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OCTOBER

11

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Essays in Honor of Jay Leyda

*Walker Evans's Message from the Interior:
A Reading*

Dr. Crase and Mr. Clair

An Interview

*Film's Institutional Mode of Representation
and the Soviet Response*

Image and Title in Avant-Garde Cinema

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Jay Leyda: A Portfolio of Photographs

A Brief Chronology

A Bibliography

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Cover photograph: La Sortie des Usines Lumière, 1895.

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MIKHAIL ABRAMOVICH KAUFMAN was born in 1897 in Bialystok, at that time Russian territory, and moved with his family to Moscow during the German invasion. After the demobilization of the Soviet Union he worked as a cameraman, first in newsreel and later in documentary film. With the production of *Kino-Pravda* #6 in 1922, Kaufman became the principal cameraman of his brother Dziga Vertov; their collaboration continued through 1929. Kaufman went on to produce his own films, including *Moscow* and *Spring*, and he has remained active as a documentary filmmaker until today. The interview published here was recorded in Moscow in January 1976 with the aid of Naum Kleiman, Curator of the Eisenstein Museum, who acted as interpreter.

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This eleventh issue of *October* presents a collection of essays in affectionate homage to Jay Leyda on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. We honor the range and integrity of his scholarship and celebrate its uniqueness, realizing that the material offered here does not represent that range with any degree of completeness.

Film, photography, and the graphic arts have played a central role in Leyda's work in the fifty years since his arrival in New York and his debut as assistant in film and photography to Ralph Steiner. His subsequent work as a photographer is represented by a portfolio of photographs, some of them selected from his exhibition of camera portraits at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1933. His published work, ranging from *Kino*, the celebrated history of Soviet film, and the translations of the quintessential Eisenstein texts to his contributions to Melville and Dickinson scholarship, is for the first time assembled in a complete bibliography.

Many aspects of Leyda's activities are not, however, susceptible to the compression and abstraction inherent in bibliography and biography: thus, the care and inventiveness of his work at the Museum of Modern Art Film Department during its first years, his resolve to build an archive there, for which he assembled the large collection of documents known as the Eisenstein Collection. It is not perhaps so generally known that the museum's first important holdings in the work of Alexander Rodchenko were also acquired by Leyda, and that his close friendship and working association with Alfred Barr were instrumental in defining the museum's role in film scholarship, now acknowledged as central in the film culture of this country. In this fiftieth year of the museum's existence, homage to Leyda has a double resonance.

One quality of Leyda's work commands the general admiration of colleagues and students: the will to enlarge constantly the field of scholarship, to widen its scope through the invention of more sensitive and flexible methods. Both this and the capacity to stimulate inventive research in others have in the past decade characterized his work as teacher and historian.

One other dimension of his career merits our special interest: the consistency with which he has conjoined the scholarly vocation with an active involvement in history. It was, no doubt, his developing sense of aesthetic and scholarly enterprise as inscribed within the movement of history that led the young man of twenty-three to apply for entrance to Eisenstein's classes at the Moscow Film School. Here is a man who has witnessed firsthand the postrevolutionary development of the Soviet Union and of China, and a scholar who has worked in the Staatliches Filmarchiv der D.D.R.: these have given him a unique vantage point for a lucid understanding of relations between East and West in our time. Leyda's contributions to a reading of our culture are, in their multiplicity, the fruit of that involvement; they testify that the field of scholarship is, at its most vital, congruent with the arena of history.

THE EDITORS

Walker Evans's *Message from the Interior*: A Reading *

ALAN TRACHTENBERG

Neither photographs nor the experience of them are innocent acts. A photographer never confronts an empty canvas, an abstract pictorial potentiality, but always a world already shaped, already understood. Reshaping, understanding anew in light of previously undetected concepts, is the most strenuous, most originating work of serious photography. How it performs this work, how photography achieves meaning: criticism stakes out its own domain in posing these questions. But in its appropriation of a secondary act of intelligence—making clear what is already latently clear in the photograph—criticism does no more than follow in the tracks of its object. The practice of photography generates the practice of photographic criticism. Clearly, a significant criticism (both conceptually and historically) began to arise only after photographers ceased their pursuit of a painterly image and turned in their own work toward solving problems of authentically *photographic* meaning. In the early modernist period solutions took various forms: theories of equivalence, of thingness, of objectivity. At this stage the materials of criticism were provided in reflective statements by photographers themselves, for example, Stieglitz, Strand, Weston. A theory (albeit embryonic) of a strictly visual meaning, of intuition pure and simple, underlay their most evocative remarks, and vestiges of that notion still flow as a deep current through contemporary criticism.

Whatever the merits of the view of the photograph as a purely intuitive act of perception, that idea has blocked attention to other sources of meaning. The failure of early modernist photographers to speak of any practice but their own, and of critics to raise their eyes to the photographic environment as such, has bequeathed huge regions of neglect. Critics employing linguistic and semiotic analysis have begun to map these regions in studies of advertising and news photographs, and in their attention to ideological messages. Their work makes plain the limits of a criticism founded upon intuition alone. In Kant's words,

* An earlier version of this essay was prepared for a conference, "Toward New Histories of Photography," sponsored by the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, May 1979.

intuitions and concepts are inseparable: "The understanding cannot see, the sense cannot think. By their union only can knowledge be produced." *To see* the world is also to know it; but knowledge arrives in consciousness only by a marriage of the sensuous "thing itself" and the concept which informs our perception of it.

One practice of photography and mode of meaning that lies within regions yet uncharted by criticism is the book—the presentation of image after image in the physical form of a book, analogous to a sequence of words. This practice has a prehistory in illuminated manuscripts and in the earliest printed books, in which engravings and letterpress text were combined into a single entity. Its photographic history proper begins very early, with William Henry Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* (1844), and continues steadily. But not until the twentieth century did it emerge as a form for serious, intentional photographs. Walker Evans was one of the first to practice this form, and *American Photographs* (1938) not only brings to first fruition his own earlier efforts in sequential statement (his Brooklyn Bridge and Havana projects) but also clarifies the legibility of such a form. *Message from the Interior*, a book of twelve images published in 1966,¹ brings the form to another level of clarity and self-consciousness.

I.

What does the reading of photographs entail? What are the presuppositions that enable a reading of *Message from the Interior*? The general question informs the specific answers. A reading that is no more than a looking will be as blind as a vision that pretends to conceptual innocence. "Reading" itself implies a desire for, an expectation of, comprehension. We read for meaning. The meaning of a photograph has been thought to lie or to originate in the answer to the question, "What does this photograph represent?" The application of linguistic theory to photographs, however, shows that *what* a photograph represents is inseparable from *how* it achieves representation. In discussions of how, two lines of argument have distinguished themselves. One maintains that insofar as a photograph is a picture, its method of representation—and thus its relation to the object or scene represented—is no different from the method and the relation of any other kind of picture; that is, the representation is also a subjective conception, an interpretation, a rendering. The other, more traditional, point of view argues that a photograph is in fact a unique kind of picture, unique in that it possesses a more immediate or primitive relation to what it depicts, a relation closer to the physical model of cause and effect than to interpretation. Moreover, some critics have also maintained that photographs employ a distinctive and unique method of conveying themselves as immediate representations of a "real" world, as communications without a code of syntax (Roland Barthes).

1. Published by The Eakins Press, New York, 1966. The photographs are reproduced here on pages 18-29.

The controversy trails off into intricate issues of epistemology and ontology and may seem irrelevant to the practical criticism of photographs. Indeed, sacrificed to the exigencies felt by critics and photographer-writers to invoke metaphysical justifications of their point of view, practical reading has suffered throughout the history of photographic criticism. A relevant background to the "book" reading I will propose here is the fact that it has no background, no precedent in photographic criticism. The presence of an informing idea of the book in Evans's work has been neglected by critics in their effort to describe the character of his individual pictures as signs of the character of his personal vision. And the apparent documentary mode of his pictures (surely because of the great importance his work has assumed in recent years as precursive of a contemporary notion of what is serious in photography) has made his pictures seem test cases in the controversy over meaning in photographs. Do his pictures yield transparent access to the world as it is? Are they impersonal, privileged acts of immediacy? Or are they pictures only incidentally achieved through photography, pictures that make visible the calculating hand and interpreting eye of the maker rather than any putative reality?

Posed in this either/or fashion, the question drastically simplifies the problem. It assumes that pictures make simple claims upon our attention, either as copies of the world as it is or as pure expressions of the artist's vision. Suppose we assume the first and then discover that the photographer in fact posed his subjects, moved furniture, used artificial light. Is the picture then art and not documentary, false rather than true? The absurdity of such a dilemma arises from overly simple alternatives. But the dilemma itself points to a conceptual predicament that has haunted photography from the moment seriousness or the making of art appeared as a motive. If art is understood as transcendence, can it be achieved in a medium confined to *copying* the world? Alternatively, if photography is just as plastic as painting or drawing (and thus eligible for transcendence), then where does its authentic uniqueness lie? Why make photographs, except as a shortcut to something else? The theory of straight photography and equivalence proposed by Stieglitz, Strand, and Weston seemed a way out of this dilemma by restraining the copy to the obedience of personal vision. But the way out then confined all other practices of photography, documentary especially, to mere unreflective copying, and thus to the status of a bad conscience, a dirty underside of the medium. Was there no way of reaching transcendence in the mode (or what Evans called the *style*) of documentary, of achieving art without releasing the photograph from the hold of quotidian verisimilitude?

Evans's concern with this question appears as early as the brief essay from 1931 in which he suggests a project for himself, a "photographic editing of society," that might combine the "poetry" of Atget's "lyrical understanding of the street" with Sander's "type studies": "a case of the camera looking in the right direction among people." I have commented on this project in more detail

elsewhere.² There is also evidence that even at this early date Evans already included the book in his conception of photographic meaning, in the process whereby an "editing of society" can become a personal "poetry" without loss of social grounding. *American Photographs* is the first seriously ambitious effort in photography, as far as I know, to pose the question and to venture an answer in strictly photographic terms. It is there, in the intricate passages among the sited images of that sequence, that we should look for Evans's conception of how photographs yield meaning.

Because of its more limited ambition and its more easily encompassed range, *Message from the Interior* offers a more convenient opportunity for analysis. Moreover this work catches Evans at a decidedly reflective moment in which the meaning of his own project seemed uppermost in his conception of the sequence. What role does the notion of the book play within that idea? We might begin, then, by asking what book itself means within the work.

Insofar as they center on questions of representation, theories of meaning have failed to take into account, and to account for, the most simply perceived feature of their object: the sheer *being* of photographs, their materiality or thingness. Of what do we speak when we speak of a photograph? An emulsified image adhering to but detachable from (as in a slide projection) a piece of paper of determinate size and shape? Is it the tangible or the optical property that comprises the photograph? Moreover, what connections exist between the thingness of the object and its *work* as an image? Books can be taken, first, as a category of material being. *Message* fulfills this category in the most obvious, least problematic sense: it consists of title page, dedication page, epigraph facing the first image, twelve pages each inscribed with a single image and interleaved with protective tissue, and a list of brief identifying captions following the pictures; the concluding item is a brief, single-page essay by John Szarkowski. Also obvious, simple, and nonproblematic is the presupposition that users of this object will recognize it as a book and treat it accordingly, for example, will take its pages in sequence from left to right. But the concrete form of the object implies another level of awareness: produced in a square format (about 14 x 14"), with a white-on-black cover, the book form itself seems a commentary on its contents. Its design is an abstract sign for the photograph. It thus presents itself as a self-conscious vehicle or context for photographs, and because we can read in the book's form further signs of qualities such as taste, elegance, and simplicity, the vehicle holds an implicit point of view toward its contents, and toward photographs as such.

But what differences arise from these recognitions of the obvious? Admittedly, the differences work at a level deep enough to submerge the specific work of books in a general truth about mediation: the vehicle or context for viewing

2. In "The Artist of the Real," *The Presence of Walker Evans*, Boston, The Institute of Contemporary Art, 1978, pp. 17-26. Reprinted in *Afterimage* (December 1978), 10-13.

images impinges upon the viewing. But even this general and most often unconscious feature of *any* reading wants articulation. The social concept of books, the cultural history of uses of books, the institutional forms for the production of books—these matters lie like dumb weights within the physical form; even in his privacy, the reader becomes a historical person in the act of becoming the subject of this object. This chain of mediations ultimately implicates language itself, the supreme social production which permits books to arise in the first place. And it is of course at the juncture of books and language, at the point where books arouse the expectation of a verbal sequence, that *Message* and all books of pictures without text violate the form. A book made exclusively of pictures immediately involves itself in the dialectic within culture at large between words and visual images. It is doubtful that this dialectic ever resolves itself into either a purely verbal or a purely visual experience, so that a book of pictures remains suspended on a sharp-edged dilemma: is the sequence a narrative, a picture-story? Or is it only analogically a *reading* experience? Any book of pictures calls to mind a whole class of such books, and since most picture books do indeed aim at an easy resolution in the form of either story or discrete visual items, a book like *Message*, which places images in sequence without an explicit story, defines itself against the prevailing mode of its own class. The notion of the book thus invites certain outside pressures into the interior experience of *Message*.

Book names a general practice, then, which determines the specific practice of *this* book. The practice is so thoroughly present as the ground—indeed the material ground—of the sequence that we cannot even *see* the images outside of its pressures unless, of course, we choose to ignore book and sequence altogether and take the pictures piecemeal—certainly one of the choices the class of picture books does allow. Wittgenstein warns against such a choice: "There is always the danger of wanting to find an expression's meaning by contemplating the expression itself, and the frame of mind in which one uses it, instead of always thinking of the practice." *Message from the Interior* is a particular practice: twelve photographs presented between covers in a reading sequence. The entity of the book (including the sequence, the placement of images) mediates our experience of each picture. Moreover, in this case the book form carries an additional charge of commentary, for it permits Evans to reflect upon the form itself, to project it before the viewer (more starkly and insistently than in the fuller, more complex *American Photographs*) as both question and answer to the problem of meaning.

II.

Message from the Interior appeared at a crucial juncture in Walker Evans's career: his departure from *Fortune* magazine in 1966 and his assumption of a position as professor of photography at Yale University. Along with *Many Are Called*, the book of subway pictures also published in 1966, the book marked Evans's reappearance in the realm of free or noncommissioned photography.

There is no doubt he took the occasion to make a deliberate statement (or restatement) of his identity as an artist-in-photography, a poised and composed clarification of the character of his work. It is clear from Evans's many lectures and interviews from 1966 to his death in 1975 that he wished to make the character of his work as unmistakable as possible, and especially to rinse it clean of the notion that during the Depression it had served a particular social and political goal. He wished, in short, to assert and explain his own autonomy. And if *Message*, published by a small, independent press (Leslie Katz's Eakins Press), is at the furthest remove from the assignments and layouts at *Fortune*, it also continues (though quite implicitly) Evans's struggle against the label of FSA or social photographer. By the early 1960s, especially with the republication of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in 1960 (and a paperback edition in 1966), the label seemed fast: Evans represented documentary photography of the thirties, a photography of searing images of poverty and social distress. Evans took a complex stance toward this view of his work; *American Photographs* itself can in fact be taken as an argument against the simplicity of the label. In public statements Evans was at pains both to affirm the "documentary" aspect of his work and to deny firmly complicity with New Deal politics. By documentary, he explained, he meant a *style*, not partisan commitment. He did not deny his own leftist politics of the thirties but vigorously denied that he made pictures for the sake of positive social change, often arguing that belief in such efficacy is fatuous.

Eventually a modified image took hold. Supported by Evans's own remarks, we now view him differently; as against the passion, anguish, and radical commitment of Agee, we see Evans as detached, fastidious, a virtual "connoisseur of chaos." And, of course, against the pragmatically political and bureaucratic Roy Stryker, we have an image of Evans as a "romantic artist," bristling at all restraint. Apparently free of politics and social commentary, *Message* might be seen as an item in Evans's own campaign to wash impure elements from his reputation. But both the revised image and a strictly aesthetic reading of *Message* fall short; the politics of Evans's work, and the deeper resonances of his style of documentary, are more elusive, more ambiguous, than either image would suggest. Taking *Message* as a book, as a considered discourse upon not only its own pictures but the whole of Evans's work, can help us untangle the relations among politics, documentary, and art in that work—not for the sake of dispelling ambiguity, but of bringing it into focus.

The title itself, and its calculated bafflements, initiate the discourse. Interior of what? The spaces depicted in the pictures? The artist's own inner realm, or the viewer's? The interior of the *book*? And *message*: do we take its meaning as news, intelligence, tidings, or *meaning* itself? The riddle of the title is further complicated by the epigraph from Matisse: "Exactitude is not truth." Is this perhaps the message? If so, the implications for the most common notion of documentary are unmistakable. If in its exactitude—the presumed basis of documentary and of Evans's own work—documentary cannot be credited as truth, then perhaps

Message intends a revision of, or a backing away from, earlier claims. Is the book then less a reflection upon the past than a turning in a new, less confident direction? The epigraph carries more weight than usual in this taut ensemble of picture and laconic statement; indeed it formulates an ambiguity at the heart of the book as a whole. "There is an inherent truth," wrote Matisse in the full passage in which the epigraph appears (a catalogue essay written for an exhibition in Philadelphia in 1948), "which must be disengaged from the outward appearance of the object to be represented. This is the only truth that matters." But "outward appearance" is precisely the realm of the photograph. In what sense might an "inherent truth" be *disengagable* from the surfaces recorded by the photograph? Does the message of the epigraph point to a limit in photography, and thus to an ironic denial of interiors altogether? Or is Evans merely employing an elegant bit of rhetoric in order to associate himself verbally with a subjectivity denied to him in photography? The discourse thus opens upon a bafflement and plunges the viewer directly into the enduring controversy about the aesthetic character of the medium. Can photography achieve transcendent art?

A further bafflement dawns upon the reader—the reader, that is, who expects a "normal" book of photographs. In such a book the coherence of pictures would normally rest on either a unity provided by the notion of the photographer's oeuvre (as in a monograph covering a period of time), a unity of place (as in Paul Strand's several books or Edward Weston's *My Camera on Point Lobos*), of theme (e.g., *The Family of Man*), or of story (a direct linkage of image and text, as in Weegee's *Naked City*). In this case, *interior* seems to name an ostensible ground of coherence: not only a unity of subject but also of genre—with a nod toward Vermeer as well as a staple mode of family and tourist albums. Ranging in time from 1931 to 1962 and in place from Florida to Maine, are not these pictures examples of a familiar kind of documentation of American interior spaces? In their faithfulness to the vernacular mode they indeed seem as *exact*—and as confident in their exactitude—as any unselfconscious photograph. What William Carlos Williams noted about the pictures in *American Photographs* in 1938 might well apply here: "A record of what was in that place for Mr. Evans to see and what Mr. Evans saw there in that time. They particularize, as Atget did for the Paris of his day. By this the eye, and consequently the mind, are induced to partake of the list that has been prepared—that we may know it." But in this case the epigraph seems to prohibit our taking the list as a mere inventory. The "it" we are invited to "know" is not a group of twelve discrete places, but a message—and a message that refuses to declare itself in any direct, literal way.

In this ensemble, then, Evans's exactitude elicits questions only latent within the formal structuring of image upon image in the earlier book. What is the message of an exactitude which is not truth? What exactly is exactitude capable of representing? And what message lies waiting to be produced in the actual series, the placement of images, the unities and relations, the constant refinement of mediation of one image by another, of each by all? The book declares at the very

least the message that truth lies elsewhere than in exactitude alone, that belonging to the whole, truth is *absent* (or partial) in each picture. It must be pursued and constructed in pursuit as the elusive picture of the whole. The pictures themselves pursue what always eludes exact definition, each picture counting on the others for a cumulative, composite meaning. In this procedure Evans follows his major precursor, Atget. A message Evans might have read in Atget could well have been that each photograph is finally incomplete—its incompleteness all the more powerful a presence the more *exact* and inventorylike the picture seems. Especially in black and white, where color is the first, most insistent absence, what is *missing* in the picture exerts itself at the edges of the frame—not so much to remind us of the radical act of spatial and temporal cropping performed by every photograph as to bring an awareness of the missing into the experience of the picture. Both Atget and Evans produced their work in sequence—Atget's album and Evans's book—but neither attempted a cinematic rendering (as did Moholy-Nagy, for example) of a coherent sequence of events in time.³ Instead, their sequences deflect any search for the missing from an investigation of what lies just beyond the borders—in the next room or the piece of wall excluded by the frame—and toward a realm that is itself brought into existence, produced, by the sequence itself—an immanent but unseeable whole that governs the entire group of pictures. Neither Evans nor Atget presumes to put us in touch with a pure reality, a thing in itself; their cropping always affirms its own arbitrariness and contingency. And the world they characteristically picture is a world already made over into a meaning that precedes the photograph: a meaning inscribed by work, by use, as inhabitation, as artifact. Their pictures are signs representing signs, integers in implicit chains of signification that come to rest only in major systems of social meaning: codes of households, streets, public places. In each picture potency resides in a withholding of the ultimate sign: like staircases or crooked alleys bending out of the frame.

Both exactitude of representation and the genre of interior are marks of Evans's claim upon a history of photographic practice crystallized in the work of Atget. Atget is the great progenitor, and Evans defines himself through difference. A major difference lies in the principle of ordering: Atget's album and Evans's book. Atget took his categories—interiors, streets, monuments—from the coherence of his subject: Paris. The city is the tangible immanence, the ultimate sign taken for granted in each of his pictures and in his arranged album sequences. Evans could claim no corresponding term of unity, no comparable whole to be called upon with historical confidence. The absent in his pictures is thus more severe than the incomplete signification of Atget's pictures. The missing principle of unity is like Emily Dickinson's "Missing All":

The Missing All—prevented Me
From missing minor Things.

3. I am indebted to Molly Nesbit's excellent unpublished essay on Atget, "Reading Rooms."

If nothing larger than a World's
 Departure from a Hinge—
 Or Sun's extinction, be observed—
 'Twas not so large that I
 Could lift my Forehead from my work
 For Curiosity.

In the absence of an All—for Dickinson, an apocalyptic, world-ending All—“minor things” engaged by “my work” suffice. And it is the work of a poet and artist to attend to such minor things, such as the twelve images drawn from everyday life, which suffice precisely because they are not sustained by an obviously immanent whole. Like Williams's “quidditas”—the commonplace details of here and now, unsanctioned by traditional ideas of art—Evans's “minor things” must find or invent other grounds for significance. How to arrive at a message through an exactitude which points to no explicit elsewhere: this defines the task of reading this book.

III.

Message describes neither a specific place nor several places related by space and time. Each image constitutes a realm of its own. Nor does the temporal order of the sequence itself represent any exterior order (such as the chronology of the prints themselves). The temporal order of viewing makes no narrative claims. The iconic relations among the images—the names of spaces and objects—comprise no clear progression. Linear form gives way (as we shall see) to circular form. No prepared meaning lies in wait to trap our attention. Sequence itself names no more than a potential activity on the part of viewer or reader: the activity of apprehension, of making sense of title, epigraph, pictures in their order of presentation.

Picture One inaugurates apprehension on a threshold: an open door beckoning us toward a recessed interior, toward the ultimate recess of light. The mirror by the door is another access to the interior, another image of light formed as image. We accumulate images on this threshold, images of substance—wood, paper, cloth—transformed into habitation, into human space and dimension, into objects. In the pure frontality of observation, we are present as witness to accomplished vernacular form. Moreover, in the two images of light, the mirror and glowing window, we witness the material medium of the event itself—the making of the photograph. The picture confronts us with another transformation, that of light into image. Space and objects signify a common intentionality which casts its own light upon the photograph's—a maker's transformation of the revelatory power of light into coherent image, into constructed picture. Light, caught in mirror and window, thus signifies the very activity of the picture, and the picture itself signifies its own grounding in a singular event—the placement of a camera, the release of a shutter. It takes us to a window and mirrors itself in the act.

Picture Two removes us rapidly from the threshold of an eloquently simple and accomplished interior to a ruin, a barely legible vestige of a unidimensional space. Here we face signs of ravage, of fire and time. Decayed plaster, charred remains of molding, underlying slats—these elements of the material ground of shaped interiors remain as traces. Once an inside (the corner of a room), the space now opens to an outside; new growth of ivy marks the place as a realm where nature and culture meet in a relation signified by the decomposition of form—and the recomposition achieved by the photograph. The picture thus foreshortens what the viewer discovers as a thematic construct in the book as a whole: signs of art entangled with signs of time, human shaping and ordering sharing its scene with erosion and decay. The polarity dissolves into a studied ambiguity as light assumes the power of a figure in its own right as a sign of time (signified by the calendar in picture Four, the clock in picture Nine, and by shadows throughout) and a sign of the making of art in photography. Picture Two makes manifest what is already latent in our viewing of picture One: the recognition that space ordered is matter ordered, held in only temporary suspension against natural loss and deterioration.

The temporariness of form measures the temporality of the artwork. In picture Three, an image of a relic, we are caught in a fragile balance between form clinging to its elegance against the erosion of neglect. The iconic message unmistakably extends the meaning; the breakfast room of once-grand Belle Grove is a vestige of a social order that persists only in the form of a relic. The interior throbs with associations, unspecified and unprohibited. And light, constrained by the closed shutters, becomes a glowing filament that recalls and recapitulates the glowing window of picture One and once again reveals its ambiguity, its allegiance to both the process of decay and the recovery marked by the photograph. Light composes the vision of decomposition. Light displays the "art" of the room resisting the light of time; in the photograph, the display itself makes seeing into a corresponding art, equally fragile and frangible.

Each successive image presents itself for similar reading. Each displays a space already composed into a scene, a space inscribed as habitation. After the stark pronouncements of the opening three pictures, pictures Four through Ten portray active habitation, living inscriptions in the form of mantel and wall arrangements, made and unmade beds, a "Secretary's Report" in picture Five, chairs prepared for sitting in picture Eight. They also portray vernacular appropriations of formal art: the modish Empire clock and fleur-de-lis glass designs in Four, the carved organ in Five, the guitar in Six, the plaster figurines above the doorway in Seven, the floral patterns in Eight, the cheap print above the mantel in Nine, the stuffed animals in Ten. Such items of art, of representation, embody powers of imagination manifest both in the shaped interiors as such and in the photographs themselves; they place art as cohabitant, as living presence. And they prepare for the final picture, in which we stand out-of-doors before an enclosed space, a circus wagon engraved with an image of the muse Calliope.

The final image releases accumulated implications, formulates them into a sign of a message. We read the image as a destination arrived at through prior readings, a meaning that earns itself through attention to sequence. The circus bandwagon demands we recover what precedes as prior, as sequential process. And in recovery we must reckon with another iconic feature of the pictures, their representation of worlds of *social* designation. The sequence orchestrates images clearly marked as rural and urban, working-class and middle-class, respectable and Bohemian. Each world projects its sociality in terms peculiar to it: the solitary light bulb of the New York City kitchen; the unpainted walls of the Alabama country fireplace. This social specificity grounds the tokens of art, or of artful making, within particular milieus. We are struck less by contrasts than by unities; in each realm we encounter signs of an activity of ordering, of imaginative shaping peculiar to that realm yet sharing a common principle with every other realm. Only in picture Seven do we detect disjunctive signs that might be read as oppressive, signs of an interior withheld from comprehension. Still, the bulb declares light, and the interior within the picture displays an artful arrangement of daily implements. In each interior we recognize the habitation of an idea of quotidian order.

The social range leads us to a kind of populist vision. The ordering of a sharecropper's fireplace is as much a sign of imagination as the elegantly sculpted parlor chairs in Oldwick, New Jersey. But the range itself also affects our sense of the photographer's own place within the sequence. Outside of each portrayal, he belongs to no particular realm and by that fact alone stands in a detached yet interested relation to society as such, a relation of curious observer. But he is an observer whose observations themselves take on the character of revelations. The vernacular art represented in the pictures is revealed through the sequence as the common, commonplace activity of several social realms, as the very activity that constitutes each realm. Shaping against the intransigence of time stands revealed as the essential "interior" activity of society as such. Adopting the calm, intransigent style, the open and direct frontality, of the vernacular itself, the pictures replace themselves within the worlds which are their origin. The picturemaker typifies the making of commonplace order out of the materials of nature, which the sequence reveals as the imaginative essence of culture. The pictures in sequence bestow awareness upon their represented worlds. They disclose worlds shaped by desire and themselves as models of such shaping. Thus the book makes conscious what is latent throughout: the idea that art, the constructive energy of culture, inhabits the realms of everyday life.

The shift to an exterior point of view in the final picture begins in the preceding image of the ticket booth of Kingston Station. Here the interior contains its own opposite—the arrow pointing away, out of the picture, to an outside road, to movement and placelessness. (Tickets also imply schedules, another order of time.) The bandwagon is also a figure of the road, its wheel signifying an ultimate detachment from any particular place. Picture Twelve

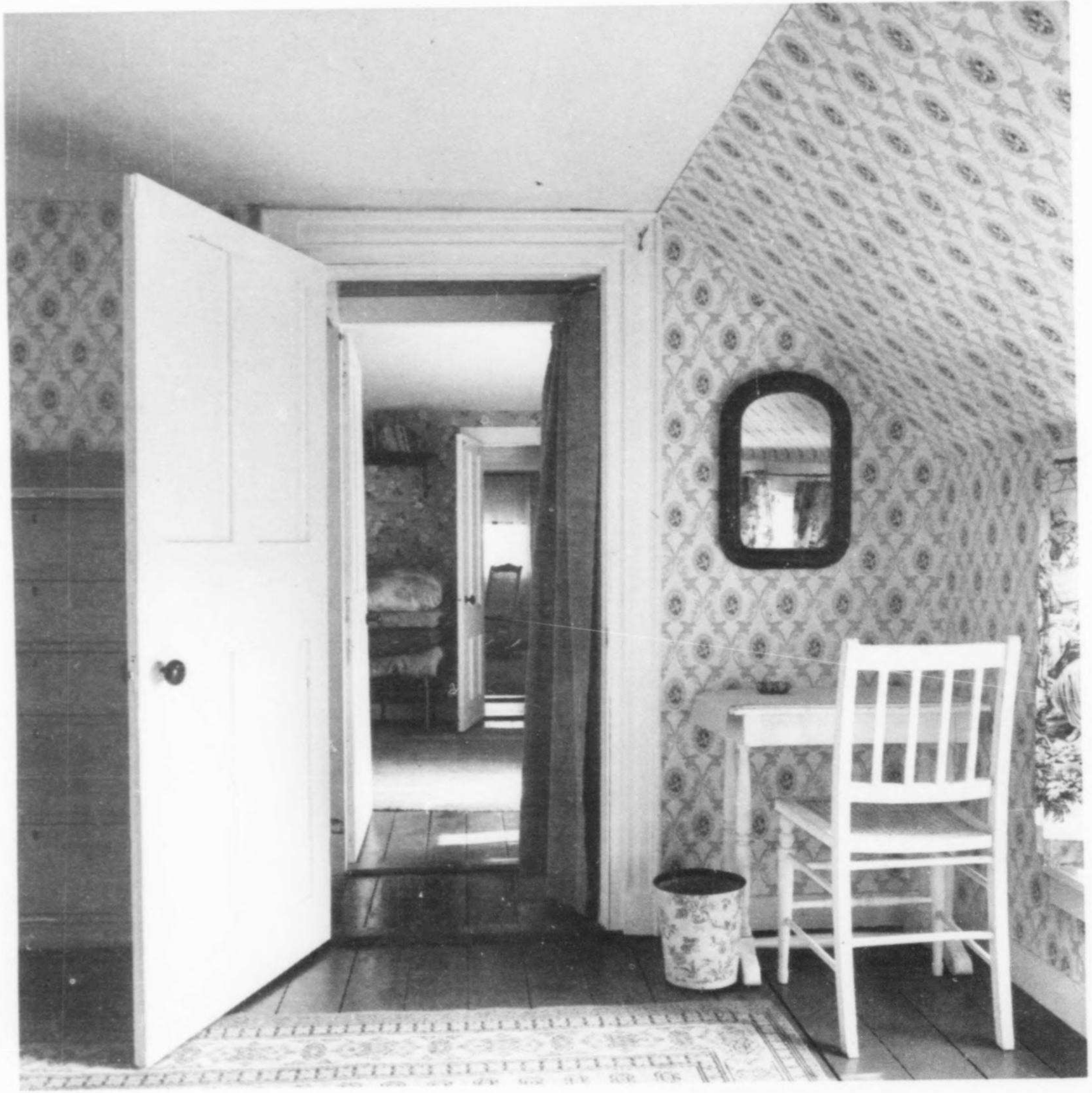
recapitulates the book: simple material shaped as art suffering the ravages of time, yet surviving as a relic of the gesture toward a humble transcendence. Both the bandwagon and its muse-inscription represent that gesture. The vernacular rendering of Renaissance motifs better known in marble—lyre, attendant winged creature, baroque arabesque—represents the imaginative powers displayed in all the pictures. Carved in perishable wood, the sign gathers additional force—the survival of an idea of form, of imagination, against nature. Art stands forth from matter and registers both its dependence and its transcendence. But the message here is not simply an iteration of an ancient theme. For the sign of art is inscribed upon another, the bandwagon on wheels—an interior representing motion and play, the fantasy and pleasure that makes *wherever* the circus sets down and pitches its tent a place of its own. By this recognition the book declares itself a similar scene of play, the making of a space for the work of art (the only work that is also play) to show itself.

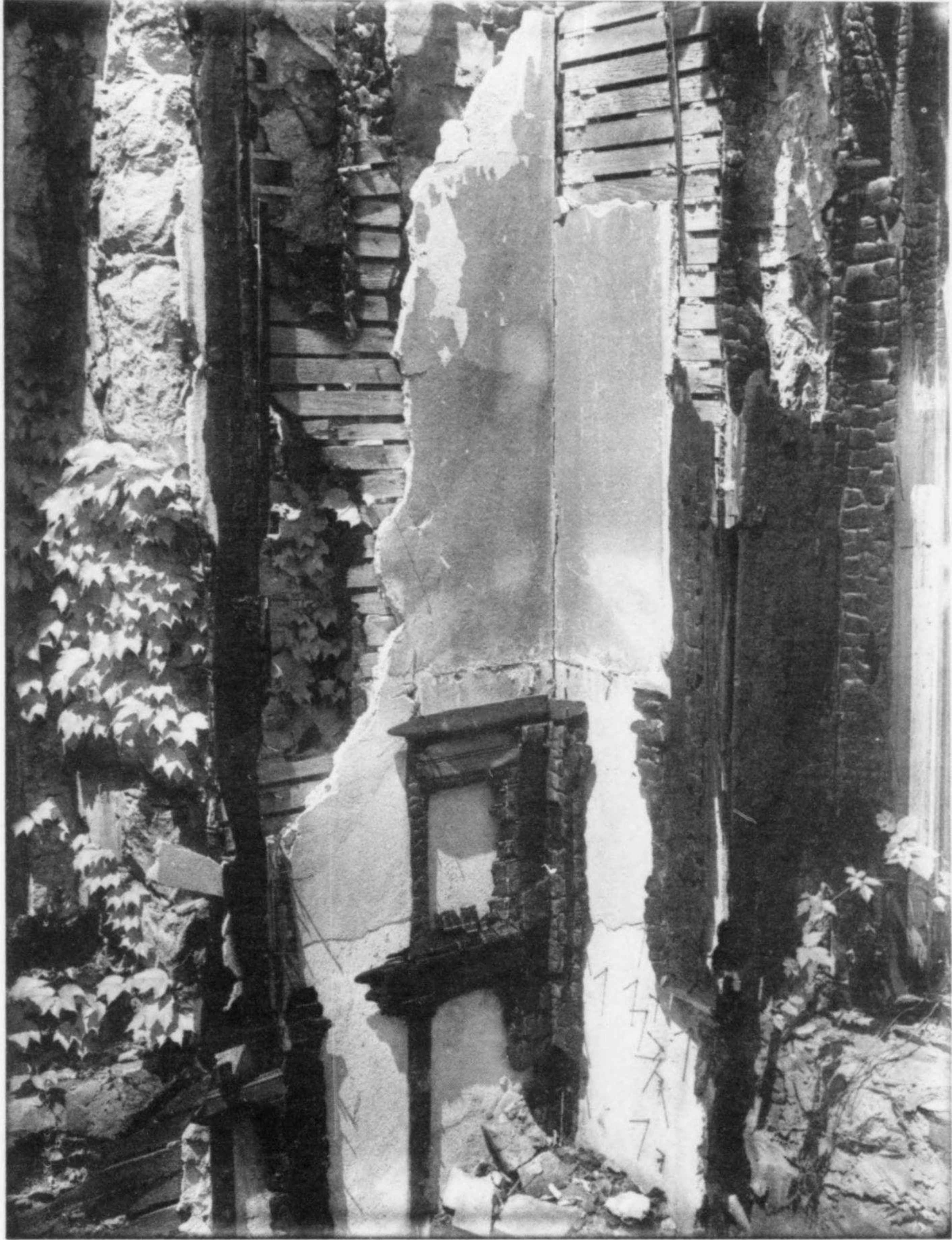
The rolling wheel of the bandwagon might also be taken as sign of the artist's own inner mobility, his own radical placelessness. The pictures in *Message* make no claim of intimacy with the worlds they depict; in their austere frontality they represent the gaze of a stranger. Evans's pictures are records of where he *has been* but no longer is. Placelessness is the paradoxical character of his work: an absence of ties that renders all places equally accessible to the same still, frontal gaze. What William Carlos Williams wrote about Poe rings true of Evans: "What he wanted was connected with no particular place; therefore it *must* be where he *was*." Evans's America (unlike Atget's Paris) is everywhere. Place appears wherever he finds himself, wherever he places his camera. Released from the hold of any particular place or subject, his eye is free to make a subject, make sense, anywhere. Nothing is given; seeing itself is what suffices.

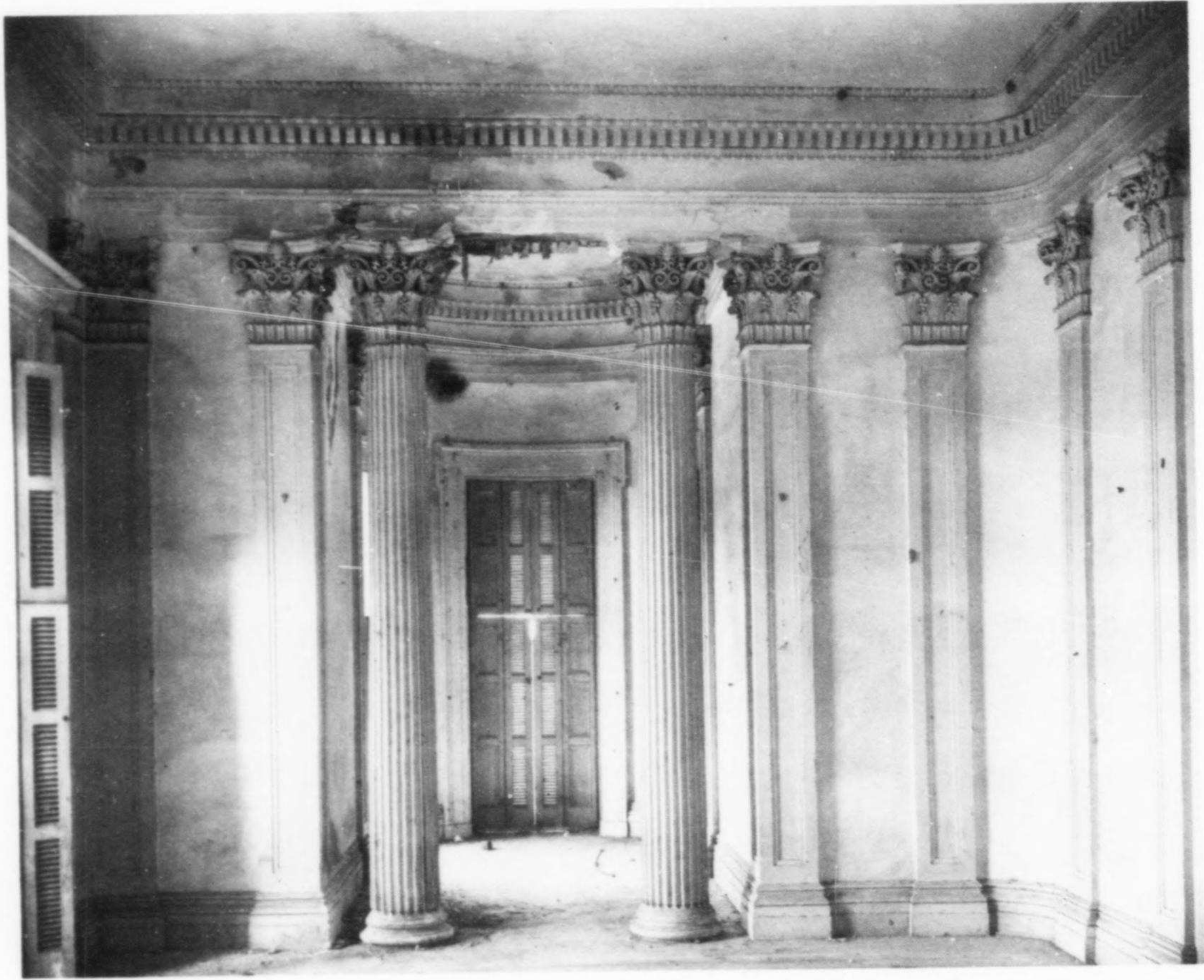
Evans's pictures appropriate the world for purposes beyond merely signifying what is there—beyond exactitude. Exact depiction, as *Message* makes clear, refers us to its own insufficiencies. Thus "the book" brings another realm into the viewer-reader's awareness, a realm that may elude verbal transcription but which can be figured as another interior—what is *inside* physical interiors of exact depiction. *Book* delineates the process whereby the insufficiencies of exactitude become the grounds of discovery, and what is *not* seen the most powerful expression of the seen.

