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Nelli Morozova on Censors, Censorship and the Soviet Film Famine, 1948-52¹

The late Stalin years are known in film history as the period of *malokartin'e* or film famine—an apt moniker for an era in which film production slowed to a trickle and annual release rates plummeted to all-time lows. The worst phase of the shortage struck in mid-1948, with a new policy requiring the production solely of “masterpieces”—politically and artistically significant films—and withdrawing approval for less grandiose projects.² The result was the halving of average production rates from 22 to 11 films per year, virtually overnight.³ At the nadir of production in 1951, a mere nine features were released, representing a fraction of the prewar norm and paling in comparison even with the output of the evacuated wartime industry.⁴ Not only did the quantity of films suffer after the war, but also their quality, as censorship was tightened and filmmakers retreated to the relatively safe subjects of Stalin’s exploits, happy collective farm workers, and historical biographies in an era marked by continuous political and cultural purging. These were the years of “the death of Soviet film”.⁵

¹ I would like to thank Samantha Sherry for organizing the conference, *New Perspectives on Censorship under Communism* (Oxford 2015), for which this paper was initially developed, and for many fruitful discussions on censorship and censors before and since. My gratitude also goes to the anonymous reviewers for helpful structural critiques. This research was made possible by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and writing up, by the Max Hayward Visiting Fellowship at St Antony’s College, University of Oxford—many thanks!

² Rossiiskii Gosudartsvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial’no-Politicheskoi Istorii (RGASPI) f. 17, op. 3, d. 1071, ll. 14-15 (Politburo resolution “On the production plan for feature, documentary and travel films in 1948,” 14 June 1948), reprinted in Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov, eds., *Vlast' i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia: dokumenty TSK RKP(b)-VKP(b), VChK-OGPU-NKVD o kul'turnoi politike: 1917-1953 gg.* (Moscow: Demokratia, 1999), pp. 635-37.

³ Specifically, there were 24 new releases in 1945, 18 in 1946, 24 in 1947, and 22 in 1948, followed by a precipitous drop in 1949 with 12 releases, 13 in 1950, 9 in 1951, and 10 in 1952. These figures exclude filmed concerts and theatrical performances, and are compiled from: Aleksandr Veniaminovich Macheret, ed., *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my: annotirovannyi katalog: vol. 2 zvukovye fil'my, 1930-1957* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961). Note that film statistics throughout the article are based on the release date, rather than the year of production, which often differed markedly from the date of licensing and screening.

⁴ The war years saw an annual average of 27 titles, with 33 in 1942, 23 in 1943, and 24 in 1944 even while the studios were in the process of relocating. (Macheret.)

⁵ Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 207. Although Kenez enunciates it with the most flair, this has been the general consensus on late Stalin era cinema both within the USSR and without from as early as 1952, when deputy chairman of the *Sovmin* Georgii Malenkov castigated Soviet cinema as “mediocre and dull [...] spiritless and boring” at the XIXth Party Congress on 5 October (quoted in Martin Ebon, *Malenkov: Stalin’s Successor* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953), p. 226). Soviet leaders and members of the artistic intelligentsia followed Malenkov’s lead with aplomb, perhaps most famously at the following Party

Though accurate in its general thrust, this simple narrative nevertheless masks the complexities of a period suffused with paradox. Film production languished in these years, yet film as an industry gained newfound prestige within the state apparatus as it was promoted from Committee to full-fledged ministry from March 1946 to March 1953. Rather than following a predictable course of development, radical policy reversals took Soviet cinema in a new direction, while the very resolution that constrained production so dramatically in mid-1948, also contained the seeds of cinema's survival in the USSR. One of the most intriguing tensions of the period is raised by the memoirs of Nelli Morozova, a Gor'kii film studio editor responsible for implementing censorship during the worst years of the film famine, 1948-52. Morozova provides a rare glimpse into the daily life of the Soviet cinema industry at its most besieged, revealing that for some of its functionaries, the way in which they implemented censorship was as much about preserving cinema as expurgating it.

This article considers Morozova's memoir in partnership with official resolutions and archived film industry records to explore what "the death of film" looked like from within. It provides an overview of how the bureaucracy of film censorship was restructured in these

Congress in February 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev slated postwar cinema for "varnishing reality" and servicing Stalin's personality cult. Russian and Western surveys of Soviet cinema tend to skip over the period (understandably, given the relatively few films to showcase; see for example: Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Cinematography, 1918-1991: Ideological Conflict and Social Reality*, Communication and Social Order (New York: A. de Gruyter, 1993); Birgit Beumers, ed., *A Companion to Russian Cinema* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2016); Birgit Beumers, ed., *The Cinema of Russia and The Former Soviet Union* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007)), or underscore the limitations of the period, including the blandness of the films (Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. xiii), the dominance of the Stalin cult (Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, 2nd edn (I.B. Tauris, 1998); Lilya Kaganovsky, 'Stalinist Cinema 1928-1953', in *The Russian Cinema Reader: Volume I, 1908 to the Stalin Era*, ed. by Rimgaila Salys (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), pp. 208-234) and "Stalinist excess" (Joshua First, 'Scenes of Belonging: Cinema and the Nationality Question in Soviet Ukraine during the Long 1960s' (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2008)), or the oppression of filmmakers (Mira Liehm and Antonín Liehm, *The Most Important Art* (University of California Press, 1980)). Belodubrovskaya's study skilfully places *malokartin'e* in context, highlighting the industrial and professional weaknesses that contributed to the film famine, but the emphasis remains on the failures of Soviet cinema (Maria Belodubrovskaya, *Not According to Plan: Filmmaking under Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017)). Evgeny Dobrenko and Sergei Kapterev, however, avoid the general consensus in their articles on, respectively, the popular appeal of the new genre of Cold War detective films, and the influence of Hollywood on Soviet film stylistics in these years (Evgeny Dobrenko, 'Late Stalinist Cinema and the Cold War: An Equation without Unknowns', *The Modern Language Review*, 98 (2003), pp. 929-944; Sergei Kapterev, 'Illusionary Spoils: Soviet Attitudes toward American Cinema during the Early Cold War', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 10 (2009), pp. 779-807).

years, and examines how it operated in practice, from the everyday absurdities to the small acts of intrepidity that defined what was at that point the most intensive system of film censorship the world had ever seen.

Morozova's recollections are central to this task. Written in the 1970s and published during *glasnost*,⁶ the editor's memoir is an uncommon resource. Although there exists a decent pool of accounts from film directors and actors of the Stalinist period, the recollections of film workers and daily life in film production are few and far between, with the most notable exception being that of Grigorii Mar'iamov, a failed director who became assistant to the Minister of Cinema Ivan Bol'shakov.⁷ In contrast to Mar'iamov's focus on the highest authority in the cinema industry—namely, Stalin—Morozova's memoir fleshes out how censorship functioned at studio and Ministry level. Adding to its intrigue is the memoir's evocation of the language and syntax of screenwriting, which is unsurprising given its author's training as a scenarist. It is less a work of literature than a cinematic omnibus—a compendium of scripts for short films, linked in their overarching theme, periodization and general setting, but distinct from one another in tone, mood, characterization, and genre. Morozova weaves together the conventions of literary and shooting scripts, combining the detailed descriptive passages typical of the former to establish the setting, characters, and underlying tensions of the scene, with the energetic dialoguing, (implicit) soundtrack cues and camera direction of the latter. The result is to render in vibrant Technicolor scenes from daily life as a censor.

Morozova's vignettes provide insight into such matters as relationships between different agencies and officials, decision-making processes, and how authority worked within

⁶ Nelli Morozova, *Moe pristrastie k Dikkensu* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1990). It was subsequently reprinted as: Nelli Morozova, *Moe pristrastie k Dikkensu: semeinaia khronika XX vek* (Moscow: Novyi khronograf, 2011). The passages about her time at Gor'kii were reprinted in the leading film journal of the Soviet and post-socialist period, *Iskusstvo kino*, ensuring that this valuable window into the machine of film censorship was not lost in the flood of Stalin era memoirs. Given its greater accessibility, it is the *Iskusstvo kino* version (now available online) that is cited in this article.

⁷ G. Mar'iamov, *Kremlevskii tsenzor: Stalin smotrit kino*, Moscow, 1992.

the industry, while also addressing questions of individual agency, risk, and the motivations of those involved in what is all too often perceived as a faceless machine. In effect, Morozova's account helps to shift the focus from the failures of the late Stalin era film industry onto its formidable success in persisting under extreme pressure. After all, the industry was able to recover production with impressive rapidity both quantitatively and qualitatively once the choke-hold of the "masterpieces" policy was released after Stalin's death.⁸ In highlighting Morozova's memoir, therefore, the intent of this article is to revive late Stalin era cinema as a dynamic period well worth reconsidering.

