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# The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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October 2 - November 18, 1975

## SOVIET SILENT CINEMA

### Part 2: 1926-1927

MOSCOW IN OCTOBER  
YOUR ACQUAINTANCE  
HOUSE IN THE SNOWDRIFTS

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.

Sunday, October 12 at 5:30

MOSCOW IN OCTOBER. (MOSKVA V OKTYABRE). 1927. Released on November 8, 1927.

Reconstruction of historical events. 6 reels. Mezhrabpom-Rus. Incomplete. Russian intertitles. ca. 40 minutes.

Scenario: Oleg Leonidow. Director: Boris Barnet. Photography: Boris Frantsisson, Konstantin Kuznetsov, Yakov Tolchan. Design: Alexander Rodchenko. Assistant director: T. Lukashevich.

Cast: worker Nikandrov (V.I. Lenin); I. Bobrov (bolshevik); A. Gromov (Red soldier): Boris Barnet.

### Synopsis

News of the overthrow of the Provisional Government aroused the workers of Moscow. They were led by the Bolshevik Party, and supported by the soldiers of the Dvinsk regiment. But the counter-evolution was also active. Crack junker troops encircled the Kremlin and blockaded the pro-Bolshevik soldiers inside. The bread sent to the besieged by the military revolutionary (Red Army) committee was intercepted by the White Guard. Incited by the enemy, the Kremlin's commander, Berzin, opened the gates to the junkers. Simultaneously, the workers were organizing armed detachments against the junkers. Violent street fighting broke out all over the city. After dislodging the enemy from

the Alexander military school, the Red detachments hastened to the center of Moscow. With the help of the artillery, they recaptured the Kremlin.

A film reconstruction of historical events. Parts 2, 3 and 6 are missing.

Soviet Fiction Films:

An Annotated Catalog, Vol. I,  
Moscow, 1961, p. 211, No. 484

Translated and revised by Sonia Volochova

The anniversary year (1927) of the October Revolution was a time of feverish activity. All the major Soviet directors had projects under way, shooting schedules were tight, working conditions difficult (exigencies of historical reconstruction necessitated shooting at the same locales), and rivalry to meet the November 7 (revised Russian calendar) screening deadline intense. Three films met this deadline: Ester Shub's THE GREAT ROAD (VELIKY PUT), Pudovkin's THE END OF ST. PETERSBURG (KONETS SANKT PETERSBURGA) (to be shown October 18 at 5:30), and Barnet's MOSCOW IN OCTOBER. But only the Pudovkin and Barnet films were screened on the jubilee date. Shub's film was shown the day before.

Jay Leyda (Kino, p. 235) states that "One critic (Lev Shatov, Novy Zritel, Nov. 8, 1927) who had seen all three films... made the inevitable comparison:

"All have the same theme, the same material, but used in three different ways: we have the film of documents and facts, edited from old newsreels that fix events of ten years ago (THE GREAT ROAD); the film of pseudo-facts, artificially recreating the events as accurately as possible (MOSCOW IN OCTOBER); and the film of images, constructed on principles of the fictional film (END OF ST. PETERSBURG).

All agreed in finding that Barnet's film was the least successful of the three, and this critic gave as his explanation that Moscow had so changed in ten years that in order to reconstruct events, the changed locations had to be photographically evaded with the use of "un-newsreel angles" .... Ivor Montagu, who attended this Bolshoi screening, offers another explanation for Barnet's failure: in his haste to finish the film for this occasion, Barnet had not had time to photograph the several explosions needed; instead, his cutter inserted the same newsreel explosion shot at every spot, producing uproarious results."

In both Eisenstein's TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD and Barnet's MOSCOW IN OCTOBER Lenin was impersonated by Nikandrov, a worker from the Urals. His performance drew the wrath of the poet Mayakovsky. "I take this opportunity, in speaking about films," he fulminated, "to protest once more, and in every way, against the portrayal of Lenin by such simulations as Nikandrov's. When a man who resembles Lenin reinforces the resemblance with poses and gestures, one senses in all these superficialities a complete emptiness, a total absence of thought, and it's disgusting to watch it. I heard one comrade put it correctly -- that Nikandrov resembled not Lenin but a statue of him."

