To
CHARLES MUSSER
and in memory of
GEOFFREY H. HARTMAN

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Note on Abbreviations, Transliteration, and Translations

ABBREVIATIONS

Of the names of frequently mentioned archives

GARF: Gosudarstvennyj Arkhiv Rossijskoj Federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation). Moscow, Russia.

NIAB: Natsional'nyj Istoricheskij Arkhiv Belarusi (National Historical Archive of Belarus). Grodno, Belarus.

RGAKFD: Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Arkhiv Kino-Foto Dokumentov (Russian State Archive of Film and Photo Documents). Krasnogorsk, Russia.

RGALI: Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art). Moscow, Russia.

RGASPI: Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoj Istorii (Russian State Archive of Social-Political History). Moscow, Russia.

TsGIASPb: Tsentral'nyj Gosudarstvennyj Istoricheskij Arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga (Central State Historical Archive of St. Petersburg). St. Petersburg, Russia.

References to materials in Russian archives use the standard abbreviations ("f." (*fond*, archive), "op." (*opis'*, list), "d." (*delo*, file), "l." or "ll." (*list/listy*, page/pages).

Of the titles of frequently cited books

DO: Dziga Vertov, *Dramaturgicheskie opyty* [Dramaturgical experiments], ed. A. S. Deriabin and introduction by V. S. Listov (Moscow: Ejzenshtejn-tsentr, 2004).

DVVS: E. I. Vertova-Svilova and A. L. Vinogradova, eds., *Dziga Vertov v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov* [Dziga Vertov in the recollections of his contemporaries] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976).

KE: Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. and introduction by Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

LR: Yuri Tsivian, ed. and introduction, *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties* (Sacile/Pordenone: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2004).

LRK 1: V. Fomin et al., eds., *Letopis' Rossijskogo Kino 1863–1929* [Chronicle of Russian Cinema 1863-1929] (Moscow: Materik, 2004).

SDZ: S. Drobashenko, ed., *Dziga Vertov: Stat'i, dnevniki, zamysly* [Dziga Vertov: Articles, diaries, projects] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966).

SV: Dziga Vertov, *Stat'i i vystupleniia* [Articles and speeches], eds., D. V. Kruzhkova and S. M. Ishevskaia (Moscow: Ejzenshtejn-Tsentr, 2008).

Of the names of Soviet institutions

VFKO: Vserossijskij Foto-Kino Otdel (All-Russia Film and Photo Division).

TRANSLITERATION

In this book, I use a slightly modified version of the GOST 2002 transliteration system for Cyrillic. I depart from the system in my spelling of certain very well-known names (e.g., Trotsky, Mayakovsky).

TRANSLATIONS

For translation help with Hebrew, my thanks to Zohar Rotem; with Italian, to Moira Fradinger; with Polish, to Krystyna Illakowicz and Małgorzata Rejniak; and with Ukrainian, to Constantine Rusanov. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from foreign languages are my own.

Away with old romance!
Away with novels, plots and plays of foreign courts,
Away with love-verses sugar'd in rhyme, the intrigues,
amours of idlers,
Fitted for only banquets of the night where dancers
to late music slide,
The unhealthy pleasures, extravagant dissipations
of the few,
With perfumes, heat and wine, beneath the dazzling
chandeliers.
To you ye reverent sane sisters,
I raise a voice for far superber themes for poets and for art,
To exalt the present and the real,
To teach the average man the glory of his daily
walk and trade,
To sing in songs how exercise and chemical life are never
to be baffled,
To manual work for each and all, to plough, hoe, dig,
To plant and tend the tree, the berry, vegetables, flowers,
For every man to see to it that he really do something,
for every woman too;
To use the hammer and the saw, (rip, or cross-cut,)
To cultivate a turn for carpentering, plastering, painting,
To work as a tailor, tailoress, nurse, hostler, porter,
To invent a little, something ingenious, to aid the
washing, cooking, cleaning,
And hold it no disgrace to take a hand at them themselves.

—Walt Whitman, "Song of the Exposition" (1871)

Introduction: How Did It Begin?

Eleves, I salute you! come forward!
Continue your annotations, continue your questionings.

—Walt Whitman, *"Song of Myself"*

Image 1: From *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929). Source: Yale University Film Archive.