Screenwriting and the Film Famine

According to the official line, the postwar slowdown in film production was due to a severe shortage of decent scripts and screenwriters. In reality, this was hardly a new problem, being in fact endemic to the film industry throughout the Stalin period.⁹ Nevertheless, it was the inadequate state of screenwriting that was bemoaned both publicly (in *Pravda*, for instance¹⁰) and behind the closed doors of the Ministry of Cinema.¹¹ The crisis in screenwriting was sufficiently acute after the war as to warrant the Central Committee's (CC) consideration of soliciting screenplays from the public in open contests, while directors resorted to writing

⁸ Production rates nearly tripled to 30 films in 1953, following the fundamental reorganisation of the industry facilitated by Stalin's death. Meanwhile, Soviet films like *The Cranes are Flying* (*Letiat zhuravli*, Kalatozov, 1957) and *Ballad of a Soldier* (*Ballada o soldate*, Chukhrai, 1959) began amassing nominations and wins at Cannes, BAFTA, and the Academy Awards.

⁹ See Belodubrovskaya, particularly Chapter 4, for an analysis of the ideological and industrial roots of this problem.

¹⁰ e.g. "K novomu pod'emu sovetskogo kinoiskusstva," *Pravda*, 28 August 1952, p. 3, cited in Belodubrovskaya, p. 149.

¹¹ e.g. RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 467, l. 71 (of 71-77) (report "On the kino-dramaturgists' conference," 18 June 1946); and RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 638, ll. 28-33 (D. Shepilov & A. Egolin to Zhdanov, "On the work of the Ministry of Cinema in 1947 and the film production plan for 1948," circa mid-1947); RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 427, ll. 74-75 (of 74-79) (letter to Georgii Malenkov from Gor'kii studio Operator S.T. Antipov and Head of Department M.I. Trutnev, 2 April 1950); RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 427, ll. 113-114 (Bol'shakov to editor of *Literaturnaia gazeta* Konstantin Simonov, copied to Suslov, "On the publication of Ivan Vinnichenko's article 'Gde film o sovetskom rabochem?' (1 Aug 1950)," 3 August 1950). Shepilov and Egolin also identify the inability of new directorial talent to secure opportunities working on feature films as a considerable problem.

their own scripts with increasing frequency.¹² The crisis was not, however, due to a lack of trained and willing individuals, as was often claimed. For, despite a desperate need for their expertise, by 1946 less than ten percent of graduates from the screenwriting programme at VGIK, the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow, were working as screenwriters.¹³ Nelli Morozova was just such a one who, as a newly minted scenarist in 1947, began working as an editor in the screenplay production department at Gor’kii film studios in Moscow, rather than as a screenwriter.

The problem was due not so much to a lack of qualified personnel as to the unfeasibility of screenwriting as a profession. The particular bureaucratic and payment structures involved in screenwriting rendered it challenging at best for inexperienced writers to secure employment—a situation that only worsened as censorship tightened. This is because screenwriters were not employed in permanent posts as members of a film studio, but instead worked according to contracts negotiated separately for each script, which were agreed on the basis of a synopsis. In other words, screenwriters worked on speculation. Once signed to a contract, they received a twenty-five percent advance on the contracted amount, which fell somewhere between thirty and eighty thousand rubles.¹⁴ Yet, young writers found it difficult to procure what was essentially a substantial investment from cautious studio screenplay departments (or, following procedural changes in 1948, the Ministry of Cinema itself) that preferred instead to work with proven writers who had several films to their

¹² Regarding contests, see for example: RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 427, l. 78, and f. 17, op. 133, d. 399, ll. 176-177 (letter to Malenkov from Bol’shakov “On holding in 1953 an All-Union competition for the best screenplay,” 17 February 1953), reprinted in K.M. Anderson and L.V. Maksimenkov, *Kremlevskii kinoteatr: 1928-1953: dokumenty* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2005), p. 909. This idea was bandied about and occasionally put into practice during the 1920s and 30s. (Belodubrovskaya, p. 61.) Ivan Pyr’ev was one such director who wrote the initial draft of his own film’s screenplay—for *Tale of a Siberian Land* (*Skazanie o zemle Sibirskoi*, 1948)—to near-disastrous effect when he was accused of plagiarism by a veteran and amateur screenwriter. RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 639, ll. 259-278 (letter from Pyr’ev to V.P. Stepanov of *Agitprop* and internal *Agitprop* correspondence, 19-24 May 1948).

¹³ More precisely, only 7 out of 80. RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 467, l. 72. In comparison, 82.5% of directorial graduates (143 out of 173) were employed in their chosen profession as of 1946.

¹⁴ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 639, ll. 118-119 (Bol’shakov to Zhdanov, “On pay grades for directors, actors, and scenarists,” 12 February 1948). This figure was revised downwards in 1951, when contracts for original scripts was capped at 60,000 r., and for screenplays adapted from a novel, play or other source, at 40,000 r. RGASPI f. 17, op. 133, d. 338, l. 148 (“On the remuneration of authors of literary scenarios,” 12 August 1951).

names, or “prestige” authors with credentials established in journalism, literature, poetry or theatre.¹⁵ The remainder of the author’s commission was paid in stages and was reliant on the script’s successful navigation of a dense system of inspection, with an honorarium when—that is to say, *if*—the film was released.¹⁶ Few screenplays survived the rigorous reviewing process. Official estimates in 1946 posited that one in three scenarists could expect to attain final approval for a screenplay each year, but by 1947 this ratio was wildly optimistic. Of the sixty-three screenplays commissioned by studios that year, only twenty-five were presented to the Ministry of Cinema, of which only ten met with approval, putting the success rate for contracted screenplays at sixteen percent.¹⁷ What is more, there were roughly 150 screenwriters working at the time, meaning that less than seven percent of writers boasted a successful screenplay that year.¹⁸ The delayed payment structure, contingent as it was on passing censorship—which slowed and more often stopped the progress of scripts altogether as it intensified throughout the postwar period¹⁹—meant that writers could not make a steady living at scriptwriting. Average production times lengthened after the war from several months to two or three years so that even the most experienced and prolific screenwriters averaged only three successful scripts during the entire late Stalin era.²⁰ Few recent graduates

¹⁵ This was particularly the case after the war when, by 1946, the average age of screenwriters had climbed from 33 years in 1936 to 43 years—a full two decades older than Morozova upon her graduation. This figure lends an air of legitimacy to concerns within the industry that new talent was not able to break into the screenwriting profession. RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 467, l. 72. On the ideologically-motivated preference for “prestige” writers, see Belodubrovskaya, pp. 159–63.

¹⁶ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 639, l. 119. For films released in 200 copies, a further 50% of the original payment was awarded; for 300 copies, 75%; 500 copies, 100%; 1000 copies, 150% and more than 1000 copies, 200%.

¹⁷ Natacha Laurent, *L'œil Du Kremlin: Cinéma et Censure en URSS sous Staline, 1928-1953*, Toulouse, 2000, p. 230.

¹⁸ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 467, l. 71.

¹⁹ For instance, 75% of screenplays in development were immediately rejected in early 1948 when contracting changes came into effect (Kenez, 212).

²⁰ Among the most successful screenwriters of the period were Mariia Smirnova and Boris Chirskov, who each saw three of their scripts filmed and screened: Smirnova, with *Sel'skaia uchitel'nitsa* (Donskoi, 1947), *Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke* (Stolper, 1948), and *Sel'skii vrach* (Gerasimov, 1952); and Chirskov with *Velikii perelom* (Ermler, 1945), *Nashestvie* (Room, 1945) and *Kavaler Zolotoi zvezdy* (Raizman, 1951). The preference during these years was for single-authored screenplays (Belodubrovskaya, p. 160.), but many screenwriters found success in collaborating with other writers (of screenplays, novels and plays), with the most proficient being Konstantin Isaev, who collaborated on three of his five scripts (*Podvig razvedchika* (Barnet, 1947), *Vozvrashchenie s pobedoi* (Ivanov, 1948), and *Sekretnaia missiia* (Romm, 1950); Isaev was the sole author of his final two scripts, *Sadko* (Ptushko, 1953) and *Maiskaia noch', ili Utoplennitsa* (Rou, 1953), released shortly

like Morozova had the studio or Ministry connections and the financial cushion necessary to embark on such a risky career path. As the realities of a career in screenwriting settled in, they instead fled the profession,²¹ turning to the greater security and stability offered by posts that were centrally assigned, like that of film editor. Such positions had the added benefit of training new screenwriters in the ways of censorship and equipping them (theoretically) to avoid the delays of rewriting and rejection caused by “errors” in scripting once they attempted to negotiate their first contract. For her part, Morozova waited for seven or eight years after graduating to take the creative leap and did not see her first script brought to life on cinema screens until 1956.²² In the meantime, she and other young professionals found themselves implicated in vetting the work of older, established colleagues rather than the reverse—one of the great ironies of the Soviet film censorship system.

