The Metabiotic State: Dziga Vertov's *The Eleventh Year**

DEVIN FORE

One of the most important units within Dziga Vertov's conceptual system is the lexeme that means BOND. It recurs throughout his writings, most often appearing as the noun *sviaz'* although sometimes it also surfaces as the verb *sviazat'* ("to link"). Occasionally it is alloyed with a second lexeme to forge strange and unprecedented compounds, as in Vertov's definition of "kino-eye" as a "film-bond [*kino-sviaz'*] between the peoples of the USSR and those of the entire world."[1] Such insistence on film's status as a visual link, or copula, explains why Vertov, in contrast to contemporaries like Lev Kuleshov, looked askance at proposals to establish a formal ontology for the medium: Itself neither matter nor substance, cinema was instead a constructive means for connecting and binding substances, a means for catalyzing interactions between diverse and seemingly incommensurate objects.[2] Thus, for Vertov, cinema was less an art form with clearly defined generic contours than "a kind of central telephonic exchange,"[3] a means of communication, a coefficient of political activity, or even, in its greatest compass, a "social movement" itself ("Metod kino-glaza," *Iz nasledііa*, 2:142).

By connecting workers scattered around the globe, the bonds forged in cinema redressed capitalism's baleful fragmentation of experience and galvanized

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1. Dziga Vertov, "Kinokam iuga," in *Iz nasledііa*, ed. A. S. Deriabin and D. V. Kruzhkova, 2 vols. (Moscow: Eizenshtein tsentr, 2008), 2:92. Hereinafter referenced in text as *Iz nasledііa* followed by volume and page number.

2. It is true that in his earliest published statement on cinema, "WE. Variant of a Manifesto" from 1922, Vertov uses the neologism *kinochestvo* ("cinema specificity") to invoke the formal-ontological attributes of cinema, but within a year he has already abandoned this term, which will never again appear in his writings. "MY. Variant manifesta," *Iz nasledііa*, 2:15.

3. I take this phrase from Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1991), p. 30. As Gilles Deleuze points out, Bergson's system of "universal variation" and "universal interaction (*modulation*)" anticipates Vertov's "first assemblage": "The materialist Vertov realises the materialist programme of the first chapter of *Matter and Memory* through the cinema." And further: "The originality of the Vertovian theory of the interval is that it no longer marks a gap which is carved out, a distancing between two consecutive images but, on the contrary, a correlation between two images which are distant." *Cinema I. The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 81–82.

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isolated individuals into a single perceptual collectivity that was no longer balkanized by nationalist ideology, regional identitarianisms, or (as was typical to claim about silent cinema in those years) the boundaries of linguistic community. Take one of Vertov's most famous statements about film from 1925, which celebrates the medium's ability to demonstrate incontrovertibly the worker's connection to other workers and, through this empirical proof, to transform the individual's experience of isolation and remoteness into one of mutuality and recognition:

> The textile worker ought to see the factory worker while the latter is building the machine that is essential to the textile worker. The factory worker ought to see the miner who gives his factory its essential fuel, coal. The miner ought to see the peasant who produces the bread essential to him. All workers ought to see one another so that a close, indestructible bond [*sviaz'*] can be established among them. ("Radio-glaz," *Iz nasledia*, 2:97)

The goal for Vertov was to produce through cinema what Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge later designated a "counter public-sphere," a coherent context of living in which those aspects of concrete, everyday existence that had been de-realized and rendered unintelligible under the rule of bourgeois rationalism could once again be made comprehensible and communicable, and, through this reconfiguration of empirical experience, to establish the foundation for "solidarity that can be grasped with the senses."[4]

For Vertov, the enterprise of linking together diverse peoples had a particular pertinence, if not urgency, within the Soviet Union, a massive multiethnic empire divided internally by extremes of sociocultural difference and by the seemingly insurmountable obstacles imposed by geography itself. In the film *One Sixth of the World* (1926), a "race" (*probeg*) to each of the corners of Russia, Vertov documented the traditional labor practices of the country's minority cultures, connecting the work performed in these distant, seemingly marginal locales to the factory sites of the industrial proletariat. All Soviet workers, irrespective of language, ethnicity, or social habitus, contribute to a single collectivity of production, the film insists. One of its promotional booklets, written for an urban audience, rhapsodized: "Was this not a miracle! You shave every other day, you go to the theater, you ride on a bus—you stand at the other end of the cultural ladder—and *One Sixth of the World* has somehow managed distinctly and indisputably to link [*sviazat'*] you with these people eating raw meat in the North. It is almost like a phantasmagoria."[5]

4. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience. Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 38.

5. Izmail Urazov, "A Sixth Part of the World," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian (Pordenone: Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004), pp. 185–86.

Ultimately, as *One Sixth* shows, these phantasmagoric couplings of near and far extend beyond even the boundaries of the Soviet Union. The film, which was contracted by the State Trade Commission (*Gostorg*) to advertise the Soviet Union to potential foreign-trade partners, begins and ends with sequences that embed the Soviet economy in the import-export cycles of international trade. Emerging out of an ever-expanding meshwork of economic bonds, the global trade system depicted in the film explodes the very condition of locality as such. Indeed, for all of the interest and attention that *One Sixth* shows towards the diverse lifestyles of Russia's minority peoples, in the end, the film utterly confounds the spectator's sense of ethnographic and geographic specificity. Rather than anchoring his film in any fixed location, Vertov instead vaults from location to location, tracing the vectors of movement in which commodities, materials, and capital circulate—on the backs of camels and in the hulls of ships, from the fur trade of the Somoeds to the exchange markets in Milan. Within this continuous—although hardly homogenous—economic network, there are no static positions or values.

With good reason, then, Vertov's exegetes have claimed that his films break apart the static grid of Euclidean space, freeing these coordinates for rearrangement into new sensory and perspectival configurations. Paul Virilio's influential reading in *War and Cinema*, for example, links Vertov's work to contemporaneous aerial photography and concludes that his films project an isometric field in which there is "no longer an above or below, no longer any visual polarity." Thrust into this "abstract zone" of perception, the spectator is left, Virilio writes, without any certain sense of the values of proximity and distance, without any fixed "sensory point of reference."[6]

Analyses such as Virilio's are entirely correct, of course. But in attending exclusively to the eccentric, and at times ecstatic, spatial construction of Vertov's work, they overlook a second, even more primary aspect of his films, namely, the importance that they place on time and succession. The 1925 statement about *Kino-Eye*, quoted above, is indicative. While the film-bond posited there indeed transcends space by connecting industrial workers at the urban centers with miners underground and farmers at the rural periphery, Vertov's example also follows the work-collective through a very specific sequence of operations: The peasant produces bread; this bread feeds the miner; the miner then produces coal; the coal, in turn, fuels the factory plant; and the worker in the factory plant builds the machine that is used, finally, by the textile worker to make fabrics. In this way, the visual bonds linking the textile worker to the peasant via the factory worker and the miner thus represent more than just a leap across space. They also provide a glance back in time that concatenates individual acts of labor in a kind of reverse-motion sequence.

Those signature flections of time for which Vertov's work is so famous—the arrested image, the analytic use of slow motion, the interpolation of the temporal

6. Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 18, 15.

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interval, and the strategy of reverse motion that Annette Michelson has compared with the rhetorical device of *hysteron proteron*[7]—all seek to demonstrate that the dimension of time cannot be reduced to a simple linear scheme, but is instead a heterogeneous and fundamentally plastic field of investigation. This field was the explicit subject of the next work Vertov would make after *One Sixth of the World*, the film *The Eleventh Year* from 1928. The titles of these pendant works, the first of which refers to geographical units and the second to chronometric ones, announce the two respective modalities of human experience—space and time—which each film takes as its subject: If *One Sixth* is, in the words of one astute commentator, Vertov's "spatially most ambitious film,"[8] then *The Eleventh Year* is certainly his temporally most ambitious one. An experiment in historical dialectics, *The Eleventh Year* brings together two seemingly unconnected and infinitely distant moments in time: On the one hand, the construction of the world's largest hydroelectric station on the Dniepr River in the Ukraine, and, on the other, the excavation of a pair of two-thousand-year-old Scythian skeletons recently discovered at the site of the industrial enterprise. Vertov's notes for the film describe a

7. Annette Michelson, "From Magician to Epistemologist. Vertov's *The Man With a Movie Camera*," in *The Essential Cinema. Essays on Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 95–111.

8. Oksana Sarkisova, "Across One Sixth of the World: Dziga Vertov, Travel Cinema, and Soviet Patriotism," *October* 121 (Summer 2007), p. 20.

Vertov. The Eleventh Year. *1928.*

project driven conceptually and visually by the friction generated through the unlikely juxtaposition of these two moments, the tension between the silent "Scythian in the grave and the din made by the onset of the new life" ("'Odinnadtsatyi' (otryvki iz s"emochnogo dnevnika)," *Iz nasledііa*, 2:140). After a series of dynamite blasts liberate the skeletons from their static earthly tomb, ushering in the eventfulness of world history, time begins to course and circulate around these remains like the water that will soon flood the territory above the dam. In this case kino-eye now "means the conquest of time—a visual bond [*sviaz'*] between phenomena that are temporally remote from one another" ("Chto takoe Kino-glaz," *Iz nasledііa*, 2:160). The bonds of mutualism and interest posited by *The Eleventh Year* extend backward beyond the brief four-term labor sequence *textile worker* > *tool worker* > *miner* > *peasant* considered above, beyond the moment when the Bolsheviks seized tsarist Russia's machine capital in 1917, beyond even the annals of written human record, reaching back into the deep time of the archaic and the mythical.

One possible reading of *The Eleventh Year* takes the film's confrontation between the archaic remnants of the Scythians and Soviet industrial modernity as

Vertov. The Eleventh Year. *1928.*

an occasion to stage the symbolic triumph of the latter over the former. From this perspective, the primitive nomads are exhumed by Vertov only in order to be put again to rest—definitively this time. Such an interpretation situates Vertov within a chorus of avant-garde voices whose enthusiasm for industrialization took the form of an aggressively liquidationist policy toward Russia's premodern past. Whereas after the French Revolution, the newly established bourgeois class began to dress in togas, build in a neoclassical idiom, and generally revive the cultural precedents of antiquity, the society inaugurated by the October Revolution was, by contrast, aggressively futurist in orientation. Seduced by the rhetoric of supersession and the vision of a Russia modernized according to the Western model, many of the revolutionaries took up their historical teleologies and, denouncing Russia's uneven development, proclaimed a radical break with the country's backward past.

