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## The Management of Art in the Soviet Union<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The article examines the theory and practice of Soviet art management. The primary area of interest is cinematic art, although the aesthetic principles that governed film production also applied to the other artistic fields. Fundamental to an understanding of Soviet art management is the elucidation of Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the role of art as part of a society's superstructure, and the contrast defined by Soviet Marxist-Leninists between "socialist" art (i.e., that of Soviet society) and the art of bourgeois, capitalist social systems. Moreover, this piece also explores the systems utilized to manage Soviet art production—the control and censorship methods and the material incentives.

### Keywords

USSR, art, Marxism, socialist realism

The culture, politics, and economics of art in the Soviet system differed in fundamental ways from the Western capitalist, and especially American, practice of art. The Soviet system of art was part and parcel of the Bolshevik effort aimed at nothing less than the creation of a new human type: the New Soviet Man (*novyi sovetskii chelovek*). The world of art in the Soviet Union was fashioned according to the Marxist understanding that art is part of the superstructure of a society. This interpretation was diametrically opposed to traditional Western views concerning art. Ideas about art such as that featured over the roaring lion's head in the MGM logo, *Arts Gratia Artis* (or "Art for Art's Sake") were rejected out of hand in Soviet theory and practice.

Per the Soviet interpretation, art did not exist for its own sake, it did not express some abstract sense of beauty, nor did it serve the function of self-expression on the part of the artist. Rather, art in the USSR was subordinated to the goal of creating a

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socialist system in a backward country and was closely monitored and controlled by the ruling Communist Party. In that regard, art was no different from every other significant aspect of human life under Communism. In fact, the Soviet Union was called a “totalitarian” system, precisely because it aspired to the “total” control of every important human endeavor. Indeed, so thorough was the theoretical subordination of art to the Soviet agenda writ large that the artist was conceived of as realizing his full potential as human and artist only by creating art in accord with this ideological system.

Not coincidentally, to encounter such an understanding of art and the artist in the West, one has to hark back to the medieval, Christian world, where art was conceived of as serving the purpose of God and of God’s representative on earth, the Catholic Church. In fact, it has been suggested that Soviet management of the arts “represents the most extensive and longest-running cultural experiment in any major society since the Middle Ages [...]”<sup>2</sup> The connection between the sacred calling of Christian creeds and the secular vocation of Communism was made explicit (to the Communists’ advantage, of course) by Trotsky. “Let the parsons of all religious creeds keep telling us,” he stated in one of his speeches, “of a paradise in a world to come; we declare that we want to create a real paradise on this earth for the human race. We must not lose sight, even for a moment, of this great ideal; it is the highest aim towards which humanity has ever striven, and in it all that is most beautiful and noble in the old faiths is united and embodied.”<sup>3</sup> In the temple of history and under the cult of Marxism, an earthly realization of paradise was to be realized in the Soviet Union under the tutelage and direction of the Communist party. And art had its role to play in this terrestrial fulfillment of the Judeo-Christian vision of a realm of perfect happiness.

As was true of so many aspects of the Soviet system, fundamentals present in Marx’s writings were adopted by Lenin and presented in polemical form. Later, the final structure would be established by Stalin. Subsequently, the terroristic aspects of Stalinism would be ameliorated, but the principles and machinery of party control over art would last till the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

The purpose of this article is to examine the theory and practice of Soviet aesthetics, at least as far as those aesthetics manifested themselves in officially approved and supported art. The primary area of interest is cinematic art, although the aesthetic principles that governed film production also applied to the other artistic fields. Fundamental to an understanding of Soviet art management is the elucidation of Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the role of art as part of a society’s superstructure, and the contrast defined by Soviet Marxist-Leninists between “socialist” art (i.e., that of Soviet society) and the art of bourgeois, capitalist social systems. Finally, this

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<sup>2</sup> John and Carol Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers’ Union* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), xii (henceforth, Garrards, *Inside the Writers’ Union*). The Garrards are referring only to the Writers’ Union, but their statement can be generalized to apply to all the arts under the Soviets.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Rene Fuegoop-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism: An Examination of Cultural Life in Soviet Russia* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965 [orig. German ed. 1926]), 75.

piece will also explore the systems utilized to manage Soviet art production—the control and censorship methods and the material incentives.

### **Lenin's ideas and Stalin's institutionalization**

One of the strengths of Marxism is the fact that it provides an integrated, systemic understanding of human existence. Marxism is sometimes referred to as “economic materialism.” In essence, this means that man is a material being with no spiritual aspect and that the defining feature of any society is its economic system. According to Marx, one's nature was determined by one's relationship to the “means of production,” for example, farmland and factories. In a famous passage, he stated that, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, Marxists maintain that members of different social classes have different natures and that human nature changes over time, as economic life evolves. Whatever the system of economic relations, though, the propertied classes always seek to defend their dominant position by means of politics and the repressive power of military and police forces. On the foundation of these basic relations, sophisticated legal, intellectual, and cultural frameworks—known in Marxist terminology as the “superstructure”—are erected, which also reflect the interests and values of the dominant economic class. Hence, law is not objective, nor is justice “blind” in the Marxist view of things.<sup>5</sup> Rather, both serve to protect and preserve the position of the elite class.<sup>6</sup>

This same sense that all aspects of human existence are linked to the economic system and are connected with the attempt by the dominant to serve their class interests informs the Marxist theory of art. As a result, Marxists maintain that there is no such thing as “art for art's sake.” Rather, those who claim to be inspired by that sentiment are either cynically or unwittingly seeking to reinforce the class domination of the elite. For example, by presenting art as a refined taste beyond the ken of the masses, they affirm the right of the elite to their privileged positions.

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx, “Preface” to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [1859] in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 4.

<sup>5</sup> A parody of the Marxist integrated, economic materialist interpretation in action was the phrase commonly encountered in Soviet publications, “eto ne sluchaino” (“it is not accidental”). This stock phrase simplified Soviet argumentation by attributing self-interest and invidious intent to any opponent, while allowing the writer to avoid explaining and demonstrating the specific working of this self-interest. The Soviet population reacted with skepticism to this one-dimensional argumentation and vilification of the capitalist West. A Soviet joke of the Brezhnev era had it that “under capitalism, man exploits man. Under socialism, it is the other way around.”

<sup>6</sup> For an extreme statement of this point of view, see Andrei Zhdanov's 1934 speech at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in H. G. Scott, ed., *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress* (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1981 [1935]), 21. He stated that, “Our Soviet literature is not afraid of the charge of being ‘tendentious.’ Yes, Soviet literature is tendentious, for in an epoch of class struggle there is not and cannot be a literature which is not class literature, not tendentious, allegedly non-political. And I think that every one of our Soviet writers can say to any dull-witted bourgeois, to any philistine, to any bourgeois writer who may talk about our literature being tendentious: ‘Yes, our Soviet literature is tendentious, and we are proud of this fact, because the aim of our tendency is to liberate the toilers, to free all mankind from the yoke of capitalist slavery.’”

Here, the “objective” message is clear: the rich are not like us, they are better. Neither can art be a pure expression of an individual need for self-expression. Like everything else in a Marxist-defined system, art must represent class values, be rooted in class-defined existence. An instance of this is the common Marxist interpretation of religious art in the Middle Ages. The Catholic Church was one of the great landowners of Western Europe and many high Church offices were occupied by junior members of noble families, so the Church worked hand in mailed glove with the aristocratic elite. Enjoying a monopoly on high culture, the Church produced a religious art that justified the social and political structures as divinely ordained (for example, the idea of the divine right of kings) and that deflected discontent on the part of the lower classes by promising them a reward in the next life for suffering in this one. This latter point is what Marx meant by his famous assertion that religion “is the opium of the people.”<sup>7</sup> ‘Whose art is it?’ is the fundamental question of Marxist aesthetics.

Lenin’s great innovation was the creation of the single-party state, an extremely important development for the political history of the twentieth century and one whose impact can still be felt today (for example, the Ba’ath party in Syria and the Communist party in China). Paraphrasing Archimedes’ famous statement that with a long enough lever he could lift the earth, Lenin said that with a strong enough party he would overturn the Russian political world. Hence, it is not surprising that his most influential writing on art discussed the relationship between his party and art. This came in his 1905 article, “Party Organization and Party Literature.”<sup>8</sup> Lenin was, among other things, a great political tactician. This article was written late in that year of revolution, when the forces aligned against the tsarist government were in retreat. The revolutionary upheavals had, however, produced changes—most notably some civil and political rights and the introduction of a Russian parliament into what had been a purely autocratic political system. Because of the altered circumstances, the censorship rules would be changed. Whereas previously the emphasis was on underground literature, the new dispensations meant that the party’s attitude toward literature—and, by extension, all the arts—had to be defined. This Lenin set out to do in “Party Organization and Party Literature.”

