

Esfir Shub

Selected Writings

ABSTRACT An unsurpassed master of compilation cinema, Esfir Shub is a major figure in the history of Soviet film. Shub's concept of film editing emerges clearly in the four articles that are presented here for the first time in English. They are selected from *Zhizn' moyo – kinematograf* (Cinema Is My Life, 1972), a collection of her essays, public speeches, and letters as well as descriptions of unfinished projects. The texts document Shub's thoughts on montage and her important work as a pioneer of found footage cinema, offering insights into the making of such groundbreaking archival compilation films as *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927), *The Great Road* (1927), and *Lev Tolstoy and the Russia of Nicholas II* (1928). **KEYWORDS** compilation film, Esfir Shub, female filmmakers, found footage film, Soviet cinema

The following four articles by the Soviet film director Esfir Shub are here translated into English for the first time. They are selected from texts gathered in *Zhizn' moyo – kinematograf* (Cinema Is My Life), a collection of Shub's essays, public speeches, and letters, as well as descriptions of her unfinished projects, originally published in Russian in 1972.¹ The texts document Shub's thoughts on montage and her important work as a pioneer of found footage cinema, offering insights into the making of such groundbreaking archival compilations as *Padenie Dinastii Romanovykh* (The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty, 1927), *Veliky put'* (The Great Road, 1927), and *Rossiya Nikolaya II i Lev Tolstoy* (Lev Tolstoy and the Russia of Nicholas II, 1928).² Shub's belief that editing is the primary creative force in cinema's visual grammar is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the Soviet avant-garde, but her vision of archival compilation as a way to express a class-inflected interpretation of history, based on authentic documents and without the need to alter the images, is quite original. In the articles translated here Shub also issues a forceful appeal to preserve historical footage and calls for the establishment of film archives.

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Born in 1894, Shub was the most prominent female director in the Soviet cinema industry from the late 1920s through the 1940s, and, together with Dziga Vertov, she is today considered a founder of Soviet documentary cinema.³ Shub started her career in 1919, after graduating from the Institute for Women's Higher Education in Moscow with a degree in literature, when she began working in the Theater Department of the Narkompros (People's Commissariat of Education). During these early years she participated intensely in the avant-garde theater movement, working closely with both Vsevolod Meyerhold (working for a period as his personal secretary) and Vladimir Mayakovsky. She was only twenty-seven in 1921 when a mass pantomime based on a text she had written with the poet Nina Rukavishnikova was staged at the Moscow circus.

Her closeness with Meyerhold and Mayakovsky led Shub to adhere to the program of the LEF group (an acronym of the words in the slogan of the French Revolution, "Liberté, égalité, fraternité"), also known as the Left Front of the Arts, a movement and an accompanying journal launched in 1923, whose mission was to foster revolution in the arts.⁴ Aligning itself with the principles of Constructivism, LEF promoted "factography," or the inscription of facts in cultural products, as the principal discursive form to be used by revolutionary artists.⁵ Shub continued to refer to these principles when she later turned to



Esfir Shub in Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).

filmmaking and started to experiment with the techniques of archival compilation. At first she completely refused any form of “played cinema” involving actors, scripts, and staged reconstructions, although she partly changed her mind in the late 1920s, when she came to admit the value of screenwriting and dramatic composition in the making of nonfiction films.⁶ Between 1928 and 1931, alongside her husband, Aleksei Gan, Shub participated in the activities of the October group, regarded as the last collective to embrace the ideas of Constructivism.⁷

Shub’s career in the film industry started in 1922, when she was hired at the major state-owned Goskino film studios (later Sovkino), where she was soon assigned to direct the editing division alongside another woman, Tatiana Levinton. This was an important and even strategic task, for not only was editing key to the development of the new language of Soviet cinema, it was also instrumental to the reworking of both foreign and prerevolutionary films to the new ideology of Soviet Russia. Shub was responsible for the ideological makeover of imported productions, a charge that included adapting foreign titles to the requirements of the new political directives.⁸ She completely reedited and retitled Charlie Chaplin’s *A Burlesque on Carmen* (1915), D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916), and Fritz Lang’s *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922), and she worked on several American serials featuring female action stars such as Ruth Roland and Pearl White, contributing to making these women actors extraordinarily popular among Soviet audiences.⁹ The practice of recutting films from abroad (which made up a significant portion of the total number of films released in the aftermath of the Revolution, due to the shortage of domestic productions) was an essential aspect of Shub’s training and had a strong impact on her subsequent innovations in nonfiction filmmaking.

