

Behind and Beyond Lenin and Dzerzhinskiy: Soviet-Polish Cooperation in Historical-Revolutionary Cinema (1960s–1980s)

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Abstract

Lenin and Dzerzhinskiy were the most promoted “divinities” in Soviet popular culture. The two leaders also had valuable characteristics for propagandising the “friendship of peoples” between the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of Poland: **Lenin** had lived two years in the Krakow region whereas Polish revolutionary **Dzerzhinskiy** became a statesman in Soviet Russia. Between the 1960s and 1980s, Soviets and Poles coproduced three movies featuring Lenin and Dzerzhinskiy as transnational heroes: *Lenin in Poland*, by Sergey Yutkevich and Evgeniy Gabrilovich (1966), *No Identification Marks* (1979–1980) and *Fiasco of Operation “Terror”* (1981–1983) by Anatoliy Bobrovskiy and Yulian Semënov. The paper considers the interactions between Soviet and Polish professionals during the preparation, the shooting and the release of these movies as examples of the “State-socialist Mode of Production” and of its “micro-politics” (Szczepanik 2013). In the 1960s, Soviets and Poles officially got along well at the ideological level. Yet a muffled antagonism continued about the representation of their nation. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, revolutionary history about Dzezhinsiy was a mere setting for mainstream movies. Once political issues had been driven to the background, the professional advantage of joint movie productions became more obvious. Co-production offered professionals multiple opportunities: to enjoy tourism abroad, go shopping, improve skills by working with foreign colleagues and cutting-edge technologies. Although the involvement of some might have been motivated by personal interests, both countries ended up benefiting from the joint projects..

Keywords: Movie-industry, Poland, USSR, Lenin, Dzerzhinskiy, 1960s–1980s, Sergey Yutkevich, Yevgeniy Gabrilovich, Yulian Semënov.

Résumé :

Lénine et Dzerjinski étaient les « divinités » les plus célébrées de la culture populaire soviétique. Mais les deux leaders ont également permis de promouvoir l’amitié entre les peuples polonais et soviétique : **Lénine** avait vécu deux ans dans la région de Cracovie, et **Dzerjinski** était devenu un homme d’État en Russie soviétique. Des années 1960 aux années 1980, Soviétiques et Polonais ont coproduit trois films les présentant comme des héros transnationaux : *Lénine en Pologne* de Sergeï Ioutkevitch et Evgenii Gabrilovitch (1966), *Pas de signes particuliers* (1979-1980) et *Le fiasco de l’opération « Terreur »* (1981-1983) d’Anatoli Bobrovski et Ioulian Semenov. L’article étudie les interactions entre les professionnels des deux pays pendant la préparation, le tournage et la distribution de ces œuvres. Celles-ci sont de bons exemples d’un « mode de production socialiste-étatique » des films et de la « micro-politique » (Szczepanik 2013) qui s’y déploie. Dans les années 1960, les désaccords entre les deux parties ne touchèrent pas l’idéologie mais la représentation de chaque nation. Au tournant des années 1970-1980, l’histoire révolutionnaire autour de Dzerjinski n’était qu’un vague décor pour des films grand public. À mesure que la politique cessait de préoccuper, l’aspect professionnel est devenu l’enjeu essentiel. En effet, les coproductions offraient de nombreuses opportunités aux professionnels : tourisme, shopping, travail valorisant au contact de collègues étrangers avec un matériel de pointe. Bien que l’intérêt personnel ait été un puissant moteur des protagonistes, les deux pays tiraient néanmoins un bénéfice réciproque de la réalisation de ces projets.

Mots-clés : Industrie cinématographique, Pologne, URSS, Lénine, Dzerjinski, 1960-1980, Sergeï Ioutkevitch, Evgenii Gabrilovitch, Ioulian Semenov.

Behind and Beyond Lenin and Dzerzhinskiy: Soviet-Polish Cooperation in Historical-Revolutionary Cinema (1960s–1980s)

Represented in numerous monuments, books and movies, Lenin and Dzerzhinskiy were the most promoted “divinities” in popular culture all through the Soviet period (Khapaeva Kopussov 1992, 966). From the beginning, the two men embodied the new regime: Lenin was the founder of the ruling party and the initiator of the October revolution, and Dzerzhinskiy played a great symbolic role as the head of the *Cheka*, the first political police. After the Second World War, as Eastern Europe became a “socialist bloc” under Soviet pressure, the two leaders proved to have valuable characteristics for propagandising the “friendship of peoples” between the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of Poland. Polish-born Dzerzhinskiy became a revolutionary while he was attending the Wilno high school where Pilsudski had studied ten years earlier. He was a socialist activist in his own country long before he joined the Bolshevik party in Russia as late as July 1917 (Blobaum 1984, 30, 106–121, 222). Lenin’s two-year stay (1912–1914) in the Polish region of Western Galicia, then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Бернов Манусевич 1988), later became another Soviet-Polish *lieu de mémoire*. The political specificities of the two men proved to be useful in the context of the Soviet-led Socialist bloc. Dzerzhinskiy once was a representative of the Marxist tendency inside the Polish socialist movement. No matter how small this minority was, it showed that Marxism in Poland could not be seen merely as an ideology imported from Russia. On the other hand, Lenin’s stance on the right of nations to self-determination was something rare among Russian socialists and even among Bolsheviks. Who else could have stated in mid-1917: “If Finland, Poland or Ukraine secede from Russia, there is nothing bad in that” (Krausz 2015, 174)? The case of both revolutionaries could help to prove that the expansion of socialism in Eastern Europe was not the effect of Russian imperialism.

