

**SOVIET YOUTH FILMS UNDER BREZHNEV:
WATCHING BETWEEN THE LINES**

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The central argument of my dissertation emerges from the idea that genre cinema, exemplified by youth films, became a safe outlet for Soviet filmmakers' creative energy during the period of so-called "developed socialism." A growing interest in youth culture and cinema at the time was ignited by a need to express dissatisfaction with the political and social order in the country under the condition of intensified censorship. I analyze different visual and narrative strategies developed by the directors of youth cinema during the Brezhnev period as mechanisms for circumventing ideological control over cultural production. During this time of ideological tension, these directors used specific cinematic Aesopian language to create covert political commentary by drawing parallels between, on the one hand, power relations between the young characters and their families and unproductive educators; and, on the other hand, the power relations between Soviet citizens and a largely ineffective government. To avoid censorship, the practitioners of Aesopian language relied on those genres that allowed for more productive use of narrative and cinematic devices. Regularly employing such Aesopian devices as allegories, allusions, citations, ellipses, parody, and other devices, Soviet filmmakers were able covertly to address various problematic topics and raise questions that were relevant and important for the late-Soviet culture under Brezhnev. My dissertation examines the specific ways in which filmmakers during Brezhnev's government used the images of teenagers and young people to allude to overall changes in behavior and attitudes toward ideology and authority among different generations of Soviet people.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

During times of ideological tension, cultural producers resort to a variety of techniques in order to continue their creative activities under close state surveillance. Among the techniques that allow artists, writers, and filmmakers to create complex, layered semantic texts is Aesopian language, which involves a set of literary and visual devices that help to create a complex, nuanced allegory. Because allegory constitutes the core of Aesopian language, it is important to clarify who is the creator of allegory and under what circumstances allegory becomes a part of Aesopian language. If Russian scholars tend to discuss the ways of creating double, indirect meaning with the help of Aesopian language, Western theorists more often refer to similar techniques simply as allegory. The discussion of Western theories of allegory may be useful for my study of Aesopian strategies in cinema, insofar as these theories provide a detailed list of characteristics and functions of allegory and illuminate the ways in which allegory appears in the process of production or interpretation of the text.¹

Many researchers (e.g. Northrop Frye, Craig Owens, and Felicity Collins) argue that, in order to read a text as an allegory, the allegorical content should already be placed there by the

¹ The study of allegory continues to attract attention of scholars from different fields. Within the last two decades, a number of comprehensive reference works have been published, including David Adams Leeming and Kathleen Morgan Drowne's *Encyclopedia of Allegorical Literature* (1996), H. David Brumble's *A Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings* (1998), Jon Whitman's *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period* (2000), and, recently, Jeremy Tambling's *Allegory* (2010) and Rita Copeland and Peter Struck's *Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (2010).

author of the text. Frye asserts that allegory is included in the original text and does not simply appear in the process of interpretation: “genuine allegory is a structural element in literature; it has to be there, and cannot be added by critical interpretation alone” (54). The reader can add her own allegorical meaning to a text that she is consuming, but it may be slightly different from the one that the author had intended to create. The allegorist-decoder may manipulate the meaning, which she discovers in the allegorical text, by placing it in a specific cultural and ideological context. Owens explains what the reader of allegory does with the text:

Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other [...]. He does not restore the original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds another meaning to the image. (69)

Thus, although allegory may be preset in the text during its creation, it is not fixed and constant. Its meaning can be changed, depending on the reader’s background and her knowledge about the cultural-historical context in which the original allegory was created.

Such scholars as David Dessler, Elana Gomel, and Sayre N. Greenfield understand allegory as a broad term that describes reading and interpreting strategies in general. According to Greenfield, allegory is an important part of the decoding process: he writes, “Granted that some literary texts are more prone to allegorical readings than others, allegory still survives more stably in each interpretative text than in the literary text” (475). Greenfield talks about the notion of “allegorical impulse,” which he understands as a need or a desire to interpret a text allegorically. Therefore, allegory “becomes the paradigm of interpretive possibility”: “one can only identify a text as allegorical by the interpretation” (476, 477). Greenfield maintains that the

importance of allegory arises from “particular cultural expectations of narrative, from the breach between our knowledge of the myth and what we actually get” (484-5). Hence, the need in reading allegorically often is entailed by the discrepancy between the familiar cultural scenarios and the new literary or visual text that appears during a specific ideological situation. The reader’s desire to interpret a text or to find an alternative meaning calls for different reading strategies.

In her book, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre*, Quilligan suggests that any kind of reading might imply an allegorical interpretation. She writes that “all reading is ‘allegorical’ if only because, in organizing our reading experience, we are criticizing the work, ‘allegorizing’ it by making our own running commentary as we read” (16). She divides the allegorical strategy into two categories: “allegorical criticism” and “allegorical narrative.” She explains the first as “focusing on the manipulations the reader can make with a text and the other [as] creating a text designed to manipulate the reader” (281). Allegorical criticism asks for an active, critical deciphering of the text, while the existence of allegorical narrative suggests that the author has liberty in creating specific meanings. Both allegorical strategies are equally important, but the scholar should study carefully who the agent of manipulation is and what the purposes of such manipulation are.

A decipherment of allegory relies not only on the reader’s or viewer’s desire to reveal the hidden meaning of cultural texts, but also on the historical, ideological context, which may impel cultural producers to operate with allegories in their works. Not all allegories necessarily target a specific historical moment or historical figure. Some authors may create allegories because they enjoy using them as literary devices for aesthetic purposes. The authors who work with this type

of allegory may create their texts even in non-repressed cultures, in which the political commentary is not an objective of their creative process.

The majority of scholars who argue that allegory emerges at the peak of ideological changes do not explicitly differentiate allegory as a general category from allegory with political impulses underneath it. In this dissertation, I have chosen to deal with the second type of allegory and, from now on, the subject of my scholarly inquiry will be an allegory that, in Deborah Madsen's words, appears as a response to some discrepancies in the historical process (135). This kind of allegory may be defined as political allegory insofar as it depends on the conditions of the political-ideological structure of the particular society. Madsen writes:

Allegory flourishes at times of intense cultural disruption, when the most authoritative texts of the culture are subject to reevaluation and reassessment. Not only the place of these texts within culture but the whole set of sociopolitical values that these texts are to justify and propound is what is really at issue. (135)

Madsen is not the only scholar who considers the socio-cultural factor necessary in discussing allegorical modes of production and interpretation. Most of the scholars, despite their differences in opinion regarding the source of allegory and debates about whether allegory belongs to the domain of writing/creating or interpreting, agree that allegory marks a shift in ideological paradigms. It marks the switch from one value system to another one, which sometimes may even contradict the preceding cultural tradition. An unstable political, ideological, or economic situation in society is also one of the most characteristic sets of conditions for the emergence of Aesopian language in literature and arts. In general, allegory transpires when one set of meanings is supplemented with another one, and the consumers

(readers or viewers) need to find the relevance of these texts to the cultural situation from which they emerge.

Walter Benjamin is among the scholars who examine this specific characteristic of allegory as a marker of change in cultural discourses, studying allegory in baroque culture. Allegory, for Benjamin, is more than a literary device; it is the mode of existence of human history and human temporality. He argues that baroque allegory arises from the need to establish new relations between the secular and the profane, and from the realization that the world is fragmented, not stable, and not permanent. In his essay, "Central Park," he writes that allegory "attaches itself to the rubble," therefore, offering "the image of transfixed unrest," which constructs the image of historical time (38).² Allegory, therefore, is an important part of the historical process and is necessary insofar as it marks a shift in paradigms, which Benjamin compares to ruins, when something has already been destroyed but new ideological and cultural concepts have not yet been developed. Consequently, allegory allows for a smooth transition from one cultural discourse to another.

Among the most important contributions of Benjamin to the theory of allegory is the idea that allegory always requires a spectator or a reader, in order to determine what is represented in it. Similarly to Benjamin, Ismail Xavier argues:

Allegory has come to the foreground, and one strong reason for its reawakening in modern times is the fact that it has always been the signifying process most identified with the presence of *mediation*, with the idea of a cultural artifact that

² For the more detailed study of allegory, see Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.

requires specific frames of references to be read, quite distant from any sense of the “natural.” (“Historical Allegory” 333)

Allegorical strategies can be understood as a special type of code in which two semantic fields are interconnected but “must be kept separate if an invariable relation of referentiality is to be established,” as suggested by Gomel. It is the reader’s responsibility to decode meaning, to build a chain of signifiers that gradually connects one semantic level to another one. According to Simon Brittan, “without a clearly defined and regulated code, allegory can be interpreted only in terms familiar to the interpreter—the situations, images, and associations made possible by the circumstances of the interpreter’s own life” (xii). In a way, allegory during the interpreting process can be flexible even when it is predetermined by an author who leaves some “footprints”—signs that send the reader or viewer into a particular direction of decoding.

Some scholars distinguish “primary” allegory, which is placed by the author, and “secondary” allegory, which emerges during the interpretive process. They associate the first one with the myth creation, while the second one with the deconstruction of this myth. Collins argues that “allegory as fragmentary supplement to earlier texts is more like a postmodern stew than a cohesive narrative, corrupting rather than preserving the original meaning of the historical document” (282). In allegory, history is revised and reinterpreted, and the myth may lose its sacredness. Paul Ricoeur emphasizes the role of interpretation in the process of reading allegories and writes about a specific “mode of treating myths as allegories” (16). He argues that:

[In] an allegory what is primarily signified—that is to say, the literal meaning—is contingent, and what is signified secondarily, the symbolic meaning itself, is external enough to be directly accessible. Hence, there is a relation of translation

between the two meanings; once the translation is made, the henceforth useless allegory can be dropped. (16)

Following Ricoeur's logic, it is possible to argue that after the "decoding" of allegory takes place, there is no need for the "primary" allegory, especially when the original cultural and historical context is changed. What is left at the end is the reader's (or viewer's) interpretive work as she takes into consideration the author's original intentions and the ideological context in which the literary or visual text was created and combines it with her own knowledge and cultural background. In this sense, as Peter Zeeman argues, "it is fair to suppose that fluctuations in distance may result in qualitative and quantitative differences in the readers' getting at the hidden political level of Aesopian works behind the surface level" (131). The allegorical interpretation may work better when there is some historical distance between the original text and the context in which the reader or the viewer consumes this text. According to Zeeman, among the most important factors that affect the level of encoded meaning is "the reader's knowledge and assumption about the author (especially his work) and his times" (131). If the "primary" allegory characterizes the connection between the author and the text, the "secondary," or interpretive, allegory is activated in the relations between the cultural producer, the text, and the interpreter of the text.

The study of allegories in cinematic texts has become popular with film historians and theoreticians within the past two to three decades. Film scholars such as Robert Stam, Ismail Xavier, Michelle Langford, Felicity Collins, and David Desser are interested mainly in national allegories in European, Latin American, and Asian cinemas.³ At the same time, relatively little

³ See Robert Stam and Ismail Xavier's "Transformation of National Allegory: Brazilian Cinema from Dictatorship to Redemocratization" (1997), Ira Bhaskar's "Allegory, Nationalism, and

research on allegories in visual texts has been done in the area of Slavic Studies. Some scholarly works are dedicated to the study of Aesopian language in Soviet and Russian literary cultures (Lev Loseff, Kathleen Parthe, Maliheh S. Tyrell, Thomas Seifrid, Joseph P. Mozur, Peter Zeeman), while the study of political allegories in Soviet cinema, especially during Brezhnev's government, is almost non-existent. One of the few major works on Aesopian strategies in Soviet cinema of the 1970s is Kevin Moss's article, "A Russian Munchausen: Aesopian Translation." Despite its importance in drawing attention to Aesopian strategies in cinematic texts, this essay chooses not to treat Grigorii Gorin's *The Very Same Munchausen (Tot samyi Miunkhauzen*, 1979) as a visual text, and focuses mostly on the narrative of the film and a linguistic analysis of dialogues. Unlike Moss's essay, my dissertation not only studies the narrative structures of youth films in the 1970s and the early 1980s, but also analyzes visual, aural, and other elements specific to cinema.

In my dissertation, I understand and employ allegory, first of all, as a mode of interpretation based on recognition of the fact that many authors during the Brezhnev years had to create their cinematic texts, while constantly reminding themselves that the encoding system should be accessible to the certain audience, but remained undetected by censors. My dissertation is an intellectual exercise of watching and reading between the lines from the position of the ideal Reader who, because of historical distancing and access to more detailed information about the Brezhnev era, is able to reveal hidden meanings and statements about the specific historical period in Soviet culture. Second, I analyze allegory as a special strategy—

Cultural Change in Indian Cinema: Sant Tukaram" (1998), Michelle Langford's *Allegorical images: tableau, time and gesture in the cinema of Werner Schroeter* (2006), Felicity Collins' "History, Myth, and Allegory in Australian Cinema" (2008), and David Desser's "Triads and Changing Times: The National Allegory of Hong Kong Cinema, 1996-2000" (2009).

narrative, visual, and oral—which I extrapolate from cinematic texts in order to connect it to the broader historical criticism of Soviet society under Brezhnev. This allegorical impulse arrives at the moment of recognition that there is a discrepancy between popularized understanding of the Brezhnev years as the period of Stagnation and actual rich and diverse cultural practices during this time. Because I want to emphasize the importance of allegory working together in conjunction with other strategies, or devices, I treat allegory as a part of more an elaborated encoding/decoding system in cultural production and consumption—Aesopian language.

In addition to understanding Aesopian language as a set of devices that serve to create a more complex and nuanced allegorical meaning, I also use this term as an additional criterion for assigning a number of films to one genre during the Brezhnev period—youth films. In my research, I discuss allegory and Aesopian language not as a genre, but rather as a way of creating or modifying genres. I suggest that Aesopian strategies may influence the development of a new film genre and new developments within an existing genre. In this regard, the youth film is an Aesopian genre of late-Soviet cinema, not only because it is imbued with Aesopian devices, but also because it is a genre that is originally intended for one audience—teenagers—but that attracted many adult viewers due to its ability to create ambiguous, double-layered meanings.⁴

Lev Loseff—the scholar who wrote the most elaborative research on Aesopian language in Soviet literature and culture—underscores the implied replacement of one category of audience by another one as an Aesopian “intention.” According to him, the ambivalence of

⁴ In his book, Loseff lists “Aesopian” literary genres: historical fiction, exotica, science fiction, nature-writing, anecdotes, and translations. I add the genre of youth films to this list, first of all, because this genre also allows us to talk about two different audiences—youth and adults—an important characteristic of Aesopian strategies, according to Loseff. Second, because in youth films, contemporary society is depicted indirectly through a separately created space of schools, pioneer camps, and other “youth” settings, there are some parallels with the imaginary spaces of science fiction, historical fiction, and exotic texts.

Aesopian practices includes the split between the “officially” recognized audience and the “intended” audience. In his book, Loseff offers an example of Aesopian strategies when in literary texts the intended audience is adults, while on the surface the form or the genre of the text is claimed to be for children. Loseff maintains that, through children’s literature, readers may be trained to develop the “Aesopian impulse.” He writes that “The overwhelming majority of modern readers have been *trained* [emphasis in the original] to read one way or another, they approach the reading of this or that work with a fixed set of expectations, and they willingly permit the author to play with their perceptions so long as the author proceeds within the bounds of the code familiar to them” (198). Children do not usually recognize the existence of Aesopian meaning while reading a specific book or watching a specific film. However, their parents are able to detect the hidden meaning, and their children eventually learn to do the same. This characteristic is especially important for Brezhnev culture, when children’s and youth culture and cinema prospered. From the second half of the 1960s, other national film studios started to focus on creating entertaining films about and for young Soviet citizens.⁵ Taking into consideration the special restrictive ideological and cultural atmosphere from the 1970s through the early 1980s, one can argue that the increased number of so-called films “dlia detei i molodezhi” (“for children and youth”) may be a result of Soviet filmmakers experimenting with

⁵ Besides the major Russian film studios, Uzbekfilm, Belarusfilm, and Dovzhenko Film Studio also released a number of youth films, with the similar narrative structures and stylistic elements as the ones made by their colleagues at Mosfil'm, Lenfil'm, and Gorkii Film Studio. Among these films are El'dar Ishmukhamedov's *Tenderness* (*Nezhnost'*, 1966), *Lovers* (*Vliublennnye*, 1969), and *Meetings and Partings* (*Vstrechi i rasstavaniia*, 1973), Konstantin Ershov's *Every Evening After Work* (*Kazhdyi vecher posle raboty*, 1973), and Igor' Dobroliubov's *The Schedule for the Day After Tomorrow* (*Raspisanie na poslezavtra*, 1978).

Aesopian strategies through narrative and genre.⁶ Thus, the genre of youth films becomes a “screening” element of the Aesopian system.

Overall, my research project aims at reviving the discussion of Aesopian language in Soviet culture, introducing it to the English-speaking academic community, expanding it, and shifting the focus to cinematic texts. I am interested in how the notion of Aesopian language functions in the context of Soviet visual culture from a critical position. My approach is distinguished from the approaches offered by other film historians, insofar as I draw parallels between the cinematic allegory and other Aesopian devices and the film genre in the context of intensified censorship and state control over cultural production.

One of my presuppositions emerges from the idea that genre cinema, and youth film specifically, became a safe outlet for filmmakers’ creative energy during a time of increased censorship and state control over film production. I am interested in the visual and narrative strategies developed by filmmakers of the 1970s through the early 1980s as mechanisms for avoiding and circumventing ideological control over cultural production. One of my tasks is to study the specific ways in which filmmakers of that time used the depiction of teenagers to allude to changes in the public attitude toward ideology and authority in Soviet society.

My dissertation contends that the genre of youth films is not only interested in the tense relations between youth and adults and in conflicts among young people, but also focuses on a

⁶ The merging of the genre of children’s films and youth (or teenage) films can be already traced in film catalogs, published by Gosfil'mofond Rossii—*Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my: Annotirovannyi catalog*, edited by N.A. Glagolev et al. Most film historians also did not differentiate these two genres as well. For instance, K.M. Isaeva’s article in *Sovetskoe kino semidesiatykh—pervoi poloviny vos'midesiatykh godov* is titled “Films for children and youth” (“Fil'my dlia detei i iunoshstva”) and does not distinguish these two genres. Kira Paramonova also unites these two genres under the name “children’s cinema” (“detskoe kino”).

specific type of character: one who is dissatisfied with past values, but whose new system of values has not yet been fully developed and who desires to break away from the constraints imposed by adults. I suggest that the figure of the teenager or young person often marks a movement toward liberalization on the part of cultural producers. In youth films, filmmakers covertly raise the questions of love and physical attraction between young people, their affairs with married people, their feelings for people much older than they are, one-night stands, jealousy, young marriages, teenage pregnancy, lesbianism, smoking, and drinking. I argue that precisely these narrative elements and themes differentiate these films from Stalinist and Thaw films about children and young people.

Understanding the message in Aesopian texts can be a subjective practice and may depend on the reader's background and knowledge. At issue is not the individual signature of a filmmaker, but a broader cinematic pattern; for this reason, scholars are well advised to examine a variety of texts by different authors from the specific historical and ideological time period. As Tyrell states, "only then will the significance of this approach become apparent, because analyzing these patterns allows us to understand the application of the Aesopian approach to literature" (110). For that reason, this dissertation explores the works of a number of film directors who worked in the 1970s and the early 1980s, such as Pavel Arsenov, Dinara Asanova, Il'ia Averbakh, Ernest Iasan, Il'ia Frez, Pavel Liubimov, Vladimir Men'shov, and Sergei Solov'ev. They represent a group of directors who made films that were unusual for the socialist tradition and were accessible to Soviet audiences and drew significant attention from Soviet film critics and viewers from various age, gender, profession, and occupation groups.

The second chapter of my dissertation, "Aesopian Language in Culture and Cinema," examines the role of Aesopian language in literature and culture before and during the Soviet

period. To avoid censorship, the practitioners of Aesopian language, first of all, relied on certain genres, which allowed for more productive use of narrative and cinematic devices. In this chapter, I discuss the use of Aesopian techniques in Soviet cinema during the Brezhnev period, exemplified in film comedies and melodramas by El'dar Riazanov, Georgii Daneliia, Mark Zakharov, Grigorii Gorin, Vladimir Men'shov, and Viktor Tregubovich. Regularly employing such devices as allusions, allegories, citations, and other Aesopian devices, these genres became a safe outlet for the filmmakers' creative energy during a time of increased censorship and state control over film production. I analyze different visual and narrative strategies developed by these directors during the Brezhnev period as mechanisms for creating double meanings in their films.

In the third chapter of my dissertation, "Censorship Meets Genre, Genres Meets Censorship," I set up the historical background for the study of Aesopian language in youth cinema under Brezhnev. One of the main differences between allegory and Aesopian language is the presence of a censoring organ, which affects the authors' writing practices and the readers' interpreting choices. For that reason, I include a brief study of censorship in Soviet culture, with a focus on Soviet cinema during the Brezhnev administration. The examination of state regulations regarding film production in the 1970s and the 1980s provides a context for the ways in which filmmakers had to resort to special narrative and visual techniques in order to produce films within the system that can be read allegorically with the help of other Aesopian devices.

I argue that the intensification of censorship may ignite the emergence of a new genre or contribute to the further development and dissemination of a genre that has recently been introduced to the audience, and in the second part of the third chapter I examine the development of Soviet youth film. Because the theoretical study of youth films is limited in Russian

scholarship, in this chapter, I rely on the Western film theories that have youth film at the center of their scholarly inquiry. In order to explain how the Soviet genre of youth films differs from its Western counterparts, I add a section with a brief historical overview of Soviet films with young protagonists, starting with Soviet cinema of the 1920s and the 1930. In this section, I briefly discuss Ivan Perestiani's *Little Red Devils* (*Krasnye d'iavoliata*, 1923) as an example of popular films in the 1920s that describes the revolutionary actions of young characters; and Sergei Gerasimov's *Komsomol'sk* (1937), in which the Party serves as the main authoritative source and educator for young people. I specifically concentrate on Stalinist films that describe the *Bildungs* process, in which a character matures into an ideal Soviet citizen, a revolutionary, military, or communist leader, such as the main characters in Nikolai Ekk's *Road to Life* (*Putevka v zhizn'*, 1931). As an example of the construction of heroism and patriotism among young Soviet citizens, I also include Lev Arnshtam, Il'ia Frez, and Aleksandr Ptushko's *Zoia* (1944) and other war films in this section.

Before discussing youth films during the Khrushchev era, I spend some time analyzing the reasons behind the flourishing of unique youth culture in post-Stalinist society. I specifically focus on the phenomenon of *stiliagi*, the development of the genre of "youth novel," and other cultural events that led to the recognition of youth culture by the state. The examples of Thaw youth films include Tat'iana Lukashevich's *Certificate of Maturity* (*Attestat zrelosti*, 1954), Viktor Eisymont's *All in Good Time* (*V dobryi chas*, 1956), Aleksandr Zarkhi's *My Younger Brother* (*Moi mladshii brat*, 1962), and Iurii Pobedonostsev's *Mishka, Serega, and I* (*Mishka, Serega i ia*, 1961), which describe the formation of youth identity and the challenges of adult life for the young characters after graduating from high school or leaving their homes. Another group of films I have chosen to discuss in this section points at the discrepancies between two

generations, like Marlen Khutsiev's *Lenin's Guard* (*Zastava Il'icha*, 1964). This section ends with an analysis of Thaw youth films that have a love story between two young people at their narrative center, such as Vasiliï Levin's *Tale of First Love* (*Povest' o pervoi liubvi*, 1957) and Iulii Raizman's *And What If This Is Love?* (*A esli eto liubov'?*, 1962). This group of films is especially important insofar as it represents the forerunners of many youth films with "adult" topics during the Brezhnev period.

The next four chapters represent case studies of specific youth films of the 1970s and the early 1980s. Each chapter is divided into two sections, each of which examines works by different filmmakers. Two sections in each chapter are united by similar narrative themes, which offer various scenarios for teenagers' interactions with each other and adults and, on an allegorical level, different behavioral patterns and attitudes toward the state among Soviet people. Even though the two sections in each chapter share narrative elements and describe similar types of teenage characters, filmmakers develop their own Aesopian strategies of commenting on the political, social, and ideological situation in the Soviet Union, through the use of cinematic language. Thus, the structure of each section within the four chapters includes an examination of narrative and visual techniques suggested by each filmmaker, a study of the semantic form of visual texts, and the ideological and cultural context of the films.

At the center of my analysis in Chapter 4, "Adult Problems of Soviet Teenagers," there are specific issues of youth sexuality and romantic and sexual relationships among teenagers as a way of establishing young people's independence from adults and authoritative figures. In the first part of Chapter 4, I am interested in the representations of the "quiet" revolt against parents and teachers as an allusion to unarticulated disagreement with Brezhnevian politics that Il'ia Frez offers in his film *Not Even in Your Dreams* (*Vam i ne snilos'*, 1980). Frez explores the topic of

teenage romantic relations and the consequences of parents' inability to understand the feelings of their children. The director also reveals the insincerity and duplicity of the adults as a result of growing consumerist tendencies in Brezhnev's society. The focus of the second section of this chapter is on Pavel Liubimov's film *School Waltz* (*Shkol'nyi val's*, 1978) that, as I argue, comments on sexual politics during the Brezhnev years in a covert way. Thus, Liubimov's film offers an ironic commentary on failed attempts of the Soviet state to control young citizens' sexuality and bodies, represented in the questions of teenagers' extramarital sexual relationships, abortion, and single parenting.

Chapter 5 explores cinematic and narrative techniques that provide viewers with the representations of teenage characters who manage to control disempowered adults. In the first section of Chapter 5, I focus on the unconventional representation of relations between a young high school student and her teacher in Il'ia Averbakh's *Other People's Letters* (*Chuzhie pis'ma*, 1975). I argue that Averbakh chooses the figure of the young high school student, Zina Begunkova, to provoke a new stage of debates about the new generation's reactions to the inertia and malfunctions of the system, captured in part by the figure of the teacher. Zina's attitudes and actions specifically represent the new tendencies in late-Soviet culture, according with which Soviet citizens created and promoted new, non-socialist values, while still following the rules and regulations established by the Soviet state. In the second part of Chapter 5, I focus on Pavel Arsenov's film, *Confused Emotions* (*Smiatenie chuvstv*, 1978), in which the director explores the ways of alluding to the weakened, destabilized role of the Soviet state through the study of relationships between disempowered adults and ironic teenagers. Arsenov's Aesopian strategy is dictated by a growing popular irony, evident most strongly in unofficial culture, and by the fact that Brezhnev's figure no longer had absolute power in the ideological and political structure of

the society in comparison to his predecessors. Arsenov's film shows the incompetence of many parents and educators and their failure to raise their children and shape their minds. In this section, I argue that feelings of being confused and lost, represented on screen, create the second, camouflaging layer over the disillusionment experienced as a conceptual disjuncture by Soviet intellectuals.

The sixth chapter examines various ways in which cinematic teenagers separate themselves from adults and appropriate their own space, thus, diminishing the power of authority and the state in general. The first section of Chapter 6 maintains a focus on different strategic ways of articulating the "unspoken" by Dinara Asanova, the director of *Woodpeckers Don't Get Headaches* (*Ne bolit golova u diatla*, 1974) and *Keys without Rights of Forwarding* (*Kliuch bez prava peredachi*, 1976). Teenage misfits, who, alone or in a small community, resist adult authority and attempt to create their own space within the school walls or outside of it, are at the center of her creative inquiry. This section demonstrates that the school in Asanova's films has a complex structure with multiple generations of teachers participating in a conflict with one another and their students. These tensions point out at the complex relationships among the Stalinist, the Thaw, and the Brezhnev generations in the late-Soviet period. The second part of Chapter 6 offers a detailed analysis of Vladimir Men'shov's film *The Practical Joke* (*Rozygrysh*, 1978) that includes references to contemporary pop-rock musicians during the Brezhnev period who had to negotiate with the state in order to enter the public music scene. The teenage band is an aural and visual allusion to the underground music scene, which was gradually adopted and transformed into the state approved vocal-instrumental bands. This section demonstrates how music and lyrics, performed by the teenage characters, function as a way of resisting adult

authority and creating their own space away from parents and teachers, and the socialist realist canons.

In the seventh chapter of this dissertation I study various strategies that young cinematic characters develop in order to escape the subjugating system. In the first half of the chapter, I explore the ways in which teenagers react to adults' actions and behavior as a covert commentary on the actions of state policy makers, represented in Ernest Iasan and Nikolai Lebedev's *Please Blame My Death on Klava K.* (*V moei smerti proshu vinit' Klavu K.*, 1979) and Iasan's *Passion and Anger Will Come* (*Pridut strasti-mordasti*, 1981). These two films provide viewers with two models of teenage characters' reaction to the adult/state control—either through trickery or through suicide attempts as a way of reclaiming control over one's body and destiny. The second section of Chapter 7 looks at Sergei Solov'ev's trilogy—*A Hundred Days after Childhood* (*Sto dnei posle detstva*, 1975), *The Lifeguard* (*Spasatel'*, 1980), and *The Heiress Apparent* (*Naslednitsa po priamoi*, 1982)—in which the avoidance of specific “Soviet” references in the discussion of teenagers' development into independent subjects represents an Aesopian strategy on the part of the director. This strategy includes narrative and cinematic references to pre-revolutionary Russian literature and Italian Renaissance art, and describes the alternatives for those who refuse to comply with the canons of socialist realism, thus alluding to “non-Soviet” moods in Brezhnev's society.

More general questions that I ultimately try to address are 1) how does Aesopian language function in cinematic texts; 2) what are the Aesopian devices that assist in creating Aesopian meaning; 3) why the genre of youth films became popular both with young and adult audiences and acquired unusual social significance specifically in late-Soviet culture. I also try to produce an indirect answer to the fourth question that may arrive from the first three

questions—Is it possible for the intensified ideological constraints to create a fruitful and productive atmosphere for cultural producers?

The particular choice of topic for my dissertation comes from the existence of two major lacunae in the study of Soviet and Russian cinema. The first understudied topic is the youth film, which has never been identified as a separate genre. Youth films were mainly defined in Soviet academia through their targeted audience (adolescents and teenagers) and were studied in terms of their capacity to convey “youth” themes and raise youth issues and were not distinguished from children films. My dissertation also addresses a second blind spot of Soviet cinema scholarship by focusing on popular Russian cinema of the 1970s through the early 1980s. Cinema and culture during Brezhnev’s administration (1964-1982) has not received sustained attention from researchers. Only two major books by Russian-speaking scholars have been written on Brezhnev cinema: Valerii Golovskoi’s monograph *Mezhdu ottepel'iu i glasnost'iu*, and the collection of articles, *Posle Ottepei: Kinematograf 1970-ykh*, edited by Andrei Shemiakin and Iu. Mikheeva. With its focus on the corpus of three major studios (Mosfil'm, Lenfil'm, and Gor'kii Studio), my dissertation offers a nuanced study of youth films and contributes to the already existent research on Brezhnev culture.

2.0 AESOPIAN LANGUAGE IN CULTURE AND CINEMA

Aesopian language is born under the conditions
of resisting censorship, in the forms of a velvet struggle with it.

--I. P. Uvarova⁷

2.1 AESOPIAN LANGUAGE IN RUSSIAN AND SOVIET CULTURE

In Russian and Soviet culture, one of the necessary conditions for Aesopian language to flourish is the censor's active involvement in cultural production. Aesopian language is more than just political allegory, even though it includes the latter. With the threat of censorship, cultural producers had to incorporate various literary and visual elements that would allow them to create and to conceal at the same time a political message. According to Lev Loseff, the expression "Aesopian language" was developed by writer Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin in the 1860s, and has been used since then by critics and the intelligentsia (1). From its original form as "a purely metaphorical designation for a distinctive body of phenomena new to Russian literature in the 1860s," Aesopian language gradually spread to other media, such as visual art, music, and film, and thus became an important quality in Russian cultural production (Loseff 2-3).

⁷ "Эзоп язык рождается в условиях противостояние цензуре, в формах бархатной войны с ней." See Uvarova 306.

Aesopian language, sometimes referred to as an “ironic style,” is necessarily linked to censorship and represents “the poetics of censorship” (Loseff, 1-4). Moreover, it is described by Elana Gomel as “a collocation of the ways of reading and writing that are born out of external sociopolitical pressures exerted upon literature” (88). According to Loseff, Aesopian language appears in the relationships among three participants—the Author, the Reader, and the Censor. All three subjects often belong to the intellectual elite and possess special sets of keys for decoding texts, although Loseff argues that these three subjects of Aesopian interaction should be “understood in an ideal sense, as if each of these actors in Russian literary process had at his command but one code for reading the text” (5). He understands the Censor as some ideal, abstract agent in Russian and Soviet culture, one who is supposedly able to read texts allegorically. However, in reality “censors exhibit varying degrees of limitation,” just as his ideal readers and authors demonstrate “varying degrees of awareness” (Loseff 5).⁸ According to Thomas Seifrid, Aesopian language is the “quintessentially Russian mode of veiled reference and strategic nonarticulation whose vital sense inheres between the lines of the text, invoked through hints, half-hints, and even ‘zero’ utterances available for decoding by the savvy reader” (611). Seifrid’s statement underlines the importance of acumen and specific knowledge as among characteristics of the interpreter of a text containing Aesopian language. These interactions require not only an author who creates a system of hints, understatements, and indirect references in order to trick censors, but also an audience capable of anticipating, interpreting, and appreciating the existence of hidden meanings—an audience, namely, that is prepared to decipher allegory and allusions. As Natal’ia Ivanova suggests, the process of

⁸ To illustrate that many censors were members of intelligentsia, serving the state, Loseff mentions that such prominent representatives of artistic and cultural elite, as S. T. Aksakov, Goncharov, and Nikitenko, at some point of their careers, served as censors (5).

deciphering Aesopian language implies a critical, highly involved participation on the part of the reader: in order to understand the message concealed in the text, the reader is expected to “listen attentively to the author’s voice, slowly reading the text, reflectively comparing it with the reality of the surrounding life and our history, with the context of political realities” (Ivanova).⁹ With its extended history of cultural censorship and with an active and engaged readership, Russian and Soviet cultures serve as an illustrative example of the quaternary relationships among texts, authors, readers, and implied censors.

The need for Aesopian strategies existed both in tsarist and Soviet Russia. Julia M. Allen defines Aesopian language in the context of Russian culture as “a term invented by nineteenth-century Russian writers to describe the variety of tropes by which they evaded the Czar’s censors” (110). According to Loseff, the role of allegorical literature in Russian culture was directly connected to the reinforcement of censorship and was re-evaluated during the years of “profound social stagnation,” in the 1880s, 1890s, and during the Brezhnev administration.¹⁰ During social stagnations, because everything in social and political lives is paused and does not require an immediate solution, people have a chance to reflect on their conditions and the conditions of the society in which they live. Aesopian language already existed in Russian

⁹ “Для того чтобы адекватно понять их замысел, от читателя требовалось внимательнейшее вслушивание в авторский голос, медленное вчитывание в текст, вдумчивое сопоставление его с реалиями окружающей жизни и нашей истории, с контекстом политической действительности.”

¹⁰ While Loseff points out at the need for Aesopian language during social “stagnations” at the end of the nineteenth century and in the late-Soviet period, Vladimir Paperny examines a unique phenomenon of Stalinist culture—the amalgamation of the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s and Socialist Realist traditions of the 1930s through the 1950s. This co-existence of Culture One and Culture Two, in Paperny’s terms, is another example of ideologically “stagnate” systems being capable of internalizing other unorthodox and, possibly, contradicting cultural elements. For more details, see Vladimir Paperny’s *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two*.

literature in the nineteenth century, and it actively penetrated other cultural spheres, such as art, by the 1920s, and theater and cinema later, during the 1970s.

Aesopian language comes into play during a co-existence of an official, state approved culture, and underground, unofficial cultural groups in the same society. Anna Wexler-Katsnelson argues in her article on Soviet art of the 1920s that the specifically established connections between the producer of an Aesopian text and its consumer “tightly binds the Aesopian system to a highly specific context of place and time, of established and known relationships between official and unofficial cultures, and of boundaries between colloquial and poetic language” (87).¹¹ Therefore, an Aesopian encrypting system can be found in the arts as well as in literature and cinema under a totalitarian regime that has hidden opposition. As Loseff suggests, “[f]amiliarity with the complex and shifting balance of relations among official and unofficial subcultures within the larger national culture [is] the basis of any understanding of Aesopian language” (13). Cultural producers thus use Aesopian strategies in cultures where official and unofficial discourses are permitted to exist under the same roof to some extent and only if they are in conflicted, tense relations.

Allegory constitutes the core of Aesopian language, but it is supplemented with other rhetorical devices, some of which can be traced to various cultural forms from different national traditions. These rhetorical moves and aesthetic decisions are especially important as long as unofficial or minority groups may be persecuted or otherwise threatened by the state or other official authorities. Thus, Michael Drewett gives an example of the use of Aesopian strategies in South African popular music as a response to the apartheid system. He writes that through

¹¹ Also see Wexler-Katsnelson’s dissertation, *Aesopian Tales: The Visual Culture of the Late Russian Avant-Garde*.

specific devices such as “the use of symbolism, camouflaged lyrics, satire, and crossover performance,” South African musicians were able to trick the censors, and that allowed them “to open spaces of resistance” (190). He also links them to rigid censorship:

It is because of censorship that the writer uses Aesopian muses to put across a dissenting message, to overcome censorship. The core element of contest is clearly revealed. An ongoing contest over structures of censorship in which both censors and censored attempt to outmaneuver the other, but also attempt to reposition themselves, in the hope that they might find a niche in which power can be exercised. (204)

We see, in other national examples, how Aesopian language becomes an essential part of cultural production under ideological and political restraints, and especially as a response to a totalitarian regime. For instance, Andrei Terian analyzes Aesopian strategies in Romanian literary criticism during late communism; Amos Vogel discusses “Aesopian metaphors” in Eastern European cinema, with the focus on Czech films; and Piret Kruuspere focuses on Aesopian language in Estonian drama and theater in the 1970s through the 1980s.

With Brezhnev’s attempts to revise the Stalinist past and revisit pre-Thaw ideological and cultural values, the culture of the 1970s and the early 1980s serves as a productive ground for an analysis of Aesopian strategies during totalitarian, or, more accurately speaking, semi-totalitarian conditions. Hannah Arendt distinguishes between those societies that have underground sources of cultural production and those that have few cultural products created by non-state associated agents and institutions. She writes about Soviet society during and after Stalin:

When Stalin died the drawers of writers and artists were empty; today there exists a whole literature that circulates in manuscript and all kinds of modern painting

are tried out in the painters' studios and become known even though they are not exhibited. This is not to minimize the difference between tyrannical censorship and freedom of the arts, it is only to stress the fact that the difference between a clandestine literature and no literature equals the difference between one and zero.

(xx-xxi)

The Khrushchev and Brezhnev societies were no longer purely totalitarian societies, but rather belong to semi-totalitarian regimes, which Dmitrii Shlapentokh describes as “those with attributes of totalitarian societies” (1). In these societies, the state no longer uses terror as the main method of controlling its citizens; nevertheless, the members of these societies are not allowed to express their opinions freely and publicly or have few opportunities to do so. The historical distancing from Stalin's totalitarian regime that occurred from the 1950s through the 1970s was one reason among many why Aesopian language reemerged during the Brezhnev period. On the one hand, the development of Aesopian strategies was affected by the need to trick still hostile censors; on the other hand, it was possible because the political and ideological atmosphere was already partially “melted” during Khrushchev's Thaw. Aesopian language requires a small dosage of cultural and ideological freedom, enough for cultural producers to feel confident to play games with the state censorship.

Aesopian language is necessarily linked to the political element of any culture. Thus, Robert Justin Goldstein defines Aesopian language as “critical commentary on the political regime in veiled form” (24). Hence, many Soviet and Western critics talked about the use of Aesopian language already in the works of Russian and Soviet writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Saltykov-Shchedrin, Ivan Krylov, Dem'ian Bednyi, Vasiliï Rozanov,

Mikhail Bulgakov, Osip Mandel'shtam, Andrei Platonov, Sasha Sokolov, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.¹²

From the 1970s through the early 1980s, reliance on political allegory was not the only strategy for cultural producers to deal with the Brezhnev regime and its restrictions. In her essay, “Smena iazyka,” Ivanova describes various types of cultural production or creative behavior during the Brezhnev period: the conformist relations with the organs of power; an ideological resistance; an open discussion of the social issues through narrowing, localizing the discourse; and, finally, the use of Aesopian language. She defines the last cultural technique as “the agreement between the writer and the one for whom he writes” and a “consciously chosen, encrypted connection.”¹³ Ivanova names Iurii Trifonov, Andrei Bitov, Fazil' Iskander, Bulat Okudzhava, Vladimir Makanin, and David Samoilov among the writers of the Brezhnev years who skillfully used Aesopian strategies in their prose and poetry.

The need for Aesopian language does not stem from specific political and ideological situations in a given society; particular economic conditions may also produce this need. Aesopian language during Brezhnev's government was not a new invention of Brezhnev culture, but rather a phenomenon revived by and coexistent with the rise of the “second” economy from the 1970s through the early 1980s. Because the government did not pay enough attention to all parts of the economic sphere, mainly focusing on heavy industry and defense, the economic

¹² For other examples of Aesopian writing in Russian literature, see Kevin Moss, “Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*: Masking the Supernatural and the Secret Police,” Ludmilla L. Litus, “Saša Sokolov's *Škola dlja durakov*: Aesopian Language and Intertextual Play,” Joseph P. Mozur, *Parables from the Past: The Prose Fiction of Chingiz Aitmanov*, Larissa Klein Tumanov, “Writing for a Dual Audience in the Former Soviet Union: The Aesopian Children's Literature of Kornei Chukovskii, Mikhail Zoshchenko, and Daniil Kharms,” and Irina Mess-Beier, *Mandel'shtam i stalinskaia epokha*.

¹³ “Договор писателя с тем, для кого он пишет. Сознательно выбираемая, кодируемая связь.”

sector responsible for housing, agriculture, and producing goods had stagnated for a long time. Film scholar Anna Lawton has examined the ways in which a “second” economy during Brezhnev’s government led to a “second” culture with the rise of the dissident movement and unofficial youth groups (79), which, in its turn, led to the extensive use of Aesopian language in literature and cinema. As a result of both political and economic dissatisfaction, cultural producers of the Brezhnev period began to question the validity and the logic of some aspects of Soviet society, and did so through the use of Aesopian language. The knowledge of the specific political and economic issues of the 1970s and the early 1980s and a stereotypical interpretation of the Brezhnev era as “Stagnation” may trigger Aesopian impulse (similar to the allegorical impulse) among contemporary readers and viewers and creates a desire to connect retrospectively the cultural text with the ideological context of that time period.

One important characteristic of the oppositional discourse based on Aesopian language during the Soviet 1970s and the early 1980s is that, in order to find its audience, it necessarily had to rely on official ideological practices. Maliheh S. Tyrrell describes Aesopian literature during Soviet time as one that “satirized the pretensions of Soviet authority without wounding” (ix). It used satire and irony in order to reveal the flaws in the constructed reality of Soviet society and did it while operating from within official discourse. As Tyrrell suggests, “for literature to be effective it has to adopt the idiom of the ruling ideology in order to cover its own tracks. The authors may harbor deep animosities toward the state, but they must act with circumspection if they wish to benefit from any material advantage that the system can confer” (4). The Aesopian text cannot ostensibly be distinctive and different from other texts that are approved and encouraged by the state: it too must be approved by the state and therefore must avoid drawing the censors’ attention. The practitioners of Aesopian language work with the

genres and narratives that are easily recognizable by audiences, and sometimes even promoted by the state. For instance, they may use the vocabulary and tropes from socialist realist texts, but endow them with other meanings through the use of irony. The characteristics of Aesopian strategy—the use of the established forms and norms as a “framing device” for its hidden message—is typical not only of literature, but also of visual texts.

Before analyzing the specifics and the functioning of Aesopian language in cinematic texts, it would be helpful to examine briefly how these political allegorical strategies work in literary texts. Loseff spends considerable time describing the literary techniques that writers have employed in order to avoid censorship. In his book, *On the Beneficence of Censorship*, he writes:

Again and again in a society where ideological censorship prevails the reader will animatedly follow this dangerous game in which intellect bests authority; again and again the reader will participate, albeit passively, in the game, not analyzing or responding emotionally to the text so much as *celebrating* it as he would a mythical ritual. (222-3)

Thus, writers, artists, composers, and filmmakers who rely on Aesopian language in their works in order to express a deep dissatisfaction with the ideological and political systems participate in a special, ritualistic game with three groups of participants— cultural producers, consumers, and censors. In his book, Loseff emphasizes the role of the author in the process of developing Aesopian language. He asserts that:

[Dispensing] with a number of direct statements in the text and with the straightforward depiction of certain details of real life, [the Author] replaces them with hints and circumlocutions. While his rationale in this instance lies outside

literature, the Author has no means but the literary—tropes, rhetorical figures, and intrigues within the structure of the work as a whole—to realize his hints and circumlocutions. (6)

However, if these literary devices are random and not systematic, they lose their significance and cannot work as a part of Aesopian language. Aesopian strategies need to be consistent, re-occurring, and recognizable by the author and the reader as a part of the second layer of meaning. Thus, Loseff defines Aesopian language as a “systematic alteration of the text occasioned by the introduction of hints and circumlocutions” (6). Loseff also refers to these systematic alterations as “screens” and “markers,” with the first “bent on concealing the Aesopian text” and the second “draw[ing] attention to that same Aesopian text” (51). Screens and markers usually work together and may be embodied in the same element of the text in order to attract the attention of an educated reader or viewer, while intending to hide or obscure it from the censor.¹⁴

Loseff dedicates his study mainly to Russian and Soviet literary culture, but his approach can be also useful for analyzing other media, especially because his metaphors “markers” and “screens” already posit a visual component. Similarly to Russian and Soviet writers, Soviet filmmakers also used specific sets of allegorical strategies, including both literary and narrative devices, as well as aural and visual techniques that are unique to cinematic texts. As in literary works, the meaning of allegory in cinematic texts may undergo some modification during the process of decoding, affected by montage, sound, and the visual structure of the film. In order to

¹⁴ Loseff explains the work of screens and markers in literature on the examples of specific verbal stylistic devices, for instance, such as anachronism, and of some plot elements. In this section of his book, he briefly analyzes Bella Akhmadulina’s poem “Saint Bartholomew’s Night” to illustrate his points.

understand films allegorically, the audience (or film critics) should tie together the structural and formal elements of the visual text with the cultural and social context in which these films were produced and distributed.

Loseff's classification of Aesopian devices is especially productive for the analysis of Soviet cinema during the Brezhnev era. He talks about three different planes of "metonymicity," or the replacement of one element by another one—the essential principles of Aesopian strategy. The first level includes genre and narrative structure, when "by dint of a series of surface, 'screening' plot features, the work claims inclusion in one genre while it in fact belongs to another" (60). The assertion that Aesopian devices can be traced in specific genres is important for the study of Soviet cinema of the 1970s and the early 1980s because during this period of Soviet film history genre films were promoted and encouraged by the state.

For some cinema *auteurs* during the Brezhnev era (particularly Andrei Konchalovskii, Andrei Tarkovskii, Kira Muratova, and Aleksandr Askol'dov), conditions of production were at times more complicated than those of filmmakers who fully adhered to socialist ideals.¹⁵ The state's methods of restricting *auteur* cinema involved severe editing or the shelving of their more experimental efforts, as well as the outright prohibition of their work or even exile from the Soviet Union. As Valerii Golovskoi suggests, these filmmakers were "crushed by the state-party machine, while a great number of interesting plans were never realized" (*Mezhdru ottepel'iu*

¹⁵ Julian Graffy writes about Kira Muratova's *The Long Farewell* (*Dolgie provody*, 1971/1985) and suggests that this film was shelved possibly for its allusive content and some aesthetic issues. Graffy writes: "The film contains a speech in which the young hero contrasts his desires as an individual (*lichnost'*) with those of the society (*obshchestvennost'*), which can serve as a microcosm of the now enormous fissure between the private agendas of Soviet citizens, almost completely divorced from official ideology, and the artistic representations of their lives that would be tolerated" ("Cinema" 186).

68).¹⁶ It is no surprise that some film scholars therefore erroneously consider the Brezhnev epoch boring and unproductive (Valerii Fomin, S. Shumakov). The Soviet cinema administration actively funded and developed genre cinema, favoring such categories as literary adaptations, industrial films, comedy, adventure films, family melodramas, and “school” films. This last genre was appropriated by such filmmakers like as Dinara Asanova, Il’ia Averbakh, Ernest Iasan, Sergei Solov’ev, Pavel Liubimov, and others, and, because of their hidden commentary on the malfunctioning of the Soviet system, ceased to be simply films about and for school children. The filmmakers used the genre conventions of “school” films—the school setting, teenage protagonists, and intergenerational conflict—as “screens” of compliance with the genre deemed acceptable and safe by the state and as “markers” that indirectly pointed at some deeper problems in society.

The last set of Aesopian techniques suggested by Loseff in his book includes literary and rhetorical devices such as allegory, parody, ellipses, quotations, among others (61). Cinema as a special signifying system can also adapt many of these devices, but utilizes them in its own way. Film uniquely employs these techniques, because of the visual nature of the medium. Instead of describing some imagery in length through the use of words, cinema makes the work of filmmakers easier, by integrating specific cinematic techniques and strategies into Aesopian text—montage, camera angles, setting, costumes, intertitles, diegetic and non-diegetic music and sounds, and the choice of actors.

¹⁶ “...были раздавлены государственной партийной машиной, в то время как множество интересных замыслов не было реализовано.”

2.2 AESOPIAN DEVICES IN BREZHNEV CINEMA

Literature under Brezhnev did not entirely suffocate from censorship, because it had other outlets besides official, state-approved publishing resources. Writers and poets had an opportunity to publish their unorthodox works either through *samizdat*, represented in the underground literary journal *Metropol'* and other unofficial publications, or *tamizdat* (publication and distribution of literary works abroad). Unlike their literary counterparts, however, filmmakers had to depend on the state system's financial support and resources.

To better contextualize the dynamics of Aesopian language in Brezhnev-era youth films, we must first consider how these techniques were deployed in other films from that era. In this section, my goal is not to describe extensively all the devices that are used in Aesopian texts, but rather to give examples of the most common ones. The most thorough study of Aesopian techniques in literature was offered by Lev Loseff. As previously mentioned, Loseff developed his typology by distinguishing two groups of literary devices based on their function and purpose: markers and screens. One of his most intriguing claims is that often both markers and screens can be found in the same textual element and have the purpose of both attracting the reader's attention to a specific part of the text and concealing its meaning at the same time. Only those literary devices that have some veiled "denotation-taboos," which cannot be used openly and indiscreetly, are Aesopian. There is always some level of secrecy, understatement, or ambivalence in order for Aesopian devices to work properly as screens and markers.

An attentive reader or viewer does not necessarily need to search for specific devices but rather must be alert when he meets them in the text. For this reason, authors have to use devices that are familiar to an educated audience, that point at some break into the continuity of the narrative and that draw the readers' attention to a specific device or a specific location in the text

because of its unusual, “mystic” character. David K. Danow writes about the following devices that are typical of Aesopian strategy: “the utilization of imagery borrowed from fables, allegorical fairy tale description, the use of periphrasis and pseudonyms, hidden allusions at times coupled with fairly direct references [...], irony, and various juxtapositions and contrasts” (9). Cinema may employ hidden allusions, references, juxtapositions, contrasts, and irony in ways that may differ from their use in which literature relies on these devices. Filmmakers may juxtapose and contrast characters visually by using low or high angles, close-ups or point-of-view angles to emphasize or devalue the importance of one character in comparison to another. They may also create sympathy among viewers with a particular cinematic character by allowing camera to identify with this character. Directors may also juxtapose the past and the present through a series of flashbacks. With the help of lighting and setting, filmmakers may present objects, subjects, or events, which are compared, either in a positive or negative way. To the list of Aesopian devices in literature, Ray J. Parrott Jr. also adds euphemisms and aposiopesis, or “the suggestive incomplete sentence,” to the list of devices that contribute to the creation of allegorical indirection and polysemy, or “semantic bi-planarity” (39, 42). Parrott generates another set of Aesopian techniques by analyzing nineteenth-century-works by Saltykov-Shchedrin: “typological names, conspiratorial nicknames, coded appellations, epithets, synonyms, metaphors and images” (44). In his discussion of Russian literature of the nineteenth century, Parrott argues:

The devices employed in an Aesopian manner were extremely varied, depending on the content of a work, the satirist’s stated aim and audience, the social and political circumstances in which a piece was written, and the general development of a writer’s artistic craft. Yet, given the central impulse toward mystification,

writers tended to employ a number of stock situations, comparisons, and contrasts as well as techniques. (43)

If the first five devices that Parrott offers are mostly unique for literary texts, images and metaphors may be found easily in films. Ludmilla L. Litus distinguishes her own set of devices that are common to the literary works of this twentieth-century-writer: “sound play, word play (neologisms, archaisms, vulgarisms), rhythmic devices, repetitions, and extended figures and tropes” (115). Some of these devices may function productively in the film narrative (sound play and word play), but also may become purely cinematic. For examples, filmmakers may emphasize the importance of specific characters, objects, or events on the screen by showing them multiple times either through flashbacks or just bringing them back through cuts. In addition to integrating rhythmic devices in poems, which may be used in a diegetic or non-diegetic layer of the film, rhythmic montage may contribute to the creation of Aesopian meaning. Among the rhetorical figures, poetic devices, and tropes common to literary works, Loseff recognizes seven main categories that can be found most often in Aesopian texts: allegory, parody, periphrasis, ellipsis, citation, shift, and *reduction ad absurdum* and *non sequitur* (61). Most of the devices listed by Loseff can be also found in visual Aesopian texts. Because film includes narrative and dialogues, these literary devices may operate in cinema in their original forms; however, because film is a visual medium, these techniques may also obtain slightly different functions.

Many of the literary devices described by Loseff work well in any cultural text, but may function differently in each text depending on the medium of translation: literature, film, music, or painting. Aesopian devices also work differently in cinematic texts because of their reliance not only on the narrative, but also on the aural and visual elements. One of the most important

devices that serve Aesopian language in literature, cinema, and music on a regular basis is allegory. Allegory is the base of all Aesopian language, upon which other devices like allusions, juxtapositions, irony, shifts, and other devices interact and function. Allegory does not necessarily have to be Aesopian, especially when censorship does not have a strong cultural presence. Even official Soviet culture often turned to allegories, and Loseff argues that this is especially evident in Soviet propaganda literature and poetry by Arkadii Gaidar, Nikolai Tikhonov, Nikolai Ushakov, and Vadim Shefner (105). The practitioners of Aesopian allegory in post-Stalinist culture included Evgenii Shvarts, Evgenii Evtushenko, Fazil' Iskander, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In a similar vein, Soviet filmmakers also resorted to Aesopian allegorical strategies in their film production. One of the most important differences between literary and cinematic allegory is that, if the former employs “speech clichés and metaphor” (Loseff 91), the latter has a richer arsenal of techniques: literary, visual, and aural. In cinema, the tracks of allegorical structures can be found not only in dialogues and monologues of characters, but also in the specifically organized settings, *mise-en-scène*, camera angle, camera movement, shot composition, costumes, sounds and music, lighting, and montage.

Aesopian allegory always implies a limited audience and can be constructed by “drawing [author’s] screens and markers either from an area with which only fairly learned readers will be familiar... or from the idiom of the intelligentsia, with which the censor is believed to be unacquainted,” according to Loseff (87). Thus, in the Soviet cinema of “developed socialism,” many films relied on allegorical principles that were evident to only a specific group of viewers, mainly to intellectuals who did not entirely trust the government anymore. The intelligentsia belonged to the select group insofar as it was more knowledgeable about the political and

economic situation in the country and was able to analyze problems more keenly than the average Soviet filmgoer.

It is not surprising that those films of the 1970s through the early 1980s that place allegorical reading at the center of the work would also feature Soviet intellectuals as key figures in the narrative. Popular films under Brezhnev offer their audiences a wide range of awkward and unfortunate situations in which members of the Soviet intelligentsia find themselves and which they then try to resolve. In El'dar Riazanov's *A Rail Station for Two* (*Vokzal dlia dvoikh*, 1982), for example, the main protagonist, musician Platon Sergeevich Riabinin, is sent to prison for a crime he did not commit; he does so in order to protect his wife. Because of an unfortunate accident, as a result of which a person has been killed, Platon Sergeevich's status changes from a well-to-do music conductor with a beautiful wife and a personal car to a prisoner-custodian somewhere in the outskirts of the country. The motif of the Soviet intelligentsia exiled to the middle of nowhere penetrates the entire film structure, and *A Rail Station for Two* is framed with episodes from the prison both in the opening and closing scenes; additionally, the continuous flow of the narrative is intermittently interrupted by visuals of Riabinin's camp life (See Figure 1). The prison setting in which Riabinin serves his sentence is visually reminiscent of the images of numerous labor camps during Stalinist years. This creates an allegorical parallel between a cinematic character in Riazanov's film and the real Soviet intellectuals who were unjustly sentenced to prison. In the closing scene, Platon Sergeevich is sitting together with his beloved waitress Vera on the road among piles of snow and playing an accordion to signal his late return from his day off to the prison guards. Cacophonous sounds gradually take over the aural space of the final scene, while the camera zooms out from the sitting figures of Vera and Platon Sergeevich with a sunrise in the background (See Figure 2). Despite an optimistic mise-

en-scène, the final eerie music contrasts greatly to the on-screen imagery, allegorically alluding to the fact that intellectuals like Platon Sergeevich are doomed to be sent to the outskirts of the Soviet Motherland so they cannot “harm” the rest of the society with their unconventional ideas.



Figure 1: *A Rail Station for Two*



Figure 2: *A Rail Station for Two*

Georgii Daneliia's *Autumn Marathon* (*Osenii marafon*, 1979) is another allegorical reflection on the impotence of the Soviet intelligentsia during the Brezhnev period. The protagonist, Buzykin, who works as a translator for an editing house, leads a boring life, does extra work for his colleague Varvara without being acknowledged for it, and at the same time has an extramarital affair with a younger woman, Alla. Dmitry and Vladimir Shlapentokh argue that in Soviet cinema under Brezhnev, "promiscuity or cheating is portrayed as a symbol of the cynicism of Soviet intellectuals and of society in general" (161). Buzykin's dissatisfaction with life echoes the disappointment with the system that some Soviet intellectuals were experiencing under Brezhnev. In one of the scenes, this allegory of a recalcitrant, inflexible Soviet society is emphasized by showing a film poster with a sad male face and the title of the film, *Destiny* ("sud'ba") (See Figure 3). Small details of the setting also contribute to the idea of the intellectuals' failure to operate effectively in a changing society. On the wall of Buzykin's apartment, there is a stylized painting of a man in a tie with a clown face, who represents an intellectual. Most of the time, this painting appears on the screen with Buzykin in the same shot. (See Figures 4-5). Therefore, Daneliia uses an ironic comparison that needs to be deciphered by viewers. This allegory the intelligentsia's impotence and incapacity is complemented and reinforced at the aural level by mournful, pessimistic music, which frames the narrative and functions as an allegorical accompaniment to Buzykin's pitiful, dishonest, passive life, an existence from which he cannot escape. The setting, the framing, and the soundtrack in *A Rail Station for Two* and *Autumn Marathon* are among important elements that contribute to the allegorical structure of the film.



