

Natalja Poljakowa

The Distribution, Censorship and  
Reception of German films in  
Soviet Russia of the 1920s

**School of Modern Languages, Literatures &  
Cultures**

Royal Holloway, University of London,  
United Kingdom

*A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy*

2015

### Declaration

I declare that this dissertation was composed by myself, the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Natalja Poljakowa

## Abstract

Despite the huge amount of research on European cinema of the 1920s, little attention has been paid to the influence of cross-cultural encounters on the trajectory of national film histories. This study argues that Soviet film was shaped by the reception of German film to an extent that existing scholarship has not acknowledged. It focuses on the impact of German and Austrian films on the revival of the Soviet film industry in the period of the New Economic Policy. German films helped to fill in the gaps in Soviet film distribution, as until the mid-1920s Soviet Russia was not able to revive its own film production and entirely relied on foreign film imports. However, all imported films were thoroughly examined, classified and, in most of cases, ‘adjusted’ to the Soviet ideology through re-editing. This thesis explores previously ignored aspects of the film exchange between the Weimar Republic and Soviet Russia: the process of selection and purchase, the censorship control over content, the reception of the films in little-known periodicals and film brochures and, finally, the influence of the imported productions on the Soviet audience. The thesis attempts for the first time to describe the mechanisms and the process of film censorship in Soviet Russia of the 1920s, with particular attention to censorship policy towards foreign cinema. Describing the German productions that reached Soviet film theatres after 1922, the thesis explores the attitude to foreign cinema in the context of the ideologically-uncompromising Soviet censorship, with the focus on the conflict between the inviolability of an author’s conception and the ideological necessity of film re-editing. The thesis offers an analysis of the cultural dialogue between the Weimar Republic and Soviet Russia on the basis of the rare archival material and the surviving copies of the re-edited German films in the Russian State Film Archive.

## Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Jon Hughes for his patience and academic support, for hours of insightful conversations about film and literature, and, most of all, for watching this long Russian-German drama with me.

I am grateful to Royal Holloway, University of London for providing the funding which allowed me to undertake my research.

I am very grateful to James Lewis for his first aid English language support, for being ready to answer my midnight mayday calls and for his incredible sense of humour that kept me alive when it was almost impossible.

I would like to especially thank film historians, archivists and friends from the Russian State Film Archive (Gosfilmofond), and in particular Petr Bagrov, Evgeny Margolit, and Anna Malguina - for beautiful nitrate films, poetry, Gérard and burning passion to cinema. Special mention goes to my colleagues in the Austrian Film Museum: Adelheid Heftberger and Oliver Henley who gave me a very warm welcome in the months of my internship, and the head of the archival collections Paolo Caneppele who made me fall in love with amateur films.

I would like to extend thanks to many people, in many countries, who so generously contributed to the work presented in this thesis. To all the Viennese for repeatedly breaking my heart and gluing it back again. To my precious friends in Berlin, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Bologna, Udine, Pordenone and Syktyvkar who gave me shelter during my research travels and helped with friendly support and much needed distraction.

The film festivals Le Cinema Muto in Pordenone where it all started and Il Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna where it all continued.

My London family – ScooterCaffe, – for proving that negroni-making can actually fund a PhD. Natasha and Ariadne Arendt for a magic cup of Crimean tea and a bit of witchcraft when I needed to keep on working. Louisa Jones, Ewan Bleach and Dakota Jim for jazzing it all up in the 1920s style. My closest friends - ‘Brainy Barmaid’ Georgina Richards Pringle, Joni Mimu and Emma Wilson - for inspiration, poverty, films, tears, despair, displacement, Chantal Akerman, talks, and friendship that has no boundaries.

Words cannot express how grateful I am to my family, and to my dear grandfather Franz Schweizer, who passed away when I was still working on my thesis.

And, above all, I want to thank Mitya, without whose love, care, patience and faith in me nothing would be possible.

## Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	5
<b>Note on Transliteration and Translation</b> .....	8
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	9
1. German-Soviet relationships in film in the 1920s.....	9
2. In the distorting mirror: Re-establishing connections between Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia .....	11
3. The problem of demarcating periods .....	14
4. The structure of the thesis and general remarks.....	19
6. What are the films? Notes on the research material.....	27
<b>Chapter 2: Between the imaginary and the authentic: Political, social and cultural implications of German-Soviet relations in film</b> .....	30
1. ‘Distribution is a de facto organiser of all film industry’: The importance of the reconstruction of foreign film distribution in post-revolutionary Russia...	31
2. Searching for balance: German and Soviet strategies of support for domestic production .....	35
3. Chronology of the development and institutionalisation of the Soviet film industry.....	37
4. The development and distribution activity of private Soviet film companies.....	49
5. The problem of the first German films in the Soviet market .....	59
6. Filmland Friedrichstrasse: Soviet film dealers in Berlin.....	66
7. Between reality and stereotypes: Russians in the Weimar Republic and the genre of Russenfilme.....	74
<b>Chapter 3: ‘Béla Forgets the Scissors’: Developing the Mechanisms of Film Censorship</b> .....	88

1. ‘A good school for a filmmaker’: Opening remarks .....	88
2. The origins of the Soviet film censorship system .....	95
3. Sources and methodology .....	98
4. The development of censorship policy: Imposing restrictions on film distribution under the NEP .....	100
5. Glavrepertkom and centralization of censorship control .....	108
6. ‘Scissors of revolution’: The work of the Soviet re-editors on German film .....	115
<b>Chapter 4: Maintaining ‘Unified Repertoire Policy’: Soviet Censorship Criteria as Instruments for Ideological Control .....</b>	<b>132</b>
1. Censorship criteria applied to German films .....	132
a) ‘Works of pornographic character’ .....	135
b) ‘Bul’varshchina’ .....	150
c) ‘Religious propaganda’ .....	161
d) ‘Mysticism’ .....	165
e) ‘Meshchanstvo’ .....	172
f) Other criteria .....	177
2. German films that received positive reviews. ....	182
<b>Chapter 5: ‘In Caligari’s Circle’: Soviet Reception of German Films .....</b>	<b>187</b>
1. From censorship to exhibition: Introductory notes .....	187
2. Soviet film periodicals and the first imported German films .....	189
3. ‘Art is never apolitical’: Ideological controversy .....	198
4. German film: Pro et contra .....	201
5. ‘Faustian soul’: German actors in the brochures of Teakinopechat’ .....	208
6. Reception of German films in Soviet literature and film .....	214
<b>Chapter 6: ‘Von der Psychoanalyse zum Traktor’: A case-study .....</b>	<b>225</b>

1. Psychoanalysis versus Reflexology: A Brief Overview .....	227
2. <i>Kulturfilm</i> or <i>Kul'turfil'ma</i> ? Instruments of Propaganda and Illustration..	239
3. Experiment against Entertainment .....	252
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	268
<b>Selected bibliography</b> .....	272
<b>Filmography</b> .....	293

## Note on Transliteration and Translation

In the text, I follow Library of Congress transliteration system, except for a few famous Russian names, where I have used the familiar form. Thus, instead of Lunacharskii, it will be Lunacharsky; instead of Trotskii – Trotsky; instead of Iurii Tsiv'ian – Yuri Tsivian. Titles in the text are given in original language at first mention. Titles of the re-edited German films in the notes are in Russian only. All German quotes are given in original language. All translations from Russian are mine unless otherwise noted.



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1. German-Soviet relationships in film in the 1920s

Film, as any other cultural phenomenon, actively involves a historical component. The youngest (and in the early 1920s still disputable) art form, cinema was able to absorb the experience of the past and to mirror the realities of the present. The study of the cinematic parallels between German and Russian cultures is complicated by cinema's ability to operate on several levels of knowledge: historical, sociological, culturological, and specifically filmic. In the 1920s, the years of ideological contradictions, cinema became a bridge that linked contrasting bourgeois and socialist worlds. It was the embodiment of modernity, first of all, through its reproducibility, in a Benjaminian sense, and with its consonance with the changing spirit and shifting tempo of the period that followed the First World War, film proved to be an ideal artistic form for the new postwar reality. Initially an urban entertainment that accompanied the growth of the cities and the reconstruction of social hierarchy, cinema was open to the masses, being principally orientated around a mixed, untrained audience from various classes and backgrounds. Due to its flexibility, it could perform different roles according to ideological need. The art of the masses, cinema corresponded with the socialist camp's desire to use film's rich educational and propaganda potential, to provide cheap and equal cultural opportunities for everyone. In the West it was primarily a form of affordable entertainment that often also comprised commercial and advertising functions, both shaping and reflecting mass tastes and habits.

The history of early Russian-German connections in film, which is the subject of this thesis, is not a complete process. Every year sees the emergence of previously unavailable documents and archival findings that attract attention to unknown aspects of this multi-dimensional interaction, signifying a general tendency: the beginning of scholarly comprehension of a complex topic that for many decades was left untouched. The research film festivals in Pordenone and

Bologna annually introduce newly discovered prints of German and Soviet films. In March 2011 the German Historical Institute in Moscow organized the first international conference devoted to the German-Soviet film studio Mezhrabpom-film and the problems of German-Soviet film relationships in the 1920s. A year later, in 2012, the Berlinale film festival devoted its retrospective section to the history of collaboration between the German production company Prometheus-Film and the Soviet Mezhrabpom. However, with a constantly growing corpus of works and with multiplying research materials, the German-Russian cultural dialogue in the 1920s is still largely a terra incognita.

We have, at most, a collection of unorganised historical facts and pieces of evidence that raise a lot of questions: is it possible to talk about an exchange of ideas between Germany's and Russia's film culture in the 1920s? If so, how equal was it and to what extent was it beneficial to both film industries? Is it important to our understanding of the trajectories of their national film histories? Was the national specificity of one film culture recognised and appreciated in the partner country? Are the involuntary and fragmented connections between Soviet and German film only reflections of the general political and economic shifts in Europe of the 1920s? Answering these questions can give us better understanding of how these national and cultural identities were reflected in film, in the face of the transitions offered by modernity. And, importantly, it can explain how the reflection of the Other, seen through film, became incorporated in the self-mythologising of both nations. It will be impossible for a single thesis to explore in full such a multifaceted theme as the German-Russian filmic dialogue in the interwar period. The most difficult task here is the need not only to be confident in the understanding of the historical processes of each particular country, but to look beyond the geographical borders in order to see the diverse and unsteady network of subtle cultural links between the two nations in, possibly, the most vibrant, dynamic and culturally diverse decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This thesis does not attempt to give final answers to the questions raised by German-Soviet interaction: it is rather an attempt to trace in detail the aspects of German-Soviet film exchange though a history of import and distribution, censorship and reception in the 1920s. This history, I will argue, is revealed through the films that these nations made,

watched, sold, imported, studied – and, finally, in the many films that were misunderstood.

## 2. In the distorting mirror: Re-establishing connections between Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia

Postwar history determined the closeness of two nations that for many centuries were linked through intensive diplomatic and economic relations. The end of the First World War changed the European map and charged western culture with new moods and trends. It saw the development of unique artistic movements that co-existed and overlapped in an unprecedented way. The fall of political regimes and the pace of technological progress influenced the paths of cultural developments which, paradoxically, brought to the forefront both the stagnating anxieties of the ‘lost generation’ and the rebellious spirit of modernity.

The War produced contradictory tendencies in European countries: the rise of nationalism and, at the same time, an openness to cosmopolitanism and cultural pluralism. In most European countries it had evoked intense interest not only in geographical neighbours but also in distant nations along with the understanding that, in order to catch up with industrial development, national culture could not be closed and self-contained.

The Weimar Republic was established in 1919, and only three years after this date the formation of the Soviet Union was officially proclaimed. Germany entered the new historical era weakened by reparations, exhausted by economic troubles and experiencing a crisis of national identity. Soviet Russia – which aimed to reconstruct and rearrange everything from social stratification, moral norms and the way of life to the face of its cities and towns – was in ruins in the early 1920s after a long period of revolution and war. The change of regimes sharpened the social and political contradictions and divisions in both countries. The Soviet Union saw in Germany – the largest centre of the workers’ movement in Europe – its major political hopes for the future ‘world revolution’ and also a strategically important economic partner. These plans included hopes for partnership in film distribution. Germany and Russia, two nations which, probably, tended to nurture

cultural and national myths more than others, often falling into similar historical traps, were in the 1920s the two most influential film-producing countries on the continent. Their mutual interest, the attraction to each other's differences and, at the same time, frequent misunderstanding of each other were rendered in their cinematic connections. The film historian Evgenii Margolit, in his overview of the connections between German and Soviet film in the 1920s and 1930s, calls the way the two are related a double 'mirror reflection'.<sup>1</sup> The image of *mise en abyme* characterizes the relationship between the two film cultures accurately – except the mirrors are distorted. The shell-shock of the First World War, the cardinal change in the political systems in the late 1910s, the economic crisis, the rejection by other countries – the two nations everywhere experienced parallel traumas. However, the differences in the historical paths of the Weimar Republic and Soviet Russia in the 1920s become evident when one looks at the development of film distribution and production. The differences in economics and ideology resulted in a lack of equality and partnership: throughout the 1920s one of the two film industries constantly overpowered the other. The apparent historical proximity of Germany's 'roaring twenties' and Soviet Russia's decade of struggle with identity reconstruction is misleading: despite the numerous attempts to establish both economic alliance and common cultural grounds, the two film cultures remained disconnected. The attempt to keep pace with each other – revealed by the introduction of the NEP (New Economic Policy) as 'capitalism under socialism' in Soviet Russia, and the rise of the Left Wing in Germany – was ultimately unsuccessful for both countries. The rebuilding of the existing system of values under the influence of Marxist doctrine in Soviet Russia led to the cultivation of an image of Germany as a 'cultural enemy' whose art was infused with well-hidden petit-bourgeois morality. For the Weimar Republic, Soviet Russia opened new marketing possibilities while feeding the mass imagination with tales of exoticism and fears of the 'Red Threat'.

---

<sup>1</sup> Margolit writes: 'Soviet Russia and pre-Hitlerian Germany (particularly its left wing) look into each other like *in the mirror* in which their past and future, correspondingly, are reflected.' See: Evgenii Margolit, 'Kak v zerkale: Germaniia v Sovetskom igrovom kino 1920-30-kh gg.)', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 59, 2002, p. 61.

Despite all this, the two cultures needed each other. The Soviet film repertoire of the early 1920s was largely borrowed from Germany. German film's theory, practice and aesthetics were reshaped under the influence of the new Soviet films in the late 1920s. The more visible the misinterpretations, misreadings and mistakes that surround the history of Russian-German encounters in the 1920s, the more striking seems the truly magnetic mutual attraction experienced by the two cultures. The richness of the material relating to German-Russian filmic encounters is not in question. Many of the key themes and trends in Weimar and Soviet culture of the 1920s involved engagement with other cultures, including the German-Russian transnational filmic alliances of the early 1920s, Russian cineastes and film stars in Weimar Berlin, the *Russenfilm* genre in Germany, Germans travelling to the Soviet Union, international debates on the pages of the film periodicals of the time, Expressionist screen images in Soviet cinema and literature, the Soviet avant-garde and Bauhaus, Sergei Eisenstein and Germany, the tragic fate of the German actors of *Mezhrabpom* in Stalinist Russia, and so on. Thus interpretation of the images, motifs, methods, styles and artistic movements in the 1920s is impossible without a knowledge of the details of this cultural exchange. This richness of the history of German and Soviet encounters in the 1920s makes the subject in question rather broad. During these ten years the power relations between the two film industries changed considerably. In the 1920s, every year – even every month – brought new reforms in distribution policies and production: the beginning of foreign film imports in Soviet Russia in 1922, the peak in the popularity of Soviet films in Germany between 1926 and 1929, the rejection of German films by the Soviets in 1929, the attempts to create a Russian-German film production alliance in the late 1920s. Throughout the 1920s the content and the form of films, as well as the audiences' preferred genres, settings and faces, were constantly changing in both countries. Fluctuating censorship criteria allowed the distribution of certain films in the early 1920s, only for them to be banned a few years after release. The beginning of imports of German film by the Soviets triggered the ten-year search for a common language in film. This is reflected, for instance, in Sergei Eisenstein's 'romance' with Germany and its culture, the history of his regular visits to Berlin and his long-term interest in the

work of prominent German filmmakers. The disagreements between the Soviet and the German film theorists and artists in the late 1920s resulted in mutually enriching debates on the pages of the film periodicals. Moreover, both the German and the Soviet film industries had to withstand the growing domination of American film over their markets. For the Soviets, I would argue, this dilemma was resolved in favour of the Germans: despite a general vogue for ‘Americanism’ (as the both the Germans and Soviets called it), I will argue that German film remained dominant in Soviet distribution, and continued to be relied on by the censors and the re-editors.

### 3. The problem of demarcating periods

Although the cultural interference between the two national cinema cultures extends through several decades of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, I have limited my analysis to the 1920s, by which I mean the period roughly starting from the formation of the Weimar Republic and the Soviet Union and ending in the early 1930s, before the ideological pressure in both countries became asphyxiating. This study is by no means an attempt to assign a definitive period to the analysis of international influences in Russian and German cinema of the 1920s but rather to systematize the available information on the cross-cultural links and thus to pave the way for future research on this inexhaustible topic.

On 14 April 1921 the Soviet government proclaimed the turn towards the New Economic Policy. The Soviet film publicist and director Nikolai Lebedev considered 1921 to be the ‘lowest point in the development of Soviet film industry’ – however, it was also the year when the need to revive film distribution through the encouragement of foreign film imports was recognized. First purchases of foreign films began in 1922. The end-point of my period of study is determined by several factors. The end of the 1920s was characterized by the strengthening pressure exerted by Stalin’s regime on the film industry and the almost total interruption of foreign film imports in 1930, the expiration date of the last distribution licenses given to German films. Moreover, the early 1930s was the time of the arrival of ‘talkies’, with their new approaches to filmmaking technique.

At the end of the 1920s and the 1930s attempts were made to combine the best aspects of the German and the Soviet film cultures to create new left film. The German-Soviet cooperation that was launched within the *Internationale Arbeiterhilfe* (IAH) inspired and produced the films of Leo Mittler, Slatan Dudov, Joris Ivens, Margarita Barskaia, Phil Jutzi and others. These films often combined the ‘Weimar touch’ with its visual expressiveness, lyricism in the depiction of characters, Soviet-influenced montage techniques and a traceable link with reality rather than fantasy, in order to create films of unprecedented political and poetic power. The German-Soviet film collaboration had a short life. Strengthening dictatorship and purges in the Soviet Union put an end to the creative experiments. Many of the German actors who worked in Soviet Russia in the early 1930s – for example, the famous actresses Marija Lejko, Hilde Jennings, Carola Neher – became victims of Stalin’s repression.

The partnership of Mezhrabpom and the German studio Prometheus is, perhaps, the most extensively researched topic in the history of the German-Soviet relationships in film in the 1920s.<sup>2</sup> For this reason it will not be my intention to focus on it. This thesis explores previously ignored aspects of the film exchange between the Weimar Republic and Soviet Russia: the process of selection and purchase, the censorship control over content, the reception of the films in little-known periodicals and film brochures and, finally, the influence of the imported productions on the Soviet audience. It is structured as a collection of sketches that describe the little-researched history of German film in Soviet Russia: from the selection of German films for Soviet distribution, to their censorship, re-editing and reception. The investigation of these questions shows how German film shaped the understanding of filmmaking in Soviet Russia; how the viewing and editing of German films became a schooling ground for the Soviet film avant-garde; how the re-edited films changed the Soviets’ understanding of European and German culture.

---

<sup>2</sup> See: *Die rote Traumfabrik: Meshrabpom-Film und Prometheus 1921-1936*, ed. by Günter Agde und Alexander Schwarz (Berlin: Deutsche Kinemathek, 2012)

As Yuri Tsivian tells us, in pre-revolutionary Russia the ban on the import of the German films was imposed in 1915.<sup>3</sup> In 1922, when the first purchases of foreign films started, the old German productions that were not familiar to the Soviet spectator were among the first films to enter the market. The first Expressionist films and the newest box-office hits were distributed at the same time by private film firms. In 1922 *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler* (1922) by Fritz Lang was shown to audiences in Moscow and St Petersburg, and in the following year Goskino, the major state film company, officially started the intensive import and promotion of foreign films within the country.<sup>4</sup> Some names of European directors were already familiar to audiences from previous years, among them Urban Gad, Otto Rippert and Adolf Gärtner. Even in the first years of the First World War, inventive pre-revolutionary cinephiles like Robert Perskii managed to import banned German productions (for instance, films with Henny Porten) to Russia, claiming them to be the production of neutral countries like Sweden.<sup>5</sup> The Russian audience, thus, was not totally unfamiliar with the style and the main stars of German cinema. Some of the old pictures continued to be shown in cinemas after the Revolution and after Lenin's nationalisation of film property in 1919, but there were several significant changes. Most of the films that were inherited from Imperial Russia were, with a few exceptions, now recognised as bourgeois and, therefore, had to go through re-examination and cutting. At the beginning of the 1920s, before the Soviet mechanisms of film control were fully established and the film repertoire revised, the programmes in urban cinemas was based simply on any films that were available for projection. The first task of the newly-established firms under the NEP was to develop their import policy and to conduct basic audience research, in order to avoid the purchase of commercially unsuccessful

---

<sup>3</sup> Yuri Tsivian, 'Between the old and the new: Soviet film culture in 1918-1924', in *Griffithiana*, XIX, 55-56, September 1996, pp. 14-63.

<sup>4</sup> Nataliia Egorova, 'Nemetskie fil'my v sovetskom prokate'. [Catalogue of German films distributed in the Soviet Union], in *Kino i vremia: Biulleten'*, Vypusk IV (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1965), pp. 380-7.

<sup>5</sup> See Rashit Iangirov, 'Kinomosty mezhdru Rossiiei i Germaniiei: Epokha Illuzionov (1896-1919)', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 58, 2002, p. 173.



films. The first, rather primitive, strategy that was used in purchases was to buy anything available and affordable before the competitor firms had a chance to do so. With the accumulation of money from distribution the agents became more selective. If in the beginning they simply demanded from the German re-sellers entertaining films, in less than a year the selection became more sophisticated. They learned that different genres are demanded according to the location of a cinema; how to avoid censorship filters and how to market their films for various audiences; how to re-sell the distribution rights and buy packages of already re-edited films for a cheaper price.

From the early 1920s the content of non-domestic film productions was regarded as inappropriate and even dangerous for the Soviet spectator, particularly given that the cinema network was constantly expanding. The potential ‘harm’ caused by the films produced by ‘class enemies’ – pre-revolutionary or foreign – was often emphasized in the media and official documentation. The relatively small community of urban cinema-goers was soon enlarged by proletarians, peasants and the army who were carefully protected by the state from any provocative cultural content. Lenin’s famous words about cinema being ‘the most important among all arts’, as quoted by Lunacharsky, signalled the forthcoming rapid changes in film distribution policy and, above all, the future development of new censorship rules and mechanisms. The instructional and educational roles of cinema – as the visual language understandable even to the largely illiterate rural population of the newly-born state – were pushed to the foreground: it became necessary to look for such films that could be potentially interesting, educational and, most importantly, ideologically safe for the particular groups of audience. In other words, the class difference of the film audience determined the need to promote certain films to certain categories of spectators, at the same time limiting them for others. In 1922 the Government officially confirmed the necessity of the regulation and the strict control over the growing number of foreign films that invaded the country. This year was marked by the reforms of the censorship apparatus that until the late 1920s was responsible for the control and re-working of German films.

Even if the reconstruction of domestic filmmaking was among the priorities of the Soviet government, the process of production revival came with hardships: with a lack of studios, of cheap film stock, suitable equipment and trained specialists, film import proved to be the easiest and the quickest way of satisfying the public demand for films. As Jay Leyda points out in his groundbreaking monograph *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, ‘both production and distribution were to be aimed at becoming self-supporting, once foreign capital had proved this necessary breathing interval’.<sup>6</sup> Wishing to break with the pre-revolutionary filmmaking traditions and still looking for a solid foundation for the developing proletarian cinema culture, the Soviets required role-models and examples that could assist with the creation of their own ideologically-grounded and, in the future, economically competitive film art. The adjustment of German films for the Soviet screen served as a good school for Soviet filmmaking. ‘To neutralize the poison of foreign films and to use them,’- this served as the motto of the Soviet censorship for the re-editor Sergei Vasiliev.<sup>7</sup>

For the German film industry the year 1921 was also an important milestone. After the international success of Robert Wiene’s *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* (1920) and the rapid development of the UFA studio that in 1921 merged with Decla-Bioscop to become a filmmaking monopoly, the Weimar Republic entered the Soviet market as a successful producer of films and one of the indisputable leaders in world film export. By the middle of the 1920s, when Soviet film production was only beginning to develop, the Weimar Republic already had a solid repertoire of films, sophisticated censorship and critical apparatus, specialized film periodicals, its own prominent directors, cameramen and world-famous film stars, and large film studios like Babelsberg. However, the Soviets, who constantly analysed the German film industry, considered the German approach to filmmaking to be rather conservative and static. Only a few years after the beginning of the NEP the Soviets managed to rebuild their film production and to bring their own revolutionary films to Europe.

---

<sup>6</sup> Jay Leyda, *Kino, a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 156.

<sup>7</sup> *Brat’ia Vasil’evy: Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*. Tom 1 (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1981), p. 159.

In the early 1920s the German cinematic style was recognized worldwide: Expressionist film with its stylized exaggerations, its artificial geometric settings, indoor filming, the deep contrast in lighting, as well as its mysterious villains and framed narratives (inherited from the literature of Romanticism) became particularly fashionable after the success of *Der Student of Prag* (1913, Stellan Rye), *Der Golem* (1920, Carl Boese, Paul Wegener) and *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari*.

Newly-born Soviet Russia with its growing number of cinema-goers opened up new possibilities for the Weimar Republic. At the beginning of 1925 the Weimar journal *Der Film* published a statistical report asserting that 80% of all foreign films that were exported to the Soviet Union during the previous year were German.<sup>8</sup> At that point Russian cinema was still known in Europe only through some slow pre-revolutionary pieces and the stylized dramas produced by Russian émigrés. However, German curiosity towards Russia, both old and new, remained steady throughout the 1920s, revealing itself in the German audience's affection for the exoticism of the so-called *Russenfilme*. The popularity of the 'Russian theme' soon provoked an interest in the new way of life in the 'authentic' parental state, which paved the way for the European success of Russian films in the late 1920s.

#### 4. The structure of the thesis and general remarks

The structure of my thesis presents the analysis of German film in the Soviet context in three major aspects: 1) distribution choices and the process of purchase, 2) censorship and re-editing, and 3) reception and cultural influence. By arranging material this way I want to show chronologically the stages of the consumption of German film by the Soviets, its metamorphoses and reflections in Soviet film culture. In the chapters of this thesis I will concentrate on the selection of suitable films for distribution and the development of censorship criteria as a response to the need to rework German films for the Soviet repertoire. Chapter 2 will outline

---

<sup>8</sup> Egorova, pp. 380-1.

the context and the main factors that determined the characteristics of the Russian-German interaction in film. The chapter focuses on various details of this interaction, mainly on when, how and in what circumstances German films were purchased for Soviet distribution, and by whom they were purchased. The discussion is followed by a closer investigation of *Russenfilme*, the specific genre of stylized films that became popular in the Germany of 1920s. Russian-style films, I will argue, transformed the existing mass stereotypes into recognizable visual codes that were later re-invented in the late 1920s through Soviet avant-garde imagery. Chapter 3, the title of which derives from Eisenstein's article that juxtaposes the revolutionary importance of editing with the conservative sentimentality of western cinema, investigates the functions of the Soviet censorship institutions in relation to German films. There has been little research on Soviet control over film, and the thesis attempts for the first time to describe the mechanisms and the process of film censorship in Soviet Russia of the 1920s, with particular attention to the censorship policy towards foreign cinema. Giving examples of the German productions that reached Soviet film theatres after 1922, the chapter 4 explores the attitude to foreign cinema in the context of the ideologically uncompromising Soviet censorship, with the focus on the conflict between the inviolability of an author's conception of their art and the ideological necessity of film re-editing. Chapter 5 is devoted to the various aspects of reception of the German films that managed to pass censorship filters. It investigates the wide range of critical responses given to these films in Soviet film periodicals, articles, essays and feuilletons published throughout the 1920s. Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the modification of the *Aufklärungsfilm* and *Kulturfilm* genres in the Soviet context through the examples of G.W. Pabst's *Geheimnisse einer Seele* and Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Mekhanika Golovnogo Mozga*, both released in 1926. I will demonstrate that these films, although marginal in the careers of both directors, can be regarded as visual manifestations of two counterpoised theoretical approaches to filmmaking, provoked by the disagreement between Freudian psychoanalysis and Pavlovian reflexology.

For the purpose of this thesis I will use the term 'German film' in a broader sense, referring to the language rather than to the country of production. The

Austrian films that were often made in collaboration with the Weimar Republic and the German-released films with an Austrian cast/director are included in the term. Moreover, Austrian films, many of which were imported to Soviet Russia along with the films produced by the Weimar Republic, were rarely identified as such by the Soviet film critics and censors who tended to apply the label ‘German’ to all German-language films. The partial exception to the rule is the term ‘Viennese film’ that was used to describe a genre specification within German film, i.e. operetta-like comedies and monumental costume films.

#### 5. Restoring history: A brief literature overview

Many aspects of the German-Russian relationships in the 1920s were forbidden topics during the Soviet Union’s existence. It would be, however, a mistake to assume that they were absolutely neglected after Stalin’s radical reforms in the film industry after 1936. The need to focus on German-Russian cross-fertilizations in the silent era was repeatedly mentioned by scholars in Germany, Russia and other countries from the late 1940s onwards. For many decades, however, this topic was, on the one hand, left in the shadow of the grand figures in Weimar and Soviet film industry that, undoubtedly, deserved to be prioritized by scholarship. On the other hand, the topic was inaccessible due to the ideological pressure of a regime that jettisoned hundreds of dissident names of the early Soviet film elite from the historical records. As Dietmar Hochmuth points out in his review of the Mezhrabpom conference held in Moscow in 2011, certain facts of this history, including even the most tragic and silenced episodes that followed the country’s ‘Stalinization’ in the early 1930s, were well-known but, due to the inaccessibility of documents, the geographical distance between the archives, the loss of many films of the silent era, were never the subject of complete and consistent research.<sup>9</sup> However fragmented, disintegrated and incomplete, German-Russian film relations in the 1920s do have their own research history. The corpus of critical works that, in differing degrees, touch upon this subject could be divided into

---

<sup>9</sup> Dietmar Hochmuth, ‘Obryvy i nerezkosty. Mezhdunarodnaia konferentsiia “Mezhrabpomfil”m i nemetsko-russkie sviazi v sfere kinematografa v 1920-e i 1930-e gody”’, *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 112, 2011, p. 455.

several categories. The pioneering monographs on Weimar or Soviet cinema that aimed to outline the major tendencies and influences in national cinemas in the pre-war period (Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*, Lotte H. Eisner's *The Haunted Screen* or Jay Leyda's *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*) mention the importance of German-Russian relationships for the development of the distinctive film schools in both countries.<sup>10</sup> Lotte Eisner, for instance, remarks on the contribution of the Russian filmmakers and set-designers to Weimar cinema (Andrej Andreiev who worked in collaboration with Robert Wiene and G.W. Pabst, the Russian director Dmitrii Bukhovetskii who made remarkable Expressionist films in Germany). Kracauer touches upon the impact of Eisenstein's and Vertov's works on German cinema in the context of the Weimar Republic's cultural debate on film.

The 1950s-1970s saw rising interest in cinema of the pre-Nazi era. Many original articles by Siegfried Kracauer, Alfred Kerr, Rudolf Arnheim, Béla Balázs and Walter Benjamin were re-published in Europe in the following years; Hans Richter's memoirs about the Russian film directors came out in 1967.<sup>11</sup> However, for Russian readers most of these original publications remained unavailable until recently, when the film history journal *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* launched regular publications of the newest Russian translations from German critical thought of

---

<sup>10</sup> See: Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947); Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969); Jay Leyda, *Kino, a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960)

<sup>11</sup> See Hans Richter, *Köpfe und Hinterköpfe* (Zürich: Arche Verlag, 1967); Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*; Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); Rudolf Arnheim, *Kritiken und Aufsätze zum Film* (Münche; Hanser/Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1977); Rudolf Arnheim, *Schriften*, in 2 volumes (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1955); *Illuminations. Walter Benjamin: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Verlag, 1969); Alfred Kerr, *Theaterkritiken*, ed. by Jürgen Behrens (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971), and other editions.

the 1920s-1930s. In the past few years the essays of Walter Benjamin and Joseph Roth were translated and published in Russia, many of them for the first time.

In the years that followed the Khrushchev Thaw research on such politically ambiguous material in the Soviet Union was undertaken primarily within the film archives. According to Naum Kleiman, the information concerning the prints of foreign films in possession of Gosfilmofond began to be collected and analysed in the late 1960s when German- and French-speaking graduates of the Moscow Language Institute joined the archival team.<sup>12</sup> Shortly afterwards, one of the most important publications came out: it was a catalogue of the German silent films in Soviet distribution compiled by Nataliia Egorova who worked extensively with the Gosfilmofond's German collection.<sup>13</sup> It was published in the first edition of the Gosfilmofond's annual bulletin *Kino i Vremia* in 1965, together with a preface written by Egorova, the alphabetical annotation and a similar catalogue composed for the French silent films in Soviet distribution. In these years the work on historical reconstruction of the German-Soviet interactions in the silent era was complicated by a lack of good German filmographies. The Gosfilmofond archivists created their own, taking information from various documents in the archive, including Soviet periodicals, advertising material, 'trophy' German reference books, the censorship cards of Reichsfilmarchiv, and surviving Glavrepertkom protocols. As a result, the catalogue, although containing some inaccuracies, revealed the importance of German film imports to the Soviet Union of the 1920s. The document contained some information on the condition and availability of the prints in Gosfilmofond, various distribution titles, the original and the Russian release years and, where known, brief information on the cast and production for each film. This publication, which contained research material of incomparable value, remains the first and, to date, the last comprehensive record of the fate of the imported German films in the Soviet context.

---

<sup>12</sup> Naum Kleiman, 'Intellektual'naiia "pechurka"', *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski*, 86, 2008, pp. 262-265.

<sup>13</sup> See publications of Iuliia Greiding on French silent films in Soviet distribution and Nataliia Egorova's catalogue of German silent films in Russia in: *Kino i vremia: Biulleten'*, Vypusk IV (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1965)



Since the late 1980s (thanks to previously unknown archival documents) the German impact on Soviet cinema has received greater critical attention. The representatives of the Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School, film historians Yuri Tsivian and Mikhail Yampolsky, have examined a broad range of subjects including the German component in early Soviet films, Sergei Eisenstein and his connections with the Weimar Republic, the German influence in Ermler's film *Oblomok imperii* (1929, Friedrich Ermler) and others.<sup>14</sup> Tsivian's book *Historical Reception of Cinema*, that has unfortunately already become a bibliographical rarity, contains many valuable observations on the influence of Expressionist imagery on the Russian literature and film of the 1920s, as well as the re-editing and titling of the silent films.<sup>15</sup> Tsivian was the first scholar who, in the 1990s, outlined the 'wise and wicked' practice of re-editing of foreign films (referring to Eisenstein's expression).<sup>16</sup>

In the German-speaking world the connections between the Weimar and Soviet film industries fall within the research scope of such film historians as Hanns-Joachim Schlegel, Maya Turovskaia, and Oksana Bulgakowa.<sup>17</sup> In 1995 Bulgakowa edited the volume *Die ungewöhnlichen Abenteuer des Dr Mabuse im Land der Bolschewiki*, which contained articles on German cinema's impact in

---

<sup>14</sup> See: Mikhail Yampolsky, 'Sublimatsiia kak formoobrazovanie (Zametki ob odnoi neopublikovannoi stat'e Sergeia Eisensteina)', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 43, 1999, pp. 66-87; Yuri Tsivian, 'Asta Nielsen v zerkale russkoi kul'tury', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 40, 1998, pp. 257-260; 'Caligari in Russia: German Expressionism and Soviet Film Culture', in *Kuenstlerischer Austausch / Artistic Exchange: Akten des XXVIII. Internationalen Kongresses fuer Kunstgeschichte*, ed. by Thomas W. Gaethens, Berlin, 15.-20. Juli 1992 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992/4), pp. 153-164.

<sup>15</sup> Yuri Tsivian, *Istoricheskaia receptsia kino. Kinematograf v Rossii 1869-1930* (Riga: Zinatne, 1991)

<sup>16</sup> Yuri Tsivian, 'The Wise and Wicked Game: Re-Editing and Soviet Film Culture of the 1920s,' in *Film History*, 8.3, 1996, pp. 327–343.

<sup>17</sup> See: *Eisenstein und Deutschland. Texte. Dokumente. Briefe*, ed. by Oksana Bulgakowa (Berlin, 1998); *FEKS. Die Fabrik des Exzentrischen Schauspielers* (University of Michigan Press, 1996); Hans-Joachim Schlegel, 'Nemetskie impul'sy dlia sovetskikh kulturfil'mov 20-kh godov', *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski*, 58, 2002, pp. 368-379; 'Bluzhdaiushchii goluboi svet, ili Strannaia vstrecha Bely Balázsa i Leni Rieffenstahl', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 100, 2012, and others.



Soviet Russia.<sup>18</sup> Two years later, in 1997, the journal *Film History* published an article by Thomas J. Saunders on the history of Russian-German collaboration within the Berlin-based company ‘Derussa’, the main foreign partner of Sovkino in 1927-1929.<sup>19</sup> In 2012 Deutsche Kinemathek published a selection of articles on the history of Prometheus and Mezhrabpom that, among others, contained essays by Alexander Schwarz, Barbara Wurm, Tomas Tode and Gunter Agde.<sup>20</sup> Some historical aspects of German and Soviet film distribution have also been covered in several publications by Kristin Thompson, Richard Taylor and Denise Youngblood.

A number of studies published since the 1990s deal with such themes as Russian émigrés and their involvement in the production of films in Weimar Germany: the books and articles by Karl Schlögel, Nataliia Nusinova and Rashit Iangirov that were published in Russia and abroad focus on the life of Russian cineastes in Berlin, and on the émigré businessmen, directors, film stars and extras who in different ways influenced the development of German film culture.<sup>21</sup>

In 2002 the abovementioned journal *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* published two special ‘German’ issues that contain contemporary scholarly articles as well as

---

<sup>18</sup> Oksana Bulgakowa, ed., *Die ungewöhnlichen Abenteuer des Dr Mabuse im Land der Bolschewiki* (Berlin: Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek, 1992)

<sup>19</sup> Thomas J. Saunders, ‘The German-Russian film (mis)alliance (Derussa): Commerce and politics in German-Soviet cinema ties’, *Film History*, Volume 9, 2, 1997, pp. 168-188.

<sup>20</sup> *Die rote Traumfabrik: Meshrabpom-Film und Prometheus 1921-1936*, ed. Günter Agde und Alexander Schwarz (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek und Bertz+Fischer Verlag, 2012)

<sup>21</sup> Nataliia Nusinova, ‘Kogda my v Rossii vernemsia...’: *Russkoe kinematograficheskoe zarubezh'e (1918-1939)* (Moskva: Eisenstein-centre, 2003); Rashit Iangirov, ‘Raby Nemogo’: *Ocherki istoricheskogo bytia russkikh kinematografistov za rubezhom, 1920-1930-e gody* (Moskva: Biblioteka-fond ‘Russkoe Zarubezh'e’ – Russkii put’, 2007); Karl Schlögel, ‘Das “andere Rußland”. Zur Wiederentdeckung der Emigrationsgeschichte in der Sowjetunion’, in *Die Umwertung der sowjetischen Geschichte*, ed. by Dietrich Geyer (Göttingen, 1991) – *Chronik russischen Lebens in Deutschland 1918–1941* (Berlin, 1999) – *Der Große Exodus. Die russische Emigration und ihre Zentren 1917 bis 1941* (München, 1994) – *Berlin, Ostbahnhof Europas. Russen und Deutsche in ihrem Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1998)

translations of key Weimar critical texts and memoirs that contribute to the research into the German impact in Soviet culture.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the digital era signified the beginning of complex restoration projects performed for the new DVD-releases of silent films. As a fortunate side-effect of this projects (for film historians), it triggered research within the European archives that hold the collections of both the Soviet and the German versions of films that were created and re-edited for release in different countries. This process requires careful collection, description and comparison of the existing film prints as well as the study of the critical discourse of the time. One of the recent examples of this profound scholarly approach to the archival work is the Austrian Film Museum's restoration of Fiodor Otsep's German film based on Tolstoy's drama *Zhivoi Trup* (German release title: *Der lebende Leichnam*; 1928/1929, Fiodor Otsep). The restoration, finished in 2012, was based on the six different existing copies of the film.

In my research I used extensively the corpus of critical works and memoirs of Soviet and German filmmakers, editors, critics, actors and theorists of the 1920s, including Viktor Shklovsky, Sergei Eisenstein, Esfir' Shub, Vsevolod Pudovkin, the brothers Vasiliev, Vladimir Erofeev, Anatolii Lunacharsky, Béla Balázs, Willy Haas, Joseph Roth, Alfred Kerr, Rudolf Arnheim and others. The Weimar Republic's interest in the Soviet film industry resulted in a large body of critical works that includes reviews, descriptions and theoretical essays on Soviet films that were available to the German audiences in the late 1920s. In my thesis, I have used German periodicals such as *Lichtbild-Bühne* and *Film-Kurier*. They, along with the key Soviet film periodicals which throughout the 1920s were publishing intensively on German film aesthetics and production, provided valuable historical material. Finally, travel reports and the popular press (such as the series of booklets devoted to the German film industry published by the state publishing house *Teakinopechat'*, now a bibliographical rarity) helped to explore the reception of the German films in the Soviet Union.

---

<sup>22</sup> *Kinovedcheskie zapiski, Nemetskii nomer* [two issues of the journal devoted to German cinema of 20's and 30's], No. 58, No. 59 (2002)

## 6. What are the films? Notes on the research material

The research material, i.e. the films that were used for the purpose of this research, requires some preliminary clarification. The question is not so much of how many film titles should be used in a cross-cultural project such as this, but rather: what *is* the very material of research when it comes to discussing the fate of silent films? As Paolo Cherchi Usai has noted, early film is, literally, a fragile matter that suffered considerably due to the instability of nitrate stock, to the long-term misunderstanding of the significance of early film, as well as factors that caused the migration of the film prints, historical shifts, and political and diplomatic barriers that emerged throughout the previous century.<sup>23</sup> Due to all these reasons many films are lost irrevocably and many exist in various incomplete prints dispersed among the world's archives. The mechanisms of film distribution in the 1920s pose a specific challenge: after the original release in their home country, the films were copied from the master negative by the re-sellers, many of them altered and re-edited by censorship and distributors prior to being sold to foreign countries. This was, for instance, the case with the majority of the foreign films that reached Soviet Russia. One of the main Soviet re-editors of foreign films, Sergei Vasiliev, commented on the low quality of the American, French and German film prints that usually were obtained through the German agents already in re-edited form.<sup>24</sup> In the destination countries the prints could be re-edited and copied again and again, with the cut-out fragments collected and reassembled in order to create new copies.<sup>25</sup> The attitude to film authenticity was also different:

---

<sup>23</sup> Paolo Cherchi Usai, *Burning Passions: An Introduction to the Study of Silent Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1994)

<sup>24</sup> 'First of all, the foreign films arrive [to the Soviet Union] not in their 'primitive' state [...] It happens often that a few copies of the same foreign film are not identical to each other. If an American film is bought in Germany (what usually happens), it often already has the cut-outs made by the German censorship.' See in: *Brat'ia Vasil'evy: Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*. Volume 1 (Moskva: Iskustvo, 1981), p. 138.

<sup>25</sup> RGALI, f. 2496, op. 1, ed. khr. 7, ll. 15-16. The 'filmotheque' in Goskino ('the library of film fragments') worked on the re-creation of the popular films from the technically worn-out copies. In the report note in defence of filmotheques issued in 1926, the popular German films *Das indische*

severe re-editing, various insertions and structural changes in the narrative were common practice during the 1920s. This often resulted in simultaneous circulation of numerous distribution versions of the same film. For the contemporary film historian it poses the problematic question of which copy to use for analysis. The digital versions that provide us with the perfect and polished quality of photography, which the silent era in face never saw, are re-collected by restorers piece by piece from the existing fragments available all around the world. As such, the differences that characterized, for instance, the French, the German and the Russian release copies, are eliminated. Watching these new versions it is impossible to say if they are presented with the same plots seen by the 1920s audience in a given country. The cultural value of these films was not recognised before the beginning of film archiving: many of them hardly survived the end of the film season. With the arrival of the 'talkies' silent films were neglected, washed off in order to reuse the expensive film-stock (as was the case in Soviet Russia) or destroyed, accidentally or intentionally. This resulted in the tragic loss of many film documents of the 1920s, including those that could have shed light on many aspects of this research.

The picture thus will never be complete: in addition to the fragmented surviving documentation of the film companies and censorship organs of the 1920s, the film prints themselves are often unavailable. This is the case, particularly, with the mainstream German films brought to the Soviet Union: in Egorova's catalogue less than one sixth of the items mentioned are marked as still existing. But the fewer the documents that survive, the more these fragile documents require recollecting, rethinking, careful description and preservation.

In the course of working on this thesis I worked with the German and Russian films in the collections of the Austrian Film Museum and Gosfilmofond (The Russian State Film Archive). In cases where the films were not available I used, where possible, the existing synopsis of the film plot in the archival annotations, censorship cards and scenarios (or 'libretto' – the term that was used in Russia the 1920s), as well as the supporting documentation (still shots, posters

---

*Grabmal* (1921, Joe May) and *Die Frau mit den Millionen* (1923, Willi Wolff) are listed as examples of successfully reproduced from the old fragments and distributed in the Soviet cinemas.

and advertising materials). In my investigations I tried to undertake any possible additional research concerning the prints that I used. In many cases I mention the length of the films in meters, as it appears in the German and the Soviet censorship documents, since the difference in length helps to distinguish various versions of the same film. This was particularly important for the investigation of censorship practices, for instance, for comparing the re-edited film versions with the originals.

In sum, there is a veritable minefield of challenges obscuring a thorough investigation of this international relation in the era's films. And in spite of this, the cultural and historical significance of that relation demands that the investigation proceeds.

## Chapter 2

### Between the imaginary and the authentic: Political, social and cultural implications of German-Soviet relations in film

The history of relations between the Soviet and the German film industries in the silent era was determined by the differences in the development of film distribution and production in the two countries. In Germany, which in the 1910s had already grown into Europe's most important film producing country, the ratio of production and distribution remained fairly balanced during the inter-war period: distribution, while remaining a subordinate sphere of the film industry, worked in cooperation with production providing a financial platform for new films. As for Soviet Russia, where the active production of films was stopped until the mid-1920s, the imbalance between distribution and production remained significant. In the western scholarly tradition, considerable attention has been paid to the development of Soviet film production. However, the importance of the import of foreign films for the foundation of Soviet cinema still remains largely unexplored. Film distribution, I will argue, should be considered the Soviets' most influential film-related activity in the years of the NEP. It was the main factor that affected the development of the Soviet film system and enabled the establishment of German-Soviet relations in film until the late 1920s. An analysis of German film's impact on early Soviet film culture would be impossible without an understanding of the metamorphoses that Soviet film distribution underwent in the period between the proclamation and the abolition of the NEP. The major events and their chronology are well-documented and described in the key scholarly works on the origins of Soviet film.<sup>26</sup> Following a brief outline of the hierarchical

---

<sup>26</sup> For instance, in the monographs of Jay Leyda, Denise Youngblood, the articles of Kristin Thompson, Vance J. Kepley that describe various aspects of the Soviet film industry's development in the 1920s. See: Jay Leyda, *Kino, a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960). Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Kristin Thompson, 'Government Policies and Practical Necessities in the Soviet Cinema of the 1920s', in *Red Screen:*

transformations of the Soviet film-related institutions and structures of the 1920s, in this chapter I will focus on the activities of the Soviet government that directly affected German-Russian film discourse in the early 1920s. After an examination of the Soviet distribution companies which worked on the German market, and the first German films that were purchased for Soviet distribution, I will focus on the influence of the NEP era film dealers on Soviet-German film relations. Finally, I will discuss the film communities of the Russian émigrés and the Soviets in Berlin, as well as the German perception of Russians through the genre of *Russenfilm*.

1. ‘Distribution is a de facto organiser of all film industry’: The importance of the reconstruction of foreign film distribution in post-revolutionary Russia<sup>27</sup>

The three-year-long interval that started with Lenin’s nationalisation of film in August 1919, and ended with the assignment of responsibilities for film-related affairs to Anatolii Lunacharsky, is commonly regarded as the period that introduced the new government’s changes to the film sphere. The first period of reforms in film ended in 1922, with the shift of the national economy to the principles of capital accumulation under the NEP. During these first years the Soviet government failed to re-establish domestic film production and failed too to develop international distribution activity in the post-war country; nor did it offer a clear strategy for the future revival of the national film industry. However, these years, known as the period of ‘War Communism’, prepared the ground for the vital reforms that ensued in the mid-1920s.

---

*Policies, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 20-21; Vance Kepley, ‘Federal cinema: the Soviet film industry 1924-1932’, *Film History*, Volume 8, 3 (1996), pp. 344-356; Vance Kepley, ‘The Workers’ International Relief and the cinema of the left 1921-1935’, in *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 23, 1(1983), pp. 9-12.

<sup>27</sup>An expression used by Konstantin Shvedchikov. I.S. Piliver, V.G. Dorogokupets, *Sistema deistvuiushchego kino-zakonodatel’sтва RSFSR* (Leningrad, Moskva: Tea-kino-pechat’, 1929), p. 8.

Film production, distribution and exhibition in the years that followed the Civil War (1917-1922) were affected by Soviet Russia's slow economic revival. The screening of old pre-revolutionary films and the acquisition of new foreign box-office hits (*boeviki*, a common Russian term of the 1920s) were both interrupted. Production of films became a difficult task due to the lack of film stock and of equipment, neither of which could be manufactured in a country where the factories were largely in ruins. Lunacharsky's famous account of Lenin's words about the importance of cinema illustrates the Party's awareness of cinema's profound educational, entertainment and propaganda potential.<sup>28</sup> However, in 1920 the (rather small) geographical area of film circulation was limited to the large urban centres, primarily to Moscow and Petrograd; and the absence of any coordinated, state-controlled network of film distributors left the remote regions of the country with little, if any, film supply. Thus, the Party's main concern throughout the years of War Communism was the development of strategies for gradual capital accumulation that would lead to the establishment of controlled, regulated film exhibition for the different population groups. This process required the creation of a unified national institution that would be responsible for the coordination of all film-related affairs.

Nevertheless, according to Vance Kepley, Lenin's reforms between 1919 and 1922 did not suggest a consistent strategy for turning nationalised film property into the basis of an effective film system that would satisfy the growing educational and entertainment demands of the newly formed state.<sup>29</sup> The Soviets were looking for financial support abroad, but until 1922 these requests mostly remained unanswered. The few successful attempts to establish connections with foreign countries in the early 1920s were confined to limited subsidies from Britain

---

<sup>28</sup> Lenin's phrase 'of all the arts, for us the cinema is the most important' was quoted by Lunacharsky in his letter to Boltianskii, which was published for the first time in: G.M. Boltianskii, *Lenin i kino* (Moskva; Leningrad, 1925), pp. 16-18; Jay Leyda, *Kino, a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> Vance Kepley, Jr., 'The origins of Soviet Cinema: A Study in Industry Development', in *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema* ed. by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 62.



and some financial support from the Komintern's Workers International Relief organisation in Berlin (*Internationale Arbeiterhilfe*, hereinafter IAH). The famous 1918 Cibrario affair, which led to the loss of the million dollars that was initially assigned by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee for the purchase of film stock and equipment abroad, left the Soviets cautious about investing in collaborations with foreign agents for several years.<sup>30</sup> Still, by the end of 1921 a few trade agreements with France, Britain (the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement) and Germany had been signed.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the Treaty of Rapallo that was concluded on 16 April 1922 broke the two countries' post-war isolation and initiated beneficial economical interaction between Weimar Germany and the Soviet Union. In the film sphere it led to the extension of contracts between German and Soviet private film companies based on State-guaranteed credits.<sup>32</sup>

After the establishment of these first financial connections in Europe, the Soviets were ready for an ongoing partnership with western film organisations that would allow the country to receive foreign subsidies for film production and,

---

<sup>30</sup> For a more detailed account of the Cibrario affair see: Jay Leyda, *Kino, a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 128; Kristin Thompson, 'Government Policies and Practical Necessities in the Soviet Cinema of the 1920s', in *Red Screen: Policies, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 20-21.

<sup>31</sup> 'The agreement between Communist Russia and capitalist England brought about a radical change in Moscow's relations to other countries. 'The British trade treaty,' argued Krassin, 'was a signal to the majority of European states, and towards the end of 1921 Soviet Russia had negotiated commercial agreements and treaties with Sweden, England, Germany, Finland, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Norway, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, and Italy. Commercial representations in Constantinople, Angora, Teheran, and China opened the possibility of establishing some trade connections with the East,' wrote Louis Fischer. Thus, the blockade was broken, and Soviet Russia began to make her first steps in the direction of a normal economic life. See Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930), vol. 1, p. 282, pp. 294-295.

<sup>32</sup> According to Louis Fischer: 'In Article 5 the German Government promised to assist private German firms – with State-guaranteed credits? – in the extension of their contracts with the Soviets. [...] The treaty robbed the Entente of one of its most effective weapons against Moscow and Berlin: pressure by isolation. Germany, for once since the war, had discarded her role of passive object and taken the initiative in foreign policy. [...] The Rapallo Treaty brought immediate as well as permanent benefits to Germany. Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930), vol.1, pp. 342-343.

therefore, could help Soviet Russia to enter the European film scene with its domestic films. Among the projects discussed in this period were possible collaborations with UFA and the prospect of a partnership with the *Europäische Filmsyndikat WESTI* – a short-lived project of the German industrialist Hugo Stinnes and the Russian exile Vladimir Vengerov.<sup>33</sup> Although these projects were not implemented, the Soviets' focus on German companies as potential business partners reflects the fact that among Soviet cultural affairs in the early 1920s, it was economic contacts with the Weimar Republic that were perceived as the most desirable. Despite this, already from 1924, disapproving comments about the influence of Weimar Germany on the Soviet film industry began to appear in official documents and state media. For instance, during a meeting in the Central Committee in 1924, the chairman of Glavrepertkom (GRK or Repertkom; the Main Committee for the Control of Repertoire), Il'ia Trainin, reported the importance of shifting the emphasis of Soviet international film affairs from Germany to other European countries. Trainin insisted on the creation of a new Soviet organisation abroad that would manage all film imports and exports. The future London- or Paris-based institution, according to the speaker, would not only be responsible for all foreign film trade, but would also perform major censorship functions. As a preliminary measure Trainin suggested radical reorganisation of the film department in the Soviet Trade Commission in Berlin and, gradually, the reduction of contacts with the German film industry that he described as unreliable, expensive and 'harmfully competitive'.<sup>34</sup>

And yet, despite frequently expressed doubts about the German market as a suitable base for developing Soviet import and export, the Weimar Republic remained the main supplier of films that were purchased for distribution in the

---

<sup>33</sup> In July 1922 the head of VFKO Liberman sent a note to Lunacharsky about the suggestions of the foreign companies concerning cooperation in film: 'The most interesting are the following offers: first of all, the integration of the private German and Russian industry under Concern UFA in Berlin, Pavel Tiemann (German representative of Russian Golden Series in Berlin), Emel'ka-Konzern (MLK) in Berlin, Swedish Biograph'. See: Veniamin Vishnevskii, ed., *Letopis' Rossiiskogo kino: 1863-1939* (Moskva: Materik, 2004), p. 374.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 458.

Soviet Union until the late 1920s. According to the German newspaper *Der Film*, 80 per cent of films that were bought by the Soviet agents in 1924 were of German origin or came to Soviet Russia through film agencies in Berlin.<sup>35</sup> Even after the Soviets set up their own film production in the mid-1920s, their film industry remained strongly dependent on profits from the distribution of foreign films: the statistics show that between 1921 and 1931 about 1,700 American, German and French films were purchased by Soviet agents.<sup>36</sup> Despite the fact that after 1925 the general share of foreign films in the Soviet market declined in favour of the Soviet Union's own films, the distribution of European and American cinema remained one of the fundamental sources of the country's film income. For instance, in 1927 the head of Sovkino Konstantin Shvedchikov claimed that Sovkino would be bankrupt were it not for the success of its stable import policy.<sup>37</sup> A similar opinion on the supporting role of distribution for 1920s Soviet film production was expressed by the Soviet critics even in 1930: 'Distribution is the de facto organiser of all film industry. It holds the market in its hands and dictates the production budget.'<sup>38</sup>

## 2. Searching for balance: German and Soviet strategies of support for domestic production

The principles of the German film industry which were established before the First World War (i.e. orientation to commercial cinema, encouragement of free market competition, support for the international distribution of German films) continued to be followed after the establishment of UFA in 1917. Most German film companies in this period heavily relied on foreign currency which was obtained through investment in inexpensive commercial film productions that aimed to be

---

<sup>35</sup> Nataliia Egorova, p. 380.

<sup>36</sup> Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 51; Yuri Tsivian et al., *Silent Witnesses: Russian Films, 1908-1919* (London: British Film Institute, 1989)

<sup>37</sup> Youngblood, p. 51.

<sup>38</sup> I.S. Piliver, V.G. Dorogokupets, p. 8.

successfully marketed abroad. The nascent Soviet economy opened up new possibilities for German film dealers who, according to the reviews in the periodicals of the early 1920s, were looking for ways of securing exclusive economic contacts with the huge Soviet distribution market. The Weimar Republic remained a key trade contact for the Soviets: even films that were produced in other countries, such as the American films that in the late 1920s rivalled German productions in Soviet distribution, were acquired through German-based resellers.<sup>39</sup>

Overall, the extensive contacts with the Weimar Republic in the early 1920s provided both financial and aesthetic platforms for the later development of Soviet avant-garde cinema. The growing distribution of German film generated money for domestic production, while the practice of extensive re-editing initiated by Soviet censorship and the high cost of foreign film stock made economical use of film materials necessary, leading to the creative development of montage techniques. The availability of popular German films in the early 1920s, undoubtedly, accompanied the growth of mass interest in cinema in Soviet Russia. Prescribed by the censorship organs for different types of audience (Red Army, worker's clubs, urban population), foreign films dictated new standards of social behaviour, manners, codes of movement and gesture that had an impact in the developing socialist society.<sup>40</sup> As an instrument for the education of the masses, they assisted the process of the formation of a new attitude to the body, to everyday routine, fashion and to social relationships.

The next task of the Soviet government was gradually to take control of film imports, which in the early years of the NEP were mostly concentrated in the hands of private companies. In the Weimar Republic – which, like the Soviet Union, faced competition between domestic and imported films – the so-called 'quota system' was established in 1925 in order to balance the distribution-production ratio on the market. It prescribed that there ought to be one German-

---

<sup>39</sup> Kristin Thompson, 'Government Policies and Practical Necessities in the Soviet Cinema of the 1920s', in *Red Screen: Policies, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 29.

<sup>40</sup> See more about the influence of cinema on the development of the new social norms in the Soviet Union in: Oksana Bulgakowa, *Fabrika zhestov* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2005)

released film with a predominantly German cast for every imported foreign film, thus allowing both the regulation of film distribution and the support of domestic production.<sup>41</sup> The RSFSR (and, from 1922, the USSR) was in an unstable financial situation: since it had no resources for the production of quality films, it had to rely on money obtained solely through the distribution of western cinema. The regulation of film import channels and, most importantly, of the income obtained from distribution and film rental was meant to be attained through the introduction of a monopoly represented by a state-owned film company. Such a company was intended to have absolute control over film distribution in every region of the country. Additionally, it was supposed have the right to license private firms for film production as well as to share the distribution rights over any foreign film imported by a licensed private company.

### 3. Chronology of the development and institutionalisation of the Soviet film industry

Leyda defines the period between 1921 and 1923 as ‘reconstruction’.<sup>42</sup> The main criterion for Leyda’s chronology is political and economic reorganisation in the early years of Soviet Russia that prepared a stable platform for the future development of domestic production. In other words, Leyda is interested in the early Soviet Union as a developing producer of films rather than an active film distributor. However, the early 1920s were important, primarily, for the reconstruction of the distribution network: the Soviet Union became one of Europe’s preeminent buyers of films. International distribution remained one of the main sources of profit for the film industry until the end of the 1920s, with the peak of its development in 1924, although the number of German films that were

---

<sup>41</sup> There were many ways to avoid this rule by obtaining the distribution license for a foreign film on low-cost basis, for instance, with the help of the small companies that offered cheap ‘German’ films in order to pass the license. See more in: Nadezhda Fridland, *Segodniashnii byt germanskogo kino* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat’, 1930); Bruce Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic: From ‘Caligari’ to ‘Kuhle Wampe’* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990)

<sup>42</sup> Leyda, p. 155.

brought into the country declined after 1925 in favour of American productions. The same phenomenon was experienced by other national cinemas (for instance, German) that underwent Americanisation in the mid-1920s. What is more, the important role played by distribution in the revival of the industry, did not consist only in the accumulation of financial and technical resources. As I will make clear in the following chapters, the Soviet Union in the early 1920s was a country whose own film culture was to a large extent based on imported, predominantly German, films.

In 1929, the Soviet publishing house Teakinopechat', which by that time was responsible for all film and theatre publications, published a selection of film-related documents entitled 'The actual system of the state film organisation in the RSFSR', edited by Piliver and Dorogokupets.<sup>43</sup> The book contains a valuable collection of materials that reflect the major governmental changes in film production, distribution and censorship between 1918 and 1929. The demarcation of periods that is suggested by the editors differs from Leyda's approach, since it takes into account structural and conceptual changes in the film industry – and first of all, in the system of distribution. The development of 1920s Soviet cinema, therefore, is divided into four main stages: 1918-1919, 1919-1922, 1922-1925 and 1925-1929. Such division is justified by the recognition of the importance of film distribution in the period: the initial period of film nationalisation (1918-1919) is followed by the first governmental reforms (1919-1922) that resulted in the primary contacts with foreign companies. The next stage starts after the transition to the NEP with its focus on foreign film import (1922-1925). Finally, the rest of the 1920s was a period of a radical shift in priorities: between 1925 and 1929 the country established itself as a fully-fledged film producer, gradually reducing the number of foreign films in distribution. At the same time, the Soviet censors set out to revise the film repertoire with the removal of previously imported foreign films from distribution. The changes through these stages reflect a tendency towards the gradual centralisation of governmental power in cinema; while the reforms of the early 1920s encouraged the development of the private sector, the

---

<sup>43</sup> Piliver and Dorogokupets, p. 8. Spelling variants of Teakinopechat' throughout the 1920s: Teakino-pechat', Kinopechat'. Hereinafter Teakinopechat'.

gradual process of monopolization of the film industry led to the reduction and further elimination of any private companies. As a result, by the end of the 1920s distribution rights were solely owned by the Soviet government and the sovereign republics.

The years between 1922 and 1926, thus, were the peak of German film distribution in the Soviet Union. The NEP perceptibly affected the country's film industry only from mid-1922, although the first private companies, which played a vital role in the later establishment of connections between the Soviet and the foreign film industries, had already begun to appear in 1921. From the beginning of the NEP the distribution of foreign films provided the lion's share of the Soviet film budget. The NEP, with its turn to the market economy, was based on principles similar to those of the Weimar Republic – most importantly, the importance of state support of the private sector and the encouragement of commercial competition – was perceived as an opportunity to secure funds for the creation and maintenance of ideologically appropriate cinema. What it meant in practice was that the breakthrough in the late 1920s by the Soviet film avant-garde was financially grounded on the ongoing success of imported 'bourgeois' melodramas, costume films and comedies that filled the urban cinemas in the early years of the NEP. The Austrian writer Joseph Roth, who was commissioned to travel to Soviet Russia in 1926 as a *Frankfurter Zeitung* journalist, commented ironically in his travel essays on the absurdities of Soviet film import and export. Roth describes a poster of the old Scandinavian film drama *Maharadja* (1917-1926, A.W. Sandberg) that he was surprised to find on the streets of revolutionary Moscow.<sup>44</sup> In the years of the

---

<sup>44</sup> The seeming ideological and temporal gap between the stylized decadent dramas and the cultivated media image of progressiveness of the Soviet reality strengthened the surrealistic impression from this encounter. Roth writes: 'Wer leuchtet mir von den Plakatwänden entgegen? – Der "Maharadshah" Mitten in Moskau! Gunnar Tolnaes, der stumme Tenor aus dem hohen Norden, schreitet siegreich durch Kanonendonner, Blut, Revolution, unverletzbar, wie jedes echte Gespenst. In seinem Gefolge befinden sich die ältesten Kinodramen Europas und Amerikas. Die Häuser, in denen sie gespielt werden, sind überfüllt. Hoffte ich nicht, den Maharadschahs und ihresgleichen zu entkommen, als ich hierherfuhr? Um ihn zu erblicken, bin ich nicht gekommen. Schicken sie uns den »Potemkin« und lassen sich dafür den Gunnar kommen, die Russen? Welch ein Tausch! Sind wir die Revolutionäre und sie die Spießler? Welch eine verrückte Welt! – – Mitten in Moskau



scandalous triumph in Europe of Eisenstein's *Bronenosets Potemkin* (1925, dir. Sergei Eisenstein), to think of a shadow cast by out-of-date bourgeois costume drama in the very heart of the highly fashionable avant-garde film culture seemed implausible. But neither Roth, nor the Soviet audience, could foresee the direct cause-effect of such an 'unfair' interchange. Spending long evenings at the screenings of the last season's foreign melodramas, or queuing for the premieres of the Expressionist box-office hits, the content of which seemed so remote from Soviet reality, the audience was contributing to the budget of the future avant-garde works of Eisenstein and Pudovkin.

The process of the institutionalisation of the film industry began with the assignment of all the country's film-related affairs to the Petrograd Cinema Committee, later joined by the Moscow Cinema Committee and a leading film organisation VFKO (the Photographic and Cinematographic Section of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment). This reform signified the beginning of a new period in the history of Soviet film distribution. The period was characterised, on the one hand, by the establishment of numerous competing state-owned and private film organisations, and, on the other, by the gradual reduction of competition and the tendency towards the incipient centralisation of power in the hands of a single domineering state organisation. The next steps in the Government's centralisation policy were the establishment of Goskino in 1922 and its later re-organisation into Sovkino – a major organisation that finally received genuine monopoly rights in the distribution of both foreign and Soviet films.

The Government soon became aware of the need to reorganise the old bureaucratic apparatus of VFKO into an institution that would better correspond with the principles of the NEP. On the 19th December 1922, Sovnarkom issued a decree that transformed VFKO into Goskino (the Central State Photographic and Cinematographic Enterprise), a company that was supposed to receive the monopoly rights on all film distribution. By imposing the monopoly of Goskino, the Government aimed gradually to eliminate companies that dealt exclusively in distribution and to emphasize the importance of production: most of the money

---

spielt man den "Maharadschah" ...'. Joseph Roth, *Der neue Tag: Unbekannte politische Arbeiten 1919 bis 1927* (Wien, Berlin, Moskau) (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1970), pp. 165-166.



obtained through the distribution of foreign films had to be put into the production of domestic films. The Instruction that followed the Decree in 1923 granted distribution rights for private film companies only if they succeeded in launching their own production – a reform that forestalled the import quota system, maintained in the Weimar Republic from 1925. The Instruction also assigned the rights of control over any foreign film purchase to the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the Commissariat of Foreign Trade.<sup>45</sup>

The initial aims of the monopoly reform were the management of the financial manipulations of small private enterprises, and, through that, a gradual turn towards the self-sufficient funding and production of ideologically suitable films. However, Goskino still had rather limited financial resources and no experience to be able to adequately fulfil the tasks that were imposed on it. When VFKO was reorganised into Goskino at the end of 1922, the distribution market was already divided by the existing companies that hindered a newly-founded state monopoly in bringing foreign film distribution under systematic and coordinated control. The published directive of Sovnarkom concerning the creation of Goskino did not specify the nature of the relationships between Goskino and the other distribution companies.<sup>46</sup> As a result, from the moment of its foundation Goskino entered into competition with existing firms that were often financially stronger and better connected with European, particularly German, film companies. For instance, the first independent enterprise, Kino-Moskva, could boast a wide, established distribution network as well as partnerships with foreign film sellers.<sup>47</sup>

The brochure of Piliver and Dorogokupets provides an account of the film-related changes that followed the proclamation of the NEP. The year 1922 began with the foundation of several film companies that worked mainly in the import and distribution of foreign cinema. Either these companies were private, or they emerged as film-oriented branches of state institutions that functioned on the

---

<sup>45</sup> See about the Decree of Sovnarkom from 19 December 1922 ‘About the transformation of the Photo-Cinema department of the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment into a Central State Photo-Cinema Organisation (Goskino)’ in: Piliver and Dorogokupets, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> *Kino*, 1 (20 October), 1922, p. 34.

principle of financial self-support ('khozraschet'). The first independent 'khozraschet' company, Kino-Moskva, was established in Moscow by the appointment of Mossovet on 23 January 1922. The main objectives of the company were the purchase, sale and rental of Soviet and foreign film, as well as the management of cinemas.<sup>48</sup> In May 1922 another company, Sevzapkino, which, like Kino-Moskva, was based on the principle of self-accounting, appeared in Petrograd.<sup>49</sup> Sevzapkino quickly grew into the biggest film distributor in the northern provinces of the country. According to the review of Piliver and Dorogokupets, these companies initially aimed only to satisfy the demands of the local regions, with their limited markets. However, within a year-long period they gradually extended their activity outside their paternal institutions.<sup>50</sup> Other distribution companies that appeared between 1922 and 1923 were Krasnaia Zvezda (attached to PUR) in Moscow, the Moscow-based private firms Ekran; Fakel; Elin-Zadorozhnyi, and others. A private company which survived the revolution, Rus', continued working in both distribution and production.

