

**CROSS-DRESSING IN SOVIET CINEMA: THE CASE OF
“HELLO, I AM YOUR AUNT!” (ZDRAVSTVUJTE, JA VASHA
TETYA!)**

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Abstract

This paper is devoted to the role of cross-dressing in the Soviet cinema. The analysis is based on the comedy *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* (*Zdravstvujte, Ja Vasha Tetya!*) (Titov, 1975). This Soviet adaptation of the play by Brandon Thomas *Charlie's Aunt* is one of the very few movies where cross-dressing is the main plot element. Based on Bakhtin's notions of carnivalesque and heteroglossia, I try to find out if and how the film was subversive towards the official Soviet discourse and why it was popular with the audience. In order to do that, I analyze the film within the Soviet context of the 1970s, looking at it both as a mainstream movie, and as potentially subversive text when it comes to gender issues. On the other hand, I also compare *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* to several mainstream Hollywood comedies based on cross-dressing as the main topic.

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Introduction

When you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is “male or female?” and you are accustomed to make the distinction with unhesitating certainty.
Freud, “Femininity”

(cited in Garber, 1993:1)

Clothes are usually the first thing we see about a person, and traditionally they used to be one of the primary elements upon which judgements were made on one’s social status, cultural level and in some cases even personal qualities. So, following Freud’s words in the epigraph, we can say that gender used to be ascribed also according to appearance and clothes.

Regardless the fact that nowadays dress codes are much more liberal then it used to be, and the distinctions between genders in the prevailing dress codes are strongly undermined, our decision on gender still depends to a high degree on the division into male and female clothes. This distinction is usually or at least was perceived as something natural¹. Cross-dressing, wearing clothes of the sex opposite to your ‘natural’ one, breaks this ‘naturalness’. It shows that clothes can easily be exchanged, and implies that gender identity closely associated with them is not something prescribed and fixed, consistent and unalterable.

Cross-dressing as an element of plot has been widely used in arts, starting from ancient times and up to our century. One early example can be the myth of Hercules, who used cross-dressing for hiding, that is for some practical purpose. Similar is the case of Portia in *Merchant of Venice* or Viola in *The Twelfth Night*, but it is not usual case for comedies, where cross-dressing is by the rule used to produce laughter. Finally, we should at least mention here more recent examples of complex treatment of the problem in films like *Boys Don’t Cry*

¹ For example, Garber uses as an epigraph to her book an abstract from Boston Globe Magazine of August, 1988: “Although the logic of anatomy might suggest otherwise, ”skirts are the traditional garb of women and pants the traditional garb of men – harem bloomers and kilts, the exceptions that prove the rule” (Garber 1993 :1).

(Peirce 1999) or *Transamerica* (Tucker 2005). However, in the Soviet cultural heritage there are only a few works of art that use this topic, and by the rule with an aim to produce laughter.

The following work is focused on the analysis of the role of cross-dressing in *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* (*Zdravstvujte, Ja Vasha Tetya!*) (Titov 1975) It is a movie adaptation of the play *Charlie's Aunt* (1882) by Brandon Thomas. This comedy was chosen because it is one of the very few Soviet films employing cross-dressing, and the only well know one where the main plot element is male impersonation of a woman. Additionally, cross-dressing is completely absent from the works on the history of the Soviet film industry. *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* is mentioned only in the book with the most famous phrases from popular Soviet films. The last fact indicates that it was a popular film.

Hence, in this work I intend to raise a number of related questions. I want to look into the complex relations between the topic of cross-dressing and the dominant Soviet culture of 1970s, to examine how the topic was treated in the chosen film, and search for an explanation why the analysed film was so popular, one of the most favourite eccentric comedies for decades. Other questions I want to answer in my work is how far cross-dressing is going in the analysed film, what laughter was aimed at in it, if and how it was subversive to official discourse and dominant ideology. The aim of the work is to reveal deeply gender aspects of the Soviet life.

In the work I see cross-dressing as a performance. That is why Bakhtin's theory is used as the basis for the analysis. I make use of his notions of the carnival and heteroglossia. Also, I am applying gender theories in my analysis of the Soviet context and I propose a close reading of the chosen film.

This work consists of 3 chapters, introduction and conclusion. In the first chapter theoretical framework for the analysis of the film is established. In it I will give working definitions of cross-dressing and transvestism that will be used in the work, present various

views on sex/gender distinction, as cross-dressing assumes clear differentiation and even contrasting the biological sex or body and social gender or clothes. Performative nature of cross-dressing and Bakhtin's theory will be discussed further one.

The second chapter will help to put the film into the context it was produced in. In order to do this I will present social situation in the Soviet Union in the 1970s (the film was released in 1975). Special attention will be paid to describing what mainstream film production was at those times. As images of masculinity and femininity lie at the core of cross-dressing, I will also pay attention to how Soviet Woman and Soviet Man were presented in the official and social discourses, what dress-code existed at the discussed moment and how strict it was.

The analysis of the film is presented in the third chapter. First it is studied as a Soviet costume comedy and as a part of the Soviet life of the 1970s. I will give the detailed plot of the film; see in what way the characters are presented and what the aim of carnival is. In the second part I will pay more attention to cross-dressing in the Soviet film in comparison to mainstream Hollywood comedies with the same main plot element. For this, *Some Like It Hot* (Wilder 1959) and *Tootsie* (Pollack 1982) were mainly used. These two were chosen not only because they were named among the best American comedies of the twentieth century, but also because they are very close either in carnivalesque nature (*Some Like It Hot*) or the date of release (*Tootsie*) to the Soviet film. The last part of the third chapter is devoted to investigation into the question how far cross-dressing is going in the discussed films.

Chapter 1. Cross-dressing as carnival. Theoretical framework

As it is seen from the title of this chapter it is devoted to establishing the theoretical framework for future analysis of the film. Firstly, I will look into the nature of cross-dressing. On the very first and most obvious level of analysis cross-dressing is based on the assumption that there is a clear distinction and well-defined boundary between the ‘real’ body and clothes, or between sex and gender. That is why I present different point of view on this dichotomy.

In my work I see cross-dressing as a performance, as a masquerade. This is the reason why Bakhtin’s theory on the carnivalesque and the heteroglossia are one of the key concepts in my analysis. I will present the main Bakhtin ideas after looking into performative side of cross-dressing, that is, why and where it is used in culture, movies, plays, what the audience reaction to it is, and where the pleasure comes from.

Definitions. Cross-dressing versus transvestism

Analysing various authors who write on cross-dressing, transvestism and drag there are various approaches in defining these notions. Annette Kuhn defines cross-dressing as a “mode of performance in which – through play on a distinction between clothes and body – the socially constructed nature of sexual difference is foregrounded and even subjected to comment: “what appears natural, then, reveals itself as artifice”. She does not address transvestism or drag, and analyses cross-dressing on the cultural level (Kuhn 1985:48).

Buchbinder sees drag as a term used for cross-dressing in gay culture and they both are thought of as a performance. There is always some gap or rupture that allows the audience to notice the actual sex of the person through the signs, gestures and behaviour. As any

performance, it ends in revealing the person's biological sex. He opposes transvestism to both cross-dressing and drag, because there is no desire for the impersonation to be discovered in the case of transvestism. Transsexualism is a type of transvestism, but the desire to change the biology for a transvestite is not mandatory (Buchbinder 1994:48-55).

It should be noted that Buchbinder talks about 'real' or 'true' sex of the performer as an opposition to 'performed' one. In other words, he stands on the grounds that there is a clear distinction between biological sex and cultural gender, between nature and nurture. This view comes very close to the Soviet situation where stable sex and gender roles were the basis of state ideology. A more detailed analysis of the sex/gender distinction will be presented in the second part of this chapter, while Chapter Two is devoted to the description of Soviet context.

Stella Bruzzi claims that cross-dressing is made necessary by a set of social and psychological conditions. Drag is also narrowed in her work to cross-dressing as a theatrical performance in a gay context (Bruzzi 1997:85).

Garber uses transvestism and cross-dressing as synonyms, interchangeable terms. She suggests a view on the cross-dresser as belonging to the "third sex/ term", which is out of the binary opposition male/female. Cross-dressing, thus, is a state of permanent mobility and mutability (Garber 1993:2-10).

Stroller presents quite contrary view on the differentiation between cross-dressing and transvestism. First of all, he defines transvestism as a fetishistic cross-dressing, performed in order to get sexual pleasure. He denies the possibility of female transvestism, based on the claim that women cross-dress only for socio-economic reasons. Secondly, he stresses the 'real' sex of the cross-dresser and rejects the idea that both transvestism and cross-dressing can change or even influence 'core gender identity' (Bruzzi 1997:85-87).

In this paper due to the fact that in the analysed films impersonation of the opposite sex is “for success” as Garber (1993) calls it, the working definitions will be the following: cross-dressing will be seen as impersonating the person of the opposite sex for socio-economical reasons, while transvestism will be defined as dressing and acting as a member of the opposite sex in order to get pleasure.

Sex/gender distinction

Anne Kuhn notices that as a source of cultural meanings cross-dressing has two dominant discourses. On the one hand, cross-dressing is often seen as a sign that gender identities and sexual differences are social constructs. On the other hand, cross-dressing is analysed as a performance, acting, carnival (Kuhn 1985:53). In this part of the chapter I will discuss the problems related to the first type of arguments by summarizing the views on sex/gender distinction. Other parts will be devoted to the second type of claims.

The dichotomy sex versus gender was first offered to indicate differences between men and women, male and female, that are biological, inherent, and cannot be changed (eg. organs, hormones, the bodily organization, physiology, etc), and separate them from social and cultural ones (eg. gender roles, stereotypes, job segregation, etc) which are constructed, but used to be seen as ‘natural’. Gender was and still is very often thought of in terms of sex, or as Christine Delphy puts it, it is “a social dichotomy determined by a natural dichotomy. We now see gender as the content with sex as the container. The content may vary, and some consider it must vary, but the container is considered to be invariable, because it is part of nature, and nature, ‘does not change’” (Delphy 2002:52).

Thus, it is assumed that sex comes first; it is biologically determined and natural. Gender, in its turn, is built upon sex in the process of socialization, up-bringing. Gender distinctions are caused by sexual ones, though they may vary from culture to culture, from society to society, or over time (Delphy 2002:51-53; Stanley 2002:31-36).

