21

SIEGFRIED KRACAUER

MONTAGE (1947)

In the grip of the existing paralysis, the German film-makers cultivated a species of films presenting a cross section of some sphere of reality. These films were even more characteristic of the stabilized period than the Pabst films, for their neutrality was the logical result of the cross-section principle itself. They would have upset their own rules if they had sided with any of the pros and cons they surveyed. They were the purest expression of New Objectivity on the screen. Their such-is-life mood overwhelmed whatever socialist sentiments played about in them.

The first German film of that kind was *Die Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkscheins* (*The Adventures of a Ten-Mark Note,* 1926), produced by Karl Freund for Fox Europe. Béla Balázs wrote the original script; he himself called the film a "cross section."[1] This picture of Berlin during the inflation consists of a number of episodes which record the capricious travels of a ten-mark note continually changing hands. Guided by it, the film meanders through the maze of those years, picking up otherwise unrelated characters, and glancing over such locales as a factory, a night café, a pawn-shop, the music room of a profiteer, an employment agency, a rag-picker's den and a hospital. According to Balázs, it is as if the plot "followed a thread that, connecting the dramatic junctions of the ways of Fate, leads across the texture of life."[2]

However, Balázs was not yet sufficiently bold, or indifferent, to substantiate his idea to the full. The documentary character of the cross-section pattern is blurred by its combination with a sentimental Berlin local drama concerning a worker and a factory girl. Like the Polish lovers in Griffith's *Isn't Life Wonderful*?, these two finally achieve one of those wooden cabins that spread all over the outskirts of Berlin, and, to complete their happiness, the ten-mark note returns to them. Its vagabondage not only serves to familiarize the audience with the infinite "texture of life," but also assumes the function of rounding out the local drama. That is, the succession of episodes results from two divergent tendencies, only one of which conforms to the cross-section principle, while the other obstructs it. This ambiguity of meaning explains why the allegedly purposeless adventures of the ten-mark note often give the impression of being concocted artificially. As if to reinforce the cross-section tendency, Berthold Viertel's

staging imbues street life with especial significance. "There is a fascinating shot of the villain sitting in the window of a café. Trams, buses and passers-by are reflected in the plate-glass. The city is intent on doing something."[3] The thread intersecting various regions of social life is bound to lead through the street.

Street scenes predominate in the prototype of all true German cross-section films: *Berlin, die Symphonie einer Grossstadt* (*Berlin, the Symphony of a Great City*, 1927). This most important film, a quota production of Fox Europe, was devised by Carl Mayer. About the time he stigmatized hypocrisy in his *Tartuffe*, Mayer recognized that the moment had come for him to turn from the externalization of inner processes to the rendering of externals, from freely constructed plots to plots discovered in the given material. Paul Rotha, a close friend of Mayer until the latter's death, reports on this symptomatic change of attitude: "Mayer was tiring of the restriction and artificiality of the studios. All these films had been wholly studio-made. Mayer lost interest in 'fictional invention' and wanted his stories to 'grow from reality.' In 1925, standing amid the whirling traffic of the Ufa Palast am Zoo, he conceived the idea of a City Symphony. He saw 'a melody of pictures' and began to write the treatment of *Berlin*."[4] It does not lessen Mayer's profound originality that under the influence of the spirit of Locarno this idea asserted itself in France as well. Cavalcanti's documentary film of Paris, *Rien Que Les Heures*, was released a few months before *Berlin*.[5]

Like Mayer, the cameraman Karl Freund was tired of the studio and its artifices, so he enthusiastically espoused Mayer's project and set out to shoot Berlin scenes with the voracious appetite of a man starved for reality. "I wanted to show everything," he himself relates in a revealing interview in 1939. "Men getting up to go to work, eating breakfast, boarding trams or walking. My characters were drawn from all the walks of life. From the lowest laborer to the bank president."[6] Freund knew that to such ends he would have to rely on candid-camera work. Craftsman that he was, he hypersensitized the stock film which was then on the market, so as to cope with poor lighting conditions, and moreover invented several contrivances to hide the camera while shooting.[7] He would drive in a half-enclosed truck with slots in the sides for the lens or he would walk about with the camera in a box that looked like an innocent suitcase. No one ever suspected that he was taking pictures. Asked at the end of the above-mentioned interview whether he considered candid photography an art, Freund answered, glowing with zeal: "It is the only type of photography that is really art. Why? Because with it one is able to portray *life*. These big negatives, now, where people smirk and grimace and pose. . . . Bah! That's not photography. But a very fast lens. Shooting life. Realism. Ah, that is photography in its purest form. . . ."[8]

Walter Ruttmann, who up to then had excelled in abstract films, edited the immense amount of material assembled by Freund and several other photographers. His sense of optical music made Ruttmann seem the right man to produce "a melody of pictures." He worked in close collaboration with the young composer Edmund Meisel, known for his interesting score for *Potemkin*. Meisel dreamed of synchronizing Ruttmann's visual symphony with a symphonic composition which might even be performed independently of the film. The role he reserved for the music was bound to strengthen the formal tendency of the editing.[9]

Ruttmann's *Berlin* is a cross section of a Berlin working day in late spring. Its opening sequence pictures the city at dawn: a night express arrives, and streets still void of human life seem the very counterpart of that limbo which the mind traverses between sleep and consciousness. Then the city awakens and stirs. Scores of workers set out for their factories; wheels begin

to turn; telephone receivers are lifted off. The passage devoted to the morning hours is filled with glimpses of window-dressings and typical street incidents. Noon: the poor, the wealthy and the animals in the zoo are seen eating their lunch and enjoying a short respite. Work is resumed, and a bright afternoon sun shines over crowded café terraces, newspaper vendors, a woman drowning herself. Life resembles a roller coaster. As the day fades, the machine wheels stop, and the business of relaxation begins. A kaleidoscopic arrangement of shots surveys all kinds of sports, a fashion show, and a few instances of boys meeting girls or trying to meet them. The last sequence amounts to a pleasure drive through nocturnal Berlin, luminous with ruthless neon lights. An orchestra plays Beethoven; the legs of girl dancers perform; Chaplin's legs stumble across a screen; two lovers, or rather two pairs of legs, make for the nearest hotel; and finally a true pandemonium of legs breaks loose: the six-day race going on and on without interruption.

"The film as Ruttmann made it," Rotha reports, "was far from Mayer's conception. Its surface approach was what Mayer had tried to avoid. He and Ruttmann agreed to differ."[10] This accounts for Mayer's early withdrawal from the production of *Berlin*. (His next enterprise—years before the appearance of river films in America and France—was a script narrating the story of the Danube. But this script was never produced.)

When Mayer criticized *Berlin* for its "surface approach," he may well have had in mind Ruttmann's method of editing. This method is tantamount to a "surface approach," inasmuch as it relies on the formal qualities of the objects rather than on their meanings. Ruttmann emphasizes pure patterns of movement.[11] Machine parts in motion are shot and cut in such a manner that they turn into dynamic displays of an almost abstract character. These may symbolize what has been called the "tempo" of Berlin; but they are no longer related to machines and their functions. The editing also resorts to striking analogies between movements or forms.[12] Human legs walking on the pavement are followed by the legs of cows; a sleeping man on a bench is associated with a sleeping elephant. In those cases in which Ruttmann furthers the pictorial development through specific content, he inclines to feature social contrasts. One picture unit connects a cavalcade in the Tiergarten with a group of women beating carpets; another juxtaposes hungry children in the street and opulent dishes in some restaurant. Yet these contrasts are not so much social protests as formal expedients. Like visual analogies, they serve to build up the cross section, and their structural function overshadows whatever significance they may convey.

