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Published in the USA  
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)  
Has been issued since 2005  
ISSN 1994-4160  
E-ISSN 1994-4195  
2023. 19(1): 71-96

DOI: 10.13187/me.2023.1.71  
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



## Western Cinematography on the Pages of the *Soviet Screen* Magazine of 1925–1927

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### Abstract

The subject of Western cinema on the pages of the *Soviet Screen* magazine in 1925–1927 was extensive and varied. Due to rather significant creative freedoms in the *Soviet Screen* in 1925–1927, photographs of Western movie stars (including photos on the covers of magazines), rather neutral or even positive biographies of Hollywood and European actors and directors, notes on filming and film distribution, reviews of Western films, etc. were widely published in 1925–1927. Although, of course, there were also ideologically biased materials on the pages of this magazine.

Based on the analysis (in the context of the historical, socio-cultural and political situation, etc.) of the first years of the existence of the *Soviet Screen* magazine (1925–1927), the authors came to the conclusion that materials on Western cinema during this period can be divided into the following types:

- ideologized articles emphasizing criticism of bourgeois cinema and its harmful influence on the audience (this included materials on censorship and perception of Western films by the Soviet public);
- biographies and creative portraits of Western actors and directors (often neutrally or positively evaluating these filmmakers);
- reviews of Western films (often positive);
- reviews of Western national cinematographies (here, as a rule, criticism of bourgeois cinematography was combined with a positive assessment of works and trends ideologically acceptable to the USSR);
- articles about Western newsreels (with approaches similar to reviews of national cinemas);
- articles about foreign film technology, studios and cinemas (as a rule, ideologically neutral, containing calls to adopt technically advanced Western experience, in particular, sound film technology);
- short informational materials about events in foreign cinema, about everyday details of the life of movie stars.

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

### 1. Introduction

In most cases, topics related to the history of the *Soviet Screen* magazine were considered by researchers in a fragmentary way, without any attempts at a full-fledged content analysis (Bogatyreva, 2017; Fedorov, 2022; Golovskoy, 2011; Golovskoy, Rimberg, 1986; Mishchenko, 2012; Orlov, 2011;

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Shishkin, 2020; Tselykh, 2021; Voronova, 2019; Zhidkova, 2014), therefore, a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis of the transformation of film criticism concepts of interpretations of Western cinematography in the *Soviet Screen* magazine – from the year of its foundation (1925) to the year of the end of its Soviet period (1991) is very relevant – both in film criticism and cultural studies, and in historical, philosophical, political science, sociological aspects.

It is in these contexts that we analyze the evolution of film-critical interpretations of works of foreign cinema in the *Soviet Screen* magazine.

We see the applied significance of the study in the fact that the results obtained can be used in the scientific activities of film critics, culturologists, art critics, sociologists, historians, scientists studying media culture; will be useful to teachers, graduate students, students, a wide range of audiences interested in this topic.

*Here we intend to proceed from the following periods of the journal's development:*

1925 – 1927: the initial period of the development of the magazine, the stage of relative creative freedom of Soviet film criticism, when foreign topics often accounted for up to half of the text of each magazine;

1928 – 1930: the period of the journal's reaction to the results First All-Union Conference of Film and Photo Workers (December 12-17, 1927), First All-Union Party Conference on Cinema (convened by the Central Committee of the CPSU(b), March 15-21, 1928 and approved the Resolution “Results of the construction of cinema in the USSR and the tasks of Soviet cinematography”); meeting in the Glavrepertkom to revise the fund of films and clear the screen of “ideologically harmful” films (April 7, 1928), after which foreign topics in the magazine were gradually reduced to a minimum. Here we take into account that at the end of 1929 the *Soviet Screen* was transformed into *Cinema and Life*, and at the beginning of 1931 it was merged with the magazine *Cinema and Culture* under the name *Proletarian Cinema*, and from that year it began to count *Cinema Art* journal (Fedorov, 2022; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2022; Levitskaya, 2022).

1939–1941: a period of ideological unification, when the volume of materials devoted to Western cinema was minimal (during these years the magazine resumed its publication under the name *Soviet Cinema Screen*);

1957–1968: the “thaw” stage in the development of the revived *Soviet Screen* magazine (when the volume of articles on Western cinema began to increase again and was by no means always associated with a negative assessment of foreign works of cinema art);

1969–1985: a period of “stagnation” when, after the international “détente” of the 1970s was replaced by a new stream of the “cold war” of the early 1980s, a negative assessment of Western films was activated in the magazine (although the works of “progressive foreign screen masters” still received highly appreciated by Soviet film critics);

1986–1991: the period of “perestroika”, when on the pages of the *Soviet Screen* there was a reassessment of attitudes towards Western cinema in many respects.

The subject of Western cinema on the pages of the *Soviet Screen* magazine in the 1920s was extensive and varied. Due to rather significant creative freedoms in the *Soviet Screen* in 1925–1927, photographs of Western movie stars (including photos on the covers of magazines), ideologically neutral or positive biographies of Hollywood and European actors and directors, notes on the shooting of films and film distribution, reviews on Western films, etc.

Of course, in reviews of Western films and in discussions about the current state of the cinema process in Hollywood and Europe, there were also propaganda clichés that opposed bourgeois commercial film interests to proletarian cinema based on a Marxist class approach. But in general, the *Soviet Screen* of the 1920s tried to more or less objectively evaluate the works of Western cinema.

## 2. Materials and methods

The research methodology consists of key philosophical provisions on the connection, interdependence and integrity of the phenomena of reality, the unity of the historical and the social in cognition; scientific, film studies, sociocultural, culturological, hermeneutical, semiotic approaches proposed in the works of leading scientists (Aristarco, 1951; Aronson, 2003; bakhtin, 1996; Balazs, 1935; Bazin, 1971; Bibler, 1990; Casetti, 1999; Demin, 1966; Eco, 1975; 1976; Eisenstein, 1964; Gledhill, Williams, 2000; Hess, 1997; Hill, Gibson, 1998; Khrenov, 2006; 2011; Kuleshov, 1987; Lotman, 1973; 1992; 1994; Mast, Cohen 1985; Metz, 1974; Razlogov, 1984; Sokolov, 2010; Stam, 2000; Villarejo, 2007 and others).

The project is based on a research content approach (identifying the content of the process under study, taking into account the totality of its elements, the interaction between them, their nature, turning to facts, analyzing and synthesizing theoretical conclusions, etc.), on a historical approach-consideration of the concrete historical development of the declared theme of the project.

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

### 3. Discussion and results

In this article, we will focus on the analysis of materials about foreign cinema published in the *Soviet Screen* magazine from 1925 to 1927, when its managing editors were: Kirill Shutko (1884–1941), Alexander Kurs (1892–1937), Vyacheslav Uspensky (1880–1929) and Nikolai Yakovlev (we, alas, could not find his life dates either in the archives or in other publications).

At [Table 1](#) statistics are presented reflecting the changes (from 1925 to 1927) of the titles of the journal, organizations, the organ of which the journal was, its circulation, periodicity, the names of the editors of the journal and time periods.

**Table 1.** Magazine *Soviet Screen/Cinema and Life* (1925-1930): statistical data

Year of issue	Magazine title	Publisher	Magazine Circulation (in thousands of copies)	Magazine periodicity (issues per year)	Editors the magazine
1925	<i>Soviet Screen</i>	Russian Film Publishing House, Cinema Printing	35–100	39	Kirill Shutko (1884–1941) № 1-23 Alexander Kurs (1892–1937) № 24-39
1926	<i>Soviet Screen</i>	Cinema Printing	45–80	52	Alexander Kurs (1892–1937) № 1-28. Vyacheslav Uspensky (1880-1929) № 29-37. Nikolai Yakovlev № 38-52.
1927	<i>Soviet Screen</i>	Theater & Cinema Printing	70	52	Nikolai Yakovlev № 1-52.
1928	<i>Soviet Screen</i>	Theater & Cinema Printing	60–80	52	Nikolai Yakovlev № 1-17. Vasily Russo (1881–1942) № 18-27. Vyacheslav Uspensky (1880–1929) № 28-52.
1929	<i>Soviet Screen</i>	Theater & Cinema Printing	25–80	45	Vyacheslav Uspensky (1880–1929) № 1-15. Jacob Rudoy (1894–1978) № 16-45.

1930	<i>Cinema and Life</i>	Theater & Cinema Printing, Earth and Factory	45–50	36	Jacob Rudoy (1894–1978) № 1-36.
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The first issue of the *Soviet Screen* was published on March 24, 1925, and soon its orientation towards the balance between the communist ideology (articles and notes about important events and Soviet films from this point of view) and the orientation towards the “New Economic People”, which was keenly interested in photos of foreign movie stars, short notes about Western cinema without any “anti-bourgeois revelations”.

On June 18, 1925, the Resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist party “On the policy of the party in the field of fiction” was adopted, which emphasized that “just as the class struggle does not stop in our country in general, it certainly does not stop on the literary front. ... Communist criticism must mercilessly fight against counter-revolutionary manifestations in literature” (*Pravda, 1925; News..., 1925: 8-9*).