And yet all too frequently *The Eleventh Year* contradicts this narrative of progress, instead suggesting that the past cannot ever be fully inhumed, indeed, that the path forward may at times even necessitate recursive maneuvers. As the film moves forward, the archaic and the modern, seemingly so distinct at its beginning, begin to reverse polarity and, in a physiognomic exchange of properties, come to resemble one another. By the film's midpoint, the Dniepr construction site, for example, has assumed the appearance of an ancient pyramid. Such visual

Vertov. The Eleventh Year. *1928.*

allochronisms suggest that historical progress is not always as consistently linear and universal, and that the course of technological development not as uniformly remainderless, as the liquidationists might want to assume.

In addition to the dam-pyramid and other pseudomorphic likenesses that the film uses to connect "phenomena that are temporally remote from one another," there are three specific devices, more sophisticated in their application, through which Vertov complicates the simple unidirectional scheme of history. First is superimposition, a visual strategy found in a number of Vertov's films but deployed with particular philosophical acuity in *The Eleventh Year*. In this film Vertov layers incommensurate elements upon one another—peasant houses, igneous rock formations, a bust of Lenin—without attributing anteriority to any one of them. At once a reference both to a primordial, antediluvian state and to the flood that will soon inundate the basin after the dam's construction, the recurring image of water, for example, indexes the region's past and its future

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simultaneously. Instead of serving as transitions to other sequences in the manner of a cinematic dissolve, these superimpositions often emerge and then disappear within a single shot, thereby eluding linear resolution. This visual device, writes Christian Metz, "resides in the (momentary, fleeting) co-presence of two images on screen, in the short instant when they become indistinguishable (see the 'collective figures' which Freud mentions apropos of condensation)." As a result of this convergence, the images presented in *The Eleventh Year* hover in a logically impossible state of simultaneity that more closely resembles the paratactic structure of the dream than the linear concatenations of causal thought. What is so striking about the figural condensations produced through such superimposition, Metz also notes, is that they have no origin, no punctual beginning, since their very point of departure is itself somehow already vestigial. "It appears as an incipient condensation, unusual in that the beginning is more like something residual, something which has always been residual."[9] In the superimposition, inception is therefore paradoxically suffused with the remainder of what came before, with what was disavowed and left behind. The very antithesis of what Metz elsewhere calls cinematic "punctuation," these spectral images suggest that, even at the level of visual syntax, Vertov's film thwarts attempts to take apart any given sequence into its constituent elements. *The Eleventh Year* is organized around "movements *and not 'units.*"[10] Thus, in contrast to Eisenstein, whose understanding of cinematic signification, at least until *The General Line* (1929),[11] remained faithful to linguistic models of meaning that defined the shot as a discrete and semantically isolable element[12] and who consequently approached montage as a fundamentally linear and sequential process, Vertov, who preferred superimposition to supersession, dissolved the individual units into a single passage of movement, foreclosing

9. Christian Metz, "Crossings and Interweavings in Film: the Lap-Dissolve as an Example of Figuration," in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, trans. Ben Brewster et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 276.

10. Ibid., p. 275. John MacKay has pointed out that the visual syntax of *The Eleventh Year* is based not on the repetition of specific imagery but on the recurrence of the camera movements themselves. Through the patterned regularity of certain pans and contouring shots, Vertov organizes the film around a recognizable vocabulary of motion. Thus it is movement and process, rather than the contents of the shots themselves, that constitute the semantic backbone of Vertov's film. MacKay dubs this technique "energetic montage": "In one sequence in the film's final reel, two forward tracking shots of two women pushing a cart full of ore or coal are juxtaposed, first, with the image of a giant crane tracking forward (of its own will!) in rhyme with the women's motion, and then with a contrasting vertically constructed image of a worker climbing a ladder amid pounding factory machinery. Plainly enough, the logic of the sequence, which continues with the image of the crane as leitmotif, suggests that the disparate things represented in these images are part of a single circuit of energy . . . " "Film Energy: Process and Metanarrative in Dziga Vertov's *The Eleventh Year*," *October* 121 (Summer 2007), p. 65.

11. *The General Line* was the first film in which Eisenstein began to supercharge the shot to striking visual and semantic effect. Devin Fore, "Jenseits der Einstellung, hinter der Szene. Ejzenstein's *Generallinie*," in *Synchronisierung der Künste*, ed. Robin Curtis, Gertrud Koch, and Marc Siegel (Munich: Fink, 2013), pp. 41–72.

12. See Peter Wollen's still unsurpassed study *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969).

the possibility of parsing the final result into distinct elements. The results are formally and semantically much messier, of course, since Vertov's images rarely denote as univocally as Eisenstein's ideograms. For base materialists like Vertov, as for documentarists in general, this ideological multivalence was a common political liability in the 1920s.

A second device used in *The Eleventh Year* to capture the compound temporality of the archaic-modern is the vertical articulation of the image into what Yuri Tsivian has designated "tiers of space."[13] These layered images invoke the visual idiom of the stratigraph, a form of natural record familiar from geological display.[14] In the deep cycles of time prospected by Vertov, in which human labor and natural history are interlocked in ceaseless metabolic exchange, the archaeology of industry merges indistinguishably with the archive of geological time that is inscribed in the earth's crust. Often, the layers in the striated arrangement presented by Vertov offer the same view, although, importantly, they capture this excerpt of space at different temporal moments. In this way, they present a cross-section of time and history. For example, in one image that is particularly supersaturated visually, a bustling crowd processes from left to right, with each band of figures moving at a different speed; in all three of the layers, however, a stationary group of Red Army soldiers remains a consistent anchor of reference, demonstrat-

13. Tsivian, *Lines of Resistance*, p. 312.

14. Vertov's stratification of the screen seemed also to stem in part from a personal aversion to shots of wide horizons: The "horizontal panorama" is "unacceptable" and "nauseating," he declared early on in his career. "O s"emke siuzhetov kinokhroniki," *Iz naslediia*, 2:22.

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ing to the spectator that the overwhelming visual chaos on the screen is in fact just a single event that has been refracted through two temporal dislocations. If the event appears to the viewer as multiple, if all he perceives is a random congeries of bodies, this is only because he has failed to discern the underlying continuity and order linking these moments together. Vertov thereby trains the spectator's eye upon the islands of identity, invariance, and continuity that endure within the Heraclitean river of history, a river whose currents had been gaining speed in Russia since 1917.

In addition to these two visual devices, Vertov's compositional method itself vexes notions of linear supersession through an archival poetics based on the preservation and reactivation of documents. The repetition of shots within his individual films, for example, confounds the distinction between beginning and conclusion. In a text on *Man With a Movie Camera*, Noël Burch observes that "often the logic of successive significations moves backwards, denying our usual sense of chronology, and even more often it will take us along an axis which is no longer syntagmatic, but paradigmatic of the film's very production (frozen frames, photograms, editing scenes,

shooting scenes, screening of the film before an audience)."[15] And if such violations of chronological exposition can be found within Vertov's individual films, these paradigmatic structures are even more evident at the level of his oeuvre generally. Although he never adhered as rigorously to the principle of compilation filmmaking as Esfir Shub, Vertov nonetheless insisted on using identical footage in a number of different works, establishing an intertextual axis of associations that cuts across the composition of each individual film. The snarling, taxidermied dog from *One Sixth of the World*, for example, reappears at the beginning of *Man with a Movie Camera*, where, situated now among an array of dormant commodities that will soon spring to life, it assumes a different, more volatile countenance. For Vertov, who began his career as an editor of newsreels, the task of a director was not to create title-bearing, feature-length, scenario-based pictures with a beginning, middle, and end: Even into the late 1930s, he would describe the essence of filmmaking as a "continuous editing process" and a "continuous production process" ("Ob organizatsii tvorcheskoi laboratorii. Predlozhenie avtora-rezhissera D. Vertova," *Iz naslediia*, 2:308, 310) that linked together an entire host of paradigmatically interconnected works. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, archival reconstruction suggests that *The Eleventh Year*, a film about the reanimation of cultural vestiges, was itself assembled out of the material remains of the two larger projects that flanked it chronologically, *One Sixth of the World* (1926) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).[16] What is more, *The Eleventh Year*'s open chain of re-signification does not terminate even within Vertov's own body of work: Entire shot sequences from the film, including an ending that was until recently considered lost or destroyed, resurface in Albrecht Blum's appropriation, the compilation film entitled *In the Shadow of the Machine* (1928).[17]

Vertov's insistent pluralization of time in a film about Soviet modernization addresses the complex temporality of Russia's nonsynchronous development. As Lenin once observed, when the Bolsheviks seized power, there were, astonishingly, no fewer than five distinct and fully elaborated modes of production, ranging from the Asiatic and primitive communist to the feudal and advanced capitalist, all of which could be found operating simultaneously in the Russian economy. In contrast to the situation in Western Europe and America, where capitalism had largely succeeded in dissolving and integrating each region's specific cultural, social, and technical infrastructures, resulting in a single unified and frictionless plane of exchange, in Russia, premodern archaisms could still be found operating alongside state-of-the-art industrial technologies. Each of these distinctive modes of production was, moreover, underwritten at the level of subjective experience by a distinct noetic framework for understanding time and causality, for, as we know from the paleoanthropologist

15. Noël Burch, "Film's Institutional Mode of Representation and the Soviet Response," *October* 11 (Winter 1979), p. 94.

16. MacKay writes that *The Eleventh Year* "was an apparently 'secondary' project shot and produced amid the larger productions of *One Sixth of the World* and *Man with a Movie Camera*." "Film Energy," p. 42.

17. Adelheid Heftberger and Aleksandr Deriabin, "Auf den Spuren des Materials," in *Shestaia chast' mira / Odinnadtsatyi* (Vienna: Österreichisches Filmmuseum, 2009).

André Leroi-Gourhan[18] and his commentators such as Bernard Stiegler,[19] every technical mode produces not just a particular genus of material object (e.g., artisanal, industrial, etc.) but an entire mental architecture of time as well, an intuitive explanatory scheme that organizes the temporality of human endeavor and dictates the logic by which individual acts of productive labor are translated into collective history. After the Bolsheviks assumed power over the Russian economy, in other words, they were confronted by five distinct histories and five collective pasts that, despite their mutual incompatibility, coexisted alongside one another in paradoxical simultaneity. Capitalist countries in the West may have an unpredictable future, as the risk sociologists of modernity have claimed,[20] but Russia, to recall the adage, is by contrast a "country with an unpredictable past" (*strana s nepredskazuemym proshlym*). Given the crooked course of Russia's uneven development and its resulting surfeit of histories, one can never be certain at any given moment which of these multifarious pasts, once activated, will capture and commandeer the country's present.

