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# *Constructing a "Novyj Vavilon"*

NATALYA NUSSINOVA

This conversation with Leonid Trauberg dates back to July 22, 1989. It took place in the retirement home for the "veterans of cinema" in the suburbs of Moscow, his residence at the time. The occasion should have been a celebration for the sixty years of *Novyj Vavilon*; a shortened version of the interview was published only a year later in "Iskusstvo Kino". By now almost seventy years have passed since the "construction" of Kozintzev and Trauberg's masterpiece, and restored version of the film will finally be presented. It is my pleasure to reproduce the complete text of the conversation with the great director and my dear master, that unfortunately can no longer be updated. I would like to thank Natalia Trauberg, Maria Cepaitite, Alexandre Deribin, Dominique Nasta, Svetlana Savenko for all their help. 219

## *The title of the film*

*The first title assigned to the film by Gregorij Kozintzev and you was Attack on heaven<sup>1</sup>. Why did you decide to change it into Novyj Vavilon?*

It is very simple: Marx called the Paris Commune an "attack on heaven", as if Parisians had tried to reach the sky; but first of all it was too pompous, and secondly, considering that the store was named The New Babylon, inevitably we had to call the film *Novyj Vavilon* as well.

*And why was the store named as such, considering that the film was drawn from Au Bonheur des dames by Emile Zola?*

You see, Paris was commonly known as the Modern Babylon, as much as Kiev was called the Mother of all Russian towns: people would call it like that in popular songs. There is even a novel by a Belgian writer, Georges Eekhoud, with the same title, *The New Babylon*<sup>2</sup>.

*Then, was the idea of Paris represented for you by the tower of Babylon?*

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The matter here is not solely the confusion of languages, here everything is mixed and confused. We know that Babylon was conquered by the Persians and then it died, no longer being a sovereign state. And in 1929 FEKS was practically already dead. Already in *Alone*, FEKS did not exist and was not represented, not only regarding style and subject matter, but also actors. Of FEKS actors only Kuz'mina was present and nobody else. Gherassimov played in a minor role, as well as Sobolevskij, in even a smaller role. What we did always underline (as in *The Devil's Wheel*, *SVD* and *Novyj Vavilon*), namely the acting, in *Alone*, was already missing. This was probably due to the fact that here it was again as if the Persians had squashed Babylon, and again this feeling, of the fall of Babylon, was already there even if we were not yet aware of it. But beside that, how are titles invented? Why did the title of Gogol's tale turn out to be *The overcoat*? *Prospective Nevskij* would have been better, but titles do spring up like that seemingly out of nowhere. I can't explain why.

*Does not the title of your films in any way hint at Babylon depicted in Griffith's Intolerance?*

I would say no, although in cinema some associations cannot be avoided: Girffith's Babylon and Babylon... Then, it might be. We loved Griffith, but for us the best of cinema was *Broken Blossoms*. We did not fully like *Intolerance*, only the last part: the film was so full of so many accessories, such stupid sentimentality... However, from a purely cinematic perspective, there were exceptional inventions. By choosing the title Babylon, somewhat we were also saying: "Remember Babylon's fate, as shown by Griffith!" But there was also another very simple reason. We thought that the title was commercial. We believed, rather naively, that the film was a commercial production.

### *"Novyj Vavilon" and intellectual production*

*The film instead was a totally original work, and it could not possibly please mass audiences.*

Then we did as follows: from the start we had a typical love melodrama. We directed this melodrama in a very linear and strict fashion, with a fairy-tale streak. However Adrian Piotrovskij<sup>3</sup> went to the editing room and started screaming out loud that we were old-fashioned, conservative and backward, ivanovskiani<sup>4</sup>, that we were pursuing a commercial and easy cinema. Ejzenstejn instead had published an article, *The fourth dimension in cinema*, which had to be studied. Kozinchev and myself were not caring very much about being fashionable, but rather about new trends and movements; in other words we took everything into consideration, we were struck by everything we