And in July 1926 the Glavrepertkom came up with an initiative to expand censorship, which was designed to combat the penetration of enemy ideas into cinema: 1) class conciliation; 2) pacifism; 3) anarcho-individualism; 4) banditry and romance of criminality; 5) idealization of hooliganism and bullying; 6) an apology for drunkenness and drug addiction; 7) boulevardism (cheap sensation, savoring love affairs and adventures of the “higher” society, poeticization of night chantans, etc.; 8) philistinism (idealization of the “holiness” of the bourgeois family, comfort, slavery of a woman, private property, etc. .); 9) decadence and psychopathology...); 10) crude Sovietization, which has the opposite effect; 11) malicious disregard and perversion of Soviet life and the cultivation of bourgeois salonism; 12) kulak-populist idealization of the old village (*Glavrepertkom, 1926: 57-64*).

In the spirit of these ideological changes, the First All-Russian Conference of Filmmakers-Political Enlighteners took place on November 2-13, 1926.

However, since all events of this kind took place against the backdrop of a sharp struggle at the very top of the Soviet power structures (between I. Stalin, L. Trotsky, L. Kamenev, G. Zinoviev, etc.), which ultimately did not give the Power the possibility of censoring detail on level of magazines (especially not of a political, but of a cinematic orientation), this did not affect the work of the *Soviet Screen* in any serious way: from March 1925 to December 1927, the pages of the magazine were generously given to photographs of Western movie stars and often completely neutral, and even laudatory articles about foreign cinema, regular reviews of the turbulent foreign and often extravagant film life.

Based on the content analysis of the texts published in the *Soviet Screen* magazine in the period from 1925 to 1927, we identified the following main genres:

- biographies and creative portraits of Western actors and directors;
- reviews of Western films;
- reviews of Western national cinematographies;
- articles about Western newsreels;
- articles about foreign film technology, studios and cinemas;
- materials about censorship and perception of Western films by the Soviet public;
- short informational materials about events in foreign cinema, about everyday details of the life of movie stars.

#### *Biographies and creative portraits of Western actors and directors*

About Western actors and directors, mostly Hollywood, *Soviet screen* wrote generously in 1925-1927, often bypassing ideological passages.

In particular, it was emphasized that “the interest of millions of viewers in the best movie actors is due to two reasons. A minority of the public is interested in the art of the actor, art as skill, the actor as a performer, revealing a thought, an experience, an idea. ... The audience in the mass is absorbed, first of all, by the beauty, dexterity, strength of heroes ... The courageous “hero” has his own ideal. Douglas Fairbanks is very close to this physiological ideal. ... Health and strength, agility and cheerfulness ... He is a great athlete and “works” with muscles joking and playing, with a smile, with contagious cheerfulness and fun of a healthy person. Everyone is drawn to this ideal, strong with pride and competition, frail with hope. There is considerable merit in this, the encouraging

and educational influence of the “screen hero” on the viewer. A healthy mind in a healthy body” ([Game..., 1925: 10](#)).

The pages of the magazine happily noted that Douglas Fairbanks (1883–1939) “finally appeared on Soviet screens in a number of major productions (*The Thief of Baghdad*, *Robin Hood*, *The Sign of Zorro*) ... Douglas plays all his roles very simply, without any stretch. This simplicity, perhaps, is what attracts the viewer so much. But, in addition, Douglas, being physically strong, cannot but arouse sympathy” ([Douglas Fairbanks, 1925: 12](#)). And Douglas Fairbanks’ gimmickry, evolving from *Robin Hood* to *The Thief of Baghdad*, is perfected in *Don Q...* There is one thing – Douglas Fairbanks, his game, his movement, his jumps, there is himself. ... He chains to himself, holds the viewer in his hands, not for a minute letting him come to his senses” ([Milman, 1925: 9](#)). In *The Thief of Baghdad*, Douglas Fairbanks... “goes down the path of using dance techniques. His gestures, and especially his gait, are so unnaturally light and rhythmic, as if he were playing the lead role in the Diaghilev Ballet” ([Abramov, 1925: 11](#)).

The authors of the Soviet Screen also wrote very warmly about the Hollywood actress Mary Pickford (1892–1979), who, as is well known, was the wife of Douglas Fairbanks from 1919 to 1936. An ironic but laudatory article about her was published by director S. Yutkevich, who was beginning at that time ([Yutkevich, 1925: 10](#)). In the same positive vein, the creative portrait of this actress was painted ([Falberg, 1925: 14-15](#)).

From 20 to 22 July 1926 Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks made a triumphant visit to Moscow. And although here the *Soviet Screen* claimed that Fairbanks is “a filmmaker who pleases and hypnotizes the public” and noted that “Mary Pickford’s specific gravity is different – she is, first of all, a great master” ([Korolevich, 1926: 13](#)). True, so that the praise of the Hollywood actress does not seem overly sweet, a reservation was immediately followed that “Mary’s films are always prosperous ... All their morality is: misfortune is followed by happiness, which is equal, in American terms, to the formula: poverty comes wealth. It is just as sentimental, cloying and deceptive as the tale of Little Red Riding Hood jumping out of the belly of a wolf, but more dangerous, because all this is furnished with sentimental plausibility” ([Korolevich, 1926: 13](#)).

But in relation to another Hollywood star – Pola Negri (1897–1987) – there were no reservations in the *Soviet Screen*: “The art of Pola Negri is hidden in the lightness and ease of the game, like her feminine charm... It seems to you that she does everything in passing, involuntarily, as if carelessly. But it only seems. Pola Negri draws her images very clearly and stubbornly... In all moments she is true to herself, alive, genuine. Only a great artist can tie up ends and beginnings in this way” ([Yureneva, 1925: 7](#)).

The work of Lillian Gish (1893–1993) was equally positively evaluated, in whose guise “the femininity of the Anglo-Saxon race reached its ideal expression. ... her talent is so remarkable that she raises the images that are akin to her to an unattainable height, transferring them to the sphere of poetic creativity of Dickens, Dostoevsky or Shakespeare” ([Kaufman, 1927: 10](#)).

Generous compliments were received in the magazine by Elisabeth Bergner (1897–1986), who “showed the strength of her talent and put herself in the position of the most famous German actress” ([Elisabeth Bergner, 1927: 13](#)).

The performance of Western comedians: Charles Chaplin (1889–1977) ([Inber, 1926: 14](#); [Koltsova, 1925: 14-15](#)), Max Linder (1883–1925) ([Renz, 1925: 6-7](#)); Harold Lloyd (1893–1971) ([Attasheva, 1925: 14](#)) and Buster Keaton (1895–1966) ([Attasheva, 1925: 14](#)).

The journalist, the future wife of Sergei Eisenstein, P. Fogelman (1900–1965), who chose the pseudonym Pera Attasheva (later there was a variant without doubling the “t”: Atasheva), was convinced that his mask plays the main role in Lloyd’s success—the mask is nothing out of the ordinary, a middle-class clerk... This mask hides the reason for his success: he is so close to all hearts ([Attasheva, 1925: 14](#)). A distinctive property of Keaton’s mask – “it is always a solemn, stony, frozen expression. Sad eyes and no sign of a smile. This is Hamlet from comedy. The movements are calculated and mechanical. An automaton with a human soul. In Keaton’s comedic devices you will not find any semitones or subtle nuances; there are no sharp transitions from grief to joy and vice versa. ... Where Lloyd makes the audience moan with a fit of laughter, Keaton will elicit an attentive, warm laugh. Reason: the mask of B. Keaton is thinner, more intelligent than the mask of Lloyd, but Lloyd is closer to the masses” ([Attasheva, 1925: 14](#)).

At that time, the duet of two Danish comedians was also very popular – Pat and Patachon. These mask roles were played by Karl Schoenström (1881–1942) (Pat) and Harald Madsen (1890–1949) (Patachon). In an article about their work on the pages of the *Soviet Screen*, the point

of view was expressed that the duet of Pat and Patashon there is no solid system, their technique is often crude, the tricks are vulgar and inept, but instead of masks they show a living human face. The human face has that dignity, forgotten by the Americans, that it can simultaneously not only make you laugh, but also touch (Korolevich, 1926: 14).

Adventure movie actor William Desmond (1878–1949) also received a positive assessment in the *Soviet Screen*: “The stunt film of today has found its ideal expression in the person of William Desmond. ... Traces of former beauty, a courageous face with an energetic chin, a beautiful plastic gesture, create the impression of that noble brave fellow who, in strict accordance with the American “law”, is the defender of the oppressed, the guardian of the innocent and the fighter for the “right”. For all this, you need to be able to perfectly jump, swim, climb a wall, box, turn your cheekbones and take a beautiful pose while doing all this. Virtue triumphs, and the American audience is touched to tears” (Tryukovaya fil'ma..., 1927: 13).