Figure 3: *Autumn Marathon*



Figure 4: *Autumn Marathon*



Figure 5: *Autumn Marathon*

Another common Aesopian technique that many films during the Brezhnev period share is intertextuality. In this instance, the film director typically includes excerpts from poems that were not widely known but were easily recognizable by the educated audience within the context of the specific time period. The citations helped the filmmakers to convey ideas that they would be wise not to openly express. An educated audience of Aesopian texts would not simply interpret a poetic excerpt in the context of the current historical and cultural situation, but would also read it holistically, by bringing in the poet's background and his role in culture and keeping in mind the rest of the poem that was not included in the film.

Citation points directly at another text and only becomes an Aesopian marker if, within the context of the new text, it creates a new meaning that can be deciphered by an educated audience but overlooked by censors. The omitted part of the citation or its original context can also be a part of the strategy. In this regard, citation is a device that is not substantially different from ellipsis because it may also mark a gap, or a lack, in the cited text, which ignites the search for hidden meaning. As a screen, ellipsis hides important meaning and at the same time, as a marker, it attracts the readers' or the viewers' attention by manipulating their desire to solve the puzzle. Because most of the time citation involves truncating the original text and recycling only a small part of it, it may also ignite the audience's curiosity to find out the origin of the specific citation and its context.

Kevin Moss gives an example of Aesopian citation in Grigorii Gorin's *The Very Same Munchausen* (*Tot samyi Munkhauzen*). The events in Gorin's film take place in Germany, and thus the screen is created to conceal any reference to Soviet society. At the same time, according to Moss, the citation from Nikolai Gogol's *Inspector General* (*Revizor*) in Gorin's film—"So,

gentlemen, I have invited you in order to inform you of a most unpleasant bit of news”—works as a way to attract the viewers’ attention to the surreptitious Russian context (24-5). It functions as marker, and by placing a quote from classical Russian literature in a foreign context, Gorin hints at the subtle connection between the events on the screen and the situation in Russian/Soviet society.

Citing from a literary source is widely popular in Aesopian literature; however, Soviet film directors during the Brezhnev years also used poems by famous Russian poets for song lyrics in their films. Song lyrics as part of a film soundtrack work even better as an Aesopian technique because they do not only draw the viewers’ attention as markers, but are veiled by music that the viewers often perceive only as a background for the actions on the screen. In El'dar Riazanov’s *The Irony of Fate or “Enjoy Your Bath”* (*Ironiia sud'by ili S legkim parom!*, 1975), many song lyrics heard in the film are based on poems by Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva, Bella Akhmadulina, and Evgenii Evtushenko. Even though most of the lyrics in *The Irony of Fate* are dedicated to the themes of love, loneliness, and friendship, an educated spectator would immediately recognize the ambivalent political and cultural status of the poets whose words are incorporated into the soundtrack.¹⁷ The biographical backgrounds of these

¹⁷ Pasternak and his works were still condemned by the Soviet state until the end of the 1980s. Similarly, Tsvetaeva was not favored by the state and she struggled to revive her literary career until her death in 1941. In some of her poems, she also skillfully uses Aesopian language to comment on the Soviet regime. Akhmadulina, even though never openly opposed the Soviet government and considered to be “apolitical,” is well-known for her active role as a defender of dissident intellectuals, such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Sakharov, and Pasternak. Evtushenko is an ambiguous literary figure in the history of Russian poetry: on the one hand, he was accused of collaborating with the regime by his fellow poets; on the other hand, his poem *Babii Iar* (1961) was criticized for invoking the Holocaust when the official Soviet heroic narratives of the World War II avoided discussing the extermination of European Jews by the state during the war. His *The Heirs of Stalin* (*Nasledniki Stalina*, 1961) was republished only under Mikhail Gorbachev.

poets cannot be ignored while analyzing their poems, and the use of their poems in melodramas during the Brezhnev years may be interpreted as an attempt on the part of filmmakers to construct a second meaning. Some of the songs in Riazanov's film include lines that refer to the absence and loss of friends, betrayal by friends and lovers, as well as the trope of roads, travel, and foreign countries. These lines can be read on two levels: as straightforward messages and as indirect Aesopian references to the political and ideological situation in the country, when the state demanded writers and artists to denounce their friends and colleagues who positioned themselves with the dissident movement and when many intellectuals were prosecuted by the government and exiled from the center of the country or from the Soviet Union altogether.

The omission that emerges in the citation of a specific literary excerpt is partially connected to Loseff's category of Aesopian ellipsis, insofar as some important piece of information is missing. If an ellipsis in general is a break in narrative continuity, it serves in Aesopian literary and visual texts as a means to conceal certain meanings. In cinema, ellipses may be constructed through editing transitions, such as jump cuts, fades, dissolves, wipes, or unmotivated changes of scene. The intention of Aesopian ellipsis is to encourage viewers to fill the gap with some meaning that is not directly expressed by the director. In the Soviet cinema of "developed socialism," the ellipsis was often a part of the narrative that in one way or another alluded to "tabooed" topics (markers) and at the same time distracted viewers' attention from some sensitive topics (screens). Thus, in Men'shov's *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (*Moskva slezam ne verit*, 1979), the ellipsis after the first half of the film allows the director to omit the part in which the young protagonist, Katia, has to deal with her unplanned pregnancy alone. Through this technique, Men'shov conceals Katia's struggle through single parenthood and emphasizes her final accomplishments and her growth from a regular plant worker into a

plant director. Consequently, Men'shov puts forward the idea that Soviet people will always triumph as long as they have a goal and work hard to achieve it.

If citation requires an exact repetition of the original text or transferring a part of it into another text, allusion indirectly or covertly refers readers or viewers to a specific text, event, or character. Thus, Moss finds several allusions to Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* in Zakharov's film *The Very Same Munchausen*. For example, the Baron's burnt manuscripts allude to the Master's burned novel and both Thomas in Gorin's film and Korov'ev in Bulgakov's novel talk about the challenge of understanding things that are concealed. All these allusions allow viewers first to draw parallels between the fictional reality of the film and the fictional reality of the novel and, then, to connect the film to the veiled reality of Stalinist Russia. In another film of the 1970s, Zakharov's *An Ordinary Miracle* (*Obyknovennoe chudo*, 1978), the allusions already appear in the opening scene of the film, when the wife of the main character, the wizard, asks her husband: "Tell me the truth! Whom should we expect today? People, or will ghosts come to play with you?"¹⁸ Dramatic, suspenseful music immediately follows this question. To add more suspense, Zakharov juxtaposes a close-up of the wizard's agitated, scared face with a shot of the clockwork mechanism. The dialogue between the wizard and his wife, together with the images, generates a metaphor of Soviet people's fear of secret forces, in this specific case, a fear of punitive authority. This scene functions as a displaced reference to the unexpected visits and arrests by the Soviet secret police, the NKVD, in the 1930s and the 1940s. The fear of being visited by NKVD members during the Stalinist purges was engraved in Soviet people's memory, and even though this fear was no longer as powerful as it was during the

¹⁸ "Говори правду! Каких гостей нам сегодня ждать? Людей? Или привидения зайдут поиграть с тобой?"

1930s and the 1940s, it nevertheless migrated to late Soviet culture. In *An Ordinary Miracle*, the threat to the wizard and his family comes from the local king who arrives at their house later. In the scene in which the king visits the wizard's house, Zakharov creates another veiled allusion: the king introduces himself as "a tyrant, despot," and explains that this is not his fault, but that of his ancestry. First of all, this introduction serves as an ironic reference to the nature of the authority during the Soviet times, specifically during Stalinism. Because the actor Leonov announces his threatening self-definition in a monotonous, inexpressive way, his statement may be interpreted as an ironic Aesopian response to the renewal interest in Stalin during the Brezhnev years. This scene represents the director's disagreement with the partial renewal of the cult of personality. This is reflected in Brezhnev's self-promotion and enciphered in the king's remark regarding the succession of dictators. Therefore, Zakharov's film indirectly references Soviet reality during the time of political dictatorship and generates a trenchant, though concealed, criticism of Neo-Stalinism in the 1970s.

Periphrasis is also a common Aesopian device that offers "the hallmark of an object [...] in place of its proper name" (Loseff 103). In *A Rail Station for Two*, Vera's acquaintance, the female character "Diadia Misha" ("Uncle Misha"), a former train conductor, refers to her occupation as a reseller of goods as "caring about people." Her masculine nickname—Diadia Misha—is ironic. It suggests a certain level of affinity and trust, as if she were everyone's relative. The irony arrives at the moment when viewers realize that Diadia Misha is a reseller and takes advantage of her customers, despite providing them with good service. She makes a comment about her business: "It is not clear who cares about people more—me or them." By using the pronoun "them," she is able to criticize Soviet authority. She claims that she takes better care of people insofar as she provides them with vegetables and fruits

of a better quality than the ones in state grocery stores. Instead of directly blaming the state for the problematic economic situation in the country, Diadia Misha resorts to periphrasis, referring to the higher echelon of Soviet power as “gastronimshchiki” (“grocery store owners”) who do not care about people’s health. Thus, the periphrasis allows a cinematic character to comment on flaws in the social and economic structures and on *apparatchiki* via circumlocution instead of directly blaming the party or the state.

Wordplay as an Aesopian device in both literary and cinematic texts is often embodied in the names of protagonists and geographical locations.¹⁹ Thus, in *A Rail Station for Two*, the name of the provincial town in which Platon Sergeevich and Vera meet is Zastupinsk, which derives from “zastupat'sia” (“to protect, to defend”), but also recalls or “tupit” (“to be in a stupor, to be slow”). The first explanation refers to the narrative, according to which Platon Sergeevich, protecting his wife, lies that he has killed a person with a car and is sentenced to prison. The second explanation refers to a more general meaning—the quality of Brezhnev’s government, which, while focusing on improving some parts of society, ignored the agricultural and economic sectors, thus, “slowing down” the quality of life. Another cinematic character with a name that has special meaning is Semen Gorbunkov in Leonid Gaidai’s *The Diamond Arm* (*Brilliantovaia ruka*, 1969). Gorbunkov finds himself in an unusual and potentially dangerous situation, when, after injuring his arm during his trip abroad, he receives a cast, which swindlers use to smuggle diamonds into the Soviet Union. The film creates a parallel between the film narrative and the situation in the country when the government was constantly taking

¹⁹ Names in cinema very often are predetermined by the literary works and scripts that underlie these films. However, it is possible to talk about the Aesopian strategy in the case when a director deliberately chooses a specific literary text and possibly participates in revising it into a film script.

advantage of common Soviet citizens. This parallel is first constructed by the depiction of Gorbunkov as a simple, naïve family man, who stands for the average Soviet citizens. Second, it is enhanced by his allusive name, which derives from “gorbun” (“hunchback”) and immediately recognizable as simile to the name of a popular Russian fairy-tale character— Konek-Gorbunok (The Humpbacked Horse).²⁰ In both instances, Gorbunkov’s name implies that he is someone who is constantly offended, ridiculed, and exploited by others. Unlike him, the allusive name of Buzykin in *Autumn Marathon*, cannot be read directly, but is instead derived by inverting it, in typical Aesopian fashion. The word “buzit” means “to start a fuss, to act up, to brawl”; however, this word does not characterize Buzykin, but rather serves as an antonymous description of his inertia and passivity as a member of the Soviet intelligentsia during the Brezhnev years. Hence, Aesopian wordplay contributes to the construction of ambivalent meaning through the direct or inverted meaning of the names of characters and locations.

Aesopian parody also plays an important role in conveying a concealed meaning. Parody needs to be distinguished from satire, which is less productive for Aesopian language because of its open, explicit ridiculing of social problems and ills. However, not just any type of parody can be appropriate for Aesopian practice. Loseff maintains that, unlike humorous, comic parody or satiric parody, only “the parodic manipulation of another’s text for social and political aims” can be an element of Aesopian technique (92). In a cinematic text, parody may express itself not only in the narrative structure or characters’ speech, but also in gestures, mimicking, or even in the choice of actors. Creating a parodic effect by inviting specific actors for specific roles in films is an Aesopian technique particular to cinema and, possibly, to theater.

²⁰ In “The Humpbacked Horse,” the main protagonist Ivan constantly uses Konek-Gorbunok’s services and treats the horse mainly as an instrument of fulfilling his own desires and dreams.

In the Soviet cinematic tradition, specific actors were associated with specific genres. These actors brought the “aura” from previous roles to an entirely different one in a new film. This happened especially if the previous film was successful with audiences, as viewers automatically projected the protagonist’s personal qualities and actions onto the actor. In such cases, directors manipulated viewers’ perceptions in an Aesopian manner and deliberately chose actors for specific roles based on how audiences perceived them. Thus, such famous Soviet actors as Igor’ Il’inskii, Anatolii Papanov, Evgenii Leonov, Georgii Vitsyn, Iurii Nikulin, Mikhail Pugovkin, Spartak Mishulin, Viacheslav Nevinnyi, and Andrei Mironov were mainly known to Soviet audiences for their comic roles. Their participation in other genre films and in roles uncommon for them had a parodic quality and was, if not shocking, at least destabilizing for the Soviet audience. It also added a grain of irony to the films in which they had atypical parts.

For example, in *An Ordinary Miracle*, the part of the “tyrannical” king is played by Leonov, who prior to that was mainly known for his comic roles as Travkin in Georgii Daneliia’s *Thirty Three (Tridtsat’ tri, 1965)*, Oreshkin in El’dar Riazanov’s *The Zigzag of Luck (Zigzag udachi, 1968)*, Evgenii Ivanovich and “Dotsent” in Aleksandr Seryi’s *Gentlemen of Fortune (Dzhentel'meny udachi, 1971)*, and Kolia in Daneliia’s *Afonia (1975)*. His peculiar posture and voice,²¹ which in many of his films create a comic aura around his characters, parodies bureaucrats and authoritative characters found in non-comic genres, thus trivializing or diminishing their importance; this is evident regarding the non-comic characters he plays, such as the king in *An Ordinary Miracle*, Kushak in Vitalii Mel’nikov’s *Vacation in September*

²¹ Leonov’s voice is familiar to millions of Soviet viewers and recognizable not only to adult audiences but also to children. For many decades, his low, thick voice was associated with the animated character of Winnie-the-Pooh, to whom he lent his voice in Fedor Khitruk’s *Winnie-the-Pooh (Vinni Pukh, 1969)*, *Winnie-the-Pooh is Coming for Dinner (Vinni Pukh idet v gosti, 1971)*, and *Winnie-the-Pooh and The Day of Troubles (Vinni Pukh i den' zabor, 1972)*.

(*Otpusk v sentiabre*, 1979), or Kharitonov in *Autumn Marathon* (See Figures 6-7). The ability to reframe a character into an object of parody is important for Aesopian practices because it creates an opportunity to criticize or mock authoritative figures and administrators without openly revealing these feelings. Other examples of indirect mocking of people in power in Brezhnev-era Soviet cinema include the role of the minister in *An Ordinary Miracle* and the member of court nobility in Nadezhda Kosheverova's *The Shadow* (*Ten'*, 1971), both played by Mironov, who became highly popular with Soviet audiences thanks to his roles as the Count in Leonid Gaidai's *The Diamond Arm* (*Brilliantovaia ruka*, 1968), Fardinar in Leonid Kvinikhidze's *The Straw Hat* (*Solomennaia shliapka*, 1974), and Ostap Bender in Mark Zakharov's *The Twelve Chairs* (*Dvenadtsat' stol'ev*, 1977). It is difficult for viewers to ignore Mironov's previous acting as a trickster and imposter while looking at his serious, "authoritative" roles. Therefore, through the deliberate casting choices, cinema opens an additional field for Aesopian practitioners to ridicule indirectly the cinematic characters who serve as referents or analogues for Brezhnev-regime bureaucrats.



Figure 6: *An Ordinary Miracle*



Figure 7: Autumn Marathon

Another popular Aesopian device that Loseff discusses in his book is a shift, defined by him as “marking exotic, historical, and fantastic parables” that can operate at different levels (111). Aesopian screens are created through geographical and temporal shifts. The events of the film may take place in another country, far away from the place of concealed criticism. The time frame may also be displaced, or shifted. Screens work more effectively if both the original place and time are distanced from the imaginary time and place of the cinematic narrative. At the same time, it is typical of Soviet filmmakers to revisit the historical past of the country, which is the target of Aesopian criticism, thus relying only on temporal shifts and avoiding geographical shifts. During the Brezhnev years, films that revisited Russia’s past and that could be subjected to an Aesopian analysis include Nikita Mikhalkov’s *At Home Among Strangers*, *A Stranger Among His Own* (*Svoi sredi chuchikh, chuzhoi sredi svoikh*, 1974) and *A Slave of Love* (*Raba liubvi*, 1975), Sergei Solov'ev’s *The Stationmaster* (*Stantsionnyi smotritel'*, 1972), Il'ia Averbakh’s *A Love Confession* (*Ob'iasnenie v liubvi*, 1975), and Petr Todorovskii’s *The Last Victim* (*Posledniia zhertva*, 1975). Some of the films of that time period touched upon sensitive

historical subjects and offered unconventional representations of historical events in pre- and Soviet Russia, and for that reason were punished. Such films as Gleb Panfilov's *No Path Through Fire* (*V ognе broda net*, 1967), Aleksandr Askol'dov's *Commissar* (*Komissar*, 1967), and Elem Klimov's *Agony* (*Agoniia*, 1975), while shifting the narrative to Russia's past, failed to make use of Aesopian techniques, which opened them up for criticism and attacks from the state.

There are a number of films during the Brezhnev years that were much more successful at adapting Aesopian shifts, and Moss gives an example of displaced time and location in *The Very Same Munchausen*. He argues that, even though the events of Gorin's film take place "in one of the many German principalities in the eighteenth century," they covertly refer viewers to contemplate the Soviet Union in the twentieth century.²² In this specific case, the setting and the costumes play an integral part in surprising and alerting viewers to their subsequent involvement in Aesopian play. Another film—Gaidai's *It Can't Be* (*Ne mozhет byt'*, 1975)—also serves as an example of a historical shift. The film is based on Mikhail Zoshchenko's satirical works and describes events in Russia during the NEP era in the 1920s. The film was made in Astrakhan', far away from Moscow, the center of the Soviet country. Despite this distancing of time and space, the educated viewer can draw parallels between events in the film and such vices and features of the Brezhnev society as materialism, insincerity, and the inability to solve problems.

A characteristic device of Aesopian language is absurdity, which not only works as a shield for some covert messages, but also becomes an essential tool for such Aesopian genres as fantasy, fairy tale, and comedy. Absurdity as an Aesopian device includes the insertion of

²² Another example of a temporal shift, as suggested by Moss, is a court scene in Tengiz Abuladze's *Repentance* (*Pokaianie*, 1984), when some members of the audience in the court room wear medieval robes and armor, while others can be identified as contemporaries (24).

atypical events and characters in the narrative, out of context, that reveals certain important issues and problems, that are usually not openly discussed. Loseff writes about this device:

The absurdity of Aesopian language is, if the truth be told, a false absurdity: depending on the circumstances, the nonsensical figures now as a screen, now as a marker; it either refers the reader to a content which is far from absurd or it keeps the same content from the censor. (115)

Thus, filmmakers during the Brezhnev period drew the audience's attention to some cinematic and narrative elements by shocking them with absurd situations or characters, while indirectly referring viewers to more serious issues. During the Brezhnev years, the absurd could not be openly practiced; nevertheless, it left its traces in films by such directors as Georgii Daneliia, Leonid Gaidai, and Mark Zakharov.²³

In pre-perestroika cinema, absurdity existed mainly in the genre of comedy—the genre that could easily incorporate “nonsensical details,” pretending that their purpose was purely to entertain audiences. Thus, Daneliia's *The Tears Were Dropping* (*Slezy kapali*, 1982) narrates the story of the city-planning officer Pavel Ivanovich Vasin, who one day starts seeing the flaws in the social system and only negative characteristics in the people around him after a small piece of magic glass gets into his eye. The opening scene introduces a fairy-tale structure reminiscent of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen*. However, instead of the young boy Kay, a fifty-year-old Soviet bureaucrat suffers from seeing the truth in everyone and everything around him, a condition that makes him irritable and mean. He tries to rationalize this change in his attitude

²³ Absurdity became very popular with Soviet filmmakers mainly in the second half of the 1980s. Such films as Karen Shakhnazarov's *Zero City* (*Gorod zero*, 1988), Nikolai Makarov's *The Name Day* (*Den' angela*, 1988), Valerii Ogorodnikov's *Prishvin's Paper Eyes* (*Bumazhnye glaza Prishvina*, 1989), and Aleksandr Kaidanovskii's *Kerosene Seller's Wife* (*Zhena kirosinshchika*, 1989) explore the topic of absurdity to a great extent.

as “nervous stress,” and only his little granddaughter explains the real reason to him. This plot contains absurd elements and, in some of the scenes, the main protagonist finds himself in awkward and unusual situations. Thus, in a suicide attempt, while trying to hang himself, Pavel Ivanovich falls with a piece of the ceiling collapsing on his head (See Figure 8). In perhaps the most absurd scene, after stealing a horse carriage with a piano on it, he ends up using the piano to play Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata* in the middle of a provincial road. Other elements add an absurd quality to this scene: Pavel Ivanovich’s off-key singing, Rostov Velikii’s picturesque ensemble of churches in the background, and an additional light directed at the characters make this scene look like a staged performance (See Figure 9). The absurd elements and the genre of tragicomedy framed as a fairy tale all allow Daneliia to reflect on the condition of a common Soviet man during the Brezhnev period who has the ability to see social problems but nevertheless bears the existential inability to change anything about them.²⁴

²⁴ Daneliia had already developed similar absurd collisions in 1965 in *Thirty Three (Tridtsat' tri)*. The film was made and released not long after Brezhnev became the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and the events are ignited by the discovery of a thirty-third tooth in the mouth of Ivan Sergeevich Travkin. The absurdity of Travkin’s situation includes him being differently treated by the system for his uniqueness. First, he is sent to a mental hospital and later to a scientific conference, where scientists try to prove his alien heritage and send him into space. Travkin’s circumstances draw the viewers’ attention to the idea that the state may treat individuals differently and use them for its own purposes.



Figure 8: *The Tears Were Dropping*



Figure 9: *The Tears Were Dropping*

Viktor Tregubovich's *If You Are Going, Go* (*Ukhodia ukhodi*, 1978) also operates with absurd elements that are already introduced in the opening scene depicting the crowded funeral of a bureaucrat. The dead man, with his semi-bald head and gray hair, visually resembles Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party prior to Brezhnev. The camera's close focus on the dead man's ridiculous white shoes may be understood as a reference to the so-called

“shoe-banging incident,” for which Khrushchev became notorious in different countries.²⁵ Other visual evidence of historical allusions to Khrushchev’s government follow: the camera cuts from the shoes to a cross over a church entrance. This is an indirect reference to the state policy against religion between 1959 and 1964, when an extensive number of churches and monasteries were closed and priests were persecuted.²⁶ The culmination of absurdity occurs when the man in the coffin gets up and refuses to be buried. Such an absurd episode draws viewers’ attention and ignites possible interpretations, among which is the reference to Khrushchev’s forced resignation. The main protagonist, Sulkin, whispers “If you are going, go,” which serves as an allusion to the conspiracy behind Khrushchev’s removal from the Central Committee. The absurd situation and details of the costumes in *If You Are Going, Go* work as the Aesopian markers of Khrushchev’s regime and their rationalization as a dream sequence, which is later explained in the film, and as the screen to veil the historical reference. Thus, resorting to absurd situations, characters, and events became an effective way for Soviet filmmakers in the 1970s and the 1980s to express their dissatisfaction with the past or the current regime.

All the Aesopian devices popular with cinema under the Brezhnev years discussed in this chapter—allegory, citation, ellipsis, periphrasis, parody, historical and temporal shifts, wordplay, and absurdity—were also used by directors who were interested in the genre of youth films. Dinara Asanova, Il’ia Averbakh, Pavel Arsenov, Sergei Solov’ev, Pavel Liubimov, and Ernest

²⁵ The shoe-banging incident happened during the 902nd Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 12 October 1960. The mass media used the moment, in which Khrushchev pounded his shoe on the table as a reaction to the speech by the delegate from Philippines, to create an image of Khrushchev as a hostile and bumptious leader.

²⁶ For more details about the destruction of the churches during the 1950s, see Nathaniel Davis, “The Number of Orthodox Churches before and after the Khrushchev Antireligious Drive,” 612-20.

Iasan wove these techniques and devices into an Aesopian structure, with the goal of protecting their films from state persecution while ridiculing and disagreeing with official versions of Soviet society. In order to illustrate that all these directors, indeed, had to work in conditions of limited creative freedom, in the next chapter, I will discuss the development and the functions of Soviet censorship that necessarily affected film production in the Soviet Union, especially during the Brezhnev period. To distinguish youth films by Asanova, Averbakh, Arsenov, Solov'ev, and other directors during the Brezhnev years, I also include a historical study of the development of this genre, tracking its roots in Stalinist cinema, through Thaw films about youth.

3.0 GENRE MEETS CENSORSHIP, CENSORSHIP MEETS GENRE

This [the genre of school film] is a backup airport in case of a bad weather. In that zone, one may say whatever is on his mind. Everyone got out of shit through this magical conjuncture of adolescence and youth.

from an interview with Sergei Solov'ev in *Seans*²⁷

3.1 CENSORSHIP IN SOVIET CULTURE

Soviet cinema and censorship have had a long intertwined relationship with each other, although the history of cinema censorship predates the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922. After tsarist censorship was officially eliminated by the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, for a few months, Russian cinema was rife with uncensored low-quality films. The formation of the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs (Glavlit) in 1922 and the Chief Repertory Committee (Glavrepertkom) under the People's Commissariat of Education in 1923 suggests that the early Soviet state also quickly recognized censorship as a useful mean of controlling social

²⁷ “Это какой-то запасной аэродром на случай плохой погоды. В этой зоне можно говорить, что в голову придёт. Все вылезали из говна через эту волшебную конъюнктуру отрочества и юности.” See, Konstantin Shavlovskii and Aglaia Chechot's “Blagorodstva bol'she net.”

and cultural processes.²⁸ In 1928, Sovnarkom established a new organization within the People's Commissariat of Education—The Main Administration for Affairs of Literature and Arts (Glavnoe upravlenie po delam khudozhestvennoi literatury i iskusstva, or Glaviskusstva). The goal of this organization was to unify and strengthen the censoring powers of the state, mainly over literature, cinema, theater, fine arts, music, and other media. Glavrepertkom was integrated into Glaviskusstva, which together with Glavlit, had control of all cultural production in the Soviet Union.²⁹

After decades of severe Stalinist censorship and total state control over cultural production, the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 created a somewhat more relaxed ideological and cultural atmosphere. Louis Harris Cohen maintains that “during the Khrushchev era a greater measure of freedom was allowed in creative work as well as the increase in production with the [introduction] of new forms of cinema, i.e., wide-format, wide-screen, color and stereophonic sound” (297). Because the state regulations were not as strict as they were during Stalinist years, many films with a high aesthetical and stylistic quality and relatively unusual topics or unorthodox approaches to old problems were produced and released in the Soviet Union. Some examples of these films included Grigorii Chukhrai's *Ballad of a Soldier* (*Ballada o soldate*, 1959), Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are Flying* (*Letiat zhuravli*, 1957), and Andrei Tarkovskii's *Ivan's Childhood* (*Ivanovo detstvo*, 1962).

The censorship of both film and theater production was managed by the People's Commissariat until 1962, when the Committee on Motion Pictures was established. Prior to that,

²⁸ Both Glavlit and Glavrepertkom became mainly independent in 1929, and Glavrepertkom was replaced by the Ministry of Culture in 1953, while Glavlit existed until the end of the Soviet era and was liquidated by the end of 1990.

²⁹ Since 1929 the name of Glaviskusstva was changed into The Council for Affairs of Literature and Arts (Soviet po delam khudozhestvennoi literatury i iskusstva).

in 1934, the resolution “On the Ratification of a Statute of 29 February 1934, on the Main Administration for Monitoring Entertainment Performances and Repertoires of the People’s Commissariat of Education of the RSFSR” was ratified. Many statements of this resolution—for instance, the ones establishing the role and functions of the Main Administration for Monitoring Entertainment Performances and Repertoires—remained valid even until the 1950s. One of the main postulates, as Valerii S. Golovskoi paraphrases it, states that the censoring organ does not allow “public performances and distribution of theatrical and musical presentations, motion pictures, and phonograph records that contain agitation or propaganda directed against the Soviet authorities and the dictatorship of the proletariat, that divulge state secrets;...that lack the proper ideological stance; or that are of an anti-artistic nature” (*Behind the Screen* 123). This set of vague reasons for censoring and prohibiting artistic works gradually led to substantial control of literature, theater, cinema, and the arts by the Party bureaucrats. This situation, according to Golovskoi, became “the principle factor in party activities affecting the country’s spiritual life” under Brezhnev’s government (*Behind the Screen* 123). In the film sector, the Repertory Control Committee was replaced by an independent Department for Film Repertory Control in 1962, which was established within the Committee’s Central Administration for Film Distribution under the umbrella of the Committee on Cinematography of the USSR Council of Ministers (Goskino USSR) In *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, George Faraday discusses the importance of establishing Goskino on Soviet cinema. He writes,

From its imposing office building in central Moscow, Goskino controlled most aspects of the Soviet film industry. Its central responsibilities included supervising the main film studios of the Russian Republic, approving films for distribution, determining film production budgets, vetting scripts, managing film

import and export, arranging foreign coproduction, and developing industrial infrastructure; it also ran film archives and creative technical institutes [...], organized film festivals, and published professional, critical, and popular film journals. (62)

Goskino complied with the requirements and resolutions of both the Committee on Cinematography and Glavlit, such that film production underwent a double censoring process. Thus, censorship in film production had a more centralized structure than in other cultural sectors with “a furcated network of inspectors..., which perform[ed] control over the film demonstration and expunging of prohibited films” (Golovskoi *Behind the Screen* 158).

The year 1967 marked the dissemination of new instructions, which “toughened the procedure of passing manuscripts at the stage of preliminary control, [and] acutely intensified the ideological component and the censors’ responsibility” (Blium 17). Despite that, the function of censoring organs during the Brezhnev years underwent some changes. In her book on political censorship in the Soviet Union, Tat’iana Goriaeva describes the relations between the Soviet power organs and the rest of Soviet society during the stage of “developed socialism” as those that “the party aspired to modernize by all means, while not losing its leading role” (20). As Goriaeva suggests, the modification of the censoring process happened when the “iron curtain” was losing its power and international opinion began to play a more important role in the government’s decisions. These changes became especially evident during the period of détente, after the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks Treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union, with negotiations taking place between 1969 and 1972 (Goriaeva 220).

One of the main characteristics of Soviet censorship during the last two decades of Soviet power included its tendency to rely on thorough editorial corrections, which also partially

functioned as ideological cleansing methods. Film censorship during the Brezhnev period can be divided into external methods (coming from the official censoring organs) and internal methods, initiated by editors or film directors themselves in order to have their films released and widely distributed in the Soviet Union. Recommendations coming from such authoritative organs as the Committee of State Security (the KGB) or the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the MVD) also affected this internal self-censorship, though the participation of these two organizations was concealed: most of the suggestions, recommendations, and requests for banning films were often made over the telephone or in private meetings.

The existence of a dynamic, multi-leveled film censorship system necessarily affected the entire process of film production. Golovskoi describes the approval process before a film was released for public viewing. First, as a literary text, the screenplay had to be approved by Glavlit, and it would “[pass] through many departments in the film studio and in the committee ... and [would arrive] at the censors’ office in ‘perfect’ condition” (*Behind the Screen* 127). After that, censors would intervene in the actual film production process by organizing multiple screenings for various representatives of Soviet bureaucracies (the Party committees, the editorial committees, the art councils, the studio editors, etc.). The final version of the film would then be reviewed by the Repertory Control Department of Goskino, and after that the film would finally be ready for distribution. As Faraday suggests, “lower-level organs were held accountable for failing to preempt problems noticed further up the chain. The higher the level a problem was spotted at, the greater the scandal” (63).

One of the ways to limit viewer access to a film was a refusal to issue a permit for duplication and theatrical release by the Control Department located at Mosfilm studios; these permits might also only be issued for a limited time. Since 1972, Goskino USSR was in charge

of approving or banning the films and issuing permits. Even if the film was accepted by these committees, there was always a risk that the film would not reach the audience. According to Golovskoi, “The placement of film censorship within the Goskino structure not only freed [Goskino] from many tasks that the editorial apparatus had assumed but also provided the opportunity to exercise complete greater local control wherever movie theaters exist” (*Behind the Screen* 130). Even if a film was approved by Goskino, there was also the risk that it might be “shelved,” often even after directors received a minimum honorarium. In this case, the Department for Film Repertory Control, under pressure from Glavlit or Goskino, would ban the film, sometimes for years, because of its “ideological errors, allusions to present conditions, [or] the presentation of Soviet life in dark colors” (Golovskoi *Behind the Screen* 132). Some films were not banned or shelved originally but later removed from circulation upon the request of Party authorities or the KGB or the MVD. The final common way of hiding films that did not comply with Soviet ideology or aesthetics was limiting the films’ distribution by diminishing the number of copies and keeping them in special depositories. Therefore, there were a number of ways in which films during the Brezhnev years could disappear from public access.

Some researchers, including Arlen Blium, demarcate the year 1970 as the end of any more or less liberal cultural expression. This is directly connected to the resignation of Aleksandr Tvardovskii, the chief editor of the journal *Novyi mir*—an event that signified “the end of any kind of games with the *shestidesiatniki* who were liberally attuned” (Blium 19). For the famous dissident writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 1970 was a successful year insofar as it was the year he received the Nobel Prize in literature. However, during Brezhnev’s government, Solzhenitsyn’s name was also associated with the intensification of ideological constraints in the literary world. In 1974 he was exiled from the Soviet Union and many of his books and the

issues of *Novyi mir* including his works were confiscated and destroyed by the government. If the incidents with Tvardovskii and Solzhenitsyn marked intensified state control over the literary production, the establishment of Goskino in 1972 was an important initial step to changing the censorious atmosphere in Soviet cinema.

Another important event that affected film production and censorship in the Soviet Union under Brezhnev was the adaptation of a resolution by the Central Committee of the CPSU on August 2, 1972—it was entitled “On Measures for the Further Development of Soviet Cinematography” (“O merakh po dal’neishemu razvitiu sovetskoi kinematografii”). This resolution indicated that the state and the Party were continually attempting to reinforce censorship in Soviet cinema. This decree stated:

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union recognizes the increased significance of Soviet cinematography in the matter of building Communism, in the formation of worldviews, moral beliefs, and aesthetic tastes of Soviet people. During the recent years, a number of films have been created that continue developing the revolutionary topics and which show the self-sacrificing struggle of the working masses for victory and the consolidation of the socialist social system. (135)³⁰

The Central Committee of the CPSU criticized Soviet filmmakers for failing to create an image of contemporary Soviet men “who would attract us by their pure characters, their human charm,

³⁰ The original text states, “ЦК КПСС отмечает возросшее значение советской кинематографии в деле коммунистического строительства, формировании мировоззрения, нравственных убеждений и эстетических вкусов советских людей. За последние годы создал ряд фильмов, в которых продолжена работа над воплощением революционной тематики, показана самоотверженная борьба трудящихся масс за победу и укрепление социалистического общественного строя.”

or their devotion to communist ideals” (136).³¹ The Party especially encouraged filmmakers to pay attention to films for children and youth, insofar as these kinds of films would contribute to “the education of the rising generation in revolutionary, combat, and labor relations of the Soviet people and on the principles of communist morality”³² (136).³³

According to this decree, the goal of all Soviet filmmakers was to develop film art in accordance with the principles of socialist realism:

The mission of the cinema art calls for the active promotion for the [molding] of the broadest masses in a Marxist-Leninist [worldview], the upbringing of the people in a selfless devotion to our multinational Socialist Motherland, Soviet patriotism and Soviet internationalism, and the affirming of communist moral principles and of an irreconcilable attitude toward bourgeois ideology and morality, petty bourgeois survivals, and to everything that interferes with our further forward advancement. (137)³⁴

Cinema was viewed as one of the most important sources for developing patriotic feelings among Soviet citizens, and for the creation and maintenance of multinational, socialist-oriented,

³¹ “... герои, которые привлекали бы целостностью характера, человеческим обаянием, преданностью коммунистическим идеалам...”

³² “Мало выпускается увлекательных, художественно полноценных фильмов для детей и юношества, воспитывающих подрастающее поколение на революционных, боевых и трудовых традициях советского народа, на принципах коммунистической нравственности.”

³³ “[воспитание] подрастающе[го] поколение[я] на революционных, боевых и трудовых традициях советского народа, на принципах коммунистической нравственности.”

³⁴ “Киноискусство призвано активно способствовать формированию у широчайших масс марксистско-ленинского мировоззрения, воспитанию людей в духе беззаветной преданности нашей многонациональной социалистической Родине, советского патриотизма и социалистического интернационализма, утверждению коммунистических нравственных принципов, непримиримого отношения к буржуазной идеологии и морали, мелкобуржуазным пережиткам, ко всему, что мешает нашему продвижению вперед.”

anti-bourgeois people. The education, or molding, of new Soviet citizens through cinema and other cultural forms remained among the most important objectives of the Party even during the period of developed socialism, and the means to do so included influencing young minds by “[bringing] them up [with]... a noble sense of love for their socialist motherland, devotion to the affairs of the Communist Party and irreconcilability to the enemies of socialism and the forces of reaction and aggression” (138).³⁵ The decree also suggested treating other cultures, especially ones that were not based on socialist ideas, as alien and harmful to the socialist order, especially for the benefit of young Soviet citizens. Thus, the goal of forming a new generation of Soviet people through cinema was supposed to include debunking foreign, non-socialist ideas and downgrading the achievements of Western cultures.

At the same time, the Committee demanded that all professionals working in the film industry—including film directors, cameramen, script writers, and actors—create “highly artistic film productions that are diverse in themes, genres, and styles,” as long as they are correlated with the Party’s directives and resolutions (137).³⁶ Producing more children’s films in consultation with the Central Committee of the Leninist Young Communist League of the Soviet Union (TsK VLKSM) was among the Committee’s many recommendations. It suggested Gorky Film Studio for Children’s and Youth Films to continue making films for young audiences, while encouraging other film studios also to include children’s and youth films in their repertoires. Therefore, the decree provided an advantage for the directors who, while following the suggestions of the Central Committee on the surface, were able to work with the youth film

³⁵ “... воспитывать у них благородные чувства любви к социалистической Родине, преданности делу Коммунистической партии, непримиримости к врагам социализма, силам реакции и агрессии.”

³⁶ “... создавать высокохудожественные, разнообразные по тематике, жанрам и стилям кинопроизведения...”

genre as a cover for their criticism of the social and political structure of Soviet society. However, despite the state aiming at shaping new Soviet citizens through the genre of youth films, some film directors found a safe niche in making films about young characters. Under the veil of conforming to the state's demands to form young Soviet citizens through cinema, filmmakers after 1972 began to produce films about the moral and emotional maturation of teenage characters, but these directors had their own approach to the problems of Soviet youth. The 1972 resolution resonated greatly among Party authorities and filmmakers, the proof of which can be found on the pages of the newspapers and magazines of that time. Film directors, film critics, actors, and Party members shared their opinions about the role of the new decree and its effect on the further development of Soviet cinema. Some of them agreed with the Committee's concerns regarding inadequate control over the production and distribution of children and youth films as well as over their ideological content.

Another decree, issued at the end of 1981 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party—"On The Improvement of Production and Distribution of Films for Children and Teenagers" ("Ob uluchshenii proizvodstva i pokaza kinofil'mov dlia detei i podrostkov")—serves as a conclusive summary of the changes that had been introduced to youth cinema during the 1970s, of the suggestions from previous decrees that Soviet filmmakers had failed to follow, and of the Party's expectations for the 1980s. The many flaws in youth films during the Brezhnev period were enumerated in this decree; the most egregious one was that "such important problems of the moral and social development of future citizens, their realization of their duty and responsibility to the society and the collective [were] not adequately represented"

(220).³⁷ In addition, the decree mentioned that the topic of molding of young citizens through labor specifically and the question of class struggle in general were not sufficiently addressed in the youth films of the 1970s.

The Central Committee was also dissatisfied with the work of the Gorkii Studio insofar as it “[did] not entirely complete its main task” (221).³⁸ The main goal of any film studio, as suggested in the decree, was to make films that were “deep in content, emotionally rich, with an interesting and entertaining form, [that could] develop an ‘idea conviction’ (*ideinaia ubezhdennost'*), a preparedness for active participation in building a new society” (221).³⁹ The Committee requested that the central and national film studios produce more films “that contribute to the development in the growing generation of the revolution, war, and labor traditions of the Communist Party and Soviet people” (222).⁴⁰ As the decree implied, many cultural producers of the Brezhnev years failed to develop positive attitudes and values among young Soviet people. For that reason, the Central Committee demanded from various organizations—Goskino, the Union of Filmmakers of the USSR, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, and the State Committee of the USSR on Professional and Technical Education—that they increase the number of children and youth films, to distribute them widely in all Soviet republics, and to be more

³⁷ “Такие важные проблемы, как нравственное и социальное становление будущего гражданина, осознание им своего долга и ответственности перед обществом, коллективом, порой не находят удачного воплощения в кинематографе.”

³⁸ “Не в полной мере обеспечивает выполнение своей основной задачи Центральная студия детских и юношеских фильмов имени М. Горького.”

³⁹ “...должны быть глубокими по содержанию, эмоционально насыщенными, интересными и увлекательными по форме, воспитывать у юных зрителей идейную убежденность, готовность к активному участию в строительстве нового общества.”

⁴⁰ “...особое внимание обратить на создание фильмов, способствующих воспитанию подрастающего поколения на революционных, боевых и трудовых традициях Коммунистической партии и советского народа.”

actively involved in controlling the aesthetic and ideological quality of film production (223). The main task for both the Ministry of Education and the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences was to improve the educational value of youth films; to develop special instructions in accordance with which these films could be used in schools; and to increase cinema's role in communist upbringing." All the organizations listed above were supposed to serve as additional censoring organs while promoting youth culture and youth topics in Soviet cinema and television.

The publication of the 1981 decree with additional instructions and orders for film producers proves that, even though the earlier 1971 decree influenced the state of Soviet cinema in the 1970s, it did not have enough censoring power to affect all filmmakers. It is evident, based on the tenor and the demands of the 1981 decree, that the censorship situation in the Soviet Union from the early 1970s through the early 1980s was complex and not at all straightforward. On the one hand, through various organizations such as Glavlit, Glavrepertkom, Goskino, and the ministries of education and culture, among others, the state established more or less effective ways in which the entire cultural sphere was constantly overseen. On the other hand, the fact that the Central Committee reminded writers, artists, and filmmakers numerous times to follow state directives and suggestions points to a situation in which these cultural producers did not closely follow the instructions from the government and, sometimes altered, if not outright inverted, them.

Thus, by the 1970s, Soviet censorship had drastically lost its retributive and circumscriptive powers. A brief overview of the dissident movement and its relationship with the state may support that statement. Since the late 1960s through the 1970s, the Soviet intelligentsia found itself in a vulnerable position. Many intellectuals, such as Vladimir Bukovskii, Petr Iakir, Natal'ia Gorbanevskaja, Iurii Galanskov, and Victor Krasin, were arrested

and sent either to prison or to mental hospitals. Famous writers, film directors, artists, and scientists would have to go to greater measures to “adjust” their works in order to have them released to the general public. Some of the dissidents were exiled to cities outside the capital for not following the state’s demands from them. Thus, nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov was forcibly exiled to Gorky in 1980 and was closely watched by KGB. Another physicist, Iurii Orlov, was sent to Armenia, while mathematician Anatolii Shcharanskii and Ukrainian writer Mykola Rudenko ended up in a forced labor camp in Siberia for their oppositional views. Other Soviet intellectuals shared a destiny with such representatives of the Soviet intelligentsia as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Iosif Brodskii, Petr Grigorenko, Vladimir Maksimov, Georgii Vins, Mark Dymshits, Valentin Morozov, Vladimir Bukovskii, and Aleksandr Ginzburg, who were stripped off their Soviet citizenship and were forced by the government to leave the country.⁴¹ The state had particular difficulties in controlling underground cultural production; for that reason, it had to find special ways of limiting the Soviet public’s access to the “cultural black market” (for example, *samizdat* and *magnitizdat*). Sending writers, poets, artists, and researchers away from the capital was among these ways of trying to eliminate the problem, by eliminating the source of dissent. Another way of restraining writers and poets was to expel them from the literary union. For instance, one Soviet dissident, Lidiia Chukovskaia (the daughter of Kornei Chukovskii, a children’s writer), was excluded from the Writer’s Union in 1974. Therefore, even if the ideological situation in the country was not as harsh as during the Stalinist purges, the persecution (even if moderate) of intellectuals signified that Soviet society was not liberated enough to have a diversity of opinions being openly expressed.

⁴¹ For a more detailed study on the state persecution of intellectuals in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, see Liudmila Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomyслиia v SSSR*.

In a 1983 discussion of Soviet censorship, Maurice Friedberg concluded that the era of Khrushchev's Thaw introduced freedom only to some parts of Soviet society. According to Friedberg, the Thaw "was a warmer temperature that melted some of the ice, but it was not spring and it was not summer. [...] [It] brought into the open the dirt and decay of old life that was hidden under the majesty of snow and ice during the total freeze" (qtd in "The Scientist's Laboratory: Discussion" 75-6). Thus, by the end of the Thaw, many aspects of Soviet life were still under close state surveillance. The continuous publication of various decrees to intensify control over cultural production led artists, writers, and filmmakers to invent different sophisticated ways of discussing the issues.

In her article on the cinema under Brezhnev, Elena Stishova points out that many filmmakers were able to express their *inakomyslie* (dissent) in their films mainly because "the absolute law of the System, according to which everyone was supposed to amalgamate with ideology in ecstasy, ceased to work" ("Da' i 'net' ne govorite" 50).⁴² According to Stishova, this happened already after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that was held on 14–25 February 1956. Cinematic dissent continued to flourish despite the state's punitive methods targeting cultural producers. Stishova writes:

The seventieth article of the Criminal Code (anti-Soviet activism and propaganda), which successfully substituted the tragic fifty seventh article during Brezhnev's Stagnation, was powerless against it [the dissent]. With the help of

⁴² "...абсолютный закон Системы, согласно которому с идеологией надлежало сливаться в экстазе."

the seventieth article, some people were sent to the defendants' bench, others into the forced immigration or the underground. (“‘Da’ i ‘net’ ne govorite” 50)⁴³

The dissent among cultural producers, and filmmakers specifically, resulted in the improvement of creative strategies. Denis Mickiewicz calls such strategies “between the lines” (“*mezhdustrok*”), while Leonid Finkelstein refers to them as “uncontrollable subtext” (“*nekontroliruemyi podtekst*”) (“The Scientist’s Laboratory: Discussion” 77). As Finkelstein argues, “censorship is very intent upon hunting [uncontrollable subtext] down and diminishing it as much as possible, but, of course, it is a ‘hare and hound’ situation” and “writers grow increasingly impertinent in using that uncontrollable subtext skillfully, especially because the area is boundless” (qtd. in “The Scientist’s Laboratory: Discussion” 77). Experimenting with various genres and different forms and styles was an opportunity for Soviet film directors to play the game of “hare and hound” with numerous editors and film administrations. An example of such games of circumlocutions can be discovered in the genre of youth films, mainly starting with films produced in the early 1970s.

3.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOVIET YOUTH FILM

The genre of youth films is difficult to define, mostly because scholars and critics often use the age of protagonists and the age of the audience as the main criteria for assigning films to this genre and there are many disagreements over these demographics. Even when critics agree, they

⁴³ “Против него была бессильна 70-я статья уголовного кодекса (антисоветская агитация и пропаганда), успешно заменившая в годы брежневщины роковую 58-ую. С помощью семидесятой одних загоняли на скамью подсудимых, других—в насильственную эмиграцию, третьих—в подполье.”

often still use these criteria inaccurately, and thus youth films are combined (and confused) with children's film, and film scholars and critics limit the audience only to young people. Among the most challenging tasks for them is not just to assign films to one or another genre category, but also to justify their taxonomy. Film theorists may treat genre films as a group of films with common themes, narrative structures, and similar characters, settings, and props (as in the work of Edward Buscombe). Other film theorists may argue that the ideological and cultural context predetermines the genre film (Andrew Tudor, Robert Stam, Robin Wood). A third group of film scholars, among whom is Rick Altman, believes in a dynamic interaction between these two approaches—coherent analysis of both cinematic and the ideological message contained within it.⁴⁴

Altman's integrated approach first employs the idea of distinguishing genres by analyzing film conventions. According to him, in order to assign a film to one or another genre, it is not enough to analyze films in terms of their form and themes. He suggests going through a three-stage process to categorize films. The first stage is a semantic analysis of cinematic texts that provides the theorist with "common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, [and] sets." The second stage—syntactic—includes the analysis of relations among these semantic elements, of their structuring principles, and of their connection to the general social structure (10). As Altman argues, no film genre can exist in an ahistorical vacuum, and it is influenced by the cultural and historical context of the period during which it is being formed (8). Later, in his 1999 book *Film/Genre*, Altman adds the third component: a pragmatic approach with its focus on audiences and institutions. He argues that scholars in their study of genre cinema should also look at film genres as a mode of production by film studios and at the role that audiences play in

⁴⁴ See Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* for the most substantial elaboration of these approaches.

creating or modifying genres through their responses. Film studios divide films into various categories in order to make sure that viewers with diverse tastes in films are satisfied. Film genres may be also approved or eliminated by institutions, depending on the demand from audiences. That is why, according to Altman, the genre theorist should analyze films on all three levels—semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic—and include the textual and cultural-historical analyses as well as the study of production history and reception history.

Various formal and structural elements of films may be analyzed cumulatively together with analyses of exterior factors. Thus, Robin Wood asserts that the cultural and ideological context in which films are produced and released necessarily influences their genre structure. In his essay “Ideology, Genre, Auteur,” Wood argues that it is essential to analyze film genres not only through the prism of *what* they convey but through the thorough study of *why* they convey something (61). The development of genre is determined by different ideological tensions evoked by contradictions between opposing components. Cinema responds to ideological tension by introducing new film genres. Furthermore, Wood asserts that the role of the individual artist is important in the emergence of a new genre. He writes that “it is only through the medium of the individual that ideological tensions come into particular focus, hence become of aesthetic as well as sociological interest” (63). Therefore, in addition to analyzing the visual, narrative, and aural structure of a film, scholars should also take into consideration the author (both the director and/or the screenwriter) of the text and the culture and historical time period in which the film was made when assigning it to a specific genre. In my dissertation, I attempt to follow Altman’s model of semantic/syntactic/pragmatic study of genres and to incorporate the examination of themes, topics, and cinematic structures in their relationship to each other and to a broader cultural-historical context of the Brezhnev time. In my study, I rely on Aesopian

language as a suture of the semantic and syntactic components of genre analysis that also depends on the pragmatic aspect of cultural production. My dissertation analyzes Aesopian language in Soviet cinema as a reaction to a product and a tool of the state institution—film censorship.

With the lack of any solid, consistent academic theory about youth films in the Soviet Union, studies of the American genre of teen film can be a useful departure point for the study of this genre.⁴⁵ The genre of youth, or teen, film is recognized by such Western film theorists as David Considine, Thomas Doherty, Jon Lewis, and Timothy Shary, as a special genre with its own visual stylistic and thematic characteristics. It is a genre in which “the Hollywood studios capitalized on youth trends and attitudes through movies that directly addressed the teenage audience” (Shary *Schirmer Encyclopedia* 207). Serious study of youth in American cinema only began in the 1980s with Considine’s book *The Cinema of Adolescence* (1985) and Doherty’s *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (1988). Since then, Shary, Lewis, Lerom Medovoi, Roz Kaveney, Stephen Tropiano, and Barbara Jane Brickman have published on American youth in cinema and culture.⁴⁶ The recent publication of such books as Karin M. Egloff’s *Les adolescents dans le cinéma français: entre deux mondes* (2007), Zhou Xuelin’s *Young Rebels in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (2007), Andrés Farhi’s *Cuestión de representación: los jóvenes en el cine argentino, 1983-1994* (2005), and *Youth Culture in Global Cinema* (2007), edited by Shary and Alexandra Seibel, indicates a growing

⁴⁵ In order to emphasize the contextual and ideological differences between Hollywood and Soviet cinema, I refer to the American genre of youth films as “teen films”—the term preferred by most American film scholars.

⁴⁶ See, Shary’s *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen*, Lewis’s *The Road to Romance and Ruin*, Medovoi’s *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*, Kaveney’s *Teen Dreams*, Tropiano’s *Rebels and Chicks*, and Brickman’s *New American Teenagers*.

interest among film scholars in analyzing representations of youth not only in American cinema, but also in French, Chinese, Argentinean, German, Indian, Eastern European, and other national film traditions.

American film scholars give several explanations for the development of the genre of the teen film. Robert C. Bulman, the author of book *Hollywood Goes to High School*, explains the segregation of young Americans into social and cultural groups as a result of drastic changes in the socio-economical structure of American society. He asserts that in the United States the category of “adolescent” was socially constructed in the 1950s under the influence of a consumer economy that targeted young people. Bulman writes that “adolescents are responding not only to their biological development, but also to the social demands placed upon them by the organization of society” (35). The role of youth in the society changes with the shifts in social and economic structure. In his essay, “Teen Films: The Cinematic Image of Youth,” Shary names (among other reasons for the emergence of teen films in Hollywood cinema) the facts that “youth have disposable incomes which they enjoy spending on entertainment; today’s children become the consumption-driven parents of tomorrow; filmmakers engage in the vicarious experiences of their own lost youth” (490). According to Thomas Doherty, the dissemination of teen film was caused by the recession of classical Hollywood cinema and the formation of “the privileged American teenager” (14). Therefore, economic factors are among the most important factors for the dissemination of youth culture in the United States.

Unlike Bulman and Doherty, Jon Lewis distinguishes one important characteristic of many American teen films in his book *The Road to Romance and Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture*. He asserts that teen films can differ from one another in their style and tone, but the only thing that remains consistent in all these movies is “a focus on a single social concern: the

breakdown of traditional forms of authority,” whether it is a breakdown of institutional, patriarchal, or legal structures (3). Therefore, the influx of youth films usually occurs as a visual signifier of changes in the power structure of the society at the specific time period. In continuation of Lewis’s argument, Shary writes about an important characteristic of American teen films—“a special appreciation for how successive generations have endured the conflicts of claiming identity and seeking recognition for their actions” (“Teen Films” 491). As a result of changes in power relations, young people begin actively to explore their own abilities and claim their independence from adults. The new generation is usually depicted as the one that better adapts to the new changes than the previous generations. Shary’s argument may be relevant for a discussion of Soviet films about teenagers and young people in the Thaw and late-Soviet cinema, insofar as one of the goals of young characters in these films is to form their own ideas, values, and tastes, thus attempting to establish their own identities, different from the generation of their parents and educators.

In addition to Shary’s characterization of American teen films, John Stephens highlights the three most important elements upon which the genre is grounded: popular generic formulas, “the structures of framework” that shape these films, and the targeted audience and its position as spectators (123). The last element is especially important, because the recognition of teenagers as a special group with its psychological, cultural, and social specifics led to the realization that young people also form a special spectatorship. Responding to popular demands of American viewers, film studios began to produce more and more products that would attract the attention of the young audience.

To sum up the discussion of teen films by American scholars, one should remember that for this genre it is important to assign young people to a separate group and a separate

spectatorship. This segregation of young people and young viewers from adults occurs as a result of socio-economic factors, such as the changes in power structure, the attempts of a new generation to find its niche in a new socio-cultural order, an influx of consumerism, and the desire of cultural producers to fulfill the demands and tastes of young Americans.

Some of these factors also contributed to the dissemination of youth films in Soviet cinema, while the rest of them were predetermined by the specific cultural and ideological atmosphere in Soviet society. In order to identify the genre of Soviet youth film, one needs to analyze a number of criteria—semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic—that are useful for genre taxonomy. The first criterion for the genre distinction is the audience. In the late Soviet period, most films about young people and teenagers were called “cinema for children and youth” (“*kino dlia detei i molodezhi*”) by Soviet critics, solely on the basis of their target audience.⁴⁷ To identify youth films only by the audience for which these films are intended radically simplifies the question of actual spectatorship. This is because many Soviet youth films made in the 1960s and the 1970s attracted the attention of young and adult audiences alike, which is evident from viewers’ responses to these films published in Soviet newspapers and magazines of that time.

The narrative structure and the themes dedicated to the problems and everyday lives of teenage characters can be another criterion for distinguishing youth films as a separate genre. Although many Soviet and Russian films have focused on the problems of teenagers and targeted this age group, such films have not been identified as a separate genre by film theorists and film critics. The scholarship on this genre was mainly absent from Soviet academia; instead, the

⁴⁷ In this dissertation I distinguish the “children’s cinema” (or “children’s films”) and “cinema for children.” The first one I define as the films that have children as the main characters and describe events in their life, while the second ones are targeted toward children and may include different genres, such as fairy-tales, animation films, comedies, etc.

films targeted at this age group were studied in terms of their capacity to convey “youth” themes and raise youth problems along with children’s issues.⁴⁸ That is why, often, scholars include films about teenage characters in their discussions of children’s films.⁴⁹ However, it is important to separate youth films from children’s films because the latter usually include children between four and twelve as the main protagonists, characters who much depend on their parents and teachers and who are usually portrayed as positive, innocent characters. In contrast, in youth films, the main protagonists often possess negative characteristics not “appropriate” for Soviet citizens, and the film directors usually depict their young characters during the peak of their maturation, on the edge between the child world and the adult world.

Some film scholars were able to detect this important difference between children’s films and youth films. They defined the second category as “social problem films” (“*problemnye fil'my*”) within children’s cinema. Thus, Kira Paramonova defines the “social problem films” as those in which “not only does the content of children’s films deepen, but also representational methods and artistic forms come through the creative renewal” (“*Detskoe kino*” 1978, 335).⁵⁰ In this category of children’s film, the characters become more complex, although often their inner characteristics do not point at moral depth, and they are not represented as positive heroes. However, treating these “social problem films” as a subgenre of children’s films is problematic because they not only cover different themes and raise different questions, but

⁴⁸ A reluctance to assign films to specific genres in Soviet scholarship is due in part to the negative associations of genre cinema for film critics and film theorists. For many decades, genre cinema was widely considered to be evidence of a “bourgeois prejudice,” and only particular genres were adapted or created as specific Soviet genres, among which were literary adaptations, musicals, historic-revolutionary films, comedies, and *proizvodstvennyi* film.

