

Illusionary Spoils

Soviet Attitudes toward American Cinema during the Early Cold War

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At any stage of the Cold War, Soviet film culture was inevitably influenced by the political and ideological content of the conflict and by fluctuations in its course. Soviet films represented confrontation with the West with various degrees of directness, dealing with such issues as ideological struggle, espionage, the fear of global hostilities (influenced by traumatic memories of the past world war), and ostentatious or genuine attempts at rapprochement with the other side. Soviet ideologues and commentators from different cultural fields were mobilized to defend Soviet filmmakers and film audiences from possible contamination. Western cinema was condemned as a source and emblem of bourgeois decadence and regarded as a tool of enemy propaganda. Films produced in the United States were the main targets of this condemnation: in stark contrast to the general friendliness which had characterized Soviet attitudes toward American filmmaking during World War II, with the advent of the Cold War they were commonly described as a “filthy torrent of slander against humanity produced by Hollywood’s conveyor-belts.”¹

Against considerable odds, however, during the Cold War American cinema remained an important presence within Soviet culture and generated a significant effect on its Soviet counterpart even during the conflict’s most difficult periods, when most American cultural products were rejected as unfit for Soviet consumption.² Even in the conditions of growing ideological repression and thorough filtration of anything that was perceived as a product of American capitalism and a tool of imperialist subversion, American films reached the

¹ Sergei Gerasimov, “Iskusstvo peredovykh idei,” in *30 let sovetskoi kinematografii*, ed. Dmitrii Eremin (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1950), 165.

² Cultural imports from other capitalist countries were also subjected to strict censorship, but on the whole, French or Italian films received more favorable official treatment than American ones. Representational strategies of West European mainstream cinema were considered more acceptable due to such factors as France’s frequent opposition to American policy, the Left’s influence in Italy, the role of the European cultural heritage in Russian cultural history, and the more developed state of Soviet cultural ties with Western Europe.

Soviet intelligentsia, as well as “common” Soviet viewers. The new xenophobic atmosphere (fueled by “anti-cosmopolitan” witch hunts and “courts of honor”) did not prevent Soviet filmmakers, who since the earliest days of Soviet cinema had demonstrated enthusiastic interest in American representations of dynamic modernity and American film techniques, from being perceptive observers and processors of America’s cinematic achievements.³ Moreover, in spite of the declared intent to fence out contaminating Western influences, Soviet ideologues paid close attention to the developments in American cinema, sanctioning the use—for very different ideological aims—of stylistic and narrative patterns commonly associated with Hollywood.⁴

This article examines certain channels and mechanisms of American cinema’s penetration of the Soviet realm at the Cold War’s initial and, arguably, most acute stage, the parameters of which were shaped in the last years of Stalin’s rule by the most violent official rejection of Western culture. It explores two inter-related issues: patterns of Soviet bureaucratic, intellectual, and popular reception of American films; and U.S. efforts to secure a position in the Soviet film market. The first issue opens another perspective on the two superpowers’ ideological and cultural rivalry; the second specifies the problem of cultural influences in a situation when the influencer has to circumvent powerful mechanisms of defense.

By demonstrating and explaining diverse responses of Soviet audiences, authorities, and filmmakers to one of the most popular and accomplished products of American culture and one of the most powerful instruments of U.S. cultural policy, I aim to give a more nuanced picture of a period traditionally regarded as one of the lowest points in the relationship between the USSR and the United States.

American Films in the USSR during World War II

The history of Soviet attitudes toward American cinema in the early course of the Cold War would be incomplete without a look at its reception in the Soviet Union during World War II.⁵ First, positive attitudes toward American cinema prevalent at that time provide a dramatic contrast to the mood of the subsequent

³ On the general patterns of American influence on Russian and Soviet culture, see Alan M. Ball, *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

⁴ An example of this paradoxical situation is provided by the biographical films about Russian historical figures copiously produced during the “film-hungry” late Stalin period. Their unmistakably xenophobic messages promoting the Soviet vision of the Cold War situation did not prevent their makers and patrons from borrowing generic and stylistic clichés from the high-end Hollywood genre of the “biopic.”

⁵ Some aspects of U.S.–Soviet cooperation in the sphere of film have been studied in connection with Frank Capra’s propaganda documentary *The Battle of Russia* and its distribution in the Soviet Union, in Marsha Siefert’s “Allies on Film: US–USSR Filmmakers and *The Battle of Russia*,” in her edited volume *Extending the Borders of Russian History: Essays in Honor of Alfred J. Rieber* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 373–400. See also Todd Bennett, “Culture, Power, and

Cold War. Second, the wartime access to allied countries' films, and the fact that large numbers of foreign movies were obtained as war trophies, profoundly influenced postwar Soviet filmmaking and the general cultural situation in the USSR.

The wartime Soviet–American alliance led to a considerable liberalization in official Soviet attitudes toward the “bourgeois” culture of the United States. This brought about a wave of enthusiasm in regard to American cinema on the part of the Soviet film community—a wave that was, in its turn, used by the authorities to demonstrate their positive feelings toward the new ally.

Among the highest points of wartime cultural cooperation was the conference on American and British cinema held at the Moscow House of Architects in August 1942.⁶ It was organized by the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS) and attended by prominent Soviet film workers, who delivered passionate tributes to their American colleagues. Thus in his opening speech Sergei Eisenstein called Hollywood “the very heart of world cinema” and compared American cinema to “a giant epic on a par with *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, or *The Song of Prince Igor*.”⁷ Eisenstein's words were echoed by the words of Vsevolod Pudovkin, who recalled American cinema's attraction to the Soviet film community of the 1920s: “The romanticized American hero was close in his spirit to our people; and the methods of directing, brought about by his image, were, quite naturally, the weapons which young Soviet filmmakers craved to find in their impatient search.”⁸ At the conference, Soviet filmmakers demonstrated their willingness to revive the fond relationship with the film culture that had shaped their formal and thematic interests two decades earlier.

Evidently, for a number of veteran Soviet filmmakers who worked during World War II and in the first years of the Cold War, the phenomenon of American cinema contained a strong nostalgic value. By praising it as a democratic art with great creative potential, they evoked memories of their own youthful excitement and—in a more oblique way—political and artistic conditions that differed drastically from the situation under Stalinism.⁹ Together with other Soviet

Mission to Moscow: Film and Soviet–American Relations during World War II, *Journal of American History* 88, 2 (2001): 489–518.

⁶ For a description and analysis of the conference, see Siefert, “Allies on Film,” 379–81.

⁷ Sergei Eisenstein, “Amerikanskaia kinematografiia i ee bor'ba s fashizmom” (“American Cinematography and Its Struggle against Fascism,” a speech at the Conference on American and British Cinema, 21–22 August 1942), in *Zhivye golosa kino: Govoriat vydaishchiesia mastera otechestvennogo kinoiskusstva (30-e–40-e gody)*. Iz neopublikovannogo (Moscow: Belyi bereg, 1999), 182–83. The last two epics cited by Eisenstein are, respectively, the most famous medieval epic poems of Georgia (Stalin's native country) and Russia.

⁸ Ibid., 198.

⁹ Their position was summed up by Bela Balazs, who lived in the Soviet Union between the early 1930s and 1945, and whose book *The Art of Cinema* (the book's Hungarian title is *Filmkultura*, translated into English as *Theory of the Film*) first appeared in Russian in 1945: “Only the specific socio-critical ideology of American democracy, as it existed at that time, and a traditionless attitude toward artistic production could create, in the studios of Hollywood, psychological conditions for

artists, they regarded the more relaxed conditions of the war as a promise and a possibility of a more open, liberal culture of the future—a culture in which interaction with other nations would play a major role as a stimulus to creativity and a channel for alternative modes of aesthetic representation. “At the end of the war and immediately after it, in 1946,” the writer Konstantin Simonov reminisced 40 years later, “to a large circle of the intelligentsia it seemed ... that something should move us to the side of ... greater simplicity and ease of socializing with the intelligentsia even of those countries together with which we fought against the common enemy.... There was in general an atmosphere of ideological optimism.”¹⁰

Soviet filmmakers’ perception of American cinema as an embodiment of democratic sentiments and ideals generally corresponded to the official Soviet position, which distinguished between “democratic” art and profit-oriented “bourgeois” cultural production and underlined dissimilarities between the American system and the rest of the capitalist world. There were, however, key differences in the degree of sincerity with which the ideologues, on the one hand, and the creators and connoisseurs, on the other, looked at American cinema, as well as in the personal experiences that these two groups brought to American film culture. Soviet filmmakers studied “Americanisms” with the aim of creating an even more advanced cinematic mode, which would support both the Soviet drive toward humane and dynamic modernity and their own experiments with cinematic language. Soviet cinema’s political supervisors centered on Hollywood: it was perceived as an efficient production system, elements of which could be integrated, in spite of their capitalistic origins, into the process of Soviet image-making.¹¹ They also appreciated Hollywood as a provider of quality entertainment, broad access to which would be pernicious for the Soviet population but which could be used as a relaxing distraction by the ruling elite and as a creative model for a select circle of trusted cultural workers. This pattern continued until the last days of Soviet power: American and other Western films remained a valuable currency within the Soviet system of cultural, social, and political communication. They were used as a status commodity and as a means of remuneration for services provided to the Party by representatives of the intellectual elite.

Probably the most famous instance of the Soviet rulers’ reception of an American film was Stalin’s favorable reaction to Julien Duvivier’s *The Great Waltz*

the appearance—at an earlier moment than it happened in Europe—of a brand new art of cinema.” See B. Balazs, *Iskusstvo kino* (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1945), 23.

¹⁰ Konstantin Simonov, “Glazami cheloveka moego pokoleniia,” *Znamia*, no. 3 (1988): 49. Quoted in Elena Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–1957* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 95.

¹¹ Regarding the 1930s Soviet film establishment’s fascination with Hollywood, see Robert Taylor, “Ideology as Mass Entertainment: Boris Shumyatsky and Soviet Cinema in the 1930s,” in *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema*, ed. Taylor and Ian Christie (London: Routledge, 1991), 193–216.

