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## “Enemy Number One” in the Soviet and American Movies During the Cold War

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### Abstract

Aspect-Press publishing house published a collective monograph “Enemy number One” in the Symbolic Politics of the Cinematographies of the USSR and the USA during the Cold War”. In this regard, the authors of the book think that Soviet and American cinematic images of “enemy number one” had many similarities, and the book noted parallelism in various aspects of creating these images. There were also significant differences: 1) in the United States, the opposition to the USSR was more rigid; 2) the policy of macropolitical identity pursued by the cinematographers of the USSR and the USA was based on different principles: class and national, respectively (this led to the production of images of “good Americans” as a necessary component of Soviet anti-Americanism); 3) Soviet cinema as a whole was characterized by a more balanced and cautious attitude towards representations of the main geopolitical rival; 4) American cinema created a more one-dimensional image of the enemy, while Soviet cinema created a more one-dimensional image of “Us”; 5) finally, the film images of “enemy number one” had different meanings for the American and Soviet audiences. For American viewers, the USSR, in all likelihood, was not only the main rival and the main threat, but also the embodiment of absolute evil; in this aspect, nothing could compete with the images of the “Reds”. As for the Soviet film audience of the Cold War, Nazi Germany was still “enemy number one” for them; in terms of emotional intensity, films dedicated to America are incomparable with the best films about the Great Patriotic War, such as *The Fate of a Man*, *The Cranes Are Flying*, *The Ballad of a Soldier*.

**Keywords:** USSR, USA, cold war, cinema, movies, enemy number one, image of the enemy, films.

### 1. Introduction

Aspect-Press publishing house published a collective monograph “Enemy number One” in the Symbolic Politics of the Cinematographies of the USSR and the USA during the Cold War” (Riabov et al., 2023). In this regard, the authors of the book kindly agreed to answer questions from the editors of this journal.

### 2. Discussion

- How did the idea for this book come about? On what basis was its group of authors formed?

Oleg Riabov, Alexander Kubyshkin: I have been dealing with the problem of mutual perception of Russia and the West since the 1990s, studying it on various sources: from philosophical treatises to cartoons. The idea of this particular book arose more than twenty years

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ago, and this is the case when a researcher can name a specific event that influenced the emergence of the idea of a study. In 2001, I did an internship at one of the U.S. universities and witnessed the reaction of the American media to the September 11 attacks. This reaction, extremely harsh, surprised – neither in the USSR of the 1980s, nor even in Russia in the 1990s, We noticed such negativism towards any social group. Then the idea arose to compare the images of the enemy that functioned in the USSR and the USA during the Cold War, their role in the propaganda of that time and their influence on modern Russian-American relations.

In addition, in the course of scientific discussions about the Soviet or American culture of the Cold War, about how the propaganda of the USSR and the USA portrayed “Us” and “Them”, questions of an evaluative nature inevitably arise: “good or bad?”, “right or wrong?”, “fair or unfair?”.

Over time, the understanding came that these value judgments cannot be correct without taking into account the context: without a comparative analysis it is difficult to see the manipulative technologies used, as well as to avoid simplified assessments that reproduce the Manichaeian, black-and-white, picture of the past.

Cinema, on the other hand, provides Soviet and American material that is quite convenient for comparison. In other words, we came to the idea of this book more from the imagology of the Cold War and a comparative analysis of the images of the enemy in Soviet and American cultures than from cinema. Accordingly, we were interested not only in the artistic merit of films, but also in their role in propaganda, which we considered in the frame of symbolic politics.

With this in mind, researchers were selected to implement the RSF project, which formed the team of authors of the book; it includes specialists not only in the field of film studies, but also in history, cultural studies, political science, sociology, and social semiotics. At the same time, we all had, of course, to learn on the go; it was difficult, but interesting, and everyone worked with enthusiasm. Historical and ideological contexts of the cinematic images of the “enemy number one” were studied by Alexander Kubyshkin, the control system for the production of these images – by Kirill Yudin, cinematic techniques for creating the image of the enemy and non-fiction films – by Olga Davydova, semiotic means of constructing the image of the enemy – by Dmitry Smirnov, the role of images of the enemy in the politics of macropolitical identity – by Dmitriy Riabov, in the politics of memory – by Sergey Belov, in the politics of space – by Tatiana Riabova, animation and children’s films – by Nina Sputnitskaia.