The films that became available through these companies brought to the Soviet audiences some of the best known German filmmakers and actors: the film directors Otto Rippert, Adolf Gärtner, Alfred Lind, Ewald Andre Dupont, Friedrich Zelnik, Ernst Wendt, Leo Lasko; the actors Margarete Kupfer, Ellen Richter, Henny Porten, Ernst Rückert, Albert Basserman, Liane Haid, who in 1922-1923 were at the peak of their popularity in the Soviet Union. These stars of the German screen were the first to influence the Soviet perception of European film culture and style.

Many large and small firms and private film traders sought to profit under the NEP. In such circumstances Goskino could not hope to accumulate sufficient funds to pay for its own production costs: instead, it attempted to cover its expenses by profiting from the distribution activity of other organisations. As a consequence, it tended to assign its monopoly rights to local organisations after

---

<sup>48</sup> See the repertoire list of films including the films distributed by Kino-Moskva published by Glavrepertkom on 24 August, 1923. TSGALI, F. 317, op. 3, ed. khr. 12. l. 7-8.

<sup>49</sup> *Letopis' rossiiskogo kino: 1863-1939*, p. 370.

<sup>50</sup> Piliver and Dorogokupets, p. 9.

imposing a special tax for the right to distribute foreign films in a given region of the country.<sup>51</sup> High taxation immediately affected ticket prices, and many companies and film theatres had to close down due to low attendance.

However, the years of Goskino's activity, when several private and state film companies competed in the area of foreign film distribution, proved to be the most productive in the import of German films. Between 1922 and 1924, it is likely that more than 250 titles were brought to the Soviet Union. In 1925, after the birth of Sovkino, this number shrank to 45 German films, with further rapid decline in the following years.<sup>52</sup>

#### **4. A film distributor or a film producer? The Re-organisation of Goskino into Sovkino and its impact on film distribution.**

Attempts by the Soviet authorities to eliminate financial problems and the flourishing bureaucracy within Goskino resulted in the following reforms to Soviet film distribution. In 1925, Goskino, which had proved to be ineffective after having been examined by a specially assigned Mantsev Committee, was reorganised into a state-owned company, Sovkino. The process of Goskino's disbanding was finished by 1926. Sovkino took on the distribution rights from all of the existing film organisations, some of which had to close down in the following years.<sup>53</sup>

Sovkino started its work after the Government's decree in 1925 and until the end of the 1920s remained an influential institution that, besides being in

---

<sup>51</sup> According to Richard Taylor, 'Goskino surrendered its distribution monopoly to various local organisations, taking between 50 per cent and 70 per cent of their turnover in return. In this way it hoped to finance its own development'. See: Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> See: Oksana Bulgakowa, 'Bildertransfer: Deutsch-russisch Filmexport und -import', in *Die ungewöhnlichen Abenteuer des Dr Mabuse im Land der Bolschewiki*, ed. by Oksana Bulgakowa (Berlin: Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek, 1995), pp. 281-291.

<sup>53</sup> The process of the elimination of smaller, less profitable film companies such as Sevzapkino and Proletkino is outlined in Nataliia Riabchikova, 'Proletkino: Ot Goskino do Sovkino', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 43, 2010, pp. 90-108.

charge of all distribution within the country, was also able to establish successful domestic film production within months. The Sovkino reform was an important step for the development of German-Soviet film relations, since the creation of a film distribution centre eliminated the other mediating film companies that had dominated the Soviet film distribution market in the early period of the NEP. The choice of films and the distribution process became more controlled and consistent. As a monopoly distributor, Sovkino was expected to buy film prints of better quality, to examine previously purchased foreign films, and to maintain the distribution of ideologically appropriate films among appropriate audience groups. However, the implementation of the distribution monopoly also triggered an inevitable decline of the number of German films on the Soviet market in favour of growing domestic production. Whereas in 1924 and 1925 the box-office income from foreign film distribution was reported to be 79% of the total distribution grosses, in 1926-1927 it showed only 51%, with 49% of income obtained from the distribution of domestic films.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the importance and the effectiveness of the foreign film distribution remained high. In fact, until the end of the 1920s it continued to be the most profitable activity of the Soviet film industry. The strong structural connections of Sovkino with the censorship institution of Glavrepertkom allowed better defined and stricter ideological filters for the films that reached Soviet screens, which explains why some major German productions of the late 1920s, while being distributed all over the world, were not available for wide audiences in the Soviet Union. The selection of German films depended entirely on the distribution strategies of the leaders of the state film organisation and the resolutions of the censorship committee.

After the monopolization of distribution rights, Sovkino inherited most of the copies of the German films that had been acquired by the old distribution companies. New foreign films were purchased through the German representatives of Sovkino who worked in cooperation with the Soviet Trade Mission in Berlin. According to the report in *Kino*, on 6th May 1925 the Head of Sovkino Mikhail

---

<sup>54</sup> The figures are taken from the report of 1930: E. Lemberg, *Kinopromyshlennost' SSSR* (Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1930), appendix 4, n.p.

Shvedchikov went to Berlin in order to organise a Berlin-based department of the company.<sup>55</sup>

Yet Sovkino's distribution activity raised many doubts, mainly concerning the specific choice of foreign films.<sup>56</sup> German 'bourgeois' productions, including adventure films and long melodramas that were welcomed by Soviet audiences, guaranteed the distribution company profit that could be used for supporting its growing production demands. However, with the strengthening of censorship criteria in the late 1920s and the transition to the distribution of only ideologically acceptable Soviet films, most foreign films came under attack from the media as 'virulent' and 'harmful'.<sup>57</sup>

After the reforms in 1925 and 1926 the main film institutions that continued operations in the Soviet Union were the Leningrad and the Moscow departments of Sovkino and Mezhrabpom-Rus'. The latter, being an important producer of films, was supposed to fulfil tasks different to those of Sovkino: as a film organisation under the protection of the Komintern, it was responsible for the popularisation of Soviet cinema abroad as well as for assistance in the distribution of Soviet films in other countries, mainly through a network of workers' organisations and clubs. Mezhrabpom-Rus' was an exceptional phenomenon in Soviet film history. It remained a successful production company long after most of the film firms that started in the early 1920s had closed as unprofitable or superfluous. The company was known for using western-style promotion campaigns that aggressively supported its own production.<sup>58</sup> In 1924 and 1925, before all distribution rights were given to Sovkino, Mezhrabpom-Rus' was one of the largest distributors of German films in Soviet Russia. Tension between Sovkino and Mezhrabpom-Rus' was created by the latter company's choice of imported films and its marketing strategies. Both Mezhrabpom-Rus' and Sovkino had

---

<sup>55</sup> *Letopis' rossiiskogo kino: 1863-1939* (Moskva: Materik, 2004), p. 485.

<sup>56</sup> On the debates around Sovkino see: *Vokrug Sovkino* (Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1928).

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, an article in *Sovetskii ekran*, 1926, 2, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> About the use of advertising by Soviet film companies see: *Kino-Teatr-Sport*, 3, 1923, p. 3; Khris Khersonskii, 'Fact i reklama', *Sovetskoe kino*, 6-7, 1926, pp. 12-3; ; Mikhail Boitler, *Reklama i kinoreklama* (Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1930)

established ongoing partnerships with German film organisations. After 1926, the competition continued in their production. An ironic illustration in one of the issues of the newspaper *Kino* depicts a chess game between two players: a dandy bourgeois dressed in a European suit, with an emblem of Mezhrabpom-Rus' in place of a face, and tall, lean 'Sovkino' in a peasant shirt and bast shoes.<sup>59</sup> The chess figures on the board – leading actors of the successful films distributed or produced by one or the other company. Despite the visible inequality, the differences between the companies severely criticized for their enterprising production and distribution strategies is only nominal. During his travels in the Soviet Union in 1926 Roth wrote about the appearance of the enterprising Nepmen, the new Soviet bourgeoisie:

Alle tragen die Zufallskleidung, die sie äußerlich proletarisiert. Alle sehen aus, als hätten sie sich auf der Flucht vor einer Katastrophe angezogen. Alle tragen die russische Hemdbluse, die ebenso nationales Kostüm wie revolutionäre Manifestation sein kann. Diese Kleidung des neuen Bürgers ist nicht nur die unmittelbare Folge seines Willens, nicht aufzufallen, sondern auch seiner besonderen Wesensart bezeichnender Ausdruck.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, the peasant costume of Sovkino in the illustration might have seemed to reflect its support for proletarian cinema, but in fact Sovkino covered the same demographic grouping as Mezhrabpom-Rus'. In the 1920s both organisations, which belonged to the 'Soviet bourgeoisie', were occasionally accused of profiteering under the NEP. Mezhrabpom-Rus' was better connected than Sovkino with the western distribution companies through which it received foreign subsidies. At the same time, Sovkino enjoyed the full financial benefits of its distribution monopoly.

After 1925 Sovkino began intensive collaboration in distribution with its regional departments. Old German films from the archives of Sovkino were sent to provincial cinemas, where they continued to be shown until the censorship

---

<sup>59</sup> *Kino*, 2 (February), 1926, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Roth, p. 189.

revision of all foreign film material in 1927. At the same time, the quantity of newly acquired films remained relatively high. In the years of Sovkino establishing itself as a film distributor, the Soviet audience had a chance to see such popular German films as *Die Straße* (1923, Karl Grune; Rus. distribution titles *Odna noch; Ulitsa*), *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Grossstadt* (1927, Walter Ruttmann; Rus. *Simfoniia bol'shogo goroda*), *Die Weber* (1927, Friedrich Zelnik; Rus. *Tkachi*), *Die Rothaugasse* (1928, Richard Oswald; Rus. *Zelionyi pereulok; Pereulok krasnogo fonaria*) and G.W. Pabst's *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929, G.W. Pabst; Rus. *Lulu; Iashchik Pandory*). Pabst's film, however, was purchased incomplete, and appeared on the screens severely re-edited.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the film received a distribution license only for the Moscow region, as was often the case with films that visualised the life of the western bourgeoisie. The last big wave of German films was imported to the Soviet Union in 1929: among them about 16 films by prominent directors such as G.W. Pabst, Karl Grune, Arnold Fanck, Gerhard Lamprecht, Richard Oswald and Carl Froelich. The films were originally released between 1927 and 1929, with a few earlier features but none made before 1924. This illustrates both Sovkino's gradual reduction of its distribution of foreign films, and the fact that at the end of the 1920s the process of film selection became prohibitively strict. Foreign comedies, costume dramas, detective and history films, the genres which represented the majority of imported productions in the preceding years, were banned. Between 1930 and 1931 only a few German films were bought for distribution in the Soviet Union.<sup>62</sup> Most of them belonged to the movement of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and focused on social conflicts: Georg Jacoby's *Meineid* (1929, Georg Jacoby; Rus. *Radi rebionka; Kliatvoprestuplenie*), Phil Jutzi's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (1929, Phil Jutzi; Rus. *Schast'e matushki Krause*), *Rutschbahn* (1928, Richard Eichberg; Rus. *Tri dzhiga; Gora katok*) and – only for distribution in Moscow – the 'mountain film' *Die weisse Hölle vom Pitz Palü* (1936, Arnold Fanck, G.W. Pabst; Rus. *Plenniki blednoi gory; Belyi ad Pitz*

---

<sup>61</sup> The case of *Lulu* is discussed in Chapter 3 of the thesis. Sergei Vasil'ev in his 1920s articles on re-editing complained that most of the foreign films arrived in the Soviet Union in already re-edited form.

<sup>62</sup> According to Egorova's catalogue.



*Paliu*). At the beginning of the 1930s German film gradually disappeared from the Soviet screens. In 1930 a last tribute to 'bourgeois' German cinema – a monograph devoted to G.W. Pabst – was published in Moscow. In the 1930s the last German silent film was bought by the Soviets: the Prometheus studios production *Jenseits der Straße* (1929, Leo Mittler; Rus. *Zhemchuzhnoe ozherel'e; Po tu storonu ulitsy; Propavshee ozherel'e; Nishchii, prostitutka i matros*). However, the film did not enter distribution.<sup>63</sup>

Summing up the results of Sovkino's distribution activity, it should be said that, firstly, the company's monopoly position in the market, once established, allowed the State to process and keep the income that was generated by the financial and ideological control over film distribution. Secondly, the censorship criteria became better outlined and more effectively implemented through the assisting censorship organisations. The content of films was scrutinized and assessed in relation to a potential audience group; the preliminary ideological revision of distributed material became obligatory. Thirdly, film production eventually established itself as an independent activity, complementing distribution and pushing it to the periphery of the Government's concerns. Lastly, the number of market competitors was reduced, which outlines the new political course towards the centralisation of power in all political, social and cultural spheres. In general, the main change in Soviet relations with foreign film partners during the second half of the 1920s was rapidly rising export of the new Soviet films and a reduction in German film purchases. Under the leadership of Sovkino, the Soviet film industry entered a new period, in which the direction of the development of international interactions was dictated by new economic tasks, such as the production, promotion and sale of Soviet motion pictures abroad. It should be mentioned, however, that despite the positive reviews enjoyed by the first Soviet avant-garde films that were exported to the Weimar Republic, particularly amongst the German cultural elite, Soviet films were not as commercially successful abroad as the Soviets wanted them to be. The impressive cinematography and exquisite montage of these Soviet films seemed not to interest

---

<sup>63</sup> The film was prohibited because of its 'romanticization of criminal world'. See the censor's review in: *Po tu storonu ulitsy*, GFF, d. 20-9.



wider audiences. The German public mostly enjoyed the documentary nature of Soviet films, as a ‘physiologisch-psychologische Studie’ embodied in the acting and the choice of actors.<sup>64</sup> Soviet films were considered to be unique for their direct reflection of reality, even if they were based on fictional scripts. Often, the German audiences were interested more in the Soviet settings of the film than its content. For instance, the *Lichtbild-Bühne* review of Evgeniy Cherviakov’s film *My Son* (1928, Evgenii Cherviakov; orig. *Moi Syn*; *Das Kind des Anderen* in the German release, the film that Asta Nielsen considered to be the best in the season of 1929) praises the documentary-style sequences that depict the city’s landmarks, but omits any mention of the Epsteinian lyricism of this masterpiece of ‘Existentialist cinema’ (using the expression of the Cherviakov scholar Petr Bagrov):<sup>65</sup>

Und bei unserer Neugier für Alles, was die Realität dieses uns so benachbarten und uns doch so weltfernen Sowjet-Russlands angeht, ist es schon etwas erregend für uns, zu sehen, wie das Leben heute durch Leningrads Strassen pulst, wie seine Wohnungen aussehen, seine Standesämter, seine Kinderheime und... seine Feuerwehr.<sup>66</sup>

#### 4. The development and distribution activity of private Soviet film companies.

The fast development of film production under the management of Sovkino resulted in a noticeable reduction in the number of foreign films on the market. The years of Goskino, by contrast, remained the most prosperous period of the distribution and the reception of German silent cinema in the Soviet Union. But who started the distribution of German films in Soviet Russia in 1922? What criteria guided their selection of films? What was their attitude to each other? In

---

<sup>64</sup> Rolf Aurich, and Wolfgang Jacobsen, eds., *Kurt Pinthus. Filmpublizist* (München, 2008), p. 225.

<sup>65</sup> Petr Bagrov, ‘O Evgenii Cherviakov: Rezhissior ekzistsentsial’nogo kino’, *Iskusstvo kino*, 7, 2010, pp. 105-106.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Filmbesprechung: Das Kind des Anderen’, *Lichtbild-Bühne*, 9, 1929, n.p.

order to answer these questions we need briefly to outline the distribution activity of Soviet firms between 1922 and 1925 – an aspect of this history that has yet to be adequately explored by scholars. Numerous distribution companies like Kino-Moskva, Sevzapkino and Fakel established the link between the German sellers and the Soviet cinemas, and were responsible for introducing the key films of the Weimar Republic to Soviet audiences.

Kino-Moskva was the most active and powerful organisation that worked in the distribution of foreign films. The company, according to a report in *Kino*, was formed in 1918 from the Moscow-based film section and the former film theatres of Narkompros.<sup>67</sup> Until the early 1920s it provided all of the local area's films. With the beginning of the NEP the company suffered from a lack of funds, and for this reason, earlier than any other film company, switched to the 'khozraschet' principle and started to charge cinemas for the use of its films. At the same time Kino-Moskva began its foreign film purchases. First of all, it sent its agents to Berlin where they entered into competition with Sevzapkino in securing the most profitable offers from the German re-sellers.<sup>68</sup> The head of the company, M. Iankolovich, went to Berlin early in 1922 where, according to reports by Sevzapkino agents, he bought a few films of the recently merged companies UFA and Decla-Bioscop.

The main rival to Kino-Moskva, Sevzapkino, the biggest distribution company in the north-western region of the country, with its head-office in Leningrad and an official branch in Moscow, sent its agents S. Mintus and M. Markus to Berlin and Riga. The surviving correspondence between M. Markus and the Sevzapkino administration sheds light on the difficulties in the purchase of foreign film between 1922 and 1924. Moreover, it reveals the atmosphere of secrecy that surrounded the first contracts with foreign partners. This atmosphere is evident, for instance, in Sevzapkino's competition with the Kino-Moskva

---

<sup>67</sup> *Kino*, 1, 1922, p. 34.

<sup>68</sup> TSGALI, F. 83, op.1, ed. khr. 25, l. 9, ll. 29-30. In his letter from 5 November 1922 Markus discusses the activity of the Kino-Moskva agents and suggests that the administration prevent Kino-Moskva from bringing new films to Soviet Russia, turning to the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Trade.

agents, who worked faster and more efficiently. The agents were responsible for the investigation of foreign film markets and the search for better offers from resellers, as well as being responsible for maintaining full expertise in relation to the German film repertoire. As becomes evident from the correspondence between Markus and the Sevzapkino administration, bureaucracy and the lack of a clear strategy for film selection prevented Sevzapkino from becoming a leader in Soviet film distribution. Sevzapkino demanded from the agents cheaper, second rate films, while Kino-Moskva and Fakel bought only box-office hits. In his letters Markus turned to the administration with suggestions of various new films, such as *Sodom und Gomorrha* (1922, Mihály Kertész) and *Lucrezia Borgia* (1922, Richard Oswald), – films that, he claimed, would ‘immediately raise the quality of our distribution’. However, Kino-Moskva managed to buy the copies of these films faster than Markus received an agreement from Sevzapkino. Among the films that he suggested were *Infamie* (1922, Emil Waldmann) — which Markus called a ‘boevik that is similar to *Mabuse*’ – *Fräulein Julie* (1921, Felix Basch) with Asta Nielsen, whose films Markus particularly recommended for purchase, and *Die stärkere Macht* (1920, Emil Waldmann) produced by Demos-Film.<sup>69</sup> For the 1923 and 1924 seasons Marcus recommended a few ‘Russian’ films that were produced abroad, mainly adaptations of Russian literature like *Raskolnikow* (1923, Robert Wiene), *Die Macht der Finsternis* (1923, Conrad Wiene), *Frühlingsfluten* (1924, Nikolai Malikov) and *Taras Bulba* (1924, Vladimir Strizhevskii). Most of his offers were turned down by the administration. Still, Markus did buy a few films for Sevzapkino from the Viennese companies Mondial- and Terra-Film, as well as from the Berlin-based Decla and Demos-Film. Moreover, Sevzapkino was the first Soviet company to sell two new Soviet films to the Germans (Aleksandr Panteleev’s *Skorb’ beskonechnaia* and *Chudotvorets*, both 1922).<sup>70</sup>

In 1922 the activity of Sevzapkino and Kino-Moskva in Europe was supported by the re-seller Arved Shnebach (according to *Kino*, the representative

---

<sup>69</sup> Other Asta Nielsen films that were recommended by Markus who ‘personally watched and approved them’ were *Hamlet* (1921, Sven Gade, Heinz Schall), *Der Absturz* (1922, Ludwig Wolff) and *Brigantenrache* (1922, Reinhard Bruck). TSGALI, F. 83, op.1, ed. khr. 25, l. 123

<sup>70</sup> *Kino*, 1, 1922, p. 34.

of the International Trade Agency in Riga, and later the head of the Kino-Moskva's Berlin department) who helped them with the purchase of German and Italian films.<sup>71</sup> The contacts of the distribution companies with the Vienna and Berlin branches of the Soviet Trade Mission also supported Soviet film activity abroad. Willi Münzenberg, an activist for the Communist Party of Germany and the founder of IAH, assisted the state organisations with the purchase of the cheapest German films and with subsidies from European left-wing organisations. In 1923 Sevzapkino changed its distribution policy and sent the following letter to Markus:

Don't loosen your grip, keep purchasing [films] only via Münzenberg. Bear in mind the avalanche of foreign films that were acquired by Kino-Moskva, Fakel and others spoiled the audience heavily. It means that we have to be extremely careful with the selection of films, preferring quality to quantity.<sup>72</sup>

The directive to buy more expensive films, coming from the conservative administration of Sevzapkino, shows that in 1923 the film tastes of the Soviet audience had already changed considerably. People were no longer satisfied with cheap, mediocre productions, instead demanding brand-new European films. Regular film-goers had established their preferences for film genres, actors and directors. In 1924 Austrian film went out of fashion and the Soviet distribution companies stopped purchasing it. As Markus reports in one of his letters, the Soviets now preferred films with big stars such as Conrad Veidt, Emil Jannings, Edith Posca, Werner Krauss, Henny Porten, Asta Nielsen and Harry Liedtke, who became the Soviets' new favourites, replacing in their popularity Maria Zelenka, Alfred Haase, Hella Moja and Albert Bassermann.

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. There is certain confusion over who Shnebakh was and where he worked, as different sources provide contradictory information. His name is mentioned in several letters by Markus (who is also confused as to Shnebakh is) to Sevzapkino. See TSGALI, F. 83, op. 1, ed. khr. 25, l 19: Markus mentions that Shnebakh provided Kino-Moskva with a credit of 20,000 000 dollars.

<sup>72</sup> TSGALI, F. 83, op.1, ed. khr. 25, l. 66.

The company Fakel, in November 1921, emerged from the circle of theatre directors, heads of museums, publishing houses and film departments. It immediately started to target the purchase and distribution of foreign films with plans to accumulate funds and launch its own productions. The company planned to produce three high-quality films a year with the participation of international stars like Diana Karenn, with the intention of marketing these films abroad. In 1922 Fakel had already signed contracts with German companies that supplied it with films for distribution: Harry-Piel-Film, Richard-Oswald Film, and Deulig, which was funded by the industrialist Hugo Stinnes. Fakel was announced as the exclusive distributor of their films in Soviet Russia. The main focus of the company was buying films ‘of instructional and artistic quality’: ‘first screen’ films (that could be successfully marketed), criminal series and *Aufklärungsfilme*.

Another agent who was in Berlin in 1922 was Moissei Aleinikov, the head of the company Rus’. According to a report in *Kino*, Aleinikov wanted to establish connections with German partners in order to start the production of Soviet films and to distribute them in Europe. The hopes for the future success of Soviet films abroad were encouraged by positive reviews of the film *Polikushka* (1919/1922, Alexandr Sanin) that, according to *Kino*, was compared by German critics to the productions of Swenska-Film. In 1924 Rus’, which was both a production and a distribution company, was reorganised into an influential private company Mezhrabpom-Rus’ that worked with the support of the IAH and, therefore, could boast exclusive connections with European leftist organisations.

The company Elin-Zadorozhnyi was the first private Soviet film firm. It entered the film market in October 1922, after the other companies had already announced their seasonal acquisitions of foreign film. The company was supposed to re-purchase distribution rights and film copies from the primary distributors and then to market these films in the south-western regions of the Soviet Union. This strategy allowed it to purchase films that had already passed censorship and had proved to be commercially successful. In the future the company planned to open its own production studio in Riga. Finally, another new company opened in 1922 was Ekran, which specialized in film series. By October 1922 Ekran had purchased

a few films with Mia May and had started to exhibit them in central cinemas.<sup>73</sup> Soviet distribution companies had varying priorities in film genres. Kino-Moskva imported popular adventures and sensational ‘monumental’ productions, Fakel distributed highly fashionable costume films with preeminent German stars, Ekran specialized in series, while Sevzapkino purchased films in bundles from the smaller European companies, mixing them with occasional box-office hits.

While commenting on the genres and themes of the German films that were preferred by the Soviet distributors of the early 1920s, it is important to note that the continuous presence of particular film types in the Soviet market was determined by the distribution patterns dictated by the German market, rather than by the personal choices of the agents. The Soviet distributors had to adapt to German sales and marketing strategies. First of all, this meant adjusting to the *Monopolfilm*-system that was used in the Weimar Republic in the late 1910s. As Rudmer Canjels argues, *Monopolfilm* referred to a scheme of distribution and trading rather than to the content of films.<sup>74</sup> It was the producers’ practice to sell to a single distributor exclusive rights to selected films. The *Monopolfilm*-system, writes Canjels, focused on expensive, multiple-reel feature films centred around a particular star like Asta Nielsen or Lya Mara. ‘The aura of exclusiveness’ [using the expression of Canjels, who explored the distribution of films focused around a star persona] was supported by Soviet distributors in the advertising of the first wave of films that arrived in 1922.<sup>75</sup> For example, in October 1922 Sevzapkino advertised its exclusive distribution of films featuring Hella Moja, Albert Bassermann and others.<sup>76</sup> The German re-sellers often negotiated big contracts with Soviet distributors, offering them a bundle of films or a continuing *Serienfilm* with a particular star. Among these films were big series like *Brennendes*

---

<sup>73</sup> In 1924 the Leningrad-based company Kino-Sever joined the group of the main foreign film distributors. The company bought and re-submitted to the censorship organs the revised and re-edited copies of many already successful films (like Richard Oswald’s films and popular adventure films). See the surviving Glavreperkom register cards in the collection of Gosfilmofond.

<sup>74</sup> Rudmer Canjels, *Distributing Silent Film Serials: Local Forms, Cultural Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 24-25.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup> *Kino*, 1, 1922, n.p. [advertising materials].

*Meer/Sterbende Völker* (1922, Robert Reinert) and Joe May's eight-part *Die Herrin der Welt* (1919, Joe May), as well as films such as *Veritas Vincit* (1918, Joe May) and *Das indische Grabmal* (1921, Joe May).<sup>77</sup> Soviet distribution experienced a trend toward such productions around 1923, after which the distributors gradually switched to 'Großfilm' — a large budget film scheme that was introduced in the Weimar Republic in the early 1920s.

While German filmmakers were capable of tailoring the content of their films to the tastes of particular audiences, Soviet distributors in 1922 did not have clear ideas of what kind of films to buy. In his essay 'O kinoraionakh Berlina' ('About the film quarters of Berlin') published in 1925 in the journal *Sovetskoe Kino*, the Berlin-based reporter Roman Gul' writes about the three common types of cinema in Berlin which composed their repertoire according to the class and tastes of their respective visitors. First of all, he mentions cinemas in the *neuer Westen* — 'film temples' where the bourgeoisie of the Kurfürstendamm watched American animated films and salon dramas 'with obligatory counts and dukes wonderfully impersonated by Vladimir Gaidarov and Ernst Hofmann' (the latter was best known in Soviet Russia for his role in May's *Die Herrin der Welt*). 'Tragödie der Liebe,' writes Gul', 'is a masterpiece of this quarter.'<sup>78</sup> The workers of Moabit, continues the journalist, attend the new UFA cinema to watch adventure films and comedies 'with the philosophy of the Salvation Army and reasonable endings'. Finally, he describes the cinemas in the dark streets around Alexanderplatz — 'the kingdom of the declassed people' — that open early in the morning to show crime and detective films to the 'underclass' of Berlin:

And what a public comes here! Bandits, burglars, pickpockets, with or without girlfriends, besiege tiny cinemas. And, it should be said in all sincerity, no other part of Berlin can boast such a stormy and busy

---

<sup>77</sup> TSGALI, F.83, op.1, ed.khr. 25, l. 21.

<sup>78</sup> Gaidarov, Mia May and Emil Jannings were the main stars of this three-part film that was also enjoyed by the Soviet audiences. Roman Gul', 'O kinoraionakh Berlina', *Sovetskii ekran*, 15 (25), 1925, p. 13.



film life as here. At the cinema's windows – irremovable, greedy, continuous crowds examining the photos of Harry Piel.<sup>79</sup>

All the listed types of films that aimed, in the opinion of the author, at the German bourgeoisie, proletarians and criminals, were eagerly purchased by the Soviets in the early 1920s, despite the ideologically unsuitable content. However, where in Germany film genres were stratified according to social and class division, i.e. films were made to target particular demographic groups, in Soviet Russia this system did not work. The film companies purchased and imported a combination of all the available film genres, which resulted in a rather chaotic structure of film repertoires. The NEPmen in Moscow and Leningrad were able to watch film programmes composed of the films enjoyed by Berlin's bourgeoisie, proletarians and underclass. A random selection of salon dramas, American animations, the crime films of Harry Piel, adventure films and comedies were exhibited in all of the central cinemas of Moscow and Leningrad. The workers' clubs and villages had their own, restricted, repertoire. Nevertheless, this too was mostly composed of films of the aforementioned genres.

Between 1922 and 1925 those distribution companies that were self-funded or based on only limited private investments experienced various difficulties. Given their irregular income, as well as inflated prices and heavy taxation, the new German films were hardly affordable. German cinema of this period was at the peak of its popularity: Expressionist settings and costumes became a distinctive characteristic of the particular German style of filmmaking, and the prices of quality German films grew quickly, though not as quickly as the price of the prints themselves. But it was the licensing fees – for permission to distribute a film in a given country or region – that were the main financial concern for the Soviet film companies. In 1923-1924, the average price of a distribution licence for the Soviet re-sellers was 2,000-4,000 dollars per film, according to its length, quality and public success.<sup>80</sup> In an interview with *Lichtbild-Bühne* in August 1922 the head of

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> TSGALI, f. 83, op.1, ed. khr. 86, l. 7.



Rus', Moissei Aleinikov, said that the high licensing and rental costs were the main obstacles in the way of good deals between private Soviet companies and the Germans. Aleinikov suggests that the foreign film agents must try to meet the needs of a developing Russian market that still cannot invest in expensive film purchase.<sup>81</sup> The situation around the high licensing fees explains why the majority of the German films that were brought to Soviet Russia in this period were often from as long ago as 1914, and why the censors sometimes had to reject already purchased films because of the unsatisfactory technical condition of a print: the film agents frequently relied on cheap, low-quality copies of out-of-season films hoping that they would, nevertheless, make a profit in the film-starved Soviet provinces.

An alternative strategy of private film companies under the NEP was to purchase the distribution rights for relatively new films which had already proved to be successful in other countries. Prior to a deal being struck, the foreign critical reviews, film advertisements, scenarios and financial reports were carefully studied, in order to guarantee successful distribution. Such films could become profitable, although committing to a contract that involved new films was a risky undertaking. The pre-distribution procedure required censorship approval of each film. In the early 1920s this was conducted through an examination of a film's intertitles, several copies of which had to be submitted in Russian to a regional censorship board. Quite often films were rejected at this early stage. In order to avoid such situations, the distributors could undertake preliminary re-editing of films that would tailor them to the tastes of the Soviet audience and remove any controversial 'bourgeois' elements. Sometimes a ready-made alternative version for regional release, with a different ending or even different plot lines, would be cut by the sellers for distributors who aimed to capture audience preferences or to avoid the censorship filters. Most foreign films (for example, American ones) came to the Soviet Union through Berlin already re-edited or shortened after passing German censorship.

---

<sup>81</sup> 'Neue Wege in Russland', *Lichtbild-Bühne*, vol. 15, no. 35 (26 August), 1922, p. 28.

Other risks, besides the possibility of rejection by the censors, included the forced re-editing prescribed by the censorship organs after examination, and the consequent reduction in film length, which would inevitably affect the market value of a print. Above all, there was no guarantee, even for a successful film, of equal popularity or demand in the Soviet context. The tastes of the German and the Soviet film audiences were different. For instance, *Polikushka*, the first Soviet film that was successfully marketed abroad, became a box-office hit in the Weimar Republic in 1922, while receiving rather modest reviews in its country of origin.

Due to the cheaper rates of the distribution licenses, old films which were unwanted in their country of release often had a prolonged screen life for years in distant regions of Europe. According to Egorova's catalogue, most of the German films that were screened in Soviet cinemas in the early 1920s were out of season in the Weimar Republic and other European countries.<sup>82</sup> Many of them were originally released before 1922, some even in the pre-war years. Examples include popular films with such established stars of the German screen as Asta Nielsen, Ossi Oswalda and Henny Porten. For instance, in the period between 1922 and 1924 many imported German films had an original release date between 1913 and 1917. Among them were Urban Gad's *Die Sufragette* (1913, Urban Gad), Joe May's *Wie ich Detektiv wurde* (1914, Joe May), *Der Tod des Anderen* (1915/1917, Willy Zein), *Der Fall Rosentopf* (1916/1917, Ernst Lubitsch) and *Der Schirm mit dem Schwan* (1916, Rudolf Biebrach).<sup>83</sup> From 1925 the number of the pre-1917 productions among the films chosen for distribution in the Soviet Union gradually decreased. However, the older films of directors who had already gained popularity in the Soviet Union – for instance, Fritz Lang or Joe May – continued to be imported until the late 1920s; the popularity of a director's name often compensated for the quality of the print and, despite everything, attracted cinema-goers.

---

<sup>82</sup> Egorova, pp. 380-387.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

## 5. The problem of the first German films in the Soviet market

Another question that yet has to receive an accurate answer in scholarship is that of which German films were brought to Soviet Russia first. Despite the growing availability of the newly-found archival materials and documents about the early years of Soviet-German relations, it is difficult to find a definite answer to this question, particularly when it is taken into account that several Soviet companies worked simultaneously on the German market in the early 1920s. Moreover, distribution rights for films could be purchased in advance and announced in the media, but the actual film prints could incur considerable delay in being sent to Russia.

Film historians suggest different hypotheses, whilst agreeing that no purchase of German films was made before 1922. Nataliia Egorova's catalogue lists about 36 German films that were distributed in the Soviet Union throughout 1922.<sup>84</sup> Among them Egorova mentions Lang's *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler*, several films of Friedrich Zelnik, films of Adolf Gärtner and of other popular directors.

The 1922 periodicals announce the beginning of the distribution of German motion pictures in Soviet Russia. For instance, the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* notified readers that 'no later than 8 March 1922 the Petrograd Photo-Cinema Committee that concluded a treaty with a syndicate of the German film companies received the first lot of foreign films.'<sup>85</sup> There is a published account of an open screening of the film *Das indische Grabmal* in Petrograd in the Soviet newspapers around the same time.<sup>86</sup> The journal *Kino* started to publish regular advertising

---

<sup>84</sup> Oksana Bulgakowa classified films from Egorova's catalogue according to the suggested year of import in: Oksana Bulgakowa, ed., *Die ungewöhnlichen Abenteuer des Dr Mabuse im Land der Bolschewiki* (Berlin: Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek, 1995), p. 281-291.

<sup>85</sup> *Izvestia*, 68, March 26, 1922, p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> According to the reviews in the newspapers *Izvestiia* and *Pravda*, 'the public screening of the German film *Das indische Grabmal* by Lang (sic! – N. P.) took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March'. See: *Letopis' rossiiskogo kino: 1863-1939*, p. 401. These reviews contain a mistake: the director of the film was Joe May; Fritz Lang, (along with Thea von Harbou) worked on the script of the film. Egorova's catalogue does not mention *Das indische Grabmal* among the German films that were distributed in the Soviet Union.

materials with the titles of films according to the distribution companies and the screening schedules for various cinemas. In September 1922 the German film newspaper *Lichtbild-Bühne* announced that the German company Deruss-film offered the distribution rights for *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* for various Eastern European countries including RSFSR. Yet, the film only reached Soviet cinemas at the beginning of 1923.

The first critical responses to German films start to appear towards the end of the 1922, when the first imported films entered the film programmes of Petrograd and Moscow. As noted by Kristin Thompson, in the German context the first reports about the transactions between the Germans and the Soviets appear in *Lichtbild-Bühne* in the summer of 1922.<sup>87</sup> According to *Lichtbild-Bühne*'s advertising materials and the regularly published column 'Was die 'LBB' erzählt', Gregory Rabinovich, an agent of the Soviet company Fakel, bought the distribution rights to Richard Oswald's film *Lady Hamilton* (1921, Richard Oswald) in June of the same year.<sup>88</sup> This note is the first documented account of a German film being openly purchased for distribution by a Soviet agent. *Lady Hamilton* was advertised by Fakel on 22 October 1922 as 'the first film that is released by our distribution' (the pronoun 'our' in this phrase is not a synonym for 'Soviet' and refers to the first film distributed by Fakel). The film was, in fact, the first new *boevik* that entered Soviet distribution in the 1920s. By October 1922 Sevzapkino had already released a few older German films, for instance, *Wogen des Schicksals* (1918, Joe May). The October repertoire contained such German films as Harry Piel's *Die Geheimnisse des Zirkus Barré* (1920, Harry Piel), three parts of the adventure film starring Ellen Richter *Die Abenteurerin von Monte Carlo* (1921, Adolf Gärtner), *Madame Récamier. Des großen Talma letzte Liebe* (1920, Joseph Delmont), two parts of *Die Hafenlore* (1921, Wolfgang Neff) and *Der Herr der Bestien* (1921, Ernst Wendt).<sup>89</sup> This short list presents some examples of the type of German production that would dominate the Soviet distribution market in the following years: adventure films, salon melodramas, circus stories, costume

---

<sup>87</sup> Thompson, p. 30.

<sup>88</sup> 'Was die 'LBB' erzählt', *Lichtbild-Bühne*, vol. 15, 27, 1 July 1922, p. 29.

<sup>89</sup> See advertising materials in *Kino*, 1, 1922, n.p.

and historical films, episodes from the life of Napoleon, serials, the criminal films of Harry Piel, films with Conrad Veidt and Liane Haid.

Later editions of *Lichtbild-Bühne* announced a package of films from the Anglo-American Film-Export Company (a small German distribution firm) that was expected to be brought to the Soviet Union. Among them were such films as Ernst Lubitsch's *Carmen* and *Sumurun* (1918 and 1920, respectively), *Vanina* (1922, Arthur von Gerlach), *Der Golem* by Carl Boese, F.W. Murnau's *Schloß Vogelöd* (1921, F.W.Murnau), which was the first cinema role of the Russian actress Olga Chekhova, *Der goldene See* (1919, Fritz Lang), which was the Part 1 of Lang's adventure film *Die Spinnen* (1919), *Der müde Tod* (1921, Fritz Lang) and both parts of *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler*.<sup>90</sup> All these films, including *Dr Mabuse*, which is mistakenly marked in Egorova's catalogue as a film that was distributed from 1922, entered Soviet film programmes no earlier than winter 1923.

Yuri Tsivian mentions *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler* as the first Expressionist film that was brought to Soviet Russia.<sup>91</sup> *Dr Mabuse* probably reached cinemas together with the other films of the Anglo-American Film-Export Company only in 1923. Although it might not be inaccurate chronologically to consider it to be the first 'Expressionist' and first characteristically 'German' film that was brought to Soviet Russia after 1920, Tsivian's statement inevitably raises the problem of terminology. As Thomas Elsaesser points out, 'the German cinema of the Weimar Republic is often, but wrongly identified with Expressionism'.<sup>92</sup> The debates over the definition of the term 'Expressionist film' have continued since the first two definitive monographs on Weimar cinema by Siegfried Kracauer and Lotte H.

---

<sup>90</sup> For instance, the Russian poet Mikhail Kuzmin who was known as an admirer of German Expressionist cinema, attended a screening of *Dr Mabuse* for the first time in January 1923, about which he left a note in his diary. Later diary entries contain information on the first screenings of *Dr Caligari* held in Petrograd on 12 February and 2 March 1923. See: [Mikhail Kuzmin's diaries], 1921-1924 (RGALI, f.232, op.1, ed.khr. 5, 9, 60, 61, 62).

<sup>91</sup> Yuri Tsivian, 'Caligari in Rußland: Der deutsche Expressionismus und die sowjetische Filmkultur', in *Die ungewöhnlichen Abenteuer des Dr Mabuse im Land der Bolschewiki*, ed. by Oksana Bulgakowa (Berlin: Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek, 1995), p. 169.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 3.

Eisner were published in 1947 and 1952 respectively. Although these works extend the label 'Expressionism' to almost all German film production of the 1920s, recent studies make an attempt to redefine the term according either to the common stylistic attributes of the films or to the directors' general involvement with the movement of Expressionism.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, the question of whether it is possible to classify Lang's film as an Expressionist classic remains open. Eisner, in her monograph on Fritz Lang, argues that 'it is possible that more expressionism has been read into the film than was intended'.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, in her later articles she excluded almost everything from her list of the Expressionist films, limiting it only to three revealing examples: *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari*, *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* (1924, Paul Leni) and *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts* (1920, Karlheinz Martin).<sup>95</sup> If we accepted Eisner's list as a basis, the first Expressionist film in Soviet Russia would be *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* – a film that reached Soviet film programmes later than *Dr Mabuse*, about six months after the first purchases of the German films were made by Soviet agents.

On the other hand, if the term 'Expressionism' is applied in its broadest sense, as a stylistic indication of a 'slight touch of exaggeration' in Lubitsch's films (Béla Balázs) or 'fantastic-romantic genre' and 'extreme, if not eccentric set designs' (Werner Sudendorf), then the stylized films of Richard Oswald, Joe May, Ernst Lubitsch or Max Mack that were imported earlier than *Dr Mabuse* or *Dr Caligari* can be considered to be the first films through which film Expressionism was introduced to Soviet audiences (although, as Thomas Elsaesser points out, these are not traditionally associated with the Expressionist classics).<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> See the aforementioned monograph by Thomas Elsaesser; as well as Dietrich Schneunemann, 'Activating the Differences: Expressionist Film and Early Weimar Cinema', in *Expressionist Film: New perspectives*, ed. by D. Schneunemann (London: Boydell&Brewer, 2003)

<sup>94</sup> Lotte H. Eisner, *Fritz Lang* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), 38f.

<sup>95</sup> Lotte H. Eisner, 'Der Einfluß des expressionistischen Stils auf die Ausstattung der deutschen ilme der zwanziger Jahre', in *Paris-Berlin: 1900-1933* (Munich: Prestel, 1979), p. 270.

<sup>96</sup> See: Béla Balázs, 'Die Selbstironie des Films', in *Schriften zum Film*, vol. 1, ed. Helmut H. Diederichs (Munich: Hanser, 1982), p. 211; Werner Sudendorf, 'Expressionism and Film: the Testament of Dr Caligari', in *Expressionism Reassessed*, ed. by Shulamith Behr, David Fanning and Douglas Jarman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 92; Elsaesser, p. 18.

The first major productions of the German film studios appeared on the Soviet screens in late 1922, and some of them remained in distribution for many years after. Until late 1923 the Soviet audiences enjoyed versions that were received in the original length, or close to it. Some prints were re-edited in Germany. However, in the following years, the prints purchased earlier underwent severe re-editing in the Soviet Union. For example, the poet Mikhail Kuzmin, who watched *Das indische Grabmal* for the first time in March 1923, left the following note in his diary after watching it again, but in a re-edited version, on 24 June 1924: ‘It was cut so badly that not only the mysticism but also the meaning and the best cinematographic minutes vanished.’<sup>97</sup>

An even more dramatic fate was experienced by the costume epic *Lady Hamilton*. This eight-reel-long historical drama, originally released in 1921, was so successful in the Soviet Union that, according to the censorship protocols of Glavrepertkom that re-examined the film in 1927, it was still being projected in cinemas after five years of use. It circulated in several copies under the titles *Lady Hamilton* or – after re-editing – *The Lady and the Lords*, and during the 1920s was repeatedly resubmitted for censorship approval by various film companies that owned the prints of the film, including Mezhrabpom-Rus’. In 1927, however, the film was banned due to its evident ‘nationalist’ undertones.<sup>98</sup> Among the 1920s censorship documents of Glavrepertkom are the protocols of the viewing of *Lady Hamilton* undertaken by the censors, with a description of the plot and the abrupt

---

<sup>97</sup> Mikhail Kuzmin’s 1924 diary. Cited by: Mikhail Ratgauz, ‘M. Kuzmin – kinozritel’, *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 13, 1992, p. 80.

<sup>98</sup> It is possible that the sudden rejection of a film about British history was one of the results of the complication and the final rupture of Soviet-British relations after 1924. The scandal around ‘Zinoviev’s Letter’, the Party’s involvement with the 1926 British general strike and the infamous Arcos Affair in 1927 (the raid of the British authorities on the principal body of Anglo-Russian trade in London that was suspected in espionage) led to a breaking of trade agreements between the two countries until October 1929. See: Stephanie S. Salzman, *Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union: Rapallo and After, 1922-1934*, Vol.29 *Royal Historical Society Studies in History* (London: Boydell Press, 2013), p. 80-85; Alastair Kocho-Williams, ‘The Soviet Union and the British General Strike, 1926’, at: *BIHG Annual Conference, University of Ulster* (2008) <<http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11524/>> [accessed 2 July 2015]



conclusion that the film is nothing but ‘vulgar pulp fiction, stuffed with pornography’:

From the political point of view the film is counterrevolutionary and chauvinist because it poeticizes the heroic nature of the English admiral who was fighting against revolutionary France. It’s necessary to ban the film.

[...]

The film can be accepted only if it is thoroughly reedited.<sup>99</sup>

A later protocol contains comments on the re-edited version of the film:

After ‘re-editing’ such confusion and in particular futility with the intertitles and the frames can be added to the previous reasons for banning, that it is not possible to talk about the film as a monolithic piece anymore. That’s why the film should remain prohibited.<sup>100</sup>

Nevertheless, this popular film was later returned to distribution in an altered version and continued to be shown in provincial cinemas until the early 1930s. The success of *Lady Hamilton* made the Austrian director Richard Oswald and the leading actors Liane Haid, Conrad Veidt and Werner Krauss the most popular and recognisable film personas in the Soviet Union. The popularity of German stars continued to rise as more films with these actors were purchased for distribution in the country in the following years. Richard Oswald’s ‘enlightenment films’ (*Aufklärungsfilme*) were among the most in demand amongst Soviet distributors. The success of the Conrad Veidt films, such as *Das indische Grabmal* or *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari*, made the actor, perhaps, the most popular German star

---

<sup>99</sup> *Ledi Gamilton*, GFF, d. 18-4

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*



in the Soviet Union.<sup>101</sup> Liane Haid, a relatively unknown Viennese actress whose fame began after the success of Oswald's film, was so admired by the Soviets in the role of Emma Lyon that even the censor of Glavrepertkom refers to her not by her name but only as 'Lady Hamilton' in the protocols for later films. An essay devoted to the acting method of Werner Krauss, one of the favourite actors of Soviet cinephiles, was published by Teakinopechat' in 1928.<sup>102</sup>

The next of Oswald's films that enjoyed long-term popularity in the Soviet Union was *Lucrezia Borgia* – another historical epic that featured the acting duo of Liane Haid and Conrad Veidt, and that was similar to *Lady Hamilton* in genre, style and content. *Lucrezia Borgia*, which was perceived by Soviet audiences as a sequel to *Lady Hamilton*, since it starred the same duo of Haid and Veidt, was released in Germany in 1922 and was imported to the Soviet Union less than a year later, immediately after *Lady Hamilton* had proven to be a box-office success. The original eleven reels of the film were purchased in two copies and, after severe re-editing that compressed the events of the original two parts into one, it was shown in the Soviet Union in 10 reels.<sup>103</sup> The re-editing, which was often undertaken by the representatives of the film companies in the country of purchase in order to diminish the cost of transportation, irreversibly affected the quality of the film. The first censorship note on Oswald's film says:

The film is rather confusing because a single episode is composed of the original two parts. However, in general it could be allowed, though the mores of the Borgia family are not sufficiently revealed.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> The popularity of Veidt in the Soviet Union is reflected in numerous discussions and reviews in the Soviet press and the two special editions of Teakinopechat' brochures that were devoted to his acting method: A. Abramov, *Conrad Veidt* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1926); Konstantin Derzhavin, *Conrad Veidt* (Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1926).

<sup>102</sup> Boris Mazing, *Werner Krauss* (Leningrad-Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1928)

<sup>103</sup> *Lukretsia Bordzhiia*, GFF, d. 18-9

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.; Horst Claus, [programme notes to *Lucrezia Borgia*], in *Le Giornate del Cinema Muto: 4-11 Ottobre 2014, 33rd Pordenone Silent Film Festival. Catalogue* (La Cineteca del Friuli, 2014), p. 177-179.

In 1926 another copy of the film was submitted to the censorship committee by Mezhrabpom-Rus'. The notes that were left by the censors are a graphic example of the usual attitude of the later censors to those forgotten first German films that came into distribution in the early 1920s:

Several years ago this film was shown in our cinemas. It is incomprehensible why it was necessary to retrieve it from the archive. Moreover, the copy is rather worn-out and in such a severely-shortened variant that is not really usable.<sup>105</sup>

Some of the German films that entered Soviet distribution in 1922 and 1923 had a dramatic fate. However, badly re-edited, often shortened, the films stayed in the memory of the audience for years, since they were the first foreign films that appeared in the country after the Revolution. References to these films can be found in later Soviet films, 1920s literature and newspaper pamphlets. These films became an integral part of urban Soviet life and survived in the visual culture of Soviet citizens. For them, these films gave a vivid example of a distinctively German film style and way of acting. Some of the films had an extremely long screen life. Complex, large-scale productions like *Lucrezia Borgia* were still able to captivate the public even at the end of the 1920s, whether by their sophisticated scripts, or by the historical costumes and the dramatic old-fashioned acting.

## 6. Filmland Friedrichstrasse: Soviet film dealers in Berlin

Many of the Soviet film distribution companies that operated between 1922 and 1924 opened official branches and trade centres abroad. The most popular destination for Soviet film agents was Friedrichstrasse in Berlin. The trade representatives were responsible for establishing connections with foreign firms as well as for the selection of films for Soviet release. In her popular brochure on

---

<sup>105</sup> *Lukretsia Bordzhiia*, GFF, d. 18-9

German cinema that was published in 1930 by Teakinopechat', Nadezhda Fridland described the atmosphere of Friedrichstrasse in the 1920s:

Behind the Leipzigstrasse another world begins... Production offices, distribution firms, laboratories, photo equipment, film stock, publishing houses, film clubs, film cafés. A city in the city where a knitting shop is seen as an alien element and its premises will be sooner or later outbid.<sup>106</sup>

The author, who worked in Berlin as a journalist during the 1920s, writes with both fascination and scepticism about the dynamics of the German film market: even as early as 1920 about 600 cinema-related companies were registered in Berlin, and their number was growing annually.<sup>107</sup> The attentiveness with which the Soviets observed the dynamic film life of Berlin in the years of the reconstruction of their own film industry can be explained by their desire to take the German film industry as a model industry for the Soviet Union, whilst avoiding the mistakes and the excesses of the capitalist approach to filmmaking. The growth of the German film infrastructure, which was based on private business initiative and the principle of free market competition, was an inspiring example for the Soviet Union under the NEP. But rather than being just a pattern to follow, it suggested a way of learning about the effective mechanisms of the foreign market while the Weimar Republic established itself as a major partner in film import for the Soviets. Fridland's brochure was one of several overviews of the Weimar Republic's film industry that were published in Russian during the 1920s.<sup>108</sup> The persistent interest in the ways in which Weimar Germany achieved such overwhelming success in film production was triggered by the desire of Soviet cinema to improve its own

---

<sup>106</sup> Fridland, p. 7.

<sup>107</sup> Iangirov, *Raby Nemogo*, p. 26.

<sup>108</sup> See the brochures by V. Erofeev, N. Lebedev, and others: Vladimir Erofeev, *Kino-industriia Germanii* (Moskva: Kinopechat', 1926); Nikolai Nikolaevich Lebedev, *Po germanskoi kinematografii* (Moskva: Kino-Moskva, 1924); Nikolai Anoshchenko, *Kino v Germanii* (Moskva: Kinopechat', 1927)

position in the international market. The German film industry was perceived by the Soviets as flourishing and financially secure. However, it did not avoid constant criticism: the dictatorship of commercial interest and opportunistic compliance with the low tastes of the ‘philistine’ audience were, for the Soviets, the inevitable consequences of ‘bourgeois’ attitudes to art. The new German films were said to be suffering from ideological inconsistency – the result of an overly-rapid speed of production that often affected a film’s style and quality. In her essay, Fridland describes the German film quota system that was used from 1925. This new system was supposed to encourage the creation of German national cinema, at the same time balancing the invasion of foreign production on the market. In the commercialised world of Friedrichstrasse, argued Fridland, such a development scheme, despite its seeming rationality and productiveness, led to the creation of low-quality films:

There is a whole constellation of small, cheap German companies created for these purposes [In order to meet the new requirement of making a new German film for every purchased foreign film. – N.P.]; they are made in two days and burst like soap bubbles. They are given some neutral, non-committal topics. [...] The film can be trashy, it can be immediately sent in the remotest depths of the provinces or simply be left on the shelf. The amount of money that was spent on it is considered to be a licence.<sup>109</sup>

Another Soviet critic who wrote about the emigrant film community tells us that poor quality quota films by Russian filmmakers from Friedrichstrasse were mainly used as cover for illegal activity and he suspected that under the pretence of film studios Russian emigrants kept brothels and gambling dens.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Fridland, p.10

<sup>110</sup> G. Antonovich, <Karsovskii>, ‘Pis’ma iz Berlina. Za ekranom’, *Za svobodu!*, 15 May, 1923.

Viktor Shklovsky, who lived in Berlin in 1922-1923 and was an observer of the first commercial contacts between the Russians and the Germans on Friedrichstrasse, wrote:

Film is a very strange article of trade. It can cost forty dollars or ten thousand dollars, and the only distinguishing criterion is taste. So they show you films in the offices... Usually, only the fourth act is shown, and one can watch about ten thousand meters of such pieces during the day. For the sake of speed the film is projected one and a half times faster. It runs like an underground train, and you can hardly read titles and advertisements. The owner sits next to you. A person of an unknown nation who (as it often suddenly turns out) can speak Russian and only hides it. And this human being who looks like an aged clown from an old circus constantly goes into raptures over his film in your ear and steps up the heat.<sup>111</sup>

This quotation from Shklovsky's memoirs gives a graphic description of the film selection process. First of all, Shklovsky mentions the varying prices of prints of similar quality and the confusion that the Soviet film agents experienced while choosing a suitable film for purchase. Secondly, the selection process rarely allowed thorough examination of films, which explains why incomplete or re-edited copies were often sold to the Soviet Union and submitted to the censorship committee. An image of a typical film reseller in a small film company on Friedrichstrasse is also representative. Russian emigrants of Berlin often worked in film production and distribution and, as described by Rashit Iangirov, were also often involved in business dealings between the Soviet Union and the Weimar Republic.<sup>112</sup> These people were interested in making profit and thus were prepared for ideological compromise: belonging to 'old Russia' and sharing the nostalgic sentiments of the White émigrés they profited both from Soviet Russia's shift to the NEP and from

---

<sup>111</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, 'Motalka. O kinoremesle. Knizhka ne dlia kinematografistov', in Victor Shklovsky, *Za 60 let. Raboty o kino* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1985), p. 41.

<sup>112</sup> Iangirov, p. 69.

the willingness of the Soviets to buy German films. At the same time, the representatives of the Soviet private companies whose tasks were the selection and purchase of films for the Soviet cinemas in Berlin, also belonged to the same category of people who benefited from ‘capitalism under socialism’.

Before Europe encountered the Soviet film avant-garde, with its collective portrait of the new Soviet man as opposed to the clichéd, demonized figure of the lone revolutionary from emigrant folklore, a new type of a Russian appeared in Berlin. Joseph Roth wrote about this type:

Aus dem Trümmern des zerstörten Kapitalismus steigt der neue Bürger hervor (nowij burjuj), der Nep-Man, der neue Händler und der neue Industrielle. [...] Aus dem absoluten Nichts entstehen Waren. Aus Hunger macht er Brot. Aus allen Fensterscheiben macht er Schaufenster. Eben ging er noch barfuß – schon fährt er in Automobilen. [...] Er will nicht befehlen, er will nicht regieren, er will nur erwerben. Und er erwirbt. Diese neue russische Bourgeoisie bildet noch keine Klasse. Sie hat weder die Tradition noch die Stabilität, noch die Solidarität einer sozialen Klasse. Sie ist eine dünne, lockere Schicht aus sehr beweglichen und sehr verschiedenen Elementen.<sup>113</sup>

The relationship between Russians and Germans in the early 1920s was not binary and supposed at least three interacting parties: the Germans and the ‘two Russias’ – new Soviet Russia within the old geographical borders and an old pre-revolutionary, imperial Russia that had moved abroad. In the early 1920s a fourth, mixed, category of Russians emerged in Germany: moving between the countries, formally belonging to the Soviet Union but extensively building business connections within the foreign and the Russian emigrant communities, willing to make profit and adhering to western capitalist ideals – they were a part of all three contradictory worlds without properly belonging to any of them.

---

<sup>113</sup> Roth, pp. 188-189.

The enterprising agents of the Soviet private film firms, undoubtedly, were related to this developing category of people that Joseph Roth named ‘the new Soviet bourgeoisie’. The film business attracted those who hoped to profit from film distribution under the NEP with its encouragement to establish financial collaborations with western firms. After familiarizing themselves with the European film scene many of them, like Gregor Rabinovich, a film agent who bought the rights to *Lady Hamilton* for Fakel in 1922, continued working successfully on the European film scene.<sup>114</sup>

On the other hand, the Soviet distribution market offered new opportunities for German-based film traders among the émigrés who were ready to work with the Soviet agents. Some infamous figures like Paul Thiemann, Robert Perskii or Alexander Khanzhonkov were known for their activity in the Russian film business before the Revolution. After leaving Russia, they continued their film affairs in other countries, including Germany, often in collaboration with Soviet organisations that tried to involve them with the Soviet Union’s film activities in Russia and abroad.<sup>115</sup> For instance, throughout the early 1920s Paul Thiemann, a member of a few film companies, floated between Paris, Nice and Berlin before eventually getting involved in film distribution in Berlin from 1923. Robert Perskii opened a Berlin-based production company Metaspop in 1920 and later assisted with the foreign affairs of the Soviet company Kino-Moskva. Also, Aleksandr Khanzhonkov got involved in an international collective in Berlin called Rossija-Film (later Russofilm) in spring 1920. In the years of the raging popularity of the so-called *Russenfilme* in Europe, Rossija-Film aimed to support the production of ‘authentic’, non-stylized Russian films, with an adequate cast and script, showing real Russian landscapes. After his eventual return to the Soviet Union

---

<sup>114</sup> Gregor Rabinovich moved to Berlin in 1927 to work as a film producer for UFA. He worked on the production of such successful films as *Die Todesschleife* (Arthur Robison, with Werner Krauss and Jenny Jugo, 1928), *Die wunderbare Lüge der Nina Petrowna* (Hanns Schwarz, mit Brigitte Helm, 1929), *Manolescu – König der Hochstapler* (Viktor Tourjansky, mit Iwan Mosjukin, Heinrich George und Brigitte Helm, 1929) and others.

<sup>115</sup> See the detailed description of their activity abroad in: Iangirov, *Raby Nemogo*, pp. 11-68; Nataliia Nusinova, *'Kogda my v Rossiu verniomsia...': Russkoe kinematograficheskoe zarubez'e, 1918-1939* (Moskva: Eisenstein-Tsentr, 2003), pp. 68-86.

Khanzhonkov was invited to work for such important companies as Fakel, Goskino and Proletkino, although the story of this collaboration ended dramatically.<sup>116</sup>

Probably one of the most intriguing figures of the new Russian film bourgeoisie was Vladimir Vengerov (Wladimir Wengerow), the enterprising creator of the International Film Consortium project. Around 1923 Vengerov came up with the idea of the united European film syndicate and started publishing appeals for the creation of an ‘anti-Hollywood battlefield’ in the emigrant periodicals of Berlin. The project, called WESTI, was supposed to be implemented with the financial support of the German industrialist Hugo Stinnes (WESTI – Wengerow-Stinnes). The idea initially met with enthusiastic approval from the Soviet government, mainly because of the expected financial benefits of the collaboration with Stinnes, one of the richest people in Weimar Germany. According to Vengerov’s articles in the Russian émigré periodicals, the alliance aimed to fight the growing domination of the Americans in the international film market through the creation of a large international network of studios and cinemas. Initially, Vengerov conceived it as a Russian-German project, with the gradual involvement of other European countries such as France, which entered the project from February 1925 when WESTI established financial and distributive connections with Pathé. The Soviets, who initially welcomed the idea of the first German-Soviet collaboration in production (between Goskino, Vostoko-Film and Berlin-based Kommedia-Film), became suspicious of the project launched by a Russian emigrant when Stinnes died in 1924. In Kirill Shutko’s article ‘The Expansion of the American Film Industry’, Vengerov’s ideas are called the ‘snuffling pacifist groans uttered by the bourgeois wolves’.<sup>117</sup> The wording of the Soviet critic refers to an interesting parallel: Vengerov’s project, from the first appeals that appeared in the Russian émigré press, did indeed reflect the pacifist ideas of the mid-1920s and the Pan-European concept of Richard Coudenhove-

---

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-41. The company ‘Russofilm’, in which Khanzhonkov worked, was liquidated, and Khanzhonkov was arrested.

<sup>117</sup> K.Sh<utko>, ‘Ekspansiia amerikanskoi kinoindustrii’, *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 1, 1925



Kalergi, whose manifesto *Pan-Europa* was printed in 1923.<sup>118</sup> ‘One should not forget that the one who saves his neighbour saves himself. The power is in unification!’ – wrote Vengerov about the need to unite the national European cinemas against the growing domination of American cinema.<sup>119</sup> These pacifist ideas, however, contradicted hopes for the global revolutionary fight against imperialism, and could hardly be appealing for the Bolsheviks. The idea of an alliance between the new socialist state and the European capitalist countries after the death of Stinnes seemed utopian. Having lost the support of the Soviet government, Vengerov nevertheless continued his agitation in France until the end of the 1920s. At the same time, he launched such Berlin-based companies as Atlantik-Film, Viking-Film, Caesar-Film and later Wengerow-Film.

The activity of Russian film entrepreneurs abroad helped to unify previously disconnected worlds. The early 1920s was a time when disparate political trends could potentially destabilise the attempts at the rebuilding of relations between the German, Soviet and emigrant film communities. The aforementioned Pan-European ideas developed along with the movement of ‘Smenovekhovstvo’, which spread shortly after the end of the Civil war, when the ‘state capitalism’ of the NEP was proclaimed in the USSR. ‘Smenovekhovstvo’, with its official Berlin-based gazette *Nakanune*, embodied the widespread emigrant hope for the adjustment of the Soviet political line from communist to capitalist – a change that could also give émigrés the opportunity of returning to their lost country. In other words, when the Soviet film agents appeared in Berlin, they encountered a community of Russian emigrants many of whom were involved in the production and distribution of films, and who had an ambiguous attitude to the Soviets. Some brief remarks should be made about the complex relationship of these two groups in the context of their attitude to film.

---

<sup>118</sup> R.N. Nikolaus Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Pan-Europa* (Wien: Paneurope-Verlag, 1923)

<sup>119</sup> *Bioscop* (Berlin), 3, 1925. Cited by: Iangirov, *Raby nemogo*, p. 59.

## 7. Between reality and stereotypes: Russians in the Weimar Republic and the genre of Russenfilme

The involvement of Russian émigrés in the European film industry is a topic of current scholarly interest. There are several articles and monographs specifically devoted to this aspect of German-Russian cultural relations in the 1920s.<sup>120</sup> The German film industry provided the Russian expatriate community with a source of occasional or permanent income. Russian émigrés worked as production designers, screenwriters and even film directors. Among them was the abovementioned art director Andrej Andrejev, one of the key figures of German cinema, who worked in the Weimar Republic between 1923 and 1933 on a wide range of film productions: from the Expressionist *Raskolnikow* and Friedrich Zelnik's stylized 'Russian films', to Pabst's *Die Büchse der Pandora* and *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1931). Another important Russian émigré who made his career in film in the Weimar Republic was Dmitrii Bukhovetskii (credited in Germany as Dimitri Buchowetzki), the director of such famous German-released films as *Die Brüder Karamasoff* (1920, Carl Froelich), *Danton* (1921, Dmitrii Bukhovetskii), *Sappho* (1921, Dmitrii Bukhovetskii), *Othello* (1922, Dmitrii Bukhovetskii) and others. All of these films were successfully distributed in the Soviet Union after 1923 and it was with their help that the Soviet audience learned the names of Emil Jannings, Werner Krauss, Conrad Veidt and Pola Negri and became acquainted with the specific style of Weimar cinema. The names of Ivan Mozzhukhin, Vladimir Strizhevskii, Vladimir Gaidarov, Nikolai Malikov and others in various years were strongly associated with German cinema. Many of the Russian emigrants worked on film sets as actors and film extras, mainly in the Weimar Republic and France. Some of them, like Alexandr Murskij, Ossip Runitsch, Alexandra Sorina, Lidiya Potekhina, Ksenia Desni, Olga Gzovskaia, Olga Beljaewa, Olga Engl, Diane Karenn and Gregory Khmara became internationally recognised film stars who appeared in many German and European films and whose success was intently followed by the Soviet press.<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> See the most influential scholarly works on this subject by: Nussinova, Iangirov, Tsivian, Bulgakowa.

<sup>121</sup> For example, reports in *Kino*, 2, 1922, p. 25; *Kino-nedelia*, 8, 1924, p. 8.

From the mid-1920s Berlin became a destination for new Russian actors and directors who arrived from the Soviet Union to join the German film scene.<sup>122</sup> There were, for example, cameo appearances by George Balanchin's wife Tamara Geva in a few German films in the mid-1920s, including the uncredited role of the seductress Lia Leid in *Die freudlose Gasse* (1925, G.W. Pabst), as well as more serious collaborations within Mezhrabpom-Rus'/Prometheus alliance, like Otsep's *Der lebende Leichnam/ Zhivoi trup* and Grigorii Roshal's *Salamandra* (1928, Grigorii Roshal', German title *Salamander*), based on a script by Anatolii Lunacharsky, or the German success of the 'Russian Marlene Dietrich' Anna Sten in the early sound film era.<sup>123</sup>

In the early 1920s the role of film extra became a common occupation for the White émigrés of Berlin, and as is evident from the periodicals and the newspapers of the time many Russians were involved in big film productions of prominent German directors. For example, the emigrant newspaper *Rul'* reports in June 1922 that Richard Oswald invited over 300 Russian extras to the set of his monumental production *Lucrezia Borgia*, a film that became one of the main box-office hits in Soviet cinemas for over five years.<sup>124</sup> Fritz Lang was known for involving Russian

---

<sup>122</sup> 'Berlin becomes the focus of Russian film industry. The centre for Russian filmmaking abroad has moved from Paris to the German capital,' wrote Russian émigré press. Cited by: Nataliia Nussinova, *Kogda my v Rossiю verniomsia...*, p. 88.

<sup>123</sup> The Mezhrabpom-Rus'/Prometheus collaborations boasted Russian-German duos in the title roles: Maria Jacobini and Vsevolod Pudovkin in the Otsep's film; Lunacharsky's wife Natalya Rozenel and Bernhard Goetzke in *Salamandra*. As for Anna Sten, she remained in Germany between 1928 and 1932, where she signed a contract with UFA and worked on a few films alongside such famous German actors as Emil Jannings, Hans Albers, Peter Lorre, Fritz Kortner, Fritz Rasp and Hermann Valentin. Around this time Sten also became acquainted with stars the Berlin cabaret scene like Trude Hesterberg, Grethe Weiser and Kurt Gerron, famously performing Friedrich Hollaender's schlager 'Ich weiß nicht, zu wem ich gehöre' in Robert Siodmak's *Stürme der Leidenschaft* (1932). More about Sten in: Peter Bagrov, [programme notes to *Stürme der Leidenschaft*], *Le Giornate del Cinema Muto: 6-13 Ottobre 2012, 31st Pordenone Silent Film Festival*. Catalogue (La Cineteca del Friuli, 2012), p. 82-84; Sergei Kapterev, [programme notes to *Lohnbuchhalter Kremke*], *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82. Elena Novikova, "Vse dumali, chto ona byla nemkoi...": Iz zhizni Anny Sten', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 58, 2002, pp. 656-665.

<sup>124</sup> *Letopis' rossiiskogo kino: 1863-1939*, p. 392.

extras in such films as *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler* or *Die Nibelungen* (1924, Fritz Lang).<sup>125</sup>

A binary image of Russia soon established itself in the German discourse of the 1920s: on the one hand, it was the Russia of the White émigrés who moved to Berlin in the years of the Revolution; on the other hand, it was the Soviet Russia of the ‘Red Threat’. Soviet Russia often had demonic connotations in European perceptions of the early 1920s, as the opposite to the image of the suffering Russian émigrés, deprived of rights. In the 1920s many émigrés became a part of the international cultural scene as artists, film extras, directors, project assistants, set designers and costume makers. As Joseph Roth notes in the opening essay of his series of reports from the USSR, the émigrés were the first to introduce ‘the Russian vogue’ to Europe:

Lange bevor man noch daran denken konnte, das neue Russland aufzusuchen, kam das alte zu uns. Die Emigranten trugen den wilden Duft ihrer Heimat, der Verlassenheit, des Bluts, der Armut, des aussergewöhnlichen, romanhaften Schicksals. Es passte zu den europäischen Klischee-Vorstellungen von den Russen, dass sie solches erlebt hatten, Ausgestossene waren, von warmen Herden Vertriebene, Wanderer durch die Welt ohne Ziel, Entgleisende mit der alten literarischen Verteidigungs-Formel für jeden Sprung über gesetzliche Grenzen: ‘die russische Seele’.<sup>126</sup>

In the early 1920s, Germans perceived Russia mostly through the emigrants who, after having left their revolutionary homeland, introduced to Europe Russian ‘national colour’ and formed socially visible communities in Paris and Berlin. The former Russian Empire was divided into two rival camps of people who shared one language (although different orthography after a reform had been carried out in the RSFSR in 1918: a change that was ignored by the emigrant community

---

<sup>125</sup> *Kino-nedelia*, 11-14, 1924, p. 9.