Message from the Interior

1. *Upstairs Room, Walpole, Maine, 1962.*
2. *Scarborough, New York, 1931.*
3. *The Breakfast Room, Belle Grove Plantation, White Castle, Louisiana, 1935.*
4. *The Farmer of Somerstown Road, Near Ossining, New York, 1931.*
5. *The Church Organ, Rural Alabama, 1936.*
6. *Mary Frank's Bed, New York City, 1959.*
7. *East 120th Street, New York City, 1961.*
8. *The Parlor Chairs, Oldwick, New Jersey, 1958.*
9. *Alabama Country Fireplace, 1936.*
10. *The Child's Room, Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 1951.*
11. *Kingston Station, Rhode Island, 1953.*
12. *The Ringling Bandwagon, Sarasota, Florida, 1941.*















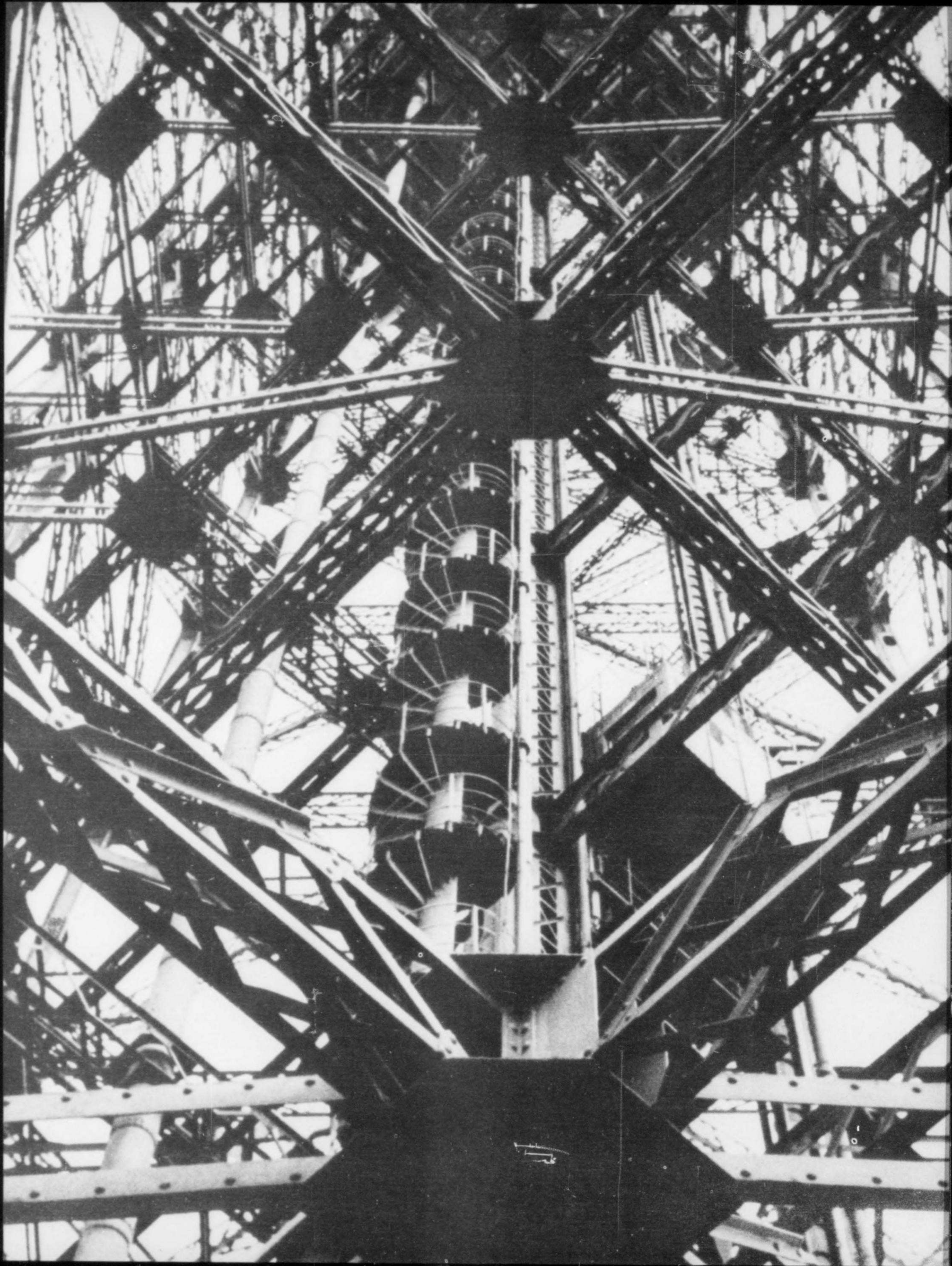












ANNETTE MICHELSON

I.

. . . If all things are devoid of matter
and if this populous Buenos Aires
comparable to an army in complexity
is no more than a dream
arrived at in magic by souls working together,
there's a moment
in which the city's existence is at the
 brink of danger and disorder
and that is the trembling moment of dawn
when those who are dreaming the world are few
and only a handful of night owls preserve
ashen and sketchy
a vision of the streets
which they will afterward define for others.
The hour in which the persistent dream of life
is in danger of breaking down,
the hour in which God might easily destroy
 all his work!

—Jorge Luis Borges

In the spring of 1926, while visiting Brussels, Dziga Vertov saw the first feature-length film by a young Frenchman. This experience was, by Vertov's own account, both exhilarating and distressing. His diaries offer few entries devoted to the consideration of specific projects other than his own; one might therefore find it curious that this little film so aroused the particular interest of the acknowledged Soviet master of the documentary form that he was moved to record that interest.

For the work in question, René Clair's slight comedy *Paris qui dort* (1924), approximately one hour long, appears more obviously indebted to the style and pace of Mack Sennett than to the efforts of the nascent European and Soviet avant-gardes. For Vertov, however, this viewing produced a shock of recognition, described in his diary entry for April 18:

I saw *Paris qui dort* at the Ars Cinema. Two years ago I conceived a plan coinciding in every way with the technical form of this film. I repeatedly tried to get permission to make it, but that chance was denied me. And so now the film has been made abroad. Kino-Eye has lost one of its positions of attack; the delay between idea, project plan, and realization is too long. Unless we are allowed to carry out our innovations as they are produced, we risk spending our time on inventions that are never put into practice.¹

This occasion, with its attendant sense of waste and bitter loss, is but a single episode in the long succession of frustration and betrayal which developed as the narrative of Vertov's career. He was to become the excruciated chronicler of the progressive degeneration of the bureaucratized film industry of the Stalinist state. In 1926, however, he was the accomplished practitioner and theoretician of the Soviet documentary film. He had established in the film essays and newsreels of *Kino-Nedelia* and *Kino-Pravda* the ascendancy of a new, revolutionary genre. As the presiding figure of the Council of Three, he had proclaimed to the world the imminent liquidation of the corrupting heritage of theatrical and novelistic convention and the opening of a revolutionary offensive upon its posterity in the narrative film of the postrevolutionary period. *Kino-Glaz* (1924) and *Forward, Soviet!* (1926) were designed and produced as the opening chapters in the chronicling of the construction of socialism. More than that, however, they were conceived and executed as revolutionary assaults upon the old *cinematic* order. And Vertov's sharpest and most aggressive polemical attacks had been reserved for the "art film," that compromised product of aesthetic Menshevism represented most dangerously, in his view, by Eisenstein's work.² Vertov had not spared *Strike* and *Potemkin*. Why, then, was he impressed by this modest comedy? Where was the point of coincidence between Clair's gentle irony and Vertov's Bolshevik militancy? In "technique" and in "form"?

These questions, inscribed with special salience within the history of postwar and postrevolutionary cinematic developments of the 1920s, have been repressed by film-historical and film-theoretical discourse. Vertov's cry of envious

1. Dziga Vertov, *Stati, Dnevnik, Zamisli*, ed. Sergei Dobrashenko, Moscow, Iskusstvo Editions, 1966, p. 165. A preliminary discussion of this text appears in my essay, "The Man With the Movie Camera: From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum*, vol. X, no. 7 (March 1972), 60-72.

2. For documentation of Vertov's position, see Dziga Vertov, "The Factory of Facts and Other Writings," *October*, 7 (Winter 1978), 109-128.

dismay remains the sole gesture of homage offered to René Clair's first major work. The historical and critical literature offers no sense of confirmation of that vividly revelatory experience set down in Vertov's journal. And even Clair himself, brilliantly articulate on his own work, is silent about *Paris qui dort*.³

It is, then, with a sense of reparation due a work curiously obscured for half a century that one asks these questions and prepares to frame answers. To do so is to advance a large claim for the comedy known in this country as *The Crazy Ray*: this film marks a threshold in cinematic history, thereby illuminating that threshold in our own history which is the invention of cinema.

Here, briefly, is its scenario.

Our hero has the "top job" in Paris; he is guardian of the Eiffel Tower and lives on its uppermost level. Descending one day for a stroll, he notices that Paris is still. Most of the great arteries and squares—the Madeleine, the Place de la Concorde among them—are empty. Here and there, in other, residential quarters of the right bank, he encounters figures in a state of trance: a man with suicide note in hand, poised for a leap into the Seine; a street cleaner asleep over his broom; a chauffeur bent over the wheel of his taxi; a drunk leaning against a wall; a policeman in suspended pursuit of a thief. All clocks say three twenty-five. The city sleeps, and the only persons exempt from the general torpor are an airplane pilot and his four passengers: Nesta, an attractive young adventuress; a businessman; and a felon chained to the detective who has him in custody. They explain that they arrived earlier that day to find themselves alone in this silent, static world. Our hero invites them to join him in the tower.

Next morning they explore the city together and discover in that silence and stasis the conditions of freedom. Paris is theirs to enjoy as they will. Bathing in the fountains of Trocadero, entering where they please, rifling jewelry shops and museums, cracking safes with the help of the felon and the complicity of his guard, they enjoy their power to the full. Returning to the tower with their spoils (the *Mona Lisa* is tucked casually into a corner of their limousine), they pass the time playing games. The four men, growing somewhat restive, begin to compete for the favors of the handsome adventuress who is now, as the popular song of the period has it, "the only girl in the world." Just as conflict threatens, a cry of distress is heard over the radio. Descending together, they follow the signal. It leads to the cellar laboratory of Dr. Crase.

It is Miss Crase, the professor's niece and assistant, who has, unknown to him, called for help. She now informs them that the professor has invented a machine whose rays can arrest the course of things. It is he who, following the equations worked out on his blackboard, has with one full turn of the machine's lever plunged all Paris into sleep. Only now, confronted with the success of his

3. The collection of early texts by René Clair, republished with commentary as *Cinéma d'hier, cinéma d'aujourd'hui* (Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1970), contains no discussion of *Paris qui dort*.

paralyzing ray, does he realize he had forgotten to work out the formula for resuscitation!

"How is it, then, that we have escaped the power of the ray?" is the question that immediately occurs to our little group, as to the viewer. "Ah, that is because as guardian of the tower and as air passengers, you happened to be, at three twenty-five, the moment of immobilization, at an altitude beyond its reach," explains Miss Crase. And her explanation is followed by a brief animated sequence offering graphic illustration of the ray's trajectory.

The professor is now persuaded to work out the formula for releasing the city, and with another push of the lever all Paris stirs again. The *figurants* now proceed *as if uninterrupted* in their respective courses: the drunkard staggering on his way, the street cleaner resuming his sweeping, the (failed) suicide awakening to the folly of despair, the felon and gendarme resuming their chase. Our characters take leave of each other and depart upon their several ways: the businessman in search of his mistress, the aviator and adventuress off to unknown destinations, the felon and detective beginning a chase that will endure, in intercutting, to the film's end.

Our hero is now alone with Miss Crase. Although disowned for her betrayal of her uncle's secret, she has decided to return home. Realizing that he does not want her to leave, our hero offers to accompany her, but realizes as well that he has no cash for a cab. In panic, and with the inspiration of despair, he decides that the solution lies in the machine: if time can be made to stop just once again, he can fill his pockets once and for all. Back, then, to Dr. Crase and his laboratory.

Once there, they struggle in hand-to-hand combat with the recalcitrant inventor. As they battle, the machine's lever rides back and forth, suspending and releasing the city's life. Whole quarters are instantaneously paralyzed; the crowds and traffic on the Place de l'Opéra and the grand boulevards are frozen on the spot, only to spring instantaneously into action once again. Boats cruising on the Seine now freeze and then, upon release, speed on their way. Cars spin and careen through the twenty arrondissements with demonic speed. For not only does the ray's power arrest and release, it also speeds and slows the flow of action. Pace, tempo, rhythm are subjected to the machine's erratically controlled action, until a final *accelerando* precipitates the explosion which alone can restore things to a natural pace and order and, in so doing, end this Crase-i-ness.

Somewhat later, while trying to explain matters at the commissariat, they realize that the sleep of Paris has been dreamless, as it were, that for the sleepers no second has been lost, and that they, offering this tale of a ray, are regarded as mad. Taken into custody, they encounter the rest of their group, who have been found wandering about spreading the same story. Upon recantation, they are released as harmless. Returning with Miss Crase to the tower, our hero begins to wonder if the dreamer was indeed, as the authorities insist, himself. A diamond sparkles from a crevice in the tower, assuring him that he has not slept. And it makes the perfect engagement ring for Miss Crase.

In this succinct, ingenious comedy, Clair proposes, with a cascade of subtle gags, the topography of a great city; he explores its scale and pace, that which sustains its life. Temporality, apprehended as *movement in space*, is the vital current of metropolis, the medium of "the course of affairs," of "the business of life." Their powerful and intricate implication is the film's generative core. Adopting the genre of science fiction—which is, as we know, one of cinema's oldest forms—Clair offers a fresh series of critical variations upon the thematic cluster—the city, the crowd, capital—which the art and the cinema of his day had begun to explore. There is in fact no single theme of *Paris qui dort* which expressionism, in an antithetical register, did not also explore. The accuracy and lucidity of Clair's enterprise were, however, products of a privileged position, a special preparation.



René Clair. Paris qui dort. 1924.

II.

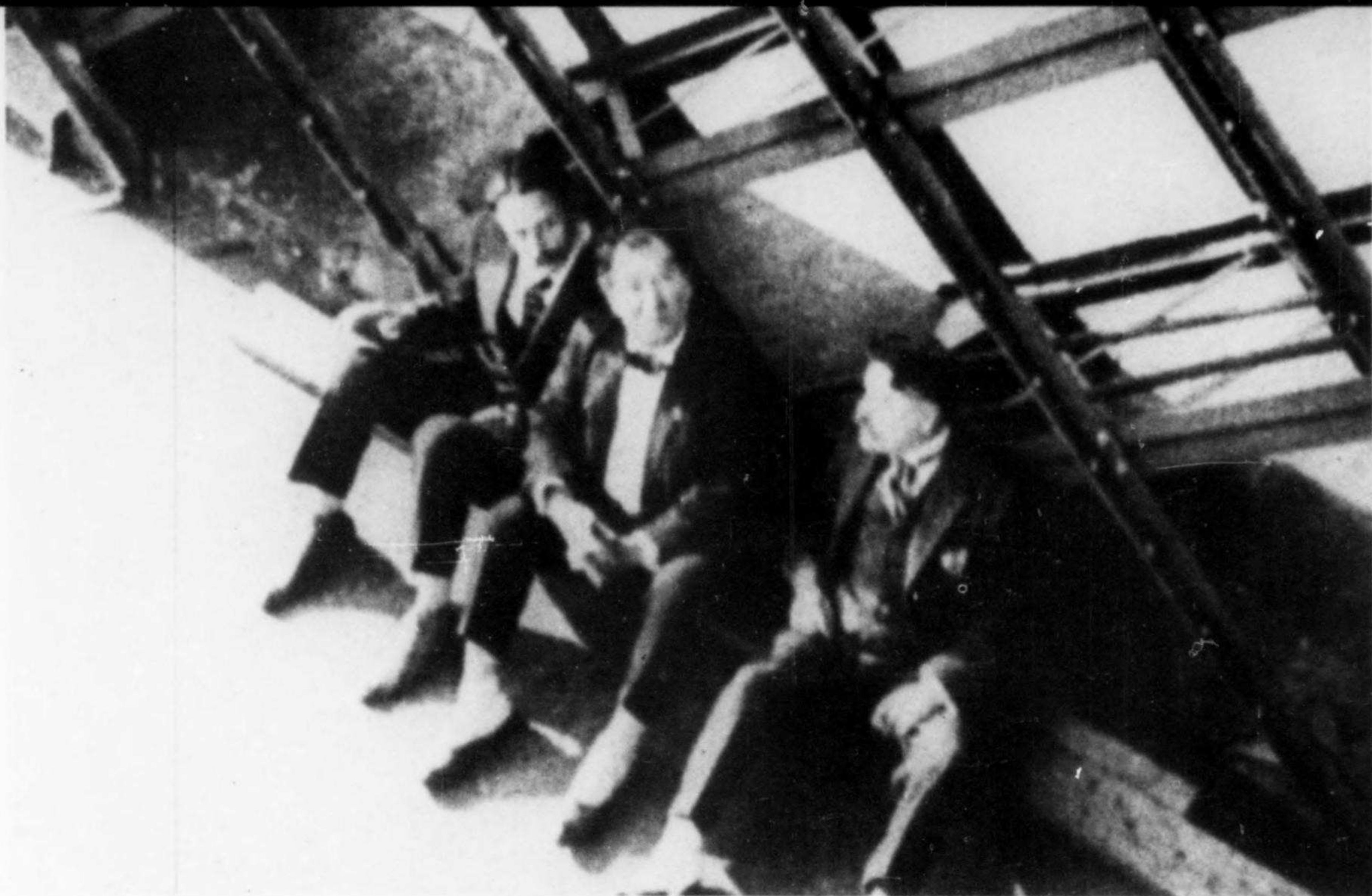
A la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien
 Bergère ô tour Eiffel le troupeau des
 ponts bêle ce matin
 Tu en as assez de vivre dans l'antiquité
 grecque et romaine

—Guillaume Apollinaire

Coming to filmmaking from journalism, René Clair served his apprenticeship under Louis Feuillade. In beginning to read the complex film text which is *Paris qui dort*, we must therefore remember that its maker worked under the supreme master of the serial film and of *location* shooting. Feuillade had, in fact, transformed Paris itself, its boulevards and faubourgs, into a vast film set. *Fantomas*, *Judex*, *Les Vampires* were shot in the crowded or deserted streets and alleys, the empty depots, the cafés and railway stations, the dark slums and sedate mansions of Paris and its suburbs. A cinematic space was synthesized in which every turn and corner of the street held promise of adventure. The men of Clair's class and generation, flaneurs in the *entre-deux-guerres* splendor of Europe's capital, followed the weekly installments of Feuillade's *racombolesque* intrigues with the sense that in them Paris had been reinvested with mystery and moment, reinvented as a landscape of the imagination.

Central in that landscape was Eiffel's Tower, designed in celebration of the Revolution's centennial. Its construction was therefore still fresh within the city's memory, and its acceptance, indeed its canonization, as the icon of the modern city was still in progress in the art of Clair's contemporaries. Initially and widely sensed as a threatening intrusion within that landscape, however, it had been stoutly contested, passionately resisted, as evidenced by the protest printed in an issue of *Le Temps* in 1887 upon the publication of its design and the announcement of its construction:

As writers, sculptors, architects, painters, and ardent lovers of the hitherto intact beauty of Paris, we protest, with all our strength and power of indignation, we register a protest in the name of French art and taste, and history, against the construction of the Eiffel Tower—that vain, monstrous object in the center of Paris. Is the city of Paris to submit, for the interests of commerce, to this project's hideous design? For the Eiffel Tower, which should and has, in fact, been rejected by even commercial-minded America, means the betrayal of Paris. Everyone knows, says, and feels this; everyone is deeply affected, and we

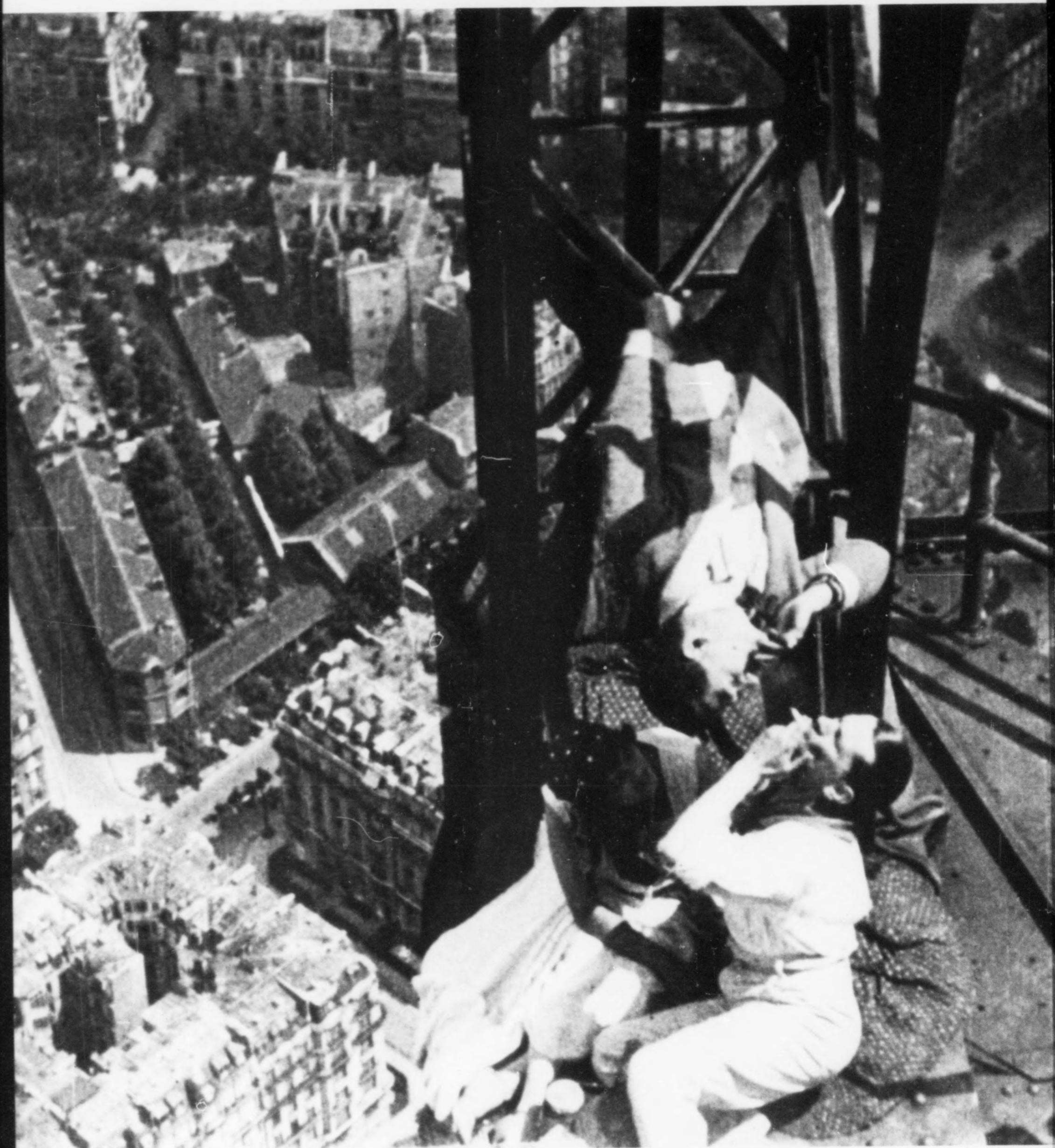


René Clair. Paris qui dort.

represent only a portion of the incensed public. Foreigners visiting our city will exclaim in amazement, "What? The French, so renowned for their taste, have erected this monstrously hideous monument?" And they will be right. They will deride and mock us, and rightly so, because the sublime Paris of the Gothic period is still the Paris of Jean Goujon. . . .⁴

The list of signatures includes those of Meissonier, Tony Garnier, Alexandre Dumas fils, and Guy de Maupassant, who later remarked that he most particularly liked to dine in the tower's restaurant because it was the only place from which he could see Paris without having to contemplate the tower. This remark is somewhat more interesting and pertinent than it appears at first glance, and René Clair grasped and used its sense in full. For the tower combines subjectivity and objectivity in a powerfully concrete manner. It is not only plainly visible, it is an agent of visibility; one looks at it and from it, upon and around and into Paris. It provides, moreover, not merely a general, panoramic view of the landscape but, in a manner grasped and fully exploited by Clair, a machine for the generation of infinite compositional variations. This is the first important element in a consideration of Clair's formal strategies.

4. For this text I have relied upon its reprinting in Roland Barthes, *La Tour Eiffel*, Paris, Editions Robert Delpire, 1964.



René Clair. Paris qui dort.

The action commences in the guard's room with a series of long shots in which the camera is stationary and the light evenly distributed in an unremarkable blandness characteristic of much lighting of the time. With the guardian's descent into the city, the tower itself is pressed into cinematic service. Mounted on its elevator, the camera produces a series of tilts and cranelike shots. Clair is at this point recapitulating a brief, forgotten chapter in the history of the early cinema, for very early on the Lumière brothers had filmed Paris from this moving elevator. Clair now involves the tower as a whole, using it as a "viewfinder," constantly shifting position, reframing, varying angle and height and distance, making every shot and sequence of action dynamic through the powerful, changing asymmetry of its framing girders. The tower, then, is not only a complex, infinitely stimulating set; it provides a range of low- and high-angle positions, a vocabulary of movement, a play of light and shadow, of solid and void, which generate visual tension, a range of kinetic responses.

In rehearsing and extending the strategy of the Lumières, however, Clair not only exploits the tower's mobile potential but also brings into play its subjective functions, its framing, focusing, viewfinding capacities. The tower had been décor and actor. By transforming it into a complex optical instrument, a filmic apparatus, Clair makes it a camera.⁵

In 1924 Vertov and Kaufman began to make extensive use of the mobile components of Soviet industry, mounting their cameras on the tracks, cranes, carts, wagons, and assembly lines of factories, steelyards, railroads, and mines. The expansion and refinement of the technology of film production is thus inscribed in the chronicle of the industrialization process which forms the central axis of their mature work.

That very year produced not only Clair's first film and *Kino-Glaz*, but another document whose implications are important for understanding *Paris qui dort*: it was, of course, in 1924 that the first *Surrealist Manifesto* was published. The strategy adopted by Breton is that of attack upon the circumstantiality of fictional representation through the intransigent rejection of one of its supreme instances. After a brief and imperious dismissal of a "positivist realism extending from Saint Thomas Aquinas through Anatole France," Breton singles out the unnamed author of one descriptive passage among many in an unspecified novel. The inventory of interior furnishings in this passage provokes Breton's dismissal of the "laziness, fatigue, banality" of the descriptive mode. Name and title are consigned, with a gesture of provocative contempt, to a mere footnote: Dostoevski,

5. René Clair is also the author of a documentary film on the tower, released in 1928. His conversion of the tower to a camera in this earlier film, however, anticipates the manner in which Stan Brakhage, filming the Third Avenue Elevated line on commission from Joseph Cornell shortly before the destruction of that line, exploits the varied optical potential of the structure. For a discussion of this strategy, see my essay, "Camera Lucida, Camera Obscura," *Artforum*, vol. XI, no. 5 (January 1973), 30-37.

Crime and Punishment. Continuing with a lament on the reign of logic and a call for valorization of the dream, whose importance "has been so justly emphasized by Professor Freud," Breton arrives at the core of his "argument": the premise of continuity between dream and the waking state, the call for "the sleep of logic and philosophy. . . . I believe in the future resolution of these two states, apparently so contradictory, which are dream and reality; I believe in a sort of absolute reality, in *surreality*, so to speak. It is toward its conquest that I direct myself, in the certainty that I shall not attain it but too uncaring of my death to forego reckoning with the joys of its possession."⁶

This passionate will toward the impossible resolution defines most accurately the nature of the surrealist enterprise. Surrealism set out to resolve that crisis which was the legacy of a bourgeois humanism discredited by the experience of the First World War. The movement's tensions, shifts, fluctuations, and ambivalences, both political and philosophical (Hegel-Marx, Berkeley-Trotsky) provide the measure of that legacy's burden. As I have suggested in another context,⁷ surrealism neither "bracketed," "froze," "suspended," "cured," nor "rejected" the classical contradictions or dilemmas of the European metaphysical tradition; the struggle for their resolution implied acceptance of their terms. Most simply stated, the linking of dream and waking states, of the "communicating vessels," presupposes not only their prior discreteness, but also an opposition which may be bridged, mediated, but not abolished. A notion of the noumenal persists in the surrealist vision; that vision in depth, through, beneath, beyond, is haunted by a transcendence subjected periodically to rituals of exorcism, but never dispelled. Surrealist immanence is, in fact and unsurprisingly, transcendence in disguise.

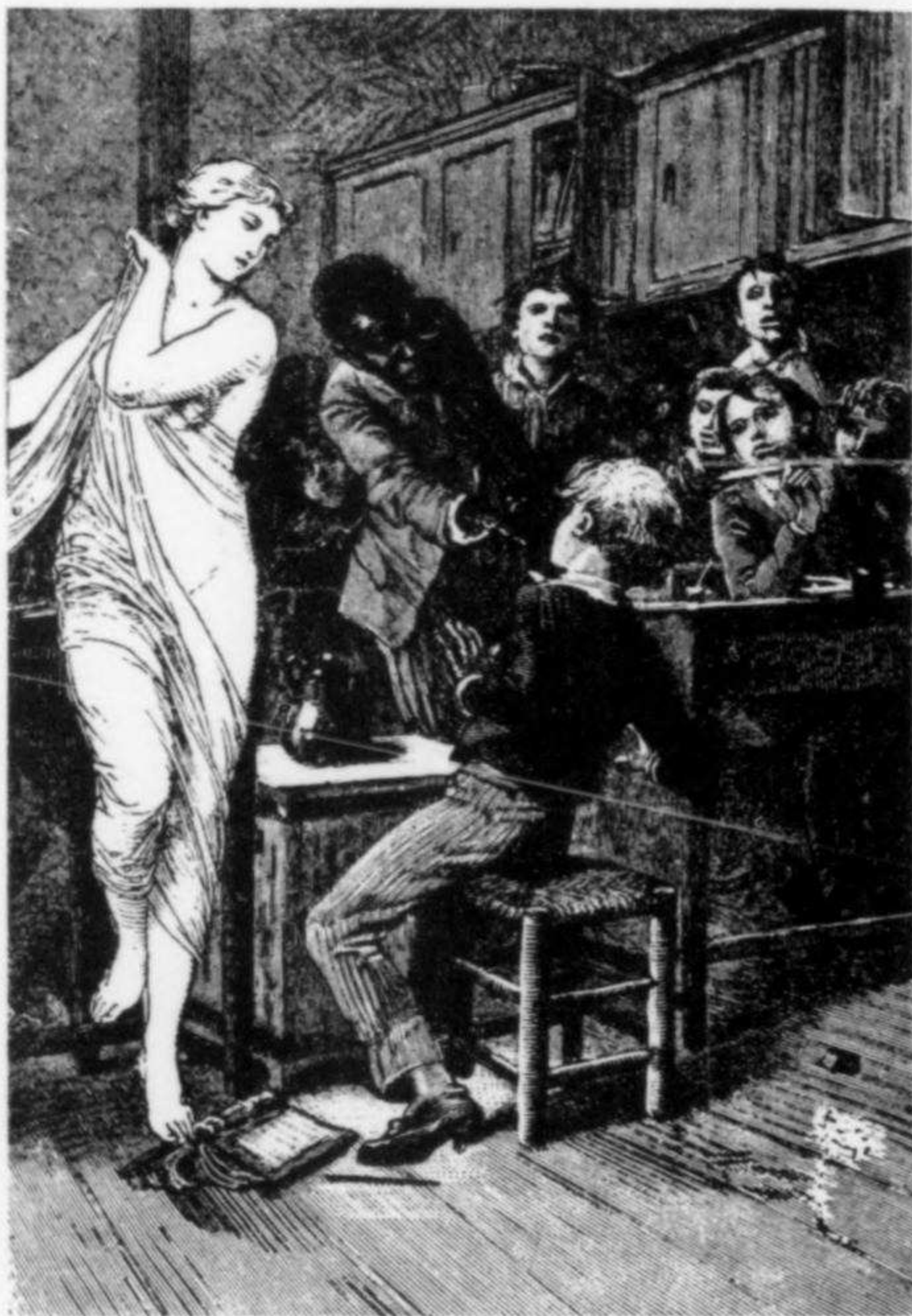
This is the source of surrealism's pathos; it is the pathos of contradiction. Committed to a negation of time, surrealism evolved necessarily within history. Surrealist ideology is permeated by that characteristic and recurrent idea proposed by Kojève as basic to Hegelian speculation, "that of a kind of metaphysical sin responsible for the origin of time" in which "the philosopher is called upon to restore that state of felicitous unity which existed prior to the birth of History." Surrealism's endorsement of this demand is intensive. In a powerful sense, the movement's history is the acting out of this demand. "We want the Beyond now," Breton declares, adding, in almost the next breath, "We are in the service of the Revolution." The unity which surrealism aspired to restore between subject and object, appearance and reality, matter and mind, dream and the waking state was to be the décor of an absolute transparency in which freedom would be free to be. The dominant mode of surrealism's aspiration to a real presence is the *ecstatic*. And it was the deeply problematic nature of that aspiration, the manner in which

6. André Breton, "Manifeste du surréalisme," *Manifestes du surréalisme*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1963, p. 23.

7. In "Breton's Aesthetics: Peripeties of a Metaphor or a Journey through Impossibility," *Artforum*, vol. V, no. 1 (September 1966) 72-77.

the surrealist position with respect to temporality epitomized the impasse produced by its conflicting imperatives—historical and eschatological—which predisposed it to the new medium of cinema. In its synthetic quality, its radical plasticity, cinema evoked a prompt response, a proprietary impulse from the movement; it touched a nerve within surrealism. Was it not the plasticity of cinematic time, the control of its flow, the power of suspension and retard that spoke to Breton and his friends? In photographic and cinematic arrest, delay, and reversal of movement, Lautréamont's generative, erotic metaphor, installed as central to the surrealist project, found its naturally and immediately *ecstatic* form.

As we know, the surrealists haunted the city's movie theaters and film clubs. Breton, Desnos, Aragon, Soupault, tireless peripatetics that they were, discovered in the films of their time—in the serials, comedies, farces, and melodramas—the articulation of a discourse which disrupted the bourgeois order from which they had emerged. And their particular predilection for photographic and cinematic narrative was to produce the paracinematic forms of collage and the illustrated novel. Max Ernst's collage novels in particular are syntagmatic chains, serially organized, titled, presented as if frozen and spliced. Their extreme spatial plasticity suggests the synthetic spectacle articulated by special effects; a continuous shifting of scale within and between images suggests successive lens changes, conferring upon objects the relations obtained in wide-angle shots. A plate entitled "fortsetzung" evokes an instant of specific action suspended as in a freeze-frame, and in "zeig deinen koffer her, mein lieber," the fleeing figures emerge into and away from the borders—right and left, respectively—of the frame,



Max Ernst. La femme 100 têtes. 1929. "fortsetzung."



"zeig deinen koffer her, mein lieber."

confirming the sense of an action framed and thereby segmented. These devices evoke the sense of an insistent splicing within a filmic diegesis.

It was, however, photography that was to bring surrealism closer to the uses of cinema. Boiffard's photographs in illustration of the promenades and expeditions of *Nadja* introduce us, through the arcades of the Palais Royal or the Place Maubert, into the theater of the surrealist encounter. This is the space of daily existence from which the stream of life has been evacuated, in which movement is canceled. The social arena has been transformed into the theater of the private encounter.

This is also the space of Atget's Paris. To Walter Benjamin his photographs evoked, in their vacant stillness, the scene of a crime.⁸ Let us say, rather, that they project a sense of imminence, of occurrences past or still to come. In them time is suspended; we are *between times*. These streets, squares, boulevards, arcades are cleared for the emergence of "*le merveilleux*"; their emptiness is *ecstatic*. It is this suspension of time that we encounter in *Paris qui dort*. The stilled city in which

8. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1969, p. 226.

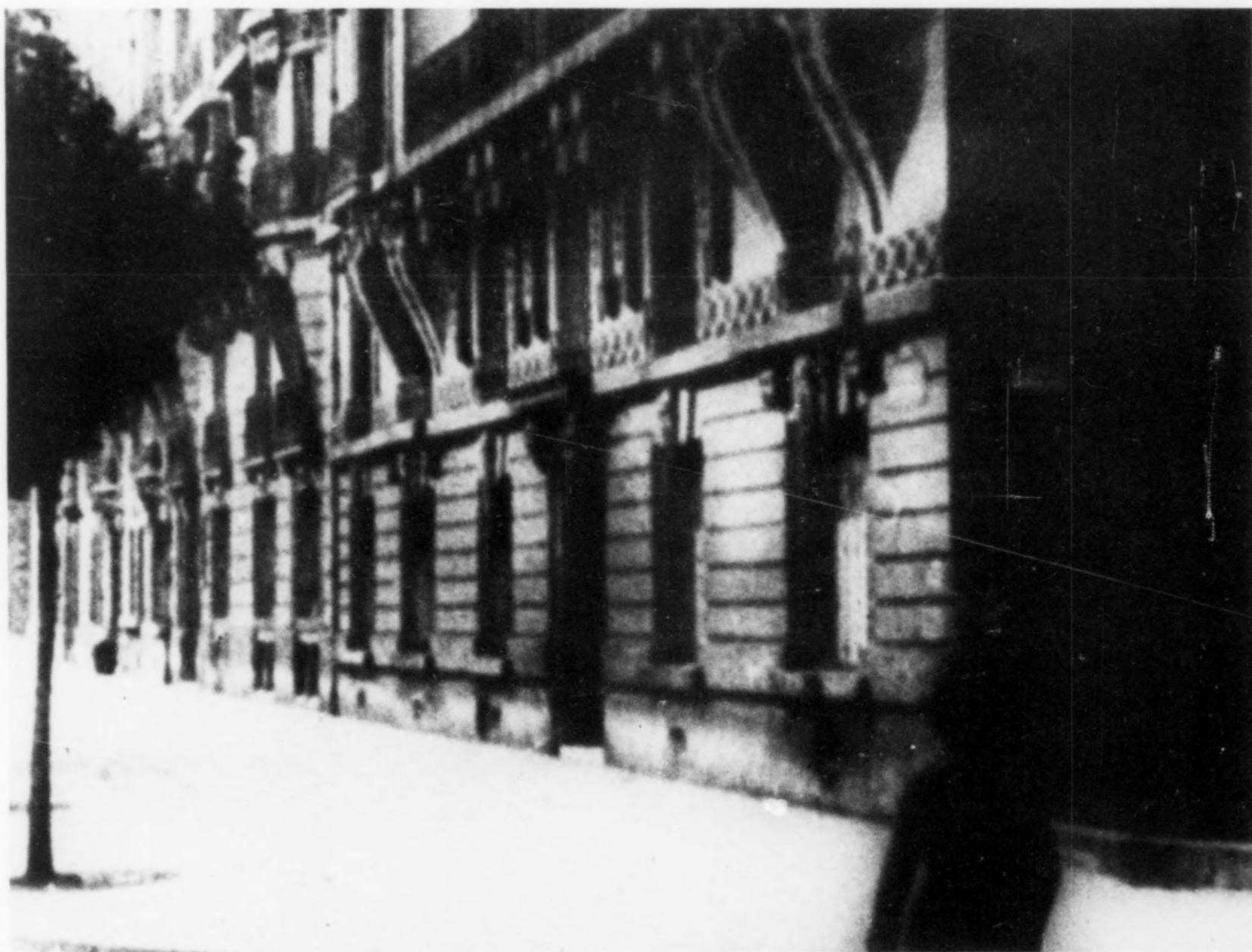


Eugène Atget. Street Scene.

our band of wanderers roam in freedom is Atget's Paris, from which the tide of affairs has receded, leaving here and there a *figurant* poised in the attire and attitudes of his trade—policeman, street cleaner, chauffeur, drunk—like the subjects of the series known as "Les petits métiers."

