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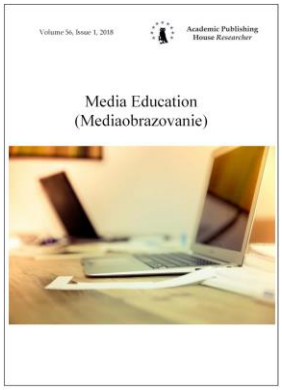

Dr. Strangelove Vs Dr. Gusev: The Evolution of the Image of a Scientist in American and Soviet/Russian Cinematography on the Cold War

Alexander Kubyshkin [a, *], Daria Pushkina [a]

[a] Saint Petersburg State University, University, Russian Federation

Abstract

This article examines how American and Soviet/Russian cinematography presented a 'scientist' during the Cold War and in the works about that period. The article presents a comparative analysis of the films from both countries that focus on a 'scientist'. The analysis demonstrates that scientists/scholars have been depicted as both subjects and objects of ideological and political confrontation of the Cold War period. While American cinematography focused on the image of a 'mad scientist,' in the Soviet cinematography scientist is more of an intellectual. Some American films used the grotesque 'mad scientist' (e.g. Dr. Strangelove) to highlight the ultimate danger of nuclear catastrophe, and Soviet films used intellectual scientist conversations (e.g. Dr. Gusev) for the same purpose of warning about the dangers of a nuclear age). We trace gradual growing similarities of the cinematography of both countries: scientist becomes to be presented in a less confrontational way as both countries become aware that scientific cooperation is vital for the prevention of the world nuclear war and global conflict.

Keywords: mad scientist, intellectual, ideological confrontation, the Cold War, American cinematography, Soviet/Russian cinematography.

1. Introduction

The topic of the image of a scientist in the ideological confrontation of the two systems during the Cold War has not been sufficiently studied in the Russian academic literature. Most of the studies of the ideological confrontation in the Soviet years, while solid in some respect, often bore the stamp of time and were distinguished by a certain engagement and ideological cliches. Nevertheless, in the recent years a number of high-quality publications that touch upon this very interesting problem emerged (Fedorov, 2010; 2013; Knysh, 2007; Pavlov, 2015; Riabov, 2015; Stent, 2015). In present article, we contribute to this emerging literature.

2. Materials and methods

The article uses Soviet/Russian and American films on scientist during the Cold War and reviews of leading film critics. We also examine a special academic literature on the relationship between science, politics and cinema during the Cold War.

3. Discussion

J. Nye Jr. refers to a film as the vital instrument of building 'soft power' (Nye Jr., 2004: 255-70). G. Almond pointed out that film is an important instrument of forming a political culture

* Corresponding author
E-mail addresses: kubyshkin.alexander@gmail.com (A.I. Kubyshkin), d.pushkina@spbu.ru (D.B. Pushkina)

(Almond, Verba, 1963). As we demonstrate in this paper, both American and Soviet/Russian cinematography have both shaped and have been shaped by the corresponding international, political and social processes in the respective countries and on the global scale.

The interest towards scientific research and scientists stems from both the specifics of the political, social and psychological atmosphere of the Cold War, and the public's fear of the possible consequences of the use of weapons of mass destruction, the weapons that emerged as a result of the scientific and technological revolution. In the middle of the 20th century, science turned not only into a productive force, which determined the pace of economic, social and political development of modern states, but also into a source of constant tension associated with the growth of alarmist sentiments, into an arena of sharp confrontation between various political and ideological systems, and further to confrontation of science and politics, science and culture (Batalov et al., 2009: 16). One can add to this the fears of losing public and government control over the activities of not only individual scientists (primarily related to nuclear physics), but also over the development of certain areas of science that could cause irreparable damage to humanity (biology, chemistry, neuropsychology) (Ben-David, 2014; Graham, 1991; Matizen, 2009).

