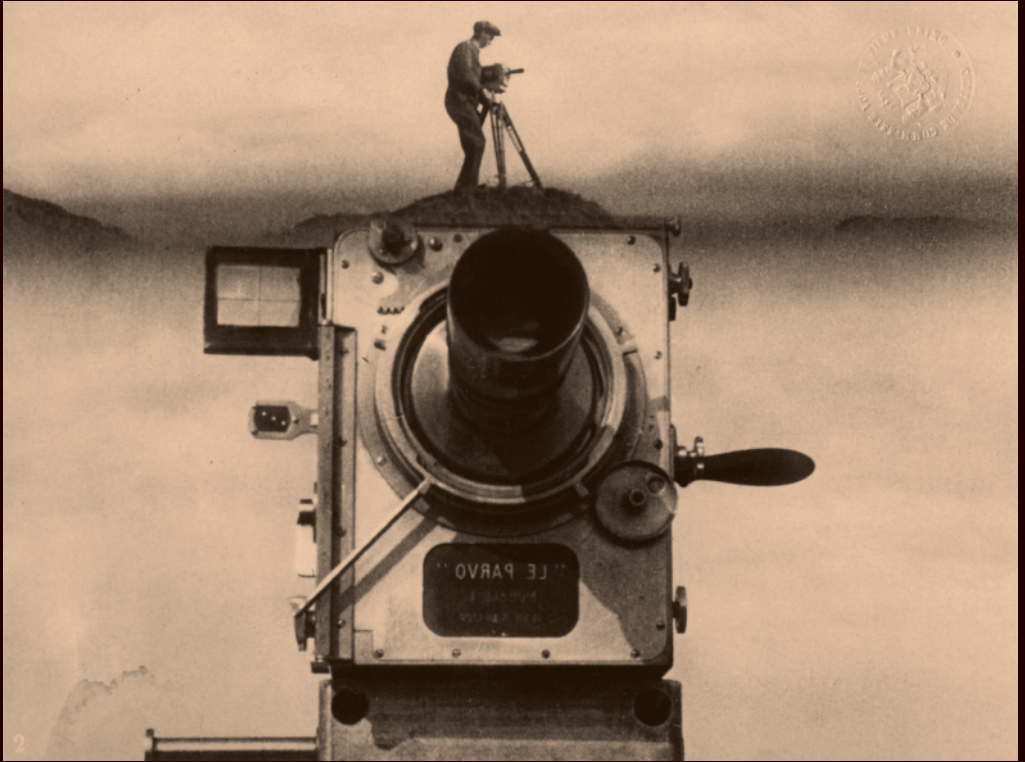


THE EYE IN MATTER

DZIGA VERTOV AND EARLY SOVIET CINEMA



Dziga Vertov. *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* [Man with a Movie Camera]. Film, 1929. EYE Filmmuseum Collection

OCTOBER / 2 ►► NOVEMBER / 23 / 2017

MUSEO REINA SOFÍA. SABATINI BUILDING. AUDITORIUM

FILMOTECA ESPAÑOLA. CINE DORÉ. HALLS 1 AND 2

MUSEO NACIONAL
CENTRO DE ARTE
REINA SOFIA


Filmoteca Española

Part retrospective and part recontextualization, this series presents a number of Vertov's feature films and selections from his early chronicles, together with several documentaries from the early Soviet audiovisual production. These films show that, from its inception a century ago, Soviet documentary has been the site of struggle between two competing epistemologies of reality that continue their contest today: on the one hand, the skeptical positivism of intransigent facts and, on the other, the logical objectivism of abstract concepts. Throughout almost thirty sessions, this film series establishes a panoramic approximation to the period through both.

The recent renaissance of interest in the Soviet documentarian Dziga Vertov began already at the turn of the millennium. In contrast to his great rival Sergei Eisenstein, whose understanding of cinema was largely beholden to linguistic models of signification, Vertov's films are much messier, inscrutable and materially dense affairs. This insight is not particularly new —already back in 1978 avant-gardists like Peter Weibel praised Vertov's commitment to "the pure materiality of film"¹—but the pervasive cultural shift away from the language-based analytics of structuralism and poststructuralism and towards the paradigms of thing theory and new materialism has provided a different context for understanding these recalcitrant "film-things," as Vertov called them. Add to this a newly resurgent preoccupation with documentary, a cultural form that interrogates the boundary between representation and reality, and the come-back of this materialist filmmaker seems inevitable.

One place to begin investigating Vertov's idiosyncratic materialism is the most basic element of his practice: the shot. Already at the beginning of his career Vertov quickly developed a visceral preference for close-ups and a corresponding aversion to panoramas, which he described as "unacceptable" and "nauseating."² This desire for a proximity to things explicitly rejected the epistemology of modernity that Heidegger famously designated as a "world-picture" (*Weltbild*)—a distant and unentangled vantage from which the subject could survey the world as a series of distinct and lucid objects. Vertov's embedded close-ups permit no such detachment. He prefers foreshortening and spatial compression to the perspectival renderings that, since the renaissance, have been used to render optical space clear, intelligible and

1 Peter Weibel, "Eisensteins und Wertows Beiträge zu einer Artikulation der Filmsprache," in *Film als Film. 1910 bis heute*, ed. Birgit Hein and Wulf Herzogenrath (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1978), p. 100

2 Dziga Vertov, "O s'emke siuzhetov kinokhroniki," in *Iz nasledija*, vol. 2: *Stat'i i vystupleniia* (Moscow: Eizenshtein tsentr, 2008), p. 22

3 Naum Kaufman, "Vertov," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian, trans. Julian Graffy (Pordenone: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2004), p. 296

knowable. “Vertov’s approach is unusual,” noted a contemporary in 1928: “Using the same details, Vertov distorts them spatially and presents them from various points of view, using foreshortening of the most various kinds. [...] Vertov constructs his montage images out of the complexes of these details of things.”³ Indeed, Vertov could not have been more delighted when one of his crew characterized their first feature as “*ino-glaz oshchup’iu*”⁴—a word that means “groping blindly” and that characterized Vertov’s inductive and often unsystematic method, but one that also referred, more experientially, to Vertov’s extreme particularism and to the literal tactility and proximity of his camera. Through extensive close-ups, Vertov interweaves the values of the visual and the tactile that renaissance optics tried so hard to hold apart. He even wrote a scenario for a film made entirely of close-ups of hands.

The use of so many tight shots would normally entail careful editing to ensure that all of these partial views are sutured together to produce a spatially homogenous and geometrically intelligible representation. To give one example: classic Hollywood cinema achieves this spatio-temporal integrality through a familiar syntax of shot and reverse shot, whose patterned alternation interlocks the camera angles to produce a fixed topographic grid. But Vertov does nothing of the sort. Rejecting what Jean-Louis Comolli called the “casuistry of matching camera angles,”⁵ Vertov’s lens instead leaps from site to site, emphasizing the intervals rather than the continuities between these various coordinates. Vertov declared that “*Kino-Eye* uses every possible means in montage, comparing and linking all points of the universe in any temporal order, breaking, when necessary, all the laws and conventions of film construction.”⁶ Gilles Deleuze pointed out in a commentary to this line that “this is not a human eye.”⁷ Rightly: Vertov’s kino-eye is not an eye that is tethered to earth-bound and phenomenological flesh; nor is it an eye that inhabits an isotropic space with an up and a down and a left and a right; nor is it an eye that is subject to the laws of linear causality that link together events in a chain of before and after.

This constant but discontinuous movement was profoundly disorienting for many spectators. One person wrote about *One Sixth of the World* that “when you show simultaneously a view of Leningrad from a plane, and the plane itself, and a normal view of Leningrad shot from the ground, and all this is moving simultaneously in different directions on the screen, then this trick may be engaging, but it does confuse the viewer. [...] All this gives rise to is painful bewilderment.”⁸ The first time he experienced the sound film *Enthusiasm*, one of Vertov’s most difficult and overwhelming works, the critic Viktor Shklovsky recalled that he was so “stunned” (*oglushen*) that, after stumbling out of the theater, he began to walk in the wrong direction. But Vertov’s goal was not to sow confusion for its own sake. Anything but random, the

4 Dziga Vertov, “Otvet na piat’ voprosov,” in *Stat’i i vystupleniia*, p. 62

5 Jean-Louis Comolli, *Cinema against Spectacle: Technique and Ideology Revisited*, trans. Daniel Fairfax (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), p. 243

6 Dziga Vertov, “From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye,” in *Kino-Eye. The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O’Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 88

7 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 81.

8 L. Sosnovsky, “A Sixth Part of the World,” in *Lines of Resistance*, p. 221

disorientation and derangement experienced by his spectators were instead by-products of Vertov's systematic program to reorganize and redistribute the human senses. Even before the invention of sound film, when film was still just a moving image projected onto a screen, Vertov announced that "following upon the visible world we are now attacking the world of the acoustic, of the tactile and so on": "all five external senses of the human" were his target, he announced.⁹ Vertov recognized that the senses are never restricted to one single perceptual path. Vision does not belong solely to the eyes, or sound to the ears, or tactility to the skin. Rather, what we call perceptions are the product of complex, culturally determined psychophysical routines for processing and configuring external stimuli. Just like the modes of production, according to Marx the modes of perception also have a history.

Working against the aesthetic regime of high modernism, which sought to balkanize the senses in accordance with its ideal of medium specificity, Vertov blurred and intermingled sensory channels in order to create a new perceptual subject. One critic likened the experience of watching *Kino-Eye* to a monstrous metamorphosis into a compound insect eye, or perhaps to Argus: the spectator suddenly becomes covered by 'kino-eyes' instead of corns on his feet, and 'kino-eyes' erupt in all the full places of his body, until finally the very head of this unwilling phenomenon turns into a many-sided eye, although with accompanying loss of common sense and proportion. And such a 'kinok' sees life around him without dividing it into the right and left sides, or into the tops and bottoms of objects; he sees everything as if through a many-faceted crystal egg.¹⁰

Even the "full places of his body" which were previously inured and insensate are breached to become pathways for sensory experience. The Soviet art critic Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov wrote that film, like photography, "establishes new relations between phenomena that are visually familiar and other ones that are not yet familiar, ones that are acoustic and functionally different, forcing the sensory organs to perceive them."¹¹ This sensitization of the body to previously unperceived phenomena, which primes the transition from one sensory configuration to another, is accompanied by no small amount of physical discomfort. "The forced opening of sense experience can only figure at first as unlocalized, unspecified pain."¹² Thus, as Vertov worked "towards the montage of facts that are simultaneously visual-aural-tactile-olfactory etc."¹³ it is little wonder that many contemporary viewers of his film-things complained of being "overloaded" (*peregruzhennyi*) by stimulation.¹⁴ The birth pangs of a not-yet-human body, this pain and irritation would eventually subside with the naturalization of the new sensory configuration. Shklovsky may have been wracked when he saw *Enthusiasm* for the first time, but the film became more intelligible when he saw it a

9 Dziga Vertov, "Chto takoe Kino-glaz?" in *Stat'i i vystupleniia*, p. 164

10 Aleksandr Anoshchenko, "Kinokoki," in *Lines of Resistance*, p. 91

11 Fedorov-Davydov, "Einleitung zu Moholy-Nagys Buch *Malerei Fotografie Film*," in *Zwischen Revolutionskunst und Sozialistischem Realismus*, ed. Hubertus Gaßner and Eckhart Gillen (Cologne: Dumont, 1979), p. 220

12 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 160

13 Vertov, "Chto takoe Kino-glaz?" p. 164

14 John MacKay, "Disorganized Noise: Enthusiasm and the Ear of the Collective, Part 3: Cacophony of the Donbass," *Kino-Kultura*, no. 7 (January 2005) p. 2

second time 20 years later, since, as he explained, his framework for experience had changed in the interim.

