

# LATVIJAS ARHĪVI

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## HISTORY

*Ābrams Kleckins*

### CINEMA AND THE DESTINY OF MODERN CULTURE

This article is an abridged version of the introduction of a book which is being published under the same title. The book is devoted to the pre-requisites for the way in which the arts developed in the 20th century. The further chapters of the book are devoted to an analysis of some of the issues which relate to this process. The project is mostly focused on the field of cultural studies.

*Key words:* culture, cinema, modernity, art, author, cinematographers.

Under the auspices of the cinematic sciences, the art of the cinema is usually interpreted as a logical result of the way in which artistic culture has developed in Europe. These interpreters feel that the progress in technologies has ensured a synthesis of older forms of art in a way which is naturally related to the emergence of new artistic opportunities. In truth, however, the way in which the art of the cinema has emerged has been far more complex than just the emergence of cinematography – especially when we understand the fact that the desire of those who created early film to ensure that their work was awarded the status of art was not something that went without saying. The world of art suffered a painful internal conflict which to this very day has not been understood completely and has not been overcome.

The cinematographer or, to put it more precisely, cinematographers have, largely subconsciously and on the basis of their form of existence alone, created very serious doubts about the ability of Europe's so-called "high arts" to continue down their own path, the path that began during the Renaissance. This cannot be explained through the "low" origins of the

cinema, even though from the beginning cinema has presented itself as an attraction for mass entertainment. Since the times of the “formal school” in Russia, however, it has generally been accepted that the development of art in modern Europe has been typified by the lifting of once humble entertainment genres to the level of high art. We need only remember the fate of the novel to avoid any doubt about the possibility and significance of this route of development.

This means that when we speak of the aforementioned internal conflict, we must pay attention to the fact that the cinema – even though its authors and theorists have constantly tried to convince themselves and others that the cinema belongs to the noble community of the arts – has, in fact, proven itself (without really understanding that this is happening) not as a lawful child of the creators, but rather as a baby cuckoo bird that has been found at the roadside. Its size and its appetites threaten all of the other birds or, at least, their ability to preserve their traditional form of existence.

In terms of quality, what were the new aspects of European culture that were brought along by the cinema? The first thing that comes to mind is the fact that the cinema has what could be called an inborn orientation toward the mass media. This does not mean, however, that it stands completely against older forms of art, because there is no reason to claim that the “high” (i.e., the professional) arts in the new age have been created as a fundamentally elite phenomenon, one which consciously seeks to limit its audience. Elitism has in the past been related to social circumstances in the various ages, not to the self-understanding of artists. The focus has been on the origins of the audience, not on the works of art as such.

Apparently the cause for the conflict can instead be found in the culture of contemporary Europe. The most distinct way in which European culture differs from other cultures and, with a few exceptions, from the arts in other eras, is the role which the artist and his personality play not only in the arts, but also in society. This emerged as the arts were emancipated from church and state, turning into an independent and very valuable cultural value and simultaneously ensuring fundamental changes in the social status of the artist. People who were once seen as craftspeople were turned into free and creative personalities. In no other culture has such great importance been attached to the artist as such.

For that reason it is important to look at the way in which the cinema appears in relation to older forms of art from this particular perspective. In that case we can also learn why such concepts as “European-type art” or “the culture (arts) of Europe in the new age” are being emphasised in this text.

### The status of the artist in the new age Europe

If we look at the history of art from perspective of the status of artists, then we find that the entire development of the arts from the Renaissance to the period of Romanticism, inclusive, has been manifested through a battle for the sovereignty of the artist, for the artist’s emancipation from governments, from the church, from the mob and from the market. In the end, this was more or less achieved. The artist’s sovereignty, of course, does not involve an ivory tower, and it is far more in line with Pushkin’s statement that “inspiration cannot be sold, but a manuscript can”. In other words, artists consider themselves to be completely free in their creative work, while the recipient of the artwork has the sovereign right to evaluate the results of the artist’s work. Determining the cash value of an artwork is a part of this process.

It was during the Renaissance that the concept of individual authorship first emerged, and artists were in many cases put on the pedestal. That was an era in which works of art awarded a special sense of holiness to houses of God, where previously the opposite had been true. Michelangelo’s statue of Moses turned the far less than distinguished Church of St. Peter in Chains in Rome into an international destination for pilgrims. The profane arts more or less took over the prestige of the arts of the church. Where artworks had been linked to religious cults, masterpieces of art themselves became the object of cult worship. They undertook a sovereign aura, although it would be more precise to say that it was the names of the artists which undertook that aura. It is only in the culture of Europe in the new age that the Artist (and I capitalise the word on purpose) is all but compared to the Lord God in his or her work. The same words are attached to artists – creator, demiurge, or even, as Shelley put it, “the unacknowledged legislators of the world”. These words, however, are usually not capitalised. It is only in this kind of

a culture that an artist can, in terms of the public consciousness, prove to be more important than the work that he or she creates and exist seemingly independently from that work. The artist is seen first and foremost as a ruler of ideas or even Ideas.

