THEORY AND HISTORY OF ART

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CINEMA: ART OR TECHNIQUE?

SUMMARY. This article is devoted to the problem of the interaction of modern cinema with the audience, as well as aesthetic and ideological problems of screen culture. The article also gives the characteristics of modern cinematography and raises the question of formalism in films.

KEY WORDS. Cinema, formalism, form, essence, idea, meaning.

Cinematography has undergone a number of rises and falls, several technical and genre revolutions. Many philosophers have named cinematography as the most important phenomenon of modernity. The cinema itself gained the status of not only the most accessible and comprehensible, but also the most popular art form. Over a number of years, cinema has not departed from its carnival and entertainment character. To the present day, the most significant of arts has been torn between businessmen dreaming of making as much money as possible, the audience, fed up with disposable films and a small group of thinkers who believe that cinema is likely to change not only an individual but the whole world too. However, is such a change really going on?

Let us turn to History. In 1897, world cinema entered almost a fatal crisis phase. In the USA, Edison began "the war of patents" and mobilized a whole army of marshals of the court. He intended to monopolize the invention. Edison's rivals disappeared one after another. Having no competitors, Edison's films were extremely mediocre. Boredom gradually made cinema halls empty [1; 40].

100 years passed. In recent years, box-office takings in the cinemas of the USA have fallen tremendously. Only in 2011, American chains sold 50 million tickets less than in 2010 [2]. There are no official statistics for Russia, but the situation is basically the same.

The majority of larger Western studio representatives believe that their films' flop is due to video piracy and "outflow" of the audience to Internet: digital media provide the audience with more exciting and diversified means of recreation than cinema halls. Nevertheless, some people within the industry began declaring that the major reason of the problem is Hollywood itself, that has been resting on its laurels too long and missed the time when it was necessary to adapt to new rules

of the game. According to most independent experts, it is precisely the fact that Hollywood places its stake on making easy money which leads to failure.

The thirst for money casts doubt on the prospects for true development both of cinematography and the human being as an individual. Indeed, nowadays more than ever, a personality depends on media culture, and cinema as the largest stratum of this culture represents the most significant mechanism of influencing an individual. Regretfully, the cradle of cinematography meets the 21st Century with the problems typical of this art at the earliest stage of its development. From ideological commitment and integrity, from meaningful narration cinema has gone back to its basics, towards "merry pictures" intended to take the audience away from reality. But why? The cinema's value is seen in quite another way — submitting to life dynamics, cinema tends not only to comply with day-to-day realities, following human essence, but it may be more than just a reflection. Presenting a contrast to dryness and lack of ideology, the immorality of the modern social majority, cinematography may present idealized images both as models for imitation and as examples for self-improvement, self-development and self-cognition.

However, at present the improvement of the individual is not a principal objective for cinema. Form is considered the main thing, as in due time it was in painting and other arts. In the History of arts, formalism represents a conception in which the artistic merit of a work of art depends completely on its form, i.e. on the means of production, observable aspects and environment, where it is placed. Formalism in philosophy is a trend in aesthetics, art, literature and other sciences, the followers of which discern the essence of things in form, overestimate form's role and forget the content ranking form first, or neglect it. The philosophical content of formalism dates back to Plato, who declared that the *eidos* (form) of things consisted of their perception, including those sensible aspects of things that the public comprehended. In particular, Plato taught that form comprised the elements of its presentation and mimesis (imitation), since the thing itself when contemplated did not pass into the observer's consciousness and was not doubled. Plato even believed that things could mislead a human being. Aristotle, using Plato in many instances, also discourses on mimesis in a quite diversified manner and not without contradictions. However, Aristotle as a typical antique thinker has nothing to do either with formalism, where the only thing that carries weight is delight in senseless virtuosity, or with criticism of one or another objective and realistic approaches to reality at all. Considering Aristotle's ontology in its entirety, he believes that mentality as the first engine is higher and much more objective than any art [3; 115].

The factor of formalism has always been characteristic of fine arts. Using special or computer effects became for cinema, as a visual art, the peak of formalism. Significantly leaving behind painting and photography in dynamics, computer effects have distinguished between all well-known forms of art. May visual effects be regarded as art? Oscar Award nomination in this field is the best argument. Undoubtedly, this phenomenon deserves close attention, since a number of sociological investigations give evidence to the fact that it is the complexity and originality of visual effects which attracts the audience to cinema halls.

