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Theoretical Articles by Film Critic Semyon Freilich in the *Cinema Art Journal*

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Abstract

The article reveals the theoretical approaches of the Soviet and Russian film critic and screenwriter, Prof. Dr. S.I. Freilich (1920–2005), which are reflected in his scientific articles published in the *Cinema Art* journal. Professional activity of S.I. Freilich was associated with the analysis of the problems of the history of cinematography, the methodology of film studies, the theory and history of cinema. He devoted his main theoretical works on cinematographic issues mainly to professional issues of film dramaturgy.

As a result of the content analysis of the main theoretical articles of the film critic Semyon Freilich, published in the *Cinema Art* journal, we came to the following conclusions:

- the author devoted his main theoretical works mainly to professional issues of film writing and film criticism, while most of his publications were written in line with the ideological and political dogmas of a particular Soviet historical period;
- in many of his theoretical articles of different years, S.I. Freilich turns to the analysis of the cinematic heritage of S. Eisenstein;
- the film critic considered the improvement of the theory of style to be a task of paramount importance for the further development of screenwriting and film art in general, therefore he repeatedly addressed this problem in his theoretical articles.
- the theoretical articles of the author contain cinematic terms, are not devoid of expressive artistic imagery; the stated theoretical concepts are confirmed by clear logic and consistent argumentation based on primary sources; the author's position and the author's attitude to the subject of research are clearly seen in the general content and generalizing conclusions; in structural terms, his articles are usually in a scientific style, have a clear structure and a significant amount.

Keywords: Freilich, film studies, *Cinema Art* journal, Soviet cinema, film dramaturgy, socialist realism, cinematography, theoretical concepts.

1. Introduction

The relevance of the historical and retrospective analysis of the evolution of theoretical approaches and concepts of the leading Soviet and Russian film critics and historians of the past years, presented in the articles of the film criticism journals, is connected, in our opinion, with the further development of the theory of cinema art as a scientific field. One of such well-known film critics was Prof. Dr. Semyon Freilich (1920–2005), a member of the Unions of Writers and Cinematographers of the USSR, laureate of the Prize of the Union of Cinematographers of the USSR (1973, 1981), the USSR State Prize for the film *Michael Romm. Confessions of a Film Director* (1985), as well as awards from the Russian Guild of Film Critics and Historians (1999).

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S.I. Freilich received his higher education at the Moscow Institute of History, Philosophy and Literature, graduating from the Faculty of Philology on the eve of the war in 1941. He went through the Great Patriotic War as a scout and finished it in Czechoslovakia, was awarded military orders and medals. He began his literary activity in 1942, when he was published in a front-line newspaper. Subsequently, in peacetime, S.I. Freilich shared his memories of the difficult war years of his youth in the form of essays and stories about the Great Patriotic War with readers on the pages of the *Cinema Art* journal under the heading Filmmakers' Stories (Freilich, 1965; 1985): only plots, she shaped their aesthetic views. And here we can talk about the spiritual experience of the people.

After the war, S.I. Freilich successfully completed his postgraduate studies at VGIK. From 1948 to 1954 he devoted himself to scientific and pedagogical work: he led a screenwriting workshop at VGIK. From 1962 to 1970 he read "Fundamentals of Film Drama" at the Higher Courses for Scriptwriters and Directors. In 1957–1971 he worked at the State Institute of Art History: as a senior researcher, head of the cinema sector, as well as executive editor of the yearbook "Questions of Cinema Art". In addition, S.I. Freilich fought for the expansion of mass film education in the popular universities of culture and cinema (Freilich, 1960). In 1964, he defended his dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Arts on the topic "Traditions and Innovations of Soviet Cinema". From 1971 to 1980 he taught at the Academy of Social Sciences under the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party.

S.I. Freilich devoted his main theoretical works on cinematographic issues, mainly to professional issues of the history of cinema and screenwriting (the main works were published at different times under the headings "Issues of Theory and History of Cinema", "Theory, History, Criticism and Publicism", "Issues of Film Drama", "Critical Diary", "Film Criticism, Theory and History of Cinema", "Abroad", "Chronicle–Documentary and Popular Science Cinema", "Theory, History, Cinema, Journalism" on the pages of the *Cinema Art* journal). Most of his articles, for obvious reasons, were written in line with the ideological and political dogmas of that historical period of the USSR (Freilich, 1957; 1971 and others).

