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## The Ideological Topic in the Magazine *Soviet Screen*: 1957–1968 (Western Cinema Aspect)

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### Abstract

Based on a content analysis (in the context of historical, sociocultural and political situation, etc.) of texts published during the Thaw in the *Soviet Screen* magazine (1957–1968), the authors concluded that an important role in this publication was played by ideologized articles that emphasized criticism of bourgeois cinema and its detrimental influence on the audience,

Not all of the magazine's authors directly sought to publish ideologically oriented articles, but it is possible to identify a small but consistently engaged group of film scholars and critics who consistently opposed the negative effects of bourgeois (and in particular Western) cinema on their audiences and defended Marxist-Leninist approaches to the analysis of the film process.

After the Prague Spring events, however, the authorities decided that the journal's ideological position was not sufficiently counter-propagandistic, and a harsh campaign was unleashed against *Soviet Screen* in *Ogonyok*, which always maintained a political mainstream position at the time.

In the end, the editorial board of *Soviet Screen* managed to persuade the "higher authorities" that the ideological course of the journal would be changed in the direction desired by the power, and (unlike the editorial board of *Cinema Art*, which was similarly criticized in 1968), editor-in-chief D. Pisarevsky managed to keep his position. Thus, the level of ideologization of *Soviet Screen* materials was elevated and in a number of articles was no different from Soviet Communist Party publications.

**Keywords:** Soviet Screen magazine, Western cinema, film criticism, ideology, politics, reviews, articles, movie.

### 1. Introduction

Articles with ideological content based on foreign material were always present in the *Soviet Screen* magazine. However, with the appointment of the film critic D. Pisarevsky (1912-1990) as editor-in-chief of *Soviet Screen* in the early 1960s, the magazine became more "thawed," and along with "ideologically correct" articles about Western cinematography, more and more materials of a politically neutral nature began to appear.

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

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## 2. Materials and methods

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

## 3. Discussion and results

Shortly after the "thaw" XX Congress of the Soviet Communist Party (1956), in January 1957, the first issue of the renewed *Soviet Screen* (as an organ of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR) was published: with a clear focus on the balance between communist ideology (articles and notes on important from this point of view events and Soviet films) and attracting the widest audience, which was interested in a panorama of cinema, including foreign.

Nikolai Kastelin (1904–1968), who was the editor of the *Soviet Screen* for a little over a year and a half (from January 1957 to August 1958), apparently viewed the magazine as some kind of ideologically seasoned advertising and information publication, which twice a month told readers mainly about the current repertoire of Soviet cinemas.

The editorial board of the *Soviet Screen* included: actors S. Bondarchuk (1920–1994) and S. Lukyanov (1910–1965), directors M. Kalatozov (1903–1973), V. Shneiderov (1900–1973) and M. Pashchenko (1901–1958), cameramen V. Golovnya (1909–1983) and M. Kirillov (1908–1975), production designer A. Parkhomenko (1911–1987) and others. A. Ershtrem was the executive secretary (a few years later he headed the press-service of the USSR State Cinematography).

Photos on color covers of Soviet actors (the only foreign woman awarded this honor was Indian actress Nargis (1929–1981): in No. 16 for 1957) or shots from Soviet films, the estimated component on the pages of the publication was minimal, mainly anonymous information, a brief retelling of the plots of films, photographs. Foreign cinema was usually allocated two pages per issue, but mostly it was about the films of the socialist countries (including China, which was friendly at that time), plus notes on Indian cinema.

From August 1958 to June 1961, the editor of the *Soviet Screen* was the film critic Elizaveta Smirnova (1908–1999), under which the circulation of the magazine increased from 200 thousand to 400 thousand copies.

With the advent of E. Smirnova, more and more "author's" materials began to appear on the pages of the *Soviet Screen*: articles lost their anonymity, leading film critics of that period did not hesitate to sign their materials, which gradually became more and more analytic.

Since 1959, the *Soviet Screen* began to cover in detail (in several issues) the work and films of the Moscow International Film Festival, which began to be held every two years. At the same time, not only information materials with lists of competitive films and prize-winners were published, but also interviews with foreign guests of the festival, their photographs (and among them in 1959 were Giulietta Masina, Marina Vlady, Nicole Courcelle, etc.).