(Quoted by Leyda, Kino, p. 237)

As if to make up for this offense, Barnet obtained the cooperation of the surviving leaders of the October Revolution -- Stalin, Bukharin, and others -- to appear in his film. Whatever the other reasons responsible for the failure of the film, it may be conjectured that the root of the failure lies in the fact that Barnet was essentially a comedy director; as his best-known films attest: e.g. GIRL WITH THE HAT-BOX (to be shown on November 13 at 5:30), HOUSE ON TRUBNAYA SQUARE, and OUTSKIRTS. In addition, MOSCOW IN OCTOBER must have suffered from its juxtaposition to a Pudovkin masterpiece.

Barnet (June 18, 1902 -- January 8, 1964) was not a major talent. But his films are, in the main, excellent examples of Soviet comedy. They were popular as entertainment, with a minimum of overt ideological orientation. A former boxer, Barnet studied in Kuleshov's workshop, where he played the stunt-like role of the cowboy in THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF MR. WEST IN THE LAND OF THE BOLSHEVIKS, 1924 (shown in Part I of the Soviet Silent Cinema). For MISS MEND (1926), the adventure film that followed, he did a triple stint: actor, co-scenarist (with B. Sakhnovsky and Fyodor Otsep, and co-director (with Otsep). GIRL WITH THE HAT-BOX, his debut effort as sole director, established his reputation and led to the assignment of MOSCOW IN OCTOBER. A number of other films followed, the best of which are reputed to be HOUSE ON TRUBNAYA SQUARE (DOM NA NA TRUBNOI), 1928, OUTSKIRTS, or BORDERLAND (OKRAINA: U.S. title: PATRIOTS), 1933, his first sound film, and BY THE BLUEST OF SEAS (U SAMOVO SINEVO MORYA), 1936. In the forties he made a number of war films. Throughout his career he continued to appear as actor, in minor or supporting roles. His last recorded film is ALYONKA, 1961.

-Sonia Volochova

Source of biography: The Russian film dictionary Kinoslovar, 2 Vols., 1966, 1970.

YOUR ACQUAINTANCE (VASHA ZNAKOMAYA). 1927. Released October 25, 1927. Drama. 6 reels. Sovkino (Moscow). Reel 2 only, all that survives. Russian intertitles. ca. 10 minutes.

Russian alternate title: ZHURNALISTKA (THE FEMALE JOURNALIST, or JOURNALIST).

Direction: Lev Kuleshov. Scenario: Alexander Kurs; Photography: Konstantin Kuznetsov; Design: Vasili Rakhals, A. Rodchenko. (The above credits are from the Soviet catalog of fiction films. Jay Leyda (Kino, p. 432) adds the following: Scenario (from story by Alexander Kurs): Kurs, V. Ashmarin, Lev Kuleshov).

Cast: Alexandra Khokhlova (Khokhlova, girl-journalist); Pyotr Galadzhhev (editorial secretary); Yuri Vasilchikov (Vasilchikov, department head and publisher); Boris Ferdinandov (Petrovsky, head of Iron Combine); A. Chekulayeva (his wife); A. Gromov (newspaper's make-up man).

### Synopsis

Khokhlova, a girl-reporter on a Moscow newspaper, falls in love with factory manager Petrovsky. To her he's the epitome of manliness -- virile, decisive, strong-minded. Conversely, she rejects the sensitive, diffident editor Vasilchikov, who's in love with her, as unmanly. Her infatuation affects her work, and she is fired. Simultaneously, she is abandoned by her beloved when his wife returns. His callous behavior exposes him as the unfeeling, gross, ill-bred man he really is. Disillusioned, she's on the verge of suicide. But the compassion and sympathy of the man she rejected avert this tragic denouement.

