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Moving Pictures for Peasants

The *Kinofikatsia* of Rural Lithuania in the Stalinist Era
(1944–1953)

Abstract: This article explores the role of the cinema in the society of rural Lithuania during the Stalinist era. The core of this article is an empirical analysis of cinema practices such as exhibition places and distribution. During the Soviet period these practices were referred to as the process of Cinefication (*kinofikatsia*). Cinefication not only was an integral element of the Soviet industrialisation but was part of a propaganda strategy. It demonstrated the technological power of the Soviet Union and used cinematic tools for an ideological indoctrination. Key research questions of this article are: What were the most essential features of the Cinefication? Did the process acquire distinctive aspects? Were the advantages of cinema utilised in the invaded area? The situation in Lithuania testifies to cultural politics and cinema politics in the rural periphery of the Soviet Union where inhabitants experienced film for the first time.

Key Words: new cinema history, Cinefication, Baltic States, Stalinism, forced modernisation

This article presents the changes and development of Lithuanian cinema culture during the Stalinist era (1944–1953), which together with the other Baltic countries (Latvia and Estonia) became an integral part of the Soviet Union after World War II. The institutions of Sovietisation (from the newly established main governing body of the Communist Party, the Central Committee and the General Office, to subordinated institutions like Ministries and Committees), fully developed within the core of Stalin's USSR, were to be integrated into the newly-annexed territories along the Western borderlands of the Soviet Union and even further into Eastern Central Europe, the satellite states of the Soviet bloc. Given the relatively more advanced state of development of these satellite areas as compared to the Soviet core, and their still quite varied political, social and cultural environments, Sovietisation techniques and institutions had to be adapted to the local conditions of these satellite states.[2] In this context specifically, cinema was meant to play an important role.

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2   Violeta Davoliūtė/Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė, Sovietization and the Cinema in the Western Borderlands: Insurgency, Narrative, and Identity in the Lithuanian film *Marytė*, in: Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 64 (2016), 391–408, 292.

The Soviet regime valued cinema as "the most important of all arts" due to several reasons. In the beginning, Soviet leaders understood cinema as a profitable form of entertainment and a convenient means of educating society (Vladimir Lenin), and later, as a tool of ideological and political indoctrination (Joseph Stalin).[3] These advantages were reinforced by the qualities of cinema itself: as a mass medium it could attract large sections of the population to screenings; the audio-visual nature of cinema enabled it to convey its messages to the illiterate part of society; and, finally, as the most attractive and popular form of mass entertainment at the time, it was, as a result, also the most lucrative type of art.

The main goal of post-war Soviet cinema politics in the new territories was to establish a networked system of film screening locations. This process, known as *kinofikatsia* (Cinefication) – a term of Soviet origins – was underpinned by the objective of making cinema available to the masses and to render it a part of daily life in order to effectively spread Soviet ideology. Like *radiofikatsia*, *elektrifikatsia*, the collectivisation of agriculture, and forced industrialisation, *kinofikatsia* was part of the revolutionary toolkit of Sovietisation in the 1920s[4] and was implemented in the new satellite areas in the 1940s.[5] As I will show, the campaign for spreading cinema became part of the Soviet modernisation process in rural areas especially and, as a technological achievement, turned into a symbol of the new Soviet system that sought to identify itself with modern, industrial society. However, unlike in the societies that remained beyond the Iron Curtain, where cinema was usually related to the development of mass consumer capitalism,[6] in the Soviet Union, at least during the Stalinist era and under the conditions of a planned economy, cinema was, at its core, about ideological indoctrination. In addition to the above-mentioned functions, cinema in the newly annexed territories was also used for constructing the identity of 'the Soviet individual'.

The Lithuanian case is quite unique in this context because it was still an agricultural, archaic society in which individual property and the land were of utmost value. Although the Baltic states were better industrialised and urbanised than other parts of the USSR, Lithuania as compared to Latvia and Estonia was much more rural. Eighty percent of Lithuanian society lived in rural areas and most of the inhabitants were native Lithuanians.[7] Consequently, Soviet modernisation proceeded much more slowly there than in the other Baltic countries: collectivisation was finished in the second part of 1950s, and the end of urbanisation and increased social mobility from countryside to city could be observed only by the early 1970s.

3   Peter Kenez, Cinema and Soviet Society. From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin, London 2008, 27; Леонид Максименков, Кремлевский кинотеатр. 1928–1953: Документы, Москва 2005 [Leonid Maksimenkov, Kremlin Cinema. 1928–1953, Moscow 2005], 15–17; Richard Taylor, Boris Shumyatsky and Soviet Cinema in the 1930s, in: Richard Taylor/Ian Christie (eds), Inside the Film Factory. New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema, London/New York 2005, 208 and 249.

4   For more on Cinefication in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, see, e.g., Nicholas Reeves, The Power of Film Propaganda. Myth or Reality?, London/New York 2003, 66 f.; Kenez, Cinema and Soviet Society, 73–78; Richard Taylor, The Politics of the Soviet Cinema 1917–1929, New York 2008, 87–89.

5   Pavel Skopal, The Cinematic Shapes of the Socialist Modernity Programme, in: Daniel Biltereyst/Richard Maltby/Philippe Meers (eds), Cinema, Audiences and Modernity: New Perspectives on European Cinema History, New York 2012, 83.

6   Judith Thissen, A New Approach to European Cinema History, in: Judith Thissen/Clemens Zimmermann (eds), Cinema Beyond the City. Small-Town and Rural Film Culture in Europe, London 2016, 1–20, 3.

7   Kevin C. O'Connor, The History of the Baltic States, London 2003, 125–129.

As a result, *kinofikatsia* in Lithuania was targeted towards rural population (peasants) rather than city residents.