In his use of "montage," Ruttmann seems to have been influenced by the Russians—to be more precise, by the Russian film director Dziga Vertov and his "Kino-eye" group.[13] Vertov, infatuated with every expression of real life, produced weekly newsreels of a special kind from the close of the Civil War on, and in about 1926 began to make feature-length films which still preserved a definite newsreel character. His intentions and Ruttmann's are much the same. Like Ruttmann, Vertov deems it essential to surprise life with the movie camera—the "Kino-eye." Like Ruttmann, he cuts his candid shots on the rhythmic movements inherent in them. Like Ruttmann, he is interested not in divulging news items, but in composing "optical music." His *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) can be considered a lyric documentary.[14]

Notwithstanding such an identity of artistic intentions, Ruttmann's *Berlin* carries a meaning that differs basically from the message Vertov's productions impart. This difference originates in a difference of given conditions: the two artists apply similar aesthetic principles to the rendering of dissimilar worlds. Vertov endeavors

to live up to Lenin's early demand that "the production of new films, permeated with communist ideas, reflecting Soviet actuality, must begin with newsreels."[15] He is the son of a victorious revolution, and the life his camera surprises is Soviet life—a reality quivering with revolutionary energies that penetrate its every element. This reality has a significant shape of its own. Ruttmann, on his part, focuses upon a society which has managed to evade revolution and now, under the stabilized Republic, is nothing but an unsubstantial conglomeration of parties and ideals. It is a shapeless reality, one that seems to be abandoned by all vital energies.

Ruttmann's film reflects this reality. The innumerable streets of *Berlin* resemble the studio-built thoroughfare of Grune's *The Street* in yielding an impression of chaos. Symbols of chaos that first emerged in the postwar films are here resumed and supplemented by other pertinent symbols. Conspicuous in this respect is a unit of successive shots combining a roller coaster, a rotating spiral in a shop window, and a revolving door. The many prostitutes among the passers-by also indicate that society has lost its balance. But no one any longer reacts vigorously against its chaotic condition. Another old motif called upon betrays the same lack of concern: the policeman who stops the traffic to guide a child safely across the street. Like the shots denoting chaos, this motif, which in earlier films served to emphasize authority as a redemption, is now simply part of the record—a fact among facts.

The excitement has gone. Indifference remains. That everybody is indifferent to his fellow men can be inferred from the formalization of social contrasts as well as from the repeated insertion of window-dressings with their monotonous rows of dolls and dummies. It is not as if these dummies were humanized; rather, human beings are forced into the sphere of the inanimate. They seem molecules in a stream of matter. In the Ufa brochure on contemporary *Kulturfilme*, one finds the following description of industrial documentaries: "Blast furnaces . . . emit . . . fire vapors, . . . white-hot iron pours into molds, material is torn, material is compressed, material is milled, material is polished, material becomes an expression of our time."[16] People in *Berlin* assume the character of material not even polished. Used-up material is thrown away. To impress this sort of doom upon the audience, gutters and garbage cans appear in close-up, and as in *The Street* waste paper is seen littering the pavement. The life of society is a harsh, mechanical process.

Only here can the difference between Ruttmann and Vertov be fully grasped: it is a difference of attitude. Vertov's continued survey of everyday life rests upon his unqualified acceptance of Soviet actuality. He himself is part of a revolutionary process which arouses passions and hopes. In his lyric enthusiasm, Vertov stresses formal rhythms but without seeming indifferent to content. His cross sections are "permeated with communist ideas" even when they picture only the beauty of abstract movements.

Had Ruttmann been prompted by Vertov's revolutionary convictions, he would have had to indict the inherent anarchy of Berlin life. He would have been forced to emphasize content rather than rhythm. His penchant for rhythmic "montage" reveals that he actually tends to avoid any critical comment on the reality with which he is faced. Vertov implies content; Ruttmann shuns it. This reluctance to appraise content is entirely consistent with his obvious delight in the "tempo" of Berlin and the *marche des machines*.[17] Tempo is a formal quality, and the socialist optimism that may manifest itself in the machine cult is nothing more than a vague "reformist illusion." Here is why Mayer called *Berlin* a "surface approach." He did not object to formal editing as such; what he condemned was Ruttmann's formal attitude towards a reality

that cried out for criticism, for interpretation. To be sure, Mayer was no revolutionary like Vertov; but he had a pronounced sense of the humane. It is hardly imaginable that he would have misused social contrasts as pictorial transitions, or recorded increasing mechanization without objectifying his horror of it.

Ruttmann's rhythmic "montage" is symptomatic of a withdrawal from basic decisions into ambiguous neutrality. This explains the difference between *Berlin* and the street films. Whereas *Berlin* refrains from idealizing the street, such films as *Asphalt* and *Tragedy of the Street* praise it as the refuge of true love and justified rebellion. These films are like dreams called forth by the paralyzed authoritarian dispositions for which no direct outlet is left. *Berlin* is the product of the paralysis itself.

A few contemporary critics identified it as such. In 1928, I stated in *Frankfurter Zeitung*: "Ruttmann, instead of penetrating his immense subject-matter with a true understanding of its social, economic and political structure . . ., records thousands of details without connecting them, or at best connects them through fictitious transitions which are void of content. His film may be based upon the idea of Berlin as the city of tempo and work; but this is a formal idea which does not imply content either and perhaps for that very reason intoxicates the German petty bourgeoisie in real life and literature. This symphony fails to point out anything, because it does not uncover a single significant context."[18]

Berlin inaugurated the vogue of cross-section, or "montage," films.[19] They could be produced at low cost; and they offered a gratifying opportunity of showing much and revealing nothing. Several films of that kind utilized stock material. One of them summarized the career of Henny Porten (1928); a second, similarly produced by Ufa, extracted love episodes from old movies (*Rund um die Liebe*, 1929); a third was the *Kulturfilm Die Wunder der Welt* (*Miracles of the Universe*, 1929), a patchwork of various explorer films.[20]

Of greater interest were two cross-section films which, after the manner of *Berlin*, reported actual life through an assemblage of documentary shots. In *Markt am Wittenbergplatz* (*Street Markets in Berlin*, 1929), Wilfried Basse used the stop-motion camera to condense the lengthy procedure of erecting tents and stands to a few seconds. It was neat and unpretentious pictorial reportage, a pleasing succession of such characteristic details as bargaining housewives, stout market women, glittering grapes, flower displays, horses, lazy onlookers, and scattered debris. The whole amounted to a pointless statement on colorful surface phenomena. Its inherent neutrality is corroborated by Basse's indifference to the change of political atmosphere under Hitler. In 1934, as if nothing had happened, he released *Deutschland von Gestern und Heute*, a cross-section film of German cultural life which also refused "to penetrate beneath the skin."[21]

Shortly after this market film, another more important bit of reportage appeared: *Menschen am Sonntag* (*People on Sunday*). Eugen Shuftan, Robert Siodmak, Edgar Ullmer, Billy Wilder, Fred Zinnemann, and Moritz Seeler collaborated in the production of this late silent film. Its success may have been due to the convincing way it pictured a province of life rarely noticed until then. A salesgirl, a traveling salesman, an extra, and a chauffeur are the film's main characters. On Sunday, they leave their dreary homes for one of the lakes near Berlin, and there are seen bathing, cooking, lying about on the beach, making futile contacts with each other and people like them. This is about all. But it is significant inasmuch as all the characters involved are lesser employees. At that time, the white-collar workers had turned into a political factor. They were wooed by the Nazis as well as the Social

Democrats, and the whole domestic situation depended upon whether they would cling to their middle-class prejudices or acknowledge their common interests with the working class.