The first person to mentioned in this context, naturally enough, is Byron. The concept of "Byronism", of course, emerged from the man's poetry, but first and foremost from Byron's personality and his fate. Lord Byron's contemporaries (and not only they) saw the poet's destiny as a full manifestation of the ideals of Romanticism, even more completely than the greatest masterpieces of Romanticist art. It was a manifestation of Romanticism that had been created by God Himself or, if you prefer, by Nature Itself. Artworks often have been and still are perceived as nothing more than the expression of the artist's personality, an aspect, an emanation of that personality. That is why in the culture of Europe in the new age, the anonymity of an artist is basically impossible, and it is certainly unnatural. That is why the anonymity of Shakespeare's personality has been disturbing not just students of the great playwright alone for the past several centuries.

(It must be added here that the roots of this aspect of culture in new age Europe can be found in the mists of antiquity, although there is no, of course, any reason to speak of their identity. Sergeiy Averincev has written this: "The *Auctor* (author) is *nomen agentis*, i.e., a descriptions of the subject of action; *auctoritas* (authority) is a description of the properties of this subject. The action itself is described with the verb *augeo*, which Goethe described as one of the *Urworte* (basic words) of the Latin language. The unusually concentrated meaning of the word can only partly be described in lexicographic ways. *Augeo* is an action which belongs first and foremost to the gods as the sources of cosmic initiative: I "enhance", I "facilitate", but I also simply "do" – I award existence to something or increase the weight, volume or potential of that which exists. *Augustus*, ruler of the Roman Empire – a man who enjoyed the actions of gods which resulted in his becoming something more than just a citizen. Still, a human being and a fully vested citizen can also become the subject of similar action. The individual is given an opportunity to "enhance" the power of a pronouncement by guaranteeing that pronouncement with his or her own good name. The

individual can “create” or “lay the cornerstone” for something. For instance, the individual can build a church, lay out the groundwork for a new city, or propose a new law. If a community of citizens accepts the action, then it is named on behalf of the individual. In all such cases, the citizen functions as an *auctor*, he makes use of *auctoritas*.<sup>1</sup>

In order better to understand the meaning of this phenomenon, we must consider it not only in terms of the culture of the age, but also in terms of the social context. A personal approach has also become typical for audiences. From this viewpoint, let us look at the issue of perspective – something that may be the most fundamental revelation of painters in the Renaissance and that is typical only of the European fine arts. It is this perspective which turns the eye of the artist and, later, the viewer into the centre of perceived reality. The world that is seen in a painting is offered to the viewer in a similar way to the method by which God created the universe. Any painting that has been created in line with these rules of perspective is based on the idea that each person who looks at the painting is the centre of the world. Thus the painter confirms himself not only as a creator, but also as a viewer at the centre of reality. This has much to do with a process that is reported in the Old Testament – all of the living creatures which God had created were paraded before Adam, and Adam gave each of them its name. This meant that Adam awarded meaning to all living things.

The perspective that was created during the Renaissance represents a fairly astonishing rejection of the impersonal nature of art in the Middle Ages, confirming a new way in which people perceived themselves and their world. A new historical era was emerging, and it was not without distinct purpose that it became known as a new age. This was a period in which the development of humankind in Europe was put on a new path, one which eventually expanded to the rest of the world and which continues to this very day. The idea of the personality was for the first time transferred to human beings. In terms of its origin, personality is a religious, not a philosophical concept. It emerges from theological disputes about the Trinity, about incarnation and about the Eucharist.

### The cinema: New rules for the game

At the very end of the 19th century, a new form of art (or, more precisely, a new opportunity for art) appeared. Its future was not yet known, but its imminent essence, irrespective of subjective intentions and efforts, emerged as an art form which from the beginning began to threaten the foundations of the artist's creative sovereignty which had been won after such a difficult battle and which always had to be reconfirmed and defended.

The point is that in the cinema, the artist basically cannot be sovereign. This is true for at least two reasons.

First of all, during the production of a film, the independence of the artist is limited by the fact that the work is of a collective nature. Even in purely technical terms, it can never be the case that a single creative individual dictates all of the rules for all of the components of the film in great detail. The cinema is **authorised** art, not the art of an author. It is no accident that the issue of copyright in the area of the cinema is so complicated and contradictory. It is very hard to determine the range of people whose copyright is to be protected in relation to a new film.

The reader may point out that the theatre has millennia of experience in the production of collective works of art under more or less similar circumstances. Sadly, this is more of a misleading comparison than an explanatory one. The number of components that must come together in a film is much higher than is the case of the theatre. Despite the fact that many of these components appear to be purely technical in nature, the fact is that they often play a decisive role in determining the form and, more importantly, the level of the artistic solutions that are pursued. In the 1990s, one of the high ranking institutions of the European Union talked about the future of the cinema in Europe and determined that if a feature film has a production budget of less than EUR 5 million, that cannot help but have a negative effect on artistic quality. (It might be added here that this minimal budget, as determined by EU experts, is approximately five times larger than the total sum of aid which was provided by the Latvian government to the cinema industry in 2003).