As a professional editor at Goskino and a member of the Constructivist group, Shub was well acquainted with many figures in the film avant-garde, including Dziga Vertov, Osip and Lilya Brik, Sergei Tretyakov, Viktor Shklovsky, and Sergei Eisenstein. She was particularly close to Eisenstein, with whom she collaborated in the early years of his career, cowriting the shooting script for *Stachka* (Strike, 1925) and coediting the “July Uprising” episode in *Oktyabr’* (October, 1928). This did not prevent her from criticizing Eisenstein’s method of “played” filmmaking, which she considered inadequate to the needs of revolutionary cinema. Eisenstein’s theory of montage was nevertheless an important source of inspiration for Shub’s own concept of editing. Her ideas about how editing could be used to recontextualize old newsreel footage can be seen as an adaptation of Eisenstein’s “montage of attractions” to

nonfiction archival materials. Shub's compilations of footage fragments do not follow a causal or consequential logic of editing, but, rather, a conceptual principle of association that expresses a political interpretation of history, or, as she explains in "The First Work" below, a vision of history "from the point of view of the class that won the revolutionary battle." At the same time, her consequent application of the "chronotopic logics" of factography, which require that the spatiotemporal location of each shot be respected in the editing, marks Shub's approach as opposite that of Eisenstein.¹⁰ Moreover, while her compilation method appears to be an ideal realization of Vertov's famous directive that "films beget films," her Constructivist refusal of any formalist intervention in the images puts her films at odds with Vertov's own highly self-reflexive cinema.¹¹

The principles of factography were first applied by Shub in the making of *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*. Commissioned by Sovkino in 1926, alongside Eisenstein's *October*, the film was meant to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the 1917 Revolution.¹² The project was to offer an account of the historical period and events that had prompted the Revolution purely by means of a compilation of authentic documentary footage. For *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, Shub researched about three million feet of film from the period between 1912 and 1917, to ultimately select the 17,060 feet that were used in the



Frame enlargement from *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927).

final work. Even before she could start studying the materials and devising an editing plan, however, she had to work hard to create an archive. She put an enormous effort into collecting films that had been stacked casually in cellars or vaults and then forgotten, and even managed to return to Russia footage that had been sold to foreign newsreel producers. (For example, she convinced the government to buy two thousand feet of negative film about the February Revolution that she had located in the United States, which contained a few scenes showing Vladimir Lenin in unofficial situations, which she used in *The Great Road*). Shub also worked to restore or duplicate precious footage that had been damaged as a result of poor storage conditions, thus rescuing invaluable documentation of the revolutionary upsurge from probable destruction. Her difficult quest for archival footage is recalled in her memoirs: “At the end of the summer, 1926, I went to Leningrad. It was even harder there. All the valuable negatives and positives of wartime and pre-revolutionary newsreels were kept in a damp cellar on Sergievsky Street. The cans were coated with rust. In many places the dampness had caused the emulsion to come away from the celluloid base. Many shots that appeared on the lists had disappeared altogether. Not one meter of negative or positive on the February Revolution had been preserved, and I was even shown a document that declared that no film of that event could be found in Leningrad.”¹³

The footage Shub was able to retrieve was disparate in both form and content. It ranged from old newsreel images to the tsar’s home movie collection, from recordings of official ceremonies to footage shot by wartime cameramen such as Aleksandr’ Levitsky and Eduard Tisse. These different, profoundly contrasting sources were combined to form what Shub conceived of as a “visual book of history,” a documentary compilation made with fragments that did not aim to produce an effect of narrative continuity, but that gained its value exclusively from its discursive, essayistic organization. Shub took great care not to sever the sequences from their historical contexts, and to produce meaning purely by means of a contrasting pattern of editing, such as when images of wealthy politicians and landowners are followed by shots documenting the hard labor conditions faced by industrial workers and peasants. She also used this method of parallel editing to achieve a satirical effect in the treatment of the tsar’s home movies.¹⁴

The large amount of historical footage Shub retrieved for *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* convinced her to pursue her project to celebrate the history of revolution through montage and found footage in two subsequent films, *The Great Road* and *Lev Tolstoy and the Russia of Nicholas II*. In 1930 she turned to contemporary matters with *Segodnia* (Today), an important title in the

so-called “public-istic” film genre, which consisted of documentaries made to reflect on critical issues of both domestic and foreign policy.