<sup>126</sup> Roth, p. 158.

almost until the 1950s). For many, Russia was the place of their birth and their historical past, but their values, aims and views – both cultural and political – were entirely different. The widespread European image of Russia before the establishment of these large emigrant groups in France and Germany was a mixture of fairy-tale images, clichéd notions concerning the demonic autocracy of Russian tsardom, the novels of Dostoyevsky and the occasional health-resort visitors from the Russian aristocracy. As noticed by Roth, those clichés were not new in the early 1920s: the emigrants, however, due to the growing visibility of their communities in the urban landscape, actualized already existing western preconceptions. The Russian formalist, Boris Tomashevsky, in his review of Erich von Stroheim's *Foolish Wives* in 1924, summarized the roles that the figure of a 'Russian' played in European literary imagery from the 18<sup>th</sup> century:

From the times of Peter the Great 'the Russian' entered literature as some kind of a 'civilized barbarian'. Soon this character type became a cliché, was mechanized, and mortified. From Voltaire, Stendhal, who exploited this image, it was passed to the younger literary rank, to boulevard novels, comic story and operetta. Functions of the 'Russian 'barin'/aristocrat' were soon determined – similarly to the functions of the 'Polish pan', Siam prince and so on.<sup>127</sup>

Russo-phobic feelings fed myths about the 'oriental' Russian brutality embodied in images of tyrannical monarchs. After the First World War, Europe encountered Russian culture indirectly, through the intermediary of the White emigrants for whom European cities became home: according to German statistics, about 200,000 émigrés from the former Russian Empire were living in Berlin in 1921.<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> Boris Tomashevsky, 'Foolishwives ("Splendid")', *Zhizn' iskusstva*, 10, 1924, p. 16.

<sup>128</sup> According to Eugene Kulisher and Nikita Struve, who base their claims on the statistical reports of the League of Nations, there were 200,000 Russians in Berlin by August 1921. However, Fritz Mierau, Robert Williams and Karl Schlögel argue that there were at least 300,000 Russian citizens in Berlin in the early 1920s. See: Nikita Struve, *Soixante-dix ans d'emigration russe. 1919-1989* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), p. 299-300; *Russen in Berlin, 1918-1933: eine kulturelle Begegnung*, ed. by

The constant Russian presence in Europe from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century helped to forge the lasting popularity of the so-called ‘Russian style’. Germany responded to this trend in the 1920s with *Russenfilme* – the type of stylized films that was wide-spread in the Weimar Republic. The enthusiasm of the masses for ‘Samovarstimmung und Asiatismus’, as Roth puts it, was not entirely dissimilar to the frequent use of oriental motifs in the cinema of that period. However, there was something that made the Russian topic more visible among other exotic discourses: the Russian aristocracy, despite being used to distancing itself from ‘spectral Germans and Frenchmen’ (Vladimir Nabokov’s expression), was quickly integrated into the ‘foreign’ society due to their knowledge of languages and familiarity with European culture.<sup>129</sup> Many of them, having no profession, survived on the appeal of their motherland, which had piqued the curiosity of Europeans: numerous Russian pubs and restaurants, singing and theater troupes, Cossack dancers and circuses with bears were established by the Russian community in Berlin and became common sources of entertainment.<sup>130</sup> Clichés about Russia entered the popular films of the 1920s. First of all, many ‘Russian films’ were made in Germany for domestic release, from adaptations of Russian ‘classical’ literature by Nikolai Malikov, Vladimir Strizhevskii and Friederich Zelnik (the latter was given the nickname of ‘an eccentric Russophile’ in the

---

Fritz Mierau (Weinheim: Quadriga, 1988), p. 259; Robert Williams, *Culture in Exile: Russian Emigres in Germany, 1881-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 111; Karl Schlögel, "Berlin: 'Stepmother among Russian Cities'", in *Yearbook of European Studies* [Germany and Eastern Europe: Cultural Identities and Cultural Differences], 13, 1999, p. 235. Also see Annemarie Sammartino's commentaries on various sources of information about the number of Russians in the Weimar Republic in: Annemarie Sammartino, 'Defining the Nation in Crisis: Citizenship Policy in the Early Weimar Republic', in *Weimar Subjects/Weimar Publics: Rethinking the Political Culture of Germany in the 1920s*, ed. by Kathleen Canning, Kerstin Barndt, and Kristin McGuire (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books), p. 323, 334.

<sup>129</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 276.

<sup>130</sup> See: Karl Schlögel, *Berlin Ostbahnhof Europas. Russen und Deutsche in ihrem Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1998)

emigrant press for his strange attachment to the Russian theme), to motifs in the films of ‘big directors’ like Carl Theodor Dreyer or Fritz Lang.<sup>131</sup>

Roman Gul’ described the practice of basing Russian films on exaggeration and stereotypes in one of his satirical articles, published in 1925. In those films, he says, the ‘Russian protagonist never comes to the table on foot but on horseback [...], drinks his wine not from the glass but straight from the bucket.’<sup>132</sup> Russian emigrants who, as Roth notes in his Russian cycle, were liable to self-mythologization and tended to promote stereotypes of the Bolsheviks’ cruelties, were not concerned about the possible inauthenticity of the screen portrayal of Soviet Russia. Roth writes about the desire of the White émigrés – mostly consisting of the former aristocracy and the impoverished social elite – to be melodramatically portrayed in western mass culture.<sup>133</sup> Roth also mentions their readiness to promote the pseudo-Russian style with its stereotypical images of spies, rescued princesses, tyrannical monarchs and balalaika orchestras.<sup>134</sup> In contrast to liberal attitudes to the depiction of Soviet Russia, any cinematic distortion of the Russian past drew a hard response from the emigrant press: Russians abroad were particularly sensitive to any exaggeration in the depiction of the patriarchal culture, the monarchy or to any inaccuracies in film adaptations of Russian literature. The periodicals provide evidence of how strong the irritation that such films caused was among émigré circles. Critics of Berlin-based newspapers such as *Vremia*, *Nakanune* or *Golos Rossii* zealously blamed such

---

<sup>131</sup> For example, stylized details in Lang’s *Spione* and Dreyer’s *Michael* both employ the Russian theme. Malikov and Strizhevskii produced *Russenfilme* in Germany based on Russian literature or on the life of the monarchs, i.e. Catherine the Great – Malikov’s *Psicha, die Tänzerin Katharina der Großen* and Strizhevskii’s *Spielereien einer Kaiserin* (1929, Vladimir Strizhevskii) with Lil Dagover. Malikov also worked as an actor in a few Russian films. Zelnik’s numerous Russian films include *Die Ehe der Fürstin Demidoff* (1921, Friedrich Zelnik), *Tanja, die Frau an der Kette* (1922, Friedrich Zelnik), *Se. Exellenz der Revisor* (1922, Friedrich Zelnik), *Lyda Ssanin* (1922, Friedrich Zelnik), *Die Kreuzersonate* (1922, Friedrich Zelnik), *Auferstehung. Katjuscha Maslowa* (1923, Friedrich Zelnik), and others.

<sup>132</sup> See: Roman Gul’, ‘Berlinskoe kinoletto’, *Sovetskii ekran*, 18(28), 1925, p. 12.

<sup>133</sup> Roth, pp. 159-161.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*



films for distortion of facts and described them as ‘evil perversion’, ‘barbarism’ or ‘sacrilege’.<sup>135</sup> The main reason for this was the emigrant community’s unwavering attachment to the pre-revolutionary world and specifically their attitude to Russian cultural heritage, for instance, to literature as last shelter, the last possession, the only property except the language they were allowed to take with them to their forced exile.<sup>136</sup>

Moreover, émigré critics were offended by the fact that German directors rarely resorted to the help of Russian consultants while working on films. As a result, many absurd details (at least from the point of view of the Russian emigrants) evoked occasional ironic and somewhat tired responses in the emigrant press. These included the piling up in a single frame of a jumble of grotesquely Russian details (i.e. Orthodox icon paintings, troika pictures, samovars, Easter cakes, even in Lang’s *Spione*), or ethnographic errors in interiors and costumes.<sup>137</sup> More serious matters like alterations to the original plot of a piece of literature in a film adaptation were the subject of many indignant reviews. Examples of this include the unexpectedly happy ending of *Auferstehung. Katjuscha Maslowa*, Zelnik’s adaptation of Tolstoy’s ‘Resurrection’ starring the director’s wife Lya Mara; or the hyperbolically *femme fatale*-like interpretation of Nastasja Filippovna by Asta Nielsen in Carl Froelich’s *Irrende Seelen* (1921), based on Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* – an image that appeared to the émigré audiences to be insultingly superficial and lascivious.<sup>138</sup> Being overly sensitive to any cinematic change to literary texts, projecting those texts onto themselves, émigrés disliked it when the ‘Russian films’ were made by Germans who used the generalizing role of stereotype-based images in silent film. The Russian topic, with its distinctive visual iconography, was very convenient for mass cinema: spectacular, eye-

---

<sup>135</sup> Iangirov, pp. 312-316.

<sup>136</sup> One of the examples is the polemics between Vladislav Khodasevich and Georgii Adamovich. See: Hagglund Roger, ‘The Adamovic -- Xodasevic polemics’, in *Slavic and East European Journal*, 20, 1976. Also see Iangirov, p. 310.

<sup>137</sup> See: *Spione* (1928, Fritz Lang); Roman Gul’, ‘Berlinskoe kinoletto’, *Sovetskii ekran*, 18 (28), 1925, p. 12.

<sup>138</sup> Iurii Ofrosimov, ‘Bez nazvaniia’, *Rul’*, 20 March, 1921, n.p.; ‘Tsel’nikovshchina’, *Kinoiskusstvo*, 1, 1922, n.p.



catching ethnographic details generated extensive, associative semantic groups and functioned as cinematic codes. Moreover, they helped to achieve psychological effects, and spectacular visual qualities without sophisticated cinematography, complex montage techniques or detailed intertitles. Not only material objects but even the typical images of Russian emigrants often functioned as such visual symbols. For example, this is the role of Grigorii Khmara's waiter in *Die freudlose Gasse*, which draws a picture of social plagues and perversions in the Austrian capital of the early twentieth century. The secondary figure of an impoverished Russian emigrant, probably of noble origin, who is forced to look for a job in Frau Greifer's brothel in the heart of the Viennese slums, contributes to the film's detailed and truthful gallery of contemporary urban images. Torn between aggressive lust and sympathy for the virginal character of Greta Garbo, between the ability to see and understand fragile beauty and, at the same time, his violent destructive desires, this character recalls Dostoyevskian protagonists and corresponds with the European stereotype about the 'duality' of the Russian soul. Asta Nielsen once remarked about her role in the film adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*:

Nastasja Filippovna... was probably my favorite role. Days and nights I had been thinking of how it would be better to display in a silent moving picture all the terrible fluctuations of the Russian temper that threw her (Nastasja Filippovna – N.P.) like a ball from prince to Rogozhin.<sup>139</sup>

Like Nastassja Filippovna's character in Carl Froelich's 1921 *Russenfilm*, images of Russian women in German films did not escape this popular cliché: the idea of the dualism of the 'Russian soul' mixed with the 'mysteriousness' that was often attributed to emigrant women (women with vague, secretive pasts who come from 'nowhere') made them perfect patterns for the roles of *femmes fatales*.

---

<sup>139</sup> Asta Nielsen, *Bezmolvnaiia muza* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo 1971), p. 228.

Another popular motif that was exploited in the *Russenfilme* was the Russian monarchy, and its demise. The public interest in this theme contributed to the frequent use of Russian characters in adventure films. Images of Nicholas II, Rasputin and Princess Anastasia settled firmly into the urban folklore of 1920s Germany. Filmmakers often cultivated complex intrigue around numerous legends about the life of the emperor's family, which often resulted in the final product presenting truly grotesque forms. Roman Gul' in his feuilleton about the new German films ironically describes the popular Austrian-released *Russenfilm Die Brandstifter Europas* (1926):

To make it clear – let's call it – “Rasputin, German-style”. Marvellous picture! Revealing. Come and see it in the mood of the bitterest pessimism and even then you will (firstly) learn about the initiators of the World War and (secondly) laugh to death. Characters that are involved: Nicholas II, Purishkevich, Grishka Rasputin, Nikolai Nikolaevich, the chief of the secret police and many other important ‘elements’. But the main one is – Sonja Starewna. [She is called] exactly this way – Sonja Starewna. This is the heroine of the film. A Russian girl. A hellish girl. Seduces everyone, kills everyone and stirs up the World War. No less than this. The eternal tall tale [Rus. idiom ‘razvesistaia kliukva’ – applied to anything pseudo-Russian, literally ‘a branchy cranberry plant’ – N.P.] of the narrow-minded European vulgarity is evident here. This is the plot: in tsarist Russia all affairs are run by Sonja Starewna and Nicholas II. They kill Colonel Redl in Vienna (why – no one knows!), carry out an assassination in Sarajevo and in the end decide to arrange the World War. And everything would be fine but for one obstacle – Grishka. So Sonja and Purishkevich entrap Grishka in the villa and kill him. But because Rasputin warned that life in Russia will be jolly, free and easy only while he is alive and that after his death everything will go down the chute, when the ‘saint monk’ passes away, they show: the Russian revolution arrives – and they start marching on the screen with the banners. It is impossible to give any commentary on this film. One can only draw the following conclusions from its popularity: 1) the

interest in anything Russian in Europe is enormous, 2) this is what is claimed to be 'Russian' here'.<sup>140</sup>

The confusing plot of this pseudo-historical film represents the average Russian-inspired production that filled the Weimar Republic's cinemas. From 1922, after the first Soviet film agencies were opened in Berlin, and the Soviet Union finally established itself in the German film market, the popular image of the dangerous, 'barbarian' Bolshevik became diffused. The Soviets joined the European community, and after the mid-1920s the former binary opposition of the 'good White' and the 'evil Red' Russian gradually lost its tension. The visibility of the Russian emigrants and the Soviets creates a gallery of contradictory images in German literature and film: figures of demonic monarchs are portrayed next to sentimental White emigrants and bloodthirsty Bolsheviks make way for the romantic young revolutionaries of *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* (1927, G.W. Pabst). With the consolidation of commercial relations between the two countries and the appearance of the first 'real Russian films' on German screens (Soviet productions), the Weimar Republic revealed its strong interest in not only in the life of conservative emigrant communities but also in that of Soviet Russia. One outcome of this mutual cultural curiosity was the growing popularity of ethnographic expeditions that aimed to 'rediscover' the lost connection between the two countries. The newly popularized genre of travel reports – the modern 'Reisebilder' of the Weimar Republic's journalists and writers – aimed at introducing to the German audience the country of this fascinating social experiment. This interest of the Germans in Soviet life as it actually was, not through popular myths and fears, resulted in several research trips by German (or German-speaking) writers and journalists – from Egon Erwin Kisch to Joseph Roth – to the Soviet Union.<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> Written for № 49 issue of *Sovetskii ekran* in 1926.

<sup>141</sup> Many articles and essays about the Soviet Union appeared in the 1920s, for instance, works of Peter Brener, Franz Jung, Max Barthel, Kurt Kersten, Joseph Roth, Walter Benjamin, Heinrich Vogeler, Egon Erwin Kisch, and others. See, for example, Franz Jung, *Reise in Russland* (Berlin: Verlag der Kommunistischen Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands, 1920); Max Barthel, *Die Reise nach*

This public interest not only in emigrant nostalgia for the past but in present Russian life strengthened in the second part of the 1920s, after the first successes of Russian avant-garde films in Germany. From the Soviet side, interest in Germany was just as strong, if not stronger, which is revealed in the key Soviet film periodicals. Although most of these periodicals were published irregularly and generally had rather short lives of one to two years, the abundance of printed material that was devoted to western film in those journals proves that the critics' attention to foreign production remained high throughout the 1920s. Each periodical usually contained a special column devoted to 'news from abroad', including reviews of the German, French and American film industries, with occasional information about Italy, Britain and the Scandinavian countries. Additionally, each issue typically included the 'librettos' of foreign films as well as articles and reviews devoted to imported films that were currently being shown in Soviet cinemas.

In September 1920 the Russian Stage Workers Union in Germany, whose members included Dmitrii Bukhovetskii and Ossip Runitsch, started its work in Berlin.<sup>142</sup> The Union aimed to control the content of all Russian-related stage and film productions in the Weimar Republic – including *Russenfilme* – and it initially received some positive reviews in the emigrant press. The Union, however, was preoccupied with such issues as the equal rights and the working conditions of Russian film extras. Thus, despite attempts to fight the cultural stereotypes and the distorted perception of Russia in German cinema, the emigrant community could not provide western audiences with quality *Russenfilme*; it could not even prevent the vulgar degradation of Russian themes in the new German films. The peak of the popularity of films based on Russian literature that were released in the Weimar Republic was in 1922-1923. In 1923 new *Russenfilme* by German directors Zelnik, Robert Wiene and Conrad Wiene were released: *Raskolnikow* (Wiene), *Katjuscha*

---

*Russland* (Berlin, 1921); Kurt Kersten, *Moskau Leningrad. Eine Winterfahrt* (Frankfurt a. M., 1924); Heinrich Vogeler, *Reise durch Rußland. Die Geburt des neuen Menschen* (Dresden, 1925), Egon Erwin Kisch, 'Zaren, Popen, Bolschewiken', in Egon Erwin Kisch, *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben*, vol. 3 (Berlin, Weimar: Bodo Uhse und Gisela Kisch, 1980).

<sup>142</sup> *Letopis' rossiiskogo kino: 1863-1939*, p. 425.

*Maslowa* (Zelnik), *Die Macht der Finsternis*, *Lida Ssanin* (Zelnik; an adaptation of Artsibashev's novel).<sup>143</sup> But on top of these releases, Russians themselves were actively participating in many of the new German films: Iakov Protazanov, for instance, signed a one-film contract with UFA and by the end of March released the film *Der Liebe Pilgerfahrt* with Charlotte Ander and Wilhelm Diegelmann. The premiere of the film *Petr Velikii* by Dmitrii Bukhovetskii was held in the cinema *Alhambra* on 9 November 1923. Towards the end of the year Buchowetzki made two more films in Germany: *Karusel' zhizni* (*Karusellen*) and *Oderzhimost' igroi* (*Der Laster des Spiels*) before moving to Hollywood. Such actors as Ksenia Desni, Vladimir Gaidarov, Olga Chekhova and others appeared in several German-Russian projects also in 1923. Grigorii Khmara starred in Robert Wiene's film *INRI* along with Asta Nielsen, Werner Krauss and Henny Porten. Dmitry Kharitonov's Berlin-based company Atlantik-Film released Nikolai Malikov's *Psicha, die Tänzerin Katharina der Großen* (1922, dir. Nikolai Malikoff) with emigrant stars such as Olga Gzovskaia and Ossip Runitsch.<sup>144</sup>

Often the release of a 'Russian film' was surrounded by an aura of 'mystery', deliberately created in order to boost ticket sales. Other films were advertised as counterpoised to Soviet ideology. For example, when several films by Ermoliev's Munich-based production company, including *Otets Sergii*, were shown in Berlin's *Alhambra* and *Wiking-Palast* cinemas, one of the German critics remarked about the 'harmful influence of the Russian emigrants' on the reception of Russian and Soviet cinema in Germany. Even neutral Russian films like *Otets Sergii*, he said, 'raise counterrevolutionary gossip' only because they are advertised as 'snatched out from the jaws of the Bolsheviks'.<sup>145</sup>

Around this time the first Soviet films were brought to Berlin with the assistance of the IAH. The greatest prospect for the Soviet agents was Sanin's *Polikushka*, an adaptation of Tolstoy's story of Russian peasant life. *Polikushka*, the success of which abroad was a significant achievement for the Soviets, bore similarities to the literary adaptations that were a popular sub-genre of

---

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., pp. 422-424.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., pp. 423-427.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 422.

*Russenfilme*. The film premiered in Berlin in May 1923, after being brought to Germany with Lenin's approval. In exchange, an agent of Mezhrabpom-Rus', Moissei Aleinikov, was commissioned to buy raw stock and film materials for the Soviet film industry. With the assistance of Willi Münzenberg, *Polikushka* was copied by Dafu, a small German company which worked in collaboration with IAH. It was then successfully shown in German cinemas.<sup>146</sup> The public interest in this film in Germany can be explained by the combination of the popularity of the Russian theme with the unexpected (for most of the Germany-made *Russenfilme*) emphasis in the storyline on tragic social and class issues, depicted through a vivid psychological portrait of a Russian peasant.

Before *Bronenosets Potemkin* became successful internationally in 1926, German perceptions of 'Russian film' were rather unambiguous. The western audience was attracted to the nostalgic depiction of Slavic people, the slow storytelling, the psychological conviction of the acting (so frequently mentioned in film reviews) and the exoticism of Russian settings and landscapes. However, in essence many pre-1925 Russian and Soviet films resembled one another, which explains why the release of *Battleship Potemkin*, shortly followed by Pudovkin's *Mother*, set a precedent: until the beginning of export of the Soviet film avant-garde the notion of 'Russian film' was associated almost exclusively with samovars, nostalgic birch trees, wooden huts and fictitious tyrannical characters. *Polikushka*, a 'Russian film', which was made in the Soviet Union and that, unlike western 'Russian films' exploiting popular clichés, addressed actual social problems and in so doing paved the way for the impact of films that depicted Russian history with more accuracy, rather than clichéd distortions created by the fantasies of foreign filmmakers. It is possible this was the reason why German left-wing critics saw in the character of Ivan Moskvín an almost documentary-style, 'genuine' depiction of a Russian peasant:

---

<sup>146</sup> Alexander Schwarz, 'Von der Hungerhilfe zum roten Medienkonzern', in *Die rote Traumfabrik: Meshrabpom-Film und Prometheus 1921-1936*, ed. by Günter Agde und Alexander Schwarz (Berlin: Deutsche Kinemathek, 2012), p. 31.

Das Unterschiedliche dieses Films von den meisten Films liegt darin: daß... daß... daß es besser gespielt wird. In gar nichts anderem. Oder mich soll der Blitz treffen. Besser? Nämlich erdhaft, echt; bis ins Letzte lebensstark.<sup>147</sup>

‘Die Vertiefung der Wahrheit’ that Alfred Kerr sees in *Polikushka* became a recognized characteristic of the new Russian – *Soviet* – cinema, as opposed to the stylized fairy-tales of the old *Russenfilme*.<sup>148</sup> The tastes of German audiences changed under the influence of altering standards in filmmaking and the new themes addressed by cinema. The interest in recent history and social problems pushed aside the cinematic ‘fantasies’ that dominated German cinema in the early 1920s. Although ‘Russian films’ continued to be produced in Germany until the late 1920s, the new trend of naturalistic depiction of Russian life attracted German audiences more and more, with real landscapes and with the actors moving naturally without artificial gestures. The gradual decline of interest in *Russenfilme* laid the groundwork for the success of the Soviet films in the late 1920s.

At the same time, an entirely different process was taking place in the Soviet Union. Soviet critics were skeptical about the western ‘Russian films’, in those rare cases where such films were passed by the censors. An interesting exception was the success of *Die Wachsfigurenkabinett* (1924, Paul Leni), which depicted the times of Ivan the Great (Conrad Veidt) in heavily stylized Expressionist settings. This ‘excellent film’, according to Sergei Vasiliev, was shown in the Soviet Union ‘without re-editing vaccination’, i.e. in its original German version.<sup>149</sup> This was an exception from the general rule of the Soviet censors, who deemed that all German films must be tailored to Soviet ideology. After films left Germany, a new, dramatic, life began. While the Weimar Republic struggled with its own stereotypes about Russia, the Soviet Union was carefully studying the phenomenon of German cinema and its variety of themes, genres and structures. The next chapter will discuss the process of this study, and its results.

---

<sup>147</sup> Alfred Kerr, *Theater und Film* (Berlin, 1990), p. 365.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> *Brat'ia Vasil'evy: Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, Tom 1 (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1981), p. 160.

## Chapter 3

### ‘Béla Forgets the Scissors’: Developing the Mechanisms of Film Censorship

#### 1. ‘A good school for a filmmaker’: Opening remarks

The analysis of the Soviet film industry in the early 1920s in the previous chapter proves that film distribution in the first years of NEP relied on imported, mostly German, cinema, i.e. on films that were different from the cultural ‘diet’ that was prescribed to the Soviet citizens by the new ideology not only in their content but also in their specific formal characteristics. In this respect, it is important to remember that the Soviet and the German film industries in the period of their interaction were in different stages of development. While Soviet film production was only in its early stages, the German film industry had its own production standards, its own system of film genres and favourite themes, its distribution mechanisms and film classifications, its instruments of conveying meaning and its formal means of expression – most of which often did not meet the demands of the Soviet distributors. The specific external and internal factors that influenced the development of cinema in the Weimar Republic (regional, historical, etc.) have been the subject of many scholarly works, starting with the renowned monograph of Siegfried Kracauer published in 1947 and continuing nowadays in the works of such scholars as Anton Kaes, who has explored the traces of the German military experience and war trauma in Expressionist films. Such works expand the knowledge of the external factors that shaped the development of national cinema in the Weimar Republic and created the system of the predominant themes and the recognizable images that travelled from one German film to another.

Thus, in order to understand the attitude to German cinema in Soviet Russia, we need to take into account the importance of regional specificity in film – an influential factor for any migration of films to a different context, including their international distribution. The Soviet film audience that in 1922 gained access to a rather chaotic selection of old and new productions from Germany and



Austria, existed in an utterly different context. In the context of the radical reconstruction of society that produced ongoing debates about the new way of life or the meaning of such concepts as the ‘new Soviet man’, ‘new family’ or ‘new art’, German films, even if their distribution in the early 1920s had predominantly entertainment purposes, were strikingly different: unusual and contrasting with the Soviet standards not only in content, but also in their form.

Debates around the formal aspects of art were central in the Soviet cultural theories of the 1920s, being initiated by the new art’s requirement for a modern means of expression and new forms that were capable of conveying the dynamism of a new social system. The urge ‘to discover the Communist expression of material structures’, argued by the central figure of Soviet constructivism, Alexei Gan, to be ‘the first task of intellectual material production in the realm of structure’, was relevant for the revolutionary approach to various areas of social life and art, including film.<sup>150</sup> Thus, metamorphoses in the form of German films, which followed the need for modification of their content, can be analysed in the broader context of the Soviet experiments with material structures in the early 1920s. Sophisticated exercises in re-editing and other interventions into the original form of film started as a basic censorship measure (removal of ideologically or aesthetically unacceptable scenes) and led to the gradual development of theories about film form and view of montage as the major creative and meaning-generating force.

Starting from the mid-1920s, Soviet cinema gained popularity in Europe, where it was, above all, praised for its innovative formal approach.<sup>151</sup> The content of Soviet films – at least in the sense that was desirable for the Soviets, who did not want their revolutionary cinema to be perceived as entertaining but to transmit Marxist ideas to European audiences – proved to be less effective than their form. Soviet cinema became highly fashionable among the European film public and

---

<sup>150</sup> Aleksei Gan, *Konstruktivizm* (Tver’: Tverskoe izdatelstvo, 1922), p. 53.

<sup>151</sup> For example, see Willy Haas’s opinion on the formulae-like structure of Soviet films in his essay *Von der neuen russischen Filmkunst*, in Willy Haas, *Der Kritiker als Mitproduzent: texte zum Film 1920-1930*, ed. By Wolfgang Jacobsen, Karl Prümm and Benno Wenz (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1991), pp. 158-162.

was commodified in a similar way to other exotic cultural phenomena. This process was noticed by Anatoly Lunacharsky, who regarded it as a form of profanation of Soviet cinema:

Now Europe demands something like Siberian snuff tobacco with ground glass and pepper.

[...]

It is even ready to gaze at the arch-revolutionary films if they, perhaps exactly because of their revolutionary character, palpate all its bones like a good bath-house masseur.<sup>152</sup>

Soviet film abroad, argued Lunacharsky, suffered from a ‘bourgeois attitude’, with its heightened attention to all things exotic and superficial.

However, even before Soviet cinema’s own experiments with montage in the late 1920s, film’s flexibility in conveying different meanings when the form is modified by re-cutting was explored by the film censors. The title of this chapter refers to an article by Sergei Eisenstein *Béla zabyvaet nozhnitsy* (*Béla forgets the Scissors*, 1926). That article, which was written in response to Béla Balázs’s essay *On the future of Film* (published in the journal *Kino* in June 1926) also contained Eisenstein’s thoughts on the ideas expressed in an earlier monograph by Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch* (1924 – original edition, 1925 – first Russian translation).<sup>153</sup>

The reference to this short – and rather ‘rude’, in the opinion of the Slavist Omry Ronen – public response to Balázs is not accidental: the polemics between Balázs and Eisenstein about the role of the editing scissors in cinema are not only representative of the variety of approaches to film form. They also demonstrate the radical difference in the attitudes of the ‘western’ Marxist Balázs and the Soviet

---

<sup>152</sup> See the article ‘Film in the West’ (1927) in: Anatolii Lunacharsky, *Lunacharsky o kino: Stat’i, Vyskazivania, Szenarii, Dokumenty* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1965), p. 78.

<sup>153</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, ‘Béla zabyvaet nozhnitsy’, in Eisenstein, Sergei, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, T. 2 (Moskva: Isskusstvo, 1964), p. 274-279; Béla Balázs, ‘Produktive und reproduktive Filmkunst’, *Filmtechnik* (Halle/Salle), 12, 12 Juni, 1926, pp. 234-235. Russian translation: Béla Balázs, ‘O budushchem fil'my’, *Kino*, 6 July 1926; Béla Balázs, *Vidimyi chelovek: Ocherki dramaturgii fil'ma* (Moskva: Vserossiiskii Proletkul't, 1925).

Marxist Eisenstein towards the basic creative principles of cinema.<sup>154</sup> Balázs's *Der sichtbare Mensch* is a poetic essay that explores the construction of meaning in film through making visible the 'face of things' with the help of non-aggressive use of formal instruments like camera or editing. The director and actors are, for Balázs, the central figures of film creation:

Die Sache ist eben die, daß Regisseur und Schauspieler die eigentlichen Dichter des Films sind.

[...]

Wir erfahren alles aus dem Gebärdenspiel, das nun keine Begleitung und auch nicht Form und Ausdruck, sondern *einzigster Inhalt* ist.<sup>155</sup>

In Balázs's essay, which caused Eisenstein's derisive response in *Kino*, the cameraman, 'the alpha and omega in film', is added to Balázs's list of cinema's 'true authors'. For him, the art of film returns to the spectator the ability to *see*, to make the unnoticed, invisible things visible. The director and the cameraman for Balázs are the guides and the conductors of this reconstructing experience of viewing, while an actor is a true body and soul of a film. Discussing the reasons why Balázs' views were not liked by Eisenstein, Omry Ronen argues:

[Eisenstein's] visual paradigmatics was based on 'type' (*tipazh*), i.e. on a generalized expressive mask that requires no individual actor's mimics, and whose syntagmatics was based on montage. [...]

The ideology of Balázs was the kindness of socialist dream, his theme – the rescue of those who suffer, his montage device – fade-in, montage without cutting, like socialism without hatred or cruelty.<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> Omry Ronen, 'Balázs', *Zvezda*, 3, 2011, pp. 230-238.

<sup>155</sup> Béla Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch oder die Kultur des Films* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001), p. 25.

<sup>156</sup> Ronen, p. 237.

In other words, film, for Balázs, is able to uncover the new aspects of reality without aggressive attempts to damage or to re-build it. For Eisenstein, by contrast, film is based on cutting, which he interprets as a highly creative force able to compose a new meaning through symbolic juxtaposition. Eisenstein opposed the ‘aggressive moment’ of the interaction of shots to a single, isolated shot, and the anonymously collective work on film to the ‘stardom’ of actors or directors. In his review he interprets Balázs’s theories and definitions as embodying a ‘German’ attitude to cinema which over-estimates the individual and neglects the collective; which erroneously focuses on the art of the image per se. As for Balázs’s view of the outstanding role of the cameraman, the director and the actors, Eisenstein reads it as a sign of non-Marxist, even bourgeois individualism. He repeats these doubts even in regard to the Hungarian critic’s choice of vocabulary: ‘Unpleasant terminology. Not ours. “Art”, “creativity”, “immortality”, “grandeur” and so on.’<sup>157</sup>

According to Eisenstein, the ‘typically German’ understanding of the filmmaking process deliberately excludes the notion of the cutting scissors as the most important, constructive instrument of attributing required meaning to a film sequence. This assumption of the Soviet director was, in many ways, based on the practical study of German cinema that was available in Soviet Russia in the early 1920s, namely through the practice of the censors and the re-editors of the foreign films who decided in *which form* western film art would reach Soviet audiences. In other words, by the time that the montage masterpieces of Eisenstein or Pudovkin were created, cinema *without scissors* was unthinkable in Soviet Russia. It is well known that Eisenstein himself worked on the re-editing of films in the Montage Bureau and adapted for Soviet screens Fritz Lang’s *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler*. This illustrates the background to his attack on Balázs, who does not make montage a central point of his argument.

The discussion of the constructive aspects of film was not confined to a theoretical disagreement between Balázs and Eisenstein. Other figures in Soviet cultural life of the mid-1920s expressed their opinion on the matter. In *Der*

---

<sup>157</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, S., ‘Béla Forgets the Scissors,’ in R. Taylor (ed.), *S. M. Eisenstein: Selected Works*, Vol. 1, Writings 1922-1934 (London: British Film Institute, 1988), pp. 77-81.

*sichtbare Mensch* Balázs praises Asta Nielsen's incredible ability to reveal the most subtle nuances of emotional palette through her constantly changing facial expression. The ability of film to make the spectator *see* this expression, understand and analyse it, and empathise with the character are, for Balázs, the highest achievements of film art and the essence of the film viewing experience. One of the key theorists of Russian formalism, Viktor Shklovsky discusses the limitations of such a purely cinematographic approach to what constitutes film in his essay *The Re-editing Table (Motalka)*. In this work that summarizes Shklovsky's experience in re-editing foreign films in the mid-1920s, he describes the conflict between an image and the power of re-editing, although in a less radical way than Eisenstein. For Shklovsky, the communicative aspect of the moving image (the message that it transmits to the spectator) is important, however, the information that can be extracted from unedited footage is relative and approximate. Physiognomy on its own, for Shklovsky, is insufficient. 'The diversity of the human face is not that great. The diversity of facial expression is even smaller. Intertitles and plot construction can entirely change the key which helps us to understand the character,' argues Shklovsky. Concluding that spectators demand from cinema something that hardly exists – 'truthful, veritable' 'lexical meaning of the feelings' – he notes that the task of cinema is, on the contrary, to offer subjective, constructed meaning: 'For a professional, the person in the frame does not cry, does not laugh, does not suffer, he only opens and closes eyes and mouth in a certain way. He is – material'.<sup>158</sup> As Valerie Posner points out, after 1926 [the year when Shklovsky begins his work in re-editing – N.P.] Shklovsky's perspective on the conception of material and the narrative aspect of cinema changed to admitting the superiority of material ('building material of an artwork') and the process of shaping it over *sujet* as ready 'construction'.<sup>159</sup> In Shklovsky's later article cinema is defined as a 'system of montage phrases that are related to

---

<sup>158</sup> Victor Shklovsky, 'Motalka', in Viktor Shklovsky, *Za 60 let raboti v kino* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1985), p. 44.

<sup>159</sup> Valerie Pozner, 'Shklovskii/Eisenstein – dvadsatye gody. Istoriiia plodotvornogo neponimaniia', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 46, 2000, pp. 179-188.

each other', rather than 'what is being told to us'.<sup>160</sup> This shift in his theories, I will argue, largely developed as a result of his experience in film re-editing.

The fact that the quarrel over montage between Balázs and Eisenstein, as well as the change in Shklovsky's attitude to physiognomy and narrative flexibility, happened in the years of the rise of the Soviet film avant-garde is significant. It shows how the solely utilitarian measures of the early 1920s (the necessary transformation of the ideologically unfavourable German films into suitable screening material by means of re-editing) gradually grew into an important theoretical debate over the tasks, the instruments and the persuasive power of cinema. The practice of re-editing foreign films that was required by the censorship restrictions became 'a good school for a filmmaker', as Shklovsky pointed out, teaching him to achieve balance between ideology and artistic quality in film.

Every German film passed through various stages on its way to release. After it was selected for purchase by a special department or by the distribution agents of a film company, it was sent to the editing room, where the re-editing plan was confirmed and preliminary adaptation was performed (including the removal of the unwanted scenes, length shortening, translation and adjustment of the intertitles). At the next stage the film was forwarded to political editors (the GRK censors), who, often in the presence of a re-editor, who reworked the film, discussed the film's suitability for various types of audiences. The censors approved or disapproved the adjustments made by the re-editors. If a film required additional editing, it was sent back to the re-editing bureau, and the process of re-editing was repeated. If a film was banned, it was either stored in the filmotheque or, when possible, returned to its initial form and sent back to the seller. If a film was passed, the censors provided it with a distribution license for a fixed period of time. When the license expired, a film had to pass the GRK examination again. This chapter is, therefore, focused on the next step in the distribution process that anticipated the debates and the Soviet film experiments of the late 1920s: it

---

<sup>160</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, 'Zvuk — smyslovoi znak', *Kino i zhizn*, 25, 1930, pp. 17–18.

explores what happened to German films in Soviet Russia when they had to be examined by the authorities and undergo a process of adjustment.

## 2. The origins of the Soviet film censorship system

In the 1920s control over film content with regard to its suitability for various groups of audiences, and for the protection of moral welfare, was widely practised internationally. In Soviet Russia, however, film censorship was twice as important. Since any foreign cultural element was considered to be potentially controversial material, all films had to go through strict examination by the censors ('political editors') before they were allowed to enter distribution. As a result of the censorship check, a film could either be passed for distribution in all cinemas with minor changes, allowed for a limited audience, passed for universal exhibition after considerable adjustment through re-editing, or declined. Within a few years the Soviet censorship mechanisms that were applied to foreign film developed into an elaborate, multi-stage procedure that was required due to the country's ideological divergence from the West, paired with continuous dependence on foreign film import. After the mid-1920s domestic production gradually replaced imported films, which was followed by the complete disappearance of foreign titles from the Soviet film repertoire in the early 1930s. However, the mechanisms of control, once established and tested on literature, theatre and the foreign cinema in the years of the NEP, continued to characterise the relationships between art and governmental power of the Soviet Union throughout its existence. After the establishment of the RSFSR, the set of restrictions towards the cultural material that could reach the wide masses proved to be an important article of the state's safety regulations. Party moralists not only insisted on the removal of the scenes which could expose the audience to violence, crime and sex. After the end of the Civil War the instability of a newly-born, revolutionary state required the most cautious attitude towards any cultural product that could provoke public anxiety and compromise the still fragile ideology. The development of control over film went through various stages, coinciding with the gradual bureaucratization of the new political regime: if in the early 1920s censorship was still in development,

remaining a part of the film selection process that was performed by the private and state distribution companies, by the end of the decade it had transformed into a set of rules that were prescribed by numerous governmental directives and instructions.

Soviet film censorship emerged in 1918 when the government faced the task of adapting the content of films that were inherited from the previous political regime to the new reality.<sup>161</sup> A few years before re-editing (understood as physical intervention into the moving image sequence) became a common practice, the primary censorship tasks were fulfilled by the oral commentaries, recitation or supporting lectures that often accompanied film screenings.<sup>162</sup> The Cinema Committees in Moscow and Petrograd that were formed in spring 1918, were supplied with their own lecturers, whose main task was to accompany screenings for workers' audiences.<sup>163</sup> As early as 1919, professional film lecturers or a film commentators became common in central and provincial Soviet cinemas.<sup>164</sup> Such verbalization of film content was the simplest form of censorship control that helped to set the tone of the screening and to impart an instructional quality to any feature film. Live commentary often helped to correct the controversial moments of the plot, or to explain and to soften the plot 'defects' caused by removed or missing scenes. The commentator who was standing behind or in front of the screen, thus supplied the audience with a set of 'tools' for reading the visual material in the 'correct' way. Most of the old films needed commentaries that offered a viewer an opportunity to take a distanced perspective on the events of the film, without allowing himself or herself to become immersed in the depicted reality or to identify with the 'wrong' character. A film screening accompanied by a lecture forced the spectators to remain onlookers rather than participants: a live

---

<sup>161</sup> The nationalized films included the imported as well as pre-revolutionary Russian films. Here 'foreign' refers to both groups of those films.

<sup>162</sup> Yuri Tsivian, *Istoricheskaia retseptsiia kino: Kinematograf v Rossii, 1896-1930* (Riga: Zinatne, 1991), pp. 274-278.

<sup>163</sup> *Istoriia sovetskogo kino. 1917-1967: V 4 t.*, ed. by Kh. Abdul-Kasimova, Vol. 1 (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1969), p. 16.

<sup>164</sup> TSGALI (St Petersburg), F. 83, Op.1, Ed.khr. 2, l.3; Yuri Tsivian, *Istoricheskaia retseptsiia kino*, pp. 274-278.



commentary separated the actual present moment of viewing from the fictional reality depicted on the screen.

However, with the beginning of the NEP and the arrival of dozens of new foreign films, such a form of adjustment became impractical. The censorship process required unification, and the training of new lecturers became inconvenient. Despite this, film commentary continued to be frequently practised in provincial film theatres as an additional censorship measure, although the new standard procedure of foreign film adjustment prescribed the use of the re-edited film copies with the new Russian intertitles.

The first censorship organ of Soviet Russia was formed in 1919, after the nationalisation of the entire film industry was complete and all surviving film property was handed over to the management of Narkompros. The Censorship and Repertoire Committee of Narkompros that started working in autumn 1919 aimed to examine and to set the distribution repertoire on the territory of the RSFSR<sup>165</sup>. Unification of the censorship process was undertaken in 1922 with the foundation of Glavlit (Chief Board of Literature and Publishing) and, a year later, of Glavrepertkom (Chief repertoire committee). Initially, Glavlit was supposed to take care of all kinds of censorship, but it focused on maintaining control predominantly over literary works and was not able to process theatre plays or films. The censorship of the arts, theatre and cinema required a separate department, and in February 1923 the Chief Committee for the Control of Repertoire, or Glavrepertkom (also referred to as the GRK or Repkom) was created as a part of Glavlit. Although the power relationships between the two institutions were ambiguous and not clearly defined, causing debates over the autonomy of the GRK up until the late 1920s, Glavrepertkom became the central institution in the vertical hierarchy of Soviet film censorship.<sup>166</sup> No film or play could be admitted for public exhibition without permission from Glavrepetkom.

---

<sup>165</sup> *Istoriia otechestvennogo kino*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>166</sup> The autonomy of the GRK as a film and theatre censorship organ and its relationships with Glavlit or other organisations that worked with film, for example, Glavpolitprosvet, were disputable and lasted until the re-organisation of Glavrepertkom in 1928 when it became a part of Glaviskusstvo. See the letter to Molotov from 3 June 1927 that discusses the 'abnormal situation

### 3. Sources and methodology

Despite the attempts of scholars to outline the structure of Soviet censorship of the 1920s, there are still several previously ignored aspects of this problem, including the censorship of foreign films in Soviet distribution.<sup>167</sup> Partially this can be explained by the current unavailability of the many documents that could clarify the details of Soviet film control, due to their loss or unknown location. According to Tatiana Gorjaeva, who has investigated structural changes in the Soviet censorship machine, the 1920s-1930s archive of Glavlit (the main art censorship institution of the Soviet Union) was deliberately destroyed in the 1940s, and documentation of Glavrepertkom was partially lost during the relocation of its archives in the 1930s-1940s. The remaining, rather fragmented Glavrepertkom documents were either distributed between various regional and specialist archives, or eventually transferred to Gosfilmofond after being stored in the archives of VGIK.

Some documents, like the protocols of closed Narkompros sessions held by RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Social and Political History), were only recently made available for research. As for the Gosfilmofond holdings derived from Glavrepertkom archives, they are not widely known and still require careful description, identification and partial republishing. Some of these documents, such as the Glavrepertkom register cards, were discovered and identified during the research conducted for this thesis and have been used for research purposes for the first time. Some of the documents of Glavrepertkom and the documentation of the Montage Bureau are currently held by RGALI, the Russian State Archive of

---

in the organisational relationships between Glavrepertkom and Glavlit' in RGASPI, F.17, Op.113, d.298, l. 147-150. According to the letter, Narkompros wanted to eliminate the independence of Glavrepertkom turning it to one of the Glavlit's departments.

<sup>167</sup> The major works that explore the history of Soviet censorship of the arts in the 1920s are: Tatiana M. Gorjaeva, *Istoriia sovetskoi politicheskoi tsenzury, 1917-1991* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Russian State University for Humanities, 2000); Steven Richmond, 'The Conditions of the Contemporary: The Censors and Censoring of Soviet Theatre, 1923-1927', in *Russian History/Histoire Russe*, 27, 1, 2000, 1-56. Gorjaeva explores censorship through the example of Soviet radio, Richmond outlines the development of Soviet theatre censorship.

Literature and Art. In other words, the history of Soviet film censorship in the 1920s still has to be written, and its mechanisms can only be reconstructed with the most careful analysis of multiple archival sources.

The Gosfilmofond collection contains ‘film cases’ (*fil'movye dela*) composed of the surviving Glavrepertkom documents concerning the imported foreign films that were reviewed by Glavrepertkom between 1923 and 1930. Each German ‘film case’ contains: a random selection of the primary censorship protocols, the handwritten protocols of revision and a plot summary, applications for additional censorship licences, intertitle lists (Russian and/or German), the revision notes of political editors or re-editors, and various supporting documents (such as articles, advertising materials and librettos,). The collection contains a few dozen German “film cases”, but it has so many lacunae that one can only speculate about the fate of some German productions with missing records. Most films were distributed under new Russian titles, with the original title, the names of the directors and actors, as well as the intertitles, absent from the censorship records. In such cases the identification of the original German films has not always been possible. My work on Glavrepertkom protocols involved identification of the existing documents and classification of them according to the year of submission and the censorship criteria applied to them. One of the most helpful sources for classification of the censorship documents was the catalogue of the German silent films in Soviet distribution by Nataliia Egorova. Despite many inaccuracies, Egorova’s catalogue remains today the only attempt at composing an exhaustive filmography of the imported German films. The incomplete collection of the Glavrepertkom register cards (the index cards on each reviewed German film) provides unique information about the date of a film’s submission to the GRK, date of revision, censors’ conclusion and the name of the distributors.

Other important sources that were used in my reconstruction of the Soviet film control process are the documents of TSGALI (Central State Archive of Literature and Art) and a very detailed collection of documentation of the Montage Bureau held by RGALI. These documents together offer a new perspective on the mechanisms of Soviet film censorship that are described in this chapter.

#### 4. The development of censorship policy: Imposing restrictions on film distribution under the NEP

The development of the Soviet censorship system went through several stages. In the late 1910s all censorship functions were performed by the film departments within Narkompros.<sup>168</sup> Official control over film content was implemented by the Narkompros Film Committee, the Department of Reviews (*otdel retsenzii*), and, after 1919, the Censorship and Repertoire Committee (within the Film Committee of Narkompros).<sup>169</sup>

From 1918 to 1921 the main tasks and responsibilities of the Cinema Committee's departments in regard to foreign films were limited to watching the material inherited from pre-revolutionary times and creating lists of what was allowed or forbidden to be screened. The members of the Department of Reviews who worked in the various areas of Moscow were obliged to write regular reports about the films in distribution, allowing the Committee 'to take urgent measures towards the removal of unwanted films' from the cinema programmes.<sup>170</sup> In 1918 the criteria for considering a film 'undesirable' were not described in detail, being defined only as 'any reasons of artistic, moral, religious, or political character'.<sup>171</sup> According to the Narkompros Decree from 6 September 1918, the Film Committee instructed distribution companies and film theatres to provide an immediate report in cases when the original film title had been modified. The Committee also imposed fines of 10,000 roubles in any cases of fraud with the censored copies.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> Sergei Bratoliubov, *Na zare sovetskoi kinematografii: Iz istorii kinoorganizatsii Petrograda-Leningrada 1918-1925 godov* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1976), p. 20 -21.

<sup>169</sup> *Istoriia otechestvennogo kino*, p. 93.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* p. 93-95.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92. 'All fragments in film that the Committee prescribed to cut out, have to be cut out from the negative as well as from all positive copies of a film, and all the cut-outs have to be presented to the Committee'.

According to the memoirs of the former Head of the Moscow Film Committee Nikolai Fiodorovich Preobrazhenskii, such frauds happened quite often, but, since the censorship regulations were weak and the procedure of control over film screenings was still to be modernized, the Committee could not prevent the circulation of uncensored versions of foreign films.<sup>173</sup> However, exercises in film re-editing had already started in the years when the number of the foreign films on the market was rather limited.

With the beginning of the NEP, the apparatus, as well as the procedure itself, was subject to considerable changes. The flow of new, ideologically unreliable material into the market required the immediate strengthening of the censorship apparatus. The ‘Suggestion for the Reorganisation of the All-Russian Photographic and Cinematographic Section of Narkompros’, published in 1922, addressed to the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, contained a proposal for the organisation of the special Censorship Committee (which ‘primarily consisted of party members’) that would be responsible for the examination of all films.<sup>174</sup> It was decreed in the new censorship regulations that all films had to be supplied with a censorship certificate (licence) that allowed distribution.<sup>175</sup> The new directive explained the importance of building a strong censorship barrier against low-quality productions from the West:

Bearing in mind that the films are much cheaper abroad than in Russia, that during recent years foreign films did not appear on the Russian market and that they, as out-of-dated material, can be discarded (*vybrasyvat'sa*) in the Russian market more cheaply than the film stock itself — IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE TIME BEING

---

<sup>173</sup> Nikolai F. Preobrazhenskii, ‘Vospominaniia o rabote VFKO’, in *Iz istorii kino: Materialy i dokumenty*, V. 1 (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1958), p. 88.

<sup>174</sup> I. Piliver and V. Dorogokupets, *Sistema deistvuiushchego zakonodatel'stva RSFSR* (Moskva, Leningrad: Tea-kino-pechat', 1929), p.13.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13. ‘Every film that is exploited in the film theatres, clubs and institutions on the territory of RSFSR should be supplied with a permission card from censorship, and without it has no right of distribution on the territory of the RSFSR’.

TO INTRODUCE THE MOST STRICT CENSORSHIP OF THE FILMS OF FOREIGN ORIGIN [Capitalized in the original text. – N.P.], taking into account that the content of foreign films is mostly trashy and of an exclusively ‘criminal’ kind.<sup>176</sup>

In the context of growing competition between the film firms under the NEP and the high prices of film copies, it was difficult for the newly-founded companies to navigate the European film market. Neither the films, nor the reputations of the production companies and the foreign re-sellers were known to Russian distributing firms and, therefore, they were not perceived as reliable. Additionally, the constant attempts by Soviet companies to save money on purchases inevitably affected the repertoire of Soviet film theatres. Foreign companies supplied Soviet agents with cheaper productions: melodramas, old costume films and adventure films from previous seasons, often reduced in length in order to minimize costs or to fit in with the Soviet film programme standards. The initiative in this respect often belonged to the Soviets: before the new German films proved to be successful among the Soviet audiences, the priority of the companies, even the most established ones, lay in purchasing the most inexpensive screening material. For example, correspondence between Sevzapkino headquarters and its agent, who attempted to strike bargains with large production companies abroad, sheds light on the company’s purchasing policy that gave preference to older films rather than costly new productions. In July 1922, in response to the attempts of German companies to establish stronger working relationships with Sevzapkino, the administration sent the following directives to its foreign agents:

---

<sup>176</sup> RGASPI, F. 17, op.60, ed. khr. 259, l. 49. The document is addressed to the Committee of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Workers and Peasants Inspection (1922). Here, as in most of the official documents of that time the choice of vocabulary is remarkable: the German firms are seen as evil and expected to «invade» the Soviet market with the low-quality, ‘corrupting’ material, whereas the selection of the films entirely depended on the Soviet distribution companies themselves.

We find the distribution of foreign films from abroad *not profitable* [Original italics here and below. – N.P.] The purchases of films released in *1914, 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918*, that can be bought at a *cheaper price* than the films of 1919, 1920, 1921 and 1922, are most desirable. In Russia interest in the films of 1914-1918 is very high because they have not reached Russia yet.<sup>177</sup>

However, less than a year after the market was opened for new films, the situation had changed, though old and second-rate films continued to constitute the lion's share of cinema programmes up until the mid-1920s.<sup>178</sup> It happened under the influence of the success which the first imported box-office hits from Germany and Austria had with Soviet audiences. The first German box-office hits, mainly distributed by the bigger companies like Kino-Moskva, offered the Soviet spectator a new world of previously unknown images and filming techniques, a broader selection of the new genres and styles, and the faces of new film stars.

As is evident from the example of the correspondence between Sevzapkino and its agents abroad, foreign distribution companies were interested in contacts with the Soviet market and often turned to Soviet agents with offers for the purchase of films.<sup>179</sup> The prices varied considerably from one film to another, depending not only the length of a film, the technical quality of the copy and the year of production, but also on the commercial success of a chosen film in domestic distribution. The situation with film purchases was complicated by the confusing inconsistency of the Soviet censorship process: after an agent received the headquarters' preliminary agreement to proceed with the purchase, he was required to send a copy of that film to the censorship organs, namely, to the Censorship and Repertoire Committee of the Narkompros Film and Photography

---

<sup>177</sup> TSGALI, F. 83, op. 1, ed. khr. 28, l. 20.

<sup>178</sup> TSGALI, F. 83, op.1, ed. khr. 25, l. 22. The telegram to the Sevzapkino agent Markus from the headquarters allowed the purchase of the newer films: 'If there is a distribution license for Russia then, indeed, buy the box-office hits'.

<sup>179</sup> An example is the correspondence between Sevzapkino and the foreign companies are held in the in TSGALI, F. 83, op.1, ed. khr. 24-26, 95, 96.

Department, for preliminary examination. The Committee was formed by a Decree from 3 October 1919 and was assigned the responsibilities for the regulation of the cinema repertoire on the territory of RSFSR.

According to the censorship decision, the films were divided into three groups: 1) those allowed to be screened on the territory of RSFSR, 2) those recommended for screening in the cinemas owned by the Film and Photography Department, and 3) those absolutely prohibited from public screening.<sup>180</sup> In cases when a film was accepted by the Department, it received a certificate (*litsenz*) and the purchase continued in the prescribed order. According to the Decree, the ‘absolutely prohibited’ foreign films were subjected to immediate confiscation by the Department, both in negative and positive copies, and were to be stored in the Department’s own archives. This led to an immense financial risk for the distribution companies, which refused to invest in a film under threat of future confiscation. Often the rejected films were sent back, which meant considerable additional charges for the buying company. Since the prices largely depended on the length of a film, a censorship order to cut unwanted scenes could also lead to financial losses. The average length of the German films purchased by Soviet companies in 1922 and 1923 was between 1500 and 2500 meters, with the exception of longer serials and *Monopolfilme*, which arrived in a package consisting of several full-length films. Shorter films and various fragments were bought by smaller distributors like PUR (Political Committee of the Red Army) which needed such films for illustrative purposes (i.e. accompanying a lecture, etc.)<sup>181</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> RGALI, F. 989, op. 1, ed. khr. 136, l. 23; *Istoriia otechestvennogo kino*, p. 95.

<sup>181</sup> The information about the Soviet distributors of the German films can be found in Glavrepertkom register cards (Gosfilmofond) – a part of the missing archive of the GRK that includes 250 entries on the German films. The cards contain the basic information on the imported foreign films (original and new title, date of submission for censorship, the title of a distribution company, and any censorship decisions with dates). The collection of cards, though not complete, includes about 250 entries on the imported German films that went through the censorship organs. It presents an important source of basic information on the fate of the distributed foreign films in the Soviet Union.



The film committee faced the difficult task of setting an optimal censorship procedure that could sequentially filter all imported films according to their ideological suitability but that, at the same time, would fill the gaps in the country's limited film repertoire. Another important task was to make more profit from distribution, which meant responding to audience demands. The division of the audiences into various groups with different levels of access to the particular parts of the film repertoire was a distinctive feature of Soviet censorship. The NEP audience was divided, essentially, into workers and NEPmen, who were judged to have different tastes and needs. According to Sergei Bratoliubov, who worked in the propaganda section of Sevzapkino from 1923, this partition was supported by the location of urban cinemas: in the city periphery and the working class quarters film exhibition was predominantly in the hands of the workers' clubs, and the central cinemas were mostly attended by the 'Soviet bourgeoisie'.<sup>182</sup> In the first report on the work of Glavrepertkom published on 5 December 1923, plays and films in Soviet distribution were divided into three groups, according to their appeal to various audiences:

The Committee does not support the viewpoint that the plays must be forever "banned" or "allowed". All popular (*khodkii*) repertoire is divided into three categories:

1 category – allowed in all theatres,

2 category – allowed but *not for the workers and peasants audience* [Italics is mine. – N.P.] Here we include plays that, according to the general censorship conditions, are possible to be allowed but cannot, however, be recommended to the wider worker and peasant audience. We also include here philistine plays, plays of the unhealthy individualistic kind, etc. But in doing this, the Committee does not want to create some sort of 'ghetto' for the working class audience. In its instructions the Committee advises to always take into account the audience profile and, if the audience consists of the more or less

---

<sup>182</sup> Bratoliubov, p. 48.

conscious working class mass that has an understanding of social relations, to also allow the works that belong to this category,

3 category – prohibited. Here we have [everything] counter-revolutionary, evidently mystical, chauvinistic and so on, as well as everything that in the modern circumstances is untimely.<sup>183</sup>

The protective separation of the worker and peasant audience from urban cinema goers resulted in limited access of the lower classes to many foreign films. The worker and peasant group was soon complemented by two other categories of population: the Red Army audience and children under 16 years of age. As a result of the attempt to protect the ideological and aesthetic vulnerability of certain social groups, the repertoire of the workers' clubs and the peripheral film theatres varied considerably from the central cinemas.

The registration cards of Glavrepertkom reveal how censorship gradually strengthened between 1923 and 1930: from almost no restrictions on German film in the early 1920s to severe audience restrictions in the mid-1920s and, finally, complete removal of German films from the cinema repertoire. For example, two films by Richard Oswald enjoyed enormous popularity among Soviet audiences in the early 1920s after censorship approval in 1923 and recommendation for universal exhibition. These films introduced the Soviet audience to the genre of the German costume film and created a cult around such film stars as Conrad Veidt and Liane Haid: *Lady Hamilton* (in RSFSR from 1923) and *Lucrezia Borgia* (in RSFSR from 1923). However, in 1928, after the film repertoire was revised by Glavrepertkom, the censors imposed audience restrictions on these films, forbidding them for peasants and children under 16. *Lucrezia Borgia*, which was accused of having erotic and clerical undertones, was also prohibited from being screened in workers' clubs. Such films as Lubitsch's *Carmen* starring Pola Negri, E.A. Dupont's *Die grüne Manuela* (1923), a poster for which appears on the city

---

<sup>183</sup> See the Project of the Instruction on repertoire control in the villages (12 February 1926) in: *Istoriia sovetskoi politicheskoi tsensury. Dokumenty i kommentarii. 1917-1993*, ed. by Tatiana Goriaeva (Moskva: Rosspen, 1997), p. 277.

streets in Dziga Vertov's *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* (1929), and *Der Sprung ins Leben* (1923, Johannes Guter) were passed by the GRK in 1925 with no audience restrictions. The period of unlimited exhibition lasted until 1928, after which the films received the right to limited distribution only.

Big box-office hits like G.W. Pabst's *Die freudlose Gasse* and E.A. Dupont's *Variété* (1925, E.A. Dupont) had similar distribution status. A copy of *Variété* was submitted to the GRK in 1927. Thanks to a brilliant actors' ensemble that included such popular stars as Emil Jannings, Lia de Putti and Maly Delschaft, the censors passed the film for all audiences, despite the fact that the theme and the content of the film were not in line with Soviet censorship policy. However, after the first public screenings the license was withdrawn and, following thorough re-examination and re-editing, the film was re-released for an audience that excluded peasants, workers and children. *Die freudlose Gasse*, which was imported by Sovkino in 1925 – the same year it was exhibited in the Weimar Republic – received its unrestricted distribution license until 1928, when this decision was revised. As a result the film, which explored themes of prostitution and poverty in 1920s Vienna, remained in distribution, but received an adult-only status. It is important to note that the film, despite depicting nudity and violence (which prompted widespread criticism), was very successful and is among the very few German films that were praised for raising social issues. According to the censorship registers, Pabst's film remained in active distribution until 1932, which was also unusual for a foreign film, most of which were officially removed from the Soviet screens no later than 1932.

It is important to note that this was not a typical case. Pabst's films were among the most important German productions that were distributed in the Soviet Union in the 1920s: more than any other German director, Pabst was well-known and respected by the Soviet audiences and critics. A Soviet monograph on Pabst studying the aesthetics and the cinematographic methods of his films was published in 1936. The monograph contained a thorough analysis of *Die freudlose Gasse* as an example of Pabst's early film style. The monograph justified prolonged distribution of the film in Soviet Russia, as opposed to Pabst's other works, which received criticism for their 'Freudianism' and bourgeois themes. The

film received a positive review from the critic when, paradoxically, it was already long out of distribution.<sup>184</sup> Some films received distribution certificates not with audience but with regional limitations. For example, Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Michael* (1924) was admitted for exhibition only in Leningrad. The distribution area of another film, Toni Attenberger's *Desperados* (released in 1919, submitted for Soviet censorship by Proletkino in 1923) was limited to Moscow cinemas only. Similarly, Dmitrii Bukhovetskii's film *Sappho* (*Lalo* in Soviet distribution) with Pola Negri and Alfred Abel received permission in September 1923 to be screened only in the central cinemas of Moscow. However, in October of the same year the film was submitted for re-examination by Kino-Moskva with a request to expand the film's distribution territory. As a result, *Sappho* was additionally allowed to be screened in such cities as Nizhniy Novgorod, Rostov-na-Donu, Saratov and Simbirsk. As demonstrated by these examples, in cases when a film was potentially profitable, basic censorship measures such as imposing distribution restrictions still allowed targeted and profitable distribution. In the late 1920s censorship policy changed due to the new shift towards a more refined cinema repertoire. After the official re-examination of all film repertoire undertaken by Glavrepertkom in 1927 and 1928, most of the foreign films that remained in distribution from the early 1920s were either rejected or limited to certain audience groups.

## 5. Glavrepertkom and centralization of censorship control

The foundation of the censorship organs Glavlit and Glavrepertkom signified the beginning of centralized control over the arts and represented a shift towards a unified repertoire policy. The process of centralisation was finalized in 1925, with the monopolisation of all film distribution by the state and the assignment of distribution tasks to Sovkino. From 1923 to 1925 all foreign films had to receive Glavrepertkom permission prior to entering the distribution network, however, all preliminary adjustment, including re-editing, re-naming or adding new intertitles,

---

<sup>184</sup> Nikolai Efimov, *Georg Vil'gel'm Pabst* (Moskva, Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1936)

was done by the editors within various distribution companies.<sup>185</sup> Often the re-editing services were provided by the central censorship boards: for instance, by the Censorship Board of the Petrograd-based Sevzapkino that consisted, besides Sevzapkino members, of invited chairmen from Gublitsprosvet and Politkontol'. The Censorship Board of Sevzapkino was responsible for censoring all films that were in distribution in the North-West region.<sup>186</sup> In January and February 1923 it examined the newly imported foreign films of such Petrograd-based distribution companies as Kino-Sever, the Petrograd Department of Kino-Moskva and its own Sevzapkino.

According to the surviving minutes of the Censorship Board sessions in the TSGALI archives, most of the films that were imported by Kino-Moskva in these two months were of German origin (about 15 films in total). The majority of them were new productions that were released between 1920 and 1922.<sup>187</sup> The minutes of the Censorship Board reveal that in 1923 the film control was not as strict as it became with the foundation of Glavrepertkom: all the films were passed without any changes, except the film of the company Ellen-Richter-Filmgesellschaft, *Zehn Milliarden Volt* (1921, Adolf Gärtner), which portrayed the working classes in an undesirable way. Even then the tone of the Censorship Board committee was more recommendatory than prescriptive:

---

<sup>185</sup> See, for example, a letter to Kino-Sever concerning the re-editing of the Austrian film *Der Graf von Cagliostro* (1920, Reinhold Schünzel) by Elin-Zadorozhnyi and Co.: TSGALI, F. 242, op.1, ed. khr. 5, l. 18.

<sup>186</sup> TSGALI, F. 83, op.1, ed. khr. 9, l. 15. For the 1923 protocols of the sessions of the Censorship Board concerning the films imported by the companies Kino-Sever and Kino-Moskva, together with the representatives of Glavpolitprosvet and Glavpolitkontrol', see TSGALI, F. 83, op. 1, ed. khr. 40 – tl. The films are given under the Russian re-edited titles only, with no additional information. The reconstruction of the German is not always possible.

<sup>187</sup> Such as *Sumurun* (1920, Ernst Lubitsch), *Die Abenteurerin von Monte-Carlo*, *Zehn Milliarden Volt*, *Des Lebens und der Liebe Wellen* (1921, Lorenz Bätz), *Die Geliebte von Roswolskys* (1921, Felix Basch), two parts of *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler*, *Treibende Kraft* (1921, Zoltán Nagy), *Satansketten* (1921, Léo Lasko), *Pariserinnen* (1921, Léo Lasko), *Praschnas Geheimnis* (1922, Ludwig Baetz) and *Das Diadem der Zarin* (1922, Richard Löwenbein)

Since in *Zehn Milliarden Volt* the workers and their leaders are shown as the unconscious enemies of culture, the film is allowed to be screened only provided that the intertitles are changed in such way that the protest against the new invention is not an organised movement of the working class but only an outbreak of a small group of ignorant depositors who are provoked by investors. Until the intertitles are changed the film is not allowed to be screened. It is suggested that the distribution company submits both the old and the new intertitle lists (montage lists) for censorship examination.<sup>188</sup>

As for the older films of Kino-Moskva, of which there were only a few titles, they also successfully passed examination by the State Censorship Board in 1923.<sup>189</sup> Films like *Die Sühne* (1917, Emmerich Hanus), *Ein hochherrschaftlicher Diener* (1918, Curt Wolfram Kiesslich), *Seelenverkäufer* (1919, Carl Boese) and *Das Glück der Irren* (1919, Johannes Guter) enjoyed long-term popularity among the Soviet audiences. A few prints, however, were considerably shorter in length than the original German versions; for instance, *Sumurun*, an oriental-themed film whose declared length upon censorship examination was 1,500 meters – 880 meters shorter than the original version that appeared in the German censorship registers. The circulation of shorter Soviet versions of German films was common: in the context of limited budgets and prices calculated per meter, shortened copies of successful and more expensive films were often purchased through smaller intermediary film companies, for lower prices. As becomes evident from correspondence with foreign agents and from shipping receipts, the prints often arrived incomplete, sometimes even with whole parts missing.<sup>190</sup> Finally, all films

---

<sup>188</sup> See a protocol from 10 January 1923. ‘Zehn Milliarden Volt’ (‘110 Milliardov Vol’t’): 1,200 meters, 6 parts. TSGALI, F. 83, op.1, ed. khr. 40, l. 11.

<sup>189</sup> The private firm Kino-Moskva mainly purchased the new films. The oldest films that were distributed by the company were still rather recent: all released after 1917.

<sup>190</sup> In early 1920s the shipping services that were used by the film firms were provided by the German-Russian company ‘Derutra’ (*Deutsch-Russische Lager- und Transportgesellschaft*) that specialized in transportation of the film reels and all related documents from the Weimar Republic

were sent without intertitles (but with separately enclosed montage lists): the distribution companies replaced them with their own Russian titles upon arrival.

The German films of Kino-Sever, a Petrograd-based private distribution company that was considerably smaller than Kino-Moskva, submitted fewer films for examination in January 1923. The majority of them were of German or Austrian origin. The company focused on the purchase of the big productions (*boeviki*), the more successful and, therefore, more expensive films: *Der Graf von Cagliostro* (1919/1920, Reinhold Schünzel), *Dubrowsky, der Räuber Atamann* (1921, Piotr Chardynin), *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari*, *Tagebuch meiner Frau* (1920, Paul L. Stein), *Haschisch, das Paradies der Hölle* (1921, Reinhard Bruck), *Der Schrei des Gewissens* (1920, Eugen Illés), *Miss Beryll, die Laune eines Millionärs* (1921, Friedrich Zelnik), *Unter Räuubern und Bestien* (1921, Ernst Wendt). Genre-wise, most of the films brought by Kino-Moskva and Kino-Sever were melodramas, crime stories or historical films. Other types included oriental fantasies, *Russenfilme*, Expressionist experiments and adventure series (so-called *Sensationsfilme*) like *Die Abenteurerin von Monte-Carlo*. It must be noted that most of the directors of these films started their careers before the First World War and by 1923 were recognized as well-established names in German cinema. Their films were successfully marketed in Europe, therefore attracting Soviet agents who continued to buy new films by these directors in the following years. Such German film stars as Ellen Richter, Carl Auen, Pola Negri, Olga Engl, Fern Andra or Alfons Fryland, who appeared in most of the foreign films or series that were extensively promoted in Soviet Russia, soon became the audiences' favourites, and their success continuously influenced the choice of films for import in the mid- and late 1920s.

Sevzapkino, which in 1923 was still hesitant about its distribution choices and preferred to buy older films, took a step towards more adventurous film purchases under the influence of competition from such companies as Kino-Moskva. It submitted three new films to the Censorship Board: *Gräfin Walewska* (1920, Otto Rippert) – a popular historical melodrama of Napoleon's life,

---

to Soviet Russia. See the receipts and invoices in TSGALI. For example: TSGALI, F. 83, op. 1, ed. khr. 86, l. 6.



