



# **The Real versus Realism Russian Cinema**

# The power of the camera

“... One indubitable advantage and the essence of cinema is the face, the eyes, speaking not less than the tongue. It has become clear that it is sufficient for the actor to think sincerely and with inspiration about what he might say, only think about it as he acts in front of the camera, creating the way he would onstage, and with every muscle, question or plea of the eyes alone, with every wrinkle visible from the most remote corner of the movie theatre, he will reveal his entire soul to the public on the screen. And the public, I repeat, will understand him without a single word or a single intertitle. “

Ivan Mozzhukhin (1918)

# Pre-revolutionary Russian film 1896-1918

- The capitalist way...



# One of the first films ever...

- In 1896 the Lumiere Brothers visited Moscow and St.Petersburg with their films. In that year the first film was made in Russia: the coronation of Nicholas II.



# A productive industry...

- Prerevolutionary cinema as fully-fledged industry along with French, Danish, German, American
- 1700 + films between 1907-1917 (some 280 have survived)
- Exported (no problem of sound); change to happy ending for export.

# The social impact

- Early cinemas have sleazy reputation.
- Cheap, informal entertainment, no dress code (unlike theatre).
- Itinerant industry (no electricity needed) in far-flung empire.
- Democratic art form – for people of all classes.

# First Russian feature film

Sten'ka Razin (1908; Aleksandr Drankov dir. )



# Productive industry



- Pre-revolutionary cinema as fully-fledged industry along with French, Danish, German, American
- Studio Khanzhonkov founded in 1905 in Moscow (over 100 films made before 1919)
- 1700 + films between 1907-1917 (some 280 have survived)
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# The Social Impact

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# Film Genres

- Newsreels and propaganda – especially during the war
- Melodramas (ex., *Twilight of a Woman's Soul* by Bauer)
- Historical and literary subjects: *Ivan the Terrible*, *Peter the Great*, *War and Peace*, *The Idiot*, *Queen of Spades*.



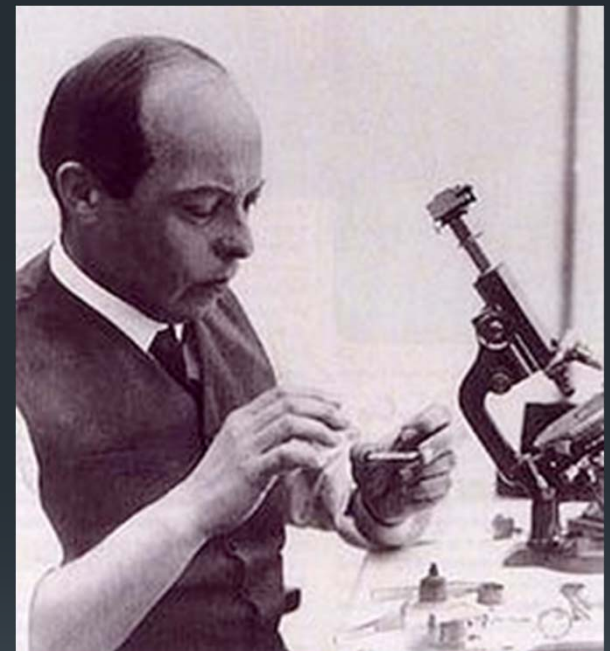
# The new aesthetic

- Directors seek innovation: Evgeny Bauer, Yakov Protazanov
- First experiments with the possibilities of light, montage (editing) and camera (e.g. travelling shots, close-ups)
- Differences with theatre: no spoken lines, closeness of camera.
- Possibility to retake shot.
- Expressive make-up.
- Exaggerated gestures to compensate for lack of speech.
- a new expressiveness of the facial gesture.



