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The Kino-khudozhnik and the Material Environment in Early Russian and Soviet Fiction Cinema, c. 1907-1930.

My doctoral thesis examines the figure of the *kino-khudozhnik* (set designer) in Russian cinema from the birth of the national film industry in 1907 up to the advent of sound technology at the beginning of the 1930s. In comparison to other film-makers, the work of the *kino-khudozhnik* is a relatively under-researched subject. Equipped with an eclectic knowledge of art and design methods, the *kino-khudozhnik* occupied the role of a versatile multi-tasker with wide-ranging responsibilities, and was thus a crucial force in the aesthetic and technical decisions involved in film-making. My research examines the evolving responsibilities and working practices of the *kino-khudozhnik* during a period that marked the beginnings of the professionalisation of the Russian film industry. In particular, I look at their role as mediators between the various studio craft workshops and the main film-making unit of the director, cinematographer and scenarist, responsible for the creative genesis of a film. In so doing, my thesis considers how available technology, the studio environment and collaborative methods of production, as much as the creative visions of individuals, shaped the evolution of film aesthetics. While a new generation of directors and cinematographers came to work in Soviet cinema after the nationalisation of the film industry in 1919, many of the same *kino-khudozhniki* who had begun their careers in the 1910s continued to work in the industry after that date. As a professional figure, the *kino-khudozhnik* therefore allows us to trace continuities and changes between late-Imperial and early-Soviet cinemas, and to question traditional historical periodisations.

In addition to examining the working practices of *kino-khudozhniki*, my thesis explores how film-makers harnessed cinema's ideological potential and used set design to articulate social and cultural discourses about the material environment. Specifically, I consider how representations of different material environments in films related to contemporary theoretical debates about materiality, commodification, industrialisation and cultural production. These issues were prevalent during the first decades of the twentieth century in Russia, which witnessed the rapid modernisation and urbanisation of the country, and they gained particular ideological potency in the New Economic Policy era (1921-1927). Although scholars have

considered how the fine arts, photography and journal publications engaged with debates about the material environment during this period, cinema set design has not been analysed in significant depth. My thesis thus looks to situate cinema as a key voice in discourse on the material environment in late-Imperial and early-Soviet Russia.

In constructing a theoretical framework for my thesis, I draw on a variety of approaches as suggested by the primary source material under consideration. These theoretical approaches derive from a number of different disciplines, including Art History, Film Studies, Material Culture Studies and Performance Studies. I draw on a range of primary and archival sources such as film-makers' memoirs, set design sketches, studio contracts and the contemporary cinema press in order to examine the technical and aesthetic contribution that *kino-khudozhniki* made to silent cinema. In my consideration of how cinematic representations of the material environment related to wider cultural attitudes of the period, I combine close formal analyses of films and related visual material with readings of socio-cultural and historical discourse of the period. My analyses of case studies follow a loosely chronological order, stretching from the first decade of Russian fiction cinema to the end of the silent era at the beginning of the 1930s. In so doing, I attempt to delineate how aesthetic and ideological concerns developed across the period, and to consider issues of continuity and change between late-Imperial and early-Soviet cinemas.

The main issues raised by my research, include: continuity and change between pre- and post-revolutionary eras; the evolving role of the artist in society; mediations between the technical and the creative sides of artistic production; interconnections between architecture, design and the visual arts; and collaboration as a creative principle.