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EARLY CINEMA IN LITHUANIA: THE EMERGENCE OF A CULTURAL TRADITION

Summary. Leaning on the notions of transnationalism of cinema or Cinema of Small States, this article sets out to evaluate early cinema in the Northwestern Krai of the late 1800s–early 1900s Russian Empire and the region's largest city, Vilnius, thematically, rather than chronologically, through the layers of the formation of film culture and the transformation of cinema into an aesthetic object. Such an approach presents a culturally new possibility of finding commonalities, allowing one to see early cinema in the provinces not necessarily as an always-late phenomenon that highlights the provinciality of the provinces, but on the contrary, as part of the overall European film tradition. This is argued from several aspects. Firstly, by showing how the perception of cinema has changed (and how this change coincided with Western trends) from cinema of attractions to narrative cinema; and secondly, by identifying changes in the repertoire of cinemas and in the established preferences of the early cinema audiences.

Keywords: Vilnius, Early cinema, Russian Empire, transnationalism, periphery, film genres, cinema repertoire, silent film.

INTRODUCTION

The article[1] does not aim to establish the exact genesis of the first film screenings in the Northwestern Krai (we will, however, offer three dates to choose from: 27 July 1896, 20 February 1897, or 24 June 1897), but to show how quickly, and by what mechanisms, an entire culture of filmgoing and film-watching in Vilnius in the early 20th century evolved out of the first sporadic moving-image showcases held by street showmen. To achieve this, it is more important for me to highlight the importance of various exchanges and cultural contacts, which allows us to talk not only about the cultural life in the provinces of the Russian Empire but also to show it as having a great deal in common with the rest of Central and Eastern Europe (and even sharing some of the same time-specific tendencies as those found in the West or the major centres of the Russian Empire). In this sense, a broader scope and discussion of the birth of the film tradition in turn-of-the-century Vilnius allows us to escape the "centre-periphery" dichotomy and even to grant a certain agency to the subjects that have so far been neglected by historiography.

THE SPECIFICS OF THE CITY OF VILNIUS IN THE LATE 19TH–EARLY 20TH CENTURY

The 1772, 1793 and 1795 partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth forever ended this common state's existence, and it was not until 1918 that both Lithuania and Poland managed to restore their independence. Until then, the Lithuanian territory was part of the Russian Empire, forming the Northwestern Krai (Russian: Северо-западный край), consisting of the governorates of Vilnius, Kaunas and Grodno. Vilnius, the key city in the region and the historical capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, was undergoing rapid modernisation and growth at the end of the 19th century, with the development of various industries (large-scale industries (food, leather and footwear, woodworking, paper, and metal products), various small industries and wholesale trade, which was facilitated by the city's becoming a major railway transport hub), as well as the emergence of a number of features reminiscent of Western urban centres (regular street network, sewerage system, lighting, buildings with modern technologies of the time, etc. in the new districts

of Vilnius). Historically, Vilnius had always been and, at the turn of the century, once again became important to the Lithuanian, Polish, Jewish, Belarusian, and Tatar communities and political movements as well as other nationalities living in the city: several emerging nations considered it their historic capital (or the capital of a future state), and various leftist movements and organisations had a particularly strong presence in the area, notably the Jewish Bund.[2] In the late 19th century, Vilnius was the city of newcomers: in 1897, the local population of Vilnius constituted only 52.4%, whereas the majority of the population consisted of peasants (around 41 thousand) and people from other towns of Vilnius Governorate (36 thousand). In 1911, the population in Vilnius was nearly 240 thousand, including the army. However, in the early 20th century, the new, modern lifestyle and entertainment in Vilnius – in luxurious restaurants, hotels, cafés, cabarets – still mingled with the old calendar religious festivals dating back to the Middle Ages, especially with Catholic indulgence feasts, processions, and fairs.[3]

THE PROBLEMATIC HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

In this introductory part, I have set out to outline the historiographical situation of early cinema in Lithuania in a broader context. At the same time, this is a gentle call for rethinking the cultural topography of early cinema, as well as a partial attempt to demonstrate that ideas of this cultural field's belonging to a particular location are fluid. This, in Dina Iordanova's words, also requires a redrawing of the maps of film history.[4] We will move on from this global perspective to the narrower issues addressed in this article (the principles of the formation of cinemas and the film-viewing network, the targeting of specific audiences by film showmen, the search for and the establishment of popular genres). I believe that focusing on these themes, which are relevant and evolving in the Western tradition of film studies, can encourage one to identify common trends, while highlighting interactions and revealing common problems can help one view the early Lithuanian film culture of the late 19th and early 20th century as a part of the European film tradition.