Confronted by this paradoxical coincidence of archaic and modern modes of production, Leon Trotsky conceded that "the development of Russia is characterized first of all by backwardness." But Trotsky also recognized that it would be a grave strategic mistake to measure this development against that of advanced capitalist countries, as if Russia were compelled to evolve through the same clear sequence of stages:

> Historical backwardness does not, however, signify a simple reproduction of the development of advanced countries, with merely a delay of one or two centuries. It engenders an entirely new "combined" social formation in which the latest conquests of capitalist technique and structure root themselves into the relations of feudal and pre-feudal barbarism, transforming and subjecting them and creating a peculiar interrelationship of classes.[21]

Examples of such technical nonsynchronicities can be found throughout the history of Russia's uneven development, whether in the twin-cylinder steam engine made of unassuming organic materials such as bark and leather that appeared in the Urals two full decades before the officially recognized invention of this machine by James Watt in the United Kingdom,[22] or in the constructivist Karl Ioganson's discovery of the engineering principle of tensegrity 25 years before the

18. See especially "Memory and Rhythms," in André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 219–68.

19. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, trans Richard Beardsworth, George Collins, and Stephen Barker, 3 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998–2011), especially volume 1.

20. Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992).

21. Leon Trotsky, "Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution," in *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, ed. Naomi Allen, 13 vols. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), 12:56.

22. Viktor Vasil'evich Danilevskii, *Russkaia tekhnika* (Leningrad: Gazetno-zhurnal'noe i knizhnoe izd-vo, 1948), pp. 9–10. The appearance of the steam engine in Britain would, of course, trigger the Industrial Revolution in the West.

emergence of the physical materials that would allow for its practical application.[23] Such curious anachronic ensembles, which Russia turned out at a furious pace in the early twentieth century, exemplify what Bruno Latour has identified as the "polytemporality" of the quasi-object, an admixture of archaicism and modernity that explodes conceptions of universal time as an irreversible arrow.[24] Historical contexts in which the outmoded and the modern, the artisanal and the mechanical, are allowed to intermingle turn out to be the most generative and fecund laboratories for scientific invention and political revolution. For this reason, the persistence of the archaic within the industrial mode of production is not simply a symptom of historical delay or a developmental retardation to be overcome, since this "combined" formation, as Trotsky puts is, is "entirely new." Phrased more axiomatically: Combined formation is *the very condition* for the emergence of the new. It constitutes what Trotsky called "the *privilege* of historic backwardness [*zapozdalosti*]."[25] Under the conditions of belatedness and nonsynchronicity such as were found in Russia, it in fact "becomes easier for critical thought to find revolutionary expression," he wrote.[26] For similar reasons, Étienne Balibar would conclude from his analysis of the Bolshevik experiment that "periods of [revolutionary] transition are therefore characterized by the *coexistence* of several modes of production, as well as by . . . forms of non-correspondence."[27]

23. Maria Gough, "In the Laboratory of Constructivism," in *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 61–100.

24. For Latour, cases of "backward" peoples combining techno-industrial constructions with premodern artifacts are not an exception to, but the very exemplification of, the practice of scientific invention. Such assemblages "are seen as mixing up different periods, ontologies or genres. … Instead of a fine laminary flow, we will most often get a turbulent flow of whirlpools and rapids. Time becomes reversible instead of irreversible." *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 73. "Let us suppose," he continues, "that we are going to regroup the contemporary elements along a spiral rather than a line. We do have a future and a past, but the future takes the form of a circle expanding in all directions, and the past is not surpassed but revisited, repeated, surrounded, protected, recombined, reinterpreted and reshuffled. … Such a temporality does not oblige us to use the labels 'archaic' or 'advanced,' since every cohort of contemporary elements may bring together elements from all times. In such a framework, our actions are recognized at last as polytemporal" (75). Within this condition of polytemporality, Latour concludes, the moderns' fantasy of the revolution as a radical break with the past is theoretically untenable, if not politically regressive.

25. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), p. 4; italics added. He continues: "The laws of history have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism. . . . From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law which, for want of a better name, we may call the law of *combined development*—by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms" (5).

26. Leon Trotsky, "For the Internationalist Perspective," in *Leon Trotsky Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), p. 242.

27. Étienne Balibar, "Elements for a Theory of Transition," in *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 343–44. Balibar's analysis of technical nonsynchronicity within the mode of production also provides a useful framework through which to address the avant-garde's dialectic of de- and re-skilling, a process that causes the recrudescence of artisanal craft practices within the very methods of industrial manufacture: "Thus manufacture is not only a continuation of handicrafts from the point of view of the nature of its productive forces, it also presupposes the persistence of handicrafts in certain branches of production and even causes handicrafts to develop alongside itself."

Based on the Russian case, Trotsky's analysis thus anticipates an intractable historical reality that would trouble Marxist thought repeatedly over the course of the twentieth century: The fact that, contrary to the deterministic narrative about the inevitability of revolutionary transition in the most advanced industrial countries, socialist movements have, at least initially, been most successful in precisely those countries where mixed modes of production prevailed, where backwardness and "combined" social systems could be harnessed as resources for revolutionary transformation. Accordingly it would be a strategic error to dismiss Russia's uneven development as a delay or setback to revolutionary activity, since archaicism and the multiplicity of pasts are not obstacles to social transformation but its very agents. It turns out, then, that the revenant cultural and ethnotechnical practices that Lenin once designated as "survivals" offer a preview, an "anticipation," of what is to come. Far from jeopardizing the revolutionary project, Althusser observes, such archaicisms actually secure its future: "The new society produced by the revolution may *ensure the survival, that is the reactivation of older elements* through both the forms of its new superstructures and specific (national and international) 'circumstances.'"[28]

The convergence in *The Eleventh Year* of archaicism and futurity spawns a whole series of interpretive paradoxes that cannot be easily resolved, resulting in a work that is profoundly *overdetermined* in the psychoanalytic sense. This term was defined by Freud as the lamination, within a single image, of a number of thoughts or meanings that are often irreconcilable, and even antagonistic, with one another. More recently, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood have argued that overdetermination is the very hermeneutic mode of the nonsynchronous, of historical unevenness: "The ability of the work of art to hold incompatible models in suspension without deciding is the key to art's anachronic quality," they write.[29] Such incompatible models proliferate within *The Eleventh Year*—pyramid and hydroelectric dam, Scythian and proletariat, necropolis and factory, hieroglyph and cinema—adulterating linear universal history with the anachronic time of Russia's combined development.[30] The

28. Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1990), p. 116. "Just as at the dawn of Human History the first stammerings of the Oriental Spirit . . . already betrayed the unconscious presage of the future achievements of the Absolute Spirit, so in each instant of Time the past survives in the form of a memory of what it has been; that is, as the whispered promise of its present. That is why *the past is never opaque or an obstacle*" (115). On the "survival" as "anticipation," Althusser writes: "The term 'survival' is constantly invoked [by Lenin], but it is still virtually uninvestigated, not in *its name* (it has one!), but *in its concept*. The concept it deserves (and has fairly won) must be more than a vague Hegelianism such as '*supersession*'—the *maintenance-of-what-has-been-negated-in-its-very-negation* (that is, the negation of the negation). If we return to Hegel for a second we see that the survival of the past as a 'superseded' (*aufgehoben*) is simply reduced to the modality of a *memory*, which, furthermore, is merely the inverse of (that is, the same thing as) an *anticipation*" (114).

29. Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2010), p. 18. My thanks to Hal Foster for emphasizing the importance of this book for any understanding of revolutionary obstinacy.

30. The centrality that Althusserians have given to the phenomenon of overdetermination grew out of the insight that this surfeit of meaning, this hermeneutic surplus, itself reflected the revolutionary condition of nonsynchronicity that, for Vertov as for Lenin and Trotsky, distinguished Russia's staggered path of modernization: "The overdetermination of a contradiction is the reflection in it of its conditions of existence within the complex whole, that is, of the other contradictions in the complex whole, in other words its uneven development." Ben Brewster, "Overdetermination," in *Reading Capital*, p. 353.

visual devices of superimposition and stratification and the poetological program of re-signification were, again, three means for Vertov to achieve this semantic supersaturation in his films. The only way to begin to decipher the impossibly dense and overdetermined network of meanings that results, Burch counsels, is to watch the film multiple times.[31] And even then, multiple viewings will never secure any definitive or exhaustive interpretation; to the contrary, they will instead uncover even more axes of interpretive determination.

The semantic overdetermination of *The Eleventh Year* reflects a defining hermeneutic characteristic of early Soviet culture. Against the prevailing tendency today to view revolutionary art as culturally univocal, institutionally monolithic, and semantically stable—in other words: to view it as simple propaganda—*The Eleventh Year* suggests that the exact opposite was the case, that the work produced at this historical moment cannot be reduced to any single ideological scheme. It is symptomatic that when Viktor Shklovsky sat down in 1923 to compose the preface to his book *Knight's Move*, an anthology of occasional criticism written during the civil war, he found it impossible to summarize the diverse contents of the volume he had himself just written. In this case, though, the problem was not his inconsistency as a thinker, as one might suspect of this notoriously idiosyncratic writer. Rather, as he argued in the preface, the dynamic culture of the revolutionary period could not be reconciled with a single perspective or reduced to a common principle:

> Some say—in Russia people are dying in the street; in Russia people are eating, or are capable of eating, human flesh . . .
>
> Others say—in Russia the universities are functioning; in Russia the theaters are full.
>
> You choose for yourself what to believe.
>
> But why choose? It's all true.
>
> —In Russia there's also something else [*est i to drugoe*]
>
> —In Russia everything is so contradictory [*protivorechivo*] that we have all become sharp-witted against our wills and desires [*ostroumny ne po svoei voli i zhelaniiu*].[32]