The most important thing to understand about the Leninist theory of art and literature is that, in its intolerance for market forces and popular tastes, it fit snugly in one of the most important nineteenth-century Russian aesthetic traditions. Classical Marxists in general neither comprehend nor trust the market, so the idea that art should compete in a marketplace of ideas and taste for the public attention

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<sup>7</sup> “Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest for their real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, [...] It is the opium of the people.” First published in the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*. It was written as an introduction to an unfinished manuscript on Hegel’s book. Karl Marx, “Introduction” in *Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* in David McClellan, ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977): 63.

<sup>8</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Party Organization and Party Literature,” *Novaia zhizn’*, No. 12 (November 13, 1905). Here cited from the Marxist Internet Archive. Accessed 5 April 2005 at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/nov/13.htm>.

is anathema to them. This orientation to art and to the people was also that of the Russian intelligentsia<sup>9</sup> and can be said to have been the dominant aesthetic theory from the nineteenth century till the fall of the Communist system in 1991.<sup>10</sup>

In this narrow sense, there was little difference between the aesthetic agenda of the Russian liberals and that of the Bolsheviks. Neither considered the people capable of making their own choices concerning art and literature. Where they differed is in the type of literature and art they thought should be made available to the people. The Russian Populist theorist of the nineteenth century, Petr Lavrov, captured wonderfully the intelligentsia's self-image, when he trumpeted the role of the "critically thinking individual." Paraphrasing a passage from the Gospels, he reflected the elevated sense of calling and exaggerated self-conception of the intelligentsia, writing that "Just as not everyone that saith unto me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, not every educated person can become a member of the group of critically thinking individuals..."<sup>11</sup> The "new man" of the revolutionary underground in many ways prefigured the later ideal of the New Soviet Individual developed by Lenin and his party. Similarly, Lenin's view of the role of literature and art was consistent with the radical intelligentsia's narrowly elitist and deeply politicized aesthetic.

For Lenin, then, not abstract ideas of beauty, nor individual self-expression, nor popular interest should characterize the Bolshevik<sup>12</sup> attitude toward art. Rather, "[i]n

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<sup>9</sup> The term intelligentsia is generally taken to mean that portion of the educated population that stands in opposition to the existing government and system. The existence of such a class or layer of people within a system is a sign of economic and social underdevelopment, because they stand in isolation from both the people as a whole and the government. The oppositional intelligentsia had a long history in Russia, dating from the late eighteenth century. The revolutionary movement, of which Lenin's party was only a minor party before their seizure of power in 1917, was a branch or subset of the intelligentsia as a whole. There is a vast literature. Some representative titles in English are: Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia; the Eighteenth-century Nobility* ([1st ed.] New York, Harcourt, Brace & World [1966]); Richard Pipes, ed., *The Russian Intelligentsia* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1961); V. M. Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: the Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Stuart Finkel, *On the Ideological Front: the Russian Intelligentsia and the Making of the Soviet Public Sphere* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2007); Masha Gessen, *Dead Again: the Russian Intelligentsia after Communism* (London; New York: Verso, 1997); *Landmarks: a Collection of Essays on the Russian Intelligentsia, 1909* (New York: Karz Howard, 1977); Jane Burbank, *Intelligentsia and Revolution: Russian Views of Bolshevism, 1917-1922* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Philip Pomper, *The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: H. Davidson, [1986] c1970); George Fischer, *Russian Liberalism, from Gentry to Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1958); Jonathan Frankel, *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews* (Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2009)

<sup>10</sup> On this, see Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> Cited in George Farraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers: The Struggle for Artistic Autonomy and the Fall of the Soviet Film Industry* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2000), 28.

<sup>12</sup> The official name of Lenin's party was the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik). He himself had dubbed his group the Bolsheviks, or men of the majority, during an intra-party dispute in 1903. Until around 1912, clear lines of separation did not develop between the Bolsheviks and the other group, who passively accepted Lenin's designation of them as Mensheviks (men of the minority). In 1918, Lenin renamed his party the Communist party, because European



contradistinction to bourgeois customs, to the profit-making, commercialized bourgeois press, to bourgeois literary careerism and individualism, ‘aristocratic anarchism’ and drive for profit, the socialist proletariat must put forward the principle of party literature, must develop this principle and put it into practice as fully and completely as possible.”<sup>13</sup> With characteristic intensity and vitriol, Lenin addresses the principle of party literature:

It is not simply that, for the socialist proletariat, literature cannot be a means of enriching individuals or groups: it cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking, independent of the common cause of the proletariat. Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, “a cog and a screw” of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class.

Lenin scornfully dismisses objections about the violation of free speech and artistic independence as false, bourgeois concepts, alien to the true freedom of party literature. He rails against “bourgeois individualists” whose cant about absolute freedom is “sheer hypocrisy.” For,

[t]here can be no real and effective “freedom” in a society based on the power of money, in a society in which the masses of working people live in poverty and the handful of rich live like parasites. . . . This absolute freedom is a bourgeois [...] phrase [...] One cannot live in society and be free from society. The freedom of the bourgeois writer, artist or actress is simply masked (or hypocritically masked) dependence on the money-bag, on corruption, on prostitution [...].

While asserting that he recognizes that literature cannot be mechanically constructed and produced and that there must be greater latitude for individual initiative than in other areas, he insists that

literature must . . . become an element of Social-Democratic Party work, inseparably bound up with the other elements. Newspapers must become the organs of the various party organizations, and their writers must by all means become members of these organizations. Publishing and distributing centers, bookshops and reading-rooms, libraries and similar establishments must all be under party control. The organized socialist proletariat must keep an eye

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Social Democratic parties had supported their nations’ war efforts during the First World War. It is common to refer to Lenin’s party somewhat interchangeably as either the Bolsheviks or the Communists, though, strictly speaking, before 1912 it is misleading and after 1918 it is incorrect.

<sup>13</sup> This and the following citations come from V. I. Lenin, “Party Organization and Party Literature,” *Novaia zhizn’*, No. 12 (November 13, 1905). Accessed 5 April 2005 at the Marxist Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/nov/13.htm>. English spelling has been changed to reflect American usage.

on all this work, supervise it in its entirety, and . . . infuse into it the life-stream of the living proletarian cause [...].

In typical Leninist fashion, he contends that the end will not only justify, but will also purify, the means, because this literature will:

be a free literature, because the idea of socialism and sympathy with the working people, and not greed or careerism, will bring ever new forces to its ranks [...] because it will serve, not some satiated heroine, not the bored “upper ten thousand” . . ., but the . . . tens of millions of working people—the flower of the country, its strength and its future. It will be a free literature, enriching the last word in the revolutionary thought of mankind with the experience and living work of the socialist proletariat [...].

It must be observed that here Lenin is addressing only party literature, because in 1905 he had no control over what others wrote, published, or read. However, when the Bolsheviks took power in 1917, he had no qualms about muzzling and eviscerating all non-party literature. Printing presses and the paper supply were nationalized, opposition writers were arrested, harassed, exiled and even executed, and private (read, non-party) expression of ideas was eliminated. Trotsky defended the Communist approach to literature and the arts. Writing after the Bolshevik consolidation of power, he urged a certain flexibility as regards the arts, but resoundingly confirmed the Marxist-Leninist line. Asking rhetorically whether the party has the right to impose censorship and “a class standard,” he answers unequivocally that:

Of course it does [...]. If the revolution has the right to destroy bridges and art monuments whenever necessary, it will stop still less from laying its hand on any tendency in art which, no matter how great its achievement in form, threatens to disintegrate the revolutionary environment or to arouse the internal forces of the revolution, that is, the proletariat, the peasantry and the intelligentsia, to a hostile opposition to one another. Our standard is, clearly, political, imperative and intolerant.<sup>14</sup>

There were limits to what could be done in the context of the 1920s, so some non-party material circulated in that decade. Something similar occurred in the 1980s during Gorbachev’s *glasnost*’ era. For the bulk of Soviet history, however, from the imposition of Stalinist controls almost to the very end of the Soviet Union, the Leninist idea that literature and art, like every other aspect of human existence, should be controlled and directed by the party for the people’s own good remained the governing principle of Communist aesthetics.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 220-221.