Vertov's rejection of the traditional apportioning of the senses also entailed a skepticism toward inherited media ontologies (film as perforce optical, phonography as acoustic, and so on). Here Vertov exemplifies a species of media experimentalism that flourished specifically in Russia immediately after the revolution. Unlike in the industrial west, where only a very limited range of phenomena such as newspaper, film, and photography were recognized as "media," in Russia the definition of the media embraced a broad variety of technical ensembles. For Vertov, as for the production artists, all varieties of object and matter could be enlisted as potential means for communication. This eruption of unconventional approaches to the media was at least in part determined by differences in the course and pacing of modernization in Russia: whereas in Europe technologies such as photography developed gradually and endogenously, the shock industrialization of the New Economic Policy and the first Five Year Plan in Russia introduced *en masse* an entire range of media in a single stroke. As a result of their novelty and unfamiliarity, these media were denuded of the normative aura of naturalness that enshrouded them in the West. Vertov wrote, for example, of a "radio-eye," an odd synesthetic conjunction that does not fit into our understanding of the senses.

The sheer strangeness and freshness of media long since ontologized in western Europe occasioned highly experimental work in Russia, where the media were still culturally undercoded, floating signifiers with no fixed identity or predictable vocation. It was Russia's belated modernization that made it such a hotbed of technological invention. After returning from Russia to Germany in 1927, Walter Benjamin observed that the flood of technical media there had initiated "one of the most grandiose mass-psychological experiments ever undertaken in the gigantic laboratory that Russia has become."¹⁵ This experimentalism was all the more pronounced in the case of the autodidact Vertov, who received no formal instruction about what cinema *should* be, but instead took the camera in hand to determine what it *could* be. Contrasting himself to those filmmakers, who, as he put it, sought to "negate the possibilities" of film, i.e. to limit its potential by restricting it to one narrowly conceived mediatic definition, Vertov consistently referred to his own work as the "negation of the negation."¹⁶ He sought to remove all limiting filters and dilate the aperture of the senses.

This overloading of the senses went hand-in-hand with documentary's disdain for the human faculty known as the imagination. Modern technical media such as film and photography leave little room for the activity of imagining that had been so essential to the literary cultures of the 18th and 19th centuries. Whereas literature always left open gaps, opportunities for the reader to envision in her own mind the events depicted on the printed page, film, like other mechanical recoding media, is wholly explicit and presentist. "The cinema knows only one grammatical

15 Walter Benjamin, "On the Present Situation of Russian Film," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2: 1927-1934, ed. Michael Jennings et al., trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 14

16 Dziga Vertov, "Pervye shagi," in *Stat' i vystupleniia*, p. 213.

mode,” wrote the novelist Robbe-Grillet: “the present tense of the indicative.”¹⁷ If cultural techniques of the literary imagination draw perception inward, into the mind’s eye, technical media like film, by contrast, turn the senses outward toward shared reality. This disabling of the imagination and the concomitant turn towards reality have long been a staple of documentary’s ideology as a cultural form that is committed to empiricism, explicitness and objectivity. With Vertov, who sought to eradicate narrative plot from his films along with all other traces of the literary imagination (including intertitles), there is nothing to envision, only facts to view.

And yet, at the same time that film’s indexical explicitness drastically curtails the role of the imagination, Vertov discovers new potentials for what Il’ia Ehrenburg called the “technological fantastic.”¹⁸ “A new imaginary sphere emerged,” Friedrich Kittler observed about the early years of cinema: “It was no longer literary, as in the Romantic period, but rather technogenic.”¹⁹ The famous sequence of *Man with a Movie Camera* in which Vertov slows down and then freezes the motion of a horse exemplifies a technological uncanny that Kracauer, in a review of the film, associated with French Surrealism: “a vision of death dwelling in the midst of life.”²⁰ This freeze frame shows us a world that belongs neither to the living nor even to the human, a dimension of material difference among us that stubbornly refuses all of our attempts to domesticate it through anthropomorphization.²¹ Using devices like slow –and reverse–motion, decentered “gaseous” camera work,²² stop–motion animations, dissolves and superimpositions, and so on, Vertov heralded the advent of an age in which, as Brik wrote, “facts are much more forceful than even the most fervent imagination.”²³ Through the manipulations of the camera, which Vertov deployed as an epistemological device for scientific investigation, forces, causalities and social logics that were previously hidden suddenly become visible to the eye. The marvelous and the demonic left the pages of the book and started to walk among us, in industrial arrayments. Vertov’s outing of the imagination shows us that demystification is not the same thing as disenchantment.

17 Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 151

18 Il’ia Ehrenburg, “Romantizm nashikh dnei,” in *Belyi ugol’ ili slezy Vertera* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1928), p. 18

19 Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media*, trans. Anthony Enns (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 2010), p. 166

20 Siegfried Kracauer, “Man with a Movie Camera,” in *Lines of Resistance*, p. 358

21 “The photograph freezes and preserves the homogenous and irreversible momentum of this temporal stream into the abstracted, atomized, and secured space of a moment. But at a cost. A moment cannot be inhabited. It cannot entertain in the abstraction of its visible space, its single and static *point* of view, the presence of a lived-body —and so it does not really invite the spectator *into* the scene.” Vivian Sobchak, “The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic ‘Presence,’” in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 92

22 This is Deleuze’s phrase. See *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*.

23 Osip Brik, “Photomontage,” trans. Natasha Kurchanova, *October*, no. 134 (Fall 2010), p. 86

PROGRAM

Session 1. NEWSREELS

Monday, October 2 – 7:00 p.m.

Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium



Dziga Vertov. *Kinonedelja nr. 1* [Kino-Week no. 1]. Film, 1918. Courtesy of the Austrian Film Museum/From the Special Collection Dziga Vertov

Dziga Vertov

Kinonedelja nr. 1 / 3 / 5 / 33 [Kino-Week nos. 1 / 3 / 5 / 33], 1918–1919

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 11' / 10' / 6' / 9'

Kinopravda nr. 5 / 14 / 15 / 18 [Kino-Truth nos. 5 / 14 / 15 / 18], 1922–1924

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 8' / 14' / 22' / 14'

— Session hosted by **Chema González**, Head of Cultural and Audiovisual Programs at the Museo Reina Sofía, and **Carlos Reviriego**, Deputy Director of Filmoteca Española

The selection that this session provides from Vertov's two earliest ongoing film series shows the astonishingly rapid development of this brilliant autodidact from the initial awkward camerawork and editing to a mature cinematic language. In six short years, between *Kino-nedelja no. 1* (1918) and *Kino-pravda no. 18* (1924) unfolds an entire history of cinema, developed inductively and endogenously. In the first newsreels, the rhythm of the editing is predictable and regular; the subjects recorded are mostly public events such as mustered troops, tribunals and funerals; resting upon its tripod at eye-level, the camera's view emulates the visual orientation of the human body; the shots are static and weighty, with the occasional slow pan over a group; even the portrait subjects mostly stand still, as if for a photographic camera. Only at the very conclusion of *Kino-nedelja no. 1* is there an inkling of what is to come: in a market, toys are displayed, attractions offered up to vision.

As the session moves forward, Vertov adds element upon element to this syntax. The camerawork grows more eccentric and leaves behind the optical analogy with the eye to become something that no longer has a referent in the human body. Meanwhile, the editing, too, becomes more experimental. In Vertov's account, *Kino-pravda no. 5* was the first great montage breakthrough, one in which he left behind simple, didactic intertitles that announce the content of the shot to follow, and began instead to develop more complex and associative semantic networks that flow both forward and backwards. *Kino-pravda no. 14* features dynamic sculptural intertitles by the constructivist artist Rodchenko. And by *Kino-pravda no. 18* an entirely new language has emerged: the camera is now embedded in moving machinery ranging from elevators to planes and machines; complex alternations between the directions and speeds of the camera pans set up contrapuntal visual rhythms; titles are integrated into the film as moving images; and the film concludes with a swift staccato montage that pushes against the limit of perception.

Session 2. COMPILATION CINEMA

Tuesday, October 3 – 5:30 p.m.

Friday, November 3 – 5:30 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 1



Portrait of Esfir Shub

Esfir Shub

Velikii put' [The Great Path], 1927
USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 115'

Shub was a master at the art of repurposing. Having started her career as a cutter re-editing some 200 Western films for Soviet distribution, she knew all too well how to change the meaning of a film by rearranging its available parts. Only later in her career, after her years making compilation films, would she pick up a camera and shoot footage herself. Like its more famous pendant, *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, which covered the years 1912–1917, *The Great Path*, which celebrates the advances made by Bolsheviks in their first decade of power, was stitched together out of newsreel footage taken from diverse sources. It picks up where the last film left off, amidst broken statues at the zero hour of socialism.

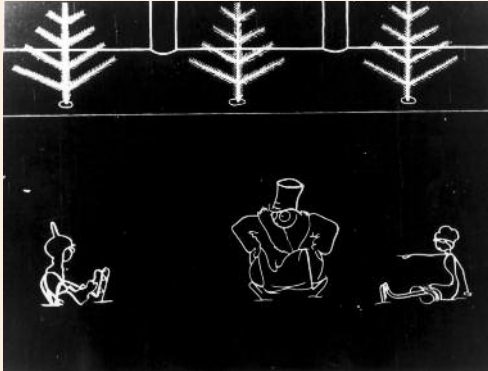
A voracious researcher, Shub worked through countless kilometers of footage to assemble *The Great Path*. Her studious eye translates into the particular style of *The Great Path*, with its long takes and visual deliberation. Most shots seem to last just a second or two over when the semantic economy of the film should dictate. This perceptual surplus prompts restlessness and curiosity in the spectator, whose eye scans the image for some extra hook of meaning to justify the delay. Lev Kuleshov praised this feature of Shub's work, writing that "events should be shown so that they can be well examined" and contrasting her dilatory gaze with that of Vertov's younger brother, the cameraman Mikhail Kaufman, whose "best sequences are too short—you cannot examine them properly." In our current historical moment of slow cinema, Shub has become actual again.

