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Published in the Russian Federation
 European Researcher. Series A
 Has been issued since 2010.
 E-ISSN 2224-0136
 2023. 14(1): 31-46

DOI: 10.13187/er.2023.1.31
www.erjournal.ru



Film Studies Discussions in *Cinema Art Journal*: 1969–1985

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Abstract

Throughout the period 1969–1985, the editors of the *Cinema Art* journal paid a great deal of attention to theoretical discussions, including discussions about specific problems of film studies. As a rule, leading Soviet film critics and film historians took part in these discussions.

The discussion on Georgian cinema, organized by E. Surkov (1915–1988), the editor-in-chief of *Cinema Art* journal, in the second half of the 1970s, had the strongest public response.

The starting point of this discussion was an article about the state of Georgian cinema, written by the well-known film critic and film expert Y. Bogomolov (1937–2023). One of the main theses of this article was the claim that Georgian cinematographers, having developed their own exquisite, parable-like style, not only lose contact with the mass audience, but also, repeating the successful artistic techniques they found, move toward a kind of creative "dead end".

This position, of course, aroused strong objections from the majority of Georgian cinematographers and film critics, who began to defend their national cinema, reproaching Bogomolov in engagement.

The discussion about genres and styles, about the phenomenon of popularity of cinematography turned out to be acute on the pages of the *Cinema Art* journal.

Keywords: *Cinema Art* journal, Western cinema, film criticism, ideology, politics, reviews, articles, movie.

1. Introduction

The Soviet period of cinema in 1969–1985 is often referred to as the "stagnant" period, but even at that time masterpieces of film art were being screened, and film historians and critics published quite a few very interesting theoretical works. It was during these years that discussions unfolded on the pages of the leading theoretical *Cinema Art* journal, many aspects of which have not lost their relevance to this day. This article will focus on the journal's discussions of genres and styles, and on the phenomenon of the popularity of cinematography.

2. Materials and methods

Research methods: complex content analysis, comparative interdisciplinary analysis; theoretical research methods: classification, comparison, analogy, induction and deduction, abstraction and concretization, theoretical analysis and synthesis, generalization; empirical research methods: collection of information related to the project topic, comparative-historical and hermeneutical methods.

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This article continues our previous series on the analysis of the film press (Fedorov, 2017a, Fedorov, 2017b; Fedorov, 2022a, Fedorov, 2022b; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2022a, Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2022b, Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2022c; Levitskaya, 2022; Levitskaya, Fedorov, 2023).

3. Discussion and Results

Discussion about genres

As before, in the pages of the *Cinema Art*, film historians pondered about film genres.

The articles by the film critic E. Levin (1935–1991), tainted with an abundance of references to the speeches of L. Brezhnev: “The discovery of social-aesthetic laws which conditioned such basic feature of socialist cinema art as its genre diversity is not only of big and actual theoretical and practical importance, but is also of great ideological and political value under the circumstances” (Levin, 1981: 178), especially this is characteristic of the genre of the film epic (Levin, 1982: 152).

Film scholar L. Kozlov (1933–2006) reflected on the contrast between authorial and genre filmmaking: “Authorial” is reduced to the purely individual self-expression of the artist's personality, “genre” to the reliance on commercially effective standards of “mass” production. Both of these things narrow and coarsen the real concreteness of cinematic development... The author and his audience are inseparable, but at the same time they are inseparable. The actual relationship between them – both in the process of creation and in the evolution of art – is dynamic” (Kozlov, 1978: 135).

Film scholar E. Gromov (1931–2005) urged to take a closer look at popular genres of contemporary cinema (western, melodrama, detective, adventure films). The easiest thing to discard these films, much more difficult to carefully and without bias to analyze the sources of their sustained audience success. ... This approach has nothing to do with ideological omnivision and spinelessness. On the contrary, it presupposes ideologically purposeful and consistent implementation of the Marxist-Leninist methodology of researching aesthetic activity taken in all its diversity and complexity (Gromov, 1975: 74).

D. Nikolaev drew the readers' attention to the peculiarities of coexistence of “pure” and “synthetic” film genres: “The spectator is really fascinated... by films in which the ridiculous coexists with the sad. But he is still captivated by “clean” comedies made with talent” (Nikolaev, 1969: 36).

Film scholar S. Freilich (1920–2005) drew the attention of the journal's audience to the fact that nowhere else do we see so nakedly the process of transforming the energy of one genre into another as in tragicomedy. Nowhere do the “low” and “high” genres equalize as in tragicomedy, and precisely because here they do not simply interact but pass into each other, each becoming its opposite (Freilich, 1972: 124).

A discussion of poetic cinema

One of the key theoretical articles of the *Cinema Art* of the 1970s was the publication entitled “Archaists or Innovators?” in which M. Bleiman (1904–1973), screenwriter and film critic, sharply criticized the so-called “poetic cinema” and declared this “school” a dead end for Soviet cinematography.

M. Bleiman believes that the origins of this “school” were in S. Paradzhanov's film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*. M. Bleiman considered S. Paradzhanov's film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* to be the origin of this “school” of cinema, and films like *Arena*, *Evening before Ivan Kupala*, *The Plea*, *The Stone Cross*, *The Color of Pomegranate*, and others were named among the followers of this creative trend (Bleiman, 1970: 59).