2. Materials and methods

Research material: texts of theoretical articles by film critic S.I. Freilich (1920–2005) in the *Cinema Art* journal.

Research methods: a comprehensive content analysis of the theoretical concepts of film critic S.I. Freilich in the *Cinema Art* journal, including methods of theoretical research (classification, comparison, analogy, induction and deduction, abstraction and concretization, theoretical analysis and synthesis, generalization) and methods of empirical research (collection of information), hermeneutical analysis.

Purpose of the study: a comprehensive study of the conceptual views of S.I. Freilich in the context of the analysis of the texts of his theoretical articles in the *Cinema Art* journal.

Object of study: published texts of theoretical articles by S.I. Freilich in the *Cinema Art* journal in a historical retrospective.

Subject of study: conceptual foundations, problems, logic and content segment presented in the theoretical articles by S.I. Freilich in the *Cinema Art* journal.

3. Discussion and results

A large number of film researchers (Andrew, 1976; 1984; Branigan, Buckland, 2015; Casetti, 1999; Eco, 1975; 1976; Etherington-Wright, Doughty, 2011; Fedorov, 2014–2022; Gibsonetal, 2000; Gorbatkova, 2016; Hill, 1960; Hill, Gibson, 1998; Kenez, 1992; Khudyakova, 2000; Levitskaya, 2022; Levitskaya, Fedorov et al., 2016; Livingston, 2009; Lotman, 1973; McIver, 2016; Muryukina, 2016; Plantinga, 1993; Razlogov, 2013; Salny, 2015, 2016; Shlapentokh, 1993; Sokolov, 2008; Stam, 2000; Stein, 2021; Villarejo, 2007; Woll, 2000; Yampolsky, 1993; Zhabsky, Tarasov, 2015 and others) have the publications about film studies and the history of Soviet and Russian films. The genesis and development of Soviet and Russian cinematography and film criticism are mainly represented in the scientific works of film historians (Fedorov at al., 2017; Fedorov at al., 2018; Fedorov at al., 2019; Fedorov, 2014; Fedorov, 2015a; Fedorov, 2015b; Fedorov, 2016a, Fedorov, 2016b; Fedorov, 2017a; Fedorov, 2017b; Fedorov, 2019; Fedorov, 2021a; Fedorov, 2021b; Fedorov, 2021c; Fedorov, 2022a; Fedorov, 2022b; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2022a; Fedorov, 2022b; Fedorov, 2022c; Levitskaya et al., 2016; Levitskaya, 2022).

S.I. Freilich began publishing regularly in the *Cinema Art* journal since 1950s. His first publication in the *Cinema Art* was the article “To the problem of language in cinematography drama” (Freilich, 1951), in which the film critic turned to the analysis of the specific language of the screenplay. According to the author, one of the main tasks of his contemporaries – film theorists and film critics – was to systematically and deeply enrich the accumulated experience of film dramaturgy as a special literary genre, as well as to study the originality of its expressive means, namely, the language of the screenplay, under which he understood the speech of the characters and the author's descriptions, remarks, thanks to which a full-fledged artistic image is created. When studying the script language S.I. Freilich suggested proceeding from the fact that, firstly, the script is a literary work, that film dramaturgy, on the basis of a deep connection with reality, develops in interaction with other types of literature, enriched by their vast experience of verbal description; secondly, the script is a special kind of literature, the word in it should be used with a clear idea not only of what the script has in common with the theatrical play and fiction, but also of what distinguishes it from them (Freilich, 1951: 11).

Comparing such genres of literature as script, fiction and drama, S.I. Freilich emphasized that the screenplay is intended to reveal to the reader or viewer the events in their immediate accomplishment, and this direct action, taking place in the present tense, distinguishes the script from prose: “Prose is characterized by an epic structure, the script is dramatic” (Freilich, 1951: 11). And in this sense, the screenplay approaches the play, where the image of the hero is not created by descriptive means, but is revealed through his behavior and actions.

