Chapter 2: Cinema of the Soviet Avant-Garde

The Rise of the Avant-garde

The great flowering of Soviet cinema from the early 1920s to the early 1930s was the work of avant-garde directors, cinematographers, camera operators, editors, grip-handlers, set-designers, and actors and actresses who identified with the revolution of October, 1917 and its sequel. But the cinematic avant-garde was merely one part of a much broader development, an artistic avant-garde politicized to the left, whose origins preceded the October Revolution. The names of the directors, Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, Pudovkin, Shub, and Vertov belong to a more comprehensive list that also includes Tatlin, Rodchenko, Stepanova, Lissitzky, Popova, Klutsis, Mayakovsky, Meyerhold, Brik, and many others in the visual, performance, and literary arts.

The emergence of a revolutionary avant-garde in the Soviet Union is a remarkable development that has no counterpart in any other successful revolution.[1] It did have a reprise in the May uprising in Paris in 1968, as well as the revolutionary movements of Latin America of the late 1960s through 1980s, but none of these revolutions succeeded. Yet the uniqueness of the Soviet avant-garde is not as surprising as it may seem. We need to keep in mind the fact that the avant-garde was a historically limited phenomenon. In Russia, Europe, and the United States, its life-span extended from the rise of post-impressionism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, until it was more or less liquidated, first in the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s by repressive administrative means, and then in the West in the 1960s and 1970s by pop art and related movements. Stalin and Andy Warhol were its oddly matched executioners. If the avant-garde survived in Latin America for another twenty years, this is attributable to the fact that the forces and relations of production there lagged behind those of the U.S. and Europe, as well as to the unique cultural discontinuities introduced by neocolonial exploitation. With the advance of industrialization and commodification in Brazil, Argentina, and elsewhere, as well as the globalization of culture, the Latin American avant-garde has now also met its historical fate.

There is something appropriately ironic in the fact that “avant-garde” was originally a term of the political left. The Saint Simonist "utopian socialists" used it to refer to an elite of scientists, industrialists, and artists who were to direct technological and social developments in a society liberated from antiquated property relationships.[2] The anarchists used the term to refer to their militants, while the “anarchist prince,” Piotr Kropotkin, edited a revolutionary newspaper in Switzerland with the name, *l'avant-garde.* Even Lenin adopted the term for his version of a disciplined Marxist political party, able to lead a revolution in the difficult conditions of Tsarist Russia, with its ubiquitous political police (though the term commonly used in English is "vanguard"). The left-wing idea of

the avant-garde is based on a military metaphor. The avant-garde originally referred to troops in forward deployment, often deep in enemy territory, performing missions of reconnaissance or harassment. As they entered unexplored areas, these troops were exposed to the risk of unknown dangers. The left reinterpreted the forward spatial deployment implied by the military term temporally, so that the political avant-garde faced its enemy, not in a region of space, but on the foremost edge of the future, where the enemy blocked forward movement. Utopian socialists, anarchists, and revolutionary Marxists saw themselves, albeit in different ways, as the most advanced troops fighting for a new emancipated society.

The shift from the spatial dimension to the temporal one is what made the metaphor of the avant-garde serviceable for the purposes of art. Just as the political militants saw themselves as breaking with the social order of the past, and on the verge of creating a new society, so did the artistic avant-garde see themselves as breaking with the art academies and juried exhibitions of the past, and on the verge of creating a radically new aesthetic order. The avant-garde in the arts began in France at the end of the nineteenth century with the post-impressionists. After the defeat of the Paris Commune, which Marx regarded as the first workers' government, artists took up residence in the Parisian suburb of Montmartre, birthplace of the Commune. When the French government declared an amnesty a few years after its destruction of the Commune, the painters in Montmartre were joined by returning Communards who had survived the wave of summary executions and imprisonments in French penal colonies. In the cafés and cabarets of Montmartre, the political and aesthetic versions of the avant-garde rubbed elbows. The art critic, Félix Fénéon, who was an active and politically knowledgeable anarchist, played a major role connecting artists and political militants. When Pablo Picasso, with an anarchist background of his own from his years in Barcelona, took his place in this milieu, the avant-garde found one of its most innovative incarnations, a status that was sealed in 1907 with his path-breaking painting, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*.

Avant-garde movements soon established a presence in other European capitals, including Zurich and Berlin, the homes of perhaps their most aesthetically radical manifestation, dada. Dada was born in the early years of the First World War, in large part as a protest against it and the utilitarian bourgeois rationality that had apparently given rise to it. It is hard to overestimate the impact of the First World War on European culture. It put to an incendiary end the expectation of rational progress that had dominated official culture in the nineteenth century. The nonsense poetry of dada, along with the movement's primitivism and love of bedlam and scandal, amounted to a rejection of the institution of art itself as part of a world that was in the process of blowing itself to pieces on the battlefields of Europe. The rejection of art as an institution, or an elevated cultural practice, was a defining characteristic of the avant-garde in its most radical expression. It would be repeated in the Soviet Union by the productivists, though in a very different way.

Dada was the incubation chamber for many avant-garde artists who would later work apart from the movement, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, and Man Ray notable among them. It was also the parent movement from which surrealism was to emerge by schism. Italian futurism, with its principal base in Rome, was older than dada by six years (futurism began in 1909), and would outlast it by more than a decade, coming to an end in the late1930s. One of the indications that the artistic avant-garde patterned itself after the political one is the role played by the literary form of the manifesto, originally a statement

of program and worldview by a political movement or party. Nearly every avant-garde movement felt compelled to issue its own version of a manifesto, at least to announce its arrival on the cultural scene, and often to refine or extend its message as time went on. The poet and painter, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, wrote the *Futurist Manifesto* in 1909, which he often read aloud in public meetings. Though it was the inaugural manifesto of futurism, other artists involved in the movement also issued manifestos of their own: a *Manifesto of Futurist Architecture*, a *Manifesto of Futurist Musicians*, a *Manifesto of Futurist Painters*, even a *Futurist Manifesto of Lust*. But Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* has the distinction, important for our purposes, of having inspired the creation of a futurist movement in Russia.

The *Futurist Manifesto* consists in two parts. The first is a prologue, written as a prose poem, that both calls for revolution in the arts, and illustrates that revolution by the visionary force of its own literary form. The energy, speed, and explosive violence of the new technologies, which Marinetti would soon witness first hand on the battlefields of the Great War, are the paths to a revelation that has nothing to do with the religious or mystical idealism of the past:

> "Come, my friends!" I said. "Let us go! At last mythology and the mystic ideal have been left behind. We are going to be present at the birth of the centaur and we shall soon see the first angels fly! We must break down the gates of life to test the bolts and the padlocks! Let us go! Here is the very first sunrise on earth! Nothing equals the splendor of its red sword which strikes for the first time in our millennial darkness" (Marinetti 2004, 26).[3]

The content of the new revelation that the futurist sunrise brings is what we might call a mythical realism; the birth, with industrial technology as the midwife, of a new centaur and new angels, in other words, the automobiles and airplanes of the new century. Marinetti invites two poet friends on a motorized excursion, Marinetti driving an automobile, and each friend mounted on a separate mythical-industrial steed in the form a motorcycle. But during the road trip, Marinetti has to swerve to avoid hitting the cyclists, and ends up in a ditch. When the poet manages to climb out of his car, he is exhilarated by his first-hand experience of the speed and violence of the modern period. At that point he preaches his visionary revelation in eleven points. The eleventh point reads:

> We will sing of the great crowds agitated by work, pleasure and revolt: the multi-colored and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capitals; the nocturnal vibration of the arsenals and the workshops beneath their violent electric moons; the gluttonous railway stations devouring smoking serpents; factories suspended from the clouds by the thread of their smoke; bridges with the leap of gymnasts flung across the diabolic cutlery of sunny rivers; adventurous steamers sniffing the horizon, great-breasted locomotives, puffing on the rails like enormous steel horses with long tubes for bridle, and the gliding flight of airplanes whose propeller sounds like the flapping of a flag and the applause of enthusiastic crowds (Marinetti 2004, 28).[4]

Marinetti's rejection of "the mystic ideal," his embrace of the explosive social ener-

gy of the new forces of production, his singing in praise of the urban crowd "agitated by work, pleasure and revolt," and of the "surf of revolutions" seems to come close to a poetic equivalent of Marxism. It is clear, however, that this is not at all Marinetti's intention from the previous ten points of the manifesto, in which he announces his fervor for war, militarism, and patriotism, his hatred of pacifism and feminism, and his contempt for women. In the unprecedented destructiveness of modern warfare, with its bombs, gas masks, armored cars, and aerial warfare, Marinetti found the forces he thought necessary to overthrow what art had become – a stultifying soporific for the cultivated bourgeois spectator. As a graveyard of ancient and Renaissance art treasures, Italy was closely associated with the soporific role of art. Only the cultural equivalent of the explosive violence unleashed by modern war could demolish the museums and libraries and picaresque Italian villages, and open the poets and artists to the unknown forces of the future. If Marinetti held women and pacifists in contempt, it was because they escaped this futurist revelation. Aggression, violence, audacity, and most of all the cult of speed made possible by industrial machines would awaken the arts from their long senescence:

> We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath ... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace (Marinetti 2004, 27).

Marinetti's veneration of rebellion, industrial technology, and the urban crowd is fused with aggression, violence, militarism, and contempt for anyone preferring peace to war, in an alloy that anticipates the fascist movement, in which Marinetti indeed was active well before Mussolini's March on Rome. He had already left the fascist party in 1920 because of what he considered to be its reactionary rapprochement with such traditional institutions as the monarchy and the Catholic Church, but his work continued to inspire artists and intellectuals who remained active fascists. Before Marinetti's politics became explicit, however, the *Manifesto of Futurism* had found its way to Russia.

In 1912, a literary group based in Moscow that included the poets David Burlyuk, Velimir Klebnikov, and Vladimir Mayakovsky issued a manifesto titled, *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*. More subdued than Marinetti's manifesto, it nevertheless shares the Italian's total rejection of the artistic past, as well as the idea that the young generation of poets must take up the task of bringing the future to birth:

> We alone are the face of our Time. Through us the horn of time blows in the art of the word.
>
> The past is too tight. The Academy and Pushkin are less intelligible than hieroglyphics.
>
> Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity (Burlyuk 2012, 21).

A *Slap in the Face* then announces a four-point program, in parallel with Marinetti's eleven points:

We *order* that the poets' *rights* be revered:

1. To enlarge the *scope* of the poet's vocabulary with arbitrary and derivative words (Word-novelty).

2. To feel an insurmountable hatred for the language existing before their time.

3. To push with horror off their proud brow the Wreath of cheap fame that You have made from bathhouse switches.

4. To stand on the rock of the word "we" amidst the sea of boos and outrage (Burlyuk 2012, 22).

Unlike Marinetti's Manifesto *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* has virtually no political content. It limits itself to announcing an aesthetic revolution, involving a rejection of the great icons of Russian literature, and the introduction of made-up words into poetry, later to be known, in its best-known version, as *zaum*. There is, however, one principle in the Russian document that is foreign to Marinetti's manifesto, and that points to the politics of the Soviet future. That is the assertion of the collective character of artistic production in the fourth right demanded for poets (standing "on the rock of the word 'we'").

A Slap in the Face of Public Taste inspired the creation of futurist groups in Saint Petersburg, Kiev, Kharkov, and Odessa in addition to Moscow. But when Marinetti arrived in Russia as the prophet of the movement in 1914, he was renounced by the Russian futurists, who sometimes booed him at his public lectures. The Russians rejected his condescending attitude and his claim to supreme authority in the movement. In repayment, after his return to Italy, Marinetti denounced the Russians, whom, he claimed, had nothing to do with futurism at all.[5]

Russian futurism was equally a literary movement and a movement in visual art. David Burlyuk was himself a painter as well as a poet, and the painters, Mikhail Larinov, Natalia Goncharova, and Kasimir Malevitch, drawing from the well springs of the new poetic imagery, began to work under the banner of "cubo-futurism." Though often mixed with strains of peasant-based primitivism, the painters developed the visual idioms that would be used by later, more revolutionary forms of art. In particular, Malevitch, who explored the dynamic possibilities of elementary geometrical forms in his suprematist paintings, helped spur the creation of Russian constructivism.

The constructivists, including Tatlin, Rodchenko, Stepanova, Popova, Lissitzky, Klutsis, and Gan, were the first artists explicitly to ally with the Bolsheviks on a significant scale. Tatlin was a key figure in this regard, especially with the invention of his corner counter-reliefs, which were objects transitional between the flat images of painted canvases and full-blown three-dimensional constructions. Once the lines, circles, squares, and triangles of the constructivist paintings made their entrance into real, three-dimensional space, they were able to connect with the works of engineering and industrial production. For some avant-garde artists, painting on canvas, even when guided by radically innovative forms, was too reminiscent of the museum art of the past. These "productivists" argued that the place of the artist is not in the academy or the studio, but in the factory, working as planner and designer alongside the proletariat, as part of the "collective worker," as Marx would have said.[6] Even artists who remained wedded to the idea of painting tried their hands at industrial design, most notably Malevitch, whose

constructivist teapot with cups is both a utilitarian object, and a significant work of twentieth-century art. Tatlin himself began working almost exclusively in three dimensions, in the process creating some of the most visionary art, or at least prototypes of such art, produced during the early period of revolutionary reconstruction. His Monument to the Third International is famous, though he succeeded in creating only a three-dimensional model of the visionary building. The real Monument was to be taller than the Eiffel Tower, and to consist of an angular frame of two helixes that were to encircle three enormous rotating geometrical structures housing the offices of the Comintern. A cube at the base of the building would complete one full rotation each year, a pyramid above it would complete a rotation each month, and a cylinder above the pyramid would complete its rotation every twenty-four hours. Tatlin's visionary invention, the Letatlin, was a more organically shaped flying machine, meant to be powered by only the muscular energy of its individual operator. The artist's vision was that of a new Soviet republic where citizens would be able to fly through the air of the socialist cities as freely and easily as birds .

Rodchenko and Lissitzky made a similar transition from painting to industry, but in the medium of the graphic arts. They each designed newspapers, books, and magazines, refitting their discoveries in photography and painting to typographical media. Stepanova and Popova applied constructivist principles to clothing design, and, with other artists, to the creation of theatrical scenery. Architects also applied constructivist principles to their work, though the costs of erecting buildings during the period of economic devastation that followed the civil war prevented more than a handful of constructivist buildings from going up. Most constructivist architecture remained confined to paper at the time, although it was to have a second birth, and a more productive lifespan, in the period following Stalin's death.

In spite of the flourishing of different movements and schools among the Soviet avant-garde, the general public, as well as the Communist Party leadership, drew no distinctions between suprematists, constructivists, productivists, and so forth. For them, all of these artists were simply "futurists."

The attitude of the Bolshevik leadership to the "futurists" was skeptical at best.[7] Lenin was worried that, largely drawn from the ranks of the petite bourgeois intelligentsia, and without the years of disciplined political work of Communist Party cadre, the Soviet avant-garde would make fair weather revolutionaries, whose loyalty could not be taken for granted. In addition, he believed that the main cultural task of the revolution was to transmit to the working class the best in bourgeois culture (Lenin 1971, 484-485). The cultural achievements of the past would be preserved and surpassed in the world the revolutionaries were making. The task of the revolution was to abolish the working class by dissolving it into the new classless society. Since the proletariat would soon be a thing of the past, the idea of developing a proletarian culture made no sense. Trotsky defended that thesis with both flexibility and aplomb in his book, *Literature and Revolution* (Trotsky 1991, 213-242). In any event, for both revolutionary leaders, it was absurd to dream of a new proletarian culture when a large percentage of Soviet workers and peasants could not read or write; universal literacy was a far more important and meaningful goal. It also did not help matters that the writer, Alexander Bogdanov, Lenin's erstwhile rival for leadership of the Bolshevik Party, was active in avant-garde circles. And yet, when the Party appointed Bogdanov's brother-in-law, Anatoly Lunacharsky, as head of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*) in the fledgling Soviet govern-

ment, the avant-garde found an intelligent and powerful ally, willing to make considerable space available to them in the state cultural apparatus then under construction. Lunacharsky's avant-garde sympathies became obvious when, shortly after his appointment as commissar, he helped Bogdanov establish Proletkult, an organization of communist artists independent of the Party. Proletkult was devoted to the creation of a new proletarian culture, in spite of Lenin's and Trotsky's misgivings.

Lunacharsky was a talented writer and literary scholar who had joined the Bolsheviks in 1917, around the time Lenin arrived from exile at the Finland Station. He was imprisoned by Kerensky during the October Revolution, which solidified his credentials as a revolutionary Marxist, and was therefore in a strong position to take on the role of Commissar of Enlightenment, in spite of his connection with Bogdanov. In charge of schools, literacy programs, concert halls, theaters, museums, art academies, and the like, *Narcompros* employed an enormous number of teachers, literacy instructors, writers, actors and actresses, directors, stage designers, composers, musicians, painters, sculptors, and graphic designers. It was a sort of twentieth-century revolutionary version of the Renaissance Medici, the institutional patron of avant-garde artists that not only paid them for their work, but also gave them an important role in the revolutionary reconstruction of Russia and the other Soviet republics.

The early Soviet filmmakers emerged and grew in this context. In revolutionary Russia, there was never any question that cinema was one of the arts, except from Vertov and a handful of other *kinoks* (film workers) who rejected the idea of art in general from an avant-garde perspective. In fact, in recognition of cinema's wide appeal for the masses of workers and peasants, Lenin had named it the most important of the arts. Thus Lunacharsky had no misgivings when he directed *Narkompros* to fund the development of a revolutionary Soviet cinema.

Russia had a film industry prior to the revolution, with privately owned production companies and movie theaters, whose most important centers were Moscow and Saint Petersburg. But many of the industry's owners joined the "Whites" (the counter-revolutionaries) in their bases during the Civil War. When they attempted to move their film equipment into White territory, the revolutionary government responded, first by placing the production companies and theaters under workers' control, and then by nationalizing them (Leyda 1983, 122-125). The foundations of a socialist film industry were thus created early on. But the fight for the survival of the socialist republic during the years of the civil war, and defense against armies from the West and Japan that had invaded Russia in support of the counter-revolutionaries, made the development of a full-fledged film industry impossible at first. The early Soviet filmmakers got their training, not by making studio films, but by working on agit-trains that visited towns and villages near the front.

The agit-train was an invention of the civil war period. It functioned as a moving cultural and propaganda center under the direction of the Red Army. Each train had an exterior painted by artists with political images and slogans, was equipped with a printing press, stage equipment, movie cameras, and a cinematic laboratory, and included writers, performers, cameramen, and directors. The mission of the trains was complex. Their passengers were charged to educate, entertain, agitate, and propagandize civilians near the front, and also to record the military actions of the Red Army for the benefit of urban audiences. The filmmakers assigned to the trains shot footage of the life of the villagers as

well as the battles of the Red Army, and often served as soldiers themselves, with a camera slung over one shoulder, and a rifle over the other.