(1938). This lavish, music-filled MGM biography of Johann Strauss was deemed by the Soviet authorities to be fit not just for their own consumption. In 1940, *The Great Waltz* was released to Soviet audiences, together with Henry Koster's *100 Men and a Girl* (1937), a romantic comedy built around a story of a symphonic orchestra.¹² The choice of these particular films could be influenced by the fact that they both dealt—directly or indirectly—with the idiom of high culture (the films were actually directed by Europeans—implicitly, bearers of the classical cultural tradition). By the end of the 1930s, cultural conservatism had supplanted the radical aspirations of early Soviet art; and the new aesthetic could, to a certain extent, accommodate concepts and conventions of “bourgeois” cinema. While *100 Men and a Girl* introduced to Soviet filmgoers Deanna Durbin, who was to become their favorite Western star for many years to come, *The Great Waltz* became a major stimulus for a cycle of screen biographies of Russian composers, opened in 1947 by Leo Arnshtam's *Glinka* and ended in 1953 by Grigorii Roshal' and Gennadii Kazanskii's *Rimskii-Korsakov*. Films of this cycle shared Hollywood's penchant for the artificiality and pomposity of costume dramas and its attention to production values; however, formal and psychological pyrotechnics typical of Hollywood's productions about creative personalities were replaced in late Stalinist biopics by academic solidity and didacticism.

The reception given by Soviet policymakers to *The Great Waltz* provides a clue to their vision of American cinematic products. While publicly declaring their support for American culture's progressive democratic values, in reality they preferred the kitschy aesthetics of the less discerning Hollywood products. This taste for Hollywood schmaltz contributed significantly to the formation of the so-called Grand Style, the most prominent stylistic feature of late Stalinism. Indeed, the monumental grotesquerie of such Stalinist epics as *The Oath* (1946) and *The Fall of Berlin* (1950) appears to have quite a lot in common with Cecil B. DeMille's pageants of the 1930s and their derivatives, the biblical spectacles of the 1940s–50s.

The 1940 exposure of Soviet audiences to two typical Hollywood products anticipated Soviet imports of American films in the course of the two countries' wartime alliance. All in all, in 1941–45 the Soviet Union bought 20 American feature films plus 2 Disney animated shorts.¹³ Among other things, they included two Durbin vehicles (her singing of the Russian-Gypsy song “Two

¹² Information on the release of these two films can be found in “Spisok amerikanskikh fil' mov v sovetskom i rossiiskom prokate, 1929–1998,” *Kinograf*, no. 16 (2005), 176. *100 Men and a Girl* was purchased in 1939, and *The Great Waltz* in 1940.

¹³ John Paton Davies, “Motion Picture Program for USSR,” to Secretary of State, 18 February 1946, quoted in David Culbert, *Mission to Moscow* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 263. The Soviet list of purchased American films (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva [RGALI] f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 152, l. 57) excludes *Battle of Russia*, 1943—probably because it was a documentary. (On the release history of *Battle for Russia*, see Siefert, “Allies on Film.”) No American films were bought in 1942, obviously due to the Soviet Union's difficult situation.

Guitars" in Frank Borzage's musical comedy *His Butler's Sister* [1943] affected the tastes of a whole generation of Soviet people); MGM's *Edison the Man* (1940), another model for late Stalinist biopics; Disney's *Bambi* (1942), an unusually emotional animated feature which was a thematic and formal revelation for Soviet animators;¹⁴ Lillian Hellman and William Wyler's *The Little Foxes* (1941), which impressed more sophisticated viewers with the seriousness of Bette Davis's acting and the expressiveness of Gregg Toland's deep-focus photography; several pro-Soviet productions, including the notoriously pro-Stalinist *Mission to Moscow* (1943); two disaster melodramas, *In Old Chicago* (1938) and *The Hurricane* (1938); the parodic musical comedy *The Three Musketeers* (1939); and *Sun Valley Serenade* (1941), a film that charmed Soviet audiences with Glenn Miller's performances, figure-skating numbers, and another female star, Sonja Henie. A 1946 report to the U.S. secretary of state noted that "among the ... pictures purchased, only one—Miss Hellman's *Little Foxes*—might be considered as freighted with social consciousness."¹⁵ Indeed, the 1941–45 American imports to the USSR constituted typical Hollywood entertainment, whose indisputable technical quality allowed Soviet filmmakers to familiarize themselves with recent technical developments in cinema, but whose main novelty was that war-exhausted Soviet viewers were able to see glimpses of another, exotically calm and comfortable existence. The importance of this American intervention in Soviet cultural affairs cannot be overstated. Although, obviously, not on a par with the many shocks of wartime, it still had a momentous impact upon Soviet life.

The wartime alliance not only brought to the Soviet Union a modest but steady and diverse stream of American films. It also invigorated personal contacts between Soviet and American filmmakers. From the summer of 1943, the Committee for Cinema Affairs of the USSR Council of People's Commissars was represented in Hollywood by Mikhail Kalatozov, the director of *Valerii Chkalov* (1941), a screen biography of a heroic pilot who flew from the USSR to the West Coast of the United States. The film was released in the United States as *Wings of Victory*, and it is quite likely that its positive portrayals of Americans facilitated Kalatozov's move to Hollywood. Kalatozov's most famous work, *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957), would bear more than one trace of his knowledge of wartime American melodramas—such as John Cromwell's *Since You Went Away* (1944), with its emotional farewell scene—which testifies to his use of the bureaucratic position of the Soviet envoy to Hollywood for a diligent study of its products and achievements.¹⁶ Kalatozov's personality comprised qualities of an outstanding

¹⁴ "After we saw *Bambi*, we began searching for fresh, fascinating themes and original expressive solutions with new energy," recalled the leading Soviet animator Ivan Ivanov-Vano. See his *Kadr za kadrom* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980), 126.

¹⁵ Davies, "Motion Picture Program for USSR," in Culbert, *Mission to Moscow*, 264.

¹⁶ "The success of American films," Kalatozov stressed at a conference of propagandists and film workers on 14 April 1945, "is determined by the professional qualities of their makers.... Ameri-

filmmaker and those of a politician and administrator;¹⁷ and his wartime sojourn in the center of the American film industry symbolized, among other things, a temporary symbiotic relationship between the Soviet political establishment and the Soviet film community in regard to American film culture.

Kalatozov's dispatches from Hollywood are a mix of expert curiosity and ideological righteousness, an authentic representation of that fascinating balance within Soviet attitudes toward American cinema and the American film industry that emerged during World War II.¹⁸ Among Kalatozov's responsibilities was the duty to select American films for Soviet audiences, and the way in which he approached that task tells quite a lot about the reception that awaited American cinema in Stalin's Soviet Union after the termination of the war alliance.

On the one hand, the Soviets were wary of American films' subversive potential, as well as of American film industrialists' promotional skills and their financial possibilities. On the other, they needed concrete actions that would demonstrate their desire to develop their relationship with the United States.

Soviet fears of American cinematic expansion were well founded. For example, a report from an Amtorg office in New York dated 25 June 1943 described a meeting of Commander John S. Young, assistant naval attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow (in the report, "mister Yong") with representatives of the largest American film studios. According to the report, the American diplomat, who was responsible for contacts with the Soviet side in the sphere of cinema, stated the need to conquer the wide-open Russian market. Young stressed the Soviet people's love for American movies and announced his plan to take back to Moscow 35–40 films, to be shown to the Soviet Cinema Committee.¹⁹ On 10 April 1944, Kalatozov advised the Soviet Embassy in Washington, DC, that the "American film industry, like all American industry, [was] extremely anxious about postwar perspectives," and that in his meetings with its heads, "each of them raised the question of whether the USSR was ready to open its market to American films."²⁰

While the Soviet political establishment pondered the threat of Hollywood's onslaught (and simultaneously tried to establish its own foothold within

can cinema has just one secret: high qualification of all sections of its personnel." See Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) f. 17, op. 125, d. 372, ll. 206–7.

¹⁷ In the mid-1930s, Kalatozov served as the director of Goskinoprom, Georgia's film studios; after his return from the United States, he became deputy minister of cinematography.

¹⁸ In the Ministry of Cinematography file (RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 80). Some of Kalatozov's letters can be found in Sergei Kapterev, "Mikhail Kalatozov: Pis'ma iz Ameriki," *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, no. 65 (2003): 196–216; and Valerii Fomin, *Kino na voine: Dokumenty i svidetel'stva* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 581–620.

¹⁹ RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 80, ll. 48–50—published in Fomin, *Kino na voine*, 569–71.

²⁰ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 291, l. 84—published in Fomin, *Kino na voine*, 615. Kalatozov's report was sent to Ivan Bol'shakov, chairman of the Committee for Cinema Affairs, and resent by him to Central Committee Secretary Aleksandr Shcherbakov.

Hollywood²¹—evidently, this was one of the main aims of Kalatozov's mission), Soviet cinema workers were establishing and re-establishing contacts with their American counterparts. In the spring of 1944, a Cinema Section was formed at VOKS. It comprised important Soviet filmmakers (Pudovkin became its president, Eisenstein the vice-president) and, together with the society's American Department, initiated a lively exchange of letters with the American film community. For example, Eisenstein communicated with John Ford and Frank Capra; former Georg Wilhelm Pabst associate Herbert Rappaport with William Dieterle; Pudovkin with Orson Welles; the theater and film director Aleksei Popov with Charles Chaplin; and the actress Zoia Fedorova with Bette Davis. An active channel of communication was established with the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization and the head of that organization, Robert Rossen.²²

The wartime atmosphere was definitely conducive to Soviet–American film cooperation and promised concrete benefits to the Soviet side: in 1943, the British producer Alexander Korda asked Pudovkin and Eisenstein to write a scenario for a screen version of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which was to be co-directed by Korda and Orson Welles (who was also to play the role of Pierre Bezukhov). In 1945, Lewis Milestone made, through Rossen, a proposition to produce a film about Peter the Great. In the same year, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., sent a letter about the possibility of making films in the USSR, suggesting *Life of Suworov* (the career of this Russian military commander had already become the subject of a 1941 Soviet production, directed by Pudovkin and Mikhail Doller) as the first title in the proposed series.²³

From Cultural Rapprochement to Cultural Warfare

By 1945, however, signs of future estrangement were already visible. Seemingly minor misunderstandings brought out intrinsic differences between the film cultures. Under the pretext of selecting films for import to the USSR, Kalatozov procured films for his superiors in Moscow, without paying anything to their makers. Obviously, this went against the business principles of Hollywood—as demonstrated by Columbia Pictures President Harry Cohn's angry letter to Ambassador Andrei Gromyko regarding the damage done to a print of Charles Vidor's 1944 biopic *A Song to Remember*.²⁴ (That careless treatment of Frédéric Chopin's life influenced, together with *The Great Waltz*, the postwar Soviet films about Russian composers).