The highly popular Hollywood actor Wallace Beery (1885–1949) also received praise from the magazine: “The artistic appearance of Wallace Beery is determined by the plethora of his temperament. Beery portrays not a schematic villain, equipped with the gloomy colors of the screenwriter. First of all, he is a man with huge strong-willed impulses that fetter the outbursts of his passions, with healthy humor and a strong smile” (Wallace ..., 1927: 10).

Even such a frankly stunt artist as Harry Peel (1892–1963) in the *Soviet Screen*, albeit with reservations, was given a completely positive assessment: “The knight of bourgeois romanticism, guarding the peace of ladies and gentlemen from the encroachments of the “scum of society”, the defender of the powerful of this world, an amateur detective by vocation, a selfless player with his life for the triumph of “law” and “justice” – such is Harry Peel, this irresistible boy scout of the world philistinism, claiming to be popular as a folk hero... propagandizing the dexterity of the bold movement of a trained body” (Pertsov, 2026: 14).

However, a different point of view about Harry Peel was expressed on the pages of the magazine: “His means are primitive to the limit. Anxiety is symbolized by bulging eyes, for contempt, lips curl a little, and for surprise, one raised eyebrow is enough. As an actor, he is infinitely flat. ... It is absolutely unthinkable to speak of the artistic or ideological good quality of his “creativity”. It marks too high a degree of spiritual squalor and bad taste to be widely used” (O Harry Peel, 1926: 6).

The then wife of the famous journalist M. Koltsov (1898–1940) – Elizaveta Ratmanova-Koltsova (1901–1964), who signed her articles as Lizaveta Koltsova or Liz Koltz, assessed the work of Hollywood stars more strictly. In particular, she scolded Rudolph Valentino (1895–1926) for his languor and sweetness (Koltsova, 1925: 14-15).

Another Hollywood actor-lover – Ramon Novarro (1899–1968) – received a similar characteristic in the *Soviet Screen*: “young, handsome, well removed, and most importantly, extremely typical in roles where he plays himself, a representative of his caste. Novarro is one of those decadent actors who create the face of modern bourgeois cinematography” (Ramon..., 1927: 14).

The favorite director of the *Soviet Screen* of the 1920s was undoubtedly Charles Chaplin (Gul, 1926: 7; Inber, 1926: 14; Koltsova, 1925: 14-15; Sorokin, 1926: 11-12; Zilpert, 1927: 13).

In particular, T. Sorokin wrote that *Gold Rush* (1925) “is not just funny, it is a tragedy of laughter. “Charlot” is no longer a jester, but the hero of the best creations of contemporary art. His latest works contain more and more dramatic and less comedic. It is difficult to determine where the comedy ends and the drama begins, so perfect and elusive are the nuances of these complicated transitions from small to big. This, perhaps, gives the main strength of the vitality of his art. ... He uses the material of cinema in a logical connection with the character of the characters and the development of the action itself. Hence the impression of exceptional truthfulness, unusual clarity and disarming simplicity. ... *Gold Rush* is an unprecedented thing even for Chaplin. Its artistic solidity is exceptional – it is not for nothing that Chaplin worked on it for almost two years. What real poetry! The tragic essence there, as nowhere else, is subtly refracted in a comic environment” (Sorokin, 1926: 11-12).

The work of Erich von Stroheim (1875–1957) (Attasheva, 1926: 14), Fritz Lang (1890–1976) (Fritz ..., 1926: 14), Friedrich Murnau (1888–1931) (Attasheva, 1926: 14), Thomas Ince (1880–1924) (Thomas..., 1926: 13), Abel Ganse (1889–1981) (Demi, 1926: 13), Richard Talmadge (1892–1981) (Richard..., 1927: 13) and Fred Niblo (1874–1948) (Sven, 1926: 13).

For example, P. Attasheva wrote that among the largest American directors and film actors, Stroheim belongs to one of the first places, the artistic success of his paintings is always enormous (Attasheva, 1926: 14).

In her article about the work of F. Murnau (1888–1931), P. Attasheva rightly noted that a feature of Murnau's directorial manner is the extraordinary thoroughness of working out the smallest details of the paintings. Every thing, every object matters in the course of the development of the action in his paintings (Attasheva, 1926: 14).

P. Attasheva equally positively assessed the films of the German director and screenwriter Ewald Dupont (1891–1956), who reveals the special style and manner of playing each actor. This feature of Dupont's directorial technique is revealed in all its breadth in *Variety*, and in the picture that brought Dupont world fame (Attasheva, 1927: 13).

On the pages of the *Soviet Screen* it was argued that the value of the director's works of Abel Gance first of all, in his desire to reveal the feelings and thoughts of a person, things and make formal techniques, perfectly controlled by him, serve the ideas of inner value, deep and sublime (Demi, 1926: 13).

In an anonymous article about another major Western director, Thomas Ince (1880–1924), it was emphasized that “the most striking thing in his art is the power over color. Inner sensation of color and accurate knowledge of the transition of tones. Rhythm of the world. ... his instinctive and deep perception of light is invariably framed by the “algebra of light”. He performs his films always in the same style as they are made up. That is why they are always simple and free” (Thomas..., 1926: 13).

D. Sven believed that Fred Niblo (1874–1948) has enormous merit. He knows perfectly well how to take the audience: he knows how to show an actor in spectacular shots. Niblo doesn't base his films on people, he bases them on premieres and accessories. His productions always resemble operas (Sven, 1926: 13).

D. Griffith (1875–1948) became a very significant Hollywood director for the *Soviet Screen* magazine, whose work was also devoted to several articles (David Griffith, 1926: 13; Zilpert, 1926: 13), where, however, it was interpreted ambiguously: “One of Griffith's most typical features is the unevenness in the quality of his production... In one picture he is a great artist, and in the next he is no different from an ordinary average director who produces ordinary works” (David Griffith, 1926: 13).

Reflecting on the career of director and actor Rex Ingram (1892–1950), one of the authors of *Soviet Screen* wrote that “Ingram encourages everyone to learn and imitate Griffith – himself, most of all, afraid of falling into imitation. Their creativity takes different paths. Griffith is, above all, the creator of monumental national films. American nationalism shines through in the smallest details of even his most chamber productions and reaches its climax in *The Birth of a Nation*. It is difficult to define Ingram's work in one word, but, perhaps, the most characteristic expression for him is directorial adventurism. Adventurism in the sense of striving for exotic romance, resolved with bright accentuated audacity, not embarrassed in the means to win over the public. ... In contrast to Griffith, who monumentalizes his crowd, Ingram individualizes the mass, giving each one an integral sculptural appearance. He is a master of masks, which he sculpts with flamboyant ingenuity. In actors, he is looking, first of all, for sculptural posture and movement. ... But his audacity is always poisoned by the desire for an sculptural pose, always shackled by the demands of the American consumer, whom he knows how to please” (Rex Ingram, 1926: 13).

The poet Nikolai Aseev (1889–1963) did not skimp on praise in particular, who titled his article quite definitely: “James Cruse is the best director in America”.

N. Aseev wrote that this director in his films is “very subtle, perhaps even too much for the modern American audience. Cruse knows how to educate an actor... James Cruse knows how to play not only actors, but also things... On the topic of his productions... Cruse, I think, is close to us. He destroys romance, he resists with the power of his irony even such a molasses of the script... He fights for the exact human gesture... he fights for the human face, not deadened by puppet prettiness, for real life, not raped by the sham lies of pasted-on wigs, sideburns, and costumes” (Aseev, 1925: 4).

The work of René Clair (1898–1981) (Kaufman, 1927: 13; Tat, 1926: 13) and Louis Delluc (1890–1924) were also highly appreciated in the *Soviet Screen*. In particular, it was noted that, although there is no sociality in Delluc's works, in the sharpness of verbal expression, the staging and rearrangement of individual words of a phrase, words, in their rhythmic alternation aimed at

identifying visual images, is the value of Delluc's scenario form. Delluc's literary phrase or a series of edited phrases are felt musically and perceived visually. This is some kind of combination of incompatible elements of sound and image (Scenarii Louis Delluca, 1927: 5).

Of course, in some cases, the work of Western directors could receive in the *Soviet Screen* and not so broad evaluation.

So in an article about Cecil DeMille, it was stated that he "never" creates "anything". He painstakingly makes his films, as the first students at school honestly memorize their lessons. There is never any creativity in DeMille's work – only the painful pursuit of success. ... What wins the audience? The courage of the idea, the skill of the actors, the sharpness of the composition? No. Only grandiose figures, scale (Cecil..., 1936: 14).

The work of the director and screenwriter Allan Duane (1885–1981), director of the popular in the 1920s *Robin Hood* (1922) with Douglas Fairbanks, was evaluated more positively in the *Soviet Screen*: "Duane's editing sheets are an example of mathematical art. Starting the first shooting, he already firmly and relentlessly knows the entire order of the montage pieces and the number of frames for each piece. ... The actor plays a huge role in Duane's work. Duane's commandment: the quality of the film depends on the quality of the actor. Duane has a rare skill to reveal an actor, to reveal his possibilities. ... There is nothing to expect great searches from Duane, this is a first-class craftsman who passes off his superbly polished craft as art" (Allan ..., 1926: 13).

