

UDC 372

## **"The Little School Orchestra": a Sample of the Hermeneutic Analysis of Media Texts in Student Audience**

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**Abstract.** The hermeneutic analysis of the cultural context is the investigation of the interpretation of media texts, cultural and historical factors influencing the views of the media agency / author and the audience's point of view. The hermeneutic analysis of media text comprehension involves a comparison of the cultural tradition and reality, insight into the logic of a media text, media text analysis through comparison of artistic images in historical and cultural contexts. Thus, the object of the analysis is the media system and its functioning in the society, the interaction with the person, the media language and its use. This article uses the film of Alexander Muratov and Nikolay Rasheev "The Little School Orchestra" (1968) as an example of the hermeneutic analysis of media texts in student audience.

**Keywords:** hermeneutic analysis; media text; film; media education; students; university; media competence.

**Introduction.** Umberto Eco reasonably asserts: "Any research of a work structures becomes *ipso facto* a development of some historical and sociological hypotheses, – even if the researcher himself does not or would not realize it. ... If one is aware of these basic principles of the research method the description of the work structures turns out one of the most effective means for detecting the interrelations between a work of art and its social-historical context (Eco, 2005, p. 208).

It needs to be reminded that the hermeneutic analysis of cultural context stands for study of the media text interpretation process, of cultural and historical factors that may have an impact both on the media texts authors/agencies and the audience's viewpoint. The hermeneutic analysis is connected with media text comprehension by matching with the cultural tradition and reality; penetration into the logic of a media text; media text analysis based on artistic images comparison in the historical and cultural contexts. The objective of the analysis is the media system and its functioning in the society, the interaction with the person, the media language and its use.

Let us take the film "The Little School Orchestra" (1968) directed by Alexander Muratov and Nikolay Rasheev as an example of the hermeneutic analysis of media texts in student audience. Following the methodology worked out by U. Eco, we highlight three "rows" or "systems" that are relevant to a media text: the author's ideology; market condition which affected the plot; narrative methods (Eco, 2005, p. 209).

This approach, in our opinion, fully correlates with the technology of media text analysis (Bazalgette, 1995; Fedorov, 2010; Fedorov, 2012) based on such key concepts of media education as *media agencies, media/media text categories, media technologies, media languages, media representations, media audiences*, since all of them are directly connected to ideological, market and structure-and-content aspects of media text analysis.

**The authors' ideology in the sociocultural context** (*dominant concepts: media agencies, media representations, media audiences*).

Under the authors we will mean its main creators – film makers, script writers, cameramen and composers. They conceived and created their film towards the end of the so-called "thaw" period when many people thought that the improved variant of "socialism with a human face" was still possible. However, unlike the majority of Russian films about schooling and youth of the 1960s "The Little School Orchestra" was highly improvised. There is no accentuated social aspect here, scrupulous description of living conditions, talks about politics or ideology and other attributes of Soviet "thaw" films...

**The market conditions that contributed to the plot, creation of the media text** (dominant concepts: media agencies, media/media text categories, media technologies, media audiences).

The Russian cinematograph of the 1960s was under the impact of the leading world filmmaking movements of those years – "cinema-variety", French and Czech "New Wave". At the same time, this influence (both stylistic, visual and plot, thematic) was adapted to the requirements of the Soviet censorship. In this aspect one should mention the film directed by G. Daneliya and G. Shpalikov "Walking the Streets of Moscow" (1965) where the so-called "current of life" devoid of any ideological pathos was created by the authors in the filigree manner at the joint of the drama and comedy genres...

**The structure and narrative methods used in the media text** (dominant concepts: media/media text categories, media technologies, media languages, media representations).

The structure, plot, representativeness, ethics, genre modification peculiarities, iconography, characters can be outlined in the following way:

**Historical period, scene:** Kiev of the late 1960s.

**Setting:** city streets, habitable rooms, a school gym used for arranging parties and orchestra rehearsals; a stadium. A room furnished in the fashion of that time, musical instruments.

