

# Postwar Cinema in Search of a New Artistic Imagery (1950-1980s)

Olga Andreeva<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>History of Culture of State and Law Department, Faculty of Humanities, Saint Petersburg Electrotechnical University "LETI", St. Petersburg, Russia

\*Corresponding author. Email: Osa3f@mail.ru

## ABSTRACT

**The article discusses the problems of post-war cinema. The objective of the cinema material is to identify new trends in the spiritual processes of the post-war world and to trace their reflection in the world cinema. In the article special attention is given to creative transformation of artistic imagery.**

*Keywords: Italian neorealism, French new wave, philosophic cinema, political cinema, Soviet cinema, modernism, postmodernism*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Both two World Wars originated in the European Continent bosom reflected a spiritual crisis of modern age. The loss of humanistic values, the depreciation of human life, set before the artists the task of philosophical reflection on the tragic experience of the 20th century. The way out of the spiritual impasse was possible on the path of reforming the content and artistic imagery in cinema. For the world that survived concentration camps and holocaust' tragedy could not be satisfied with hackneyed cliché and entertaining plots pre-war films. The historical epoch demanded true and realistic mass cinema. Only such a cinema, understandable to everybody, could give an objective picture of life and strengthen the hope of its revival.

A new language for cinema was born in the European Continent. It was Europe, which survived the horrors of war that became the center of the global film industry within these years. Moreover, new artistic movements appeared in countries where the forces of good and evil, life and death, humanism and fascism clashed in direct confrontation.

The most radical steps towards in this direction were taken in Italy. The main discover of 1940-1950-s became Italian neorealism.

## II. A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF REALISM IN ART

Italian neorealism was born on the fertile ground. From the moment of its origin and up to the First World War Italian cinema remained on the leading edge in the world. A resource base of cinema was strengthened significantly with the accession to power of Mussolini. Dictatorial regime considered cinematography as the

most important tool of propaganda. In 1933 was founded Tirrenia film studio complex in Livorno, in 1935 in Rome was created Experimental center for film makers, in 1937 also in Rome was opened Cinecittà Studios consisted of 10 film studios. The state bought chain of distribution companies and cinemas. But artistic value of films was pretty low. In these films glorified grandeur of the Ancient Rome, that helped to strengthen the fascist regime from the position of official propaganda. Drawing room melodramas, "cinema dei telefoni bianchi" with sardoodledoms from the high class society reigned on the screens that time. The Italian director and critic Carlo Lizzani (1922 – 2013) wrote: "Now it's impossible to imagine how could appear and breed these empty movies as Italian "standard films" which were far from real life and real people during those years when the world survived such shock. How could dominate the atmosphere of Olympian calm and misunderstanding when the catastrophe of the Second World War was preparing and coming!" [1].

During the War Italian cinema industry was almost destroyed. The pavilions that survived the bombarding were transformed into military warehouses. Other pillaged warehouses served as refugee shelters. Film equipment from the Cinecittà Studios was destroyed or sent abroad, to Germany. American films came down in Italy, finishing this destructive process. In the circumstances neorealism became the platform to unite all progressive, democratic, antifascist forces in the struggle for a spiritual revival of national culture. Origins of a new movement were rooted in Italian cultural traditions, mostly in verismo. A considerable role played the movement of "calligraphers" which representatives were against fascism, supporting humanistic values. "Calligraphers" appealed to the classical literature, thus came such films as "Small old

world" by Mario Soldati (1941), "A shot" by Renato Castellani (based on A.S. Pushkin, 1941), «Idealist Giacomo" by Alberto Lattuada (1942). Some features of a new movement appeared in such movies as "Four steps in the clouds" by Alessandro Blasetti (1942), "Kids look at us" by Vittorio De Sica (1943), "Obsession" by Luchino Visconti (1942). A spiritual revolution was also prepared by discussions about cinema art problems on the pages of "Bianco e nero" and "Cinema" magazines [2].

