

## Socio-cultural Child's Image (Soviet and Russian movies' Analysis)

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The current situation of studies of childhood goes back to the classical psychological theories, in Russian psychology to cultural-historical theory. These theories were developed as a generalization and comprehension of the realities of childhood, which were typical at the time of the creation of these theories. Rapid social changes, especially in recent decades, led to the emergence of a wide range of sources that emphasize the changing daily life of childhood – childhood changed from epoch to epoch, there was even the metaphor of a “disappearance of childhood”. The article describes a gradual change of child's image in relation to an adult, and the Soviet and Russian films of the 40-ies – 2000-ies were used as a material of analysis. Study is based on the assumption that a consistent analysis based on a theory of text structure M. Lotman, demonstrates the changing image of the child. In the 40s – 50s the child appears immature, pre-adult, and the adult – the embodiment of ideal forms, and the main conflict – a manifestation of the child's immaturity/ Then gradually from decade to decade more and more the main characters – the child and the adult - appear as different personalities; and the child (teenager) sometimes acquires a pronounced negative features. The very dichotomy of child-adult loses its value.

**Keywords:** childhood, adulthood, ideal form, crisis of childhood, child's image in belletristic texts, representation of child-adult relationship in movies.

Various areas of scientific knowledge focus on differences between childhood and adulthood lately. Who is an adult? What are the criteria of becoming an adult? What is the borderline between childhood and adulthood and what is it in its essence? Discussions on the matter date back to N. Postman [19] and P. Aries [3], however, modern developmental science attests to less distinct borders between the developmental stages, which in its turn challenges these constructs themselves. Is childhood principally different from adulthood indeed?

It is crucial to note that the material and practical environment in which children grow up is changing with time, as well as childhood-related activities, and so called “age-related cultural symbolism” (by I. Kon[9]), notion of a child and her must and mustn'ts, which constitute an epoch-specific “metaphors of childhood” (by D. Elkind [17]).

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### Theoretical Grounds of the Present Research

#### Evolution of Childhood

The key changes of childhood routine are agreed to have started as early as 1950-60s. According to J.J. Arnett, for example, the pathway to adulthood leading through higher education and marriage, so common in 1950s, is nowadays becoming more complex and undergoes further diversification [16]. Seemingly immutable socio-cultural spaces in which children used to grow up few decades ago, today transform into something new [14]. The modification of parental routine, unpopularity of schools, emergence and development informal learning activities are among such new practices [14].

Various rituals that marked the transition from childhood to adulthood cease to be apparent and symbolic, and start losing their universal nature. J.J. Arnett [16]. mentions marriage, parenthood, financial independence in this

context; according to P. Buechner et al [5]. dispersion of earlier common biographical events serves as such a marker, and some other researchers (e.g. L.Petranovskaya, [12]) point out at abandoning of initiation rituals and their more and more spontaneous, occasional nature.

D. Richter highlights similarity between adults and children as regards fashion, clothing, television programs choice, with school activities resembling working activities of adults. An adult ceases to be the only mediator between a child and culture. Children recourse to the internet and their fellows as to the sources of knowledge and opinions; adults continue to study even in their mature age [12]. The variety of childhood models increases. R. Settersten [21], for example, points at vast education opportunities children get due to uncensored access to the internet, and indicates this as a reason for children's ways of becoming adults getting more individual.

This overview of scientific literature on the childhood shows it necessary to acknowledge the new reality of child's development and to doubt the validity of the very construct of "age" as regards modern world [13]. Similarly, J.J Arnett marks the concepts of developmental "periods" and "milestones" as outdated, with directions of development varying greatly and the stages of development not necessarily following ascending order. The scientist introduces the concept of "emerging adulthood" instead, in an attempt to describe young people who can not boast being an adult, but who cease to be adolescent at the same time [16]. According to D.Elkind (year), the individual differences between children of the same age, as well as of different age, are of most interest for the scientific research, and inter-age differences are claimed to be more salient than the intra-age ones [17].