Soviet Fiction Films:

An Annotated Catalog, Vol. I.  
Moscow, 1961, p. 184, No. 432

Translated and revised by Sonia Volochova



YOUR ACQUAINTANCE followed Kuleshov's successful, but, in the Soviet Union, controversial BY THE LAW. It was made in response to the authorities' demands that he substitute Soviet themes for American ones. Steven P. Hill describes this film as "a psychological romance, done somewhat in the modern Antonioni style of free narration, and featuring futuristic sets designed by Rodchenko." (*Film Culture*, Spring 1967). Thematically, it ridiculed Soviet Bohemia and certain influential people. Critics assailed it as an unscrupulous attack on the Soviet press, and the film was hastily withdrawn from the screen. (Paul Babitsky and John Rimberg, *The Soviet Film Industry*, p. 121.) Its failure marked a long period of disfavor and obscurity for Kuleshov, as well as for his wife, and leading lady of his films, Alexandra Khokhlova.

Kuleshov himself considered YOUR ACQUAINTANCE to be an underrated film. In a letter to Hill, dated September 26, 1966, he stated that "there for the first time I succeeded in showing what the French call 'slice of life,' which the French did several decades later. But those were the first attempts then. Those attempts were understood by almost nobody." (*Film Culture*, Spring 1967, p. 11)

The film is also notable for exemplifying Kuleshov's theories of décor as subservient to the needs of montage and the action. Dismissing overcrowding of sets as an impediment to the viewer, he advocated the sparsest economy in the setting of objects and details, a practice, he claimed, applied for the first time in YOUR ACQUAINTANCE. In his own words: "When we needed to construct the room of an actress, from whom the journalist was buying something, whatever we tried, whatever tasteless objects we dragged in, nothing worked out. When we carried everything away, removed everything, leaving only -- on a wall shelf -- a ridiculous looking glass elephant, while by the divan we put a coat hanger in a vase, it was sufficient to reveal the entire essence of the room. And everything else only confused and concealed the characteristic properties of this room." (*Kuleshov on Film*, selected, translated, and edited by Ronald Levaco, University of California Press, 1974, pp. 74-75.)

-Sonia Volochova

HOUSE IN THE SNOWDRIFTS (DOM V SUGROBAKH). 1927. Released March 23, 1928. Drama. 6 reels. Sovkino (Leningrad). Incomplete. Russian intertitles. ca. 35 minutes. Alternate Russian title: DOM V RAZREZE (THE SUBDIVIDED HOUSE).

Scenario (from Yevgeni Zamyatin's story "The Cave" ("Peshchera"): Boris Leonidov. Direction: Friedrich Ermler. Photography: Yevgeni Mikhailov, G. Bushtuyev. Design: Yevgeni Enei. Assistant director: Robert Maiman.

Cast: Fyodor Nikitin (musician); T. Okova (his wife); Valeri Solovtsov (speculator); A. Bastunova (his wife); Yakov Gudkin (Yasha); G. Shaposhnikova (his sister); V. Plotnikov (spectator); Masayev (worker).

### Synopsis

Petrograd, 1919. Workers brigades are leaving for the front to fight the approaching White Army. Food and fuel are scarce. The houses are buried in snow. In one such house live three families: a musician and his wife, a speculator in wood and his wife, and, in the cellar, a worker and his children. The musician and his wife are cold and hungry. But most of all they suffer from the feeling that they are useless people, no longer needed, outcasts. The musician is convinced that in these difficult times he and his music are superfluous. Nevertheless, he is determined to celebrate his wife's name day, no matter what the cost. But he humiliates himself in vain by begging a few logs from the speculator. In despair, he steals the logs, as well as the parrot of the worker's children. Charred remnants of the logs and the plucked feathers of the cooked parrot, which masqueraded as "chicken" expose the "criminal."

The new humiliation is more than the musician can bear. He's on the verge of suicide. At that moment he's asked to play the piano at a party welcoming the Red soldiers back from the front. He plays his favorite pieces. Their enthusiastic reception brings realization that the new society needs and wants the art of the past. He's imbued with new hope: active participation in the new life.

Soviet Fiction Films:  
An Annotated Catalog, Vol. 1.  
Moscow, 1961, p. 192, No. 450  
Translated and revised by Sonia Volochova

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Friedrich Ermler (May 13, 1898 - July 12, 1967) is best known for FRAGMENT OF AN EMPIRE (OBLOMOK IMPERII), 1929, (intermittently shown at the Museum), and PEASANTS (KRESTYANE) 1935 (shown some years ago).