With the advent of the Stalinist era, growing ideological prejudice against formal experimentation created turmoil in the Soviet film industry. It was at this point that Shub moved from her rigorous practice of archival compilation to shooting her own documentaries. Her first project based on original filmed material was *K.Sh.E.*, or *Komsomol, Leader of Electrification* (1932), a sound film that celebrates the enthusiasm of a group of young Communists involved in the general effort to modernize the Soviet Union. The film, which used the technique of estrangement to uncover the means of its own production (the work begins by taking the viewer inside a film studio),¹⁵ was not well received by the political establishment and Shub found herself increasingly marginalized in the film world. As Graham Roberts reports, “After publishing a number of articles calling for less rivalry and more cooperation in the film industry, she became increasingly desperate, producing detailed plans for projects that were never filmed.”¹⁶ One of those unrealized projects was a documentary about the condition of women in the Soviet Union, conceived with the premise that “only the proletarian revolution finally went through ‘the history of the woman question.’”¹⁷

Despite her great experience and activism, Shub found it difficult to find a place for herself in the context of Soviet cinema after the Stalinist turn. She made several more films, as both a director and an editor, but only a few of them can be said to reflect her original intentions.¹⁸ For example, the film she made in 1937 for the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution, *Strana Sovetov* (Land of the Soviets), was no more than a recombination of materials she had already used for *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, supplemented with intertitles that exalted the role of the Communist Party and the figure of Stalin as a father of the Revolution. Yet even a bureaucratic enterprise such as this one did not win the favor of the political commissars. Roberts notes, “Shub had done her best to highlight the role of the new rulers, but the results were disappointing, as there was no visual material to support the assertion of their revolutionary credentials. . . . Her abilities of ironic juxtaposition, linked to her inability to produce lies from factual materials, served as an example of the power and dangers of documentary films.”¹⁹

Understandably, Shub’s problems with censorship do not surface in her collected writings, which were likely edited and adjusted before they went to print.²⁰ These texts are nonetheless extremely valuable because they offer a unique insight into her vision of nonfiction cinema, and particularly compilation

film, as the only genuinely revolutionary form. At the same time a large part of *Cinema Is My Life* is devoted to her important professional and intellectual relationships (and debates) with two giants of the Soviet avant-garde, Eisenstein and Vertov.

The four texts presented in the following pages—“From My Experience” (1927), “The First Work” (1928), “The Great Road” (1928), and “And Again the Newsreel” (1929)—document Shub’s experience with archival research and compilation during the period of her work on her silent trilogy. Shub reports several details of the quest she painstakingly undertook to retrieve the materials, and highlights the importance of preserving the archive for future work. Her vision of compilation cinema as the most powerful form of revolutionary cinema, where the meaning of history is produced exclusively through the articulation of authentic documents, left untouched in their original form and content, emerges clearly. Shub describes her approach to found footage as a method that can generate fresh meaning from obsolete materials, without altering or distorting the images in any of their parts. Her concern for the integrity of the historical image goes as far as to present her films as concrete demonstrations of the necessity of preserving archival footage.

Shub explicitly declares that the theoretical framework of her experiments in “non-played,” nonstaged cinema is Constructivism, and makes it clear that the goal of Constructivist cinema is not just to make movies, but to participate actively in the building of a new classless society, as the ultimate “organizer, advocate, and propagandist” of the spirit of revolution. At the same time Shub acknowledges that the kind of intellectual, factographic cinema she is proposing can be difficult for popular audiences to grasp. She attributes this problematic situation to the lack of a “culture of watching practices for nonfiction film.” Yet she does not blame the audiences for this; rather, she suggests that the general lack of interest in compilation films stems from how rarely audiences encounter them and the visual and intellectual training process that is needed for viewers to fully appreciate the political significance of this form of cinema.

“FROM MY EXPERIENCE,” 1927

The film *The Fall of The Romanov Dynasty* was made for the tenth anniversary of the February Revolution.

The February Revolution is viewed as a rebellion of millions of workers and peasants against the monarchy, which had become obsolete, and as a step on the way to the working masses obtaining power in 1917.

There are three themes in the film:

1. Tsarist Russia during the black reactionary years and capitalist Europe during the same period.
2. World bloodshed.²¹
3. February.

The footage for the film was taken entirely from Russian and foreign newsreels from 1913 to 1917.