Both Eisenstein and Vertov served on agit-trains. In 1920, Eisenstein, who had art training, was assigned by his Red Army unit to an agit-train as a painter. The twenty-year-old Vertov was similarly assigned the same year, but worked right from the start as a movie director. The first real advance made by Soviet cinema came from Vertov's assignment. The young director and his cameramen shot hundreds of thousands of meters of film that Vertov edited, sometimes on the train, and sometimes in studios back home, and then released in the form of newsreels that were shown to movie theater audiences. He named the newsreel series, Kino-Pravda, literally Cinema-Truth, after the Communist Party newspaper, Pravda. The series was quite popular with movie audiences, and made Vertov's reputation at his young age. Its greater significance for the history of Soviet film, however, lies in the fact that, in editing the footage for Kino-Pravda, Vertov developed the avant-garde techniques that he would later use in *Man with a Movie Camera* and his other feature-length films.

It is hard to overestimate the significance of the fact that Soviet film was born under the conditions of the civil war.[8] Marx knew from the history of the French Revolution, as well as the revolutions of 1832, 1848, and the Paris Commune, that the response to revolution is counter-revolution. He also knew something of the ability of modern armies to lay waste to vast regions from his journalism on the American Civil War, though he reported the war from Europe without experiencing it first hand. But he was in no position to anticipate the unprecedented destructiveness of the weapons and armies of the First World War, and these were the forces that were unleashed on the Russian Revolution. The seeds of the Russian civil war were planted the day after Red Guard detachments took the Winter Palace, preparing the way for Lenin's announcement that a Soviet government had been formed, and that the construction of socialism was about to begin. What their enemies characterized as the Bolsheviks' "seizure of power," or "coup d'état" – although a majority of the worker, soldier, and sailor delegates to the Petrograd Soviet supported the insurrection – drew immediate resistance from the powerful and privileged under the old order. At first the resistance was passive or obstructionist, but shortly after the new government concluded a peace agreement with Germany at Brest-Litovsk in March, 1918, the opposition took up arms against the regime in the name of an outraged nationalism. White Armies funded by expatriates as well as the Western powers took control of much of the old Russian Empire, and French and British troops came to their aid through invasion. They would eventually be joined by forces from many other nations, including the United States and Japan. The Bolsheviks were able to organize their detachments of Red Guards into a unified army under Trotsky's command, but they came close to losing the war on more than one occasion. No one was certain that the Soviet Republic would survive; on the contrary, most expectations ran in the opposite direction from the first days of the new government. Lenin is said to have danced in the snow when his regime had survived a single day longer than the Paris Commune. The civil war lasted five years, and, before its conclusion, nearly one million soldiers had died on both sides of the conflict, while hundreds of thousands of civilians had perished through forced relocations and reprisals. Three million died from an outbreak of typhus that might have been contained with a peacetime medical system. Millions more perished in the famine of 1921, a combined result of drought, the destruction of farms in the war, and peasant re-

sistance to the forced requisitioning of crops by Bolshevik detachments. In addition, when it looked in danger of losing the war, the Soviet government created the Cheka as a branch of the Red Army, and invested it with extraordinary powers of interrogation and summary execution, a practice hardly compatible with the advanced workers' democracy the Bolsheviks had set out to create. All of this is an example of what Raymond Williams called the "tragedy of revolution" (Williams 2006, 87-109). Those who would make a genuine revolution must dislodge the former ruling class, its retainers, and its allies, and so are met with the most trenchant opposition. The revolutionaries are faced with the necessity of creating a new society, not under ideal conditions, or even after a limited period of armed conflict (which was probably closer to Marx's expectation), but under conditions of protracted violence, social hatred, encirclement by foreign powers, and mass devastation.

The Soviet filmmakers, especially Eisenstein and Vertov, were deeply marked by their wartime experience. From the beginning of their careers, they thought of cinema as a weapon of class struggle. Their work as artists on agit-trains influenced all of their later cinematic work, and they never ceased to regard cinema as an art of agitation, though in a sense that remains to be examined. The formal innovations of the two directors had great significance, not least because they won them an international audience that has now outlasted the Soviet Union itself. But in the minds of the directors, including Vertov, advances in cinematic form were not ends in themselves, but meant to serve the defense, preservation, and advance of the Revolution. Thus in spite of the international preeminence of Soviet film in its most creative period, and in spite of its continuing influence on Western filmmakers, early Soviet cinema is radically different than that of the French, the Americans, the Italians, or any other national school of film. This is because it was forged in the crucible of revolution, counter-revolution, and a five-year civil war.

It would be a mistake to think of the formal advances and the political purpose of Soviet avant-garde film as external to one another. In the eyes of Eisenstein, Vertov, and the others, the political purpose *demanded* formal innovation. The political purpose, or in Sergei Tretyakov words, "the social command" of film, exercises dominance over both form and content, and thereby unifies the two. This is the main point of a fine article by Tretyakov published in 1928, titled "Our Cinema." A battle had been raging in Russian literature and visual art since the appearance of futurism and literary formalism before the Revolution, a battle that Stalin's government would settle by fiat by with its endorsement of socialist realism in 1932. The theme under contention was whether form or content had primacy in the arts, with realists subordinating form to content, and many futurists subordinating content to form. According to Tretyakov, this is a battle on badly chosen ground because it presents a false alternative. Form and content are both subordinate to the social function of the work of art .

In bourgeois society, the function of cinema is to preserve the existing social order through the creation of a realm of illusion in which the members of the audience are offered pseudo-satisfactions in compensation for the exhaustion, boredom, and lack of control in their day-to-day lives. In the movie theater, the proletarian and the office worker are able to experience the adventure, heroism, and eroticism that are denied to them in reality. Without such substitute satisfactions, Tretyakov argues, bourgeois society would be "up to its neck in revolt" (Tretyakov 2006, 30).

By contrast, the social command of revolutionary art is two-fold: first, to agitate, by

charging the working-class audience with the energy necessary for building a new society, and second, to provide that audience with a depiction of social fact, with the information it needs to engage in the work of revolutionary reconstruction. The filmmaker accomplishes these interrelated tasks by constructing raw material. In the constructivist idea of *tektura*, material is content (in the case of film, thematic content), and construction the discovery of the form the material requires. But the construction of material is a process with a goal, and that goal is given by a social command, which Tretyakov understands as the will of the working class. According to him, the stale conflict between form and content is resolved in revolutionary purpose.

In Tretyakov's article, agitation takes on a technical meaning. To agitate is to stimulate the psycho-physical organism through the administration of shocks that heighten attentiveness and energy. Tretyakov worked out the idea of agitation through shocks in collaboration with Eisenstein.

Montage

Just as the agit-trains provided a venue where avant-garde practitioners of different arts mixed, sharing work and ideas in the comradeship that resulted from battlefield conditions, so did Proletkult bring visual, theatrical, literary, and cinematic artists together in workshops, schools, theaters, and other venues. The agit-trains during the civil war, and the activities of Proletkult in the war's aftermath, enabled ideas to flow easily between what might otherwise have been specialized regions of culture. This open communication had a special significance for cinema, as theater, painting, and poetry exercised important influences on Soviet film. In particular, the ideas of the constructivists about the nature of visual form helped inspire the development of cinematic montage.

Artists from the productivist wing of constructivism formed the organization, Left Front of the Arts (LEF), which published the journal, *LEF*, from 1923-1925, and its successor, *New LEF*, from 1927-1929. Edited by the poet, Mayakovsky, and the critic, Osip Brik, and with covers by Alexander Rodchenko, the journals were laboratories for combining art forms. Those involved in *LEF* and *New LEF* became enthusiasts of cinema, which its writers and editors saw as a dynamic visual art of the industrial age, in favorable contrast with the easel painting of the past. They were especially attracted to montage, a cinematic technique they saw as consonant with the aesthetic strategies of constructivism. Constructivism had grown out of cubism, which proceeded by analyzing physical objects into their primary geometrical forms, then breaking those forms apart and rearranging them in new, unanticipated ways, often with the purpose of depicting subject matter from multiple points of view. Cinematic montage proceeds in the same way, except that, instead of geometrical shapes, it works with discrete passages of time recorded on segments of film. It rearranges these segments in such a fashion as to establish unexpected correspondences, build visual metaphors, create jarring clashes, and organize conflicts between opposing forces.

The beginnings of Soviet montage are legendary, involving the nearly miraculous arrival in Russia – no one knows how – of D.W. Griffith's film *Intolerance*, at a time when the new socialist republic was the victim of a crippling Western blockade (Leyda 1983, 142-143). Involving four stories occurring in four different historical periods, *Intolerance*

is a masterpiece of parallel montage, though Griffith uses other montage techniques as well within each of the interwoven stories. Lenin was rumored to have contacted Griffith after viewing the movie in order to convince him to take control of the new Soviet film industry, though that tale, and many others like it, are probably apocryphal. It is undeniably true, however, that *Intolerance* had a profound impact on the filmmakers and future filmmakers of the Soviet Union, and that its appearance is the point of origin of Soviet montage.

The avant-garde set designer, Lev Kuleshov, was the first significant theorist of montage. In the course of his transition to a career as a film director, Kuleshov made three indispensable contributions to Soviet cinema: he wrote a series of insightful articles on montage, established an influential workshop that Eisenstein, among others, attended, and conducted the "Kuleshov experiments" in an effort to discover and explore the properties of montage.

In his best-known experiment, Kuleshov shot the expressionless face of the actor Mosjukhin, which remained constant throughout the experiment. By prefacing the shot of the actor's face with the close-up of a hand lifting a spoon from a steaming bowl of soup, the face appears to express hunger. When the initial image is that of a dead infant, Mosjukhin's face takes on an apparent expression of grief. When preceded by a shot of a pretty young woman in a skimpy outfit, the actor's face seems to indicate passionate longing. In general, the experiment showed that montage is able to influence perceptual interpretation by varying the images to which a given image is linked. In another experiment, Kuleshov demonstrated the ability of montage to make a nonexistent entity appear. He built up the image of a woman from shots of one woman's legs, another woman's neck, a third woman's arms, and so on. It is easy to see the influence of constructivism here.

Kuleshov's ideas about montage varied over the course of his life. His earliest theoretical writings viewed it as the defining characteristic of cinema, as what distinguishes cinema from still photography and theater. Montage is "the essence of cinematic technique, the essence of structuring a motion picture" (Kuleshov 1974, 193); it is…"the organization of cinematic material," the "joining and alteration of scenes among themselves" (Kuleshov 1974, 99). Kuleshov attributes the discovery of montage to American filmmakers (and not just to Griffith). It was by observing the difference between the static, fixed-camera-position long takes of Russian films, and the rapid cutting between shots of American movies that Kuleshov first developed his ideas about montage around 1916. At that stage, he held a purist position: it makes no difference what the subject of a particular shot is or how the shot is composed; all that matters for filmmaking is that the shot can be combined with other shots in whatever way the filmmaker chooses. In later years, Kuleshov modified his early position considerably, asserting the significance of the content and composition of individual shots, as well as, along with Tretyakov, the overriding importance of the filmmaker's ideological purpose. With respect to the latter, he came to emphasize the idea that films represent specific class positions: American films, that of the bourgeoisie, and Soviet films, that of the proletariat, for example. In this view, montage is not just a method of constructing works of art, but a weapon in the ongoing struggle between classes.

Kuleshov's favorite Soviet montage-maker was Esfir Shub. Shub became a director after years of work as a film editor, and it is easy to see that her editorial skills shaped her

approach to filmmaking. She was one of the creators of the compilation film, and originator of the compilation documentary, in which the cinematic work is pieced together exclusively from already existing film footage. Working prior to the existence of film archives, Shub spent countless hours tracking down her sources, consisting mostly of newsreel footage found in boxes left behind in obscure government offices, although she also used footage from privately shot movies as well. Her talent lay in her ability to construct a coherent film by subtly fitting together fragments of documentary footage from multiple sources. She held each fragment, no matter how brief, to be "a bit of reality." [9] Her filmmaking is documentary in the literal sense that it seeks to document the existence of objective facts, authenticating them while presenting them for public viewing. This concept of documentation is compatible with the general emphasis of the dialectical materialist worldview on the objectivity of knowledge. The camera seems a quintessentially objective device in that it records the light reflected from an object, apparently without interference. Rejecting the use of film to express emotional states, Shub practices an objective montage. Moreover, she combines her film fragments into an integrated film product that purports to be an objective record of a more extended historical event, even when it serves propagandistic purposes.

Shub's best-known film is *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, which she made to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the February Revolution that deposed the Tsar and brought Kerensky temporarily to power. Her approach is authentically Marxist, as she begins with an analysis of the class divisions in Tsarist Russia, moves on to explore the role of the dominant classes in the political system, and investigates the large-scale economic forces – the introduction of capitalist industry and the competition for world markets – responsible for the instability of the old order, including the drive toward war. All of this is a prelude to her treatment of the history of Russian involvement in World War I, and the rebellion in the armed forces that culminated in the February Revolution.

A compilation film is almost inevitably a form of montage. Stitching together fragments of film from disparate sources forces the filmmaker to make abrupt transitions, and the good filmmaker to use the transitions in cinematographically significant ways. In *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, Shub employs an organizing principle that makes her montage stable and unobtrusive; she uses intertitles to introduce montage segments, or to elaborate upon them. This creates a kind of didactic pausing that absorbs the montage seamlessly into the thematic divisions of the film. Although there are abrupt cuts within some of the individual segments, the primary transitions are from inter-tile to film segment to new intertitle. Each segment illustrates a point made in its corresponding intertitle, so that the jarring impact of the montage is softened. If we were to re-edit Shub's film by removing the intertitles, their softening effect would become clear, as the montage segments would collide with one another dramatically. As it is, her technique is stable, balanced, and nearly classical in style.

Shub's work in cinema is a curious combination of avant-garde radicalism and aesthetic conservatism. On the avant-garde side of the ledger, not only does she employ what, by themselves, would be jarring forms of montage. It is also the case that the idea of the compilation film draws from the most radical wing of the European avant-garde. It is akin to Picasso's incorporation of bits of newspaper and other small objects into his painted canvasses, and to Duchamp's readymades. The aleatory principle – that of the found object or the random sound – challenges the significance of the category of art.

Duchamp's most famous readymade is his work, *Fountain,* a urinal turned upside down, bearing his pseudonym-signature, R. Mutt, at the bottom. He once said that he intended to throw the work into the face of the public as a protest against the very idea of art, while the art establishment was able to neutralize the assault by exhibiting the urinal in museums, thereby turning it back into art. John Cage did something similar in some of his musical compositions by using readymade sounds to challenge the traditional experience of music as art. In using found footage in constructing her films, Shub is squarely within this radical avant-garde tradition. But, on the other side of the ledger, she is able to tame the aleatory principle in creating didactic works, which she herself called "propaganda." Didactic works succeed only if they are accessible to their audience, and efface their purely aesthetic purpose in favor of the communication of content. *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* is not an object thrown in anyone's face, but an attempt to educate the Soviet public about the significance of the February Revolution from the Bolshevik perspective. In spite of its didactic, propagandistic character, we should not underestimate the significance of Shub's aesthetic achievement. Dziga Vertov was the only other Soviet filmmaker who attempted a similar fusion of radical avant-garde technique with the political education of a mass audience, and Vertov was condemned by all and sundry for being an extreme "formalist."

Shub's films got a different reception. *New LEF* became a champion of her work, especially its editor Osip Brik, who favorably contrasted the intelligibility and balance of her montage with the supposedly chaotic montage of Vertov.[10] Brik also became an advocate of Eisenstein's approach to montage, once again contrasting a favored filmmaker positively with Vertov.

Eisenstein published his pivotal article, "The Montage of Attractions," in *LEF* in 1923, while he was still working in Proletkult theater. His use of the word "montage" on this piece refers to theatrical technique. The author rejects the conception of theater as representation, as a copy or imitation of the outside world. We might capture Eisenstein's point by adapting Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: "Bourgeois theater has only attempted to mimic the world; the point, however, is to change it." The theatrical performance changes the world by effecting human beings at their most basic psychophysiological level. It does this by creating attractions, or shocks. We have already encountered the concept of shock in Benjamin's theory of cinema. The idea of the shock seems to be deeply embedded in avant-garde theory and practice in general, though its meaning varies. In its crudest form, it is expressed in the dadaist impulse to *épater le bourgeois*. But in Benjamin and Eisenstein, the concept is far more sophisticated. For Benjamin, the shock is a threat to the perceptual apparatus, a threat deeply rooted in modern urban experience. In cinema, the mass audience learns to master the shock (of clashing images, for example) by developing an attitude that fuses enjoyment with distanced expertise. By contrast, for Eisenstein, the aesthetic purpose of the shock is not to evoke an attitude that permits mastery. Quite the opposite. It is to canalize the emotions of the audience so as to elicit calculated actions. The context of action is the construction of socialism in the midst of an often violent class struggle. The working class can prevail in that struggle only if the actions of its members share a common direction. Thus Eisenstein conceives of the role of theatrical shocks on the model of Lenin's vanguard party. Both the filmmaker and the leader of the October Revolution oppose the veneration of spontaneity. Both believe that, without the directive, organizing activity of a revolution-

ary vanguard, the energy of workers would dissipate in multiple, uncoordinated directions.

Gramsci once wrote that the fundamental fact of politics is the distinction between leaders and led (Gramsci 185a, 144). He did not mean by this that the distinction should remain intact. The fundamental fact of politics is also its fundamental problem. We should add that the problem is rooted in social and economic conditions, and not just authoritarian attitudes or patterns of behavior. It can be mitigated through the development of forms of direct or council democracy, preferential recruitment of workers to leadership positions, and new kinds of mass education, but it cannot be abolished without the expansion of free time made possible by the development and rational organization of the productive forces of society. Moreover, the specialized function of political leadership is needed most of all in a time of revolution, which is also a time of war, when the consequences of bad strategy and tactics can be suicidal. The analogous situation exists in the arts. It is a fantasy to think that everyone is or can be an artist in a society in which the majority of the population must devote most of its waking hours to work. That does not mean that workers should not write reports on their circumstances for revolutionary media (as they did in the early Soviet Union), or develop criticism of films (Eisenstein's films, like all products of Soviet cinema, were submitted to factories for comment by workers before their release), or learn writing or painting and so on. But it does mean that the role of artist, or cultural worker, or whatever we want to call it, is a specialized one, and that it will not disappear until art is reunited with ordinary life in a society of relative abundance. That said, critical evaluation of the vanguardism of Lenin and Eisenstein remains important. The real question is not whether leadership and specialization are necessary, but whether every step to overcome them that is possible at a given historical moment has been taken. That is a question that we must leave open here.

