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Film Societies in Soviet & Russian Media Education

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Abstract

This article explores the space between old and new realities and fields of cultural studies – the relationship of film clubs and film societies, the professional film education system in Russia, and general media competence. The starting point of the analysis is given by the creation and activity of the society “Friends of Soviet Cinema” (1925–1934) as the link between filmmakers and film buffs. Thanks to its president, the notorious Felix Dzerzhinskiy, it became a controlling tool that did not really work. The author also emphasizes the difference of approach to media education in the periods of the Thaw (after Stalin’s death), Perestroika, and the present when the Russian Filmmakers’ Union affirms as one of its main goals the re-creation of “Friends of Cinema” society. Special attention is given to the relations of Russian film buffs with foreign cinephiles, as well as participation of Federation of Film Clubs of the USSR and then Russia in the work of International Federation of Film Societies. Personal experience of the author confirms the ongoing interaction between the filmmakers’ formation, especially in the oldest film school of Russia and the world – VGIK, and mass media education under diverse jurisdictions in different times and localities.

Keywords: Friends of Cinema society, film club, film society, film and media education, VGIK.

1. Introduction

On March 21, 2013, the 10th Congress of the Union of Russian Filmmakers voted to revive the society “Friends of Cinema.” According to those who initiated the project, the main task of this society, just as it had been in the late 1920s – early 1930s, was to become the propaganda of Russian cinema.

“Despite some festival and box office successes,” the ITAR-TASS report announced a year later after a plenary session of the board of this organization, “the situation in the contemporary domestic film industry cannot be considered successful. The efforts of state bodies to support the production and distribution of domestic films have not brought decisive changes in the current situation. The main reason is the loss of the permanent connection between professional filmmakers and the most forward-thinking viewers that existed in pre-Perestroika years. At the time, the life of our industry was largely determined by the active work of the Soviet Film Propaganda Bureau and a unified network of film clubs” (Filmmakers Union, 2014).

Filmmakers decided to create an Organizing Committee which would take control of the development of the “Society of Friends of Cinema”: “The Union of Russian Filmmakers came up with the initiative to revive the Society of Friends of Cinema (ODK), which used to successfully promote the distribution of domestic films and supervised film education in schools, factories, etc.

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In addition, ODK held annual All-Union conferences to discuss the previous year's film production and distribution," the report says (Filmmakers Union, 2014).

As part of this decree, the Union of Filmmakers calls on Russian film clubs to register for further assistance and development: "The task of the Organizing Committee is also to register existing film clubs in the country. Registered film clubs will receive special preferences; they will be able to organize meetings venerable filmmakers, to discuss new films, and to get acquainted with interesting film projects that are launched into production; to hold annual All-Russian conferences. Participation in international events is also anticipated" (Filmmakers Union, 2014).

Unfortunately, these good intentions were not fully realized. The Organizing Committee was headed by director G. Poloka, who was well acquainted with the activities of film clubs, which had helped him in the difficult period of Stagnation, especially after the ban on his film *Intervention* (*Interventsiia*, 1968). His efforts were interrupted by his untimely death of December 5 of the same year, and the promising undertaking was not developed further.

The author of this article sets himself the task of initiating a systematic study of the experience of the film club movement in Russia and to place it in the context of contemporary media education. The inclusion of the history of Russian cinema and of the systems of distribution and reception of films in the audience that is primarily interested in the development of screen art in its various forms, allows to take a fresh look at the processes of social and psychological changes of new generations, who focus primarily on screen-based communication, and in the future, on virtual reality. Based on the unique experience of film education in the USSR and Russia, which began in 1919 with the creation of the first institution of higher education in the field of cinema, known today as the All-Russian (formerly All-Union) State Institute of Cinematography named after S.A. Gerasimov (VGIK), we will try to outline the specifics of interaction of the education of professional filmmakers as well as mass cinema education, where the real and virtual film clubs have been and still remain the crucial link.

2. Materials and methods

The research materials are articles and reports on Soviet & Russian film clubs and film education, including from archives. Basic research method: analysis of articles and reports in sociocultural, political and historical contexts.

