> The supersession of private property is, therefore, the complete emancipation of all the human qualities and senses. It is such an emancipation because these qualities and senses have become human, from the subjective as well as the objective point of view. The eye has become a human eye when its object has become a human, social object, created by man and destined for him. The senses therefore become directly theoretical in practice.
>
> Karl Marx, *Third Manuscript of 1844*

Introduction

I

We are in Moscow in January 1935. A dozen men, suspending for a moment the contradictions and rivalries which involve them in cross-fire polemic and tactical maneuvering, are poised in the uneasy amity of a command performance. They are the Class of 1925: assuming attitudes of official concord for the still photographer, they sit surrounded by their juniors for a portrait of the All-Union Creative Conference of Workers in Soviet Cinematography.[1]

The photograph will instruct us in the contours of a heroic era, projecting the topography of a culture that engendered a new grammar of cinema. The position of these men, their attitudes, the trajectories of glances exchanged and deflected, disclose an interplay of character and sensibility that articulates a grand collective aspiration. This picture is a historic text; it demands close reading.

In the first row are four elder masters: Pudovkin, Eisenstein, Tissé, and Dovzhenko, prime animators of revolutionary cinema's

1. Eisenstein emerged from this conference, at which he delivered a major address (reprinted as "Film Form: New Problems," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory,* ed. and trans. Jay Leyda [New York, 1949], pp. 122–49), with a humiliating fourth-class award. An account of the conference, called in celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the Soviet film industry, is presented in Marie Seton's *Eisenstein: A Biography* (New York, n.d.), pp. 330–50.

The All-Union Creative Conference of Workers in Soviet Cinematography, 1935

first dozen or so years. Yury Raizman, Mikhail Romm, Mark Donskoy, Sergei Yutkevich, Amo Bek-Nazarov, Mikhail Chiavreli and Yefim Dzigan form a second rank. The man peering at top left over the heads of his colleagues, just coming into view and smiling—as well he might—is Georgy Vasiliev, co-director of *Chapayev,* the film whose easy narrative flow and psychological invocation of a revolutionary hagiography has taken that year's honors, and with them the most general official assent. Its success, and his, hover premonitorily in the air of this assembly, thickening it with ironies and ambiguities.

In the center of the first row, Eisenstein, the session's embattled chairman, sits in the authority of his achievement and international reputation and the dignity of his thirty-seven years. "The old man" clutches a briefcase containing, one surmises, elaborate notes and bibliography for his opening address, whose brilliance, irony, and controlled intellectual pathos will bring his listeners to a pitch of fury, will draw from these talented and pressured men a massive and concerted attack. At this moment, however, Eisenstein is alive with a characteristic smile of generous delight in his colleague's success, attending wholly to Pudovkin, who is standing at the left and half-

turned from us in an attitude of graceful vivacity. Pudovkin is at work charming and diverting the assembly like the gifted and disciplined actor that from a wide range of film roles we know him to be.

The lean and elegant creature on Eisenstein's other side, bending toward us, poised and concentrated, is Tissé, the great cameraman and Eisenstein's lifelong friend and co-worker. His gaze slants to the right, beyond the scene of action, past the camera, through rather than toward things. Then, almost at a right angle to that gaze, looking far to the left, apparently at nothing in particular, another glance travels. It is Dovzhenko's. As in all his pictures, he is beautiful; he rests slightly slouched, abandoned in meditation, his person half-encircled by the sweep of Tissé's arm. Tissé's pure, focused gaze and Dovzhenko's stare would seem—if this were possible—to cross but nowhere to meet. Tissé's eyes, looking out upon the world, embrace another scene somewhere between our space and his. Dovzhenko's look seems collected back into itself. He smiles slightly—again as if to himself.

The juniors are involved in a general contraposto of body and focus of interest, a tangle that must drive a viewer to distraction—or to pedantry. Eisenstein's eyes, fixed upon the moving object, must see Pudovkin, his old adversary, who has been addressing himself just slightly past Eisenstein to the tangle of the assembled filmmakers.

