

СОЦІОЛОГІЯ

THE INTERPLAY OF ELITIST AND POPULAR DIMENSIONS IN SHAPING THE IMAGE OF FILM HEROES**Kudinov I.***PhD, associate professor**post-doctoral student, Institute of Sociology of NAS of Ukraine; Associate Professor, Department of Sociology*

Zaporizhzhia National University

ORCID:  0000-0001-7785-1637

The article examines the evolution of the relationship between elitist and popular dimensions in shaping the image of the film hero in public consciousness across different historical periods and national cinematic traditions. Drawing on a combination of the socio-cultural and comparative-historical approaches, as well as content analysis of over 300 scholarly works and a corpus of 110 film scripts, the study traces how the image of the film hero has shifted between serving as a vehicle for philosophical and aesthetic depth and as a product of market-driven mass entertainment. The article analyses key historical models of the film hero — commercial, ideologized, auteur, and hybrid — from the Hollywood Golden Age and Soviet cinema to the blockbuster era and contemporary streaming culture. It demonstrates that the absolutization of either pole leads to a distortion of the hero's cultural functions: excessive commercialization reduces the hero to a vehicle of entertainment, while radical elitism marginalizes it from public consciousness. The article argues that contemporary cinema, shaped by digital technologies and audience co-creation, is moving toward hybrid models in which complexity of meaning coexists with mass engagement. Special attention is given to Ukrainian cinema's trajectory from Soviet ideological conditioning to the post-totalitarian search for authentic, existentially profound film heroes. The study concludes that for the film hero to retain cultural relevance, cinema must maintain a dynamic balance between elitism and mass appeal.

Key words: film hero, mass culture, elitist culture, public consciousness, cinema

Introduction

The image of the film hero in public consciousness is studied within various fields of social and humanitarian knowledge. In the academic literature, two main approaches to the analysis of this topic can be identified. The first approach is based on the idea of the authorial origin of the hero's image, which is formed as a result of the creative vision of the director and screenwriter and embodied by the actor, who gives it individual expressiveness. Within this paradigm, the film hero appears as a projection of the author's cultural vision, a bearer of aesthetic, moral, philosophical, or ideological meanings that actively influence the audience's consciousness. According to this approach, cinema is considered as a

means of education, social projection, and a source of new ethical orientations and forms of collective imagination (Foucault, 1998a).

The second approach, by contrast, emphasizes the consumer-reflective nature of the film hero's image, arguing that it is formed under the influence of the collective demand of the audience. Viewers, through the symbolic projection of their own desires, fears, and values, "select" acceptable images of heroes through approval, popularization, memetization, or commercial success. Thus, the film hero becomes a product of the cultural market, a result of the interaction of social expectations, fashion, ideological trends, and psychological projections. This approach highlights the risks of the standardization of thinking, the unification of values, and the establishment of stereotypical or manipulative models of behavior that replace complex moral dilemmas and multidimensional characters with simplified schemes (Тихий, 2023).

In our view, the opposition between these two positions reflects a fundamental contradiction between elitism and mass culture in the nature of cinema. On the one hand, cinema is a form of aesthetic reflection, authorial creativity, and philosophical inquiry. On the other, it functions within the conditions of mass culture, a market economy, and digital interaction, which require consideration of the tastes, demands, and behavior of a wide audience.

Accordingly, the image of the film hero acts as a kind of "marker" or identifier of the tension between high culture and mass consumption, between deep value-based meanings and easy identification. It is precisely in the process of the social reproduction of this image — through films, television series, discussions on social media, merchandise, and fan culture — that opportunities emerge for sociological research into the dynamics of the development of public consciousness, including its orientations, demands, conflicts, and transformations.

The state of scholarly development of the topic of the film hero's image in public consciousness within the Ukrainian space is formed at the intersection of cultural studies, sociology, media studies, and film studies. Ukrainian researchers are characterized by a focus on the representational mechanisms of cinema, archetypal models of the hero, the ideological functions of the screen image, and its role in the construction of collective representations. Among the studies in this field, it is possible to highlight the works of Yurii Bondarenko, Larysa Briukhovetska, Daria Vystavkina, Iryna Zubavina, Oleksandr Konovalov, Maksym Lepskyi, Oksana Musiienko, and others.