**Representation of reality:** positive in relation to practically all the characters. Contrary to the established tradition of the Soviet cinematograph of the 1960s the protagonists (school leavers) are shown practically without any actuals of the "socialistic mode of life", and there are no teachers and parents among the characters. At the same time, there dominate image and music in the film but not words (the first word in the film is pronounced on the ninth minute of its action). A striking example is the scene where the major character of the film conducts an excursion in the cathedral: we do not here her words; we only see her inspired gestures and facial expression accompanied by music. As for the episode of the cycle race it was shot as a jazz improvisation – with freeze-frames, abstract lines of lights again accompanied by musical jazz melodies which sound in "The Little School Orchestra" nearly all the time...

**Characters, their values, ideas, clothing, constitution, lexicon, mime, gestures:** the characters are dressed in accordance with the "conservative" fashion of the late 1960s and are slim. Their mime and gestures are sometimes emotional and artistic. Their speech is plain. But they mainly communicate non-verbally – with jazz melodies.

**Significant change in the characters' life:** in June, 1968, the school leavers finish school and like many other young people they fall in love for the first time...

**Incipient problem:** choosing a future career, love peripetias.

**Search for solution to the problem:** an attempt to uphold one's own choice ("Why should I take up medicine?" – One of the characters exclaims. "I want to fly! Why not? This is an occupation for a man!")

**Problem solution:** the solution to the problem is given in the end only in an outline – in the form of collages: some characters are going somewhere; the others are seeing them off...

The famous researcher and media educator A. Silverblatt (Silverblatt, 2001, pp. 80-81) worked out a set of questions for the hermeneutic analysis of media texts in the historical, cultural and structural contexts. We will try to apply them to the analysis of "The Little School Orchestra" according to the basic aspects of this system:

#### **A. Historical context**

1. What does a media text tell about the time of its creation?

a) When did the premier of this media text take place?

The premier of the film could have taken place on one of the central TV channels but the film was banned by "higher authorities". The main reason for the ban was the accusation of the authors for "excessive" liberty. The film "was brought to Moscow in the autumn of 1968, but they said in Moscow: "Such musicians made the Prague Spring. Banned". The film had an extremely clear voice" (Margolit, 2010). As a result, "The Little School Orchestra" lay on the shelf for record 42 years: it was due to persistent search of film expert E. Margolit who managed to find the banned film in television archives, that the film was shown to Russian viewers in 2010.

b) How did the events of that time affect the media text?

The film was shot on the decline of the political "thaw" in the USSR, however, the media text does not reflect any political events of that time. Apparently, the media text got under the influence of the stylistics of "cinema-variety", the French and Czech "New Wave" of the 1960s.

c) How does the media text comment on the events of the day?

The principal feature of the film (which immediately put the censors on their guard) was its detachment towards political (school-Komsomol) and national contexts. In fact, the characters do not live either in the USSR or Kiev (though some aspects of Kiev are reflected in the film). They live in some "average European" city where extravagant ladies walk their pedigree dogs along the park avenues while a school orchestra is playing jazz at the school leaving ball. And one of the major sixteen-year-old characters falls in love with a beautiful thirteen-year-old neighbor (she is a restorer and a guide in St. Sophia Cathedral)...

2. Does the knowledge of the historic events contribute to the media text understanding?

a) media texts created during a certain historic event.

In the 1960s, a number of avant-garde films in point of content and film language concerning youth came out. The most outstanding films of the Czech "New Wave" were the pictures "Competition" (1963), "Black Peter" (1964), and "Loves of a Blonde" (1965) created by M. Forman. As for the French "New Wave", one can mark out "The 400 Blows" (1959), "Love at Twenty" (1962) and "Stolen Kisses" (1968) directed by F. Truffaut. Speaking of the Polish cinematograph, the most prominent films were "Innocent Sorcerers" (1960) by A. Wajda, "Knife in the Water" (1961) by R. Polanski, "Rysopis" (1964) and "Walkover" (1965) by J. Skolimowski. However, it is plausible to assume that the crucial influence on the film "The Little School Orchestra" was produced by the famous film of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Alain Resnais "Last Year at Marienbad" (1961, rewarded the Golden Lion of St. Mark at the Venice Film Festival).

