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# The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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October 2 - November 18, 1975

MOTHER

## SOVIET SILENT CINEMA

### Part 2: 1926-1927

By special arrangement with Gosfilmofond, the Soviet State Film Archive, and the Pacific Film Archive of the University Art Museum at Berkeley, the Department of Film will present the second of a three-part retrospective of Soviet cinema in its silent period. This program is the most comprehensive ever mounted outside the U.S.S.R. of the classic and revolutionary films of the Soviet Union. Part I, comprising 29 titles, covered the years from 1918 through 1925, and was presented in 1974 from March 7th through April 15th. Part 2 limits itself to the two peak years, 1926 and 1927, and will include forty titles to be exhibited from October 2nd through November 18th. Part 3, completing the silent years of Soviet filmmaking, will be announced in the future.

The works in the retrospective were selected from a list of surviving Soviet silents in the Gosfilmofond Archive by Professor Jay Leyda in consultation with Victor Privato, Director of Gosfilmofond, and Tom Luddy, Program Director of the Pacific Film Archive. Professor Leyda is the author of the definitive text in English on the history of Russian and Soviet cinema, *Kino*.

The majority of the prints in Part 2 will contain only the original Russian intertitles. Some of the films which will complement the program will be from the Museum's own collection, and many of these will have English intertitles. Almost all the films will be in 35mm.

Synopses and detailed information will be distributed at each screening. The documentation for the notes has been supplied through the generosity of Gosfilmofond, Jay Leyda, the Pacific Film Archive, Jacques Ledoux of the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique (Brussels), Vlada Petric and Andy McKay. Additional information is also drawn from the Museum's own Study Center files. The Department of Film owes a special thanks to Sonia Volochova who is not only translating from original Russian sources but who is assisting in the compiling of these notes as well.

Monday, October 13 at 2:00

MOTHER by Vsevolod Pudovkin

### ***The Work of Pudovkin***

Vsevolod Ilarionovich Pudovkin was born in 1893 in Penza. His father, of peasant stock, was a commercial traveller. When Pudovkin was four his family moved to Moscow, where all his schooling took place. At the Moscow University he majored in physics and chemistry, but the outbreak of war found the student enrolled in the artillery and, by February 1915, a prisoner. After three years in a German prison (while G. W. Pabst was in a French prison) profitably spent learning foreign languages, he escaped and late in 1918 returned to Moscow. He worked as a chemist till 1920, and pursued old interests in painting and music by night. He has said that he took no interest in the silly cinema until Kuleshov, whom he met in 1920, took him to see *Intolerance*. Only two other films ever made as deep an impression on him —Eisenstein's *Potemkin* and Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris*.

In 1920 the First State School of Cinematography was opened by the Commissariat of Education under the direction of Vladimir Gardin. Pudovkin joined the school and became wholeheartedly absorbed in his new studies. Kuleshov had gone back to the front, and Pudovkin spent the two years until Kuleshov's return to Moscow under the tutelage and practical assignments of Gardin. His first film experience was a role (as a red army commander) in Perestiani's *Days of Struggle* (1920). In *Hammer and Sickle* (1921) Pudovkin not only played the leading rôle but collaborated on the scenario—besides assisting the administrator, the director and the property man. After one experience in the theatre assisting Gardin in a staging of Jack London's "Iron Heel" at the Theatre of Revolutionary Satire, he collaborated on the scenario and direction of *Hunger . . . Hunger . . . Hunger* (1921) which Edward Tisse photographed. Gardin gave him his first directing responsibility when he allowed Pudovkin and Tisse to work on one scene without him. After another scenario with Gardin (*Locksmith and Chancellor*, from a play by Lunacharsky) he was invited to co-direct the film with him, but Kuleshov had renewed his Workshop and Pudovkin preferred to join him.

The Kuleshov Workshop (see Series VII, Program 3) was Pudovkin's home for three years, when he left to work in the studio of Mezhrabpom-Russ. During these three years he became Kuleshov's closest assistant. Pudovkin assisted on the scenario and direction of *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*, as well as playing the role of the chief villain. *The Death Ray*, which temporarily wrecked the Workshop, was written and designed by Pudovkin; he assisted in the direction of the film and again played the part of chief villain.