At first glance, it would seem that, if we were to provide a rigorously Vertovian response to the question of Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's place within the history of cinema, that answer would have to be "virtually none whatsoever." After all, according to Vertov (born David Abelevich

[later mutating into Denis Arkadievich] Kaufman in Bialystok, Russian Empire [now Poland], January 15, 1896; died in Moscow, February 12, 1954), what is conventionally designated the history of cinema would more properly be termed the history of cinema's suppression:

> Our eyes see very poorly and very little—and so men conceived of the microscope in order to see invisible phenomena; and they discovered the telescope in order to see and explore distant, unknown worlds. The movie camera was invented in order to penetrate deeper into the visible world, to explore and record visual phenomena, so that we do not forget what happens and what the future must take into account.
>
> But the camera experienced a misfortune. It was invented at a time when there was no single country in which capital was not in power. The bourgeoisie's hellish idea consisted of using the new toy to entertain the masses, or rather to divert the workers' attention from their basic aim: the struggle against their masters. Under the electric narcotic of the movie theaters, the more or less starving proletariat, the jobless, unclenched its iron fist and unwittingly submitted to the corrupting influence of the masters' cinema. The theater is expensive and seats are few. And so the masters force the camera to disseminate theatrical productions that show us how the bourgeoisie love, how they suffer, how they "care for" their workers, and how these higher beings, the aristocracy, differ from lower ones (workers, peasants, etc.). . . .
>
> The essential thing in theater is acting, and so *every motion picture constructed upon a [script] and acting is a theatrical presentation*, and that is why there are no differences between the productions by directors of different nuances.
>
> All of this, both in whole and in part, applies to theater [including acted films] regardless of its trend and direction, regardless of its relationship to theater as such. *All of this lies outside the genuine purpose of the movie camera—the exploration of the phenomena of life.*[1]

These "completely childlike words" (Vertov's phrase)[2] have been taken as adequate summaries of his basic theoretical position on a number of occasions,

1 Dziga Vertov, "Kino-Eye," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. and introduction by Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 67–69); emphasis in original, translation slightly altered. Hereafter cited as *KE*.

2 The words were evidently addressed orally by Vertov to one of the earliest audiences of *Kino-Eye: Life Caught Unawares* (*Kino-Glaz: Zhizn' Vrasplokh*, 1924), his first major

and indeed they tell us quite a lot about him and his thinking, and not just on the level of content.[3] Their deliberately condescending, faux-schoolmasterly tone is but one of the many polemical instruments, ranging from shrill denunciation to subtle, even cryptic onscreen critiques of contemporary film practice, that he used in his long and losing battle against fictional, acted cinema in the Soviet 1920s and 1930s. Even in a time and place of generalized and ferocious contestation over (among other things) what cinema should be, Vertov stood out. Who else, after all, would have openly described his old colleague Lev Kuleshov's more-or-less innocent comedy *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924) as "counterrevolutionary" at a meeting of members of the Left Front of the Arts (LEF) (and gotten shouted down for it)?[4] No doubt, as one critic has noted understatedly, he "must have often alienated even potential allies by seeming intransigent."[5]

Seeming intransigent? Indeed, years later, director Grigorij Kozintsev wondered aloud whether Vertov's apparent injunction to "destroy fiction filmmaking [*khudozhestvennaia kinematografiia*] for its uselessness to the proletariat" was not also a form of "acting" (*igra*); and perhaps suspicions of posturing raised as many hackles back in the day as the injunction did.[6] He was, as many have noticed, neither wholly consistent nor especially original

feature-length film. "We are still being accused of using incomprehensible slogans. I think that is rather an unwillingness to understand—our program is so simple and clear. But, just in case, I shall repeat it for the thousandth time, in completely childlike words" (Dziga Vertov, "An Introductory Speech before a Showing of the First Part of *Kino-Eye* [13 October 1924]" in Vertov, "An Introductory Speech before a Showing of the First Part of *Kino-Eye*," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. and introduction by Yuri Tsivian (Sacile/Pordenone: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2004), 99. Hereafter cited as *LR*.

3 For instance, in Guy Hennebelles's contribution to the debate "Pratique Artistique et Lutte Idéologique," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 248 (September 1973), 54; Hennebelle, review of Georges Sadoul's *Dziga Vertov* (1971) and of Vertov's *Articles, journaux, projets* (1972) in *Écran* 13 (1973): 45; and Stephen Crofts and Olivia Rose, "An Essay Towards Man with a Movie Camera," *Screen* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 9.