Projecting the temporal ambiguity of the deserted streets, *Paris qui dort* plays upon the relation of still to moving image. The Place de la Concorde, the Madeleine, the quais, the Passy streets, which we contemplate with our hero in his first surprising and exploratory stroll about the sleeping city—are these filmic images of a city stilled or still images, postcard views, of Atget's Paris? The flickering light of the projected strip is the sole trace of the temporal current whose level or site of inscription we cannot locate with any certainty. The constant relocation of that level or site animates this work, its characters.

Seeing this, we also see that behind the cast of characters there is yet another cast which generates the narrative in which the little band of flaneurs is implicated. These figures—mechanisms all—are the tower, the wireless, the airplane, and that fourth machine, that crazy ray, which is the moving-picture camera. All intervene at the turn of the century to complete the passage of the metropolis into



René Clair. *Paris qui dort*.

modernity, celebrated as it had been shortly before by Apollinaire. Dr. Crase, then, is the filmmaker. With his little engine he stills and quickens, projects life in and out of motion, speeds and slows the course of things. Setting a city careening headlong into the dizzying pace of modernity, he can at will arrest the flow of life in the ecstatic suspension of time itself.

René Clair's celebration of modernity therefore turns upon that threshold in our history which was the invention of the motion picture. And in the sequences of arrest and release, of retard and acceleration, we experience the shock and thrill, the terror and delight which express the intoxicating sense generally shared in the first decades of the century, the fulfillment of *une promesse de bonheur* deeply inscribed within the hopes and fantasies of our culture: the control of temporality itself. In its play upon the relation of still and moving image, *Paris qui dort* restores the moment when the photographic image, after sixty years of existence, leaped into action on the screen of a boulevard theater, thus extending its spatiotemporality into the cinematic dimension.⁹

9. While shooting *Paris qui dort* during a three-week period in the summer of 1923 (it was to be released in 1924), René Clair published the following text, quoted by Georges Sadoul in his entry for



Eugène Atget. Street Vendor.

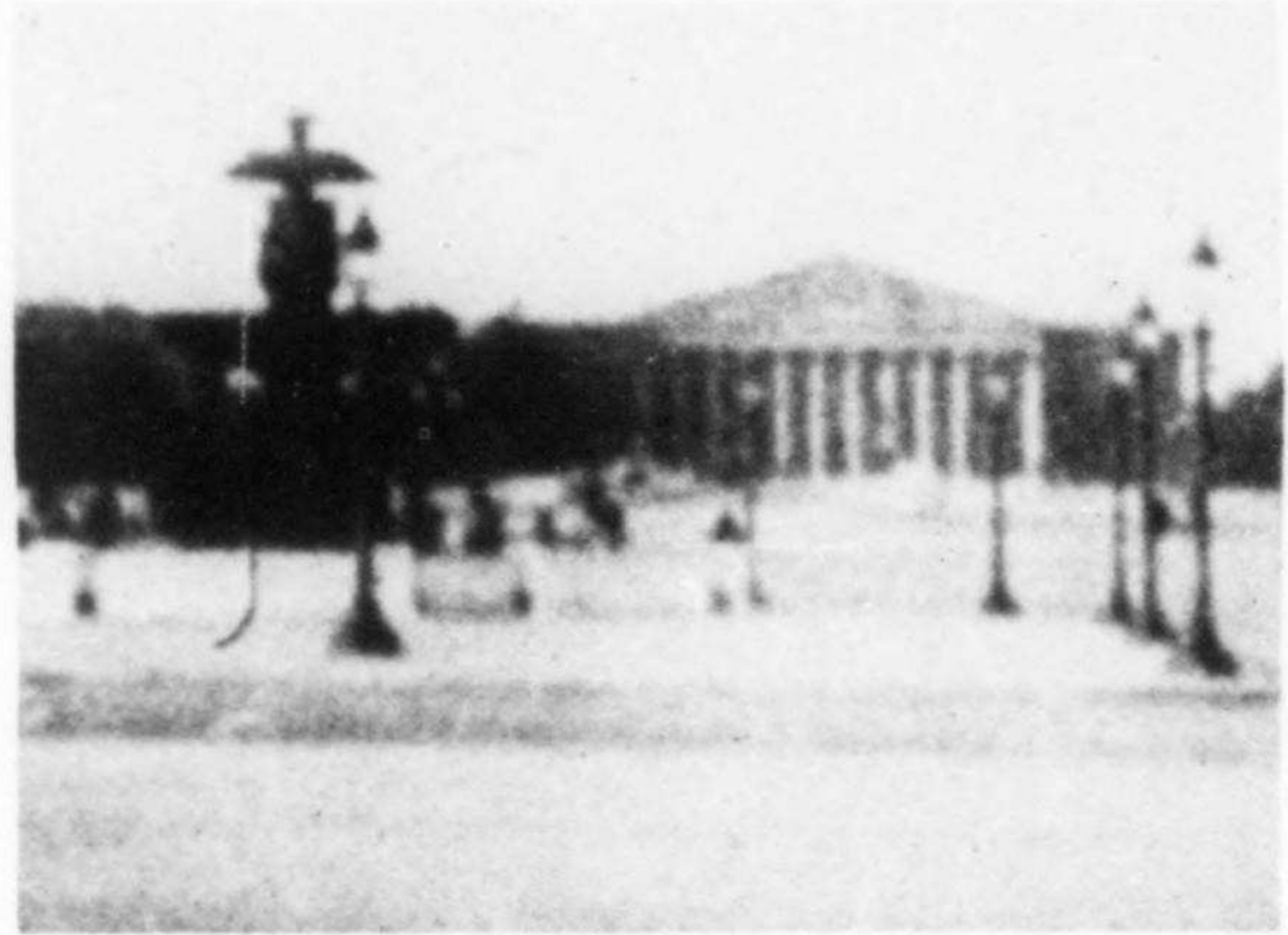
The film's last quarter, its sustained climax in which the city is subjected to the violence of the ray's erratic action, proposes an exultant deployment of cinema's quintessential resources. We are offered, in a set of variations upon the techniques of stop-motion, acceleration, deceleration, and animation, those aspects of the cinematic effect most stubbornly resistant to description and analysis—and to photographic illustration: those most deeply and specifically characteristic of the filmic process. The frozen crowds, the awakening *figurants* suspended until now in the slouch of sleep, the precipitation of stasis into a choreography of frenzy, the general revival by reinscription of the temporal flow within the dozing world, declare the demiurgic powers of the filmmaker. Scientist, magician, and demiurge coalesce in the features of Dr. Crase, now revealed, through the systematic deployment of filmic process, as those of Mr. Clair, whose

the film in the *Dictionnaire des films* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1965, p. 188): "The main task for this generation should be the return of the cinema to its origins, and for this purpose, the elimination of all the false art which is stifling it. I thought it possible to make films like those of cinema's earliest times, films whose scenarios are written directly for the screen, using some of the resources proper to the camera." The stated aims of this program, though succinctly and coolly formulated, are those of Vertov's as presented in "Kino-Eye: Lecture II," in Harry Geduld, *Film Makers on Film Making*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1967.



René Clair. Paris qui dort.

tacit message to us is, "Sleepers, awake!" It is this power, this hold on temporality embedded within the apparatus, which produces a shock or thrill as, with each motion of the ray's "lever," we rehearse the discovery of 1895 that we are the privileged beneficiaries of modernity's gift, "the philosophical toy," that object of science fiction which ministers to our abiding infantile fantasy of omnipotence.



René Clair. Paris qui dort.

III.

If all the watches in Berlin suddenly went wrong in different ways even only so much as an hour, its entire economic and commercial life would be derailed for some time. . . . The technique of metropolitan life in general is not conceivable without all of its activities and reciprocal relationships being organized and coordinated in the most punctual way into a firmly fixed framework of time which transcends all subjective elements.

—Georg Simmel

Cinema's analytic propensities, so eagerly explored in the film theory and practice of the 1920s,¹⁰ and most particularly by Epstein, Eisenstein, and Léger, thus find their most concentrated and elaborate expression in the work of René Clair and Dziga Vertov. Both adopted as the theater of their metacinematic paradigms the city in its structural complexity and restless flux. In so doing they were responding to the hopes of a generation of intellectuals, men such as Benjamin, Faure, and Einstein, who, speaking as early as 1920, voiced support for "a means of education that has so far been used only by way of trial in class-teaching. . . . The triumphal march of the cinematograph will be continued into pedagogic regions, and here it will have a chance to make good its wrongs in thousands of picture shows in showing absurd, immoral and melodramatic subjects."

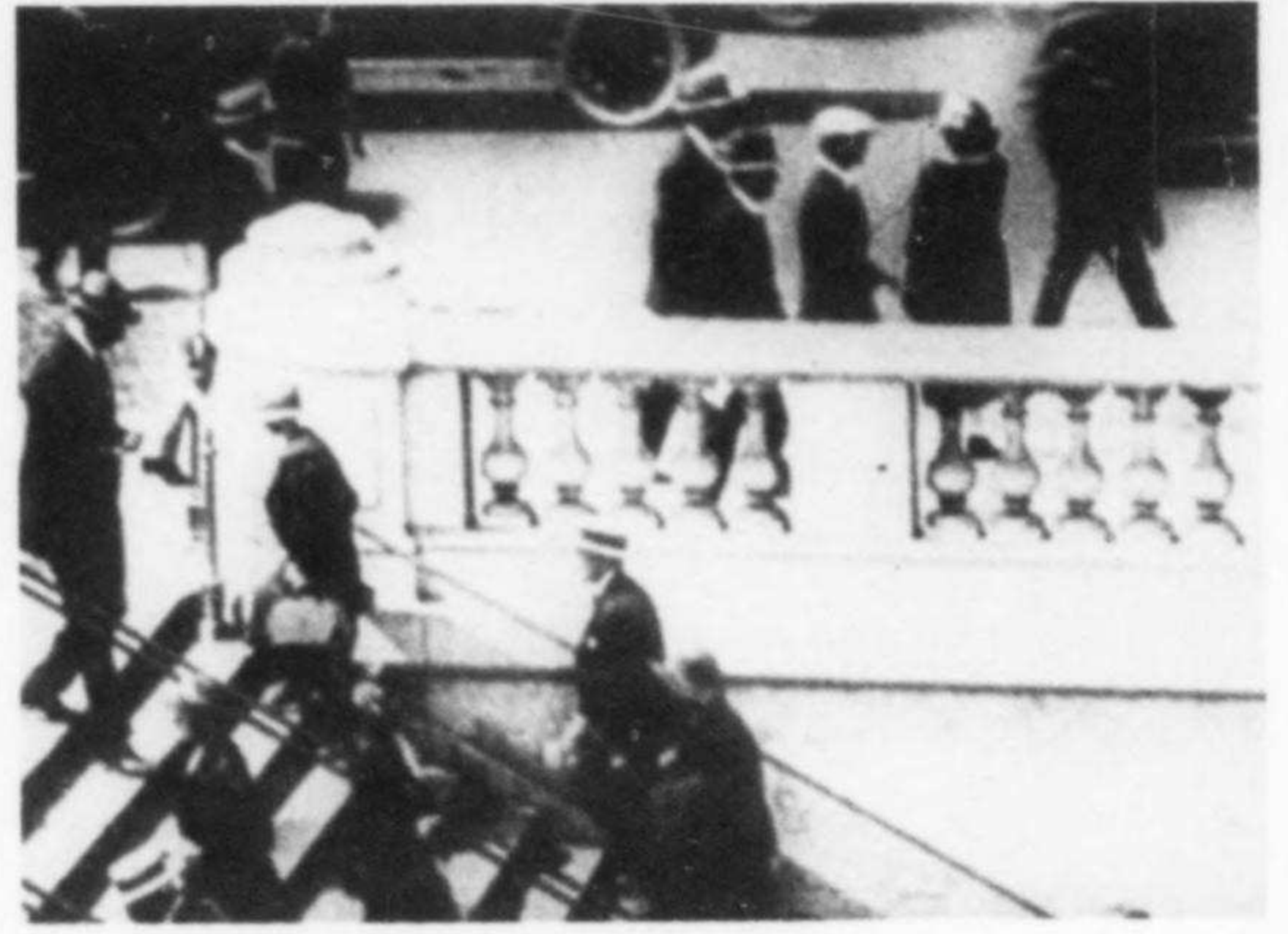
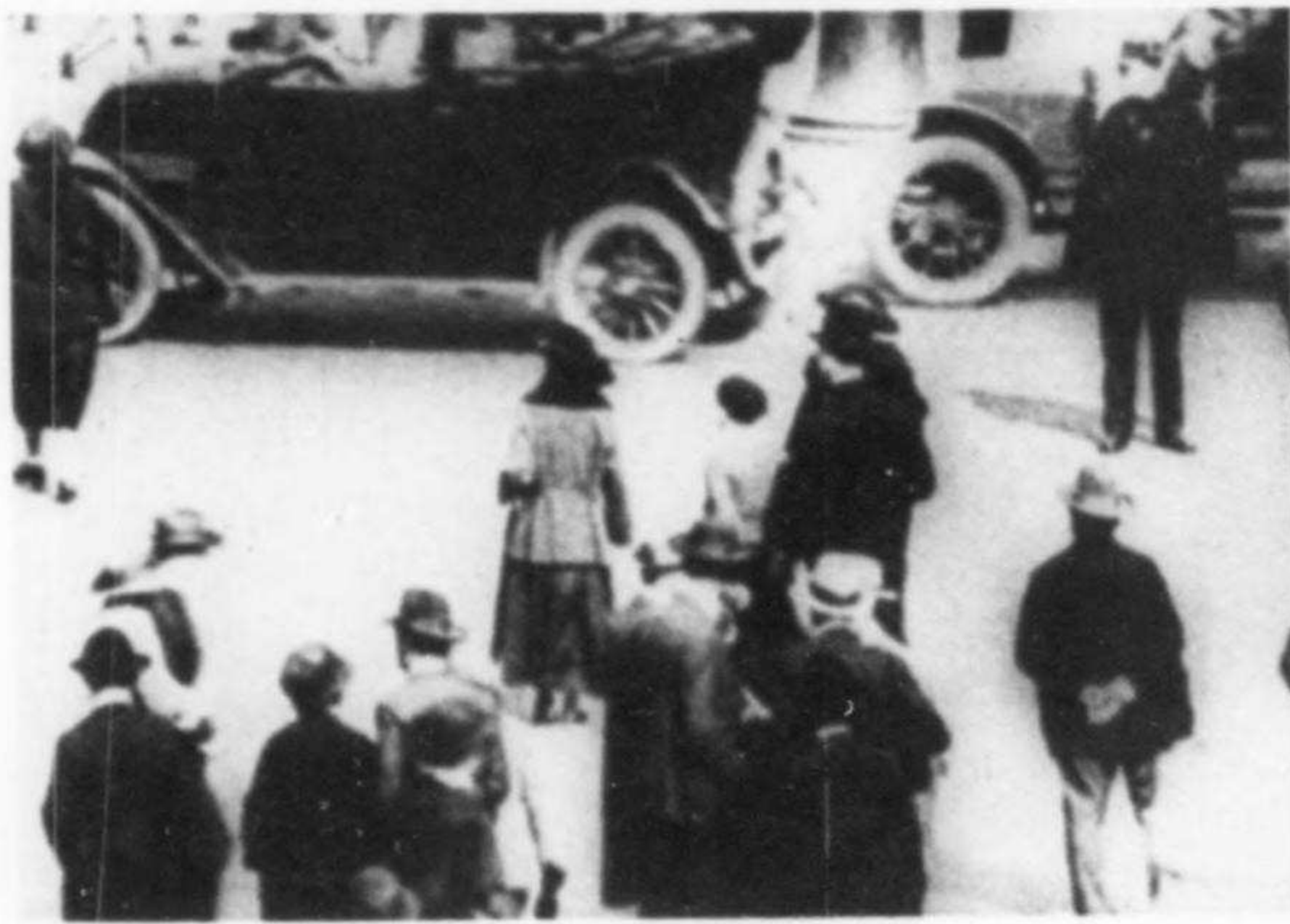
Einstein, continuing, offers a program for the medium's development which anticipates with remarkable precision Vertov's revolutionary project:

By means of the school film, supplemented by a simple apparatus for projection, *it would be possible firstly to infuse certain subjects*, such as geography, which is at present wound off organ-like in the form of dead descriptions, *with the pulsating life of a metropolis*. And the lines on a map will gain an entirely new complexion in the eyes of the pupil, if he learns, as if during a voyage, what they actually include, and what is to be read between them. An abundance of information is imparted by the film, too, if it gives an accelerated or retarded view of such things as a plant growing, an animal's heart beating or the wing of an insect moving. *The cinema seems to me to have a still more important function in giving pupils an insight into the most important branches of technical industry, a knowledge of which should be common property. Very few hours would suffice to impress permanently on the schoolboy's mind how a power-station, a locomotive, a newspaper, a book, or a colored illustration is produced, or what takes place in an electrical plant, a glass factory or a gasworks. . . ."*¹¹

The conjunction of the metacinematic project with the analysis of the structure and dynamics of the urban complex distinguishes the work of both Clair and Vertov from the considerable number of lively exercises which compose the genre of the city film, developed through the work of Ruttman, Cavalcanti, Vidor,

10. For a discussion of this question, see my essay, "Reading Eisenstein Reading *Capital*," *October*, 2 (Summer 1976), 27-38.

11. Quoted in Alexander Moszkowski, *Conversations with Einstein*, trans. Henry L. Brose, New York, Horizon Press, 1970, pp. 69-70, italics added. Benjamin suggests in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that the "resources of [the camera's] lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions . . . introduce us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses." (p. 237).



René Clair. Paris qui dort.

among many others. By that conjunction they extended, in registers whose differences I shall presently consider, the analytic meditation on the problematic nature of the metropolis which developed in response to its growth as the center of industrial and finance capitalism.

In 1903 Simmel, in his investigation of "the specifically modern aspects of contemporary life," saw the metropolis as "creating the sensory foundations of mental life," a life whose form is, in contrast to that of the rural social unity, "essentially intellectualistic." The intimate interinvolvement of the money economy and the domination of the intellect are examined in the seminal text, *The Metropolis and Mental Life*.

The purely intellectualistic person is indifferent to all things personal because, out of them, relationships and reactions develop which are not to be completely understood by purely rational methods—just as the unique element in events never enters into the principle of money. . . . The modern city is supplied almost exclusively by production for the market, that is, for entirely unknown purchasers who never appear in the actual field of vision of the producers themselves. Thereby, the interests of each party acquire a relentless matter-of-factness, and its rationally calculated economic egoism need not fear any divergence from its set path because of the imponderability of personal relationships. . . . The calculability of money has generated a precision and a degree of certainty in the definition of equalities and inequalities and an unambiguousness in agreements and arrangements, just as externally this precision has been brought about through the general diffusion of pocket watches. The relationships and concerns



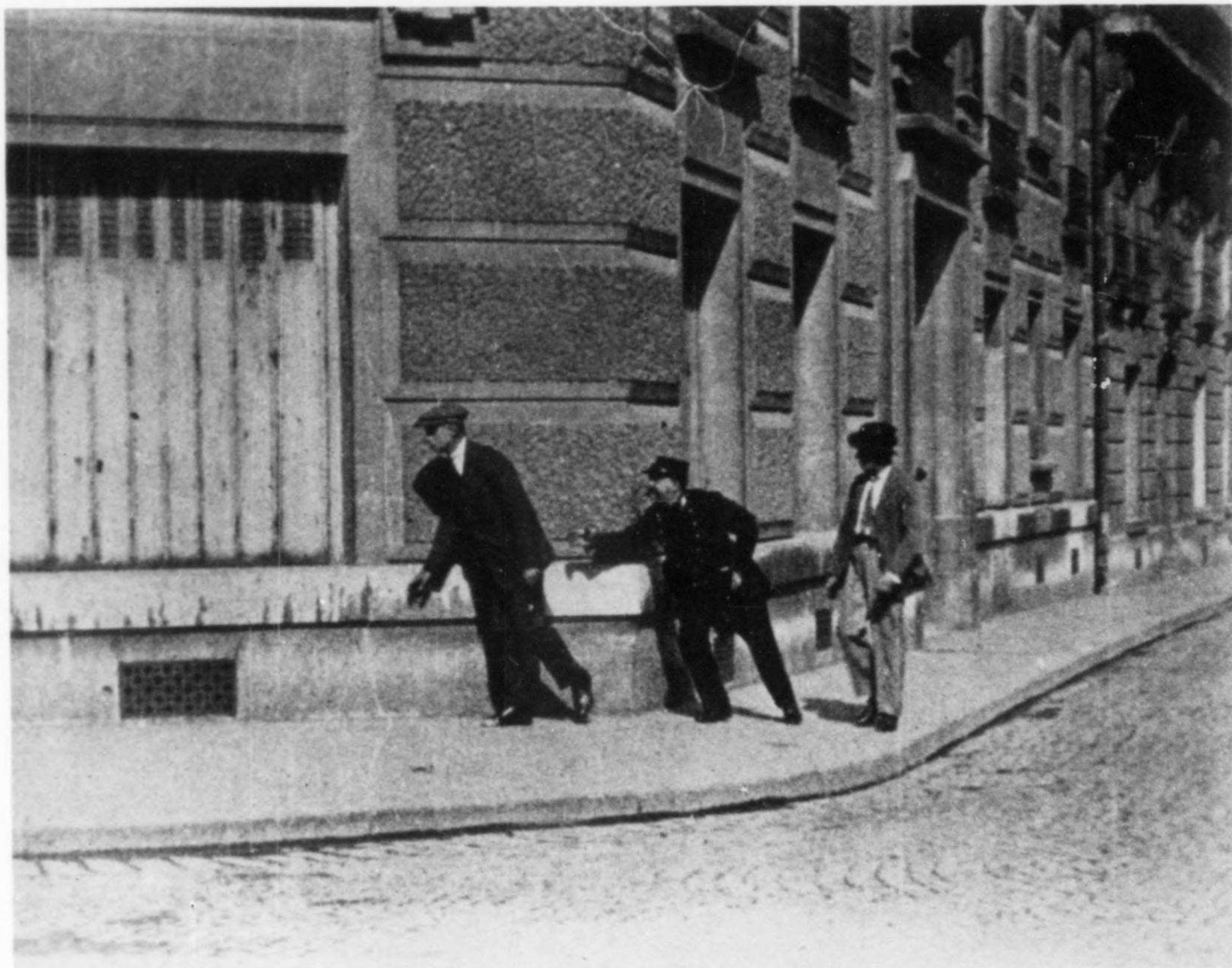
of the typical metropolitan resident are so manifold and complex that especially as a result of the agglomeration of so many persons with such differentiated interests, their relationships and activities intertwine with one another into a many-membered organism. In view of this fact, the lack of the most exact punctuality in promises would cause the whole to break down into an inextricable chaos. If all the watches in Berlin . . .”¹²

Or in Buenos Aires . . . or in Paris . . . or . . .

It is indeed “the fixed framework of time” which insures the dreamless sleep of Paris. Awakening, the sleepers proceed about their business, propelled into motion within the seamless continuity of the perfect, perfectly invisible splice; life proceeds as in the diegesis of complete representational transparency. In this Paris, the center of a money economy, the first and most immediate demands are those of payment (a rose for Miss Crase, a cab in which to see her home), of punishment exacted for theft (as in the detective’s resumed pursuit of the felon, suspended, like the economy and its institutions, during the city’s torpor). In time, “all things float with the same specific gravity of money.” “Time,” as the first American minister to the court of Versailles knew, “is money.” Disruption of the social order predicated on the economy threatens the principle of reason itself. The ecstatic virtuality of our new hold upon causality is, then, demonic in its gratification of desire.

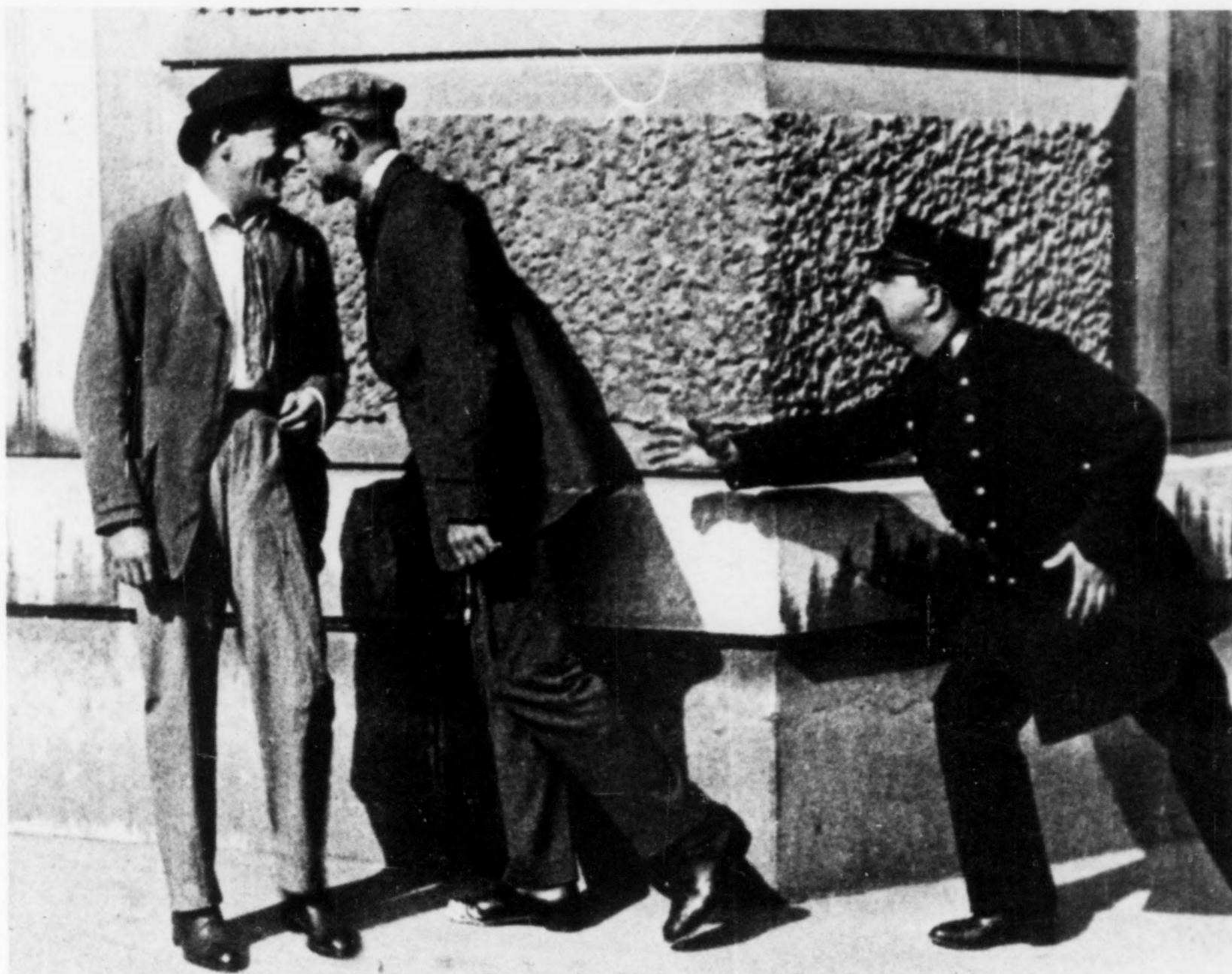
It is this knowledge which sets Clair’s film apart from the corpus of expressionist narrative, from the work of Lang, Murnau, Grune, May, Pabst, in

12. Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1971, p. 328.



which the elements of Simmel's analysis of urban alienation were, throughout the 1920s, to be elaborated. Its reflexivity determines the concrete intimacy and powerful irony of Clair's gloss upon a text whose pertinence transcends the limits of formal sociology. This was, in fact, the point at which Simmel's analytic enterprise encountered the core of the Marxist critique of alienation, producing a text which now demands a reading in the light of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. It was in the *Third Manuscript* that Marx argued the equivalence of money with the alienated self, claiming money as a reduction of human values to those which were merely quantitative, interchangeable, lacking in specificity.

That which exists for me through the medium of money, that which I can pay for (i.e., which money can buy), that I *am*—the possessor of the money. My own power is as great as the power of money. The properties of money are my own, the possessor's properties and faculties. What I *am* and *can do* is, therefore, not at all determined by my individuality. I am ugly, but I can buy the most beautiful woman for myself. Consequently, I am not ugly, for the effect of ugliness, its power



to repel, is annulled by money. . . . I who can have, through the power of money, everything for which the human heart longs, do I not possess all human abilities? Does not my money, therefore, transform all incapacities into their opposites?

If *money* is the bond which binds me to human life, and society to me, and which links me with nature and man, is it not the bond of all *bonds*? Is it not, therefore, also the universal agent of separation? It is the real means of both *separation* and *union*, the galvano-chemical power of society.”¹³

Clair, offering the spectacle of the young hero “awakening” to his implication in the cash nexus, provides us with the comic reading of that text, initiating in this slight work the conjunction of a metacinematic discourse and a cinematic critique of capital, whose theater is the capital of Europe.

13. Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, ed. and trans. T. B. Bottomore, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964, p. 192.

IV.

All praise to the inexhaustible
 Labyrinth of cause and effect
 Which, before unveiling to me
 the mirror
 Where I shall see no one or shall
 see some other self
 Has granted me this perfect contemplation
 Of a language at its dawn

—Jorge Luis Borges

Vertov seized upon cinema's demonic power, enrolling it in the service of an art conceived as vectorial in the revolutionary process. He extracted and developed its epistemological implications, fusing the deep gratification of temporal control with a cognitive project. The systematic use of reverse motion in the visual trope of hysteron proteron thus becomes the pivotal element in the elaboration of his Marxist propaedeutic.

Beginning with *Kino-Glaz*, Vertov retraces the working process—the manufacture of bread, the production of meat—linking consumption to production, reconstituting the unity of the social structure which they in turn produce through the analysis of its successive stages in reverse. The steaks and chops sold in the marketplace are thus returned to their transport units, then back to the slaughterhouse where, in the spectacular reassembling of “the negative of time,” the bull is resuscitated, then herded once again into the train which will restore him to his breeding place.

The “negative of time” is thus developed and refined into an instrument for “the communist decoding of the world.” That world is the arena of industrial labor and its construction of socialism and, converging as it does upon the great synthetic city, is itself created on the editing table out of footage of both Moscow and Odessa. The hysteron proteron takes its place within the arsenal of devices and “anomalies” (freeze-frame, acceleration, slow motion, split screen, and the bravura of a hyperbolically assertive editing technique). In 1929 Vertov offered a summa of the silent cinema's resources and achievements and the vision of that city in which the conditions of alienation are to be annulled. Fades, superimpositions, cuts, visual rhymes, and intercutting articulate a unity, a continuum of labor and leisure, of country and city, of production and consumption, in which the resolution of antinomies is superseded by the resolution of class struggle. It is in that continuum that, like Butcher, Baker, and Magician, whose power of enchantment is inscribed on the faces of the children gathered around

him in the marketplace, *The Man With the Movie Camera* takes his place. As the features of Magician and Child are revealed as those of cameraman and spectator, film, like magic, is disclosed as the product of labor. Thus Clair's ironic gloss upon the dynamics of alienation finds its extension in Vertov's celebration of the realm of freedom.

I shall now explain my invention to you.

—Adolfo Bioy-Casares



Mikhail Kaufman with the technical equipment used to shoot The Man with a Movie Camera, 1928.

An Interview with Mikhail Kaufman

October: In 1929 you and Dziga Vertov completed *The Man with a Movie Camera*, which was the last film on which you collaborated, as well as a summation of the resources and techniques of silent cinema. Can you tell us how the project developed?

Kaufman: The idea for *The Man with a Movie Camera* had already arisen in 1924. How did this idea take shape? Strictly speaking, we needed a Kino-theory and a Kino-program in cinematic form. I suggested such an idea to Vertov, but it could not be realized at that time. There had been a lot of trouble with *A Sixth of the World*;¹ we had exceeded the budget, and the film had not been understood and appreciated as it should have been. The Kinoks² were accused of exaggeration when they claimed they could make successful full-length films.

October: This happened not only after *Kino-Glaz*,³ but after *A Sixth of the World* as well?

Kaufman: Yes, even after *A Sixth of the World*. I too was fired . . . did I tell you about that? Even though my idea had to be deferred, I was already working on a variety of shooting techniques, refining methods so as to obtain a maximally expressive handling of documentary material. The working method of a documentary film director does not involve components such as design, acting, or dramatic composition. His principle is that of creating a film without a preliminary scenario; still, he has a basic theme in mind.

1. *A Sixth of the World*, the third feature-length film produced by Goskino on which Mikhail Kaufman worked with Dziga Vertov, was released on December 31, 1926.

2. Kinoki, or Kinoks, was the name taken by the group organized by Vertov in the early 1920s. Vertov wrote in 1924, "Our movement is called Kino-Eye. We who fight for the Kino-Eye idea call ourselves kinoks." For fuller documentation of the movement and its organization see Dziga Vertov, "The Factory of Facts and Other Writings," *October*, 7 (Winter 1978), 109-28.

3. *Kino-Glaz* (*Kino-Eye*) is the title of the first of the feature-length films on which Kaufman worked with Vertov. It was released on October 31, 1924, one year before Eisenstein's *Strike*. Both Vertov and Kaufman often refer to the group of which they were founding members as Kino-Glaz.

October: So there was a general plan. Some sort of scheme had been worked out.

Kaufman: Yes. This particular project was extremely complex. While developing the most complex sections, we began to realize that we should not work so loosely, that every kind of work requires an organized form. Otherwise you're not using your energy profitably . . .

October: May I interrupt for a second? Was it the influence of Gastev's⁴ ideas that made you consider the profitable and economical use of energy?

Kaufman: No, that was not the reason. My personal inclination, no matter what I do, is to find ways of improving the process.

October: The work process?

Kaufman: Yes. If you work in disorder, it will obviously be unproductive. Certain skills take shape gradually or, better, they are born. These skills lead one to eliminate other, secondary factors. One has to find one's direction. This led to my working out of ideas, elaborating and experimenting in the area of theory, of film analysis. But I'm not going to discuss film analysis now; that is a different area. In any case, the process had already been conceived.

One idea involved in *A Sixth of the World* was to visit the Kuban and to film the great changes taking place in agriculture, to document the old and also that which was being born. I had managed to work out this plan before the planting season in the Kuban. Vertov was busy elsewhere; he sent young cameramen separately by train to the North. They had not yet done anything; it was impossible to grasp so much material in such a short time, so that many began their work on such trips. There was Konstantinov. Then Tolchan, who was a beginner. And then Lemberg shot a little film in Turkey.

October: In what year?

Kaufman: 1925.

October: Already in 1925?

Kaufman: The film was released in 1926. After *A Sixth of the World*, we set off for

4. Alexei Kapitonovich Gastev (1882-1941), a poet born in Suzdal, became a leading figure in labor organization within the U.S.S.R. In 1920 he organized the Central Labor Institute under the All-Union Central Council of Labor Unions. He was, from 1924-26, the Chairman of the Council for the Scientific Organization of Labor under the People's Commissariat of Workers and Peasants' Inspection.

the Ukraine, where there was a prospect of actually making *The Man with a Movie Camera*.

October: As early as 1926?

Kaufman: Yes. But so as not to begin with that film, we made *The Eleventh Year*⁵ first. I was already able to free myself of secondary concerns, so work on *A Sixth of the World* was considerably more organized and focused. Nevertheless, the synthesis of these different goals and the thought of the future application of this material remained in my mind the whole time.

The entire group consisted of two people: myself and the young Kinok, Boris Kudinov, the leader of the Komsomol Pioneers, whom we had filmed as early as *Kino-Glaz*. It was thanks to him that I shot such expressive material. He had a feeling for the old village life with its primitive agriculture, as well as for the new life then emerging. But this statement as such did not satisfy me. I had already decided to work toward a more creative interpretation.

October: How so? Can you describe it?

Kaufman: I would observe separate phenomena and analyze the elements of the old—those from which it derives—looking for the manner in which the old expressed itself. It is clearly expressed in solitary labor with the scythe on vast

5. *The Eleventh Year*, Kaufman and Vertov's fourth feature-length film, was released May 15, 1928, two months after Eisenstein's *October*.



Kaufman and his assistants during the shooting of The Eleventh Year, 1927.

stretches of land: the primitive labor of the countryside. And suddenly a tractor appears. I decided to include the two within one frame. In addition to the portrayal of the old agricultural labor, I created, as a kind of culmination, a synthesized frame in which, on the left, bulls are grazing; I then added a woman with a scythe bending down to cut grain, others sowing wheat, and from the center, against all of this, there advances . . .

October: A tractor.

Kaufman: Technology.

October: This was in 1925? Before Eisenstein's *General Line*?⁶

Kaufman: Yes, before *General Line*, which is most characteristic of that period, even though all sorts of other stylistic elements were developed in the Crimea or in Novorossisk. It was not that particular image, but the fact that a synthesis of separate elements was taking shape as a new form.

October: Were the individual frames organized, or did you combine several images?

Kaufman: I always tried not to organize the action.

October: But how were you able to get four such different notions within one frame? Did you combine them optically?

Kaufman: Yes, optically, and in a very primitive way. At this point I was taking a risk, because it was so primitive. I cut out pieces of cardboard, divided the frame, and cut specific parts out of the cardboard leaving a place, let's say, for "reaping with a scythe." Everything for that frame was shot independently. It was as if I were covering one part of the frame and going on to the next part. So that's how it was created. . . .

At the time it was very complicated. Later I learned to do it post factum. I could make a synthesis based on any material whatsoever, no matter where it had been shot. But this came much later. The main thing was to have material ready right where you were. I would not proceed in that way now, although it ultimately produced work of very high quality. The frame of which I've just been speaking was presented in its primitive form.

6. Eisenstein's film on the agricultural program of the first five-year plan, *The General Line*, was retitled *The Old and the New* on Stalin's express recommendation. It was released on November 7, 1929.

October: In *A Sixth of the World*?

