



Man With a Movie Camera

“You must remember that, of all the arts, for us the cinema is the most important” - Lenin



Soviet Union in a precarious state. Cinema is recognised as a powerful tool of propaganda to show unity, strength and happiness.

Post revolution cinema in Russia

1918

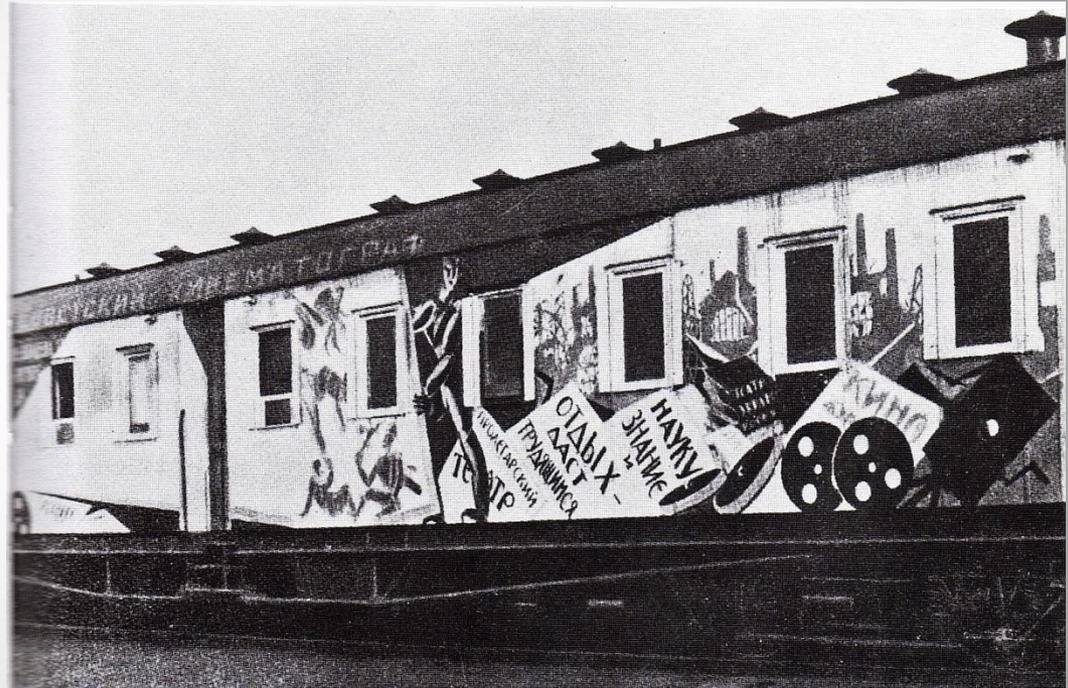
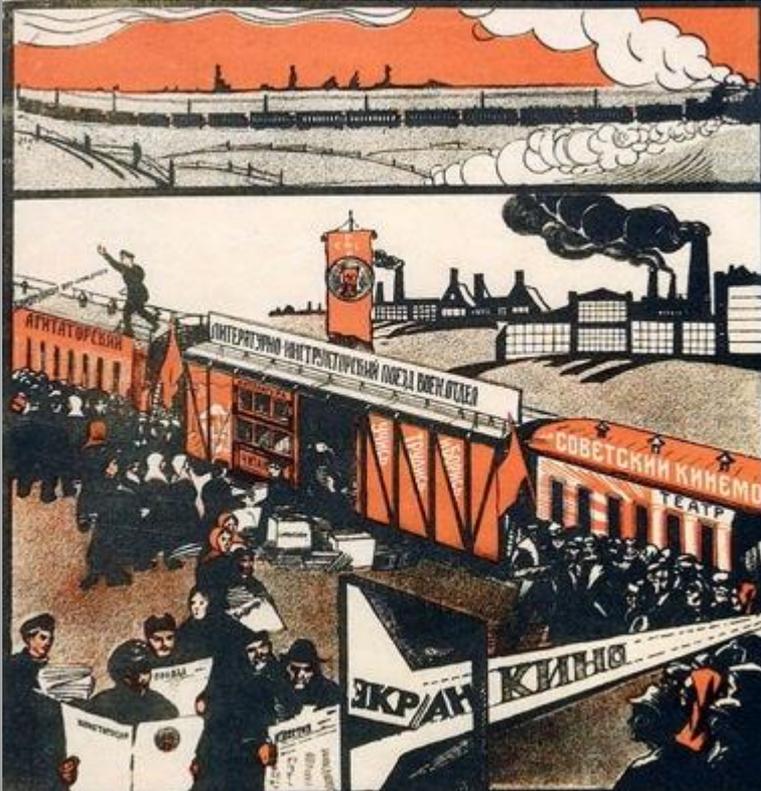
Civil War