Eisenstein normally refers to "attractions" rather than shocks, appealing to the model of the circus. The circus is significant in his theory because it is, as it were, a theater without a plot. Circus attractions are acts that rivet the attention of the audience, and, while so doing, produce calculable emotional effects. The hire wire act produces excitement, fear, and relief, the clowns create a feeling of mirth and delight, and so on. In spite of its origins in the circus, however, Eisenstein's concept of attraction has a connotation of vigorous or violent impact, and is therefore related to the idea of shock:

> An attraction (in our diagnosis of theater) is any aggressive moment in theater, i.e. any element of it that subjects the audience to emotional or psychological influence, verified by experience and mathematically calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole (Eisenstein 2010a, 34).

In formulating the theory of attractions, Eisenstein relies on the biomechanics of labor developed by the avant-garde poet and director of the Central Institute of Labor, Aleksei Gastev.[11] The attraction is a sudden stimulus that acts on the organism by altering the internal physiological disposition of muscles, nerves, and glands. Each such alteration is a change in emotional state. A theatre of attractions selects a specific sequence of attractions calculated in advance to produce the associated physiological changes and correlative changes in emotion required by the purpose of the play. In revolutionary theater, that

purpose is political, not dramatic, and so has little to do with plot. The purpose, or principle, that unifies the attractions is what Eisenstein calls "the final ideological conclusion," clearly the equivalent of Tretyakov's concept of "social command."

In "The Montage of Attractions," Eisenstein illustrates his theory by providing a list of attractions he employed in a production of the play by A.N. Ostrovsky, *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man*, for the Moscow Proletkult Theater. There are 25 items on the list, but the final one is enough to convey Eisenstein's conception of an attraction. At the conclusion of the performance, firecrackers under the seat of each spectator are remotely detonated.

Eisenstein does not give a definition of montage in his essay, but what he means by the word is clear from the context of usage. Montage is a process of connecting attractions with one another in such a fashion as to result in the final ideological conclusion. In "The Montage of Attractions," Eisenstein claimed that theater was the best medium for that process, but, within a year of writing the piece, he changed his mind. The problem with theatrical attraction is that it functions as what we might call a bare shock, an immediate stimulus that exercises its effect in a punctual moment. Cinema allows the expansion of this punctual effect into a cluster of associations (we will see how in a moment). The desire to enrich the montage of attractions in this way was Eisenstein's theoretical motive for making the transition from theater to film.

In 1924, after making his first film, *Strike*, Eisenstein wrote an essay titled, "The Montage of Film Attractions" (Eisenstein 2010a, 39-58). By this time, he had already entered into a polemic with Dziga Vertov and the Kino-Eye school. The entire article is in fact Eisenstein's attempt to establish his aesthetic position in an extended critique of Vertov. The status of film as art, its relation to theater, the nature of montage, Vertov's concept of "life as it is," his fascination with machines, and the role of acting are all at issue in the critique.

Vertov took the position that cinema must free itself from any connection with the arts of theater, literature, or painting. Only in this way, would it be able to pursue the unique possibilities of a purely cinematic mode of expression. He went further by asserting that the film must not claim the mantle of art at all, because art is a thing of the past, bound up with class society. The revolution, whose purpose is to put an end to classes, must also put an end to art. (For example, in the textual prologue to *One Sixth of the World*, Vertov says that his film is not an artwork, but an object, a "kino-thing"). Eisenstein rejected both positions. To begin with, he asserted an organic connection between cinema and theater, on the grounds that both address an audience, and that both ought to proceed by getting the members of the audience to move in a calculated direction through the imposition of a series of shocks. Secondly, he affirmed that cinema, like theater, is a form of art. For Eisenstein, art is a repository of the aesthetic and technical conquests of the past, conquests that the Soviet filmmaker must not annihilate, but preserve and extend. In Eisenstein's eyes Vertov's anti-art radicalism was a form of aesthetic nihilism.

On the topic of montage, Eisenstein found the approach of the *kinoks* (Vertov and his collaborators) too loose and unstructured. The Kino-Pravda series, "takes no account of attractions – but 'grabs' you through the attraction of its themes, and, purely superficially, through the formal mastery of montage of separate sequences … (Eisenstein 2010a, 41)." This is Eisenstein's version of the common criticism that Vertov is a "formalist," a label the latter rejected. His point is that Vertov's montage stitches together visual appearances

without structuring them as attractions. According to Eisenstein, Vertov is an “impressionist” who plunges us into the flux of appearances without orientation or direction (Eisenstein 2010a, 62).

These criticisms lead Eisenstein to reject Vertov’s emphasis on "life as it is." According to Eisenstein, this emphasis embroils us in the world of surface phenomena, a world that the revolutionary must penetrate. But, unlike Marx’s deciphering of the surface forms of market exchange, the goal of the cinematic penetration of appearances is not cognitive. For Eisenstein, the filmmaker must attempt to change the surface level of human actions by working at the deeper level of the emotions, provoking and unifying them through an ordered series of attractions.

Part of Vertov’s emphasis on life as it is expresses itself in a fascination with machines. At the time Vertov and Eisenstein were making their films, the Soviet Union was in the throws of a state-directed industrial revolution. Machines were beginning to appear in more and more places, in both urban and rural areas. They were becoming part of the fabric of everyday life. But, according to Eisenstein, Vertov carries his fascination with machines to rapturously absurd lengths. Enchanted by machines in the process of movement, Vertov continues to lose himself in the immediacy of the impressionistic moment.

Eisenstein's alternative to Vertov’s supposedly “impressionistic” montage is, of course, the montage of attractions. But, in “The Montage of Film Attractions,” Eisenstein goes beyond his previous article by claiming that cinema has an advantage over theater. While both art forms proceed or ought to proceed by developing attractions, theater limits its montage elements to real events that occur on the stage, while film works with visual representations. The ability to cut up and rearrange these representations in the editing room enables the construction of film sequences in which the representations unfold at a rhythm that allows each to accumulate a penumbra of associations. It is not the elements of montage that clash and otherwise interact, but rather the associations that each element accumulates. Since different audiences have different associations to the same visual representations, it is important to be able to select homogeneous audiences. For Eisenstein, this is a prescription for a class cinema, and a language of montage that addresses itself specifically to the proletariat.

The last of Vertov's themes that Eisenstein considers in his article is the role of the actor. Vertov advocated an “unplayed” cinema, a cinema without actors or plot. People appear in his films, of course, but in documentary form. He went to great lengths to prevent his cameras from interfering with the way people behave in “life as it is,” or as he also put it, “life caught unawares.” His methods include concealing the camera, distracting the public, filming people absorbed in their work, and so on. In principle, Eisenstein tells his readers, he too is an advocate of unplayed and plot-less film, but the time for such cinema is still a long way off. It will be necessary to create new social conditions (what these are, he does not say) in order to prepare the way for the unplayed film. In the meantime, what Eisenstein calls the “model” actor or actress has great potential for moving the film audience. In model acting, the actress or actor does not try to affect the audience through her or his personal virtuosity, but rather through the instructions of the director in assuming the correct bodily postures, facial expressions, and styles and rhythms of movement, all of which can be scientifically calculated to produce the intended emotional effects.

Vertov did not remain silent in the face of Eisenstein’s critique. He responded by

criticizing Einstein's film, *Strike* for remaining trapped in "the sacred garden of 'art.'" There is much in *Strike* that the *kinoks* agree with, including its montage constructions and its handling of intertitles. According to Vertov, what is best in *Strike* is it use of newsreel techniques, but these come from *Kino-Pravda* and the film, *Kino-Eye*. By contrast, the theatricality of *Strike*, including the "tragic poses of 'silent howling,'" and the dependence on acting in general prevent the film from fulfilling its promise. It is a half-measure, a way station on the path to the new cinema. It relies too much on the ability to create a magical illusion of reality. Insofar as *Strike* has adopted Vertov's own documentary methods, it represents a victory over the standard feature film, and an advance for *kinok* principles, but in a form that remains wedded to "the manure of actors, the circus tricks, and the decadent slobbering." In emphatic capital letters, Vertov writes:

> IT IS NOT THROUGH SOVIET MAGIC AGAINST *BOURGEOIS* MAGIC BUT THROUGH THE UNIFIED VISION OF MILLIONS OF EYES THAT WE SHALL STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITALIST SORCERY AND DECEIT. OUR CINEMA WEAPON IN OUR STRUGGLE WITH THE BOURGEOIS WORLD MUST BE AND WILL BE THE ALL-UNION AND THEN THE UNIVERSAL KINO EYE (Vertov 2004, 126).

"THE UNIFIED VISION OF MILLIONS OF EYES" refers to two aspect of Vertov's cinematic practice. The first is that, like Esfir Shub, he often uses stock footage. His own cameramen generated some of that material, and some was anonymous archival footage. In that context, the phrase, MILLIONS OF EYES, refers to the large number of cameras and camera operators involved in creating the material for Vertov's films. The second aspect refers to the basic theory of the Kino-Eye. According to Vertov, the camera extends human perception; it does not replicate or represent it. In particular, through its own mobility, and in combination with the techniques of montage, the camera is capable of assuming any given point in space. In this sense, the unified vision of millions of eyes, and ultimately the utopian UNIVERSAL KINO-EYE, are comprised of the infinite totality of spatial points the camera can occupy; they refer to the capacity of the camera to see the world from every point of view.

Eisenstein responded to Vertov's counterattack with one of his most memorable statements. He begins by rejecting the idea that *Strike* uses Vertov's techniques. Rather, it employs a form of montage that is the "direct antithesis" of the Kino-Eye, a form that is not wedded to "life as it is," because its purpose is to change that life. In spite of his anti-art posturing, Eisenstein insists that Vertov's cinema is in fact a form of art – the art of a primitive impressionism that employs filmed fragments of real life the way the pointillists employed spots of color. Now comes the statement:

> In our conception a work of art …is first and foremost a *tractor plowing over the audience's psyche with a class purpose in mind*. … The Kino-Eye is not just a symbol of *vision*: it is also a symbol of *contemplation*. But we need *not contemplation, but action. It is not a Kino-Eye we need, but a Kino-Fist* (Eisenstein 2010a, 64).

Eisenstein does not mince words. Cinema is a tractor that ploughs over the psyche of

the audience. In his earlier articles, he also called it an "attack" on the audience. It is a violent act, an act that agitates the spectator, that forcibly changes his or her emotional state. The dispute between Eisenstein and Vertov does not concern whether revolutionary film should influence action. The two filmmakers agree that it should. The dispute is over the method of influencing action. For Eisenstein, such influence occurs by means of montage as the organization of attractions, about which theater and even the circus have much to teach. For Vertov as well, the ability to influence action is the result of a montage of visual elements, but one that does not operate by way of emotion. Vertov's unstated presupposition is that, when workers act in a way contrary to the demands of the revolution, the reason is because of their lack of awareness of the vast scope of social transformation the revolution has undertaken, and of the place of their own actions within it. By creating that awareness, by producing a concrete image of the circuit that connects action with its revolutionary social context, the filmmaker enables workers to act more effectively than they would otherwise. *A Sixth of the World*, *The Eleventh*, and *Enthusiasm* are examples of films by Vertov that present the film audience with breathtaking synoptic views of the transformation of the Soviet Union. Eisenstein, on the other hand, does not see cinema as having an educational function. Or, if he does, it is the function of an *éducation sentimentale*, a shaping of emotions. In short, while Vertov's montage is intellectual, Eisenstein's montage is affective.

The montage sequence that was dearest to Eisenstein's heart when he wrote "The Montage of Film Attractions" is the death scene in *Strike*, in which thousands of striking workers are slaughtered by the Tsar's army (Eisenstein 2010a, 43-44). In order to deal with the problem of overacting by the thousands of extras hired from the labor exchange, Eisenstein decided to use a parallel associative montage of bulls being slaughtered in an abattoir. The extras had the sole job of rolling down a hill (and apparently off a cliff), while all of the emotional content of the slaughter is conveyed by the killing of the bulls in extremely graphic detail. The horror of mass murder of the wretched of the earth by the minions of the ruling class – conveyed through association by the slaughter of the bulls – is meant to provoke anger in the working-class audience, as well as a resolve to continue the struggle against capitalism in solidarity with the martyred dead.

Reading the two filmmakers leaves little doubt that Eisenstein is the superior theorist. Vertov began his career in the arts as a poet, and while his theoretical writings are strong on expressiveness, they are weak on conceptualization. By contrast, Eisenstein is devoted to the development of concepts, and the careful exploration of their logical implications. Ironically, Vertov, the champion of film as a mode of clarification and education, is emotive in his theoretical writings, and Eisenstein, the advocate of affective manipulation, is conceptually precise in his theorizing. Vertov's view, however, is more democratic than that of Eisenstein. It expresses the basic position of the Enlightenment that the oppressed act incorrectly as a result of the ignorance in which they are kept, so that knowledge is the key to correct action. In an article that appeared in the February 3, 1925 edition of the newspaper, Kino, Vertov writes:

> Our basic programmatic objective is to aid each oppressed individual and the proletariat as a whole in their effort to understand the phenomena of life around them…
>
> This objective of ours we call kino-eye. The decoding of life as it is. Using

> facts to influence the workers' consciousness (Vertov 1984, 49).

For Vertov, as for Eisenstein, the purpose of montage is to influence action in accordance with the "final ideological conclusion." In the passage quoted above he adds:

> The choice of facts recorded will suggest the necessary decision to the worker or peasant. (Vertov 1984, 49).

But Vertov has more confidence in the ability of workers to see what the final ideological conclusion demands than does Eisenstein. That conclusion, in any event, is very general: that the revolution must be defended, that religion is a regressive force, that workers should emulate revolutionary heroes, that tractors are the key to increasing agricultural production, that petty personal disputes should not stand in the way of collective organization, and so forth. These messages can be made into slogans and conveyed on placards. The problem is to know how to apply them in concrete situations. That is possible only if those who must act possess knowledge of the context of their actions. There is an element of truth in Eisenstein's claim that Vertov is an impressionist. He does attempt to plunge the film audience into the maelstrom of social transformation. But he also expects them to find their bearings, to learn the new cinematic language, and to leave the theatre with an image of what is being done and what remains to be accomplished.

One might argue that played films have a contribution to make to solving the problem of translating the final ideological conclusion into concrete action by presenting cases of the application of revolutionary principles to the film audience. But this is a cognitive matter rather than an affective one, and it is not Eisenstein's approach in his early essays. The dispute between Eisenstein and Vertov turns out to be a familiar one: is intellect or emotion the more powerful agent? More specifically, in motivating action, should the artist rely on the intellect or the emotions, on rational or non-rational forces? Perhaps the best answer to this question is that the artist ought to rely on both, because effective action involves both knowledge and passion. In that case, Vertov and Eisenstein are making the same error, that of thinking that revolutionary avant-garde film must take only a single form, because it supposedly has only one task to accomplish.

There are places in his writings where Eisenstein seems to recognize that revolutionary film has more than one task, if not in a warming to Vertov, then at least in his own work. For example, in "The Montage of Film Attractions," he describes in places in *Strike* where the film shows the methods of the revolutionary underground: how its members repair shoes, how they operate an underground printing press, and how they discover informants and agent provocateurs. Workers, he says, are not interested in the emotions of the actors and actresses, but rather in concrete demonstrations of how things work, and how they are produced (Eisenstein 2010a, 45). It seems that Eisenstein found a place in *Strike* for a purely intellectual content, though one that, under the right circumstances, is capable of influencing action. Who could know if Russian revolutionaries might have to go underground once again? But this points beyond the theory of attractions to a theme that he takes up after filming *October*, that of "intellectual montage."

In his articles of 1929, Eisenstein began to conceive of film on the model of language, and the principles of montage on the model of syntax. The syntax that interests him, however, is not that of Russian, but Japanese. Like most ideographic languages,

Japanese builds word meanings through the combination of signs. In one of Eisenstein's examples, the sign for Eye and that for Water result in the sign for Crying. The juxtaposition of two different meanings generates a third meaning (Eisenstein 1977, 30). This is an instance of intellectual montage. Eisenstein was fascinated by Japanese culture, and in fact devoted an early essay to the significance for film of the Kabuki dance. It is plausible to think that he arrived at the idea of intellectual montage by way of reflection on the nature of Japanese characters, or, as he refers to them, "hieroglyphs." Whether this is true or not, Eisenstein employed the idea in his film, *October*. For example, the "idols sequence" is a montage of religious images that begins with a Slavic crucifix and ends with an Eskimo "idol." On one level, the entire sequence is itself a single montage unit that is juxtaposed to images of the counterrevolutionary general, Kornilov on horseback. On that level, it functions as a commentary on Kornilov's mobilization of Muslim and Christian forces in an assault on the Provisional Government of Kerensky in the name of "God and Country." But the sequence also operates on a second, internal level as a critique of religion that associates the Christian image of God with a succession of "primitive idols." The two levels of the montage are intellectual. They make two purely visual arguments. In the first argument, Kornilov's anomalous combination of Muslim and Christian troops is expanded into the sequence of religious images that shows the opportunistic absurdity of general's religious amalgam. In the second argument, the most sublime Christian image is seen to have a status no higher than that of the other idols. At the same time he was developing the idea of intellectual montage, Eisenstein framed the project for a film of Marx's *Capital* that would communicate its theoretical content without the use of words (Eisenstein 1976). Unfortunately, he was not able to convince Sovkino, the state cinema organization, to fund the film. While he never abandoned the theory of attractions, it seems that Eisenstein came to recognize its limitations, by regarding it as part of the technique of montage rather than its essence.

As early as "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form" (1925), Eisenstein was groping toward a dialectical approach to montage. In the essay, he proceeds by arguing that montage is a materialist technique because it develops the form demanded by the nature of filmic material. The constructivists had said as much with their concept of *tektura*. However Eisenstein goes further than the dualism of material and form. Material does not exist in simple opposition to form, or even as a substrate from which form emerges; rather, the two are unified by a film's ideological purpose. It is curious that Eisenstein does not describe this relationship as a dialectical one, since it is a case of a triad in which the opposition between two terms is overcome in a third term. The conflict between form and material is resolved in the ideological purpose that works through both. When Eisenstein does use the word "dialectical" in his essay, he does so inaccurately. He says that his adoption of the perspective of mass struggle in *Strike* stands in "dialectical opposition" to the individualistic orientation toward the development of plot in bourgeois film (Eisenstein 2010a, 61). But such opposition would be dialectical only if it were both suspended and preserved in a third cinematic approach, and Eisenstein's point is clearly that his proletarian perspective is superior to the bourgeois one, not that the two need to be unified on a higher level. Eisenstein does not seem to realize that not all instances of opposition are dialectical; some are simply antagonistic.