This article questions how and if the purported benefits of cinema were "effectively" used by the State for the purposes of the Sovietisation of Lithuanian society, and if cinema indeed became the most convenient and attractive tool of ideological and political indoctrination there. As I will show, the development of cinema was initiated from above (new government system) to below (mass society). Its institutionalisation was not an easy process; on the contrary, it was hindered by a lack of infrastructure, technological difficulties and, most importantly, by sociocultural, ideological and economic factors. I will thus argue that the advantages of indoctrination that are possible via cinematic forms were never effectively exploited in Lithuania, which resulted in the delay of Sovietization there. In the Lithuanian context then, Soviet state measures were not easily or effectively applied to the local context.

By looking deeper into the historical and social development of cinema in Soviet Lithuania, I reveal a more complex understanding of the actual role of cinema in the Sovietisation of the country, and provide much needed nuance to the well-entrenched opinion that cinema was the most successful audiovisual medium of the time. This has resulted in a long-term societal suspicion of cinema which, to this day, is regarded as a "gift" passed on by the conqueror.[8]

In regard to the complex historical context presented here, I analyse cinema as a social, political, cultural and economic institution. In other words, this article is in line with the aims of New Cinema History, which has moved "away from the content of films to consider their circulation and consumption, and to examine the cinema as a site of social and cultural exchange".[9] This kind of approach allows us to see the processes of how cinema is used and experienced in wider socio-cultural (e.g. post-war daily life, leisure time) and regional contexts. The latter aspect is particularly relevant here since the bulk of research on the Soviet period which has aimed to discuss the above-mentioned points has either been limited to the analysis of the early Soviet period (before World War II) or, specifically in the case of Russia, has not taken the regional peripheral features of the Soviet Union into account. The Soviet Union was a diverse empire, which developed in stages and came to include 15 republics from the Baltic countries in the west to the Siberian regions in the east, each with different identities and sociocultural experiences. This article, about the Soviet manipulations of cinema in Lithuania, is the first attempt to analyse the regional cinema politics of the Soviet Union with a focus on its periphery states.

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8   The approach towards cinema as a phenomenon imported by occupiers also supports another common conception which refers to film production in Lithuania at the national level. During the period of the first independent Republic of Lithuania (1918–1940), local feature film production did not receive much attention, as, like in most small film industry countries, feature film production was low (only two fiction feature films were made). Professional Lithuanian filmmaking was born during the Soviet period. As some research has shown, it became quite authentic only in the late 1950s, when it was inspired by local, national topics and unique film language – despite censorship and industrial dependence on Moscow. In the 1990s, when regaining independence, all local films made during the Soviet period were treated as "non-national" and "non-Lithuanian". This approach is still viable in contemporary Lithuania.

9   Thissen, A New Approach, 3.

"Providing Film Services in Rural Areas": Challenges and advantages in the development of the network of film screening locations

Among the first tasks in the countries annexed by the Soviet Union was to build a peripheral administrative unit that could ensure the efficient performance of the various functions of cinema. In Lithuania, this task was entrusted to the Board of Cinefication (*kinofikatsia*) at the Council of People's Commissars (hereafter, CPC) of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (hereafter, LSSR), founded in August 1944,[10] and to the Chief Film Distribution Agency (*glavkinoprokat*) established in the same year. The Board of Cinefication had to perform the general function of building and developing the cinema network, as well as maintaining film equipment, while the Film Distribution Agency was responsible for providing films for screening. Soon after its establishment in 1946, however, the Board of Cinefication was dismissed and replaced by another unit of a higher administrative status – the Ministry of Cinematography of the LSSR (operated until 1953), which had under its jurisdiction all cinema-related questions and worked in coordination with the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (b). From this point onward, the local institutional governance body mirrored the central one and was under its supervision. At the top of the institutional hierarchy was the Central Committee of the Communist party of the USSR, while its Department of Agitation and Propaganda (*agitprop*) was in charge of cinema affairs.

As the cinema network expanded, by 1949 the structure of its executive agencies crystallised into something more concrete. It came to consist of 40 subordinate regional administrative units: 14 Departments of Cinefication and 26 Directorates of the Cinema Network. Departments of Cinefication were established in larger counties, and Directorates of the Cinema Network under the charge of the heads of cinema theatres were reserved to smaller districts. All the administrative units of the film industry were managed according to the principle of dual power: they were under the direction of the Ministry of Cinematography and under the supervision of the regional and local committees of the Lithuanian Communist Party (b).

In the post-war period the main task of the institutions of cinema administration was to build and develop the cinema network and to ensure film distribution and film screenings. This was implemented in accordance with the simple logic that the cinema network had to function. So that the film production could serve the purpose of ideological-political indoctrination, the first objective was to ensure the means of its propagation, which required technological screening facilities. Said otherwise, in order for a film to make any kind of impact, it was necessary to ensure that its target audience had a location in which to view the film.

However, it was not so easy to achieve this goal. As World War II subsided, it turned out that there were hardly any means to help ensure the continuous functioning of the cinema

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10 Объяснительная записка к годовому отчету управелния кинофикацыи при Совете Министров Литовской ССР за 1945 год [Explanatory note to the annual report of the Board of Cinefication at the CPC of the Lithuanian SSR for 1945], Lithuanian Archive of Literature and Arts (hereafter referred to as LLMA), f. 472, ap. 1, b. 1, 15–27.

network. For example, in a report describing the situation in 1944, the head of the Board of Cinefication of the LSSR Aleksandras Avdenis, while comparing the achievements of the first Soviet occupation of 1941 with the situation of the given time, expressed his regrets that out of 60 mobile film equipment locations (i.e. travelling cinemas) not a single one remained, while the stationary screening locations guaranteed "film services in the cities, whereas it is impossible to provide film services in the rural areas without our own transport in the Republic of Lithuania at the present time".[11] Providing film services in the rural areas, where the largest number of residents was concentrated, became the greatest challenge of the post-war Stalinist years for several reasons. In the periphery, the hostility to Soviet authorities was the strongest, and a guerrilla war was going on.[12] Despite these difficulties, the sociocultural advantages of the cinema became distinct in rural areas. It was still regarded as a privileged form of entertainment for urban residents, and thus it was not so easy to impress them with screenings – hence, what was shown, that is, the film itself rather than the fact of screening, was more important for this audience.