Cinema is overseen and regulated by the People's Commissariat of Education (Narkompros)

Private film companies close or flee, taking production equipment and film stock

- Vertov makes his earliest films – newsreels for Narkompros
- Soviet government entrusts Jacques Cibrario, a distributor who had worked in Russia with \$1 million to purchase American equipment – he bought some worthless used material and absconded with the rest. There was therefore very little material for filmmaking at this period.

1919-1920 Nationalisation of cinema - film as propaganda



- Agit-trains
- Most new films simple newsreels and agitki – propaganda films. Some older Russian films being shown.
- Agit trains toured the country – ideal for spreading Bolshevik message to illiterate masses.
- Space cleared for a whole new generation of filmmakers.

Lev Kuleshov



Narkompros establishes the State Film School in 1919.

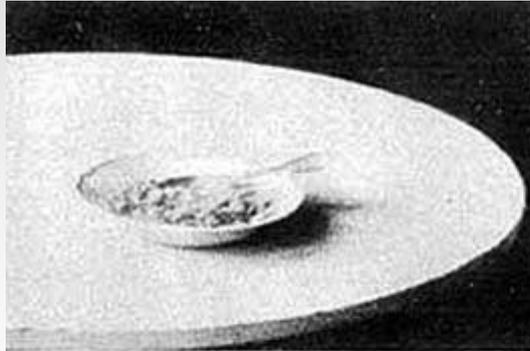
Working with limited resources made his teaching inventive. Soviet filmmakers began using shorter shot duration due to lack of film stock.

Kuleshov's satire: *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in The Land of The Bolsheviks*

By the Law uses careful editing to construct narrative

The Kuleshov effect

The effect of leaving out a scene's establishing shot and leading the spectator to infer spatial or temporal continuity from the shots of separate elements

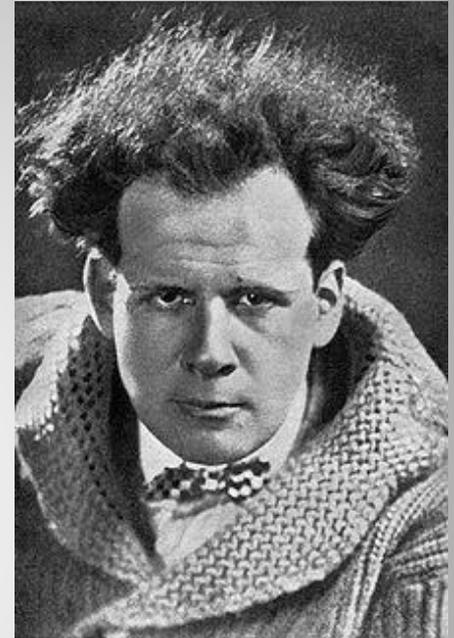


Lev Kuleshov teaches Eisenstein and Pudovkin the power of montage: another experiment had him edit together different close-ups of facial features of different women to convince an audience that seemed to show just one. **The filmmaker built up a space and time that did not exist.**

