythological interpretation of reality. Moreover, the mask became a certain code for myths that permeate all forms of human life and act as the main texts of primitive culture, proto-advertising (clan and tribal totems), the basic elements of which are various symbols, including a mask.

The myth, as the basis of first the primitive, then the man of Antiquity and the medieval man, and as the basis for the emergence of a mask, has always pursued a specific goal, subordinating nature to the human value scale, personifying it, where all the forces of the world reached the same level and where a person could easily communicate with them, no matter how formidable these forces were [22]. Meanwhile, the mask served as a cultural and mythological medium and intermediary.

Thus, the world turned out to be outside the boundaries of everyday relations and interests, and one could not only look into the world as in a mirror but also manage, that is, conduct it according to the laws of nature and myth. The first theatrical performances in primitive society, using the mask as a code and medium, served the same purpose, as well as the ones in the subsequent periods of theatrical art development: in Ancient times, in the Middle Ages, in Modern and Contemporary history.

Having shown the need to correlate the mask that exists in a particular ethnic community with the masks of other communities, C. Lévi-Strauss discovered the logic of transformations in intercultural contacts [3]. In this regard, the scholar's work «The way of the masks» substantially supplemented the scientific understanding of mythological thinking: both binary oppositions and all the operations on which the logic of myths is based turn out to be effective in situations of transformation of the plastic characteristics of masks. In other words, the canvas of thinking thus acquires not only a virtual but also a real psychological status in the spiritual life of people of different societies. Thanks to the ethnological study, in various museum artifacts, including the collections of preserved masks, one can see the embodied mythological thinking of different cultural traditions.

The first attempts at scientific comprehension of the myth and ways of its implementation in culture, as it is known, can be found in Antiquity: the allegorical interpretation of the myth was characteristic of the sophists and stoics (the gods are the personification of their functions), the philosophical and symbolic interpretation of Plato. And the representation of the myth took place on the stage through the plots of ancient playwrights (Euripides, Sophocles, Plautus, etc.), as well as through the play of actors, each of whom had his own mythological mask. Thus, the actor, putting on this mask, turned into a kind of medium. The Middle Ages was the second time of great myth-making when Christian and Muslim myths arose on the basis of new world religions. Renaissance humanists (J. Boccaccio, F. Bacon) believed that myth was an expression of the feelings and passions of an emancipated personality, as well as moral and poetic allegories. At the same time, all these periods of human civilisation are associated not only with the spread of mythology but also with the further development of a theatrical culture based on the synthesis of the mask and myth, which becomes a special socio-cultural value. The theatricalisation of myth in the Renaissance becomes an artistic phenomenon not only in professional dramaturgy (P. Ariosto, D. Bruno, N. Machiavelli in Italy, L. de Vega and Calderon in Spain, etc.) but also in the development of the folk theater. A striking example of such a theater is the rise of the Italian commedia dell'arte with its famous masked characters, such as Harlequin, Colombina, Piero, Pantalone, Tartaglia, and others, which have survived to this day through the images of the dramaturgy of C. Galdone and C. Gozzi.

The discovery of America marked the beginning of an era of new horizons in the comprehension of myth. In the fundamental work by G. Vico dated 1725 «The new science» [23], an original philosophy of myth is proposed. The most Ancient era is presented as poetic, in all aspects rooted in myth. Mythology is called divine poetry, with a specific way of thinking, comparable to child psychology, based on sensuality, concreteness, corporality, emotionality, from which Homer's heroic poetry eventually emerges, myths and legends of Ancient Greece. However, the French enlighteners (Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu) debunked myth and mythology as products of ignorance, deceit, and superstition.

At the end of the 19th century, the era of remythologisation begins, which started with the works by F. Nietzsche, A. Bergson. In many works of art (for example, in R. Wagner's operas), there was an apology of myth as an eternal, timeless, living essence of culture, and not as a half-forgotten episode of its prehistory. Within the framework of the evolutionary direction, the ritualistic concept of myth arose. J. Frazer made

his own adjustments, opposing magic to animism as a universal form of worldview and considering myth as a cast of a dying magical ritual, in which a significant role was given to the mask [21].

The sociological study of myth began with the works by E. Durkheim and L. Lévy-Bruhl who suggested that mythology and religion, as collective representations expressing social reality, differ from magic. Moreover, L. Lévy-Bruhl drew attention to the myths that combine the supernatural and the natural in primitive thinking, which we identified earlier in the analysis of the mediating function of the mask in the life of primitive man [22].

In the 20th century, the psychological direction in the study of myth was also developed. For Z. Freud, myths were the expression of psychological complexes; for C. G. Jung, myths appear as clumps of ideas about the collective unconscious and archetypes as a category of symbolic thought [24]. C. G. Jung's influence can

be found in the position of the American researcher J. Campbell which analyses the evolution of the mythological hero [25]. A peculiar theory of myth was proposed in E. Cassirer's works. Mythology, along with language and art, appeared to him as a special symbolic form of culture, and the philosopher designated mythological consciousness as a code [26]. The ideas of C. G. Jung, J. Campbell and E. Cassirer somehow unite myth and mask, making it possible to consider them as mediums, that is, mediators between a person and the world around him, helping to know this world.

Thus, researchers of the 20th century, having proved the fundamental role of myth and ritual, made it obvious that mythology, as well as the magical role of the mask, are closely related to each other and have become peculiar forms of maintaining the socio-cultural basis of human society, contributing to its development in different historical periods.

Conclusion

All in all, it can be noted that the phenomenology of the mask can be traced throughout the history of mankind, including not only primitive society but also the culture of Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, Modern, and Contemporary history. Whereas the relation of the mask and myth, considered in the article, is a factor of cultural development not only of Western European countries, but also different peoples of the world, including the regions of Asia, the East and Latin America.

The author examined the history of the mask as a unique multifunctional phenomenon that plays a significant role in the formation of the communicative and ritual (festive) culture of society. This trend intensifies during the period of the emergence of animism

(religious worldview), when the mask in the full sense of the word becomes a medium – not just an intermediary, but a pass to the mysterious mythological world of spirits, occupying a special place in the structure of mythological consciousness. The interaction of the mask and the myth becomes obvious during the period of the appearance of the Ancient (Ancient Greek and Roman) theater, as well as the further development of stage culture.

In the information age, the mask is an integral part not only of artistic and media culture but also of political mythology, penetrating the sphere of political life. Based on the study of myths as a mechanism for modelling the image, a new science was born called imageology.

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