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MODERN YAKUT CINEMA: LOGOS, ETHOS, PATHOS

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the issues of regional cinema development as the way of universal and ethno-specific cultural values translation. The author believes that development of regional cinema in Russia reflects existing contradiction between the trends in globalization of culture, on the one hand, and on the other, aspiration of nations and regions to preserve their identity, to oppose the uniqueness of authentic cultural oikumena to the universal standards of global civilization. The subject of analysis is artistic ‘world picture’ of the Yakut cinema addressing spiritual traditions of the people and search for existential foundations of a modern man existence alienated from those traditions. The author considers a cinematic text as a specific sign system endowed with meaning, which can be understood and perceived due to decoding the elements that organize it. Based on the analysis done the conclusion on screen culture and artistic communication significance in formation of public consciousness was made. Particular vision inherent in cinema not only reflects the existing world in its visible and hidden details and images but the vision itself acquiring the form of completed utterance and setting the optics of the viewer’s perception of current cultural meanings becomes the way to construct social reality.

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1. Introduction

Cinema in modern society is one of the most popular and contemporary art forms and Days of National or Regional Cinema, which are held on a regular basis becoming the most common and accessible way of cross-cultural interaction. Integral presentation of artistic material, meetings with film directors, actors and producers, lectures held by critics and discussion of films give a chance to the audience open up the universe of different culture, feel its uniqueness and specificity, make richer and more voluminous the perception of the outer world.

Screen culture plays nowadays the dominant part in formation and spreading values and meanings, it makes a remarkable impact on transformations occurring in the sphere of creation, education, leisure. Cinema detects and imprints zones of spiritual distress, it 'creates space, which has a particular property, which is – to speak: not by the author but through the author expressing that kind of contradiction, which an artist himself is not capable to resolve (Aronson, 1998). Reflecting the reality cinematic images having entered the screen become a newsbreak for discussion, public debate and, consequently, an important 'element of social reality' (Zheltikova & Gribakina, 2018). That is why the names of outstanding film directors and the films shot by them so vividly and deeply depict the epoch expressing its moral searches, losses and gains.

Specialists emphasize moral and aesthetic significance of artistic communication since communication between a creator and a spectator introduces the latter to the most important socio-political and spiritual values through the sphere of art thus defining 'forms and degree of actualization of humanizing principle of culture as a system' (Chernikova, 1998).

2. Problem Statement

Development of regional cinema in Russia reflects existing contradiction between the trends in globalization of culture, on the one hand, and on the other hand, aspiration of nations and regions to preserve their identity, to oppose the uniqueness of authentic cultural 'oikumena' to universal standards of global civilization. Modern cinema not only carefully looks into the origin of ethnic cultures, it in many ways reconstructs them and returns to the audience as 'it is the screen, which is today the prevailing way of translating cultural products that shape identity, values and meanings via various kinds of communication' (Kochelyaeva, 2017).

In recent decade the films by Fedorchenko ('Yellowhammers', 'Heavenly Wives of Meadow Mari'), Strelyanaya ('The Sea '), Davidov ('The Scarecrow'), Novikova ('The King Bird'), Burnashev ('The Black Snow'), Yurieva ('The Whaler') have become convincing examples of artistic explorations on traditional cultures of the peoples of Russia. Due to the works of talented filmmakers the cultural variety of the present-day world acquires visible features and, being embodied in the artistic product, it manifests the search for universal values and at the same time ethno-specific language for their representation.

Many modern researchers write about the visual representation of the ethnocultural communities of the north in cinematography (Golovnev & Golovneva, 2019; Lavrenova, 2019; Perevalova, 2018). They note the primacy of space over man as a feature of the northern latitudes, analyze the images of the road, the motive for overcoming space in the context of the cultural landscape of the northern territories

and show the role and significance of these territories in the "discourse of national identities" (Harvey & Knox, 2015; Lavrenova, 2020).

3. Research Questions

Special place in this row is taken by the new Yakut cinema – it stepped on to the Russian and world screens vividly and unexpectedly. Quite recently in 1992 the state national film company 'Sakhafilm' was set up, in 2012 – the association of independent film makers 'Sakha Cinemaclub'. And just in a few years in 2016 -2020 the Yakut feature films scored a splendid triumph at the prestigious Russian and International festivals in Yakutsk, Khanty-Mansiysk, Cheboksary, Viborg, Moscow, Hong-Kong, Berlin, Toronto, Seoul, Montreal.

