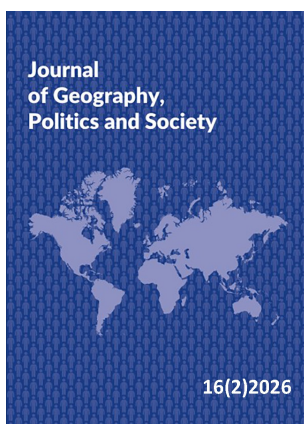




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SCREEN DIPLOMACY AS A TOOL FOR SHAPING CINEMATIC ARCHETYPES OF SECURITY

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Abstract

This article examines screen diplomacy as a strategic component of contemporary public diplomacy and an instrument of state soft power. It analyses how film and other screen media transmit national values and shape international images of states during periods of geopolitical crisis. Particular attention is paid to the transformation of cinematic security archetypes, in which the figures of the “Saviour” and the “Defender” become symbolic foundations of national resilience, while representations of the “External Enemy” contribute to collective perceptions of threat and to the legitimization of security responses. The study considers contemporary war-related screen narratives across Western and Ukrainian feature and documentary cinema and interprets the screen as a dynamic arena of meaning-making, political legitimization, and strategic communication. It argues that screen diplomacy operates through the interaction of public diplomacy, political semiotics, and archetypal structures, thereby influencing both domestic understandings of security and international perceptions of political actors.

Key words

screen diplomacy, security archetypes, war narratives in cinema, political communication, national resilience, public diplomacy.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary international relations, classical instruments of hard power are increasingly complemented by communication technologies, cultural influence, and visual media. Within this environment, screen diplomacy can be understood as a form of strategic communication in which film, television, streaming content, and other audiovisual formats contribute to the projection of political meanings and national images. In the context of hybrid threats, geopolitical instability, and sustained information confrontation, it is therefore important

to examine how screen representations shape public perceptions of national and international security, legitimise political decisions, and construct images of the “Self” and the “Other”.

This problem is particularly significant when approached through the concept of cinematic archetypes. Unlike explicitly rational political messages, archetypal narratives appeal to recurring symbolic structures such as the “Defender”, the “Enemy”, the “Saviour”, and the “Victim”. When reproduced through screen media, these structures organise perceptions of what constitutes security, where threats originate, and which forms of response appear legitimate. Analysing the

transformation of such archetypes helps explain how cinema not only reflects existing security discourses but also shapes expectations concerning geopolitical alliances, conflicts, and appropriate models of collective action.

For Ukraine, where Russia's full-scale war has made national security an existential issue, the study of cinematic security archetypes has moved beyond a purely theoretical concern and acquired direct relevance for strategic communication and cultural diplomacy.

First, the screen has become an important arena for the international legitimization of competing security narratives. Russian state-aligned media have long promoted narratives of a "brotherly nation", a "shared security space", and the alleged need to "protect" Russian-speaking populations, while simultaneously representing Ukraine through tropes of instability and threat. Analysing and deconstructing these narrative codes is therefore relevant to understanding mechanisms of information influence. At the same time, Ukrainian screen diplomacy increasingly articulates its own counter-narratives, including representations of Ukraine as a defensive frontier of Europe and of the Ukrainian soldier as a "Just Defender". Such narratives contribute to international awareness, empathy, and political solidarity.

Second, during wartime cinema also performs an important internal function of social consolidation and symbolic processing of collective trauma. War disrupts basic perceptions of safety at both individual and collective levels. Screen narratives that organise experiences of threat, resistance, loss, and recovery into recognisable symbolic structures may help audiences interpret traumatic events and situate them within broader narratives of resilience. In this sense, cinema can contribute to the transformation of victimhood into agency without reducing the complexity of wartime experience to a single heroic formula.

Third, cinematic archetypes can influence the longer-term post-war security imagination. They do not simply reproduce current realities but may shape future perceptions of reliable allies, enduring threats, legitimate forms of defence, and the boundaries of political community. Analysing cinema through political semiotics and archetypal theory can therefore contribute to a long-term cultural-policy strategy aimed at strengthening Ukraine's agency in the international information environment and reducing vulnerability to renewed forms of cultural and informational domination.