*Abenteuer der schönen Dorette* (1921, Otto Rippert) and *Landstrassen und Grossstadt* (1921, Carl Wilhelm). These films were made by well-known German directors who started their filming careers in the early 1910s and were already known in Russia. *Gräfin Walewska* and *Abenteuer der schönen Dorette* starred Hella Moja – one of the four foreign star personas whose films were specially selected for distribution and exclusively advertised by Sevzapkino.<sup>191</sup> Carl Wilhelm's *Landstrassen und Grossstadt* starred Conrad Veidt, who was at the peak of his popularity in Europe. Following public demand, and the success of these films, in July 1923 the company adjusted its distribution policy and submitted for censorship approval such box-office hits as *Danton*, *Störtebeker* (1919, Ernst Wendt), *Christian Wahnschaffe* (first part – *Weltbrand*, 1920, Urban Gad) and *Die Schreckensnächte auf Schloß Rochester* (1922, Conrad Wiene).<sup>192</sup> The selection of genres was representative of Soviet mass tastes: historical melodramas, pirate stories, crime dramas and *guignol* sketches were among the most desirable films.

Towards the end of 1923 Glavrepertkom started to regularly practise re-editing of imported productions. After that, practically all German films that reached distribution were re-edited. The censorship scissors often removed the most controversial scenes, making the films considerably shorter. For instance, *Danton*, a historical film that depicted the French Revolution and starred Emil Jannings and Werner Krauss, was submitted to the Censorship Board in July 1923 as a copy of 1,896 meters in length (about 80 meters shorter than the original 1,978 meters). After examination by the censors the film required further adjustments, and less than two months later it was submitted again, at a length of 1,867 meters (according to the minutes). Finally, in October 1923 the film was sent for approval to the newly-formed Glavrepertkom committee at 1,200 meters in length. At this stage the 'capital re-editing' of the film was undertaken by the Goskino bureau of montage. The story of the inventive re-editing of *Danton* (in Soviet release

---

<sup>191</sup> Other Sevzapkino-promoted stars were the Germans Albert Bassermann, Helga Molander, Mia May and the Austrian-Albanian actor Alexander Moissi who was well-known to the Russians after his tour with the Reinhardt theatre ensemble in 1911. See: advertising materials enclosed to *Kino*, 20 October, 1922.

<sup>192</sup> TSGALI, F. 83, op. 1, ed. khr. 40, ll. 12-68.



*Guillotine*) by the editor Veniamin Boitler was famously recalled by Sergei Eisenstein.<sup>193</sup> Thus, approximately one-third of the film was cut out by the censors, and such significant abridgement was frequently practised on German films in the re-editing bureau.<sup>194</sup>

It is important to note that with the foundation of the GRK the censorship criteria applied to foreign films became stricter, and films were more often subjected to re-editing and extensive cutting. Before the GRK was formed, it was easier for a film to pass the censorship examination with minor changes only. Most of the films were passed in their original form, and the limited distribution in certain areas was the most strict censorship measure. In 1923 Glavrepertkom took over the censorship process and re-examined films that were already in distribution. Many German films in their previously existing form did not satisfy the new censorship requirements. The private companies which re-purchased the distribution rights on certain previously passed films were refused permission to continue the films' distribution.<sup>195</sup>

Among other things, the GRK was responsible for publishing lists of foreign films that were allowed or forbidden to be screened on the territory of the Soviet Union. Sending film recommendations for the regional censorship centres was also among the GRK's tasks. From the beginning of its existence in February 1923 to the end of August of the same year the GRK published four such repertoire lists.<sup>196</sup> One of them, for instance, features the two parts of *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler* that were imported by Kino-Moskva as a forbidden film, although earlier, according to the protocols of Sevzapkino, it was allowed by the regional Censorship Collegium.<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>193</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, ed. by Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1949), p. 11.

<sup>194</sup> More about the work of the re-editing bureaus in Soviet Russia in: Yuri Tsivian, 'The wise and wicked game: re-editing and Soviet film culture of the 1920's', *Film History*, 3, 1996, pp. 327-343.

<sup>195</sup> Like, for instance, the company Elin-Zadorozhnyi and Co. that bought the rights on distribution particular films from the bigger distributors, for instance, Kino-Moskva.

<sup>196</sup> *Istoriia sovetskoi politicheskoi tsenzury*, p. 429.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p.432. Two parts of *Dr Mabuse*: 1) 1 episode, 8 parts, 2,000 meters in length and 2) 3 episodes, 7 parts, 1,600 meters in length, were purchased by Kino-Moskva.

A related point to consider is Glavrepertkom's intermediary position in the Soviet censorship system. The GRK was given permission to perform final control over films and to approve or reject films that were reworked by the film editors. In doing so, the GRK regulated the activity of the re-editing bureau. The bureau, despite its subordinate position in the censorship vertical, nevertheless, was allowed certain creative freedom with regards to foreign films. Despite its privileged position, the GRK was a rather enclosed institution and remained fully controlled by the superior organs of Narkompros and, on a higher level, by the Central Committee. Most of the censors, who worked in the GRK in 1925, had only secondary education.<sup>198</sup> Political editors of Glavrepertkom, armoured with the prescribed directives about safe methods of ideological control over film (by 'changing and removal' – Rus. *izmeneniem i vycherkom*) often preferred to cut out more than was needed, being hardly concerned with the preservation of a film's original structure and content.<sup>199</sup> As for film re-editors, they had a unique position in Soviet censorship apparatus. Before the establishment of the GRK, the editors played a more marginal, technical role. Their tasks were limited to shortening film length, in order to make a film fit a film programme, and to removing frivolous scenes. After the GRK was formed and the editors became more and more dependent on the decisions of Glavrepertkom committee, the editors began to look for a theoretical foundation of film re-editing. This search was stimulated by required collaboration with the political editors and by the arrival of a young generation of editors in the re-editing bureau. A few future film directors and film theorists who became influential in the following years (Eisenstein, Esfir' Shub, Kuleshov, Shklovsky, brothers Vasiliev, to name a few) had a chance to work on the re-editing of foreign cinema. Perhaps, the filmotheque of the montage bureau in the mid-1920s was a place of creative freedom and inspiration for the future filmmakers. The editors had access to uncensored, ideologically unreliable, and

---

<sup>198</sup> RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 60, d. 737. Minutes of the Cinema Committee Session from 30 September 1925

<sup>199</sup> See methods and principles of film control in the Central Committee report concerning the GRK activity (29 August 1926) in *Istoriia sovetskoi politicheskoi tsensury*, p. 278.

often openly counter-revolutionary film footage, as well as to the newest experiments and technical novelties of western cinematography.

## 6. ‘Scissors of revolution’: The work of the Soviet re-editors on German film

In his essay which defends the practice of re-editing foreign films, Sergei Vasiliev compares the censors’ scissors to the scissors of proletarian revolution. They both, argues Vasiliev, work on the removal of a harmful bourgeois component – one from the structure of a film, another from the structure of society. The ‘Soviet scissors’ of re-editing, argues Vasiliev, must be seen as a constructive, rather than a destructive, device: like revolution, they help to transform a dissatisfying reality instead of preserving the conservative ‘spirit of conciliation’.<sup>200</sup>

Yuri Tsivian’s article on re-editing practices in the Soviet Union of the 1920s describes in detail the foundation of the Montage Bureau, which gathered the best Soviet specialists on foreign cinema. The history of re-editing of new German films began at the beginning of the NEP when the adjustment of foreign films to Soviet circumstances was undertaken by editors within the distribution companies and by the regional censorship organs.<sup>201</sup> After 1924 the re-editing co-operatives of the old film firms started to group around the central Montage Bureau of Sovkino (Redaktsionno-montazhnaia kollegia), which, having thus collected the most qualified and experienced personnel, started to work in close partnership with the GRK censors. The responsibilities of the editors, many of whom were specialists with substantial work experience and who, judging by the surviving documentation of the Bureau, had a deep understanding of cinema, were strictly prescribed. Having no control over new purchases, they worked with the films in active distribution, chose films for re-editing from newly acquired material and re-

---

<sup>200</sup> *Brat'ia Vasil'evy: Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, Tom 1 (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1981), p. 157.

<sup>201</sup> For instance, the regional re-editing bureau of Sevzapkino.

worked previously made alterations to older films.<sup>202</sup> In other words, the editors performed all the preliminary adjustment – ‘literary refinement’ – of the films before they could be passed on to the higher censorship organs for approval. The official written conclusion of an editor who worked on film adjustment had to be submitted to the GRK along with other documents (written application, film copies, original and new Russian intertitles).<sup>203</sup> The re-editors’ notes can be found in the surviving files on many of the German films that were examined by the GRK after 1925, along with the GRK’s own protocols and censorship verdicts. Normally, the editor’s note contained a brief synopsis followed by an expert conclusion on the suitability of the film for Soviet audiences. Often these documents contained various remarks on the difficulties of re-editing. These notes were supposed to be read prior to the meeting of the censorship committee that would then forbid or pass the film after reviewing it. The procedure of film approval in the GRK required the editor’s attendance at a viewing session in person (along with representatives of other organisations and the invited experts on the subject of the examined film).<sup>204</sup> In practice, it seems, this rule was not always enforced. Until the introduction of a closer partnership between the editors and the censors in 1926, only the GRK members and invited experts attended the viewing sessions: the surviving protocols for German films are rarely signed by more than three members of the censorship board and the secretary.<sup>205</sup>

After adjustment in the Montage Bureau, a film was submitted to the GRK for final approval. Usually the censors examined the film within two days, after which it was sent back to the Bureau if it needed further re-editing. The process could be repeated a few times until the censors were finally satisfied with the results. After the first screening followed by a discussion of the film, the secretary filled in the protocols, registering the presence of the board members, providing a

---

<sup>202</sup> About Montage Bureau’s inability to participate in film purchases see: RGALI, F. 2496, op. 1, ed. khr. 5, 6, l. 9.

<sup>203</sup> For the instruction on the re-editing of foreign films see the protocols of the Montage Bureau sessions on 6 March 1926. RGALI, F. 2496, op.1, ed. khr. 5, 6, l. 10.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 11.

<sup>205</sup> For information on some chief Glavrepertkom censors see: Richmond.

brief synopsis of the content with an ideological evaluation and recommendations for the editors regarding which scenes and intertitles to add or to remove.

During a conference devoted to re-editing in March 1926 the Sovkino Board discussed the importance of carefully written expert reviews of foreign films, as part of a general evaluation of foreign cultural products. The reviews were supposed to be used as reference material by official critics and the purchasing department. The protocol of the conference suggests the division of all foreign films into two groups (forbidden, and re-worked films) which required two different types of protocols: more detailed ideological evaluation for films that had been declined, and longer synopses for the films that were accepted for re-editing. Moreover, after 1926 it was ordered that all foreign films be classified according to their commercial-distributional value (with subdivisions into I class – box-office hit, II – first screen, III – second screen), and according to ideology and their acceptability in worker's cinemas (I class – recommended to the workers' audience, II – allowed, III – unacceptable).<sup>206</sup>

If the GRK disapproved of a film, the re-editor's responsibility was to return the film to its pre-re-edited condition to be sent back to the foreign distributor in its original length. The editors worked with Glavrepertkom directly and were restrained from communicating with other departments of Sovkino and any external organisations<sup>207</sup> Most of the Montage Bureau editors, and particularly the GRK censors, remained in the shadow of the process, rarely speaking out publicly or in the press. An exception was the Vasiliev brothers – renowned re-editors of the Bureau who openly participated in debates on re-editing between 1925 and 1926.<sup>208</sup>

In contrast to the re-editors, the GRK members rarely had experience in film. First of all, Narkompros demanded 'politically educated' censors – their

---

<sup>206</sup> See the protocol 2 of the sitting of Sovkino committee on 29 March 1926. RGALI, F. 2496, op. 1, ed. khr. 5, 6, l. 12.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, l. 11.

<sup>208</sup> In 1926 Sovkino prohibited any participation of re-editors in public discussions, either verbally or in print. RGALI, F. 2496, op.1, ed. khr. 5, 6, ll. 18-19.

knowledge of cinema was secondary. Following Narkompros's prescriptions of the strengthening of both the Censorship Board and the re-editing personnel with more Bolsheviks, non-party members in both institutions were gradually replaced with more politically reliable people.<sup>209</sup> The relationships between the re-editors and the GRK censors were complex. Re-editors had an important role in all stages of the adjustment and creative adaptation of the film. Still, the opinion of Glavrepertkom was conclusive. The re-editors, as experts in film, ardently defended each film they reworked for Soviet distribution, while the GRK often demanded additional corrections or even banned films altogether. The re-editors blamed Glavrepertkom censors for their insufficient knowledge of film art and the nuances of film re-editing. The GRK censors blamed the Montage Bureau for hack-work and the low quality of re-editing, leaving sarcastic comments about re-editing in the protocols. For instance, examining the film *Sterbende Völker* (1922, Robert Reinert; in Soviet release *Drama in the Bay – Drama v bukhte*) in 1926, the censor remarks:

Previously, the film was called *Dying Nations* and the critics rightly renamed it *Dying Freaks*. The re-editing extends this honourable title to the re-editors themselves.<sup>210</sup>

One of the Glavrepertkom members who criticized low-quality re-editing was Eduard Birois. Eisenstein mentions him as one of the re-editors of the montage division of Goskino.<sup>211</sup> In the mid-1920s Birois moved to the GRK and often criticized low-quality re-editing in his protocols.

Re-editing was perceived as a necessary measure that could neutralize the harmful content of western film. In an article by Sergei Vasiliev, foreign filmmakers are described as vigilant enemies. According to him, the seeming apolitical appeal of their films is nothing but counterrevolution in disguise, a

---

<sup>209</sup> From the report on the GRK activity on 5 December 1923: 'Besides the proper communist commercial directors we must strengthen the film companies with workers who can take care of the ideological side'. *Istoriia sovetskoi politicheskoi tsenzury*, p. 265.

<sup>210</sup> *Drama v bukhte*, GFF, d. 14.

<sup>211</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, p. 11.

‘dextrous camouflage’ that hides corrupting bourgeois themes.<sup>212</sup> The editors were given complete freedom in the way they treated foreign films, and Sovkino granted them full responsibility for the results of their work. The assurance of the young re-editors in their knowledge of how to achieve the desired psychological effects led to an understanding of the process of re-editing as a process of ‘improvement’ which, they considered, often made the Soviet versions (even in the cases of Griffith, Abel Gance, and Murnau) better than the original.

In the various years of its existence the Bureau had from four to seven re-editors. The inventive re-editing practices of the Montage Bureau are mentioned in the memoirs and articles of former re-editors – Viktor Shklovsky, Sergei Eisenstein, the Vasiliev brothers. In his article on Soviet re-editing, Yuri Tsivian sums up the creative approach of the Montage Bureau members to the process of adjusting films to the Soviet screens. Sergei Vasiliev remembered that the re-editing bureau became an excellent school of montage for future filmmakers, as they had exclusive access to the best examples of western cinema.<sup>213</sup> The need to ‘exterminate the poison, the smack of petit-bourgeois morality’, using the expression of Sergei Vasiliev, often led to fundamental re-editing that was considered to be the only possible method of keeping these films in distribution. Sergei Vasiliev remarked that of the 700 films that he reworked, only 1-2 percent required just changing the intertitles. More than 60 percent of all imported films were rejected by the Montage Bureau as impossible to re-edit, and the others were subjected to considerable alterations.<sup>214</sup> On the re-editing table foreign films became construction material that could be shaped into any desired final product. At this stage the majority of German films lost their original structure. The re-editors justified the need for capital adjustments by the ‘demands of the Soviet spectator’ who, they claimed, required cinema that was purified of any abstract, sentimental, ‘elegant’ element and of plots with ‘layers of psychology and morality’. ‘He [The spectator. –

---

<sup>212</sup> *Brat'ia Vasil'evy*, p. 158.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>214</sup> Georgii Vasil'ev, ‘Kinokritika ili kinorazviaznost’’, in *Brat'ia Vasil'evy*, p. 139.

N.P.] demands common sense, simple and convincing colloquial intonation,' argued Vasiliev.<sup>215</sup> In their articles, the Vasiliev brothers describe how the quality of foreign films was often improved by re-editing.

The history of the Montage Bureau still requires more detailed research. What interests us in this respect is how the Bureau's members formulated their theoretical approach to re-editing foreign films. The work of the re-editors was not limited to experiments with cutting. In fact, their work was more complex, since they tried not only to unify the criteria and the methods of re-editing but also to classify and to study the re-editing material. During one sitting of a Sovkino Collegium in March 1926 the decision was taken to begin the 'theoretical elaboration of questions related to foreign production'.<sup>216</sup> First of all, this entailed the need to classify films according to their country of production and to study 'the theory of montage using the example of cuts from foreign films'. Moreover, the re-editors were asked to analyse thoroughly the big, high-quality films and the creative methods of the major foreign film directors and actors.<sup>217</sup> For this purpose a library of foreign periodicals and major research works on film was organized in the Bureau.

From September 1926, the editors of the Bureau started to specialize in films of particular regions of production. According to the official documents, Georgii Vasiliev started to work with German films, and Sergei Vasiliev specialized in Austrian film (and also in American productions together with the re-editor Kornil'ev).<sup>218</sup> These reforms reflected the need to unify and to accelerate the re-editing process. The suggested regional division relied on the re-editor's expertise in the cinema of a particular country, his understanding of the style and genres of a particular film industry, as well as knowledge of the relevant languages. Additionally, it became easier to control the work of the re-

---

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>216</sup> See the protocol of the second sitting of Sovkino collegium on 29 March 1926. See RGALI, F. 2496, op. 1, ed. khr. 5, 6.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., l. 18.

<sup>218</sup> The division was not strict, and other re-editors like Kornil'ev who specialised in American films, occasionally re-edited German productions. Ibid., l. 24.



editors. The re-editors of the bureau maintained a serious approach to their work: not only did they adapt films to the restrictions of the Soviet censorship, but they also worked on theoretical aspects, for instance, trying to analyse the suitability in general of films of a particular region to the needs of Soviet distribution. The Bureau encouraged ‘experimental and scientific work on foreign cinema’ as well as the self-education of the re-editors and research into the audience. The re-editors were supposed to keep diaries of their work and to submit personal reports on their re-editing activity every quarter. For instance, the reports of Sergei Vasiliev from 1 January to 1 April 1926 show that he worked on such German films as *Der letzte Mann*, *Die Verrufenen* (1925, Gerhard Lamprecht) – a social drama about the poorest slums of Berlin, based on the sketches of Heinrich Zille and starring Goetzke, Aud Egedy-Nissen and Mady Christians), *Die gefundene Braut* (1925, Rochus Gliese), with Xenia Desni and Jenny Jugo, and *Pietro, der Korsar* (1925, Arthur Robinson) starring Egede-Nissen, Paul Richter and Rudolf Klein-Rogge. In his reports, the re-editor, as an expert on German cinema, gave a brief assessment of every film: from a highly enthusiastic review of Murnau’s film (*‘Der letzte Mann is an example of all the achievements of modern film technique... One must see this film – otherwise it is useless to even talk about it’*), to positive comments on Lamprecht’s Berlin-film (*‘For the first time a film provides us with an understanding of the life of Berlin’s lower classes... The film should be especially recommended for the worker’s clubs’*). The adventure film *Pietro, die Korsar* with Paul Richter in the title role – the star of the recently released *Die Nibelungen* – also received a positive review from Vasiliev:

The film could be regarded as a ‘first screen’ production. The actors’ ensemble is superb, though it is used by the (theatre?) director rather unskillfully. The performance, that was designed to be ‘grandiose’, fell into an opera-theatre-like sham and that’s why its artistic value is

considerably diminished. To all appearances, the remains of the stage props from *Die Nibelungen* were used for the film.<sup>219</sup>

Finally, *Die gefundene Braut* is described as a mediocre film of average quality with satisfactory acting and cinematography (as was true of most of the films with Xenia Desni that were imported to the Soviet Union in the 1920s). The review finishes with general remarks about the films that had been reworked by the Bureau in the previous quarter, particularly about their satisfactory ideological quality, and the complaint that the films were often received by Sovkino already re-edited.

Another surviving report belongs to the re-editor Korniliev, who reworked the film *Namenlose Helden* (1925, Kurt Bernhardt) in the first quarter of 1926. *Namenlose Helden* was the first production of the left-wing company Prometheus-Film, with Willi Münzenberg as producer. The chronicle-like film depicted the history of the First World War through the mishaps of a working class infantryman, Scholz. The portrayal of a 'German man of the working masses' attracted the Sovkino purchasing department. 'Its social value is that it is the first film with communist slogans that is received from the West,' writes Korniliev. The editor found the quality of the performance quite low, however. Pointing out that the film was successful in the workers' quarters of Berlin because of its social message, he suggests that it might also be well received by Soviet audiences. As Sergei Vasiliev notes in his response to the critic Il'ia Trauberg, the film was admitted for universal exhibition without re-editing.<sup>220</sup>

In 1926 the editors started their work on research into national cinemas. The notes of the editors were never published and belonged to Sovkino's internal documentation. The re-editors were interested in the suitability of films for Soviet distribution and the possibility of the improvement of films through

---

<sup>219</sup> RGALI, F. 2496, op. 1, d. 5, 6, l. 14. The re-editors divided the films into 'first', 'second' and 'third' screen productions, according to their marketing and artistic value.

<sup>220</sup> See the article 'Pavly Vlasovy dolzhny byt' unichtozheny...', in *Brat'ia Vasil'evy*, p. 158.

re-editing, according to their country of origin.<sup>221</sup> The report on the German films that were purchased between October 1925 and October 1926 begins with some short statistics: in the given period of time 47 German films were imported, with 25 films rejected by the political editors of Sovkino, 18 passed by the GRK and 4 forbidden. After giving a brief outline of the history and political life of the Weimar Republic, the reviewer concludes that the ‘degenerative’ moods in German art reveal an ‘absolute unbelief’ in the dogma of the bourgeois social system. He gives the examples of epic German films like *Die Nibelungen* and *Sterbende Völker*. ‘German decadence is gloom, despair, the death of ideals and an inclination towards a past grandeur; self-reproach and aimless wandering in the chaos of psychological darkness,’ argues the reviewer, explaining the phenomenon of Expressionism, which, in his opinion, reveals social critique of capitalist decay. Analysing the content of German films from the point of view of the ‘self-reflexive’ class and social system of post-war Germany, the reviewer explains the growing interest in social themes in German cinema (*Der letzte Mann*, *Die freudlose Gasse*, etc.). Another tendency of German film is the popularity of more conservative films that attempt ‘healthy bourgeois critique’. Films like *Die Straße* (1923, Karl Grune) or *Sylvester* (1923, Lupu Pick) are considered to be steps towards propaganda for ‘chauvinistic’ and ‘proprietary’ moods, which is then openly revealed in the films with Xenia Desni like *Bardame* (1922, Johannes Guter) and *Die gefundene Braut*. German film, concludes the reviewer, is characterized by four tendencies that don’t diminish the good prospects for re-editing and successful use of the films for Soviet distribution. They are: 1) ‘sick and decadent psychologism’; 2) mystical-symbolic character; 3) propaganda for the ideals of ‘healthy rural lifestyle’ and 4) propaganda for Christian morals.<sup>222</sup> At the same time, the

---

<sup>221</sup> According to the Sovkino documents, the research work in the re-editing bureau began ‘with the aim to discover the ideologically benevolent suppliers’ of films that would be less time-consuming as re-editing material. RGALI, F. 2496, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 5-6.

<sup>222</sup> RGALI, F. 2496, op. 1, ed. khr. 6, l. 8. The document also contains reviews of other national cinemas, i.e., Scandinavian films that were considered to be difficult to improve, American films that were characterized as possible to be re-edited but quite poor in terms of content, since they

constantly growing technical quality of German film is perceived as a side effect of the bourgeois crisis: ‘The artistic value of German cinema is relatively high. Technical performance is flawless.’<sup>223</sup>

Re-editors often complained about the negative decisions of the GRK, particularly when it prohibited high quality films that Sovkino had considered to be suitable for distribution, or when it demanded additional re-editing. The changing of the original titles, which was performed by the GRK for almost every film, also provoked critical remarks from the re-editors, who considered that this practice diminished advertising possibilities. Moreover, the re-editors were constantly criticized by audiences and critics for the ‘mutilation’ of foreign films, though it was often really the fault of the GRK that a film lost its coherence and integrity after the removal of key scenes.<sup>224</sup>

In 1928-1929 Glavrepertkom and Sovkino undertook a capital revision of all the foreign films that were in Soviet distribution and had been allowed by the GRK between 1923 and 1927.<sup>225</sup> The purpose of this procedure was to clear the film repertoire of old productions and to limit the total number of foreign films in Soviet distribution. The films were re-examined one by one by the GRK censors after preliminary revision by the Sovkino editors. The editors’ role in this process was important: they could give an ideologically dubious film a chance to be accepted for distribution. As a result of this revision, about 300

---

were ‘preaching class harmony and class reconciliation’), French cinema that was defined as decadent to the level of ‘psychological sadism’, ‘chauvinistic’, ‘nationalistic’, ‘vulgar’ (with the exception of films by Abel Gance). British and Italian films were called ‘primitive’ and ‘commonplace’.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> The ‘debates over re-editing’ in the Soviet press in 1925-1926 resulted in a quarrel between Sergei Vasil’ev with the critic Il’ia Trauberg, who considered it to be inadmissible that the Soviet audience must ‘judge Griffith’s work watching him re-edited by some Kornil’ev’. See *Brat’ia Vasil’evy*, p. 157.

<sup>225</sup> RGALI, F. 645, op. 1, ed. khr. 391, l. 225: Circular letter of Glavrepertkom addressed to all film organisations of the Soviet Union, 20 November 1929. Due to the late submission of the lists of the previously allowed films by Sovkino, the revision work was finished in December instead of September.

foreign films from a total 1,000 were removed from cinemas. The Circular letter about the results of examination stated that most of the films that remained in the repertoire were allowed only limited distribution due to the ‘inadequate ideological tone’ of the films. The complete removal of such films was impossible because it would leave Soviet distribution bare.

The foreign films that were revised in 1927 were reported to be of extremely low ideological and artistic quality. Only three of them were described as dealing with social and political themes, the others being adventures, romantic melodramas, or films focusing on family affairs, etc. All re-examined films portrayed the petite bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. The only German film that the censors mentioned as depicting the life of the working classes was *Die Weber* — an adaptation of a play by Gerhart Hauptmann about an uprising by Silesian weavers. This film about revolutionary upheaval was welcomed by the Soviets, as were any German films with leftist tendencies. Yet, the censors complained about the degree of artificiality and theatricality in the German portrayal of the revolt of the working classes. *Die Weber* was made by Friedrich Zelnik — a director who worked with popular, mainstream genres like oriental stylisations and operetta-like film, and was known in Soviet Russia for his *Russenfilme*. The Soviets suspected that in Europe *Die Weber* was merely another *Russenfilm*, being Zelnik’s response to the unprecedented popularity of *Bronenosets Potemkin*.<sup>226</sup> Despite this, the film was rarity among German films, which were usually blamed for the idealization of pathological and decadent tendencies of the ‘decaying’ bourgeoisie, ‘undisguised cruelty and sadism’, implicit popularization of prostitution and debauchery through nudity, sensationalism and criminality, and so on.<sup>227</sup> The censors and the re-editors explained the worsening situation around film repertoire as an outcome of the lack of clear ideological directives

---

<sup>226</sup> Siegfried Kracauer considered that *Die Weber*, despite being a well-made film, simply used a fashionable pattern of the revolutionary Russian films and is, to a certain degree, another ‘Russian film’ of the director.

<sup>227</sup> Glavrepertkom’s list of forbidden films and an official report on the removal of the low quality production from film repertoire in RGALI, F. 645, op. 1, ed. khr. 391, l. 43.

addressed to their foreign partners, and the low level of political education in the Sovkino's purchasing department. In the early 1930s all German films were replaced by Soviet productions.

In the 1920s a new – vertical and centralised – system of censorship was created according to a common model and adopted by most Soviet institutions, in which each element of the bureaucratic hierarchy was responsible not only for its individual tasks but also for regulating the work of other elements. The vertical censorship system provided absolute control of German film on various levels: selection, research, re-editing, approval by the official censorship organs, and selective removal of unwanted scenes. The film censorship structure was governed by Narkompros, which in turn was subordinate to the Political Bureau. Narkompros made important organisational decisions, developed censorship strategies and implemented general political control of films that were already in distribution.

In most cases the 'decontamination' of German films by the Soviet censorship entailed the deprivation of their individual characteristics and often films became very similar to one another. In the case of capital re-editing, films were cleansed of any distinguishing element and then attributed a new meaning through the insertion of new fragments or through re-intertitling. The result of this procedure raises a question over the authorship of the 'Soviet' German films. In the early 1920s the notion of authorship was an important part of western film discourse – not least, under the influence of the American filmmaking industry where in the 1910s the word 'director' became a trademark, a label that signifies a certain style and quality. The prominence of this issue is revealed, for instance, by the fact that in the Weimar Republic, popular directors and actors often established their own film studios, like Richard-Oswald Film, Lubitsch-Film, Ellen-Richter-Film, Friedrich-Zelnik-Film, and others. The exclusiveness of style guaranteed by authorship became a major factor in film marketing. The censorship of German films in the Soviet Union indicated the two countries' different approaches to authorship. In the mid-1920s authorship – 'individual' and 'collective' – became a subject of theoretical debate among Soviet film directors and critics. One of the results of this debate was Eisenstein's response to Balázs.

In 1930 Balázs published *Der Geist des Films*, his second book on film theory, where he discussed the expressive means of cinema in the years of the medium's transition to sound. Justifying the use of predominantly Russian film examples, Balázs notes that Russian filmmakers are not only artists but also theorists of their own art – a feature that distinguished them from their German counterparts:

We have our specialists in aesthetics and the philosophy of art, who have nothing to do with practice, and we have our artists, who do not think.

[...]

The artistic intentions informing Russian films are thus implemented more radically than in German films.<sup>228</sup>

A year before Balázs completed his book, he participated in the first international Congress of Independent Film Makers, which gathered representatives of the film avant-garde from all over the world. The filmmakers and critics met for discussions of film theory in the castle in La Sarraz. Among the participants were the Soviets Sergei Eisenstein (according to a surviving letter by Hans Richter, discovered by Thomas Tode, Eisenstein was delegated to Switzerland in the place of Dziga Vertov), Grigori Aleksandrov and the cameraman Eduard Tisse.<sup>229</sup> In the presence of the Soviet delegates, a discussion of merely theoretical aspects immediately transformed into a debate on the political role of art. Eisenstein described the members of the congress reacting as 'aesthetes, shocked by politics' when, in a conversation on the future of independent film, the Soviets asserted the impossibility of achieving independence of creative thought within western political ideologies. The conference, argues Eisenstein, demonstrated in practice

---

<sup>228</sup> Bela Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), p. 116.

<sup>229</sup> Thomas Tode, 'Dziga Vertov i La Sarraz', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 87, 2008, pp. 108-117.

that art is never apolitical and that a film reveals the political views of its creator. The stories that surround the creation of an impromptu film by conference members, amongst the debates on the political role of art, reveal a considerable degree of irony in the relation of the Soviets to the film resolutions of the ‘bourgeois left’. The lost film farce, made by an international group of filmmakers in La Sarraz, portrayed the symbolic liberation of the ‘spirit of independent cinema’ from the hands of ‘villains’ – the supporters of commercial film, with Béla Balázs as a captain – by the film avant-garde musketeers (led by Eisenstein and his ‘d’Artagnan’ Léon Moussinac). What survives from the film – memoirs and photographs of some participants – demonstrates the delegates’ considerable degree of self-parody regarding their own role in the film process. The photographs, for example, show Eisenstein himself dressed as a Don Quixote of independent film.

In practice, the Soviet approach to ideological disagreement in film was not so well-humoured, as can be seen from the example of the censorship of German cinema. The obsession of Soviet re-editing with the imaginary enemies that were supposed to be concealed in western film resulted in the banishing of all individual characteristics from imported films. The future stars of the Soviet film avant-garde played the ‘wise and wicked game’ of re-editing with quixotic vigour. Sergei Vasiliev, for instance, defended in his articles the process of re-editing as a one that liberates foreign film from its bourgeois element and gives it a chance to be ‘re-created’ as independent.

In reality, the re-edited films often lost their individuality and charm, compared to the original. An appropriate example of this is Pabst’s *Die Büchse der Pandora*, which was re-edited in June 1929. The literary foundation of the film, Frank Wedekind’s plays about the seductive Lulu, was very popular in Russia before the Revolution, particularly in artistic circles.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, an earlier film adaptation of the plays, *Erdgeist* (1923, Leopold Jessner) with Asta Nielsen, had been brought to the Soviet Union by Mezhrabpom-Rus’ a few years earlier and

---

<sup>230</sup> Wedekind’s play *Frühlings Erwachen* was put on stage by Vsevolod Meyerhold in 1907. Meyerhold also translated two of Wedekind’s plays: *Erdgeist* and *Die Kammersänger*. The articles on Wedekind were published in 1907-1908 by Aleksandr Blok, Lev Trotsky, and others.



enjoyed successful distribution. The new film by Pabst, which combined two ‘Lulu’ plays in one film, was passed by Glavrepertkom in a severely re-edited version. According to the surviving intertitle list that was submitted to Glavrepertkom by Sovkino, the re-editors attempted to transform *Die Büchse der Pandora* into a more conventional ‘circus film’ with elements of a criminal drama – a film type that was familiar to the Soviet audience from Harry Piel’s *Die Geheimnisse des Zirkus Barré* and *Was ist los im Zirkus Beely?* (1926, Harry Piel), which had been imported previously. In the new version, Lulu becomes a ‘former circus performer’ who is convicted for the murder of her lover but escapes punishment ‘thanks to the help of her circus friends’. The final part follows Lulu’s escape from prison, including the scene of her death at the hands of Jack-the-Ripper on Christmas Eve (mainly the plot of the play *Die Büchse der Pandora*). But this part was entirely removed. The film was renamed *Lulu* for Soviet release; the ‘erotic’ scenes were removed. By making these alterations, the editors attempted to ‘demystify’ the film and to neutralize any sentimental, lyrical or entertaining element, in an attempt to make the film resemble an old-fashioned film, similar to hundreds of other bourgeois melodramas on the Soviet market.

*Die Büchse der Pandora* was an unusual film for Soviet censorship. The ‘subversive’ nature of the film is revealed not in particular scenes, or through familiar images of the decaying bourgeoisie, but in the very image of Lulu, performed by Louise Brooks. On the one hand, Lulu, despite her vampire-like literary prototype, is too artless to remain within the traditional image of the *femme fatale*.<sup>231</sup> On the other hand, her constant objectification and victimization by men is combined with a lack of suffering. Lulu’s independence from the determinate binary characteristics of victim/vamp – though they both are present in the film – manifests itself in her free motion, both in the film frame and between social categories. It is also manifested in the lack of obvious determinacy and reflexivity of her actions and, thus, in the break with the traditional dual scheme of the typical ‘bourgeois woman’s’ attributes into which this Sphinx-like image does not fit.

---

<sup>231</sup> As Thomas Elsaesser suggests, ‘it assumes a knowledge and an intentionality in relation to evil which Lulu lacks’. Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000)

Lulu's smile, which is impenetrable, unchanging and mask-like, yet at the same time very sincere, lively and childish, was viewed by some critics as a sign of 'a lack of depth'<sup>232</sup>. The ambiguity of the smile is intensified by its opacity: like those who surround Lulu, spectators can only skim the surface but are not allowed to comprehend the puzzle of her ambiguity. The film, thus, suggested a new type of female image that resisted the stereotype of a bourgeois woman that was often intensified by Soviet censorship during re-editing. The heroine was neither a bourgeois femme fatale, nor merely a victim of a patriarchal capitalist system. In Pabst's film *Lulu* freely moved between social classes, finally becoming a prostitute in the London slums where she is killed by Jack the Ripper. Lulu picks up a man on the street and brings him to her room even when he confesses that he has no money. But even the final scenes had no strong social connotation, as was emphasized by Louise Brooks, who described the ending of the film: 'It is Christmas Eve and she [Lulu] is about to receive the gift which has been her dream since childhood. Death by a sexual maniac.'<sup>233</sup> Having little experience in how to deal with such film, the censorship was unable to remove the 'Freudian tendencies' embedded in the plot, for which the film was later blamed in Efimov's 1930s monograph on Pabst.

Secondly, the re-editing neutralized any direct references to the original plays by Wedekind, which in the Soviet context were considered openly bourgeois and decadent. Despite this, the film attracted audiences that were familiar with Wedekind's plays. Louise Brooks became briefly popular in the Soviet Union after the release of the film. Postcards with her portrait were published by 'Teakinopechat'. Despite this, in 1930, *Lulu* was banned together with the British-German co-production *Moulin Rouge* (1928, E.A. Dupont) as bourgeois productions. The censors noted that the Leningrad Inspection of Workers and Peasants expressed their energetic protests against the distribution of both films.

---

<sup>232</sup> Both Elsaesser and Mary Ann Doane describe Lulu as 'totally devoid of thought' and recall the 'emptiness of her smile' and 'blank face'. See: Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), p. 152.

<sup>233</sup> Louise Brooks, 'Pabst and Lulu', in *Pandora's Box* (Criterion, 2006), p. 74-93.

The second reason that was declared in the protocol was a ‘changed political situation’.

In concluding this chapter, I would like to point out once again that it offered an analysis of two fundamental institutions in the Soviet film censorship hierarchy, which were responsible for control over all foreign films. The GRK provided censorship control by regulating and examining the alterations made to German films before they could enter distribution. The role of the re-editors was complex, as they had not only to unify the criteria and the methods of re-editing but also to study and to classify the re-editing material, which provided an opportunity for the study of national cinemas. What requires mentioning here is that both careful rigour of the GRK censors and creative experiments of the film editors were regulated by censorship criteria that were prescribed by the Soviet authorities. The criteria demanded removal of film scenes that were in discord with the official ideology. Most of them, however, were vague enough to cause uncertainty among censors and editors about what to consider unacceptable for the Soviet audiences. The next chapter describes the main censorship criteria and explains how they were applied to particular German films.

## Chapter 4

### Maintaining ‘Unified Repertoire Policy’: Soviet Censorship Criteria as Instruments for Ideological Control

#### 1. Censorship criteria applied to German films

In the previous chapter I looked at the structure of the Soviet film censorship apparatus, focusing on the interrelations between various levels of censorship control. The ‘vertical’ organization of Soviet film censorship comprised two main groups of censors: on a basic level, film editors who directly worked on adjustment of newly purchased foreign films through cutting out unwanted scenes, and on a higher level, political editors of Glavrepertkom. The latter conducted ideological assessment of all imported re-edited films that were selected for distribution within the Soviet Union. The secondary but equally important function of the GRK members was regulation and control over the work of the film editors.

But what censorship criteria were utilised by both groups of film censors, to ensure that no ideologically unacceptable elements were left in a foreign film? How did the work of both editors and censors determine the fate of a particular film? How did German films, according to the censorship criteria applied, classify as acceptable or unacceptable for various groups of audience? And, finally, what was the fate of some famous German films that went through the double filter of Soviet censorship? This chapter aims to answer these questions.

One of the main tasks of Glavrepertkom was to ensure that the censorship criteria were adhered to. The general criteria were formulated with the establishment of Glavlit as the official censorship centre of Soviet Russia. The Glavlit Decree of 6 June 1922 set out to identify and to eliminate artworks that a) raised agitation and propaganda against the Soviet power (‘works comprised of agitation against the Soviet power’), b) exposed military secrets of the Republic, c) incited public opinion by means of spreading false information, d) incited

nationalistic and religious fanaticism, e) that were of pornographic character.<sup>234</sup> These censorship categories were used by Glavrepertkom and applied to all examined theatre plays and films. Reference to these can be found in Glavrepertkom's circular letters to the local censorship organs (*gublity*), quarterly and annual reports to the Narkompros collegium and, finally, in the protocols of the GRK board of censors regarding every foreign film that was submitted by the distribution companies. According to Steven Richmond, these censorship categories were perceived by the government as helping 'to oversee controlled entry into modernity: preserving the best aspects of the old world, and taking the best of the new, while filtering out the malevolent aspects'.<sup>235</sup> In other words, in a situation where the film repertoire was almost entirely composed of foreign films, these censorship categories were the censors' main point of reference.

The aforementioned censorship criteria had varying relevance in the process of film examination. For instance, point (b), which was a sensitive issue left for the more elaborate organs of control, was never used as a reason for the rejection of films in Glavrepertkom protocols. Point (a) was irrelevant for foreign film censorship, because films that contained an anti-Soviet element were rejected at the stage of purchase and, therefore, never reached the GRK. Thus, the major points from the Glavlit Decree that were used by Glavrepertkom for censoring foreign cinema were c), d) and e). It is important to note that the Glavlit censorship criteria were outlined in such vague and generalized terms that the censors were often confused by their meaning, which raised a problem of categorization and definition. As a result, the censors often referred to the prior criteria that were formulated in the years of the establishment of RSFSR. During that period censorship was trying to rework the pre-revolutionary film heritage to suit new purposes. In August 1918 the Resolution of the Film Committee of Narkompros concerning the prohibition of certain films that were in circulation removed from distribution films with: 1) pornographic elements, 2) portrayal of crimes that have

---

<sup>234</sup> See *Polozhenie o glavnom upravlenii po delam literatury i izdatel'stv (Glavlit)* that implemented preliminary examination of the artworks and issued exhibition permissions. GARF, F. R-130, op. 5, d. 112, l. 9.

<sup>235</sup> Richmond, p. 52.

no psychological cause – psychologically incorrect and provoking people’s lower instincts, 3) a biased and inartistic portrayal of life, of characters’ psychology, or, in particular, of the military, 4) inartistic and distorted depictions of history, 5) rude and vulgar comicality, 6) a likelihood to offend religious feelings.<sup>236</sup> In 1922 the censorship categories became more compact and direct, yet the directives offered no clear and instructive definition, which until 1927 left the Glavrepertkom censors uncertain about what to consider ‘pornography’, ‘mysticism’ or, for instance, ‘counterrevolution’.<sup>237</sup>

While examining a particular film, the censors interpreted the given criteria rather broadly. Often the official Glavlit categories of censorship could not describe all objections of the GRK censors against a given film or a theatre play. Moreover, German films were examined on a case-by-case basis, which often required employing more detailed censorship categories. R. A. Pel'she, the Chairman of Glavrepertkom from 1924 to 1926, expressed the need for a clearer approach to censorship work, with more thoroughly outlined criteria. In 1926 he submitted a report suggesting expansion of the censorship prescriptions to 19

---

<sup>236</sup> *Istoriia otechestvennogo kino*, p. 90-91.

<sup>237</sup> See the censors’ speeches during the Narkompros theatre conference in 1927: ‘...there is not sufficient clarity in the definition of what is counterrevolution, what is pornography, what is mysticism. Here we have the main root of the problem, where we get confused. We interpret the phrase differently – is it counterrevolutionary or is not counterrevolutionary [?] There is no precise prescription [*ustanovka*] for this question, and this is the main problem of our censorship organs...’ (RGALI F. 2579, op. 1, d. 1969, l. 90); Markichev’s speech at the February 21, 1927 session of Narkompros theatre conference). The former Chief Censor of the GRK, R.A. Pel'she, expressed a similar opinion: ‘Comrade Lunacharsky employed four prescriptions [*ustanovki*] for censorship activity: counterrevolution, pornography, mysticism and hackwork. These are the bases, but this is not enough. Life is more complicated and, once again, we can in our practical experience demonstrate how sensitively we relate to artistic works. We do not approach works in a bureaucratic manner. Just what is pornography? [...] It is extremely difficult in practice to say what is counterrevolutionary... the concept of ‘counterrevolution’ is extremely loose [*kraine rastiazhimoe*]’ (RGALI, F. 2579, op. 1, d. 1970, ll. 51-52; Pel'she's speech at the March 14, 1927 session of Narkompros theatre conference). Cited in: Richmond, pp. 14-15.

categories, instead of the Glavlit's five.<sup>238</sup> Although his proposals remained only a suggestion, never being officially ratified, in fact they summarized the actual criteria used by in the GRK censors over years. This assumption is easily proven by the GRK minutes and reports, where the same formulas are used over and over again: class appeasement, pacifism, banditism or romantic criminality, idealisation of hooliganism, apologia for alcoholism and drug addiction, vulgarity, cheap 'sensationalism', the savouring of the romantic adventures of 'high' society, vulgar poeticisation of the life of night cafes, *meshchanstvo* (as 'idealisation of 'sanctity' of the petit-bourgeois family, of comfort, of the slavery of woman, of private property'), hack-work, decadence and cultivation of bourgeois salon life.<sup>239</sup> In my examination I want to focus on these censorship criteria that were actually used in the Glavrepertkom protocols for the particular German or Austrian films: the existing documents allow us to trace the main reasons for a film being prohibited or requiring adjustments through re-editing.

#### a) 'Works of pornographic character'

One of the most important and earliest censorship measures that was taken in respect of foreign films was the elimination of 'pornographic elements'. 'Pornography' was understood as the exploitation of vulgar and sexually explicit images, and nudity for nudity's sake. The 'speculation' on the 'darkness of the masses' that was considered to be an attribute of the bourgeois approach to art, in the opinion of censors, meant that almost every foreign film displayed a wide range of inadmissible elements, from indiscreet nudity or provocative dance movements, to sexually ambiguous scenes and intertitles. It is important to note, however, that at the same time the Soviets eagerly imported German *Aufklärungsfilme*, which famously dealt with the problems of sexuality, venereal and hereditary diseases,

---

<sup>238</sup> See circular letter to Gublits signed by Lebedev-Polianskii and Trainin: GARF, F. 2306, op. 1, d. 1894, l. 9; and Pel'she's report on the activity of Glavrepertkom in: RtsKhDNI, F. 17, op. 60, d. 789, l. 19 – *Dokladnaia zapiska o deiatel'nosti Glavrepertkoma, s 9 fevralia 1923 po 1 iulia 1926*, Aug. 29, 1926 (cited by Richmond, pp. 42-43).

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

sexual taboos, deviant behaviour, and so on. The popularity of the *Aufklärungsfilme* in the Weimar Republic was raised by public health campaigns that attempted to present socially relevant topics in a more attractive fictional form. Yet, according to film scholars, the origin and the 1920s implantation of the genre is more complex as it dates back to early adult films that were intended to be shown in brothels and night clubs.<sup>240</sup> With the evolving interest of the Soviets in the documentary genre, new German ‘enlightenment films’ that combined documentary elements with an elaborate fictional plot became a popular article of Soviet film import and distribution. According to Lenin’s directive, as quoted by Lunacharsky in his 1929 article *Kulturfilm*, ‘a cinema performance must by all means consist of three parts: firstly, of a well-made newsreel that must be imbued with *our* ideas and show things from *our* point of view [Italics are mine. – N.P.]; secondly, a main film that must have simultaneously an artistic, entertaining (*khudozhestvenno-uvlekatel’noe*) and educational significance; thirdly, a good scientific film that provides certain pictorial and instructive information’.<sup>241</sup> *Aufklärungsfilme*, due to their genre flexibility and polyfunctionality combined the second and the third types of film required by the Soviet distributors for a satisfying film programme, being a fictional story infused with the elements of scientific or instructional film. But where was the thin line between the governmentally approved sexual enlightenment cinema and the ‘inappropriate’ content that allowed the censors to forbid a scene or a whole film as pornographic? Popular articles from the mid-1920s emphasize the specificity of the radically modern, new attitude to sexual aspects that was described as rational, ‘without hypocrisy’ or ‘false shame’, in contrast with the bourgeois ‘indecent’, old-fashioned exploitation of sexual motifs. The Soviet approach to questions of sexual enlightenment was argued to be in opposition to vulgar and titillating western speculation on eroticized elements in theatre, cabarets and cinema. The danger of over-excitement with such ‘addictive’ images was recognised as a result of the typically ‘western’ portrayal of any erotic experience as mysterious, secret

---

<sup>240</sup> Richard Oswald – *Regisseur und Produzent*, ed. by Helga Bělach, Wolfgang Jacobsen (München: edition text + kritik, 1990)

<sup>241</sup> Lunacharsky *o kino: Stat'i, vyskazyvaniia, dokumenty*, p. 156.



and, therefore, highly desirable. Any sexual feelings experienced through cinema were perceived as an individualistic, uncontrolled and, therefore, a potentially corrupting experience that contradicted the Soviet directive towards a more open, disciplined and self-reflective society, and strictly regimented work and leisure time. Moreover, an unhealthy interest in the erotic content in cinema raised the question of the ‘bourgeois’ objectification of women, particularly in scenes that exploited nudity in a vulgar way. In the censorship documentation, however, pornography was linked predominantly to the notion of low, ‘cheap art dressed as high art’ and was subjected to elimination. In the mid-1920s, with the rise in the popularity of western cinema and theatre under the NEP, the ‘bourgeois’ exploitation of nudity was publicly discussed in Soviet periodicals. The article ‘*Their and Our Entertainments*’ published in 1926 in the journal *Smena* (a popular journal for the Soviet youth) denounced unrestricted nudity as a corrupting western phenomenon that contributed to the spread of social vices. This instructive article, which was aimed at discouraging young Soviet people from romanticizing western cultural productions, is useful for understanding the importance of banning ‘pornography’ in the imported German films, as well as for the persistent interest of the Soviets in the import of *Aufklärungsfilme*:

On the surface, the forms of entertainment are similar in the capitalist West and in our country. (...) But the inner meaning, the essence of these formally similar entertainments are essentially different, and this drastic discrepancy captures the difference in social system, morals and culture. It must seem strange for us to see how much space is given in the entertainment of the capitalist countries to the ‘sex question’... This question is also very important in our everyday inner life (*v nashem bytu dukhovnom*), but in what sense?

We see a completely different picture there. In the spiritual capitals of the West, on the streets of Berlin, Paris, London, New York you will never find placards notifying you about the public debate on the sex question (*polovoi vopros*)... Oh, you must be kidding! These themes — of monogamy, polygamy, not to mention questions

concerning conception and abortion — more than anything else are considered to be indecent. At least indecent for the wide masses, because even if they are discussed, then it happens only within the small circle of specialists. And even the very words like ‘abortion’, ‘prostitution’ are considered to be indecent, the heavy shroud of ‘sexual mystery’ covers them. Moreover, these questions are considered to be not interesting, or interesting only in the sense of ‘public scandal’. And this attitude to the sex question is called ‘protection of social morals’.<sup>242</sup>

As this quotation shows, in the Soviet system of values hypocritical attitude towards the ‘sex problem’ was revealed through the aesthetic choices of foreign art that was dictated by the pressure of providing commercial success. The traditional understanding of the role of the performing arts, such as in the circus, cabaret, theatre and, later, cinema, as openly providing *public* voyeuristic pleasure that could not be achieved elsewhere was associated with previous stage of social development and contrasted with the new – didactic, instructional, functional – portrayal of the ‘sex question’ that was demanded by the Soviet censors. The explicit presentation of the body as sexually attractive and desirable was linked to the exploitation of the low tastes of the petit-bourgeois public. Permitting such motifs, argued the censors, would mean stimulating the low taste of the NEPmen audience. The author of the article in *Smena* continues in half-serious, half-grotesque manner:

But what, at the same time, is the ideological content of the hundreds and thousands of the popular theatres, large and small, scattered around the aristocratic, bourgeois and working-class areas of western capitals? Exactly that ‘sex question’ but in a completely different presentation... Namely, through demonstration of naked legs (*posredstvom demonstratsii golonozhia*)! [...] The meaning is reduced to, first of all, chic staging, to various stage tricks but,

---

<sup>242</sup> ‘Razvlecheniia u nikh i u nas’, *Smena*, 19, 1926, pp. 14-15.

mainly, to exposing as much as possible of beautiful girls with their naked beautiful legs. The more girls, the more naked legs on the stage – the more successful is the revue. [...] *Golonozhie* [Here and further the author uses a neologism derived from *golaia noga* — naked leg. Literally: “nakedlegness”. – N.P.] is, generally, a significant factor of western moral life. They don’t organise competitions for the best village library (*izba-chital’nia*) but they often have contests for the most beautiful womens’ legs. [...] Exactly because of the social hypocrisy that is preached by the Christian religion and that is an essential superstructure of the capitalist system; because of the existence of a bourgeois morality that prohibits an open discussion of sex problems, an average man tries to link his need for entertainment – in theatre, in cinema — to the desire to taste ‘forbidden fruit’: through the contemplation of a woman’s naked leg. It is absolutely natural that questions of sex play a big role in the psyche of every human and that where an open, public discussion of them is impossible, there the ‘sex mystery’ emerges, and as its result — the craving for *golonozhie*.<sup>243</sup>

As a result of such an attitude, all scenes that contained nudity or frivolous elements were ordered to be removed. When there were only a few such scenes, there was no need to ban a film entirely: the re-editing scissors could easily fix the problem, cutting out unwanted fragments without damaging the storyline and only insignificantly shortening the original length. Examples of such treatment of German films are, for instance, Viktor Janson’s comedy *Das Milliardensooper* (1923), for which the GRK demanded the removal of the ‘excessive showing of women’s legs’.<sup>244</sup> Similarly, in Adolf Gärtner’s three-part Monopol-series *Die Abenteurerin von Monte Carlo* a scene of ‘pornographic character’ at the beginning of the first part was ordered to be cut, after which the film was allowed to be screened for all audience groups.

---

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>244</sup> *Million za uzhin*, GFF, d. 18-28

Another example that is unusually well-documented, the film *Landstrasse und Großstadt* (1921, Carl Wilhelm), which was in Soviet distribution from 1923 to 1931, having been re-submitted by Goskino in 1924, also required similar treatment. The film told the story of a poor talented violinist Raphael Strate (Conrad Veidt) who, with his accidental friends, the organ-grinder Mendel Hammerstein (Fritz Kortner) and the chambermaid Maria (Carolla Toelle), come to a big city in search of a better life. Strate becomes a famous musician and marries Maria. Hammerstein, who becomes rich through his friend's success, betrays him: after financial machinations with Strate's contracts he leaves him in poverty and seduces his wife. After the first examination in 1923, the GRK immediately demanded the removal of the 'undressing scene' at the end of the second part of the seven-act drama. It is possible that more fragments were removed from the original copy that was imported by Sevzapkino in 1923: the film appears in various censorship documents in three different lengths. According to the minutes of the Sevzapkino Censorship Committee, which examined the film for the first time in February 1923, the submitted copy was 2,176 meters in length, which is 376 meters longer than the original 1921 German version (1,800 meters).<sup>245</sup> It is unknown what these additional meters in the Sevzapkino copy were: either it contained added fragments from another film, or there was merely a mistake in the documentation. However, the copy that was submitted by Sevzapkino for the next censorship approval (by Glavrepertkom in November of the same year) was already 176 meters shorter than the previously examined copy of 2,176 meters. Finally, Goskino's 1924 version was 1,800 meters – which, surprisingly, coincided with the original film length.<sup>246</sup> In 1924 the GRK requested the removal of further parts of the film: a few frivolous intertitles from the scenes where Maria leaves Strate for Hammerstein, such as 'in order to save Rafael Maria decided to sacrifice herself', 'I have to give in...', 'in the rush of passion', etc. and a scene that depicts Strate's poverty in a grotesque manner. Finally, a change in the distribution title from the old-fashioned *In the rough stream of life* (*V burnom*

---

<sup>245</sup> TSGALI, F. 83, op. 1, ed. khr. 40, l. 65. *V burnykh potokakh zhizni* (in other sources *V burnom potoke zhizni*) was examined on 12 February 1923.

<sup>246</sup> *V burnom potoke zhizni*, GFF, d. 10-2

*potoke zhizni*) to *Man on his own (Odnochka)* was demanded. Why was the original title *Landstrasse und Großstadt* (Rus. *Country Road and Big City*), which emphasized the main conflict of the film – the opposition of the poor but honest life of wandering musicians to the corruptness of the city – replaced in Soviet Russia with an average salon melodrama title in 1923 and, later, with a rather neutral, one-word name in 1924? The explanation can be found in the GRK 1923 minutes, where the film is defined as a ‘drama of petit-bourgeois life’, which proves that the GRK censors did not recognize the film’s dualism of ‘proud poverty’ and ‘corrupting success’.<sup>247</sup> Despite the film’s critical attitude to the world of the rich, as well as the ‘happy ending’ of the film, the conflict remained within ‘bourgeois values’: the audience was supposed to sympathize with the ‘poor’ main character who in the end wins back both his wife and his fortune. The new Soviet titles suggested an interpretation of the conflict as a love melodrama or a more abstract story of a ‘lonely artist’, rather than a study of the ‘good’ and the ‘evil’ characters among the ‘evil’ bourgeoisie.

In the early 1920s not only films with subtle erotic references but even those with ‘frivolous’ content were frequently allowed to be shown to a limited audience, although the censors emphasized the undesirability of such films. For instance, the operetta-based *Schwarzwaldmädel* (1920, Arthur Wellin) was admitted only for the central cinemas in Moscow, with the following commentaries: ‘We don’t need such films [...] the film is frivolous’, ‘the film is German, rather vulgar and silly’.<sup>248</sup> At first glance many such films were not much different from the already circulating pre-revolutionary cinema, with its foreign salon melodramas filled with erotic undertones and decadence.

In the mid-1920s when the market opened for new productions the censorship minutes became more thorough, with the censors more often giving a detailed appraisal of an examined film, usually briefly defining its genre category and artistic value. They often included instructions on how to re-edit certain scenes, identifying the ‘bourgeois’ element, particularly in the salon or the criminal dramas where the plot revolved around wealth. For example, the film *Die*

---

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> *Devushka iz naroda*, GFF, d. 13-20

*gefundene Braut* starring Xenia Desni, an actress much loved by the Soviet audience, received the following commentary:

A rather silly, typically philistine comedy with love adventures, inheritance and so on. It could be allowed on the condition that the ending of the film is changed, so that Harry marries against the will of his rich uncle refusing the inheritance, as well as cutting out the undressing scenes. [Suitable] for commercial cinemas only.<sup>249</sup>

Censorship documents of *Variété*, the famous melodrama by E.A. Dupont, reveal a long debate about the suitability of the film for the Soviet distribution. The film had all the characteristics needed to become an unprecedented box-office success: a circus setting, a love triangle story, sophisticated stunts, murder, and finally, the famous Emil Jannings and two of the most favourite actresses of German cinema, Lya de Putti and Maly Delschaft, in the title roles. Despite its ‘scandalous’ content, the film was passed by the GRK for all audiences after the primary examination, which can be explained by the popularity of Emil Jannings and, above all, by the strikingly high quality of production and acting, compared to the average foreign film. The ease with which the film received the green light to be shown in workers’ clubs, however, caused controversy within the censorship organs and even attracted the attention of the Investigation Bureau of the Central Executive Committee (TSIK).<sup>250</sup> The censors expressed the utmost need to provide critical reviews of the film in the press. ‘The film *Variété* should not be allowed in cinemas of the workers’ quarters because it has no ideas; with its content it could sow unhealthy seeds and cannot give anything useful to the worker’s heart or mind,’ ran one of the TSIK letters for the GRK censors. Without providing a detailed explanation for the much-demanded rejection, the reviewer pointed at the general ‘unhealthiness’ and vulgarity of the film:

---

<sup>249</sup> *Devushka iz provintsii*, GFF, d. 13-21

<sup>250</sup> *Variété*, GFF, d. 10-14

In the future when only strictly chosen films will be allowed to be screened, such films will have no place in Soviet cinema. I am not in a position to prove and to stress some moments in the film that, I would say, are ‘stupid and vulgar’ but I want to attract the film to the attention of someone who is strong in criticizing, so he can demonstrate the negative sides of this film that, I will argue, cannot be useful for the masses but are able *to give rise to unhealthy instincts* (Italics are mine. -N.P.).

[...]

In the film the main character who left his wife and his beloved child without maintenance, did not send them financial help in a lucky moment of prosperity.

[...]

According to him, life is a continuous entertainment and a continuous tremor of passion. No, such films are of no use for cultural enlightenment, – but for the purpose of fishing for coins they are, of course, beneficial.<sup>251</sup>

Despite such a negative review, the film was not rejected. The censorship conclusion contained a remark about the need to suggest that Mezhrabpom ‘cut the scenes that add excessive obscenity and pornographic quality to the film, depicting moments of an exquisitely sensual kind’.<sup>252</sup> Admitting that the film is ‘ideologically doubtful’ and ‘undesirable’ to the Soviet audience but is a work of outstanding artistic quality, the Committee passed the film ‘as an exceptional case’ for a restricted audience (strictly not for villages, working clubs and children under 16 years of age). A warning message was sent to Mezhrabpom ordering them to avoid purchasing such ‘inappropriate’ films in the future. The film continued to be in distribution until 22 May 1930, after which it was moved to the archive.

---

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. See protocols from 21 May 1927.

However, *Varieté* was a rare case when the censors of the late 1920s made an exception by passing a controversial film. In most cases, if there was no opportunity to make a film passable by cutting out a few unwanted scenes, such a film would be banned outright as ‘pornographic’ or as ‘advocating the wrong values’. An example of such treatment was *Die Frau mit dem Weltrekord* (1927, Erich Waschneck): ‘A vulgar and typically bourgeois by ideology film, saturated, on the one hand, with semi-pornographic scenes and, on the other hand, with lecturing about the amenities of bourgeois marriage and family cosiness. Needs to be prohibited.’<sup>253</sup>

When a film was banned, the copies were most often sent back to the foreign distributors within a specified time period. The financial loss in such cases depended on the terms and conditions of a given contract. The rejected film could also be exchanged for another film by the German partner, or the Soviet distributor could re-appeal to the GRK committee with a thoroughly grounded request for resubmission. However, the result of such a request, particularly in the mid-1920s, was most likely to be negative because films were rarely accepted once they were banned. As for the late 1920s and early 1930s, the rejected copies of foreign films were often sent to the archive (*fil'moteka*) for future use, or ordered to be washed off the film stock.

Normally, a film with elements of ‘pornographic character’ was entirely prohibited only when the censors had additional complaints about the content and/or the form of the film. In the majority of cases such films were identified as ‘bul’varshchina’ (cheap or trashy production). Such a category, for example, was applied to two films that passed through the hands of the GRK censors between 1923 and 1926. In summer 1923 Kino-Moskva purchased a copy of Michael Kertesz’s *Sodom und Gomorrha* – the grandest Austrian production by the Vienna-based company Sascha-Film. The famous two-part *Monumentalfilm* had a complex structure (frame stories, symbolic parables and a biblical legend embedded in the main plot) and told an elaborate story of the intrigues of Mary Conway, a young woman in contemporary London. The plotline is interrupted

---

<sup>253</sup> *Esli b ia byla shestoi*, GFF, f. 9-27



twice by allegorical visions of Mary as the cruel Queen of Assyria and Lot's wife. This film extravaganza is, undoubtedly, a sensational production that hardly qualified as a suitable film for Soviet distribution: both parts of the film are full of daring scenes, lavish sensationalism, and highly seductive acting from the main actress Lucy Doraine, who plays the immoral Mary. Moreover, the purchase of such a lengthy and high budget film was an audacious decision for its time, and not only because of the high prices on the copies. The film was bought for Soviet distribution even before its release in Berlin on 15 August 1923, which was unprecedented. In the early 1920s only Kino-Moskva, with its thoughtful financial policy and an effective agent network abroad, including in Austria, Germany and Latvia, could afford such a purchase. However, the imported copy was significantly shorter than the version for Austrian release. The original film was almost 4,000 meters in length, with the prologue and four acts (2,100 meters) in the first part and the 6 acts (1,800 meters) in the second part. When Kino-Moskva submitted a request concerning *Sodom und Gomorrha* to the GRK on 30 July 1923, the length of the six-act film was registered as only 2,500 meters. It is probable that the imported copy was shortened and cut from the two original parts either in order to diminish the costs, which was frequently practised by both the purchasing film companies and the re-sellers, or to obtain more money from the distribution of two separate edits of the same film as fully-fledged films: a salon drama and a 'historical' film.<sup>254</sup> Fraud on behalf of the re-seller could also be a possible reason for the film's significantly shorter length compared with the original.

Despite the submitted application, the print of *Sodom und Gomorrha* was not sent to the GRK, for an unknown reason, as stated on the existing register card: 'The decision was not taken because the film was not submitted for viewing'.<sup>255</sup> The film reached the censorship organs later the same year under the title *Golden Mirage (Zolotoi mirazh)* and was not immediately identified as a fragment of *Sodom und Gomorrha*. The censors considered the film and the image of the main

---

<sup>254</sup> It was also often practised by the censors during the re-editing process. For example, *Die Kinder der Finsternis* (1921, E.A. Dupont) that was re-cut into a one-part film from the two original parts in 1925. See: *Dva mira*, 2605/24, GRK register cards, GFF.

<sup>255</sup> *Sodom i Gomorra*, 510/23, GRK register cards, GFF.

actress overly frivolous: ‘The film leaves a rather unpleasant impression because of its problem statement of “woman’s power” over men. Talentless acting by the main actress, splendid costumes and grand staging boil down to a simple savouring of the life of that “high society prostitute” whose reformation does not awaken anyone’s interest’.<sup>256</sup> According to the description, *Golden Mirage* was re-cut into a separate new film from the first part of *Sodom und Gomorrha* that depicts the high society life of Mary Conway, this fact being traced by the GRK censors only in the late 1920s: ‘The film is a fragment from the Austrian two-part *Sodom und Gomorrha* with Lucy Doraine, whom we know from *The Gilded Rot* [i.e., the re-edited version of Lang’s *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler*. The censor is probably mistaking Lucy Doraine for Aud Egede-Nissen who played the dancer Cara Carozza in Lang’s film. – N.P.J. She likes to play vampire women who destroy all men with whom they get involved’.<sup>257</sup> However, this was not the only version of *Sodom und Gomorrha* that was in circulation in the 1920s. In 1926 the GRK committee examined the film *Priestess Lia*. The censorship register of the film was filled in by Eduard Birois – one of the most interesting personae among the GRK censors of the mid-1920s to be working on censorship of the foreign films. Birois was, undoubtedly, knowledgeable about foreign cinema and left many valuable commentaries on German productions in an attempt to fight trashy films on the Soviet screens.<sup>258</sup> He immediately identified the origin of the film: the first

---

<sup>256</sup> *Zolotoi mirazh*, GFF, d. 9-31

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> Eduard Birois-Schmit (1891-1937) was a Latvian poet, journalist and party member who became a victim of the ‘Latvian execution’ in 1938. Not much is known about Eduard Birois-Schmidt’s work in film censorship in the mid-1920s. Some sources assert that he worked in Sovkino’s re-editing bureau (Sergei Eisenstein mentions the re-editor named ‘Birrois’, see Eisenstein, *Film Form*, p.11), whereas others suggest Narkompros (*Adresnaia i spravochnaia kniga na 1927 god*, Otdelenie 5. Reprinted edition (Moskva: Directmedia, 2013), p. 230). According to the protocols of the GRK, Birois was one of the chief political editors who worked with German films from 1925 to 1927. Many important summaries and reviews of the films were written by Birois. The information about the life of Birois, as well as about other Glavrepertkom censors, is scarce. It is known that he was arrested in 1936 and was sent to Solovki prison camp, on false charges of belonging to a nationalist terrorist organisation, together with the other members of the Moskow-based Latvian theatre *Skatuve* where Birois was a literary manager. Notably, one of the

symbolic parable in the original *Sodom und Gomorrha* where Mary Conway is portrayed as the Queen of Syria. The re-editors tried to re-cut the film in order to make it resemble an oriental costume drama – *Orientalfilm*, a genre that was so popular in the 1920s. Birois comments:

The affair supposedly takes place in ancient Assyria where, on the celebration day of Astharta, Lia abandons her husband in order to give herself to everyone. The main heroine, an expert in prostitution affairs [*masteritsa prostitutskih del*] Lucy Doraine, acts in a talentless way, as usual, with a single aim: to make the spectators admire her and her attires. A grand performance with splendid mass scenes. The ‘Ammonite tsar’ bombards the city and destroys the walls, as we can see, with at least six inch guns and mortars. We can only wonder at the military equipment of Ancient Assyria. It is useless to talk here about any historical credibility. It can all be explained only by the fact that the film is a remake in which everything reminds us of its previous essence, and even of the Bible (intertitles and scenes number 27, 28). Additional remarks: The remake is a piece of the two-part *Sodom und Gomorrha*.<sup>259</sup>

In the late 1920s, when the film was re-examined by the Montage Bureau, the editor, who again did not identify the origin of the film, commented on the old re-editing practice that made the film’s plot confusing and even absurd:

Pompous pseudo-historical film from the ‘life’ of ancient Assyria-Babylonia with tremendous, senseless mass scenes, with colossal

---

arrested members of *Skatuve* was the famous actress Marija Leiko who was known to the Soviet audience from roles in such famous German films as *Satanas* (1920, F.W. Murnau), *Kinder der Finsternis* (1921, E.A. Dupont), *Die Rothausgasse, Kwannon von Okadero* (1920, Carl Froelich), *Glück der Irren* (1919, directed by the famous director, Lieko’s partner and fellow Latvian Johannes Guter), *Kain* (1918, Arthur Wellin), and others.

<sup>259</sup> ‘Conclusion of the political editor: to forbid. Eduard Birois. July 31, 1926’. *Zhritsa Liia*, GFF, d. 61-5

expenditure of money on sumptuous scenery that tries naively to reproduce the life of Babylon, with a ridiculous and silly plot. Nowadays [the film] has only museum value. The film was produced under the huge influence of Griffith's *Intolerance* (Ancient Babylon). Particular frames that are trying to replicate the American film, as a matter of fact, only parody it, pitifully and carelessly.<sup>260</sup>

The re-editor critically remarks on the new intertitles that were added to the film in order to 'sovietize' the content and to make the film pass censorship. He criticizes the re-edited version for giving a caricature portrayal of revolution:

In our re-editing version the attempt was made to fill and to lighten up the love adventures of the legendary priestess Lia with some social meaning (with the help of the intertitles), for instance, concerning the cruel ruling priesthood, people being speechless during the sacrifice (it says exactly like this: 'the people are speechless'). Disturbances and revolts in Babylon are presented almost as if it is a revolutionary protest of the oppressed nation, and so on. The intertitles are generally an example of that 'adaptation' of the bourgeois films to the Soviet screen that was undertaken in the first years of foreign film purchase.<sup>261</sup>

*Sodom und Gomorrha* was not an exceptional case of a film criticized for having the 'wrong' female protagonist. Similarly to Lucy Dorn's roles, Pola Negri's 'femme fatale' character, who is engaged in multiple love affairs in *Sappho*, left the Soviet censors moralizing about the behaviour of a 'typical vamp' and the unsuitability of the film for the village audience, who were not familiar with city life. The film was blamed for depicting 'the unhealthy struggle for possession of a woman' – a topic that was not considered appropriate for provincial Soviet audiences. The political editor who reviewed the film on 13 June 1924 noted:

---

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

The heroine represents a type of a woman who without assistance cannot fill her life with anything and who finds no depth or interest in any of the male friends she encounters.