People on Sunday is one of the first films to draw attention to the plight of the "little man." In one sequence, a beach photographer is busy taking pictures which then appear within the film itself. They are inserted in such a way that it is as if the individuals photographed suddenly became motionless in the middle of an action.[22] As long as they move they are just average individuals; having come to a standstill, they appear to be ludicrous products of mere chance. While the stills in Dovzhenko's films serve to disclose the significance of some face or inanimate object, these snapshots seem designed to demonstrate how little substance is left to lower middle-class people. Along with shots of deserted Berlin streets and houses, they corroborate what has been said above of the spiritual vacuum in which the mass of employees actually lived.[23] However, this is the sole revelation to be elicited from a film which on the whole proves as noncommittal as the other cross-section films. Kraszna-Krausz states of it: "Melancholic observation. Not less, not more."[24] And Béla Balázs points out the "fanaticism for facts" animating *People on Sunday* and its like, and then comes to the conclusion: "They bury their meaning in an abundance of facts."[25]

NOTES

1. Balázs, "Der Film sucht seinen Stoff," *Die Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkscheins*, and Balázs, *Der Geist des Films*, p. 86.
2. Balázs, "Der Film sucht seinen Stoff," *Die Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkscheins*.
3. Quoted from Blakeston, "The Adventures of a Ten-Mark Note," *Close Up*, Nov. 1928, pp. 59–60.
4. Rotha, "It's in the Script," *World Film News*, Sept. 1938, p. 205.
5. Cf. Rotha, *Documentary Film*, pp. 87–88; *Film Society Programme*, March 4, 1928.
6. Evans, "Karl Freund, Candid Cinematographer," *Popular Photography*, Feb. 1939, p. 51.
7. Evans, ibid., pp. 51, 88–89; Blakeston, "Interview with Carl Freund," *Close Up*, Jan. 1929, pp. 60–61.
8. Evans, ibid., p. 89.
9. *Film Society Programme*, March 4, 1928; Meisel, "Wie schreibt man Filmmusik," *Ufa-Magazin*, April 1–7, 1927. For Ruttmann's other films during that period, see *Film Society Programme*, May 8, 1927.
10. Rotha, "It's in the Script," *World Film News*, Sept. 1938, p. 205.
11. Cf. *Film Society Programme*, Jan. 18, 1929.
12. Balázs, *Der Geist des Films*, p. 59. For other devices in *Berlin*, see Arnheim, *Film als Kunst*, p. 98, and Rotha, *Film Till Now*, p. 295.
13. Rotha, *Documentary Film*, p. 89; Potamkin, "The Rise and Fall of the German Film," *Cinema*, April 1980, p. 25.
14. Vertov, "Dziga Vertov on Film Technique," prefaced by Moussinac, "Introduction," *Filmfront*, Jan. 28, 1985, pp. 7–9. For Vertov and "montage" in Russian films and in *Berlin*, see Pudovkin, *Film Technique*, pp. 188–89; Richter, "Ur-Kino," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, April 2, 1940; Balázs, *Der Geist des Films*, pp. 57–58, 89, 94–95; Brody, "Paris hears Eisenstein," *Close Up*, April 1930, pp. 283–89.
15. Quoted from Leyda, *Program Notes*, Series VII, program 2.
16. Cf. p. 142, and also "30 Kulturfilme," *Ufa-Leih*.
17. Rotha, *Film Till Now*, p. 283.
18. Kracauer, "Der heutige Film und sein Publikum," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Dec. 1, 1928, Rotha, *Documentary Film*, p. 161, comments on *Berlin* in about the same way.
19. Cf. Potamkin, "The Rise and Fall of the German Film," *Cinema*, April 1930, p. 25.
20. Cf. Kraszna-Krausz, "The Querschnitt film," *Close Up*, Nov. 1928, p. 27; "Rund um die Liebe," *Film-Magazin*, Jan. 27, 1929; Stenhouse, "The World on Film," *Close Up*, May 1930, pp. 417–18.
21. Quoted from Rotha, *Documentary Film*, p. 121. For *Street Markets in Berlin*, see *Film Society Programme*, May 4, 1930; Arnheim, *Film als Kunst*, p. 123; Balázs, *Der Geist des Films*, pp. 106–7.
22. Arnheim, *Film als Kunst*, p. 140.
23. Cf. p. 131 f.
24. Kraszna-Krausz, "Production, Construction, Hobby," *Close Up*, April 1930, p. 318.
25. Balázs, *Der Geist des Films*, p. 202.

22

ANNETTE MICHELSON

THE MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA

From Magician to Epistemologist (1972)

This introductory essay on the cinema of Dziga Vertov, one of four intended as a section in a critical reconsideration of Soviet cinema between 1920 and the death of Eisenstein, is offered in grateful and affectionate tribute to P. Adams Sitnev, whose intelligence, energy, and wit have been a constant stimulation during my past three years of intensive involvement with the subject. The convergence and divergences of our thinking make for a complementarity of approach I especially value. I think, in particular, of the manner in which his own preoccupation with and knowledge of classical rhetoric, far exceeding my own, have—in the form of conversation, lectures, and in essays yet unpublished—sharpened, confirmed, or corrected, views only embryonically my own at the time.

I should like to thank both Mr. Sitney and Jonas Mekas, as directors of the Anthology Film Archives, for the courtesy of special screenings which helped in the preparation of this particular essay.

The Film Department of the Museum of Modem Art has, for these past three years, made it possible to teach Soviet film in the pleasantest of circumstances and to use their rich archive. For this opportunity and for the patient cooperation of Mr. Arthur Steiger, their projectionist, I am grateful.

***

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

The photograph will instruct us of the general contours of an heroic era, projecting the topography of a culture which engendered that which we now know to

FIGURE 22.1 The All-Union Conference of Workers in Soviet Cinematography, 1935.

be, in more than any vaguely metaphorical sense, a "language of cinema." The placing of these men, their attitudes, the trajectories of glances offered, exchanged, deflected, describe the interplay of character and sensibility which articulates a grand collective aspiration. This picture is an historic text; it demands a reading, in every which way: across, up, down, around, all the way through.

In the first row, subtending as it were, the presence and efforts of men such as Raisman, Trauberg, Romm, Donskoi, Yutkevitch, Beck-Nazarov, who form a second rank, are four elder masters: Pudovkin, Eisenstein, Tissé, Dovjenko—prime animators of revolutionary cinema's first dozen years or so. The man peering at top left over the heads of his intermediary colleagues and just coming into view, smiling—as well he might—is Vassiliev who, together with his brother, has produced the film whose easy narrative flow and psychological inflection of a revolutionary hagiography has taken that year's honors and the most general official assent. Its success, and his, hover premonitorily in the air of this assembly, thickening it almost irrespirably with ironies and ambiguities.

Eisenstein, the session's embattled Chairman, known to friends in the authority of his achievement and international reputation—and the dignity of his thirty-seven years—as "The Old Man," sits in the center of the first row. He's clutching a briefcase containing, one would think, the elaborate notes and bibliography for an opening address whose brilliance, irony, and controlled intellectual pathos were to bring his listeners to a pitch of fury, releasing from these talented and pressured men, a massive and concerted lynching. He is for this moment, however, alive with a characteristic smile of generous delight in a colleague's success, attending wholly to the man standing at the left and half turned

from us in an attitude of entirely graceful vivacity. This man is Pudovkin, and like the gifted and disciplined actor we know him in the widest range of film roles to be, he is at work charming and diverting the assembly.

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 action past the camera, through rather than towards things. It "pierces," as we say. Then, at an angle almost perpendicular to that gaze, as if far to the left, but, so far as one can see, looking at nothing in particular, travels another glance. It is Dovjenko's. He is, as in all his pictures, beautiful; he rests, slightly slouched in an abandon of meditation, his person half-encircled by the sweep of Tissé's arm. Tissé's pure focused gaze and Dovjenko's stare would seem—if this were possible—to cross but nowhere to meet. And this might be because indeed one is a stare, the other a gaze. Tissé's eyes, looking out upon the world, embrace another virtual scene somewhere between our space and his. Dovjenko's look seems recollected back into itself. He smiles slightly—again as if to himself.

The juniors are involved in a general contraposto of body and focus whose traces will produce a tangle that must drive a reader to distraction—or to pedantry. Eisenstein's eyes, though fixed upon the moving object, must see Pudovkin, his old adversary who has been, in fact, addressing himself just slightly past him to that tangle of the general assembly. . . .

Two men, however, are missing from this dialectical icon. Kuleshov, the pioneer of montage and once the teenage teacher of these men, is nowhere to be seen. We do nevertheless know him to have spoken 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 conflicts and realignments by the second; 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. Vertov could have, as we shall see, no place in this picture.