M. Bleiman considered the main drawback of these films to be the authors' desire to symbolize every detail, to make an allegory of every real situation an image of folk life, an image of folk history (Bleiman, 1970: 62), which led to decorum and the primacy of spectacular components. Portrait characteristics replace the depth of psychology, compensate for the movement of feelings, the movement of thoughts. ... Landscapes are as picturesque as portraits ... they are expressive in themselves. That's why film requires examining every painterly-finished frame, contemplating it, penetrating into the depths of its autonomous content. Only the juxtaposition of portraits and landscapes in each, self-contained situation can create a sense of absent action, movement of events, movement of characters, movement of their psychology (Bleiman, 1970: 63).

As a result, M. Bleiman posed the question, why did a group of talented film artists, and artists of different kinds, come, independently of each other, to a single poetics that was sharply different from the general line of art development?" And the film critic suggested that "the origins of this phenomenon should be sought not only in individual tastes, but also in some need of the art itself. ... We know films in our cinematography that completely ignore the spectacular nature of cinema. They are good films and bad films, outstanding films and passé films. Regardless of their quality, they equally lose sight of cinema as spectacle. Films are reduced to a plot, to the reenactment of situations played out by actors. These films are not even supposed to create a visual image of reality. We have a lot of films of this kind, most of them. And naturally a kind of revolt of spectacular cinematography emerged, a desire to oppose the film-play to the film-picture. This rebellion is to some degree understandable, though not promising. ... "School" returns cinematography to its origins of natural spectacle. This is its well-known novelty. It not only insists on using the methods of painting in film, but also asserts a new pictoriality. And one can understand (not justify!) the polemical sharpness of the films of the "school", the emphasis on the pictorial nature of art, leading to a conscious neglect of its literary elements. Polemics often lead to extremes. That is why you cannot deny the experience of the "school" from the outset: there is no reason to close your eyes to its private achievements. Art is always in development, and innovation is a condition of its existence (Bleiman, 1970: 67-68).

M. Bleiman further wrote that one cannot say that there is no true life in the art of the 'school' at all. But it appears in an archaic, stylized form. And also in an illustrative form, which is why the seemingly justified appeal to forgotten means of visual expression and the innovation that grows out of this appeal in a strange way returns cinematography to archaicism, to the limitation of its subjects to historical and ethnographic motifs, to illustrativeness and schematization. Art striving to become innovative turns out to be stylization, dangerous for the fate of art (Bleiman, 1970: 71-72).

At the end of the article, apparently to somehow smooth out its harshness, M. Bleiman emphasized that this article is not a verdict, but a conversation, not a condemnation of innovation, but a discussion of its principles. Masters of "school" – people thinking and talented. But no talent does not guarantee against errors. They need to think about this (Bleiman, 1970: 76).

Film scholar A. Vartanov (1931–2019) joined the discussion about the "school" of poetic cinema and regarded M. Bleiman's article very critically, reproaching it for having artificially and inappropriately constructed a "school" from heterogeneous works of art. "The 'school' this is, – A. Vartanov wrote, – apparently a kind of aesthetic reserve, a kind of monastery where everyone prays from the same books. But as I see it, no school unites the filmmakers named [by M. Bleiman]. They are all different and, above all, in the roots from which their art grows. Where did the concept put forward by M. Bleiman come from? I think it came about precisely because the critic, in his analysis of artistic phenomena, proceeded from techniques and was ready to reduce all the pictures he analyzed to the sum of the techniques. And it turned out that the artists under his pen are distinguished and united primarily by the style, and not the identity of the historical past of nations and not the commonality of their historical future, reflected in the works of these artists. Speaking about the enormous responsibility of contemporary criticism for the condition and direction of cinema art development, one must not forget that one of the most important elements of aesthetic analysis of film should be the consideration of its national identity, its national nature" (Vartanov, 1977: 113).

Literary scholar and film critic L. Anninsky (1934–2019) partially agrees with M. Bleiman that the film *The Evening before Ivan Kupala* "came out as a decorative phantasmagoria, a nice jumble of colors. All these surrealistic passions, moonlight visions replaced by a gaudy riot of color, dwarf mills, priests sitting cuckoo on trees, all these green, gold, purple and other abysses – nothing more than a collection of pictures" (Anninsky, 1971: 144), praised Paradzhanov's *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* and their plastic expressiveness.

In response to this, cinema critic I. Kornienko (1910–1975) pointed out that for a truly scientific analysis of his movie L. Anninsky lacked knowledge of the history of Ukrainian literature, the domestic national order of old Ukraine, his subjectivist approach to the phenomena and processes taking place in contemporary cinematography is especially vivid (Kornienko, 1971: 8-9).

Many years later, the *Cinema Art* published an article by literary critic I. Dzyuba (1931–2022) titled "Opening or closing of the "school"?" written back in 1970, but reached its readership only in 1989.

I. Dzyuba believed that in defining the characteristic features of the foundational film for the 'school', *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, in terms of its poetics and life content, M. Bleiman missed much that was important, and interpreted much in a very prejudiced or one-sided way. As a result, the "original idea" of the "school" turned out to be somewhat distorted and, perhaps, strange (Dzyuba, 1989: 67).

As I. Dzyuba believes, M. Bleiman, having quite rightly and convincingly shown the inconsistency and inferiority of two another failed films, nevertheless passes judgment not on them, but on the "school", that is, in fact, on the principles of S. Paradzhanov's poetics (for so far the poetics of "school" has been identified with the poetics of *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*) (Dzyuba, 1989: 68).

