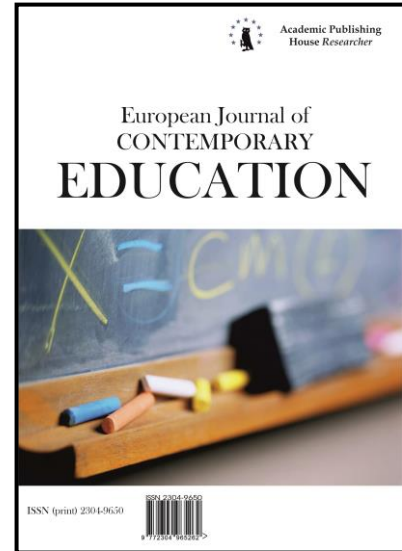




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## School and University in Soviet Cinema of "Perestroika" (1986–1991)

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### Abstract

Films of the "perestroika" period (1986-1991) related to school/university theme showed that:

- the educational / upbringing process has lost the previous strict storylines and in many respects has lost its communist landmarks;
- both school and university have acute problem areas (crisis, disappointment and fatigue, professional "burning out" of teachers, stagnation, hypocrisy, lies, bureaucracy and authoritarianism, pragmatic cynicism of students, teenage cruelty, underage sexual activity, etc.);
- the activity of a schoolchild / student again became more directed toward the outside world than to the inner world;
- appropriate distance in the teacher-student relationship has become more fragile (familiarity, sexual relation, or its provocation); in the films *Work on Mistakes* (1988) and *Asthenic Syndrome* (1989), male teachers even fight with high school students in class or in the school corridor;
- the prestige of the pedagogical profession in the eyes of students and the public has fallen even lower; in accordance with the real state of affairs, female teachers' images (often lonely, unsettled) came to the forefront;
- the main conflicts of plots were built on the opposition of non-ordinary teachers and students with stagnation, bureaucracy, mediocre bosses / colleagues / peers.

In fact, one can probably assume that the exposing "black series" of the perestroika cinema (where the youth theme was one of the most prominent ones) served a kind of "mobilizing purpose", only at the time it was not the orientation of "Soviet power elites in the renewal of the tools which they embodied the communist project with". Conversely, a Western-oriented part of

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the Soviet ruling elite used "uncensored" cinematography as one of the levers for the gradual liquidation of socialism. On the other hand, it is possible not to attach special importance to this "conspiracy" assumption, believing that Soviet cinematographers spontaneously walked in the wake of political and socio-cultural changes of the "perestroika" era. After all, we should not forget that by the end of the 1980s a paradoxical situation arose in the USSR when the state continued to finance film production, but in the actual absence of censorship, filmmakers could produce all that they wanted, practically ignoring the opinion of the leading bodies of the CPSU and the government.

**Keywords:** audiovisual media text, film, the USSR, perestroika, school, university, student, pupil, teacher, cinema.

### 1. Introduction

In this article, we address the goals, objectives, and author's concepts of audiovisual media interpretations of the theme of school and university in the Soviet cinema during "perestroika" (1986–1991). As in our previous works (Fedorov et al., 2017), relying on the technologies developed by C. Bazalgette (Bazalgette, 1995), A. Silverblatt (Silverblatt, 2001: 80-81), W.J. Potter (Potter, 2001), U. Eco (Eco, 1998; 2005: 209), O.V. Aronson (Aronson, 2003; 2007), N.A. Khrenov (Khrenov, 2006; 2008), we perform a general hermeneutic analysis of Soviet feature films related to the theme of school and university of this period.

### 2. Materials and methods

The material of our research is Soviet feature films relating to the theme of school and university. The main method is a comparative hermeneutic analysis of Soviet films during perestroika (1986–1991), including: analysis of stereotypes, ideological analysis, identification analysis, iconographic analysis, plot analysis, character analysis, etc.). Books and articles touching upon school and university subjects in cinema have been also examined (Anninsky, 2006; Arcus, 2010; Belyaeva, Mikhaylin, 2015; Gerber, 1989; Romanenko, 1989; Shipulina, 2010; Stishova, 1992; Sumenov, 1989; Zorkaya, 1989, etc.).

### 3. Discussion

Keen researchers of films on school and schoolchildren G.A. Belyaeva and V.Y. Mikhailin argue that "the emergence of the school genre was due to the need of the Soviet power elites in updating the tools which they embodied the communist project with and carried out the necessary work to create profitable and acceptable to the viewers matrices, with which the latter could build their own projective realities. In this sense, the customer or the agency, forming the system of expectations necessary for the emergence of the genre is two social groups: the actual Soviet power elite (and the closely related cultural elites) form the "commission" directly, solving very specific mobilization tasks. However they are guided by a very definite set of projective realities, compatible with the positively and negatively colored personal expectations of a "common Soviet man", who, in this way, is also directly involved in shaping this commission" (Belyayeva, Mikhailin, 2015: 551). Aside from the fact that the authors clearly confuse the terms "genre" and "theme" (a film genre isn't its theme, but there may be overlap; so any topic, including school, can be features in different genres), it is quite possible to agree with the rest. However, it was true before the "perestroika" period, when a lot of films about the school and university broke the former Soviet "mobilization agenda": the communism project was rejected, the former idealized screen world of school and university collapsed.

First Western cinema, and a little later – Polish and Hungarian cinema in the 1970s, broke the previous censorship bans and disclosed striking themes of minors' violence, drug addiction, child prostitution, sexual relations not only between students, but also between school teachers and students. Thus the generation gap eternal problem was tinted with new and shocking colors.

With an understandable delay, Soviet cinematography joined this tendency only in the perestroika period, although in the first half of the 1980s it seemed that the *Boys* (1983) and *Scarecrow* (1983) marked the top bar of the censorship permissible representation of youth in the Soviet cinema.

So, in the drama *Arsonists* (1988) a special school for girls aged 15-16 was graphically shown. The action of the first half of the film is transferred from the toilet to the punishment cell, from the

shabby barn to the dark closet. Violence, drugs, cruelty, in a spiritually sanctimonious state shell accompanied with the song "My address is not a house or a street ...". When a youthful teacher, well aware of the mores of the school's population, prefers not to notice the fresh blood on the mirror in the bedroom for twenty people. When the strong take pleasure in bullying the weak. The first part of the film features some strong episodes. And the main character - the leader of the vocational school's class- is presented by the authors unusually harshly, giving no hints for sympathy, without traditional scenes of reformation and hope.