**It is usually assumed that pupil and master parted because of basic differences but Kuleshov himself helped Pudovkin to find and hold his new job,**

and later even helped with some difficult scenes in *Mother*. Mezhrabpom-Russ was an amalgamation of the pre-revolutionary company Russ with the film department of Mezhrabpom, the Russian office of the Workers International Relief. They produced all types of films including purely educational ones. After a few unhappy days as assistant to Eggert on *The Wedding of the Bear*, Pudovkin was assigned to make a film popularization of Pavlov's studies in conditioned reflexes. Pudovkin's scientific background made him an admirable choice for the job and he approached the new work eagerly, less as an artist than as a scientist. Clearly as his "psychological resemblance to Griffith" has been indicated by Harry Alan Potamkin, a parallel with Pabst's development is often inevitable—particularly in comparing *Mechanics of the Brain* (1925-26) with *Secrets of a Soul* (1925-26), both begun as simple instructional films and both furnishing the director with a foundation for a realistic aesthetic, Pudovkin on Pavlov, Pabst on Freud.

MOTHER (MAT). 1926. Released October 11, 1926. U.S. release: New York, May 29, 1934. Drama. 7 reels. Mezhrabpom-Rus. English intertitles. ca. 75 minutes. Sound track added in 1935. The version being shown is the original silent version.

Scenario (from Maxim Gorky's novel): Natan (Nathan) Zarkhi. Direction: Vsevolod Pudovkin. Photography: Anatoli Golovnya. Design: Sergei Kozlovsky. Assistant director: Mikhail Doller.\* Music (for sound version): D. Blok. Sound (for sound version): V. Dmitriyev.

\* Jay Leyda (*Kino*, p.431) lists two assistant directors: Doller and V. Strauss. There is no record of a V. Strauss in the Russian sources examined.

Cast: Vera Baranovskaya (Nilovna, the mother); Nikolai Batalov (Pavel, her son); A. Chistyakov (Vlasov, the father); Anna Zemtsova (Anna, a student); Ivan Koval-Samborsky (Vsesovchikov, a young worker); N. Vidonov (Misha, a worker); V. Savitsky (salesman, member of the Black Hundred); Vsevolod Pudovkin (police officer); F. Ivanov (prison warden); I. Bobrov (young convict); V. Uralsky (a student); A. Gromov (a revolutionary).



Gorky's novel was the base, but not the only source of Natan Zarkhi's scenario. He drew upon memoirs of the 1905-06 period, particularly events in the city of Tver, changing thereby the structure, but not the spirit or color of Gorky's treatment of the epoch. The history of the finished scenario is curious. It was first assigned to Yuri Zheliabuzhsky to direct, who—unable to find the right actress for the title role—asked Zarkhi to rewrite the scenario, transferring the character of the *mother* to a *father*, to be played by Moskvin. For some reason the plan was dropped, until revived by Pudovkin who brought back the original scenario with its simple theme of a down-trodden working-class mother rising to political consciousness through participation in revolutionary activity.

In the scenario, Zarkhi and Pudovkin consciously established a sonata outline through the various stages of production: first and second reels—*allegro* (saloon, home, factory, strike, chase); third reel—a funeral *adagio* (dead father, scene between mother and son); fourth and fifth reels—*allegro* (police, search, betrayal, arrest, trial, prison); sixth and seventh—a furious *presto* (spring thaw, demonstration, prison revolt, ice-break, massacre, death of son and mother). This early consideration for tempo is a contributing factor to the notable rhythm of *Mother*.

Most of the casting problems were solved by Doller, Pudovkin's assistant, who brought Baranovskaya and Batalov from the Moscow Art Theatre, and found Chistyakov, working as accountant in the studio, for the father. The bit-roles were discovered everywhere. For the colonel in the scene of Pavel's arrest, Doller found a former officer in the czarist army—who played himself. The lesser officer in this scene was taken by Pudovkin, who always plays a small part in his pictures (also a habit of Alfred Hitchcock) and used to enjoy acting in the films of other directors.