The condition of our film libraries significantly complicated the working process. To find footage from February was especially difficult. They said that all of the negatives of the February events in St. Petersburg were shipped away to the United States. Only 500–600 meters of negatives remained in Moscow. Positive footage that I was able to find was mostly taken from a former Kino-Moskva storehouse and from the Moscow film library of Sovkino. About 60 meters of valuable positive prints (including footage of armored cars) I found in the Museum of the Revolution. The material was in such poor condition that it was impossible to make a duplicate negative from some of the parts and we had to drop them. Over the course of two months I watched 60,000 meters of negative and positive film. We made 5,200 meters of positive prints (from duplicate negatives) for editing; out of this, 1,500 meters made it into the film. While editing I sought to address the documentary nature of the material. Without abstracting the material, without focusing exclusively on formal tasks (subject matter—objective form—just means of expression), I used the functional method of Constructivism. This allowed me to consistently and steadily, despite the very limited range of the filmed historical events, create a cohesive film story demonstrating a certain phase of the Revolution.

Together with the Museum of the Revolution, I worked out the plan of the film and accentuated the theme. Research associate M. Z. Tseitlin was my consultant from the museum.

I believe that my experience of working with *February* will convince many to urgently raise a question about the importance of preserving negatives and striking duplicate negatives from existing positives.²² The prints are wearing away, shrinking, deteriorating. With each new day our chances of preserving this valuable footage from the February events to October battles for future generations are vanishing—there are almost no new negatives of this footage.

It is important to understand that each little piece of newsreel filmed nowadays has to be considered a historical document for the future. This idea has to determine the choice of filmed events and accidents, the form, the montage, the

angles, and the dating. Without footage from today, future generations will not be able to understand and interpret their present.

"THE FIRST WORK," 1928

Two hundred reedited foreign films and a dozen edited Soviet films were my editing school. My first independent work, however, I wanted to make out of nonfiction historical footage.

To get this job was hard. The studio director thought I would not be able to manage the task.

At the end of August 1926, I was commissioned to make a historical non-fiction film for the tenth anniversary of the February Revolution. After clarifying to myself the objective of the film and the method to make it, I fully immersed myself in the search for the footage. "Discovering" footage became a kind of sport for me. Neither the Leningrad studio nor the Moscow studio had film libraries. The valuable footage was stored uncatalogued. Mysterious piles of unindexed cans: nobody knew what was inside of them.

I obtained the lists of old newsreels; they helped to navigate this chaos. I was able to find out that negatives of the February events, as well as valuable reels chronicling the tsar, had long ago been taken to the United States. They were exchanged for aid packages from ARA.²³ Sovkino managed to buy out some of this footage through Amtorg, but I only received it when I was already working on *The Great Road* (1927).²⁴ Sorting out this material, I discovered something highly precious—an unknown negative of an episode with V. I. Lenin filmed in close-up with a cat on his lap (for the first time featured in *The Great Road*). Footage from the February Revolution was partially found in positive prints among discarded footage in the storehouse of the former organization Kino-Moskva, and partially at the Museum of the Revolution.

Footage of the Battle of Verdun, along with newsreels from Gaumont and Pathé depicting the Imperial War, were discovered quite by chance in storage for unknown footage at the first studio of Sovkino. Footage of the tsar was piled up in a wet basement in Leningrad and had never been catalogued by anyone.

Disjointed negatives, selected by me, were examined carefully. I had to determine the year they were filmed. Sometimes I managed to put together an entire episode from scattered parts of footage. The examination of the footage allowed me to define the theme. The theme emerged out of the footage. The topic and the footage determined the form of the film.

Connecting disjointed footage of the historical events through continuity editing, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* became an authentic film document of the recent past.

The goal was not just to show the facts, but also to interpret them from the point of view of the class that won the revolutionary battle. This made the film, which was made mostly from counterrevolutionary material, a revolutionary film.

Because the viewer is persuaded by the real environment, real people and events, presented in historical continuity and proper juxtaposition, the film became not just agitprop, but also emotionally engaging, because there is nothing stronger than a fact presented skillfully and with a clear message.²⁵

My firm belief that the message is right, that only original, nonstaged film documents can and must reveal the past, helped to overcome all the difficulties.

I knew that if an attempt to create a historical film based on the original footage were to be successful, this would be the most persuasive argument for the necessity of preserving, cataloguing, and researching collected footage.

I knew that this kind of film would persuade all those in doubt and all those kneeling down for fiction film that bits of newsreels are good not only for newsreel compilations, but for creating bigger projects. In 1928 it is already clear to everyone.

The victory of *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* I consider to be the victory of the school and the method.

In the past two years some things have been achieved. The film libraries in Moscow and Leningrad started to carefully collect and put in order historical footage. Newsreels expanded beyond October and May celebrations, ceremonial meetings and physical exercises.