4 The meeting of January 17, 1925 was convened by poet Vladimir Mayakovsky to bring LEF and various groups with kindred views together under a single organizational rubric (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art [hereafter RGALI] f. 2091, op. 2, d. 194, l. 3; RGALI f. 2852, op. 1, d. 115, l. 35); more about it to come in volume 2.

5 Ernest Larsen, "Kino Revolution [review of *KE*]," *The Independent* 9, no. 8 (October 1986): 12.

6 Kozintsev, *Sobranie sochinenij v piati tomakh*, vol. 4 (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1984), 196. Privately (in diary notes), Vertov himself raised the spectre that "Vertov" was a mere role, as we will see in volume 3.

in his anti-theatricalism.[7] Even on the personal level, Vertov befriended and esteemed various artists in the "enemy" fictional camp (like Vsevolod Pudovkin [1893–1953]),[8] while speaking or writing abusively about many others—critic, theorist, memoirist, and screenwriter Viktor Shklovsky (1893–1984), for instance; his own brother, cinematographer and director Mikhail Kaufman (1897–1980); or (perhaps most of all) his rival documentarian Esfir' Shub (1894–1959)—all of whom turned out to be, if not entirely on his side, nonetheless critical supporters and admirers of his nonfictional work.

Mikhail Kaufman noted in the 1970s that much of Vertov's invective and bluster reflected a desire to undo or invert documentary film's perenially secondary status within the cinema galaxy; and this desire, or its militant expression, just as surely congealed into a kind of public role-playing, as Vertov's contrastingly introspective diary notes suggest.[9] As far as antagonism to fiction goes, Kaufman thought (at least in retrospect) that even that apparently unshakable Vertovian principle required qualification as well:

> 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 [fiction] 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.[10]

Scripts might have been the nemesis for Vertov, but it's quite clear that he is constructing a scenario of his own in his fable about cinema's non-realization, one that conforms neatly to the fanciful (or even "childlike") conventions of romance.[11] He gives us the beginning of an adventure story, setting the stage for

7 His particular brand of which belongs to what we might call the Rousseau–Tolstoy tradition: see Jonas A. Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 256–74; and chapter 4 and volume 2 of the present work.

8 On Vertov's shock at the death of Pudovkin in 1953 (less than a year before his own), see E. Segal-Marshak, "To, chto sokhranilos' v pamiati," in *Dziga Vertov v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov* [hereafter *DVVS*] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), 258.

9 "Shy but impulsive" was Ernest Larsen's capsule impression of Vertov's character upon reading *KE* (Larsen, "Kino Revolution," 12).

10 "An Interview with Mikhail Kaufman [conducted by Annette Michelson]," *October* 11 (Winter 1979): 69–70.

11 For more on those conventions, see Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 89–136, esp. 96–106; and Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

the heroic rescue of the imprisoned princess (named "the camera," here surely a synecdoche for cinema as such) by those brash enough to storm the citadel. Cinema, having lost its autonomy and even identity from the get-go, would regain it through the efforts of the "masters of vision"—Vertov and the kinocs ("cinema-eyes," a neologism derived from the Russian *kino* [cinema] + *oco* [an old word for "eye"]), his friends and followers within (for the most part) the professional realm of Soviet nonfiction filmmaking—who would find their own identities, and much more besides, in the process.[12]

Vertov seems to stage something like this rescue operation (or its allegory) about ten minutes into his most famous film, *Man with a Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kino-apparatom*, 1929).[13] We see two shots of a young woman (though not her face) sitting on, then standing next to a bed, pulling on stockings and stepping into shoes after waking up. Lodged between these two shots, in the kind of apparently unmotivated transition that has already become familiar by this point in the film, we see the eponymous "man with a movie camera" (Kaufman) standing erect with his tripod and camera in a chauffeured truck, rushing at great speed across and then alongside railroad tracks in some prairie-like setting. Here the filmmaker creates a hint, just a hint, of those back-and-forths between rescuer and rescuee (or "alternate syntagmas," as Christian Metz would call them) that D. W. Griffith, a significant influence on Vertov, made so famous. Classically, the heroine requiring melodramatic rescue would be right there, tied to the tracks; here, however, she will be rescued from the comfort of her own home—or so it would appear.