Among foreign researchers of this topic, particular attention should be given to the works of Terry Lovell (analysis of cinema as a form of social knowledge and a space for the production of social meanings); Nick Couldry (symbolic power, algorithmic environments, and the formation of social representations); Martin Barker and Daniel Biltereyst (perception of character images, their interpretation, and collective discussion by audiences); Ben Walmsley and Bridgette Wessels (processes of public opinion formation around media texts); Slavoj Žižek (cinema as a mechanism of ideological construction of desire and subjectivity), and others.

In general, the existing studies make it possible to outline a broad theoretical and methodological spectrum for analyzing the film hero. However, the problem of the relationship between elitism and mass culture in the image of the film hero in public consciousness requires further systematic reflection. In this context, the aim of this article is to conduct a comparative analysis of the forms of representation and transformation of the relationship between elitism and mass culture in the image of the film hero in public consciousness throughout the evolution of national and world cinema.

Research methodology

The methodological framework of the article is based on a combination of the socio-cultural and comparative-historical approaches. The socio-cultural approach made it possible to consider the image of the film hero as a socio-cultural construct formed at the intersection of artistic intention, ideological frameworks, market mechanisms, and audience expectations. The comparative-historical approach enabled the tracing of transformations in the relationship between elitism and mass appeal in the image of the film hero within the dynamics of the development of world and Ukrainian cinema.

At the level of specific methods, the study employed literature analysis, comparative analysis, and content analysis of a dataset of film scripts. Literature analysis was used to systematize theoretical approaches to the study of public consciousness, the film hero, mass culture, auteur cinema, and mediatized audience participation. Comparative analysis was aimed at contrasting different historical models of the film hero — commercial, ideologized, auteur, and hybrid. Content analysis was applied to a corpus of scientific publications, film scripts, and transcribed audiovisual materials in order to identify recurring semantic structures, types of heroization, markers of elitism and mass appeal, as well as the nature of their representation in public consciousness.

The empirical basis of the study consists of more than 300 scholarly works in Ukrainian and English. The dataset of scripts and transcribed materials includes scripts (transcripts) of 100 films from the list of the best films according to IMDb as of January 2025 (Internet Movie Database, 2025a), as well as 10 scripts (transcripts) of Ukrainian films from the TOP-100 ranking of the best films in the history of Ukrainian cinema (ДОВЖЕНКО-ЦЕНТР, 2025).

During the preparation of the article, artificial intelligence was used as a component of the author's research methodology, integrated with self-developed Python scripts aimed at automating routine operations of searching, collecting, processing, selecting, translating, and summarizing large volumes of textual and multimedia data. At the data collection stage, the author's software scripts SEARCH_PDF, SEARCH_SCHOLAR, and SEARCH_YOUTUBE were used to automate the retrieval of scholarly publications, film scripts, and other relevant materials based on predefined keywords. In cases where film scripts were unavailable in text format, particularly for Ukrainian films, transcription of video and audio materials was carried out using the author's TRANSCRIBATOR script based on the AssemblyAI API.

At the stage of data processing and analysis, custom Python solutions were employed for text normalization, structuring of the corpus, selection of relevant fragments, translation of large text datasets, and preliminary summarization using the OpenAI API. All results generated with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools underwent mandatory verification, critical comparison with primary sources, and substantive interpretation by the author. The final formulation of conclusions, synthesis, analysis of materials, and writing of the article were carried out independently by the author. The source code of the developed scripts is publicly available in the GitHub repository: <https://github.com/iitiro>. Full responsibility for source selection, accuracy of interpretation, reliability of the content, and the final text of the article rests solely with the author.