Censorship and the Film Famine

Underlying the official reason for the film famine, therefore, was the unspoken one: the complex web of implications that stemmed from censorship. Not only did increasingly rigorous censorship render screenwriting non-viable as a profession for all but a few, but it also lengthened the film production process interminably. This is largely because film censorship was not a standalone machine. It boasted no equivalent to Glavlit, the centralised agency implicated in literary censorship, but was instead diffused throughout the cinema

after Stalin’s death), and Evgenii Gabrilovich, who co-wrote *Nashe serdtse* (Stolper, 1947) and *Vozvrashchenie Vasilii Bortnikova* (Pudovkin, 1953), and collaborated with the directors for *Vo imia zhizni* (Zarkhi & Kheifits, 1947). Indeed, the heavy involvement of directors in developing the final shooting script under what Belodubrovskaya has termed the “director-centered mode of production” unique to the USSR, meant that it was not unusual to credit the film’s director as a co-author (Belodubrovskaya, pp. 91, 142.). Petr Pavlenko’s scripts were particularly prone to this, with all three of his postwar pieces being credited also to their directors: *Kliatva* (Chiaureli, 1946), *Padenie Berlina I & II* (Chiaureli, 1950), and *Kompozitor Glinka* (Aleksandrov, 1952), which was completed by Natal’ia Treneva after Pavelenko’s death in 1950. Tellingly, each of these five leading screenwriters were well established in the field by 1945, having already produced over 20 successful screenplays between them. For screenwriting credits for Soviet films, see Macheret.

²¹ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 467 l. 72.

²² By the end of her career, Morozova had three co-written screenplays to her credit: sea-faring family drama *More zovet* (Braun, 1956), written with Valentin Morozov; a short film in the omnibus *Malen’kie mechtateli* (Grechikho, Turov, Iastrebov, 1962), also with Morozov; and murder mystery *Razorvannyi krug* (Dorman, 1987), written with her husband, Vladlen Bakhnov.

production system, fully embedded into each stage of film development and consequently given to time-consuming repetition (discussed further below). Censors went by an array of job titles, none of which was in fact “censor”—a term that is markedly absent from the archival record. Rather than censorship, the processes of scrutinizing, editing, excising, demanding rewrites and denying approval for screenplays and films were considered part of film production, integral to achieving the mandate to create good films that Soviet audiences would enjoy. Defined non-euphemistically, this meant films that were ideologically correct and artistically substantive—well-acted, shot and edited, using the latest technology whenever possible (particularly colour film stock)—which, it was believed, would ensure their popularity and therefore profitability at the box office. From the official perspective, the inspection and interference that effected censorship were framed in terms of the state’s collaboration with filmmakers to produce what it considered to be politically, aesthetically and economically worthwhile cinema.

The foundations for the close scrutiny of cinema were well-developed by the postwar period, but the bureaucratic structures that facilitated the tightest phase of Soviet film censorship were not finalized until the eve of Morozova’s arrival at the *Soiuzdet’fil’m*—soon to be renamed *Gor’kii*—studios in 1947, following a year-long phase of continuous reorganization, purging and recentralization in the film industry. The aim of these transformations was ostensibly to rationalize the production system and improve cost-effectiveness, but in practice it translated into a drive to censor films more closely so as to avoid committing costly “errors” to film stock and the prolonged delays necessary to remedy them. To this end, Georgii F. Aleksandrov, the head of *Agitprop* (the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee), and subsequently, the *khudsovet* (the Artistic Council of the Ministry of Cinema) were tasked with reasserting control over film production on behalf of the state, before the CC finally intervened directly. Its resolution of 4

September 1946, “On the film *The Great Life*,” admonished film workers for their irresponsibility and corrected their thoughtlessness by banning Leonid Lukov’s eponymous film outright and lambasting three more features, two of which—directed by Eisenstein, and Kozintsev and Trauberg—were ultimately shelved as well.²³ Only Pudovkin’s film was salvaged after substantial reshoots. The resolution unleashed a two-month wave of administrative purges and contrite public displays of self-criticism that cost the careers of many a film worker, as well as a handful of filmmakers (Eisenstein did not complete another film, while Kozintsev and Trauberg no longer filmed together during Stalin’s lifetime). In a follow-up resolution drafted by Aleksandrov, Kuznetsov, Beriia, and Stalin himself in December, Minister of Cinema Bol’shakov was threatened with dismissal if he failed to improve release rates and profit margins.²⁴ The result was yet another bout of restructuring as the beleaguered Minister scrambled to eliminate repetitive stages of screenplay inspection at studio level and purge studios of ineffective personnel.²⁵

Despite the intent of streamlining film production, this season of reform actually multiplied the stages of censorship from nine in 1946²⁶ to “twelve to fourteen circles of hell”, as Morozova describes, in mid-1947. Five of these stages occurred at studio level, as first the editor, then the editorial council of the screenplay department, head of the screenplay department, artistic council of the studio, and director of the studio weighed in on the quality of the project. The process was then repeated at the Ministry level as the Ministry equivalents of these bodies screened the work, with added input from the head of the General Directorate, the Deputy Minister, and the Minister himself. The final word was shared between the

²³ RGASPI f. 17, op. 116 d. 277, ll.30-34 (Orgburo resolution, “On the film *The Great Life*,” 4 September 1946), reprinted in Anderson and Maksimenkov, pp. 763-767.

²⁴ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 467, ll. 143-147 (memorandum from Bol’shakov to Zhdanov, “On major shortcomings in the organization of the production of motion pictures and the large scale squandering and theft of public funds in film studios,” 24 October 1946), reprinted in Anderson and Maksimenkov, pp. 773-75.

²⁵ Laurent, *L’œil*, pp. 196–197.

²⁶ Director Mikhail Romm identified them as being, at studio level: the College of Directors, Artistic Council, and Director; at Ministry level: the General Directorate of the production of feature films, the Commission of Scenarios of the *khudsovet*, the *khudsovet* itself, followed by the Deputy Minister and Minister of Cinema; and finally the cinema committee of *Agitprop*. Laurent, *L’œil*, p. 182.

Minister and the *khudsovet*—at least officially. Stages would often be repeated several times before a project was released to the next step in production.²⁷ Morozova's map of film development takes into account what were in reality unofficial checks, as studios persisted in vetting scripts even after Bol'shakov eliminated studio level censorship (in keeping with the December 1946 resolution).²⁸ This can be seen as another example of the institutional and individual self-preservation that had flourished in the film industry of the 1930s when unpredictable discipline from above exposed administrators to the constant risk of the loss of life or livelihood. As Jamie Miller demonstrates, such a capricious work environment inspired bureaucrats to duplicate censorship unofficially and shrink from decisive decision-making, instead yielding responsibility to higher levels of administration. Both strategies were attempts to minimize the possibility of being in error and reaping the consequences.²⁹ This remained a valid concern during the cultural purges of the postwar period and helps to account for why Bol'shakov struggled to accomplish his assignment of liquidating excess stages of censorship in the studios.

A final resolution in April 1947 rounded out the regimen of cinema industry reform by remoulding the artistic council of the Ministry of Cinema into a more puissant tool of inspection. The *khudsovet* had been created in September 1944 to serve as the most centralized film censorship body yet organised. Initially, it was peopled by filmmakers and other members of the artistic intelligentsia who were tasked with scrutinising production and thematic plans, sounding out musical scores, and viewing rushes and completed films before advising as to final edits.³⁰ They debated every aspect of the industry vigorously, including

²⁷ Nelli Morozova, 'A sud'i - kto?', *Iskusstvo kino*, 1. 1994, pp. 136-46 (p. 136).

²⁸ Laurent, *L'œil*, p. 230.

²⁹ Jamie Miller, 'The Purges of Soviet Cinema', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 1, 2006, pp. 5-26.