Key Soviet Filmmakers

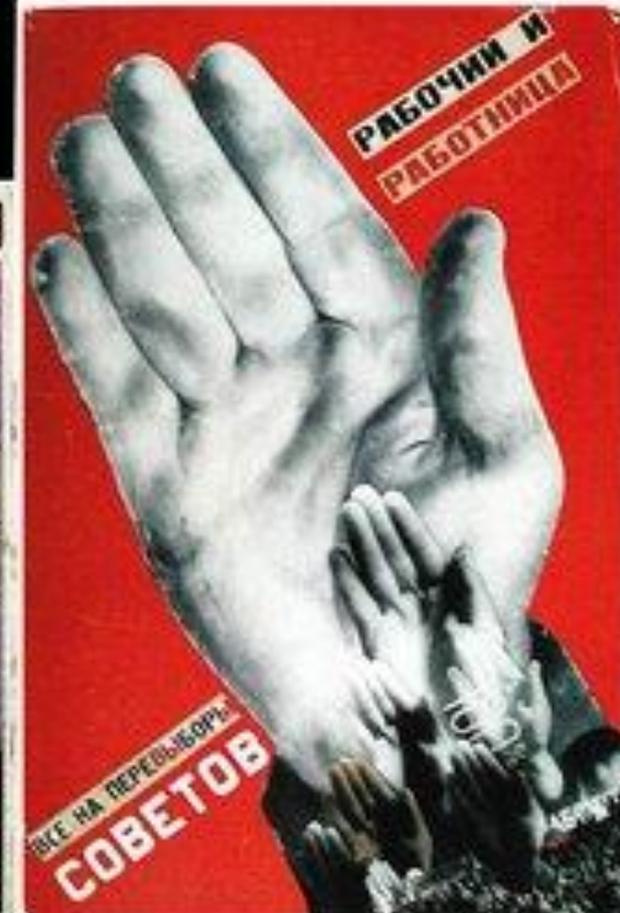


Vsevolod Pudovkin & Sergei Eisenstein



- Key directors from this era – reject the style of Hollywood as bourgeois.
- Focus on editing, real life locations, ‘true’ stories, the issues that face the proletariat.
- Eisenstein focused on the crowd as heroic, not the individual.
- The Soviet film industry also needed to sell films abroad in order to fund domestic propaganda. Thus, a dynamic, internationally commercial style of film was needed: *Battleship Potemkin* and *Mother* became international hits, facilitating the Soviet industry.

Constructivist Art



Constructivism

The movement was in favour of **art as a practice for social purposes**.

Movement compared art to a machine – put together from parts and used the term **montage** meaning putting together parts of a machine.

The filmmakers also adopted this term when discussing the value of editing.

