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Self-Determination of European Cinematographies: Basic Issues and Ways of Resolving Them

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Many challenges are facing us today that require understanding and prompt actions, but one problem stands apart: preservation of the uniqueness of different cultures. The globalized world has put national and cultural identity at stake, which is why studies of the mechanisms making it self-sustainable are of great current interest. The role of imaginative visualization and establishment of cultural uniqueness is played by the cinema. However, cinematographic experience has shown that national interests (institutional, economic-and-industrial, and artistic) have to be defended under rather severe conditions. This article is an attempt to reveal the factors that hinder or promote self-determination of cinematographies in European countries. For this purpose, the main development stages of European cinematography are looked at taking into account the complex opposition of unification trends and the urge to preserve the specificity of national traits. The analysis of the cinematographic process in the first half of the 20th century (based on economic priorities and Hollywood hegemony) and of the contradictory trends in the second half of the 20th century caused by the sociocultural issues of the "common European house" makes it possible to conclude that self-determination of national cinematographies is effective.

Keywords: cinematographic art, European cinema, cinematographic domain, national and cultural self-determination, cultural uniqueness, unification, language of cinematography, independent films, film industry

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Contradictions of the present-day reality are often explained by the processes of globalization which are manifested, on the one hand, in homogenization and unification of the world, and on the other hand, in accentuating culture localization trends. Under these conditions the national and cultural uniqueness of regions and ethnic groups becomes more self-sustainable. However, the social and political reality demonstrates poor efficiency of measures aimed at maintaining national and cultural identity and shows the absence of cross-cultural dialog concept and valid mechanisms for interaction of ethnic groups and cultures in the globalizing world.

Studying the cinematographic form of visualization and establishment of culture uniqueness can contribute to the search of possible ways to solve the specified problem. As a product of national and cultural identity based on the system of values of a given society, its traditions,

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moral and ethical attitudes, general history, humor specifics, ethnographic peculiarities etc., cinema is an effective mechanism of culture self-identification. We believe that one of the success criteria in terms of culture self-identification is the existence of national cinema schools with distinctive characteristics. But the history of cinema shows that the road of self-identification is challenging and leads to quite different results. It should be noted that cinema historians of the 20th century (G. Sadoul, J. Toeplitz, J. Lawson) reconstructing the development of the world cinema in its institutional, industrial and artistic aspects didn't focus on the difficulties of this process. It is the present-day film experts that pay attention to the importance of the cultural and national component of cinematographic art. Some researchers mention this problem in the context of development of modern global cinematographic domain (K. Razlogov, A. Plakhov, A. Dolin); others look at it from the point of view of the national specificity of European film art (N. Samutina, H.-J. Schlegel etc.).

In this article the key problems of the establishment of European cinematographies in the 20th century are analyzed. The idea of the culturological approach on which the research is based made it possible to disprove the notion that globalization in culture is necessarily connected with unification of ideological and artistic processes. Thus, this article features a description of a battle (either unconscious or conscious) for preservation of cultural identity, which played an important role in formation of film schools and independent cinema that glorified European cinematography.

Economic and artistic aspects contributing to the efficiency of cinematographies in the first half of the 20th century

The evolution of such a complex audiovisual system as cinema is determined by two dimensions: artistic and productive-economic. These two sides of film process have always acted either as contradictory forces or concurrently, which is an important condition for development of national cinematographies. One the one hand, film directors form a language that is able to capture the uniqueness of national and cultural self-awareness. On the other hand, the large scale of the cinema sets strictly commercial priorities: financial success, payback of film distribution on internal and external markets etc. For these reasons, formation of national cinematographies has always been connected with the problems of both artistic development and commercial profit.

As a rule, financial landmarks were determined by large industrial groups standing behind the back of film companies. In different countries film industries develop their own methods of providing commercial efficiency. For example, one of the effective mechanisms is adoption of the aesthetical standards of commercially successful films. Another variant is formation of favorable distribution policy and financial support by the national film industry. The third method – subduing the whole world film industry to its hegemony – was temporarily tried by Germany and successfully implemented by the USA. The tycoons of American cinema did everything to seize the ground in France, Italy, England and other European countries, provoking a pursuit of independence. This led to self-determination and separation of national film schools. Since film art and film industry are closely connected, it is necessary to stand up for independence both in the domain of creative quest and in the economical and industrial sphere.

