

Studies in Documentary Film
Volume 7 Number 2

© 2013 Intellect Ltd Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/sdf.7.2.135_1

ERIN ALPERT

University of Pittsburgh

The visual in documentary: Sergei Loznitsa and the importance of the image

ABSTRACT

In the late Soviet period, Russian documentary cinema rivaled feature film in popularity. It attracted attention for its ability to reveal the previously unspoken 'truth' about problems in the Soviet Union, both past and present. Domestic and international audiences learned not only what 'really' happened under Joseph Stalin, but also about contemporary problems facing Soviet citizens. Russian documentary auteur Sergei Loznitsa is making a name for himself not for following in the footsteps of the documentary film-makers who popularized the genre in the 1980s and early 1990s, such as Juris Podnieks, Marina Goldovskaia and Stanislav Govorukhin, but rather by taking a very different approach to film. Loznitsa's film-making style focuses on visual aesthetics and shifts the importance of the film to the image as the message. His documentaries, almost all of which are filmed on celluloid instead of digitally, are characterized by intense contrast, and a lack of narration and non-diegetic sound, allowing for fluid images, and are populated by simple, timeless characters who are not meant to convey a political message.

KEYWORDS

Sergei Loznitsa
Russian
post-Soviet
35mm film
auteur
visual aesthetic
documentary

In his article 'Konets "dokumental'nogo" kino'/'The End of "Documentary" Cinema', (2005b) director Sergei Loznitsa, known for his work in documentary cinema, writes that he does not believe in film's ability to present 'objective reality'. He further explains that when a director makes a film about someone's life or about a historical situation, he or she will always make mistakes and that 'in this sense a documentary film does not differ in any way from a fictional film or animation' (Loznitsa 2005b). Rejecting the 'reality' of documentary cinema, Loznitsa claims that a documentary film cannot be separated from its author (2005b). Loznitsa's own documentary films serve as evidence for his assertion. I argue that they have a shared film style, particularly in terms of the visual aesthetic, that directly reflects back on the author and the author's focus on the image as the primary message of his films

I emphasize the role of the image and the visual aspect here because this is something that already sets him apart in the audience's eyes from many other documentary film-makers. The visual aesthetic is often subordinated to the specific message of a documentary film. While numerous documentaries have featured both stunning images and a clear message, Jack Ellis and Betsy McLane note in their book *A New History of Documentary Film* (2006) that 'audiences have been conditioned for several generations now to accept certain aesthetic qualities as part of documentary [film] In fact, documentaries have long been victim to being judged solely for their content rather than for their skilful use of film techniques' (2006: 329). Loznitsa views his films neither as a form of self-expression, as someone like young, controversial director Valeriia Gai Germanika discusses in her film *Sestry/Sisters* (2005b), nor in the same vein as the documentary *publitsistika* of the 1980s, which served as a form of cinematic investigative journalism, often exploring darker elements of Soviet life. This type of film-making, often produced very quickly and on relatively low budgets, exploded during the glasnost era in the Soviet Union and became immensely popular for the discussion of previously unimaginable content, covering topics ranging from Stalin and his legacy to the problems of alcoholism. Juris Podnieks' *Legko Li Byt' Molodym?/Is it Easy to be Young?* (1986) and Stanislav Govorukhin's *Tak Zhit' Nel'zia/This is No Way to Live* (1990) are two particularly strong examples of this type of film. *Is it Easy to be Young?* follows the investigation of vandalism on a train after a rock concert, but is better known for giving a voice to the youth movement and disclosing the existence of multiple subcultures within the Soviet Union. *This is No Way to Live* explores the hardships of life for Soviet citizens, despite the attempts at reform, and compares the poor conditions there to life in America and Germany. Loznitsa says of these two films that 'these filmmakers performed social rather than artistic functions. To some degree their work could be considered a kind of journalism' (Sidarenka 2009). Unlike these famous documentaries of the previous era that brought both domestic and international attention to the genre, Loznitsa instead focuses on the image as the message and not on crafting a clear and overt argument. While, like Govorukhin and Podnieks, Loznitsa's films represent marginalized people, they do so in a way that focuses on a technically well-executed, artistic representation of simple things and people, rather than a sensational social message.

While Loznitsa is one of the most well known and critically acclaimed Russian documentary film-makers today, he did not come to being either 'Russian' or 'a documentary film-maker' easily or traditionally. Born in Baranovichi, Belarus in 1964, Loznitsa moved to Kiev, Ukraine as a teenager. He graduated from the Kiev Polytechnic Institute with a degree in

engineering and mathematics. He was employed as a scientist at the Institute of Cybernetics, where he was involved in the development of artificial intelligence, and worked as a translator from Japanese to Russian on the side. In a drastic change of careers, he entered the *Vserossiiskii gosudarstvennyi institut kinematografii imeni S.A. Gerasimova (VGIK)*/Russian State Institute for Filmmaking in 1991, where he was trained as a feature film director, graduating from Nana Djordjadze's workshop in 1997. His debut film, the documentary *Sevognia my postroim dom/Today We Are Going to Build a House* (1996), won several awards, including the prize for the best debut at the Russian Documentary Film Festival in Ekaterinburg. He has since made seven more shorts, three feature-length documentary films, and two fiction films, which have been screened at festivals throughout the world. Loznitsa immigrated to Germany in 2001, but has continued to work with the Saint Petersburg Documentary Film Studio.