⁴⁹ See Nataliia Miloserdova, “*Detskoe kino*.”

⁵⁰ “...это новое явление детского кино, связанное не только с углублением содержания детской картины, но и с заметным творческим обновлением изобразительных средств, художественной формы в целом.”

also have developed different cinematic strategies and focus on different film characters. What Soviet theorists ignored was the distinction between different age groups—small children and teenagers. They treated teenagers as “problematic” children who might challenge adults’ authority and try to express their independence from their teachers and parents, but considered this endeavor of young Soviet citizens facile, superficial, and ineffectual. Thus, teenagers were seen as spoiled, disobedient children and nothing more. The difficulty in distinguishing and categorizing these films is understandable and is related to the failure to delineate and demarcate young, teenage Soviet citizens from adult Soviet society in general.

The next criterion—the common setting—was used by Soviet film critics as another reason for combining films about children and youth into one group. Michael Brashinsky and Andrew Horton refer to this group of films as a subgenre of the “school film” (“*shkol'nyi fil'm*”), which they identify as films about “the moral upbringing of children,” and about “a conflict between teachers and high-school students—almost always concerns the teachers’ recognition of the students’ dignity and human maturity” (69). The events of some films included in this dissertation, indeed, take place in the high school environment and describe teacher-student relations. But many other youth films explore the problems of Soviet teenagers and young people outside of school, in places as diverse as homes, pioneer camps, the university, the beach, rehearsal rooms, amusement parks, and the workplace.⁵¹ Therefore, similar problems, characters

⁵¹ By comparison, the teenage protagonists of Nicolas Ray’s *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) spend much time on the streets and in the park. A group of films about young Americans made in the late 1950s and the 1960s, most of which settings include the beaches, was even named by film critics “beach movies,” or “beach party movies.” Among these films are Henry Levin’s *Where the Boys Are* (1960), Paul Wendkos’s *Gidget* (1959), *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* (1961); a further development was *Gidget Goes to Rome* (1963); for more information on the “beach movie” phenomenon, see chapter 5. Such films as John Hough’s *Sixteen Candles* (1984), *Breakfast Club* (1985) have schools and teenager’s homes as the primary locales, while the

and stylistic elements can be found in films with different settings. For that reason, setting is just one decisive factor among many others for identifying a specific genre.

Therefore, Soviet youth cinema and culture share only some characteristics with American youth culture, while developing its own features in the condition of specific ideological constraints. The alterations in ideological atmosphere affected the attitudes toward the system and the authority among young people. The changes that occurred as the result of discursive shifts between different historical periods—between Stalinism and the Thaw, and between the Thaw and the Brezhnev period—influenced the ways in which young Soviet citizens reacted to the educational system or family structure at a specific time. I will briefly discuss these historical and ideological changes, insofar as they are essential for understanding why youth films emerged as a genre only during the Thaw and reached their acme during the Brezhnev years.

Before and during Stalinism, youth was not recognized as a separate social group with its own values and beliefs. Together with adults, young people were supposed to build communism and to promote the ideology of the Soviet state. Their personal maturation was related to the awakening of their socialist consciousness. However, after the October Revolution, “children’s cinema” began to attract the attention of many film critics and film producers. Films for and about children had the function of developing a communist spirit in young Soviet citizens, preparing them for their bright future. Many films popular with children and youth in the 1920s were set in contemporary Soviet Russia and were dedicated to the heroic deeds of Soviet youth. Many posters, postcards, and banners depicted young Soviets working in collective farms and

events in his *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) mainly take place in the car or in the city’s downtown.

communes together with adults. Among the most popular films about the revolutionary actions of young characters was Ivan Perestiani's *Little Red Devils* (*Krasnye d'iavoliata*, 1923). It is difficult to define Perestiani's film as a pure "children's film" or "youth film" insofar as it follows the generic formula of many "revolutionary" films and intertwines various elements from other genres. Kira Paramonova assigns Perestiani's film to "children's cinema" and explains that it was not created specifically for children, but was rather made as an adventure film, and "it [became] the first Soviet film that children definitely accepted as intended for them and the love for which they would be passing from generation to generation" ("Detskoe kino" 1973, 292).⁵² Aleksandr Prokhorov also writes about the complex structure of *Little Red Devils* and identifies it as "a model for combining communist ideology with a Western-style frontier adventure story" ("Arresting Development" 131). The film narrates the story of three young friend-scouts—Misha, Duniasha, and Tom—who help the Red Army to conquer its enemies during the Civil War. Due to their courage, enthusiasm, and resourcefulness, the young characters manage to resist grotesquely depicted adults: Makhno and his cohorts, the greedy speculator Garbuzenko, and a corrupt clerk. Thus, the confrontation between the older and younger generations is depicted in Perestiani's film as a conflict between revolutionary youth and the enemies of the young Soviet country.

The Soviet state often encouraged filmmakers to produce films that would target young citizens and teach them how to be true members of Soviet society. In 1936, by the order of the Central Committee of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, the film studio Union Children's Cinema (Soiuzdetfil'm) was established instead of the Mezhrabpomfil'm Studio, and

⁵² "первый советский фильм, который дети так определенно признают своим и любовь к которому будут передавать из поколения в поколение."

renamed the Gorkii Central Studio for Children and Youth Films in 1963. At this studio, many films with young people at their narrative center were produced during this time. Among these films, Nikolai Ekk's *Road to Life* (*Putevka v zhizn'*, 1931) focuses on teenagers rather than on children and addresses the most important issues of society: homeless young people and their re-forging into young Soviet citizens. It describes a labor commune of delinquent teenage boys, who together with their advisor, Nikolai Sergeev, work far away from any big city, making boots, building furniture and railroads, and thus transforming into substantial members of Soviet society. Ekk's film uses the trope of an ideological mentor who re-educates and transforms the young characters, a trope that comes from the socialist realist myth of the mentor and the disciple, which Katerina Clark describes in *The Soviet Novel*. As Clark argues, this cultural model embraces a formula in which "a 'disciple' (son) acquires 'consciousness' under the tutelage of a 'mentor' (father)" (126). Even if young protagonists are not ideal Soviet citizens at the beginning of the film, by the end, they are transformed with the help of adults.⁵³

The 1930s films about youth became less entertaining and more ideologically loaded: they "turned into propaganda cinema with a mandatory cluster of topoi and the dominance of a direct ideological message, no matter what generic conventions the filmmaker exploited to deliver the message" (Prokhorov, "Arresting Development" 133). Prokhorov writes that children in Stalinist films represent the collapse of the myth of the nuclear family and promote "the ideological rule of the big state family" ("Arresting Development" 137). The gap between

⁵³ This trope would be challenged, critiqued, and revised in late Soviet cinema. Dinara Asanova's *Tough Kids* (*Patsany* 1983) is set in a correctional summer camp for teenage delinquents. It is about the relations between a group of teenagers and their pedagogue, Pasha, who treats them as adults with trust and respect. Unlike in Stalinist films, the young delinquents are never reformed and do not attain socialist consciousness.

generations did not cinematically exist in Soviet cinema yet: children, adolescents, and adults were all working toward one goal—to build a bright future for Soviet society.

Stalinist cinema is often preoccupied with the centripetal movement of characters who move to Moscow after their industrial achievements in the provinces. Along with adult workers and peasants, the young protagonists undergo their ideological transformation after their visit to the capital of the Soviet country, or they are rewarded with this trip for their prior “socialist” maturation.⁵⁴ Examples of this rewarding trip to Moscow can be found in Grigorii Aleksandrov’s *Volga-Volga* (1938) and *The Shining Path* (*Svetlyi put'*, 1940) and Ivan Pyr'ev's *The Swine Girl and the Shepherd* (*Svinarka i pastukh*, 1941). In all these films, young female protagonists travel to the capital where they are awarded with a music prize, a meeting with Stalin, or a future husband who is also an outstanding worker.

Sergei Gerasimov's *Komsomol'sk* (1938) is another success story about a group of young people who fulfill Party requirements, however, far away from the capital, in the Far East by the river Amur, where they build the new city Komsomol'sk.⁵⁵ In this film, the young characters are independent, and they attain a socialist consciousness and become good citizens with only minimal involvement from the Party leaders. Being far away from the ideological center allows the characters to focus on other issues besides their work. Thus, the unorthodox questions that are raised in the film are the hardships of marriage, unplanned pregnancy, and suicide attempts

⁵⁴ There are some exceptions to this model, and, on some rare occasions, life in the capital may not be successful for provincial workers. Thus, Aleksandr Macheret in his film *The Private Life of Petr Vinogradov* (*Chastnaia zhizn' Petra Vinogradova*, 1934) narrates a story of a young provincial worker who comes to Moscow, finds a job at a factory, and starts part-time studies at the university, but has trouble dealing with his new life style in the capital.

⁵⁵ More than two decades later, another director, Iurii Chuliukin, made a film, *The Girls* (*Devchata*, 1961), in which he also described the everyday life of Soviet youth in Siberia and paid special attention to female workers.

as a result of unrequited love.⁵⁶ Gerasimov emphasizes the importance of the collective visually: both in the work place and the domestic space, the young Komsomol members are usually depicted together with their colleagues (See Figures 10-11). This characteristic of a young collective is one among a few that travels to the Thaw cinema and youth films under Brezhnev.



Figure 10: *Komsomol'sk*



Figure 11: *Komsomol'sk*

⁵⁶ Gerasimov's film also represents a mixture of genre conventions: a melodrama, a detective film, and an action film.

The films made during WWII also addressed the idea of all Soviet citizens working together on the welfare of their Soviet Motherland, despite their age, gender, or ethnicity. These films were produced under the motto “Everything is for the front, everything is for victory” (Paramonova 1978, 321), which defined the themes and the patriotic atmosphere of most of the films in the first half of the 1940s. Lev Arnshtam, Il’ia Frez, and Aleksandr Ptushko’s *Zoia* (1944) is one of the most remarkable films of this period: it narrates the story of young patriots during the war. It commemorates the self-sacrificing, heroic deeds of a young member of the underground, Zoia Kosmodem’ianskaia. Other films about young Soviets’ struggle against Nazi Germany and their personal tragedies and sacrifices in relationship with their collective survival include Iulii Raizman’s *Mashen’ka* (1942), Mark Donskoi’s *Rainbow* (*Raduga*, 1943), Viktor Eismont’s *Once There Lived a Little Girl* (*Zhila-byla devochka*, 1944), Vasiliï Pronin’s *Son of the Regiment* (*Syn polka*, 1946), and Sergei Gerasimov’s *Young Guard* (*Molodaia gvardiia*, 1948). Without visibly being distinguished from one another, Soviet children and young adults sacrifice their lives for their Motherland. By the end of the 1940s, with the closure of Soiuzdetfil’m, the number of films with children and youth as main protagonists drastically decreased until their revival in the middle of the 1950s.

In the 1950s Soviet youth finally appeared as a separate social group in public discourse. After Nikita Khrushchev’s secret speech in 1956 at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party, young people, like their older colleagues and relatives, began to share their opinions more openly. David Burg, however, relates the visibility of Soviet youth as a group with its social, political, and cultural specifics not directly to the politics of “destalinization,” but to another set of reasons that had already existed before the Thaw. According to him, these reasons include “a

discontent over a regular state intrusion into the young people's lives [...]; a dissatisfaction with poor living conditions, not only of their own but also with the ones of their country in general; a resentment of the regime's terror, a realization of their position as deprived of rights, both in political and spiritual senses" (46-7). The individual and collective realization of such discrimination resulted in the apprehension that there was a "discrepancy between Marxist theory and communist practices" (Burg 47).

Burg connects the first public acknowledgement of teenagers as a group to the appearance of information on *stiliagi* in the Soviet press. *Stiliagi* was a movement among Soviet young people whose "signifiers were a public rejection of official values" and who did not accept "the work ethic that the regime had always promoted among the proletariat" (Stites 143). Besides their obsession with Western culture and music, they tried to distinguish themselves from the rest of Soviet society by wearing colorful clothes and using their own slang.⁵⁷ James R. Miller argues that "the *stiliagi* phenomenon reflected the growing consumerist and leisure-oriented mentality of the upper crust of Soviet society" (1479). The feuilleton "The Mold" ("Plesen"), published in 1954, mentioned *stiliagi* and publicly acknowledged that there were "teenagers' problems" problems in the USSR (35). The phenomenon of *stiliagi* made youth culture visible and also pointed at its potential to diverge from the official, mainstream culture.

Cinema about youth continued to gradually develop along with the rest of youth culture, but this development was complicated by the fact that often the state supported it both financially and ideologically. For instance, in 1957, the USSR Ministry of Culture issued an order to

⁵⁷ For more on *stiliagi* see Mark Edele, "Strange Young Men in Stalin's Moscow: The Birth and Life of the *Stiliagi*, 1945-1953" and Juliane Fürst, "The Arrival of Spring? Changes and Continuities in Soviet Youth Culture and Policy between Stalin and Khrushchev."

organize a section for children and youth films at Mosfil'm—Youth (Iunost').⁵⁸ The state enhanced the importance of children's and youth films in Soviet culture by the establishment in the 1960s of the Artistic-Methodological Board on Children and Youth Cinema at the USSR Ministry of Culture. The fact that all these studios and the Artistic-Methodological Board were established during these years indicates that, after the late 1950s and the early 1960s, the Soviet government took more intense administrative measures to formally recognize two special groups of Soviet citizens—children and youth. Similarly to Burg, Prokhorov argues that the figure of an adolescent hero in the Thaw cinema symbolizes a revolt “against the former figures of authority and symbolized the changing values and new distribution of power after Stalin's death” (“The Adolescent and The Child”115). Starting in the 1950s, young cinematic characters were given a chance to make their own decisions and their own mistakes without being closely guided by the Party or the collective. Natal'ia Miloserdova, a Russian film scholar who studies children and youth cinema, explains that, in Thaw films, “a human being—big and small—is granted a right to a private life” (58).⁵⁹ Having a desire for a private life with its own secrets, interests, and dreams became a distinguishing characteristic of young protagonists in Soviet cinema of the 1950s and the mid-1960s.

An important marker of the development of Soviet youth popular culture and youth cinema was the emergence of the “youth novel” literary genre, which Clark dates back to the year of 1956 (227). Youth films of the 1950s through the mid-1960s share similarities in plot and characters with the youth novel. According to Clark, the youth novel “mutates” the Stalinist

⁵⁸ Aleksandr Mitta, Elem Klimov, Rolan Bykov, and many other Soviet film directors made their films about children and adolescents in the Youth Film Union. However, it did not last long and in 1971 this section of Moscow Studio was closed.

⁵⁹ “Человек—большой и маленький—получает право на личную жизнь.”

myth about the relations between the public and the private. The young protagonist “lives in two completely separate worlds, one false and one true, in each of which he has both a ‘great family’ (or public life) and a ‘little family’ (or personal attachments)” (227). The cinematic characters also have to participate in both worlds and detect “the conflict between the imperfect reality revealed in 1956 and the higher reality of Communist ideals” (Clark 227). Anatoly Vishnevsky refers to this type of literature about young protagonists as “the Young prose” and contends that, by the end of the 1960s, it was no longer significant in Soviet literature. He explains that the Young prose gradually ran dry because it was still based on outdated socialist ideals:

The Young prose had an optimistic outlook based on the hope for social and cultural reform and for the return of the still-cherished values and ideals of the early postrevolutionary years, and the movement’s deterioration was a sign of devaluation of those ideals and values. (5)

Vishnevsky’s statement is significant for the discussion of youth films, because he notices the discursive shift in the representations of youth in Soviet culture in the second half of the 1960s. However, he does not acknowledge these changes in the portrayal of young cinematic protagonists already in films during the Khrushchev period.

Young protagonists in some films in the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s begin to develop a type of thinking that is critical and independent from adults, as a result of the discrepancy between reality and the Communist Imaginary. Thus, Tat’iana Lukashevich’s film *Certificate of Maturity* (*Attestat zrelosti*, 1954) focuses on the problems of high-school student Valentin Listovskii, whose life is divided into two parts: his activities on the school committee and his private life, which is characterized by his obsession (potentially, homoerotic) with another high-school student, Zhenia Kuznetsov, and later, with his teenage sister, Vika. Valentin

constantly provokes conflicts at his school and challenges teachers' ideological and moral positions. At one of the school meetings, he opposes the entire school collective of teachers and students, and the camera visually confirms it: Valentin is framed alone during his speech, while other students are usually depicted next to other school members. The young protagonist is punished for his individualism and is expelled from the Komsomol organization. However, the choice of the actor for the part of Valentin—handsome Vasili Lanovoi, with his refined facial features and thick dark hair—makes viewers sympathize with him, rather than judge him for his anti-collective behavior. At the end of the film, Valentin is rewarded: he is reinstated into the Komsomol organization, reunited with the collective, and travels with them on the train outside Moscow. This scenario is predictable because the film still recycles the socialist realist model of re-forging members of Soviet society.

The centrifugal movement from Moscow or Leningrad is a result of reversing the Stalinist myth of the centripetal movement of young workers due to the realization that large urban spaces may cause trouble for (rather than bring success to) literary and cinematic characters. In the Thaw youth novels, “Moscow (or Leningrad) functions as the ‘false’ place, polluted by bureaucracy, careerism, insincerity, and other such ‘Stalinist’ ills, whereas some place ‘far away from Moscow’ [...] becomes the haven of Leninist ideals to which the hero is drawn” (Clark 227). Therefore, in the capital of the Soviet Motherland, the young protagonists realize that they may not find good opportunities for their future careers. The youth films parallel the youth novels regarding young protagonists' disappointment in life in big cities. Thus, Viktor Eismont's *All in Good Time* (*V Dobryi chas*, 1956) is a film about a high-school graduate, Alesha, who arrives in Moscow from Siberia and fails the entrance exam at the university. After constant arguments with his aunt and uncle, who live in Moscow with their

son, Andrei, Alesha and his cousin go to Siberia in a search of their calling. Even though Eisyment addresses the issues of young people's independent decisions and uncertainty regarding their future, this film still follows the idealistic model of previous Stalinist films, according to which the important moment of maturation is related to the re-forging that occurs through labor and acquisition of class-consciousness.

Russian film critic Neia Zorkaia argues that, unlike children, the young people of the Thaw began to perceive the world's inner tension. Zorkaia gives a description of this new postwar teenager:

The young man rejects an imposed morality or refuses to follow others blindly because he senses the hypocrisy, groundlessness, and unreality of moral declarations. He resents the discrepancy between words and deeds, theory and practice. Becoming aware that some of the ideals suggested to him are hypocritical, he stubbornly denies all other moral values. (*The Illustrated History* 238)

Therefore, the increased skepticism and suspicion regarding state ideology and its system that becomes apparent in Soviet culture during the Brezhnev years had already taken hold among Soviet youth during the 1950s. Thus, the narrative of many youth films includes the challenges of adult life, which the young characters face after graduating from high school or leaving their homes, the search for their own ways of perceiving the world around them, and the formation of youth identity. Lev Anninskii identifies the period of the 1960s as "the era of *shestidesiatniki*" the signifying cultural characteristics of which included "the symbol of undefeated idealism," "the symbol of search," "the symbol of liberty," and "the symbol of awakening" (5). Many

literary and cinematic texts produced during this decade were defined by the search for freedom, new ways of expression, and new truths.

Examples of youth films from the 1950s and 1960s based on youth prose include Vasiliï Levin's *Tale of First Love*, adapted from Nikolai Atarov novel of the same name (1957), and Iulii Karasik's film, based on Ruvim Fraerman's novel *The Wild Dog Dingo*. Vasiliï Aksenov's youth novel *A Starry Ticket* (*Zvezdnyi bilet*, 1961) offers an example of young people who, as Richard Stites mentions in his book *Russian Popular Culture*, do not agree with "kvass patriotism, official bombast, and village-style surveillance by the neighbors of their clothing, their morals, and their leisure habits" (127). Instead of following his elder brother's advice about doing something meaningful with his life after graduation from school, the main character, seventeen-year-old Dima, decides to search for adventure at the Estonian seashore with his three friends. The young adventurers find odd jobs when they are out of money, go to restaurants and meet girls, sunbathe on the beaches, all while trying to make the most important decisions of their lives—what to do with their future (See Figures 12-13). Arnold McMillin argues that Aksenov's novel "aroused tremendous empathy among Soviet youth, brought up in the rigid moulds of Stalinism and, at the time novel appeared, beginning to sense, through occasional Western broadcasts, films and concerns, the possibility of a far freer form of life" (104). Aksenov divides his novel in several chapters and dedicates some of them to Dima and his friends, Iura, Alik, and Galia, and some to Dima's brother, twenty-eight-year-old Viktor, who is working on his dissertation. Aksenov parallels Dima's adventures with the academic life of his brother in order to signal the general flaws of the society in which the young generation has to live—a society where lies, corruption, and plagiarism are not unusual characteristics. The author is especially interested in the younger generation, which "is shown to be uninhibited, attracted

toward Western subcultures, shunning double-speak, and aspiring after independent judgment” (Terras 17). This young, independent generation is depicted as having a lot of free time and enjoying smoking, drinking alcohol, and spending nights at restaurants. This new portrayal of young Soviet citizens attracted the attention not only of the adult and young audiences and critics, but also of cultural producers.⁶⁰



Figure 12: *My Younger Brother*



Figure 13: *My Younger Brother*

⁶⁰ For more detailed analysis of Aksenov’s *A Starry Ticket* see Aleksandr Prokhorov’s *Unasledovannyi diskurs*.

Despite the fact that Aksenov's novel did not receive unanimous positive responses among Soviet readers, the release of Aleksandr Zarkhi's 1962 film adaptation of *A Starry Ticket*—entitled *My Younger Brother*—demonstrates an increased interest in youth topics not only among general audiences, but also among state officials and the film administration. Both *A Starry Ticket* and *My Younger Brother* have many similarities with the *Bildungsroman*, in which young protagonists' travel, work, and love experience finally leads to their maturation. This *Bildungs* motif would be later adopted successfully as the theme of maturation by many filmmakers during the Brezhnev period. One of the most important contributions of both Aksenov's novel and Zarkhi's film was to render visible images of the new Soviet generation as independent, capable of making its own decisions, and different from previous generations. Zarkhi uses Viktor's voice-over in the opening scene and Dima's voice-over at the end of the film to show the continuity between the generations of young people in their late twenties and thirties and the generation of teenagers. Despite the fact that Viktor's role in the film is drastically reduced in comparison to the novel and its importance is diminished, the director creates a strong connection between the two generations, which find themselves in a world filled with corrupt scientists and "businessmen." Although Zarkhi attempts to follow Aksenov's novel, he fails to do so, mostly due to the restrictions of Soviet censorship. Thus, despite the teenage protagonists' apparent rebellious, they do not cause any real trouble. In addition, from time to time, various adult figures act as mentors to the young characters, thus challenging the young protagonists' independence.

Despite negative reviews of Zarkhi's film from state officials, *My Younger Brother* serves as an illustrative example of Thaw culture, and its adaptation began a wave of unusual literary and visual texts, which Soviet audiences would have never had a chance to read or see

prior to that time. As Julian Graffy asserts, the film's "compromises hint at the increasing ideological and generational complexities of Soviet society. In its wary engagement with its young protagonists, it suggests the emergence of a new Soviet generation, and a new cinematic theme (the 'youth film')" ("Film Adaptations" 70). Both Aksenov's novel and Zarkhi's film signal the gradual spreading of youth topics and youth problems that were unique and different from those in the 1930s and 1940s films.

Zarkhi's *My Younger Brother* is not the only example of youth films under Khrushchev that shows teenagers acting rebelliously toward adults, and especially toward teachers. Iurii Pobedonostsev's *Mishka, Serega, and I* (*Mishka, Serega i ia*, 1961) also depicts Soviet youth as mistrustful of the adults in their lives, because they perceive in those adults the failure to present an adequate model of behavior for young Soviet citizens. Josephine Woll defines this film as presenting "adolescents as crude egoists, their parents as idiots, and other adults as fools and drunks" (134). The high school students sabotage classes, bully one another, and fight with their parents. Not only are the young rebels—Garik, Misha, and Sergei—in the narrative center of *Mishka, Serega, and I*, but the events are shown from the perspective of one of them. The film opens and ends with Garik's voice-over and the camera's gaze represents the teenager's perspective while showing his school or his friends' houses. Structuring the narrative and visual form of the film through the young protagonist's perspective is Pobedonostsev's attempt to study the new generation and its emotional and psychological dilemmas.

Marlen Khutsiev is another director of the Thaw period who was also interested in youth's emotional and moral turmoil and who also structured his film from the perspective of young protagonists. His *Lenin's Guard* represents the cultural space of growing neo-Leninism and the generation without fathers (children whose fathers were killed during the WWII). The

young protagonists of Khutsiev's film are not teenagers anymore, but one of them, Sergei, continues living with his mother, who takes care of him when he is sick after his return from the army. Sergei's life is depicted as carefree, without responsibilities: he plays soccer, dances at night in the courtyard, and discusses his personal problems in the playground with his friends. That setting, in which Sergei is depicted during his free time, alludes to his immaturity and child-like decisions. Even Sergei's dates with Ania take place at the playground with a swing. At the same time, the space of young protagonists in *Lenin's Guard* is not straightforward: Sergei and his friends are depicted not only in the "space of childhood" but also in "adult" locales: plants, universities, and pubs. Therefore, all three of the characters are represented as not yet have crossed the line between childhood and adulthood, and the rest of the film is dedicated to their maturation. The characters of *Lenin's Guard* are more independent than any younger protagonists of the Thaw cinema: they have jobs or their own families. As Prokhorov argues, "lack of the father and the quest for the ideal associated with his name" are the main motifs of many Thaw films, including *Lenin's Guard* ("The Myth of the 'Great Family'" 31). In Khutsiev's film, the devaluation of the paternal figure includes the act of lowering their military rank or even age, as in the imaginary meeting between twenty-three-year-old Sergei and his twenty-one-year-old dead father. They question the authority of the elder generation, which is represented in this scene by the father who died during World War II and whom Sergei does not remember. According to Prokhorov, "Sergei and his generation represent a complex compromise of communal and individual identities, beyond the scope of what the father ever knew and experienced" ("The Myth of the 'Great Family'" 33). With the absence of the authoritative paternal voice, the young characters of *Lenin's Guard* begin their own search for

the meaning of life, for their own truths, in contrast to the tropes of Stalinist cinema.⁶¹ This search is ignited by the identity crisis in Soviet culture after the death of Stalin. It reflects the deconstruction of the collective identity and emphasizes instead a different model, often the individual nuclear family.⁶²

The visual difference between youth culture and adult culture is an essential characteristic of youth films because it alludes to the split between generations, a split also marked by an increased emphasis on young people's individuality and uniqueness. The younger generation is also distinguished from other generations by foreign dance music; by classical music ("Ave Maria"), which serves as a background to Sergei and Ania's date; by contemporary poetry, which they recite on dates and listen to at the Polytechnic Museum; and by classical art at the museum. In his article "Landscape, with Hero," Evgenii Margolit further develops this idea of the split by arguing that Khutsiev's film refers indirectly to a more general separation between the subject and the world:

The process of the subject's separation from the world constitutes the latent, inner plot of the film, while on the surface the film celebrates the merger of the subject with the world, and the inability to explore this sense of separation verbally makes it all the more acute. (45)

The discrepancy between the public and the private, and between the internal world of characters' emotions and thoughts and the external order of social regulations and restrictions

⁶¹ The death of the main protagonist's father during the war is allegorically linked to the death of many fathers during Stalinist purges, including Khutsiev's father and the father of Bulat Okudzhava, who appears on the screen in cameo.

⁶² Aleksandr Prokhorov offers a more thorough study of Khutsiev's film in his book *Unasledovannyi diskurs*.

begins to appear gradually in Thaw culture. Khutsiev's film alludes to this divergence by depicting the maturation of young protagonists while revising their parents' values. As Woll maintains, "all three heroes are painfully maturing, troubled by the discrepancy between their everyday lives and their dreams" (143). This "painful maturation" is caused by the adult world rejecting the possibility for young people to have their own, private life and to act upon their own desires and personal interests. Prokhorov writes that "playing homage to the importance of communal identity, Khutsiev carefully negotiates the value of the individual as part of that identity" ("The Myth of the 'Great Family'": 32). Therefore, *Lenin's Guard* plants the seed of individuality as an important part of youth identity.⁶³

Such a distance became a threat to the stable, fixed socialist order, and the animosity and miscommunication between generations increased on the screen. Consequently, many youth films described the personal relations among young people and their ineffective interaction with their parents and teachers. Thaw cinema begins to explore this topic in greater detail in such films as Vasilii Levin's *Tale of First Love (Povest' o pervoi liubvi, 1957)* and Iulii Raizman's *And What If This Is Love? (A esli eto liubov'?, 1962)*. Each of these films depicts relationships between young couples and the adults' intervention in teenagers' feelings. In his film, Levin narrates the story of two high school students, Olga and Mitia, who live in a small town near the

⁶³ Another youth film of the late 1960s— Mark Osep'ian's *Three Days of Viktor Chernyshev (Tri dnia Viktora Chernysheva, 1968)*—"parodies Khutsiev's picture, calling attention to the crisis of the Great Family mythology" (Prokhorov "The Myth of the 'Great Family'": 44). Even though Osep'ian's film offers an interesting example of a young man whose identity formation is not shaped by the memory of state history, but by his individual experiences, I deliberately have not included this film in my discussion because the film was shelved from 1968 till 1988 and did not reach the general public. Only briefly, in the late 1960s, did Osep'ian's film see a limited release. This limited release and shelving may suggest that the ideas that Osep'ian expressed in *Three Days of Viktor Chernyshev* were not veiled enough to avoid censorship. Thus, Osep'ian's film is not a productive example of late-Soviet youth films that employed Aesopian techniques.

seashore. As in other Thaw films about young couples, the teenagers' romance usually flourishes in a space far away from the center: either in a provincial town or in secluded places in urban space.⁶⁴ In *Tale of First Love*, after Olga's mother dies, the girl moves in with Mitia's family and the young people fall in love. However, the society, represented by a school collective, does not accept their relationship. The two social settings are set in opposition to each other in Levin's film: the family and Soviet society. The first one is sympathetic and supportive of the teenage protagonists: Mitia's family "adopts" Olia. The safety and comfort of the domestic space is emphasized by the setting of the teenager's apartments, in which the family members are depicted either constantly eating and drinking tea, or doing such domestic chores as ironing. The attitudes of the second setting are expressed in the teachers' reaction to Mitia and Olia's cohabitation: they are suspicious and distrusting of the high school students. Thus, the gym teacher indirectly expresses inappropriate personal interest in Olia and even attempts to make a pass at her during the graduation dance. Therefore, Levin's film alludes to a new situation in society during the Khrushchev years, in which the young generation did not feel comfortable or safe in the public space, and was able to find a shelter only in their homes. As Levin's film also suggests, young Soviets could practice their own culture, but only within the walls of their homes, which can be supported by the scene during the private house party in which two young characters, dressed like *stiliagi*, dance to foreign music (See Figure 14). Several adults who are present at the party look disapproving and ridicule the young dancers, indicating that while youth culture is acknowledged by the previous generations, it is nevertheless found unacceptable. In Thaw cinema, even though young characters already

⁶⁴ The main female character of Iulii Karasik's *The Wild Dog Dingo* (*Dikaia sobaka Dingo*, 1962) also experiences the first love and the first separation from the object of her affection.

attempted to separate themselves from adults, early Soviet values and traditions still weighed heavily and limited the young generation's chances of separating themselves from their parents and educators.



Figure 14: *Tale of First Love*

An analogous confrontation between adults and high school students regarding teenagers' desires and choices is depicted in Raizman's *And What If This Is Love?* However, in Raizman's film, this confrontation happens not only at school, but also in the domestic space. Similarly to Olga and Mitia in *Tale of First Love*, Ksenia and Boris explore their recently developed feelings for each other. One of their love letters is intercepted by a teacher, and this incident ignites a wave of disapproval on the part of most teachers, neighbors, and parents.⁶⁵ The film studies the young protagonists' behavior and their relations with peers and adults within four main spaces in which Soviet teenagers function: the school, the home, the courtyard, and on the streets or outside the city. The farther away the young characters are from adult surveillance, the more freely they express their feelings and thoughts. Ksenia is more courageous than her

⁶⁵ Averbakh uses the motive of intercepted love letters in her *Other People's Letters*, but inverts the story and makes a teenager responsible for stealing and reading her teacher's letters, thus, gaining control over adults.

boyfriend and attempts to set herself against the adults who judge and shame the young couple. Even on the screen, the teenage girl, more often than Boris, appears within the frame alone, while teachers and the teenagers' neighbors represent a collective, which is supported visually by framing them together most of the time. The physical, sexual attraction between Kseniia and Boris is already outlined in the provincial scenes in the woods and in an abandoned church. In the secluded space of the old church, with the remaining icons on the wall, the teenagers dream about their future not as Party members and the builders of communism, but as average family people, with children and grandchildren (See Figure 14).⁶⁶ Because, unlike the young couple in *Tale of First Love*, Ksenia and Boris do not find support either at school and at home, their romance is doomed. This film already anticipated what became common in the 1970s youth films: neither educators nor parents could be trusted by young characters, and the only secure and happy places for teenagers were the places far away from home or school.



Figure 15: *What If This is Love?*

⁶⁶ Young protagonists in other films also find a harbor or search for their sense of themselves within the walls of churches and houses of prayers, for instance, in Vasilii Ordynskii's *Clouds over Borsk* (*Tuchi nad Borskom*, 1960) and Georgii Daneliia's *Walking the Streets of Moscow* (*Ia shagaiu po Moskve*, 1963).

In Raizman's film, cinematic youth differs from their peers in the preceding films about young Soviets for a number of reasons. Woll suggests that this film does not follow the pattern of previous films about young couples and writes that "[the film] has no positive hero. It regards the 'collective, that eternally reliable buttress of the typical,' as neither irreproachable nor wise. It not only insisted that audiences judge for themselves but that they judge themselves" (136). The collective is depicted as cruel, intolerant, and incapable of understanding the young lovers' feelings, and this makes them finally give up on those feelings. *And What If This Is Love?* also already alludes to the possibility for young Soviet citizens to have different values from the ones that were officially constructed by the Party and to separate themselves from older generations.

Instead of the monolithic Stalinist society, which consisted of exemplary Stakhanovite workers and overachievers, signs of visible diversity of behavior and attitudes among Soviet citizens began to penetrate Thaw cinema and culture. The young characters spent more time having fun and socializing with one another than building a bright socialist future. Additionally, in Raizman's film and many other Thaw youth films, high school students and graduates were depicted in the "adult" or neutral space and not necessarily in the school setting: for instance, city streets, bars, restaurants, public beaches, and the seashore. These locales associated teenagers more with an "adult" culture rather than a "children's" culture. The topic of covert sexual attraction among teenage protagonists in youth films starting with the 1950s also added some nuances to the portrayal of young Soviets. Thaw film directors chose to show the intimate interaction between the young characters in the secluded, empty spaces, often dark, full of shadows. Consequently, the creation of the spatial distance between the young generation and the generation of their parents and grandparents allowed the young film characters to further

develop their own ideals and values and to practice their own philosophies. Such a distance became a threat to the stable, fixed socialist order, and the animosity and miscommunication became characteristic of the relationships between parents and their children.

The gap between the new post-war generation and the early Soviet and Stalinist generations visibly increased in Soviet cinema and became the core of the genre of youth film in the beginning of the 1970s. This genre flourished during the late Soviet period, perhaps as a response to the more rigorous censorship of cultural products after the liberating years of the Thaw period. In her essay “Look Who’s Here! A New Trend in Soviet Cinema,” Elena Stishova explains the phenomenon of the “lost,” or “ruined,” generation of the 1970s, in terms of its awareness of the Soviet past and self-recognition, and its simultaneous inability to speak and to express its opinion. After Khrushchev’s 1956 Secret Speech, adolescents became the age group that suffered in specifically intense ways because they still had not formed their own values and did not have enough life experience to comprehend social, cultural, and political changes. Stishova writes that “it was probably in the period of Stagnation that people started resenting ideology as such—a feature that modern socio-psychologists believe to be very typical of the younger generation generally” (“Look Who’s Here!” 264). For these youths, the adult world was alienating, unjust, and sometimes even ridiculous, and they began to question the moral values provided by grownups—their parents and educators.

Stishova believes that, despite the stiffening of the political situation in the Soviet Union in the 1970s through the early 1980s, many young filmmakers “succeeded in overcoming the resistance of the upper echelons and raised the most pressing social and cultural issues” (“Look Who’s Here!” 261). Despite ideological tension and severe censorship, these filmmakers of the Stagnation period were able to make their films because, paradoxically enough, they were

supported by the government, for instance, through the establishment of a new Experimental Youth Creative Union Debut at the Mosfil'm Studio in 1977. Hence, the 1970s witnessed a “youth” boom in cinema with much attention paid to film debuts not only at Mosfil'm but also at other studios where debut films made up one fourth of all Soviet film production (Golovskoi 87).

Another reason for the rapid dissemination of youth films during the Brezhnev period can be explained by the fact that the dynamics of Soviet spectatorship had changed by the mid-1970s. An increase of young viewership was one of the consequences of the baby boom. Valerii Golovskoi mentions that a survey conducted by the journal *Soviet Screen* (*Sovetskii ekran*) and the newspaper *Komsomol Truth* (*Komsomol'skaia pravda*), showed that adolescents represented sixty percent of all Soviet spectatorship during the Brezhnev period (165). The number of visits to movie theaters by adults decreased from nineteen to sixteen per year in the first half of the 1970s. However, the popularity of movie-going among young people remained almost the same. For this reason, the state began to focus more on the young viewers' interests while choosing the topics and genres for the studio repertoire.

During this time, many Soviet films with teenagers as the main protagonists shared similar narrative, visual, aural, and stylistic elements, even if they were made at different national film studios.⁶⁷ These youth films place young characters and their problems at their narrative center. The more specific features of this genre, which are traceable in many late Soviet films, include a focus on young characters' psychological and emotional states, and the

⁶⁷ Besides the major Russian film studios, Uzbekfil'm, Belarusfil'm, and Dovzhenko Film Studio also released a number of youth films, with similar narrative structures and stylistic elements as the ones made by their colleagues at Mosfil'm, Lenfil'm, and Gorkii Film Studio. Among these films are El'dar Ishmukhamedov's *Tenderness* (*Nezhnost'*, 1966), *Lovers* (*Vliublennye*, 1969), and *Meetings and Partings* (*Vstrechi i rasstavaniia*, 1973), Konstantin Ershov's *Every Day After Work* (*Kazhdyi den' posle raboty*, 1973), and Igor' Dobroliubov's *The Schedule for the Day After Tomorrow* (*Raspisanie na poslezavtra*, 1978).

depiction of the challenges of teenage life and of the process of maturation. A key feature of the young protagonists of youth films is a structural pattern of conflict between youths and adults, as well as conflicts among young people, their social or economic dependence on parents and educators, and their desire to break through these constraints.

Cultural producers in the 1970s through the early 1980s challenged the socialist realist notion of the positive hero, who was “at the heart of a work of art” (Shneidman 7). In the context of a “second” culture, ignited by the “second” economy, a new character comes to the foreground—neither positive, nor negative, but a person who finds him- or herself unable to fit into a new system of values. In their youth films, Soviet filmmakers raised the questions of love and physical attraction between young people, affairs with married people, feelings for people much older than they are, one-night stands, jealousy, young marriages, teenage pregnancy, lesbianism, smoking, and drinking.

Among shared cinematic characteristics, there are the use of particular soundtracks (e.g. instrumental pop music and rock songs); the extensive use of point-of-view shots from the position of the young characters; the intensification of their gaze by using binoculars and telescopes and looking at objects and people through these visual magnifiers; long takes of open or empty space (the sea, the field, the sky); and the placement of the young people next to the art, sculptures, and paintings within the frame. The recurrent settings in these youth films are the school, the pioneer camp, the beach, the street, parks, discothèques, and abandoned houses. In addition, many films include references to non-Soviet culture and arts, such as paintings of Italian Renaissance and Russian literature of the nineteenth century. Specific actors and actresses, such as Ol'ga Mashnaia, Elena Tsyplakova, Tat'iana Drubich, and Igor' Nefedov, became associated with the genre of youth films.

If common narrative and cinematic characteristics of many youth films have been developing gradually since the Thaw and were not entirely a new phenomenon, the use of Aesopian language became a meta-characteristic of the genre of youth films during the Brezhnev years. The need for this meta-characteristic developed as a consequence of the intensified control over film production, and especially over films about and for youth, as evident from the 1972 state decree and the 1981 decree. The allegory of discord or conflict between different generations and the impossibility of young characters to find a safe place in domestic and public settings were among the most important features of youth films during the period of “developed socialism.”

During the Brezhnev years, three major film studios in the Russian Federation were producing films about Soviet youth: Mosfil'm, Lenfil'm, and Gor'kii Film Studio. Both Gor'kii Studio and Mosfil'm were located in Moscow—the center of the Soviet state, and closer to the Kremlin. The censorship control at both film studios was more severe than in Lenfil'm. In addition to this, Gor'kii Studio was specifically formed to make films for children and youth, and its long history of producing light and happy films for this age group had to affect the content of youth films. Because Aesopian language is a universal concept within the context of a culture with harsh ideological constraints, similar Aesopian devices can be found in the works of film directors from all three studios. Youth films by different directors developed various allegories that can be connected to the economic, political, and social situation in the country. Some films have a tendency to operate with one set of Aesopian techniques more than with others, and, in the next four chapters, I will focus on similarities as well as divergences in the mechanisms of avoiding censorship by different filmmakers in the 1970s and the early 1980s.

4.0 ADULT PROBLEMS OF SOVIET TEENAGERS

“There is no sex in the USSR!”

from the TV show, *US-Soviet Space Bridge*.

4.1 IL'IA FREZ: FIRST LOVE AND GENERATIONAL DISCORD

Il'ia Frez's *Not Even in Your Dreams* (*Vam i ne snilos'*, 1980) explores the topic of romance and sexual relationships among teenagers in the context of changing cultural and ideological beliefs under Brezhnev.⁶⁸ I argue that a significant aspect of 1970s Soviet society—the increasing role of consumerist culture—modifies relationships among the characters in *Not Even in Your Dreams* and suggests an affinity of some adult characters as potential representatives of the corrupt bureaucracy typical of this historical period. I argue that the young characters serve as detectors of this transformation, which leads to a larger gap between generations. At the same time, the growth of consumerist values and behavior led to a kind of budding individualism under which young Soviet citizens focus more on their personal interrelationships than on

⁶⁸ Unlike other filmmakers of the 1970s discussed here, Frez was already in his sixties when he made *Not Even in Your Dreams*. Frez already had a very solid reputation as a filmmaker, and had established himself as a director of children's and youth films. Consequently, the cinematic and ideological traditions of the Thaw necessarily affected the content and the style of his youth films in the 1970s.

building socialist society. Frez uses love between sixteen-year-old high school students as the main grounds for disagreement between teenagers and adults. These disagreements alienate the young characters from their everyday community and create a gap between their teachers and parents and themselves. This gap is often represented in youth films visually through the depiction of the teenage protagonists in secluded places or away from the city. In Loseff's terms, personal relations between teenagers function as screens, hiding the fact that they are linked to the more general attitudes in Soviet society. At the same time, the problems that the young protagonists face in Frez's film reveal the signs of developing dysfunctionality of the system during the late-Soviet period.

The narrative of *Not Even in Your Dreams* describes the relationships between two high school students, Roma Lavochkin and Katia Shevchenko, who become neighbors and classmates after Katia's family moves to a new Moscow neighborhood. The teenagers' parents oppose their children's close relationships, which develops gradually throughout the film, despite constant intervention and attempts to separate the young lovers. In accordance with an evil plan, put together by Roma's grandmother, who lives in Leningrad, the teenage lovers are separated, but, by the end of the film, Roma and Katia manage to reunite. This reunion of the teenage lovers is also facilitated by their young teacher Tat'iana Nikolaevna and their classmates.

The story in Frez's film has a Shakespearean-quality, and Romeo and Juliet's relationship can be read as a universal model for intergenerational conflicts and the power relations between teenagers and adults. The original title for Galina Shcherbakova's novel was *Roman and Iul'ka*—the title that has a more explicit connection with Shakespeare's love story. However, both the editorial board of a literary journal *Youth (Iunost')* and the administration of Goskino

asked her to eliminate this reference. Thus, Shcherbakova renamed her female protagonist Katia and the title of the film became *Not Even in Your Dreams*.⁶⁹

In addition to Shakespeare's play, Frez's film integrates a number of references to the American musical *West Side Story*, which is also based on the love story of Romeo and Juliette, but set in New York in the 1950s. Roma and Katia's classmates attend a play, which is staged by the theater in which Tat'iana Nikolaevna used to play. The posters of the play hang on the streets, and, in one of the scenes, the students read a review of the play, published in a Soviet newspaper. The viewers, who also read Shcherbakova's novel prior to watching the film, could have recognized the allusion to *West Side Story* even in the new title of the film.⁷⁰ In the novel, Tat'iana Nikolaevna's girlfriends tell her: "We have such a great *West Side Story*—you cannot imagine it even in your dreams." In the film, however, this reference to the American love story is absent, and instead, the title is a truncated citation of the principal's threat, directed toward the high school students: "You cannot imagine such misery even in your dreams!" Thus, the new title of the film, on the one hand, makes the reference to the Western love story less implicit, functioning as a screen; and, on the other hand, emphasizes the insuperable gap between the older generation and the young generation, insofar as the principal's threat targets mainly the teenage lovers.⁷¹

The allusion to British and American love stories and their comparison to the romantic relationship between Soviet high school students allow Frez, first of all, to create a more

⁶⁹ For the history of Shcherbakova's novel see the interview with her by Iuliia Chasovnikova, "Pisatel'nitsa, stsenarist Galina Shcherbakova," published in *Komsomol'skaia pravda* on 23 March 2010.

⁷⁰ The novel was published in *Youth* in 1979, and the film was made one year later.

⁷¹ Because this reference was important for and targeted mostly Soviet viewers, Frez's film was released in the United States under the title *Love and Lies*. See "Screen: Soviet 'Love and Lies'," published in *New York Times* on 5 March 1982.

sympathetic attitude among viewers toward the young couple, and second, to emphasize “the otherness” of the young Brezhnev generation, their difference from the previous Soviet generations. As in Shakespeare’s tragedy and the American musical, some adults in *Not Even in Your Dreams* are depicted as negative and tyrannical, failing in their responsibilities as parents or educators. Because of this failure, young people find some peace in expressing their individuality and building personal, or even intimate, relationships among themselves.

The love story in *Not Even in Your Dreams* is framed within the more general story of changing values in late-Soviet society. Frez’s film includes a number of signifiers that allude to the changing focus on consumerist culture and the effect it has on people’s behavior and relationships. Li Chzhifan argues that in their films, many directors in the Brezhnev years focused on “essential, socially significant problems of identity formation in the conditions of the approaching ‘pragmatization’ not only of industrial, but also of human relationships” (57).⁷² The pragmatization of the social sphere had a different impact on Soviet youth and Soviet adults; the spreading of consumerist values seems to have a positive outcome on the younger generation and on the selected adults who are open to changes. Overall, adults on the screen seem to get easily corrupt by new goods, which are available to Soviet consumers.

Frez shows that consumerist values have a great impact on Soviet people’s lifestyle and behavior. He employs a set of visual synecdoches of Western consumerism, which also work as metaphors for the Westernization of the Brezhnev society. For example, Frez uses the depiction of the opening of a new department store across from the school as an allusion to the new consumerist culture during the Brezhnev era, and the young people’s romance rapidly develops

⁷² “Авторы этих фильмов приковывают внимание к существенным, социально значимым проблемам формирования личности в условиях надвигающейся ‘прагматизации’ не только производственных, но и человеческих отношений.”

after this important consumerist event takes place (See Figures 16-17). The opening of a new consumerist heaven interrupts the everyday routine of high school students and their teacher, both narratively and visually. First, on-screen music from the opening interrupts classes, and the students run to the windows to see the source of noise. Then, in the next shot, a pair of scissors cuts a red ribbon, as part of the official opening ceremony. Metaphorically, this scene represents the “intrusion” of Western consumerism into the lives of Soviet people; however, for the young Brezhnev generation, it does not have a negative effect.



Figure 16: *Not Even In Your Dreams*



Figure 17: *Not Even In Your Dreams*

Paradoxically, with its long lines and consumerist goods, the crowded department store offers the teenage lovers a perfect place for privacy. While everyone is busy choosing goods and standing in lines, Roma and Katia have their dates by the small swimming pool, filled with inflatable toys. In addition, the signifiers of Westernization permeate this new consumerist culture: we see a customer with a Marlboro grocery bag, a Pepsi-Cola truck next to the department store, and high school students wearing jeans (See Figure 18).



Figure 18: *Not Even In Your Dreams*

Frez links the flourishing of consumerist culture to the increased importance of individualism in Brezhnev culture. In *Not Even in Your Dreams*, the juxtaposition of adults and teenagers, together with a comparison of their reactions and behaviors in similar situations, can be helpful in creating Aesopian meaning. The decision by Roma's father, Kostia, to acquire a tailor-made suit (instead of buying it at the department store) represents an amplified interest in individualism. Thus, consumerist behavior also feeds off the desire to emphasize one's

individuality, both among adult and younger characters. In his attempts to be appealing to Katia's mother Liudmila, Kostia looks pathetic and awkward. The comic affect is also created by the skillful acting by Albert Filozov, who was known for his roles of quiet, feeble men such as Vasilii Chaban in *A Quiet Person (Tikhonia, 1973)* and Ivan Karlovich in *The Black Hen, or The Underground Inhabitants (Chernaia kuritsa, ili Podzemnye zhiteli, 1980)*.⁷³ Kostia's desire to reject uniformity, even if it is in fashion, is not supported by other adults, and is rejected even by his own wife.

The somber portrayal of teachers and parents who either have problems adjusting to new conditions in the society or become corrupt as a result of growing consumerism can be placed within the specific historical context. The 1970s was a period of worsening economy and changing consumerist behavior, when almost every member of Soviet society had to participate in the second economy, buying goods on the black market or using personal connections to access some commodities. Richard Stites describes 1970s Soviet society as one that experienced escalating "material growth, full employment (if underemployment), and peace" at the same time as it was characterized by "agricultural decay, low efficiency, technological lag, corruption, and a declining birthrate" (149). Lynn Attwood argues that, despite different attempts to improve the life of Soviet people, the situation in the Soviet economy had barely changed since the 1950s and the 1960s. She writes that about one third of the Soviet working population was still engaged in industries producing weapons. At the same time, the economic sector responsible for housing, agriculture, and producing goods did not receive sufficient attention from the state, which resulted in the development of a second, or shadow, economy (Attwood 78). The relationship

⁷³ After his part in *Not Even in Your Dreams*, Filozov continued playing powerless, passive characters, for instance, Fedor Laptev in Dmitrii Dolinin and Stanislav Liubshin's *Three Years (Tri goda, 1980)*.

between teenagers and adults in Frez's film are also affected negatively by such characteristics of consumerist culture as insincerity, selfishness, and corruption. These negative characteristics are associated with the specific adult characters, with Roma's mother as one of their representatives.

Frez represents the negative outcome of the expansion of consumerist attitudes and behaviors in *Not Even in Your Dreams* through an implied allegorical comparison of Roma's mother, Vera, to Soviet bureaucrats during the Brezhnev years. Vera focuses mostly on her family's material well-being. When it comes to solving some emotional or moral dilemmas, she fails by offering bad solutions. Ian D. Thatcher describes the late period of Brezhnev's governance as the time of an ineffective political leadership because Brezhnev "avoided self-criticism, was increasingly incapable of giving his attention to state affairs, by-passed consultation with the Party, and led the country to a state of crisis both internally and internationally" (31). Thus, the viewers are meant to understand and interpret Vera as an allegorical allusion of the Brezhnev regime, because she exhibits many of Brezhnev's most recognizable and notorious qualities. From the beginning, Vera is portrayed as a strong, authoritarian woman. She is active and attempts to control every aspect of her family's life; at the same time, she fulfills all the stereotypical roles of a woman: she buys groceries, she cleans, and she cooks. Throughout the film, Vera is usually depicted in the kitchen either in her apron or her robe. Upon Vera's return from the store early in the morning, she turns on the radio with a traditional morning program and puts a copy of the newspaper *Pravda* on her husband's bed. She makes sure that she feeds and takes care of her family members, and she also ensures that they receive their ideological education. On an allegorical level, with her constant intervention in peoples' lives and her nurturing desires, she can be compared to the state that attempts to

brainwash and control its citizens through mass media, while at the same time trying to keep them fed and happy.

Roma's mother also represents the "broken screws" in the Soviet ideological machine. In the 1970s, Soviet society began to discover the existence of wrong-doers inside the system. As Elena Stishova writes in her article, "'Da' i 'net' ne govorite..." "the System has shamelessly recruited pragmatists, cynics, and careerists into its power structures" (50). Even some loyal adherents to the ideological system gradually became corrupt, evident in their stealing and their participation in the second economy. Daniel Bertaux, in collaboration with Marina Malysheva, also suggests that the corruption during Brezhnev's years spread from the top and "became apparent to those governed, as a kind of tacit public knowledge" (47). Vera has power over the people around her, thus representing authority in general; at the same time, she displays negative characteristics that are associated with the corrupted *apparatchiki*. Vera lies to her son and her husband and tries to break up the Roma and Katia's relationship mostly out of jealousy of Katia's mother, Liudmila. She is one of the main adult figures in the film who denies the teenage characters the expression of their personal desires and wishes. She embodies an authoritative character who establishes restrictions and prohibitions for the young generation because of her strong desire to keep the status quo.

Roma's mother is not the only adult who does not approve of the development of individuality and uniqueness in high school students. The school principal is also constructed as a dysfunctional authoritative figure. She imposes her decisions on the people around her and does not believe in any serious relationships between high school students. She articulates her views at the meeting with Roma's mother, claiming, "I am personally for ascetism, for the mortification of flesh until the maturation of soul. And souls at schools are still green."

According to her, all students should obey the standard rules of behavior and be a part of the collective, rather than find an outlet in the individual desires and relationships. Reminiscent of many bureaucrats of the 1970s, the principal has a double agenda: in order to save the school's reputation, she assists Roma's mother with separating the teenage lovers. She suggests sending Roma to a mathematical school under a false pretense that it is a good opportunity for Roma to receive a better education. However, she is motivated mostly by her recognition of Roma's propensity to separate himself from the collective, to express his individuality, and to confront adult wrong-doers. Therefore, the principal represents the official punitive forces for people with non-conformist attitudes and thinking like Roma. By depicting an elaborate intergenerational conflict at home and at school, Frez's film may be understood as a commentary on the corrupt power of the 1970s, a corruption in late Soviet culture that was pervasive, rather than isolated.

In *Not Even in Your Dreams*, some adults are more supportive of the younger generation; generally, these individuals are the people in their thirties, such as the young homeroom teacher, Tat'iana Nikolaevna. She belongs to the group of Soviet people who adhere to the values of the preceding ideological systems, and specifically, to the values of the Thaw. Even though this category of adults recognizes the teenagers' need to create a distance between themselves and the adult world, they often fail to protect high school students from their parents and corrupt authorities due to their personal problems. Tat'iana Nikolaevna is not evil or deceptive like Vera or the school principal, but is instead depicted as an ineffective educator whose personal life intervenes in her ability to understand her students. This is not a unique case of unproductive educators; rather, Tat'iana Nikolaevna is suggestive of a trend in Soviet films in the 1970s and early 1980s. Frez sets up the interaction between Tat'iana Nikolaevna and her boyfriend, Misha,

as an example of unsuccessful relationship between a man and a woman that may affect their professional lives. In addition to Misha being unfaithful, he is corrupt and offers to forge his girlfriend's medical history. Visually, he is identified with the consumerist culture by wearing jeans and a stylish denim jacket and by smoking an imported brand of cigarettes.⁷⁴ Frez depicts Misha's adherence to consumerist values in the film not as something unnatural or criminal, but as a part of the everyday life in the 1970s and early 1980s. On the one hand, because of his age (mid-thirties), he should represent the Thaw generation; on the other hand, he is interested in achieving his personal goals and he focuses on personal gains.

In the context of shifting values toward individualism and self-affirmation in the consumerist society under Brezhnev, familial relationships also undergo some changes in Frez's work. In the first scenes of the film, Frez parallels two families: Tat'iana's unhappy family, which includes her mother and her boyfriend, and Katia's reconstructed family, which consists of her mother, her step-father, Volodia, and her. In the parallel montage, Tat'iana's mother is framed with a stack of books on the rear window of the car—the setting that alludes to her reliance on reason and intellect rather than on feelings. Tat'iana's mother judges everything from the position of her generation, late Stalinism. Her traditional views on family result in her obtrusive desire to fix her daughter's personal life.

While only two generations participate in the intergenerational conflict in Tat'iana Nikolaevna's family, Roma's family has representatives from three generations that span different historical periods—Stalinism (Roma's grandmother), the Thaw (Roma's parents), and the Brezhnev period (Roma). In Roma's family, the role of the Stalinist generation is

⁷⁴ In one of the scenes, at the airport, the depiction of Misha in the phone booth, partially blocked from viewers by the packs of imported cigarettes, may create an allusive connection between the corrupt doctor and the symbols of Western consumerist culture.

emphasized through the depiction of Roma's grandmother as a powerful, even tyrannical character. Similarly to the increased significance of disseminating Stalin's portraits in the 1940s, the grandmother's omnipotence is already present in the first scenes of the film: she first appears on the screen in the form of a picture on the wall of the Lavochkins' apartment.

Roma's grandmother represents the phenomenon of the "aging" of political leaders, and despite her old age, she is actively involved in constraining her young grandson. The importance of the grandmother in *Not Even in Your Dreams* parallels the significant role grandparents usually play in Soviet society. Frez takes this model of close connections between grandparents and grandchildren and inverts it. It is the younger generation, represented by Roma, who takes care of the old generation (Roma's grandmother). Roma's mother's malicious scheme to separate the young people by lying about the grandmother's health works because of Roma's attachment to his grandmother and his morality. He does not hesitate to leave school and his girlfriend when he finds out about his grandmother's illness. However, the connection between the Stalinist generation, represented by the grandmother, and the new Brezhnev generation are corrupt and superficial. As a representative of the generation of repression, Roma's grandmother intercepts Katia's letters. This kind of behavior is an allusion to the Soviet state's actions during Stalinism, when it scrupulously monitored the communication and correspondence of its citizens. In response to her grandson's good deeds, the grandmother keeps the truth from Roma about Katia's constant attempts to contact him, and also limits his freedom. She pretends to be sick when Roma is around, and drinks Czech beer and smokes when he is at school. She even bribes the mail carrier with old clothes in order to intercept Katia's letters to Roma; thus, she is depicted as a dishonest and amoral person, whose values are rooted in Stalinism, but altered in the new

historical conditions. As Frez's film implies, changes in the social structure and consumerist behavior reveal the negative side of the Stalinist generation.