But Eisenstein was only beginning his attempt to think about cinema dialectically in "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form." His thinking did not come to frui-

tion until he wrote "The Dialectical Approach to Film Form" four years later, in 1929. Eisenstein had made three films in the interim between the two pieces: *Battleship Potemkin*, *October*, and *The General Line*. *Potemkin* is his most famous film, and arguably his best. Though it did not do well in Russia, it made him famous when it was screened in the West, and the fame flowed back into his own country. With *Strike*, these films comprise Eisenstein's most revolutionary period. The movies he made after Stalin consolidated power include two masterpieces, *Ivan the Terrible* and *Alexander Nevsky*. They, however, are nationalist rather than revolutionary responses to the invasion of Russia by Germany in the Second World War, and they are not at all dialectical responses. In any event, by the time he wrote "The Dialectical Approach to Film Form," more than just his thinking had matured. His film practice had developed as well, and his thinking in relation to that practice.

In the new essay, as in "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form," Eisenstein's interest in dialectic focuses on the theme of conflict, though he handles the theme at much greater length, and with considerably more theoretical subtlety than in the earlier essay. He writes in the context of "dialectical materialist philosophy," as codified by Communist Party intellectuals in his period:

> The basis of this philosophy is the *dynamic* conception of objects; being as a constant evolution from the interaction between two contradictory opposites. Synthesis that *evolves* from the opposition of thesis and antithesis (Eisenstein 2010a, 161).

The "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" triad comes from the work of Fichte. Hegel used it very infrequently, and while Marx refers to it in his critique of Hegelian dialectic in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, mention of it then drops out of his writings. The triad is not so much wrong as it is overly schematic and incomplete. The concept of synthesis in particular is misleading in that it misses the emphasis on the novelty involved in a dialectical resolution of contradiction in both Hegel and Marx. The "synthesis" of contradictory opposites exists in the resolution, but in internally suspended form, as the reference that the resolution necessarily makes to the terms of the contradiction that preceded it. However, the emphasis of Marx and Hegel is not on the aspect of synthesis, but rather on the emergence of an essentially new content. The dialectical resolution is a novel reality, one that transcends the original contradiction, including the synthesis of its two terms. Still, the "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" triad does no damage in Eisenstein's article because the author is not very much interested in the stage of synthesis. The focus of his attention is the dynamics of contradictory opposition.

Eisenstein makes reference once again to the theory of persistence of vision by arguing that contradictory opposition is involved in the most basic phenomenon of cinema: the illusion of motion. We have the experience of motion when one film image follows another because the first image lingers on the retina while the second image is superimposed upon it. The conflict between the two images produces the illusion of motion (Eisenstein 2010a, 164). The falsity of the theory of the persistence of vision does not affect Eisenstein's point. Even if the processing of images occurs in the occipital lobe and higher brain centers rather than on the retina, the fact remains that the contradiction between the perceived position of objects in the two projected images creates the illusion of mo-

tion. This is a profound insight on Eisenstein's part, one that harks back to Hegel's solution of Zeno's paradoxes of motion. For Hegel, motion exists *because* it is contradictory, since it involves being in a location and being beyond it at one and the same moment. For Eisenstein, the illusion of motion exists because of the opposition at the same moment of two incompatible images. The insight has an important implication for film theory: *at the level of its most basic, defining characteristic, film is montage*. The dynamic juxtaposition of images that the editor creates post-production is merely a further elaboration of the more fundamental juxtaposition of still images that occurs whenever the film moves through a projector. Montage is a series of variations on a theme that makes cinema possible in the first place.

The fact that contradiction is involved at multiple cinematic levels makes Eisenstein's dialectic an "expressive" one (in Althusser's terminology). His dialectic is organic, which is why he uses the word "evolution" in the passage quoted above. Further on, he adds: "*The shot is not a montage element – the shot is a montage cell (a molecule)*" (Eisenstein 2010a, 166). Although Eisenstein does not point this out, the contrast between element and molecule is that between a substance (element) that does not share the chemical properties of the complex whole of which it is a part (e.g. hydrogen is a component of water, but is not a liquid apart from its combination with oxygen), and a substance (molecule) that does share those properties (a molecule of water has all of the chemical properties of the pool of water it is in). But the biological idea of the cell adds something to this expression of the whole by the part, and the part by the whole: namely, the idea of dynamic change. The cell evolves by a process of division in which each successor cell is a genetic replica of the parent cell, though with some individualizing mutations. The basic unit of montage is cellular because the higher-level montage that constitutes the film as a whole is already present within its simplest part, from which the whole evolves.

A substantial section of "The Dialectical Approach to Film Form" is a catalogue of the different forms of conflict involved in editorial montage, along with photographic illustrations from Eisenstein's own films. He names ten forms of conflict:

> 1. Graphic conflict, illustrated by the contrast, from *Potemkin*, between a dead human body and the parallel lines of the Odessa Steps which the body intersects at an angle.
> 2. Conflict between planes, illustrated by the descending planes of each level of the Odessa Steps.
> 3. Conflict between volumes, illustrated by the coexistence within a frame of two women of different size and shape.
> 4. Spatial conflict, illustrated by the contrast between a roof in the foreground, and a building in the background.
> 5. Conflict in lighting (not illustrated).
> 6. Conflict in tempo (not illustrated).
> 7. Conflict between matter and shot, illustrated by the distortions of an African mask by different camera angles in two different frames from *October*.
> 8. Conflict between matter and its spatiality, created by means of optical effects of the camera lens (not illustrated).
> 9. Conflict between an event and its temporality, by means of fast and slow motion (not illustrated).

10. Conflict between the optical complex and the complex of sound in sound movies (not illustrated) (Eisenstein 2010a, 168).

In reflecting on this list, Eisenstein introduces two analogies between film and music. The first is based on the musical idea of the dominant (common pitch). Just as in music, a chord is more than its pitch, though the pitch "dominates" the chord, in film a montage cell can involve more than one form of conflict, though the cell is dominated by only one of the ten forms. The second analogy is based on the musical idea of counterpoint, in which harmonic dependence is combined with independence of rhythm and pitch contour. According to Eisenstein, sound film can be realized as audio-visual counterpoint. This is a much different conception, for example, than that of the musical score as illustrating the plot. Eisenstein's approach to sound in film (which he shares with Vertov) is that sound ought to be handled as an independent element, in counterpoint with the film's visual content. Once again, we can see that the dialectical idea of film form involves conflict.

The analogy between film and music follows from the fact that both are temporal arts. Time, motion, and change are the inescapable themes of both. Since this is the case, music as well as film is eminently dialectical in character. (Think of dissonance – a conflicting tone combination – and its resolution in tonal music).

According to Eisenstein, in addition to the audio-visual counterpoint of the sound film (still a few years off at that time), there is the purely visual counterpoint of the silent movie. Visual counterpoint in embodied in the whole dialectical triad as applied to film. The first stage of the triad is formulated in the dialectic of the intertitles, the second is formed spatially within each individual shot, and the third "explodes with the growing intensity of *the conflict montage between the shots*" (Eisenstein 2010a, 168).

The idea that montage exists in the single shot or frame as a conflict of aspects of the still image is yet another innovation in the treatment of montage Eisenstein develops in his article At least five of the ten forms of conflict we canvased above belong to this category. But the triad Eisenstein describes is not that of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, as he seems to think. It consists, rather, of three stages in the development of the antithesis, i.e. in the development of contradictory opposition. The transition from intertitle to single shot, and then from single shot to the "explosion" of the montage of combined shots is an intensification of conflict without the moment of resolution. It is instructive to think about this in relation to *Battleship Potemkin*. There is no visual or narrative resolution at the end of the film. We know from history that the Revolution of 1905 was defeated, but defeat is not indicated in the final shots, in which the ship continues to move through the water after the crew's successful appeal to the sailors of the fleet to let Potemkin pass. The film ends with text superimposed on a shot of Potemkin's sailors waving their hats and throwing them in the air from the prow of their ship. The text is a quote from Lenin from 1905 calling the uprising "an unconquered area of the Revolution," and praising Potemkin's crew for "an attempt to form the nucleus of the revolutionary armed forces." Even this is not a resolution though, on the one hand because the uprising was an unsuccessful attempt, and, on the other, because a revolutionary military is an institution that has meaning only in relation to conflict. Once again Eisenstein is not interested in resolution, but in conflict; in the discovery of multiple ways to present it, in its intensification as it moves from intertitle to shot to moving montage, and in the counterpoint between

opposed forces that nonetheless imply one another. Eisenstein's dialectic ends in explosion, not resolution or reconciliation.

There is a historical reason for this. Like all Soviet communists at the time, Eisenstein saw his country, his adopted class, and himself as living in the middle of an extended battle. In 1929, the year of the article, the Soviet republics were still recovering from the devastation of the civil war. They were internationally isolated, subject to boycott and blockade, and surrounded by countries whose leaders wanted to make good on Churchill's threat to "strangle Bolshevism in its cradle." In addition, fascism had triumphed in Italy, and the Nazis were on the rise in Germany, posing a particularly dire threat to the Soviet Union. This was not the time for the dialectical resolution of contradictions. It was the time for explosion. The same message, the same overarching "final ideological conclusion," is present in all of Eisenstein's films, from *Strike* to *Alexander Nevsky* – continue the struggle.

Nature, Machines, and the Pantheistic Heresy

Their critics called both Dziga Vertov and Alexander Dovzhenko "pantheists." Pantheism was a heresy that threatened to seduce dialectical materialists because of the difficulty involved in distinguishing it from their canonical beliefs. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the idea of dialectical materialism as a philosophical "worldview" comes from Engels, in whose work it is linked with the idea of a dialectic of nature. In what was, in effect, a revival of Hegel's philosophy of nature, Engels argued that the natural world, like the social one, is a process of progressive change driven by internal contradictions. In his book, *Dialectics of Nature*, he tries to demonstrate this by reference to the findings of the mathematics and natural science of his own day. The relation between differential and integral equations, the phenomena of electrical and magnetic polarity, and the transitions between phases in chemical events are a few of the examples Engels gives to illustrate the dialectical character of natural processes and of mathematics as the language of nature. A consequence of the view that natural change is the dynamic expression of internal contradictions is the idea that nature is self-moving. But the idea of a self-moving nature belongs to pantheism.

For the ancient Greeks, living things were defined by the fact that they are animate, which means that they move themselves. Whatever moves itself has a *psyche*, a "soul." If nature in its entirety is self-moving – and the Greeks could see that it is from the rotation of the heavens – then nature has a soul. Plato explicitly drew this conclusion in his dialogue on cosmology, the *Timaeus*. Plotinus, the Neoplatonist, accepted the idea of the World Soul, but saw it as merely the last of the three "hypostases," the successively less perfect stages of emanation through which Reality expresses itself (the first two hypostases are the One and the Divine Mind). One way to arrive at pantheism is to reformulate the philosophy of Plotinus by abandoning the first two hypostases. The result is a view of reality in which there is only nature and its process of self-movement.

For most pantheists (Spinoza is an exception) it is impossible to give a reductive, mechanistic account of life. The fact that nature is alive requires retention of the idea of the soul. But if nature is the whole of everything that exists, and if nature has a soul, then the soul of nature has at least some of the properties of what is traditionally understood as

God; for example, it is omnipresent, since there is nothing outside of nature, and it is omnipotent since self-movement is the source of every possible exercise of power. Possessing such divine attributes, ensouled nature is an appropriate object of veneration and awe. In their battle with religion, dialectical materialists were understandably concerned to draw a line between their worldview and that of pantheism. One way of accomplishing this is to show that, far from being divine, nature moves through ordinary physical processes. The problem, however, is that dialectical materialists also rejected what they called "mechanical materialism," which understands matter as inert substance that moves under the impact of external physical causes. For them, matter is dialectical, which means that it is self-moving. But now we are back to the problem of pantheism. How is it possible to distinguish the self-moving nature of the pantheists from the self-moving matter of dialectical materialism?

Marx began his Young Hegelian period as an atheist, a position he refined under the influence of Bruno Bauer. But as early as 1843, he began to think that atheism was beside the point of philosophical criticism. Religion may be the opium of the masses, but Marx did not propose a war against drugs. His battle was against the miserable conditions of human life that caused people to turn to the religious opiate (Marx 2000, 71-72). The Russian revolutionaries faced a different situation than Marx, who had lived in Germany, France, Brussels, and England, in other words, the advanced countries of Western Europe. They were advanced, among other reasons, because they had already gone through bloody struggles against established religion, whether in the form of the Protestant battle against Roman Catholicism, or the struggle of the radical wing of the Enlightenment against Christianity as a whole. The French had even expropriated Church property in their revolution. But in Russia, in the early years of the twentieth century, the Eastern Orthodox Church reigned supreme as both the official religion, and as a power integrated into the state. Priests sat as representatives in the Duma, and the monk, Rasputin, was assassinated by a wing of the aristocracy because of the influence he wielded over the Tsarina. With respect to religion, the Russian revolutionaries faced conditions similar to those of the French revolutionaries a century and a half before them, and they responded by adopting the anti-clerical radicalism of their French counterparts. Only the Russians went further than the French by opposing all forms of religion. Islam and Buddhism were influential in some of the Soviet Republics, and fell under the same critique of religion that the communists directed against Russian Orthodoxy. Still, until the rise of Stalin, the official atheism of the party was at least intermittently tolerant. The religious beliefs of workers and peasants did not prevent them from enjoying party membership, the Orthodox Church was left in possession of most of its fixed property, and religious services continued to be held for large congregations. In 1929, however, the Soviet state launched a campaign against religion that involved, in addition to ideological battles, the expropriation of Church buildings, and the massive persecution of the clergy. Unlike Robespierre, whom he resembled in other ways, Stalin had no interest in creating a public religion as a substitute for the existing Church. Instead, atheism took the place of religion in the form of the dialectical materialist worldview.

Slavic paganism remained an active influence on the Russian peasantry, not in the form of organized cults, which had been destroyed by Christians a long time before, but as incorporated into the fabric of Christianity. For example, as Dovzhenko points out in his notebooks, peasants celebrated Easter as a pagan rite of spring (Dovzhenko 1973, 53).

In the Slavic countries, it was common to refer to the ancient pagan religion, and its persistence in ostensibly Christian form, as "pantheism." In their battle to modernize the Russian countryside, it is not surprising that communist officials regarded the declared pantheism of some poets and philosophers as merely a sophisticated expression of the pagan worship of natural forces, a worship that could only hinder the development of the forces of production.[12]

Communist Party critics accused Dovzhenko of being a pantheist after he released the third film in his Ukrainian Trilogy. *Earth* is Dovzhenko's greatest movie, and the filmmaker knew that when he finished editing it. The hostile reception the film received from Party officials broke his spirit, sending him into a period of depression, isolation, and thoughts of suicide. The year was 1930. Stalin had triumphed over Trotsky as well as the Right Opposition led by Bukharin, and was well on his way to consolidating autocratic power. He had launched a massive campaign for the collectivization of Soviet agriculture, a campaign that would ultimately result in the deportation and death of perhaps as many as six million peasants. Before 1930, though, collectivization was a relatively mild, largely voluntary process. Still, it was beginning to elicit opposition from the kulaks, the so-called "rich peasants," some of whom began to wage a kind of guerrilla war against it. This included the slaughter of millions of heads of cattle and other farm animals in defiance of the demand that the kulaks give the animals to the newly formed collective farms. It also involved forms of sabotage, including burning down collective farm buildings, and even the murder of communist party activists in the countryside. Stalin's response to the opposition was to use overwhelming force, including summary executions as well as mass deportations that resulted in death by starvation. However, before things had gotten to this state, Dovzhenko made his film about the creation of a collective farm in the Ukraine over the opposition of a kulak family.

Earth is a "played" film, with actors, actresses, and plot. Its narrative is simple. Vasyl, an activist in his village communist youth organization (*Komosol*), leads the collective in acquiring a tractor that puts an end to the domination of farming in the village by a kulak family, over the initial opposition of his father, Opanas. In retaliation, one of the kulak sons murders Vasyl as he returns from his fiancé on the day of his triumph, the day the tractor arrives. The assassin shoots Vasyl with a rifle as his victim is dancing down a village road. Vasyl's father sets out to find his son's murderer and confronts the perpetrator, who denies the crime. But Opanas does not push the matter to the point of revenge. Instead he appeals to the village Soviet to give his son a funeral based, not on the old religious ceremonies, which he now rejects, but on the life that his son and the other youth of the village were in process of creating. The new, communist ceremony is held, still without action against the murderer, who, at a visible distance from the ceremony, engages in a mad parody of Vasyl's dance the night he was shot. Vasyl's finance cannot bring herself to attend the funeral ceremony, though we see her in parallel montage in her home, clothes torn from her body in grief, mourning in the nude. The final scene, shows us the girl with a new lover, as the two look into each others eyes, breathing heavily, not with sexual desire it seems, but in recognition of the weighty historical significance of their own lives.

The fact that Dovzhenko has Vasyl's father forgo vengeance for his son's death did not please the new Stalinist authorities. By the time Dovzhenko finished the film, the relatively mild first phase of collectivization was already over, and the "annihilation of the

kulaks as a class" was underway. In the new context of intensified struggle, the Bolshevik "folk-poet," Demian Bednyi, accused Dovzhenko of being a "defeatist," and Earth of being a "Kulak film" and a "counter-revolutionary obscenity," in an article that appeared in *Izvestiia* in April 1930 (Bednyi 1983). But the frequent claim that Dovzhenko was a pantheist was an equally grave charge.[13] When Stalin put an end to the uncertain struggle between party factions with his decisive victory, the relative, albeit limited, freedom of art and ideology was replaced with rigid control from the center. The problem of orthodoxy and heresy was being raised in all parts of Soviet society, including the factories, but nowhere more insistently than in the work of the intelligentsia, which was, after all, responsible for the production of ideas. But what was the basis of the charge that *Earth* is an example of Dovzhenko's pantheism?

There is no doubt that, in his film, Dovzhenko depicts organic nature with loving sensitivity. In fact, *Earth* includes some of the most beautiful, enchanting, and utopian scenes of nature in the entire history of cinema. The movie opens with a shot of the wind blowing through a field of grain, followed by two progressively more extreme close-ups of the same wind-swept field. The scene is so beautiful that the viewer hardly notices the montage. *Earth*, in fact, consists almost entirely of montage. There are only two or three tracking shots, and the camera never pans. On the few occasions when the camera moves, it is in order to create a sense of stillness. For example, one sequence involving camera motion occurs when Vasyl is slowly walking along the village road, and the camera moves backward as he moves forward, always maintaining the same distance from his face. Other than a handful of similar exceptions, the only change in the perspective of the camera consists in abrupt transitions between shots in which relatively little changes. The result is a feeling of stasis at the heart of movement, especially when a shot is held for a while before making a transition to another shot.