If one concentrates exclusively on Soviet films about youth of the 1960s it is worth mentioning the films: "I am Twenty" (1961-1965) by M. Khutsyev and G. Shpalikov, "Walking the Streets of Moscow" (1965) by G. Daneliya and G. Shpalikov, "The Private Life of Valentin Kuzyayev" (1967) by I. Averbach and I. Maslennikov, "Not a Very Lucky Day" (1967) by Y. Yegorov, "Let's Live Until Monday" (1968) by S. Rostotsky, "Manlike Talk" (1968) by I. Shatrov, "Three Days of Viktor Chernyshov" (1968) by M. Osipyan, etc. Many of these films were notable for social bitterness ("Three Days of Viktor Chernyshov") which was not characteristic of those days but, nevertheless, they came out. But that's just the thing – the above-mentioned Soviet media texts (more or less) fitted into the sociocultural context of the "socialism with a human face", whereas "The Little School Orchestra" (1968) directed by A. Muratov and N. Rasheev breathed the air of freedom, improvised jazz lightness, the plot and image given in watercolours.

Vladimir Chinaev who played the role of the musician on drums in the film wrote forty odd years later: "A mass of reminiscences, feelings. Now, curiously enough, this film-mood is better received than in the 1960s. It is to be regretted that now it is black-and-white; it was a color film in the original. I remember S. Paradzhanov liked this film (Chinaev, 2010).

– *What events occurred when the media text was created?*

It was exactly in 1968 – the period when the film "The Little School Orchestra" was being made – when virtually at the same time in Prague and Paris there broke out militant actions of revolutionary-minded leftists.

The events which took place in the spring of 1968 in Paris are appropriately called an attempt of the "students' revolution". Having started with spontaneous student disturbances connected to the dissatisfaction of Paris cinema goers with Henri Langlois's dismissal from the post of the director (April, 1968), the events very soon - already in May of the same year – grew into a genuine social crisis – with large-scale demonstrations, mass riots and a general strike under political (Marxist, Trotskyist, Maoist and anarchist) slogans, with economic demands of a forty-hour workweek and increase in minimum wages. Eventually, it caused a change of government and a resignation of the most famous French president – Charles de Gaulle (he resigned on 28 April, 1969). That was also the reason for serious changes in the French and European society. So, the "revolutionary" closure of the Cannes Film Festival by leftists in May, 1968, turned out a local episode against such a large-scale background...

The reaction of the Soviet authorities (who were on good terms with France and Charles de Gaulle in the 1960s) to these events was mostly negative. At the same time, Soviet media especially underlined the negative aspects of the Maoist and anarchist disturbances of May, 1968...

The events in Czechoslovakia where the government began to actively follow the policy of the European integration since the mid-1960s were not less acute. On 5 January 1968 Alexander Dubček was elected the First Secretary of Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Since his accession to power the state censorship (which was a most liberal one among the countries of the socialist camp before) noticeably slackened; the gateway for public debates was opened. It was even more often told about the usefulness of a multi-party system and private property, business activity; about the need for freedom of expression, meetings and movement, etc. (after twenty years it was voiced, almost word for word, already in the USSR during "Gorbachev's Perestroika"). Thus, 1968 was the culmination year of the endeavor to build "socialism with a human face" in a "separately taken state".

Naturally, unlike France, in the case of Czechoslovakia the Kremlin could afford much more than just criticism and denunciation of this or that event. At first the assault on "the Prague Spring" was led in a "peaceful way": in the spring of 1968 (on 23 March in Dresden and on 4 May in Moscow) the Soviet administration openly expressed their dissatisfaction with the democratic changes in Czechoslovakia. The political pressure on A. Dubček's team got intensified in July-August of 1968. Being convinced that the reforms concerning "socialism with a human face" are supported by broad masses (as well as in France – students and youth) in Czechoslovakia and it is impossible to "calm down" the rebellious with words, the Kremlin decided to apply to armed intervention – on the night of 20/21 August 1968, troops were brought into Czechoslovakia. Naturally, it led to mass protests (including armed) of Czechs and Slovaks against the occupation. But the forces were too unequal: in April, 1969, (almost simultaneously with Charles de Gaulle's resignation in France) A. Dubček was resigned from office and a long period of "crackdown" was launched in Czechoslovakia...