In order to popularise the life of such great people, cinema was without doubt the most effective medium. In the Soviet Union, after the 1920s and the attempt at presenting the working people as the collective hero of the revolution, the movie industry promoted the *vozhdi* (leaders), during the Stalin era and after Stalin’s death (Sumpf 2015). In this context, from the 1960s to the 1980s, Soviets and Poles coproduced three movies featuring Lenin and Dzerzhinskiy as transnational heroes. This topic of cinematic co-productions was encompassed in Cold War cultural studies for a decade. The study of actual cooperation between

the East and the West (Shaw and Youngblood 2010, 53–54) and inside the Eastern bloc (Siefert 2016) reveals agreements and misunderstandings and shows what is at stake between partners beyond ideology. Indeed, Lenin and Dzerzhinskiy's activity could be perceived differently in the USSR and Poland, even "People's Poland." This paper considers this mismatch. Yet, rather than focusing on the explicit discourse promoted by these movies (which is quite predictable) or their aesthetics, considering them as ready-to-see objects, we will study the filmmaking and distribution processes. These processes are typical of a "State-socialist Mode of Production" (Szczepanik 2013). Without discussing whether such an approach belongs to the history of film or is just institutional history applied to cinema, this aspect deserves to be studied for itself because it helps to shed new light on crucial periods of Soviet cinema (see Познер и др. 2017 on the Great Patriotic War). Since movies are not the creation of a lone artist but an industry that involves the cooperation of various people, crafts and corporations, ideological constraints and national concerns are entangled with institutional and technical matters. This study aims thus at describing the "Micro-politics of Production Communities" (Szczepanik 2013, 126), as it appears in the interactions between Soviet and Polish professionals that occurred during the preparation, the shooting and the releasing of these movies.

First, an overview of these movies is necessary. *Lenin in Poland* [ЛЕНИН В ПОЛЬШЕ, *Lenin w Polsce*], a 98-minute drama released in 1966, was coproduced by the Soviet Mosfil'm company and the Polish Zespół Filmowy "Kadr." Based on a screenplay by Evgeniy Gabrilovich, the movie was directed by Sergey Yutkevich, who had already directed several historical-revolutionary movies (*The Man with the Gun* [Человек с ружьём], 1938; *Yakov Sverdlov* [Яков Свердлов], 1940; *Stories about Lenin* [Рассказы о Ленине], 1957). The movie begins with the arrest of Lenin in August 1914 by the Austrian police. Held in custody, the Bolshevik leader thinks about the war that has just broken out and he recalls the two years he spent in Poland, in Cracow and Poronin: how he supervised Bolshevik deputies at the state Duma, how he met Polish social-democrats and how he discovered the life of simple Polish people, through Ulka, his household maid, and Andrzej, a shepherd, her fiancé (the two latter being fictional characters).

Among numerous Soviet movies about Dzerzhinskiy, two were coproduced with Poland some fifteen years later. Still, Soviet professionals held the leading positions: both were directed by Anatoliy Bobrovskiy from a screenplay by the famous writer Yulian Semënov. The first one, called *No Identification Marks* [Особых примет нет; *Znaków szczególnych brak*] (Zespół Filmowy "Iluzjon,"

DEFA, Mosfil'm, 1979–1980, 137 mn), shows how young revolutionary Dzerzhinskiy escaped from his Siberian exile in 1902 and got back to Warsaw. He then worked tremendously hard to organise Polish workers. The Tsarist political police, the *Okhranka*, pursued him, and Glazov, an ambitious young officer, devised a malevolent plan both to catch Dzerzhinskiy and get rid of his own chief, Shelyakov. The sequel is called *Fiasco of Operation "Terror"* [Крах операции "Теппоп"; Krach Operacji "Terror"] (Zespół Filmowy "Iluzjon," DEFA, Mosfil'm, 1981–1983, 145 mn). The plot is situated in 1921. Felix Dzerzhinskiy, who now heads the *Cheka*, is appointed as People's commissar for Communications. At the same time, in Poland, Boris Savinkov, the famous S-R terrorist, who is sponsored by Western powers, organises a plot with various anti-Bolshevik forces to disrupt the grain supplies in Soviet Russia. As a *chekist*, Dzerzhinskiy combats this conspiracy while, as a People's commissar, he persuades "Bourgeois specialists" to work for the Soviet homeland in order to restore its railways.

This study is based upon archival material kept by the Soviets, which may represent a bias. Still, as it includes documents issued by both sides, it explains what was at stake in the transnational cinema cooperation and how concerns changed depending on the period. In the early 1960s, minutes of meetings of Soviet and Polish professionals provide an insight into the long and difficult elaboration of the screenplay of *Lenin in Poland*, showing different approaches to the content of the movie. The files on the two movies concerning Dzerzhinskiy, which are much less ideologised, shed light on another range of questions: these relate to the technical and social aspects of transnational cooperation and show how Soviets and Poles actually organised the work of transnational shooting teams.

1. In search of a historical and political agreement about *Lenin in Poland*

The project of *Lenin in Poland* was launched in 1958 but the shooting took place only in 1964–1965. Hence, it spanned a crucial period in both countries as Stalin's death made some dramatic moves possible. Initiated in 1956 at the 20th congress of the CPSU, Khrushchëv's thaw peaked in the USSR in 1961 with the de-Stalinisation proclaimed at the 22nd congress, but it was cut short by Brezhnev's takeover in 1964. In Poland, even though Gomułka quickly succeeded in shattering the hopes of the 1956 Polish October, he deterred the Soviets from intervening directly in Polish affairs. By doing so, he strengthened some sense of Polish sovereignty. Archival materials reveal these contradictory processes.

Indeed, the files concerning *Lenin in Poland* consist not only of dozens of photographs taken during the shooting, including some of Lenin look-alike actor

Shtraukh standing in front of a memorial plaque dedicated to Lenin's stay in Poland. The richest material is the minutes of meetings of various Soviet and Polish bodies in 1959–1963. In the USSR, an artistic board composed of movie industry professionals and a historian was set up in 1959 to supervise the screenwriting by Evgeniy Gabrilovich.¹ A similar process had to take place in Poland, which had its own screenwriter, Igor Newerly.² A joint Polish-Soviet “screenplay commission” was organised a few months later. It seems that a final meeting was held in 1963 to sort out the remaining problems with the screenplay, so the shooting could begin only in 1964. This long and difficult development was due to control procedures that had not changed much since the 1950s (Szczepanik 2013, 117) and also to specific tensions between Soviets and Poles. From historical facts and political agenda to artistic vision and institutional matters, we consider what appeared to be troublesome for either side and show how they reached an agreement.