In our opinion, the second part of the film looks weaker, when a girl, having escaped from the "educational institution", makes her way to Central Asia. A lot of episodes seem superfluous and protracted, and, probably, the picture would only have benefited if the authors had deepened their investigation into the characters and relationship in the special school.

Even more shocking, especially compared to Soviet films about children of the 1950s and 1970s, was the *Government Facility* (1989). The film had a terrifying ending: a 15-year-old orphan killed a man as a revenge for his girlfriend, raped by him. But it was also a vengeance for his ruined childhood, for his friend's drug overdose, for the hypocritical slogans of adults, for the social indifference, for the wretchedness of his life. Only five years earlier Soviet people enjoyed watching a sentimental *Orphanage's Headmistress* (1983), where the caring and affectionate heroine performed by N. Gundareva sincerely tried to create a home comfort for her disadvantaged foster pupils.

But in 1989 the very name of the film *Government Facility* sounded like a severe and ruthless accusation. There's nothing to do about it: by the beginning of the 1990s, almost the entire country turned into an unfriendly and uncomfortable state house, whose inhabitants were doomed to humiliation of human dignity, discomforts and stresses, poverty and lack of freedom; the orphanage, as a water drop, reflected all the vices and misfortunes of Soviet life.

"The headmistress" of the government facility was played by G. Polskhih. Previously she had played a lot of charming, good mothers. But here her character, the head teacher of the orphanage, is far from educational problems. G. Polskhih played an administrative appendage of the government mechanism of foster children's management.

At the same time, she is not at all a monster, at times, she can talk to someone heart to heart. She has quite good relationship with her colleagues. She is not too strict. She may scream with the power of the fire alarm, but she settles the nerves quite quickly, too.

By the way, this feature was pointed out by the authors very accurately. The system of interrelations in an average educational institution made school and orphanage's employees develop an ability to bring oneself almost to hysterics (outwardly) with absolute coldness and indifference (internally). G. Polskhih's character values the facade of well-being in the first place. For its sake, she is ready to turn a blind eye to anything. The film gave a kind of sociological snapshot of the life of the "captives" of orphanages, calling for mercy, compassion, changing the community for the kinder way.

In the film *Made in the USSR* (1990), the usual secondary school became a model of a totalitarian state. A trivial story about a mysterious theft of a VCR (curiously enough, a VCR and a video camera used to be some of the most common objects of theft in "perestroika" films about the school, but today's young audience probably needs a special explanation on the prestigious value of video or branded jeans during perestroika) turns into a grotesque and gloomy farce, when the acting director terrorizes students and teachers as a dictator. Young "patriots" punish their peers "dissidents", joining the ranks of the "pioneer-yugend", and a school laboratory turns into a torture room. The sinister and bitter satire of this film was undoubtedly inspired by the anti-utopias of G. Orwell and E. Zamyatin, but, oddly enough, it does not seem outdated even today.

However, perhaps the most pessimistic view of school problems was in K. Muratova's *Asthenic Syndrome* (1989): in mainstream cinematography "the director would know exactly who is good, who is bad, who is right, who is wrong. If the teacher is not talented, then it's OK for the students not to listen to him; or vice versa: they are loafers and hooligans, if they do not listen to their teacher ... Muratova has a different way; people generally do not care at all who is right, who is wrong, what is going on here or elsewhere: is there anyone here" (Anninsky, 2006: 78-79). Here the students are busy with anything (eating, looking at obscene pictures, chattering, etc.), but not the subject matter. Here, a teacher, tormented by such a pedagogical process, can easily fight a high school student right during the lesson, and in the end of the film simply fall asleep forever.

It was during the perestroika years that the previously poorly accentuated topic of material inequality was sharply outlined in the films about school.

For example, analyzing the drama *Temptation* (1987), V.S. Ivanova persuaded the readers that it "inherited the best traditions of our school film: careful attitude to the youngest, the conversation is not at different levels, but on an equal footing, because even the smallest creature running around you is a person. In all the high sense of the word. That is, he, she may be already bad, and already good, but they entered life, society, they have a sum of claims, but also a sum of promises. ... Yes, others say, it is necessary to give the injection of adult life to children as early as possible – I do not know if it is so. but let's all the same do this gradually. With anesthesia. And in any case, with love. Otherwise it's a shock. Otherwise, scrap. As in *Temptation* (Ivanova, 1990: 52).

At the beginning of the film *Temptation* it seems that the tenth grade student Zhenya is an elder sister of Lena (Scarecrow, 1983). Firstly, as Lena, she's new in class, and secondly, she falls in love with the cleverest and the most handsome and popular guy. But most importantly – she is a strong personality. But while Lena finds the strength to oppose the crowd one versus all, Zhenya is craving to win a place under the sun of the school elite. Zhenya's and Lena's classmates, if different from each other, it is only by age. The circle of interests they have, in fact, is the same. But the film's directing is deprived of lyricism and semitones.

At pre-perestroika times, the authors would simply have to expose the character possessed by the "thirst for a beautiful life". However, *Temptation* is different. The problem is not about Zhenya dreaming of being accepted to "upper society" at her new school. The drama of the heroine is that she fell victim to the double morality of the society, an imaginary equality of opportunities. When the camera is mercilessly showing the fierce fight of Zhenya with her classmates after they exposed her fictitious elitism, the authors' position is clearly emphasized.

If *Temptation* had been produced in the beginning of the 1980s (actually, the script by Yuri Klepikov was written for Dinara Asanova), it would undoubtedly have produced a shock effect, even more than *Scarecrow*. But at the box office in 1988, along with other "exposing" picture, Zhenya's story was received without any special public resonance.