Two men, however, are missing from this icon of dialectics, and their absence is significant. Kuleshov, the pioneer of montage and once the teenage teacher of these men, is nowhere to be seen. We know that he later spoke from the floor in a splendidly candid and courageous defense of Eisenstein.[2] The arena of public honor and debate, contracting in the Stalinist climate, was precipitating sudden conflicts and realignments; pressures falsified positions. We must suppose that by this time Kuleshov was somewhat removed from the public scene, and with him that one artist most problematic in his radicalism for even the greatest of his peers: Dziga Vertov. As we shall see, Vertov could have had no place in this picture.

We do, of course, have other pictures of him: the really speaking likeness arrests him in midair, leaping or pirouetting, delivering him to us as a body in violent movement, immobilized in the stilled presence of motion that suggests a "frame." The likeness projects a preoccu-

2. Seton, *Eisenstein,* p. 339.

pation spelled out by his abandonment of the name Denis Kaufman: Dziga Vertov, adopted at the very threshold of his working life, is derived from the verb which means to spin or rotate; the onomatopoeia of the first name, as Vertov intimated, reproduces the repetitive sound of a camera crank turning (dziga, dziga, dziga . . .).

I remember my debut in cinema. It was quite odd. It involved not my filming but my jumping one-and-a-half stories from a summer house beside a grotto at no. 7 Malyi Gnezdnikovsky Lane.

The cameraman was ordered to record my jump in such a way that my entire fall, my facial expression, all my thoughts, etc., would be seen. I went up to the grotto's edge, jumped off, gestured as with a veil, and went on. The result on film was the following:

A man approaches the edge of a grotto; fear and indecision appear on his face; he's thinking: "I won't jump." Then he decides: "No, it's embarrassing, they're watching." Once again he approaches the edge, once again his face shows indecision. Then one sees his determination growing, he's saying to himself, "I must," and he leaves the grotto edge. He flies through the air, flies off-balance; he's thinking that he must position himself to land on his feet. He straightens out, approaches the ground; once more his face shows indecision, fear. Finally his feet touch ground. His immediate thought is that he fell, then that he's got to keep his balance. Next he thinks that he jumped nicely but should not let on that he has, and, like an acrobat who's performed a difficult maneuver on the trapeze, he pretends that it was awfully easy. And with that expression the man slowly "floats off."

From the viewpoint of the ordinary eye you see untruth. From the viewpoint of the cinematic eye (aided by special cinematic means, in this case, accelerated shooting) you see the truth. If it's a question of reading someone's thoughts at a distance (and often what matters to us is not to hear a person's words but to read his

> thoughts), then you have that opportunity right here. It has been revealed by the kino-eye.[3]

Epistemological inquiry and the project of a revolutionary cinema converge in that world of truth seen by the cinematic eye. And Vertov is that world's great discoverer. His work is paradoxically concrete, the original and paradigmatic instance of "an attempt to film, in slow motion, that which has been, owing to the manner in which it is perceived in natural speed, not absolutely unseen but missed by sight, subject to oversight. An attempt to approach slowly and calmly that original intensity which is not given in appearance, but from which things and processes have nonetheless in turn derived."[4]

The evolution of his work renders insistently concrete, as in a series of kinetic icons, that philosophic phantasm of the reflexive consciousness: the eye seeing, apprehending itself as it constitutes the world's visibility: the eye transformed by the revolutionary project into an agent of critical production.

Vertov's is a very special case: a forty-year history of the most distrustful and hostile reception and of systematic critical neglect. The distrust and hostility are not, of course, unique; but the sustained neglect, the shared distrust and bewilderment on the part of generally perceptive and qualified spectators, the evasive and inadequate literature on Vertov's film work give us pause. The history of Soviet film is one of the most elaborately documented and consecrated areas of the medium. It is true, of course, that much research into Soviet film history remains to be done and redone, to be rescued from the damaging mold of piety, but the absence of close and serious attention until very recent times makes Vertov's case singular indeed. Shoved hastily and distractedly into the ash can of film history, his major works were left to tick away, through four decades, like time bombs.

Here is one contemporary judgment of *The Man with a Movie Camera,* published in the December 1931 issue of *Close-Up,* two years after the film's initial release in the Soviet Union. Offered by Jay Leyda in *Kino* as a sample of reactions to the film, it is an excellent index of Vertov's general reception.

3. Dziga Vertov, "*Three Songs of Lenin* and Kino-Eye," p. 123 below.

4. For development see Gérard Granel, *Le Sens du temps et de la perception chez Husserl* (Paris, 1968), p. 108 (translation mine).