The phenomenon of such a meteoric rise can be explained by the rich cultural potential and by special 'editing vision' of the people, by traditions of the epic tale that require visualization, by eternal confrontation of a human being and the nature in severe conditions of the cold and desolate space.

The big screen has become an opportunity for the Yakut moviemakers to carry on the open dialogue with Russian and foreign audience. 'I am trying to talk about my culture. We as native minorities have not yet spoken out in full voice. Nobody ever asked us to', – remarks T. Everstova, the film director, whose debut feature film 'Her Daughter' won the Grand Prize and the diploma from the Guild of Film Critics of Russia at the XXIV Festival 'Window on Europe' in 2016.

Among the prize-winners of International festivals there are films by Davidov 'Scarecrow', Novikova 'The King Bird', Burnashev 'The Black Snow'. The above-mentioned films of the Yakut filmmakers, the system of images and motives presented in them as well as artistic and visual tools have become subject of study in this article.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of study is identifying the value paradigm of the Yakut cinema, determining semantic coordinates of the world artistic picture and specifics of the visual-expressive language of its representation.

5. Research Methods

The author of the articles relies on the structural-semiotic method that allows for the considering of a cinematic text as the specific sign system endowed with meaning, which can be understood and perceived by decoding the elements that organize it. Within this method the film is understood as the way of author's utterance that requires from the audience ability to interpret images, decode the system of signs, symbols and codes to eventually perceive the content embedded in the work (Aronson, 1998; Bart, 2004; Metts, 2013).

6. Findings

Nature and a human being in traditional culture are connected with powerful root system: nature universum determines the way of life and type of people's activities, its mythological ideas and national character traits. In a word, 'type of local nature, human character and national mentality are all in mutual correspondence and complementarity' (Gachev, 1995).

Vastness and desolation of snow-covered tundra determine much in aesthetics of the Yakut cinema: motive of the road – movement ('The Black Snow'), the loneliness of a man in the world, home concept - protection against the merciless element of the cold and idea of the contiguity of a house to the surrounding world ('The King Bird'). The yurt keeps the hearth heat, the amulet guards the yurt and its owners, pets live side by side with people behind the partition, the house joins the king-bird – an eagle, who did not have enough strength to fly away with his kin and had to winter near human habitation. Day-to-day, hard but clear life of the two elderly people in the remote ulus is fitted in eternal cycle of everyday life and existence and permeated with cosmogonic ideas about the structure of the universe. Here the King Bird acts as a messenger of a sacred world and requires from a human-being scrupulous performance of the ritual.

Ritual takes a huge part in traditional life of auchthonous people, however according to researchers understanding the meaning behind it is equally important for the modern man as well. In the opinion of the English anthropologist Turner, 'ritual and its symbolism are not just epiphenomena or camouflage of deeper social and psychological processes, they have ontological value having some relation to the state of a human being as developing species whose evolution is mainly happening due to cultural innovations... Decoding of ritual forms and disclosure of symbolic actions origin may be more useful for our cultural growth than we previously supposed' (Turner, 1983).

Ritual actions that are repeated from century to century attach stability and meaning to everyday life of the people, they can cure mental illnesses and injuries ('Scarecrow'). Chiskiiray – the main character of Romanova – a wise woman, a witch doctor whose nickname is 'Scarecrow' – performs mysterious rituals (using the editing joint the film director leaves them off camera), which miraculously help her fellow villagers while being extremely exhausting for her. Scarecrow as if exists on the border of the worlds inhabited by spirits and people, and this borderland is painful for her not only physically, but also mentally. Existing world rushed forward (signs of present-day life are marked in the movie with stinging lines), but Scarecrow – the bearer of traditional knowledge and the unique natural gift – is tetering on the edge of time and space, trying to drown out her desolation and hidden from the audience tragedy of her passed life, which is off camera. Her loneliness is inevitable (fellow villagers with but few exceptions treat her with inexplicable contempt and hostility), her house is in a state of neglect and inconvenience. Her sacrifice is her voluntary choice and poignant climax of the film. Saving a seriously ill girl being sick for a long time Scarecrow restores her health at the cost of her own life, with this sacrifice having atoned for a heavy burden of the past and having recognized delusive hopes for the future.