In the meantime, in more remote locations of Lithuania, where a film was a rare event, cinema – like other forms of leisure entertainment (performances of music bands, amateur theatre) – had to surprise and attract the curious. As noted by an *agitprop* employee, "there are some villages and solitary homesteads where people have not seen any films in their lifetime".[13] The Soviets were able to exploit this circumstance to their advantage in that they were easily able to use cinema to instil the impression of technological progress and to create a field of positive associations for the benefit of the Communist regime. This advantage becomes especially distinct when taking into account that, as a result of the general spread of Cinefication, the intrusion of cinema into daily life was a totally new phenomenon for Lithuanians. The rate at which film screening locations spread throughout Lithuania in the pre-war period or under the rule of Nazi Germany did not equal that of the post-war years.[14]

Like other forms of leisure entertainment, cinema acted as a kind of recreational bait, a way of attracting large numbers of people to the film venue. For audiences it was not only important to see what was screened, but also to witness the very effect of screening. The idea then was to entice people to attend out of curiosity (what is going on?) and furthermore, due to the lack of trustworthy information, gatherings before screenings served as an opportunity to get to know from other people what was really happening or might happen in the

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11 This early report reveals not only the limited technological possibilities, but also the structure of the cinema network of that time: The screening locations were divided into stationary ones (meant for cities and larger settlements) and mobile ones (meant for rural areas). Letter by the head of the Board of Cinefication of the CPC of the LSSR to the deputy head of the CPC of the LSSR, comrade Grigarauskas, 10 October 1944, Lithuanian Central State Archive (hereafter referred to as LCVA), f. R–754, ap. 4, b. 113, 9. All translations of Russian and Lithuanian source material into English are my own.

12 Arvydas Anušauskas/Juozas Banionis/Česlovas Bauža (eds), Lietuva 1940–1990. Okupuotos Lietuvos istorija, Vilnius 2007, 288 and 317.

13 Секретарю центрального комитета ВКП (б) товарищу Жданову А. А. Докладная записка, 1946 мая [Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) to Comrade Zhdanov A. A. Memorandum, May 1946], Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (hereafter referred to as RGASPI), f. 1771, ap. 9, b. 439, 67.

14 On the eve of World War II, there were 55 cinema projectors in larger and smaller cities, and several intermittently operating mobile projectors throughout Lithuania. During the years of the Nazi occupation, 56 cinema projectors were in operation. Vytautas Mikalauskas, Kinas Lietuvoje, Vilnius 1999, 169 f. and 349.

future. Having gone through war after war, and all of the attendant confusion and uncertainty, cinema thus offered an important means of socialisation for the Lithuanian society of that time. Moreover, gathering people together for the screenings meant that the floor was open for verbal agitators who accompanied them: to explain the content of the screened films; to present the ready-made presentations elucidating the present situation, (obviously in a light favourable to the occupying regime); and to agitate for various actions (to encourage people to voluntarily give away their material possessions, to prevent resistance to the nationalisa-tion of property, etc.).

Despite the above-mentioned advantages of cinema, one major obstacle in ensuring the permanent functioning of the network of film screening locations was the system of solitary homesteads in the countryside whose influence the regime had underestimated. The social structure of the rural areas was based on individual farming or the system of solitary home-steads which was formed in Lithuania in the 1910s after the Stolypin agrarian reform. The advantage of film screenings – assembling large groups of the population – was hardly achiev-able in this context: how could one organise film screenings in a location whose structure was not adapted for that purpose, and where the majority of the residents was difficult to reach? Although travelling cinemas were supposed to solve these problems,[15] the slow transportation of film equipment (due to a lack of motorized vehicles, film equipment was transported with horse-drawn carriages and was called "horse cinema") and its complicated maintenance (it often broke down, spare parts were hard to find) got in the way.

Simultaneously, the expectations that cinemas in the cities would compensate for the minimal amount of rural film screenings were only partially fulfilled; the establishment of regular screening in the cities was also difficult, due to electricity shortages[16] and the lack of film production.[17] To deal with the challenges of Cinefication in the LSSR, units of the Red Army and *agitprop* groups (brigades of the Agitation and Propaganda Departments, specially created for that purpose), agitation trains and cars were temporarily brought in. This circum-stance is highlighted in a curious document from 1945, which contains the minutes of the congress of the employees of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Lithuanian Communist Party (b):

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15 The priorities and scale of the development of the cinema network in the Stalinist era can be described with the following numbers: in 1945, there were 47 cinema projectors in Lithuania, out of which 43 were stationary, and four were mobile; in 1947, there were 146 projectors: 67 stationary and 79 mobile, 67 in the cities, 79 in rural areas; in 1950, there were 248 projectors: 86 stationary, 162 mobile, 81 in the cities, 167 in rural areas; in 1953, there were 404 projectors: 104 stationary, 300 mobile, 85 in the cities, 319 in rural areas.

16 However petty this reason may seem, electricity shortages became a serious obstacle in organising film screen-ings, e.g., in 1946, one fifth of the screenings in Lithuania could not take place as a result of these electricity shortages. Справка о состоянии кинообслуживания Литовской ССР [Information on the state of cinemato-graphic service of the Lithuanian SSR], 2 January 1947, Lietuvos Ypatingasis Archyvas (Lithuanian Special Archive, hereafter referred to as LYA), f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 55, 40 f.