Since the turn of the 21st century, the historiography of cinema has been increasingly focused on the transnationalism of cinema. Such studies, however, tend to bypass the Eastern and Central European region.[5] On the other hand, Polish film scholars Ewa Mazierska and Michael Goddard have noted that authors from this region (both resident and expatriate,[6] and non-native scholars[7]) tend to talk about cinema in a way that bypasses the phenomenon of transnationalism and does not address the differences between films made in this part of Europe and those made elsewhere.[8] In the context of films made since around 1980, and even more so since the fall of the Iron Curtain (i.e. when the local Eastern-Central European film industry becomes more complex), they argue that such a discussion should at least include the themes of co-production and expatriate filmmakers, the questions of the extent to which contemporary film is national, the portrait of the contemporary spectator, issues of collaborations, co-productions, exchanges and the like.[9]

The transnationalism of cinema has also been influenced by general developments in the humanities, which, following such thinkers as Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm and Homi Bhabha, have begun to reconsider the processes of national community building, the influence of media, and the "invention of tradition" in general. Following this logic, if a nation-state is non-existent (or unstable, or still in the making), its cinema should also be in a constant state of flux. This paradigm is particularly appropriate in Lithuania, as in other Central and Eastern European countries: the centuries-long struggle for the re-establishment of national sovereignty, the tumultuous history of the 19th century in its various dimensions (from the military to the cultural to the social), and the relatively frequent changes in the Lithuanian borders, have all contributed to a corresponding situation of the country's cinema. Thus, early Lithuanian cinema (pre-1918) is inevitably linked to other countries, primarily Russia,

Poland, Germany or Denmark (a cinematic powerhouse until World War I), as well as to culturally active national communities, primarily the Jews of the Pale of Settlement and emerging Belarusian, Lithuanian and Polish national movements. Therefore, the transnationalism of this period's cinema ought to be understood in the most basic way. As in other European countries, cinema in Vilnius appeared relatively soon after the first screenings in Paris, i.e. at the end of July 1896, there were screenings of Thomas Edison films using the Animatograph[10] in the Concert Hall of the Vilnius Botanical Garden, and, in the second week of March 1897, the films of the Lumière brothers' Cinématographe were shown at Hotel Paris on *Didžioji* Street.[11] In the following decades, local film industries began to emerge in some of the countries of the region, and in this sense, the cultural and cinematic tradition was even ahead of the processes of political sovereignty: "authentic national cinema started growing when statehood was but a dream".[12] Nonetheless, as my colleague Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančiorienė has proved, it is not so easy to separate national narratives from the first moving images and their exhibition[13] as the histories of Lithuanian cinema written before the fall of Communism – in fact, not only histories of cinema, but history as a science in general – approached the past from the national narrative perspective, which helped the country to preserve its national and civic self-consciousness during the Soviet occupation. Some Lithuanian film scholars and historians have been continuing this narrative even after the restoration of independence.

Since one of the topics of the article is the cultural topography of early cinema, it seems that it should be easy enough to define at least the geographical boundaries of the article. Far from it: the problem lies in the interrelation of at least three factors (the nation-state, the very phenomenon of early cinema, and the high diversity of the society in which cinema was shown). Setting out to analyse the Vilnius and Kaunas Governorates, or Vilnius as the largest city in the region and the railway hub (which allowed its citizens to experience the passing-through cultural news and attractions), runs the risk of overlooking or failing to adequately appreciate various rather nuanced processes of the development of early cinema. For early film culture was highly sporadic, fragile, and in a constant state of flux, not entirely bound by administrative or national borders. Film screenings depended on many factors, ranging from proximity to efficient transport arteries, favourable commercial conditions, local censorship or the religious calendar (which still had a strong influence on the day-to-day life), or simply technical failures (cracking projection lamps, breaking or spontaneously combusting cellulose nitrate film reels). The constant migration of talent, and their participation in transnational creative processes, is another striking feature of early cinema, impeding the localisation of cinematic developments. Nor does the region's society help make the situation any clearer, with the gradual intermingling of Belarusian, Lithuanian, Polish, and Jewish national ideas and movements, which, in one way or another, tried to incorporate into the narratives of their national imaginations such well-known places as, for example, the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius, where Poles would come to film and then proceed to show their moving images both in Vilnius, possibly in Kaunas too, and in Warsaw.[14] Natan Gross, a researcher of Polish-Jewish cinema, also points out that there were Jewish feature films made in Vilnius.[15] This means that while the early manifestations of film culture are very obscure, the sources themselves should not be analysed selectively.[16]

These are the problems that have led to a consensus in European film studies over the last decades on the need for new models that go beyond the notion of the nation as a monadic entity.[17] Especially if, like Lithuania, a nation's history is marked by an era of colonial subordination, which further complicates the study of such cultural relations. One of the conceptual models that shed more light on this situation is the analytical device of the Cinema of Small Nations, which allows for a partially new exploration of the correspondence between the subnational, the national, the international, the transnational, the regional and the global powers in the field of cinema.[18] Its applicability is quite broad, as small nations or states are a relative phenomenon (a state

is small only in relation to a larger state), and therefore a small state should be considered as a proxy for a state's relation to larger states.[19] Although the Cinema of Small Nations is not a well-defined category, it is often understood intuitively (albeit with the identification of certain parameters: national subjects, local nature, population, size of territory, and GDP in the films; equally important is a history of long-lasting and structurally significant subordination to a ruling state).[20] Most studies use the device of the Cinema of Small Nations to refer to national cinema, especially after 1989, even though acknowledging that its origins and features were already evident in the silent film era.[21]

