

The Path of Soviet Cinema to Great Changes and Freedom from the Period of “Stagnation” to “Perestroika”

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Abstract

The transitional period in Soviet cinematography coincides with the historical period called “perestroika”. Children become heroes of the “stagnation” period. However, they are different from the “archetype of the young hero” that is shown in the student films of Tarkovsky and Konchalovsky. The main themes of the movies are the problems of the youth. The filmmakers analyze such themes as education, conflict between a child and adult, and common mistakes of different generations. They treat these problems as a result of a static state of society. The youth become a powerful force that revives the concepts of “change” and “freedom”.

Keywords

Perestroika, Stagnation, Young Hero, Freedom, Soviet Cinema, Children, Adult Society, Changes

1. Introduction

The transitional period in Soviet cinematography coincides with the historical period called “perestroika”. After the end of the romantic thaw period, Russian cinema has been in an indefinite position for a long time. The atmosphere of disappointment and confusion is expressed in the movies of that time. The failed expectations about the following changes and social stagnation lead to disappointment.

Unrealized idea of freedom gives hope to people. We expect something extraordinary from the younger generation of filmmakers who grew up in an atmosphere of thaw freedom. Children become heroes of the “stagnation” period. However, they are different from the “archetype of the young hero” ((Zaitseva,

2017) A Cinematographic Image of the Thaw Time (60 - 80s)), that is shown in the student films of Tarkovsky and Konchalovsky. The main themes of the movies are the problems of the youth. The filmmakers analyze such themes as education, conflict between a child and adult, and common mistakes of different generations. They treat these problems as a result of a static state of the society.

The long period of “stagnation” brings the birth of new energy. The youth become a powerful force that revives the concepts of “change” and “freedom”. The cinema of the “perestroika” period does not come into conflict with the cinema of the “stagnation” period, otherwise, it becomes a sort of logical development ((Zorkaya, 2014) History of Russian Cinema: N.M. Zorkaya). The cinema of the “perestroika” period deals with new themes that were not reflected during the period of “stagnation”.

In our research, we analyzed the Soviet films of the period of “stagnation” and “perestroika”. We defined the general themes and examined the connection between movies of these two periods.

2. The Cinematography of the “Stagnation” Period

2.1. Great Changes

Young generation takes an active part in the protest movement. In the adult world, it observes the contradiction between ideal and real. The man of the “stagnation” period is not free because he can’t shape his personality being influenced by conservative and archaic educational methods. So, the overarching influence of seeking to “educate” adults prevents young people from moving in a new direction and changing the reality. However, the young generation traces stagnation in the views of the old generation and tries to resist it. The fourth episode from Aleksei Korenev’s movie “Big School-Break” begins with the cheerful phrase “Something new is near, things are going to change”. This is not about school life. The movie tells us about changes in perception of regular monotonous life. On the school bus, we see adult students who didn’t get school certificates at the proper time. Their teachers are not older than them and some are even younger than their students (Cinematography of the Thaw. Book. 1. Resp. ed. (Trojanovsky & Roskomkino, 1996)).

There has been a significant change in the education system since the release of Khutsiev’s “Spring on Zarechnaya Street”. The conflict of the love affair between teacher and student remains relevant; however, it takes a new turn. In “Big School-Break” Svetlana Afanasyevna, a literature teacher, (played by Natalya Bogunova) and Grigory Ganzha, a student (played by Alexander Zbruev) lead a calm family life. The wife’s excessive focus on educating her husband and the man’s natural desire to show his leading position cause the breakup. Ganzha tries to break free from the authoritarian educational methods. In the essay “Who do you aspire to be like?” the character says that he just wants to be himself. The work is not well-graded by the teacher as such a bright individuality is not welcomed. A true personality shouldn’t go to the dancing clubs during

school and shouldn't kiss girls in the streets.