17 Справка о состояний киносети Управления Кинофикацыий при СНК Лит ССР за деянии I–XI–45 [Information about the status of cinemas of the Directorate of the Cinema Network under the CPC of the Lithuanian SSR for the deed I–XI–45], 1945 lapkričio 11, LYA, f. 1711, ap. 8, b. 329, 55, Отчиот о работе сектора култполитпросвет работы Отдела агитации и пропаганды ЦК КП (б) Литвы за I-е полугодие 1945 года [On the work in the sector of cultural politics of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) of Lithuania for the first half of 1945], LYA, f. 1771, ap. 8, b. 324, 9.

"The comrades here have said that cinema will be a great help. That's correct. The village needs cinema. But so far we haven't had a possibility to use cinema. We don't have screening equipment. Only the residents of the city of Šiauliai go to the movies, and in the settlements, villages and solitary homesteads there is no cinema, we only use the mobile cinema of the Red Army garrisons in those locations where they are stationed."[18]

In addition to film screenings, *agitprop* brigades often held performances of music bands and amateur theatre, which were preceded by propaganda speeches given by agitators and question and answer sessions.[19] This is how the head of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Ukmergė district described his initiative:

"We organised an agitation wagon from whatever means available. It was a simple vehicle, a truck furnished with posters and slogans. It contained a mobile cinema. There are 15 people from the House of Socialist Culture. A band of the House of Socialist Culture, and two lectors […]. Before the meeting, propagandists and lectors give speeches, which are followed by performances of amateurs."[20]

This kind of agitation-propaganda programme was nothing new in the USSR. Identical means (combination of entertainment and political/ideological indoctrination) had already been worked out in the early period of the Bolshevik state, during the civil war of 1917–1921.[21]

As mentioned above, the use of such means was meant but as a temporary solution. Ensuring the long-term functioning of cinema, sustainable expansion of the film screening network and the use of the existing film screening locations were hindered not only by technological difficulties, but also by the attitude of officials supervising film activity. For example, in 1947, the minister of cinematography of the LSSR Stasys Brašiškis stated that the local party committees in the districts and cities exercised poor control over the work of the heads of the Departments of Cinefication; they "[…] take too much liberty and independently organise film screenings in the villages".[22] On the other hand, the heads of the Departments of Cinefication felt a certain lack of attention and efforts in ensuring film activity not only from the local committees, but also from the Ministry of Cinematography of the LSSR. The deadlock situation in distributing the administrative responsibilities that had been formed due to organisational chaos was soon noticed by the highest institutions of power of the LSSR,

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18   Стенограмма совещания пропагандистских работников ЦК КП /б/ Литвы, 1945 декабря 13–14 [Minutes of the meeting of propagandists of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) of Lithuania, 13–14 December 1945], LYA, f. 1771, ap. 8, b. 147, 29.

19   More on the work of the *agitprop* brigade of the Red Army: The 95th border guard detachment [ru. Погранотряд] organised an *agitprop* brigade, which consisted of a detachment agitator, a Red Army ensemble and a mobile cinema. The brigade went to the settlements of Батоки, Eržvilkas and Šilalė. In each village, 120 to 250 local residents assembled to listen to the agitator's speech and watch the ensemble's performance and a film; RGASPI, f. 597, ap. 1, b. 3, 81.

20   LYA, f. 1771, ap. 7, b. 146, l. 52.

21   Cf. Richard Taylor, Film Propaganda. Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, London/New York 2009, 209 f.

22   Справка о работе киносети Литовской ССР на 1946 год и первый квартал 1947 года, 1946 XII 30 [Information on the functioning of the Lithuanian SSR cinema network for 1946 and the first quarter of 1947, 30 December 1946], LYA, f. 1771, ap. 9, b. 439, 35 f.; notification from the Minister of Cinematography of the LSSR Brašiškis to the Council of Ministers of the LSSR, 27 June 1947, LCVA R–754, ap. 4, b. 1047, 1–4.

which began to show greater concern for cinema in 1948. At that time, the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party set out to discuss the cinema affairs and issued a decree acknowledging that "the Ministry of Cinematography did not take any practical measures to implement Decree No. 2925 of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of 17 August 1947 'On the Measures to Promote the Film Exhibition Network in the Villages' and failed to realise the importance of providing films to rural settlements and presenting the most important works of Soviet cinema to the wide masses".[23] Internal inspection revealed that despite the implementation of the pre-planned policy of developing the cinema network, the LSSR ranked 50th in the entire Soviet Union in terms of audience attendance in the cities, and last in terms of audience attendance in rural areas.[24] Because of this situation, the Minister of Cinematography of the LSSR Brašiškis and his deputy were dismissed.

The new minister of cinematography Michalina Meškauskienė was faced with significant challenges: not only did the cinema have to be pulled out from the bottom of planned performance indicators, but a tight rein also had to be put on the officials of executive institutions whose attitude toward cinema was rather offhand. This can be well illustrated by the apprehensions expressed by the head of the Varėna film network when she tried to make contact with the secretaries of the local party committees: "[…] I constantly hear the same answer: why should we care about cinema, we have enough work as it is!"[25] There were complaints not only about their negligent approach to cinema affairs, but also about deliberate appropriation of fuel, refusal to provide transportation, locations, etc. The most frequent manifestations of the self-willed behaviour of these officials were apparent in their attempts to combine film screenings with other kinds of entertainment. Officials of executive institutions were more willing to organise dance parties and concerts of music bands than film screenings. For example, the officials of the Jonava district were much more interested in dances: "[…] party organiser, comrade Bogdanovas at gunpoint made the film mechanic Zvižinskas broadcast dance music on the radio gramophone using the amplifier of the film theatre. By the orders of comrade Bagdonas, dances are held on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays."[26] Expressing her indignation at the abnormal activity of Saulė Cinema in Rokiškis, Meškauskienė noted that one of the main reasons the figures of the local party committee were fond of concerts was because:

"By the order of the Ukom, film screenings are often disrupted because of unplanned performances of concert brigades in the town of Rokiškis. The sites of the cinema the-

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23   Постановление бюро центрального комитета КП (б) Литвы от апреля 23 1948 г. О работе Министерства кинематографии Литовской ССР [Decision of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (b) of 23 April 1948 on the work of the Ministry of Cinematography of the Lithuanian SSR], LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 75, 37–42.