Discussing the role and significance of the stage direction in a screenplay, S.I. Freilich substantiated its importance both for the director and cameraman, and for the actor. Cinematic remarks, according to S.I. Freilich, help the operator to create the correct image of the scene described in the script, thereby developing the dramaturgy of the film. For the actor, the remark “tells”, for example, how to pronounce this or that line, as well as how to behave in front of the camera before and after the line in the scene. If the content of a remark can be filmed by a cameraman, played by an actor, staged by a director, it will also satisfy the reader, it will also be read, i.e. the image in the script will not be created schematically, not retold, but drawn by the word and the endless possibilities that it gives to the screenwriter (Freilich, 1951: 13). Therefore, S.I. Freilich always urged his colleagues to improve the script language, because this is inextricably linked with the growth of their professional skills in film dramaturgy.

S.I. Freilich considered the improvement of the script language to be a task of paramount importance for the further development of screenwriting and film art in general, therefore he repeatedly addressed this problem in his theoretical articles. In his article “For great screenplay literature!” (Freilich, 1959), the film critic argued that the literary script is the ideological and artistic basis of the film, and film dramaturgy is the basis of cinematography, which largely determines its level. However, such an important task, in his opinion, as the creation of a theory of screenplay, was not the subject of study of his contemporaries – neither critics nor film historians.

S.I. Freilich described in detail in his publication the process of formation and development of the film script as a literary form, starting from the 1920s. The process of transforming the original scenario-scheme into a work of artistic value took place in organic interaction, on the one hand, with the development of literature and dramatic art, and on the other hand, with the development of screen art (Freilich, 1959). At the same time, he emphasized that the script would become a complete literary work only if it was designed for the specifics of the screen.

On the example of famous documentaries and feature films of that time, S.I. Freilich showed how the dramatic principles and directorial techniques in cinema developed. He proposed to make the work of such professional screenwriters of the 1920s the subject of research. like N. Zarkhi, V. Turkin, K. Vinogradskaya, B. Leonidov, V. Shklovsky, A. Dovzhenko. Studying samples of scripts of that period (in particular, collections of Soviet cinema scripts published in 1949–1951), the film critic came to the conclusion that the film script as a literary form finally took shape only in the 1930s: “Two factors helped the script to find itself and speak in full voice: a deep comprehension of life and a deep comprehension of the poetics of the sound screen” (Freilich, 1959: 69).

In his theoretical articles, S.I. Freilich insisted on an integrated approach to the study and analysis of a film work. The approach to the study of the film as a dynamic process, including all links: from conception to perception, should, according to the film critic, lead to interesting and useful results in the field of theory and practice of creativity (Freilich, 1968).

Speaking about the specifics of the film's dramaturgy, as well as the relationship between the screenwriter and director in the process of film production, S.I. Freilich was convinced that the final success of the film is possible only if both the screenwriter and the director are independent artists. At the same time, he defined the dramaturgy of the film as follows: 1) the dramaturgy of the film is the vital content of the film, the real contradictions that are reflected in the dramatic conflict; 2) the dramaturgy of the film – scenario, cinematographic principles of expressing this content; 3) the dramaturgy of the film is not limited to the script, it is a broader concept (Freilich, 1959: 78). From here, in the dramaturgy of the film, the relationship between the script and the production of the film, the relationship between the work of the screenwriter and the director of the film is revealed.

The development of the theory of screenplay by S.I. Freilich imagined it inextricably linked with the development of Soviet cinema art in line with socialist realism (Freilich, 1952). According to the film critic, socialist realism requires the versatility and completeness of the artistic depiction of life in all its complexity, primarily the richness of the spiritual image of a person (Freilich, 1952: 60).

Another important research topic for S.I. Freilich was the problem of plot in a film script: the capacity of a work is determined by the capacity, the depth of its ideological and artistic basis – the plot (Freilich, 1952a: 55). At the same time, he interpreted the plot as a story of character, in which the theme is solved and all the elements necessary for the composition of a film work are concentrated, including the expansion of the dramaturgical conflict underlying the plot: the plot prompted by the idea itself ultimately serves as a means of its figurative embodiment in a work of art, a means of deep disclosure of a dramatic conflict, a means of writing the truth (Freilich, 1952a: 55).