Although the movie was about events that actually occurred over a short period of two years, professional historians seem to have had a rather minor role in its elaboration. Two party historians who would write biographies of Lenin, Vasilii Evgrafov and Vladlen Loginov (Евграфов 1960; Логинов 1962, 2005, 2010 and 2017), attended some artistic board meetings. They only spoke up when they were uneasy with some distortion of a quotation or the simplification of an event.³ Anyway, filmmakers only asked historians for assessments on specific issues and wanted them to provide factual details. The Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, the highest body devoted to revolutionary history in the USSR, had to make a thorough investigation to determine if Lenin's stepmother did indeed smoke.⁴ Walentyna Najdus, both a scholar and an old Polish communist, who was the author of a monograph on Lenin's stay (Najdus 1953; Najdus 1983, back cover) had to help the filmmakers by speculating who might have reported to the Austro-Hungarian police about Lenin in August 1914.⁵

Except for this technical contribution (for which Loginov and Najdus were acknowledged in the credits), historians did not express any original views about

1 Российский государственный архив литературы и искусства (РГАЛИ), Ф. 2453, оп. 1, д. 764, (*Стенограмма художественного совета по обсуждению лит сценариев [...] Ленин в Польше*, 15 December 1959). All archival material used in this paper is from РГАЛИ.

2 Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 694, (*Стенограмма заседания сценарной комиссии по обсуждению фильма “Как в одном метечке” (“Ленин в Польше)”*), 11 March 1960).

3 Ф. 2453, оп. 1, д. 764, лл. 25 (screenwriter Mikhail Papava), 28a (Gabrilovich).

4 The answer is yes. Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 694, л. 38 (Gabrilovich).

5 Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 695, л. 15 (Aleksandrov). Yutkevich remembered that he had had heated arguments with Najdus and Loginov (Юткевич 1991, 223–224), but this left no trace in the available archival material

the historical background or the ideological orientation of the movie.⁶ It was unnecessary because the filmmakers had already extensively mastered Lenin's biography and political choices. This was true of both the director of the movie, Sergey Yutkevich with his experience in setting up revolutionary events before the camera, and Grigoriy Aleksandrov, whose advice was asked for in 1960. Even though Aleksandrov was famous for making successful musical comedies, the report he signed is striking in its historical accuracy and comprehensiveness: in referring to people, groups and newspapers, he delineated the various tendencies of social-democracy in Russia and Poland.⁷ Still, such contextualisation gave no grounds for debate as the course of history necessarily proved that Lenin was right. Not one event could show the contrary.

In this respect, the only disturbing fact might be Lenin's close relationship with provocateur Roman Malinovskiy. The latter, a worker and activist, had been the head of the Bolshevik fraction at the State Duma of the Russian Empire and, with other deputies, was received in Poland by Lenin twice, in Cracow in December 1912 and in Poronin in September 1913. By this second conference, Malinovskiy had already been publicly accused of being an *Okhranka* agent, but Lenin defended him against "Menshevik slanderers." In 1917, the contents of the *Okhranka* archives were unveiled and proved Lenin had been wrong. A year later Malinovskiy was tried and executed by the Soviet authorities (Badaev 1932, 78, 134, 202–215; Elwood 1977, 31, 51–53, 62–67). Hence, there arose the problem of how to show Malinovskiy's close relationship with Lenin in 1912–1913 and how to face up to the fact that the Bolshevik leader had been lacking in revolutionary vigilance. Soviet and Polish filmmakers discussed this issue several times, both agreeing to attempt to show that Malinovskiy did attend the Poronin conference while subtly suggesting some mistrust on Lenin's side.⁸ Finally, Malinovskiy was simply erased from the picture.

Since history was not a matter of debate, the discrepancy between Soviets and Poles emerged in more symbolic matters. With this movie the Soviets were essentially concerned with writing a new page of the *Kinoleniniana* in line with the "return to Lenin" which was one of the main mottos of the Khrushchëv Thaw (Woll 2000, 36–37, 84–86). Hence, the Soviet filmmakers involved in the Soviet-Polish project expressed the need to show a more human and intimate Lenin.⁹ This

⁶ Ф. 2453, оп. 1, д. 764, лл. 31, 33 (Evgrafov). Ф. 2453, оп. 4, д. 26, л. 57 (Loginov).

⁷ Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 695, лл. 16, 18.

⁸ Ф. 2453, оп. 1, д. 764, лл. 14, 35 (Gabrilovich). Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 694, л. 9 (Starski).

⁹ Ф. 2453, оп. 4, д. 26, (Стенограмма заседания коллеги [...] обсуждение лит. сценария Ленин в Польше, 21 March 1963), л. 16 (writer Yuriy Bondarev).

involved presenting him “in a more objective way, with more historical fairness than was done some decades ago.”¹⁰ Among cultural productions during the Thaw, Emmanuil Kazakevich’s short story *The Blue Notebook* [Синяя тетрадь] (Казакевич 1961) is mentioned as an example to be followed.¹¹ Nonetheless, the main common references for Soviet filmmakers remained movies of the Stalin era such as *The Great Citizen* [Великий Гражданин] (Fridrikh Ermler 1937) and *Lenin in 1918* [Ленин в 1918 году] (Mikhail Romm 1939).¹² Breaking with the Stalin-style cult did not mean promoting some other interpretation of Lenin’s political activity but only showing “an ordinary Lenin, a normal and warm person,”¹³ even though these minor details should not obscure his historic stature. Gabrilovich complained: “We are blamed because we should not show Lenin with rolled-up trousers.”¹⁴ Hence, Lenin’s normality was to be shown as something exceptional. When he sits on a sofa, “he does not sit as we are sitting on a sofa. Lenin sits in a fighting stance, giving the impression that this very same Lenin will stand on an armoured car in Petrograd.”¹⁵