<sup>15</sup> Here we need to note that totalitarian theory and practice diverge. The domestication of artists under the Soviet system did not mean that artists obeyed implicitly every direction from above. During the era of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, for example, from August 1939 until the invasion of the

It fell to Josef Stalin, then, to institutionalize the controls articulated and advocated by Lenin. It is true that Lenin did not exercise as direct a control over artists and writers as did Stalin. But Lenin's legacy is a bit like the Bible. Wildly different systems of belief and behavior can be established that claim Leninist parentage. It is at least fair to assert that most Stalinist institutional systems and practices had some precedent in Leninist theory and practice. Lenin fell victim to strokes and was incapacitated from about 1922 till his death in January 1924. Full-scale Communist coordination of the arts was put off, while the Leninist succession was decided. By the time of Stalin's fiftieth birthday in 1929, he had emerged as the undisputed leader of the Communist party and as the "Lenin of today."<sup>16</sup>

The bulk of the 1920s was a time out of time, when cultural pluralism co-existed with spasmodic efforts at establishing a cultural orthodoxy, which would then make possible the persecution of practitioners of cultural heterodoxy (or cultural heresy, as it were). During an era of cultural revolution beginning in 1929, Stalin utilized the cultural radicals who wanted to root out all non-proletarian art as a cudgel with which to batter the cultural intelligentsia into submission. Once that task had been accomplished, he reined in the radicals, dismantling or gutting the institutional bases of their cultural authority before establishing a Stalinist aesthetic orthodoxy.

The final solution of these issues resulted in an art world that served the purposes of the Stalinist construction of a new, totalitarian and imperial order. The effervescent experimentation of the 1920s gave way to rigid conformity in the '30s. This was accomplished by means of terror in the first instance. At the same time, though, a new aesthetic was formulated and an institutional structure for the arts was created. While random terror disappeared with Stalin's death in 1953, the power of the secret police and the threat of the prison camps remained until the Soviet system began to dismantle under Gorbachev.<sup>17</sup> The aesthetic system stayed in place to the bitter end, although it had lost most of its force well before the final collapse of the USSR. What remained effective right up to the end was the institutional

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USSR by the Germans in June 1941, the official line was friendship and cooperation with Hitler and the Nazis. Few artists responded to this orientation, resisting almost by passive disobedience such directives. In addition, especially after Stalin's death, other artists and writers either wrote for the "desk drawer" (i.e., without any hope or intent of publication) or, like the later "guitar poets" even wrote and performed oppositional pieces in unofficial performances. It is a mistake to think that any system has exercised complete "totalitarian" control over its population. It is also a mistake, however, to ignore the totalizing aspirations of the Communist system.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, Stalin turned fifty in 1928, but he gave his birthday as 1879, and for all those who knew who celebrated his fiftieth birthday in 1929 that was accurate. See the recent study by Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 26.

<sup>17</sup> The camp system was known as the GULag, an acronym for Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerey, or the Main Administration of the Camps (from the German, *Lager*, as in Stalag). Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn dubbed the network of camps sprinkled across the vast expanse of the USSR the Gulag Archipelago. Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*. 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974-1978). The formal agency, GULag, was closed under Khrushchev, but forced labor camps for prisoners, including politicals, existed till practically the end of the Soviet Union.



structure for the production of art and the rewarding of artists, as so designated by the state.

As has been indicated, the Bolsheviks began to control literature—in this case, party literature—even before they came to power. After the 1917 Revolution and especially after their victory in the Civil War, they extended their control as far as possible under the conditions prevailing during the “breathing space” that lasted until Stalin began to consolidate power in the late '20s. Already in 1922, the main censorship office Glavlit was established.<sup>18</sup> Later that decade, in 1928, the “decisive event in the history of the film industry” occurred—a conference at which the foundation principles of Soviet film were established.<sup>19</sup> One of the most important ideas put forth was that of “movies for the millions”: that is, film had to be accessible to the masses of the population. Accessibility by itself was not enough, though, because movies had an educative function to perform. Rejecting the idea that popular tastes, or what we might call market forces, be allowed to determine what movies were made, the head of the Party’s Agitprop Department (*Otdel agitatsii i propagandy*) declared:

Soviet cinema must not follow in the wake of the audience, but must move ahead of it; it must lead the audience, support the beginnings in it of the new man, instill into it new views, tastes, habits which correspond to the task of the socialist reconstruction of the whole of society. In this we can see the striking difference between the Soviet cinema and the bourgeois cinema which, in its relationship to its audience, indulges and supports in its views, tastes and attitudes that are reactionary, anti-Revolutionary, directed against the interests of the workers, and are cultivated by capitalism in its own interests.<sup>20</sup>

The final resolution of the conference stated that:

The feature film should become an instrument of communist education and agitation and a weapon of the Party in the education and organization of the masses around the basic tasks in the period of building socialism (industrialization, rationalization of production, collectivization of

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<sup>18</sup> Its full name was the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs (*Glavnoe upravlenie po delam literatury i izdatel'stv*). It was commonly known by the shorthand Glavlit, a name that continued in usage even after the official name had been changed.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Kenez, *Film and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge, UK; New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 103.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Richard Taylor, ed., *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 207. The Department of Agitation and Propaganda was an institution designed to carry the message of an elite party to the masses. In Western political terms, it performed some of the functions of a press office of the national committee of a political party, as well as that party’s educational outreach to voters. It is perhaps interesting to note in this context the institution of the Roman Catholic Church known as the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, although the function of that institution is merely to raise money and support Catholic missionary activity,

agriculture, resolution of the problems of cultural revolution, struggle against bureaucratism, enlivening the work of the soviets, strengthening the military potential of the country, problems of the international revolutionary movement in the West and in the East).<sup>21</sup>

These organizational and ideological developments found their full expression in 1932, when Soviet “creative unions” (*tvorcheskie soiuzy*) were established. As a result of a decree of the Communist Party Central Committee “On the Restructuring of Literary and Artistic Organizations” (“*O perestroike literaturno-khudozhestvennykh organizatsii*”) the Writers’ Union, Composers’ Union and Architects’ Union were formed.<sup>22</sup> Subsequently, the Artists’ Union (1957), Journalists’ Union (1959), Cinematographers’ Union (1965), Theatrical Workers’ Union (1986), and Designers’ Union (1987) were established. These were not unions in the Western sense of the word. In other words, they were not independent entities promoting the interests of their members. Rather, they were organizational mechanisms for the control and direction of art along approved channels. By the mid-1960s, “writers, literary critics, and scholars, translators, architects, composers, music historians and critics, artists, art historians and critics, and people working in journalism and film” were encompassed in these organizations, which “in one way or another touch[ed] the lives and creative activities of the vast majority of the creative intelligentsia.”<sup>23</sup> Throughout the history of the Soviet Union, the creative unions retained “their primary function as a means of controlling the cultural community and subordinating the creative intelligentsia to the ideological demands and bureaucratic structure of the Party [...]”<sup>24</sup>

As a result of these developments, the artistic intelligentsia had a function (the creation of a socialist society and a new man) and an organization (the relevant creative union). What they lacked was an “esthetic” a definition of what should be considered “beautiful” or “artistic.” This was provided in the doctrine of Socialist Realism. Although the term Socialist Realism was in use by 1932, its meaning was defined at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. The clearest statement of Socialist Realism came from that Congress, which defined it as:

the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism, [which] demands from the artist the truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time, truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the

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<sup>21</sup> Cited in Kenez, *Film and Soviet Society*, p. 104.

<sup>22</sup> Robert H. McNeal, ed., *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. vol. 3, The Stalin Years: 1929-1953* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 115-116 .

<sup>23</sup> Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, “Perestroika and the Soviet Creative Unions,” in John O. Norman, ed., *New Perspectives on Russian and Soviet Artistic Culture: Selected Papers from the Fourth World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Harrogate, 1990* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 131.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

task of ideologically remolding and educating the working people in the spirit of socialism.<sup>25</sup>

Subsequently, three elements added more specific requirements to this rather abstract definition. Art must have *ideinost'* (ideological correctness), *partiinost'* (proper party spirit), and *narodnost'* (accessibility to the masses). The similarity of this triad to the components of tsarist ideology known as Official Nationality—Orthodoxy (Russian Orthodox Christianity), Autocracy, and Nationality—have been noted often.

Socialist Realism has been characterized somewhat neutrally, as “an esthetic based on ‘the socialist conception of the world and of man during the era of establishment and foundation of socialist society.’”<sup>26</sup> Others have been less kind. In a recent textbook written by noted Russian historians, this process has been described as an attempt by the Communist party “to drive all of the multifaceted literary forms into the Procrustean bed of ‘socialist realism.’”<sup>27</sup> Albert Camus acidly remarked that Socialist Realist art becomes socialist “only to the extent that it ceases to be realist.”<sup>28</sup> Another scholar noted that Socialist Realism “dictated far more than the form of an artistic work; in addition, socialist realism strove to control how an artist worked and how an audience received and perceived any work of art [...]. Consequently, socialist realism was realized as a totalizing system that would inculcate Soviet citizens into the new ideological system [...].”<sup>29</sup>

Certain caveats need to be registered. First of all, the whole system worked according to special rules under Stalin. He not only served as “first censor,” viewing and approving every film released in the Soviet Union, for example, but his terror apparatus put those who fell afoul of his tastes or moods into either the Gulag, a grave, or both. Circumstances were especially bad for writers, since Soviets and particularly Stalin gave precedence to the written word. Artists of all kinds were in particularly dire straits under Stalin, because “socialist realism was normative, but only negatively so: it gave practical instructions on what could not be done, but its positive applications and its theorizing [...] remained highly nebulous.”<sup>30</sup> The system remained capricious and subject to abrupt changes, but, as one writer noted about Khrushchev, he “was very contradictory and whimsical. We never knew what would happen the next day. In this he was like Stalin. But with the one existential and very important difference: we knew that whatever happened, it would *not* be arrest and

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<sup>25</sup> Cited Cynthia A. Ruder, s.v. “Socialist Realism,” in James R. Millar, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Russian History*, vol. 4 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 1418.

