

ARTICLE



## Images of urban space in constructing the Cold War enemy: American skyscrapers in Soviet animation

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### ABSTRACT

This article deals with an analysis of the representation of American cities in Soviet animated films of the Cold War (1946–63). The space-oriented discourse of popular geopolitics was a resource for constructing the Cold War enemy. The authors point out that the images of skyscrapers served as the main signifier of Americanness in Soviet animation. Among their principal functions were othering and dehumanising 'enemy number one', supporting the positive collective identity of the Soviet people and legitimising the Soviet way of life. The image of skyscrapers is discussed as a political symbol, which Soviet propaganda treated as an embodiment of America. This image incorporates the negative characteristics of the American enemy: exploitation; economic and social inequality; racism; the dictatorship of the magnates of Wall Street; egoism and hostility among persons; dominance of mass culture; incitement of base instincts in a person; and cult of violence and war.

### KEYWORDS

Soviet animation; skyscraper; Cold War; urban space; anti-Americanism; image of the enemy

## Introduction

Since the 1930s Soviet censorship considered the film poster as an important weapon of propaganda that should contribute to supporting the Communist ideology and exposing the flaws of capitalist society ("Iskusstvoved" 1931). So, most posters for Soviet films of the 1940s–1960s, in which a noticeable place was given to the USA, depicted skyscrapers. Particularly interesting is the case of Abram Room's *Silvery Dust* (*Serebristaya pyl'*, 1953), which was characterised as 'probably the most venomous anti-American movie in the history of the film industry' by *The New York Times* (quoted in Caute 2005, 158). The film shows life in the small, fictional US town of Fortskill, which surely has no skyscrapers – and they do not appear on the screen either. Meanwhile, on the billboard for the film's release designed by Mikhail Khazanovskii for Reklamfilm in 1953, one of the main characters, Professor Samuel Steal, is depicted against a skyscraper.<sup>1</sup> This alone suggests that the image of a skyscraper played an important role in Soviet film representations of 'enemy number one'.

The post-war confrontation between the USSR and America became a unique event in world history largely because of the important role of culture, convincingly shown by

works concerning ‘the cultural turn’ in Cold War studies (Griffith 2001; Johnston 2010). On the one hand, culture actively shaped international affairs; on the other hand, it is difficult to understand many aspects of cultural life during the era outside the context of the two superpowers’ contest. Cinema is known to have been one of the main theatres of the cultural Cold War. On both sides of the Iron Curtain, the leading directors, actors and scriptwriters were involved in the so-called ‘struggle for hearts and minds’. Cinema, which combined three forms of propaganda (production of visual images; narration; and sound), served as a very effective tool in constructing the enemy’s image. It contributed to substantiating the superiority of a certain way of life, to producing a positive collective identity and to creating an image of the enemy. In forming cinematic images of the enemy, various discourses are employed, among them political, civilisational, national, moral, aesthetic, historical, anthropological, gender and sports ones; they have been intensively studied (for more detailed information on the cinematic Cold War see Kenez 1992; Turovskaya 1993; Strada and Troper 1997; Shaw 2007; Shaw and Youngblood 2010, 2017; Dobrynin 2009; Fedorov 2010; Shcherbenok 2010; Kapterev 2010; Kozovoi 2014; Seifert 2014; Riabov 2017; Knight 2017). The role of representations of urban space in constructing the Cold War enemy in cinema should be analysed as well.

Joanne Sharp’s work convincingly showed that spatial discourse was widely used in American propaganda of the Cold War to construct American identity and representations of the USSR (Sharp 2000). In recent years, spatial discourse has attracted the attention of experts in the Soviet and Russian studies (Widdis 2004; Bassin, Ely, and Stockdale 2010), including film researchers (Beumers 2016; Sputnitskaia 2017; Apostolov 2017). However, these studies are often focused on the creation of an image of the space of ‘us’. Meanwhile, we would like to explore the role played by the spatial discourse of Soviet cinema in constructing the image of ‘them’. We point out that the spatial discourse functioned as one of the resources for constructing the enemy image.