At the beginning of the passage, it seems that Shklovsky is referencing the

31. Noel Burch, "Film's Institutional Mode of Representation," p. 94. Burch observes about *Man with a Movie Camera*: "One may safely say that there is not a single shot in this entire film whose place in the editing scheme is not overdetermined by a whole set of intertwined chains of signification" (94).
32. Viktor Shklovsky, *Khod konia. Sbornik statei* (Berlin: Gelikon, 1923), p. 10. *Knight's Move*, trans. Richard Sheldon (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005), p. 4. Translation modified.

ineluctable fact of material necessity during the civil war and struggling to understand the place of culture during this desperate historical moment. And yet, by the end, it is clear that his subject is instead a certain hermeneutic paradox that faces the critic in periods of revolutionary transition: How does one summarize the culture of a country that, on the one hand, has devolved into an apocalyptic landscape peopled by cannibals, but that is, at the same time, politically the most advanced civilization on the earth? Was this barbarism or utopia? "It's all true," he replies. This is the condition of overdetermination writ large. Contradiction and sharp-wittedness, meaning in excess of authorial intentionality, become unavoidable facts at historical moments of radical social upheaval, Shklovsky points out: Whatever is said, there is inevitably always "something else" contained within the utterance, an additional set of meanings that express a second version of reality that is equally valid. Thus, even when sincerity is desired in interpersonal relations, at moments of cultural overdetermination it is necessarily irony that comes out of one's mouth; likewise, political action may demand resolution and univocity, but in times of revolutionary transition it is instead amphiboly that becomes the rule.[33]

This quality of contradiction, exemplified in the work of Vertov, is a feature that distinguishes the production of the early Soviet avant-garde from contemporaneous artistic formations in the West, where industrial modernization and mass culture had uniformly distributed a standard repertoire of artistic strategies ranging from the readymade to the monochrome, and where the critical distinction between progressive and regressive aesthetic practices was, consequently, unambiguous. In Russia, by contrast, where one finds virtually all modes of production working simultaneously, the demarcation of anticipation from survival and of progress from regress was hardly as clear. There are numerous examples beyond the work of Vertov, of course: Take the sculpture of Tatlin, which is deeply archaic, even Aristotelian, in its elementarist approach to what he called the "culture of material,"[34] but which is at the same time uncompromisingly modern in its functionalist understanding of technical construction; or Malevich's remorselessly rationalist demystification of the painterly support in *Black Square*, where rigorous adherence to the principle of the deductive structure results in an autotelic visual tautology—albeit a tautology that the artist chose to exhibit in the place reserved

33. It is hardly surprising, then, that this period, with its heightened sensitivity to semantic contradiction and internal otherness of language, would eventually produce such philosophically and linguistically nuanced theories of heteroglossia: see Valentin Voloshinov's discussion of *chuzhaia rech'* ("alien speech" or "speech of the other") in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 259–422.

34. For Tatlin, the use of each specific artistic material followed a fixed repertory of forms: just as wood always appears as a geometric plane, metal always assumes the shape of cylinder or cone, while glass, in turn, constitutes a transition between inner and outer space. Margit Rowell, "Vladimir Tatlin: Form/Faktura," *October* 7 (Winter 1978), pp. 93–94.

for sacred Orthodox icons and that he expounded theoretically using the language of metaphysical transcendence. Like Tatlin's elementarist functionalism and Malevich's immanentist metaphysics, Vertov's archaic modernism reflects a certain hermeneutic excess within revolutionary society that outstrips the capacity of critics to circumscribe the cultural object within clearly defined theoretical categories.[35] Witness today the plurality of different, and often mutually incompatible, scholarly narratives about the art and literature of this period. Far from indicating a laxity of thought or the ambivalence of the fellow-traveler, this duplexity of revolutionary culture is, to the contrary, the very essence of what George Herbert Mead in 1930 called "sociality," a condition of overdetermination that he deemed necessary for the historical emergence of the new: "The social character of the universe we find in the situation in which the novel event is in both the old order and the new which its advent heralds. Sociality is the capacity of being several things at once."[36] It is a capacity, Mead also notes, that increases at moments of accelerated historical evolution and revolutionary transition, when the individual is called upon to navigate and simultaneously inhabit multiple and often conflicting identities defined by social systems ranging from culture to economy, polity to ecosystem, labor collective to family.[37]

All of this would change with Stalinization, of course. By 1927, when Vertov was at work on *The Eleventh Year*, the systematic refeudalization of Soviet society was already under way, its overdetermined culture subjected to the violence of monologization (a process soon to be consecrated in the Socialist Realist tenet of *ideinost'*, or ideological univocity) and its mode of production, once multiplex and uneven, flattened in favor of heavy industrial manufacture (Stalin's assumed name being taken from the Russian word for steel, *stal'*). Whereas in the years of the New Economic Policy the Bolsheviks had promoted a compound mode of production under the rubric of an "alliance" (*smychka*) between the proletariat and the peasantry, beginning in 1928, the Party began forcing the peasant class to submit to the first Five-Year Plan's one-sided apotheosis of industrial labor. This abrogation of the "alliance" was a direct corollary to Stalin's policy of Socialism in One

35. T. J. Clark has likewise stated that aesthetic modernism, in its most powerful instantiations, sought to achieve an explosive condition of overdetermination through a kind of "forcing" of opposites—a "continual extremism" that collapses together contrasting terms such as structure and infantilism, transparency and sensuous immediacy, uniformity and randomness, order and contingency: the "point is that modernism was always on the lookout for the moment, or practice, to which both descriptions apply." "Modernism, Postmodernism and Steam," *October* 100 (Spring 2002), p. 165.

36. George Herbert Mead, "The Social Nature of the Present," in *The Philosophy of the Present* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), p. 75.

37. "The point is that a body belonging to a system, and having its nature determined by its relations to members of that system, when it passes into a new systematic order will carry over into its process of readjustment in the new system something of the nature of all members of the old. So in the history of a community, the members carry over from an old order their characters as determined by social relations into the readjustments of social change. The old system is found in each member and in a revolution becomes the structure upon which the new order is established. So Rousseau had to find both sovereign and subject in the citizen, and Kant had to find both the giver of the moral law and subject of the law in the rational being." Ibid., p. 77.

Country, a strategy that historians have likened to a form of "internal colonialism": As Stalin smothered the voices championing internationalism and as a siege mentality took root within the party, the leadership began to steer its energies away from external initiatives to internal targets within its borders, substituting "internal colonialism for external revolutionary imperialism [and] domestic violence for foreign violence."[38] The domestic target of this redirected violence was the peasantry, now contemned as backwards, archaic, and premodern.

Although the intertitles of *One Sixth of the World* are based on the speech at the XIV Party Congress where Stalin first introduced Socialism in One Country,[39] Vertov's film in fact systematically dismantles this policy, point by misguided point. Vertov invokes Stalin's words only to turn them on their head: Where Stalin valorized industrial labor exclusively, *One Sixth* lionizes the diverse forms and temporalities of labor performed by the Soviet peasantry and national minorities, ranging from reindeer husbandry to traditional agriculture; and while Socialism in One Country maintained that socialism could succeed only within a state cut off from all external ties, *One Sixth* depicts a remarkably porous Soviet economy whose very existence depends on exchange with the remaining five sixths of the world. In his notes for the project Vertov even invokes Stalin's theory of "two worlds" that are separate and distinct, one capitalist and one socialist, only to unravel this fixed political binarism by showing that the Soviet Union is not a state with bounded contours but an open "juncture" or "hub" (*uzel*) within the international trade cycle "America–Europe–USSR–The East" ("Predvaritel'naia skhema rabot po kartine Gostorga," *Iz naslediia*, 1:107). The result is a complex geopolitical model that more closely resembles Immanuel Wallerstein's theory of world-systems than the high-contrast Manichaeism of Stalin's Socialism in One Country.[40]

If *One Sixth of the World* punctured the fantasy of economic autonomy and industrial domination that motivated the policy of Socialism in One Country, Vertov's next film, *The Eleventh Year*, in turn, took aim at the other great pillar of Stalinist economy strategy, the Great Break, or *velikii perelom* (a phrase typically translated as "Great Change," although it literally means "Great Fracture," like the fracture of a bone). As a corollary to the geopolitical sequestration proposed by Socialism in One Country,

38. Alvin W. Gouldner, "Stalinism: A Study of Internal Colonialism," *Telos* 34 (1977), pp. 25–26. The Party had been transformed into "an urban-centered power elite that had set out to dominate a largely rural society to which they related as an alien colonial power; it was an internal colonialism mobilizing its state power against colonial tributaries in rural territories" (13). Gouldner further observes that the strategy of internal colonialism "links state socialism with the capitalism it had promised to transcend and sees the peasants as the Soviets' Indians and the Soviet countryside as a continental reservation" (41). More recently, see Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

39. Jeremy Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), p. 46.

40. In a discussion of Wallerstein and Second World modernism, Fredric Jameson dismisses the categorical distinction between the capitalist and socialist systems as an ideological construct of the Cold War: "Actually existing socialism was not and could never have been an alternative system, since at any given moment only one world system can hold sway; the various socialisms, rather, were antisystemic movements within the force field of a capitalist world system itself." "Utopia, Modernism, and Death," in *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 76.

this policy, proclaimed by Stalin in his article "The Year of the Great Break," pursued *temporal* sequestration, as it were, a radical rupture with all that had come before.[41] The Great Break marked the definitive supersession of Russia's premodern past, a revolution consummated. After the ruin of the civil war and the chaotic mixed economy of NEP, after the transitional years of backbreaking reconstruction, after the semantically overdetermined and ideologically contested cultural production of the avant-garde, Russia was at last poised for a massive leap forward into a post-historical condition, Stalin proclaimed. By erecting barricades "that were supposed to protect the country from the flood of historical change," writes Boris Groys, "the Stalinist project to escape from world history" sought, like Hitler's Thousand Year Reich, "to conquer time and enter into eternity."[42] Marx himself had recognized that the emergence of a new society also necessitates the disappearance of that which—and those who—preceded it: The "present generation," he wrote, "must not only conquer a new world, it must also perish in order to make room for people who will be equal to a new world."[43] But only Stalin was so monstrous as to literalize this line of Marx, consummating the Great Break with the past through the murder of an entire generation of revolutionaries. From this perspective, the brutal purges of the late 1930s should be seen as the direct elaboration of a policy inaugurated a decade before, when Stalin began systematically to bury the past.

