

**PERAET 2021****International Scientific Conference «PERISHABLE AND ETERNAL: Mythologies and Social Technologies of Digital Civilization-2021»****ARCHETYPAL FILM MYTHOLOGY OF VISUAL  
EXISTENTIALISM IN IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF  
SOVIET MAN**

Sergey A. Malenko (a)\*, Andrey G. Nekita (b), Vasiliy A. Smirnov (c),  
Alexander P. Spornik (d)  
\*Corresponding author

(a) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University (NovSU), Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation,  
olenia@mail.ru,

(b) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University (NovSU), Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation,  
beresten@mail.ru,

(c) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University (NovSU), Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation,  
novtransa2010@yandex.ru,

(d) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University (NovSU), Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation,  
Alexander.Spornik@novsu.ru

**Abstract**

Soviet culture and ideology gave rise to a special type of social mythology that allowed solving short-term socio-political and economic problems, as well as creating and successfully promoting the archetypal image of the Soviet man as a variant of the re-ideologization of classical heroic mythologies. Such complex problems were largely due to the Great Patriotic War and the need for a qualitative rethinking of this tragic experience. The archetypal hero of Soviet post-war cinema sought to get rid of political clichés as much as possible, presenting themselves as an ordinary person with a spectrum of thoughts and feelings gained through suffering. The film-mythological actualization of the archetypal essence of the Soviet man always asserted the priority of the spiritual over the material. The implementation of such a strategy turned the post-war cinema into a space of Soviet visual existentialism. The Soviet film hero of this era demonstrated their achievements in the cosmos of their own everyday life which becomes a self-sufficient symbol of the Soviet cinema myth. This is how its film heroics were transformed from the visualization of the chronicle of power to the assertion of archetypal individuation as the main theme of Soviet post-war cinema. The Soviet man became a full-scale symbol of the “Self” archetype in which individual and collective values were dialectically interconnected. This made it possible to ontologize the mythology of the Soviet man, constructing an ideologically significant chronotope of the “Sacred Motherland”, in which times and generations symbolically united.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

*Keywords:* Archetype, ideology, mythology, Soviet post-war cinema, Soviet visual existentialism



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## **1. Introduction**

Culturological and psychoanalytic research of Soviet post-war cinema makes it possible to determine the basic images, meanings and plots that not only correlate with the leading political and ideological strategies of that time but, first of all, base on deep, collective in nature symbols that reveal the internal laws of the evolution of the human mind and feelings. The unconditional dominance of family-clan and collective themes in Soviet cinema, especially in the post-war period, unequivocally testifies to the presence of a deep and therefore extremely stable sociocultural demand for intuitive and creative discoveries of outstanding filmmakers regarding the role and place of a person in the world around them, which paradoxically coincide with close by the tonality political and ideological demands of the Soviet regime.

The clear artistic achievements of this era include the widespread practice of creating and promoting the sublime emotional context of film narrations, indicating the desire to embrace, express and realize the most culturally and existentially significant meanings that form a single sacred, archetypal space of the collective being of the Soviet people. As already mentioned, the presence of epic pathos unambiguously points to the archetypal nature of the paradigm of Soviet cinema in the post-war period, indicating a change in the “audience's experience and a rethinking of the aesthetic possibilities of the cinematic environment” (Kim, 2018, p. 19). The numinous emotions which every Soviet cinema-goer experienced again and again invariably helped them discover in themselves an inexhaustible source of meanings, spiritual and physical forces generated as a result of deep feeling, realization and personal acceptance of fundamental, collective ideals.

## **2. Problem Statement**

In this paper, for the first time, an attempt has been made to reconstruct in an interdisciplinary way the ideological strategies of Soviet post-war cinema, within the framework of which visual scenarios for the creation and ideological promotion of the archetypal mythology of the Soviet man were successfully sublimated. Its creation and cinematic visualization in many ways allowed Soviet society to achieve high, internationally recognized results in the economic, political, cultural and other spheres of social life.