In this article, we argue that space-oriented discourse served as one of the resources of constructing the enemy, and Soviet Cold-War animation employed the image of skyscrapers as an essential sign of Americanness. Our empirical data-set includes Soviet animated films of the ‘Long Fifties’ (1946–1963); more specifically, we focus on five short films, released by the studio Soyuzmultfilm: Viktor Gromov’s *Mister Wolf* (*Mister Uolk*, 1949, based on Boris Efimov’s caricatures); Anatolii Karanovich’s *Mister Twister* (*Mister Tvister*, 1963); Grigorii Lomidze’s *An Overseas Reporter* (*Zaokeanskii reporter*, 1961); Vitol’d Bordzilovskii and Iurii Prytkov’s *The Millionaire* (*Millioner*, 1963); and Roman Davydov’s *The Shareholders* (*Aktsionery*, 1963). The contribution of Soviet animation to the creation of enemy images has not been sufficiently studied (only Fedorov 2016; Riabov 2018 can be noted), although all in all this film genre has always been of interest to scholars (Krivulia 2002; Kapkov 2006; Beumers 2007; Pontieri Hlavacek 2012; Pikkov 2016; Blackledge 2017).

Thus, the research objective is to analyse how representations of American urban space – above all, through the prism of the image of skyscrapers – were used in the production of images of the American enemy in Soviet animated films. The research questions are as follows: What features did the image of American urban space represent? What role did skyscraper images play in it? How did the images of skyscrapers correlate with other markers of the American enemy? What functions did they perform? What cinematic tools were used to create the images of skyscrapers?

Structurally, the article is divided into three parts. The first section considers theoretical approaches to researching a skyscraper as a political symbol. Second, we examine the historical context of the research, focusing on the meanings of American skyscrapers in Soviet Cold War culture. Third, we discuss the use of this symbol in creating the image of the American enemy in Soviet animated films.

## The skyscraper as a political symbol

Theorists working in the social sciences and humanities have challenged the idea that space is a fixed, unproblematic and inconsequential background against which history occurs; meanwhile, space and spatiality are essentially relational and closely entangled with social and political processes (Certomà, Clewer, and Elsey 2012, 1). Social construction of space is assisted by various resources, including symbolic ones (Zimmer 2003, 180).

Political semiotics approaches monuments, buildings, neighbourhoods or entire cities as symbolic texts that reflect social, economic and political relationships of power and resistance through their aesthetics, function, layout, and scale (Diener and Hagen 2013). Space is always tied to positions of power and embedded in systems of exclusion and inclusion. Moreover, space creation becomes part of a deliberate policy aimed at establishing power relations and drawing symbolic boundaries, including at the level of international relations.

Discussions of space have become prominent in popular geopolitics in recent years. Klaus Dodds notes (2005, 267) that the introduction of this term 'signified a renewed interest in the manner in which popular ideas about global political space help to reinforce or resist the foreign policy discourses and practices of political elites'. In comparison with formal and practical geopolitics, which study theories and official documents, popular geopolitics focuses on widely-spread, common perceptions of different parts of the world and on the reproduction of these perceptions by means of popular culture (see Tuathail and Dalby 1998, 5; Dittmer 2010; Saunders 2017; Szostek 2017). As a methodological frame of research, popular geopolitics, aligned with critical geopolitics, analyses discourses and representations of international relations widely circulated in films, comics, mass media texts and popular Internet resources (Dittmer 2010, 21). According to Dittmer (2010, xviii), geopolitics is about assigning value to places. Geopolitical imagination constructs hierarchies of peoples and places; some places are considered geopolitically more important than others; some matter, some do not. Such cultural hierarchies contribute to creating actual inequalities between cultures, peoples, countries and civilisations. As Dittmer also notes, the key to geopolitics is the concept of identity. In David Campbell's postulation (1992, 9), identity is constituted in relation to differences, while differences are constituted in relation to identity. Forming collective identity implies producing representations not only of 'us' but also of 'them' – as well as a symbolic boundary between the two.

According to Donald Appleyard, an environment intended or perceived as representative of someone or some social group may be used as a political symbol (Appleyard 1979, 144). Symbols are essential for politics because they are connected with power relations. There are various forms of mutual influence of politics and symbolism. Political symbols can help to elevate some ideologies over others and, conversely, can be used to challenge dominant national narratives, either by amending them or by outright replacing them

with alternative ones (Nieghut and Raney 2017, 89). In addition to promoting one's own symbols, discrediting the opponents' symbols also serves as an essential practice of political struggle. Therefore, contesting for the interpretation of symbols serves as a necessary element of symbolic politics; this struggle for interpretation is facilitated because, in Anthony Cohen's opinion (1985, 15), symbols do not so much express meaning as they give us the capacity to make meaning. As Gabriela Elgenius observes (2011, 16), symbols are effective precisely because they are ambiguous, imprecise and their meanings are 'subjective' without undermining their collective nature. Among other characteristics of symbols that make them especially convenient for political actors, we should note, above all, their ability to serve as a tool of inclusion and exclusion. Symbolism is by nature 'boundary-creating' (Elgenius 2011, 13); every symbol contributes to binding an in-group and juxtaposes it to out-groups (Phillips DeZalia et al. 2014).