Scholarly interest in this problem is also driven by the limited number of comprehensive

interdisciplinary studies located at the intersection of film studies, political science, public diplomacy, and security studies, particularly with regard to contemporary Ukraine. For a state engaged simultaneously in military defence and information confrontation, understanding the mechanisms of screen diplomacy has both theoretical and practical significance for cultural diplomacy, counter-disinformation strategies, and international positioning.

The object of the study is cinema and related screen media as spaces in which security meanings are constructed. The subject of the study comprises the mechanisms, characteristics, and political-semiotic techniques through which screen diplomacy contributes to the formation of cinematic security archetypes.

The purpose of the article is to provide a theoretical account of screen diplomacy and to identify the political-semiotic mechanisms through which it shapes cinematic archetypes of security in contemporary global and Ukrainian media discourses.

To achieve this purpose, the study addresses three research objectives:

- to clarify the genesis and conceptual boundaries of the term "screen diplomacy";
- to identify how security archetypes, particularly the "Defender", "Saviour", "Enemy", and "Threat", function within cinematic narratives;
- to analyse contemporary uses of screen content in information confrontation and in the deconstruction of hostile political narratives.

2. Data and Methods

study employs an interdisciplinary methodological framework combining political semiotics, public-diplomacy theory, critical security studies, and Michael J. Shapiro's approach to cinematic geopolitics. Terminological and comparative-historical analysis is used to clarify the conceptual development of screen and cinematic diplomacy. Cinematic security archetypes—the "Defender", "Saviour", "Enemy", and "Threat"—are identified through structural-semiotic analysis and an archetypal approach informed by C. G. Jung's theory of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1969). Critical discourse analysis is additionally used to examine how visual composition, narrative framing, and montage contribute to the legitimization of security strategies and the deconstruction of hostile political narratives.

The empirical material consists of three interconnected groups of sources. The first group comprises official documents, reports, and analytical materials produced by institutions involved in public and cultural diplomacy, including the Ukrainian Institute and relevant Ukrainian state bodies, together with materials from international organisations engaged in strategic communication and media analysis.

The second group consists of selected feature films, documentaries, and television or streaming series released between 1983 and 2025 in which national and global security archetypes are particularly visible. The US corpus includes *The Day After* (1983), *The Terminator* franchise (1984–2019), *The Matrix* franchise (1999–2021), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Contagion* (2011), *American Sniper* (2014), *1917* (2019), *Don't Look Up* (2021), *Westworld* (2016–2022), and *House of Cards* (2013–2018). The European corpus includes *Au revoir les enfants* [Goodbye, Children] (1987), *Joyeux Noël* [Merry Christmas] (2005), *Das Leben der Anderen* [The Lives of Others] (2006), *Snowpiercer* (2013), *Under sandet* [Land of Mine] (2015), *Transit* (2018), *Triangle of Sadness* (2022), *Zielona granica* [Green Border] (2023), *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022), *Anatomy of a Fall* (2023), *The Zone of Interest* (2023), *Emilia Pérez* (2024), *Conclave* (2024), *Caliphate* (2020), and *Black Mirror* (2011–2025). Ukrainian examples include *Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die* (2017), *Donbass* (2018), *Atlantis* (2019), *Butterfly Vision* (2022), *Myrnyi-21* (2023), and *20 Days in Mariupol* (2023), among others.

The third group comprises textual and multimedia materials distributed through contemporary media platforms and streaming services, which function as important channels for screen diplomacy and information confrontation.

3. Results and Discussion

To examine the relationship between screen diplomacy and security archetypes, the results are organised into two interconnected thematic blocks. The first considers screen diplomacy as a component of public diplomacy; the second analyses the formation and transformation of cinematic security archetypes.

3.1. Screen Diplomacy as a Component of Public Diplomacy

The concepts of “screen diplomacy” and “cinematic diplomacy” developed at the intersection of two

broader intellectual trends: the emergence of soft power as a major category of international-relations analysis and the visual turn in the study of global politics. Nye's formulation of soft power emphasised the capacity to influence others through attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 1990). Against this background, scholars increasingly examined film, television, and other visual media as practical vehicles through which states and societies project cultural narratives, identities, and political values.