All the above relates directly to domestic cinematography as well. Thus, the day before the premiнre of the Russian blockbuster "August. Eighth" the film director Dzhanik Fayziev jointly with the distributing company "20th Century Fox" conducted

a considerable sociological study. It is worth mentioning that the plot of the film develops around the history of the Russian-Georgian conflict. However, in spite of the fact that the film is positioned as a military drama, one can see giant robots and various fantastic special effects in shot. The director himself comments upon the results of the performed survey as follows:

"At the exits of cinema theaters after watching the movie preview with robots, we polled simple people far from film production, who often go to cinema theaters. We discovered that the teaser has a very high percentage of memorability. Robots provoke bewilderment, but this perplexity is practically much like curiosity. And this is very good for us because it means that people having watched the movie preview now would like to know what is going on there with these strange creatures who were integrated into real life" [4; 1].

Once the premiere had screened, the film left bewildered both movie critics and a great deal of "simple people far from film production". Fayziev insists upon the fact that the special effects were used as an expressive means to attract young people into cinema halls. This is despite the fact that to produce computer graphics, an immense attention was paid, and huge resources were allocated. So, both by their cost and for the purpose intended, these effects play the role of "silver cutlery", at the glitter of which an impressive flight of magpies will gather. Such a fixed comparison characterizes the process of film-making not to its advantage.

Nevertheless, the main problem is that there is nothing behind a beautiful cover but technical novelties and tons of "iron", which visualizes all that. There exists a huge lack of ideas and methods for expressing thoughts and ways to attract the attention of the audience to certain problems. The scales turn in favour of virtual environment and not human existence. Since the point in question is virtual environment, then the problems and issues to deal with are related to criteria and categories specific to this environment. Special effects are becoming an imaginary panacea for a crisis of senses and lack of ideas.

Thus, a famous author, script writer and film critic Dmitriy Bykov believes that good cinema is impossible without a strong system of values. "Nowadays the situation in our country is that when there are no moral criteria, when nobody knows whether it is good or not to betray one's friends; it is loyal or not to make the country closed-off and to humiliate all the population, — and this is the main reason for the absence of good scripts. On top of that, modern Russian literature represents either a slice of life, recording yet not interpreting reality, or dreadful fantasy. What does the audience need? The audience requires an everyday story powered by a strong, exciting plot that would keep in suspense and with a great metaphysical message. The story that would raise the present life in Russia and bring it into a certain context. Nothing more" [5; 1].

One can agree with the author, but not on all points. Probably, it is not everyday reality that is worth showing but life as it should be… without idealizing, going as far as Utopia, but defining a certain vector of values and indicating the direction. It is possible to affect quite palpably the culture and mode of thinking of amenable men in the street. Certainly, creating a human being is not as simple as breaking one; nevertheless, it seems a necessity to do so in order to promote society's evolution.

There is another viewpoint on the process of sense formation in film art. For example, Vyacheslav Dmitriev in his work "Does philosophy need cinema?" asserts:

"Cinema will get into philosophy if we accept the idea that it is not art but technique. Film-making is no more than the recording of visual and dynamic material, work to make visual sequences and methods for exposing pictures on screens. Cinema technique and philosophy may intersect whereas cinema art and philosophy may not. When film-making art and philosophy met in an "intellectual" movie, cinema about philosophy and meta-cinema, their merging did not happen" [6; 1].

But what situation will arise if we gain a glimpse into the near future? Slightly ahead? If we consider cinematography not only from the technological point of view but from the perspective of an independent sense-making tool? Trivial techniques of animated cartoons or animation still can both create interesting, original images and arouse emotions and feelings in people.

Pixar Studio in 2008 made an incredible surge and counterpoised animation and cinematography. The main character of the cartoon "WALL-E" (Oscar Award — 2009 for the best animation film) left a lasting impression on the audience and critics. "It appeared animated to such an extent that sometimes one had to remind oneself that this very sweet little can was not a nominee for Oscar Award for the best actor — a great talent — but just a sequence of digits, transformed by the processor into the character in motion", Real Cinema magazine writes [7; 1]. All over the world, film critics and most of the audience as well as the Internet community have recognized "WALL-E" as the best film of the year.

It is exactly by creating emotions, making people empathize, that the art of cinema gains a loyal army among its audience.

Dating cinematography back to its profound nature in the first instance, it is essential to rely upon philosophy as a meaningful source of ideas, senses and answers. Special effects may play a key role in getting across to the audience specific messages, which are hard to explain to an "uneducated" spectator, on the level of subconsciousness, incomplete (not to the end) conscious perception.

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