The Poles officially agreed with the need to show Lenin as “a man above all,” as Polish party official Artur Starewicz put it.¹⁶ That said, the Polish participants showed other concerns, which were more nationally oriented. This became obvious on the subject of the Polish Legions. These were created in 1914 by Polish nationalists as military units within the Austro-Hungarian Army in order to form the basis for a would-be national army (Szymczak 2015, 38). Ludwik Starski, then the director of the main Polish movie studio “*Iluzjon*,” thought their “political meaning” was not sufficiently brought out in the 1960 version of the screenplay. For him, the Legions were the sign of “the awakening of the Poles” and could be considered as “the first armed forces of Poland which were not at that point subject to fascistisation by Piłsudski.” He even acknowledged that “as far as [he] could remember, [he] looked at them with sympathy at that time.”¹⁷ The only concession to Marxist-Leninist ideology here was to deny Piłsudski’s actual role

¹⁰ Ф. 2453, оп. 4, д. 26, лл. 3–4 (studio department director Yuriy Shevkunenko).

¹¹ Ф. 2453, оп. 4, д. 26, л. 43 (movie director Yuriy Ozerov). The novel entangled “great history” (Lenin writing *The State and Revolution* while hiding in Razliv in the summer 1917) with everyday life anecdotes about Lenin’s relationship with his Bolshevik fellows and with the family who hosted him. The novel was adapted for the screen in 1964 by Lev Kulidzhanov.

¹² Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 694, 11 March 1960, л. 21 (movie director Jerzy Kawalerowicz). Ф. 2453, оп. 4, д. 26, лл. 16 (Bondarev), 57 (historian Vladlen Loginov).

¹³ Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 694, л. 13 (movie director Jan Rybkowski).

¹⁴ Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 694, л. 37 (screenwriter Evgeniy Gabrilovich).

¹⁵ Ф. 2453, оп. 1, д. 764, л. 11 (screenwriter Vladimir Belyaev).

¹⁶ Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 694, л. 26 (Artur Starewicz).

¹⁷ Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 694, лл. 5–6 (Ludwik Starski).

in the setting up of the legions and to put the blame on him for their further so-called “fascistisation.” However, such statement made in front of Soviet delegates by a Warsaw official proved how openly Polish patriotism could be praised during Gomułka’s rule.

The Soviet representatives did not react to the national aspect of Starski’s remarks. Ever since cinematic cooperation had been initiated inside the Socialist Bloc, the CPSU leadership had warned about the danger of patronising foreign comrades (Siefert 2016, 169). That is obvious from the consultation about the screenplay with the famous film director Grigoriy Aleksandrov. Although he did not take part in the project, he was asked for advice in December 1960, apparently because his renown and authority would help to sort things out. Aleksandrov thought that the feelings of the audience should be taken into account. For instance, he recommended not “provoking that part of Polish society which is now still committed to Catholicism” by directly mocking or criticising priests.¹⁸ He also reiterated that the recognition of Poland’s historical right to independence was a crucial principle since Lenin put it forward in opposition to Rosa Luxemburg and the Polish Marxists’ so-called leftist policy on the national question. In his statement, Aleksandrov focused on this debate within the socialist movement and comprehensively exposed Lenin’s position. His main point was to emphasise that “Russian socialists did insist on the self-determination of Poland, even to the point of separation from Russia.” To illustrate this point, Aleksandrov proposed “using the anthem of the Polish legions ‘We throw ourselves into fire, We do not want anything from you’ in the movie.” Eventually, the Polish legionaries are shown through the character of a young railway worker. When he enlists in the Legion, he is greeted by his workmates.¹⁹ But his eventual death on the front is presented alongside the death of a young Russian.²⁰ While the first scene acknowledges the Polish people’s deep patriotism, the second is a reminder of the absurdity of fratricidal war among working people.

2. A movie about Lenin or about Poland?

Since Soviet and Poles could find a consensus about such a sensitive issue as nationalism in late 1960, one might wonder why the project was blocked for another two years. This was the result of a long-lasting confrontation between the two screenwriters appointed at the very beginning of the project. Both had strong

¹⁸ Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 695, Стенограмма совещания у Г.В. Александрова по отбору материала для фильма ‘Мир и война’ (‘Ленин в Польше’), 23 December 1960, лл. 3–4, 16.

¹⁹ *Ленин в Польше*, 1:10:20 to 1:11:20.

²⁰ *Ленин в Польше*, 1:28:07 to 1:30:00.

arguments to prove their skills in writing about Lenin in Poland.

Evgeniy Gabrilovich (1899–1993) was the successful screenwriter of *Two Warriors* [Два бойца] (by Leonid Lukov 1943). He also had experience in writing screenplays for historical-revolutionary movies (*The Last Night* [Последняя ночь] by Yuliy Raizman, 1936; *Stories about Lenin* [Рассказы о Ленине] by Sergey Yutkevich 1957) and he had already tackled Polish topics in 1939–1940, such as in *The Dream* [Мечта] by Mikhail Romm in 1941 (Aunoble 2018, 88). Igor Newerly (1903–1987) was a Polish writer with real Soviet and revolutionary experience as he had lived in Russia from 1915 to 1925. He was not only a witness of the revolution, but he participated as a member of the Youth Communist League during the Civil War. Apparently, he became bitter about Bolshevism and escaped from the USSR after being persecuted for having organised a left anti-communist organisation. Back in Poland, he became a writer of renown and the secretary of Janusz Korczak and was arrested as such by the Gestapo in 1943. Later, he became a member of the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party), when the Polish Socialist Party (of which he was a member) merged with the Stalinist Polish Workers' Party in 1947 (Matuszewki 1999, 386; Encyklopedia Puszcza-Bialowieska 2008).