Shub explained that *The Great Path* was more difficult to make than *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* for technical reasons: the more recent footage had been poorly archived and indexed, especially after 1922, and so, as she approached the present day, the film was harder for her to sequence chronologically. But this technical challenge was also a philosophical one: How is it possible to make sense of the present moment while still in the midst of its chaotic unfolding, when the *telos* in history is not yet clear? In the case of the tsarist Russia, the end of that story was obvious and the plot moments of *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* were correspondingly easy to sequence. But a present that is still unfolding is much harder, if not impossible, to represent with certainty. At a screening of *The Great Path*, Sergei Tret'iakov pointed out that Eisenstein had it easy when he made *Battleship Potemkin*, since the events took place way back in 1905, but that Shub had taken on a much more difficult task in trying to depict the interval of time from the recent past to the current moment, where the great path leads could not yet be discerned. *The Great Path*, which, in Shub's words, was meant to "preserve our epoch for a future generation," presumes a future anteriority, a vantage from which the glorious chaos and breakneck transformations of the present day will finally make sense.

Session 3. ANIMATION

Wednesday, October 4 - 7:00 p.m.

Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium



Nicolai Bartram. *Katok* [Ice-Rink]. Film, 1927

Vladislav Starevich

Strekoza i muravei [The Grasshopper and the Ant], 1911

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 5'

Dziga Vertov

Sovietskie igrushki [Soviet Toys], 1924

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 11'

Nicolai Khodotaev

Mezhplanetnaia revoliutsiia [Interplanetary Revolution], 1924

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 8'

Kitai v ogne [China in Flames], 1925

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 32'

Samoedskii mal'chik [Samoed Boy], 1928

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 7'

Nicolai Bartram

Katok [Ice Rink], 1927

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 7'

Nicolai Khodotaev

Groznyi Vavila i tetka Arina [Formidable Vavila and Little

Aunt Arina], 1928

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 7'

Odna iz mnogikh [One of Many], 1927

USSR, 35 mm, b/w, 15'

Budem zorki [We Will Be in Alert], 1927

USSR, 35mm, silent, sepia, 3'

Vertov regularly incorporated animated sequences into his films, both of the cel and, more often, of the stop-motion variety. At the beginning of his career he produced two standalone animations, including *Soviet Toys*, and even at the end he still had unrealized plans for a full-length feature animation. At first glance, Vertov's interest in animation is difficult to reconcile with the epistemology of objectivity that underwrites documentary, for animated cinema is not taken from life but is something completely fabricated, if not fantastical. And yet, in a different regard, animation (especially stop-motion) is in fact a corollary expression of documentary's desire to depict a world "caught unawares," since it seeks to pull aside the veil of human perception and witness things as they exist without us. This desire is especially pronounced in the stop-motion sequences of his feature-length films, in which animation brings the inorganic to life. Starevich's classic *The Grasshopper and the Ant*, which was the first Russian stop-motion film and which Vertov regularly screened on his agit-train in 1919-1920, depicts a microscopic world entirely without us.

A great fan of Disney, Eisenstein had praised the metamorphic capacity of animation—the way that it is always transforming one thing into another thing, things into people, people into animals, and so on. Animation reveals a great stream of becoming. These Ovidian transformations are also perhaps what makes traditional drawn animation so entertaining. In *Soviet Toys*, for example, after the Nepman¹ becomes a pig, the worker and the peasant merge into a single figure who slits open the Nepman's belly to release hoarded resources. Here, as in other films in this session, propaganda receives a light touch. A Hollywood fangirl fantasy, *One of Many* visualizes one Russian girl's dream of being taken to America, a lysergic land of endless transformations between skyscrapers, cowboys and dinosaurs

— Session hosted by **Gonzalo de Pedro**, film programmer and professor at Carlos III University of Madrid

¹ Name given to the entrepreneurs arisen from Lenin's New Economic Policy in 1921, which allowed small private initiative in order to avoid economic collapse

Session 4. KINO-EYE**Friday, October 6 - 5:30 p.m.**

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 1



Dziga Vertov. *Kinoglaz* [Kino-Eye]. Film, 1924. Courtesy of the Austrian Film Museum/From the Special Collection Dziga Vertov

Dziga Vertov*Kinoglaz* [Kino-Eye], 1924

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 78'

— Session hosted by **Devin A. Fore**, professor at Princeton University, curator of the series and film scholar specialized in cinema and image theory within the Soviet avant-garde

In 1916, at the age of 20, Vertov began studying at the Psychoneurological Institute in Petrograd where he heard lectures from the reflexologist Vladimir Bekhterev and was introduced to a variety of experimental instruments for scientific inquiry. These tools made it possible to record phenomena and processes that were otherwise undetectable to the unaided eye. So too would the camera become for Vertov a device for scientific investigation, a means not to tell stories or to make art but to disclose aspects of the empirical material world. For him, the camera was meant not to represent reality but to uncover its underlying laws and structures:

Our eye sees very badly and very little. And so people invented the microscope, in order to see invisible phenomena. And so people invented the telescope, in order to see and study distant unknown worlds. And so people invented the movie camera, in order to penetrate more deeply into the seen world, in order to study and note down visual phenomena, in order not to forget what is happening and what it will be essential to take into account in the future.

Like the microscope and the telescope, the movie camera was an instrument for understanding the world.

Kino-Eye explores the potential of this device for epistemological discovery. Not only does it show us life from vantages inaccessible to the human eye and penetrate through flesh with x-ray vision, but it also makes visible the causalities that surround us every day but to which we remain oblivious. Thus the famous reverse sequences of *Kino-Eye* traces phenomena back to their origins, when they were something else: played backwards, the meat is reassembled into the cow from which it came, the bread is returned to a field of grain, even a group of young Pioneers leaps in reverse out of the water into which they sprang. The fact that *Kino-Eye* is centered on a Pioneer camp is no accident, for, as film scholar Béla Bálazs wrote in 1930, “the acting of children is always natural”: like primitives and animals, Bálazs explained, children play but they do not dissimulate. They take camera direction poorly. The child is, in effect, the paradigmatic anti-actor, and therefore the perfect subject for a film that, according to the opening titles of *Kino-Eye*, was “The First Non-Artificial Film-Thing, Made Without a Script, Actors or a Studio.” For Vertov, the Pioneer camp was an ideal laboratory for the study of human behavior.

Session 5. INFLUENCES

Saturday, October 7– 7:00 p.m.

Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium



Dave Fleischer. *The Einstein Theory of Relativity*. Film, 1923
© Edition Filmmuseum/Filmmuseum München

Dave Fleischer*The Einstein Theory of Relativity*, 1923

USA, BetaSP, silent, b/w, 29'

Vitalii Zhemchuzhnyi*Stekliannyi glaz* [Glass Eye], 1928

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 48'

When Vertov saw Kornblum's popular science film *The Einstein Theory of Relativity* for the first time, he claimed to have had the idea one year before. Indeed, although it may not resemble any of Vertov's work formally, Kornblum's film, which survives today only in a drastically shortened English-language edit, contains a wealth of Vertovian concepts. After a tour of the technological marvels of the present, *The Einstein Theory of Relativity* proclaims that these inventions were the result of having overcome "the deception of the senses." Like the genius of Vertov, Einstein's genius was to penetrate through the world of human perception to a subjacent reality that eludes the unaided senses.

The majority of Kornblum's surviving film consists of an animated illustration of Einstein's principle of the relativity of time. This sequence starts with a launch into space and the loss of the Earth as a point of reference ("We have lost our sense of direction," an intertitle announces). Vertov's camera-eye, too, liberates perception from the earthly bodies that encumber human perception. In one of his most famous

manifestoes, written the same year that Kornblum's film was released, Vertov declared "WE fall, we rise...together with the rhythm of movements—slowed and accelerated, / running from us, past us, toward us, / in a circle, or a straight line, or ellipse, / to the right and left, with plus and minus signs; / movements bend, straighten, divide, break apart, / multiply, shooting noiselessly through space." Most of Kornblum's film focuses on the consequences of relativity theory for our understanding of time, showing, for example, how a person traveling at great speeds could actually travel backwards in time or how an hour on earth could be the equivalent of a century on another planet. Here *The Einstein Theory of Relativity* makes a conceptual link between two of Vertov's signature practices as a filmmaker: his use of a radically decentered camera that ignores all fixed spatial coordinates and his use of slow motion, freeze frame and reverse motion to render time and causality plastic, malleable and relative.

As the title indicates, *Glass Eye*, by director Vitalii Zhemchuzhnyi and writer Lili Brik, is a direct reference to Vertov's *Kino-Eye*. Engaging directly with the contemporary debates around the "played" and the "unplayed" film, i.e. the scripted and the documentary, *Glass Eye* consists of two parts: the first half of the film offers a sendoff to the tradition of Hollywood studio cinema, whose dominant narrative codes of adventure and romance are parodied to the point of absurdity. The other half of the film consists of what Zhemchuzhnyi, invoking Bekhterev's work, called the "intellectual" dimension of cinema. Echoing Vertov's understanding of the camera as means of scientific inquiry, Zhemchuzhnyi wrote that cinema is "an important means in the realm of scientific research and in the realm of the cognition of human reality in general." Dedicated to showing this "research," the majority of *Glass Eye* consists of episodes from contemporary documentary and scientific films that demonstrate the nearly unlimited powers of the camera.

Session 6. KULTURFILM I

Sunday, October 8 – 8:00 p.m.

Wednesday, November 8 – 8:00 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 2



Vsevolod Pudovkin. *Mekhanika golovnogo mozga* [Mechanics of the brain]. Film, 1926

Lev Kuleshov*Sorok serdets* [Forty Heats], 1931

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 49'

Vsevolod Pudovkin*Mekhanika golovnogo mozga* [Mechanics of the brain], 1926

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 98'

The genre known as the *Kulturfilm* (a designation taken from the German) is one of the most important yet forgotten genres of early Soviet cinema. Almost all of the great masters of the period, including Eisenstein, tried the form out. Burgeoning in the second half of the 1920, this genre of educational documentary then disappeared just as quickly in the beginning of the 1930s together with the studios that made them. The demise of the *Kulturfilm* was due in part to lagging demand within a movie system that was increasingly oriented toward entertaining, feature-length films. Perhaps more importantly, though, in ideological debates about fact versus invention the *Kulturfilm* occupied an uneasy position on the border between the two. On the one hand, the *Kulturfilm's* commitment to scientific topics ranging from personal hygiene to ethnography evidenced its strong commitment to the laws of objective reality over fictionalization. On the other hand, the means that these instructional films used to convey these laws were not strictly documentary. For example, these instructional films often employed reenactments to depict paradigmatic cases, which, technically speaking, made them "played" fiction films.