The image of a skyscraper also has these features; we suggest considering a skyscraper as a political symbol included in Cold War popular geopolitics. In US culture, it is designed to symbolise the core values of the American way of life (Flowers 2009; Domosh 1988; Graham 2016). Its appearance in the late nineteenth century was due not only to economic and aesthetic factors but also to the rise of American nationalism (King 2004, 11). In the Cold War discourse, skyscrapers turned into an essential sign of America's identity – just as the Coke bottle, the baseball and the Marlboro cowboy (Sudjic 1996). The size, cost and technical excellence are among the characteristics of the skyscraper that are meant to be illustrative of the triumph of Americanism, demonstrate the power of America and serve as a justification for its claim to superiority.

A skyscraper is a marker of America even outside the United States; at the same time, in different countries, the content of the image is shaped by their own space policy, and the values attributed to the hegemonic discourse in the USA are often disputed. This is particularly noticeable when anti-Americanism is a significant factor in identity construction, as was the case in Soviet propaganda during the Cold War.

### **Images of US skyscrapers in Soviet Cold War popular geopolitics**

The Cold War division of mankind into two sides produced a Manichaean picture of the world, according to which each superpower was believed to be the 'enemy number one' for the other. From the mid-1940s 'America' became constructed largely through its opposition to the USSR (Sharp 2000, 73; 29). As for Soviet identity, the picture of the 'capitalistic surrounding' always played a very important role. The construction of Sovietness implied making the image of the enemy, who was considered to be everywhere (for detailed information on the image of the American enemy in Soviet propaganda, see Fateev 1999; Magnúsdóttir 2019).

There were several stages in the Soviet efforts to represent 'American imperialism' as the Soviet Union's primary enemy. This move to mark the USA as the 'Other' was reinforced by the 1949 decree 'The Plan on the Reinforcement of Anti-American Propaganda in the Near Future'. It recommended the underlining of 37 themes in anti-American propaganda, including 'Propaganda of amorality and bestial psychology in the USA' (Anon 2005, 324). Among the specific measures that this document prescribed, the requirement to widely use the works of Maxim Gorky is conspicuous. In particular, Goslitizdat (State Publishing House of Literary Fiction) was ordered to publish a book of

pamphlets and essays by Gorky about America with a circulation of 500,000 copies within five days. Moreover, the Ministry of Cinematography was to create a film based on Gorky's 'The City of the Yellow Devil', a short story written in 1906 during his stay in the USA and translated for Appleton's Magazine under the title 'The City of Mammon' (Kireeva 2013, 383).

Gorky's story is of particular interest in the context of our topic. The writer creates a repulsive image of New York as a city that is subject to only one thing – making money. The devilish principle that governs everything and everyone in New York is gold (Kireeva 2013, 383; see also Magnúsdóttir 2019, 29–30). Gorky writes about skyscrapers as follows:

Twenty-storeyed houses, dark soundless skyscrapers, stand on the shore. Square, lacking in any desire to be beautiful, the bulky, ponderous buildings tower gloomily and drearily. A haughty pride in its height, and its ugliness is felt in each house. There are no flowers at the windows and no children to be seen ... (Gorky 1972, 8)

The descriptions given by Gorky became the matrix for representing New York in Soviet culture, in which the image of a skyscraper took an important place.<sup>2</sup> This was determined not only by Gorky's status as the founder of Socialist Realism but also by the fact that a skyscraper itself was convenient for marking symbolic borders. It indicated clearly the distinction between 'us' and 'them'. The image of a skyscraper occupies a special place among the signifiers of Americanness due to the dissimilarity to Soviet housing and correlations with the image of the United States as a whole.

In the period under study, the tradition of depicting skyscrapers as the embodiment of greed, inhumanity, ugliness and exploitation prevailed in various forms of propaganda: journalism and speeches of party leaders, fiction and scientific treatises (e.g., Baskin 1949, 44–46). Skyscrapers were used as a signifier of Americanness in Soviet visual culture in the 1940s–1960s in paintings – for example, *He has Lost Hope to Find Work* by Boris Prorokov (1951), posters – for example, *Freedom, American Style* by Efimov and Dolgorukov (1950), and caricatures – for example, *The Victims of Hollywood* by Lev Brodaty (1949) and *Wall Street's Property* by Iulii Ganf (1951).