## **3. Research Questions**

To assess the peculiarities of the archetypal mythology of the Soviet man, it is necessary to accomplish the following tasks:

- 1) to analyze the socio-cultural conditions for the transformation of the ideology of Soviet society;
- 2) to reveal the specifics of the cinematic heroification of the Soviet man;
- 3) to establish the features of Soviet visual existentialism on the example of the post-war cinema.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to analyze the strategy of transforming the ideological attitudes of Soviet society on the example of the formation and promotion of the Soviet person mythology in the post-war cinema.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The spiritual heritage of the Soviet era is a unique phenomenon in world culture, which urgently requires comprehensive, interdisciplinary, cross-methodological humanities research. The post-Soviet period especially clearly demonstrated persistent research and daily interest in the spectrum of Soviet cultural practices, in which ideology, traditions, everyday life and vital interests of Soviet people were specifically intertwined. Interdisciplinary analysis of these processes becomes the subject of reflection for domestic and foreign authors. H. Gunther has devoted a number of his studies to defining the structure of Soviet culture using the archetypes of the collective unconscious. He has tried to build a typology of Soviet archetypes, illustrating them with a variety of cultural material (Gunter, 2010). The works of Russian researchers are devoted to the exploration of the mythology specifics of the Soviet-era totalitarian culture, which makes it possible to establish a clear relationship between Soviet myth-making and the archaization of consciousness (Popova, 2019; Zinoviev, 1982). Its reflection in Soviet art gave rise to a special artistic language embodied in a specific way in Soviet cinema where the entire range of political, ideological, propaganda and educational tasks facing the Communist Party and the Soviet state was actively solved (Nemchenko, 2018; Shchebrova, 2018). Thus, throughout the entire period of the country's existence, Soviet cinema was a vivid and consistent example of ideological construction, visualization and mass propaganda of mythologems and symbolic codes, with the help of which the key tasks of party, economic and cultural development were communicated to the broad masses in a timely manner, in a figurative and visual form. A number of researchers has logically managed to identify the key principles of the formation and practical implementation of this unusually effective cultural and ideological technology, the comprehensive influence of which “on Soviet life is not easy to describe” (Rywkin, 1989, p. 5). It, among other things, was successfully carried out due to the ubiquitous, sometimes extremely successful use of archetypal images and plots (Arysheva, 2017; Evallyo, 2019; Kirillova & Danilova, 2019; Kolotaev, 2018; Ovsyannikova, 2019).

#### **6. Findings**

The ideological and figurative-symbolic heritage of Soviet culture is a unique phenomenon, the comprehension of which represents a special cultural, civilizational and intellectual challenge, the answer to which turns out to be especially acute in the context of the transformations of modern civilization. Soviet ideology gave rise to a special type of social mythology, the heroism of which was aimed at actively transforming the old world, which found a specific, “playful and ironic” reflection in the Soviet post-war cinema myth (Thorsen, 2018, p. 2).

The unprecedented tragedy that the Soviet people experienced during the Great Patriotic War radically changed the original content of the Soviet cinema myth. In spite of hunger, devastation and colossal economic difficulties, for the first time in history, there were new topics, related to the need to overcome any material deprivation, in the name of creating a special type of communication formed on universal human moral values. It is in the space of this kind of communication (due to a qualitative shift in the focus of attention from “internal” enemies to external ones) that the theme of class struggle, so characteristic of the cinema mythology of the first decades of the formation of Soviet power, was significantly weakened and then almost completely leveled out.

The slogans of the sacred struggle and widespread social confrontation were replaced by the idea of a society consolidated on the principles of common affairs, previously unseen in the world, and heroic victories along this path, which determined “the return of the romanticized ideals of the October Revolution to the screen” (Shevchenko-Roslyakova, 2020, p. 218). In such a visual doctrine, the Soviet cinema myth for the first time confidently and everywhere introduced the story of an ordinary person, with a spectrum of their unique concerns for themselves, the fate of other people, their country and all humanity into the context of its narratives.