In June 1961, film critic Dmitry Pisarevsky (1912–1990) was appointed editor-in-chief of the *Soviet Screen*, who managed to hold this post for a record period – until February 1975, that is, almost 14 years! No other editor, before or since, managed to lead the magazine for so long.

Under D. Pisarevsky, the "thaw" tendencies in the *Soviet Screen* at first not only continued, but also strengthened. Not only the Moscow International Film Festival of 1961, 1963, 1965, 1967 was widely covered. Increasingly, large materials about Cannes, Venice and other major Western film festivals began to appear, extensive reviews of weeks of foreign cinema in the USSR, and voluminous reviews of Western films that ended up in Soviet distribution.

On the covers of the magazine, albeit rarely, photographs of Western movie stars began to appear: Marina Vlady and Sophia Loren (1965), Catherine Deneuve (1967).

In some issues of the *Soviet Screen* of the mid-1960s up to 30 % of the total text was devoted to foreign cinema (mainly Western).

Apparently, to a large extent due to such trends (the main reason, of course, was the growth of cinema attendance in the USSR: from 17.7 cinema visits per inhabitant of the country in 1961 to 19.8 visits in 1968), the circulation of *Soviet Screen* in the 1960s increased quite significantly: from 400 thousand copies in 1961 to almost three million copies in 1967.

*Ideologized articles emphasizing the criticism of bourgeois cinema and its harmful influence on the mass audience*

Of course, in the "thaw" times, the struggle against bourgeois cinematography on the pages of the "Soviet Screen" differed significantly in its intensity from the previous stage of the magazine's publication in 1939–1941. The style of such materials and articles has become less rough and sharp. However, the general anti-bourgeois orientation of this kind of materials was stable.

For example, the magazine consistently negatively treated such an "ideologically harmful" genre of foreign cinema as the "horror film". Here is a negative review published in the *Soviet Screen* about the films *Curse of Frankenstein* (UK, 1957) and *Revenge of Frankenstein/The Blood of Frankenstein* (UK, 1958): "these films is supported exclusively by shots with disgusting physiological details. These films are characterized by details that quite accurately reproduce the atrocities of the concentration camps ... For the purpose of advertising, English film companies slip into the pages of newspapers and magazines such statements by "film specialists" as the statement of an anonymous psychiatrist: "These films are generally harmless. They are a fairy tale for young people, far from real life. A commentary on this touching remark can serve as figures about the growth among the younger generation of Englishmen of the so-called "unmotivated crimes", that is, crimes committed on the basis of hysteria and psychosis" (Mikhailov, 1959: 11).

It has also been argued that in Hollywood's "entertaining trinkets about kings and princesses, behind the screen of melodramatic sentimentality there is always contempt for the masses" (Kukarkin, 1963: 18), and the "malicious" stuffing "characteristic of "Tarzaniada" is contained in most other Western adventure films, no matter how varied the material they are based on. Only sometimes the reactionary ideological tendentiousness is skillfully hidden behind the external amusingness of the plot and the romanticized images of the characters, while in other cases it is presented quite frankly" (Kukarkin, 1964: 18-19).

The *Soviet Screen* also reacted extremely negatively to the famous franchise about 007 James Bond (Kukarkin, 1964: 18-19): "Of course, all these are films of the lowest kind, film waste. ... Films of this kind ... of a malicious, anti-humanistic orientation ... are among the worst examples of the adventurous-adventure genre. But their annual production reaches an impressive figure! ... So, shamelessly speculating on the audience's natural love for action-packed narration, the creators of Western adventure films "in passing" drag bourgeois morality, individualistic ideas about happiness and success, the crown of which is money, money and again money!" (Kukarkin, 1964: 18-19).

In this regard, the then Deputy Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Union of Cinematographers of the USSR (and from 1965 to 1986 – Secretary of the Board of the Union of Cinematographers of the USSR) A.V. Karaganov (1915–2007) recalled that "bourgeois" commercial film encourages in the audience not curiosity, but idle curiosity; he opposes the truth of life with clever writing, shamelessly exploiting and inflating the viewer's interest in the most intimate manifestations of love, in mysterious crimes and ingenious detectives looking for a criminal, in rare facts and strange events that amaze the imagination. It would seem that the producers and owners of the rental, financing such films, care only about profits. But commercial interests and calculations here are easily combined, closely intertwined with ideological interests: a "commercial" film distracts the viewer from the problems born of his everyday experience, from the acute social issues of our time; amusing, entertaining, he spiritually and morally robs the viewer – lulls his searching thought, inspires false ideas about life; showing the bourgeois way of life as the only possible state of society, he affirms the bourgeois way of thinking (Karaganov, 1964: 18-19).