In 1991, the theme of schoolchildren from "high society" was continued by the film *Darling Ap* (screen version of the story by G. Mikhasenko). E. Stishova wrote that this film priori asked for critical reproaches in the varnishing of reality. Severe critics had a lot of remarks. Children's Versailles, arranged by the director in the pavilions of the Belarusian film studio, was a nice change to people, exhausted by perestroika. Teenagers dressed in tuxedos with bow ties at a classmates' birthday party, girls dressed up in haut couture gowns, the americanization of interiors and conversations, the rejection of everyday truth in the name of Beauty was, of course, an attempt for poetics, polemical in relation to the symbol of faith of the modern screen, pretending to reflect "life in the forms of life itself". To the critic's taste, there was not enough author's presence in the film, irony could be barely read, which is why the system of conventions, consciously chosen by the director, can be perceived as the relict thinking of the times of socialist realism, and not at all like a fairy tale movie, deliberately dropped out of social coordinates, deliberately abandoned psychology and connotation. *Darling Ap* manifests a certain intention of the film process, ready to form in the direction. It's the break with ideology, in the place of which any mythology will do - from Hollywood to the ancient one (Stishova, 1992: 135).

We must pay tribute to the perspicacity of E. Stishova: the proportion of films that got rid of connotations and psychological underpinning became noticeably larger in Russian cinema both in the 1990s and in the 2000s, affecting the school theme, too.

Perestroika cinema about schoolchildren has also broke old sexual prohibitions. Virtually, university teacher-university student affairs (albeit puritanically shown) were possible in Soviet cinema (*Grasshopper*, 1979), but the sexual relationship between school teachers and high school students was taboo (although there might be a hint of it, for example, in the melodrama *The Story of the First Love*, 1957).

It started small: in the drama *Come What May* (1986), the zealous head teacher accused an innocent school dance production in the propaganda of "lecherous break dance," and an extraordinary high school student called his young teacher a beauty and declared his love in front of the whole class.

However in *Work on Mistakes* (1988), one of the key scenes of the film was a seduction attempted by a school girl of her teacher (the teacher, though, resisted); schoolchildren mocked a

classmate, who's still a virgin being 16. Scenes of seduction (although unsuccessful) of teachers are also present in the films *Joys of the Youth* (1987) and *Slap in the Face that Never Happened* (1987).

The drama *The Doll* (1988) boldly violated the last censorship bastion, featuring (no details) the sexual relationship between a female schoolteacher and a male high school student. Against the backdrop of the flow of perestroika revelations and turbulent political events of the late 1980s, *The Doll* did not cause a sensation. Someone grumbled, but press reacted calmly - as to the usual fact of life, transferred to the screen (Gerber, 1989). To a greater extent, the film proved to be interesting because of the different highlight: exhausting sports work from early childhood leaves not a second of childhood, turning a living girl into an elastic doll. The fairy tale ends, the doll gets ill and is no longer of interest to the state sport committee. She used to be a princess, but becomes a Cinderella, she has to start all over again in a new class. And she does so according to the principles developed by professional sport: twice two makes only four (Gerber, 1989: 7).

In the perestroika period, the storyline of an extraordinary university / school student was developed again (*Come What May*, 1986; *Work on Mistakes*, 1988; *The Whistler*, 1988; *The Jester*, 1988; *Puppy*, 1988; *Darling Ap*, 1991, etc.). One can probably agree with the opinion of A. Romanenko, voiced by her in 1989: no matter how bitter it is, but still we must admit that the inner life of a young man remained for decades closed not because our grown-up children are so complicated and closed for us, but because the art was afraid to look at their features, to describe their morals, to listen to a sincere confession. Because it would require new ways of analysis, and civic courage, and awareness of the fact that the film may not be allowed on the screens. Too strong were obstacles for such films and books, the whole period of a person's maturing was missed. Now the art has begun to make up for lost time, but it does it sometimes feverishly and hurriedly, going only the upper layer of life deep. Because life that has gone ahead requires new forms of communication, and new tools for analysis, philosophical equipment, sociological thinking, and the publicist's gift. ... A decade ago, three points of view on the current generation of young people were widely popular. The first argued that our youth is wonderful, heroic, almost burning with enthusiasm. The second focused on negative phenomena in the youth environment. They even exaggerated their scale. Still others ironically lamented: two thousand years ago people used to complain about the youth's moral degeneration, nothing new about that. Meanwhile, no one was able to penetrate into the real essence of the issues bothering young people, to feel the guilt and responsibility of the older generation, to understand the role of that social atmosphere that reigned in the seventies and influenced the spiritual warehouse and the attitude of the young. Today, the problem of youth has become the key one in life and in art. ... It is not surprising that keen interest, which was caused by the films offering a new level of truth in the conversation about youth (Romanenko, 1989: 43, 46).

Despite the acuteness of many "perestroika" films, the most debated film, where the main character was an offbeat schoolboy, was *Plumbum, or a Dangerous Game* (1986). Ruslan Chutko, nicknamed "Plumbum" is a young assistant of the police, using for the sake of "high" goals any means - betrayal, blackmail, lies, violence. But the authors of this dramatic parable do not make him a disgusting monster. Yes, Ruslan meticulously and pedantically interrogates his father-poacher, reveling in his incorruptible authority. But the audience can see some human, even children's feature. But the line of Ruslan's parents is schematic: his mother is only interested in sentimental songs, fashion and figure skating on TV, and his father - in fishing in the wrong place. These are not alive characters, but signs, symbols of superficial slip in life. Other characters are somewhat hyperbolized too. Earlier works of A. Mindadze and V. Abdrashitov did not contain such obsessive symbolism and frank didacticism. However in *Plumbum* almost every episode is translated unambiguously.

Apparently, given the relatively small box-office success of their previous works (*The Word in Defense*, *The Turn*, *The Fox Hunt*, *The Train Stopped*, *Planet Parade*), the authors decided to get own back by making a spectacular picture, aimed at disputes. In order for the film to become more understandable and easier to read, they intentionally chose to simplify the characters, to repeat the symbolism, to add suspense. Perhaps, it made sense in terms of building a bridge between popular culture and more complex works of art. *Plumbum* just became such a link.

However, in the second half of the 1980s, the main character, Plumbum caused drastic disagreement among the audience. Some considered him a hero, others – a scoundrel. Some saw him as a role model, others angrily exposed his ignoble actions.