Loznitsa's films have been made in a variety of formats and Loznitsa has worked with different co-directors and cameramen. These films include: two co-directed with Marat Magambetov – *Today We Are Going to Build a House* and *Zhizn', Osen'/Life, Autumn* (1998); one commissioned as part of a series – *Severnyi svet/Northern Light* (2008); two compilation documentaries – *Blokada/Blockade* (2005) and *Predstavenie/Revue* (2008); and two feature films – *Schast'e moe/My Joy* (2010) and *V tumane/In the Fog* (2012).¹ Loznitsa worked first with cameraman Pavel Kostomarov on four films – *Polustanok/The Train Station* (2001), *Poselene/Settlement* (2001), *Portret/Portrait* (2002) and *Peizazh/Landscape* (2003) – and with Sergei Mikhalechuk for three – *Fabrika/Factory* (2004), *Artel'/Artel* (2006), and *Northern Light*. Despite the differences in the form and production circumstances of these films, Loznitsa's *oeuvre* constructs his overall 'film', with shared themes and film style.²

In his discussion of Howard Hawks as an auteur, Peter Wollen notes that Hawks' films 'exhibit the same thematic preoccupations, the same recurring motifs and incidents, [and] the same visual style and tempo' ([1969] 1972: 81). The same can be said of Loznitsa's films. One common motif in Loznitsa's films is landscapes, where sweeping pans of the countryside reveal similar objects throughout his films: snow, water, dogs and dilapidated houses. Loznitsa returns to the motif of work and everyday life throughout his films, frequently depicting people labouring. With the exception of *Blockade*, a film about the nearly 900-day Blockade of Leningrad by the German Army during World War II, Loznitsa sets his films away from major cities, because he believes that 'real life happens far away from the metropolis' (Sidarenka 2009). There he creates a sense of beauty from the old, the decrepit, and that which is simply different from what his city-dwelling, festival-attending viewers might encounter in their daily lives. He has explicitly stated his interest in capturing these rarely seen images, particularly those of potentially disappearing lifestyles. He explained in an interview that 'Cinema was always interested in objects that pass away. Ten years from now there will be no villages in the traditional form. The way of life is changing, even the appearance of the inhabitants of these villages is changing'. These are new images for his audience.

The idea of capturing different ways of life is something that both connects him to and set him apart from the tradition of ethnographic documentaries inspired by Robert Flaherty's films such as *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Moana* (1926). While both Flaherty and Loznitsa present an unfamiliar lifestyle, Loznitsa frames it in glimpses of the culture, without a detailed, in-depth

1. As Loznitsa does not believe in a difference between documentary and fiction film, it is not surprising that his first feature film, *My Joy*, remains consistent with the style of his documentary films. While I refer to specific technical elements of *My Joy* in my discussion of Loznitsa's style, this article focuses on Loznitsa's work in documentary. At the time of writing this article *In the Fog*, a drama set in war-torn Belarus in 1942, recently screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2012, where it was the only Russian film in competition.

2. I draw on Wollen's framework from 'The Auteur Theory', in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1972), in which he uses a structuralist approach to analyse the diverse corpus of Howard Hawks and demonstrates how auteur theory can give insight into individual works within his *oeuvre*, including those that initially seem not to fit with the director's other films. For Wollen, auteur theory is an act of deciphering. Drawing on Renior's comment that a director spends his whole life making one film, Wollen uses his notion of auteur theory to construct the overall 'film' of a given director. This 'film' will not always be consistent, but 'there will be a kind of torsion within the permutation group, within the matrix, a kind of exploration of certain possibilities, in which some antinomies are foregrounded, discarded, or even inverted where others remain stable and constant' (Wollen [1969] 1972: 104).

exploration. The audience questions who these people are and how exactly they live, but most of their questions are left unanswered. On the subject of his films, Loznitsa has said 'I'm interested in people, that no one looks at because their pictures are not on the covers of glossy magazines' (Boiko 2009). Unlike Flaherty, he emphasizes his interest in the visual aspect of presenting these people and the way they look on-screen, and not necessarily on preserving an endangered culture.