<sup>26</sup> Cited by B. A. Blois, s.v. “Socialist Realism,” in Joseph L. Wiczynski, ed., *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, vol. 36 (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1984), 91.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander A. Danilov, et al., *The History of Russia: The Twentieth Century*; trans. Galina Ustinova and Vincent E. Hammond, ed. Vincent E. Hammond (n.p.: The Heron Press, 1996), 184.

<sup>28</sup> Cited by B. A. Blois, s.v. “Socialist Realism,” 92.

<sup>29</sup> Cited Cynthia A. Ruder, s.v. “Socialist Realism,” 1416.

<sup>30</sup> Leonid Heller, “A World of Prettiness: Socialist Realism and Its Aesthetic Categories,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* vol. 94, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 697-698.

death.”<sup>31</sup> Only under Stalin was arrest and death part of a “cultural pogrom” such as that which occurred in the realm of jazz in post-World War II Russia, when authorities even went so far as to confiscate saxophones, as “the American instrument.”<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, even Stalin did not have his way completely, as, for example, in the resistance Soviet artists exhibited to participating in the love fest toward Hitler’s Germany dictated from above during the life span of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. And finally, it has to be noted that Soviet artists did not have to be forced to accept an instrumentalist aesthetic like Socialist Realism. As has been said above, an important component of the Russian artistic world was used to view art as subordinate to political and social goals from the first half of the nineteenth century. In a famous exchange in the late 1840s, the literary critic Vissarion Belinskii took the great Russo-Ukrainian novelist Nikolai Gogol to task for insufficient political correctness. Belinskii noted that Russia “is always ready to forgive a writer a bad book, but it will never forgive a harmful book.”<sup>33</sup> The artistic world did not have in mind Stalin’s particular aesthetic, and they certainly did not desire a system that purged them so violently (though they were not always as squeamish about its application to their artistic opponents). But artists did not have to be driven kicking and screaming into this utilitarian aesthetic. Stalinist Socialist Realism was a particularly narrow and coercive variant of the role of art that they already embraced.

Post-World War II Stalinism was a most repressive time for artistic culture, not unlike that of Emperor Nikolai I after the 1848 revolutions in Europe. Led by Stalin’s henchman, Andrei Zhdanov, and hence known as the *zhdanovshchina*,<sup>34</sup> post-war Stalinist cultural policy was hyper-xenophobic. This was an era of claims of Soviet or Russian preeminence in all fields so extreme that people joked “Soviet watches are the fastest in the world.”<sup>35</sup> Soviet ‘firsts’ asserted at this time included, “inventions in the fields of radio, electric lighting, the electric transformer, electrical transmission with direct and alternating current, electric-powered and diesel-powered ships, the airplane, the parachute, and the stratoplane.”<sup>36</sup> At this time, the fraudulent genetics of Trofim Lysenko (pre-Darwinian genetics based on the false premise that acquired traits are transmitted) led to disastrous attempts to grow

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<sup>31</sup> Cited in Garrards, *Inside the Writers’ Union*, 78, from a personal interview with Shimon Markish. This non-lethal arbitrariness led to ludicrous situations. In a fit, Khrushchev once dissolved the Party organizations in the Writers’ Union. All the Party members had to join the nearest Party organization, which turned out to be in the Moscow zoo! See *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Richard Stites, “The Ways of Russian Popular Music to 1953,” in Neil Edmunds, ed., *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin: The Baton and the Sickle* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 29.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in George Gibian, ed., *The Portable Nineteenth-Century Russian Reader* (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1993): 239 from Vissarion Belinsky’s “Letter to Gogol.”

<sup>34</sup> Zhdanov died in August of 1948, but the cultural repression lasted until Stalin’s demise five years later.

<sup>35</sup> Mikhail Heller and Aleksander Nekrich, *Utopia in Power*, trans. Phyllis B. Carlos (New York: Summit Books, 1986 [1982]), 485.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 484-485.

unsuitable crops, like corn, in the Soviet Union's northerly, continental climes. Lysenko promoted a process called "vernalization," by which soaking seeds in warm water would induce more rapid germination, making up for the USSR's shorter growing season.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, after having defeated the racist Nazis, Stalin became more—or, at least, more openly—anti-Semitic, and an attack was launched on "rootless cosmopolitans," a code name for Jews. The brilliant satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko and the extraordinarily evocative poet Anna Akhmatova were verbally abused and booted out of the Writers' Union.<sup>38</sup>

A good example of the heightened control was the film industry. These studios were stripped of the right to conclude their own contracts with writers. The Ministry of Cinema now required that any organization experiencing the slightest point of tangent with the subject of a film whether "the Young Communist League, or the Ministries of Education and Defense, had to approve its script, and they continued to safeguard the interests of their constituencies in post-production screenings."<sup>39</sup> But the smothering cultural control of this era can be seen in the fact that even *The Conveyor-Belt of Death*, a film by the compliant director, Ivan Pyrev, went through fourteen remakes before it was allowed to be released.<sup>40</sup> Censorship and supervision were so stifling, and the penalties for mistakes so severe, that only nine films were made in 1951. At a time when saxophones were confiscated and the popular Jewish actor Solomon Mikhoels was killed in a car crash staged by the secret police, artists kept their heads down and tried to stay off the ridge line.

### Post-Stalinist management

Things changed in a fundamental way after the death of Stalin in March 1953. Probably no one among the possible successors was as pathologically vindictive and paranoid as Stalin. However that may be, the collective leadership acted in such a way as to make it impossible for anyone to use the terror apparatus against the Party again. Once they had defanged the NKVD (the secret police), by arresting and killing Lavrentii Beria and most of his henchmen, the Party elite could not apply terror to the general public in quite the same way as Stalin. Another way to put it is that they could not apply random terror to the Soviet populace and not run the risk that the terror apparatus would be utilized against them, too. Therefore, they had no choice but to deconstruct significant aspects of the Stalinist system.

What Nikita Khrushchev managed to do with his famous 1954 "Secret Speech" to the Party Central Committee was to delineate a "good" and a "bad" Stalin. The

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<sup>37</sup> There is an extensive literature on Lysenko and Soviet science. See Zhores A. Medvedev, *The Rise and Fall of T. D. Lysenko*, trans. I. Michael Lerner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); David Joravsky, *The Lysenko Affair* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); Alexander Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); and Valerii Soyfer, *Lysenko and the Tragedy of Soviet Science*, trans. Leo Gruliov and Rebecca Gruliov (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 412-413.

<sup>39</sup> Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2000), 4.

<sup>40</sup> Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 54.



“good” Stalin was the leader who won approval in the 1920s and who led the drives to collectivize agriculture (in which millions of peasants died) and to industrialize the country (leading to a startling decline in living standards). The “bad” Stalin was he of the “cult of personality”—the gross adulation and brutal, dictatorial rule that comprised over half of Soviet history in 1954—and of the poor leadership in World War II that caused so much death and destruction in the Soviet Union. This balancing act did not come off without a hitch, as the uprisings in East Germany, Poland, and Hungary demonstrated. It did, however, allow the leadership to disown the worst parts of the Stalinist legacy, while holding on to both power and the instruments thereof. One of those instruments was a controlled and directed artistic establishment.

When the dust had settled in the Soviet house of culture after Stalin’s death, a Soviet artistic order was in place that would endure with minor variations until 1991. In that artistic order, the central leaders of the Communist Party remained preeminent. They could and did dictate changes in art, when they so desired. Anyone attempting to present ideas deemed unacceptable or overtly hostile was warned off and then punished for persistence. When the cultural climate got too lax for their taste, the leadership sent sharp and unmistakable signals to the artistic subculture. For the most part, though, the leadership was comfortable with the system in place and the artistic products it generated. Their comfort level reflected both a mellowed, middle-aged Communist aesthetic that was much less aggressive in terms of creating new people in a new society and an artistic community that, enjoying certain privileges and benefits within the current system, eschewed dissent. In sum, art was controlled from 1953 on by *knut i priianik* (the whip and the gingerbread), the Russian equivalent of the carrot and the stick.<sup>41</sup>

The period from Stalin’s death to a partial recrudescence of Stalinism under Brezhnev in the mid- to late 1960s is generally known as “the Khrushchevian Thaw,” or *Khrushchevskaiia ottepel’*, based on the title of a novel by Ilya Ehrenburg. In fact, while overall cultural control eased, conflicting currents swirled during this era, for example, the attacks on Boris Pasternak, who was forced to turn down the Noble Prize for Literature he won in 1958, after his work *Doctor Zhivago* had been published in the West. The tension produced by the scurrilous attacks on him probably contributed to Pasternak’s premature death in 1960. The KGB could be a bitter and dogged foe. Shortly after Pasternak’s burial, his lover Olga Ivinskaiia and her daughter were “convicted of currency speculation and were sentenced to eight and five years, respectively, in a labour camp.”<sup>42</sup> Yet just a year later, Nikita Khrushchev would personally intervene to get in print Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s work *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the story of an average day in the life of a *zek*, or political prisoner in the Gulag.