³⁰ RGALI f. 2456, op. 1, d. 915, ll. 99-101 (Sovnarkom resolution "On the artistic council of the Committee of Cinematographic Affairs," 5 September 1944), reprinted in Valerii Fomin, *Kino na voine: dokumenty i svidetel'stva* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), pp. 430-32. These privileged twenty-nine consisted of nine directors—Grigorii Aleksandrov, Sergei Eizenshtein, Sergei Gerasimov, Ivan Pyr'ev, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Mikhail Romm, Igor' Savchenko, Mikhail Chiaureli, and Sergei Vasil'ev—actors Boris Babochkin, Aleksei Dikii (who played Stalin in *Stalingradskaia bitva*), Nikolai Okhlopkov, Nikolai Khmelev, Nikolai Cherkasov, and Boris Chirkov;

their very existence as a council.³¹ This is largely because, though charged with elevating the artistic and ideological level of fiction films, the *khudsovet* was not vested with the power to determine the fate of a single film.³² It was limited instead to recommending the release or revision of a film to the CC—an assignment it failed in September 1946. The April 1947 reform reorganised the *khudsovet* and replaced members of the artistic intelligentsia with more reliable types: critics, editors, and functionaries from the CC, *Agitprop*, and *Komsomol*, most of whom were Party members. Only four survived the reshuffle—none of them filmmakers—while Bol'shakov was rendered a silent member and was replaced as head initially by Aleksandr Egolin, a literary critic and deputy chief of *Agitprop* (1944-47), and subsequently in January 1948, by Leonid Il'ichev, the editor of *Izvestiia* and a bitter opponent of the Minister of Cinema.³³ The purview of the reformed *khudsovet* was extended to include all drafts of screenplays, daily rushes, budgeting and, when deemed appropriate, aesthetic and

writers Boris Gorbatov, Leonid Sobolev, Nikolai Tikhonov, Konstantin Simonov, and secretary of the Writers' Union Dmitrii Polikarpov; composers Tikhon Khrennikov, Iurii Shaporin, and Dmitrii Shostakovich; the artistic director of the Piatnitskii choir, Vladimir Zakharov; camera operator Andrei Moskvina and artist Vladimir Egorov; Major General Mikhail Galaktionov (editor of the military section of *Pravda*) and General Nikolai Talenskii; with Bol'shakov as the chair. In June 1946, the membership was expanded to thirty-three as Moskvina, Polikarpov, Tikhonov, Khmelev, and Cherkasov were replaced by director Mikhail Kalatozov, actor Vasilii Vanin, Bol'shoi theatre actor Fedor Fedorovskii, writer Leonid Leonov, artistic director of the Moscow Lenkom Theatre Ivan Bersenev, camera operator Anatolii Golovnia, bureaucrats T.M. Zueva (chair of the *komitet kul'turno-prosvetitel'nykh uchrezhdenii RSFSR* or Committee of Cultural and Educational Institutions of the RSFSR), V.N. Ivanov (Secretary of the *TsK* of the *Vsesoiuznyi Leninskii Kommunisticheskii Soiuz Molodezhi* or All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, hereafter *Komsomol*), and Nina Popova (Secretary of the *Vsesoiuznyi tsentral'nyi sovet professional'nykh soiuzov* or All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions). RGASPI f. 17, op. 3, d. 1059, ll. 138-139 (Politburo resolution “On the confirmation of the production plan for feature films in 1946-47, and the composition of the artistic council of the Ministry of Cinema,” 17 June 1946), reprinted in Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov, eds., *Vlast' i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia: dokumenty TSK RKP(b)-VKP(b), VChK-OGPU-NKVD o kul'turnoi politike: 1917-1953 gg.* (Moscow: Demokratiia, 1999), pp. 556-58. (Note that the member list skips the number 27, meaning that the document appears to appoint thirty-four rather than thirty-three members. This error has been widely reproduced in the secondary literature.)

³¹ Natacha Laurent, ‘Le Conseil Artistique du Ministère Soviétique du Cinéma (1944-1947)’, in Natacha Laurent (ed.) *Le Cinéma 'stalinien': Questions d'histoire*, Toulouse, 2003, pp. 71-80 (pp. 73-77).

³² Laurent, ‘Le Conseil Artistique du Ministère Soviétique du Cinéma (1944-1947)’, p. 73.

³³ RGASPI f. 17, op. 3, d. 1064, ll. 45-46 (Politburo resolution “On the composition of the artistic council of the Ministry of Cinema,” 24 April 1947), reprinted in Artizov and Naumov, pp. 620-21. In addition to heritage members Gorbatov, Zakharov, Leonov, and Galaktionov, were added the above-mentioned Egolin and Il'ichev, as well as *Agitprop* officials Polikarp Lebedev (art department), V.P. Stepanov (film department), and E.N. Gorodetskii; the Secretaries of the CC of the *Komsomol* Nikolai Mikhailov, and of the propaganda section of the Moscow city committee, N.N. Danilov; literary critics David Zaslavskii, Vladimir Shcherbina, and Vladimir Ermilov, who also edited *Literaturnaia gazeta*; as well as Aleksei Surkov, a writer and the editor of *Ogonek*, and Liudmila Dubrovina, head of children's literature publishing.

technical features such as casting, set design, costumes, make-up, lighting, and props.³⁴ This was a daunting task for the sixteen men and woman, all of whom already held full-time jobs, meaning that the council met only once a week.³⁵ Yet, as the *khudsovet*'s purview extended, so too did its propensity for demanding time-consuming edits and re-shoots.

Analysis of the *khudsovet* has concentrated on the earlier period, 1944-46, when it functioned essentially as a mechanism of self-censorship by filmmakers. Laurent, for instance, concentrates on the ambiguity of a council headed by a Minister opposed to its existence and treated by directors as a forum to both demonstrate their political reliability and express non-conformist opinions; while Belodubrovskaya reveals that the *khudsovet* served as a producer in a system that lacked this key production element, as well as contributing to the leading filmmakers' standing as virtually a "self-governing elite".³⁶ The more bureaucratic incarnation of the *khudsovet* (April 1947 to June 1949³⁷) has excited less interest, being stripped of its more renowned members and with them, the attendant ambiguities of self-censorship and lively exchanges that elicit the theme of resistance and conformity in filmmaking. In place of the political debates of artists, the 1947-49 *khudsovet* offers up a case study of the political infighting of *apparatchiki*, in which censorship was used as a means of self-preservation—even by those who held positions of great authority within the Party bureaucracy.

³⁴ Artizov and Naumov, pp. 620-21.

³⁵ Laurent, *L'œil*, p. 218.

³⁶ Natacha Laurent, 'Le Conseil Artistique du Ministère Soviétique du Cinéma (1944-1947)', in *Le Cinéma 'stalinien': Questions D'histoire*, ed. by Natacha Laurent (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2003), pp. 71–80; Belodubrovskaya, pp. 121–129.

³⁷ The composition of the *khudsovet* took another dramatic turn in June 1949, when Bol'shakov was reinstated at the helm and membership was expanded again to thirty-nine as numerous deputy ministers and the heads of cinema production in the Soviet republics were added into membership. Two film directors also regained membership: Savchenko and Chiaureli. Subsequently, in March 1951, long-time members Gorbatov and Gorodetskii were replaced by actor and director of the Mal'yi Theatre, Mikhail Tsarev, composer Mikhail Chulaki, and artist Nikolai Zhukov, thereby reinjecting the *khudsovet* with a greater degree of artistic representation. See Anderson and Maksimenkov, p. 610, fn. 5; Artizov and Naumov, p. 788, fn. 35. Also cited in Belodubrovskaya, p. 105, fn. 59.

This was the *khudsovet* with which Morozova was acquainted, and to which she dedicates the opening segment of her memoir's account of her working life.³⁸ The tale, "The *Khudsovet* in Action," takes the form of a tense courtroom drama. The setting is the "supreme court" (*verkhovnoe sudilishche*) of the *khudsovet*,³⁹ which is located in the main hall of a mansion requisitioned for the Ministry of Cinema from the millionaire Lianozov. It is equipped with a T-shaped arrangement of tables for the council, behind which hover desks for the stenographers and Bol'shakov, with a couch and chairs along the wall for the accused awaiting trial, that is, the editors, writers and directors involved in the film project under scrutiny. Having set the scene, Morozova defines the central dramatic conflict of the segment, namely, the opposing value systems at war within the cinema industry. These forces are represented by Bol'shakov and Il'ichev, who are cast as the flawed hero and suave villain of the *khudsovet*. Bol'shakov, though inconsistent in his moods and rather ungainly in appearance—with an easily reddened visage, twitchy eye and persistent stammer particularly noticeable with the word "cinematographic" (*kinematograficheskii*)—is styled as a mildly sympathetic antihero who seeks to fulfil his duty to provide films to Soviet audiences and, for the most part, champions vulnerable filmmakers. He is a flawed tragic hero, compromised by his relationship with a tyrannical Master (*Khoziain*), but nevertheless idealistic in his desire to do the work necessary to actually produce films. Il'ichev, in contrast, exults in the opportunity to humiliate the filmmakers and oversee the shredding of their work into tatters. His *modus operandi* is to dodge all decision-making responsibilities by refusing to either condemn or approve a single film, much to the frustration of Bol'shakov.⁴⁰ (The central conflict evoked by Morozova is consistent with the archival record in which Bol'shakov

³⁸ It is unclear in what capacity Morozova attended *khudsovet* meetings, though it was not uncommon for guests to be invited to the proceedings (particularly screenwriters, directors and "consultants"). Laurent, p. 74. Given the prominence of Il'ichev in her account of the meetings, it is likely that they date from between January 1948 and June 1949, when Il'ichev headed the *khudsovet*.