The key issue in this regard is the interaction of the professional training of filmmakers with the dissemination of their work to a broad and interested audience. This was the concern of the activists of the movement in support of Soviet cinema. In the first issue of the magazine *Soviet Cinema* (*Sovetskoe kino*) for 1925, K. Maltsev examined the main problems associated with the establishment and future activities of the "Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema":

"The position put forward in the early years of the Revolution, that Soviet cinema can develop only with the participation of broad organized masses in its construction, remains unchanged now. The question now comes down to whether it is possible at all to talk about the broad involvement of the masses in the construction of Soviet cinema and, if so, how best to approach this task.

In part, we can find the answer to this question in the limited experience of the Society of the Builders of Proletarian Cinema (OSPK). Created about a year and a half ago on the initiative of the Proletkino studio, with some support from professional and Komsomol organizations, this society was, at one time, fairly widespread. It enjoyed the greatest success in the provinces. Without any efforts or special campaigns, some local branches of the OSPK quickly began to combine more than one thousand workers in their organizations (Saratov, Samara). Workers eagerly joined OSPK cells, because in them they found some spiritual food and, most importantly, at least some work, which does not happen in the cells of a number of other societies (Dobrokhim, ODVF, etc.). The OSPK cells, despite a number of shortcomings in the work of the OSPK as a whole, showed tremendous initiative. They organized "trials" of films they had watched, gave reports on the tasks of the cinema, chose special film correspondents, and in some places even brought out regular small film newspapers.

Judging by the reports and letters from the provinces, interest in cinema among workers is constantly on the rise. This interest is further fueled by the new Soviet films depicting events close to the workers and understandable to them, often, as they say, "grabbing the gut." The movement of the masses towards the cinema spontaneously proceeds from below and, apparently, not that much effort at all is needed to channel this movement into an organized course and use it with the maximum benefit for the Soviet film industry.

The Society of the Builders of Proletarian Cinema could not fully manage this movement and give it the right direction. The OSPK, which had set itself the task of organizing workers of the world around proletarian cinema, had approached its task in quite a commercial and narrow-minded way. The OSPK considered itself as an appendage to Proletkino and considered workers drawn into the Society to be the participants of Proletkino who should provide it with moral and material assistance. The OSPK also considered it possible for its lower-level cells to use film projectors and films, the establishment of film studios, laboratories, and other production and commercial activities. Thus, the OSPK organization suffered from the following main disadvantages:

1) while uniting and calling on the workers to provide material and moral assistance to Proletkino, it completely bypassed other, more reputable Soviet film organizations (Goskino, Sevzapkino, etc.),

2) directed the activities of its cells towards the creation of their own production and commercial film enterprises, thereby developing excessive amateurism and distracting the Society cells from the immediate tasks of assisting Soviet cinema in all its manifestations” ([Soviet Cinema, 1925](#)).

The author goes on to consider the background to the creation of the Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema: “At present, the OSPK has decided to cease its isolated existence. Instead of the OSPK, a new voluntary society to assist the Soviet cinema is being created; unlike OSPK, it is no longer attached to any individual film company but wants to help everyone in their work equally. This society is called the Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema. Preparatory organizational work to create the Society has already been done. An agreement has been reached with the OSPK, according to which it merges into the newly created society, fully accepting its charter. The base-level cells of the OSPK are preserved, however, the nature of their work changes and they are connected to the center in a different way.

What tasks does this new Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema pose? In the draft statute, in the section “the goals and objectives of the Society,” we find the following: a) the fight against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology in cinema; b) facilitation of the production and dissemination of ideologically viable films; c) promotion of the creation of scientific and children’s films; d) promotion of cinema in the village and carrying out measures directed at making cinema available; etc.

The society plans to make its cells the basic strongholds of its work. These cells: a) organize trials of newly released films; b) help the work of local cinema theaters; c) facilitate the organization of new film projectors and film portable film projectors; d) popularize cinema among workers and peasants, etc. The organizational structure of the Society differs little from the organization of the OSPK.

