

## **The Dramaturgy of the Film by Semjon Freilich**

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*"The drama must represent the conflicts of life, otherwise it is not drama."*

### **Background information:**

In this book, which was published in Moscow in 1963 and in the GDR in 1964, as in Müller's "Dramaturgy of Theater and Film", there is a strong ideological zeitgeist: the descriptions of the "new dramatic form of revolutionary Soviet film art" breathe the spirit of the revolutionary filmmaking in the becoming Soviet Union at the time of Pudovkin, Eisenstein and their colleagues.

The book thematizes the film dramaturgy and leaves out the pre-film forms of the drama. The author focuses mainly on the analysis of the Soviet films "Battleship Potemkin" (1917 - S. Eisenstein), "The Mother" (1919 - V. Pudovkin) as well as numerous examples of Socialist Realism.

The book is well structured, but its execution disappoints in some aspects. The definition of classic terms remains vague, terms such as "fable" and "subject" are interpreted differently in different contexts. In addition, when classic key terms are used, the original source is rarely referred to.

However, the author knows how to convincingly explain the difference between the craft and the art of writing dramatic texts and give an interesting insight into the history of Russian and socialist film art. Soviet film art is in the foreground, comparisons to American film mostly occur in the intention to upgrade the domestic film art. Even after 45 years, the film "Battleship Potemkin" is still the epitome of dramatic film art for the author.

The book gives an insight into the history of Russian film art, but above all it remains interesting because of its sometimes remarkable view of an outsider on the mechanisms of American film fables.

### **Definition of the drama:**

The real contradictions of life form the content of the dramatic conflict. The artistic quality depends on the ability of the author to "capture the real contradictions of life and find ways to artistically embody the new forms of human community life."

Film drama means the ability of the respective work to give real-life contradictions a reflection in the dramatic conflict. However, an artist not only works on a specific topic, but also with specific design principles. As a result, the dramatic conflict can be expressed on the one hand

through the content but also through a specific design. Therefore, a dramaturgy of film must describe the dramaturgical principles of the scenario on the basis of which a certain content is presented. Third, a dramaturgy of film also must include the rules of cooperation between the scenario writer and the director to produce the script and to translate it into a movie.

### **Structure of the drama:**

“The subject of each scenario is based on the revelation of the dramatic situation, the intensification, development and solution of the dramatic conflict.”

After the introduction of the fundamentals of action, the intensification takes place, i.e. the increase in tension that leads to the climax of the drama. The backstory of the dramatic event is presented here. The main part of a drama is summarized by Aristotle as the stage of “peripeties and revelations.” Revelation is for Freilich to be equated with recognizing the character with which the viewer relives the story. The viewer is to be enabled to identify and thus participate in the dramatic development. The resolution answers the question that arises from the intensification of the conflict. The form in which the dissolution takes place results from the conception of the work. However, according to Freilich, this does often not apply to American film production: “In most Hollywood films, the focus on a happy ending does not result from formal reasons inherent in the development, but from the ideological focus on reconciliation [of the protagonist] with the bourgeois world. ” so that sometimes the finale is changed in film adaptations even of classics in order to “optimize” the entire course of the dramatic ideological plot, which falsifies the actual message.

However, Freilich does not see the art of dissolution in answering the questions raised by the plot within the boundaries of the plot. Materialistic dialectics does not see in the dissolution the achievement of a state of calm, but the beginning of a new movement: the end of a drama is the beginning of a new one.

A new dramatic form in revolutionary art is the “optimistic tragedy”: the antagonistic conflict that underlies the tragedy culminates in the revolution, which is the true climax and at the same time a way out of the crisis. The way out of the crisis is to overcome the sufferings of the masses by overcoming the profound contradictions of society.

### **Basic dramatic principles:**

Freilich outlines the function of tragedy in socialist art in the words of Karl Marx: “The real topic for tragedy is revolution.” The formal basis for this is provided by the dramaturge Nicolai Sarchi, who describes that “the hero's striving meets an opposing striving. The subjects of this opposing striving can be another hero or a group of heroes, a certain (social) elementary phenomenon and other things.” The dramatic clash should not be generated by means generated from the scenario itself, but rather through an event introduced from outside into the dramatic action. This event must be of general importance, such as the strike, the war or

the revolution." As a dramatic hub, this contradiction becomes the basic conflict of the drama: the goal-oriented striving of the hero is partly driven forward by the event, partly inhibited until it comes to the climax, the duel. This duel can take place openly or covertly in physical, dialectical, dialogical form. In a movie it is mainly made visible in a series of physical actions, in a system of blow and counter blow. The opposing movements can be seen as two clashing moments: on the one hand the hero's dream and his purposefulness on the other hand the means of its realization. These two moments form the basic characteristics of the dramatic characterization. It is the task of the young Soviet cinematographic art of socialist realism to grasp the new reality in its historical concreteness and development and to express it adequately.

So far, the separation of being into idea and action and the overemphasis on one of the two has led to a distorted reality. In films based on the "inner realism" model, the idea was weighted too heavily: the "inner realism" hero is isolated from society, his motives for action are justified purely psychologically. In "direct film" the milieu is true to life, but the actors are only shown as elements of the plot.