Hence, it is dangerous too be overly sweeping in one’s generalizations. Nonetheless, there was a cultural easing after Stalin. In particular, the cult of the leader and the

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<sup>41</sup> Garrards, *Inside the Writers’ Union*, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Woll, *Real Images*, 104.

unwavering triumphalism of the imperial art of high Stalinism gave way to more human-scaled representations that allowed for the expression of genuine emotions, if still in carefully hedged ways. Even these small relaxations enabled Soviet artists to produce work that was well received by international audiences, such as the late 1950s' films, *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957) and *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959). At the Cannes Film Festival, *Cranes* garnered the *Palme d'Or* in 1958, and *Ballad* won a Special Jury Prize in 1960 (it was also nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film). In the same year that *Ballad* was drawing international approval, the preeminent Soviet composer, Dmitri Shostakovich, joined the Communist Party. Although he was heavily pressured into joining, the fact that the Party leadership wanted him in was a clear sign of cultural mellowing. In the 1930s, he had been bitterly attacked for his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, and attacks were renewed during the *zhdanovshchina* over his "formalism."

A new frost would strike from 1965 on, when the anti-Soviet activity clause (Article 70 of the Criminal Code) was used to send two well-known writers, Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel, to the Gulag for publishing their works in the West. This was followed by other arrests and trials, including those of Ukrainian activists, by the campaign against Solzhenitsyn, and by the forcing out of Aleksandr Tvardovskii, the reformist-minded editor-in-chief of the important literary journal *Novyi Mir*.<sup>43</sup> This rather more liberal use of the *knut* on the artistic world by the leadership of the Communist party marked a real tightening of the reins of cultural policy, but it in no way indicated a return to Stalinism. Rather, it was a marking of the permissible perimeter of Soviet artistic freedom, while within that ambit artists were free to practice their craft.

Under Brezhnev the final dispensation of Soviet cultural control was worked out. That this represented a culmination of governmental practices is fairly obvious. What is less self-evident is the fact that this also marked the last stage in the evolution of the Soviet artistic community, as well. It is a mistake to overestimate the degree of control exercised by the government, to think that the authorities could get any art produced that they dictated. Josephine Woll is undoubtedly correct when she asserts that "unless Party directives coincided with what film-makers wanted to do, and even with what viewers wanted to see, those directives bore little fruit."<sup>44</sup>

It is also misleading, however, to assume that Soviet artists were not willing to participate in this controlled artistic set up, especially in the post-Stalinist decades. If late Soviet artistic control represented the tandem working of the *knut i prianik*, Western scholarship and Western mindsets make it easier to detect the ugly red weals left after the exercise of the *knut*, than it is to notice the bright eyes and broad smiles elicited by the distribution of *prianik*. In effect, Soviet artists had assimilated the negative lessons of cultural crackdowns. They enjoyed the relative cultural

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<sup>43</sup> Birgit Beumers, "The 'Thaw' and After, 1953-1986," in Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky, eds. *A History of the Russian Theatre* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 371.

<sup>44</sup> Woll, *Real Images*, 21.

permissiveness of the Khrushchev era, but once the choke-collar had been yanked tight in the half decade from 1965 to 1970, they heeled again quite readily. This responsiveness to cultural control from above was all the easier to effect, however, because of the privileged position accepted artists enjoyed within the Soviet system.

The best examples of the Soviet control system come in the realms of film and literature. In fact, they can both be considered instances of literary censorship, since the Soviet leaders were so logocentric: word-oriented. The novelist Vasilii Aksionov remarked on the Soviet leadership's paranoia of the written word, noting that they "are so afraid of books; they exaggerate terribly the importance of books. They fear that a writer will instigate an uprising."<sup>45</sup> Like the Catholic Church, the Soviet censorship organization maintained its own index of taboo subjects, individuals, and works, known sarcastically as the "Talmud." Quirkily, filmmakers enjoyed relative freedom, because of Soviet over-concentration on the "iron script." *Sovetskoe kino*, one of the most important periodicals of the centralized film industry asserted in 1933, "It is the scenario which gives the director material whose ideological quality determines the political correctness and artistic convincingness of the film."<sup>46</sup>

It has been remarked that one of the greatest of Soviet directors, Andrei Tarkovskii, known for his profound, evocative, and distinctly un-Soviet films, such as *Andrei Rublev*, more or less constantly reconceptualized and changed his works during filming. This directorial approach was possible, because "remarkably little supervision was provided either by the studio or by Goskino. No one from Goskino was present to make certain that the director shot what was approved in the script."<sup>47</sup> Ironically enough, these profoundly atheistic men accepted the validity of the Biblical saying, "In the beginning was the word."

In the case of film, at the top stood Communist Party and Soviet governmental supervision. The Central Committee of the party had an office that supervised film: until 1960 the Department of Agitation and Propaganda and after that the Department of Culture.<sup>48</sup> Within that Department, the Film Section, or *Sektor Kino*, housed the personnel who rode herd on the industry as a whole. Different individuals were tasked with distinct fields of supervision, such as distribution or documentaries. In addition, there was a full-time Party official in each studio, who was known as the "free" Secretary of the Party committee in the studio. This was a very important *nomenklatura* appointment that was vetted and approved all the way to the summit, and he was kept free of other responsibilities—hence the name—so that he could maintain proper supervision.<sup>49</sup> In addition, there was a Party

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<sup>45</sup> Cited in Garrards, *Inside the Writers' Union*, 198.

<sup>46</sup> Cited in Woll, *Real Images*, note 6, 229.

<sup>47</sup> Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 68.

<sup>48</sup> The discussion of mechanisms of Party control is based on Val S. Golovskoy with John Rimberg, *Behind the Soviet Screen: The Motion-Picture Industry in the USSR, 1972-1982*, trans. Steven Hill (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), 17-29.

<sup>49</sup> The *nomenklatura* system was a method of keeping appointments, especially to significant positions, under the control of the Communist Party and its members. Through this mechanism,

Committee at each studio, and the studio head, deputies, and leaders of creative teams were likely to be Party members. In terms of governmental organizations, the State Film Agency or Goskino was the most important institution. Scripts were vetted and approved by Goskino. It had under its control the most important film studios and the film school from which almost all Soviet filmmakers graduated. The key issues of distribution (not only whether a film would be distributed, but the number and caliber of copies made available) were decided by Goskino. Allocating film budgets and deciding financially significant issues, such as what Soviet films to export or who would be involved lucrative foreign co-productions, were Goskino matters. Aspects central to the emergence and cultivation of a receptive audience (film festivals, film periodicals, and reviewing) fell within the purview of Goskino, too.<sup>50</sup>

As in the West, film studios were the central production unit for Soviet film. Soviet central control operated to induce a certain uniformity in the way they worked. According to Josephine Woll:

All the studios operated in essentially the same way. ‘Script Boards’ read and evaluated drafts of scenarios; artistic councils [*khudsovet*], consisting of directors, editors, writers and other involved personnel discussed approved scripts and the subsequent projects. ‘Creative units’ [*tvorcheskije ob’edineniia*], the basic working teams, actually made the films. In each team the director made artistic decisions, the production manager handled business matters, a group of editors worked together with writers and acted as censors, and a team *khudsovet*—critics, writers, actors, cameramen and others, plus at least one Party representative—met to assess screen tests, watch rushes and so on. The studio’s in-house newspaper contained reports of its discussions.<sup>51</sup>

Because of Communist logocentrism, the development, vetting and censorship of scripts was a key control process routinely performed in the Soviet film world. Petr Todorovskii’s reconstruction of the process allows us an insider’s view of how this process worked:

Let’s say I’m a script writer working at the Odessa film studios. I give a director a script. He gives it to an editor who can make corrections, then it’s re-written and discussed by the editorial council of the studio. If they don’t make corrections (and it was unusual that they didn’t) then [it went] to the director of the studio, then to Goskino Ukraine; where there’s a special editor for the Odessa studio. If no corrections, then to the vice-minister,

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the Party insured that no power would coalesce outside its grasp. I use the pronoun “he” here advisedly. The power positions were overwhelmingly male.