Dovzhenko uses the length of the shot to contract or expand time, as in the death scene in the beginning of the film, where the longest lasting shots are of the dying grandfather, Semen, surrounded by a sea of fallen fruit. Along with Semen's slow movements, and the gently persistent smile on his face, the length of the shots expand the feeling of time to the borders of eternity. There is no suggestion of an eternal life for the soul however. The request by Semen's old friend, Petro, that Semen try to contact him from the other side becomes the topic of a joke later in the film. But death as nothingness of the individual personality is just as eternal as immortal life. More importantly, the death of the individual is not as significant as the continuing existence of the human and natural world. The scene treats the human life span as a natural fact by having Semen die among hundreds of fallen apples. It also treats the succession of generations as a natural fact, in a montage that cuts between Semen eating a peach while sitting on the ground, and two of his young grandchildren eating apples while similarly seated. Life, death, and rebirth in the form of the life of the new organism are themes that run throughout the film.

Vasyl's funeral at the end of the film repeats the death of Semen at its opening. The apple branches brush against Vasyl's face as the pallbearers carry his body through an orchard. When the funeral ends, the camera cuts first to branches laden with apples, and then to heaps of apples, peaches, and melons lying on the ground. While the camera points toward the branches, it slowly begins to rain. When the camera cuts to the fruit lying on the ground, the rain has become a downpour. Though there are several transitions between shots within that scene, some of the shots linger, and the whole sequence of

shots seems quite long. The result is a sense of stillness, but not of eternity. What we experience instead is the slow but varying passage of time. The rain is what Gilles Deleuze calls a direct time-image (Deleuze 1989). The rain *is* time, and the passage of time is the varying tempo of the rain; only a few raindrops at first, then a downpour, then lighter rain, then a few drops, then the sunlit fruit dripping with rainwater. By that point, the camera has returned to the apple-laden boughs.

There is no death at the end of that passage of time. The tree branches are heavy with fruit, and the falling rain waters the soil the trees grow in. The fruit that lies on the ground will be collected or go to seed, and the seeds will take root in the wet soil. People are born and die like the apple trees, but the life of nature, of which human life is a part, goes on.

We can see from this description that the charge of pantheism was not groundless. But it failed to grasp the other side of the film, the side that celebrates machinery. The story, after all, is about the acquisition of a tractor. When one of Vasyl's young comrades delivers the eulogy at his funeral, he says that "with a communist steel horse [Vasyl] overturned the thousand-year-old forces." The tractor is not a stranger in the natural world; it is, rather, a new form that nature has taken. The mechanization of agriculture not only permits the defeat of the kulaks. Just as importantly, it increases natural abundance, as demonstrated in the scene that extends from plowing the fields to harvesting the grain, to separating the wheat from the chaff and baking it into loaves of bread with mechanized equipment.

This may be a romantic view of technology, but it is not pantheistic. Instead, it comes astonishingly close to Marx's conception in the 1844 *Manuscripts* of "the humanization of nature and the naturalization of humanity." There is a humorous scene that supports this interpretation. When the tractor first arrives at the outskirts of the village, it stops moving because there is no water in the radiator. After puzzling for a while about how to get the machine moving again, three of the village men urinate into the radiator, which enables the tractor to continue along its way. It is hard to think of a more concrete image of the unity (dialectical, of course) of human being, nature, and machine.

In his autobiography, Dovzhenko wrote that he attempted to create poetic films, an attestation that has influenced the interpretation of his work ever since. It is easy to see that the statement is true, though hard to say what it means precisely. In part, it seems to refer to a rejection of realism. In *Earth*, the story of collectivization takes second place to a meditation on life, death, and rebirth. The details of the very simple plot are opportunities for developing the underlying meditation through the creation of visual metaphors. Sometimes, montage conveys the metaphors, as at the conclusion of Semen's death scene where the camera cuts from a shot of the dead body to a shot of a wilted sunflower. But more often the metaphor is borne by the composition of the single shot, as in the image of melons in heavy rain. Yet if Dovzhenko's compositional principles are poetic, they are equally painterly. Dovzhenko was trained and worked as a painter before he made the transition to film. The beauty of *Earth* often lies in the fact that the static shot seems to *want* to be rendered in paint, as landscape, still life, or portrait. There are so many examples of this that it is hard to chose one, but we would not go wrong by focusing on Vasyl's dance, precisely because it seems so filmic in that it takes motion as its theme. But perform the experiment of freezing any frame in the sequence: in a close-up at the moment just before he breaks out into dance, as the joy of the day builds, not in a smile,

but behind the serious expression of the actor's face; or a distance shot where the village road dwarfs Vasyl's body; or a medium shot where the body is in the vigorous, powerful posture required by the dance, and clouds of dust come up from the ground at the dancer's feet. Dovzhenko's attention to compositional structure and detail in each of these shots is meticulous. Each stands on its own.

The poetic and painterly treatment of nature in *Earth* exists, as Eisenstein might say, in "counterpoint" with scenes of the tractor and the mechanized process of turning the harvested grain into bread. But this dialectical contradiction finds its resolution in scenes where machinery appears to be more the fulfillment of nature than its conquest. When the tractor first arrives at the village, the villagers come out to watch its arrival, but so do the horses and other farm animals. Animals and people are assimilated to one another by being shot from the same distance, and at the same angle from below, which gives them an epic quality. It is as though the horses and cattle are excited by an arrival that they and their fore-bearers have been anticipating for millennia; the birth of a new species that will relieve them as well as the villagers of their onerous labor.

For Dovzhenko, birth, life, death, and rebirth are not a pantheistic cycle, but a dialectical spiral. They constitute a historical as well as a natural process through which nature becomes humanity and humanity surpasses itself in the machine, while all three continue to exist in a dynamically changing balance.

Eisenstein is the one who labeled Vertov a pantheist, in "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form":

> Cine-Eye, sketchbook in hand (!), rushes after objects as they are *without rebelliously interrupting the inevitability of the statics of the causal connections between them, without overcoming this connection through a powerful social-organizational motive but yielding to its 'cosmic' pressure*. Vertov uses the fixing of its external dynamics to mask the statics of a manifest pantheism… (Eisenstein 2010a, 168).

It is a remarkable insight, especially in light of Eisenstein's simultaneous condemnation of Vertov's cult of the machine. Vertov was not the founder of that cult. A fascination with machines, along with the idea that they had initiated a new epoch in human experience, ran deep in constructivism and, before that, back to the very beginnings of futurism. Marinetti praised machines as the centaurs and angels of the modern period. He was attracted to their speed and violence as instruments of industry and leisure, as well as weapons of war. In his view, they were blowing to smithereens the claustrophobic culture of Europe and preparing the way for the new poets and other creators. The Russian futurists rejected Marinetti's proto-fascism, but they accepted his veneration of machines, and their ability to clear away the debris of the past. In particular, cubo-futurism lent itself to a machine aesthetic, since the cubist decomposition and reconstruction of form suggests the idea of a mechanical rearrangement of parts. The constructivists took the machine aesthetic of the cubo-futurists and carried it further, from the two-dimensional canvas into the third dimension. The productivists, who emerged from the constructivist movement, brought the early futurist interest in machines to fulfillment when they advocated the abandonment of art through participation in the mechanized processes of factory production. Vertov is the cinematic representative of this extended avant-garde tradition. But

what does this have to do with pantheism?

As was the case in other avant-garde movements, Vertov issued a founding statement, this one titled "WE: Variant of a Manifesto" (Vertov 1984, 5-9). There were only four or five other members of the "movement," and only two of those, in addition to Vertov, were included in the collective pronoun, WE: Vertov's brother, Mikhail Kaufman, who was his main cameraman, and his future wife, Elizaveta Svilova, who worked as an editor on his films. They called themselves the "Council of Three." WE begins by distinguishing its understanding of filmmaking from both standard feature films that are produced only to bring profit at the box office, and what passes for avant-garde film. It rejects the "played" movie in any form on the grounds that it patterns itself after the model of theater. This subordinates film to an already existing art form, and imposes upon it qualities that do not belong to its nature. The enactment of a literary form (the script), the production and manipulation of emotional states, and the rehearsed gestures and facial expressions of acting are so much artistic detritus that the filmmaker must sweep away. According to WE, film is a new form of expression, and the task of the filmmaker is to discover the methods, conceptions, and expressive possibilities that are unique to it. Any attempt to fuse cinema, at least at this early stage in its development, with any of the other "arts," is to be rejected in the name of the search for "pure cinema." WE however does hold open the prospect of a synthesis with other "arts" after cinema reaches a stage of maturity. Most of all, cinema must stay clear of the psychological drama:

> The "psychological" prevents man from being as precise as a stopwatch; it interferes with his desire for kinship with the machine (Vertov 1984, 5-9).

It is better to think of filmmaking according to the model of technology and science than to conceive of it as a form of art. According to Vertov, *Kinochevsko* is entirely different than "cinema" or "cinematography" as they have been understood up until now. It is a medium for the exploration of "pure movement" that must first of all discover such movement as a "resultant" of the apparent chaos of day-to-day events, just as the physicist must ignore the chaos of ordinary movements in order to discover laws of motion in experimentally controlled events.

The theme of pure movement is the basis of the affinity of *kinoshevko* with machines:

> 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 (Vertov 1984, 7).

The control of movement and the precision such control implies is a conquest that the human species begins to achieve through its technology. But the invention of new technology, which, in Vertov's period, means new machines, is only the beginning of a complex process of transformation. In inventing machines, people alter the world they live in, and the initial result of that change is disorientation. Industrial machinery releases powers that threaten to overwhelm its creator. The problem that WE poses is that of adaptation, the adaptation of human beings to the unanticipated world that results from their own activity. Marxism emphasizes the importance of planning in overcoming alienation

and the fetishism of commodities. But WE implies that a socialist society must also be adept at mastering the unintended consequences of planned action. Even the planned introduction of technology intervenes in a causal nexus that is far too complex for us to understand fully. This does not invalidate the principle of planning. On the contrary, it extends it to the process of adaptation. For Vertov, film is the vehicle of new planned, adaptive interventions in the course of events.

WE looks forward to a transformation of humanity, the rise of "new man." This is a theme about which the dominant trends of "postmodern" thought are profoundly suspicious, seeing at work a millenarian and totalitarian impulse. However, in spite of the apocalyptic quality of the poetry of WE, the end of days is not what Vertov has in mind. The modern period is not the first time a "new man" has arisen. The transformation of human nature is a continuing theme of history. From the evolutionary branching that resulted in our species, to the formation of hunting and gathering bands, to the invention of settled agriculture, to the rise of the first cities and the ensuing succession of the various forms of class society, what has our history been other than the repeated creation of new men and women?

For WE, the whole industrial system of machines makes our current transformation possible. WE is particularly enthralled by the process of electrification that was on the verge of transforming everyday life in the Soviet Union. Lenin once said that socialism is electrification plus the soviets, in other words, the most advanced technology plus workers' democracy. Without political responsibilities, Vertov is not concerned with the democratic structure of the soviet. His interest is in electrification alone freed from all capitalist limitations:

> *Our path leads through the poetry of machines, from the bungling citizen to the perfect electric man*. …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 (Vertov 1984, 8).

The key to creating a new man is to foster a new relationship with machines. There is no reason for mechanical labor to be onerous under socialist conditions. If workers control the direction and organization of their work, then why should they seek their freedom only in leisure time? The task is to enter into a partnership, even a family relationship, with machines. Through the visual "poetry of machines," the *kinoks* will get workers to love their machines, to feel a "kinship" with them, thereby "introducing creative joy into mechanical labor" (Vertov 1984, 8). The "new man" will emerge as the "perfect electric man," not with the deadpan expression of industrial routine, but with the joyful exuberance of a new form of creativity enabled by partnership with machines.

Vertov's films often focus on machinery at length and in meticulous detail. Moving from the whole process of movement to the moving parts that comprise it, and back to the whole once again, he explores the intricate dance of machinery, revealing what would normally escape our notice. But *kinoshevko* expands its field of view beyond the movement of machines, in order to see them as one instance of a universal principle. All motion is machine-like in essence. This is what the conception of *kinoshevko* as an art of "pure movement" means. Whatever its specific subject matter may be, the camera must pick out three essential properties of motion: "radical necessity, precision, and speed." It

must find these properties in earthquakes as well as power plants, “in the movements of comets and meteors and the gestures of searchlights that dazzle the stars” (Vertov 1984, 8). There is no opposition between nature and machines because nature *is* a machine. Human beings seem to be alone among nature's creatures in failing to recognize that this is so. The task that the *kinoks* give to themselves is that of reintegrating into the cosmic machinery a human species that has become alienated from it. The task begins with the creation of an art of motion; an act of extracting the three properties essential to movement from the succession of filmed images.

In an unacknowledged violation of its prohibition against premature synthesis with the other arts, WE, like Eisenstein, believes that music has much to offer film. The basic unit of *kinoshevko* is not movement *per se*, but the intervals between movements, the points of transition between them, just as in music the interval is not a note, but the relationship between two notes. This is another way of stating the point that montage is at the center of cinematic technique, since the fundamental element of montage is not the single shot, but the transition between shots. The main problem of *kinoshevko* is how to arrange intervals into a whole composition that expresses the rhythm of the movement involved in the material of the film. The problem is solved by proceeding through an intermediary stage that arranges intervals into phrases. In each phrase, movement rises, reaches a high point, and then falls off, just as tonal music builds to a high point of dissonance and then to its resolution. Interval of movement, phrase, and composition are the three levels of organization involved in extracting the machine-like properties of motion.

Vertov wrote WE in 1922. The following year he penned another manifesto: “The Resolution of the Council of Three” (Vertov 1984, 13-21, the document in which Vertov introduces his theory of the Kino-Eye. In focusing on factories, automobiles, electricity grids, and so on, as well as the machine-like properties of the movements of nature, it is important to remember that the movie camera is also a machine. It is capable of a kind of vision radically different than, and superior to, that of the human eye. The camera can go anywhere, occupy any point in space, a mobility that the accumulation of stock footage greatly assists. Through montage, the camera, or as Vertov now calls it, the Kino-Eye, can arbitrarily link any two points in space. It can alter the flow of time through fast and slow motion. Through its own movement, it can come close to objects or back away to a considerable distance in the flash of an instant. It can piece together coherent narratives that seem to transpire in a single location and in a matter of moments from shots taken years apart at far distant locations. By combining the hands of one person, the legs of a second, and the head of a third, it can create the “perfect Kino-Man” (as Kuleshov created a nonexistent woman in one of his experiments). Through montage, it can free itself from the confused welter of impressions of the spectator at a boxing match or a ballet, combining shots in the most advantageous way. It can connect the film audience with places it has never been, and with times that are now past. Best of all, unlike the human eye, the camera is unendingly perfectible. Each new improvement extends perceptual possibilities, and so opens new regions of a world in motion for the *kinok* to explore.

Though Vertov emphasizes the superiority of the camera-machine to the human eye, it is clear that he values it, not for its own sake, but for its ability to extend and multiply the eye’s visual capacities. In spite of his encomium to machines, Vertov is a humanist. For him, humanity is not something over and done with, but an ongoing process of development punctuated with moments of radical transition. What Vertov wants is, not the

triumph of the machine over humanity, but the marriage of humanity and machine. He wants their symbiotic connection.

As a result of such symbiosis, the human senses undergo transformation. In "The Resolution of the Council of Three," Vertov introduces this thesis. Like Benjamin, he seems to understand Marx's treatment of the transformation of the senses without having read the 1844 *Manuscripts*:

> The main and essential thing is: The sensory exploration of the world through film (Vertov 1984, 14).
>
> I [the Kino-Eye] make the viewer see in the manner best suited to my presentation of this or that visual phenomenon (Vertov 1984, 16).
>
> I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it (Vertov 1984, 17).
>
> My path leads to the creation of a fresh perception of the world (Vertov 1984, 8).

The "perfect electric man" is the human being with a new sensorium, the human being who is sensitive to the range of visual phenomena (and, in the era of the sound movie, the range of auditory phenomena) that the camera discovers and presents on screen. Machines have altered our world in ways we hardly understand by plunging us into a chaos of images in seemingly disordered motion. How many of us can make sense of the visual impressions we receive in a single hour walking through city streets? But a machine also provides us with a way to master these images, a way to explore and organize them into a coherently rhythmic whole. It is nearly a cliché to say that the main actor in *Man with a Movie Camera* is the camera. Vertov even animates the camera by having it walk autonomously on its tripod legs toward the end of the film. But it is just as important to recognize that *Man with a Movie Camera* is about our experience of the modern city. In the film, the camera reveals what the urban dweller ordinarily does not see; for example, the street cleaners beginning their work, and the homeless population awakening at dawn. It occupies perspectives we never occupy; a hole in the ground underneath a moving train, a position high atop a water tower. It breaks motion apart into varying tempos by slowing it down, speeding it up, and freezing frames. It films from a speeding car, and shows itself filming through the use of a second camera. It analyzes visual stimuli that accelerate as the film nears its end, so much so that we are left with a feeling of exhaustion when the final titles appear. It arranges the transitions between images into larger groups, and uses these groups to build a vast composition. It teaches us to hear (or better, to see) the music of the industrial city. No matter how fast the movement, the camera preserves its details, reducing the chaos of movement to its general "resultant," discovering the visual formula that makes us aware of the "necessity, precision, and speed" of the whole. The city is a machine that the camera-machine enables us to see in its own terms. By changing our perception, the camera makes our experience intelligible.

Concern with necessity, precision, and speed as properties of motion is not the exclusive affair of the Kino-Eye. It is also the way the natural sciences go about apprehending the world. The sciences see in nature, not just the way it appears on the surface – the way

it appears to unaided human vision. They dig down to a deeper level in order to uncover the mechanisms that generate those appearances. Vertov is not afraid of the ban on "mechanistic materialism," pronounced on pain of excommunication or worse by the dialectical materialist priesthood. Like Spinoza, he suggests that we have not even begun to understand the minute dimensions at which mechanism operates. Nor have we begun to grasp the extraordinary complexity of mechanistic arrangements, in which the smallest parts of matter communicate their motion to one another in regular patterns, and so combine into wholes, which in turn communicate their motions to one another in higher-order patterns that produce new, more complex wholes, and so on, through an unimaginable number of nested levels (Spinoza 1992, 75-76). For Vertov, as for Spinoza, the apparent opposition between the mechanical and the organic is an illusion that comes from our ignorance of the way nature works. To call nature a machine is not to denigrate it. It is, rather to indicate what machines are capable of achieving. If nature is a machine, and the human body is a machine, and humanly made machines are machines, then mechanism is present everywhere in a cosmos in perpetual motion, a mechanistically self-moving world. This returns us to the theme of pantheism. Strangely, Eisenstein's charge that Vertov is a pantheist is more plausible than the critique of Dovzhenko's alleged pantheism by his Communist Party critics. Vertov is a monist while Dovzhenko is not. For Dovzhenko, there are three orders of reality that are dialectically related but distinct. Humankind, nature, and machines exist in a complex unity in which they lose neither their distinctiveness nor their oppositional tension. But for Vertov, there is only one order of reality, just as there is for the pantheist. Still, a difference between the Vertov's position and that of the pantheist remains. For Vertov the monistic order is not divine. It is the resolutely secular order of the rationally intelligible machine.