In the context of this article, the use of the image of skyscrapers in narrative films, where it was a very marked element of US representations, is especially noteworthy (Riabova 2019). Since Soviet directors had no chance of shooting films in the United States, either creating a model of a skyscraper in the film studio or finding a similar landscape in the USSR (for example, the image of cinematic Germany was often created while shooting in the Soviet Baltic republics), they used other methods to represent America. First of all, the relevant documentary shots were included in feature films: for example, Mikhail Romm's *The Russian Question* (*Russkii vopros*, 1948) begins with a panorama of Manhattan with skyscrapers and ends up with a view of the Empire State Building. Another way to incorporate the image of skyscrapers into film discourse was the use of compositing, for example in such films as Aleksandr Dovzhenko's *Farewell, America!* (*Proshchaj, Amerika!*, 1951), Nikita Kurikhin and Teodor Vul'fovich's *The Last Inch* (*Poslednii diuim*, 1958), Grigorii Roshal's *Judgement of the Mad* (*Sud sumasshedsikh*, 1961), Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov's *The Coin* (*Moneta*, 1962), or Leonid Gaidai's *Strictly Business* (*Delovye liudi*, 1963). The technique noted at the beginning of the article – the reproduction of skyscrapers on film posters – was also a well-established practice as is evident from the poster for *The Russian Question* by Mikhail Khazanovskii,



**Figure 1.** Poster for the film *The Court of Honour*.

Mikhail Kheifets and Lazar Rappoport (1948); Mikhail Romm's *Secret Mission* (*Sekretnaia missiia*, 1950); *The Coin* (1962); or Abram Room's *The Court of Honour* (*Sud chesti*, 1949).<sup>3</sup> The poster for the latter is especially interesting because it opposes the Good and the Bad, 'us' and 'them', with the help of contrasting the images of two cities: in this case, positive characters are depicted against the Kremlin, while the villain – Soviet biologist Losev – is represented against the background of New York skyscrapers (Figure 1). Due to his 'kowtowing to the West', Losev revealed sensitive scientific secrets of national defence to US business people (who, of course, turned out to be spies). In fact, skyscrapers are not shown in the film, since the action takes place in Moscow. However, Academician Vereiskii in his speech before the court of honour thunders against the cosmopolitanism of a certain part of the intellectual society and demands to put an end to the attempts by the American spies to establish contacts with Soviet scientists. 'Let them sit in their skyscrapers', he says, thus turning the skyscraper into an ominous symbol of danger for the USSR.

However, against this background, it was animation that became the most effective form of attracting the image of skyscrapers as a symbol of the United States in cinema.

### American skyscrapers in Soviet animation

Animation acts as a popular propaganda tool, including military propaganda. An animated film has significant potential in creating enemy images: the distortion of reality in the cartoon is perceived by the audience as a quite respected observance of the rules of the genre – in contrast to narrative films, where such distortion tends to be interpreted as propaganda.

In the USSR, animated films were employed in anti-capitalistic propaganda already in the 1920s: Dziga Vertov's *Soviet Toys* (*Sovetskie igrushki*, 1924), based on Viktor Deni's political cartoons, was among the most remarkable (Mjolsness 2008). Some films

released in the 1920s–1930s contributed to constructing the satirical image of Americans – for instance, Ivan Ivanov-Vano's and Leonid Amal'rik's *Black & White (Blek end Uait, 1932)*, based on Vladimir Maiakovskii's poem, which criticised racism in the US society.

Cartoons became a substantial part of propaganda during World War II. It is therefore not surprising that they were involved in solving tasks in the Cold War. The use of animation significantly expanded the possibilities of cinema in constructing the image of 'enemy number one'. This is especially noticeable in those Soviet films where the action takes place in the United States. Film critics noted the necessity to attract animated films to cover foreign policy issues. Thus, in a 1951 article complaining about the lack of cartoons on 'topical issues from international life', the author emphasised: 'The military "deeds" of General MacArthur and Eisenhower's activity in ganging up an army of new crusaders are expected to be satirically expressed' (Druzhnin 1951, 37).