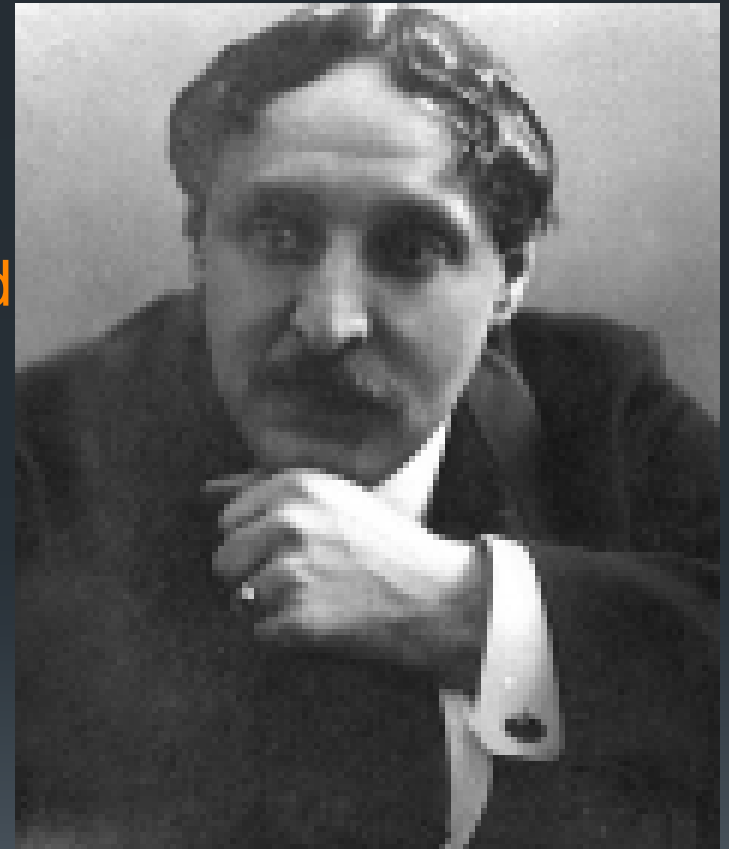
## ...and directors

- Wladislaw Starewicz (1882-1965)  
(a.k.a. Ladislav Starevich)
- First Russian animated films, beginning in 1910.
- Stop motion technique.
- Used dead beetles, attaching legs with wax.
- *The Cameraman's Revenge* (1912)
- After revolution moved to France, worked in Paris.



## ...and directors

- Evgeny Bauer Movie-making career 1913-1917
- experimented with the possibilities of light, montage and camera (e.g. travelling shots)
- static camera becomes moving camera
- artful use of light
- carefully crafted shots
- complicated subject matter, sophisticated plot, psychological depth, compassion to characters



# Russian Avant-garde Cinema 1918 – 1930



## Cinema nationalized 1918

- Lenin's article "Directive on film-making" (film as a tool for propaganda)
- Lenin's phrase "For us film is the most important art form."
- Lenin's instruction: to shoot the processes of industrial production; educational and scientific films.
- Profitable art: entertainment "without obscenity and counterrevolution"

# Vladimir Mayakovsky

Beat the squares with the tramp of rebels!  
Higher, rangers of haughty heads!  
We'll wash the world with a second deluge,  
Now's the hour whose coming it dreads.  
Too slow, the wagon of years,  
The oxen of days — too glum.  
Our god is the god of speed,  
Our heart — our battle drum.  
Is there a gold diviner than ours/  
What wasp of a bullet us can sting?  
Songs are our weapons, our power of powers,  
Our gold — our voices — just hear us sing!





# Artists... Vladimir Tatlin...

Monument to the Third  
Socialist international  
(1919-1920)