> Theorists mostly love their theories more than a father loves an only child. . . . Vertov also has waged fierce, vehement and desperate battles with his materials and his instruments (reality and the film camera) to give practical proofs of his ideas. In this he has failed. He had failed already in the era of the silent film by showing hundreds of examples of most cunning artistry in turning: acrobatic masterpieces of poetic jigsaw, brilliant *conjuring* of filmic association—but never a rounded work, never a clear, proceeding line. His great efforts of strength in relation to detail did not leave him breath for the whole. His arabesques totally covered the ground plan, his fugues destroyed every melody.[5]

The judgment echoes that of Eisenstein most significantly, inducing reflection on a very interesting and knotty issue in Soviet film history and aesthetics: the relationship between the perspectives of Eisenstein and Vertov. For Eisenstein, *The Man with a Movie Camera* is a compendium of "formalist jackstraws and unmotivated camera mischief," and its use of slow motion is unfavorably compared with Jean Epstein's in *La chute de la Maison d'Usher [The Fall of the House of Usher]* and on secondhand evidence at that. Attempting to account for the naked and disingenuous belligerency of those remarks, one recalls Eisenstein's late strictures on his own first mature work.[6] His film closest in style and tone to Vertov's is *Strike,* a work he professed to see, from the vantage point of

5. Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York, 1960), p. 251. The italics in this quotation are my own and are intended to suggest author A. Kraszna-Krausz's references (writing in *Close-up,* December 1931) to Vertov's association of the themes of magic and prestidigitation in this film. The association of these themes is discussed in detail in my essay *"The Man with a Movie Camera:* From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum* (February 1971), which offers a number of the themes of the present Introduction in a somewhat different form.

6. The remarks occur in Eisenstein's important theoretical essay "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," written in 1929. Discussing the style of the Kabuki theater and its "unprecedented slowing down of all movement," he goes on to say,

> Here we see disintegration of the process of movement, viz., slow motion. I have heard of only one example of a thorough application of this method, using the technical possibilities of the film with a compositionally reasoned plan. It is usually employed with some purely pictorial aim, such as the "submarine kingdom" in *The Thief of Bagdad,* or to represent a dream, as in

maturity, as infected with "the childhood disease of leftism," a metaphor for aesthetic formalism borrowed from Leninist polemics.

But here is a third view, that of Leyda himself, the senior and in every way exemplary scholar of the period, advanced with a characteristic scrupulousness:

> My memory of *The Man with the Movie Camera* is not reliable; I have not seen it since it happened to be, in 1930, the first Soviet film I saw. It was such a dazzling experience that it took two or three other Soviet films with normal "stories" to convince me that all Soviet films were not compounded of such intricate camera pyrotechnics. But I hope to be forgiven for not bringing away any very clear critical idea as I reeled out of the Eighth Street Playhouse—I was even too stunned to sit through it again. The apparent purpose of the film was to show the breadth and precision of the camera's recording ability. But Vertov and his cameraman-brother, Mikhail Kaufman, were not content to show any simple vocabulary of film practice; the cameraman is made an heroic participant in the currents of Soviet life. He and his methods are treated by Vertov in his most fluid montage style, establishing large patterns of sequences: the structure resembles that of *Kino-Eye,* with a succession of "themes"—the audience, the working day, marriage, birth, death, recreation—each with a whirling galloping climax; but the execution of the

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Zvenigora **[Dovzhenko's first film]. Or, more often, it is used simply for formalist jackstraws and unmotivated camera mischief as in Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*. The more commendable example appears to be in Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison d'Usher*—at least according to the press reports. In this film, normally acted emotions filmed with a speeded-up camera are said to give unusual emotional pressure by their unrealistic slowness on the screen. If it be borne in mind that the effect of an actor's performance on the audience is based on its identification by each spectator, it will be easy to relate both examples (the Kabuki play and the Epstein film) to an identical causal explanation. The intensity of perception increases as the didactic process of identification proceeds more easily along a disintegrated action.**

Even instruction in handling a rifle can be hammered into the tightest motor-mentality among a group of raw recruits if the instructor uses a "break down" method. (Reprinted in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory,* ed. and trans. Jay Leyda [New York, 1949], pp. 43–44)