The difficulties of artistic self-determination were connected with the fact that the use of language that went beyond the standard and "time-tested" methods didn't always meet the requirements of distribution demand and had little success with the audience. Excessive experimental

enthusiasm was controlled by producers, who, as G. Sadoul pointed out, were businessmen in the first place and didn't want to invest money and go bankrupt out of pure love of art [4, p.48]. Besides, films that were close to a certain culture in terms of ideological and artistic solution could fail to interest cinemagoers. Perhaps, uniformity of the cultural values of Europe and America (the most important distribution rival) could balance the commercial success of the relevant cinematographies. However, there has never been such uniformity. Sophisticated cinemagnates were aware of the differences in "habitual worldview". Analyzing the causes of crisis in the French film industry in 1918, Charles Pathé suggested that script-writers and directors wishing to export their motion pictures should "bear in mind that different nations have different views on expression of emotions and passions. ...But it would be even better to adapt the imagined situations to the way of thinking that pertains not only to the French" [4, p.52].

Before the First World War, France was in the avant-garde in terms of the cinema language development and French film industry was thriving, thus proving that it was possible to combine the two dimensions of the cinema. No film enterprise could surpass the company of Charles Pathé which was leading "by its financial strength, abroad network width, significance in its own country, monopolization of related industries..." [5, p. 11]. The successful start of French cinematography was due to the combination of art and commercial requirements. This approach was taken by such companies as Gaumont, Eclair, and especially Film d'Art founded by a group of writers and theatre workers trying to turn a lower-class performance into «high art».

However, two world wars and revolutions made adjustments to the world alignment of forces – the USA became the global leader in many respects: military, economic, technological and cultural. The majority of countries joined in the American "mass culture", its aesthetic norms and system of values which were transmitted through film art. America became the center of the world cinema and took the liberty of shaping the destiny of national cinematographies. America's claim for the film production hegemony caused a counter reaction from Italy, England, Denmark, Sweden, Russia and other countries. European cinematographies faced the challenge of national and cultural self-determination. Thus, during the first half of the 20th century two trends were opposing each other: standardization of the film language of European countries (i.e. reduction of Hollywood aesthetic criteria, methods and images to the common denominator) and productive search for means of expression identifying national cultural uniqueness.

During the first years after the war it was not so much the obvious policy of capturing film markets that caused resistance as the problem of implanting standards and cultural values that were not entirely shared by Europeans. In 1918, L. Delluc, appealing to the national psyche, wrote with bitter sarcasm that everyone at the motherland of Flaubert and Verlaine suddenly started to americanize love. But "an American film should be American, an Italian one should be Italian, and a French one should be French!" [4, p.107]

Results of confrontation to Hollywood aesthetical formula

The hegemony of the American cinema began with the release of D.W. Griffith's film "The Birth of a Nation" ("The Clansman") that had great commercial success and made the Americans proud of their national cinema. But Hollywood – the center of the cinematographical empire since 1913 and the creative motherland of the aesthetic "role model" – became the quintessence of all

endeavors. The basic principles of Hollywood movies included: technical excellence; commonality of artistic devices; participation of bright actors – "stars"; clear genre structure; "Hollywood realism"; mostly happy end; and steadily increasing priority of spectacularity. Ideology was also involved: Hollywood films demonstrated the standards of the American way of life based on the values of American people. But the most important trait characterizing the formula of Hollywood cinema (which was later associated with the American cinema in general) was its commitment to commercial success. Hollywood was reluctant to make risky experiments in the sphere of author's style or explicit references to regional cultures. As early as in the 1910-s the American cinema rapidly turning into industry was not so much an innovative artistic language as a commercially thriving business [4, p. 46]. By the 1930-s Hollywood production in certain countries reached 95%. After the Second World War the hegemony of Hollywood began to play the key role in the development of the world cinema.

How were European cinematographies functioning under these conditions? First of all, there was an important breakthrough in the development of language. Not only the pure wish to bring film art to a new level, but "almost any idea of national or cultural identity expressed by the means of cinema had to develop by opposing itself to Hollywood, by as many parameters as possible"[7]. Experiments with artistic devices and acting were used, and the priority of topics, plots and cinematographic focus was set. As a result, in the1920-s many national film schools appeared that were as different as their worldview and creative attitudes.