Nicholas J. Cull's research on propaganda, public diplomacy, and the United States Information Agency provides an important foundation for understanding film as a resource of international communication (Cull, 2008, 2019). In a later essay for the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, Cull explicitly discussed “cinematic diplomacy” and the historical use of motion pictures as cultural and diplomatic assets (Cull, 2010). Rather than attributing the broader term “screen diplomacy” to a single author, the present study uses it as an analytical category encompassing the diplomatic and strategic use of audiovisual content across cinema, television, streaming platforms, and related screen media.

Costas M. Constantinou is among the scholars who have developed the concept of visual diplomacy and examined the relationship between diplomatic practice, spectacle, and cinematic ways of thinking. His work demonstrates how images can transmit political meanings, shape relations between actors and publics, and transform diplomacy into a visually mediated practice (Constantinou, 2018a). In his chapter “Diplomacy” in *Visual Global Politics*, he further situates diplomacy within the broader visual turn in international relations (Constantinou, 2018b).

Research on cinema as an instrument of foreign policy is necessarily interdisciplinary, drawing on political semiotics, geopolitics, public diplomacy, and media studies. A contemporary contribution to this field is Erich Schwartzel's *Red Carpet: Hollywood, China, and the Global Battle for Cultural Supremacy*, which examines the interaction between Hollywood, the Chinese market, censorship, and geopolitical competition, showing how commercial screen industries can become arenas of cultural and political influence (Schwartzel, 2022).

Michael J. Shapiro's work provides another important theoretical foundation. In *Cinematic Political Thought: Narrating Race, Nation and Gender*, Shapiro shows how cinema does not merely represent political reality but participates in producing the categories through which race, nation, gender, and political belonging are perceived (Shapiro, 1999). His approach makes it possible to

treat film composition as a form of political thinking rather than as a passive reflection of pre-existing political conditions.

This argument is developed further in *Cinematic Geopolitics* (Shapiro, 2009) and *The Cinematic Political: Film Composition as Political Theory* (Shapiro, 2020), where cinematic form is analysed as a means of organising geopolitical imagination and political perception. These works are particularly relevant to the study of security archetypes because they draw attention to the ways in which film can frame war, nationhood, vulnerability, and threat before such categories are consciously articulated by audiences.

Taken together, these approaches support an understanding of screen diplomacy as a contemporary form of public diplomacy and strategic communication. In the present article, the term refers to the purposeful use of audiovisual content across cinemas, television, streaming services, online video platforms, and mobile screens to circulate political narratives, shape a country's image, legitimise security positions, and influence both domestic and international audiences.

Cinema nevertheless remains central to this broader screen-diplomacy environment. By combining narrative, visual imagery, sound, performance, and emotional identification, film can translate abstract political values and security doctrines into accessible symbolic forms. Through feature films, documentaries, festival circulation, and streaming distribution, political communities can embed security meanings in narratives that affect perceptions of solidarity, legitimacy, threat, and geopolitical belonging.

States therefore increasingly treat audiovisual culture as an element of strategic influence rather than as a sphere isolated from foreign and security policy. Public support for film production, international promotion, co-production, and festival participation can serve cultural-policy objectives while simultaneously shaping external perceptions of national identity and political values. This does not mean that state-supported cinema functions automatically as propaganda; rather, it indicates that screen industries operate within institutional environments in which cultural, economic, and strategic objectives may overlap.

Three institutional mechanisms are particularly relevant to the incorporation of cinema into external cultural and communication policy: direct state commissions and targeted funding; grant programmes and cultural institutes; and international co-production.

Direct state commissions and targeted funding provide resources for screen content that is aligned with particular public, historical, defence, or diplomatic priorities. Such support can influence which stories receive institutional visibility and how national myths, military service, historical memory, or external threats are represented. A frequently discussed example is the long-standing interaction between US defence institutions and Hollywood, in which access to military equipment, personnel, and locations may depend on institutional review and cooperation.

