

# EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA



NO. 3  
25c

From TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD

EISENSTEIN

Ayuntamiento de Madrid



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**S**ERGEI M. EISENSTEIN, GREGOR V. ALEXANDROV and EDUARD TISSE need no introduction in *Experimental Cinema*. The list of their films to date is as follows:

**WORKERS, STRIKE!** . . . Directed by Eisenstein, photographed by Tisse. Not released in U. S. A.

**ARMORED CRUISER PRINCE POTEMKIN** . . . Directed by Eisenstein, photographed by Tisse. Scenario by Eisenstein and Alexandrov. Alexandrov played the part of a Czarist captain on board the "Potemkin."

**TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD** . . . Directed by Eisenstein and Alexandrov. Photographed by Tisse. Scenario and montage by Eisenstein and Alexandrov.

**OLD AND NEW (THE GENERAL LINE)** . . . Directed by Eisenstein and Alexandrov. Photographed by Tisse. Scenario and montage by Eisenstein and Alexandrov.

**ROMANCE SENTIMENTALE** . . . A two-reel experiment in sound, made in Paris in the summer of 1930 by Eisenstein, Alexandrov and Tisse.

At present they are making a film in Mexico. (See the "HOLLYWOOD BULLETIN" in this issue.) The June, 1930, issue of *Experimental Cinema* contained an interesting article on Eisenstein's activities as a teacher in the Moscow Cinematographic University and also on his research into the Japanese "Kabuki" Theatre, on which *The Cinematographic Principle and Japanese Culture* is based.

**V**SEVOLOD I. PUDOVKIN also requires no introduction. The list of the films he has made in USSR is as follows:

**THE CHESS PLAYER** . . . a two-reel experimental analytical and cross-cutting montage, made five years ago. Not released in U. S. A.

**MECHANICS OF THE BRAIN** . . . a laboratory film made by Pudovkin in conjunction with Prof. Pavlov of the Psycho-Neurological Brain Institute in Leningrad. Studies in the activities of the "conditioned reflex." This important film-document has had "educational" (but not popular) release in this country.

**MOTHER** . . . The powerful film of the 1905 strike revolution based on Gorki's novel of the same name. Banned in the U. S. A.

**THE END OF ST. PETERSBURG** . . . Produced by Mezhrabpom for the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. Released in U. S. A. very much abridged. The original was three hours long.

**STORM OVER ASIA** . . . Pudovkin's masterpiece on Russian imperialism in Asia and the Mongolian uprising. Partial release in U. S. A.

He has just completed a film, "LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL."

Victor Turin is the Soviet director of "TURK-SIB."

All Soviet stills courtesy Amkino Corporation.

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# STATEMENT



**T**HIS, the third issue of EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA, makes its appearance after six months of ceaseless effort to raise funds for its publication. After half a year of financial and other difficulties, we are finally enabled to appear—with an intensification and a clarification of policy which will bring EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA into close relationship with the labor movement in America.

The widespread interest that has manifested itself in our two earlier attempts to release the film for intelligent contact in America, encourages us to hope that with this issue, which makes clear the proletarian basis of our organ, EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA will succeed in establishing the ideological and organizational foundations of an American working-class cinema. This is particularly desirable at a time when the current Hollywood movie boasts a banality and a stupidity that seems to wax greater in proportion to the growth in the unsettlement and distress of American life. Two organizations, independent in operation but united in purpose, have already been formed for this task, although much remains to be done in each case to complete the basic direction and activity. These two groups are: THE WORKERS FILM AND PHOTO LEAGUE OF AMERICA and THE AMERICAN PROLET-KINO. These are the first two film-producing units of the American working-class.

It is clear to the editors of EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA that Hollywood, while it is an almost inexhaustible source of stupefying "entertainment," is also at the same time the tool of American imperialist political policy, which it serves so faithfully and so supinely through the medium of war films, anti-USSR films, news reels, etc. The United States with its appalling rate of illiteracy is fertile soil for so direct an instrument as the film. The talkie, by eliminating the printed caption, has overcome the last barrier necessary to make the cinema the most simple, the most powerful and the most popular political weapon in existence today.

American imperialism has not been slow in recognizing this. It is wielding this dangerous sword in a most conscious way. There is a bill pending in Congress at the present time calling for the transformation of the movie industry into a public utility under federal control. The United States Government openly cooperates in the production of films glorifying the achievements of American marines in crushing latin-american uprisings. The film, "Flight," was an open attack on Sandino and the Nicaraguan struggle for national freedom from American imperialist domination. Such bluntly jingoistic, flag-waving films as "Wings," "The Mighty," "Tell It To The Marines," "The Patent Leather Kid," etc., etc., are only a beginning.

Thus, the need to develop active film-machinery in the working-class to counteract this nefarious and growing activity, maliciously organized to prepare the American masses for martial suicide in the next war to end war—becomes doubly, immeasurably urgent.

EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA in future issues will expose in its pages the growth of practices such as those stated above, as well as the source of this capitalist propaganda in the film-industry, where a boycott is now in force on all films and news reels that reveal any evidences of the class struggle.

EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA will also endeavor in the future, as an inalienable part of the workers' film-movement, to cooperate in the production of films of a nature which will serve to give cohesion to the movement among the masses of movie-goers and which will also serve to counteract amongst these masses the stupefying opiate of the Hollywood product.

EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA, in conclusion will reveal to students of the film, through important articles, essays, photographs, stills, etc., the means and methods whereby films of the life of the American workers will be adequately produced and presented for working-class audiences.

**SUPPORT OF EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA MEANS SUPPORT OF THE FIRST WORKERS' FILM GROUP IN AMERICA!**



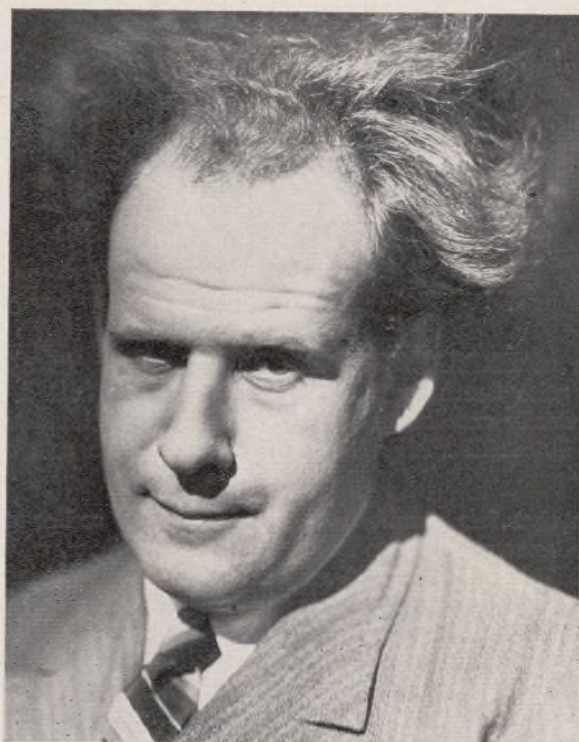


Photo by  
BRETT  
WESTON

## EISENSTEIN

**I**N America, the film, the one absolute and vital cultural force of our time, is completely imbedded in the ideas and doctrines of a reactionary class. The bourgeois currents behind the puerilities of the film are dead to any promise of unfoldment within the lens. Only the ethos of the class-struggle contains any hope for a new transformation of the film in America.