One of the main strengths of the aforementioned theoretical devices like the transnationalism of cinema or the Cinema of Small States (which have stemmed from common trends in early 21st century research on politics, society and culture) lies in their ability to reveal the transcultural and dynamic nature of cinema, the flows of ideas (commodities, people, images), the transgression of borders and the possibility of a culturally new search for commonalities.[22]

THE EMERGENCE OF FILM CULTURE

One such commonality is the formation of film culture, the transition of early cinema into an aesthetic object, a permanent and relevant participant in the cultural field, as well as the development of relevant knowledge and institutions on the part of the consumers of film. Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault were amongst the first to conceptually discuss the art of watching early cinema, the spectator's habituation to the enjoyment of moving images (not necessarily narrative ones), and even the aspiration to be dazzled by the kinaesthetic effects inherent in the modern technologies of the late 19th century.[23] This was also documented by Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė at the beginning of the 20th century in her writing about new cultural phenomena, such as the Cinématographe and the experiences it evokes as well as spectators who are already accustomed to these experiences:

> Aren't we reading newspapers in a feverish frenzy of romanticism? Isn't it romanticism that leads us to cinemas? Isn't it romanticism that drives us to look for special news in novels, novelettes and chronicles? It is enough to hear a gunshot or some other noise to make us jump ... and what insatiability of excitement keeps us in thrall, I wonder, as we hungrily seek out and suck in everything that stirs our imagination. [...] we are all romantics today, without realising it. Only our romanticism [...] cannot be a [sentimental] romanticism for passion, only for excitement.[24]

According to Petkevičaitė-Bitė, unlike in the days of old, the modern man of the early 20th century wishes to have everything presented quickly, concisely and efficiently, so he searches for such experiences in novels and newspapers, he expects to find them in the city streets as well as film screenings. For example, as if echoing cultural critics' observation that the emotional basis of the modern individual is craving intense impressions and addiction to emotional turbulence,[25] a 1913 advertisement for the Vilnius cinema audience stressed that "we have become accustomed to murders and horrible images" and that the advertised cinema novelty would offer "real and rampant terror".[26] In the early 20th century, film lovers in the Russian Empire emphasised another strong aspect of cinema: the democratic nature of this new cultural field. According to F. Shtibel, a film enthusiast who described his impressions in the *Kinematograficheskiy Teatr*, a citizen of the European part of the Russian Empire, or a visitor of the cities, would choose cinema entertainment over going to the theatre or the opera after a day of work simply because there was no need to "dress up in new clothes, shave, style one's hair, and to look decent in general [...] in a cinema one is allowed various mis-groomings, one can feel free to sneeze, cough [...] one can leave his coat on".[27]

Bitė, a women's rights advocate and activist, does not point out that cinema audience of the day was exclusively male, so it is safe to assume that women were already established as consumers of cinematic entertainment at that time. Barbora Didžiokienė

writes in her memoirs of her adolescence in the early 1900s St. Petersburg, Kiev, Moscow, Odessa and other European cities of the Russian Empire that even in the evenings film-going (usually with her older sister or friends) was virtually a common everyday practice, not requiring separate parental permission or escort.[28] The culture of early cinema-going reflected the topical issues of the Russian Empire and Lithuanian society in the early 20th century, as well as the problems and challenges posed by the women's rights movement: liberation from traditional patriarchal relations in public and private life, women's education and correspondingly paid work, participation in public activities or political equality. Overcoming such traditions was inseparable from broader processes of economic modernisation, as more and more young women left home in the early 20th century in search of work and better fortunes, sometimes hundreds of kilometres away from their homelands. Coincidentally, the active participation of women in the cultural sphere in general is seen as one of the factors that led to the rise of mass culture and contributed to the commercialisation of fiction films.[29]