Vertov differs from Marx while remaining a communist thinker. Marx saw emancipatory potential in industrial machines, but he regarded them as illustrating his principle that "history progresses by its bad side." The almost unbelievable increase in the productive power of human labor that resulted from the introduction of machines into factories made it possible to satisfy human needs on a scale never before imagined. But the price was steep. Workers were subordinated to the independent movement of machines. The whole system of machines made the factory into an automaton, a monstrous self-moving entity in which workers had a place only as machine tenders. As the production process becomes automated, the fetishism of commodities expresses itself as the fetishistic animation of machines, to which the commodity, labor-power is subordinated (Marx 1992, 492-508).

At least this is Marx's account in *Capital*. He presents a different view in the earlier "fragment on machinery" in the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973b, 690-695). According to that text, when workers are pushed to the periphery of fully automated production, they exchange their blue overalls for the white lab coats of the scientist. The value of automated production can no longer be measured by units of socially necessary labor time, but is instead dependent upon application of the accumulated achievements of science. The worker becomes a representative of the universal state of scientific knowledge, the bearer of "the general intellect," presumably in the role of engineer or technician. In this description, workers are no longer subordinated to the self-moving product of past labor. Instead they "step to the side" of the mechanized labor process. At the same time, machines become the fixed capital in which scientific knowledge – the general intellect – is objecti-

fied.

No country was at such an advanced stage of industrial development when Vertov was making his films, let alone Russia. Industrial labor was still a performance of mind-guided muscle. The revolutionary Russian regime was faced with the need to do what Russian capital had been unable to accomplish; to fully industrialize the nation. But isn't it possible that the very backwardness of Russia might have been made into an advantage? If political and economic power really were in the hands of the working class, then it should have been possible to industrialize in a different way than capitalism had done. The planning of production and technological innovation might have been conducted with the goal of achieving a balance between increases in labor productivity, and increasing control by workers over the conditions of their labor. In such a context, it might not have been so far-fetched that the worker would come to "love his workbench." A new relationship between human being and machine might have emerged even before the advanced stage of development Marx refers to in the *Grundrisse.* If we see things from Vertov's point of view, however, that relationship would have been different than the one Marx envisioned in the fragment on machines. For Vertov, the promise of machines lies in their material symbiosis with the human body, rather than their embodiment of the general intellect. This symbiosis consists first of all in the emergence of new perceptual capacities, a hybrid human-machine sensorium.

Neither Marx's vision nor Vertov's came to pass in the Soviet Union. One-person management replaced workers' control of production even under Lenin. Stalin's conversion to a break-neck pace of industrialization subjected Soviet workers to labor conditions that made those of England in the mid-nineteenth century seem leisurely by comparison. Like Marx's vision of the supersession of labor by the general intellect, Vertov's vision of a creative symbiosis between the human senses and machines remained only a dream. Both were supplanted in the 1930s by the idealized figure of the exemplary worker, willing to drive his body to its limit in order to exceed production quotas. Still, in recording his vision on film, Vertov preserved the record of a path that was not, but might have been taken. That record has obvious relevance for our present, shaped as it is by the ubiquity of micro-electronic machines, and for a future that is bound to involve an increasingly complex technological alteration of our mode of perceiving and acting in the world.

Revolutionary Awakening

Vesvolod Pudovkin is the author of *Film Technique*, a book that has probably had more influence on the history of cinema than any other single work (Pudovkin 1970). It was already published in English in 1929, and read by both British and American filmmakers and producers. Alfred Hitchcock carried the book with him, and expounded upon its content to colleagues. It became a classic, widely used as an instructional text in film schools, a platform from which it shaped more than one generation of film practice.

Pudovkin has a talent for simplicity, coherence, and economy of expression, qualities he prized in his filmmaking as well as his written work. Lacking the conceptual brilliance of Eisenstein and the poetic enthusiasm of Vertov, he was not a great theorist. But he was able boil down Soviet montage into its most basic ingredients, and present them clearly to

filmmakers and students who were not especially interested in theoretical subtleties. He accomplished this task in the process of discussing the seven stages of filmmaking:

1. Developing the scenario.
2. Preparing the shooting script.
3. Selecting the actors.
4. Building the sets and selecting exteriors.
5. Shooting the scenes indicated in the shooting script.
6. Processing the film in the laboratory.
7. Editing the processed film footage.

We can see from this list that Pudovkin did not share Vertov's rejection of, or Eisenstein's ambivalence about, the played film. Yet, in *Film Technique*, Pudovkin rejects the idea that cinema should pattern itself after theater (Pudovkin 1970, 79-89). The director of a stage play is limited to presenting real events from the fixed point of view occupied by the stationary theater audience. But the events of cinema are neither real nor perspectivally static in this way. They do not exist until the director has their elements filmed with a mobile camera, and then constructs the events from these elements through editing. Filmic time is different than real time, first of all because it is compressed (days, months, years, and even centuries are compressed into an hour and a half or so), and secondly because the director pieces time together from fragments, while determining the pace of transition between them. Similarly filmic space differs from real space in that it too must be constructed, sometimes from spatial segments that are not continuous in the real world (Pudovkin gives the example of the conclusion of the Odessa Steps Sequence in *Battleship Potemkin*, which Eisenstein shot in three different cities). In spite of his perspicuous demonstration of the independence of cinema from theater, Pudovkin's conception of film is nevertheless half-theatrical in character. Like theater, film operates with a script that must be brought to life by actors under direction. It is just that cinema must accomplish this enactment of the written scenario in its own unique way.

According to Pudovkin, the director should take clarity and continuity as aesthetic guides (Pudovkin 1970, 59-63). The audience must never be at a loss to know what is happening in a film. Editing for continuity is especially important in Pudovkin's book, through the use of such techniques as establishing eye-line matches, and matching the direction of motion in different frames. It is easy to see why Hollywood gave *Film Technique* a warm reception, since intelligibility is one of the primary virtues of Hollywood film. In fact, throughout his book, Pudovkin expresses admiration for Hollywood cinema, and Hollywood was happy to return the complement by embracing Pudovkin's book.

Prizing intelligibility above all else, Pudovkin was aesthetically the most conservative of the major filmmakers of the Soviet avant-garde. But he does belong to the avant-garde nevertheless, by virtue of his sometimes quite radical montage. His greatest aesthetic achievement is the way in which he unites montage with narrative intelligibility in his best films. Though the flow of events in Pudovkin's movies is simple to follow, the demands of simplicity do not constrain his montage technique. In *Mother*, for example, he shoots the sequence in which Mother joins the workers' underground at thigh-height. Peoples' upper bodies and faces do not appear in the frame, though we know what is transpiring, even to the point of being able to identify the characters from only their lower

legs. Another example from *Mother* is the complex symbolism of the ice flows, shot in extended montage, and mirroring the spring thaw in the workers' movement (as workers march *en masse* to the prison to free their comrade, the Son), *and* the motion of the convicts as they walk in a circle in the prison yard, *and* the conflict between the workers and the army. At the same time, the ice flows function realistically as the Son's means of escape. Because of the sophistication of his montage technique, Party critics condemned Pudovkin's films, just as they had condemned the works of Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, and Vertov (they were especially scathing about the concluding scene of Storm *Over Asia* [Leyda 1983, 250]). Narrative intelligibility was not enough for them. There must be nothing at all challenging in a film, nothing that could interfere with communication of the "final ideological conclusion." When this critical standard became the norm with the official adoption of socialist realism by the Soviet state, Pudovkin had an easier time adapting than did the other avant-garde filmmakers, because he was, in effect, already halfway there. Narrative intelligibility plus official ideological message minus montage and other avant-garde techniques is the formula for socialist realism in cinema.

The Party did not adopt the doctrine of socialist realism until 1932. Pudovkin's greatest films, *Mother*, *The End of Saint Petersburg*, and *Storm Over Asia,* precede that date. In addition to their formal properties, these films are connected with one another by a shared theme. They all involve the process of revolutionary awakening in an individual character.

Pudovkin asks a question with important implications for revolutionary practice. How does an ordinary worker, an ordinary peasant, or an ordinary Mongol hunter become a revolutionary? One way to approach this question would be to focus on the particular circumstances – historical, biographical, and psychological – of a well-developed character that contribute to explaining the emergence of a revolutionary vocation. However, to the filmmakers of the Soviet avant-garde, this would have seemed a bourgeois approach because of its individualistic orientation. Pudovkin proceeds in a different way, by depicting typical characters, specifically, characters who are representatives of their social class (*Mother*), or of people who are in the process of making a transition from one class to another (*The End of Saint Petersburg*), or of members of an oppressed race or nationality (*Storm Over Asia*). And yet, the approach by means of typical characters is not in itself sufficient to explain the emergence of a revolutionary vocation, because the majority of members of the group the character typifies do not become revolutionaries, at least not until the revolution has reached a very advanced stage. So Pudovkin is faced with the problem of portraying the atypical behavior of typical characters. The only way to go about this is through the depiction of the atypical circumstances in which a typical character undergoes an atypical transformation.

Marx's writings are helpful at this point, not because they solve the problem Pudovkin poses, but rather because they account for the specific bonds that must be broken if the revolutionary transformation of an individual or a class is to be possible. There are three bonds that work to preserve the exploitative social and economic order of capitalism according to Marx: the repressive power of the state, periods of relative economic prosperity, and the effects of the dominant ideology.

Although for Marx, the state is not reducible to its repressive apparatus, it is nevertheless repression that enables the state to exist, and the rule of the dominant class by means of the state. Police, courts, and prisons protect the property of the dominant class

through the routine enforcement of the law. In periods of revolutionary turmoil, the army and other branches of the military become especially important in maintaining the status quo, since only they have the large numbers of personnel and the instruments of destruction necessary to quell mass unrest. However, the state takes an enormous risk when it calls out the military to put down mass rebellions; that of defection from the military ranks. No revolution can triumph without large-scale defections because of the state's overwhelming monopoly on the organized means of violence. As long as the armed forces remain intact and willing to follow orders, revolution is doomed to defeat. Whether defections occur on a scale large enough to constitute a disintegration of the state repressive apparatus depends on a number of factors, including whether or not there have been rebellions in the recent past, whether work has been done by revolutionaries in or with respect to the armed forces, whether there is a professional, a volunteer, or a conscript army, whether soldiers and sailors have their own grievances with the state, stemming perhaps from involvement in what seems an interminable war, and so on. No state wants to run the risk that enough of such factors might be present, and present in such a way as to result in mass defections from the armed forces. That is why it normally calls the military into action only as a matter of last resort. (Military regimes are another matter, though, even in these cases, the armed forces normally perform ordinary police functions, rather than mobilizing on a massive scale). Still, the threat of violent repression is often enough to dissuade oppressed and exploited people from engaging in revolutionary activity – the day-to-day repression of the police and state security agencies, as well as the prospect of massive military mobilization.

Stable regimes, then, will call out the military only under extraordinary circumstances. Most of time, the ruling class rules without exercising massive and overt repressive force. What enables it to do so is the strength of the dominant ideology. We will remember that, according to Marx, the ideology of the dominant class is the dominant ideology. For an ideology to be dominant, it must be accepted, not only by those who created it or who are advantaged by its creation, but also by the majority of people who are subordinate to the dominant class, and, in most cases, exploited by it. But why do the exploited accept an ideology that justifies or otherwise contributes to their exploitation? Marx's theory of ideology provides two answers. The first is that the dominant class owns the means of the production of ideas, including newspapers, magazines, publishing companies, and so on, and hires those who work in these fields. Though it does not have a complete monopoly (there are union newspapers, for example), its control of what liberals like to call "the marketplace of ideas" is nevertheless overwhelming. Marx's second answer is that the dominant class develops ideologies that reflect the prevailing social conditions, which are the conditions of its dominance. In capitalist society, these social conditions appear to be natural, as a result of the fetishism of commodities in which social relations take on a rigidly objective form. The dominant ideology has an advantage over a revolutionary one in that the former coincides with the "common sense" of an era, in that it embraces the natural, eternal appearance of the prevailing social relations. Revolutionary ideology challenges that "common sense," and therefore is less likely to be adopted by significant numbers of people.

Still, the dominant ideology faces a difficulty in that it portrays the interest of the dominant class as the universal interest of all members of society, and this portrayal is simply false. There is a tension between capitalist ideology and reality. Under capitalism,

for example, most workers feel that politicians are crooks, and that the rich have rigged the game against the poor. But this is where an ideological mechanism of last resort kicks in, namely, the idea that nothing can be done to change this. Discontent becomes revolutionary only when the discontented come to believe that a new social arrangement is possible, and so they do not have to suffer as they do.

In addition to repression and the dominant ideology as forces inhibiting revolutionary consciousness and activity, Marx refers to the fact that people rarely rebel in good times. He drew this conclusion early in his London exile from the failure of the revolutions of 1848. Counterrevolution dashed the hopes of the revolutionaries in each of the fifty-odd countries in which they were active. But why did the counterrevolutions triumph? Marx published his answer in 1850, in the final issue of the newspaper he edited, the *Neue Rhenische Zeitung*. There he argues that a crisis of overproduction in the immediately preceding period had prepared the way for the explosion of 1848. Even the new railroads were incapable of absorbing all of the available surplus capital. As a result, markets became saturated, production declined, and bankruptcies ensued. By 1849, however, the crisis had run its course and global economic activity revived, especially with the discovery of gold in California. That is why the revolutionaries had been unable to consolidate their initial gains. It was clearly not possible to overthrow the existing order while its guardians were celebrating the return of good times:

> While this general prosperity lasts, enabling the productive forces of bourgeois society to develop to the full extent possible within the bourgeois system there can be no question of any real revolution… A new revolution is only possible as the result of a new crisis: but it will come just as surely as the crisis itself (Marx 1973, 131).[14]

In capitalism, the recovery from crisis is always temporary. In *Capital*, Marx identifies two reasons for this. The first is that the rate of profit has a tendency to fall as capitalists invest increasingly in plant and equipment, including new technologies, in order to gain an advantage over competitors. Competitors, in turn, try to abolish that advantage by following suit. As a result, the ratio of constant capital (plant and equipment) to variable capital (labor) increases across the entire society. But since labor is the only commodity that produces value, it follows that the rate of surplus value must fall, and, since surplus value is the source of profit, the rate of profit must fall as well. When the rate of profit falls beneath the level at which capitalists are willing to risk their money by investing in production, the result is unemployed workers and idle plant and equipment – in a word, crisis. The second reason why recovery from crisis is temporary, in Marx's view, is that the ability of workers to consume the products of capitalist enterprises is weak, as a result of the need of employers to maximize profits by driving down wages. In addition to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, there is a tendency toward under-consumption in capitalist economies that undermines economic expansion. The debate over Marx's theory of capitalist crisis has raged ever since he first formulated it, both between Marxists and their critics, and within the ranks of Marxism itself. But whether or not the mechanisms of crisis Marx identifies are correct, the irrefutable fact is that crises have appeared again and again over the course of the history of capitalism. The most recent crisis, initiated by the financial meltdown of 2007, is especially instructive in this regard because it

came on the heals of the widespread proclamation that "the new economy" had finally put an end to crisis.

The theory of crisis should not be mistaken for the simple idea that economic crisis causes anti-capitalist revolution. The point Marx makes is only that crisis opens a breach in the defenses of the existing social order. Whether the working class and its allies walk through that breach is another matter. State repression, the continuing hold of the dominant ideology, and the level of organization, experience, and confidence of the working class all play their parts in determining whether or not crisis is a prelude to revolution.

Pudovkin is interested, not in the economics of crisis, but rather in the psychology of the revolutionary. What is it that makes people willing to risk their lives by attempting to step through the breach? This is the theme of three of his films: *Mother*, *The End of Saint Petersburg*, and *Storm Over Asia*. The films scenarios take place during three phases in the development of the Russian Revolution: the failed revolutionary uprising of 1905 (*Mother*), the October Revolution (*The End of Saint Petersburg*), and the civil war (*Storm Over Asia*).

Mother is based on the novel of that name, written by Maxim Gorky in 1906. Gorky's story takes place during the 1905 Revolution, though it is based on events that occurred three years earlier during a May Day demonstration by workers in Sormovo. The chief characters in the novel, as in the film, are Pelagea Nilovna and her son, Pavel Mikhailovich. There are many differences between the novel and the film, as there ought to be, according to Pudovkin's account of filmmaking as an independent art, but that is not of any concern here. For present purposes, we will focus on the film exclusively.

Pavel is a leader in the workers' underground, which is in the process of organizing a strike in a local factory. A group of pogromist "Black Hundred" thugs working for the factory's owner becomes aware of the strike preparations, and sets about to thwart them with pipes, brass knuckles, and a revolver. (The thugs include Pavel's father – Pelagea's abusive, drunken husband.) Before the encounter with the pogromists, the underground gives Pavel a cache of arms, which he hides under a loose floorboard in his house. When the day of reckoning between the Black Hundred thugs and the workers arrives, one of the workers shoots and kills Pavel's father. Though this was a act of self-defense, the Black Hundred squad nevertheless beats the worker to death. The father's body is brought to his house, where Pelagea dutifully mourns for him, though neither she nor anyone else is going to miss the violent drunkard. Pavel returns home, where he is interrogated by the police, who tell him that they will let him go if he reveals where the arms are hidden. Pelagea pleads with her son to reveal the location, and, when he refuses, she turns the weapons over herself. Instead of releasing Pavel, however, the police beat him and place him under arrest. Conviction at his trial is a foregone conclusion. As Pavel is carted off to prison, his mother begs his forgiveness. Pelagea soon joins the workers' underground by hiding leaflets for her son's friends, placing them under the loose floorboard in her house. On a visit to his prison cell, she brings her son a message from the underground detailing preparations that have been made for his escape on May Day, when workers will march to the prison. The other prisoners get wind of the preparations, and begin planning their escape as well during their daily walk in the prison yard. However, when the prison authorities become aware of the workers' march, they order the prisoners back indoors, and a riot ensues. Pavel, who was confined to his cell for a minor infraction, is released by the uprising, and manages to escape by hopping between nearby ice

flows. In the meantime, most of the convicts have been shot dead by the prison guards. Pelgea participates in the workers' march with a broad smile on her face. As the march converges on the bridge leading to the prison, a cavalry division approaches, and begins firing into the crowd. A bullet hits Pavel, who dies in his mother's arms. Mother spots a red flag that has fallen with the death of its bearer, and holds the flag aloft as she marches into the oncoming troops. Their horses trample her to death. In a concluding montage, the red flag appears flying above a building in the city.