We return to the woman in dorsal view, now plainly standing inside some kind of domestic, apartment-type space—think of the apartment in Abram Room's *Bed and Sofa* (*Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, 1927), one of the film's crucial intertexts—as she removes her nightgown and puts on her bra and slip. It is a peepshow, in other words, shot (and staged) in quite unobtrusive Hollywood continuity-editing style. A cut back to camera and cameraman shows us Kaufman, all hands and muscly arms and still out of doors, mounting a huge phallic lens on the camera—apparently (by association) energized and engorged by the striptease spectacle—then violently turning it ninety degrees to the right. Could this be a kino-rapist, and not the hero?

12 "Kinoks: A Revolution," *KE*, 20. Frye stresses romance's narrative function as radically oriented toward identity, a "self-creation and self-identity that passes beyond all the attached identifications, with society, or belief, or nature" (Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, 186).

13 Here I separate this sub-sequence from what surrounds it, as those who have seen the film will notice.

We might expect an even more detailed peepshow to follow, given this sort of equipment, but we get nothing of the kind. Instead, we find ourselves suddenly ogling from above a young homeless man, also in a state of semi-undress and scratching his armpits, who wakes up rather pleased to find himself being filmed, at least initially. (And he *is* being filmed: intercalated images of the lens and of Kaufman cranking the camera, quasi-reverse shots, keep reminding us of that.) Our vision is then carried, or drifts, to a woman sweeping streetcar tracks soon to be much traversed by traffic, with other homeless sleepers lying like bags in the background; to an older homeless man, one-legged and possibly a war veteran, waking up on a bench and trying to ignore the camera; to a nearly empty city intersection with a big banner hanging above it; and back to the woman in the apartment, now washing up just like (as we will see) the world outside her apartment is.

This sequence and (with it) the opening section of *Man with a Movie Camera* culminate in an allegorical subsequence clearly presaging the film's famous and more compact final emblem of an eye superimposed on a camera lens like the *Oculus Providentiae*. We see the woman's blinking eyes as she becomes accustomed to the morning light; venetian blinds flipping open and shut (or alternating with black) in a visual rhyme; and the camera lens as it brings a patch of lilacs into focus. Human eyes previously closed and contained are turned outwards, with and by the camera, beyond the confines of walls now become porous in any case. Only at this point, as *Man with a Movie Camera* shifts into its second movement, do we move more or less definitively out of the young woman's private space into the myriad, cinematically interconnected spaces of the film, just as the romance narrative also ends and its secret is silently revealed. We spectators, not (or not only) the young woman, were the ones rescued by the cameraman: rescued from another peepshow, or another melodrama, or another domestic comedy; and cinema was rescued along with us.[14]

14 My thoughts here have been influenced by Jean-Louis Comolli's great essay on *Man with a Movie Camera*, and particularly by this beautiful passage: "Dazzled by the morning light, the young woman blinks her eyes, her eyelids flicker; she is as though blinded, the world is blurry, overexposed . . . [and] one assumes [she endures] some slight pain, a sort of discomfort. . . . But the eye of the young woman—decidedly human, all too human—perplexed by this bad awakening, receives unforeseen reinforcement. Between the still-dozing world and an eye slow to break into it, Vertov's montage interposes another eye, a mechanical one, the lens of the camera. The focus ring turns, and the eye (of the character [*personnage*], of the spectator, of the camera?) adapts itself to a bush with white blossoms. The blades of the iris open and close again; the eye measures the light. The gaze of the young woman, now inhabited by the machine, accedes to mastery of images. Finally we can see her eyes and even—identification— recognize in them the form of our own" (Jean-Louis Comolli,

Image 2: From *World Without Play* (Leonid Makhnach, 1966). Source: Russian State Archive of Film and Photo Documents (hereafter RGAKFD) 21650.

Or was it (and were we)? Vertov and his cocreators—the latter including, preeminently, his brother Mikhail and his wife, editor, and collaborator Elizaveta Svilova (1900–1975)—evidently did believe, at least through the 1920s, that the kind of experimental nonfiction practice they advocated amounted to nothing less radical than a Communism of film, on an analogy with that truly human history that would commence, according to Marx, once "the prehistory of human society" closed upon the disappearance of bourgeois capitalism.[15] Working in the immediate wake of the October Revolution,

"L'avenir de l'homme? Autour de *L'Homme à la caméra*," *Trafic* 15 (1994): 32–33). There may be a recollection in Comolli of a passage in Youri Tsyviane [Yuri Tsivian], "*L'Homme à la caméra* de Dziga Vertov en tant comme texte constructiviste," *La Revue du Cinéma/Image et Son* 351 (June 1980): 125. See also Judith Mayne's remarks on the sequence in *Kino and the Woman Question: Feminism and Soviet Silent Film* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1989), 176.