In the period under study, there are several animated films that have one thing in common: they focus on representations of the United States and the lifestyle of Americans.<sup>4</sup> *Mister Uolk* shows the big businessman Mr Uolk (his surname means 'Wolf' in Russian) who, frightened by the threat of an impending atomic war, quits his business and settles on a secluded island. However, as soon as oil is found on this island, Mr Uolk discards his pacifism and fights for income alone with everyone else, including members of his own family. While this cartoon is aimed at exposing the greed and hypocrisy of American capitalists, *An Overseas Reporter* is a pamphlet directed against the bourgeois press. The newspaper company Strikoroba Corporation (Packoflies Corporation) sends journalist Bob Sketch to the USSR to prepare anti-Soviet materials. However, in the end, the overseas reporter suffers a complete collapse. In 1962, the film's director Anatolii Karanovich expressed his impressions of the cartoon as follows: 'How many of such people, these overseas reporters, still visit our country, taking advantage of our hospitality. They, like despicable wretches, are prowling in the outskirts of our construction activities and away from public roads, sniffing and looking for something to profit from' (Karanovich 1962, 143). The following year, Karanovich directed an animated film based on Samuil Marshak's poem *Mister Twister*, a satire on American racism. Mr Twister, a millionaire and an ex-minister, travels with his family from New York to Leningrad. He demands that he be accommodated in a hotel where there would be no coloured people. However, eventually, he has to accept the fact that representatives of all races are staying at his Leningrad hotel since there is no colour bar in the USSR, which he is accustomed to in his country. *The Millionaire* is a screen version of Sergei Mikhalkov's poem. It deals with the omnipotence of money in bourgeois society. According to the plot, a rich American bequeaths all his fortune to her bulldog. After her death, the dog lives the life of an American millionaire: it goes to receptions, frequents resorts, and even makes a successful political career and becomes a senator. Since it owns millions, nobody is bothered that it is not a human being. *The Shareholders*, an animated film which contains the most detailed image of the life in American society, is devoted to debunking the myth of bourgeois propaganda about popular capitalism. The main character, Michael Chase, is a worker at Mr Pearson's factory. The fact that he holds a share of this factory means, as propaganda instils in him, that he is Pearson's partner and a co-owner of the factory. However, the realities of American society dispel these illusions fast. As soon as Pearson replaces workers with robots, Michael loses everything: his work, his apartment and, eventually,

his health. His girlfriend Jenny leaves him for Pearson, and Michael himself is forced to live rough.

In order to reveal the reasons why the image of the skyscraper was used so extensively in Soviet animation, we shall analyse its functions. First and foremost, the representations of American skyscrapers in Soviet animated films served as markers of America that helped identify the country where events were unfolding. This image therefore appears in all the animated films under study. Moreover, it is used much more actively than other markers such as the Statue of Liberty, the dollar sign or Coca-Cola.

In addition to the significative function, the image of skyscrapers also functions as a means of constructing Soviet identity. The outline of an American city with skyscrapers is so different from that of a Soviet city, making it possible to identify the distinctions in the organisation of 'our' and 'their' space. At the same time, the image of a skyscraper not only denotes Americanness but also attributes certain meanings to it. Symbolising America, this image absorbed most of the negative characteristics of the 'enemy number one'; the meanings that were ascribed to it helped to represent the United States as different from the USSR and inferior in comparison with it, which made it possible to maintain a positive collective identity of the Soviet people.

The image of skyscrapers is used to mark all the evils of American society. As for the economic sphere, these include the exploitation of man by man and the poverty of the working class; as for the social sphere – inequality and racism; as for the political sphere – the dictatorship of the magnates of Wall Street and imperialism; and as for the cultural sphere – dominance of the mass culture and cult of money.

First and foremost, the image of skyscrapers was meant to illustrate the principal idea of Soviet propaganda about the 'two Americas' (Caute 2005; Riabov 2017). Skyscrapers represent the spatial segregation of American society. Those who own America are in these buildings: Mr Pearson, the millionaire dog and the head of the travel agency Mr Cook from *Mister Twister*. In this cartoon, it is on the skyscrapers that the words 'for whites only' are posted. Moreover, one of the scenes shows a black man knocking at the door of a skyscraper, but in response, he receives a blow from a door supervisor. Michael Chase from *The Shareholders*, who got fired, also tries to get into the skyscraper, but without success. The images of skyscrapers appear in the story when Michael experiences all the other misfortunes, each being represented as a social problem in the United States (Figure 2). Skyscrapers blink alarmingly when he loses his job. Homeless Michael sleeps



**Figure 2.** Still from *The Shareholders*.

on a bench in a rainy, cold and dark street – and inhospitable skyscrapers are lined up nearby. Down and out, bent over from all the misfortunes that have rained thick upon him, he drags himself along skyscrapers that create a sense of hopelessness with their mechanical and insensible glitter. This hungry, unemployed and lonely person is helpless against an enormous ferocious monster.

