

Title: Contextualizing Ayn Rand's Early Admiration of Hollywood
Author: Elizabeth Blake, Saint Louis University

By the time Ayn Rand (née Alisa Rozenbaum) began attending the State Institute of Cinematography (1924-25), the Soviet film industry had already passed through the era of propaganda shorts (*agitki*) and was entering the era of early revolutionary full-length feature films, such as Lev Kuleshov's *Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924), Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (1924), and Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Chess Fever* (1925). The effects of ideological control over the industry were already apparent with the growing influence of the Association of Revolutionary Cinematography (ARC) and with the censoring of film scenarios by *Narkompros* (beginning in 1924). Yet, strangely absent from her movie diary are these cinematic classics whose innovative techniques (most notably montage) and positive portrayal of Revolutionary reality define the Golden Age of Soviet film (1924-29). Rand's critical de-construction of montage in her early autobiographical novel *We the Living*, her early admiration of the star system in *Pola Negri* and *Hollywood: American City of Movies*, and her focus on Western cinema suggest a conscious rejection of the prevailing film theories on revolutionary content and form that informed the budding industry in both Leningrad and Moscow.

This paper will first consider Rand's formal film education, Russian writings on film, and *We the Living*, in which she focuses on the glamour of Hollywood that emanates from the big screen in works by Cecil DeMille and D. W. Griffith with such talent as Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, and Rudolph Valentino, instead of concentrating on the political and technical potential of the new medium like so many of her native contemporaries. Then, drawing on her American film experience, as revealed in her biography, correspondence, journals, and scenarios, I will explore the aesthetic and political motivations for these cinematic preferences that prioritize the creative contributions of actors, scenarists, and directors.