> two films, separated by less than five years, are worlds apart. The camera observation in *Kino-Eye* was alert, surprising, but never eccentric. Things and actions were "caught" but less for the catching's sake than for the close observation of the things themselves. In *The Man with the Movie Camera* all the stunts that can be performed by a cameraman armed with Debrie or hand-camera and by a film-cutter armed with the boldness of Vertov and Svilova can be found in this full-to-bursting film, recognized abroad for what it really is, an avant-garde film, though produced by VUFKU, a state trust.[7]

And Leyda's later viewing at the Paris Cinémathèque confirmed his initial impressions of brilliance.

Now all these texts deserve a closer reading than I shall give them here: they raise problems, directly or implicitly, that are historiographic, stylistic, aesthetic, political. Leyda's estimation of the nature of Vertov's development from *Kinoglaz* ("Kino-Eye" or "Cinema-Eye") on and the precise similarities and differences of style between earlier and later films demand revision, but the films themselves demand a more detailed and analytical consideration than was possible at that time. *The Man with a Movie Camera* was simply unavailable for concentrated study within the Soviet Union, and until 1970 it was equally unavailable, for all practical, critical purposes, in the West. The film was made, as Vertov expressly tells us, for the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union: the unavailability in both East and West informs us that its author indeed has no place in the picture; it is an index of the strangeness of his text.

One is thus led to scrutinize the circumstances of this repression and elision, and to inquire, in particular, whether Vertov's work constitutes an unwelcome redefinition of that "intellectual cinema" which had so haunted Eisenstein, Vertov's work producing the shadow text of Eisenstein's unrealized projects, the planned film versions of *Das Kapital* and of Joyce's *Ulysses.* One might, in fact, see the trajectory between the two men's work as a shift from the articulation of a comprehensive and dialectical critique of political economy to the reflexive exploration of the dynamics of consciousness. I will

7. Leyda, *Kino,* pp. 251–52. Quite understandably, Leyda has exaggerated the film's reputation abroad at that time.

suggest that it is Vertov who poses, in *The Man with a Movie Camera,* the conditions of such a transformation within cinema, sustaining as he does so the method and energies of both constructivism and Marxism. If this argument is sound, we can easily suppose that it was a shock of recognition, a shudder of remembrance and perhaps of reawakened aspiration long repressed, that elicited the bitter triviality of Eisenstein's attack—Eisenstein, the intellectually powerful and generous man we have seen beaming so disarmingly at Pudovkin, his old antagonist.

Vertov, born Denis Arkadyevich Kaufman in 1896, was the son of Jewish intellectuals of Bialystok, then Russian territory. His younger brothers, Mikhail and Boris, were later to work in the cinema. Mikhail was Denis's cameraman and later worked independently as a director. Boris, also a cameraman, emigrated to New York in 1940 by way of France, where he had shot *A Propos de Nice* (1929), *Taris* (1931), *Zéro de Conduite* (1933), and *L'Atalante* (1933) for Jean Vigo. Denis Kaufman studied music at the Bialystok Conservatory, interrupting his studies when obliged to flee with his parents from the invading German army. The family settled in Moscow. There, as a very young man, he began to write verse and science fiction. During this period of youthful literary activity between 1914 and 1916, he was impressed and influenced, like many of the artists and intellectuals of his generation, by futurism, and it was then that he adopted the pseudonym Dziga Vertov. In 1916 and 1917 he studied medicine in St. Petersburg. While pursuing his medical studies, Vertov began experiments with sound recording and assemblage, producing verbal montage structures.

In 1918 Vertov joined the Film Committee of the People's Commissariat of Public Education in Gnezdnikovsky Street in Moscow, becoming editor of the first newsreel programs produced by the Soviet Government: *Kinonedelia* ("Film-week"). It was here that he met his future wife and close collaborator, Elizaveta Svilova, at that time employed in cleaning and preserving film. In 1919 he worked as a war correspondent on the front near Tsaritsyn, reporting on the fighting against the counterrevolutionary White armies. In 1920, together with President Kalinin, he toured the battlefronts of southwest Russia on a propaganda train known as "The October Revolution," returning with a series of documentary films.

Vertov's *Kinopravda* ("Film-truth") films, named in honor of