The work by Cesare Zavattini (1902 – 1989) "Some thoughts about cinema" became as a manifesto of neorealism. In this work the writer, screenwriter and director declared that cinema should unmask fascism, should tell us frankly about existing orders and reflect problems of normal people. These ideas shared also such artists as Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti, Vittorio De Sica, Giuseppe De Santis. Neorealist epoch began with the film "Rome, open city" by Roberto Rossellini (1945). On the screen appeared unforgettable images of ordinary people. Many of them approached victory over fascism, supporting resistance movement. An outstanding actress Anna Magnani discovered a tragedy of Pina, one of the war's victim. She became a symbol of Italian woman, on whose shoulders lay the whole burden of the war years. This film found new facets of female image in the cinema of the post-war era.

Film screening had a stunning effect on the audience. Its artistic images combined organically with documentary background of the movie. The vitality of the frame was created thanks to full-scale shooting on the city squares, transmitting air condition and natural lighting. Characters acted in a habitual living environment. Although a significant part of shots was shot indoors, people's faces were deprived of studio beauty, which was achieved the help of various camera angles. Often natural and emotional acting of actors was shot from one take how it was during very famous scene of dramatic death of Pina. Non-professional actors, children also took part in this movie together with professionals.

Documentary way of this film confirmed also by the fact that shooting was taken on the scene. The most dramatic scenes was taken in torture chambers and places of execution. Real great names of history were traced in the images of heroes. Don Morosini e Don Papagallo became prototypes of Don Pietro, which was executed by fascists. Dialogues and phrases of heroes were non fictional. The words of Don Pietro before his death in the movie: "It's not so difficult to die worthily, it's pretty difficult to live worthily" in reality belonged to the priest Don Morosini. Original his words were: "It's not difficult to die. It's difficult to live" [3]. Semiotic space of the film underlined many times the reality of what is happening. In an almost documentary

shot of a German raid in a residential quarter, German speech was heard, German prisoners of war took part in shooting. Shooting on location, historical realism, appeal to the lives of ordinary people, using of definite semiotic images and signs – all these artistic tools stressed the tragedy of the situation. For this purpose served also a laconic use of lighting effects in black and white cinema to reveal the internal state of characters. These innovations broke stereotypes and formed a special film atmosphere that was far from the experience of pre-war movies.

National film industry destruction resulted in movies was made without any financial resources. The film deficit had to be filled with a low quality film. Rolled up film when projected onto the screen it looked like newsreel, in terms of reliability looked as masterpieces of Soviet documentary films (D. Vertov). Leaning towards documentary images obliterated distinction between cinema and photography for neorealists. Some film shots were like photograph. It's no coincidence that in all forms of art in which neorealism has developed as theater, literature, painting, graphics mainly photography was affected by it. Luigi Crocenzi defined photography as "a fixed movie on the printer's sheet". The works of this prominent photographer such as "View at Milan" (1946), "Outskirts of Rome" (1947) were true to neorealist film. Together with works of such masters as Gianni Berengo Gardin ("Venice"), Mario Giacomelli ("Man, woman, love"), Fulvio Roiter ("Sicily") and Friul group of a new photography (GFNF) were represented at the exhibition "Photography and neorealism in Italy, 1945 - 1965". The exposition of more than 100 works by Italian photographers was accompanied by screening of masterpieces of Italian cinema. In Russia it held as part of the year of the Italian language and culture (2011). Its organizers were Photography Research and Archiving Centre (CRAF), The State Russian Museum and Exhibition Centre (Rosphoto), The State Russian museum of photography with a support of Ministry of Culture of Russian Federation and Nizhegorodsky region and Italian Institute of Italian culture in Moscow and Saint – Petersburg.