The cost of film production is consistently on the rise. What could possibly be said about an artist's sovereignty under such circumstances? It

is not true all over the world that the producer becomes directly involved in the creative process, dictating the artistic solutions that are chosen, but in Hollywood, at any rate, the producer has long since been the author of the film in legal terms. The director is a hired employee who can be sacked at any moment. This is a trend which is gradually emerging in Europe, too.

No less important is the fact that the process of producing a film does not involve one of the major factors which forms works of art in the theatre – film production does not involve a large room filled with an audience, while in the theatre the audience participates in the creative process. It is also true that theatrical productions can be improved from night to night while preserving the unique aspects of the play that is being performed. This is something which Walter Benjamin described as the working aura of traditional art, while modern communications specialists call it a direct reciprocal link which is not found among such works of art as cinematic films.

The level of alienation and separation between the work of the screenwriter and that of the director cannot be compared to that which happens when a musical composition or a play is being performed. A concert or a theatrical performance is always seen as just one possible version of the presentation, not as the work of art as such. In the 20th century, the theatrical arts have also put the director at the centre of attention, but at the very best the director can be the author of the production, never the play itself. The play, unlike a screenplay, preserves the status of a work of art completely independently from the performance each night. The play lives an independent life as a fact of literature, and it is always possible to organize a new production of any play.

A film, by contrast, usually absorbs all of the “raw materials” from which it is created. Remakes, just like suites that are created from music which has been composed for a film, do not change this fact. Even when a book is brought to the screen, the resulting film usually replaces the original work of literature in the minds of the mass audience instead of representing it. It is far more often the case that people read the book after seeing the movie instead of the other way around. Mass literature, it might be added, today involves a new genre – books that are based on screenplays and are illustrated with scenes from a film.

This lack of sovereignty among the authors of films is also manifested in another aspect which was addressed by Walter Benjamin – as a work of art, a film does not have an original. There are only copies, which can differ from one another to quite a significant degree in terms of their technical quality while still representing the concrete work of cinematic art in an equal way.

A writer owns the manuscript, an artist owns the painting, the composer owns the score, at least until such time as they decide to sell their works. Even then, they can make choices both about the terms of the sale and about the buyer. The film producer has no such right, unless, of course, the producer has financed the entire process of the production from his or her own pocket. Needless to say, this does not happen very often at all, and when it does, it can be considered the exception which proves the rule.

Another factor which limits the independence of the cinematic artist, perhaps to an even more inevitable degree, is that even when filmmakers seek to ensure that their products have the status of “art”, the fact is that movies are not always art. They are, however, always products. Production is possible only if the final product is something that is intended for sale. That is true even if the aim of the production has not been profit. If products that are produced are not sold, then the production facility cannot survive. It has no money for the next production cycle, and it is forced to go bankrupt.

Here, too, we can draw certain similarities with the theatre, but here, too, the comparison does not explain much of anything. That is because in this case the important factor is not the similarity, but rather the differences. The situation is basically the same as in comparing industrial production with the output of a craftsman who works at home. If the craftsman adapts the production process to his own needs and to his individuality, then the process of industrial production, with all of the technologies that are involved, automatically subordinates all of the people who are involved to its own requirements. The production process itself is sovereign, and the worker, just like the artist, is completely subjected to the discipline of finances, technologies and productions. There can be no illusion of direct dependence on factors that lie outside of the worker’s (artist’s) direct influence – money, the masses and, in many cases, power. The similarity of cinema and the theatre has been on the rise to a significant degree in recent times, that is something that must be admitted. Still, this is the result of

a reciprocal process. The way in which cinema productions are organised increasingly influences the technology for preparing theatrical productions, especially if we speak of Broadway-type blockbusters.

For people who have grown up under the traditions of high culture in Europe, the commercial aspects of phenomena that seek to become a part of the community of the arts which has been destined by the ages were completely alien and could not help but lead to internal opposition. This had not so much to do with movies themselves, but rather with professional participation in the production of the films. This is particularly interesting, because many representatives of high art very quickly understood the great creative potential of the newly emerged area not of art as such, but rather of the marketplace. It is no accident that a legend has remained alive – that one of the great thinkers of his age, Lev Tolstoy, was the one who declared that cinema at that time was “the noble mute”.

The inventors of the cinema, it must be said, did not have much faith in their product. Louis Lumière, is supposed to have said that “the cinema is an invention without a future”. Only a few years later, after the very first cinema showing in a Parisian café, Lumière sold his patent to Charles Pathé. Lumière had decided that there was no further commercial benefit to be earned from this particular form of attraction, and so it was time for him to return to his serious activity – production of photo and cinema materials. It apparently didn’t occur to anyone that they had invented not an uncommonly impressive attraction, but rather a fundamentally new opportunity for the arts. This happened in part because people in their circle of acquaintances had been told from childhood that art must always be unique and non-repeatable. Certainly art could never be produced with the help of machinery.