The cinematography of both USA and USSR (later Russian Federation) attempted to address those issues, albeit in different ways. According to A. Fedorov, from 1949 to 1986 in Hollywood more than 90 films about the Cold War of various genres were released – from comedies and blockbusters to thrillers and science fiction sagas (Fedorov, 2010). V. Matizen proposed an interesting classification of different types of scientists and one can quite clearly identify these characters within the framework of American (as well as Soviet) cinema (Matizen, 2009). There is a "Mad Scientist." Matizen noted that: "in the largest cinema database (imdb.com) the phrase "mad scientist" is present in the annotations of more than three hundred films and is more common than the word "scientist" itself" (Matizen, 2009). It is curious that in the period when science became a mass profession and included hundreds of thousands of scientists working often in large scientific teams, American cinematography preferred the individual image of a lone scientist, often contrasting scientist with society, hence the references to "crazy professor" ("mad scientists", "mad professor") (Danilin, 2015; Knysh, 2007).

An infamous example of a mad scientist on the American screen is Dr. Strangelove, a former Nazi who moved to the United States (*Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) by S. Kubrick) (Kubyshkin, Heed, 2018). Dr. Strangelove endorses his invention – the nuclear bomb – to advocate for cleansing of the human race, while his invention eventually leads to the end of the world due to a human error. Often in the image of the bearer of absolute Evil, features of actual scientists can be detected. For example, Dr. Strangelove is a frank parody of the German designer of ballistic missiles V. von Braun and the American physicist E. Teller. These kinds of characters were supposed to cause fear in the Cold War conflicts (Zhemchugova, 2016).

Another example of a mad scientists in American films is Dr. Hoenikker – an eccentric character who does not think about the consequences of his scientific experiments for humanity, from the film by N. Hawley's *Cat's Cradle* (2013), based on the Cold War era novel by C. Vonnegut. Finally, mad scientist, the bearer of evil, is sometimes depicted as a cosmopolitan character without a specific nationality (Dr. No from the film of the same title – the first of the Bondian novel by J. Fleming (1962), or Dr. Evil (Douglas Powers) – a double parody of both James Bond himself and his antagonist – super hero O. Powers in a series of comedy films by D. Roach (1997–2002).

In the Soviet cinema, an example of a mad scientist would be an engineer Peter Garin, from the adaptations of the novel by A.N. Tolstoy's *Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin* – a film by A. Gunzburg (1965) and a television version of L. Kvinikhidze (1973). Peter Garin uses his invention, hyperboloid, to take over the financial and political power, eventually failing to the group of revolutionaries who capture his own invention. Mad Scientist type was generally not typical for the Soviet cinema (engineer Garin is more of an exception). While the character that is called "Shurik" in the popular comedy by L. Gaidai *Ivan Vasilievich Changes the Profession* (1973) fits the stereotype somewhat, he is 'mad' in a lovable way not in the destructive way of a 'typical Mad Scientist."

While in the Soviet Union, cinematography rarely depicted Soviet scientists as 'mad,' in Soviet Union as in the USA during the Cold War, there was an interest in a classical works that depicted mad professor**.** An interesting example is the attention to the main character of the novel by R. Stevenson *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), which has been repeatedly

filmed in various versions. The period under review includes an American film, shot by C. Jerry in 1968 and a Soviet film by A. Orlov (1986).

Directly opposed to the 'mad scientist' is a "true scientist." The true scientist is looking for 'the truth' and his/her work is based on humanistic principles rather than world supremacy ideas. American cinematography of the Cold War period lacks the images of a "true scientist." "True scientist" only emerges in the US cinema after the end of the Cold War, including, the brilliant mathematician (real figure) D. Nash *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) and Harvard Professor R. Langdon from the films *Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *Angels and Demons* (2009), all films by R. Howard.