If one compares the statutes of the OSPK and the new Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema (ODSK), one finds a lot in common in them, and only upon closer examination it becomes evident what a deep and fundamental difference divides them. The main goal of OSPK’s activities was to help Proletkino, while the main goal of ODSK is to help and assist the entire Soviet film industry; the cells of OSPK could engage in their own production and commercial activities, while the cells of ODSK do not start their own production and commerce dealings and only contribute to the production work of the Soviet film organizations.”

The author concludes that it seems that the way of organizing the general public around Soviet cinema has been found: Party and professional organizations should bring this matter forward, into the masses and together with them help the Party and the Soviet Republic to make the most of cinema as one of the most powerful instruments of communist propaganda and enlightenment.

The Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema (ODSK) as a voluntary mass society was officially organized on August 20, 1925, on the initiative of the Association of Revolutionary Cinematography (ARK) and the Main Political and Public Education Department of the People's Commissariat of Education. On November 12 of the same year, the Council of the Society was established.

Many filmmakers took part in the work of ODSK, the first among them being representatives of the Soviet film avant-garde including D. Vertov, V.M. Kirshon, V.K. Turkin, and others.

Officially, the objectives of ODSK included bringing the cinema closer to the worker and peasant masses and fighting against the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology on the

minds of viewers: in a word, counteracting the influence of popular Western European and American genres films that predominated in film theaters at the time.

The Society had a positive program as well. ODSK put a lot of effort into helping the “cinefication” of the country, that is, extending the distribution and exhibition network, especially in the villages; it created film clubs in factories and plants, launched an amateur film movement, organized work in educational institutions and at film theaters. From 1929 on, the ODSK became known as the Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema and Photography (ODSKF).

The process of self-determination of the Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema continued almost continuously until its liquidation in 1934. It is customary to begin the history of the film society movement in Russia with its activities, although the sources of this movement, as we have seen, are indeed even older.

According to the plan, film societies were supposed to help the development of the film industry, although in reality the desire to control the industry was behind it. Incidentally, the trajectory of the formation of the Union of Soviet Filmmakers from the founding of its Organizing Committee in 1957 to its creation in 1965 was quite similar.

On April 3, 1926, at the plenary session of the Council of ODSK, F. Dzierżyński was elected Chairman of its Board. To illustrate his understanding of the current problems in the field, we can refer to his report of April 24, 1926, almost immediately after his appointment to this post: “It so happened that I got to be Chairmen of the Board of ODSK. The goal of society is to assist the film industry. I think that for the near future, the best way of assistance will be to identify any messes and excesses in this area, as well as to take measures to reduce costs and so on. I therefore ask you to help me and collect the necessary materials. It would be nice if the comrade in charge of this task reported to me about the situation. By the way, it is necessary to outline measures against the fascination with acting for cinema, which is only a waste of funds and materials.” Dzierżyński’s postscript to the document sounds very topical as well: “I was also told that in the cinema, completely unprecedented manners of directors towards actresses reign supreme. Is that so?” (Dzierżyński, 1926). But let’s not remind ourselves of H. Weinstein. Let’s return to the situation of the 1920s instead.

The activities of the Society of Friends of Cinema developed in several directions. The most influential and widespread one was the direction associated with amateur filmmaking, which, according to its creators, was supposed to present the opportunity to get a camera, filming equipment, and so on, primarily for representatives of the working class, who were cut off from the production of this expensive entertainment. The second task, of course, was related to the fact that along with entertainment products and large politically engaged films that made up the main repertoire of film theaters, it was necessary to develop stories about the daily lives of people who, in principle, represented the field of documentary and propaganda cinema.

It is worth recalling that in March 1928 the famous First All-Union Party Conference on Cinema at the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) was held, which more strictly than before raised the question of the political subordination of cinema to current ideological tasks (Roadmap..., 1929).

And although the problem of earning money for the Land of the Soviets was no less acute than ideology, nevertheless, the commercial function in the discussions at this meeting faded into the background, as evidenced by the speech of N.K. Krupskaya. She emphasized that when it came to the film commerce, somehow trade, politics, and ideology had to be all connected into something whole.