On the other hand, the development of the cinema in Russia is organically related to the new social forces and economic implications of the era. These forces manifest themselves stirring in the Soviet film. Directors there define the revolutionary working class reality and ideology.

Functioning as one of the leaders of this new spirit is Eisenstein, director of "Strike", "Potemkin", "Ten Days That Shook The World", and "Old and New". Eisenstein in concentrated images expresses cinematically the social forces released by the proletarian revolution. Impelled by this upheaval, he has evolved autonomous laws of cinematic form sharply related to the needs of the Russian masses. The film has been transformed thru his "tonal" and "over-tonal" montage from a bourgeois opiate into an intense experience in which the spectator becomes a participant in a new and orphic conception.

The creator of cinematic prose-rhythm, Eisenstein, employs a style which enables him to pack and combine multiple perceptions, implications and meanings into each of his images; assigning to each their manifold content, their angle, their tone, their precise action and movement, their rhythm and exact function so that there will be no discrepancy between his attitude and the projected film. Furthermore, he proportions each quality of image:

its context, its tempo, its duration, its interval and position its "overtone" and its plastic and social purpose in the cinematic plan: **Montage**—the plastic means toward profound effects and the nucleus of every subsequent film intelligence.

The images of Eisenstein are never "photographic" and never merely decorative, but because of their cadre and rhythmic action, their "collisions and conjunctions," their transitions and conflicts—their essential rightness, they infect and charge the mind and emotions of the spectator and instil anticipatory reverberations, both organic and significant, for their response.

It is from this condition that they function: the first image and its qualities prepares for the second, which meets the expectation roused by the rising modulation and impulse, and the third is a challenge and collision,—a response differing from its cinematic associates in a visual way, but yet conforming in an organic precision. A structure is created which introduces a number of impulses and counterpoints whose reconciliation is the activity of the montage groups and their momentum: a structure which piles up emotional effect by junction and multiplication cumulation and conflict. Any effort to cut or substitute for an image in a sequence, or to speed or slow an image or sequence, or to juxtapose an arrangement, will indicate how organic the whole is and at once injure the esthetic value of the total. Here is a mighty style and a form that evolves and corresponds with the complexity and precision of the triumphant proletariat, the first to dominate the films' organic problem and the most able to saturate its structure with the program of the revolutionary social substance.

LEWIS JACOBS



# THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC PRINCIPLE AND JAPANESE CULTURE

WITH A DIGRESSION ON MONTAGE AND THE SHOT

by S. M. EISENSTEIN



It is a weird and wonderful feat to have written a pamphlet on something that in reality does not exist.

There is not, for example, any such thing as a cinema without cinematography.

And yet the author of the pamphlet in which this essay first appeared<sup>1</sup> has contrived to write a book about the cinema of a country that has no cinematography. About the cinema of a country that has, in its culture, an infinite number of cinematographic traits strewn everywhere with the sole exception of—its cinema.

This essay is on the cinematographic traits of Japanese culture, lying outside the Japanese cinema, and is itself as apart from the pamphlet as these traits are apart from the Japanese cinema.

A cinema is: so many companies, such and such turn-overs of capital, such and such stars, such and such films.

Cinematography is—first and foremost: montage.

The Japanese cinema is excellently equipped with companies, actors, subjects.

But the Japanese cinema is a complete stranger to montage.

And yet the principle of montage can be identified as the basic element of Japanese representational culture.

Writing.

For writing is primarily representational.

The hieroglyph.

The naturalistic image of an object as portrayed by the skilful hand of Tzanki 2650 years before our era becomes slightly formalised and, with its 539 fellows, forms the first 'contingent' of hieroglyphs.

Scratched out with an awl on bamboo, the plastic portrait of an object still in every respect resembles its original.

But then, by the end of the IIIrd Century, the brush is invented.

In the Ist Century after that happy event (A. D.)—paper.

And, lastly, in the year 220—Indian ink.

A complete upheaval. A revolution in draughtsmanship. And, after having suffered in the course of history no fewer than 14 different styles of handwriting, the hieroglyph crystallises in its present form.

The means of production (brush and Indian ink) have determined the form.

The 14 reforms have had their way. As result.

In the fierily cavorting hieroglyph "ma" (a horse) it is already impossible to recognise the features of the dear little horse, pathetically sagging in its hind-quarters, of the writing style of Tzanki, so well-known from ancient Chinese sculpture.

But let it rest in the Lord, this dear little horse, together with the other 607 remaining "sianchin" ciphers—the first **depictive** category of hieroglyphs.

The real interest begins with the second category of hieroglyphs—the "choy-ee," i.e. 'copulative'.

The point is that the copulation—perhaps we had better say, the combination—of two hieroglyphs of the simplest series is to be considered not as their sum but as their product, i.e., as a unit of another dimension, another power: each, separately, corresponds to an **object**, to a fact, but their combination corresponds to a **concept**. By the combination of two 'depictables' is achieved the representation of something graphically undepictable.

For example: the picture for water and the picture of an eye means—'to weep';

The picture of an ear near a drawing of a door—'to listen';

a dog and a mouth—'to bark';

a mouth and a child—'to clamour';

a mouth and a bird—'to sing';

a knife and a heart—'sorrow', and so forth.

But this is—pure **montage**!

Yes. Exactly what we are doing in the cinema, combining the as far as possible mono-significant, individually neutral (from the content point of view), **depictive** shots, into **intelligible** contexts and series.

A means and method inevitable in any cinematographic representation. And, in its condensed and purified form the starting point for the ideological cinema.

For a cinema seeking a maximum laconism for the visual representation of abstract concepts.

As the pioneer among these paths we hail the method of the late lamented (long lamented) Tzanki.

We have spoken of laconism. Laconism affords us a transition to a further point. Japan possesses the most laconic form of poetry. The "khai-kai" (which appeared at the beginning of the XIIth Century) and the "tanka".

Both are almost hieroglyphs transposed into phraseology. Even so much so that half their value is appraised by the calligraphic quality of their draughtsmanship. Their method of construction is completely analogous.

This method, which in hieroglyphics provides a means of laconic determination of an abstract concept, gives rise when transposed into literary representation to an identical laconism of pointed imagery.

The method applied with concentration to the ascetic combination of ciphers strikes from their conflict a dry definiteness of the concepts determined.

The self-same method expanded into the luxury of a



group of already formed verbal combinations, swells into a splendour of **image** effect.

The concept—a bare formula; its adornment, expansion by additional material, transforms it into an image—a finished form.

Exactly, though in reverse, as the primitive mode of thinking—image thinking, concentrating to a definite degree, became transformed to conceptual thinking.

But let us turn to examples:

The "khai-kai" is a concentrated impressionistic sketch:

"In the hearth  
Two shining dots:  
A cat is sitting."  
(Cheo-Dai)

or:

"An ancient monastery,  
The cold moon.  
A wolf is howling."  
(Hik-ko)

or:

"All is quiet in the field.  
A butterfly is flying.  
The butterfly has gone to sleep."  
(Go-Sin)

The "tanka" is slightly longer (by a pair of lines).