However, until the middle of the 20th century the belonging to this or that European country was demonstrated not so much by deliberate emphasis on ethnographic peculiarities as by the totality of artistic achievements shared with everybody. Such mastering of new expressive means pertaining to a certain national cinematography (in the form of German Expressionism, Italian Neo-Realism or French Avant-Garde) automatically singled them out from the whole European cinema domain. It should be noted that mastering of certain means was determined to some extent by the specificity of the national and cultural mentality forming cinematographic interest, "orientation" of the outlook.

Thus, France, opening a new page in the history of the cinema, showed an example of quite a fruitful struggle for cinematographic independence. A serious achievement that made French cinematography a leader of the world film process was its Avant-Garde experiment. It helped to satisfy the national and cultural ambitions of the French cinema in the 1920-s and to set out the forms of artistic resistance to the Hollywood model. Instead of standardization, many bright and diverse avant-garde schools shaped the destiny of cinematography: Surrealism (visualization of fantasies, dreams and associations), "Pure Cinema" (strictly visual experience), Impressionism (having the effect of variability and fluidity of reality). In the 1930-s French cinematographic thinking led to "Poetic Realism" restoring the "truth of life". Its aesthetics was characterized by subtle estheticism typical for French culture, by the rationality of harmony between reality and poetry inspired by French Naturalism and Romanticism of the 19th century, and by the perfect flexibility of visual imagery influenced by Impressionism and Avant-Garde.

German cinema, too, found creative resources to suggest its own outlook on the world. Its uniqueness was revealed in the Expressionism movement of the 1920-s that demonstrated special sensitivity of the German psyche to the irrational and to the depths of human nature which was different from the creative tasks

of both Hollywood and other European film schools. The poetics of this product of national and cultural uniqueness contributed to the artistic experience by introducing expressive means able to show the infernal side of human nature who is "running helplessly from the reality, but whose conscience is so imbued with the spirit of violence and humiliation that he can not tell reality from fantasy" [2, p.82].

As for Italian national cinema, its "trademark" was the experience of participation in the everyday reality of an ordinary man discovered by Neo-Realism and shared with everybody. Formation of Italian Neo-Realism was directly connected with the historical collisions of the 1940-s and expressed the national and patriotic self-awareness. Such basic principles of the Neo-Realism aesthetics as "truth of life", its authenticity and humanity, as well as the national tradition and artistic culture achievements (literature, theater, and painting) radically denied the Hollywood model.

Social and cultural self-determination conditions of European cinematographies in the second half of the 20th century

Notwithstanding the success of national film schools, there were many difficulties in the process of their establishment. Since the second half of the 20th century, self-determination of European cinematographies was governed by a new set of both negative and positive factors. First of all, Hollywood lost its positions. In the 1950-s the external markets of the American film industry shrank because of the crisis caused by the development of television. "Almost everywhere the retreat of Hollywood was followed by the revival of national cinema" [6, p. 373]. Until the 1950-s the history of the cinema was represented by not more than six countries, and in the second half of the 20th century national film schools were formed everywhere (in eastern

countries, in Latin America, in Central Europe etc.). After Hollywood had lost its positions, the habitual opposition of aesthetic reference points acquired another character. The Hollywood model successfully took root in European mass entertainment cinema and didn't irritate the maîtres of high art like before. Moreover, apart from being voluntarily borrowed, this "exemplary" formula of commercial cinema was now used ironically and parodically.

Secondly, it was due to economic stabilization and falling costs of film production that made the situation more favorable. The governments of many European countries supported national cinematography backing internal film distribution. Low-budget experimental cinema also received certain preferences. Liberation from commercial pressure increased author's independence. Since late 1950-s the phenomenon of "auteur" cinematography appeared in the cinematographic practice of Europe. In this case it was the director (not the producer like in the USA) who was responsible for a film. The main characteristics of such "auteur" ("indie") movies are as follows: orientation at problems, innovation of form, originality of film language and visual devices, appeal to personality, emphasized intellectualism, focus on film concept as opposed to the plot. It was noted that from that time it was the author's individuality, and not a trend pertaining to a certain country's cinematography, that shaped the cinema domain [7].