Against this rhetoric of rupture and supersession, the open and unfinished temporality of *The Eleventh Year* forges bonds of sociality and solidarity between people situated at different moments in time, people inhabiting different moments in a given labor sequence (e.g., *textile worker—tool worker—miner—peasant*) or at disjoined

41. I. V. Stalin, "God velikogo pereloma: K XII godovshchine Oktiabria," *Sochineniia,* 18 vols. (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo politicheskoi literatury, 1949), 12:118–35. Although published in 1929, the text is written about the previous year, 1928, the year of the Great Break.

42. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 75, 109, 72. Stalinist culture compensates for this oversimplified caricature of history, this chiliastic flattening of time to a single homogenous plane, through the complexification of the experience of space, which becomes increasingly nuanced and internally diverse starting in the late 1920s. Thus Katerina Clark writes that "the defining features of the Soviet regime and its ideological underpinnings were presented through the discourse of space and architecture." "Socialist Realism and the Sacralizing of Space," in *The Landscape of Stalinism. The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*, ed. Evgenii Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), p. 16. Clark's analysis describes a condition in which space has swallowed up time, as it were: "The division into two orders of space [one sacred and one profane] that lies at the heart of socialist realist practice implies a parallel division into two orders of time—or, more accurately, there is a division into two orders of spacetime. The temporal dimension, however, is largely implicit; Stalinist culture put extraordinary emphasis on space" (9). Also significant for our analysis here is the contrast, within the visual iconography of the period, between the dynamism of Lenin and the post-historical stasis of Stalin. Writing about Socialist Realist painting, Clark observes that "Lenin and the people are in a state of *becoming*," while "Stalin is in a state of *being*" (12). It is as if each leader presides respectively over one of the two modalities of human experience, time and space.

43. Karl Marx, "Class Struggles in France," in *Selected Works*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 1:193. Georg Lukács comments: "In order to achieve the social preconditions necessary for real freedom, battles must be fought in the course of which present-day society will disappear, together with the race of men it has produced." "Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization," in *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1994), p. 315.

phases of ethnotechnical evolution (e.g. *proletarian—farmer—nomadic Scythian*). To borrow a term from the great anatomist of time Velimir Khlebnikov, these nonsynchronous bonds can be designated as *metabiotic*. This concept was highlighted by Khlebnikov in an early text on forms of interdependence in the animal kingdom, where he described two axes of biological mutualism. The first bond that exists between organisms, he observed, is the relationship in which two organisms coexist "in one and the same place" to mutual benefit; this is the relationship of symbiosis, examples of which in nature are numerous and obvious, and thus, for Khlebnikov, require no elaboration. Far more important and intriguing for him, however, is the second axis of mutualism, which, although still under-researched by scientists, he considers to be of equal importance. This is metabiosis, in which "the relation between the two organisms connects two successive intervals of time." One instance of metabiotic mutualism cited by Khlebnikov is the "soil-altering bacteria" that decompose dead organic matter, feeding themselves at the same time that they facilitate the renewal of forest vegetation. These phytonutrient sources provide food for animal life that will, in turn, die and nourish the bacteria. Unlike organisms connected through symbiotic relations, which encounter each other face-to-face at the same moment in time, organisms linked together in a metabiotic system are thus not contemporaries, but instead follow upon each other in a chain of transformation (here: *dead animal > bacteria > plant > living animal*). But because such metastable mechanisms take place on an ecological order of existence that is higher than that of simple symbiosis, their compound mechanism is harder to discern in its totality. The presentist prejudices of modern science, in particular, make it difficult to model and track such biological relations over time and to recognize the breadth of their mechanism. As Khlebnikov also explains at the end of his essay, the laws of metabiosis can be observed not just in biological relations among organisms but in social relations among humans as well, such as those connecting "generations of people within a nation." One specific example he offers is the "metabiosis between the Slavic and the German worlds," two worlds that, through a kind of cultural crop rotation carried out over centuries upon the soil of Central and Eastern Europe, have enriched and cross-fertilized each other through the exchange of custom, technology, and ideas.[44]

Vertov explores forms of metabiotic mutualism at both of the levels proposed by Khlebnikov, that of ecology and of society. Shortly before starting work on *The Eleventh Year*, Vertov had in fact composed a short scenario for an educational film in which microorganisms and worms decompose buried human bodies into their chemical components, causing grasses to shoot up from the nitrogen-

44. Velimir Khlebnikov, "Opyt postroeniia odnogo estestvennonauchnogo poniatia," in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 3 vols. (Saint Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2001), 3:140–143; "An Attempt to Formulate a Concept in the Natural Sciences," in *Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov*, ed. Charlotte Douglas, trans. Paul Schmidt, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987–1997), 1:222–224.

45. The scenario, dated June 21, 1925, is translated in MacKay, "Film Energy," p. 59. Original document in RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 235, ll. 3–4.

enriched soil and fueling life "in various parts of the USSR"[45]; likewise, in direct illustration of Khlebnikov's example of Germano-Slavic exchange, the region that is to be powered in *The Eleventh Year* by the construction of the hydroelectric dam on the Dniepr, although now in the Soviet Ukraine, was at an earlier time a German colony. Through these cinematic archaeologies, Vertov depicts a Soviet Union that is more than just a spatial entity, defined by its borders to Europe in the west and to Asia in the east. For the young Soviet Union, founded in 1922, was also an event, a further cycle, in the metabiotic conversion of nature into the artifacts of human culture and history. In this way, Vertov reveals the "Soviet Union" to be both a set of geographical coordinates as well as a temporal process—both a physical territory and a metabiotic state. If, as we saw earlier, a distinction can be drawn between *One Sixth of the World* and *The Eleventh Year* regarding their two orientations towards space and time, respectively, these two axes are also reflected in the kinds of social bonds that Vertov explores in each of these projects: Whereas *One Sixth* explores a nexus of horizontal, symbiotic mutualism that, reaching across a vast territorial expanse, links distant fur trappers in the east to manufacturing in the west, *The Eleventh Year* prospects downward into the earth like a cinematic stratigraph, uncovering the metabiotic interactions that connect the present civilization to a deep, prehistorical time. Like bacteria that prepare the forest floor for rejuvenation, the Scythian skeletons buried deep in the soil below the construction site prepare the earth for a revolutionary future.[46]

In this regard, *The Eleventh Year* aligns with Trotsky's credo of permanent revolution. As Trotsky explained, "The revolution does not come to an end after this or that political conquest . . . [for] we continually and constantly advance it. . . . This applies to the conquests of the revolution inside a country as well as to its extension over the international arena."[47] According to Trotsky, the policy of permanent revolution corresponded to Russia's peculiar historical position in 1917: Instead of a single, pervasive mode of production, Russia, as we have seen, had five of them; and instead of the single political revolution that faced communist movements in the capitalist countries of the West, after October, Russia had to undertake at least two political transitions at once—a bourgeois revolt against the tsarist government and, in a further simultaneous involution within this struggle, a proletarian revolution against this same bourgeoisie. Thus, in a brief and compressed period of time, Russia was experiencing multiple economic, technical,

46. For Deleuze, this anachronic temporality is already anticipated in *One Sixth of the World*, a film in which the cinematic apparatus operates as "that which unites the man of tomorrow with the world before man, communist man with the material universe of interactions defined as 'community' (reciprocal action between the agent and the patient). *A Sixth of the World* shows the interaction at a distance, within the USSR, between the most varied peoples, herds of animals, industries, cultures, exchanges of all kinds in the process of conquering time." *Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 82.

47. Leon Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition*, ed. Naomi Allen, 3 vols. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975–1981), 1:113. On Trotsky's sources in Marx, see *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution. The Documentary Record*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

cultural, and political revolutions, some failed, some partial—but none complete, as Stalin wanted to claim. The latter's "bureaucratic reaction against October," Trotsky observed from exile, had denied the "incomplete, limited, and partial character" of the Bolshevik revolution.[48]

The conflict between the policy of the Great Break and that of permanent revolution leads beyond the realm of socialist strategy, ultimately broaching questions of a more philosophical nature. At issue is whether the revolution should be understood as a discrete threshold or as a set of conditions that continue to unfold in the present. Is the revolution an event or a transition, a punctual episode or a movement of becoming? For one observer of Soviet Russia in 1931, it all boiled down to a conflict between "revolution" and "evolution."[49] Where Marx and Engels stood on the matter was apparent from the definition of communism proposed in *The German Ideology*: "Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence."[50] Given this definition, one historian of Soviet state institutions has recently concluded that, within the framework of Marxist thought, "a final revolutionary victory over time appears impossible."[51]

The paradigm of permanent revolution informs many of the aspects of *The Eleventh Year* that have already been considered here, whether at the level of theme (the encounter between Scythian nomads and industrial modernity), device (the visual preference for superimposition over supersession), or composition (the understanding of the compilation film as "continuous editing process"). On each of these registers the film undermines the myth of originarity and, in turn, the blueprint of linear history as the sure guarantor of progress. But a series of questions immediately arise in response: Without the framework of universal history as the prognostic and measure for development, against what standard can political projects chart their success? How, at the moments when history doubles back on itself, can progress and decline be effectively distinguished from one another? If, as Ernst Bloch wrote about National Socialism in 1932, there is "nothing more dangerous than this power of being at once . . . contradictory and non-contemporaneous," how is it then possible to distinguish revolutionary archaicism from the Fascist reaction?[52] Moreover: Does Vertov's skepticism towards teleological thought condemn him to a cyclical model of

48. Trotsky, "Three Conceptions," p. 73.

49. This is the question posed by Michael Farbmann in *Piatiletka. Der Fünfjahresplan. Die neue Offensive des Bolschewismus* (Berlin: Fischer, 1931).

50. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), pp. 56–57. This privileging of Becoming over Being reappears in Marx's anthropology as well, which defined man as an unfinished, historical animal that incessantly produces itself through acts labor that transform its own body and the surrounding environment alike.

51. Stephen E. Hanson, *Time and Revolution. Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 55.

52. Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 97.

history, a conservative Spenglerian morphology in which cultures are constantly recycling the forms of the past?