The *Soviet Screen* wrote rather sourly about the films of Herbert Brenon (1880–1958), Henry King (1886–1982) and Charles Hutchinson (1879–1949), each time emphasizing the harmful influence of bourgeois Hollywood on these filmmakers:

About Herbert Brenon: "America, which gave him a world name, turned this artisan into a stamper, as it turns all its actors and directors" (Herbert ..., 1926: 13).

About Henry King: "Along with fashion and triumph, King had to change the nature of his work. He no longer puts on unpretentious farm pictures, he puts, but at the request of entrepreneurs, sensational action films that are very beneficial to the American cash box office but alien to us" (Ven, 1927: 13).

On Charles Hutchinson: "His films don't go to the big theaters where the audience is more sophisticated and demanding. Its base is some kind of low-grade screen of large centers and, mainly, the provinces, the entire huge American province" (Tolkachev, 1927: 13).

And the work of Marcel L'Herbier (1888–1979) received a completely negative assessment (in the spirit of the proletarian struggle against "formalism") in the magazine: "The self-sufficient importance of form, not justified by content, inevitably leads to the fact that aesthetics does not find its inner justification. ... L'Herbier's work ... bears the stamp of stressed refinement, of excessive complexity and detail, sometimes of formal coldness bordering on affectation, which cannot but lead to naked aestheticism" (Marcel..., 1926: 13).

On the whole, it can be concluded that the authors of the *Soviet Screen* in 1925–1927 were not only able to single out the most significant figures of Western directors at that time, but also did not skimp on their praise.

#### *Western film reviews*

In 1925–1927, the *Soviet Screen* tried to review the most notable Western films, and many of them received a very positive assessment.

So even another film adaptation of Tarzan's adventures received praise: "It turned out a fair amount of series of trick pictures: fights, chases, etc., along with a love affair. In these pictures, that exotic background is pleasant, which highlights the action so well. ... Of course, the jungle and everything else was done in California, but this could not significantly damage the overall impression" (Tarzan..., 1925: 13).

The reviewer of the *Soviet screen* was pleased with the comedy *Three Ages* (1923) with the participation Buster Keaton: "The picture is very funny, very light, despite the fact that it is confused in three pines (three eras), and in essence very empty in terms of plot. There is, however, a bit of good irony over the family way of different eras. ... The picture is perceived as a very entertaining, masterfully executed spectacle" (Krasnov, 1926: 7).

Another comedy, this time with Chaplin in the title role – *Pay Day* (1922) received an enthusiastic rating in the magazine: "This (American) film is worth talking about. She is extremely excited. This movie is a comedy. And the worker Charlot must be funny. He is funny too. You laugh at his awkwardness and eternal failures, sometimes until you drop. But suddenly it becomes sad. And somehow I sincerely feel sorry for this typical (after all, we meet thousands of such Charlots:



this is a genuine mass concentrated in a given person) simple worker. ... How does Charlie manage to combine the funny and the tragic in one face, and sometimes in a gesture? I would say comically funny and cosmically tragic. This is the real game. This is an actor” (Lemberg, 1925: 12).

The Hollywood film *A Society Scandal* (1924) was regarded in the *Soviet Screen* as “a satire on American marriage. ... the unnecessary trifle *A Society Scandal* looks without stopping, in one gulp ... The film ends and you regret that there is no second series. Leave and forget forever. Everything except acting. ... Gloria Swanson does not capture the experiences of her heroine, only skill. You keep a close eye not on what she will do, but on how she will do it. ... Gloria Swanson is a cold master, with the experience of an accountant, taking into account all the resources of her abilities and achievements. Maybe she touches little, but one cannot but follow the mastery of her art with surprise” (Korolevich, 1926: 13).

Another Hollywood film, *The Dangerous Maid* (1923) (in the Soviet box office, it was called *The Insurgent*), this time on a historical theme, was also received quite favorably in the magazine: there are all the typical elements that are so characteristic of American historical colors. The qualities are: the splendor of the production, the faithfully conveyed historical flavor, for the most part sustained in the style of the era, effective and varied scenes. Disadvantages: superficial approach to history” (Insurgent, 1925: 12).

K. Vidor’s film *The Big Parade* (1925), which went to the USSR under the name *Long March* and told about the events of the First World War, was even more highly appreciated in the *Soviet Screen*: “King Vidor made a lot of good pictures and continues to do them; but he has one, because of which you should look at his way of filmmaking. This picture is *Long March*, dedicated to the theme of the “Great War”. ... It is only necessary to say that it has an amazing effect on the viewer, even if the viewer is negatively disposed towards it. This exciting action of the *Long March* is ensured by the unusually well-found coherence of the parts, the excellent distribution of the material presented to the viewer, the unfolding of the tempo, which is completely invisible to the eye, and the rhythmic clarity” (Shutko, 1927: 6-7).

Quite sympathetically, the reviewer of the *Soviet Screen* reacted to the German drama *Outcasts* (*Die Verrufenen*, 1925): “the film is really good, although it does not have any special innovations and directorial tricks. But the production is good, the best artists are playing. In addition, according to the American method, the types are perfectly matched. The content is also more significant and interesting than many other recent films. ... This gives hope that the German film market will be somewhat cleansed of the endless, boring “salon” films” (Season..., 1925: 6-7).

It must be said that the *Soviet Screen* in 1925–1927, in general, followed the development of German cinematography quite closely, appreciating the works of R. Wiene, F. Lang, F. Murnau:

*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, 1920) by R. Wiene: “in general, is a serious artistic achievement. ... strong, bright, beautifully filmed, amazingly acted out. It’s not for nothing that the public is blaming him” (Gul, 1925: 12).

*The Nibelungs* (*Die Nibelungen*, 1924) by F. Lang: “Defeated and crushed Germany wanted to show how great the spiritual wealth of the German people is, that the testaments of ancient heroes are alive, that spiritual forces have accumulated in it for centuries, that this spiritual power will raise its people to new exploits. During a period of severe financial collapse, under incredibly difficult conditions, the Nibelungs were slowly, slowly created. ... The majestic and monumental style is sustained throughout the film and this is the main merit of the director Fritz Lang” (Nibelungs, 1925: 9-10).

*The Joyless Lane* (*Die freudlose Gasse*, 1925) by G. Pabst: “It excites ... a topic, scarcely – though, used to expose the social face of the city after the war. Separate acute moments excite, giving plentiful and bitter food to memories ... The plot is fragmented into numerous small jumping pieces. It is rather an artistic report showing a number of everyday phenomena from the life of a crushed Vienna, Vienna under the knife of inflation and blatant poverty” (Krasnov, 1926: 5).

*The Last Man* (*Der letzte Mann*, 1924) by F. Murnau: “The picture is recognized by critics as the most outstanding production of recent times. ... The ensemble cast is top notch. Of course, first of all, Janings, who, by playing the main role, managed to give a strong, amazing image of the “last” person, conveying with great skill that subtle play of shades that this role required” (Irinin, 1925: 10). “Murnau is calm and slow, like Balzac, like Dickens, and that is his strength. The story of the porter, who was reduced to a lower position for decrepitude, is told admirably. It is told in magnificent cinematic language, so convincing that no captions were needed” (Gecht, 1926: 5).

*Faust* (*Faust – eine deutsche Volkssage*, 1926) by F. Murnau, who “set himself the difficult task of turning the sentimental “costume drama” into which the old German legend about Dr. Faust has turned into a cinematic philosophical work. And Murnau very successfully did not fulfill his task. Luckily, because the film turned out to be excellent both in terms of the acting and the subtle resolution of a number of technical tricks that obscured the “world questions” that tormented Murnau” (Faust, 1927: 10).

Far less fortunate in the *Soviet Screen* was Abel Gance’s film *Napoléon* (1927), which noted large-scale historical scenes, although “all of them are presented with inexpressible pathos, turning into vulgarity, into a purely operatic spectacle. ... It is difficult to say who is more to blame for the failure of the picture: Abel Gance, who interprets it as a narrowly patriotic, reactionary national epic, or Dieudonné, who plays an operetta irresistible victorious hero” (Tatarova, 1927: 8-9).

But the same reviewer highly appreciated the famous *Metropolis* (1927) by Fritz Lang...

#### *Reviews of Western national cinematographies*

The primacy in the reviews of Western national cinematographies in the *Soviet Screen* of 1925-1927 undoubtedly belonged to Hollywood productions.

It is clear that, despite a certain kind of “liberties” available to Soviet journalists during this period, at the request of “above” such materials had to practically necessarily contain elements of strict “Bolshevik” criticism based on class anti-bourgeois approaches.