In Soviet cinema, "The True Scientists" character was masterfully recreated in a series of biographical films about Russian scientists and inventors from N.I. Pirogov and I.P. Pavlov to I.S. Michurin, created in the mid 1930 – early 1950's (Zudina, 2011; Knysh, 2007). "True scientist" is also a type of nuclear physicists D. Gusev and I. Kulikov from *9 days of one year* by M. Romm (1962). Despite the veiled nature of the scientific problem that the heroes of the latter film are working on, the topic of the atomic bomb is one of the main topics in the dialogs of physicists Gusev, Kulikov and their colleagues. Dr. Gusev is working on the nuclear bomb and, contrary to Dr. Strangelove, does not like the idea of the bomb, only agreeing to continue his work on it as the bomb can provide a security for his country. The latter films were reflective of an official Soviet idea that science is supposed to be leading to progress and scientific cooperation.

The image of a professor which was much more widespread in the USSR – an eccentric, devoted to science and sometimes quite critical of the realities of the surrounding reality, though generally loyal to the socialist system, include Professor Polezhaev from the *Baltic Deputy* by I. Kheifets, A. Zarhi (1937) or Professor Preobrazhensky from the film adaptation of M. Bulgakov's novel *Heart of a Dog*, filmed by V. Bortko (1988). Professor Preobrazhensky acts as a kind of humanized version of Frankenstein, modifying human nature and transforming the homeless dog Sharik into a marginal human being but, after seeing what consequences this change brings about, reversing the results of his experiments. Sometimes in benevolent stories about Soviet scientists unforeseen collisions arose, as in the film *The Error of the Engineer Kochin* (based on the play by Sheinin's brothers), directed by A. Macheret (1939), but the erring scientists and specialists were quickly reformed by the Soviet security services.

The image of the Soviet scientist, opposing the Western way of life and resisting attempts by foreign intelligence to recruit him/her, was quite common in the Soviet cinema in the 1970s – 1980s. A vivid illustration can serve as a popular series *The Fate of the Resident* by V. Dorman (1979-1986). In this four-part film, Soviet physicists involved in the development of secret rocket weapons staunchly counter the efforts of Western intelligence agencies to recruit the young and talented physicist V. Borkov and to persuade academician Nesterov to collaborate.

Overall, films in both countries, demonstrated the desire to politicize scientific activity. It was especially noticeable in the context of the arms race and the ideological confrontation of the Cold War, when the role of scientists and science as a whole has grown immeasurably and science has become an important resource of international and domestic politics (Danilin, 2015). Scientific discoveries most directly affected the process of political decision-making, including in local and global crises. *Doctor Strangelove…* by S. Kubrick came out in 1964, right after the Caribbean crisis, which put the world on the brink of a nuclear catastrophe (Pavlov: 2015).

The ideological reasons explains largely the fact that in the period of Cold War, Soviet scientists portrayed in Hollywood often look like passive performers, victims of the machinations of international terrorists and criminals. Examples can be found in the many of James Bond films. At the end of the Cold War, S. Spielberg in *The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008) in a semi-parody form portrayed the Soviet woman – scientist – anthropologist Irina Spalko (Kate Blanchett) as a person who is striving to know the absolute truth encrypted in the message of aliens and who is ultimately crashed. To some extent, Spielberg ridiculed the stereotypes and cliches of Western propaganda about the destructive nature of Soviet science, which sought prove not only the superiority of social engineering, but also the ability to know the essence of man and the mechanisms of his management (the possibility of creating a kind of socialist Frankenstein), even if it requires the help of aliens.

For the American viewer, the interpretation of the Soviet scientist as a carrier of destructive force that poses a threat to American democracy and the entire American value system has constructed that dense curtain of misunderstanding and alienation, bordering on hostility, the basis of the psychology of the Cold War, which A. Stent wrote about in her book (Stent, 2015).

American cinematography extensively uses one of the key elements of American popular culture – the idea of 'frontier' – the border between civilized and wild not only in the films directly showing the Wild West but also in many other films, for example, about Soviet Union/Russia, international security in general (Pushkina, 2017).