considered right, but which was not invented by us. And then we read Ejzenstejn's article, where he wrote that the film should not necessarily be edited by following the plot development: "She has exited one room, entering another", but also: "She is in a room and afterwards something dating back to King Nabucodonosor's time could be shown." So that the message would be that she lived as in King Nabucodonosor's time. Then we understood that the film could be not only the script or the feeling, but also an intellectual production, and we rushed to edit the film anew. At the end the result was something terrible, because audiences, rather confused, could not understand what we referred to. This type of editing would later become quite fashionable, but let us say that in Pudovkin it was really organised, as well as for Ejzenstejn: the scene progressed without cuts or jumping. Instead we did everything as based on jumps in the plot.

*In any case, what was in essence your notion of intellectual editing? Let's take for example one of the first opening scenes. The drum, the dancing, the sawing machine, the shoemakers, the laundry ladies, the umbrellas. If this was for you a train of associations, what was the principle behind that?*

You see, all this we included with the last minute touch-ups. Before there was nothing like that. The first part of the film was the one which we changed the most. I don't remember if the steam engine was there – I think so – and then a great part about the store. In practice the entire first part was dedicated to the store with people selling all kind of goods: everything was put together during editing, but all inside the store. No owner, no drum, no dance on the stage, there was nothing like that, but there was simply a scene with the store and the heroine received an invitation for a ball, soon followed by the grand scene of the ball with its own secondary story. Then we changed everything as follows: the train and after the train the garden. From the editing point of view we combined everything with the sign "We sell cheaply": we sell cheaply the armed forces, we sell cheaply actresses, as well as the goods in the store. After that we had to show the owner as the "boss", by underlining the importance of his entry with the booming of a drum. From the action perspective, no drum was supposed to be there, but as an accompaniment it worked well. An orchestra was meant to be there, but we did not trust it, and then we showed it with an image. Again, if we had a boss, then he must order around someone else, and at that point we showed the laundry ladies, the shoemakers and the seamstresses. The sawing machine, like the drum, we took it only because it had a good rhythm, and in fact someone complained: "So, the meaning of the Commune is just that machines worked faster than before?". We had however made up our minds: if everything started again in a happier mood, if they did not suffer, but on the contrary they were laughing, then all this spelt "Commune". This is the most important thing and the second one is the music.



## Schostakovich's score

*Did Schostakovich's music enter also in the editing of the film?*

222 From the point of view of the musical score for the film, Schostakovich's music for *Novyj Vavilon* seemed out of place, and even a cacophony, because it was really music in its truest form. Audiences were used to lively and animated melodies, and the orchestra knew all of them, they had just to read their scores and start playing. Schostakovich prepared a new score and they had to learn it, but there was no time nor money to do so. The film with Schostakovich's score was screened only in three theatres in Leningrad, while everywhere else, there was right away a neat separation between the two. You could see that: on the screen there was a funeral, and the music was a cancan, or on the contrary in the film there was a cancan and the orchestra played a dirge. Audiences as well felt out of place. How it came about that instead of *The Virgin's prayer* or Grieg's *Solveig*<sup>5</sup>, there was this invention by an avant-garde composer? An important man told me that he saw personally on the walls of the Aurora theatre this writing: "The orchestra director was drunk."

## Official reactions to the film

*At the end, however, Piotrovskij was happy. He was the one to encourage you.*

Correct! I remember it perfectly: as soon as we finished *Novyj Vavilon*, at 12.30 we took the train and at 9.00 the next day the film was screened for the members of the Cinema Board. From the party regional Committee there was Obnorskij (probably he ended up somewhere in Siberia, he was an old fashioned intellectual, from St. Petersburg: I have never understood why he had become a Bolshevik), Piotrovskij, already artistic director, Ermler<sup>6</sup>, Rokotov, the editor of Leningrad's magazine, Kino, and somebody else. It was a great fun. The film was screened; Schostakovich played the piano and at the end there was an uproar, a real success. Piotrovskij took the floor screaming that it was a new discovery, that a film like that had never been made before, that it was worthy of a medal, and I don't remember what else... But that was nothing compared with what Rokotov said. He was a fat man, hefty and small, with a falsetto voice, but very authoritative. He also started screaming: "I forbid you to sully this film. How you dare praising this film? You should keep silent, keep silent and shed tears of admiration." All said the same thing, they were all moved and you could see that they meant it. We brought the film to Moscow, where we showed it to Sovkino. What they did you could not imagine it: the year was 1929 and all of a sudden you could start smelling that the wind had turned: formalism!