So, the angry and hard-line response of the cinematographic authorities to the free-flying improvisation of young characters of "The Little School Orchestra" in the humanistic spirit of "universal values" in the autumn of 1968 was quite predictable.

– *How does the understanding of these events contribute to our understanding of the media text?*

It stands to reason that the comprehension of the historical-political context enables one to better understand the audiovisual imagery of a film. It may be difficult for a person who is unaware of the historical-political context of the late 1960s to understand why "The Little School Orchestra" was banned in the USSR.

– *What are real historical allusions?*

The foreign historical-political background of the late 1960s has been stated above. As for the events that occurred in the USSR, the second half of the 1960s is known to be the end of the "thaw" when both timid attempts of economic reforms and anti-Stalinism rhetoric came to nothing but the censorial grip became more rigid (the most vivid examples are the prohibition of books written by A. Solzhenitsyn, A. Tarkovsky's film "The Passion According to Saint Andrew" (1966), S. Paradzhanov's film "Kiev Frescos" (1966), A. Alov and V. Naumov's film "A Bad Joke" (1966), A. Askoldov's film "Commissar" (1967) and the film "Intervention" (1968) by G. Poloka).

– *Are there any historical references in the media text?*

Being absolutely politically indifferent "The Little School Orchestra" precisely mirrored the "musical trends" of the late 1960s: the film characters live by music, their life seems to be dissolved in jazz tunes and beats of the remarkable music of M. Tariverdiev.

The talks though somehow concerning the social context (the episode in the workshop) are minimized. The main thing in the film is music and love, improvisation and freedom.

## **B. Cultural Context**

*1. Media and popular culture: how does the media text reflect, strengthen, suggest or create cultural: a) relations, b) values, c) conduct, d) concern; e) myths.*

Namely in the second half of the 1960s the era of "recorded" music began in the USSR when broad masses of population for the first time gained an opportunity to secretly record and listen to western rock and jazz music which was almost eliminated from the official Soviet media (the radio, television, gramophone recording). Under the influence of the extremely popular western bands "The Beatles", "Rolling Stones", etc. the so-called "playing and singing groups" (professional and amateur) sprang up all over the USSR; jazz groups were revived.

"The Little School Orchestra" reflects it all very precisely – the major characters – school graduates of the 10th grade – play jazz with enthusiasm that in many respects defines their attitudes, values and behaviour. Music can be both a declaration of love and a momentary experience and a symbol of freedom...

*2. Outlook: what world is shown in the media text?*

*a) What is the culture of this world? People? Ideology?*

Contrary to the standards of the "Soviet society" there dominate the motives of jazz improvisation, love, the atmosphere of free flying and admiration for cultural/religious heritage of the past in this world (the scene presenting an excursion to St. Sophia Cathedral conducted by one of the characters of the film). The main characters are young – they are from 16 to 30, they are beautiful, charming, musical, and intelligent. There is neither ideological jabber nor Komsomol meetings, nor edifying speeches of their teachers and parents (the latter are altogether taken beyond the story).

*b) What do we know about the people who belong to this world?*

*– are the characters shown in a stereotyped manner?*

The characters of "The Little School Orchestra" are represented in contravention of Soviet film stereotypes on the "school-youth" theme of the 1960s: they do not reflect on the topic of the revolutionary heritage ("I'm Twenty"); they are not absorbed in social problems ("Three Days of Viktor Chernyshov") and/or family problems ("Manlike Talk"). Though the images of the characters are given in outline it does not prevent them from getting the viewer's sympathy.

*– What does this representation tell us about the cultural stereotype of this group?*

If the expression may be tolerated, the "cultural code" of the young characters of "The Little School Orchestra" is enthrallment with jazz music, love, inner freedom, detachment toward the "Soviet lifestyle".

*c) What outlook does this world represent - optimistic or pessimistic?*

*– Are the characters of the media text happy?*

*– do the characters of the media text have a chance of being happy?*

In spite of some minor notes connected to the characters' love peripetias the world of "The Little School Orchestra" is optimistic. And its characters hope to be happy (maybe in their illusions)...

*d) Are the characters able to direct their own fates?*

Yes, in a way, the collage epilogue of the media text testifies to that.