In his notes, S.I. Freilich insisted on the concrete knowledge of life by the screenwriter, reflected in the screenplay: to take up a topic without sufficient knowledge of concrete life material, everyday life and all the diversity of the characters' living conditions means only to reduce or even compromise it (Freilich, 1952a: 56). The topic of creating the image of a positive hero in the script was not left without attention – the image of a new Soviet man, a man of ideological purposefulness, high ideals that give rise to constant vigorous activity, a desire to intervene in life, to turn our land into a wonderful community of mankind (Freilich, 1952a: 60).

The problem of the hero on the Soviet screen S.I. Freilich devoted a whole series of articles in the *Cinema Art* journal (Freilich, 1957; 1970; 1974; 1980). The film critic believed that the character of the hero in the film should be manifested through the opposite: this is the meaning of the tragic conflict in which the artist tests his hero: having known the limits of the hero's human strength, the artist affirms his moral ideal in him (Freilich, 1970: 86).

All theories of dramaturgy are largely related to the interpretation of the interaction of the hero and circumstances, and the filmmaker as an artist inevitably, according to the film critic, reveals the circumstances that form the character of the hero, and also reveals the nature of human relationships in the film. Studying approaches to portraying a positive hero in Soviet cinema, S.I. Freilich was convinced that the director is not able to "compose" such a character if he does not exist in reality, and the desire to take the hero "ready" is always futile, it is in such cases that the pictures turn out to be artistic illustrations of known truths (Freilich, 1970: 90).

Based on the epistemological foundations of realistic film art, the film critic believed that the hero's field of action is always "charged with a positive or negative charge" (Freilich, 1974a: 66). At the same time, the problem of the hero in the film is a social and art problem, since many cinema theories interpret the image of the hero on the screen in different ways, and, according to the author, these are ultimately different approaches to the interpretation of the human personality (Freilich, 1980: 101).

In this regard, S.I. Freilich analyzed the problem of the exploratory nature of film art, since the study of a person as a person reveals his analytical nature, thanks to which cinema art is able to discover new knowledge: the aesthetic experience that a work inspires us always has a moral background: a strong work can not only give us a new idea of subject, but also to change ourselves (Freilich, 1974a: 66). Hence the field of action of the hero of the film is always our consciousness, because the continuation of the true action is the impact (Freilich, 1974a: 66).

Speaking about the dialectics of the development of socialist cinema, S.I. Freilich emphasized that it offers its own concept of a person who is able to realize himself in the historical process and take responsibility for the fate of the people, i.e. human fate is the fate of the people, therefore the climaxes of the best Soviet films of that time, according to the film critic, were associated with moments when the protagonist faced a choice and had to make a difficult decision in his life, this

internal struggle played an important role in the ideological and content the concept of the entire film: The sensual and intellectual principles never reach unity in a person without a struggle. A person can be deprived of the human, not only by throwing him into the clutches of nature and flesh, but also completely depriving him of them, that is, turning him into an ideological automaton (Freilich, 1978: 77).

In his theoretical article "The Way of the Discoverers" S.I. Freilich (Freilich, 1967a) made an excursion into the history of the creation and development of Soviet cinema, in particular, he examined the classic period of Soviet cinema in the 1920s: the period of the formation of socialist cinema, when, in particular, epic films were created that reflected socio-historical conflicts and changes, as well as chamber or household films related to the depiction of psychological conflicts and personal experiences of a person. In this regard, it was mainly about the films of S. Eisenstein. It was the innovators of the cinema of this period, who, according to the deep conviction of the film critic, discovered a positive hero in the domestic cinema art, active, changing the surrounding reality and capable of changing himself. In addition, it was a time of outstanding acting images.

In many of his theoretical articles of different years, S.I. Freilich (Freilich, 1964; Freilich, 1966; Freilich, 1968; Freilich, 1974; Freilich, 1981; Freilich, 1983) refers to the analysis of the cinematic legacy of S. Eisenstein. In particular, a deep film criticism analysis of S. Eisenstein's work is presented in a theoretical article by S.I. Freilich "Old and New Eisenstein" (Freilich, 1964b), in which the film critic analyzed the laws of composition of S. Eisenstein's famous film works.