Loznitsa frequently depicts people performing physical labour or holding objects that imply that they are in the process of working, such as in *Portrait*. Two of his films highlight work – physical labour – in the title: *Factory*, where workers labour in steel and clay factories, and *Today We Are Going to Build a House*, where construction workers 'build' a house by doing no work at all. *Northern Light* parallels the stories of a woman at home with her newly adopted children and her husband at his job. *Artel* portrays people ice fishing. *Settlement* depicts the daily working life of people in some kind of an institution. While *Portrait* does not explicitly portray people working, the characters hold objects such as saws and farming equipment that imply they are in the process of working. When not working, Loznitsa's subjects are depicted in other seemingly normal and everyday situations. For instance, in *The Train Station* passengers sleep while waiting for their train. The characters in his films are 'everyday' people. At the same time, however, Loznitsa also remains separate from his subjects. He is not part of the image. He does not integrate or even interact with them, as directors such as Germanika or the American Michael Moore are known for doing. He presents them simply as subjects to his audience.

Loznitsa's films share a common visual style and tempo. They feature starkly contrasted areas of black and white or, in his colour films, sharply juxtaposed areas of complementary colours, sometimes discretely framed and separated by black outlines, such as in the opening shots of *Factory* where warm shades of red connected to the outdoor scenery occupy one distinct area of the screen and the cooler greens of inside of the factory fill another. The way Loznitsa films and edits his documentaries draws attention to the visual. He opts for long takes, with few, if any, cuts within a single scene. Usually when there is a cut, it is accompanied by a change of location. In *My Joy*, Loznitsa's feature film, he utilizes long takes, noting that there are only 140 cuts in the entire film (Hames 2010), compared to the approximately 1000 usually estimated in a typical feature film. The extremely long takes used in *Portrait* mimic a photograph, where the person or people in the scene remain as motionless as possible, often with only the wind or a small dog or other animal betraying the fact that the image is not, in fact, a still. The camera, when it is adjusted at all, tends to move slowly and steadily in Loznitsa's films, usually featuring pans across landscapes or groups of people, with a noticeable preference for panning from left to right. While this happens in several films, it is especially evident in *Landscape*, where the camera pans in this motion for every scene of the film, until the departing bus at the end disrupts this flow by moving to the left and the last shot of the film is static. The slow camera movements, which are usually in the form of physical movement of the camera such as a tracking shot or panning shot as opposed to zooming in, force the viewer to examine carefully the scene. The one exception to this is *My Joy*, where instead of the stationary camera and long, slow panning shots of his documentary films, Loznitsa uses a handheld camera mounted on an easyrig, which frequently moves around. The unstable movements of the camera, however, also direct the viewer's attention to the image and the film itself.

Time in Loznitsa's films does not usually progress linearly. It stands still, is indeterminate, or is part of a natural cycle. In his introduction to his interview with Loznitsa, Anton Sidarenka writes that Loznitsa's 'film about a contemporary fishing expedition [*Artef*] [...] could be seen as a universal model of many centuries of human history' (2009). There are no obvious markers of the time period in which it was filmed. *The Train Station* lingers on a moment, which could be situated anywhere in a long period of historical time, when passengers sleep at night, waiting for their trains to arrive. *Portrait* more explicitly pauses time, as both the camera and the characters remain motionless. *Portrait*, however, also utilizes nature's cyclical time, as the series of portraits progresses through changes in the seasons. In *Revue*, Loznitsa uses newsreels from the film chronicle *Nash Krai/Our Land* from 1957 to 1967, but eliminates all actual markers of time, although the film clips are organized chronologically (Beiker 2008). *Blockade*, where Loznitsa uses newsreel footage shot between 1941 and 1944, is also arranged by season, as opposed to actual chronological time. The daily cycle also governs the films *Today We Are Going to Build a House* and *Northern Light*, both of which begin in the morning and progress over the course of a single day.

Despite using visual cues to capture viewers' attention and make focus on certain images, Loznitsa does not say how to look at and interpret his images. The viewer learns practically nothing about the specifics of the characters other than what can be inferred from the visual. There is little explicit storytelling and one can only guess what is happening in the lives of the people whose snippets of conversations are overheard and whose fragmented images appear on-screen. The images in his film are left to produce their own meaning as inferred by the viewer, without the use of non-diegetic sound such as a voice-over or music. The sound supports the visual, reinforcing what is on-screen, rather than giving the image a new meaning or offering an explanation for it. A lack of significant human speech allows the image to remain fluid. Speech is only used as background noise, as any other sound would be. Loznitsa says that 'I have films where there are words, but the words are like sound-music' (Malpas 2006). Instead of meaningful dialog, crisp, diegetic sounds fill Loznitsa's films, to the point where it becomes conspicuous, particularly sounds of crunching snow, flowing water, and barking dogs. In *Blockade*, which is comprised of old newsreel footage, Loznitsa even recorded a soundtrack to mimic diegetic sound. Although he rarely makes use of non-diegetic sound – non-diegetic music appears only in *Today We Are Going to Build a House*, towards the very end of *Settlement*, and as the ending credits begin to roll in *The Train Station* – Loznitsa sometimes utilizes characters singing, as in *Life*, *Autumn*. Voices and songs continue even once he has cut to another image, preserving the fluidity of images. There are, with one exception, no voice-overs used to narrate his films, although he uses intertitles or chapter titles in *Life*, *Autumn*, which usually consist of one noun such as 'son' or 'fiancé', and in *Factory*, where he describes, again in one word, what is being produced, such as steel or clay. Only in *Revue* is there a voice-over narrative; however it is largely culled from the archival footage he uses to construct the film as opposed to a recording based on a script written specifically for the film, with the exception of a few moments towards the end of the film.