*- At first glance, the Cold War is already a distant past; it has been replaced by hot wars. How do you see the relevance of your monograph?*

*Oleg Riabov, Alexander Kubyshkin:* It is generally accepted that the Cold War developed in the chronological framework of the second half of the 40s and ended in the late 80s of the last century. The main field of tension and rivalry took place in the ideological, political, military and economic areas. But the mechanisms of mutual hostility and rivalry originated in the distant historical past and were transformed in accordance with the development of international relations as a whole.

During the Cold War, there was not only rivalry and outright hostility in the actions of its main participants, primarily the USSR and its allies on the one hand and the West led by the United States on the other, but a joint mechanism was developed to prevent a global nuclear catastrophe. Although the context of the Cold War included various methods of force (fierce political discussions, the arms race, economic sanctions and the so-called cultural wars), already from the beginning of the 60s it was possible to begin the process of establishing international control over the spread of nuclear weapons, as well as significantly expand humanitarian contacts, including cinematography. Thus, confrontation and rivalry shifted towards ideological discussion, which, however, did not exclude both various forms of pressure and productive dialogue. This was largely facilitated by the institutions of the post-war Yalta-Potsdam system of international relations.

This system, as is known, has undergone a serious deformation in recent decades, and many mechanisms for stabilizing Russia's relations with the countries of the West have been eliminated. In this sense, the current situation looks much more uncertain and unpredictable than it was even during the most intense times of the Cold War, for example, during the Korean and Vietnam Wars or the Caribbean crisis of 1962. Not to mention the collapse of the architecture of international security, one can point to the strengthening and purposeful spread of culture cancellation in relation to Russia and the actual destruction of the entire spectrum of scientific and cultural contacts. That is why it is absolutely necessary to study how the system of relations between the opposing sides in the field of sociocultural practices operated, since the scientific analysis of the problems of the influence of propaganda on the development of the friend-foe dichotomy is most

clearly traced precisely in culture (both elite and popular mass). Cinematography is a very representative source to study the socio-cultural and ideological aspects of the Cold War. Thus, an attempt to analyze the combination of the intellectual component and various forms of reflection of everyday consciousness in the process of artistic comprehension of the realities of the Cold War seems to us a very urgent task.

*- A lot of scientific works have been written about the Cold War, including on the screens of the world over the past decades. What is the novelty of your book in this context?*

*Oleg Riabov, Alexander Kubyshkin:* Indeed, a lot has been done in the study of the cinematic Cold War by Russian and foreign scientists. The works of A. Fedorov, T. Shaw and D. Youngblood devoted to a comparative analysis of Soviet and American film images were the most valuable for our study (Fedorov, 2017; Shaw, Youngblood, 2010).

As for our contribution to this research field, we see it in the fact that the historical problem is studied with the help of the categorical apparatus of political science – the concept of symbolic politics, which can be defined as public activity associated with the production of various ways of interpreting social reality and the struggle for dominance of them (Malinova, Miller, 2021). We analyzed the role of film images in such forms of symbolic politics as the legitimation of power, the politics of Soviet and American identity, the politics of memory, and the politics of space. The importance of cinema as an actor of symbolic politics is determined by cognitive and affective factors: it contributes, firstly, to the production of everyday political knowledge (that is, it translates political problems into a language accessible to the mass audience), and, secondly, to the formation of an emotional, personal attitude to questions of international politics (which promotes the political participation of individuals). The viewer felt his/her involvement in the events of the Cold War better when he / she saw them on the screen through the prism of romantic or detective stories, empathizing with movie heroes. The cinema of the USSR and the USA, therefore, not only reflected the Cold War, but in a certain sense created it, taking an active part in its legitimation.

In addition, we investigated the conditions and methods for creating cinematic images of the enemy. It was important to establish not only how the "enemy" is depicted on the screen, but also to determine the causes and conditions for the creation of these images. To do this, it was necessary to analyze the historical and ideological contexts, to study the system of control over the production, distribution and consumption of enemy film images (including formal and informal norms, positive and negative sanctions, state and non-state actors), to identify the role of such factors as the language of cinema and the patterns of film semiotics.

Further, we tried to reflect the history of the cinematic Cold War as fully as possible by analyzing documentaries, animation, children's films, as well as those feature films that are rarely in the field of view of researchers. As it is customary to say in such cases, to what extent we succeeded, it is up to the readers to judge.

Finally, our study aimed to explore how significant the cinematic legacy of the Cold War is today, what impact film images have on the social views of Russians and Americans and on contemporary Russian-American relations.