We do, of course, have pictures of him, and the really speaking likeness is one which has him arrested in mid-air, leaping or pirouetting, delivering him to us as a body in violent movement, immobilized in what the stilled presence of motion suggests might be a "frame." It projects the preoccupation spelled out in the pseudonym which replaced, at the very threshold of his working life, the family name of Denis Kaufman. Dziga Vertov, translated, is "Spinning Top." That photograph, taken in maturity, is of course the late image of these early thoughts:

> Nineteen-eighteen. I moved to Gnezdnikovsky No. 7.
>
> Did a risky jump for a slow-motion camera.
>
> Didn't recognize my face on the screen.
>
> My thoughts were revealed on my face—irresolution, vacillation and firmness (a struggle within myself), and again the joy of victory.
>
> First thought of the Kino-Eye as a world perceived without a mask, as a world of naked truth (that cannot be hidden).[3]

That "world of naked truth" is, in fact, the space upon which epistemological inquiry and the cinematic consciousness converge in dialectical mimesis. And Vertov is its 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 none the less in turn derived."[4]

The evolution of his work, and of the master work with which I'm now concerned, renders insistently concrete, as in another dialectical icon, that philosophical phantasm of the reflexive consciousness, the eye seeing, apprehending itself through its constitution of the world's visibility.

We are dealing certainly with a very special case, a film with a forty-year history of the most generally distrustful and hostile reception and of systematic critical neglect. The hostility and distrust are not, of course, unique, but the sustained neglect, the shared distrust and bewilderment of some generally perceptive and qualified spectators, the totally evasive and inadequate literature on *The Man with the Movie Camera* give us pause. Soviet film is, after all, one of the most elaborately and swiftly documented and consecrated areas in the history of the medium. It's true, of course, that much remains to be done and to be redone, to be rescued from the damaging mold of piety, but the absence of close and serious attention makes this film something of a very special case. Shoved hastily and distractedly into the ashcan of film history, it has been left to tick away, through four decades, like a time bomb.

Here is one contemporary judgment of the film, published in the December, 1931, issue of *Close-Up*, two years after the initial release in the Soviet Union. Offered by Jay Leyda as a focus for the film's presentation in *Kino*, it is an excellent index of general reaction.

> Theorists mostly love their theories more than a father loves an only child. . . . Vertov also has waged fierce, vehement and desperate battles with his material 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* (italics mine) 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]

This rhetoric and imagery, though interesting, are not my immediate concern. The judgment most significantly echoes that of Eisenstein, and in a manner which induces reflection on one of the most interesting and knotty critical issues in Soviet film history and esthetics: the relation between Eisenstein and Vertov. For Eisenstein, *The Man with the 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 *The Fall of the House of Usher*. It's compared, rather, with that which had been reported of Epstein's film in the press, since Eisenstein admits, in what must have been an impatient afterthought, that he had not yet seen the film! Attempting to account for the naked and disingenuous belligerency of those remarks,[6] one recalls Eisenstein's late strictures on his own first mature work, the film closest in style and tone to Vertov's. *Strike* he professed to see, from the vantage point of maturity, as infected with "the childhood disease of leftism," a metaphor for esthetic formalism borrowed from Leninist polemical literature.

But here is a third view, that of Leyda himself, our 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 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 Parisian Cinemathèque confirms his initial impressions of brilliance.

Now all these texts deserve a closer reading than I shall give them: they raise problems directly or implicitly of all sorts: historiographic, stylistic, esthetic, political. Leyda's estimation of the nature of Vertov's development from *Kino-Eye* on, the precise similarities and differences of style between earlier and later films demand revision, but the films demand a finer, closer reading than anyone could at that time give. *The Man with the Movie Camera* was simply unavailable for study within the Eastern zone. Yet here is a film, available for rental in this country from a major distributor of 16 millimeter work, and obviously, for all practical critical purposes, just as "unavailable." That double circumstance tells us that its author does indeed inhabit another space: it is an index of its strangeness as a filmic object.

Thinking again of Eisenstein, one is led to inquire whether Vertov's masterwork does not constitute a redefinition of that "intellectual cinema" which had so haunted Eisenstein's imagination. We know that his career produced not only an oeuvre, but that shadow oeuvre of unrealized projects, its poles defined by the projected filmic versions of *Capital* and of Joyce's *Ulysses*. One might, in fact, see them as positing a shift from the articulation of a comprehensive and dialectical view of the world to the exploration of the terrain of consciousness itself. I will suggest that it is Vertov who effects that shift, and who maps that terrain in *The Man with the Movie Camera*. Suggesting that, I then suppose that only a shock of recognition, a shudder of remembrance and perhaps of reawakened aspiration long repressed, could elicit this bitter triviality from the intellectually powerful and generous man we've watched beaming so disarmingly at Pudovkin, his old antagonist.

Vertov begins his career in 1919 with a death verdict pronounced on all motion pictures made until then. He is making no exceptions and redefines cinema as capturing "the feel of the world" through the substitution of the camera, that "perfectible eye," for the human eye, that "imperfectible one." For Vertov, then, the distinction or conflict between what was known as the "art film" and any other kind of cinema then

being made was totally without meaning. He relocated the frontier between mimesis and "the feel of the world," recalling to us Shklovsky's command: "We must recover the world; we live as if coated with rubber." So too, in the preparation of *Enthusiasm*, his first sound film, he entirely redefined the problems and possibilities created by the new parameter, shifting the focus of research from the borderline separating synchronous and asynchronous sound to that which distinguishes the fictive from the evidential, the composed from the concrete.

Vertov's disdain of the mimetic, his concern with technique and process, with their extensions and revelation, stamp him as a member of the Constructivist generation. The shared ideological concern with the role of his art as the agent of human perfectibility, of a social transformation which issues in a transformation of consciousness in the most complete and intimate sense, the certainty of accession to that "world of naked truth" are grounded in the acceptance, the affirmation of, the radically synthetic quality of film-making in the stylistics of montage.

> *Kino-Eye* is a victory against time. It is a visual link between phenomena separated from one another in time. *Kino-Eye* gives a condensation of time, and also its decomposition.
>
> . . . *Kino-Eye* avails itself of all the current means of recording ultra-rapid motion, microcinematography, reverse motion, multiple exposure, foreshortening, etc., and does not consider these as tricks, but as normal processes of which wide use must be made.
>
> *Kino-Eye* makes use of all the resources of montage, drawing together and linking the various points of the universe in a chronological or anachronistic order as one wills, by breaking, if necessary, with the laws and customs of the construction of cine-thing.
>
> In introducing itself into the apparent chaos of life, the *Kino-Eye* tries to find in life itself an answer to the question it poses; to find the correct and necessary line among the millions of phenomena which relate to the theme.[8]

The montage style, a refinement and extension of the heritage of Griffith and Kuleshov, was original in the intensity of its refinement and in the imaginative power of that extension to every parameter of the cinema. For Vertov, as for Eisenstein—inheritors, as well, of the last great philosophical system of the West—the responsibilities implicit in this double birthright were felt as weighty and imperious. As Bazin was later to hypostasize his ontology of film into an ontology of existential freedom (rejecting, as he did so, the "tricks" of montage), so for the prime theorists of Soviet cinema, montage thinking became "inseparable from dialectical thinking as a whole." The process of intellection elicited in the experience of the montage unit is thus hypostasized into the triadic rehearsal of the dialectic.

To survey or somewhat more concretely to grasp the sense in which Vertov shares the concerns and strategies of Constructivism, one does best, I think, to defer thinking about his employment of Gans and Rodchenko as collaborators and to consider rather—initially, at least—the possible relation of this particular filmic object to another object of the period, as strange and bewildering in its time, as controversial—though not, of course, as universally condemned. This is Tatlin's model for *The Monument for the Third International* made, as Shklovsky remarked, of "iron, glass and revolution."

I have, in quite another context, discussed the manner in which Tatlin, caught in the dialectic of the "esthetic" and the "functional," moves into the real space of function while preserving the esthetic character of sculpture, thereby initiating a

movement of transgression, bewildering in the extreme to its beholders and manifest in contradictions and ambiguities of the contemporary debate over the nature and qualities of the *Monument*.[9] Confronting this work, those beholders produced a map of intellectual life in the Soviet Union of the early '20s: Punin sees it as functional, as an "organic synthesis of the principles of architecture, sculpture, and painting"; Ehrenberg, as an expression of the dynamic tomorrow, surrounded by the poverty of the present. For Trotsky, it is a nonfunctional intrusion, a luxury in the devastated city of the immediately postrevolutionary period, and for Shklovsky, of course, a formal structure with its own immanent logic, its own semantics.