Kaufman: Absolutely. I have a still of that frame; later, it was widely publicized. You could say that all of my work consisted in learning to film life in such a way that it could impress and influence one emotionally without the mediation of the artist or actor. To simply film, photograph life is to produce a chronicle. We actually went beyond the limits of the chronicle and began to create works of art—using the image, working on the image through every possible means: through camera angles, through photography. If you take someone's picture, you should make it an image, not simply a photograph. This doesn't mean that I have to compose the person into an image. Rather I catch the moment when reality becomes an image.

Ever since childhood Vertov had the ability to perceive things through images and to communicate them in poetic form. It's interesting, by the way, that even as a child I was attracted to different forms of representation than he. I studied photographs, I drew—and since we're discussing the early stages of our collaboration, we can say that it began when our beloved Aunt Masha graduated from medical school. Vertov wrote a poem for her, and I drew a sort of congratulation picture of a dove in flight. There was already a certain . . .

October: Division of labor.

Kaufman: Division of labor, and a form of collaboration—even though I did not always feel that Vertov perceived the material I shot quite as I did, even when something was missing. He was perceptive, however, and he had a way of communicating the emotional impact of life in very simple and effective ways, in both *A Sixth of the World* and *Kino-Glaz*, where the material had the most immediate role. I feel that he collected footage for *A Sixth of the World* very well, very effectively. The sense of collaboration was also very strong in *Kino-Glaz*. It was not distorted in his diaries or by later theoretical interpretations.

Today it appears as though scenarios had always existed for *Forward, Soviet!*⁷ and *The Man with a Movie Camera*. Vertov wrote in his diaries that he would have liked to have created films based totally upon documentary footage. Having gone through the archives, he acquired the skill and the desire to work solely with documentary footage. He used found archival footage, probably shot by cameramen at the front, or footage that had been preserved in the archive for long periods of time. He made a wonderful film that was not, however, from my point of view, a poetic achievement, since it was made primarily from dry material, descriptive photographs of the civil war. Here there was a synthesized

7. *Forward, Soviet!*, the second feature-length collaboration between Kaufman and Vertov, was commissioned by the Moscow Soviet and released on July 23, 1926.



Stills from Dziga Vertov's History of the Civil War, 1922.

image of the army and of military heroism, of an army that had been victorious in this kind of warfare. I still remember this film, and I recall with great pleasure each frame of the civil war, shot by cameramen chosen at random and used without regard for chronology, but for the expressiveness which lay within each frame. Even though that expressiveness was primitive, since the shooting had been very standard, it had been extracted from the facts. They were found facts—not like what you get in Esfir Shub's work,⁸ where you have things like Tolstoy on a stroll . . .

October: In *The Great Way*, however, it's no longer so simple.

Kaufman: Something special does happen in *The Great Way*. Until then Shub had tried to tell things in a poetic manner. . . . By the way, I have Vertov's review of *The Romanov Dynasty*. In it he describes with revulsion this method of using footage—and to a certain extent he's right. From the point of view of historical context, however, it is extremely interesting, even if in terms of interpretation, the way in which images and emotions are presented, it leaves a great deal to be desired. The footage can speak for itself; it doesn't need the author's interpretation. . . . So Shub had her first great success, greater than ours with *Kino-Glaz*. She won her first real victory. A big film—which we couldn't have made—received a magnificent welcome. And Vertov was jealous. I didn't see anything threatening in all this; things were as one might expect them to be at this particular point. But that didn't mean one had to stop there. If you're advancing in documentary film and the art of the image, it's natural that the way opens up only gradually. I felt that we had achieved a great deal in this respect.

October: The question of the relation of the two works is interesting, however. They do use the same material: in *The Great Way* Shub uses much of the footage of Lenin's burial that is used in *Leninist Kino-Pravda*⁹ and in *Three Songs of Lenin*.¹⁰ Would you say that the different editing styles are grounded in totally different conceptions of documentary cinema?

8. Esfir Shub (1894-1959), one of the earliest and most innovative of Soviet documentary filmmakers, was the inventor of the compilation film. Using archival material and found footage, carefully sifted and edited, she produced both *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, an analytic chronicle of the First World War and its part in the collapse of the tsarist regime, and *The Great Way*, a celebration of the achievements of the first postrevolutionary decade.

9. *Leninist Kino-Pravda*, released in 1924, is a three-part "cine-poem" on the death of Lenin composed of footage shot by several different cameramen, including Kaufman, Lemberg, and Edward Tisse, the newsreel cameraman who was to become the life-long collaborator of Eisenstein.

10. Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin*, released on November 1, 1934, is a feature-length sound film. In it he used the newsreel material previously edited in both Shub's *The Great Way* and his own *Leninist Kino-Pravda*.

Kaufman: Absolutely. With Shub, you somehow still have a connected plot, an accessible story which develops gradually. Her work is closer to Pudovkin's. We felt that when working with documentary material one shouldn't follow a standard narrative; it was extremely important to piece facts together and to unite everything in a single thrust. Actually, we felt that the point of editing, in the full sense of the word, was not only to have an image in every frame, but to produce . . .

October: A collision of images?

Kaufman: No, an *interpretation* of images.

October: Do you feel this was more closely related to Eisenstein's principle?

Kaufman: Not at all, although Eisenstein felt that he learned a lot from us. He came from the theater; in the theater one directs dramas, one strings beads. But he immediately realized, like an intelligent man with a good eye, that in cinema one needs a fresh outlook. One has to realize, for instance, that all the facts and phenomena which in life are torn apart both temporally and physically can also conjoin. Kuleshov considered this to be the interest, the focus of montage.¹¹ Someone raised his hand in America, and here in Moscow they responded; they raised their arms and fired in Red Square! People looked through binoculars from the Eiffel Tower and saw the Spassky Dome. Everyone realized the possibilities of cinema.

October: And so, evidently, did you. You were, of course, aware of the experiments being made, were you not?

Kaufman: There were no experiments yet.

October: In 1920 there were.

Kaufman: Whose?

October: Kuleshov's.

11. Lev Kuleshov (1899-1963) was a pioneer of Soviet film practice and theory. His analysis and intensification of American editing techniques were widely and deeply influential upon the work of his contemporaries, among them his student Pudovkin. Kuleshov's best known films of the silent period are *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924) and *By the Law* (1926). A collection of his theoretical writings, *Kuleshov on Film*, was published by the University of California Press in 1974.

Kaufman: Kuleshov's experiments in editing? But they didn't excite us. To be quite honest, it was the editing of *Intolerance* that influenced us.¹²

October: Directly? Griffith?

Kaufman: Yes, Griffith.

October: Through Kuleshov?

Kaufman: No, Griffith. We all felt, each of us in his separate part of the world, that through the documentary film we could develop a new kind of art. Not only documentary art, or the art of the chronicle, but rather an art based on images, the creation of an image-oriented journalism.

October: There is a very interesting moment in one of Eisenstein's discussions with the Kinoks after the screening of *Strike*, when he says: "*Strike*, as opposed to *Kino-Glaz*, doesn't pretend to disengage itself from art."¹³ The Kinoks felt that they were working outside of art, but Eisenstein did not claim to be disengaged from art.

Kaufman: He didn't claim to be disengaged from art, but at that time the Kinoks were using constructivist phrases; we felt that we were intellectual engineers, that we were constructing thought out of figurative material. This may have played a certain role, up to a certain point, but actually the documentary had never been disengaged from art; on the contrary, it was a developing art, which is now evidently in full bloom. It has actually only just begun. Certain possibilities were open to us; one can now show the magnificent sorts of things that can be created. We used a lot of leftist phrases. There were the "Nichevokis" . . .

But we have strayed from the subject. I want to clarify the basis for our impulse to seek a new film language, and the way in which I fulfilled my task and tried to improve the film camera. At the very beginning there were no telephoto lenses whatsoever, to film people unawares, let's say. It's harder to film straight on; it's much better to observe from afar. We had to work out a system of possibilities, independently of what we wanted or needed to film. The special problem was filming people. After an argument between us, Vertov decided to publish a sort of

12. D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) was exported to the Soviet Union in 1919. The film's immense influence has been acknowledged by all the filmmakers and theoreticians of the period. The most eloquent testimony to that influence is Eisenstein's essay, "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today," in *Film Form*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda, New York, Harcourt Brace and World, 1949, pp. 195-255.

13. Eisenstein's differences with the Kino-Glaz group are most explicitly articulated in "On the Question of a Materialist Approach to Form," in *The Avant-Garde: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney, New York, New York University Press, 1978, pp. 15-21.

ban ruling out the "kinokina" and temporarily ruling out the subject as an object of filming because of his inability to behave in front of a camera. As if a subject absolutely has to know how to behave! At that time I put it as follows: In the narrative feature one has to know how to act; in the documentary cinema one has to know how *not* to act. To be able *not* to act—one will have to wait a long time until the subject is educated in such a way that he won't pay any attention to the fact that he is being filmed. There's no school like that yet, is there? So instead of waiting, I said to him: "You've just reminded me of the first photographs I took as a child." I shot all sorts of interesting occurrences—the neighbors, and in school. There was an incident when I was expelled from school because I had snapped a picture of a pupil passing an answer to someone. And I said to Vertov, "There's a whole system to be worked out. We have to find this system."

Following that line of thought I constructed a sort of tent, something like a telephone booth, for *The Man with a Movie Camera*. There has to be an observation point somewhere. So I made myself up as a telephone repairman. There weren't any special lenses, so I went out and bought a regular camera and removed the deep-focus lens. Standing off to the side I could still get things very close up, and that's why you saw those wonderful faces of the children and of the Chinese magician in *The Man with a Movie Camera*. This method supplied us with material which was much more expressive. For instance, when I filmed "the rescue," the attempt to save the asphyxiated guard, the first aid team left. Standing off to the side, I observed the display of emotions, and totally new and fresh material appeared.

Gradually all these methods were perfected, and the whole system as well. The shooting process for "life as it is" required that people's attention be distracted. But there was more to it than just the shooting. We had to organize an environment in which we could work comfortably, one in which we could bathe as one would in oil. For example, when I filmed a threshing competition, nobody knew what was going to happen. I just promised that the one who could thresh the most would have his picture taken. At that time a photo was still worth a lot. They worked as hard as they could, and I observed from off to the side and filmed something that was reckless, wonderful fun, and an interesting work process. A wonderfully interesting episode came out of the threshing incident.

I also want to describe a series of devices which we succeeded in working out and which Vertov included in his memoirs. We worked on them daily. Every day we thought of something new in the way of shooting methods: for example, shooting while in motion, which finally led to the motorcycle and the racing car. I would take part in races—not for the prize, but simply to observe, which didn't bother anybody. It worked splendidly; the steering wheel was used to keep the objects in front of one all the time. One didn't even have to look through the camera. Everything was set automatically. Before it was automatic I had to crank the camera by hand. Those were the devices which then became the crane. At that time even narrative feature films didn't have cranes, the magnetic crane to cover a

wide range. We had to use high lookout points, when these existed. There weren't any helicopters. One should really have climbed out on top of a chimney, because then one gets a sense of the whole layout, as well as a very unusual view of life. And I climbed onto the crane in front of millions of people.

When a great quantity of material had been accumulated, we gradually worked out the artistic methods which were involved in our idea of the cinema-eye. An ordinary person finds himself in some sort of environment, gets lost amidst the zillions of phenomena, and observes these phenomena from a bad vantage point. He registers one phenomenon very well, registers a second and a third, but has no idea of where they may lead. He has no goal. Unless, let's say, he's a writer. So he writes something down, that's all. He's not, however, trying to make this material into the heritage of millions.

But the man with a movie camera is infused with the particular thought that he is actually seeing the world for other people. Do you understand? He joins these phenomena with others, from elsewhere, which may not even have been filmed by him. Like a kind of scholar he is able to gather empirical observations in one place and then in another. And that is actually the way in which the world has come to be understood. We're not setting ourselves the task of knowing the world in the sense of penetrating the depths of science—as in physics, let's say, or biology. But our work as journalists and organizers consists in observing life from the point of view of the social structure. Besides, at that time the silent cinema was still highly praised, not only for the reasons that Chaplin praised it (and you know it was very hard for him to switch to sound), but because silent film is a language that is accessible to all people. During that period it inspired us because it was an international language. It's not even like Esperanto. You have to learn Esperanto, but everybody already has this language. And it's better to see something once than to hear it a hundred times. So there were many exciting things. I was constantly amassing material. My assistant was shooting; let's say, I would climb up on the roof and he would shoot it.

October: Then he was filming the work process?

Kaufman: I collected a whole carton full of shots of the work process, which I wanted to use. But as soon as we agreed upon this, there was an insistence on compromise. I still have the plan. Not on film; the material which we recorded disappeared in the Odessa film studios. But they immediately began to say: "You have to do it this way or that. This is real, and that is not." But I was never interested in compromise. And of course there was the fact that I "destroyed" the Bolshoi Theater in jest.¹⁴ Would you like me to tell you how I destroyed it? I used a very simple and interesting method. Until now, no one has known how. Everyone asks me, "How did you do it?" I say, "It was very simple."

14. *The Man with a Movie Camera* contains, in its accelerated climactic sequences, a series of shots of the Bolshoi Theater seen breaking in two and sinking into the ground.

October: How?

Kaufman: I'll tell you later.

October: But doesn't it relate to the subject of our discussion?

Kaufman: One really has to demonstrate. The camera is attached to a vertical tripod, so that it can slant this way or that. But I put it on its side, like that. So that my lens faced that way, and the camera could sway this way and that. I had found a method to film in a different way than I had in the Kuban—which I told you about.

October: By mixing everything together.

Kaufman: Yes. First of all it occurred to me a long time ago that the geometric division of the frame isn't the division of art and isn't the division of illusion. This is the way I perceive it: Cinema is illusion. We had absolutely no need to make the division this way. It turns out badly. Maybe sometimes it's useful that way, but in the present case it was better to make an overlap within the frame. I had already done things like that before the Bolshoi Theater. So here is the border. I don't want to get a border line, but a gradual blending into semishades. And I have to get the same thing from that side. Here's the figure, and here is the passage to the semishades. They join right here at this place, and one compensates for the other.

October: The center of the frame presents itself as a partial overlap.

Kaufman: In this particular case it produced that effect. One can actually make five divisions. That's the way we did the crowd scene in *The Man With a Movie Camera*. Do you know how the crowd was done? There was no crowd. What was I supposed to do? I needed a crowd. Besides, you get some interesting effects this way. Here is the frame. I divided it like this.

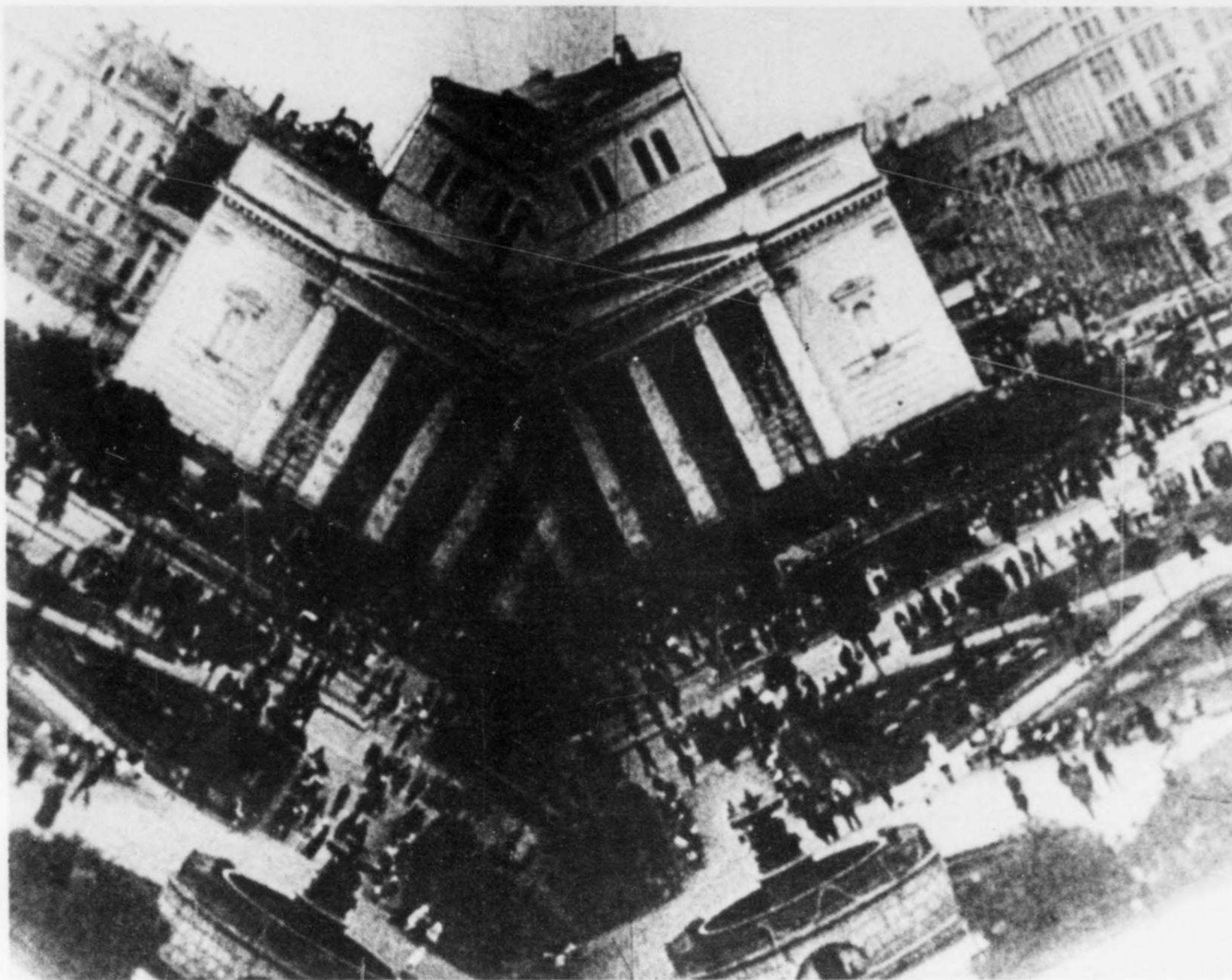
October: Horizontally, into a few different parts.

Kaufman: I used a telephoto attachment for this part.

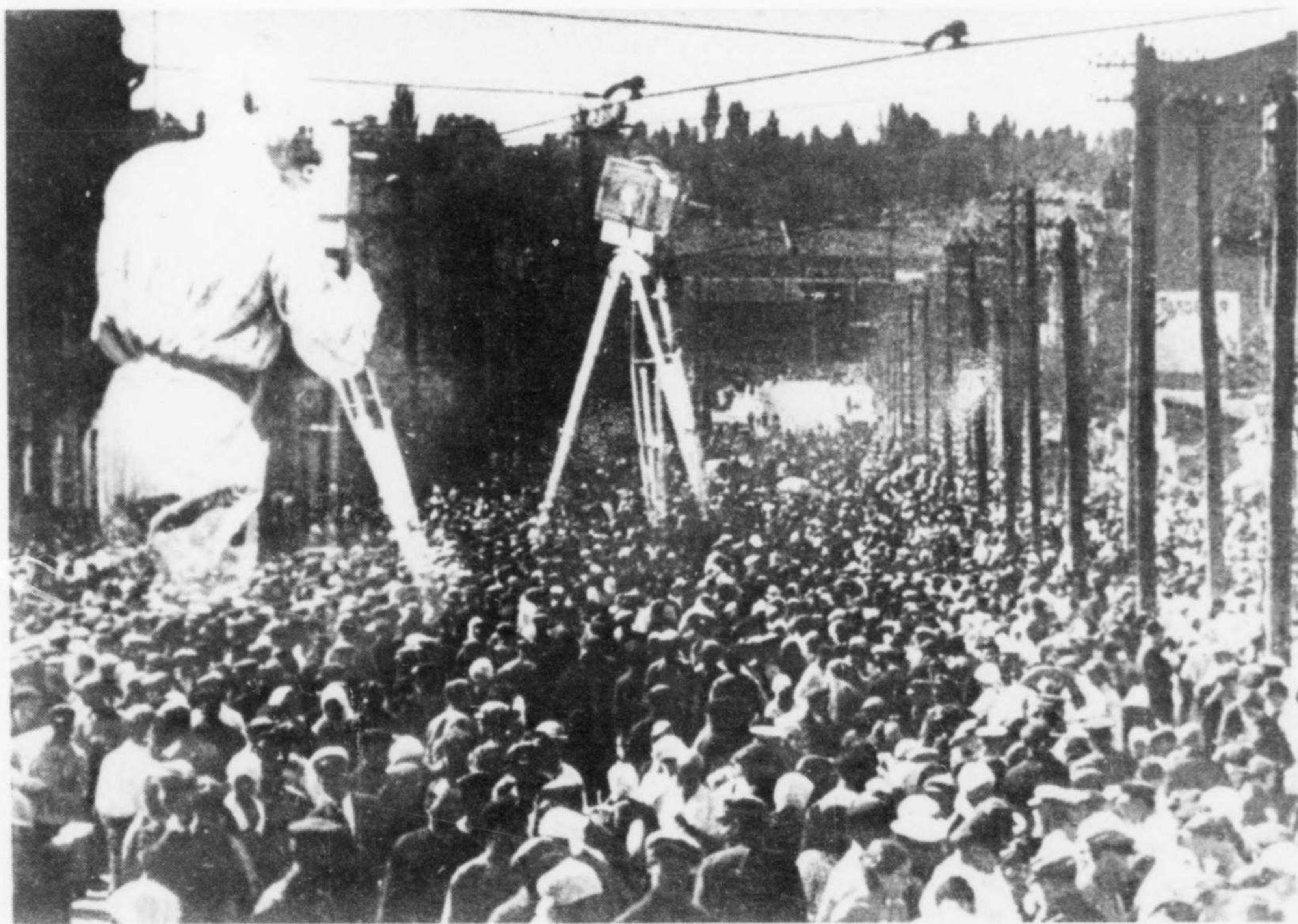
October: For the lower part you used a deep-focus lens.

Kaufman: I shot the next one with a lens with a shorter focus. I obtained a fantastic perspective.

October: You shot one and the same crowd?



Kaufman's special effects for The Man with a Movie Camera, 1929.



Kaufman: Yes, the same one. Still, it changed a bit. But I just shot everything in consecutive order.

October: And later you combined them optically into one frame.

Kaufman: I didn't combine them later. The results were immediate. I blocked it like this with the inner-frame overlap.

October: An overlap within the frame . . .

Kaufmann: I gradually transferred, changed the focus, in every section. There's no border, you understand. And it goes gradually, gradually . . .

October: The overlap.

Kaufman: Here it is sort of gradated, but that's an illusion again. Let somebody try to do it. Well, if you reread this today, of course, it doesn't suffice.

October: That's understandable.

Kaufman: So I obtained—that is, I built—my first machine. But that was after I had grown tired of working like this, you know. After all, it's really very complicated.

October: To combine in the camera.

Kaufman: During the shooting. At that time I made a projector-camera. I took an American Pathé camera—have you heard of Pathé? The Pathé "camel" camera? Was it called that in the West?—which I used because it had a magazine for reels on top. It had those humps, so we called it a camel. I attached a light to the camera, which illuminated the frame, and with another camera (the French Debrie) I filmed this frame directly on a macros shooting scale. I shaped up *Lenin* that way. I redid all of the Lenin material. I got close-ups of Lenin. All with this camera. This was the first trick camera. I could do everything with it, because I could always use it as a projector.

October: That way you could get a second generation of material, and a third, and so on.

Kaufman: Today, of course, we're lagging way behind.

October: Behind the twenties?

Kaufman: No, not only the twenties.

October: The technology of the West?

Kaufman: We're lagging behind television. Television is now achieving fantastic things—inconspicuously, quite easily. But at that time it was extremely costly. We accumulated an enormous number of devices of all sorts which were supposed to be revealed in *The Man with a Movie Camera*. Not exactly revealed, but shown as a means to an end. Briefly, the man with a movie camera lands in the middle of life's turmoil. First we see him as someone in the midst of this whirl, unable to make sense of his situation. He rushes towards one thing, then towards another, and towards a third, and so on.

October: In disorder.

Kaufman: Chaotically. And that explains the accumulation of a tremendous number of phenomena. But gradually, because he is homo sapiens, he starts to find connections between these. And the moment he finds the connections—even one single connection—he's no longer attracted to just any impression, but to the next associated impression. And that is how we get the thinking man with the movie camera, comprehending the world. Do you see?

October: Yes. Was this your suggestion?

Kaufman: That's why I shot . . . why I actually jumped from one side to the other, and to a third. I shot freely. Everything was interesting. Montage as spectacle. But the material allowed it. It's true that some things weren't shot because we were so carried away by Odessa. Material was supposed to be shot which would then lead to the search for other material, so as to comprehend all shooting processes, to interpret them. We were filming in a particular environment in our country, where particular sorts of processes take place. Finally we had to hand in the picture, the second half of the picture—perfecting, comprehending this life which we . . .

October: And frames from the first half were supposed to be used?

Kaufman: Absolutely. New connections. That was my dream. Vertov knew; Dziga knew perfectly well. I knew after all what the result would be. He had an irresistible urge; he wanted to compromise the feature cinema at any cost. I found this childish. It was envy. Actually, it was spite.

October: A feeling of persecution?

Kaufman: That was the result, actually. We had to show that we too were entitled to material resources—the struggle for a place in the sun. But I always felt that there was a certain hypocrisy in going to see feature films with great pleasure,

delighting in them, to go to the theater, let's say . . . well, we didn't like anything but opera. That's the truth. And we wanted to reject art. Nevertheless, we had a plan and we went off to Odessa. But then the time came to finish the film. I was summoned: "Listen, are you going to be shooting this film indefinitely? We're already running out of film stock. What are you actually doing here?"

October: Was this during the shooting of *The Man with a Movie Camera*?

Kaufman: Yes. Well, it came when we had to break off shooting, and Vertov started editing. I was very disappointed then. Instead of a film which had been thought out, what came out was actually only its first part. And it's terribly overloaded with events which are, from my point of view, very intrusive. I'm being perfectly open with you. And I don't want this to . . .

October: Remain unclear?

Kaufman: Do you remember that interminable number of trams? Those repetitions? Even when reusing the same material, one should never have so many repetitions. Things have to move forward in some direction.

October: Did you take part in the editing?

Kaufman: I had already stopped participating in the editing. Well, I was involved in editing, insofar as editing starts with filming.

October: Naturally.

Kaufman: First with the plan, and then with the shooting, because that's what dictates the material.

October: And Svilova?¹⁵

Kaufman: Svilova was an editor. She spliced, distributed material, and made selections. But she was an assistant editor, not a coauthor.

October: Did you participate in such a way that you actually looked over the material when it had already been edited to a certain extent?

15. Elizaveta Ignatyevna Svilova (1900-1976), Vertov's wife and collaborator, began her career as a printer and editor for Pathé Frères in Moscow. She was chief editor for some of Vertov's major films. In 1921 she began to collect all available film footage on Lenin, and in 1922 she made a compilation film released as a special issue of *The Goskino Calendar Series* in celebration of the anniversary of Lenin's birth. Svilova is also listed as codirector on four of Vertov's films of the 1940s.

Kaufman: No. If I had looked it over, much of it wouldn't be there.

October: You sent in the material, but continued filming?

Kaufman: I had already started *Spring*.

October: Wasn't *Spring* later?

Kaufman: What do you mean?

October: The film was edited in 1929.

Kaufman: And in 1929 *Spring* was released.

October: During the same time as the editing of *The Man with a Movie Camera*?

Kaufman: Yes.

October: And when did you realize that *The Man with a Movie Camera* hadn't fulfilled your own plan?

Kaufman: I could tell from the material.

October: If not from the material which hadn't been shot.

Kaufman: Exactly.

October: Because the filming was broken off?

Kaufman: Yes.

October: Even before you had seen the finished film?

Kaufman: We had wanted to make *Spring* for a long time. When I was in Kiev I saw certain things, so I speeded things up—under terribly difficult conditions, I should add, because I was also counted on as a cameraman. But I somehow acquired the authority, and they took a risk.

October: In commissioning you?

Kaufman: I had made a small film in two parts about children, which had been enthusiastically received.

October: During the shooting of *The Man with a Movie Camera*?

Kaufman: Yes. When *The Man with a Movie Camera* came out, it was also received with great interest.

October: Really? And how do you relate that to the fact that you became a director?

Kaufman: I didn't become a director then. I had made *Moscow* before that, and an aviation film called *The Challenge of the Sky* (*Dayosh Vozdukh*), which was also very well received. I wouldn't blush if I were asked to show it now. And while working on that film, I learned how to fly; a couple of pilots taught me. They noticed my enthusiasm. Aviation had always been a dream of mine, and from childhood on I had always planned to go into aviation. . . . So I had made a whole series of films before this. *Moscow* was also extremely exciting in its time.

October: Yes, I know.

Kaufman: But Vertov perceived this as a . . . well, he always felt that we were losing time, all the more because he knew that Eisenstein was trying to win me over.

October: He invited you to work on *Potemkin*?

Kaufman: Actually he was very forward about it, but I didn't want to be disloyal. Basically, I didn't want to leave.

October: And on which film did Dovzhenko want you to work? *Aerograd*?¹⁶

Kaufman: Yes, on *Aerograd*. After *Spring* and *The Man with a Movie Camera*. He very much liked my way of shooting. As I see it, he had no need for anybody like me. Maybe I could have staged some vivid scenes, but I was always interested in one thing: not staging, played out by actors, although I probably would have filmed the actors unawares as well. That's what made the Italians great.

October: But wasn't there enough room for documentary filming in *Ivan*?¹⁷

Kaufman: Yes.

October: On the Dnieper. Do you remember when he invited you to work on . . . was it not on *Ivan*?

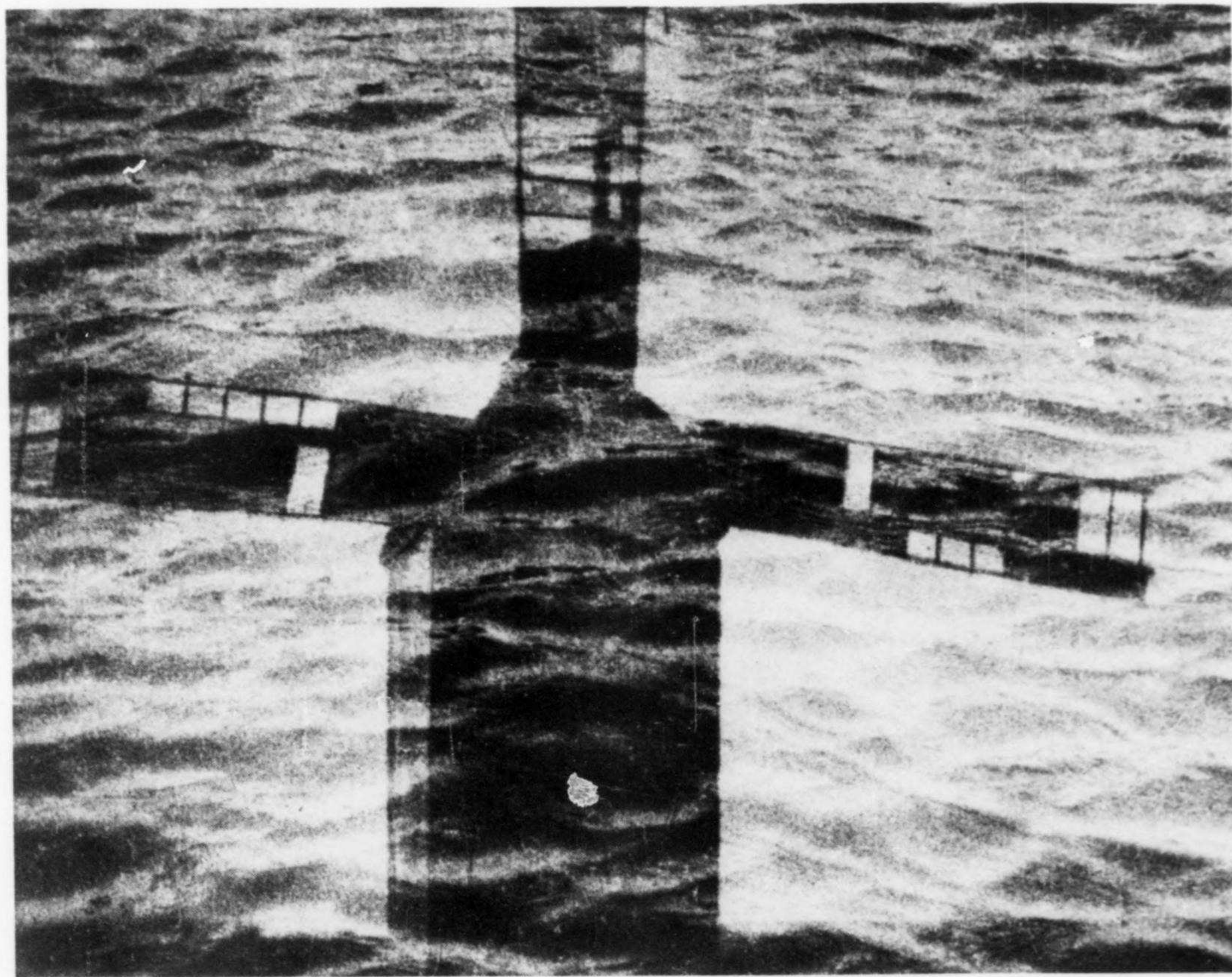
16. *Aerograd*, written and directed by Alexander Dovzhenko, was released on November 6, 1935.

17. Dovzhenko's *Ivan* was released on November 6, 1932.

Kaufman: No, it was for *Aerograd*, in Kiev. Eisenstein did not approach me personally. He probably felt uncomfortable about it. But Shub literally attacked. Perhaps there was some antagonism, an attempt to undermine. I explained everything to her. In relation to this, she was perhaps more progressive. In any case, she and I shared a common interest; we belonged to one sect. The point is to go out into life armed with a movie camera and to use it to procure the necessary material for the making of a film.

In *Enthusiasm* there is a whole row of frames which were shot by my assistant and which repeat episodes from *Spring*. Do you remember the church drowning? I can drown whatever I like. It's an extremely simple trick effect. You have a church, it drowns, and in place of a church you have a pond.

Kaufman's "drowning" effect.



Although I'm very fond of *A Sixth of the World*, I must tell you that when Vertov had collected all the material, he almost lost his head. Then I suddenly hit on a book of Chukovsky's. Do you know which little book I mean? I still have that book somewhere. I've kept it as a souvenir. And now try to figure out how *A Sixth of the World* was made.

I feel a bit awkward; my life is drawing to a close. I want you to have a clearer idea of our problems. Why did we have problems in making *A Sixth of the World*? Well, it was a commissioned work, what they call a film to order. It was a film product for export. You are given a theme, and there are no other alternatives. At that time we couldn't have made a big film ourselves. All of a sudden we got an order from Gostorg; we had to make one. In one sense, the film was already shot, because it was a film on commission. It can be very frightening to find yourself within those types of limitations. And you can imagine what type of people commission films; try to prove to them that you're, as they say, a camel. But in the end I surmounted the difficulties.

October: And Belinson¹⁸ helped you with this?

Kaufman: Belinson?

October: Didn't Belinson help you on *Kino-Glaz*?

Kaufman: Belinson published a book. In fact, he was really infected with the idea of *Kino-Glaz*. He wrote an article against the theater of fools and in favor of *Kino-Glaz*. He was some sort of art critic attempting to theorize. A wise-guy trying to be smart, raving about: "What's narrative? It's anecdote, thought up out of the blue! It's religion, a religious ritual, a drug." That's how people looked at narrative drama, maybe because it was fashionable to do so.

October: Belinson published an article in which he claimed that Gostorg, with its staff of Troyanovsky, Belensky, and Yasny, intended to shoot a publicity film of their own, and Belinson, as supervisor, submitted a production plan to the executive staff. After that he proposed the film to Eisenstein, who rejected it. Belinson, who became involved in the plan through his own doing, expressed the conviction that one could collect material using the itinerary of the cameraman—that is, one could organize all the material for the Gostorg import-export project—with the tentative itinerary of London-Moscow-Shanghai—but one could also shoot it in an improvised, documentary, real-life style, so as to make it

18. Alexander Belenson was the author of *Cinema Today* (1925), which includes essays on Eisenstein, Kuleshov, and Vertov.



Mikhail Kaufman (left) and Dziga Vertov, 1922.

less of a commercial film, and more interesting and attractive for presentation abroad. And that, says Belinson, is what he insisted on. It was after that the fragment of *Kino-Glaz* appeared.

Kaufman: I didn't know about that.

October: You didn't?

Kaufman: All I know is that there was a certain Yasny and a certain Troyanovsky. We became good friends. There was also Enchin, a political consultant, who strongly supported my ideas for this film.

October: Good timing, right? . . . It's remarkable. Belinson seems to have been a bit of a rogue. He really loved to take credit . . .

Kaufman: Belinson had no part in it at all. No part whatsoever. All he did was to support the idea of *Kino-Glaz*. But I don't know of his doing anything for *A Sixth of the World*.

October: He was a real businessman, judging from all this.

Kaufman: Well, no, he was a clever man. That's why his article was interesting. It was an interesting article.

But it was a pity that the *Kino-Glaz* group fell apart. It shouldn't have collapsed. Frankly it could have continued to develop. A great deal could have been built on that foundation. Two circumstances contributed to the collapse of *Kino-Glaz*: first of all, the release of *A Sixth of the World*; and the refusal to allow us make *The Man With a Movie Camera*. After that it was impossible for us to get work, so we left for Kiev. Out of the whole *Kino-Glaz* group only Vertov and I remained. We felt quite confident about the future.

Film's Institutional Mode of Representation and the Soviet Response

NOËL BURCH

It is tempting to regard the system of representation at work in the vast majority of films produced during cinema's earliest period (which we may situate between 1892 and 1906) as an authentically working-class system, in opposition to not only the bourgeois novel, theater, and painting of the nineteenth century, but also an institutional mode of representation as it was to develop after 1906. In the countries where the film industry first developed, not only was the audience of this cinema largely proletarian, but in many respects the system of representation which we may identify as specifically of this period derives little from the characteristically bourgeois art forms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and almost everything from popular art forms descendent from the Middle Ages and before.

However, much of the *otherness* of the films of this era is patently overdetermined, often due to the contradiction between the aspirations—conscious and unconscious—of middle-class inventors and entrepreneurs on the one hand and the influence of such plebeian or otherwise “alien” art forms as the circus, the carnival sideshow, the picture postcard, or the lantern show on the other.¹ In any case, one must regard as highly problematic any direct intervention of the working classes, whose taste could have directly affected only the substance of the films they saw (in France and England, especially); while the deepest aspirations of the working class were sometimes catered to symbolically, these films certainly never reflected revolutionary ideology. In France this privileged relationship between an essentially populist cinema and the working classes lasted practically until the introduction of sound. In the United States, however, where even in the era of a wholly proletarian audience the substance of the films mostly reflected the lives and ideals of their petit-bourgeois makers, the industry quickly came to see that the condition for its commercial development was the creation of a mass audience, that is, one which also included the various strata of the bourgeoisie, less fragile

1. More recent research has shown that other contradictions, economic and psychological, played a major role in this process of overdetermination.