Main body

In our research, we operate with the concept of “public consciousness” as a designation of a set of ideas, views, beliefs, ideals, and theories that possess a supra-individual character and connect members of society. It refers to an informational and ideal connection, the prerequisites of which lie in the publicity of a certain set of informational and ideal forms, their acceptance by the majority, and their stable circulation in social communications. In this sense, public consciousness manifests itself in the existence of socially recognized patterns, views, or specific “schemes of thinking” that are formed under the

influence of cultural and structural factors of the social environment (Sztompka, 2004a) and directly affect both individual and group perception and understanding of social reality. It is within this context that we consider the image of the film hero as a socio-cultural construct that is formed and functions within public consciousness.

On the one hand, this image contains elitist values and ideals oriented toward an intellectual audience. On the other, it reflects and reproduces mass perceptions, stereotypes, archetypes, and others. Thus, the image of the film hero simultaneously performs two roles: that of an indicator and that of a catalyst for the circulation of ideal forms that acquire significance within the socio-cultural context of a particular society.

In this sense, the study of the relationship between elitism and mass culture in the image of the film hero makes it possible to better understand the mechanisms of cinema's influence on public consciousness, as well as the reverse process — the influence of dominant ideas and values of society on the formation of film hero images, which, in turn, become embedded as exemplary or counter-exemplary ideal forms in cultural memory.

At the same time, in the era of the globalization of social life, cinema not only reflects localized national representations of the hero but also actively influences the formation of a globalized system of images that circulate within transnational cultural flows. Given the dominance of the American film industry in the twentieth century, especially in the postwar period, it was Hollywood film heroes that became a kind of agents of cultural influence, shaping behavioral models, values, and notions of the “heroic” far beyond the borders of the United States.

The so-called “Golden Age” (1930s–1950s) laid the foundation of Hollywood aesthetics and the studio system (Lewis, 2019a), which later became a field for experiments in combining elitist content with mass influence. The large studio format made it possible to create both large-scale entertainment projects and profound social dramas that reflected complex social problems and the conflicts of the human inner world. As a result, film heroes emerged who were capable of simultaneously appealing to a mass audience and conveying complex cultural meanings. In other words, the images of film heroes were transformed into multifaceted symbols of the era — integral elements of public consciousness.

In our view, an example of such a combination of elitism and mass appeal can be found in the work of Charlie Chaplin (Lewis, 2019a, p. 82). In his films, the mass accessibility of the comedy genre was combined with a deep social and philosophical subtext. In particular, in the film “City Lights” (1931), which in form is a romantic comedy about the adventures of the Tramp (Chaplin's character), there is a concealed reflection on important social issues, including social inequality, the injustice of the social order, and the necessity of preserving humanity in social relations.

At the same time, the “Golden Age” of Hollywood was also a period of the emergence of the first purely commercial products of cinema, in which mass appeal clearly prevailed over elitism. A vivid example is the film “Tarzan the Ape Man” (1932), based on the adventure novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs. The plot represents a classic example of the use of a template narrative following the scheme “hero — trial — victory” (Lewis, 2019a, pp. 116–117). The spectacle dominates the film, with exotic jungles, wild animals, and scenes in which Tarzan demonstrates extraordinary strength and agility. The choice of the lead actor, Johnny Weissmuller, was based not on his acting abilities but on his athletic achievements, as he was an Olympic swimming champion. Issues such as colonialism, racial discrimination, and the role of humans in nature were omitted, while the image of the “white super-hero” in an exotic environment was romanticized. Despite this, or perhaps precisely because of it, the film achieved significant box office

success. Between 1932 and 1948, MGM produced twelve sequels based on it (MyMovieRack, 2025a). In this case, the goal was likely not artistic innovation but the maximum exploitation of a profitable franchise.