"A slowly walking  
Mountain pheasant; its tail  
Trails behind.  
Oh, night without end,  
Alone can I endure it!"  
(Khitomaro)

From our point of view—these are montage phrases. A montage plan.

The simple combination of two or three details of a material series yielded a perfectly rounded-off representation of another order—psychological.

And, if the finely ground edges of the intellectual determination of the concepts formed by combination of hieroglyphs are here blurred, yet, in **emotionalism**, the concepts have blossomed forth immeasurably.

Of Japanese writing it is uncertain.

Whether its aspects as a character system (the deterministic), or as an independent creation of graphics, (the depictive) predominates. . . .

In any case, born of the duomonistic mating of the depictive by method and deterministic by purpose, the method of hieroglyph continued both its lines. (Continued—not **historically**—consecutively, but consecutively in **principle**, in the minds of those developing the method).

Not only did its deterministic lines continue into literature, in the "tanka," as we have shown.

But exactly the same method (in depictive aspect) operates also in the most perfect examples of Japanese pictorial art.

Sharaku. The creator of the finest engravings of the XVIIIth Century. Of an especially immortal gallery of portraits of actors. The Daumier of Japan. The Daumier whom Balzac—himself the Bonaparte of literature—in his turn named "the Michael-Angelo of caricature."

And, in spite of all this, almost unknown to us.

The characteristic features of his work are noted by Julius Kurth. Discussing the question of the influence of sculpture on Sharaku, he draws a parallel between a portrait of the actor Nakayama Tomisaburo and an antique

mask from the semi-religious No theatre—the mask Rōshi (an old bronze).

"... there is the same cast of countenance in the mask also created in the days of Sharaku, and in the portrait of Tomisaburo. The features of the face and the distribution of the mass are very similar, though the mask represents an old man, and the engraving a young woman (Tomisaburo in a female part). The likeness strikes the eye, and yet there is nothing in common between the two. But it is just here that we discover the most characteristic trait of Sharaku: whereas the mask is carved from wood in almost correct anatomical proportions, the proportions of the face in the engraving—are simply impossible. The distance between the eyes is so enormous as to be a mockery of a sound sense. The nose in comparison with the eyes is at least twice as long as any normal nose can afford to be, the chin in relation to the mouth is out of all proportion; the eyebrows, the mouth, in general every detail considered in relation to the others, is entirely unthinkable. The same may be observed in the faces of all the big heads of Sharaku. The possibility that the great master did not realize the erroneous relationship of the sizes is quite out of the question. He rejected naturalism quite consciously, and while every detail separately regarded is constructed on the principle of the most concentrated naturalism, the combination in the general composition is subordinate solely to the problem of content. He took as his normal proportions the quintessence of psychological expressiveness. . . ."

(Julius Kurth. "Sharaku", pp. 79,80,81. R. Piper, Munich)

Is this not the same as does the hieroglyph, combining the independent 'mouth' and the unrelated 'child' to form the content expression 'clamour'?

And is this not exactly what we of the cinema do to time, just as he in simultaneity, when we cause a monstrous disproportion of the elements of a normally flowing event, dismembering it suddenly into 'gripping hand large', 'medium shots of struggle' and 'bulging eyes, filling screen' in making the 'montage' disintegration of an event into shots? In making an eye twice as large as man's full height? By the combination of these monstrous incongruities we gather up the disintegrated event once more into one whole, but in **our** aspect. According to our treatment in relation to the event.

The disproportionate depiction of an event is organically characteristic in us from our very beginning. A. Luria, of the Psychological Institute in Moscow, has shown me a drawing by a child on the theme 'lighting a stove'.

Everything is depicted in passably accurate relationship and with great care. The firewood. The stove. The chimney. But in the central space of the room is a huge tangled mass streaked with zigzags. What are these zigzags? They turn out to be—the matches. Taking into account the crucial importance of these very matches for the process depicted, the child allots them a scale according to their due.

The representation of objects in the actual (absolute) proportions proper to them is, of course, only a tribute to orthodox formal logic.

A subordination to the conception of an unalterable order of things.

Both in painting and in sculpture there is a periodic and unceasing return to periods of establishment of absolute order.

An exchange of the expressiveness of archaic dispropor-





A Victim of Tsarism

From POTEKIN

portion for the regular 'table of ranks and classes' of an officialdom-created harmony.

Positivistic realism is in no way the correct form of perception. Purely and simply—a function of a certain form of social structure.

Following a state monocacy, implanting a state mono-

typic form of thought.

An ideological uniformation, developing figuratively in the uniformed ranks of the regiments of Guards.

Thus we have seen how the principle of the hieroglyph —'determination by depiction' split into two,



First along the line of its purpose (the principle 'determination') into the principles of the creation of literary imagery.

Then along the line of its method of realization of this purpose (the principle depiction,) into the striking methods of expressiveness of Sharaku.<sup>2</sup>

And, just as the two outspreading wings of a hyperbola meet, as we say, at infinity (though no one has visited so distant a region), so the principle of hieroglyphics, infinitely splitting into two (in accordance with the functionalism of ciphers), suddenly from this dualistic estrangement once more unites, in yet a fourth sphere—the theatre.

Estranged for so long, once again—in the cradle period of the drama—they are present in parallel. In a curious dualism.

The **signification** (determination) of the action is effected by its narration by a man behind the stage—the **representation** (depiction) of the action is effected by a dumb marionette on the stage—the so-called Dzeiruri.

Together with a specific manner of moving, this archaism migrated also into early Kabuki. It is maintained, as a part method, in classical repertory even to this day. (Where certain parts of the action are narrated from behind the stage while the actor acts in dumb-show).

But this too is not the kernel.

Most important is the fact that into the technique of acting itself the hieroglyphic (montage) method has instilled itself in the most interesting ways.

However, before we discuss this finally, let us allow ourselves the luxury of a digression. Let us pause at the wayside halt of the question of the shot, in order to settle the question of shot-montage once and for all.

A shot. A single piece of celluloid.

A small rectangular frame with, somehow organised into it, a bit of an event.

'Sticking to each other,' these shots form montage. Of course, when they stick in appropriate rhythm.

Thus, roughly, teaches the old, old school of cinematography.

"Screw by screw,

Brick by brick. . ."

Kuleshov, for example, even writes with a brick, thus: ". . . Should there be for expression any fractional idea, any particle of the action, any link of the whole dramatic chain, then that idea must be expressed, built-up out of shot-ciphers, as if out of bricks. . ."

(L. Kuleshov, "The Art of the Cinema." Published by Tea-Kino-Pechat, p. 100).

"Screw by screw,

Brick by brick. . .," as the song goes.<sup>3</sup>

The shot—is an element of montage! Montage—is a 'junction of elements'.

A most pernicious method of analysis.

One in which the understanding of a process as a whole (linkage, shot-montage) is derived merely from the external characteristics of its flow (a piece is stuck to a piece).

Thus it would be possible, for example, to arrive at the well-known conclusion that tramcars exist to be laid across streets.