The motive of human loneliness in the midst of the alien and hostile world repeated in different variations (otherness, specialness, jeering, impending doom) is a motive of the Yakut cinema. Filmmakers of 'Fire in the Snow' (Davidov), 'The Sun Is Not Setting Above Me' (Borisova), 'The Moth' and

'Fisherman' (Semenov), 'The Scarecrow' (Davidov), 'The Black Snow' (Burnashev) invite the audience to a straight and hard talk about ontological and existential problems of people living today without getting carried away by ethnic exoticism or aesthetic sophistication. Their task is 'not to decorate reality but being able to see it recording everyday life and at the same time trying to make out behind the observed reality invisible reality of folklore, culture, history' (Kartashov, 2020).

Related to this is special aesthetics of truth and naturalness achieved not only via camerawork and location shooting, authentic realia of everyday life (clothes, utensils, housing), but also via authenticity of the stories told and participation of actors – non-professionals providing a high degree of sincerity and artlessness of artistic expression. One of such actors is 73-year old S. Petrov – a former driver and a member of the national theatre debuted in Novikova's film 'The King Bird' in 2018 and in a year acted in a full-length film of Borisova 'The Sun Is Not Setting Above Me' based on the script written especially for him and having reflected the tragedy of his life (Everestova, 2021). A sense of vital certainty is the necessary condition of audience's trust in the author's utterance within artistic communication.

Trampling on traditions, violation of norms and due diligence rules of the behaviour bequeathed by the ancestors turns out to be a tragedy for the individual. Burnashev's movie 'The Black Snow' is, in essence, a parable (with genre signs of social drama and horror) about the lost, fallen from the clan and wayward man. A long snow-covered road amidst the boundless and snowy distances is the main metaphor of the work - and not only because the main character is a truck-driver but also because his selfishness, greed for profit at any cost, dismissive attitude toward his fellow villagers, disrespect to his father are taking him further away from inviolable principles of community life. The misfortune that had befallen him on the road is inevitable retribution and at the same time the starting point on the way to himself in search of lost truths and meanings.

Colour is a very important element of artistic expressiveness in the cinema. The white snow is habitual for the Yakuts, it covers the earth for the major part of the year, its purity and depth is a metaphore of natural, authentic, severe life. And it is the white paint, which is the main. 'Khara Khaar' ('The Black Snow') – the name of Burnashev's movie – signifies tragic antithesis of the natural and the unnatural order of things underlines the author's narrative, completes the parable.

The metaphor of the time is the changed colour of ribbons that decorated the branches of the holy tree – larch – in the film 'The King Bird'. The leafless larch was getting grey, the colours of the ribbons were getting dull, the time was not kind to the characters either - they grew old, buried their son, however they accepted their fate without grumbling and reproaches, which honoured them with an unexpected meeting with the King Bird.

Sound of national instruments is another significant element in the structure of cinematic text, which sets the tone and rhythm to communication between the creators and spectators of a movie, customizes in a certain way the nature of perception of what is happening on the screen.

7. Conclusion

Diversity of the nations, languages and cultures existing in Russia give modern cinema a chance 'to grasp some last cobwebs of vanishing traditions', to capture archetypal images of collective

unconscious and preserve them as an artistic document of the passing era as a unique fragment of the cultural landscape.

Wealth of artistic and technical tools makes the art of cinema one of the most realistic and at the same time capable of reproducing 'imaginary non-existing in reality objects very often by means of constructing reality phantoms in direct contact with spheres of the iconic and symbolic' (Zheltikova & Gribakina, 2018). Particular vision inherent in the cinema not only reflects the existing world in its visible and hidden from eyes details and images but also itself acquiring the form of a completed utterance and setting the optics of the viewer's perception of current cultural meanings is becoming the way to construct social reality.

Creators of the new Yakut cinema relying on ethical and mythopoetic traditions of the people are discussing existential foundations of a man being detached from those traditions with great confidence in the viewer.

We believe that efforts of the Yakut cinema are in the mainstream of the broad context in search for universal mental foundations of modern society existence and attach deep and authentic sound to the artistic dialogue of cultures.

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