15 See Marx's "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (accessed June 24, 2017 at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm).

they, mainly via their helmsman Vertov, argued that such an approach to film would create new ways for a revolutionary people—which would comprise all people, ultimately—to represent itself to itself, by breaking away from the tropes, templates, types and canons of "art," and indeed from many of the prior limitations set by language and human subjectivity as such, while still generating ultimately legible (if initially obscure), endlessly novel, and sensuously captivating representations of the world in flux, and of changing perceptions of that world.

Noël Burch has noted that Vertov "[alone] among the Soviet masters [. . .] advocated an uncompromising tabula rasa," and that this position generated an array of internal ironies and paradoxes together with the predictable external opposition.[16] What Vertov saw as an opening up to hitherto unexplored possibilities was regarded by others, including many who admired his work, as stubborn asceticism, an unjustifiable jettisoning of slowly amassed formal and expressive resources, and an impoverishing of cinema rather than an enriching.[17] Has the past with all its undoubted squalor really left us with nothing—nothing—that we can use? This seems a burden at least as great as any "anxiety of influence," and evidently weighs much more heavily on our own era than it did on that of Vertov, who has become part of that past for us.[18]

At the same time, perhaps this insistence that everything is still out there to be discovered once the conventional "theatrical" obstructions are removed, and at relatively low cost, is what makes Vertov a perennial favorite of the young—I write as someone who teaches his work often to

16 Noël Burch, "Film's Institutional Mode of Representation and the Soviet Response," *October* 11 (Winter 1979): 93. See also Elisabeth Roudinesco and Henri Deluy, "Entretien avec Elisabeth Roudinesco: Dziga Vertov ou le regard interdit," *Action Poétique* 59 (1974): 310.

17 "After all, feature fiction filmmaking had amassed in its arsenal such tried-and-true tools in the struggle for the spectator as the story and plot [*fabula, siuzhet*], whose development the spectator would follow; and the play of actors, with whom the spectator might identify him or herself. Dziga Vertov consciously deprived himself of all of this, relying solely on the power of life itself and on the poetry loaded into the camera's film cassette" (director Sergej Iutkevich, "Pervoprokhodets," *DVVS*, 273).

18 "The new emancipatory politics will no longer be the act of a particular social agent, but an explosive combination of different agents. What unites us is that, in contrast to the classic image of proletarians who have 'nothing to lose but their chains,' we are in danger of losing everything" (Slavoj Žižek, "How to Begin from the Beginning," *New Left Review* [new series] 57 (May–June 2009): 55. See also Wolfgang Streeck, "The Post-Capitalist Interregnum," *Juncture* 23, no. 2 (2016): 68–77.

undergraduates—in the way he passes cinema on as something for *them* to create, endlessly. We know from an April 1953 issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* that a rare screening of *Man with a Movie Camera* blew the minds of a crowd of young cine-club members at Paris's Cinémathèque Française on February 28 of that year, just five days before Joseph Stalin died. (Vertov, too, was still alive, unbeknownst to them apparently, and would miserably languish in Moscow for nearly another year.) The film seems to have elicited not only extraordinarily insightful remarks—after just one screening, and of *this* film!—but instances of devotion as well.[19] In a brief memoir of encounters and (mostly) missed encounters with *Man with a Movie Camera* between 1953 and 2001, the publisher, editor, and (like Mikhail Kaufman) ogler Ben Sonnenberg gave us evidence of this:

> *Paris, April 1953.* Flirted with a pretty French girl outside the Cinémathèque. Twenty or maybe twenty-one, three or four years older than me. Grey eyes, black brows, short skirt, good legs. She said, "Aimez-vous Dziga Vertov?" I answered truthfully, "Vertov? Connais pas." Exit pretty French girl. Drat. Should have said, "Vertov? Je l'*adore*!"[20]

Even then, Vertov, the "OG [Original Gangster] weirdo" as one contemporary enthusiast has called him, was cool.[21]

At the Cinémathèque Française, at least. Vertov and Svilova would have been surprised by the adoration, to put it mildly; or perhaps (in Vertov's case) too numbed by this time to even notice. Increasingly deprived of opportunities for creative work starting in the late 1930s, he had already told at least one