Even the teachers don't know how to educate a true personality. To be well-educated, it is not enough to quote Chekhov. The teachers are annoyed with the monotonous school life pattern. The great change for them is a new male-teacher. ((Grigorieva, 2007) *The Image of a Teacher in the Soviet Cinema: From the Thaw Period to "Big Change"*//Visual Anthropology: New Views on Social reality) Nestor Petrovich Severov's (Mikhail Kononov) idealistic views on education influence the appearance of real feelings that were previously shown only in books covered with dust. The revolution happens in all the characters' minds. Nelly Ledneva (Svetlana Kryuchkova) falls in love with the young teacher. Nelly's father (Evgeny Leonov) who represents the older generation protests against the prohibition laid down by his daughter. His desire to get an education is so great that he climbs through the school window. In order to get an education Victoria Korovyanskaya (Nina Maslova), an unemployed woman, is ready to start working as a crane-operator.

In the movie "Big School-Break" released in 1973 the characters undergo changes. Their love is something alive. It can't dry like inks in the school certificate. Love unites people with different views and willingness to social changes. However, the social stagnation delayed the resolution of the conflict. At the end of the movie, all the characters go dancing, thus, postponing the serious conversation and indulging the illusion of freedom.

2.2. A True Man Uprising

"Practical Joke" (1976) directed by Vladimir Menshov opens with the battle of personalities. Two ninth grade pupils have a fight in the school locker room. One of the boys says that the reason for the fight is revenge. Igor Grushko (Dmitriy Kharatyan) is a boy with a guitar who came to Moscow from Novosibirsk. The character wants to create his musical group. He tries to introduce his own musical vision to the world, but no one is able to understand the language of art. So, Igor Grushko can't cope with emotions and starts waving his hands. The character played by Natalia Vavilova is a highly sensitive person. Taya Petrova is not able to tell a lie and confront liars in the school. Taya's tears and Igor Glushko's nervous antics are not a sign of weakness. Their behavior is a special way to protest against the laws of society.

Oleg Komarovsky (Andrei Gusev), beaten in the school locker room, protests against the outdated model of life. He is at home among his classmates, who constantly use literary quotes to demonstrate the knowledge of the school program. Oleg Komarovsky has found a way to achieve success. He is the first who realized how to become a personality. His speech is so beautiful that fools such a sincere girl as Taya Petrova, who is the first to think that Komarovsky is a personality.

"We can wait till our life will change or we can change it ourselves," the character reproaches his father for his life. Komarovsky is ready to do everything to

prove his point of view. He insults the teacher during the birthday congratulation prepared by the classmates. Devyatova (Evgeny a Khanaeva is shocked by the student's speech. He reproaches her that she has not changed over the years at school and has not reached such a high position in society as her own students.

However, this character is ready for a change even more than others. As a mathematician, she can hardly support Igor Glushko's musical group. Being a mathematician she believes that art is a form of escapism from the world of illusions. It is not preparation for future life. However, Devyatova does not treat the performance at a wedding ceremony made by children in order to make money as a silly childish act. She believes that action speaks louder than words. In her flat, we see old black and white pictures of the former pupils. She is not going to dwell on the past. Instead of this, she is able to hear the voice of a new generation.

Kaleria Georgievna (Natalya Fateeva), a head teacher, is more conservative. It is terrible for her to see children working at the wedding ceremony or a policeman visiting school. Kaleria Georgievna does not think that a fight in the locker room is only pupils' personal affair. The conflict between Glushko and Komarovsky is based on a personality difference. The first opponent is ready to change the world and the second one is able only to wait for a change.

2.3. The Right to Be Heard

We see a completely different type of characters in Ilya Frez's "Could one imagine?" (1980). The picture of Pushkin in the classroom is lopsided. Noone can straighten it. The literature teacher does not even try to conceal instability of educational system. Tatyana Nikolaevna (Elena Solovey) does not prevent the protest of the pupils. Walking in the park, the schoolchildren ironically worship an iron lamppost instead of studying sculptures.

Tatyana Nikolaevna, whose life is void of love, starts the lesson with the phrase: "We enter the world of literature that is full of love stories." Her career is not successful. Tatyana Nikolaevna graduated from acting school, but she has to work as a school teacher. However, we can't compare her with Nestor Petrovich from "Big School-Break". Teaching for her isn't self-sacrifice, it is her own choice. Tatyana Nikolaevna wants to break the laws imposed by society. She believes that no family can exist without love, so the woman breaks up with her boyfriend. The character tries to help the pupils to save their sincere love.