Another complaint about Kalatozov's behavior was presented by a filmmaker who offered more propaganda potential for the Soviets than a relationship with

²¹ "Cinema in America represents the most powerful means of propaganda; therefore, we must try to use it in our interests as broadly as possible" (letter from VOKS representative Vladimir Bazykin, dated 13 October 1942, RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 14, l. 6).

²² Examples of such letters are contained in the archive of VOKS, in Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. 5283, op. 14, ed. khr. 181, 245, and 262.

²³ Documents concerning these proposals are contained in GARF f. 5283, op. 14, ed. khr. 181 and 245.

²⁴ GARF f. 5283, op. 14, ed. khr. 339, ll. 67–68.

the notoriously tough and vulgar Hollywood mogul. A letter written by the wife of William Dieterle (the author of the romantic Spanish Civil War drama *Blockade* [1938] and a number of high-profile, somber biographies of famous people, which provided an important model for postwar Stalinist biopics)²⁵ stated that Kalatozov had disappeared from the United States with *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939), *All That Money Can Buy* (1941), and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935).²⁶ These three films probably re-appeared in Moscow, at “closed” screenings in the Kremlin and other high places.

Relatively small differences in approaches to the relationship with the American film system soon gave way to much bigger ones. The Cold War was beginning to overwhelm all contacts between the Soviet Union and the United States, and this fully applied to cinema. The American press scoffed at the bluntly Stalinist themes of Mikhail Chiaureli's epics *The Oath* and *The Fall of Berlin*; while the Soviets were enraged by the 1948 release of William Wellman's *The Iron Curtain* (based on the case of Soviet defector Igor Gouzenko).²⁷ In the same year, the Soviet film industry produced its first postwar anti-American diatribe, Mikhail Romm's *The Russian Question*, which denounced the “reactionary” American press.²⁸ Earlier, on 14 August 1946, the Central Committee of the CPSU issued the notorious resolution “On the Journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*,” which severely criticized a number of prominent literary figures, who allegedly demonstrated a “spirit of servility toward the current bourgeois culture of the West.”²⁹ The declaration of war on literary deviations was soon followed by similar decrees concerning theater (26 August 1946) and cinema (4 September 1946) and, later, music.³⁰ This onslaught on culture was

²⁵ An analysis of Dieterle's screen biographies of famous people (surprisingly sober for the year in which it was published) stated that the filmmaker “tried to be ... truthful and realistic,” presumably under the influence of Soviet cinema. See Rostislav Iurenev, *Sovetskii biograficheskii fil'm* (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1949), 62. Probably unintentionally, Iurenev's study reveals one source of the Soviet biographical film cycle: prestigious, socially conscious biopics produced in the second part of the 1930s by Warner Bros.

²⁶ GARF f. 5283, op. 14, ed. khr. 339.

²⁷ The U.S. Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry sent information about preparations for the production of *The Iron Curtain* to Deputy Minister of Cinematography Mikhail Kalatozov on 12 April 1947 (RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 125, l. 30). On the further history of Soviet reactions to the film, see Irina Aggeeva, “Kanada i nachalo kholodnoi voiny: Delo Guzenko v sovetsko-kanadskikh otnosheniiakh,” in *Kholodnaia voina 1945–1963 gg.: Istoricheskaiia perspektiva*, ed. Natal'ia Egorova and Aleksandr Chubar'ian (Moscow: OLMA-Press, 2003), 395–97.

²⁸ According to its director Mikhail Romm, *The Russian Question* was “to be shot with exceptional speed, with a very short preparatory period, and an even shorter pre-production period” (Romm finished the script on 15 February 1947—that is, practically simultaneously with the preparations for *The Iron Curtain*). See Romm's letter to Minister Ivan Bol'shakov, RGALI f. 2456, op. 2, ed. khr. 22, l. 5.

²⁹ *The Central Committee Resolution and Zhdanov's Speech on the Journals “Zvezda” and “Leningrad”* (Royal Oak, MI: Strathcona, 1978), 42.

³⁰ See Efim Levin, “Piat' dnei v 49-m,” in *Iskusstvo kino*, nos. 1 (93–99), 2 (93–101), and 3 (77–91) (1990), regarding the situation generated by this decree and Soviet film workers' reactions to the charges of “cosmopolitanism.” The “anti-cosmopolitan” campaign actually started during

brought about by the fear of intellectual and popular unrest, a real possibility in a situation where the regime was evidently unable to continue its relaxed wartime policy and transform it into a set of practical measures that would remunerate the people for their wartime sufferings.

The Cold War added another dimension to the anti-intellectual campaign: most of the foreign, “cosmopolitan” products were regarded as dangerous and unacceptable.³¹ Classical and “progressive” foreign cultural figures were still extolled by the Soviet establishment; and some recent foreign films, such as Roberto Rossellini’s *Open City* (1945) and Rene Clement’s *The Battle of the Rails* (1946), were purchased for Soviet screens. Nevertheless, an almost total ban was put on foreign cultural products, and “decadent” Western modernism and “degenerate” Western mass culture were subjected to severe and primitive attacks. A telling instance of the cultural policies prevalent during the early period of the Cold War is Oleg Feofanov’s 1954 *Bourgeois Culture in the Service of Imperialist Reaction*, a book that gave a blatantly negative picture of contemporary Western culture and presented the United States as the main source of cultural contamination. Cinema was among the worst expressions of Western/American imperialism: in Feofanov’s typically colorful words, the “latest cinema blockbusters glorified, under various sauces, obscurantism, violence, murder, and war.”³²

In the late 1940s, the official Soviet treatment of American cinema was becoming more and more negative. A graphic case of this rapid change is represented by the VOKS speeches of Vsevolod Pudovkin, a filmmaker who had been profoundly influenced by American cinematic achievements (in particular, by American narrative-editing and film-acting), and whose wartime pronouncements had testified to his continuing interest in the work of American filmmakers and film actors.³³

At the end of the 1940s, the VOKS Cinema Section devoted a considerable portion of its meetings to discussions of the contemporary state of American

the war, in 1943, when a Central Committee decree criticized the filmmaker Leonid Trauberg’s “incorrect and harmful” introduction to the Soviet edition (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1943) of Ben Hecht’s screenplay to Jack Conway’s *Viva Villa!* (1934). According to the decree, Trauberg “had ignored the screenplay’s bourgeois-class tendentiousness” and, consequently, had been “captured by a reactionary bourgeois writer’s ideology.” See RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 214, l. 24, publ. in Kirill Anderson, Leonid Maksimenkov, et al., eds., *Kremlevskii kinoteatr, 1928–1953: Dokumenty* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2005), 659–60.

³¹ An important object of “anti-cosmopolitan” critique was Iulii Raizman’s *The Train Goes East* (1948). The film’s “cosmopolitanism” was revealed not just in its screwball-comedy situations and Mary-Astor-like heroine but, first and foremost, in its having been inspired by Leonid Maliugin’s wartime play *Road to New York*, based on Robert Riskin’s screenplay for Frank Capra’s *It Happened One Night* (1934).

³² Oleg Feofanov, *Burzhuaiznaia kul’tura na sluzhbe imperialisticheskoi reaktsii* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1954), 65.

³³ See, for example, Pudovkin’s paper “Actors of American Cinema,” presented at the 1942 conference on British and American cinema and published in *Zhivye golosa kino*, 196–203.

film culture and the film industry. These discussions represented an interesting effort to compare the state-controlled Soviet cinema with the principles of private enterprise governing cinema in the United States. In Pudovkin's words, the section's tasks included a "correct and sufficiently deep analysis of the political role of American film production."³⁴ He talked about a certain "American standard" in cinema and stressed—in accordance with the official ideological position—that it was not a "standard of the American ideology of an average American, and not even a standard of an average American's taste. It [was] a standard of attack, a standard of systematic onslaught, which began considerably long ago, and which [was] developing in a particular manner."³⁵

This statement by a veteran Soviet filmmaker who occupied a visible place within the Stalinist film culture demonstrates the Soviet position that was forming in regard to the cinema of its new adversary. According to the Soviets, Hollywood's aggressive behavior in overseas markets reflected the imperialist policies of the post-FDR U.S. establishment. Therefore, American cinema was to be confronted with powerful Soviet film propaganda and to be banned from the "socialist camp." In 1950, Grigorii Aleksandrov, whose films *Jolly Fellows* (1934) and *Circus* (1936) used American models as a basis for starting the genre of Soviet musical comedy and who had earlier studied American filmmaking alongside Sergei Eisenstein, both in the Soviet Union and in the United States, wrote in a high-profile publication dedicated to Soviet cinema's 30th anniversary: "In recent years, in capitalist countries millions of viewers have been subjected to criminal subversion by rotten servants of American imperialism, who are trying, under the banner of art, to corrupt peoples' souls and turn them into a *Landsknecht* army, to be used in new military adventures planned by the imperialists."³⁶

Mikhail Kalatozov, whose knowledge of contemporary American cinema and Hollywood was probably unmatched among Soviet filmmakers, made his own contribution to the anti-American campaign with a 1949 book, *The Face of Hollywood*. Sparse items of information were spiced in that publication with stories

³⁴ "Introductory and Concluding Speeches at the March 31, 1947, Meeting of the Cinema Section of VOKS," in Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Collected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1976), 3: 366.