The Eleventh Year provides no simple answer to these questions. Their insolubility is inscribed upon the very form of the film itself: As John MacKay has shown in his remarkable analysis of *The Eleventh Year*, there is an underlying conflict in the film between, on the one hand, the circular model of time evident in the film's depiction of natural processes such as electrical conversion and, on the other, the cumulative linear narrative about the momentous achievements of communism.[53] And while it is true that neither of these two patterns of time—cyclical myth and linear history—ever prevails definitively over the other in the film, Vertov does not simply leave this contradiction unmediated. Instead he relieves the tension between the geometries of the circle and the line through the introduction of a third figure, the spiral. This was a shape that Vertov associated in his writings with the special course of Russia's uneven development: "our socialist national economy," he once wrote, "will grow like a continuous spiral," amassing, transforming, and exporting capital in constant metabolic exchange with the outside world. From the "abundance" of Russia's natural resources to the output of its industrial factories via international trade and the acquisition of foreign machines—"our country industrializes through an entire series of such spirals" ("Predvaritel'naia skhema rabot po kartine Gostorga," *Iz nasledііa*, 2:107). On this point Vertov turns out to have been an astute reader of Marx, who, after Sismondi, taught that the course of economic aggregation and reproduction unfolds in the shape not of a line or a circle but of a spiral. The construction of *The Eleventh Year* itself follows this same compositional principle, advancing recursively, as it were, with each mounting revolution in the ascending spiral of cinematic signification. Given this compound structure, it is not surprising that Vertov's contemporaries complained after screenings that the montage of *The Eleventh Year*, which had seemed so straightforward at the beginning of the film, became far too complex, too involuted, for them to understand the later reels of the film.[54]

This helical logic gives rise to a certain conceptual loop identified in Vertov's writings as "the theme of 'machines that produce machines.'"[55] In a key sequence from *The Eleventh Year* celebrating Russia's industrial capacity, the film's intertitles

53. Because "there is nothing inherently 'progressive' or even particularly 'meaningful' about energy flow," Vertov "risks the loss, across long stretches of his film, of that chain of meaningful relations linking each event to the larger project under way, to the metanarrative of Communism." MacKay, "Film Energy," pp. 50, 75.

54. Unfazed by these critics, Vertov responded that "the first part is obviously situated at a level that is easier for the spectator's perception. The fourth and fifth parts have a more complicated construction: there is far more inventiveness in their montage than in the first two parts; they look farther into the future of cinematography than the second and third parts. We could say that the fourth and fifth parts are related to the first parts like *higher education is related to primary school*. It is natural that the more complicated montage forces the spectator to greater exertion and that its embodied perception demands greater attention." "Vystuplenie na diskussii v ARRK o fil'me *Odinnadtsatyi*," *Iz nasledііa*, 2:137–138.

55. Vertov discusses the theme of "machines that produce machines" in a journal entry dated April 12, 1926. *Stat'i, dnevniki, zamysli*, ed. S. Drobashenko (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966), p. 165.

proclaim, "We turn out one locomotive after another," "one workbench after another," and "one factory shop after another." Each of these declarations is followed by a thetic shot of the named object that provides incontrovertible evidence of the existence of the phenomenon heralded by the words on the screen. Behold the productivity of Soviet factories, the intertitles thereby proclaim. But these words also convey more than just the inexhaustible fecundity of Russian industry, for, as the intertitles progress, moving farther and farther away from the initial verb "we turn out," a certain semantic drift begins to take hold of them, enabling the other meaning of the Russian preposition *za*—"behind." This second meaning is accentuated by the grammatical inversion used by Vertov, who writes *za stankom—stanok* instead of the more common *stanok za stankom.*[56] In this way the intertitles declare that "*behind* each workbench is another workbench" and "*behind* each factory shop is another factory shop." Thus, at the same time that this sequence pays tribute to the future industrial production of the Soviet Union ("one thing *after* another"), the spiraling mise-en-abyme of factory capital also reveals the ontological groundlessness of this very industry ("one thing *behind* the other"). Borrowing a term from Derrida, we could say that this passage in the film observes an "obsequent" logic, in which a kind of semantic reverse thrust internal to the film drives meaning backward as the reel moves forward.[57] Diegesis and semiosis point in opposite directions here. And so, in the same way that, as we saw above, Vertov sought to demonstrate that each act of human labor was always necessarily based upon a previous act of labor (behind the textile worker was the machine worker, behind the machine worker was the coal miner, and so on), *The Eleventh Year* discovers the same structure of infinite regress in Russia's objectivated forces of production as well. A single law regulates both forms of capital, flexible and constant, living and dead.

Through "the theme of 'machines that produce machines,'" *The Eleventh Year* thus demands that the spectator engage in genealogical thinking while at the same time denying her recourse to the historico-philosophical category of origin that could anchor this inquiry. One conspicuous symptom of this groundlessness, evident at the level of Vertov's rhetoric, is a tendency in his writing to lapse into tautology when discussing linkages and bonds. Rather than issuing causally from a single defining event in the past, bonds between people are always defined by Vertov through

56. This construction would normally require the auxiliary verb *est'*, which in Russian performs the function of positing or asserting existence, but in this sequence from *The Eleventh Year* such positing is superfluous, since the shot of the object that follows immediately upon each of the intertitles operates itself to establish the material actuality of the object.

57. "Obsequent" describes the flow of a stream that runs against the direction of other streams in the area that follow the original slope of the Earth's surface. "Living On," in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979), p. 129. Significantly, Derrida's remarks on obsequent signification occur in his analysis of a case of photographic superimposition in Blanchot's *Death Sentence.* It seems that the device of photographic superimposition is particularly well suited to express this logical paradox, since, as Metz notes, the lap-dissolve "tends . . . to create a pre-existing relationship after the event." "Crossings and Interweavings in Film," p. 279.

Vertov. The Eleventh Year. *1928.*

their relation to other bonds, with the entire system of interconnections—society itself—being sustained not through reference to any transcendental term or natural law but through sheer voluntarism. Bonds always double back on other bonds, the resulting social structure held in place only by the force of will: "Kino-Eye must bind [*sviazat'*] together all of the workers scattered around the entire world through a single bond [*sviaz'iu*], through a single collective will, and must help to reveal to each individual oppressed person and to the entire proletariat as a whole the secret of capital . . . " ("'Kino-Glaz' i vidimyi mir," *Iz nasledііa*, 2:64). For Vertov, the obscured truth about capital, referenced in this last phrase, is the willfulness and arbitrariness of the socioeconomic edifice that it generates, the fact that this system of relations has no historical origin but instead relies on a tautological ruse for its ideological justification. Indeed, the "secret of capital" to which Vertov refers here is nothing other than what is identified in the last book of *Capital* as "The Secret of Primitive Accumulation." According to Marx, the logic of primitive or originary accumulation (*ursprüngliche Akkumulation*) functions as the foundational myth of capital: Like the fable of original sin, which, for Christians, serves to justify humanity's mortality, penury, and creaturely servitude vis-à-vis God, the legend of primitive accumulation grounds capitalism's social order ontologically by connecting the current relations of production to an infinitely remote, phantasmic moment in the past.[58] As Marx points out, this legendary zero hour of capitalist accumulation is pure fiction, a legend designed to compensate ideologically for the reality that capital in fact does not at all observe the laws of genealogical descent and that the process of expropriation is, to the contrary, constant and ongoing. Here "the Marxist theory of the history of production (and therefore society)" exhibits an avowedly nonlinear, even "radically anti-evolutionist" character.[59] The appearance of capitalist social relations is not an isolable historical event, but rather a "conjuncture" or "encounter" (*ein Gegenübertreten*, Marx calls it) between the owners of the means of production and the workers who sell their labor power—a conjuncture that, once established, "reproduces itself on a constantly extending scale."[60] The purpose of the myth of primitive accumulation, Marx observes, is to deny and conceal the arbitrariness of this self-perpetuating tautological structure:

58. The myth of primitive accumulation, writes Marx, "plays approximately the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology. . . . Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote about the past. Long, long ago there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite; the other, lay rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. . . . Such insipid childishness is every day preached to us in the defense of property." *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1992), pp. 873–74.

59. Balibar, "The Elements of the Structure and their History," in *Reading Capital*, p. 252. Structuralist Marxism believed that philosophy must intervene here to relieve historicist thinking, which is limited by its dogged adherence to a notion of the event as point of origin. According to Balibar, the historian "perpetuates two kinds of difficulties: those relating to the notion of the historical *event*, which is assessed according to the single criteria [*sic*] of *brevity* (suddenness) and is therefore almost of necessity confined to the sphere of political events; and those relating to the impossibility of making *clean* breaks" (230).

60. Marx, *Capital*, p. 874.

> The whole movement, therefore, seems to turn around in a never-ending circle, which we can only get out of by assuming a primitive accumulation (the "previous accumulation" of Adam Smith) which precedes capitalist accumulation; an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure.[61]

Given the fact that an entire book of *Capital* is dedicated to dismantling the ideologeme of primitive accumulation—Marx's "refusal of the Robinsonade," as Foucault called it[62]—it is surprising, then, to observe the rehabilitation of this myth in the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s, at the moment when Vertov was at work on *One Sixth of the World* and *The Eleventh Year*. In 1924 the influential economist Evgenii Preobrazhensky proposed a policy of "primitive *socialist* accumulation," a strategy designed to drive Russian farmers from the land and extract economic surplus from the agricultural sector in the hopes of accelerating the transition from a feudal mode of production to a modern industrial one.[63] Initially the tactic was of course rejected by Soviet Marxists, who rightly pointed out that it was effectively indistinguishable from familiar methods of capitalist exploitation. After all, the strategy replicated almost exactly the one used to expropriate the British peasantry at the turn of the sixteenth century. However, just four years after its contentious appearance in 1924, "primitive socialist accumulation" was embraced by Stalin and established as the official strategy for developing the state's industrial sector.[64] "The Year of the Great Break" declared that the fundamental "problem of accumulation" (*problema nakopleniia*) along with that of Russia's "indigenous backwardness" had at last been solved, detailing a tactic to overcome these problems that recapitulated precisely Preobrazhensky's plan for industrialization. Within the parameters of Socialism in One Country, primitive accumulation—now sacral-

61. Ibid., p. 873. Balibar famously characterized primitive accumulation as a case of "ahistorical historicism": "Marx's critical recognition (against political economy) of the historicity of capitalism—the fact that capitalist relations are neither natural nor eternal but rather the product of conditions with a determined genesis—is balanced by an incapacity to think about and analyze the very history of capitalism." "The Notion of Class Politics in Marx," trans. Dominique Parent-Ruccio and Frank R. Annunziato, *Rethinking Marxism*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1988), p. 49.

62. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 3 vols. (New York: The New Press, 1997–2001), 2:274. In this essay Foucault relates Marx's "refusal of beginning" to the "always-incomplete character of the regressive . . . process in Freud." With Freud and Marx, interpretation "has at last become an infinite task," Foucault concludes.