The archetypal hero of the post-war Soviet cinema was no longer inclined to blindly follow political patterns but persistently tried to deal with the situation, to understand and correlate the ideological and internal prerequisites for the formation of the enemy's image. “The heroic feat is viewed through the prism of purely human features, due to an appeal to the inner world of a common soldier” (Sennikova & Savelyeva, 2017, p. 255). This meant that for the first time not only a thinking hero appeared in the space of the Soviet cinema myth, but also an adversary who was not inferior to the former in spiritual and intellectual potential.

Ideological visualization of such meanings radically changed the mythical paradigm of Soviet cinema. Therefore, its heroes were not so much workers on the home front or the military, selflessly performing production and combat tasks, as ordinary people with high moral qualities, for whom moral relations were the key to accomplishing complex social tasks or solving personal problems. In such a social environment, any material hardships not only ceased to be insoluble problems but often did not become the subject of everyday reflection at all, being actively displaced by collectively significant ideological slogans. In such a doctrine, the Soviet cinema myth confidently introduced the story of an ordinary person, with a spectrum of their unique concerns for themselves, the fate of other people, their country and all humanity into the context of its narratives. From that moment on, Soviet culture, represented by its post-war cinema, acquired an existential orientation with specific plots, heroism, ideals and scenarios for their achievement.

Ideologically affirmed the unconditional priority of spiritual principles over material ones, the Soviet cinema myth finally turned the theme of the archetypal into the leading strategy of its artistic development, consistently visualizing the events of world history, sublimated in the personal myths of living people. Thus, the Soviet authorities visually gave the life of every person a universally significant, sacred meaning, creating and successfully maintaining the ideological and everyday illusion of a single social organism.

In the Soviet cinema of the post-war era, the rise of archetypal mythology falls on the sixties, seventies and the first half of the eighties. At the same time, unlike Hollywood which used archetypal mythology mainly for the assertion and worldwide propaganda of the values of liberal ideology, the Soviet cinema managed to balance Soviet ideology as collective mythology in form and individual in content.

The Soviet cinema myth of the post-war era did not so much visualize the Marxist concept as it brought it as close as possible to the existential tradition founded by European intellectuals. It was the Soviet post-war cinema that for the first time in the world managed to reveal the laws of human existence precisely in the context of one's co-being with Others and active co-experience with them. This is how *Soviet visual existentialism* spontaneously developed and, in the artistic forms of literary and cinematic mythologies, it tried to compensate for one-sided scientific theories and ideological patterns that dominated the Soviet political and cultural space. Intuitively found samples, plots and heroes, as well as ways to convey their biography to the mass Soviet audience, scenarios for the artistic glorification of large and "small" deeds, led to the possibility of rethinking the entire dramatic experience of European, Russian, Soviet and world history, the events of which could now be told within the framework of Soviet cinema myth as a story of living, suffering, loving, dying and conquering people. This is what made it possible, within the framework of the tradition of Soviet serial films, to create epics — outstanding mythical pictures which to this day are the largest epic masterpieces of the "pre-TV series" era of the world cinema.

Such attitudes filled Soviet cinematic mythology with new images and meanings, emphasizing its special, numinous character and truly sacred mission, contributing to the creation of a unique heroic paradigm, the cultural and ideological significance of which can hardly be overestimated. For the first time in the history of the country and the whole world, a Soviet film hero attracted the attention of millions of viewers precisely with his or her everyday life, unique scenarios for the acquisition and subsequent embodiment of existential experience within the framework of which his or her individualization transformation took place.

The inner world of the hero of Soviet films during that period was increasingly acquiring a self-sufficient value, demonstrating the priority of personal meanings in mastering the collective movement towards the ideal. Although the production theme was still undividedly present in the ideological space of the Soviet cinema myth, its content began to shift towards *the spiritual production* proclaimed in the party ideological documents, which meant, first of all, "the production" of the Soviet person themselves and the further development of the cultural space of their realization.