While the older generations are challenged by a new value system, in which individual well-being prevails over collective welfare, the young representatives of the Brezhnev generation adjust to this system of values and beliefs without major troubles. The high school students in *Not Even in Your Dreams* act like regular young Soviet citizens, or at least wear the masks of obedient citizens, who, on the surface, follow the rules of the party, but deep inside already believe in a different system of values. The teenagers wear Komsomol pins, attend classes, and do their homework like exemplary Soviet students. However, when it comes to discussing the ideas that the state creates and offers to its citizens, the teenagers "lose" their obedience. Roma and Katia share many unconventional views with their classmates. In one of the early scenes in the film, when Katia arrives at her new classroom, one of the students reads a review of the play, *West Side Story*, which they saw together with Tat'iana Nikolaevna the night before. This scene is filled with ironic undertones, typical of Aesopian strategies: the students ridicule the pompous, artificial phrases published in a Soviet newspaper review about the play's "nervous fabric of the form," "plastic sufferings," and "the symbolics that strikes with the back of the hand." The young citizens do not perceive the published words seriously because they are able to see the emptiness, the lack of essence behind these words. Thus, the characters' critical perspectives are marked by a skeptical attitude toward the verbal forms that support Soviet mythology; Frez makes clear that the younger generation no longer automatically absorbs everything offered up by the state.

This skeptical attitude toward the Party's values can be explain by the discrepancy between the pragmatic and mythological levels of Soviet mentality, about which Vladimir

Shlapentokh writes in his book *Soviet Public Opinion and Ideology*. The mythological layer of Soviet mentality includes all the elements of the Soviet symbolic system--including legends and myths about Soviet heroic people and the belief in importance and power of the Communist party--while the pragmatic layer covers all the rituals, actions, and behavior that correspond to Soviet mythology. Shlapentokh discusses the relationship between state ideology and the citizens' reaction to it:

The evolution of popular attitudes toward official values supposes the gradual removal of these values from the pragmatic level of the mentality of the Soviet people and to their mythological level, demanding only verbal support. But, then, with the further erosion of ideology, official values abandon the mythological level, and cannot elicit even verbal recognition. (135)

By the 1970s, the mythological level began to lose its verbal support, and Soviet mottos and slogans ceased to carry ideological significance for many Soviet citizens, especially young people. After Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech, in which he denounced Stalin, and after the Party members accused Khrushchev of political mistakes and he was forced to resign in 1964, the attitude toward official ideology gradually began to change. All these political events introduced a hint of suspicion among the Soviet people. During the Thaw, the ideological system was maintained at the mythological level, with members sincerely believing in Soviet mottos and slogans as symbols of Soviet power. However, by the 1970s, because the fear created by the Stalinist purges had dissolved almost entirely and Soviet ideology had weakened, many citizens just pretended that the Soviet symbolic system remained valid. Despite mild repression of the cultural elite, the political atmosphere was not as severe as during the Stalinist years. The young people of Brezhnev's time felt more independent from adults than their

predecessors and they were less amenable to ideological persuasion than their parents or grandparents; according to Shlapentokh, they were “much more skeptical and critical of the official ideological hypocrisy than their elders” (*Soviet Public Opinion* 138). These characteristics of the young Soviet generation are apparent in Frez’s film.

In *Not Even in Your Dreams*, the students’ reaction to the review of the play *West Side Story* represents the mentality caused by the gap between real life and the official dogmas that “allow them to ignore public interests and to absorb themselves in private or illegal activity in their workplace while preserving a surface allegiance to the Soviet system” (Shlapentokh *Public and Private Life* 13). The students attend the play as a mandatory field trip, organized by their teacher. However, when Tat’iana Nikolaevna is absent from the classroom, the teenagers react to the review with laughter and irony. Without Tat’iana Nikolaevna in class, Katia and Roma’s classmates complain about the current situation in a society in which everything is tied together—“love, a [socialist] plan, and wood cutting”—alluding to the state’s constant intervention into the public and private lives of its members. The young generation chooses to put together the three words, which do not have an implicit logical connection, as a special Aesopian strategy to ridicule the socialist order. This narrative element represents a circumlocution through which the high school students comment indirectly on the Soviet system and its empty signifiers, represented in socialist slogans and mottos.

Another discussion that is important for the narrative takes place in this scene—the teenagers openly mention sex and identify its important role in their lives. In a confession unusual for Soviet youth films, one of the teenage protagonists claims that “sex is the only pure thing that is not affected by anything.” This statement links the two teenage protagonists—Roma and Katia—and anticipates the nature of their future relationship. After the statement

about the sincerity and purity of sex, the camera cuts to a close-up of Katia's face, while she is looking at Roma with interest and curiosity. In the next shot, Roma joins Katia at her desk; and from now, on their romance develops and becomes the center of the film narrative. Explicit, or more often implicit, sex and love between the young characters is one of the differentiating features of the 1970s youth films, and become the grounds for dispute between the young and the older generations.

Katia and Roma's love and loyalty to each other confirm that individual interests become more important for young Soviets than the collective needs. In the dialogue with Tat'iana Nikolaevna, Katia debunks the ideals of her teacher, and explains to her that love is more important than a sense of duty. This view of love as the main motivation in life is atypical of earlier Soviet cultural traditions. Yet these new values are not entirely repudiated by the adult characters, who also partially accept the falseness of the ideological values on which they were raised. Thus, the young generation influence the older generation because of its ability to see more clearly the ineffectiveness of previous ideals in Soviet society.

The love between teenagers in *Not Even in Your Dreams* poses a threat to the stable order of the adult world not only because it diminishes the importance of the collective, but also because it is partially sexualized. The sexualization of teenage relationships occurs in one of the early scenes of the film. During the field trip to Ostankino Park, Roma pays attention to Katia's feet. In a medium shot, the camera freezes on Katia's red sandals and bare heels and the gazing teenage boy (See Figure 19). This moment reveals the physical, sexual nature of Roma's feelings for Katia. His desire to gaze transforms into a desire to touch and gradually leads to mutual sexual interest between the teenage characters. In a later scene, Frez encodes the intercourse between the young characters through ellipsis: he juxtaposes the scene in which

Roma and Katia hold each other in an empty apartment with a subsequent scene in Roma's kitchen when his happy face and playful mood confirm the teenagers' sex in the preceding scene (See Figure 20).⁷⁵ Galina Shcherbakova's novel, on which Frez's film script is based, was subjected to a less severe censorship than its film adaptation, and more openly discussed the teenage protagonists' attitudes and thoughts regarding sex. Because Frez had to receive an approval from the studio administration, any explicit depictions of sex among teenagers could not make it to the final version of the script.



Figure 19: *Not Even In Your Dreams*

⁷⁵ In Shcherbakova's novel, the allusions to Roma and Katia's first sexual interaction are more explicit than in Frez's film. Katia narrates that she has been preparing herself for this evening for a long time. She even puts on a nice shirt and uses her mother's expensive French perfume. In the novel, the sex between the young characters is depicted as a seductive act on the part of Katia, and not a pure coincidence.



Figure 20: *Not Even In Your Dreams*

Gradually, as Frez's film indicates, the young characters change adults' attitudes toward love, and toward teenage love in particular. By showing the ways in which the younger generation modifies the older generations' perception of love and personal relationships in the late-Soviet period, *Not Even in Your Dreams* puts forward an idea that Soviet society steps further away from the ideologems and morals of the Stalinist era. In her book on Soviet childhood, Catriona Kelly studies the role of love in Stalinist society. She writes that, during this period, "the relationship between a girl and a boy that bordered on, while not quite spilling over into, 'love' was seen as a specially elevated form of permissible friendship, one requiring suspension of prejudice in favor of higher ideals on both sides" (581). The teenagers in Frez's film deconstruct this kind of understanding of love and romance between young people; and this deconstruction also indicates the existence of more than one possible scenario for Soviet citizens' behavior. That is to say, the discovery of love's possibilities indicates that, in the Brezhnev society, there were other interpretations, authored by individuals, besides the ones created and maintained by the state.

The deconstruction of previously existing views on love and intimate relationships among young people in the late-Soviet period made visible the idea that more than one state-manufactured truth had a right to exist. Oushakine claims that “within the existing ‘regime of truth,’ the dissident discourse that mimetically replicated (not without Aesopian twisting) the discourse of the dominant was probably the only one that could be accepted in that society as truthful” (208). Yurchak opposes this statement, pointing at the plurality of truths because “the concept of ‘truth’ became decentered and no longer anchored to constative meanings of the authoritative discursive field” (130). The members of 1970s society occupied the position between different types of truth, and they could choose to believe in one truth over another. Mikhail Brashinskii distinguishes an important characteristic of the 1970s—“Brezhnev’s pluralism” (*brezhnevskii pliuralizm*)—which lacks any common aesthetics and at the same time is “solemnly and proudly faceless, and consequently permissive and omnivorous” (“Roman s zastoem” 102). Frez’s film develops an idea that the Soviet state allows for other opinions and discourses to exist, along with the main authoritative discourse. The teenagers not only create their own truths, but also prove the validity and relevance of these truths. They also create their own alternative discourse in which they can express their feelings and attitudes.

Not Even in Your Dreams creates one such alternative discourse that allows high school students to exercise their rights to be independent through the help of recorded music and tape-recorders. In cinema, objects on the screen and in the narrative may have a special value and create a secondary layer of meaning. Frez’s film draws parallels between the recorded music and the teenagers’ independence and outlines the role of tape recorders in Soviet society during the Brezhnev years. The first reel-to-reel recorders appeared in the Soviet Union in the late 1950s; the cassette recorder became more accessible to the public only in the first half of the 1970s.

The use of tape recorders ignited the dissemination of bard music and later led to *magnitizdat* (recording music and lectures in a home setting and distributing these recordings among a special circle of friends)—both unique phenomena of Brezhnev culture.⁷⁶ According to Peter Steiner, the music distributed through *magnitizdat* was “managed to project a new kind of intimate space [...] that stood at a marked variance from the official public space resounding with mass and heroic songs” (622). Shlapentokh asserts that the tape recorders used by young Soviet people “broke the monopoly of the state on information and the arts, and ushered in a new era in the Soviet Union” (*Soviet Public Opinion* 139). In *Not Even in Your Dreams*, similarly to the interactions between dissidents and people who did not entirely support the state policies, the communication between the two teenage lovers is mediated through secret recorded messages—an allusion to the existence of *magnitizdat* practices. Katia listens to the tape secretly in her bedroom, when her parents are not around, and Roma’s messages give her strength to confront her parents. The close-up of Katia’s glasses on the top of the recorder invokes a metaphor of the connection between the intellectuals and the audio recordings made at home.

In addition to using tape recorders, the teenage characters rely on other techniques that allow them to express their difference from adults. One involves physical seclusion, in which they separate themselves from the adult world and create their own private space. The high school students’ choice to go to Ostankino Park may be partially explained by the fact that this space is withdrawn from the Soviet context, insofar as the Ostankino palace was built in the second half of the eighteenth century by Count Nikolai Sheremet'ev.⁷⁷ Any signs of Sovietness are missing in this scene, and the temporal shift creates a safe non-Soviet context in which the

⁷⁶ *Magnitizdat* appeared in Soviet culture at the end of the 1950s.

⁷⁷ Later in the film, Katia and Roma return to this park to say farewell to each other before Roma’s departure for Leningrad.

teenage protagonists can disengage themselves from Soviet reality. The white sculptures in Ostankino Park represent the members of the tsar's family. The depiction of the teenagers with pre-revolutionary sculptures in the background can be understood as the reference to the young Soviets' desire to disengage themselves from the Soviet reality. The students detach themselves from the rest of the society, and this non-Soviet space gives them an opportunity to feel free from adults' control.

The secluded space of Ostankino Park allows them to mock and invert some Soviet traditions and values. In a childish game, all students begin kneeling and praying to the street light. One of them screams aloud mottos reminiscent of many Soviet industrial mottos: "Glory to open-hearth furnaces and blast furnaces! Glory to progress! Glory to folks and knives!" Stites explains that Brezhnev's regime "too often, instead of answers and solutions, [...] offered smug slogans about progress" (149). As Frez's film makes plain that the traditional socialist slogans no longer carried the same value for the new generation of Soviet people as they used to for the generations of their parents and grandparents. In *Not Even in Your Dreams*, the reproduction of Soviet values with criticism and irony differentiates the younger generation from the older one. Yurchak argues that the performative participation in authoritative discourse in the late-Soviet period implied the reproduction of the form of this discourse rather than its meaning. Yurchak states that this "performative reproduction of the form of rituals and speech acts" did not lose any meaning but "actually enabled the emergence of diverse, multiple, and unpredictable meanings in everyday life, including those that did not correspond to the constative meaning of authoritative discourse" (25). The performative aspect of young Soviet citizens' behaviors and attitudes toward the official ideological system allowed them to function within the system without being punished.

In addition to the performativity of political discourse during the Brezhnev years, such an attitude toward Soviet ideologemes can also be explained by the notion of mimetic resistance, about which Oushakine writes in his article “The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat.” Based on Michel Foucault’s ideas on discourse and power/knowledge, the notion of mimetic resistance points at the specific ability of dissidents in the Soviet Union to work within the system, to be on the surface of the state’s ideological structure. According to Oushakine, “the oppositional discourse in a sense shared the symbolic field with the dominant discourse: it echoed and amplified the rhetoric of the regime, rather than positioning itself outside of or underneath it” (192). Thus, the state and the dissident, and the relationships between them—defined by Oushakine as the relationships between the dominant and subordinate—“belong to the same discursive field, as relating to each other intradiscursively rather than interdiscursively” (207). They necessarily share the same linguistic and symbolic fields, and “neither the dominant nor the dominated could situate themselves ‘outside’ this vocabulary” (Oushakine 207). Therefore, despite the idea that the teenage characters in *Not Even in Your Dreams* are already able to play with Soviet slogans and mottos, ridiculing them to some degree, the students still operate within Soviet discourse, resting their responses on ideological postulates. The mimetic resistance, expressed in the students’ worshiping an iron streetlight, allows students to mock Soviet values without being punished: instead of stopping her students, Tat’iana is standing next to them with a happy smile on her face (See Figure 21). As an authoritative figure, she accepts this kind of behavior—based on the mimetic resistance—among her students, insofar as it is not significantly harmful to the current ideological structure.



Figure 21: *Not Even In Your Dreams*

During the Brezhnev period, the growing importance of individualism and the partial rejection of the collective as a supporting structure led to the development of separate unofficial youth communities that protected young people from adults' harmful intervention. In Frez's film, when Tat'iana Nikolaevna fails to defend her students from their unsympathetic parents and teachers, a group of Roma and Katia's classmates supports the teenage lovers. Unlike the classmates in Thaw films about teenagers' first romantic relationships, the high school students in *Not Even in Your Dreams* form a small supportive community that excludes parents and teachers. This secluded, closed community becomes one of the main characteristics of many films of the 1970s and alludes to various communities of intellectuals during the Brezhnev era, represented by *samizdat* groups, the unofficial journal *Metropol'*, and underground artists.

Drawing parallels between the young characters of *Not Even in Your Dreams* and unofficial groups and people with an alternative way of thinking is one of the Aesopian strategies, especially because the teenagers recreate in their behavior and actions many important elements of the relationships between official and unofficial discourses during the 1970s. Sometimes they openly disagree with postulates provided by the adults, and this leads to

punishment and “exile”: Roma’s “deportation” from Moscow to Leningrad is an allusive example of such practice. As the allegorical representations of dissident intellectuals, the high school students in *Not Even in Your Dreams* have views on love, career, and their future diverge from those of their parents and teachers. Thus, the relationships between the young protagonists and authoritative adults are reminiscent of the ones between Soviet intellectuals and the state in the late-Soviet period.

Using this parallel between the teenage rebels and the generation of dissenters, it is possible to say that Frez’s film maps out an optimistic future for the country, if it allows its citizen to express their individuality and to become consumerists without being negatively affected by the new economic rules. As *Not Even in Your Dreams* implies, the development of independent thinking and individual opinions and thoughts among the teenage protagonists is rewarded in the end. A possible positive outcome for the “dissident” figures and communities is represented in the final scene of the film, in which the young lovers are reunited and hold each other, while sitting in the snow by the house of Roma’s grandmother. Aleksei Rybnikov’s emotional, lyric music, which through the entire film represented Roma’s and Katia’s developing romance, intensifies in the last scene and muffles any other sounds and voices. The teenage lovers win their battle with the adults, and two five- or six- year-old children—a boy and a girl—witness this victory. In multiple reverse shots, this younger couple is likened to the teenage protagonists and represents a continuity of newly established and consolidated values, which they, as the future generation of Perestroika, would develop further, invert, and, at the end, devalue.

4.2 PAVEL LIUBIMOV: SEXUAL RESISTANCE

According to Neia Zorkaia, many films made during the Brezhnev years bear such characteristics as “an inimitable diversity, a freedom of expression, confession, and revelation of the sacred” (*Istoriia sovetskogo kino* 397). This point of view can be supported by the growing popularity of youth films with a focus on young people’s interactions with their educators and parents, relationships with one another, their first sexual explorations, and the search for their sexual identities—topics unheard of in Soviet cinema of the preceding periods of Stalinism and the Thaw. As Igor' Kon suggests, “[f]or many decades Soviet society hypocritically portrayed itself as utterly asexual, even sexless; it eventually even convinced itself of such drivel” (*Seksual'naia kul'tura* 15). Some youth films during the Brezhnev years partially debunk this erroneous view of Soviet sexlessness. If Frez’s film, *Not Even in Your Dreams*, cautiously explores the intimate relationships between teenage protagonists through the help of omission, ellipsis, and allusion, Pavel Liubimov’s *School Waltz* investigates the topic of teenage sexuality and sexual interactions among young characters more boldly and in greater detail. I argue that this revelation of “the sacred,” represented in a cinematic example, can be seen as a veiled commentary on the Soviet sex politics in the 1970s and early 1980s. Deciphering Aesopian meaning underneath the connections between the teenagers’ sexual relationships and adults’ reaction to it in Liubimov’s film may help to create historical references to the overall discourse on sex and sexuality in the Soviet Union in the late-Soviet period.

In this section, I investigate the reasons behind a partial revelation of the taboo topic of teenagers’ sexual relationships at this specific historical period. In *School Waltz*, a failure of school educators and parents to understand, manipulate, and influence young people’s decisions regarding their bodies and their sexual behavior creates allegorical parallels with the Soviet

government's unsuccessful effort to regain its power after the liberating years of the Thaw. *School Waltz* traces the story of two high school students—Zosia and Gosha—who fall in love and, after their first sexual encounter, Zosia gets pregnant. Her boyfriend fails to take responsibility for their child and leaves her. Despite her mother's opinion, Zosia keeps the baby, finds a job at the construction site, and manages to live with her son, independent from her parents. Gosha marries his classmate Dina, but because of the unhappy marriage, he starts to drink. At the end of the film, Zosia confronts Gosha at the school reunion, realizes that he is miserable, but does not confess to him that she has kept their baby.

The allegory of the augmented split between adults and teenagers alludes to the increased gap between the state and its citizens and an overall public disappointment and dissatisfaction with the economy and government politics regarding Soviet citizens' sexual behavior and health during Brezhnev's years. The attitudes toward sex in Soviet society were never homogeneous. Soviet citizens' attitudes toward sex and the state's involvement in controlling discourse concerning sexuality created what Finnish sociologist Anna Rotkirch calls two generations of Soviet people: "the generation of silence" (the 1930s through early 1960s) and "the generation of personalization" (the second half of the 1960s through the 1980s). For the first generation, "sexuality belongs totally in the realm of secrets" (Rotkirch "What Kind of Sex" 97).⁷⁸ The gap "between the official ideology and the private behavior" increased in the late 1960s, and "personal values, such as family life and leisure" became the core values of the generation of personalization (Rotkirch "Sovetskie kul'tury seksual'nosti" 152). In the conclusion of her article on Soviet youth sexuality, Ann Livschiz writes:

⁷⁸ For a more detailed description of the Soviet generations within sexual discourse, see Anna Rotkirch, "What Kind of Sex Can you Talk About."

When it came to raising young future builders of socialism, sexuality was viewed not as a normal part of life, but rather an obstacle to realization of greater goals. It certainly was not an attribute of the ideal Soviet child/adolescent that the state envisioned. Faced with expressions of adolescent sexual behavior, the state perceived sexuality as a political problem, in need of a political solution. (411)

Since the 1930s, adolescent sexuality was considered to be a problem that paradoxically needed to be solved, as Livschiz states, “without being able to study or talk frankly about sex” (411). The silencing of sexual relationships among teenagers continued through the decades of Soviet history, and hints to romantic feelings among teenage characters finally became somewhat visible in Khrushchev culture.

Despite the partial cultural liberation during the Thaw, controlling the discourse on sexuality was still not a priority for the Soviet state, and sexual relationships between young people was not addressed in official popular culture. However, already during this period, Soviet cinema carefully began to explore the topic of teenage platonic love with such examples as Vasili Pelvin’s *Tale of First Love* (*Povest' o pervoi liubvi*, 1957), Iulii Razman’s *And What If It Is Love* (*A esli eto liubov'?*, 1961), Vasili Ordynskii’s *Clouds Over Borsk* (*Tuchi nad Borskom*, 1960), Iulii Karasik’s *The Wild Dog Dingo* (*Dikaia sobaka Dingo*, 1962), and Il'ia Frez’s *I Loved You* (*Ia vas liubil*, 1967). Since Thaw cinema, the figure of a young protagonist has begun to symbolize the discord between the old social order and the new system of values. As Aleksandr Prokhorov argues, “the adolescent [transgresses] the former limits of the possible, and by doing so, [establishes] new borderlines in tune with the new, redefined Soviet values of the Thaw” (“The Adolescent and the Child” 118). In the post-Stalinist years, Soviet youth was finally recognized as a separate group, which allowed for the discussions of its unique characteristics

and needs, including a need to be accepted by peers and have personal interactions with young people of the opposite sex.

The various social changes that Soviet society experienced in the 1970s were also among the reasons that allowed Soviet directors to start alluding to sex in their films. Christopher Williams points out that even though sex was a taboo subject in the Soviet Union during this period, the sexual behavior of Soviet people was undergoing changes: the number of sexually transmitted diseases and abortions increased, as did the birth rate. These critical shifts in sexual health caused the Soviet government to start paying more attention to the development of sciences that would improve the situation in the country. Sociological studies of sexuality in the Soviet Union were absent from academic research until the mid-1960s, when Kon and Sergei Golod were doing their research in sexology. The 1970s marked the re-emergence of medical sexology (“sexopathology”) in the Soviet Union—the science that had been gradually getting its authoritative voice back since the first seminars on sexopathology for physicians in Gorkii (Nizhnii Novgorod) in 1963. All the factors listed above gradually led Brezhnev’s government to start a sex education campaign from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, and teenagers were its main target.⁷⁹

These changes in the social structure of Soviet society suggested that the discourse on sex was not entirely invisible in Soviet culture of the Brezhnev era. Some aspects of this discourse started to spread in academic circles and media, as well as in popular culture. There are a number of films—including youth films such as Il’ia Averbakh’s *Other People’s Letters* (*Chuzhie pis'ma*, 1975) and Pavel Arsenov’s *Confused Emotions* (*Smiatenie chuvstv*, 1977)—that

⁷⁹ For more information on sex education of youth in the Soviet Union see Livschiz’s “Battling ‘Unhealthy Relations:’ Soviet Youth Sexuality as a Political Problem” and Rotkirch’s *The Man Question. Loves and Lives in Late 20th Century Russia*.

carefully explore the topic of sexuality and sexual relationships among Soviet citizens. Many films of the 1970s continued the trends of Thaw youth cinema: Soviet directors further developed the topic of adolescent love and desire, while still partially “silencing” visual and verbal manifestations of young people’s sexual relationships. During the Brezhnev years, the government encouraged and supported filmmakers, including Liubimov, to make films about contemporary youth; but, in their films, they conveyed messages that did not necessarily support official socialist dogmas. For the Soviet state, youth films could be another source for educating young citizens about their bodies and sexualities. Though the state wanted to control, educate, and mold teenagers into obedient Soviet citizens and future Communists through cinema, Soviet filmmakers of this period outlined the impossibility of *perekovka*, or re-forging, of young people, including them being “programmed” by the state as asexual beings.

In his book on Soviet and Russian popular culture, Richard Stites argues that many Soviet films of the 1970s “dealt with everyday life in the present and wholly ignored politics” (172). The first part of Stites’ argument is correct: many filmmakers, such as Dinara Asanova, Il’ia Averbakh, Ernest Iasan, Pavel Liubimov, and Pavel Lebedev, dedicate their films to the contemporary youth of the 1970s. The second part of Stites’ argument, however, is only partially true. Cinema never stopped addressing politics and did not become non-ideological. Anna Lawton suggests in her article, “Toward a New Openness in Soviet Cinema, 1976-1987,” that Soviet popular films of the 1970s “were [still] supposed to sustain orthodox ideology and socialist moral values” (4), but many of them failed to do so for different reasons. One of these reasons is the fact that in order to avoid having their films shelved, some film directors of the Brezhnev era decided to switch from making ideologically charged films to more commercially successful ones.

This “commercialization” of cinema in the 1970s is another reason for Soviet directors’ interest in the topic of sex and sexuality. Stites writes that, during the Brezhnev period, “the drift away from politics was massive and the realities of Soviet life and personal destinies loomed ever larger on the screen” (169). This ideological apathy and materialistic tendencies necessarily affected the content of the films. Lawton distinguishes “the breeding of a consumer mentality,” the “bourgeois” public taste, and the turn to “commercial films which met the public demand and increased profits for the Soviet government” among the characteristics of the cinema of that period (“Toward New Openness” 4). Hollywood films also had a covert impact on the films of these years, especially because the new head of Goskino, Filipp Ermash (1972-1986), was a secret admirer of American cinema. According to research conducted by the State Institute for Cinematography, Lawton argues that both Soviet and American cinematic traditions of that time shared similar traces, such as a “contemporary theme, [...], continuity (no flashbacks), simplicity, spectacular” and many other characteristics (“Toward New Openness” 5). However, she excludes “sex and violence” from the list as a feature of Soviet commercial films of the 1970s. Lawton mentions *School Waltz* as an example of an “undistinguished [film] for mass consumption,” but I argue that Liubimov’s film also illustrates the successful “commercial” film that refers to the topic of teenage sexuality and love as a way of gaining the attention of a larger audience. Unlike its Western counterparts, such as Mike Nichols’ *The Graduate* (1967), John Schlesinger’s *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), and Peter Bogdanovich’s *The Last Picture Show* (1971), which openly depict the sexual nature of adolescents, Liubimov’s film explores youth sexuality in a more covert way.

Liubimov’s *School Waltz* is one of a few cinematic texts of the Brezhnev years that selected specific topics on youth sexuality—including abortion or single parenthood during

adolescence—and introduced them into public discourse. This happened both on screen but also through viewers’ responses that were subsequently published in the Soviet press after the film’s release. In his film, Liubimov addresses changes in young people’s sexual behavior and problems related to it. He no longer depicts teenage characters as innocent children, and links their sexual behavior to wider problematic issues such as abortion or single parenthood during adolescence.⁸⁰ These adult issues distinguish teenagers from children and, at the same time, the existence of such problems among the young cinematic characters allows Liubimov to participate in the discourse on sex during the Brezhnev era.

As a marker, the question of teenage abortion is included in *School Waltz* because it draws viewers’ attention to some important social problems of the Brezhnev society, but as a screen, the issue creates a veiled discourse on power relations between the state and its citizens. Even though abortions were officially legal, numerous anti-abortion campaigns took place in the Soviet Union beginning in the early 1960s, campaigns predicated mainly on educating women through a series of radio and television lectures and articles that appeared in the Soviet press. Liubimov’s film not only deals with the question of teenage sexual behavior and social responsibilities as young parents, but also, through allegories, comments on unsuccessful sexual

⁸⁰ Abortion was legalized in the Soviet Union 1920 by Vladimir Lenin, and, once again, in 1955 after a few decades of prohibition during the Stalinist years. After that, abortion was the most common and accessible method of “birth control.” Abortions were banned by a decree introduced by Stalin in 1936 because of his concern about the decline of population. In his essay “Abortion and Women’s Health in Russia and the Soviet Successor States,” Christopher Williams asserts that the abortion law resulted in increasing numbers of abortions among Soviet women and at the same time created dissatisfaction among the party leaders (146). Williams names the problems in such sexual education: inability to discuss the reasons and motives for abortions, lack of facilities and specialists to deal with abortion patients, and inadequate knowledge among Soviet citizens about alternative contraceptives (147). Paralleling Williams’ research, Tomasz Wites suggests that after 1955 about 6-7 million abortions were performed annually in the Soviet Union (218).

politics in the Soviet Union in a broader context. Aesopian meanings can be revealed during the cinematic exploration of specific situations, in which the teenage protagonists have to solve multiple problems related to their sexuality and the societal attitudes toward abortion, teenage pregnancy, and single parenthood.

For many decades of Soviet history, the state targeted youth for the implementation of new regulations and policies in order to help build communism and to protect the new Soviet social order. State officials expected Soviet youth to participate actively in the social, political, and economic development of the country, and “youth transition, for instance, from school or university to the world of work was also determined by the dominant ideology of Marxism-Leninism and by the needs of the state” (Williams et al. 1). However, by the late Soviet period, young citizens began to question fairness and sincerity of the state and the Communist Party and were able “to voice their opinion of the contradictions” that was affected by the state “not to reward young people for their efforts” (Williams et al. 2). In *Seksual'nost' i kul'tura*, Kon writes that young people were among the most important and active participants in the sexual revolution of the twentieth century. He defines the 1960s and 1970s as the global marker of the “sexual debut” at an earlier age among young people and “the alienation of adolescent and youth sexuality from external forms of social control” that caused numerous negative consequences, such as unplanned pregnancies, STDs, and abortions (*Seksual'naia kul'tura* 50). The number of early sexual contacts in the Soviet Union increased between 1965 and 1972, as demonstrated in Sergei Golod’s research on sexual relationships in Russia.⁸¹ Sex became something more casual, something that young people experienced as a part of the socialization and maturation processes.

⁸¹ In his sociological study, Golod indicates that if in 1965 there were 5.3% of young people under sixteen year old who have already had their first intercourse on the moment of the survey, in 1972 this number increased to 8.2%.

The increasing number of teenagers who had their first sexual experience earlier than the preceding generations coincided with and reinforced the shift in a social discourse, with young people achieving their independence from adults earlier than their predecessors. Kon also associates the period of the 1970s with a rise of “various anti-normative and deviant forms of behavior,” which, according to him, is directly connected to earlier sexual contacts among teenagers (*Seksual'naiia kul'tura* 50). The acknowledgment of the existence of deviant or unorthodox behavior among young Soviets by the state also made the existence of teenage sexuality visible. Youth sexuality was accepted by the state in the late-Soviet period, because it was considered to be deviant and something that required adjustments. This recognition of teenagers’ possessing active, even though “deviant,” sexuality by parents, teachers, and other authoritative figures was an important step in recognizing the young Soviets’ maturity and potential autonomy. In Aesopian parallel, the complex sexual dynamics between teenagers and adults in Liubimov’s film is linked to the ambivalent relationship between Soviet citizens and the state, with the latter acknowledging sexuality of Soviet subjects and trying to restrain or at least modify it.

Consequently, because this relationship gradually became the object of the state’s inquiry, the signs of it became more visible in popular culture, and *School Waltz* illustrates that.⁸² If youth sexuality became more visible in Soviet society, it happened because popular culture was no longer determined by the “repressive hypothesis,” to use Michel Foucault’s term.

⁸² When I talk about sex discourse not being public in Soviet culture, I refer to the society between the 1930s and 1970s. The 1920s is a problematic decade in Soviet history, when the newly developed ideological system also focused on the questions of Soviet citizen’s body and sexuality. In his book, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*, Eric Naiman discusses the importance of sexual discourse during early Soviet history as “a means of popular mobilization and, at the same time, as a process of ideological entrapment (and self-entrapment) of which the Party and Komsomol were never in total control” (4).

According to Foucault, it is important “to account for the fact that it [sex] is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said” (11). *School Waltz* serves as an example of a Soviet film in which “the speaking” about sex comes not only from the authorities (the party and film administrators), but also from the young people, that is represented by cinematic teenagers who possess an active gaze and an active sexuality.

Liubimov places three high school students, who reject their parents’ and teachers’ opinions, at the narrative center of his film. Unlike early adolescent film characters, most of them are marked by what Prokhorov calls the specific characteristic of the Brezhnev youth: namely, a loss of “the ability to undergo re-education and to be mentored” (126). Two of the teenage characters, Zosia and Gosha, are in love with each other, and their classmate Dina—the third part of the love triangle—also has feelings for Gosha. From the beginning, Liubimov emphasizes the close connection between Zosia and Gosha and alludes to its sexual nature. Active sexuality is linked to the teenage protagonists’ active subjectivity and agency. Because of that, the film’s story is constructed in such a way that all the adults become secondary characters without any strong, authoritative voice. The families in the film are dysfunctional or broken. Zosia’s mother cheats on her husband, while Dina’s parents are preoccupied with obtaining material goods and fulfilling their daughter’s every desire. The parents and teachers in the film lack knowledge and understanding of their children’s and students’ interests, and the adults’ apparent blindness makes them partially impotent and passive when making decisions and controlling young people. In *School Waltz*, the teenagers are represented as both the objects and

the subjects of the gaze and desire that is constructed in the film as something natural, something that historically predetermined.

Liubimov's film develops an idea that teenagers' romantic relationships and sexual experiences are a logical result of them displaying their subjectivity and agency. Liubimov reinforces the idea of the teenage characters being active and creative by showing the high school students making their own documentary film. *School Waltz* opens with a shot of viewers sitting in front of the screen and watching home video footage of high school students. The students are not only the main actors in this black-and-white film about everyday school life, but also its directors and cameramen. From the beginning, Liubimov suggests that the story will be narrated from the teenagers' point of view and, for that reason, the film-within-a-film has a documentary quality. The students are making their film in order to preserve memories about the fun days at school, and the intertitles of their silent film inform viewers that the students are "making a film...for our descendants...with a hidden camera." Some of the scenes are indeed shot through the open door or through coat racks in the school cloakroom (See Figures 22-23). The existence of teenage sexual relationship is discovered for the first time not by adults, but the camera with a teenage cameraman behind it. Thus, the active voyeuristic teenage gaze is linked to teenage active sexuality. The camera spies on the two teenage protagonists—Zosia and Gosha—while they are hugging or kissing in the secluded space of the cloakroom, empty classroom, or stairs. *School Waltz* begins with a voyeuristic tendency of a portable camera that is spying on the teenage protagonists, and the rest of the cinematic narrative is constructed as peeping at the development of Zosia and Gosha's intimate relationship. The teenage characters assume voyeurism because they realize that they can do it, with the authoritative figures not being able to entirely control it. Thus, teenage voyeurism becomes an act of latent agency and

power. Additionally, Liubimov resorts to a metaphor of passionate love between the teenagers by juxtaposing their kiss with lava and ashes thrown up by a volcano, reminiscent of ejaculation. This passionate love and sexual desire for each other distinguish Gosha and Zosia from adult characters and their peers.



Figure 22: *School Waltz*



Figure 23: *School Waltz*

Even the *mise-en-scène* in *School Waltz* suggests that the main teenage characters do not blend with the masses. In the first half of the film, teenage love and sexuality are associated with something secret, not intended for the public. The camera not only peeks on Gosha and Zosia in a school setting, but also follows them outside the classroom to the courtyard. Throughout the film, Zosia and Gosha very often are depicted in empty, secluded spaces of the school cloakroom, the empty classroom, and the dark courtyard. These scenes not only distinguish the two teenagers from the rest of the characters, but also create a feeling of a deep intimacy between them. Their vulnerability and the fragility of their relationships are emphasized in the scene in the courtyard when their two figures, lit by an improvised fire, occupy a small part of the dark frame. Zosia and Gosha prefer the cold, dark yard to the warm and modern apartments of their parents. They acknowledge their loneliness and alienation from the world of adults, which is best articulated by Zosia when she says, “We are homeless with you, like tramps.” The dark, empty streets on the screen serve as a metaphor for the pessimistic feelings that the teenage protagonists experience as a result of the dysfunctionality of their families. As represented in *School Waltz*, because of the significant gap between the older generations and the young representatives of the Brezhnev generation, young people chose not to fit in with the rest of the society and develop their own rules and values, relevant to the changing historical discourse.

Home no longer provides teenagers with a feeling of safety and comfort. Gosha’s parents are absent from the screen because they constantly travel. Zosia’s parents do not communicate with each other, and her mother constantly talks on the phone with her lover to whom she refers as “Liusia” as if he were her girlfriend. The kitchen is empty, and father and mother are never depicted cooking or cleaning. Even though the family sits together at the

kitchen table, they do not look comfortable around each other. The trust between the two generations is lost, and they live without understanding or mutual support.

The young characters and their parents' disagreement regarding sex, infidelity, and unplanned pregnancy also embodies the overall conflict between the late-Soviet generation and previous generations. Zosia finds out about her mother's infidelity by eavesdropping on a parallel phone. Her anger and disappointment result in her rebellious behavior, and she secretly brings Gosha to her apartment late at night. The instability of families and the teenagers' distrust of their parents ignite the desire among young people to explore their sexuality in pre-marital relationships.

School Waltz is an example of youth films under Brezhnev that explores the teenage protagonists' sexual relationship through allusions and ellipsis. The teenagers' intimacy scene is unusual for Soviet youth film and is shot mainly in the dark. Liubimov does not openly show intercourse between Zosia and Gosha, but sex between them is implied through visual hints. The rhythmical sounds of clocks interrupt the silence of the apartment, representing Zosia's heartbeat, while she is making her decision to have her first sexual experience that night. This scene is not explicitly sexual, but it provides viewers with enough allusions to the taboo sexual act between the teenage characters. Nudity is absent from *School Waltz*, and the viewers are allowed to see only Zosia's naked shoulders, followed by the darkened screen (See Figure 24). The ellipse suggests that intercourse has already happened. In earlier youth films, young couples would never be depicted naked or in bed; therefore, partial exposure of teenagers' bodies is a unique phenomenon for post-Stalinist films.⁸³ Mark Banting and others argue that, because of

⁸³ It is not accurate to state that all of popular culture of that period lacks the representations of naked bodies. One of the examples of half-naked post-coital bodies can be found in Men'shov's

the boom of corruption among *apparatchiki* (representatives of the Soviet bureaucratic system) during the Brezhnev era, including corruption “in sexual terms,” more untraditional and less “restrained sexual interests” became apparent in popular culture. According to them, “while the representation of nudity and any kind of copulation, however ‘normal’ and heterosexual, remained taboo in literature and on film, there were often surprisingly overt depictions of erotic behavior” (342). Because, the state often ignored some instances of deviant behavior during the Brezhnev years, teenage sexuality also frequently was overlooked by Soviet authorities.



Figure 24: *School Waltz*

In the “seduction” scene of *School Waltz* a teenage girl is depicted as an active, desiring subject. Zosia represents a young Soviet woman, who is more sexually liberated than her elder counterparts from the previous generations. She “seduces” her peer; therefore, female sexuality and desire are depicted as stronger and more powerful than male sexuality. Teenage female

Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears. In his film, Men'shov also shows female breasts in the shower and teenage Aleksandra from her back, wearing only her underwear.

sexuality is also represented, to some extent, as destructive, because it causes negative consequences, such as unwanted pregnancy or abortion. Such representation of a strong female character in her teens with an active sexual life is rather an exception for post-Stalinist youth films.

The partial empowerment of Soviet women can be explained by the phenomenon of resexualization, about which Kon writes in his article “O sotsiologicheskoi interpretatsii seksual'nogo povedeniia.” He explains the resexualization of Soviet society in the late 1960s by “the drastic increase in female sexual activity” and female sexual pleasure (118). The discourse concerning sex and sexuality in the Soviet Union underwent some metamorphosis in the 1970s; however, female sexuality was still not the main object of sociological study and public discussions. As something more than just a pure reflection of the social discourse of that time, Soviet cinema of the 1970s through the early 1980s constructed female sexuality and desire as visible, active, and sometimes even destructive. It introduced it to public discourse through a number of representations of Soviet women for whom their personal happiness and desire to find a partner (for emotional and, possibly, sexual pleasures) became the main incentive of their existence.⁸⁴

As a part of the control mechanism over young citizens' bodies, teenage sexuality, and female sexuality specifically, was constructed by the state as something that was at least harmful to young people's future, if not downright destructive. In *School Waltz*, Liubimov shows that early sexual relationships between young people are more likely to end with dramatic

⁸⁴ These films include El'dar Riazanov's *Office Romance* (*Sluzhebnyi romans*, 1977) and *Train Station for Two* (*Vokzal dlia dvoikh*, 1982), Vladimir Men'shov's *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (*Moskva slezam ne verit*, 1978), Petr Todorovskii's *The Mechanic Gavrilov's Beloved Woman* (*Liubimaia zhenshchina mekhanika Gavrilova*, 1981), Samson Samsonov's *Singles Are Provided With Dormitory* (*Odinokim predostavliaetsia obshchezhitie*, 1983).

consequences. Thus, as a result of unplanned teenage pregnancy, the private, intimate, autonomous space that the young characters of *School Waltz* share with one another transforms into the public (or semi-public), communal, and even medicalized spaces of the work dormitory, abortion clinic, and maternity hospital. When sexual relationships between Gosha and Zosia exist in the private space, the adults do not interfere with their lives. As soon as teenage sexuality becomes public with its visual manifestation in pregnancy, it immediately becomes stigmatized and forces the adults to intervene and to control their children's bodies.

In *School Waltz*, abortion functions as a metaphor of the “corrective” politics, which authoritative (parental) figures use to adjust citizens' (teenagers') behavior and actions. It is seen by adults as the only way that may return “rebellious” teenagers to their parents' homes and the only solution that Zosia's mother chooses for her daughter. If in literary Aesopian language “the suggestive incomplete sentence” helps readers to recreate the concealed meaning, in a cinematic text, visual allusions reveal the message to viewers. Even though the 1970s was a period of “privatization,” the silencing of sex and adolescent sexuality still existed: the only time that the word “abortion” appears in Liubimov's film is on the poster “Abortion deprives maternal happiness” at the abortion clinic. A large dead flower and a small white figure of a woman in despair are depicted on the black background to intensify the horror of abortion. As a marker, the abortion poster draws viewers' attention to this sensitive social problem in the Soviet Union. Because most of the time Zosia stands in front of the poster, partially blocking the audience's view of it, this poster also serves as a screen (See Figure 25). Therefore, it veils the state's desire to control women's bodies, and especially teenage body and sexuality, represented by a cinematic pregnant teenager. The adults' main incentive is to obviate the noticeable consequences of early sexual relationships among teenagers through the abortion policies.

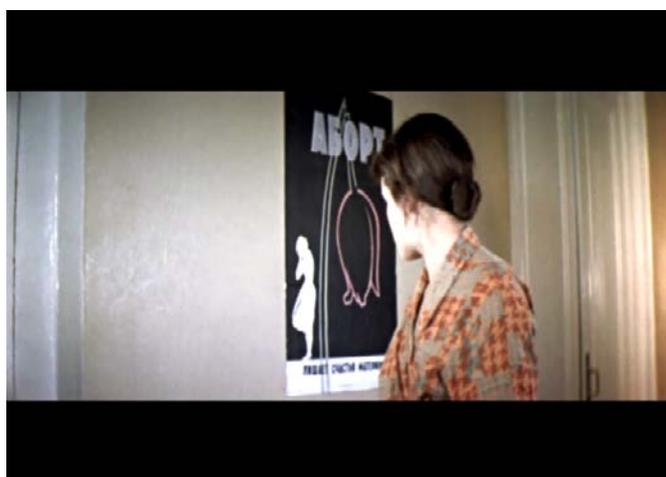


Figure 25: *School Waltz*

The film puts forward implicitly the idea that the state policies regarding its citizens' bodies and private lives eventually fail. This idea is endorsed by the fact that Zosia finally takes control over her body and her life. She refuses to terminate her pregnancy, leaves her parents' apartment, finds a job, and moves into a dorm. This sexual and social liberation from adults marks the teenager's maturation. To make this idea more explicit, later in the film Liubimov uses parallel montage to compare the official "entrance into adulthood" through the marriage ceremony between Gosha and Dina and Zosia's mature decision to start living independently. Once Zosia leaves her home, she is never depicted together with her mother in any private setting. With the "visualization" of teenage sexuality through pregnancy, private space temporarily coincides with public space, but after the young female character makes a decision to liberate herself from her parents, private space is returned to her and she no longer shares it with adults.

Zosia is presented in the film as a moral barometer, an independent person, who does not need her parents or the state. Her decision to keep the baby and leave her parents' house is the catalyst for her parents' confession regarding their lies and infidelity and their acceptance of their dysfunctionality as a family. She is presented not simply as a sexual being, but as a mature young woman with the "proper" moral values. Sexuality or lack of it no longer defines the moral nature of the cinematic characters. As Andrei Shemiakin argues in his essay, "Formula perekhoda," since the 1960s, the word "moral" became "the censored synonym for the sexual" (305). During the Brezhnev period, morality did not replace sexuality, and cinema of that period signals the possibility of their peaceful co-existence. On the one hand, Zosia is portrayed as a teenage girl, who is curious about her sexuality; on the other hand, she accepts the consequences of her sexual activities and does not shuffle off the burden on the immature father of her child or on her parents, who cannot even save their marriage. She transgresses social norms, follows her physiological urges, "seduces" her peer, and, after all, solves her problems independently, without involving adults or the school Komsomol organization. Zosia's actions represent a rebellious act against any involvement of the party or the school administration that previously had a strong influence on the Soviet citizen's decision making. As Kon describes in his book, the period of the 1970s was a transition from "the command-administrative methods of protecting marriage and family to the moral-administrative methods" (*Seksual'naiia kul'tura* 118). The moral-administrative punishment came not from the law and the legal organs, but from the party or Komsomol organizations by publicly reprimanding the "transgressing" members at official meetings and forcing them to take responsibility for their actions. As Liubimov's film hints, not every member of the Brezhnev society was afraid of moral judgment on the part of her colleagues and administrators. Zosia's relatively successful withdrawal from the collective

signifies a partial victory of the new generation over the rules and regulations of the previous generation.

Liubimov's film offers a unique scenario for solving problems in the power structure of Soviet society by showing a small slice of private life under Brezhnev. The main teenage protagonist of *School Waltz* does not rely on the power of the Party that would usually intervene in Soviet citizens' private life and in certain situations would affect the youth's political and professional careers. Even though Zosia is a *komsorg* (a Komsomol organizer), she does not trust the Party or the school administration to control her body and to make decisions for her about her future. The film ends with Zosia walking away from the school reunion, leaving Gosha and her past life behind her. She chooses to raise her son all by herself, realizing all the difficulties of single parenthood. The closing scene of *School Waltz* suggests that Zosia will have an opportunity to raise her child not because of the state's involvement in her life, but because she obtains an apartment as a result of her family's dysfunctionality (See Figure 26).

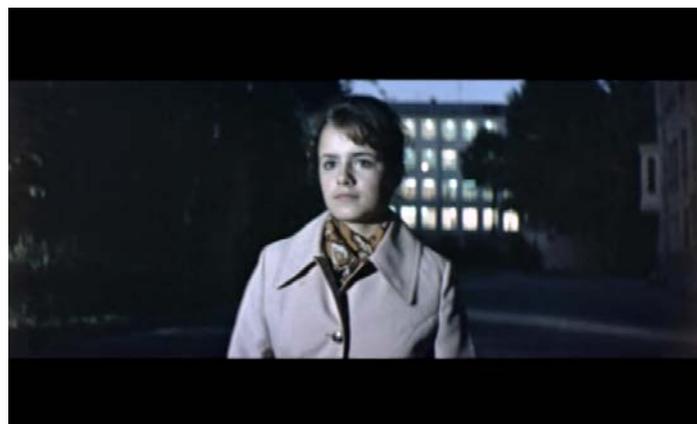


Figure 26: *School Waltz*

The model of relationships between teenagers and adults, in which the young generation already begins to take control over their lives, partially supports Foucault's ideas about the three "axes" that lie at the core of human sexuality as "a historically singular experience." He argues that the phenomenon of human sexuality consists of specific forms that allow and enforce individuals to perceive themselves as sexual beings, the power systems that control and regulate it, and sciences or disciplines for studying it (4). Liubimov's film acknowledges the existence of teenage sexuality and desire; however, it attempts to prove that, when it comes to sex, young characters do not trust their teachers and parents or the Party to make important decisions for them regarding their bodies. The recognition and representation of active teenage sexuality and its embodiment in unplanned pregnancy and single parenthood limit the state power to some extent and points to the state's failure in bringing up its young citizens in a specific way. Juliane Fürst notices the connections between the political and economic instability of the society and the visibility of youth culture. She writes that "just as youth could stand for everything that was positive about the future, its actions and behavior could also come to symbolize deep-seated social insecurities" (Books review 683). In a similar way, "liberated" and self-conscious teenage sexuality can be a threat to the status quo of the power structure. In *School Waltz* young people's "rebellious" behavior is related to the dysfunction of some parts of the Soviet system, which is embodied in adults' decisions and actions. Both Liubimov and Frez, by referring to adults and teenagers' complex relationships regarding sex and young people's partial liberation from parental control, allude to the changing relationships between the Soviet state and its citizens, who no longer entirely rely on the ruling ideology. Similar to the distrust that the young people experience towards adults, an average Soviet person of the 1970s "identifie[d] little with public goals and [was] far from the official normative image of the Soviet citizen" (Shlapentokh *Public*

and Private Life 156). Thus, cinematic teenagers' experiences and problems were more comparable to the ones that adults characters had in youth films under Brezhnev. Filmmakers in the 1970s through the 1980s no longer treated their young characters as children. The problem of liberating oneself from authorities and social and ideological constraints is linked in these films to a temporary control over the teenage protagonists' own bodies, sexualities, and life decisions. Therefore, the young Brezhnev generation in these films is depicted as gradually obtaining agency and voice, especially when it concerns their own lives and their future. The next chapter examines various ways in which young people during the Brezhnev period are able to confront older Soviet generations and sometimes even overpower them, even temporarily.

5.0 EMPOWERED TEENAGERS

A character—a person from outside—brings a new, normal view on the state of things, which have been established and accepted, and which intrinsically were unnatural.

--Irina Shilova.⁸⁵

5.1 IL'IA AVERBAKH: BEING VNYE

Il'ia Averbakh, along with Dinara Asanova and Ernest Iasan, were among the Lenfil'm filmmakers who developed the theme of independent, empowered teenagers in their films.⁸⁶

Zina Begunkova, the teenage protagonist of Averbakh's 1975 film *Other People's Letters* (*Chuzhie pis'ma*), serves as an example of a young Soviet citizen who functions within the system; ostensibly, she follows its rules and mechanisms, but she constantly reinterprets them in

⁸⁵ “...персонаж—человек со стороны—вносит новый, нормальный взгляд на устоявшееся, общепринятое, а по сути—противоестественное положение вещей.” See Shilova's “I мое kino...” 162.

⁸⁶ Averbakh started his career as a doctor after receiving a degree from Leningrad Medical Institution in 1958, and, later turned to cinema, completing the Higher Course of Scriptwriting at Goskino, in Evgenii Gabrilovich's workshop. Later, in 1967, he finished a course in film direction at Lenfil'm Studio, where he studied under the supervision of Grigorii Kozintsev. After graduation, Averbakh worked at Lenfil'm as a director and a scriptwriter for documentaries and feature films.

her own way, and in so doing inverts the values and principles of Soviet society.⁸⁷ I contend that in *Other People's Letters*, Zina allegorically represents the phenomenon of “vnye” (being simultaneously outside and inside of the authoritative discourse), which is typical of late-Soviet culture and about which Alexei Yurchak writes in his book. The study of the teenage protagonist's behavior and decisions in Averbakh's film reveals new tendencies in the interactions among the representatives of the Brezhnev generation, their attitudes toward Soviet ideology, and their relationship with the previous generations of Soviet people. At the allegorical level, it also examines antagonistic relationships between the Thaw generation of intellectuals and the Brezhnev generation—the generation that often included materialistically oriented young people and representatives of the working class who tried to pass for intellectuals.

In *Other People's Letters*, Averbakh follows the dynamics of the relationship between high-school student Zina Begunkova and her young teacher Vera Ivanovna. After having a fight with her family, Zina is invited by Vera Ivanovna to move in with her. In her new home, the teenage protagonist becomes controlling, trying to introduce changes not only into her teacher's household, but also into her personal life. Zina finds love letters written to Vera Ivanovna by her long-distance boyfriend, and copies one of them, but addresses it to herself. The teenager is attracted to her elder brother's friend, but, after being rejected by him, she projects her affection onto her teacher. After the discovery of Zina's dishonesty, Vera Ivanovna first discontinues her friendship with her student, but later forgives her.

⁸⁷ By the time *Other People's Letters* was released, Averbakh was already well known for his film *Monolog* (1972).

Averbakh chooses to show his young protagonist not only in the domestic locale, but also in the school environment during her interaction with her teachers and peers. As Aleksandr Troshin writes that school in *Other People's Letters* is “a metaphor of the society, with all its chronic and acquired diseases,” and the relationships among the characters represent a “test, which is used to check the condition of our society” (543).⁸⁸ Averbakh’s thorough study of the dysfunctional relationships between Zina and Vera Ivanovna and Zina and her classmate reveals possible scenarios for Soviet citizens’ behavior in the changed ideological conditions. Thus, he creates Aesopian allegory of the complex relationships between the Thaw and the Brezhnev generations through the examination of Vera Ivanovna and Zina’s interaction. Averbakh initially presents Zina as an exemplary straight-A student and a leader: she wins literary competitions, organizes *ezhednevki* (daily class meetings) to reprimand her classmates for wrong-doing, and is unemotional with her own mother as a way of disapproving her actions. Acting as a “true” representative of socialist youth on the surface, Zina develops relationships with the authoritative figures and her classmates, atypical of a young Komsomol member. Thus, the teenage protagonist embodies the representative of the *vnye* philosophy and practice.

Yurchak describes *vnye* as a specific attitude and relationship between the Soviet subject and Soviet reality:

To be *vnye* usually translates as “outside.” However, the meaning of this term, at least in many cases, is closer to a condition of being simultaneously inside and outside of some context—such as being within a context while remaining oblivious of it, imagining yourself elsewhere, or being inside your own mind. It

⁸⁸ “Школа...—метафора общества, со всеми его застарелыми и благоприобретенными болезнями,” “...тест, по которому проверялось состояние нашего социума на том этапе.”

may also mean being simultaneously a part of the system and yet not following certain of its parameters. (128)

In *Other People's Letters*, we see Zina's in-betweenness, thus marking her as a representative of *vnye* philosophy and practice. Although Zina is a model student at school and extensively uses the language of the system, she nevertheless reinterprets many of the principles according to which her family and teachers live, so that she will benefit from them.⁸⁹ Yurchak does not define such a behavior or life style as oppositional to the state, but rather as "a central and widespread principle of living in that system," that "was enabled by the Soviet state itself, without being determined by or even visible to it" (128). This mode of existence or behavior allows the young protagonist of Averbakh's film to function within the system and even obtain some power over her peers, as well as adults. Yurchak argues that being *vnye* may create "new temporalities, spatialities, social relations, and meanings that were not necessarily anticipated or controlled by the state" (128). Similarly, Averbakh depicts the unusual relationship between Zina and her teacher—relationships that are controversial to some degree due to the fact that the teenage girl assumes the role of a nurturing and caring, but also strict, mother, and because she also harbors certain repressed sexual desires for her teacher.

The relationship between Zina and Vera Ivanovna begins as regular interactions between a student and a teacher, with the latter trying to "re-educate" her new student. Zina transforms from a troubled teenager into a model Komsomol member, one who wears a Komsomol pin on

⁸⁹ Even though thematically and stylistically *Other People's Letters* may remind viewers of other "school films"—a genre that became popular in the Soviet Union in the 1950s—the unusual representation of a high-school student raised debates among the audience and film critics. In the pages of the newspaper *Smena*, the discussion of problems raised in *Other People's Letters* lasted more than three months. See N. Tolstykh's article, "The Truth of Kindness" ("Pravda dobra"), published in the discussion section "Pro and Contra" ("Za i protiv") on January 8, 1977.

her school uniform and employs the language established by the Party. Zina uses phrases considered standard for many official meetings in the Soviet Union, such as “we are avoiding the most painful questions” (“ukhodim ot nabolevshikh voprosov”) and “there is no place for people like that” (“takim ne mesto”) during the *ezhednevki* (daily meetings). This kind of behavior, however, can be defined as a “performative reproduction,” which, as Yurchak maintains, allows Soviet subjects “to be engaged with other meanings, including creating one’s own” (129). One of the earlier scenes of Averbakh’s film, when Zina is reciting Tatiana’s speech to Onegin from Aleksandr Pushkin’s versed novel *Evgenii Onegin* in front of two retired teachers from her school, reveals the performative aspect of participation in the official discourse by the young contemporary generation. In this scene, Averbakh inserts ironic undertones: Zina’s gestures and intonations are exaggerated, even grotesque. Although she is reciting an excerpt from a nineteenth-century piece of Russian literature, her performance resembles more closely the accusatory speeches common to Party meetings. A. Sheglov notices in his film review in *Znamia* that the teenage protagonist “experienced no feelings of camaraderie, not a single drop of pity for her peers, and, being absolutely confident in the rightness of her actions, she talked about her classmates’ misconduct.”⁹⁰ Therefore, Zina organizes a special meeting for reprimanding her peers not because she is a sincere Komsomol leader who wants to re-educate other students, but instead because she desires to maintain her power within the system. She abides by the rules and scenarios that are standard for the Soviet system and uses them to satisfy her own desire for manipulation and control, thus creating her own personal system of values and beliefs within, but also in contradiction to, the generally accepted ones.

⁹⁰ “Не испытывая ни чувства товарищества, ни капли жалости к своим сверстникам и будучи абсолютно уверенной в правильности своих действий, она рассказала о проступке своих одноклассников....”