By attracting women (and children) and thus creating a socially heterogeneous audience, the first cinemas faced the problem of cultural status. New spectators did not only increase ticket sales, they also alienated, first and foremost, the so-called "theatre audience", which was usually more educated and affluent. Similar insights into the status of cinema were shared by the editors of *Kinemakolor*, one of the first film magazines in the Russian Empire, who stated that the first films were perceived as "pandemonic amusement", and that people would come to see them casually, with nowhere else to spend a spare hour.[30] Vilnius cultural commentators would add that cinema was initially perceived as "poor man's theatre", attracting only the low-income audience and those who had previously been buying only the cheapest theatre tickets.[31] They do admit nonetheless that the crisis of theatre and its censorship, of course along with cinema's repertoire ("breathtaking, sensational dramas advertised by flashy titles and eye-catching posters"),[32] and the increasing number of cosy and comfortable screening rooms, led to a significant expansion of cinemas' clientele. The above-mentioned *Kinemakolor* states that by 1910, there was an established demanding spectatorship, following the cinema repertoire and choosing what to watch rather than attending random screenings: "Cinema has become as much a part of the common life as the theatre".[33] What the *Kinemakolor* columnist says about the imperial situation of cinema was echoed in Vilnius of the time: in the same year, 1910, the Polish press in Vilnius stated that cinema had become a completely independent cultural phenomenon, flourishing at the expense of theatre:

Cinemas are thriving, packed late into the night with all kinds of spectators, competing with the Polish theatre, which is going through a severe crisis, yielding great profits, enriching their owners, and often impoverishing those whom they rob of the most precious treasures of the heart, the peace of mind and the purity of feelings.[34]

Imperial Russian and Western film distributors tried to reinforce cinema's cultural status by emphasising that their films featured the leading actors of Russian,[35] French,[36] Danish[37] or Polish[38] theatres.

AUDIENCE PREFERENCES: GENRES AND STARS

As in the history of any cultural practice, there is a point in early cinema when the recent past becomes history. In the case discussed here, this boundary separates early cinema's affiliation to the more general popular amusement culture of the late 19th century, in which cinema was often presented as a new technological invention (known as moving pictures), and showcased as a visual entertainment alongside vaudeville, café-chantant, circus, pantomime, singers of various genres, acrobats, and other visual stage performances. Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault, who were the first to identify this cultural break, argue that in the early days of cinema, films were displays of spectacular imagery rather than narrative stories. To quote in more detail:

To summarize, the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself. The attraction to be displayed may also be of a cinematic nature, such as the early close-ups just described, or trick films in which a cinematic manipulation (slow motion, reverse motion, substitution, multiple exposure) provide the film's novelty. Fictional situations tend to be restricted to gags, vaudeville numbers or recreations of shocking or curious incidents (executions, current events). It is the direct address of the audience, in which an attraction is offered to the spectator by a cinema showman, that defines this approach to filmmaking. Theatrical display dominates over narrative absorption, emphasizing the direct stimulation of shock or surprise at the expense of unfolding a story or creating a diegetic universe.[39]

This period in which cinema was perceived as yet another new form of entertainment at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, ends in Western Europe and Imperial Russia around 1910, when cinema becomes a separate cultural institution with its own codified practices and norms.[40] Around this time, films undergo a metamorphosis: those based on a purely visual prank, a single striking scene (or a sequence of disjointed mise-en-scenes) are replaced by films whose segments seem more connected and have a clearer narrative by the use of montage, and whose single mise-en-scène in the plotline is replaced by a thoughtfully designed sequence of such elements.[41] In addition, economic considerations begin to take hold in the film industry, and early cinema spectators themselves become much more demanding.[42] In Vilnius, too, in the early years of cinema, audiences were fully satisfied with so-called "cinematic attractions" rather than films, which provided visual curiosity and enjoyment of the new technological capabilities of the machines to demonstrate exciting spectacle (first moving pictures, later moving X-ray imagery), often accompanied by live café-chantant or circus performances. In Vilnius, this period of the cinematic history comes to an end in 1910, with the emergence of an audience that demanded a more complex and varied narrative film structure. As cinema gradually becomes a cultural institution, it is not only the audience that changes, no longer satisfied with "pandemonic amusement" and random "moving images". This shift is also attributable to social changes in society: intense migration/immigration, the growing number of consumers, and changing traditional gender roles. Mirian Hansen, who has studied early cinema showing and viewing practices and discussed the above-mentioned turning point in cinema consumption, adds that nobody had written about the "spectators" of cinema until around 1910, describing them in general terms instead, as different socio-cultural groups. (The stratification of film spectatorship in the early 20th century Russian Empire was also enabled by the differential pricing of better seats, which had also been documented by contemporaries).[43] Hansen goes on to add an important point that the changing portrait of the early filmgoer introduces exclusions, and the audience is no longer seen as exclusively male: in the early 20th century, cinema and film-going becomes an "alternative public sphere" for women.[44]

In parallel, there is a change in film-going habits, as the very first cinema screenings were open all day long, and one could just walk into a cinema regardless of what was being shown or even if the film had already started. This was the kind of entertainment and the consumption of it offered in advertisements by *Iliuzija*, the first full-time cinema in Vilnius (and Lithuania), which opened on 60 *Didžioji* Street on 30 December 1906. The cinema's regular advertisements emphasized that the programme would change on Sundays and that visitors were welcome to simply drop in without having to adjust to the repertoire: every day from 16.00 to 23.30, and from 13.00 to 23.30 on Saturdays.[45] A month later, the advertisements for this electro-theatre were repeated, again emphasising that the films were shown continuously and that the programme was made up of exclusive films.[46] The first screening of a single film in Vilnius took place in 1911, it was the first Russian historical war film, *Оборона Севастополя* (Defence of Sevastopol, dir. Vasily