The frequent use of animated sequences in the *Kulturfilm* illustrates this double-bind. Animation is of course not an objective record of empirical reality. It is a hand-drawn piece of fiction. And yet, as the films in this session testify, animation can nonetheless be used to illustrate objective phenomena that otherwise cannot be seen with the naked eye: the theory of relativity (Kornblum), electricity (Kuleshov), the nervous system (Pudovkin), or radio ether (Vertov, *Kino-pravda no. 23*). Citing his own drawn sequences and those of Kornblum as exemplary, Vertov observed in "Kino-Eye and the Visible World" that "we have tenaciously prepared for the convergence of the chronicle and the scientific film, and here the method of animation should play a decisive role." For Vertov, animation was another means to achieve his perennial goal of visualizing that which eludes vision.

The *Kulturfilm's* task of edification did not foreclose the possibility of entertainment. The artist responsible for the animations in both Kuleshov's and Pudovkin's films, Ivan Ivanov-Vano, clearly did not restrict his imagination. The pulsing and lysergic rendering of electricity in Kuleshov's *Forty Hearts*, in particular, recalls the highly abstract experimental animations of Viking Eggeling's *Diagonal Symphony* or Walter Ruttmann's *Opus* series. More restrained and scientific in its temperament, though, *Mechanics of the Brain* was considered to be such a successful rendering of its subject that the director Pudovkin was offered a job in the scientific laboratory where he shot the film.

Session 7. KINO PRAVDA**Monday, October 9 – 7:00 p.m.**

Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium



Dziga Vertov, *Kino-pravda: 23. Radiopravda* [Kino-Truth: 23. Radiopravda]. Film, 1925. Courtesy of the Austrian Film Museum/From the Special Collection Dziga Vertov

Dziga Vertov

Kino-pravda: 21. Leninskaia kinopravda [Kino-Truth: 21. Lenin Kino-Truth], 1925
USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 36'

Kino-pravda: 22. Krest'ianskaia kinopravda [Kino-Truth: 22. Peasant Kino-Truth], 1925
USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 18'

Kino-pravda: 23. Radiopravda [Kino-Truth: 23. Radiopravda], 1925
USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 23'

— Session hosted by **Miguel A. Bouhaben**, film historian and professor at the Littoral Polytechnical Higher School and the Guayaquil University of Arts, Ecuador. Co-editor of *Dziga Vertov. Memorias de un cineasta bolchevique* (2011)

This sequence of the three final *Kino-pravdas* touches upon three topics central to the political agenda and cultural imaginary of the period: the death and legacy of Lenin, the *smychka* (union) between the proletariat and the peasantry, and the electrification of the country. *No. 21* reviews the recent history of hardship from revolution and civil war to the period of reconstruction, showing Lenin's leadership through these transformations. After his decline, which is depicted in an animated sequence that shows his flagging pulse and breathing, the Bolshevik leader dies and movement is replaced by stasis ("Lenin... but he doesn't move" or

"Lenin... but silent"). But the movement is then transferred to the masses. *No. 21* ends with the "union" between city and country, which is where *No. 22* then picks up. In the latter, a delegation of peasants arrives in Moscow, where they tour Lenin's artifacts, attend an assembly and listen to speeches. *Kino-pravda No. 23* then returns the spectator to the countryside, where the radio is presented as a means to overcome the distance between urban and rural existence, and to equalize the cultural differences between the two.

This suite of films reminds us that Vertov never thought of himself as a feature filmmaker. If the lengths of his "mature" works fall within the conventional range of 60–80 minutes, this was purely a convenience of marketing and distribution. Forgoing the structuring conceit of the narrative plot, there is very little that holds his films together as individual works. "There are no twenty-three *Kino-pravdas*," he wrote in 1926: "There is no film *Kino-Eye* [...] There are no films about the Moscow Soviet, the State Trading Organization, and so on. You just think there are [...] There is the constant scientific and experimental work of *Kino-Eye* [...] but there are no individual films [...] there are no fulfilled commissions." This last line explains, too, why Vertov was fired from Sovkino at the end of the year: he never delivered the discrete product that he was hired to make. Instead the commissions were used to fund the ongoing project of his group, the "kinoks", who worked not like artisans who manufacture a discrete commodity but like scientists who create knowledge in a laboratory.

Vertov wrote of a "continuous production process" and a "continuous editing process." The "kinoks" were making not a product but a project. Thus when one critic accused Vertov of having squandered 26,000 meters of film stock to make *One Sixth of the World*, which was 1,140 meters in length, Vertov surprised everyone when he responded that this stock was in fact used to make six films. *The Eleventh Year*, for example, was a secondary project made from pieces of *One Sixth of the World* and *Man with a Movie Camera*. Thus, when Vertov would state that his goal was always to make "a film that helps to make film," he was referring not only to the experimental cinematic devices he had pioneered (no great fan of Vertov, even John Grierson had to admit that a film like *Enthusiasm* was "so full of ingenuities that practitioners like myself will be feeding on its carcass years from now"). Vertov was also speaking, quite materially and concretely, about the fact that the footage he shot could be used for many different purposes, assembled to create many different films. He was always adding to his stockpile for future works. "Not a film, but a filing cabinet" was his model, even late into life: "*Kino-pravda* is made with footage just as a house is made with bricks. With bricks one can build an oven, a Kremlin wall, and many other things. One can build various film-objects from footage."

Session 8. MOVING FORWARD

Tuesday, October 10 – 5:30 p.m.

Friday, November 10 – 8:00 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 1



Dziga Vertov. *Šagaj, Sovet!* [Stride, Soviet!]. Film, 1926. Courtesy of the Deutsche Kinemathek

Dziga Vertov*Šagaj, Sovet!* [Stride, Soviet!], 1926

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 80'

Commissioned by the Moscow Soviet to advertise their achievements and get them re-elected, *Stride Soviet!* in fact does little to campaign for any actual members of *Mossoviet*. With the exception of a couple of brief segments, it scarcely documents the speeches of the members or introduces any of the relevant personalities. Traditional politics is about discourse and debate, but in this film Vertov is far more interested in showing the politics of technology. If, in Lenin's famous definition, "Socialism equals power to the soviets plus the electrification of the entire country," in this film Vertov clearly privileges the latter over the former. In this regard, *Stride Soviet!* exemplifies the shift that philosopher Hannah Arendt described (and bemoaned) in *The Human Condition* as a move away from a political and public existence that is based in language toward one based in science, matter and technical construction. Vertov replaces speech with making, communication with metabolism, the rhythm of syntax with the rhythm of machines.

The film follows a fairly straightforward chronological reconstruction of the recent history of Moscow, from the poverty, unemployment and disease of the civil war era to the industrial and cultural accomplishments of reconstruction. Following Trotsky's policy of a quasi-military mobilization of labor, Vertov shows the continuity between wartime and peacetime economies: hammers are equivalents of rifles, nails of bullets, and so on. Organized around the basic semantic opposition between "then" and "now," *Stride, Soviet!* combines newsreel footage with original sequences that Vertov shot for this film. As time moves forward to the sequences that Vertov is shooting in the present, two things happen. First, the film grows darker: these shadows serve as a background against which the achievements of electrical illumination (and of metaphorical enlightenment) become all the more brilliant. Second, the use of close-ups increases: this general sensation of proximity corresponds to the existential and experiential situation of being in the present, in which concrete things are ready-to-hand but in which the exigencies and pressures of the moment also foreclose clarity and certainty about the bigger picture. As one of Vertov's critics wrote in 1924, film "can be produced only at some distance in time, only retrospectively, from those elements which have already been shaped in life into definite, clear, crystallized forms, assimilated and digested by consciousness." But retrospection was a luxury that documentarists like Vertov did not have.

Session 9. COMPILATION CINEMA

Wednesday, October 11 - 7:00 p.m.

Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium

Esfir Shub. *Segodnia* [Today]. Film, 1930**Esfir Shub***Segodnia* [Today], 1930

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 65'

Whereas Vertov organizes the film *Stride, Soviet!* around the semantic binary “then” versus “now,” Shub’s structures her remarkable film *Today* around the contrast between life “here” (*u nas*) and life “there” (*u nikh*, i.e. in the capitalist west). Most of *Today* is actually dedicated to covering recent events in Europe and in the United States. Like Vertov’s *One Sixth of the World*, it situates the Soviet Union in the global order of its day. But whereas Vertov’s film explores the Soviet Union’s economic position in the world, *Today* focuses on its political, technological and cultural position. Here people are being scrubbed and hygiene is being promoted; women in Central Asia are removing their veils and are educated; palaces of culture and leisure are being built for the working class; and, as *Today*’s astonishing shots of blast furnaces and industrial landscapes testify, the very surface of the earth is being transformed according to man’s will. There, on the other hand, chaos and oppression reign: Sacco and Vanzetti are executed and protests ensue; harsh colonial regimes fetter the global masses; and all the while a bored ruling class distracts itself with frivolous pursuits like underwater weddings, stunt shows on rollerskates, and, of course, cosmetics. For Shub this kind of sensationalism only seals the downfall of an anemic capitalist order.

Today, which was a collaboration between Soiuzkino and Weltfilm (the film unit of Willi Münzenberg’s International Worker’s Aid) and which was intended for an international audience, is ultimately a feature-length advertisement for the Soviet state. Using Shub’s signature devices such as contrastive-ironic montage, the film concludes with a rousing call for the defense of the citadel of world socialism. Some in the West would denounce this as base propaganda. But, as so many Russians rejoined in the 1920s, what in fact distinguishes advertising from propaganda? Where is the boundary? The rhetorical means of persuasion are identical, the only difference is what exactly is being advertised—a commodity or the state.

Session 10. VERTOV

Friday, October 13 – 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, November 12 – 5:30 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 1



Dziga Vertov. *Šestaja ast' mira* [One Sixth of the World]. Film, 1926.
 Courtesy of the Austrian Film Museum/From the Special Collection Dziga
 Vertov

Dziga Vertov

Šestaja ast' mira [One Sixth of the World], 1926
 USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 73'

The Soviet Union was a massive multiethnic empire divided internally by extremes of socio-cultural difference and by the seemingly insurmountable obstacles imposed by geography itself. In *One Sixth of the World*, which, like *Kino-pravda no. 18* was a “race” (*probeg*) about 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. This ethnographic film does not privilege the latter as the exclusive revolutionary subject. It lionizes diverse forms of labor performed by the Soviet peasantry and national minorities, ranging from reindeer husbandry to traditional agriculture. 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 theatre, 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 you with these people eating raw meat in the North. It is almost like a phantasmagoria.” The mediatic connections flow in both directions: just as audience in the urban theater watches a film of sheep being washed before a shearing, the Saami in the north listen to Lenin’s voice on a phonograph record. What is more, the film shows that these phantasmagoric couplings of near and far extend beyond even the boundaries of the Soviet Union. *One Sixth*, which was contracted by the State Trade Commission 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 like the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Paul Virilio have both claimed that his films break apart the static grid of Euclidean space, freeing these coordinates for rearrangement into new sensory and perspectival configurations.