[...]

Typical consequences of bourgeois life'.<sup>262</sup>

The censors scrutinized the love adventures in salon dramas in search of the 'moral of the story' that could, even if it was in conflict with Soviet morals, at least serve as a negative image in the re-edited version (for example, to embody 'bad' bourgeois values). The re-editing task in such cases seemed to be difficult, and when in April 1926, for instance, the censors looked at the altered version of the old film *Die Tänzerin Barberina* (1920, Carl Boese), they had to forbid it despite 'all the particularly revolting places' being previously cut out of the film. The film was a costume drama that depicted the adventures of a street dancer Barbara Campanini (Lyda Salmonova) who becomes a courtesan who has a long series of love affairs. The roles of Barberina's lovers – an English Lord, the French and the Prussian kings, the dance teacher Fossano, and others – were played by actors who were well-known to Soviet audiences in the mid-1920s: Harry Liedtke, Otto Gebühr, Reinhold Schünzel, Julius Falkenstein, and others. The original version of the film, as well as the Soviet re-edited copy, have not survived but the Glavrepertkom minutes, particularly compared with the synopsis of the original film, give an idea of how the Soviet re-editors tried to construct a 'moral' story from completely unsuitable material. It was difficult to make the adventures of the promiscuous dancer look like a tale of chastity:

---

<sup>262</sup> *Sappho*, GFF, d. 8-3. The document contains a handwritten note by Il'ia Trainin, the chairman of Glavrepertkom (1923-1925) and the future head of Sovkino: 'It was demonstrated in practice that it is possible to make the films more suitable through the thoroughly performed alterations. The film company is demanded to remake the film after which it might be passed. 14 June 1924.'

The intertitles say that she innocently declines the solicitation of all the kings and becomes intimate with the poet. But on the screen the king and the ‘poet’ have no difference one from another – they all take her in the same way, like a female animal who, it seems, has nothing against it. All her protests and ‘intractability’ that are mentioned in the intertitles, cannot be seen in the film.

[...]

The film has one moral... that is quite worthy only of the narrow-minded female dreamers who can think only about seducing rich males with their curves.<sup>263</sup>

The film was, therefore, forbidden in 1926 as ‘trashy’ and a bad adaptation from the original, after previously staying in distribution for a few years in its re-edited form.

#### b) ‘Bul’varshchina’

‘Trashy’, or ‘bul’varshchina’, was another unofficial censorship criterion that was frequently used by Glavrepertkom to describe low-quality productions. This negative term that was previously applied mainly to literature entered the vocabulary of the film censors in the late 1910s. The word usually described a film with a ‘meaningless’ plot that could hardly be improved through re-editing. The category was rather broad and could include various subject-matter and genre characteristics that could be attractive to a mass audience, for example, detective and crime stories, salon dramas, oriental and costume films, often containing a combination of various tricks and provocative, scandalous, or erotic elements. Normally, the films labelled as ‘bul’varshchina’ were prohibited or, in less dramatic cases, were given permission for restricted distribution. Examples of the latter include mostly older films like *Die Marquise von O.* starring Hans Albers (1919, Paul Legband). The film was the first screen adaptation of the novella by

---

<sup>263</sup> *Tantsovshchitsa Barberina*, GFF, d. 25

Heinrich von Kleist that depicts the forced seduction of an Italian marquise by a Russian count during the Napoleonic wars. The film was described as ‘an ordinary German trashy (*bul’varnaia*), sentimental drama, a cheap story’ that could only be admitted in ‘bourgeois’ urban cinemas. The film, however, was not entirely prohibited: rejecting such films would mean rejecting the majority of the imported entertainment films. The main censorship measure in such cases was issuing the film company restricted distribution rights that would not permit distribution in the workers’ quarters and the provincial/village cinemas.

Most such films, however, were still banned in the mid-1920s, after a few years of distribution, since re-editing and re-intertitling often failed to improve the cheap, low-quality character of the productions. The historical film *Königin Karoline von England* (1922/1923, Rolf Raffé), for instance, was allowed in 1923 but banned after revision in 1926. The film was made by the director Rolf Raffé, whose production company was based in Munich and specialized in historical and costume dramas about the lives of royals. The cinematic tales of Raffé were produced when films about monarchy were at the peak of their popularity in the Weimar Republic. More than half of these films made between 1918 and 1933 focused on the lives of the Hohenzollern monarchs.<sup>264</sup> Raffé chose a more local subject for his films, mainly focusing on the life of Bavarian and Austrian royalties: the films that preceded *Königin Karoline von England* were *Ludwig der Zweite, König von Bayern* (1920, Rolf Raffé), *Kaiserin Elisabeth von Österreich* (1920, Rolf Raffé) and *Das Schweigen am Starnbergersee. Schicksalstage Ludwig II., König von Bayern* (1921, Rolf Raffé). The film about the life of Queen Caroline was purchased by Goskino and submitted to Glavrepertkom on 21 December 1923

---

<sup>264</sup> Siegfried Kracauer notes that the ‘Fridericus films’ were ‘exploiting top figures of Prussian history indulged in obtrusive patriotism’. Their patriotism, he argues, ‘had an outright cliché character which [...] suggested the existing paralysis of nationalistic passions.’ Siegfried Kracauer, Siegfried, *From Caligari to Hitler, A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 156. Also see Bruce Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic: From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe* (Austin: University Texas Press, 1990), p. 75.

under a different title – *Ventsenosnyi Don Zhuan (Crowned Don Juan)*.<sup>265</sup> Although the historical film was one of the most popular genres among the imported productions, monarchy as a film subject, for obvious reasons, was not in favour among the Soviet censors. The only possible way for a distribution company to make a film admissible was to re-edit it in such a way that the film obtained a didactic tone, portraying the ‘bad morals’ of the monarchs. However, the plot of the re-edited *Crowned Don Juan* not only continued to resemble a salon drama but became inconsistent. First of all, the new title caused confusion because the plot of the film did not correspond to it:

No one among the court circles raises any sympathy [in the audience], only maybe the queen, as a woman. [The film] can be allowed for all. The film is somewhat a rehash of a story about pious Geneviève. The title doesn't fit *because the title role is Karolina* [Italics is mine. – N.P]. And why should the Soviet spectator think that once upon a time there was a princess in England who had a lover only before marriage, why do we have to sympathize with the fate of the queen? Why do we need to be interested in the love affairs of the feudal court in an old production? To be happy that the German princess became a queen? In my opinion, such films falsify history and give a one-sided opinion on the life of the court, interpreting the royals as people who are busy only with their family affairs and problems, and finally ‘morality’ triumphs and the evil will of certain evil people is brought crashing against the crystal-clear purity of the ‘royal martyr’ (which is what the film should have been called).<sup>266</sup>

Despite the negative conclusion of the political editor (‘the film should be banned as evoking sympathy with feudal customs and pious queens, because nothing can be improved here’), it was still passed by the GRK on 28 December 1923 and even

---

<sup>265</sup> According to one of the later protocols the film was also distributed under the title *Koronovannaia griaz'* (*Crowned Dirt*).

<sup>266</sup> *Ventsenosnyi Don Zhuan*, GFF, d. 10-17



the censorship certificates for the additional copies were ordered by Goskino. It was ordered that the frivolous intertitles (such as ‘really, it seems that the bride is bored in her bedroom and wants to have some fun with us...’) were removed. According to the GRK register cards, the film was banned on 27 March 1926. The old copy, however, was revisited by the censors once again in 1927:

The film depicts the life of the court without any critical attitude. All the events are given as valuable positive phenomena, though they have absolutely no value and no interest to our audience. The film has a tone of cheap gossip (*bul’varnoi spletni*) and the re-editing that has been undertaken since the old film *Crowned Don Juan* did not make any changes. It is suggested that the film be forbidden as unnecessary and harmful.<sup>267</sup>

In the late 1920s the majority of new foreign films were forbidden by strengthening censorship as ‘extraneous’, uninteresting to the Soviet audience and too remote from Soviet reality; even the names of famous films stars or directors could not help the film enter distribution. A film about a judicial error *Schuldig* (1927, Johannes Mayer) was banned by Glavrepertkom in 1929 despite the enormous popularity of its main actor, Bernhard Goetzke.<sup>268</sup> The censors justified their decision by referring to the cheap criminal character of the film and the overall irrelevance of the film’s theme: ‘Crime-centred and trashy work that cannot be saved by the neck and acting of Bernhard Goetzke. Besides, its theme is absolutely alien to the Soviet spectator.’<sup>269</sup>

In Soviet Russia ‘bul’varshchina’ in literature, theatre and film was considered not only to be aesthetically or thematically unacceptable, but was classified as

---

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> In 1928 the publishing house Teakinopechat’ even devoted to him one of its brochures on foreign film stars, with an essay written by Boris Mazing. See: Boris Mazing, *Bernhardt Goetzke* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat’, 1928)

<sup>269</sup> *Vinoven*, GFF, d. 10-20

provocative and suspected of causing unhealthy reactions in the audience. Therefore, censorship measures towards imported German films, the majority of which in the early 1920s were labelled as ‘bul’varshchina’, had not only protective but also ‘sanitary’ functions. Social hygiene was an important issue in Soviet Russia, and any cultural production that could compromise or put in doubt official standards of social behaviour was unwanted. The recognized ability of cinema to ‘enchant’ spectators through the overall attractiveness of performance, an interesting fictional plot or even by raising compassionate feelings towards the characters, influenced, first of all, the attitude of the Soviet officials to genres such as detective films. Such films were suspected of arousing and encouraging antisocial behaviour. In this respect, one of the additional censorship criteria suggested by Pel'she – ‘idealisation of hooliganism and homelessness [*brodiazhnichestvo*]; banditism and romantic criminality’ – became useful, as it directly targeted detective and trick films, despite their continued popularity among the Soviets.

Detective films that were imported in big numbers in the early 1920s were often passed by the censors as less ‘bourgeois’ than salon dramas or historical films. The censorship measures were limited to cutting out the small, removable fragments containing ‘pornography’ or ‘mysticism’. Despite this, in the late 1920s the perception of the threat posed by such films led to clearing these productions from the cinema repertoires. In some cases the censors were so inventive that they even suggested the retention of previously purchased German detective films, using the re-edited versions as instructional films for Soviet police, as in the case of *Sein großer Fall* (1926, Fritz Wendhausen) with Aleksandr Murskii and Olga Chekhova. The film was imported in the late 1920s when the genre of the detective film in Soviet Russia had fallen out of fashion. Noting that the film attempts to revive the ‘dying form’ of the crime story, the censor remarked: ‘Because of the depiction of the latest technical inventions being used by the police, this film can have purely utilitarian interest for our criminal intelligent services. But for the mass audience, certainly, this film is not needed’.<sup>270</sup>

---

<sup>270</sup> *Ego bol'shoi sluchai*, GFF, d. 9-25

Generally, however, detective and adventure films formed a highly entertaining, profitable part of the film repertoire. On the Soviet censorship scale such films were not among the most unwanted. Probably, the most prominent examples in this respect were the films of the German actor and director Harry Piel. Piel's films such as *Die Geheimnisse des Zirkus Barré*, *Unus, der Weg in die Welt* (1921, Harry Piel), three parts of *Der Reiter ohne Kopf* (1920/21, Harry Piel), *Das Schwarze Kuvert* (1922, Harry Piel), *Der Mann ohne Nerven* (1924, Gérard Bourgeois, Harry Piel), *Was ist los im Zirkus Beely?* (1926) and others were imported between 1922 and 1928, with a new Harry Piel film appearing in cinemas almost every film season. The persistence with which the film companies returned to Piel's films reflected audience demand, as well as the distributors' awareness that these films would pass censorship with minor adjustments. Harry Piel, the 'German Douglas Fairbanks', was one of the exceptional cases of a German film star who was continuously present on the Soviet screens throughout the 1920s. The author, director, producer and star of his films, Harry Piel became popular abroad, including in Soviet Russia, for the sensationalism of his crime films, which were known for their original stunts, thrilling plots, car chases and various special effects. Moreover, his image as an adventurous charmer – 'the man without nerves' – was so popular that young people repeatedly mentioned Piel as a favourite actor in the questionnaires of Soviet film periodicals. On top of that, his name features in several literary works of the 1920s:<sup>271</sup> the negative influence of Piel's romantic and criminal image on Soviet youth was emphasized, often in the form of feuilletons and poems. According to these texts, after watching such films Soviet youth 'learns how to break windows using the system of Harry Piel' and even repeats Piel's life-threatening stunts like tightrope-walking, climbing on rooves or jumping from great height.' Even worse, growing levels of hooliganism were

---

<sup>271</sup> The name of Harry Piel notably appears in a few literary works between 1923 and 1927: the years of the active distribution of Piel's films in Soviet Russia. The examples are the works of Valentin Kataev (story 'Ivan Step' (1923), poem 'Prichiny i sledstviia', 1926), Vladimir Maiakovsky (unpublished film script 'Pozabud' pro kamin' (1927), poems 'Marusia otravilas' (1927), comedy 'Klop' (1928), Igor Severianin's translation of the poem of Aleksis Rannit 'Ty i ia' (early 1930s), Il'ia Nabatov's poem 'Parodiia na fil'my' (1926), and others.

claimed to be in direct correlation with the ‘pathetic scuffles’ and ‘cheap sensationalism’ of films made by the German ‘Dynamitregisseur’ Piel.<sup>272</sup> *Der Reiter ohne Kopf* was blamed by the GRK censors for a long series of ‘meaningless and dumb’ tricks that ‘can only multiply the hooligans and scum for whom Piel’s trashy production is actually made.’ The reviewers found the film to be unacceptable:

It is so low-quality that it affects the spectator with the directness of moonshine. Horrors, crimes and silly tricks follow in such quantity that the spectator must lose his wits and surrender his defenceless mind to the hands of the criminal bourgeois ideology of such films.<sup>273</sup>

Despite such reviews, Piel’s films continued to be imported because of their commercial success. An interesting, and rather amusing, fact was that in June 1928 a public trial was organised by the ‘Friends of Soviet Film’ society in the Moscow cinema Antei.<sup>274</sup> The conclusion of the trial was unfavourable for the films of Harry Piel: it was declared that they should be removed from the cinema repertoire immediately. However, since the films were already purchased and withdrawing them would mean considerable financial losses to Sovkino, the films were allowed to remain in distribution on the condition that Sovkino stop buying new Harry Piel films. The Committee also called for the creation of ‘good’ and entertaining Soviet films that could rival and replace the sensational films of Piel.

The decision to remove Harry Piel’s films from the cinema repertoire was not based only on negative feedback from the audience. Re-editing the detective and the adventure films was a difficult, time-consuming task because of the nature of those film genres. Simple removal of a few scenes could not significantly improve the content and, as the plot of an action film is rich in events, censorship scissors often removed the cause-effect links that connected the numerous

---

<sup>272</sup> See Boris Kolomarov, ‘Veshch’ v kino’, *Kino i kul'tura*, 5-6, 1929, p. 32.

<sup>273</sup> *Vsadnik bez golovy*, GFF, d. 10-29

<sup>274</sup> *Letopis' rossiiskogo kino, 1863-1929*, p. 620.

episodes of the plot. It is not surprising that such re-editing caused constant complaints from audiences, critics and even the Narkompros leaders. The attempts by the editors to process such films in a more sophisticated way resulted in the practice of radical — ‘capital’ — re-editing, as in the case of Eisenstein and Shub’s *Dr Mabuso/Gilded Rot*. Such treatment of a film often meant the removal of whole plot lines or attributing the characters with new characteristics, sometimes very different to the original. In other words, the final re-edited version might hardly have resembled the original film, but would allow it to enter distribution. The original *Dr Mabuse* was banned in July 1923, and the censor expressed his concern about foreign crime films reaching an immature Soviet audience:

[The film] must be banned. I consider it is necessary in the future to make [the film companies] answerable for purchase of such films that are explicitly corrupting for young people.<sup>275</sup>

Looking at the surviving intertitles of *Gilded Rot*, one notices that the original film’s plot has been considerably shortened and given didactic intonation while still remaining a detective story. The intertitles were completely changed in order to impart instructional qualities to the film. The original criminal story of Dr Mabuse was transformed into a schematized illustration, almost a *Kulturfilm* that informs the spectator about a wrecked bourgeois world with no positive characters. The original plot-line relating to Chief-Inspector von Wenk was completely removed and even Mabuse’s victim, the ‘good’ character Countess Dusy Told, is converted to a lustful femme fatale. In the new version even the title character, Dr Mabuse, has been renamed. Instead, we have the ‘adventurer and cardsharper’ Braun – a name that to the Russian ear sounded familiar, more westernized and less fictional. It manifested easy-read connotations concerning the ideological opposition between the ‘rotten’ capitalist world of Europe, and Soviet Russia, rather than the fantastic strangeness of the name ‘Mabuse’. This small detail is important as an early sign of a general trend that strengthened in the late 1920s:

---

<sup>275</sup> *Dr Mabuso*, GFF, d. 14-19

the Soviet rejection of ‘art for art’s sake’ in favour of structural simplicity and ideological straightforwardness. In Soviet discourse a character originating in the fantastic world of German cinematic villains like Scapinelli, Caligari or Nosferatu who had an easily-traceable connection with Hoffmannian figures and German folklore, symbolized the political confrontation between the right and the left, omitting the original cultural link with Romanticism and Expressionism. The metamorphosis of Lang’s film in the Soviet context implied the elimination of any ideological and stylistic ambiguity. The film opens with a long intertitle that describes the corruption of the Weimar Republic:

International carnage led Imperial Germany to breakdown and capitalist bankruptcy. At a time when the working classes make incredible efforts in order to at least somehow support their existence and to ward off domestic and foreign predators, people who did not take part in the war and who are free of its burdens, who are used to having an idle life, used to speculation and adventurism; these people continue to live like that, even after the war managing to lead a dissolute and reckless lifestyle.<sup>276</sup>

The intertitles that describe the characters have descriptive and evaluative functions: ‘Gul – an idler and pleasure seeker who is wasting his father’s millions’; ‘The aristocrat woman — a seeker of vulgar entertainment’, ‘Decadent art — the life scenery of a degenerate patron of arts’; ‘The pastime of those people who have nothing else to do in life’, and so on. The main purpose of such intertitles was to keep the borderline between the imaginary world on the screen and reality appreciable: the spectator is forced to remain on the ‘real’ side of an invisible commentator who suggests a way of reading and understanding the fictional ‘western’ world. Thus, in a new version of *Mabuse* ‘bul’varshchina’ served the right ideological purpose, since it vividly demonstrated everything that a Soviet

---

<sup>276</sup> [Esfir’ Shub, Sergei Eisenstein], ‘Pozolochennaia gnii’. Kino-p’esa v 6 chastiakh’, ed. by A. Deriabin, *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 58, 2002, p. 147; the copy of the intertitles is also held in the collection of Gosfilmofond: *Pozolochennaia gnii*, GFF, d. 20-20.

new man should not be and, thus in theory inculcated in the audience feelings of contempt and repugnance towards the bourgeoisie.

Examples of German films being blamed and forbidden for ‘raising unhealthy impulses’ in the audience were numerous. For instance, *Das Panzergewölbe* (1926, Lupu Pick) was banned for its criminal tendencies, and ordered to be transported back to the foreign supplier by its importer Mezhrabpom.<sup>277</sup> Reinhold Schünzel’s *Das Geld auf der Strasse* (1921, Reinhold Schünzel), which Kino-Moskva submitted for inspection on 12 January 1925, was rejected a few days after submission. The film was sent for censorship examination in a considerably shortened version (6 parts covering 1,500 meters in length against the original 2,400 meters). This melodrama about the life of impoverished barons and rich bankers was given another chance to enter distribution after revision in 1926. The censors, however, decided to keep the film forbidden for its portrayal of ‘the life of thieves and swindlers without any critique and analysis’.<sup>278</sup> The film, about the marriage of a poor aristocrat to a rich capitalist, indeed, had no didactic side to it that could make the film passable: the financial machinations of sly and greedy aristocrats, the bankrupt investors and a deceived banker who commits suicide at the end of the film revolve around the love intrigues of an adulterous banker’s wife. The censors disliked the fact that the film lets the audience empathise with the cheated rich husband. One unidentified German film with the Italian star Carlo Aldini was reviewed by the GRK in 1928. The film was forbidden because the censors disapproved of the positive portrayal of the upper social classes that oppose poor ‘criminals’:

Vulgar bul’varshchina. The mixture of a detective story with the portrayal of life of aristocracy. Refined aristocrats contrast with the

---

<sup>277</sup> *Bronirovannoe khranilishche*, GFF, d. 9-9. The submitted version was considerably shorter than the original: 6 parts, 1,500 meters of length in the GRK minutes and 7 parts, 2,729 meters in the German censorship registers. Probably the re-editing was undertaken by the distributor prior to be submitted to the GRK. The film was ordered to be sent back to the re-seller.

<sup>278</sup> *Zolotoi tuman*, GFF, d. 9-32. The re-edited Russian copy of the film starring Schünzel and Liane Haid is held by Gosfilmofond.

‘scumbags of society’ in the face of Chinese den keepers, black men and the bandits. The moral of the film: the poor should not envy the rich, the rich don’t have an easy life. The film is [...] harmful. To be banned.<sup>279</sup>

A film by Erich Waschneck, *Die Carmen von St. Pauli* (1928), depicted the life of the sailors, thieves and prostitutes of the famous ‘red light’ district of Hamburg. The plot of the film centres around the story of an honest shipman who finds himself at the epicentre of criminal intrigues initiated by ‘Carmen’ — St Pauli girl Jenny Hummel (Jenny Jugo). The Soviet censors found the portrait of the lower classes unconvincing and the driving force of deviant social behaviour unexplained. In the original film the antisocial behaviour of the characters is not class-determined. Taking this into account, the censor concluded: ‘The [film’s] ideology is that the environment does not influence an individual: at its core it is an idealistic point of view. The favourite motifs of foreign productions: criminality, debauchery and the erotic find a rather convincing, artistically formal implementation which makes the film unacceptable for us’.<sup>280</sup> The film, despite

---

<sup>279</sup> *Dvoinik*, GFF, d. 9-23. The film was forbidden in 1928. The original title of the film is not registered, the re-edited title — *Dvoinik (Doppelgänger)* — does not allow identification of the film. A film under the same title appears in Egorova’s catalogue, stars Erna Morena and Walther Brüggemann and, most probably, is *Die Großindustrielle* (1923, Fritz Kaufmann). It is, therefore, unclear which of Aldini’s German films was reviewed by the GRK in 1928. My suggestion is that the film called *Der Kampf gegen Berlin* (1925, Max Reichmann) was also distributed under another Russian title, *Which one of the two (Kotoryi iz dvukh)*. The film has a criminal plot that matches the description in the censorship documents (opposition of the world of the criminals and the aristocrats, the ‘Doppelgänger’ bandit Tesborn who personates ‘good’ engineer Nielsen, etc.). According to Egorova, only two films with Carlo Aldini were distributed in Soviet Russia, both re-edited prints of which are currently held in the archival collection: *Helena. Der Untergang Trojas* (1924, Manfred Noa) and *Der Kampf gegen Berlin* (1925, Max Reichmann). According to the GRK register cards a film under the title ‘Doppelgänger’ was submitted to censorship examination on February 16, 1925 and rejected on February, 19 of the same year. It could possibly be the second re-edited version of *Der Kampf gegen Berlin* (6 parts 1,084 meters in length of the ‘Russian’ version and 6 parts, 1,734 meters of the original German version).

<sup>280</sup> *Karmen iz San Pauli*, GFF, d. 9-36



its entertaining plot and the famous actors in the title roles (Jenny Jugo, Willy Fritsch and Fritz Rasp, all of whom were previously popular in the Soviet Union), was rejected.

### c) 'Religious propaganda'

The official censorship category of 'religious propaganda' covered two types of films: any films containing religious references or scenes, i.e. works of a 'pro'-religious kind; and films with supernatural, 'mystical' content. Films with religious undertones, like films with 'pornographic' elements, were easily adjusted through the removal of the parts suspected of cultivating reactionary moods. Examples of such treatment of religious matters in films can be found in almost any surviving censorship protocol. Popular films with scenes which had to be removed before the film could enter distribution include *Des Lebens und der Liebe Wellen* (1921, Lorenz Bätz), *Vanina*, *Schlagende Wetter* (1923, Karl Grune), *Lucrezia Borgia* and many others.<sup>281</sup> Such mild adjustment, particularly of films that fell between the two censorship categories (for example religious/petit-bourgeois films), allowed the censors to pass a film with only insignificant changes. The film *Alkohol* (1919/1920, E.A. Dupont, Alfred Lind) raised the theme of the social stigma attached to criminals. In the final scenes of the film the protagonist's father, a negative character who is an alcoholic and a murderer who escapes imprisonment, is killed in a fire saving people's lives. According to the censors, the story of a man who is 'good at heart' but who was driven to crime by social circumstances was made overly-sentimental, with the accent shifted from social issues to melodrama. Here the censors criticize not the film itself but the general inability of German filmmakers to identify the most important argument in a film and to give it powerful artistic implementation. Despite this, in 1923 the film was allowed limited distribution under the title *Father's Love (Liubov' ottsa)* and was released

---

<sup>281</sup> *Volny zhizni i liubvi*, GFF, d. 10-4. The protocol orders removal of titles 17 (a scene in a church), 72 (a praying scene with a Catholic priest). In *Vanina* (GFF, d. 10-12) the church wedding scene was cut out. In *Shakhtior Tomas* (GFF, d. 27-22) scenes with a couple going to a church wedding and prayers of a coalminer in front of a crucifix were removed.

after the removal of only a few intertitles that had religious and decadent undertones.<sup>282</sup>

When a film had too many religious scenes or was entirely based on the forbidden topic of religion, it could either be banned or ordered not to be purchased as ‘not needed in the present epoch’. One example is the film *Der Pfarrer von Kirchfeld* (1926) made by the Austrian directors Luise and Jacob Fleck. The title role in the film was played by Wilhelm Dieterle, the star of more than a dozen films distributed in the Soviet Union during the 1920s. However, the topic of this film made it impossible for it to be accepted as suitable screening material: ‘The film is solely focused on religious matters, it agitates for the church, religion, a good pastor... Conclusion: the film must not be purchased’.<sup>283</sup>

An interesting example of censorship compromise in the case of a film that contradicted anti-religious propaganda criteria was *Wunder der Schöpfung* (1925, Hanns Walter Kornblum, Johannes Meyer) — an elaborate film essay about the creation of the universe and human knowledge about Earth. The film, which included alternating documentary, animation and acting scenes, was a product of a collaboration between several film companies, with fifteen experts working on special effects, nine cameramen and a few famous actors (Margarete Schön, Margarete Schlegel and Theodor Loos) working on the production. This grandiose *Kulturfilm* about astronomy, which was imported in the late 1920s, was valuable for the Soviets. The scientific basis made it possible for the film to be used for educational purposes – a type of film that was highly appreciated and even welcomed in Soviet distribution. However, the film confused the censors, who

---

<sup>282</sup> *Karnaval zhizni i smerti*, GFF, d. 18-12. The censor wrote: ‘A petit-bourgeois film drama, sentimental in the German style. Good performance. Can be allowed in the central cinemas with a change of the intertitles 14 (‘One Christmas Eve...’), 26 (‘Oh Lord, this is a sign of fate...’), 102 (‘No, I will die like a gentleman, not a convict’ and the cutting out of [the scenes] 8, 22 (‘And when the Christmas bells rang...’), 103 (‘So, Death, beloved girlfriend, come to me and we will conjoin over a last glass of wine’). According to Egorova’s catalogue, the film had two more distribution titles (*Two Devils* and *Father’s Love*) that were different from the original title *Alkohol* (removed as unfavourable since it evoked associations with alcoholism). Initially the film was distributed by Kino-Moskva, who purchased a copy of 2,000 meters in length.

<sup>283</sup> *Kirkhfel’dskii pastor*, GFF, d. 9

considered it to be not entirely scientific in its content. Every part of the film that depicted astronomic discoveries was supplied with quotations from Genesis, and various references to the Bible were embedded in the structure of the film. According to the prescribed procedure for reviewing films with specialized content, the censorship examination was conducted in the presence of an invited specialist who had some expertise in the film's subject. A curious document is held among the minutes of the GRK in Gosfilmofond – an original handwritten review signed by Mikhail E. Nabokov (1887-1960), who was invited to assess the film's scientific quality.<sup>284</sup> Nabokov was a member and the co-founder of the Moscow Society of Amateur Astronomy (which existed until 1932), an assistant scholar in the Astronomic Observatory of Moscow State University and a future professor who contributed to the development of astronomy in Soviet Russia.<sup>285</sup> Nabokov's review was written shortly after the GRK examination of the film on 2 January 1930. The document is important because, being a considerably longer review than the usual GRK minutes, which were merely technical notes, it sheds light on various aspects of Soviet film censorship from the typical re-editing mistakes to the question of what content could be acceptable in an imported scientific film. Pointing out that it is difficult to give an adequate assessment of an entire film after only one screening, Nabokov describes in detail the negative and the positive sides of the work. First of all, he finds the Russian distribution title *Miracles of Heaven* unsuitable. 'The title,' writes Nabokov, 'does not correspond with *our* [Italics are mine. – N.P.] view of the Universe as *cognizable*, meaning it does not contain 'miracles' but only underresearched areas.'<sup>286</sup> Mentioning that the original German film was made in collaboration with famous astronomers and, thus, makes no serious theoretical mistakes, he points at a few inaccurate moments (a 'mystical' explanation of lunar phases – a fragment that was shot in the style of a feature film; no explanation of the phenomena of the changing seasons, no details on the

---

<sup>284</sup> Mikhail Nabokov, 'Chudesa neba; Astronomicheskaiia kino-kartina', in *Chudesa neba*, GFF, d. 27-21

<sup>285</sup> More about Mikhail Nabokov in V.K. Lutskii, *Istoriia astronomicheskikh obshchestvennykh organizatsii v SSSR* (Moskva: Nauka, 1982)

<sup>286</sup> *Chudesa neba*, GFF, d. 27-21

construction of the space rocket, etc.). Next, he mentions the confusing results of re-editing, which was probably done hastily, allowing many intertitles, German names and inscriptions to remain without translation. Finally, the Apocalyptic scenes and repeated references to the Old Testament that describe the divine creation of the world instead of offering the ‘modern cosmogonic hypotheses’ had to be removed, along with the ‘sugary-sentimental’ ending with its depiction of German everyday life. The latter, writes Nabokov, would be incomprehensible and irrelevant for the Soviet audience, and ‘maybe even boring’.

Such small mistakes could easily be fixed by the editors but Nabokov dwells on describing more profound problems that, for him, lie in the film’s essential divergence from the principles of dialectical materialism. Instead of presenting the world as ‘matter in motion’, the film suggested an interpretation of it as an inexplicable chain of miracles. The aim of the German film, argues Nabokov, is *descriptive* when, in fact, it should be explanatory. An anti-religious directive is absent from the film, which Nabokov finds surprising in a scientific documentary. He expected to see the more emphasis on the portrayal of the conflict between astronomers and the church as well as a stronger materialist statement.

For Nabokov, the balance of fiction and documentary was incorrect: the ‘feature’ elements of the film overshadow the important scientific content, which does not correspond with ‘the Soviet idea of the enlightenment of the masses’. Here the reviewer shows, like most of Soviet censors of the 1920s, his misunderstanding of the German genre of the *Kulturfilm* – a notion that was broader than just documentary, educational or instructional film. The *Kulturfilm* often balanced between various genres. Most often it was a film essay with intermittent dramatized scenes that served the purpose of supporting the scientific, documentary content of the film. In other words, the *Kulturfilm* was an entertaining educational film rather than a didactic lecture.

Taking into account the valuable scientific component of the film, Nabokov suggests that *Wunder der Schöpfung* could only be shown after: 1) a full review and, perhaps, re-editing according to the principles of dialectical materialism, 2) the addition of new, domestically produced parts to the film that emphasize the abovementioned tendency, 3) the improvement of certain scenes and intertitles

between the images as well as inscriptions inside the images, 4) the complete removal of the end of the film (the last part) and insertion of entirely new shots of Soviet production. The directives of the reviewer were followed only partially, since the demand for the documentary films in the country was very high. The censors of the Leningrad Regional Committee considered the film to be harmless in its original form. They prescribed only the removal of a few ‘sentimental scenes’ (containing religious references), after which the film was allowed to be shown for all audiences, even in workers’ clubs.

#### d) ‘Mysticism’

‘Religious propaganda’ in films was not restricted only to religious aspects. It also included ‘mysticism’ -- a category that was defined by the literary critic, professor Iu. Grosman-Rishchin as a ‘suggestion of a general connection with a different world’ or ‘recognition of the presence in the history of nature of higher intelligent or rationalistic, but very valuable (sic!) forces.’<sup>287</sup> The category was more often applied to German films than to any other imported productions, as a result of their specific content, choice of themes, unusual settings and lighting, as well as ‘inexplicable’, ‘eerie’ events. The famous gallery of ‘German villains’ (mad professors, somnambulists, vampires, supernatural creatures) and the frequent settings of such films (opium dens, haunted castles, old mansions) were criticized by the censors and film reviewers for being too remote from Soviet reality. Such films were considered to be deceitful because of their ability to transfer the spectator from the real into a fantasy world filled with ‘false enemies’, as opposed to the ‘real’ ones (the bourgeoisie). The memory of pre-revolutionary times echoed in the continuing interest in the world of the irrational and offered an easy escape from everyday life. Despite the continuing popularity of such films among the wider population, their import was under the strict supervision of the censorship organs. The ‘out of control’ world of decadence depicted in such films was

---

<sup>287</sup> Quoted from Grosman-Rishchin’s speech concerning Gogol’s *Revizor*, presented at the Glavrepertkom theatre conference in 1927. See Richmond, p. 30.

perceived as awakening unhealthy impulses in the viewers and was linked to deviant social behaviour such as alcoholism, drug addiction, violence and ‘hypersexuality’.

In Soviet perception, the German Expressionist cinema that became available from the early 1920s was associated exclusively with ‘mysticism’. The critical debates around Expressionism as ‘degenerate art’ (*upadochnicheskoe iskusstvo*) did nothing to stop the growing interest in the new art movement. Since Expressionist cinema was at the peak of its popularity and could guarantee profitable distribution, many such films were, nevertheless, imported and were passed by the censors, often without many changes. Remarkably, Expressionist film, despite its ideological controversy, was associated with ‘Germanness’ in the Soviet context and also left traceable intertextual parallels in the Soviet cinema of the late 1920s. Examples include such Soviet films as *The Ghost That Never Returns* (1929, Abram Room), *Miss Mend* (1926, Boris Barnet, Fedor Otsep), films of the FEKS group and others.

The famous *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* was released in Soviet cinemas in winter of 1923. According to the surviving list of Russian intertitles, the film was distributed in a version that was very close to the original. The copy of the film that was re-examined by the GRK in 1926 was only 80 meters shorter than the original version (1700 and 1780 meters, respectively). Before the film was released, the critics attempted to interpret it as a ‘new and brave world’ in art, not accepted by the conservative bourgeois West. However, after the release of the film, its ‘mystical’ quality became a focus of critical debate. The film ‘in futurist settings’ was popular and was regularly exhibited until June 1926, when it was finally forbidden. The censorship board considered it to be an ‘unhealthy film that represents only delirium and horrors, and serves as an example of degenerate bourgeois art.’<sup>288</sup> Some films with ‘mystical’ content had successful distribution in Soviet Russia, for example, the film *Die Schreckensnächte auf Schloß Rochester* starring Anna von Palen, Bruno Decarli, Marquissette Bosky and Mara Markhoff. The film was submitted by Sevzapkino for Glavrepertkom inspection on 7 August

---

<sup>288</sup> *Kabinet doktora Kaligari*, GFF, d. 5-1

1923 and as a work that was ‘well-staged but all infused with dark mystical moods’, it was forbidden to be screened for the workers’ and the Red Army audiences. A handwritten note was later added to the protocol reporting that the film was finally allowed to be shown in the workers’ clubs, after its successful release in the central cinemas. Yet, in June 1924 the film was forbidden for all.<sup>289</sup> The censorship documents reflect a change in the attitude to such films. Even if they were allowed to be distributed in the early years of the NEP, before Glavrepertkom started its active work of monitoring film repertoire, later they were ordered to be removed for not corresponding with a changing reality. Also, the film copies were often in poor condition after years of extensive use. This was the reason, for instance, for the film *Der Graf von Cagliostro* with Anita Berber and Conrad Veidt being removed from the film repertoire. Initially, the censors allowed universal exhibition of the film after some re-editing, but in 1924 the film already had to be removed from distribution as the copies were worn out and impossible to project. The purchase of a new copy of this film was deemed unreasonable because the theme had become obsolete. The figure of the demonic count had, supposedly, lost its romantic appeal. The censor left a remark: ‘Cagliostro discredits himself with his own tricks’.<sup>290</sup>

Films that exploited ‘mystical’ themes were extremely popular in the West in the mid- and late 1910s, with some prominent German directors like Fred Sauer, Carl Boese or Ernst Wendt specializing in their production. Very often the supernatural component of such films was linked to oriental legends as, for instance, in the Austrian precursor of the ‘Caligari’ story *Der Mandarin* (1918, Fritz Freisler). Sometimes it appeared in crime stories revolving around ‘strange deaths’, mysterious disappearances, or crimes committed by somnambulists. However, such films arrived in Soviet Russia after the peak of their popularity in Europe, often with a few years’ delay. In Russian perceptions, the fantastical plots were associated with the German literary tradition and could, for instance, be traced back to the literature of German Romanticism. With the strengthening of

---

<sup>289</sup> *V zamke Rochester/ Noch ’v zamke Rochester*, GFF, d. 10-5; GRK register cards, 531/23

<sup>290</sup> *Graf Kaliostro*, GFF, d. 13-9. The film was passed for distribution with the considerable cut-outs.



ensorship control, such films were among the first to be excluded from the distribution lists. By the mid-1920s ‘mystical’ films, with a few exceptions, disappeared from distribution, giving way to popular circus, adventure and detective films which, in turn, were replaced by *Kammerspiele* and social dramas, *Bergfilme* (‘mountain films’) and *Aufklärungsfilme*.

Numerous imported films represented a mixture of film styles and themes where ‘mysticism’ was only a plot device: *Schloß Vogelöd, Schatten — Eine nächtliche Halluzinazion* (1923, Arthur Robison), *Nosferatu – Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1921, F.W. Murnau) and many others combined the supernatural with crime plots, elements of *Strassenfilme* with ‘haunting’ Expressionist settings.<sup>291</sup> The attitude to such films was often more forgiving. The episodic film *Der Schädel der Pharaonentochter* (1920, Otz Tollen) with Emil Jannings, Erna Morena and Bernhard Goetzke was brought to Soviet Russia by the company Ekran and received censorship permission in June 1923. The censors concluded that the high technical quality of production allowed it to be accepted despite its light mystical undertones: ‘There is a certain degree of mysticism in the film. But because of the splendid staging that depicts four different epochs with their everyday life and so on, the film has great value and raises great interest. It is possible to allow it on condition that the missing intertitles are reconstructed.’<sup>292</sup> Similarly, another episodic film that was passed after re-editing, despite its even more conspicuous references to the supernatural world, was Lang’s *Der müde Tod*— a film with three episodes within an Expressionistic frame story. The Russian re-edited version of the film did not survive but, according to the GRK minutes, it is possible to conclude that adjustments to the plot involved cutting out the Biblical references and changing the frame story about the encounter of the young couple with Death.

---

<sup>291</sup> Other imported films in this respect were: *Paganini* (1922/1923, Heinz Goldberg), *Orlacs Hände, Die Nacht des Grauens* (1924, Robert Wiene), *Gestohlene Seele* (1918, Carl Boese), *Der Unheimliche* (1921, Ernst Wendt), *Madame X und «die schwarze Hand»* (1920, Fred Sauer), *Der Schrecken der roten Mühle* (1921, Carl Boese), *Professor Nissens seltsamer Tod* (1916/1917, Einar Zangenberg, Edmund Edel), *Der Totenklaus* (1921, Richard Löwenbein), *Kwannon von Okadera* (1920, Carl Froelich), *Praschnas Geheimnis, Das Wachsfigurenkabinett, Die Straße, Der müde Tod, Raskolnikow*

<sup>292</sup> *Cherep docheri faraona*, GFF, d. 27-8



The frame story was probably re-cut into a separate part, so that after re-editing it could be admitted for distribution under the title *Four Lives*. Due to these adjustments the film started to resemble the popular genre of historical episodic films, like Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916, D.W. Griffith), which allowed the censor to conclude: 'The version was re-edited from a mystical film and the re-editing is successful. There is no mysticism any more'.<sup>293</sup>

The film *Alraune* (1928, Henrik Galeen), an adaptation of the 1911 novel by Hans Heinz Ewers, was imported to Soviet Russia in 1929. The film told the story of a young woman Alraune (Brigitte Helm) who was born as a result of experiments conducted by a professor of genetics, Jacob ten Brinken (Paul Wegener). The professor, inspired by medieval legends about the mandrake root, artificially inseminates a prostitute with the semen of a hanged murderer. The child is then adopted by the professor, who aims to explore whether human behaviour is determined by genes or the environment. Despite all the attempts of the professor to provide a Christian upbringing for Alraune, she grows into an emotionally cold and scheming woman who drives men into the abyss and even takes cruel revenge on her own 'creator'. The Russian re-edited version converted the story of the mysterious genetic experiment into a more conventional psychological melodrama, considerably shortening the film and removing all the elements of 'mysticism'. All the scenes of the experiment and the background references to the legend of Alraune were carefully cut. Instead, the Russian version begins with the return of the teenage heroine to the house of her adopter after years in a boarding school, and continues as a story of the young woman's accidental discovery of her background. Another motif that becomes more important in the re-edited film, compared to the original version, is the professor's growing infatuation with Alraune and his struggle with these feelings.

The re-editors attempted to adjust the film to a more accepted genre type — a chamber or a salon drama, even a psycho-sexual drama, which investigates the psychology of the young woman's relationship with her adoptive father. For these purposes they sacrificed the elements of science fiction, i.e. Alraune's bizarre

---

<sup>293</sup> *Chetyre zhizni*, GFF, d. 7-16

origin as the product of the professor's experiment, the association of the story with the legend of the 'mysterious' mandrake root, and so on. Moreover, if in the original film *Alraune*'s hypersexual behaviour is explained through supernatural causes (the professor creates a child who has no soul and is unable to love), in the Soviet version her frivolity is interpreted as an outcome of her 'hypocritical' Christian upbringing in the convent. In other words, where the German film used a combination of elements of mysticism with popular science, the Soviets attempted to show the events from a perspective 'closer to life', shifting the focus towards the environment-orientated explanation of social behaviour and the problem of awakening sexuality. Despite succeeding in maintaining relative coherence in the plot, the editors failed to make the re-edited film convincing: the film lacked proper cause-and-effect links, which was noticed by the censors. Noting that the film stands out from most imported films because of its advanced formal characteristics and, therefore, its desirability for distribution, the censors pointed out that it is, at the same time, too decadent and overloaded by 'sexual moments' while having a rather confusing plotline. Thus, *Alraune* was forbidden to be screened.<sup>294</sup>

The 'mystical' film that was more successful in Soviet distribution was *Orlacs Hände* (1924, Robert Wiene). It was imported by Sevzapkino in early 1925 when Conrad Veidt, the film's major star, was already well-known to the Soviet audience for his 'Expressionist' roles in *Lady Hamilton*, *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari*, *Das indische Grabmal* and other major imported productions. Like *Alraune*, the film tells the story of a medical experiment and explores the origins of deviant behaviour, whether it is determined physically or psychologically. The pianist Paul Orloc is severely injured in a railway accident, and the surgeon, in an attempt to save his hands, transplants onto him the hands of a hanged murderer. While recovering and learning about the operation, Orloc starts to believe that together with the criminal's hands he has received a predisposition towards violence, after which he develops nervousness and an obsession with murder.

---

<sup>294</sup> *Al'raune*, GFF, d. 9-1. The censorship protocol was issued on 23 February 1929. The registered length of the film is 1,950 meters, which is 1,352 meters shorter than the original version (about one third of the original running length)

Exaggerated, expressive acting by Veidt reminded audiences of his earlier films, which received wide distribution in Soviet Russia. A copy of the film was purchased at the end of 1924 by Sevzapkino. Under the title *Nerves Dance* (*Pliaska Nervov*) it was passed by the GRK on 31 January 1925. Debates around the admissibility of such a ‘decadent’ psychological film, even with a popular actor in the title role, resulted in temporary suspension of distribution in late March of the same year and the return of the film to the repertoire only in 1927. But not for long. Only a year later the film was finally removed from all screens during the 1928 general re-examination of the cinema repertoire by the GRK. The official reasons for banning were ‘bul’varshchina’ and mysticism: ‘Trashy story, entirely infused with pathology and decadence that are presented and propagated through the popular name of the “film star” Conrad Veidt’.<sup>295</sup>

Portrayals of ‘abnormalities in social behaviour’ were also subjected to the strictest censorship. Such elements were classified as romanticizing a decadent, asocial, self-destructive and unhealthy lifestyle and suggesting negative role patterns from which the audience also needed to be protected. Examples include films that portrayed drug-addiction and alcoholism (like the old commedia-dell’arte film *Marionetten* (1915, Richard Löwenbein), *Blitzzug der Liebe* (1925, Johannes Guter) with Ossi Oswalda or *Das Leben und die Liebe Wellen*), violence and aggressiveness (*Pariserinnen* (1921, Leo Lasko); *Madame DuBarry* (1919, Ernst Lubitsch), hooliganism (*Der Reiter ohne Kopf*), suicide (*Die Schuhe einer schönen Frau* (1922, Emmerich Hanus)) and so on.<sup>296</sup> In some cases positive

---

<sup>295</sup> *Pliaska Nervov*, GFF, d. 57-19. The original length was 2,507 meters, whereas the Russian copy is 2,074 meters long. The film was forbidden on 15 June 1928. The GRK documents contain the protocol from 27 January 1926 that, possibly, refers to another film that could be purchased for Russian release, however, is not mentioned in Egorova’s filmography as imported to Soviet Russia: *Nerven* (1919, Robert Reinert). The hypothesis is proved by the censors’ note that the film was cleared off of all unwanted references to the World War I as well as any ‘social element’ and, therefore, can be passed as an ‘illustrated example of hypochondria’. The original version of *Orlacs Hände*, unlike *Nerven*, had no references to the World War I.

<sup>296</sup> *Marionetten*, GFF, d.18-14, *Blitzzug der Liebe* with Ossi Oswalda, GFF, d. 27-25, *Pariserinnen*, GFF, d. 18/15, *Madame DuBarry*, GFF, d.10/9, *Der Reiter ohne Kopf*, GFF, d.10-29, *Die Schuhe einer schönen Frau*, GFF, d.10/10

references to violent customs like vendetta were removed, particularly in cases of a film being prepared for distribution in those regions of Soviet Russia where such customs were still practised (for example, the intertitles removed from Georg Jacoby's *Vendetta* (1919)).<sup>297</sup>

e) 'Meshchanstvo'.

The most frequently used – and rather broad – criterion that was applied by the censors to German films was 'meshchanstvo'. To take up the fight with a widespread philistine way of life and way of thinking was one of the main tasks of the new ideology. Apart from denoting particular social classes, the word 'meshchanstvo' in Soviet Russia received additional negative connotations that related to personal characteristics, such as narrow-mindedness, stinginess, triviality, pettiness. Western film, for which the petite bourgeoisie as a class was the target audience, often exploited the settings of bourgeois salons, cabarets, restaurants, hotels, etc. The content of such films did not vary one to the next: family affairs, financial speculation, becoming rich through inheritance, advantageous marriage, and so on were constant themes. The original versions of such films had 'happy endings' that were often removed from the Russian distribution copies – as Yuri Tsivian points out – in order to avoid the suggestion 'that one can be happy under capitalism'.<sup>298</sup> The censors protested against the 'idealization of the "sanctity" of the meshchanskaia family, the idealization of their comfort, of the enslaving of women, of private property' (according to Pel'she's censorship categories). This resulted in the censors' hostile attitude to such elements in German film. The GRK instructed the re-editors how to identify and remove the most outrageous elements of bourgeois idyll from the films. However, it was not always possible. When films were re-edited in this way,

---

<sup>297</sup> *Vendetta*, GFF, d. 10-16. Censorship removed the intertitle number 80 from the montage list: 'I'm a woman from Corsica, and we, Corsicans, firmly abide by the sacred law of vendetta.'

<sup>298</sup> Yuri Tsivian, 'The wise and wicked game: Re-editing and Soviet film culture of the 1920s', p. 333.

particularly in the late 1920s, they would often be proclaimed ‘bourgeois in spirit’ and banned. The category included films that praised philistine ‘German’ virtue and the bourgeois exploitation of women; those that propagated faith in bourgeois ‘goodness’ and fatalism; that praised becoming rich as the route to happiness; and those that were of a banal or sentimental character. The adjective ‘sentimental’ acquired negative connotations in the censorship vocabulary and became associated exclusively with German *Kammerspiel* dramas.

Nevertheless, such films were treated with a certain degree of leniency, since the censors admitted that all cultural production received from the capitalist West would be imperfect, but for the time being Soviet Russia was forced to rely on its importation. While in the early 1920s many such films were allowed to be distributed, with the sole censorship measure being the limitation of exhibition to the central ‘NEPmen’ cinemas, in the mid-1920s the practice of capital re-editing stepped forward. The re-editors attempted to preface the films with didactic instructional intertitles on how to interpret the film ‘in the correct way’. They also altered the plotlines, as in the case of *The Gilded Rot*, and adjusted the key scenes of a film so that they fundamentally changed their meaning (as with the handful of adjustments to *Danton*). In the late 1920s the films that were identified with ‘meshchanstvo’ were most often forbidden. This was the fate of *Das schwarze Chauffeur* (1921, unidentified director), *Das Licht und Mitternacht*, *Der Witwenball*, *Eddy Polo mit Pferd und Lasso*, and others.<sup>299</sup> With the rising number of Soviet productions in distribution, the censors found it time-consuming and unprofitable to work on the adjustment of foreign films, considering that the results of such adjustments were almost always deplorable.

The films were only forwarded to the editors of the Montage Bureau if, despite their petit-bourgeois character, they were high quality productions. Such films often caused long debates about their acceptability for Soviet distribution. For instance, this was the case with the famous film *Asphalt* (1929, Joe May), starring Gustav Frölich and Betty Amann. *Asphalt* tells the story of a young and

---

<sup>299</sup> *Das schwarze Chauffeur*, *Das Licht und Mitternacht* (1922, Hans von Wolzogen), *Der Witwenball* (1929/1930, Georg Jacoby 9-12 ), *Eddy Polo mit Pferd und Lasso* (1928, Eddie Polo)

naive policeman who is seduced by a glamorous trickster femme fatale, abandoning both his duty and his old moral principles. It was not the passionate love story but the figure of the protagonist's father — an old policeman who himself takes his son to the police station after he confesses having committed murder — that attracted the attention of the censors:

The figure of the old policeman Holk is an expression of the modern social-policed Germany where 'order' and 'lawfulness' are strictly maintained.

[...]

The image of the policeman turns into a symbol. The old Holk teaches how to maintain order, asserts the stability of 'law' and serves as an example to the unstable youth.<sup>300</sup>

For the Soviet censors, *Asphalt* was not a romantic love story between the representatives of two different social classes, it was a parable of bourgeois 'duty'. The film's tale of fathers and sons/crime and punishment, argued censors, is solved in a most conservative fashion. The re-editor's note contains a few remarks on the film's brilliant technical quality and the art of the cameraman Günther Rittau. The re-editor did, however, suggest that the film be declined since he could not see the possibility of remaking it into a more ideologically acceptable product without affecting its quality:

Despite the high quality of the artistic performance, the ideological directive and the material of the film suggest no possibility of remaking. I suggest declining the film.<sup>301</sup>

The next reviewer added:

---

<sup>300</sup> *Asfal't*, GFF, d. 9-3

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

The ideology is clearly maintained from the bourgeois point of view. Despite the happy ending, the class morale that stands on-guard for 'order' overpowers everything, the vice is three times punished. Menacing class rule speaks out in the face of a merciless but reasonable and, of course, loving father. What could be more convincing than such morality? This is the way an ordinary spectator of the bourgeois country is brainwashed.

[...]

*Asphalt* deserves not only rapt attention but also a methodological study as an outstanding example of bourgeois skills in the area of dramaturgy.<sup>302</sup>

The re-editors, unlike most members of the GRK, possessed an excellent knowledge of cinema (Yuri Tsivian calls them 'connoisseurs' of western film) and could appreciate the artistic side of foreign films. In their reviews, they often expressed their unwillingness to rework high-quality films of bourgeois content that have a poetic, lyrical quality to them, like, for instance, *Asphalt* or *Jenseits der Straße*.<sup>303</sup> In such cases they suggested that the films be forbidden altogether. However, there were some exceptions. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), a grandiose production of UFA, was reviewed by the censors in 1929. The editor's note that preceded the screening in the GRK gave a brief synopsis of the film, stating that such symbolic expression of capitalist harmony ('one must treat the workers well, like domestic animals') should be allowed on Soviet screens, since it would not be perceived as attractive. On the contrary, argues the editor, *Metropolis* will not excite the imagination of the Soviet spectator. The film will cause the exact

---

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> *Po tu storonu ulitsy*, GFF, d. 20-9. The poetic quality of films was often perceived by the GRK censors as 'bourgeois' romanticization and sentimentality that distracts the spectator from 'real' social problems. *Jenseits der Strasse*, for instance, was forbidden for these reasons despite its powerful social message and lyricism in depiction of the lower classes as well as its connections with the German Left (the film was produced by the left film organisation Prometheus-Film that worked in close relation to IAH; Willi Münzenberg was the film's producer). In the Soviet Union of the late 1920s left-wing German films were often perceived as not ideologically consistent.

opposite reaction from the audience, since ‘its absurdity and impudence can only cause indignation and resentment against the capitalists’. Further, the editor suggests a plan of passing the film, which is ‘full of a spirit of class conciliation’, with a preliminary ‘experimental’ re-editing. The plan for re-editing included four main alterations: 1) composing a long preface to the film with an explanation as to why Sovkino decided to allow the film to remain in distribution; 2) reducing the length of the film by at least one third, in order to emphasize the political idea; 3) inserting new intertitles not to parody the film but, again, to make the film’s ideas more flagrant; 4) adding a proper conclusion that explains the true meaning of the film to the Soviet audience.<sup>304</sup> The editor’s suggestion for radical preventive censorship of the film was not supported by the GRK censors, who considered that the film could potentially do more harm than good. The protocol of the GRK examination is brief and abrupt: ‘It was unanimously decided by the Board to forbid the film.’

Re-editors’ hopes concerning the Soviet release of ‘dangerous’ films like *Metropolis*, even with severe adjustment, were rarely satisfied. In the late 1920s such films had no chance of being distributed. Among all imported film productions, they were considered to be particularly harmful since they contained direct counter-revolutionary messages and compromised the ideology of the Left. The film *Schuldig*, about a falsely-convicted man being released from prison, for instance, was forbidden for its assertion of bourgeois ‘justice’, and for its depiction of workers as defenders of capitalism. After examination, the censor concluded that allowing such films ‘is impossible today, in the circumstances of the international economic crisis and the maximum activation of the world’s workers’ movement.’<sup>305</sup> Another film, *Sprengbagger 1010* (1929, Carl Ludwig Achaz-Duisberg) was accused of ‘depicting modern capitalism as a progressive force that destroys feudalism. It is a poem about not only stable but actively advancing, strengthening capitalism.’<sup>306</sup>

---

<sup>304</sup> *Metropolis*, GFF, d. 17-12

<sup>305</sup> *Ia svoboden*, GFF, d. 10-20

<sup>306</sup> *Vzryvaiushchii ekskavator*, GFF, d. 9-15



#### f) Other criteria

In their work on German film, the censors often used other criteria that could classify films as unwanted material. The general formula ‘work of alien ideology’ (*chuzhdoi ideologii*) included films that depicted colonial patriotism and chauvinism, that romanticized fatalism and social evils, propagated ‘bourgeois’ pacifism and liberalism, or suggested undesirable interpretations of historical events. Some of these criteria were essential for Soviet Russia, which tried throughout the 1920s to overcome nationalistic moods and prejudices in the Soviet republics. Most such films were banned after the first examination. Films that were classified as nationalistic were usually based on historical material, such as costume productions like Oswald’s *Lady Hamilton* or *Gräfin Walewska* (‘saturated with Polish nationalism’).<sup>307</sup> Joe Stöckel’s trick film *Marcco, der Ringer des Mikado* (1922) was classified as a ‘typical American film that provokes patriotism with a colonial smack’.<sup>308</sup> In the Soviet context, any mockery of ethnicity was considered to be unacceptable. Such scenes were removed (for instance, the censor ordered the removal of ‘a scene with a black man as a mockery over ethnicity’ from the film *Milliardensouper*). *Flucht in die Fremdenlegion* (1929, Louis Ralph), was classified as a film of high technical quality, but was nonetheless banned for its inappropriate ‘social directive’ (*sotsial’naia ustanovka*), as the film portrayed strike-breakers in a positive light. The film depicted hordes of Arabs attacking the ‘heroic’ Spanish Foreign Legion but being successfully repelled and suppressed, which elicited a negative reaction from the Censorship Board:

The revolt itself is depicted as a riot by a drunken rowdy mob, although the campaign in the desert – without water, in incredibly harsh conditions, without an aim that interests people, for the sake of

---

<sup>307</sup> *Ledi Gamil’ton*, GFF, d. 18-4; *Grafinia Valevskaia*, GFF, d. 13-10. Both films were left in distribution despite the protest of censors.

<sup>308</sup> *Marko — boets Mikado*, GFF, d. 18-21

the unknown plans of strangers – can be a reason for a serious mutiny. Arabs are, of course, “traitors”... not just people who are fighting for their freedom.<sup>309</sup>

Films that advocated individualism were not welcomed by the censors. Individualistic heroism, as opposed to the Soviet ideal of the collective, was perceived as a bourgeois notion. Lunacharsky’s essay about the reasons for hostility towards heroism illustrates why ‘bourgeois’ films with an emphasis on the personal success of a strong protagonist, not presented as a part of collective, were not acceptable:

Our communist principles stem from collective heroism: they appreciate an individual only if we can be sure that this individual gave all his talents for the benefit of the common deed; when he abstained from personal undertakings and is keeping step with the correctly understood reality. The Proletariat likes and values such a person who is not in disagreement with discipline.<sup>310</sup>

The motif of personal success, as opposed to collective benefit, could be manifested in film in various ways: first of all, in the depiction of unwanted heroism in social and everyday situations. Such ‘heroism of an individual gust’, using Lenin’s phrase, was regarded as arousing competitive feelings in the spectator.<sup>311</sup> For instance, one example is the film by Reinhold Schünzel *Das Geld auf der Straße (Zolotoi tuman)* that was prohibited for cultivating the ‘taste for heroic deeds’ and ‘awakening the natural feeling of competition.’<sup>312</sup> In the 1920s films could be prohibited for indirect correlation with this category, for instance, when they emphasized personal achievement in sport. The individual figure of a

---

<sup>309</sup> *Begstvo v inostrannyi legion*, GFF, d. 9-5

<sup>310</sup> Anatolii Lunacharsky, *Geroizm i individualizm* (Moskva: Novaia Moskva, 1925), p. 44.

<sup>311</sup> Rus. *geroizm ot del'nogo poryva*. Vladimir Lenin, ‘Velikii pochin’, in Vladimir I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V. 39 (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1970), p. 17.

<sup>312</sup> *Zolotoi tuman*, GFF, d. 9-32

sportsman as a champion/hero, thus, was undesirable. It was particularly relevant to such sports as boxing, which, in the mid and late 1920s (until 1933), was officially rejected in Soviet Russia on the grounds of its discrepancy with the developing mass-orientated sports movement.<sup>313</sup> Until the late 1920s the word ‘champion’ was never mentioned in Soviet sports journalism.<sup>314</sup> The attitude to German sports films was, thus, variable: boxing-themed films like another of Schünzel’s films, *Liebe im Ring* (1929/1930), had little chance of attaining Soviet distribution, whereas the so-called *Zirkusfilme* that depicted athletes and gymnasts struggling with poverty in bourgeois countries were warmly welcomed.<sup>315</sup> In the late 1920s circus films were eventually replaced in their popularity with *Bergfilme* (‘mountain films’), where skiing was depicted as a healthy collective alternative to athletic competition.

Returning to individualism in film, it is important to note that idealized depictions of strong personalities such as historical figures was also unacceptable. The rejection of the ‘individualism of historical personality’ was the reason for the

---

<sup>313</sup> More about soviet attitude to boxing see in: Kassia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008)

<sup>314</sup> Aleksandr Sunik, *Rossiiskii sport i olimpiiskoe dvizhenie na rubezhe XIX-XX vekov* (Moskva: Sovetskii sport, 2004)

<sup>315</sup> An illustrative example of the 1920s Soviet attitude to cinematic portrayal of boxing is the film *The Ring* by Alfred Hitchcock (the Russian title *Liubov' Sil'nogo Cheloveka* – *Love of a Strong Man*). The film was purchased for Soviet distribution as a German re-edited version adapted by Süd-Film, Berlin (re-edited for German release). The drama, about two boxers, was disapproved of by the censors. They demanded that the editor Kozlov alter the film such that ‘championship is discredited’. Despite re-editing, the film was forbidden after revision. *Liubov' sil'nogo cheloveka*, GFF, d. 62-13. Some boxing-themed films like *Die Boxerbraut* (Nevesta boksera) with Ksenia Desni and Willy Fritsch (1926, Johannes Guter) and *Marccos schwerer Sieg* (1922, Joe Stöckel) were purchased for the Soviet Union in the late 1920s but did not reach distribution, having been forbidden by the censorship. Joe Stöckel’s film was submitted to the GRK on 21 May 1926 but on 24 May was already declined by the censors (see the GRK register cards). The ‘circus films’ enjoyed stable popularity among the Russians. For example, Alfred Halm’s *Der Mann auf dem Kometen* (1925) – *Chelovek na komete*, GFF, d. 27-4 that tells the story of an amateur circus performer who invents a successful circus show called ‘A man on the comet’. The re-editor left a comment on the need to forbid the film as ‘propaganda for the heroic fight for individual happiness’. Despite this, the film was passed.

censors' disapproval of Napoleonic films that were very popular abroad but rarely appeared in Soviet distribution (for instance, *Madame Récamier. Des großen Talma letzte Liebe*, which was ordered to be radically re-edited prior to distribution).<sup>316</sup> Individualism as a decadent, bohemian attitude was not left unnoticed, although the censors' attitude to this form of individualism was much milder. Such films as Dreyer's *Michael* were perceived as an 'incredibly truthful' psychological portrait of 'lonely people of a moribund era'. This film about an 'extraordinary individualist who suffers from loneliness' was, surprisingly, not banned, despite its individualist tendencies. And it did not cause controversy because of its homosexual undertones, despite the fact that such undertones were, according to the Dreyer scholar Casper Tybjerg, 'readily apparent to many contemporaries', though they remained implicit.<sup>317</sup> The protocols reveal that the story of a love triangle between the artist Claude Zoret, his model and companion Michael, and the bankrupt countess Lucia Zamikoff, who seduces Michael, was understood by the censor in a different light. The suffering of the artist Claude Zoret was interpreted as unreciprocated love of the countess rather than jealous love of Michael, whom the censor calls Zoret's 'adopted son'. The film was temporarily passed in Leningrad in December 1924 after the removal of a few scenes. In January 1925 it received a new license that allowed Sevzapkino universal exhibition of the film. *Michael* was successfully distributed until January 1930 in a version that was 766 meters shorter than the original. The re-edited version of the film had an introduction that, like the intertitles in *Gilded Rot*, invited the audience to see the film merely as a case-study of another bourgeois/decadent type.

---

<sup>316</sup> *Madame Recamier*, GFF, d. 18-16. The film was re-edited because it portrayed 'individualism of a historical persona'.

<sup>317</sup> Casper Tybjerg, 'The Makers of Movies: Authors, Subjects, Personalities, Agents?', in *Visual Authorship: Creativity and Intentionality in Media (Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook 2004)*, ed. by Torben Grodal, Bente Larsen, Iben Thorving Laursen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2005), pp. 58–59.

Herman Bang [The author of the novel on which the film was based. – N.P.] belongs to the type of the western-European writers most of whom in the early 1890s depicted the petit-bourgeois class in their literary works. The dominant mood of these works was depression and melancholy, disappointment and mysticism.

[...]

Under the mask of individualistic philosophy, wrapped up in the robe of the ‘tragedy of loneliness’, the heroes of his novels are, as a matter of fact, just the ordinary petite-bourgeois who shed tears at the sight of a small scratch.<sup>318</sup>

Other German films with homosexual subtexts, like *Gesetze der Liebe* (1927, a version of *Anders als die Andern* (1919), both by Richard Oswald), or *Hamlet* with Asta Nielsen (1921, Svend Gade, Heinz Schall), were passed by Soviet censors who found no serious reason to ban them. While in Soviet Russia homosexuality was decriminalised in 1922 (according to Dan Healey, it was a conscious decision of the pre-authoritarian state that re-imposed the ban in 1934), it remained marginalised, with homosexual subculture living in relative invisibility.<sup>319</sup> Homosexual tendencies in German films were, accidentally or deliberately, overlooked: there are no commentaries on their controversy in the censors’ protocols. Thus, Oswald’s film was passed in 1928 as one of the directors much in-demand in Soviet Russia. *Hamlet’s* homosexual undertones were ignored by the censors, who described the film as a well-made historical production with beautiful costumes and wonderful acting by Asta Nielsen. However, they found the film’s cross-dressing motif rather odd. Nonetheless, the film entered distribution only for a few weeks. In July 1923 it was removed from the repertoire.<sup>320</sup> Elsewhere a scene containing a provocative dance between the lesbian Countess Geschwitz and Lulu

---

<sup>318</sup> *Michael*, GFF, d. 18-31

<sup>319</sup> See: Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>320</sup> GRK register cards for *Hamlet*, 270-23, GFF.

in *Die Büchse der Pandora* was removed as the film was considerably shortened and re-cut.<sup>321</sup>

In more rare cases, films could be banned for less obvious reasons, like the over-aestheticized and overly stylized film adaptations of literary text. For instance, reviewing *Ein Sommernachtstraum* (1925, Hanns Neumann), Eduard Birois commented on the unfamiliarity of the Soviet masses with Shakespeare's text, which makes this 'overly theatrical' and complex film difficult to watch, particularly in the workers' and village audiences. 'The film, it seems, is aimed at grown up children who received classical education,' ironically remarked the censor.

Films with Russia as the topic (*Russenfilme*) were in most cases rejected as low-quality productions. Often the category 'hack-work' (*khaltura*) was applied to describe such films. It is interesting that most Austrian films by such companies as *Sascha-Film*, *Saturn-Film*, *Terra-Film* and others were rejected for this reason. The censors found them eccentric, low-quality, full of stylistic and technical flaws, or overly slow.<sup>322</sup>

## 2. German films that received positive reviews.

Not all German films were criticized by the censors. In many cases they received positive reviews and were allowed distribution, particularly if they addressed social issues or presented bourgeois habits and the bourgeois way of life in a unfavourable light. Anatolii Lunacharsky was one of the strongest defenders of the unlimited use of satire in art. His article about comedy and satire in film, published in 1931 after his speech in defence of the Soviet filmmaker Aleksandr Medvedkin, instructs the reader on how satire can be used as a powerful 'class tool' that helps to discredit the bourgeoisie. Lunacharsky emphasised the difference between the western and the Soviet approach to 'laughter' (*smekh*):

---

<sup>321</sup> Censorship minutes for *Lulu*, GFF, d. 18-10

<sup>322</sup> See the re-editors' notes for the Austrian films among the GRK documents in Gosfilmofond, d. 62.

Bourgeois auteurs often slip into purely entertaining art and it serves the bourgeoisie, distracting the opposition from serious social questions. Our art must offer serious proletarian content and must provide such entertainment that, while giving rest after work, would at the same time be an act of education.<sup>323</sup>

The educational tasks of ‘Soviet laughter’, according to Lunacharsky, justified the use of any available artistic methods, including caricature — a method that was often used in fundamental re-editing of German films. Films that already contained this element, in explicit or implicit form, received special attention. Sometimes it was simply emphasized by inserting a few key intertitles, as in the case of *Der letzte Mann* (1924, F.W. Murnau). This is a story of an ageing hotel doorman who is demoted to a toilet attendant, after which his family and neighbours turn away from him leaving the hero destined to end his life in misery. It was received by the Soviets with enthusiasm. The story about the loss of his uniform, which metaphorically expressed his loss of status, reminded the audience of an important text of Russian classical literature, Nikolai Gogol’s *Overcoat*. The hallucinations of the drunk doorman in the film recalled the visions of Akakii Bashmachkin in Gogol’s story. Nevertheless, for the Soviets, the uniform in the film symbolized something bigger – the institutional power of capitalist hierarchy. The implicit irony that runs through the whole film and reveals itself on various levels (and that was notably rare in imported German films) was noticed by the Soviet censors. Parable-like narrative and metonymy were often used by Soviet literature and art as powerful persuasive devices, and *Der letzte Mann* employed both of these. Most importantly, it had a traceable associative link between the doorman’s worship of the uniform that wins him self-respect and respect from his social class, and the metaphorical transformation of the story into a critique of superficial western society where a garment serves as a guarantee of social acceptance.<sup>324</sup>

---

<sup>323</sup> Lunacharsky, p. 205 [first published in *Proletarskoe kino*, 9 September, 1931, pp. 4-15]

<sup>324</sup> Jon Hughes, “‘Zivil ist allemal schadlich’. Clothing in German-language culture of the 1920s’, in *Neophilology*, Volume 88 (2004), p. 439, pp. 429-445.

