

Soviet documentary & propaganda

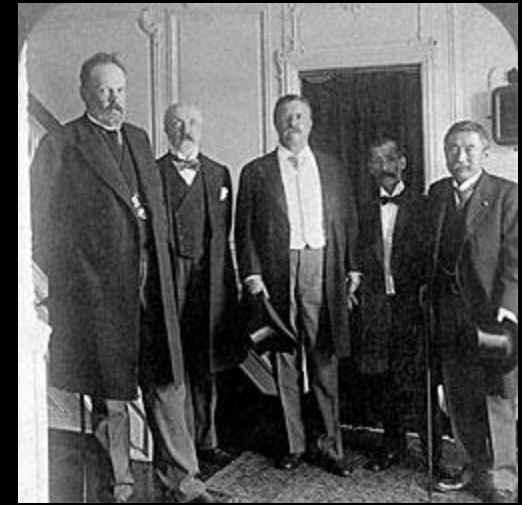
“Of all arts, the cinema is the most
important for us”

Lenin





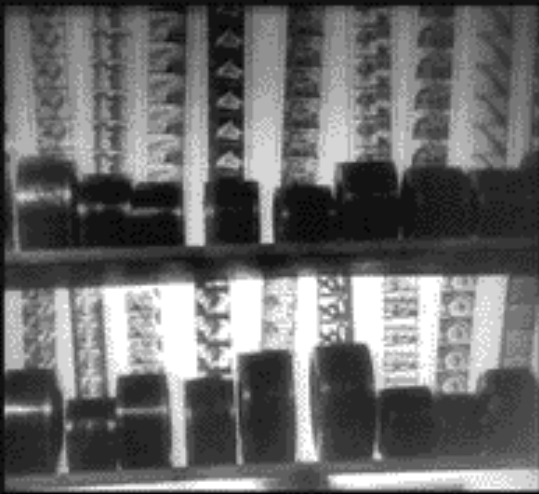
Russia



- 1905 Russo-Japanese War
- 1905 Revolt
- 1914 World War I
- 1917 February Czar deposed, Kerensky heads provisional government
- 1917 October Bolsheviks seize government, establish Soviet Union (1917-1991)
- Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin



Montage – Film Editing



- Lev Kuleshov – Creative Film Experiments
- Eisenstein's Montage of Attractions



Cinema as propaganda

1917 – Bolshevik Revolution

1919 – film industry nationalized

VGIK – State Institute of Cinematography – founded

Documentary filmmakers of the 1920s:

committed Marxists

wanted to educate and indoctrinate Soviet people

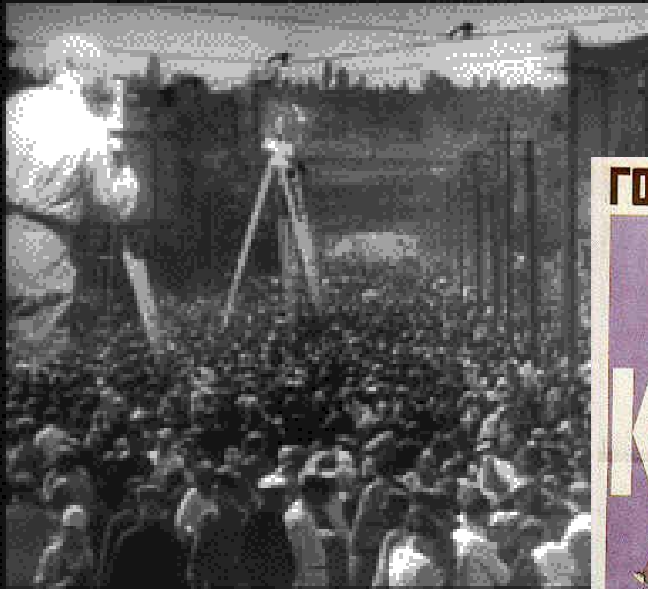
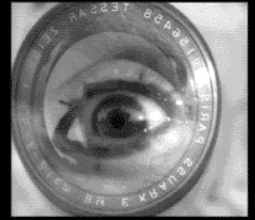
Prominent types of non fiction film in the 1920s:

Newsreel-indoctrinational series

Compilations of archival footage tracing recent history

Epic-scale celebrations of contemporary Soviet life

Dziga Vertov



- Worked on Soviet agitprop train
- 1922-25 *Kino-Pravda*, *Kino Eye*
- 1929 *Man With the Movie Camera*

Kino Glaz theory & practice of filmmaking

Close relationship between filming process and human thought
“Machine eye” of the camera is more perfect than the eye

His film practice demanded anti narrative, antif ictional forms
to arrive at the ‘truths’ of the actual world

Instead of exotic subjects (Flaherty) Vertov zeroes in on
contemporary reality – records facts found in real life

The ideological meaning of this reality comes out through editing
(montage) – reality ‘deciphered’ by Communist worldview

Fascination with technology & machines – futurism & modernity

Films by Vertov

Kino Pravda - 1922-25 23 series of short films
propaganda newsreels, 20 minutes, 3 or 4
reports to inform & indoctrinate covering
life in the Soviet Union

No recreation or direction – ‘life as it is’, ‘life caught unawares’

Nitty-gritty naturalism – vs. Flaherty’s romantic naturalism

Screen journalism – communicated dynamically with audience

In *Kino Pravda* clash Vertov’s artistic and ideological impulses

Kino Eye (Kino Glaz) – 1924 feature –length documentary w/
vignettes & anecdotes – investigative journalism

Vertov's masterpiece: *Man with the Movie Camera*

1929 – dense, complex experimental film

impressionistic montage of Moscow life from dawn to dusk – 'city symphony'

examines filmic illusion in relation to reality

Uses wide range of special effects: split screen, animation, slow motion, speeded motion

Cinematographer – Vertov's brother, Mikhail Kaufman

Other Vertov films

One-sixth of the World 1926

Symphony of the Dombas 1931

Three Songs of Lenin 1934

Other filmmakers

Esther Shub

pioneered the **compilation documentary**

reconstructed Russian history through editing diverse

materials – newsreels, home movies, archival records

1927 – *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*

Russian history from 1912 to 1917

Victor Turin

made the documentary epic *Turksib* 1929

about the construction of the Turkestan/Siberia railway

The documentary impulse of Eisenstein

His cinema is very close to the documentary impulse

Subjects related to actual life lived recently

People in relation to their institutions - social, economic & political

His purpose is to inform & involve emotionally regarding

- Bolshevik Revolution, origins & struggles
- support for the new Soviet State

Key films: *Strike* 1924 *Battleship Potemkin* 1925
October 1927 *The General Line* 1929