Grant programmes, national cultural institutes, and specialised film-support organisations allow states to pursue a less direct form of cultural influence. Funding for subtitling, distribution, festival promotion, and national participation in film markets can expand the international circulation of screen narratives without predetermining their ideological content. European cultural institutions and film agencies illustrate how public resources can support the external visibility of national and transnational cinema. Recent festival successes such as *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022), *Anatomy of a Fall* (2023), *The Zone of Interest* (2023), *Emilia Pérez* (2024), *Conclave* (2024), and *Hamnet* (2025) demonstrate the international reach of European and European-linked screen production.

International co-production represents an especially important mechanism because it moves screen production beyond a purely national framework. When two or more countries co-finance a project, they share financial risks, production resources, and often cultural perspectives. Co-production can therefore facilitate the circulation of political and social meanings across national audiences. *Triangle of Sadness* (2022), directed by Ruben Östlund and produced through a multinational European partnership, illustrates how co-production can place questions of class, gender, migration, and institutional fragility within a transnational cultural frame.

The institutional ecology of film support thus transforms the screen into a field in which artistic, commercial, cultural, and diplomatic interests intersect. Where public institutions act as funders, facilitators, or promoters, they can increase the visibility of particular narratives and symbolic resources, including those associated with national security and political legitimacy.

Contemporary screen culture can also function as a semiotic arena in which political actors are humanised, delegitimised, reconciled, or demonised. Through framing, montage, genre conventions, and

recurring visual codes, cinema may contribute to the reinterpretation of an actor's political status, presenting that actor either as an archetypal source of danger or as a legitimate partner within a revised geopolitical narrative. Such effects should not be understood as automatic or uniform; rather, they demonstrate the capacity of screen media to prepare emotional and cognitive frameworks through which later diplomatic initiatives, sanctions, conflicts, or reconciliation processes are interpreted.

3.2. The Genesis and Nature of Cinematic Security Archetypes

Within this conceptual framework, screen diplomacy may first be understood as an "architect of security meanings". Through recurring cinematic archetypes, it constructs recognisable images of protected space, legitimate authority, and sources of danger, thereby linking abstract security strategies with the emotional and symbolic perceptions of audiences. Second, screen diplomacy is not reducible to cultural export. It can also function as a means of visualising national security, with archetypal figures ranging from the "Fortress State" to the "Hero-Saviour" serving as condensed codes through which stability, vulnerability, preparedness, and political agency are communicated internationally.

Third, contemporary screen diplomacy extends beyond theatrical cinema to streaming platforms and other digital environments. As audiovisual content circulates transnationally, security archetypes become increasingly detached from a single national audience and enter a shared visual repertoire built around cyber threats, pandemics, ecological crises, terrorism, and technological disruption.

Understanding cinema as a tool of screen diplomacy therefore requires attention to its archetypal structure. In Jungian analytical psychology, archetypes refer to recurrent symbolic patterns associated with the collective unconscious (Jung, 1969). In screen narratives, such patterns are not reproduced mechanically; they are culturally reinterpreted through characters, conflicts, symbols, and genre conventions. Their analytical significance lies in their capacity to organise complex social experience into emotionally recognisable forms.

In political and geopolitical analysis, the security archetype can be treated as a dynamic symbolic matrix that becomes especially salient during crises, catastrophes, and wars, when perceptions of safety are destabilised. On screen, security rarely appears as an abstract concept; it is personified and spatialised through figures, institutions, boundaries,

and the recurring opposition between "Self" and "Other". Screen diplomacy can mobilise these codes to define protected values, identify sources of danger, and represent particular forms of political action as legitimate or necessary.

The cinematic transformation of the security archetype ranges from personified protection to the encoding of danger. The figures of the "Defender" and the "Saviour" represent strength, order, sacrifice, and the restoration of justice, while the "External Enemy" and the "Invisible Threat" represent different forms of vulnerability and uncertainty. In Ukrainian wartime screen discourse, the Defender has increasingly been associated with the Armed Forces of Ukraine and with civilian mobilisation, whereas representations of hidden threats often draw on the experience of hybrid warfare, disinformation, and covert influence.

3.2.1. The Archetypes of the "Defender" and the "Savior"

To trace how screen diplomacy mobilises recurrent symbolic structures, this section compares the archetypes of the "Defender" and the "Saviour" across four geopolitical contexts: the United States, Western Europe, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation. The comparison is heuristic rather than exhaustive and is intended to identify dominant tendencies within selected screen narratives rather than to characterise entire national cinemas.