As Garber notes, the great interest in cross-dressing by literary and cultural critics can be easily explained by its status as “sign of constructedness of gender categories” (Garber 1993:9). In other words, cross-dressing is seen as based on clear differentiation between sex and gender and on destroying connection which is perceived as natural between male and masculinity or female and femininity.

However, in any known mammalian species there is no such clear and strong distinction between ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’, ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ as with human beings. More to the point, as Stanley or Kaplan and Rogers note, recently natural scientists, biologists come to realize that the male/female dichotomy is not that absolute, but rather problematic and doubtful, especially facilitated by the development of genes studies. It was also discovered that cellular and hormonal differences, which were thought to be very distinct between the sexes, are not so clearly differentiated (Kaplan and Rogers 1990:226-28; Stanley 2002:31-41). In other words, our biology makes less distinction between the sexes than our social world; the polarity of male and female is a social construct; this dichotomy is almost like an illusion.

As a result, the naturalness of sex and sex dichotomy becomes highly questioned and allows Christine Delphy to claim that gender precedes sex and not vice versa, “sex itself simply marks a social division, (..) it serves to allow social recognition and identification of those who are dominants and those who are dominated” (Delphy 2002:53).

Liz Stanley distinguishes between biological sex and the sex of up-bringing, noting that cytologists prove gender, and psychological sex to be matters of up-brining. According to her, biological invocations still keep on as they are rooted in a rational way of interpreting and constructing what is it to be a man or a woman in society (Stanley 2002:31-41).

The naturalness of male and female sexuality and sex drive are also put into question lately. Ann Oakley proves that they are products of culture rather than nature and depend

mostly on up-bringing, on the existing power relations and discourses, on cultural traditions and customs, which differ drastically from country to country (Oakley 1996:35-49).

As an addition to this, Stevi Jackson claims that gender and sexual categories are rooted in inequalities. According to materialist radical feminism, men and women are not biologically, naturally given entities, but social groups 'defined by the hierarchical and exploitative relationship between them'. It follows from this, that sexual categories such as hetero and homosexualities are also products of these class relations, 'the categories heterosexual and lesbian could not exist without our being able to define ourselves and others by gender' (Jackson 1996:175-176).

As a result of the problematization of sex/gender dichotomy as a nature/culture opposition and thus, of the biological origin of division into male and female, the naturalness of body is put into question. Terry Threadgold stresses that sexual difference and the sexed body are 'central to political, social and historical questions and none of these things is separable from the discursive, semiotic and representational practices and processes in and through which they are alternately constructed, reified, de-constructed and transformed' (Threadgold 1990:30).

Mora Gatens in her critique of the sex/gender distinction argues that it is responsible for the ignoring of sexual differences and the foregrounding of class, discourse and power in accounts of the construction of subjectivity. The sex/gender dichotomy was constructed to enable the claim of equality independent of sex. As a result, it is based on the assumption of the assumed neutrality of the body and the primacy of consciousness. Thus, the body is seen as a *tabula rasa* on which masculine and feminine behaviour is inscribed as consciousness. It follows from this that by changing culture it is possible to change the effects of lived experience and that the social determination of identity is operating on the level of the ideas.

However, Gatens shows that masculine and feminine behaviour has different personal and social significances when acted by male and female subjects (Gatens 1983:3-20).

It follows from the last claim that the same actions, gestures, mannerisms will be perceived by the audience, by the society differently, depending on the sex of the person who performs them. In other words, the same behaviour by a man or a woman, the same clothes arise different reactions, have different social and personal value.

Gatens insists that there is a non-arbitrary relationship between the male body and masculinity and the female body and femininity and gender categories correspond to the construction of the male and female body in a relation of social and historical specificity (Gatens 1983:3-20). Theresa de Lauretis does almost the same by defining masculinity and femininity as the cultural contents given to sexual difference (Lauretis 1987).

Thus, what is taken as a biological given is already a cultural construction. The meaning of the biological body for human beings, its significance as lived varies a lot with ideas about bodily functions in a given culture. The significance is learned and developed in a milieu of social meaning and value and constitutes the imaginary body (Gatens 1983:3-20).

To sum up, stories employing cross-dressing pivot around mistaken identifications of gender. As Anne Kuhn says: “the narrativization of such themes may provoke questions about the ways in which gender is socially constructed: it may even subject to a certain interrogation the culturally taken for granted dualities of male\female and masculine/feminine” (Kuhn 1985:51). At the same time it is arguable to what extent this strategy is subversive. The pleasure of the most popular films of sexual disguise might lie in their capacity to offer, at least for a short period of time, a vision of fluidity of gender options; to provide a glimpse of “a world outside the order normally seen or thought about” – a utopian prospect of release from the ties of sexual difference that binds us into meaning, discourse, culture (Kuhn 1985:50-51). Although more attention in the following analysis of the film will be paid to the

performative side of cross-dressing, I will also try to see whether there is a clear contrast between natural or biological and cultural.

Cross-dressing as performance

Cross-dressing by definition involves clothing, which is closely associated with the gender of the wearer, it serves as “an outward mark of difference”, as ‘a fundamental attribute of the wearer’s identity’ (Kuhn 1985:53). Although gender codes of dressing, for example colours associated with this or that gender (eg. pink for girls and blue for boys), change over time and culture, they are seen as stable, ‘natural’, consistent by people². As Bruzzi states, clothes are never only clothes, “they are how the social world ‘reads’ and contextualises the individual” (Bruzzi 1997:84).

In the performance aspect of clothing, there is a clear play between visible outward appearance and inward, ‘invisible’ essence, which is held to be more real. Thus, gender as signified by dress is contrasted to the ‘true’ gender of the person, which is concealed literally and metaphorically beneath the clothes (Kuhn 1985:53-54).

As Kuhn claims in narratives of sexual disguise, like the well-known *Tootsie* (Pollack 1982), *Some Like it Hot* (Wilder 1959), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Columbus 1993), cinema strongly affirms that “the body beneath the clothes is indeed the ultimate site of sexual difference, and that the difference is after all absolute” (Kuhn 1985:72-73).

Buchbinder adds to this that cross-dressing in such films is always temporary, and, thus, its challenge to the official discourse is also short-term, because when the ‘wrong’ clothes are removed, the ‘true’ sex is revealed and becomes unquestionable. The confusion that cross-dressing causes in people is never long-lasting, as after some confusion, amazement, anger or

² Marjorie Garber writes about great surprise from the side of New York Times’ readers, when there appeared several articles on historical changes in clothing and colours. The most striking fact was that in the beginning of the 20th century pink was boys’ colour, and dresses were usual clothes for infant boys and girls (Garber 1993:1-3).

contempt, there is a return to previous assumptions about sex and gender (Buchbinder 1994:54).

Kuhn also notices that, in most narratives employing cross-dressing, this disguise should have some reasons, be explained and justified within the story. If the character takes on sexual disguise in the course of the action, it affects the story and sets it into motion. It is very usual that a cross-dresser is a performer by profession, and performance constitutes the main theme of the story (Kuhn 1985:57-58). The usual ‘excuses’ for cross-dressing are economic reasons; the desire to overcome some social rules and regulations that hinder characters’ way to happiness, threaten their life or freedom. At the same time, for sexual disguise to be ‘pardoned’, there must be something noble in the reasons: the person should be in real need or want to earn money, for example, to help a friend. If cross-dressing is not justified well-enough in the course of action, the cross-dresser is marked as a pervert, criminal or both.

That is why, as Kuhn states, most narrative films employing cross-dressing belong or come close either to a thriller or a comedy. In both genres cross-dressing is not only explained in some way within the narrative, but also “cultural references work within the specific generic conventions, thus they reproduce and reconstruct these conventions” (Kuhn 1985:59).

In their attitude towards cross-dressing, one of the main differences of comedies from thrillers is that in them narration ensures that the spectator is always aware of the sex of the characters. Thus, one of the pleasures for the audience comes from the ‘knowing’ position they are put in by the narrative. It allows Kuhn to note that in this connection, comedy “does not denaturalize sexual difference” (Kuhn 1985:63).

Young pays attention to one more feature of the performative nature of cross-dressing. She notes that representations of men passing as women very often assume the most conspicuously ‘feminine’ accessories, bits and pieces like false, long eye-lashes, heavy amounts of coloured eye-shadow and foundation, over-elaborate hairstyle and others. These

excessively 'feminine' external signifiers take on a parodic role (Young 1995:276). In other words, cross-dressing, especially in comedies, is usually based on exaggeration, hyperbolization of stereotypical features of this or that sex and in this regard cross-dressing comes close to carnival. That is why, Bakhtin's theory on carnival is the basis of the following film analysis.

Bakhtin's ideas on Carnavalesque and Heteroglossia

According to Zappen, carnival is "both a general sense of the world and of language and a specific literary form" (Zappen 2000). Bakhtin develops the concept of carnivalesque in his book "Rabelais and His World", where he understands carnival as a way of life on the one side, and a mode of language which stands in opposition to the official discourse. It is an expression of universal freedom from official norms and values both in society and in language (Zappen 2000).

Bakhtin traces carnival back to the Dionysian festivities in Ancient Greece and the Saturnalia in Ancient Rome. Carnival reached its summit of both observance and symbolic meaning in the High Middle Ages. He describes the carnivalesque as something that is created when the themes of the carnival twist, mutate, and invert standard themes of society's structure. Bakhtin made contemporary theory aware of how much popular culture in early modern Europe involved flourishing traditions of carnivalesque that mocked those in authority and parodied official ideas of society, history, destiny, fate, as unalterable. With its masks and monsters and feasts and games and dramas and processions, carnival was many things at once. It was festive pleasure, the world turned upside down, destruction and creation; it was a theory of time and history and destiny; it was utopia, cosmology, and philosophy. The very pleasures of carnival were at the same time philosophical modes. In other words, the carnivalesque principle abolishes hierarchies, levels social classes, and creates another life free from conventional rules and restrictions (Stam 1989).

