

MAN IN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

First Stage in Otar Iosseliani's Career

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Alienation became an accompanying problem of the active rhythm of the 20th century, the process of urbanization and permanent mental changes; it is an internal state that arises against the background of global changes and determines a person's attitude, worldview, philosophy of life, forms of relationships and a place in society. The interest in this topic increased in the culture of the 20th century, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, in the process of reevaluating World War II and its aftermath. Unlike Western cinema, Soviet film did not search or investigate the causes of man's spiritual crisis, but talked about consequences, the society that already existed in this reality.

Soviet ideology offered society a double standard of life rather than promised freedom. Under totalitarianism, man could no longer identify himself with authority, which had become an abstract, elitist caste. Having lost a sense of private property and hence personal responsibility, there was no longer any diverse and objective information. Censorship, the closure of borders, ideologized media hindered objective perception of the outside world and formation of critical thinking.

Repressions resulted in the loss of a sense of personal security, and the person became a passive observer. In the process of formation of the Soviet man, there was also a tendency for national identity and characteristics to disappear which, of course, exacerbated this problem. Suffice it to say that the problem of alienation from traditions, nature and society in the Soviet man formed two different lifestyles in reality and hence the types of people such as Gia in *Once Upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird* and Otar in *Falling Leaves*.

In his documentary-chronicle style and sharply personal, individual expressive way, as well as a psychological precision of shots, Otar Iosseliani tells us about a society where a conflict occurs at the background of loss of traditions, national identity and spiritual values. A conflict rages within the individual, between the individual and his innermost

being and basic values of society, in the society where a person devotes his rights to the state, i.e. commits de-individualization.

April is Otar Iosseliani's first film. The story revolves around an enamored couple in an old and new city (traditions and progress, eclectic environment and symmetry), distinguished by an individual style and self-evident old city mazes, musical phrases from different windows, a piper's sad melodies with the noise of the city, and coexistence of new and old eras is taken as a symbol of the couple's inner state. The black-and-white image is graphic, often silhouette-based: the silhouette of a tree in the open field and the characters fixed nearby will be understood not only as a representation of the couple's interdependence, but that of the world as well.

The old is opposed to the new (confrontation between the old and the new was a proven method in the Soviet avant-garde cinema in the 1920s, although it is used differently by Iosseliani: old as roots, traditions, new as seemingly progressive, the unity of time is preserved). In the new one, the melody of the pipe is replaced by the piercing sound of the trumpet. Artists locked behind monotonous, rectangular windows can no longer create a unified musical score. Under the influence of the urban environment and society, the spiritual values of the characters are replaced with materialistic ones. The sense of harmonious coexistence with the world is lost. There is a problem of spiritual alienation of the couple, one symbolized by a cut tree in the finale.

After *April*, Iosseliani makes *Once Upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird* and builds his narrative mainly at the expense of a visual-expressive line, almost saying no to dialogue, though creating a rich polyphonic-sound line. What matters here is not words, but action, the overall environment, because the main character, Gia Agladze, is a generalized, collective type. The film describes two typical days in his life. They clearly reflect the inner nature of the character, past or present, hence the logical consequence of such a lifestyle. In the overall tissue of the

film, losseliani focuses on Gia's spontaneous, chaotic lifestyle, which is a kind of protest against the reality where it is no longer possible to create any value.

Otar losseliani perceives the orchestra in *Once Upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird* as a unified system in which all participants have their functions. Gia is one of the elements in this environment, necessary and yet insignificant. We can see Gia take the last chord in time but always break the rules set by the "dictatorial conductor." Playing with life, light disobedience and irony, which become significant in the life of losseliani's hero, as I have already mentioned, settle in the real environment, he seems to acquire national traits and can be said to give impetus to creation of the typical environment and characters in Georgian cinema. losseliani also uses the method of controversy (prologue and main theme) in later films as well.

In the bosom of nature in *Once Upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird*, the camera shows a rolled-over hero from a lower angle, in an unusual, deformed state. Gia is perceived as the main object of the world; on the other hand, the author offers us an adult who has become a child, thus emphasizing his characteristics from the very beginning: infantilism, instability of interests, irresponsibility, emotionality. The horrible squeak of the car's wheels (this sound in the movie resurfaces from time to time) fills the shot. The street full of cars makes air hard to breathe, as if banishing people, dictating them lifestyle. Gia is a stranger in this environment, the rhythm of his life is always moveable, panoramically transient from one place to another. The unfinished construction is an expression of Gia's discomfort. He is a kinsman everywhere, in all layers of society and still "a stranger." His relationship with his mother, a Russian guest, a girl or a friend is marked by outward courtesy and superficial feelings. In the prologue to *Falling Leaves*, the author scrupulously describes the rituals and traditions of vintage, grape pressing and winemaking. The film tells the story of their disintegration, reassessment of values and conformism.

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If we glance at the cinema of the 1960's, we will see that there is a tendency toward enhancing the role of things in the overall tissue of the film. The relationship between the hero and the thing becomes more dialogic, tighter. In losseliani's works the thing also determines the spiritual and social condition of the hero. The interior of Gia's room is a collection of cluttered, incompatible items. The sewing machine, the metronome, the musical chest, the writing desk in the middle of the room are the bearers of Gia's scattered, disintegrated spiritual structure. Tyranny of possessions pursues him through the streets of the city. In *Falling Leaves*, the thing is an indicator of the character of the social stratum, the hero. The delicate relationships in the family are marked by an almost invisible movement in the film. A certain symmetry of ancestral photos on the white wall, the aura of old things defines both Niko's spiritual and social status. Otari's world is the opposite of Niko's environment: white, almost empty walls, modern interior, emphasize both the spiritual emptiness of the hero and the authoritarian relationships in the family. It is in this environment that the conformist, careerist Otari, is formed, who reveals different character traits (aggression, arrogance) "outside."

If in *Falling Leaves* there is an obvious accentuation, specification of the possession, in *Once Upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird*, the thing is lost in the "orderly" chaos. What matters here is a common atmosphere, a specific sign from the environment. If the hero is active in *Falling Leaves*, Gia in *Once Upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird* is a passive person, scattered in everyday life. It can be said that for losseliani, the material values of man, the attachment to his possession are even the main sign of human alienation, spiritual crisis.

Thus, Otari losseliani talks about modern man, who seems to be lost in the space of the big city, in the chaotic and routine life.

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