Mother's transformation into a revolutionary is the narrative center of the film. At the beginning of the story, Pelagea appears as a working-class woman beaten by her husband. She is deferential to public authorities, including the police, and often crosses herself in the Russian Orthodox manner. She accepts the dominant ideology and her subordinate place in her home and society. When her son is arrested, she takes the police at their word, and hands over the weapons her son has hidden in an attempt to secure his release. The beating and arrest of her son constitute the beginning of her transformation, the first step in her journey toward becoming a revolutionary. The second step takes place at her son's trial, where she recognizes his failure to receive justice at the hands of the state. The third step is her decision to join the workers' underground by hiding leaflets under her floorboard. The fourth step is her delivery of the underground's message to her son. The fifth, her happy participation in the workers' march. And her sixth and final step is her retrieval of the fallen red flag and her march into the oncoming cavalry.

Mother does not become a revolutionary because she is exploited and oppressed. On the contrary, her acceptance of the dominant ideology entails acceptance of her exploitation and oppression. Her awakening begins when she comes to recognize the injustice involved in her son's treatment by the police and the law court. The dominant ideology tells her that the state is just, but her own experience gives that the lie. This is the first important insight of Pudovkin's film. The perception of injustice and the moral outrage that ensues is the beginning of Pelagea's radicalization.[15]

The fact that Pelagea's son is the one who is treated unjustly gives her perception of injustice an emotional force it would not otherwise have. For her, joining the workers' underground is a way of making amends to her son, while at the same time entering into a close relationship with his friends. By delivering the message to her son in prison, she finally expiates her guilt over having caused his trial and conviction, but in the process she also performs a successful act of revolutionary work. The workers' march is organized in order to assist her son's escape, but her demeanor while marching shows that she has discovered the joy of being one comrade among others in the struggle. Picking up the red flag is a way of defying her son's killers, but also a symbolic act in support of the socialist revolution. Every stage of Pelagea's radicalization, from her initial perception of injustice to her rescue of the red flag, is bound up with her relationship with her son. In Freudian (or Althusserian) terms, we could say that her radicalization is "overdetermined" by that relationship.

Through the treatment of Mother as a typical character, a working-class woman in Russia in 1905, Pudovkin develops an implicit theory of revolutionary transformation. We can reconstruct the theory in the following form. In an oppressive social order, a revolutionary consciousness begins to develop through the confluence of two factors: a perception of injustice, and a personal connection with the victim of the injustice that overdetermines its meaning and impact. That is only a beginning, however. In order for an

oppressed and exploited person to become a revolutionary, there must be an existing or incipient revolutionary movement (such as the workers' underground) that welcomes her or his participation, and through which the person involved is able to experience a new form of community, or solidarity, that replaces attachment to the old order. In different ways, this theory is also behind the stories told by *The End of Saint Petersburg* and *Storm Over Asia*.

Like Eisenstein's film, *October*, *The End of Saint Petersburg* commemorates the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. The differences between the two films are instructive. Eisenstein's movie does not develop its characters, except perhaps for Kerensky, and then only in the form of parody. It also subordinates its story, which is sometimes hard to follow, to the demands of the montage technique, which can be quite experimental, and not always successfully so. Pudovkin's film, on the other hand, is entirely "legible." Like *October*, its theme is the October Revolution, but as seen in relation to two clearly developed characters (even though we never learn their names), a Young Man – a peasant who arrives in Saint Petersburg in search of work – and a man from his village whom he asks for assistance – a Communist who works at the Lebedev metalworking factory. The Young Man arrives at the home of the Communist while the latter is in the midst of making preparations for a strike with a comrade, the Bald One. The Communist's wife tells the Young Man that the Bald One is a troublemaker who is taking food out the mouths of her children by encouraging the workers to strike. When she informs the Young Man that he needs to go out and look for work because "no one is going to feed you," he joins hundreds of unemployed workers waiting to be hired as strike breakers by the Lebedev management. An assistant to the plant manager notices the Young Man when he has an argument with one of the workers on strike, and brings him to the manager, who asks him for any information he might have. The Young Man replies that the Bald One is responsible for the strike, and leads the manager and police to the Communist's home in order to make an arrest. But the police arrest the Communist as well as the Bald One, while the Young Man, in confusion, accepts payment for his information. The residents of the working-class apartment complex witness the payoff, and tell the Communist's wife about it. She confronts the Young Man, striking him in full view of the residents. Out of his shame, he vows to himself to set things right, and goes to the main office of the Lebedev plant to secure the release of his fellow villager. But when the company president orders his removal, a fight breaks out in which the Young Man defeats the five or six office assistants attempting to remove him, and goes on to assault the president himself. The Young Man is arrested, beaten by the police, and jailed. When Russia becomes involved in the First World War, the police enlist the Young Man in the army as a "volunteer." While serving in the army, he encounters the Communist once again, who is now working in the ranks as an agitator. The Young Man joins him in leading a mass desertion, and the two later fight as comrades in the storming of the Winter Palace. Both survive the battle that inaugurates the Soviet republic, though the Young Man is wounded in the fight.

Pudovkin cuts into this character-centered narrative long scenes telling the story of Russia's participation in the war, focusing on the war profiteers who benefit from it, including the Lebedev stockholders and managers. We can ignore that footage for our purposes. With respect to the character-centered narrative, the *End of Saint Petersburg* and *Mother* follow similar scenarios. Both films focus on a member of an exploited class (a

workers' wife in *Mother*, and a peasant hoping to become a worker in *The End of Saint Petersburg*), who accepts the dominant ideology, as is evident from her or his deference to state and class authority. In both films, the central character attempts to help someone with whom she or he has a personal bond (a son in one case, a fellow villager in the other) by complying with authority, and in both cases the attempt backfires, resulting in the arrest and imprisonment of the recipient of the intended help. Shame, regret, and a decision to set things right result when the character becomes aware of the deceit of the authorities, and their unjust treatment of the person the character sought to help. The decision to make amends for her or his role in the injustice leads the central character to take further action in which she or he must oppose representatives of the dominant class. The act of opposition eventually leads to the character's involvement in revolutionary activity, and the experience of solidarity that involvement affords.

As in *Mother*, so in *The End of Saint Petersburg*, it is not the experience of oppression or exploitation that begins the central character's transformation, but rather the perception of injustice. The feeling of shame indicates the moral character of the initial break with the dominant ideology. Pudovkin handles this especially well in *The End of Saint Petersburg* in the scene where the working-class apartment residents see the Young Man taking money for acting as an informant, and the Young Man sees that they have seen. Pudovkin combines shots from below of people looking out their apartment windows, with shots from above of the Young Man looking up, and then shamefully bowing his head. The shots convey the fact that he feels moral shame, not in the eyes of God, but in the eyes of fellow workers who occupy the elevated standpoint that God has vacated. The lofty position of the witnesses underscores the fact that, in a revolutionary morality, God's place is taken by the working class and its ethic of solidarity.

This raises the vexed question of the role of morality in Marxism. There can be no doubt that Marx considers existing moral systems to be forms of ideology, and therefore distorted expressions of an underlying social reality. But it is just as obvious that, throughout his writings, Marx condemns capitalism in moral terms. At one moment, he rejects the idea of justice as an ideological cover, in the form of what appears to be equal exchange in the market, for the extraction of surplus value from the labor of the direct producers. At a different moment, he says that the International Working Men's Association must "vindicate the simple laws of morals and justice, which ought to govern the relations of private individuals, as the rules paramount of the intercourse of nations" (Marx 1973a, 12). The explanation of this apparent inconsistency would take us too far from our theme. Here it is sufficient to note that moral language has always played at least two roles in Marxism. The first is that of condemning the bourgeoisie for violating its own norms. Since the ruling class must present its interests as universal ones, there is a kind of universalist surplus – a claim to universality that cannot be met – even in bourgeois morality, to which the Marxist critic can appeal. For example, since bourgeois legal systems espouse the idea of equality before the law, it is relatively easy to condemn the unequal treatment of rich and poor by the police and the courts as a violation of the legal standard. But unequal treatment is not a problem that can remedied through reform. It is a necessary expression of the disparity between the wealth and power of the exploiting class, and the poverty and powerlessness of the exploited. For this reason, the critique of unequal treatment has revolutionary implications when carried to its limit, since the principle of equality before the law cannot be realized within the boundaries of bourgeois society.

The second role morality plays within Marxism is in attempting to unify the working class and its allies through appeals to solidarity, which is a moral principle fundamentally different than those of the individualist moralities of bourgeois society; for example, maximization of utility (utilitarianism), the categorical imperative (Kant), "reflective equilibrium" (Rawls), and so on. Some Marxists have tried to underscore this uniqueness by claiming that there are only class moralities. But this neglects the strong universalist strain in Marx's work. The purpose of the working class is to abolish itself, not perpetuate its particularity, and the idea of solidarity is a universalist one, applicable to relations between all people in the society without class that Marxists hope for and work to create.

Morality plays both of these roles in *Mother* and *The End of Saint Petersburg*. The perception of injustice in the treatment of the Son in the first film, and the Communist in the second is a recognition that the legal system has violated its own standard of justice. This begins the process of undermining bourgeois ideology in the eyes of Mother and the Young Man respectively. But the collapse of the dominant ideology does not end in cynicism, because the new moral norm of solidarity is there to replace it, not abstractly, but as concretely embodied in the behavior of comrades who are bound together in a community of struggle.

Storm Over Asia is the third of Pudovkin's films in which we can see this two-sided moral process at work. But unlike his earlier movies, this film does not involve the industrial working class at all. It is set, not in Russia, but in Mongolia at the time of the civil war. The director takes liberties with the historical record in this movie by having the British occupy Mongolia, which is contrary to fact. Of the films we are discussing by Pudovkin, *Storm Over Asia* is the furthest from historical accuracy, but it clearly admits that distance in its final scene, which depicts the power of the rising Mongols as a physical windstorm that sweeps away the British. This is not realist cinema.

The story concerns a young Mongol hunter and trader named Bair who is sent by his ailing father to a trading post in order to sell a fine silver fox fur in the family's possession. A fair price for the fur would be enough to keep the family fed for many months. British merchants run the trading post, where they routinely cheat the Mongol hunters coming to trade, who are in no position to object because of British domination of the territory. When the merchants take the young Mongol's fur in exchange for an amount of money far below its value, the trader objects, but the merchants refuse to return the fur. A fight breaks out in which Bair gets the better of the merchants while stabbing one in his hand. As he makes his escape, the cry breaks out to "avenge the white man's blood." After joining a Bolshevik partisan band, Bair is captured by the British and condemned to summary execution. A soldier under orders takes him some distance from the military compound where he has been held and shoots him. In the meantime, the commanding general who ordered his execution finds a document among Bair's effects that he mistakenly interprets as evidence that the young Mongol is a descendant of Genghis Khan. Seeing an opportunity to have Bair assume the position of a puppet ruler, the general has his body retrieved, which proves to be still alive. After receiving medical treatment, and while recovering from his injuries, Bair is prepared by the general and his staff to play his new political role. The British occupying forces announce that the only surviving descendent of Genghis Khan is about to ascend to the Mongol throne. Just before the new Emperor's first public appearance, however, the British shoot and kill another Mongol in his presence. Enraged, Bair defeats several soldiers in hand-to-hand combat, and manages

to escape. We see him at the conclusion of the film on horseback, leading an army of Mongols against the British, while a windstorm comes up that blows the British forces away. While the montage identifies the windstorm with the revolutionary Mongol army, its leader ends the film by shouting from horseback at the head of his troops, "Oh my people, arise in your ancient strength and free yourself!"

Storm Over Asia is the first great anti-colonialist film, and, as such, a harbinger of even greater events. From our vantage point, it is easy to see the Chinese Revolution in the Mongol uprising, though that, of course, could not have been Pudovkin's intention. The Bolsheviks approached the "national question" in the context of anti-imperialist politics. In addition to exploited classes, according to them, global capitalism had produced oppressed nations in the form of outright colonies, such as India at the time, or semi-colonies, such as China. The fight against capitalism must extend beyond the factory, and even beyond the political struggle by workers to achieve state power, to include the battle of oppressed nations to throw off imperialist domination and establish independent states. In that great historical struggle, the workers of the world, and the Soviet Union as the first socialist society, must be steadfast allies of the oppressed nations. In Pudovkin's movie, the Bolshevik's anti-imperialist version of nationalism is reflected in the fact that the civil war between Whites and Reds plays a role secondary to the Mongol uprising. The windstorm is a symbol of the irresistible force the Mongol masses, and the Asian masses in general, would constitute if they were unified in a revolutionary project. Even if not overtly socialist, such a project of national liberation could only succeed by weakening global capitalism.

Against this historical background, the revolutionary awakening of the Mongol trader has a different character than that of Mother and the Young Man. Class is not the issue around which the transformative moral insight congeals; the crucial issue is race. The transformation begins when the hero is treated as someone whose property can be forcibly taken for the sole reason that he is a Mongol. (There is no need for "overdetermination" in this scenario because the central character himself is the immediate victim of injustice). Bair joins the band of Bolshevik partisans, not because they are fellow members of his class, but because they are not racists. They accept the Mongols as equals, and are seeking to defeat the British who have imposed the racist order. The solidarity Bair discovers with the partisans is that of comrades who are bound together in struggle regardless of skin color. This solidarity that crosses racial lines leads him to become, as he proudly says at one point, "a red."

And yet, in spite of this dissimilarity, *Storm Over Asia* shares with Pudovkin's two earlier films the perception of an injustice that initiates the central character's transformation. In this case, the injustice is that of the theft of the fine pelt. The trader is not offered a fair price for an item forcibly taken from him, and this violates the standard of justice he takes for granted. As a trader, he expects to receive an equivalent value for the item he has to sell, or at least one that both parties to the transaction agree upon. In this regard, the small trader shares a conception of market fairness with the capitalist. But capitalism in its colonialist form is not the internal capitalist market of Europe. It exercises a more overt and extreme form of exploitation than even the domestic proletariat experiences. It has no compunction about breaking its own rules flagrantly, and using outright coercion – theft, imprisonment, and murder – in exploiting "inferior races." When the Bair becomes aware of this simple, brutal fact, he is immediately enraged, and begins a

struggle that does not end until he leads the Mongol troops to victory over their oppressors. Pudovkin underscores the moral indignation that begins Bair's transformation by repeating it at the end of the film. When the "Emperor" rebels against his elite British captors, and just before he makes his escape, he calls them "bandits" and "thieves," as though he were addressing the vulgar, corrupt white men at the trading post. His critique of the highest officials of the colonial occupation is that, although they believe themselves to be cultured, noble, superior beings, they are no better than the lowest criminals, since both violate the civilized code of justice, a code the Mongol traders live by, which means, more or less, the entire Mongol nation.

If this interpretation is correct, then Pudovkin's films have implications for revolutionary theory and practice. The most fundamental of these is the recognition that the experience of oppression and exploitation is not enough to turn workers, peasants, or Mongol hunters and traders into revolutionaries. That experience elicits revolutionary consciousness and action only when it becomes, at the same time, an experience of injustice, not just intellectually, but emotionally as well. That is why moral shame and outrage play such important roles in Pudovkin's films. The moral interpretation of oppression and exploitation as unjust results from the judgment that the dominant social order, and so the class in power, has broken its own norms; norms of legal justice in *Mother* and *The End of Saint Petersburg*, and norms of justice in transactions in *Storm Over Asia*. The evident and entrenched violation of the legal, political, and moral norms of the dominant ideology by those responsible for defending them weakens their hold on the minds of the dispossessed. Moral outrage becomes revolutionary, however, only under three further conditions. The first is that the representatives of the ruling class (political, economic, legal, and military) are unwilling to rectify the injustice, blocking the road to amelioration. The second is that the outraged person discovers in the injustice a fate common to his or her class, race, or nation, and not merely an individual grievance. The third condition is that an already existing or incipient revolutionary movement (such as an underground strike committee or a partisan detachment) offers the outraged person membership in an alternative community engaged in struggle and governed by a new ethic of solidarity.

Here one advantage of the narrative clarity of Pudovkin's movies becomes obvious. His films are capable of conveying, in an artistically compelling way, not just the "final ideological conclusion," but also the dynamics of the development of revolutionary consciousness and struggle.

The End of the Avant-Garde

Shub, Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, Vertov, and Pudovkin all found it necessary to adapt to the vastly altered cultural climate of the mid-1930s. The political event behind that alteration was Stalin's definitive consolidation of autocratic power as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, a result of the defeat of his rivals on the Party's Central Committee – Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Bukharin. The consolidation of power inaugurated an epoch of "revolution from above" that was as massive in its transformative impact on Soviet society as it was humanly devastating. As a result of Stalin's ascension to power and unquestioned authority, and his implementation of the doctrine of "socialism in one country," one hundred million peasants abandoned their individual hold-

ings for collective farms, the Soviet Union was industrialized in little over a decade, the population became widely literate, and the Soviet Army was equipped with the weaponry necessary to defeat the German invasion of the 1940s in an epoch struggle that ended with Hitler's suicide in Berlin and a red flag flying over the Reichstag. The human cost of all of this is almost unfathomable: six million dead in forced relocations during collectivization, the gulag system of labor camps, the growth of the political police, the Moscow show trials, the execution of the leaders of the October Revolution, purges and deportations of whole nationalities, twenty million lives lost to the German invasion, and, in Isaac Deutscher's words, "the complete loss, by a whole generation, of political and spiritual freedom" (Deutscher 1949, 294).

Against this world-historical background, the fate of Soviet film might seem inconsequential, except that it did not occur in isolation, but was bound up with the transformation of all other aspects of Soviet society. The altered cultural climate of the mid-1930s is merely one expression of the transition from Lenin's revolution to that of Stalin, and the momentous changes it unleashed. In the narrow realm of cultural policy, two related events are most worthy of note: the Soviet Communist Party's liquidation of all existing art organizations with the Central Committee's "Decree on the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations" of 1932, and the adoption of the doctrine of socialist realism by the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, held in 1934, and chaired by Maxim Gorky and Andrei Zhdanov.

The decree of 1932 incorporated artists organizationally into the Communist Party's bureaucratic apparatus by dissolving independent artists' organizations that had evolved more or less organically since 1917. It replaced them with officially sanctioned artists' unions that regulated access to employment, and enforced political and aesthetic standards (Central Committee 1976, 288-290). But this organizational shell was not filled with content until the Writers' Congress two years later. The First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers had an impact that reached far beyond the field of literature. It was the first meeting of artists to receive widespread coverage in the Soviet press, Pravda devoting 50 pages of a single issue to its coverage. Gorky's presence as one of the two chairmen of the Congress lent the meeting literary substance, but more importantly the Congress had the enthusiastic imprimatur of Stalin. It was packed with Party luminaries, including Stalin himself, a levy of former workers who had been elevated to mid-level positions in the bureaucracy, and "exemplary workers" and "heroes" chosen from throughout the Soviet Union as symbols of the new Soviet life. The history of socialist realism prior to the Congress consisted largely in the development of an influential movement of painters that sought to perpetuate and transform the realism of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian painting in the new context of the Revolution. Developed by painters and art theorists in the organization AkhRR (Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia) and its successor, AkhR (Association of Artists of the Revolution), socialist realism was first of all a rejection of "leftism" in the arts – i.e. the avant-garde work of Tatlin, Rodchenko, Lissitizky, and so on – as an echo of the late bourgeoisie. "Leftism" was supposed to be both artistically decadent and inaccessible to the masses. AkhRR and its successor claimed that, in opposition to the art of the avant-garde, the revival of Russian realism under revolutionary conditions would embrace technical excellence in representational depiction, accessibility to the worker and peasant masses, and the role of the artist as a militant participant in the task of building socialism. While the 1932 decree dis-

solved AKhR along with all other existing artists organizations, Stalin endorsed the conception of socialist realism the organization had pioneered, and it was unveiled with great fanfare at the Writers' Congress. The idea was translated from painting to literature by way of adaptation of the Russian realist novel (Tolstoy was often referenced) to the epoch of the "construction of socialism." Writing must be a skilled representation of Soviet reality "in the process of its revolutionary development," that is accessible to the masses, and that celebrates the achievements of the worker and peasant heroes and heroines who are building the new society, under the direction of that "leader of genius" – the words are Zhdanov's – "Comrade Stalin" (Zhdanov 1976, 293).