In contrast to the Hollywood studio system, which was oriented toward market logic, audience success, and profitability, Ukrainian cinema of the Soviet period developed under conditions in which its primary task was not so much to entertain as to educate — to form a “new person” and to transmit the ideals of revolution, socialism, and collectivism. Within this system, the image of the film hero acquired a distinctly ideological character: the hero was perceived not as a unique individual but as a model embodiment of class values and a representative of collectivist ideals. The process of film production was under strict control of the party-state apparatus, and the mass function of cinema tended toward serving totalitarian practices — standardization of thought, mobilization, and ideological influence. However, even within this system, zones of relative creative freedom emerged, especially during periods of weakened ideological pressure.

Into this space entered cinema that appealed not to instruction but to culture, ethics, and philosophy, striving to find an authentic artistic language. In such cases, the elitist component of cinema was associated with humanistic ideals, poetic vision, and critical reflection on reality, extending beyond the functional role of cinema as an instrument of influence on public consciousness. This tendency is demonstrated by the avant-garde period in the work of Oleksandr Dovzhenko, represented in particular by such films as “Zvenyhora” (1928), “Arsenal” (1929), and “Zemlya” [Earth] (1930). Dovzhenko’s heroes are not only carriers of official ideology but also bearers of deeper, often semi-mythological meanings, including a connection with the land, nature, and the historical memory of the people (Скуратівський, 2006). In the film “Earth”, for example, the peasant-innovator Vasyl appears as a transitional hero, in whom the pathos of collectivization is combined with poetic metaphors of death and rebirth and inner awakening, clearly exceeding the limits of propagandistic and agitational functions.

At the same time, the overall development of cinema in the mid-twentieth century demonstrated a deepening crisis of its artistic authenticity both in the commercialized West and the ideologized East. On the one hand, Hollywood films increasingly focused on box office success, spectacle, and genre conventions, which led to the standardization of narratives and the simplification of hero images that were intended more to entertain than to provoke reflection. On the other, Soviet cinema, functioning under strict ideological control, acted as an instrument of mass propaganda and the unification of thought. All these processes — commercial standardization and ideological programming — devalued the artistic nature of cinema, undermining its potential as a form of free artistic expression, humanistic statement, and philosophical reflection.

One of the responses to this crisis was the emergence of the phenomenon of “auteur cinema” in the 1950s–1970s, within the frameworks of the French New Wave, Italian neorealism, Soviet art-house cinema, and non-commercial Japanese cinema. This movement was not only an aesthetic experiment but also had cultural and political significance, as it was directed against standardization, ideologization, and the hegemony of Hollywood narratives. Directors sought their own, nationally inflected cinematic language, creating original film heroes who embodied deeply rooted national themes, humanistic values, and existential inquiries, while demonstrating new ways of engaging with the audience.

A particularly illustrative case is the development of Ukrainian Soviet art-house cinema, which, despite censorship restrictions, produced films with profound poetic and philosophical content. An example is Yurii Illienko’s film, based on a screenplay by Ivan Drach, “Krynytsya dlya sprahlykh” [A well for the

thirsty] (1965), which combined elements of symbolism, allegory, cultural memory, and the tragedy of national experience (Брїоховецька, 2006). The main character, an old father who alone tends a well in an abandoned village, appears as an allegorical figure of memory, self-sacrifice, and inner dignity — a typical example of an elitist image of the film hero that does not correspond to the requirements of mass ideological identification. The film was banned from screening in the USSR.

Similarly, the image of the film hero in European auteur cinema emerged as an embodiment of intellectual inquiry, moral reflection, and cultural resistance. For example, in Ingmar Bergman's film "Smultronstället" [Wild Strawberries] (1957), the central character is the elderly professor Isak Borg — a man who, while traveling to a ceremony in his honor, simultaneously embarks on a journey into his own past (Kalin, 2003a). This is a film hero as a thinker, a figure of introspection and moral doubt, embodying Swedish Protestant culture, a philosophy of responsibility, self-reflection, and melancholic rationality.

Another example is Federico Fellini's film "8½" (1963). Its protagonist, director Guido Anselmi, experiences a creative crisis and revisits his life, memories, and fantasies (Guldemon, Bloemheugel & Stourdžé, 2013). This is a reflective film hero, deeply rooted in the postwar Italian mentality marked by Catholic notions of guilt, redemption, and the ambivalence of human nature. In this film, Fellini not only creates a complex authorial world but also presents the hero as a representative of a national cultural code capable of resisting globalized homogenization.