<sup>50</sup> Description of state mechanisms of control derives from Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 43 and 61-62.

<sup>51</sup> Woll, *Real Images*, 6.

then to Moscow to the all-Union Ministry where there's someone in charge of Ukraine [...] It was a harsh, very harsh system.<sup>52</sup>

According to a former Goskino official, Val Golovskoy, there were very specific guidelines for censorship. Officials of Glavlit, the censorship bureau, were “issued a list (index) of place names, proper names, and other ‘forbidden’ items of various kinds that cannot be mentioned. This censorship process is routine and does not vary from one location to another. Published scenarios are checked a second time just prior to their appearance in a magazine or book publication.”<sup>53</sup> A similar process occurred after the film was made and once again before release:

Once the first cut was completed, it went through another series of checks. First, the film was viewed by the editorial committee of the creative team to which the director belonged, then by that of the studio as a whole, then by the studio chief. If problems arose, the director might be asked to reedit or reshoot parts of the film. The studio then offered up the film for initial clearance by Goskino; it then went to Glavlit (the government organ with overall responsibility for censorship in the arts and media) and finally was checked by the Repertory Control department of Goskino. Only then could it be copied and sent out to local distribution offices. Lower-level organs were held accountable for failing to preempt problems noticed further up the chain. The higher the level a problem was spotted at, the greater the scandal.<sup>54</sup>

This type of microscopic supervision had led one wit to remark earlier in Soviet history that, “It’s difficult to make a Soviet comedy, because we don’t know what to laugh at.”<sup>55</sup>

On top of these formal censorship and control mechanisms, powerful institutions potentially affected by the topic or treatment in a film had a right to raise objections. These include “the USSR Ministry of Defense, national and republic officials of the Communist Union of Youth (Komsomol), national/republic officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and national/republic officials of the KGB”.<sup>56</sup> In one famous incident, the general who was in charge of the Chief Political Administration of the Ministry of Defense demanded that Vladimir Vysotskii, a well-known quasi-dissident guitar-poet, not be shown in *Reference Point*, a film about the Soviet army, because Vysotskii was insufficiently patriotic for the general’s taste. Despite the fact that Goskino hoped to boost revenues by including the popular Vysotskii in the film, his footage was cut.<sup>57</sup> Eventually, of course, all those involved in the process assimilated the restrictions as part of their workday practices, and for the most part

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<sup>52</sup> Cited in Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 62-63.

<sup>53</sup> Golovskoy, *Behind the Soviet Screen*, 29.

<sup>54</sup> Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 62-63. According to Golovskoy, in excess of 90 percent of Soviet films were also approved by the Repertory Council. See *Behind the Soviet Screen*, 30.

<sup>55</sup> Woll, *Real Images*, 14, citing Osip Brik

<sup>56</sup> Golovskoy, *Behind the Soviet Screen*, 33.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.



it was only at times when the overall trajectory of art in the USSR—as, for example, in the second half of the 1960s, when the new political leadership reined art in after the Khrushchevian Thaw—that extraordinary censorship came into play.<sup>58</sup>

Similar censorship mechanisms worked for literature as a whole in the main working through editors as a locus of “self-censorship” before materials are ever submitted to the official censorship agency, known as Glavlit. Texts endured five instances of review by editors, and approval by one level did not guarantee success at the next. Party approval of texts was insured by a certain redundancy of Party inspection. Party officials in charge of ideology—headed for much of the post-Stalin period by the severe Mikhail Suslov, a sort of Communist Cardinal, safeguarding the purity of the faith—reviewed texts as a matter of course. Anything that sent up red flags was reviewed further up the hierarchy, sometimes reaching the Central Committee itself. But, in addition to these established and transparent review processes, there was also a control mechanism on the editorial boards themselves, since, “In the structure of each journal, or in any other central publication, there is always a place for people who are called ‘the eye of the tsar,’ meaning ‘the eye of the state.’”<sup>59</sup> Typically, there was one representative each for the KGB and the Party. Writers understood that texts were inspected and scrubbed and that it was in no one’s interest—except perhaps that of the author and his potential readership—to preference art over ideology. In the words of the dissident writer Anatolii Gladilin:

Editors are called into meetings all the time where they are given instructions. They all know perfectly well that no editor, at any time, has ever lost his job for printing a dull but safe piece of literature. But many editors lost their jobs because they let through a ‘sharp’ thought, a questionable hint which might qualify as a political mistake. Therefore, when they review your manuscript they check it from every possible side, because they risk their own heads. The editor will be held responsible for everything that can qualify as an ideological or political mistake, not the writer. The writer would be criticized: he might not be published for several years. But then he could be published again. This happened to me. But the editor will lose his job. And then what could he do? Could he become a worker, a plumber for instance? Therefore, the institution of censorship in the Soviet Union begins with the editors.<sup>60</sup>

Careers and livelihoods, not to mention prestige and power, were on the line. In almost every instance, art and artistic expression was a very low priority. As in the case of film scripts, authors knew the limits of the acceptable and sought to avoid transgressing them. Censorship was internalized, but the censorship mechanisms

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<sup>58</sup> “More and more these principles became understood by Soviet writers, film-makers and editors until these censorship principles were internalized, not only by the minds of creative people, but also by everyone engaged in review and approval procedures pertaining to motion pictures.” *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>59</sup> The Garrards cite Sergei Iurenin in *Inside the Writers’ Union*, 175.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-178.

continued to function to insure the lessons were neither forgotten nor accidentally contradicted.

As if this were not enough, it had been part of the political culture since Stalin's time for prominent officials to preview films at their country houses (*na dache*), which sometimes led to further problems for filmmakers.<sup>61</sup> Dating from the first days of the Revolution, it was also common for artists of all stripes to have patrons in the Party. Simon Montefiore compares Stalin's cronies to *ancien régime* aristocrats in terms of the way they reveled in their roles as patrons (although, given the violence and crudity of their culture, a more apt analogy might be brutal Renaissance *condottieri*-dukes): "Like eighteenth-century *grands seigneurs*, the [Stalinist] magnates patronized their own theatres, their own poets, singers and writers, and defended their protégés whom they 'received' at their dachas and visited at home. 'Everyone goes to someone,' wrote Nadezhda Mandelstam in her memoirs [...] 'There's no other way.'"<sup>62</sup> While this did work at times to enable powerful film industry officials and prominent filmmakers to plead their case with the powers-that-be, it also represented another element of connection with and control by the power elite over the cultural elite. Spies within the studios provided secret information, which was digested and reported to the Party's Central Committee. A sense of how the Party viewed filmmaking is the fact that the head of Goskino from 1963 to 1973 had served earlier as a high official in the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee.<sup>63</sup>

Aside from these forms of control, art was channeled in Party-approved directions by means of membership in the "creative unions." As was noted above, the early 1930s saw the creation of three creative unions (Writers', Composers' and Architects' Unions) with another three coming into existence in the 1950s and '60s (Artists', Journalists' and Cinematographers' Unions) and two more (Theatrical Workers' and Designers' Unions) emerging in the 1980s. Because of the absence of private companies in the Soviet Union, the Party and state institutions could limit publically-consumed artistic creation, by requiring membership in creative unions (as well as by censorship and by preventing public exhibitions or performances). As George Faraday has noted, "From the 1930s on, the Party-State attempted to confine legitimate intellectual and cultural activity to those working within state-funded and supervised institutions. To perform in public a musician, for instance, had to be employed by a *filharmonia*; an actor had to join a repertory theater. There were no freelance musicians or actors, or dancers or journalists—contracts were permanent."<sup>64</sup>

A Western reader can perhaps easily understand how film could be controlled, because a movie is a major investment, requiring a sophisticated and expensive infrastructure. Especially in the era before relatively inexpensive, high quality video

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<sup>61</sup> Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 65.

<sup>62</sup> Montefiore, *Stalin*, 136.

<sup>63</sup> Woll, *Real Images*, 6.