An entirely logical deduction, if one orientate oneself on the external characteristics of those functions they performed, for example, in Russia in the February days of '17. But the Materialist Conception of History interprets it otherwise.

The worst of the matter is that an approach of this

kind does actually lie like an unclimbable tramcar across the possibilities of formal development.

Such an approach predestines one not to dialectical development, but only to gradual evolutionary 'perfecting' in so far as it gives no bite into the dialectical substance of events.

In the last resort, such evolutionising leads either through refinement to decadence or, on the contrary, to a simple withering away from stagnation of the blood.

And, strange as it may seem, a melodious witness to both these cases simultaneously is Kuleshov's last film—"The Gay Canary."

The shot is in no wise an **element** of montage.

The shot is a montage **cell**.

Just as cells in their division form a phenomenon of another order, the organism or embryo. So, on the other side of the dialectical leap from the shot, is montage.

By what then is montage characterised, and consequently by its cell—the shot.

By collision. By conflict of two pieces standing in opposition to each other. By conflict. By collision.

In front of me lies a crumpled yellowed sheet of newspaper.

On it a mysterious note:

"Linkage—P" and "Shock—E."

This is the material trace of a hot engagement on the subject of montage between E—myself and P—Pudovkin (About a year ago.)

This is the established order. At regular intervals he comes to me late at night and we rew, behind closed doors, on subjects of principle.

Here as before. Hailing from the Kuleshov school he heatedly defended the conception of the montage as a **linkage** of pieces. Into a chain. Bricks.

Bricks, by means of their rows **narrating** a concept.

I confronted him with my point of view of montage as **collision**. A viewpoint that from the **collision** of two given factors arises a concept.

Linkage is, in my interpretation, only a possible **special** case.

You remember what an infinite number of combinations is known in physics in the matter of the impact (collision) of balls.

According to whether they be resilient, or non-resilient or mixed.

Amongst all these combinations there is one in which the impact is so weak that the collision degrades into the even movement of both in one direction.

This case would correspond to the point of view of Pudovkin.

Not long ago I had another talk with him. Today he stands in agreement with my present point of view.

True, during the interval he had taken the opportunity to acquaint himself with the substance of the lectures I had read during that period at the Central Cinematograph College.

Thus, montage—is conflict.

The basis of every art is always conflict. A peculiar 'image' transubstantiation of the dialectic principle.

And the shot represents a montage **cell**.

So, consequently, it also must be considered from the point of view of conflict.

Intra-piece conflict—

—potential montage, in the development of its intensity shattering its quadrilateral cage and exploding its conflict



into montage impulses between the montage pieces.

And if montage must be compared with something, then a phalanx of montage-pieces, 'shots', should be compared to the series of explosions of an internal combustion engine, multiplying themselves into montage dynamics and thereby serving as 'impulses' to drive along a tearing motor-car or tractor.

Intra-piece conflict. It may be of very various nature: it may even be—a conflict in the action depicted itself. As in "What happened to Mary." In the course of a piece 400 ft. long. Such conflict is clearly not subject to examination in the light of questions of cinematographic form.

But 'cinematographic' are:

Conflict of graphic directions (either static lines or dynamic lines).

Conflict of scales.

Conflict of spaces.

Conflict of masses (spaces filled with various intensities of light.)

Conflict of depths.

Any of these and the following conflicts of such degree that they wait only for one push of intensification to fly into couples of antagonistic fragments.

Close and long shots (C.U.'s, M.S.'s and L.S.'s, etc.)

Graphically vari-produced pieces. Pieces solved, by volume with pieces solved by area.

Dark pieces with light pieces, etc.

And, lastly, there are such unexpected conflicts as:

The conflict of an object with its normal dimension, and the conflict of an event with its normal temporal nature.

This may sound extraordinary but both these cases are familiar.

The first—an optical distortion of the lens, the second—speeding-up or slow-motion.

The assembling of all properties of cinematography into one formula of conflict, the grouping of all cinematographic characteristics into a dialectical series under one single head—is no empty rhetorical diversion.

We thus seek a unified systematization of the method of cinematographic expressiveness that shall hold good for all its elements.

The assembling of them to a series of common interpretation will solve the problem as a whole.

Experience in the various separate departments of the cinema varies in measure beyond compare.

Whereas we know a great deal about montage, in the theory of the shot we are still bubbling about between the Royal Academy, the French Impressionists, and pure geometrisations that begin to set one's teeth on edge.

The regarding of the frame, however, as a particular, 'cellular' case of montage—the smashing of the dualism 'shot-montage', makes possible the direct application of montage experience to the question of the theory of the shot.

The same with the question of lighting. The conception of this as a collision between a current of light and an obstacle, like the impact of a gush of water from a fire-hose striking an object, or of the wind buffeting against a person, must result in a usage of it comprehensible entirely different from that afforded by playing around with 'gauzes' and 'spots'.

The one available such interpretative principle is the principle of conflict:

**The principle of optical counterpoint.**

And, let us not now forget that shortly we shall have to solve another and less simple counterpoint, namely, the

**conflict of auditory and visual impulses in the sound cinema.**

At the moment, however, let us return to one of the most interesting of optical conflicts:

The conflict between the limits of the frame and the object shot.

The shooting-angle as the materialisation of conflict between the organising logic of the director, and the inert logic of the object, in collision, giving the dialectic of cinema-viewpoint.

In this respect we are still impressionistic and devoid of principle to a point of sickness.

But, in spite of this fact, a sharp degree of principle is proper to the technique of this also.

The dry quadrilateral, plunging into the haphazard of natural diffuseness. . . .

And once more we are back in Japan!

For, thus—the cinematographic is one of the methods of drawing instruction used in Japanese schools.

What is our method of drawing instruction?

We take an ordinary four-cornered piece of white paper. . . .

And we cram onto it, in most cases even without using the corners (the edges are usually grease-stained with long sweating over it), some tedious caryatid, some vain Corinthian capital, or a plaster Dante (not the juggler at the Moscow Ermitage, but the other one—Alighieri, the comedy writer.)

The Japanese do the opposite.

Here's a branch of cherry-tree, or a landscape with a sailing boat.

And the pupil extracts from its whole, by means of a square, or circle, or a rectangle, a composition unit.

He takes a frame!

And just by these two ways of teaching drawing are characterised the two basic tendencies struggling in the cinema of today.

The one—the expiring method of artificial spatial organisation of the event in front of the lens.

From the 'direction' of a sequence, to the erection of a Tower of Babel in the literal sense, in front of the lens.

And the other—a 'picking-out' by the camera, organisation by its means. The hewing of a piece of actuality by means of the lens.

However, now, at the present moment, when the centre of attraction is beginning, in the ideological cinema, finally to be transferred from the material of the cinema as such into 'deductions and conclusions' formed by the order of its approximation, both schools lose the importance of their differences and can quietly blend into a synthesis.

Some pages back we lost, like a golosh in a tramcar, the question of the theatre.

Let us turn back to the question of methods of montage in the Japanese theatre.

In particular, in acting.

The first and most striking example, of course, is the purely cinematographic method—'untransitional acting'.

Alongside with mimic-transitions carried to the limit of refinement, the Japanese actor uses the exactly reverse method.

At some moment or other of the acting he interrupts it.