In this context, it is also important to mention the work of Akira Kurosawa, which laid the foundation for Japanese auteur cinema. His film "Rashōmon" (1950) not only experimented with narrative structure but also questioned the very possibility of objective truth. The main characters of this historical allegory appear as ambiguous, internally fragmented individuals, incapable of self-knowledge and sincerity, as each presents their own version of the same events, distorted by personal fears, desires, and justifications (Desser, 2021a). Kurosawa succeeded in combining philosophical reflection with the aesthetics of traditional theater within the framework of a samurai epic, creating film heroes who do not conform to standard models of heroism but instead embody the drama of conscience, guilt, fear, and the need for hope.

Ultimately, auteur cinema across different national traditions produced its own complex and non-stereotypical film heroes, who embodied an elitist type of cultural reflection — heroes of thought, memory, and inner resistance, extending beyond mass-mediated expectations and ideological clichés.

At the same time, the elitist depth of auteur cinema had reverse consequences. Above all, the increasing complexity of the film hero hindered its perception and comprehension by mass audiences. Heroes of auteur cinema appeared not as clearly structured figures with defined ethical positions but as internally contradictory, reflective, and socially isolated characters whose behavior was difficult to evaluate unambiguously. Directors of auteur cinema deliberately ignored the narrative expectations of viewers, creating "heroes as signs" or "heroes as problems," who function more as metaphors or subjects of internal drama than as actors within a conventional narrative space.

The detachment from mass narrative structures and typical heroic figures complicated the integration of these images into public consciousness. Without sufficient cultural preparation, viewers experienced a sense of exclusion from the process of identification with the hero, particularly due to the loss of clear moral guidelines in the characters' behavior. This situation contributed to the marginalization of auteur cinema. Low box office revenues and the absence of a broad audience deprived such film projects of adequate funding (Довженко-Центр, 2025). In the 1970s and 1980s, studios experimenting with non-commercial films suffered significant financial losses (Lambie, 2014a). Even in the USSR, where art-house cinema received state support, it remained largely confined to intellectual circles and did not

significantly influence mass representations of the heroic.

As a result, the detachment of auteur cinema from mass audiences was simultaneously a detachment of its heroes from public consciousness. The rejection of classical narratives, traditional archetypes, and familiar systems of opposition (good versus evil, honor versus treachery) made such heroes difficult to understand. In some cases, directors deliberately complicated their characters, creating “heroes for the initiated,” which further narrowed their social significance. Ultimately, this led to the formation of a kind of “cinema for insiders,” in which the image of the hero no longer fulfilled the social function of cultural orientation, as it had in the era of Charlie Chaplin.

The emerging “voids” and lacunae within the cultural and artistic space created favorable conditions for the rise of the era of Hollywood blockbusters. In essence, this represented a counter-wave that shaped a new form of cinema as a “cinema of attractions,” whose creators sought to ensure maximum accessibility of their products for mass audiences (late 1970s–2000s). For example, in films such as Steven Spielberg’s “Jaws” (1975) (Quirke, 2019a) or George Lucas’s “Star Wars” (1977; 1980; 1983) (Guynes & Hassler-Forest, 2018a), emphasis was placed on dynamic storytelling and spectacular visual effects. Audiences were expected to experience simple yet intense emotional reactions during viewing (Frakes, Peck, Perkowski, Singer, Wolfe & Yaszek, 2018a). The downside of this strategy was the simplification of dramaturgy, the stereotypical nature of main characters, and the prioritization of entertainment at any cost in order to retain audience attention.

Such instrumentalization of cinema led to a shift in cultural balance: the mass dimension became not merely accessible but dominant, pushing the elitist dimension to the margins. As a result, there was a gradual devaluation of the authorial perspective, complex aesthetic forms, and reflective depth, while a culture of immediate impression and consumer satisfaction became established. In this way, the very notion of “value” in cinema was redefined: instead of uniqueness and semantic complexity, the primary criteria became market success and maximum comprehensibility for mass audiences.

