Soviet Montage (1924-1930)

1917- Russian Revolution October 1917
Take year to develop national film industry
Private production companies operating in MOSCOW and ST. PETERSBURG
Mid-10’s slow melodramas/acting bravura

Private companies resist nationalization- don’t supply gov. theaters, etc.


Under these harsh conditions a small number of film makers begin SOVIET MONTAGE MOVEMENT

Dziga Vertove at 20 in charge of GOV newsreels.-
Lev Kuleshov- begins teaching at new STATE SCHOOL OF CINEMA ART
Kuleshov and pupils begin writing essays on film art/theory.

1920- Sergie Eisenstien (Engineer)(works at propaganda delivery in civil war), starts workers theatre-1920
Vsevolod Pudovkin (Chemist)- acting debut in play put on by STATE FILM SCHOOL.

ALL inspired by DW Griffith- Intolerance/BirthofANation (Fairbanks and Pickford)- films that kept circulating because of small Russian output.

None of MONTAGE school where important film makers of PRE-REVOLUTION.

1921- NEP-New Economic Policy in 1921 release film stock. MORE PRIVATE PRODUCTION

1922-Gov tries to control industry through central distribution company, GOSKINO in

1922- Newreels series called KINO-PRAVDA starts 1922- Vertov

1922 “Of all the arts, for us the cinema is the most important” Lenin-

1923 Red Imps first big success.

1924-Kuleshovs class presents Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks
1925 Kuleshov- The Death Ray
1925 Eisenstien- Strike
1925 Eisenstien Potemkin
1927- Soviet film output income tops foreign imports.
1927- Aleksandrov, Eisenstein- October
1928 –Pudovkin Storm over Asia

Down play of character psychology as cause, focuses on social causes forces…often not one single protagonist, collective heroes/ social groups

Avoided well know actors, uses no professionals- uses TYPAGE (type casting)

By end of 20’s 4 films apiece. Decline not caused by economic factors/industrial factors but by political pressures discouraging MONTAGE…..seen as too intellectual, esoteric

1929-Eisenstien goes to Hollywood to study sound for film.

STALIN and SOVIET encourage simple films by 1932 soviet films change
1934 Official government policy is for SOCIALIST REALISM style- depiction of revolutionary development but REALIST style.

DONE in 1933. ends with VERTOV’s Enthusiasm (1931) and Pudovkins’ Deserter (1933)

**The Soviet Montage-Theorists**

This theory appeared in the Soviet Union, from the 1920s.

Theorists concerned not only with grand ideas but also with the **practical questions** of constructing a socialist film industry, combining authorial creativity, political commitment, and mass popularity.

Emphasis is on **technique, construction**, and **experiment**.

The basis of the cinematic expression: **montage**. A kind of structuralist approach, insisting that the filmic shot gains its meaning in the course of editing, when it gets related to other shots.

As Lev Kuleshov, the founder of the world’s first film school said, what distinguishes cinema from other arts is its capacity to organize fragments (shots) into meaningful, rhythmical sequences. Editing creates meaning and emotions that go far beyond the meaning and content of individual shots.

Other montage-theorists: **V. I. Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov, Grigori Alexandrov.**

Most influential: **Sergei Eisenstein**, director and theorist
- Wanted to create a highly stylized and intellectual cinema;
- Wanted to enrich cinema through cross-fertilization with other arts;
- Nowadays he would be considered multiculturalist, for using elements from the
cinemas of other nations;
- Created an anti-naturalistic cinema, focusing on the composition of the image, and stylized acting;
- Less interested in a linear, cause-and-effect plot; his films are disruptive, fractured, interrupted by digressions;
- His films think and comment through images;
- Montage is the key to both aesthetic and theoretical mastery;
- By the novelty of the filmic associations (constructive editing), he wants to call the audience’s attention to contemporary problems, wants to raise the people’s consciousness.

Dziga Vertov

- More radical than Eisenstein; cinema: means to enlighten the proletariat;
- Treats the camera as an eye that reveals the truth: the kino-eye;
- Calls for “kino-pravda”, “cinema truth”; to present reality and life as it is;
- Designs “poetic documentaries”; tension between the truth and fact he wants to present, and the way of presenting it;
- His films echo the fight against Tsarism, and against the Hollywood star system.