Goncharov, 1911, Studio Khanzhonkov), depicting episodes of the Crimean War.[47] Ginzburg calls this film the first hit film, a 2000-metre-long filmreel with a runtime of 90 minutes. The preview and special screening of a single film represents not only the maturing audience's tastes, but also a change in the film production industry: it means that filmmakers had started to produce traditional narrative cinema, gradually leaving the "old" pandemonic and attraction films behind. The Goncharov film was also notable for its promotional campaign, as the widely advertised film appealed to patriotic sentiments, attracting a highly diverse audience, which no longer paid attention to the critical merits of the film itself.[48] An ideologically very similar film about the Russian victory over Napoleon's armies, *1812* (1812 год, Vasily Goncharov, 1912), was also screened in Vilnius as a stand-alone film, attended by the distinguished administrative and military authorities of the country.

Not the ideology of the Russian Empire and the corresponding cultural service (for which Khanzhonkov was awarded the Order of St. Stanislaus by Emperor Nicholas II of Russia), which was clearly manifested in the aforementioned films, but rather the cultural panorama of Vilnius was reflected in the film *Quo Vadis* (dir. Enrico Guazzoni, 1913), based on the eponymous novel about the sufferings of the Christians and their persecutions, by a well-known Polish author Henryk Sienkiewicz. The film, according to the advertisements, was grandiose, 3000 metres, or approximately two hours long.[49] Its stand-alone screening attracted very wide, diverse and numerous audiences. That was also evident in the ticket prices, as the difference between the cheapest and the most expensive one was more than ten-fold[50] and there was "a fight for every ticket", according to the Vilnius press.[51] These cases of different films being offered to Vilnius spectators not only mark the fragmentation of the cinema audience, but can also be used to generally illustrate the modernisation, fragmentation and subjectivity of the modern society of the early 1900s in the North-western Krai, as well as the freedom to choose even things of which traditional political, religious or cultural authorities did not approve.

Alongside the maturing cultural tastes of filmgoers, there was a growth in the possibilities for film producers to offer more choice to both genders. At that time cinema audiences in Vilnius and in Lithuania do not seem to have been researched in detail. This was noted in 1913 by the editors of the Vilnius daily newspaper *Vakarinis laikraštis*, who argued that film culture had become very strong, and that scientific research into film audiences was much welcome. With this in mind, the daily paper's editors presented a survey of filmgoers' portrait in Tomsk, a Siberian city at least a third smaller than Vilnius. As in Vilnius, the most popular genre in Tomsk, judging by cinema advertisements, was long dramas depicting modern life, which received 1,194 votes from respondents. They were followed by various newsreels (1,082) and comedies (878). More specifically, spectators indicated their preference for crime dramas (1,219), romantic dramas (1,031) and dramas based on the lives of circus performers (821). The second place went to actualités, or newsreels, further subdivided into nature scenes (1,257), films about scientific achievements (1,006), films about extraction and manufacturing industries (997) and films on sports (929).[52]

By 1913, part of the Russian Empire's film-going public had not only decided on their favourite genre, but also their favourite actors: the international stars of early cinema, Asta Nielsen (1219) and Max Linder (1212), followed by the French Stacia Napierkowska (960), Italian Francesca Bertini (829) and Valdemar Psilander (known in Russia as "Garrison") (1172), "Bébé" (920), Charles Prince (known to the Russian audiences simply as Prince, or as one of his characters, Rigadino) (845) or André Deed (much better known to the Imperial Russian audiences as "The Fool" (Russian: Глупышкин, 763).[53]

One of the striking features of the globalism of the early cinema culture in Lithuania could be not only the established structure of film-going and preferences, as in the West (or in the region of Central-Eastern Europe), but also the entry into a common global distribution network and the emergence and consolidation of theatres that operated in several different regions. For example,

the Richard Sztremer cinema opened in Vilnius in 1909 as part of the Sztremer cinema chain, which also had branches in Kiev, Minsk, Riga and other cities.

