

## Document Citation

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SOVIET CINEMA: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Thursday, November 10 - 8pm

THE NEW BABYLON

CAST: Yelena Kuzmina, Pyotry Sobolevsky, D. Gutman, Sophie Magarill, Sergei Gerasimov, Andrei Kostrichkin, V. Pudovkin

CREDITS: Director & Screenplay: Leonid Trauberg, Grigori Kozintsev; Photography: Andrei Moskvin, Yevgeni Mikhailov; Art Director: Yevgeni Enei; Music: Dmitri Shostakovich

Released in 1929  
Running Time: 100 minutes

The rise and fall of the French Commune in 1871, focusing on the life and death of a girl, Louise (Kuzmina), employed in a Parisian store, The New Babylon. The film is in eight parts: 1. The War of 1870. In the big department store, The New Babylon, a frenzied sale is in progress. 2. In a cafe are an over-gallant shop assistant (Pudovkin), a journalist (Gerasimov), and a Nana-like singer (Magarill), who hear the news of the defeat of the French Army. 3. The Prussian march through the snow towards Paris. The common people take up arms and fraternize with the soldiers while the government surrenders. 4. The women take the cannons rise against the government, and march on Versailles. 5. Paris sets up its own government--the Commune. The cannons at Versailles are aimed on Paris. 6. Barricades are established in the streets. The Communards fight heroically for 49 days. 7. The Communards are arrested and insulted by the prosperous merchants. 8. After a mockery of a trial the Communards are ordered to dig their own graves and are then shot.

The actress Kuzmina wrote of her role: "Louise is not to be found in the literature of the time. We sought her in the whole epoch. This was the synthetic image of a communist girl at the time of the Paris Commune...While working on THE NEW BABYLON it was Zola who gave us the most. All of us read all his works."

This magnificent film by Kozintsev and Trauberg (their last silent one) is not as well known as it deserves to be. Enei's sets, especially those for the luxurious Parisian department store, are excellent. The direction, despite some occasional historical errors, carries one forcefully from the sardonic opening scenes to the moving climax as the heroic tragedy of the Paris Commune gradually unfolds. The music was Shostakovich's first film score.

----Georges Sadoul, Dictionary of Films

This work took a year and a half to make with filming taking place in Paris and Leningrad. NEW BABYLON was the story of the events surrounding the Paris Commune of 1871, the first popular social revolt in modern times. The bourgeois world and social tension within the New Babylon Department store. The Heroine, Louisa, comes to recognize her working class loyalties and joins the Communards while Jean, her young soldier lover, refuses to follow her and in the end watches her die as the Communards are executed. The emotional mood of the film was



heightened by Dmitri Shostakovich's accompanying musical score. By any measure NEW BABYLON, because of its revolutionary theme and working class bias, should have received critical acclaim. Unfortunately the film came out at a time when the whole atmosphere in the Soviet film industry was changing. Critics were not too happy with the film's expressionistic style which they saw as similar to Eisenstein's OCTOBER, which had been criticized for being too intellectual. Only today is NEW BABYLON considered by the Soviets to be the climax of Soviet silent film art.

---Alexander S. Birkos, Soviet Cinema