The parents of Katya Shevchenko (Tatiana Aksyuta) and Roma Lavochkin (Nikita Mikhailovsky) believe that their children repeat past mistakes. Coincidentally, Roman's father, Konstantin (Albert Filozov), was in love with Katya's mother, Lyudmila (Irina Miroshnichenko). Their children fall in love too. Their sincere and pure love is not accepted by the parents. The children become victims of their parents' mistake.

Roman's mother (Lidiya Fedoseyeva-Shukshina), jealous of the husband's ex-

girlfriend, decides to get him out of the relationship. Driven by a wounded mother's pride, Vera deceives her son forcing him to come to Leningrad to take care of an allegedly sick grandmother and thus, she separates the lovers. Vera Vasilievna's behavior doesn't show her as a wise person. Her son acts like an adult. He offers his help and he is ready to sacrifice for the close people.

Katya can't help trying to send letters and call her boyfriend though her attempts to contact are suppressed by the grandmother who intercepts the letters and declines the calls. The children take action while the adults only think of it. Katya's arrival to Leningrad is the final step to get free from parental control. Roman's fall from the window is a considerable price that the parents pay for the mistakes of adulthood.

The grandmother cries: "We will tie you with robes and chains to save you." The changes become obvious in the stagnant society. The adults no longer conceal their conservatism. The mistake of their youth is that they didn't fight for freedom. The children are ready to take responsibility for their life and to defend their right of freedom and love (Sadul, 1963).

In Ilya Frez's movie there are new types of characters who try to confront social stagnation that is typical of the previous generation. Roma and Katya's feelings for each other are sincere and pure. Katya says that they don't snog in the childish way like their mother and her new boyfriend did. They don't impose conditions on each other like Tatiana Nikolaevna's boyfriend does and they don't start a brawl as Roma's mother. The young characters look silently into each other's eyes and try to be closer to each other. "I understand nothing in this life," says Katya's mother, realizing that the children act like adults. Thus, we see that even in the period of "stagnation" there are still some changes.

2.4. A New Hero

In the movies at the end of the "stagnation" period, we meet a new character. He is decisive in his desire to challenge the ossified social structure. We see that children become conservative like adults. In 1983 Rolan Bykov made a movie called "Scarecrow".

The audience sees a rural town the inhabitants of which want to leave it forever and spend some time in Moscow. The pupils of the sixth grade waited for a spring break trip to Moscow for a long time. So, the trip to Moscow is canceled as a punishment for missing the lessons. This fact is treated by children as a catastrophe. The children get their aggression out on the new girl who differs from the other pupils. The girl took on the guilt of one of her classmates.

Lena Bessoltseva's (Kristina Orbakaite) traits as honesty and bravery are not welcomed in the conservative society. The theme of betrayal is more urgent in this movie than in Vladimir Menshov's "Practical Joke". Lena can protect herself from the people's aggression, but she can be hurt by a beloved one whose guilt she takes on. Dima Somov (Mitya Egorov) will never admit that it was he who betrayed the classmates. He is used to keeping silent like a coward and to look the same as the people, otherwise he may be burnt by his classmates.

The girl who acquired the nickname “scarecrow” acts bravely in front of people, but on the way home Lena loses her calmness. Being ready to forgive the beloved who hurt the girl she suffers. Lena’s classmates are shocked by her extreme behavior. The girl cuts her hair off and then delivers a pointed diatribe about the classmates. This action makes everyone have a wholesome respect for Bessoltseva. The character is a true personality who manages to be authentic and not to change under the influence of conservatism. Lena wants her life to matter and to leave a mark in history. Lena and her grandfather (Yuri Nikulin) are going to leave the provincial town. They donate an old portrait of Nikolai Nikolayevich’s grandmother who looks like Bessoltseva. The picture makes the children feel guilty. They write on the chalkboard “Scarecrow, forgive us!”, but it’s too late for an apology. Lena will never read the phrase.