Session 11. ETHNOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY I**Saturday, October 14 - 7:00 p.m.**

Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium

Pare Lorentz. *The River*. Film, 1937**Pare Lorentz***The River*, 1937

USA, 35 mm, b/w, 31'

The treatment of landscapes in Pare Lorentz' work largely echoes Soviet ethnographic documentary within the context of the American New Deal. The landscapes of Lorentz's *The River* are efflorescing and even quasi-animistic. The eponymous protagonist of this Farm Security Administration film, the Mississippi river, reacts to mankind's labors in unpredictable and willful ways. The land is full of movement. Lorentz's frequent tracking shots, for example, in which the clouds stand perfectly still while the earth below shifts and moves, reverse the values of stability and dynamism conventionally associated with ground and sky.

Besides the remarkable landscape footage, perhaps the most striking feature of Lorentz's film is its overdubbed narration, a poem written by Lorentz in blank verse spoken by the opera singer Thomas Chalmers. With its sophisticated catachreses and internal acoustic resonances, the text "has the rhythmic cadence of flowing water," one reviewer noted in *The New York Times* in 1938. The form of the text, which Lorentz published simultaneously as a book, recalls the heterogenous accumulations found in an ode, a kind of poem that gives voice to a series of absolute singularities. The ode is thus the perfect poetic genre to reflect the indexical particularism of the documentary mode. Not for nothing, in fact, did Vertov use the ode as a model for the incantatory, non-narrative intertitles of the silent film *One Sixth of the World*, which was described at the time of its release as "a grandiose song on screen," "an epic poem," and "a cine-poem." Vertov was a "Soviet Whitman... insatiable in his grasp of life," one critic wrote in 1929. If, by Vertov's own admission, the intertitles of *One Sixth of the World* were indeed indebted to the poetry of Walt Whitman, in Lorentz's paean to the Mississippi river this documentary Whitman—a hybrid that was engineered in Russia—is repatriated to American soil one decade later.

Session 12. CONNECTIONS**Sunday, October 15 – 5:30 p.m.**

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 1

Tuesday, November 14 – 8:00 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 2



Portrait of Roman Karmen

Roman Karmen*Moskva–Karakum–Moskva* [Moscow–Karakum–Moscow], 1933

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 30'

K Sobytiyam v Ispanii nr. 2 / 7 / 10 / 11 / 14 / 17 [On the Events in Spain nos. 2 / 7 / 10 / 11 / 14 / 17], 1936–1937

USSR, 35 mm, b/w, 60'

Roman Karmen was one of the foremost war filmmakers of the 20th century. Trained within the framework of the Soviet debate around documentary, his cinematic perspective codified conflict at an international level and established its models of representation as both a historical experience and a constant flow of current affairs. Karmen's experiences during the Spanish Civil War played a key role in this, to which this session bears witness. Karmen (born Roman Kornman on 16 November 1906 in Odessa) was a member of the Russian Association of Proletarian Photographers and his photography work was widely published on newspapers and illustrated journals, including landmark publications as *USSR in Construction* and *Sovetskoe Foto*. In 1928, his work was included in the exhibition *Ten Years of Soviet Photography*, in Moscow, along with that of Aleksandr Rodchenko, Semyon Fridlyand and Max Penson. Throughout the 1930s, Karmen worked at the Central Studio of Documentary Film and as a correspondent for Soviet newspapers, including *Pravda* and *Izvestii*. He participated in

the crucial exhibition *Film und Foto*, mounted in Stuttgart in 1929—which somehow set up the mechanistic view of the camera as an independent eye—, as well as the *Exposition internationale de la photographie contemporaine* (International Exhibition of Contemporary Photography), at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, in 1936. Karmen was the foremost filmmaker of the Spanish Civil War and World War II. He was present on the front lines, documenting Madrid's resistance, the Leningrad blockade, the surrender of German field marshal Friedrich Paulus in Volgograd, and the liberation of the Majdanek concentration camp in Lublin.

Before Roman Karmen discovered his métier as a wartime cinematographer, he made films on more occasional documentary subjects. For *Moscow–Karakum–Moscow* he and cameraman Eduard Tisse joined a historical automobile expedition that traveled from Moscow to Central Asia's Karakum desert and back at the end of the summer of 1933. Picking up on the genre of the "cine-race" (*kino-probeg*) that was pioneered in Vertov's *One Sixth of the World*, Karmen's extended adventure newsreel documented the caravan as it cut across landscapes of desert and marsh facing hostile conditions ranging from sandstorms to scorpions. In Vertov's assessment, Karmen was a cameraman who managed "to be in a dozen places at once."

Part automobile race and part parade, the cars and trucks of the expedition were greeted at every station, from Tashkent to Tbilisi, by cheering crowds with signs and banners. These people came out not just to welcome the explorers, but to celebrate the triumph of Soviet industry over nature, since 19 of the 23 automobiles in the expedition had been built in Russian factories, testifying to the new independence of the Soviet economy from those of the industrial West. Russia had at last achieved the goal identified by Vertov in *The Eleventh Year*: the construction of "machines that produce machines." Thus, at the same time that *Moscow–Karakum–Moscow* provides a survey of the diverse Soviet empire, it also pays tribute to the victories of the First Five-Year Plan.

On the Events in Spain, 1936–1937 gathers together the newsreel series on the Spanish front that Karmen shot and sent periodically to Moscow. Karmen's ability to "capture" the historical subject through the different typologies of men as well as to record the live events (sometimes without even thinking about restaging them) made these installments into one of the most significant film archives of the Spanish Civil War. His images would later be used by many film-makers of different ideologies and dramatized in Shub's film *Spain*.

Session 13. VERTOV

Tuesday, October 17 – 5:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 15 – 7:30 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 1



Dziga Vertov. *Odinnadtsatyi* [The Eleventh Year]. Film, 1928. Courtesy of the Austrian Film Museum/From the Special Collection Dziga Vertov

Dziga Vertov*Odinnadtsatyi* [The Eleventh Year], 1928

USSR, DCP, silent, b/w, 53'

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 working notes for the film describe a project driven 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." After a series of dynamite blasts have set world history in motion, liberating the skeletons from their static earthly tomb, 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 "means the conquest of time—a visual bond between phenomena that are temporally remote from one another."

Whereas *One Sixth* explores a nexus of horizontal 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 interactions that connect the present civilization to a deep, prehistorical time. So often *The Eleventh Year* contradicts the Bolshevik narrative of progress-through-modernization, instead suggesting that the past cannot ever be fully left behind, 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 allochronisms suggest that historical progress is not always consistently linear and universal, and that the course of technological development is not necessarily remainderless.

In addition to the dam-pyramid and other pseudomorphic likenesses there are two specific cinematic devices through which Vertov complicates this simple unidirectional scheme of history. First is the dissolve, a visual strategy found in a number of Vertov's films, but deployed with particular acuity in *The Eleventh Year*, where Vertov layers incommensurable elements upon one another—peasant houses, igneous rock formations, a bust of Lenin—without attributing anteriority to any one of them. As a result of this convergence, the image-world of *The Eleventh Year* hovers in a logically impossible state of simultaneity that more closely resembles the paratactic structure of the dream than the linear concatenations of causal thought. And second is the vertical articulation of the image into what Yuri Tsvivan has called "tiers of space," a visual layering that recalls the geological idiom of the stratigraph. In the deep cycles of time prospected by Vertov, in which human labor and natural history are joined together in metabolic exchange, the archaeology of industry merges indistinguishably with the record of geological time that is inscribed in the earth's surface.

Session 14. EISENSTEIN VERSUS VERTOV**Wednesday, October 18 – 7:00 p.m.****Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium**

Sergei Eisenstein. *Staroie i Novoie o General'naia liniia* [The Old and the New or The General Line]. Film, 1929. Courtesy of Filmoteca Española

Sergei Eisenstein

Staroie i Novoie o General'naia liniia [The Old and the New or The General Line], 1929

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 90'

Made at the apogee of Vertov's influence, *The General Line* was Eisenstein's one attempt to make a feature-length documentary film. Not, however, that the result of this attempt resembled any work of Vertov. Eisenstein's remarkable film about agricultural industrialization and the *smychka* (union) between rural peasants and urban workers contained a number of its own formal innovations. First of all, Eisenstein came up with a clever dramaturgical solution to the challenge of the "non-played" film: instead of using professional actors, Eisenstein cast people essentially to play themselves on screen. Thus the film's protagonist Marfa Lapkina (real name: Marfa Lapkina) performs for the camera, but the script that she follows is based upon her own real-life experiences, habits and expressions as a peasant. She was in effect not representing anything except herself. In turning away from the professional actor towards the use of human types such as Lapkina, Eisenstein had created, in the estimation of Béla Bálasz, the "greatest masterwork" of "art made from nature." Eisenstein had taken the documentary injunction against fictionalization and studio acting as an occasion to direct life itself.

Secondly, documentary's prohibition against filming within the controlled confines of the studio also forced Eisenstein out-of-doors, where he and cameraman Eduard Tisse shot *en plein air*. Using a complex set of mirrors to reflect light and a 28mm lens that allowed them to achieve an unprecedented focal range, Eisenstein and Tisse produced some of the visually most striking images of landscape in the cinema of the time. Above all, the shots integrate foreground and background, rendering in equally fine detail all elements from the tiniest filigree on a tractor's side to the massive mountain range in the distance. By using the 28mm lens, Eisenstein had dismantled the distinction between proximity and depth, flattening the image on the screen optically and offering everything up to the viewer in, as he put it, a "dense, naturalistic idiom." The fusion of proximity and depth ornamentalizes the image on screen. Even the long-shots are close-ups, even the vistas are within hand's reach. Eisenstein would later disavow this film's "dense, naturalistic idiom" as too materialist, too indebted to the raw indexicality and actuality of Vertov's work. The film was insufficiently abstract, he wrote, and lacked the means of cognitive generalization that was the hallmark of his own life's project, "intellectual cinema."

Session 15. OFFSHOOTS

Friday, October 20 – 5:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 16 – 5:30 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 1



Mikhail Kaufman. *Vesnoi* [Spring]. Film, 1929.
EYE Filmmuseum Collection

Mikhail Kaufman*Vesnoi* [Spring], 1929

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 67'

Joris Ivens*Regen* [Rain], 1929

The Netherlands, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 12'

Spring was the first film that “kinok²” cameraman Mikhail Kaufman made after breaking with his older brother Dziga Vertov (alias for Denis Kaufman). Mikhail had felt sidelined in their last production together, *Man with a Movie Camera*, whose final edit was quite different from what Kaufman had expected. *Spring* testifies to a very different sensibility than Vertov’s. Above all, in *Spring*, Vertov’s technophilia is replaced by visually more lyrical compositions. Like *Man with a Movie Camera*, *Spring* foregoes intertitles entirely, realizing Kaufman’s goal of “speaking in pure film language, without recourse to the help of literary explanations,” but for Kaufman, it was nature, not technology, that most eloquently expressed this pure film language, this language without the intercession of human speech or thought.