S.I. Freilich noted that S. Eisenstein considered not only the internal structure of a film work, the interconnection of individual parts in it, but also the connection of the film work itself with the external objective reality, of which this film work becomes a part. In this, S. Eisenstein saw the organic nature of a particular order, which, in his opinion, is achieved by the fact that the rhythm and integrity of the work are fed by the rhythm and integrity of natural phenomena (Freilich, 1964b: 22). At the same time, S. Eisenstein considered pathetic composition to be the highest manifestation of such organicity, as a result of which he always gravitated towards large epic forms. Working on the composition of a film work, S. Eisenstein, as an artist, set himself the following tasks: 1) the composition had to express the objective content of the subject; 2) the composition should reflect the attitude of the author to the subject; 3) the artist must involve the viewer in the action.

Speaking about the specifics of cinema, S.I. Freilich drew attention to the fact that the interaction of time and space in cinema is the interaction of frame and montage: Cinema is a seismograph of history, it is sensitive to its deep shocks, reacts to its shifts. Concerning this question, Eisenstein traces the history of the montage method, noting its ups and downs (Freilich, 1964b: 31). The film critic emphasized that S. Eisenstein considered the problem of method in cinema art in three aspects: the cinematographic method, his own method of a film director, and the method of Soviet cinema – socialist realism. At the same time, in his discussion of the method there is a constant theme of unity: the unity of the work, the unity of art, the unity of art and reality (Freilich, 1964b).

Among other epic artists of Soviet cinema art, S.I. Freilich often mentioned V. Pudovkin and A. Dovzhenko in his theoretical articles: Dovzhenko's epos is lyrical. The epic of Pudovkin is dramatic. Eisenstein is publicistic, emotionally open; in the field of poetry, Mayakovsky is closest to him. This openness is a state of pathos – the main feature of Eisenstein's works (Freilich, 1964b: 23).

In the article "The Thirst for the Epic" (Freilich, 1974), the film critic deeply analyzed the genre specifics of the epic works of these directors, including their cinematic methods and techniques: The epic developed into a novel in the work of prose masters. Dovzhenko remained a poet to the end; like Einstein, he turned to tragedy as a new source of the epic (Freilich, 1974b: 49). At the same time, the tragedy, which retained the scale of the epic, provided a new magic crystal: a deep human character, in which the contradictions of life converged and resolved (Freilich, 1974b: 49).

In the 1930s, the first collections of film scripts began to be printed in the USSR. The main achievement of the 1930s was the emergence of a new social cinematic drama; more and more complex phenomena of social life became the subject of artistic embodiment in cinema. During this period, the expressive means of screen art were improved, and the active development of the language of cinema continued. In wartime, newsreels and documentaries came to the fore: Soviet cameramen ended up at the front, many of them died, leaving behind historical footage that became part of the film chronicle of the heroic struggle of our people against fascism: forbidden in

art. The war confirmed the right of art to tragedy, the right to depict bitterness, death: the eternal companion of life, to depict evil (Freilich, 1967a: 40).

In the era of the “thaw”, a new stage in the development of Soviet cinematography began, which was marked by the expansion of Soviet film production, an increase in the release of films. In the 1960s, in the cinematography, according to the film critic, a peculiar evolution of the hero took place on the Soviet screen: the films of those years again brought us back to the idea that in art the significance of the hero does not depend on the title or title, but on whether his passions are deep and true. It turned out that there were no ordinary people (Freilich, 1967a: 41).

At the same time, the main essence of the changes that occurred with the film image of the hero in art was not who they began to portray, but how they began to portray. In cinema, the understanding of the concept of “dramatic action” has changed, which began to determine the nature of the game of film actors: the pictorial decision is not dictated by external reasons, not by the plot, the image itself is the content, action and therefore in itself conceals the reasons for just such a construction of the frame and the replacement of one frame by another (Freilich, 1967a: 41). According to the film critic, society in this period needed an active personality, and art sought to unravel and show this personality, its pathos and the psychology of behavior.