Moreover, the real qualities of films which, according to M. Bleiman, represent a 'school' do not always and not in all respects coincide with the characteristic that the researcher gives them. If a "school" does exist, then it is desirable to find such attributes which are inherent in all of its works and have decisive form-formative value for them. If there is no school, but a series of different works which objectively express a kind of dissatisfaction with the existing state of cinema, a need to search for a new one, then it was worth attempting to establish the causes of this dissatisfaction and the nature of this need. Having spoken of the increasing need to search, M. Bleiman, the quality of this search was impoverished and often distorted, because it was governed by a preconceived scheme and a priori known judgment of "school". So it was not so much the opening as the closing of irrespective of Bleiman's intentions, but a number of the most interesting phenomena of Ukrainian cinematography, a number of the most promising ways of its development. "School", in my opinion, does not exist (Dzyuba, 1989: 82).

I. Dzyuba, as it turned out in reality, was right in the middle of the story: leaders of Ukrainian cinematography in 1970s used M. Bleiman's article to gradually choke poetic cinematography and creative experiments in general at Dovzhenko studio...

A discussion of cinematic stylistic trends

In 1978 the editorial staff of the *Cinema Art* launched in its pages a discussion about the diversity of stylistic trends in contemporary Soviet cinema. The main purpose of this discussion was to analyze the variety and richness of the styles and forms of the Soviet cinema art of the 1970s.

The discussion began with an article by the film scholar V. Mikhalkovich (1937–2006) (Mikhalkovich, 1978: 69-87).

Returning to M. Bleiman's memorable article "Archaists or Innovators?" (Bleiman, 1970), V. Mikhalkovich wrote that in many Soviet films of the 1970s the decorative masses prove to be the most active form-forming factor. It even happens that the aesthetic effect is determined by them and not by the characters. In such cases capriciously, whimsically composed, colorful decorative masses suppress the person, reducing him to the role of a special plastic accent. M. Bleiman in his article "Archaists or Innovators?" refers to the second half of the sixties. Consequently, the painterly "school" and "direction" (Bleiman's terms) already have a history of some ten years. In the article "Archaists or innovators?" says a great deal about this "school" – that instead of "films-plays", which neglected the representation, overloaded with dialogues, it put forward "films-paintings", where "the content is transformed into a set, and the set becomes the content", that the shots here are static, hence the entire work generally acquires a statuarial character, that the school "was a form of protest against the reproduction of simple cases "from life" on the screen, against the lack of meaning of naturalistic plots, flooding the cinema". Publishing an article in 1970, the critic observed the emergence of style, saw it at a certain stage of development. And the films which he put under the sign of a "school" (*The Night before Ivan Kupala*, *Superfluous Bread*, *The Plea* and others) had common features in their subject matter. They were drawn to ethnographic, exoticism, depicted not the acts of the actors in all their psychological motivation but the reaction. The construction of the parable was clearly discernible in the plot, and each shot, as well as the entire plot, was constructed as an allegory. Because of this parable, allegorical nature, because of the "principled anti-psychologism" M. Bleiman defined the school as unpromising (Mikhalkovich, 1978: 70).

However, V. Mikhalkovich was convinced that the practice of cinematography of the 1970s has largely refuted Bleiman's conclusions because in the films of Mikhalkov, Titov, Solovyov and other directors the picturesque frame acquired its lawful place, albeit without any obvious signs of parable. M. Bleiman associated the desire for picturesque with a certain type of subjects – they are

inherent, he believed, gravitating toward exoticism, ethnography, allegorism. But it turned out that later on the plastic expressiveness of the frame appears also in subjects of a completely different type (psychological). Thus, directors were moving in different directions toward plasticity, which gave the frame a particular pictorial completeness and structure, and their persistent pursuit of one goal testified above all to the fact that "pictoriality" became, if not the dominant, then at least the most common style in the films of the mid-seventies (Mikhalkovich, 1978: 73).

The film director E. Dzigan (1898–1981) disagreed with this point of view in many respects, believing that V. Mikhalkovich establishes the presence of two different styles in the same work. Mikhalkovich establishes the presence of two different styles in one and the same work, considering such a mixture of languages to be one of the signs of modern cinema. But both multilingualism and diversity have their exact name – eclectic. If different styles are mixed in a film, this is more indicative of the eclecticism of the author's work than of a certain variety of language styles coexisting in one film, as the author of the article tries to assure readers (Dzigan, 1978: 111).

Reflecting on the problems of cinema, the cameraman Y. Gantman (1932–1987) wrote that the struggle against beauty undoubtedly reflected a reaction against certain negative phenomena in our cinematography, but it was far from always possible to define the boundary that separated beauty from genuine, real beauty. Again and again the cameraman was not at all to blame for this, because the same image can acquire completely different properties depending on the context of the film. Nevertheless, the deliberate de-aestheticization of reality proved to be as harmful and false as outright embellishment, for it deliberately deprived objects and phenomena of such properties as perfection, harmony, expressiveness, completeness (Gantman, 1978: 92).

M. Turovskaya, a film critic, draws attention to the fact that "pictorial" cinema of the 1970s partly aspires to the theatricality of life's material: The old art of theater strives for direct contact with life; the young art of cinema aspires to contact with art styles of the past. Both gravitate toward open, explicit conventionality (Turovskaya, 1978: 105).