Contrastingly, Murnau's *Kammerspiel* drama does not contain open social criticism. On the contrary, an important part of the film's charm is that it does not over-stress an implicit metonymic shift: the film remains a reflective, even melancholic sketch about the fragility of social roles and the fragility of self-worth that is imposed by age. In the Soviet version, this film about the 'personal' had to become a film about the 'general'. The mild irony in the film concerning the enchantment of German society with the power of uniform, a motif that continued to resound in post-war German literature – for example, in Carl Zuckmayer's *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick* (1929) — was used by the Soviets to make a sharp satire. What interested them was the portrayal of capitalist society, in which every element is easily replaceable, and which discards obsolete 'human material' without regrets.

The censors praised *Der letzte Mann* for Emil Jannings' acting and the film's innovative technical side — contrasting lighting, the famous use of the *entfesselte Kamera*, and the absence of supporting intertitles. As a result, the film was passed and remained in distribution until 1930. The few alterations that were made to the film were, first of all, a change of title from *Der letzte Mann* to *Chelovek i livreia* (*The Man and the Uniform*), placing an emphasis on the link with Gogol's text; and the insertion of an instructive first intertitle:

This film brightly reflects the worldview of a modern Philistine...  
Wealth is his ideal... Servility is the means of achieving that ideal...  
Uniform, tail-coat, livery are the only signs of appreciation of the  
man's merit.<sup>325</sup>

The inserted intertitle thus highlights the film's central motif of the 'philistine' protagonist's relationship with his deified uniform as a symbol of power. The beginnings of the six parts of the film were preceded by short titles, while the original film had no intertitles: 'The chapter in which the livery hides the man', 'The chapter in which the man finally appears from behind the livery', etc. The

---

<sup>325</sup> *Chelovek i livreia*, GFF, d. 27-3



grotesque ending where the toilet attendant accidentally becomes a millionaire was not removed from the film.<sup>326</sup> The surviving montage list shows that the ‘happy ending’ followed after a short intertitle, as in the original film: ‘There are no miracles in the world but the author, for the sake of calming, nevertheless, invents a miracle.’<sup>327</sup>

Other films that received positive commentaries from the Soviet censors were two comedies: *Das Moral* (1927, Willi Wolff) and *Sechs Mädchen suchen Nachtquartier* (1928, Hans Behrendt). Both films represent ironic sketches of the bourgeois life in which female characters reveal the hypocrisy of patriarchal society under capitalism. The Soviets’ fight with the commodification and objectification of woman led to the passing of these films, neither of which was devoid of a certain degree of frivolity. The first film, which starred Ellen Richter, told the story of a cabaret dancer who uses a film camera to collect compromising evidence against her male visitors —members of the ‘Society of Morals’. Revealing this material, she unmasks the hypocrisy of these men, who are secretly trying to seduce her while publicly speaking against her ‘immoral’ performances. The film’s ‘political directive’ was considered to be acceptable despite piquant, entertaining scenes that ‘concealed the social meaning of the film.’ *Sechs Mädchen suchen Nachtquartier* with Jenny Jugo, told the story of six enterprising young cabaret dancers who, after being fired from work, organise a brothel in the provincial St. Magdalene’s Asylum for Remorseful Sinners. The respectable men of the village secretly frequent the ‘Magdalenas’ in the night while their wives think that they are playing skittles in the club. The film was passed as a ‘funny, although not very deep, satire on the sanctimony of the German meshchanstvo’ and a denunciation of the religious hypocrisy of the middle classes.<sup>328</sup>

Finally, there are examples of films that were passed for their truthful depiction of social problems. Consider two dramas: Pabst’s *Die freudlose Gasse*,

---

<sup>326</sup> The removal, however, was mentioned by Yuri Tsivian in his article on re-editing. See: Yuri Tsivian, ‘The Wise and Wicked Game: Re-editing and Soviet Film Culture of the 1920s’, *Film History*, Vol. 8, 3 (1996), p. 333.

<sup>327</sup> *Chelovek i livreia*, GFF, d. 27-3

<sup>328</sup> *Moral*, GFF, d. 18-33; *Shest' devushek ishchut nochnogo pristanishcha*, GFF, d. 27-23

and Jutzi's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*. The latter — a production by Prometheus-Film and Willi Münzenberg — was called by the censor 'the first revolutionary foreign film' for its explicit social message and the depiction of the misfortunes experienced by the lower classes in capitalist Germany. The film was allowed distribution, except for the village audiences for whom the censor found the film to be 'overextended'.<sup>329</sup>

The number of German films that received positive appraisals from the Soviet censorship was not very great. Such films appeared only in the late 1920s, when the gradual involvement of the Weimar Left in film production with the help of Prometheus-Film introduced social themes to German cinema. Before that, 'valuable' German cinema was limited to the few accidental films with ironical portrayal of bourgeois morals.

---

<sup>329</sup> *Schast'e matushki Krause*, GFF, d. 23-13

## Chapter 5

### ‘In Caligari’s Circle’: Soviet Reception of German Films

#### 1. From censorship to exhibition: Introductory notes

Foreign films that successfully passed censorship were distributed in central and provincial cinemas of the Soviet Union, according to the censors’ allocation. In this chapter I want to look at the critical response to, and the popularity of German films, that is, at the ways these films were interpreted, analyzed and consumed by Soviet society in the 1920s.

Little attention has been paid to this question in the scholarly literature. In 2002, the journal *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* started to republish previously unknown archival material concerning the reception of German cinema in the Soviet Union: reports by the Soviet filmmakers Friedrich Ermler, Abram Room, Grigorii Giber and Vladimir Erofeev about their visits to Berlin in the late 1920s, and the articles of the ‘Soviet correspondent in Berlin’, Roman Gul’.<sup>330</sup> The impact of Expressionist film on Soviet filmmakers was discussed by Yuri Tsivian, Neia Zorkaia and Evgenii Margolit.<sup>331</sup>

However, the Soviet film periodicals of the 1920s, which provide rich material on the reception of German film in the Soviet Union, have never been the subject of scholarly discussion. In 1922, when the first German films were imported to Soviet Russia, the critics responded to their popularity with a series of articles on various aspects of the Weimar Republic’s film industry, including on German distribution practices, and the genres and styles of selected German films. They also provided informative advertising material. In the first years of NEP,

---

<sup>330</sup> See *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 58, 2002, pp. 221-285.

<sup>331</sup> See: Yuri Tsivian, ‘Caligari in Rußland. Der deutsche Expressionismus und die sowjetische Filmkultur’, in *Die ungewöhnlichen Abenteuer des Dr. Mabuse im Lande der Bolschewiki* (Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek, 1995), pp. 169-176; Neia Zorkaia, ‘Doktor Kaligari i Akakii Akakievich Bashmachkin. K voprosu o nemetskikh vliianiiakh v russkom revoliutsionnom avangarde’, *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 59, 2002, pp. 52-60; Evgenii Margolit, ‘Kak v zerkale: Germaniia v sovetskom kino mezhdru 1920-1930 gg.’, *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 59, 2002, pp. 61-80.

which were characterized by competition between several distribution companies on the Soviet market, foreign films were often reviewed even before they appeared in distribution. Such reviews (usually positive) were a form of advertisement. For example, the discussion of *Caligari* began several months before the film entered exhibition, which enhanced public interest in the film.

From the mid-1920s, journal articles were not the only materials concerning German film that became available in the Soviet Union: there were booklets and postcards on popular German film stars, 'librettos', books on the German film industry and on technical aspects of cinematography. Moreover, German films became a subject of various feuilletons, sketches and poems. At the end of the 1920s, Soviet filmmakers who were already known in Europe visited the Weimar Republic (1928-1929) and, upon their return, reported back to the Association of Revolutionary Cinematography (ARK) about the results of their visit. Some reports were published in film periodicals as articles about the German film industry.<sup>332</sup> At the same time, the experience of watching and re-working German films for the Soviet screens resulted in the adoption of certain styles, techniques and images from German cinema in the Soviets' own productions. Eisenstein worked on a Soviet epic film as a counterpoint to Fritz Lang's *Nibelungen*; Expressionist settings inspired the directors of the FEKS group in Leningrad; Ermler's *Oblomok imperii* was created as a response to the director's visit to Berlin, where he became acquainted with the latest German theatre pieces and films; German films influenced the imagery of popular adventure films like *Miss Mend* that use intertextual parallels to Expressionist classics. And throughout these years the Soviets were not only watching but also studying the ideological basis and artistic methods of German film. In the late 1920s the Soviets refrained from importing foreign films. This led not only to complete revision of the cinema repertoire by the censors, who removed every German film from distribution, but also to the absence of any material in the film periodicals about new German films. In other words, the Soviet film journals that were published in the early 1920s, which depended on the distribution of foreign films for their content, included

---

<sup>332</sup> *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 58, 2002, pp. 239-285.

considerably more information on German and American film production than later publications such as the long-run official film journal *Sovetskii ekran*. Changes in the political environment, economic reorientation from the NEP to central planning, and the strengthening of the Party's ideology all inevitably affected film production. The ensuing break with western aesthetics led to almost complete neglect of foreign film in the Russian print media. In general, the attention to domestic production grew gradually from the 1922 issues of *Kino-(journal)* to issues of *Sovetskii ekran* in 1928 or 1929, in which the previously compulsory photographs of foreign film stars were replaced by portraits of Soviet actors and directors.

## 2. Soviet film periodicals and the first imported German films

The major Soviet film periodicals regularly published articles on German cinema throughout the 1920s. In this chapter I will examine the materials published in *Kino-(journal)* (looking at issues from the period between 1922 and 1923), *Kino-nedelia* (1924-1925), *Kino-zhurnal ARK* (1925-1926), *Kino-(gazeta)* (1927) and the 1925-1929 issues of *Sovetskii ekran*.

With the arrival of the first film purchases in October 1922, when only a few German films appeared in the cinema repertoires of Moscow and Leningrad, *Kino* published its first article on new German cinema. The article 'From foreign impressions' was based on a report that was made by K. Fel'dman of the Society of Filmmakers in Moscow.<sup>333</sup> Providing a detailed overview of the economy and politics of the Weimar Republic, reflected in the development of the country's film industry, the reviewer describes the peculiarly German film genres. First of all, he mentions the particular interest of the Germans in the genre of historical film.<sup>334</sup> Fel'dman explains this interest by the post-war crisis which resulted in an increased reflectiveness amongst the masses. Offering a list of the titles of the most popular historical film dramas like *Madame DuBarry* and *Danton*, he emphasizes the

---

<sup>333</sup> K. Fel'dman, 'Iz zagranichnykh vpechatlenii', *Kino*, 1, 1922, pp. 26-29.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

achievements of the Germans in the development of this genre. Historical film, for Fel'dman, represented the future of film as an art. The second type of German film that interests the reviewer is the so-called 'constructivist film', such as *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*. Describing the 'futurist' settings of *Caligari*, Fel'dman deliberately avoids using the term 'Expressionist film'. The critic concludes that German 'constructivist film' is the 'new way in art', as opposed to 'disappointing' American montage films, and he expresses hope for the young Soviet filmmakers to grasp the technical achievements of the West in order to create the 'synthetic (*sinteticheskii*) film' of the future.<sup>335</sup>

Various notes on the situation around the German film industry were published in the same issue of *Kino*, reporting on the 'excessive number of new films on the German market'.<sup>336</sup> Such articles, which referred to information provided by the German publications *Film Zeitung* and *Deulig-Film*, aimed to raise the audience's interest in German films in the months that preceded their distribution in central cinemas.

In late December of the same year, *Kino* opened a public dispute on *Caligari* publishing a lengthy review of the film.<sup>337</sup> This time the article praised German cinema – 'the liveliest in the world' – for offering a variety of any imaginable type of film: 'films for children, medical, scientific films; films for the petite-bourgeoisie, for the educated classes; for the performers and artists; propaganda films.'<sup>338</sup> However, the positive commentaries about Wiene's film caused prolonged debates in subsequent issues of *Kino*. In January 1923, immediately after *Caligari* was released in the Soviet Union, a group of Soviet cinema and theatre directors responded to the review of the previous issue with severe criticism of the film.<sup>339</sup> The reviewers emphasized the decadent nature of

---

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-29.

<sup>337</sup> K.F. Fel'dman, *Kino*, 4, 1922, pp. 10-12.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>339</sup> 'O "Kabinete doktora Kaligari"', *Kino*, 1-5, 1923, pp. 15-18. Debates on *Caligari* with Anoshchenko, Boltianskii, Tairov, Lev Kuleshov, Chaikovskii, Fel'dman, Turkin, Sabinskii and Doronin.

the 'futurist' film that reflected the 'crisis of bourgeois culture'. 'Futurism,' argued the Goskino director Aleksandr Anoshchenko, 'is the psychological anarchism of bourgeoisie'.<sup>340</sup> While Anoshchenko defined Expressionist cinema as an 'anomaly of capitalism', other critics referred to it as merely an 'amateur experiment' (Vladimir Turkin). Criticizing the form of Wiene's film and its constructed settings, Lev Kuleshov called the method of the director 'unhealthy' and 'ridiculous'. For Kuleshov, the film seemed to be rather old-fashioned in its theatricality, and resembled a 'typical spectacle by Pate made in 1910 or 1911'. Kuleshov and the actor and director Mikhail Doronin, however, mentioned the talented acting of Conrad Veidt, whom they considered to be 'wonderful material' that suffers in the 'cold' hands of German cinema.<sup>341</sup> 'Good actor', Werner Krauss, achieved less enthusiastic appraisal, Doronin finding his acting overly theatrical.<sup>342</sup> The main trend that is traceable at this stage of the Soviets' perception of German film is the attempt of the Soviet cultural elite to understand the phenomenon of Expressionist film. The search for new forms and themes in cinema, and the new definition of a film actor, like Eisenstein's concept of 'typage' (*tipazh*) or Kuleshov's notion of the 'model actor' (*naturshchik*), resulted in their break with theatre. *Caligari* was perceived by most Soviet critics as a repetition of theatre-like cinema from the old times and a return to decadence: in other words, it qualified as a reactionary bourgeois production.<sup>343</sup>

The reviews of German films that were published in the periodicals in the first years of the NEP help to reconstruct the chronology of their release in Soviet cinemas. In January 1923 comparative review in *Kino* of two new productions, Ernst Lubitsch's *Sumurun (Zhemchuzhina Garema)* with Pola Negri, and Tod Browning's *The Virgin of Stamboul* (1920, Tod Browning; Rus. *Nishchaia iz*

---

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>343</sup> Anoshchenko, who asserts that *Caligari* a 'futuristic film' and who defines futurism as 'degenerative anomaly of bourgeois art', regarded the film to be an 'illustration of contemporary crisis of bourgeois culture'. Turkin considered the film to be merely an 'amateur experiment'. Sabinskii regarded it to be a cinematographic exercise which could be interesting only to a small circle of film experts.

*Stambula*) with Priscilla Dean – signified a new trend towards ‘oriental film’.<sup>344</sup> Using the examples of these films, Soviet critics explored the differences between American and German cinema – two leading exporters of films to the Soviet Union. The genre of ‘oriental film’ was very successful in the Soviet Union, as it was in other countries, gaining popularity in the mid-1910s. German costume dramas – which were based on oriental fairy-tales and stories about harems, slaves and padishakhs, like *Die Teppichknüpferin von Bagdad* (1920, Edmund Linke), *Sumurun* or the episode film *Der Schädel der Pharaonentochter* – were among the Soviet audience’s favourites. Primarily, German oriental films were different from other countries’ productions because of their attention to the smallest details of setting. *Sumurun*, argues the reviewer, is a rather ‘heavy’ film compared to the dynamic American alternative, which had faster action and less dramatic acting. Being overloaded with theatricality, however, it attracted the audience with its carefully selected costumes and interiors. Admitting that *Sumurun* is a quality film, the reviewer expresses hope that German cinema will find a ‘less theatrical’ approach to film-making in the future.

Shortly after the arrival of *Caligari*, Soviet audiences got a chance to see another famous villain of German cinema: Lang’s *Doctor Mabuse* was first shown in early 1923 as *Doktor Mabuso*, a less radically re-edited version than Eisenstein’s and Shub’s *Gilded Rot*. The first review in *Kino* demonstrates that even without re-editing, Lang’s film was regarded to be a deliberate satire on the bourgeoisie: ‘Sharp and angry satire that in certain moments becomes horribly grotesque. The film has no positive characters.’<sup>345</sup>

The material offered by these first publications can be roughly divided into several groups, according to the character of their reference to German film. The first, and the largest group, is comprised of material devoted to the latest news and events in the German film industry. The purpose of these articles was to outline the situation on the German film market and to prove that film is ‘never apolitical’. Regularly published columns entitled, ‘Abroad’ (*Kino*), or ‘Film in the West’ (*Kinozhurnal ARK*) revealed the impact of political and diplomatic relations on

---

<sup>344</sup> ‘Sumurun: libretto’, *Kino*, 1(5), January, 1923, pp. 13-14.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.



European film industries. Since the Weimar Republic was the biggest film producing country in Europe, and the Soviet Union's major film supplier, reviews of German cinema occupied the most space in these columns.

Soviet film periodicals were not isolated from the rest of the film world. They often made use of the alternative German film periodicals, such as *Lichtbild-Bühne*, *Der Film*, *Film-Kurier*, *Die Kino-Technik* and *Kinematograph*, which supplied the Soviet editions, particularly *Kino-nedelia*, with information on the German film industry, statistical data and foreign film reviews. References to *Film-Kurier* and *Lichtbild-Bühne* were used most frequently.<sup>346</sup> In 1922, *Kino* published a positive review of a German article about Russian filmmaking, *Put' v Rossiiu* (*Der Weg nach Russland*), which had been published in *Der Film* in the same year.<sup>347</sup> The German article approvingly mentioned that the Weimar Republic had recently become interested in the Soviet Union as a potential film partner and pointed out the recent improvement of the Soviet economy. Another example of Russian film journals drawing from their German counterparts came from as competent and informative a journal as *Kinozhurnal ARK*, the official organ of the Association of the Workers of Revolutionary Cinematography. *Kinozhurnal ARK* referred to *Der Film* almost in every issue in 1925 and 1926. For instance, issue number 2 from 1925 reviews a German article on Soviet filmmaking that was originally published in 1924.<sup>348</sup> As the Soviet critic emphasizes, the German article explores potentially suitable films for the German market and gives commentaries on the foreign success of Soviet *Kulturfilme* such as *Abortion* (1924, Grigori Lemberg). However, the Soviet reviewer concludes with regret that ideological censorship and the inevitable 'Bolshevist propaganda' are still considered to be an insuperable obstacles for the import of Soviet films to the Weimar Republic. The

---

<sup>346</sup> See some examples of references on German periodicals in *Kino*: 2, 1922, p. 24-25; 4, 1923, p. 3, p. 12. Also see *Kino-nedelia*, 3-4, 1924, p. 8; *Kino-nedelia*, 5, 1924, p. 6; *Kino-nedelia*, 8, 1924, p. 5; *Kino-nedelia*, 14, 1924, p. 7; *Kino-nedelia*, 22, 1924, p. 5; *Kino-nedelia*, 35, 1924, p. 21-22; and *Sovetskii Ekran*, 25, 1926, p. 14.

<sup>347</sup> 'Put' v Rossiiu', *Kino*, 2, 1922, pp. 24-25.

<sup>348</sup> 'Iz inostrannoi kino-khroniki: Nemtsy o sovetskom kino', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 2, 1925, p. 30 [originally in *Der Film*, vol. 50, 1924].

German article mentions two Soviet action films released in 1924 as examples of Soviet films that could be potentially interesting for the foreign spectator. These films, the comedy *Papirosnitsa iz Mossel'roma* (1924, Iurii Zheliabuzhskii), and *Morozko* (1924, dir. Iurii Zheliabuzhskii), both made by the company *Mezhrabpom-Rus'*, embodied for the German side the hope for future collaboration between the two countries. The critic emphasizes the strong interest of German distributors in similar Soviet productions. In his opinion, the distinctive characteristic of such films is their balance between documentary and action film genres, as opposed to the artificially constructed foreign *Russenfilme*: for example, the combination of an exciting plot with documentary shots of the streets in Moscow; of folklore references and real Russian landscapes, and so on.<sup>349</sup>

The second group of material devoted to German cinema included feuilletons, reviews and discussions about particular films. For example, a lengthy article on Lang's *Nibelungen* was published in *Kinozhurnal ARK* in 1925. The article is an example of a new tendency in Soviet critical discourse of the late 1920s: a gradual shift towards the rejection of bourgeois cinema. The reviewer L. Rosenthal blames foreign cinema (mainly German and American films by Fritz Lang, Richard Oswald, Ernst Lubitsch and D.W. Griffith) for its attempt to portray historical events in a deliberately subjective way. Lang's *Nibelungen*, he argues, are overly static and lack 'inner movement'. This is, for him, a sign of bourgeois cinema's weakness in its portrayal of heroic events: 'The creation of heroic epics in film is a very difficult task. Today's Germany, and particularly the social circles to which Lang belongs, cannot produce an artist who is able to create monumental and tragic images.'<sup>350</sup> The reviewer criticizes both *Caligari* and *Nibelungen* for their use of highly ornamental or unrealistic settings. The contrast between real people and artificial scenery is comic and even absurd, argues Rosenthal. In his opinion, even the actors that were selected by Lang did not qualify as heroes of German epics. Thus, Paul Richer is called a 'miserable, frail blond German boy' who hardly resembles the hero Siegfried; Hannah Ralf (Brunhild) is described as 'a short-haired femme fatale from some cheap postcard.' As becomes evident,

---

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>350</sup> L. Rosenthal, 'Nibelungi', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 6-7, 1926, p. 33.

Rosenthal's article, which asserted that heroic epics could be created only in a country of socialist revolution, followed the official Soviet ideology in refusing the capitalist West any considerable artistic achievements. It is important to remember in this respect that such reviews of popular foreign films were often ordered by censors who, in passing an ideologically doubtful but commercially successful film for exhibition, tried to minimize its harmful effects by publishing negative articles in the popular press.

The Soviets' fight with the popularity of Lang's 'bourgeois' epics, and the 'wrong' portrayal of the masses, resounds in Eisenstein's work on the film 'The Year 1905' – a project which later became *Bronenosets Potemkin*. Eisenstein himself compared the film to *Nibelungen* in an interview that preceded the shooting. Oksana Bulgakowa notes:

Sein Held sei die Masse, und die Fabel würde es nicht geben; er habe gewaltige Massakerszenen vor: den Brand in der Tomsker Oper, Judenpogrome, das armenisch-tatarische Blutbad und die Unterwasseraufnahmen von Schiffen der bei Tschutschima versenkten Flotte. "Die Aufnahmen werden expressionistisch das reale Material bearbeiten." Das Material, von dem Eisenstein hier sprach, war der Körper der Masse, in Fritz Langs Nibelungen zum dekorativen Ornament verwandelt.<sup>351</sup>

Most articles on German directors that were published in the mid-1920s expounded negative images of German film directors. For instance, *Kinozhurnal ARK*'s note about Fritz Lang ('The conversation with Fritz Lang') depicted the director of 'bourgeois film' with irony.<sup>352</sup> Skeptical reviews of Ernst Lubitsch's American films and comments on the 'naivety and opportunism' of the 'bourgeois

---

<sup>351</sup> Eisenstein und Deutschland: Texte, Dokumente, Briefe, ed. by Oksana Bulgakowa (Berlin: Akademie der Künste/Henschel Verlag, 1998), p. 143.

<sup>352</sup> Aleksandr Neverov, 'Beseda s Fritzem Langom', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 10, 1925, p. 32.

left' director Lupu Pick were published in the same year.<sup>353</sup> Such articles persistently produced an image of 'corrupted' German filmmaking or described German film directors as artists who are 'enslaved' by the capitalist system and, therefore, cannot produce anything worthwhile. These motifs resounded in many publications on foreign film in later years, for example, in the brochures of Teakinopechat', or in Efimov's monograph on Pabst, who was to be criticized for his refusal to come to the Soviet Union.

In 1925, the Soviets expressed contradictory opinions on the suitability of foreign films as examples to be followed. In his article 'Film in Germany', a regular contributor to *Kinozhurnal ARK*, Kirill Shutko (who also translated Béla Balázs's *Der sichtbare Mensch* in the same year), wrote: 'The Soviet film industry has little to learn from the German film industry. It has no reason to trust it without the strict guarantee of full compensation.'<sup>354</sup> In August of the same year Anatolii Lunacharsky responded with an article 'On Film' in the newspaper *Komsomol'skaia pravda*: 'We must learn from the bourgeois film industry, and learn not only the technical aspects but also the art of scriptwriting, acting, directing.'<sup>355</sup>

Despite the significant reduction of the number of positive reviews of German film in the Soviet press after 1925, articles that carried information about current affairs in the German film industry were consumed with interest. Regular overviews of technical novelties, detailed descriptions of German film studios, news concerning German distribution companies that could potentially be involved in collaboration with the Soviet Union or commentary on the current film repertoire in Berlin's cinemas were usually presented from an expressly 'foreign' perspective. Such material came under the subheading 'From our correspondent in Berlin'. These articles were usually written by journalists from émigré circles, like Roman Gul', who published his articles in *Sovetskii ekran* between 1925 and 1927. The reviewers could be Soviets living abroad, such as Vladimir Erofeev, the

---

<sup>353</sup> <V.T.>, 'Nemetskii rezhissior v Amerike', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 2, 1925, p. 33; R., 'Kino i burzhuznoe obshchestvo', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 3, 1925, p. 28.

<sup>354</sup> K. Shutko, 'Kino v Germanii', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 4-5, 1925, pp. 22-23.

<sup>355</sup> Lunacharsky, p. 53.

creator of the entertaining newspaper *Kino-(gazeta)*, who, from 1925, worked as a representative in the Soviet film trade mission in Berlin and regularly published his insightful commentaries on German cinema in the Soviet press. Such articles familiarized Soviet readers with the German film scene: its latest trends, premiers, new film stars and the study of German film audiences. The use of ‘external’ commentators in such essays implied the authenticity of the information about western film and allowed an ‘insider’ view on the subject.

Particular attention in the Soviet periodicals was paid to the success of Russian emigrant film stars abroad. Although most of them received negative reviews in the late 1920s when the movement of *Smenovekhovstvo* was rejected, the early 1920s saw lively interest in Russian success abroad. In 1922-1924, the Soviet film journals included brief notes on the foreign works of such personalities among Russian filmmaking circles in Europe as Ivan Mozzhukhin, Vladimir Gaidarov, Grigorii Khmara, Olga Gzovskaia, Ossip Runitsch, Ksenia Desni, Diana Karenn, and others. One of the many examples of this class of publication provides information on emigrant film stars, filmmakers and companies in the West as well as approvingly referring to the new ‘Russian films’ made by émigrés.<sup>356</sup> International projects like *WESTI* by Vengerov and Stinnes, received positive responses from the Soviets. For instance, in 1925 *Kinozhurnal ARK* published regular notes about this project, calling it ‘a contact that aims to unite Russian artistic forces and German technologies’ in order to withstand the ‘American interest in the treatment of European problems’.<sup>357</sup> However, such articles, despite their generally optimistic intonation, also reveal hidden doubts about the very possibility of any German-Soviet collaboration: the ideological difference between the countries was a barrier to collaboration, particularly for the Soviets, who could not support capitalist, bourgeois Germany. As a critic writes in 1925, the Soviet Union, in this fight for filmmaking dominance between world leaders, should rather ‘lie in wait catching their inevitable failures and moments of depression.’<sup>358</sup>

---

<sup>356</sup> ‘Russko-germanskoe kinoproizvodstvo v Germanii’, *Kino-nedelia*, 8, 1924, p. 8.

<sup>357</sup> ‘K obrazovaniuu vseevropeiskogo sindikata’, *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 3, 1925, p. 26.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*

However, despite the interest in emigrant production, the Soviets often expressed a desire for films with Russian themes to reach Europe not through the hostile camp of White emigrants but ‘through the hands of the workers’.<sup>359</sup> This marked the beginning of a campaign against the foreign *Russenfilme* on the European market. In the late 1920s the names of the Russian emigrants disappear from the Soviet film press.

### 3. ‘Art is never apolitical’: Ideological controversy

Thus, the critical reception of German films in the official Soviet press went through four major stages: 1) in 1922-1923 German films were widely advertised, and the German film industry was praised for its resourcefulness. The Soviets saw the Weimar Republic as an example of success, and the film reviews were usually positive. Soviet critics carefully studied the German film industry and the artistic method of the main German directors; 2) around 1924 the Soviet critics developed a critical attitude to German film (based on an assumption that the bourgeois world cannot create anything good); 3) in 1925-1927 the critics openly attacked the weaknesses of the German film industry with its lack of a stable financial platform, strengthening Americanization, and so on; 4) after 1928 almost all German films were ignored by the Soviet press, or received negative reviews.

In the Soviet Union of the 1920s, film was considered to be a reflection of ideology, national identity, and the national approach to history. The Soviet film periodicals explored this phenomenon and, disclosing the myths, beliefs and political tendencies concealed in films, tried to determine the place of the Soviet Union in the confrontation between the film industries of various countries. What becomes evident from the Soviet film press of the 1920s is that in the highly politicized context of Soviet cultural life, even the failures or successes of particular films were perceived as symptoms of political and economic tendencies rather than purely artistic achievements and faults. Remaining relatively impartial in the confrontation between the leading world film industries – American,

---

<sup>359</sup> <S-kii>, ‘Khronika’, *Kino*, 2, 1922, p. 28.

German and, to some extent, French – the Soviet Union, nevertheless, planned to profit from it in the future: most importantly, through economic and cultural partnership with the Weimar Republic as the leading producing country. In 1922-1923 Germany was, indeed, seen as such a leader and a role model for the developing Soviet film industry. Genre flexibility and the variety of German production, from epic dramas and ‘American’ adventure films, to stylized *Kunstfilme*, evoked contradictory opinions. The majority of the reviews that were published in Soviet periodicals, however, spoke of it positively: ‘The power of the production of German companies lies in the fact that this country produces movies that suit any tastes, that meet all purposes, national and international.’<sup>360</sup>

The Soviet Union followed any changes in relations between post-war Germany and other countries, including the situation around film production, with unconcealed interest. For instance, a reviewer of *Kino* defended the superiority of the Germans in the domain of historical film, explaining their success in this genre by the humiliation that the country experienced after the First World War:

Germans interpret their history in a heroic vein and speak ironically of the ‘great’ past of their recent enemies. They can allow this absolutely innocent revanche, if it brings any liberation to the spiteful feelings! A German film – about Frederick the Great – is an example of modern German epics. The stories from the first empire in France – for instance, *Madame Récamier*, – are a malicious and ironic farce dethroning Napoleon. If the French responded to the German sneer with another sneer, we could witness an interesting competition between the different points of view on the history of the great European nations, the debunking of historical fetishes and mutual unmasking and defamation, and would also profitably extract something from it for ourselves. We would not maybe know the

---

<sup>360</sup> The article in *Kino* is based on film reviews from the French film periodicals. ‘Za granitse: Leon Deliuk o mirovoi kinematografii’, *Kino*, 1, 1922, p. 24.

history better, but we would start to understand the weaknesses of its patriotic interpretations.<sup>361</sup>

In 1923, the Soviets' fascination with the high level of development of German film production reached its climax. In an article devoted to Ernst Lubitch's *Anna Boleyn* (1920), Soviet critics wrote about the need to follow Germany's example as a strong model for the development of domestic production: 'We are used to boasting in front of Europe of our culture and our artists, and we have every reason to do this. But really, in film we have things to learn from our neighbour Germany, and not only technical skills, but also genuine artistic craft'.<sup>362</sup> Until 1924, commentaries about German film were still optimistic, though the growing popularity of American productions on the Soviet market altered the Soviets' preferences. A 1923 review in *Kino* gives a contradictory conclusion about German film on the Soviet screen:

We *don't* like German films that much. They are marked with an artistic pedantry and a conscientious Munich-style training that does not save them from faults of taste and technical lapses that cause much annoyance and perplexity.<sup>363</sup>

At the same time, the critic also points out that the average American film cannot be considered a satisfactory substitution for German production for the Russian audience, since the audience finds it overly entertaining, superficial and naïve. In 1925, with the establishment of Sovkino, American films were classified as ideologically unsuitable.<sup>364</sup>

Partly due to economic limitations, French cinema could not compete for dominance in the field of filmmaking with Germany and America. Some articles

---

<sup>361</sup> Veronin, 'Kriticheskie zametki', *Kino*, 1, 1922, p. 12-13.

<sup>362</sup> 'Na prosmotrakh: "Anna Boleyn"', *Kino*, 3-7, 1923, p. 16.

<sup>363</sup> Veronin, 'Kriticheskie zametki', *Kino*, 1-5, 1923, pp. 10-11.

<sup>364</sup> S. Boitler, 'Neskol'ko myslei praktika', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 11-12, 1925, pp. 24-26.



explore the quality of the French productions that reached Soviet cinemas. Analyzing French films released in 1924, Vladimir Pozner, a Russian journalist based in France, concludes in his 'Letter from Paris' for *Kinozhurnal ARK* that the French have significantly better artistic taste than the Americans, as well as the ability to create 'intelligent', though overly 'literary' or theatrical, films:

In French films people always talk too much, far too much try to clarify the action through the intertitles (a tribute to literature), the French actors make too grand gestures, too expressively roll their excessively penciled eyes, too demonstrably suffer (a tribute to theatre).

[...]

Americans, of course, feel better. They have neither tradition, not art behind them.<sup>365</sup>

In the following year, *Kinozhurnal ARK* published an article by Vladimir Erofeev, 'Why America wins'. Scrutinizing the secret of American success in filmmaking, Erofeev concludes that American film is not national but initially *international* and because of this it is accessible for audiences all over the world. Similarly to Pozner, he explains this quality by America's independence from any historical-cultural burden as well as by America's strategy of employing the best European artists for its own films. The German film industry, Pozner says, despite being the most profitable in Europe, has the same problems as the French: mainly, due to its dependence on the traditions of literature and drama, the Weimar Republic creates 'non-cinematographic cinema' that carries the ballast of the 'old culture'.

#### 4. German film: Pro et contra

---

<sup>365</sup> Vladimir Pozner, 'Frantuzskii kinematograf v 1924 godu: Pis'mo iz Parizha', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 2, 1925, pp. 27-29.

Starting from 1924, German films and actors were reproached more often than any others for theatricality, decadence and exaggeration. One of the reporters of *Kino-nedelia* in 1924 makes an attempt to rehabilitate German cinema. As he points out in the article ‘About some German films’, the total rejection of German productions would be unnecessary, undesirable and even harmful. He suggests that Soviet filmmakers try to understand and adopt the stronger sides of German cinema for use in Soviet productions:

Despite all the efforts of German filmmaking at least not to pass ahead of but to go arm in arm with America in production of adventure films, it is clear that only in cases where Germans operate with the actors’ suffering and with a slow tempo of plot development, their works are interesting and make sense.<sup>366</sup>

Throughout most of the 1920s, Soviet reviews of German film defined it as highly artistic. If in the early 1920s the critics apply this characteristic to set designs, costumes and the choice of genres of German cinema, from the mid-1920s they start to talk about a distinctively ‘German’ style of acting which is defined as having ‘psychological depth’ of artistic expression, a result of the strong theatre tradition in Germany. Because of the emphasis on actors’ emotions and the psychological portraits of the characters, German productions, for the Soviets, were characterized by a slower tempo of production – the distinctive feature that, depending on the circumstances, became a matter of criticism (films are ‘static’) or praise (films are of ‘higher quality’).

The increasing public ardor for the inauthentic ‘American-style’ films produced in European film-making countries, primarily in the Weimar Republic, irritated Soviet printed media even more than the naivety of German *Russenfilme*. The director Leonid Trauberg, in an ironic feuilleton published in 1924, scrutinized the recent vogue for the ‘American style’ in Europe. He distinguished three main types of ‘Americanism’:

---

<sup>366</sup> L. Nikulin, ‘O nekotorykh nemetskikh fil'makh’, *Kino-nedelia*, 9, 1924, pp. 6-7.

1) American – the wide range of names from Griffith, Erich von Stroheim, Chaplin to ‘some unknown but super-genius masters of the two-act comedies’; 2) Russian (Mozzhukhin!); 3) German, with ‘too many well-dressed extras; the luxury of ‘Americaine’ interiors and exteriors; tricks: hundreds of automated man-servants and clerks, low-taste jokes, something unexpected in settings (springing out telephones, a ladder that slid along the wall). Sensation: chic of the dancing parties, music-halls, fuss of the streets, newspaper men, advertisement. Wonderful actors in dramatic roles; specific manner of acting that is: exaggerated imperturbability or nervousness...But rarely – (I emphasize it!) – any new methods of filming, montage, disposition.

[...]

This is the main drawback of the beautiful work of the ‘German Yankees’.<sup>367</sup>

From the mid-1920s, the official Soviet press started to publish regular articles on the ‘crisis of the German filmmaking’ and on the ‘UFA downfall’. One of the Soviet Union’s main supporters of the German film industry was Nikolai Lebedev who, besides writing regular reports on German film in media and promoting German *Kulturfilme*, also supplied the Soviet reader with detailed essays on German filmmaking. In 1924, Lebedev published a book *About German cinematography*, a thorough review of the current state of affairs in the German industry, with a list of the major film studios, actors and directors.<sup>368</sup> The book received a rather aggressive reaction from the radical reviewers of *Kino-nedelia*. Explaining why such works are of no use for the Soviet filmmaking, the critic concludes:

---

<sup>367</sup> L. Trauberg, ‘Esche o “Zhenshchine s milliardami” i prochem’, *Kino-nedelia*, 4, 1924, p. 3.

<sup>368</sup> Nikolai Lebedev, *Po germanskoi kinematografii* (Moskva: Kino-Moskva 1924)

The ignorant god of geographical borders attached us not to America, not even to France, but to Germany. In the realm of filmmaking we are disturbed by this allocation. From 100 pictures that are shown in Soviet cinemas 90 are German. [...]

If we take into account the stylistic range of German film, we will be surprised even more. Mysticism, bizarrerie, theatricalism, tastelessness, hysteria – everything that is openly antipodal to the aims of the Soviet film, we can state it. If we come across any amusing detectives or comedies – they are not more than the ‘Ersatz’. ‘Celebrated’ German actors are annoying because of their filmic anti-realism. But no... not America – Germany is closer to the USSR. Nothing can help. Nevertheless, there are things to learn from Germany in terms of film technique! [...]

If there is something we can take from Germany than these are (of course, for a cheap price) floodlights, film and equipment. The aims and reviews of Germany’s ‘artistic cinema’ are of much less interest to us.<sup>369</sup>

From the mid-1920s, proletarian art signified a reorientation towards realism, manifest optimism and innovative approaches to filming technique. First of all, this largely meant an almost complete break with the ‘decadent’ bourgeois film that in the Soviet discourse was primarily associated with Germany. Khrisanf Khersonskii’s article ‘About the last foreign films’, published in the first 1925 issue of *Kinozhurnal ARK*, radically diverges from Expressionist aesthetics. The article explains this through the ‘unhealthiness’ of German films in comparison to the ‘romance of everyday life as the specific characteristic of French, American and Swedish cinema’. German film, concludes the reviewer, is much less optimistic due to the social conditions, political troubles and the post-war national

---

<sup>369</sup> <T.>, ‘Bibliografiia’, *Kino-nedelia*, 9, 1924, p. 7.

despondency. Non-German cinema, at the same time, is perceived as a 'healthy' alternative to German cinematic decadence:

Germany in its Expressionist experiments, mainly, in the direction of Robert Wiene and in the 'double orchid' of this movement, Conrad Veidt, portrays mentally-abnormal people who are often plainly insane. It demonstrates psychical degradation, mental kinks and gangrenous wounds.<sup>370</sup>

In conclusion, Khersonskii calls for the need to re-orientate Soviet cinema towards American models and to refuse to follow Germany as the film-making leader, stating that 'Germany is attracted to false shams, dummies, and Expressionist scenery'. For Khersonskii, German cinema was characterized by 'disappointment in real life, misleading the spectator moving him to the shadowy environment of supernatural, unrealistic phantasmagorias.' In the critic's opinion, American films would be a better choice for the Soviet market: 'Real Americanism, and not the notorious detective-story crap, is for us a better *technical* teacher than German cinema.'<sup>371</sup>

German films that were henceforward proclaimed to be unsuitable for the Soviet spectator for ideological and aesthetic reasons were still considered to be suitable for projection but had to be carefully inspected. Thus, advising the workers' clubs and proletarian audiences on suitable foreign films, *Kinozhurnal ARK*, in 1925, suggested rather old and ideologically 'safe' German films such as Lubitsch's historical drama *Madame DuBarry* with Pola Negri, *Ilona* (1921, Rober Dinesen) that explores the life of Hungarian peasants, and *Der kleine Napoleon/So sind die Männer* (1922, Georg Jacoby; in Russian release *Napoleon's Courier*) starring Harry Liedtke, who was very popular among Russians. Interestingly, *Der kleine Napoleon*, an extremely long, ten-part historic drama was mentioned along with another German film, *Das indische Grabmal*, by Mikhail Bulgakov in

---

<sup>370</sup> Kh. Khersonskii, 'O poslednikh zagranichnykh lentakh', *Kino-zhurnal ARK*, 1, 1925, pp. 29-30

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

‘Devilry’ (*Chertovshchina*) – a short comic story about provincial clubs where, due to a lack of rooms, film screenings and public lectures were paradoxically held at the same time.<sup>372</sup> The majority of films that were suggested by the editors of *Kinozhurnal ARK* in this short note in 1925 were old productions: Griffith’s *Intolerance*, Abel Gance’s *J’accuse* (1919, dir. Abel Gance; ‘A film in plain language and clear for workers language tells about the horrors of the World War slaughter’ – stated the article), and the American adventure box-office hit *The Woman God Forgot* (in Russian release *Montezuma’s Daughter*; 1917, Cecil B. DeMille) were all released before 1920, some even before the Revolution. For the western audience of 1925-1926, the years of the rising European vogue for the Soviet avant-garde, the selection offered to the Soviet workers could have seemed almost pre-historic.

In the mid-1920s the Soviet discourse of film criticism found all other national cinemas unsatisfactory: German films seemed to be overly stylized, ‘boring’ or, like Russian pre-revolutionary cinema, too remote from reality in their sentimental appeal; French production was considered to be overloaded with unnecessary details and too literature-orientated; American films misused trick effects and were perceived as primitive in their themes, acting and psychological effects. In the mid-1920s, foreign films became the subject of satirical poems, feuilletons and jokes. In 1924 the illustrated newspaper *Kino-nedelia* published the ironic poem ‘Four Films’ that illustrated the national cinemas’ clichés in their extremes.<sup>373</sup> This was one result of the Soviets’ experience of watching a repertoire of exclusively foreign film for a few years, a poem that expressively portrayed the essence of pre-revolutionary Russian, German, French and American films. The titles of the films in the poem recalled the typical Soviet distribution titles that frequently appeared in the cinema repertoire: 1) ‘Playing with her heart like with a doll he broke her heart as if it was a doll’ or ‘In the Waves of Love’, ‘a Russian film, pre-revolutionary and rather intelligent’; 2) ‘The Father of little Jeanne’ or ‘The Merciful Foresight’, ‘a French film, with morals and senses’; 3) ‘40 000

---

<sup>372</sup> Mikhail Bulgakov, ‘Chertovshchina’, in Mikhail Bulgakov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, T.2 (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1992)

<sup>373</sup> Aleksandr Neratov, ‘Chetyre fil'my’, *Kino-nedelia*, 16, 1924, p. 5.

Miles under Water’ or ‘The Colonel at the Equator’, ‘an extremely American and adventurous film’; 4) ‘Karl and Emilia’ or ‘The Woolen Socks’, a German film, old and sentimental’. In this ironic poem, Russian pre-revolutionary cinema was associated with exaggeration and decadence, French films with sophisticated family melodramas, and American with excessive special effects and tricks. The German film is primarily associated with lengthy *Kammerspiel* dramas from the life of the petite-bourgeoisie:

Poor but honest Karl loves Emilia,  
 Calls her lovingly ‘my lily’  
 And gives her other little names –  
 And, of course, treats her with the Russian pancakes.  
*Eine so schöne Idylle!*  
 Half rent is paid by Karl, another – by Emilia...  
 One day Karl’s stomach gets upset,  
 And Emilia, loving and delicate,  
 Cures him with poultice from his cramps,  
 And he rewards her with the collection of stamps.  
 They want to get married but – what an omission! -  
 Emilia’s father won’t give his permission  
 Until Karl earns enough money to buy a double bed...  
 But (as we need, at some point, to reach the end)  
 All obstacles are smoothed away by a happy chance,  
 The marriage is finally announced.  
 Karl buys a large tankard for beer,

She slowly knits him socks – now all is clear! –

Daddy's smile is moving and affectionate,

Everything ends up in the best state...<sup>374</sup>

The poems and feuilletons in entertaining mass editions like *Smena*, *Iskusstvo trudiashchimsia* or *Kino-teatr-sport*, as well as popular publications like the brochures of the publishing house 'Teakinopechat', demonstrate that, despite the manifested severity of the official Soviet press, the reality was not that gloomy: foreign actors still enjoyed wide popularity among the Soviet audience in the late 1920s.

##### 5. 'Faustian soul': German actors in the brochures of 'Teakinopechat'

The brochures of 'Teakinopechat' were published in the Soviet Union between 1926 and 1928. These essays, only a few pages long, with photographs, were devoted to foreign and Soviet film stars and were aimed at giving a brief analysis of the work and acting style of a chosen actor. The 'Teakinopechat' booklets were unique because of their content: the essays did not contain the actor's biography or references to foreign sources. They were aimed at a wide audience, being highly original and interesting to read. The majority of publications were devoted to German stars, who enjoyed enormous popularity among Soviet audiences. The target readers of the brochures were a heterogeneous mass of the population: urban film-goers, amateur filmmakers, readers in provincial libraries, workers of regional film organisations, and film lecturers – whom the brochures were supposed to help with the task of building the film repertoire. In total, about 15 brochures on German actors were published in 1926 and 1928. Most of the essays on German actors were written by two authors: Boris Mazing, a regular author of the 'Teakinopechat' series and a respectable theatre critic who belonged to the Germanophile circle of the poet Mikhail Kuzmin (who was a colleague of

---

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.



Mazing's at the newspaper *Krasnaia-gazeta*), and the Soviet journalist and critic Ismail Urazov.<sup>375</sup> The brochures, now a bibliographic rarity, have never been the focus of scholarly research. However, they provide a demonstration of how German actors were perceived by the mass Soviet audience. From 1927, a series of postcards of popular German stars (Emil Jannings, Conrad Veidt, Paul Wegener, Bernhardt Goetzke, Asta Nielsen, Louise Brooks) was launched by Teakinopechat' as an addition to the brochures. Most of them repeated the original German Ross-Verlag postcards, sometimes in a bigger format, and reached a print run of 15,000-20,000 copies.

In 1926, Teakinopechat' published the first brochures on Asta Nielsen, Conrad Veidt, Harry Liedtke, Ossi Oswalda and Henny Porten, all of which were written by Izmail Urazov. In 1927, the Harry Piel brochure and another booklet on Conrad Veidt were published. In 1928 they were followed by essays devoted to Pola Negri, Paul Wegener, Emil Jannings, Werner Krauss, Liane Haid, Bernhard Goetzke and Lia de Putti, mostly written by Boris Mazing.

Asta Nielsen was one of the most popular actresses amongst Soviet audiences, who still remembered her from her 1910s films by Urban Gad. Her early films (*Engelein*, *Die Suffragette* and others) were among the first productions that were imported in 1922. However, in 1926, the Danish actress, who started her film career when, according to Urazov, cinema was still 'vulgar art', was known to the younger generation of the Soviet film-goers from her newly-imported German films, such as *Hamlet*, *Geliebte Roswolskys*, *Vanina*, *Erdgeist* and *Die freudlose Gasse*. In the essay Asta Nielsen is referred to as an inventor of the *Bubikopf* haircut for her role in *Hamlet* – one of Nielsen's most popular films in the Soviet Union. Giving a brief biography of the actress, Urazov includes a few paragraphs on Nielsen's acting method and her roles:

Asta Nielsen often stars in films with unhappy endings. Often plays prostitutes. Doomed women. People who are bored to live happily.

---

<sup>375</sup> Mikhail Kuzmin, 'Zhizn' podo l'dom (Dnevnik 1929 goda)', ed. by S. Shumikhin, in *Nashe Nasledie*, 93-94, 2012, pp. 90-98.

And sometimes, when there's a kiss in the last episode according to the script, you are still left thinking that there will be another episode and the happiness is not to be.<sup>376</sup>

One of her most recent roles, of Hedda Gabler in an adaptation of Ibsen's play, was called by Urazov the quintessence of Nielsen's acting. As we know from the correspondence of Sevzapkino in the early 1920s, films with Nielsen were one of the priorities for the film agents: the actress was so popular that the acquisition of such films guaranteed successful distribution. When the brochure was published, the Soviet audience was already familiar with Béla Balázs's book *Der sichtbare Mensch*, where Balázs gives a 'portrait' of Asta Nielsen, illustrating his theory of physiognomy in cinema. Balázs writes about the actress's unique ability to reflect the most subtle emotion in her face:

In Asta Niensens Kindlichkeit liegt ihr Filmgeheimnis, das Geheimnis ihres mimischen Dialogs, *der ohne Worte einen lebendigen Kontakt mit dem Partner schafft.*

[...]

Asta Niensens Mienenspiel ahmt, wie das der kleinen Kinder, während der Gesprächs die Mienen des anderen nach. Ihr Gesicht trägt nicht nur den eigenen Ausdruck, sondern kaum merklich (aber immer fühlbar) reflektiert sich darin wie in einem Spiegel der Ausdruck des anderen.<sup>377</sup>

Asta Nielsen's talent in combining 'ein großartiges Gebärdenspiel der Erotik' and child-like ability to mirror the facial expression of the other person, mentioned by Balázs, made her the favourite actress of the Soviet audience. Leopold Jessner's *Erdgeist*, where Asta Nielsen played the lustful Lulu, remained for several years

---

<sup>376</sup> Izmil Urazov, *Asta Nielsen* (Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1926), p. 12.

<sup>377</sup> Bela Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch*, p. 107-109.

one of the most popular foreign films in Soviet distribution. Nielsen's marriage to the Russian actor Grigorii Khmara was mentioned in the Soviet film periodicals, the 'psychological depth' of her acting method and her role as Nastas'ia Filippovna in the 'Russian film' *Irrende Seelen* (Carl Froelich's adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, 1921) attracted the attention of Soviet audiences that wanted to see her as a 'Russian' actress.

In the Soviet Union, Nielsen had a reputation as an actress who portrayed the 'tragedy of woman and womanhood.' 'It is hard to definitely say what her audience is,' writes Urazov, 'even her opponents watch her films.'<sup>378</sup> In 1927, after seeing in Berlin the premiere of *Dirnentragödie* (1927, Bruno Rahn) – a powerful drama where the actress played an ageing street walker Auguste – Lunacharsky mentioned Nielsen among the actors who 'strongly expressed their wish to work in Russian cinema.'<sup>379</sup>

The second of Urazov's essays that was published in 1926 was devoted to another 'classical' face of German cinema, Henny Porten. For the Soviet audiences, this actress was associated with the canonical image of a German woman – 'a woman of 4 Ks', 'a woman of pre-war quality', notes Urazov. Henny Porten was known primarily from the film *Anna Boleyn*, where she played alongside Emil Jannings. Urazov praises Porten's ability to make a historical figure understandable to the wider masses: 'It is not a tragedy that is common to all humankind, *Anna Boleyn*. It is a story of a gentle blonde German girl from an ancient small town. What else could we expect? Henny Porten, the torch-bearer of the spiritual power of Germany's past, plays only German women.'<sup>380</sup> Ossi Oswald was also known to the Soviet audiences from the films of Ernst Lubitsch, primarily from *Die Austernprinzessin* (1919). Her operetta-like comedies and

---

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>379</sup> Lunacharsky, p. 81. The plan was never implemented but, paradoxically, Nielsen's colleague in *Dirnentragödie*, Hilde Jennings, who played a younger street walker, Clarissa (who seduces Auguste's lover), moved to the Soviet Union with her husband, the Mezhrabpom film director Mikhail Dubson. In 1941 she was charged with espionage and sent to a labour camp in Kazakhstan. Arkadii Bernshtein, 'Gollivud bez happy-enda: Sud'ba i tvorchestvo Vladimira Nil'sena', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 60, 2002, pp. 213-259.

<sup>380</sup> Izmail Urazov, *Zhenni Porten* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1926), p. 6.

simple adventure films like *Das Mädel mit der Maske* (1922, Viktor Janson) belonged to the light genres that were mostly enjoyed by urban audiences. In his essay about Ossi Oswald, Urasov notes that, if Henny Porten is a nostalgic image of a woman of pre-war Germany, Ossi Oswald is the 'new German woman', virtuous and sentimental: 'She is a woman, an ordinary, pure-blooded bourgeois woman.'<sup>381</sup>

It is important to note that the essays of Teakinopechat' served not only to provide brief information on foreign actors but, mainly, to familiarize the Soviet audiences with German society. The notion that these actors, through their typical roles and their 'mask', as the Soviets called it, did not simply embody various psychological types of people but also represented characteristic features of the members of different social classes, was very important for the Soviet audience. Boris Mazing, who wrote most of the Teakinopechat' brochures in 1928, changed the tone of editions, preferring thoughtful analyses of the German national character as embodied in film acting to light sketches on actors' biographies that were prevalent in the mid-1920s. The critic attempts to analyze German cinema and film acting in a broader context of modernity, generously supplying his essays with the references to Oswald Spengler, Georg Gross, Heinrich Zille, Sigmund Freud, Franz Werfel, Kasimir Edschmid, Ernst Toller, Gustav Meyrink, or even Albert Einstein.<sup>382</sup>

Bernhard Goetzke was described by Boris Mazing as 'a collective image of reflexive German intellectuals', who reflected the 'Faustian culture' of the bourgeois world. Goetzke was favoured by Lunacharsky, who even invited him to the first German-Soviet collaboration, *Salamander* that was based on his script. Abram Room, in his report about his visit to Germany in 1928, calls Goetzke 'the best actor of German cinema.'<sup>383</sup> The actor was known to the Soviets from his previous roles in the most popular German films like *Dr Mabuse*, *Das indische*

---

<sup>381</sup> Izmail Urazov, *Ossi Oswald* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1926), p. 15.

<sup>382</sup> Boris Mazing, *Bernhard Goetzke* (Leningrad-Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1928); *Paul Wegener* (Leningrad-Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1928); *Werner Krauss* (Leningrad-Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1928)

<sup>383</sup> Abram Room, [no title], *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 58, 2002, p. 258.

*Grabmal, Herrin der Welt, Verrufenen*, and others. For the Soviets, Goetzke, along with Conrad Veidt, embodied the typically German type of ‘Expressionist’ actor.<sup>384</sup> Another Expressionist actor that the Soviets knew from fantastic films like *Golem* was Paul Wegener. ‘Half-European, half-Asian’, writes Mazing, ‘his face is a fantastic mask.’<sup>385</sup>

Throughout the 1920s, Harry Liedtke, Werner Krauss, Emil Jannings and Conrad Veidt remained the favourite actors of Soviet audiences. Liedtke, as a German antipode to the ‘caramel’ Rudolf Valentino, was a favourite actor of the younger generations of Soviet people, whose ‘kind and clever smile’, wrote Urasov, allowed him to play young rakes and broken counts. Liedtke, who appeared in a lot of films in the mid-1920s was one of the most recognizable faces of the Soviet film repertoire: *Die Tänzerin Barberina*, *Sumurun*, *Der Mann mit den eisernen Nerven* (1921, Georg Jacoby), *Austernprinzessin*, *Vendetta*, *Die Insel der Träume* (1925, Paul Ludwig Stein), *Das Weib des Pharao* (1921, Ernst Lubitsch), *Madame wünscht keine Kinder* (1926, Alexander Korda), based on a script by Béla Balázs, and many other films, were amongst the most successful releases of Soviet distribution in the 1920s.

In his brochure, Urasov notes that Liedtke, like many other German film stars, used to be a theatre actor. The theatre background of Germany’s most prominent actors was emphasized by the Soviet critics as a distinctive feature of high-quality German film. Boris Mazing wrote:

German cinema is following American in that the public demands new faces. Those new actors are numerous and quite often they are overly advertised but their acting is poor. The best acting of the German screen is still an achievement of a very small group of people. And everyone knows those people: Veidt, Jannings, Krauss, Wegener, Goetzke, Klein-Rogge, Asta Nielsen.<sup>386</sup>

---

<sup>384</sup> Boris Mazing, *Bernhard Goetzke*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>385</sup> Boris Mazing, *Paul Wegener*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>386</sup> Boris Mazing, *Werner Krauss*, p. 3.

Werner Krauss was regarded to be one of the most skilled German actors who, according to the Soviet critic, completely dissolves in the image he portrays in cinema and whose ‘typically German face’ amazed the Soviet audience with its ‘plasticity of expression’.<sup>387</sup> Krauss’s acting won high esteem among Soviet audiences and critics – this fact possibly explains why his films continued to be distributed in the Soviet Union until the late 1920s, at a time when German production had almost completely disappeared from the Soviet screens. The Soviet audience knew him from his leading role in *Caligari* and such box-office hits as *Fräulein Raffke* (1923, Richard Eichberg) or *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett*.<sup>388</sup> *Fräulein Raffke* was welcomed by Soviet censors, who identified the film as a sharp satire of the bourgeoisie, though the critics later blamed Krauss for delivering an overly ‘sentimental’ image of a rich capitalist.<sup>389</sup> Jannings, who appeared in a number of films on Soviet release, was liked for his ‘cheerful and lively realism’. Lunacharsky, who highly enjoyed Jannings’s work in *Variété*, calls his acting ‘mimic achievement of highest quality’.<sup>390</sup>

## 6. Reception of German films in Soviet literature and film

Finally, the German actor who caused the most controversy in the Soviet Union was Conrad Veidt. After he was initially praised for his image of the somnambulist Cesare, he received rather critical commentaries concerning his ‘nervous’ and ‘expressionist’ roles as suffering artists, homosexuals, criminals, decadent bohemians. One *Kinopechat* reviewer wrote:

---

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>388</sup> In his essay on Krauss Boris Mazing notes that the print of *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* suffered from re-editing: the final fragment where Krauss appears as Jack-the-Ripper (‘another bright figure of Expressionist cinema’) was removed. This information contradicts the words of the re-editor of Sovkino Sergei Vasil’ev who writes that the film was not re-edited and was shown in its original form. See: *Brat’ia Vasil’evy*, p. 160; Boris Mazing, *Werner Krauss*, p. 14.

<sup>389</sup> P.-Vein., ‘Doch’ Raffke’, *Kino-nedelia*, 19, 1924, p. 2.

<sup>390</sup> Lunacharsky, p. 84.

These eyes are as if they have seen everything and learned everything. There's no joy or bravery or daring in them. They are cold and dead. Such, probably, was the stare of dying civilizations. And this is the gaze of the shards of modern humankind, shards that do not believe neither in the past nor in the future and that know nothing apart from satiety.<sup>391</sup>

While the professionalism of Veidt as an actor was not in doubt, the gallery of his roles was constantly associated with bourgeois tendencies: 'mysticism', 'painful deviations of mind' and 'sexual distortions.'<sup>392</sup> Veidt was the first new film star to become famous in 1922 when he featured as Lord Nelson in *Lady Hamilton*, alongside Liane Haid (a 'modest actress with a pretty face', as she is characterized in *Kino*). In the early 1920s some critics regarded him as the embodiment of the 'dark' side of German culture and a symbol of the post-war generation:

Veidt is a product of a certain social environment. This environment gave birth in literature to pathology and mysticism and in life to homosexuals and the 'fatigued'. This environment produced the idea of 'The Decline of the West'. And in its secret crypts the philosophy of Spengler was born. Veidt is of its flesh. He is one of its brightest manifestations. His art is the logical end of this line of development that led bourgeois civilization to the brink of extinction. It is the brightest stroke of the cultural degeneration that is a fertilizer for European capital.<sup>393</sup>

The superlative tone of this description of Veidt's 'decadence', his 'distorted' figure and the 'hands of a pianist', illustrates how strong the cult around Veidt was

---

<sup>391</sup> Al. Abramov, *Conrad Veidt* [first edition] (Moskva: Kinopechat', 1926), p. 3.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

in the Soviet Union. His films had a strong impact on Soviet life in the 1920s. Expressionist classics like *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari*, which resounded throughout Europe several years before, stimulated lasting discussions of its ‘artistic synthesis’ and ‘futurist approach’ to film style, even after 1925. The film was extremely famous in the Soviet Union where the ‘nostrils of Conrad Veidt’ (from a famous close-up of the somnambulist’s face in the scene of the prediction of Alan’s death) became part of the urban folklore and moreover, a recognizable metaphor for Expressionist cultural ‘decadence’. For some critics, Conrad Veidt was a scandalous fashion idol from the bourgeois West, for others, like Valentin Turkin, his method of work was ‘not at all something exceptional’, it signified nothing of a ‘sick and degenerate talent’ but merely a ‘specific power of auto-suggestion’.<sup>394</sup>

Conrad Veidt was a favourite actor of Mikhail Kuzmin, one of the most prominent Russian poets of the 1920s who, as is known from his diaries, watched *Caligari* at least three times in 1922-1923. In his diaries he mentions the ‘ravishing face of the Somnambulist’.<sup>395</sup> In March 1923 Kuzmin watched another film with Veidt, *Das indische Grabmal*. The experience of his first encounter with Expressionist films resulted in Kuzmin’s use of images from the film and references to Conrad Veidt in his poetic cycles *Forel’ razbivaet liod* and *Novyi Gul’*, which were devoted to his lover Lev Rakov. (Edgar Hull – one of the characters of *Dr Mabuse*, played by Paul Richter, resembled Rakov, according to Kuzmin). After his second experience of watching Wiene’s film, Kuzmin left a note in his diary concerning ‘Caligari’s circle’ – an example that illustrates how the relationship of the characters in the film and the hypnotic image of Caligari were interpreted by Kuzmin in a personal homoerotic context: ‘All the characters are terribly familiar [*blizki*]. To abandon honour, peace and work and to live in a

---

<sup>394</sup> Valentin Turkin, *Kino-akter* (Moskva: Teakinopechat’, 1929), p. 128.

<sup>395</sup> Nikolai Bogomolov, ‘Vokrug “Foreli”’, *Mikhail Kuzmin i russkaia kul'tura XX veka: Tezisy i materialy konferentsii 15-17 Maia 1990 goda*, ed. by G.A. Morev (Leningrad: Muzei Anny Akhmatovoi v Fontannom dome, 1990), p. 207.



shed like scum with a monstrous and heavenly guest. [...] And Francis: once you step into Caligari's circle – say goodbye to any other life.'<sup>396</sup>

The popularity of *Dr Mabuse* and *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* left its impact not only on poetry but also on Soviet film. Allusions to Germany and Weimar film were dispersed throughout most Soviet production of the late 1920s and early 1930s. These references could come in the form of a parody of the commercialized and corrupted German film industry in Iakov Protazanov's *Prazdnik Sviatogo Iorgena* (1930), or the stylized Expressionist interiors in *Shinel'* (1926) by Kozintsev and Trauberg from the Leningrad-based studio FEKS, or even the motifs of *Strassenfilme* in Margarita Barskaia's *Rvanye bashmaki* (1933), which explored the life of workers' children in the Weimar Republic. The 'haunted' fantasies of Expressionist film, with its images of villains, became so common in Soviet discourse of the early 1920s that they started to be used as a cinematic code in adventure films like *Miss Mend* or *The Ghost that Never Returns*.

*Miss Mend* was a four-hour adventure film that was made by Boris Barnet and Fedor Otsep. The adventures of three reporters who try to prevent a biological attack on the USSR planned by the powerful western businessman, criminal scientist, terrorist and pro-fascist profiteer, Chiche, represent a complex mixture of motifs borrowed from almost every kind of foreign film: from Louis Feuillade's criminal dramas, to the stylized comedies of Lubitsch, and the spy films of Fritz Lang. The most strikingly ironic are the references to German Expressionism: the villain Chiche wears the top hat of Dr Caligari and the frock-coat of the criminal Haghi from Lang's *Spione*; he has the same hypnotic, piercing eyes as Dr Mabuse and spends his free time playing chess with his victims (a variation on Mabuse's card gambling) in the grotesque interior of his American villa. The action of one of the most interesting episodes of the film takes place on the big deserted ship that brings Chiche to Leningrad. This scene playfully uses the famous motif of Murnau's *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* where the death-bringing

---

<sup>396</sup> See more on Kuzmin as a film spectator in: Mikhail Ratgauz, 'Kuzmin-kinozritel', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 13, 1992, pp. 74-82; and Nikolai Bogomolov, *Mikhail Kuzmin: Stat'i i materialy* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 1995). Ratgauz mentions two lost articles written by Kuzmin as response to the film: 'Caligari' (1923) and 'Veidt' (1925).

vampire arrives on the ship in a coffin on his way to killing the crew. The dramatic sequence of the German film, the ghost-like ship rocking on the ocean waves, carrying Nosferatu, is repeated in *Miss Mend*. Nosferatu's coffin is also present: Chiche forces his victim, a weak-willed, blackmailed millionaire Mr Storn whose death, according to Chiche's plan, is publicly announced, to travel in a coffin in the ship's hold. There is a scene in which Storn, a Nosferatu-look-alike caricature – bold, big-eyed, dressed in a similar frock-coat, but certainly more funny than frightening – rises from his coffin in an obvious reference to the well-known German image of the vampire. On the other hand, the coffin scene echoes Dr Caligari and his somnambulist: as Storn, frightened, tries to escape, the manipulative Chiche appears in the room and forces him to return to his coffin.

Another adventure film that used references to the image of the Weimar cinema villain was Abram Room's *Prividnie, kotoroe ne vozvrashchaetsia* (1929, *The Ghost that Never Returns*). In fact, this film about American prisoners and worker's rebels, based on a novel by Henri Barbousse, was made by Room in 1929, soon after he returned from his travels in Germany. As is indicated by the transcript of his lecture given at the Association of Revolutionary Cinematography in 1928, visiting Germany, Room was particularly impressed by the films of Fritz Lang, despite their ideological repugnancy:

The film *Spione* is an anti-Soviet film, whose main character is Dzerzhinskii. Here they advance the idea that, as they say, our Trade Mission truly concealed a spy organization. The film is made with unsurpassed artistic skill; the traditions of *Dr Mabuse* are preserved. Every two-three minutes – a new action, new facts.<sup>397</sup>

Room used these cinematic discoveries while working on his own film: dynamics in action, parallels with *Metropolis* in the prison sequences, similarities between the depictions of Lang's Haggi and Room's governor of the gaol, the live symbol

---

<sup>397</sup> Abram Room, [report], *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 58, 2002, p. 268.

of capitalist vampirism. The governor is attributed the crooked fingers of Nosferatu – a small detail that refers the spectator to another well-known image.

Another film, *Oblomok imperii*, is a remarkable example of the direct influence of German art, experienced by Soviet film in the years when the Soviet government encouraged filmmakers to make short-term trips to the Weimar Republic. During those trips, directors and critics were supposed not only to establish contacts with the Weimar Republic and to learn the secrets of German filmmaking but also to explore the drawbacks and advantages of the bourgeois approach to film. Nikolai Lebedev's introduction to his cycle of articles 'Film-expedition in Germany' states:

My expedition is a reconnaissance. It must show how and to what extent a Soviet filmmaker can work in Germany. If the film expedition is successful, it will open one of the ways to the West that is so much demanded by us. Secondly, it can give the Soviet spectator a series of truthful film sketches about the life of bourgeois Germany captured not by the odious hand of an UFA cameraman but by the impartial Soviet lens.<sup>398</sup>

To see the inner side of the capitalist industry was the official reason for visits by members of the ARK– Nikolai Lebedev, Grigorii Giber, Abram Room, Friedrich Ermler, Vertov's group and others – who made a number of trips to the Weimar Republic in 1926-1929. Their opinions and impressions of German filmmaking were registered in a series of publications in *Kinozhurnal ARK* and in public lectures. 'I would define German filmmaking approximately like that: cinema in Germany is a madhouse,' was the opening sentence of Ermler's talk in the ARK on 22nd March 1928. Speaking disapprovingly of the confusing German methods, their filmmaking techniques, the stratification of work, he mentions, for instance, the impressive repertoire of German theatres. As Yuri Tsivian accounts for in his article 'Caligari in Russland', Ermler, during his stay in Berlin, watched a significant number of films and also attended theatre performances.<sup>399</sup> One of

---

<sup>398</sup> Nik. Lebedev, 'Kino-ekspeditsiia v Germanii', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 9, 1925, pp. 26-27.