In *The Millionaire*, the image of skyscrapers demonstrates absurd situations related to the omnipotence of money; thus, this image is meant to reinforce the idea of the deviation of the social system in America. So, for example, skyscrapers appear in the windows of the luxurious dining room, where the servants serve lunch to the bulldog, sitting stately and solemnly at the table (Figure 3) The dog is elected to Congress – this is possible in the society of hard cash – and the viewers see it travels in an expensive car with skyscrapers in the background.

The association of skyscrapers with the world of exploitation and inequality is also facilitated by placing advertisements on them, which serve as another marker of Americanness in Soviet propaganda. Sex, violence and alcohol consumption, which are exposed on giant neon billboards, should leave no doubt in the Soviet viewer about the immorality of the American way of life.

Finally, another way of marking skyscrapers negatively is used in *An Overseas Reporter*. The skyscraper in which the Strikoroba Corporation is located transforms into a cannon that fires Bob Sketch so that he can get to Moscow to fulfil his despicable mission. In other words, the skyscraper is shown allegorically as a weapon, an instrument of aggression against the USSR.

In order to convince the audience of the depravity of US society, filmmakers present pictures of a happy life in the USSR. This juxtaposition is seen in *An Overseas Reporter* but it is used even more actively in *Mister Twister*. In the latter, the plot is built on the opposition



**Figure 3.** Still from *The Millionaire*.

of Soviet and American ways of life, including the contrast of urban space and the juxtaposition of Leningrad and New York. When constructing the image of New York, the filmmakers use colour, light and music. New York is shown to the viewer in the dead of night. Skyscrapers creep over each other like asymmetric monstrous rectangles. Their walls are covered with advertisements that flicker annoyingly, blinding people with a bright yellow light. These shots are accompanied by the aggressive sounds of jazz music. Leningrad, where Mr Twister comes, appears to be a completely different city: a beautiful, peaceful, spacious, light space with an architecture proportional to people. The ship floats smoothly on the Neva river on a sunny day past easily recognisable cathedrals. Every bridge is drawn welcomingly in front of it (Figure 4 a, b). That is, the opposition between 'our' and 'their' city and 'our' and 'their' space is reinforced by other oppositions understandable to the viewer: day and night, light and darkness, beauty and ugliness, harmonious music and cacophony. The harmony in the Soviet urban space indicates the harmony in the entire social order in the USSR, which has no social evils, especially no racism.

Thus, the contrast between the two cities, New York and Leningrad, becomes an important component of the contrast between the two social systems: American and Soviet. It urges one to recall the well-known typology of city images proposed by Peter Langer (1984): the soulless and impersonal city as Machine is opposed to the living city as Organism; and the city as Bazaar, where everyone finds their place, is opposed to the city as Jungle where there is a constant struggle of all against all.

Admittedly, following Maxim Gorky, cartoons portray New York as a soulless machine that is hostile to man. Likening the enemy to a machine is one of the forms of dehumanisation and a principal technique of creating an enemy image. According to Nick Haslam (2006), the mechanistic form of dehumanisation includes the denial that outgroup representatives have such traits as will, subjectivity, individuality, emotionality, interpersonal warmth, sympathy and flexible thinking. The mechanistic dehumanisation of the enemy has been widely used by the propaganda machines of both superpowers; for example, communism as the 'Red Machine' is a significant element of anti-Soviet discourse in the United States (Riabov 2020).

The animated films under study use the propaganda message that, in contrast to a socialist society where technological advances give benefits to all its members, in a capitalist society the machine is hostile to man. In *The Shareholders*, Michael gets fired



**Figure 4.** (a,b) Scenes from *Mister Twister*.

because the factory owner Pearson replaces workers with robots. In one scene, Michael, like the Luddites, lashes out against robots and destroys them, not realising that his enemy is the soulless capitalism system itself. Pearson himself is shown as a heartless machine that is only interested in money. He says: 'Without a heart and a brain, without a soul and a stomach, without feelings and thoughts – this is my ideal worker!' He is ready to organise the production of human-like robots that could replace a person at everything.<sup>5</sup>

*An Overseas Reporter* shows that this idea is already being implemented in American society. Before going to the USSR on a mission to do an anti-Soviet report, the protagonist, journalist Bob Sketch, is put through a special process on a conveyor belt, like machine parts. As a result, not only his body changes – in fact, he turns into a zombie. The main assistant to the newspaper tycoon, who heads the Strikoroba Corporation, is a robot; it must be a robot that the US press policy towards the USSR largely depends on.