It has been argued, for example, that in Hollywood comes out “a huge number of new paintings, caused by the greedy demand of an undemanding foreign market, the fierce competition of different firms, – all this gives an incentive to release more pictures, equipped with good advertising, often without caring about quality. ... The titles of some of them that were very successful in America: *Her Night of Love*, *Teacher of Love*, *The Man She Bought* are clear enough. They are designed for a bourgeois viewer... Of course, they are not suitable for our audience” (America..., 1925: 11).

“The fascists from the Ku Klux Klan protect one hundred percent “morality” of Americans. ... A plan has been developed for ten new films about 100 % Americanism. ... specifically against the labor movement and blacks. ... Special oversight groups should monitor the sessions, set fire to theaters that do not obey. Disobedient actors, directors and mechanics “disable”! (Zilpert, 1926: 13).

N. Kaufman, in general, hastened to declare the total crisis of American cinema: “Having mastered the grandiose technical capabilities, America, like any capitalist country, subordinated them to the service of its bourgeois ideological interests, the justification of bourgeois morality, the tastes of the American crowd and issues of American exports. At the beginning, when these technical achievements were still accompanied by artistic searches and achievements, Hollywood acquired that halo of the “heart of world cinematography”, which turned the eyes of film workers from all over the world to it. But now it's over. ... there is a natural impoverishment of the spiritual baggage of American film, which is already being felt in America, among the masses, in criticism, in the general press” (Kaufman, 1927: 8-9).

In a similar vein, L. Koltsova also assessed American film production: “In Hollywood, there is a scenario hunger. The golden script fund is drying up. The world’s classic literature, thrown under the lens of a Hollywood camera, is gutted and swallowed by a multimillion-dollar spectator. ... Hollywood in a panic is compiling and trying out new household film recipes” (Koltsova, 1926: 4-5).

To all other criticism of the bourgeois mores of Hollywood, the *Soviet Screen* also added anti-religious passages: “American cinema has so far been a brilliant propaganda of capitalist ideas. Day after day, in hundreds of ateliers, scenes “spun” in which millionaire “stars” played out false stories about poor girls who were rewarded with a cruel at first, but fair in the end ... fate – a happy (which means rich in America) marriage. From evening to evening, tens of thousands of cinemas showed pictures of poor and honest young people who became rich as a reward for their modest valor: “honest work” and obedience to “senior”, “superior”. Screens are constantly shouting to the American worker and clerk: be the same as our heroes, endure, work, and you will suffer ... happy end, wealth and family happiness. And suddenly, the American film propaganda decided to step sideways to achievements “new” to it, it decided to reinforce the Christianity ideas” (Failed..., 1927: 7).

An interesting discussion on the pages of the *Soviet Screen* arose about the problem of happy endings in cinema.

A. Tatarova reacted to this ironically: “Let the directors of all American film factories argue, the viewer, having come tired from the factories and from the offices to the cinema for an hour and a half, will rest in it. There is no need to remind unfortunate people of the bad sides of life; let them

know that virtue will always prevail... And long live the happy ending – Happy end!” (Tatarova, 1927: 8-9).

But the poet and journalist S. Neldikhen (1891-1942) expressed a different point of view: “Our grin about foreign scenario requirements – “the end must certainly be happy” – is connected with the “slightly ideological content” of foreign films, where the happy ending is “love” and often, simply, attached. However, even with a more serious ideology and in our conditions, such a requirement is also characteristic of us” (Neldikhen, 1926: 14).

On the pages of the *Soviet Screen* of the 1920s, there were also generalizing characteristics of Western cinema in general. At the same time, very negative: “Cinema is not fun, not a game, not entertainment, but a powerful long-range weapon. Cinema is a struggle for a person, for thought, for will, for action. ... Films are the distributors of imperialism in the colonies” (Zilpert, 1926: 5).

And more: “We don’t see a lot of pictures that are very characteristic of bourgeois cinematography, because they are not bought by our purchasing authorities or do not pass the Soviet censorship. And we lose little from this ... Their content, their “core” can be described in a nutshell: this is a piece of pornography around which either tragedy or comedy is built. ... It’s good that this stream of dirt does not reach us!” (Cinema..., 1925: 10).

One of the favorite amusements of the *Soviet Screen* of the 1920s was a caustic mockery of the attempts of Western filmmakers to make films about Russia and Russians (Attasheva, 1927: 4; Berlinskie..., 1927: 4; Gul, 1926: 10; 1927: 4; Tverich, 1926:14):

“Since there is a demand for Russian movies, there is also a demand for experts on Russian issues. Profitable, bread profession, especially for retired generals out of work. ... The “flower” of Russian emigration cinema is gradually gathering under the hospitable wing of Uncle Sam” (Attasheva, 1927: 4).

“Americans are especially distinguished by their absolute ignorance of Russia. ... the fashion for Russian movies has reappeared, and a whole series of films about Russians’ everyday life has been and is thrown into the world market” (Tverich, 1926: 14).

“Russian themes are more interested than any other, namely, German directors, and the great German director Pabst is now working on a large Russian film based on Erenburg’s novel *The Love of Jeanne Ney*. Another director, Fejer, has now released ... a picture from “Russian life”: *Mata Hari – a red dancer*, and, despite the continuous “spreading cranberries” of the pre-war period, the picture has a certain success” (Berlin..., 1927: 4).

This kind of criticism of Western filmmakers moved from issue to issue and was “caused by the emphasized exoticism of the images they modeled. The critical pathos of journal notes fixes, first of all, that they take ‘us for others’, they want to see ‘others in us’. Exoticism as a sign of otherness is manifested in estranged redundancy and exaggeration. Redundancy and exaggeration, especially in the depiction of peasant life, exaggerated situations that are used as a technique for creating a comic effect – all this did not go unnoticed by the authors of the magazine” (Bogatyreva, 2017).

Even the writer and editor Roman Gul (1896–1986), an émigré who fought in the civil war against the Bolsheviks, laughed with pleasure at the “Russian” Western films. Here is what he wrote, for example, about the German movie *Incendiaries of Europe* (*Die Brandstifter Europas*, 1926): “To be clearer, let’s call it *Rasputin in German*... Eternal spreading cranberries of European philistine vulgarity – and here it is. ... It is impossible to comment on this film. From its attendance, only conclusions can be drawn: 1) the interest in everything Russian in Europe is enormous, 2) this is what is presented here as “Russian”, 3) in order to put an end to all this petty-bourgeois “Russian” rubbish, our Soviet paintings must persistently make their way to Europe” (Gul, 1926: 10).

And here we can agree with E. Bogatyreva: the intrigue of how Russia, the USSR, and the Russians were represented in the West, “was added by the fact that immigrants from Russia often acted as an intermediary in creating images of Russian life in Western cinema. The underlying reason for doubts about the authenticity of the film images they created was not only and not so much ideological as cultural. The authors of the journal complained about the image, which, using the terminology of M. Bakhtin, can be described as ‘I-for-the-other’. Bakhtin’s concepts of ‘I-for-myself’ and ‘I-for-other’ convey different aspects of self-perception” (Bogatyreva, 2017).

Indeed, “variations of the film image a la russe were identified at the intersection of two perspectives, two differently directed intentions: on the one hand, this is the representation expressed by Bakhtin’s concept of ‘other-for-me’, and on the other hand, the representation of ‘I-for- another’, in which, indeed, there is a moment of self-presentation. There is nothing

surprising in the fact that in the first decades of the 20th century, representatives of emigration acted as mediators, that is, the subject of the 'I-for-other' representation as carriers of a certain national culture, living compactly in a different cultural environment" (Bogatyreva, 2013).

The journalist Boris Zilpert (1891–1938) (Zilpert, 1926; 1927), who was shot in the late 1930s on charges of espionage and terrorist activities in favor of Japan, specialized in caustic feuilletons on the topic of bourgeois cinema in the Soviet Screen.

In second place in terms of the number of publications in the *Soviet Screen* of 1925–1927 was German cinematography.

Here, sharp, sometimes feuilleton criticism was combined with quite positive articles.

Here are just two vivid examples of the negative attitude towards German cinema on the pages of the magazine:

"The overwhelming success of *Battleship Potemkin* revolutionized the policy of using films in Germany for propaganda purposes. From the moment the German filmmakers came to know the "truth", "that politics on the screen makes money at the box office", we have been witnessing a phenomenon as curious as it is instructive, however, very characteristic of "democratic" Germany. In this country, ruled by the Menshevik Social Democrats, the capitalist film-makers are beginning to mass-produce films, the meaning of which lies in the most shameless agitation of monarchist tendencies" (Borisov, 1926: 3).

"The military theme runs like a red thread through all the new [German] movies. Over the past six months, about ten films from military life have been released. It is interesting that the characters are only officers, and that the action takes place before the world war. Despite the fact that the best actors often play in such films ... they are nevertheless imbued with the spirit of chauvinism to such an extent that they cannot be considered as works of art" (What ..., 1925: 3).