<sup>64</sup> Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 71.

cameras, freelance filmmaking was a rarity. It may be harder, though, to grasp how creative writing could be constrained. There was, in fact, a vast reservoir of aspiring writers in the Soviet Union, owing to the status of intellectuals in that culture, to a relatively underemployed and under-compensated educated population, and to the potential rewards awaiting a successful writer. Known as *samotok*, or self-flowing, such writing continued to pour into the offices of the Writers' Union and to literary journals. Unfortunately for the aspiring writers, they had essentially no chance of succeeding. As the Garrards noted in their insightful contemporary study of Soviet literary controls, "The [Writers'] Union virtually is the publishing industry for creative writing, because it controls all major literary journals in the country [and] most Soviet fiction appears for the first time in one of the 'thick journals' [...]"<sup>65</sup>

This Union had at its disposal its own printing presses, a publishing house and every major Soviet literary journal. Controlling access to the publishing world and faced with a larger supply of writers than it had positions to fill, the Union oversaw a "buyer's market" in terms of fiction writers. Many aspiring writers were kept on the periphery of this world, working as—in the bitter Soviet phrase—"literary niggers" (*literaturnye negry*).<sup>66</sup> As a result, non-Union members found it practically impossible to get published. Hence, the creative unions were used as "transmission belts" to communicate with the population what the political leadership desired. One common approach was the designation of a "theme plan" (*templan*)<sup>67</sup> for a particular year, such as a decade anniversary of the 1917 Revolution (*Velikaia Oktiabrskaiia Sotsial'isticheskaia Revolutsiia*/The Great October Socialist Revolution)<sup>68</sup> or of World War II (*Velikaia Otechestvennaia Voina*/The Great Patriotic War). Creative unions, subordinate institutions (like periodicals and studios), and individual artists themselves were designated certain responsibilities—known as a "commissioned theme" (*zakaznaia tema*)—under these general rubrics. The creative unions have been compared to the American Medical Association, gaining membership compared to getting tenure at a university, but those comparisons fail to reflect the thoroughly domesticated, or "house broken," character of the unions. An impression of how docile and subordinate they were can be gained from considering that twenty years elapsed between the first and second congresses of the Writers' Union and from the fact that one man, Tikhon Khrennikov, was in charge of the Composers' Union from 1948 until the collapse of the Soviet system in 1991.

In addition to the negative controls of censorship and required union membership, Soviet authorities controlled art by funneling significant material benefits to compliant artists. This was particularly important in a system that did not function according to market mechanisms. In short, money alone did not determine one's

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<sup>65</sup> Garrards, *Inside the Writers' Union*, 173-174.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 4. The Garrards translate *literaturnye negry*, as "literary slaves," but I do not think that captures the demeaning sense of the term.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> In 1917, Russia used the Julian calendar which was 13 days behind that used in the West. In early 1918, the Bolsheviks decreed the adoption of the Western, Gregorian calendar. Hence, they celebrated the "October" Revolution on November 7th.

living standard. The closest thing to this in American society is the military. No matter how much money a private has, he cannot go into the Officers' Club, cannot get officers' housing, and in many places could not park where officers park, *even if* he were allowed to have a car on the base. What matters in such societies is status (in the military, rank) and connections. In the Soviet artistic world, both status (official accreditation as an artist) and connections (*blat*, or pull) were connected with and determined by the creative unions. In the words of the authors of the most penetrating study of the Writers' Union:

The Union is a remarkable organization, the centerpiece of a unique effort by government not simply to control writers, but to harness them in service to the state. To this end, the Union does not use force as much as psychological and material inducements. Its forms and rituals provide members with a sense of community and status that anchors them in Soviet society. The Union serves the interests of the Communist Party, while managing and meeting the needs of its members. In a collective society that means a great deal.<sup>69</sup>

Since unemployment was declared to be non-existent in the USSR, "parasitism" was one of the charges used to imprison dissidents. Hence, even if someone had wanted to try to make a living as an unofficial artist, there were serious impediments, including having to hold down an official job. Moreover, this would have brought one none of the perquisites that membership in a creative union bestowed on the privileged official artists.<sup>70</sup>

It must be recognized that the system was not completely consistent. In 1934, Boris Pasternak received a call from Stalin (a common Stalin-as-patron practice) in his communal apartment, where he could not hear clearly because of children playing in the hallway.<sup>71</sup> Communal apartments were the norm in the overcrowded Soviet cities and still exist. Families have a private room/sleeping chamber, but they share kitchen and bath facilities. Such problems continued past Stalin's time. One of the most successful filmmakers of the late 1970s-early 1980s was Vladimir Menshov, whose politically correct (from the Party's point of view) romantic comedy *Moskva slezjam ne verit* (*Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*) won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 1981. It was also the highest grossing film on the domestic Soviet market in that era, selling twice as tickets as its nearest competitor, the Western World War II film *The Great Escape* (in the Soviet movie system two tickets had to be bought for any film that ran longer than eighty minutes). *Moscow* sold 150 million tickets and *Great Escape* 76 million. The closest Soviet competitor was *The Red Snowberry Tree* for which fifty million tickets were sold. Despite the success of his film, Menshov and his actress wife lived in a "small apartment, poorly furnished and cluttered with odds and ends" in a bad apartment house "in a rundown

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<sup>69</sup> Garrards, *Inside the Writers' Union*, xi-xii.

<sup>70</sup> The information about Menshov's apartment is in Golovskoy, *Behind the Soviet Screen*, 67; ticket sales data comes from Golovskoy, 60.

<sup>71</sup> Montefiore, *Stalin*, 133.

neighborhood.” One can hardly imagine similar situations for successful novelists or Hollywood directors. The point is not that every artist lived cushy lives, but that everything an artist received was determined by the state and not the market.

The Garrards were undoubtedly correct in their assessment that the Party used the creative unions as part of a proactive relationship to art as a device for influencing the public. They asserted that:

Party guidance has come to mean pervasive control of the writer’s total activity, far more extensive than mere censorship. The activities of the formal censorship organization, Glavlit, whatever their intrinsic interest, are inadequate to explain the true nature of the Soviet literary situation. It is true that all works must receive the Glavlit stamp of approval, but the Party’s guidance system has already affected the creative process long before the manuscript reaches the Glavlit censor’s desk. If the Party relied passively on censorship, its system would be no different from that of the tsars in the past and more recent dictatorships around the globe. Whereas traditional censorship focuses on the end product of writing—the manuscript—Party guidance targets the author; it aims at influencing the creative process from the moment of inspiration.<sup>72</sup>

Hence, the Party’s relationship to the arts was one I would characterize as “pre-censorship.” This issue represents one of the crucial distinctions between totalitarian systems, such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and an authoritarian fascist system, like Mussolini’s Italy. Stalin’s role as “first censor” and ultimate arbiter of Soviet film is analogous to that of Joseph Goebbels in Germany. In both systems, the political elite were not willing to allow public opinion to shape itself. Nor did they content themselves with prophylactic practices, such as simply not allowing topics to be discussed. Rather, they were actively involved in presenting the topics in the manner and at the time of their choosing.

A quick example can demonstrate the difference. Throughout the time of Mussolini’s control of Italy, the Vatican newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, continued to be published. When it contained an article the Fascist government would not allow, the paper was printed as usual, but the offending column was left blank. It was often obvious what the topic of the missing article was, and therefore it was also clear that the Vatican disagreed with Mussolini on the issue. This was far too passive and ineffective an approach to censorship for either the Nazis or the Communists. In post-Stalinist USSR, for example, any problem addressed in a work of art, say a novel or a film, for example, had to be presented with what was called “soup,” which explained any problem that did exist, by arguing that, after all, it was caused by the West’s hostility to the Soviet system and to socialism, but that, yes, there was a problem, and the government was addressing it.<sup>73</sup> It was the artists’ role to prepare this thin, unpalatable broth for public consumption.

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<sup>72</sup> Garrards, *Inside the Writers’ Union*, 9.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 170.



The range of benefits was impressive and even opulent for the most favored. It bears repeating that there was no open market in the Soviet Union and that all Soviet citizens received their benefits through their place of work. In that the creative unions were no different. Where they diverged is in the quantity and quality of benefits they provided. These included access to special stores with goods unavailable to the average citizen; bigger, better appointed and more centrally located apartments; hard to get items with long waiting lists, such as cars and telephones; access to or ownership of dachas (country houses, such as those at the famous writers' colony at Peredelkino outside Moscow); vacations to special health and recreation resorts; special medical clinics and hospitals; access to foreign goods, including foreign literature, films and liquor; excellent restaurants and cafeterias; money and status.<sup>74</sup> The most prestigious creative union was that for writers. The following is a description of the Central House of Writers, commonly referred to as "the Club," in downtown Moscow:

It contains a well-stocked bar, a pleasant cafeteria, and a spacious reading lounge, plus a library, a barber shop, and a variety of large meeting rooms, one of which is used to show recent Soviet and foreign films to members and their guests. But the Club's main attraction is its excellent restaurant, probably the best in Moscow, and that means in the whole country. The prices are heavily subsidized, and the service is quick and polite—a great contrast to other restaurants in town, as any Western tourist (and many a Russian) will be quick to verify.<sup>75</sup>

So prestigious was the Writers' Union that Party and government officials whose work involves the Union commonly listed membership on their business cards. Any Soviet official—police or otherwise—who saw this on a card would know that the bearer had powerful contacts. It greased many a skid in the Soviet Union. While the other unions were neither as well funded nor as respected as the Writers' Union—which the writer Vladimir Voinovich called "fat city"<sup>76</sup>—all of them delivered substantial benefits to their members. That is why new unions were organized in the 1950s, '60s, and '80s. For example, the filmmaker Ivan Pyrev, who traced his success all the way back to Stalinist musicals in the 1930s, lobbied long and hard for the creation of his "dream," the Cinematographers' Union.<sup>77</sup> These unions appeared as the result of pressure from below, not fiat from above, because people in those fields aspired to the kind of benefits the writers and composers enjoyed.