19 "Tribune de F.F.C.C.: le debat est ouvert sur 'L'Homme à la Caméra,'" *Cahiers du Cinéma* IV, no. 22 (April 1953): 36–40. From what I can tell, this is the sole transcript of a cine-club discussion to have appeared in *Cahiers*, at least during the 1950s. The transcript was translated in part by John Shepley as "*Cahiers Du Cinéma*: Open Debate" and included in the excellent program notes (preserved at Anthology Film Archives in New York) for the April–May 1984 "Dziga Vertov Revisited" retrospective at New York's Public Theater and Collective for Living Cinema. The discussion ought to be made available in English in full; I will refer to it later in these pages.

20 Ben Sonnenberg, "From the Diary of a Movie Buff," *Raritan* 21, no. 2 (2001): 1.

21 Nicole Disser, "Relive the Indie Film Forum That Brought Us *Heavy Metal Parking Lot* and *Penis Puppets*," *Bedford + Bowery* (June 24, 2016): accessed on September 12, 2016, http://bedfordandbowery.com/2016/06/relive-the-indie-film-forum-that-brought-us-heavy-metal-parking-lot-and-penis-puppets/.

interlocutor, probably around 1953 and "with a barely detectable touch of humor," that "Dziga Vertov was dead," no less.[22] Indeed, for many years, but especially post-1935, he had often referred to "Vertov" in the third person, like an ego-ideal who had done much in cinema but had to be projected outward, protected by personification. If "Vertov" was mainly the bearer of a roster of achievements by that time, it seems that in the 1920s—yes, the self-reflection began that early—"Vertov" or his equivalent had stood in for a kind of pure possibility.

In one of his first published articles (September 1922), for instance—entitled "He and I," and significantly not included in the widely disseminated Soviet collection of his articles from 1966[23]—Vertov described, with unusual public frankness, his frustrations with work at the All-Russia Photo-Film Division (where he was already embarked on the *Kino-Pravda* series) via the observations of one alter ego ("I") looking at another ("He"):

> Every day he shows up at work . . . intending to spend the day in unceasing, rhythmical labor.
>
> I see, regretfully, how his persistence resembles that of a sledgehammer swinging through the air, not noticing that the anvil's been taken away.
>
> The gear is turning . . . . But why should it, if it can't connect with other gears, if it can't turn the wheels of the machine?
>
> [. . . .]
>
> . . . He spoke to me about his impossible work conditions. No transport. No money.
>
> [. . . . .]
>
> As far as shooting political [topics] is concerned, the situation is absurd. They [i.e., the authorities] demand it and forbid it at the same time. Which means: you have to film [political events], but we'll oppose the shooting with all our strength. You'll set up your lights, we'll take them away immediately; you'll catch up to us in corridors and on the street, and we'll wave you away with our hands and turn our backs to the camera. Dull incomprehension of the importance of film on political topics.

22 The interlocutor was Leonid Braslavskij, soon to become a prolific writer of scripts for documentaries (L. Braslavskij, "Istoriia odnogo zhurnala," *DVVS*, 236).

23 Dziga Vertov, *Stat'i, dnevniki, zamysly*, ed. S. Drobashenko (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966); henceforth *SDZ*. This edition is the basis for virtually all later translated collections of Vertov's writings; aspects of its circulation and presentation of the texts will be discussed below.

> [. . . . .]
>
> Every day he returns home tired and in a bad mood, disgusted by the results of his work—yet the next day, somehow reassured, he goes off to pointlessly twirl his propeller in airless space.
>
> "Air! Air!"
>
> He envies me, of course, as I stride from factory to factory with physics and geometry in my hands, indifferent to the fate of *Kino-Pravda* and the All-Russia Photo and Film Division. He envies me, breathing heavily alongside a locomotive, enthusiast of driving belts, pressing a shuddering ampere-meter to my heart.
>
> I've split in two.
>
> It was the only solution. He wanted to work no matter what. Badly, absurdly, but still work. He couldn't just work on his own, with his own sensations and calculations, as I do.
>
> I remained alone with my sensation of world movement, with eyes that serve as camera and film, fixing on my retina only the movements that I need.
>
> I remained alone with pencil and paper, with my attempts to notate the film-études growing in the convolutions of my brain, alone, inebriated by my searches and somersaults into the souls of machines.[24]