The change that happened in the minds of people during the “stagnation” period is based on the desire to be free from the educational standards the aim of which is not to create a personality but to make a passive observer who suits the stagnation model of society. Only a few characters are ready to defend the right to be free, to love and to develop themselves as a personality. The characters of the “stagnation” period are different from the selfish children who are shown in the “perestroika” period movies such as Eldar Ryazanov’s “Dear Yelena Sergeyevna” (1988). The characters are merely just beginning to think about freedom and the laws of modern society. The great change happens when people start asking questions and trying to find the truth. The old social models no longer work, and the new ones have not yet appeared.

3. Cinematography of the “Perestroika” Period

3.1. The Unwillingness to Change

The people who were born in the sixties carry the dream of freedom through their whole life. Their life motto is “political transparency and democracy”. After the end of the “stagnation” period they are ready to experience something new again. The young generation also joined the movement. Their life is now full of things that were previously limited. “You struggle just in order to survive all your life, we will struggle for a better life”. In Eldar Ryazanov’s movie “Dear Elena Sergeevna” (1988) the characters, the pupils of the graduating class, believe that it’s quite good to follow the laws formed during the “perestroika” period. It is not my fault that my parents are ordinary people. It is not my fault that the rich get their place at university immediately after birth. Trying to get out of tough situations and to get free from the social system teenagers put their teacher on the spot. She embodies the idea of self-sacrifice for public welfare. The young generation treats freedom as freedom from moral teachings that have no practical use in a tough, fast-developing and businesslike society.

The conflict between the teacher and the pupils is not based on the seemingly obvious difference in wishes and goal, the difference in views on the ways to find their place in life. The conflict results from the different views on the idea of

freedom in the “perestroika” period. The teacher played by Marina Neyolova is open to new experiences and she is able to appreciate changes. Moreover, she tries to be on the same page with the pupils. At home Yelena Sergeevna watches international TV programs to follow the latest news. Her social position doesn’t allow her to treat Nabokov’s “Lolita” as a book of high educational potential. However, Vysotsky’s poems, which are so popular among young people, can be found in the teacher’s books collection. She finds drinking champagne with the pupils morally reprehensible. However, the teacher feels free to dance to classical and modern music. While the teacher dances, the pupils destroy her house.

Elena Sergeevna is more free in expressing her beliefs and ideals than Lyalya (Natalya Shchukina), Pasha (Dmitry Maryanov) and Vityok (Fedor Dunaevsky). All the pupils become victims of manipulator Volodya (Andrei Tikhomirnov). The characters who reject the socialist system are not free in the brutal capitalist system. Volodya is a typical representative of the “perestroika” period. The young people, obsessed with the idea of freedom, will take Volodya as a role model.

3.2. It’s Time to Grow up

The unwillingness to change is shown through the endless attempts of the young characters to act like adults. In Sergei Solovyov’s “Assa” (1987) Alika (Tatyana Drubich) calls her mother and says: “I’m not a kid, you know.” After this call the girl kills her sugar daddy. Alika doesn’t know who to choose. Bananan (Sergei Bugaev), a singer and creator, who is of her own age. She also falls in love with Krymov (Stanislav Govorukhin), who is the head of a criminal group. He is a master of his own life. Being financially supported by the lover, Alika tries to get away from the world of capitalist values in the world of dreams. Bananan helps Alika to do it. The underground world of art embodies the spirit of freedom, but even here the spirit is not so strong. The motto “I Want Changes!” becomes a sort of compass for the young people. When Alika (Tatyana Drubich) discovers that Krymov is the head of a criminal group she kills him. Alika gets spiritual freedom only in prison.