The 'Black Ones' obligingly conceal him from the spectator. And lo—he is resurrected in a new make-up. A new wig. Characterising another stage (degree) of his emotional state.

Thus, for example, in the play "Narukami" is solved the transition of Sadandzi from drunkenness to madness.



By a mechanical cut to it. And a change in his collection (armoury) of coloured streaks. On his face, emphasizing those of them whose lot it is to fulfill a task of higher intensity than that allotted to those used in the first make-up.

This method is organic to the film. The forced introduction into the film, by the European acting tradition, of pieces of 'emotional transitions' is yet another influence forcing the cinema to mark time. Whereas the method of 'cut' acting makes possible the construction of entirely new methods. The supplantation of one changing actor-face by a scale of vari-mooded type-faces always affords a much more acutely expressive result than that enabled by the surface, too receptive and devoid of organic resistance, of the face of a professional actor.

The banishing of the intervals between the polar stages of expression of face in sharp contrast has been used by me in our new village picture. By this means is achieved a greater sharpness in the 'play of doubt' around the separator. Will the milk thicken or no? Trickery? Wealth? Here the psychological process of the play of motifs—faith and doubt—is disintegrated into the two extreme positions of joy (confidence) and gloom (disillusionment). Moreover there is a sharp emphasizing of this by light (in

head. A disintegration into shots. With the shortening of the separate successive constituents at the approach towards the . . . tragic end—death.

By shaking himself free from the yoke of simple naturalism, the actor is enabled by this method entirely to grip the spectator by 'rhythms', thus rendering the stage, which in its general composition is constructed on the most consecutive and detailed naturalism (flesh and blood, etc.), not only apprehensible but affective.

Since we now no longer make a distinction in principle between questions of intra-shot and montage, we may here cite a third example:

The Japanese makes use in his work of a slow tempo of a degree of slowness unknown to our stage. The famous scene of harakiri in "The Forty-seven Ronin". Such a degree of slowing down of movement is absent from our stage. Whereas, in the previous example, we dealt with disintegration of the linkage of movement, here we have disintegration of the process of movement. Slow-motion. I know of only one example of a thorough application of this same method, as technically employable in the cinema, for a compositionally thought-out end. Usually it is used either for a depiction, as "The Submarine Kingdom" ("The Thief of Bagdad"), or for a dream ("Zvenigora").



THE ODESSA MASSACRE

From POTEMKIN

no wise conforming to actual light conditions). This leads to a considerable strengthening of the intensity.

Another remarkable characteristic of Kabuki is the principle of 'disintegrated' acting. Thus, Siozoi, the female part lead of the "Kabuki" company that played in Moscow, in depicting a dying girl in "The Sculptor of Masks", performed his part in pieces of acting entirely detached from one another.

Acting with only the right arm. Acting with one leg. Acting with the neck and head only. The whole process of the general death agony was disintegrated into the solo playing through of each 'part' separately from the others: the parts of the leg, the parts of the arms, the part of the

Or, more often still, it is just formal spillikens and purposeless camera hooliganism ("The Man with the Movie Camera"). The instance I have in mind is Epstein's "The Fall of the House of Usher". Normally acted emotions taken with a speeded-up camera gave an unusual emotional pressure by their slowness on the screen (judging from the press reports). If it be borne in mind that the effect of the acting of an actor on the public is based on its imitation by the spectator, it will be easy to relate the two examples to one and the same causal explanation. The intensity of the reception increases because the imitative process goes more easily along a disintegrated motion . . .

Training in how to handle a rifle was hammered into



even the stiffest automata among 'raw' recruits 'along disintegration'...

The most interesting association of the Japanese theatre, however, is, after all, with the sound cinema, which can and must learn what is basic for it from the Japanese—the bringing of both visual and auditory impressions to one common physiological denominator. But I consecrated a whole article in the "Zhizna Iskusstva" (1928, No. 34).<sup>5</sup> to this point, and I shall not return to it here.

So, it has been possible cursorily to establish the permeation of the most various branches of Japanese culture by the pure element and basic nerve of cinematography—montage.

And only the Japanese cinema falls into the same error as the 'left-drifting' "Kabuki".

Instead of learning how to extract the principles and technique of their remarkable acting from out of the traditional feudal forms of what they act, the progressive theatrical leaders of Japan fling themselves into adaptation of the spongy shapelessness of our own academic psychological naturalistic Art Theatre. The results are tearful

and sad. In the realm of the cinema Japan similarly pursues imitations of the most revolting examples of commercial American and Middle-European market junk.

To understand and apply her cultural peculiarities to the cinema, this is the task of Japan.

Colleagues of Japan! Are you really going to leave it to us?

1. This essay was first published as an epilogue to N. Kaufman's pamphlet "The Japanese Cinema" (Tea-Kino-Pechat. The Theatre and Film Press, Moscow, 1929) and entitled "Outside the Shot." The present text is translated by Ivor Montagu and S. S. Nalbanov and revised by the author.

2. It has been left to Joyce to develop in literature the depictive line of the Japanese hieroglyph. Every word of Kurth's analysis of Sharaku may be applied, neatly and easily, to Joyce. —S. M. E.

3. The quotation is from "Kerpitchiki," a Russian popular song.—I. M.

4. The **Black Ones** in Kabuki are persons attired completely in black and thus relatively invisible. Besides functioning as described, they move furniture and carry out all manner of changes.—I. M.

5. Republished in a French translation in "Monde," December, 1928.—S. M. E.

## The Problem of the New Film Language

by VICTOR TURIN

**A** CHARACTERISTIC feature of the filmic language of the majority of our films is that it is based on the intellectual sense of the composition. By that we mean that not only the visual appearance on the screen as such, but also the idea behind it, affects the spectator.

A few film-people have expressed this fact in paradoxical form, as follows: **The essence of the film lies not in the images, in the scenes, but between the scenes.** Eisenstein terms this the "fourth dimension" of the film. He means that one does not just see the art-work, but feels-and-thinks it,—that is, "senses" it. This principle is undoubtedly applicable to the film that is expressed in poetic film-terms.

Every film-work is actually supposed to consist of a series of thought-impulses, and the action to serve only as opportunity for the visualization of these thoughts.

In contrast to the so-called **prosaic** film with its dynamic of action, stands poetic film-language with its dynamic of thought. Instead of: "I see that he walks," it will become: "I feel, what the artist thinks."

The thought is realized through the action and comprehended in its pure form, without being obscured by the events.

The thought thus becomes the basic element of the montage. The visual unity is only an equivalent of the thought. **The basis is therefore not the composition of the action, but the composition of the thought.** The most effective means for the realization of such a composition is the "association montage." The development and perfection of this method will make it possible to construct artworks along manifold thematic lines of highly varied material. To master this method completely, means to have attained the ideal of art-creation, whose task it is, as the old Dutch philosopher Hemsterguy put it, "to express the greatest number of ideas in the shortest time."

There is no doubt that the time-limitations of the film ("the shortest time") and our attempt, to give "the greatest number of ideas," are in accord with this teaching of the old Hollander. The nature of the film offers the pos-

sibility to solve this difficulty and for the other arts insoluble, task.