At the same time, over recent decades, contemporary societies have undergone profound cultural and value transformations, including growing distrust in traditional social institutions, disillusionment with ideas of progress and success, and the spread of existential anxiety and instability. In this context, the stereotypical image of the film hero — as unequivocally positive, decisive, and confident in their righteousness — began to appear artificial and outdated. Viewers increasingly sought characters capable of reflecting internal contradictions, moral ambiguity, and the search for meaning. This shift became a key precondition for rethinking the image of the film hero and gradually restoring a balance between elitist complexity and mass accessibility within popular cinema.

Thus, directors such as Denis Villeneuve (“Blade Runner 2049” (2017), “Dune” (2021; 2024)) and Christopher Nolan (“Interstellar” (2014), “Oppenheimer” (2023), “The Dark Knight” (2008)) create films that combine complex philosophical structures with visual spectacle and emotional engagement.

Similarly, the Ukrainian film by director Antonio Lukich “Moyi dumky tykhi” [My thoughts are silent] (2019) combines elements of comedy and road movie with a profound exploration of loneliness, intergenerational relationships, and the search for self. The success of such films demonstrates the possibility of hybrid forms that do not sacrifice depth for the sake of mass appeal. Changes in audience expectations were closely linked to institutional transformations in the media environment.

In the second half of the 2000s, the traditional model of film production — based on major studios and centralized distribution control — entered a period of crisis. The spread of digital technologies, the development of the internet and piracy platforms, and later the emergence of legal streaming services

such as Netflix and Amazon Prime fundamentally transformed the nature of audience interaction with film (Hadida, Lampel, Walls & Joshi, 2021a). Viewing ceased to be a linear, one-time act, as audiences gained the technical ability to choose what, when, and how to watch. This fostered a more active position: the modern viewer does not merely consume but interprets, compares, comments, and situates films within broader cultural contexts. Under such conditions of increased interpretative autonomy, demand has grown for more complex and ambiguous characters — particularly heroes who embody not ready-made answers but questions, challenges, and internal conflicts.

These expectations are clearly reflected in films that transcend traditional genre conventions and offer viewers new modes of engagement. For instance, Todd Phillips's "Joker" (2019), drawing on a popular comic-book character, presents a psychologically complex and traumatized figure who challenges conventional notions of the hero as a bearer of clear moral values. Similarly, the series "Black Mirror" (2011–) experiments not only with themes but also with formats of perception, as in the interactive episode "Bandersnatch" (2018), where the viewer directly participates in shaping the narrative.

Ultimately, contemporary audiences have acquired informational and technological tools that allow for direct participation in discussions and even co-creation of film characters. Social media, fandoms, hashtags, and petitions to studios (for example, public campaigns supporting or opposing specific casting decisions or plot developments) demonstrate the growing influence of viewers on character development and the fate of film franchises. Examples include campaigns surrounding "Game of Thrones" (2011–2019) (Schlütz & Jage-D'Aprile, 2021), feminist reinterpretations of "Barbie" (2023), and fan-driven efforts to restore the "Snyder Cut" of "Justice League" (2021).

Another consequence of the informational and network transformations of the media environment is related to the fact that the image of the film hero in contemporary visual culture has extended far beyond the screen: it is disseminated through merchandising, memes, TikTok trends, fan art, and cosplay. All of this creates an intermedial environment in which the hero becomes not only a film character but also a cultural sign that is constantly changing, being interpreted, and "experienced" in different contexts. This blurred status transforms the image of the film hero into a tool for a complex cultural game that may include philosophical, political, or ironic subtexts.