This triadic structure, multifunctional in design, turning at three different and simultaneous speeds (encompassing the full temporal scale of day, month, and year), receiving and emitting information, bulletins and manifestos, projecting film from a screen and writing weather forecasts in light upon the heavens, is "based," as Malevich remarked, "upon the Cubist formula" as much as *The Man with the Movie Camera* is grounded in the technique of montage.[10] Both structures propose an hyperbolic intensification of those techniques, insisting upon the materiality of the object and upon its architectonics as the core of interest. It is for these reasons and perhaps insofar as both structures do, in their polyvalence and circularity, more literally revolve about a core, that they seem—in a common movement of transgression—to converge upon the definition of a style, a program, a "semantics" of construction. And here is Vertov's adumbration of a "culture of materials":

> To make a montage is to organize pieces of film, which we call the frames, into a cine-thing. It means to write something cinematic with the recorded shots. It does not mean to select pieces, to make "scenes" (deviations of a theatrical character), nor does it mean to arrange pieces according to subtitles (deviations of a literary character).
>
> Every Kino-Eye production is mounted on the very day that the subject (theme) is chosen, and this work ends only with the launching of the film into circulation in its definitive form. In other words, montage takes place from the beginning to the end of production.[11]

Vertov then proceeds, in this second lecture on *Kino-Eye*, to articulate the stages of montage production involved in "Evaluation of Documents," "directly or indirectly related to the chosen theme (manuscripts, various objects, film clippings, photographs, newspaper clippings, books), the plan of shots which is the focus of Montage Synthesis, and General Montage, the synthesis of the observations noted on the film under the direction of the machine-eye. Proceeding to the discussion of composition through organization of "intervals," upon the movement between frames and the proportions of these pieces as they relate to one another, taking into account relations of planes (small and large), relations of foreshortenings, relations of movements within the frame of each piece, relations of lights and shades, relations of speeds of recording. This theory, which has been called the "theory of intervals" was launched by the *kinoks* in their manifesto *WE*, written as early as 1919. In practice, this theory was most brilliantly illustrated in *The Eleventh Year* and especially in *The Man with the Movie Camera*.''[12]

And

> All who love their art seek the essence of technique to show that the eye does not see—to show truth, the microscope and telescope of time, the negative of time, the possibility of seeing without frontiers or distances; the tele-eye, sight in spontaneity, a kind of *Communist decoding of reality*. Almost all art film workers were enemies of the Kinoks. This was normal;

> it meant they would have to reconsider their *métier*. *Kino-Pravda* was made with materials as a house is built with bricks.

In 1924, Vertov made the film we know as *Kino-Glaz* or *Kino-Eye*, the first of a projected series. The *Kino-Pravda* series, his first major work, had involved him for some years in the production of short documents or newsreels on the widest variety of themes. *Kino-Glaz* is a didactic work, centered on episodes which articulate major preoccupations of the young Soviet regime: it deals with the manufacture and distribution of bread, the processing and distribution of meat, celebrates the constructions of youth camps, and discusses the problem of alcoholism.

Kino-Glaz is going to interest us especially (my own first viewing of it came some years after I had come to know some of Vertov's mature work, much after my sense of the dynamics at work in *The Man with the Movie Camera*, so that my experience of it was primarily as a stage in the evolution of those dynamics as of something fitting, as with a final click, into place). It introduces Vertov's formal adoption of the articulation of filmmaking technique as his subject. It begins, as well, to suggest what we may understand by "the negative of time" as a key "to the Communist decoding of reality." Looking for the negative of time, we find it in the use of reverse motion as analytic strategy.

It is near the beginning of *Kino-Glaz* that we first see a peasant woman on her way to the market to buy meat. We next see her, walking backwards, propelled by the reversal of that sequence, whence she came. The processing and distribution of meats is then recapitulated in reverse, as well.

Here are the numbered intertitles of that:

23. Kino-Eye pushes time backwards
24. Only to meat market and freezer
25. Beef 20 seconds ago
26. Beef gets its intestines back
27. Skin is returned to him
28. Resurrection of the bull

And later in the film, from a Pioneer's diary, title 64: "If time went backwards the bread would return to the bakery." And the film then continues with a recapitulation of bread distribution and manufacture.

It is, however, essential that we note the sequence separating these two recapitulations in reverse action: it is entirely devoted to the presentation of a magician, and its intertitles read as follows:

56. Film Eye about a Chinese magician
57. Gui Yuan works for his bread
58. Behold
59. Observe, observe, the whole hand
60. Observe the hand, observe the hole
61. Nothing—nothing
62. Now, make one live mouse

The transition, then, between the two reversals of action is the image of the magician. Vertov is presenting him, of course, as a worker, someone who earns his bread by the creation of illusion, that worker whose prestidigitation is perhaps closest in effect to that of the filmmaker. We shall meet with the magician once again in the paradigmatically reflexive film in which the processes of filmmaking, editing, and projection will be revealed and assimilated, through constant and elaborate parallel montage, to the processes and functions of labor. If the filmmaker is, like the magician, a manufacturer of illusions, he can, unlike the prestidigitator and in the interests of instruction of a heightening of consciousness, destroy illusion by that other transcendentally magical procedure, the reversal of time by the inversion of action. He can develop as it were, "the negative of time" for "the Communist decoding of reality." This thematic interplay of magic, illusion, labor, filmic techniques, and strategy, articulating a theory of film as epistemological inquiry is the complex central core around which Vertov's greatest work develops. I want, therefore, to

suggest that *Kino-Glaz* directly articulates in a remarkably subtle and complex manner a polemical statement made the very same year. Extracted from the stenographic record of his speech made during a colloquium on Art and Everyday Life, it was published for the first time in Moscow in 1966.

> We raise our protest against the collusion of the director as enchanter with the public submissive to enchantment.
>
> Only consciousness can fight the sway of magic.
>
> Only consciousness can form a man of firm opinion and solid conviction.
>
> We need conscious men, not an unconscious mass submissive to any passing suggestion.
>
> Long live the class consciousness of healthy men with eyes and ears to see and hear with.
>
> Away with the perfumed veil of kisses, murder, doves and prestidigitation.
>
> Long live the class vision.
>
> Long live the cinema eye.

Reverse motion, first used in *Kino-Glaz* to illuminate process, will come to occupy a privileged place in a work dedicated to the creation of a dialectically inflected consciousness. It will, in fact, develop into the most personally characteristic and central visual tropes of Vertov's mature work, the formal pivot of his epistemological discourse. That development is, in its complexity and coherence, unique within the history of film. Turning, for some analogous example of the strength and organicity with which that central trope will infuse his mature work, one reaches for the complex image clusters which articulate the later plays of Shakespeare.

The notion of film as language, the concern with the linguistic aspects and analogues of film structure, is, as we know, one of the dominant characteristics of Soviet filmmakers and theoreticians of the heroic period. The hyperbolic intensification and growth of montage style with its attendant metaphoric thrust, the manner in which film after film—from *Strike* through Trauberg's *China Express*—tends towards the elaboration of a central metaphoric cluster, testifies to the importance and the depth of a concern natural in men living close to the sources of modern linguistics and of formalist criticism, close to the work of Shklovsky, Brik, Jakobson. And it is, of course, a sure sign of the times that Eisenstein's sustained concern with these problems, his attempt to extend and refine upon earlier formulations in the light of recent anthropological studies, should have triggered the fury of the Conference of 1935.

The Man with the Movie Camera is, among other things, a massive testimonial to this concern, sharing, hyperbolizing the use of metaphor, simile, synecdoche, rhyming images, parataxis and incurring, above all, the reproach of gramatical inconsistency, one might better term a strategic use of anacolutha.