The camera of the chronicler is slowly, not always deliberately, overcoming severe filming conditions, trying to be in the midst of political, social, and everyday life.

Newsreel footage becomes a battery—a syringe with camphor for the weakening fiction film. At the moment almost every fiction film features some episodes from newsreel footage.

Nonfiction film became a reality and, despite absolute inequality, is conquering the screen.

My further task is to create a film from the original footage of the present, with real people in their everyday struggle for a new life.

To learn how to film those people in their everyday behavior is what I want to work on.

"THE GREAT ROAD," 1928

I made *The Great Road (10 Years)* from nonstaged, authentic film documents. We, workers of nonfiction film, with firm belief in our truth, think that the path of culture-revolutionary cinema lies in the refusal to stage reality and thereby distort it.

Our cinema must first of all reflect upon the greatest historical epoch, the epoch we are fortunate to live in. This can only be done through careful collecting of newsreel footage. When this necessity is realized, then the technical and material conditions of newsreel footage will change not just in words, but in practice. Then normal working conditions will be created for those who work with, invent, and experiment with nonfiction.

We do not have these conditions yet. To gather together surviving bits of historical footage scattered in various places I had to work hard.

Once the footage was collected, I had to determine the theme and the date of every bit and carefully duplicate shrunken and deteriorating negatives and positives to preserve footage from being lost indefinitely.

A lot of historical footage was lost, a lot of valuable footage somehow ended up abroad, and many important moments of the struggle were not filmed. It was difficult to grasp the theme of the selected footage entirely and to cement it. We were aware of these problems while working on *The Great Road*, but nevertheless worked with enthusiasm. We firmly believed that only those not technically suitable, deteriorating bits of film can truthfully resurrect the great road we had followed, and to preserve for future generations the truth about the harsh heroic epoch, the struggle of our fathers for the bright future.

"AND AGAIN THE NEWSREEL," 1929

Lev Tolstoy and the Russia of Nicholas II was my third work. As with the two previous ones, it was made from old footage. I worked with great enthusiasm on my first two films, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* and *The Great Road*. Why do I keep coming back to old footage with such persistence? Because I work within the boundaries of a certain school, the school of Constructivists. The goal of this school in cinema is to work with authentic and nonstaged footage. We firmly believe that only newsreel, only nonfiction film, only live footage is capable of representing the great epoch we are going through, and the people who live and work in it.

When I was offered the chance to make a film about Tolstoy, I had a great deal of hesitation. His persona is extremely complicated and controversial, and

there is not much historical footage of him. But I immediately decided that I should not refuse, that I needed to work on this. It would be the first time a nonfiction film would focus not on a collective, but on an individual personality, trying to assess the political stance of Tolstoy. I was given an extremely important and at the same time difficult task that was worth spending five or six months working on.

How did I work? There was only 80 meters of footage of Tolstoy. I set myself a goal of making a film using those 80 meters. Besides that, there was 100 meters of footage from Yasnaya Polyana, 100 meters of Astapov, and 300 or 400 meters of footage from Tolstoy's funeral. That was all.²⁶ It was, of course, impossible to evaluate Tolstoy's religious and philosophical views with so little original footage. It was not just about montage. Montage is a key skill for cinema workers. A person who cannot edit should not make films at all. Just like a cameraperson who cannot shoot should not make films as a director. These are crucial elements of making a film. This is not only about montage, but about the message.

I mostly had footage of everyday life and newsreels from ceremonies. Most of the footage was about the tsar. Nicholas II liked to be filmed, and there is about 40,000 meters of newsreel footage about him. He had his own cameraman, a good one, and the quality of the material is often very good. The tsar chronicles are not charged with meaning. So my goal was to select the footage I could reverse—in other words, make revelatory. I was able to find quite interesting historical footage. You will see the Sarov Desert, Moscow from 1906, famine in the countryside in 1906–7, Khitrov Market in 1907.²⁷ All this footage is interesting and has great potential. That is how I was able to make a film about Tolstoy. The goal was to evaluate just one aspect of Tolstoy's philosophy, the principle of nonresistance. The historical footage of that time is so wonderfully expressive that it reveals the fallacy of this sermon and the sheer loneliness of Tolstoy.