It is interesting to note that in the midst of ideological battle, there have also been several films that present different politically neutral types of the scientist. In adventure and comedy films, the image of the "Scientist – an Adventure Lover" was popular. This is, for example, the archaeologist Professor G. Jones from films about Indiana Jones by S. Spielberg (1981-1989) or the comic character in *The Nutty Professor* by D. Lewis (1963), remake made by T. Shadyak in 1996. Another type, the "Practitioner" type exemplified by engineer Cyrus Smith from the film adaptations of the novel *Mysterious Island* by J. Verne. It is worth noting the remarkable similarity of this image of "Practitioner" scientist (exclusively in a positive way) as a technocrat of progressive views, both in the first Soviet film adaptation of the novel by J. Verne by E. Penzlin in 1941 and in the American version of the novel by C. Anfield (1961) (Staples, 1971: 116).

In the context of political changes in the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s, a new topic emerged in the USA – Western support for Soviet scholars-dissidents fighting authoritarianism and seeking to enter the Western scientific community with the best intentions, for example, to prevent a war between the two countries. A typical example is the film adaptation of D. Le Carré's spy novel *The Russian House* (*Russia House*, 1990). It is interesting that *Russia House* was the first Hollywood film entirely shot in the USSR.

While the cinematography of the Cold War period has depicted the horrors of a nuclear conflict (Heed, Kubyshkin, 2019: 250-258), the theme of global responsibility of science as a whole as well as the responsibility of an individual scientist is becoming very noticeable in the Soviet cinema in the latter period of USSR. A. Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker* (1979) represent scientists as members of a single international community who jointly attempt to solve global problems. This trend is also visible in films by Konstantin Lopushanski *Letters of the Dead Man* (1986) and *Visitor to the Museum* (1989). Later, another confirmation of the desire of now Russian filmmakers to rethink the role of science in ideological and creative confrontation in an arms race was the documentary cycle of the Russian director E. Dubrovsky *The Brotherhood of the Bomb* (2005-2007), which revealed many details of a fierce rivalry between USA and USSR in creating weapons of mass destruction that were previously unknown. In the American cinema we can note the type of "Scientist-Prophet" emerging, exemplified by the meteorologist Jack Hall from *The Day After Tomorrow* by Roland Emmerich (2004), where scientist warns humanity about the consequences of technological changes and the global warming.

4. Results

In our comparative analysis of American and Soviet/Russian cinematography on the Cold War and their representation of a 'scientist' we found out that films in both countries, often politicize scientific activity. This took place in the context of the arms race and the ideological confrontation of the Cold War when science was both influencing and being influenced by international and domestic politics. The analysis demonstrates that scientists/scholars have been depicted as both subjects and objects of ideological and political confrontation of the Cold War period. While American cinematography focused on the image of a 'mad scientist,' in the Soviet cinematography scientist is more of an intellectual. Some American films used the grotesque 'mad scientist' (e.g. Dr. Strangelove) to highlight the ultimate danger of nuclear catastrophe, and Soviet films used intellectual scientist conversations (e.g. Dr. Gusev) for the same purpose of warning about the dangers of a nuclear age). We trace gradual growing similarities of the cinematography of both countries: scientist becomes to be presented in a less confrontational way as both countries become aware that scientific cooperation is vital for the prevention of the world nuclear war and global conflict.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, we found out that there has been a significant role that filmmakers have played in the propaganda during Cold War. They have participated in political and ideological struggle by the inclusion of the characters from the scientific community to highlight dominance and advantages of one political and ideological system over another. The image of a scientist in the cinema of the 1950s – 1980s developed from an abstract villain with dark intentions to a character who skillfully mastered powerful tools of influence on politics, economy and security and who has been strictly

opposed to his/her political and ideological opponents. The prevailing discourse in politics but also art in the Cold War era reflected "Us" versus "Them" approach, including prejudices and negative emotions against "the other." As Cold War progressed though, one can also find, the desire to understand the opponent (adversary) and find a mutually acceptable form of cooperation as this seems to be the only way to avoid, ultimately, a universal catastrophe.

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