The main concepts of the carnival are the valorization of Eros and life force; the notion of bisexuality and the practice of transvestitism as a release from the burden of socially imposed sex roles; a corporeal semiotic celebrating the grotesque, excessive body and the 'orifices' of the lower bodily stratum; the topos of carnival as "gay relativity" and Janus-face ambiguity and ambivalence. In carnival there is also always a perspective on language that valorises the obscene, the nonsensical, and 'marketplace speech' as expressive of the linguistic creativity of common people. Besides the carnival is seen as participatory spectacle, a 'pageant without footlights' which erases the boundaries between spectator and performer (Stam 1993:116-145).

Bakhtin states that the aim of subverting official discourse is achieved by ridiculing another's language, direct discourse. One of the main ways of ridiculing (but not the only one) is mimicking, parodying another, travestyng. The satire is based on playing with stereotypes, which are exaggerated, reduced to a type. Bakhtin thinks that by this ridiculing, satirizing, parodyng the existing status quo is challenged. Thus, the main function of the laughter and of carnival respectively is to work as a corrective. As he writes in *From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse* "All these diverse parodic-travestyng forms constituted, as it were, a special extra-generic or inter-generic world. But this world was unified, first of all, by a common purpose: to provide the corrective of laughter and criticism to all existing straightforward genres, languages, styles, voices; to force men to experience beneath these categories a different and contradictory reality that is otherwise not captured in them" (Bakhtin 1992).

As I work with a comedy, carnival is realised as both a way of life and a mode of language. In the Soviet context, as Andrew Horton writes, the carnivalesque or joyful laughter in a satiric vein has existed in different forms since the 1920s. Young Soviet revolutionary filmmakers were influenced by vaudeville and *comedia dell'arte*, American silent comedies, especially ones with Charlie Chaplin, Bustin Keaton or Harold Lloyd (Horton 1993:9-10).

According to Michael Holquist, carnivalization as well as polyphony (many voices or consciousnesses in novel among which the authorial point of view is only one of them, not the main or dominating) are two specific ways in which the primary condition of heteroglossia manifests itself (Holquist 2002). Heteroglossia is the difference between the various discursive strata within a language, it concerns the diversity of speech styles in a language. Any utterance takes shape in an environment of dialogized heteroglossia. Thus it is the main condition which governs the operation of meaning in any utterance. It also insures the primacy of context over any text, because at any given time, and given place, there will be a set of conditions for a word in an utterance to have a meaning, which will be different in any other conditions. In other words, the term heteroglossia refers to the qualities of a language that are extralinguistic, common to all languages. These include qualities such as perspective, evaluation, and ideological positioning. In this way most languages are incapable of neutrality, for every word is inextricably bound to the context in which it exists (Clark and Holquist 1984; Morson and Emerson 1990).

I think, it is important to mention that one and the same person or character is able to use different languages, depending on the situation and the interlocutor. Change from one language to another, or rather one style to another can happen within one utterance, this move is “predetermined and not a thought process” (Bakhtin 1992). In other words, this change happens in some way subconsciously, no special intention, effort is needed. In connection to sexual disguise, a cross-dresser is constantly moving from speaking ‘like’ a representative of one sex to speaking like the other sex. Sometimes this move is not that clear and the audience is left to wonder who exactly is speaking at the moment – a man or a woman.

Robert Stam reached prominent results in appropriating Bakhtinian concepts for film theory and especially film analysis. As Pearce puts it “despite the fact that Bakhtin’s is predominantly aural theory of communication, and film is predominantly a visual medium,

there is much in the dialogic model that has proven liberatory to an area of textual analysis still heavily dominated by structuralist theory” (Pearce 1994). The aforementioned Robert Stam in his book *Subversive Pleasure* renegotiates text-spectator relations, explores the significance of the nonverbal elements, explore the representation of ethnic voices and “developing”, “Third World” countries in world cinema, defines some main strategies in postmodernist film critique, basing them on different aspects of Bakhtin’s dialogics (Stam 1989). As for heteroglossia, it is understood broader than the social diversity of speech types in film theory. It results in crossing disciplines and integrating the visual with the verbal, the spoken with the textual (Pearce 1994).

Conclusion

To sum up, although there are different views on cross-dressing and transvestism, and the difference between them, in this paper the main feature that distinguishes them is the aim of sexual disguise. If cross-dressing is seen as personification only for social or economic reasons, transvestism is for pleasure (sexual, psychological).

Two main discourses intersect in discussions of cross-dressing – the constructedness of sex/gender categories and its performative nature. Many authors agree that cross-dressing can be regarded as carnivalesque in nature. Based on Bakhtin’s view of carnival as a way of life, and a mode of language opposed to official discourse, Buchbinder sees cross-dressing as potentially liberating, breach of codes and discourses of gender (Buchbinder 1994). However, in comedies, this potential subversiveness is usually not fully realised, though it depends on ‘closedness’ or ‘openness’ of the plot. In most films, there should be a clear reason for cross-dressing to be justified. If there is none, cross-dressing is labelled as sick. One of the pleasures for the audience comes from the fact, that they always know the ‘real’ sex of the character, or what is under the clothes. I will analyse this closely in connection to the discussed film in Chapter 3 of the present work.

Chapter 2 *Hello, I am your aunt!* and the Soviet life and cinema in the 1970s

The analysed comedy belongs to the very few well-known Soviet films where cross-dressing is the main plot element. Among these it is the only film allowed to be broadcast to a public audience in the Soviet Union where a man impersonates a woman. As cross-dressing in Soviet cinema is not mentioned in any encyclopaedia or any work on the history of Soviet film industry, I had to rely on my own, my friends', family's and acquaintances' knowledge of produced films and we all were able to remember not more than two or three Soviet films where the whole plot is built on cross-dressing (about four-five where cross-dressing is used at least for some period of time).

The main aim of this chapter is to find out in what social and cultural context the film appeared. It is important to see not only what the mainstream cinema looked like in the 1970s, but also pay attention to social context, because cross-dressing is built on playing with images of femininity and masculinity, gender roles and gender stereotypes, dress codes. In this chapter, I will find out what features make *Hello, I am your aunt!* belong to the mainstream Soviet cinema of the 1970s and what the image of men and women was, as represented in the official discourse, what the differences are in the representation of this period in comparison to the previous ones.

The period of Stagnation

The two decades when Leonid Brezhnev ruled the Soviet Union (1964-1982) are known as a time of stagnation, which had its impact on all spheres of life of Soviet society: economic, cultural and personal. It followed a rather short period of the so-called Thaw

(late 1950s – early 1960s), which was characterized by a low level of repressions and censorship and the emergence of liberal movements. In his speech on the 20th Party Congress in 1956, Khrushchev denounced Stalin, his Cult of Personality and the repressions he had placed on the Soviet Union, which gave rise to open-minded tendencies in literature, music, cinema, etc. In the works of art authors were no longer afraid to criticize the society, to show a picture that was closer to the reality than before. However, it should be mentioned that the liberation was only on the surface and only a moderate critique was allowed. Nevertheless, in comparison to Stalinist times, it was a big step to liberalization.

The new leadership tried to restore some of the old Stalinist control mechanisms, to re-establish the new “Cult of Personality”, that is virtual deification of the leader, this time building it around Brezhnev. However, as a result of the Thaw, the ideology lost its mighty power, especially among the intelligentsia. As Attwood writes, the result of this was that the population responded with irony towards the Communist Party, proclaimed ideals and acknowledged gains and achievements and cynicism, when the authorities tried to idealize Soviet society and the Soviet system once again. ‘In public they supported the system; in private, they either attacked or ignored it’ (Attwood 1993:78). Shlapentokhs Dmitry and Vladimir add that, for example, many filmmakers in behaviour were conformists and played by the state rules, but in thought remained dissidents (Shlapentokh and Shlapentokh 1993:148-149).

In the cultural sphere, artists, film directors, writers were no longer afraid for their lives. At the same time, the boundaries of what was accessible, approved by the Party and acceptable for general audience access were tightened in comparison to the period of the Thaw. What is more important, these boundaries were ill-defined and censors tended to err on the side of caution. It was a time when many films were denied public broadcast

and were put on the shelves of the archives. Other films, although allowed to have public access, were severely edited. Many intellectuals, dissidents, human rights activists and defenders were sent into exile or denied Soviet citizenship and had to leave the country, and some were sent to mental hospitals (Attwood 1993; Shlapentokh et al. 1993; Zorkaya 1989).

Soviet cinema of the 1970s

Cinema was always seen by the Soviet authorities as an important ideological tool that can be used in the propaganda of Soviet ideals and building a New Soviet Person's identity. As early as in the end of 1910s – beginning of the 1920s, just after the Revolution, Lenin proclaimed that cinema was the most important of all arts for a new Soviet state, especially when about 70 per cent of the population was illiterate (Shlapentokh et al. 1993:21). However, relations between film makers and ideology, as several authors notice, changed a lot during the history of the Soviet state. In the period after the Revolution, most cinematographers accepted the new state ideology as their own. In the Stalinist' times they had no choice, but to obey it regardless of their own beliefs and opinions. Those who did not serve the state right were either sent to GULAG or sentenced to death. Only after Stalin's death and liberalization of the regime, to some extent, film directors were able to express their own views (Shlapentokh et al. 1993:16-17).

Throughout its whole history, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) used film to politicize culture; not only to entertain the nation, but to educate it as well, to provide a looking-glass, through which the Soviet reality and a life of ordinary Soviet people were presented in optimistic tones. All the existing problems were seen as dating back to the pre-revolutionary history or as a result of sabotage from the capitalist countries or 'the enemies of the People' (Attwood 1993; Shlapentokh et al. 1993; Zorkaya 1989).

In order to judge the value of any cinematic work, standard criteria were established. The main model of criticism was in the form of Marxist-Leninist principles and Socialist Realism (also called pedagogic realism). Evaluations of ideological accuracy and of the depth of social analysis were the main principles in judging films and their artistic quality. As mentioned before, the process of creative liberation, that started in the 1960-s, was hampered by a growing pressure on filmmakers exerted by the USSR State Committee of Cinematography (also known as Goskino) and the growing intolerance of editors on different levels ranging from studios to nationwide film boards (Zorkaya 1989:267-70).