In his account of these theoretical concepts, film scholar M. Zak (1929–2011) noted that one cannot, however, fail to see how with a certain persistence terms whose meaning is far from 'textual' cinematography are being introduced into practice and into theory. There is the "film picture": a polemical term coined by M. Bleiman in order to accuse films like *The Plea* of "archaism". There is the "film collage" proclaimed by S. Yutkevich in word and frame. On the basis of N. Mikhalkov's work there is talk of "the theatricalization of cinema" (M. Turovskaya). Agreeing with these hypotheses or, on the contrary, arguing, it is necessary above all to proceed from the idea that they do not cover the entire range of cinematic material. Enough examples remain within it with which to correct any claims (Zak, 1982: 36).

Continuing the discussion, film scholar Y. Bogomolov (1937–2023) noted that form is a clot, the essence of content. Its phenomenality does not lie in special techniques or combinations of techniques, but in the peculiarities of coupling these or those techniques with vital material. A technique may not, as a rule, be new, but its coupling with the material of reality is new. This is perhaps the most important point to focus on when examining the question of stylistic expressiveness in cinema (Bogomolov, 1978: 80).

Literary scholar B. Runin (1912–1994) agreed with him in many respects: The phenomenon of style seems to be the quintessence of art, the innermost secret of artistic matter. In any case, style is so inherently "built into" its structure that it does not lend itself to any abstraction, to any dissection, without losing its true properties. That is why probably the style can be characterized most precisely only by means of art, i.e. figuratively and metaphorically. Style is the idea of the selection and internal organization of all elements of meaningful form, the principle underlying their holistic, co-subordinated unity (Runin, 1978: 63).

Film scholar A. Lipkov (1936–2007) was convinced that the 1970s saw an increase in the role of the author's beginning in cinema, the importance of his voice – in the first person. And so cinematic poetry did not and cannot lose its significance. It is not at all inadequate to the commonplace set of niceties and pretentiousness. It can appear in various guises: it can grow out of prose... and explode all the usual measures of hypocrisy... Its language can be both "authentic" and "natural", and anti-faithful and anti-natural. Poetic vision is the ability to penetrate through the shell of any appearances, exposing their essence, raising the particular to a generalizing height (Lipkov, 1978: 112).

I. Rosenfeld agreed with this approach: The author no longer hides in the shadows. He does not want to "die," he is not satisfied with the role of narrator-commentator, but wishes to come out into the "people," to engage in dialogue with the audience. The presence of the "creator," the god of this hour-and-a-half or three-hour "cinematic microcosm" is no longer concealed, but de-masked and demonstrated (Rosenfeld, 1978: 108).

Film scholar I. Weisfeld (1909–2003) believed that style is also a broader concept than individual techniques, even quite striking ones, and one time style has its own dependencies. Style is an inheritance of the artistic method. ... Style is barren, narrow, limited until it does not embody – always individually – the laws of artistic thinking, artistic method. To summarize, we can say that the consistency, the unity of style on the screen is the unity of the work's emotional logic, its imagery as a process embracing both social being and psychology, and the depths of the artist's subconscious (Weisfeld, 1978: 97, 100).

Film scholar S. Freilich (1920–2005) emphasized that the individual style is the talent, distinguished by the 'uncommon expression of the face'. Talent is a natural phenomenon and a social one equally, talent is a concentration of conscience, it is unselfishly responsive and reacts to social problems as to its own personal problems. Only the original artist can rise to the expression of universality. This is the dialectic of art, and it is no accident that theorists attach such importance to the individual style (Freilich, 1981: 96).

The philosopher I. Lisakovsky (1934–2004), speaking exclusively for the dominant socialist realism of cinema, believes that on the philosophical-aesthetic level, the notion of 'style' is as it were laid bare, shedding the motley garb of individual manifestations: here, from the manifold phenomenon 'style' is extracted its essence – as if timeless, the same for all. ... The style is nothing other than a concrete artistic way of expressing certain ideological and aesthetic principles, based on the constructive and emblematic side of artistic creativity. ... The manner, style, character and genre of the work, as well as those or other of its typological features, derive from the realist artist's understanding of the most essential and perspective in man and society, are subordinate to it (Lisakovsky, 1979: 61, 70).

Film historian E. Levin (1935–1991) was convinced that V. Mikhalkovich could not identify the features of the modern style because he regarded it at the level of individual expressive means, the main ones of which he called the static camera and the intense painterliness of the frame. At the same time, he identifies pictoriality only with plastic expressiveness, thus immediately eliminating the very problem of pictoriality as a style feature. This is because plastic expressiveness is characteristic of every frame of any style of feature film... So we may speak about different forms of plastic expressiveness, about the degree of picturesqueness, and not about picturesqueness as a style (as Y. Bogomolov and I. Weisfeld convincingly point out) (Levin, 1978: 75).

That is why E. Levin eventually agreed with those participants in the discussion who believed that the style of film is not reducible to the style of one or more artistic components and cannot be considered at their level and least of all at the level of expressive means and formal techniques. We are obliged to investigate that new aesthetic quality, which is the synthesis of all the styles of all, the components of the movie – the individual styles of all its co-authors. In other words, the subject of our analysis is the synthesis of interacting styles as an unfolding process and simultaneously as a present result (Levin, 1978: 78).

A discussion of Georgian cinema art

At the end of the 1970s, the *Cinema Art* journal held probably the most famous theoretical discussion in its history – about Georgian cinema.

This discussion began with a sharply polemical article "Georgian Cinema: Attitude towards Reality" by the film critic Y. Bogomolov (1937–2023) (Bogomolov 1978: 39-55).