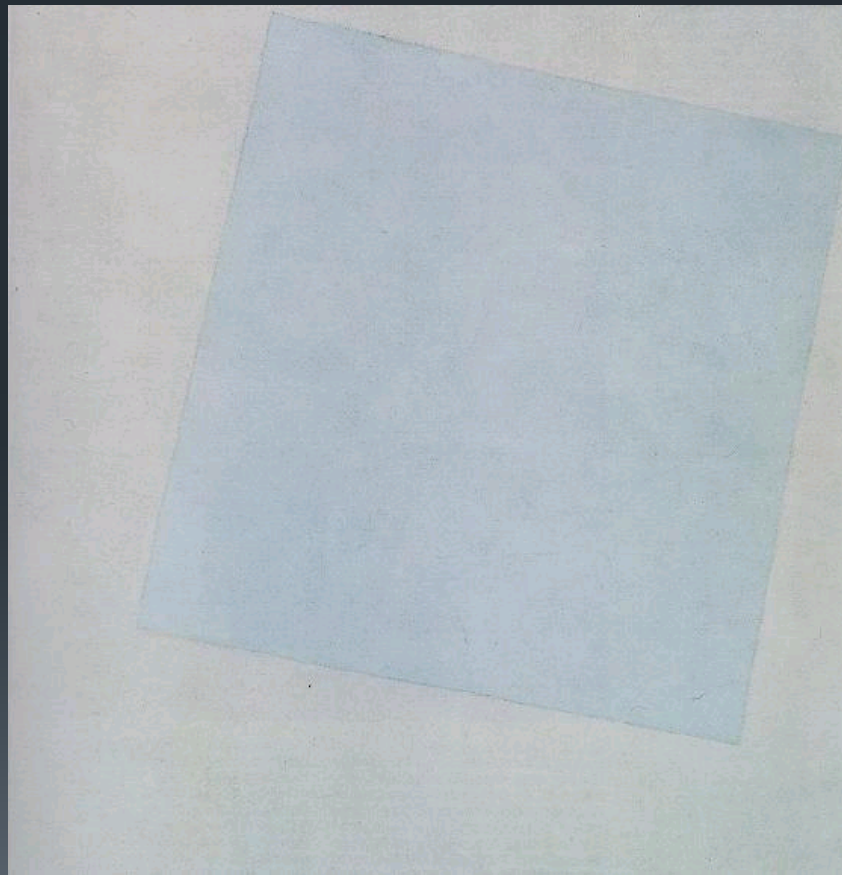




# ... and Kazimir Malevich



White quadrilateral on white (1916)

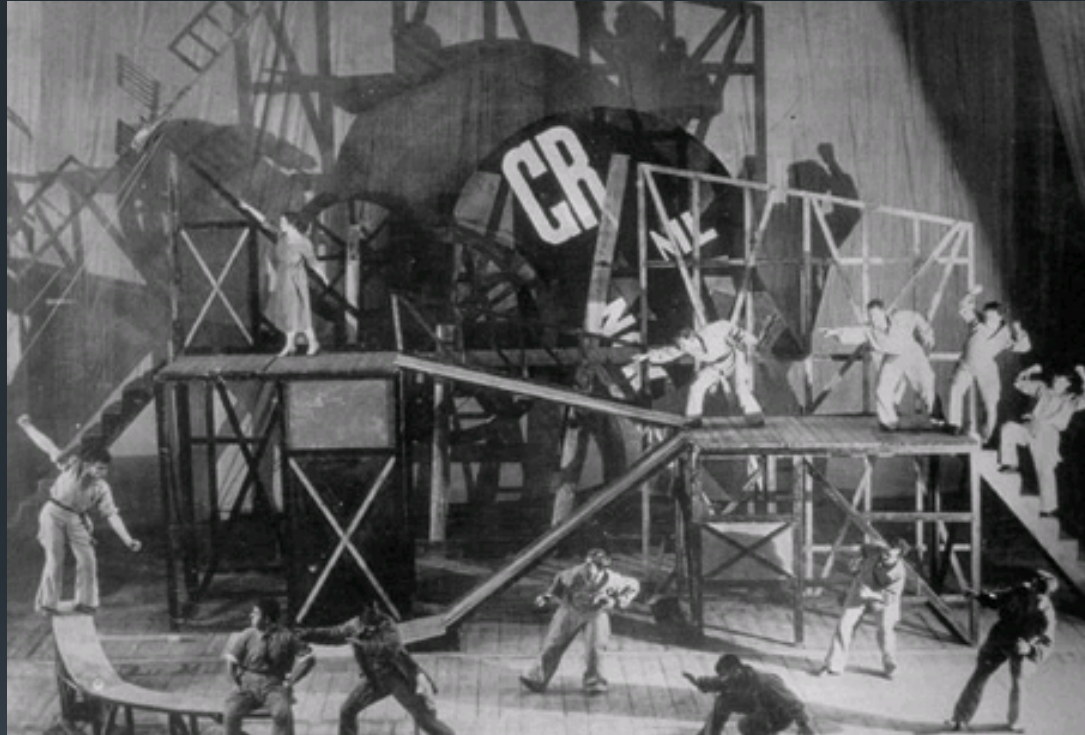


# Photographers ...

Aleksandr Rodchenko



...and theatre directors



Vsevolod Meyerhold's *Magnificent Cuckold*

# What were the elements of avant-garde art?



- Rejection of “bourgeois” values
- Shock effect
- Abstraction
- collage
- focus on form
- cult of the modern (“Futurism”), the new industrial processes, machines
- Primitivism
- revealing the true form of things (Constructivism)