Film critics' opinions differentiated, too. For example, A. Romanenko wrote: "Today the screen exposes the stereotypes of our thinking, explodes the usual patterns and approaches to analysis. According to generally accepted indicators, the hero of the film by V. Abdrashitov *Plumbum* – a teenager Ruska – can quite claim the role of a hero. An excellent student, a public figure, an obedient son. But if one correlates Ruska's world with universal moral values: mercy, love – all his qualities begin to grow smaller and are seen as if in a different light. The knowledge he has mastered is just information that cannot become the basis of human culture, the relationship with parents is a ritual, the struggle against the criminal world is a way to test one's self, a self-assertion. Everything is turned inside out, the polarity is being reversed (Romanenko, 1989: 44).

A. Gerber believed that Vadim Abdrashitov and Alexander Mindadze's film does not reassure or cheer. Some people might even humble with its impartial truth. She anticipated the irritation of the viewer, who is used to treating art as a well-groomed cemetery in the summer months, where everything is quiet and simple – "neither friends, nor enemies can be seen", as she puts it. However other audiences will say that this is not our boy, not our criminals, not our problems, it's disgusting, sick, pathological. The author argues that all of us, one way or another, are contaminated with this sickness, and on the screen we see an open form, with obvious symptoms. As a society, we have not yet thought about the destructive power of social activity, not backed by moral ideals, devoid of moral guidelines. Abdrashitov and Mindadze have (Gerber, 1989: 24).

This opinion was challenged by M. Kuznetsova: "I'm infinitely sorry for the boy named Plumbum. I'm tormented by the question: is it right with an unmercifully almighty author's will to load an incredibly heavy weight onto the immature shoulders of a child? All the sad experience of disappointment in people, piles of lies, which a person by the age of forty goes through... multiplied by talent, impassivity of the film director about the most painful moral issues of our time and the nearest past, – all this causes controversy, rejection and – worst of all – misunderstanding. I'm afraid that the younger generation can perceive Plumbum as an example to follow" (Kuznetsova, 1989: 130).

S. Shumakov was even harsher in his assessment: "If the authors of *Plumbum* set themselves the task of waking up the viewer, make him think about the destructive power that the right words can be charged with, what threatens society and people, especially the young, the principle that the goal always justifies the means, – then the authors have achieved their goal. The film certainly hits the mark. It is watched, it is argued about, it touches everyone, including those who do not want to admit it. ... In essence, we are dealing with a trap, an intellectual labyrinth, which it is very easy to get into, but it is almost impossible to get out of it.

The parents' hypocrisy turns into a total imitation of life. Aspiration of their son by any means to reunite the word and the deed turns this life into a dangerous game. Both ways are bad. Where is the way out? The authors do not know. This is not surprising. They faced one of the fundamental questions of our history, culture, social life. ... The authors of the film *Plumbum, or a Dangerous Game* pushed us into the sphere of speculative constructions and abandoned us there. Get out, they say, as you want. We opened the box, showed it, spotlighted it, and it's up to you to decide. But we cannot decide, because there is no image of the human soul in the film. We have no one to feel compassion for, so, there is nothing for our morals. A cold, distant glance, that has no sympathy, kills all life in the picture... And in the end the authors' become captives of their own game. Ruslan Chutko shamelessly manipulates people. It's immoral. But, while proving this to us, the filmmakers themselves did not notice the way they manipulated the hero, lost their moral reference point and found themselves in Plumbum's situation" (Shumakov, 1989: 131-134).

Two years later the theme of an unconventional personality of a school pupil was presented by the director A. Eshpai in a more aesthetic perspective in his film *The Jester* (1988). The main character Valentin is a nice guy, an honors pupil, a son of a professor, a researcher specializing in Japan studies. Valentin's film forerunners, who did not want to put up with the surrounding evil, tried to defeat it with its own weapon (*Plumbum*), escaped into the world of rock music (*The Burglar*), furiously and hopelessly took revenge (*The Blackmailer*), or sarcastically played a simple-hearted mask of a folklore Ivan the fool (*Courier/ Messenger Boy*). Valentin chooses a

different form of confrontation and self-affirmation, perhaps a more sophisticated one – his biting jests stick into a person's self-esteem.

Breaking the narration (based on the story of Y. Vyazemsky) about Valentin Uspensky's life with the subtle vignettes of the chapters, Andrei Eshpai was in no hurry to convict his hero with a guilty verdict. Valya is smart, charming, witty. His "jesters" at first are completely harmless and even justified in their own way. Isn't it fair to play a trick on a self-confident handsome teacher who humiliated a student in love with her? Or to give a verbal injection to a shop assistant, whose rudeness is truly boundless? Valya has a solid philosophical justification for his jests. But, alas, his jests are becoming more and more aggressive. The game gradually turns into a disease. Valya "creates a kind of a space of general buffoonery around him, contempt for others, which is difficult to break out of" (Khloplyankina, 1988: 14).

At first glance, it seems that the visual imagery of the film is too refined for the genre of a quite dramatic comedy. Mists, greenish-pastel colors, luminosity of interiors, unclear fading of bizarre dreams. However, it is surprisingly in harmony with the image of the protagonist, with his low-key, but good manner of dressing, with his outward invisibility, hiding an unshakable confidence in his abilities and powers.

In fact, Valya has only one worthy opponent – a Maths teacher, an ironic skeptic and a brilliant professional. He even resembles Valya in some ways – independent in his judgments and actions, witty. He is the only person, who Valya's tricks won't go down with. Only he can unravel the jester's philosophy. The actor's charisma of I. Kostolevsky suited the role well. To the authors' credit, they were not tempted to offer a trivial solution to the conflict in the form of re-formation of the main character by a talented teacher. The question of Valentin's future remains open.

Cinema of the reformation period reinforced the critical attitude towards the teaching profession. One after another, miserable portraits of unhappy women teachers, whose salary was 20-30 dollars per month, appeared on screen. Thus, the drama *Homo Novus* (1990) featured high school pupils bullying their depressed, gloomy teacher (I. Kupchenko). Moreover, they went as far as kidnapping her only son...The film meticulously depicted details of the characters' boring, dark life. To make the effect more powerful, the authors used black-and-white film, perhaps feeling themselves as cold surgeons operating on a tumour.