However, in other articles about German cinema, the position of the magazine was different, more objective: "The German film has something in common with the Swedish one, although it differs from it in some features. Similarity: the same seriousness and thoughtfulness, excellent technique and some touch of mysticism and philistinism. A special specific, unhealthy bias of German cinematography is "Dostoevsky" style, a kind of "psychological" self-picking, a disease that pre-revolutionary Russian film production suffered from. ... An exceptional contingent of directors and actors contributes greatly to the artistic value of German film production. In view of the fact that almost all German actors and directors came to the cinema from the theater, a certain bias towards the "theatricalization" of productions and individual shots is noticed in German film production. German film technology, photography, laboratory are impeccable. The editing is calm, even, somewhat slowed down, with all sorts of minor details – 'facial expressions'... this always results in a certain stretch... Still, despite its unhealthy "psychological" bias, German film production is much more acceptable to the Soviet screen than French and especially Italian" (Byt ekrana, 1925, 1925: 3).

It was further stated with regret that in the USSR "Behind the *Nibelungs*, *Caligari*, *The Last Man*... average German films are not noticed. Meanwhile, they have a special social, technical and artistic orientation, which differs sharply from the "hit movies" of the German film industry. ... The average German film closely follows any change in public taste and mood ... Its path goes: from mysticism and historical plots of the times of inflation, which served as a way to turn away from formidable reality, to the present, following that passion for military films, to ... nationalist films that amused an infringed national feeling and unleashing the national passions of the bourgeois and, finally, a film of the last time in a kind of everyday life, corresponding to the new "stabilization", showing the life of a big city, attracting the city bourgeois and petty bourgeois to the enticing lights of cinema, where the life of the world and the half world is shown, where, like a modern reworking of the fairy tale about the magic prince, a love affair is conveyed between the inhabitant of the "parterre" – from the golden youth and the poor milliner from the attic. In these movies there is a share of a kind of democracy ... The bourgeois and the petty bourgeois in these pictures are reflected in all their ideological emptiness, with all the ugliness of his life, with their insignificant interests and passions" (Alf, 1926: 5).

French cinematography was also ambiguously evaluated in the *Soviet Screen*. On the one hand, readers were informed that "French film production is imbued with a kind of frivolous approach. Very favorite themes of ordinary French films are all sorts of tabloid love stories, with emphasis and savoring of unhealthy erotica. In more serious films, however, a certain pseudo-classical bias towards outward theatricality and sugary "prettiness" is noticed, both in the nature of

the productions themselves and in the choice of actors. ... In addition, both ordinary films and action films are imbued with petty-bourgeois 'rentier' psychology. ... General conclusion: France was once the cradle of cinematography, but from this cradle a real enfant terrible has grown up there, who ... behaves more than suspiciously. And we need to approach the purchase of French films very carefully" (*Byt ekrana*, 1925: 3). But "the French public has become so accustomed to these ridiculously sentimental stories about Anglo-Saxon beauties escaping the trap of some notorious scoundrel and being saved by a generous bandit that the appearance on the screen of a film that has any real interest is bewildering" (*Polyak*, 1927: 13).

On the other side, French cinematography in recent years, even in the last one year, has made great strides – really good films are appearing more and more (*Schagena*, 1925: 10), the French screen of recent years has been enriched by several interesting films, a whole galaxy of young and talented directors (Abel Gance, L'Herbier, G. Dulac, Rene Clair, etc.) are applying new shooting techniques to cinematography: foregrounds, etc. (*Polyak*, 1927: 13).

But the Polish cinema of the 1920s, journalists from the *Soviet Screen* did not complain at all, arguing that the "Polish film industry does not yet have its own face. Or rather, there is no Polish cinematography yet. ... Watching any Polish film, you quickly get tired of the noiseless hustle and bustle on the screen. ... Actors kiss incessantly, wringing their hands, look into the auditorium for a long time and go out the door to enter another door or ride a horse. The Poles do not like car chases" (*Koltsova*, 1927: 4-5).

Italian cinema, often referred to as fascist at that time by the *Soviet Screen*, was written much sharper: "An ordinary Italian film is a hopeless miserable hack, imbued with the same religious and ultra-petty-bourgeois spirit, and there is no need to talk about the technique of the production itself and the actors; complete confusion, helplessness and ignorance of elementary cinematic truths and laws. ... In historical films, the adventures of all kinds of Roman emperors and generals are endlessly shown. People's experiences are usually not shown, and if they are shown, then in a very dubious light. From an ideological (and purely artistic and cinematographic) point of view, all ordinary Italian film production is almost absolutely hopeless, and we must definitely refrain from buying it" (*Italian...*, 1925: 8).

It was emphasized that in Italy "fascism monopolized cinema. The screen kindles passions. The Mediterranean Sea floats in front of the viewer under the fascist flag. ... Recently, an order was issued – to view all the acting films. They were looking for sedition. The scissors cut hundreds of meters without any regret. Campaign for one hundred percent integrity on the film front. "But you can follow everything." And so it happened. In one film, where the biography of the leader of fascism is given in heroic colors, annoying lines from the distant past crept in. Mussolini once called himself a socialist. ... It is clear that the cinema was smashed and the moviegoers were beaten. An ultimatum was made. Forget what you saw. For fascists, even the laws of vision are retroactive" (*Zilpert*, 1927: 14).

The *Soviet Screen* of the 1920s had a much more positive attitude towards the cinema of the Scandinavian countries.

Thus, in the pages of the magazine it was noted that "Swedish film production is very original and has some specific features. First of all, I am pleased with the almost complete absence of "salon" themes in general. We are so tired of "nobly" suffering dress-coat gentlemen and languid ladies, whose entire costume sometimes consists of several ribbons and rests "only on parole" ... and it is so gratifying to see simple, healthy, strong people on the screen – and in general the whole uncomplicated life northerners, more kindred to us in spirit. From the ideological point of view, there is, unfortunately, a tendency towards the fetishism of petty-bourgeois property-ownership, predominantly of a farmer-petty-bourgeois fold, and some aspirations of a mystical nature are noticed. Otherwise, Swedish production is ideologically one of the most acceptable for the Soviet screen" (*On...*, 1925: 9).

Another article commended Danish film adaptations of literary classics, although the main "field of achievement for the Danish film industry is comedy films. One has only to name the names of Pat and Patashon, as the whole of Europe laughs. Both of them have become favorites of half the world... They are an example of real Danish humor – healthy, strong" (*Grossman*, 1925: 11).

So, the articles of the *Soviet Screen* about Western cinematographies were much more imbued with ideological approaches than reviews of individual films or portraits of foreign actors and directors.

However, there were also articles of a different nature in the journal. For example, the reflections of the young at that time director G. Roshal (1898–1983) about the typology of films on a historical topic.

Grigory Roshal believed that the comprehensive and vague concept of historical film can be easily divided into four main, typical groups according to the method of using and processing historical material:

1. Reproduction-restoration of a historical episode, era, or way of life. A film that requires a lot of scientific study and authenticity.
2. The film is mainly entertaining.
3. Adaptation or use of the historical situation for the approximate solution of certain artistic and psychological tasks and some social problems set before us by modernity.
4. A form of targeted distortion of historical material to exacerbate parody, grotesque, irony and satire...

It is clear that these types of film do not occur in their pure form, but the emphasis on one or another of them determines the general line of the picture (Roshal, 1926: 5).

#### *Articles on Western Newsreel*

As in relation to feature films, the position of the *Soviet Screen* in relation to Western newsreels was significantly dependent on ideological approaches.

Of course, it was argued that in the West, “cinema is a powerful tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Hence, the newsreel should be something that captures only the outward brilliance of life. ... The worker on the screen is an extremely unpleasant sight for bourgeois eyes. ... Brilliant in appearance and wretchedly one-sided in content: this is how all Western newsreels have to be characterized” (Foreign ..., 1925: 7). “The themes of foreign newsreels are clearly specific. “How they live and work” uncrowned kings of capital. Their life, accessories, environment, background. Fashion, casinos, resorts, yachts, horse racing, running. Weddings, divorces, incidents in the “society”, scandals, bankruptcy, careerism” (Two..., 1925: 4). “The bourgeoisie tells in the newsreel its million-meter life, its way of life... Newsreel is 100 % film advertising. The screen was taken over by manufacturers, shopkeepers, and even rag merchants. ... The chronicle is also full of criminal tricks” (Zilpert, 1926: 14).

At the same time, it was noted that in the West there are dozens of movies that are very interesting for people of science, beautiful as scientific aids, but so uncomplicated in terms of artistry and entertainment, so unpopular that it was not possible for an ordinary, wide audience to show them outside of universities no possibility. ... And finally, the third, most brilliant period in the development of culture-film came, when they began to enjoy the same success as world action films” (German..., 1927: 6-7).

And in N. Spiridovsky’s articles about newsreels in America there was no politics at all, but there was a detailed story about the technologies for creating such films (Spiridovsky, 1927. 9: 5; 18: 5).