As a result of state ideology, the main film genre in the 1970s was films on every day life or 'bytovie'. In contrast to the 1930s, the life of ordinary, non-heroic Soviet citizens was shown in ordinary circumstances, their day-to-day life, which was full of small problems and almost devoid of the necessity for heroism. There was growing interest in problems of morality and ethics, film directors looked for the ideal down-to-earth and thus realistic Soviet citizen. They looked for selfless, disinterested, non-pragmatic persons with a sense of social duty (Gillispie 2003; Zorkaya 1989).

Thus, the state ideology was aimed at convincing people that everything was smooth, problem-free and wonderful in the Soviet state and society, that problems with the availability of some goods were just temporary on the way to communism. Thus, there was nothing to criticize, nothing to laugh at. In such conditions satire fell into disgrace and comedy had only entertaining function left (Vlasov 1997:63-65). During the Thaw period comedy was used as a means to tackle the corruption of the bureaucratic apparatus, along with some other vices and absurdities of the Soviet system and official discourse. After 1968, musical elements were moved into the background and slapstick and physical humour took the lead in comedies. However, while, for example, the musical comedies of the Stalinist era served mainly to confirm ideology, the comedies of the stagnation period subverted it, undermined the ethos of

the previous eras. A Stalinist musical comedy aimed at eliminating fear and reassuring the audience of the ideals of socialism, the slapstick comedies of the 1970s provided comic relief, the aim of which was to make up for the despair and greyness of everyday life (Beumers 2003).

As an answer to the hegemony of realism and documentalism in fiction films in the Soviet film production of the stagnation period, there appeared a tendency to make theatrical, costume films. Many films were produced that tended to have a minimum number of characters, unity of place, time and action. This tendency to theatricalization and carnivalization was also made obvious by the creative use of methods intrinsic to folk, street theatre, by the atmosphere of parody and improvisation (Vlasov 1997:5-8).

This is also the period of film director's attraction to the so-called 'retro' style. They tried to reproduce the look and atmosphere of a not-so distant future with as much detail and as close to 'truth' as possible. A lot of attention was paid to the uniqueness of time tokens and signs, details of everyday life, characteristic manners, customs and fashion. An object for reconstruction was usually a period in the near past that was still remembered by older generations; that was a time of childhood and adolescence to film makers (Vlasov 1997:5-8).

The analysed film *Hello, I'm your aunt! (Zdravstvujte, ja vasha tetya!)* (Titov 1975) belongs to this kind of retro films. It is a costume eccentric comedy, the action of which takes place in about 1920s-1930s in some capitalist country. Most probably it is Britain, as it is an adaptation of the English playwright Brandon Thomas' *Charlie's Aunt*, but there is no clear indication on the time and place. There is a rather limited number of characters and most of the action takes place in one house. The only exception is the black-and-white pseudo documentary material that serves as an introduction and prologue to the main action. From its very beginning the film reminds the audience of carnival, carnivalesque traditions.

Thus, it follows one of the main tendencies observed in the Soviet film industry of the 1970s, that is theatrical, costume pseudo-historical slapstick comedy. At the same time, it stands out because the main plot element in it is cross-dressing. This theme was hardly ever used in Soviet cinema, because although women's emancipation was widely proclaimed, it was a society with strictly and clearly defined gender roles, firm gender stereotypes and dress code, which was made a rule, although an unwritten but closely followed one.

Femininity in the official Soviet discourse

Analyzing the images of femininity in the Soviet and contemporary official and cultural discourses, Temkina and Rotkirch notice "that there was a constant tension in the Soviet gender system". This tension showed itself in, on the one hand, incorporating women into the 'androgynous' Soviet Citizen, which was implicitly male. On the other hand, Soviet official discourse was based on biological determinism, which never questioned physical and psychological, 'natural', women's 'peculiarities'. As such, the Soviet gender system hardly changed from after the Second World War until the Perestroika. (Temkina and Rotkirch 1997).

After the October revolution of 1917, Soviet Russia was one of the first countries where women were granted the same rights as men, at least officially, on paper they were made equal. Divorce and family laws were liberalized, free love was proclaimed. It was thought that the family as a unit of society would not exist and would not be needed in the Soviet socialist state. All the functions of the family would be taken on and fulfilled by the society, by the community. However, this discourse did not live long and by the beginning of the 1930s, state ideology returned to the old, patriarchal view on the family (Goscilo and Lanoux 2006:4-7).

Yulia Gradszkova, in her article on women's emancipation in the Soviet Union, pays special attention to women's involvement into the political system. It is important to see how the state saw women and their role in society. First of all, giving equal political rights were not seen as enough to make women full and active members of society. Leaders of the

Bolsheviks Party did not see women as able to use these rights as fully as men, because women were regarded as “culturally backward”. In the official Soviet discourse of those times, working women were put into the position of gift receivers. Based on this, Gradskova claims that women hardly had any subjectivity in the Soviet system. Nobody expected women to take part in solving political problems (Gradskova 1998).

In the process of the so-called cultural revolution, the main changes in the ‘female’ were seen in getting rid of qualities traditionally regarded as feminine and taking up masculine ones. What is important, no changes were thought to be needed in the image of masculinity. Men, according to Gradskova’s analysis of the discourse in after-revolutionary Russia, were seen as more advanced beings for building a social order, while women were supposed to get rid of some psychological qualities and become similar to men (Gradskova 1998).

At the beginning of industrialization, when there was a great need in the workforce, the address was directed at involving women in paid labour. Many women’s magazines were published, the abundant use of feminine markers can be observed in the official discourse (eg. *Zhenchshina* – *rabotnitza* or woman-worker. Both words in Russian are gender marked as feminine), and conferences on women’s problems were held rather often (Kirilina 2000).

According to Kirilina, starting from the second half of the 1930s, the situation changed as most of the population of the working age was already involved into the workforce. The campaigning among women was no longer so intense and there were less gender-marked forms and addresses especially to women in the official discourse. Heroism, common work for the prosperity of the Soviet country became the main topic, without the gender distinction of the main characters and heroes. In the press of those times gender stereotypes were not explicitly manifested and the sex was not stressed. Articles and photos show the desirability or prestigious status of different professions, the friendship of Nations, etc. Femininity of the characters was rarely expressed by morphological or lexical means. Common and Collective

nouns were preferred in references to people. Sexuality and the body of both male and female images were not foregrounded. There are hardly any articles concerning personal relations, this sphere of life is represented only in the articles on motherhood (Kirilina 2000).

Starting from the 1960s and in the 1970s, one of the main problems for the Soviet state was high divorce rate and low birth rate, especially in the European republics. All these could have led to an acute labour shortage in the future, especially in European republics where most industry was situated. Many authors (Attwood, Temkina, etc) state that it was one of the reasons why the official discourse on femininity changed drastically at this time. State propaganda started to make the values of motherhood, family more explicitly expressed. Gender equality was redefined. The new motto was "Equal but different" and women were supposed to put work to the second place and devote more time to family and children. In schools a new subject was introduced, the aim of which was to socialize children into more appropriate gender roles (Attwood 1993:79-81; Temkina et al. 1997).

In Soviet films of this period one of the main topics was the (re)presentation of successful women who reached high positions in their work, devoted much of their time to work, to social life, putting family and personal life into the second place. In the dominant discourse, however, such women were not regarded as leading happy, full lives; they were portrayed as lonely, discontent with their lives and their achievements. There was a clear critical treatment of such heroines and the predominant message was that there had been a high price to pay for being emancipated. I think it important to mention that in the Soviet official and social discourse women's emancipation was understood mostly as women's employment only (Attwood 1993).

Thus, in comparison to the previous decades there were changes at the symbolical level of the Soviet gender system during the Thaw and the Stagnation. There was an increase in the attention that media and education paid to (re)establishing the values of a "feminine

appearance and behaviour" for women. Due to their "biological specificities" women were still seen as the "second" type of citizen (Temkina et al. 1997), even if they were fully participating in the building of socialism. As a result, the reason for male-to-female cross-dressing, that is for going down in the social hierarchy were supposed to be really good.

Masculinity in the discourse of the 1970s

As one more negative consequence of women's emancipation there were discussions on the crisis of masculinity. It is important to mention that it was predominant in the dissident discourse, the Soviet state never admitted that there was anything wrong with the male population, with masculinity. As for opponents of the official regime, the masculinization of women and feminization of men were discussed as important social problems and were regarded as signs of the crisis of the socialist regime. Men were seen as victims of the regime, inactive members of the society that are far from building their own lives. Male identity of the 1970s was contrasted to other types of masculinity, which were seen as successful. They were, first of all, hegemonic soviet masculinity or the image of fathers, who were heroes of industrialization and the Second World War. The main goal for such Man was to serve the state. Another type is traditional Russian masculinity. It had two forms: Russian village man or real 'myzhik' and a noble man with high ideals and principles, self-confident and liberal intellectual. The last but not the least type of successful masculinity was western hegemonic masculinity (a cowboy, independent, self-confident, alone, ready and able to protect a weaker person) (Zdravomislova and Temkina 2002).

Neither of these images could be realized by a Soviet man of those times and the main reason was seen in women's emancipation, in women's taking male's place in the society, or the workforce (Zdravomislova et al. 2002). In the films and official discourse there was nostalgia for times when men were knights and women were ladies (Attwood 1993).

Sexuality and the “Soviet Person” of the 1970s

According to Temkina and Rotkirch, Soviet womanhood found its symbolic expression in “metaphysical and patriotically heroic maternity”, which had little or no connection with actual bodies or sexuality. Sexual matters were not publicly discussed or talked about. They were usually only mentioned in connection with prohibition or prosecution. Igor Kon named this mentality and politics of “sexless sexism”: “sexuality and sexual difference were avoided to the point of interpreting men and women as 'similar', while actual male supremacy remained unquestioned” (Temkina et al. 1997).

Ex-Soviet citizens themselves often think Soviet ideology to be ‘sexless’ and androgynous. From the 1970s, psychologists, teachers started to publicize more diverse, differentiated gender roles to ‘overcome’ the ‘masculinization’ of women. Although, sexual topics were presented in mainstream socialist popular literature and cinema, although romantic love was one of the dominating genres, the image of women was closely and intrinsically connected with motherhood (Temkina et al. 1997).