Zina's ambivalent behavior and actions allegorically represent a specific type of interaction among Soviet citizens during the Brezhnev period. Through this Aesopian allegory, Averbakh discusses alienation from other members of Soviet society, family members, or even friends—a trait of Soviet society that gradually became noticeable in the 1970s and early 1980s. Zina does not share her newly acquired meanings and values with anyone around her. She has only one friend, Sveta, whom she abandons during a dance, and, after moving in with Vera Ivanovna, Zina distances herself from her friend entirely. Therefore, Zina represents a special case of being *vnye*; as a Komsomol activist, she is not accepted by people around her as *svoi*, defined by Yurchak as “normal people” and as “a kind of *detrterritorialized public*” (original italics, 117). Yurchak describes the relations among *svoi* people as being based on trust, friendship, and “the connected moral responsibility not to cause problems to one of *svoi*” (109). Those who are identified as being *vnye* also have relationships with one another like those of the *svoi*. Because Zina does not have these *svoi* connections, her peers treat her as an outsider. She represents the specific type of a person who exists as *vnye*, left out of Yurchak's description. The high-school student attempts to build relations with Sveta or Vera Ivanovna, similar to the ones that the *svoi* had in the Soviet society of the 1970s through the first half of the 1980s, but she ultimately fails. Despite that, Zina still belongs to the category of *vnye*: if, in the beginning of the film, the teenage protagonist actively performs the behavioral standards established and maintained by the state, then in the second half of the film, she entirely loses interest in them. Zina's growth as a Komsomol member no longer matters to her, and instead she becomes obsessed with winning over Vera Ivanovna's friendship and affection. As Averbakh's film implies, during the Brezhnev years, a certain category of Soviet people could not relate

themselves to the rest of the society. They failed to maintain a “socialist behavior” and, at the same time, could not even build *svoi* relationships with *vnye* people.

In *Other People's Letters*, the co-dependent interactions between the high-school student and her teacher parallel the relationship between the two Soviet generations. Averbakh only gradually reveals Zina's true desires and interests, doing so after the teenager faces trouble at home and moves in with her teacher. Through numerous visual allusions, Averbakh suggests that Zina's feelings for Vera Ivanovna are complex (See Figure 27). She develops a strong attachment to her teacher, and at the same time intervenes in Vera Ivanovna's personal life in a sadistic manner. What starts as Vera Ivanovna's passionate involvement in her student's life, typical of many Soviet teachers, transforms into her subjugation to Zina. The relationship becomes twisted and inverted, as the teacher becomes dependent on her practical, business-like young student. Zina makes decisions for both of them about what kind of food they need to eat and whether they should buy a TV set for Vera Ivanovna's apartment. At the same time, Zina also needs her teacher for shelter and emotional support, especially when she leaves her family. The complex interplay between these two cinematic characters is reminiscent of the connections between the generation of “idealists” (“idealisty”) and “newly arrived pragmatists” (“novoprishedshie pragmatiki”), suggested by Troshin. According to Troshin's schema, the generation of pragmatists in the late-Soviet period began to create new meanings in a society, subjecting the previous generation to the new order. The “newly arrived pragmatists” embody the attitude and the philosophy of *vnye* and adjust to the changing conditions in Soviet society much more easily than the idealists of the Thaw period. As Troshin argues, Averbakh's film is about “the two generations, two paces of living, two languages, and two moralities,” which are

represented by fifteen-year-old Zina and her thirty-year-old teacher (545).⁹¹ The acknowledgment and acceptance of new pragmatic, and to some extent even individualistic, values distanced the generation of *vnye* further away from other generations who still believed in socialist principles and in the capacity to achieve some measure of collective happiness.



Figure 27: *Other People's Letters*

Averbakh emphasizes that the two generations are essentially different from each other, a difference to which he already alludes through a metaphor in the opening scene. The film opens with a shot of an apple tree with branches full of well-ripened apples, while Vera Ivanovna is walking down the street. The branches swing in the wind and the apples fall to the ground on the other side of a fence. Averbakh uses the metaphor of apples and a tree to show the maturation of high-school students who, after they “ripen,” leave the walls of their school and enter into an adult life. Another association which may come to mind while watching this scene, is the famous saying, “The apple never falls far from the tree” (“Яблоко от яблони недалеко падает”). Even though, on the screen, the apples fall not far away from the tree, the entire film

⁹¹ “Два поколения, два ритма жизни, два языка, две нравственности....”

is preoccupied with the question of whether the new generation follows in the footsteps of the previous generation or whether it pursues its own path.

The discomfort that the generation of idealists experiences in the presence of the generation of pragmatists is introduced in the scene in the apple orchard, when Vera Ivanovna and her boyfriend visit an old couple, two retired teachers from her school. Her students are picking apples and cutting down old trees while listening to Western pop music; meanwhile, Vera Ivanovna tries to hide from them behind some trees. Unlike the depiction of many other educators in earlier films about school as wise, patient, and idealistic, Vera Ivanovna has doubts about her profession and her personal skills, as well as a dread of the young generation. She confesses to her older colleagues that she does not like children and has difficulty connecting to her students and understanding her troubled student, Zina. Averbakh establishes such atypical reactions from a teacher within the Soviet school context in order to create a situation that best reveals the dramatic gap between Soviet idealists and pragmatists.

The dichotomy between idealists and pragmatists is important for developing further the distinction between the Thaw generation and the young Brezhnev generation. In *Other People's Letters*, Vera Ivanovna belongs to the intellectuals-*shestidesiatniki*, while Zina is being raised in a family, in which the mother functioned as a service-sector representative before her arrest and imprisonment for embezzlement. Therefore, the teacher is less materially grounded than her teenage student and is more interested in spiritual, intellectual, and cultural growth than in the accumulation of material goods. Averbakh uses the setting of the teacher's apartment and Zina's house as an Aesopian technique that assigns each character to a specific generational and ideological group. With its minimal furniture, many books, and basic furnishings that include Russian poet Anna Akhmatova's portrait and an old record player, Vera Ivanovna's apartment

represents the “idealist” interests and values of the Thaw intellectuals, which V.F. Semerchuk defines as “faith in the power of intellect, moral purity, and an acute feeling of responsibility not only for yourself but also for the entire humanity” (386).⁹² Unlike her teacher’s apartment, Zina’s parents’ apartment resembles many other Soviet apartments of that time, in which a portrait of famous Russian poet Sergei Esenin is next to kitschy figurines and crystal glasses in the cupboard. This setting represents the philistine philosophy common in Soviet society, when the working class desired to pass for members of intelligentsia without really understanding its values. The abundance of meats, vegetables, and fruits surrounding Zina while she prepares for her brother’s wedding presents her as representative of material goods and pragmatist values. The desire for material gain is one of the features that distinguish Zina from Vera Ivanovna and that alienates her from the ideological context encouraged by the state.

Zina, who does not have the same beliefs as the older generations, and who, according to Natal’ia Miloserdova, “begins to frighten and horrify with [her] pragmatism, impatience, spiritual immaturity, cynicism, and cruelty,” represents a hyperbolized embodiment of the new order (71).⁹³ While she outwardly performs the role of a good citizen in front of an audience, her behavior and attitude manages to contradict those of a “true” Soviet pioneer or Komsomol member, thus making her an example of what it means to be *нше*. Zina devalues or dismisses the earlier moral code, intrudes on other people’s privacy, and, according to Troshin, opens envelopes containing letters to Vera Ivanovna from her boyfriend “under the pressure of a bare

⁹² “Вера в силу интеллекта, нравственной чистоты, высокого чувства ответственности не только за себя, но за все человечество...”

⁹³ “... новое поколение начинает пугать, ужасать—своим прагматизмом, нетерпимостью, душевной неразвитостью, цинизмом, жестокостью.”

philistine curiosity” (548).⁹⁴ Yurchak argues that the existence of various opinions and practices demonstrates that “the supposed spatial and temporal linearity and totality of late socialism became everywhere injected with new forms of diversity, plurality, and indeterminacy” (157). Thus, Zina embodies the result of a sincere belief in the dominant “ideological” truths of Soviet society giving way to a philistine, materialistic drive—another possible intellectual and behavioral scenario during the Brezhnev period, suggested through Aesopian allegory.

In his film, Averbakh relies on a number of visual metaphors and allusions to emphasize the idea of the change in cultural-ideological discourses. The shifting of values and beliefs among Soviet people is represented allegorically in one of the scenes at the old teachers’ house, in which Vera Ivanovna confesses her own incompetency as an educator to the old couple. Following her words, a pile of old books falls down to the floor in slow motion, accompanied by the film’s musical theme. Many film critics have paid particular attention to this scene and interpreted it variously. In the film review “The Main Lesson” (“Glavnyi urok”) V. Zal’tzman calls this scene “scene-premonition,” understanding it as a symbol of “the fragility of the world of good, which can be easily destroyed by one careless movement.” In contrast, A. Sheglov interprets this episode in connection with methods of education in the Soviet Union contemporaneous to the film. He writes that “none of the bookish sciences [were] capable of foreseeing all the occasional and complex entwinement of life situations and conflicts. Pedagogy is a creative discipline.... A teacher should constantly improve himself, be able to solve occurring problems independently.”⁹⁵ The authors of reviews argue that Averbakh’s film puts

⁹⁴ “...под напором голого обывательского любопытства...”

⁹⁵ “... никакая книжная наука не в силах предусмотреть всех случайных и сложных сплетений жизненных ситуаций и конфликтов. Педагогика—наука творческая.... Учитель должен постоянно совершенствоваться, быть способным самостоятельно решать

more emphasis on personal improvement of individuals than on collective re-forging of Soviet subjects. In his review, “An Examination on Humanity” (“Ekzamen na chelovechnost',” *Sovetskaia Latviia*, 1976), T. Iasson also pays attention to this scene, but understands it as the collapse of Vera Ivanovna’s “bookish ideas.” According to Iasson, Zina challenges her teacher’s perception of reality, and the falling books are a metaphor for Vera Ivanovna’s final realization about the complexity of life. Thus, many Soviet critics agreed that it was a quintessential scene that represented a change in the established order, a change that was traumatic for the generation of *shestidesiatniki*.

The pragmatists’ philosophy and behavior, represented by Zina and her generation, are new and uncomfortable for the Thaw intellectuals. Zina eliminates any personal borders between Vera Ivanovna and herself. As a pragmatist, the teenager presents herself as an experienced, independent, materially grounded person who understands the current conditions in the world better than Vera Ivanovna, her idealist counterpart. Zina constantly attempts to re-educate Vera Ivanovna in accordance with a new set of values that she has modified from the official system. Thus, the teenage girl acts like a mentor to her teacher: she teaches her “surrogate mother” about the new values and rules of the current society, strongly rebuking her once when she claims, “You, Vera Ivanovna, live in an entirely different dimension. You don’t know anything about life.”

In this particular scene, Averbakh relies on a special camera angle and the positioning of the characters on the screen to emphasize the young generation’s dominating status. During the conversation in the kitchen, Zina’s prevailing position is indicated visually: she sits on the

возникающие проблемы...” See, A. Sheglov, “Zina and The Entire World” (“Zina Begunkova i tselyi mir”), *Znamia*, 31 August 1976.

kitchen chair, while Vera Ivanovna squats in front of her. Visually, Vera Ivanovna occupies less space on the screen, which allegorically can be read as her not having enough power over the member of the young generation. She represents the values and beliefs of the 1960s, which have become outdated and have lost their importance. Averbakh relies on montage to create an idea that Vera Ivanovna, with her views and beliefs, is obsolete. This idea is emphasized in a later scene during a biology class by the juxtaposition of Vera Ivanovna's face with a poster depicting biological atavisms and rudiments in human bodies, suggesting that her archaic views are discordant with those of the young generation of the 1970s.⁹⁶ She is an atavism that exists in Brezhnev culture as a residue of the past cultural period.

As *Other People's Letters* implies, the new generation of pragmatists takes over the Thaw idealists. Thus, Zina's desire to be in charge of everything and everyone is expressed in many scenes at Vera Ivanovna's house, such as when she adjusts a vase of flowers on a shelf or covers a portrait of Akhmatova with a curtain.⁹⁷ Averbakh uses visual and thematic references to Russian poets who held views that were not necessarily in consonance with socialist realist principles. Additionally, the visual reference to Akhmatova in *Other People's Letters* allow for the comparison between her and Vera Ivanovna. The reference to Akhmatova, as K. Rudnitskii suggests, serves as "the only, but important, sign of the connection between a modest teacher of

⁹⁶ In her review, published in *Sovetskaia Rossiia* on 21 September 1976, I. Ovchinnikova offers another interpretation of the episode with "atavisms and rudiments." She argues that the high-school students represent faceless, empty "atavisms and rudiments," specifically because they do not use proper moral judgments, and read Zina's letter.

⁹⁷ After Stalin's death in 1953, Akhmatova's status among Soviet intelligentsia began to increase because many of her works, censored earlier, were published and became more available to the general public. The 1960s generation admired her, and she was writing her last literary works during the Thaw years until her death in 1966.

Russian language and literature and the world of big and eternal spiritual values.”⁹⁸ However, there is another link between the cinematic character and the Russian poet. Both Akhmatova and Vera Ivanovna do not fit well in the culture in which they live. As Galina Rylkova argues in her book on the Silver Age, “in contrast to some of her celebrated contemporaries, such as the writer Il’ia Ehrenburg, who thrived during the Thaw, Akhmatova fell victim to its liberating processes” (158). The last decade of Akhmatova’s life during Khrushchev’s government was marked by misfortune and difficulties. According to Rylkova,

The new angst accounted for her poor health (a succession of heart attacks) and increased anxiety that manifested itself in repeated assaults on real and imaginary opponents and in her damning remarks about any other interpretation of the pre-revolutionary period except, perhaps, for that in Nikolai Berdiaev’s autobiographical *Self-exploration* (Samopoznanie, 1940-1948). (158)

Hence, the reference to Akhmatova in Averbakh’s film is important in the context of the poet’s alienation and desire to protect the pre-revolutionary culture during the Khrushchev period. Not only Akhmatova’s portrait in Vera Ivanovna’s room is a reminder of the importance of poetry and spiritual values over materialism and pragmatic values, but it also links the poet to the teacher, whom Averbakh depicts as confused, lost, and alienated from her colleagues, students, and neighbors. Zina hides Akhamtova’s portrait behind the curtain, thus diminishing the significance of the preceding generation’s cultural traditions and ideas, which Vera Ivanovna seems to value. To further denigrate the poet’s picture, she hangs on the opposite wall of the room her teacher’s portrait, made by Vera Ivanovna’s boyfriend, the artist from the city (See

⁹⁸ “...единственны[й], но важны[й] знак[] связи скромной преподавательницы русского языка и литературы с миром больших и вечных духовных ценностей...”

Figure 28). This scene signifies a shift from worshipping literary and cultural figures under Khrushchev to the prevalence of personal icons: contemporaries who are not much different from the rest of the society.



Figure 28: *Other People's Letters*

Averbakh depicts another aspect of the *vnye* culture—the young generation’s attitude toward the idols created by the state. The relationships between this generation and their idols differ from the ones among the preceding generations, as Averbakh’s film suggests. The connections between them are more personal, and sometimes even have an intimate undercurrent. *Other People’s Letters* creates an idea that the young people of the 1970s and early 1980s chose their own icons in accordance with certain personal criteria, and if these icons did not satisfy these criteria, they attempted to change them. Unlike the Stalinist generation, or even the Thaw generation, the Brezhnev generation did not blindly accept the ready-made role models, but instead created and molded their own personal idols. Consequently, Zina

simultaneously admires Vera Ivanovna for her *intelligentnost'* and decency but also constantly tries to change her teacher's attitude toward material goods, romance, and life in general.

The relationship between the high-school student and her teacher is based not on respect for and obedience to the representative of official power, but has some unconventional characteristics that diminish Vera Ivanovna's status as an educator. The teenage protagonist develops untraditional feelings for her teacher, which even include the elements of sexual obsession. Zina's unusual attachment to her teacher is a result of being rejected by her brother's friend, Zhenia, and her unconscious aspiration to fulfill her suppressed, unresolved sexual tension. Vera Ivanovna represents a figure of admiration for the high-school girl, and this narrative element may contribute to the idea that sexual or erotic undertones become a new and unconventional characteristic of the attitude of the generation of the 1970s and early 1980s's toward cult figures.

If the attitude toward the cultural figures in the preceding historical periods was more idealistic and more distant, the creation of personal figures of admiration during the Brezhnev period allowed for more "intimate" relationships between the subjects and objects of admiration. In the context of this newly revised value system, Averbakh explores the development of teenage sexual desire by showing Zina's obsession with Vera Ivanovna, as well as her crush on Zhenia, who is much older than she is. Zina not only possesses an active sexuality—a characteristic that distinguishes her from the conventional representations of Soviet high-school students— but she also acts upon it, permitting her to control the objects of her affections and desire. Averbakh does not openly disclose Zina's sexual desires, but rather relies on visual allusions and hints to show them. A scene in the bathroom alludes to the erotic nature of Zina's obsession with her teacher. In a move that is out of character with previous "school films," the camera observes

Zina naked in the bathtub, while Vera Ivanovna rubs the teenager's back with a sponge (See Figure 29). The camera focuses on Vera Ivanovna's hands, and Zina humbly touches her teacher's wet hand and kisses it with passion and adoration. Thus, in *Other People's Letters*, Averbakh makes plain that the relations between a high-school student and a teacher has the capacity to cross clear ethical borders in the context of the Soviet school under Brezhnev's regime. The teenager's active sexuality, along with her craving for material well-being, ground her more deeply in an emerging pragmatist, material culture and create a profound gap between her and Vera Ivanovna, whose relationship with her boyfriend are depicted as more platonic, or even poetic.



Figure 29: *Other People's Letters*

Another interpretation of the scene in the bathroom, suggested by Dmitrii Bykov, acknowledges the discussion about the subjugation of the older generation of idealists by the newly emerged generation of pragmatists, but Bykov introduces another binary in his reading—intellectuals and the working class. In his essay “Toska Il’i Averbakha,” Bykov points out the

director's skillful use of an allusive language in "the scene in which the intelligentsia obediently and even tenderly rubs the back of the triumphant proletariat" (136).⁹⁹ Later in the film, the teenage protagonist prohibits Vera Ivanovna from going on a date with her boyfriend, and even locks her in the apartment, consequently attempting to control the older generation's personal (and presumably, sexual) life. *Other People's Letters* offers an Aesopian allegorical parallel between the erotic or "sexual" domination of the teacher by the teenage student and the subjugation of the intelligentsia by the proletariat. This scene brings back the idea that the Thaw generation of intellectuals, represented by Vera Ivanovna, is overpowered by the young generation of philistines during the Brezhnev period.

The realization of the gradual disintegration of harmonious relationships among the members of *shestidesiatniki* generation is another aspect of Soviet culture that Averbakh reveals in his film. Zina can sense some tensions between Vera Ivanovna and her boyfriend artist, both of whom represent the generation of *shestidesiatniki*. By portraying their dysfunctional relationship, Averbakh's film suggests that, in the new historical and ideological conditions, the previous generation of cultural intelligentsia often finds itself ineffective and unable to connect to each other, let alone understand or relate to the problems and peculiarities of the new Brezhnev generation. As a subject who is aware of the impurities and lies of adult life, Zina tries to show her teacher the ineffectiveness of the ideas of the *shestidesiatniki* and, as a result, to distance Vera Ivanovna from her boyfriend.

As *Other People's Letters* serves to illustrate, the younger generation of pragmatists, materialists, and opportunists dominates over the Thaw idealists, but its victory is not ultimate.

⁹⁹ "...эпизод, в котором интеллигенция покорно и даже нежно трет спинку блаженствующему пролетариату..."

Bykov argues that in many of Averbakh's films, including *Other People's Letters*, the main theme is "the revolt of an *intelligent*, who is driven to the periphery, to the niche of the tactful, quiet, and charming coward."¹⁰⁰ Vera Ivanovna is originally portrayed as a quiet, soft educator who has problems disciplining her students, and who gradually falls under her student's power. In the second half of the film, however, the teacher partially gains back her authoritative voice. After Zina brings to school a fake letter, which she has written herself from her imaginary boyfriend, and her classmates read it against her will, Vera Ivanovna gives them a moral lesson about the importance of respecting other peoples' privacy. She does it as a response to Zina's violation of the teacher's privacy. Therefore, she attempts to fight back to defend the values on which she was raised and which have been devalued by the young generation. As proof of the 1960s intelligentsia's ability to partially preserve its values, Averbakh inserts a metaphor in the scene in which Zina packs her bag and leaves Vera Ivanovna's apartment. The curtain no longer covers Akhmatova's portrait; thus, the cultural idol of the pre-Brezhnev era hangs on the wall right over the teacher's head and symbolizes a small victory of Soviet intellectuals over the working class, who had began to gain momentum since the end of the Thaw.

Despite a temporary triumph over her materialistic and controlling student, Vera Ivanovna is not able to maintain her authoritative status, which might suggest that the intelligentsia of the 1960s has been weakened by the system. In an introduction to the discussion about Soviet "school" films published in *Iskusstvo kino*, Vladimir Ishimov claims that youth films of the 1970s skillfully developed "the theme of moral maturation of a young citizen of the Soviet Union, who, since early childhood, has been living in the world of big achievements, true

¹⁰⁰ "...тема его—бунт интеллигента, загнанного на задворки, в нишу тактичного, тихого, обаятельного труса."

humanism, and assurance that every person is personally responsible for everything that is happening in the country and on the planet” (3).¹⁰¹ Averbakh’s film undermines Ishimov’s argument, insofar as the young people of the Brezhnev era in *Other People’s Letters* are not portrayed as responsible for other people’s lives, or even for their own actions. Their values are different from the ones that their parents or grandparents used to have. The teenagers are also not depicted as caring much about socialist ideals, especially because they already notice that this “true humanism” has a rotten side and that the “big achievements” are artificial and shallow. Visibly adhering to the socialist ideas, despite sensing their emptiness, the members of *vnye* culture not only begin to live in accordance with modified moral and ideological principles, but also attempt to impose them on some members of previous Soviet generations.

The ending of Averbakh’s film suggests that the new rules are already firmly entrenched and a return to the old, idealist values is impossible. After Vera Ivanovna forgives Zina for her earlier inappropriate behavior, the film concludes with a scene that resembles and recalls one of the earlier scenes: the same group of students in the old teachers’ garden are packing and cleaning. Zina continues bossing her peers around instead of helping them to load a truck. It is clear from this scene that she has not changed and still holds to her own rules and beliefs. While leaving the garden on the truck together with the rest of her class, Zina yells to her teacher, “Good bye, Vera Ivanovna! Catch up with us!” Vera Ivanovna stands before a gray, dull background. Zina’s bright red rain coat, which functions as an ironic comment on Zina’s superficial adherence to communist values, significantly contrasts her teacher’s gray coat. In a metaphorical move, the teacher—a representative of the 1960s generation—is left behind. As

¹⁰¹ “...тема нравственного мужания юного гражданина Страны Советов, с детства живущего в мире больших свершений, истинного гуманизма, убежденности, что каждый человек несет личную ответственность за все, что происходит в стране и на планете.”

Averbakh's film implies, developed as a part of mainstream Soviet culture, the *vnye* philosophy and attitudes gradually started to spread. The last scene also serves as an allegorical reference to the incapacity of the Thaw cultural elite, with their remaining sincere belief in socialist order, to fully adjust to the new conditions. Therefore, *Other People's Letters* advances the theme of older Soviet generations' inability to be ideal tools for molding young Soviet citizens, who, while being *vnye* in the socialist system, created their own values that further developed and expanded during the Perestroika years.

5.2 PAVEL ARSENOV: IRONIC TEENAGERS AND POWERLESS ADULTS

If Averbakh's film is concerned with the issues of gradual overpowering of adults by teenagers who act within the socialist discourse but on their own terms, Pavel Arsenov's *Confused Emotions* (*Smiatenie chuvstv*, 1978) focuses on the development of teenagers' independence as a result of the weakening of adult power. Arsenov's film describes relationships between young people and adults "without pressure, without putting periods, offering viewers an opportunity to assume and to articulate a simple story, checking themselves and, through that, believing the protagonists' confused emotions" according to T. Otiugova (*Smena*, 1978).¹⁰² Otiugova argues that, despite an uncomplicated plot, the film offers a "serious and symptomatic meaning," thanks to the scriptwriter Aleksandr Volodin. I argue that this "symptomatic meaning" arrives at the Aesopian parallel between an elaborate series of interactions between the teenage characters and their parents, based on irony and pessimism, and the interactions of a similar nature between

¹⁰² "...без нажима, без расстановки точек, предоставляя возможность зрителю додумать и досказать незамысловатую историю, проверив себя и собой поверив смятению героев."

different Soviet generations. In his film, Arsenov describes the lives of high-school students during both their final examinations at school and summer months after graduation. The main teenage protagonist Volodia discovers that Nadia, the girl for whom he has feelings and who has moved to Leningrad to study at the university, is back in town. Nadia confesses to Volodia that she is in love with a married man from her university. The rest of the film follows the complex relationship between the two young protagonists. Volodia and Nadia bond while taking care of Nadia's mother, who is seriously sick. Volodia then leaves to join the Army, despite his parents' plans for him to go to the university, and Nadia returns to Leningrad.

The title of the film—*Confused Emotions*—allusively suggests some connections between the overall confusion and uncertainty among Soviet citizens during the Brezhnev period and feelings of the teenage characters in Arsenov's film. Uncertainty regarding adults' behavior and actions arises among young characters, due in part to the possibility of interacting with each other without teachers and parents' surveillance. In the film, the locale of the beach serves as a fruitful site for development of liberated thoughts, including critical and even ironic attitudes toward authority. I argue that these pessimistic attitudes among cinematic teenagers may be interpreted as a displaced reference to Soviet citizens' reactions to the weakening power of authority under Brezhnev. To develop this allusive connection, Averbakh's film uses ill, disempowered adults as a metaphor for the destabilized role of the state in the economic, political, and social sectors of Soviet life. In order to develop a stronger link between the growing uncertainty and disappointment among Soviet people and the cinematic narrative, Arsenov depicts the events in his film in two temporal dimensions—the past and the present.

In *Confused Emotions*, the relationship among the teenage characters and their interaction with their parents generates another Aesopian technique—a juxtaposition of the past and the

present. The past and the present of the teenage protagonists' relationship allegorically parallels the past and the present of Soviet society. Two narrative past-present threads include the personal story of the main two young characters, Volodia and Nadia, and the description of the teenage collective before and after graduation from high-school. The allegory of a lost past to which one cannot return is connected to nostalgia for the liberated cultural and ideological atmosphere of the Thaw. Arsenov creates the feeling of nostalgia for more "relaxed" times during the opening credits with a set of black-and-white photographs, depicting Volodia and Nadia during school times, both happy and smiling. The lyrical, melancholic music by Evgenii Krylatov further evokes the feeling of nostalgia and later becomes the leitmotif of Volodia and Nadia's complex relationship.

Arsenov develops the story as a trajectory from carefree adolescence to life with adult responsibilities. Even structurally, the director divides the film into two different parts: the enjoyable first days of the summer after graduation and the tense and stressful days on the threshold of the fall and adulthood, so there is also a seasonal component to the narrative arc. Arsenov presents the history of Volodia and Nadia's tight bonds as optimistic in the past, which is documented in the photographs: in many of them, the teenagers stand close to each other, either hugging or with Volodia holding his girlfriend in his arms. The story of the young characters' relationship in the present is complex and not positive. Nadia studies and lives in Leningrad and dates a married man; this relationship is the cause of her unhappiness. Volodia is tortured by jealousy and Nadia's alienation, and because of that, he flirts with other girls from his former class. His obsession intervenes in his everyday life and ruins his chances to get into a university. I interpret such a contrast of a bright, positive past and a difficult present as a larger

commentary on two periods in Soviet history—the Khrushchev years and the Brezhnev era. Svetlana Boym argues in *The Future of Nostalgia*, that:

Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future.... Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal or collective. (xvi)

Fantasizing about the historical past—the Khrushchev period—Soviet subjects immediately project their positive feelings about this time period into the future. They dream and hope that the current disappointing conditions of Soviet society are only temporary, and, in the future, the country’s economical, political, and social structures will improve. As Boym maintains, personal nostalgia is linked to collective nostalgia, and Arsenov’s film illustrates the suture of these two types of nostalgia.

Arsenov already depicts the whimsical, carefree school years in the opening scene of the film. *Confused Emotions* begins with a scene in which the young characters are swimming, playing in the water, sunbathing, and flirting at the local beach. They look happy and relaxed, even though the primary goal of these group activities is to study for final exams. These scenes evoke a citation of American “beach films,” which also emphasized the existence of youth culture as a separate cultural phenomenon. In the 1950s through 1960s, “beach movies,” such as Paul Wendkos’ *Gidget* (1959) and *Gidget Goes to Hawaii* (1961), William Asher’s *The Beach Party* (1963), and Maury Dexter’s *Surf Party* (1964), offered viewers an image of carefree teenagers. Like their American counterparts, Soviet teenagers in Arsenov’s film enjoy their time

on the beach without adult supervision. Even the light, cheerful music in the beach scene, reminiscent of the music in a series of films about the American teenage girl Gidget, creates a feeling of lightheartedness and happiness. In Arsenov's film, the white tourist boat on the river, which is set as a background for the youth collective, symbolizes leisure and entertainment, unlike the industrial cargo ships and military boats in preceding Soviet cinematic traditions, which usually represented civic duty, technological progress, and patriotism. By indirectly referring to the genre of American beach movies, Arsenov's film partially disengages from the Soviet context and places the story about Soviet teenagers in a Western framework.



Figure 30: *Confused Emotions*

As L.R. Rutsky argues, American beach movies are not simply based on the ideas of escapism and a reassuring conformity, but emphasize the idea that “the freedom and live-for-the-present hedonism of the beach tend to be represented as childish or adolescent in contrast to the adult values of responsibility, work, and marriage” (12). Even though the beach has some hedonistic characteristics and is used mostly by the teenage characters for their interaction with

one another in Soviet youth films of the 1970s, this space is not represented entirely as non-serious, immature, and whimsical. The beach becomes a perfect locale for a youth community to solve their personal dilemmas, especially because adults are busy with their own family and work problems in the city.¹⁰³ In contrast to American films, in Arsenov's film, the beach is a place in which the teenagers' emotional turmoil, as well as fun and enjoyment, is introduced. Nadia walks by the teenagers' study group and joins her new boyfriend for swimming, resulted in Volodia's jealousy. Starting with this moment, Arsenov begins to unwind the complex narrative of the teenagers' relationship. Similarly to Liubimov's *School Waltz*, an important confession about the teenagers' personal feelings takes place at the beach. Paradoxically, the public beach undermines its supposed openness and instead serves as a safe haven for secluded groups and functions as a site where teenagers privately explore their personal relationships. While the students share this secluded space with one another, the urban landscape on the other side of the river functions as a reminder of this space being just a small part of a larger adult world, from which it is impossible to escape forever.

Despite the impossibility of avoiding adult control permanently, the young characters attempt to free themselves from their parents at least temporarily and have their own unsupervised space, in which they often use irony to comment on the dysfunctional world of their parents and teachers. This feature of teenage culture links them to Soviet intellectuals of the 1970s, for whom irony was an essential practice and an important technique in cultural

¹⁰³ In his book *Hollywood Surf and Beach Movies*, Thomas Lisanti explains the popularity of beach films among young American audiences: they "created a carefree environment where good kids don't have a care in the world and enjoy an easygoing, parentless lifestyle of surfing, dancing, rock'n'roll and romance, which was unconnected with reality" (13). Similarly, Fiona Handyside conceptualizes the locale of the beach in American beach movies as a "place of desire and escape," which the young protagonists choose in order to flee from the city, "to leave behind the stifling heat and crowds of the city and find a paradise of near solitude" (153, 154).

production. Anatoly Vishnevsky studies the role of irony in Soviet literary tradition during the Brezhnev era:

The ironic mood was the result of the collapse of dreams and hopes for a better and freer society brought on by the temporary liberalization of the country's political atmosphere after Stalin's death. The ideals of the late 1950s were no longer valid, the values no longer unshakable, and the belief that it was possible to change society was fully abandoned. (4)

Similarly, in his study of the ironic mode in Soviet literature, Thomas F. Rogers describes irony as “frequently the critical anti-social response of an otherwise helpless dissenter. The wit is acid and irreverent and the disapproval or hatred for which it stands is intensely earnest” (296). The cinema of the 1970s introduced a new type of cinematic character—ironic, or even partially skeptical teenagers, who do not listen to adults and follow their own rules to some extent. Both young protagonists of *Confused Emotions* use the ironic mode when communicating with their parents and with each other, and they do this when they have limited possibilities to articulate their opinions. Volodia's rebellious behavior is partially determined by his unrequited love for Nadia, and partially by his thinking, which is unconventional for a Soviet high-school student. This is apparent when Volodia tells Nadia and his classmate Masha: “It seems to me that every person is facing a problem upon leaving childhood—either to continue living depending on the high and mighty or to overcome this dependence.” Volodia says this phrase with artificial pomposity and ironic undertones. He refers to teenagers' subordination to adults, which may allegorically be read as the general Soviet people's dependency on the power structure.

Arsenov introduces Nadia's intentions to escape parental control in the first scene, in which one of the high-school students tells the others that she has entered medical school in

Leningrad in order “to be far away from her parents.” When she has to co-exist with her parents in the same apartment, she speaks ironically or even sarcastically. When her mother informs her family that she feels pity for an old lady who was eating a stale patty in the park, Nadia reacts with an ironic retort: “It is so beautiful. But you know, mom, leave these thoughts...You’ve got all the sensitivity in our family, and nothing was left for us.” Nadia also constantly uses sarcastic language to attack Volodia. Her sarcasm allows her to articulate some things which she would not be able to say otherwise. The cinema of the 1970s studies this new type of young characters who, at first try to escape their teachers’ and parents’ authority, but later, confront adults and even successfully reverse the roles with them.

Nadia and Volodia are able to confront their parents not only because they use ironic language but also because the adults are depicted as not absolutely influential and controlling. The authoritative figures in *Confused Emotions* are not as powerful as in other youth films of the 1970s. Arsenov’s film creates an allegory of inactive, impotent adults that parallels with Brezhnev’s government. Unlike other youth films of the Brezhnev era, which focus on corrupt parents and educators, one of the most significant tropes in *Confused Emotions* is ill adults. The dysfunctionality of families, typical of the Soviet family in the cinema of the Brezhnev years, is predetermined in Arsenov’s film by the illness of the authoritative figures. It is possible to develop these Aesopian connections between the cinematic characters and the real political figures insofar as Soviet culture of the 1970s and the early 1980s contained many signs of weakened authoritative figures. For instance, all three Soviet leaders of that time period—Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko—were ill during their terms, and their

health problems interfered with their political activities.¹⁰⁴ Soviet people often address this issue in private conversations and jokes (*anekdoty*). Ineffective leaders with their decaying health are linked to the overall weakening political power and the Soviet people's distrust of it. Edwin Bacon calls Brezhnev "a metaphor for his country" and associates the 1970s and the early 1980s with "the impression of a decaying superpower" (2, 3). Bacon writes that "a political and economic malaise appeared to have settled on the Soviet Union by the early 1980s as the superpower found itself ruled by a gerontocracy which was slowly dying out" (3). In *Confused Emotions*, Arsenov depicts both Nadia's parents as failing in their paternal roles, partially because of their health problems. They embody disempowered authority that no longer is capable of maintaining control.

As a representative of the adult authoritative figure, Nadia's father, Viktor Semenovich, signifies state power that is weak, corrupt, and dishonest. He has recovered from a serious disease and, on the screen, is usually depicted sitting passively in a chair and covered with a blanket. His physical weakness is a reflection of his moral flaws. Viktor Semenovich's authoritative status is also diminished as a result of comical elements. Aleksandr Kaliagin, the actor who plays Nadia's father, is best known to Soviet audiences for his comic role in Viktor's Titov's *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* (*Zdravstvuite, ia vasha tetia!* 1975). The intertextual reference to Kaliagin's role as a funny, clumsy trickster in Titov's film affects how viewers may react to his role in Arsenov's film. Thus, Viktor Semenovich is depicted as a weak and non-serious figure. As many other adults of Brezhnev-era cinema, he appears to be a hypocrite and a liar. In one of the scenes, Viktor Semenovich asks Volodia to lie to Nina Dmitrievna, saying that he and

¹⁰⁴ Both Andropov and Chernenko were struggling with terminal illnesses. Andropov died in February 1984, and Chernenko died in March 1985.

Volodia were together prior to his wife's birthday party. This conversation happens on the street, by stands displaying the major Soviet newspapers of that time—*Moscow Truth* (*Moskovskaia pravda*), *Soviet Russia* (*Sovetskaia Rossiia*), and *Socialist Industry* (*Sotsialisticheskaia industriia*). This specific setting in Arsenov's film functions as an allusion that these sources of the state "truths" also contain lies regarding the economic and political situation in the country.

Viktor Semenovich's wife, Nina Dmitrievna, is another example of an ineffective authoritative figure whose authority is also put into question in the second half of the film. In the first half, she dominates at home and her leadership skills also extend to her workplace. She constantly praises herself for her good public deeds and expects to be complimented for her "caring" nature by her colleagues and family members. This kind of behavior is reminiscent of Brezhnev-era preoccupation with medals and regalia.¹⁰⁵ Nina Dmitrievna always tries to perform good deeds for other people, while ignoring her own family and failing to see her daughter's emotional dilemmas and her husband's implied infidelity. Otiugova defines this quality of Nadia's mother as a negative characteristic of the older generation, when "Nina Dmitrievna's unlimited kindness turns into violence toward the people to whom she directs this kindness, into a specific method of subjugation of people."¹⁰⁶

The negative qualities of Nadia's parents and the dysfunctionality of her family are further revealed in the scene at the birthday dinner. Nadia's mother and her husband are no

¹⁰⁵ Over the years of Brezhnev's governance, he received 114 medals, among which were the most prestigious award for service to the Soviet state, The Hero of The Soviet Union, in 1976, and the highest military award, The Order of Victory, in 1978.

¹⁰⁶ "А безграничная доброта Нины Дмитриевны оборачивается насилием по отношению к людям, на которых эта доброта распространяется, становится своебразным методом порабощения людей..."

longer close to each other emotionally, which is supported visually on the screen, when, at the dinner table, they do not sit next to each other. They communicate through allusions and exaggerated performance. Their relationship is not sincere and the communication between the two of them is often mediated through poetry or sceptical retorts. In the birthday party scene, Arsenov introduces poetry as an allusive way of the older generation's criticizing and attacking one another. Following her husband's adulatory speech, Nadia's mother recites these lines from Iurii Levitanskii's poem, "The fool was given the sea" ("Podarili duraku more")¹⁰⁷:

The fool was given the sea.
He touched it, and felt it.
He wet his finger and licked it.
His finger was salty and bitter.
Then the fool spat in the sea.¹⁰⁸

First of all, this poem alludes to Nadia's parents' broken marriage, because it is based on lies and insincerity: by being unfaithful, Nadia's father is the fool who "spits" at his family. Thus, Arsenov links the dysfunctionality of families to the dysfunctionality of the system in general

1.1.1 ¹⁰⁷ Levitanskii's other poem, "Dialog u novogodnei elki" ("The Dialogue by The New Year Tree") appears in Men'shov's *Moskva slezam ne verity (Moscow Does Not Believe In Tears)*.

¹⁰⁸ Подарили дураку море,
Он потрогал его, пощупал.
Обмакнул и лизнул палец.
Был соленым и горьким палец.
Тогда в море дурак плюнул.

through citing specific poems. Using poetry by certain poets, popular cinema of the 1970s and the early 1980s also had an opportunity to give voice to certain opinions regarding the situation in the country and to have those opinions reach a much broader audience. A closer look into the poet's background and his status within official Soviet culture helps to decipher the double entendre in this specific scene.

Levitanskii is an illustrative example of those poets who existed on the border between official and unofficial discourses. With his numerous military poems, he was a mainstream poet during and after World War II, but in the 1960s he began to write parodies, a genre not favored by the Soviet state. Additionally, Levitanskii was among the first writers to sign letters in support of his colleagues, the writers Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel, during their trial. Therefore, a reference to this poet and his work in *Confused Emotions* signifies ambivalent, complex relations not only between this individual couple, but also potentially between the public—the official—and dissent—the unofficial. Arsenov presents his viewers with a paradox: while representing an authoritative figure, Nina Dmitrievna operates in the allegorical mode of expression and recites poetry. First, Levitanskii's poem may foreshadow Nina Dmitrievna's later loss of power and control over her family members due to her serious illness. Second, it may indicate that Aesopian language and irony penetrated different layers of Soviet culture and affected different groups of Soviet society.

Other adults also turn to poetry as the mode of criticism to express dissatisfaction. During the dinner party, Nadia's father recites lines from the poem "Zvezdopad" ("Starfall") by Nikolai Dobronravov, who was famous for his youth poems¹⁰⁹:

The only one is right is he who is ardent and disdainful peace,
Who flies to people as a bright star.¹¹⁰

Viktor Semenovich recites this poem with sarcastic undertones, implicitly attacking Nina Dmitrievna's self-admiration and artificial altruism. In 1965, when "Zvezdopad" was written, it sincerely described a new young Soviet hero, who was always active, motivated, enthusiastic, and ready to help people gratuitously. Citing these lines in reference to his wife's actions, Viktor Semenovich reveals a different set of traits characteristic of the Soviet people of the 1970s, such as insincerity and shallowness regarding public duties. The teenage characters react to this revelation of the truth more strongly than adults; and because of that, Nadia and Volodia leave the party before its end.

Their realization of the insincerity and corruption of the adult world fosters the teenagers' desire to segregate themselves from their parents and teachers and to create their own secluded space. In fact, Arsenov frames the young couple exclusively together, without other people in the shot, even while being on busy streets. At its best, the youth community substitutes for a family; and one of the students even suggests at a party: "Guys, a family picture would be nice!" The black-and-white stills of carefree and content students who are posing for a group photograph indicates the positive quality of the remembered past.

¹⁰⁹ The composer Aleksandra Pakhmutova wrote music for Dobronravov's lyrics, and, since 1965, "Zvezdopad" became an emblematic song for the famous pioneer camp Orlenok in the Tuapse region.

¹¹⁰ Прав лишь горящий, презревший покой,
К людям летящий яркой звездой.

The high-school students are excited about their future, and they try to break with their school life as soon as they pass all their exams. The act of burning their school notebooks in the school backyard enacts their attempt to liberate themselves from their teachers and to draw a line between the past and the present. They symbolically annihilate the official space of school, in which teachers have control over them. After the important ritual of liberation, the students continue functioning within their small community without adults and organize a party in a dark room, behind closed curtains. Arsenov presents a scene in which the teenagers are burning their notebooks as a flashback and juxtaposes it with the party scene through a parallel montage. These two scenes, sutured together with the main melody by Krylatov, bring back the contrast between the bright past and the dull present. The scene in the school yard is overexposed, full of light, the girls are wearing white aprons, and the students are joking, laughing, and jumping over the fire. The scene at the party is dark, and Volodia and Nadia's quarrel interposes in the gathering. Despite their desire to live only in the present, the young characters are haunted by their previous happy days in ways that suggest a broader social frame: these former happy days evoke a sense and nostalgia for the Thaw years as a symbol of temporary cultural liberation and sincerity in the public consciousness.

In the second half of the film, the atmosphere takes on negative tones and the lives of the teenagers become more complicated and stressful. Starting with the scene in which Volodia's mother interrupts her son's playing soccer and sends him to the grocery store, both Volodia and Nadia spend more screen time doing chores like cleaning Nadia's apartment, buying groceries, and taking care of Nadia's ill mother. The teenagers start to fit in better with the adult crowd, which is evident from the scene in which Nadia is undifferentiated from other people queuing on the street. On the one hand, both young characters mature as a result of Nina Dmitrievna's

illness; on the other hand, the routine makes them even more dependent on their parents, of whom they should now take care. The teenagers exchange roles with their parents: Nadia is not afraid of arguing with her father about his inability to take charge in his own house, and she acts more like a parent to the irresponsible adult. Arsenov offers his ironic commentary on the teenagers' current situation by juxtaposing the shot of a sick Nina Dmitrievna in bed, and Volodia and Viktor Semenovich adjusting a TV set for her with the on-screen song from a famous Soviet animated film about Winnie-the-Pooh (See Figure 31). The happy, light tune and the song's lyrics—"Winnie-the-Pooh lives very well in this world, that's why he sings these songs aloud"¹¹¹—ironically contradict the overall dark and depressing setting of Nina Dmitrievna's bedroom. Therefore, Nina Dmitrievna's illness not only ignites the early maturation of the teenage characters, but also disables her ability to rule and, in fact, infantilizes her.



Figure 31: *Confused Emotions*

With the disempowered authoritative figures in the background, irony in *Confused Emotions* flourishes. Linked to pessimism and uncertainty, it becomes one of the most profound

¹¹¹ “Хорошо живет на свете Винни-Пух, оттого поет он эти песни вслух.”

feelings not only in cinema, but in Brezhnev culture at large. The teenage characters in Arsenov's film embody these ironic tendencies. Thus, in his conversation with his classmate Masha, Volodia addresses his concerns regarding the past and the future, which are representative of many Soviet people during the Brezhnev era: "There used to be a feeling of harmony in the world. But what should we do? It has disappeared now." This remark refers to his life as a teenager, but can also be understood in a broader sense as a comment on the situation in Soviet society during the 1970s. The specific cinematic techniques help to construct these connections: the camera does not show Volodia's face while he is making this philosophical observation, but instead is looking at Masha's sad face from Volodia's back. This specific angle may suggest that this pessimistic opinion comes from some anonymous, generalized narrator who represents the views of the young generation of the 1970s. In his essay "The 'New Soviet Man' Turns Pessimist," John Bushnell argues that optimism was a characteristic feature of the Thaw, when people believed in the functionality of the Soviet system and trusted the Soviet government. He relates the growth of pessimism among Soviet citizens in the 1970s mainly to the changes in the economic situation in the country:

The rise and decline of middle-class optimism can be linked in part to political developments, but the crucial determinant has been the changing perception of Soviet economic performance. The degree of the Soviet consumer's present and anticipated future satisfaction has been influenced by the real performance of the consumer sector... This pessimistic outlook on future consumption has contributed to mounting skepticism and cynicism about the values and performance of the regime in other areas as well. (138)

Bushnell also asserts that because the younger generation does not have a memory of economically devastated times after World War II to compare to the economic situation in Brezhnev's society, "they are less impressed by advances in the standard of living over the last twenty years...[and] are more likely to project their present discontents into the future" (146). The young generation's disappointment with the standards of living during Brezhnev's government also gradually developed into overall depressive moods.

The teenagers in Arsenov's film are affected by this depression, and eventually their interaction with each other and their parents ceases to be sarcastic. They try to escape the unhappy present, the situation in which they find themselves, but their intentions usually end unsuccessfully. The visual depiction of the young character' running without a purpose is paralleled with the motion of the young Brezhnev generation toward the transformation of Soviet society. It represents, first of all, an attempt to escape the system, and, on the other hand, it offers a hint that political, ideological, and cultural changes happen rapidly in the Brezhnev society.¹¹² In *Confused Emotions*, while Volodia runs through the city, he passes by trucks with the sign "Produktovyi" ("Grocery"). The trucks follow him even outside the city, which may signify that, despite all the teenager's efforts to escape from the routine and consumerism of the adult world, he is still doomed to operate within the rules of this society. This scene ends with dark shots of the road and the woods outside the city and a pouring rain, intensifying the atmosphere of pessimism and despair.

Pessimistic undertones prevail by the end of the film, despite the fact that Arsenov inserts a small break into the dark setting that dominates the second half of his film. The young

¹¹² The motif of a running teenager reoccurs in other youth drama films of the 1970s, most notably in Asanova's *Woodpeckers Don't Get Headaches*.

couple's last meeting before Volodia's departure for the army happens on the street during daylight. However, Arsenov immediately juxtaposes the farewell scene with a flashback to Volodia and Nadia's school romance. The nearly overexposed, dreamlike quality of the shots function as another reminder of the idealized lost past. Arsenov contrasts them to the closing scene, in which the ill Nina Dmitrievna is still lying in bed and her husband informs her that it is snowing outside. Nadia has left for Leningrad, and Volodia has been serving in the Soviet Army. Nadia's parents are alone and unhappy. Viktor Semenovich gives his wife an orange, which simultaneously identifies the time of the final scene—New Year—and alludes to the deficits, long lines, interminable waiting, and constant dissatisfaction that marked attempts to acquire exotic fruits in Soviet society.¹¹³ Tropical fruits or any exotic, unconventional goods were usually associated in the Soviet Union with queuing for hours and an overall dissemination of consumerist culture and rituals, which required a lot of time and energy on the part of Soviet consumerists.

In addition to the object on the screen—one orange—which invokes associations with hardships of consumerist culture in the late-Soviet period, the setting of the final scene contributes to an overall feeling of dejection. With its grey landscape behind the window, this scene invokes melancholy, as the gloomy weather outside reflects the pensive atmosphere in the family and in Soviet society in general. *Confused Emotions* ends with a dramatic, somber striking of the clock, leaving the viewers with a feeling of anxiety and discomfort—feelings, one might argue, in many ways typical of the cultural mode during the Brezhnev era. The structure of the film, from black-and-white happy images of the teenage protagonists to the dark setting of

¹¹³ In the 1970s, oranges and tangerines were available in the Soviet Union only around the New Year time. Because these fruits rarely appeared in the grocery stores, Soviet people would stay in lines for hours to buy them.

the room with disempowered and/or sick parents, contributes to the allegorical trajectory of maturation and gradual detachment of the Brezhnev generation from previous Soviet generation. Volodia serves in the Army and Nadia returns to her studies in Leningrad. The young protagonists leave their parents to pursue their own path, symbolizing the new generation's desire to make their own choice and develop in their own ways. The weak, powerless adults are left alone in a dark room, which, on allegorical level, suggests that in late-Soviet culture, authority, including the state authority, gradually became inert and ineffective.

Both Averbakh in *Other People's Letters* and Arsenov in *Confused Emotions* leave their characters—the representatives of older generations—in a state of perplexity or despair at the end of their films. This reaction among cinematic adults is usually caused by their realization that their teenage children or students no longer depend on them. This happens for different reasons, among which, as presented by Averbakh and Arsenov, are the teenage protagonists' ability to confront adults with the help of irony or to manipulate them, because of the discrepancy in value systems of different generations. Teachers and parents, who, on a larger scale, represent subjects in power in the Soviet system, lose their battle with the young Brezhnev generation, because of the previous Soviet generations' dysfunctionality in personal relationships and the professional sphere. If Averbakh's and Arsenov's films focus on the new type of relationships between the Brezhnev generation and the Thaw and Stalinist generations, Dinara Asanova's and Vladimir Men'shov's films, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, examine the new type of young people—misfits—who, alone or in a small community, attempt to create their own space in which they can develop and practice their own interests and values.

6.0 CREATING PERSONAL SPACE

“Let us understand each other without spelling things out!”

from Bulat Okudzhava’s song “A Wish to Friends” (“Pozhelanie druz’iam”)

6.1 DINARA ASANOVA: TEENAGE MISFITS

Film historian Lidiia Zaitseva argues that Soviet youth films of the 1970s are concerned with the everyday life of average Soviet people (*byt*), and “earthy problems,” the solution to which becomes more dramatic than the solutions in previous films about youth (42). According to Zaitseva, among the new types of cinematic characters of the Brezhnev period are young people in their thirties, who find themselves in the middle of a dramatic psychological conflict. Zaitseva explains,

Such a character does not realize yet that his strictly personal problems originate in the social milieu, that these are not naïve, unconscious movements or the subjective gaze of the artist, but an analytical immersion into a new layer of eternal questions, which conceals the most complicated problems of interaction between a human being and a society. (42)

I would argue that younger characters as well—those in their teens, as represented by Dinara Asanova’s teenagers in *Woodpeckers Don’t Get Headaches* (*Ne bolit golova u diatla*, 1974) and

Keys Without the Right of Forwarding (*Kliuch bez prava peredachi*, 1976)¹¹⁴—are subjected to a similar emotional and psychological turmoil as described by Zaitseva.¹¹⁵ Unlike the generation in their thirties, teenagers are more rebellious and express more openly a critical attitude toward the adult world, while also recognizing that their personal problems are often grounded in social and ideological turmoil. The young cinematic “misfits” especially sense a discord between the promised, ideal socialist order and the reality of the 1970s. According to Aleksandr Troshin, Asanova’s *Woodpeckers*, *Keys*, and her other films of the 1970s, “have created a peculiar narrative and thematic layer in the repertoire of the studied decade that accumulated public anxiety” (“Semidesiatye” 443).¹¹⁶ The young characters of both Asanova’s films create special scenarios that allow them to co-exist with adults, despite their differences and discords, and to deal with ideological and political anxiety. Anna Lawton writes that Asanova’s films establish a theme—“the world of adolescents, with all the uncertainty and uneasiness of a time of transition, and their troubled relations to adults” (23). These adolescents form specific small unstructured communities that differ from the school collective or the official Pioneer and Komsomol organizations. In Asanova’s films, the study of these misfit communities offers a range of potential parallels in the relation to the unofficial structure of late-Soviet society.

Misfits in Soviet cinema were not a unique phenomenon, and their presence was hardly characteristic of or isolated only to films made under Brezhnev’s government. Liubov' Arkus

¹¹⁴ Because these two films have relevantly long titles, for brevity’s sake, I will refer to them as *Woodpeckers* and *Keys*.

¹¹⁵ Asanova develops her interest in teenage characters already in her first, independently made film—a short *Rudol'fio* (1969) that is based on Valentin Rasputin’s story of the same title. Asanova’s other films about children and adolescents include *The Useless Girl* (*Nikudyshnaia*, 1980), *What Would You Chose?* (*Chto by ty vybral?* 1981), *Tough Kids* (*Patsany*, 1983), and *Dear, Dearest, Beloved, The Only One...* (*Milyi, dorogoi, liubimy, edinstvennyi...*, 1984).

¹¹⁶ “...образовали в репертуаре обозреваемого десятилетия характерный сюжетно-тематический пласт, аккумулировавший в себе общественное беспокойство.”

argues that, even in the 1940s and 1950s, the so-called “white crows” in films about school students became prototypes of the later representations of non-conformist teenagers. She defines one of the main characteristics of teenage “white crows” as “a realization of their exceptionality, opposing themselves to the collective.”¹¹⁷ The figure of a misfit became widely popular and more visible in Soviet cinema in the first half of the 1970s and represented a tendency in the social and cultural discourse to view the society as deficient in satisfying the needs of the individual. As a result, the interactions between young misfits and their peers, parents, and teachers became one of the most important motifs of youth films of the 1970s.

The influx of cinematic misfits during Brezhnev’s government was predetermined if not by acceptance, than at least by disregard of behavior and actions that are atypical of Soviet citizens. In *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*, William Tompson contextualizes young people’s preference of counter-culture over official culture, explaining it by “the regime’s willingness to tolerate a great deal of deviant behaviour that would previously have been punished” (90). He elaborates, arguing that “lax policing of the second economy and the turning of blind eyes to report-padding and corruption on the part of managers constituted a part of the regime’s ‘Little Deal,’ a tacit accommodation between the regime and its increasingly acquisitive subjects” (90). In the context of “lax policing” of the economy, state authorities also ignored some unorthodox types of social behavior among young citizens as long as they had not become a wide-spread tendency in the society. The presentation of the main young characters as loners, outsiders, and misfits responds to this cultural phenomenon in the Soviet social structure. Asanova’s choice of referencing them indirectly functions as Aesopian allusion. Lev Gudkov and Boris Dubin are

¹¹⁷ “Типические черты «белой вороны» определены уже здесь—это сознание своей исключительности, противопоставление себя коллективу.”

among those who refer to these groups as “the second’ or ‘shadow’ society” (23) or “the organizing forms of ‘other life’” (55). Gudkov and Dubinin write about this “shadow” society, observing that “the carriers of ‘capabilities’ and subjects of ‘demand’ in the era of deficit were substituted by people ‘with opportunities,’ which do their work in the way they understand it. Thus, the private relations between ‘their own’ became the main form of their interaction” (23).¹¹⁸

In her films, Asanova examines the relationships among young people “with opportunities” and their unorthodox decisions and actions. She focuses on teenagers who do not fit in the school collective or any other officially established groups and who metaphorically represent the “shadow” society. They remain aloof and distant from their relatives and peers, and have close relationships with only a select group of people. More than other characters in the same films, they are usually able to evaluate an unfair situation or corrupt authoritative figures. Elena Prokhorova argues that “only a misfit can be a defender of social justice,” an idea that is represented in some films of the Brezhnev period (59).¹¹⁹ The portrayal of misfits, who usually stay within the borders of their small group and analyze other people’s actions and behavior from this position, allows viewers to study another characteristic of the socio-cultural

¹¹⁸ “...на смену носителям ‘способностей’ и субъектам ‘потребностей’ в эпоху дефицита приходят люди с ‘возможностями,’ которые занимаются делом так, как они его понимают. Тем самым основной формой взаимодействия становится приватное общение ‘своих’.”

¹¹⁹ In her film *Tough Kids* (*Patsany*, 1983), Asanova’s strategy consists in taking the socialist notion of *perekovka*, or re-forging, re-shaping through labor, and inverting it by using a correctional camp for young delinquents as a mini-model. In this film, the instructor at the camp fails to re-educate the young characters, and his pedagogical experiment ends with aggression and violence on the part of the teenagers. The film lends itself to a broader commentary on the intensified ideological education of the young (and not only young) Soviet citizen, and the growing ironic response that is evident in the culture of the unofficial economy.

climate in the Soviet Union: an existence of alternative thinking within the presumably fixed and stable ideological system.

Aesopian juxtaposition is among various narrative and cinematic strategies that Asanova employs in her films in order to draw parallels between cinematic misfits and ideological and cultural dissent in the Soviet Union. The representations of teenage misfits in *Woodpeckers* and *Keys* are enriched and complicated by the representations of these misfits in their relationships not only with authoritative figures, but also with another young generation—the generation of thirty-year-olds. This Aesopian juxtaposition of two cinematic generations parallels the two intellectual generations in Soviet culture— *shestidesiatniki*, or Khrushchev’s generation of the 1960s, and *semidesiatniki*, or Brezhnev’s generation of the 1970s.

The split between *shestidesiatniki* and *semidesiatniki*, the latter of whom Alexei Yurchak calls “the last Soviet generation,” resulted in part by the impact of the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia (Yurchak 31). According to Yurchak, specific Soviet events such as revolution and destalinization influenced the formation of the first generation. The generation of the 1970s was united by “a shared experience of the normalized, ubiquitous, and immutable authoritative discourse of the Brezhnev’s years” (32). The teenagers of the 1970s embodied this generation of *semidesiatniki* that was born in the second half of the 1950s and the 1960s and whose memory of Stalinist purges or the dramatic years of the World War II were historical, rather than direct and personal, in nature.