Since 1958, the two screenwriters had been supposed to work together to write the screenplay. However, two years later, twelve versions of the screenplay had been written but the authors could not agree on any. The whole project was delayed. This caused discontent at the Mosfilm studio which was meant to shoot the movie. Its officials spoke out about it and the leading newspaper *Sovetskaya Kul'tura* [Soviet Culture] published on 24 November 1959 an anonymous account called “The Irresponsibility of Screenwriter Gabrilovich” [Безответственность сценариста Е. Габриловича]. It seems that artistic boards were set up in Soviet Union and Poland in order to solve this crisis. According to Gabrilovich, the way the project was managed caused the disruption:

We frequently had put together writers in accordance to an administrative principle; I mean we say: here is a renowned writer in Poland, Newerly, and here is Gabrilovich in the USSR. We will put them together; their double skills will be added. But it does not come out this way, it is a mechanistic approach.²¹

In his own turn, Newerly accepted that he and his Soviet colleague had “very different personalities.”²² As each country supported its own screenwriter, this personal mismatch did reflect a wider opposition. Considering the forthcoming joint artistic board meeting in order to sort out the situation, the Soviet filmmakers

²¹ Ф. 2453, оп. 1, д. 764, л. 29 (Gabrilovich).

²² Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 694, л. 37 (Gabrilovich).

openly considered it as a battle field between the two nations:

What will happen if we go to Poland? The Poles will start firing right away [...]. Maybe, we should wear body armour for some ten-twelve days in order to be stronger, as I have a feeling that it will be hot.²³

The two-year failure of the project was thus understood as a matter of inter-state relations. Therefore, the Soviet filmmakers thought they needed strong institutional backing from their own country.

This is the second time that a Soviet screenwriter has gone abroad without being accompanied by a sufficiently authoritative Party representative [...]. In such a case it is not the studio's general director who should have agreed with the Polish Party C[entral] C[ommittee], but an authoritative person from the minister.²⁴

The archives are silent on this matter, but it seems that an intervention from above took place: in October 1960, Newerly was replaced by Jerzy Tyrowicz,²⁵ a high-ranking official who was not a writer or a filmmaker but who would soon become the director of the Chief Board of Cinema (*Naczelny Zarząd Kinematografii*) (Rembacka 2013, 142). As he eventually did not appear in the credits of the movie, the role he played in the making of *Lenin in Poland* may have been purely political and diplomatic.

Behind the conflict between the screenwriters the essence of the film to be was being questioned. According to a member of the Soviet artistic board in 1960:

It is no secret that we have a disagreement with the Polish comrades on the artistic question. Hence, in place of a profound and intellectual dramaturgy we have in Newerly's variant an attempt at pleasant genre scenes that hinders our main aim—the image of Lenin.²⁶

This difference of approach is summarised by the title each writer chose for his screenplay: *Lenin in Poland* for Gabrilovich, *In One Little Town* for Newerly. The latter title emphasised the local aspect of the story. Indeed, the Polish side suggested putting forward the nature and folklore of the Zakopane region.²⁷ Newerly thought it was possible to seek a “compromise between a popular-political movie [...] and a *Kammerspielfilm*. Hence, it [would be] a compromise between the wishes of the Soviet audience and the wishes of the Polish audience.”²⁸

²³ Ф. 2453, оп. 1, д. 764, л. 42 (movie director Valentin Nevzorov).

²⁴ Ф. 2453, оп. 1, д. 764, л. 1Б (screenwriter Nikolay Kovarskiy).

²⁵ Ф. 2453, оп. 4, д. 219, л. 5, 19 October 1960.

²⁶ Ф. 2453, оп. 1, д. 764, л. 19 (Papava).

²⁷ Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 694, л. 10–12 (Kresko, unidentified function).

²⁸ Ф. 2453, оп. 5, д. 694, л. 33 (Newerly).

By saying this, Newerly implied that the artistic antagonism had reflected an opposition between the two countries.

As such a compromise proved to be out of reach, it seems that the Soviets recovered total control over the project after Newerly's dismissal. The appointment of Yutkevich as the film director in 1963 was a major step as he was one of "the top Soviet directors," used to representing his country internationally (Siefert 2016, 167, 179). That same year, Loginov, the historian representing the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, wrote that "the thing that is worth working on is Russia. Poland is very well described [...]. First, we must work on Russia."²⁹ This was a hard-hitting remark, far from the original idea of an authentically transnational story. From this point of view, the character of Ulka, Lenin's household maid, became central as a way to summarise Polishness without changing the focus of the movie:

We very much like the character of the Polish girl and her whole story which reflects as in a drop of water [the fate of] a whole generation of Polish people; at the same time, this story is on the one hand rather dramatic and on the other hand very moving, sweet and democratic.³⁰

This democratic nature may be questioned as the different narrative layers in the movie are separated by a sort of class divide. On the one side, Lenin discusses serious matters and takes decision with militants both Russian and Polish.³¹ On the other side, simple working-class people (such as Ulka, her boyfriend Andrzej the shepherd and the railway worker who becomes a Legionary) are subject to events.

The debate about the screenplay was over when this Russian-centred narrative with Polish *couleur locale* was endorsed as late as March 1963. It is noteworthy that formal issues were never discussed in Soviet, Polish or joint artistic boards. This is striking as the movie proved to be highly innovative in its way of delivering the discourse elaborated through all these endless meetings. It uses an impressive visual stylisation far from pompous socialist realism and the story telling takes the form of an interior monologue with no voice heard except Lenin's. The latter quite original narrative mode was chosen as early as 1959³² and never became a bone of contention, nor even a matter of discussion between Poles and Soviets.³³

²⁹ Ф. 2453, оп. 4, д. 26, л. 61 (Loginov).

³⁰ *Ibid.* Ф. 2453, оп. 4, д. 26, л. 5 (Shevkunenko).

³¹ In addition to the Bolsheviks elected at the Russian State Duma, Lenin met Polish social-democrat Jakub Hanecki.

³² Ф. 2453, оп. 1, д. 764, л. 4 (Kovarskiy).