<sup>399</sup> Yuri Tsivian, *Istoricheskaia retseptsiia kino. Kinematograf v Rossii 1869-1930*, p. 392.

them, Erwin Piscator's production of Ernst Toller's *Hoppla, wir leben!*, which opened in Berlin in 1927, became the starting point for Ermiler's film *Fragment of the Empire*. Exploring the same topic of a metaphoric return to life – in the film, after the years of postwar amnesia – it transferred the spectator to post-revolutionary Russia. The pessimism of the play, however, is replaced in the film by a hope for the future. The main character, a shell-shocked soldier, whose memory slowly returns, finds himself in a completely transformed – Soviet – reality. An outsider, an anachronism, he is surprised to see the novelties of urban and social life, from the short women's skirts to the newly-built constructivist housing blocks. The film's narrative involves allusions to foreign films, from Abel Gancean trains in *La Roue*, to the classical examples of German cinema.<sup>400</sup> *Fragment of the Empire*, a film about time and the feeling of time, represents a complex mixture of genres with alternating tonality: the striking naturalism of the opening episodes; the expressive symbolism of the hero's visions; the dramatic portrayal of the war including pacifist motifs; the avant-garde montage of the episodes with returning memories; the touching lyricism of the city sequences; and the embedded elements of the documentary genre when the camera focuses on the perfection of the proletarian world or presents a near case-study of Pavlov's reflex system in the face of the main character. Finally, the director operates with detective motifs in the sequence in which the hero is looking for his wife. 'The theme of the German battlefield,' argues Yuri Tsivian, 'dictates the aesthetics of the episode'.<sup>401</sup> This assumption undoubtedly explains the use of explicitly Expressionist elements in a sequence of the character's visions about the war. The *Doppelgänger* motif, traditionally associated with German culture, is implemented in an episode in which there is a metaphoric meeting of Russian and German soldiers on the battlefield. The expressiveness of the white path that horizontally divides the black field is strengthened by the striking encounter, and the fraternization of the protagonist with the enemy, in whom he recognizes his double. The innocent face of the actor Fedor Nikitin, who is surprised to see himself in the approaching figure of the German soldier, contrasts with the

---

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

aggression of the commanding officers. The symbolic vision of Christ wearing a gas mask in the same scene is, as Tsivian tells us, a direct German allusion: to George Grosz' scandalous illustration *Christus mit Gasmaske*, which was made for Jaroslav Hašek's *Der brave Soldat Schwejk*. Famously, the trial of Grosz, who was accused of blasphemy for this drawing, was held in Berlin in 1928 during Ermler's stay in Germany.<sup>402</sup> This striking case attracted the director's attention to the drawing, which became a visual symbol of the pacifist ideas that he put into his film. The image of Christ, however striking, may seem like a slight deviation from the episode's theme of fatal conformity to the military authorities. However, through the implicit reference to Hašek's text, it creates semantic completeness, as the film itself becomes a perfect illustration of the passage from the book:

Jesus Christ was innocent too... and all the same they crucified him. No one anywhere has ever worried about a man being innocent. *Maul halten und weiter dienen!* – as they used to tell us in the army. That's the best and finest thing of all.<sup>403</sup>

*Oblomok Imperii* suggests parallelisms not only with German theatre, literature and fine art but also with other films that might have been watched or re-watched by Ermler in Berlin. For instance, there is a connection with Pabst's *Geheimnisse einer Seele* (1926, G.W. Pabst), with its explicitly Freudian topic which, along with references to Pavlov's reflexology, is significant for the film's study of the subconscious. Another cinematic parallel is F.W. Murnau's *Der letzte Mann*. One of the most meaningful visual details in Murnau's film, the revolving doors of the hotel, serve as the symbolic threshold that marks the line between the outer – real – world of the street, and the inner world of social and class 'otherness'. In *The Fragment of the Empire*, the main character, while looking for his wife in Leningrad, enters a workers' club where dinner is being accompanied by a public

---

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Jaroslav Hasek, *The good soldier Schweik*, trans. by Paul Selver (London: Penguin, 1951), p. 145.

lecture on the new family relations in the Soviet society. This episode recalls the hotel setting of *Der letzte Mann*, a film that examines the motif of the 'little man's' social mobility in bourgeois society. In the opening sequence of Murnau's film, the camera moves smoothly in the elevator from the invisible 'paradise' of the upper-class world to the crowded entrance hall and the roulette wheel of the revolving door. In the reformed world of social equality for all 'little men', shown in Ermiler's film, the same detail becomes a symbol of the transformation that has taken place. The revolving door is not an entrance to the limited circle of the rich – on the contrary. In the Soviet film it invites the character and the audience to a classless 'paradise' for everybody, anticipating the upcoming change of the character from the presently passive observer and, in the past, a toy in the hands of the reactionary administration, into an active citizen of the future socialist society.

This chapter revealed various aspects of the reception of German films by Soviet audiences. 1920s were characterized by a stable interest in the German film industry. It is important to note that not only imported films themselves, but also the audience were variegated. The evidence of the Soviets' acquaintance with German cinema can be found in the influential film periodicals of the 1920s. Soviet periodicals rarely included questionnaires or letters from filmgoers, unlike foreign publications. Most published materials on the reception of German films were articles and essays by the established film critics, as well as film 'librettos' and reports on the new film releases in Germany. Film periodicals were classified by various groups of readers who were interested in film: small circles of film theorists and filmmakers who were interested in German 'art' film, film style and technical novelties; urban cinema-goers, who preferred films of light genres and box-office hits; the worker and peasant audience, who were allowed to see a limited film repertoire. Some articles, mostly containing negative reviews of popular but ideologically controversial German films, were ordered to be published by the censorship organs. The large number and frequency of publications on German cinema prove that German films were a significant contribution to Soviet cultural life.

Regardless of the negative tone of many Soviet publications that criticized the 'bourgeois' appeal of foreign films, the German film industry was considered

to be exemplary. Essays on German acting, methods of filming and directing were published not only in every issue of the major Soviet film periodicals like *Kino*, *Kino-nedelia*, *Kinozhurnal ARK*, *Sovetskoe kino* and *Sovietskii ekran*, but also in a few popular magazines for the worker's audience, such as *Iskusstvo trudiashchimsia*, *Smena* and *Smekhach*. The cult of German film stars was established after the release of the first postwar German productions: costume dramas, historical films and film series in the early 1920s, and *Kulturfilme* and social dramas after the mid-1920s. This chapter provided evidence of the popularity of German film amongst the Soviet film audiences from the examples of the magazine articles, Teakinopechat' brochures and postcards that were extensively published in the mid-1920s.

German cinema was widely discussed by Soviet filmmakers. Not only were they familiar with the newest films released in Germany, they were also well-informed on style and work methods of particular German directors. In the late 1920s Soviet filmmakers of ARK travelled to Germany where they had the opportunity to watch some films that were unavailable in the Soviet Union due to censorship reasons.<sup>404</sup> Moreover, trips to Berlin gave filmmakers a chance to visit significant film ateliers like Staaken, Babelsberg and Ufa-Tempelhof. These visits evoked major interest in the Soviet Union where they became a matter of public discussion.<sup>405</sup>

The tone of response to some German films depended strongly on ideological disputes between filmmakers and film critics. One of the most controversial film genres with this regard were instructional, non-feature films, known as *Kulturfilme*. Such films maintained a steady interest due to their 'factual' nature which responded to the Soviet concept of cinema's educational tasks.<sup>406</sup>

---

<sup>404</sup> “Tam ia uvidel neobychainye veshchi”. Sovetskie kinematografisty o svoikh poezdках v Germaniiu (ARK, 1928-1928)’, *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 58, 2002, pp. 239-285.

<sup>405</sup> Giber's and Room's articles about their trips to Germany were published in *Kino* in 1928. Ibid., pp. 239-240.

<sup>406</sup> See articles by Esfir Shub on non-feature film and by Vladimir Erofeev on ethnographic film: Esfir' Shub, 'Neigrovaia fil'ma', in Esfir Shub, *Zhizn' moia – kinematograf* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1972), pp. 262-268; Vladimir Erofeev, 'Po "Kryshe mira" s kinoapparatom' (Moskva: Molodaia grvardiia, 1929)

German non-feature films had prolonged life in Soviet distribution, since the matter of depicting reality in film was a major theme for debate amongst Soviet film theorists. *Kulturfilme* often combined elements of both fiction and documentary, which were perceived as particularly 'German' in style. The next chapter offers a case-study of one such film in the Soviet context, including a comparison to the style of Soviet non-feature films.



## Chapter 6

### ‘Von der Psychoanalyse zum Traktor’: A case-study<sup>407</sup>

When I think about Freud and myself, I imagine two groups of diggers who started to dig a railway tunnel in the foot of a huge mountain – human psyche. The difference, however, is that Freud went down and buried himself in the thickets of the unconscious when we have already reached the light [...] By studying the effects of irradiation and concentration of inhibition in the brain, we can now trace precisely where the nervous process that interests us started, where it moved to afterwards, how long it remained there, and when it returned to the starting point. And Freud can only with a certain degree of brilliance and intuition speculate about the inner conditions of an individual. He might, perhaps, himself become a founder of a new religion...

Ivan Pavlov<sup>408</sup>

It is clear to everyone how important it is to propagate this idea, corroborated by the materialist world view, that for the present time the notion of ‘Soul’ is conclusively extinguished.

Vsevolod Pudovkin, on the day when he started to work  
on the ‘Mechanics of the Brain’<sup>409</sup>

---

<sup>407</sup> Rudolf Arnheim’s expression from his essay *Ermler und Eisenstein* (1930). Rudolf Arnheim, ‘Ermler und Eisenstein’, *Die Weltbühne*, 9, 25 February, 1930, p. 331.

<sup>408</sup> The record made by Y.P. Frolov, noted in the book: S.D. Kaminskii, *Dinamicheskie narusheniia deiatel’nosti kory golovnogo mozga* (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo Akademii meditsinskikh nauk SSSR, 1948), pp. 195-196

<sup>409</sup> Vsevolod Pudovkin’s article in *Kinogazeta*, 28 July, 1925, cited by: Amy Sargeant, *Vsevolod Pudovkin: Classic Films of the Soviet Avant-Garde* (London; New York: I.B.Taurus Publishers, 2000), p. 49.

Despite the overarching need to reveal and to describe general trends and processes in the German-Soviet film relations in the 1920s, it is important to remember that each imported film had its own story. The factors that influenced distribution, censorship and reception of a film often included the changing political situation, reforms of the censorship apparatus, the prevailing trends in art and science, and, most of all, the unpredictable decisions of censors and re-editors who worked with a particular film. The previous chapters were focused on various aspects of German-Soviet relations in film; namely on purchase, censorship, re-editing, distribution and reception. This chapter aims to combine all these aspects and to demonstrate, in the example of a single film, how German cinema related to the active debates in various spheres of social and cultural life in the Soviet Union. Moreover, the chapter aims to compare experiments of German and Soviet filmmakers with the non-feature and feature film genres. In other words, the final chapter of my research invites the reader to look at one of the many individual episodes of German film reception in the Soviet Union. I believe that the detailed history of this interaction, composed of a number of such case-studies, is still to be written.

Pabst's cinematic illustration of psychoanalytical theory *Geheimnisse einer Seele* (1926, G.W. Pabst; *Secrets of a Soul*), and Pudovkin's first independently directed documentary devoted to conditioned reflex, *Mekhanika golovnogo mozga* (1926, Vsevolod Pudovkin; *Mechanics of the Brain*), have little in common in their form, content or cinematographic style. However, the histories of these films display an overwhelming number of similarities. Both works were released in 1926, one commissioned by UFA, the other by the Mezhrabpom-Film, and both remained marginal in the careers of both prominent filmmakers. It might be hard to believe that the films, the very titles of which catch one's eye with their suggestive syntactic and semantic parallelism, were conceived and created independently from each other. The similarities, though striking, are accidental. Jay Leyda was the first scholar who referred to Pabst's film as a cinematic 'double' of *Mechanics of the Brain*.<sup>410</sup> Hans-Joachim Schlegel, in his article on German

---

<sup>410</sup> Leyda was the first scholar who noticed the semantic parallelism of these films that were important milestones in the formation of Pudovkin's and Pabst's directing styles. In the monograph

influence on the Soviet documentaries of the 1920s, considers Pudovkin's film to be a 'dialectically significant counterpoint' to Pabst with the latter's 'propaganda' for Freudian psychoanalysis. And while mentioning that the semantic connection between the two films became evident only recently, it is worth also noting that during a retrospective of Pabst at the Berlinale festival in 1997, Schlegel points out – and this comment requires further clarification – that neither of films could be successfully distributed in the Soviet Union.<sup>411</sup>

### 1. Psychoanalysis versus Reflexology: A Brief Overview

The obvious reason why the two films are often presented in opposition to each other is the core difference in their ideological vectors: the film scripts were based on the opposing psycho-physiological doctrines that dominated the scientific discourse of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The history of psychoanalysis in Russia started in 1908, the year of the foundation of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, with the publication of Nikolai Osipov's critical review of Freudian ideas in the leading Russian psychological journal.<sup>412</sup> In 1910 Sigmund Freud's *Jahrbuch* published a report on the emergence of psychoanalysis in Russia, and in the following year the Russian Psychoanalytic Society, which was modelled on the Viennese group, was formed. This received

---

*Kino* he writes: 'A parallel with Pabst's development is almost inevitable – particularly in comparing *Mechanics of the Brain* (1925-26) with *Secrets of a Soul* (1925-26), both begun as instructional films and both furnishing the director with a foundation for a disciplined realistic aesthetic, Pudovkin on Pavlov, Pabst on Freud'. See: Jay Leyda, *Kino, a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton: Princeton university Press, 1960), p. 174.

<sup>411</sup> Hanns-Joachim Schlegel, 'Terra Incognita: Obrazy Rossii u Georga Vil'gel'ma Pabsta', in *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 33, 1997, p. 370.

<sup>412</sup> The first meeting of Russian readers with Freud, however, dates back to 1904 when the *Die Traumdeutung* was published in Russia. The translation was published in the supplement to issue 5, 1904, of *Vestnik psikhologii kriminal'noi antropologii i gipnotizma* (St. Petersburg: Brokgauz-Efron, 1908): N.E. Osipov, 'Psikhologicheskie i psikhopatologicheskie vzgliady Sigm. Freud'a v nemetskoj literature 1907 goda', *Zhurnal nevropatologii i psikhiatrii im. S.S. Korsakova*, nos. 1-2, 1908, pp. 564-584.

immediate scholarly attention from authorities on psychiatry, and soon psychoanalysis found ardent admirers among the intellectual elite, coinciding with a belated period of Russian ‘decadence’ of the early 1910s and the popularity of Nietzschean philosophy.

After the October Revolution the research activity of the Psychoanalytical Society ceased for more than two years, and *Psychotherapy*, the only Russian scientific journal that published on psychoanalysis before 1917, was closed. However, the political transformation did not eliminate the growing interest in Freudian ideas. Starting in 1920, the Russian Psychoanalytic Society continued its research and tried to apply psychoanalytical methods to the treatment of shell-shocked soldiers and, most importantly, in the study of children. The ideological construction of the ‘New Man’ of the Socialist future determined the specificity of early Soviet psychoanalysis. From 1920, a psychoanalytic approach to curing children with neurotic problems was developed in a special laboratory attached to the Institute.<sup>413</sup> In 1921 it was reorganised into a school – the ‘children’s home’ named ‘International Solidarity’ – that worked with children according to psychoanalytical principles and until 1923 was officially financed by The Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros).

With the intensive psychological, physiological and psychoanalytical research on children, the state’s interest in collective education and the new areas of developmental psychology had practical value in Soviet Russia of the 1920s: the determination and development of qualitative changes in human nature that could allow the construction of an individual with a new, Soviet, identity, became a major goal for scholars. The experiments began as part of psychological therapy for victims of social chaos, mainly soldiers with psychotic disturbances caused by the traumatic experience of war, and the displaced, orphaned children of the Revolution. The foundation of the Soviet school of Pedology signalled the authorities’ official line in looking for new approaches to developmental psychology. Pedology was a science developed by the efforts of Vladimir Bekhterev, who after the Revolution supervised the Institute of Pedology, which

---

<sup>413</sup> Martin A. Miller, *Freud and the Bolsheviks: Psychoanalysis in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998), pp. 64-65.

was part of the Institute for the Study of Neurology and Psychology. Both the psychoanalytical ‘children’s home’ and Bekhterev’s neurological Institute of Pedology aimed to find means of future social reconstruction through the unveiling of the ‘secrets of the soul’. The constructive, therapy-based approaches to psychological trauma that were offered by the new trends in psychology were perceived as a more suitable basis for the social reform planned by the Bolsheviks, as opposed to trying to manipulate the ‘bourgeois’ notion of a complex and ambiguous inner world. The idea of ‘the soul’ was actively excluded from the new political and scholarly vocabulary: for example, A. Zalkind, writing in 1924, defends the importance of grounding biology with the principles of Marxist sociology in order to start an immediate ‘materialist attack on the soul’.<sup>414</sup> The newspaper *Pravda*, in its review of *The Mechanics of the Brain* in 1926, formulates the major achievement of the film as its persuasive and consistent elimination of the ‘mythical’ idea of human spiritual life in favour of objective biological reasoning:

It destroys totally the myth of the human soul. Without willing it, and even in spite of himself, the spectator is irresistibly led to the only possible conclusion: the soul does not exist, the life of the soul, its creation, its inspiration – all this is nothing more than a higher level reflex.<sup>415</sup>

Looking for the instruments that would help to investigate and construct this new type of human required, first of all, grounding the new method in the principles of materialist ideology. In the early 1920s an attempt was made to find connections between Marxism and Freudianism. In these years, the ideas of Freud on which the utopian socio-futuristic hopes of Leon Trotsky’s ‘Freudo-Marxist’ circle were

---

<sup>414</sup> A. Zalkind, ‘Freidism i Marksism’, *Krasnaia Nov’*, 4, 21, 1924, pp. 163-164 (cited by Miller, p. 76, p. 190).

<sup>415</sup> *Pravda*, 14 December, 1926; cited by: *Pudovkin v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, ed. by Tatiana Zapasnik and Adi Petrovich (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1989)

based, were not seen as running contrary to alternative psychological schools such as reflexology and behaviourism that were developing in Russia at the same time.<sup>416</sup> Before Lenin's death on the 21 of January in 1924 and the subsequent political rejection of Trotsky, Freud's theories were treated with interest and respect, as were the experiments in neurology and physiology conducted by Bekhterev and Pavlov. According to Martin Miller:

Soviet psychiatrists and psychologists were attempting to develop 'an analysis of psyche' on an empirical basis acceptable from a scientific standpoint and on an ideological foundation rooted in a Marxist framework. These simultaneous endeavours required the integration of biological and neurological science with Marx's historical materialism. The scientific papers of both Ivan Pavlov and Vladimir Bekhterev, though they themselves were in disagreement on many theoretical issues, were used as a kind of model for others to follow and develop further.<sup>417</sup>

Many psychologists believed that even if the psychoanalytical approach would not become a new ideology, it could potentially contribute to a deeper understanding of society in the specific context of the socialist future. Moreover, during the high tide of psychoanalysis in Soviet Russia between 1921 and 1924 Pavlov and Freud were often seen as the two ground-breaking revolutionaries, the 'psychological surgeons' whose ideas complemented each other and who fought the idealistic myths of the past in support of the materialist point of view.<sup>418</sup>

---

<sup>416</sup> In the early 1920s Leon Trotsky spoke of the 'selective man of the future' as the man born the new Soviet reality and, therefore is free from memories, uncertainties and anxieties of the past. See: Aleksandr Etkind, *Eros nevozmozhnogo: Istoriia psikhoanaliza v Rossii* (Sankt-Peterburg: Meduza, 1993)

<sup>417</sup> Miller, p.70.

<sup>418</sup> See, for instance, A. Zalkind's article 'Freidism i Marksism', p. 76: 'To accomplish his goal, Z. cited the reflex physiology of Ivan Pavlov and the psychoanalytic work of Sigmund Freud as 'the two central and new biological studies which, in the literal sense of the word, explode all the old notions about our mental functions.'

The theory of conditioned reflex started as a science in Russia in the early 20th century with the research work of Bekhterev, and was later developed through the theoretical and experimental activity of Sechenov and Pavlov. Explaining individual behaviour from the perspectives of dialectic materialism, which ignored any 'subjective' component in the individual, and social consciousness, Pavlov's study of nervous mechanisms was based on the experimentally observed nervous responses of living organisms (animals and humans) to various external and internal stimuli. In the early 1920s, Pavlov's long-term research experiments on conditioned reflexes received wide acclaim and recognition from the ruling party. Lenin's positive opinion of reflexology determined its destiny in Soviet Russia, despite Pavlov's scepticism towards Bolshevism.<sup>419</sup>

From the middle of 1920s the Soviet government financed a physiological laboratory in Koltushi near Leningrad, where Pavlov conducted his experiments. It was in this laboratory that the first educational film on classic conditioning, *Mechanics of the Brain*, was shot. The experiments of Russia's first Nobel Prize winner, on frogs, dogs and monkeys, as well as on children, provided the material for Pudovkin's film. In 1936, after Pavlov's death, the laboratory was transformed into the Pavlov Institute of Physiology, part of the Russian Academy of Science, thereby finally establishing Pavlov's conditioned reflex as the dominant theory of the field in Soviet academia.

From 1924, classical conditioning and neurology were presented as counterpoints to western 'psychologism'. 'Some party officials assumed that psychoanalysis was the nerve centre of all of western psychology', argues Martin Miller.<sup>420</sup> This suspicious attitude towards the western preoccupation with sexual psychology corresponded with the struggle for the 'new morality' in Lenin's Russia. What Lenin's own attitude was to Freudianism remains an open question: there is no existing direct evidence of his opinion on the subject apart from Klara

---

<sup>419</sup> Pavlov was known for expressing his negative opinions on Bolshevism. However, this did not minimise the state's official protection of Pavlov's research work. See: Amy Sargeant, *Vsevolod Pudovkin: Classic Films of the Soviet Avant-Garde*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>420</sup> Miller, p. 113.

Zetkin's memoir, published in 1925. Zetkin attributes a negative view of psychoanalysis to Lenin:

Freudian theory is the modern fashion. I mistrust the sexual theories of the articles, dissertations, pamphlets, etc., in short, of that particular kind of literature which flourishes luxuriantly in the dirty soil of bourgeois society. I mistrust those who are always contemplating sexual questions, like the Indian saint his navel. It seems to me that these nourishing sexual theories which are mainly hypothetical, and often quite arbitrary hypotheses, arise from the personal need to justify personal abnormality or hypertrophy in sexual life before bourgeois morality.<sup>421</sup>

In the early 1920s the European 'modern fashion' for sexual theories, which was perceived as the foundation of bourgeois commercialisation and the fetishization of pleasure, became the object of vocal criticism. Following the reform of social institutions and marriage – the 'liberation of woman' and the distribution of sexual education propaganda among young people – the erotic 'mystery' in social relationships had to be comprehensively eliminated. The 'novyi byt' (the new way of life) of Soviet society presupposed a simplification of sexual relations and the removal of any distracting personal component from the centre of one's life. This resulted in scepticism towards western mass culture, including foreign films and fashion where the image of the woman was deliberately eroticized. Articles arguing against the fetishization of woman's fashion and the western commodification of femininity were published in various periodicals designed to manipulate the tastes of the Soviet population.<sup>422</sup> The image of women in foreign

---

<sup>421</sup> See Klara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (London: Modern Books Limited, 1929), pp. 52-53. The work was originally published in German in 1925.

<sup>422</sup> Even such prominent figures as Nikolai Forreger supported convenience, unification and practicality of woman's dress and expressed their negative opinions on the corrupting western 'coquettish' style, 'perverted European women of fashion' and the popular image of a 'doll woman'



films and the depiction of the ‘sexual question’ on the screen were also criticized, as was discussed in the chapter above that discussed attitudes to Soviet censorship of ‘pornography’. The fetishization of the naked body on screen and stage were considered to be humiliating to women. But beyond that, as a revealing symptom of repressed western sexuality, this fetishization had to be rejected in the Soviet context. The position of the Soviet authorities on ‘sexual mystery’ was repeatedly expressed in popular periodicals: sexual behaviour that was silenced or surrounded by the hypocrisy of capitalist morality was considered to lead to ‘unhealthy’ and ‘deviant’ processes in society and in human consciousness. Psychological traumas of this kind were perceived as a western disease that had to be liquidated in the future Soviet Union by means of mass education and cultural de-eroticization. The journal *Sovetskoe kino* expressed its negative opinion on Germany’s limitation of distribution of *Kulturfilme* that explored sexual themes, stating that in Soviet Russia it would be impossible:

The laws of bourgeois ‘morality’ have led the Germans to a state in which a film such as *Veneral Diseases* is shown in closed screenings, and even separately to men and to women. [...]

We are fighting these diseases openly as a social evil, creating economic and cultural preconditions for its liquidation.<sup>423</sup>

In the late 1920s, psychoanalytic studies were already perceived as individualising, and thereby obscuring, societal evil, and thus as the wrong method for fostering psychological progress in the masses. However, in 1921-1923 the defenders of Freud – Aron Zalkind, Karl Radek, Leon Trotsky and others – were still convinced that this approach to the people’s sexual and social nature could be reconciled with dialectical materialism. So how did it happen that not only was Freud’s theory rejected, but it became a synonym for the counter-revolution and bourgeois

---

eroticized by the patriarchal society. See: Nikolai Forreger, ‘Shtany i iubki [Trousers and skirts]’, *30 dnei*, 4-5, 1927, n.p.

<sup>423</sup> *Sovetskoe kino*, 6, 1925, p. 19.

corruption, having been seen as the Marxist science in the early 1920s? In the opposition of the two systems of interpretation, the one that was more mechanistically simplifying and experiment-based won out. Psychoanalysis was criticised as a method that dealt with ‘individual cases’ and used subjective therapy methods that were not based on any scientific data, whereas behaviourism and reflexology interpreted every individual case as the biologically-grounded result of a general objective process. The theory of the inevitable physiological response of any living organism to any external physical stimuli and the projection of this idea onto social life suited the ‘New Soviet Man’ model: it was possible to achieve a predictable and desirable result through the careful selection of stimulating factors. The futuristic construction of the new society supposed total visibility. Martin Miller points out:

A new type of person was required for such mythic tasks, one who had transcended inner conflicts, who functioned in the external social world where the demons were visible. In such a world, there could be no tolerance of Freud’s psychic demons who carried out their devastation deep within the unconscious.<sup>424</sup>

Throughout the 1920s state mechanisms for observing and controlling social life became increasingly pervasive, including reforms in censorship, the division of potential audiences into different categories (urban, peasant, military, proletarian) and, according to this division, the prescription of relevant cultural ‘diets’ determined for each social group. The death of Lenin and the following political struggle within the party led to the marginalisation of Freud’s ideas, which were supported by Trotsky and his allies. Reviews that expressed political scepticism about psychoanalysis, labelling ‘Freudianism’ as a hostile counter-revolutionary ideology, were published regularly from 1925. As early as 1924 Zalkind in his generally positive article ‘Freudism and Marxism’ mentioned errors and mistakes

---

<sup>424</sup> Miller, p. 113.

in the ‘metaphysical’ and over-sexualised Hegelian idealism of psychoanalysis.<sup>425</sup> Rejecting the idea of an oppressive struggle between individual ‘psychological reality’ and objective external reality in the ‘underground of the unconscious’, many opponents of psychoanalysis denounced it for spreading its ‘damaging’ influence not only over psychology but also over culture. In the book *Freudism* published in 1927 by Valentin Voloshinov, a member of a Mikhail Bakhtin’s circle, psychoanalysis is defined as ‘one of the varieties of subjective psychology’ that deals with the ‘elemental nature of the soul’ and therefore *per se* cannot provide any objective interpretation of the life of human psyche.<sup>426</sup> An even more irreconcilable opinion was expressed in a 1926 article by Aleksandr Voronskii, in which psychoanalysis is labelled as ‘subjectivism’. Voronskii argues that it is mainly based not on experimentally proven practice but on scholars’ projections, and will therefore fail to provide any scientifically grounded interpretation.<sup>427</sup> The person-centred approach to psychoanalysis and its vision of the human soul as a complex and ambiguous entity – an initial idea that could not lead to the explanation of the class structure of society – caused major divergence in opinions between psychoanalysts and the Soviet theoreticians: ‘The world that surrounds us is much more rich and diverse than its reflection in our psyche,’ writes Voronskii, emphasizing that reality, on a Marxist reading, should not be perceived only as ‘a conventional sign’ as it is on a psychoanalytic reading.<sup>428</sup> From the middle of the 1920s the influence of psychoanalysis in Soviet Russia was gradually curtailed. In 1926 the government took a decision to stop funding the Psychoanalytic Institute. Up until the beginning of the first five-year plan in 1928, after the collapse of the NEP and the initiation of an open ideological fight against the capitalism of ‘bourgeois’ Europe (for which psychoanalysis became a symbol), the name of

---

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., pp. 76-77.

<sup>426</sup> Valentin Voloshinov, *Freidism. Kriticheskii ocherk* (Moskva, Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1927), pp. 74-83.

<sup>427</sup> Aleksandr Voronskii, *Literaturnye zapisi* [Texte imprimé] (Moskva: Krug, 1926), pp. 14-15. In the late 1920s Voronsky was persecuted as a ‘Freudist’ among other members of the Trotsky’s opposition. In 1937 he was arrested and killed.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

Freud was excluded from use in the Soviet context. The activity of the Psychoanalytic Society officially stopped in 1930, and the last adepts of psychoanalysis who took refuge in pedology were finally liquidated after a special decree of the Central Committee 'On Pedological Perversions in the Narkompros System' in 1936.

Despite the official rejection of psychoanalysis, many public figures in Soviet Russia continued to be inspired by Freud's ideas and kept contacts with the psychoanalytical communities in Germany and Austria. For instance, Sergei Eisenstein's interests in contemporary psychological studies, including psychoanalysis (mostly in the interpretation of Otto Rank and Hanns Sachs) and its application to the creative process, explain his contacts with the Psychological Institute in Berlin where, during his trip to Germany in 1929, he gave a lecture entitled 'Expressive movement'.<sup>429</sup> Freud remained an influential figure for the Soviet director following Eisenstein's discovery of his writings in 1918. In his memoirs, Eisenstein twice mentions his unfulfilled wish to visit Freud together with Stefan Zweig.<sup>430</sup> Eisenstein's idea of the 'psychotechnique of spectatorship', according to Mikhail Yampolsky's analysis of the director's unpublished article "Luch" i "Samogonka", devoted to two films by Lev Kuleshov and Abram Room, was a complex combination of both theories: Pavlov's reflex and Freud's sublimation.<sup>431</sup> In this article Eisenstein for the first time in his theoretical works, sees psychoanalysis as an alternative method to reflexology.<sup>432</sup> Oksana Bulgakowa argues that this closer encounter with psychoanalysis during the director's German trips of the late 1920s, 'adjusted Eisenstein's reflexology-based hypothesis of the impact of art (stimulus-reaction)'.<sup>433</sup> In Berlin, Eisenstein was introduced to Kurt Lewin by the influential Russian neuropsychologist Alexander Luria, who, in the

---

<sup>429</sup> Oksana Bulgakowa, 'Sergei Eisenstein i ego "psikhologicheskii Berlin" – mezhdru psikhoanalizom i strukturnoi psikhologii', in *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski*, 2, 1988, p. 175.

<sup>430</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Beyond the Stars: The Memoirs of Sergei Eisenstein*, Vol.IV, ed. by Richard Taylor (London: BFI Publishing, 1995), p. 113, p. 355.

<sup>431</sup> Mikhail Yampolsky, 'Sublimatsiia kak formoobrazovanie (Zametki ob odnoi neopublikovannoi stat'e Sergeia Eisensteina)', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 43, 1999, pp. 68-70.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Bulgakowa, 'Sergei Eisenstein i ego "psikhologicheskii Berlin"', p. 185.

early 1920s, was an ardent follower of psychoanalysis. By that time Eisenstein was interested in the psychological aspects of movement and in the ‘Freudian slips’ in motor activity. He was already familiar with Lewin’s *Hanna und der Stein* (1928, Kurt Lewin), a short documentary film on affect and physical reactions in children. Under the influence of psychoanalytical theory, Pavlov’s and Freud’s terminology in Eisenstein’s writings of that time become almost interchangeable: Oksana Bulgakowa argues that ‘Eisenstein could have easily substituted in his lecture the terms instinct (*Triebhandlung*), will, reflex-inhibition with the terms unconscious and consciousness’.<sup>434</sup>

Eisenstein’s first encounter with Freud’s works occurred, according to his memoirs, in 1918:

Thus my introduction to psychoanalysis. I even remember when and where it happened. Only a few days after the official formation of the Red Army (Spring 1918) when I volunteered for the sappers. In Gatchina. Standing in a wagon en route for week-end leave at home. I remember it as if it were yesterday. The carriage corridor. A rucksack on my bag. My fur cap stinking of dog. And the quarter-litre bottle of milk I had stood in it.

Later, on the platform of the train, in the mad crush, I was so absorbed in my little book that I failed to notice that some time ago my carton of milk had been completely crushed and the dog-fur of the cap and the khaki rucksack were both saturated.<sup>435</sup>

This almost filmic description of Eisenstein’s first encounter with Freud’s books recalls another episode in Soviet film history – the striking scene at the beginning of Ermler’s *Oblomok imperii* that shows a hungry dying soldier in the Civil War sucking a dog’s milk. It is unknown whether Ermler, who was Eisenstein’s close friend for many years, knew about this episode in Eisenstein’s biography but the similarity in images could hardly be accidental. Like Eisenstein, whose film from

---

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>435</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Beyond the Stars*, p. 354.

the same year, *General'naia liniia (Staroe i novoe; 1929, Sergei Eisenstein)*, reveals a strengthening influence of psychoanalysis, Ermler offers the spectator a suggestive series of provocative, implicitly eroticised, but sublimated images. Eisenstein, who, according to Bulgakowa, had 'a unique talent for putting the hypotheses of different psychological schools in new connections, at the same time releasing them in his own system', was severely critical of the first version of the film ('You are Freudian and managed not to use it!') and later assisted in re-editing of the first part of the film.<sup>436</sup> However, he did not approve of Ermler's overpowering enthusiasm concerning psychoanalysis either. In his letter to Ermler during the latter's work on *The Old and the New*, he suggests that he 'read Pavlov in order to see that not only Freud exists in the world'.<sup>437</sup> As a result, the first part of *Fragment of an Empire* presents a visual encyclopaedia of the newest trends in psychiatry, investigating the psychoanalytical mechanisms of sublimation and the unconscious, presented through a non-linear montage of the sequences of remembering, and through Filimonov's dreams and flashbacks that are evidently inspired by the theory of conditional reflexes. A scene on a platform that triggers Filimonov's memories after he hears the acoustic signal and sees a woman's face in the train's window corresponds with Pavlov's idea of acoustic and physical stimuli. The meek shell-shocked officer Filimonov, whose memory gradually returns throughout the film, is half-child, half-animal, involved in an almost Pavlovian experiment. On the other hand, the eclectic *Fragment of an Empire* is a cinematic *Bildungsroman* where the action takes place in the laboratory of the new Soviet reality. The psychological metamorphoses of the main character recall pedagogical experiments and, at the same time – as Filimonov wanders in the subjective, semi-real world of his inner associations and projections, sublimated symbols and flashbacks – a psychoanalytic hypnosis session is also evoked.

The notion of the 'effective work of art' and the theory of montage that was widely discussed in the 1920s, determined an interest of all Soviet directors of the

---

<sup>436</sup> Fridrich Ermler, *Dokumenty, stat'i, vospominaniia* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1974), p. 112.

<sup>437</sup> Ermler quoted Eisenstein's remark: 'If you don't stop the fuss about Freud, I will stop talking to you. You are an idiot. Read Pavlov and you will see that not only Freud exists in the world'. See: *Eisenstein v vospominaniakh sovremennikov* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1974), p. 204.

silent era in psychological studies and, in particular, in reflexology and psychoanalysis as the two major systems fighting for dominance. In “*Luch*” i “*Samogonka*” Eisenstein gave a psychoanalytical interpretation of the distinctive methods of Kuleshov and Room: he considers Kuleshov a Freudian ‘fetishist’ focused on the depiction of details, and Abram Room to be ‘suffering from the neurosis of the aestheticization of the disgusting’.<sup>438</sup> Later in 1928, Eisenstein conducted polemics with Vsevolod Pudovkin, by that time a follower of Pavlov, who throughout the 1920s had developed a reflexology-based approach to montage theory. Pudovkin’s interest in reflexology and its application in film theory appeared during his work on *Mechanics of the Brain* in 1926. It is evident that for the Soviet filmmakers and theoreticians the debates over the merits of reflexology and psychoanalysis (and even the validity of putting the two doctrines in opposition) remained unsolved. However, a directive on the elimination of Freud from the Soviet context in the late 1920s brought about the creation of documentary films that would render impossible any psychoanalytical theories, or experimental films on psychology like *Hanna und der Stein*. Moreover, the aforementioned ideological resistance of Pavlov’s theory to Freud in Soviet Russia after 1925 explains the impossibility of *Secrets of a Soul*, previously widely advertised in the Soviet film press, reaching the Soviet screens after its release in Germany. The fate of *Secrets of a Soul* illustrates not only the usual censorship practice of the Soviet authorities towards counter-revolutionary German film production: its accidental but eloquent contrast to *The Mechanics of the Brain* illustrates the beginning of a deeper ideological divergence between Germany and Russia in the late 1920s.

## 2. *Kulturfilm* or *Kul’turfil’ma*? Instruments of Propaganda and Illustration

Pabst was commissioned by UFA to create a motion picture illustration of Freud’s theories: according to the initial plan of the studio, the film was meant to provide

---

<sup>438</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, ‘Luch i Samogonka (Opyt opredeleniia ideologicheskoi nesostoyatel’nosti v oblasti tekhniki i formy’, *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 43, 1999, pp. 35-65.

a schematic overview of psychoanalysis for a wider audience. *Secrets of a Soul*, timed to coincide with Freud's seventieth birthday, presented a case-study of an unconsummated marriage: it was a story set in the middle-class family of a chemist and his young wife whose relationship is complicated by the husband's unconscious anxieties. As a result of the psychoanalytical sessions provided by doctor Orth (ironically, played by a Russian actor with the name Pavlov) these anxieties are cured, and the protagonist's family reunites in an idyllically happy ending.

Not a documentary record of the psychoanalytic method in terms of its style and content but nonetheless fulfilling those illustrative and educational tasks, *Secrets of a Soul* gave Pabst an opportunity to experiment with combining both psychological melodrama and elements of educational film. A sophisticated cinematic hybrid of *Kammerspiel*- and *Aufklärungsfilm*, it stood out against the majority of films released in Weimar Germany in the mid-1920s. This peculiarity was immediately noticed and praised by Vladimir Erofeev, a Soviet critic and documentary filmmaker who actively promoted the genre of *Kulturfilm* in the Soviet context.<sup>439</sup> From 1925, Erofeev worked for Berlin's Soviet Trade Mission and, was thus able to attend the premieres of German films that did not always cross the Soviet border. He was the author of many reviews and articles on German film that were published in Soviet periodicals. Thus, the *Soviet ekran's* 'own correspondent in Berlin' writes:

Several months ago the motion picture *Secrets of a Soul*, which explains Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious, appeared on the screens of Berlin. The film is, undoubtedly, interesting from many perspectives: scientific, artistic and so on; but we would like, first of all, to emphasize its special importance as a pioneering picture. It finally synthesizes *Kulturfilm* and fictional film. Indeed, an exceptional phenomenon. A *Kulturfilm* – but unexpectedly with the talented Werner Krauss in the title role; a 'scientific' film – but

---

<sup>439</sup> Vladimir Erofeev, 'O fil'makh "vtorogo sorta"', *Sovetskii Ekran*, 29, 1926, p. 4.



unexpectedly with the decent director Hans Neumann and the cameraman Guido Seeber. This is all absolutely unusual.<sup>440</sup>

The genre of *Kulturfilm*, as William Uriccio points out, was ‘a rather elastic category’, and, first of all, supposed a specific relation between a documentary and reality.<sup>441</sup> The idea of a possible confluence of the two genres was certainly not new: the flexibility of film as a new art form with no strictly established formal limitations allowed experiments with both form and content, and the early 1920s saw some examples of the ‘synthetic’ film style both in Germany and Russia. According to Barbara Wurm, *Kulturfilm* was a broad term that in the 1920s described various types of film:

Der *Kulturfilm* wiederum war eine Dekade lang Oberbegriff für “Aufklärendes Kino”, “Agitations-film”, “nicht-fiktionaler Film” und bildete eine hybride Mischung aus Bildung und Unterhaltung, die kurzfristig zum Erfolgsgaranten wurde.<sup>442</sup>

While the feature film remained strongly linked to the aesthetics of the theatre (a characteristic in which, for instance, Soviet critique constantly saw the unwanted manifestation of artificiality, distortion of facts and bourgeois escapism), documentaries signified a cinematic compromise with reality. In tune with avant-garde constructivist theories, they aimed to transform a single individual’s vision into an all-seeing *collective eye*. *Kulturfilm* was the only film genre that could get

---

<sup>440</sup> Erofeev’s mistake: Hans Neumann, the Austrian director of *Ein Sommernachtstraum* (1925) who was also a producer of such films as *Raskolnikow* and *I.N.R.I.*, was not a director but assisted in scriptwriting and producing of Pabst’s film. Erofeev, ‘O fil'makh “vtorogo sorta”’, p. 4.

<sup>441</sup> William Uriccio, ‘The Past as Prologue? The ‘Kulturfilm’ before 1945’ in *Blicke in die Welt*, ed. by H. B. Heller, P. Zimmermann, (Konstanz:UVKUniversitätsverlag, 1995), p. 264.

<sup>442</sup> Barbara Wurm, ‘Von Mechanik des Gehirns zu „Vierzig Herzen“: Meschrabpom-Film und der Kulturfilm’, in *Die rote Traumfabrik. Meschrabpom-Film und Prometheus 1912-1936*, ed. by Günther Agde und Alexander Schwarz (Berlin: Bertz+Fischer; Deutsche Kinemathek, 2012), p. 122.

close to the ideal way of portraying facts, according to the Soviet film theorists Vladimir Erofeev and Nikolai Lebedev. *Kulturfilm* was seen to express the domination of collective objectivity over the subjective, chimerical and, therefore, dangerous imagination of the artist.<sup>443</sup> Towards the end of the 1920s the number of documentary films in the Soviet Union grew significantly. The Soviets invested in the German *Kulturfilm* their hopes for the films of the future: not only did it correspond with materialist ideology but, importantly, it fulfilled the educational and informative tasks that, following Lenin's directives, acquired the highest priority after the October Revolution.

The influence of German *Kulturfilm* and the development of the documentary genre in the Soviet Union is a remarkable and still overlooked period in Soviet film history that has only recently received scholarly attention.<sup>444</sup> A review of Soviet film periodicals makes clear that in the mid-1920s the government consistently supported an information campaign for the adaptation and the development of the German *Kulturfilm* genre in the Soviet context. The German term for the documentary-type films (in Russian 'kul'turfil'ma') triggered debates in the Soviet Union. Erofeev, for instance, considers it to be confusing in the context of Soviet discussion about the quality of entertainment films:

The German notion *Kulturfilm* refers to all types of films apart from entertaining ones. The notion is quite vague and raises perplexity: shouldn't the 'artistic' film be also cultural? But because there is still no such broad term in Russian, we sometimes have to use this (not particularly precise) word of explicitly bourgeois origin.<sup>445</sup>

In Weimar Germany in the mid-1920s the *Kulturfilm* was already an established type of film that, along with animation, advertising shorts and newsreels, was a

---

<sup>443</sup> See: Vladimir Erofeev, *Kino-industriia Germanii* (Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1926); Nikolai Lebedev, *Po germanskoi kinematografii* (Moskva: Kino-Moskva, 1924)

<sup>444</sup> See, for instance, the articles by Aleksandr Deriabin and Hans-Joachim Schlegel in *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski*: 54, 2001, pp. 53-70, and 58, 2002, pp. 368-379.

<sup>445</sup> Vladimir Erofeev, *Kino-industria Germanii*, p. 75.

regular part of any standard evening film programme in urban cinemas. The educational and informative value of such films was important but shifting audience preferences demanded that they be first and foremost entertaining, original and exotic. *Kulturfilm* remained a supporting, peripheral genre in relation to the longer and commercially more successful features.

The Soviet Union's views on this matter were entirely different. The state's strategy for the transformation of the documentary genre into the cinema of the future implied, in the first instance, the adaptation of the western model of documentary filmmaking through selective importation of German documentaries. The key film periodicals regularly published their own research on German documentary production and encouraged the creation of more educational and ethnographic films within the Soviet Union. Though the importance of documentary was recognised quite early, particularly after the success of Robert Flaherty's and Colin Ross's films, not many of the original German *Kulturfilme* were widely distributed in the Soviet Union of the 1920s.<sup>446</sup> Egorova's catalogue of German silent films in Soviet distribution includes less than two dozen such films (including those that could potentially be considered 'feature films of an educational character' or containing only some elements of *Kulturfilm*). The Russian release subheadings that accompanied the titles of these films often included the formulas 'ethnographic film', 'scientific film' and, in rare cases, 'documentary' (this applied, for instance, to Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, which was shown in Soviet Russia from 1928).

Judging by the selection of documentaries intended for Russian distribution, the audience had a particular interest in deviant behaviour, physiology and sexual psychology. The Soviet distribution companies expressed particular interest in buying educational *Kulturfilme*, which was encouraged by the

---

<sup>446</sup> Foreign documentaries enjoyed relative popularity among the NEP audience: the arrival of Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* in 1924, which became the box-office hit of the year, with the assistance of *Mezhrabpom*, and the interest in the inspiring film *Mit dem Kurbelkasten um die Erde* by Colin Ross launched a series of the Soviet ethnographic documentaries and 'cinema-expeditions'. The ethnographic period in Soviet cinema of the 1920s was focused on the creation of filmic reports about the national minorities and distant regions of Soviet Russia.

government. One type of such films was particularly preferred by the Soviets: the so-called *Aufklärungsfilme*, an exclusively German genre of ‘sexual enlightenment’ film that dealt with a variety of themes around sexuality and sexual hygiene. Topics covered included abortion, deviant social behaviour, venereal diseases, and so on. *Aufklärungsfilme* had distinctive formal characteristics. The films comprised a combination of fiction and documentary elements, and their production often involved actors as well as invited experts on the theme of the film (for instance, doctors, psychiatrists, neurologists and social workers). These ‘sexual enlightenment’ films – along with the genre of *Sittenfilm* that contained a less pronounced educational component but also employed tabooed themes – depicted sexual problems within the social context from which the films were produced. The social determinacy expressed in such films made them ideologically acceptable in the Soviet Union. In order to address the wider masses, such films used a parable-like structure, illustrating the social message with a fictional story, interrupted with documentary passages. Films that could address the problems of hygiene and sexual education in an accessible form were interesting to the Soviets as a means of educating the masses. Such screenings were often accompanied by public lectures on sexuality and were screened in youth clubs as illustrative material that was supposed to ‘demystify’ sex (contrary to bourgeois morality) and to make it a subject for public discussion rather than a forbidden topic.

Thus, the Soviet Union in the 1920s became an ardent importer of *Aufklärungsfilme*. In Germany this type of film had at least two functions: educating and entertaining. Introducing a wide range of problems, from sexual education to modern psychological theories, these films, nevertheless, had a distinctive commercial purpose. The origin of *Aufklärungsfilme* in the pre-war ‘adult’ films determined its function in the Weimar Republic: the ‘sexual education’ content often became only a cover for erotic themes.

It is, therefore, not accidental that the Austrian director Richard Oswald, who made some of the most commercially successful films in the Weimar Republic, chose *Aufklärungsfilme* as his favourite genre of films. His productions were provocative, used interesting plots and involved famous actors and experts on sexual problems. One of the leading stars of German cinema, Conrad Veidt,

became popular in the Soviet Union in this period, when a few of Oswald's films were imported into the country after the success of *Caligari*. However, it is difficult to say what came first: Veidt's popularity in the Soviet Union stimulating the import of the *Aufklärungsfilme*, or the Soviet Union's interest in sexual enlightenment cinema making Veidt – a major star of those films – such a popular actor.

Another factor that gave *Aufklärungsfilme* their prominence in Soviet distribution is that such films easily passed censorship, which treated them not as 'pornographic' but as 'educational' films where the erotic element is somewhat neutralized by the explicit social message. In such films the didactic, propaganda element was so carefully concealed in an entertaining – adventurous or melodramatic – plot, that the film seemed to have little difference from other popular films in the repertoire.

*Aufklärungsfilme* did not only employ elements of other film genres like salon dramas, they were also self-referential. For instance, in *Anders als die Andern*, Conrad Veidt's character has a symbolic vision of the long procession of the famous homosexuals among poets, kings and musicians who suffered from social mistreatment. A similar scene was used seven years later in another film, *Kreuzzug des Weibes* (1926, Martin Berger). There, the attorney, again played by Veidt, imagines a long silent procession of women – the victims of the social system that criminalizes abortions. The film raised the question of the citizens' responsibility for the post-war demographic crisis. Harry Liedtke's character in the Soviet version of the film, a doctor who performs illegal abortions in upper class families, openly criticizes the hypocrisy of the state which leads the country into wars and then encourages population growth by criminalizing abortions.

Some of the *Aufklärungsfilme* in Russian distribution were defined with the rather broad term 'drama'. One example was, for instance, Richard Oswald's *Anders als die Andern*, the renowned 1919 film protesting against Paragraph 175 that reached the Russian audience under the title *Zakony ljubvi* (*The Laws of Love*). *Anders als die Andern* was one of the prototypes of *Secrets of a Soul*: with a fictional narrative, it nevertheless aspired to portray an authentic medical case-study. As in Pabst's 1926 film, which received scientific advice from Karl

Abraham and Hanns Sachs, *Anders als die Andern* was made under the guidance and with the participation of Magnus Hirschfeld. The participation of a real doctor in a feature film like *Anders als die Andern* acquired a special significance: he was there to signify the authenticity and relevance of the story. Oswald included in the film extracts from Hirschfeld's lectures, which gives it the impression of a documentary. In *Secrets of a Soul* the role of Dr Orth was played by a professional actor, the aforementioned Russian emigrant Pavel Pavlov. Here the fictional doctor is an active participant in the fictional narrative, unlike Hirschfeld, who is never directly involved in the events that are portrayed in the film. However, the staged conflict has a medical resolution which links it with scientific film.

Documentary-style insertions in feature films were a popular cinematic device in the 1920s that could make a fictional narrative appear to be more informative, credible and convincing. Some such films placed the characters in authentic settings or often involved non-professional actors: for instance, German *Bergfilme* or – a later example – F.W. Murnau's collaboration with Robert Flaherty in *Tabu* (1931, F.W. Murnau). As for Soviet cinema, the best illustration is, probably, Pudovkin's *Potomok Tchingiz-Khana* (1928, Vsevolod Pudovkin): a skilful mixture of adventure film, revolutionary propaganda and ethnographic documentary. Interestingly, this film is used nowadays as a historical document that showing the flourishing Buddhist culture in rural areas of Buriatia, including a rare recording of the cham dance at the Tamchin datsan.

Another film with Veidt that was popular in the Soviet Union was Oswald's drama about syphilis *Dürfen wir schweigen?* (1926, Richard Oswald). For the Soviets, films like *Dürfen wir schweigen?* and *Kreuzzug des Weibes* were important because they helped to fight the prejudices of the working classes about venereal diseases, abortions and medical help. One of the characters in the re-edited version of *Dürfen wir schweigen?*, a working class woman, remarks: 'When someone can still work, he does not need a doctor'.

The impact of this genre on Soviet cultural and social life was considerable. Even the Soviets' own productions like *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* (1927, Abram Room) with their use of the themes of sexuality and abortion recalled, though indirectly, the popularity of the German 'sexual enlightenment' films.

*Aufklärungsfilme* introduced Soviet audiences to various novelties from contemporary science: the lectures of Magnus Hirschfeld on sexuality, the ‘rejuvenation operations’ of endocrinologist Eugen Steinach, and psychoanalytical experiments. Despite the fact that Soviet distributors often preferred the documentary component to the elements of fiction, the audience enjoyed the entertaining plots of such films. Lunacharsky himself was an ardent supporter of the ‘entertaining’ *Kulturfilme* (or, as he calls them, ‘report films’). In his article ‘Artistic tasks of cinema’ he defends ‘artistically-made’ documentaries with their depiction of ‘human figures that evoke our sympathies and antipathies’ in the foreground. He considers such films to be effective because they show a general phenomenon through a particular example that is able to provoke an emotional reaction in the audience.<sup>447</sup>

*Aufklärungsfilme* on female sexuality and abortion like *Das Erwachen des Weibes* (1927, Fred Sauer), *Madame Lu, die Frau für diskrete Beratung* (1929, Franz Hofer), *Cyankali* (1930, Hans Tintner), were eagerly purchased by Sovkino for Soviet distribution in the late 1920s, though not all of them successfully passed censorship. The poster of the film *Das Erwachen des Weibes* (*Probuzhdenie zhenshchiny*) on street in Moscow can be seen in Dziga Vertov’s *Chelovek s kinoapparatom*. Vertov uses the metaphor taken from the German film title in order to create an image of the awakening city. In reality, Sauer’s film, which was very popular in Soviet release, portrayed the sexual awakening of a young woman and explained the need for sexual education in the younger generation, since it could help to avoid venereal diseases and unwanted pregnancy. In this *Kammerspiel*film several plotlines revolve around characters who live in an urban apartment-house on the same street, similar to Melchiorgasse in Pabst’s *Die freudlose Gasse*. The young girl, played by Grete Mosheim – an actress who became famous in the late 1920s and early 1930s for her ‘girl next door’ roles – has a secret affair with the owner’s son. The affair is, however, unnoticed by her parents and neighbours because everyone in the house is busy gossiping about the local *femme fatale*.

---

<sup>447</sup> Lunacharsky, pp. 180-181.



When the girl gets pregnant, the doctor lectures the distressed parents on the need for the sexual enlightenment of the youth.

The film was made with the participation of psychiatrist Curt Thomalla, who was involved in the production of a few German *Kultur-* and *Aufklärungsfilme* in the 1920s. In 1922 Thomalla was an assistant director of *Steinach-Film* (1922, Curt Thomalla, Nicholas Kaufmann; in Soviet release the film was called *Omolozhenie*, or ‘rejuvenation’), which was widely advertised in the Soviet press for its depiction of experiments on human hormonal system.

Thomalla’s name was known to Soviet audiences after the success of his film *Ein Blick in die Tiefe der Seele* (1923, Curt Thomalla). Thomalla’s *Kulturfilm*, which was an important step paving the way for the creation of *Mechanics of the Brain*, was the first film on psychoanalysis that was brought to the Soviet Union. Little is known today about *Ein Blick in die Tiefe der Seele*, which presented the basic ideas of psychoanalysis, like the notions of unconscious and sublimation, in a combination of animated sequences, Expressionist episodes with actors, scenes from other films used as ‘case-studies’ (for instance, Murnau’s *Nosferatu*), and lengthy documentary fragments.<sup>448</sup> The latter portrayed the experiments conducted by professional psychotherapists who demonstrated how hypnosis and suggestion could be effectively used as a curing method.

In her memoirs, the Soviet actress Galina Kravchenko, who started her career in a small role in the film *Aelita* (1924, Iakov Protazanov) and then continued to work in other Mezhrabpom-Rus’ productions, recalls an episode from her years in the Institute of Cinematography in Moscow. When Thomalla’s six-reel film was imported to the Soviet Union, it arrived with one missing part (according to Kravchenko, the missing part was devoted to hypnotic sleep initiated by voice). When the decision was made to produce the missing part domestically, Kravchenko was invited to be one of the actresses on whom famous psychiatrists

---

<sup>448</sup> The animation sequences in the film were made by the artist Svend Noldan who continued working as a director on Kulturfilm-productions in the 1930s and 1940s. The print held by Gosfilmofond has a few original Expressionist-style intertitles by Hans Rewald; these intertitles were added in ‘feature’ scenes that depicted fear of death, sexual anxieties, and so on.



conducted experiments using hypnosis.<sup>449</sup> The most interesting detail, however, was that it was Vsevolod Pudovkin who was commissioned to conduct the process of filming. Pudovkin, who, according to Kravchenko, ‘all his life [...] was interested in psychology, particularly in telepathy and suggestion’, invited famous psychiatrists to take part in the experimental part of the film. Kravchenko remembers the director’s enthusiastic work on the production:

I remember how attentively he questioned the experts and how he analyzed the cases of foresight and presentiment in the course of his work. It was the interest of a researcher that, certainly, had nothing to do with superstition. Thus, his film ‘Mechanics of the Brain’, that was made later, was not accidental.<sup>450</sup>

It is unknown what happened to the ‘Soviet’ part that was added to the German film, and Galina Kravchenko is the only one who, though briefly, mentioned its creation. The surviving print that is currently held by Gosfilmofond has, indeed, one missing part (six out of seven) and the original German intertitles made by the illustrator Hans Rewald. The film was renamed for Soviet release as *Gipnoz i vnushenie* (*Hypnosis and Suggestion*), since the ‘mystical’ original title (‘a look into the depths of the soul’) did not correspond with the Soviet understanding of the scientific film.

However, the decision to make an additional part for the Soviet distribution of the film proves that the interest in psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union of the mid-1920s remained strong. Pudovkin’s work on Thomalla’s film reveals the director’s interest in modern psychiatry and anticipates his future work on the film about Pavlov’s theories. Moreover, like Eisenstein, who had a chance to experiment with the re-editing of German films before starting his own

---

<sup>449</sup> The practice of re-filming or adding missing parts was sometimes applied to the most valuable foreign films.

<sup>450</sup> Galina Kravchenko, *Mozaika proshlogo* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1971), pp. 56-57.

experiments in montage cinema, Pudovkin developed his methods of documentary filmmaking while working on the Soviet version of *Ein Blick in die Tiefe der Seele*.

For Pudovkin, work on a documentary film was an exercise in guiding and controlling the spectator's attention and understanding of the film's content. As is often noted, *Mechanics of the Brain* was a landmark film for the director. Created in the same year as his widely-acclaimed adaptation of Maxim Gorky's novel, *Mother*, it launched Pudovkin's independent career in cinema. Notably, *Mechanics of the Brain* also marked the beginning of the director's long-term collaboration with Anatolii Golovnia, his favourite cameraman, who contributed to the development of the director's distinctive filming style. The documentary about Pavlov's experiments on neurological reflexes in animals and children initiated an experimental field for the filmmaking technique that would later develop in Pudovkin's feature films. Showing sequentially the series of experiments in Ivan Pavlov's laboratory, *Mechanics of the Brain* translated into clear and comprehensible visual language the theories that corresponded with the Marxist understanding of human behaviour.

As was mentioned earlier, *Secrets of a Soul* was produced by UFA, while Pudovkin's film was made by Mezhrabpom-Film. The company was constantly under pressure from the state: a media campaign in the late 1920s against the 'bourgeois' Mezhrabpom with its connections in Europe forced the company to produce more films that would be regarded as suitable for the Soviet audience. With the government encouraging production of educational and scientific films ('nauchfil'ma'), the documentary about Pavlov's reflexology was a safe choice for Mezhrabpom. The film, however, as noted by Erofeev, was far from a box-office success:

It was said that the film *Mechanics of the Brain* released by the studio Mezhrabpom-Rus (by the director Pudovkin) was announced to be unprofitable a priori (although it cost only 30,000), and it means that it will be impossible to see the film in the leading cinemas of the country.<sup>451</sup>

---

<sup>451</sup> Erofeev, 'O fil'makh "vtorogo sorta"', p. 4.

The question of profit, however, was decisive neither for Pudovkin, for whom the project allowed the continuation of his experiments with the documentary genre, nor for Mezhrabpom. For Pudovkin, working on a film about Pavlov's experiment was a scientific experiment in its own right: the process of filmmaking for him was a research laboratory where the point of view of the camera itself becomes the content of the experimental process:

Every experiment has its own methodology. If you mechanically record on film the whole process of conducting an experiment and then leave the viewer himself to make out the result, he will be able to understand only as much as the casual bystander. You need a cinematic language to film a scientific experiment, to make an analysis and then to synthesise the outcome.<sup>452</sup>

In other words, the metaphoric parallelism of the process of conducting the experiment and the process of making a scientific film were particularly important for Pudovkin. He continues:

In scientific work you never conduct a single random experiment. A scientist conducts a series of experiments and then, depending on the results, draws his conclusion. That is precisely the way in which we should approach the shooting of a scientific film. We have to intervene in the events that are taking place in front of the lens.<sup>453</sup>

Thus, the scientific laboratory becomes both a film set and a theatre stage where the play is carefully planned, rehearsed and performed. The aim of this process had to be the creation of a new cinematic language of a documentary film, different from simply registering and reproducing reality.

---

<sup>452</sup> Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Selected Essays*, ed. by Richard Taylor (London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2006), p. 19.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Though overly-sophisticated, too much so to be appreciated by the urban movie-goers, who expected more entertaining and narrative-orientated films, *Mechanics of the Brain*, undoubtedly, was one of the most remarkable *Kulturfilme* produced in the Soviet Union of the 1920s. Pavlov and his conditioning theory corresponded with the materialist approach to human psychology: mechanistic, comprehensible and explicable physiological foundations of the ‘psyche’, the idea of the development of reflexes and habits under the influence of external stimuli were the key notions that grounded hopes for the future re-construction of man. Corresponding with the Marxist theory of class determination, classic conditioning opened new perspectives for the construction of the future communist world. The film, therefore, was meant to be widely used in education and state propaganda. *Secrets of a Soul*, based on the suggestive theory of the unconscious with its repressed fears and sexual desires, by contrast, used a cinematic language that was familiar to a wider audience. The ideological content of film determined its form: a mixture of a conventional bourgeois drama and a *Lustmord*-story, it ended up almost with a detective investigation into the secret motivations of the human mind.

### 3. Experiment against Entertainment

Since, for Pudovkin, the shooting of a film and scientific research were virtually the same process, the documentary on reflexology became an investigation into the audience’s reactions. *Mechanics of the Brain* aims to convince us of its subject’s validity through the portrayal of consecutive laboratory experiments which are presented almost in Darwinian terms. The ideological foundation of the film determines the way it is structured, which images appear on the screen, and in what order. Frogs, dogs, monkeys, children and in a final montage sequence, various birds and mammals that were filmed by Golovnia in the Leningrad Zoological Garden – every living organism is consistently claimed to be subject to the law of nervous stimulation and conditioned reflex. The conclusion to which the film leads the spectator through the gradual portrayal of the different stages of Pavlov’s research is that an outer stimulus determines any biological and,

therefore, social action, habit and motivation. The circular frame becomes a metaphor for the surface of a microscope glass, and the spectator is invited to participate in the laboratory experiment. The de-personalised interiors of a physiologist's laboratory, which are filmed with the use of the deep chiaroscuro lighting, are devoid of any irrelevant details. In his later films, Pudovkin continued to use this approach to the construction of a film frame: he was known for his preference for empty backgrounds – a 'monosemantic', 'pure', 'dried', 'compressed' frame, as Viktor Shklovsky defined it in his 1927 article 'Mistakes and inventions'.<sup>454</sup> The montage of the film is regular and consistent; the motionless frame excludes any possibility of the audience being distracted from the course of the experiment. We barely see the experimenter himself: the active body in the frame is fragmented and everything but the hands is removed from the spectator's attention. The hands of the experimenter are consistently shown from the left side which, according to Pudovkin's concern with the psychology of visual perception and the direction of movement in film, brings regularity and dynamics to a frame that is filmed by a static camera lens. The scientist thus becomes a functional instrument, a bodiless medium that transmits to the audience experimentally-proven information. In other words, what Pudovkin and his cameraman achieve through the formal consistency of the frame is the convincing feeling of complete objectivity and of the authenticity of the filmed content.

In Pabst's film on psychoanalysis, by contrast, no attempt is made to present the events in any way other than subjectively. In fact, all that we see *is* a subjective point of view extended to its utmost. The story is given indirectly, often through someone's words. For instance, Fellman and his wife learn about the murder in their neighbour's house from hearsay; the laboratory assistant and the visiting woman exchange ambiguous glances and smiles behind Fellman's back; Fellman imagines the decadent settings of Erich's Oriental trips, and so on. The anxious feeling of an inability to fully understand the real course of events haunts Fellman and multiplies his nervousness and jealousy. Finally, the psychoanalyst Dr Orth learns about the protagonist's dreams through his patient's subjective

---

<sup>454</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, 'Oshibki i izobreteniiia', *Novyi LEF*, 11-12 (Moskva: Gosizdat, 1927), p. 30.

interpretation and then provides Fellman with his own psychoanalytical interpretation of these images. The doctor – a German analogue to the Soviet experimenter – is not distanced from the narrative while representing the objective voice of knowledge (as, for instance, is the status of the doctor in *Anders als die Andern*). On the contrary, he is fully involved in the events of film and acts as a fictional character – for example, in the scene of his first meeting with Fellman. In this scene Dr Orth accidentally notices Fellman in the bar and follows him at night in the street in order to pass him a forgotten key after which the therapy part of the film begins.

The emphasis on the fictional narrative in this *Aufklärungsfilm* is not the only characteristic feature of Pabst's approach. He deliberately includes elements of a variety of film genres in his film, making it a combination of a newspaper feuilleton, suggestive surrealist images, and with an underlying scientific message. *Secrets of a Soul* is thus an example of an eclectic combination of a criminal story with a *Kammerspiel* drama, of Oriental motifs and clear references to the popular Expressionist films. The method of combining several genre elements in one film was previously used by Pabst in his film *Die freudlose Gasse*. That was also a synthetic film that combined social melodrama with detective story overtones. But, unlike *Die freudlose Gasse*, Pabst's investigation of psychoanalysis remains a story of the *anticipation* of a crime rather than a criminal drama. The increasing anxiety and tension caused by the polyphony of the various points of view and the use of symbolic details become the driving forces of the story.

The film begins with an idyllic family scene that is reminiscent of Karl Grune's *Die Straße* and, even more powerfully, of Murnau's Expressionist film *Nosferatu*. We see the peaceful morning routine of a middle-class family. When the wife joyfully asks her husband to trim her hair and when he leans over her neck with a razor in his hand, the camera suddenly shows a close-up of a terrified woman screaming for help. This fragment, which is built into the initial sequence, changes the idyllic mood of the opening shots and, through the unexpected juxtaposition, evokes a feeling of inexplicable disturbance. The 'scream' functions as an acoustic signal that triggers the husband's mental disorder and finally leads him to a paranoid fear of sharp objects, the embodiment of his irresistible

compulsion to kill his wife. Although the scream is a signal that functions in a similar way to the previously discussed sound of the train horn in *Fragment of an Empire*, in Ermler's film it is only an accidental acoustic stimulus of the memory reflex. In *Secrets of a Soul* the acoustic signal has the metaphoric importance that illustrates the psychoanalytic context of the film: at the moment of the scream, Fellman suddenly sees himself in the position of a murderer. The psychological shock of the main character, who finds himself holding a razor over his wife's neck and, therefore, unexpectedly faces his own secret motivations and desires which he cannot resist, is the shock of the projected, transposed situation.

In the first dream sequence the metaphors of sexual violence and the phallic symbolism of a knife are evident in a scene where the impotent husband sees himself repeatedly stabbing his wife. Pabst's preoccupation with knives, which became a recurring image in many of his films, attains a special role in *Secrets of a Soul*: the leitmotif of stabbing points to the context of *Lustmord* that was familiar to the Weimar audience. Sexual violence, as documented by Maria Tatar in her book on representations of sexual murder in the Weimar Republic, had a strong grip on the German public and artistic imagination of the 1920s.<sup>455</sup> While investigating the nature of sexual brutality (a frequent subject of Weimar newspaper headlines and, by that time, a phenomenon of everyday urban life), the film aims to provide an illustrative explanation of this psychological disorder. The realistic *Kammerspiel*-style setting of the film that frames the story of an average family (at first glance) aims to convince the audience that the scenario of Fellman's disease and its potentially tragic consequences are something that can happen unnoticed in a neighbour's house. However, since the content of the film is the opposition of two worlds (sane objective reality and the subjective vision of a mentally challenged character), it also becomes a transitional space charged with erotic symbolism in the style of Vilhelm Hammershoi's paintings. The haunting

---

<sup>455</sup> See the monograph on the cultural context of sexual violence in Weimar Germany by Maria Tatar: Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995)

empty corridors of the house and the close-up shot of the wife's neck in the opening scene recall the unsettling images created by the Danish painter.<sup>456</sup>

Some intertextual levels of the film link it with the visual imagery of Weimar Expressionism. The striking allegories of the 'Freudian' dream sequences with their distorted and hyperbolized imagery remind the viewer of Kozintsev's and Trauberg's *Shinel*. Admittedly, this Expressionistic adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's story was not familiar to Pabst during his work on *Secrets of a Soul* and could not have influenced the content of his film. However, both films contain very similar elements, sometimes almost identical, that are based on a recognizably Expressionist portrayal of an 'insane' world.<sup>457</sup> The most distinctive Expressionist imagery in Pabst's film derives from *Nosferatu*. Certainly, there is a strong meta-filmic idea that lies in the core of the film and explains the way the dream sequences are shown: recalling the Expressionist notion of the metaphoric connection between film and dreams, Pabst accumulates recognisable visual references from a host of silent films in Fellman's dream fragments. But I would argue that Pabst in *Secrets of a Soul* also makes an attempt to provide a Freudian reading of the famous vampire film story by transferring it into the context of objective reality – an additional context that was easily read by the cinema audience of the 1920s. Fellman and his wife correspond with the images of Harker and his wife Ellen, whose family life in the opening scenes is idyllic but already bears the implicit elements of decadence. As mentioned above, Fellman's anxieties are uncovered in the scene where he sees his wife's neck (compare this with *Nosferatu*'s disturbing remark: 'Einen schönen Hals hat Eure Frau'); and later in his dreams Erich is shown kissing Fellman's wife in a shadow window scene that

---

<sup>456</sup> There is no documented evidence of Pabst being influenced by Hammershøi's imagery but it is most probable that Pabst was familiar with his works. The Danish painter achieved international recognition in his lifetime and travelled extensively visiting Germany with exhibitions, including the X. International Art Exhibition at the Royal Glaspalast in Munich, where Hammershøi presented seven paintings, and the bigger exhibition in Hamburg in 1906. See more in: *Hammershøi und Europa: ein Dänischer Künstler um 1900*, ed. by Kasper Monrad and Maryanne Stevens (München: Prestel; København: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2012)

<sup>457</sup> The subjective, insane world was a frequent setting in Expressionist classics like *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari*, *Wachsfigurenkabinett*, *Raskolnikoff* and other films of the early 1920s.



almost precisely repeats the closing sequence of *Nosferatu*. Erich, the wife's cousin, visits the Fellmans' house immediately after his Asian journey: like *Nosferatu*, he represents a dangerous but magnetic outsider who doesn't belong to the world of idyllic bourgeois normality. In the film he sends Fellman a little Asian statuette prior to his visit. But in Fellman's visions this innocent present is transformed into a disturbing symbol of the approaching threat, and the image of the cousin himself takes on the semantic complex of dangerous exoticism. The latter was the common constituting motif for many Oriental costume films of the silent era, from the sexually ambiguous Doppelgänger plot of *The Red Lantern* (1919, Albert Capellani) with Alla Nazimova, to the British *Monkey's Paw* (1923, H. Manning Haynes), a mysterious story about a death-bringing Indian souvenir. Finally, the harem scene in *Secrets of a Soul* recalls the eroticism of popular stylized productions like *Sumurun*, *Das indische Grabmal*, *Der Schädel der Pharaonentochter* and many other films that were enjoyed by mass audiences in the early years of the Weimar Republic's existence. Thus, in Pabst's film, the invisible erotic tension of *Nosferatu*'s love triangle, as described by Thomas Elsaesser, and the clichéd juxtaposition of the connotations of violence, sexual love and death in the image of a dangerous vampish 'outsider', aim to underline the story of jealousy and the eroticized sublimations of Fellman's dreams. These dreams operate through recognizable Expressionist imagery.<sup>458</sup>

The use of actors, even famous stars, was a typical characteristic of German *Aufklärungsfilme*. The role of Fellman in *Secrets of a Soul* was played by Werner Krauss, who was one of the most popular Weimar film stars in the Soviet Union.<sup>459</sup> The elements of acting are used in Curt Thomalla's documentary on psychoanalysis. Pudovkin, on the other hand, radically decides not to use any actors in *Mechanics of the Brain*, similarly to a few other Soviet directors, representing a Soviet, avant-garde alternative to the 'bourgeois' German film style and acting.