## So then nobody supported you?

For example, Fadeev ~~did~~, but then he was different from the person he would later become<sup>7</sup>; it was not a surprise when he killed himself. However he liked the film very much, and that was sensational. He spoke before a very important cinema board, maybe he was drunk because he spoke for too long, saying that he did not like everything about *Novyj Vavilon*, that the director and the actor had not always chosen the right approaches, but in general he backed the film. And the reason was the following: "Tolstoj taught us that what a person does is not important, but rather what he/she would understand of a given time. *Novyj Vavilon* showed exactly what happened in history. It is true, the farmer did really squash the Commune, and from that point of view the main events in *Novyj Vavilon* plot are realistic – FEKS's people have taken the right direction towards realism. If we consider all their previous works, then the film should be considered not only a step, but a leap forward. Because, and he said so, they filmed a really strong scene: the soldier not only became the enemy of his loved one, but also contributed to her death. This is the perfect symbol of the Commune's history, the French dug the graves of their brothers. Beside that, Kozincev and Trauberg were the first, among the Soviet directors, not to be afraid of having the film end badly. Because *Potemkin* ends with the passing of the boat; *The Mother* with the woman staggering but still holding the flag; in Dovzenko's *Arsenal*, the man does not die, no bullet can touch him. FEKS's people were not afraid of showing that the Commune had reached its tragic end." He spoke very well, people clapped their hands. Kozincev was very moved, but he was not alone in that, there were people believing that this would be a step forward for the Soviet cinema. Also the members of RAPP supported us.

*Odd: on the one hand the accusation of formalism, on the other Rapp's support...*

Yes, it was very odd. For example, Rapp hated Ermliev and I do not know why. Probably they accused him of Litfrontovism<sup>8</sup> or I do not know what else, but anyway they considered him an enemy and we were listed not as friends or road companions, but as "tolerable".

Ejzenstejn told us that Stalin liked *Novyj Vavilon*. I do not know if the expression "liked" would be suitable, but more or less that's what happened. Ejzenstejn, Aleksandrov and Tissé were with Stalin at the end of *The General Line*, and he said that they had not shown the countryside in the best way, nor the most important thing: the role of the Party in the reconstruction. I can just imagine the words he might have used, but then nobody really knew Stalin for what he truly was. It seems that he added afterwards: "Have you seen *Novyj Vavilon*?" "Yes, some friends of ours made that", they answered. And Stalin: "Did Kirshon write the script?"<sup>9</sup>. After that, Ejzenstejn added:



"No, they have also written the script." "Aha", exclaimed Stalin. But the fact that he did not say that it was an unacceptable example of formalism, was already a victory, although he did nothing to defend the film. He went to the point of ordering people to "choke" the film with a curtain of silence.

*"Informal" opinion about the film FEKS's members and Ejzenstejn: Emile Zola and the Soviet cinema*

*There was also an "informal" opinion about the film, first of all the filmmakers' opinion. Vertov's opinion would be interesting to know.*

224 I do not know Vertov's opinion, but I believe that in general he hated fiction cinema. He did not know anything about it and he never spoke about that in public. He was also a bit insulted because he did something which nobody took seriously and at the same time some skilled Kuleshov's, and Pudovkin's followers and FEKS' people were doing something that somehow reached and touched the audiences.

*And Pudovkin?*

I was so impressed by the film *The Mother*, that I rewrote the script for *Novyj Vavilon*. At the beginning we had the plot for *SVD*, a melodrama; then the proof of our growth was that we eliminated the melodrama.