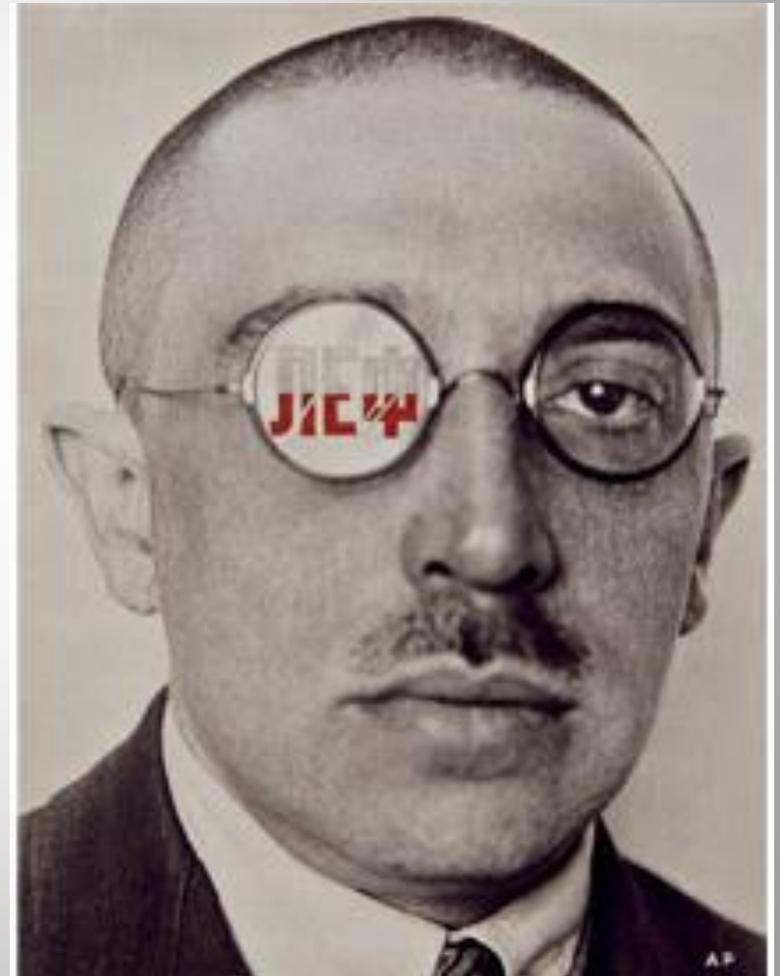
At the time, industrialisation was stressed. Communist values focused on the dignity of labour: factories and machines are stressed as symbols of society.

The factory in Pudovkin and Eisenstein's films may be the centre of conflict between bourgeois and proletariat but it is *not* the factory itself that is the problem (compare this to the Weimar film *Metropolis*)

Alexander Rodchenko & Photomontage

Rodchenko was a photographer who experimented with the medium of photography to create a soviet form of art.

He experimented with the idea of photomontage.



Through
juxtaposition of
various images,
he could create
a new meaning
absent from any
image by itself.

Compare this to the Kuleshov effect





As a tool for expressing an image of Soviet strength, Rodchenko's images were valuable.

Both photography and cinema were seen as having the potential to be truly Soviet media.

Both were young art forms and therefore had less of a bourgeois background like the traditional arts.

Film and photography were associated with modernity – vital in a time of rapid industrialisation

In this shot from *Man With a Movie Camera*, composition is dynamic, showing the influence of Rodchenko. Machinery is shown in a very positive light.