I have a request for the comrades who are going to watch the film. You already bear some culture of watching practices. Unfortunately there is not yet the culture of watching practices for nonfiction film. It is not the viewer's fault. We are to blame for this. We have very few nonfiction films, and our work has just begun. Our films should be looked at as student works. We do not have the traditions and resources that fiction film has. Our films should be watched differently. There is no story the way it exists in fiction film; the footage works differently, based on its authenticity and documentary nature. Fiction film mostly appeals to the emotions; we appeal to the

intellect. We want our viewers to be absorbed not emotionally, but intellectually, as only this will allow the correct evaluation of the film. There are some gaps in our works: we were limited in our opportunities, and we did not have enough original footage. The significance of the film is purely in its agitprop nature. I think that this film about Tolstoy, a man who was born a hundred years ago, is just crying out about the fact that we do not film enough of contemporary reality. If, ahead of the eleventh anniversary of [the] October [Revolution], we decided to make a film about Lenin, we would realize that we do not have enough footage.

What I want to say is that the school of Constructivism is not going to limit itself to work on old newsreel footage. I think this is my last such work. If I am to come back to this method, it will only happen in three or four years. I believe that using this method we could make a hilarious comedy, *The Russia of Nicholas II*. This is something I want to make using old newsreel footage. At the moment I am working on the film *Ten Years of Komintern*. It is not a historical film; it is about Komintern.²⁸

We need to advocate for old newsreel footage, to prove that it has great value. In this sense my film played an important role. We found footage in basements, in places with such levels of humidity that the emulsion was peeling off the film base. And this was footage of great historical value.

Right now we need to advocate for newsreel footage of today. It needs to be considered not just because of its agitprop value. When we speak of fiction and nonfiction film, we do not mean that fiction film should be abolished. We see great potential in fiction film. The best forces work there: actors, artists, highly professional camerapeople. Meanwhile we just have a tiny studio, there are no camerapeople, no enthusiasts. Without this we cannot accomplish anything.

Now, was it necessary to make such a film only having 80 meters of original footage? I believe that because of our goals and methods, it was our duty. The repertoire committee was concerned that the film would serve to further canonize Tolstoy, who is already being canonized in various ways. The worst of evils would be if we canonized Tolstoy. He was a controversial figure. . . . When I was filming at Yasnaya Polyana I spoke with Alexandra Tolstaya.²⁹ She now occupies the position of the chair of the museum. I asked her if old folks from Yasnaya Polyana had seen the historical footage of Tolstoy. She said that she saw it, but when she watched it she realized that Lev Nikolaevich did not differ much from other landowners, and so she did not dare to show it publicly. Celluloid does not lie; it speaks for itself. When I asked to watch our film attentively, I appealed to the persuasive power of the authentic footage. What is

Tolstoy like here? Look how elegantly he wears his outfit, or how he drinks water. Like a nobleman. And what about his “going to the people”?³⁰ . . . The film needs to be watched very attentively. Tolstoy is sawing and then goes away, leaving a worker to finish the sawing. Isn’t the film persuasive enough? And take his walks. . . . Tolstoy’s persona was questionable, indeed. He suffered, but did not leave because of his nonresistance philosophy. I talked to old peasants. They did not regard Tolstoy and that time with admiration.

Lastly, I want to say that our goal is not just to make a film. It is not our only interest. Let us leave it to fiction film. We believe that cinema has to be organizer, advocate, and propagandist. This is how we planned to do this work. And when there is a need to make an antireligious film or a film about the Soviet countryside, we will always insist that this is our job, not that of fiction filmmakers. I deeply regret that I did not show you a film about Tolstoy made after his death by the renowned film director Yakov Protazanov, *The Life and Death of Tolstoy*.³¹ If you want me to, I can bring couple of clips for you to see what it is. To say more, you know that Eisenstein filmed 2,000 meters of the actor [Vasili] Nikandrov for the role of Lenin for his film *October*, but only used 10 meters in the film. When we look at this Lenin, he is not convincing. We acknowledge Tolstoy as a big artist, we publish the complete edition of his works. That is why we provide a caption in the film saying that Tolstoy is the greatest writer, who masterfully portrayed old Russia in his works. I reiterate, our films have to be watched closely, and maybe not even once but twice. . . . ■

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NOTES

1. Shub’s writings were first published in 1959, the year of her death, in *Krupnym planom* (In Close Up) (Moscow: Gos. Izd.vo, 1959). The 1972 edition of her writing, *Zhizn’ moya – kinematograf* (Cinema Is My Life) (Moscow: L. Poznanskaia), also

includes letters and other papers from her private archive. An in-depth description of the book's contents can be found in Vlada Petric, "Esfir Shub: Cinema Is My Life," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3, no. 4 (1978): 429–48. English translations of some of Shub's other writings are published in Ian Christie and Richard Taylor, eds., *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896–1939* (New York: Routledge, 1994): "The Manufacture of Facts," 152; "We Do Not Deny the Element of Mastery," 185–86; "This Work Cries Out," 217; and "The Advent of Sound Cinema," 271.