The trope developed in *Kino-Glaz*, quintessential in the evolution of Vertov's style, flowering in the film of 1929, is the cinematic embodiment through reversal technique of the figure of speech known in classical rhetoric as hysteron proteron, that figure by which what should come last is put first, positioning or arranging things in the reverse of their natural or rational order. (An example, extracted from the *Oxford Shorter Dictionary* and therefore properly biblical, is: "Take ye, eat ye, this is my body": the injunction to eat preceding the presentation of the substance, its condition. Another would be Enobarbus' description in Act III, scene 8, of *Antony and Cleopatra*: "Th'Antoniad, the Egyptian admiral, with all their sixty, fly, and turn the rudder.") Action

reversed, then, "the negative of time" will function as a prime agent of Vertov's structural and conceptual projects. We shall be seeing its consummate development in the admitted dazzlement of *The Man with the Movie Camera*.

Something of great moment was, however, to occur between the making of the two films. Vertov saw in April of 1926, the first film of the young René Clair, *Paris Qui Dort* (known in this country as *The Crazy Ray*), and the experience was upsetting. He records in his journal the mixed feelings it elicited, the sense of delight mixed with the exasperation felt upon encountering the work one wanted—one had indeed planned—to make one's self.

Paris Qui Dort is a film about a rather amiably mad scientist who immobilizes all of Paris in a trance of sleep with a magical paralyzing ray machine. Only the handsome young guard of the Eiffel Tower and his guests—an airplane pilot and four passengers—and the scientist's pretty daughter are exempt, through the altitude of the tower to which the ray cannot penetrate. The last quarter of this charming work is animated by the series of variations played, in a shower of gentle gags, upon the basic techniques of stop-motion, acceleration, deceleration, animation. The sustained climax, involving the subjection of an entire city to the erratic control of the ray is extraordinary. A sort of electric charge or thrill is produced by the instants of freeze and of release. This, of course, is the aspect of filmic experience most characteristic of moviola or editing-machine experience of film, and one most stubbornly resistant to the effort of verbal description. It is in so far as Clair and Vertov are engaged in the direct manipulation of filmic process that their finest work resists description. To describe a movement is difficult; to describe the instant of arrest and of release reversal, of movement, is something else again; it is to confront that thrill on the deepest level of filmic enterprise, to recognize the privileged character of the medium as being in itself the promise of an incomparable, an unhoped for, grasp upon the nature of causality.

These instants of complex magic—Clair's arrest of boats in their slow cruising on the Seine (slow to the point of being rendered visibly in motion *through* that arrest), the paralysis and vivification of whole city crowds, the resuscitation of figures frozen, unsupported in a slouch of sleep—all deserve their Ode, must have, in any case, an essay of their own. . . .

Remarkable in *Paris Qui Dort* are the quality and aspect of the Parisian streets, intimately reminiscent of the photographs Atget would continue to make until his death in 1927 and of which Walter Benjamin remarked:

> It has quite justly been said of [Atget] that he photographed [the streets of Paris] like scenes of crime. The scene of a crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences and acquire a hidden political significance. They demand a specific kind of approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to them. They stir the viewer; he feels challenged by them in a new way. At the same time picture magazines begin to put up signposts for him, right ones or wrong ones, no matter. For the first time, captions have become obligatory. And it is clear that they have an altogether different character than the title of a painting. The directives which the captions give to those looking at pictures in illustrated magazines soon become even more explicit and more imperative in the film, where the meaning of each single

> picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones.[13]

Those deserted streets will reappear in the opening section of *The Man with the Movie Camera*, the greatest of the "city documentaries," the silent film from which Vertov resolutely excluded titles. Atget's concern with the space of places and of objects and with the virtual spaces and images of reflection will also reappear in Vertov's shops and their display windows. And the window pane will be the plane on and through which, in reflection, the space outside, of city landscape and its figures will be confounded with the space inside and its mannequins. Vertov will carry the conceit of the glass as both camera and projector to its dazzling extreme in a sequence in which the glass of a revolving door will project, in its swing of 180 degrees, its panning image of the neighborhood surrounding it.

Vertov had planned to make a film of *Moscow Asleep* two years prior to his encounter with the Clair film, and of course that general idea is rendered in the opening shots of Odessa, her streets empty, her shutters and blinds opening, her machinery set in motion as her people stir to life again in the morning. Both Vertov and Clair do build to a finale through a coda of Rossini-like acceleration. Clair's scientist, however, with his endearingly simple, freaky-looking little machine, irresistibly suggests to us, as well he might to Vertov, a metaphor for the movie maker and his camera, an invention roughly the contemporary of both the tower itself and that other dream machine, the aeroplane. It remained, then, for Vertov to draw the conclusion of which that metaphor is a sort of premise, to work out, as it were, the consequences of that insight.

Supposing this, I will suppose as well that the encounter with *Paris Qui Dort* was more than frustrating; it was catalytic, sharpening and confirming Vertov's epistemological orientation stimulating the more systematic deployment of the filmic techniques and strategies. The multiple themes of *The Man with the Movie Camera*—the life of man from birth through marriage and death, the progress of a day, the making and projection of a film—will be articulated not only through the use of metaphor, synecdoche, simile, comparison, rhyming images, but through the freeze-frame, acceleration, split-frame, superimposition, all the "anomalies'' of his own inventory, and many more.

The result, articulated most powerfully through the presentation of the filmmaking editing and projection process, is a revelation, an exposure of the terms and dynamics of cinematic illusionism. And this it is—and not the speed, complexity, formal virtuosity, "obscurity,"—that produced the shock, the scandal, the bewilderment in its beholders. It is the manner in which Vertov questions the most immediately powerful and sacred aspect of cinematic experience, disrupting systematically the process of identification and participation, generating at each moment of the film's experience, a *crisis of belief*. In a sense most subtle and complex, he was, Bazin to the contrary, one of those directors "who put their faith in the image"; that faith was, however, accorded to the image seen, recognized as *an image* and the condition of that faith or recognition, the consciousness, the subversion *through* consciousness, of cinematic illusionism.

Thirty years after the invention of the medium, four years after Eisenstein's inaugural master-work of the Revolutionary period,[14] Vertov had produced a film which, taking cinematic consciousness as its theme, defined in a stroke the outermost limits of his art, that art par excellence of this century and its revolution. How many bold and innovative filmic enterprises by gifted and energetic men might not look somewhat conservative, if not regressive, in comparison? Vertov had thus produced an impossible situation, a situation hardly to be borne. Or to be borne only in the rigidity of shock, dealt with through the reflex of

exclusion, the cri du coeur which speaks the idiom of invective.

We now want, however, a closer view of Vertov's work, some knowledge of his strategies. Here is a brief and partial inventory:

1. *The continual reminder of the presence of the screen as a surface*. As in the repeated, simultaneous movement into the depth of its illusionist projection and out towards the spectator of the trams, a kind of push-and-pull which coexist in a virtual stasis, and neutralizing one another, tend to pull one's eye back to the screen's surface, their point of encounter.

2. *The intrusion of animation techniques into the action*. Our magician appears once more, but suddenly, as if conjured up by another magician, another magic. This apparition is followed by another, that of carrousel horses quickly coming into view on the carrousel which has been presented without them. We then see a trick of magic performed by animation of inanimate objects. The magician's appurtenances are animated by the filmmaker, who has taken the magician's place or function. After this, the layout of a poster, performed by animation magic, once again, and we focus on the poster, whose image of an athlete leads us into the slow motion of the sport sequence.

3. *The alternation within one large sequence of slow and "normal" speeds*. In the sports sequences we see athletes performing, in slow motion, sometimes arrested, and in normal speed as well. We also see spectators watching (them) in intercut sequences. They are, it would seem, looking at what we see. There is, at least, as in all montage sequences of this sort, the implication of a spectacle shared by filmed spectator and spectator of the film. They are seen, however, in a setting which implies as well an integral space which contains them and the athletes, and their activity of looking is shot at normal speed, while we see the athletes performing in slower speed. The implication of shared spectacle is therefore subverted, and one is made conscious of this disjunction.