Lighting helps to suggest a forceful image

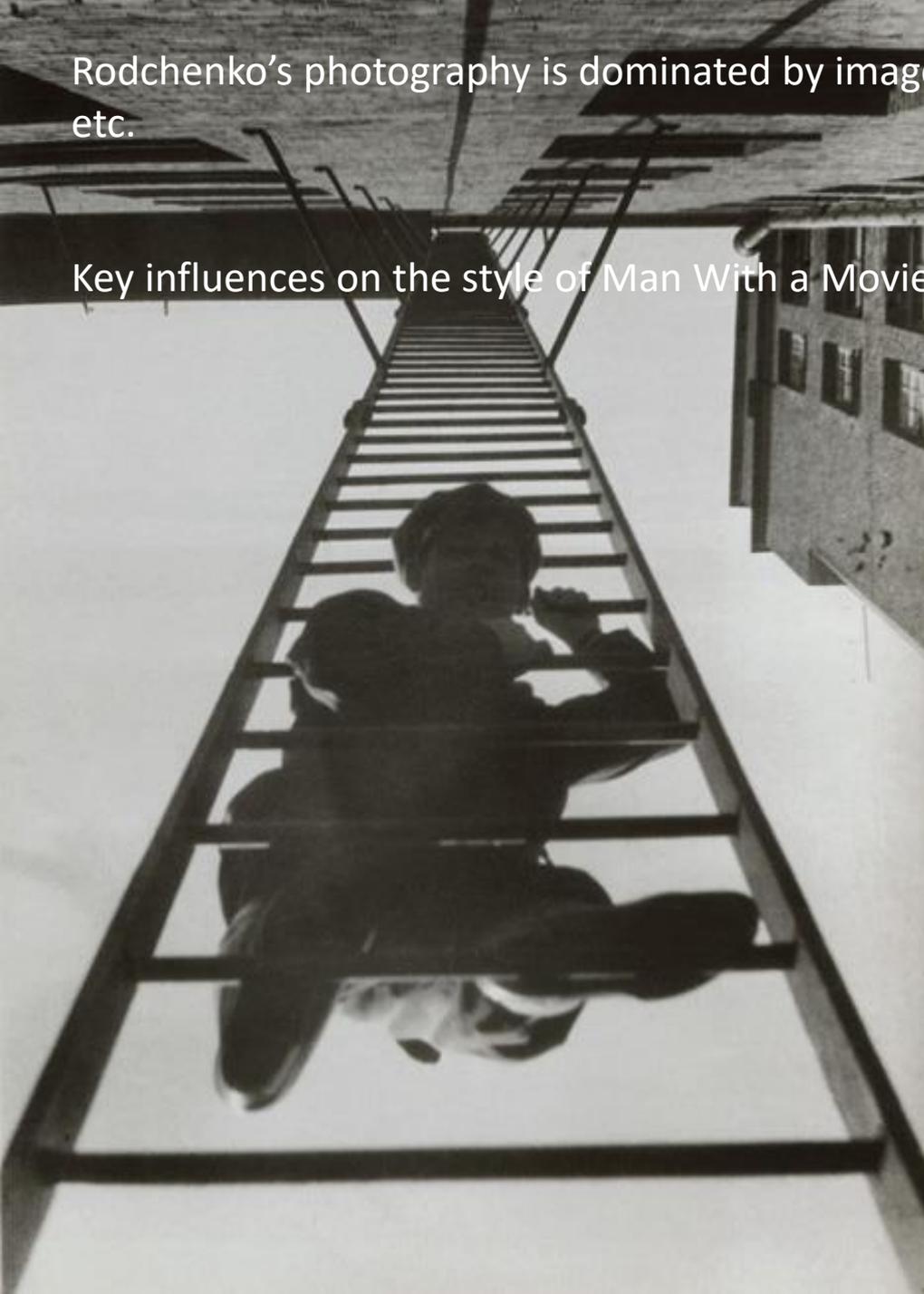


Recurring
images of
communication,
technology and
industry
throughout
constructivist
art



Rodchenko's photography is dominated by images of Soviet unity, proletarian strength, etc.

