

The heat of the carriage is shown by those trying to catch a fresh breeze from an open window, or an arm extended out to feel the rain. *Railway Sleepers* quietly categorises social class in its edit. The film begins with the carriages offering seat only, for day and night; then moves onto the world of the restaurant car and carriages with multiple bunk berths inhabited by families and made up by staff; concluding, in contrast to that alive chatter, with the loneliness of the private first class couchette. Resting in its pink silk interior, two travelling professionals talk about the workers who died whilst building the railway.

The films have something to share with each other and with us. The train's own movement offers the camera and in turn the audience, a stationary, privileged position from which to pan across landscapes, into others lives and communities. The contemporary films do not flinch from present day realities, unlike the white travellers on the Thai train, when an amputee beggar crosses uninvited into their space. Neither do the films avoid uncomfortable histories; whether factually stating the colonial origins of tracks in Lebanon, built by the British in WW2 to transport equipment and troops; or by situating the promise of prosperity for the people through Progress

clearly amongst the ruins of those hopes. The toxic wooden sleepers of the rail tracks are burnt by those with nothing else to keep them warm in *Autor's Newsreel #63*.

In early November 2017, I travelled from Glasgow to Vilnius², a round trip of 68 hours, on ten trains and two buses. I firstly felt elation with the train, given knowledge of the close proximity of European countries. The train crossed borders and languages with ease, from UK to France to Belgium into Germany, all within half a day. Then my elation gave way to a mounting anger at Brexit with its unsubstantiated promises and the uncertainties of an isolationist agenda. We in Britain are 'riding the rods'³ of a by-gone Empire. The unemotional mechanical eye of the camera is recording as we watch and wait.

¹ The Lumière brothers, Auguste Marie Louis Nicolas (1862–1954) and Louis Jean (1864–1948)

² The route was Glasgow–London–Brussels–Frankfurt–Vienna–Warsaw–Vilnius–Warsaw–Berlin–Amsterdam–Brussels–London–Glasgow

³ Autor draws on footage of Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd as those from filmic history who 'ride the rods' under the railway carriages

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FILM OVER THREE DAYS

FRIDAY 13 JULY

12pm-5pm | *Newsreel #63: The Train of Shadows* (Slovenia, 2017, Nika Autor, 37 mins, English subtitles) **free**

5.30pm | *Train-Trains: A Bypass, 1999-2017* (Lebanon, 2017, Rania Stephan, 35 mins, English subtitles) **£2/£1**

6.30 | *Turksib* (USSR, 1929, Viktor Turin, 59mins, English subtitles) **£4/£2**

SATURDAY 14 JULY

12pm-5pm | *Newsreel #63: The Train of Shadows* (Slovenia, 2017, Nika Autor, 37 mins, English subtitles) **free**

5.30pm | *Train-Trains: A Bypass, 1999-2017* (Lebanon, 2017, Rania Stephan, 35 mins, English subtitles) **£2/£1**

6.30 | *Railway Sleepers* (Thailand, 2016, Sompot Chidgasornpongse, 102mins, English subtitles) **£5/£2**

SUNDAY 15 JULY

12pm-3pm | *Newsreel #63: The Train of Shadows* (Slovenia, 2017, Nika Autor, 34 mins, English subtitles) **free**

3pm | *Hugo* (US, 2011, Martin Scorsese, 120 mins, U) **£5/£2**

7pm | *The Darjeeling Limited* (US, 2007, Wes Anderson, 90 mins, 15) **£5/£2**

Combination tickets are available for evening screenings on Fri 13 and Sat 14 July, as well as Sun 15. See our website or Facebook page for detail, or email us.

Screening Introduction Jenny Brownrigg

This film programme takes you along, through, inside, over and most importantly, under. No matter if the films cover different histories and timeframes, as they criss-cross the kilometres from Turkestan-Siberia, Belgrade-Ljubljana, Lebanon-Palestine or across Thailand's networks. The sound of these trains' horns, pistons and wheels on track are easily recognisable, forming a distinct and therefore universal language.

The scale of the films is epic. *Railway Sleepers* [Sompot Chidgasornpongse, 2016] gently edits eight years of filming and 140 hours of footage into a train journey across Thailand, which appears to take place over two days and nights. Viktor Turin's *Turksib* [1929], captures the vastness of nature and human endeavour as a track is built over desert and frozen tundra, as part of Stalin's Soviet Five-Year Plan, to link up the cotton harvests of Turkestan to the grain of Siberia. Turin's technique, given the early period it was made in, is astounding; often documenting what seems to be the impossible, such as water travelling from mountain source to the dry fields below. Rania Stephan utilises montage to great effect for *Train-Trains: A Bypass, 1999-2017*, transposing archival footage of

film from the region, the heyday of train travel, onto present day pictures of rotting train stock, as she follows a decommissioned once-key coastal artery. The train track itself physically dissolves into dust and weeds for stretches. 'A train along the sea? We don't ever remember a train.' Her questions to those that live in or sometimes on, the old track, attempt to re-map, through individual memory, a route and train that linked to Syria and Iraq. Nika Autor's *Newsreel #63* [2017] takes an essayist format and looks at the history of cinema, from the early Lumière brothers' film of a train arriving at a station, to footage that the narrator posits has 'no filmic history' – mobile footage from two refugees travelling under the train, between its wheels. The voiceover intones that these two men, in these 'times of barbarity... they no longer have a right to be seen.'

There are also little everyday dramas which present the full range of the human condition. In *Railway Sleepers*, a small boy bleeds as his tooth has naturally fallen out. An adult is on hand with a bottle of water to sort him out: 'Drink this.' There are disputes over booked train seats. People eat and sleep the time away as a litany of wares is incanted by train sellers to tempt any passenger: 'Cold water, cold towels, fresh hot buns, sweet lotus leaf, boiled eggs and mangoes.'