63. Preobrazhensky first proposed the idea in a paper from August 1924 entitled "The Fundamental Law of Socialist Accumulation," which was subsequently elaborated in his *Novaia ekonomika: opyt teoreticheskogo analiza sovetskogo khoziaistva* (Moscow: Izd-vo Kommunisticheskoi akademii, 1926). Preobrazhensky was himself aware that this was a violent process, for he used words like "expropriation" and "exploitation" to characterize its mechanism.

64. "No other viewpoint developed during these years [of debate about industrialization] was so violently repudiated at the beginning only to be implemented ultimately, on a scale surpassing anything its author had ever thought possible." Alexander Erlich, "Preobrazhenski and the Economics of Soviet Industrialization," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 64, no. 1 (February 1950), p. 58. See also James R. Millar, "A Note on Primitive Accumulation in Marx and Preobrazhensky," *Soviet Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1978), pp. 384–93.

ized through addition of the word "socialist"—redirected the violent forces of imperialist expansion toward domestic targets in accordance with the logic of internal colonialism. For Stalin, 1928 marked a new cosmogony. This primitive accumulation, established in the eleventh revolutionary year, the year of the Great Break, would serve as the source point, or deposit, around which all subsequent Soviet history would accrete. Stalin's Robinsonade could begin.

One consequence of Vertov's insight, against the originary myth of primitive accumulation, that capital's composition follows a continuous spiral of labor is a pronounced hesitation in his films around the integrity or identity of objects. It is as if, for Vertov, things have no particular quiddity of their own. This is because objects produced by the hands of men are first and foremost quantities of labor that have been transfigured and enciphered. Marx suggested as much in his famous definition of the commodity-object as "coagulated labor time" (*geronnene Arbeitszeit*),[65] a phrase whose haematic imagery evokes the transitional phase at which the liquid energy of blood assumes the fixed characteristics of a static substance, and life force is given concrete material form. It is only through the ontological mystification of commodity fetishism that this process of becoming is mistaken for a state of being. For commodities are not made of hard and fast matter, but are instead pseudo-objectivations in an ongoing process of transformative labor, nodes in an endless chain of production. As *The Eleventh Year* shows, behind every factory workbench and locomotive is always another instantiation of fixed capital that, at an earlier time, was itself the product of human endeavor. Through such demonstrations, Vertov liquefies the static and inert commodity, dissolving it into a social diagram. Even a thing as seemingly factical and self-evident as a loaf of bread is revealed in the celebrated reverse sequence from *Kino-Eye*, for example, to be a condensation of collective endeavor—an endeavor that ultimately yields an object that, for all its professed innocence, has a distinct ideological valence. There is communist bread and there is capitalist bread, Vertov concludes.

Whereas capitalist fetishism, in its systematic disavowal of the body of the worker, seeks to erase all traces of human labor and indications of social provenance from the commodity, Vertov reinstates the body denied through this mystification. After all, the commodity, as Marx proposed, is nothing but a condensed "hieroglyph" of human relations. Much of Vertov's work aims to recognize and decipher this social hieroglyph, an enterprise that necessitates abandoning the superficial anthropomorphism of bourgeois humanism, with its strict epistemological division between person and thing, subject and object. A curious but instructive psychological corollary to this program is Vertov's intense cathexis of objects, which seem to beckon him with the arms of a lover. While filming a fac-

65. Marx, *Capital,* p. 130; translation modified. On the products of labor, Marx writes that "there is nothing left of them in each case but the same phantom-like objectivity; they are merely coagulated quantities of homogenous human labor" (128).

tory for *The Eleventh Year*, for example, he struggled in his notebooks to come to terms with the attachment he felt to this colossal industrial body: "I hesitate to use the word 'love' when speaking of my relationship to this factory. And yet I do really feel as though I want to press myself against it and caress those gigantic smokestacks and black gas tanks . . . "[66] While the tenderness of these lines may recall the fetishist's devotion to the inorganic, there is the crucial difference that Vertov never naturalizes the commodity form, never obscures its social origins; in this regard, the kind of perverse cathexis of machine forms to which Vertov here gives voice is in fact not fetishism at all, for it is an erotic attachment to the very aspect of the object—its human and social complexion—that fetishism seeks to disavow. Indeed, for Vertov, it is precisely because objects are the products of human labor and because they are media of social intercourse that he loves them with such devotion and intensity. One encounters this same structure of erotic investment again and again in Soviet culture during the 1920s: Take the treatises of Sergei Tret'iakov, the Futurist who pioneered the genre of the "biography of the thing" and who wrote in 1924 that "untouched nature" is "repellant," while "everything that bears the trace of the organizing human hand is beautiful"[67]; or Rodchenko's 1925 Workers' Club in Paris, which triggered a veritable haptic orgy among its working-class visitors.[68] If machine capital is nothing but the exteriorized organon of man, examples such as these suggest that such organs are not without a sensuous aspect and a corresponding corporeal appeal. In the socialist thing-culture of this decade, the object continues to bear the traces of the laboring hands that fashioned it. It retains the warmth of their coagulating blood. This is the warmth that draws Vertov to the smokestacks of the Dzerzhinsky plant and solicits from him a corresponding caress.

In Vertov's work, the line that divides man from his technical organon must not be confused with the one that divides the organic from the inorganic, biology from mechanics. For him, the distinction between human and object instead boils down to the relative—not categorical—difference between the two temporalities that they inhabit: the time of the living and that of the dead. After all, capital, according to Marx, is nothing other than "past objectivated dead labor" (*vergangene vergegenständlichte tote Arbeit*), an inorganic condensation of the toil, skill, intellect, aspiration, and desire of previous generations that endures into the present. Every act of production, every interaction with fixed capital, can therefore be understood as a kind of resuscitation of the dead forebears whose spirits are

66. Vertov, *Stat'i, dnevniki, zamysli*, p. 172.

67. Sergei Tret'iakov, "Otkuda i kuda (perspektivy futurizma)," *Lef*, no. 1 (1923), p. 201; "From Where to Where?," in *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes, 1912–1928*, ed. and trans. Anna Lawton and Herbert Eagle (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 214; translation modified.

68. A review of Rodchenko's Workers' Club in Paris described how one worker who visited the pavilion "lovingly stroked the case for the wall newspaper with his hand." Further, "almost every worker…was drawn precisely to stroke one or another of the things in the club, and to stroke it lovingly." N. Neznamov, "Na parizhskoi vystavke," *Rabochii klub*, no. 8–9 (1925), p. 82. Quoted in Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions. The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, Mass.: the MIT Press, 2005), p. 240.

housed in the factory's machinery. From this perspective, industrial labor resembles intercourse with a machine "as if its body were by love possessed," writes Marx, quoting *Faust*.[69] It is a form of necrophilia. As Vertov rewinds the flow of production, reanimating the human labor that once engendered the now seemingly inert thing, so too does he unspool the boundary between the current generation and those who came before. If, by the middle of *The Eleventh Year*, the construction site on the Dniepr has been transformed into an ancient pyramid, later sequences of the film then take the viewer deep into the heart of the factory-necropolis where human and machine—labor in its living and objectivated formats—interact against explosions of molten metal and machine constructions.[70] Thus, despite what seems to be a gross thematic disparity between the film's archaeological beginning and its industrial end, the final sequences depicting a concert of factory labor are thus directly connected to the archaic Scythians excavated at the start of the film. While some of the ghosts, like the Scythian skeletons, have retained their mortal frame in the afterlife, the majority of them, having been transformed by the hand of time into fixed capital, continue to haunt the living in the guise of things.[71]

The logic of Vertov's film thus exposes one of the glaring ideological inconsistencies of Stalin's turbo-modernization, a program whose ambition to break with the labors of preceding generations obscured the fact that it is the most advanced industrial technologies that contain the vastest accumulations of dead, objectivated labor. Such compound technical assemblages—machines produced by machines—reach much farther back in time than simpler, more primitive modes of production, which instead remain grounded in an immediate, anthropic scene of work. Unlike the so-called primitive cultures that have been derided by the moderns for their spiritism and animism, it is therefore the industrialized West that, despite claims to ideological enlightenment, still remains in practice not just haunted but even determined by the past generations who influence the present through the technical artifacts they have left behind. The more complex the technology, the more dead labor it contains. This law of posthumous influence pertains not just to machine capital, of course, but also to the technical media and written records that have

69. Marx, *Capital,* p. 302; translation modified. Marx describes the process of objectivation as follows: "During the labour process, the worker's labour constantly undergoes a transformation, from the form of unrest [*Unruhe*] into that of being [*Sein*], from the form of motion [*Bewegung*] into that of objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*]" (296).

70. Fedor Gladkov's classic of Socialist Realism, *Cement*, likewise describes factory production as a process of necromancy. The text characterizes the factory as a "dead planet" and the protagonist, in turn, as a revenant ghost, as dead labor restored to life. *Cement: A Novel*, trans. A. S. Arthur and C. Ashleigh (New York: Ungar, 1980), p. 14.

71. Vertov's materialist necromancy was recognized by the East German playwright Heiner Müller. Müller's 1974 production play about the recovery of revolutionary remains forgotten in the soil, *Traktor*, quotes verbatim Vertov's declaration that the textile worker ought to see the worker in the factory, the worker in the factory ought to see the miner, etc., and then brings this metabiotic reverse sequence to its logical culmination: the play concludes with an apocatastasis of objectivated labor in which the graves open and "the liberation of the dead takes place in slow motion." *Traktor*, in *Werke*, ed. Frank Hörnigk, 13 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998–2011), 4:493–494, 502.

exploded in the modern era: "The realm of the dead is as extensive as the storage and transmission capabilities of a given culture," observed Friedrich Kittler.[72] In other words, as these storage and transmission capabilities are extended through media such as cinema, so too expands the realm of the dead.