Judging by the sporadic recordings of audience opinions, film advertisements and the early films themselves, early spectators and viewers were particularly attracted to films that depicted reality and the present. Film reviews often emphasised a film's "modernity", "realism",[54] the fact that it was based on "real events" or "real life of today". An almost typical description of the film *Asya the Student* (Курсистка Ася, Pathé Moscow Branch, 1913), shown at Cinema Eden, stresses that the film is a student life drama based on Russian literature, therefore viewers are about to witness "not a scene, but life itself".[55]

Around 1910, cinemas in Vilnius started to settle down on an established structure of a film session, crystallising the cinematic genres that were constantly on the programme. From this period onwards, the city's main cinemas would change their programmes roughly every three days, and a session would consist of 3–5 films, starting with a newsreel (by Pathé, Goumont, or unnamed), followed by a drama, and ending with a comedy or two or a lighter travelogue film. The spectator could also experience the "serious" aspects of cinema: newsreels reflecting on daily global affairs, scientific achievements, etc.[56] These were then followed by a "serious" feature film such as drama or tragedy, and, to end the session on an uplifting note, the spectator would have been treated with comedies. This period saw the increased professionalism not only in the early cinema audiences, but also in the efforts by film entrepreneurs in bringing their product to audiences. For instance, film advertisements became more detailed and specific, discussing not only the more "substantial" fiction films but also documentaries. This is also when films about events in Vilnius or neighbouring cities such as Minsk, Riga or Smolensk would appear and be presented to the local audience[57] (*Пожаръ нефтянопогонкаго заводе въ Риге* (Fire at the Oil Refinery in Riga, Grand-kino, 1914; *The Sights of Smolensk* (1911, Pathé) or *Денъ Белаго цветка въ Вилне 1 мая* (White Flower Day in Vilna on May 1, (1914, Bronislava) (such festivities took place all over the empire, and one could see images from Minsk, Riga and many other cities on the screen);[58] *Литовскаха Маевка в Вильне* (Lithuanian outings in Vilna, (1914, Repos); *Пребывание государя императора Вильньне* (The Emperor's Arrival in Vilna (1914, Studio Khanzhonkov?); *Биленские торжества 21 февраля 1913 г. по случаю 300–летия юбилея царствования дома Романовых* (The celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Romanov reign in Vilna (Bronislava, 1913) as well as various picturesque views of Vilnius and its surroundings, the River Vilnelė, Druskininkai, Trakai. It can also be interpreted as an attempt by cinema owners to not only present distant events, but also to show that local town streets and events were film-worthy.[59]

CONCLUSIONS

Leaning on the notions of transnationalism of cinema or Cinema of Small States, the article set out to evaluate early cinema in the Northwestern Krai of the late 1800s–early 1900s Russian Empire and the region's largest city, Vilnius, thematically, rather than chronologically, through the layers of the formation of film culture and the transformation of cinema into an aesthetic object. Such an approach presented a culturally new possibility of finding commonalities, allowing one to see early cinema in the provinces not necessarily as an always-late phenomenon that highlights the provinciality of the provinces, but on the contrary, as part of the overall European cinematic tradition. By highlighting the features of the film culture in the early 1900s Vilnius, a provincial city of the Russian Empire at the time, we can discern commonalities with trends in the European and Western[60] cinematic traditions, which also makes it possible to rethink the relationship between imperial, colonial regimes and their periphery.

In this article I have discussed several common themes and cultural trends that allow one to view

the Lithuanian and Western cinema tradition of the time as coherent. The first is the transition of cinema from attraction (here called pandemonic cinema) to narrative films and the correspondingly evolving needs of the film audience. In Vilnius, the somewhat belated introduction of the cinematographic apparatuses of the Lumière brothers, Edison and Robert W. Paul, and their ability to project images, enticed and attracted the city's residents and visitors alike. The first screenings were namely the presentation of the latest technological achievement: moving pictures. In the early years of cinema, audiences were fully satisfied with the so-called cinematic attractions, rather than films, which provided visual curiosity and enjoyment of the new technological possibilities of machines demonstrating a fascinating spectacle. In Vilnius, as in the West, this phase of cinematic history came to an end in 1910, with the emergence of an audience that demanded a more complex and varied narrative film structure. The second revelation of the similarities between early film culture in Lithuania and Europe, as well as the intercultural and dynamic nature of cinema as a cultural phenomenon, is the changes in the repertoire of cinemas and the established taste of filmgoers, specifically, the preferences for film genres and star actors.

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Notes

[1] This article is part of the research project "Early cinema in Lithuania: National, Imperial and Global Connections" (Nr. S-LIP-19-72) funded by the Research Council of Lithuania and carried out by the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre.

[2] Moshe Mishkinsky, "Regional Factors in the Formation of the Jewish Labour Movement in Czarist Russia", *Essential Paper on Jews and the Left*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 78; *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 4.

[3] Laima Laučkaitė, *Vilniaus dailė XX amžiaus pradžioje* (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2002), 166–176.

[4] Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe. The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London, New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 14.

[5] See Stephen Crofts, "Concepts of National Cinema", *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. John Hill, Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Tim Bergfelder, "National, Transnational or Supranational Cinema? Rethinking European Film Studies", *Media, Culture & Society* 27, no. 3 (2005), 315–331; Nataša Durovicová, Kathleen E. Newman, *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, "Concepts of

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[6] Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002).