In Anatoli Golovnya, a pupil of Levitzky, Pudovkin found a cameraman who, with him, made a working partnership as harmonious as that of Tisse with Eisenstein. The first scenes shot (the exteriors at the courthouse) established the character of the photography of the whole. One of the shots in this scene, the powerful composition of the standing policeman, called "an example of foreshortening which has become 'classic' in cinematic practice" (Vladimir Nilsen), gives us a key to another art drawn upon to contribute to the art of Pudovkin. The character and viewpoint of this composition comes from the well-known "camera angle" of Velasquez' "Bollo." We know that Pudovkin was not only acquainted with the best-known classical painting through reproductions, but had direct knowledge of the contents of Moscow's Museum of Modern Western Art, where the inspiration for the entire episode of the prison exercise hour is hung—Van Gogh's "Prison Courtyard." The carefully composed realism of Degas, the haggard blue-period work of

Picasso and the prints of Käthe Kollwitz are all contributors to the graphic representation of the mother. Another painting in this collection—Rouault's "Judges"—furnished the exact characterization for the three judges in the trial scene. The revelation to Pudovkin of the camera possibilities latent in the other medium came however from a film—*Potemkin*, without which the paintings may well have gone unused, in spite of Pudovkin's previous concern with that medium.

More important than any individual compositions in *Mother* is its continuation of the Griffith-Eisenstein tradition of camera as active *observer* rather than mere *spectator*. Lunacharsky remarked that the film carried a conviction as though an extraordinary cameraman had been present at the actual events. The photography of the actors is especially emotional in effect. Pudovkin has told how he establishes personal relationships with each actor in his films, a method that, particularly in *Mother*, renders them intimate to the spectator, helping to make this the most lyrical and intimate of the great cycle of Soviet films in the silent era. The mother's character is so firmly developed that her first smile (in her visit to the prison) usually breaks down any resistance that the spectator may have had.

During *Mother*, Pudovkin was also writing the first book of film theory by a practitioner—theory hitherto being the province of the critic. In two small booklets (condensed in English as "Film Technique") he makes "a simple and comprehensive introduction" to the new approach to film materials developed by Kuleshov and himself. The most startling (at the time) statement to foreign readers occurs in one of the introductions: "The foundation of film art is editing." The fresh attitude toward this process tended abroad to blind followers to the other basic material in the book, even to ignore Pudovkin's cautious use of the word "foundation." The editing process is not the only one that made *Mother* great, but one can learn more of the value that Pudovkin placed on the process from this film than from the masses of *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927) or the technical tour-de-force of *Storm Over Asia* (1928). The expert cutting on human movement of *Mother* has been more widely absorbed into general film technique than its more intense cutting propositions. The clearest example in all of Pudovkin's work of the "associative" editing of unrelated scenes to form a "plastic synthesis," is still the episode of Pavel's joy in prison. Senses of smell (saloon, early morning), feeling (mud, blow of a fist), and sound (water drip, swollen stream) could not have been so strongly communicated with any other method. *Mother's* editing is the logical outcome of the disjunctive cutting introduced by Edwin S. Porter, enlarged by D. W. Griffith and others, and analyzed by Kuleshov. Although in direct opposition to Eisenstein's shock montage, Pudovkin used a linkage method far beyond Kuleshov's "brick by brick" theory, but (again) pushed there by *Potemkin*.

The individualized characterizations of *Mother* within the bold pattern of *Potemkin* is the first but not the only distinguishing quality that separates Pudovkin's work from that of Eisenstein. Léon Moussinac has further clarified this difference in an epigram, "An Eisenstein film resembles a shout while a film by Pudovkin is comparable to a song"—a song not lyrical alone, however, but in turn sad, bitter, angry, heroic.

Jay Leyda.

Museum of Modern Art film notes

There are at least two other Russian versions of Gorky's novel, both called MOTHER: a 1919 version, directed by Alexander Razumny, and a 1956 remake, directed by Mark Donskoy. A third film, also entitled MOTHER, is a two-reel 1941 war-propaganda short directed by Leonid Lukov. The story of a patriotic Soviet mother who sends all her sons to fight the fascist enemy, it bears no relation to Gorky's work.

For Pudovkin's post-MOTHER career, see Leyda, Kino. For his theories and filmography of his work, see his Film Technique and Film Acting, translated by Ivor Montague, and available in paperback, Grove Press, 1970.

### Biographical information

The three people who contributed so greatly to the success of MOTHER -- Natan Zarkhi, (1900 - July 17, 1935), Anatoli Golovnya (February 2, 1900 --), and Mikhail Doller (1889 - 1952) -- were close associates and friends, of Pudovkin throughout his career.