³⁹ Jay Leyda uses this metaphor as well: Jay Leyda, *Kino; a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), p. 385.

⁴⁰ Morozova, pp. 136–137.

regularly recommends the release of films—be it during *khudsovet* discussions or in reports on projects under review by the CC—while *Agitprop* representatives like Il'ichev more often advocate abandoning projects.⁴¹) Morozova characterizes the remaining *dramatis personae* with similar sharpness: from David Zaslavskii, the man Lenin named a “political prostitute”; to Leonid Leonov, the *enfant terrible* whose speeches are so long, exhausting and incomprehensible that it is quite possible they are seditious—no one can tell; to Mariia Prilezhaeva⁴² and Liudmila Dubrovina, a pair of hypocritical pedants; and Nikolai Mikhailov, the prosecutor who delights in the ring of political slogans as they roll off his tongue.⁴³

To illustrate the stakes of the conflict, Morozova conjures images of fainting filmmakers and the waft of smelling salts, heart attacks and the directorial genius Dovzhenko shaking in his boots. She also partners the metaphor of the courtroom with its close companion in the Soviet context, the language of terror and the desperate fight for survival. The threat of punishment or massacre (*rasprava*) threatens every film as the *khudsovet* inflicts acts of torture (*pytki*), forcing filmmakers to cling to any small chance of survival (*shans vyzhit'*). The atmosphere is tense and the stakes are high.⁴⁴ Even so, the suffering of the filmmakers remains but the context for the battle between Bol'shakov and Il'ichev, rather than the primary drama of Morozova's plot. In keeping her focus on the conflict between officials and avoiding the temptation to drift into the familiar dissident narrative of artists versus authorities, Morozova is able to explore the performativity and arbitrariness of decision-making in the *khudsovet*. For example, she reveals that the only instances Bol'shakov managed to outmanoeuvre Il'ichev and secure a straightforward ruling on a film

⁴¹ For the former, see for example: RGASPI 17.125.468 ll. 81-85 (*Khudsovet* minutes for the film *Sons* (Ivanov, 1946), 8 March 1946). Bol'shakov stresses the need to be releasing films rather than holding them back for pointless reasons (l. 85). For the latter, see for instance: RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 90, ll. 74-77 (letters to Malenkov from Bol'shakov, and Shepilov and Pereslavitsev of *Agitprop* “On the film *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*,” 13 November and 27 December 1948).

⁴² Prilezhaeva does not appear to have been an official member of the *khudsovet*, but may well have been a consultant for children's films (of which there were at least six in production between January 1948 and June 1949), given her expertise as a children's author.

⁴³ Morozova, pp. 138–139.

⁴⁴ Morozova, pp. 136–137.

or screenplay were when he had already received a word “from on high”, that is, from Stalin himself. On such occasions, Bol’shakov would declare his opinion abruptly, hoping to catch Il’ichev in a contradictory frame of mind and best him by revealing it to be in fact the official perspective. Il’ichev was not so easily fooled, however, and was often able to discern that Bol’shakov’s opinion was not merely his own in those moments. With “malicious glee”, Il’ichev would then subvert Bol’shakov precisely by agreeing with him calmly. Through this scene, Morozova implies that Il’ichev’s brand of politicking and avoiding decisive decision-making dominated the administration of film production and could be cut through only by a word “from above”.⁴⁵

Yet, not all decisions were made by Stalin (either directly or by proxy) or dissembled away into meaninglessness by Il’ichev. In a second episode depicting the weekly workings of the *khudsovet*, Morozova reveals the arbitrariness and futility of decision-making, this time by Zaslavskii, who led the council in approving a particular adventure film that featured a “smart enemy”. This villainous character presented a clear ideological paradox that should have earned its immediate rejection. Morozova and her fellow editors identified the problem easily—the doctrine of Soviet superiority made it impossible to depict an intelligent foe, to the point of necessitating conflictlessness (*beskonfliktnost’*) in film plotting—and waited in anticipation for the fallout of Zaslavskii’s approval. The error was caught subsequently and the film returned to the *khudsovet*, whereupon the so-called “political prostitute” shamelessly blamed his young grandsons for his mistaken ruling. They had watched the film with wide-eyed wonder and he had seen it through their eyes rather than from his own, more mature perspective which, of course, he now expressed in rejecting the film without hesitation. It disappeared into oblivion. With this example, Morozova accounts for the unpredictability of censorship through the idiosyncratic approaches of individual censors, the pressure to

⁴⁵ Morozova, p. 138.

conform to a critical perspective, and the challenges to filmmaking posed by ideological premises that, taken to their logical end, contradict the basic building blocks of cinematic plotting.

So far the discussion has concentrated on the official workings of the censorship system, but its informal machinations are perhaps even more pivotal to understanding the effects of censorship in slowing film production and reducing the number of titles approved for release. The first of these were the unofficial stages of scrutiny that bloated the system even further. Morozova identifies two of these in her memoir, each the domain of a formidable individual. One was a virtual unknown, Lidiia Galameeva, whom Morozova refers to as Bol'shakov's Cerberus, no doubt due to her fierce thoroughness. Galameeva headed a "special sector" that perused every feature film following its conditional acceptance by the *khudsovet*, and foreign films as well, before they passed on to the Minister of Cinema. According to Morozova, the "short, lush blonde" was unassailable, as even fêted directors like Mikhail Romm could not argue with her, but instead "feared her like fire and called her the Fury."⁴⁶ Even so, the fate of each film lay not with her, but with another unofficial arbiter of cinematic production—and one of much greater notoriety: Stalin. The Soviet leader's late night Kremlin film screenings are now a familiar feature of Soviet film histories, thanks in no small part to lively accounts from memoirs by Mar'iamov, Nikita Khrushchev, and Stalin's daughter, Svetlana Allilueva. The practice began in the 1930s and intensified after the war, when a collection of over 10,000 foreign films captured by the Red Army (known as trophy films) broadened considerably the possibilities for cinematic *divertissement* among the political elite. Film screenings became the standard *digestivo* to the elaborate feasts hosted most nights by Stalin, and it fell to the Minister of Cinema to provide an appropriate selection of titles. According to Morozova, Bol'shakov exploited this regular access to "the court" to

⁴⁶ Morozova, p. 139.

aid in achieving his primary official responsibility as Minister of Cinema, namely, releasing new Soviet films. He would read Stalin's mood at the Kremlin screenings and, when the moment seemed opportune, bring out a new domestic production in hopes of eliciting that elusive final nod of approval so necessary for securing a screening license. Occasionally, Bol'shakov would have to wait for Stalin to withdraw to his dacha in Sochi in order to find his disposition more amenable. The Minister co-ordinated his holidays with the leader so that he could arrange viewings at the dacha, and if the time was right, he would order a film awaiting approval to be flown in for Stalin's consideration. As a result, by Morozova's calculations, the final stage in the production process could take several months to half a year as Bol'shakov carefully chose his moment, leaving film directors to haunt the halls of the Ministry in the meantime, hoping to overhear even the faintest rumours as to the fate of their films.⁴⁷

Stalin's judgements were rarely straightforward (or even verbalised), leaving Bol'shakov to determine precisely what was problematic to the critical eye of the ultimate censor. Often the verdict was based on an incomplete viewing, which further complicated the process of "correction". Morozova's vignettes reveal that Bol'shakov in turn replicated Stalin's ambiguous means of expressing approval and disapproval. The day after a late night screening of a film under review, Bol'shakov would appear at the Ministry around noon, whereupon word would spread throughout the institution as to whether his eyes were closed or open when he walked in. Open eyes augured an acceptable or even positive prognosis. Closed eyes boded ill, for they were heavy presumably with weariness and the futility of a late night spent to poor result: the film would be shelved or require substantial amendments.⁴⁸ Morozova recounts one instance when Galameeva worked herself into a fever of anxiety over Bol'shakov's closed eyes, convinced that reference to a coffin in a Hungarian musical was

⁴⁷ Morozova, p. 139.