The directors of the Soviet Montage got into political trouble after 1935, when social realism became the politically accepted style. They were persecuted for their formalism and “elitism”.

Soviet Cinema in the 1920s

Multiple Choice

1
What was Narkompros?
A) a Russian film production company forced to flee after the October Revolution of 1917.
B) the name given to the newly nationalized film industry in the Soviet Union
C) the People's Commissariat of Education set up under the Bolsheviks, which was given responsibility for overseeing cinema
D) the Soviet film school established in 1919
2 Which of the following best characterizes Soviet cinema from 1918 to 1920?
   A) The new Soviet cinema was immediately quite productive and successful, producing a steady stream of popular propaganda films that filled the country's theaters.
   B) Immediately upon seizing power, the Bolsheviks nationalized the film industry and began mass production of patriotic films that were never very popular.
   C) During this period, Soviet cinema was disorganized and production was low, though many short films made their way to troops and villagers in the countryside and many old films were shown in theaters.
   D) During this period, virtually no films were made or seen in the Soviet Union as time and resources had to be spent on things more necessary than cinema.

3 What is the Kuleshov effect?
   A) the sense of wonder viewers get from seeing images edited rapidly together.
   B) the impression of a continuous space and time that viewers get from images edited together in the absence of an establishing shot.
   C) the aim of Soviet propaganda films, which was to mobilize the workers and peasants in support of communism.
   D) a trick of editing that creates an illusion of continuous motion occurring in two separate shots.

4 Which of the following does not characterize Sovkino, established in 1925 to replace Goskino as the national film company?
   A) It was responsible for both opening theaters in the cities and for getting films out to the countryside.
   B) It profited from the distribution of foreign films in the Soviet Union.
   C) It profited from the distribution of Soviet films abroad.
   D) It concentrated mainly on entertainment and did not concern itself much with artistic films or films that would advance a communist agenda.

5 Which of the following was a main principle of Constructivist artists?
   A) an artwork is like a machine assembled out of different parts.
   B) an artwork is the expression of the artist's inspired vision.
   C) art should not be used as propaganda.
   D) elite art forms such as opera are superior to popular arts such as the circus.

6 Which Soviet Montage director began his career with the Proletkult theater, combining his experience in engineering with an interest in modernist drama?
A) Kuleshov  
B) Eisenstein  
C) Vertov  
D) Pudovkin

7. Which Soviet Montage director worked mainly on documentary filmmaking?  
A) Kuleshov  
B) Dovzhenko  
C) Vertov  
D) Pudovkin

8. How does Eisenstein conceive of editing in his theoretical writings?  
A) as bricks joined together  
B) as a smooth succession of images used to tell a story clearly and with excitement  
C) as the selection and combination of "cine-facts"  
D) as the collision of conflicting forces that create the maximum emotional and intellectual impact

9. What was most Montage directors' approach to narrative?  
A) they built their stories around the heroic struggles of individual Bolshevik revolutionaries  
B) they shied away from depicting actual events, instead preferring more mythical or allegorical subjects  
C) they preferred not to emphasize individual characters and made social forces the source of causes and effects in the narrative  
D) they deplored narrative and adopted a challenging, non-narrative, modernist style

10. Which of the following is not a characteristic that is especially distinctive of Soviet Montage editing?  
A) overlapping editing  
B) shot/reverse shot editing  
C) elliptical editing  
D) rapid editing

11. What innovative function did Soviet Montage editors achieve by using intercutting?  
A) highly suspenseful chases with last-minute rescues
B) a sense of fast, frenetic motion  
C) clearer, more efficient storytelling  
D) making a thematic or metaphorical point

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Which of the following was not a factor in bringing about the end of the Montage movement?
   A) many Montage directors grew tired of the style, which had become passé  
   B) governmental and film-industry officials accused Montage directors of "formalism"  
   C) the first Five-Year Plan, which aimed to eliminate exporting Soviet films abroad  
   D) the formation of Soyuzkino, a new national film company to oversee production throughout the Soviet republics