*Did you invite Pudovkin to play in Novyj Vavilon for that reason?*

No, he was also a friend of ours and he had liked enormously *The Overcoat* and *SVD*.

*And Novyj Vavilon?*

Not so much.

*What did Ejzenstejn think about that?*

He was ambivalent, as he liked many aspects of the film, but he believed that it was necessary to show the Commune, without focussing too much on the story of the two protagonists: that was his favourite topic before *Ivan the Terrible* (*Ivan Grosny*). He was not interested in people, but rather the context, the background.

*In Novyj Vavilon there was something which he must have liked: the interest for Zola<sup>10</sup>. But where do you think this interest lied and what difference there was between your interpretation of Zola and Ejzenstejn's?*

There are questions which are answered by life itself. Both Kozintzev and myself gave great importance to the atmosphere, which was not "sacred" however: most of all we had close-ups of protagonists and their encounters. From the start, from *Avventure di Ottobrina*, although in *Adventures* there was the atmosphere of St. Petersburg, with the monument to Alexander III, the scarecrows, the basilica, and so forth... Also in *The Overcoat*, there is the same atmosphere from Tjniaova, even though it was not central: for us the most important thing was the human factor, we were interested in Akakij Akakijevich, his relationship with the girl he loved....

*How could that be associated with your refusal of psychology in acting and the choice of "cinegesture"?*

Why? A person could enter into the scene also in a non psychological manner. All the "human comedy"<sup>11</sup> is based on that, the person is there, but there is no psychology. But Ejzenstejn was always attracted by the atmosphere, which came before anything else, or at least it had seemed so until the second half of *Ivan the Terrible*. He was interested in everyday life: the crusades, folk dances, the crowning, massacres, staircases.... *Strike* started precisely from that, the atmosphere of everyday work, he was not interested in the proletariat, he liked the outside – but also inside – atmosphere, because he searched for a philosophical meaning underneath the surface. Let us remember how he had grasped Mexico, although there are photos and fragments of takes, today we still do not know what he wanted to do in Mexico. There was no plot, only situations, cacti, etc.

*In other words, did you take from Zola the events making the plot progress?*

We took the plot and the staging. And this is why he said, also about *Novyj Vavilon*, that we were transposing for the screen the belly of Paris because as far as the atmosphere was concerned, it was brilliant: a starving man would walk amidst mountains of food – apples and meat – and this sight would produce a stronger impression than just showing a man starving. Or in the same novel there is a scene with a rape: the shopkeeper goes in the cellar with her clerk and there is a cabinet full of eiderdown and chicken feathers because there the birds were plucked before selling them. And all of a sudden he is taken by this devilish need, he pushes her on the feathers... the fact that the action takes place with all these feathers in the background would have been the most important one for Ejzenstejn, while instead for us it would have been that beastly life. A man comes back from exile and finds only animals surrounding him, not people: his brother, his wife and servants, they have been changed into animals from a zoo. For Ejzenstejn the most important thing would have been the atmosphere. The same thing would have happened for *General Line*, where the life in the countryside was shown with its stupid and

225



mechanised routine. And I don't even mention *October*. There, instead of the tragedy of the Winter Palace and the Revolution, a special atmosphere had been created, workers, officers, staircases, the Minister, and so forth. Therefore our relation with Zola was different, and my interest for Zola was mostly narrative.

### *Paris Commune and FEKS's "mischief"*

*Why did you choose the Paris Commune? Was there some association with the October revolution for you?*

226 Surely. Paris Commune was an anticipation of the October Revolution. Also there is no other revolution in Zola's novels, only the Commune.

*Was it then only an excuse for you, so that you could work with Zola?*

Of course. Zola was interested in the same subject matter: the luxury of the Second Empire which somewhat attracted us for its cinematic potential; the Commune included all that because it was the result of the Second Empire. You have to understand that now I can say it, but ten years ago I would have never said that. *Nana* or another interesting novel such as *Au Bonheur des dames*, all that interested us, but the "justification" for that could only be the Commune, we could not make a film about *Au Bonheur des dames*. Who could use that in Soviet Russia?