Key influences on the style of Man With a Movie Camera



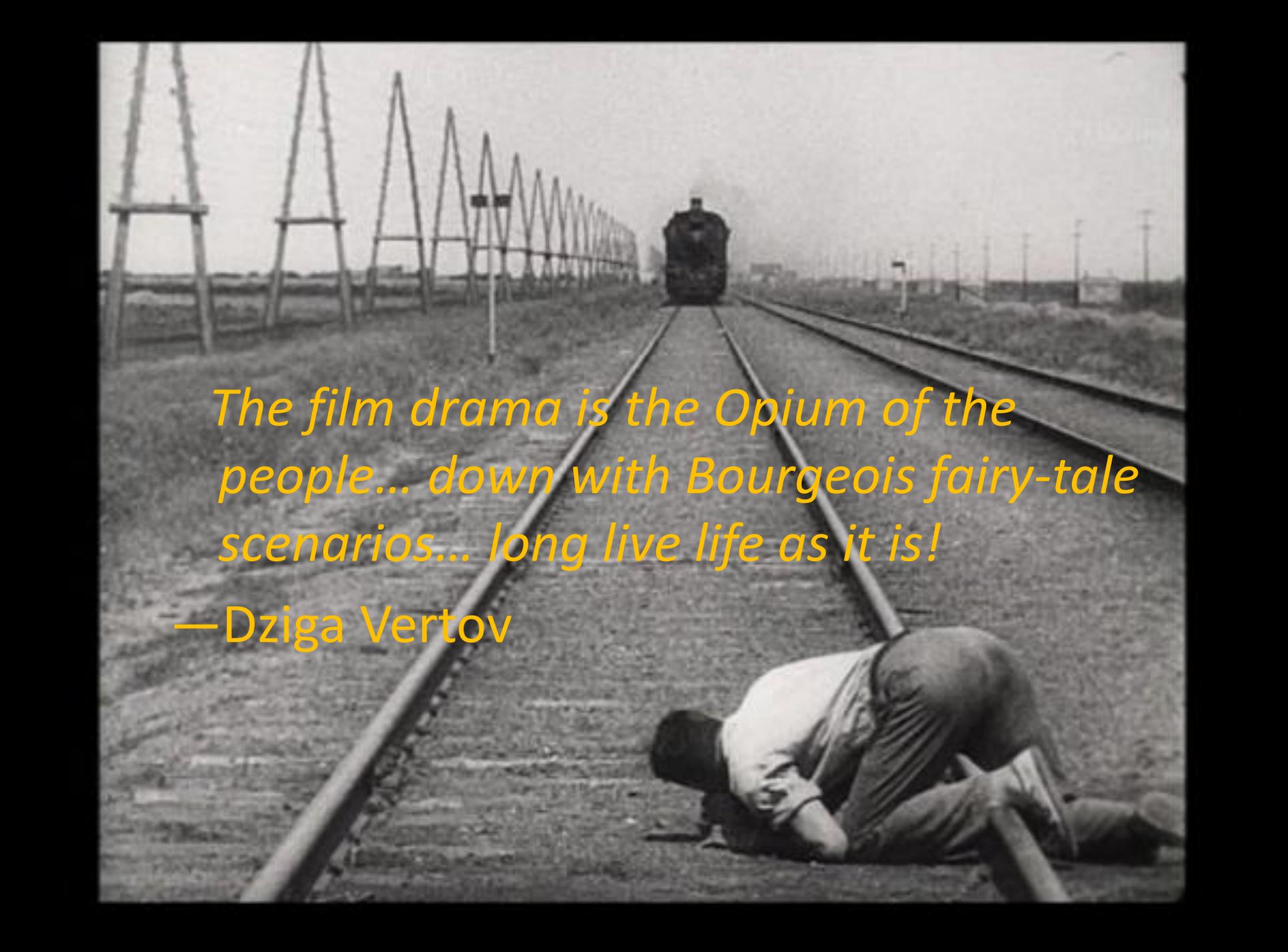
Dziga
Vertov
and the
'Kino Eye'



By 1929, Vertov had been making films for ten years.

Vertov proclaimed the primacy of the camera itself (the 'Kino-Eye') over the human eye. He saw it as some kind of innocent machine that could record without bias the world as it really was.



A black and white photograph of a train on tracks. The train is in the distance, moving towards the viewer. The tracks are flanked by tall, thin wooden structures on the left side. In the foreground, a person is crawling on the ground, facing away from the camera and towards the train. The person is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants. The overall scene is desolate and industrial.

The film drama is the Opium of the people... down with Bourgeois fairy-tale scenarios... long live life as it is!