Here's how the film critic A. Medvedev, who was then deputy editor-in-chief of *Cinema Art*, wrote about the origins of this discussion: The distributors prepared a certificate for Ermash, which indicated that viewers watch Georgian films very poorly. ... And once on the board Ermash uttered a remark: "Like, we rush with the Georgian cinema, but people do not want to watch it. Where are they going?" I am certain that this remark by F.T. Ermash, which was heard by a member of the Board E.D. Surkov, was the impetus for this article. I do not know why Yuri Bogomolov undertook it. All I know is that he was very nervous about the whole situation after the article was published, when there was a certain resonance. In general, he was writing about films each of which probably deserved criticism, but the thing is that the great modern Georgian cinema was taken out of the

brackets. This arrangement of the article, from the title "Georgian Cinema: Relation to Reality" to the editorial line, which undoubtedly varied the words of Philip Timofeyevich Ermash, created a sense of a tendentious pro-worker document (Medvedev, 1999: 138).

In his article Y. Bogomolov wrote that cinematographers' artistic temperament, talent, professional skill, good intentions are too often destroyed by the impregnable bastions of sham plots. In the pavilions of "Georgia-Film" studio, maybe not more often than in the pavilions of other studios, but here disasters and injuries are for some reason more noticeable and for some reason especially sensitive. Could it be because here the very intentions, talents, and temperaments of the artists are so unmistakable and obvious? (Bogomolov, 1978: 40).

This was followed by a rebuke from Y. Bogomolov that in the films *Anara Town* by I. Kvirikadze, *Cranks* by E. Shengelaya, *Come to the Valley of Grapes* by G. Shengelaya, etc. All the usual and already well-known aesthetic discoveries of Georgian cinema are closed in on themselves. That is why here we are mostly dealing not just with a special worldview that peculiarly and organically combines lyricism and irony, but with an exercise in this worldview, with a kind of training in this worldview. In this way (albeit unconsciously, perhaps even contrary to the author's original intentions), the isolation of feelings and emotions from their immediate sources and specific occasions is achieved. And again, the attitude displaces reality from the frame, substitutes reality, and claims the status of reality itself (Bogomolov, 1978: 42).

Y. Bogomolov lamented that there is something fatal in all this. Whether the artist is trying to talk about reality outside of its concrete data, disowning it, distilling his impressions and observations (as, for example, in *The Real Tbilisian*, or composing, inventing a particular reality with its particular concreteness and authenticity (*Anara Town*), or by not inventing anything and not renouncing anything, but directly addressing the material of the present (*Come to the Valley of Grapes*), he always makes his authentic hero a Relation to the World, leaving the World to choose between the possibility of conforming or not to conform to this Relation. That is, leaving reality in the secondary role. ... Apparently, the crisis moments in the works of some Georgian filmmakers are not private facts of their biographies, they are related to some phenomena of general order, perhaps to the crisis of a favorite subject and a favorite genre. There is an end to everything. In Georgian cinematography the era of imitation has come to an end. Precious treasures of spiritual humanity, of deep spirituality are badly exhausted. The time of lyrical manifestations as a sign of devotion to beautiful ideals has passed (Bogomolov, 1978: 43, 55).

In the intellectual circles of Georgia in the late 1970s this article by Y. Bogomolov was mostly perceived negatively. Georgian filmmakers saw in it an attempt to give their bosses an excuse to strangle their cinema, as was partly the case with the censorship of Dovzhenko studio cinema after the publication of M. Bleiman's article "Archaists or Innovators?" (Bleiman, 1970).

To appease the anger of Georgian filmmakers the chief editor of *Cinema Art* E. Surkov (1915–1988) prefaced the discussion with the following: I have been told that Bogomolov's article provoked a very sharp reaction in Georgia. This, I think, is not surprising, because the article is precisely meant to encourage readers to look excitedly into the future of Georgian cinema, into those processes that, if they are not recognized soberly and clearly in time, can lead to leaks, self-repeats, in a word, to phenomena and processes that you have to think about even today. I should not be suspicious that by saying this I am showing a lack of understanding of the achievements of the Georgian cinema in the so-called "parabolic film", in the field of high and vital symbolism, in the art of comicism, which is as full-blooded, "Rubensian" as it is tricky, and often very bitter in the subtext. I am not talking about "close" some artistic trends, the other "decree". The point is different: it seems to me that it is still necessary to move forward, vigilantly avoiding self-replications and clichés weakened by frequent use, by means of a persistent creative search for the generally significant life content, the characters and collisions, the problems and conflicts that emerged on the basis of life itself, that opened up to artists in its eternal movement (Surkov, 1979: 89, 91).

In response, film director E. Shengelaya reproached Y. Bogomolov's article for the fact that most of the conclusions made in it are unquestioning and unproven. For example, the critic says that most of the Georgian films of the 1960s and 1970s are limited to purely aesthetic concerns. Is this true? Denying poetic cinema, the author urges us all to migrate to prose cinema, forgetting or not knowing that Georgian cinema, along with poetic cinema, has long been developing prose cinema (Shengelaya, 1979: 93, 96).

Film critic K. Tsereteli fully supported the opinion of E. Shengelaya, noting that Bogomolov's article contains precisely this kind of superficial and outside view. It seems to me erroneous and arbitrary in its basic, fundamental provisions. With all its originality and national peculiarity, Georgian cinema is part of socialist culture. The unity of socio-historical tasks and active creative cooperation, being an expression of Lenin's policy of leadership of the Soviet art, also determined the multinational character of the Soviet cinema. Meanwhile, the author of the article puts the object of study in a strange position: finding out "the relation of Georgian cinema to reality" and accusing it of egocentrism and insularity, he himself analyzes it in isolation from this reality (Tsereteli, 1979: 105).