School pupils from the drama *Dear Elena Sergeevna* (1988) displayed the similar attitude to their naive teacher. To tell the truth, the story of an appalling blackmail that students initiated to get better exam marks, was presented unconvincingly in the film. Moreover, abstract, constructed image of an idealist teacher deprived the screen character of life authenticity (Sumenov, 1989: 15). It was hardly believable that a teacher in her forties over all the years of her teaching experience had not got to know her pupils. It was also doubtful that an impudent son of a big boss, a straight "A" student, who was going to enter MGIMO university, decides on the criminal act: in real life he would find a safer and more effective way to achieve his goal.

Images of male teachers in perestroika films were as well not positive. For example, director V. Derbenev totally relied on the talent of I. Smoktunovsky in the screen adaptation of V. Tendryakov's novel *60 Candles* (the film had a gloomy title *Black Corridor*, 1988). Smoktunovsky plays a history teacher recalling his far from ideal career. But actor's efforts were not backed up by the script and directing. Literally every shot is too straightforward and didactic. "No, you are not a villain, you're worse, – his ex pupil tells the teacher. – A villain simply violates the rules. But the one who sincerely believes that a white lie is necessary for the humankind, that person makes his meanness a rule. You are not a villain, you are an evil idea!"

The teacher's image is absolutely low leveled in K. Muratova's film *Asthenia Syndrome*, where the teacher Nikolai Alekseevich teaches an English class as if in the desert, in a class where pupils are busy with what not, but not the subject of the lesson. Dethroning of the teacher's image, that had started quite harmlessly, since the rethinking of the theme in *We'll Live Until Monday*, reached its logical end (Shipulina, 2010).

Against such a background, Perestroika films about school often featured teachers' phrases like:

- What if they jump on your head? (*Work on Mistakes*);
- Oh my God, when will I finally retire and get rid of these criminals? (*The Doll*);
- I don't know if there is a borderline that you (pupils) will not cross (*Dear Elena Sergeevna*).

On the wave of easing censorship's bans during Perestroika, some cinematographers thought that it was rather simple to make a film about school. Their formula was: a new sensational play/novel or a short story used as a scenario basis, dialogues updated with sharp phrases from the current press (about the commodity and food deficit, about the low standard of living of the working people, etc.), and a popular actor invited to play the leading role. Alas, they often forgot a "trifle", which, probably, would not even be worth mentioning if it did not distinguish art from kitsch: artistry. But without it, any, the most beautiful slogans remain just newspaper headlines. Without it the audience is going to see ridiculous theatrics, falseness and overacting, only reinforcing the contrived scenarios.

Something of the sort happened to the drama *On the Outskirts, Somewhere in Town...* (1988), which became anemic, deprived of the author's pain, sluggish collection of cliché situations that were moving about from one "school film" to another in the late 1980s. A tormented teenager associates with shadowy personalities. A "progressive" teacher tries to pull the poor fellow out of the mess. No doubt, such situations do happen. The idea of the film is humane. But the attempt is in vain, since the cast is failing, the script is weak, as well, as director's work. Instead of sincerity and pain, a bad theater and a primitive chronicle reign here...

N.M. Zorkaya in her article published in the year of the release of another revelatory film – *Puppy* (1988) wrote that this "picture is serious, bitter, and tough. It makes one doubt if a praised "glasnost" really triumphed in our lives. In the village where the action takes place, it is unlikely that it will ever triumph. A sixteen-year-old boy, the film protagonist, pays the ultimate price for telling the truth. Without sparing us, the spectators, adult people, the screen unveils the mechanism of isolation and revenge, which throws out the one who dared to say out loud what everyone knows but keeps silent about. This is the only fault of the incautious truth-seeking school pupil, who is only supported by a very young idealist teacher – too fragile support!" (Zorkaya, 1989: 14). In fact, we can agree that in those episodes where the director gave way to improvisation, the story of a truth-loving high-school student who decided to write an expository letter to the central newspaper takes the breath of life. But these episodes, alas, are rare. A surface-deep publicist scenario was composed, essentially, of the "seamy side" stamps: drinking, orgies in a dormitory, corruption, fights, etc. Let's add here the inexpressive acting. All this taken together negated the critical pathos of the film.

However, one should bear in mind that the cinematographic process is one of the most inertial, from the script concept to its screen release, it often takes more than one year. Hence it is clear that a considerable number of films that came out during perestroika period, had been made according to the patterns of the previous epoch (*The White Horse is not My Grief*, 1986; *Hello, Gulnora Rakhimovna!*, 1986; *Leaf Fall in Summertime*, 1986; *Malyavkin and Company*, 1986; *A Very Scary Story*, 1986; *Examination for the Headmaster*, 1986; *We Are Your Children*, 1987, etc.).

Thus, in the comedy *Malyavkin and the Company* (1986), the pioneers are delighted with a personal computer, they search for a missing dog, collect paper for recycling, save a drowning man, and in the finale perform a heartfelt song "Sing, my youth". In the drama *We Are Your Children* (1987), students of the vocational school eagerly go to work in a rural cowshed. And *Examination for the Headmaster* (1986) was just about the only feature film that directly responded positively to the school reform of 1984: the main character of this picture is a young teacher who came to a rural school charged to be a true proponent of pedagogical progress.

Among such late comings was a semi-detective melodrama *A Slap in the Face, That Never Happened* (1987).

A seventeen-year-old boy, contrary to the title of the picture, gives a sonorous slap to his former classmate (a girl), who, out of jealousy, gave a teacher a "compromising document" – a photo of a timid kiss of two high-school students. The boy in the picture was the one she was in love with, the girl was her more successful rival. As a result, the young headmaster calls the police, insists that a criminal case must be initiated against the boy, and the innocent photo is declared nothing less than pornography.

Is it possible to imagine such behavior of a teacher in a Soviet school? Certainly. For example, in a school in 1937 or 1947. Back then, in fact, because of tenth graders' kiss, at times, urgent Komsomol meetings were convened, or politically incorrect school paper article could result in much serious sanctions.