³⁵ Ibid., 368. In the summer of 1950, comparing French and American screen versions of *The Count of Monte Cristo* (probably Robert Verney's *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* [1943] and the 1934 version by Rowland V. Lee), Pudovkin stereotypically contrasted Hollywood's "poverty of ideas and deadly formal banality, complete lack of artistic taste and imagination" with the French filmmakers' "solicitous treatment of the literary original" and "genuine artistic sensibility" (RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 429, ll. 23–24). Traditions of the "Old World" were certainly more welcome in the Cold War Soviet Union than North American commercialism; however, in this context a comparison of two cultural opposites provided a pretext for a perceptive description of some typical defects of a mainstream Hollywood production ("in accordance with the demands of the plot, the protagonists depict human feelings in a stereotypical, bored-to-death manner"; "everything is a cliché: joy and sorrow, moustaches and eyelashes, declarations of love and walking fashions" [ibid., l. 23]).

³⁶ Grigorii Aleksandrov, "Sovetskie fil'my na zarubezhnykh ekranakh," in *Tridsat' let sovetskoi kinematografii* (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1950), 199.

of American insensitivity and degradation. The “influence exerted by Hollywood and its films is more powerful than the influence of the church, the school, science, the press, and the Republican and Democratic parties,” wrote the future reformer of Soviet cinema. “In any newspaper, you will come across three notions: ‘president,’ ‘million dollars,’ and ‘Hollywood.’ ... Filmgoers are drawn into an artificial, totally false world, which is created by hundreds of films produced by eight major studios.”³⁷

Obviously, circumstances for the import of American cinema were less than favorable. Nevertheless, in the last years of Stalin’s rule Soviet audiences were exposed to a remarkably large number of American movies: together with German, British, and other productions, they became the staple fare of Soviet clubs, houses of culture, and, less frequently, regular movie theaters.³⁸ The reason for this was the condition of the Soviet film industry, which, due to the ravages of the war, could produce only a very limited number of films, while the postwar economic and psychological situation demanded that the Soviet population see as many films as possible. Movie screens had to be filled with something, and trophies captured by the Soviet army during the war (since the 1939 occupation of Polish lands and including the films moved to the USSR from the German State Archive) were a potential substitute for the dwindling Soviet film output.³⁹ In August 1948, the cinematic spoils of war, together with the items obtained during and before the war through commercial and other channels, amounted to 3,544 sound films.⁴⁰ Among them, American films constituted the largest group: 1,531 titles, as compared to 906 German, 572 French and 183 British titles.⁴¹

Most of the American sound films available in the USSR were made between 1936 and 1939, and in many of the films taken from the Germans 10 to 15 percent of the footage was lost due to the films’ wear and tear, as well as to cuts made by German censors and European exhibitors.⁴² Many of the films had subtitles in European languages; and Russian subtitles had to be printed right over them, which more often than not resulted in ugly black strips covering large parts of the frame (sometimes, a close-up of Greta Garbo or Errol Flynn would

³⁷ Mikhail Kalatozov, *Litso Gollivuda* (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1949), 27, 29.

³⁸ A 15 May 1950 report to Central Committee Secretaries Georgii Malenkov and Mikhail Suslov contained a complaint that only 13 new domestically produced films had been screened in the Soviet Union in 1949, while the number of foreign releases for that year was 61 (RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 427, l. 63).

³⁹ In 1945, Soviet studios released 18 films; in 1946, 22; in 1947, 22; and in 1948, 16—see Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 188.

⁴⁰ For the list of American silent films exhibited in the USSR, see Elena Kartseva, “Amerikanskie nemye fil’m y v sovetskom prokate,” *Kino i vremia*, no. 1 (Moscow: Gosfilmofond, 1960), 193–325.

⁴¹ A secret report signed by Minister of Cinematography Ivan Bol’shakov and dated 15 August 1948 (RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 123, l. 4).

⁴² RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 88, l. 6.

be half-concealed by such a strip, leaving quite a lot to a viewer's imagination).⁴³ Russian subtitles contained appropriate ideological corrections, and the films were usually preceded with ideological texts explaining their content in accordance with the official Soviet position.⁴⁴ Some films were also subjected to "editing abridgments."⁴⁵

Here we arrive at one of the most fascinating issues facing a student of Soviet film culture in the late Stalin era. American films were shown on Soviet screens to packed audiences, but the Soviet side did not pay a cent to their American producers. In 1951, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow was still trying to get back, through the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) and *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) (known to Soviet audiences as *Senator* and *The Dollar Rules*) and Jack Conway's *Viva Villa!* ([1934] seen in Moscow in 1935 as part of the First International Film Festival and known in the postwar Soviet Union as *Captain of the Freedom Army*), which were exhibited without permit. U.S. authorities were also trying to stop the exhibition of *The Three Musketeers*, which, according to an agreement with Twentieth Century Fox, could be screened in the USSR only between 1941 and 1946.⁴⁶

"Trophy" films were distributed according to the following pattern: German films were shown on the state-owned network, and they were usually dubbed (except for the songs, which Soviet audiences were allowed to hear in the "compromised" German language). American films were shown on secondary, "closed" screens, mostly at trade union clubs and houses of culture, with subtitles and under new titles (among the more striking title changes was the transformation of Raoul Walsh's gangster melodrama *The Roaring Twenties* [1939] into *The Fate of a Soldier in America*).

Films were selected for exhibition by special Central Committee "brigades." For this purpose they were annotated, with an emphasis on the films' political and critical qualities. The permission to show them to the ideological brigades was given by Minister of Cinematography Ivan Bol'shakov, who had direct access to Stalin—among other things, organizing private viewings for him and his entourage.

⁴³ These prints are still shown at Moscow's archival theater, Illiuzion, so a researcher can get an approximate experience of what Soviet audiences saw in the 1940s–50s.

⁴⁴ For example, John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939)—called *The Journey Will Be Dangerous* in its Soviet release—carried a text about the white colonizers' brutal treatment of the Native American population.

⁴⁵ Agitprop Department's report to Central Committee Secretary Georgii Malenkov, dated 1 August 1948 (RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 92, l. 11). Out of the 69 foreign films viewed at the department, 19 were rejected as "politically alien" or as "artistically inferior" (ibid., l. 11).

⁴⁶ This conflict is discussed in Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's secret letter to Minister of Cinematography Ivan Bol'shakov on 2 October 1951 (RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 335, l. 291).

It was at those private Kremlin night viewings that the fate of films, both Soviet and foreign productions, was really decided.⁴⁷ Stalin's taste defined the opinions of his subordinates: thus any *risqué* sequences were unacceptable to the leader's puritanical mind, while energetic action/adventure movies were his favorites. "For viewings, Stalin selected films himself," recalled Nikita Khrushchev in his memoirs. "Most of the movies shown to us were trophy films. There were many American films, many westerns. Stalin liked them a lot. He criticized them for their primitiveness and gave them correct evaluations but immediately ordered new ones."⁴⁸ Obviously, this was one of the main reasons why westerns and swashbucklers frequently appeared on Soviet screens (the Tarzan films constituted the most outstanding case). Socialist Realism's acceptance of romantic activism was, potentially, another reason for this benevolent attitude toward "bourgeois" entertainment.

Another type of special viewing was targeted at filmmakers, who were supposed to learn from the technically superior American cinema and produce Soviet equivalents of films liked by the leadership. Thus a 1943 Soiuzintorgkino (organization engaged in film trade with foreign countries) document concerning a new delivery of American films noted that George Cukor's 1937 melodrama *Camille* "should be definitely recommended for exhibition among creative cinema workers."⁴⁹ As we will see, Soviet filmmakers were good learners, readily absorbing Hollywood novelties and conventions and adapting them later to the requirements of postwar reconstruction. Until the start of the "acute" Cold War, American achievements were discussed by Soviet filmmakers at their trade meetings (Pudovkin's speech at the VOKS Cinema Section was part of such a discussion); this signified their professional interest in contemporary Hollywood products and, probably, the wish to recreate at least a small portion of that energetic discussion around American cinema, which had been conducted—largely by the same people—in the 1920s.

Final decisions about "trophy" films' appearance before Soviet audiences were issued by the Communist Party's Politburo. These resolutions included orders to the Ministry of Cinematography and the Central Committee's Agitprop Department regarding the films' re-editing, subtitling, and prefacing. The resolutions also stipulated the net profit that the Ministry of Cinematography was to get from the films' release. Thus in 1948, 50 foreign films "from the trophy fund"—among them 23 American productions, including John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and William Dieterle's *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937)

⁴⁷ For example, an 11 August 1951 letter from Minister of Cinematography Ivan Bol'shakov to Central Committee Secretary Georgii Malenkov stated that Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe* (1941) was being "prepared for exhibition ... in accordance with Comrade Stalin's instruction" (RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 335, l. 248).

⁴⁸ Nikita Khrushchev, *Epoch, People, Power: Memoirs*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Moskovskie novosti, 1999), 104.

⁴⁹ RGALI f. 2918, op. 1, ed. khr. 74, l. 89.

and *Juarez* (1939)—were to earn no less than 750 million rubles, including 250 million “from the trade union network” (which was to show all the American films and one British production).⁵⁰

Here we come to the American movies’ most numerous Soviet audience: the war-decimated people of the Soviet Union, who were to deliver the amounts of money stipulated by the 1948 Politburo resolution. In 1948, the material situation of the Soviet population was miserable, and people needed as much money as they could get. The abolition of food rationing and the introduction of a monetary reform at the end of 1947 did not bring the expected alleviation of suffering: the living standards of many families actually went down, and the people’s mood remained gloomy and pessimistic.⁵¹ In those conditions, people desperately needed distractions; and in its usual manner, Hollywood was to bring them its well-tested medicine—albeit without getting anything in exchange.