"The little boy who ran errands for a pharmacist and organized the other children of the neighbourhood to act out his filmscripts in the backyard, was at last prepared to put his dreams and hopes on celluloid. His days as bit player (in Viskovsky's RED PARTISANS) and student of the Leningrad Film Technicum ended with a clear position of his future 'fundamentalist' approach to realism. Being the only communist among the students led him to take a position for 'revolutionary content' as against 'revolutionary form', then being noisily declared by the FEX group. To oppose this emphasis on outer effects Ermler organized KEM (Experimental Film Workshop) among the students; the group planned and staged films without film-stock. On graduating from Technicum he and another beginner-director, Eduard Johanson, proceeded to put their principles on film. Their first jointly directed film was CHILDREN OF STORM (released August 17, 1926), on the role played by young communists in the defense of Petrograd during the Civil War; the adventures of one Komsomol group captured by the White Guards, and of another group endeavouring to rescue them, kept the film moving, but with no especial revelation of character. The two young men were still learning their craft. Their next effort was more memorable, more quiet in tone and closer in spirit to Ermler's mature work, still to come, KATKA'S REINETTE APPLES" (shown October 4 and 6), followed by HOUSE IN THE SNOWDRIFTS, directed by Ermler alone.

Jay Leyda, Kino, pp. 216-17

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Ermler may be regarded as a model Communist director. The son of a cabinet maker, he is one of the few prominent Soviet directors who joined the Communist Party as a young man. After applying for Party membership in 1919 he enrolled as a student in the Leningrad Film Institute. Ermler began work at the Leningrad studios in 1924 and directed four films within the next five years. Although his work was criticized for 'impressionism' and 'Freudianism,' Ermler became editor of the journal Proletarskoye kino (Proletarian Film) and was sent to study at a Communist academy for two years. He joined Sergei Yutkevich in directing COUNTERPLAN (1932), one of the first films to introduce socialist realism to the Soviet screen. The film, which concerned sabotage in Soviet industry, was well received by Communist critics. Ermler spent three years writing and directing his next film, PEASANTS (1935) and was awarded the Order of Lenin the year of its release, although censors finally deleted one scene of the film after criticism of Ermler's 'naturalistic tendencies.' His film GREAT CITIZEN (Part One, 1937; Part Two, 1939) was a fictionalized biography of the assassinated Communist leader Kirov.

During the Second World War Ermler became a supervising director. He was made responsible for the work of A. Ivanovski, who directed the picture ANTON IVANOVICH GETS MAD (1942). In addition to supervisory work, Ermler directed his own film SHE DEFENDS HER COUNTRY (1943). After the war THE TURNIGN POINT (1946), a fictionalized version of the battle for Stalingrad made under his direction, won high praise from Soviet critics. While Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Ludov, Kozintsev, and Trauberg found themselves in serious trouble because of 'ideological errors' in their latest films, Ermler won a Stalin Prize d for 1946. Later he directed GREAT FORCE (1950), which deals with the campaign by Communist scientists to end 'obeisance to foreign science,'"

Paul Babitsky and John Kimberg,  
The Soviet Film Industry, pp. 310-11

Ermler's early silent films owe a large debt to the acting of Nikitin (b. May 3, 1900 --\_) who played Vadka, the intellectual gone to seed, in KATKA'S REINETTE APPLES, the deaf-mute in THE PARISIAN COBBLER, and the musician in HOUSE IN THE SNOWDRIFTS. A noted stage actor, Nikitin began his theatrical career in 1917, his screen career in 1926, with KATKA'S REINETTE APPLES. Three more Ermler films followed: HOUSE IN THE SNOWDRIFTS, THE PARISIAN COBBLER (1927), and FRAGMENT OF AN EMPIRE, 1929 (shown intermittently), in which he created his most famous role, the man who lost his memory. He played (mostly supporting roles) in many other films, too numerous to list. None is outstanding. The best known are LONE WHITE SAIL (BELEYET PARUS ODINODY), 1937, directed by Vladimir Legoshin, ACADEMICIAN IVAN PAVLOV (AKADEMIK IVAN PAVLOV), 1949, and MUSSORGSKY, 1951 both directed by Grigori Roshal. He was still acting in 1968.

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