*e) What is the hierarchy of values in this outlook?*

*– what values can be found in the media text?*

*– what values do the characters embody?*

Music, improvisation, youth, friendship, love are the chief values of the film characters that are shared by the authors of the media text.

*– what values prevail in the end?*

*– what does it mean to be a success in this world? How does a person succeed in this world?*

*What behavior is rewarded in the world?*

The world of "The Little School Orchestra" is not concerned about material values, the major characters are on the cusp of adulthood, success or failure. Actually, in the real Soviet world of the late 1960s one's success was associated not only with one's promotion up the Komsomol and the party ladder but also with one's progress in culture and sport, for example. So, the major characters' passion for music, perhaps, gave them a chance to advance...

**Conclusions.** It should be noted that A. Silverblatt's methodology corresponds to basic approaches of the hermeneutic analysis of audiovisual, space-and-time structure of media texts. There are some associative links between the screen and the viewer's experience (life and aesthetic); the emotional empathy with the characters and authors of the media text begins with intuitive, subconscious appreciation of the dynamics of the audiovisual, space-and-time artistic image of a scene. Then follows the process of its analysis and synthesis – ascertaining the meaning of frames, angles, shots, etc., their synthetics, combination, comprehension of ambiguity, expression of one's personal attitude...

For instance, it is possible to recall the space-and-time dynamics of the audiovisual image of one of the first scenes in "The Little School Orchestra" obviously shot in the style of a most famous masterpiece of the French "New Wave" – "Last Year at Marienbad" (1961) directed by A. Robbe-

Grillet and A. Resnais. At first we see figures geometrically put and placed in the interior space, and then – a picturesque city alley shot from the top view: it is full of elegant ladies with dogs strolling towards each other, one of the dogs carrying the owner's umbrella. The geometry of the figures placed on the landscape is again scrupulously adjusted and thought-out. The people sitting on benches seem to have stooped dead in the freeze-frame. A jazz improvisation is being played... In this way the authors boldly introduce the audience into the image world of their media text...

This is a sample of how one can verbally analyze a media representation of the seen and heard flow of sound-and-visual images which can be given in a more detailed way, including the light-and-color solution, mise-en-scène, actors' plastique and mime, use of certain details. Thus, one should interpret not only the psychological and emotional but also the audiovisual, space-and-time contents of the artistic image in this episode, its culmination meaning... In other words, from a more or less linear interpretation of the narrative scheme we proceed to an associational, polyphonic one. The events, characters, the artistic and musical solution are perceived as a unity, holistically.

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### Filmography

**The Little School Orchestra. USSR (Ukrtefilm), 1968. 59 min.** Directed by Alexander Muratov and Nikolai Rashev. Script writers: Vladimir Zuev, Alexander Muratov, Nikolai Rashev. Cameraman: Oleg Martynov. Composer: Mikael Tariverdiev. Art director: Galina Shabanova. Cast of actors: Galina Shabanova, Svetlana Smechnova, Sergei Vlasov, Victor Totski, Vladimir Khodzitski, Vladimir Chinaev and others.

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### «Маленький школьный оркестр»: опыт герменевтического анализа медиатекста на занятиях в студенческой аудитории

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**Аннотация.** Герменевтический анализ культурного контекста (Hermeneutic Analysis of Cultural Context) – исследование процесса интерпретации медиатекста, культурных, исторических факторов, влияющих на точку зрения агентства/автора медиатекста и на точку зрения аудитории. Герменевтический анализ предполагает постижение медиатекста через сопоставление с культурной традицией и действительностью; проникновение в логику медиатекста; анализ медиатекста через сопоставление художественных образов в историко-культурном контексте. Таким образом, предмет анализа – система медиа и ее функционирование в обществе, взаимодействие с человеком, язык медиа и его использование. В качестве примера герменевтического анализа медиатекста в студенческой аудитории в статье использован запрещенный советской цензурой фильм Александра Муратова и Николая Рашеева «Маленький школьный оркестр» (1968).

**Ключевые слова:** герменевтический анализ; медиатекст; фильм; медиаобразование; студенты; вуз; медиакомпетентность.