⁴⁸ Morozova, p. 139.

the cause of the Minister's—and thus Stalin's—displeasure.⁴⁹ Stalin's involvement in censorship may not have been defined in an official capacity, but it was central in practice, to the point where his presence was implied virtually throughout the filmmaking process, as his reaction—both anticipated and actual—shaped Ministry-level decision-making and determined which films were viewed by Soviet audiences.

Further convoluting film censorship was the proclivity for continual interference by interested parties who, motivated by everything from budget problems to personal vendettas, exploited informal and semi-official connections in attempts to influence the outcome of a particular film. Disregard for the established hierarchy of film production is in evidence throughout the archives of specific films and cinema policies. For instance, although studios were answerable to the state's Ministry of Cinema, records reveal that studio heads frequently appealed to the Party's *Agitprop* department or Central Committee instead. Similarly, Ministries of Cinema in the republics appealed not just to the Ministry of Cinema for the USSR, but also to the Council of Ministers of the USSR, the Council of Ministers for the Russian republic (an odd choice), and also the Party's CC and its individual members. Andrei Zhdanov and Georgii Malenkov received numerous personal appeals from lower-ranked Party members and cinema workers requesting that they intervene in practically every aspect of the industry, which they did, repeatedly disrupting Bol'shakov in his management of the Ministry of Cinema.⁵⁰ Following Zhdanov's death, Malenkov (acting on behalf of the CC) consulted Kruzhkov in *Agitprop* and Sazonov in the CC cinema department in addition to Bol'shakov on cinematic matters, often exciting contradictory recommendations and a flurry of memos, not to mention—reading between the lines—heated tempers.

⁴⁹ Morozova, p. 145.

⁵⁰ Multiple examples can be found in RGASPI f. 17, op. 133, d. 338 (Department of Literature and Art, October 1950 to April 1952).

The case of a Georgian comedy about a collective tea farm provides an illuminating example of how informal networks interfered with the production process. Filming began on *The Girl from Natsikhvari* (*Devushka iz Natsikhvari*) in early 1948 at Tbilisi film studios under the direction of Nikoloz Sanishvili. The Politburo of the CC did not approve the film production plan for 1948 until 14 June, however, at which point it excluded Sanishvili's project (and nine others) from development. This was the practical application of the new policy of creating fewer, but better films by investing only in "masterpieces". At some point in the subsequent weeks, the cultural department of *Agitprop* learned that filming had already begun on the comedy and determined to review the footage. Deeming it ideologically and artistically inoffensive, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers Kliment Voroshilov (whose portfolio was unrelated to cinema, though he was a well-known patron of the arts) recommended to Malenkov that production resume. After all, the filming was already ninety percent complete. It was subsequently re-included in the plan.⁵¹

Meanwhile, First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party Candide Charkviani dispatched a telegram to Zhdanov on 5 July requesting that the Ministry of Cinema—with which Zhdanov had no official ties—require its cancellation as it was too costly to complete.⁵² Zhdanov was ailing at the time, leaving the telegram to gather dust for some months before finally being transferred to the *Sekretariat* of the Party on 4 November. A week later, *Agitprop* confirmed to Malenkov that production had resumed.⁵³ The *Agitprop* archives are silent after this, but nearly a year later on 26 September 1949, a new film depicting the joyousness of life on a tea plantation premiered in Tbilisi under the title

⁵¹ RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 88, ll. 64-65 (report from Il'ichev to Malenkov, 8 November 1948); f. 17, op. 132, d. 90, ll. 64-67 (report from Voroshilov to Malenkov, 14 August 1948).

⁵² RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 90, l. 10 (telegram from Secretary of the Party in Georgia, Kandid Charkviani, to Zhdanov, 5 July 1948).

⁵³ It is unclear as to precisely when this happened, but was likely not until sometime after 8 October. RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d.90, ll.11, 62-63, 69 (various correspondence, 8 October to 11 November 1948).

Fortunate Encounter (*Schastlivaia vstrecha*), directed by Sanishvili.⁵⁴ Following Georgian release, the film was dubbed at *Gor'kii* film studios and screened on limited release in Moscow.⁵⁵ It remains a mystery as to which branch of government ultimately approved its completion, though Stalin must certainly have winked his agreement at some point in August or September 1949, perhaps from the comfort of his dacha. With agencies representing Party and state, All-Union and republic alike weighing in on this film, production took twenty-two months for local release, and approximately two years for Russian-language screening. In terms of length of time in production, Sanishvili's film was utterly typical of the period. The broth of Soviet cinema production was clearly being spoiled by too many cooks, who were often of rather questionable qualification.

The tendencies visible here of ignoring bureaucratic protocol by appealing to the highest authority one dared (e.g. a flagging Zhdanov), and using semi-official methods to achieve one's agenda (e.g. of reducing expenditures) had proliferated throughout the Soviet system since well before the war, as Sheila Fitzpatrick and Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov demonstrate in their studies of patronage networks and appeals to the leadership.⁵⁶ Such complicated ties impeded the management of cinema as well, rendering the convolutions of postwar film censorship partly a product of long-term bureaucratic trends. But the alacrity with which top officials interfered in cinema administration must also be considered in light of the power struggle that absorbed the Party leadership during Stalin's decline. Film was crucial to the political-ideological battleground of what Gorlizki has termed "party revivalism",⁵⁷ with censorship and its ability to confirm the orthodoxy of a particular political

⁵⁴ Aleksandr Veniaminovich Macheret, ed., *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my: annotirovannyi katalog: vol. 2 zvukovye fil'my, 1930-1957*, Moscow, 1961, p. 430.

⁵⁵ RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 427, ll. 1-2 (report on films under production, January 1950). It is now available on Youtube.

⁵⁶ Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, 'On Heterochrony: Birthday Gifts to Stalin, 1949', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 12, 2006, pp. 355-375; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, Oxford 1999, pp. 109-114.

⁵⁷ Yoram Gorlizki, 'Party Revivalism and the Death of Stalin', *Slavic Review*, 54 (1995), pp. 1-22.

stance proving a valuable tool. The personal animosity between Minister of Cinema Bol'shakov and members of *Agitprop* and the CC—particularly G.F. Aleksandrov and Malenkov—not to mention the rivalry between Malenkov and Zhdanov in the early postwar period, help account for the propensity for one body to criticize, undermine, or circumvent another through the guise of concern for the content and financing of particular films.

In sum, the film censorship system was structured according to a clear hierarchy on paper, but in practice, was infused with hidden layers of unofficial inspection and unpredictable interjection from a range of Party and state officials motivated by contradictory agendas. The issue of how authority was distributed within this system also disrupted its actual functioning. The authority to approve a film's release and therefore complete the production process did not fall within the control of the film industry, but was monopolized instead by Stalin. It would therefore be natural to conclude that the censorship machine was merely performative: shuffling projects around the industry until the moment was ripe to test whether it would meet with Stalin's approval. But this would be to overlook the authority that was delegated to the officials and councils implicated in censorship who, although denied the ability to officially complete the censorship process, nevertheless retained the authority to shape and reject a cinematic project—an imposing prerogative indeed.

The Policy of Film Famine

The peculiarities of censorship certainly exacerbated the postwar downturn in film production, underlying the script shortage and drawing out the filming and editing process by years at a time. But the film famine was also instigated deliberately by the June 1948 production plan, which called for reduced production with the expectation that doing so would improve the artistic and ideological quality of Soviet cinema.⁵⁸ Morozova attributes

⁵⁸ Artizov and Naumov, pp. 635–37.

the “masterpieces” policy to Stalin himself, the ““genius of all times and peoples’,” as she quotes sarcastically. In a rush of staccato text, she mocks the strategy that emerged from his “coryphaeus head” that “the thing was not to release many films, but the opposite, few! Not fifteen, but five...but make them better. Why make average films? We need genius now! Five! Everything else already in production? Shut it down.”⁵⁹ Though somewhat more frenzied in tone, Morozova’s parody captures the gist of an outburst by Stalin over a draft of the production plan. According to the memoirs of Deputy chief of *Agitprop* Dmitrii Shepilov, who was serving as de facto chief by 1948, Stalin declared that: “The Ministry of Cinema conducts incorrect policy in film production. [...] They want to make sixty films a year. We do not need this. This is incorrect policy. We need four or five features a year, but good ones, outstanding ones [...] We should make fewer films, but good ones. Here, I am looking at the [1948] plan of film production. How much rubbish is planned here!”⁶⁰ Apparently, someone at the meeting took the hint and redrafted the plan. It was ratified three days later.