In her debut full-length feature film, *Woodpeckers*, Asanova gives examples of these two generations: a seventh grader, Seva Mukhin, or Mukha (“Fly”) represents the younger generation, while his teacher, Tat’iana Petrovna, is the representative of the older generation. Mukha does not fit in with his family or his peers, except for his female classmate, Ira Fedorova,

and his best friend, Leva Bulkin, or Baton (“White Loaf”). Asanova creates an image of Mukha as a positive character, one who is honest and sensitive to adults’ lies. Natal’ia Miloserdova describes him as “extraordinary, talented, firm, and true to himself and to his calling” (69).¹²⁰ He usually practices playing his drums all by himself in some secluded place, which emphasizes his status as a loner. The only adult figure who is allowed to “penetrate” the teenage world to some extent is Mukha’s teacher, Tat’iana Petrovna, who belongs to the young generation of the thirty-year-olds. Asanova distinguishes the teacher from other adults because she does not act like a typical Soviet educator. Although she follows the school program and on the last day of school requests that students submit an essay on how they will spend their summer vacation—a traditional essay for the Soviet school system—she jokes with her students, allows Baton to talk back to her boldly, and tells her students that she also prefers playing soccer to sitting in the classroom on the last day before summer break. As a representative of the generation of *shestidesiatniki*, she sympathizes with the teenagers and reproves the generation of her students’ parents. Unlike Mukha’s and Leva’s parents, Tat’iana Petrovna accepts the teenagers’ individuality and their right to make decisions for themselves, and she expresses this point of view during the conversation with Mukha’s father. Because of the teacher’s sincere belief in high school students and her idealism regarding teaching and parenting methods, she can potentially be recognized as a member of *shestidesiatniki*, for which, according to Lev Anninskii, the “symbol of search, symbol of liberty, and symbol of awakening” are characteristic (5).¹²¹ The generation of *shestidesiatniki* often focuses on searching for truths and trying to express their thoughts openly, while still believing in the indestructibility of socialist ideals. In

¹²⁰ “...незаурядный, талантливый, стойкий, верный себе и своему призванию...”

¹²¹ “...СИМВОЛ ПОИСКА, СИМВОЛ ВОЛЬНОСТИ, СИМВОЛ ПРОБУЖДЕНИЯ...”

Woodpeckers, Tat'iana Petrovna embodies these values of *shestidesiatniki*, and tries to “awaken” her students by teaching them to express themselves independently.

By showing complex relationships between different generations, Asanova creates an allegorical parallel to manifold attitudes in Soviet society during the Brezhnev period. She even shows that within the young generation there are different opinions and relations with adults and authoritative figures; each generation is represented not by a homogenous, monolithic totality but instead as a composition of individuals and their various perspectives. Thus, Mukha's elder brother, Andrei, is another representative of the young generation, who fits in well with the adult world and is even praised by adults for being a good basketball player. These two brothers—Mukha and Andrei—embody different value systems and different cultural discourses within the same generation. Andrei represents conformist attitudes in Soviet society of the 1970s, and he gets along well with his father. He is a successful sportsman who stands for the traditional, socialist realist admiration of a healthy, strong body. As Richard Stites argues, sport always played an important role in Soviet culture, and “sports stars ranked with film and entertainment figures in celebrity and were held up as model citizens” (175). In the scene where a bus of tourists stops by the Mukhins' house, Asanova edits in the sound of cheering and applause in the background with pictures of Andrei wearing medals at different competitions, which is juxtaposed to the current image of Andrei. The insertion of black-and-white photographs capturing Andrei's sports achievements functions as a flashback to Andrei's successful sport career, and at the same time allusively connects the images of the young sportsman from the Brezhnev period with the early popular imagery of Stalinist years.¹²² This Aesopian allusion

¹²² For more detailed study of Soviet sport during the Stalinist period see, Levent, O'Mahony, Shneidman, and Riordan.

allows for the comparing of two historical eras in Soviet history. In this capacity as a sportsman, Mukha's elder brother is reminiscent of many strong and fit masculine figures in Stalinist art, including figures in Aleksandr Deineka's *The Race* (1932-33), *Athletes* (1934), *The Goalkeeper* (1934), and *The Relay Race on the Streets of Moscow* (1947).

In *Woodpeckers*, Asanova creates a parallel between entertainment that was “in constant flux between prohibition, censorship and sponsorship” and entertainment heavily favored and endorsed by the Soviet government (Lücke 1). Mukha embodies the first, unofficial type of entertainment, while his brother stands for the state encouraged entertainment—sport. This parallel between the two brothers contributes to the work of Aesopian language. Unlike Andrei, Mukha is associated with jazz music and drums. In the Soviet Union, jazz represented the music of freedom, and as Martin Lücke describes in his article “Vilified, Venerated, Forbidden: Jazz in the Stalinist Era,” “the Great Terror placed Soviet society into a period of great insecurity, and naturally did not hesitate to attack music associated with freedom and improvisation such as jazz” (4). Therefore, the juxtaposition of the two brothers works as the juxtaposition between an official form of entertainment, such as sport, and an “unofficial” (or semi-official) cultural form, such as jazz music, which was finally acknowledged—though hardly encouraged—by the Soviet state in the 1970s.¹²³ Andrei in Asanova's film represents the adherence to socialist realist ideals, which began to develop under Stalin, while Mukha's status as a “misfit” is reinforced through the association with jazz.

The two brothers, at an allegorical level, also represent different opinions regarding the state politics among various groups of Soviet people during the Brezhnev years. K.B. Sokolov writes that one group of the Soviet intelligentsia “not begrudging any energy, was protecting the

¹²³ For the study of jazz in the Soviet Union, see Starr.

official worldview”¹²⁴: this group was comprised of members of various creative unions and “petty ideologists” such as Party organizers, curators of cultural clubs, and some journalists, scientists, and artists (231). The other group opposed the official value system and tried to create “an alternative worldview.” According to Sokolov, this group was originally affected by the generation of *shestidesiatniki* but gradually developed into something else—a dissident movement (233). The supporters of state ideology, or “intelligentsia on the side of power” (“intelligentsiia pri vlasti”), helped the government to repress the oppositional intelligentsia by writing accusatory letters, asking to intensify repressions, and “hoping, not without reason, to occupy niches ‘freed’ by oppositional intelligentsia” (Sokolov 234).¹²⁵ Mukha’s brother metaphorically belongs to this group, although he is not portrayed as extremely repressive and unsupportive. Nevertheless, he is the first character in the film, who does not let his brother play drums, thus limiting Mukha’s freedom of expression. Andrei does not recognize his younger brother’s passion for jazz and drums as a unique way of expressing his individuality, especially because he himself participates in and furthers the tradition of the collectively forging individuals through sport, a tradition firmly established during the Stalinist period. Therefore, as Asanova dramatically demonstrates in *Woodpeckers*, the new generation of Soviet people is not homogenous but is instead split into those supporting the old regime and those in favor of restructuring Soviet society and revising the values of the socialist system.

Linking the cinematic characters to some objects (in this specific case, a musical instrument) in the narrative and on the screen is another Aesopian strategy to which Soviet film directors resorted to create a multi-layered portrayal of teenage misfits. This narrative and

¹²⁴ “...не жалея сил, защищала официальную картину мира...”

¹²⁵ “...не без основания надеясь занять ‘освобождаемые’ оппозиционной интеллигенцией ниши...”

cinematic technique, first of all, functions as a synecdoche, and every time, the viewers see drums on the screen, they associate them with the teenage protagonist (See Figure 32). Second, the image of the drums serves as an Aesopian metaphor of the young Brezhnev generation's connection to jazz music, and more generally to foreign culture. In *Woodpeckers*, the teenager's drums serve as a reason for his disputes with adults, but they also have another, more allusive, meaning. K. Isaeva defines Mukha's drums as "a mean of defending his independence, his individuality" (99).¹²⁶ It provides the teenage protagonist with an opportunity to express his creative potential. Additionally, drums usually play an important role in socialist musical culture, but Mukha transforms this instrument into a symbol of Western music and Western culture in a broader sense. He dreams about being in a band, but in many instances, grownups do not allow him to pursue his calling. The drums acquire the status of a "prohibited" and thus rebellious musical instrument and through historical allusions are linked to another instrument, one not favored by the Soviet government for a long time—the saxophone. Asanova develops further this association between Mukha's drums and prohibited instruments: in one of the later scenes, the teenager wanders on the street and ends up in front of a music store. The first instrument he sees on display is a saxophone, and next to it is a drum set. If the saxophone is a reference to an underground, unofficial, prohibited culture during late Stalinism and the Thaw, then Mukha uses his drums in the 1970s as a protest against repression by adults.

¹²⁶ "Барабан становится для него средством отстоять свою независимость, свою индивидуальность."



Figure 32: *Woodpeckers*

For the teenage protagonist in *Woodpeckers*, the drum beat also mimics the natural sound of a woodpecker pecking on the tree. Therefore, Asanova links two metaphorical objects—drums and a woodpecker—to Mukha’s craving for independence and self-realization. The woodpecker symbolizes the spirit of freedom for the teenage musician because it can make noise at any time, while adults limit Mukha in his choices. The title of the film—*Woodpeckers Don’t Get Headaches*—functions as an allusion to the woodpeckers’ ability to heal the diseased body of trees as their main task, without having concerns for anything else. Woodpeckers are a metaphorical representation of the late-Soviet generation that is also interested in “curing” Soviet society from empty ideological postulates and ineffective state policies. This ability to fix, change society may be considered dangerous by the state, and that is why Stakan Stakanych, as a representative of state bureaucrats, presumably, kills Mukha’s woodpecker in the second half of the film. By this action, he encroaches on the teenager’s freedom of expression through drumming and adherence to foreign music. However, Asanova makes sure that the young generation wins the battle with the stale state power, and in one of the final scenes, the sound of the woodpecker interrupts the aural structure of the shot. This pecking signifies the

woodpecker's return and, at the same time, symbolizes the persistence of the young generation in their yearning for cultural and ideological transformation.

Another technique that Asanova employs in *Woodpeckers* in order to emphasize the difference between the young Brezhnev generation and previous generations is setting the teenage character in opposition to Stakan Stakanych. This technique is an Aesopian juxtaposition, which includes putting the opposites next to each other: positive teenage characters with negative adult authority. Stakan Stakanych is presented as a comic figure and played by Mikhail Svetin, who is famous for his comic roles in Soviet cinema.¹²⁷ The director's choice of Svetin allows for a parodic effect, which Loseff considers to be among Aesopian techniques. Stakan Stakanych is shallow, corrupt, and mean, and he belongs to the service sector that flourished during Brezhnev's government. He works as a hairdresser, but, as is presented in one of the scenes, he does not do his job well and for that reason he does not have many clients. He represents a corrupt Soviet service system, and in his response to the film, published in *The Pacific Ocean Star (Tikhookeanskaia zvezda)*, B. Davydov identifies Stakan Stakanych as a usual type of Soviet petit bourgeois—"a quite recognizable figure of a philistine for whom his personal peace is above all things."¹²⁸ At the same time, the actor Svetin, with his small height and squeaky voice, diminishes the seriousness and importance of the members of Soviet petit bourgeoisie and allows for ridiculing them. In comparison to the grotesque personage of Stakan Stakanych, whose nickname allusively suggests that he may have a drinking problem (the exact

¹²⁷ Svetin's most recognizable comic roles in the 1970s were in Georgii Daneliia's *Afonia* (1975), Leonid Gaidai's *It Can't Be (Ne mozhnet byt' 1975)*, and Mark Zakharov's *Twelve Chairs (Dvenadtsat' stol'ev, 1977)*.

¹²⁸ "«Это вполне узнаваемая фигура обывателя, для которого личный покой—превыше всего.»"

translation from Russian would mean “The Glass, Son-of-the-Glass”), Asanova describes her misfit Mukha in a positive light (See Figure 33).



Figure 33: *Woodpeckers*

Unlike some of her other youth films, Asanova’s *Woodpeckers* optimistically puts forward the idea that the Brezhnev generation may influence and transform previous Soviet generations, and that authoritative figures can be reeducated and ultimately adjust to a new value system. Mukha’s persistence and dedication to drumming make his father change his own attitude toward his son’s independence and Western music. The shot in which the father is framed with the picture of Ringo Starr on the wall supports this idea. Stakan Stakanych discovers Mukha’s father playing his son’s drums, who gradually adjusts to and accepts the young generations’ values and interests. In response to the transformation of Mukha’s father, Stakan Stakanych capitulates, thus losing his battle with the new order, despite being the most rigid bureaucratic character in *Woodpeckers*. Consequently, the desire of the young generation to cure the illnesses of Soviet society pays off, and adults either transform culturally and

ideologically under the influence of their children, as Mukha's father does, or they give up and let young people choose their own path, as represented in Stakan Stakanych's final actions.

The ending of *Woodpeckers* illustrates the idea that the young misfits' attempts to affect older generations are not yet a common phenomenon. As in many non-American "school films," according to Robert C. Bulman, the teenage character "confronts and then tries to escape the oppressive social world" (149). The teenage characters in Asanova's film still remain isolated and aloof. By the end of *Woodpeckers*, Asanova emphasizes the status of her cinematic teenagers as loners and misfits even more: Ira moves to another city with her family, and Mukha loses the support of his small secluded community. Mukha runs after the train, in which Ira leaves the city, and the director underlines the teenage protagonist's despair through a freeze frame of the running boy with a desperate expression on his face. This visual metaphor refers to the situation in late-Soviet society, when the young generation tried to introduce changes into the ossified system, but often did not succeed. As an allegorical embodiment of the young Brezhnev generation, Mukha tries to challenge the adult world and even has an impact on it by making his father and Stakan Stakanych acknowledge the possibility of an alternative culture represented by teenagers. However, by the end of the film, Asanova depicts the young protagonist in the secluded space of his rehearsal room all by himself, which implies that he has not been able to succeed in transforming the Brezhnev society on a larger scale. Through its parallels with the cultural-ideological climate in the Soviet Union, the conclusion of Asanova's *Woodpeckers* implies that the non-conformist young generation under Brezhnev, despite numerous attempts, still did not have enough power to introduce significant social and cultural changes into the stagnant socialist system.

Asanova directed her next film, *Keys Without the Right of Forwarding*, one year after making *Woodpeckers*. In this film, she continues developing the topic of complex relationships between teenage misfits and their parents, teachers, and peers. In *Keys*, in comparison to *Woodpeckers*, Asanova offers a more optimistic script for teenagers' interactions with adults and focuses mainly on a community of teenage misfits who has a harmonious relationship with a member of the generation in their mid- or late-twenties—the school teacher Marina Maksimovna. The minimal age difference between the high school students and their teacher allows for more sincere and friendly relations between the two generations. If Mukha, at the end of *Woodpeckers*, is left all by himself, the young community in *Keys* not only unites teenage misfits, but also makes them powerful enough to transform the old generation of teachers.

In *Keys*, Asanova depicts teenagers as a mystery or a puzzle that needs to be solved, but she seems more interested in posing questions about the teenage world rather than offering any answers. Asanova introduces this atmosphere of mysteriousness already in the opening credits: matte glass hides from the audience the faces of the high-school students who mingle during a break. Viewers can only guess what they are doing and what they are talking about. Already in the opening scene, the director separates the teenagers from the audience by glass, first of all, visually demonstrating the existence of a specific, secluded “teenage” space that has its own rules and rituals (See Figure 34). Second, the visual barrier on the screen metaphorically signifies a difficulty that adults experience while trying to understand their children and students. Thus, the cinematic quality of the shot (the presence of the glass that separates the audience from the teenagers) is linked thematically to the incomprehensibility of the young generation by older generations. The glass renders the space and activity behind it physically as mysterious and incomprehensible as the teenagers' misfit natures.



Figure 34: *Keys*

Asanova's film helps to explain the misfits' popularity in Brezhnev culture. She does that through the depiction of the dysfunctional space of school. The teenagers in *Keys* object to the ways in which authoritative figures, such as parents and teachers, treat them. Many teachers are represented as incompetent, unethical, and unfair. As representatives of official power, they are corrupt and dishonest, which leads to confrontations with the students. For instance, Asanova portrays the chemistry teacher as an unjust educator: she expels students from her class without any legitimate reason; she also smokes and flirts with the new principal. During her class, students revolt against her, when she unjustly lowers some students' grades. Thus, teenagers represent the new generation that is not only able to see the flaws of society but even try to object to them to some extent. The teenage misfits alienate themselves from adults and create their own group which functions in accordance with its own rules, because the regulations established by the authorities are not necessarily relevant and productive for the young generation. This type of relationship, according to Juliane Fürst, represents, on a larger scale, a phenomenon that began to spread already during the Khrushchev years—*kompaniia* (a company), the members of which “desired to contribute to the collective good and believed in

the existence of individual and societal perfection” (“Friends in Private” 244). The teenagers’ relationships in Asanova’s film reproduce a similar mode of interactions among members of *kompaniia* and represent an alternative for the official *kollektiv* (a collective) that is created and controlled by the state.

In addition to examining the relationships between teenage misfits and their peers and teachers, Asanova also depicts the rapport among different generations of educators within the school space and in a domestic setting. In *Keys*, school has a complex structure with multiple generations of teachers representing different ideological investments in Soviet discourse and ideology. The tensions between new and old generations of pedagogues at the same school constitute Asanova’s strategized way of commenting through Aesopian language on Brezhnev culture’s breaking with certain cultural traditions. Asanova chooses to introduce her young characters during the literature class of Marina Maksimovna, a progressive, non-traditional teacher. She shares many similarities with Tat’iana Petrovna from *Woodpeckers*; they are both sympathetic to their students’ problems and both teach literature—the only subject in Soviet schools that allowed students to express more freely their opinions on ethical, aesthetic, and philosophical topics. Asanova links these two teachers from her films to each other, thus creating parallels between similar characters not only within the same film, but also within the broader context of her directing experience. These parallels contribute to reading the characters allegorically as the embodiment of Soviet educators during the Brezhnev period in general. For the viewers, who are already familiar with the representations of teachers in youth films under Brezhnev, and specifically with the films made by Asanova, the parallel between Tat’iana Petrovna in *Woodpeckers* and Marina Maksimovna in *Keys* is, if not obvious, at least, allusive. In many of her films, including *Woodpeckers* and *Keys*, Asanova chose to depict a select group

of teachers positively. These teachers, who are not stagnant and conservative in their teaching approaches, include male and female educators from different generations. Consequently, Asanova puts forward an idea that even educators in the late-Soviet period consisted of a heterogeneous crowd, who are not entirely devoted to socialist ideals. By comparing the two young teachers in *Keys* and *Woodpeckers*, viewers have an opportunity to assign both young teachers to the same group of new educators with teaching methods unusual for the Soviet educational system. In her article, Liubov' Arkus identifies Marina Maksimovna with the figure of a “white crow”: “The White crow put together nestlings in a flock and teaches them to be White crows.”¹²⁹ Therefore, Marina Maksimovna (and Tat'iana Petrovna as well) belongs to the group of misfits among Soviet teachers who raise a new generation in accordance with the “philosophy of white crows.” Asanova usually juxtaposes these atypical Soviet educators and more traditional teachers whose teaching philosophies are significantly affected by socialist doctrines. She does that to emphasize the otherness, the uniqueness of atypical Soviet educators.

The Aesopian juxtaposition within the film narrative of the characters representing the old, more conservative educational system with the characters who rely on innovative methods allows for a broader comparison of the two generations responsible for influencing young Soviet people during Brezhnev's government. Such juxtaposition helps to develop an Aesopian reading, insofar as it allows for critical attitudes toward older Soviet generations, supporting socialist values. In *Keys*, Asanova juxtaposes Marina Maksimovna with the school principal, Kirill Alekseevich, who received his assignment without any prior pedagogical experience after serving in the military. Kirill Alekseevich is familiar only with military discipline and tries to impose order in his new workplace; and because of his age and his commanding methods, he

¹²⁹ “Белая ворона сбивает в стаю птенцов и учит их быть Белыми воронами.”

clearly belongs to the Stalinist generation. He symbolizes the appropriation of Stalinist traditions by the Brezhnev administration: Brezhnev's politics were not a simple return to the Stalinist culture, but rather a significant revision of some values and beliefs combined with the re-entrenchment of other Stalinist principles. According to Tompson, "Brezhnev brought Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign to an abrupt halt, but the rehabilitation of Stalin's reputation was largely confined to his role in the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany" (27-8). Kirill Alekseevich's association with the army serves as an allusion to many Soviet leaders who also served as supreme commanders-in-chief of the armed forces.¹³⁰ Through this character, Asanova makes stronger connections between the figure of the authoritative educator during the Brezhnev period and such political leaders as Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev.

Kirill Alekseevich not only stands metaphorically for Soviet political leadership, but also bridges Stalinism and the post-Stalinist era. In the first half of the film, he is obsessed with fixing different material problems at school, such as replacing a broken window and painting the walls. He belongs to a group of traditional Brezhnev authoritative figures who focused on the improvement of the country's economic situation as the priority for the government. The school principal does not approve of Marina Maksimovna's pedagogical techniques, in accordance with which she allows her students openly to argue with and even contest her ideas. The conservative principal asserts that Marina Maksimovna's liberal approach may invoke young Soviet citizens to challenge and criticize any authoritative voice, including school authorities, and, by extension, the state. Kirill Alekseevich's role in the film is to contrast Marina Maksimovna not only as an

¹³⁰ Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev served as supreme commanders-in-chief. The first Russian President, Boris Yeltsyn, and the current president, Vladimir Putin, received both the titles of a President of the Russian Federation and a Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.

educator from a different background and a different generation, but also as one with an approach to students that is less personal and more dogmatic, a trait that changes slightly in the second half of the film. Through his constant interaction with the collective of misfits, he finally acknowledges their uniqueness and difference from his generation.

If a bureaucratic figure such as Kirill Alekseevich carries the values of the Stalinist system, the close relationships between Marina Maksimovna and the high-school students allude to the continuity between the Thaw generation and the new generation of young people in the Brezhnev society. The students spend every Saturday at Marina Maksimovna's house having tea parties, and also leave the city with her on a skiing trip. As someone who has grown up and formed her views during the liberating years of the Thaw, Marina wants to develop independent ways of thinking among her students. Thus, she gives her students an unusual essay topic during one of her classes—"What would you say to humanity if you had a chance?" She encourages the teenagers to talk about global questions, ones important not only for Soviet society but for all mankind, and she does not distinguish between socialist or capitalist societies. The students actively respond to this topic and are not afraid of sharing their ideas with Marina Maksimovna, even if their answers are provocative: "You should address humanity briefly and comprehensively, through mottos and slogans," "The most effective and interesting way to reach humanity is through arts and paintings," and "In order to address humanity, one should use the language of thought." Asanova presents these responses in the form of documentary footage for verisimilitude, as if she has conducted a survey among real Soviet people. This technique calls for a visual and thematic metaphor: as Soviet citizens could openly express their opinions only behind closed doors, the teenagers in *Keys* can discuss the importance of reaching people as

individuals in the closed space of a classroom and only in front of the single adult they trust—Marina Maksimovna.

The scene in which the high school students openly share their views with their young teacher is essential insofar as it discloses the dynamics of relationships within the small teenage community and shows a diversity of opinions among young Soviet people. The scene in the classroom during which high school students discuss a variety of ideas alludes to an overall tendency of the Brezhnev society to question and criticize certain issues in the Soviet structure. The students offer a diversity of answers to Marina Maksimovna's question, often diverging from the socialist formula of "building a new society together." This scene also reveals one of the important characteristics of Marina Maksimovna as a representative of the Thaw value system—her belief in logos, or the power of words, which was imported to the Khrushchev era from Stalinist culture. Marina Maksimovna's sincere adherence to the cliché that "in order for the truth to appear to the world it needs to be named" provokes an aggressive reaction from one of the main teenage misfits in *Keys*—Sasha Maidanov. Asanova visually distinguishes him from the rest of his peers: while the other students actively participate in debates, the camera shows Sasha's disinterested face and his hands holding a sport newspaper. Unlike his classmates, he does not trust his teacher, which, allusively points at the tendency among young misfits to reject preceding ideological traditions. The character of Sasha represents a misfit who does not necessarily agree with the opinions of the members of a secluded community to which he also belongs. Therefore, not only Soviet educators have a diversity of opinions and beliefs, as Asanova presents it in her film, but even the young Brezhnev generation has heterogeneous attitudes toward the system and the representatives of the same and other generations.

In her film, Asanova points out the continuity between the Thaw and Brezhnev culture. The support for this can be found in the scenes of public poetry readings, in which Asanova employs an Aesopian citation. She visually references the poetry reading scenes from certain Thaw films, such as Marlen Khutsiev's *Lenin's Guard (Zastava Il'icha, 1964)* and *July Rain (Iul'skii dozhd', 1966)*, and includes documentary shots of famous Soviet poets. In *Keys*, Bulat Okudzhava, David Samoilov, Mikhail Dudin, and Bella Akhmadulina are reading their poetry dedicated to Aleksandr Pushkin, and Marina Maksimovna and her students listen to them during the opening of a new Pushkin museum-apartment. The poetry reading scene employs a pan movement similar to the one in Khutsiev's film, where the camera observes the audience attentively listening to the poets, who are standing by a monument. Even formally, Asanova's film repeats its Thaw predecessors: the poets are filmed in close-up, and the length of each shot is extremely long, emphasizing the importance of poets and poetry.¹³¹ The camera spends a considerable time on each poet reading an entire poem; hence, Asanova makes it clear to viewers that this specific scene has a strong impact on high school students. As indicated by Marc Slonim, even before the Brezhnev period, poetry, especially lyric poetry, "gave an outlet to emotions and dreams repressed in preceding years; it answered the yearning for imagination, fantasy, inner warmth, self-expression—all of which had been crushed by Communist rationalism and utilitarianism" (316). The public poetry reading during Khrushchev's Thaw allowed for the expression of certain new or unorthodox ideas in public, and including these scenes in the youth film made during the Brezhnev period evokes nostalgia for Thaw culture.

¹³¹ This poetry reading scene is also similar to another 1970s film by Aleksandr Men'shov, *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears (Moskva slezam ne verit, 1979)*.

Another Aesopian reference in *Keys* links teenage misfits to the underground “dissemination network” in Brezhnev’s society—otherwise known as *magnitizdat*. Through a parallel montage, Asanova creates a link between the poetry reading and the scene at school, in which Kirill Alekseevich and the mother of Iulia Baiushkina, one of Marina Maksimovna’s students, listen to the tape recorder in the teachers’ lounge. The school authorities plan to expose Marina Maksimovna’s unofficial “circle” after its members’ opinions about teachers and school administration were recorded as “a sonic letter to the descendants.” Thus, the teenage characters not only record their sacred thoughts and ideas, but also make sure that their values are preserved for future generations. The tape recorder is emblematic of *magnitizdat*, insofar as it was used to record lectures, music, and songs, not approved by the Soviet government during the Brezhnev era. The goal for *magnitizdat* practitioners as well as for the young characters in *Keys* is to create a secluded space for the select group of people who have access to ideas that are oppositional or different from the official ones. The practitioners and the users of *magnitizdat*, on the one hand, and Asanova’s teenage protagonists, on the other hand, are able to create an alternative discourse mainly because they are no longer under authorities’ scrutinous surveillance. Peter Steiner maintains that *magnitizdat* “managed to project a new kind of intimate social space ...that stood at a marked variance from the official public space resounding with mass and heroic songs” (622). The teenagers in Asanova’s film also seek a similar private space, first, at Marina Maksimovna’s apartment, and later at Maidanov’s *dacha* (summer cottage), where they record their opinions about their parents and school authorities (See Figure 35). The secluded physical space allows for the promotion of an alternative cultural space. Thus, the high school students in *Keys*, with the tape recorder as a symbol of their detachment

from adults, are allegorical representations of intellectuals who develop various ways of circumventing state representatives.



Figure 35: *Keys*

Besides referencing *magnitizdat*, the later scenes, in which these high-school students’ “dissident” recordings finally are discovered and monitored by parents and teachers, create a link to the moments in Soviet history when cultural producers were severely controlled and repressed by Soviet state authority. The “recording” scenes reference the well-developed surveillance system in Stalin’s society as a way of “disciplining and punishing” Soviet citizens. Therefore, Asanova’s film addresses the specific atmosphere of the Brezhnev years, which Irina Shilova describes as affected not by “a fear of repression, but by the memory about it, [which] oppressed the will and called for caution” (173).¹³² Asanova uses covert, allegorical references to the relationship between the cultural elite—with its unconventional, anti-state worldviews—and the

¹³² “не страх репрессий, а память о них подавляли волю, призывали к осторожности.”

oppressive Soviet governments to create sympathy for the young generation of the 1970s, which is subjugated by the adult authorities.

During the Brezhnev period, both society in general and the cultural elite in particular had to develop various deciphering systems for social and cultural exchanges to keep the state at bay and to avoid any punishment. In *Keys*, Asanova examines the teenage misfits' specific ways of communicating with one another while excluding adults from this communication. This kind of communication among cinematic characters in Asanova's *Keys* allegorically references the interaction between Soviet intellectuals and the state. The teenage characters invent different ways of keeping their parents away from their own lives, and Iulia, for instance, begins speaking English with her boyfriend over the telephone when her parents are eavesdropping. The teenage characters use English as an encoding system to keep their secrets from adults, and this strategy also points at the Brezhnev generation's strong interest in European and American cultures. The use of foreign language in Asanova's film, similar to the use of Aesopian language in Brezhnev culture, functions as a cultural, ideological strategy for avoiding state censorship on the part of non-conformists and dissident members of Soviet society. English language in *Key* is an allegory of Aesopian language insofar as only select group of young characters are able to use it to convey meanings that they do not want their parents to understand.

In *Keys*, the community of teenage misfits has enough agency and voice to influence adults, and Asanova's optimism regarding the potential change in authority is best represented by the development of the character of Kirill Alekseevich. Asanova portrays the school principal as a person who is not comfortable in his new position. He does not remember the names of teachers correctly and does not have "the keys" to high school students, who confronts their principal and respond with sarcasm. In his final conversation with Marina Maksimovna, Kirill

Alekseevich tells enviously that it is unique when a talent and a job match. In addition to that, Asanova visually underscores Kirill Alekseevich's out-of-placeness: the camera follows him at school, when he walks up the stairs, nervously putting an unlit cigarette in his mouth and taking it out. Later, at the school library, the principal is depicted without a suit and with a loosen tie. He no longer looks like an authority figure—the idea, which Asanova accentuates by depicting Kirill Alekseevich bewildered among bookshelves and piles of books. Overall, he personifies a number of Soviet bureaucrats who received their job assignments despite lack of special education and background.

Inadequacy and inexperience of people in power, as implied in *Keys*, is also a reason why the young generation manages to overpower the older generations. Asanova shows Kirill Alekseevich in a state of doubt when he receives Iulia's record player and tries to decide whether he has any right to listen to the personal conversations between Marina Maksimovna and her students. This scene is emotionally intensified through the use of Bulat Okudzhava's song "A Wish to Friends," or "Let's exclaim," ("Pozhelanie druz'iam," or "Davaite vosklitsat") in the background. "A Wish to Friends" contributes to the development of Aesopian meaning on different levels. First of all, this song highlights the importance of sincere friendship, which to some extent, is a reference to the sincerity of Thaw culture:

Let's exclaim, admire each other.

We don't have to fear high-flown words.

Let's compliment each other—

Surely, these are the happy moments of love.

Let's grieve and cry sincerely

Together, or separately, or in turn.¹³³

This song reoccurs several times throughout the film, and its lyrics promote an open communication among people. Okudzhava advocates for expressing one's feelings and thoughts freely, without "fearing high-flown words." Following Okudzhava's advice, the teenage characters in *Keys* share their opinions with their teacher and one another and tell Kirill Alekseevich that they are not afraid of defending their opinion in his office.

Second, the choice of the performer in Asanova's film—Okudzhava—is significant, mostly because his name was associated with *magnitizdat* already in the late 1950s, along with the names of Aleksandr Galich, Vladimir Vysotskii, and Iulii Kim. Okudzhava's song is performed by Marina Maksimovna's students during their trip outside the city, when they also record their uncensored thoughts. By adding this song to the aural structure of the scenes with the teenage collective, Asanova develops stronger connections between the young characters and the representatives of the cultural underground, and *magnitizdat* in particular. The choice of Okudzhava is also important for Aesopian reading, especially by contemporary audiences, insofar as the poet's parents were the victims of Stalinist purges. In this regard, Okudzhava's song links the high school students and Kirill Alekseevich, and the Brezhnev generation with the Stalinist generation. Through "A Wish to Friends," Asanova emphasizes the indirect impact of

¹³³ Давайте восклицать, друг другом восхищаться.
Высокопарных слов не стоит опасаться.
Давайте говорить друг другу комплименты -
ведь это все любви счастливые моменты.
Давайте горевать и плакать откровенно
то вместе, то поврозь, а то попеременно.

Stalinism on the young Brezhnev generation that results in their aspiration to be different and more open than preceding Soviet generations.

In addition to that, through Okudzhava's song, the teenage protagonists are also linked allegorically to intellectuals during the late-Soviet period, and specifically to the writer Iurii Trifonov. Trifonov's name is associated with "A Wish to Friends," because Okudzhava originally dedicated this poem to him. The covert reference to Trifonov is important in Asanova's film, because he is known as the author of many novels, which, through the examination of private lives of Russian urban residents, commented on the dysfunctionality of the state system during the Brezhnev years. The high school students in *Keys* are also critical of the educational system and of the methods that parents and school authorities use in their interaction with teenagers. In the final scene, "A Wish to Friends" signals the changes, which Kirill Alekseevich undergoes after his sincere and heart-rending conversation with Marina Maksimovna about the moral principles of a good pedagogue. The school principal realizes that his methods and views may be outdated and that Marina Maksimovna's approach to students is more relevant and appropriate in the changing cultural situation. This approach includes challenging students' opinions and, at the same time, allowing them to question and debate specific issues. Consequently, Asanova's use of Okudzhava's song, dominant in the closing scene, symbolizes her optimistic belief in the possible satisfactory outcome of the disputes between teenagers and adults, and between different Soviet generations. The song helps to create an idea that even such a conservative, authoritarian figure as Kirill Alekseevich may give up under the influence of emerging value system. Asanova employs a metaphor and brings back "A Wish to Friends" as non-diegetic music at the end of the film, while Kirill Alekseevich is stuck in a car with a sputtering engine. In this scene, she shows the dependence of the older

generation on the younger one, when Kirill Alekseevich asks his students to help him to jump-start his car. Thus, she offers a metaphor of the Brezhnev society—an old car that does not work and that requires an assisted start from young people. This metaphor includes the idea that, without a new generation and its energy, opinions, and values, the old generation is stuck in time and remains inert, thus justifying the name given to the Brezhnev period by Gorbachev’s political advisers—“Stagnation.”

In both of her youth films—*Woodpeckers* and *Keys*—Asanova constructs an allegorical microcosm of Soviet society during the Brezhnev years, with the teenage misfits representing the cultural intelligentsia, who more or less openly disagreed with the current regime. Similarly to what occurred during the 1970s, the cultural intelligentsia split into different groups: the ones who were punished, fired, or sent into exile for their views of Soviet ideology, and the ones who, despite ideological restraints, still made a great impact on culture and on the older generation of Soviet citizens. Asanova in her films describes, through the use of allegories and other Aesopian devices, the second group of young people during the Brezhnev period. In *Woodpeckers*, these young misfits mostly act alone, while, in *Keys*, the collective of teenage misfits succeeds in affecting the worldviews of older Soviet generations. The existence of positive adults—adults who are capable of transforming or are accepting of young characters as they are—is an example of Asanova’s optimistic belief in a positive change for the Soviet society of the 1970s, which can be traced in *Woodpeckers* and is further developed in *Keys*. In his essay “Roman s zastoem,” film scholar Mikhail Brashinskii argues that “if the period between 1968 and 1974 was the period of producing the formula of life without illusions, meaning without future, then the

‘mature’ 1970s was the time for this formula to prove its viability” (97).¹³⁴ Contrary to Brashinskii’s statement, Asanova’s films demonstrate that not all cultural artifacts of the Brezhnev era were pessimistic, and some of them were quite explicit in acknowledging that the future of the Soviet country might be in the hands of young misfits—the non-conformist young generation who had developed its own values and beliefs.

6.2 VLADIMIR MEN'SHOV: MUSICAL RESISTANCE

If Asanova’s teenagers create their own informal space, in which they share their ideals and beliefs, the young characters in Vladimir Men'shov’s film *The Practical Joke* (*Rozygrysh*, 1976) choose music to be the important element that unites them against adults. Diegetic and non-diegetic music is among the various visual, narrative, and aural techniques that can be used to create an effective Aesopian meaning. In her book *Soviet Film Music: A Historical Survey*, Tat’iana Egorova studies scores written for Soviet films and suggests that at the Brezhnev period was marked by “a quaint and often paradoxical combination of the outdated clichés of socialist realism with the latest advances of modern music, which made the music of the ’70s and the early ’80s motley, eclectic and unbalanced” (213). Overall, diegetic and non-diegetic music plays an important role in youth films in the 1970s and the early 1980s, because it draws attention to the complex relationship between Soviet citizens and the state.¹³⁵ In these films,

¹³⁴ “Если период с 1968 по 1974 год был периодом выработки формулы жизни без иллюзий, то есть без будущего, то в течение ‘зрелых 70-х’ пришла пора этой формуле доказать свою жизнеспособность.”

¹³⁵ Many well-known composers, such as Isaak Shvarts, Evgenii Krylatov, Aleksandr Zhurbin, Viktor Kisin, and Oleg Karavaichuk, wrote music for these youth films.

rock music is introduced to the narrative as a successful tool of criticism of and resistance to the adult world. It serves as an allegory of the alternative cultural space and practices. It also becomes a fruitful ground for dispute among different generations, and specifically, Stalinist and Thaw generations, on one hand, and the Brezhnev generation, on the other hand.

In Men'shov's *The Practical Joke*, a group of high-school students from Moscow organize a music band; and a new student, who has recently moved to Russia's capital from Novosibirsk, Igor' Grushko, becomes the band's composer and leader. While a number of teenagers want to be in a band and are curious about Igor's music, an informal class leader, Oleg Komarovskii, is disapproving of the band's activities. Oleg manipulates his classmate Taia, knowing that she is Oleg's secret love interest. Because of Taia's honesty and integrity, a math teacher discovers that the entire class told her a lie about the upcoming test, masking it as "a practical joke." Oleg uses different methods in order to get rid of the failing grade that he receives as a punishment for dishonesty. By the end of the film, Igor' confronts Oleg and fights with him for insulting the teacher and Taia.

The teenage band in *The Practical Joke* is an example of underground rock bands, popular among Soviet youth in the 1970s, with certain characteristics of so-called vocal instrumental ensembles (*vocal'no-instrumental'nyi ansambl'*, or VIA), officially recognized by the state. Similarly to other youth films under Brezhnev, *The Practical Joke* suggests that teenagers have their own ways of expressing their feelings and thoughts.¹³⁶ They attempt to escape from the imperfect adult world into their small constructed worlds and communities, and are united by their intense passion for contemporary music. I argue that the youth band in *The*

¹³⁶ *The Practical Joke* is an example of youth films made at Mosfil'm, and has being always very popular with the audiences; its remake was made by Andrei Kudinenko in 2008.

Practical Joke is a symbolic representation of the struggle between Soviet rock musicians and the state. Men'shov's film creates an allegory of the complex relationship between cultural producers and the state in the late-Soviet period through the depiction of a teenage band that tries to survive and to find recognition, while resisting their teachers and school administrators. Men'shov's cinematic study of the young band traces the overall changes in the cultural space during the late-Soviet years and the state's attitudes toward unofficial, alternative collectives.

From the beginning of the film, it becomes evident that music plays an important role in the relationship between high-school students and teachers. Men'shov opens his film with shots of the interior of a Moscow school, with a famous song, "Farewell Waltz" ("Proshchal'nyi val's") in the background.¹³⁷ Composed by Aleksandr Fliarkovskii, with lyrics by Aleksandr Didurov, the song reads thus:

When we leave the schoolyard,
With the sounds of ageless waltz,
The teacher will walk us to the corner,
And he should return and, again in the morning,
He should greet, teach, and say farewell,
When we leave the schoolyard.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ This song is easily recognizable by the majority of the viewers who lived as Soviet citizens, because it was often performed at the end of the academic year to celebrate students' graduation.

¹³⁸ Когда уйдем со школьного двора
Под звуки нестареющего вальса,
Учитель нас проводит до угла,
И вновь—назад, и вновь ему с утра—
Встречай, учи и снова расставайся,
Когда уйдем со школьного двора.

In an important thematic reversal, the song does not emphasize teachers' role in the development of young Soviet citizens but instead privileges the lives of Soviet youth, who will eventually leave their educational institutions, evident in the phrase "When we leave the school yard," which repeats multiple times in both stanzas. The song is about leaving the place, in which young people develop not only intellectually, but also psychologically, emotionally, and morally. In an allegorical parallel with senior high-school students on the verge of graduating and starting adult life, the young Brezhnev generation was already ready to leave "the walls" of the Soviet ideological system. Even the title of the song—"Farewell Waltz"—is important for creating Aesopian meaning and alludes to the fact that the situation has changed and it is time to say farewell to the old times. This song opens the film and also closes it in a cyclical fashion, emphasizing the importance of the idea of "departing from socialism" for the film structure and narrative. However, the majority of the scenes in between the opening and closing are dedicated to the ideological and moral resistance of the young characters, made manifest in their band and its music.

Men'shov employs a juxtaposition and introduces the two teenage protagonists, Igor' and Oleg, who represent opposite types of young Soviets in the Brezhnev society. Igor' is a rebellious, confrontational teenager, who misses classes because of the band's practice; while Oleg is a reserved, highly motivated straight-A student, who seems to be well-respected by his peers and teachers. In one of the early scenes, a school supply manager rebukes the two teenagers in front of other teachers for starting a fight at school. Men'shov draws viewers' attention to the tool of teenagers' fight and, later in the film, of their resistance to adult authority—an electric guitar. This electric guitar visually separates the two teenage protagonists from each other on the screen and serves as an Aesopian metaphor for alternative cultural

practices and as a signifier of the unofficial, underground discourse. Showing the teenage protagonists with the guitar in the early scenes allows Men'shov to create an allusive parallel between the cinematic young characters and the generation of young cultural producers during the Brezhnev years. In the beginning of the film it is not clear who is right in this quarrel between the two high-school students. Through the rest of the film, Men'shov investigates the reasons behind their actions in a flashback and collects enough evidence for viewers to make a conclusion that the first type of Soviet people, represented in the rebellious teenage musician, is preferable to the second, “ideal” type of a Soviet citizen.

Terry Bright discusses interactions between the representatives of Soviet counter-culture and the state in the 1960s; however, his statements may be helpful in understanding better the dynamics of relationships between Soviet youth and authorities the decade later. Bright writes:

While Soviet youth in those days were very interested in Western counter-culture and the ‘youth revolution,’ their own conflict with the authorities went no further than an adolescent rebellion marked by the playing of electric guitars. This rather backward attitude was linked to the prevailing atmosphere of faith in communism and belief in the Party claim that universal happiness and self-fulfillment were just round the corner. Disappointment at the failure of this epoch to arrive was to hit this generation hardest of all, armed with their electric guitars but with nowhere to go. (127)

This statement is relevant for the 1960s atmosphere; however, in the context of the 1970s, these broken hopes for a complete socialist order already transformed into overall pessimistic attitudes among many young people, and especially among the ones who belonged to the cultural intelligentsia. Many citizens no longer believed the optimistic promises given to them by the

Party. For that reason, a number of cultural producers, including musicians, preferred to estrange themselves from the Soviet context and the realities of Soviet life and searched for new ways of expressing themselves through music. Richard Stites writes that, during the Brezhnev years, young Soviet people no longer easily accepted the music scenes that the state created for them and “resented the style of official performance, ‘the same buttoned-up suits, the same expressionless faces, brightened only occasionally by a poster-style smile’” (161). In *The Practical Joke*, the teenage musicians try to develop their own musical style, which is different from the one that the Soviet officials impose on them. Therefore, the introduction of the electric guitar in the same shot contributes to the creation of Aesopian meaning and suggests that there are special connections between Soviet youth and Western contemporary music. This strong link between the young Soviet generation and the West is reinforced by the fact that the guitar that the teenage protagonists use for fighting is an expensive, imported guitar. In the 1970s, the majority of amateur musicians could not afford and did not have opportunities to buy expensive instruments. Therefore, most musical equipment was handmade. In *The Practical Joke*, Igor’ and his friends are depicted playing acoustic guitars in the beginning of the film, and later, their guitars are changed, presumably, by the young musicians themselves into electric ones. The final visual transformation of the teenage band’s music instruments—from amateur, local guitars to imported, professional electric guitars and drum set—signals the solidification of the Western influence on Soviet youth culture in the late-Soviet years.

The teenage band in *The Practical Joke* is, first of all, an allegorical embodiment of numerous popular unofficial bands that had become active since the 1960s, which, according to Bright, “were created and supported by the youth themselves, and lived by the principle that they should express the feelings and concerns of their own constituency, whatever the authorities

might like them to have included” (124). In the 1970s, many of these bands performed at small concerts, in cafes, and in private locations for a closed circle of friends and acquaintances. Paul Easton elaborates further on these performances: “Concerts were rarely officially sanctioned and most took place whether in private flats or in public auditoria where the custodian either had a plan to storm [sic] or an eye to profit” (52). Bright defines these unofficial music bands as collectives, which “pushed by an irresistible desire to express their own views and feelings, wrote and played their own music and lyrics, developed original styles, and as a result were taken by young people as genuinely representing the spirit of their generation” (125). Gleb Tsypursky explains the young generation’s yearning for unofficial cultural forms and practices during the Brezhnev era by the state’s failure to provide them with adequate cultural policy targeted the development and dissemination of youth culture. He writes:

[T]he promotion of discipline instead of initiative in youth policy under Brezhnev arguably played a not unimportant role in the eventual destabilization of the Soviet Union as the population increasingly stopped participating in Party-state institutions and strove to satisfy their wants in nonofficial contexts. (44)

Through the development of various music bands and experimentation with Western music, the Brezhnev generation created its own cultural space. The popularity of these bands among Soviet youth in turn attracted the state’s attention. Thus, many of them became “engulfed” by the state in exchange for official status, a stable income, and a chance to continue performing for large audiences. Soviet youth closely associated themselves with these bands, because they usually started as amateur bands, without state control and censorship, thus expressing openly many ideas and issues which concerned contemporary young Soviets. At the same time, the state found this connection between the bands and the young citizens to be useful

in ideologically manipulating the youth. The state began to patronize many of these rock bands and, as Bright argues, “Party programmes and resolutions [made] it the duty of the Party organisation to support and cultivate amateur efforts in art, music, the theatre and literature” (126). Thus, Men'shov’s film serves as an allusion to the historical fact that, during the Brezhnev era, the state recognized the importance of shaping young Soviets through their own culture.

The Brezhnev administration used the youth music collectives to sustain state power. On the one hand, Men'shov shows the development of such music collective, consisting of sixteen-year-old musicians, within the walls of their own school; on the other hand, he depicts this band as, if not oppositional to adults, at least resisting control by school administrators. Though the high-school students practice their underground music, they nevertheless superficially follow the social rituals established by the Party and wear school uniforms and Komsomol pins. They also perform patriotic Soviet songs for the police department. Therefore, the teenage protagonists do not openly reject socialist values and continue performing the roles of obedient Soviet citizens, while playing their own music on foreign rock instruments.¹³⁹ In this respect, the story of the band in *The Practical Joke* is an allegorical examination of an unofficial band during the Brezhnev years, which eventually is recognized and accepted by the audience and becomes approved by the principal as an official school band. This narrative element, first, addresses what Alexei Yurchak describes as “being *vnye*,” when young Soviets managed to “lead creative lives that were made possible by the political system but not quite constrained by it” (147). It

¹³⁹ Men'shov depicts that the young musicians acquire foreign rock instruments gradually, not without difficulties. For instance, the viewers find out that Il'ia's drum set from Yugoslavia was a gift from his grandmother, without whom it was impossible to obtain it.

also alludes to the fact that the state gradually became in general more accepting of alternative cultural groups in the late-Soviet period.

The example of the VIAs is an evidence of state authorities' relevant tolerance toward unofficial cultural forms as long as the messages, which were included in these forms, were still controlled and censored by the Party. Easton suggests that the VIAs were encouraged and organized by the government as a counterpart of unofficial rock bands and "as a response to the demand for Western-style music" (49). Timothy W. Ryback characterizes the VIAs as the ensembles which "through their sanitized version of Western rock and roll, tempered with folk music and socialist themes,... managed to please cultural officials while cultivating a degree of sincere affection among Soviet youths" (150). Many plants, factories, and universities had their own vocal bands, which performed at various events and concerts. According to Ryback, the repertoire of the bands was approved by the state, and the VIAs "accelerated the official acceptance of rock music through their songs about steel production, grain harvests, and antifascist solidarity" (151). Unlike rock bands during the Brezhnev period, the VIAs were relatively popular at restaurants and, often were invited to perform at official state-sponsored events.

Men'shov is able to study an example of alternative youth culture more closely by adding some characteristics of officially approved VIAs to the teenage band and using them as screens to make them look less unofficial or oppositional. By examining the development of relationships between the teenage musicians and adult authorities, Men'shov provides his viewers with allegorical representations of the members of the Soviet alternative music scene. The teenage band has such VIAs' characteristics as their popularity with the public and official Party organizations. According to Stites, the VIAs were the "groups who played a hybrid of

rock, jazz, and pop with safe repertoires and who wore mod but moderate costumes, a compromise which got some of them television appearances, recordings, and concert bookings” (162). Igor’s band in Men’shov’s film also plays popular rock and eventually gains popularity at local restaurant and Komsomol parties. They adjust their repertoire to perform for the local police department and, for that performance, are even awarded with the certificate of appreciation. This certificate, which they receive in front of the school administration from one of the police officers, becomes the reason for the school principal finally to accept the band and make them “official.”

The motif of alternative culture that, at first, is rejected and disapproved by the state, and, later, is appropriated, transformed, and finally approved as a part of the official culture is also enriched by Men’shov’s use of songs performed by the real VIA The Good Fellows (Dobry molodtsy). It is a displaced reference, because the name of the band never appears in the film, except the final credits. The Good Fellows were created from the amateur beat-band, The Avant-garde (Avangard) in Leningrad in 1963 (active since 1965). From the beginning, the members of the band were fascinated by jazz and The Beatles, as recalled by Aleksandr Petrenko, one of the founders of the band.¹⁴⁰ The musicians from The Avant-garde were greatly influenced by Western music, and specifically by such rock and pop bands as The Rolling Stones, The Hollies, Swinging Blue Jeans, The Searchers, and The Shadows. The teenage band in *The Practical Joke*, which is a cinematic embodiment of Soviet beat-bands, or later rock-bands, through this parallel with The Good Fellow, is implicitly presented as being influenced by Western music as well. In general, European and American jazz, rock-n-roll, and beat music greatly affected the music in the Soviet Union during the 1970s. In his book *Red and Hot: The*

¹⁴⁰ See the official website for the VIA Good Fellows at <http://www.via-dm.ru/>.

Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, S. Frederick Starr argues that during the late 1960s and 1970s, rock music in the Soviet Union “represented a return to the quest for an individually liberating and truly popular culture” (294). Men'shov’s film creates a chain of allusions: from Igor’s band to The Good Fellows, from the real band’s obsession with European and American jazz and beat-music to the overall Westernization of Soviet popular culture in the late-Soviet period. For Men'shov, it is important to emphasize that the young generation manages to deal with their disappointment with the conditions of Soviet society by distancing themselves from official Soviet culture.

Non-diegetic “citing” of the real band that exchanged its underground position for the official status as one of the first VIAs is one of the Aesopian techniques in Men'shov’s film. The two bands—the teenage band on the screen and the real band, tremendously popular with the Soviet audience in the late 1960s through the 1970s—are juxtaposed. The cinematic story of the teenage musicians to some extent reconstructs the history of The Good Fellows. By the time *The Practical Joke* was released in 1976, The Good Fellows occupied an important niche in the public cultural sphere, and Soviet listeners easily recognized their songs. The relationship among the film’s band members is also based on their collective desire to play music not prescribed by the Communist Party. At the same time, a part of their repertoire is safe enough to be played at various official events. Thus, in order to practice music that the teenagers prefer, they ought to negotiate with the system.

The teenage protagonists have to play different types of music, depending on the setting, the audience, and the occasion. That is why the teenage band plays its own music only in the secluded space of an art studio. Polly McMichael writes that “descriptions of Soviet rock characterize its culture as one founded on informality, with concerts organized in a confluence of

effort and happenstance; the atmosphere evoked is one of conviviality and alluring exclusivity” (333). The Soviet rock movement was born from the desire to create an isolated space for communication, while, at the same time, not entirely breaking from the system. This idea is supported in Men’shov’s film narratively and visually. In the beginning, Igor’s band has rehearsals at school; however, they meet in the private space of the school photo laboratory (See Figure 36). In one of the scenes, Il’ia places a sign “Do Not Enter! Processing [film]!” to keep away the school administration from sacred teenage space. The sign originally refers to photo processing; however, in the new context, the actual phrase in Russian—“In the Process” (“V protsesse”)—may hint at the process of creating music. Therefore, this sign keeps adults from interrupting creative processes, in with the young generation is involved. Later in the film, viewers discover that the father of one of the teenage musicians is an artist who, at the moment, does not have inspiration for painting, and Igor’ and his friends use his art studio for their rehearsals. The band performs most of their songs in this location. This scene allegorically refers to the situation in late-Soviet society, when alternative culture could exist mostly behind the closed doors, away from the state authority, and also shows that the Brezhnev generation feels less restrained than the older generation of cultural producers, represented in the creatively impotent father-artist.



Figure 36: *The Practical Joke*

Men'shov's portrayal of the band slightly deviates from the traditional representation of instrumental ensembles. There are similarities that the teenage band in *The Practical Joke* shares with underground rock bands during the Brezhnev years. McMichael suggests that Soviet rock was an amalgamation of the Western tradition appropriated by musicians and Soviet traditions to which these musicians were already accustomed. She writes:

Rock musicians and fans inspired by the music of the Beatles and active in Leningrad in the 1970s were also the inheritors of long-standing Soviet cultural practices, including playing at dances or in restaurants, giving private concerts in the apartments of sympathetic acquaintances, swapping recordings and sharing information about Western and local popular music and jazz. ("After All" 665)

The young musicians play electric guitars, compose pop rock songs, and perform at various events, without notifying the school administration. Men'shov emphasizes their status of an underground band not only by the secluded locations in which they practice, but also by a special use of light. Most of the scenes in which the teenagers play their music are relatively dark with a limited light source. Only at the end of the film, after the school principal pronounces them an

official school band, are the young musicians depicted playing music in the daylight in the classroom (See Figure 37). This is also the first time when the band is depicted playing for an audience, consisting of their classmates and some teachers. Therefore, Igor's band loses its unofficial, underground status and becomes a part of the system, both narratively and visually.



Figure 37: *The Practical Joke*

The increasing diversity in music, musicians, and fans is another characteristic of rock music scene during the Brezhnev time, and can be traced in Men'shov's film. The diverse band members in *The Practical Joke* represent the phenomenon in late-Soviet culture when alternative music no longer was appreciated and practiced only by intellectuals, who originally influenced the development and dissemination of Soviet rock in the 1960s. During the first band's practice, the viewers find out that one of the teenage musicians belongs to the artistic family, another one is from the working class, and Igor' lives with his aunt and, presumably, struggles financially, because he rejects his father's monthly child support. The drummer Il'ia Vardzieli, with his distinctive facial features and Georgian last name, represents the ethnic minority. Therefore, as *The Practical Joke* allusively suggests, by the second half of the 1970s, people from different

social and ethnic backgrounds could practice alternative music and be in rock bands. This diversity signifies an important shift in Soviet alternative culture during the Brezhnev years: it became more inclusive and gradually penetrated different social and ethnic groups in Soviet society.

The lyrics in *The Practical Joke* seem to be on topics that neither promote socialist ideals nor are antagonistic to them. As such, they need to be carefully deciphered within their particular cultural-historical context in order to expose their covert meanings and the band members' hidden agenda. In general, lyrics always played an important role in the development of Russian rock. Artemy Troitsky explains their significance by the fact that, because of the strong influence of Western music, Soviet musicians often wanted to make their lyrics unique. Troitsky also writes that ideas carry great weight in the lyrics written by Soviet rock musicians because of "their weaker technical virtuosity, and the fact that the commercial and dancing functions of rock music never predominated here" (40). Sabrina Petra Ramet, Sergei Zamascikov, and Robert Bird maintain that Soviet authorities were especially suspicious about the lyrics of many rock songs. They write:

Where the lyrics were concerned, the authorities grumbled, in the early stages, because the songs were generally performed in English—which some of them could not understand and which, besides, was the language of the West. Later, when most of the songs were written and performed in Russian, the authorities fretted that the words were inconsistent with socialism. (192)

The repertoire of the high-school band in *The Practical Joke* does not include any specific references to the Soviet system, unlike many compositions of the VIAs; and the teenagers themselves write the lyrics. The young musicians rely on Aesopian circumlocution, when,

instead of openly attacking certain parts of the system, they write about birds, butterflies, and public transportation. Because their songs are not subjected to the censorship on the part of the school administration or parents, the ideas in the lyrics have a greater capacity to express the teenagers' real concerns and hopes. In *The Practical Joke*, Men'shov shows that the young musicians write their songs based on their own experience. Thus, Igor' composes one of his songs—"That is All Strange Indeed" ("Eto stranno vse deistvitel'no")—when, during a chemistry test, he ends up sitting at the same desk as Taia. Presumably, the band's other songs—"Butterflies" ("Babochki") and "Swifts" ("Strizhi")—are written as a result of the teenagers' emotional and intellectual turbulence. The first song, which the teenage band practices in the secluded space of the art studio, is a song about butterflies. At first glance, the lyrics of the song seem innocent and ideology-free:

On the trolleybus,

The windows are closed tightly.

On the trolleybus,

The people have their noses in newspapers.

But if these people turned away for a moment from the newspaper lines,

They would have shouted:

Butterflies are flying! Butterflies!¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ В троллейбусе плотно
Закрыты все окна.
В троллейбусе люди
В газеты уткнулись.
Но если бы люди
На миг оторвались
От строчек газетных,
Они б закричали:

The first stanza establishes images of everyday life in the Soviet Union, when people are riding public transportation to and from work, while politically and ideologically “molding” themselves through the Soviet press. The second stanza further develops this metaphor and allusively compares the situation during Brezhnev’s “Stagnation” with the winter time, described in the lyrics:

On the trolleybus,
Through snowy avenues,
Through snowy boulevards,
A long time before the summer,
Before hot sun,
On the winter trolleybus,
Which is barely dragging,
Butterflies are flying! Butterflies!¹⁴²

The inclement season of the year, when everything is frozen, alludes to the return of more rigid ideological and cultural constraints. With the end of Khrushchev’s Thaw and the “freeze” of the Brezhnev era, Soviet people are craving for another ideological thaw, and this desire seethes in the teenagers’ songs.

Бабочки летают!
Бабочки!!!”
¹⁴² В троллейбусе старом,
По снежным проспектам,
По снежным бульварам,
Задолго до лета,
До жаркого солнца.
В троллейбусе зимнем,
Что еле плетется,
Бабочки летают! Бабочки!!!”

