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■ by KELLY VANUE

THE NEW BABYLON

Directed and written by Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg. With Elena Kuzmina and Piotr Sobolevski. At the Pacific Film Archive, Tuesday, September 12.

From the decadent, self-absorbed moping of Nico and her European friends, we now turn to a film about one of the historical events that made them that way. We're talking about the ill-fated Paris Commune of 1871, the subject of a hard-hitting antique piece of agitprop called *The New Babylon*, playing Tuesday night at the Pacific Film Archive.

Written and directed in 1929 by Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, a pair of Russian avant-gardists who operated under "eccentrist" prin-

ciples in serving the cause of revolution, *The New Babylon* tells the interlocking stories of a shopgirl in the eponymous Paris luxury department store (reportedly modeled after the Bon Marché) and her lover, a soldier. Fed up with serving the idle classes, she joins the Commune and is executed; he ends up being ordered to dig her grave.

The film is a little shaky on historical events, and Eisenstein's portraits of decadent bourgeois bosses were much more concise, but that's probably what we should expect from the members of a workshop named FEKS (Factory of the Eccentric Actor). It nevertheless delivers a rousing account of revolution, a Russian view of

French history peppered with world-beating montage and exaggerated acting style. The most striking scene occurs when the bourgeoisie rush en masse out of their cafe to attack the captured communards in a pouring rain. The most poignant: the burial of the shopgirl (played by Elena Kuzmina) in Père Lachaise Cemetery.

The original music score by Dimitri Shostakovich was intended to be a vital part of the narrative, performed

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live with plenty of musical comments on the action. For the PFA engagement, pianist Bruce Loeb's accompaniment takes inspiration from the original score and also incorporates other period music. *The New Babylon* is part of the PFA's series Avant-Garde Film. It's preceded by *Interplanetary Revolution*, a 1924 Soviet cartoon satire of *Aelita* in which a Red Army soldier battles insidious bourgeois forces in outer space.