Finally, film process was determined by internal contradictions of globalizing Europe. On the one hand, commitment to the "Europe of regions" principle favored the development of national cinematographies. An effective mechanism of such support was the practice of film co-production by different European countries financed by special European bodies. Potential conditions were created for art cinema trying to bring explicit national traits to film

artistic solutions. However, active development of international co-production, as seen nowadays, brings national film schools "...to the average European quality level and, perhaps, to the loss of national individuality" [3, p.215]. Present-day cinema domain is already full of films tagged "euro puddings", which means that they "were patterned after successful western samples and have no nationality, no identity, and no trace of cultural authenticity" [8].

Another consequence of building the "Pan-European House" uniting different peoples and cultural values was the need of new uniformity. As a result, by the end of the 20th century a unified "European cinematographic model" (N. Samutina) was worked out aimed at the "European subject" and destined to demonstrate the basic values of the European community. It was formed primarily by the directors of auteur cinema. It must be said that, despite the individuality of cinematographic thinking, the totality of aesthetic principles of such films manages to escape the "country of origin" mark and national characteristics. A characteristic feature of such indie movies is their "essential non-nationality... as a film's ability to appeal to multi-national audience not as an ethnographic fact but as a fact of their own culture" [7]. Thus, after the unification of Europe, the uniqueness of separate cinematographies had to fit in the common cultural space.

What makes the situation ambiguous is that formation of pan-European cinema model leads not only beyond the borders of national specificity, but beyond the possible interests of a hypothetical "European subject". This direction is taken by a part of art cinema that avoids everyday social concretization and creates universal, "globally metaphorical", films. Neither objects, nor names, nor geography can be identified as specifically national in such films. But instead we become familiar with the

work of a director who managed to "carefully wrap eternal values into a radically relevant form" [1, p. 352] which is perfectly clear for not only European audience, but also American, Russian Asian or any other. Such films fit into the "panhuman" category and (along with pan-European and national models) confront globalized Hollywood products.

Thus, favorable film production conditions do not necessarily lead to the temptation of fixing the national specificity of artistic dimension. At the turn of 20th-21st centuries several trends were coexisting: pan-European film model, "globally metaphorical" works, globalized Hollywood production, and films adhering to national and cultural traditions.

Thus, self-determination of European cinematographies in the first half of the 20th century occurred under the conditions of forced balancing between economic interests and creative search, as well as in opposition to Hollywood standards aimed at unifying film language. As a result, the configuration of European cinema domain was formed by many film movements and national schools with such leaders as France, Germany and Italy.

Starting from the second half of the 20th century the viability of European national cinematographies was determined by such factors as freedom from the hegemony of Hollywood and rather favorable economic and industrial conditions for development of auteur cinema. National and cultural uniqueness was granted a chance to be featured in art films. At the same time, the contradictory "pan-European house" policy favoring the development of national cinematographies and provoking the formation of a trans-ethnical pan-European film model, gives birth to new kinds of uniformity. Under these conditions, the uniqueness of cinematographies faces many problems having to fit in the pan-European cultural space.

However, the described difficulties are not invincible obstacles on the way of film art development. Modern cinema manages to handle the contradictions of social and cultural reality, demonstrating a wide range of both universal and nationally unique films.

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Самоопределение европейских кинематографий:
основные проблемы и пути их преодоления

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Среди вызовов современной действительности, требующих осмысления и оперативных действий, особое место занимает проблема сохранения самобытности культур. Национально-культурная идентичность в условиях глобализирующегося мира оказывается под угрозой, что актуализирует исследования механизмов, обеспечивающих ее жизнеспособность. Миссию художественно-образного воплощения и утверждения культурной самобытности берет на себя кинематограф. Однако практика киноискусства показывает, что отстаивать национальные (институциональные, экономико-производственные и художественные) интересы приходится в достаточно жестких условиях. В основе содержания данной статьи попытка выявить факторы, затрудняющие либо обусловливающие комфортные возможности самоопределения кинематографий стран Европы. С этой целью рассматриваются основные этапы развития европейского кинопространства в контексте сложного противостояния унификационных тенденций и стремления к сохранению специфики национального кино. Итоги анализа кинопроцесса первой пол. XX в. (базирующегося на экономических приоритетах и голливудской гегемонии), а также противоречивых тенденций второй пол. XX в., вызванных социокультурными проблемами «Общеевропейского дома», позволяют указать на эффективность усилий самоопределения национальных кинематографий.

Ключевые слова: киноискусство, европейский кинематограф, кинопространство, национально-культурное самоопределение, культурная самобытность, унификация, киноязык, авторское кино, киноиндустрия.