### **Childhood from the Cultural-Historical School Perspective**

According to the cultural-historical approach, one of the main concepts that account for the integrity of childhood is "ideal form", which refers to an image of perfect adulthood (L. Vygotsky, [6]). Unlike phylogenetic perspective of a man's development, a child in her ontogenesis masters primitive, natural forms of behavior at first, at the same time aiming at higher, ideal forms of behavior, which are represented by norms, patterns, regulations a child has to master — or culture, in other words.

According to this approach, children base their perception of future solely on the image of adulthood — of an ideal, perfect adult. Thus, an adult acts as a moderator between real and ideal world perception, shaping and reflecting the boundaries between them.

The swift changes of the world children face today reflect critical stage of the childhood: the perfect adult image is lost or does not reveal itself to a child. According to D. Elkonin [15], such phenomena, being, essentially, crises of childhood, result in building up new forms of relationships between adults and children.

### **Research Question**

The described above changes that affect childhood challenge the understanding of a child as someone who is sup-

posed to become adult, and of adulthood being shaped by a perfect, ideal form of a child. If this hypothesis is correct and rhizomatic development indeed replaces purposeful child's development, mediated by ideal image of an adult [13], then the very grounds of childhood, parenthood and family research are to be revised. The first step to that lies in analysis of a child's image in everyday discourse.

The changing reality of childhood, naturally, induces alteration in image of a child and childhood in general. A number of studies [8], [11] reveal the correlation between an image of a child and child fostering practices in a family. We assume that the said transformations might be identified in wider range of social life events, for example, in arts.

Thus, the object of this research is perception of childhood in everyday life, the sustainability of this image. The source of the data is the image of a child as depicted in the cinema of the second half of XX century, compared by decades. The prototype of such approach is P.Aries's analysis of historical evolution of a child's portrait [3]. A child's image in cinema has already been subject to scientific attention on the part of culture studies and philology [1] [2] [7]. The aim of the present study is to further existing knowledge by investigating evolution of a child's relationship with an adult as an essence of difference between them. The logic of the research is based on an assumption that the way cinema depicts a child is recognized and approve by its audience.

### **Method**

Initially, the collection of movies filmed between 1940s and 2000s was made, in which the main character was a school-age child, or children, and the key conflict or key scenes were covering the topic of child-adult relationships.

There were few relevant films shot in 1940–1950s, whereas in 1960–1980s they came in plenty. In order to identify most typical films, 10 experts in the field of education and child psychology were involved. However, this tactic did not allow creating any shortlist: the films' number grew, and the frequency of references did not.

According to the initial hypothesis, the objective change in a child's image and relations with adults would be observed: namely, vanishing of initial characteristics of child-adult interaction in earlier films and appearance of its other forms in the later ones. Yet, this assumption has proved wrong with one same models appearing in 1940s, 1950s and 1960s films, and new models being highlighted in 1960s films and later. We had to conclude that this trend reflects rather diversification of childhood models than consequential change of those.

This observation has forced us to change the initial hypothesis of the study. The initial version would require theoretically unlimited number of films to be analyzed, and still the risk of finding new material would remain. However, in order to support the second hypothesis one would have to record new models in the cinema of the later years as compared to the earlier decades, and this would allow comparatively

looser criteria for films choice<sup>1</sup>. This is why it was decided to take a sample of the most widely known films.

In the analysis of the films, the structure of a belletristic text analysis according to Y. Lotman's method [10] and M. Bakhtin's dialogic conception [4]. were applied to the film scripts.

Here are the main assumptions that were used at this stage of the work:

1. A film's narrative is constructed by a system of iconic and verbal signs, and hence it is possible to discover underlying conceptual patterns by analyzing the film scripts.

2. Any belletristic text reflects certain idea.

3. Structure of a belletristic text follows certain rules:

- A text being spatially limited represents a model of a boundless world.

- The model of the world is reflected in the structure of a text's semantic space, it is a sum of homogenous objects (phenomena, functions, figures, meanings) which could be described in terms of spatial relations (integrity, space, etc) [10].

- The semantic space is communicated to a reader through the plot, which unfolds with the *event* of a protagonist's transition between the intersecting semantic spaces. There is a tight connection between the main plot of the story and the setting in which the story takes place. The latter serves as a reference point for a judgement whether an event is significant for the story or does not communicate any new ideas. A significant event is always a breach of a taboo, a fact that has happened contrary to the existing logic of the world.