“If we compare our cinema with the cinema of bourgeois countries,” emphasized Krupskaya in her speech at the meeting, “we will see a very big difference; of course, neither propaganda of tsarism or propaganda of religion, chauvinism or anti-Semitism is conceivable here. On our screen, all this is absolutely impossible and not only impossible because such is the line of Sovkino, but impossible because the masses would not allow it. But now that we are making more profound demands, we cannot calmly look at how the screen serves as the place for purely bourgeois propaganda in the field of human relationships as well. Let us take the following example: all the work of our Women’s Committees has developed so profoundly, captured the masses so thoroughly, that to see on the screen the constant preaching of attitudes towards a woman as a toy of some kind, the glorification of petty-bourgeois family relationships, presenting brothels in detail, etc. becomes completely unbearable, contrary to all our daily work. The glorification of zealotry, which has so been so fused together with all the bourgeois ideology, is already unthinkable,

intolerable. We are pursuing a policy of fighting against zealotry, but on the screen, it is being glorified with might and main. We cannot remain indifferent to the preaching of bourgeois approaches to all questions. After all, it is all intertwined. Perhaps, for a long time it had not been so noticeable; the bourgeois approach to one or another phenomenon of everyday life is not open anti-Soviet propaganda, but this is ideology, bourgeois ideology through and through.

And if we look at this fact from the point of view of the task that Comrade Lenin always emphasized, the task that falls to the proletarian state during the proletarian dictatorship: to re-educate, to retrain all classes, to inject them with the proletarian ideology, then how are things in this respect in the field of cinema? It is clear that the standards on the part of the Communists in this regard are high. It is impossible to remain calm when, instead of spreading proletarian influence with the help of cinema to petty-bourgeois strata of the society, through foreign films imported in abundance, petty-bourgeois influence extends not only to the petty bourgeoisie, but to a certain extent to the proletariat; it extends to our younger generation.

After all, we do not notice, perhaps, we do not take into account all the power that cinema has. There are a number of works on psychology that prove that an engineer, an agronomist, a worker, or a peasant — all those who deal with material things, with a predominance of them — that for them images are much more convincing than logical persuasion. This is the power of cinema, but we use this power to spread influence foreign to us. We do not take into account the meaning of all this” (Krupskaya 1929).

As for the things connected with acquaintance with films, with screenings, and with meetings of filmmakers with the viewers, here the possibilities of the Society of Friends of Cinema were limited from the start. These programmatic and declared tasks were considered secondary, but in practice, the people’s desire to take part in such activities was so significant that it eventually became perceived as socially dangerous, which in fact led to the liquidation of the Society in the mid-1930s.

As a result, this initiative, which was the first in the world, essentially did not receive further development in the Soviet Union, although it sowed the first seeds of a similar approach in countries that experienced various political upheavals and therefore their population was activated, including in the sphere of the employment of cinema.

3. Discussion

Since until the 1970s, internationally there was still no sharp separation of artistic and experimental films from the current film repertoire, cinema societies and clubs in the form they acquired after the Second World War could not be widespread in our country. In the USSR, film clubs were enough, in particular in rural areas, where films of the current repertoire were shown, mainly those of popular genres.

That is why, in the 1930s, the need for such organizations disappeared as if by itself; it turned out that it could not fulfill the tasks of ideological control, unlike the party organizations in the field of film production. During World War II, there were other, more pressing tasks.

The second significant rise of the film club movement in the USSR, the disappearance of which was lamented by filmmakers in the ITAR-TASS report above, and in fact, its formation in our country were associated with the Thaw period after the death of Stalin. At the time, social activity increased sharply; new connections were established between the creative professionals and the audience; just like everywhere else around the world, young filmmakers, young viewers, and young critics sought to solve similar problems and hoped for a rejuvenation of both the film industry and social life.

During this period, domestic film buffs already encountered a well prepared milieu, because the international film club/film society movement, which had originated in the pre-war years and, as it were, had been stopped the war, was re-established in 1947 by the creation of the International Federation of Film Societies.