This emphasis on the visual permeates all aspects of Loznitsa's films, particularly the technology he uses in creating them. In his description of the new generation of Russian documentary film-makers, a list that includes Loznitsa, as well as Sergei Dvortsevoi, Vitalii Manskii, Pavel Kostomarov and Antoine

3. *Northern Light* is Loznitsa's only film that was not shot in 35mm, but rather with DVCPRO, recorded on a type of digital cassette tape developed primarily for news reporters. The film has a very unique set of production circumstances, although the director insists that they had no influence on the type of film he made, stating that 'there were no kinds of influences or constraints. I wanted to make a quiet, peaceful film and to approach the heroes closer, entering the interior' (personal communication). The film was commissioned as part of a documentary film series released in 2010 called *L'usage du monde/The Ways of the World*, co-produced by the Musée du Quai Branly, the production company Les Films d'Ici, and the television channel ARTE France. The film was originally broadcast on television, unlike Loznitsa's other films, which have been primarily shown at festivals, and is widely available for purchase for personal use.

Cattin, Valeriia Gai Germanika among others, Vladimir Padunov cites their comfort in working with new technology as one of the defining characteristics of this group (2008: 685). Loznitsa has embraced many aspects of the technical revolution. He has commented on the ability to edit anywhere, including on a train, and how work on a film can be done in multiple places all over Europe. He cites his film *Revue* as an example of a multinational collaboration, where he

worked on *The Revue* in Russia and edited it in Minsk [...] The technical aspects were taken care of at Belarusfilm. The sound was done together with the prominent Belarusian sound expert Uladzimer Halaunitsky, in a studio in Vilnius that belongs to another friend of [his], the great Lithuanian director Šarūnas Bartas.

(Sidarenka 2009)

He also praises the use of the Internet for bringing art to everyone, saying that he thinks

all the information accumulated by mankind, including art, should be accessible to everyone. How many wonderful old films are just shelved in the archives! And no one will bother to take them out for viewing. The internet gives the fans of these films the possibility of downloading archival footage and viewing such films home on their computers.

(Sidarenka 2009)

In many ways, technology has greatly influenced how Loznitsa makes and screens his films.

Loznitsa, however, remains firmly committed to celluloid. With one exception, Loznitsa has shot all of his films in 35mm, as of the time this article was written.³ Loznitsa's commitment to working with 35mm film technology is also reflected in the emphasis he puts on the image as the most important part of his films; the visual is something he sees as very closely linked with the technology used to make the film. In other words, the technology utilized directly affects the image. When asked about the 'ideal' film, Loznitsa says that the most important thing for him is the image and that film, and the method by which the film is shot, is a way to communicate this image, explaining that 'Film is, among other things, a mode of communication, a mode of influencing by way of the image. The manner and method of filming should correspond to the idea of the film' (Plakhov 2006). Only after the image come sound, length of the shots, the form, and the texture (Plakhov 2006). Loznitsa also describes the explicit connection between the technology used to make a film and its cinematic language in an interview with Iulia Boiko (2009), saying, 'because when you are working with film, you are connected to technology. The language of the film changes in relationship to how technology changes'. When asked why he works with film when most documentary film-makers have switched to digital, he replied that

digital cameras are just attempting to match to the quality of the film reel. Existing technology, including High Definition, lack shadows. Shadows create an enigma around phenomena. The importance of shadows was discussed way back by Leonardo da Vinci. Shadows are those understatements that make the viewer think.

And added later in the interview that ‘miniaturization [of the camera] allows for the use of a “candid camera” and the foregoing of lighting equipment. I do not see any other advantages’ (Sidarenka 2009). The names of two of his films, *Portrait* and *Landscape*, can be seen as a reference to the focus on the visual. While these names could be an allusion to painting or to photography, I emphasize the connection to the latter, in that the image in Loznitsa’s film is as important as the image in photography, another artistic medium where some artists refuse to transition from film to digital.