*- What are the similarities and differences in the cinematic images of enemies in American and Soviet films?*

*Oleg Riabov, Alexander Kubyshkin:* Soviet and American cinematic images of "enemy number one" had many similarities, and the book noted parallelism in various aspects of creating these images. There were also significant differences: 1) in the United States, the opposition to the USSR was more rigid; 2) the policy of macropolitical identity pursued by the cinematographers of the USSR and the USA was based on different principles: class and national, respectively (this led to the production of images of "good Americans" as a necessary component of Soviet anti-Americanism); 3) Soviet cinema as a whole was characterized by a more balanced and cautious attitude towards representations of the main geopolitical rival; 4) American cinema created a more one-dimensional image of the enemy, while Soviet cinema created a more one-dimensional image of "Us"; 5) finally, the film images of "enemy number one" had different meanings for the American and Soviet audiences. For American viewers, the USSR, in all likelihood, was not only the main rival and the main threat, but also the embodiment of absolute evil; in this aspect, nothing could compete with the images of the "Reds". As for the Soviet film audience of the Cold War, Nazi Germany was still "enemy number one" for them; in terms of emotional intensity, films dedicated

to America are incomparable with the best films about the Great Patriotic War, such as *The Fate of a Man*, *The Cranes Are Flying*, *The Ballad of a Soldier*.

- *To what extent was the gender component reflected in the American and Soviet images of enemies?*

*Oleg Riabov, Alexander Kubyshkin:* Cinematic images of "enemy number one" were created using various discourses - anthropological, historical, national, political, etc. All of them performed the same functions: they showed the opposite of "Us" and "Them" and rated the former higher than the latter. Among these discourses there was also a gender discourse, which in this context is interesting as an example of how appeals to the natural properties of a person were used when creating film images of the enemy. A person easily correlates stereotypical ideas about the qualities of men and women with his / her personal experience, perceives them as perhaps the most obvious and understandable, therefore it is convenient to manipulate these ideas to substantiate this or that idea, to oppose "us" and "them". It is easier to convince mass audience of the advantages of a certain socio-political system by referring not to the theory of surplus value or the concept of a post-industrial society, but to images of masculinity and femininity.

Let's say that the American audience would agree that the ideas of communism were contrary to human nature, you could show the film *Ninotchka* – that's how the Bolsheviks deformed femininity! Or, in turn, as evidence of the injustice and immorality of the capitalist system, in the USSR films were shown, from which it followed that in a bourgeois society a woman was forced to engage in prostitution.

- *What were the main symbols and signs of the film images of enemies in the USSR and the USA?*

*Oleg Riabov, Alexander Kubyshkin:* A wide variety of symbolic markers were involved – for example, language, anthropological features, clothing, national cuisine, music – which not only ensured the recognition of "Us" and "Them", but also contributed to the attribution of certain qualities, positive and negative, to them. Quite traditional markers were widely used – such as a capitalist with a cigar, the Ku Klux Klan, bears, vodka, caviar. In addition, new ones were invented – for example, jazz or skyscrapers. At the same time, it was important also to establish the meanings of these signifiers for the audience, to convince it that jazz was a symbol of the decay of capitalism, the music of spiritual poverty, and a skyscraper was a symbol of inequality, exploitation, militarism, and inhumanity.

- *To what extent and how exactly did real political events influence the changes in the images of film enemies?*

*Oleg Riabov, Alexander Kubyshkin:* In the context of the "struggle for hearts and minds", current political events had to receive appropriate interpretations in popular culture – one of the main theaters of the Cold War; Newspapers, TV news programs, cartoons, and popular music performed this task most quickly. But the cinematography tried to keep up. Let us give an example of the film *Forty-nine Days* (directed by G. Gabay, 1962), dedicated to the story that took place in the Pacific Fleet of the USSR in early 1960s. Four sailors were taken to the ocean on a barge; for seven weeks they bravely fought the elements until they were discovered and rescued by the crew of a US Navy aircraft carrier. History fully met the tasks of ideological work, showing the advantages, on the one hand, of communist morality, on the other, of peaceful coexistence with the United States. As follows from the archival data, already on March 19, 1960, almost immediately after the official announcement of TASS, even before the return of the four to the USSR, the Film Production Department turned to the Minister of Culture N. Mikhailov with a proposal to shoot a documentary film within 20 days, as well as promptly organize the shooting of a feature film together with filmmakers from the United States (RGALI. F. 2329. Op. 12. Item 1143. L. 7). The feature film was released, however, only in 1962.