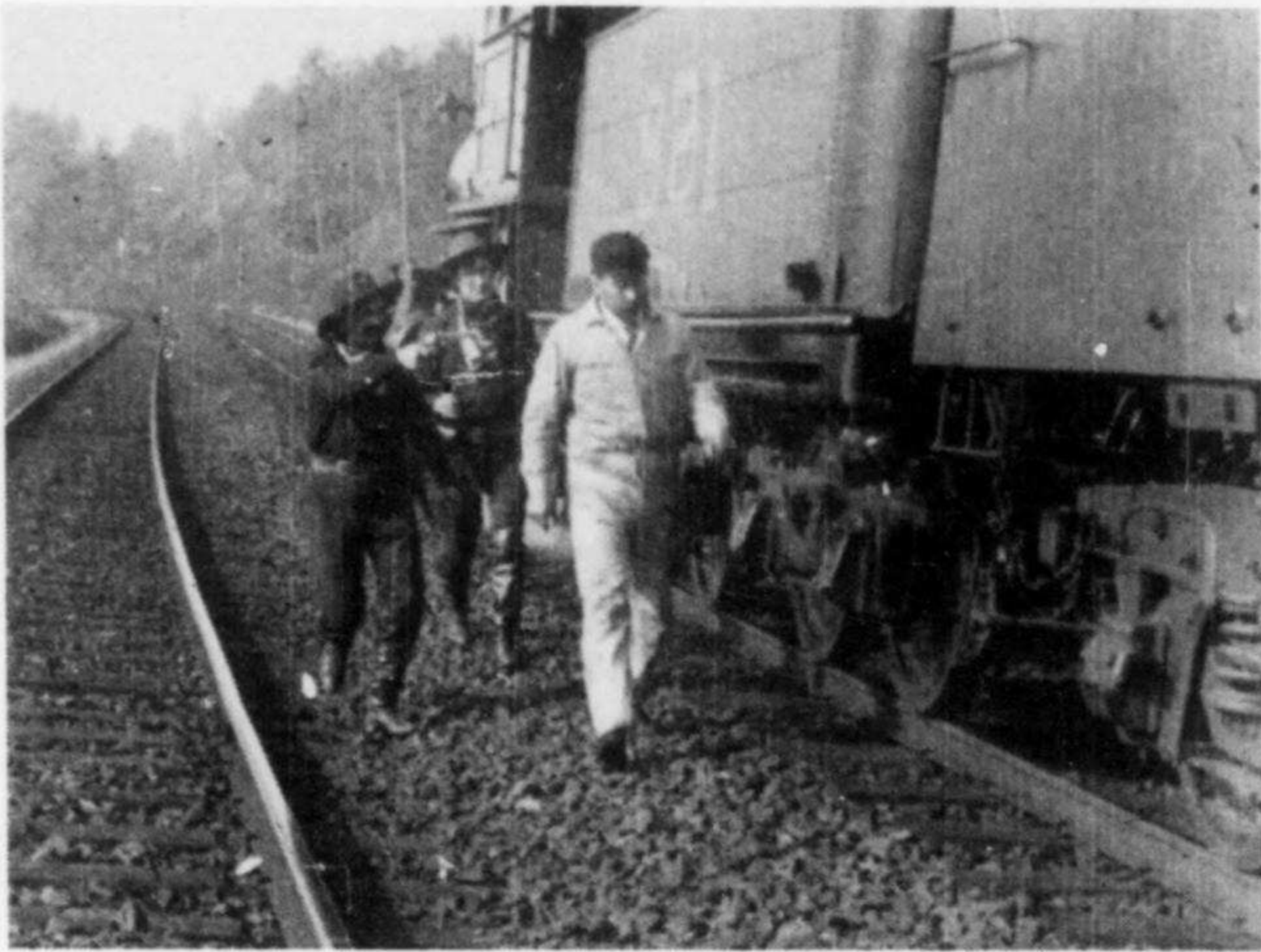
economically and possessing more leisure time than the immigrant working classes.

It is important to realize that the extraordinary expansion of the American cinema and its rise to world dominance after World War I was a direct consequence of the creation of that audience during the period 1905-15. In France, on the other hand, the industry remained content to exploit the early mode of representation for nearly three decades, catering to a small domestic audience which was almost exclusively working class, and counting on the skills of its cameramen and actors to continue to captivate indefinitely the huge international market which it had conquered early in the century. The corollary of this situation was that the French bourgeoisie was not to come to the cinema in any appreciable numbers until the screen finally acquired a *voice*, that crucial element of presence which would at last place it on a par with the legitimate—which is to say, bourgeois—stage.

Early cinema was marked, in the eyes of the international bourgeoisie, by the absence of the persona, of nearly all the signs of character individualization capable of satisfying expectations created by naturalistic theater and novels, and steeped in the primacy of the individual, in the centrality of the Subject. The voice was indeed the biggest lack, hence the constant but only very relatively successful efforts to invent a sync-sound system, from Edison's Kinetophonograph to the Gaumont Chronophone. However, the persona was lacking on the visual plane as well.

One of the founding visual models for the early period as a whole was the long shot as exemplified in *La Sortie des Usines Lumière* and also in films such as *L'Assassinat de Marat*, which Hatot directed for the Lumière Company during the early months of its production. Films like the latter—and there were many of them—illustrate in spectacular fashion the gap between early cinema and the bourgeois theater: the coextension of proscenium arch and film frame produces an effect of distance through smallness and low definition which is very different from the effect of presence indissociable from the bourgeois stage and produced by the “sync” voice, by “natural” color, three-dimensionality, and the eye's faculty of focusing in space, often with the aid of opera glasses. As the various socio-ideological pressures to make the cinema “more respectable” became stronger, this long shot came to be perceived as an obstacle.

We may take as both metaphor and illustration of this a film produced in 1903, Edwin S. Porter's *Great Train Robbery*. As in so many films of the period, it would be impossible even to distinguish between, for example, the outlaws and the posse were it not for the bandannas worn by the former, so wide are all the shots of the action proper. For this film, however, Porter—who seems to have experienced with unusual acuity the contradictions of that transitional era—supplied exhibitors with a small, separate roll of film consisting of a single shot, which they were free to splice onto the head or tail of the film, whichever they chose. This mobility itself stresses the otherness of an era in which films were not



Edwin S. Porter. *The Great Train Robbery*. 1903.

yet closed objects. As is well known, this shot showed a close, head-on view of one of the outlaws shooting into the camera, an image which gives clear, almost brutal expression to the need then being felt to *reduce distance* . . . at all costs. This "close-up," which seems to hover on the fringe of a diegesis which cannot assimilate it, is indeed the sign of something already sensed as lacking at that time. But sensed by whom? All that we can say with any certainty is that the lack was felt by commentators, producers, exhibitors, directors, cameramen; what the mass of film viewers may have felt is an altogether different matter, which for the moment can only be left to conjecture.

Despite legend, it certainly was not Griffith who singlehandedly solved the problem of the interpolated close-up, of facial legibility, that sine qua non for the institution of the persona. In fact, while Griffith, during his richly innovative career at Biograph, gradually moved the camera closer to all of his tableaux, true close-ups picture objects far more often than they do people. Moreover, Griffith was one of the last directors to relent on the matter of actors' anonymity, which for a variety of reasons had been a universally respected rule during the early period. This belated adhesion to the star system—the counterpart of the close-up in the constitution of the filmic persona—is undoubtedly both cause and effect of the paucity of true facial close-ups in the Biograph films, which were in other respects so forward-looking.

Another aspect of early cinema which did not fulfill expectations created by modes of representation dominant at the turn of the century resulted from the great difficulty experienced by early filmmakers in reproducing, under certain circumstances (especially for indoor scenes), the depth cues long essential in



Georges Méliès. *L'Homme à la tête de caoutchouc*. 1901.

Western imagery, whether in easel painting or on the proscenium stage. A great many films made during this era are characterized by the *relative perceptual flatness* of their (interior) imagery. *L'Assassinat de Marat* and the other "theatrical" films produced by the Lumière brothers at the start of their undertaking are examples of this. More significant still, perhaps, are the many remarkable instances found in what I call the mature early era.

Consider *The Life of Charles Peace*, the narrative of a celebrated Victorian murderer filmed by a remarkable artisan of working-class origins, William Haggar.² Most of the film consists of a series of single-shot, richly orchestrated tableaux, but it culminates in a multishot chase sequence filmed on location. All of the stylized interior scenes are shot against two-dimensional backdrops from which all illusion of haptic space seems to have been cunningly excluded, and in front of which actors play according to a strictly lateral blocking scheme. This trait is common to nearly all scenes shot in the studio until at least 1910³ and was brilliantly illustrated by the great Méliès, for whom the "essence" of cinema was precisely its capacity for rendering three-dimensional space and movement in two

2. This film is a fine example of the populist tradition in the early British cinema, as referred to above. Peace is treated as a kind of folk hero.

3. I should exclude the very precocious Danish cinema from this statement, however.

dimensions (see in particular the trick effect in *L'Homme à la tête de caoutchouc*).⁴

This tendency continued to make itself felt in the films of Griffith and of most of his contemporaries. This was due to the persistence of two factors that had determined its presence from the start. One was filming in daylight, in studios with glass roofs or in the open air, which gave an even, "flat" lighting that tended to place everything on the same plane. The other was the stationing of the camera, still resolutely frontal, with the lens axis rigorously parallel to the floor and always at the height of a standing man. Consequently, until about 1915 or even later a character would occupy full screen height only if he or she were standing in the foreground. When the actor was seated in a chair, crouching on the ground, or standing in the background, his head only reached the middle of the screen, which produced a flattening effect, familiar to graphic artists, in which the background—set or landscape—seems to be looming overhead, ready to topple into the foreground, as it were.

At the same time, however, other factors had already been working in the opposite direction. The generalization of electric lighting made it possible to obtain more subtle modeling and chiaroscuro effects. Color had long been used by the French, including Méliès himself, to counteract the flatness of certain images (with the introduction, in particular, of artificial effects of aerial perspective). Around 1914 several directors and technicians began to avoid placing their cameras at a ninety-degree angle to the rear wall, as had been customary. Finally, there was the introduction—possibly by DeMille in *The Cheat* (1915)—of a systematic, slightly downward tilt of the camera, which meant that characters would occupy the whole height of the screen even when they were at the back of a moderately deep set, and which furthermore accentuated the obliqueness of horizontal lines. Together, all of these procedures were gradually to bring about the creation of a full-blown haptic pictorial space "in" which the diegetic effect would be able to reach full development.

However, the chief problem for the major pioneers, from Porter and the early British filmmakers (Smith, Williamson, Hepworth . . .) to Barker and Feuillade, was, on the one hand, what I call the linearization of the iconographic signifier and, on the other, the construction of a linearized diegetic continuum. Let us now briefly examine these two closely linked issues.

The *panoramic tableau* of the most characteristic early films offers two basic traits which may also be seen as *complementary*—for we must not lose sight of the fact that all of these "inadequacies," as well as the strategies which ultimately led to their reduction, interpenetrate in complex fashion. First there is the relative

4. In this film a magician-scientist pumps his head up to huge proportions with a bellows. As is shown in Franju's film *Le Grand Méliès*, the effect was obtained by pulling Méliès up an inclined plane on an invisible trolley towards the camera. For Méliès, close-ups were always "giant faces": the screen, he felt, was the only plane a film could contain.

rareness of any of the indexes of individualization-differentiation alluded to above; then there is a tendency to confront the spectator's gaze with an entire surface *to scan*, at times along a relatively controlled trajectory (but which generally took in most of the screen's surface). At other times the gaze is undirected, considering the absence of most of the ordering procedures—strategies of isolation or signalization—which would gradually make it possible to normalize the behavior of the spectator's eye. One very striking example of the typically "chaotic" tableau is the opening shot of a Biograph film of 1905, *Tom Tom the Piper's Son*, known to us today through Ken Jacobs's enlightening rehandling of it. The shot shows a crowded marketplace distractedly dominated by a woman tightrope walker in white. But she has no role in the narrative (in fact, she is the only character never to be seen again). On the other hand, what is meant to be the central action—the preliminaries leading up to the theft of the pig, the theft itself, and the start of the chase as the thief escapes—is nearly invisible for the modern spectator at first viewing. For he is accustomed to having each shot in a film carefully organized around a single signifying center and to the linearization of all the iconographic signifiers through composition, lighting, and/or editing.⁵ And as we know, the first step in overcoming this "handicap" was the dissection of the tableau into successive fragments (closer shots), each governed by a single signifier, so that each frame would be immediately decipherable (at least in accordance with certain norms of legibility) *at first viewing*.

However, in order that these successive images not bring about the dislocation of the "original" profilmic space—the space of the single tableau, the space, if one prefers, of the proscenium—a long evolution was necessary. Starting from the first premises of the alternating shots in the work of Porter and the British, and the earliest contiguity matches (matches of direction and eyeline), this evolution, through the increasing ubiquity of the camera, was ultimately to succeed in establishing the conviction that all the successive separate shots on the screen referred to the same diegetic continuum. In other words, the time spans represented were linked together by relations of immediate succession, simultaneity, or a more distant anteriority or posteriority; the spaces pictured communicated directly or at one or more removes; and above all the whole constituted a milieu into which the spectator might penetrate as an invisible, immaterial observer, yet one who not only saw but also "experienced" all that transpired there. The camera's ubiquity and the strategies which led to the spectator's identification with the camera's viewpoint, together with the system of orientational matches by

5. It should be noted that as often as not a contemporary presentation of this or any other film would have been accompanied by a "lecture," the task of which was to center these acentric images. Independently of the *alien* nature of this typically primitive splitting of the narrative signifier, it is my contention that an audience which had been watching such films for as many as ten years may well have been sufficiently "on its toes," even without the help of a lecturer, to conduct spontaneously a slightly more topological reading than we are normally capable of today.

which the right/left relationships of the spectator's own body organized his apprehension of all contiguous spatial relationships on the screen from shot to shot, reinforced the sense of spatial integrity. These two acquisitions were ultimately to converge in the figure known as the reverse-angle set-up,⁶ destined to become the keystone of the entire edifice at the level of visual signification.

While the full head-on reverse-angle did not become generalized until the mid-twenties, and while of course the sync voice was not heard until the end of the decade, the system thus constituted as a visual entity had become fully operational in the United States before the end of World War I and in Western Europe by the early 1920s. Fritz Lang's *Mabuse* diptych (1922) is an early example of the system mastered to a perfection that has perhaps never been surpassed. And it is not without interest that Eisenstein had the opportunity of studying closely such a supreme example of the system whose emergence I have briefly sketched here, having been involved—in what capacity has not, I believe, been clearly established as yet—with the editing of the Soviet version of *Mabuse*.

Several years before the first projections at the Grand Café, Edison was already dreaming of filming and recording operas, and in this his enterprise is antithetical to that of Louis Lumière. Not only did the team working under Edison's auspices (W. K. L. Dickson and his associates) invent the first "sound movies" with their Kinetophonograph, whose eyepiece and earphones prefigure, at the scale of the individual spectator, the dark, womblike isolation of the modern movie palace, but they also shot some of the earliest close-ups. And all of this was done in the Black Maria, that precursor of the modern sound stage. If the company was soon forced by the competition from Lumière to give up the attempt at sound and to copy the more typical early European models, these early experiments attest to the existence of a need, ideologically determined in part, but only in part, that would ultimately give rise to an institutional mode of representation.

We also find, as early as the first Lumière films, and throughout the early period of French cinema up to the masterpieces of Jasset, Perret, Feuillade, and the émigré Fasnier, first in scenes shot on location, later in increasingly elaborate studio sets, a very thorough exploitation of the possibilities of deep-focus mise-en-scène. In fact, we are dealing here with an increasingly sharper prefiguration of that pseudomontage within a single take (except in the work of Feuillade, intrasequential editing was still rare in France before World War I) which would ultimately be capable of reproducing the structures of classical montage. This approach, which among French directors continued to serve as a vehicle for strictly primitive elements, such as the insistent glancing at the camera which one still finds in Feuillade as late as 1916, would reappear twenty years later in the canned theater of the early sound years, when it was simultaneously theorized by

6. Also called shot-reverse-shot or shot-countershot in tribute to the French *champ-contre-champ*.

none other than Eisenstein (the paradox is only apparent) in his classes at the Moscow Institute.⁷

The dominance of the Western mode of filmic representation was determined neither by ideological factors alone nor by sheer economic opportunism. Rather, it corresponds broadly to the mode of constitution of the Subject in our culture, and it developed into an ideological vehicle of unprecedented power. However massive its political and social consequences, it was the result of an overdetermined convergence and not simply a class strategy.

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At the time when the civil war was receding within the young Soviet Union and the great period of artistic experimentation was beginning, the system of representation developing in the film industries of the capitalist world was not yet fully consolidated. We have already noted that sync sound constituted a serious lack which, it is clear today, the intertitle never completely filled. To the very end of the silent era, it retained (and indeed still retains) a "distancing" potential which directors like Gance and L'Herbier had sought to exploit to aesthetic ends. A film industry as culturally important as that of France remained very strongly dominated by early practice, with frontality still dominant as late as 1925, with the rules of orientation still very poorly assimilated. And in all countries the various "punctuating" opticals made possible by recent technology were as yet scarcely encoded and were often used—and not only in avant-garde films—to contribute to a freely decorative style. This "unfinished" state in which the system found itself, especially in Europe, played a decisive role in the orientations of the most important Soviet directors who, with only one exception, were otherwise quite prepared to accept the system's claim to a privileged status.

It is no doubt this twofold circumstance which determined the earliest options of Lev Kuleshov and his troupe. It was this which led them to the first theorization of the system of orientation matching. Their most famous experiment consisted of a series of montage fragments linked by actors' entrances and exits, so that various parts of Petrograd were seen as contiguous, whereas anyone familiar with the city knew that they were miles apart. This experiment was in fact nothing more than the rational formulation of the contiguity match long since mastered at the practical level by D. W. Griffith. In *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912), for example, a whole "imaginary" neighborhood is similarly constructed by laying end-to-end fragments of settings which are brought together only by the successive frame exits and entrances of the actors.

Following these laboratory experiments, the films that came out of the

7. See Vladimir Nizhny, *Lessons with Eisenstein*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda and Ivor Montagu, New York, Hill and Wang, 1962.

Kuleshov workshop attest to another concern, not unrelated to the first: studying and *appropriating* the codes governing the major genres of the capitalist film industry—the spy serial, as in *The Death Ray* (1925); the comedy, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924); the “Far North” adventure drama, *By the Law* (1926). The guiding principle behind all these productions was that the institutional mode of representation, the genres and other coded systems founded upon it, offered ideal vehicles in the ideological struggle because of the privileged relationships which they already enjoyed with mass audiences.

After the Kuleshov group disbanded in 1925, its ambitions were no doubt best achieved in *Miss Mend* (1926), directed by an ex-disciple of Kuleshov, Boris Barnett (in collaboration with Fyodor Otsep). In this film the principle of political didacticism through pastiche is maintained, but with one fundamental difference: this monumental “serial” (three parts, over four hours long) frequently shifts abruptly from one popular genre to another. Spy thriller, sentimental melodrama, romantic comedy, slapstick farce follow each other in quick succession. The intention is clearly to undercut the escapist and alienating absorption of the popular genres.

I have no wish to establish, in the context of this inventory, any hierarchical order whatsoever. The wide range of Soviet attitudes and options, which runs from Kuleshov's pastiche to Dziga Vertov's “deconstruction,” corresponded to a pluralism indispensable to the socialist ethic. It also reflected the very concrete and highly diversified needs of Soviet society, coming into existence under notoriously complex and difficult conditions. Kuleshov's undertaking thus appears doubly justified. The urban masses were already quite familiar with the current mode of representation and forms of expression, and it was obvious that one important way of reaching them consisted in acquiring the theoretical mastery of that mode and in appropriating its forms of expression. Furthermore, although the bulk of the peasantry did not come to know the cinema until after the revolution, it takes the optimism of a Vertov to become convinced that linear expectations with regard to the cinema would only be produced by previous film-going experience, and that these peasant masses were consequently “unspoiled.”

V. I. Pudovkin also came out of the Kuleshov workshop. His approach was not fundamentally different from that of his mentor, although his methodology—and, of course, his stylistics, which are not the subject of this essay—is quite different and his ambition, in a sense, far greater. Pudovkin was striving principally to extend the possibilities of the existing system, while maintaining its essential principles. This undertaking has undeniably enriched our cultural heritage, with such remarkable films as *The End of Saint Petersburg* (1927) or *The Deserter* (1933), but it was certainly not devoid of contradictions. Significantly enough, these actually repeated, at a higher level of elaboration, the contradictions experienced by the pioneers of the early and formative periods.

Some years ago, in a programmatic essay which has not surprisingly fallen

into neglect, two British critics, Michael Orrom and Raymond Williams, voiced a number of criticisms concerning the Pudovkin method in connection with a sequence from *Storm Over Asia* (1928).⁸ They argued that the director disrupted too radically the cohesion of the spatiotemporal continuum, that essential guarantee of verisimilitude, in other words, of the full-blown diegetic effect. And they went on to compare this outmoded, disjunctive style, too analytic for their taste, with the techniques of modern cinema, illustrated by a sequence from George Stevens's *Shane*. Here, they demonstrate, continuity is ensured by the juxtaposition in long shots of all the signifiers present to the scene, their ordering being assured by picture composition instead of their being linked together only by eyeline and screen-direction matching, as was so often the case in Pudovkin's films. Despite the ingenuous character of their demonstration, these writers pointed to a fundamental contradiction, one which is of considerable interest to basic research in this field.

Pudovkin's writings and his polemic with Eisenstein clearly bear out the evidence of his films: his chief concern was to draw the ultimate consequences from that historical process of linearization of the iconographic signifiers to which I have already referred. Let us consider the sequence at the beginning of *The Mother* in which the father, trying to take the household clock down from the wall to exchange it for vodka, is confronted by his son and wife. He accidentally breaks the clock and leaves the house carrying off the laundry iron which served as the clock's counterweight. This scene is a perfect illustration of Pudovkin's method. The scene is broken down into a series of key fragments, big close-ups whose meaning is wholly unequivocal and which, while respecting and rendering quite satisfactorily the continuity of the action, primarily serve to *spell out* that action in a series of elementary, carefully differentiated signs, in a simple, causal chain. A face grows tense, an arm is raised, a wheel of the clockwork rolls across the floor. There is no room for the gaze to roam unguided (or even guided) about the image for so much as an instant. The director's constant concern is, on the contrary, to regulate the "flow of signs" as closely as possible. Moreover, in a sequence such as this one—and it is here that Pudovkin adds a new dimension to an approach which is otherwise fundamentally Griffithian—acceleration of tempo and strong rhythmic patterns in certain editing fragments generate the *pathos* of the close-up, to use an Eisensteinian term which seems perfectly apt in this context. The fragmentary scansion of the signifiers no longer has as its sole aim to confer order on denotative signs. It also serves to control the underlying production of meaning, the connotative dimension of the filmic discourse—what has often been called the "emotion" of the scene—by means of the dynamics of the succession of the montage fragments. Moreover, the connotative production is also used by Pudovkin in a reiterative manner, in particular to suggest sound effects. One

8. Raymond Williams and Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film*, London, Film Drama, 1954.



Vsevolod Pudovkin. *The Mother*. 1926.

thinks of the bar scene in *The Mother*, which immediately follows the one described above. The lively atmosphere, the throb of the music are suggested by the very dynamics of the succession of details, no longer subject to causal order but rather swirling about in an impressionist description, a vertical equivalent of the horizontal transparency of Griffithian linearization.

It is a fact, however, that in many passages, especially those involving confrontations between more than two characters—here I have in mind a scene involving the mother, the son, and the tsarist soldiers, or another in which “The Heir to Genghis Khan” confronts the English fur traders—Pudovkin’s analytical penchant, his concern to make each picture into a “brick” as elementary as possible in a chain of signification which he can control as closely as possible, does indeed lead him to *weaken the verisimilitude of the diegetic spatial continuum*. And yet this verisimilitude was a founding historical condition of the system which subtends his whole endeavor. Wishing to carry to its extreme consequences the logic of linearization through editing, Pudovkin comes up against the same obstacle encountered by the pioneers when they were casting about for methods capable of overcoming the unfortunate “dissociative” effect which the first interpolated close-ups had upon the unity of films that still depended almost exclusively on the layout of the primitive tableau. In both cases, this disintegration, as it were, was the price that had to be paid for an increase in “expressive-

ness," in other words, a greater control over the production of meaning. Striving to remain within the bounds of fundamental linearity and to strengthen that linearity, Pudovkin fails to see that the enunciation characteristic of the system is not simply a succession of signs, as decomposed as possible, but that it is founded on a dialectic between such "stripped-down" images and a more complex spatiality offering complementary guarantees.

The close-up, as integrated into filmic discourse by Griffith, Barker, the Ince brothers, etc., drew an important share of its signification from the wider shots that preceded and followed it and from which it was in a sense *excerpted*. It was through this alternation of long-shot and close-up that the strongly diegetic cinema was to attain maximum effect (and in this sense a film like *Shane* is certainly an example). Intoxicated, as it were, by the possibilities revealed in the new-found mastery of orientational matching procedures (and in particular the eyeline match), Pudovkin sought to reconstitute a given profilmic space in its entirety solely through the successive presentation of its details. He attempted to render the full presence of characters, objects, and indeed the diegesis itself solely through this "nearsighted" approach. Yet in so doing he set his work at odds with a whole dimension of the system he was seeking to improve, since in many sequences of his silent films diegetic space is reduced to such an abstraction that important effects such as the illusion of the presence of characters *to each other* are considerably weakened.

Paradoxically, one of the finest moments in *The Mother* is that in which the method described above is abandoned completely and Pudovkin returns, for reasons of stylistic and dramatic contrast, to a space which is much closer to that of the films of Louis Lumière. The first part of the admirable scene showing the confrontation between revolutionary workers and strikebreakers in the factory yard is filmed in fixed, wide-angle shots which remind us how aptly suited is the primitive tableau to scenes of mass struggle. This demonstration will be confirmed again and again throughout the Soviet cinema's silent period and well beyond it.

It was Dreyer, in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, who went on to derive from what we might call the Pudovkin contradiction a coherent dialectic based precisely upon that diegetic dissolution, *assumed as such*, of profilmic topography. However, it was the Ukrainian master Alexander Dovzhenko, in the opening sequence of his greatest film, *Earth* (1930), who went furthest in putting that contradiction to work, designating it as such, showing how it was possible to construct, with classical spatiality, an ambiguous diegetic space, in the sense that it is essentially and disturbingly *uncertain*.

This celebrated sequence deals with an old man dying and a dialogue between him and friends and relatives standing or sitting around him. But is it so certain that they are actually around him? Some shots, especially those of the baby playing, seem to involve a relationship which has nothing to do with ordinary contiguity; they seem more like elements of "attraction" in the manner of

Eisenstein. The characters are never seen together in the same shot; they are linked only by their eyeline exchanges. A close reading of this sequence shows a whole series of discrepancies which actually render impossible a reading of diegetic space in keeping with the traditional system of orientation: "in the place where" the orientation of a glance from the old man had enabled us to situate this or that character, we now encounter another; in the course of another series of apparent reverse-angle shots, we encounter still another character "in the same place," and yet, as far as we are able to judge, the hieratic stillness of the scene has been preserved throughout. At other moments a shot of a field of wheat seems to be located in an "impossible" space with respect to the eyeline directions of those who see it. And this opening scene offers only one of various strategies employed by Dovzhenko: often an articulation between sequences will leave fundamental doubts about the precise moment when the spatial or temporal hiatus actually occurred. Along another axis certain shots, though more closely related to an "emblematic" space/time than to the diegetic space/time proper, nevertheless continue to entertain subsidiary links with the latter (witness the series of shots indicating the passing of the seasons, the quasisymbolic sequence of "the lovers' night," or the shots of a young woman standing by a sunflower). Conversely, other moments which are firmly anchored in the primary diegesis (such as Vassili's famous dance-and-death or his father's night of mourning) seem to partake in turn of those emblematic shots, tending to suspend the movement of the diegesis. It is through such ambiguities as these, such derogations from the seamlessness of



Alexander Dovzhenko. Earth. 1930.

the representational fabric, such attacks on the metonymic integrity of the diegesis by the introduction of fragments of a metaphoric discourse, that Dovzhenko comes closest to an important aspect of Eisenstein's great adventure. But in fact this type of construction in one way or another was a major concern of nearly all the important Soviet directors. Yet while it has often been identified with them exclusively, it should be pointed out that these techniques grew out of an objective encounter between crosscutting of the type perfected by Griffith in *Intolerance* (1916) and the metaphoric cutaway of Gance, procedures which in turn are merely extrapolations of the earliest inserts and crosscutting.

The final sequence of Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925), consisting of an alternation between shots of butchers at work in a slaughterhouse (shots which absolutely do not belong to the principal diegetic space/time) and images of the persecution of the striking workers by mounted Cossacks, provides the earliest example of this type of figure in narrative Soviet cinema. Here the relationship between diegetic and metaphoric space/time (which in this instance involves its own strongly diegetic effect) still derives from a linear concept which is perfectly compatible with the Griffith approach. In fact, one might cite several mainstream films of the sound era which have incorporated this technique of parallel and extended metaphor (Walter Graumann's *Lady in a Cage* comes to mind . . . but do not the shots of buildings and city streets in *Muriel* function in a similar way?). On the other hand, Eisenstein's developments of this strategy in *The General Line* (1929) and above all in *October* (1928) may be said to be fundamentally at odds with this linearity.

The mechanical peacock in *October*, which appears fragmentarily within the montage piece associated with the opening of the door as Kerensky enters the great room which is to shelter his precarious power, is of course a symbol of Kerensky's fatuous character. But it is so tightly meshed into the movement of the door itself that it resists any reduction to a single signifying function. A naive reading, predicated on the inviolability of diegetic space/time, might conclude that this is an automaton set in motion by machinery which connects it with the door. This is but one (perfectly "legitimate") aspect of a complex production of meaning irreducible to any linear model.

I cannot draw here a complete picture of Eisenstein's contribution to the far-reaching investigation of the established representational mode, undertaken in fact by all the most advanced members of the Soviet school. One would have to discuss typage, that important reconsideration of the cinematic persona, and the complex relations which it entertained with the stereotyped casting of the capitalist cinema. One would have to discuss as well the concept of the mass-as-hero and the revaluing of the long-shot associated with it, as well as the mixtures of style and genre in *Strike*, *October*, and *The General Line*, and of course such ambitious attempts to extend the director's range as "tonal montage" or "intellectual montage."

However, it seems to me that Eisenstein presents his most stimulating

challenge when, first in his films, later in his teaching, he strives to found a dialectics of orientational matching which, though he saw it as a complement to the system that had risen over the previous twenty years, also tends to undermine the very foundations of that system.

I have already suggested that it was precisely because of the unfinished status of the representational system that Eisenstein and his fellow filmmakers found themselves in a relatively privileged situation for a rethinking of film practice. At that time in Europe, eyeline and direction matching, for want of any universally accepted codification, for want of a "continuity girl," was no more than a working hypothesis, one which seems to have enjoyed favor, it is true, but which remained only one possible option among others (witness all the mismatched eyelines in French and German films of every category as late as the mid-twenties).⁹

In this connection *Strike* contains an extremely significant sequence. The spying foreman is knocked off his feet by a clout from a huge steel wheel swinging on a crane driven by a group of mischievous revolutionary workers. In this sequence, perhaps for the first time in film history, we see illustrated the proposition that "correct" direction matching, the logic of which corresponds to that of the right/left orientations of a real or imaginary "establishing shot," could very well coexist with other systems, and that although the latter might contradict the logic of the former, together they could constitute a single *composite space/time* characterized by its unnaturalness (i.e., its rejection of left/right body logic). For indeed, in the successive shots showing the foreman being knocked over, the swinging wheel changes screen direction at each shot change, and yet all the diegetic evidence (and our own common sense) tells us that in reality the direction of the wheel remains constant.

Of course the intention here and, at one level, the effect produced consist in an exteriorization, through this "violation" of representation, of the latent class violence behind this relatively harmless incident. In his account of Eisenstein's teachings, Vladimir Nizhny tells how the master theorized his doctrine of the "montage unit," which advocates dividing up a given sequence into subsequences defined by successive crossings of the 180° line. These "bad" position/direction matches are of course meant to emphasize privileged moments of tension in the narrative flow. Indeed, whenever Eisenstein provided a rationale for his innovations—invariably after the fact—he invoked criteria derived from the ideology of representation. And the dramaturgy at work in the sequences that are most representative of his dialectics of matching provides confirmation of this "expressionist" outlook and of the correlation between such experiments as these and Eisenstein's quest for the effect which he called pathos. However, it seems to me no less true that there is a precious parallel statement in this strategy, for it also

9. In Lang's *Metropolis*, L'Herbier's *L'Argent*, Raymond Bernard's *Le Miracle des loups*. . . . We are clearly not talking about the mistakes of amateurs.

involves a jeopardizing of the system's greatest "secret": the fact that a film is made up of fragments of montage, that it is not by nature but by artifice that the classical *découpage* produces an effect of continuity.

We find one particularly vivid illustration of this in the Odessa steps sequence in *Potemkin* (1925). Here the extreme discontinuity of the editing goes far beyond mere impressionistic subjectivism, and the principle of montage units intervenes spectacularly to organize the climax of the episode. In this instance the expressive intention is accompanied by a programmatic statement of no small importance: that a secondary organization of the signifiers, endowed with relative autonomy, can give filmic discourse an entirely new dimension, irreducible to linear expressiveness. The sequence is constructed around two broad montage units, of which the second intervenes only when the nurse first appears with her baby carriage and is then associated with the carriage as it rolls alone down the steps. However, the images of this dramatic trajectory are intercut with shots of the continuing massacre, and these are filmed from angles which belong to the first montage unit. Finally, the carriage seems, toward the end of its run, to "fall back" into the first unit (in other words, into the initial right/left relationship), and after this "dissonant" period consisting of cuts back and forth between the two units, the sequence ends entirely in the first. It is through such constructions as these—we might also cite the second section of *Potemkin*, "Drama on the Quarterdeck," the cream-separator sequence in *The General Line*, or the raising of the bridge in *October*—that Eisenstein became the first to succeed in relativizing certain fundamental norms of the institutional mode of representation. This mode would, of course, reintegrate them into a subsystem derived from it, but which at the same time contained the premises of a more fundamental contestation. We may, I believe, sum up both the progressive and the contradictory nature of this work with the following well-known observation taken from *Notes of a Film Director*:

The strength of montage lies in the fact that the emotions and minds of the spectators are included in the creative process. The spectator not only sees those elements of the work which are capable of being seen but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and formation of the image just as it was experienced by the author. This probably is the highest possible degree of approximation to visually conveying the author's sensations and conception in the greatest possible completeness, to conveying them with "that almost physical tangibility" with which they arose before the author during the creative process, at the moments of his creative vision.¹⁰

Under close scrutiny, this text may be seen to reveal with great precision

10. S. M. Eisenstein, *Notes of a Film Director*, New York, Dover Press, 1970, pp. 77-8.

Eisenstein's complex attitude. On the one hand, he rejects everything in the representational system which causes the spectator to see only "those elements capable of being seen," in other words, he rejects transparency. This is the credo, as it were, that underlies his "dialecticization" of the matching system and all the other "illusionist" strategies; his goal is to make the work of the signifier visible. Yet at the same time this work is reintegrated into a spectacle of the classical type, one which is certainly on a "higher plane" than the other, but one which nevertheless must in the last analysis submit to the same linear, we might even say totalitarian, model: what the spectator is supposed to grasp at the end of the process, whatever work he or she may have been called upon to perform, is assumed to be what the author put into it. We find ourselves face to face with the old illusion that holds the work of art to be a mediator, a means of communication between two sensibilities. This will perhaps also help us to understand why Eisenstein never sought (not even in *Strike*, despite all claims to the contrary) to oppose the system by then established with any notion of a tabula rasa. In spite of their differences, in spite of their disputes, he shared with Pudovkin and Kuleshov the deep conviction that the "language" with which the name of Griffith was then so closely associated was tantamount to a basic language whose fundamental components were intangible. Even a filmmaker who proclaimed his attachment to dialectical and historical materialism and who felt his task was to enrich that system through critical reappraisal was bound to remain within the conceptual framework which it defined. This is the nerve center of his polemic with Vertov. Needless to say, it would in my estimation be foolish to reproach him for this.

Among the Soviet masters, Dziga Vertov alone advocated an uncompromising tabula rasa. In the USSR of the 1920s, such a position also involved contradictions which are far from negligible. The fact remains, however, that Vertov was the first filmmaker and theoretician to have produced—in ways that were at times crude, at others deceptively polemical—a critical definition of the nature of cinematic representation, and to have undertaken, in his masterwork *The Man with a Movie Camera*, a practical critique of it.

Reading certain Vertov texts overly literally, commentators have often made of him the irrepressible champion of documentary against the fiction film. However, what this reading of his career fails to reveal is that the reason Vertov seemed to be combating fiction per se was that he perceived in the fiction film of that era the hegemony of a deeply alienating system of representation. This was in part because of the ideological substance which in capitalist countries it almost invariably purveyed—explicitly or implicitly—and in part because of the passive attitude that it required of the spectator. And if he attacked Eisenstein, seeming to confuse him with the masters of Hollywood, it was because he felt that in the revolutionary context a tabula rasa strategy was indispensable to clean the eyes of the masses, as he might have put it. Reading his texts, seeing his films, it is hard to believe that he did not realize that *The Man with a Movie Camera* (or *Kino-Glaz*, for that matter) was as much, or as little, a fiction as *Potemkin* or *The Mother*.

We know that Vertov's project did not merely concern the perception and reading of images. Vertov had a deep political commitment, and he even had the presentiment that exercises in the decoding of images could provide training for the decoding of reality. This project still holds promise today, and we have had, in the films of socialist Cuba, a glimmer of its fulfillment. In the Soviet Union of the 1920s, however, such amalgamations could easily lead to serious political illusions. It is also true that in Vertov's case, it produced masterpieces. Through recent literature we are beginning to have a better appreciation of the true breadth of this film, long regarded as a simple display of cinematic fireworks.¹¹ This classical response, so common among viewers even today, is a symptom of the almost total illegibility of this film for several decades, the veritable crisis which it causes within filmic representation as a whole . . . and all the light which, at a second level, it sheds upon it. I can only sketch the broad outlines of the work accomplished in this immense film, and I must start with the observation that its chief target is the fundamental linearity of filmic representation, a linearity contested in all its aspects, and no longer simply in that of syntax, as was chiefly the case with Eisenstein.

This film is not made to be viewed only once. It is impossible for anyone to assimilate its work in a single viewing. Far more than any film by Eisenstein, *The Man with a Movie Camera* demands that the spectator take an active role as *decipherer* of its images. To refuse that role is to leave the theater or escape into reverie. For the relationships proposed between these images are seldom self-evident; 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). Here again, however, the trajectory followed is not determined by any simple chronology of production but is the result of the multiple interaction of other structures—the cycle of the working day, the cycle of life and death, a reflection on the new society, on the changing situations of women within it, on the vestiges of bourgeois life, on poverty under socialism, and so on. Further associated with all this is a reflection on filmic representation itself, on the constitution of haptic space, the illusion of movement, and so on. One may safely say that there is not a single shot in this entire film whose place in the editing scheme is not overdetermined by a whole set of intertwined chains of signification, and that it is impossible to decipher fully the film's discourse until one has a completely topological grasp of the film as a whole, in other words, after several viewings.¹² Resolutely reflexive, this film was the most radical gesture that the silent cinema had known—in the Soviet Union or elsewhere.

11. See for example Annette Michelson, "'The Man with the Movie Camera': From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum*, vol. 10, no. 7 (March 1972) 60-72.

12. In my work the concept of the univocality of the institutional mode of representation refers of



Dziga Vertov. The Man with a Movie Camera. 1929.

Vertov was, however, a communist; as long as he was permitted to do so, he strove to involve his work in the concrete construction of socialism. At the same time, his analyses—written and filmic—were some thirty or forty years ahead of their time. Not until the 1950s did the young Stan Brakhage produce a critique as penetrating, albeit written from the opposite ideological position; not until the mid-1960s did European Marxist critics reintegrate Vertov into Left aesthetics. Small wonder, then, that Vertov should have fallen prey to the pedagogical illusion, that he should have imagined that films which have probably only become legible in the past ten years or so (and even then only through much hard work), could spontaneously “educate the senses” of the illiterate peasant masses or, for that matter, of the urban masses, however highly developed their political consciousness. For their expectations had long since been programmed by their experience of dominant film practice.