Changes in technology have revolutionized documentary film-making throughout the world. This is particularly evident in the recent trends in Russian documentaries. Take, for example, Kinoteatr.doc, a group dedicated to ‘real’ cinema, both fiction and non-fiction, which is comprised primarily of young film-makers and hosts an annual film festival.⁴ Of the eighteen films listed under ‘Our Films’ on their website, more than three quarters were made using digital technology, primarily mini-DV. The transition to digital film-making is particularly interesting in the case of Russia, as it happens simultaneously with the end of the state controlled cinema industry. Ellis and McLane note in their discussion of new film technologies that

the domination of the Soviet system of centralized filmmaking through the 1980s dictated that most documentaries there were made with 35mm equipment. [...] In the Eastern bloc countries the leap was from 35mm to portable video with little stopover at 16mm. The 16mm television documentaries of Marina Goldovskaya were an unusual exception to this.

(2006: 328)⁵

These changes in technology, have given young film-makers the ability to begin to make new and often innovative films. They can do so more quickly and on significantly smaller budgets. Film-maker Vitalii Mankii is one of the most well-known figures in Russian documentary cinema today, both as a director and an advocate for the genre. He discusses how documentary film-makers are using new forms of technology to circumvent the prohibitive cost of film-making in Russia in an interview entitled ‘Russian documentary film: extinct, or almost’ (Shakirov 2010a). He writes that

you can’t make a film for \$30,000 in Russia when sound and a good cameraman cost \$1,000 per filming day, and flights in Russia are twice as expensive as they are in Europe. So directors are using mini-cameras. They edit on lap-tops, record their own music and text.’ He concludes, however, ‘but that’s not cinema, it’s amateur art.

(Shakirov 2010a)

Olga Sherwood in her article ‘The Russian documentary: An endangered breed’, which ponders the creation of the new category of ‘Russian-language films made outside Russia’ at the Artdokfest Russian documentary film festival, views the combination of these two factors even more grimly:

There can be little doubt that the Soviet collapse and modern technological revolution conspired to cause a crisis within cinema generally, but it is also true that it dealt a greater blow to documentaries than other genres. [...] The extent of the ambitions of these [young] documentary

4. The first Kinoteatr.doc festival, one of several documentary film festivals in Russia today, was hosted in 2005 and included a screening of Loznitsa’s *Factory*, which was entered under the category ‘work’. Kinoteatr.doc is involved in many aspects of so-called ‘real’ cinema, including documentary, realistic feature films, and even animation and films shot on cell phone cameras, featured in ‘mobile.doc’ in 2006 (Kinoteatr.doc 2010). Their website describes their mission as ‘the project Kinoteatr.doc unites the young generation of Russian film directors and presents film that truly reflects life and opens new heroes and new themes’. The Kinoteatr.doc screenings evolved out of a partnership with teatr.doc, a group that focuses on documentary theater. In addition to hosting the kinoteatr.doc festival, the kinoteatr.doc group’s members are involved in creating and producing films and have several DVDs of films shown at the festival, as well as other films produced by kinoteatr.doc. Kinoteatr.doc generally focuses on showcasing young and unknown film-makers and many of them work with new digital cameras and handheld technology. Some of them have become successful in larger festivals or on television, such as Germanika, whose films have been shown at Kinotavr and Cannes. She now works on the Russian television series *Shkola/School*. Kinoteatr.doc also incorporates an educational component in its work and has showcased films made under the tutelage of Marina

- Razbezhkina, a leading documentary film-maker (Matvienko 2009).
5. The 16mm camera is largely credited for the rise of the cinema vérité/direct cinema movement of the 1960s and 1970s, led by film-makers such as Robert Drew, Richard Leacock, D. A. Pennebaker, and Albert and David Maysles. 16mm technology, which was used extensively during World War II, revolutionized this type of documentary film-making because of its portability and ability to be used by only one person; not only was it smaller than 35mm cameras, but it was also able to record synchronously both video and sound. Many of the post-Soviet documentaries, such as Dvortsevoi's *Khlebnyi Den/Day of Bread* (1998), Kostomarov and Cattin's *Mat/Mother* (2008), and Germanika's *Girls* (2005), *Mal'chiki/Boys* (2007) and *Sisters* (2005), are shot in the style of cinema vérité, but using digital technology.
 6. While all areas of cinema were affected by the cine-anemia of the mid-1990s, documentary was particularly hard hit in terms of the quantity of films made. During the 1970s and 1980s, there were approximately 1500 documentaries produced annually in the Soviet Union, a figure which includes films produced for television and for the big screen, as well as many films that were essentially made for the archives (Dzhulai 2001: 177). The institutions sponsoring these films collapsed and these types of massive documentary projects practically disappeared. Although there has been a revival

film makers were, it seems, reduced using extreme physical proximity to a character (a technique made possible by digital cameras), and the absence of moral inhibitions, to create the illusion of a 'new truth'. While movies and animation made what efforts they could to adapt to the new market, documentary film was sidelined to the margins of culture. In its place came ideologized and fly-on-the-wall, made-for-TV junk.

Loznitsa, then, sets himself up in opposition to this trend. Choosing to shoot in 35mm says 'this is not amateur art'. It is also something that requires both technical skill and the requisite authority of an established documentary film-maker to acquire funding.