- The structure of the plot includes the following elements: 1) Semantic space that is formed by two complimentary subspaces. 2) Borderline between the subspaces, which is normally impregnable; the storyline implies the protagonist's breakthrough. 3) Protagonist.

The plot's elements mentioned above constitute the analysis of the chosen movies.

## Results

### 1940–50s

The films that were picked out to form the sample of 1940–50s are "Pervoklassnitsa" (Frez, 1948), "Krasnyi Galstuk" (Sauts, Sukhobokov, 1948) and "Attestat Zrelosti" (Lukashevich, 1954).

The world conception is similar in all the three films: the society strictly regulates roles, norms, values and patterns of everyone's behavior. Every age period culminates with solving a unique problem: a pre-schooler has to become a "real" pupil, younger teenager, a "real" teenager, late teenager, "real" comsomolets (young communist) — "real" in terms of conforming to the new role norms. The images of a child and an adult are uniform, an adult being a role model, representing wisdom, maturity, professionalism and honor. In contrast, a child appears as an inferior preform of an adult, lacking responsibility and perception

of own actions' consequences, or maturity, in other words.

The world paradigm consists of two semantic dimensions: immature individualistic space of childhood, to which the protagonist belongs, and the ideal collectivistic adult world, which is represented by the main character's peers and adults. Adhering to the individual interests is shown in the negative light as it prevents the characters from efficiently fulfilling their social role demands: being naughty and capricious, breaking rules, leaving a friend in need, avoiding group duties are denounced, whereas group-beneficial qualities are depicted as socially approved markers of maturity.

If to link this paradigm to a storyline, it is necessary to introduce the concept of an incident — an event that goes contrary to the logic of the world where it takes place and which fuels the storyline's further development. The less likely is this incident to happen, the more salient it is, and the more information it communicates [10].

In the films of the explored decade the collectivistic norms prevail, and it is seen as natural for a person to come of age accordingly. In this context, any event that would disturb the process of socialization would become an incident. Expectantly, all the three films build on the controversy between impulsive immaturities of a child and an adult's consciousness and, all in all, perfection. Valery Vishniakov, the protagonist in "Krasnyi Galstuk" (Sauts, Sukhobokov, 1948), neglects his group duties and earns disrespect of his peers and loses the attributes of the pioneers' group affiliation. Valentin Listovsky from "Attestat Zrelosti" faces the same trial, being excluded from his reference group comsomol as a result of his egoism, arrogance and irresponsibility. This ostracism strikes both boys hard and serves as a reason for introspection for them, their peers and adults, too. The denouement comes with both boys' public repentance, their egoism overcome and errands successfully completed, which earns them forgiveness of their friends and adult society. A wise and experienced adult helps them understand wrongness of their position and decide to remedy the evil. For example, in "Attestat Zrelosti" Valentin's father plays this role.

Marusya, the protagonist in "Pervoklassnitsa", is impulsive and wayward and despises rules set by the society, and is less than uncaring for the consequences of her behavior. Her tutor Maria Ivanovna helps the girl adapt to the school rules and become a successful student. The words Maria Ivanovna addresses to the new first grade students on the first study day are characteristic of the whole period in the cinema, and the whole ideology of the time: "Soon will you become real students". The episode where Marusya talks her friends into a hazardous walk in woods without letting anyone know and gets into a trouble could be considered the culmination of the film. Anna Ivanovna the teacher helps the children out, and the whole story ends with Marusya begging for pardon and becoming a diligent student.

The set of characters is similar in all the three films. The protagonist is a child, who unlike the others (peers, adults) can cross the border between the two worlds: adult and child ones. This transition takes form of breaking social

<sup>1</sup> Science fiction and fantasy films were excluded from analysis as the present research was focused on real actual interaction between children and adults.

norms, denial and depreciation of recognized by the society values. A salient figure of a perfect adult impersonating wisdom, maturity and honor acts allows the protagonist to recognize and acknowledge his or her errors.