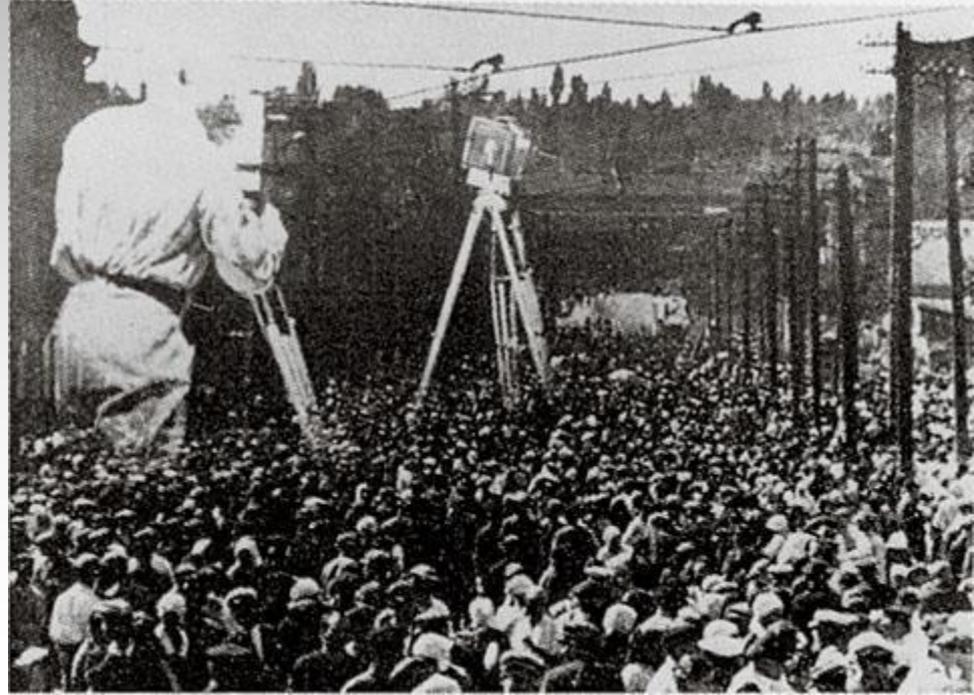
—Dziga Vertov

- Like Pudovkin and Eisenstein, his films are characterised by their dynamic visual composition and revolutionary editing style.
- Unlike them, he rejected the use of the actor, script and use of reconstruction as bourgeois and untruthful. Narrative as bourgeois.
- His films utilise montage for documentary purposes.



Kino-Pravda

checklist of
essentials for a
Kino-Eye
filmmaker:



1. Rapid means of transport
2. Highly sensitive film stock
3. Light handheld film cameras
4. Equally light lighting equipment
5. A crew of super-swift cinema reporters

- Vertov asserted that truth could be obtained only when the subject does not know when he or she is being filmed.
- This is clearly contradicted in the film when we see several times that the people either directly interact with the camera or could not possibly have been unaware of its presence.
- Plus, the idea that the camera is objective and not at all selective is something we would take issue with. How much has been set up or at least carefully selected should concern us in any discussion as to the film's 'truth'. Even the homeless are smiling in this film.



Man With a Movie Camera is characterised by images of a dynamic, integrated Soviet Union.

The film is structured as a day in the life of the people – not, Like Pudovkin using symbolic characters, but through montage of a cross-section.

Work and industry are central but so are rest, play and entertainment – a perfect integration and a very communistic ideal.

BUT, this is as much a construct as Pudovkin's rewriting of the historical events of the 1905 revolution. As is the **selection** of material.





Dynamic composition shows directional juxtapositions



Like Eisenstein,
colliding lines
dominate composition.



Like Rodchenko,
society is integrated,
physically strong and
powerful.



The film is loaded with symbolic juxtapositions. Some purely created through montage – birth/death, marriage/divorce, left/right, up/down for instance. Many point to the ideal of an integrated society all contributing in some way – hairdressers are intercut with factory workers ; workers packing cigarettes and switchboard operators and Vertov points us to the similarities in the rhythm of hand movements.