It turned out that those who wished to evaluate the essence and importance of the new invention required a less trivial approach to the matter than the one that was used by the people who made the invention in the first place. If the inventors were to understand, however, that their invention represented their true mission in life, then it was not enough for them to have the necessary talents. They had to base their thinking on the system of artistic values. In terms of quality, their system was very much different than that which the high arts of Europe had created. It was necessary for

those who supported the high arts to sacrifice some of their main and most precious conquests.

### Plebeians and the *lumpenproletariat*

From where on earth did these artists appear? The answer is quite obvious. They came from those circles of European society in which people did not have to overcome an internal system of artistic values. This was perhaps just because they were not, for various reasons, have much knowledge or understanding about the high arts. In other words, they had no reason to bow before the "holy cows" of those who focused on high (educated) culture.

So who were these people? Most of them, one assumes, were people who, because of their social situation, had virtually no chance to learn about the aforementioned cultural values in any serious way. We might say that these were plebeian circles of society, although we are not, of course, sneering at them. This is simply a definition of the relevant social status. People from these circles found it all but impossible to become involved in the high arts, even if they wanted to. Certainly the people who crossed the gap had to pay a price – a complete rejection of their original social status so that they could move toward another one. As a book which is no longer well known put it, "They had to leave their people in the most direct and saddest sense of the concept". In short, very few people abandoned the vast majority of residents in their countries.

Over the last 10 years or so, the French have developed a certain school of thought which mostly brings together Medieval researchers. They, along with Aaron Gurevich in Russia, have done a great deal to study and introduce readers to "the difference between the educated or official culture on the one hand and the unofficial and popular culture on the other", as Gurevich put it. The researchers have found that elite culture and popular culture have stood against one another. The elite and the ordinary people have had different mentalities. They have thought and felt differently, they have had different perceptions of humankind and the world. Gurevich has gone so far as to suggest that there has been a silent majority in the field of culture which has not yet been adequately studied. One of his books is called "The

Medieval World: The Culture of the Silent Majority" (Moscow 1990). The vast majority of people in the Middle Ages had no access to books, which meant that they could not record their thoughts, desires and feelings on paper. Standing behind this situation was a painful gap between the culture of ordinary people and the culture of the educated strata in society.

There were, however, people who either abandoned or were kicked out of the privileged circles of society, and in some cases they stepped away from the traditions of high culture. Some did so purposefully, while others were forced to do so by subjective or objective circumstances. Among the best known literary characters in the former case is Fedya Protasov in Tolstoy's "The Living Corpse". The Baron in Gorky's "The Lower Depths" is a representation of the latter case. Protasov shot himself, the Baron drank himself to death. Basically these men represented two aspects of the *lumpenproletariat*.

There is reason to think, therefore, that the forefathers of the new form of art emerged from the plebeian and *lumpenproletariat* segments of society.

(This, incidentally, helps to explain why so many Jews were among the originators of the cinematic industry. Jews at the time were distinct representatives of plebeian society. They were pushed side by the privileged classes two or three times more than other people in much of the world. High culture was unknown to Jews who had suffered through ghettos and forced settlement during the reign of the Russian tsars, the culture was alien not just in and of itself, but also in political and social terms. The word "Jew" at that time spoke not just to ethnic or religious belonging, but also to a specific political and social status – a plebeian among plebeians. Here we can draw certain parallels with the situation of ethnic Latvians until the latter half of the 19th century. The words "Latvian" and "boor" were seen as synonyms by the Baltic German aristocracy. The word "Latvian" described not just ethnicity, but also a specific social situation. It was almost impossible for Latvians to overcome the gap between them and the governing and official culture which prevailed.)

### Looking for one's place

The aforementioned facts in and of themselves, however, do not provide much of an explanation if we do not take note of the fundamental changes which occurred in the social life of all of Europe at the time when the cinema was appearing. Plebeians and members of the *lumpenproletariat* were not welcomed into European society in the late 19th century, but up to that particular time they had not participated in the development of high culture at all. That was true despite the fact that since the Renaissance, and particularly during the period of Romanticism, the people's culture and folklore served to inspire many creators of high art.

Folklore at one point became so fashionable that artists began not only to collect it, but also to work with it so as to create national eposes. In some cases authors discarded the original folklore elements altogether to create a new interpretation of the relevant motifs. New and grand mystifications were presented to audiences, and not without considerable success. Leave us only remember the mythical figure of Ossiane, as well as Merimee, whose "Western Slavic Songs" were interpreted in Russian by Pushkin.

It should be added that the concept of "interpretation" was a certain keyword until the very end of the 19th century when it came to analysis of the relationship between popular and professional art. Artists searched for inspiration in folklore, but they interpreted folklore on the basis of very different rules of art. Artworks that emerged became a part of the high arts, and there is every reason to think about the increasingly extensive use of folklore materials, but not about the direct inclusion or participation in the high arts.

At the end of the 19th century, there was a process which moved forward more and more quickly even though it was explained and called in many different ways – from the "revolution of the masses" in the eyes of Ortega y Gasset to the "transformation of the masses into a subject of history" in the views of Marxists.<sup>2</sup> One of the aspects of this process was the fact that boundaries between classes – boundaries which had always been strictly delimited – began to become less important and porous for those who sought to overcome them. It was of particular importance that the social status of individuals no longer had to be associated with their origins and

their belonging to a specific class in society. No longer were people ejected from the class to which they did not belong in terms of their status.