---

<sup>458</sup> See: Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000)

<sup>459</sup> According to the reviews Soviet periodicals and Nataliia Egorova's catalogue of the German films in Soviet distribution.

Boris Mazing's phrase about German cinema, its lack of the 'relevant social analysis', could in particular be applied to *Secrets of a Soul*.<sup>460</sup> The main conflict of the film develops around a middle-class family and an ageing bourgeois man who is preoccupied with a secret sexual problem. The luxurious interiors of the Fellmans' house, the wife's fashionable dresses, and her idleness, could not but be perceived as counter-revolutionary: in the aforementioned article by Nikolai Forreger the 'aesthetically acceptable' western clothes and the 'impractical' long hair are considered not only to be 'distracting in work and in struggle' but also to signify women's social 'slavery'.<sup>461</sup> In short, the Fellmans' self-contained existence out of any social context was too distant from Soviet reality and the Soviet idea of the future with its projects of communal living and the working woman. Comparing *Secrets of a Soul* to Soviet films about love triangles, one can see a distinctive contradiction: in the Soviet 'love stories' – from *Oblomok imperii* and Abram Room's *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, to Otsep's *Zhivoi trup*, which explore such issues as polygamy, divorce, abortion and communal living – the social context and the truly investigative approach towards the nature of people's relationships comes to the fore. Joseph Roth in his travel essays *Reise in Russland* writes about the total de-eroticization of all spheres of life in a 'hygienic' Soviet society:

Russland ist nicht unmoralisch, keineswegs, – es ist nur hygienisch. Die moderne russische Frau ist kein Wüstling, – im Gegenteil: sie ist eine brave soziale Funktion. Die russische Jugend ist nicht hemmungslos, sie ist nur maßlos aufgeklärt. Die Ehe- und Liebesverhältnisse sind nicht unsittlich, sondern nur öffentlich. Rußland ist kein 'Sündenpfluß', sondern ein naturwissenschaftliches Lesebuch.<sup>462</sup>

---

<sup>460</sup> Boris Mazing, *Werner Krauss* (Leningrad-Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1928), p. 5.

<sup>461</sup> Forreger, n.p.

<sup>462</sup> Roth, p. 229.

Following the social changes and the prescriptions of the new Soviet morality that dictated the elimination of the distracting erotic component from the everyday life of Soviet citizens, Russian cinema was preoccupied with the social role of women and the impact of collective labour and communal life on individuals. Comparing it to Soviet social dramas, the male-centred world of *Secrets of a Soul* was perceived by Soviet officials as limited and self-obsessed. The role of peripheral characters like Fellman's neighbours, or his laboratory assistant, played by Hertha von Walter, remains purely functional. They serve only to introduce the main conflict of the film. In the closing scene of the film, Fellman, who is finally cured of his derangement, does not return to active social life. On the contrary, the happy ending implies escape from the suffocating atmosphere of the city. The husband and wife are shown with their new-born son in an idyllic countryside setting enjoying their pastoral happiness far from their social duties. The western interpretation of psychological sanity, a form of the 'paradise found', could not be approved by the Soviet censors, who considered such endings to be escapist and even dangerous. Erofeev's book on German cinema illustrates the disparaging Soviet attitude to such endings:

The same is true of the films that explore peacefully-Philistine themes: the German bourgeois who is exhausted by the feverish period of inflation and has not yet recovered from the fear of the "red threat" is drawn to the quiet cosy life. But having been unable to return this cosiness he greedily takes pleasure in seeing it on the screen.<sup>463</sup>

If through the different stages of Pudovkin's experiment the spectators are taught a Marxist notion, that society is an open laboratory, Pabst invites us to enter the invisible laboratory of the individual unconscious. The Weimar 'individualist' approach was a subject of fascination and reproach in the Soviet critique. In his

---

<sup>463</sup> Erofeev, *Kino-industria Germanii*, p. 72.

essay about Bernhard Goetzke, published in one of the Teakinopechat' booklets, Mazing writes:

The world of ideas in which a modern German man lives and works is, undoubtedly, grandiose and diverse. But the general essence of it, though, is the same: the assertion of human superiority. An individual who contains in himself the whole world is proclaimed to be the centre of existence'.<sup>464</sup>

*Secrets of a Soul*, first of all, illustrates an 'idealist' notion about people's complexity and difference – and, thus, the impossibility of learning what is hidden in the secret corners of one's mind without individual analysis. The Soviet ideology of unification, which was based primarily on developmental psychology, adopted the strategy of totally rebuilding an unsatisfactory system of values. This was preferred to psychoanalytical 'therapy' and the attempts to improve what already exists. Where Pabst illustrates and captivates, Pudovkin intentionally tries to change the spectator's attitude to the depicted subject.

Pudovkin's constructive and minimalist approach, however, resulted in the inevitable loss of the film's entertaining qualities and the limitation of the potential audience. As it was mentioned above, *Mechanics of the Brain* was a box-office failure for Mezhrabpom. Lunacharsky, who was convinced that good quality cinema can be both enlightening and exciting to watch, spoke against the constructivist minimalization of the expressive narrative methods in film and suggested that the strategies of the western film industry be adopted. Writing about film in 1926, he emphasizes film's educational role with no regard of any difference between fiction and documentary:

This is an instrument that can not only give an artistic reflection of life but also serves science in making closer what seemed far, giving us an opportunity to make long instructive journeys while sitting on

---

<sup>464</sup> Boris Mazing, *Bernhard Goetzke* (M.-L.: Teakinopechat', 1928), p. 3.

the chair, to see something unbelievably small without touching the microscope and to examine the luminaries in optical magnification with no telescope.<sup>465</sup>

However, neither educational, nor instructional tasks should be exaggerated, Lunacharsky points out, because cinema, first of all, remains a means of entertainment:

But of course, one thing is when it is an openly scientific film. It is attended by those who have academic curiosity. But if you want to offer a big film drama, a big film novel, shortly speaking, an artistic film, your didactic tendencies will be harmful. Because the wide masses want to relax, to be entertained, to be carried away and forget everything but you start rubbing salt in their everyday wounds, talking about their misfortunes, about their urgent problems, about their duty, opening their eyes onto these or those social responsibilities, and so on. So they get bored, they start to feel themselves being present at some lecture.<sup>466</sup>

Continuing to defend the cinema of the West where the narrative structure and an educational component were well-balanced, Lunacharsky concludes that it should be used as a pattern for Soviet filmmakers. A beautifully shot, interesting film that invokes an emotional reaction to the portrayed events, according to Lunacharsky, is by no means counter-revolutionary, but more effective:

When the big and small pedants of Soviet cinema start to teach us bombastically that all this is, in fact, rubbish and that we should as soon as possible move towards the absence of the plot, of the film

---

<sup>465</sup> Anatolii Lunacharsky, 'Kino – velichaishee iz iskusstv', *Krasnaia panorama*, 15 December, 1926, n.p.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

character, of eroticism etc., they can do us an ill turn. Without denying the potentially significant role of this type of films, it needs to be said directly, by the way, that this is a production that will hardly find not only the commercial (this is just a half of the trouble) but even the mass psychological market.<sup>467</sup>

Although his point of view was not shared by Soviet avant-garde film theorists, it revealed the actual situation with the audience's preferences. The popularity of western melodramas and adventure stories outstripped domestic revolutionary productions. Here we again refer to Joseph Roth's *Reise nach Russland*, where he ironically writes about the posters of *Maharadja* that surprised him on the streets of Moscow – an unlikely anachronism after the huge success of Eisenstein's revolutionary *Bronenosets Potemkin*.<sup>468</sup> In Dziga Vertov's famous *Man with a Movie Camera* the camera glimpses posters advertising a German *Aufklärungsfilm* and a criminal melodrama hanging on the streets – the abovementioned *Das Erwachen des Weibes* and *Die Grüne Manuela*, a 1923 film by E.A. Dupont. The German 'Faustian soul', the traditions of 'psychological' acting, Expressionist fantasies, or Harry Piel's sophisticated tricks evoked much more interest in the mass audience than film propaganda did. Lunacharsky consistently defended his position towards the entertaining potential of cinema in a series of articles on film such as 'About film', 'Film in the West' and others, but did not receive wide support. He wrote:

The spectator of the world, even a proletarian, is not a patient who wants medicine and not a student whom you can put behind a school desk. He will send to hell our Soviet cinema if it happens to be excellently clever, excellently noble, excellently orthodox and excellently boring.<sup>469</sup>

---

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> Roth, pp. 165-166.

<sup>469</sup> Lunacharsky *o kino: Stat'i, vyskazyvaniia, dokumenty*, pp. 46-55.

Lunacharsky's suggestion, to orientate Soviet film around the traditions of western entertainment cinema, did not correspond to the ideological line of the Soviet avant-garde. Writing about the two major filmmaking strategies in Germany and Russia of the 1920s, Hanns-Joachim Schlegel traces the main difference in the aesthetic concepts of Eisenstein and Pabst. He argues that the conflict between Pabst and Eisenstein is a conflict between narrative and concept cinema that, at the same time, represents an uncompromising conflict between *Neue Sachlichkeit* and the avant-garde obsession with 'things'. 'Eisenstein,' argues Schlegel, 'replaces an individual psychological manner of acting that is based on empathy with the 'psychologization of things' and 'playing with material objects'.<sup>470</sup> The difference between Eisenstein's and Pabst's approaches, thus, is the difference between symbol and allegory: where Pabst suggests that the spectator recognizes his own experience in fictional events, Eisenstein, through structural changes and the rhythmic combination of metaphor, demands creative action on behalf of the spectator. Viktor Shklovsky considered Eisenstein's theory of attraction to be a method that 'does not *remind* a spectator about an emotion but *arouses* his emotions' [Italics are mine. – N.P.]. Eisenstein, he argues, affects the spectator by activating the instruments of psychological projection that cause unconscious physical movements:

I think if we attached dynamometers to the cinema seats, we would be convinced that the spectator perceives an emotion even in the non-attraction film because he implicitly experiences it, repeats it and, probably, the aesthetic emotional experience here is linked to the repression of the physical imitation. It is something similar to the inner speech when you hear a poem.<sup>471</sup>

---

<sup>470</sup> Hanns-Joachim Schlegel, 'Terra Incognita: Obrazy Rossii u Georga Vil'gel'ma Pabsta', pp. 154-155.

<sup>471</sup> Shklovsky, 'Oshibki i izobreneniia', p. 30.

The binary of Eisenstein's and Pabst's methods is representative of the differences between German narrative-based fictional cinema and the Soviet constructive search for a new structural language. The former was based on the spectator's ability to recognize narrative models and to empathise with characters, whereas the latter could affect and change the audience's perception. But Eisenstein and Pabst, though in conflict, still have a common denominator – for instance, in their experimentation with psychology – and though it is possible to compare *Secrets of a Soul* with Ermler's *Fragment of an Empire*, Pudovkin's film has no visible connection with *Secrets of a Soul*. Strictly speaking, it is not a relation of opposition because there is no criterion for comparison: both stylistically and content-wise these films are different. Ermler's film about a child-like man who is re-constructing his memory and identity in the brave new world, or even Pudovkin's later film *Potomok Tchingiz-Khana* – a story of a person's psychological and cultural transformation – would be much more suitable for comparison with Pabst's piece. Eisenstein's search for the perfect cinematic language gave rise to his experiments with the combination of several psychological tactics and the relation between form and content. Pudovkin was more interested in formal experiments. He radically refused any other way to make a scientific film: the narrative approach suggested by the western school, or a simple registration of facts; both methods seemed equally dissatisfying. In his supporting article on *Mechanics of the Brain* Pudovkin writes:

If something is being filmed in montage terms, i.e. the camera changes lens position several times, recording first a general impression, then a detail, filming an experiment that develops logically and coherently then becomes impossible.

[...]

Of course, if you are dealing with a purely scientific film record [*kinoprotokol*] intended for scientific specialists you could give preference to the continuous filming of an experiment as a whole, sacrificing instructive exposition. But, if you are aiming at the average viewer, you will have to work differently. You will have to



organise the experimental material in a special – cinematic – way in order to achieve a convincing exposition on screen'.<sup>472</sup>

In other words, where Pabst *describes* the experiment, the Soviet directors *conduct* it. Despite the arguments between the German film school and the Soviet avant-garde artists, among whom there was still no unified opinion, it is evident that the Soviet filmmakers were learning from Pabst's films. After the success of *Die freudlose Gasse* the name of Pabst – a recognized artist whose *Neue Sachlichkeit* style charmed the spectator visually and seemed to be ideologically acceptable – for the Soviets was a synonym of quality *per se*. Despite the aesthetic disagreements that existed between Pabst and Eisenstein, the Austrian director was respected by the Soviet cultural elite, including Lunacharsky himself.<sup>473</sup> Pabst's frequently expressed sympathy towards Soviet culture, the realistic portrayal of the oppressed working class and the social wounds of the prosperous West in *Die freudlose Gasse*, made the Soviets for many years believe in the revolutionary intentions of 'red Pabst' – an assumption that secured his success until the late 1930s.<sup>474</sup>

It is time to return to Hanns-Joachim Schlegel's remark about the impossibility of success for such a film as *Geheimnisse einer Seele* in the Soviet context. In fact, the film was considered for purchase by Sovkino and even reached Glavrepertkom, in the hope of the successful distribution of a new *Aufklärungsfilm* with Werner Krauss in the title role. The trial copy of the original length (2,214 meters) was sent to the re-editing office, where the political editor changed the intertitles. The montage list among the Glavrepertkom documents shows that the new intertitles considerably simplified the film; many scenes became less clear. Glavrepertkom's own protocols to the film have not survived. However, the censor left a pencil note on the intertitle list stating that 'there is almost no psychoanalysis

---

<sup>472</sup> Pudovkin, *Selected Essays*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>473</sup> See: Hanns-Joachim Schlegel, 'Tera Incognita: Obrazy Rossii u Georga Vilgelma Pabsta', pp.154-155 and Lunacharsky's article 'Shalyapin v Don Quichote' in: *Lunacharsky o kino*, pp. 212-216.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

here; the film is not made problematic'.<sup>475</sup> Dissatisfaction with the absence of explicit documentary content led the censors to define the film as another bourgeois melodrama. The title of the film also raised questions over the suitability of such a film for Soviet audiences. As a result, *Geheimnisse einer Seele* was never purchased.

Despite the controversy surrounding his later films in the Soviet Union, Pabst, remaining an active filmmaker in the 1930s and turning to the production of 'talkies', was influential after the collapse of the NEP and the following Stalinization of the country. The state's disappointment in Pabst's political uncertainty is evident in the tone of the first (and the last) monograph on Pabst published in the Soviet Union in 1936. It was written by Nikolai Efimov, one of the first Soviet film scholars and a specialist in German cinema.<sup>476</sup> This monograph is unique evidence of Pabst's recognition: no other German or Austrian filmmaker of the 1920s received such attention in Stalinist Russia. Efimov provides a thorough analysis of Pabst's cinema, including complete descriptions of the films in their original versions. Trying to justify the interest of the 'master of bourgeois cinema' in 'Freudian' themes and his unwillingness to leave Germany for the Soviet Union, Efimov concludes that 'the artist consciously chooses a path of compromise in order to lull the suspicions of a businessman and to secure himself an opportunity to work with social themes.'<sup>477</sup> The evident 'bourgeois' elements are consistently explained in the monograph as an inevitable outcome of the director's orientation towards a western audience. Pabst's films are not merely entertaining: according to Efimov, he has a missionary role of correcting the tastes of the capitalist spectator. Pabst's frequently repeated refusal to 'come and create' on Soviet soil is interpreted as a noble wish to sacrifice himself in order not to allow the corrupted western world to fall into a cultural abyss. Despite his huge interest in Russian culture, Pabst himself never visited the Soviet Union and could hardly have known of the severe re-editing of the 'Freudian' *Die Büchse der*

---

<sup>475</sup> *Taina odnoi dushi*, GFF, d. 8-18

<sup>476</sup> See an article on Efimov: Petr Bagrov, 'Ob avtore knigi i nemnogo o ee geroe', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 84, 2007, pp. 267-274.

<sup>477</sup> Nikolai Efimov, *Georg Vilhelm Pabst* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1936), p. 9.

*Pandora*, the negative reception of *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney*, or the fate of his *Secrets of a Soul* that, despite a considerable advertising campaign, was not allowed to reach Soviet screens.

In any case, the fate of *Secrets of a Soul* was not exceptional: throughout the 1920s, German directors were often suspected of a predominance of ‘biological motivations’ in their characters over the ‘social truth’. ‘Freudism in Pabst’s films dangerously takes the form of ideology’ – warns Efimov. In the circumstances – the political disfavour of psychoanalytical doctrine’s ‘pseudo-philosophical concept’ – the threat of ideology was an insurmountable obstacle to the Soviet distribution of German films after 1925.

However, Pudovkin’s formalist study on reflexology and the psychology of the audience’s perception was no more successful: the future of Soviet cinema did not lie in the narrative-free experimentations of avant-garde artists. Nor was it to be found in the poetic realism of Vertov’s *Kinoglaz* (1924, Dziga Vertov), or in Eisenstein’s search for effective structural devices on the margins between psychology and physiology. Radically turning away from the structural experiments of the 1920s, the Soviets were to return to the narrative-type cinema of social realism, to the idyllic musical comedies and historical films of the late 1930s, which illustrated the Stalinist notion of Socialist ‘construction’.

## Conclusion

This thesis has addressed little known aspects of the history of Soviet-German film relations in the 1920s, focusing on the selection, distribution, censorship and reception of German films in the Soviet Union. It has attempted, for the first time, to systematise what is known about this most productive and rich period of German-Soviet interactions. The study set out to explore whether German films influenced the development of the Soviet film industry in the years before the Soviets had the opportunity to re-establish their own film production. In my study I have looked at this problem from various different perspectives, at the same time tracking the main stages of the adaptation of German films to Soviet distribution, namely the acquisition and adjustment of films for the Soviet market, followed by their critical reception.

Partnership with the Soviet film industry continued for eight years out of the fourteen-years of the Weimar Republic's existence. In 1922, only a few years after the end of a period of revolutions and wars, the Soviets attempted to adapt to the conditions of the flourishing western film market, in order to offer its population a new film repertoire. This thesis has demonstrated how the Weimar Republic, which became the Soviet Union's main collaborator in this task, responded to the demands of the Soviets, allowing new partnership opportunities – for example, the creation of a network of Soviet film agencies in Germany. Additionally, this study explored Germany's collaboration with the community of Russian émigrés, who were also interested in the contacts with the Soviet Union. By providing a detailed analysis of the Russian émigrés' involvement in the process of film purchase, I have demonstrated how the beginning of Soviet film distribution helped to (re-)establish connections between various communities: émigrés and Soviet Russians, Germans and émigrés, Soviets and Germans.

First of all, the thesis answered the questions of when and how the purchase of German films began, who determined the choice of German films for the Soviet film market, and what genres of German film were selected for Soviet distribution. As this study has proven, in the early 1920s the Soviet Union imported films rather inconsistently, offering the audience a mixed selection of salon dramas, comedies

and costume films. Not familiar with the film productions of the late 1910s, the Soviets eagerly imported films that were already out of the repertoire in the Weimar Republic, thus, familiarizing the Soviet audience with the key achievements of European cinema. The most successful film companies were able to introduce a number of bigger new productions, *Monumentalfilm*-series and Expressionist film to Soviet spectators.

Despite many financial difficulties and the rather chaotic selection of films, the Soviet companies under the NEP were still able to bring a fair number of quality German films to the Soviet market. As Viktor Shklovsky notes, the Soviets might not have had an opportunity to see everything that was made abroad, but, at least, the greatest achievements of European cinema reached distribution.<sup>478</sup> The tastes of the Soviet audience, which experienced a belated encounter with German film, corresponded with the main European film trends: adventure and detective film, salon melodrama, historical film, oriental film, Expressionism, *Kammerspiel*, and social drama. The Soviet distributors – who were particularly interested in documentary genres, which fulfilled the ‘instructional’ role of art and the task of educating the masses – in the spirit of the new ideology, eagerly purchased German educational and ‘enlightenment’ films. The study has determined the late 1920s shift in Soviet understanding of the educational film genre: from fiction-orientated *Aufklärungsfilme* imported from Germany in the early 1920s, to the development of a new, Soviet, documentary that excludes traditional fictional components.

Another task of this research has been to describe the Soviet film censorship mechanisms, on the example of the alterations made to German films before they could enter distribution. The vertical censorship system provided absolute control over imported German film on various levels. The Soviets used re-editing as the main instrument to ‘neutralize’ ideologically unsuitable content in films. Soviet censorship carefully studied the phenomenon of German cinema and its variety of genres and themes. The thesis has shown that in the Soviet Union of the 1920s, censorship criteria were formulated *in the process* of reworking German films for Soviet distribution. These criteria were tested on a number of

---

<sup>478</sup> Shklovsky, p. 40.

imported German films, in the hope of creating ideologically safe products without considerably damaging their quality. The re-editing bureau, which was created as part of the state distribution organization, received an opportunity to study directly the structure, genres and styles of German cinema. The revision of intertitles, the removal of controversial scenes, and the radical re-editing that were carried out by Soviet re-editors, allowed them to shape a film into any desired product, free from 'bourgeois' content. The re-editing bureau became a creative laboratory for future Soviet avant-garde filmmakers who received an opportunity to exercise their montage skills while reworking German films for the Soviet market. The work of the re-editors was not limited to experiments with the 'wise and wicked game' of re-editing. Their work was more complex, as they tried not only to unify the criteria and the methods of re-editing but also to classify and to study the re-editing material. This thesis has shown that German film in the Soviet context was used for various purposes: there were films that filled the gaps in the country's film repertoire and, at the same time, provided material for the study of national cinemas.

The thesis has addressed the issues of the reception of German films by the Soviet critics of the 1920s. The Soviet film periodicals responded enthusiastically to the import of new German cinema. In the late 1920s, when censorship control became stricter, the tone of German film reviews changed. The creation of the 'New Soviet Man' signified the need to cultivate new tastes in film: the negative reviews of new German films that appeared in the mid-1920s aimed to educate the masses, teaching them how to identify 'bad' bourgeois productions. In the mid-1920s, many negative articles in periodicals were ordered to be written by the censorship organs. In the late 1920s, critical reviews of German films, as well as the films themselves, completely disappeared from the Soviet cultural scene. The Soviet periodicals of the 1920s rarely published material on the audiences' reception of films, unlike western publications. This study provided evidence of the popularity of German film stars among the Soviet audiences from the example of the Teakinopechat' brochures that were published in 1926-1928.

The arrival of sound film in the late 1920s reduced the possibility of formal alterations of ideologically unsuitable films through re-editing. Cinema became a

less flexible material for ideological adjustments. Despite the seeming continuation of the exchange of creative ideas and methods between the two film cultures in the 1920s – for example, the visits of the Soviet filmmakers to Germany in the late 1920s, or the creation of the first German-Soviet joint productions with the support of the left wing organisations (Mezhrabpom) – Soviet censorship, which was strengthening from the mid-1920s onwards, determined the future decline of German-Soviet relations in film.

With the complexity of the theme and the abundance of material that still awaits scholarly attention, this thesis explores only a few directions for research into film relations between the Weimar Republic and the Soviet Union, and by no means constitutes an exhaustive study. There are still more aspects to be covered: the distribution and reception of German films in the various regions of the Soviet Union; more thorough research on the personalities of censors and film agents, and the details of their involvement in the distribution process; the little-known details of the reception of Soviet films in the Weimar Republic – to name a few. Space and time have prevented me from focusing on these themes but I hope that, with the help of this study, they will get scholarly attention they deserve. Among the first steps is the creation of a more detailed catalogue of the German films in Soviet distribution, with the use of the recently discovered archival material.

This study attempted to open new perspectives for systematised research into intercultural connections between the Weimar Republic and the Soviet Union. It suggests the inclusion of more historical documentation like censorship protocols, register cards and the surviving prints of re-edited foreign films in the study of national film histories. Similar research questions can be raised with regard to the Soviet import of American and French films in the 1920s.

Concluding my examination of the German-Soviet relations in film in the 1920s I would like to point out once again that Soviet film was shaped by the reception of foreign film to an extent that existing scholarship has not acknowledged, and that further study of this influence would help us better understand the dynamics of European film history.

## Selected bibliography

### Archival sources:

Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI)

Central State Archive of Literature and Art (SPb) (TSGALI)

Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI)

State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF)

Russian State Film Archive (Gosfilmofond)

### Literary works and critique:

Abramov, A., *Conrad Veidt* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1926 [second edition 1927])

Anoshchenko, Nikolai, *Kino v Germanii* [Cinema in Germany] (Moscow: Teakinopechat', 1927)

Arendt, Hanna, ed., *Illuminations. Walter Benjamin: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Verlag, 1969)

Arnheim, Rudolf, 'Ermler und Eisenstein', *Die Weltbühne*, 9, 25 February, 1930

— *Film Essays and Criticism* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997)

— *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957)

— *Kritiken und Aufsätze zum Film*, ed. by Helmut H. Diederichs (München: Hanser, 1977)

— *Schriften*, in 2 volumes (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1955)

Antonovich, G. <Karsovskii>, 'Pis'ma iz Berlina. Za ekranom', *Za svobodu!*, 15 May, 1923



Balázs, Béla, *Der sichtbare Mensch, oder, Die Kultur des Films* (Wien; Leipzig: Deutsch-Österreichischer Verlag, 2001)

— *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010)

— *Theory of the film: Character and growth of a new art* (London: D. Dobson, 1952)

Benjamin, Walter, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit: Drei Studien zur Kunstsoziologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969)

Boitler, Mikhail, *Reklama i kinoreklama* (Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1930)

Boitler, S., 'Neskol'ko myslei praktika', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 11-12, 1925, pp. 24-26.

Boltianskii, G.M., *Lenin i kino* (Moskva; Leningrad, 1925)

*Brat'ia Vasil'evy: Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1981)

Brooks, Louise, 'Pabst and Lulu', in *Pandora's Box* (Criterion, 2006)

Bulgakov, Mikhail, 'Chertovshchina', in Mikhail Bulgakov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, T.2 (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1992)

Coudenhove-Kalergi, Nikolaus R.N., *Pan-Europa* (Wien: Paneurope-Verlag, 1923)

Derzhavin, Kotsantin, *Conrad Veidt* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1926)

Efimov, Nikolai, *Georg Vil'gel'm Pabst* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1936)

Eisenstein, Sergei, 'Béla Forgets the Scissors,' in *S.M. Eisenstein: Selected Works, Vol. I, Writings 1922-1934*, ed. by R. Taylor (London: British Film Institute, 1988)  
 — *Film Form*, ed. by Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1949)  
 — *The Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975) – *Film Form* (New York-London: Harcourt Brace, 1977)

— “Luch“ i „Samogonka“ (Opyt opredeleniia ideologicheskoi nesostoyatel'nosti v oblasti tekhniki i formy', *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski*, 43 (1999)

Eisner, Lotte H., 'Der Einfluß des expressionistischen Stils auf die Ausstattung der deutschen ilme der zwanziger Jahre', in *Paris-Berlin: 1900-1933* (Munich: Prestel, 1979)

— *The Haunted Screen* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969)

Erofeev, Vladimir, 'O fil'makh „vtorogo sorta“ [About the second-rate films]', *Sovetskii ekran*, 29 (1926)

— *Kino-industriia Germanii* [Film industry of Germany] (Moskva: Kinopechat', 1926)

— 'Po "Kryshe mira" s kinoapparatom' (Moskva: Molodaia grvardiia, 1929)

Ermler, Fridrich, *Dokumenty, stat'i, vospominaniia* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1974)

Efimov, Nikolai, *Nemetskie kinoaktery* [German film actors] (Moscow: Teakinopechat', 1926)

Fel'dman, K., 'Iz zagranichnykh vpechatlenii', *Kino*, 1, 1922, pp. 26-29.

Forreger, Nikolai, 'Shtany i iubki [Trousers and skirts]', *30 dnei*, 4-5, 1927, n.p.

Fridland, N.N., *Segodniashnii byt germanskogo kino* [Today's life of German film] (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1930)

Gan, Aleksei, *Konstruktivizm* (Tver: Tverskoe izdatelstvo, 1922)

Gert, Valeska, *Ich bin eine Hexe: Kaleidoskop meines Lebens* (München: Franz Schneekluth Verlages, 1989)

Gul', Roman, 'O kinoraiionakh Berlina', *Sovetskii ekran*, 15-25 (1925)  
— Gul', Roman, 'Berlinskoe kinoletto', *Sovetskii ekran*, 18(28), 1925, p. 12.

Haas, Willy, *Der Kritiker als Mitproduzent: texte zum Film 1920-1930*, ed. by Wolfgang Jacobsen, Karl Prümm and Benno Wenz (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1991), pp. 158-162.

Hasek, Jaroslav, *The good soldier Schweik*, trans. by Paul Selver (London: Penguin, 1951)

Kaes, Anton, ed., *Kino-Debatte. Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909-1929* (Tübingen: Nimeyer, 1978)

— ed., *Weimarer Republik: Manifeste und Dokumente 1918-1933* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1983)

Kazmin, N., 'Emigrantskie gazety' [Émigré newspapers], *Pechat' i revolutsiia*, 4 (1923), pp. 65-66.

Kerr, Alfred, *Russische Filmkunst* (Berlin: E. Pollak, 1927)

— *Theaterkritiken*, ed. by Jürgen Behrens (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971)

Khersonskii, Khrisanf, 'Fact i reklama', *Sovetskoe kino*, 6-7, 1926, pp. 12-3;

— 'O poslednikh zagranichnykh lentakh', *Kino-zhurnal ARK*, 1, 1925, pp. 29-30.

Kolomarov, Boris, 'Veshch v kino', *Kino i Kul'tura*, 5-6 (1929)

Kuzmin, Mikhail, 'Zhizn' podo l'dom (Dnevik 1929 goda)', *Nashe Nasledie*, 93/94 (2012)

Kracauer, Siegfried, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947) – *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995)

Kravchenko, Galina, *Mozaika proshlogo* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1971)

Lebedev, Nikolai, *Po germanskoi kinematografii* [On German cinema] (Moskva: Kino-Moskva, 1924) – *Kino (Ego kratkaia istoriia, ego vozmozhnosti. Ego stroitel'stvo v sovetskom gosudarstve)* [Cinema. Its brief history, Its possibilities. Its development in the Soviet state] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Krasnaia Nov', 1924)

Lunacharsky Anatolii, 'Kino – velichaishee iz iskusstv' [Cinema – the greatest of all arts], *Krasnaia panorama*, 15 December (1926), n.p.

— *Lunacharsky o kino: Stat'i, Vyskazyvaniia, Stsenarii, Dokumenty* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1965)

Mazing Boris, *Bernhard Goetzke* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1928)

— *Werner Krauss* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1928)

— *Paul Wegener* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1928)

Münzenberg, Willi, *Erobert den Film! Winke aus der Praxis für proletarischer Filmpropaganda* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag, 1925)

Nabokov, Vladimir, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography revisited* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967)

Neratov, Aleksandr, 'Chetyre fil'my', *Kino-nedelia*, 16, 1924, p. 5.

Neverov, Aleksandr, 'Beseda s Fritzem Langom', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 10, 1925, p. 32.

Nielsen, Asta, *Bezmolvnaia muza* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1977)

Nikulin, L., 'O nekotorykh nemetskikh fil'makh', *Kino-nedelia*, 9, 1924, pp. 6-7.

Ofrosimov, Iurii, 'Bez nazvaniia', *Rul'*, 20 March, 1921, n.p.

Pozner, Vladimir, 'Frantzuzskii kinematograf v 1924 godu: Pis'mo iz Parizha', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 2, 1925, pp. 27-29.

P.-Vein., 'Doch' Raffke', *Kino-nedelia*, 19, 1924, p. 2.

Pudovkin, Vsevolod, *Selected Essays*, ed. by Richard Taylor (London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2006)

Richter, Hans, *Köpfe und Hinterköpfe* (Zürich: Arche Verlag, 1967)

Rosental, L., 'Nibelungi', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 6-7, 1926, p. 33.

Roth, Joseph, *Der neue Tag: Unbekannte politische Arbeiten 1919 bis 1927* (Wien, Berlin, Moskau) (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1970)

Shklovskii, Viktor, *Za 60 let. Raboty o kino* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1985)

— 'Oshibki i izobreteniiia', *Novyi LEF*, 11-12 (Moskva: Gosizdat, 1927), p. 29-33.

Shub, Esfir', *Zhizn' moia – kinematograf* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1972)

Shutko, K., 'Kino v Germanii', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 4-5, 1925, pp. 22-23.

— 'Ekspansiiia amerikanskoi kinoindustrii', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 1, 1925

Spengler, Oswald, *Politische Schriften* (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1933)

Tomashevsky, Boris, 'Foolishwives ("Splendid")', *Zhizn' iskusstva*, 10, 1924, p. 16.

Trauberg, L., 'Esche o "Zhenshchine s milliardami" i prochem', *Kino-nedelia*, 4, 1924, p. 3.

Turkin, Valentin, *Kino-akter* (Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1929)

Urazov, Izmail, *Asta Nielsen* (Moskva-Leninrad: : Teakinopechat', 1926)

— *Ossi Oswald* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1926)

— *Zhenni Porten* (Moskva-Leningrad: Teakinopechat', 1926)

Veronin, 'Kriticheskie zametki', *Kino*, 1, 1922, p. 12-13.

Veronin, 'Kriticheskie zametki', *Kino*, 1/5, 1923, pp. 10-11.

*Vokrug Sovkino* (Moskva: Teakinopechat', 1928)

Voloshinov, Valentin, *Freudism: kriticheskii ocherk* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'tvo, 1927)

Voronskii, Alexandr, *Literaturnie zapisi* (Moskva: Artel' pisatelei 'Krug', 1926)

Zetkin, Klara, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (London: Modern Books Limited, 1929)

<S-kii>, 'Khronika', *Kino*, 2, 1922, p. 28.

<V.T.>, 'Nemetskii rezhissior v Amerike', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 2, 1925, p. 33;

R., 'Kino i burzhuaznoe obshchestvo', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 3, 1925, p. 28.

<no author>, 'Put' v Rossiuu', *Kino*, 2, 1922, pp. 24-25.

<no author>, 'Iz inostrannoi kino-khroniki: Nemtsy o sovetskom kino', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 2, 1925, p. 30.

<no author>, ; 'Tsel'nikovshchina', *Kinoiskusstvo*, 1, 1922, n.p.

<no author>, 'Za granitse: Leon Deliuik o mirovoi kinematografii', *Kino*, 1, 1922, p. 24.

<no author>, 'Na prosmotrakh: "Anna Boleyn"', *Kino*, 3-7, 1923, p. 16.

<no author>, 'Russko-germanskoe kinoproizvodstvo v Germanii', *Kino-nedelia*, 8, 1924, p. 8.

<no author>, 'O "Kabinete doktora Kaligari"', *Kino*, 1-5, 1923, pp. 15-18.

<no author>, 'K obrazovaniuu vseevropeiskogo sindikata', *Kinozhurnal ARK*, 3, 1925, p. 26.

### **Research works:**

Abdul-Kasimova, Kh., ed. by, *Istoriia sovetskogo kino. 1917-1967: V 4 t., T. 1* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1969)

Agde, Günter und Alexander Schwarz, eds., *Die rote Traumfabrik: Meschrabpom-Film und Prometheus 1921-1936* (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek und Bertz+Fischer Verlag, 2012)

Ahdreesen, Walter, *Berlin und die russische Literatur der zwanziger Jahre (mit Beispielen aus den Beständen der Staatsbibliothek)* (Berlin: Staatsbibliothek – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Mitteilungen, 1983)

Andronova, I.O., ‘Rossiia i Germaniia: Paralleli tvorcestva (K voprosu o zaimstvovanii v sfere teatra i kino pervoi treti XX veka)’, in *Vestnik Gumanitarnogo Instituta TGU*, Toliatti, 1 (7) (2010), pp. 192-196.

Aurich, Rolf and Wolfgang Jacobsen, eds., *Kurt Pinthus. Filmpublizist* (München, 2008)

Bagrov, Petr, ‘Ob avtore knigi i nemnogo o ee geroe’, *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 84 (2007), pp. 267-274.

Bélach, Helga, and Wolfgang Jacobsen, eds., *Richard Oswald – Regisseur und Produzent* (München: edition text + kritik, 1990)

Bird, Robert, ‘Russkii simvolizm i razvitie kinoestetiki: nasledie Viacheslava Ivanova u A. Bakshi i Andr. Piotrovskogo’ [Russian symbolism and the development of film aesthetics], *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, No. 81 (2006)

Birett, Herbert, ed., *Verzeichnis in Deutschland gelaufener Filme: Entscheidungen d. Filmzensur: Berlin, Hamburg, München, Stuttgart: 1911-1920* (München; New York; London; Paris: Saur, 1980)

Bogomolov, Nikolai, *Mikhail Kuzmin: Stat'i i materialy* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 1995);



— ‘Vokrug “Foreli”’, *Mikhail Kuzmin i russkaia kul'tura XX veka: Tezisy i materialy konferentsii 15-17 Maia 1990 goda*, ed. by G.A. Morev (Leningrad: Muzei Anny Akhmatovoi v Fontannom dome, 1990)

Böhmig, Michaela, ‘Das „Emigranten“-Theater in Berlin im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Theaterkritik. Berichte und Rezensionen aus Berliner Tageszeitungen’, in *Russische Emigration in Deutschland 1918-1941. Leben im europäischen Bürgerkrieg*, ed. by Karl Schlögel (Berlin: Akademie, 1995), pp. 343-355.

Bratoliubov Sergei, *Na zare sovetskoi kinematografii: Iz istorii kinoorganizatsii Petrograda-Leningrada 1918-1925 godov* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1976)

Bulgakowa, Oksana, ed., *Die ungewöhnlichen Abenteuer des Dr Mabuse im Land der Bolschewiki* (Berlin: Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek, 1995)

—ed., *Eisenstein und Deutschland. Texte. Dokumente. Briefe* (Berlin, 1998)

— *Fabrika zhestov* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2005)

—‘Russische Film-Emigration in Deutschland: Schicksale und Filme’, in *Russische Emigration in Deutschland 1918-1941. Leben im europäischen Bürgerkrieg*, ed. by Karl Schlögel (Berlin: Akademie, 1995), pp. 379-398

—‘Sergei Eisenstein i ego “psikhologicheskii Berlin” – mezhdru psichoanalizom i strukturnoi psikhologii’, *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 2 (1988)

— *Sovetskii slukhoglaz: kino i ego organy chuvstv* [Soviet film and its organs of sense] (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2001)

— ed., *The White Rectangle. Kazimir Malevitch on Film* (Berlin: Potemkin Press, 1997; English Edition 2002).

— *FEKS. Die Fabrik des Exzentrischen Schauspielers* (Berlin: Potemkin Press, 1996)

Burchard, Amory and Ljudmila Duwidowitsch, *Das russische Berlin* (Berlin: Berliner Senat, 1994)

Canjels, Rudmer, *Distributing Silent Film Serials: Local forms, cultural transformation* (London: Routledge, 2011)

Cherchi Usai, Paolo, *Burning Passions: An Introduction to the Study of Silent Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1994)

Corey, Ross, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Dehl, Oleg, *Verratene Ideale. Zur Geschichte deutscher Emigranten in der Sowjetunion in den 30er Jahren* (Berlin: Trafo, 2000)

Deriabin, Alekandr, Daria Kruzhkova, eds., *Vertov, Dziga, Iz naslediiia, Vol.1, 2: Stat'i i vystupleniia* [From artistic heritage: Articles and speeches] (Moskva: Eisenstein Centre, 2008)

Dodenhoeft, Bettina, *“Laßt mich nach Rußland heim”. Russische Emigranten in Deutschland von 1918 bis 1945* (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, Bern: Lang, 1993)

Drews, Peter, ‘Russische Schriftsteller am Scheideweg. Berlin 1921–1923’, in *Anzeiger für slavische Philologie*, 12 (1981), pp. 119-132.

Egorova, N., ‘Nemetskie fil'my v sovetskom prokate. Katalog nemetskikh fil'mov, byvshikh v sovetskom prokate’ [Catalogue of German films distributed in the Soviet Union], in *Kino i vremia: Biulleten'*, Vypusk IV (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1965), pp. 380-387.

Elsaesser, Thomas, ‘National Subjects, International Style: Navigating Early German Cinema’, in *Before Caligari*, ed. by Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli (Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Imagine, 1990), pp. 338-354.

– *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000)

Fedyuk, Artiom V., *Sovetskaia sistema kinoproizvodstva i kinoprokata v 1920-30 gody* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Institut istorii Sibirskogo otdelenia RAN RF, Novosibirsk, 2009)

Fischer, Louis, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, Vol.1 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930)

Goriaeva, Tatiana M., *Istoriia sovetskoi politicheskoi tsenzury, 1917-1991* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Russian State University for Humanities, 2000)

Hagglund, Roger, 'The Adamovic -- Xodasevic polemics', in *Slavic and East European Journal*, 20 (1976)

Hake, Sabine, *The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany 1907-1933* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993)

Hartsough, Denise, 'Soviet film distribution and exhibition in Germany, 1921–1933', in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 5, 2 (1985), pp. 131-148.

Hicks, Jeremy, 'The International Reception of Early Soviet Sound Cinema: *Chapaev* in Britain and America', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 25, No. 2, June (2005), pp. 273-289.

Hochmuth, Dietmar, 'Obryvy i nerezkosti. Mezhdunarodnaia konferentsiia "Mezhrabpomfil'm i nemetsko-russkie sviazi v sfere kinematografa v 1920-e i 1930-e gody"', *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 112 (2011)

Hughes, Jon, "'Zivil ist allemal schadlich". Clothing in German-language culture of the 1920s', in *Neophilologus*, Vol. 88 (2004)

Iampol'skii, Mikhail, 'Sublimatsiia kak formoobrazovanie (Zametki ob odnoi neopublikovannoi stat'ie Sergeia Eisensteina)', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 43 (1999)

Iangirov, Rashit M., 'Man of Fortune: A sketch of Alexander Drankov's life after Russia', *Film History*, Volume 11, 2 (1999), pp. 164-174.

— 'Raby Nemogo': *Ocherki istoricheskogo byta russkikh kinematografistov za rubezhom, 1920-1930-e gody* ['The Slaves of the Silent': Essays on the life of Russian cineastes abroad: 1920-30s] (Moskva: Biblioteka-fond 'Russkoe Zarubezh'e' – Russkii put', 2007)

— *Drugoe kino: Stat'i po istorii otechestvennogo kino pervoi treti XX veka* [Other cinema: articles on the history of Russian film of the first third of XX century] (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2011)

— 'Kinomosty mezhdru Rossiei i Germaniei: Epokha Illiuzionov (1896-1919)', *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski*, 58 (2002), pp. 153-178.

Kaminskii, Semion D., *Dinamicheskie narusheniia deiatel'nosti kory golovnogo mozga* [Dynamic disorders of the cerebral cortex] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii meditsinskikh nauk SSSR, 1948)

Kasper Monrad and Maryanne Stevens, eds., *Hammershøi und Europa: ein Dänischer Künstler um 1900* (München: Prestel; København: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2012)

Kepley, Vance Jr., 'Cinefication': Soviet film exhibition in the 1920s', *Film History*, Volume 6, 2 (1994), pp. 262-277.

— 'Federal cinema: the Soviet film industry 1924-1932', *Film History*, Volume 8, 3 (1996), pp. 344-356.

— 'The Workers' International Relief and the cinema of the left 1921-1935', *Cinema Journal*, Vol.23, № 1 (1983), pp. 9-12.

*Kinovedcheskie zapiski. Nemetskii nomer* [two issues of the journal devoted to German cinema of 20's and 30's], No. 58, No. 59 (2002)

Kinter, Jürgen, *Arbeiterbewegung und Film (1895-1933). Zur Geschichte der Arbeiter- und Alltagskultur und der gewerkschaftlichen und sozialdemokratischen Kultur- und Medienarbeit* (Hamburg: Medienpädagogik-Zentrum, 1985)

Kleiman Naum, 'Intellektual'naia "pechurka"', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 86 (2008)

Korotkij, Viktor M., *Operatory i rezhissory russkogo igrovogo kino: 1897-1921* [Cinematographers and directors of Russian action film: 1897-1921] (Moskva: Institut Kinoiskusstva, 2008)

Kovaleva, Nataliia V., *Obraz sovetskoj Rossii v Veimarskoj Germanii* [An image of Soviet Russia in Weimar Germany] (unpublished doctoral thesis, Tomsk State University, 2003)

Lavrov, Aleksandr, Aleksandr Ospovat and Roman Timenchik, eds., *Ot slov k telu: Sbornik statei k 60-letiiu Yurii Tsiviana* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2010)

Lemberg, Efraim, *Kinopromyshlennost' SSSR* (Moscow, 1930)

Leyda, Jay, *Kino, a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960)

Lutskii, Valerii, *Istoriia astronomitcheskikh obshestvennih organisatsii v SSSR* (Moskva: Nauka, 1982)

Margolit, Evgenii, 'Kak v zerkale: Germaniia v sovetskom kino mezhdu 1920-1930 gg' [Like in the Mirror: Germany in Soviet Cinema between 1920s and 1930s], *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 59 (2002)

Mierau, Fritz, *Russen in Berlin – Literatur Malerei Theater Film 1918-1933* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1987)

– *Russen in Berlin: Eine kulturelle Begegnung; 1918–1933* (Weinheim; Berlin, 1988).

Miller, Martin A., *Freud and the Bolsheviks: Psychoanalysis in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998)

Milyavskii, V., Duganov, R., Radzishhevskiy, V., ‘Neizvestnye stat’i Vladimira Mayakovskogo’, *Voprosy literatury*, № 8 (1970)

Murray, Bruce, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic. From ‘Caligari’ to ‘Kuhle Wampe’* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990)

Nusinova, Nataliia, ‘Kogda my v Rossiiu vernemsia...’: *Russkoe kinematograficheskoe zarubezh’e (1918-1939)* [‘When we come back to Russia...’ Russian film community abroad (1918-1939)] (Moskva: Eisenstein-centre, 2003)

Ogorodnikova, Olga A., *Russko-nemetskie kulturnye sviazi v kontse XIX – nachale XX v.* (Unpublished doctoral thesis; Moskovskii gorodskoi pedagogicheskii universitet, 2002).

Oltmer, Jochen, *Migration und Politik in der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht Verlag, 2005)

Osipov, Nikolai E., ‘Psikhologicheskie i psikhopatologicheskie vzgliady Sigm. Freud’a v nemetskoj literature 1907 goda’, in *Zhurnal nevropatologii i psikhiiatrii im. S.S. Korsakova*, nos. 1-2, 1908

Piliver, I.S., V.G. Dorogokupets, *Sistema deistvuiushchego kino-zakonodatel’stva RSFSR* [The actual system of the state film organisation in the RSFSR] (Leningrad; Moskva: Tea-kino-pechat’, 1929)

Pozner, Valerie, 'Shklovskii/Eisenstein – dvadsatye gody. Istoriia plodotvornogo neponimaniia', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 46 (2000), pp. 179-188

Schöning, Jörg, ed., *Triviale Tropen: Exotische Reise- und Abenteuerfilme aus Deutschland, 1919-1939* (München: Text+Kritik, 1997)

Thompson, Kristin, 'Government Policies and Practical Necessities in the Soviet Cinema of the 1920s', in *Red Screen: Policies, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema*, ed. by Anna Lawton (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 19-41.

Petersen, Vibeke Rützou, *Women and Modernity in Weimar Germany: Reality and its Representation in Popular Fiction* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001)

Traub, Hans and Lavies, Hans Wilhelm, eds., *Das Deutsche Filmschriftum – Eine Bibliographie* (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1940)

Raeff, Marc, 'Emigration – welche, wann, wo? Kontexte der russischen Emigration in Deutschland 1920-1941', in *Russische Emigration in Deutschland 1918-1941. Leben im europäischen Bürgerkrieg*, ed. by Karl Schlögel (Berlin, 1995), pp. 17-31.

Raev, Mark I., *Rossiiia za rubezhom: Istoriia kultury russkoi emigratsii 1919-1939* [Russia abroad: The cultural history of Russian émigrés in 1919-1939] (Moskva: Progress-Akademiia, 1994).

Ratgauz, Mikhail, 'M. Kuzmin – kinozritel', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 13 (1992), pp. 52–82.

Richmond, Steven, 'The Conditions of the Contemporary: The Censors and censoring of Soviet Theater, 1923-1927', in *Russian History/Histoire Russe*, 27.1, (2000), pp.1-56.

Richter, Hans, *Köpfe und Hinterköpfe* (Zürich: Arche Verlag, 1967)

Rimscha, Hans von, *Der russische Bürgerkrieg und die russische Emigration 1917–1921* (Jena: Frommann, 1924)

Robinson, David, 'Alexander Shiriaev: Dance to Film', *Film History*, Volume 21, 4 (2009), pp. 301-310.

Ronen, Omry, 'Balázs', *Zvezda*, 3 (2011), pp. 230-238.

*Russkaia emigratsia: Zhurnaly i sborniki na russkom iazike (1920-1980): Svodnii ukazatel' statei* [Russian-language journals and editions of Russian émigrés in 1920-1980: catalogue of articles], ed. by T. Gladkova and T. Osorgina (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Slaves, 1988)

Riabchikova, Nataliia, 'Proletkino: Ot Goskino do Sovkino', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 43 (2010), pp. 90-108.

Salzman, Stephanie S., *Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union: Rapallo and After, 1922-1934, Vol.29 Royal Historical Society Studies in History* (London: Boydell Press, 2013)

Sargean, Amy, *Vsevolod Pudovkin: Classic Films of the Soviet Avant-Garde* (London; New York: I.B.Taurus Publishers, 2000)

Saunders, Thomas J., *Hollywood in Berlin. American Cinema and Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992)

— 'The German-Russian film (mis)alliance (Derussa): Commerce and politics in German-Soviet cinema ties', *Film History*, Volume 9, 2 (1997), pp. 168-188.

Scandura, Claudia, 'Das russische Berlin 1921–1924. Die Verlage', in *Zeitschrift für Slavistik*, 32 (1987), pp. 754–762.



Schlegel, Hanns-Joachim, 'Terra Incognita: Obrazi Rossii u Georga Vil'gel'ma Pabsta', *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski*, 33 (1997), pp. 368-380.

— 'Nemetskie impul'sy dlia sovetskikh kulturfil'mov 20-kh godov', *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski*, 58 (2002), pp. 368-379.

Schlögel, Karl, 'Das "andere Rußland". Zur Wiederentdeckung der Emigrationsgeschichte in der Sowjetunion', in *Die Umwertung der sowjetischen Geschichte*, ed. by Dietrich Geyer (Göttingen, 1991)

— *Chronik russischen Lebens in Deutschland 1918–1941* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1999)

— *Der Große Exodus. Die russische Emigration und ihre Zentren 1917 bis 1941* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1994)

— *Berlin, Ostbahnhof Europas. Russen und Deutsche in ihrem Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1998)

Schneunemann, Dietrich, 'Activating the Differences: Expressionist Film and Early Weimar Cinema', in *Expressionist Film: New perspectives*, ed. by D. Schneunemann (London: Boydell&Brewer, 2003)

Schwarz, Alexander, 'Von der Hungerhilfe zum roten Medienkonzern', in *Die rote Traumfabrik: Meschrabpom-Film und Prometheus 1921-1936*, ed. by Günter Agde und Alexander Schwarz (Berlin: Deutsche Kinemathek, 2012)

Stollery, Martin, 'Eisenstein, Shub and the gender of the author as producer', *Film History*, Vol. 14, 1 (2002), pp. 87-99.

Tatar, Maria, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995)

Taylor, Richard, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

Thompson, Kristin, 'National or international films? The European debate during the 1920s', *Film History*, Volume 8, 3 (1996), pp. 96-281.

Tode, Thomas, 'Dziga Vertov i La Sarraz', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 87 (2008), pp. 108-117.

Tomashevskiy, Boris, 'Foolishwives' ("Splendid") [Kinofil'm], *Zhizn' iskusstva*, 10 (1924), p.16

Tsivian, Yuri, 'Asta Nielsen v zerkale russkoi kul'turn' [Asta Nielsen in the mirror of the Russian culture], *Kinovedchskie zapiski*, 40 (1998)

— 'Between the old and the new: Soviet film culture in 1918-1924', *Griffithiana*, XIX, 55-56, September 1996, pp. 14-63.

— 'Caligari in Russia: German Expressionism and Soviet Film Culture', in *Kuenstlerischer Austausch / Artistic Exchange: Akten des XXVIII. Internationalen Kongresses fuer Kunstgeschichte*, ed. by Thomas W. Gaethens, Berlin, 15.-20. Juli 1992 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992-1994), pp. 153-64.

— *Early Cinema in Russia and Its Cultural Reception* (New York, London: Routledge, 1994)

— 'Leonid Kinskey, the Hollywood foreigner', *Film History*, Volume 11, 2 (1999), pp. 175-180.

— 'Eisenstein and Russian Symbolist Culture: An unknown script of October', in *Eisenstein Rediscovered*, ed. by Ian Christien and Richard Taylor (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 79-109.

— *Istoricheskaia recepsiia kino. Kinematograph v Rossii 1869-1930* [Historical reception of film. Cinema in Russia 1896-1930] (Riga: Zinatne, 1991)

— 'Russia, 1913: Cinema in the Cultural Landscape', *Griffithiana*, 1994, vol. 50, pp. 125-148. Reprinted in: Richard Abel, *Silent Cinema* (Rutgers UP, 1996), pp. 194-216.

— *Silent Witnesses: Russian Films, 1908-1919* (London: British Film Institute, 1989)

— ‘The Wise and Wicked Game: Re-editing and Soviet Film Culture of the 1920s’, *Film History*, Vol. 8, 3 (1996), pp. 327-343.

— ‘Two ‘Stylists’ of the Teens: Franz Hofer and Evgenii Bauer’, in *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades*, ed. by Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), pp. 264-276.

— ‘Zhest revolutsii, ili Shklovskii kak putanik’ [Gesture of Revolution, or Shklovskii as a confusing person], *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, No. 92 (2008)

Urban, Thomas, *Vladimir Nabokov – Blaue Abende in Berlin* (Berlin, 1999)

Uriccio, William, “The Past as Prologue? The ‘Kulturfilm’ before 1945”, in *Blicke in die Welt*, ed. by H. B. Heller, P. Zimmermann (Konstanz: UVK Universitätsverlag, 1995)

Vette, Volfram, ‘Obrazi Rossii u nemtsev v XX veke. O sostoianii issledovanii’ [German’s images of Russia in XX century], in *Rossia i Germaniia*, Vypusk 1 (Moskva: Nauka, 1998)

Vishnevskii, Veniamin, Aleksandr Deriabin, eds., *Letopis’ rossiiskogo kino: 1863-1939* [Chronicle of Russian film: 1863-1939] (Moskva: Materik, 2004)

— ed., *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil’m’y: Annotirovannyi catalog v 4 t. T.1. Nemye fil’m’y (1918-1935)* [Soviet action films: Annotated catalogue in 4 volumes. V.1: Silent films] (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1961)

Volkman, Hans-Erich, *Die russische Emigration in Deutschland. 1919–1929* (Würzburg: Holzner, 1966)

Williams, Robert C., *Culture in Exile. Russian Emigrés in Germany. 1881–1941* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 1972)

Wurm, Barbara, ‘Von Mechanik des Gehirns zu „Vierzig Herzen“: Meschrabpom-Film und der Kulturfilm’, in *Die rote Traumfabrik. Meschrabpom-Film und*

*Prometheus 1912-1936*, ed. by Agde, Günther und Alexander Schwarz (Berlin: Bertz+Fischer; Deutsche Kinemathek, 2012)

Youngblood, Denise J., *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

— *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918-1935* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980)

## Filmography

### German films:

Abenteuer der schönen Dorette, 1921, dir. Otto Rippert

Die Abenteuerin von Monte Carlo, 1921, dir. Adolf Gärtner

Der Absturz, 1922, dir. Ludwig Wolff

Alkohol, 1919/1920, dir. E.A. Dupont, Alfred Lind

Alraune, 1928, dir. Henrik Galeen

Anna Boleyn, 1920, dir. Ernst Lubitsch

Asphalt, 1929, Joe May

Auferstehung. Katjuscha Maslowa, 1923, dir. Friedrich Zelnik

Die Büchse der Pandora, 1929, dir. G.W.Pabst

Bardame 1922, dir. Johannes Guter

Berlin – Die Sinfonie der Grossstadt, 1927, dir. Walter Ruttmann

Blitzzug der Liebe, 1925, dir. Johannes Guter

Brennendes Meer/Sterbende Völker, 1922, dir. Robert Reinert

Brigantenrache, 1922, dir. Reinhard Bruck

Die Brüder Karamasoff, 1920, dir. Carl Froelich

Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari, 1920, dir. Robert Wiene

Carmen, 1918, dir. Ernst Lubitsch

Die Carmen von St. Pauli, 1928, dir. Erich Waschneck

Christian Wahnschaffe, 1920, dir. Urban Gad

Cyankali, 1930, dir. Hans Tintner

Dürfen wir schweigen?, 1926, dir. Richard Oswald

Danton, 1921, dir. Dimitri Buchowetzki

Das Diadem der Zarin, 1922, dir. Richard Löwenbein

Desperados, 1919, dir. Toni Attenberger

Die Dreigroschenoper, 1931, dir. G.W. Pabst

Dr Mabuse, der Spieler, 1922, dir. Fritz Lang

Dubrowsky, der Räuber Atamann, 1921, dir. Pyotr Chardynin

Die Ehe der Fürstin Demidoff, 1921, dir. Fridrich Zelnik

Ein Blick in die Tiefe der Seele, 1923, dir. Curt Thomalla

Ein hochherrschaftlicher Diener, 1918, dir. Curt Wolfram Kiesslich

Erdgeist, 1923, dir. Leopold Jessner

Das Erwachen des Weibes, 1927, dir. Fred Sauer

Der Fall Rosentopf, 1916/1917, dir. Ernst Lubitsch

Frühlingsfluten, 1924, dir. Nikolai Malikov

Fräulein Julie, 1921, dir. Felix Basch

Die Frau mit dem Weltrekord, 1927, dir. Erich Waschneck

Die freudlose Gasse, 1925, dir. G.W.Pabst

Die gefundene Braut, 1925, dir. Rochus Gliese

Die Geheimnisse des Zirkus Barré, 1920, dir. Harry Piel

Geheimnisse einer Seele, 1926, dir. G.W.Pabst

Das Geld auf der Strasse, 1921, dir. Reinhold Schünzel

Die Geliebte von Roswolskys, 1921, dir. Felix Basch

Gesetze der Liebe // Anders als die Andern, 1927/1919, dir. Richard Oswald

Gestohlene Seele, 1918, dir. Carl Boese

Das Glück der Irren, 1919, dir. Johannes Guter

Der Golem, 1920, dir. Carl Boese, Paul Wegener

Die grüne Manuela, 1923, dir. E.A. Dupont

Gräfin Walewska, 1920, dir. Otto Rippert

Der Graf von Cagliostro, 1919/1920, dir. Reinhold Schünzel

Die Hafenlore, 1921, dir. Wolfgang Neff

Hamlet, 1921, dir. Svend Gade, Heinz Schall

Hanna und der Stein, 1928, dir. Kurt Lewin

Haschisch, das Paradies der Hölle, 1921, dir. Reinhard Bruck

Der Herr der Bestien, 1921, dir. Ernst Wendt

Die Herrin der Welt, 1919, dir. Joe May

Ilona, 1921, dir. Robert Dinesen

Das indische Grabmal, 1921, dir. Joe May

Infamie, 1922, dir. Emil Waldmann

Jenseits der Straße, 1929, dir. Leo Mittler

Kaiserin Elisabeth von Österreich, 1920, dir. Rolf Raffé

Königin Karoline von England, 1922/1923, dir. Rolf Raffé

Der kleine Napoleon/So sind die Männer, 1922, dir. Georg Jacoby

Die Kreuzersonate, 1922, dir. Friedrich Zelnik

Kreuzzug des Weibes, 1926, dir. Martin Berger

Kwannon von Okadera, 1920, dir. Carl Froelich

Lady Hamilton, 1921, dir. Richard Oswald

Landstrasse und Großstadt, 1921, dir. Carl Wilhelm

Des Lebens und der Liebe Wellen, 1921, dir. Lorenz Bätz

Der letzte Mann, 1924, dir. F.W.Murnau

Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney, 1927, dir. G.W. Pabst

Lucrezia Borgia, 1922, dir. Richard Oswald

Ludwig der Zweite, König von Bayern, 1920, dir. Rolf Raffé

Lyda Ssanin, 1922, dir. Fridrich Zelnik

Der müde Tod, 1921, dir. Fritz Lang

Die Macht der Finsternis, 1923, dir. Conrad Wiene

Madame DuBarry, 1919, dir. Ernst Lubitsch

Madame Lu, die Frau für diskrete Beratung, 1929, dir. Franz Hofer

Madame Récamier. Des großen Talma letzte Liebe, 1920, dir. Joseph Delmont

Madame X und «die schwarze Hand», 1920, dir. Fred Sauer

Der Mandarin, 1918, dir. Fritz Freisler

Der Mann ohne Nerven, 1924, dir. Gérard Bourgeois, Harry Piel

Marionetten, 1915, dir. Richard Löwenbein

Die Marquise von O., 1919, dir. Paul Legband

Meineid, Ein Paragraph, der Menschen tötet, 1929, dir. Georg Jacoby

Metropolis, 1927, dir. Fritz Lang

Michael, 1924, dir. C.T. Dreyer

Das Milliardenouper, 1923, dir. Victor Janson

Miss Beryll, die Laune eines Millionärs, 1921, dir. Friedrich Zelnik

Das Moral, 1926, dir. Willi Wollf

Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück, 1929, dir. Phil Jutzi

Die Nibelungen, 1924, dir. Fritz Lang

Nosferatu, Eine Symphonie des Grauens, 1921, dir. F.W.Murnau

Orlacs Hände, Die Nacht des Grauens, 1924, dir. Robert Wiene



Othello, 1922, dir. Dimitri Buchowetzki

Paganini, 1922/1923, dir. Heinz Goldberg

Das Panzergewölbe, 1926, dir. Lupu Pick

Pariserinnen, 1921, dir. Léo Lasko

Der Pfarrer von Kirchfeld, 1926, dir. Luise Fleck, Jakob Fleck

Pietro, der Korsar, 1925, dir. Artur Robison

Praschnas Geheimnis, 1922, dir. Ludwig Baetz

Professor Nissens seltsamer Tod, 1916/1917, dir. Einar Zangenberg, Edmund Edel

Psicha, die Tänzerin Katharina der Großen, 1922, dir. Nikolai Malikoff

Raskolnikow, 1923, dir. Robert Wiene

Der Reiter ohne Kopf, 1920/21, dir. Harry Piel

Die Rothausgasse, 1928, dir. Richard Oswald

Rutschbahn, 1928, dir. Richard Eichberg

Die Sühne, 1917, dir. Emmerich Hanus

Sappho, 1921, dir. Dimitri Buchowetzki

Satansketten, 1921, dir. Léo Lasko

Der Schädel der Pharaonentochter, 1920, dir. Otz Tollen

Schatten — Eine nächtliche Halluzinazion, 1923, dir. Arthur Robison

Der Schirm mit dem Schwan, 1916, dir. Rudolf Biebrach

Schlagende Wetter, 1923, dir. Karl Grune,

Schloß Vogelöd, 1921, dir. F.W.Murnau

Der Schrecken der roten Mühle, 1921, dir. Carl Boese

Die Schreckensnächte auf Schloß Rochester, 1922, dir. Conrad Wiene

Der Schrei des Gewissens, 1920, dir. Eugen Illés

Die Schuhe einer schönen Frau, 1922, dir. Emmerich Haus

Schuldig, 1927, dir. Johannes Mayer

Das schwarze Chauffeur, 1921, dir. unidentified, Bayerische Film-Gesellschaft Fett & Wiesel (München)

Das Schwarze Kuvert, 1922, dir. Harry Piel

Schwarzwaldmädel, 1920, dir. Arthur Wellin

Das Schweigen am Starnbergersee. Schicksalstage Ludwig II., König von Bayern, 1921, dir. Rolf Raffé

Se. Exellenz der Revisor, 1922, dir. Fridrich Zelnik

Sechs Mädchen suchen Nachtquartier, 1928, dir. Hans Behrendt

Seelenverkäufer, 1919, dir. Carl Boese

Sein großer Fall, 1926, dir. Fritz Wendhausen

Sodom und Gomorrha, 1922, dir. Mihály Kertész

Spielereien einer Kaiserin, 1929, dir. Vladimir Strizhevskii

Die Spinnen, 1919, dir. Fritz Lang

Sprengbagger 1010, 1929, dir. Carl Ludwig Achaz-Duisberg

Der Sprung ins Leben, 1923, dir. Johannes Guter

Die stärkere Macht, 1920, dir. Emil Waldmann

Störtebeker, 1919, dir. Ernst Wendt

Steinach-Film, 1922, dir. Nicholas Kaufmann, Curt Thomalla

Die Straße, 1923, dir. Karl Grune

Der Student of Prag, 1913, dir. Stellan Rye

Die Sufragette, 1913, dir. Urban Gad

Sumurun, 1920, dir. Ernst Lubitsch

Sylvester, 1923, dir. Lupu Pick

Tabu, 1931, dir. F.W.Murnau

Tagebuch meiner Frau, 1920, dir. Paul L. Stein

Tanja, die Frau an der Kette, 1921, dir. Fridrich Zelnik

Taras Bulba, 1924, dir. Vladimir Strizhevskii

Die Teppichknüpferin von Bagdad, 1920, dir. Edmund Linke

Der Tod des Anderen, 1915/1917, dir. Willy Zein

Der Totenklaus, 1921, dir. Richard Löwenbein

Treibende Kraft, 1921, dir. Zoltán Nagy

Der Unheimliche, 1921, dir. Ernst Wendt

Unter Räubern und Bestien, 1921, dir. Ernst Wendt

Unus, der Weg in die Welt, 1921, dir. Harry Piel

Vanina, 1922, dir. Arthur von Gerlach

Varieté, 1925, dir. E.A. Dupont

Vendetta, 1919, dir. Georg Jacoby

Veritas Vincit, 1918, dir. Joe May

Von Morgens bis Mitternachts, 1920, dir. Karlheinz Martin

Das Wachsfignurenkabinett, 1924, dir. Paul Leni

Was ist los im Zirkus Beely?, 1926, dir. Harry Piel

Die Weber, 1927, dir. Friedrich Zelnik

Die weisse Hölle vom Pitz Palü, 1935, dir. G.W.Pabst, Arnold Fanck

Wie ich Detektiv wurde, 1914, dir. Joe May

Wogen des Schicksals, 1918, dir. Joe May

Wunder der Schöpfung, 1925, dir. Hanns Walter Kornblum, Johannes Meyer

Zehn Milliarden Volt, 1921, dir. Adolf Gärtner

Zhivoi Trup (Der lebende Leichnam), 1928, dir. Fiodor Otsep

**Other films:**

Aelita, 1924, dir. Yakov Protazanov

Bronenosets Potemkin (Battleship Potemkin), 1925, dir. Sergei Eisenstein

Chelovek s kinoapparatom (Man with the Movie Camera), 1929, dir. Dziga Vertov

Chudotvorets, 1922, dir. Alexandr Panteleev

General'naia liniia/Staroe i novoe (The Old and the New; The General Line), 1929, dir. Sergei Eisenstein

Intolerance, 1916, dir. D.W.Griffith

J'accuse, 1919, dir. Abel Gance

Kinoglaz, 1924, dir. Dziga Vertov

Maharadjahens yndlingshustru (The Maharaja's Favourite Wife) 1917-1926, dir. A.W. Sandberg

Mekhanika golovnogo mozga (Mechanics of the Brain), 1926, dir. Vsevolod Pudovkin

Moi Syn (Das Kind des Anderen), 1928, dir. Evgenii Cherviakov

Monkey's Paw, 1923, dir. H. Manning Haynes

Morozko, 1924, dir. Iurii Zheliabuzhskii

Oblomok Imperii (The Fragment of the Empire), 1929, dir. Friedrich Ermler

Papirosnitsa iz Mossel'proma (The Cigarette Girl of Mossel'prom), 1924, dir. Iurii Zheliabuzhskii

Polikushka, 1919/1922, dir. Alexandr Sanin

Potomok Tchingiz-Khana (Storm over Asia), 1928, dir. Vsevolod Pudovkin

The Red Lantern, 1919, dir. Albert Capellani

Salamandra (Salamander), 1928, dir. Grigorii Roshal'

Skorb' beskonechnaia, 1922, dir. Alexandr Panteleev

Tret'ia Meshchanskaia (Bed and Sofa), 1927, dir. Abram Room

The Virgin of Stamboul, 1920, dir. Tod Browning

The Woman God Forgot, 1917, dir. Cecil B. DeMille