

8. Friedensbrücken Kino



place Klosterneuburger Strasse 33, XX Brigittenau
time May 13, 1933, 11:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m.

Fig. 26, p. 73

On Saturday night, May 13, 1933, **two exemplary works of Russian film** are screened in the Vienna Friedensbrücken Kino at Klosterneuburger Strasse 33: starting at 11 p.m., the Association of Friends of the Soviet Union (*Bund der Freunde der Sowjetunion*) shows Sergei Eisenstein's *Panzerkreuzer Potemkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*) and Viktor Turin's *Turksib*.⁸³ Founded in 1928, the association was a group of communists led by the doctor and writer Marie Frischauf, with the aim of propagating the USSR's policies in Austria. It published a journal, held lectures and exhibitions, and in 1931 organized an excursion to the "workers' paradise" in the East.⁸⁴ One of the group's main advertising media was Russian films, which were screened in various small movie theaters. Opened in 1913 as Wailand Lichtspieltheater, the Friedensbrücken Kino had seats for 360 viewers around 1930.⁸⁵

Fig. 92, p. 219

The silent film *Battleship Potemkin*,⁸⁶ premiered in Moscow in 1925, tells the story of a mutiny that had taken place on the **Potemkin warship** in the revolutionary year 1905. The crew refuses to eat rotten meat, throws the czarist officers overboard, and joins forces with the striking citizens of the port town of Odessa, where the uprising is brutally suppressed by Cossacks. The Potemkin, however, evades the approaching squadron as the ships lower their guns to let the escaping comrades pass. In the film's most famous sequence, in which

83 See *Die Rote Fahne* (Vienna), May 13, 1933, p. 4.

84 See Peter Grabher: "Sowjet-Projektionen. Die Filmarbeit der kommunistischen Organisationen in der Ersten Republik (1918–1933)," in: Christian Dewald (ed.): *Arbeiterkino. Linke Filmkultur der Ersten Republik*, Vienna: Filmarchiv Austria 2007, pp. 221–303, here pp. 278–279 [our trans.].

85 See Werner Michael Schwarz: *Kino und Kinos in Wien. Eine Entwicklungsgeschichte bis 1934*, Vienna: Turia + Kant 1992, p. 289.

86 The German versions from 1926 and 1930, for which Edmund Meisel composed the music, are contained in the DVD *Panzerkreuzer Potemkin & Oktjabr'*, Munich: Edition Filmmuseum 2014.

the people of Odessa flee from the shooting soldiers on the harbor steps, close-ups of rows of stamping boots are intercut with pictures of a desperate mother holding her shot child in her arms, rifle barrels are contrasted with horrified faces in shorter and shorter cuts, as a baby in a buggy rolls down the steps. The scene is intended to create pathos, to put the audience into an ecstatic state.⁸⁷

III.2.3

According to Eisenstein's understanding, the physical, emotional, and intellectual effects of film merge. The **montage of camera shots** prompts motor movements: the spectator flinches, pulls a face, covers their eyes. The rising abhorrence and the conclusion that justice must be done are also, in Eisenstein's view, (brain-based) physiological reactions to sensory stimuli.⁸⁸ Whether the director succeeds in creating this effect is a question of artistic skill. In the case of *Battleship Potemkin*, professional opinion has always been undivided, even that of Joseph Goebbels: "It is wonderfully made, it signifies filmic art without parallel," the National Socialist propaganda minister said in a speech to German filmmakers in Berlin on May 28, 1933.⁸⁹

Turksib was also a major success around 1930, but in film scholarship it has not been regarded as a masterpiece.⁹⁰ Viktor Turin, who had studied in the USA, made the documentary about the Soviet construction project, the Turkestan-Siberian railway, in the style of a drama. He used a screenplay by Viktor Shklovsky, employed workers as actors, and outstretched the budget of the small Vostok Kino studio. When the film was released in 1929, critics and audiences were hugely

87 See Sergei Eisenstein: "Organic Unity and Pathos in the Composition of *Potemkin*" [Russian 1939], in: *Notes of a Film Director*, ed. R. Yurenev and G. Ivanov-Mumjiev, trans. X. Danko, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House 1959, pp. 53–62, here pp. 59–60.

88 See Sergei Eisenstein: "The Fourth Dimension in Cinema" [Russian 1929], in: *Selected Works. Vol. 1: Writings, 1922–34*, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor, London: BFI 1988, pp. 181–194, here p. 193.

89 Joseph Goebbels: "Rede im Kaiserhof am 28.3.1933," in: Gerd Albrecht (ed.): *Der Film im Dritten Reich. Eine Dokumentation*, Karlsruhe: Doku Verlag 1979, pp. 26–31, here p. 27 [our trans.].

90 See Matthew J. Payne: "Viktor Turin's 'Turksib' (1929) and Soviet Orientalism," in: *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 21/1 (2001), pp. 37–62, here p. 37.

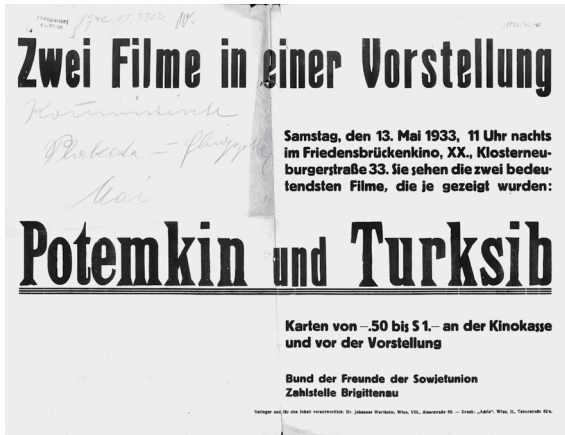


Fig. 26: Poster by the communist Association of Friends of the Soviet Union announcing the screening of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* and Viktor Turin's *Turksib* at the Friedensbrücken Kino in Vienna from 11 p.m. on May 13, 1933. Source: Austrian National Library, PLA16304668.

Fig. 93, p. 221

impressed—not only in Russia, but in the rest of Europe as well.⁹¹ *Turksib* presents the building of the railway line as a battle against nature by man and machines. Once the engineers have surveyed the land and planned the line, civilization in the form of the **steam-driven steel machine** breaks through deserts and ice to transport grain to the south and cotton to the north of the Soviet Union.⁹²

Turin's Orientalist view of the Asian parts of the state is clear in a sequence staging a race between nomads and a locomotive. Kazakh riders chase after the train on horses, bulls, and camels, but they seem ridiculous with their animals in contrast to the fast-moving engine, its iron wheels and pillars of smoke appearing huge on the screen. Hence, *Turksib* does not show a class conflict, but an ethnic gap between progressive Europeans and backward Asians—a message that may well have helped the film to its international success.⁹³ In Vienna on May 13 and 14, 1933, at least, this dichotomy was something the hostile parties could agree on, be it in a communist movie night or at the “Turks Deliverance Celebrations” (*Türkenbefreiungsfeiern*) held on Saturday in the **Engelmann Arena** and on Sunday in the **gardens of Schönbrunn Palace**.

II.7 · II.10

91 See Payne: “Viktor Turin’s ‘Turksib’ (1929) and Soviet Orientalism,” pp. 48–52.

92 The film’s English version, released by John Grierson in 1930, is contained in the DVD *The Soviet Influence. From Turksib to Night Mail*, London: BFI 2011.

93 See Payne: “Viktor Turin’s ‘Turksib’ (1929) and Soviet Orientalism,” pp. 53–56.