24   Notification from the Deputy Minister of Cinematography of the LSSR Michalina Meškauskienė to the secretary of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (b), comrade Sniečkus. LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 75, 56; Secret notification of Pivariūnas to the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (b), LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 75, 51.

25   Letter from the head of the Varėna cinema network Martynenko to the Chief Board of Cinefication of the Ministry of Cinematography of the LSSR, 27 August 1948, LYA, ap. 11, b. 481, 25.

26   Letter from the head of the Kaunas Department of Cinefication Nešukaitis to the Minister of Cinematography of the LSSR, 23 December 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 553, 31.

atre are often given to concert performances despite the fact that the cinema theatre announces the schedule of film screenings in advance and thus experiences losses."[27]

Employees of the lowest rank, mechanics who were "the life and soul of the cinema", were a cause of no lesser concern. Hardly supervised by the heads of peripheral party committees and Departments of Cinefication, film mechanics had a lot of freedom to do things in their own way. One of the most painful problems was appropriating the money from ticket sales. For example, Meškauskienė, generalising about film activity in the villages in 1949, admitted that in those countryside settlements where inspections were held during the film screenings, two or three times more money was collected from ticket sales than in the same settlements when there was no inspection.[28] Film mechanics lacked not only discipline, but also professional skills. Due to their ignorance and nonchalance, equipment kept breaking down and film copies were damaged:

> "Due to the low professional skills of projectionists, film screenings are sometimes held without sound and last six or eight hours instead of the standard two. Such screenings are sheer torture for the audience and totally discourage people from going to see a film. The film copies are often damaged, and sometimes film reels are mixed."[29]

On 1 January 1949, the Republican School for Film Mechanics was established with the aim of solving the problems of training and the shortage of film mechanics but this simply revealed that the roots of the problem lay elsewhere. Because of the undervalued nature of the work of film mechanics – work conditions were poor and salaries were low – these jobs were often taken on by young and mobile people who saw it as a temporary job. The prevalence of young people in this occupation resulted in yet another problem. Freshly trained film mechanics who had just started to work were soon conscripted into the Red Army.[30] Thus, the shortage of electric power gradually gave way to a shortage of film mechanics in a domain where some expertise was required because of the difficulties associated with the repair of film equipment.

In an attempt to improve the situation, directive orders were repeatedly issued, and inspections were held. In the spring of 1951, the inspection of the Chief Board of Cinefication of the

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27 Letter from the Minister of Cinematography of the LSSR Michalina Meškauskienė to the secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party (b) Preikšas, 17 July 1948, LYA, ap. 1771, ap. 11, b. 481, 21.

28 Приказ министра кинематографии Литовской ССР N° 31, Об усилении борьбы с растратами и хищениями в киносети Литовской ССР [Order from the Minister of Cinematography of the Lithuanian SSR N° 31 on fighting embezzlement in cinemas of the Lithuanian SSR], 28 February 1950, LLMA, f. 472, ap. 1, b. 77, 48.

29 Speech by the prime minister of the LSSR, Kazys Preikšas, in: Minutes of the 7th plenum of the Lithuanian Communist Party, 5–7 July 1950, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 90, b. 15, 476.

30 E.g. in 1950, out of 326 film mechanics, 90 were conscripted into the Red Army, and 30 were dismissed for other reasons. Объяснительная записка к годовому отчету за 1950 год по кинофикации Министерства кинематографии Литовской ССР [Explanatory note to the annual activity report for 1950 of the Ministry of Cinematography of the Lithuanian SSR], LLMA, f. 472, ap. 1, b 53, l. 114. In the activity report for 1951, without a detailed account of the reasons, it was mentioned that 213 film mechanics were newly employed, and 173 were dismissed. Заключение по сводным отчетом министерства кинематографии Литовской ССР за 1951 год [Conclusion of the annual report of the Ministry of Cinematography of the Lithuanian SSR for 1951], 28 April 1952, LLMA, f. 472, ap. 1, b. 160, 5.

Ministry of Cinematography of the USSR took place in Lithuania. In its aftermath, the problems pestering the film industry of the LSSR were discussed in the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (b). The representative of the Ministry of Cinematography of the USSR in charge of the inspection, Krapotin, had to acknowledge that the unsatisfactory situation of cinema in Soviet Lithuania had acquired the nature of a "chronic" disease – the state plan of maximising audience attendance was yet again unfulfilled.[31]

In an attempt to find out who was to blame for this situation, responsibility was shifted to local institutions in charge of film distribution – the Republican Agency for Film Rentals and its employees. They were accused of poor distribution of the best Soviet films and, as a result, the majority of these films never reached the theatres and were ultimately seen only by a small part of the population.[32] It is difficult to determine the extent to which this was due to employee negligence. Without doubt, however, this problem could partly be explained by the cumbersome development of the film screening network and the shortages previously mentioned. Oftentimes films were not screened as there was no physical space in which to screen them or because there were no employees who could operate the equipment. There is another interesting circumstance that came up during the inspection: even in instances when a location was available for screening films, screenings often did not take place because the audience failed to attend. In light of all these difficulties, the situation can be described as a contradictory one. When trying to understand the logic of planned calculation in cinema attendance, it becomes clear that the planning logic never materialised. In reality, as the number of film screening locations increased in Lithuania, revenues dropped.[33] In other words, the film industry was unprofitable: there was a lack of spectators and a lack of income. This was a multifaceted problem which I elaborate on in the following section.