The two elements of this new film-language, association and brevity, justify the designation of this method as the **Method of "Associative Laconism."**

This conditioned expression (practically speaking, all expressions of art-theory are conditioned) offers the occasion to analyze the elements of filmic language from a particularly definite point of view.

Associative laconism affords, in my opinion, the possibility to establish in the work the line of development of the theme. This method makes it possible to control time and space more effectively through a successful composition of the abstract meaning; it facilitates the unification of highly varied types of visual material into a single, definite thought subordinated to the whole. It reduces the time of the action to a minimum. Association ultimately corresponds completely to the principle of the intellectual film, in which the subject-matter is subordinate to the intellectual reflex. If one takes into further consideration that poetic language, according to its own peculiar nature, is not composed of isolated grand thoughts, but frequently consists in intimations and allusions to definite ideas, then it becomes very clear that just this **associative laconism** constitutes its technically adequate means of expression.

Our films are therefore not constructed on the development of the external action, and do not depend on the external dynamic, but are based on the continuation of an intellectual thought-line.

The explanation for this lies in the circumstance that for us it is not possible to have a previously established continuity.

**The final formation of our films occurs solely in the montage, in the cutting.**

During the cutting, much—very much—is changed, this change often even depending on the substitution of some title for a very important picture. In fact, in such



films, the placement of the titles is as important as that of the images.

It is no accident that most of our best directors (Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, etc.) write their own manuscripts. The language of their manuscripts originates out of their extensive relationship, as directors, to the material and out of their extensive knowledge of the film-camera. Even in the films of Pudovkin the so-called "poetic spots" are incorporated by the director himself. It is also no accident that these directors have found fewer followers than the directors of the old theatrical "school," of which the outstanding representatives in Soviet Russia are Protozanov, Ozep and Room.

There is no doubt, however, that the transformation of the theme is likewise accompanied by a revision of the formal-stylistic disposition.

We must not only change the thematic contents of our works, but we must also seek new means of expression. Such a necessity impels us to constant change and experimentation; it permits of no stand-still, and it prevents us from creating still further art-works according to the old banal methods.

Our main task was to show the development of our country from a complete technical backwardness and lack of culture to our present-day colossal advancement, at the threshold of which we now stand. Our country is today seized with the enthusiasm of construction. The building of the Turkestan-Siberian Railroad is only one manifestation of this gigantic labor.

Not a single art-work that has its origin in the Soviet Union today is the metaphysical brain-child of an artist; but all art-works are based on material of actual occurrence, which forms the best foundation for any kind of creative work. Our central theme is the manifestation of socialism, the daily life of our Union.

All the imagination of our artists, all their inventive genius, can be applied to the wealth of material of our own lives. We need not ponder over subject-matter, for it can be found in every nook and corner of our Union, and we can therefore concentrate our full creative strength on the search for new and better means of expression. But these new methods for the construction of our film-works we seek only in order to reflect that which happens to us in reality, in as powerful and vital a way as possible.

We realize that in our work we are still a long way from perfection—more, that we stand just at the beginning of these new paths of the Soviet film.

We are technically still very weak and must daily seek and invent new art-means. Our cinema, artistically as well as technically, is still in its childhood days. Thus, we have just recently started to familiarize ourselves with the technique of the sound-film; but we know, we are convinced, that when we have once learned to master these new methods, we shall be able to create art-works which will deeply move the proletarian spectators of the entire world.

(Translated from the German by Christel Gang)

The development of art has at all times been closely related to the ideas and forms of life of the class ruling at a given time. In all former epochs which, with but few exceptions, made art the monopoly of the possessing and ruling class, those forms of art were encouraged which served to satisfy the higher, more refined individual requirements of the privileged. The satisfaction of the artistic needs of the masses was regarded as a subsidiary matter. Art was doled out to them in bad mass reproductions.

Things are different in the Soviet Union. There the masses are considered first. Consequently those arts which, in themselves, can benefit the masses, receive special encouragement. In the present stage of development these are the cinema and the wireless. They have long been recognized as extremely effective means for influencing the masses and giving them an artistic education—KURELLA

—The Five-Year-Plan and The Cultural Revolution.

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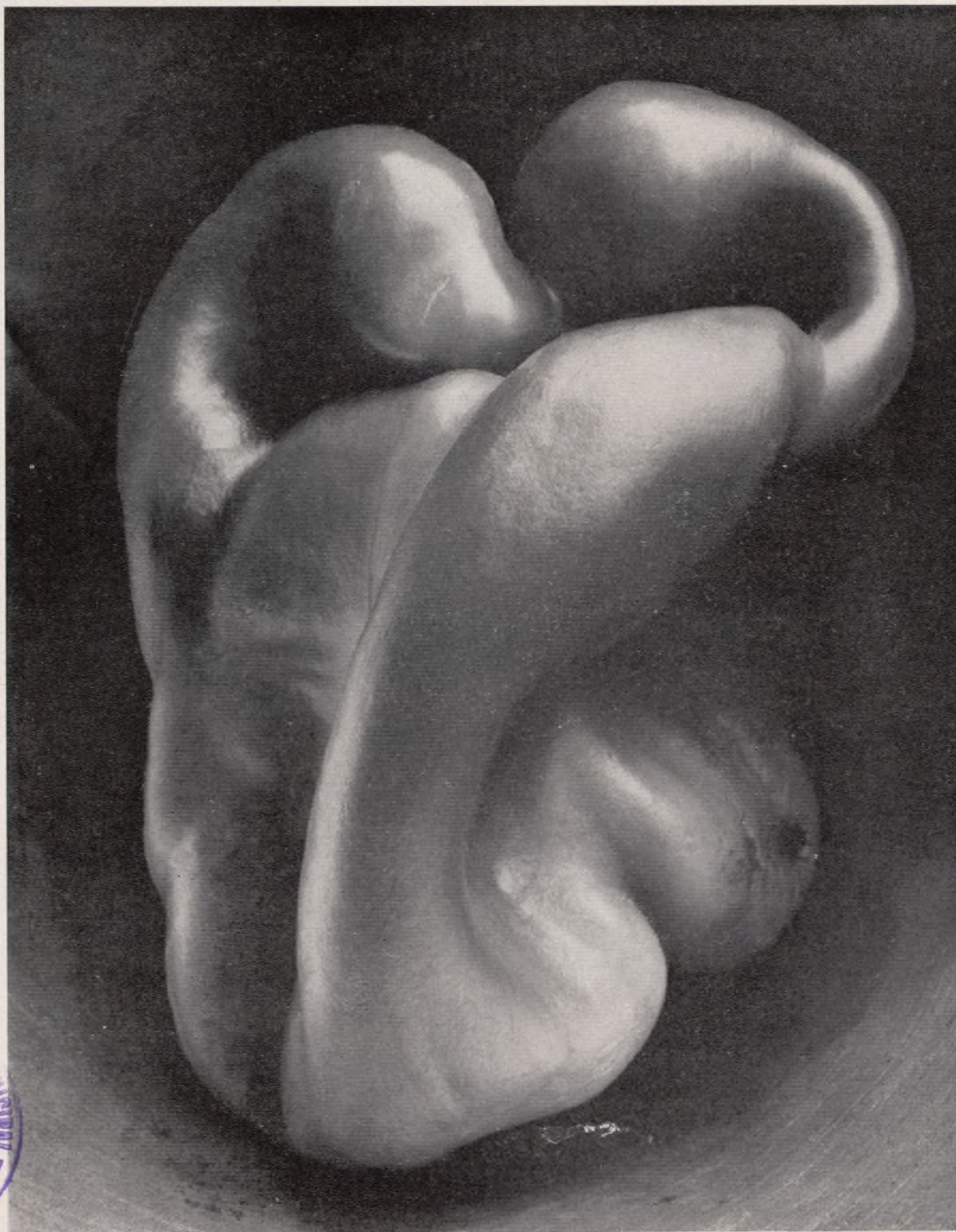
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PEPPER