4. *The subversion and restoration of filmic illusion acting to distend and contract the filmic image*. As in the penultimate sequence in which we are constantly alternating between the image of the cyclist racing and the image of the theater auditorium containing the stage containing the screen upon which the image is projected. The oscillation between illusion experienced and illusion revealed accelerates in the final coda of the film.

5. *The subversion of the cinematic illusion, through processes of distortion and/or abstraction*. These involve the use of the split screen which will multiply images in repetitive patterns (as with the trams), impose the abstraction of visual gags (the image of the athlete exercising with dumbbells, converted into a trunkless, many-limbed monster) and, most importantly, arrest—through a process of multiplication or opposition or superimposition of spaces—of the temporal flow which generates the illusion. This is involved, most interestingly, in the technique of superimposition and deserves some particular study, though I would propose the work of Stan Brakhage as an evidently richer field for this particular investigation.

6. *The process of intellection so constantly solicited by the complex structure, the entire texture of this most assertively edited film*. This is the most constantly used distancing technique.

It is, however, the reversal of order and of action, the hysteron proteron which, as the pivot of Vertov's strategy, most strongly solicits our attention. One thing is plain: the manner in which the use of that trope has evolved since the making of *Kino-Glaz*. In the earlier film it is employed straightforwardly, for directly didactic purposes: simple reverse motion sends the peasant woman backwards through the streets, the bull back through dismemberment to resurrection, as though by magic. In *The Man with the Movie Camera*,

the figure is employed in a manner far more complex, refined, varied, heightened. Applied very seldom in the manner of *Kino-Glaz* (an exception would be the reordering of a chess set back to its initial position on the board), it is sometimes even difficult to detect—as in the sequence of a locomotive moving either so quickly or so slowly that we deduce its inversion from other elements in the image—from the movement of human figures at the periphery of the screen. It is used metaphorically, as in the swift and somewhat humorously reversed orientation of the telephoto lens which intervenes between sequences showing marriage and divorce bureaus—as if to intimate that marriage is another process, and therefore, reversible. Here, though, are other instances:

The film contains, as we know, an image of the life cycle—in which mourning (the image of a mother grieving, weeping over a tomb) proceeds the funeral procession of the young hero.

One sees the railway train roaring towards one, and later the cameraman and the camera on the track, the level from which that shot was filmed. Or one sees, emerging from a mine shaft, a worker steering a coal wagon, shot at a tilt. He passes, and one sees the cameraman prone on the ground, filming him.

The shot of an elevator moving up, then down, is followed by the shot of the cameraman on the ground filming. This second shot, filmed from the elevator cage in motion, causes the cameraman, standing stationary on the landing, to appear in vertical motion.

It is above all in the detailed elaboration of the processes of filming and of editing, projection and viewing that Vertov has seized upon the trope as a master strategy, elevating it to the function of a radical innovation. These sequences, initiated about halfway through the film, begin with the summer promenade of elegant ladies from a peasant market in a carriage followed by the cameraman who is cranking madly away as they chatter, laugh, observe, and mimic. Their horse gallops to a sudden stop, hooves poised in mid-air, as Vertov freezes all the life and elegance into an interval that fills the screen with what one might call the *evidence* of life. He then contracts that image into the strip manipulated by the editor's skill. We have seen some minutes ago a young peasant woman in the market. We see her now as a series of single frames composing a strip to be organized into the film we are watching, the segment we've just seen. As if to intensify the subversion of illusion involved in the contraction and multiplication of the image, Vertov swivels the image about so that the strip lies on its side. We have been confronted with an Eleatic paradox in which confusion as to the anteriority of the woman's existence to her presence as an image is compounded by confusion as to the anteriority of the film strip to the projected illusion.

Another, ultimate variation on this theme presents the strip of frames which record the faces of children, and it is only much later in the film that we see, we recognize, these children in movement—alive within the illusion of the film. They are the magician's enchanted and enchanting children, brought to life by a "conjurer," that conjurer who has in turn animated the magician. For behind every image of the cameraman is another cameraman, and behind the magician. . . . We have, then, a loop which runs as in a Möbius strip, from twisting from "live" to "fictive" and back again.

Pushing beyond the disclosure of filmmaking techniques, Vertov has abandoned the didactic for the maieutic, rendering causality visible. Now, it is the most general characteristic of adult logic as distinguished from that of children, to be reversible. The logico-mathematical operations characteristic of adults are, as we know, interiorized actions, reversible in that each operation involves a

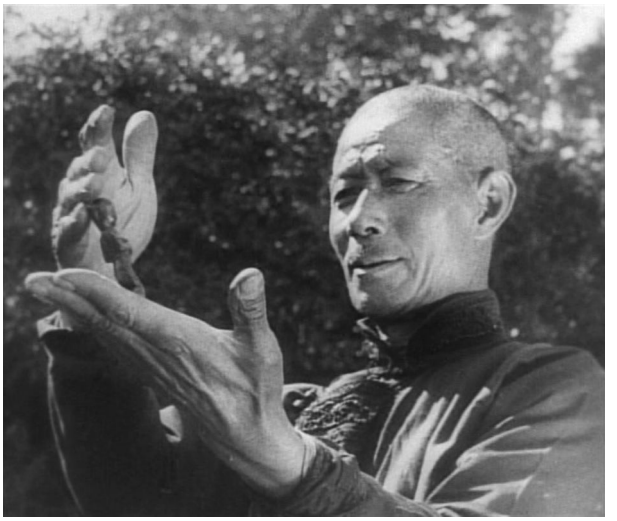

FIGURE 22.2 Magician, in *The Man With the Movie Camera* (1929). Still capture from DVD.

counteroperation—as in addition and subtraction.[15] We must, then, looking at *The Man with the Movie Camera*, see, in that eye reflected by the camera lens, Vertov as defining—through the systematic subversion of the certitudes of illusion—a threshold in the development of consciousness. "Rendering uncertainty more certain," he invited the camera to come of age, transforming with a grand cartesian gesture, *The Man with the Movie Camera* from a Magician into an Epistemologist.

NOTES

1. An account of this conference, called in celebration of the 15th anniversary of the Soviet film industry and from which Eisenstein emerged with a humiliating fourth-class award, is presented in Marie Seton's *Eisenstein: A Biography*, New York, n.d., pp. 330–50.
2. Ibid., p. 339.
3. From *The Notebooks of Dziga Vertov*, trans. Val Telberg, from *Iskusstvo Kino*, 3, 1957, and reprinted in Harry M. Geduld, *Film Makers on Film Making*, Indiana, 1967.
4. The metaphor of this formulation, by Gérard Granel, of the phenomenological project and method is discussed in my previous essay, "Toward Snow," *Artforum*, June, 1971. For Granel's text, presented here in my own translation, see *Le Sens du Temps et de la Perception chez Husserl*, Paris, 1968, p. 108.
5. Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, London, 1960, p. 251.
6. They 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 possibility of the film with a compositionally reasoned plan. It is usually employed with some purely pictorial aim, such as the 'sub-marine kingdom' in *The Thief of Bagdad*, or to represent a dream as in *Zvenigora* (Dovjenko's first film). Or, more often, it is used simply for formalist jackstraws and unmotivated camera mischief as in Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera*. The more commendable example appears to be in Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison 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 lightest motor-mentality among a group of raw recruits if the instructor uses a 'break-down' method.

Eisenstein, Film Form, Essays in Film Theory, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda, Cleveland, Ohio, pp. 43–44.

7. Leyda, *Kino*, pp. 251–52. Leyda has, quite understandably, exaggerated the film's reputation abroad.
8. Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: Lecture II*, in Geduld, *Film Makers*, p. 102.
9. Annette Michelson, Robert Morris. *An Aesthetics of Transgression*, for the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1969, pp. 71–75.
10. The Malevich text, pertinent to this discussion and quoted in extenso on page 73 of Michelson's *Robert Morris* catalogue is exacted from Kasimir S. Malevich, *Essays on Art:* 1915–1928, trans. Xenia Glowacki, Copenhagen, 1968, p. 77.
11. See Vertov, *Kino-Eye: Lecture II*, in Geduld, p. 102.
12. Ibid., pp. 103–105.
13. See Benjamin's celebrated essay, "The Work of Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York, 1969. I reserve discussion of Benjamin's views on photography and upon cinema for another essay, pointing out on this occasion his view that the "resources of (the camera's) lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions introduce us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses."
14. *Strike* was made in 1925.
15. For a presentation of this notion, central to Jean Piaget's theory of developmental epistemology, see his *Six Etudes de Psychologie*, Geneva, 1964. For previous discussion within a specifically cinematic context, see Annette Michelson, "Bodies in Space: Film as Carnal Knowledge," *Artforum*, February, 1969.