At the same time, Slavoj Žižek expresses skepticism regarding the ability of contemporary cinema to create heroic images in which depth of meaning is combined with mass accessibility. In his view, films such as "Joker" merely simulate the posing of profound problems without immersing the viewer in genuine reflection. These are often marketing-constructed images of a "deep hero" that in reality reproduce worn-out Hollywood patterns in a stylistically refined form, without overcoming the boundary between superficial effect and authentic ethical experience (Žižek, 2006a).

Contemporary Ukrainian cinema attempts to overcome such simulation by searching for a genuinely authentic and existentially profound image of the film hero, capable of being both accessible to the audience and a bearer of deep meanings. Having undergone a complex trajectory from Soviet ideological conditioning to post-totalitarian renewal, and subsequently to the reflection on national trauma, war, and identity, modern Ukrainian cinema actively seeks to find a balance between elitism and mass appeal.

The heroes of contemporary Ukrainian cinema — both auteur, festival-oriented, and genre-based — are often associated with themes of personal identity, loss, family relations, war, inner fragmentation, and the search for one's place in a transformed world. In Nariman Aliyev's "Evge" [Homeward] (2019), the central motif is the collision between cultural traditions and individual choice, while in Dmytro Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk's "Pamfir" (2022) it is the tension between family loyalty and moral boundaries

that cannot be crossed. In the already mentioned film “Moyi dumky tykhi” [My thoughts are silent] (2019), the narrative centers on the tension between personal self-determination and the pressure of familial expectations, whereas in Kateryna Gornostai’s “Stop-Zemlia” (2021) the focus is on the experience of adolescent maturation and self-awareness under conditions of emotional instability.

All these films do not offer idealized or heroicized characters but instead concentrate on everyday experience, inner doubts, and life compromises, allowing viewers to identify with them and reflect on their own situations (Тихий, 2023). Thus, contemporary Ukrainian cinema is moving toward the formation of a hero who is not a bearer of ready-made truths but rather a participant in an open-ended process of searching for answers to complex personal and social questions.

Conclusions

In summary, the forms of interaction between the elitist and the mass in the construction of the film hero have evolved depending on the historical, sociocultural, and technological conditions of particular societies. In different periods, film heroes have fulfilled functions ranging from the expression of philosophical ideas, moral dilemmas, and national identity to the reproduction of standardized behavioral models oriented toward mass consumption. Ultimately, the image of the film hero in public consciousness is formed at the intersection of artistic intention, social demand, and audience expectations, and it is precisely this dynamic that determines its complex yet significant role within the cultural space.

The analysis of key historical stages in the development of cinema demonstrates that the absolutization of one of the poles (mass or elitist) in the representation of the film hero leads to a distortion of its functions in public consciousness. Excessive commercialization or ideological instrumentalization reduces the hero to a superficial vehicle of entertainment, whereas radical elitism complicates identification with the hero and results in the loss of its social influence. In both cases, the essential capacity of the film hero — to perform cultural, communicative, and ethical functions as an integral component of public consciousness around which values and conceptions of the human in society are structured — is undermined.

At the present stage, the image of the film hero is characterized by such features as polyphony, intermediality, and hybridity. It extends beyond the boundaries of the cinematic text — through social media, fan culture, memes, merchandising, and TikTok — and is actively interpreted by audiences themselves (Cardullo, 2011a). In such an environment, the hero is no longer exclusively the creation of the director or screenwriter but is formed within a network of interactions between creators, audiences, and media platforms.

Within this context, the relationship between elitism and mass appeal acquires new forms, in which complexity of meaning can coexist with a high level of audience engagement. Therefore, in order for the image of the film hero to retain cultural relevance and continue to play a socially significant role in public consciousness, cinema as both an art form and an industry must maintain a dynamic balance between elitism and mass appeal. Only under this condition can the film hero remain not merely a product of consumption but also a symbol of its era, a bearer of meanings, a factor of social dialogue, and an instrument of positive sociocultural change, particularly in the context of wartime challenges and societal reconstruction.

Кудінов Ігор Олексійович. Взаємодія елітарного та популярного у формуванні образу кіногероя

Ключові слова: кіногерой, масова культура, елітарна культура, публічна свідомість, кінематограф

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