However, the action of the film *A Slap in the Face, That Never Happened* takes place in the second half of the 1980s, when both school and schoolchildren had very different problems. When cases of intimate relations between high school students did not seem sensational, because the problems of drug abuse and other substance abuse were on the agenda. Compared to this, the sterile world of the film seemed archaic and false at that time. Moreover, the actor's pinch (in gestures, facial expressions, intonations), noticeable literally in every episode, plus the negligence of visual techniques, the banality of *mise-en-scène* and montage.

Perhaps, to a lesser extent, but also rather archaic was *Work on Mistakes* (1988), based on the story of Y. Polyakov. The film was about a young journalist and a teacher of the Russian language and literature who was looking for a manuscript of a writer repressed in 1937. He got a difficult class of students that was led by an irresistible and spoiled "A" pupil, the daughter of a big boss. Maiden love, rivalry, search of a case with the manuscript, stolen from the teacher, a seduction scene, – all this makes the audience involved, although one can feel some things stretched or artificial. For example, why does this versatile group easily become helpful pathfinders searching for a novel that disappeared in the 1937 when the author was arrested? Why does the teacher easily give up, capitulate, throwing his case into the fire? (Zorkaya, 1989: 15).

It should be noted that *Work on Mistakes* was not the only film plot that the politics directly entered. Politically, *The Whistler* (1988) concept was quite sharp, as the beginning of the film featured the scene of the recruitment of a first-year student by a KGB officer. However, later the authors, as if frightened of their "perestroika" courage, changed the situation: the recruiter was not a real agent, but the rector's son. But the leader of the underground circle of students was presented as an ideological fighter against the authorities and organizer of student protests.

An individual place in the "school series" of perestroika period is occupied by few films, the action of which took place in the 1920s and 1930s. On the one hand, we have to admit that the author of the brilliant film about teachers and schoolchildren of the 1920s *The Republic of ShKID* (1966), G. Polok was not able, as they say, to set foot in the same river twice. *Our Calling* (1981), as well as *I am the Leader of the Outpost* (1986) were a pale shadow of his ShKID story. On the other hand, a notable event in the second half of the 1980s was the screen adaptation of the novel *Tomorrow Was the War* by Boris Vasilyev (1987), which first touched upon the theme of Stalin's repressions of the 1930s in the context of school theme. In this drama, young high school students come across manifestations of human betrayal, deception, hypocrisy (which at the state level has already led to the planting of a system of denunciations, arrests and quick massacre (Kudryavtsev, 2006)).

#### **4. Results**

*The perestroika period films (1986-1991) on the school/university topic.*

*Place of action, historical, social, cultural, political, and ideological context*

*Historical context (dominant concepts: "media agencies", "media categories", "media representations" and "media audiences").*

*Features of the historical period when media texts were created, market conditions that contributed to the idea, the process of creating media texts, the degree of influence of that time on media texts.*

The timeframe for the historical period has been defined conditionally since 1986 (the beginning of the "perestroika" processes after Mikhail Gorbachev's coming to power) up to 1991 (when the Soviet Union was liquidated by proclaiming the independence of the former Soviet republics).

The main characteristics of this historical period:

- the proclamation of M.S. Gorbachev's policy of "restructuring and glasnost", pluralism, democratization and improving socialism (including holding free elections with alternative candidates);
- the official condemnation of the communist regime's crimes and the rehabilitation of about a million of innocently convicted, and dissidents;
- the gradual abandonment of ideological struggle and the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, the proclamation of a disarmament policy;
- a course towards the gradual abolition of censorship bans and the free exchange of specialists and ideas with the West;

- a new "perestroika" impulse to continue the exploitation of the official doctrine of the established common community of the Soviet people and the absence of class, ethnic, national, racial problems in the USSR; the possibility of peaceful coexistence of socialist and capitalist systems (against the background of improving political relations with the U.S. and western European countries);
- an attempt to open the way for private cooperation, i.e. to partially revive the trends of the Soviet "new economic policy" of the 1920s;
- economic (largely due to a steep drop in oil prices) and the ideological crisis that eventually led to an attempt at a conservative coup d'etat in the summer of 1991;
- the disintegration of the Soviet Union in late 1991;

**Table 1.** Key dates and events in the USSR and worldwide in perestroika period (1986–1991): politics, economics, culture (compiled by A. Fedorov)

Year	Key dates and events in the USSR and worldwide in perestroika period (1986–1991): politics, economics, culture
1986	<p>XXVII Congress of the CPSU: February 25 – March 6.                      Accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant: April 26.                      V Congress of USSR Cinematographers: a film director E.G. Klimov was elected the chairman of the USSR Cinematographers Union: May.                      Resolution of the CPSU Central Committee. "On disadvantages of buying and distributing foreign films": June 4.                      The threefold drop in world oil prices (from \$29 to \$10 per barrel), which sharply intensified the economic crisis in the USSR: June.                      The announcement of M.Gorbachev that "perestroika" has begun: June.                      French President F. Mitterrand visits the USSR: July 7–10.                      M.S. Gorbachev and R.Reagan meet in Reykjavik: October 11–12.                      Opening of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna: 4 November.                      The return to Moscow of the nuclear physicist and activist for human rights and peace A.D. Sakharov from a 7 year exile: December 23.</p>
1987	<p>M. Thatcher's visit to the USSR: March 28–April 1.                      The abolition of most western radio stations' jamming on the USSR territory: May 23.                      The unauthorized flight of the German amateur pilot M. Rust from Hamburg (via Helsinki) to Moscow (illegal landing on the Red Square): May 27.                      The 70th anniversary of Soviet power: November 7.                      Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Washington. The signing of the treaty on the elimination of medium-range nuclear missiles: December 1–10.                      M. Gorbachev was declared Person of the Year by <i>Time</i>.                      Low world prices for oil, contributing to a further decline in the economy of the USSR and the standard of living of its population.</p>
1988	<p>The beginning of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan: May 15.                      M. Gorbachev and R. Reagan meet in Moscow: May 29 - June 2.                      Chancellor of Germany H. Kohl visits the USSR: October 24–27.                      French President F. Mitterrand visits the USSR: November 25–26.                      The abolition of jamming the radio station "Free Europe" on Soviet territory: November 30.                      Visit of M.S. Gorbachev in New York (UN). His statement on the reduction of the Soviet armed forces and the beginning of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe: December 6–8.                      Low world prices for oil, contributing to a further decline in the economy of the USSR and the living standards of its population and to the rising desire of some citizens to (now authorized) emigrate.</p>
1989	<p>The end of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan: February 15.                      George Bush Sr. becomes the US President.</p>