There has been a resurgence of scholarly interest in socialist realism in recent years that emphasizes the diversity and quality of a least some of the work created under its auspices (Barteilik 1999, 90). The main contribution of this resurgence is a new awareness that socialist realist art is not a monolith, but the result of a complex and shifting negotiation between party officials, the Soviet public, and artists who managed to carve some space for creative initiative out of the official doctrine. Nevertheless, the pressure on artists to conform to the new paradigm was intense, and was ultimately backed by the sanctions of loss of livelihood, internal exile, and, in some cases, loss of life.

Soviet film differed from the other arts in the way the doctrine of socialist realism was enforced. The role of the union in imposing the orthodoxy was less important than in the other arts. This was because of the economic barriers to filmmaking. As in Hollywood, film production in the Soviet Union was an expensive affair. It was not as easy for film makers to get access to cameras, crews, and editorial assistance as it was for painters to get access to paint and canvases, or writers to pens and paper. Since, lacking private investors, the approval of the state was necessary in order to get any major film project off the ground, Soviet filmmaking had been subject to sometimes intense political pressure from its beginnings.

If an unfavorable review of *Earth* in Pravda drove Dovzhenko to the verge of suicide fours years before the Writers' Congress convened, it was not because he was overly sensitive to criticism. On the one hand, it threw into doubt his ability to make another film, and, on the other, it created political difficulties with the Ukrainian Communist Party leadership, including widespread and plausible rumors of Dovzhenko's impending arrest.[16] Dovzhenko left the Ukraine for Moscow, where, on the advice of friends, he wrote a letter to Stalin asking for protection. Stalin responded by inviting Dovzhenko to a meeting where he received him with courtesy and praise in the presence of members of the Central Committee. The warm reception and implicit promise of protection won Dovzhenko's gratitude and allegiance. When, on a later occasion, Stalin asked Dovzhenko's advice about where in Soviet Asia he would build a new city were he an urban designer instead of a filmmaker, Dovzhenko pointed to a location on the map that was to become the theme of his next film, *Aeorograd*. Conforming to socialist realist standards, *Aeorograd* is about Bolshevik partisans who defeat Japanese invaders, clearing the way for the construction of a future city on the Soviet Union's easternmost shore. The film was released with Stalin's enthusiastic approval, and, of course, to great critical acclaim, securing Dovzhenko's political and artistic position, and permitting his safe return to the Ukraine. Stalin himself suggested the topic of Dovzhenko's next film, *Shchors*, about an obscure Ukrainian Bolshevik that Stalin sought to have elevated to the status of a great revolutionary leader. Dovzhenko complied, but the process of making *Shchors* led him

into conflict with the General Secretary. The distortion of the historical record that Stalin demanded from Dovzhenko was too much for the director to accept without opposition, and disagreements about the film led to late-night audiences in which Stalin vented his anger in no uncertain terms. Dovzhenko later recounted one such late-night meeting that Stalin ended by sending him home in a chauffeur-driven car. According to Dovzhenko, when he stepped out of the car upon arriving at his home, he was relieved when he realized that he was not going to be shot in the back of the head. Dovzhenko completed *Shchors*, but in a way that provoked more anger from Stalin. Stalin's aides told Dovzhenko that he had made a colossal mistake by not mentioning Stalin in the film, even though the General Secretary was unknown to the public at the time of the story, and played no role in the Ukrainian events.

The tension between Dovzhenko and Stalin came to a head in 1943 when the director asked and received the Ukrainian communist leader, Nikita Khrushchev's approval to publish and circulate a script on the Soviet struggle against the German army in the Ukraine. The film was to be titled, *Ukraine in Flames*. When Stalin read the script, he was livid, and called Dovzhenko to a meeting at which half the members of the Politburo were present. Stalin berated Dovzhenko for what he claimed were the director's criticisms of Soviet war preparations in the Ukraine, for Ukrainian nationalism, for failing to emphasize the class struggle, and for his critical depiction of the leaders of the Party and government. Again, there was no bullet. However, Dovzhenko was forbidden to engage in any further work on *Ukraine in Flames.* Worse, he was ordered to leave the Ukraine, which he always regarded as the source of his creativity, and take up residence in Moscow, where he was placed under close observation by the political police; the NKVD. He continued to make films that he hoped would be approved by Stalin, and some indeed were, including *Michurin* and *Goodbye America*, but he was consumed by self-doubt and blocked by self-censorship, lest he run afoul of Stalin once again. Though the Soviet film authorities judged that his late films conformed to the standards of socialist realism, the time of Dovzhenko's contribution to the art of cinema had passed. He died in 1956, having survived Stalin by three years.

Well before the Writers' Congress, official criticisms of *October* drove Eisenstein, not to the contemplation of suicide, it is true, but to a long sojourn in Europe, the United States, and Mexico, with rumors of defection to the West that he was able to dispel only by returning to Russia. Eisenstein's filmmaking following his return was fraught with tension with Stalin. In January 1935, at a public ceremony at the Bolshoi Theater, the Order of Lenin was awarded to several filmmakers, including Dovzhenko and Pudovkin, but not to Eisenstein; an obvious public rebuke (Leyda 1983, 319-320). Still, Eisenstein never had quite as much trouble with Stalin as Dovzhenko. In part this was because Eisenstein was Russian, not Ukrainian. The internationally famous director was quite willing to make movies that ratified Stalin's wartime embrace of Great Russian nationalism, two of which, *Ivan the Terrible* and *Alexander Nevsky*, are still among his most widely-viewed films. His montage technique in both is very subdued, which was a condition of making films in the era of socialist realism. But Eisenstein was a master filmmaker, able to turn down the volume on montage to the point where it became unobtrusive, yet without liquidating cinematic form. The great conflict between Eisenstein and Stalin was over Part Two of *Ivan the Terrible*. Part One had prepared the way for Ivan's epic conflict with the Boyars, into whom the audience could read, either the rich kulaks (who, like the Boyars,

were forcibly relocated), or the Old Bolshevik leaders who were supposed to have become traitors, and were executed by Stalin's government. But Part Two of the film portrayed Ivan as conflicted, tormented, and indecisive, and his personal armed guard – in whom the audience was bound to see the NKVD – as brutal thugs. Stalin fumed over both of these portrayals, and Part Three of the film was never made. Eisenstein managed to see the end of the war, and the triumph of the Soviet Union, dying in 1948.

Artistically, Pudovkin probably had the easiest time adapting to the socialist realist paradigm because, as we have seen, he emphasized narrative clarity from early in his career. All that he had to do was drop the "formalist" experiments with montage, and he would conform to the socialist realist standard of accessibility as well. In addition, the central characters of his three early films were already worker and peasant heroes and heroines, though they were not the exemplary soldiers and production workers the socialist realists touted. We also should remember that Pudovkin's film, *Mother*, was based on Gorky's famous novel of the same name, and that, during the Writers' Congress of 1934, Gorky was the poster boy for socialist realism. This last remark should be taken quite literally. In a special edition devoted to the Congress, Pravda ran a half-page poster of Stalin and Gorky, looking at each other with prankish, peasant smiles on their faces. *Deserter* is an interesting transitional film in which Pudovkin presents, in cinematic form, the Stalinist ethos of rapid development of heavy industry, along with the Stakhonovist cult of exemplary industrial workers who over-fulfill production quotas set by the central plan. But the film is still atypical of socialist realist movies in that it continues to experiment with montage. That experimentation, though, would soon come to an end. It was certainly long over by 1953, the year Pudovkin made *The Return of Vasilii Bortnikova*, a film that conformed so exactly to the standards of socialist realism that it won the Stalin Prize. 1953 is also the year Pudovkin died.

Esfir Shub's career following Stalin's rise to power was not as star-crossed as that of Dovzhenko, nor as relatively unproblematic as that of Pudovkin. Although Kuleshov, Brik, and *New LEF* in general championed her work, Shub's use of montage in her first three compilation films – *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, *The Great Road*, and *Lev Tolstoy and The Russia of Nicolai the Second* – was didactic enough and intelligible enough to make a transition to socialist realist aesthetics perfectly conceivable. In addition, her own artistic development, which led to her work with sound, resulted in a general de-emphasis on montage, as in *Komosol: Hero of Electrification*, which appeared in 1932, two years before socialist realism became the official Soviet aesthetic. During the Stalin years, Shub made a number of films sanctioned by the regime, including *Country of the Soviet* (1937), *Fascism Will Be Defeated* (1941), and *Native Land* (1942). However, the dominant forces in Soviet film during this period never took her seriously as a director, perhaps because they felt that she was still "only" an editor, or more likely because she was a woman. While Dovzhenko, Eisenstein, and the others received state awards recognizing their status as great directors, Shub was awarded recognition, not as a director, but rather as a skilled technician. Yet in spite of her adaptation to the new regime, she remained true to her avant-garde origins by continuing to experiment with non-realist techniques, such as including in her films footage of people on the streets noticing and reacting to her movie cameras. She died in obscurity in 1959.

Vertov had the hardest time adapting to socialist realism, but then Vertov was widely regarded as occupying a position on the extreme "formalist" left. This was so not only for

critics writing for the Party press, but also for many avant-garde directors and writers, including Osip Brik, who accused Vertov of incoherence in the pages of *New LEF*, as we have already seen. Vertov did make a bid for Stalinist respectability by devoting one of his films to the Lenin cult that Stalin had initiated. But *Three Songs About Lenin* (1934) makes a mistake similar to the one Dovzhenko made in *Shchors* – it fails to give Stalin a central place.[17] In 1937, Vertov made *Lullaby,* his last film of any significance, which includes an attempt at Stalinist hagiography, but is still too much of a "formalist" work to win any Stalin Prizes. Vertov was willing to tack with the political winds as far as the content of his films was concerned, but he was never able to reconcile himself to compromises over matters of aesthetic program. The theory of the Kino-Eye, the demand that cinema be unplayed, and the attempt by the filmmaker to help the film audience acquire a new sensorium appropriate to the age of electrification and industrial machines were simply too far from the standards of socialist realism to permit adaptation. There would have been nothing left of Vertov as a filmmaker had he made acceptable compromises in these areas. As a result, he spent most of his time in the 1930s and 1940s working as an editor of ordinary Soviet newsreel footage. When Jay Leyda – Eisenstein's assistant and later author of the classic history of Soviet cinema, *Kino* – met Vertov in Moscow in 1934, he was surprised by the filmmaker's sense of bitterness and dejection (Roberts 2001, 36). Still, Vertov continued to write about his theory of film, and to make appearances and give talks at meetings of filmmakers. Like the other four masters of Soviet avant-garde cinema, he managed to survive the Stalin purges, and, in his case, Stalin himself by a single year, dying in 1954. Just two years later, Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union opened the books on the crimes of the Stalin era, but by that time there was no longer an avant-garde to give them cinematic expression.

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[1] Cuba might seem to be another example of a successful revolution with an art avant-garde allied with a socialist regime. But while many art tendencies in Cuba, from the 1960s to the 1980s, were vital and innovative, none met the definition of avant-garde art as we understand it in this book. That is because, in spite of their ability to innovate, the best Cuban artists emphasized intelligibility to a population of *compesinos* unfamiliar with either traditional or avant-garde art, and whose first task was to learn how to read and write. In this, they were closer to Lenin's and Trotsky's position than to that of the Soviet avant-garde. Socialist realism was also an influence on the art of the Cuban Revolution from the time of its alliance with the Soviet regime, although Cuban revolutionary art very rarely descends to the banality of the worse of Soviet socialist realist works. Cuban revolutionary poster art is a case in point. It often makes bold use of color, and involves simplified, almost abstract forms, but it also extols nationalism, revolutionary heroism, and even the cult of the exemplary worker familiar in Soviet socialist realist art. There has been little socialist realist influence in Cuba's highly developed cinema, but even here the emphasis on accessibility of the Cuban Institute of Film Art and Industry (CIFAI) has softened any hard, avant-garde edges its films might have had (although the Castro regime has allowed the CIFAI to function with considerable freedom, including the freedom to criticize the government). Thomas Gutierez Alea is a superb director, for

example, but his films lack the spirit of radical experimentation that we see in the work of such revolutionary Latin American filmmakers as Fernando Solanas of Argentina, or Glauber Rocha of Brazil. (See below, Chapter Five). In the twenty-two years since the collapse of its Soviet ally, including Cuba's survival of its ensuing "special period," a great deal has changed. The art scene in Cuba is very different now than it was in its first three, revolutionary decades. Some contemporary artists are quite close to the politically null post-modernism of Europe and the U.S., though others still dedicate their work to political purposes, some with avant-garde techniques. But the latter apply these techniques in a very different set of historical conditions than those faced by the Latin American avant-garde in its heyday. In Cuba, the avant-garde has not aged. It was already senescent when it arrived on the scene.

[2] The Saint Simonist conception of the avant-garde comes astonishingly close to some versions of Soviet avant-garde productivism . On this point, see Rose 1988, 123-125.

[3] Translation slightly altered.

[4] I have corrected the punctuation in this translation so it matches that of the original Italian text.

[5] There is a relatively thorough treatment of Marinetti's ill-fated trip to Russia in Vladimir Markov's book, *Russian Futurism: A History* (Markov 1968, 147-163).

[6] The productivist position is nowhere more clearly expressed than in Aleksei Gan's book, *Constructivism*, written in 1922:

> **Art is finished! It has no place in the human labor apparatus.**
> **Labor, technology, organization!** …
> THE REVALUATION OF THE FUNCTIONS OF HUMAN ACTIVITY, THE LINKING OF EVERY EFFORT WITH THE GENERAL RANGE OF SOCIAL OBJECTIVES –
> **that is the ideology of our time**…
> **Intellectual-material production establishes labor interrelations and a productional link with science and technology by arising in the place of art—art, which by its very nature cannot break with religion and philosophy and which is powerless to leap from the exclusive circle of abstract, speculative activity** (Gans 1976, 223).

[7] In *The Total Art of Stalinism* (Groys 1992), Boris Groys develops the thesis that the Bolsheviks and the avant-garde were rivals in the struggle to reshape a Russia that had been reduced to "year zero" by the civil war, and that Stalin won this competition for the Bolsheviks by assuming the role of the ultimate avant-garde artist in relation to the raw material of Soviet society. While Groys' thesis opens up new perspectives in the interpretation of the soviet avant-garde, it overstates the tension between the Bolsheviks and the avant-garde by interpreting it as a full-scale struggle for power, for which there is little evidence in the writings of either the Bolsheviks or the avant-garde artists.

[8] On the history of the Russian Revolution through the end of the civil war and its immediate aftermath, see the three volume treatment by Edward Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution from 1917-1923* (Carr 1978).

[9] Shub quoted in Leyda 1983, 224.
[10] In a review of Vertov's film, *Eleventh Year*, that appeared in the fourth issue of *New LEF* in 1928, Brik writes: "It is curious that Shub's film *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* constructed out of old pieces of footage, produces a far more unified impression [than *Eleventh Year*], thanks to the careful working out of a thematic montage plan" (Brik 2004, 311). Brik's review enraged Vertov, especially since it praised the "brilliant" work of the cameraman for the film, Vertov's brother, Mikhail Kaufman. Vertov insisted that Kaufman publicly repudiate the review, on pain of expulsion from the Kino-Eye group, and Kaufman complied in a letter jointly signed by Vertov, Kaufman, and Svilova.
[11] Aleksei Gastev was both a poet who contributed to *LEF*, and founder and director of the Central Institute of Labor in Moscow. His experiments and publications in the biomechanics of labor extended and radicalized the time-and-motion studies pioneered by the American engineer and founder of the Efficiency Movement, Frederick Winslow Taylor. Gastev's work in biomechanics exercised wide influence among the constructivists, since its attempt at a mechanization of the human body was consonant with their interest in machines and modern industry in general. In cinema, it influenced the work of Eisenstein and Vertov, both of whom were also associated with *LEF*. See Vaingurt 2008.
[12] Romantic pantheism was a marked tendency in Russian poetry of the early nineteenth century, just as it was in England and Germany. In Russia, however, pantheism was revived on a more scientific and even materialist basis by the symbolist poets of the 1890s (Chisholm 1937), and continued to exercise influence in the early years of the twentieth century.
[13] Without any party axe to grind, the theater critic, Boris Alpers, made the point rather gently in an article he wrote in 1930: "Dovzhenko himself by no means rid himself of the pantheistic features in the attitudes of *Earth*'s heroes. In this sense, his creative work is in many respects ambivalent. The contradictions that live in the psyche of todays peasant, even today's progressive peasant, have not yet been resolved in it. And Dovzhenko is primarily an artist of the peasantry." Cited in Dobrenko 2007, 314.
[14] This is a more complicated matter than Marx realized. Prosperous times may generate rising expectations that cannot be met by the social and economic order, the frustration of which leads to rebellion. On some interpretations, this is what happened in the United States and Western Europe in the 1960s.
[15] Barrington Moore makes the related general point in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*: "Massive poverty and exploitation in and by themselves are not enough to provide a revolutionary situation. There must also be felt injustice built into the social structure, that is, either new demands on the victims or some reason for the victims to feel that old demands are no longer justifiable" (Moore 1966, 220).
[16] Here I am following the account in Georg O. Liber's article, "Adapting to the Stalinist Order" (Liber 2001).
[17] In "Allegory and Accommodation: Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934) as a Stalinist Film," John MacKay challenges the received view that Stalin does not appear at all in Vertov's film. MacKay attributes Stalin's absence in currently available versions to an act of editorial de-Stalinization performed in 1969 by Vertov's wife and co-worker, Elizaveta Svilova, among others. Appealing to archival evidence, he argues that Stalin

appeared throughout the original version of *Three Songs about Lenin*, but he made little impression on contemporary audiences because Vertov depicted him as decidedly secondary to Lenin himself (MacKay, 2006).