24

DZIGA VERTOV

WE

Variant of a Manifesto (1922)

We call ourselves *kinoks*[1]—as opposed to "cinematographers," a herd of junkmen doing rather well peddling their rags.

We see no connection between true *kinochestvo*[2] and the cunning and calculation of the profiteers.

We consider the psychological Russo-German film-drama—weighed down with apparitions and childhood memories—an absurdity.

To the American adventure film with its showy dynamism and to the dramatizations of the American Pinkertons the kinoks say thanks for the rapid shot changes and the close-ups. Good . . . but disorderly, not based on a precise study of movement. A cut above the psychological drama, but still lacking in foundation. A cliché. A copy of a copy.

WE proclaim the old films, based on the romance,[3] theatrical films and the like, to be leprous.

—Keep away from them!

—Keep your eyes off them!

—They're mortally dangerous!

—Contagious!

WE affirm the future of cinema art by denying its present.

"Cinematography" must die so that the art of cinema may live.

WE *call for its death to be hastened.*

We protest against that mixing of the arts which many call synthesis. The mixture of bad colors, even those ideally selected from the spectrum, produces not white, but mud.

Synthesis should come at the summit of each art's achievement and not before.

WE are cleansing *kinochestvo* of foreign matter—of music, literature, and theater; we seek our own rhythm, one lifted from nowhere else, and we find it in the movements of things.

WE invite you:

—to flee—

the sweet embraces of the romance,

the poison of the psychological novel,

the clutches of the theater of adultery;

to turn your back on music,

—to flee—

out into the open, into four-dimensions (three + time), in search of our own material, our meter and rhythm.

The "psychological" prevents man from being as precise as a stopwatch; it interferes with his desire for kinship with the machine.

In an art of movement we have no reason to devote our particular attention to contemporary man.

The machine makes us ashamed of man's inability to control himself, but what are we to do if electricity's unerring ways are more exciting to us than the disorderly haste of active men and the corrupting inertia of passive ones?

Saws dancing at a sawmill convey to us a joy more intimate and intelligible than that on human dance floors.

For his inability to control his movements, WE temporarily exclude man as a subject for film.

Our path leads through the poetry of machines, from the bungling citizen to the perfect electric man.

In revealing the machine's soul, in causing the worker to love his workbench, the peasant his tractor, the engineer his engine—

we introduce creative joy into all mechanical labor,

we bring people into closer kinship with machines,

we foster new people.

The new man, free of unwieldiness and clumsiness, will have the light, precise movements of machines, and he will be the gratifying subject of our films.

Openly recognizing the rhythm of machines, the delight of mechanical labor, the perception of the beauty of chemical processes, WE sing of earthquakes, we compose film epics of electric power plants and flame, we delight in the movements of comets and meteors and the gestures of searchlights that dazzle the stars.

Everyone who cares for his art seeks the essence of his own technique.

Cinema's unstrung nerves need a rigorous system of precise movement.

The meter, tempo, and type of movement, as well as its precise location with respect to the axes of a shot's coordinates and perhaps to the axes of universal coordinates (the three dimensions + the fourth—time), should be studied and taken into account by each creator in the field of cinema.

Radical necessity, precision, and speed are the three components of movement worth filming and screening.

The geometrical extract of movement through an exciting succession of images is what's required of montage.[4]

Kinochestvo is the art of organizing the necessary movements of objects in space as a rhythmical artistic whole, in harmony with the properties of the material and the internal rhythm of each object.

Intervals (the transitions from one movement to another) are the material,[5] the elements of the art of movement, and by no means the movements themselves. It is they (the intervals) which draw the movement to a kinetic resolution.

The organization of movement is the organization of its elements, or its intervals, into phrases.

In each phrase there is a rise, a high point, and a falling off (expressed in varying degrees) of movement.

A composition is made of phrases, just as a phrase is made of intervals of movement.

A kinok who has conceived a film epic or fragment should be able to jot it down with precision so as to give it life on the screen, should favorable technical conditions be present.

The most complete scenario cannot, of course, replace these notes, just as a libretto does not replace pantomime, just as literary accounts of Scriabin's compositions do not convey any notion of his music.

To represent a dynamic study on a sheet of paper, we need graphic symbols of movement.

WE are in search of the film scale.

WE fall, we rise . . . together with the rhythm of movements—slowed and accelerated,

running from us, past us, toward us,

in a circle, or straight line, or ellipse,

to the right and left, with plus and minus signs;

movements bend, straighten, divide, break apart,

multiply, shooting noiselessly through space.

Cinema is, as well, the *art of inventing movements* of things in space in response to the demands of science; it embodies the inventor's dream—be he scholar, artist, engineer, or carpenter; it is the realization by kinochestvo of that which cannot be realized in life.

Drawings in motion. Blueprints in motion. Plans for the future. The theory of relativity on the screen.

WE greet the ordered fantasy of movement.

Our eyes, spinning like propellers, take off into the future on the wings of hypothesis.

WE believe that the time is at hand when we shall be able to hurl into space the hurricanes of movement, reined in by our tactical lassoes.

Hurrah for *dynamic geometry*, the race of points, lines, planes, volumes.

Hurrah for the poetry of machines, propelled and driving; the poetry of levers, wheels, and wings of steel; the iron cry of movements; the blinding grimaces of red-hot streams.

NOTES

Glosses followed by "ed." or "trans." are additions by the original editor or the translator. Glosses which are not so marked are taken from the Moscow edition without substantial alteration.

1. Kinoks ("cinema-eye men"): A neologism coined by Vertov, involving a play on the words *kino* ("cinema" or "film") and *oko*, the latter an obsolescent and poetic word meaning "eye." The *-ok* ending is the transliteration of a traditional suffix used in Russian to indicate a male, human agent.

   Kinoglaz ("Kino-Eye") is the name Vertov gave to the movement and group of which he is the founder and leader. The term was also used to designate their method of work. It is, as well, the title of the feature-length film that, in 1925, initiates the period of his maturity. We have chosen to use the Russian title in all cases involving specific reference to that film, since it is by its Russian title that the film is generally known to scholars and archivists. This work was the culmination of a development begun in 1922 with the production of a series of shorter newsreel films bearing the same title and devoted to aspects and problems of the new Soviet society. When reference is made to the group or movement as such, we have used the name *Kino-Eye*, both in order to distinguish it from the specific productions and to stress the continuity involved in the production, by Vertov and his group, of the *Kinonedelia* ("Kino-week") and *Kinopravda* ("Kino-truth") chronicles, which preceded the appearance of the film *Kinoglaz*—trans. and ed.
2. Kinochestvo: Another of Vertov's neologisms: the suffix *chestvo* indicates an abstract quality, therefore, the quality of the cinema-eye. While its precise signification is rather vague, it would appear from the context that Vertov is using it, by analogy with *kinok*, in contrast to *cinematography*. In his journal of 1924, he writes, "We almost never used the term *kinochestvo*, as it says nothing and is gratuitous word building." Film theory of the period is characterized, internationally, by a proliferation of terminology, and this particular instance recalls the elaborate speculation surrounding the notion of "photogénie" proposed in France by Vertov's contemporary, Jean Epstein—trans. and ed.
3. Romance: Vertov is referring to a type of sentimental film based on songs ("romances"), popular at that time—trans.
4. Montage: In Russian a single word conveys notions that in English are rendered by the two words *montage* and *editing*. In most instances, one English meaning has been chosen according to the context—trans.
5. Material: This term is frequently used by Vertov and others to mean film footage. Its constructivist connotation is significant with respect to Vertov's theory and practice—trans.