Since the end of the strictly state-financed film industry, funding for film production has been an incredibly complicated problem for all film-makers, not just those involved in creating documentary films.⁶ While, as Manskii explained, many documentary film-makers have turned to lower cost technologies to reduce their expenses, Loznitsa's commitment to working with film results in funding becoming even more complicated and difficult.⁷ The question of how Loznitsa funds his films has come up in several interviews. In an interview with Andrei Plakhov in *Iskusstvo kino/Art of Cinema* (2006), Loznitsa explains he has worked at the Saint Petersburg Studio of Documentary Films, where he was invited to work in 2000 by Aleksei Uchitel' and had made five films there at the time of the interview. He also explains that he received German funding for both *Landscape* and *Life, Autumn*, and that *Blockade* was financially supported by the Ministry of Culture (Plakhov). For Loznitsa, and for other documentary film-makers, outside funding has been instrumental in keeping the industry afloat. Documentary cinema worldwide has seen an increase in co-productions, and international co-financing, beginning in the 1990s (Ellis and McLane 2006: 330). Manskii discusses the influence of foreign financing on Russia documentary cinema in a recent interview with Mumin Shakirov. He mentions that only a few directors, specifically Loznitsa, Aleksandr Sokurov, Viktor Kosakovskii, Sergei Dortevoi, Aleksandr Rastorguev, Sergei Miroshnichenko and Pavel Kostomarov, get to make 'real films with a proper budget' in Russia, and that it is only because of western investors (Shakirov 2010a). Later, in explaining Dvortsevoi's film *Khlebnyi Den/Day of Bread* (1998), he says 'but what makes the film great is not only the genius of [Dvortsevoi,] but the fact that Western producers invested serious money in it: you don't get far on Culture Ministry grants' (Shakirov 2010b). Loznitsa now works largely outside of Russia in part because he has a Ukrainian passport and Russia had stopped funding people with 'the "wrong" passport' (Hames 2010). In his review of *My Joy*, which was filmed in Ukraine, Peter Hames notes that Loznitsa's films remain culturally Russian, but as a German resident he has better prospects of raising the funds he needs for his films. Even outside of Russia, financing art films is not easy. Loznitsa laments 'unfortunately, in Europe now it is becoming more difficult to receive financing for independent art films – independent, for example, from the opinion of the editor of the television channel. And television channels are gradually changing their politics, financing more primitive films' (Plakhov 2006).

The decision to work with 35mm affects what can be filmed and how. One cannot simply shoot everything for an extended period of time and see what can be turned into a film – something that is possible when working with digital and is not uncommon in contemporary documentary film-making. For comparison, Gai Germanika, who works exclusive with digital, describes the

plan behind and the making of her first film, *Devochki/Girls* (2005a), which won the prize for best short film at Kinotavr in 2006, 'I told them [the girls]: "Cool. You'll mess around, do what you always do. And I will walk around behind you"' (Maliukova 2008). Aleksandr Deriabin writes that 'the high cost of shooting in celluloid and the impossibility of shooting anything for more than ten minutes in one take forced filmmakers to approach with much more care those moments that they intended to record' (2006). Loznitsa's films, consequently, are tightly focused around an idea or concept, such as a day spent building a house or images of people sleeping at a train station.⁸ Since shooting on film limits the amount of material that can be recorded, every image must be carefully and knowingly selected.

The visual is what has attracted audiences and critics to Loznitsa's work. Sidarenka writes in his introduction to an interview with Loznitsa 'They do not write about every director: "He created his own cinematic language." They do about Loznitsa' (2009). Director and film critic Aleksei Gusev describes Loznitsa in his article 'Esse cinema'/'Essay of cinema' (2007): 'Sergei Loznitsa is practically the only domestic documentary film director today working towards "genius." And it is not a matter of talent, but of style. The formal extremism of Loznitsa's films can only be described as a "masterpiece"'. He stands apart as a film-maker who has used this attention to the image to set himself apart in the world of documentary.