Many Russians who had survived the scarcity of the first postwar years (and the famine that swept the country in 1946–47), as well as political repression (in 1949–50, the Gulag population reached its peak, comprising 2,356,685 residents in January 1949), recalled that American (and German) films provided them with many of the things they could not find in real life—or in most of the films produced by Soviet studios.⁵² “I saw *Stagecoach* no fewer than ten times and *The Roaring Twenties* no fewer than fifteen,” writes Vassily Aksyonov in a book with a telling title, *In Search of Melancholy Baby*.⁵³ “There was a period when we spoke to our friends almost entirely in quotes from American movies.”⁵⁴

Even hostile publications such as the *Komsomol'skaia pravda* editorial of 18 October 1947 titled “Why Do Movie Screens Become Channels for Bourgeois Morality?” could not frighten away Soviet spectators. While intellectual kowtowing before the West was being energetically eradicated, the “common” people could enjoy quite a few products of Hollywood—in spite of its becoming a place “where the movie camera turned into a blood brother of the A-bomb, where it served a pathetic group of profiteers, possessed by money lust and hatred toward freedom-loving nations.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰ “Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O vypuske na ekran zagranichnykh kinofil'mov iz trofeinogo fonda’” (31 August 1948), in *Vlast' i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia: Dokumenty TsK RKP(b)—VKP(b), VChK—OGPU—NKVD o kul'turnoi politike, 1917–1953 gg.*, ed. Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1999), 639–40.

⁵¹ See Zubkova, *Russia after the War*, 40–55, 74–108.

⁵² Galina Ivanova, “GULAG: Gosudarstvo v gosudarstve,” in *Sovetskoe obshchestvo: Vozniknovenie, razvitie, istoricheskii final*, ed. Iurii Afanas'ev, 2: *Apogei i krakh stalinizma* (Moscow: RGGU, 1997), 233.

⁵³ “My Melancholy Baby” was the name of the song performed in *The Roaring Twenties* by Priscilla Lane's heroine to a restaurant crowd drunk on bootleg and James Cagney's enchanted gangster Eddie Bartlett.

⁵⁴ Vassily Aksyonov, *In Search of Melancholy Baby*, trans. Michael Henry Heim and Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Random House, 1987), 18.

⁵⁵ Feofanov, *Burzhuaiznaia kul'tura*, 104.

Negotiating with the Enemy

The Soviet regime was using American films in the same way it had used them in the first decade of its existence: to obtain money needed for the implementation of its grand projects, to satisfy the population's hunger for light entertainment, and to restore its psyche, shattered by war. This time, however, it was not ready to pay for the products it was using—the fact that they turned up in the USSR seemed to be fully justified by its contribution to the war effort.

The international aspect of this issue made itself felt quite quickly. In the autumn of 1948, an American delegation, headed by President of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA) Eric Johnston,⁵⁶ arrived in Moscow (his request for a visit was approved by Stalin)⁵⁷ with the aim of correcting the situation and selling to the Soviets 20 American films for a total of \$1,000,000 US.⁵⁸

Johnston first visited the Soviet Union in 1944 at Stalin's invitation and as Roosevelt's emissary. Being then head of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, he believed that "we can—and we must—learn to adjust to differences in external trade relations," upholding a "dedication to higher standards of conduct in business."⁵⁹ On 26 June 1944, Johnston met Stalin, who, according to Johnston, said "that he liked to do business with American business men because they always kept their word."⁶⁰

When Johnston returned to the USSR in 1948, he brought with him a proposal to negotiate the purchase of the first batch of American films as a step toward their systematic purchase; evidently, he used the fact of his 1944 meeting with Stalin as a means of influencing the Soviet negotiators. At that time, the American film industry was trying to restore and broaden its presence in overseas markets. As the Americans met with such problems as opposition to their motion pictures in Canada and discriminatory trade barriers set up by Britain,⁶¹ as well as a high tax placed on American films in France,⁶² they started to look beyond

⁵⁶ On Eric Johnston's initiative, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) was split in 1945 into MPAA and MPEA. See Ian Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign: The North Atlantic Movie Trade, 1920–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 227.

⁵⁷ Record of the conversation with Eric Johnston held at the USSR Ministry of Cinematography on 15 September 1948 (RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 210, ll. 75–76).

⁵⁸ Ibid., ed. khr. 152, l. 23.

⁵⁹ Eric Johnston, *America Unlimited* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1944), 229, 236.

⁶⁰ Eric Johnston's letter to Soviet Deputy Minister of Cinematography Vasilii Riazanov, dated 26 August 1949 (RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 210, l. 27).

⁶¹ Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 398, 422. Johnston actually planned to visit the Soviet Union in the summer of 1947 but had to postpone the visit due to the British government's decision to put a 75-percent tax on the imported films (RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 210, l. 75).

⁶² See Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, "From the Blum-Byrnes Agreement to the GATT Affair," in *Hollywood and Europe: Economics, Culture, National Identity, 1945–95*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Stephen Ricci (London: BFI, in association with UCLA Film and Television Archive, 1998),

their traditional sphere of influence. The Soviet Union was one of the new objects of their attention. Johnston's faith in the possibility of business cooperation between different economic and political systems, his messianic idea that America "must strive constantly to utilize all ... modern tools of communication to tell the democratic story,"⁶³ his awareness that illegally exhibited American films enjoyed huge popularity with Soviet audiences at all levels ("Let the Communists attack an American film and urge the people to stay away from it, and they go—in droves"),⁶⁴ as well as his confidence that Stalin's "sponsorship" could help him overcome inevitable obstacles, combined into a stubborn wish to secure a position in the Soviet film market even in the conditions of the intensifying Cold War.

It seems that initially the Soviets genuinely pondered the possibility of buying American films, although they had reservations about the quantity proposed by the other side.⁶⁵ Besides, they were not ready to pay the amounts asked; but being aware of the international situation around American films, they probably hoped—or at least tried—to get certain concessions.

The first discussion with Johnston, held on 15 September 1948, made the Soviet negotiators take—or pretend to take—a more skeptical position. Their superiors Viacheslav Molotov and Anastas Mikoian were informed that "at the moment Johnston [was] interested solely in the political result."⁶⁶ On the one hand, he was ready to let the Soviet Union edit the purchased films—that is, to make for it an exception from the general rule enforced by the Americans; on the other, according to Deputy Minister of Cinematography Vasilii Riazanov, he did not discuss economic details, was not interested in how many films the Soviet side was ready to buy, and did not have any specific list of titles for sale. Therefore, Riazanov suggested—in a very Stalinist manner—that, "in practice, it would be proper to drag out the negotiations on the purchase of films and not to object to Johnston's sending a list of films recommended for sale—in order to decline to make the purchase at the most convenient moment."⁶⁷

Nevertheless, Johnston's faith in the possibility of Stalin's personal intervention was not completely groundless. A decree of the USSR Council of Ministers, issued on 24 March 1949 and signed by Stalin, allowed the Ministry of Cinematography to continue negotiations with Eric Johnston "about the purchase of 20 American films for exhibition in the USSR." The decree, however, stipulated that

47–60. After his September 1949 visit to Moscow, Johnston intended to go to Paris to negotiate imports of American films (RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 210, l. 76).

⁶³ Eric Johnston, *We're All in It* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1948), 69.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶⁵ "The Ministry of Cinematography of the USSR believes that the proposal to purchase a large number of American films should be declined.... [However,] we consider it possible to open a preliminary discussion of our agreement to purchase a small number of American films" (informational note regarding the forthcoming meeting with Eric Johnston signed by Deputy Minister Vasilii Riazanov, undated but before 15 September 1948 (RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 152, l. 3)).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, ed. khr. 210, l. 71 (15 September 1948).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 71–72.

each film was to be purchased for no more than \$30,000 US.⁶⁸ A total amount of 3,180,000 “hard currency” rubles—the equivalent of \$600,000 dollars—was to be allocated for the purchase; it was planned that the distribution of the purchased films would bring the state a net profit of 500–600 million rubles.⁶⁹

On 26 March 1949, Manager of Sovexportfilm (which in 1945 replaced Soiuzintorgkino as the organization responsible for all export and import activity in the film sphere) Nikolai Sakontikov⁷⁰ wrote in a letter to Johnston that the Soviet side confirmed its interest in 24 films from the list of 100 forwarded by the American side in November 1948.⁷¹ Simultaneously, he requested an additional “large number of new films of the adventure, historico-biographical, and other genres, including those released in 1949,”⁷² and denied Johnston’s claim that the Soviets had agreed to buy 20 films for \$1 million.⁷³ On 18 May, Johnston sent Sakontikov a supplementary list that included “many pictures of the type specifically requested in [his] letter, such as adventure and historical biography” plus “a few pictures [with] unique classical qualities..., based on great works of literature, historical and biographical subjects”⁷⁴—that is, less recent films whose cultural content might appeal to late Stalinist taste.

In August 1949, a team of Sovexportfilm functionaries met the MPEA’s East European representative, Louis Kanturek, who had requested a meeting after receiving a telegram from his superior, MPEA’s Vice-President Irving Maas, with an order to discontinue the deliveries of films for selection until the film prices had been clarified. The Soviets informed Kanturek that three films—the biopics *Madame Curie* (1943) and *The Adventures of Mark Twain* (1944) and *Wintertime*, a 1943 musical with Sonja Henie—had been selected for purchase for a total of \$90,000. Simultaneously, they insisted that the negotiations could be expedited

⁶⁸ Ibid., ed. khr. 152, l. 89. According to Minister Ivan Bol’shakov’s 17 January 1949 letter to Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers Kliment Voroshilov, \$30,000 was the maximum amount paid for the American and other foreign films purchased in 1941–47 (ibid., l. 82).

⁶⁹ Ibid., l. 84.

⁷⁰ It was decided to transfer the correspondence with Eric Johnston from the Ministry of Cinematography to Sovexportfilm “to ward off Johnston’s tendentious claim” that Deputy Minister Vasilii Riazanov had agreed to purchase 20 American films for the sum of \$1 million (Minister of Cinematography Ivan Bol’shakov to Minister of Foreign Trade Anastas Mikoian, ibid., l. 38).