With the October Revolution, socialist realism was proclaimed in Russian art, with the aim of resolving the contradiction between thought and reality, intellectual life and practical activity in art. Not a single individual, but an entire social class, the proletariat, is now in the center of attention as the new "hero" as is the case with the movie "Battleship Potemkin." The proletariat is shown for the first time as a thinking, acting and suffering entity. The novelty of the Soviet film is characterized by this new content, which is supposed to reflect the novelty of the social conditions. Instead of focusing on the suffering, success or failure of the individual in society, as is the case in contemporary bourgeois film art, especially in Hollywood's work, and instead of using social upheavals merely as a backdrop, framework or coloring of individual stories, Soviet filmmakers are interested in historical truth. They take a look at the main forces at work in historical events: the way of life of the peoples, the living conditions, those responsible and the methods of changing the conditions and holding those responsible to account, are the subjects of the filmmaker in the USSR. If love is shown, it should be respectable, the woman should not be shown as a seductive cocotte without a psychological profile, but as a person with an intellect. Since the task of the new Soviet film is to capture "the typical in life on the road to communism", a new theme in Soviet art is the relationship between people and their work. In the transition of social relationships, work is no longer regarded as compulsion, but the self-realization of man through free work. This becomes his highest task, his most intense effort. When making a film, both reality and the artist's relationship to reality must be visible.

The cinematic is the "art of representation of movements and acoustics," or, according to Villegas López, "the art of time in the multiple forms of space." Film is a synthetic art: it uses optics like painting and sculpture do, it makes use of harmony and rhythm as music does, it uses narrative action as literature does and the art of acting as theater does. However, film does not replace the other arts and is therefore not universal. While a certain artificiality is unavoidable in the theater due to the spatial and temporal limitation, the film is characterized

by its closeness to reality: in a film, actors and surroundings are seen as a unit, the actor is also identified much more strongly with the role played.

Reality is represented according to cinematic rules: an approaching train does not have to be shown as such, it is sufficient to indicate, e.g. turning wheels, the sound of escaping steam and a pair of observing eyes.

The creation of reality as well as the focus on the central event is achieved primarily through montage (editing). The montage removes superfluous elements, it shapes the relationship between the essential and the inessential, the pace of action and the rhythmic development of the film. "The (individual) image is the cell and partial element of a take that the montage combines into a set to form a higher entity." The montage is thus the transition of a conflict that initially exists within a one take into a conflict of two adjacent partial takes, which breaks down into a whole system when the action is continued and is brought together again into a unified whole with the help of the partial takes of an event.

The parallel montage, developed by D.W. Griffith, is straight forward parallel acceleration. Eisenstein criticizes Griffith's editing technique for the inherent dualistic view of society, which uses bourgeois criteria and accepts a dichotomy of poor and rich, good and bad. Griffith lacks the socialist understanding that what he shows in a parallel plot are not parallel phenomena, but two sides of the same phenomenon: a society based on exploitation. Soviet cinematography, on the other hand, sees montage as an artistic means of revealing precisely such a dramatic conflict. Montage and dramaturgy are in a dialectical reciprocal relationship: where the connections made by the montage are not action-motivated, they have a mechanical effect, but if they are guided by the inner meaning of the action, they become dramatic in their essence. The director's creativity is based on the vivid implementation of the montage described in the scenario.

The synthesis of image and word characterizes the essence of modern film art. The dialogue, in interaction with image, composition and montage, is the main element of the dramaturgy. The dramatic forms of film are: the film novella, the film drama, the film poem, the film narration or the film tragedy.

### **Creation of a script:**

The subject is the artistic idea that arises from observing reality. This observation defines the artist's attitude towards reality. The fable is the material through which the overarching idea, the intention, i.e. the subject, is conveyed. The story shows the conflict (the subject). As an example, the author cites Gogol's story "The Auditor", which is based on an anecdote by Pushkin. Pushkin was mistaken for a governor-general in a small town. Gogol turns this anecdote into his subject: the auditor in his play is an involuntary cheat. He profits from the illegal acts of the civil servants - the actual fraudsters of society - who through his fraud finally get what they deserve and become the cheated themselves.

In various stages of the realization of a creative idea, both the fable and the subject are sometimes an expression of content, sometimes one of form. The interrelationship between fable and subject is to be understood dialectically: the fable is "the presence of contradictions in the fact itself, which to a certain extent enable it to be explored through the artistic narrative (the fable). The fact here is to be understood as the true event on which the sketch is based. " The subject is considered to be a "means to recognize and discover the essence and the appearances in reality." The artistic value arises in the reciprocal relationship between subject and fable: the truthful is the source of the artistic, the degree of the artistic value is thus the best criterion for the truthfulness of a work. A film adaptation fails if subject or fable are neglected in the dramaturgical sense.

The "emotional scenario" of the cinematic art of the thirties reads like an expressionist poem, but it lacks the concrete and technical basis that the "technological scenario" provides. In the "technological scenario", however, the poetry and the representation of the author's relationship to reality are missing. Both scenarios are unable to reflect real reality. "The poetic course of the film's subject must be given in the concreteness of the fable."