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<sup>74</sup> Most avidly sought after was foreign travel. Hedrick Smith once wrote that there are two kinds of Russians: those who have been abroad and those who want to go abroad. An index of how rare a privilege this was is the fact that in 1970, while some 50,000 Americans visited the USSR, only 260 Soviets were allowed to visit the US. Mervyn Matthews, *Privilege in the Soviet Union: A Study of Elite Life-Styles under Communism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), 178. A quick calculation of the ratio of 260 to 50,000 yields the figure .0052.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>76</sup> "Ochen' bogataia kormushka," Garrards, *Inside the Writers' Union*, 114.

<sup>77</sup> Woll, *Real Images*, 227.

The unions were able to provide such largesse, because they disposed of enormous resources. These were substantial institutions with construction departments, offices to help members get monetary help, medical care, find housing, arrange travel and vacations (for example, to the Crimea and Abkhazia on the Black Sea, the “Soviet Riviera”), and provide for retirement. Alone among Soviet institutions they were allowed to collect and disburse money. For the Writers’ Union, this meant royalties on books, income from journals, and lucrative foreign publishing deals. For example, the Literary Fund or Litfond, established in the Brezhnev era was allowed “a sum equivalent to 10 percent of the fees and honoraria paid to authors by all Soviet publishing houses and literary journals; plus 2 percent of receipts from all performances in large theaters, and 2 percent of receipts from all performances in small theaters.”<sup>78</sup> On top of this, it received a cut from all sales abroad and was not required to pay any taxes. Because of this rich, steady flow of income, in 1972 the Litfond had “seventeen ‘creative houses’, with a capacity of 16,000 stays a year, three *hotel-pensions*, twenty-nine writers’ clubs and its own *dacha* compound.”<sup>79</sup> The Writers’ Union was such a sweet deal that movie script writers preferred it to the Cinematographers’ Union, which was also well endowed.<sup>80</sup>

The Cinematographers’ Union had its own juicy sources of income. It enjoyed a “virtual monopoly on the production and sale of souvenirs related to the motion-picture industry.”<sup>81</sup> In addition, it garnered most of the receipts it shared with *Pravda* (the publisher) from the sale of the most popular film magazine, *Soviet Screen*.<sup>82</sup> In a country with few alternative sources of entertainment, one in which over 100 million people went to the movies at least once a month, returns from these sales, as well as from sales of movie souvenirs, including postcards and posters, were not insubstantial.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to union supervised and distributed benefits, artists also made very large sums of money by Soviet standards. In fact, there were:

Almost certainly more ruble millionaires among writers than in any [sic] other legal profession in the Soviet Union, including the prestigious Academy of Sciences. Other members of the Soviet elite, such as world-class scientists, ballet dancers, and athletes enjoy dazzling privileges, including the chance to travel to the West, but as a general rule they do not have the same opportunity to earn such vast sums.<sup>84</sup>

The most detailed study of composition and indices of elite life in the Soviet era confirms this picture. Mervyn Matthews found that “the people with the largest money incomes in the USSR are artists, academicians and military leaders, followed

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 121-122.

<sup>79</sup> Matthews, *Privilege in the Soviet Union*, 49.

<sup>80</sup> Golovskoy, *Behind the Soviet Screen*, 40.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>83</sup> Woll, *Real Images*, 227.

<sup>84</sup> Garrards, *Inside the Writers’ Union*, 180.

possibly by the most responsible industrial managers.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, while the average income in the Soviet Union in the 1970s was around 100 rubles a month, concert performers received from 90 to 220 rubles per performance.<sup>86</sup> We are accustomed to wide variations in income, especially for successful artists, but all members of the Writers’ Union, not just a few stars, were among the nation’s elite in terms of standard of living.

Perhaps the oddest part of this scenario from a Western perspective is the degree to which political decisions, rather than market forces, determined who got what. Thus, royalties were based on the print run of a book, not on sales. Hack work that nonetheless earned massive print runs and the corresponding royalties were condescendingly referred to as “secretary literature,” a source of no small amount of grievance among more talented, rank-and-file members of the Writers’ Union.<sup>87</sup> It was a source of common mockery, for example, that Brezhnev’s collected works were produced in vast numbers. In the 1980s, the first secretary of the Writers’ Union saw almost forty million copies of works by him into print, making him enormously wealthy.<sup>88</sup> Most of these works were never bought and ended up being pulped to make new paper. Similarly, for films there were in practice four different distribution categories each with different monetary compensation (eight thousand, four thousand, two thousand five hundred, zero, and the special category for “commissioned themes” that earned twelve thousand rubles). The designation of a given film to one of the categories was “determined, not by how many people in fact saw the movie, but by how many people the authorities considered *ought* to see the movie.”<sup>89</sup> Among other things, these decisions determined how many prints of a film were distributed and even whether it was distributed in black-and-white or color format.<sup>90</sup>

Meanwhile, the film industry to a large extent ignored opportunities to make money, especially by making films the public wanted to see. What they wanted was less moral uplift and more entertainment, as, for example, in detective movies, which were very popular. “Above all,” Josephine Woll tells us, “audiences wanted to laugh. Respondents of all ages and social and educational categories ranked comedy the genre most poorly represented on screen [...]”<sup>91</sup> Belatedly, the film industry began to address this, but never at the level the public wanted. A film promoter captured the prevailing attitude, when he said, “The state financed all films and no one ever cared if they sold the films. If it made you feel good you could say, ‘my films are in distribution,’ but who cared? Because the next time your films were subsidized

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<sup>85</sup> Matthews, *Privilege in the Soviet Union*, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> More talented, that is, in their own estimation. None of these writers had their works tested in a free critical and market environment.

<sup>88</sup> Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, p. 59.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 59. Italics in the original. There is some disagreement on this subject. Golovskoy, who had actually worked in the film industry, indicated that there were five categories, *Behind the Soviet Screen*, p. 47. See also Woll, *Real Images*, 153, but she seems to base her argument on Golovskoy.

<sup>90</sup> Golovskoy, *Behind the Soviet Screen*, p. 47.

<sup>91</sup> Woll, *Real Images*, 188.

[anyway] but the state was never interested in this money. Who counted this money? [...] Film production and distribution were never connected.”<sup>92</sup>

Who cared, indeed?

### **In Place of a Conclusion**

The purpose of this article has been to detail the theoretical foundations and practical (if such it can be called) implementation of Soviet artistic management. Given the disconnect between the artist and consumer established by the system established for the management of art in the Soviet Union, it is perhaps amazing that art with real popular resonance was produced at all. Already in the first half of the nineteenth century, Russian creative artists had demonstrated the ability to produce art that spoke movingly of the condition of contemporary mankind. Despite the mechanistic simplification of Socialist Realist aesthetics and the hobbling and hectoring of artists—especially filmmakers—by the Soviet system of censorship and artistic control, Russian culture in the Soviet period continued in many instances to live up to the standards set by pre-revolutionary writers, composers, visual artists, and others.

This piece is not intended to be a root-and-branch condemnation of Marxism as a tool for social analysis or aesthetics. That Soviet aesthetics fell into a Stalinist trap does not mean that more flexible applications of Marxist theory have not generated perceptive and astute interpretations applicable to art and society. One need only consider György Lukács’ theory of society as a “totality” (not to be confused with totalitarian) and art’s functions in such a system, the concept of “cultural hegemony” developed by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, and the continuing influence of the Frankfurt School’s critical theory to refute such an idea.<sup>93</sup> Nor should the material here be taken as some sort of imprimatur of the market as the sole or optimum means of resolving aesthetic questions. There is plenty to bemoan regarding the market economy for the performing arts, as parodies from *The Producers* (1967) to *The Player* (1992) remind us.

Rather, the moral of this article, if there be one, is to beware of the total. That is, any totalizing system—market or Marxist, Stalinist or sanctified—will ultimately reach the tether end of rational control and productive output. The answer to an over-engineered system is not more engineering, but a recognition of human limits, especially in a realm as resistant to Taylorism as human creativity. The joyful news of the twentieth century is that the human spirit and its expression in art cannot be constrained by plan, five-year or otherwise, nor constricted by *index prohibitorum*. As Russian art moves into the brave, new, twenty-first century world of Vladimir

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<sup>92</sup> Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, 57-58.

<sup>93</sup> See Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research* (Boston: Little, Brown [1973]); Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); and Theodore Adorno, et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London, New York: Verso, 2010).

Putin's 'sovereign democracy' and 'vertical of power,' it is to be hoped that this lesson will not go unheeded.

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