The main character of Karen Shakhnazarov’s movie “Messenger Boy” wants to get freedom, however he does absolutely nothing to get it. Ivan Miroshnikov (Fyodor Dunaevsky) has just finished high school and now he is free from social restrictions. He has a quite careless attitude to work and education. However, he has his own life position, which is based on rudeness and nihilism. The character is really indifferent to everything in life. His life position attracts Katya Kuznetsova (Anastasia Nemolyaeva), whose fate is predetermined from the very birth. Katya, the daughter of a famous professor, is tired of playing the piano and wants to sing stupid songs. She is guided by the desire to break the conservative rules imposed by her passive parents.

Ivan’s life position makes him completely free. He doesn’t need to fight for freedom. Ivan tells Katya’s father (Oleg Basilashvili) that he wants to marry her

just to get money. These words make Semyon Petrovich crazy. Katya and her mother just laugh at Ivan's proposal. However, Ivan doesn't want to make a good joke, he actually tells the truth.

There is no positive result of this relationship. Driven by emotions Katya says that she is not going to exchange the stability of life for freedom. Soon she returns to her old environment. Ivan gives up the dream of love and freedom. We realize that he does not need it.

3.3. Freedom of Choice

Vasili Pichul in the movie "Little Vera" speaks about new ideas of freedom. The movie tells us a story not just about bright life in Moscow and calm life in a country. The theme is freedom of love. Vera (Natalya Negoda) is a bit irrational as she is guided only by her feelings and intuition. The audience sees a typical picture of the Russian household: pickled products, stewed-fruit juice, borscht. A woman who protects her alcoholic husband because she can't live alone is not just a typical image of conservative family; it is an embodiment of the conservative "stagnation" period ((Zorkaya, 2014) N.M. History of Russian Cinema: N.M. Zorkaya.). Young people who love each other can hardly live in such an atmosphere but they don't have money to move.

Vera attracts Sergei Sokolov (Andrei Sokolov), a handsome, intelligent and open-minded young man, by her strong desire to love. Vera can be compared with a wild small animal. She doesn't analyze her behavior and follows only her sexual desires. Vera is also a representative of the "stagnation" period. Vera is different from her parents who respond like a chameleon. She is a victim of the social system who tries to get freedom through love. Vera has nowhere to move from the provincial town, that is why she convinces the parents to accept her relationships.

Vera's friend (Alexandra Tabakova) chooses another way to freedom and joyful life. Lenka Chistyakova is attracted by the idea of spiritual freedom. Mikhail Petrovich (Alexander Lenkov) who is old enough to be Lena's father shows the girl the world of yoga. Yoga helps the girl to get spiritual freedom. Lena violates her own life principles: she is not going to get an education and find a job. In order to get freedom Lena is ready to start a journey in the company of Mikhail Petrovich. Vera's brother (Alexander Alekseev-Negreba) wants to go to Moscow, but family problems make him return to hometown. No matter how strong the characters of the "Little Vera" want to be free, they have to follow the rules of society.

The characters of the "perestroika" cinematography need changes. Freedom brings lots of new changes and, thus, it becomes unnecessary and useless. Pepsi-Cola, rock "n" roll, permed hair, acid wash jeans are symbols of a new period and freedom. However, this freedom is just an illusion. ((Zaitseva, 2016) The Mythologeme of "Happy Childhood" in the Soviet Cinema of 1920-1980: The Value Aspect). The process of destruction that began during the "stagnation"

period becomes more obvious due to the external social changes. The characters of the “perestroika” films fail to get freedom in the new world. Some of them continue to live in poor conditions; others die in the struggle for a happy life.

4. Conclusion

The characters of the “stagnation” and “perestroika period” share the common desire to live a full life and to be heard. Moreover, they all are desperate for changes. Children become wiser than adults. The reason for this is not education. The young characters follow their intuition and they are not afraid of speaking their mind. However, the young characters face challenges while sharing their ideas with the old conservative generation that is used to following their own rules. Adults develop a protection strategy and punish children for the aggressive manifestation of freedom. In the movies “Could One Imagine?”, “Scarecrow”, and “Assa”, the children lose against the adults. But in the movies such as “Dear Yelena Sergeevna” and “Little Vera”, the young characters take revenge on their parents. The symbol of freedom is represented in Viktor Tsoi’s song “Change”. A new period dictates new youth-friendly trends.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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