

Panel E3

Sala delle Colonne 2

Animation and “Reality”

Jana Rogoff

Fedor Khitruk’s *Story of a Crime* (1962): The Early Call for Sound Environmentalism



Fedor Khitruk's *The Story of a Crime* was an immensely successful social satire. It was considered to mark the renaissance of Soviet animation after two decades of Socialist Realism. Aesthetically, Khitruk diverged from the Disney-like naturalistic canon, which was adopted by majority of Soviet animators in the 1950s and 1960s and created an original style characterized by experimentation with sound, contemporary setting and laconic graphics. On the level of social engagement, the film can be read as an early expression of sound environmentalism and an open critique of Soviet urban life. In this paper, I discuss Khitruk’s film with the primary focus on his approach to sound. I ask what relationship the film stages between an individual/society and their acoustic environment; what acoustic motives were in prominent use and how they reflected the broader socio-political situation of the country.

The Story of a Crime is an example of an animated film that becomes means for looking at cultural and social phenomena, in this case related to the Soviet Thaw period. The documentary quality of the film is partially due to the tradition of Soviet animation, which, unlike e.g. American animation, started of as an art form used not only as a medium of entertainment but first and foremost as a propaganda tool. Moreover, animation of the Soviet Thaw represented a breaking point, when a number of progressive filmmakers rejected the previous domination of fantastic subjects, promoted during the Stalin era, and began to address topics from contemporary life. Thereby, they questioned the very conception of animated film and challenged the established expectations of the audience. This paper examines the role of *The Story of a Crime* in the context of the medium’s redefinition and in connection to the political developments within the Soviet Union.

The analysis of Khitruk’s *Story of a Crime* is part of my post-doctoral project on *The History of Eastern European Animated Film as a Political Medium, 1945-1989*. The project examines the critical engagement of Eastern European animation with the history of the 20th century, especially periods such as WWII, the Soviet and Polish Thaw, the Czechoslovak normalization, and the fall of the iron curtain. It seeks to reverse the traditional exclusion of animation from film theory, and from film sound theory in particular.

Biography

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Jana Rogoff is a Slavic Studies scholar and translator. She studied English-American Studies and Russian Studies at the Charles University in Prague and the New York University, NYC. She received her PhD from the Humboldt University in Berlin. Her dissertation *Audiovisual (A)synchrony in Early Soviet Sound Film*, published by the Humboldt University in 2016, is a media-historical study of the emergence of sound in Soviet cinematography. Rogoff’s research interests include Eastern European film and

literature, history of animated film, and film sound theory. She taught seminars on Eastern European cinematography at the Humboldt University of Berlin and the Southern University of Maine. She is currently working on her post-doctoral project *The History of Eastern European Animated Film as a Political Medium, 1945-1989*. The subject of her latest paper presented at the Screen Industries Conference in Prague (November 2016) was the aesthetic and cultural analysis of Jan Švankmajer's and Piotr Dumala's animated films that thematized the end of communism in Eastern Europe. Rogoff was awarded multiple research fellowships in the U.S., Germany and Moscow, including a research grant at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, the DAAD fellowship and a research residency at the Bowdoin College.