All of this began to appear quickly and actively in the area of culture, and particularly in the field of the arts. Industry began to use more and more complicated techniques and technologies, and this could not happen without the introduction of general and compulsory systems of education. A new class – that of the intelligentsia – inevitably appeared. In the Russian Empire (i.e., also in Latvia), these people were described with the word *raznochinets* – people from different classes who formed a new stratum in society not on the basis of their origin, but rather on the basis of educational and professional criteria. The concept of “free professions” began to emerge, and it was applied to artists, too. Graduates of art academies received diplomas as “**free** artists”, and this is important for our purposes.

The new social class became increasingly important as its numbers expanded. People became a part of this class solely on the basis of their personal interests and abilities. The class delegated representatives to all other groups in society, thus gradually becoming a part of society as such. This opened up new horizons for society, new opportunities for spiritual growth. The foundations for the development of culture were constantly expanded, and eventually societies became open to any and all forms of creative impulse. To be sure, this broke down the stability of culture in terms of preserving and developing traditions. The concept of “pure style” became more and more problematic, and there was always more extensive room for various kinds of speculation and mystification. At the same time, however, the new and more open system also allowed many artists to pursue truly creative discoveries.

This fact allows us to understand one of the most important causes for the emergence of unprecedented and unimaginable discoveries and inventions in all of the areas of intellectual activity – the process which eventually lead Alvin Toffler to speak of “future shock” – shock concerning the future, fear of one’s inability to follow along with the changes that were forever influencing the very foundations of human existence.

The emergence of an open space in the area of arts and culture allowed artistically gifted plebeians to perceive the high arts as an appropriate area for their own work. It does have to be said that people who went to school

learned about these arts and their traditions to a certain extent, but in most cases that was enough to ensure that the knowledge became an organic and inviolate component of their inner world. Artists have to live in their field, it is not enough to study or even to praise it. This often requires not just years, but also generations.

It is no accident that sociologists use the term “semi intelligent”. This is not a humiliating phrase, it merely makes note of a social phenomenon. A first generation member of the intelligentsia will not be a member of the intelligentsia in the full sense of the word, even though he may belong to that status in terms of social status and professional accomplishment. The values, self-understanding and lifestyle which are accepted automatically by children who grow up in the environment of the intelligentsia may be learned by outsiders at the age of 18, 25 or 40 – or never at all.

In general terms this can be said not only about the intelligentsia, but also about any other stable social group. In the case of the intelligentsia, however, the issue is more obvious, because the intelligentsia, as opposed to other groups in society, are joined by outsiders quite frequently, this is the rule, not the exception. The fact that the phenomenon is evident not only amongst the intelligentsia, however, can be confirmed with many different facts. The concept of the *nouveau riche*, for instance, is a derogatory concept in many languages. In Latvia, the words “new Russian” or “new Latvian” are used to describe someone who has quickly become very rich but has not been able to establish a lifestyle which is appropriate to the new status.

In the context of these ideas, it is important to understand that in the world of culture, the moment when one suddenly faces a special chance often does not coincide with the moment when one can take full advantage of that opportunity. An artistically gifted person cannot wait endlessly, of course, he or she has only one life. In the late 19th and early 20th century, however, one could not speak of only a few very uncommon talents. There were streams of people who were pursuing their creative abilities. Most of them did not have any opportunity to enter the world of the high arts, but many people did try to create new spaces for art, ones that would be independent of the snooty aspects of culture. People who worked in these spaces did not have to forget about themselves or their roots. On the contrary, their roots were the essence for the work that they did.

### The person from the village goes out into the world

All of the aforementioned can be confirmed very clearly if we look at virtually any 20th century European artist with a plebeian background. It is seen most distinctly, however, if we look at the destinies of Jewish artists from Eastern Europe and Russia during the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That was a time of mass migration from places where they had once been forced to settle. After bloody pogroms in Romania and then in Russia, the Jews lost all hope of becoming fully vested citizens. The Jewish villages, or *shtetls*, began to empty out as people emigrated. Between 1885 and the beginning of World War I, no fewer than 2.5 million Jews departed from the Russian Empire and Romania alone. Thousands of young Jews entered European (and occasionally Russian) universities insofar as “percentage norms” permitted them to do so. A higher education allowed a Jew to choose the place where he lived and the work that he did.

The point is that millions of people suddenly found themselves out in the wide-open world, irrespective of whether they were forced to be there or chose to take the trip themselves. They were forced to find a place for themselves in this unimaginably vast space. It goes without saying that among them there were artistically gifted people who wanted to put their talents to use in one or another way.

For many, the cinema proved to be a particularly appropriate area in which to work. There were no stable or alien traditions in the cinema which a Jew would have to have learned, there was no need to adapt one’s thinking to out-of-date fashion. The Jews themselves had no biases against this profession, which was already creative, but not yet particularly artistic. As was noted previously, they knew nothing about the European cultural traditions of the modern age. Their origins and the relevant social conditions kept them apart from a European education, they could not join the world of the arts unless they were prepared to renounce their people and their culture. Full assimilation was the other option, and that is exactly what happened to Mendelssohn, Levitan, Pissarro and others.