The promising career of Zarkhi was cut short by his death in an automobile accident that nearly killed Pudovkin as well. His reputation rests on the two scenarios he wrote for Pudovkin: MOTHER and THE END OF ST. PETERSBURG (to be shown October 18 at 5:30). He revealed a sure grasp of the visual principles inherent in scriptwriting in his very first film, THE GOLUBIN HOUSE, or KSYUSHA (OSOBNYAK GOLUBINYKH, or KSYUSHA), 1925, an agitprop film on how to fight tuberculosis. He is credited with the scripts of only five other films: WOMAN'S VICTORY (POBEDA ZHENCHINY), 1927, directed by Yuri Zhelyabuzhsky; BULAT-BATYR, 1928, co-authored and directed by Yuri Tarich; CITIES AND YEARS (GORODA I GODY), 1930, co-authored and directed by Yevgeni Chervyakov; BOMBAST (BOMBIST), 1932, a children's film, co-authored by A. Filimonov and directed by V. Zhuravlev, and the posthumously released VICTORY (POBEDA), 1938, a version of his 1935 scenario THE HAPPIEST ONE (SAMYI SHCHASTLIVYI) completed by Yevgeni Vishnevsky and directed by Pudovkin. Soviet film scholars consider his screenwriting theories an affirmation of "socialist realism." A compilation of these theories, entitled "Cine-Dramaturgy," was never completed, and was published only in installments.



The gifted Golovnya was as indispensable to Pudovkin, whose approach to filmmaking he shared, as Eduard Tisse to Eisenstein and Andrei Moskvin to Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg. In fact, after his first film, LITTLE BRICKS (KIRPICHIKI), 1925, he worked almost exclusively for Pudovkin, from CHESS FEVER (SHAKHMATNAYA GORYACHKA), 1925, to ZHUKOVSKY, 1952. Of the handful of films he photographed for other directors, only two are important: Yakov Protazanov's THE MAN FROM THE RESTAURANT (CHELOVEK IZ RESTORANA), 1927 (to be shown October 25 at 5:30, and October 28 at 2:00) and Fyodor Otsep's THE LIVING CORPSE (ZHIVOI TRUP), 1929, in which Pudovkin played the lead. Golovnya is also the author of several books on cinematography, was both scenarist and director of GREAT WEEKDAYS (VELIKIYE BUDNI), 1932, and wrote the script for RUDI'S CAREER (KARIERA RUDDI), 1934, directed by Vladimir Nemolyayev. Since 1934 he has been teaching at the State Institute of Cinematography.

Doller, Pudovkin's general factotum and trouble-shooter, came to films from the theater, where he worked as both actor and director from 1910 to 1923. His first two films were LITTLE BRICKS and EKH, LITTLE APPLE (EKH, YABLOCHKO), 1926, both codirected by Leonid Obolensky. Work with Pudovkin followed, first as assistant on MOTHER, then as co-director of THE END OF ST. PETERSBURG, A SIMPLE CASE, or LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL (PROSTOI SLUCHAI), 1932, VICTORY, MININ AND POZHARSKY (MININ I POZHARSKY), 1939, SUVOROV, 1940, and FEAST AT ZHIRMUNKA (PIR V ZHIRMUNKE), 1941, one of the FIGHTING FILM ALBUMS (compilations of short films produced during World War II). He was also co-director of Erwin Piscator's REVOLT OF THE FISHERMEN (VOSSTANIYE RYBAKOV), 1934, and worked on a few other, less important films. Because of his theatrical background he was especially adept in the casting and acting departments, and as already stated, therein lay his chief services to MOTHER, particularly in the casting of Vera Baranovskaya in the key role.

Baranovskaya (December 7, 1935) came to the screen from the Moscow Art Theater, in 1916. Her early, pre-revolutionary films were undistinguished, e.g.: DESTINY'S YOKE (ROK GNYOTA), 1916, directed by V. Tatishchev; THE POWER OF THE FIRST (LOVER), (VLAST PEROVO), 1917 directed by M. Bonch-Tomashevsky and Tatishchev; THIEF (VOR), 1917, the earliest known version of Yakov Protazanov's THREE THIEVES, 1926 (to be shown October 25 at 3:00), directed by Bonch-Tomashevsky; GOLD, ART, AND LOVE (ZOLOTO, ISKUSSTVO I LYUBOV), 1917, directed by Tatishchev; and THE HEART IS NOT A STONE (SERDTSE NE KAMEN), date unknown, directed by V. Krivtsov. Following her two Pudovkin successes she made RUTS (UKHABY), 1928, directed by Abram Room. In the same year she emigrated to Czechoslovakia, where she created another memorable MOTHER-like portrait in Carl Junghans' outstanding film SUCH IS LIFE (TAKOVY JE ZIVOT), 1929 (shown at the Museum April 19 & 25, 1975). She left Czechoslovakia for France, where she appeared in THE ADVENTURES OF KING PAUSOLE (LES AVENTURES DU ROI PAUSOLE), 1933, directed by Alexander Granovsky, another Russian émigré. As a rule, émigrés became non-persons and their names were erased from Soviet records. Because of the importance of MOTHER and Baranovskaya's performance in it, the rule was contravened in her case.