The topic of personal growth also transformed the second strategic direction of Soviet cinematography, concerning the depiction of war and military exploits. If the first twenty years of Soviet power visualized the ideology of war as a decisive confrontation of irreconcilable, class-opposing forces, invariably leading to a tragic social catastrophe, then the Soviet cinema of the military era and especially the post-war era consistently showed the war as a personal drama of an individual Soviet person, experienced against the background of a large-scale collective, nationwide tragedy. Thus, ideological and cinematographic ideas about history as an exclusive and demonstrative newsreel of the power were

seriously eroded, and instead, the archetypal theme of individualization of a person as a typical representative of the heroic Soviet people was actively asserted.

Therefore, it was the Soviet man who became the new and main symbol of the “Self” archetype, its standard created by the collective efforts of Soviet culture in the 20th century and fully consistent with the anthropological and cultural parameters of the “perfect man” production method. The ascent of the Soviet man to the “Self” was always linked with the appearance of the most significant, symbolic figures of “the archetypal pantheon” on their life horizon, interaction with which was unconsciously sublimated in this unique myth. The phenomenology of the collective “Self” involved the consistent creation of mythological and symbolic integrity that organically united society and state, people and party, nature and culture, individual and collective, past, present and future (Lugarić, 2020).

The unique in the world Soviet chronotope of the Holy Motherland, which bonded the living and the dead, and even the unborn generations of Soviet people by the idea of overall patronage, was created and successfully visualized. However, the aspirations of the Soviet nomenklatura to unconsciously supplant the heroic myth by expanded reproduction of the cult of the party or its individual representatives led to an unprecedented “capitalization” of hypocrisy, widespread distrust of officials, social institutions, and, ultimately, of the entire Soviet ideology as a whole. It was these reasons that led to the transformation of the “Self” of the Soviet film hero, to the appearance of a fundamentally new type of heroism on the country's cinema screens, that was formed outside the official spaces, in the sphere of everyday life of “ordinary” Soviet people who sincerely and utterly accepted communist ideals as their own and were an example of a meaningful life choice within the framework of which the free development of each person became an indispensable condition for the free development of all people.

## 7. Conclusion

The nostalgia for the Soviet that has not subsided for three decades now undoubtedly demonstrates the effective tools found by the Soviet authorities to consolidate society and impart the necessary dynamism to it. The unprecedented emotional upsurge that accompanied the stages of the formation and development of Soviet society confirmed the deep nature of the influence of the ideological doctrine which directly affected the archetypal and mythological meanings of a man. The Soviet post-war cinema, of course, performed a consolidating function extremely important for the entire state and society. If, for the first decades of Soviet power, the visualization of open and irreconcilable contradictions in the form of class confrontation was most characteristic, then, in the post-war era, the image of social conflicts shifted to the sphere of relations between the party elite and the Soviet people. It was cinema, in collaboration with other types of art, that persistently broadcasted “*non-toxic*” patterns of relations between different social groups, performing a stabilizing and even socio-therapeutic function. It is about a kind of messianic practice of purposeful and, in this case, of course, ideological conveyance of such cultural and social values which at any cost and on any basis united the society into a single socio-cultural and ethno-national organism. It was precisely the ideologically oriented Soviet cinema that carefully prevented the “viral” spread of the everyday values of the ruling party nomenklatura, persistently convincing the Soviet person of the original and fruitful unity of themselves and the state. This practice made sense already because it made it possible to prevent the growth of idle and consumer values, which,

in spite of the extraordinary counterpropaganda ideological measures being taken, inevitably seeped out from behind the Iron Curtain.