The United States: Individualism and the Global Messiah. American popular cinema has frequently projected narratives of US leadership through strongly individualised protagonists. The "Defender" is often represented as a soldier, law-enforcement officer, or other professional who protects not only a physical community but also a normative vision of the American political order. Captain Miller in *Saving Private Ryan* and the screen representation of Chris Kyle in *American Sniper* exemplify this form of sacrificial professional defender.

The American "Saviour" is frequently configured as a messianic figure who assumes responsibility for the survival of a wider community, humanity, or the planet at a moment of existential collapse. Neo in *The Matrix* franchise and superhero figures such as Captain America or Superman exemplify this pattern. Such narratives can symbolically reinforce conceptions of exceptional agency and global responsibility, although their political meanings vary considerably across genres and historical contexts.

Western Europe: Collective Trauma and the Defence of Institutions. European cinema, shaped by

sustained reflection on the catastrophes of the twentieth century, often approaches military heroism with greater scepticism. The Defender is therefore frequently an ordinary individual, professional, or institutional actor who protects human dignity, legal order, or vulnerable groups rather than embodying an uncomplicated martial ideal. In this interpretative frame, films such as 1917 place duty, vulnerability, and the human cost of war at the centre of the security narrative.

European war dramas also illustrate how the Defender archetype may diverge from the more individualised conventions of Hollywood action cinema. Whereas US war narratives often connect security with the restoration of control through military capability, European films such as *Under sandet* [Land of Mine] (2015) and *Joyeux Noël* [Merry Christmas] (2005) emphasise moral restraint, trauma, reconciliation, and the preservation of humanity amid institutional violence. The Defender may therefore act in tension with state orders rather than simply execute them.

The European “Saviour” is often represented through humanitarian workers, diplomats, medical professionals, volunteers, or ordinary individuals who defend human dignity within crisis situations. Anti-totalitarian and refugee-centred narratives are especially important in this respect. Films such as *Zielona granica* [Green Border] (2023), *Au revoir les enfants* [Goodbye, Children] (1987), *Transit* (2018), and *Das Leben der Anderen* [The Lives of Others] (2006) shift the focus of salvation from geopolitical triumph to the protection of concrete human beings and moral choice.

Ukraine: The Existential Fighter, the Volunteer Warrior, and the Shield-Nation. Since 2014, Ukrainian screen narratives have increasingly transformed security archetypes from primarily folkloric figures into instruments of contemporary cultural self-representation. The Defender is often embodied by the volunteer soldier or citizen-soldier who protects home, territory, and political community from external aggression. *Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die* (2017), *Myrnyi-21* (2023), *20 Days in Mariupol* (2023), and *War Note* (2020) provide different fictional and documentary forms through which this archetype is articulated.

The Ukrainian Saviour archetype is frequently collectivised rather than concentrated in a single messianic protagonist. Volunteer networks, paramedics, medical workers, local communities, and military units may function as collective agents of rescue and resilience. *Butterfly Vision* (2022) and *Atlantis* (2019), for example, connect survival with

the longer-term consequences of war, trauma, social reconstruction, and the restoration of agency rather than with a singular heroic intervention.

The Russian Federation: Imperial Revanchism, Extrajudicial “Truth”, and Sacred Sacrifice. In the state-aligned Russian screen corpus examined here, security narratives frequently reproduce themes of besiegement, force, imperial continuity, and the moral exceptionalism of state power. The Defender may be represented as a security-service officer, soldier, or mercenary whose legitimacy derives less from legal constraint than from loyalty to the state and to an imagined collective “ours”. Earlier popular films such as *Brother* and *Brother 2* and later state-supported productions concerning Crimea, Donbas, Syria, or Africa illustrate different stages in this development.

The Russian Saviour archetype likewise tends to acquire authoritarian and quasi-messianic features, centring on a “strong leader”, security operative, or military actor who restores order in a hostile environment. Retrospective representations of tsarist or Soviet rulers and contemporary films about Russian military operations can translate state power into a narrative of civilisational rescue. In propaganda-oriented productions, this framework may serve to legitimise military intervention by presenting Russian force as uniquely capable of restoring security.