How is it possible, – continued K. Tsereteli, – when posing the problem of Georgian cinema's relation to reality, to omit a number of films which directly respond to this theme? Just because it does not suit the author? I do not understand it. I will say once again that all these reticences are an elementary question of ethics, critical ethics (Tsereteli, 1979: 108).

K. Tsereteli bitterly recalled further M. Bleiman's article "Archaists or innovators?" (Bleiman, 1970), where completely different films with a picturesque visual range were declared in it as the works of a certain "pictorial school". The author of the article predicted the authors belonging to this "school" to be doomed to stylization and a permanent crisis only because the artistic idea in the pictures was revealed not traditionally – not through character. Prophecy is not a critic's profession. Doomed by Bleiman to stylization and stalemate, Tengiz Abuladze in his stylistics continues to open new artistic horizons. But has this article also benefited the Ukrainian cinematography? Some in the country took it as a "guide to action", as a call to fight against formalism. Is it necessary to speak of the sad results of this "struggle"? (Tsereteli, 1979: 111).

Film scholar I. Kuchukhidze shared Tsereteli's opinion: In contrast to Yuri Alexandrovich [Bogomolov], I think that at the present stage the work of individual Georgian directors does not absolutize this or that way of imagery generalization, this or that type of poetics, let alone this or that theme and problematics. In the work of almost every director one can distinguish between a specifically historical interpretation of the material and a romantic one, and in some cases a conventionally fantastical one. All of these are manifestations of the variety of forms in socialist realism, which is not, of course, limited to a single type of artistic generalization or typification. ... Yury Bogomolov is evidently irritated by the romantic pathos of our best films, he considers their romantic tone to be false and excessive. And relying on the weak, secondary films resolved in this trend, he tries to find the cause of the phenomenon in the imperfection of the aesthetic structure, in the wrong choice of themes in good Georgian films. Fortunately, both in the past and today, Georgian cinema is quite diverse in terms of both themes and aesthetic positions. Isn't that why Yuri Bogomolov consciously bypassed a number of significant Georgian films, didn't mention them even in passing? (Kuchukhidze, 1979: 113, 116).

Film director L. Gogoberidze was convinced that Bogomolov's article is vulnerable in one more thing: it was written without any real respect for culture of the people. It is difficult to put into words how we all felt this disrespect, but it is there. And this is what caused us a special reaction to this article (Gogoberidze, 1979: 95).

Responding to the criticism of Georgian filmmakers, Y. Bogomolov admitted that he realized that his article caused not just disagreement, but also resentment. The article was perceived as a "failure" to the Georgian cinema. Hence the desire of the speakers to justify themselves literally on every point of an accusatory verdict, which is what my article seems to you to be. ... I did not write a historical essay. So all reproaches about the incompleteness of the material, as well as on the estimates of these or those paintings, I leave aside. I did not write an anniversary article, so I do not consider it possible to respond to all the ambitious claims and insults about the lack of syrup either (Bogomolov, 1979: 89-90).

Moscow filmmakers and film scholars also joined the discussion, many of whom tried to justify the editorial position on Georgian cinema.

The speech of film director S. Solovyov (1944–2021) was one of the most benevolent: According to this logic, the "functional zeal" of Shengelaya and all our other Georgian friends about Bogomolov's article is understandable and even logical. We are dealing with not only artistic and critical analysis of pieces of art, but with a kind of veiled artifice-disguised salvo of long-range artillery, which has a concrete goal outside of art: to defame the entire Georgian cinematography. The polemical pathos of Shengelaya and his colleagues is not based on Bogomolov's article. It has

been nurtured by the ancient prejudices associated with the "pro-worker" criticism of the past. The inertia of this approach to criticism is still alive today. And so behind the critical performance of Bogomolov is seen the intention that has non-artistic purpose: to teach the Georgian cinema a lesson, even to attack its prestige. From this it is clear why Shengelaya passionately defends and protects the high achievements of cinema, which needs no protection (Solovyev, 1979: 120).

Film critic A. Troshin (1942–2008) takes the mildest stand among Moscow cinematographers: Does Georgian cinema, while moving toward new themes and searching for new artistic means, need to part with what was its uniqueness, its specific intonation? Hardly. Maybe it is worthwhile to check how the spiritual and ethical program of Georgian cinema of the 1960s corresponds today to the reality of new viewer demands. And to complement the poetic "optics" with analytical, psychologistic elements, which must have the same artistic energy as many Georgian films had a different stylistics, a different relationship to reality (Troshin, 1979: 76).

On the other hand, film critic A. Plakhov was convinced that the main merit of Bogomolov's article which he highly assessed, is that it raises questions that are also important for Georgian and entire cinematography in general. How completely and deeply does the cinema screen reflect reality? How do poetry and prose relate to each other in today's cinematography? What is the reason for the prevalence of one or another generic, genre structure? How does the realistic imagery of our cinema interact with symbolic and mythological models? All these problems are extremely interesting in terms of the theory of the film process, and, moreover, they are supported by many precise observations, reduced to a solid and in their own way logical concept (Plakhov, 1979: 122).