### 1960s

The number of films depicting children increases in these years. The following films were chosen "Drug moy, Kolka!" (Mitta, Saltykov, 1961), "A esli eto lyubov?" (Raizman, 1962), "Dozhiviyom do ponedelnika" (Rostotskiy, 1968) as showing the evolution as a child's image more evidently. This principle was observed in the film choice of the coming decades, too.

Norms, values and patterns of behavior still play enormous role in the worlds of these films, however, becoming more relative. For example, diligent students in "Drug moy, Kolka!" become more of know-it-all boffins, being insincere and unforgiving formalists, whereas Kolya, a tease and a weak student, acts kindly and fairly towards others.

The novel relativity of judgements might be related to an increasing complexity of an adult's image characteristic of cinema of this period. The contrast between two adult characters could serve as an example of this observation: Lidia Mikhailovna, the pioneer group tutor who favors successful students and treats others half-heartedly and formally, provokes fighting among students, is opposed to a new pioneer leader Sergei Rudenko, who equally cares for all the children and helps those who are in need. The two significant characters in "А если это любовь?" also treat the emerging love between teenagers differently: either with condemn and scold, as the protagonist's mother the German teacher, or with compassion and mercy, as another young teacher involved in the situation. The adults in "Dozhiviyom do ponedelnika" start being more human, suffering from emotional burnout, loneliness, alienation, too.

A child is looked at differently as well, now getting an independent autonomous personality and the right to express his individuality and views. Thus, the protagonist in "Drug moy, Kolka!" is rather saving his time from things that do not interest him than is being immature. Boris in "A esli eto lyubov?" shows courage and toughness in his fight against the adult world for his right to love.

The spatial structure of 1960s films is also more complex. Different characters represent different ideas and views and thus combination of these elements results in a new semantic chord. The plot's structure becomes polyphonic "Dozhiviyom do ponedelnika", illustrates this idea with its several equally significant storylines. There is a history teacher Ilya Semionovich, who is deep down in his existential crisis, Natasha Gorelova, who recently joined the school teaching cohort and is secretly in love with Ilya, rigorous Svetlana Mikhailovna, who is struggling through a family crisis, high school student Gena Shestopal, who inequitably loves Rita Cherkasova his classmate, to name but a few. Each of these characters, with their own perception of world and self-knowledge, create their own semantic spaces, their own worlds. Here, a person is stuck in their self, but the others' world exists for them and is open and available. "Drug moy, Kolka!" and "A esli eto lyubov?" show this as a conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist (Kolka and the pioneer group leader, teenagers and

adults, respectively), and the interaction between the characters in "Dozhiviyom do ponedelnika" is based on differences in character's life views, which are equally significant and valueable. The real dialogism (in M. Bakhtin's sense of self-cognition through interaction with others) will appear a decade later. The films of this decade stand out with their numerous dialogues between characters, who are equally relatively right, or wrong — both children and adults.

This evolution of the semantic space has visibly affected the narrative of the films. The importance of socialization is still highlighted, and the incident still implies the protagonist to go against the societal norms, however, the protest and the denial become a conscious act of will, rather than the result of immaturity. The resolution of the conflict becomes less indisputable and universal: for example, adults force the girl to give up her feelings towards her fiancée, but the protagonist stays true to his views and sticks to himself ("A esli eto lyubov?"), and there is no common solution for the characters of "Dozhiviyom do ponedelnika", too: everyone finds their own way to cope with the challenges they face.

### 1970s

A child and his inner world come into the focus of attention of 1970s' cinema. Elaborately depicted thoughts, motivation, emotions and needs of a teenager, their understanding and critics of adults' norms and values ("Oh uzh eta Nastya!" (Pobedonostsev, 1972), "Klyuch bez prava peredachi" (Asanova, 1977)), intergroup relations ("Rozy-grysh" (Menshov, 1977)) lead the discourse of this age.

The previously questioned perfection and infallibility of adults' world logically leads to evolution of the whole world's perception. Values and norms that seemed to be set in stone in 1950s, being shown from a child's point of view, become subject to sharp criticism. The society itself serves only as a background and source of the young main characters' thoughts and feelings. Thus, the episode showing the start of the school year in "Oh uzh eta Nastya!" highlights Nastya Ryabinina's worries about her not being on the right spot, and draws less attention to the rituals and festivities themselves.