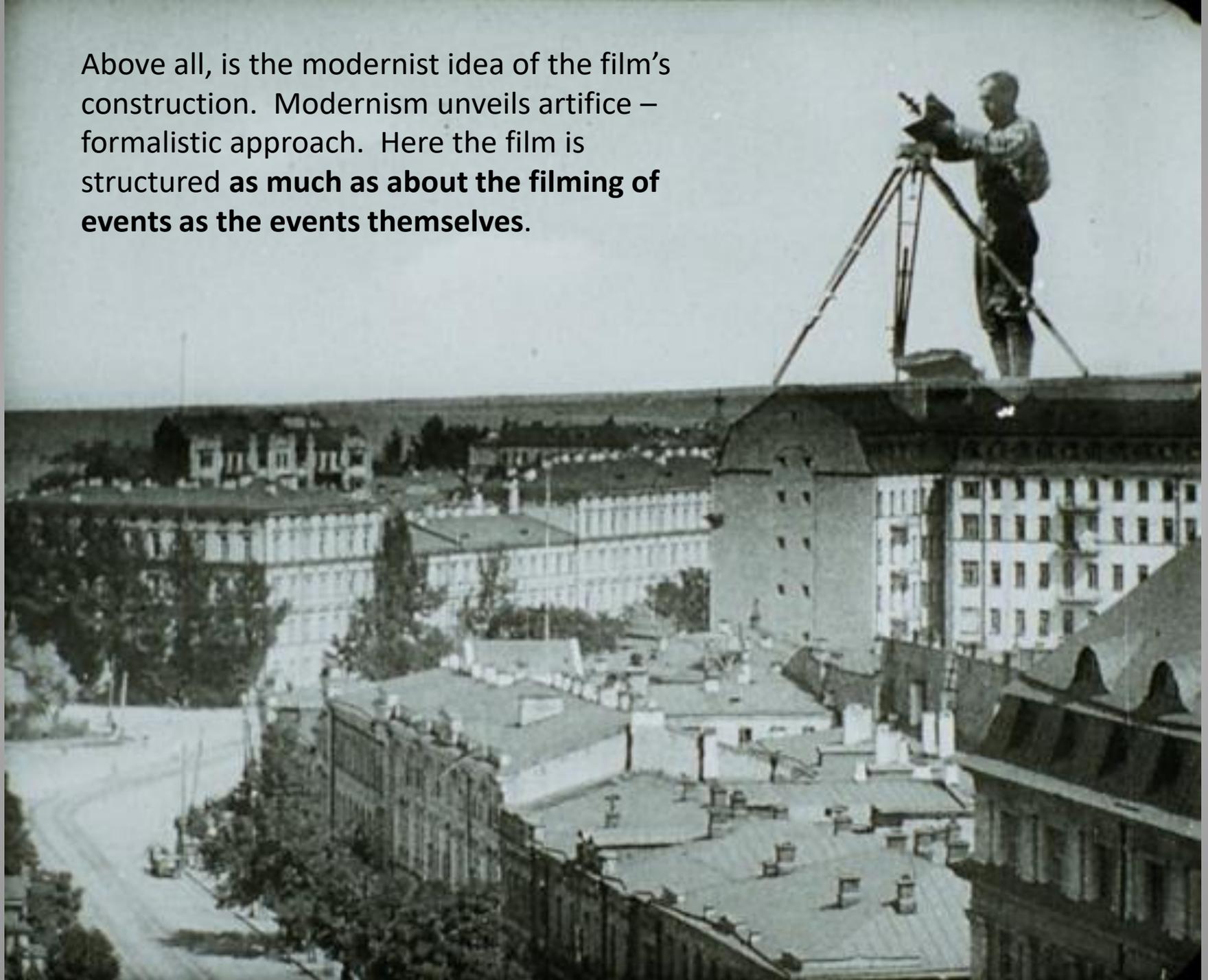
The film also uses cinematographic tricks such as splitting the screen. One shot playfully splits the Bolshoi Theatre, home of pre-revolutionary ballet and opera.



Accident sequence – meaning created through montage, rhythm of editing, which mirrors the disorientation of the victim. One frame per second images.



Above all, is the modernist idea of the film's construction. Modernism unveils artifice – formalistic approach. Here the film is structured **as much as about the filming of events as the events themselves.**



Cinema opening mirrors our own communal activity of film going and we see shooting, editing and exhibition juxtaposed with the footage shot. Thus filmmaking is integrated in the whole of Soviet society.

