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0521021073 - Inside Soviet Film Satire: Laughter with a Lash

Edited by Andrew Horton

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*Inside Soviet Film Satire: Laughter with a Lash* is a lively collection of sixteen original essays by Soviet and American scholars and film commentators. It is the first in-depth examination of an important genre within the Soviet film tradition.

From its origins, humor and satire have been closely linked in Soviet cinema. Nowhere in this tradition is there the pure comic genre typified in the West in films by Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton; by contrast, Soviet comedy can best be described as “laughter with a lash.” Films made during the early years of the communist regime depicted characters and situations at a moment when the promise of socialism had yet to be realized. By the final years of totalitarian rule, filmmakers had found ways to create satiric films that powerfully indicted communism itself.

Offering a general overview of the evolution of Soviet film satire during a seventy-year period, this volume also provides in-depth analyses of such classics as Kuleshov’s *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*; *Volga, Volga*, a popular musical of the Stalinist period; and the bitter and surrealistic *Zero City*, *The Fountain*, and *Black Rose*, *Red Rose* of the glasnost period. It also examines the effects of communism’s collapse in 1991 on the tradition of satire and includes an interview with the renowned Soviet filmmaker Yuri Mamin.

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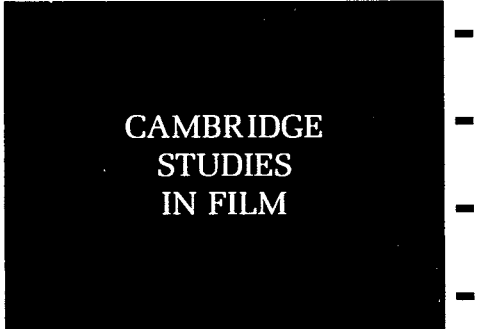
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# INSIDE SOVIET FILM SATIRE

Laughter with a Lash

*Editor*

ANDREW HORTON

*Loyola University, New Orleans*



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[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521430166](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521430166)

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First published 1993  
 This digitally printed first paperback version 2005

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Inside Soviet film satire : laughter with a lash / Andrew Horton,  
 editor.

(Cambridge studies in film)

p. cm.

Papers from the New Orleans Conference on the Spirit of Satire in  
 Soviet Cinema held at Loyola University.

Filmography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-521-43016-X

1. Comedy films – Soviet Union – History and criticism – Congresses.  
 2. Satire, Soviet – History and criticism – Congresses. 3. Communism  
 and satire – Congresses. I. Horton, Andrew.

PN1995.9.C55I54 1993

791.43'617 – dc20

92-32195

CIP

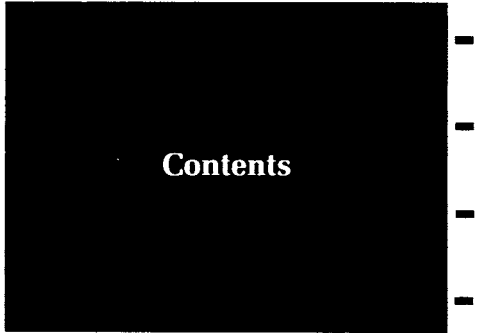
ISBN-13 978-0-521-43016-6 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-43016-X hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02107-4 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-02107-3 paperback

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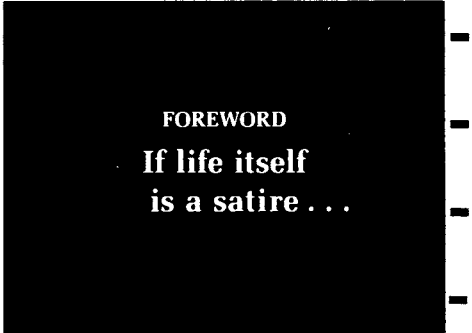
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It's quite a thrill to open a book about Soviet film satire when the Soviet Union has disappeared, for satire has now become a fundamental characteristic of everyday life in the ex-USSR. It seems that the satiric verve along with Russia's cultural tradition is, unlike the Union, still alive. This fact makes the present retrospective even more interesting, in a way like a postmortem.

Andrew Horton has succeeded where everybody else failed: In New Orleans (Loyola University), he gathered a group of Russian and American scholars with very different backgrounds, both academic and practical, and made them speak the unspeakable: about satire in a totalitarian state. And each speaker discovered and proved from his or her own perspective not only that satiric films did exist, but that they constituted the most subversive genre in the vast domain reigned over by Socialist Realism.

In a way, the posttotalitarian seriousness we have experienced since the beginning of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, down to the farcical conclusion with the August Coup (1991), proves to be a backlash from the previous Aesopian power and satiric perspective cherished by many Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, and other filmmakers in the former Soviet Union.

This book is as much testimony as it is an investigation into the unknown or, better, never-acknowledged territory of Soviet film satire. Not just Yuri Mamin – the only filmmaker present among the scholars – but every ex-Soviet writer relies on his or her own experience in shaping satire. As for the Americans within this collection, they bring an intertextual perspective in an easy, almost nonacademic style. And one is even tempted to try and satirize the American analysis of Russian feelings (or the “Slavic soul”) about film and life as a kind of global satire. “Situation hopeless, but not serious” would thus also be a way to describe the present realities in the former Soviet Union.

Dr. Kirill Razlogov

Director  
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Moscow



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## Acknowledgments

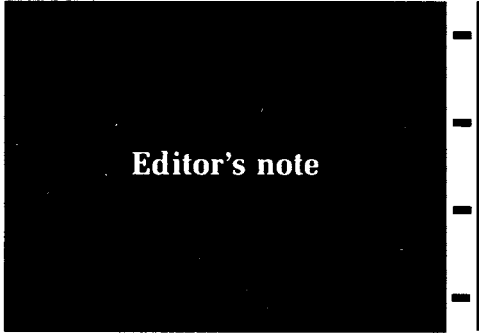
I wish first of all to thank Beatrice Rehl, my editor at Cambridge University Press, for her unfailing support, helpful critical comments, and, yes, fine sense of humor in seeing this project to fruition. My thanks to all of the others not represented in this collection who made the New Orleans Conference on the Spirit of Satire in Soviet Cinema possible: to Anna Lawton, who was the coorganizer of the conference; and to Romana Bahry of York University; Daniel Goulding of Oberlin College; Sergei Lavrentiev, a leading Soviet film critic; and Peter Shepotinnik, an editor of the influential Moscow-based film journal *Iskusstvo kino*. I also extend a hearty thanks to Loyola University of New Orleans for providing many services and some of the funding for the conference together with the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities for a minigrant that made it possible to bring Yuri Mamin to New Orleans. All photos appear thanks to Sovexport Film and the Kinocenter of Moscow. Finally, hats off to all filmmakers in all of the republics and provinces that were the Soviet Union who are still able to see satire and humor in the darkest moments.

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In transliterating Russian terms and names into English, this volume adheres to the Library of Congress system (with the elimination of the apostrophe-designated soft sign in the text). Exceptions have been made in the case of Russian names that have become widely known under a different system of transliteration. Every attempt has been made to standardize terminology and documentary references in the chapters, but this does not exclude the possibility of exceptional usages in the style of individual authors. There is often considerable variation in the English translation of Russian film titles. We have tried to be consistent even where there are no “standard” English versions of titles.