The plots and semantic spaces become more elaborate, too. It could be a simple controversy between two worlds, as between Nastya's breathtaking imaginary town Eolis and a black panther she befriends on the one hand, and everyday routine with her school teacher, classmates, elder sister on the other. The essence of this clash is vivid in the sisters' dialogue at a breakfast:

— Sveta! It would be so great to have the Black sea right at our doorsteps! You could watch shipwrecks all the time! Don't you think?

— Just eat your porridge, will you?

Nastya is an equilibrist at the border of the two worlds. She acts weirdly, at least for a real world observer, which fuels the conflict between Nastya and others: Nastya is accused of being a liar, is ostracized by her classmates and due to this fails to enter the pioneer organization. This story would have ended with a public penitence of the hero, who would embrace the societal norms in the end — had it been filmed in 1950s. Twenty years later, both the teacher and peers are expected to accept and respect Nastya the way she is.

The matters are considerably more complex in “Rozygrysh” and “Klyuch bez prava peredachi”. The dialogic pattern evolves here to its next step, with interaction of different worldviews and values, clash of different semantic spaces of “myself” and “the other”, be it an adult or a peer.

In “Klyuch bez prava peredachi” a tightly bound and secure class group, affiliated with their young class tutor, treats other teachers as conservative and archaic. They voicerecord their loose judgements, that eventually end up at the headmaster’s disposal. Quite unexpectedly for the kids, the headmaster, a former army officer, naturally treated as a martinet, does not make it public and chooses to erase the recordings. The idea of the film is supported by the final song lyrics: “let us be more attentive to each other so as not to err twice in our judgements”.

What’s more, the image of an adult becomes less distinct, and it is no longer possible to say, what is characteristic of adulthood. It is Oleg Komarovskiy’s father (“Rozygrysh”) who suggests that Oleg misses the school classes, which Oleg turns down, appealing to him being more ambitious than his father and accusing him of living a boring life:

— Just imagine what you could achieve, had you stayed focused on one thing! You can passively wait for something to happen to you, but you can make things happen to you too! I simply can’t afford being laid back now; we are living in a new world.

— In fact, that’s what I should tell you. Where does this spirit come from? One could think you are a wise old man already.

This episode serves to show the indistinctiveness of markers of adulthood.

### 1980–1990s

The trends, identified basing on the earlier decades, remain in this decade, as well.

The worries and sorrows of a first grade school student are innumerable (“Solntse v karmane” (Gavrilov, 1984)), but there always are responsive parents and caring teacher who would help overcome them — a twin story to already discussed “Pervoklassnitsa” (Frez, 1948). Teenagers from “Vam i ne snilos...” (Frez, 1981) have to save their love from the adults’ condemn and criticism, just like their peers from “A esli eto liubov” of 1961, but no longer have to fight back the dominant ideology and have more opportunities for a peaceful solution. It is tempting to compare Valya Uspenskiy from “Shut” (Eshpay, 1988) to Valya from “Attestat Zrelosti” (Lukashevich, 1954), but this would be only half truth: the 1980s is a period of past years values’ crisis, and there’s no one to personalize perfection any more. In this new society both adults (“Vam i ne snilos...”) and children (“Chuchelo” (Bykov, 1984), “Shut”, “Dorogaya Elena Sergeevna” (Ryazanov, 1988), “Kukolka” (Fridbergas, 1988)) can act equally terrifying. However, only teenagers seem to have capacity to reveal and exaggerate the adults’ and peers’ faults, whereas the younger children still accept the authority of an adult (“Solntse v karmane”). Valya Uspenskiy classmates, parents and teachers find themselves in awkward situations,

being provoked by this bright secondary school student (“Shut”), with all their faults and weaknesses for show. The society of 1980s cinema allows him to “help people be better” this way freely, so unlike his 1960s “twin” Valentin Listovskiy, harshly oppressed by the adults and peers.