The subject of *Spring* poses a certain challenge to the filmmaker: How is it possible to capture something that has neither story nor plot, a change from cold to warm that can be registered with a thermometer but is not directly visible to the eye? *Spring* can be shown only elliptically, through partial effects. And so Kaufman, through extensive use of close-ups, depicts this global thaw through a series of miniature vignettes: trickling icicles and a melting snowman, the inertia of mud, slugs spiraling in a coital embrace, flowers blooming through stop-motion photography. Meanwhile, a human population digs (and detonates) itself out from under a frozen sheet, aerates its dwellings, and begins to reinhabit public spaces. Construction, a perennial theme of early Soviet ideology, also resumes, although for Kaufman industry and technology do not release us from our organic beholdingness to nature and the environment (as in the classic Marxist analytic), but are, to the contrary, our own species-specific way of participating in the great metabolic cycle of nature. Workers build houses just as birds build nests.

In addition to the nature cinematography, some of the most striking sequences of *Spring* are its shots of running water. With these sequences, Kaufman captures the materiality of spring at the most elemental level of existence, in the phase shift from frozen solid to dynamic liquid. In the process Kaufman discovers that water—all movement and reflected light—is one of the most cinematic of subjects, a phenomenon exemplary of the “pure film language” that he desired. The same year Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens made this discovery as well: his experimental documentary *Rain* pivots the camera downward and Amsterdam emerges in the reflective mirror of the water’s surface, just like the picture on a movie screen.

2 Member of Vertov’s group, “scientist” in his ongoing cinema project (see Session 7. Kino-pravda)

Session 16. EUROPEAN CONTEXTS I

Saturday, October 21– 7:00 p.m.

Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium



René Clair. *Paris qui dort* [Paris Asleep or The Crazy Ray]. Film, 1928.
© Fondation Jérôme Seydoux-Pathé

Alberto Cavalcanti*Rien que les heures* [Nothing but Time], 1926

France, Bluray, silent, b/w, 47'

René Clair*Paris qui dort* [Paris Asleep or The Crazy Ray], 1924

France, 35 mm, silent, 35'

Hans Richter*Everyday*, 1929

United Kingdom, 16 mm, b/w, 17'

This session considers the interactions and influences between Vertov and contemporaneous European avant-garde filmmakers. Vertov despaired when he first saw *Paris qui dort* in 1926, claiming that he had conceived a similar film several years before, albeit set in Moscow rather than Paris. Clair's science fiction film tells the story of a city frozen by a scientist who has invented a ray that stops time. Only upon the Eiffel tower, amidst the metal trusswork that was prominently featured in *Kino-pravda no. 18*, do the survivors find a haven of movement within the stasis that holds the rest of Paris in its grip. As he walks among the living wax museum of Paris, the protagonist Albert comes across a suicide poised to throw himself in the Seine, who carries a note that reads: "it's the terrible pace of life that has driven me to this." This message,

delivered by a frozen figure, expresses the paradoxical temporality of the modern world, in which, between total stasis and unbearable acceleration, there seems to be no place for a human scale of time. Vertov's own work used cinema to explore these inhuman temporalities, unfolding time in a plastic field of investigation through the use of his signature devices such as frozen imagery, slow-motion, nonsynchronous dissolves, and reverse motion. The final sequence of Clair's film, in which footage of the streets of Paris is played forwards then backwards then forwards then backwards, could be taken straight out of *Man with a Movie Camera*.

Vertov referred also to Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures* in his writings, this time boasting of his influence outside of Russia rather than despairing of his missed opportunity. Cavalcanti's film offered a curious solution to the documentary injunction to create works without plots. This was in fact a challenge that faced all varieties of plotless work: How to make an integral work capable of capturing the attention of the spectator without the use of fictional narrative to hold the whole thing together? For Cavalcanti, the solution is a film that consists of a series of strange minimal narratemes, fragments of stories that are repeated and intercalated with one another, setting up an associative field of drift and contagion from absinthe, to water, to kisses, and so on. To be sure, the subject matter of *Rien que les heures* has little in common with that of Vertov's films, but its non-linear construction is in fact closely related. Vertov would be accused of utilizing such symbolism and associationism in films such as *One Sixth of the World* and *The Eleventh Year*, which, his critics argued, violated the strict chronological structure of the newsreel. At the end of *Rien que les heures* this associative chain collapses into a chaotic simultaneity of exposition, in which all episodes happen at once.

Hans Richter first met Vertov in the summer of 1929 when he was touring Europe with *Man with a Movie Camera*. Richter invited Vertov to visit his Berlin film studio, where Richter was working on the sound-film experiment *Everything Turns, Everything Moves*. Although few details are known about the making of Richter's film *Everyday*, which appeared around the same time as *Everything Turns*, the close dialogue with Vertov is evident in *Everyday*'s close-ups of hands and machines, its stop-motion animations, its shots of the audience in the movie theater, its depictions of labor (both actuarial and industrial), its frenzied packing of cigarette boxes—not to mention the scenes of coruscating water and fiery slag that are taken directly from footage for *The Eleventh Year*.

Session 17. VERTOV**Sunday, October 22 – 9:30 p.m.**

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 1

Friday, November 17 – 8:00 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 2



Dziga Vertov. *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* [Man with a Movie Camera]. Film, 1929.

Dziga Vertov

Chelovek s kinoapparatom [Man with a Movie Camera] 1929
USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 86'

Justifiably recognized not just as Vertov's masterpiece but also as one of the greatest works in the history of cinema, *Man with a Movie Camera* rewards multiple viewings. This is not just because it's a classic. Designed to defy linear narrative thought, the complex structure of its editing sets up a vast network of connections and causalities among its individual episodes that could never be fathomed in a single sitting. On *Man with a Movie Camera* the film critic Noël Burch once wrote 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)." Complicating matters still further is the fact that these axes of signification reach even beyond *Man with a Movie Camera* into other films by Vertov, which contain some of the same shots that are found in *Man*. Vertov, to repeat an earlier point³, did not make title-bearing, feature-length, scenario-based pictures with a beginning, middle and end. He believed instead to be working on a single, continuous, interminable project. Indeed, in 1929 he claimed already to have made *Man with a Movie Camera* twice before, in 1926 and 1928. Vertov's film only provides the thinnest pretense of a plot: a cameraman travels around a city in a single day. *Man with a Movie Camera* was Vertov's technophilic, tongue-in-cheek response to the emergent poetics of Socialist Realism, which demanded a return to psychological drama and depth through representations of the "living person" (*zhivoi chelovek*). If Viktor Shklovsky announced in a 1928 text about contemporary Soviet cinema culture that montage "has retired to an auxiliary role" to be replaced by a renewed interest in the human, apparently no one had told Vertov that editing was now supposed to be secondary to acting: "*Man with a Movie Camera* has the smallest median shot length among all films made in the first part of the 20th century," observes Lev Manovich. "It is also the "fastest" among all other famous films directed by other Russian filmmakers of the montage school." The pace of the film is indeed breathtaking as it races to capture all the incommensurable events transpiring in a single day. No human could actually pull off such a feat, and by the end of the film, it becomes clear that the real star of the show is not the cameraman but the apparatus that he carries, which, brought to life through stop-motion animation, finally shuffles dutifully onto the screen and takes a bow. "The movie camera takes control of the man, subordinates him to itself, turns him into its appendage, its implement," wrote one critic about Vertov's opus. A film about the powers of film, *Man with a Movie Camera* is not just a self-reflexive summa of the formal devices that Vertov learned in his first decade using a camera, but also a proclamation of this apparatus's superiority to man.

³ See text of Session 7. Kino-pravda

Session 18. URBAN SYMPHONY**Monday, October 23 – 7:00 p.m.**

Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium

Mikhail Kaufman. *Moskva* [Moscow]. Film, 1927**Mikhail Kaufman***Moskva* [Moscow], 1927

USSR, digital file, silent, b/w, 60'

— Session hosted by **Marcelo Expósito**, artist, theorist and freelance lecturer. His work includes research on the contemporary reception of Dziga Vertov and the Russian avant-garde

Shot together with fellow “kinok⁴” Il’ia Kopolin, Kaufman’s city symphony observes very different principles than *Man with a Movie Camera*. While Vertov’s film constructed an abstract and ideal-typical city out of footage collected in Kiev, Moscow and Odessa, Kaufman’s *Moscow* is firmly grounded in the topography of the Russian capital, its specific streets, bridges, squares and monuments. Vertov’s city symphony dispenses with all intertitles, but Kaufman identifies by name each specific location, every street and factory, so that the spectator always knows where he or she finds herself. The composition of the film is correspondingly logical and transparent: to get the spectator oriented, *Moscow* begins with a tour through the major parts of the town, then depicts the commercial and public life of the city, then moves on to various notable sites of production, culture and leisure. A glimpse into the political life of the capital city, with portraits of various government officials and heads of state, recalls the earlier newsreels of *Kino-nedelja* and *Kino-pravda*. To be sure, there is the occasional post-production trick—the use of reverse motion here or slow motion there—but the film is largely free of flagrant technical flourishes. It is a film about Moscow, not about filmmaking, and by the end of the film the spectator feels an intimate familiarity with this bustling metropolis as if one of its own denizens.

Moscow may lack the cinematic pyrotechnics of *Man with a Movie Camera*, but many praised it as revelatory, if not visionary. Moscow local Lev Kuleshov, for example, wrote: “what is shown here opens our eyes to the routine Moscow that we see so often; we walk around and pay no attention to the remarkable parts of the town, to the large amount of traffic, to those unexpected shots which Kaufman has managed to see and film.” Following Kuleshov, we could say that Kaufman’s film exemplifies that poetic device that Shklovsky famously called “estrangement” (*ostranenie*): not radical alienation or modernist self-reflexivity, but just enough of a shift or dislocation of perception to transform the familiar and habitual into something unfamiliar and new.

4 Member of Vertov’s group, “scientist” in his ongoing cinema project (see Session 7. *Kino-pravda*)

Session 19. EUROPEAN CONTEXTS II

Tuesday, October 24 – 8:00 p.m.

Friday, November 17 – 6:00 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 2



Jean Vigo. *Taris, rois de l'eau* [Taris, King of the Waters]. Film, 1931.
© Gaumont

Eugene Deslaw

La marche des machines [March of the Machines], 1928
France, 16 mm, silent, b/w, 9'

Jean Lods

La Seine, la vie d'un fleuve [The Seine, the Life of a River],
1931
France, digital file, b/w, 25'

Jean Vigo

Taris, roi de l'eau [Taris, King of the Waters], 1931
France, 16 mm, silent, b/w, 9'

Jean Lods

Le Mile, Jules Ladoumègue [The Mile, Jules Ladoumègue],
1932
France, digital file, b/w, 41'

Joris Ivens

De Brug [The Bridge], 1928
The Netherlands, 16 mm, silent, b/w, 14'

Jean Lods

Odesa, Histoire d'une ville [Odesa, History of a City], 1936
USSR, digital file, b/w, 24'

This session foregrounds the collaborations between French filmmakers and cameraman Boris Kaufman, the youngest of the three Kaufman brothers. In 1927 the 21-year-old moved to Paris to study philosophy, but quickly found himself following in his older brothers' footsteps. Already the next year his first film

experiment came out, the short *La marche des machines*, which consisted entirely of the rhythmic details and abstract geometries made by factory machinery. There is a clear likeness with the factory sequences of his brothers' films, but unlike the latter, no working bodies or laboring hands are ever shown in Boris's film, and no attention is ever given to the totality or utility of the equipment. Shot entirely in close-up, technology is presented in *La marche des machines* as pure optical effect, as unadulterated *photogénie*. Kaufman's film is paired in the session with Ivens' contemporaneous short about the new Rotterdam train bridge, which uses similar formal means as Kaufman, but which avoids the latter's extreme machine fetishization by addressing the bridge's functional specificity and the role of the worker as well.