³³ At least within official bodies such as the artistic board. Other than that, Gabrilovich had had only informal discussions with Yutkevich on this topic. Later, Yutkevich exchanged ideas about it with Andrzej Wajda, whom he met by accident (Юткевич 1991, 225).

Eventually, it looks as if three layers of discourse coexisted as if they had no link one with another. At the ideological level, Soviets and Poles officially got along well while a muffled antagonism continued about the very representation of the nation. Still, filmmakers in both countries were caught up in the same “new wave” aesthetic and they agreed spontaneously on a daring way of telling a story on the screen. Hence, *Lenin in Poland* was a highly successful movie which received several international awards (Best Director in Cannes and Best Historical-revolutionary Movie in Kiev). It deserved it, for *Lenin in Poland* was less ideological and more political than the previous *Kinoleniniana*; it was emotionally more sober but more effective.³⁴ Hence it could appeal to Western audiences. It was also a milestone for Soviet spectators, who could see for the first time Lenin cycling, fishing and walking, far from the rigid statues of their neighbourhoods (Жизнь как кино 2017).

As such, Yutkevich’s movie was the swan song of the Soviet Thaw. But it came out in 1966, when Brezhnev had already overthrown Khrushchëv for two years, and the new blooming of Leniniana was part of the cultural return to order (Woll 2000, 201). Two further minor Soviet-Polish attempts at tackling Lenin’s stay in Poland in documentary movies (Пумпянская 1979; Skrzydło 1985³⁵) were disappointing, lacking the vividness and the sense of ease of their predecessor. The only thing that remained from Yutkevich’s movie was the national focus: the story should be about Lenin rather than about Poland.³⁶

3. Making a historical movie is not just about history

Leaving the details aside, the Polish-Soviet collaboration had eventually proved to be fruitful. The movie was made possible by the development of joint cultural initiatives in the Socialist bloc after Stalin’s death. *Lenin in Poland* became in turn a motive to strengthen international cooperation. In 1968, a special Soviet body for international cinematographic cooperation was founded and it became the “all-Soviet Union for movie production with foreign countries,” known as *Sovinfilm* a year later³⁷ (Siefert 2016, 170). In the international cooperation that

³⁴ *Stories about Lenin*, the first attempt to humanise Lenin by Yutkevich and Gabrilovich in 1957, was still politically Stalinist and loaded with pathos (Woll 2000, 84).

³⁵ Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2291, Дело фильма “Ленин в Кракове,” производство ЦСДФ, 22 March 1979–21 January 1980. Ф. 3160, оп. 2, дд. 590, 2144, 2145, Дело фильма “Ленин среди друзей.” Производство: к/с “Леннаучфильм” (СССР), ВФО (ПНР).

³⁶ Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 590, лл. 1–10; Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2144, лл. 52(об.)–71.

³⁷ РГАЛИ, *опись фонда 3160 за 1968–1977 гг.*, Справка, л. 8. About *Sovinfilm*’s involvement in cooperating with the West, see Shaw and Youngblood 2010, 51, 53, 58; Kozovoi 2011, 67; Pisu 2019 and Mityurova 2019, 32.

was then promoted during the 1970s and early 1980s, coproduction with the socialist “brother countries” alone concerned dozens of fiction and documentary films. Of course, the latter projects were not supposed to be ideologically neutral.

In the co-produced movies, the Soviet filmmakers and their colleagues have tried to create works based upon an important political material, to raise actual problems of contemporary international life. [...] Movies on war and historical-revolutionary themes [...] are prominent (Суменов 1982, 5).

In these co-productions, *Sovinfilm* acted as an intermediary between Soviet filmmakers and their foreign counterparts. Among other tasks, it was meant to “conduct negotiations” and to deal with “the further work on production of screenplays for joint movies with Socialist countries.”³⁸ In other words, *Sovinfilm* centralised all the paperwork, largely preventing direct correspondence between the Soviet and foreign studios.

The two movies about Dzerzhinskiy (*No Identification Marks*, 1979–1980 and *Fiasco of Operation ‘Terror’*, 1981–1983) made in this new institutional context are essentially adventure movies which combine the characteristics of several sub-genres, such as *detektiv* (crime movie), *fil’m o razvedchikakh* (spy movies) and *istoriko-revolutsionnyy fil’m* (historical-revolutionary movie). Indeed, the late Soviet era witnessed the development of genre cinema as “an increased number of multi-partite popular films for release in the movie theatres.” This coincided “with the increase in numbers of films produced according to the same generic syntax” (Prokhorov and Prokhorova 2017, 6, 67–68). The genre pattern of these movies is also largely due to the screenwriter Yulian Semënov, who was at the centre of both projects. Yulian Semënov (1931–1993) was a Soviet journalist and writer, who had gained popularity with the enormous success of the TV serial *Seventeen Moments of Spring* [Семнадцать мгновений весны] in 1973, the screenplay he adapted from his own novel. *No Identification Marks* is also a close adaptation of his novel *Burning* [Горение] (Семенов 1977), a romanticised biography of the young Dzerzhinskiy. As a Russian critic rightly pointed out:

Yulian Semënov had created an original form of political-historical theatre, [and] afterwards he also created a real detective theatre [...]. There, along with characters he had invented, you could see on the stage Lenin, Dzerzhinskiy, Hitler, Franco, Truman and dozens of other real politicians (Березин 2016).