[7] Paul Coates, *The Red and the White: The Cinema of People's Poland* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005); Sheila Skaff, *The Law of the Looking Glass: Cinema in Poland, 1896–1939* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008).

[8] *Polish Cinema in a Transnational Context*, eds. Ewa Mazierska and Michael Goddard (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 1.

[9] Plg. *Politinis lūžis ekrane: (po)komunistinė transformacija Lietuvos dokumentiniame kine ir videokronikoje*, eds. Anna Mikonis-Railienė, Renata Šukaitytė, Mantas Martišius, Renata Stonytė (Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2020); Renata Šukaitytė-Coenen, "Contemporary Lithuanian documentary cinema: a critical overview of main film directions" *Apertúra: Film–Vizualitás–Elmélet = Apertura: Film–Visuality–Theory*, 2021, Fall, 1–23; Renata Šukaitytė, "Lithuania Redirected: New Connections, Businesses and Lifestyles in Cinema Since 2000", *East, West and Centre: Reframing Post–1989 European Cinema*, eds. Michael Gott, Todd Herzog (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 175–190.

[10] *Виленский вестник*, 1896.V.9, VII.30.

[11] *Виленский вестник*, 1897.III.18.

[12] Frank Bren, *World Cinema 1: Poland* (Wiltshire: Flicks Books, 1990), 9; more: Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe. The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London, New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 1–19.

[13] Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančiorienė, Kas yra "nacionalinis kinas"? Kanonas, transnacionalinis ir ankstyvasis kinas [What is "national cinema"? Canon, Transnational and Early Cinema], *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, Nr. 107 [in print].

[14] One of the first Polish films, shot in Vilnius and later screened in Warsaw: W. Z. [unidentified author], "Wystawa wileńska III (Korespondencja własna *Kur. Warsz.*)", *Kurjer Warsawski* 253 (1902.09.13), 9.

[15] Natan Gross, *Film żydowski w Polsce* (Kraków: Rabid, 2002); Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančiorienė, Kas yra "nacionalinis kinas"? [in print].

[16] Paolo Cherchi Usai, *Burning Passions. An Introduction to the Study of Silent Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 36.

[17] Plg. *The Cinema of Small Nations*, eds. Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1; Andrew Dudley, "An Atlas of World Cinema", *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 45, No. 2 (FALL 2004), 9–23; *European Visions. Small Cinemas in Transition*, ed. Janelle Blankenship and Tobias Nagl (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015).

[18] *The Cinema of Small Nations*, 2.

[19] *Ibid*., 2.

[20] Miroslav Hroch, *The Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge, London: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[21] *The Cinema of Small Nations*, 15; *European Visions. Small Cinemas in Transition*, 15; *A notable exception, the compilation for reconsidering the notions of early cinema, a nation and national cinema: Early Cinema and the "National"*, eds. Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini, Rob King (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

[22] Plg. *Silent Cinema and the Politics of Space*, eds. Jennifer M. Bean, Anupama Kapse, and Laura Horak (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 1–7.

[23] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early film, its Spectator and the Avant Garde", *Wide Angle* 8, No. 3/4 (Fall 1986), 63–70; André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema*, translated by Timothy Barnard (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

[24] Gabielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė, "Mintys apie romantizmo esmę", *Iš gyvenimo verpetų* (Vilnius: Vaga, 1989), 113.

[25] George Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life", *The Blackwell City Reader*, eds. Gary Bridge, Sophie Watson (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2002), 11–12; Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden, Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2008), 121.

[26] Вечернаяя газета 168 (1913), 2.

[27] Е. Штибелъ, По кинематографической России (Любитель для любителей), Кинематографический театръ 1 (1912), 1.

[28] Plg. Barbora Didžiokienė, *Mažosios dailininkės atsiminimai* (Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas, 2011), 121, 137, 174, 203–204.

[29] Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Permutations of the Public Sphere", *Screen* 34 (3) (Autumn 1993), 176, 196; Elizabeth Ewen, "City Lights: Immigrant Women and the Rise of Movies", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, No. 3 (1980), 57; Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play. Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 265.

[30] [Unauthored, untitled], Кинемаколоръ 1 (1910), 5.

[31] В. Г. [unidentified author], Театръ и кинематографъ, *Вечернаяя газета* 107 (1913), 3.

[32] В. Г. [unidentified author], Театръ и кинематографъ, *Вечернаяя газета* 107 (1913), 4.

[33] [Unauthored, untitled], Кинемаколоръ 1 (1910), 6.

[34] Czarny Jegomość [unidentified author], Kinematografy, *Goniec Wileński* 13 (1990), annex, 5.

[35] Advertisement for the film "Gydymas saule", reklama, *Вечернаяя газета* 48 (1912), 1.

[36] Advertisements for the film "Punčinelio paslaptis", *Вечернаяя газета* 147 (1913), 1.