	<p>Numerous meetings of M. Gorbachev with world leaders (including US President George W. Bush) and his statement on further disarmament.                  The literary magazine "New World" was the first one in the USSR to publish a book by A.I. Solzhenitsyn "The Gulag Archipelago": July.                  The 70th anniversary of Soviet cinema: August 27.                  The fall of the Berlin Wall begins: November 9.                  The overthrow of T. Zhivkov's regime in Bulgaria: November 10.                  The victory of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia: November 24.                  The victory of the anti-communist opposition in the elections in Hungary: November 26.                  The victory of anti-communist forces in Romania: December.                  A.D. Sakharov's death: December 14.                  Further decline in the economy of the USSR and the living standards of its population, and the growth of emigration.</p>
1990	<p>Consent of the USSR to the unification of Germany: January 30.                  XXVIII Congress of the CPSU: July 2–13.                  The USSR gives consent for united Germany to join NATO: July 14–16.                  Numerous meetings of M. Gorbachev with western countries leaders.                  Mikhail Gorbachev is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.</p>
1991	<p>The war in Kuwait between the US and Iraq: January 16–19.                  World oil prices remain low, which leads to a further decline in the economy of the USSR and the living standards of its population.                  the Warsaw Treaty after 36 years of military alliance of Central and Eastern Europe states with the USSR disestablished: July 1.                  The attempt of a coup d'état, organized by the conservative part of the leadership of the USSR: August 19–21.                  The actual disintegration of the USSR: December 8.                  Voluntary resignation of Mikhail Gorbachev from the post of the President of the USSR, transfer of power to Boris Yeltsin: December 25.                  Official disintegration of the USSR: December 26.</p>

*How the knowledge of real historical events of a particular period helps to understand the given media texts, examples of historical references in these media texts.*

Soviet audiovisual texts of 1986–1991 on the school and university, according to the authorities, were supposed to support the main lines of the then state policy in the educational and socio-cultural spheres, that is, to show that the Soviet system of education, upbringing and culture, while maintaining common ideological guidelines:

- has some challenging issues in education and upbringing, but is being reformed and is capable of changing for the better;

- the teacher-pupils relation continues to be democratic, to some extent creative.

However, these tendencies were characteristic mainly of the initial stage of "perestroika".

At the final stage of perestroika, the absence of state censorship and ideological vacuum resulted in filmmakers' focusing on the acute painful issues of school / university and society.

*Social, cultural, ideological, and religious context (dominant concepts: "media agencies", "media categories", "media representations" and "media audience").*

- *ideology, directions, goals, objectives, world outlook, the concepts of the media texts' authors in the socio-cultural context; ideology, culture of the world, depicted in media texts.*

In the perestroika era, the communist ideology in the USSR continued to dominate (although it was gradually criticized by the opposition), but the film industry was under less censorship, than in the past, so school and university themes in Soviet cinema very quickly entered previously forbidden plot territories.

- *the world outlook of the characters of the "school world" depicted in media texts*

The world view of the characters was increasingly losing its optimism, some films contained shockingly graphic scenes. Films based on the normal Soviet hierarchy of values (communist ideology, collectivism, diligence, honesty, willingness to help people in need) became history. More

and more often the screen was reflecting life realia. For example, the films *Avaria - a cop's daughter* (1989), *Government Facility* (1989) and *Made in the USSR* (1990), were factually based on cases of soulless bureaucracy, lies, violence, substance abuse and other vices of society including school.

*Structure and narrative techniques in these media texts (dominant concepts: "media categories", "media technologies", "media languages", "media representations")*

Schematically, the structure, plot, representativeness, ethics, features of genre modification, iconography, character characters of audiovisual media texts on school and university topic in the perestroika period can be presented as follows:

- *the location and time period in media texts*. The main location in films is school classes and corridors, schoolyards and flats; the plot is set mostly (if it's not a retro) at the time when the film is made.

- *the environment typical for these media texts, household items*: the furnishings and household items of school films are still modest, however oftener than before wealthy apartments are shown (*Come What May*, 1986; *Temptation*, 1987; *Work on Mistakes*, 1988; *The Whistler*, 1988; *Darling Ap*, 1991, etc.);

- *genre modifications of school and university subjects*: predominantly – drama; filmmakers in the second half of the 1980s, seemingly, decided that a comedy genre was absolutely inappropriate in the hard, incriminating "perestroika film flow";

- *narrative techniques, narrative bias*: positive characters are rarely idealized, and negative ones tend to be presented ambiguously too;

- *typology of characters (character traits, clothing, physique, vocabulary, facial expressions, character gestures, the presence or absence of the stereotypical manner of representing the characters in these media texts): characters' age*: the age of schoolchildren is in the range of 7–17 years, however, teenage characters are most common; the age of other characters (teachers, parents, grandparents, etc.) varies, but adults but adults under 60 prevail; *education level*: corresponding school year for students, teachers presumably have a university degree, supporting characters can have any level of education; *social status, profession*: the financial situation of students is basically the same (although the material inequality of individual characters began to be clearly indicated), they can be either from the families of workers and farmers, or from the intelligentsia. The parents' jobs are diverse; *characters' marital status*: school students, naturally, are not married; adult characters are mostly married, however, single teachers also appear on the screen (resulting in plot twists connected with the love relationships of teachers and students); *appearance, clothing, physique of characters, features of their characters, vocabulary*: the appearance of the characters of school children and students in the films of the perestroika period is within the framework of the canons of the student's image of that time, which was by far more free than in the 1970s.

A frame from the film *Non Slap in the face* (1987) gives an idea of the appearance, clothes, physique of the characters – students of the era of "perestroika".