As *Seventeen Moments of Spring*, a spy story, was apparently sponsored by the KGB (Lipovetsky 2011, 210), the pair of biopics about the founder of the *Cheka* followed the same ideological line, praising the courage and the inflexibility

³⁸ РГАЛИ, *опись фонда 3160 за 1968–1977 гг.*, *Справка*, л. 8.

of the hero. And just as in *Seventeen Moments of Spring*, the relationship of Dzerzhinskiy's biopics to historical facts is loose, whereas the emphasis on movie sets and costumes seeks to show a pleasant picturesque past rather than a truthful one (Lipovetsky 2011, 213–214). The vision of Dzerzhinskiy's youth borrowed all the common places of Soviet propaganda about underground revolutionaries before 1917 with a touch of Polish *couleur locale*. The need for political correctness made Dzerzhinskiy into a Leninist standing for Poland's independence, which he never was.³⁹ Anyway, the screenplay did not focus on politics but on the tricks of the Tsarist secret policemen. History was a mere background for stories of manipulation, similar to Semënov's usual spy novels. The success of this first film prompted the quick preparation of a sequel about Dzerzhinskiy in 1921, with an original screenplay as Semënov had never written a novel about this post-revolutionary period. Once again, the political discourse was very vague. It set counter-revolutionaries working for foreign powers against Russian patriots, whether Bolsheviks or "bourgeois specialists" serving the new regime.⁴⁰ This was the background for another spy story where Poland was a setting for "the aid from Polish workers to Russian ones" and for "sensible politicians arguing [...] against Russian anti-Soviet organisations acting in Poland" (such as Irena Kosmowska, a leftist deputy in the Sejm). All these *clichés* seem to be Semënov's work: there is little discussion about the screenplay itself in the archive.⁴¹

Beyond the historical facts (mis)represented in these movies, there are many more issues in the making of them which caused a lot of paperwork. This should be no surprise as it was a big project. In addition to Soviet and Polish studios, DEFA from the German Democratic Republic was also involved in the co-production of *No Identification Marks* to allow the shooting of some scenes located in France, Great Britain or Switzerland, in Weimar, Dresden, Potsdam, Berlin and in the picturesque Saxon Switzerland.⁴² The twenty-five days of shooting in the GDR alone involved some 70 people from three countries and cost more than 150,000 roubles.⁴³ All this work and its logistics meant a lot of transnational interactions.

³⁹ On the contrary, along with Rosa Luxemburg he maintained an extreme anti-nationalist stance (Blobaum 1984, 101, 230).

⁴⁰ Similar to *Kremlin Chimes* [Кремлевские куранты], by Viktor Georgiyev and Oleg Stukalov (Mosfil'm, 1970), based upon a 1939 play by Nikolay Pogodin.

⁴¹ Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2141, лл. 31–33 (*Протокол переговоров*, 28 June–7 July 1979).

⁴² *No Identification Marks*: Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2178, лл. 22 (4 May 1977, telex from *Sovinfilm* to DEFA), 73 (October 1977, *Съемки в ГДР*); Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2179, лл. 6 (November 1977, *Отчет о поездке в ГДР*). *The Fiasco of Operation "Terror"*: Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2142, Jan. 1981, лл. 2–12 (*Контракт*), 13–15 (*Календарно-постановочный план*).

⁴³ Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2179, т. 2, л. 28 (с. 23 January 1978).

By organising the making of co-productions, the movie industry turned out to be a travel provider. It prepared visas to Poland for Soviet citizens or/and to the USSR for Poles and for both to the GDR. The planning was a lot of work, as is clear from the example of *No Identification Marks*. It involved twenty-three Soviet crew members and from ten to sixteen actors who travelled between cities in two countries.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, nobody complained about the inconvenience. Going abroad, be it only within the Socialist bloc, was then a privilege and a reward for Soviet citizens (Gorsuch 2011, 96–100). Therefore, transnational filmmaking became a form of tourism. The project heads received *kommandirovki* (paid travel assignments) to attend artistic board meetings and scout for shooting locations. As an aspect of cinematic transnational cooperation, travel abroad thus came under special scrutiny from the KGB (Kozovoï 2011, 70; Siefert 2016, 177). At their level, the cinema authorities understood what kind of leisure and shopping opportunities these business trips presented. So, they exercised administrative control over the number of “days off” during the stay, trying (not always with great success) to reduce them to a minimum.⁴⁵ Actors also tried to take advantage of their participation in co-productions. The Polish movie star Krzysztof Chamiec (1930–2001), who played Dzerzhinskiy in *Fiasco of Operation “Terror,”* asked to be paid in roubles in order to spend the money in the USSR after the shooting. He asked several times to book a stay at the Pitsunda resort in Abkhazia. Unfortunately, there were no vacancies at that time due to the Olympics in Moscow.⁴⁶

In the 1960s, such eagerness to have a good time thanks to work already existed. Among the photographs taken during the shooting of *Lenin in Poland*,⁴⁷ a special album shows how the crew enjoyed their stay in Poland: they visited old Cracow, fed pigeons, had drinks at street cafés, etc. However, one should not think that these moments of social life were meaningless. The album was prepared and offered by the Cracow Regional Film Board to their Soviet colleagues⁴⁸ and showed the official aspect of the trip. Lenin’s look-alike actor Shtraukh was photographed in front of the tombs of Soviet soldiers killed in the Second World War. Members of the crew attended a meeting under a portrait of Gomulka and the slogan: “Soviet cinema serves the cause of peace and friendship between peoples.” Such involvement of filmmakers as agents of soft power was also a way of securing

44 Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2178, л. 30 (June 1977, *Отчет по командировке в ГДР*). Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2179, л. 42 (22 February 1978, letter from *Sovinfilm* to *Mosfilm*).

45 Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2145, л. 150 (*Sovinfilm* to *Lennaučfil'm*, 19 September 1985).

46 Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2142, л. 87 (*Minfin* to *Sovinfilm*, 11 February 1980), Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2143, лл. 15–16 (*Przedsiębiorstwo Realizacji Filmów “Zespoły Filmowe”* to *Sovinfilm*, 16 June 1980).

47 Ф. 3070, оп. 1, д. 301, 302, 304.