Cinema promptly reacted to political events, releasing films with the required interpretations of the Korean War, the Hungarian events of 1956, the construction of the Berlin Wall, the flight of the first man into space. Current events even influenced cinematic interpretations of the past – for example, the transformation of the West Germany into the main ally of the United States in Europe led to the appearance of films that reconsidered the role of Nazi Germany in World War II.

Political events influenced both the mood in society (which had to be taken into account in order to achieve a box-office success) and the "party line", the position of the actors of control, from state security agencies to public organizations. Filmmakers could not ignore this, making

changes to the film images of "us" and "them". In the USA, the "leash" for them was longer than in the USSR, but nevertheless very tangible.

- *Your research took several years. To what extent did the results of your work coincide with your initial ideas about the topic you have chosen? Were there any surprises here for you?*

*Oleg Riabov, Alexander Kubyshkin:* The question is interesting. Probably, after all, we were surprised by the scale of the "cinematic Cold War" – leading directors, actors, screenwriters, composers of both countries were involved, several hundred films were shot, in which "enemy number one" directly appears.

Another surprise was the films of the Thaw; there was a rehumanization of "enemy number one", the images of the United States were changing; apparently, the feeling that the Cold War was drawing to a close was in the late 1950s not so uncommon. It is significant that in the last issue for 1959, *Krokodil* published a cartoon depicting Soviet and American men who, pointing to an ice bucket where a bottle of New Year's champagne lies, said: "Let only this ice remain between us!" ([Efimov, 1959](#)).

It was also surprising to find that the basic values of the two cultures were not so different (despite the fact that the USSR and the USA presented each other as antipodes). After all, the noted similarity in the content of the film images of "enemy number one" also speaks of the similarity in the images of "Us". Meanness and betrayal were condemned, and heroism and self-sacrifice were glorified. Violence against the weak was considered a vice and attributed to "Them", while the protection of women and children was interpreted as a virtue and attributed to "Us". Loyalty, honesty, nobility, love for children, patriotism, humanism - all this was part of the moral ideal of movie heroes on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Soviet propaganda is often laughed at now, and was chuckled at in the USSR (let's recall how in the film *Three Poplars on Plyushchikha* the hero whose role was played by Oleg Efremov laughs, when the Tatiana Doronina's heroine, in response to his ironic question "Is it scary in America?" replies with conviction: "Yes, it is scary. Otherwise they (Soviet newspapers) wouldn't write"). Meanwhile, US propaganda used similar techniques in depicting "Us" and "Them".

In Hollywood films, it is easy to find analogues of such concepts of Soviet propaganda as the well-known "We're faithful to Lenin's precepts", "Friendship of peoples", "Two worlds – two childhoods", "The people and the army are one hand" ... The discovery of this parallelism and the realization that such slogans were conditioned by not some defects of propaganda in the cinema of the USSR or the USA, but the conditions of the Cold War and the general patterns of creating cinematic images of the enemy, was also a kind of surprise.

- *How have the images of film enemies changed in American and Russian films after the collapse of the USSR?*

*Oleg Riabov, Alexander Kubyshkin:* We have not investigated this problem; many works in Russia and abroad are devoted to it (for example, the monograph by E. and M.B. Goshchilo ([Goscilo, Goscilo, 2014](#)), the translation of which was also published in Russia). We would like only to note here that during this period in Russian cinema, these images have undergone a more noticeable evolution than in American cinema. Probably, the films not only reflected changes in the mood of Russian society, but also predicted these changes (and, perhaps, contributed to them – let's recall A. Balabanov's film *Brother 2*).

- *Does your research team intend to continue the topic related to the images of enemies on the screen?*

*Oleg Riabov, Alexander Kubyshkin:* Yes, we plan to publish a monograph in 2024 with the results of research into the next stage of the cinematic Cold War, from 1964 to 1991. In addition, now a group of authors with almost the same composition is working on a project (Russian Science Foundation grant No. 22-18-00305), the purpose of which is to check the extent to which it is possible to extrapolate the conclusions obtained in the course of work on cinematographic material to mass culture in general (including posters, cartoons, comics, photography, popular music, sports reports, video games, etc.). We also hope to establish what role these images play in today's life in Russia and the United States: to what extent they influence the mutual perception of Russians and Americans, and how they are used in contemporary politics.

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