**Fig. 1.** A frame from the film *Non Slap in the face* (1987)

Schoolchildren in the films 1986–1991, unlike the "thaw" and "stagnation" periods, have a rather pragmatic life vision, related to material prosperity, or, on the contrary, are in deep depression. Screen teachers often put up with the idea that it is impossible to reform a "bad" student. Perestroika period teachers are even more melancholic than in the films of stagnation period. The professional distance between them and the students becomes even more fragile (that is vividly illustrated in such films as *Come What May*, 1986; *Temptation*, 1987; *Work on Mistakes*, 1988; *The Doll*, 1988; *Dear Elena Sergeevna*, 1988; *Avaria – a cop's daughter*, 1989; *Homo Novus*, 1990). Like in films during stagnation period, some screen faculty wear rather casual clothes.

A shot from the movie *The Doll* (1988) reflects the appearance, clothing, physique of the character-teacher of "perestroika" years.



**Fig. 2.** The frame from the film *The Doll* (1988)

*A significant change in the life of media characters and the challenge that the characters face (a violation of the usual life):*

*Option 1:* among the next-door characters, schoolchildren who live a normal life, are those who for some reason do not fit into the standard framework of interpersonal communication and learning process, that is:

- the behave abnormally, sometimes steal (*Come What May*, 1986; *Haunted House*, 1987; *Blackmailer*, 1987; *The Doll*, 1988; *The Whistler*, 1988; *Avaria – a cop's daughter*, 1989; *Government Facility*, 1989; *Made in the USSR*, 1990, etc.);

- try to dominate, subjugate their classmates and/or teachers, acting sometimes violently (*Plumbum of the Dangerous Game*, 1986; *Haunted House*, 1987; *Work on Mistakes*, 1988; *The Doll*, 1988; *Dear Elena Sergeevna*, 1988; *Government Facility*, 1989; *It Happened by the Sea*, 1989; *Homo Novus*, 1990, *The Window*, 1991);

- stand out among classmates (in a good way or in a bad way) so conflict with the rest of the class and / or teachers (*Come What May*, 1986; *Plumbum of the Dangerous Game*, 1986; *Work on Mistakes*, 1988; *The Doll*, 1988; *Dear Elena Sergeevna*, 1988; *Puppy*, 1988; *The Jester*, 1988; *Dear Ap*, 1991, etc.);

- fall in love (*Come What May*, 1986; *The Slap in the Face that Never Happened*, 1987; *Temptation*, 1987; *Work on Mistakes*, 1988; *Dear Ap*, 1991, etc.).

*Option 2:* there are extraordinary teachers among faculty - those who also do not fit into the standard school framework, that is, they try to:

- resist the outdated and / or, from their point of view, incorrect methods of the school principal and / or teaching staff and collide with him / them (*White Horse is not My Grief*, 1986; *Examination for the Headmaster*, 1986, etc.);

- establish trust-based relations with the students, no matter how difficult it may be (*Hello, Gulnara Rahimovna!*, 1986; *Leaf Fall in Summertime*, 1986; *Examination for the Headmaster*, 1986; *We are Your Children*, 1987; *The Doll*, 1988; *Work on Mistakes*, 1988; *Accomplice*, 1990, etc.).

*Solving the problem:*

Option 1 (student-centered): "odd ones out" school students keep their belief, because they do not comply to educational/parental influence (*Come What May*, 1986; *Plumbum or the Dangerous Game*, 1986; *Work on Mistakes*, 1988; *The Doll*, 1988; *Dear Elena Sergeevna*, 1988; *Avaria- a cop's daughter*, 1989; *Dear Ap*, 1991);

Option 2 (teachers-centered): unconventional teachers triumph (*Hello, Gulnama Rahimovna!*, 1986; *Leaf Fall in Summertime*, 1986; *We are Your Children*, 1987), lose (*Slap in the Face that Never Happened*, 1987; *Temptation*, 1987; *Work on Mistakes*, 1988; *Dear Elena Sergeevna*, 1988; *Avaria- a cop's daughter*, 1989; *Asthenia Syndrome*, 1989, etc.) or (as in *The Doll*, 1988) the result of their relations with students becomes ambiguous...

We agree with N. Sumenov: a lot of films about school and the youth were limited only to ascertaining acute problems, hence the straightforwardness of oppositions arose: often young film authors held elder generations responsible for the troubles of the young, and older film creators blamed the youth (Sumenov, 1989: 53).

## 5. Conclusions

Summing up, the films of "perestroika" period (1986-1991) on the school-university theme showed that:

- the education / upbringing process has lost its previous strict storylines, in many respects has lost its communist landmarks;
- school and university have acute problem areas (crisis, disappointment and fatigue, professional "burning out" of teachers, stagnation, hypocrisy, lies, bureaucracy and authoritarianism, pragmatic cynicism of students, teenage cruelty, underage sexual activity, etc.);
- the activity of a student / student again became more directed toward the outside world than to the inner world;
- appropriate distance in the teacher-student relationship has become more fragile (familiarity, sexual relation, or its provocation); in the films *Work on Mistakes* (1988) and *Asthenic Syndrome* (1989), male teachers even fight with high school students in class or in the school corridor;
- the prestige of the pedagogical profession in the eyes of students and the public has fallen even lower; in accordance with the real state of affairs, female teachers' images (often lonely, unsettled) came to the forefront;
- the main conflicts of plots were built on the opposition of non-ordinary teachers and students with stagnation, bureaucracy, mediocre bosses / colleagues / peers.

Actually, one can probably assume that the exposing "black series" of the perestroika cinema (where the youth theme was one of the most prominent ones) served a kind of "mobilizing purpose", only at the time it was not the orientation of "Soviet power elites in the renewal of the tools which they embodied the communist project with" (Belyaeva, Mikhailin, 2015: 551). Conversely, a Western-oriented part of the Soviet ruling elite used "uncensored" cinematography as one of the levers for the gradual liquidation of socialism (Razzakov, 2013: 404-405). On the other hand, it is possible not to attach special importance to this "conspiracy" assumption, believing that Soviet cinematographers spontaneously walked in the wake of political and socio-cultural changes of the "perestroika" era. After all, we should not forget that by the end of the 1980s a paradoxical situation arose in the USSR when the state continued to finance film production, but in the actual absence of censorship, filmmakers could produce all that they wanted, practically ignoring the opinion of the leading bodies of the CPSU and the government.

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