Nothing will ever excuse or justify the persecutions to which this great master was subjected during the latter part of his life, when he was given

course to a relationship between the films and the spectators—most spectators—who have been written into the institution by society. The others—a few scholars, critics, filmmakers—will often perceive the very real polysemic dimension of just about any film text. However, this reading is not only conducted from outside the institution (whose vocation, as Christian Metz reminds us, is “to fill theaters, not to empty them”); it is ultimately irrelevant to our understanding of the institution as a single text.

practically no opportunity to work. Nevertheless, we must make no mistake about it: if the work of Vertov still contains an immense theoretical potential, if it helps us to understand the system which still governs 99% of the world's film and television production, if it helps us to reflect on the possibilities of eventually developing—within a political and social context comparable, *at the very least*, to Vertov's—methods of audio-visual education and propaganda which might depart significantly from the basic norms of cinematic representation, he invented no magic recipes. In particular, it is clearly a delusion to imagine that reflexiveness has automatic pedagogical value. The key to educating the senses of the masses, an education that would enable them to read the filmic system—to read themselves inside it rather than simply being written into it again and again—lies in changes a good deal more far-reaching. Even at the strictly audio-visual level, the education of the senses must pass through the schools of Kuleshov and Eisenstein before that of Vertov, must move, in other words, in an ascending order of contradiction.

Image and Title in Avant-Garde Cinema

P. ADAMS SITNEY

When Louis and Auguste Lumière first presented their cinematographic machine to the public, Baudelaire had been dead for twenty-eight years. In the histories of cinema that initial projection in 1895 marks the conventional division between cinema proper and the long protohistory of machines for the representation of movement. Yet Baudelaire had already written on the two fundamental elements of the Lumière brothers' invention. In his review of the Salon of 1857 he recorded his hostility to the influence of photography on painting. What would later be called the indexicality of photographic signs gave them, according to Baudelaire, an illusory authority, a falsely privileged ontological status, over painted representations. While he condemns the aesthetics of photography, in "Morale de Joujou" he extolls the phenekistoscope as a machine of the poetic imagination.¹ What distressed Baudelaire about photography, the seductiveness of its illusionism, was absent from the phenekistoscope. In fact, the mechanics of the toy emphasized the contrivance of its illusion. The child playing with it may be thrilled but not seduced into conferring an ontological stability upon the image he animates, precisely because he animates it himself. Baudelaire's reactions to photography and to synthetic motion machines prefigure a later contradictory response of advanced literary sensibilities to the cinema itself.

The interaction of photographic realism with the language of intertitles was to produce in artists, and particularly in writers, fascinating and complex attitudes toward the cinema. Often these reactions are concealed from readers unwilling to pursue avenues of investigation other than those established by

1. A phenekistoscope is a protocinematic device consisting of a disk perforated by slots through which a viewer looks. The disk rotates around an axle through its center before a mirror. On the circumference of the disk are a series of sequential images—they may be either drawings or photographs—which blend into an illusion of movement as the disk is turned. The phenekistoscope, then, is a machine for the creation of *synthetic motion*. All motion-picture projectors operate on a version of the same principle.

convention. Looking for analytical or theoretical articles directly treating the subject is the most obvious method, but interesting examples are quite rare. Yet there are several ways in which we may discover how photography and cinematography impressed advanced thinkers at the turn of the century. Often a passing reference in a poem, an essay, or a novel can be compared to a parallel statement in the writer's work and thereby made to reveal a nexus of implicit reflections about photographic representation. Finally, the labor of interpretation can be directed to films which incorporate aesthetic decisions in response or reaction to the norms of their time. A film of this sort may systematically bypass a convention of its period, so that we may conclude, at least, that the filmmaker did not find that convention essential to the cinema or to the particular genre in which he was working.

In France, the paradoxes and ironies of cinema's claim to realism were first posed by a poet who made no films. Guillaume Apollinaire, who gave us the word *surréalisme*, for which Breton and his companions were to find a meaning, wrote an early parable—possibly the first—of filmmaking. On December 23, 1907, he published "Un Beau Film" in the journal *Messidor*. Three years later to the month, the same brief text reappeared as a chapter of his picaresque novel *L'Herésiarque et Cie*. The chapter has only nineteen paragraphs. Here are translations of one near the text's beginning and a few from the end. The sinister Baron d'Ormesan is speaking:

"In 1910 I created the *Cinematographic International Company* together with a few friends. We abbreviated it as the C.I.C. It succeeded in getting films of spectacular interest and then set up film shows in all the important cities of Europe and America. Our program was very well composed. Thanks to the indiscretion of a manservant we were able to get an interesting episode showing the President of the Republic getting up. We have even filmed the birth of the Prince of Albania. But best of all, by bribing some of the Sultan's officials, we were able to capture forever in motion the powerful tragedy of the grand-vizier Malek-Pacha. After heart-rending goodbyes to his wives and children, he drank poisoned coffee by order of his Lord on the balcony of his house in Pera."

...

The baron's production company needed a crime story, but they refused to compromise their commitment to authenticity by acting one out. Instead they rented a villa, ambushed first a young couple and then a man in evening wear, and forced them inside at gunpoint. They forced the man to murder the couple, but not before he had persuaded them to let him wear a mask.

"We had our sensational crime," the baron continued. "It created a tremendous scandal. The victims turned out to be the wife of a minister from a small Balkan country and her lover, the son of a pretender to the crown in a principality in northern Germany.

"We had rented the villa under a phony name, and the renting agent, to share in the excitement, claimed he recognized the young prince as the tenant. The police were on the hook for two months. The papers put out special editions and, since we were showing the film everywhere, you can imagine our success. The police did not believe for a minute that we were showing the real murder in the headlines. Yet we made sure we advertised it as plain as day. But the public wasn't fooled. It gave us a very warm reception, and by distributing the film to the members of our corporation we made three hundred and forty-two thousand francs in six months.

"Since the crime had received too much publicity to go unpunished, the police ended up by arresting a Levantine who couldn't provide a good alibi for the night of the crime. Despite his claims of innocence, he was sentenced to death and executed. Then we really struck it lucky. Through a lucky accident, our cameraman was able to take part in the execution, and we spiced up our film with a new scene, just the thing to bring in the crowds."

Apollinaire's bitter wit underlines the fact that the common moviegoer of 1907 was less of a dupe than the more "sophisticated" audience that would begin to come to cinema a decade or more later. But in the story two blind acts of faith converge. The police, professional detectives of the truth, err in their assurance of the falsity of that which is represented in the film; while the public, connoisseurs of film companies' spiraling quest for snatching true and normally concealed horror, believe in the actuality of that which they see on the screen if only because, like St. Anselm, they know it is better if it is true.

The parable is a good one; it touches upon the problematic of truth and fiction in the unique way in which cinema encounters it. More interesting still is the fact that this story occurs within a literary fiction. It is an early text among many of its kind. Writers highly conscious of the issues of truth and falsehood within literary narrative have used cinema as a metaphor or hyperbole of the ambiguities of representation. A masterpiece of this mode appeared eight years later. Pirandello's 1915 novel *Si Gira!* or *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio, operatore* showed a firmer grasp of the theoretical subtleties of cinematic representation and its relationship to subjectivity than any work of its time, including Hugo Münsterberg's *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, published the same year.

The point is one that Jay Leyda has maintained and developed for many years: there is no primitive phase in the history of cinema. The machinery required for moving photographs was invented at a time when the problems of representation in painting and literature were being discussed in terms of a crisis. The ontology of the photographic image had been a vital issue since the time Baudelaire had introduced the issue in reference to painting. It would be naive to think that the new cinema could escape the attention of those most deeply

concerned with the aesthetics of illusion. Rather than a primitive period, the first two decades of filmmaking were a time of exuberance and insight. It is Leyda again whom we have to thank for the vital clue to recovering this moment of intellectual history. Look to the most advanced fiction and poetry of the period, he advised, and you will find recorded the variety and depth of the experience of cinema in that period of intense experimentation.

I have attempted to expand the concept of film theory by examining the attitude toward language in cinema in France during the 1920s. Within this context two well-known films are to be seen in a relationship previously unexamined. They are *Anémic Cinéma* and *L'Etoile de mer*. Furthermore, their relationship to each another is relevant to one of the most strenuously debated theoretical issues of their time: the status of the intertitle in films.

With his development of the rayograph Man Ray drove a wedge between photography and camera work. He placed objects—strings, buttons, tacks, a hand—directly on the surface of photosensitive material before exposing it to light. A positive image gave him a brilliantly outlined white shape on a black background; the negative reversed it. Parts of the surface could even be exposed to a conventional camera negative to create a synthesis of camera and contact imagery.

The rayograph demonstrated that the camera was not a necessary part of the art of photography. Rather, the photosensitive surface was the essential material element. Even though photographic images usually were and continue to be generated by cameras, Man Ray's work stated the claim that the imagery of the lens was a contingent aspect of the art. This theoretical position is comparable to that of the German dadaists, who held that sounds and letters of the alphabet rather than words were the fundamental materials of poetry.

For cinema, the implications of Man Ray's photography were large and complex. In his first film, *Le Retour à la raison*, Man Ray actually applied the rayograph technique: he stuck tacks into successive frames, laid a spring across several feet of film in his darkroom, and sprinkled some granular substance on more undeveloped film. When he exposed this to light and then processed the pieces, the same pure white shapes danced in black space because of the slight variations in the positioning of objects from frame to frame. But even by alternating negative and positive strips of these moving rayographs he could only get a minute or so of moving imagery. A number of conventionally photographed images—a nude torso striped by bands of light and shadow, a twirling grid superimposed asynchronously over itself, night lights, etc.—also appear in this very short film. Much of the same material was reused for his longer, more structured film, *Emak Bakia*.

My concern in this essay is not exclusively Man Ray's contribution to the avant-garde cinema and its theory. This rayograph technique could not effectively cope with the repetitiousness of film frames. The investigation into the irreducible

elements of cinema, of which *Le Retour à la raison* and *Emak Bakia* were parts, proceeded on a much more provocative and profound level in two projects in which Man Ray participated: Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* and his own collaboration with Robert Desnos, *L'Etoile de mer*.

Our understanding of these two films and their theoretical importance requires, however, that we attend to intellectual issues to which they were responding. We are accustomed to consider Soviet revolutionary cinema during the silent period in relationship to the theoretical writings of Eisenstein, Vertov, and Pudovkin, among other filmmakers; and more recent scholarship has extended that consideration to the work of the formalist critics Shklovsky, Brik, and Tynjanov, who were intensely interested in new developments in cinema. The parallel development in France has not, however, attracted the attention of historians of the cinema. One obvious reason for this is that the most respected filmmakers did not write essays on the nature of cinema: from Duchamp, Man Ray, and Buñuel we do not have theoretical texts on issues fundamental to their film practice. And interestingly, Léger and Clair, who did publish theory, have often been ignored.

An insidious distinction between a so-called first avant-garde (Epstein, Dulac, Delluc, L'Herbier) and a second (associated with the dada and surrealist movements) has helped to perpetuate a distorted picture of this period. All of the artists of the "first avant-garde" were active theoreticians, but their theories have been as neglected as their films. The surrealists were at least partially responsible for this distinction and for the rejection of those filmmakers not aligned with influential movements in painting and poetry. But even their polemic occurred within the intellectual arena in which Epstein, Dulac, and Clair worked. The surrealist films were usually shown at the same Ciné-club de France at the Vieux-Colombier theater where others would lecture on theoretical issues.

One of the more intense debates of the 1920s concerned the status of the intertitles in silent cinema. The German director Lupu Pick made *Scherben* with only one significant title and *Sylvester* with none. Charles Ray's *The Ol' Swimm' Hole*, Murnau's *Der Letzte Mann*, and Kirsanoff's *Menilmontant* narrate complex stories without titles. And at the end of the decade Dziga Vertov proudly subtitled his tour-de-force *The Man with a Movie Camera* "a film without intertitles." Claims of cinematic purity and of a universal language were often linked to these films without words. In 1924 Jean Epstein wrote:

The theory underlying the film without titles is obviously logical: cinema exists to narrate with images and not with words. However, one should never push a theory to its limits: their extremity is always the weak spot where it collapses. Looking at a film completely without titles is undeniably depressing, for psychological reasons; the subtitle is first of all a rest for the eye, a punctuation mark for the mind. A title

often avoids a long visual explanation, which may be necessary but is boring and banal. . . . Isn't advertising a film as having no subtitles like praising Mallarmé's poems because they do not have punctuation?²

This is the context in which *Anémic Cinéma* and *L'Etoile de Mer* acquire meaning.

*

The surrealist poet Robert Desnos published film criticism regularly during the 1920s. In 1923 he devoted an article to "Musique et sous-titres." He saw the title as an integral part of the art of cinema. "Everything that can be projected on the screen belongs in the cinema, letters as well as faces. All means are good when they produce good films, and it is in the mind that the quest for purity must occur rather than in a subsidiary technique."³

The first film within the tradition of the avant-garde to claim equality of title and image was Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*. The very language that appears on the screen owes something to the literary practice of Desnos and to the long-standing friendship between the poet and the plastic artist. In 1923 Desnos published a long poem entitled *Rrose Sélavy*. It consists of one hundred and fifty punning sentences. In a footnote to the title Desnos advises us: "The author regrets that he cannot cite the name of the initiator of Rrose Sélavy without annoying him. Curious minds might decipher no. 13." That verse—"Rrose Sélavy connaît bien le marchand du sel"—links Marcel Duchamp's name with Rrose Sélavy's by means of spoonerism. In general, the puns are aggressive, mocking religion and society and above all emphasizing sexuality. For instance:

1. Dans un temple en stuc de pomme le pasteur distillait le suc des psaumes. [In a temple of apple stucco the pastor distills the juice of the psalms.]
2. Rrose Sélavy demand si les Fleurs du Mal ont modifié les moeurs du phalle: qu'en pense Omphale? [Rrose Sélavy asks if The Flowers of Evil have changed the customs of the phallus: what does Navel think about it?]
150. Aimable souvent est sable mouvant. [Lovely is often quicksand.]

Rrose Sélavy is the name of a verbal game, an exploration of the potential of the pun, founded by Duchamp and continued by Desnos. The sayings of Rrose Sélavy are all examples of language turned back upon itself, in which new

2. Jean Epstein, "Pour une avant-garde nouvelle," in *Ecrits sur le cinéma*, Paris, Seghers, 1974, vol. I, p. 148.

3. Robert Desnos, "Musique et sous-titres," in *Cinéma*, ed. André Tchernia, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, p. 98.

meanings are found in the redistribution of verbal sounds. The meaning of any of these sayings can be crudely parsed as I have done, but translation is impossible. And the name too is a pun. In French the letter *r* is pronounced *er*, and thus "Rose Sélavý" strikes the ear as "Eros, c'est la vie!"

Part of the wit of Duchamp's elaborately witty film *Anémic Cinéma* derives from the recognition that by and large the cinematic experience during the silent period was one of an alternation of reading and looking at images in an illusionistic depth. Duchamp carries this to an extreme limit; for every image there is a verbal passage, or between every two images, a title. In all, nine statements by Rose Sélavý are shown interspersed with nine nonverbal images. This relationship to contemporary conventions of cinema is purely theoretical, for *Anémic Cinéma* does not look like any film that had been made before it. The images are all disks of eccentric circles within circles and spiral lines. The words are nothing more than single sentences (in Rose Sélavý's manner) printed spirally on disks, winding from outside in. The eye grasps the disks as wholes; their motion induces an optical illusion of three-dimensionality. Some seem to protrude from the flatness of the screen; others look like conical depressions. The viewer's response to this structure affirms the power of optical stimuli to create reflexes within a system of repetition.

A film composed only of spirals and puns is indeed an example of anemic cinema. *Anémic*, the secret epithet hidden within *cinéma*, is not a French form; *anémique* has been corrupted by an English spelling. In at least two of the disks with texts there are similar cases of French infected by English. The title obviously identifies the film we see as a weak, bloodless example of cinema. But it can also be interpreted as a general statement about the art as a whole: cinema is anemic. This is the only film Duchamp ever made, although he experimented with a stereoptical project.⁴ It is his one statement in film and about film. It implies that cinema is anemic because it all takes place in the mind of the viewer through automatic responses, as that viewer is duped into believing that the successive still images move, that their flatness is really depth, that they bear a relationship to their titles. The titles seem, at first, unrelated to the images:

Bains de gros thé pour grains de beauté sans trop de bengué.

L'enfant qui tête est un souffleur de chair chaude et n'aime pas le chou-fleur de serre chaude.

Si je te donne un sou, me donneras tu une paire de ciseaux?

On demande des moustiques domestiques (demi-stock) pour la cure d'azote sur la Côte d'Azur.

Inceste ou passion de famille, à coups trop tirés.

4. See Jean Clair, "Opticeries," *October*, 5 (Summer 1978), 101-12.



Marcel Duchamp. Title disk for *Anémic Cinéma*. 1926.

Esquivons les ecchymoses des esquimaux aux mots exquis.

Avez vous déjà mis la moëlle de l'épée dans le poêle de l'aimée?

Parmi nos articles de quincaillerie paresseuse, nous recommandons le robinet qui s'arrête de couler quand on ne l'écoute pas.

L'aspirant habite Javel et moi j'avais l'habite en spirale.⁵

The final title presents a fingerprint and reads, "Copyrighted by Rose Sélavy 1926."

At first sight *Anémic Cinéma* would seem to underline the difference between optical and verbal images. Two modes of representation are held together by the figure of a spiral. And as we begin to perceive the puns as implicated in sexual play, that play determines the way in which the spiral images are seen. The abstract gyrating shapes which project and recede from and into the plane of the screen come to resemble the breasts and genitalia evoked by the words. The sexuality is neither in the literal surface of the words nor in the optical illusion. It is an operation of the viewer's reading of one part of the film into the other. Cinema, Duchamp seems to imply, is anemic insofar as it is contingent upon such indirection.

5. Because these titles are puns, they pose obvious translation problems. For their translation with annotations, see Katrina Martin, "Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*," *Studio International*, vol. 189 (January 1975), 53-60.

The final title describes the position of the imaginary author of the words and of the film. "L'aspirant habite Javel et moi j'avais l'habite en spirale." *L'aspirant* is a candidate. The word is used for a suitor in love and, in a nautical sense, for a midshipman. The sailor as suitor touches upon popular myths of sexual urgency and excess, much as the "esquimaux aux mots exquis" of the sixth title disk hints at the myths of Eskimo hospitality. Javel is a district of Paris. After a beginning which locates the horny sailor in Javel, we should expect a parallel statement of the *moi's* address with another covert allusion to his sexuality. This is not exactly what we get. *Avoir l'habite* literally means "to have the coat" or "to have the clothes," and the phrase could be construed as "I had my clothes in a spiral." However, another contamination of French usage by English is apparent here; Duchamp is using *avoir l'habite* as if it were *avoir l'habitude*, "to have the habit." Another English deformation had been "une paire de ciseaux"; in France scissors are not spoken of in terms of pairs.

Rose Sélavy not only wears a spiral suit and has the spiral habit, but he or she has "la bitte inspirale." The phrase contains a vulgarism and a corruption. *La bitte*, which means "bitt," is a vulgar name for the penis. *Inspirale* is a twisting of *inspiratrice*. Rose Sélavy had the inspiring cock, the spiral cock, and the cock in a spiral. As puns spiral out from this self-identification, the eroticization of the spiral itself finally becomes explicitly thematic, whereas until this concluding title it had been covert.

*

Man Ray's participation in the making of *Anémic Cinéma* was purely technical. Duchamp called upon him together with Marc Allégret to help him record the movement of the disks on film. But in *L'Etoile de mer* Man Ray made his own statement about the interrelationship of words and images in film. The occasion for the making of this work is somewhat obscure. In his autobiography, *Self-Portrait*, he says that Robert Desnos read a poem before a gathering of friends prior to his departure for a conference in the Caribbean, whereupon Man Ray promised to make a film of the poem in the time Desnos was away. The outline of the event is probably true, but one would like to know how Desnos could appear in the film if it was indeed completed in his absence. Perhaps the final scene, the only one in which he appears, was added after his return. Unfortunately Man Ray does not address himself to this detail. A more troubling problem is the disappearance of the poem, which Man Ray tells us was called "L'Etoile de mer," was eighteen to twenty lines long, and contained all the images of the film. Gallimard has published three collections of Desnos's poems, including many previously unpublished. There is no sign of "L'Etoile de mer" in them. The claim has been made that "La Place de l'Etoile," Desnos's dramatic "antipoème" was the basis for the film. The only point of juncture is the appearance of starfish in both the film and the play, making the claim rather untenable. At this time we cannot

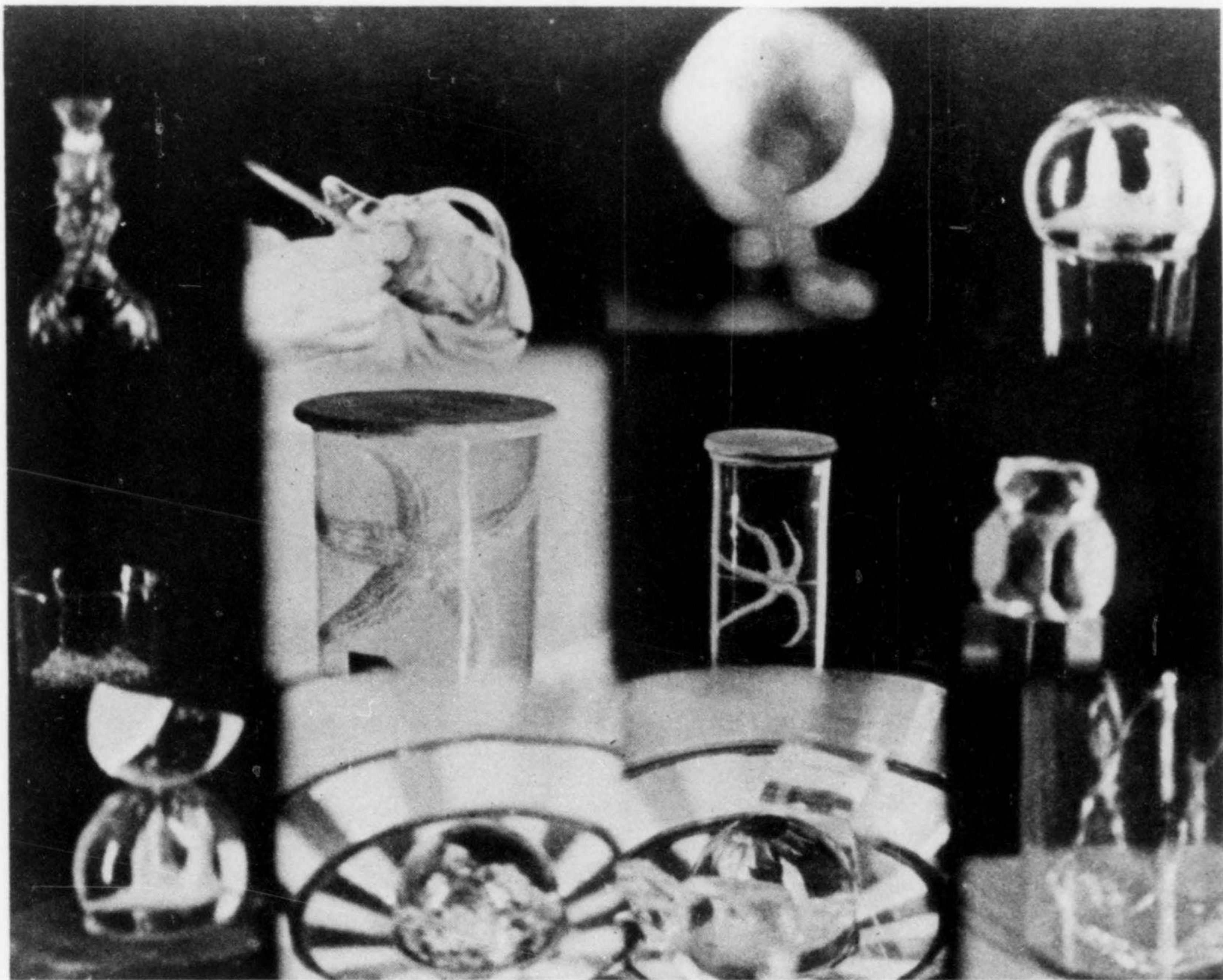
determine the respective contributions of Man Ray and Desnos. Although I assume all the titles that appear in the film are quoted from Desnos, even this may not be the case. Surely the titles do not constitute the whole of the poem; Man Ray's description of its imagery argues that much of the text has been omitted. Here are the titles as they appear in the film:

les dents des femmes
sont des objets
si charmants . . .
. . . qu'on ne devrait
les voir qu'en rêve
ou
à l'instant de l'amour.
Adieu
Si belle! Cybèle?
Nous sommes à jamais
Perdus dans le désert
de l'éternèbre.
Qu'elle est belle
"Après tout"
si les fleurs
étaient en
verre
"belle, belle comme
une fleur de verre"
"belle comme une fleur de chair"
Il faut battre les morts
quand ils sont froids.
Les murs de la Santé
Et si tu trouves
sur cette terre
une femme
à l'amour sincère . . .
"belle
comme une
fleur de feu"
Le soleil, un pied à
l'étrier, niche un rossi-
gnol dans un voile
de crêpe.
Vous ne rêvez pas
"qu'elle était belle"
"qu'elle est belle
belle

Women's teeth
are objects
so charming . . .
. . . that one ought
to see them only in a dream
or
in the instant of love.
Farewell
So beautiful! Cybele?
We are forever
Lost in the desert
of eternal darkness.
How beautiful she is
"After all"
if the flowers
were in
glass
"beautiful, beautiful like
a flower of glass"
"beautiful like a flower of flesh"
One must beat the dead
while they are cold.
The walls of the Santé
And if you find
on this earth
a woman
of sincere love . . .
"beautiful
like a
flower of fire"
The sun, one foot in
the stirrup, nestles a nightin-
gale in a veil
of crepe.
You do not dream
"how beautiful she was"
"how beautiful she is"
beautiful

In Andre Breton's *Nadja* there are two photographs of Desnos taken by Man Ray showing in successive images on a strip the poet asleep. Desnos had a reputation for being able to compose poetry in a sleeplike trance produced by self-hypnosis. Many of his finest poems from the 1920s describe dreams, and they often present the poet as a lover in a desperate erotic situation. A commonplace of surrealist literature is the encounter with a strange, perhaps mad, woman. *Nadja* itself chronicles Breton's meetings with such a woman. In Desnos's poetry the fascinating but impossibly distant female is called "la mystérieuse."

L'Etoile de mer presents another version of the encounter with "la mystérieuse." This much of the plot is clear: a man meets a woman who sells newspapers on the street. They go to her apartment where she takes off all of her clothes; he leaves immediately, taking with him a glass paperweight in which is enclosed a starfish. They meet again on the street, this encounter followed by several scenes of each of them alone. At the conclusion they meet in a scene almost identical to their initial encounter, but this time another man (played by Desnos) arrives suddenly and takes the woman away with him.



Man Ray. *L'Etoile de mer*. 1923.

The film's energy is not concentrated in this elementary plot, but in the depiction of the male figure's mind. The most obvious index of subjectivity is Man Ray's use of a stippled lens which distorts many of the images, especially at the opening. Such distortion as a sign of subjectivity had been part of the French cinema since Abel Gance's *La Folie de Dr. Tube* of 1919. The most surprising aspect of Man Ray's use of it is its apparently arbitrary intermittence. The sequence of the meeting at the opening of the film is by and large distorted optically, but there are details filmed through a "normal" lens. Given Man Ray's skill as a photographer and the manner in which he called into question the status of the camera lens in both photography and cinema, this alternation of optical perspectives cannot be unimportant. The very subtitle of the film, "poème de Robert Desnos tel que l'a vu Man Ray," draws our attention to the difference between text and sight and bids us look for the particulars of Man Ray's vision.

But "tel que l'a vu Man Ray" refers not only to the filmmaker's envisioning of the poem, but also to the very nature of camera vision in general. The alternation of lenses points first of all to the very fact that there are lenses. *L'Etoile de mer* is a film about seeing the world through layers of glass. That is naturally the barrier of the camera which always protects its sensitive film surface from the exterior world with a wall of glass. The implication is that the so-called normal lens is as artificial as the stippled one. This implicit principle of pure theory functions as an essential component of the film's thematics in much the same way as the claim of the impoverishment, or anemia, of cinema in Duchamp's work. Both stress the abstract peculiarity of illusionistic modes of vision; in both, language is poetically reflexive; in both sexuality mediates between the two extremes.

As they walk together early in the film, the woman attracts the man's attention by stopping to fix her garter. The title which interrupts her gesture reads, "Les dents des femmes sont des objets si charmants. . . ." Had we seen an image of her smile this title would have been nothing more than a banal convention. Coming where it does, however, it generates a new level of signification, for the image of the woman's thighs, coupled with a mention of her teeth, brings into play the image of the *vagina dentata*. That image, a synthesis of picture and text, is only figuratively represented in the film and comes to dominate and determine the man's action.

The fascination of the *vagina dentata* compels him to accompany the woman to her room and to watch her strip, but in his fear he then bids her adieu and leaves without making love. Instead, he takes an object: the paperweight she used to hold down her newspapers. Alone in his room, he contemplates the starfish in the glass paperweight. The pun he utters has an ambiguous referent. Is the woman or the starfish "Si belle"? In uttering the sounds "Si belle!" he pronounces the name Cybèle.

Catullus addressed a long poem, numbered sixty-three in the *Carmina*, to the cult of Cybele. It opens in this way:

Upon the fleet ship, Attis rapidly flew
 Eager to find the sacred Phrygian grove,
 And in its deepest shade, great Cybele drew
 Him madly onward till he, shuddering, drove
 A flint into his groin, and staggering back
 He wailed for his lost manhood, shrieked in a fire
 Of pain. The stain of hot blood reddened the black,
 Cold earth, and her white hands in maddened desire
 Then seized the sacred tambour, Cybele's horn
 And trumpet, struck the hollow, echoing hide
 With slender hands; to her companions reborn,
 She sang, "Now come, who would with Cybele bide
 In lofty groves together. . . ."⁶

The frenzied follower of Cybele castrates himself and then, to follow Catullus's usage, she bemoans her deed for the remainder of the poem.

The starfish which holds the attention of the man possessed by the titillating dread of the *vagina dentata* and Cybelean castration is, significantly, contained within a cylinder of glass. Within the world encased in the camera's glass is a man peering into a glassed-in zone. As he peers, the starfish comes alive. "Après tout," the title declares at this moment. "After all" what? It is for the viewer to decide. After all, as it wraps itself around a sea urchin, the living starfish looks like the dreaded *vagina dentata*.

In the more abstract sequence which follows, language and the camera's glass eye are conjoined by a pun: "Si les fleurs étaient en verre." Literally: "If the flowers were in glass." Coming when it does, after the image of a potted flower, the title names, in the conditional mood, the status of the image we have seen, a flower viewed through the glass of the lens. The flower is a sexual organ as well, so that the line refers metonymically to the man's desire to encounter the *vagina dentata* from the same close but protected distance as that from which he studies the starfish. Proximate to this title there is a succession of multiple images of revolving starfish in glass cylinders, roulette wheels, a sword plunged into and pulled out of a scabbard. The composite image in motion is possible only in cinema. And a flower "en verre" or a flower "de verre," as the next title varies it, is possible only in poetry. The pun of *verre* (glass) and *vers* (poetry) fuses the optical and verbal aspects of the film. The space between these two autonomous and reflexive systems is that of figuration in which the dominant but invisible "image" of the *vagina dentata* holds sway.

The invented word *l'éternèbre*, which fuses *éternal* (endless) and *tenèbre*

6. *Catullus*, trans. Reney Myers and Robert J. Ormsby, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1972, p. 64.

(darkness), speaks of the constant and hopeless attraction of "la mystérieuse."⁷ Man Ray subsequently introduces two new means of optical distortion. The speed of a train affects the camera's view of a landscape viewed through a window. A fog reduces boats seen by the man in a harbor to eerie silhouettes. The filmmaker is letting us see that a stippled lens is not the only source of modified vision: the very speed of the camera's movement and even the atmosphere through which it gathers its light can determine transformation. To these two kinds of distortion he adds still another, presenting a still life in fluid contours, moving from distorted to conventional perspective by merely turning the focus mechanism on his lens. This establishes that the fluctuation of perspective is built into the glass eye of the camera. And when the still life does come into crisp focus, the two half-sliced bananas on the table beside a wine bottle turn out to be one more displacement of the fear of Cybele's castrating intoxication.

In a reversal of the opening metonymy of thigh and teeth, the first "fleur de chair" we are shown is the woman's face as she removes a mask. The second fleshly flower appears on the man's hands as the lines of his palms appear in dark tracings. In *Self-Portrait* Man Ray laconically mentions that the French censors suggested he remove the title which follows this image of the flower of lifelines: "Il faut battre les morts quand ils sont froids." The censors had obviously perceived—as two or three generations of historians and critics have not—that "les morts" are the genitals of the fetishist, rendered impotent by his fearful fascination. The title is a call for masturbation, defined in *Le Dictionnaire surréaliste* as "the hand in the service of the imagination."

The surrealist hero has chosen to live in the imaginative realm of displacement, fantasy, and mythopoeisis. The scandal of Breton's enthusiasm for Freud, I suspect, was that he was not concerned with psychoanalysis as therapy but with its picture of the imagination, the manner in which it affirmed the lively notion that the dreams of magistrates, presidents of the republic, and archbishops are closer to the visions of Sade than to those of Plato.

Optical distortion and Eros are conjoined in the most elaborate title in the film: "Le soleil, un pied à l'étrier, niche un rossignol dans une voile de crêpe." The complex metaphor derives from the traditions of Provençal troubadour poetry and the code of courtly love. Two elements of the *aubade*, or poem to the dawn, appear here. The courtly lover hates the dawn because it marks the end of his tryst. Desnos portrays the sun as a horseback rider. With one foot in the stirrup, the sun mounts the horse; his radiance can be seen glowing around the horse, but the disk of light has not yet appeared on the horizon; it is the glow that precedes the dawn. With the coming of this light, the nightingale which sings at night and sleeps in the morning and is thus a friend to lovers, goes to its nest. The veil of crepe is the

7. One collection of Desnos's poetry from this period is entitled *A la mystérieuse*; another, *Les ténèbres*.

crepuscular half-light of this moment. With this metaphor the theme of optical distortion seen in the stippled lens, the train-driven camera, the fog, and the turning focus finally appears in the titles. It announces the end of the nocturnal fantasy and the film's conclusion.

The encounter of man and woman, repeated once again, is followed by the arrival of the second man to terminate the chain. As the woman goes off with him the title declares, "Qu'elle *était* belle." The first man still has the starfish to sustain his erotic fantasy. Staring at the fetish-object, he thinks, "Qu'elle *est* belle." The woman now appears in a mirror, the word *belle* printed across the glass seemingly suspended in the foreground. In this brief moment, image and word coincide, only to be denied. A thrown object shatters the mirror, making it clear for the first time that this concluding image is indeed in glass. With this splitting of the two modes of representation—glass and word—from their mysterious and distant object, the film ends.

Desnos seems to have been pleased with Man Ray's film. In his 1929 article, "Cinéma d'avant-garde," this work, together with *Entr'acte* and *Un Chien Andalou*, is spared his condemnation. Of these films he says, "It's not a question of creating a work of art or a new aesthetic but of obeying a new form's deep, original, and consequently necessary movements."⁸ That he also takes some credit for *L'Etoile de mer* is apparent in his footnote: "Here the author of these lines assumes a rather modest pose."

*

Neither *Anémic Cinéma* nor *L'Etoile de mer* has hitherto been considered as a contribution to the theory of cinema, and to the particular problem of the relationship between images and words in the silent film. Such is the constricted view of film theory. Henri Fescourt's *La Foi et les montagnes* (1959), a gossipy contemporary account of the development of cinema in France, remains the most useful book on French film of the 1920s precisely because the author chronicles the intellectual activity surrounding filmmaking. Future scholars investigating cinema's place in modern intellectual history can take hints from that book which places Blaise Cendrars's *Fin du monde: filmée par l'ange N. D.* and Jules Romains's *Donogoo-Tonka* as contributions to the cinematic milieu beside the actually realized films of Gance and Dulac, for example.

Much work remains to be done before we have an adequate picture of the development of film theory during that period of intense artistic activity. There can be little doubt that the question of the status of language in film was a central issue to which both *Anémic Cinéma* and *L'Etoile de mer* responded. As well, the status of the lens itself was in question. In 1925 *Les Cahiers du mois* devoted an

8. Robert Desnos, "Cinéma d'avant-garde," *Tchernia*, p. 189.

entire issue to the aesthetics of cinema. Desnos was one of the seventeen writers consulted on the relationship of cinema to literature and modern thought. The same issue presented two photographs by Man Ray with the following editorial comment:

We publish at the back of this volume some photographs of M. Man Ray, who has miraculously been able to provoke on sensitive paper the illusions and revelations (close-ups, deformations, soft focus, superimpositions, in short simultaneity, abstractions, synthesis) that effect in us the sort of feeling one might be tempted to call cinematographic and which would, so it seems, be an a priori paradox to want to achieve with a still image.

Upon opening the issue containing their contributions, Man Ray and Robert Desnos would have found the first article written by the most active theoretician of their day, Jean Epstein, whose neglected work is crucial to an understanding of avant-garde cinema in the 1920s. That article, "Le Regard du verre" (The Glass Stare) speaks of a mirror-lined spiral staircase as a metaphor for cinema. The filmmaker's experience of shock and depletion as he descends amidst multiples of his own reflection is tied, according to Epstein, to an unmasking of the self and its deceptions which is the fundamental gift of cinema:

The mission of cinematography seems not to have been understood precisely. The camera lens is an eye that Apollinaire would have called surreal (with no connection to present-day surrealism), an eye endowed with nonhuman analytical properties. It is an eye without prejudices, without morality, free of influences; and it sees in the face and in human movement traits which we, weighted down by likings and dislikings, by habits and considerations, can no longer perceive.⁹

Both Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp deny the transcendental authority of the cinema's glass stare. For them it constitutes only one moment of the cinematic experience. The other is language. The two conjoined reveal the surrealist view of anemia and the power of the erotic imagination.

9. Jean Epstein, "Le Regard du verre," *Ecrits*, pp. 136-7.

El Lissitzky: Reading Lessons

YVE-ALAIN BOIS

translated by CHRISTIAN HUBERT

Not everything in print is to be read in a traditional way; there are new modes of reading which correspond to new modes of writing.

—Emile Benveniste

Then a voice which seemed to come from the sky rather than from the cock's throat cried, "Student, be seated. Pluck a quill from the cock's tail and with it write the book of books, containing all the *patres et matres lectionis*, the book that even the greatest genius must have studied before the age of five. In one word, the most perfect book of all, with the longest title: *Abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz* (although we may abbreviate: *Abc . . .*). Write this book, Fibel! Everyone will read it!"

With that, he awoke and sat up in bed—which is of course what any unseasoned author would have done.

—Jean-Paul, *The Life of Fibel*

Until the advent of modernism, writers paid little attention to typography. After the whimsical pictograms of medieval manuscripts and the mannered calligrams of Greek, Hebrew, Gallic, and Arabic poetry, typography became the restricted province of a few specialists. Economics dictated "justification," the most efficient use of the page: in this way, the book became a grisaille. Although typographers designed new faces, writers were interested only in the arrangement of type by the linear foot, punctuated by an occasional ornamental capital. Except for Rabelais and Laurence Sterne (and a few other exceptional cases), writers were either bored by typography or threatened by what they saw as an impediment to the presumed transparency of the signifier.

But then Lewis Carroll, Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Marinetti, and finally the *painters* emerged to prove that "the past and the future of the letter (where it comes from and what remains open to it) are independent of the phoneme."¹ A brief history thus begins with this swarm of seminal names: Bayer, Berlewi, Bill, van Doesburg, Feininger, Hausmann, Heartfield, Höch, Zdanevitch, Itten, Léger, Lewis, Moholy-Nagy, Peeters, Man Ray, Schwitters, Strzeminski, Werkman, Zwart, and especially *El Lissitzky* and *Alexander Rodchenko*, who exemplify the two tendencies of modern typography—the pure use of type and photomontage.