# “Avantgarde” political cinema

Lev Kuleshov (1899-1970) - theoretician

Vsevolod Pudovkin (1893-1953)

Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948)

Dziga Vertov (1896-1954)

Aleksandr Dovzhenko (1894-1956)



Мать. Реж. В.Пудовкин. 1926

# Post-revolutionary film

- “agitka” (агитка): spreading the word about the revolution in the villages
- non-narrative
- ideological
- propaganda value
- hero system (Lenin)
- non-erotic content



# Soviet Sci Fi

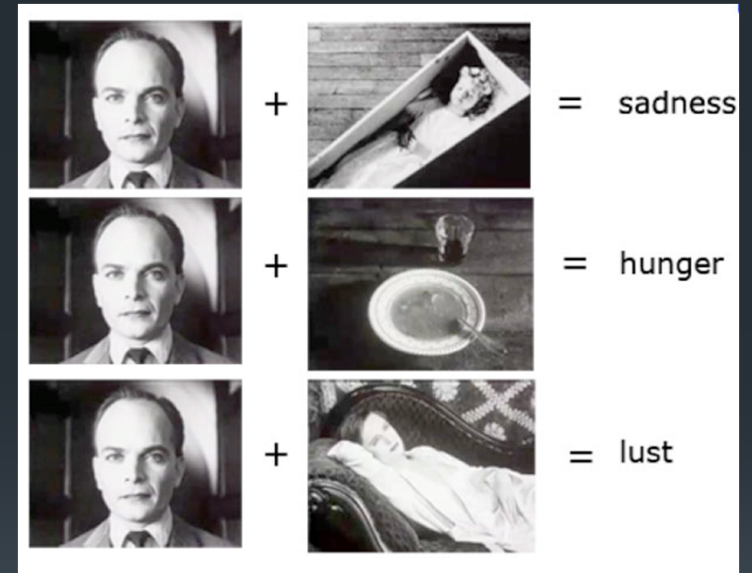


- Yakov Protazanov's *Aelita* (1924)
- Constructivist sets, costumes
- Revolutionary theme: spreading the revolution to other planets
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wccJAt-bCew&feature=related>



# Montage: the Kuleshov effect

- Lev Kuleshov. 1910-s.
- The same footage of Ivan Mozzhukhin's face + other shots (a plate of soup, a young beauty, a child in a coffin) evokes different emotions.
- The audience's reception of emotion on the actor's face depends on the sequence of images.
- The importance of montage and film editing
- psychological "programming" of audience





# Montage: the Kuleshov effect

- Montage editing can be seen as an alternative to CONTINUITY EDITING (or the classical Hollywood style). Continuity editing strives to make the editing invisible; done well, as in most Hollywood movies, the audience is barely aware of camera movement or cuts.
- Montage, on the other hand, uses editing to construct the meaning of the piece rather than as a means to an end. The effect, thus, isn't only in the shots; it's in the order of the shots.

# Continuity Editing vs Montage



- Smooth transition between two shots
- Seamless, Setting takes precedence, staged and worked upon arrangement
- A bevy of editing techniques and strategies used for a more market friendly product.
- Privileged Look
- Clash of one image against the other
- Hurried, urgent, Action takes precedence
- Sees continuity as a distancing device and gives way for a democratic interplay between shots, geared towards and intellectual and emotional response
- Urgent feel

# Methods of montage:

- ***Metric*** – where the editing follows a specific number of frames (based purely on the physical nature of time), cutting to the next shot no matter what is happening within the image. This montage is used to elicit the most basal and emotional of reactions in the audience.
- this is the running time of the shot or each of the shots.

# Methods of montage:

- ***Rhythmic*** – includes cutting based on time, but using the visual composition of the shots — along with a change in the speed of the metric cuts — to induce more complex meanings than what is possible with metric montage.
- this combines elements of the first concept / since it is about rhythm, the combination or collision of two shots or the "rhythm" of the shots. How the movement in one shot affects the movement in the next shot. Here, movement takes precedence over length.