The comparison suggests that security archetypes are adapted to different political and cultural traditions. US narratives often magnify individual agency; European narratives frequently emphasise institutional restraint, trauma, and human dignity; Ukrainian wartime narratives increasingly collectivise protection and resilience; and state-aligned Russian narratives may invert defensive language in ways that normalise coercive or expansionist forms of state power. These are analytical tendencies rather than exhaustive descriptions of national cinemas.

3.2.2. The Archetypes of the “External Enemy” and the “Invisible Threat”

The architecture of cinematic security is incomplete without figures of danger, because the Defender and Saviour acquire meaning only in relation to a perceived threat. Screen diplomacy therefore also constructs negative poles of identity through the archetypes of the “External Enemy” and the “Invisible Threat”. These figures organise fear, justify mobilisation, and define the boundaries of the political community. Over time, the cinematic threat has evolved from a clearly localised adversary toward

increasingly dispersed, technological, biological, and informational forms of danger.

Whereas the Defender and Saviour express how a political community imagines protection and agency, the External Enemy and Invisible Threat reveal what it fears and how it represents those fears. Comparative analysis of these archetypes therefore highlights differences in political memory, strategic culture, and the ideological uses of threat representation.

The United States: From the “Evil Empire” to Cyber Threats. American cinema has a long history of representing adversaries in ways that correspond, although not mechanically, to changing geopolitical contexts. Nazi and Soviet antagonists dominated different phases of twentieth-century screen culture; after the attacks of 11 September 2001, terrorist networks and Middle Eastern settings became more prominent. More recent productions have also incorporated Russian political actors, cyber adversaries, and concerns about China into narratives of strategic competition.

The archetype of the Invisible Threat is particularly prominent in US screen culture. Artificial intelligence escaping human control, as in *The Terminator* franchise and *Westworld*; pandemics, as in *Contagion*; and conspiratorial or digitally mediated threats, as in *House of Cards* and numerous cyber-thrillers, relocate insecurity from a visible battlefield to complex technological and institutional systems.

Western Europe: Fear of Internal Fragmentation. European cinema less frequently relies on a single, clearly defined external state enemy and more often explores threats arising within societies themselves. Religious extremism, political radicalisation, authoritarian legacies, xenophobia, social exclusion, and institutional failure become sources of insecurity whose boundaries are difficult to define. Productions such as *Caliphate* illustrate this turn toward internally networked and socially embedded forms of threat.

The Invisible Threat in European screen discourse also appears through ecological crisis, technological alienation, social fragmentation, and contested migration. *Zielona granica* [Green Border] brings the politics of borders and humanitarian vulnerability to the foreground, while *Black Mirror* repeatedly represents the destabilising potential of digital technologies, surveillance, and algorithmic systems. These narratives shift the meaning of security from protection against invasion toward the resilience of democratic, social, and technological institutions.

Ukraine: A Concrete Existential Enemy and Hybrid Warfare. In Ukrainian screen narratives of the past decade, the external threat has become markedly

less metaphorical because it is grounded in the experience of Russian military aggression. Films such as *Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die* (2017), *U311 Cherkasy* (2019), *Sniper: The White Raven* (2022), and documentary works on the war construct the enemy through occupation, military violence, and the destruction of Ukrainian political and social space.

The Invisible Threat in Ukrainian cinema is closely associated with hybrid warfare: covert collaboration, information manipulation, sabotage, disinformation, and psychological pressure directed at social cohesion. *Myrnyi-21* (2023) and *Donbass* (2018), among other works, depict environments in which the distinction between civilian life, propaganda, coercion, and military confrontation becomes unstable.

Russia: Geopolitical Besiegement and the Internal Enemy. State-aligned Russian screen production frequently reproduces the image of Russia as a “besieged fortress”. Within this framework, the collective West, especially the United States and NATO, is represented as a persistent external source of danger, while domestic dissent, “foreign agents”, and alleged internal conspirators are constructed as invisible threats. Such representations can legitimise authoritarian control by translating political opposition and external competition into a continuous security emergency.