Igor's band performs another song—"Swifts"—which may also be read allegorically as the younger generation's desire for independence. The swifts symbolize youth, activity, and freedom, and they stand for the Brezhnev generation of cultural producers, who search for new means of artistic expression. The lyrics are written in the first plural, presumably, from the point of view of average Soviet people:

Half-asleep, we are opening the window,
We need silence,
But, the swifts do not care,
They just want to sing, just want to sing their songs.¹⁴³

In contrast to these "half-asleep" Soviet citizens, the swifts represent the musicians, because they do not want to be quiet and want to continue singing even if they put themselves in danger. The lines in the second stanza refer to a variety of threats that the swifts may face: "the wind has taken them to the ground, or they perish from cats, or die from wheels."¹⁴⁴ Despite this danger, the swifts-musicians continue to create and to perform, and, as Men'shov's film suggests, it makes them not only strong, but also allows them to influence Soviet society:

There are no stronger wings
Over the city, than the swifts' wings.
And their wings cut the darkness of the night

¹⁴³ Полусонные мы открываем окно,
Нам нужна тишина,
А стригам все равно.
Им бы петь,
лишь бы петь свои песни!"

¹⁴⁴ Ветер на землю снес,
Им от кошек погибель
И смерть от колес.

Till the very dawn!
And cats from the attic constrict their pupils,
Children, blinking, put their fists to their eyes,
The swifts have awakened the sun!¹⁴⁵

The discussion of the music scene in the Brezhnev society also allows Men'shov to draw the viewers' attention to another important dispute between the older Soviet generation and the young generation in the 1970s: the question of rock and pop music as a profession and as a possible, and even legitimate, way of making a living. According to Sergei I. Zhuk, "the new beat music culture brought to the market those elements in the local youth culture that emphasized the businesslike, profit-oriented, and enterprising aspects of young rock fans' behavior" (104-5). Not only fans, but also some musicians became oriented toward commercial values and found their music to be a useful source for moneymaking. This new characteristic of the young Soviet generation—an ability to make even a hobby profitable—is one of the reasons for disagreements between the educators and the teenagers in *The Practical Joke*.

The heated debates on the high-school students' profit-oriented band—debates that happen in the closed space of the teachers' lounge—represent the more general disagreement between the Stalinist and the Thaw generations, on the one hand, and the Brezhnev generation, on the other hand. The film juxtaposes the younger generation's pragmatism with the older Soviet generations' idealism, most evident in the teachers' negative reaction to the teenage band

¹⁴⁵ А крыльев сильнее
Стрижиных над городом нет!
И рубят их крылья
Мрак ночи под самый рассвет!
И чердачные кошки сужают зрачки,
Дети жмурясь кладут на глаза кулачки.
Это солнце стрижи разбудили!

performing at the Komsomol wedding for pay. The high-school students' interest in forming a band is not based purely on their enthusiasm and love for Western music, but also on their aspiration for financial independence, ignited by Igor'. The teenagers' hard work results in success and recognition by the audience outside their school. Already in the beginning of the film, Men'shov creates a visual allusion to rock music being associated with profit. A group of Igor's classmates sits at the café and notices him talking to one of the musicians. The musician plays an expensive imported electric guitar, and, in the next shot, Igor is depicted counting money. The high-school students look impressed and fascinated with the pile of banknotes, and the camera first focuses on Il'ia with ice-cream in his hand, and, then, in a pan movement, cuts to the first meeting of the band in the school photo laboratory. Therefore, through the montage, editing, and camera work, the creation of the band and the financial gain are visually linked together.

The majority of adults in Men'shov's film do not accept the high-school students' interest in being professional rock musicians. Most teachers, including the school principal, are especially perturbed that music is not simply a hobby for the young people, but also a source of income. One of the teachers articulates the traditional socialist belief that only physical labor should be rewarded. To emphasize the significance of the traditional socialist views among the school administration and teachers, Men'shov fills up the teacher's lounge with the signifiers of the Soviet Symbolic: the red flag with a hammer and a sickle; Soviet certificates of honor on the wall; and the bust of Maksim Gorkii—the “father” of socialist realism—and the poster with his portrait and his citation regarding the upbringing of proper Soviet citizens. These Soviet signs signify that the school administration and the teachers in Men'shov's film belong to the Stalinist and Thaw generations and still trust and rely on the socialist system.

However, as *The Practical Joke* suggests, not every teacher depreciates the teenagers' intentions to make their living by playing in a band. The old chemistry teacher confesses that no one paid him for his accordion playing, and the school supply manager agrees with him that it is a noble thing to make one's own money from an early age. Thus, Men'shov makes plain that the opinions even among Soviet educators in the Brezhnev era were not homogenous, doing so with a touch of irony. Thus, the French teacher responds to the news about the teenage musicians' popularity with the Komsomol by saying "C'est magnifique!" He says this with some irony in his voice. The fact that the teacher uses French—the bastion of Western decadence and culture—in response to the news about high-school students' aspiration to make their living by playing in a rock band signifies the older generation's critical attitude toward young Soviets trying to ally with the West. The French teacher is depicted sitting and smoking in front of the poster with Gorkii's quotation. The quotation is truncated by the camera shot, and the viewers are only able to see the words or parts of the words: "study...be go[od]... inexhaus[table]... of the country...smart...strong...demands." The French teacher's ironic comment devalues the importance and sincerity of the words on the poster. The young Soviets deviate from the "true" socialist path, and instead of developing into smart and strong citizens who can support their country, they pursue their individual interests and desires. In the case of Igor' and his band, it is rock music, for which the teenage musicians get paid and that intervenes in their development as "true" Soviets.

The criticism of the young generation by older Soviets becomes specifically evident at the moment when school teachers discover that the teenage musicians wish to be different from previous generations, to deviate from the model of ideal Soviet citizen on their own will. Starr

argues that the notion of deviance is one of the most important ones for the development of alternative music in the Soviet Union during the post-Stalinist period. He writes:

With the rise of modern jazz in the fifties, the cultivation of social deviance as an end in itself had given place to a searching interest in music for its own sake. The world of rock picked up the lost thread of deviance and wove it into the fabric of *demi-monde* life. (297)

Similarly to other teenage protagonists in youth films under Brezhnev, the young musicians in *The Practical Joke* set themselves against not only adult authority, but also against their conformist peers. They skip classes to rehearse, do not let other students to the art studio, and do not participate in their class's extra-curricular activities and parties. They need to be different, to deviate from the social norm of a true young Komsomol member.

Despite the fact that the school principal suspects that the abundance of extra cash may corrupt their young souls, Men'shov portrays his teenage characters as people with strong morals. In one of the scenes, the director reveals that the young musicians have made a decision to donate their extra earnings to the Ministry of Health. This decision is affected by the fact that Igor's mother recently died. It is not stated implicitly that she has died because of the flaws in the health system; however, the decision of the teenage musicians to donate their money to the state institution alludes to the unsatisfactory conditions of the Soviet system. By showing the teenagers' altruistic intentions, Men'shov's film also implies that Western culture and rock music do not have a negative effect on the teenagers and, on the contrary, allow them to become more independent and responsible people.

Men'shov emphasizes the positive impact of rock music and playing in a band by contrasting Igor' and his friends to another teenager, Oleg Komarovskii. Oleg represents an

exemplary Komsomol member and a Soviet citizen: he participates in academic competitions, is a promising athlete, and already knows to which university he will apply. In the first half of the film, Oleg is depicted as a class leader, respected both by his classmates and teachers. Even though he belongs to the young Brezhnev generation, his values and beliefs seem to coincide with the ones by the older generation of his teachers. Similarly to many teachers, Oleg does not approve his classmates' interest in forming a rock band and spending their time at rehearsals, rather than preparing for graduation. He stands for the selected group of young Soviet people from the new generation, whose idealism transforms into pragmatism, but with negative consequences for the people around him. Natal'ia Miloserdova argues that Oleg is “a young pragmatist, who equanimously, cynically insults an old teacher and a girl, who is in love with him” (70-1).¹⁴⁶ Being a highly-motivated and goal-oriented person with, presumably, solid moral principles, he eventually transgresses and offends his teacher and his classmate Taia. He does this because his participation in the academic competition is jeopardized when the entire class lies to their teacher that she has never announced the upcoming test. A model Soviet citizen of principles, Oleg turns out to be motivated mostly by individualism and vanity. Through the development of Oleg's character, Men'shov gradually reveals that the “ideal” examples of Soviet citizens have a performative quality and are false at their essence. Unlike Oleg, Igor' and his band manage not only to preserve their high morals, despite their obsession with rock music, but they even present themselves as altruistic and compassionate, qualities lacking in those destined to be good Soviets.

¹⁴⁶ “...юный прагматик, хладнокровно, цинично оскорбляющий старую учительницу и влюбленную в него девушку...”

As *The Practical Joke* suggests on an allegorical level, during the Brezhnev era, the Soviet state had to accept the development of a unique youth culture, based not on socialist ideals, but on Western cultural values. Ramet, Zamascikov, and Bird argue that Soviet authorities acknowledged rock music as an important part of the popular culture since the second half of the 1960s. According to them, “rock could not be dismissed. Hence it had to be placed under surveillance, censored, sanitized, and in some instances quarantined, as if it were an infectious disease” (183). Despite these constraints, the young generation continued creating their unique songs with lyrics discreetly targeting the regime in the late-Soviet period. Thus, by studying a fictional case of a high-school band and the difficulties which the teenage musicians face on their way to fame and recognition, Men’shov is able to allude to the situation in the late 1970s when the state gradually accepted rock and other alternative music and cultural expressions. Thomas Cushman explains the complex cultural scene in the late-Soviet period as one in which Soviet citizens were able to influence the state’s decisions, regarding the incorporation of Western culture into the Soviet everyday life. He writes:

The sheer complexity of global changes and of the inability of the Soviet state to police all spheres of a complex society ensured that some cultural information found its way into the space of Soviet society. And because actors are endowed with the ability to use culture creatively to evade and resist even formidable structural barriers, it was possible for people living in the Soviet Union to draw on Western culture ‘to make something out of what was made of them.’ (19)

The 1970s already marked the dissemination of alternative culture, based on Western artistic and music traditions, and the teenage rock band in *The Practical Joke* embodies the limited empowerment of unofficial cultural agents.

Therefore, young characters in Asanova's and Men'shov's films share several common features. First of all, they deviate from the model of ideal socialist subjects and often differ from adults because of their interest in foreign culture and their desire to create their own space, not accessible to adult authorities. They use foreign music or foreign language to create their own space and to distance themselves from their parents and most teachers. Ekaterina Dobrotvorskaia explains this fascination of the young Brezhnev generation with Western rock music as their desire to experience, instead of the socialist constructed future, "the Present, even if it was actually another's Present. This was an attempt to commune with and gain access to another's lifetime: *live* [the emphasis in the original] time" (148). Thus, through Western music and culture, the young generation started to reject the Soviet state's promises about the ideal, communist future for the entire country. Second, because the cinematic teenagers do not fit well with the rest of the society, they develop their own cultural forms and practice them within their own teenage communities. They gradually introduce adults to their culture and their space—the theme that serves as an allegory for the gradual transformation of Soviet society and acceptance of newly formed values by previous Soviet generations. A unique teenage space allows teenage characters to develop more sophisticated, nuance strategies in order if not to overpower, at least, to avoid adult authority. The next chapter will examine these strategies, which teenage characters use to escape the system, in Ernest Iasan's and Sergei Solov'ev's youth films.

7.0 ESCAPING THE SYSTEM

7.1 ERNEST IASAN: SUICIDE AND TEENAGE TRICKSTERS

Two films made at the Leningrad film studio—*Please, Blame My Death on Klava K. (V moei smerti proshu vinit' Klavu K., 1979)*,¹⁴⁷ co-directed by Ernest Iasan and Nikolai Lebedev, and *Passion and Anger Will Come (Pridut strasti-mordasti, 1981)*¹⁴⁸, directed by Iasan alone—channeled the sense of disappointment with authorities through the use of Aesopian language.

¹⁴⁷ *Please, Blame* is a unique collaboration between two different generations of Soviet filmmakers—a young Leningrad filmmaker, Ernest Iasan, and a representative of an older generation of filmmakers, Nikolai Lebedev; there is almost a forty-year difference in age between Lebedev and Iasan. There are other examples of intergenerational film collaboration. More than thirty years separate Naum Kleiman (b. 1937) and Sergei Iutkevich (b. 1904), who co-directed *Bezhin Meadow (Bezhin lug, 1968)*. In 1967, Grigorii Aronov (b. 1923) and Aleksei German (b. 1938) collaborated on *The Seventh Companion (Sed'moi sputnik)*. In Soviet cinema, the collaboration of two filmmakers from the same generation was more common. Thus, Iosif Kheifits (b. 1905) directed a number of films in collaboration with Aleksandr Zarkhi (b. 1908), while Marlen Khutsiev (b. 1925) and Feliks Mironer (b. 1927) made their famous film about the Thaw youth—*Spring on Zarechnaia Street (Vesna na Zarechnoi ulitse, 1956)*.

¹⁴⁸ Two years after *Please, Blame*, Iasan directed a teenage drama *Passion and Anger*—this time without Lebedev. Like many other film directors who worked with the genre of youth drama, Iasan finished the Higher Course in Scriptwriting and Directing in Moscow in 1971, where he studied in Georgii Daneliia's workshop. Prior to that, he received his degree in acting from Leningrad State Institute of Theater, Music, and Cinema (LGITMiK) in 1964 under the supervision of Fedor Nikitin. Iasan not only directed films, but also wrote scripts for many of his films, and the film script for *Passion and Anger* was also written by him.

The two films offer two different scenarios that stem from this disappointment: suicide (or suicidal thoughts) as a response to the state control in *Please, Blame* and an active mocking and tricking the representatives of the authority in *Passion and Anger*.

In both of Iasan's films, Aesopian allegory has multiple layers, offering a set of different possible interpretations. The first layer of allegorical structure includes the cinematic representations of teenage protagonists. The portrayal of teenagers' behavior and actions deviates from typical socialist realist young protagonists. The young characters in *Please, Blame* and *Passion and Anger* express their independence from adults more openly than their cinematic peers in films by other directors and, in some instances, even have some measure of control over their parents and teachers. The film directors present many of their teenage characters as mature individuals, who can make reasonable decisions and are capable of being responsible for their lives and for the people around them.

In *Please, Blame*, Iasan and Lebedev are not interested in the transformation of the teenagers into social beings or into ideal Soviet citizens; instead, they focus on the teenagers' personal maturation and self-realization as individuals. The film centers on the development of the relationship between two high-school students, Klava and Sergei. Initially Klava is a domineering individual in relationship to her peers and to adults. She bosses Sergei around, makes him do her homework, and even manipulates him into kissing her when she is sick. Klava and Sergei's classmate Tosia has feelings for Sergei, while Klava becomes emotionally involved with one of the smartest high school students in their school Lavrik. Sergei threatens to kill himself to show Klava that he is in control of his life; however, he never follows through with his threats. After Tosia's mother dies, she leaves school and finds a job as a nurse in the

hospital. Tosia's misfortune brings her and Sergei closer together, but he is never able to erase his feelings for Klava.

The allegory of a teenager with a strong will and the ability to manipulate even adults, represented by Klava and partially by Sergei, is connected to the notion of individualism, a characteristic that openly begins to penetrate the entire culture during the Brezhnev period and that finds its outlet in young people on- and offscreen. Vladimir Shlapentokh argues that, in the 1970s, this individualism was a complex phenomenon, combined with "the yearning for collective actions" (*Soviet Public Opinion* 159). Even though individual values and desire began to play more important role in Soviet society, the importance of the collective transformed into the need for a community. We see Shlapentokh's argument manifested in Iasan and Lebedev's presentation of Klava and Sergei's story, evident especially in their interactions with their peers and their friends, Lavrik and Tosia.

The directors study the teenage collective at school and explore their lives far away from adults, when they go to the movies, amusement parks, and dances on weekends. This sacred teenage space allows the young protagonists to explore their feelings for each other without their parents' constant surveillance. Depictions of the teenagers' interactions dominate the narrative, while only a few scenes take up their relations with their parents and teachers. Thus, the role of parents (as well as other authoritative figures) is diminished in *Please, Blame*; and Iasan and Lebedev depict the teenage characters as relatively independent and knowledgeable. The film indicates that the generation of the teenagers' parents were fooled, brainwashed by the state and the authorities, the younger generation, represented by Shurik, Sergei, Klava, Lavrik, and Tosia, are more sagacious and more critical than adults. This group allegorically represents a new

group of Soviet people who question authority and who focus more on their individual problems and desires than on societal expectations.

A second layer of Aesopian allegorical reading that the directors construct in their films is the implicit discussion of taboo topics, namely suicide; these topics were generally not allowed to circulate openly in public discourse. In order to include these subjects in their films, the directors had to invent more complex schemes and scenarios, for instance, talking about related issues but placing them in different contexts. Following the logic of Loseff's classification of Aesopian devices, one may argue that Aesopian shift is at work here—a contextual, rather than temporal or geographical shift. Therefore, a broader social context is “screened,” and then “marked” by a more specific, personal example. Iasan and Lebedev do not directly address the problem of suicide among Soviet citizens during the Brezhnev years, but rather frame this sensitive social issue in a feature film about teenagers' suicidal thoughts as a result of unrequited love.

In the Soviet Union, suicide was among many topics that were not discussed outside medical journals and psychiatric institutions. Statistical information indicates that the rate of suicides increased in the Soviet Union between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. N. Plotnikov offers statistics on the number of suicides committed in the Soviet Union over the period of five years between 1965-69 and 1980-84 (41-3); even taking into consideration the growth of population between the late 1960s and the first half of the 1980s, the number of suicides among Soviet citizens slightly increased.¹⁴⁹ The discourse on suicide is enciphered in Iasan and Lebedev's film and draws attention to the question why the number of suicides increased during

¹⁴⁹ According to Plotnikov's data, in 1965-1969, the number of suicides among Russia's population was 162,588, while in 1980-84, the number increased to 250,678. Therefore, the percentage increased from 0.077% to 0.092%.

the Brezhnev administration. Representing Aesopian shift, the young protagonist's suicidal intentions, which eventually become public, implicitly hints at the overall pessimistic mood and the increased suicide rate in the Soviet society under Brezhnev's government.

The ability or even intention to self-destruct distinguishes teenagers from young children, who were rarely depicted as depressed or suicidal in Soviet films. Moreover, most of the time this self-destructive desire is missing in the young characters of Stalinist or Thaw cinematic traditions.¹⁵⁰ The characters of the earlier socialist-realist cinema were ready to sacrifice their lives for the common good or the Soviet Motherland, but it was not typical for young Soviet citizens to threaten to kill themselves because of emotional turbulence. A suicidal desire in a teenage character is not only openly discussed in *Please Blame*, but it is nevertheless the film's central idea and is even directly included in the title of the film.

We may interpret the title—*Please Blame My Death on Klava K.*—in several ways. First, repeating the sentence from Sergei's suicide note, the title implies that the film is made from the perspective of the teenage protagonist, allowing viewers to identify and sympathize with him. Second, the ironic undertones of the title become evident when throughout the film Sergei never manages to accomplish his suicidal plans. Even though he threatens to kill himself on numerous occasions, the ironic context of such an action is revealed when Sergei's parents discover a piece of paper, on which he had practiced his suicide note multiple times in a nice handwriting. Because allegories often connect one element with another to which they allude indirectly, Sergei's incomplete suicide attempt is linked to the overall mood and tendencies in the Brezhnev society might be seen as an ironic variation on the era's perpetual series of failed

¹⁵⁰ Iulii Raizman's *And What If It Is Love* (*A esli eto liubov'?*, 1961) is one of a few examples of suicidal attempts among teenagers in the Thaw cinema.

promises. A common characteristic of Brezhnev's administration, the failed promise, became an emblematic gesture and for that reason, it is not a surprise that sometimes the artifacts of popular culture directly alluded to the idea of broken promises and unfulfilled plans.

Finally, Sergei's suicide note may also reveal a shift in the perception of the enemy in Soviet culture under Brezhnev. In his note, he blames Klava for all his misfortunes—the person who is not much different from the rest of the citizens. The source of the teenage protagonist's suffering is not an abstract social enemy (external or internal, as in previous decades), but on a member of his cohort. Klava is a known figure, identified in the title only by her first name and her initial. Thus, she stands for an average Soviet young person in the late-Soviet period; and the film's title ironizes the Brezhnev era culture for also placing blame on common people for everything that has gone wrong in the system.

The cinematic representation of suicide signifies an act of free will and an escape from subjugation and suffering, and the setting manifests some Aesopian characteristics (See Figure 38). As a metaphor, it stands for freeing a subject from social constraints and control. In *Please, Blame*, I read Sergei's decision to end his life by jumping off a cliff as an act of free will. He makes this decision not because of his desire to die, but because of his realization that he has control over his death. Sergei tries to prove to the object of his love—Klava—that he has power over his life, even if it is through self-annihilation. Sergei's choice of a method of suicide is symbolic: he tries to jump off the cliff numerous times, as if trying to free himself of the earth's gravity and of the gravity of everyday life. Furthermore, the location chosen for the suicide—a high cliff on a riverbank—is visually and thematic important, too. Open space, often associated with a craving for freedom, also becomes a frequent site for dramatic action in many youth films

of the 1970s through the early 1980s.¹⁵¹ The setting can function as Aesopian metaphor or Aesopian allusion in some cases, when the emphasis is put not on a general, collective Soviet space, but rather on a personal space that lacks any specific markers of Sovietness. In *Please, Blame*, while trying to commit suicide, Sergei comes to the cliff either alone or with Tania and Lavrik and is usually depicted in front of wide, almost empty landscapes. The long-takes of open space as a background for the young protagonists' interaction may signify the tendencies among teenagers to find a safe and comfortable space, further away from the city's crowded streets, from any form of control and surveillance. These liberated locales of empty parks, woods, and riverbanks allow teenagers to express their difference in opinions and views from the ones that adult characters have.

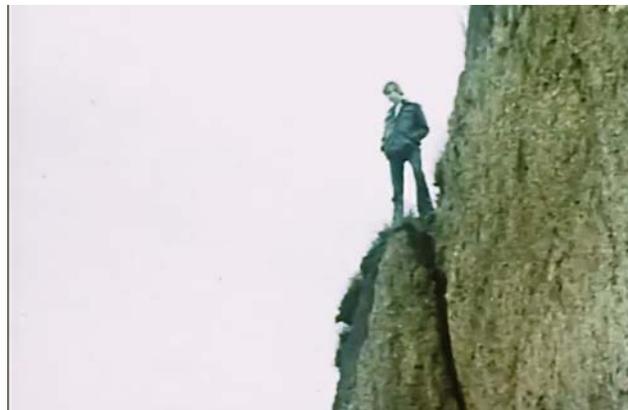


Figure 38: *Please, Blame*

¹⁵¹ The youth films by Sergei Solov'ev, Pavel Arsenov, and Pavel Liubimov also have abandoned buildings and empty public beaches as a common locale for the teenage protagonists' interactions.

However, this impulse toward individuation is not limited to provincial settings in the film. The city roof, for example, may serve as an urban equivalent. To impress Klava, Sergei stands on his hands upside down on the school roof (See Figure 39). The visually inverted position of the teenager on the screen works as a circumlocution that contributes to the construction of Aesopian meaning. At the literal level, this action can be understood as the teenager's attempt to show his uniqueness, to distinguish himself from other peers in front of his love object. At the metaphorical level, such behavior may indicate a desire to turn everything upside down: teachers' and parents' expectations, school rules, and behavioral requirements, which the system assigns to its young citizens. The image of the upside-down teenager is also an embodiment of the Brezhnev generation that craves for changes in the system.



Figure 39: *Please, Blame*

The interactions between teenagers and their parents in *Please, Blame* represent complex relations among different generations in the late-Soviet period. At the macro social-historical level, the Brezhnev generation was able to recognize that early socialist realist values upon

which the previous generations grew up were no longer relevant or adequate in the cultural and ideological context of the 1970s and the early 1980s. At the micro level of the film narrative, the teenage protagonists' craving for freedom stems from their recognition that there is often discrepancy between their parents' beliefs and actions and the moral and ideological postulates established in Soviet society. To illustrate this, Iasan and Lebedev depict the dysfunctional families and ineffective educators who have a negative influence on young people.

The teenagers' moral and psychological dilemmas develop in reaction to their teachers' and parents' unstable relations. As in many youth films from the 1970s through the early 1980s, the adults in *Please, Blame* are depicted as distant from their children. The film directors focus on parental influence over high school students' behavior, values, and beliefs because the parents are not ideal examples of Soviet citizens. Sergei is alienated from both of his parents partially because his family is dysfunctional: his parents, Rita and Pavel, fail to understand what is happening to their son and even have problems communicating with each other. Klava grows up in a single-parent family with her mother, Vera, who is trying to make a living and settle her own personal life. Vera is ambitious and materialistic, and Klava gradually appropriates many of Vera's personal characteristics and habits. The girl's inability to sing and to recognize the music notes in the beginning of the film are symbolically related to her "moral deafness," about which V. Gorshkova writes in her film review, "V moei smerti proshu vinit' Klavu K." Gorshkova, observing moreover the connection between Klava's selfishness and her "moral deafness," writes, "The specific significance of this deafness is a lack of inner ear: therefore, when her soul wakes up, defrosts, then, under Lavrik's influence the hearing, the 'inner ear' of a ninth grader,

Klava, also opens.”¹⁵² Klava’s mother is the first character who does not recognize her daughter’s potential and who continues to emphasize Klava’s intellectual “mediocrity” and lack of talents. Indeed, in the beginning of the film, Klava is individualistic, manipulative, and controlling, but later she undergoes a metamorphosis. However, these changes do not occur under the influence of the educational system or parents, but rather happen with the help of her peer, Lavrik.

The teenage characters’ non-conformity and disappointment with figures of authority relates to the use of Aesopian aposiopesis, or a deliberately unfinished sentence that requires the listener to guess or imagine the rest of the idea. Aesopian aposiopesis functions first as a screen while omitting the important part of the sentence, but immediately becomes a marker when the listener or the viewer recognizes that some meaning should be reconstructed. In *Please, Blame, Klava*, in the circle of her friends, expresses her disappointment with everything: “I am so tired of all of you: this club, this school, this town, and” She stops, but an attentive viewer can guess that logically the next word on her list would be “this country.” Lavrik helps her and continues with the phrase “and this world,” thus, excluding the word that can be defined by Soviet censors as ideologically inappropriate. Therefore, Aesopian aposiopesis transforms into an Aesopian substitution, which instead of an omission, offers a different variant, which does not necessarily follows the logic of the preceding statement. Because Klava is located on the screen closer to the audience than the other teenagers, at the metaphorical level, she may represent a spokesperson for the 1970s young generation. The adults, the Party, and the state cannot fulfill

¹⁵² “Своеобразное обозначение этой глухоты—отсутствие слуха; недаром же, когда пробуждается, оттаивает ее душа, то открывается—под воздействием Лавра—и слух, ‘внутренний слух’ Клавы-десятиклассницы.”

young people's interests and desires, which results in an atmosphere of disappointment and distress among youth, best expressed by Klava.

The young characters' frustration regarding their personal lives is linked through Aesopian allusions to young people's overall critical attitudes toward the previous generations during the Brezhnev period, which were specifically expressed in the disagreement with the Stalinist or the Thaw generations. If Thaw culture was preoccupied with the trope of the reconstructed family, in which cultural producers revised the Stalinist "myth of the Great Family" and filled it out with "the sincerity, lyricism, intimacy, and romance" (Prokhorov "The Myth" 34), Brezhnev-era cinematic families are often broken and unable to communicate with each other. Juxtaposition can be a part of Aesopian encoding and decoding systems. By contrasting Sergei's beliefs and values to those of his parents, Iasan and Lebedev establish the parallels between the Brezhnev generation and the Thaw generation.

In his article "The Myth of the 'Great Family' in Marlen Khutsiev's *Lenin's Guard* and Mark Osep'ian's *Three Days of Viktor Chernyshev*," Aleksandr Prokhorov discusses the specific characteristics of the Thaw generation as it is presented in cinema and argues that "the communal reciting/listening of lyrical poetry or the performance of Bulat Okudzhava's song provides a successful visual and aural representation of the Thaw era's Great Soviet Family" (34). Iasan and Lebedev resort to this characteristic in their description of Sergei's parents. They employ an Aesopian poetic citation, which is evident from the scene in which Sergei's father cites the Soviet Symbolist-Futurist poet Nikolai Aseev.¹⁵³ He gives Sergei a piece of advice regarding his son's obsession with Klava: "The dearest cannot be like that.... Protecting

¹⁵³ Nikolai Aseev (1889-1963), started as a symbolist and a futurist, but during the Thaw, wrote many poems with philosophical reflections on reality, for instance, in his poetic collections *Reflection* (1955) and *Lad* (1961).

your heart from melancholy, you clench your teeth and forget about them.”¹⁵⁴ Pavel is a representative of the Thaw generation who grew up on the poetry of Bulat Okudzhava, Bella Akhmadulina, Evgenii Evtushenko, and similar poets. On the one hand, he represents the part of Khrushchev’s generation that “supported political reform and the artistic avant-garde, acclaiming as their accredited representatives the poets who had begun to voice the anxieties and yearnings of their generation” (Slonim 324). On the other hand, Pavel’s suggestion to avoid confrontations and to ignore heartaches can also be an allusion to the attitude among another group of Soviet citizens toward the ideology of the Khrushchev administration, for which sincerity and trust in the state were still the defining characteristics. Marc Slonim identifies this co-existence of seemingly opposite views as an important characteristic of the Khrushchev’s years and points at the role of the Westernized inaccurate opinions, according to which “the liberal camp is opposed to Communism and [...] its members, the so-called writers of the opposition, are enemies of the Soviets” (348). Therefore, the case of Sergei’s father serves as an example of the 1960s generation, which supported liberal ideas but at the same time did not reject the communist order.

Through Aesopian juxtaposition of the young generation and the generation of their parents, Iasan and Lebedev imply that the Thaw generation and the generation of the Brezhnev period cannot have peaceful co-existence with each other, despite multiple attempts to achieve it. The filmmakers’ effort to re-connect the teenagers with their parents ends unsuccessfully, and the young characters find satisfaction in their relationship with other teenagers or in a search for their inner selves. By the end of the film, the adults disappear from the screen, leaving their children to sort out their individual and romantic problems on their own. Sergei and Klava’s

¹⁵⁴ “Милые такими не бывают...Сердце от тоски оберегая, зубы сжав, их молча забывают.”

classmate, Tania, has to mature quickly, quit school, and find a job as a nurse at the hospital because of her mother's death. Sergei's reaction in bewilderment can also be read as his disappointment that the government does not take care of an orphaned teenager who has to find a job in order to support herself and her younger sister. If in the first half of the film, the teenagers experience adult feelings and act like mature individuals while still being guided or controlled by their parents and teachers, in the second half of the film, the young characters are depicted as entirely free of adults' surveillance. This change in the dynamics of relations between teenagers and their parents may allude to the director's hope that the only solution for the new generation during the Brezhnev years was to develop differently from the previous Soviet generations.

Through the entire film, the topic of teenage disappointment and suicide shape the narrative; however, the closing scene emphasizes the teenagers' independence and also signifies their final entrance into the adult world. The allegory of independent teenagers is linked to the idea that the young of Brezhnev's generation had to develop on its own and depend on itself when it came to implement any changes in the Soviet system. In the final part of the film, the allegory is supplemented with synecdoche and metaphor. The final scene in which Sergei confesses his love to Tania and is rejected for the second time takes place in the winter in an amusement park, and the directors use lyrical music by Aleksandr Zhurbin for a more dramatic effect. The season of the year—winter—and a white, empty park are the allegorical signifiers of the historical “freeze”—an allusion to Brezhnev's “Stagnation.” The camera moves from Sergei's bewildered face to the swings covered in snow behind him (See Figure 40). As a metaphor, the empty swings stand for childhood that eventually ends, replaced by adulthood. The late-Soviet generation, whose experience can mainly be described by disappointment, miscommunication, and loneliness, need to solve various social, economic, and cultural

problems without true support by other generations, as it can be read through a number of allusions in the film. Tanya Frisby describes this phenomenon in youth culture in the late-Soviet period:

[Over] the last two decades, the younger generation seems to have felt, more than ever before, the ‘hypocrisy, artificiality, and dishonesty’ of the lifestyles of the older generations—those seemingly intelligent, refined and good-natured people, the former ‘romantic’ youth of the 1960s. Young people became acutely aware of two sides of life: the ‘facade’ and the ‘inside’; and they became alienated from society, experiencing ‘loneliness,’ social as well as psychological. (4)

The discovery of the discrepancy between what young Soviets learn both at school, from textbooks and socialist doctrines, and from their parents’ actions and lifestyles is revealed in the cinematic study of the teenagers’ reaction to their families’ “shallow” values in *Please, Blame*.



Figure 40: *Please, Blame*

A disappointed teenager who craves independence is also at the narrative center of Iasan’s second film, *Passion and Anger*. This film, made by Iasan without mentoring of an older

director, also employs a set of Aesopian devices, among which allegory plays a central role. The unique characteristic of this youth film is its allegory of a teenage trickster, who represents a young generation that can outsmart the generation of their parents and educators. In *Charms of the Cynical Reasons*, Mark Lipovetskii discusses the specific role of the trope of trickster in Russian and Soviet culture. He explains the popularity of the trickster among Russian audiences with the specific cultural and ideological atmosphere in the country:

[The] immense popularity of the trickster is mainly justified by the cultural need to provide symbolic justification to the practices of the “shadow” economy and sociality—or, in a broader sense, to the mechanism of cynical survival and deception that existed behind the ideologically approved simulacra of the state-run economy and “classless” society, and thus constituted the core of the Soviet “cynical reason.” (17)

The allegory of the trickster in youth films during the Brezhnev period describes the cultural situation in which filmmakers are allowed to display some cynical attitudes as long as they are directed toward a specific set of problems in the society, like, for instance, the educational system.

This cynical attitude among teenagers in society and on screen develops as a result of disappointment with their teachers’ actions and their parents’ parenting methods, and indirectly, with state authorities. Iasan parallels the unease among Soviet people regarding the country’s future with the anxiety that the teenage protagonist of *Passion and Anger*, Len’ka Buldyrev, a teenage trickster, feels in respect to his own future after graduation. This teenage protagonist’s reaction is symptomatic of the social anxiety of the metropolitan elite, including the cinema industry’s own filmmakers, having undergone the trauma of purges and repressions as well as

the abrupt changes associated with the cultural and ideological liberation during the Thaw. Elena Stishova also writes about a special “social depression” typical of the Brezhnev society. She argues that this pessimistic attitude in the Brezhnev culture had developed from the conflict between “the realistic and the mythological” and the question “whether we would wake up for social and civil life or would continue sleeping and seeing dreams, evoked by propagandist myths and their screened copies” (“Da’ i ‘net’ ne govorite” 52).¹⁵⁵ The partial return to the Stalinist ideological atmosphere during the Brezhnev administration had necessarily invoked a question among Soviet citizens whether this stiffening of ideological constraints was the final destiny for society or whether it would be followed by another wave of cultural freedom.

As in *Please, Blame*, the title of the film— *Passion and Anger Will Come*— also offers its viewers allegorical meaning and creates the idea of an uneasy future. This film title is a partial citation of Maksim Gorkii’s 1913 story—“Strasti-mordasti,” which has been translated for English-speaking readers as “Fat-Faced Passions.” An educated reader, who is well-familiar with Gorkii’s literary works, would immediately recognize the context in which Iasan places his characters. Gorkii’s story describes an episode from the life of a single mother at the bottom of Russian society. She lives in awful conditions with her disabled twelve-year-old son, who shares the same name with the teenage protagonist of Iasan’s film—Len’ka. The story ends on pessimistic notes, because the narrator recognizes that he cannot really change anything for the woman and her son. Therefore, referentially related to Gorkii’s story, the title of Iasan’s *Passion and Anger* already predetermines the pessimistic mood of the cinematic story, which mirrors the atmosphere in Soviet culture under Brezhnev.

¹⁵⁵ “...проснемся ли мы к социальной и гражданской жизни или и дальше будем спать и видеть сны, навеваемые пропагандистскими мифами и их экранными подобиями.”

This literary citation may function as an Aesopian parallel and advances the idea that there is no resolution to the situation in which young Soviet people or teenage cinematic characters find themselves. In *Passion and Anger*, the teenagers' parents want their children to follow the life patterns that they followed when they were younger, while the young Brezhnev generation prefers its own ways of maturation and desires to determine their own career paths. By forcing their children to make "independent" choices for the future, the adults participate in state discourse, which comprises a paradox, as described by Yurchak. According to Yurchak, this paradox includes "the announced objective of achieving the full liberation of the society and individual (building communism, creation of the New Man) by means of subsuming that society and individual under full party control" (11). Len'ka's parents "cooperate" with the state by bringing up a good Soviet citizen in the traditions of developed socialism. As S. Trofimova notices in her film review, published in *Kuznetskii rabochii*, the parents articulate official truths: "for example, the scene with the parents' arguing has a quality of copy-books, the newspaper articles, which thoroughly develop the topic of career choice."¹⁵⁶ However, the teenager refuses to follow the established scenarios offered by their parents and, indirectly, by the state. E. Lyndina, in her film review published in *Moskovskii komsomolets*, explains the unique portrayal of a young character in Iasan's film by his recognizable image as a Soviet teenager, "with his commonness, simplicity, and lasting childishness," on the one hand, and the recognition of "Len'ka's world being complex and casual in its own way,"¹⁵⁷ on the other hand. Under the pretense of giving their teenage children comfortable lives, the adult characters in Iasan's film

¹⁵⁶ "Например, сцена спора с родителями уж слишком отдает прописями, газетными статьями, разрабатывающими вдоль и поперек тему выбора профессии."

¹⁵⁷ "Ему откровенно мил Ленька ... с его обычностью, непритязательностью, неизжитой детскостью," "...мир Леньки по-своему сложен и своеобразен...."

attempt to initiate them into Soviet society, in which the young people have to follow specific rules and regulations.

However, in Iasan's film, teenagers are not as powerless as the young characters in some youth films of the Khrushchev era, and one of the ways through which they can resist adult authority and therefore state authority is through outsmarting them, or, in essence, by playing tricks on them.¹⁵⁸ In *Passion and Anger*, Iasan articulates this idea through Aesopian parallels and on-screen music reference. In one of the first episodes, during the telephone conversation between Len'ka and a rude woman who has dialed the wrong number, a famous song from the Soviet children's film *The Adventures of Buratino* (*Prikliucheniia Buratino*, 1975) by Leonid Nechaev plays in the background, to which the teenager later whistles and sings along. Even though this children's song, instantly recognizable to almost any Soviet person, is performed by two other characters in Nechaev's film—famous swindlers and liars, the fox Alisa and the cat Bazilio—we are meant to immediately associate it with the main protagonist Buratino. While the camera focuses on Len'ka, the male voice coming out from a record player narrates the story of a young wooden trickster: “But Buratino has not sunk, because he was made of wood.” Iasan juxtaposes these lyrics with the image of the teenage protagonist on the screen, thus creating a parallel between Len'ka and Buratino, both of whom are resilient and rebellious.

As a result of this association, Iasan covertly parallels Len'ka and Buratino in the story, one loosely based on Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1880). In her article dedicated to the analysis of “buratinology” as the phenomenon of Brezhnev culture, Marina

¹⁵⁸ Among the cinematic teenage characters who lose battle with the adults are teenagers in Iulii Karasik's *The Wild Dog Dingo* (*Dikaia sobaka Dingo*, 1962), Iulii Raizman's *And What If This Is Love?* (*A esli eto liubov'?*, 1962), and Vasilii Ordynskii's *Clouds Over Borsk* (*Tuchi nad Borskom*, 1960).

Balina draws parallels between Nechaev's film character and a Soviet everyman. Similarly to Buratino, who is manipulated by Alisa and Bazilio, Soviet people feel tricked by bureaucrats and the system in general. Balina offers an Aesopian reading of Nechaev's cinematic narrative vis-à-vis the Brezhnev society. She acknowledges the construction of a special Aesopian meaning in the film, and specifically in the sound track. The double-layered meaning in Iasan's film is constructed through referencing another Aesopian cinematic text—Nechaev's *The Adventures of Buratino*.

Buratino is an embodiment of a Soviet trickster in the culture under Brezhnev. His Aesopian status is concealed through his belonging to the genre of fairy tale. Iasan's Len'ka possesses characteristics similar to the wooden trickster, like his desire to disobey authority and to act upon his own will; but his importance as a trickster is "screened" by his portrayal as a teenage joker in the genre of youth film. Besides Balina, Lipovetskii and Aleksandr Prokhorov are among a few scholars who analyzed the second meaning of this literary and cinematic character in Soviet culture. Similarly to Balina, Prokhorov also points out the allegorical status of Nechaev's Buratino. He writes that the film director "makes his main protagonist ambivalent, incomplete, carrying double meaning like Orwell to some extent, staying between the two worlds—the world of a fairy tale-musical genre for Soviet television and the world of philosophical parable for those children and adults who are still able to think" ("Tri Buratino" 176).¹⁵⁹ According to Prokhorov, the figure of Buratino can be interpreted differently, depending on the context and the audience. He identifies Nechaev's character as "a social

¹⁵⁹ "Нечаев делает своего главного героя амбивалентным, незавершенным, а в какой-то степени и по-оружелловски двоемыслящим, стоящим между двумя мирами—миром жанровой сказки-мюзикла для советского телевидения и миром философской притчи для тех детей и родителей, которые еще способны думать."

outsider, who is not following moral and social norms; a character who constantly assigns new meaning to the world which he destroys and recreates” (“Tri Buratino” 172).¹⁶⁰ Len'ka plays a joke on a lady, who mistakes him for a plumber, and over the phone, promises to fix her pipes for a bottle of vodka. In his conversation with parents or teachers, he constantly resorts to jokes and irony as well. Due to his status as a joker, a trickster, Len'ka also transgresses the borders between average citizens and the state power, represented by bureaucrats and administrators.

The young trickster represents the group of nonconformist Soviet people who recognize the dissemination of “functionaries who are all for themselves,” in Stishova’s words (50). As Stishova argues, in the 1970s, “those who served the System were no longer its loyal knights. The System recruited impudent pragmatists, cynics, and careerists in its power structures” (“Da’ i ‘net’ ne govorite” 50).¹⁶¹ The young character in Iasan’s film channels his disappointment with his parents and corrupt Soviet officials openly and comments on the adult world and its flaws. He is allowed to do that by the system as long as he is not serious and just performing. Lipovetskii argues that such a trickster as Buratino is not punished for his “incorrect behavior” or transgressions (“Buratino” 137). Similarly, Len'ka does his upside-down trick at the gym in front of teachers and the principal, and is not punished by pretending that he got hurt while falling off the bars. Any other of his “rebellious” acts are perceived by adults as a joke, and Lev Gudkov assigns this kind of attitude and behavior to a specific mentality typical of the Brezhnev years. Gudkov argues that “for the type of a mass person, which was formed in late-Soviet conditions, the formula of ‘a wily slave’, whose all thoughts are directed toward survival in any

¹⁶⁰ “Будучи социальным аутсайдером, не следующим моральным и социальным нормам, этот герой постоянно заново придает значение миру, который он постоянно разрушает и создает.”

¹⁶¹ “Те, кто служил Системе, уже не были ее бескорыстными рыцарями. И система в свои властные структуры беззастенчиво рекрутировала прагматиков, циников, карьеристов.”

conditions, including those in which nothing depends on him, is the closest one” (494).¹⁶² Balina continues Gudkov’s ideas and maintains that “‘cunning’ in the context of Soviet ‘slavery’ expressed itself in full disrespect not only of the authority and its requirements, but also to its representatives—party functionaries and administrators.”¹⁶³ Len’ka in *Passion and Anger* is not afraid of criticizing the bureaucratic system, especially when it is unfair and shallow. After being refused a job at the plant, the teenager confronts the director and suggests closing the plant because of its ineffectiveness. Through concealed tricks and jokes, Iasan’s young character fights adults in the name of truth and fairness. As I. Semenovich writes in the film review “Proshchanie s detstvom,” “Len’ka’s teenage is a transition from the intuitive feeling of fairness to the precise and clear realization of its triumph.”¹⁶⁴ Iasan himself explains that his film is

an attempt to raise some problems of contemporary young people, to tell them about themselves, and, on the example of Len’ka Buldyrev, to invoke them to actively participate in that life, which they started today or will start tomorrow.... But, while encouraging this, we should also tell only the truth about us, adults, and about them, young people, and about the life—the truth, which they see

¹⁶² “Типу массового человека, который сформировался в поздних советских условиях, ближе всего подходит формула “лукавый раб”, все помыслы которого направлены на то, чтобы выжить в любых ситуациях, в том числе и таких, где от него самого ничего не зависит.”

¹⁶³ “‘Лукавство’ в контексте советского ‘рабства’ проявлялось в полном неуважении не только к самой власти и ее требованиям, но и к ее носителям - партийным чиновникам и администраторам.”

¹⁶⁴ “Ленькин переходный возраст—это переход от интуитивного чувствования справедливости к четкому и ясному сознанию ее торжества.”

around themselves daily, and which developing and forming their conscious (qtd. in “Sputnik kinozritel’ia”).¹⁶⁵

Thus, Len’ka articulates a strategically juvenile version of a criticism, concerning the shortcomings of industry during the Brezhnev years.

As a typical representative of the young Brezhnev generation, Len’ka is a rebel type, and he directs his rebellious acts against the dictatorship of adults. Iasan employs an Aesopian “trick” similarly to the one he uses in *Please, Blame*—the metaphor of reversing, “flipping” upside down the values of the generation of his parents and teachers, which he creates through the actual shots of Len’ka being upside down in the school gym in front of school administration and his peers (See Figure 41). Len’ka violates the school code of conduct openly, in front of a large audience. He “performs” his disagreement with the school system and with the system in general, and does it visually through positioning himself upside down. The message that Iasan sends to his film’s audience in the scene at the school gym conveys the teenagers’ desire to turn everything upside down: social norms and adults’ expectations for them, as well as previous ideals and values. By doing this, young people also draw attention to the flawed educational system.

¹⁶⁵ “Фильм «Придут страсти-мордасти»... является попыткой поднять некоторые проблемы сегодняшней молодежи, рассказать ей о ней же самой и на примере главного героя Ленки Булдырева призвать к активному участию в той жизни, в которую она вступает сегодня или вступит завтра... Но призывая к этому, мы должны говорить и о нас, взрослых, и о них, молодых, и о жизни только правду, ту правду, которую они видят вокруг себя ежедневно, которая, в конечном счете, воспитывает и формирует их сознание.”



Figure 41: *Passion and Anger*

As Trofimova writes, the main characteristic of the teenage protagonist in *Passion and Anger* is his “desire to understand the essence of things on his own, and not to use the borrowed, prepared formulas and norms of behavior.”¹⁶⁶ From the beginning of *Passion and Anger*, Iasan anticipates a conflict between teenagers and authority. This conflict is similar to the one between the state and Soviet intellectuals, “who refused to take the road of passive obedience to party diktat” (Sandle 156). Sandle describes this ideological and cultural tension between officials and the intellectuals in his essay “A Triumph of Ideological Hairdressing? Intellectual Life in the Brezhnev Era Reconsidered” and divides the Soviet intellectuals into two main categories. He writes:

For some the struggle was a high-profile public one; for others it took place behind closed doors. On occasions the struggle saw lone individuals lined up against the state; on others it was one individual wrestling with his/her conscience. Individuals struggled to break free of the constraints of the official belief system and sought various ways to publicize their views. (156)

¹⁶⁶ “Стремление дойти до сути самому, а не пользоваться взятыми напрокат готовыми формулами, нормами поведения.”

In the 1970s through the early 1980s, Soviet young people usually belonged to the first category and were individually or collectively “fighting” state ideology through artistic and cultural forms, hoping to introduce some changes into society.

Len'ka's status as a trickster gives him not only power over adults but also knowledge. During one of the fights with his father, he confronts his father and says, “I am an adult and I know my rights.” As Hillary Pilkington maintains in *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*, “discussion of the relationship between youth and the state had concentrated on the rights enjoyed by youth under the Soviet constitution (the right to work, education and labour protection) and the ‘active’ part young people played in politics and government”(78). The teenage protagonist of *Passion and Anger* is not only knowledgeable of the flaws in the state system and family structure and ready to use this knowledge against his own parents, but he is also aware of what he is entitled to and how he can use state privileges. Even visually in the scene with his parents, Len'ka dominates the screen: he is taller than his parents, and during their conversation he occupies an entire half of the screen, while both his parents are situated in the other half. Thus, his visual dominance within the film frame visually supports and reinforces his superiority. It emphasizes that he has agency, which eventually may help him to become more independent from the adult authority. Len'ka does not respect his parents and does not take seriously his teachers and other adults, because they represent an “outdated” Soviet regime, whose values are no longer popular with the younger generation.

Although he plays a trickster, Len'ka nevertheless also plays the role of mediator between the officially approved culture of adults and the non-conformist culture of youth. He reads a love novel by Guy de Maupassant to Zoia while she paints the ceiling in their house, thus, bridging the Soviet manual labor with classical French literature. The teenage character

appropriates this role from Buratino, whom Lipovetskii defines as “one of the best examples of mediators between Soviet and non-Soviet, and official and non-official discourses” (“Buratino” 143). To emphasize Len'ka's alliance with non-Soviet culture, Iasan depicts his young protagonist as fascinated by the culture of the European Renaissance. The teenager is interested in the physical beauty of individuals, typical of the Renaissance, and Isan emphasizes that in the scene in which Len'ka looks through his binoculars at the reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and in the scenes in which he is enchanted by sculptures and the plaster ceiling in a renovated cathedral (See Figure 42). By the end of the film, Len'ka assimilates into the system and finds a job as a painter. However, he never gives up his identity as a trickster, and in the closing scene, during the conversation with his young friend, the teenager jokes that he works as a director. This retort is not accidental in the final scene, insofar as it refers viewers back to an earlier episode in the film in which Len'ka rebukes his classmate for wanting to be a manager and not a worker. It works on Aesopian level only if the viewers juxtapose these two episodes in the film. Thus, Len'ka's critical comment alludes to the tendency in Soviet society under Brezhnev to find positions in the service sector or in the top of the party echelon, which would allow having access to deficit goods and other benefits. Being an allegorical representation of many dissident intellectuals of the 1970s, the teenage protagonist deliberately and voluntarily chooses a working-class job, despite his parents' requests to study at the university. Even though Len'ka undergoes socialization and is integrated into the system, he keeps his ironic attitude toward it, which implies that, at the level of allegory, the new generation can no longer return to the sincerity of the Thaw and prefers to stay skeptical and critical of the system within the system.



Figure 42: *Passion and Anger*

The teenage characters—Sergei and Len'ka—in both of Iasan's films are disillusioned as a result of experiencing ineffective interactions with adults and observing their parents' inability to understand and to help their children. They react differently to the injustices and disappointments of the current order, whether it is represented by the adults' actions or by the dysfunction of the parts of the system in general. They rebel, to some extent, through the attempts to take control over their lives and make their own decisions regarding suicide or through creating a special ironic, skeptical attitude toward the representatives of power. The moderately pessimistic realization that it was not possible to alter the situation was the first type of reaction to the changed conditions in the society under Brezhnev. These moods could explain the increased rate of suicides in the country. The second attitude was also common among Soviet people in the 1970s and early 1980s and has been described by Balina in her article, in which she writes: "We should not be surprised by the fact that, after a Soviet person had stopped 'respecting his kingdom,' he began not only laughing at his 'kingdom' (political anecdotes), but

also fooling and ignoring this ‘kingdom’ in various ways.”¹⁶⁷ Therefore, through depicting the teenage characters’ attitudes toward the adult order, with the help of allegories and other Aesopian devices, Iasan’s films link the young people’s actions to these two scenarios for the spectator’s behavior during the Brezhnev era.

7.2 SERGEI SOLOV'EV: TEENAGE MATURATION AND NON-SOVIET LITERATURE AND ART

One of the Mosfil'm directors who during the Brezhnev years managed to make several films about Soviet youth was Sergei Solov'ev. He started his career with the genre of film adaptation of Russian literature. Choosing this genre for his first films was a productive and safe strategy. Adapting literary works by Anton Chekhov, Aleksandr Pushkin, and Maksim Gor'kii allowed Solov'ev later to realize his own projects. Valeria Gorelova argues that Soviet cinema of the 1970s chose to adapt famous literary works for the screen because it “did not only give filmmakers a wonderful literary base, but also provided them with a certain freedom, even with the ability to comment on the contemporary problems indirectly—through the classical literature, which often served [cinema] as a unique ‘Aesopian language’” (531).¹⁶⁸ According to Gorelova, Solov'ev did not need to use literature to create allegories and allusions; rather, he used it in his

¹⁶⁷ “Стоит ли удивляться тому, что, перестав «уважать свое царство», советский человек стал над своим «царством» не только смеяться (политические анекдоты), но и просто это «царство» душить и игнорировать всеми возможными способами.”

¹⁶⁸ “...экранизация не только давала режиссерам прекрасную литературную основу, но и предоставляла им некоторую свободу, вплоть до возможности высказывания о современной проблемах опосредованно—через классическую литературу, часто служившую кино своеобразным ‘эзоповым языком’.”

film adaptations as a way of escaping from social problems (531). However, even after switching to other film genres, relying on literature and art became one of Solov'ev's techniques to create allusive commentary on the contemporary problems in the Brezhnev society.

After making film adaptations of Russian classical literature, such as *Family Happiness* (*Semeinoe schast'e*, 1970), *The Stationmaster* (*Stantsionnyi smotritel'*, 1972), and *Egor Bulychev and Others* (*Egor Bulychev i drugie*, 1972), Solov'ev redirected his focus as a director and a scriptwriter to the new genre of youth film. His early films were approved by the studio administrators and the party leaders, and, under the protection of this approval, Solov'ev turned to youth cinema, which provided him more opportunities to comment on social problems of Russian society under Brezhnev. Solov'ev's *A Hundred Days after Childhood* (*Sto dnei posle detstva*, 1975), *The Lifeguard* (*Spasatel'*, 1980),¹⁶⁹ and *The Heiress Apparent* (*Naslednitsa po priamoi*, 1982), which are often referred to as a trilogy, are about young people in the Brezhnev society and their problems. These films also share many narrative characteristics, including teenagers and young people as protagonists, themes of coming of age, and also various visual and aural elements.

Despite Solov'ev's own description of himself as a "rebellious" film director, he managed to make a number of films that were not only released in the Soviet Union, but also travelled to international film festivals with the permission of Soviet state institutions.¹⁷⁰ Despite the fact

¹⁶⁹ In his memoirs, Solov'ev confesses that the idea of making *The Lifeguard* had been developing for over four years. He wrote numerous variants of the script for this film, and even though the administration of Mosfil'm liked his idea, he had to wait in line until he got permission and money to make the film. See Sergei Solov'ev, *Assa i drugie proizvedeniia etogo avtora. Kniga pervaiia*.

¹⁷⁰ Solov'ev's *A Hundred Days after Childhood* received a number of international awards: a silver medal at the 1976 International Film Festival in Avellino, Italy, and Silver Bear at the 1975 International Film Festival in Berlin, Germany. *The Lifeguard* participated in the 1980

that most of Solov'ev's films were approved by the film studio administration, he still faced the challenges of Soviet censorship and bureaucracy, a struggle he describes in his book trilogy, *Nichego, chto ia kuriu?* Solov'ev recalls in his memoirs that for a long time *The Lifeguard* could not receive an official approval from Goskino, at that time headed by Filipp Ermash, or intervention and support from director of Mosfil'm, Nikolai Sizov. In the first volume of *Nichego, chto ia kuriu?* Solov'ev describes his long fight to have *The Lifeguard* filmed:

I finally managed to film *The Lifeguard*, even though its approval and, later, its release, was postponed for years. First, I had to make a Soviet-Japanese co-production *The Melodies of a White Night* in Japan, which Ermash and, by the way, Sizov really liked. At the peak of the boss's benevolence, I again dragged myself to Ermash with the script for *The Lifeguard*, which was one more time rejected by Sizov, who rigorously wrote on the cover page: "The Studio Mosfil'm never made and is not planning to make films about people who commit suicide."
(57-8)¹⁷¹

As this passage illustrates, during the Brezhnev era, young film directors—Solov'ev among them—had to fight the Soviet bureaucratic apparatus to make the films that they wanted to make, and part of that fight included being forced to make the films they were commanded to make as a *goszakaz* (a state order).

International Film Festival in Venice, Italy, and *The Heiress Apparent* received a golden medal at the 1983 Festival for Children's Films in Salerno, Italy.

¹⁷¹ “‘Спасателя’ мне все же снять удалось, хотя пробивание его, а потом и сдача растянулись на годы. Сначала мне пришлось снять в Японии ‘Мелодии белой ночи,’ советско-японскую картину, которая Ермашу, а кстати, и Сизову, очень понравилась. На гребне начальственного благоволения я вновь притащился к Ермашу со сценарием ‘Спасателя,’ который еще раз был зарублен Сизовым, жестко начертавшим на титульном листе: ‘Фильмов о самоубийцах студия ‘Мосфильм’ не ставила и ставить не предполагает’.”

These films, so often defined as a trilogy on maturation, provide an opportunity for my argument that the motif of maturation may itself function as an Aesopian allegory. The transitional period in the country's history under Brezhnev parallels the period in the young cinematic characters' lives in Solov'ev's films. This Aesopian juxtaposition indirectly refers to such phenomena of the Brezhnev era as the establishment of the idea of so-called "developed socialism," which Brezhnev himself defined as "a stage in the maturing of the new society when the restructuring of all social relations on the collectivist principles inherent in socialism is completed" (qtd. in Sandle "Brezhnev and Developed Socialism" 168). Consequently, the process of teenagers' maturation can be read as an allegorical parallel with the development of socialism in the Soviet Union. Mark Sandle writes that developed socialism "embodies a great deal of optimism about the opportunities which now existed to overcome scarcity, and to replace Stalinist, heavy-industrial based economic growth with intensive, balanced economic growth" (169). Ironically, the teenage protagonists of Solov'ev film trilogy do not mature in the way, in which their parents and teachers expect them to develop. Similarly, even though the concept of the positive outcome of developed socialism was heavily supported by Soviet authorities, by the mid-1970s, Soviet society diverged from the original path to socialism.