At that time, France became the center of the international film society movement, and this was due to the fact that American cinema, classic Hollywood, which at that time was experiencing certain difficulties, had rather sharply become more prominent in the European box office. Consequently, the connection of national filmmakers with their own domestic audiences became an extremely important and urgent task. The French Federation of Cinema Clubs was the first to strengthen its position. Already in the early 1950s, it was a fairly stable organization; some time later, the Federation began publishing its monthly film journal *Cinéma*. The careers of film critics

were formed within the framework of the film society movement and well-known French film scholars began with film clubs, just as future well-known French directors began with journalism. And by contagion, the film society movement spread to neighboring countries. In the USSR, the state ideological censorship was an additional stimulus for the spread of the film society movement.

The situation in the Soviet Union at the time has been vividly described in the book of L. Ostrovskaya, a veteran of the USSR's film society movement, called *The Taste for Life (Vkus zhizni*, the third installment): "In the distant years of the middle of the last century, when film fans of different ages, different professions, and tastes rushed around in search of opportunities to see films by prominent masters of world and domestic cinema, there were few such opportunities: something at the Moscow International Film Festival, something on imported video cassettes, something from the personal archives of our directors, and something from the shelves of the state film archives. The problems of the "film hunger" were the main incentive for these people to group into film societies: at work in various research institutes, at universities, at film theaters and cultural centers; to find access to films and directors, to exchange copies, and to fiercely discuss what they saw. For these reasons, in 1988, the Federation of Film Clubs of the USSR was established, which still exists today in the legal status of the Interregional Public Organization – the Federation of Film Clubs (Ostrovskaya, 2018: 43).

I would like to add that a crucial factor in the consolidation of the film society movement in the capital was the opening in 1966 of the film theater *Illyuzion* of the Soviet State Film Archive (Gosfilmofond), where one could watch domestic films and, to the extent possible, foreign films of the past decades. My personal participation in the work of film societies also dates to this period. During my years of study at the Department of History of the Moscow State University (1964 – 1969) at the University's film society on Lenin Hills, I first tried my hand at the simultaneous translation of films, which later became my second profession (after Art History) and my main source of income.

It was at that time that I met O.O. Roitenberg, an art historian and film society movement enthusiast. We were brought together by our Art History education and our love of cinema. "Olga Osipovna Roitenberg (1923–2001), – wrote R. Frumkina in her column on the website "Troitskii variant – Nauka", – was an unusual human being in many respects. Burdened from childhood with a serious illness, walking with the help of crutches or, at best, with a walking stick, she was agile not only spiritually and mentally: she was also physically tireless if this was required by the Cause. One of such large-scale causes in her life was the organization of a film society at the Moscow Union of Artists in the early 1960s. As an art historian, Roitenberg was accepted into the youth section of the Moscow Union of Artists in 1956. With characteristic energy and enthusiasm, she organized exhibitions of young artists, collaborated with the magazines *Art (Iskusstvo)*, *Creativity (Tvorchestvo)*, and *Decorative Art of the USSR (Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR)*; published articles on the history of fine art and reviews of exhibitions. In the 1960s, Olga Osipovna became fascinated with cinema, but, of course, she could not be just a spectator. With characteristic passion to introduce other people to the things that were close to her heart, she organized the famous film society at the Moscow House of Artists and became its permanent chairman. The society had the opportunity to show films that were not intended for distribution and to discuss these films with their creators (for example, in G. Staroverov's film, you will see a story about a meeting with Federico Fellini and Giulietta Masina). As the head of the club, Roitenberg organized screenings and discussions of the best domestic and foreign films and served as a representative at forums and film festivals in Russia and abroad" (Frumkina, 2014).

On O. Roitenberg's initiative, I was elected President of the National Federation of Film Clubs and received the opportunity to get closely acquainted with the work of the International Federation of Film Societies.

It was at the turn of the 1990s that I had the opportunity to participate in one of the congresses of this very influential at the time organization. It should be noted that many filmmakers who I encountered later in the film festival field participated in this event. Thus, one of the activists of the film society movement was a representative of Greece, D. Eipides, who for many years was responsible for selecting films from Eastern Europe (including Russia) for the International Film Festival in Toronto (Canada).