The dialogue is expressive when it reveals the character. The word is an act and at the same time the coloring of the character. Since being determines the consciousness that in turn determines the choice of words, the character of the person speaking is revealed with objective necessity through the word.

The descriptive part of the scenario not only provides information about the characters and their milieus, but also develops the plot. Dialogues should not repeat what is shown. A good scenario enables insight into the truth of life and this is what distinguishes the craftsman from the artist: "The craftsman tends to dabble with reality, the artist expresses it. The craftsman can only show a small piece of truth, the artist, on the other hand, grasps the truth of the epoch. He helps the epoch to self-confirm on the path it has taken." The artist shows the general laws of life based on the individual fate of the hero. "We don't go to the movies to hear a lesson about the development of society, but to see the fate of society through the fate of real people." By recognizing the hero, we also recognize the time that produced him. Battleship Potemkin does not bring in the idea of the dialectical class struggle from outside, but lets it grow out of the circumstances. At that time, "the art of film learned for the first time to make an action dependent on the century in which it takes place." In this film, monumental and yet simple like a folk tale, "we have everyday life very directly, without the source of the revolution and its ideas being intangible."

### **Chinatown according to the rules of Semjon Freijlich:**

Freijlich's understanding of the essence of drama as a reflection of the real contradictions of life and of the society is reflected in the film Chinatown. Two years before the film premiered, the Watergate scandal attracted a lot of public attention. The exposure of political corruption and ruthless striving for power at the expense of the inviolable good of democracy led to a disillusioning perspective on social justice. Screenwriter Robert Towne lets private detective

Gittes comment cynically: "the rich even get away with murder". The exposure of covert corruption and crimes by the private investigator are also formally implemented. Freijlich's demand to also communicate the dramatic conflict in a concrete way is fulfilled. Gittes has to work his way through a lot of Chinese mirror cabinets before he realizes - too late - the truth: the wrong Ms. Mulwray, the wrong lover, the long dead Hollis Mulwray.

In addition, Gittes needs visual aids in order to recognize the connections: first binoculars, several times a camera, photos provide information, and finally glasses serve as evidence for the conviction of the suspect. Freijlich's accusations of the American film industry expose his interpretive approaches as outdated. That Hollywood is committed to a happy ending in order to strive for ideological reconciliation with the bourgeois world is not confirmed by the example of Chinatown. However, it must also be said here that Chinatown is an "unusual" Hollywood film that was only conceivable in this way in the seventies and the era of the "independent filmmaker."

As can be seen from the Chinatown analysis according to Linda Seger's rules, the most tragic and most unforgiving of the three versions proposed by the author was chosen for production. Even Freijlich's accusation that social conflicts are merely a backdrop for a love intrigue cannot be traced back to Chinatown. In Chinatown, the affair between Gittes and Evelyn Mulwray forms a subplot to the actual main plot, which is about the exposure of Noah Cross' corruption and perversion.

However, it must be emphasized here again that Chinatown is more of a socialist drama and therefore a very unusual Hollywood film. One can go so far as to apply Freijlich's requirement that a subject should reveal the author's attitude towards reality. Chinatown, in its cynical, pessimistic attitude towards the US economic system with its unleashed capitalism, certainly reflects in many respects Polanski's (East-)European worldview. The fact that this view could be implemented so drastically has to do with the focus of the era on the "filmmaker".

The artist (Polanski) uses the water scandal to present a truth about his epoch: Corruption and dishonesty undermine the basis on which America rests: equal opportunities for everyone with the "American way of life." Freijlich's demand is also fulfilled, that the general laws of life be represented by the individual fate of the hero.

However, Chinatown cannot comply with Freijlich's demand for an "optimistic tragedy". There is nothing optimistic in Gittes' cynicism about his failure. Instead of the audience being offered a new conflict after this conflict has been resolved, they are served hopelessness with no way out of the misery with the message: "The world is bad, we cannot change it". Freijlich would certainly have preferred a "more socialist" ending, in which, for example, the hero of the story, Gittes, overcomes personal failure and uses the water scandal to overthrow the government and establish a "fairer" regime. This would have altered the accent of the story from a psychological "inner" conflict between a detective Gittes who still firmly believes in basic values such as individual dignity and respect and a Noah Cross, who has turned away from all humanity in his greed, to the less dramatic "external" conflict of dissatisfaction with social conditions. Freijlich's recommendation that the dissolution of the drama also form the

beginning of a new drama can be found here in exactly the wrong way: When Noah Cross takes care of his granddaughter at the end of Chinatown by pulling her away from her mother's corpse in a hug covering her eyes, it can also be understood that evil is now turning away from the current conflict. There's nothing left to do here. This battle is won. Cross protects his daughter from the rigors of life and prepares himself and maybe she for new misdeeds.

Of course, the structure of the tragedy with intensification, development and resolution of the dramatic conflict corresponds to the three parts of an action in Aristotle and can be read in the interpretation approach of Chinatown according to the rules of Aristotle.