And yet presentist liquidationists such as Stalin would seek to deny the agency of these past generations. Just one year after the revolution, a dismayed Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, observed that "socialism showed no concern at all [*ne zabotit-*

Vertov. The Eleventh Year. *1928.*

sia] for the dead" and predicted that "with time the people would not forgive it for this."[73] This disregard for the past, apparent to Bakhtin already in 1918, would culminate a decade later with the proclamation of the Great Break. The word used by Bakhtin to designate the proper ethical relationship to the dead—"concern" (*zabota*)—reappeared the following year in a text by Lenin, a text that was itself almost certainly a source for Vertov's later meditation on Soviet affect, the film *Enthusiasm.*[74] In the 1919 text "A Great Start," Lenin contradicts Bakhtin's claim that socialism shows no such "concern": To the contrary, there Lenin describes a new community of "concern" just now beginning to emerge in the revolutionary era, a community not limited to "one's neighbors" (*blizhnye*) but one that encompassed "the farthest ones" (*dal'nye*) as well.[75] Tellingly, the word used by both Lenin and Bakhtin to

72. Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 13.

73. As recounted by a local correspondent in Nevel who attended a debate in November 1918 on "God and socialism" at which Bakhtin spoke. Quoted in K. Nevel'skaia, "M. M. Bakhtin and M. I. Kagan (Po materialam semeinogo arkhiva)," *Pamiat'*, vol. 4 (1979), p. 274.

74. Considering that *Enthusiasm* culminates in a celebration of *subbotnik* labor, it is safe to conclude that Vertov knew Lenin's 1919 brochure "A Great Start," considered to be the most important canonical analysis of the *subbotnik* movement.

75. Vladimir Lenin, "Velikii pochin," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 55 vols. (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo politicheskoi lit-ry, 1958–1965), 39:22.

describe this distal eros—"concern"—is also the Russian equivalent of the German *Sorge*, a word that Heidegger used to designate a kind of directed and purposive care, or solicitude, that, importantly, gathers together the three temporal modes of past (*Schon-sein-in-der-Welt*), present (*Sich-vorweg-sein*), and future (*Sein-bei*) into a single horizon of existence. The bond of "concern" is, according to Heidegger, unique among emotional attachments in that it explodes the confinement of affect to the immediate environs of the perceiving subject, extending this connection to those situated at other historical moments.

Zabota, *concern*, *Sorge*. All of these words identify the emotional valence of the metabiotic bond that Vertov's films establish between peoples. For Lenin, this interepochal axis of intimacy was the very cornerstone of revolutionary communist affect, which, unlike the more limited affective architectures of, say, the nuclear family or the tribe, extends to include those he calls "the farthest ones." Lenin's source here was of course not Bakhtin or Heidegger, neither of whom the Bolshevik leader ever read, but Nietzsche, whose *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* could be espied in his personal library in the Kremlin.[76] In that book, Nietzsche cajoled the reader:

> You crowd around your neighbor and you have pretty words for it. But I say to you: your love of the neighbor [*liubov' k blizhnemu*] is your bad love of yourselves.
>
> [...]
>
> Do I recommend love of the neighbor to you? I prefer instead to recommend flight from the neighbor and love of the farthest!
>
> Higher than love of the neighbor is love of the farthest and the future [*liubov' k dal'nemu i budushchemu*]; higher still than love of human beings is love of things and ghosts.[77]

The terminology used by Lenin to characterize the ideal of communist affect in 1919, when he elevates concern for "the farthest ones" (*dal'nye*) over concern for "one's neighbors" (*blizhnye*), is taken directly from these lines from the Russian translation of *Zarathustra*.[78] Echoing Nietzsche and Lenin, in turn, Vertov's kino-eye, as

76. Robert Service, *Lenin. A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 203.

77. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Robert Pippin, trans. Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 44. Russian translation as *Tak govoril Zaratustra*, trans. V. Izraztsov (St. Petersburg: Probuzhdenie, 1913).

78. Similar words also surface around the same time in the work of leftist thinkers such as Andrei Platonov. Thomas Seifrid, for example, has pointed out that the first notebook kept by Platonov when he began writing in 1921 opened with a quotation from *Zarathustra*: see *A Companion to Andrei Platonov's* The Foundation Pit (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008), p. 36. Hans Günther has similarly noted that the second chapter of *Happy Moscow* is titled "Liubov' k dal'nemu," or "Love of the Farthest Ones," with explicit reference to Nietzsche: see "Andrei Platonov und das sozialistisch-realistische Normensystem der 30er Jahre," *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, vol. 9 (1982), pp. 165–86. In

we saw, similarly connects "all of the workers scattered around the entire world through a single bond." It is a bond that transcends the humanist and presentist bias of neighbor-love, extending its embrace to "things and phantoms," to smokestacks and Scythians.

It is ultimately fitting, then, that Lenin, the architect of communist concern for "the farthest ones," would himself eventually become Vertov's most celebrated and beloved phantom. If *The Eleventh Year* analyzed the cognitive and epistemological riddles presented by metabiotic mutualism—unraveling, for example, the paradox of primitive accumulation—the hagiographic *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934) in turn explored the affective dimensions of these metabiotic bonds. The film examines an aspect of subjective experience that is utterly central to modern media societies: the capacity for intersubjectivity and intimacy without co-presence or simultaneity. In this regard, it is indicative that *Three Songs* systematically excludes the perspectives of those who were close to him. For Vertov is not interested in the testimony of Lenin's contemporaries—the *blizhnye,* or "neighbors," who knew him personally. Nadezhda Krupskaia appears fleetingly in the film, for example, but is never even identified as Lenin's widow. Vertov instead focuses on the new populations now coming to maturity a full decade after Lenin's death, subjects who never had any firsthand encounter with him. The young women in Baku, for example, lament that "we never once saw him" and "we never heard his voice." From the very outset of the film, Lenin is already lost to them, already a specter. But through cinema, photography, and phonography, it becomes possible for them to see and hear the absent leader, who elicits song, poetry, and declarations of love from these very women who never even met him. Lenin is restored to these latecomers through a vast orphic archive in celluloid.

Vertov's film exploits every possible technical strategy to re-spectralize the Bolshevik phantom and subvert the spectator's fantasy of co-presence. In this regard, the veneration of Lenin in *Three Songs* must be sharply distinguished from the pseudo-intimacy of Hollywood's celebrity system, which seeks continuously to simulate the sensation of proximity and immediacy. Lenin could not be more remote in this film. Again and again Vertov presents the archival film and photo stock of Lenin in ways that foreground its status as a secondhand, mediatized image. Thus the picture of the bench near Lenin's house shown at the film's beginning is flagged as a snapshot by the intertitle "Here is the bench made famous in a photograph": Enframed in this way, it is rigorously isolated diegetically from the Now of the women in Baku. Likewise, throughout the film Vertov flagrantly manipulates the footage of Lenin at political rallies, changing its speed

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Platonov's novels, this "love of the farthest" coalesces around the theme of orphanhood and the potential that the rupture of traditional bloodlines holds for reconceiving social bonds (e.g., Nastya in *The Foundation Pit* or Moscow in *Happy Moscow*). To be sure, in Platonov's novels, the loss of the parent-child relationship is bound up with a deep melancholia, but this rupture also enables a recovery of relations obscured by the restricted kinship systems of bourgeois society.

and looping it, first forward and then backward, to remind the spectator insistently that she is looking not at the living man but at a mechanical reproduction that has been subjected to postproduction alteration. Finally, towards the end of the second song, when the thunder of the cannons at Lenin's burial ushers in a moment of silence, Vertov stages the motionlessness that follows through two entirely different means: While the cinematic footage from the 1924 funeral procession is, at that moment, literally arrested in a series of uncanny still frames, these frozen images are intercut with close-ups shot a decade later of motionless peasants in distant lands, although the latter are frozen not like the photographs from 1924 but instead stand still, blinking and unsteady, as the camera continues to roll; and then, to further underscore the historical remoteness of Lenin, this funeral sequence concludes with a group shot of Azerbaijani women sitting down all at once in the seats of a theater, reminding the audience that these women "never once saw him" and that they, like the audience, had in fact been sitting in a movie house the entire time.

To be sure, Vertov was hardly the first to exploit the media as catalysts for distal cathexis. As is well known, the medium of print, for example, had forged a robust alliance with a pair of newly emerging social apparatuses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, establishing the two primary vectors of ideological indoctrination that would come to define the modern subject as we know it: the nuclear family as the orthopedic of psychic individuation[79] and the nation-state as the framework of socio-linguistic identity.[80] Media, in other words, have always produced "imagined communities." But what distinguishes the collectivity posited by Vertov is its fierce repudiation of the presentist bias found in the other social configurations that have dominated in modernity. Unlike the "neighbor love" of the nuclear family, it extends community to "the farthest ones"; unlike the nation-state, it does not rely on the conceit of the revolution as a point of legendary origin. It is apt, then, that Vertov's interrogation of the category of contemporaneity is precisely what makes his work so actual today, six decades after the filmmaker's death: at a moment when capitalism is promoting a myth about the frictionless synchronization of existence around the world and is marketing under the slogan of instantaneity a reactionary phenomenology of co-presence, Vertov returns to reveal a different ecology of history, one responsive to the metabiotic relations between people across time and the political exigency of the nonsynchronous. With the collapse of the two-world system of the Cold War and the resulting diversification of global temporalities, Vertov's work has acquired new importance and

79. Friedrich Kittler explores the collusion between literary Romanticism, the nuclear family, and the German bureaucratic state apparatus in *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), esp. pp. 3–173.

80. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

currency. In this regard, parallels can again be seen between the fortunes of Vertov and those of Trotsky, whose theorization of structural nonsynchronicity and technical heterogeneity has become an important resource once again for critics of globalization seeking to understand a world system in which uneven development turns out increasingly to be the rule rather than the exception.[81] Under such conditions, instead of the presentist rhetoric of eventhood and of messianic rupture proposed by neo-Stalinist currents within radical philosophy today, what is needed are strategies of persistence and obstinacy, a social attunement toward metabiotic relations, and a renewed commitment to permanent revolution.

81. It is telling that, since Stalin's death in 1953, nearly all of the revolutionary leaders, from Bukharin to Zinoviev, have been rehabilitated with a single glaring exception: Trotsky. Like Vertov, Trotsky never found a place with the two-world system of the Cold War. His idea of permanent revolution was "anathema equally to apologists of capitalism and to those of 'actually existing socialism.'" Hugo Radice and Bill Dunn, "Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects 100 Years On," in *100 Years of Permanent Revolution*, ed. Dunn and Radice (London: Pluto Press, 2006), p. 2. Given the challenges faced by the left in the post–Cold War global order, Žižek suggests that "perhaps the signifier 'Trotsky' is the most appropriate designation of that which is worth redeeming in the Leninist legacy." "Lenin's Choice," in V. I. Lenin, *Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2002), p. 306.