In general, S.I. Freilich believed that Soviet cinema had a great influence on world cinematographic culture, while mastering all the richness of world culture, on the other hand.

Studying the dialectics of the genre, S.I. Freilich stated that each stage of the history of cinema is characterized by its own system of genres, for example, in the mid-1920s, epic and psychological drama were the dominant film genres. Since film genres practically do not exist separately, but depend on each other, forming a certain system at each stage of cinema development, then, according to the film critic, it is very important to try to see the moment of regrouping of genres in cinema, when the connections between them are mobile and the new system is just beginning to take shape (Freilich, 1966). In the genre of the work itself, the attitude of the film director to the event depicted on the screen, his outlook on life and his individuality is always revealed. The cinematic specificity of the genre is due to the fact that the art of cinema is conditional and therefore it not only forms already known genres in its own way,

In his film history articles, S.I. Freilich analyzed films of different genres of Soviet cinema (Freilich, 1956; 1958; 1960; 1962; 1965; 1967; 1975; 1985). In the article “Through the prism of genre” (Freilich, 1972), the film critic deeply analyzed the evolution of genres in cinematography, the specifics of “low” and “high” film genres.

Developing the theory of film genres, the film critic in his theoretical articles came to the problem of style (Freilich, 1972; Freilich, 1981; Freilich, 1983). He always emphasized the historical significance of style: “the system of genres – at each stage of the history of cinema – is a certain artistic system, which is nothing but style” (Freilich, 1966).

S.I. Freilich was interested in style as a historical, aesthetic and cinematic issue. The film critic considered the frame to be the primary element of style in cinema: the specifics of cinema is not in the structure of the frame, but in the movement of frame to frame, that is, in montage” (Freilich, 1981: 92). In addition, he interpreted style not only as a set of cinematic techniques that organically express meaning. Style, according to the film critic, carries the idea of artistry, acting as a kind of “artistic criterion” (Freilich, 1981: 94).

Systematic study of style in cinema S.I. Freilich proposed to carry out at different conceptual levels: 1) at the level of an individual work; 2) to the levels of the biography of an artist with an individual style; 3) at the level of artistic trends.

Speaking about the individual style in cinematography, S.I. Freilich was convinced that the personality of the artist himself – the creator of the film – always lives in any film work, and his individual style is revealed in the unity of his views and techniques: “the constancy of the director's style comes from the need to express a certain theme. Theme – not in the sense of plot, but in the sense of intimacy, that is, a sense of life” (Freilich, 1981: 99).

4. Conclusion

As a result of the content analysis of the main theoretical articles of the film scientist, film historian and film critic S.I. Freilich, published in the *Cinema Art* journal, we came to the following conclusions:

- the author devoted his main theoretical works mainly to professional issues of film writing and film criticism, while most of his publications were written in line with the ideological and political dogmas of a particular Soviet historical period;
- as the author of the leading professional Soviet journal on cinematography *Cinema Art*, broadcasting in the Soviet era the ideology of cinematography of the ruling communist party of those years, S.I. Freilich often quoted in his publications K. Marx, V.I. Lenin and I.V. Stalin, as well as the resolutions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party; sharply criticized the "bourgeois decadent art" of Western cinema, defending the value of the ideological and moral content of Soviet cinematography;
- in many of his theoretical articles of different years, S.I. Freilich turns to the analysis of the cinematic heritage of S. Eisenstein and other prominent Soviet directors;
- the film critic considered the improvement of the theory of style to be a task of paramount importance for the further development of screenwriting and film art in general, therefore he repeatedly addressed this problem in his theoretical articles.
- improvement of the theory of style by S.I. Freilich considered it a task of paramount importance for the further development of screenwriting and film art in general, therefore he repeatedly addressed this problem in his theoretical articles;
- the theoretical articles of the author contain cinematic terms, are not devoid of expressive artistic imagery; the stated theoretical concepts are confirmed by clear logic and consistent argumentation based on primary sources; the author's position and the author's attitude to the subject of research are clearly seen in the general content and generalizing conclusions; in structural terms, his articles are usually in a scientific style, have a clear structure and a significant amount.

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