1. Roland Barthes, "L'esprit de la lettre," *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, June 1, 1970.

In Russia, the first attempts at a new typography were, paradoxically, handwritten—the lithographed books of the futurist painter-poets. Here, the grain of the calligrapher's letter acknowledges spacing and thus gives form to difference:² "You have seen letters laid out with a ruler, which, equally grey and colorless, appear constrained, frustrated. These are no longer letters, but seals of infamy! Any student of language will tell you that a word written by a particular hand, with a particular pen, barely resembles the same word written by another."³ It was, however, the "Typographic Revolution" proclaimed by Marinetti's *Words in Liberty* that, in Russia, prompted further typographic investigations. As Lissitzky was to write:

Prior to October our artists demonstrated little interest in typesetting. That task was left to the printers. But after October a number of our best artists from various fields, in their desire to express the new through the specifics of each medium, set about producing the new book in terms of the material of the book itself—that is, type. Their work took two directions: the first, which might be called "the architecture of the book," proceeds from a plan of the whole and of each page based on the proportion and relations of the parts, the relation of composition to the page, the size and contrast of the letters, and above all the exclusive use of standard typographic elements and the specific characteristics of the typographic process, such as overprinting and the like.

The second direction, which might be called "figurative montage," arranges compositional materials in a mosaic for the design of covers, isolated pages, and posters.

Both are directly linked to production.⁴

Lissitzky was the herald of the first "direction"—the total conception of the book, its construction (on the title page of *Dlia Golosa* he referred to himself as *konstructor knigi*).⁵ At the same time, he never completely subscribed to claims of specificity which, in a restrictive formalist aesthetic, underpin the very idea of modernism. He seems instead to have been committed to mixing genres in order to destroy any division of the arts on essentialist grounds. He claimed that he created *Dlia Golosa* exclusively with standard typographic elements.⁶ He used, however, not only letters (in the UNOVIS almanac he wrote: "Gutenberg's Bible was printed with letters only; but the Bible of our time cannot be

2. On these concepts, see the works of Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1976), *Writing and Difference* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1978), *La dissémination* (Paris, Seuil, 1972), and *Positions* (Paris, Minuit, 1972).

3. Victor Khlebnikov and Alexei Kruchenikh, "La lettre en tant que telle," *Manifestes futuristes russes*, ed. L. Robel, Paris, Editeurs Français Réunis, 1971, p. 23.

4. El Lissitzky, "The Artist in Production," *Catalogue of the Graphic Arts Section*, Polygraphic Exposition of the Union of Republics, Moscow, 1927.

5. Written by Mayakovsky and designed by Lissitzky, this book was published in Berlin in 1923. It was recently reissued in a facsimile edition by Verlag Gebr. König, Cologne/New York, 1973. The title may be translated as *For the Voice*.

6. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky, Life, Letters, Texts*, trans. Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall, Greenwich, New York Graphic Society, 1968, caption to illustrations 95-108. All further references to this volume will appear in the form of page numbers directly following the citations.

just presented in letters alone."—p. 358), but also a whole range of underutilized accessories: thick, fine, and dotted lines; grids; diverse geometric forms. These were refined, transformed into figures. In addition, on many pages nontypographical elements were introduced; some of the illustrations approach photomontage.⁷

Lissitzky's typographic career, which began at approximately the same time as his career in painting, is well known. His first works were a series of small books for children, illustrated in the style of Chagall (with whom he had worked in Vitebsk). No matter what we may be told, these hardly contain anything new; in fact, according to his wife, "these little books were put away and later scarcely mentioned by Lissitzky." (p. 20) During the revolution he made posters, including the famous *The Red Wedge Defeats the Whites*; it was, however, in Berlin that he produced most of his typographic works. There, in 1922, he printed his *Of Two Squares* (written in 1920). In 1925 he became an honorary member of the Gutenberg Society; in the 1927 *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* he wrote:

The invention of easel pictures produced great works of art, but their effectiveness has been lost. The cinema and the illustrated weekly magazine have triumphed. We rejoice at the new media which technology has placed at our disposal. We know that being in close contact with worldwide events and keeping pace with the progress of social development, that with the perpetual sharpening of our optic nerve, with the mastery of plastic material, with the construction of the plane and its space, with the force which keeps inventiveness at boiling-point, with all these new assets, we know that finally we shall give a new effectiveness to the book as a work of art. (p. 359)

In the same year he published "The Artist in Production" in Moscow:

October opened the route towards the masses. The experience of the artist's studio, of easel painting, had to be transposed to the factory, the machine. What is more, paintings had become luxury items because of the disproportion between the energy required to produce them and their limited sphere of influence. And as the printed page began to attract the artist, painting slowly died.

In April 1924 he wrote Küppers from his sickbed: "I no longer imagine for a moment that I will return to painting again, even if I recover." (p. 48)

7. If Lissitzky was the herald of the first direction, Rodchenko was clearly the champion of the second, "figurative montage." Malevich, however, could not abide photomontage: "New art is above all architectural, and its true meaning was not understood by the 'left' artists who turned to individual aesthetics and intuitive moods, and created from the debris of photo-montage eclecticism, thus placing a barrier in the path of the developing form of new art 'as such.'" (*Essays on Art 1915-1933*, ed. Troels Andersen, New York, Wittenborn, 1971, vol. I., p. 230.) Lissitzky's view of photomontage was more temperate, yet he also perceived its limitations: "Most artists make montages, that is to say, with photographs and the inscriptions belonging to them they piece together whole pages, which are then photographically reproduced for printing. In this way there develops a technique of simple effectiveness, which appears to be very easy to operate and for that reason can easily develop into dull routine, but which in powerful hands turns out to be the most successful method of achieving visual poetry." (Küppers, p. 359) However, he appears to have considered Rodchenko among the "powerful hands." He also admired, outside of Russia, the work of John Heartfield.

And he was right.

In 1923 in Berlin his environmental *Proun Raum* had been a triumph. Subsequent exhibition designs—in Dresden in 1926, Hanover in 1928, not to mention the *Pressa* in Cologne, also in 1928, and the various Soviet pavilions in the great international exhibitions—revolutionized the classical conception of exhibition space. For Lissitzky, the organization of exhibition space and the construction of books and posters were the *Aufhebung* of easel painting, whose death—the cliché of the era—was proclaimed by many, from Mondrian to the Russian productivists.

But what role did typography play?

But let us digress about an object: a thin book, almost a pamphlet, carrying the UNOVIS insignia (to acknowledge from the beginning Malevich's silent but insistent presence: the emblem is a red square on a white ground, and it is encircled as well), conceived in Vitebsk in 1920 and printed in Berlin in 1922.

The reasons for this separation—two years and a relatively great geographic distance lie between conception and execution—are primarily *economic*. In 1920, at the height of the civil war, paper was as scarce as film . . . as everything. The paper shortage had been felt as early as 1912 (which sanctioned the printing of the futurists' manifestoes on toilet paper and forced Khlebnikov to write his poems on old bills, spilling from verso to recto, letters inscribed between numbers, much to the discomfiture of his followers and exegetes). The economic blockade hardly improved this situation. Thus it was not possible to print just anything; choices had to be made.

There were also *technical* reasons. Manual lithography (which Lissitzky himself used for Malevich's book *Suprematism—34 Drawings*, printed in Vitebsk⁸) was incapable of producing the desired precision and evenness of inking. New techniques would be necessary if the perfect, nonhierarchical unity of "figure" and "letter" (although it is uncertain whether the two may so easily be opposed) which Lissitzky envisioned were to be achieved. With traditional typography (in the narrowest sense) the figure would have suffered; whereas with lithography, given the poor quality of the available equipment, the letter would have been blurred, indistinct. These conditions, however, did not prevent Lissitzky from speculating on future technical possibilities, as well as on those currently at hand.

Finally, there may also have been resistance to the publication of this story—a question of cultural politics, although this is unlikely, at least prior to the NEP.⁹ We must insist, therefore, upon the technical difficulties; even in industrial Berlin it was difficult to execute Lissitzky's other great typographic work, *Dlia Golosa*: "Editions of our books were usually produced by large printing-works, but the

8. Reissued in facsimile by J.-C. Marcadé, Paris, Chêne, 1974.

9. "During the twenties, a relatively liberal publishing policy was pursued by the state." (Peter Wollen, "Art in Revolution: Russian Art in the Twenties," *Studio International*, vol. 18, no. 932 [April 1971], 152). Total repression came later, with resolutions passed in the early thirties.

production manager at the Berlin office, Skaponi, found us a small firm, because, he said, 'As this is a risky thing, it is better to work with a small printer—they will pay more attention to you there.'" (p. 25)

The New Book

The story *Of Two Squares* is a textbook; it should instruct. Although meaning might be uprooted and the denotative illusion destroyed, the primary problem—on its own modest scale (of production, distribution)—was essentially similar to that of Eisenstein or Vertov: in a revolutionary period, it is impossible to eliminate the signified. In *Of Two Squares*, however, the political signified is extremely weak; text and illustrations are barely informed by it. There is simply the requisite amount of narrative. Only the colors, whose symbolism is highly conventional, offer a clue . . .

Children, however, have little need of extensive historical knowledge. A plastic scenario, a pictorial strategy is sufficient to indicate to them the forces which are face to face. Adults, on the other hand, know the entire story, which renders their readings both more epic and more perverse (epic in Brecht's or even Schiller's sense: "The goal of the epic poet is already present at every stage in his trajectory; this is why we do not press on toward some final destination, but dally like lovers with each step.").

The *epic*: Lissitzky spoke of it ("We, however, are satisfied if in our book the lyric and epic evolution of our times is given shape."—p. 359) as if responding to Marx:

. . . is Achilles possible side by side with powder and lead? Or is the *Iliad* at all compatible with the printing press and steam press? Does not singing, and reciting, and the Muses necessarily go out of existence with the appearance of the printer's bar, and do not, therefore, disappear the prerequisites of epic poetry?¹⁰

Not if the typographer is also the poet, Lissitzky seems to answer, not if a *new* history serves as the pretext for the book. (And is October not the actual, prodigious history which gives rise to a mythology—as Marx wrote, "there must be *one* mythology" which provides the material of the epic—a mythology which is, in miniature, the subject of this book?)

But is *Of Two Squares* really a picture book?

Instead of investigating the fundamental question, which has been posed by men such as Freud, Wittgenstein, and Eisenstein (Does visual thought exist? Is a picture capable of stating a proposition? Can a preconceptual logic which existed

10. Karl Marx, Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1857 ed.), trans. N. I. Stone, Chicago, Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1904, p. 311.

prior to articulate speech reemerge in an image?), I will simply recount what Z, a character in an imaginary dialogue by Mondrian, described: a film screened during World War I in which clashing armies were presented as small colored squares. "The plastic expression given by the violent displacement of elements was due in part to the idea of 'struggle,' which was known in advance."¹¹

This is obviously not Lissitzky's point. The written text of *Of Two Squares* carries little information. This "narrative" has no denouement; it concludes with the phrase *to be continued*, so that it is up to the reader to complete the book, the revolution. Despite appearances, this is not simply a pictorial translation of a narrative. Still, the example from Mondrian demonstrates the timeliness of the question (A narrative composed of abstract images?).

The book must function as a work; it must be effective. It must, by forcing the reader to work, elicit another kind of reading, serve as a model for the transformation not only of production but also of consumption, reactivate reading. Taking a stand against those who "consider the difficult work of art as a weekend pastime,"¹² it must transform the reader.

Art as an "instrument of social change"—such was the program, but without any instrumentalist intention (the sad consequences of which are familiar from the case of social realism). The book must change the reader in a completely *material* way. By transforming itself formally, it also transforms the conditions of its apprehension. (Especially since form is the preferred hiding place of ideology, largely because in the West we have the bad habit of ignoring form. "Form is *always ideological*," Eisenstein wrote in response to charges of "formalism" leveled against him.¹³ This is well known, but bears repeating.)

Does the political nature of this book not then lie in its attempt to transform the power of the book over the reader's body (as opposed to what would later be called the easy reading of the NEP), rather than in the fact that it offers children a little mythology of October? Indeed, "by reading, our children are already acquiring a new plastic language; they are growing up with a different relationship to the world and to space, to shape and to colour; they will surely also create another book." (p. 359)

All of this is undoubtedly political.

The Broken Line

In 1927 Lissitzky complained: "Yes, in this present day and age we still have no new shape for the book as a body; it continues to be a cover with a jacket, and a spine, and pages 1, 2, 3. . . . We still have the same thing in the theatre also." (p. 359)

11. Piet Mondrian, "Natural Reality and Abstract Reality," in Michel Seuphor, *Piet Mondrian*, New York, Abrams, n.d., p. 321.

12. "Qui le Lef prend à la gorge," *Manifestes futuristes russes*, p. 73.

13. S. M. Eisenstein, "In the Interest of Form," *Kino*, November 12, 1932.

Nevertheless, this little book (12 sheets, printed on crude, slightly yellowed paper, 22 by 28 centimeters), made five years before this expression of regret:

1. has no real cover (Were the first and last pages made of cardboard or of heavier paper? How was the book bound?)

2. has no jacket or sleeve (Something else gives Lissitzky's works their volume, such as the "alphabetical" index of *Dlia Golosa*.)

3. is unpaginated. (So that the order or reading does not appear to be prescribed, at least not explicitly. This apparent absence of constraint must be analyzed.)

However:

Our first encounter with a book rarely consists in laying it flat on a table, opening it to the first page, and commencing to read with the first word. Especially when it is a picture book. We often leaf through it, thumbing the pages while the eye darts quickly in and out in a series of glances which rhyme with the rhythm of our leafing through the spatialized "body" of the book.¹⁴

Of Two Squares is perhaps the last work which allows us to read from the first word to the last without lifting our heads. (But what if, as Roland Barthes once suggested, it is only when one lifts one's head that one truly reads?) It thus reveals in its entirety (in several ways, on several levels) the contradiction between continuity and discontinuity which constitutes the book.

Although its format may pose some difficulties, the book invites us to thumb its pages—like the doodles sketched during a boring lecture in students' notebooks, which, when rapidly leafed through, are transformed into an *animated cartoon*. In this way the book is presented as a metaphor for the filmic ("the continuous page-sequence—the bioscopic book"—p. 355). But it also denounces the optical illusion of cinematic continuity. We know today, from "experimental" cinema, that a film is constituted of a number of small units placed end to end: pictograms and black intervals. In (commercial) cinematic narrative, however, the illusion of presentness (in which each image appears to efface its predecessor and is itself destined to be forgotten in turn, neutralized by the succeeding image) conceals the real material discontinuity of film.

The fact that every "plate" in Lissitzky's book reacts (in the chemical sense) with every other one overdetermines the cinematic metaphor: the "montage of attractions." This book is thus the trace, the residue of an animated film from which the best moments have been excerpted. As his friend Eggeling wrote, "Lissitzky hoped to resolve the problem of the representation of movement in the visual arts with the assistance of a camera. But *Of Two Squares* never became a

14. Martine Deborne, "Volumes-feuillets-planches," *Communications*, 19 (1972).

film." (p. 380) It remains a collection of stills without origin, the floating detritus of an absent text.¹⁵

Of Two Squares might also be mistaken for a *false* comic strip, each page representing a separate frame:¹⁶ "The linearity of the book, justified by communication alone, is destroyed, or rather exploded and dispersed . . . as if the volume itself required the detachment and dispersal of its pages and the assimilation of either the real or the fictive space of the image (paging and spacing)."¹⁷ Thus the book, the concept of the book passes from the singular (the scroll, the codex in its wooden box, *The Legend of Prague*, for example) to the plural: "The traditional book was torn into separate pages, enlarged a hundred-fold, coloured for greater intensity, and brought into the street as a poster." (p. 358) These posters—as opposed to the gigantic billboards of modern (American) advertising, which are meant to be read from moving vehicles—are "for people who would stand quite close and read it over and make sense out of it" (*ibid.*)—like the *dazibaos* of the Chinese cultural revolution.

Yet since "as long as the book is of necessity a hand-held object, that is to say not yet supplanted by sound recordings or talking pictures, we must wait from day to day for new fundamental inventions" (p. 357) which will destroy the traditional form of the book. Meanwhile, another maneuver—a Trojan horse—suggests itself: the poster might become part of the book.

Perhaps this is the case with *Of Two Squares*.

(Elsewhere, Lissitzky expressed interest in the comic strip. In 1925 he wrote on the subject of a periodical—undoubtedly *Asnova*, on architecture: "I am now introducing in our newspaper a kind of cartoon serial, captioned by a few explanatory sentences, thus conveying an idea through this visual method."—p. 68.)

But another rubric—rhythm—summons another metaphor which is offered

15. I will rehearse in this context neither the theory of the "filmic," which is based in the pictogram, nor the polemic which found Eisenstein and Malevich in opposed camps. Both, however, are relevant. For the former, see Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, New York, Hill and Wang, 1977, pp. 52-68. For the Eisenstein/Malevich polemic see Malevich, *Essays on Art*, vol. I, pp. 226-38, and Eisenstein, *Film Form*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949, pp. 72-83. See also Annette Michelson, "Reading Eisenstein Reading *Capital*, Part 2," *October*, 3 (Spring 1977), 82-9.

16. "There are other 'arts' which combine still (or at least drawing) and story, diegesis—namely the photo-novel and the comic-strip. I am convinced that these 'arts', born in the lower depths of high culture, possess theoretical qualifications and present a new signifier. . . . There may thus be a future—or a very ancient past—truth in these derisory, vulgar, foolish, dialogical forms of consumer subculture. And there is an autonomous 'art' (a 'text'), that of the *pictogram* ('anecdotalized' images . . .); this art taking across historically and culturally heteroclitic productions: ethnographic pictograms, stained glass windows, Carpaccio's *Legend of Saint Ursula*, *images d'Epinal*, photo-novels, comic-strips. The innovation represented by the still (in comparison with these other pictograms) would be that the filmic (which it constitutes) is *doubled* by another text, the film." (Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," p. 66).

17. Martine Deborne, "Décrire," *Ca*, I, 1 (1973).

as a pretext for and constitutes one of the codes of reference of the book, of the story *Of Two Squares* as an emblem of the book of the future: music. The book is a score, perhaps less than *Dlia Golosa*, which as its title indicates was made for the voice, "to be read aloud." According to Lissitzky, the illustrations "stand in the same relation to the accompanying poems as a piano to the violin."¹⁸ (There are two types of layout in *Dlia Golosa*. Double pages indexed by notches, as in an address book or subway map, are complex graphic games in two colors. These are separated by other pages which, while more numerous, simply present poems scanned according to a red/black opposition.) Writing is silent, but when scanned rhythmically, it becomes orchestral.

Rhythm, we know, predates the invention of writing and of painting:

We have found rhythmic inscriptions from the Mousterian period, thirty thousand years before the birth of Christ, and therefore well before the first writing. These inscriptions were probably not semantic; they were, in fact, preinscriptions. All of them are in some way or other what we generally call abstractions. Abstraction therefore existed even before the appearance of figuration or writing. Consequently, in this unique area of corporeal practice, painting and writing would have originated in the same nonfigurative and nonsemantic gesture, one that was simply rhythmic.¹⁹

And, in his remarkable analysis of "The Concept of 'Rhythm' in its Linguistic Expression," Emile Benveniste demonstrates that rhythm designates the contradiction between the continuous and the discontinuous, and that this contradiction is operative even at the level of the letter.²⁰

Thus the letter becomes, at the minimal level, the cipher of the book: caught up in the flow, it may nevertheless, like the page, be detached.

Theory

As early as 1919, Lissitzky wrote to Malevich:

I think it is necessary that we should pour the thoughts, which are to be drunk from the book with the eyes, over everything which is perceived by the eyes. The letters and the punctuation marks, which impose order on the thoughts, must be included in our calculations; the way the lines are set out can lead to particular concentrations of thought, they must be concentrated for the benefit of the eye, too. (p. 380)

18. El Lissitzky, "Typographische Tatsachen," *Gutenberg-Festschrift*, Mainz, 1925.

19. Roland Barthes, "La sociologie de l'art et sa vocation interdisciplinaire," *Coloquio/artes* (Lisbon), 18-19 (April-June 1974).

20. In *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, Coral Gables, University of Miami, 1971, ch. xxvii.

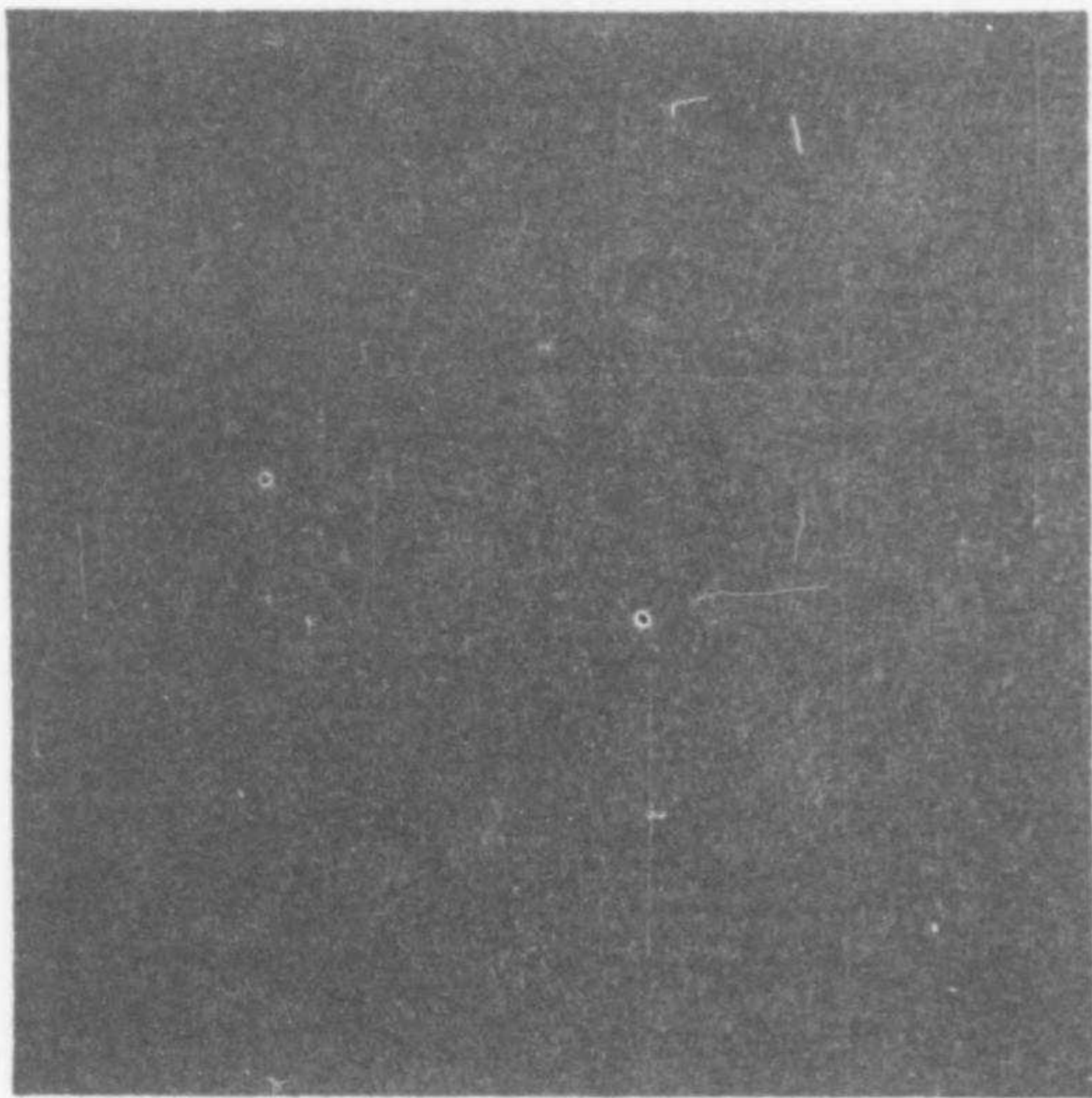


El Lissitzky. The Red Wedge Defeats the Whites (Poster). 1919. (Above).

Cover for Of Two Squares. 1922. (Opposite).

ПРО

2



Лісницький

But let us return to the letter, since everything begins with it. As Mallarmé wrote, "The book, the total expansion of the letter. . . ."

Lissitzky did not envision the creation of a new alphabetical typeface. So many were available that it seemed unnecessary to add another to the list; he borrowed from several, varying their formats. What he envisioned was a new *layout* of the page. But if Lissitzky sought a new formal arrangement of type, it was in order to expose the idea of a great alphabetical combinatory. Letters are *articulated*:

Inordertocommunicateyourthoughtsinwritingyouhaveonlytoform certaincombinationsfromthesesymbolsandstringthemtogetherinan unbrokenchain.

but—NO.

YOU see here that the pattern of thought cannot be represented mechanically by making combinations of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. Language is more than just an acoustic wave motion, and the mere means of thought transference. In the same way typography is more than just an optical wave motion for the same purpose. From the passive, non-articulated lettering pattern one goes over to the active, articulated pattern. (p. 355)

Like Albers, Lissitzky understood that the most economical graphic signs, hence the least articulated, were also the least legible. The letter is the articulation of *phonè* and *graphie*; an absence (spacing) marks their separation. To underscore this fact is to break with the traditional *grisaille* of the book.

On this basis, Lissitzky elaborated a veritable typographic argument which may be connected with certain recent preoccupations about language:

—the letter is an *element* which is itself composed of elements (—, |, /, and the curve—far fewer than the Chinese ideogram). The immense text of the world is born from these few nonhierarchical marks, as equal as the text is infinite. ("YOU have observed that in an organic pattern all the facets exhibit the same structural unity."—p. 356)

—continuity does not exist; it always bears the imprint of difference, since "the linear norm was never able to impose itself absolutely for the very reasons that intrinsically circumscribed graphic phoneticism. We now know them; these limits came into being at the same time as the possibility of what they limited, they opened what they finished and we have already named them: discreteness, difference, spacing."²¹

From the very beginning of the book, however, something has attempted to conceal the fact that "phonetic writing *does not exist*."²² Something has resisted spacing and sought, in a great mimetic deception, to imitate the *flumen orationis*.

21. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 86.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Thus the cursive, syncopated letter was retained out of a desire to minimize the discontinuity produced by the machine. ("By the time that Gutenberg invented printing, the manuscript had attained such a degree of perfection that it served as a model for books executed in this totally different process."²³) This resistance to technical change (but technology, Lissitzky reminds us, is hardly innocent or independent) appears to indicate that the passage from the *volumen* to the page represents a profound epistemological mutation, one which has yet to be fulfilled: "the end of linear writing is indeed the end of the book."²⁴

—phonetic writing, like pure alphabetic writing, does not exist (the myth: one grapheme for each phoneme). The graphic sign is neither transparent nor without residue, but has its own density. Perceived by the eye ("the words on the printed sheet are learnt by sight, not by hearing"—p. 355), which is often quicker than the ear, writing is silent. It bears the imprint of difference, repetition; the wheel is its emblem. Thus typography summons a new type of writer, one who is attentive to the book's materiality, its corporeality. The new writer already writes with a machine: Lissitzky, who himself typed certain diacritical marks in red, wrote: "The new book demands the new writer. Inkstand and goose-quill are dead." (*ibid.*)

—Lissitzky nevertheless envisioned a *motivated* graphics, for which he cited as precedents Marinetti and Sonia Delaunay-Terk (for her design of Cendrars's poem, where changes in color underscore thematic shifts). He might have added Mallarmé and, among his contemporaries, Strzeminski or Moholy-Nagy, among others. "The designing of the book space through the material of the type, according to the laws of typographical mechanics, must correspond to the strains and stresses of the content." (p. 355) Thus a new, abstract Cratylism emerges: the graphic sign must "follow," as well as vacillate with the *rhythm* of content. Modern thought requires modern typography. Above all—and herein lies the innovation—the graphic sign itself must *influence* reading, especially reading *out loud*—not simply imitate the voice and gestures of the speaker, but also regulate the intensity, inscribe the silences, and thus program (theatricalize) the diction of writing. (When discussing the book, Lissitzky mentions the theater, which, he claimed, had yet to explode traditional scenography. This conjunction of theater and the book is also characteristic of Mallarmé.)

—since the book must become pictogrammatical, the relationship of image and text must be subverted. First, the subordination of image to text must be reversed (which is why Lissitzky praised American magazines which "first started to shift the emphasis and make the word the illustration of the picture, instead of the other way around"—p. 357). In the end their opposition must be abolished (which explains the attraction of new photomechanical techniques in which "the production style for word and illustration is subject to one and the same process.")

23. El Lissitzky, "The Artist in Production."

24. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 86.

[*ibid.*] The letter is simply one figure among others.) *Of Two Squares* represents the first phase of this deconstruction, *Dlia Golosa*, the second.

But we must now return, after so many detours, to our object.

The Title

We are struck immediately by the naked violence of the "cover," the "first" page, which is actually a page like all the others. (But to comprehend fully its effect, it is important to bear in mind the ornamental grisailles that were common then, or even the conventional paradigms of contemporary French publishing.)

What accounts for the paper? Did economic reasons alone dictate the choice of this unpleasant, grainy texture and sallow color? Or did convention play a role? Did Lissitzky shrink from producing a deluxe edition? (He spoke enthusiastically about the books of the painter-poets, which "were not numbered, de luxe copies, they were cheap, unbound, paperbacked books . . ."—p. 358. Nevertheless, at the end of his book we are informed that fifty signed and numbered copies were produced—a paradox?)

The paper is surprising: *The white will never be white.*

Practically nothing distinguishes this page from the others. It is "articulated"—beyond the dedication, a second title page, and the "directions for use"—to the "first" page of the story (7, if the cover is 1). All odd-numbered pages are printed, except for 21 (opposite the colophon) and 23 (opposite an entirely black page), which are "white." All the even pages are blank, except for 6 (which I call "directions for use"), 20 (the colophon), 22 (black), and 24 (the last page, the back "cover" inscribed with two lines, one grey, the other black).

All of the pages devoted to the narrative (there are six: 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, although this choice is arbitrary—is the cover not also part of the story?) bear large squares of identical size which frame the images; the "text" (which is also an image) is always outside this frame. On the "cover," however, this framing square, which delimits a field of pure vision, is distinctly larger than those which follow, and it contains a text. This text is quite special; it is a rebus, although it may at first not appear as such—a red square, an invocation of the father (Malevich, 1915).

This square is weighty.

It is printed with the same red ink that is used elsewhere in the book, but here color is intensified because of size (as Matisse remarked, "The quantity of color was its quality."²⁵). Similarly, the square's frontality distinguishes it from all subsequent red figures, which are oblique, and links it with the other elements of the rebus. According to Lissitzky:

25. Henri Matisse, "Statements to Tériade," *Matisse on Art*, ed. Jack D. Flam, London, Phaidon, 1973, p. 59.

Combinations occur in the horizontal and perpendicular directions. These two lines produce the right (unambiguous) angle. It can be placed in alignment with the edges of the surface, then it has a static effect (rest). It can be placed diagonally, then it has a dynamic effect (agitation). These are the axioms of typography. (pp. 355-56)

The rebus is a title.

This title is not, however, aloof, separated from the text like a blurb, an incitement to purchase this book. As a pictogram it is already implicated in the matrix of the book. What we have here, despite its deceptively simple appearance, is in fact a syntagm in three different expressive orders—which immediately raises the problem of articulation. Each semantic unit must be read within a different frame of reference (ППО 2 ◻), thus challenging the possibility of any transcription or translation—although Western logocentrism, erasing the differences, considers this translation to be “natural”: *Of Two Squares*.

The order in which the rebus is to be read seems obvious (we know, however, from Klee and Eisenstein, that when the text is an image, the order in which the reader approaches it always transforms the image's meaning):

—there is an arithmetic progression in the size of the semantic units which comprise the syntagm: ППО 2 ◻ should be read in the order 1, 2, 3.

—in the West, we read from left to right and from top to bottom (undoubtedly a Christian custom). The ППО is at the left and inclines upwards; the 2 is to its right, beginning slightly above and ending slightly below it; and the red square is even further to the right, its upper edge slightly higher than the lower part of the 2.

But this order might just as well be reversed. It is the red square which strikes us first (*The Red Wedge Defeats the Whites*). This order is also challenged by an inscription found outside the frame: the printed signature of Lissitzky, the book's “architect.” This signature is interrupted by a fold (the first name, or its diminutive—Lazar, El—occupies a descending slope which forms an angle with the surname, in upper and lower case letters of the same typeface, which occupies an ascending slope. This signature—a right angle, hence “nonambiguous”—placed obliquely—hence “dynamic,” according to Lissitzky's axiomatic system—is to be related to the bolder but shorter inscription, ППО, printed in a different typeface—the only other diagonal on the page.

These two oblique axes are not parallel, but intersect at a point (a vanishing point? anamorphosis?) which is off the page, about 30 centimeters from the upper right-hand corner of the frame. Since Lissitzky had abandoned single-point perspective, we must ask whether this “initial” page represents the persistence of the visual pyramid, which Lissitzky claimed had been superseded by axonometrics. Has another received cultural system been substituted for the customary vertical/horizontal format of the book? There is no doubt that here reading

remains on the surface; forms have no thickness, and the oblique inscriptions do not diminish in depth. Nevertheless, the danger persists.

Yet the signature, which appears not as a paraph but as a distorted inscription outside the frame, is itself twisted into a figure as a result of the parallel (which is not a *physical* parallel) which may be drawn between it and the "first" and only word of the title. Thus the (economic, commercial) bond which unites title and signature is exposed and undermined, and the calm linearity of conventionally coded readings is destroyed (first the author's name, in smaller type; then the title, in bolder type. This order is maintained in every work published today, although it may be reversed, for commercial purposes, by inscribing the author's name on a colored band or wrapper.)

There is one final disruption of sense hidden in the rebus, one which redoubles the ruse of the signature which takes the place of a caption without fulfilling its function. Nowhere is it indicated that one of the two squares will not be red (not even on the title page, page 5, where this rebus is exhaustively decoded—although something is always lost in translation.)

The unprepared eye does not even perceive this elision: the ideological overdetermination of red through a symbolism of color, which is neither psychological as in Kandinsky nor totally arbitrary, is accepted as "evidence," when it is in fact a rape, a dishonest forcing, of meaning . . .

ROSALIND KRAUSS

To come to photography from an intense and often embattled experience of modernism is to feel a peculiar sense of relief. It is like coming in from the cold, like leaving a swamp and gaining high ground. For photography seems to offer a direct, transparent relationship to experience, to the *objects* of one's experience. It does not involve us in that sense of deprivation and attack that we feel in much of modernist painting and sculpture. In forcing us to consider our connection to the world *only* through the mediation of an abstract language, modernism seems to be imposing on us a kind of parsimony, an abstention from the sensuous appetites we had always expected art to satisfy. And it hounds us as well with questions about *how* we can claim to know what we know, *how* we can think we see what we see. For a time—long for some, shorter for others—we are deeply engaged with those questions. But then, out of frustration or exhaustion or even mere curiosity, we find ourselves kicking the stone—like Dr. Johnson, indignant at Berkeley's idealism, pointing to the stone and to his foot and crying, "I refute it *thus*." In short, we turn to photography.

In so doing we might feel a certain amusement at the private joke that history had up its sleeve, in the sense that in those very same hundred and forty years during which modernism was steadily draining the world out of the frame of the image—emptying art of certain of its contents—there was something else working all the while progressively to fill it back up. For modernism and photography share almost precisely the same time span—a fact that seems to have a certain satisfying symmetry.

If photography and modernism share the same chronological berth, they share something else as well, something that is very important to keep in mind during any discussion of photography's autonomy, of photography's possible distinctness from the other art mediums. That thing they share is perhaps a curse, perhaps a threat, perhaps in the end a source of aesthetic strength. It is the problem of fraudulence.

That the idea of fraudulence is central to the practice of the modernist arts is one of the themes of the aesthetician Stanley Cavell. By insisting on fraudulence as

the inherent condition of modernism, one is not merely referring to that history of catcalls, of shouts of fake and phony that greeted each new wave of avant-garde production—although this characteristic response is symptomatic of what one does mean. The issue is rather that within the art itself, once it is cut free from a certain relation to tradition, it is difficult to establish the difference between the fake and the genuine; that is, there seems to be no ground on which to establish the authenticity *as art* of, say, one white square painted on another. In trying to defend that particular Malevich, for example, against someone else's disparagement that it is a fake, our problem is not to prove that it is *not* a copy or an imitation of some other person's work; our problem is exactly the reverse. The putative fraudulence of *White on White* is based precisely on its failure to conform or to comply with examples of what art had been known to be. In that failure it seems to lay itself open to all sorts of accusations: that there isn't enough work in it to qualify as a work of art; that in its reduction it is too mechanical to be an image of art; that in its abstraction its language is too private to function as communication on the level of art.

In a slightly modified form, all of those accusations are precisely the ones leveled at photography as it has, in its own turn, been plagued by the stigma of fraudulence: there isn't enough work involved in the making of an image that is initiated by pushing a button; the very process involved is merely mechanical; and photography cannot be a language for art, not because it is too private, but because, lacking the requisite forms of transposition and symbolization, photography is not a language at all. Again, this situation is not external to the practice of photography, the creation of a hostile and uncomprehending public. Rather it is internal to the art, documented over and over again through those movements like pictorialism in which photographers attempt to win for themselves the ground that has already been claimed for art, or in those discussions—by now the cliché of photographic histories—in which photographers argue, whether defensively or truculently or exuberantly, for the viability of what they are doing. One of the forms this argument takes in modern photographic journals—and this is a combination of both the truculent and exuberant parts—is that substitute for criticism which is the listing of what could be called the photographic specs for the image—film and lens types, as well as details of darkroom procedure. This sort of list both points to and documents the considerable range of choice that goes into the making of a given image, and it is thus a furtive response to the accusation that there is not enough work in photography to legitimize it as a work of art. But in responding to that censure, this kind of listing also admits it as an issue for photography. The reason the list is a substitute for criticism, rather than criticism itself, is that it does not engage the issue *consciously*, that is, in any way that could release photography from the problem, could make it go away.

Obviously, the increasingly conspicuous presence of the question of fraudulence has shaped the behavior of critics and the practice of criticism at the same time that it is a part of the art itself. This is particularly apparent with regard to

modernism, and more recently it has begun to operate in relation to photography as well. One of the things critics tend to do in order to grapple with this problem is to mount what could be called the ontological argument. That is, in order to defend something against accusations about what it is not, they try to establish what in fact it is. This they do in relation to a logical category, one that applies to all possible examples of a given medium, one that is, moreover, the necessary and sufficient condition for the medium's providing the possibility for art in the first place. They try, in other words, to circumvent the questions of that history or tradition which *might* have legitimized the work in question, but of which it is now deprived or, more positively speaking, from which it has been liberated. And this they do by substituting a definition that is deductive in nature and is thus the source of a very different and, it is sometimes hoped, more powerful authority.

The problem with this strategy, no matter how noble or well-meaning its intentions, is precisely its insensitivity to history. Because in presenting us with the idea of or definition for an autonomous medium, it encourages us to feel that the categories it establishes are like bottles lying around on some philosophical shelf, waiting to be filled. The issues of when or why they come to be filled, or by whom, tend to be demoted as areas of concern. That is, this strategy most often fails to acknowledge that it is only artists, or more precisely specific works of art, that make something a medium, a vehicle for art. Since this is so deeply contingent a fact, it is not a transhistorical event, but is severely limited to particular contexts. I would like to turn therefore to one of those contexts: the work of Alfred Stieglitz and, within the body of his work, the nine-year-long series of cloud studies that he made and to which he gave the name *Equivalents*.

One of the reasons Stieglitz makes so compelling an example for any discussion of photography's autonomous status as an art is that he spent at least the first twenty-five years of his career deeply engaged with this subject. This engagement took many forms. We find it in the work of other photographers whom he chose to sponsor and to reproduce. We find it in the critical and theoretical essays on both sides of the issue of pictorialism which he, as editor of *Camera Work*, chose to publish. And we find it most importantly in his own work, which demonstrated an overt concern with the question of definitions.