*How the Paris Commune could be associated with the FEKS's Eccentricity? You have often repeated that SVD was the end of FEKS. How was Novyj Vavilon placed in that scenario?*

I'll try to answer you seriously: surely films such as *Le avventure di Ottobrina*, *The devil's wheel*, and even *The Overcoat* and *SVD*, had some mischief in them, if we could say that about cinema. For us being mischievous was stimulating. In *Novyj Vavilon* this trait does not appear; there are stupid scenes, but this was due to the fact that we did not know how to represent the Commune. You cannot possibly represent it on the screen. There are dozens of works representing it, but none of them are "readable", including Zola. Only now, at 88, I finally understand it: the Paris Commune was an event marked by an extreme confusion; Marx was confused, who was kindly asked not to go to Paris; the same Parisians were confused, they did not know what to do. They burned aristocratic homes, Montpassier castle, a beautiful architectural example, nobody knows why they razed Vendôme column, nor why they killed the Archbishop. Let us consider that all that was carried out under a state of siege, with a counterrevolution already on the move. They

did terrible things. And those speeches, as Marx wrote, when houses and work were promised to workers, were all lies. That was a war, there was famine, but they would organise meetings and say absolutely useless things. It was the defeat of the so-called socialist explosion. The Commune rebels were fantastic, great people, also Russians with them, but they did not have a ruler, good people, who could not govern. They did nothing because they did not solve anything.. for this *Novyj Vavilon* is a mature interpretation, where all elements of this reasoning are already present. Had we pursued in this direction, we would have really made a great film.

### *The word in "Novyj Vavilon"*

Novyj Vavilon *was a sort of divide between two epochs: the silent and the sound cinema. In the film did you take that into consideration?* 227

Of course, partly because we were tempted by Schostakovich's music. We had already read that Ejzenstejn, Pudovkin and Aleksandrov were against sound in cinema<sup>12</sup>.

*Did you also feel that sound was necessary?*

Of course. In *Novyj Vavilon* there are few intertitles, such as the ones you may find in *SVD*, explanatory intertitles. Only brief sentences: "For Sales", "We sell cheaply". And also the lines...

*Did you write the intertitles after the film had been completed?*

No, they were already in the script.

*Did you use puns?*

Of course: "We sell cheaply", was clearly a pun, a play on words; or "For a happier Paris", and you find out that happier Paris was empty. That was the play between writings and images.

*Also did you try to express something else with the lettering style of the intertitles?*

We thought that the writing was something different, that it should not draw attention from the image.

*Did you try to include as little as possible of them?*



Indeed, yes.

*In which way was the work distributed between you and Kozintzev while filming Novyj Vavilon? From what I know you followed a different job distribution throughout your partnership: you filmed The Overcoat together, SVD in shifts, and what about Novyj Vavilon?*

Things went different there, because we had to follow the script. I had simply to rewrite the scene during shooting.

### *Figurative set-up*

228 *In so many of your films during the FEKS's period, you always stated openly the tradition that had inspired you. For example, the figurative set-up for The Overcoat referred clearly to German Expressionism. Where did you draw the inspiration for Novyj Vavilon?*

In my opinion, *Novyj Vavilon* was born out of three elements: first of all, as I have already said, we started by writing the script out of pure fascination for Zola. All the atmosphere came from that. Then there is an association with the first generation of Impressionists. Moskvina<sup>13</sup> and Enej<sup>14</sup> had to decide the chiaroscuro, the instruments and the lenses to use. In this case this meant choosing Manet or Renoir, or even early Cezanne. And finally the most important thing: Impressionists are known for their total lack of psychology. We might say that Impressionists had an immediately and easily grasped touch, and we learnt from them. Semionova raising a glass is the portrait of a true lady and not of a hailing cocotte.