The world of the cinema created new obligations for artists, and people who had grown up under the traditions of the new age inevitably protested against these. For plebeians, however, the new rules seemed to be completely

logical, and it is quite possible that the regulations helped the plebeians, and not them alone, to establish a new area of the arts.

Those who had just arrived in the wider world found it completely natural to see a work of art as a commercial product and the work of an artist as a way to earn money. This idea attached a certain amount of sense, or at least justification to the work that was done. It is likely that most of these people could never have imagined any other approach to professional work. In the world where they had grown up, people who did things for reasons other than putting food on the table were seen as a bit crazy (the exception being those who studied Scripture). It was far harder for these people to imagine that art should exist for its own sake. Their lives had never included any element that would allow them to develop such views. For families that spent generation after generation simply scraping out a bare existence, such ideas about art could never be easily understood.

Evidence about life in the *shtetl* tells us that it was far more complicated than we might imagine at this remove. The 19th century Russian author Saltikov-Shchedrin wrote this about a poor resident of one of the villages: "He was one of the poor but enthusiastic Jews who, in the stink and garbage of the village, could create a torturously noble mirage for himself, one that weakened him, but simultaneously gave him strength to live". Is it not true that the same is evidenced in Sholom Aleichem's gallery of "people of the air"?

It may well be, however, that this is not a contradictory matter at all. These artistically gifted individuals could not achieve anything with their talents in the environment in which they grew up, because there was no practical application for an artistic talent. That tormented them and drove them into desperation through the "torturously noble mirages".

Alienation from the traditions of a specific culture usually becomes a practically insuperable obstacle against active participation in the further development of the culture. During times of great reform, however, new circumstances for existence emerge, and the cultural paradigm must change. It turns into a certain advantage, because it awards people with a necessary level of internal freedom – one without which fundamentally new routes cannot even be discovered. New art is impossible, and the foundations of artistic consciousness in the era cannot be renewed. Of course, even in such

times there is competition among creative individuals and directions, but the competition becomes more equal. The benefit that is offered by education and a belonging to a certain tradition often stops being a benefit, and often it can even hinder the process.

It is, therefore, very logical and understandable that when artistically gifted individuals broke free of their spiritual reservation, they immediately tried to express themselves through the emerging art of the cinema. In order more fully to understand the logic and volume of this creative potential, however, we must bring it alongside a different process which also allowed artistically gifted plebeians at that time to demonstrate their talents in the arts. These were people who became a part of various manifestations of the *avant garde*. From the very beginning, they denied any traditions or traditionalism in the arts. That allowed everyone to start out with a blank sheet of paper, forgetting about what had gone before.

### Chagall, for example ...

It was very easy for plebeians to deny tradition, because they had only a foggy idea of what that tradition was in the first place. Certainly they were not very familiar with it. By renouncing tradition, they basically settled accounts not with tradition itself, but rather with their lack of self-esteem in the previous system of co-ordinates. They eliminated any problems that had been in place, not so much in the aesthetic as in the psychological and social sense of the word. The *avant garde*, like the cinema, can with good reason be known as the art of the plebeians.

We must not forget, however, that this is also the art of the *lumpenproletariat* – perhaps first and foremost the art of the *lumpenproletariat*. Only members of this class were really full members of the *avant garde*. Only they denied tradition specifically because they were familiar with it and had grown up in its environs. Everyone else was denying tradition through abstract argument about elitism, about holidays in which they had no role to play. The theorists and leaders of the *avant garde*, therefore, more often than not appeared from the circles of the *lumpenproletariat*. The same can be said about the leaders of bohemian life. They contrasted their standard of living with that of the upper classes and their traditions.

The way in which a Jewish plebeian found his way toward *avant garde* art is seen with surprising clarity in the memoirs of the great Marc Chagall, entitled "My Life". Let us begin with his statement that "the word 'artist' as such was so peculiar, so very much borrowed from books, that it seemed as if it had arrived from a different world. Perhaps I had heard it somewhere by accident, but in our village no one ever spoke that word. It was something that was so far from us! I would never have encountered it." When Chagall eventually found out that the issue was not just a word, but also an existing profession which he could perhaps learn, then his mother immediately posed this question: "Please tell me ... is this art something polite?" From her viewpoint, she received a precise and unquestionably negative response: "What are you talking about? That is nothing that can be sold or bought."

Young Chagall was not happy about that answer, and he began his artistic studies. He didn't understand anything. "They set up a gypsum head. I, along with everyone else, had to draw it. I diligently went to work. I looked at it, I measured it, I put the pencil up to my eye. Nothing helped. The picture was crooked." And then: "From every corner I was being watched by the heads of Greek and Roman citizens, and I, a poor boy from the provinces, had to do an in-depth consideration of the nostrils of Alexander of Macedonia or some other gypsum idiot. Sometimes I struck their noses with my fingers. Other times I looked at the breasts of Venus, which were displayed in the depths of the studio. I was praised, but I did not think that I had achieved much of anything."