This is clear in the very early Stieglitz, from 1889, called *Sunlight and Shadows: Paula/Berlin*. In this work, the image Stieglitz gives us is of a young woman seated in a room at a table on which she is writing, the table itself placed by an open window through which there floods the sunlight that supplies the illumination for the image. Now there is much that can be said about this photograph—that in its stylish creation of extremes of light and dark, in its juxtaposition of blackened and flattened silhouettes against complex passages of broken pattern, it echoes many of the formal devices of late nineteenth-century painting and thereby identifies itself with the work of other photographers of the same time with similar concerns. But it also presents us with what could almost be called a catalogue of self-definition: an elaborate construction through which we are shown what, in its very nature, a photograph *is*.



*Alfred Stieglitz. Sunlight and Shadows: Paula/Berlin.
1889.*

The woman seated at the table bends her head towards a picture which occupies its center. There we see an image of a young woman—perhaps the same one who is writing—set in an ornate oval frame. This image could of course be a painting, but it is obvious that it is not, because hanging on the wall right above the woman's head is a duplicate of the image in the frame—a second print of the same photograph. To the left and a little below this photograph is another view of the woman, in almost the same position, but this time flipping the pose into a mirror-reversal of the same shot. Flanking these photographs are two others—this time landscapes, which we once again identify as photographs through their appearance on the wall in exact duplicate. Set inside the image of *Paula*, then, is an elaborate demonstration of the fact of reproducibility which lies at the heart of the photographic process and which, by implication, rebounds onto the very image we are now looking at, so that at some later point in the series it too could take up residence on that same wall. From this center of concern with those factors which are inherently photographic radiate other features that are also emblematic of what it means to be a photograph. There is, of course, the light—here almost fetishized as the source of visibility upon which photography depends. The pattern of striations in the blind hanging over the window shapes the light into bands of projected luminescence and shadow, fracturing it into a decorative pattern which stands for or represents the action of light as a series of rays. And there is also the window itself, shown here as a pair of frames that open onto the scene, by means of which opening, light is permitted to enter. It seems fairly obvious that if we are talking about emblems we have here a symbolic stand-in for the shutter of the camera—for that mechanical aperture which functions to admit light into the darkened room of the *camera*.

We have, then, an extraordinary constellation of signs—and I am using that word advisedly—by which this image speaks of the processes that generate and define its own being. And through that constellating of signs we also have some sense of Stieglitz's own commitment to the enterprise of symbolism as an artistic doctrine deeply concerned with the vehicles of aesthetic transformation.

If I preface what I have to say about the Stieglitz series *Equivalents* with this photograph, it is because something rather interesting is missing from this work, a work so self-conscious, self-aware, defining itself as photographic in terms of a medium dependent on light which mechanically duplicates the world and is itself duplicable. Something has been left out of the ensemble, something that is—according to some people's ontologies—crucial to the definition of photography.

That something is a recognition of the cut, the crop, the fact that if photography duplicates the world, it does so only in pieces. Thus Cavell, for example, has no difficulty in localizing the essence of the photographic image in the necessary fact of the cut. "What happens in a photograph," he says, "is that *it* comes to an end. A photograph is cropped, not necessarily by a paper cutter or by masking but by the camera itself. . . . The camera, being finite, crops a portion from an indefinitely larger field. . . . When a photograph is cropped, the rest of the

world is cut *out*. The implied presence of the rest of the world, and its explicit rejection, are as essential in the experience of a photograph as what it explicitly presents."¹ In this particular Stieglitz work, nothing of what Cavell describes as central to photography is acknowledged; in fact, the effects of cutting or cropping are deliberately masked by Stieglitz, covered up or fuzzed over by the effects of internal framing, by the verticals of the window and of the shadow along the right-hand side, and by the areas of obscurity at top and bottom which encircle the components of the image in much the way the frame on the table contains and holds its own contents.

But if Stieglitz has not attended to or acknowledged here so "crucial" a fact of photography as cutting, it seems clear that the reason is that it simply was not crucial for him in the 1890s or, for that matter, in the first decade of the twentieth century, and further, that it was only certain developments in photography that could have made it crucial, and that when this happened it had certain extraordinary effects.

Very briefly, those developments have to do with pictorialist photography, specifically those features of it from which Stieglitz found himself increasingly estranged: not merely the characteristic effect of soft-focus that we find in early Steichen or Coburn or White, but also that feature of internal framing which seems to have been a natural outgrowth of the same sensibility which produced the taste for the blurred image. Much of Coburn's or White's effort was to resolve the image inside its frame and to do so by means of strategies of design that are very familiar from the history of painting. So that if Stieglitz grew to dislike soft-focus, he had also to recognize that framing—or perhaps *enframing*—was a concomitant issue.

By the same token, we know that the early work of Paul Strand, to which the last two issues of *Camera Work* (in 1916 and '17) were devoted, came as a sort of revelation to Stieglitz. What he welcomed in these works was not only their extremely sharp resolution, but also their insistence on the effect of cropping.

With all of this in mind, we might now turn to the cloud pictures Stieglitz made from 1923 through 1931 and called *Equivalents*. For these are works that are most radically and nakedly dependent on cutting, on the effect of punching the image, we might say, out of the continuous fabric of the sky at large. That they are so dependent is due in part to something about the sky itself—or rather to something that Stieglitz makes evident in these images. This is not simply that the sky is vast and the photograph is only a limited part of it, but that the sky is essentially not composed. In these photographs there is a sense not merely of found or fortuitous composition, the luck of some accidental arrangement. There is, rather, a sense of the object's resistance to internal arrangement, a positing of the irrelevance of composition, in much the same way that, for example, a Duchampian readymade short-circuits any discussion of the internal relationships between its parts. *Relationship* cannot mean anything here that has much to do

1. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, New York, Viking Press, 1971, p. 24.

with its conventional meaning within the traditional arts. Just as a readymade stakes everything that it might signify on the single gesture of its recontextualization and placement, so these images, which come to us as unanalyzable wholes, stake everything on the single act of cutting something out—the gesture that makes them by cutting.

Stieglitz is not interested in simply leaving it at that. What these photographs do again and again is to insure that the impact of that cut, that dislocation and detachment, will resonate through every internal point of the work. The incredible verticality of these clouds as they rise upward along the image creates an extraordinary sense of disorientation—almost to the point of vertigo. We do not understand what is up and what is down, or why this image that seems so much to be *of* the world should lack that most primitive component of our own relationship to it, which is our firm orientation to the ground. In that sense this kind of cutting goes beyond simply ripping something out of a larger continuum; it charges the image in such a way that we feel it as something ripped away from *us*, as no longer the possible extension of our experience of our own physical occupation of the world that photographs had always seemed, dependably, to be.

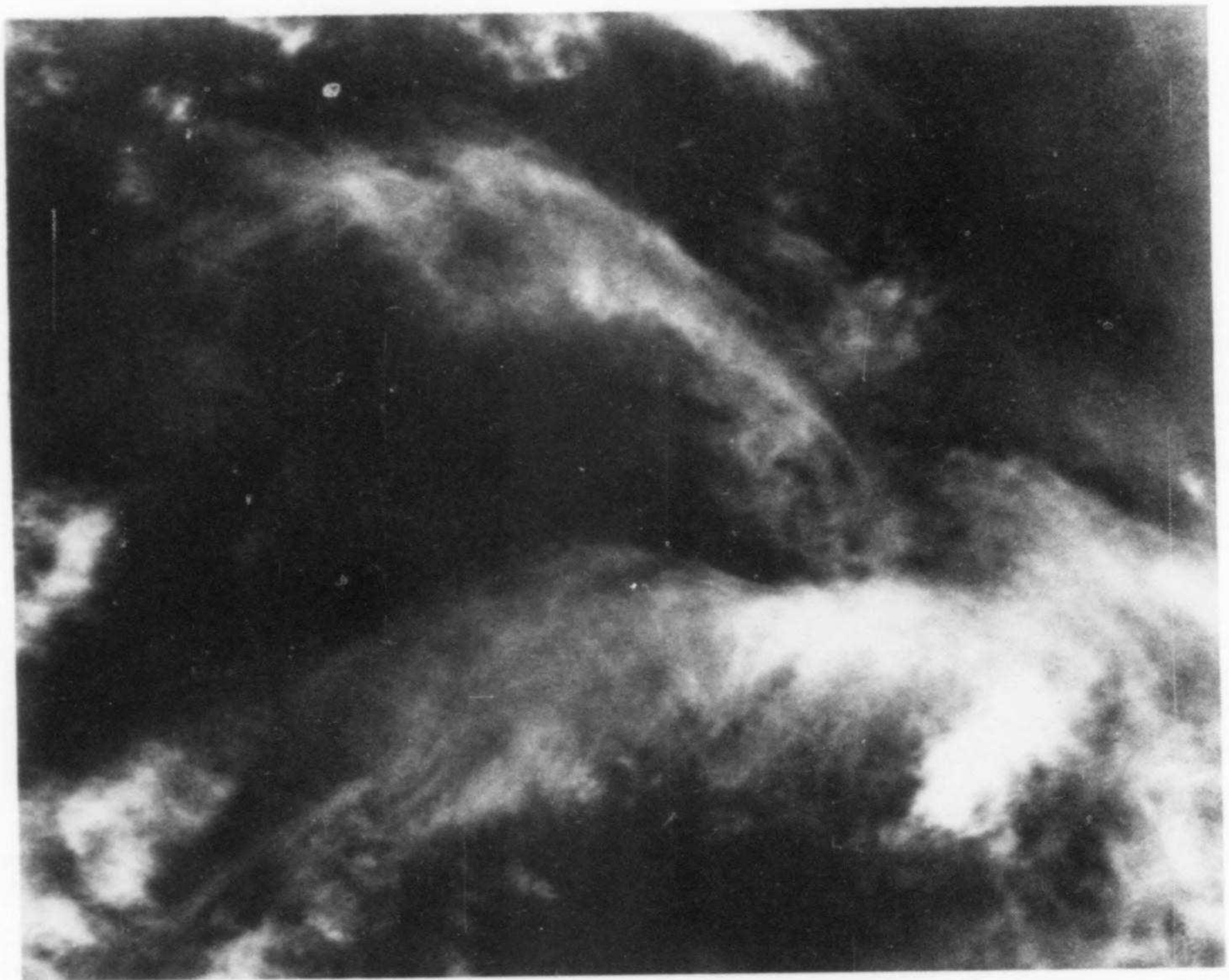
These are images without grounds. On the most literal level, Stieglitz has banished any indication of the ground, the earth, the horizon, from within the compass of the image. On another, more graphic level, the ascending shafts of the clouds evoke in us a sense of the thing that is lost by parodying it. That is, within the field of the sky they establish a strong indication of vectors, or lines of orientation, of axis. In some of the photographs they divide the field into a zone of light and a zone of dark. In so doing they call to mind both our need for orientation and our customary means of achieving it by recourse to a horizon that will organize and confirm our relation to the earth. The cloud supplies that memory but at the same time fails to satisfy it. For the cloud is vertical.

In their verticality the clouds echo or double the initial meaning of the cut, or rather, each reinforces and doubles the other. For both are involved in displaying the world only by means of an image that is radically cut loose from its moorings, an image that is about being unmoored. The cloud is also, of course, about something else. It is the trace of the atmosphere; conditions of wind and moisture are registered and made visible by the configurations of clouds, which are themselves made visible by the refraction of light. In the way that clouds record or trace something that is itself invisible, they are natural signs. Stieglitz's feat in the *Equivalents* is to transform them into unnatural signs, into the cultural language of the photograph. Further, it is clear that this transformation is not meant to function in the part-by-part way at work in the image of *Paula*, in which separate integers of the visual array end up representing something else. In the *Equivalents* this is intended to work en bloc, so that the sky as a whole and the photograph as a whole are set into a symbolic relationship to one another. The aesthetic vehicle on which such a reading depends is the medium of the cut.

In these photographs, then, the cut is no mere mechanical phenomenon. It is









the only thing that makes the image, and in so making it, it is about the photograph as an absolute transposition of reality. Not because the photograph is flat, or black and white, or small, but because as a set of marks on paper made by light it is shown to have no more "natural" an orientation to the axial directions of the real world than do those marks in a book that we know as writing.

In calling this series *Equivalents*, Stieglitz is obviously invoking the language of symbolism, with its notions of correspondence and hieroglyph. But what is intended here is symbolism in its deepest sense, symbolism as an understanding of language as a form of radical absence—the absence, that is, of the world and its objects, supplanted by the presence of the sign.

What I am *not* proposing is that here, at last, with the cut we have a definition of what is most purely or most essentially photographic. The cut may be a fact of photography, but it is no more essentially related to the medium's aesthetic possibilities than many other facts, like the reproducibility of the medium or its semiological status as a trace. At a particular moment, a particular artist made this fact a medium of art, discovered the kind of experience that only this medium could register. As such a medium, it made a great deal of work possible—the continuing series of cloud photographs—as well as providing a context for the extraordinary portraits of Georgia O'Keeffe's hands, which are also about the image's severance from a body that might, in life, support it, substituting for this body the plane of the photographic print. In certain cases Stieglitz determined that any one of its four sides might serve as the "top."

Finally, I am proposing something more: that a certain kind of recourse to the ontological argument can do damage to our experience of anything—photography, painting, theater—as art. Because to determine some kind of a priori category—in this case photography in relation to the cut—is to make it seem as though that category were *there* all along, simply waiting to be seen and filled. When we do so, we obscure the much more central fact of risk that is involved in making a work of art, or at least in making great art. That risk is often about working blind, with no certainty that anything will guarantee success. If we have not seen the risk that accompanies the vertigo in Stieglitz's cloud photographs, then we have not seen the photographs. We would not have seen what he had to expel in order to make them work, or what his source of authority was in believing that they would work or insisting that they did work. And to see the risk is to recognize that, as always in art, failure would have been experienced as fraud.

Jay Leyda: A Portfolio of Photographs
New York, 1931-33

1. *Doris Maddow.*
2. *Alfred Barr.*
3. *Sheila O'Connell.*
4. *Dorothy Fleitmann.*
5. *Portrait of a Woman.*
6. *Albert Krume.*
7. *Walker Evans.*
8. *Carol King.*
9. *Kathleen Tankersley Young.*
10. *Lincoln Kirstein.*

(Photographs 1-9 collection *The Museum of Modern Art, New York*; photograph 10 collection *Lincoln Kirstein, New York.*)



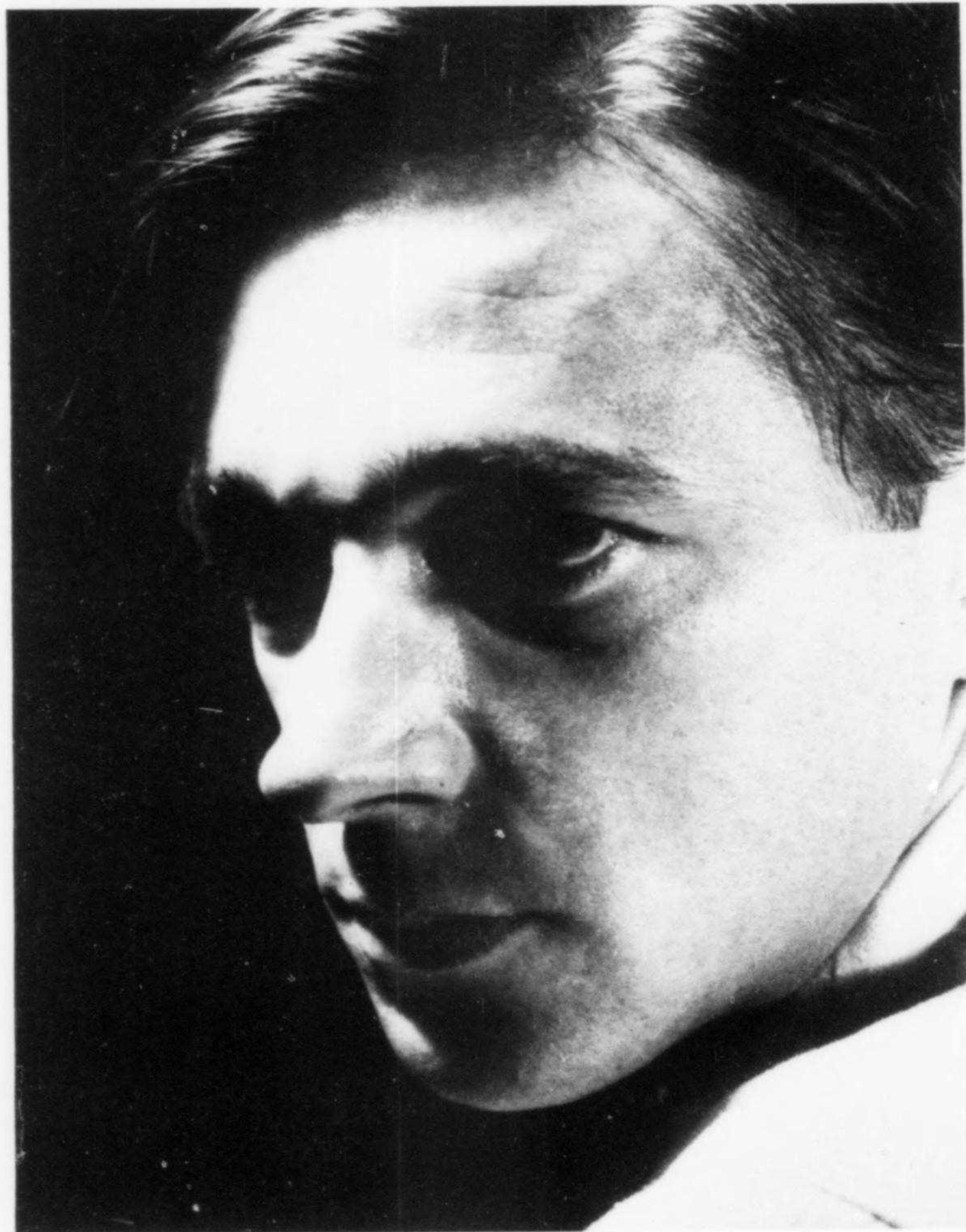






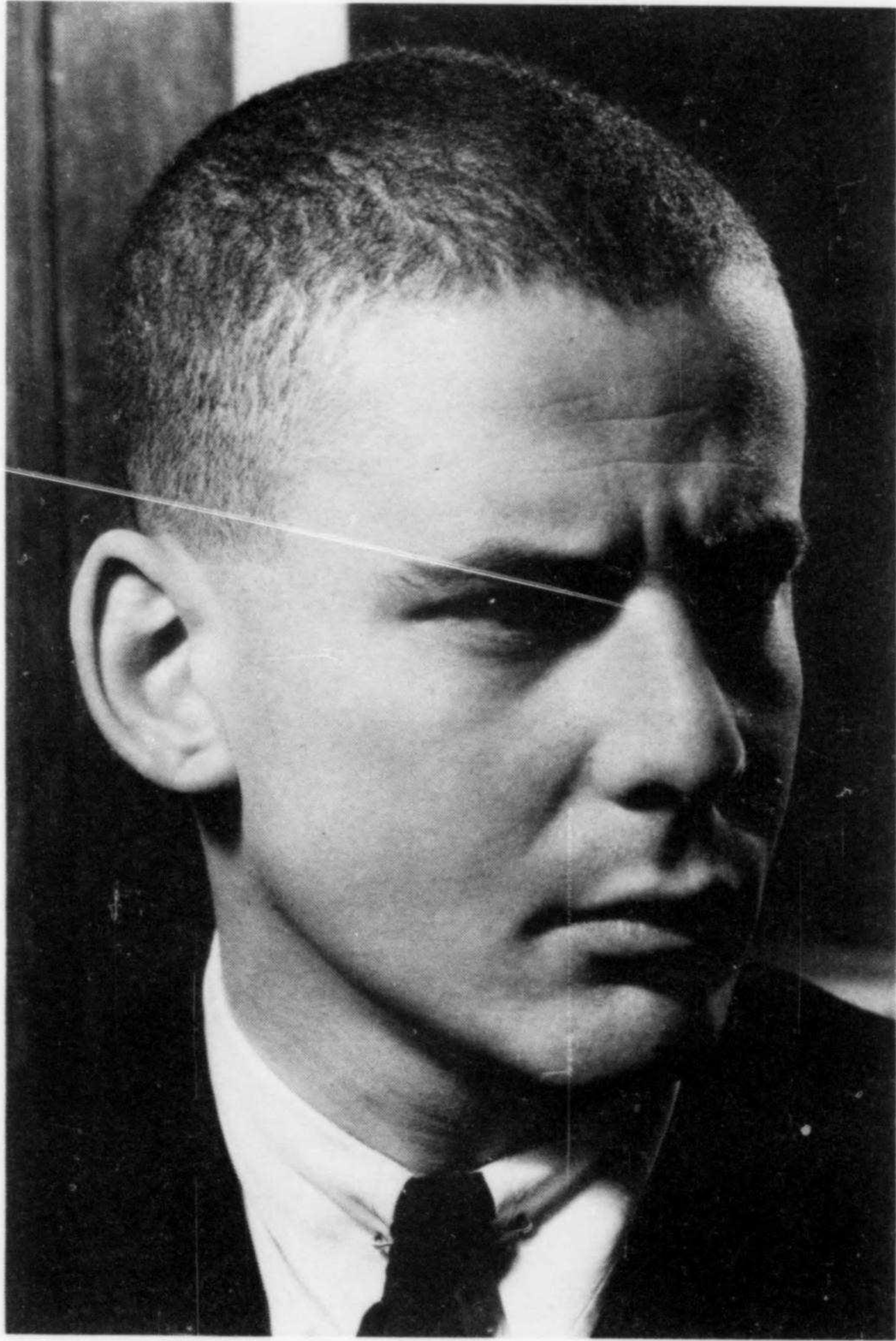












Jay Leyda: A Brief Chronology

- 1910 Born February 12 in Detroit, Michigan.
- 1930 Arrived in New York City. Worked as a darkroom assistant and assistant on experimental films to Ralph Steiner.
- 1931 Photographic portraits of artists, collectors, and dealers published regularly in *Arts Weekly*, New York.
- 1932 Arranged musical accompaniment for (foreign) silent films, Bronx Playhouse, New York. Bought an Eyemo camera and made a short film, *A Bronx Morning*.
- 1933 Exhibition of photographic portraits at Julien Levy Gallery, New York. Participated in the organization of The Film Society and the Film Forum. Accepted at the Moscow Film School to study with Sergei Eisenstein. Arrived in Moscow in September.
- 1934 Russian correspondent, *Theatre Arts Monthly*, New York. Still-cameraman, production historian, and one of five apprentice directors on the Eisenstein film crew. Exhibition of photographic portraits at the Moscow Museum of Modern Western Art. Married Si-lan Chen, dancer and choreographer.
- 1935 On location near the Azov Sea, Kharkov, and Moscow. Edited special Soviet issues of *Theatre Arts* and *New Theatre* magazines.
- 1936 Accepted post of assistant curator, Department of Film, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Returned to New York via Berlin, Paris, and London, acquiring films in each city.
- 1937 Prepared new film acquisitions for distribution by the Museum and worked on Film Department publications. Film editor for a new production group, Frontier Films.
- 1938 Founded a new quarterly, *Films*. A history of Soviet film commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art.
- 1941-42 Publication of *The Film Sense*, a collection of Eisenstein's film essays. Hired by Warner Brothers as technical advisor on Russian subjects. Moved to California.
- 1943-44 Drafted. Basic training at Fort Knox. Pneumonia and discharge. Began Musorgsky translations (later published as *The Musorgsky Reader*).
- 1945-46 Reconstruction of Melville's correspondence (to become *The Melville Log*, published in 1951). Edited Melville's complete short stories.

- Collaboration with Sergei Bertensson on a biography of Rachmaninoff. First copy of *The Film Sense* reached Eisenstein, who immediately proposed a sequel (later published as *Film Form*).
- 1948-49 Guggenheim Fellowship for reconstruction of the biography of Emily Dickinson.
- 1950-52 Fellowship renewed. Met composer Walter Aschaffenburg and wrote the libretto for his opera *Bartleby*.
- 1953-54 Catalogued all unedited film for Eisenstein's unfinished Mexican film and prepared two study films from it.
- 1955-58 Invited to work at the Cinémathèque française and to complete a history of Soviet film, *Kino*. Arrived in France in April 1957. Eisenstein study films first screened in Paris in May, and later in London, Brussels, and Venice.
- 1959 Eisenstein study films screened across Europe: Berlin, Warsaw, Moscow. Invited to Peking to work in the recently formed Chinese Film Archive. Arrived in Peking in May. Subsequently employed by the Film Bureau at the Ministry of Culture.
- 1960-61 Identification of the Chinese Archive's collection of foreign films and study of the large Chinese collection. Arranged the first Chinese film festival in London.
- 1962-63 Began a history of the compilation film (*Films Beget Films*). Prepared a third collection of Eisenstein essays (published in 1968 as *Film Essays, with a Lecture*). Started a book on Chinese film, *Dianying*.
- 1964 Left China to work at the Staatliches Filmarchiv der D.D.R., Berlin. Assisted in the preparation of a retrospective of Robert Flaherty's films for the Leipzig documentary film festival and collaborated on the book published on this occasion.
- 1965-69 *Dianying* accepted by MIT Press. Research at the Staatliches Filmarchiv.
- 1969-70 Fellow at Ezra Stiles College, Yale University.
- 1970-73 Professor of Fine Arts, York University, Toronto.
- 1974- Gottesman Professor of Cinema Studies, New York University School of the Arts.

Jay Leyda: A Bibliography

compiled by JOHN HAGAN

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1972: *Dianying (Electric Shadows): An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

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- 1969: Vladimir Nizhny. *Lessons with Eisenstein*. Ed. and tr. Leyda and Ivor Montagu. New York: Hill and Wang.
- 1974: Sergei Eisenstein. *Three Films*. Ed. Leyda, tr. Diana Matias. Annotated scripts of *Battleship Potemkin*, *October*, and *Alexander Nevsky*.
- 1977: *Voices of Film Experience: 1894 to the Present*. Ed. Leyda. New York: Macmillan, 1977.

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- 1938: "About Facts and Fiction." *Theatre Arts Monthly*, 22 (May 1938), 387. A response to an article by Paul Rotha on the development of Soviet cinema.
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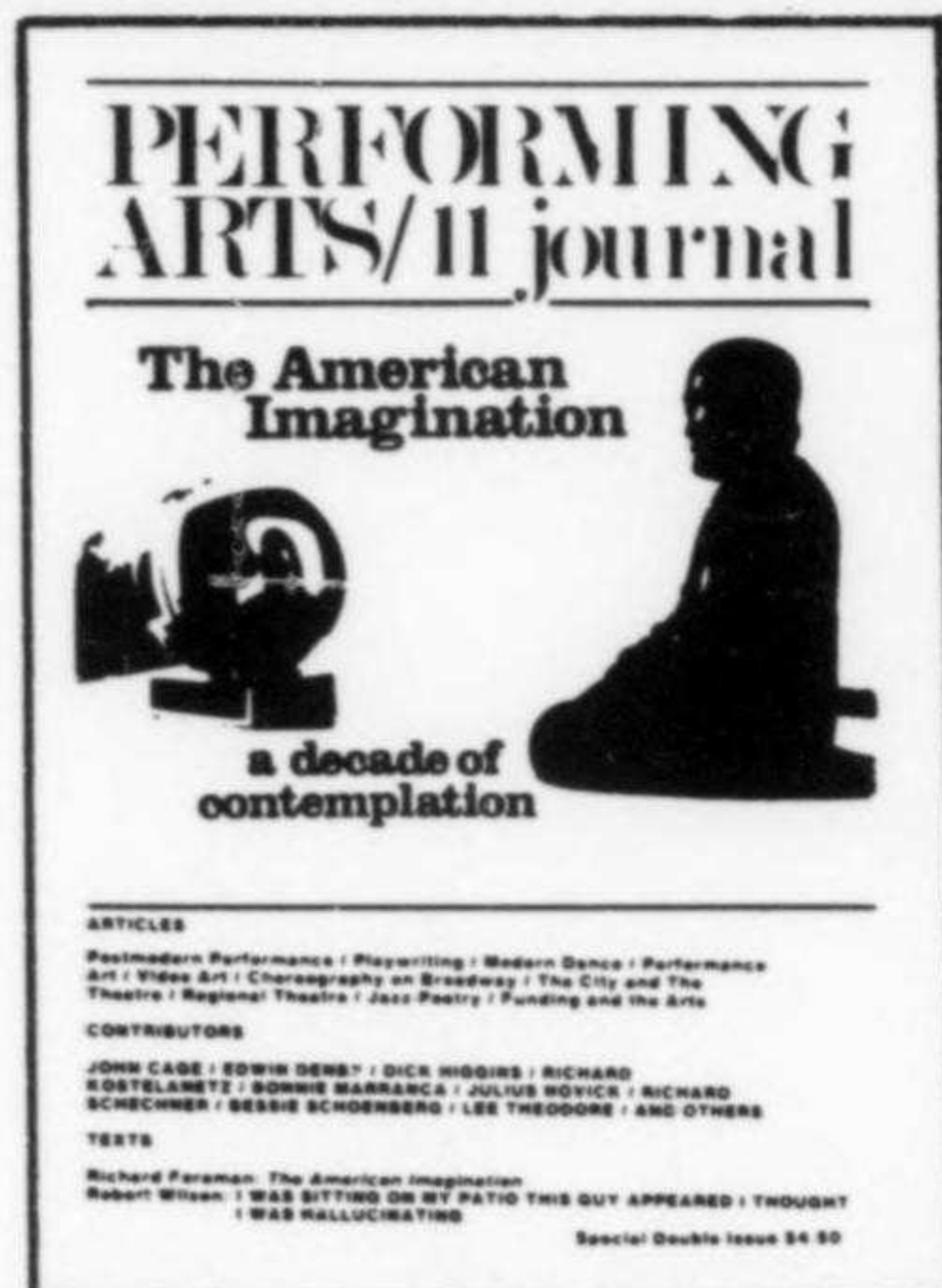
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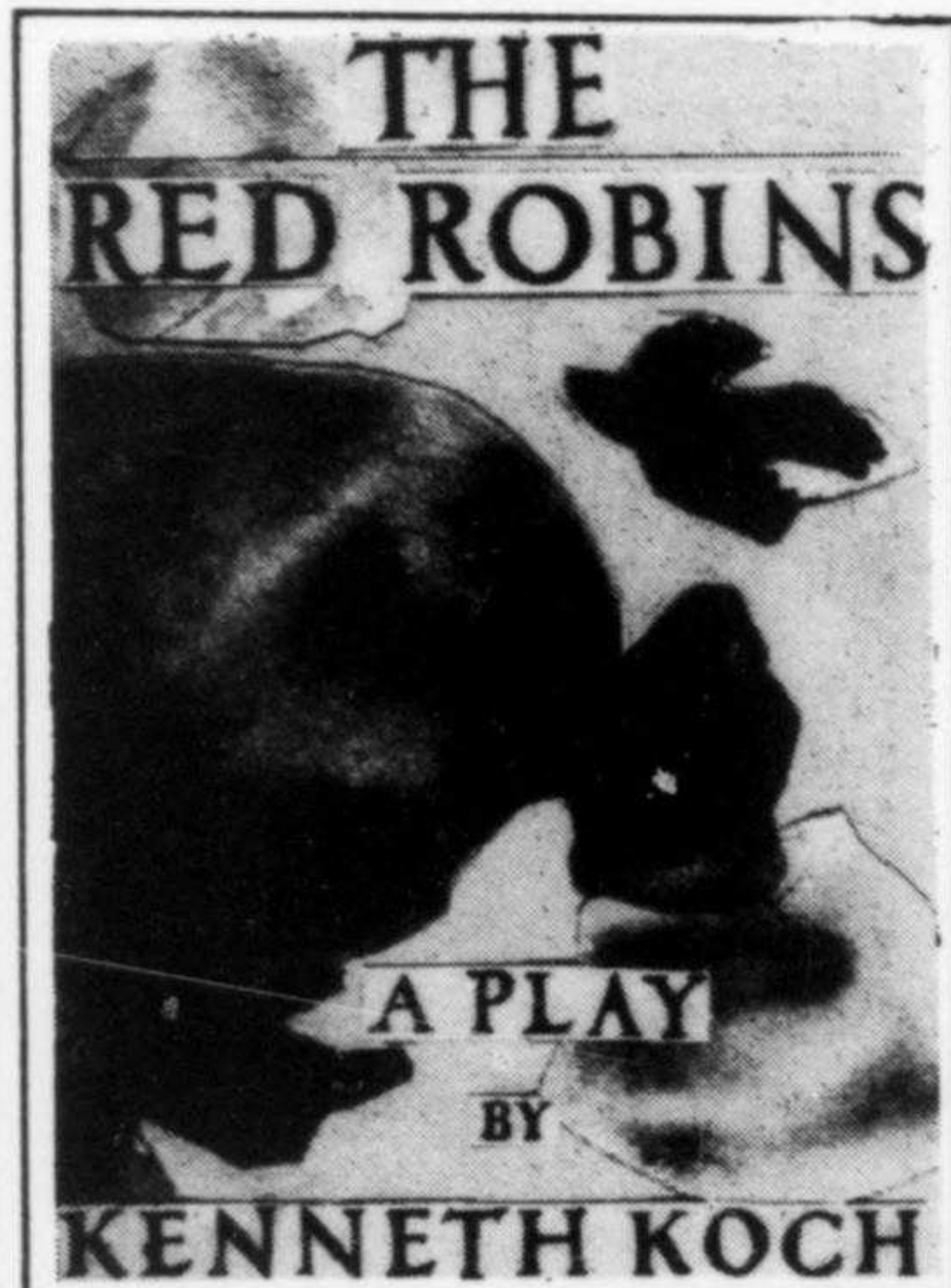
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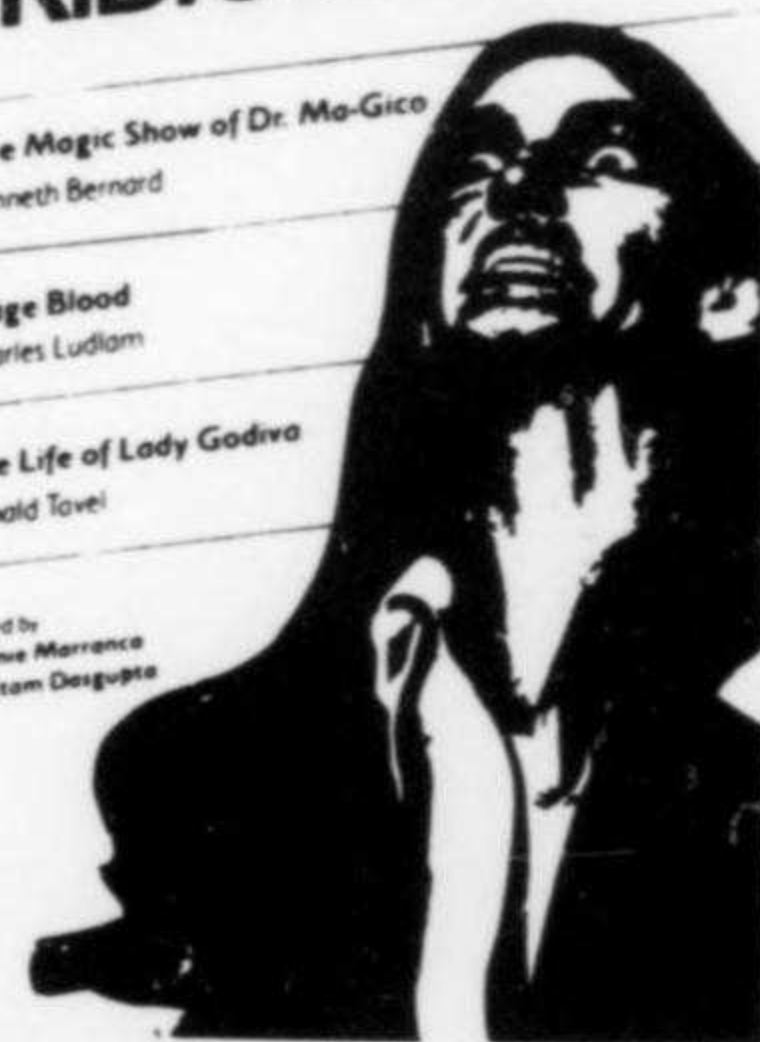
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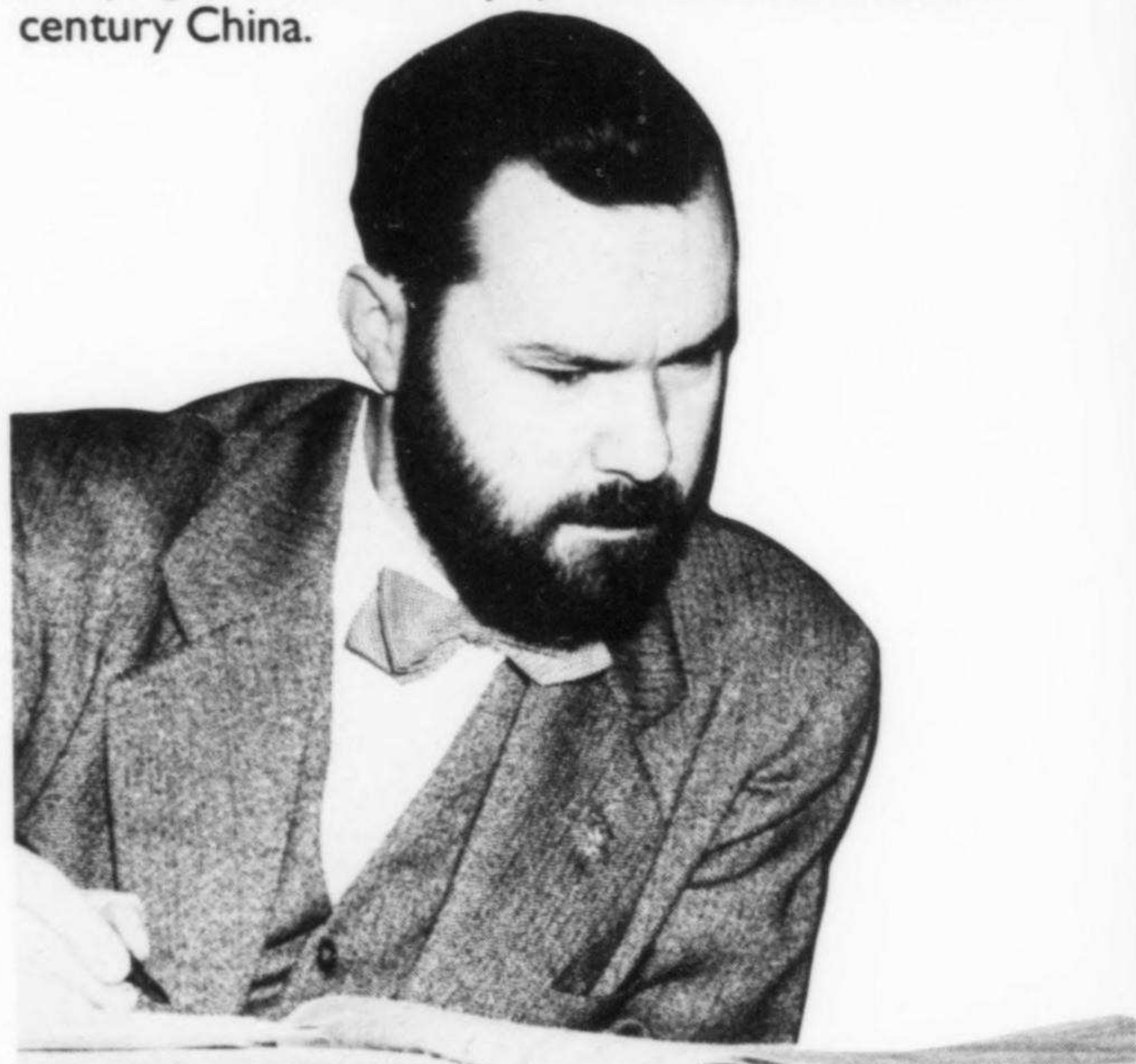
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