For all its proximity to documentary, neorealism was far from the primitive realism of Lumiere brothers' films. Esthetics of French avante - garde helped with it. Ideas about "Photogénie" by Louis Delluc (1890 – 1924) and about "Suggestive imagery" by Jean Epstein (1897 – 1953). Due to the conception, an artist should achieve the unity of all elements of the film. Meanwhile any shot should discover the inner beauty and expressiveness of the subject. Films of "poetic realism" were full of a special atmosphere. Different tools of the artistic imagery were used for them as: a special acting' technique, light air and sound technologies, frame composition, music. Assimilation French experience

was not in vain. Neorealist films had a huge emotional strength and spirituality, leaving in mind bright artistic images. Showing in the raw lives of ordinary people, they discovered the beauty of souls and the strength of mutual aid. Perhaps first time in the history of the cinematography the most important film function became so clear: to be originally humanistic and democratic art. This art could appear only in the free Italy that casted off fascism and dictatorship chains.

The gold reserve of neorealism was consisted of such films as: "Paisa"(1946), "Germany, year zero" (1947) by Rossellini; "Shoeshine"(1946), "Bicycle thieves" (1948) by De Sica; "One day in life" (1946) by Blazetti; "The sun still rises"(1946) by Vergano; "Lost youth " (1947) by Germi; "The Earth trembles"(1948) by Visconti; "Rome 11:00" (1952) by De Sanctis. These movies reflected problems of the most social unprotected sectors of society such as children, women and old people. But even for young people situation was absolutely insufferable in the conditions of mass unemployment and manufactory disruption. The film "Rome 11:00" tells us like a newsreel about a tragedy that happened on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1951 in Rome. Hundreds of young girls who had seen a job announcement and were looking for a job of a typist came to Savoya street at the same time. As a result the staircase collapsed, under its rubble one girl was killed, many others were wounded. Any try of police to investigate reasons of this tragedy didn't have effect. Who was guilty in this tragedy? It sounds as a rhetorical question in the film. It is clear that at the sight of camera of neorealists were real events and life of ordinary people. Often newspaper chronicle provided some "hot facts". The film points out at the role of media in the post-war society and shows also the tools to create a needed media image. Sometimes a scenario was not needed, making acting as improvisation. The variety of speech communication was also typical for that. A spoken language, common language, local dialects were also widely used in such movies.

In words of Russian translator and film critic G.D. Boghemy (1920 – 1995), neorealism shook the foundation of the whole building of Italian bourgeois cinema. It became a dominant movement in Italian cinematography for almost than 10 years. After neorealist films it seemed impossible to come back to the banality and vulgarity of traditional movie shows [4].

### **III. CINEMA LANGUAGE STYLISTICS: DISCOVERS OF 1950-1980s**

At the turn of 1950-1960s in Italy the economic recovery and industrial expansion began. This gave rise to conservative forces to blame the representatives of neorealism of absence of patriotism. They requested to

end "these harmful films about poverty". A close position was taken by the Roman Catholic Church. Some directors turned to religious subjects, made films commissioned by the Vatican. In the global film market, competition for consumers has increased. As a result all this led to the fact that neorealism as an artistic movement transmuted. It acquired new cultural forms, having completed its historical mission.

Cinema began to represent a wider spectrum of life, preserving a realism as an art method. This was most clearly manifested in the works of outstanding director Federico Fellini (1920-1993). In such films as "The road "(1954), "The night of Cabiria"(1957), "Sweet life" (1959) the Master rethought the condition of Italian society. Now the time for the unification of the nation has passed. Life was returning to a normal condition. The society was divided by material wealth. As it was before, the wealth belonged to somebody meanwhile others didn't have anything. Fellini adopted the law of nature. He faced up with it, searching a paradox of a different order. War didn't change the human nature. It lighted up the spirit strength of one and the meanness of others. The great master does not condemn the separation of people according to material and social principles. He explores their separation by moral and ethical criteria. It would seem that Cabiria (from the "Nights of Cabiria") should be a woman image of immoral and infamous character that could hardly come to God. However Fellini shows that she is incapable of meanness and keeps her soul in a naive purity. This is what attracts to her crooks and criminals. They came to her from a low social environment. While at the same time wealthy people tend to show mercy towards this eccentric girl.