The latter words were written about the second school which he attended. About the third: "And I stopped going to that school. It was beyond my abilities. I suppose that I never yield to training. I can only follow my instinct. Do you understand? The wisdom of schools cannot enter my brain."

And the final conclusion: "For more than a year, at night I dreamed of bread with sausage. In these dreams, I want to paint. I am expected by green rabbis, by men in a sauna, by red Jews, kind, wise, with canes, with bags, on the streets, in the shops and even on the roofs. They are expecting me, and I am expecting them. We each cannot wait for the other to arrive."

When he entered the arts, Chagall did not abandon his Jewishness, he emerged from it and based himself on it. That is the essence of the new social and cultural situation that was emerging.

The cinema and the *avant garde* allowed a huge number of artistically gifted people to express their talents in the arts, and these were people whose potentially gifted predecessors over many, many generations would never have known about the possibility that something like that could happen in life. Irrespective of how one rates the role of the cinema and the *avant garde* in terms of the destinies of the traditional high arts, the fact is that from the perspective of social justice and the need to allow people to pursue their creative potential – from that perspective the arrival of these things in the world of the arts can only be commended.

### When opportunities open up for nations

The approach which has been discussed here has been applied not only to plebeians who are artistically gifted. As the new age turned into an even newer age, the ideas were also accepted by peoples who had for centuries been unable to establish or maintain their national statehood, who had been oppressed in social terms but who experienced a great increase in national self-confidence in the mid-19th century. The new thinking was first and foremost manifested in the world of culture, confirming the spiritual sovereignty of these people, as well as the fact that their sovereignty belonged to Europe. Here I am referring to the “new Latvians” and to other groups that were similar to them in many parts of Eastern and Southern Europe.

These movements, of course, emerged several decades before the appearance of the cinema and the *avant garde*, this was a period of national and social awakening. It took time to awaken wide circles of people who could nominate talented individuals from amongst themselves whose creative spark would eventually become one of the main factors in the cinema and in the *avant garde*. In looking back at this time, therefore, we can try to find the original social source of the cinema and the *avant garde*.

The way in which Latvian culture emerged is valuable and typical in this regard. Latvians who had achieved a certain level of education usually focused on the world of high art in Europe, and they did not feel that it could never be merged with or contrasted with the culture of the Latvian people as such. On the contrary, educated Latvians in the latter half of the

19th century thought that the high arts were a stimulus for the development and new emergence of the people's art.

This is an idea which created great enthusiasm among those who set to work in studying and collecting the treasures of the people's spiritual and cultural heritage. On the other hand, there were also efforts to attach elements of "educated" art to the traditional art of the people. This was seen most vividly in the organising of the first Latvian Song Festival in 1873. If the first of the aforementioned processes confirmed the great value of the Latvian cultural heritage, then the latter one proved that the Latvian culture could easily stand alongside the cultures of other European nations, it did not have to copy anyone else. The Song Festival was a challenge, but also a confirmation of the fact that Latvian folk songs can serve as a foundation for choral works from the high arts. People demonstrated that they could not only sing the new adaptations, they could adopt them as an inviolable part of their own art. This process was no less valuable than the similar process which was then taking place among the Germans.

The atmosphere which existed at that time is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that during this period, the national anthem of Latvia appeared quite organically. "God, Save Latvia" was composed at a time when no one was really even thinking about the possibility that Latvia might become an independent country. It is important to understand that that which has become known as the Latvian Renaissance emerged not from desperation or any inferiority complex, but rather from faith and hope. It was an expression of self-respect, and it was therefore aimed not at denying things, but rather at creating things and allowing Latvians to prove themselves. This represented a cleansing of the Latvian soul so as to get rid of the leftover elements of slavery that had been forced upon the people for century after century.

Similar, albeit highly varied processes took place in all of the national cultures which emerged during that period. It must be noted, however, that in none of these processes was there any significant element of the *avant garde* or of modernism. It goes without saying that there was nothing that involved the cinema. Even later these elements appeared in national cultures only after significant delays, even though plebeians from the various nationalities stood at the cradle of the phenomena. We must not

forget, however, that these were individuals who had broken away from their traditional environment or had been kicked out of it. Voluntarily or in response to force they went out into the world and left their lands of origin.

There are at least two conclusions that are to be drawn from this. First of all, these people expressed their own cultural traditions in an alien and multicultural environment. They were happy to receive the influence of that environment, and they were more (cinema) or less (*avant garde*) forced to adapt to it. They did not continue to develop their traditional cultures. Rather, the interaction of many national cultures and traditions worked together to develop something very new and unprecedented.

This leads us to the second conclusion. The work that these people did basically meant the appearance of the process of globalisation in the world of the arts and culture. The word “globalisation” is no exaggeration in this case, and that is demonstrated by the fact that at its origins, the *avant garde* could not have been imagined without the powerful influence of traditions not only from Europe, but also from Eastern Asia and Africa. The soup in that pot cannot be attributed to any single national culture, just as the art of Paris at that time could not be viewed with the same eyes and on the basis of the same criteria as the art of France.