As for ‘deviant’ sexual behaviour, it was denied completely and was seen as non-existent in the Soviet society. Homosexuality was prohibited since 1930’s and, as Temkina and Rotkirch write, was “treated as 'an unmentionable sin' in the literal sense of the word”. According to Article 121 of the Russian Federation Criminal Code, homosexuality was punishable by deprivation of freedom for a term of up to five years. This was applied only to male homosexuality, as lesbians and bisexuals were not supposed to exist in the USSR at all (Temkina et al. 1997).

In the mainstream Soviet cinema of the 1970s (and previous decades as well), sex scenes or naked bodies were almost completely absent. In all the films, especially romantic ones, the main stress was made on platonic love, on the feelings of the characters. Even showing a kiss was regarded as something out of the ordinary, let alone any visual

presentation of sexual desire between the characters. Any discussion of sexual matters, especially in the media, was banned. Even the word “sex”, in the meaning of “sexual intercourse” was borrowed from English and came into common use only in the 1980s. As a result of the official discourse’s silence on sexual matters, at the end of the 1980s, during one of the TV-bridges between the Soviet Union and the US, one of the participants from the Soviet side said “There is no sex in the Soviet Union, there is only love”. It should be mentioned that in the final variant of the program, that was broadcast on TV, the second part of this phrase was cut and appeared as “There is no sex in the SU”, which reflects the official view on sex and sexuality in appropriate way (ehfrau 2007).

Dress code

It is also important to mention that there existed a rather strict division of clothes associated with the sexes. There is hardly any literature on this topic, but judging by my own knowledge and also opinions of people who lived in the Soviet Union in the 1970s and whom I asked, there was firm dress code, especially for official occasions. Although there were no written rules on these, the only fully appropriate clothes for women at work (especially if they worked in the state apparatus) were either a skirt or a dress. In schools, the uniform for pupils was clearly gender divided – boys wore dark blue suits, girls wore dark brown frocks with black or white for festive occasions aprons. Jeans and trousers were worn only by the youth of both sexes, or by university staff, where the atmosphere was more liberal and less austere. However, both of these categories wore clothes more appropriate for their sex on official occasions and ceremonies, or if they needed to apply to state apparatus.

Conclusion

To sum up, the 1970s in the Soviet Union are called the age of stagnation, which can be observed not only in the economic sphere, but in the cultural one as well. Censorship became

stricter and the range of allowed or approved topics was narrowed greatly in comparison to the period of Thaw. As an answer to this, costume films, musical comedies in historic or pseudo-historic surroundings, films in the form of a theatrical play were mass-produced at this period, as it was easier to get a censors' approval when the film didn't show the Soviet reality. More creativity, satire and irony were allowed in such films. *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* falls into this category, as the action takes place supposedly in Britain in 1920s-30s and there is no visual connection with the Soviet reality. At the same time, this film stands out, because cross-dressing is the central element in its plot.

As for the official Soviet discourse, it was aimed at building, bringing up a Soviet person. This concept was supposed to be gender-neutral, but, in fact, presupposed a male. Although women were officially emancipated just after the revolution, they were still seen as inferior to men. In the light of the demographic crisis, the official ideology became "equal but different", and women's emancipation was regarded as one of the reasons not only of low birth rate, but of masculinity crisis as well. Sex, sexual topics, sexuality were absent from the official discourse and male homosexuality was prohibited and outlawed. There also existed a rather strict division in the clothes that were appropriate for men and women.

Chapter 3. *Hello, I am your aunt!* in comparison to mainstream American comedies based on cross-dressing

As it was several times mentioned in the previous parts *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* (Titov 1975) is one of the rather few Soviet films employing cross-dressing as the main plot-element. At the same time, despite it being rather unique, it still belongs to the mainstream Soviet cinema of the 1970s and belongs to a rather big class of costume, pseudo-historic movies, which were widely produced at those times.

On the one hand, it falls into the category with medium artistic value and quality. The plot is simple and not intriguing; there are no special effects or ground-breaking camera work, though very good actors play in it. On the other hand, it was enormously popular and was named the best eccentric Soviet comedy of the times. Many phrases from it became bywords.

One of the questions I want to answer in this chapter is why the film was popular. I claim that it could not have been only for the wonderful cast and their good playing. Another question is if and how subversive the film was. Although on the surface it might not have been intended to be subversive to the official discourse, I want to show that it was. To my mind, cross-dressing, in the system with rigidly defined gender roles, cannot but be dissident to some extent. However, I do not claim in any way that the film led to the system and country collapse.

In the first part, I will present the analysis of the film as a part of the Soviet life and cinema, thus the film will be examined in the context presented in the previous chapter. Next parts present a closer look on cross-dressing, the role it plays in the film. In these parts the Soviet film is compared to Hollywood mainstream comedies with cross-dressing. In other words the film will be studied against the American film context.

Hello, I am Your Aunt! as a Soviet costume film

Before going into the analysis of the film, I think, its plot should be presented. The main character is Babbs Baberley. He is unemployed, and looks very similar to tramps portrayed by Charlie Chaplin. He has to run from the policemen, who think that he stole suitcases, which he actually found on the road. During this run Babbs cross-dresses trying to hide from the police and gets into the house of Jackie Chesney. Jackie and his friend Charley Wickham are waiting for Charley's rich aunt Donna Rosa d'Alvadorez from Brazil. They need her to get a permission to marry two girls (Bettie and Annie) from their guardian Judge Kriegs. They first take Babbs for the aunt, and then with the help of the policemen make him impersonate the aunt before Judge Kriegs. As they think Babbs to be a rich widow, Colonel Chesney (Jackie's father) and Judge Kriegs start to court him/her. When the real aunt comes, nobody pays her any attention. After receiving the permission Babbs cross-dresses back, 'real' identities are revealed and everything goes back to 'normal'. Babbs becomes forgotten, as he is not needed anymore and he returns back to his jobless, homeless life.

The film starts with a setting – that is a modest brick cottage in the park or forest with a pond in front of it. It is all in colour with a slow, romantic music playing as a background. Then colour disappears; energetic, loud, music starts and a black-and-white pseudo-documentary begins. For the next 12 minutes, the story of the film does not set off but the audience is put into the atmosphere of the capitalist countries of the 1920s-30s. This first part is made in the mode of chronicles. However, there are not only extracts of authentic documentaries used in it, but parts of films of those times as well. There are also shots of the main character made as if a part of the chronicles, or a 'fake' documentary. From the very beginning the boundary between real and unreal is crossed in some way.

In this connection it is important to refer to the afore-cited Andrew Horton, who mentions that Soviet film-makers used extensively, especially in early history of Soviet cinema,

elements of slap-stick comedies, of films by and with Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd (Horton 1993:9-10). That is why the film under analysis can be read as aiming at returning to Soviet people Hollywood traditions, re-appropriating them for the Soviet Union. It takes more than ten minutes for the action in the film to start in the course of which not only carnival, social and cultural realities are shown, but extracts of Hollywood comedies, that are regarded as classical in the world, but were almost forgotten by the Soviet audience. In addition to this, the film evokes a number of intertextual references. In the whole course of the film the viewers keep finding similarities with other films, slapstick comedies or great actors of the silent cinema.

As for colour, it appears only when the main character meets Ella Delahay, Donna Rosa d'Alvadorez's foster daughter and falls in love with her at first sight. Colour is lost again in the end, when Baberley returns to the street, forgotten and forsaken by everybody. In other words, only when he loves and has at least small hope that his feelings are reciprocal (Ella notices him and gives him a rose during their first meeting), the film turns to colour, and does not look like chronicles anymore. Once again, the audience is reminded of conventions in Chaplin films: The tramp meets a girl and falls in love with her. However, as soon as the Soviet film enters the genre, it immediately leaves it – the colour appears. At this moment the action starts, and Babbs' life becomes bright or colourful at least for some period. However, unlike Chaplin characters Babbs is alone in the end and has to leave without a girl. He is not needed anymore, and Baberley returns to black-and-white existence.

As mentioned before, the film starts with a shot of a dozen camera men and scenes of carnival in New York, with showing big figures with exaggerated heads walking along Broadway. Thus, from the very beginning there is a clear indication that the whole film should be seen as a carnival or vaudeville. Later we realise, there are no 'real', 'close to life', realistic characters. All of them are in some way caricatures, representatives of various classes,

types, or social groups. Yet, they are not strongly caricatured; they are not ultimately funny, because otherwise, cross-dressing would be completely lost.

In the black-and-white beginning there are shown figures with big, disproportionate parts of body as a part of carnival. In the main body of the film personal characteristics of characters are hyperbolized. For example, girls, Bettie and Annie, are walking stereotypes of young women of their time – they giggle all the time, shrill, flirt, sigh to seem more romantic, etc. They are passive, do nothing themselves to get what they want and rely on others, first on their suitors, then on Babbs. Even their countenance features are in some way exaggerated: for example, Annie's face is full of rather big freckles that do not look natural at all. As for rival suitors on Donna Rosa d'Alvadorez's millions, Judge Kriegs and Colonel Francis Chesney, they have no other feelings rather than desire to have money. Charlie, as he presents the stereotype of a rich young man without any definite occupation, is infantile, afraid of everything, unable to make a decision, eager to blame everybody around. He is wearing glasses, what makes him even farther from the ideal images of masculinity, which existed in the Soviet Union of the 1970s.

In the scene where Charlie and Jackie try to tell about their feelings to the girls, they repeat each other word by word. To my mind, it is done to stress once again that there is nothing real in all the characters, no unique feelings, that they all act according to some patterns established by the society and there is nothing genuine left.

The unreal nature of all the action is also underlined by some 'theatralization' of the whole action. By this I mean, that sometimes the film looks very much like a play in the theatre (thus, the film's origin as a theatre play comes through), and there is almost no attempt to make it look real, close to life. First of all, as in most theatre performances, there is a very limited number of characters. Not counting policemen that appear only in small episodes and people in the black-and-white 'documentary' part there are less than 10 characters. Setting is

also theatrical. But for the first 12 and the last 2 minutes, the whole action takes place in the same house and the same scenery. Acting is close to theatre tradition because it is visible, unlike film acting which is supposed to be invisible and look like real life. More to the point, from time to time, most of the main characters address directly to the audience, not some other characters or aside to themselves.