The image of Gelsomina ("The road") at the first glance seems far – fetched. It is as confronted the common sense of life. Actress Giulietta Masina who played this role was called "Chaplin in a skirt". Actually the image of Gelsomina is more tragic than Charley's image. Violence against a woman is always committed in more cynical and brutal form. Fellini definitely pointed out the social important problem. That is why his film evoked a wide response. Stores, restaurants and cigarettes were called after "The road". Women wrote to Masina about abusive treatment of their husbands. Fan clubs of Gelsomina appeared. Dolls, perfumes and chocolate were called after her [5].

In the film "La Dolce vita" F. Fellini presented a mosaic of degradation and amorality of upper class society and nobility. Where a talented writer and journalist Marcello Rubini (M. Mastroianni) due to life circumstances tries to find the sense of faith, life and love. His environment is permeated of cynicism and debauchery. Even Marcello's friend, the intellectual Steiner, who had all the blessings of this world, was disappointed in his life values. Having lost the meaning

of life, ended his days, killing himself and his children. A simple girl, a friend of Marcello, offers him real love and traditional family values. However, the contradictory Marcello's soul and lifestyle is inaccessible to her understanding. Unable to resist the temptations of this world, Marcello crosses the fine line. He accepts the rules of the game of high society, becoming part of it and selling his talent. The film provoked a division in Italian society. Roman Catholic Church saw in it an anticlerical protest. It declared for its ban in those countries where Catholicism was the major religion.

Despite criticism many perceived the film as a new page in a world cinema. Fellini renovated the style of cinema language and introduced a new artistic image. It revealed it using universal cinema tools. Among them was a subtle psychological acting; a modern city block music; sounds and beats of big city life with its usual rush; ubiquitous press with a new phenomenon "paparazzi"; combination of pavilion and field shooting. Against the background of Rome, faith and disbelief, religious ceremonies and social traditions, symbols of Catholicism and paganism clashed invisibly. Italian language with its colorful emotional timbre and precise gestures characteristics of its speakers gave peculiar charm to the film. The film innovation consisted in philosophical reflection of ongoing events. It was complemented by a psychological depth, focusing of a restless soul of the hero. Thanks to this, the screen space presented the viewer with an universal semiotic image of the modern era. Its hero was worthy to it, whose image was brilliantly revealed by M. Mastroianni.

Image is an artistic combination of form and sense. Artistic image is a special way of displaying reality, carrying a signal of historical, documentary and emotional transformation. Any historical style as baroque, empire, modern has its personal historical "flavor" that determines an emotional perception and recognition of the artistic image [6]. Fellini's innovative discoveries were part of a modernist quest in the art of cinema. The age of modernism matched with economic boom in Italy and the advent of the era of global consumption and mass culture of the emerging global world.

The external image is the indispensable attribute of the screen play personage. Marcello Mastroianni, Anita Ekberg (Sylvia) and Anouk Aimée (Maddalena) created on the screen a mythologeme of the "Sweet Life". Their bright, unforgettable images live in our memory not only because of the natural beauty of the actors but also thanks to the professional work of the costume designers. The film received the "Oscar" for the nomination "For the best costume design for black and white movies" (1962). This success became possible thanks to the collaboration with P. Gherardi, who

created costumes for A. Ekberg. Italian designers turned actors into fashion icons. Italian dress was always distinguished by sophisticated style, elegance, high - quality materials and a good workmanship. It also symbolized connection between Italian history, culture and traditions [7].

Many famous Italian designers created exclusive costumes not only for celebrities but also for the richest people in the world. Dolce & Gabbana fashion brand prepared a collection devoted to neorealism in the Italian cinema. Starting from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian fashion has taken leading positions in the world. The mega-brand "Made in Italy" was promoted by the fact that Italian designers intuitively overcame a contradiction between mass culture and art. They realized that through fashion a person tries to express himself and maintain individuality in the mass culture world. According to researchers, the inherent ability of Italian designers to overcome the antinomy of art and mass culture was the main reason of success of Italian mega brand [8].

Fellini' movies give us a vivid image of the epoch and its leading artistic styles. The film—"Eight and a half" (1963) might be considered as a peculiar "stream of consciousness". The great Master often used metaphor and parable which served to reveal complicated, ambiguously interpreted images ("Orchestra rehearsal", 1979; "And the Ship sails on", 1983). These films can be called by right philosophical and intellectual cinema.