REFERENCES

- Baranovskaia, Marina (2009), 'Sergei Loznitsa: Zriteliu nuzhen shok' / 'Sergei Loznitsa: The Viewer Needs Shock', *Telekritika*, 28 April, <http://www.telekritika.ua/lyudi/2009-04-28/45281>. Accessed 5 June 2012.
- Beiker, Mariia (2008), 'Igra v neigrovoe' / 'A game in unplayed cinema', *Iskusstvo kino*, 4, April, <http://kinoart.ru/2008/n4-article15.html>. Accessed 5 June 2012.
- Belopol'skaia, Viktoriia and Manskii, Vitalii (2005), 'Chelovek bez kinoappara-ta' / 'The man without a movie camera', *Iskusstvo kino*, 11, November, <http://kinoart.ru/2005/n11-article21.html>. Accessed 5 June 2012.
- Boiko, Iulia (2009), 'Sergei Loznitsa: Glavnyi geroi segodnia – ne oligarkh' / 'Sergei Loznitsa: The hero of today is not the oligarch', *Novaya*, 4 March, <http://www.novaya.com.ua/?/articles/2009/03/04/161136-6>. Accessed 5 June 2012.
- Deriabin, Aleksandr (2006), 'Judgment day: Recreation and stylization (on ethics in documentary filmmaking and other matters)', *KinoKultura*, 13, July, <http://www.kinokultura.com/2006/13-deriabin.shtml>. Accessed 5 June 2012.
- Dvortsevoi, Sergei (1998), *Khlebnnyi Den'/Day of Bread*, Moscow: Vysshie Kursy Stsenaristov i Rezhisserov.
- Dzhulai, Liudmila (2001), *Dokumental'nyi illiuzion: Otechestvennyi kinodokumental'izm--opyty sotsial'nogo tvorchestva / Documentary Illusion: Russian Film Documentaries as Experiments in Social Creativity*, Moscow: Materik.
- Ellis, Jack C. and McLane, Betsy A. (2006), *A New History of Documentary Film*, New York: Continuum.
- Flaherty, Robert (1922), *Nanook of the North*, USA: Pathé Exchange.
- (1926), *Moana*, USA: Paramount Pictures.
- Germanika, Valeriia Gai (2005a), *Devochki/Girls*, Russia: Kinoteatr.doc.

of the film industry in the 2000s, it looks like the problems associated with financing documentary cinema are far from over, as a 2010 interview with Manskii begins with his upset declaration that 'the state has stopped financing documentary cinema. Completely!' (Shakirov 2010a).

7. I suspect that budgetary constraints were the reason for the change in technology in filming the television documentary *Northern Light*.
8. While Loznitsa carefully constructs his films, this is not necessarily predetermined by a script written ahead of time, as only five of Loznitsa's documentaries credit a scriptwriter. When there is a script, it still reflects Loznitsa's control over the focus of the film, as Loznitsa himself is the scriptwriter in each of these five films.

- (2005b), *Sestry/Sisters*, Russia: Kinoteatr.doc.
- (2007), *Mal'chiki/Boys*, Russia: Kinoteatr.doc.
- Govorukhin, Stanislav (1990), *Tak Zhit' Nel'zia/This is No Way to Live*, Moscow: Mosfil'm.
- Gusev, Aleksei (2007), 'Esse cinema'/'Essay of cinema', *SEANS*, 31, August, <http://seance.ru/n/31/films31/portret/ecce-cinema>. Accessed 5 June 2012.
- Hames, Peter (2010), 'Sergei Loznitsa, *My Joy*', *KinoKultura*, 30, October, <http://www.kinokultura.com/2010/30r-schaste.shtml>. Accessed 5 June 2012.
- Kinoteatr.doc (2010), 'Kinoteatr.doc', <http://www.kinoteatrdoc.ru>. Accessed 5 June 2012.
- Kostomarov, Pavel and Cattin, Antoine (2008), *Mat'/Mother*, Russia, Switzerland and France: Les Films Hors-Champ.
- Loznitsa, Sergei (1996), *Sevognia my postroim dom/Today We Are Going to Build a House*, Russia: Studio Okno.
- (1998), *Zhizn', Osen'/Life, Autumn*, Russia: Pop tutu.
- (2001a), *Polustanok/The Train Station*, Russia: Russland, Studio Okno, RTR Vitaliy Manskiy.
- (2001b), *Poselene/Settlement*, Saint Petersburg: Saint Petersburg Documentary Film Studios.
- (2002), *Portret/Portrait*, Saint Petersburg: Saint Petersburg Documentary Film Studios.
- (2003), *Peizazh/Landscape*, Russia, Germany: Ma.Ja.De. Filmproduction.
- (2004), *Fabrika/Factory*, Saint Petersburg: Saint Petersburg Documentary Film Studios.
- (2005a), *Blokada/Blockade*, Saint Petersburg: Saint Petersburg Documentary Film Studios.
- (2005b), 'Konets "dokumental'nogo" kino'/'The End of "Documentary" Cinema', *Iskusstvo kino*, 6, June, <http://kinoart.ru/2005/n6-article9.html>. Accessed 5 June 2012.
- (2006), *Artel'/Artel*, Saint Petersburg: Saint Petersburg Documentary Film Studios.
- (2008a), *Predstavlenie/Revue*, Germany, Russia: Ma.Ja.De. Filmproduktion and Saint Petersburg Documentary Film Studios.
- (2008b), *Severnyi svet/Northern Light*, France: Les Films d'Ici, Musée du quai Branly, Arte France.
- (2010), *Schast'e moe/My Joy*, Germany-Ukraine-Netherland: Ma.Ja.De. Filmproduktion, Sota Cinema Group and Hubert Bals Fund.
- Maliukova, Larisa (2008), 'Pontovaia vyskochka' / 'A Hip Upstart', *Gazeta Novaya*, 15 May, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/data/2008/34/33.html>. Accessed 5 June 2012.
- Malpas, Anna (2006), 'Everyday battles: An award-winning documentary depicts day-to-day life during the siege of Leningrad, using little-seen footage', *Moscow Times*, 17 March, <http://www.loznitsa.com>. Accessed 5 March 2011.
- Matvienko, Kristina (2009), 'With a cine-eye through Russia: The festival "Kinoteatr.doc" 2009', *KinoKultura*, 25, July, <http://www.kinokultura.com/2009/25-matvienko.shtml>. Accessed 12 June 2012.
- Padunov, Vladimir (2008), 'Re-viewing a lost civilization: Sergei Loznitsa's revue', *The Russian Review*, 68: 4, pp. 684–87.
- Plakhov, Andrei (2006), 'Sergei Loznitsa: Besedu vedet Andrei Plakhov: Ia – rezhisser vtorogo plana' / 'Sergei Loznitsa: A conversation with Andrei Plekhov: I am a director of the second plan', *Iskusstvo kino*, 5, May, <http://kinoart.ru/2006/n5-article7.html>. Accessed 12 June 2012.