However, the editor of the *Soviet Screen* D. Pisarevsky (1912-1990), in fact, entered into a debate with A. Karaganov, quite optimistically stating that although the screens of the Cannes Film Festival in 1965 were "pictures that lead away from life, all kinds of aesthetic exercises and films of a frankly commercial spirit, savoring the problems of sex, crime. But they were in the minority not only in the literal, quantitative sense of the word, but also in the moral minority – in terms of audience success, press sympathy, public outcry. And this is significant. More and more artists are seriously thinking about the requirements of the times. And among filmmakers and distributors, a sober, realistic view of things is becoming stronger: the mass audience cannot be won or kept by mere entertaining trifles or "supercolosses". People are looking for in the cinema not only thoughtless relaxation or a colorful spectacle, but also food for thought, an answer to the most burning questions put forward by reality. ... The film review ... showed the strengthening of fruitful and progressive trends in the development of world cinema. ... The review showed that art is developing, growing,

strengthening, addressed to the true interests of the audience, that its successes are inseparable from the cinematic study of life. And the fact that the needle of the cinematographic barometer is moving in this direction is an indication of the objective trend in the development of cinema as a mass art, the trend of strengthening its citizenship” (Pisarevsky, 1965: 16-19).

However, very soon the position of the *Soviet Screen* left the "thaw" illusions about "progress in Western cinema".

For example, already in 1966 it was emphasized that "speaking of the crisis in English cinema, one cannot fail to note the most important thing – its spiritual decline, the enormous changes that have taken place in recent years in the subject matter and ideological orientation of English films. Not so long ago ... on English screens it was often possible to see films raising serious social and domestic problems in a realistic manner. ... In recent years, even talented directors, trying to adapt to the current situation on the film market, avoid sharp questions in their films and make empty, purely entertaining films at best” (Yakovlev, 1966: 18).

And A. Karaganov, who promptly responded to the political conjuncture of the “Paris May” and “Prague Spring”, published a program article in 1968, where he noted that “themes, ideas, words that rightfully belong to our revolutionary cinema, now often fall into the wrong hands and are misinterpreted and distorted for the benefit of Trotskyists, Maoists and other enemies of the communist movement. We still produce few films in which, at a high level of art, the most important themes and problems of our time would be developed. In today's most complex international situation, the question of the political orientation of our cinema is becoming particularly acute. In order to work fruitfully in the cinema, we need to be at the level of modern Party thought, to wage an ideological struggle not defensively, but offensively. It is impossible only to respond to someone's attacks – it is necessary that we pose problems, that we put forward questions, the discussion of which is in the interests of our communist cause. It is necessary to strengthen friendly ties with the progressive cinematographers of the capitalist countries in every possible way, and thereby help the party in every possible way in rallying all the revolutionary forces of the modern world” (Karaganov, 1968: 2).

In a similar vein, the article of the then chairman of the Committee on Cinematography under the Council of Ministers of the USSR A. Romanov (1908-1998) was sustained: “We need not only to expose bourgeois propaganda, to show the doom of imperialism, we must comprehensively reveal the great truth of communist ideas, the successes of communist construction. High ideological content, offensiveness, efficiency, and intelligibility of works of art for hundreds of millions of people, including those abroad of our Motherland – this is what should become the main motto of our creative life” (Romanov, 1968: 2-3).

Thus, in the “official” materials of the *Soviet Screen* of 1968, the state course towards the abolition of the “thaw” and tightening the “ideological screws” was clearly indicated.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on a content analysis (in the context of historical, sociocultural and political situation, etc.) of texts published during the Thaw in the *Soviet Screen* magazine (1957–1968), the authors concluded that an important role in this publication was played by ideologized articles that emphasized criticism of bourgeois cinema and its detrimental influence on the audience,

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