Film programming and distribution: film shortages, smuggling and film "hooliganism"

As already mentioned, film distribution was the responsibility of the Republican Agency for Film Rentals, which operated under the supervision of the Ministry of Cinematography of

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31 Протокол заседания бюро Центрального Комитета КП (б) Литвы [Minutes of the meeting of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) of Lithuania], 27 July 1951, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 112, b. 81, l. 9–11; Постановление бюро Центрального Комитета КП (б) Литвы О состояние и мерах улучшение кинообслужевание население республики [Resolution from the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) of Lithuania on the state and measures of improving of the number of film service attendants of the Republic], 27 July 1951, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 112, b. 81, 68–75.

32 Приказ министра Кинематографии Литовской ССР, № 52, О результатах проверки работы киносети республики бригадой Главного Управления Кинофикации Министерства Кинематографии СССР [Order from the Minister of Cinematography of the Lithuanian SSR, № 52, On the results of inspecting the work of the country's cinema network by the brigade of the Main Directorate of Cinematography of the USSR Ministry of Cinematography], 3 May 1951, LLMA, f. 472, ap. 1, b. 130, 98–102.

33 For example, according to the data of the Lithuanian Republican Office of the State Bank of the USSR, in 1949, 22.7 mil roubles were collected from 220 film screening locations, in 1950, 21.1 mil from 248 locations, and in 1951, 21.2 mil from 302 locations. Letter from the Lithuanian Republican Office of the State Bank of the USSR to the Council of Ministers of the USSR, LCVA, f. R–754, ap. 4, b. 2876, l. 9.

the LSSR and was under direct control of the Chief Board for Film Distribution of the USSR. The latter compiled the lists of repertoire films, and in accordance with these lists, films were sent out to its subordinate departments.

In Soviet Lithuania, film distribution took place in the context of the centralised repertoire policy of the Soviet Union. If in the 1920s the residents of Soviet Russia could still choose alternatives offered by the diverse "market" of film production, by the 1930s this became impossible. The year 1937 marks the successful end to the consistent ideological "cleansing" of the film repertoire and the absolute reduction of international film production in cinemas.[34] The second factor that made an impact on the condition of film repertories was the considerably decreased film production in the USSR in the post-war years, a period that was dubbed "film shortage" (ru. *малокартинье*)[35] and lasted from 1947 to 1953.

In the beginning, the film production of the late Stalinist period was supposed to fulfil the needs of World War II by using propaganda plots directed against other countries (e.g., anti-Polish, anti-British), but which naturally changed depending on particular political actions (allies or enemies of the USSR). Films that were supposed to inspire the viewers with victorious marches of the Red Army were in circulation on the screens of the Soviet Union. In Soviet war-themed films, spies were exposed, and later, the fates of soldiers in the trenches of the front lines were represented. These heroic films were accompanied by others which commemorated the feats of the red partisans.[36] Despite the tendentious filmography, due to strict regulation and control, film production became an insurmountable challenge even for well-seasoned filmmakers. Certainly, the shortage of funds caused by World War II, and the disrupted system of film production played a decisive role. The shortage of films resulted in large gaps in the repertoire. Thus, with the decrease of Soviet film production, there soon remained no new films to screen.

In an attempt to avoid total financial chaos in the film industry (if there was nothing to be screened, there was no way to collect money), and the devaluation of people's cinema-going habits (no film, no audience), the situation was temporarily (1947–1951) fixed by allowing theatres to screen trophy films captured from the countries occupied by the USSR during World War II. Thus, during this period, films produced in the Third Reich and the USA had a considerable edge over Soviet ones in the repertoire.[37] Having analysed the filmography of trophy film production, Russian researcher Maya Turovskaya has observed that it mainly consisted of entertainment films,[38] while ideologically charged films were most often directed

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34   Until 1936, 500 films were banned from the repertoire, and in a short period from 1936 to 1937, 250 films were banned. Максименков, Кремлевский кинотеатр [Maksimenkov, Kremlin Cinema], 41.

35   In 1927, 119 feature films were released in the USSR, in 1933 – 29, in 1945 – 18, in 1951 – 9, and in 1953 – as many as 44. Kenez, Cinema and Soviet Society, 188; Maya Turovskaya, The 1930s and 1940s: Cinema in Context, in: Richard Taylor/Derek Spring (eds), Stalinism and Soviet Cinema, London/New York 1993, 34–53, 44.

36   For detailed descriptions of films released in the years of World War II in the USSR, cf. Peter Kenez, Films of Second World War, in: Anna Lawton (ed.), The Red Screen. Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema, London/ New York 1992, 147–169.

37   E.g. in 1947, films made in the Third Reich constituted 17 percent of all screened films in the USSR, in 1948 – 82 percent, in 1949 – 94 percent, and the rest were Soviet films. Turovskaya, The 1930s and 1940s, 51.

38   Some examples: *The Indian Tomb* [*Das indische Grabmal*] (Germany 1938), *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (USA 1938), *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves* (USA 1944). In Lithuania most remembered was a film about Tarzan (might be *Tarzan's Revenge*, USA 1938). For a detailed list see Taylor, Film Propaganda, 212–214.

against British imperialism. It is important to note here that even these ostensibly innocent entertainment films (most often musicals) reached the screens with changed titles and were "scrupulously edited", e.g. unwanted footage was "edited out" and a unique Soviet version was presented in its place.[39]

Despite these features of the Soviet Union programming policy, in Lithuania the situation is to be understood from a number of different angles. The appeal for the screening of trophy films, which was justified by the need to collect more income, reached Lithuania in 1948.[40] There is an interesting document that sheds more light on the screening of foreign films in Lithuania, and alludes to attempts by the administrators of *kinofikatsia* in Kaunas county to evade the centralised distribution of films. In 1951, the already mentioned state-level inspection revealed that banned films were screened in Kaunas cinemas:

> "The Board of Cinefication of the Kaunas county (head V. Garolis) and the director of the city department of the Chief Board for Film Distribution (V. Astrauskas), violating the rules of film rental in the territory of the USSR, were allowed to screen films of foreign production that had been taken off the repertoire in the cinemas of the city of Kaunas."[41]