- Podnieks, Juris (1986), *Legko Li Byt' Molodym? /Is it Easy to be Young?*, Soviet Union: Rizhskaia Kinostudiia.
- Shakirov, Mumin (2010a), 'Russian documentary film: Extinct, or almost. Interview with Vitaly Mansky', openDemocracy, 6 September, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/mumin-shakirov/russian-documentary-film-extinct-or-almost-interview-with-vitaly-mansky-0>. Accessed 12 June 2012.
- (2010b), 'Russian documentary film: Extinct, or almost. Interview with Vitaly Mansky. Part two', openDemocracy, 10 September, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/mumin-shakirov/russian-documentary-film-extinct-or-almost-interview-with-vitaly-mansky-par>. Accessed 12 June 2012.
- Sherwood, Olga (2011), 'The Russian documentary: An endangered breed', openDemocracy, 12 January, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/olga-sherwood/russian-documentary-endangered-breed>. Accessed 12 June 2012.
- Sidarenka, Anton (2009), 'Sergei Loznitsa: Conversations on cinema – "A Master of Time"', *KinoKultura*, 25, July, <http://www.kinokultura.com/2009/25-sidarenka.shtml>. Accessed 12 June 2012.
- Solntseva, Alena (2007), 'Kinoteatr.doc: The first three years', *KinoKultura*, 15, January, <http://www.kinokultura.com/2007/15-solntseva.shtml>. Accessed 12 June 2012.
- Vishnevetsky, Ignatiy (2010), 'Time indefinite: A talk with Sergei Loznitsa', *MUBI*, 29 September, <http://mubi.com/notebook/posts/2322>. Accessed 12 June 2012.
- Wollen, Peter ([1969] 1972), *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, London: Secker and Warburg.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Alpert, E. (2013), 'The visual in documentary: Sergei Loznitsa and the importance of the image', *Studies in Documentary Film*, 7: 2, pp. 135–145, doi: 10.1386/sdf.7.2.135_1.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Erin Alpert is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Pittsburgh. She received her B.A. in Russian Studies from the College of William and Mary and her M.A. in Slavic Languages and Literatures from the University of Pittsburgh. Her articles and reviews have appeared in *Directory of World Cinema: Russia*, *KinoKultura*, *Slavonic and East European Review*, *Slavic and East European Journal* and *Studies in Slavic Cultures*.

Contact: Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, 1417 Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

E-mail: era17@pitt.edu

Erin Alpert has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.

Intellect books

publishers of original thinking | www.intellectbooks.com

The Architecture of the Screen *Essays in Cinematographic Space*

Graham Cairns

ISBN 978-1-84150-711-8 | 232pp
£19.95, \$30.00 | 2013
Paperback | 230x170mm
eBook available

With the birth of film came the birth of a revolutionary visual language. This new, unique vocabulary – the cut, the fade, the dissolve, the pan, and the new idea of movement – gave not only artists but also architects a completely new way to think about and describe the visual. *The Architecture of the Screen* examines the relationship between the visual language of film and the onscreen perception of space and architectural design, revealing how film's visual vocabulary influenced architecture in the twentieth century and continues to influence it today. Graham Cairns draws on film reviews, architectural plans, and theoretical texts to illustrate the unusual and fascinating relationship between the worlds of film-making and architecture.

Graham Cairns is a visiting scholar in architecture and design at both Florida State University, USA and Ravensbourne, UK.



We are here to support your ideas and get them published. To send us your new book or journal proposal, please download a questionnaire from www.intellectbooks.com.



To view our catalogue or order our books and journals visit www.intellectbooks.com

Intellect, The Mill, Parnall Road,
Fishponds, Bristol, BS16 3JG.

Tel: +44 (0) 117 9589910
Fax: +44 (0) 117 9589911