It was then that I realized that there were two types of film societies in the world, only one of which was represented in the Soviet Union. Most of the film societies represented at the Congress

were more or less legally segregated and were independent organizations, sometimes very large ones. In English, they were called film societies. Although this term is often translated into Russian as “a film club,” these are organizations that systematically show films that are difficult to understand, films that require special training, for those who love cinema as an art form. In France, they are respectfully called cinephiles, and here they are *kinomany* (film fans) (Golubev, 2015), which is closer to the American term “film buff.”

Such organizations, of course, were especially prevalent in the UK, and then migrated, unlike traditional European film clubs, to the United States, where they remain in operation to this day, but already as large non-profit organizations. An example of this is the Film Society at the Lincoln Center in New York, where large film festivals are held. This cultural work is based on the very existence of the Lincoln Center both as a building and as a cultural non-profit organization, and in general is already quite far from the original club associations with which this movement began.

Currently, a club distribution network in the United States is being developed among universities and film archives, where organized film societies may exist. In contrast to film societies, film clubs proper existed at schools and institutions of higher education as amateur associations or organized courses for after school activities. They were more like what we had in the Soviet Union. The difference was that this kind of activity in the USSR was often seen by the authorities as a socially dangerous conductor of the “pernicious influence of the West.”

In the Soviet Union, in the years of the Thaw, the film club movement was not particularly encouraged by the state; it was not formally organized, but rather formed spontaneously. As I have already noted, I witnessed this period personally already in the 1960s, being a very young film fan. I can say that film clubs united people who were interested in cinema as an art form and in watching those films (including domestic ones) that were released in our country in a limited release of two hundred copies, i.e. they ended up only in the largest distribution offices where they settled and, as a rule, were not exhibited at all, although there was no direct ban on it. One way or another, film clubs were the ones to give life to these films, because they were not formally banned, they were allowed to be screened, they could be acquired in distribution offices for fairly moderate rent, and, most importantly, all these circumstances allowed to invite film directors, sometimes actors, screenwriters and other crew members, and to form such a cultural environment not only in large cities with a population of over a million, but also in small towns, where film clubs were sometimes formed that had quite a serious influence and significance.

A significant part of film clubs was created (formally or informally) at institutions of higher education, at universities where film buffs gathered, organized, and announced their existence without becoming an independent organization, but rather a meeting place for people that searched for new ways of filmic expression. In Europe, this happened in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, when intellectual philosophical cinema was put in the forefront, in the years when the number of film theaters around the world was decreasing. In Russia, this process would start much later, only from the end of the 1960s, and would be associated with the spread of television. The distinction between cinema as artistic and commercial enterprise, between films with a real artistic value and film, which were primarily created as consumer goods, was initially quite relative. Both categories of films appeared in the same distribution network, were released in the same film theaters, and although they attracted audiences that differed by age, social composition, etc., they were open to all. The ousting of serious films to a kind of periphery of festival or art house cinema occurred much later.

In the 1970s, as the control over the cinema repertoire tightened and the number of films that were not banned but were not shown increased, cult director's figures were formed, which included K. Muratova in Odessa, A. Tarkovsky, as well as young directors who, in one way or another, acquired popularity, and those representatives of the older generation, whose careers experienced difficulties.

One of the enthusiasts of the film club movement at that time and subsequently was G. Poloka, who at some point, as mentioned above, became the head of the Organizing Committee of the Union of Filmmakers on the re-establishment of the Society of Friends of Cinema.

At that time, I often had to travel to film clubs around the country; some of them were well known, especially those that combined an amateur film studio and a film club to discuss films, such as the *Youth (Yunost')* film club in Yaroslavl, where there was a rather serious audience for these kind of meetings.

As the ties between the professional film industry and the non-professional film club environment grew stronger, more and more directors looked for their audience at the film clubs, since they did not find it in regular film theaters. Therefore, this movement acquired a rather important cultural function.