The human body figures more prominently in the three other Kaufman films in this session. The early sound film *La Seine* explores the interactions between the river, the landscape and the workers who move between the two. *Taris, roi de l'eau* and *Jules Ladoumègue* are portraits of record-breaking athletes, in swimming and track respectively. Both films were made after Vertov stayed with his brother during the European tour of *Man with a Movie Camera* in 1929, and both films recall the sequences in *Man* that depict athletic feats. The champion swimmer Jean Taris demonstrates aspects of his craft ranging from proper breathing technique to the coordination of arms and legs. He introduces "new styles" of swimming such as the breast stroke and the side-stroke, and concludes with an underwater ballet of spinning and spiraling. Like Vertov, Kaufman manipulates the footage, playing it in reverse, showing it in slow-motion, and overlaying it with dissolves of other sequences. Through these manipulations, the human body, perhaps the most intuitive and self-evident object that we know, is transformed into something strange, an alien biomechanical object. If Vertov's cinematic dissections of the body are more analytic in their disposition, Kaufman's instead have an oneiric quality, confirming the philosopher Adorno's observation that objectivity and surrealism are in fact just two sides of the same coin.

The session is rounded out by a documentary by Jean Lods about Odesa, which Vertov claimed as a descendant of his own work. Written by Odesa native and celebrated author Isaak Babel, the film provides a tour through the history, economy and cultural life of the seaport, culminating in a replay of the famous scene on the Odesa steps from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*—although this time things turn out better: a woman approaching the descent with a baby carriage averts tragedy by veering off before she reaches the first step, and the soldiers who then begin marching in lockstep down the stone staircase break out of formation halfway down and are joined in celebration by their sweethearts.

Session 20. INDUSTRIAL SYMPHONY**Thursday, October 26 – 7:00 p.m.**

Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium



Joris Ivens. *Pesni o geroiakh* [Song of Heroes]. Film, 1931.
EYE Filmmuseum Collection

Joris Ivens

Pesni o geroiakh [Song of Heroes], 1931
USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 49'

Two years after Vertov filmed *Enthusiasm*, Ivens shot *Song of Heroes* (aka *Komsomol*) in Magnitogorsk, a small town in the Urals that the first Five-Year Plan had transformed into one of the most important Soviet steelworks. There was no infrastructure for the tens of thousands of peasants and workers who were relocated overnight to the site, both electively and forcibly, so foreign experts like the German architect and urban planner Ernst May were called in to design an entire civilization ex nihilo complete with housing, schools, and places of leisure. With their didactic associations, the chalkboards that are visible everywhere in *Song of Heroes* remind the viewer that education and literacy, for example, were important aspects of the “civilizing” mission of Magnitogorsk. One scene in the film shows a worker slowly sounding out the words that are chalked on the side of a train car. Another, which shows a British engineer directing the Russian workers on the site, functions metonymically to represent all of the foreign experts such as May or Ivens himself, who were brought in to educate Russia in the arts and sciences of industrial modernity. Unlike in Vertov’s *Donbass Symphony*, most of the sound in *Song of Heroes* is not location recording but overdubbing. Although there are long passages of industrial clatter and pounding noise, these sounds are embedded digetically by machines that are visible on the screen. Short dialogues—what Ivens called “organized episodes”—were shot in a film studio. Even the rousing song at the end, with music by Hans Eisler and text by the factographer⁵ Sergei Tret’iakov, is performed by the Komsomol as they drive by at night with flares in their hands. In general *Song of Heroes* more closely resembles a conventional “talkie” than *Enthusiasm* did, but this did not spare Ivens from the criticism of aesthetic conservatives, who complained that *Song of Heroes* lacked concrete depictions of individualized characters, a human storyline to which the audience could relate. Ivens, who had no experience working with actors, could hardly be blamed for this shortcoming. With its powerful sequences showing factory machinery, the film was visually closer to his 1929 New Objectivity short *The Bridge* than to anything resembling Socialist Realist drama.

⁵ Factography is an aesthetic and ideological strand in Soviet avant-garde during the 1920s based on the sheer reality of facts and their potential to reach a new understanding of reality. The factographer is understood to be the producer of real stories in the Soviet 1920s.

Session 21. VERTOV

Friday, October 27 – 5:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 21 – 5:30 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 1



Dziga Vertov. *Entuziazm* [Enthusiasm/Donbass Symphony]. Film, 1930. From the collection of the Austrian Film Museum (Frame enlargement: Georg Wasner)

Dziga Vertov

Entuziazm [Enthusiasm/Donbass Symphony], 1930
USSR, 35mm, silent, b/w, 65'

— First screening hosted by **Peter Kubelka**, experimental filmmaker and founder of the Austrian Film Museum.

Vertov dreamt of making sound film long before its technical invention and in 1929 he finally got his chance. The resulting film, *Enthusiasm*, is one of Vertov's most experimental works and correspondingly difficult to situate within the mediatic economy of its day: part moving picture, part radio broadcast, part morse code transmission, and part sheer noise, the film even contains a version of television *avant la lettre* (television did not yet exist, but Vertov anticipates the medium in a segment featuring what he calls a *radiokinoapparat*). The film was not an easy one to make. Vertov's insistence that it be shot on location in the Donbass region of the Ukraine did not simplify the task, since, unlike the highly mobile and agile camera, the Shorin sound recording equipment weighed over a ton and was virtually immovable. Nevertheless, as usual Vertov persisted against gravity, resulting in a film that, in Vertov's words, "dramatically expands our aural horizon." Rejecting the "division of films according to the categories of talking, noise, or sound," as he put it, *Enthusiasm* forces human speech to compete with other varieties of sound within a richly stratified acoustic

environment that layers swathes of droning noise and then interrupts this thick acoustic landscape with sharp signals such as the punctual report of a forge hammer or the piercing tone of a workshop bell. *Enthusiasm* presents all varieties of machine language, from the radiotelegraph and the ticking of a metronome to the factory whistle that is manipulated by Vertov to sound distinct musical notes. Human speech is in the film as well, but never in the form of plot-driven dialogue. While the voice made a triumphal comeback in the "talkies" of America and Europe, it barely holds its own amongst the industrial machinery of *Enthusiasm*.

The soundtrack of the film, hailed today as one of the first examples of *musique concrète*, hardly constitutes easy listening. Vertov sought to create an acoustically overwhelming experience: when screening *Enthusiasm* in London in November 1931, he seized control of the sound board and, according to one spectator, dialed the volume up to an "earsplitting level" so that "the building seemed to tremble with the flood of noise coming from behind the screen." Although this threshold experience was received abroad with great fanfare by members of the avant-garde, it seems that the time for such experimentation had passed in the Soviet Union, and *Enthusiasm* was rejected domestically as incomprehensible and hermetic. Addled Russian spectators dismissed the film as a "caterwaul" and so many "inhuman noises." Even those sympathetic to formal innovation were at best stupefied: "After I heard and saw this film," Shklovsky wrote, "I went out into the street but not in the direction that I was supposed to go. I was stunned (*oglushen*)." Shklovsky's confusion was doubly conditioned. As in Vertov's pre-sound films, *Enthusiasm*'s camera leaps from location to location, dissolving the fixed grid of Euclidean space into a dispersed gaseous field. And with the introduction of the acoustic dimension, Vertov was able to accelerate this spatial dissolution of the spectator. As Marshall McLuhan once noted, acoustic space "has no center and no margin, unlike strictly linear space, which is an extension and intensification of the eye."

Session 22. KULTURFILM II**Saturday, October 28 - 7:00 p.m.**

Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium



Aleksandr Ptuško. *Slučaj na stadione* [An Event at the Stadium].
Film, 1928

Lecture

A Soviet education through cinema. Dziga Vertov and the Kulturfilm

By **Barbara Würm**, film programmer and professor at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Author of *Dziga Vertov. The Vertov Collection at the Austrian Film Museum* (2007)

The *Kulturfilm* was an educational documentary genre mainly devoted to the dissemination of science and manufacturing in the context of Soviet visual culture, and a mandatory step for all the early Soviet filmmakers, including Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Vertov. It combines animation and real staged footage, without overlooking the need for learning and amusement, which proves its cross-cutting value. During the lecture, several passages and audiovisual citations of this recently revived forgotten genre will be shown.

Session 23. VERTOV

Sunday, October 29 - 5:30 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 1

Wednesday, November 22 - 8:00 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 2



Dziga Vertov. *Tri Pesni o Lenine* [Three Songs about Lenin]. Film, 1926. Courtesy of the Deutsche Kinemathek

Dziga Vertov

Tri Pesni o Lenine [Three Songs about Lenin], 1934
USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 64'

— First screening hosted by **Marcelo Expósito**, artist, theorist and freelance lecturer. His work includes research on the contemporary reception of Dziga Vertov and the Russian avant-garde

If Vertov showed little interest in human psychology in his previous films and preferred instead—true to his training in Petersburg—to analyze the individual as a psychophysical bundle of reflexes, the issue of emotional depth and subjective experience is finally raised in *Three Songs About Lenin*. But even here, the psychological interiority that he explores is technically mediated. Made for the 10-year anniversary of Lenin's death, *Three Songs* pays little attention to the testimony of those contemporaries who were actually close to him. Lenin's widow Nadezhda Krupskaja, for example, appears in the film several times, but is never even identified as such. The real focus of Vertov's film are instead the new populations now coming to maturity a full decade after Lenin's death, people who never had any first hand encounter with him. Far away from Moscow, young women in Baku, Azerbaijan, lament that "We never once saw him" and "We never heard his voice."

From the very outset, Lenin was always already lost to them. 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 the women who never met him. Vertov restores Lenin to these latecomers through an orphic archive in celluloid. They respond in the collective voice of oral folk poetry.