⁷¹ Eric Johnston’s letter, sent with the list and dated 19 November, stated—contrary to the Soviet opinion that the Americans did not care about what would be done to the purchased films—that, in accordance with the Moscow agreement, “while deletions could be made, there would be no additions or other changes in the pictures selected and that all translations and dubbing would be faithful to the original text”; it also confirmed the previous agreement that any picture chosen from the submitted list would be screened “in Moscow, Stockholm, or any other convenient place” (ibid., l. 23).

⁷² In December 1948, the Soviet side complained that the films submitted by the Americans had been produced, “with only a few exceptions, 5–10, and even 13, years ago and, being so old, [were] of no interest to [it]” (ibid., l. 37).

⁷³ Ibid., ll. 98–99.

⁷⁴ Ibid., l. 113.

by MPAA's consent to distribute Soviet films in the American market.⁷⁵ On 26 August, Johnston wrote to Deputy Minister of Cinematography Riazanov that the Soviet proposal was unacceptable; however, he stated that "in view of the slow progress in selecting [the] pictures," the American side was "willing to modify the terms of delivery" by breaking the "monolith" group of 20 films into three separate batches.⁷⁶

From 29 November to 16 December, Kanturek and Maas visited Moscow for another round of negotiations. They were persuaded to start the negotiating process anew, without reference to Johnston's original proposal. To the three films selected for the August negotiations, the Soviets added four more films. This time their selection was more exotic: *La Perla* (1947), a U.S.–Mexican adaptation of John Steinbeck's novelette; two pirate swashbucklers, *The Sea Hawk* (1940) and *Captain Kidd* (1945), and *Tarzan's New York Adventure* (1942). The price of \$27,000 per film, proposed by Sovexportfilm in the context of the recent devaluation of world currencies, was not accepted by the American negotiators. Nevertheless, the Soviets expected further concessions—in view of the lower film prices and the shrinking international market for American films (a number of "bourgeois" states had restored their war-affected film industries, while the new Soviet satellites practically ceased importing films from the United States), as well as the American side's evident willingness to advertise the Soviet purchase of American films as a political victory.⁷⁷ Of course, in the situation of the intensifying Cold War, the last fact could be regarded by the Soviets only negatively.

The course of the Soviet–American negotiations could have been affected by one more factor. News of contacts between ideological enemies in one of the most important ideological spheres was met with bewilderment among Soviet sympathizers in Europe, particularly in the newly established "popular democracies." In June 1949, Sovexportfilm's representative in Czechoslovakia, Lebedev, reported to Deputy Minister of Cinematography Sakontikov that "negotiations with Kanturek, and especially the purchase of films from MPEA, will bring about enormous reaction in all (popular democratic) countries, and in Czechoslovakia" (which broke negotiations with MPEA on the insistence of the Soviet side). "You cannot even imagine the seriousness of the situation," Lebedev wrote in his dispatch. He also asked for elucidation of such issues as the reasons for Soviet efforts to buy American films, the absence of a common policy toward MPEA, and the Soviet reluctance to buy films from independent American entrepreneurs, as well as from France.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Record of a conversation between Sovexportfilm's manager, Nikolai Sakontikov, and Louis Kanturek, 10 August 1949 (ibid., ed. khr. 210, ll. 20–21).

⁷⁶ Ibid., I. 28.

⁷⁷ Ibid., ll. 124–27.

⁷⁸ Dated 21 June 1949 (ibid.). In the winter of 1950, Sovexportfilm held negotiations with an independent Hollywood producer, Boris Morros (who also worked as a Soviet espionage agent and, after the mid-1940s, as a counterspy for the FBI). Morros proposed a sale of 20 American films produced by "independents" for \$20,000 per item; according to him, the purchase of these films

The negotiations dragged on with only one specific result: Soviet functionaries—led by Stalin—were able to enjoy recently produced American movies.⁷⁹ In a conversation with U.S. negotiators, which took place in Moscow on 15 July 1949, representatives of Sovexportfilm expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that some of the films sent to Moscow were 16mm prints instead of the commercial 35mm format.⁸⁰ It is quite probable that this sentiment originated with Minister Bol'shakov, who had to explain to his superiors the low quality of the projected image.

November 1949 saw a prompt Soviet publication of an abridged translation of Gordon Kahn's *Hollywood on Trial* (1948), a book about the House Un-American Activities Committee's actions against the filmmaking community and a kind of propaganda counterbalance to Western reactions to the Soviet "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign. The preface to that edition, signed by Grigorii Aleksandrov, explained Johnston's appointment as the head of the MPAA as an action contributing to the "first stage in the fascistization of American cinema."⁸¹ Kalatozov's *The Face of Hollywood* derided Johnston as a "latter-day savior of Hollywood," who "turned the MPAA into an official organ of American reactionary propaganda."⁸² Even though these denunciations were comparatively mild by Stalinist standards, they signaled the end of the Stalinist bureaucracy's interest in negotiations with the American film industry.

The aim of the Soviet negotiators was to demonstrate that the "Soviet Union [was] not walling itself off from the outer world, as [was] being claimed by its enemies." Instead, it was necessary that the "ideological direction and content of the purchased films satisfy the Soviet spectators' requirements."⁸³ In reality, eventually the Soviet side decided not to buy *any* American films. A secret letter from a deputy manager of Sovexportfilm to a deputy minister of cinematography stated this quite unambiguously, pointing to the necessity to "break negotiations at the present stage, before they were broken by the Americans, who would use this circumstance in their press against us." As a pretext for the cessation of the talks the letter recommended using an anti-Soviet statement made in *Film Daily*

"would deliver a powerful blow to Johnston's association and exert great influence on 'independent' entrepreneurs' attitude toward the USSR." Minister of Cinematography Ivan Bol'shakov was ready to sign an agreement with Morros, reserving for Sovexportfilm the right to discontinue it at any time (Bol'shakov's unsent letter to Stalin, *ibid.*, I. 69).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, II. 27–28.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, ed. khr. 152, II. 140–42.

⁸¹ G. Kan [Gordon Kahn], *Progressivnye deiateli Gollivuda pored sudom* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo inostrannoi literatury, 1949), 11.

⁸² Kalatozov, *Litso Gollivuda*, 120–21.

⁸³ A letter from Nikolai Sakontikov, now deputy minister of cinematography, to Sovexportfilm's representative in the United States (16 August 1949), with instructions about how to explain to the American side the absence of progress at the negotiations (RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 210, II. 43–44).

on 13 April 1950 by Louis B. Mayer, vice-president and general manager of Hollywood's major studio, MGM.⁸⁴

Learning from the Enemy

Although the Cold War was affecting the film trade between the nations in a most conspicuous manner, Soviet filmmakers diligently studied the work of their American counterparts and mastered the advanced technique of Hollywood productions. Though the American influence on the style of late Stalinist cinema requires a much more detailed study—mostly through textual analysis, as, for obvious reasons, Soviet filmmakers were not eager to acknowledge any such influence on their work in public statements—I would claim that it was considerable, building on the positive wartime experience and on the fact that it revived the “pro-American” leanings of Soviet film veterans.

⁸⁴ Dated 28 June 1950 (*ibid.*, ed. khr. 267, l. 26). The course—and eventual failure—of the negotiations on Soviet purchases of American films could be defined by several factors. Fluctuations in the position of the Soviet negotiators could be influenced by different attitudes—and power struggles—within the Soviet political and cultural establishment. On the one hand, in the difficult economic situation of the late 1940s the Soviet leadership was trying to raise the profitability of the state-controlled network of film distribution. Among other things, it discussed the option of taking over the trade union, cooperative, and other non-state distribution networks and, therefore, controlling the exhibition of “trophy” films in a more financially rewarding manner (for conflicting opinions on this plan, see RGASPI f. 17, op. 121, d. 729, ll. 11–12; and *ibid.*, op. 132, d. 253, ll. 100–3). In spite of all ideological attacks on the United States, the Soviets did not want to annoy the American side by openly exhibiting unlicensed films, so American films were shown on less conspicuous non-state-owned screens. Considering a possible change in film distribution and not wishing to lose a tested, solid source of profit, the Soviet establishment could earnestly consider the possibility of their legitimate purchase. On the other hand, the growing confrontation with the West made the more orthodox elements within the Soviet establishment demand a stricter policy toward foreign films, which competed with the scarce and generally less exciting Soviet productions with disturbingly successful results.

This conflict of economic and ideological interests was also reflected in the international arena. The Soviet Union's new role as the leader of an emerging “Eastern bloc”—consolidated in September 1947 by the founding of the Cominform, an agency that was to provide a propagandist counterbalance to the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan—required greater attention, at least at the initial stage, to the requests and grievances of its newly acquired satellites and allies. As noted above, the Soviet Union's separate commercial negotiations with the United States, held despite its own insistent calls for ideological unity and purity and alongside its efforts to limit the new allies' contacts with the West, could not but annoy and offend both the nations in the bloc and Soviet sympathizers on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

Last but not least, the negotiating tactics of the Soviet side can be regarded as an integral part of late Stalinist diplomacy: even in the absence of concrete results, the negotiating process could be used as a tool for obtaining valuable information about the specific object of negotiations and on broader political and economic issues. One may cite here the conduct of the Soviet delegation to the Paris Conference of 27 June–2 July 1947: regardless of the delegation members' pessimistic evaluation of their current efforts, they still considered it an important reconnaissance mission in preparation for a Soviet–American summit. See Mikhail Narinskii, “Narastanie konfrontatsii: Plan Marshalla, Berlinskii krizis,” in *Sovetskoe obshchestvo*, 2: 61–62.

Of course, the postwar situation can hardly be compared to the 1920s, when America served for the Soviets not only as an aesthetic but also as an economic model (this explains the Soviet film industry's interest in the standardized methods of Hollywood production in the mid-1930s). The late Stalinist regime, however, demanded that the dwindling number of Soviet films represented quality cinematic products. The regime's notions of quality were dubious; however, if we take into account the number of American films seen and stored in the Soviet Union, as well as the populist tastes of Soviet leaders, Hollywood was the most logical inspiration for the postwar Soviet film style.