Babbs Baberley is at some point the most real in all the film, or better to say most human. He is able to have deep feelings, for example, to love wholeheartedly. He has compassion, as in the end he impersonates a woman not because he is made to by the circumstances, but because he really wants to help the young guys to get permission. At the same time he looks and acts so much like Charlie Chaplin's characters, especially in the very end, when the masquerade is uncovered, that he does not seem real at all. There is similarity not only in behaviour, but in acting as well. In his films Charlie Chaplin manages to be not only funny, but touching, arousing pity and compassion as well. Alexander Kalyagin, who plays Babbs, manages to do the same, especially in the final scene.

It is interesting to think why Charlie Chaplin was chosen as the prototype for the main character. I do not think that the only reason was the fact that Chaplin is regarded as the best comic, the legend, or because he greatly influenced the whole genre for many years to come. He was also an ideologically 'correct' Hollywood actor. Basing on his autobiography, although he worked for many years in the United States, he never took American citizenship. In his films he criticized American way of life, thus, was close to some extent to the Soviet state. In the times of McCarthyism and 'witch-hunting for Communists', Chaplin was accused of being anti-American, pro-communist and Marxist. He decided to leave the United States with his whole family and moved to Switzerland (Chaplin 1992). In other words, Charlie Chaplin was not only one of the greatest comic, but he suited ideologically very well to the Soviet discourse.

It should be mentioned that there is one important difference between Babbs Baberley (played by Alexander Kalyagin) and Charlie Chaplin's image, which is their figure, body construction. On the one hand, height of their characters is below average, at least perceived so by the audience in comparison to other actors. It is done on purpose – to make them look less confident, more like “Others” in the society they have to live. On the other hand, Charlie Chaplin is rather slim. He is small not only in height but in size as well. In his turn Alexander Kalyagin and thus Babbs Baberley is rather chubby. Babbs figure being bigger than ordinary or standard one is emphasised almost at the very beginning of the film. In its black-and-white, pseudo-documentary part it is shown that women are measured to ideal figure made out of carton. At first we see a line of girls who want to check their figure against the ‘ideal’, and some of them are rather close to it. The next shot shows Baberley, and it is obvious that he is really far from it.

According to Olga Vanstein, over-weight women in Soviet discourse were pitied, were seen as in some way physically handicapped, not attractive. “They were marked as a deviation from the norm and served as the object of all kinds of instructions, often with moralistic cast”. Plumpness was also very often associated with the shortness of height and age of a woman (Vanstein 1996:79-80). Thus, Babbs, when he impersonates a woman, is far from being an attractive one according to the existing standards. In my opinion, it is done to make it completely clear for the audience that Colonel and Judge courted him/her only for money. They could not have been attracted to him/her physically or emotionally, like for example Les is to Dorothy Michaels in *Tootsie*, or Osgood Fielding III to Daphne in *Some Like It Hot*³.

It should be stressed that Babbs Baberley is far from the ideal image of masculinity as well. It becomes obvious especially in comparison to Brasslet, the butler at the Chesney's house. He is tall, slim, well-built. There is even an episode, where he does some physical

exercises, thus showing that he tries to keep his body in good shape (it was seen as rather important, especially taking into account that one of the well-known Soviet mottos, as far as I know, was “Where there is a sound body there must be a sound mind” and a lot of attention was paid to physical education of Soviet citizens). More to the point, Brasnet does not have any physical flaws: he does not have a limp as Colonel Chesney, or hobble like Judge Kriegs. I do not think that it is by chance that in the Soviet film an image of masculinity is realised by a servant, a person of lower class, who manages to stay above all the situation, do not interfere, and appears to be much smarter and more intelligent than any representative of the so-called upper class, the nobility.

Coming back to the masculinity crisis in the Soviet Union of seventies and eighties, the representatives of the so-called intelligentsia, more educated class (Charlie and Jackie) are shown as weak, passive, unable to do anything themselves. In other words, they are not real Men, masculine enough as they are not in charge of their own lives and depend on others.

As it was said in previous chapters, according to Bakhtin, one of the main aims of carnivalesque, grotesque is to produce corrective laughter. In connection to *Hello, I'm Your Aunt!* the question arises what this carnivalesque laughter is aimed at. The first and obvious answer is, of course, the capitalist society with all its vices. Basing on the Soviet context presented in the previous chapter it was one of the few ways to get censorship approval. The fact that the film hardly underwent any editing by censors unlike all other films even by the same director is also the proof that in the ‘official reading’ film was regarded as criticising capitalist society and its class system.

Hello, I am Your Aunt! was made a costume comedy also with the aim to get approved by Goskino. On the one hand, it seems that the action takes place in the past and in some foreign

³ It will be analyzed later but in the case of *Some Like It Hot* the characters are more like masks, or stereotypes. Thus, to some extent, it is difficult to talk about ‘real’ feelings, but unlike *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* Osgood feelings are at least made to seem more sincere.

country, as such costume, pseudo-historic films⁴ were very popular at those times for the reasons discussed in the previous chapter. On the other hand, there is no clear indication to time and place. The whole story is taking place in one house, which stands somewhere in the park near the pond, far from other houses. That is all the audience know about place and time. It makes me claim, that laughing at the capitalist society was not the only and the most important aim of the director.

I think, in the Era of Social Realism, that took place in the Soviet Union during the stagnation, costume films were one of the ways to forget about gray and difficult life. They served as a kind of escape from the reality and it is one of the reasons they were so popular at those times. The pleasure for the viewers came not only from the wonderful play of famous and favourite actors, but from the possibility the films gave to forget about surrounding problems, deficit, and authoritarian control. To my mind, the escapist nature of laughter in costume comedies in general, and *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* in particular makes it subversive in the controlled situation of the Soviet Union in the 1970s. In a society where gender roles are strictly written down and there is no open talk about sexuality, cross-dressing foregrounds many questions and laughter, based on this carnival, is dissident and to some extent rebellious. As mentioned in previous chapter, this subversive effect of comedies may not last long, but it is still there and cannot be denied.

To sum up, from the very beginning of the film *Hello, I'm your aunt!* the notion of carnival is awoken in the audience. There is hardly any intention from the side of the director or actors to make the action and characters real, close to life, or realistic (which was one of the principles to judge films about Soviet life). They are all, their features, behaviour,

⁴ As history was as all other parts of the Soviet life was highly ideologized, it was rather difficult to release a truly historic film. Shlapenkoth, for example writes that there were special instructions how to portray this or that historical figure, especially members of the Romanov family (Shlapenkoth et al. 1993). Thus, there was not much space for creativity in this genre.

qualities are very exaggerated, or hyperbolized, which make them more like stereotypical representatives of various groups, classes, and social layers.

However, pseudo-documentary part in the very beginning does not only serve to give the air of carnival, it bases the whole film on the Hollywood tradition of slap-stick and silent comedies of Charlie Chaplin, Bustin Keaton and others. In other words, the film brings back, in some way returns to people what they were deprived of for a long time. In this connection, a British play from the previous century as an origin of the film seems as a justifiable choice. As for the carnivalesque nature of cross-dressing and its possible subversiveness, it will be more closely discussed in the next part.

Cross-dressing as carnival

In carnivalesque nature, in playing on stereotypes and having masks instead of 'real people' *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* seems to be very close to *Some Like It Hot*, though the American film was shot almost 20 years earlier. In this Hollywood cross-dressing comedy most of the characters, especially main one, are not real, they are very stereotypical, they represent types like that of a millionaire (Osgood), head of the mob, or female singer at any travelling jazz band. Even the names are in some way close to stereotypes. For example, to stress that Tony Curtis's and Jack Lemmon's characters are 'ordinary' common musicians they are called Joe and Jerry. These names can be a substitute for any other names and are usually given to a person whose name is unknown. The lead singer in the band, played by Marilyn Monroe, is Sugar Kane/ Kowalczyk. As she is an object of sexual desire for lots of men, her name in some way implies that every male wants to 'lick' her. As expected, the millionaire has a rather long name with a number in the end (Osgood Fielding III), criminals are called no other than Spats Colombo, Little Bonaparte and Toothpick Charlie.

In this film there is a pair of 'real' man and woman, ideal images of masculinity and femininity Joe (Tony Curtis) and Sugar Kane Kowalczyk (Marilyn Monroe). They also

represent the ideal of 'true love', their story follows the path of a proper romance. There is also a pair of 'not real', 'fake' man and woman. Osgood Fielding III (Joe E. Brown) is small, bony and skinny, still obeys his mother and is as far from the image of masculinity as Jerry / 'Daphne' (Jack Lemmon) is from being a woman, according to the gender expectations of the time.

In *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* it is possible to find similar comparison – real lovers and suitors, and 'not real', those who are obviously fake ones. The audience is made to believe that both young guys (Charlie and Jackie) are honest in their feelings and intentions towards Bettie and Annie, unlike Colonel Chesney and Judge Kriegs. It is made absolutely clear that they court Donna Rosa d'Alvadorez (impersonated by Babbs) for money only. However, in the Soviet film even the 'real' characters are far from the ideals to be followed and to be adored. As it was analysed before, both young men are far from being masculine enough for that. It concerns both their behaviour and appearance. They act according to some pattern, are not eager and able to break the conventions and get what they want only with another person's help.

In other words, if in the American film the ideal, 'exemplary' pair of the right man and woman is present, in the Soviet comedy there is nobody whose example can be followed, who can be regarded as an ideal to strive for. To my mind, it may be the result of absence of these ideal Man and Woman in real life. There was nobody to be a model for behaviour, although there were strictly written gender roles. As mentioned in the previous chapter the official discourse was too much aimed at bringing up an ideal Soviet citizen, which was a gender – neutral, or rather, gender –blind concept. It was a sporty person with a body in good physical form, but almost absolutely asexual.

Addressing the question of sexuality it should be mentioned that in the Soviet Union the film *Some Like It Hot* was edited before broadcasting, many scenes were deleted. Most of

these were considered to be too much sexually explicit, like the one where Jerry and Joe (as Daphne and Josephine already) staring at other girls in the band walking around the train in underwear. Furthermore, the title was translated in a way that allowed no sexual connotations, as it is the case with the original title. In the Soviet Union, the film was known as *V Dzhazetol'ko devushki* (There are only girls in jazz).