At the same time that Vertov explores these women's intense cathexes of the leader, he also takes every opportunity to subvert the experience of presence. Lenin is everywhere in the film and yet he could not be more remote. Again and again the spectator is reminded that he or she is looking not at Lenin, but at his secondhand, mechanical mediation. Thus the picture of the bench near Lenin's house shown at the film's beginning is flagged by the intertitle "Here is the bench made famous in a photograph." Likewise, throughout the film Vertov flagrantly manipulates the footage of Lenin at political rallies, changing its speed and looping it, first forward and then backwards, reminding the spectator that she is looking not at the living Lenin but at a reproduction that has been subjected to post-production alteration. Finally, towards the end of the second song, canons thunder at Lenin's funeral, ushering in a moment of silence. At that moment the cinematic footage from the 1924 funeral procession comes to a halt in a series of uncanny still frames. Vertov intercuts these frozen images with close-ups of spectators who are not exactly frozen but instead stand still, blinking and unsteady, as the camera continues to roll. A contrast emerges between two kinds of stasis—the frozenness of the past versus the motionlessness of the present. The funeral sequence then concludes with group shot of Azerbaijan women sitting down all at once in the seats of a theater, an abrupt action that reminds the spectator that these women "never once saw him" and that they are in fact moviegoers like the rest of us. If we thought that we were watching funeral attendees in 1924, it turns out we were instead just looking at another one of the movie audiences that populate all of Vertov's films, from *One Sixth* to *Man and Enthusiasm*.

Session 24. VERTOV

Sunday, October 29 - 8:00 p.m.

Thursday, November 23 - 8:00 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 2



Dziga Vertov. *Kolibel'naja* [Lullaby]. Film, 1937. Courtesy of the Austrian Film Museum/From the Special Collection Dziga Vertov

Dziga Vertov*Kolibel'naja* [Lullaby], 1937

USSR, DigiBeta SD, b/w, 58'

Vertov's perpetual tormentor Vladimir Erofeev joked in 1934 that Vertov "had a woman on his hands," and indeed, for a number of years Vertov, a dedicated feminist, had been exploring possibilities for depicting the experience of the Soviet woman on screen. *Three Songs of Lenin*, which included passages on the education of women in Central Asia and an interview with the shock worker Mariia Belik, was one installment in this ongoing project. With *Lullaby* Vertov finally had the chance to commit an entire film to the subject of women—to their work on the production line, to their cultural contributions, to their military readiness, but above all to their reproductive labor. Buoyed by the popularity of his interview with Belik, which was celebrated as one of the most authentic and moving segments of *Three Songs*, Vertov collected interviews with women about their various exploits. Designed to convey personal experience and psychological interiority, these biographical interludes followed the Socialist Realist injunction to depict the "living person"—a program that Vertov had once mocked with films like *Man with a Movie Camera* (actual Russian title: *Person with a Movie Camera*). *Lullaby* returns to the theme of children from *Kino-Glaz* (1924), although here children are no longer a cipher of authenticity and spontaneity but model Soviet citizens in miniature: one delivers a virtuosic performance at the piano under the scrutiny of her piano teacher and another delivers a well-rehearsed speech before Stalin himself. The film is deeply conflicted: at the same time that *Lullaby* celebrates the agency and self-realization of women, its reassuring rehearsal of familiar Stalinist clichés and the tranquil rocking of its camerawork also gently lull the active spectator to sleep.

Session 25. ETHNOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY II**Monday, October 30 – 7:00 p.m.****Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium**

Viktor Turin. *Turksib – Stal'noj put'* [Turksib – The Steel Road]. Film, 1929. Courtesy of the Austrian Film Museum/From the Special Collection Dziga Vertov

Viktor Turin

Turksib – Stal'noj put' [Turksib – The Steel Road], 1929
USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 83'

After graduating from MIT in Boston and working briefly in Hollywood as a scenarist and actor, in 1922 Viktor Turin returned to Russia, where he began making films several years later. Made on a tight budget and in little time, his first documentary, *Turksib*, was far more successful than anticipated and remains his best-known film. Using staged scenes but without professional actors, *Turksib* was considered to be an extended *Kulturfilm*. With the most economical cinematic means, this ethnographic masterpiece depicts one of the major projects of the first Five-Year Plan, the construction of the railway between Turkestan and Siberia. As the self-proclaimed “flatteners of the mountain and the steppe,” the Bolsheviks arrive with their crew of engineers to build a railway that will connect two regions that are otherwise infinitely remote from one another. The construction of this commercial conduit will allow the cotton grown in the south to be traded for the wood from the north. Like *One Sixth of the World* (which Vertov claimed had been Turin's model), *Turksib* is about eradicating spatial distance by bringing people and things into circulation. This exchange entails other collateral benefits like literacy as well.

In its frequent depictions of clouds, sand storms, mist and steam, Turin's film discovers a fascinating visual equivalent for this victory of movement over inert geography. The construction of the railway, for example, pulverizes the earth into dust, sending its dry particulate up into the air and scumbling the boundary between ground and sky. The sand and dust, the clouds and cotton, dissolve the fixed contours of the landscape into a nebulous blur. In this regard the process of modernization depicted in *Turksib* is something that is profoundly anti-picturesque (the critic Jay Leyda called the film “anti-pretty”). If, as Deleuze suggested, Vertov realized an experience of “gaseous perception” through a montage practice that leapt from shot to shot, Turin realizes this diffuse and decentered vision within the shot itself.

Session 26. HEROES OF A NATION

Thursday, November 2 – 7:00 p.m.

Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini Building. Auditorium



Esfir Shub. *Komsomol –shef elektrifikatsii* [Komsomol: The Boss of the Electrification]. Film, 1932

Esfir Shub

Komsomol –shef elektrifikatsii [Komsomol: The Boss of the Electrification], 1932
USSR, 35 mm, b/w, 70'

Made with the same Shorin sound system used in Vertov's *Enthusiasm*, Shub's film opens in a production studio where an orchestra is led by a soloist who plays an early electronic instrument invented in Soviet Russia called the Theremin. We see the bouncing waves of the film's optical track. The performance is brought to an end, however, by a young Komsomol member at the studio control panel, who clicks the "stop" switch, prompting the film to leave the confines of the recording studio and move out of doors. True to the film's title, the Komsomol (Communist Youth League) is the boss here, deciding not just when and what takes place in front of the camera, but also where it takes place. And this film, faithful to the documentary ethos of authentic location recording, refuses to be confined to the controlled and artificial environment of the recording studio. "We have little interest in what is being done in the studio—in those hermetically sealed theatrical boxes with microphones, amplifiers, etc." Shub wrote in 1929. And so, after the opening sequence, *Komsomol: The Boss of Electrification*, like *Enthusiasm*, takes the spectator-auditor out into the cacophony of the world—the chatter of telephone operators, the noise of demonstrations, the reverberations of bells on the street. But unlike in *Enthusiasm*, this noise eventually cedes to the individual human voice, which emerges to offer testimony and political declarations.

This testimony is offered above all by the Komsomol themselves. "A country should know its heroes," the film announces at the beginning, and then proceeds to present a series of portraits of leading figures in the youth movement. In the spirit of popular Socialist hagiography, many of these concrete exemplars are identified by name, the achievements of a certain Klimov or Dmitrusenko recorded for all time. *Komsomol* captures voice and language, but Shub anchors this speech in concrete sources in the screen. We haven't yet arrived at the extradiegetic, authoritative voiceovers that will become a regular feature of the documentary mode in the 30s. As she put it, *Komsomol* treats sound as an "organic raw material just like film footage," rather than as a disembodied acoustic phenomenon. The orchestra making soundtrack music and the singer in the radio station are both visible. Shub even reveals the awkward reality of the process of filming, at one point showing herself on camera conducting the interviews and at another capturing the discomfort of one speaker who is blinded by the artificial lighting used by the crew. In just a few more years, these residual traces of the facture of filmmaking will disappear from Soviet documentary.

Session 27. EPILOGUE

Sunday, November 5 – 8:00 p.m.

Tuesday, November 7 – 8:00 p.m.

Filmoteca Española. Cine Doré. Hall 2

Esfir Shub. *Ispaniya* [Spain]. Film, 1939**Esfir Shub***Ispaniya* [Spain], 1939

USSR, 35 mm, silent, b/w, 85'

— Session hosted by **Sonia García López**, film historian and professor at Carlos III University of Madrid. Author of *Spain is Us. La Guerra Civil española en el cine del Popular Front (1936/1939)* (2013)

This last session expounds on the similarities and filmic connections between Spain and the USSR during the Spanish Civil War. Not only the armed conflict filled a mobilizing and sentimental space among Soviet filmmakers, but it became an inexhaustible archive of collective resistance and the battlefields in the 20th century. The footage shot during the conflict by Roman Karmen and Boris Makaseiev excels for its proximity to the events and its gifted capacity for depiction. Their work became an enduring source of raw material for films produced by both contending sides, as those of Luis Buñuel and José Luis Sáenz de Heredia. Vertov himself would partially use this footage for *Lullaby*, but it was Esfir Shub who arranged and dramatized this huge archive into a folk feminist tale about the Spanish Civil War. Edited along with the popular songs and *coplas* of *No pasarán*, Dolores Ibárruri—*La Pasionaria*—emerges as a leader among equals while the portraits of militiawomen stand out from the crowds. The massacre and mass exodus of children appear as the most heinous war crime before the gaze of goddess Cybele, turned into a Republican allegory. Here the ability to narrate and assemble historical cinema through montage reaches its maturity.

Spain was devised under two difficult circumstances. On the one hand, the 1939 German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact meant that anti-Nazi comments had to be removed from the narration, which might help explaining absences so glaring as the bombing of Gernika. Even though images are not subject to such checks, as illustrated by the overlapping skull and the Nazi swastika crossed out by Spanish farmers. On the other hand, the film rises to the challenge of telling the story of a war shortly after the war has been lost. And it does it by rebuilding an ideal of modernity and egalitarianism that revolves around people. The start of the film with Galician peasants and Valencian farmers communing with the Atlantic and Mediterranean landscapes is followed by a metropolitan interval in Madrid and then kicks against the black Spain of religious bigotry and military authoritarianism. This very same call to identity and popular resistance was one of the subject matters in the Soviet documentary that most harshly criticized productivism and the ideal of the machine. And it was also paramount to the international legitimization of the Spanish Republic, as can be seen in the regionalist plea of the 1937 Spanish Pavilion at the Paris Exhibition. Interestingly enough, in the cinema theater built just across from Picasso's *Guernica* at the Spanish Pavilion, Carlos Velo would reread the footage from Karmen and Makaseiev in order to speak about an ancestral Galicia.

**Museo Nacional
Centro de Arte
Reina Sofía**

Sabatini Building

Santa Isabel, 52

Nouvel Building

Ronda de Atocha s/n

28012 Madrid

Tel. (+34) 91 774 10 00

Cine Doré

Santa Isabel, 3

28012 Madrid

Tel. ticket office (+34) 91 369 11 25

Venues:

Museo Reina Sofía.

Sabatini Building. Auditorium

Free admission

Filmoteca Española.

Cine Doré. Halls 1 and 2

Tickets: 2,5 €

Curatorship:

Devin A. Fore, professor at Princeton University, and film scholar specialized in cinema and image theory within the Soviet avant-garde

With special thanks to:

Austrian Film Museum, Vienna and Gosfilmofond of Russia, Moscow

All the films are projected in the original version with Spanish subtitles

NIPO: 036-17-016-2