Postwar Soviet films were predominantly Stalinist and Russocentric; nevertheless, they incorporated stylistic elements commonly associated with American cinema and aspired to reach the Hollywood level of quality. The latter aspiration should be considered a consequence of the Stalinist leadership's imperial ambitions—its efforts to create a universal language, which would be understood by everyone, domestically and internationally, and would communicate that sensation of grandeur which haunted the Soviet leader until his last days.

Imperialist overtones of the postwar Stalinist style had their expressions in Soviet cinema, architecture, literature, and music. In cinema, they were represented mostly by high-profile ideological productions, the scale of which was supposed to impress viewers even if the latter disagreed or did not understand the films' political messages. Such productions employed static compositions and stately rhythms, which embodied the grandiosity of communist construction and, simultaneously and paradoxically, the intrinsic link with old Russian art—that of icons, quasi-realistic pictures of the 19th-century "Itinerants," reflexive literary works, and, eventually, tableaux-like images of prerevolutionary cinema.

The first filmmaker to employ stylized archaic rhythms of the Russian past—and to do this with an unsurpassed creative brilliancy—was Sergei Eisenstein, formerly an avid proponent of rapid American editing. Eisenstein's example, set in *Ivan the Terrible* (1944–46), was followed by other filmmakers. In biographical films and propaganda pageants some of them brought the metaphors of stasis, created by Eisenstein and his team, to an almost unwatchable degree of literalness. Within the new nationalist format, which became the official style of postwar Stalinism, there was almost no place for American narrative methodology with its smooth, motivated continuity; balanced, centered compositions; and viewer-friendly editing. At first glance, postwar Soviet cinema was the opposite of glossy Hollywood films of the 1940s–50s, in which high production values and psychological expertise represented the sophisticated propaganda mechanism of a consumerist superpower.

One variety of postwar Soviet films, however, had important similarities with the products of Hollywood. The already mentioned biographical film—the "super-genre" of late Stalinist cinema—developed from the Hollywood biopic, rather than from such prewar Soviet films as Sergei and Georgii Vasil'ev's *Chapaev*

(1934) or Aleksandr Dovzhenko's *Shchors* (1939), in which romanticized depictions of the Civil War represented a dramatic turn from the de-individualized revolutionary epics of the 1920s. Although the slow rhythm and static compositions of Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) can be regarded as prototypical stylistic features that anticipated the style of postwar biopics even before his own *Ivan*, Grigorii Roshal's *Academician Ivan Pavlov* (1949) and Grigorii Aleksandrov's *Composer Glinka* (a second version of the composer's biography [1952]) are closer, in what I would call "the stylistic spirit," to the "serious" biographical films of Dieterle or to kitschy Hollywood paeans to artistic creativity. They provided outwardly Russian but essentially Hollywood-inspired versions of individualist melodrama, in which Science or the Motherland became substitutes for the romantic interest, and where solemn nationalist optimism was underpinned by a certain nervous gloom, so familiar to the fans of Irving Rapper (who, incidentally, was the dialogue director of *Juarez* and *The Life of Emile Zola*) or Douglas Sirk (whose films combined German and American qualities, both a visible presence in postwar Soviet film culture).

Whether the individualist overtones of American biopics influenced postwar cinematic representations of the cult of Stalin's personality is an open question. However, the sheer number of Soviet biographical films produced after the war and the fact that in its own biopics Hollywood treated historical facts in a notoriously irreverent manner point at least to an affinity between the clusters. The precedence of the Hollywood cycle and its accessibility to powerful Soviet viewers tempts one to think of a direct American influence.

Another important argument in favor of such an influence on postwar Soviet cinema is the Stalinist obsession with production values, demonstrated in practically all manifestations of the so-called "Grand Style," be it architecture, music, or cinema. American film technique was definitely the prime example for emulation, and high-quality American film equipment was a highly desirable commodity in the Soviet Union. The war alliance was certainly helpful in this respect: thus the use of the Mitchell BNC camera was a major contribution to the elaborate interior cinematography of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*.⁸⁵ When the wartime

⁸⁵ The film historian Barry Salt's claim about Eisenstein's use of this state-of-the-art equipment (see his *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, 2nd ed. [London: Starword, 1992], 243) is convincingly corroborated by numerous views of a Mitchell BNC in the production stills made by the film's second cameraman, Viktor Dombrovskii, during the production of *Ivan the Terrible*; a representative selection of these photos is presented in Inna Dombrovskaiia and Ol'ga Dombrovskaiia, eds., *Viktor Dombrovskii: "Ivan Groznyi" i drugie fil'my* (Moscow: n.p., 2006), 64–65, 71, 96. A Mitchell BNC camera arrived—with other American film equipment (including a Hollywood-produced camera dolly, also seen in Dombrovskii's photos [Viktor Dombrovskii, 64, 100]) and high-quality American film stock (ibid., 111)—in Novosibirsk from the United States in the spring of 1942. In May, it was scheduled to be delivered to the Central United Film Studios in Alma-Ata, where the filming of *Ivan the Terrible* was soon to begin (record of the status of U.S. import orders as of 5 May 1942, RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 79, l. 25).

alliance was superseded by the Cold War, the Mitchell BNC camera was still used for the shooting of such high-profile Soviet productions as the Cold War pamphlet *The Russian Question*⁸⁶ and the super-colossus of late Stalinist cinema, *The Fall of Berlin*.⁸⁷ Another wartime import, Max Factor makeup, continued to be used by the Soviet film industry even after Soviet–American relations sharply deteriorated—among other things, to conceal traces of aging on Liubov’ Orlova’s face in Grigorii Aleksandrov’s glossy comedy *Spring* (1947).⁸⁸

At the end of the war, the under-funded and under-equipped Soviet film industry (most of which had been evacuated to Central Asia) received a boost from Europe: it got access to the Barrandov studios in Prague, as well as to German film stock and film equipment. Lend-lease also contributed significantly to the industry’s upgrading, and the ambition to produce high-quality spectacles made Soviet filmmakers and bureaucrats look at high-key Hollywood productions and the expertise of their makers. The transfer of this expertise to Soviet cinema had an emblematic value: films were to become showcases for Soviet postwar reconstruction efforts.

The results of this drive for quality were felt soon after the end of the war. Among the 23 films produced in 1946, at least several features can be viewed as imitations of quality Hollywood cinema. Two of them were biopics: Arnshtam’s already mentioned *Glinka*, the initial Soviet answer to Hollywood renderings of famous composers’ turbulent lives; and Pudovkin’s *Admiral Nakhimov*, with sea battles rivaling the ones in Michael Curtiz’s *Captain Blood* and *The Sea Hawk*.⁸⁹ Scenes of sea combat figured prominently also in Viktor Eisymont’s *Cruiser “Variag”* (1947), a patriotic story from the years of the Russo-Japanese War, which, among other things, depicted the treachery of Western powers, giving an early representation of the unfolding Cold War.⁹⁰ And though Mikhail Chiaureli’s *The Oath* was almost surreal in its overwhelming Stalinism, it was, first and foremost, a spectacle whose scale and religiosity resembled the spectacles of Cecil B. DeMille. Just as spectacular was Aleksandr Ptushko’s color production of *The Stone Flower* (1946), a didactic fairy tale which won an award at the First Cannes Film Festival (*The Oath* was awarded the Golden Medal at the Seventh Venice Festival).

⁸⁶ Ibid., op. 2, ed. khr. 22, l. 79.

⁸⁷ Ibid., ed. khr. 74, l. 133.

⁸⁸ In August 1944 the film’s director and Orlova’s husband, Grigorii Aleksandrov, had asked for delivery of the makeup, including “one individual set (in a personal case)” at the pre-production stage, when the project carried a Hollywoodesque title of *Star of the Screen* (GARF f. 5283, op. 14, ed. khr. 262, l. 25).

⁸⁹ Michael Curtiz’s *Captain Blood* was among the eight films requested by Mosfilm Studios for “familiarization with the technique of marine cinematography in foreign films.” The list also included Henry Hathaway’s *Souls at Sea* (1937), Frank Lloyd’s *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935), and Alfred L. Werker’s *Kidnapped* (1938). See RGALI f. 2453, op. 2, ed. khr. 7, l. 6.

⁹⁰ Actually, Cold War motifs can already be discerned in *Admiral Nakhimov*, which used the example of past Russian naval victories as a warning to Western “adventures” on the Soviet Union’s southern flank.

All these films demonstrated a high level of attention to conventional quality, hardly a characteristic trait of the idiosyncratic prewar Soviet cinema. In spite of its close attention to Western—chiefly American—achievements, that cinema was pursuing its own special path. After the war, Soviet filmmakers began—under growing ideological pressure and in conditions of waning creative competition (only seven feature films were produced by Soviet studios in 1951)—to smooth out idiosyncrasies, taking as a model the standardized and transparent “classical” Hollywood style.

Probably, the most graphic translation of the Hollywood tradition of quality into Soviet terms was the already mentioned musical comedy *Spring*, produced by the connoisseur of American popular culture Grigorii Aleksandrov. *Spring*, which opened on 2 July 1947, was a remarkable mixture of Soviet optimism and Hollywood conventions, including the comparatively recent convention of deep-focus photography, perfected by Gregg Toland in the 1941 productions of *Citizen Kane* and *The Little Foxes*.⁹¹ Aleksandrov and his director of photography, Iurii Ekelchik, reproduced the deep-focus, low-angle shots of Welles’s *Citizen Kane* almost literally, using the opportunity to create multi-object compositions provided by deep-focus photography, for representations of comfortable apartments of the Soviet middle-class—and to demonstrate Soviet cinema’s newly acquired ability to compete with Hollywood.⁹²

The cinematic results of 1946–47 point to another feature of the postwar cinema: the growing generic demarcation of film production, arguably in emulation of Hollywood’s genre structure. Soviet ideology and national traditions prevented filmmakers from large-scale direct imitations of American genres, and the 1920s–30s had seen the emergence and formalization of their specifically Soviet equivalents (for example, the production film and the revolutionary epic). The increased importance of genre cinema in postwar Stalinist culture, however (the postwar genre hierarchy has been compared with the Classicist era)⁹³ envisaged further standardization of its components, for which Hollywood films provided a most convenient model.