Another thing that brings *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* (Titov 1975) and *Some Like It Hot* (Wilder 1959) close together is that the mere fact of cross-dressing is already supposed to bring laughter. It also again reminds of the carnival, where the costume itself, showing this or that person in power or performing certain social roles, animals, half-humans – half/animals represents the means for amusement and for subverting the rules and norms turning them upside-down. In comparison to them, in *Tootsie* (Pollack 1982), which was produced almost at the same time as the analysed Soviet film, cross-dressing is not enough to make audience laugh and it is not intended to be. In both Wilder's and Titov's films cross-dressing is a forced measure, the option to being a woman is either to be killed or to be arrested. In Pollack's film Michel Dorsey chooses his 'role' almost voluntarily. Of course, he finds himself in difficult economic situation, but there is absolutely no threat to his life or freedom. Moreover, he has enough money to live on; he just needs more funds to help his friend and flatmate to stage a play. He might also choose to cross-dress to have a job that will better fulfil his artistic, creative nature of an actor.

As it was said in previous chapters, carnival is not only mode of life, but a type of language as well. That is why carnivalesque is closely connected with the notion of heteroglossia, that is diversity of speech types within one speaking subject. In other words one and the same person or character is using different styles according to situation. Usually movement from one to another happens subconsciously, but in the case of cross-dressing, the impersonator should be always aware what 'language' should be used at this or that moment.

Most of the researches prove that there is no clear-cut, stable difference between the way women and men speak. It is possible to speak only about dominant female or male strategies, which can be used both by men and women. However, according to Kavinkina, there are certain stereotypes and some norms that exist in folk consciousness and are fixed in proverbs, sayings, idioms. They are usually far from being true and reflect the reality, but play an important role in society. On the one hand, they influence speech perception of representatives of the opposite sex. On the other hand, they influence speech, because they are perceived as rules or norms (Kavinkina 1999). As for the comedy, laughter is usually based on employing the stereotypes (Hayward 2000: 72-73). That is why cross-dressers usually consciously act according to social assumptions of what 'male' and 'female' ways of speech and languages are supposed to be.

The most common belief is that women are more talkative. For instance, Swacker gives examples of proverbs from various cultures (Jutland: "The North Sea will sooner be found wanting in water than a woman at a loss for words"; Britain: "Women's tongues are like lambs' tails – they are never still"; China: "The tongue is the sword of a woman, and she never lets it become rusty") that prove the existence of this belief (Swacker 1975:76). In addition to being chatter-boxes, women are thought to like asking questions; to curse more rarely than men; and to be more polite (Dvinaninova 2001).

Based on observations by British and American scholars and on her own analysis of the Russian language, Zenskaya claims that women tend to use broader prosodic range and a higher main tone (Zenskaya 1993:90 -105). Kavinkina adds to this that diminutive suffixes are more common for female speech (it concerns mainly Russian, where there is a developed system of diminutive-hypocoristic suffixes) (Kavinkina 1999). As for lexical peculiarities, the social norms are stricter, much less approving to cursing and vulgarisms in women's speech, than in men's one. It is also more common for men to use expressive, stylistically low figures

of speech, professional words and terms (Dvinaninova 2001). Thus, to some extent, the results of the researches confirm the popular beliefs⁵.

In the analyzed Soviet film distinguishing male and female speech plays an important part in creating comic effect and in showing Babbs Baberley's attitude to cross-dressing. In aforementioned American comedies, especially *Tootsie*, there is a clear difference in the tone of the voice between Michael Dorsey or Joe and Jerry speaking as men or women. In *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* Baberley does not change his voice register on purpose to show that the cross-dressing was forced upon him. Only later, when he gets into it, his voice changes a bit.

At the same time, he tries to follow all the other conventions concerning women's speech; though not always succeeds in this. For example, when he forgets and curses in front of the people, who think him to be a 'real' woman, he has to ask for an excuse and make up a story on Brazilian customs and cultural norms. It should be noted that in Russian there is a developed system of word endings, which to a great extent depend on the grammatical gender of this or that word. In a grammatically correct sentence it is mandatory to connect verbs, nouns and dependent adjectives by using the same gender endings. In his speech Babbs often mixes everything up, breaks these conventions and can use the noun of masculine gender along with an adjective with feminine gender ending. On the one hand, it produces comic effect, on the other, it shows that he never becomes a 'woman' and is somewhere in between. He is, using Garber's terminology (1993), 'the third term'.

As for other characters who know about cross-dressing, Charlie and Jackie at some point are lost and puzzled. They address Babbs using both words in feminine and masculine gender. They are lost in carnival they started. I think it happens because for them clothes and biological sex are intrinsically bound. Babbs' cross-dressing puts it into question for them. As

⁵ Nevertheless, it does not prove that folk psychology is right. To my mind, as it was already mentioned before, these beliefs rather than reflecting the reality correctly are more likely to structure the reality, to form expectations. However, the questions of what is influenced by what, whether beliefs are formed by reality, or vice versa is a very complicated one and out of the scope of my paper.

for the butler Basset, who also knows everything, he avoids this confusion. For him, Baberley never stops being a man, and he keeps addressing to Babbs as ‘sir’. He stays out of the carnival and does not take part in deceit. In some sense, I presume, he is above it and judges people only for their interior (in this case, biological body) not their exterior appearance (clothes). Coming back to his social position as a servant and Soviet/communist ideology, I suppose, it is not a coincidence that Basset is the only one who does not fall for the cross-dresser’s clothes or manner, but sees in the ‘core’.

As cross-dressing is carnival, the question is what its subversive nature is aiming at in the analyzed films. On the one hand, in *Some Like It Hot*, and *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* there is no intention to really subvert gender roles or patriarchal system. Both comedies play on stereotypes, and, on one level, they are more likely to re-establish them than to break. In *Some Like It Hot*, it is made obvious if the analysis pays attention mostly to Tony Curtis’s and Marilyn Monroe’s characters. As for *Tootsie*, there are different views on its subversivity. Some critics think that it is really progressive (especially for its time) in showing that women are better than men and in foregrounding problems women had to overcome in their personal and professional life. According to Buchbinder, it is a politically correct reading of the movie. He himself and feminist critics (Showalter, for example) say absolutely the opposite thing, claiming that the film shows that the best women and feminist are men (Buchbinder 1994; Garber 1993). Thus, they deny any possibility for the film to be revolutionary in any sense.

However, I tend to agree with Garber (1993), who says that cross-dressing is criticizing not gender roles, but gender itself as a category. As any carnival, cross-dressing cannot but be subversive. By foregrounding that there is no direct and stable connection between clothes and body, biological sex, it already questions the existing gender system, the firm correlation between nature and culture. As stated several times before, this subversion, doubting and

destabilizing effect of cross-dressing in comedies may not last long. Nevertheless, it can not be denied completely.

Analysing the ‘end’ of the carnival, it is the most ‘closed’, normalizing in the case of the Soviet film. There is not only return to standards, and to established gender roles and expectations, but there is no possibility for cross-class connections left as well. A fake millionaire turns back to tramp, but unlike his prototype –Charlie Chaplin’s characters – Babbs Baberley does not leave with a girl he loves. Following the tradition of the Soviet cinema there is no happy-end mandatory for Hollywood. In contrast to it, in *Tootsie* Michael and Julie leave together discussing clothes. In *Some Like It Hot* lovers both real and fake one speed away in the boat towards the horizon. In the latter case, the ending is the most ‘open’, allows interpretations as the audience left to ponder on the relations between Osgood and Jerry/Daphna.

Cross-dressing and gender bending

Following the discussion of the subversiveness of cross-gender in the comedies and the allowed openness of the ending, it is necessary to see whether there is any gender –bending in the discussed examples of cross-dressing. And the question arises how far the impersonation is going, whether it is always felt as a forced measure, out of necessity and with no other choice.

In the case of Tony Curtis’s character there is definitely no gender bending happening. No matter what clothes are on him, he is always a man. He hardly ever tries hard to be a woman. For him “(t)his is just to get us out of town. Once we get to Florida, we’ll blow this whole setup” (*Some Like It Hot* 1959). It is a bit different for Jack Lemmon’s character, who from the very beginning not only wears women’s clothes to save his life but also shows some interest in learning how to behave like a woman. He looks at his female colleagues from the band, not only with ‘male gaze’ as sexual objects, but also with some intention to learn from

them how to become similar in conduct. At first not to get revealed, he has to conceal his desires and remind himself “I’m a girl”. However, when he gets a proposal from Osgood he has to repeat for himself “I’m a boy. I’m a boy. I wish I were dead. I’m a boy.” then at some point he stumbles and questions: “Boy, oh boy, am I a boy?” I think, at this moment he is not sure where exactly he is, concerning gender dichotomy. He is ‘the third sex’ which is out of male-female opposition. At the same time, I should note that it is clear from his exclamation “oh boy” that he finds this situation troubling and disturbing.

Hello, I am Your Aunt! goes further in gender-bending and comes closer to *Tootsie* in this. At some moment both Babbs Baberley and Michael Dorsey start to get pleasure from their position of woman-impersonators. Of course, this moment is much shorter in the Soviet film than in the Hollywood comedy, where Michael makes his own, voluntary choice, nobody forces him to cross-dress (only circumstances). That is why he starts to enjoy it almost from the very beginning and stops when he falls in love with Julie.

As for Babbs, at first he is clearly against cross-dressing. Then gradually he gets into it and starts enjoying his position of knowing and the power of this different position. He is a ‘phallic woman’⁶ and he tries to use the advantages of his double position in between the two genders. In this connection, the episode when real Donna Rosa appears and tries to show Babb’s being a ‘fraud’ is rather illustrative. Although she knows that her place and name were taken and appropriated, real Donna Rosa believes it is done by a woman. She mentions that in Brazil all women smoke cigars in a manly fashion. She is sure that the impersonator will fail to do it properly and is very surprised when Baberley does everything with pleasure, nice smile and exactly like a man. As in *Tootsie*, any pleasure from cross-dressing disappears when Babbs meets the girl and it is again felt as something imposed and forced upon.