With that, the decades-long priority of the Soviet cinema industry to out-produce Hollywood in terms of quantities of films was abandoned. Rather than one hundred new features per year, the goal of production was lowered to approximately twenty-five, which in reality translated into ten new films per year. It was this policy that inaugurated the most intensive season of film famine, calling for the immediate exclusion of ten films already under development, four of which had begun filming (one being Sanishvili’s comedy, as discussed earlier), and limiting future film commissions. It was this policy that transformed a systemic problem into an ideologically justified production strategy, thereby nullifying the need (or indeed the recourse) to address the problem and its causes in any meaningful way.

⁵⁹ Morozova, p. 140.

⁶⁰ Translated and cited by Belodubrovskaya, p. 48. See Dmitrii Shepilov, ‘Vospominaniia’, *Voprosy istorii*, 5 (1998), pp. 3–27 (pp. 24–26).

It is true that Stalin had this policy shift in mind for some time before its introduction,⁶¹ no doubt inspired by his own viewing habits, since he preferred to rewatch favourite films dozens and even scores of times rather than view what he considered to be shoddy new films, and assumed that Soviet audiences would do likewise. There had also been sporadic rumblings within the industry since 1932 regarding the advantages of focusing on mastery rather than quantity.⁶² Nevertheless, the masterpieces policy of 1948 presented a break with established priorities and discursive norms that was unanticipated by Soviet leaders and the filmmaking community alike.⁶³ It is therefore apt that Morozova adopts the genre of disaster film to discuss this “catastrophe”, the impact of which she likens to an earthquake, spreading panic and peril. Studio workers flooded the Ministry, guards neglected to check passes, adult men fainted and sobbed, and an ambulance stood at the ready in front of the Ministry building as directors Aleksandr Dovzhenko and Lev Arnshtam suffered heart attacks. The bulk of film workers—assistant directors, camera operators, artists, production managers, and writers—found themselves suddenly out of work. Through this picture, Morozova conveys a sense of both the absurdity and profound seriousness of film industry policy. This may have been the resolution that ultimately converted shortage into famine, but it also, as Morozova observes, awakened in industry officials a determination to preserve cinema in the face of such short-sighted policies.⁶⁴

Foreign Films and the Film Famine

⁶¹ Belodubrovskaya, p. 47.

⁶² Belodubrovskaya, pp. 12–51.

⁶³ Rather unusually, this policy shift was not preceded by what Fitzpatrick terms “dosage”, the strategy by which Stalin would hint at an upcoming policy change (or replacement of a colleague) through incremental amendments in policy or press releases, undermining the old policy (or person) before ultimately replacing it. Consequently, even as late as January 1948 Zhdanov and other officials were repeating the well-rehearsed line concerning the need to increase production rates. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2015); Belodubrovskaya, p. 47.

⁶⁴ Morozova, p. 140.

For Morozova, any gestures she might seek to make toward the preservation of the Soviet film industry would take place within the context of foreign film processing, which proved to be fundamental to maintaining a thriving box office in the USSR during the worst of *malokartin'e*. Although she does not acknowledge the connection, the opportunity for her to participate in this work owed a debt to the disastrous masterpieces policy. This is because the very resolution that stalled domestic film development also approved the processing of foreign films for screening in the USSR in what was a highly unusual and possibly unique mention of non-Soviet films in a production plan. This development marked the final renunciation of the ideal of autarky that had previously shaped the Stalinist film industry. During the mid-1930s, the industry had been weaned off its reliance on imported films to bolster revenue. Since then, new foreign films screening in the USSR had never numbered more than a handful and were approved on a case-by-case basis. The production plan of 1948, however, announced a revived interest in foreign films and presented their processing as part of the official strategy for the development of Soviet cinema. The concurrence of the heightened profile of foreign films with the reduction in domestic production implies that the Central Committee appreciated the risks of the masterpieces policy in leaving Soviet audiences hungry for films and curtailing box office earnings.⁶⁵ As they awaited Soviet masterpieces, audiences were sustained by a steady diet of foreign films from their favourite genres: comedies, musicals and adventures. Western trophies from Hollywood and Nazi Germany dominated until 1951, when foreign socialist films began to replace them as the newly nationalized cinema industries of Hungary and Czechoslovakia began to export their output, and Austrian, Italian, and French films amenable to the Soviet worldview became available. Box office data indicates that from 1948-52, trophy films were released at a rate of

⁶⁵ Claire Knight, 'Enemy Films on Soviet Screens: Trophy Films during the Early Cold War, 1947-52', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 18, 2017, pp. 125-149 (pp. 129-130, 134).

1.4 per domestic production (outnumbering them 93 to 65),⁶⁶ while from 1951 to 1952, foreign imports attracted just over half as many tickets sales as new Soviet titles. In fact, in 1952, in the wake of the worst year of the film famine, foreign trophy and import films together accounted for 80.7% of ticket sales.⁶⁷ Foreign films were more successful at achieving the official Soviet aim of entertaining viewers and filling state coffers than domestic productions, keeping cinema alive as a viable industry through *malokartin'e*—and Morozova was at the heart of it.⁶⁸

Morozova's memoir contains three episodes from her life as a foreign film editor, which are fascinating in the way they deploy the plot structures of melodrama, comedy and slapstick, effectively disrupting the narrative of tragedy associated with censorship and the late Stalin period. Her colourful anecdotes personalise what otherwise seems a rather anonymous system of control in which meaning was (re)assigned and foreign films Sovietized through editing, subtitles and dubbing. It is clear that rather than being a case of simply fulfilling directives and completing lists of assigned edits,⁶⁹ foreign film censorship involved a degree of negotiation by editors like Morozova. In fact, Morozova claims even greater agency for herself and other cogs in the censorship machine, stressing her artistic sensibilities, ambivalence towards the work, and the small forms of resistance she engaged in as she fought to maintain professional integrity. Under Morozova's pen, foreign film censorship is rendered a series of battles between artists and *apparatchiki*, but with the twist

⁶⁶ Claire Knight, 'Stalin's Trophy Films, 1946-56: A Resource (Updated)', *KinoKultura*, 2017 <<http://www.kinokultura.com/2015/48-knight.shtml>> [accessed 15 April 2015].

⁶⁷ Calculations based on box office statistics compiled by Sergei Kudriavtsev, 'Poseshchaemost' otechestvennykh i zarubezhnykh fil'mov v sovetskom kinoprote', *Kinanet.livejournal.com* <<http://kinanet.livejournal.com/689229.html>> [accessed 4 February 2014]; Sergei Zemlianukhin and Miroslava Segida, eds., *Domashniaia sinemateka: otechestvennoe kino 1918-1996*, Moscow, 1996.

⁶⁸ Sustaining Soviet cinema *artistically* during the film famine was another matter altogether, to which at least partial credit must be given to the new genre of filmed theatrical performances (*fil'my-spektakli*) that arose at the end of 1951 and provided not only a significant number of titles for release, but also a training ground for young filmmaking talent.

⁶⁹ Knight, 'Enemy Films', pp. 137–138.

that the artists are in fact *apparatchiki* themselves. Morozova the editor-censor becomes a master-director.

This transformation in characterization is rooted in the editor's emphasis on her artistic credentials. She establishes them both subtly—making mention of the artistic merits and limitations of specific films—and more directly, as with her assessment of the work she was required to carry out on Hollywood films. This she likens to “pure plunder”—a play on the Russian term for trophy films, *trofeinye* (meaning captured or booty), that casts a shadow over their handling by the Soviet regime. She expresses disgust at the “barbaric outrage” that her department perpetrated on the fine human emotions of the Hollywood classics with which she was already familiar from her training at VGIK.⁷⁰ Morozova also underlines the lack of artistic culture among those in authority, as in the episode where the particularly belligerent head of the General Directorate, Dulgerov, embarrasses himself (albeit unknowingly) in an otherwise dull meeting with a theatrical malapropism worthy of Sheridan's heroine herself. The film workers all recognise the slip and shake with suppressed laughter, demonstrating their superior level of culture.⁷¹

Those in authority were similarly deficient in their technical understanding of cinema, which provided the grounds on which for Morozova to confront her superiors over nonsensical demands and, with the tenacity and discursive wit of a Capra heroine, pressure them to amend decisions. Two of her anecdotes follow this arc, the first, over the impossibility of excluding “Yankee Doodle” from the soundtrack of a Capra film,⁷² and the

⁷⁰ Morozova, p. 142.