*And the role of the manikin? It appears in The Overcoat and in Novyj Vavilon it has an important role.*

Probably it was a successful invention by our set designer. It was he who invented this "statue of a manikin", and Kazintzev and myself, we tried only to highlight it. That manikin did not want to fall and burn on the barricades: it was to be the symbol of the Commune's defeat, but the attempt failed.

*In which way is the manikin associated with the heroine? It appears always with her, as her shadow or her alter ego.*

Well, it seems to me that the manikin was included in the first version of the script. There the sales girl sold herself practically all the time, and the symbol of that was a non living woman, a piece of merchandise, the manikin. She is not a living being, but a pleasurable object. The manikin remained in

the second version as well, although there was not any longer a social meaning; it became one of the set designs, which was not any longer important for us. I don't remember ever discussing it.

### *Film sources*

*Did you also have cinematic points of reference?*

No. At that time we saw King Vidor's *The Big Parade* and the parting scene between Louise and Jean on the road referred to that. However from a stylistic point of view, the scene was shot according to our fashion and not Vidor's. King Vidor was not concerned with the point of view nor with chiaroscuro, which instead were important for us. However, also from a purely dramatic perspective, the intensity by which the plot is developed and so forth, we were not influenced by American cinema; at most we considered it. For example, Fejos's film, *Lonesome*, Sternberg's *The Docks of New York*.... However, the year was 1928 and we had been involved in cinema for 4 years already, and we had some experience. We watched many films and certainly we had many influences. At the same time we wanted to express ourselves and not merely copying others.

*You wrote that during your visit in Paris in 1928, for the shooting of Novyj Vavilon, you became friends with Jean Renoir<sup>15</sup>. Was there a link between his interest for Zola and yours? And the cancan, as depicted by he and you?*

Renoir had filmed *Nana*, and so he had come closer to the world of cancan, of operetta... well before *Novyj Vavilon*, and the same could be said for Zola, and therefore he could not have copied us. On our part, we did not likewise follow him. His first films were incredibly odd, *Nana* as well as *The Little Match Vendor*. It was terrible, you did not understand a thing, nor see what was going on: someone is walking and you don't understand why. However we liked *Mentilmontant* by Kirsanov; Renoir's *Toni* followed the same style, but the former was more Parisian and the latter closer to reality.

*And German Expressionism? During Novyj Vavilon, did it have an influence on you?*

For some shots, yes. In general we went into another direction. What people called the "hiding places of the soul" were not there. For example, Karl Grune's *The road* was a Bible for us. We adored it, but you would find very little of it in *Novyj Vavilon*. In a sense for us that was a sort of practising a continuous denial: *Novyj Vavilon* was the denial of *SVD*. *SVD* was a true melodrama, while *Novyj Vavilon* moved away from melodrama towards realism.



*The end, however, where the hero digs the grave of his loved one, is very melodramatic.*

Of course, but that was a melodramatic ending suitable for a realistic film. Not the melodramatic ending of *SVD*, where the hero dies in a poetic manner, with the trees bordering the river on the background, and the heroine covering him with a coat: that was a melodrama. In *Novyj Vavilon*, where they dig under the rain and she is standing there, waiting for the firing squad, that is a big move towards realism, there is no longer melodrama, but its denial: in that, *Novyj Vavilon* is the opposite of *SVD*, but the funny thing is that after this film we did not move to make another feature about France or the revolution further developing that topic, but *Alone*, a film about a teacher. That was a complete turn, not a mere change of subject matter. Also the white colour permeating the entire film made it contrast with *Novyj Vavilon*. We needed that "denial of a denial", as a way to stress our perception of cinema constantly moving forward.