48 Ф. 3070, оп. 1, д. 304.

the success of their own enterprise. The promotion of the released movies also created opportunities for both diplomatic and professional trips. Screenwriter Semënov and director Bobrovskiy flew to Poland to attend the premiere of *No Identification Marks* and then went to the Ten-day Soviet Film festival in 1978. It was of course an occasion to make contacts for further projects, first and foremost the sequel about Dzerzhinskiy in 1921.⁴⁹

Leaving diplomatic reasons aside, joint projects were also fruitful from a technical point of view. Professionals seized the opportunity to improve their skills. A Polish film set designer who had participated in the shooting of *No Identification Marks* in the USSR expressed the wish to spend some time in Moscow and Kiev in order to expand his knowledge and see how his Soviet colleagues worked.⁵⁰ Joint productions were also a chance to acquire the best equipment available, which was often made in Western countries. For the *Fiasco of Operation "Terror,"* the Soviets provided Swiss Nagra reel-to-reel tape recorders and Soviet Ritm cassette tape recorders as well as Japanese Nikon photo cameras. For their part, the Poles provided German Arriflex movie cameras.⁵¹ Motion picture film was a special issue: in every Soviet-Polish contract in the 1970–1980's, it was specified that the Poles should provide Kodak colour 35mm film (whose perforation and format were to be adapted to Eastern-bloc movie cameras), as well as intermediate film for print stocks.⁵² For filmmakers who struggled with the uneven quality of Soviet-made film, these Kodak items were valuable but rare products (Pozner 2019). Poles may have been able to buy them as they massively imported Western technology in the 1970s thanks to a high level of debt (Gomulka 1978).

If technical cooperation went smoothly between Poles and Soviets, film distribution was a potential bone of contention between the two countries. This was due mainly to economic constraints, which usually conflicted with the political goals pursued by cinematic transnational cooperation (Siefert 2016, 166). This had an impact on movie production. Formally, everything was regulated by the contract signed by the co-producing studios, which specified the obligation of each partner in shooting, editing and releasing the movie, how the credits should be mentioned, which partner could sell the copyright to such and such countries.⁵³

⁴⁹ Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2180, л. 32 (*Minfin* to *Sovinfilm*, 9 October 1978).

⁵⁰ Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2179, л. 14 (Letter from *Sovinfilm* to *Mosfilm*, 1 December 1977).

⁵¹ Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2142, лл. 21–22, 28 (Lists of devices, March 1979).

⁵² Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2178, л. 11 (Preliminary contract, c. January 1977). Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2179, л. 13 (Telegram from *Sovinfilm* to *Mosfilm*, 29 November 1977). Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2142, лл. 2, 7 (March 1979). Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2144, л. 15, 22 (Correspondence *Przedsiębiorstwo Realizacji Filmów "Zespoły Filmowe" - Sovinfilm*, 3, 7 Sep. 1984). Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2145, л. 66 (Contract, 15 January 1985).

⁵³ Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2179, л. 46 (Agreement about regions of distribution, 28 February 1978).

Still many disputes could arise concerning the final payment of services delivered by one country or the other, such as film development or edition of copies. Close to the release of the movie, delays in completing technical tasks could also provoke tension between the co-producing parties.⁵⁴ There is no explicit trace of disputes on political grounds, but some facts may suggest them. For unspecified reasons, Poles tried to cut scenes from their version of the first biopic about the young Dzerzhinskiy.⁵⁵ The sequel, *Fiasco of Operation “Terror,”* was released in 1981 in the USSR but was available in Poland only in 1983. Even though the archival material gives no reason for this delay, suffice to say that it might not have been the best time to release a movie about the founder of the Soviet political police when *Solidarność* was rising and subsequently banned under martial law.

The study of these three movies helps us understand the changes in relations to the past from the 1960s to the 1980s. In 1959–1965, Yutkevich, Gabrilovich, Newerly and Najdus, the collaborators in the making of *Lenin in Poland*, had all witnessed and/or participated in the revolutionary period or the heroic period of communism. Influenced by the post-Stalin spirit, they wanted to produce a historical representation “in a more objective way,” but also to leave room for sensitivity and emotion in order to show a new, more human, Lenin. Nevertheless, this new spirit had a very different impact in the USSR and Poland. While the Soviets could cautiously claim to come back to the authentic Lenin, Poles would rather come back to their own national narrative. Surprisingly, this was not grounds for political confrontation as the Soviet side perfectly understood the strength of national commitment and sought in turn to adopt Russia’s point of view in the movie.

By the late 1970s and early 1980’s, a younger generation (represented namely by Yulian Semënov), could use the period of “wars and revolutions” (1912–1921) as a mere background for popular movies where ideology played a lesser role, once it was established that Dzerzhinskiy embodied the supreme values put forward by the power in place: determination in seeking a goal and toughness in accomplishing duty. As political issues had been driven to the background, the professional side of joint movie productions became more obvious. This was made easier by the special body the Soviets had created, *Sovinfilm*, to manage ever more ambitious

⁵⁴ Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2180, л. 55, 57, 60 (Correspondence *Przedsiębiorstwo Realizacji Filmów “Zespoły Filmowe” - Sovinfilm - Mosfilm*, 30 January–6 February 1979).

⁵⁵ Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2180, л. 40 (Telex from *Goskino* to the Movie Committee of the Polish ministry of Culture, 31 Oct. 1978, concerning a scene where Boris Savinkov, the leader of the SR Combat group, operated from Poland in 1903). Ф. 3160, оп. 2, д. 2141, л. 116 (*Протокол о встрече Польско-советского руководства по съемкам фильма*, 19 Dec. 1979), unspecified scene.

and expensive transnational projects. Co-production also became attractive for professionals to participate in as it offered multiple opportunities: to enjoy tourism abroad, go shopping, improve skills by working with foreign colleagues and using cutting-edge technology. Although the involvement of some might have been motivated by personal interests, both countries would also benefit from the joint projects. Their nationals taking part in filmmaking abroad acted as agents of soft power, consciously when attending propaganda meetings, and unconsciously when developing transnational professional ties.

Lenin and Dzerzhinskiy had argued fervently in favour of internationalism in their time. After “socialist” states were set up in all Eastern Europe, their fiery image gradually faded. Nonetheless, they modestly provided the opportunity to push forward an apolitical form of inter-sectoral international cooperation. It remained “socialist” only as far as the mode of production was concerned, in a mixture of high ideological claims and petty bureaucratic procedures.

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