In representations of American society as inhumane, the images of skyscrapers play an important role. They are often depicted as identical: the de-individualisation of 'others' is one of the techniques of mechanistic dehumanisation (Haslam 2006). Moreover, they also depersonalise those people who are inside them. So, for example, in one of the scenes of *Mister Twister*, the skyscraper is shown in cross-section, and absolutely identical secretaries are sitting there in each of the 24 offices.

Crucially, by contrast with Leningrad, New York is shown as a city where there are neither trees nor a river as symbols of life; it has only skyscrapers. The robotic nature of the city is most noticeable in *The Shareholders*. All the ups and downs of Michael's life take place against the background of skyscrapers that look like senseless, indifferent machines, which emphasises his loneliness.

In addition to the mechanistic form of dehumanisation that likens the enemy to the machine, Haslam also suggests distinguishing the animalistic form associated with the likening of outgroup representatives to animals. In this case, the image of 'others' is assumed to have such features as lacking in refinement, moral sensibility, higher cognition, civility and self-control (Haslam 2006, 255).

Both Soviet and American propaganda likened 'enemy number one' to animals by direct comparison and by attributing to the enemy such characteristics that mean insufficient human attitudes. While in the American anti-Soviet discourse the Soviet Union is endowed with such traits as barbarism, backwardness and lack of respect for the human being, in Soviet propaganda the 'bestial image of American imperialism' expresses itself, above all, in certain qualities of individuals: the US establishment cultivates in people base, primal instincts, substitutes spiritual needs with money worship, and compensates for the lack of genuine culture with pop crafts; secondly, in the nature of relations between people, which are based on the 'dog-eat-dog' principle; thirdly, in policies towards other countries, which are characterised by the cult of war and violence.

The metaphor which, in Soviet ideology, was meant to indicate the inhumane character of the American city and capitalist society in general, is the 'concrete jungle'.<sup>6</sup> In a scene from *The Millionaire*, skyscrapers dance a frightful dance in a twisting manner and, in fact, resemble the jungle; in this jungle, the morals of the animal world dominate, and everyone sees the other as an enemy.

In *The Millionaire*, we see the most notable case of the representation of the enemy as an animal. Also, skyscrapers play a prominent role in the key scene of the cartoon. The



episodes that show the bulldog in the club are designed to show the evils that Soviet propaganda attributed to American society: moral decay, debauchery, greed and cultural mediocrity. The narrow shadows of people dancing 'to the wails and whines of the saxophone' at first resemble skyscrapers. However, as people completely lose their human appearance and drop down to all fours, skyscrapers turn from shadows into grinning monstrous beasts. The skyscraper also appears as a background in the scene when the dog completely 'dehumanises' and relieves itself by lifting its paw at a policeman who, to make matters worse, even salutes the millionaire obsequiously.

The role of soundtracks in these scenes should be addressed separately. The enemy is rendered not only visually but also through sounds. This was of particular importance in animated films. In Soviet cinema of the Cold War, jazz acts as the musical signifier of Americanness, a symbolic border guard that separates 'us' from 'them'. For example, an expressive sound portrait of America through jazz music was created by Aram Khachaturian in *The Russian Question* and Dmitrii Shostakovich in *Meeting at the Elbe* (*Vstrecha na El'be*, dir. Grigorii Aleksandrov, 1949). Jazz was also actively used as a marker of America in the cartoons under study. At the same time, this marker, which the directors of these films associate with skyscrapers, was also attracted to dehumanise the enemy: in jazz, they saw a manifestation of the animal cult in humans and the worship of society in front of a soulless machine.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

One of the forms of the cultural Cold War was the opposition of 'our' and 'their' space within the framework of popular geopolitics. As Sharp noted, in the conditions of the post-war confrontation, only few could get behind the 'Iron Curtain'. Consequently, ideas about 'their' space and its differences from 'ours' were instilled primarily through the influence of visual propaganda (Sharp 2000). A special role was played by animated films, whose makers had more artistic means to visualise the contrast between 'our' and 'their' space than directors of feature films. It is telling that all the cartoons that touched the USA had images of skyscrapers.

The skyscraper is a political symbol that expresses the values of the American community and is used to construct the American identity. However, during the period of the cultural Cold War, like other symbols, it becomes the object of a symbolic struggle, and Soviet culture attributed certain meanings to it.

First of all, propaganda employed the image of skyscrapers as a signifier; while marking America, this image plays a special part among the signs of Americanness because of the high degree of awareness and correlations with the image of the United States as a whole.