I think it is interesting to see how actors prepared to the role of cross-dresser and how they felt about it. In various interviews Dustin Hoffman claimed that not only his character

became a better man after playing a woman, but the actor himself did as well. According to Internet Movie Database, a well-known transvestite actor was hired to coach Hoffman for the role of cross-dresser. Members of the crew noticed that Dustin was "much nicer as a woman", that is why they preferred to tell him about any problems when he was in a drag (*Internet Movie Database*).

As for the Soviet actor Kalyagin, he denies any special training for the role of Babbs Baberley in women's clothes. In his autobiographical book he says that he played the role relying only on his memory, on his observation of the women he knew and of unknown women, seen on the street. He says that most of the gestures, postures came from within, from subconscious. To some extent he based his acting on Charlie Chaplin's film "Woman". At the same time he admits the desire to understand women, to feel, to some extent, what they feel wearing stockings, skirts, haberdashery, etc, but he never mentions if he succeeded in it and whether the role influenced him in any way (Kalyagin 2002).

Returning to gender-bending it seems worth looking how the 'unaware' characters react to it. In *Some Like It Hot*, for example, the band leader sees Joe in women's disguise and Sugar kissing and is really shocked by it. In *Victor/Victoria* King Marchand is afraid that he will be taken for a gay, if anybody sees him with Victoria in male disguise. In *Tootsie*, Julie thinks that Dorothy is a lesbian, and tries to stop any communication with her. Thus in all three films the question of hetero and homosexuality is touched upon.

In *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* there are no scenes where characters doubt their or somebody else's sexuality, sexual orientation. Even in the scenes where Babbs, in woman's dress, is dancing with girls only Jackie and Charlie (those who know about cross-dressing) become mad and jealous, but there is no surprise or shock from other characters. I think, it happens because the existence of homosexuality and homosexuals was completely denied in the Soviet

⁶ This term was offered by Freud in *Fetishism* (1927) and *Femininity* (1933) (Garber 1993:9)

official discourse. Thus, there could not be even a hint in the film on doubting heterosexual normativity of the characters.

Conclusion

To sum up, from the very beginning of the film it is suggested that the audience should see *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* as a carnival. The feeling of carnivalesque is first awoken by the pseudo-documentary black-and-white chronicles in the very beginning of the film. Then it is sustained by the grotesqueness, stereotypization of the characters, which look more like masks than real people. In this the analysed Soviet film comes close to *Some Like It Hot*, where there is also not much intention to make the characters, especially main one, look real.

However, unlike the Hollywood film, in *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* there is no 'ideal' Man and Woman, images of masculinity and femininity that can be followed or adored. I think, it is in some way the result of aiming at building the Soviet Person, without gender distinctions in the official discourse.

Although it is rather unique in employing cross-dressing as a main plot element, *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* belongs to mainstream Soviet cinema and stands in the line with many other films. It is a costume pseudo-historic comedy with a strong element of theatricalization. That is, there is a rather limited number of characters, there is continuity of time and place and the acting is purposefully made visible.

The main character, Babbs Baberley, is a paraphrase of Charlie Chaplin's characters. He is a tramp who falls in love and gets into a set of funny events. However, unlike Chaplin's heroes Babbs ends up alone in the end and does not get the girl he loves. As for the appearance and mannerisms, Kalyagin (who played Baberley) copies them from Chaplin a lot. However, he is not only of small height but also chubby, which makes him even further from being an attractive woman after cross-dressing, according to standards existing in the Soviet Union at the 1970s.

On the surface, the aim of the film, the object of laughter is the capitalist society with all its vices, poverty, hypocrisy, judging and valuing people by their bank account rather than personal characteristics. At the same time, it served to return and re-appropriate the traditions of Hollywood slapstick comedies that were almost lost for Soviet citizens. As many other costume films, the film was an escape from the social reality. This escapism can be treated as subversive, because it indicates that Soviet citizens were tired of Socialist reality and wanted to forget about it, to hide from it at least for some time.

As for cross-dressing, it was hardly been aimed to be subversive. However, in the system with clearly and strictly defined gender roles, with the existing dress code changing clothes, playing and reversing the roles cannot but be subversive. It is a carnival, and although, its overthrowing effect can last only for a short period of time, the ability to turn everything upside-down is still there.

Although in many other aspects (forced cross-dressing, the very fact of changing clothes produces laughter, etc) the Soviet film is close to *Some Like It Hot*, gender bending element or the episodes where the main character starts enjoying his position of a 'phallic woman' brings it closer to *Tootsie*. Unlike any mainstream Hollywood comedies with cross-dressing there is no even a hint on homosexuality, on questioning heterosexual normativity of the characters in the Soviet film.

Conclusion

This work was devoted to the analysis of the Soviet film *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* As the title implies special attention was paid to study of the role of cross-dressing in it. The main research questions were how the main topic was treated in the film, why the film was popular and what features of the film make it subversive to the Soviet context, if any.

For the purpose of the research working definition of cross-dressing was narrowed to impersonating a person of the opposite sex for social or economic reasons only. Wearing clothes, traditionally associated with the other sex, to get psychological or sexual pleasure was understood as transvestism and was not in the scope of this work.

In my work I am assuming that any cross-dressing can be related with two kinds of discourses. On the one hand it assumes the existence of clear distinction between nature and culture, or body and clothes in this case. However, this dichotomy where sex is something biological, natural and gender is socially constructed, which was taken for granted several decades ago, nowadays is put into question. Many researches claim that sex, body, sexuality are also social and cultural constructs. Based on this, cross-dresser sometimes is understood as ‘the third term’ which stands outside male/female dichotomy. Thus, it subverts gender as a stable category.

The second discourse of cross-dressing sees it as a performance, as a masquerade. In this it comes close to Bakhtin’s notion of carnivalesque. Some authors (Buchbinder, Kuhn, etc) claim that possible subversiveness of cross-dressing depends on the genre. However, I think, that as any carnival it always questions the predominant discourse, the existing system, by turning it upside down, by reversing the roles. Thus, it makes the naturalness, unchangeable character of sex/gender categories doubtful. At the same time, I do not claim that this effect lasts for long, especially in the case of comedies.

As for the analysed film, *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* (1975) follows the tendencies observed in the Soviet cinema of the 1970s. It is a costume comedy that takes place in pseudo-historic surroundings. This kind of films was popular for several reasons. Film makers liked it because it allowed more creativity, due to the fact that censorship was not that strict to this genre. For the audience it was a way to escape the greyness of everyday life and a good alternative to prevailing Social Realism in the cinema.

The film's escapism from reality becomes obvious in its highly carnivalesque nature as well. It becomes clear when we look at the characters that are not real and are not intended to be. They are stereotyped masks, and as it is the case with most carnival masks, their qualities are exaggerated, or hyperbolized. Not only cross-dressing, but the whole film looks like a theatrical performance: the action takes place in one place, there is a rather limited number of characters and the acting is made intentionally visible, more like in theatre, than cinema.

Another reason for popularity is that the film tries to return and re-appropriate American silent comedies traditions that were forgotten in the Soviet context. It is done by including more than ten minute's pseudo-chronicle black-and-white part in the very beginning, where abstracts from many Hollywood comedies of the 1920-30s are used along with documentaries. Throughout all film there are references to American films. In addition, the main character is a paraphrase of Charlie Chaplin's characters. The main difference is in the closing – Chaplin's tramp almost always leaves with the girl he loves. Babbs Baberley is forgotten and forsaken, no cross-class connection is being allowed, which seems a bit strange in the 'classless' society.

As for cross-dressing, in its treatment and picturing the Soviet film is rather close to *Some Like It Hot*. In both films it is a measure enforced by circumstances or other people. The very fact of cross-dressing is intended to produce laughter. The characters are not real but stereotypical figures.

One of the main differences is that in the Hollywood comedy there is still a pair of 'ideal' Man and Woman, who meet, fall in love, following the rules of romantic film. In the Soviet film there is no such couple. There is no exemplary image of a feminine that can be an object of desire for most men. The only character that is close to the image of masculinity is the butler Basset. It can be explained as an intended satire on the capitalist society, or on the impotency of upper classes and the intelligentsia. To my mind, it is the result of the fact that the official Soviet discourse aimed at constructing the Soviet citizen (a gender-blind concept), there was no sexual discourse in the country and sexuality was not addressed at all. Womanhood was spoken of only in terms of motherhood. Thus, there were no images of 'real' Woman and 'real' Man.

Unlike most mainstream American cross-dressing comedies *Hello, I am Your Aunt!* has not even a smallest hint on homosexuality, as it was seen as almost non-existent by the state and was prosecuted. The official and cultural discourse did not allow any question and thus threat to heterosexual normativity.

At the same time, there is an episode, where gender bending occurs. At some point, Babbs Baberley starts enjoying his position of the "phallic woman". Cross-dressing is not felt as a forced and hated measure. He is getting pleasure of not belonging to either of the gender categories, of being 'the third sex'. In this the Soviet film is close to *Tootsie*, though in the American film the period when cross-dressing brings some delight is much longer.

To sum up, in this thesis I discovered that cross-dressing was probably missing from Soviet films because it has the potential to undermine strict gender codes, and, thus, was seen as a threat to the Soviet state. In the 1990s, after perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union, a considered number of films with the same topic appeared, many drag-queens came to the hall, which confirm my claim.

The film was popular not only because of the main actor, but in my view it proves to be subversive on various levels. As a costume, pseudo-historic comedy it served as an escape from Socialist Realism, dominant in the Soviet cinema of the 1970s and highly supported by the authorities. On another level, the film brings Hollywood context, or 'enemy's ideology' through into, conclusion and in-text references. On the level of cross-dressing and gender-bending, it is subversive to the whole system which was based on strict differentiation of male and female gender roles, on firm dress codes and the official discourse aimed at constructing the sexless, genderless Soviet Person.

I think, this topic should be pursued further as it is a rather complex one. It seems interesting to investigate and analyse the Soviet audience reaction to it, what they paid attention to in reviewing the film. I suppose, the comparative analysis of the Soviet film, the original play and American and British adaptations of the same work can help to more fully reveal deeply structured gender aspects of the Soviet society.

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