⁹¹ Thanks to Mikhail Kalatozov, *Citizen Kane* was shown to Soviet filmmakers at the end of the war. Although some of them—for example, Fridrikh Ermler and Mikhail Romm in political spectacles of the 1930s—had experimented with deep-focus photography and deep-space staging, there is no doubt that Welles’s film—and, before it, Wyler’s *The Little Foxes*—impressed the Soviet film community by its inventiveness and its impressive demonstration of American cinema’s technical potential (proof of this is contained in Eisenstein’s letter to Welles, in which he praises the American director’s film in spite of Welles’s “nasty” (according to Eisenstein) evaluation of *Ivan* (GARF f. 5283, op. 14, ed. khr. 385, l. 1).

⁹² Although the deep-focus photography in *Spring* was quite successful (though not particularly inventive), Aleksandrov and Ekelchik failed in their emulation of Hollywood’s other forte, the romantic close-up: the film’s principal actress Orlova was too old for the role, and Ekelchik’s skills in this particular field were well below Hollywood’s level.

⁹³ Moisei Kagan, *Morfologiia iskusstva* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1972), 412.

A less noticeable example of American stylistic influence was constituted by the Soviet borrowing of elements of *film noir*. In the words of a scholar, “borrowing presupposes the existence of a receiving environment with motifs or subjects similar to the ones brought from the outside.”⁹⁴ Such a motif was provided by the great drama of the war. *Film noir* was a product of a certain dark mood, rather than a genre in the true sense of the word; although official Soviet ideology and aesthetics propagandized optimism, war sufferings added to some of the postwar films a distinctly dark tonality. In order not to be accused of “alien” pessimism, Soviet filmmakers formalized this darkness via the cautious use of American cinematic conventions—such as low-key photography and expressive camera angles—which their ideological superiors were, probably, quite used to after watching so many “trophy” films, as well as more recent productions delivered to them through Johnston’s efforts.

Certainly, the same conventions had been used by Soviet filmmakers in the 1920s and early 1930s, but in ideologues’ minds their use in that period was firmly associated with the negative notion of “formalism.” American thrillers and melodramas demonstrated a more motivated use of those atmospheric effects; and a number of Soviet films—*Cruiser* “*Variag*,” Boris Barnet’s *The Scout’s Exploit* (1947), and such Cold War propaganda pieces depicting American mores as Mikhail Romm’s *The Russian Question* and Aleksandrov’s *Meeting on the Elbe* (1949)—imitated them in a quite conspicuous manner.

After the advent of Khrushchev’s anti-Stalinist reformism, the Soviet regime undertook a number of propaganda efforts aimed at demonstrating to the outer world its liberal intentions. While Soviet ideologues continued to treat bourgeois influences as undesirable and dangerous (“Anyone who advocates the idea of political coexistence in the sphere of ideology is, objectively speaking, sliding down to positions of anti-communism,” Khrushchev proclaimed in 1963,⁹⁵ thus separating ideological issues and the current “relaxed” attitudes toward the West), the Soviet side transmitted to the American side its willingness to allow the Soviet population a limited but admitted and legalized access to American cultural products, including films. This led to the establishment of a cultural import policy, which continued—with inevitable fluctuations brought about by changes in the political relationship with the United States—until the Soviet Union’s collapse.

The institutional history of American cinema’s presence in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union took the form of another long round of negotiations, which started soon after Grigorii Aleksandrov made a proposal at the 1954 Cannes Festival to

⁹⁴ Aleksandr Veselovskii, “Poetika siuzhetov,” in his *Istoricheskaiia poetika* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1940), 506.

⁹⁵ Nikita Khrushchev, “Lofty Ideology and Artistic Craftsmanship Are the Great Forces of Soviet Literature and Art,” a speech at the second meeting of creative artists and party leaders, 8 March 1963, quoted in Priscilla Johnson and Leopold Labedz, eds., *Khrushchev and the Arts: The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962–1964* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), 178.

revive the Soviet–American dialogue in the sphere of cinema.⁹⁶ The American reaction was rather favorable: the two sides decided to renew the exhibition licenses for some of the “trophy” films. This pointed to the new Soviet leadership’s willingness to move to more civilized forms of doing business with Hollywood, as well as to Hollywood’s desire to forgive its unreliable partner for the purposes of getting a foothold in its huge market.

In 1956, the negotiating process was disrupted by the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Eventually, however, the two countries came to an important agreement on film exchanges—in the framework of the Soviet–American agreement in the sphere of science, technology, and education, signed on 27 January 1958.

Initially, American companies were to buy seven Soviet films,⁹⁷ and the Soviet side was to respond with a purchase of ten American productions—all purchases of American films were to be implemented via the mediation of the U.S. government (which was to control the content of the films selected by the Soviet side, as well as supervise—through its embassy in Moscow—the accuracy of Soviet dubbing and the completeness of the exhibited prints).⁹⁸ In the future, Sovexportfilm and American companies were to exercise the “right to conduct negotiations regarding the purchase and sale of films, and to conclude agreements in accordance with the clauses of the cultural agreement.”⁹⁹

The positive results of the negotiations became a triumph for Eric Johnston, who had begun his campaign to conquer the Soviet market back in 1944, during an “extended conversation with Generalissimo Stalin.”¹⁰⁰ The agreement brought to American audiences Mikhail Kalatozov’s *The Cranes Are Flying*, Sergei Iutkevich’s *Othello* (1956), Ivan Pyr’ev’s *The Idiot* (1958), and other recent Soviet productions. Soviet spectators were lucky to get, among other things, William Wyler’s *Roman Holiday* (1953, still one of the best-loved American films in Russia), Delbert Mann’s *Marty* (1955, the first film in the set to open in the Soviet Union, simultaneously with the premiere of *The Cranes* in the United States), and John Sturges’s *The Old Man and the Sea* (1958, this film was selected on the basis

⁹⁶ RGALI f. 2918, op. 1, ed. khr. 76, l. 298.

⁹⁷ The first American film to be purchased after Stalin’s death was Herbert Biberman’s *Salt of the Earth* (1954), an independent production about a Mexican-American strike and racial prejudice. Biberman, one of the blacklisted “Hollywood Ten,” belonged to that “progressive” segment of American culture which had been traditionally approved by the Soviet establishment, and although his film had been characterized in Minister of Culture Aleksandrov’s report to the Central Committee as being of “mediocre artistic quality” (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii [RGANI] f. 5, op. 17, ed. khr. 502, ll. 64–65), the Soviets decided to buy it and released it in 1957.

⁹⁸ Thus the U.S. government was against the sale of George Cukor’s *A Star Is Born* (1954) and Elia Kazan’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) to “the Soviet bloc” because of these two films’ critical depiction of American life (RGALI f. 2918, op. 1, ed. khr. 77, l. 67 [a translation from *Variety*, 3 December 1958]).

⁹⁹ A translation of the second Russian-language version of the concluding protocol, presented to the American negotiators by the Soviet side (RGALI f. 2918, op. 1, ed. khr. 80, l. 33).

¹⁰⁰ RGALI f. 2456, op. 4, ed. khr. 210, l. 27.

of Ernest Hemingway's popularity with Soviet readers; later, in 1962, Sturges was to change the Soviet cultural landscape with *The Magnificent Seven* (1960). After a decade and a half, with the assistance of the U.S. government, Hollywood was back in the Soviet market on capitalist terms.¹⁰¹

This significant victory in the contest of images that constituted an essential element of the Cold War had been prepared by the American cinematic infiltration of the late Stalin era. The Occidental imagery and streamlined form of American films undermined Soviet stereotypes, not only by cheering Soviet viewers up at a time of scarcity and involving them in an unorthodox vision and an alternative system of values but also by making the creators of Soviet propaganda and entertainment accept the ideological enemy's artistic conventions. On the other hand, American films brought money to the depleted coffers of the late Stalinist state—among other things, financing its struggle against America.

Soviet curiosity toward things American could not totally eliminate the essential basic difference between dynamic American cultural patterns and the considerably more static Russian aesthetic mode, which came to the fore of Soviet culture in the late Stalin period. A good example here is the case of Soviet animation. In the late 1940s–early 1950s, the “Disneyization” of the animated image, which had been actively pursued by an influential segment of the Soviet film community since the mid-1930s, gave way to slower narrative rhythms, constructed in accordance with the traditionally non-dynamic narratives of classical Russian literature.¹⁰²

Still, the American cinema's dynamism continued to attract and charm viewers and filmmakers brought up in the Russian cultural tradition. American stylistic influences on postwar Soviet films emphasized the continuing importance of American cinema—and the growing importance of Hollywood conventions—for Soviet film aesthetics at a time when the official language of Soviet ideologues almost invariably presented American films as immoral tools of imperialism.

The story of American films on the screens of the Stalin era reflected conflicts that, eventually, were to undermine the fundamentals of Soviet society: the discrepancy between ideological slogans and economic needs; the intrinsic defectiveness of existence-as-survival in a situation when the alternative world is able to deliver—in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles—representations of its own superiority; and the impossibility of completely preventing artistic and intellectual subversion of fossilized aesthetic practices. Paradoxically, in a situation when Hollywood was effectively banned from the lucrative Soviet market, American cinema formed a significant part of the Soviet segment of the Cold War world. It would not be an overstatement to say that it was those cultural factors

¹⁰¹ The last group of uncensored “trophy” films was released in the USSR in 1955.

¹⁰² At the 1956 International Congress of Animators, two French filmmakers praised their Soviet colleagues for creating “a slow rhythm, understandable to children”; a rhythm that “imparted to their films the character of an appealing illustrated book, the leaves of which should be turned over in a calm, unhurried, and loving manner” (Ivanov-Vano, *Kadr za kadrom*, 182).

that prepared the ground for Soviet society's transition to more open forms of everyday existence and intellectual life.

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