Another function of the image of skyscrapers was to contribute to the maintenance of Soviet identity; skyscrapers were attributed with the sum of meaning that helped to represent the United States as not only different from the USSR but also inferior in comparison with it. This image incorporates the negative characteristics of the American enemy: exploitation; economic and social inequality; racism; the dictatorship of the magnates of Wall Street; egoism, hostility among persons; dominance of mass culture; incitement of base instincts in a person; and cult of violence and war.

Finally, the use of the image of skyscrapers functioned as a means of dehumanisation of the 'enemy number one'. This dehumanisation was carried out through the mechanistic

form when skyscrapers were depicted as the most important part of a huge soulless machine that suppresses people; and the animalistic form, when skyscrapers were presented as the concrete jungle, the basic principle of which is the ‘dog-eat-dog’ one. Certain cinematic techniques of animation were used in the process of dehumanisation, including distortion of the proportions of bodies; juxtaposition of light and darkness; contrast between the colour characteristics of ‘us’ and ‘them’; and jazz music as a signifier of Americanness.

Thus, the use of the image of skyscrapers by the cartoons presents a case that the cartoons served as a weapon of propaganda, contributing to the construction of the image of the enemy. That calls for continued study of the animated films as a part of cinematic Cold War. Comparative analysis of Soviet and American animations as a tool in the Cold War struggle for hearts and minds would be particularly productive.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

1. For the poster, see <https://ruskino.ru/mov/10399>. A skyscraper also appears in advertising posters for the film when it was released in Eastern Europe, for example, for the Romanian poster from 1953 for *Silver Dust* (<https://www.kinomania.ru/film/408196/posters/59968>).
2. restingly, the image of skyscrapers appeared in Russia in the late nineteenth century as a symbol of progress, faith in reason and strength of a person; similar interpretations are also found during the period under study in the works of famous writers such as Ilya Ehrenburg, Viktor Nekrasov and Boris Polevoi (Nabilkina 2014, 222). For more detailed information on the ambivalence of the Soviet image of New York, see Magnúsdóttir (2019), 7.
3. Poster for The Russian Question, 1948, by Mikhail Khazanovskii, Mikhail Kheifets, Lazar' Rappoport for Reklamfilm: <https://www.kino-teatr.ru/kino/movie/sov/6099/poster/69340/>; Poster for Secret Mission, 1950, by Arsenii Klement'ev: <https://www.kino-teatr.ru/kino/movie/sov/6320/poster/67402/>; Poster for The Coin from 1962: <https://www.kino-teatr.ru/kino/movie/sov/8884/poster/62503/>; Poster for Court of Honour, 1949: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/ru/7/7c/Плакат\\_к\\_фильму\\_«Суд\\_чести» jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/ru/7/7c/Плакат_к_фильму_«Суд_чести» jpg)
4. Cases of using animation in feature films where America is shown: Aleksandr Kozyr and Mikhail Kariukov's *The Sky is Calling* (Nebo zovet, 1959); Grigorii Aleksandrov's *Russian Souvenir* (Russkii suvenir, 1960).
5. Interestingly, the idea that American imperialism is keen on the artificial production of human-like robot soldiers for military invasion is reflected in other works of Soviet culture, for example, Lazar Lagin's novel *Patent AV* (1947) and Aleksei Gabrilovich's documentary *Mannequin Factory* (*Fabrika manekenov*, 1966).
6. For instance, in 1961 Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev noted ‘imperialistic jungles’ in his report on XXII Congress of the Communist party of the USSR (Khrushchev 1961).
7. For example, Viktor Gorodinskii in his book with the eloquent title ‘The music of spiritual poverty’ (*Muzyka dukhovnoi nishchety*) denotes jazz as music, which, on the one hand, ‘humanises a machine in art, and, conversely, transforms a person into a machine’. On the other hand, it is characterised by imitation of sounds, behaviour and habits of pigs, horses, donkeys and other representatives of the animal world (Gorodinskii 1950, 85–86).
8. Animated films such as *Make Mine Freedom* (1948), *Meet King Joe* (1949), *Albert in Blunderland* (1950), *Duck and Cover* (1952), *Destination Earth* (1956) were widely employed in US Cold War propaganda as well.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to show our gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful suggestions.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This work was supported by the Russian Science Foundation under Grant [18-18-00233], 'Cinematic Images of the Soviet and American Enemies in the Symbolic Politics of the Cold War: Comparative Analysis'.

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