2. The title of Shub's 1927 film *Veliky put'* has sometimes been translated into English as *The Great Way* rather than *The Great Road*, the translation we are using here. Also, throughout the introduction and the translations of Shub's writings published here, Tolstoy's given name has been translated as Lev, rather than Leo, the name by which he is most familiar to English-language readers. "Lev" is the correct translation of his patronymic name, Nikolaevich, the name Shub sometimes uses when referring to him.

3. For an introduction to Shub's work see Vlada Petric, "Esther Shub: Film as a Historical Discourse," in *Show Us Life: Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary*, ed. Thomas Waugh (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984), 21–46; Graham Roberts, "Esfir Shub, A Suitable Case for Treatment," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 11, no. 2 (1991): 149–59; Graham Roberts, "Esfir Shub and the Great Road Forward," in *Forward Soviet! History and Non-Fiction Film in the USSR* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 50–72; Joshua Malitsky, "Esfir Shub, Factography, and the New Documentary Historiography," in *Post-Revolution Nonfiction Film: Building the Soviet and Cuban Nations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); and Dunja Dogo, "Esfir Shub," in *Women Film Pioneers Project*, ed. Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta (New York: Digital Research and Scholarship, Columbia University Libraries, 2013), accessed April 15, 2016, <https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-esfir-shub/>. See also Sibley Anne Labandeira Moran, "From Waste to Worth: Recycling Moving Images as a Means for Historical Inquiry" (PhD diss., University of Madrid, 2015), accessed April 15, 2016, http://e-archivo.uc3m.es/bitstream/handle/10016/22369/labandeira_images_tesis_2015.pdf.

4. The first series of *LEF*, running from 1923 to 1925, was edited by Vladimir Mayakovsky and Osip Brik, a formalist who was a member of OPOIaZ (the Society for the Study of Poetic Language). The editors of the second series, *Novyi LEF* (The New LEF), launched in 1927, were Mayakovsky and Sergei Tretyakov.

5. The notion of "factography" was at the core of the cultural battle of *Novyi LEF*, advocated with particular enthusiasm by Sergei Tretyakov and Osip Brik. According to Joshua Malitsky, the term indicated the cultural program of "an interdisciplinary movement that sought to align with the First Five-Year Plan by eliminating the opposition between signification and production, transforming the relationship between language and work. Shub's films were consistently held up as models of factographic work, despite the fact that her use of historical materials ran counter the factographers' promotion of a 'presentist' practice that privileged newspaper reports, diaries, and *ocherks* (essays or short sketches) of contemporary life." Malitsky, "Esfir Shub, Factography, and the New Documentary Historiography," 159.

6. The issue of “played” versus “non-played” cinema was the subject of one of the most intense disputes within Russian cultural debates after the Revolution. The negative connotation of “played” (i.e., staged) cinema was brought up several times in several different ways to criticize not only the current production of mainstream narrative cinema, but also the work of avant-garde filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. Shub herself, despite her friendship with both filmmakers, did not hesitate to dismiss their respective approaches as just two variants of “played cinema.” For a reconstruction of this debate, see Christie and Taylor, *The Film Factory*. See also Matte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-garde and the Invention of Film Culture, 1919–1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 176–78.

7. In 1921 Aleksei Gan, a graphic designer and anarchist, was one of the founders of the First Working Group of Constructivists, alongside Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova. In 1922 he launched *Kino-fot*, a short-lived journal that promoted film and photography as new media capable of replacing the function of painting. (Dziga Vertov’s manifesto of Kinokism, “Us,” was first published in its pages.) In the late 1920s Gan’s radicalism made him an easy target for ideological indictment. He was arrested in 1941, found guilty of counterrevolutionary propaganda, and executed on September 8, 1942.

8. For more on reediting practices in postrevolutionary Russia, see Yuri Tsivian, “The Wise and Wicked Game: Re-editing and Soviet Film Culture of the 1920s,” *Film History: An International Journal* 8 no. 3 (1996): 347–53.