# Methods of montage:

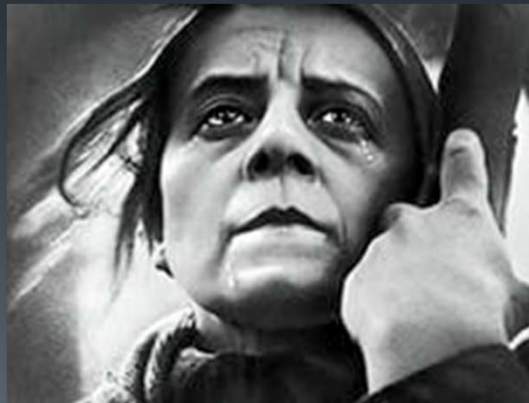
- ***Tonal*** — a tonal montage uses the emotional meaning of the shots — not just manipulating the temporal length of the cuts or its rhythmical characteristics — to elicit a reaction from the audience even more complex than from the metric or rhythmic montage. For example, a sleeping baby would evoke calmness and relaxation.

# Methods of montage:

- ***Overtonal/Associational*** – the overtonal montage is the cumulation of metric, rhythmic, and tonal montage to synthesize its effect on the audience for an even more abstract and complicated effect.
- ***Intellectual*** – uses shots which, combined, elicit an intellectual meaning.
- *this is the conscious creation of new ideas when two shots or images are cut together to form a new idea or object*

# Key Concepts in 1920s films, esp. Eisenstein

- New cinematic language rejecting “literature” (narrative) and “theatre” (psychological realism of stage)
- Montage of attractions: collision (juxtaposing) of visual images to create a third meaning : (A + B = C)
- Typage: rejection of actors, preference for facial “types”



# The Real versus Realism



- Two approaches:  
narrative and abstract films
- What is narrative and why film would use it?
- Viewers saw film as real
- What techniques do the filmmakers use to make their films realistic to the viewer and believable as historical events, how do they make their narrations of historical events appear real?



# The Real versus Realism

Avant-garde film rejected the “psychological realism” of Stanislavskian theatre.

Eisenstein: “The Moscow Art Theatre is my deadly enemy. They string their emotions together to give a continuous illusion of reality. I take photographs of reality and then cut them up to produce emotions... I am not a realist, I am a materialist. I believe that material things, that matter gives us the basis of all our sensations. I get away from realism by going to reality.”

# October (1927) by Sergey Eisenstein

## First non-documentary featuring Lenin

- By Sergei Eisenstein. Based on book by John Reid
- Made to commemorate 10th anniversary of Bolshevik seizure of Power
- 23-27 February 1917 Crisis
- 15 March Tsar Nicholas II abdicates
- Confrontation between Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet (Workers' Council)
- April 1917 Vladimir Lenin returns via the Finland Station
- July Demonstrations broken up, Lenin goes into hiding
- October 24-25 (7 November) 1917
- Storming of the Winter Palace in Petrograd and removal of Provisional Government.

# Eisenstein's October

- Historically inaccurate: the myth, not the literal truth
- Political message conveyed visually
- Film technique: editing
- Use of types: "Lenin" is a worker who looked similar.
- No acting: simple gestures
- Montage of faces, e.g. Kerensky, with dolls, e.g. Napoleon
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# Eisenstein Filmography

- Strike 1923
- Battleship Potemkin (1925)
- October (Ten Days that Shook the World) 1928
- The General Line (The Old and the New) 1929
- Que viva Mexico! (unfinished – abandoned 1932)
- Bezhin Meadow (1935 – undistributed, destroyed)
- Alexander Nevsky 1938
- Ivan the Terrible Pt. I 1944
- Ivan the Terrible Pt II (finished 1946, released only in 1958)



# Vsevolod Pudovkin (1893–1953)

- *Chess Fever* (1925)

Popular comedy on non-political theme.

- *Mother* (1926)

Classic based on Maxim Gorky's novel about strikers in 1902.

- *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927)

For the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution.  
Compared unfavourably to Eisenstein's *October*.

# A. Tarkovskiy