Similar processes occurred in the cinematic arts and are continuing to occur, but this is a different process. The cinema is constituted as art fairly slowly, and because of its dual nature (art – production), it cannot express itself in as textured a way as some of the other arts. That, however, is more an issue for other papers, not this one.

#### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> See Аверинцев, С. *Риторика и история европейской культурной традиции* (Rhetoric and the History of the European Cultural Tradition). Moscow, 1996. P. 75.

<sup>2</sup> See, Ortega y Gasset, J. *Revolt of the masses*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994.

*Ābrams Kleckins*

## KINO UN MŪSDIENU KULTŪRAS LIKTEŅI

Kinozinātnes ietvaros kinomāksla parasti tiek traktēta kā Eiropas tipa mākslinieciskās kultūras attīstības likumsakarīgs rezultāts, kā tehnikas progresa nodrošināta vecāku mākslu sintēze, kas dabiski saistīta ar jaunu māksliniecisku iespēju rašanos. Taču īstenībā kinomākslas veidošanās process ir noritējis daudz komplicētāk un kinematogrāfijas parādīšanās, it sevišķi tās pretenzijas uz mākslas statusu nebūt nebija pašas par sevi saprotamas. Tās izraisīja mākslas pasaulē visai sāpīgu un pat pašlaik vēl līdz galam neapzinātu un nepārvarētu iekšējo konfliktu.

Kinematogrāfs, precīzāk – kinematogrāfisti, lielā mērā neapzināti, jau ar savas eksistences veidu vien, radīja ļoti nopietnas šaubas par pašu iespēju Eiropas tā dēvētai “augstajai” mākslai arī turpmāk iet savu, jau Renesanses laikā iesākto ceļu. To nevar izskaidrot ar kino “zemo” izcelsmi, kaut gan tas sākumā pieteica sevi kā vēl vienu masu izklaidei domātu atrakciju. Taču jau no krievu “formālās skolas” laikiem vispārpieņemta ir atziņa, ka Jauno laiku Eiropas mākslas attīstībai ir tieši raksturīga necilo izklaides žanru “pacelšana” augstās mākslas līmenī. Atliek atcerēties kaut vai romāna likteni, lai nerastos šaubas par šāda attīstības ceļa iespējām un nozīmi.

Tāpēc, runājot par pieminēto iekšējo konfliktu, būtu jāpievērš uzmanība tam, ka kino, kaut gan tā radītāji un teorētiķi neatlaidīgi centušies pārliecināt citus un arī pašus sevi par tā piederību cildenajai mākslu saimei, īstenībā to pat neapzinoties, apliecināja sevi nevis kā likumīgs to bērns, bet gan kā atradenis, kā dzeguzēns, kas ar saviem izmēriem un ēdelīgumu apdraud visu pārējo putnēnu eksistenci, katrā ziņā – iespēju saglabāt agrāko pastāvēšanas veidu.

Kas tad bija tas kvalitatīvi jaunais, kas ienāca Eiropas tipa kultūrā ar kino parādīšanos? Pirmais, ko gribas pieminēt, ir kinematogrāfijai piemītošā, varētu teikt iedzimtā, orientācija uz masu auditoriju. Tomēr tas vēl nenozīmē, ka kino tādā veidā tieši pretstata sevi vecākām mākslām, jo nav pamata apgalvojumam, ka Jauno laiku “augstā” (citiem vārdiem – profesionālā) māksla tiktu radīta kā principiāli elitāra parādība, kas apzināti censtos ierobežot savu auditoriju. Elitārisms bija galvenokārt saistīts ar laikmeta

sociāliem apstākļiem, nevis ar mākslinieka pašapziņu, kā arī ar auditorijas izcelsmi un nevis mākslas darbiem.

Acīmredzot konflikta cēlonis ir drīzāk meklējams Jauno laiku Eiropas kultūras raksturā. Visuzkrītošākā tās atšķirība no citām kultūrām un ar retiem izņēmumiem arī no citu laikmetu mākslas ir mākslinieka, viņa personības vieta un nozīme ne tikai mākslā, bet arī sabiedrībā. Tā radās mākslas emancipācijas gaitā no baznīcas un valsts, tai pārvēršoties par patstāvīgu un ļoti nozīmīgu kultūras vērtību, vienlaikus kardināli mainot arī mākslinieka sociālo statusu no amatnieka un bieži vien kalpa līdz brīvai radošai personībai. Nevienā citā kultūrā tik liela nozīme netiek piešķirta mākslinieka personībai.

Tāpēc būtu svarīgi analizēt un izprast to, kā šajā vecākajām mākslām tik būtiskajā aspektā izskatās kinematogrāfija. Tad arī noskaidrotos, kāpēc šajā tekstā tiek akcentēti tādi vārdu salikumi kā "Eiropas tipa māksla" vai arī "Jauno laiku Eiropas kultūra (māksla)".

*Atslēgvārdi:* kultūra, kino, modernie laiki, māksla, autors, kinematogrāfisti.

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