9. The “Bolshevization” of Fritz Lang’s *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* was completed by Shub in 1924 with the help of Sergei Eisenstein, who served as her assistant. This was Eisenstein’s first editing experience. The original two-episode work was reduced to a single feature, released as *Golden Putrefaction*. For a discussion of Shub’s position as a film author in relation to Eisenstein, see Martin Stollery, “Eisenstein, Shub, and the Gender of the Author as Producer,” *Film History: An International Journal* 14, no. 1 (2002): 87–99.

10. The notion of “chronotopic logics” is employed to describe Shub’s factographic approach in Malitsky, “Esfir Shub, Factography, and the New Documentary Historiography,” 173–79.

11. According to Esther Leslie, “Shub objected to Vertov’s efforts to monopolize non-fiction film, insisting in a piece written in 1926 that ‘different facts must reach the studio,’ not just those endorsed by the Futurists working within Vertov’s Kinoks or Cine-Eye. Vertov deployed all manner of tricks and technical devices, derived from the fragmented and dynamic world-view of Futurism, in order to emphasize cinema’s role in mediating reality. Shub’s archival work rescued fact from oblivion and made it speak again in a new context and not to questions of cinematic self-reflection.” Esther Leslie, “Art, Documentary and the Essay Film,” *Radical Philosophy* 192 (2015): 11.

12. More precisely, Shub’s project was to offer a visual account of the February Revolution, rather than the October Revolution, which posed an ideological challenge to the official reconstruction of the revolutionary process as propounded by the Stalinist political establishment. The February Revolution, where women had played a

decisive role, was seen as a spontaneous upsurge that should not be allowed to overshadow the leading role of the Bolshevik party in the October Revolution. Notably, in “The First Work,” here translated, Shub refers to the film by calling it *February*. See Dunja Dogo, “The Image of a Revolutionist: Vera Figner in *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*,” in *Researching Women in Silent Cinema: New Findings and Perspectives*, ed. Monica Dall’Asta, Victoria Duckett, and Lucia Tralli (Bologna: Department of Arts, University of Bologna, 2013), accessed April 15, 2016, <http://amsacta.unibo.it/3827/>.

13. Quoted in Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films: Compilation Films from Propaganda to Drama* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), 24.

14. For an in-depth analysis of the film see Dogo, “The Image of a Revolutionist” and Roberts, “Esfir Shub and the Great Road Forward,” 50–56.

15. According to D. W. Springer, “*K.Sh.E.* begins with a parade of cinematographic equipment. The director invites the public to a sound recording studio, displays the possibilities of film technology. And later, the picture is punctuated with shots where one can see the film team at work.” D. W. Springer, “Soviet Newsreel and the Great Patriotic War,” in *Propaganda, Politics and Film 1918–1945*, ed. Nicholas Proney and D. W. Springer (London: Macmillan, 1982), 264.

16. Graham Roberts, “Esfir Shub,” in *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, ed. Derek Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 2235.

17. Shub, *Zhizn’ moyá – kinematograf*, 286.

18. These include *Ispanya* (Spain, 1939), a compilation on the Spanish Civil War that ingeniously combines materials from American and Italian newsreels with Soviet footage shot on the front, and *Po tu storonu Araksa* (Across the Araks, 1947), which Shub made in Iran to document the miserable living conditions of the Azeri population.

19. Roberts, “Esfir Shub,” 2236.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Shub is here referring to World War I.

22. By referring to *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* as *February*, Shub is underscoring its treatment of the February Revolution. See note 12.

23. ARA stands for American Relief Administration, an American relief mission to Europe and Russia after World War I.

24. Amtorg (American Trading Corporation) was the first trade company representing the Soviet Union in the United States, established in New York in 1924.

25. While “agitprop” and “propaganda” have negative connotations in English, implying misinformation and manipulation, in Soviet rhetoric both terms had a positive meaning and were used quite extensively.

26. Yasnaya Polyana was Tolstoy’s family home and became a museum to his memory shortly after his death.

27. Khitrov Market or Khitrovka was an area of Moscow that housed thousands of unemployed citizens and criminals and was notorious at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. In 1907 the Russian pioneer filmmaker Aleksandr Drankov released the film *Former People*, which was shot in Khitrov Market.

28. Comintern (the Communist International) was established in the Soviet Union in 1919 to promote Communist ideas on a global scale.

29. Alexandra Tolstaya was Tolstoy's youngest daughter and later served as his secretary.

30. In his later years Tolstoy often put on simple dress and ventured into the countryside to meet common people. Such ventures were called "going to the people" or "*khozheniya v narod*."

31. Shub appears to be referring here to *Departure of a Grand Old Man* (1912).