[37] Advertisements for the films "Lunatizmo aukos", "Baisus juokas" or "Tragedija debesyse", *Вечернаяя газета* 135 (1913), 1; 137, 1; 152, 1.

[38] Advertisement for the film *Wykolejeni* (To Step out of One's Way) by Polish director Kazimierz Kamiński, *Вечернаяя газета* 124 (1913), 1.

[39] Tom Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions", *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, eds. Thomas Elsaesser, Adam Barker (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 58–59.

[40] One of the first to identify this distinction was Sergei Eisenstein in his 1923 article *The Montage of Attractions.* His idea was elaborated in 1960–70s by André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning, see С. М. Эйзенштейн, Монтаж аттракционов, *Избранные произведения в 6 томах*, Составители П. М. Аташева, Н. И. Клейман, Ю. А. Красовский, В. П. Михайлов, том 2 (Москва: Искусство, 1964), 269–273; Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early film, its Spectator and the Avant Garde", *Wide Angle* 8, No. 3/4 (Fall 1986), 63–70; André Gaudreault , *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

[41] André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction,* 59.

[42] Denise J. Youngblood, *The Magic Mirror*, 46.

[43] Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005).

[44] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[45] *Виленский вестник* 1071 (1906), 1.

[46] *Виленский вестник* 1095 (1907), 1.

[47] Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančiorienė, Kas yra "nacionalinis kinas"? [in print].

[48] Denise J. Youngblood, *The Magic Mirror*, 28.

[49] *Вечернаяя газета* 191 (1913), 1.

[50] A lodge seat in Bronislava cost 3.40 rubles, armchair 0.85, first class seats 0.65, second class seats 0.50, third class seats 0.40 and balcony seats 0.30 rubles. This film must have been familiar to the local audiences not only from Sienkiewicz eponymous novel but also from its accompanying visual sources, the widely used works of Jean–Léon Géróme, which formed an essential representation of public life in Ancient Rome, see Ivo Blom, "Quo Vadis? From Painting to Cinema and Everything in Between", *La decima musa. Il cinema e le altre arti / The Tenth Muse. Cinema and other arts*, eds. Leonardo Quaresima, Laura Vichi (Udine: Forum, 2001), 283, 285.

[51] Кн. И., На екране ы "Брониславa", *Виленский вестник* 2940 (1913), 4.

[52] [Unauthored], Посетители кинематографовъ и ихъ вкусы, *Вечерняя газета*, 1913, № 187, с. 3.

[53] Ibid.

[54] See the presentation of the unidentified film "Plėšikai-padegėjai" (Arson robbers) pristatymas, Виленский вестник 1330 (1907), 1.

[55] *Вечернаяя газета* 147 (1913), 1.

[56] More at: Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė, Juozapas Paškauskas, Local and Global Framework of Early Cinema in Lithuania: Vilnius cinemas, Programme Formats and Audience, *Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication,* [in print].

[57] Ibid.

[58] *Документальные фильмы дореволюционной России, 1907–1916* (Москва: Музей кино, 1996), 134.

[59] Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė, Juozapas Paškauskas, Local and Global Framework of Early Cinema in Lithuania: Vilnius cinemas, Programme Formats and Audience, *Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication,* [in print].

[60] Due to the limited scope of the article, I have excluded historiographic overviews or different case studies from non-European or non-Western contexts, which would add significantly to this ongoing discussion.

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ANKSTYVASIS KINAS LIETUVOJE: KULTŪROS TRADICIJOS ATSIRADIMAS

Santrauka

Remiantis kino transnacionalumo ar mažosios valstybės kino koncepcijomis, straipsnyje bandoma ankstyvojo kino XIX a. pab. – XX a. pr. Rusijos imperijos Šiaurės vakarų krašte ir didžiausiame regiono mieste Vilniuje raidą įvertinti ne chronologiškai, bet tematiškai, per kino kultūros formavimosi ir kino tapimo estetiniu objektu sluoksnius. Ši prieiga suteikia kultūriškai naują bendravardiklinimo galimybę, leidžiančią ankstyvąjį kiną provincijoje matyti nebūtinai kaip tik vėluojantį ir provincijos provincionalumą išryškinantį reiškinį, bet priešingai – kaip bendrą Europos kino tradicijos dalį. Straipsnyje tai argumentuojama keliais aspektais. Pirma, parodant, kaip keitėsi (ir kaip ši kaita sutapo su Vakarų tendencijomis) kino samprata nuo atrakcionų kino į naratyvinį kiną. Antra, identifikuojant pokyčius kino teatrų repertuare ir nusistovinčiose ankstyvojo kino žiūrovų preferencijose.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Vilnius, ankstyvasis kinas, Rusijos imperija, transnacionalizmas, periferija, filmų žanrai, kino repertuaras, nebylus kinas.

Gauta 2022-04-25
Parengta spaudai 2022-08-29

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