In his film trilogy, Solov'ev relies on what Loseff refers to as "sentimental Aesopian language," which he distinguishes from "ironic" instances of Aesopian language and which is not "as a rule associated only with the products of satiric or comic genres" (53). Solov'ev's youth films create a special emotionality while describing the process of teenagers' maturation, and this emotionality allows for the viewers to compare the experience of Soviet citizens during the Brezhnev era with the experience of on-screen characters. The director employs a variety of Aesopian devices that avoid satire or irony and that can be provisionally divided into two groups:

narrative and stylistic. Using the narrative as a screen, he chooses teenage characters to represent Soviet society in general and, for that reason, places them at the center of his films. Because young people are not entirely formed into “ideal” Soviet citizens, tracking their emotional and ideological transformation is safer than directly commenting on the changes through which the Soviet society was going through in the late-Soviet period. Three young characters from Solov'ev trilogy represent the same age group—youth approximately between thirteen and twenty years old. Zhenia in *The Heiress Apparent*, at thirteen, is the youngest among all the characters. The film depicts a slice of her life during the summer break, which she spends with eighteen-year-old Volodia, a son of her parents’ old friends. Zhenia is obsessed with an idea that she may be an heiress apparent of famous Russian poet and writer of the nineteenth century Aleksandr Pushkin. She gradually develops feelings for Volodia and tries to attract his attention, using different strategies. However, her hopes and dreams are shattered, when she realizes that Volodia is in love with a young singer Valeriia. By the end of the film, with the help of an old man, a specialist in pyrotechnics, Zhenia organizes a series of explosions in an old mansion at the beach, ousting Volodia and Valeriia’s older lover Vlad from the place, which she associates with Pushkin.

Fourteen-year-old Mitia Lopukhinin *A Hundred Days* is in the middle of this age group, and Solov'ev dramatizes a few months from Mitia’s life at the summer pioneer camp. Mitia suddenly discovers that he is attracted to one of the girls in his group, Lena Ergolina, who likes another student Gleb Lunev. The love turbulence is complicated by Sonia Zagremukhina from Mitia’s group confessing her feelings for Mitia. At the summer camp the high school students learn about art and life from their teacher, an architect Serezha. They also stage Mikhail Lermontov’s play, during which Mitia’s skills as an actor and feelings for Lena flourish. In the

final scene of the film, Mitia and Sonia accept their rejection by the people for whom they have feeling, thus, maturing and promising to each other to remember that summer.

Valia and Asia in *The Lifeguard* are the oldest among all of Solov'ev's characters: they are between eighteen and twenty years old. Valia works as a lifeguard at the local beach during his final days prior to starting his service in the Army. Asia is married to her classmate, but despite the fact that she is financially well-provided for by her husband, she is unhappy in her marriage. Asia visits her former literature teacher, Larikov, and later buys him a painting and an inflatable boat for his birthday. She attempts to commit suicide by drowning as a result of disappointment in Larikov and his teaching on life. Valia saves her, and the two young protagonists bond. In spite of Solov'ev's young protagonists' age differences and their varying social status within the society, all of them share common characteristics and have similar doubts regarding the adult world.

In his films during the 1970s, Solov'ev had to use some subtle cinematic language to have his scripts approved, even though he had multiple important contacts within the system. Many of Solov'ev's films differed from the films by the early Thaw generation of filmmakers in their use of the displacement of historical time, or temporal shifts. Aleksandr Lipkov describes the director's unique cinematic vision in his book *Mir fil'mov Sergeia Solov'eva*:

In the generation of the filmmakers of the 1960s, among which Solov'ev was the youngest, he stood at some distance. His slightly older colleagues were drawn to the contemporary day, to the revelation of the soul of contemporary man, and to the solution of moral problems. They turned to revolution, to the years of the Great Patriotic War, to more distant history, finding true parallels between all this and that which worries us nowadays. Solov'ev, for a long time, made films based

on classical literature, as if he did not even try to actualize it and to discover its current meaning. (49)¹⁷²

Among the most important tropes of Solov'ev youth films is the teenage protagonists' initiation into adulthood through developing relatively unconstrained thinking and independent tastes with the help of pre-revolutionary Russian and foreign arts and cultures. These tropes also function as allusions to the overall reliance of the Brezhnev society on the traditions that preceded socialist realism.

The teenage protagonists' concerns and doubts regarding the world around them are addressed in all three parts of Solov'ev's trilogy. Both *The Lifeguard* and *The Heiress Apparent* begin with a shot of a sleeping boy with the windows in the room wide open and a light breeze ruffling the curtains. Mitia and Valia look innocent and unperturbed, and when they wake up they have to face their everyday life—the teenage life, in which maturation and self-awareness become the main objectives. The depiction of the teenage characters' actual awakening in the opening scenes allusively anticipates the characters' future emotional and moral awakening. All young characters in Solov'ev's films are preoccupied with the philosophical questions of human existence, the meaning of life, loneliness, and love, and they often share their uncertainties and fears with each other. Thus, in *A Hundred Days* Mitia asks another boy from the pioneer camp, Sasha Lebedev, if he ever feels lonely. In *The Heiress Apparent*, Zhenia asks Volodia if he believes that human beings are the only living creatures in the universe. In *The Lifeguard*,

¹⁷² “В поколении режиссеров 60-х годов, самым младшим из которых был Соловьев, он стоял как бы поодаль. Чуть более старших коллег тянуло к дню сегодняшнему, к открытию мира души современника, к решению нравственных проблем. Они обращались и к революции, и к годам Великой Отечественной, и к истории более далекой, находя во всем этом живые параллели к волнующему нас сегодня. Соловьев же долго снимал фильмы по классике, причем словно бы даже не стараясь актуализовать ее, обнаружить ее злободневный смысл.”

during a conversation with Valia, Asia confesses that she has always wanted to live in accordance with her beliefs, but she has failed. All the cinematic teenagers in Solov'ev's trilogy feel lonely and abandoned, and try to find some answers in order to explain the unsatisfactory conditions of the society in which they live, as they begin their path to maturation.

The search for new life paths resulted from the changes through which Soviet society in the 1970s was going, and Solov'ev's film alludes to these social and ideological changes by tracking the teenage protagonists' emotional and intellectual transformation. Tat'ana Lotis argues that it was cinema of that time specifically that depicted teenagers differently, mostly because many films "added adolescent feelings to the list of most interesting, socially important, and serious artistic topics" (25).¹⁷³ Arguing against Lotis's statement, one can say that the opposite was true: Soviet youth and its culture was indeed transforming in the late-Soviet period. Young people became more independent, rebellious, and mature, and that is why Soviet cinema during the Brezhnev era explored young people's experiences on the way to adulthood in greater detail. In the tradition of Brezhnev cinema, Solov'ev's films examine Soviet youth from an angle slightly different from the one that the Thaw youth films offered. Solov'ev's trilogy differs from other "school films," which show generational conflicts simply as a result of misunderstanding between adults and young people. As Lipkov suggests, Solov'ev's films depict adolescence as "full of internal dramatism, of agonizing spiritual work" (73).¹⁷⁴

One of the characteristics of youth films during the Brezhnev years is the idea that the teenage characters begin to explore their own uniqueness or otherness. As Zaitseva suggests in

¹⁷³ "Скорее кинематограф 'не тот,' поскольку включил отроческие переживания в круг наиболее интересных, общественно важных, серьезных художественных тем."

¹⁷⁴ "...у Соловьева этот возраст показан исполненным драматизма внутреннего, мучительной духовной работы."

her book, since the mid-1970s, Soviet cinema included “the motif of spiritual ‘disjunction,’ psychological break, internal drama, which was distinctly marked by time not only in their titles..., but also in the ‘open’ ending of many films.”¹⁷⁵ The young protagonists of Solov'ev's trilogy embody this philosophy of “spiritual disjunction.” Solov'ev presents his teenage characters as misfits and loners, who have problems with connecting to other people, especially adults. To reveal that the existence of misfits in late-Soviet culture was not an exception from the rule, but rather a tendency, none of Solov'ev's teenage loners are usually shown alone on the screen. They all are depicted either in the collective or with their friends and peers. On one hand, their status as loners is concealed by their being visually depicted in the collective; on the other hand, the youth collective is represented as consisting of misfits. All of them share one common desire—to have a sacred space to which teachers and parents do not have access. The young misfits can be characterized by their use of either peripheral or non-Russian space: *A Hundred Days* is set outside Moscow in an old mansion; *The Lifeguard* in a Russian provincial town, Vyshnii Volchek; and *The Heiress Apparent* in Odessa, Ukraine.¹⁷⁶ Thus, Solov'ev employs Aesopian geographical shifts and chooses locations far away from the major Russian cities, such as Moscow or Leningrad, in order to avoid a more concrete historical context. A. P. Romanenko writes:

We would not be able to guess where the events take place in S. Solov'ev's films. The southern harbor, an average Russian town, a summer camp outside Moscow.... Everything here is approximate and conditional. The authors are not

¹⁷⁵ “И в фильмах возникнет мотив духовного ‘разобщения,’ психологического слома, внутренней драмы, отчетливо обозначенной по времени не только в названии..., но и в ‘открытом’ финале многих картин.”

¹⁷⁶ In one of his interviews, Solov'ev tells that his prior visit to Odessa inspired him to write a script for *The Heiress Apparent*. See, Lipkov's *Mir fil'mov Sergeia Solov'eva*. 117.

embarrassed if a spire of the television tower in the capital or a recognizable detail of Sestroretsk appears in the shot. There is an ideal country of childhood, of adolescence, in front of us, the world, built in a certain way, where the characters may express themselves more completely. (32)¹⁷⁷

Thus, rather than specifically locating his films in the instantly recognizable environments and time periods associated with the Soviet space of Russia's political and cultural capitals, Solov'ev instead depicts teenagers' emotional and psychological turmoil in settings that are not immediately identifiable. This geographical distancing functions as an Aesopian screen and helps to generalize and universalize Solov'ev's filmic examination of teenagers and their problems. Through this effect of estrangement created by geographical shifts, the director is able to propose that the old Soviet methods of shaping the new generation are no longer effective and to describe different ways of maturing in the Soviet Union.

In addition to geographical shifts, Solov'ev also uses shifts of settings in his youth trilogy. The events in all three films happen at summer camp, in the city, and at the seashore during summer break, and other places outside the school. Solov'ev avoids portraying his young characters in a school setting, with teachers, school policy, and discipline. Therefore, the film setting contributes to the construction of the tacit meaning that in spaces not controlled by authorities, young people have more opportunities to form their own individual tastes and interests, and their "spiritual disjunction" becomes more visible.

¹⁷⁷ "Напрасно стали бы мы гадать, где происходит действие в фильмах С. Соловьева? Южный порт, среднерусский городок, подмосковный лагерь.... Здесь все приблизительно и условно. Авторов мало смущает, если в кадр попадает шпиль телевизионной столичной башни или узнаваемая деталь Сестрорецка. Перед нами некая идеальная страна детства, юности, особым образом выстроенный мир, где герои могут наиболее полно себя выразить."

This sacred space that allows for the young characters to mature as individuals also lacks parental supervision. Parents' behavior in *The Heiress Apparent* is typical of that in youth films of the 1970s: Zhenia's father is hypnotized by the TV and *estrada* music, and does not notice changes in his daughter's emotional state, while Zhenia's mother is always irritated by and critical of her daughter. In *The Lifeguard* Valia's mother is not aware that her son lacks friends or a girlfriend. In order to make her happy, Valia pretends that he has them both and invites some random young people to his farewell party. The parents' absence from their children's lives also means that they can no longer impose their values and beliefs on their children, which results in the Brezhnev generation trying to form their own opinions and ideals.

Because of the lack of direct parental involvement, the task of mentoring is assigned to other adults in the films, usually to young educators. That is why the teenage protagonists of *A Hundred Days* do not dismiss the lectures on life and art, offered to them by a young educator, the sculptor Serezha, but disregard and ridicule the pedagogical methods of the camp counselor, Kseniia L'vovna. Kseniia L'vovna is a typical pedagogue, who calls the teenagers "children" and has trouble remembering their names. In the narrative, she functions in contrast to Serezha's innovative pedagogical approach. Serezha perceives young people as stone that can be shaped with the help of a skillful educator-sculptor—this is the metaphor he uses in the film. For him, the teenage years are a magical time of self-exploration and self-discovery. His pedagogical principles include not giving the young Soviets formulaic instructions of how to become responsible and loyal citizens; instead, he offers them a variety of examples from world cultures and arts, from which the teenagers can extract special meanings and values that are different from socialist dogmas.

References to world arts and pre-revolutionary Russian literature constitute another set of Aesopian devices to which Solov'ev resorts in his film trilogy. First of all, these references allow the director to create a necessary level of emotionality and sentimentality in order to make the viewers sympathize with the teenage characters. Second, by portraying the reliance of the young Soviets rely on cultural systems other than the socialist one, Solov'ev creates a cinematic omission. He does not depict the teenagers debunking the Soviet system directly, but rather shows their avoidance of following the socialist ideals and objectives while forming their personal value systems. In this vein, adults are no longer essential for the formation of teenagers' personalities, but some of them are allowed to be the medium (not mentors) through which the young protagonists are introduced to pre- or non-Soviet cultures. Thus, the young educator Serezha is the one who originally exposes the young protagonists to Italian Renaissance art and Russian nineteenth-century literature, from which they learn values different from the ones offered by the rigorous socialist educational model. It is worth noting that Serezha is not a trained teacher, but a professional artist, a sculptor, and for that reason, his methods of "educating" the pioneers are unorthodox. For instance, he exposes the teenagers to images from Italian art and asks the students to contemplate them. In the scene in which Serezha shows his students slides of Leonardo da Vinci's painting, the shot of Mona Lisa's mysterious smile is juxtaposed with close-ups of the teenagers' faces. The young people have a contemplative expression on their faces and sadness in their eyes that mirror the mysterious expression of Mona Lisa's face. This scene represents, first of all, the students' fascination with the power of non-Soviet art and nostalgia for pre-Soviet times. Second, the juxtaposition of Mona Lisa's face with the faces of contemporary Soviet students can be read more generally as an attempt to link the Brezhnev generation with the Renaissance generation. The linkage of the two different historical

and cultural epochs functions as an Aesopian juxtaposition, signifying that the Brezhnev culture was already multifaceted and receptive of other cultural traditions, besides the one dictated by the Communist Party.

This juxtaposition of Italian Renaissance and Soviet culture under Brezhnev has an allusive nature, especially because Russia never went through the Renaissance transformations, as did the rest of Europe. Therefore, the social, political, and cultural changes that marked this epoch in European history can be used as semi-fictional characteristics of the Brezhnev society in order to contrast it to the Stalinist and Thaw cultures. European Renaissance involved a revival of antiquity with its value system and artistic tastes, and referring to it in the Brezhnev culture may be, first, explained by the desire to revive the traditions that preceded the Soviet era. To create stronger connections between the Brezhnev culture and Renaissance culture, Solov'ev adds a soundtrack, which consists of stylized Renaissance music by a contemporary Soviet composer, Isaak Shvarts. The allusive link between the Soviet youth of the 1970s and European Renaissance in Solov'ev's films also represents an attempt to emphasize such Renaissance values as the veneration of the individual over the collective and the central significance of the arts in human development, values that were re-discovered by cultural producers under Brezhnev.

To emphasize the special role of art in Brezhnev culture, and more specifically in his own youth films, Solov'ev interweaves different types of art into the narrative and stylistic structure of his film trilogy. The director creates a certain level of fictionality in his youth films through the references to theater and literature, which open the possibility of discussing more boldly the teenagers' estrangement from the socialist culture. Thus, in *A Hundred Days*, literature and theater serve as a leitmotiv of Mitia's life at the summer camp. Solov'ev emphasizes the connections between classical literature and *A Hundred Days* by structuring this film as a written

work. Similarly to a novel, the film is divided into chapters, each of which has its own title: “Who is Who? Day One,” “Sunny Day,” “A Smile in Twilight,” “Misanthrope. July,” “A Sunstroke,” “Masquerade. Act One,” “Insomnia. The Middle of Summer,” and “Cherry Compote.”¹⁷⁸ As in realistic theater, the boys and girls from Serezha’s group are introduced to the teacher in a special “theatrical” way. The audience and Serezha find out their names and a short characterization of them, their hobbies, and talents through the narration by one of the pioneers. In this scene, the camera helps to introduce the main characters by focusing on one character after another. Later, theatricality defines Mitia’s way of interacting with other young people from his group. After reading Lermontov’s *The Hero of Our Times*, he transforms himself into Werner, the “skeptical and materialistic” doctor with a limp. Mitia attaches a fake cast to his leg to resemble Werner, thus, transforming into a nineteenth-century literary character. Not being happy with the identity that his teachers and parents try to impose on him, the teenage protagonist attempts to form his identity with the help of Russian classical literature and theater. Therefore, this link between the young generation in the late-Soviet period and the literary characters of pre-Soviet literature hints that, in Brezhnev culture, Soviet values were no longer the dominant ones.

Soviet film critic Aleksandr Troshin, in his dissertation on film genres, also suggests that there is a strong linkage between Solov'ev's film and theater. He argues that *A Hundred Days* is a film about the period in young people's lives when playing roles is gradually replaced by the realization that they have to face their own problems. This film is “a word about the performative, ‘theatrical’ in adolescent views, articulated with the help of theater” (Troshin 43).

¹⁷⁸ Gorelova also notes that this division into chapters, and especially the chapter “A Sunstroke,” may also refer to Ivan Bunin’s prose. See, Gorelova 533.

Troshin writes about the ability of youth films of the 1970s, and Solov'ev's *A Hundred Days* in particular, to exemplify socio-historical tendencies in Soviet culture and cinema. According to him, youth films “always respond to the outlined tendencies in cinema faster, equally reacting to the dynamics of social values and stylistic shifts” (42).¹⁷⁹ To develop further Troshin's ideas, one may argue that, relying on the narrative elements and the methods of Russian theater of the nineteenth century, the young protagonists of Solov'ev's film are able to learn how to deal with the turmoil and jealousy of first love. Soviet textbooks and formal education are designed to teach young people how to be loyal, patriotic Soviet citizens, while studying stories and characters offered by classical Russian theater allows teenagers to develop into honest, emotionally sincere human beings—an important tendency, which can be traced in many other youth films during the Brezhnev period.

In the other two parts of the film trilogy, Solov'ev relies on other art forms in order to show their significance to the teenage protagonists and to Brezhnev culture, in general. Art becomes a way of escaping from the tedious and amorphous life under Brezhnev's government. As Irina Shilova argues, “in a dull existence of the 1970s, there is a need for creating a magical world-sanctuary, so that a young person may see *Giaconda's* smile and experience a love sun-stroke” (139).¹⁸⁰ In *A Hundred Days* and *The Lifeguard*, the teenagers endeavor to make sense of non-Soviet art independently. Paintings play an important part in the narrative of Solov'ev's films, and according to Andrei Plakhov, all three films are based on “the nostalgia for high and

¹⁷⁹ “... всегда быстро отзываются на наметившиеся тенденции кино, равно реагируя и на динамику общественных ценностей, и на стилевые сдвиги.”

¹⁸⁰ “В тусклом существовании 70-х нужно искусственно создавать волшебный мир-заповедник, чтобы юный человек увидел улыбку Джоконды, пережил солнечный удар любви.”

acute picturesque style à-la Visconti and Tarkovskii.”¹⁸¹ In *A Hundred Days*, the high-school students try to solve the mystery of Mona Lisa’s smile together, while Asia in *The Lifeguard* is intrigued by Renaissance art, and especially by Botticelli’s paintings. She gives Larikov, her former literature teacher, a copy of a Botticelli’s painting for his birthday. Through this painting, she attempts to reach him spiritually and to confess her feelings for him. Solov'ev visually compares her to Renaissance women from Botticelli’s canvas. In one of the scenes, while waiting for Sergei under a tree, Asia poses next to the painting. With her dark, wavy hair, she resembles Venus in Botticelli’s painting.¹⁸² The birth of Venus from the ocean foam becomes symbolic of Asia’s emotional and sexual transformation under the influence of her feelings for Larikov. It also represents her maturation, when she eventually realizes that the values and ideas she has learned at school do not correlate with reality.¹⁸³ K. M. Isaeva defines Solov'ev’s *The Lifeguard* as a film about “the eternal moral conflict—about the contradiction between a dream and reality, or between our perception of reality and reality” (96). It is not just some amorphous reality, but the reality in which the young characters of Solov'ev’s films have to live—the reality of corruption, skepticism, and “empty” ideologemes of the Brezhnev society.

In addition to re-investigating the values of the European Renaissance, Solov'ev’s youth films suggest the existence of a strong connection between the young Brezhnev generation and the Golden Age of Russian literature. Among the Russian writers of the nineteenth century, Soviet filmmakers of the Brezhnev years chose Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, and Lev

¹⁸¹ “...ностальгия по высокому и пронзительному живописному стилю а-ля Висконти или Тарковский” (on-line).

¹⁸² Russian film critic, Valeriia Gorelova, also compares the actress Tat'iana Drubich in *A Hundred Days* with the character of Botticelli’s *The Spring*.

¹⁸³ Venus is a Roman goddess of love, beauty, and fertility. Asia embodies all three of qualities: she is a very beautiful young woman who is in love with Andriusha, and who is pregnant from her husband, as revealed to the viewers in the last scene of the film.

Tolstoi to represent the cultural and ideological atmosphere of the late-Soviet culture. Plakhov, in his book *The Soviet Cinema*, argues that the teenage characters of Solov'ev's trilogy "while becoming conscious of their individuality...experience the influence of deep-rooted cultural traditions stemming from the world of images created by such Russian classical writers as Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov and Lev Tolstoi" (31). The teenagers cite Lermontov in *A Hundred Days*, Pushkin in *The Heiress Apparent*, and try to analyze Tolstoi's novel in *The Lifeguard*. They also adapt literary identities from Tolstoi's, Lermontov's, and Pushkin's works.

Because the teenagers prefer their own interpretation of literary works, they often choose to adapt the personal traits and actions of literary characters which do not correlate with the socialist ideals. For instance, Asia, who is eavesdropping outside Larikov's class while he is giving a lecture on Lev Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina*, attempts to kill herself later in the film as a consequence of disappointment in the society around her and in Larikov's ideas in particular. The young protagonist copies this action from Tolstoi's literary character because, in the 1970s, she feels suffocated by the society, similarly to how Anna felt in the nineteenth century. Gorelova maintains that, in *The Lifeguard*, "life again is entrusted to the categories of art, and the author again suggested that his protagonists compare themselves to the characters of classical literature" (536).¹⁸⁴ Referencing famous characters from classical Russian literature and juxtaposing them with the young Soviet people in the 1970s and the early 1980s can be used, on the one hand, as an Aesopian screen, to encipher the disappointment with the societal expectations in the late-Soviet period. On the other hand, it functions as a marker to draw attention to a more complex relationship between the society under Brezhnev and its members

¹⁸⁴ "Здесь жизнь вновь проверялась категориями искусства, и автор опять предлагал героям примерить себя к персонажам классической литературы."

and, as a result of that, to “untraditional” behavior and decisions (such as suicide) of the young Soviets.

To emphasize a connection between the writers and literary characters of nineteenth century Russian literature and Soviet teenagers, Solov'ev resorts to a visual simile. This simile is not an Aesopian device, but may be used to enrich such Aesopian techniques as juxtaposition or allegory. The teenage protagonists in Solov'ev's film trilogy visually identify themselves with classic Russian writers. For instance, in the first episodes of *A Hundred Days*, one of the main teenage characters, Mitia, is introduced to the viewers with a fake moustache, which makes him look like Lermontov (See Figure 43). Later in the film, Mitia poses next to Lermontov's portrait, and his friend exclaims, “It is either you look like him or he resembles you!” Zhenia, in *The Heiress Apparent*, with her curly hair, visually resembles Pushkin in his childhood (See Figure 44). In these films, the visual comparison of the teenage protagonists with Lermontov, Pushkin, and their characters, may contribute to the construction of Aesopian meaning insofar as this “appropriation” of literary identities has elements of parody. Mitia in *A Hundred Days* looks ridiculous and comical with the fake mustache—the impression, which is exaggerated by the camera focusing on his serious, concentrated face, while posing next to Lermontov's portrait. Later, in the film, when Mitia tries to copy Dr. Werner from Lermontov's *The Hero of Our Times*, he also looks more like a parody of that literary character. Zhenia in *Heiress Apparent*, in the middle of the film, makes a spontaneous decision and has her head shaved, thus eliminating the visual signifiers of her familial relationship with Pushkin. Therefore, the teenage protagonists, in Solov'ev's film trilogy, often “adopt” literary identities from the works by Russian classical writers only temporarily. In their self-searching and self-actualization, they

usually end up developing their own unique identities, based on the cultural traditions they have absorbed earlier.



Figure 43: *A Hundred Days*



Figure 44: *A Hundred Days*

Solov'ev refers to the European Renaissance and the Golden Age in Russian literature emphasizing their transitional status. If the Renaissance was the transitional period between significantly different cultural epochs—the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment period—Lermontov represents a shift from Romanticism to Realism. Elizabeth Cheresch Allen argues in her book *Fallen Idol is Still a God: Lermontov and the Quandaries of Cultural Transition* that Lermontov represents a “transitional” Russian author, whose writings mark “the psychological

quandary of living with cultural anomie” and “the historical quandary of finding truth without a firm set of cultural values or a clear vision of the future” (19). According to Allen, Lermontov “rose above his generation by diagnosing its disorientation and inadequacies as a historical condition, by giving voice to that condition, and by confronting the quandaries that such a condition posed” (2). He represents a cultural and literary “misfit,” who is “detached from the past, adrift in the present, and purposeless before the future” (Allen 2). In *A Hundred Days*, Solov'ev uses the figure of Lermontov to draw a parallel between these two transitional periods in Russian history—Lermontov's times and the Brezhnev era. The Brezhnev years were a transitional period between the post-Stalinist period, which was still based on socialist myths and ideas, and the Perestroika years, during which Soviet people criticized and more openly rejected everything that was related to the Soviet era. This period marked a gradual switch from the sincerity of the Thaw to the irony and skepticism of Perestroika.

In addition to associating his teenage protagonists with the “transitional” poet, Solov'ev also compares them to Lermontov's literary characters. Solov'ev's citation of specific characters who are different from and often antagonistic toward their society is also an Aesopian technique. The first reference to Lermontov's characters appears in one of the scenes in which Mitia is reading Lermontov's novel *The Hero of Our Times*. While the camera shows Mitia reading the book, the voice-over, which quotes the description of Dr. Werner, belongs to the teacher Serezha. The fact that this passage is read not by Mitia, but by Serezha, may indicate that the literary identity of Werner is “imposed” on the teenager by his teacher. Werner's skepticism and materialistic tendencies do not match Mitia's own perception of himself. After an unsuccessful attempt to resemble Werner by putting a fake cast on his healthy leg, Mitia breaks the cast and abandons this role. According to Allen, the literary character of Werner has special ties with the

main protagonist of *The Hero of Our Times* Pechorin, who “is a thoroughgoing post-Romantic personality suffering from cultural anomie” (180). Werner, along with some other characters from *The Hero of Our Times*, symbolizes “some variations on [the] malaise of Pechorin’s post-Romantic times. [He does] this by initially possessing quite genuine Romantic ideals, which give [him] more consistent [identity] than Pechorin has, but subsequently [he discovers] that these ideals do not avail, a discovery that leaves [him] bereft and dispirited” (Allen 180). Even though Werner represents a character who “transitions” from Romanticism to Realism, he does it unsuccessfully because of the weight of Romantic values that he brings into the new cultural epoch. Placing this character in the late-Soviet context, it is possible to read Mitia-Werner in *A Hundred Days* as a similar “transitional” figure, but the one that moves from Soviet to post-Soviet cultural systems. Mitia has to abandon this role, because it represents an atavistic cultural figure. By trying on different masks, borrowed from classical Russian literature, the teenage protagonists finally refers to another character of Lermontov’s works—Arbenin from *Masquerade*.

The choice of Lermontov’s *Masquerade*, which the high school students stage in the old building with the walls painted by an Italian artist in the eighteenth century, is not coincidental. First of all, the setting of the play reinstates the connection between pre-Soviet Russian literature and European art (painting). Second, in addition to referencing certain literary heroes, Solov’ev includes this Lermontov’s play as an allusion to a dramatic work, which, at the time of its creation, was subjected to numerous changes advised by state censors. According to Boris Eikhenbaum, *Masquerade* had problems with censorship and had to be revised five times.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Eikhenbaum discusses the revisions of Lermontov’s play in detail in his article, “Piat’ redaktsii maskarada.”

Third, Lermontov's play is an illustrative example of a dramatic work, which, according to Allen, was able to show "how clinging to the ideals of Romanticism in its twilight could all too easily become an exercise in ideological deception" (112). This play also signifies a transitional period in Russian culture, and as Allen puts it, the "combination of a tribute to Romantic ideals and a warning against Romanticism as ideology makes *Masquerade* one of the more provocatively transitional works of the 1830s" (132). The reference to this important function of Lermontov's *Masquerade*—debunking the previous cultural ideals because they are no longer effective—is used in *A Hundred Days* as a comment on the ineffectiveness of many Soviet ideals in late-Soviet culture. Mitia feels connected to Arbenin, because this protagonist is "a post-Romantic ideologue, someone who has transformed established Romantic ideals into a belated and rigidly systematic set of self-deceiving ideas that blind him to his own folly" (Allen 117). However, unlike Arbenin, Mitia is finally able to recognize the falsity of the ideals with which he had been living until that summer. This recognition marks his maturation, both emotional and ideological.

In addition to comparing the young protagonists to Lermontov and the characters of his literary works, Solov'ev draws parallels between the teenage protagonists and Pushkin. In *The Lifeguard*, Valia's mother compares her son to Pushkin, when she shows Valia's "fake" girlfriend his childhood curls. *The Heiress Apparent* is structured around Zhenia's belief in her being Pushkin's offspring. Throughout the film, Zhenia imagines how Pushkin met her great grandmother and reads Pushkin's letters to Volodia. In the dream-like scenes, Solov'ev places the teenage protagonist next to Pushkin, who is imagined by her (See Figure 45). As Romanenko argues, the figure of Pushkin for Zhenia has a special meaning: he is "a certain image of the inner world—unstable, unclear, and changing in time. At first, [this image] is

exactly an imprint of Romantics' textbook illustration; then, [it] takes on the characteristics of the beloved young man, contemporary and funny, almost a parody; and finally, [it is] a more sophisticated portrait, in which irony and sadness are amalgamated, the image that makes us guess about a rapid internal growth of the protagonist" (27-8).¹⁸⁶ Thus, Pushkin becomes a multifaceted symbol for the teenage protagonist. He represents the cultural producer who is able to express his feelings and thoughts in his letters and literary works. He is also a nostalgic figure of the "golden age" of Russian culture, before socialism took over. As Evgeny Dobrenko suggests the myth of Pushkin includes "a conflict between a lofty image of Russia's majesty, and the bleakness of her past and uncertainty of the present" (202). The image of Pushkin in the post-Stalinist era is more related to the concept of Russianness, rather than Sovietness. Thus, the association of the teenage protagonist in *The Heiress Apparent* with Pushkin may be understood as an attempt to renew the importance of Russian identity as opposed to Soviet identity. Such an association can be defined as Aesopian periphrasis: the devaluation of Soviet dogmas is not expressed directly, but is rather constructed through the avoidance of any specific Soviet context and through the emphasis on pre-revolutionary Russian values.

¹⁸⁶ "...это некий образ ее внутренней жизни, зыбкий, неясный, меняющийся во времени. Вначале – точно отпечаток с хрестоматийной иллюстрации романтиков, потом принимающий черты любимого юноши, современный и смешной, почти пародия, и наконец, более сложный портрет, в котором слились ирония и грусть, образ, заставляющий нас догадаться о стремительном внутреннем росте героини."



Figure 45: *The Heiress Apparent*

For Zhenia, Pushkin is a source of inspiration and creativity and, as Sandler puts it, “the muse to a young girl seeking to create her own destiny” (193). Zhenia’s freedom includes her choice to continue believing in Pushkin’s creative power. According to Sandler, *The Heiress Apparent* “proves that Pushkin retains the capacity to create that zone of safety, one which can provide safe passage toward maturity for even the quirkiest young woman” (193). Even after Zhenia’s childish dreams are partially shattered by her love object, Volodia, she still remains loyal to the ideals of the nineteenth century poet. According to Romanenko, “a while ago [Zhenia’s] predecessors in the films *A Hundred Days After Childhood* and *The Lifeguard* were discovering this world for themselves, were experiencing this discovery as ‘a sunstroke,’ were learning to preserve and save it, as a sacred island, were learning to pay for their loyalty to [this world]” (27).¹⁸⁷ Romanenko argues that, unlike other teenage protagonists in Solov’ev’s trilogy, Zhenia sacrifices her illusions and tries to “protect [this world], even in the most ridiculous,

¹⁸⁷ “Когда-то ее предшественники в фильмах *Сто дней после детства* и *Спасатель* открывали этот мир, переживали это открытие, как ‘солнечный удар,’ учились платить за преданность ему” (27).

absurd, and awkward forms” (27).¹⁸⁸ However, even though, she eliminates the visual signifier of her connection to Pushkin and has her curls shaved off, her attachment to the nineteenth century literary figure is not destroyed. In the final scenes, she is reunited with Pushkin in a dream sequence, while breaking up entirely with Volodia. Therefore, Solov'ev's task in *The Heiress Apparent* is to show Zhenia's maturation, which, despite being painful as a result of Volodia's betrayal, is successful and complete. The metaphor of freedom is created by Solov'ev in one of the final scenes in which a shot of Zhenia's face cuts to a shot of a sailing boat leaving for the ocean and disappearing into the fog. This scene represents the final act of freedom, when Zhenia punishes adult wrong-doers and is reunited with Pushkin, while sitting with him on the beach in the dream-like scene. Therefore, her loyalty to a pre-revolutionary Russian poet is rewarded with her personal freedom.

Allusive references to Pushkin as a poet who is known for his subtle criticism of authority and his use of Aesopian language in tsarist Russia enrich the trope of teenagers' craving for freedom. In post-Stalinist culture, the figure of Pushkin signifies a certain cultural freedom and, according to Dobrenko, “remains a pocket of ‘secret freedom’ for the dissident intelligentsia” (212). In his trilogy, Solov'ev expresses his concerns with teenagers' desire for self-actualization and independence, and his references to Pushkin allow him to discuss these themes indirectly. Dobrenko suggests that such references make it possible “to dissect ‘eternal’ themes and conflicts such as the people and power, power and freedom, [and] political violence” (213). Similarly to *The Heiress Apparent*, *A Hundred Days* and *The Lifeguard* also include closing scenes in which a metaphor of young people's final emancipation and entrance into the adult world on their own terms becomes dominant. Mitia and Sonia, who is secretly in love with

¹⁸⁸ “...защищать его, пусть в самых смешных, нелепых и неуклюжих формах...” (27).

him, decide to accept the challenges of adult life—a life full of disappointments and betrayals. Their conversation takes place in the secluded space of the empty beach, without adult supervision. In the last scene of the film, a shot of a young boy running with a kite is juxtaposed with a shot of the kite flying and alternates with a shot of a group of teenagers standing in a field, with their heads raised, following the movement of the kite (See Figure 46). The kite is a metaphor of the freedom that the teenagers want to achieve. In *The Lifeguard*, Solov'ev uses a similar technique to the one in *The Heiress Apparent* to create a metaphor of maturation. After interrupting Asia's suicide attempt, Valia and she develop strong emotional connection with each other. In the closing scene, Valia rides a boat, which takes him and a group of other eighteen-year-olds to serve in the Army, while Asia says her farewells in the crowd left behind on the river bank. The boat is heading toward the horizon, and Valia's voice-over with the emotional music by Shvarts in the background explains to viewers that he has left everything behind, including his childhood and his old way of living.



Figure 46: *A Hundred Days*

In all three films, the teenage protagonists' final goal is to become mature, independent adults, who no longer need to defend their dreams and beliefs from their parents and educators, raised in socialist traditions. Many youth films during the Brezhnev years address teenagers' independence from adult authority as a final goal of the maturation process that includes various components: from becoming financially autonomous to liberating themselves ideologically and morally. In Solov'ev's film trilogy, the metaphor of teenagers' maturation becomes a covert reference to the late-Soviet society's gradual disengagement from socialist doctrines and requirements, dictated by the Party. Solov'ev depicts teenagers and young people are depicted in the middle of their search for the meaning of life, with their desire for freedom and self-realization. They fall in love and through the help of classical literature and arts, are transformed and mature. Each young character of the trilogy establishes borders between the world of fantasy and the real world after being disappointed. Mitia is rejected by Lena, Asia realizes that Larikov is simply a school teacher and not the source of a life "wisdom," and Zhenia is betrayed by Volodia, who not only rejects her love but also destroys the fantasy which helped her to deal with her problems.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, the maturation of Solov'ev's characters comes from crossing the line between the happy world of childhood and the disappointing dimension of adulthood, which can be also allegorically understood as crossing the line between the Soviet and non- or post-Soviet discourses. The teenage protagonists successfully enter the adult world, relying not on socialist values, but on the traditions of the European Renaissance and the legacy of Tolstoi, Lermontov, and Pushkin, therefore, exemplifying a new type of homo "non-sovieticus."

¹⁸⁹ Gorelova writes that *The Heiress Apparent* "completed the trilogy and acknowledged the final break between real life and 'figments' thrown away from the ship of contemporaneity" (536).

8.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to return to the four general concerns that I presented in my introduction, specifically: which Aesopian devices can be detected in youth films under Brezhnev and how do they specifically function in cinematic texts? Why did youth films become popular with Soviet audiences, both among children and adults? Finally, did intensified censorship have any positive impact on creative practices in late-Soviet culture?

As my dissertation has argued, cinematic Aesopian language includes an assortment of individual devices and various combinations of them as well. Foremost among these devices are allegories, which youth films in the 1970s through the early 1980s relied upon heavily. Some youth films generate allegories that focus on a positive image of the new Brezhnev generation: the portrayal of the Brezhnev generation as more liberated intellectually, ideologically, and sexually than previous Soviet generations (Liubimov's and Frez's films); the allegory of a new type of Soviet people, those officially viewed as misfits, who no longer blindly trust the government or believe in the socialist ideals, but quietly, behind the closed doors, establish their own value system (Asanova's and Men'shov's films); and the depiction of the Brezhnev generation's greater level of adaptability to consumerist culture than the older Soviet generations (Frez's film). The next set of allegories has relationships between Soviet people and the state at their core: the allegory of disempowered state authority and an empowered new generation of Soviet people (Arsenov's and Averbakh's films) and of the state's partial acceptance and/or

appropriation of alternative and Western cultures (Men'shov's and Asanova's films). The last group of films creates allegories that describe various ways of dealing with the state's repressive nature: the allegory of escaping from the socialist reality through literature and art (Solov'ev's films) and of overall disappointment with the regime and a desire to trick subjects in power or to reclaim control over your own body and your decisions (Iasan's films). In addition to this last set of allegories of pre- and non-Soviet influence on the new generation of Soviet people, youth films under Brezhnev also sometimes present an allegory of nostalgia—nostalgia for the Khrushchev liberating years and the rejection of the pessimistic present, embodied in the Brezhnev years (Arsenov's film).

All these cinematic allegories may stand alone or be supplemented with narrative, visual, and aural juxtapositions of characters from different generations, citations from previous cinematic traditions, and allusions to on-screen and off-screen cultural phenomena (for instance, music, theater, and poetry) specific to the Brezhnev era. Ellipsis and periphrasis may enrich and complicate the meaning in the youth films of the late-Soviet period, especially when some topics and questions might prove to be too provocative to discuss openly in public (such as those in Frez's and Libimov's films). Irony and parody are represented in characters' actions and their location on the screen, their gestures, and their indirect comparison to actors' previous roles or other cultural and cinematic characters (for examples, Buratino in Arsenov's film). Direct and indirect references to specific literary and cultural figures from Russian and Soviet history, who either were in conflict with official authorities or were representatives of alternative, underground cultural movements, also help to enhance allegories and make them more nuanced and difficult to decipher (Men'shov's, Asanova's, and Solov'ev's films). In addition to narrative

devices, camera angles, montage, and diegetic and non-diegetic sound contribute to the construction of concealed meaning (as is evident in Men'shov's and Arsenov's films).

There are several reasons why these youth films received recognition by general public and film critics. Partially because many of these films outlined various controversial themes, such as teenagers' disapproval of and disagreement with adult authority, teenage sexual relationships, homosexual impulses, teenage pregnancy, abortion, single parenting, and other unorthodox topics, they became highly popular with the Soviet audience. However, the second reason why these films attracted the attention of viewers of different ages and social and professional backgrounds is their potential to provide their audiences with a variety of signs, which, led by Aesopian impulses, allowed for the watching of these films between the lines. On the one hand, new decrees established for monitoring film production in the Soviet Union – specifically the decrees “On Measures for the Further Development of Soviet Cinematography” (1972) and “On The Improvement of Production and Distribution of Films for Children and Teenagers” (1981)—limited filmmakers' possibilities in discussing a great variety of topics in youth films. On the other hand, this intensified censorship ignited the use of more creative narrative and cinematic strategies among directors, who wanted to channel their disillusionment regarding how the system worked and how it tried to salvage gradually decomposing socialist ideals. Youth films reflected and corresponded to Soviet filmmakers' collective fascination with creating meaning in their films through the use of allusions, allegories, and indirect references to protect themselves from the ideological attacks on the part of the state. As Irina Shilova argues, in Brezhnev cinema, “[p]lots are constructed based on associations, paraphrases, and roll calls—the plots that destroy the fortress of isolation, that connect the present with the past, and that

remind us of universal human problems” (“I moe kino...” 138).¹⁹⁰ Having grown tired and bored with predictable socialist realist formulas, Soviet audiences found it entertaining to interpret and analyze these films by trying to read their deeply embedded messages. In reviews, letters-to-the editor, and discussion boards, many of which were published on the pages of then-current newspapers and magazines, young and adult viewers offered their readings of these films—some of which were unusual and controversial for the state press.¹⁹¹

In this regard, my dissertation argues that, in contrast to many common opinions (Valerii Fomin, Sergei Shumakov, and the authors of the collection of articles, *Pogruzhenie v triasinu: Anatomii zastoia*), the Brezhnev period was a relatively rich, fruitful period for cultural production. I support Irina Shilova’s assertion (seconded by Aleksandr Troshin, M.P. Vlasov, and Neia Zorkaia)¹⁹² that, for Soviet cinema, the 1970s and early 1980s were a productive time, exemplified in the works by Andrei Tarkovkii, Sergei Paradzhanov, Vasilii Shukshin, Tengis Abuladze, Anrei Konchalovskii, Otar Ioselini, and other directors. To the names of these filmmakers who skillfully operated with allegories and created double meanings in their films, I would add the names of youth film directors such Asanova, Iasan, Averbakh, Solov’ev, Men’shov, and others. Shilova maintains that, in Brezhnev cinema, “the search for new measures, new foundations, and new coordinates, without which local art could not exist prior to

¹⁹⁰ “На ассоциациях, иносказаниях, переключках строятся замыслы, разрушающие крепость изоляционности, сближающие настоящее с прошедшим, напоминающие об общечеловеческой проблематике.”

¹⁹¹ As an example of these diverse readings of these youth films by Soviet viewers, see, N. Tolstykh’s article “Pravda dobra,” published in the discussion section “Za i protiv” (“Pro and Contra”) on January 8, 1977. On the pages of the newspaper *Smena*, the discussion of problems raised in Averbakh’s *Other People’s Letters* and other youth films sometimes lasted several months.

¹⁹² See Neia Zorkaia’s “Khitroumnye gody,” Irina Shilova’s “I moe kino,” and Aleksandr Troshin’s “Semidesiatye.”

that, led to the discussion and revelation of social ills and to the persistent search for social, moral, and aesthetic ideals” (“I moe kino...” 138).¹⁹³ During the last decades of the Soviet era, filmmakers tried to find new ways of conveying the meanings that the state would not approve; they had to conceal these meanings in a variety of ways in order to trick censors. Similarly to Shilova, Troshin contends that, because of particular ideological tensions in Soviet society under Brezhnev, cinema became more creative in finding ways of self-fulfillment. According to Troshin, Brezhnev cinema “developed and deepened its vision, balancing between officially permitted and its own internal needs” (“Semidesiatye” 429).¹⁹⁴ Zorkaia identifies these filmmakers during Brezhnev’s government as artists “who managed first to make a decision that tallied up the diligent state service with a camera in one’s hands—there are many of those—and then transcend the problem of this decision: the decision has been made—the wings are spread” (*Istoriia sovetskogo kino* 397).¹⁹⁵ Zorkaia defines specific characteristics of this type of cinema under Brezhnev: “a unique diversity, a freedom of self-expression, a profession of faith, a revelation of the sacred that excites the soul, and not a ‘thematic plan’” (*Istoriia sovetskogo kino* 397). As I have demonstrated, many talented filmmakers chose this path and made films that thematically and aesthetically diverged from the requirements of *goszakaz*, and this thoroughly debunks the dominant critical understanding of the Brezhnev period as the “stagnate phase” in late-Soviet culture.

¹⁹³ “Поиск новых мер, новых опор и новых координат, без которых до тех пор не могло существовать отечественного искусства, вел к обсуждению и розоблачению социальных недугов и к упорному поиску социальных, моральных, эстетических идеалов.”

¹⁹⁴ “Оно развиалось, углубляло свое зрение, балансируя между официально разрешенным и собственными внутренними потребностями.”

¹⁹⁵ “[те художники], которые сумели сначала принять решение, подводящее черту под усердной государственной службой с камерой в руках—их немало!—а далее воспарить и над самой проблемой решения: выбор сделан—крылья расправились.”

This cinema “anticipated the social milieu due to its ambivalence” (*Zorkaia Istoriia sovetskogo kino* 396) and, “being born from constraints, was our mirror that reminded us about the sense of existence, about the ideals of beauty and harmony” (Shilova “I moe kino...” 173). As my dissertation has suggested, the microcosm of relations between young characters and adults offered by Soviet filmmakers during the Brezhnev era represents the macrocosm of relations between the state and Soviet people. Youth films in the 1970s through the early 1980s depict educators and older family members as focusing on their own problems, lacking time for their children and students, and, in general, not being able to understand them. These generational relationships allude to the problems of Brezhnev’s governance, with multiple attempts to stabilize the economic situation in the country; to keep Soviet citizen in ideological restraint; and to control the cultural sphere through the mechanisms of prohibition, the shelving of literary and cinematographic texts, and the exiling of cultural producers. The problems in the economic structure of the Soviet Union in the 1970s through the early 1980s, such as a limited market for consumer goods and services, resulted in the emergence of a “second,” or “shadow,” economy that, according to cultural anthropologist Steven S. Sampson, “exacerbates the gap between society and the State, between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (120). Asanova, Averbakh, Solov'ev, Iasan, Frez, and others, are able to present the relations between Soviet teenagers and their parents and teachers with complexity and ambiguity, creating in cinematic discourse a parallel “us vs. them.”

In the context of late-Soviet cinema, the image of a teenager becomes essential for creating this dichotomy of us/Soviet citizens and them/Soviet authorities, especially when signaling shifts in the power structure. Liubov' Arkus argues that “school as a territory was a dangerous structure for cinema because it always looks like a model of the state,” and for that

reason, “school films” did not really exist during Stalinism.¹⁹⁶ Placing young characters within the walls of a school or any other place, where the conflicts between teenagers and their teachers and parents develop “naturally,” allows filmmakers to allude either to the state’s insatiable desire to suppress any attempts of independence or to the attempts by subdued participants of these power relationship to declare their rights to freedom. Developing further the idea that the space of school in cinema may potentially evoke Aesopian impulses, Evgenii Margolit writes that “the appearance of a child as a central character of cinematography every time seems to be connected to moments of liberalization (to one or another degree) of the Soviet regime” (“Prizrak svobody”).¹⁹⁷ The changes in the representations of children in popular culture did not always follow the changes in the images of teenagers in Soviet cinema. As it has been illustrated in my dissertation, it is specifically the representations of young people in their teens that signal liberating processes in Soviet culture.

After the Brezhnev years, Soviet cinema and popular culture had rebellious, ignorant, selfish, and often cruel teenagers at the center of their focus. The genre of the youth film did not die with Mikhail Gorbachev’s entering the political arena; rather, the Perestroika and *glasnost’* years saw the emergence of the *chernukha* youth films, with their more gloomy content and outlook.¹⁹⁸ Eliot Borenstein emphasizes the historical continuity between Brezhnev culture and the culture under Gorbachev and argues that “the flowering of dissent and experimentation that

¹⁹⁶ “Во-первых, школа как территория была фактурой слишком опасной для кино, т. к. она всегда выглядит как модель государства.”

¹⁹⁷ “...появление ребенка в качестве центрального персонажа кинематографа оказывается всякий раз связано с моментами либерализации (в той или иной степени) советского режима.”

¹⁹⁸ *Chernukha* derives from the word “chernyi,” which means “black,” and is associated with a gloomy, pessimistic depiction of Soviet society during the Gorbachev years. For more detailed study of *chernukha* films during Perestroika, see Seth Graham, “Chernukha and Russian Film” and Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinskii, *The Zero Hour*.

characterized perestroika did not come from nowhere” (7). Youth films during the Brezhnev years cracked open the doors for the filmmakers working during Gorbachev’s administration and gave them ideas about how to approach youth themes and present youth characters in unconventional, and even provocative, ways. Some narrative and cinematic features of Brezhnev youth films were even appropriated by Perestroika youth films, at the same time as supposedly new themes and tropes entered Soviet cinema during Gorbachev’s period of “openness.”

Films about young people made in the second half of the 1980s also have their focus on a conflict between youths and adults, as well as conflicts among young people. In these films, according to Michael Brashinskii and Andrew Horton, “troubled youth present a search for new values and thus a challenge to a crumbling socialist tradition” (68). Borenstein explains Perestroika cinema’s interest in youth by the fact that, ironically, more liberal times led to “the moral failings of wayward youth”—something that was worth focusing on. He writes:

Chernukha indulged its audiences’ fears of sexually depraved, drug-taking, irreverent young people devoid of guiding moral principles. To a large extent, chernukha was about a crisis that was at least as much pedagogical as it was moral: how can good young people be raised in such treacherous times? (15)

Similarly to the Brezhnev youth films, Perestroika films reference youth subculture and youth communities, young misfits and their struggle with previously established values and ideals. However, *chernukha* films treat the characters and the problems differently from the previous cinematic traditions. They more openly discuss teenage sexuality, promiscuity, rape, violence, and drug and alcohol problems among young Soviets—all of this would have been considered inappropriate for socialist society under previous regimes, and would therefore seek refuge in

Aesopian techniques. The description of young characters as dangerous, delinquent, and revolting entered Soviet cinema only during the Perestroika period (while in American cinema these themes were already present in the 1950s) with its movement toward “new openness” and “pluralism of opinions.”

Perestroika films in which the young characters decline or even destroy the adults’ authority and criticize and ridicule Soviet power began with Rolan Bykov’s “transitional” youth film *Scarecrow* (*Chuchelo*, 1983).¹⁹⁹ The list of films with cruel or indifferent young characters continued with Vadim Abdrashitov’s *Pliumbum, or A Dangerous Game* (*Pliumbum, ili opasnaia igra*, 1986), Viacheslav Sorokin’s *Temptation* (*Soblazn*, 1987), and Valentine Pichul’s *Little Vera* (*Malen'kaia Vera*, 1988). The theme of cruelty and selfishness of a young generation of Soviet people represents a shift in cultural discourse, with the further weakening of state power. Among the films that develop the topics of independent, rebellious teenagers, and even transform them into moral and emotional monsters, are El'dar Riazanov’s *Dear Elena Sergeevna* (*Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna*, 1988), Valerii Kurykin’s *Blackmailer* (*Shantazhist*, 1987), Valerii Ogorodnikov’s *The Burglar* (*Vzломshchik*, 1986), and Isaak Fridberg’s *Little Doll* (*Kukolka*, 1988). This group of films depicts teenagers who are not only merciless and selfish, but also powerful enough to hurt adults and to distance their teachers and parents from their own cruel teenage world. The young characters in these films negate the authority of parents and educators; this youthful behavior in some films is cast as a drive to control and even assault adults, both physically and verbally. Thus, the Brezhnev era films helped give rise to more realistic filmmaking such as the *chernukha* films.

¹⁹⁹ For more on Bykov’s film see Aleksandr Gershkovich’s “*Scarecrow and Kindergarten: A Critical Analysis and Comparison*” and Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov’s “*Children at War: Films by Gubenko, Evtushenko, and Bykov.*”

Chernukha youth films did not varnish the bleak reality of the last years of the Soviet era and showed all the ills of late-Soviet society through the representations of young people as a product of the decomposing system. As such, the use of Aesopian strategies in culture and cinema was mainly discarded during the *glasnost'* years because there was no need to conceal messages during officially proclaimed times of “openness.” Instead of Aesopian language, other methods and strategies permeated cultural texts. Kitsch, *steb*, and sarcasm were among these techniques. In the context of Perestroika culture, kitsch was used by the “officially” disempowered groups as a strategized way of expressing their disappointment with authorities, of mocking and, therefore, criticizing the traditional cultural forms. It became one of the dominant aesthetic techniques that Soviet intellectuals and cultural producers used in order to ridicule and devalue the socialist traditions, while still relying on and using them.

The examples of kitsch can be found in Sergei Solov'ev's Perestroika youth films *Assa* (1988) and *Black Rose is an Emblem of Sorrow, Red Rose is an Emblem of Love* (*Chernaia roza—emblema pechali, krasnaia roza—emblema liubvi*, 1989).²⁰⁰ According to Aleksei Yurchak, *steb* was another common mode of communication and cultural production in the second half of the 1980s.²⁰¹ He defines it as a special form of irony that “required such a degree of *overidentification* (emphasis in the original) with the object, person, or idea at which this *steb* was directed that it was often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of the two” (“Everything Was Forever” 250). It was difficult to

²⁰⁰ More on kitch in Soviet culture and cinema, see Svetlana Boym's “Perestroika of Kitsch: Sergei Solov'ev's *Black Rose, Red Rose*,” Ia. M. Iakovleva's “Kich i parakich: rozhdenie iskusstva iz prozy zhizni,” and Olga Klimova's “Anti-Soviet Kitsch in Perestroika Melodrama: Sergei Solov'ev's *Assa*.”

²⁰¹ For more detailed study of *steb*, see Aleksei Yurchak and Dominic Boyer's “American *Stiob*.”

distinguish the borders between irony and seriousness in texts created by the practitioners of *steb*. Nevertheless, unlike the users of Aesopian language, *steb* practitioners would foreground their ideas directly, rather than resorting to enciphering messages for a specific audience. Sarcasm was also associated with the reaction of the Perestroika generation to socialist simulacra in the last years of the Soviet order. Sarcastic young characters who constantly attack and make fun of the representatives of power are at the narrative center of Karen Shakhnazarov's *The Messenger* (*Kur'er*, 1986) and Andrei Eshpai's *The Joker* (*Shut*, 1988). The declining role of Aesopian techniques and the increased significance of sarcasm, *steb*, and kitsch resulted from *chernukha* philosophy and aesthetics based on the open revelation of truths. Borenstein argues that *chernukha* was “a form of muckraking” (12), “the absence of systematic lying” (12), and “the rejection of enforced optimism based on lies and an insistence on uncovering long-suppressed truths” (13). In this respect, the strategies of cultural production during Perestroika had an opposite goal from Aesopian constructions of meanings: instead of skillfully concealing meanings, filmmakers, writers, and artists made their intentions and ideas open and direct for audience consumption.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the socialist system that for the previous decade was first criticized, then mocked, ridiculed, and devalued, finally ceased to exist. With crisis in production and distribution, cinema entered a temporary phase of anarchy. The system of censorship collapsed, and so did the filmmakers' urges to create narratively and stylistically sophisticated films. With the lack of ideological constraints, filmmakers did not have to play with cinematic techniques in order to create concealed meanings. Many films in the 1990s, with poorly developed narratives and basic stylistic elements, exemplified the creative apathy among cultural producers. Even though the 1990s was the decade that was the most liberated from

socialist ideology, teenagers as main cinematic protagonists almost disappeared from the screen. With some exceptions, teenagers in post-Soviet cinema were usually depicted as victims of their peers, for example, in Stanislav Govorukhin's *The Rifleman of the Voroshilov Regiment* (*Voroshilovskii strelok*, 1999). In the late 1990s, Russian filmmakers briefly depicted their young characters reacting to the dreadful economic and political situation in the country by dreaming about better life and better places, for instance, in Valerii Todorovskii's *The Land of Deaf* (*Strana glukhikh*, 1998) and Dmitrii Meskhiev's *The American Bet* (*Amerikanka*, 1998).

One of the cult young figures of the cinema of the 1990s, Danila Bagrov in Aleksei Balabanov's *Brother* (*Brat*, 1997), embodies as the inverse of the young cinematic characters during the Brezhnev years, though he, too, desires truth and justice. On the one hand, he is portrayed as highly patriotic, but emotionless; on the other hand, he is independent socially and financially, functioning far beyond the capacities we would associate with teenage individuals. His mercilessness and cold-bloodedness would be adopted and embodied in other cinematic teenagers in the 2000s, in such films as Sergei Bodrov's *Sisters* (*Sestry*, 2001), Fedor Popov's *Caucasian Roulette* (*Kavkazskaia ruletka*, 2002), Marina Liubakova's *Cruelty* (*Zhestokost'*, 2007), Aleksei Mizgirev's *Hard-Hearted* (*Kremen'*, 2007), and Leonid Rybakov's *Say Leo* (*Skazhi Leo*, 2008).

Together with a delinquent, dangerous teenager, a teenage collective, merciless and threatening to adults and teenagers themselves, makes a comeback in the 2000s, exemplified by Andrei Kudinenko's remake of Men'shov's film *Practical Joke* (*Rozygrysh*, 2007) and Valeriia Gai-Germanika's *Everybody Dies but Me* (*Vse umrut, a ia ostanus'*, 2008). Many themes and motifs from Brezhnev and Perestroika youth films return in the 2000s and 2010s. These films in contemporary Russia revisit questions of personal and intimate relationships among teenagers, as

in Andrei Kavun's *For Children under 16...* (*Detiam do 16...*, 2010); the conflict between parents and children, as in Vladimir Kott's *Mukha* (2008) and Larisa Sadilova's *Sonny* (*Synok*, 2009); violence among young characters, exemplified by Katia Shagalova's *Once Upon a Time in the Provinces* (*Odnazhdy v provintsii*, 2008) and Pavel Bardin's *Russia 88* (*Rossiiia 88*, 2009); and pessimism and inertia among contemporary Russian youth, for example, in Boris Khlebnikov's *Free Floating* (*Svobodnoe plavanie*, 2006). Many of these films, with their bleak depiction of common people's lives in contemporary Russia and their re-discovered interest in relationships between young people and the representatives of authority (financial, social, and political), on one hand, and their precaution to comment on and criticize directly the current government and its policies, on the other hand, may inspire a new wave of Aesopian interpreting impulses. The key question that arises from this observation is the following: If the figure of a cinematic teenager returns to the Russian screen after almost a decade of absence, is it possible to presuppose that social, cultural, ideological, and political reasons for this are similar to the ones that allowed the youth film genre to flourish during the Brezhnev time and to find its apogee during Perestroika?

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