Crisis phenomenon of the modern society gave a birth to the profound psychological films. Italian film director M. Antonioni (1912 – 2007) was one of the first who researched the tragedy of human loneliness. Such his movies as "Story of a love affair" (1950); "The cry" (1957); "The eclipse" (1961); "Red desert" (1964); "Blowup" (1967); "Zabriskie point" (1970).

Philosophical and psychological films of Swedish film director I. Bergman (1918 – 2007) were marked with a bright talent. They raised the problems of meaning of life, society dehumanization, disintegration of traditional foundations, people dissociation. Among these films are "Wild strawberries" (1957); "Cries and whispers" (1972); "Autumn sonata" (1978).

Italian comedy revealed new facets of the comic things. It incorporated experience of *commedia dell'arte*, the popular theater of masque and Napolitan popular drama. The comedy reflected the colorful national character, life values of Italian society and its stable stereotypes. The satirical sketch of society moral values was intensified. The best movies of this period became "Yesterday, today and tomorrow" (1963), "Marriage Italian style" (1964) by V. De Sica; "Divorce Italian style" (1961), "Seduced and abandoned" (1963),

"Serafino" (1968) by P. Germi. A unique and versatile character was created on the screen by Sophia Loren.

French cinematography has updated the style of cinema language in the framework of a "New wave". As Russian culture expert K. Razlogov remarks, thanks to the media find, – the catchy name of the trend – the "Wave" became a general symbol of a new type of cinema. Unlike with the Italian school, the "New Wave" Masters emerged from the cinema critique. They were not connected by conventions of cinema and traditional film drama. The main representatives were F. Truffaut, C. Chabrol and J-L. Godar. All three sharply criticized the cinema of the previous generation and claimed to start a development of not national but worldwide cinema [9].

The "New Wave" presented to the viewer wide range of films. Among these movies were presented modernist innovations in which space and time, past and present, illusion and reality were shifted as it was in "The last autumn in Marienbade" (A.Renee, 1961). Some of them reminded of intense storylines and denouement of films by A. Hitchcock ("Les bonnes femmes" by C.Chabrol, 1960). Musical drama "The umbrellas of Cherbourg" (J. Demy, 1964) became the sign of the times. The "New wave" attempted to create a modern, democratic, mass cinema, responding the diverse needs of the viewer. Sometimes cinema was a demonstration of the so – called "culture of everyday life". The new cinema changed the type of hero. Now the screen art did not need anymore a "restless soul", nor a sophisticated intellectual, who had natural beauty and good manners. Mass art had different request. Internal charm was enough counterposed to external beauty. Simple and democratic clothes instead of elegant costumes. Such a new type of hero doesn't depend on any conventions of society. He despises and openly opposes public institutions. Jean Paul Belmondo created the image of the modern hero. The actress Catherine Deneuve combined natural beauty with charm and a subtle psychological game in the disclosure of feminine character.

French "New Wave", in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, intuitively mirrored in art the advent of the post-modern era. Postmodern as an artistic movement, was characterized by blurring the line between "high" elite and "low" mass art. In reflection of life skillfully mixed various styles and forms of art. Based on the experience of predecessors, the Postmodern Movement rethought quotes, allusions, irony or an absurd context. Habitual forms of people communication were replaced by game forms of relationships. Reflecting mass culture requests, postmodern pointed out problems related to violence, cruelty, erotic, lust of possessions and power. This movement, declaring the personal freedom, eroded the ideological foundations, erased the boundaries of what is permitted in art, proposed a moral relativism in

relation to good and evil. This external personal freedom from social institutions in reality was a manifestation of its greater spiritual lack of freedom. That is why search of meaning of life, faith and love for postmodern heroes ended often more tragically for them than in previous eras.