## References

- Arysheva, A. S. (2017). Kinematograf v massovoy kul'ture: ot tirazhirovaniya lubka k rabote s arkhetypom i mifom [Cinematography in popular culture: from replicating luboks to working with archetype and myth]. *Teatr. Zhivopis'. Kino. Muzyka* [Theatre. Painting. Cinema. Music], 2, 135-146.
- Evallyo, V. D. (2019). Sovetskiye ideologicheskiye fil'my i poiski novogo kinematograficheskogo yazyka v 1960-1980-kh godakh [Soviet ideological films and the search for a new cinematic language in the 1960s-1980s]. *Kul'tura i iskusstvo* [Culture and Art], 8, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.7256/2454-0625.2019.8.30328>
- Gunther, H. (2010). Literatura v kontekste arkhetypov sovetskoy kul'tury. *V poiskakh novoy ideologii: sotsiokul'turnyye aspekty russkogo literaturnogo protsesssa 1920-1930-kh godov* [Literature in the context of the archetypes of Soviet culture. In Search of a New Ideology: Socio-Cultural Aspects of the Russian Literary Process of the 1920s-1930s] (pp. 191-229). IWL RAS. <https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=30667261>
- Kim, O. (2018). Cinema and painting in Parajanov's aesthetic metamorphoses, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 12(1), 19-36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503132.2017.1415519>
- Kirillova, N. B., & Danilova, A. N. (2019). Mif i mifotvorchestvo v ekrannoy kul'ture kak novoy paradigme kommunikatsii [Myth and myth-making in screen culture as a new communication paradigm]. *Culture and Arts Herald*, 3(59), 56-66.
- Kolotaev, V. A. (2018). Estetika otchuzhdeniya: konstruirovaniye novogo cheloveka sredstvami sovetskogo kinoiskusstva [The aesthetics of reflection: the construction of a new person by means of Soviet cinema art]. *RGGU Bulletin. Series: Literary Theory. Linguistics. Cultural Studies*, 8-2(41), 231-249.
- Lugarić, D. (2020). 'I'm beginning a new life': the (im)possibility of beginning or ending in Larisa Shepit'ko's *Wings* and Pavel Chukhrai's *The Thief*, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 14(1), 37-56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503132.2020.1711609>
- Nemchenko, L. M. (2018). Mok'yumentari: semantika i pragmatika (na materiale fil'mov A. Fedorchenko i M. Mestetskogo) [Mocumentaries: semantics and pragmatics (based on the films of A. Fedorchenko and M. Mestetsky)]. *Philological class*, 1(51), 62-71. <https://doi.org/10.26170/fk18-01-21>
- Ovsyannikova, A. A. (2019). Semioticheskiye kody i mifologemy v sovetskom kinematografe (na materiale fil'mov Sergeya Paradzhanova "Teni zabytykh predkov" i "Tsvet granata"). [Semiotic codes and mythologemes in Soviet cinema (based on Sergei Parajanov's films "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors" and "The Color of Pomegranates")]. *Vestnik of Moscow State Linguistic University. Humanitarian Sciences*, 2(818), 173-181.
- Popova, A. D. (2019). Legendy o bande "Chernaya koshka" kak otrazheniye fenomena kriminal'nykh mifov v rossiyskom obshchestvennom soznanii [Legends about the Black Cat gang as a reflection of the phenomenon of criminal myths in the Russian public consciousness]. *Noveyshaya istoriya Rossii* [Modern History of Russia], 1, 234-240. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu24.2019.114>
- Rywkin, M. (1989). *Soviet Society Today* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315493619>
- Shevchenko-Roslyakova, A. (2020). Ruined myth: dead spaces in Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov's *Pavel Korchagin* (1957), *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 14(3), 218-234, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503132.2020.1808393>
- Sennikova, V. V., & Savel'yeva, Y. N. (2017). Obraz geroya v otechestvennom kinematografe: ot obraztsovoy modeli sotsrealizma k neopredelennosti postsovetskogo vremeni [The image of a hero in Russian cinema: from the exemplary model of socialist realism to the uncertainty of the post-Soviet period]. *Tomsk State University Journal of Cultural Studies and Art History*, 27, 255-259. <https://doi.org/10.17223/22220836/27/23>

- Shchebrova, S. Y. (2018). “Svetlyy put” v demograficheskiy tupik: o rukovodstve kinematografom v sovetskiy period [“The Bright Path” to a Demographic Dead End: On the Leadership of Cinematography in the Soviet Period]. *Nauka televideniya* [The Art and Science of Television], 14(2), 28-57. <https://doi.org/10.30628/1994-9529-2018-14.2-28-57>
- Thorsen, E. (2018). The ‘cinematic poetry’ of the Thaw, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 12(1), 2-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503132.2017.1415520>
- Zinoviev, A. A. (1982). *Homo Sovieticus*. L’age D’homme.