The comparison therefore reveals an important asymmetry. US and European screen cultures frequently explore global, technological, social, or future-oriented risks; Ukrainian cinema increasingly represents a concrete external aggressor alongside the diffuse mechanisms of hybrid warfare; and state-aligned Russian cinema often constructs both external and internal enemies within a broader narrative of geopolitical encirclement. These contrasting patterns demonstrate how security archetypes can function simultaneously as cultural narratives and instruments of political legitimisation.

Rapid technological change is now expanding the semiotic boundaries of cinematic threat. Twenty-first-century narratives increasingly move away from conventional battlefield confrontation toward decentralised challenges such as cyber insecurity, biological risk, algorithmic manipulation, and transhumanism. As a result, the symbolic repertoire of screen diplomacy is also shifting from visible military adversaries to systems and processes whose danger is difficult to localise.

Contemporary screen narratives increasingly represent the digital environment as a major security domain. Algorithms may replace conventional weapons, while the Defender archetype is recast as

an analyst, hacker, engineer, or system administrator. Cybersecurity is visualised through critical-infrastructure failure, identity theft, surveillance, data manipulation, and network disruption. The resulting imagery produces a distinctive form of vulnerability in which states and individuals can be paralysed without conventional military attack.

A parallel development concerns biological and public-health threats. Cinematic narratives about pandemics, laboratory accidents, ecological collapse, or genetic technologies dissolve conventional political borders and expose the limits of traditional military security. Medical professionals, scientists, and epidemiologists may therefore assume the role of legitimate Saviours, while laboratories, information systems, and healthcare infrastructures become central sites of security. This shift from the “military shield” toward informational, biomedical, and infrastructural resilience reflects broader changes in contemporary understandings of national and societal security.

4. Conclusions

4.1. Main Findings

The study demonstrates that contemporary cinema and other screen media function not only as entertainment but also as important mediators of public diplomacy and strategic communication. Screen diplomacy connects the specialised language of security policy with mass public perception by translating abstract doctrines into emotionally resonant narratives organised around recurrent archetypes such as the Defender, Saviour, External Enemy, and Invisible Threat.

Screen diplomacy can contribute both to the legitimisation of security measures and to the formation of societal resilience. The comparative analysis also reveals substantial geopolitical differentiation. US screen narratives often emphasise individual agency and exceptional responsibility; Western European narratives more frequently foreground human dignity, institutional restraint, and collective trauma; Ukrainian wartime cinema increasingly collectivises the Saviour and Defender through soldiers, volunteers, medical workers, and communities; and state-aligned Russian narratives often instrumentalise security archetypes to normalise authoritarian and expansionist political meanings.

Screen diplomacy should therefore be understood as a significant instrument of public and cultural diplomacy through which states and societies project values, construct international images, and exercise forms of soft power. Institutional mechanisms—including public funding, cultural institutes, festival promotion, and international co-production—shape the circulation and visibility of cinematic narratives without determining their meanings in a simple or automatic way.

At the same time, screen space remains an arena of political contestation in which actors may be legitimised, humanised, delegitimised, or demonised. Cinema can facilitate cultural reconciliation and the processing of historical trauma, but it can also intensify antagonistic representations and reproduce exclusionary political narratives. The political significance of contemporary screen culture therefore lies precisely in its capacity to mediate between artistic representation, collective memory, public diplomacy, and national-security discourse.

4.2. Future Research Directions: Artificial Intelligence and Digital Platforms

The future development of screen diplomacy will be closely connected with digitalisation, global streaming services, and artificial intelligence. Platforms such as Netflix, Max, and Amazon Prime have reduced many traditional distribution barriers and created a transnational audiovisual environment in which similar representations of cyber threats, pandemics, political violence, and ecological crisis circulate across different societies. This process may contribute both to the globalisation of security archetypes and to their local reinterpretation within distinct political cultures.

AI-based recommendation systems can further personalise the distribution of screen content by aligning it with behavioural profiles, viewing histories, and inferred audience preferences. At the same time, generative AI is beginning to transform audiovisual production itself, from synthetic images and voices to automated editing and script development. These developments create new opportunities for creative production but also new risks associated with deepfakes, disinformation, and the manipulation of trust. Future research should therefore examine how algorithmic distribution and generative media alter the formation, circulation, and political effects of cinematic security archetypes.

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