Postmodern coincided with the beginning of the postindustrial era. Its formation took place in the background of destabilization of political institutions of power, escalation of terrorism and violence, emergence of radical currents of the right and left sense. Destructive processes were implemented by massive student unrest, youth counterculture and sexual revolution. Crisis events revived interest in antifascist, antiwar issues and political cinema. The most bright images in this direction made L. Visconti ("The Damned", 1969), B. Bertolucci ("Conformist", 1970), F. Vancini ("The assassination of Matteotti", 1973).

In the postmodern interpretation, the emphasis in understanding the most complex phenomena has shifted. Fascism began to be viewed through the prism of divine sexual patterns of behavior. The cinematic material was saturated with shocking visual images. Screening of "Salo, or 120 days of Sodom" by P. Pasolini was accompanied with public scandals and trials. The storyline of "The Night Porter" (1974) by L. Cavani was built on the base of sadomasochistic love between a former prisoner of concentration camp and her tormentor. Bans accompanied erotic drama by B. Bertolucci "The last tango in Paris" (1972). The desacralization of culture has led to the fact that the screen space has turned into public display of the deepest natural instincts and psychical flesh of a person. Thus, a certain matrix of the behavioral model was created. With the help of the screen, one of the facets of human relationships became a social norm. In 1980-s the world came to an equilibrium. The style of the language of Cinema was changed. Now its understanding required the viewer decipher the art of film text (P. Greenaway "A Zed & Two Noughts", 1985).

#### **IV. SOVIET CINEMA**

Soviet cinema developed in line with pan-European and world progression. Leading in the cinema was the theme of war. Starting from the middle of 1950-s, after the death of I. Stalin, humanistic turned into human problems reminding the Italian Neorealism and the French "new wave". However, the humanistic pathos coming from the victory of Soviet population over fascism enhanced itself in a purposeful anthropocentric character. In films this sentiment reflected the tragedy of the war and the immense sorrow for its victims, the failed love of young people separated and the dramatic fate of people mutilated but not broken in spirit. The "Golden Fund" includes such movies as "The cranes are flying" by M. Kalatozov (1957), "The fate of a man" by

S. Bondarchuk (1959), "The ballade about a soldier" (1959), "Clear sky" (1961) by G. Chukhray, "Ivan's childhood" by A. Tarkovsky (1962), "Belorussian station" by A. Smirnov (1971), "The dawns here are quiet" by S. Rostotsky (1972), "Seventeen moments of spring" by T. Lioznova (1973).

Documentary film "Ordinary fascism" by M. Romm (1965) showed its true sinister nature. Fascism, by the definition of modern scholars, is a radical **anti-humanism**, theory and practice of radical **inhumanization** [10] (underlined by the author – O.A). The movie "The ascent" by L. Shepitko (1976) is a symbol of human victory over the power of darkness. In this film the feat of Sotnikov, who preferred a physical death to betrayal, was revealed as a spiritual path to Calvary.

The quintessential film was the movie "Come and see" by E. Klimov (1985). From a standpoint of view as an intertextuality, in it there are analogies with the film by P. Pasolini "Salo, or 120 days of Sodom" and "Apocalypse Now" by F. Coppola (1979). The movie deserved the attention of famous Russian cultural expert N.A. Khrenov. However the movie by Klimov develops with a different conceptual paradigm. It doesn't bow showing the atrocities of war: for example Nazis burning a Belorussian village and its habitants. The war was presented like the collapse of space, the death of the world, a global catastrophe. The darkest, the most destructive forces came to the upper level. It was the end of any morality and culture. It was a total violence. It was the Apocalypse and the Last Judgement [11].

Films by A. Tarkovsky were both an epic canvas of the tragic pages of Russian history, psychological drama and a search of spiritual meanings for the human existence on the scale of the Earth civilization ("Andrey Rublev", "Mirror", "Solaris", "Stalker").

## V. CONCLUSION

The period of 1950-1980-s was the most important page in the development of cinema. Italian neorealism, French "New Wave", Modernism and Postmodernism became the sign of the times. New genres of cinema as philosophic, intellectual and political sort came out together with new artistic images. Fine arts and cinema language have changed. Cinema reflected life in all its diversity and inconsistency.

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