How should we assess the fact that these banned films were ultimately screened? Was it simply the result of an accidental oversight? Not at all. It turns out that the heads of the cinemas were perfectly aware of what they were doing. In official reports they used to indicate the titles of other films – the so-called "best Soviet films". Their motivation to screen banned films was most likely the simple reason of wanting to make a profit. This also reveals to us that audiences preferred Western productions over Soviet films. Turovskaya also comes to a similar conclusion – the most popular films were not the "best Soviet" ones, but little known films – often from the West – that fulfilled the audience's entertainment expectations.[42] Even in the post-war period, the audiences of Soviet Russia were fond of films that had nothing to do with World War II, but adventure films or theatrical melodramas instead. In other words, the most popular films were those that satisfied needs separate from the imagined ideological or aesthetic ones: films that offered the opportunity to escape from the drudgery of daily life.

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39 Report from the deputy head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party VSKP (b) L. Ilyichev to the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) of the USSR comrade G. Malenkov, 28 March 1949, RGASPI, f. 17, ap. 132, b. 250, 35; report from the Minister of Cinematography of the USSR I. Bolshakov to the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) of the USSR comrade G. Malenkov, 25 April 1949, RGASPI, f. 17, ap. 132. b. 250, 36.

40 Letter from the deputy head of the Republican Film Rental Agency Davidson, 6 November 1948, LCVA, f. R–82, ap. 1, b. 11, 81.

41 Kanklės Cinema screened the German film *Don't Forget Me* [ru. *Не забывай меня*, German *Vergiss mein nicht*, dir. Augusto Genina, 1935] and the American comedy *Charley's Aunt* [ru. *Тётка Чарлея*, dir. Archie Mayo, 1941]; this film was also screened in Baltija and Daina Cinemas. Two more banned films were screened in Kanklės: the Austrian musical *Bohemian Miracle* [ru. *Богема*, German *Zauber der Bohème*, dir. Géza von Bolváry, 1937] and American film of the same genre *Sun Valley Serenade* [ru. *Серенада солнечной долины*, dir. H. Bruce Humberstone, 1941]. Notification and annex to the notification of the Minister of State Control of the LSSR A. Efremov to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) of the LSSR A. Sniečkus, 6 December 1951, LCVA, f. R–754, ap. 4, b. 2529, 165.

42 Turovskaya, The 1930s and 1940s, 50.

As the case of "film smuggling" in the city of Kaunas confirms, these insights allow us to understand that the post-war expectations of city audiences were geared toward entertainment and recreation. Several additional hints found in the sources also testify to audience predilection for entertainment films in the Lithuanian provinces. For example, in the Kėdainiai county, the employees of the local party committee noticed that musical films enjoyed high popularity, and there were similar comments from the town of Zarasai: "Feature films of popular genre were a greater success."[43]

In addition, one more circumstance needs to be addressed – the difference between the repertoire policy in the cities and in the countryside. In Soviet Lithuania, the circulation of foreign-produced films was limited to the cities, while in the countryside, it was explicitly forbidden.[44] This kind of repertoire planning resulted in yet another problem. If in the cities repertoire gaps could partly be filled with foreign films, in the rural areas, because of the ban and the lack of Soviet production, films often had two or more screenings.[45] This shows a direct relation between attendance and the financial plan of anticipated income. Attendance was obviously better when new films were screened, and it dropped in the case of repeat screenings. This gave rise to quite an absurd situation: directives required a wide repertoire of Soviet works and collection of planned income, but there was not much to be screened, however diligently the orders may have been executed.

Although the short-term use of trophy films delayed in part the absolute financial chaos in the cinema industry, it also produced a distortion in the repertoire policy. The screening of foreign films acquired an almost uncontrollable scale while Soviet films were pushed into the periphery of cinema screens.

Beside the repertoire gaps, there were additional circumstances that hindered the screening and "assimilation" of Soviet film production. Just like in the development of the film screening network, there were frequent problems in film distribution as well. Departments of Cinefication and the heads of the cinema network in the countryside loosely followed the screening schedules that had been prepared in advance and thus, film copies often arrived late or were sent to other locations. Due to the negligence of film mechanics, copies were often damaged or irretrievably lost. The employees of the Agency for Film Rentals were slack in fulfilling the repertoire demands and sometimes would send a film that had already been recently shown in the given location or would replace the requested film with another one.[46]

Regarding the spread of Soviet film production (and its attendant difficulties), another quite simple but important circumstance has to be taken into account. In the cases of Lithuania and other occupied countries, it was not enough to release films; scripts had also to be translated into Lithuanian or other national languages. All Soviet-produced films were in

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43 Explanatory letter of the *Thirty Years to the Komsomol* Cinema in Zarasai, attached to the balance sheet of 1949, 1 January 1949, LLMA, f. 472, ap. 1, b. 35, 231 f.

44 Letter from the head of the Republican Film Rental Agency Davidson to the Deputy Prime Minister of the LSSR K. Preikšas, 5 June 1949, LCVA, f. R–754, ap. 4, b. 1812, 67 f.

45 Заключение Минситерства финансов Литовской ССР по отчету за 1-ое полугодие 1948 года Управления кинофикации Минситерства кинематографии Литовской ССР [Conclusion of the Ministry of Finance of the Lithuanian SSR on the report for the first half of 1948 of the Cinematography Directorate of the Ministry of Cinematography of the Lithuanian SSR], 10 November 1948, LCVA, f. R–754, ap. 4, b. 1412, 8–11.

46 Letter from the Rokiškis county to the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (b), 1948, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 479, 92.