The teenage severity and other deviant behavior result from their sincere beliefs (“Shut”, “Chiuchelo”) or obstacles they face on the way to a desired goal, regardless of anything — or anyone. Tanya Serebriakova, the champion of world in gymnastics from “Kukolka” finds herself in an ordinary secondary school after a serious injury. Tanya’s otherwise unquestioned uniqueness is being threatened by unrequited love to her classmate, who secretly admires their class tutor. When the girl’s attempts to conquer his attention by humiliating the teacher, deceiving the classmates fail, she practically destroys herself by doing the best thing she is capable of and that has always brought the desired results — acrobatics on a balance beam.

One of the most shocking examples of teenage cruelty might be met in “Dorogaya Elena Sergeevna”, where the tenth grade school students bring their class tutor to a suicide only to get a key from a locker with their semester tests results.

### 2000s

The first millennium decade has not been ripe with films that would answer this study requirements<sup>2</sup>, and a remake of “Rozygrysh” of 1976 (Kudinenko, 2008) and “Igry Motylkov” (Proshkin, 2004) were chosen as most representative of this time period. TV shows were also left out as requiring more elaborate analysis than the present paper allows.

The border between adulthood and childhood, previously shown as indistinct already, vanishes in the world of 2000s society, as depicted in films. The teenagers’ running over a man by a car after a party goes in line with the main character’s mother attempts to bribe officials to save her son from jail and a police officer’s corruption in “Igry Motylkov”. One wouldn’t want to identify with any of the film’s characters, all of them being unhappy in this or that way, and this might be considered a sign that age loses its significance as a source of differences and conflicts. Thus, in the beginning of “Rozygrysh” Oleg Komarov characterizes others equally disrespectfully regardless of their age: “Mikh Mikh the Hamster” (of the school headmaster), who is “useless, but not dangerous too”, his classmate Taya Petrova “clueless but brilliant at math, wears trinkets from her Granma’s youth”, and so on.

The stories of the two films, “Rozygrysh” of 1976 and its remake, unfold similarly with a school class informal leader Oleg Komarovskiy intending to play a practical joke on a teacher (an English teacher, as a “revenge” for his low mark in the later film, and in order to persuade the math teacher not to run a test in the original version), while another student Igor Glushko stands up to Oleg, and the interaction between the three of them: Oleg, Igor and the teacher builds up the plot of the films.

<sup>2</sup> We have excluded TV series about school life because of their prolonged plots including very different plot lines which require a much more detailed analysis. Neither did we analyze the movies of Gai Germanika which also require a more detailed analysis though we consider them revealing similar trends.

Due to the change of the world paradigm, the same episodes which become incidents in the film of 1970 and which are shown as compelling, lose their importance in the picture of 2000, which focuses on feelings and emotions of the students instead. Taya is heartbroken having trusted someone who betrayed her, Oleg is reflecting on his future career opportunities ensured by his father, which fail to be attractive to him as compared to Taya's or Igor's future prospective requiring much more effort.

## Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis of the children world paradigm by decades basing on the films shot between 1950s and 2000s has revealed the following trend in the way how a child was depicted.

Initially, being opposed to a perfect wise and mature adult in impulsiveness and waywardness, the child hero receives criticism from the others and comes all the way back to becoming a "real" student, pioneer, comsomolets.

The 1960s bring more relativity to the judgements of a child's behavior, and the storylines become more elaborate. Both a child and an adult show more complex

behavior: a child ceases to be a pre-form of an adult and an adult's perfection is challenged. This is the time when the story builds on the "self-other" interaction, in which both an adult and a child start acting and being treated as equals. A child of 1970s is an individual who tries to analyze and question the norms and values he was taught since his early years. His thoughts and feelings come into the focus of attention, and the borderline that used to separate a child from an adult becomes indistinct.

By the 2000s this borderline vanishes completely, a child being actually an adult, displaying adult flaws and weaknesses, at the same time denouncing and mocking the norms and classical patterns of the adults' world. The contrast between a child and an adult loses its significance and ceases to be an explanatory factor, with attention being drawn to interaction between people in general, regardless of their age.

The analysis reveals a gradual steady erosion of the clear boundaries between childhood and adulthood, reveals uncertainty about the future associated with achievement of an absolute, perfect adulthood. Meanwhile, the scientific "construction of" childhood remains within the concept of adulthood as the period of the maximum realization of human faculties and the leading role of the adult as a mediator between a child and cultural experience.

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