⁷¹ Morozova, p. 144.

⁷² Morozova identifies the film as *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) (p. 142), but it features “O My Darling Clementine” rather than “Yankee Doodle”, which is instead woven through the score for Capra's other Depression-era political drama, *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). Both were processed for release during Morozova's tenure at Gor'kii. In Soviet cinema, “Yankee Doodle” was used mockingly to signal the appearance of US soldiers on screen. For instance, Shostakovich incorporated the quintessentially American song into his score for *The Meeting on the Elba* (*Vstrecha na El'be*, Aleksandrov, 1949) during a scene depicting a gathering of US military officials and soldiers who had shown themselves to be racist, sexist, materialist and corrupt in a series of earlier scenes scored with raucous jazz music. One of the soldiers weaves unsteadily, still drunk from the night's activities, as he attempts to stand at attention while “Yankee Doodle” plays. In contrast, the song is

second, regarding the dismissal of a colleague for failing to achieve what was technically impossible: improve the quality of a poorly scripted, acted and filmed Czech drama.⁷³ Both accounts demonstrate that official decision-making in foreign film censorship could be challenged from below, given sufficient expertise and stubbornness, albeit with a certain degree of trepidation. It was a machine vulnerable to jostling from the cogs and Morozova, by her own account, was a most reverberant cog.

Morozova partnered these rare moments of outright confrontation with more nuanced and sustained acts of defiance against her superiors and the task she was set. The most cunning of these was to fulfil her duties as Hollywood film subtitler—she had aspired to be an English literary translator before entering VGIK, her first love being Dickens rather than Chaplin or *Chapaev*—with exaggerated irony. She sought to deliberately distance her captions as far as possible from what was depicted on screen, in order to highlight the disjuncture and so reveal the artifice of the captions. The “friendly mocking laughter” that such subtitles evoked in the anonymity of the darkened theatre was her only consolation, she writes, though she seems to have relished such opportunities to laugh in mockery herself as well.⁷⁴

Indeed, humour and specifically mockery of those in authority pervade her reminiscences of her worklife, as in the masterful final anecdote of her memoir that combines a Chaplinesque gag with a revelation about Stalin and the birth of a peasant folk hero. The merriment begins when a frantic Galameeva tasks the editor Perel'shtein with removing a subtitle slide with the word “coffin” from the Hungarian operetta *Erkel* (Keleti, 1952), on the

used in Capra's film to underline the patriotism, energy, and positive moral values of Mr Smith and his band of boys. The demand for the song to be excised may have stemmed from this battle to define the melody's meaning. Equally, the Russian-language *Voice of America* radio programme targeting Soviet listeners launched in 1947 and used “Yankee Doodle” as its theme song, rendering the melody politically sensitive at that time. (Gregory Malanowski, *The Race for Wireless: How Radio Was Invented (or Discovered)* (AuthorHouse, 2011), p. 101.)

⁷³ Morozova, p. 144. The film was *The Strike* (*Sirena*, Stekly, 1947).

⁷⁴ Morozova, p. 141.

strength of Bol'shakov's closed eyes (mentioned earlier). No doubt due to the late-night timing of the commission, Perel'shtein removes the wrong slide, leaving the coffin reference intact. The next morning, Morozova and her colleague, the good-natured if shell-shocked peasant-veteran Leva Furikov, are alerted to the mix-up when they hear cries emanating from Galameeva's office as she rages apoplectically, "Coffin! ... Coffin!" When they investigate, the histrionics intensify: "Furikov! Coffin! [Perel'shtein] has killed me! Stabbed without a knife!" In this moment, the sound of the Fury's cries and Furikov's attempts to pacify her fade as the camera focuses in a close up on Morozova: she is having an epiphany. Our heroine is overwhelmed by the sudden realisation that Stalin—the source of Galameeva's urgency in expunging the morbid term—is terrified of death. After her initial shock, Morozova snaps back to attention in time to hear Furikov proclaim solemnly that were Galameeva not a woman, he would stifle her with *mat* (crude urban slang), with which pronouncement he walks away. "And so," concludes a mirthful Morozova, "Furikov defeated the Fury."⁷⁵ The entire episode builds towards this punch line that hints at the inexorable victory of the simple Soviet people, represented by Furikov, over the convolutions and (ineffectual) control of a system so delusional in its priorities that it seeks to deny the reality of death, as represented by head of the "special sector", Galameeva the Fury. And so, one might echo, Morozova concludes with the knowing wink of Aesopian language, transforming the censor into a dissident.

Yet the final transformation of cog into agent in Morozova's account of foreign film censorship is not complete without mention of the ambivalence with which said censor viewed her own participation in the machine. As with any Soviet artist, Morozova's claim to a legitimate voice requires that she use it to practice self-criticism, which she does in a passage that reads like an opening voice-over from the older, wiser incarnation of the

⁷⁵ Morozova, p. 145.

protagonist recalling her youth with a mixture of regret and acceptance. In it, she reflects on the considerations that could have motivated someone to participate in such work. She lists self-preservation, youthfulness, lack of options, the need to feed a child and provide shelter, the risk of alerting the authorities if one were to quit, which would be particularly dangerous since one's father was repressed—and with this she reveals that the “one” she is attempting to understand is in fact herself⁷⁶—and finally the palpable threat of the prison camp. This is not an exercise in self-justification for Morozova, however, but an attempt to understand her younger self and the decisions she made. It is as if, in facing her involvement in censoring film, she is attempting to find herself, recognise who she is now in who she was then and recapture a sense of the menace she felt then from the safety of a time, decades later, when the threat of the camp is but a distant, bitter memory. Her consolation—again she uses this term—is that at least now she can tell all.⁷⁷ And in telling it, she has helped to clarify our understanding of censorship during the film famine.

Nelli Morozova was a product of the times, a screenwriter who worked as a censor; she was a victim of the times, implicated in work that she found distasteful; and she was mystified by the times, uncertain in retrospect why she conceded to complicity with a repressive regime, and doubting whether her small acts of resistance were meaningful. She is the flawed hero of her own memoir: a bystander to the *khudsovet*'s terrorization of fellow screenwriters and filmmakers, a participant in the travesty of trophy film editing, an artist who served as an *apparatchik*. This is not a clear-cut tale of either defiance or tragedy. Morozova instead highlights the daily instances of death and life found in a convoluted corner of a repressive regime, preferring snapshots with their own thrilling, dramatic, or comedic arc to demonstrate

⁷⁶ Morozova was the daughter of an “enemy of the people”, the journalist and Bolshevik Party member Aleksandr Platonovich Morrison of Helsinki, who fell victim to Stalin's purges in 1937. Morozova, *Moe pristrastie k Dikkensu: semeinaia khronika XX vek*, p. 200.

⁷⁷ Morozova, p. 141.

how the cogs in the machine of censorship both expurgated and preserved Soviet cinema. As an editor, Morozova refashioned reality for Soviet viewers according to the official perspective, yet as an editor of *foreign films*, her work facilitated the survival of the industry and entertained millions when Soviet filmmakers could not. Through her eyes, we gain a glimpse of the layers of informal inspection and unofficial interference that complicated a seemingly streamlined (albeit ponderous) censorship system. With her focus on Bol'shakov, Galameeva, and the *khudsovet*, Morozova clarifies the implicit nature of Stalin's influence on cinema industry management, as his preferences are implied throughout, but never heard directly within the production process. She also demonstrates in vivid detail the extent of these supporting characters' authority within the vetting process—to instigate heart attacks, fainting, loss of sleep and humiliation, and banish films—refusing to lay all blame at the feet of the ultimate censor. The vibrancy of Morozova's dramatization of her life and work as a censor derives from not only her professional training and literary aspirations, but also the melodramatic nature of the film production process itself in these years. It was a system built on unpredictability and inconsistency, continual interruption, winks and nods, where the absence of rationalized practices gave way to decision-making fraught with emotion, from Morozova's anger when confronting her superiors to Stalin's fear of death. Through her memoir, Morozova transforms an episode of cinema history often presented as a turgid single-act tragedy into a genre-defying omnibus of sobering peril, shocking disaster, thrilling adventure and sly humour. She brings Soviet film production of the *malokartin'e* years into colourful focus, revealing this to have been a period in cinema history not of slow death, but rather of the persistence of life.