### *Sixty years later*

*Now, where would you place Novyj Vavilon?*

Until a few years ago, I thought that we had made some good films, including *Novyj Vavilon*, but just recently I saw it on TV with my wife, Vera Nicolajevna, with a terrible musical accompaniment, but to both of us it seemed that we had overvalued it. There was too much useless confusion, and most important a sense of direction was lacking, the mastering of events charged with emotions. For example, as in Puskin's *The Captain's Daughter*, in *Novyj Vavilon* there are too many superfluous elements: the scene, for example, where Guttman finds his woman in the politician's arms. However, I also see many good scenes in *Novyj Vavilon*, for example the ball was filmed very well, although maybe we gave it too much importance as it was slightly overdrawn. The scene from Kuaz'mina's arrival to the galloping horses is truly exciting; as well as the one where the guns are not carried away, and the ending, from the point where the people from Versailles break through, is a good one. Just to show you that I am not partial, I would like to stress that between 1982 and 1984 I had the chance to see the film in different countries and in different contexts: in Holland, in England and in Belgium. They screened the film with Schostakovich's score, and I understood that many positive traits of the film were due to the music which had also been created specifically for it [...] Also, I don't want you to think that I am overbearing, but when the scene of the Paris Commune starts, with Cerviakov rushing in and crying: "The Versailles garrison has broken in!", and for the following two and a half reels (the end of the Commune, the meetings, the barricades,

the graveyard) I felt that the mood in the theatre was changing and that even if the rest of the film might not be so appreciated, in that moment there was the total silence you find when a film is beautiful. For this reason, after a screening in a small Dutch town, there was almost an ovation, and in London the film was a success, I felt that it was well deserved, at least from that point onward.

*(Translation from Italian by Maura Vecchiatti)*

*A short version of this interview has appeared on "Iskusstvo Kino", no. 4, 1990, p. 126-131.*

### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Ejzenstejn called as such Kozintzev's and Trauberg's future film in his article published on the review "Na Literaturnom Postu", no. 1, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> In this case Trauberg is not very precise: evidently he refers here to Georges Eekhoud's novel, *La nouvelle Carthage*, Paris, Merton de France, 1914. For the remark, we would like to thank Dominique Nasta and Marc Domipicy of Université Libre de Bruxelles.

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Piotrovskij (1898-1938), literary critic, translator, stage critic, playwright, scenarist, cinema critic and expert. In the period between 1928 and 1937 he worked as artistic director of Sevzapkino Studios (from 1934 Lenfilm). He had a strong influence on production and had been associated with Kozintzev and Trauberg since 1926, when he asked the young directors, at their first experience, to work on his script, *Aurora's Sailor* (the film was released as *The Devil's wheel*).

<sup>4</sup> Reference is made here to Aleksander Ivanovskij (1881-1968), old-guard director, starting his career in cinema in 1918, and considered by young avant-garde members as the embodiment of banal and traditionalist cinema.

<sup>5</sup> *Solveig* is a song written by Grieg for his *Peer Gynt* (1875).

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Ermler (1898-1967), Soviet director.

<sup>7</sup> Aleksander Fadeev (1901-1956), Soviet writer, theoretician of the literature of Soviet realism. One of Rapp's (1926-1932) directors and Secretary General of USSR's Writers' Union between 1945 and 1954. A pillar of State literature.

<sup>8</sup> Litfront was a literary group within Rapp in the thirties, playing an inside opposition role for some specific issues.

<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Kirshon, soviet playwright famous for his celebration of workers' everyday heroism. A Rapp's officer, he often took the floor in meetings to discuss cinema. He also published a book dedicated to cinema in 1928.

<sup>10</sup> As for the interest for Zola shown by Ejzenstejn, please refer to the article published in Sergej Ejzenstejn, *Sobranije Socienij*, Vol. 5 ("Literatura i Kino"), Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1968, p. 525.

<sup>11</sup> Here, reference is probably made to Balzac's "la comédie humaine".

<sup>12</sup> Reference to the famous manifesto of 1828, signed by Ejzenstejn, Pudovkin and Aleksandrov.

<sup>13</sup> Andrej Moskvina (1901-1961), cinematographer for *Novyj Vavilon*.

<sup>14</sup> Evgenij Enej (1890-1971), set designer.

<sup>15</sup> Leonid Trauberg, *Svezest' Bityja*, Mosca, Kino-centr, 1988, p.85. You can find Renoir's answer in Jean Renoir, *Les Ecrits 1926-71*, Paris, Belfond, 1974, p.90.