## EDWARD WESTON

**E**DWARD WESTON is an example of how America ignores first rate artists. It is more than fifteen years since Weston produced the first of his enormous volume of photographs, the majority of which have carried his name and the technique associated with his method, far around the world. But in the United States he is still known to an extremely limited number of people, chiefly, we believe, because the fundamental idea behind his conceptions and the unsweetened vitality of his results are too bold, and creatively too profound, for the type of American "mind" that "likes photography." Weston's photography is not what the average Hollywood movie-photographer would rate as "good": the quality of

his work is a permanent message to future proletarian technicians, both of the still and of the film camera, against the bourgeois "technique" of American photography that is even today, in spite of Soviet camera-accomplishments, a befuddled standard to a great part of the world. Here, in this man's work, the product of an honest eye, is no unhealthy artificialism of design, no back-lighting or cross-lighting, a complete absence of conventional technical sentimentalism, etc. . . .

Edward Weston's work represents the high-point of photography in the United States—its healthiest and most vital still-camera accomplishment.

Ayuntamiento de Madrid





# STATEMENT

BY

EDWARD WESTON



**1931**—today—the tempo of life accelerated—with airplane and wireless as speed symbols—with senses quickened—minds cross-fertilized by intercommunication and teeming with fresh impulse.

Today—photography—with capacity to meet new demands, ready to record instantaneously—shutter co-ordinating with the vision of interest impulse—one's intuitive recognition of life, to record if desired, a thousand impressions in a thousand seconds, to stop a bullet's flight, or to slowly, surely, decisively expose for the very essence of the thing before the lens.

Recording the objective, the physical facts of things, through photography, does not preclude the communication in the finished work, of the primal, subjective motive. **AN ABSTRACT IDEA CAN BE CONVEYED THROUGH EXACT REPRODUCTION:** photography can be used as a means.

Authentic photography in no way imitates nor supplants paintings: but has its own approach and technical tradition. Photography must be,—Photographic. Only then has it intrinsic value, only then can its unique qualities be isolated, become important. Within bounds the medium is adequate, fresh, vital: without, it is imitative and ridiculous!

This is the approach: one must prevision and feel, **BEFORE EXPOSURE**, the finished print—complete in all its values, in every detail—when focusing upon the camera ground-glass. Then the shutter's release times for all time this image, this conception, never to be changed by after-thought, by subsequent manipulation. The creative force is released coincident with the shutter's release. There is no substitute for amazement felt, significance realized, at the **TIME of EXPOSURE**.

Developing and printing become but a careful carrying on of the original conception, so that the first print from a negative should be as fine as it will yield.

Life is a coherent whole: rocks, clouds, trees, shells, torsos, smokestacks, peppers are interrelated, interdependent parts of the whole. Rhythms from one, be come symbols of all. The creative force in man feels and records these rhythms, these forms, with the medium most suitable to him—the individual—sensing the cause, the life within, the quintessence revealed directly without the subterfuge of impressionism, beyond the range of human consciousness, apart from the psychologically tangible.

Not the mystery of fog nor the vagueness from smoked glasses, but the greater wonder of revelation, —seeing more clearly than the eyes see, so that a tree becomes more than an obvious tree.

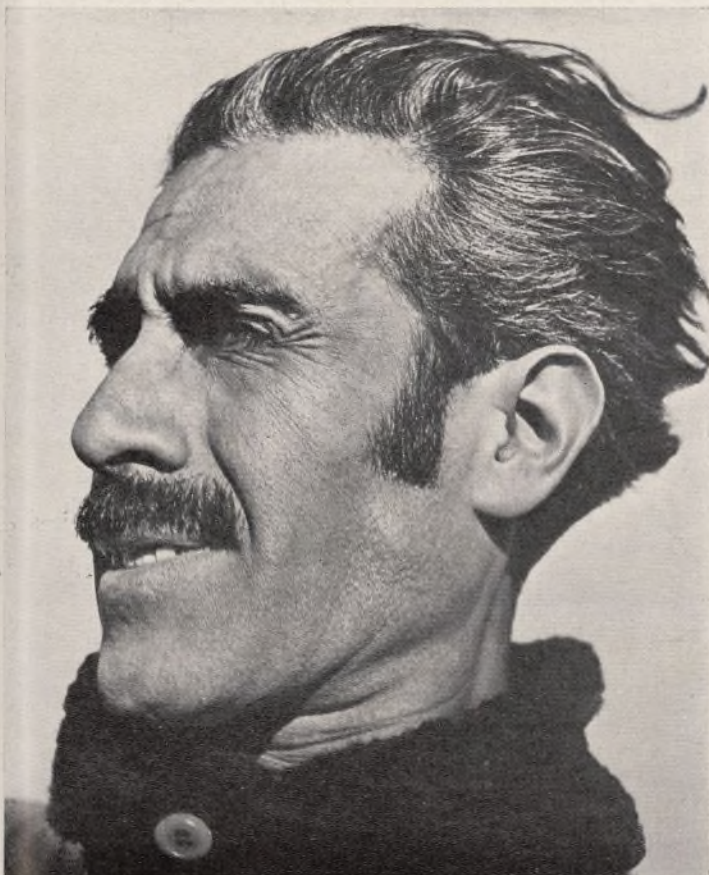
Not fanciful interpretation,—the noting of superficial phase or transitory mood: but direct presentation of **THINGS in THEMSELVES**.

## TECHNICAL REMARKS

These photographs,—excepting portraits—are contact prints from direct 8x10 negatives, made with a rectilinear lens costing \$5.00,—this mentioned because of previous remarks and questions. The portraits are enlarged from 3 1/4 x 4 1/2 Graflex negatives, the camera usually held in hands.

Edward Weston, Carmel, Cal.





**E**DWARD WESTON is an internationally known photographer who lives and carries on his main work in Carmel, California. After several years spent in Mexico, where he contacted his contemporaries in the field of painting, Orozco and Diego Rivera, Weston returned to the United States and produced a mass of photographs which have had revolutionary consequences in expanding the powers and developing the dynamic of the still-camera. Reproductions of four of his prints appear in the present issue. Weston's most noted work is in his groups of peppers, tree-roots and early industrial subjects.