Batalov (December 6, 1899 -- November 10, 1937), the man Doller cast in the important role of the son, is, in the West, perhaps even better known for his charismatic performance in Nikolai Ekk's THE ROAD TO LIFE (PUTYOVKA V ZHIZN, 1931. Like so many other Soviet players, he came to films from the Moscow Art Theater. MOTHER was only his second film, the first being Protazanov's AELITA, 1924. Like Baranovskaya, he was reluctant to accept the role of the son, but was talked into it by everyone. MOTHER was followed by another success, Abram Room's BED AND SOFA (TRETYA MESHCHANSKAYA), 1927 (to be shown November 3 at 5:30). He made only five other films before death ended his career: EARTH IN CHAINS or THE YELLOW PASS (ZEMLYA V PLENU), 1928, directed by Fyodor Otsep; HORIZON (GORIZONT), 1933, directed by Lev Kuleshov; THE SHEPHERD AND THE TSAR (PASTUKH I TSAR), 1935; directed by A. Ledashchev; and TREASURES OF A SUNKEN SHIP (SOKROVISHCHA POGIBSHEVO KORABLYA), 1935, directed by A. Braun; and THREE COMRADES

(TRI TOVARISHCHA), 1935, directed by Semyon Timoshenko.

Nikolai Batalov should not be confused with his nephew, the actor and director Alexei Batalov, who played the son in Mark Donskoy's 1956 remake of MOTHER, as well as the lead in LADY WITH A DOG (DAMA S. SOBACHKOI), 1960, directed by Iosif Heifits.

Another subsequent émigré cast in a prominent role in MOTHER was the noted actor Ivan Koval-Samborsky (September 16, 1893-1962). He had "appeared in so many Soviet films that the elimination of his name (until recently restored) was physically awkward...He went to Berlin to appear in a Prometheus production of a Bela Belazs scenario, 1+1 = 3, but arrived four days too late, so waited for another role, in Schinderhannes; he later returned to Moscow, but disappeared again for a while." (Kino, p. 271.)

The checkered career of this prominent actor encompassed both stage and screen. He came to films from Meyerhold's theater. His first important film was Protazanov's HIS CALL, or THE 23RD OF JANUARY (YEVO PRISYV, or 23 YANVARYA), 1925. Equally expert in both drama and comedy, he was popular and in demand, especially in Germany. His more important films, in addition to MOTHER, include: Pudovkin's CHESS FEVER; Barnet's MISS MEND, 1926, and GIRL WITH THE HATBOX (DEVUSHKS KOROBKOI), 1927 (to be shown November 13, at 5:30); Protazanov's THE FORTY-FIRST (SOROK PERVY), 1927 (to be shown October 23, at 5:30, and October 27, at 2:00), and THE MAN FROM THE RESTAURANT (CHEVELOK IZ RESTORANA), 1927 (to be shown October 25, at 5:30 and October 28, at 2:00); Otsep's EARTH IN CHAINS; Raisman's FLYERS (LYOTOCHIKI), 1935; and Alexander Macheret's BOLOTNIYE SOLDATY (MARSH SOLDIERS), 1938. His last appearance was in Gleb Nifontov's THE GREEN PATROL (ZELYONY PATRUL), 1961.

Of the 20 or more films he appeared in abroad, the following are of interest: SCHINDERHANNES (Germany, 1928), directed by Kurt (Curtis) Bernhardt; CAGLIOSTRO (France, 1928), directed by Richard Oswald; DAS DONKOSSAKENLIED (SONG OF THE DON COSSACKS) (Germany, 1929), directed by Georg Asagaroff; ALRAUNE (Germany, 1930; U.S. release, 1934), directed by Richard Oswald; and GROSSTADTMACHT (Germany, 1933), directed by Otsep or Ozep. (We are indebted for the information on Koval-Samborsky's non-Russian films to Norman Miller.)

-- Sonia Volochova

Main source of biographical data: the Soviet film encyclopedia, Kinoslovak, two volumes, 1966, 1970.

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