International activity has allowed me to understand how our film clubs differ from film clubs that exist in France, Germany, Great Britain, and other countries. At that time, the strengthening of the ties between film clubs in different countries contributed to the rather complicated process of film exchange, since there were only 35 mm film versions that were difficult to transport across borders: various permits had to be obtained, and so film sharing was not systematic. On the other hand, there was a systematic exchange of people, as well as the establishment of contacts, the arrangement of various kinds of meetings and symposia, which were not immediately perceived as the corrupting influence of the West. Incidentally, it was during this period that the world cinema and Soviet cinema developed in the same direction of turning cinema into serious art.

With the increase of political control and aggravation of the international situation, as well as with the defeat of student unrest in the West and as a result of the invasion of troops of the Warsaw Pact countries into Czechoslovakia, film clubs in their desire to preserve and show those films which did not always reach the regular screens acquired the status of tacit opposition to what was happening in the country and in the world in general. We sought not only to show films but also to somehow arrange some rather important cultural events around the screenings. At the same time, one has to mention that universities and other educational institutions and continued to play a fairly significant role in the film club movement, as did cultural institutions and organizations.

If we look at the map of the film clubs in the Soviet Union at that time, we will see that film clubs are concentrated in university cities. It was not exclusively Soviet practice. As I have already noted, all the film society and film club movement in the USA has become a university movement. Therefore, strictly speaking, the film club movement as such ceased to exist there. There were university clubs that showed films in university cinema halls, where an alternative system of distributing artistic or experimental films, non-commercial films not intended for screenings in theaters was developed, since, before they got into museums, these films should have received support of this special audience. As a matter of fact, the social role of film clubs in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century was preparing this particular audience, because, while in the late 1950s - early 1960s, it happened so that most of the audience in Western countries were students and intellectuals and the family audience moved to television, by the 1970s, the situation changed dramatically and the family audience returned to film theaters, led by children and teenagers in the first place.

Strictly speaking, this child and teenage "wave" made the formation of new film clubs oriented towards popular, mass cinema meaningless. A rather sharp separation occurred at this juncture between the so-called mainstream cinema and the arthouse. Arthouse cinema, which existed in post-Soviet Russia as well, in part due to the newly emerging film clubs, has primarily become festival cinema, and this tendency has developed around festivals in general.

The largest film clubs created their own festivals and received public recognition because of this. A perfect example in this regard is the Days of Russian Cinema in Limoges, which the Russian Federation of Film Clubs has been conducting for several decades with the help of colleagues from the French province of Limousin. Larissa Ostrovskaya writes about this in detail in the above-mentioned text. She also talks about the work that the Moscow-based Chekhov Media Club does in the sphere of cinema. The change from cinema to media is not accidental here: the most forward-thinking film clubs, not without the influence of the Internet, which has become the main channel for presenting films to the viewer, use modern terminology, which differentiates them from the inert traditional cinema education system.

It may seem that in modern conditions the traditional function of the club movement, that is, redressing an injustice justice in relation to previously underappreciated works, has faded into the background.

In fact, the situation is reversed. I will give one example well known to me: the fate of my graduate student from the Russian State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK), G. Darakhvelidze. His BA thesis, devoted to the work of the cult French director J.-P. Melville, already testified to creative maturity and was published as a separate book by the same Vinnitsa publishing house as most of the books by activists of the USSR film club movement. Then he began a dissertation on

the work of British directors M. Powell and E. Pressburger, who, in the Soviet times, were unfairly considered undeserving of critical and scholarly attention.

When the Department of Cinema Studies at VGIK refused to approve his work and recommend him for a defense on the basis of a voluminous text, on the basis of which he, due to youthful maximalism, refused to write a separate dissertation in its canonized form, a nervous breakdown followed that almost cost the young man his life. Even I was not able to save the day.