In an article by G. Boltyansky (1885–1953), one of the pioneers of Soviet newsreels, who in 1926–1931 held the post of chairman of the amateur film section of the Central Council of the Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema, it was generally about the lessons of overseas newsreels useful for Soviet filmmakers: “American firms have a large staff in the center, their own special laboratories, airplanes, trains, cars. Operators of the firm receive high salaries. Big money is paid for some sensational shootings. ... it is clear that their costs are paying off. What explains this? First, the widespread operation and network of operators around the world. Secondly, by organizing the marketing of the chronicle in a large number of copies and in different countries. ... In addition to the variety of material and good organization of the case. The main importance in the work of the foreign chronicle is the speed of delivery of the filmed material and the speed of the release of the chronicle. ... We must also, like American firms, become the world giant of the chronicle, but the chronicle of the Soviet, the chronicle of the proletariat” (Boltyansky, 1926: 6).

#### *Articles about foreign film technology, studios and cinemas*

Articles on the topic of foreign film technology, the functioning of film studios and cinemas in the *Soviet Screen* were practically apolitical.

Moreover, magazine stories about Western experience in this area were sometimes simply enthusiastic: “Hollywood, an amazing, fabulous city, has grown spontaneously in a few years, thanks to the extraordinary development of the film industry. ... Rumor has surrounded Hollywood with bad fame. Several high-profile scandals caused by the blackmailing tricks of some capitalists

who stuck to cinematography contributed to the creation of an opinion about Hollywood as a hotbed of vices, revelry and orgies. Reality, however, refutes this. There are no theaters, no nightclubs or dance halls in Hollywood, but instead there are countless movie theaters. The whole mass of film workers, as soon as they have a free minute, hurries to these cinemas to look at the latest films from other films" (Hollywood..., 1926: 14).

"Hollywood is the first movie city in the world. Hollywood is a place of complete mixing of races, peoples and languages" (Attasheva, 1925: 10).

"The motto of their film industry: no accidents. Everything must be provided for, the work of directors, actors and editors proceeds in a strict rhythm according to an iron script. Not a single minute can be lost, money is paid for every minute, and therefore every minute must be used. It is not allowed to damage a single button in an established mechanized device. Everything must be foreseen and verified in advance, like moves in a chess game" (Leonidov, 1926: 6-7).

Similar opinions were expressed on the pages of the *Soviet Screen* of 1925–1927 about Western cinemas (Alf, 1927: 8; Moore, 1927: 10; Tchaikovsky, 1927: 5), and about the technology of filming sound films in the USA (Talking..., 1926: 14).

Such approaches proceeded from the traditional tasks cultivated in the USSR of the 1920s: to criticize Western ideology, but to adopt successful Western practical experience in the field of technology and production.

However if in 1925–1926 the articles of this thematic field in the *Soviet Screen* rather focused on "learning from the experience of Western cinema, then in the following 1927, the topic of cultural interactions in the field of cinema begins to sound like a call to overcome dependence on foreign film production. The trend is changing, but the theme of "they" and "we", that is, the consideration of Soviet film production in a broad global context, remains one of the main intrigues of film journalism" (Bogatyreva, 2017).

*Short informational materials about (sensational) events in foreign cinema and everyday details of the life of movie stars*

Actually, it was precisely for the sake of these materials, coupled with photographs of Hollywood movie stars, that the 'New Economic Policy' public read the *Soviet Screen*, thanks to which the circulation of the magazine in 1926–1927 was maintained at an average of 70-80 thousand copies and brought profit to the publishing house.

In these illustrated materials, at first, as a rule, the luxurious life of Hollywood stars was colorfully described. Or, for example, such a vivid text was published: "A vampire woman, a predator, overwhelming and conquering, a spider woman tightening her victim in love with her web of webs, a demon woman, seductive and terrible ... how many of these "Vamps" work in the studio of Hollywood, Los Angeles, New York, etc." (Zhenshchiny-vampiry, 1925: 12). But then the authors reminded the readers of the magazine that this is an atmosphere full of not only brilliance and glory, but also the most greedy capitalist revelry, the atmosphere of the dictatorship of the big over the small, the atmosphere of crushing, humiliation, the most shameless exploitation of a small fry, an employee, an extra, a beginner (Attasheva, 1925: 13-14; Ih byt, 1925: 7; Zilpert, 1927: 14).

Plus, of course, the magazine could not resist the temptation of feuilletonism when it was reported that the court of the state of Ohio, standing guard over Lincoln's legality and freedom of the individual, ruled that every citizen of the state has the right to get drunk and go to the movies in this form (Zilpert, 1927: 6), and Hollywood went so far as to film the scene of a real suicide man (Zilpert, 1927: 10).

Scoured the *Soviet Screen* and Western film advertising:

"Advertising is condiment. A means of stimulating the appetite for the spectacle... The technique of advertising is the most complex science of how to overcome human apathy and distrust. ... What does every cunning person do, wanting to achieve his own? Depending on their temperament, they can use various tricks: firstly, to stun, psychologically stun, stun, and then deal with the stunned as he wants. Secondly, you can stubbornly and methodically drum something into a person that he may not agree with ... Then you can play on any strings-passions of a person (curiosity, greed, stinginess, etc.)" (Psihologiya reklamya, 1925: 10).

"Advertising plays a huge role in the life of cinema abroad. In essence, 75 % of the success of any film is built on advertising. ... In our pathetic attempts at publicity, we are still children. Any American movie maker will laugh at our way of advertising in the form of tiny ads and colorless posters. In this we are definitely, undoubtedly and colossally lagging behind. And this is good. ... That unhealthy type of advertising that has formed in the capitalist states corresponds as well as

possible to their external and internal appearance. He is alien to us. We are building our cinema under different conditions, and we do not need those methods of advertising that are created by the bourgeois-capitalist economy” (Reklama, 1925: 12).

*Materials on censorship and perception of Western films by the Soviet public*

Of course, *Soviet Screen* cannot ignore the topic of perception of Western films by the Soviet public and censorship.

In particular, there was concern about the negative impact of Western cinema on the increase in crime rates among Soviet youth:

“In the campaign against hooliganism, no one has yet remembered the role that cinema plays in the development of criminal acts and the role that it plays and can play as a fight against anti-social manifestations. Criminologists in Europe and America have long been studying the question of the influence of cinema on crime. More than once, the influence of detective films, in which the criminal is portrayed as an attractive romantic hero, has been established on juvenile beginners in the craft of hooliganism and other types of crime. There is no doubt that the movies that idealize the heroism of crime give appropriate impetus to the unstable psyche of young people, of course, prepared for a criminal action by a number of other everyday conditions. At the same time, it should be assumed that such impetus can be given not only by pictures directly and openly romanticizing crime, but also by those that excite the viewer with the appearance of bourgeois luxury and depravity, even if this is offered under the guise of exposing “bourgeois decay”. We will find such grateful material in a significant number of foreign films, the effect of which is not only neutralized, but aggravated by the eye-catching redrawing of our witty editors and editors. The dispute about the harmfulness of a certain part of foreign paintings could be transferred to the rails of objective study if our criminologists collected material on the degree of their influence on hooligans and juvenile delinquents who passed through the judicial authorities” (Cinema..., 1926: 3).

As is well known, in the USSR of the 1920s, for the purpose of censorship, the method was widely practiced not only of cutting out “unwanted episodes”, but also of re-editing foreign films, supplying them with “ideologically correct” titles. In this regard, the *Soviet Screen* published an article on its pages, where the censors were urged to show a kind of tolerance for Western film production: “There is no more thankless and painful work than rewiring a finished tape. There is no more difficult work in the cinema than extracting plot fasteners from a finished plot, when the entire plot structure collapses with a bang and you have to make props for the plot with the help of inscriptions and randomly suitable shots. ... They don’t buy films that are obviously harmful and hostile to us. Buy generally harmless. If they have provisions that can be developed in such a way that they make the viewer think and move their brains, then often, with the help of scissors and inscriptions, the film is given a burdensome weight that drags it to the bottom. ... So – be careful with scissors, comrades” (Nikulin, 1926: 5).

It is clear that such “liberal” statements were no longer possible in the next, ideologically stricter period of the journal’s existence...

#### 4. Conclusion

So, our research has shown that the subject of Western cinema on the pages of the *Soviet Screen* magazine in 1925-1927 was extensive and varied. Due to rather significant creative freedoms in the *Soviet Screen* in 1925–1927, photographs of Western movie stars (including photos on the covers of magazines), rather neutral or even positive biographies of Hollywood and European actors and directors, notes on filming and film distribution, reviews of Western films, etc. were widely published in 1925–1927 (all these materials were written in a lively, non-scientific language, designed for a mass audience). Although, of course, there were also ideologically biased materials on the pages of the magazine.