Fully supporting the editorial position, the film scholar E. Levin (1935–1991) stated: We have come together to talk about the urgent problems of the contemporary Georgian screen, and not to discuss Bogomolov's article, which I regard as correct, and profound, fundamentally important from both theoretical and methodological points of view. ... Thinking about what is going on in the Georgian cinema today, I agree with Yuri Bogomolov: it has been going through the end of a certain period. We are dealing with a serious, innovative historical and theoretical study, the cinematographic significance of which goes far beyond the scope of our discussion. The article requires thought, an open-minded attitude, one can argue with it, but first one must understand it and certainly not attribute to the author what he did not claim (Levin, 1979: 102).

This opinion was generally shared by the film critic I. Weisfeld (1909–2003), who thought that the main merit of [Bogomolov's] article lies not in particular assessments with which one may agree or dispute, but in the transversal line of reflection. The article is essentially about art's aesthetic awareness of cinematic reality, about the fact that these or those artistic forms of content development run out of steam over time, and their repetition impoverishes and deadens art (Weisfeld, 1979: 111).

Against this background, the speech of film scholar L. Mamatova (1935–1996) looked somewhat strange. Quoting Leonid Brezhnev, she limited her speech to an inarticulate, party-ideological statement that the main goal remains valid: to reflect the newness and revolutionary youth of our society in the spirit of the time and in the fruitful tradition of our time, to investigate the laws of its development artistically, without, of course, closing our eyes to difficulties and contradictions, but by clearly seeing the direction and prospects of its development. For as we all know only in this revolutionary movement realizes the true dialectics of tradition and innovation in reality and art, the fruitfulness and enrichment of tradition, in which the living past nurtures the present and in unity with it prepares the future (Mamatova, 1979: 89).

But the final editorial summary looked particularly depressing ideologically, presenting an assortment of ideological clichés and "Communist party" quotations.

It is curious that three years later film critic A. Karaganov (1915–2007), returning to this discussion, wrote that he strongly disagrees with the evaluation that Yuri Bogomolov gave to the Georgian cinema... But I think that his point of view is not accidental, his article reflected real-world movements of aesthetic thought, the mood in criticism. That is why this article provoked such interesting reactions, a substantial polemic. The discussion made it clearer and more comprehensible that artistic variety in Soviet cinema is not a slogan or a call to action, but the reality of cinematic creativity as it appears both on the screen and in film criticism itself (Karaganov, 1982: 14-15).

More than thirty years after this discussion, film critic E. Stishova wrote that, in her opinion, the Moscow's colleagues defended Bogomolov. The Georgian critics and directors' opponents were mostly their own people who were intelligent, clever, well-versed in the ideological situation. And they were not naive at all. Surkov did not succeed in turning us against each other. He understood this very well, and he did not escalate the situation. I envied the Georgians, who rallied in the face of common danger, putting aside personal danger. They stood up for their cinema, but most of all for their identity and their right to it. There was a huge moral high ground in this (Stishova, 2011: 130-131).

Discussions about the popularity of cinema

At the turn of the 1980s a number of Soviet films (*The Crew*, *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, and *Pirates of the 20th Century*) became box office successes never seen before, attracting between 71 and 87 million viewers during their first year of cinematic release, the *Cinema Art* journal decided to hold another debate devoted to the so-called phenomenon of mass market success.

And here the most theoretically sound presentation was that of film scholar N. Zorkaya (1924–2006).

N. Zorkaya noted that for a long time film industry, and film criticism in particular, generally little interested in the functioning of the film, referred to the issues of "mass", "popular", "box office" to the special management of classification and distribution or in the sociology of cinema (the theme of "cinema and the audience"), judged them in passing, without proper knowledge of the case. The gap between the real life of cinemas and the cozy world of the Central House of Cinema, where we watch selected films of our own and foreign production, was growing wider and wider. This gap was most vividly and conflictingly revealed in the evaluations of "films of success" by the critics and the general public. ... We have a certain set of judgments and clichés that, in my opinion, greatly impede clarity in the questions we discuss-questions that, being theoretically neglected and underdeveloped, are shrouded in a cloud of illusions, delusions, and misperceptions. Here are these clichés: "box-office" is not "mass" because a) the audience sees what the box-office offers, which means that b) mass success can be created artificially (the number of copies printed, the favorable treatment and "green street" in cinemas for these and not other films, advertisements, etc.) and, finally, c) the number of "screenings" is not yet an indicator of success, that is, that the audience really liked the film: the viewer may not sit through to the end, finish watching it and say with annoyance, "What a load of garbage!". But things are different in real life. Namely: A "box-office film" is necessarily a film of mass success-mass demand-mass preference-mass distribution. Any professional cinema and distribution worker, any conscientious sociologist, who seeks the truth, and does not adjust data to a priori results, will confirm with facts in his hands that the box office index is the most reliable witness of mass success (or lack there of) (Zorkaya, 1983: 30-31).

In this regard, Zorkaya rightly drew attention to another common cliché ... – the cliché of the 'evil distributor'. Because films of mass success, as a rule, become those that we do not like, we are inclined to attribute it to the influence of certain forces that are most often embodied for us in the renting agent, deliberately tucking the viewer "standard-beautiful" films, and even in several major cinemas simultaneously, and at the best evening screenings, but highly talented paintings he gives in the morning and one or two days. But the purpose, the profession of the distributor is to fulfill the plan. ... But he won't be able to fulfill the plan when the theater is half-empty. He is obliged to ensure that the plan is fulfilled, so he sells tickets for the film for which tickets are bought, and for as many days as they are bought (Zorkaya, 1983: 31).