Russian, and the part of the Lithuanian population that was the main target of the Soviets, i.e. rural residents, did not understand the Russian language. Initially, there were attempts to solve this problem by providing explanations of the contents of the films before the screenings, but bearing in mind that local party committees and their *agitprop* departments had little concern for cinema, the content of the films were hardly ever explained, and the audience's ability to understand the film was therefore severely hindered. Over time, some Soviet films were dubbed into Lithuanian or subtitled, but not sufficiently: "Films dubbed in Lithuanian are seldom screened, and there are very few films with Lithuanian or, where needed, Polish subtitles, and thus these films are inaccessible and incomprehensible to spectators who do not speak Russian".[47] Such was the indignation voiced at the 7th plenum of the Lithuanian Communist Party in 1953.

However, even when the difficulties of distribution of Soviet films were overcome, a less than favourable attitude of the people to Soviet film production got in the way of the industry. For example, in the early post-war period, film "hooliganism" was quite widespread: Soviet films were distorted and ridiculed by certain people who did so by inserting fragments of films produced in the Third Reich. "There were occurrences in Klaipėda, Mažeikiai, and Šiauliai, when some footage from German films was inserted into the films (*Professor Mamlok* [*Профессор Мамлок*, dir. A. Minkin, G. Rapoport, 1938], *Arinka* [*Аринка*, dir. N. Kosheverova, J. Muzykant, 1939], *Baltic Deputy* [*Депутат Балтики*, dir. A. Zarkhi, J. Kheifits, 1937])".[48] Sometimes the audience expressed considerable indignation at these films, particularly in those cases when the twists of plot clashed with their values. For example, in the Kentra district of the Pagėgiai county "unknown individuals made the projectionist stop the screening of the film *Life in a Citadel* […] at the moment when a group of people's traitors was exposed in the plot".[49] In some cases people did not go to watch films because they were afraid of partisans who warned against participating in any kind of events organised by the Soviet state.[50] In other cases non-attendance was a symbolic act of disagreement with the new order.[51] The greatest hostility towards Soviet film production was among teachers who were supposed to organise screenings for their pupils. They managed to find various excuses for avoiding screening films for their school classes. There are mentions that in the Prienai county the "headmaster is clearly not inclined to show Soviet films, among them the films *V. I. Lenin*, *Court of Honour* [*Суд чести*, dir. Abram Room, 1948]".[52] While the teacher of the Raguviškiai school Juškevičius refused to screen the second part of the film *Battle of*

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47   Minutes of the 7th plenum of the Lithuanian Communist Party, 5–7 July 1950, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 203, 271.

48   Секретарю центрального комитета ВКП (б) товарищу Жданову А. А. Докладная записка, 1946 мая [Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) to Comrade Zhdanov A. A. Memorandum, May 1946], RGASPI, f. 1771, ap. 9, b. 439, 67.

49   Справка о состоянии кинообслуживания населения в Клайпедской области [Information on the state of cinematographic services in Klaipėda region], 24 December 1950, LCVA, R–754, ap. 4, b. 2195, 2.

50   In some areas of Lithuania, partisans attacked public gatherings such as dances, festivals, and also film screenings. Minadaugas Pocius, Kita mėnulio pusė, Vilnius 2009, 245 f. and 333.

51   Davoliūtė/Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė, Sovietization and the Cinema, 404.

52   Report of the inspection of the activity of the cinema network of the Prienai county, 23 May 1949, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 61, b. 19, 38.

Stalingrad [*Сталинградская битва,* dir. Vladimir Popov, 1949] "on the grounds that after the screening of this film the children became disturbed".[53]

Conclusion

After World War II, one of the main tasks of Communist authorities was the integration of the newly occupied territory into the common system by means of an administrative control mechanism. This integration, also known as the Sovietisation process, was accompanied by the indoctrination of society through various forms of propagating information. Although the cinema had limited possibilities, it was meant to play an important role: by increasing the number of film screening locations, or through the Cinefication of society, the authorities hoped to create a successful informational and recreational environment for the ideological indoctrination of society. However, the expectations of the new authorities were not destined to materialise.

The Cinefication of Lithuanian rural society got stuck because of an unforeseen challenge – the structure of Lithuanian rural settlements, which was based on the system of solitary homesteads. That is why the presumed advantage of the cinema as a sociocultural phenomenon – the possibility to amass people for the purpose of political and ideological indoctrination – faded away and became potentially achievable only after the implementation of the collectivisation process. These circumstances reveal an unexpected paradox: although systematic processes analogous to those that took place in Soviet Russia in the 1920s and 1930s could be observed in post-war Lithuania (and probably in other Baltic countries too), they were arbitrarily implemented without taking into account the regional features, rendering their implementation inefficient. General cinefication in Lithuania annexed by the USSR in the Stalinist era was thus an impractical aspiration. Cinema as the main symbol for brutal agrarian cultural modernisation, and *kinofikatsia* as part of the utopian Soviet modernisation project, which was implemented alongside electrification, industrialisation and collectivisation, failed in the periphery regions.

This overview of the Stalinist period brings us to an understanding that, when considering the advantages of cinema in general, Soviet ideological politics often overestimated the potential. Said otherwise, the status of cinema as "the most important of all arts" was a construct of official politics, a phenomenon that did not function in reality. This case reconstruction also opens up the possibilities for a broader discussion, and demonstrates the multifaceted character of Soviet politics, while also raising additional questions: what course did the Cinefication processes take in other republics? What place does the cinema have in the general politics of entertainment? How did television change the evaluation of cinema? These questions are especially relevant when we bear in mind not only the subsequent changes in cultural politics that were to occur during Khrushchev's Thaw and Brezhnev's Stagnation, but also the social and economic transformations that took place both in cities and rural areas as the collectivisation and industrialisation processes continued to gain momentum throughout the late fifties and sixties.

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53   Notification from the Deputy Minister of Cinematography of the LSSR J. Mikalauskas on the results of the committee's inspection in the Kretinga district, 17 November 1950, f. R–754, ap. 4, b. 2195, 5.