But then the support of film clubs arrived. Here is how L. Ostrovskaya tells the story:

“The Federation of Film Clubs of the Russian Federation for ten years, from the first volume (2008) to the current one (2017), as a community of readers, viewers, admirers, and active popularizers, has been keenly and attentively accompanying this huge scholarly work, one of the most significant studies in film history of the recent decades. All volumes as they appeared have been presented by the Federation of Film Clubs to professional and general viewing audiences at various club venues, including the main one, the Chekhov Media Club in the Chekhov Library. Starting with a monograph in two volumes devoted to the work of the duo of eminent film masters Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, this project of a young (born February 7, 1985) film scholar Georgiy Darakhvelidze, in the process of accumulation, expansion, and deepening of the author’s analytical and informational background has by the fourth volume reached the level of the most extensive encyclopedic panorama of all British cinema as the creative habitat of Powell and Pressburger” (Ostrovskaya, 2018: 90).

The presentation of the fifth volume of this work took place in the second half of 2018, unfortunately, not at VGIK, where the author, rejected by the film scholars’ establishment, had studied, but at a cinema club venue. It is characteristic that the author, who is looked down on at VGIK, is recognized by the leading foreign specialists in British cinema, starting with Ian Christie and Kevin Brownlow, with whom he has corresponded, as well as with Martin Scorsese. The classic situation “no man is a prophet in his own land” reminds us of the need for pluralism in views not only on politics, but also on art, in which the film club movement serves as a natural counterbalance to professional aberrations (as the saying goes, “every expert is like a gumboil: his fullness is one-sided”).

4. Results

An attempt to revive the film club movement after the Fifth Congress of Soviet Filmmakers (1986) during the restructuring of the film industry, which eventually led to very sad consequences for the cinema, was unsuccessful. In the new system of the commercialization of cinema, film clubs were deprived of their previously existing opportunities for acquiring films for screening, and the films they wanted to show were in any form or other released in theaters anyway as a result of the activities of the Conflict Commission at the Union of Filmmakers, even though they were not successful with the general public and quickly disappeared from the screens.

This process was also aggravated by the general crisis of Russian film industry and the almost complete collapse of the distribution system under the influence of various video salons, which publicly showed videos, which were not intended for public viewing, as a rule, in bad quality.

Nevertheless, in recent decades, one way or another, the film club movement has begun to experience a new resurrection, and again there has been a need to somehow connect the domestic film clubs with those club-like organizations that have existed in different forms in Western European countries, now the European Union, and in those European countries that are not among its members. For some time, the relations between American universities and Russian film clubs intensified, but then this interest has faded from both sides due to the aggravation of the international situation and it has moved away to the far periphery of cinematic interests. So, at the beginning of the 21st century, the film club movement in Russia once again has become a primarily national phenomenon, reflecting the peculiarities of the national film distribution and the need to form, in addition to the constantly growing network of film festivals, a club rental system, which would allow to show the audience those films that initially were not and did not have to be designed for mass commercial success of the mainstream.

In this sense, the social functions of film clubs in the modern world have become even more obvious and the film club movement has become one of the engines of the artistic process, which has often went in the opposite direction to the mainstream, which, since as early as the 1970s, has acquired the form of predominantly high-budget entertainment cinema, the center which has become Hollywood (erroneously called American cinema, and in fact a transnational center, where

all personnel capable of making films highly profitable, has gathered) and Bollywood, which has played the same role in Asia. There is also Nollywood, Nigerian cinema, which to some extent has played a similar role in Africa. Russian film clubs do not have direct connections with these centers, i.e. with the Indian and African ones, and as for Hollywood, it has seized the dominant position in the film distribution of all countries around the world, and post-Soviet Russia in this regard has been no exception.

5. Conclusion

It must be said that the promising task of developing a project of a club distribution network that would connect the numerous film clubs that are currently being formed in various cities, as a rule, again, around some institutions of higher education and sometimes around theaters and film theaters, is becoming more and more relevant. Therefore, if we talk about the revival of some form of a federation of film clubs, which, although it still exists formally, in fact simply unites several people who used to be involved in the film club movement during its heyday, i.e. in the 1960s – 1970s, then, accordingly, this new system should probably be formed on the basis of strengthening international relations and studying the experience, first of all, of German municipal film theaters and of film clubs in American universities, and, of course, of the French experience, where the film club movement, having survived several crises, continues to exist and is a rather active part of the current film process.

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