Based on the analysis (in the context of the historical, socio-cultural and political situation, etc.) of the first years of the existence of the *Soviet Screen* magazine (1925–1927), we came to the conclusion that materials on Western cinema during this period can be divided into the following types:

- ideologized articles emphasizing criticism of bourgeois cinema and its harmful influence on the audience (this included materials on the perception of Western films by the Soviet public and censorship);
- biographies and creative portraits of Western actors and directors (often neutrally or positively evaluating these filmmakers);
- reviews of Western films (often positive);



- reviews of Western national cinematographies (here, as a rule, criticism of bourgeois cinematography was combined with a positive assessment of works and trends ideologically acceptable to the USSR);
- articles about Western newsreels (with approaches similar to reviews of national cinemas);
- articles about foreign film technology, studios and cinemas (as a rule, ideologically neutral, containing calls to adopt technically advanced Western experience, in particular, sound cinema);
- short informational materials (with photographs) about events in foreign cinema, about everyday details of the life of movie stars; which became the main bait for a significant part of the magazine's readers.

## 5. Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the Russian Science Foundation grant (RSF, project No. 23-28-00015, <https://rscf.ru/project/23-28-00015/>) at the Taganrog Institute of Management and Economics. Project theme: "Western cinema on the pages of the *Soviet Screen Magazine* (1925–1991)". Head of the project is Professor A. Levitskaya.

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**Appendix.** The main dates and events related to the historical, political, economic, ideological, socio-cultural and cinematic context in which the publication of the Soviet Screen magazine was carried out in 1925–1927.

**1925**

January 15: leaving Trotsky (1879–1940) from the post of People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs.

January 16-17: the first meeting of the workers of the “Left Front of the Arts” (LEF).

February 23: a first meeting on the organization of the “Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema” (ODSK).

March 1: creation of the All-Russian Photo-Cinematic Joint Stock Company “Soviet Cinema” (Sovkino).

March 12: by decision of the Press Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the publishing houses “Soviet Film”, “Cinema-week”, “Proletarian Cinema” and others were merged into a single “Film Publishing House of the RSFSR” (hereinafter “Cinema Print”), headed by V. Uspensky (1880–1929), who kept this post until his suicide.

March 24: in connection with the creation of the Film Publishing House of the RSFSR, magazines and newspapers are reorganized. The magazine *Screen Cinema Journal* was reorganized into the *Soviet Screen*, and *Cinema Journal* was reorganized into the newspaper *Cinema* (*Kino*. 1925. 1: 1. March 24).

March 24: publication of the first issue of the weekly newspaper *Cinema*.

March 24: publication of the first issue of the *Soviet Screen* magazine. Chief Editor: Kirill Shutko (1884–1941).

April 1: publication of the first issue of the magazine *Soviet Cinema*, an organ of the artistic council for cinema under the Glavpolitprosvet.

April 7: death of Patriarch Tikhon.

April 10: Tsaritsyn is renamed Stalingrad.

June 18: Resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party “On the policy of the party in the field of fiction”.

10 July: establishment of the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS).

May 12: Kirill Shutko, editor of the *Soviet Screen*, appointed deputy Chairman of the Artistic Council for Cinema at the Main Political Education Department.

May 21: elected to the new board of the Association of Revolution Cineasts: N. Lebedev (1897–1978), V. Erofeev (1898–1940), Ratner, N. Bravko (1900–1972), I. Kobozev (1893–1973), B. Guzman (1892–1944), H. Khersonsky (1897–1968), A. Room (1894–1976) and the future editor of the *Soviet Screen* A. Kurs (1892–1937) (*Kino*. 1925. May 26; *Cinema magazine ARC*. 1925. 4-5: 37).

May 25-31: Congress of Union of Art Workers, which adopted a resolution on cinema based on the report of Sovkino and VUFKU.

July 24: the NKVD approved the charter of the ODSK. The Organizing Bureau of the ODSK was created under the chairmanship of F. Dzierżyński (1877-1926).

September 7: Alexander Kurs (1892–1937) succeeded Kirill Shutko (1884–1941) in his position of editor of the *Soviet Screen* magazine.

October 12: signing of the Soviet-German trade treaty.

November 12: organizing meeting of the ODSK (Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema).

December 28: death of the poet S. Yesenin (1895–1925).

December 18-31: XIV Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, which adopted a course towards industrialization.

**1926**

January 18: premiere of S. Eisenstein's film "Battleship Potemkin".

February 5: armed attack on Soviet diplomatic couriers in the territory of Latvia. Diplomatic courier T. Nette (1896–1926) killed.

April: L. Kamenev (1883–1936), G. Zinoviev (1883–1936) and L. Trotsky (1879–1940), at the head of the so-called “united opposition”, insist on the dominant development of heavy industry, an uncompromising struggle against the “kulaks” and assistance to the revolutionary movement in other countries of the world.

April 3: plenum of the Central Council of the ODSK, chairman - F. Dzierżyński (1877–1926).

April 23: the Berlin Treaty between the USSR and Germany was signed, which confirmed mutual obligations under the 1922 Rappalo Treaty.

May 12-15: a coup d'état in Poland, the establishment of an authoritarian “sanation” regime, in which the actual power in the country was in the hands of Minister Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935).



July 20: death of the chairman of the Cheka and ODSK F. Dzierżyński (1877–1926).

July 20: Vyacheslav Uspensky (1880–1929) succeeded Alexander Kurs (1892–1937) in his position of editor of the *Soviet Screen* magazine.

July 20-22: Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks arrive in Moscow.

July 14-23: plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which removed G. Zinoviev (1883–1936) from the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks and elected Y. Rudzutak (1887–1938) to the Politburo, who, after the death of F. Dzierżyński led to everything else and ODSK.

July: Glavrepertkom report, which, among other things, discussed a significant expansion of the range of censorship in cinema.

August 16: liquidation of “Goskino”, “Leningradkino” (formerly “Sevzapkino” and “Kino-Sever”) and “Proletkino” as independent film organizations of the RSFSR, with the transfer of their film production to “Sovkino”. As a result, the entire film production of the RSFSR turned out to be concentrated in “Sovkino”, “Mezhrabpom-Rus” and “Gosvoenkino”.

August 27: Resolution of the Presidium of the Central Committee of Rabis on the merger of the Rabis publishing house with the Kinopechat (Cinema Print) publishing house.

September 21: Nikolai Yakovlev succeeded Vyacheslav Uspensky (1880–1929) in his position of editor of the *Soviet Screen* magazine.

October 16: the United Opposition criticized its “splitting activities”.

October 18: publication in *The New York Times* of Lenin's so-called “testament”.

October 23: the joint plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission of the Communist Party removed L. Trotsky from the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and relieved L. Kamenev of his duties as a candidate member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

November 2-13: first All-Russian Conference of Filmmakers-Political Enlighteners. The conference adopted a resolution on the report of “Sovkino” on the rental, training and retraining of personnel, etc.

November 9: direction of Agitprop of the Central Committee of the Communist Party to the Glavrepertkom on the need to close access to the Soviet screen for “white émigré films”.

December 11: Resolution of the Presidium of the Central Committee of Rabis on the procedure for the implementation of the ideological leadership of filmmaking by the film production bodies of the People’s Commissariat of Education and the expediency of maintaining the artistic council for cinema as an auxiliary body under the artistic department of the Main Political Education (*Bulletin of the Central Committee of Rabis*. 1927. 1: 21).

December 13: Resolution of the Collegium of the People’s Commissariat of Education on the liquidation of the artistic council for cinema at the Main Political Education and on the transfer of its functions to the Main Repertoire Committee in terms of control and supervision of film production and consideration of scripts.

## 1927

February 23: Great Britain sent the “Chamberlain note” to the USSR.

April 18-26: The principle of five-year planning was approved at the IV Congress of the Soviet Communist Party.

May 26: Great Britain annuls the trade agreement and severed diplomatic relations with the USSR due to the “hostile activities” of the Communist International.

June 7: assassination in Warsaw of the Plenipotentiary of the USSR in Poland P. Voikov (1888–1927).

June 10: according to the Decree of the OGPU, twenty representatives of the nobility of the former Russian Empire were shot as a response to the murder of P. Voikov.

September 3: “Platform of the 83’s” brings together opposition leaders who criticize Stalin.

October 6: premiere of the first full-length sound film *The Jazz Singer* (USA).

October 15: Decree of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR “On the transformation of the Partnership on the shares of the Film Publishing House of the RSFSR into Teakinopechat”. The publishing house is still headed V. Uspensky (1880–1929).

October 21-23: plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party excludes L. Trotsky and G. Zinoviev from the Central Committee.

November 7: the USSR solemnly celebrated the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. On this occasion, the United Opposition organized street demonstrations in Moscow and Leningrad.

November 7: premiere of S. Eisenstein's film *October*.

November 10-12: World Congress of Friends of the USSR in Moscow.

November 14: L. Trotsky and G. Zinoviev are expelled from the Communist Party.

December 2 – December 19: XV Congress of the Communist Party, which approved the program of collectivization of agriculture. Another defeat of the oppositionists: 75 representatives of the "Trotsky-Zinoviev bloc" (L. Kameney, G. Pyatakov, K. Radek, C. Rakovsky and others) and supporters of the "democratic centralism" group were expelled from the Communist Party.

December 12-17: First All-Union Conference of Film and Photo Workers.