In its reflexivity, the article almost reads like a script for a very different—more confessional, more pathos-laden—version of *Man with a Movie Camera*. One (or, at least, his biographer) wishes Vertov had appended names to the alter egos: do we have here the free radical "Dziga Vertov" observing the diligent, downtrodden "D. A. Vertov," the former the author of flamboyant kino-Futurist manifesta, the latter the morose signatory of innumerable bureaucratic documents? Probably most adults feel this way about their lives—a small oasis of dreams evaporating slowly or quickly in the midst of vast plains of dour scraping, scrounging, and scheduling—but it is notable that Vertov made such an

24 "On i ia," in Dziga Vertov, *Stat'i i vystupleniia* [hereafter *SV*], ed. D. V. Kruzhkova and S. M. Ishevskaia (Moscow: Ejzenshtejn-Tsentr, 2008), 18–20. The article first appeared in *Kino-Fot* 2 (September 8–15, 1922): 9–10, and was included (as "Er und ich") in the first large German collection of Vertov's writings, which incorporates a few pieces not in *SDZ* (Dsiga Wertow [Dziga Vertov], *Aufsätze, Tagebücher, Skizzen*, ed. and trans. Hermann Herlinghaus and Rolf Liebmann (East Berlin: Institut für Filmwissenschaft an der Deutschen Hochschule für Filmkunst, 1967), 60–65. A major absence from *SDZ* to which I will again refer, I expect to see it in what promises to be the most exciting edition of translated writings by Vertov in many years: *L'Oeil de la Révolution: Écrits sur le cinéma*, eds. François Albera, Antonio Somaini, and Irina Tcherneva (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, forthcoming).

early and conscious *internal* differentiation (he was only twenty-six) between a giddy longing for creative exploration on one hand, and entanglement in the viscous realities of money and regulations on the other. The contrast was analogous, to be sure, to his distinction between the "corrupting influence of the masters' cinema" and "the genuine purpose of the movie camera." We will see him making it again, over and over, particularly during his long post-1935 slide downwards.

Not the least problem with the tabula rasa is that it can't provide the material supports (film, cameras, labs, professionals, etc.) one needs in order to actually make films and not remain "alone with pencil and paper"; and with the ambiguous exception of a relatively brief but important period (from around mid-1924 through early 1925) to be discussed much later on, Vertov never really wanted to strip cinema clean of *authorship* as a value, either, even if it was a value he often seemed to ascribe to collective rather than individual practice. In his own lifetime, he constantly insisted on his own paternity vis-à-vis the entire later history of Soviet nonfiction film; was both profoundly flattered by the attention his films received and intensely anxious about others stealing his work or ideas; and would take all opportunities not only to promote his work but also to exaggerate his importance (as when he groundlessly claimed, as others did and do, that the "Camera Eye" and "Newsreel" sections of John Dos Passos's "USA Trilogy" were written under his influence).[25] Vertov's face accordingly became a famous

25 For some of his early (ca. January 1925) claims about the popularity of "Kino-Eye" as a slogan, see *SV*, 69. For his claims about Dos Passos, see RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 241, l. 51 (from a 1932 notebook); *SV*, 322, 358, 363, 384, 442, 447 (all references from the 1940s). There is no even moderately persuasive evidence that Dos Passos so much as heard of Vertov or his work, although the novelist evidently met some filmmakers and saw some Soviet films when he visited the USSR in 1928, and was certainly interested in montage strategies of representation. "Newsreels" were standard fare in movie houses around the world during this time, of course, and "camera eye" (not "Kino-Eye" in any case) was an English-language commonplace in some variant or another at least since William Henry Fox Talbot in 1844 (e.g., the section "Plate VIII: A Scene in a Library," in Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature*, introduction by Beaumont Newhall (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969); see also George Dawson's *Manual of Photography* (London: J & A Churchill, 1873), 90; "Canada Through the Camera's Eye," *American Amateur Photographer* 4 (1892): 135–41; and scores of other examples): the copresence of these rubrics in the novels proves nothing. Dos Passos's "Camera Eye" sections are, moreover, overwhelmingly subjective, stream-of-consciousness-type representations rather than anything readily derivable from Vertov's films or theories. In the original 1931 translation by Valentin Stenich of *The 42nd Parallel*, "Camera Eye" was in fact translated as "Camera Obscura," and "Newsreel" as "News of the Day" rather than the more Vertovian "*khronika*" (*42-ia parallel'*, trans.