And further, N. Zorkaya logically and provably justified the phenomenon of mass film success: For many years engaged in problems of mass art, I am absolutely convinced and repeatedly expressed my conviction that films of mass success are those in which folklore plots, images, expressive means and above all the structure of a fairy tale are reproduced. ... A number of the most important features of mass cinema and folklore coincide or are closely related. These are the inner formulas, the stable schemes of plots as well as aesthetic attributes of mass film (entertaining, effective, colorful, etc.). These mass-produced films could be likened to a single self-reproducing multi-episode feature film, or to a series of feature films, the principal one of which has the archetype of a fairy tale as its underlying basis. Fairy tale structures are often seen in films that are, so to speak, realistic, full of vivid sketches of contemporary life and the truth of our contemporary life (Zorkaya 1983: 32).

Soon there was an article in the *Cinema Art* journal by film scholar K. Razlogov (1946–2021) wrote an article about amusing cinema, in which he reasonably pointed out that if it is with pragmatism that Americans ... strive to calculate the role and 'share' of good leisure – including entertainment – in the growth of labor productivity, then we should also consider the fact that the driver of this central indicator of economic progress is not only new technology, not only improved services, but also the full development of the recreational and entertaining function of art (Razlogov, 1984: 72).

K. Razlogov further wrote: Soviet criticism, including film criticism, spent a great deal of time and energy denouncing entertainment in its bourgeois version. The textbook formula of "diverting – to entertain, entertaining – to distract" and the attendant notion of "escapism" served as the basis for an initial and a priori negative evaluation of the entertaining cinema. But even in the capitalist world, entertainment is by no means always a "cheap spectacle". ... As proof of this, suffice it to cite the indisputable example of Charlie Chaplin. The theoretical basis for negativism is that entertainment is synonymous with "escaping" from life. But it is possible not only to distract, but also to educate and develop the personality and to educate the audience ideologically, morally and aesthetically. Moreover, in the conditions of socialism entertainment in itself is a positive value, a source of social wealth (Razlogov, 1984: 73).

K. Razlogov then goes on to suggest, logically, that "It is necessary to encourage the artist to work in the genre, not to neglect it, to meet the needs of the audience, not to reproach them for their 'undeveloped taste. After all, the eternal need for carnival is essentially indestructible. One has only to learn to entertain, not to distract, but to teach, to educate, to form artistic tastes, to develop personality (Razlogov, 1984: 81).

Of course, everything said by K. Razlogov's point of view substantially differs from the view, which for many years reigned in official Soviet film criticism, that a study of the demands of the mass Soviet audience shows that it is not escapism, nor a desire to escape from the hardships of reality, nor a need for mindless entertainment, that determine our audience's attitude toward cinema. The long-standing practice has shown that with the help of films the Soviet viewer consciously seeks to go deeper into the complex phenomena of life, to find the answer to the questions that concern him, to gain aesthetic pleasure. We can rightfully say that along with the phenomenon of Soviet cinema in our country the phenomenon of the Soviet viewer was formed (Baskakov, 1981: 69).

Film scholar V. Dmitriev (1940–2013), entering into a polemic with K. Razlogov, has expressed a highly controversial hypothesis that "the romantic dream of pure genres is an illusion. The situation of the present time, the moment of development of art, the relationship between the artist and the viewer are now such that the genre-bearing construction of an entertainment work must include a complicating parameter as a necessary ingredient to ensure stability. The number of such ingredients is quite large, and it is up to the artist's intention, skill, and taste to determine what he chooses. In some cases a correction to a different genre comes in handy, in others – stylization, in others – a replica in the direction of old cinema (Dmitriev, 1984: 86).

Film scholar M. Zak (1929–2011), who entered into the theoretical dispute, noted that he was close to V. Dmitriev's position, who wants to know not only the attendance figures of this or that film, including adventure films, but also the real price of success. What does it consist of? (Zak, 1984: 106).

And the film critic J. Warszawski (1911–2000) disliked (in our opinion, irrevocably) the very term "entertaining film": If you want to call some films entertaining, how will you call others? All films have to entertain. And funny comedies, and exciting adventures, and philosophical dramas. There are no good non-entertaining films, or rather, there cannot be (Warszawski, 1984: 37).

4. Conclusion

Throughout the period 1969–1985, the editors of the *Cinema Art* journal paid a great deal of attention to theoretical discussions, including discussions about specific problems of film studies. As a rule, leading Soviet film critics and film historians took part in these discussions.

The discussion on Georgian cinema, organized by E. Surkov (1915–1988), the editor-in-chief of *Cinema Art* journal, in the second half of the 1970s, had the strongest public response.

The starting point of this discussion was an article about the state of Georgian cinema, written by the well-known film critic and film expert Y. Bogomolov (1937–2023). One of the main

theses of this article was the claim that Georgian cinematographers, having developed their own exquisite, parable-like style, not only lose contact with the mass audience, but also, repeating the successful artistic techniques they found, move toward a kind of creative "dead end".

This position, of course, aroused strong objections from the majority of Georgian cinematographers and film critics, who began to defend their national cinema, reproaching Bogomolov in engagement.

The discussion about genres and styles, about the phenomenon of popularity of cinematography turned out to be acute on the pages of the *Cinema Art* journal.

5. Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the grant of the Russian Science Foundation (RSF, project No. 22-28-00317) at Rostov State University of Economics. Project theme: "Evolution of theoretical film studies concepts in the 'Cinema Art' journal (1931–2021)". Head of the project is Professor A.V. Fedorov.

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