KELP



# SCENARIO and DIRECTION

by V. I. PUDOVKIN

**I**N response to a number of inquiries and requests, **Experimental Cinema** informs its readers that the Christel Gang translation of Pudovkin's book, **Film Direction and Film Manuscript**, the first half of which was published in the February and June, 1930, issues respectively, is the first and only translation of this work published in the United States. An English translation has been published in Great Britain, but this is not available on the American market. With this number, however, **Experimental Cinema** discontinues the serialization of Christel Gang's translation and prints instead a recent manuscript by Pudovkin dealing with present developments in his methodology. As Pudovkin himself makes clear in the course of this essay, the ideas formulated in his book, which was first published in the U.S.S.R. four years ago, are now obsolete when considered in relation to the rapid growth of Soviet film-technique. Its appearance was "unfortunate," to use Pudovkin's own word, in view of the radical advances and changes that Pudovkin himself has made in his entire method. There seems, therefore, to the editors of **Experimental Cinema**, no valid reason for continuing this outmoded work at the present stage of the evolution of the Soviet cinema.

## THE EDITORS

**R**READING for the first time a scenario by Alexander Rjechevsky, I experienced a sensation until then unknown to me.

While reading it, the scenario created the same emotion in me as a literary work. I say unknown sensation because, for reasons unexplained, the authors of scenarios always use, to express themselves, a style characterized by its platitude and banality. All scenarists seem to forget that the word is their only means means of expression; it is by means of the word that they must convey to the director the complex whole of their ideas and sensations which, on the other hand, the screen must convey to the spectator. The co-operation of the scenarist and director is very important. Until now this was partially realized by meetings, discussions, conversations, but as a rule, the author of a scenario, having sold his work to a firm, was from then on completely out of touch with actual production and grew indignant against the director who often distorted his work. The lack of coincidence of scenario and film can often be ascribed to the incompetence of a director, but is in most cases due to reciprocal misunderstanding. The erroneous propaganda which called for the writing of the scenario as a simple series of frames, has given unsatisfactory results. Four years ago I, unfortunately, took part in this campaign of "the idea thru the picture". It must be said that then scenarists were exclusively preoccupied with montage. The content of the film, its idea, its intentions, were all united in the theme. The director limited himself to taking care of the simplest descriptive montages: a departing train, a well mounted fire, were considered fair results.

Times have changed. The cinema has progressed. The cinema-creators of today know how to impart to an audience, by a series of montage, very complicated abstract notions. The domain of the motion picture is broadening. Its possibilities are increasing: that which some time ago seemed impossible of expression thru the film is today a tangible and clear reality wherefrom we draw our best productions. It would be astonishing, if, in view of such changes, the scenario writers, so closely linked with the realization of the film, were not to transform their technique. Many directors, however, write their own scenarios. They jot them down on **montage sheets**, simple scheme or technical plan of work for shooting. In such cases everything must be read between the lines.

- 1.—Paul's face.
- 2.—Fist.
- 3.—Ivan's face.
- 4.—Fist pounding table.
- 5.—Table collapses.
- 6.—Ivan's face, etc.

What about Ivan's face, what is this pounding fist, what happens to Ivan? Nothing is indicated . . . Everything is clear only to the director, who, briefly, telegraphically, determines the nature of the frames discovered and shot by himself . . . This telegraphic style has unfortunately been adopted by the authors of scenarios. To think only in pictures,—to do the work of the director, in other words, often leads the scenarist into blind alleys. He forgets that in his work, contrary to the purpose of the montage sheets, everything must be contained in the lines. The word is his instrument. He must master it to perfection; otherwise it is inevitable that his work be inaccurately and superficially felt by the director.

Consequence: the interpretations of the theme are variable and the film loses all its value. In Rjechevsky, however, we have an interesting example of scenarios profoundly elaborated in their content. For instance:

Extract from "The 26 Communists of Baku:"

- The front.
- Against the spectator, completely against him, the inseparable wall of maddened machine-guns, crackling.
- Covered with blood a soldier of the red army meditates at length; at last he finds . . .
- He has something to say to the whites . . .
- He writes it down on paper. Then he plunges back into his long meditations; several times, a vague motion with his hand to better determine the specific weight of the first word with which he wishes to begin his speech. Mysteriously, he smiles, motions hopelessly with his hand and writes at last in best penmanship, large upon the paper. . .
- Bastards!



- The whites fall, one after another, in the ranks; thru the holes in their chutes, could be seen before one's self a stretch where the shells of the Reds were bursting; a tank, leaning on its side, in distress, called for help like a semaphore.
- In close-up, the Red trenches; a commander standing on the parapet howls something.
- Fear, dread . . . Over the parapet appear first the bayonets; then, congealed, heads, only the faces of Red soldiers, somber and lifeless that stare, straight ahead of them.
- Knocking like mad, the Red machine-guns prepare the attack; in close-up, an agonizing man lies, breathing with difficulty. Our soldier looks at him; he thinks, very moved; tears in his eyes, he continues his message to the whites . . .
- My land swells, and my heart, too, swells. . .
- In close-up, Red trenches and the Red chief howling on the parapet.
- Fear, dread . . . Over the parapet appear first the bayonets; then, congealed, heads, only the faces of Red soldiers, somber and lifeless, which stare straight ahead of them.
- Completely against the frightful wall where the Red soldiers are, our soldier who has just been wounded pins his message to the whites on a bayonet, and on the paper is written . . .
- At any rate, you shall be massacred. The Revolution wants to make victims of you . . .
- Farewell upon this good word!
- And in the smoke of the White's trench, faces stare; upon these faces fear appears when they see, black and red in the smoke, the line of Reds advancing to attack. . .
- At the edge of a naked precipice, under heavy clouds, over endless water,—a great river or perhaps blue sea—great shells bursting successively . . .
- A Russian izba was afire . . .

I concede that in this case the subtitles are of primordial importance. But we have in this scenario an example of verbal expression which attains very great intensity. There is no possible wavering; the director may do less well than the scenario, but he will not be able to do something absolutely "different". The words express too exact a picture; the director will have no occasion to become tied up.

The Soviet cinema as a whole attained its forms by searching for new themes which until then seemed inaccessible and were not accepted by the "representatives of art." Rjchevsky has the virtue, his aims being limited, to pose problems bravely before the director; he determines the emotional content and the sense of the film without determining the visual contours. At times he even does no more than to give the impulse; a very determined form would indeed only confuse the director by imposing upon him fixed visual contours instead of indicating sensations to be expressed, the sense of the work.

#### Extracts from a Scenario

- Beginning.
- A naked and majestic precipice. Upon this precipice, some pine or other of remarkable beauty. Nearby, (you know how they are) a Russian izba. Near the izba, over the precipice,

the clouds are heavy, the wind tears, and here is the endless water, a great river or the blue sea, perhaps; here a man stands, congealed.

- The wind, the wind, the wind that blows across God's whole world . . .
- Here: we see, on this same precipice, near this same izba, under these heavy clouds, while the wind howls over the endless water, blue sea or great river, we see a man who
- Slowly
- with anguish
- frenzied
- his hands cupped around his mouth that his voice may carry
- a man who weeps, hiccoughs and speaks . . .
- he shouts, the man, desperately
- he howls . . .
- from an edge of the precipice
- above the immense water
- to the other shore
- and here, in close-up, horsemen rush forward. . .
- dash forth . . .
- then ride away . . .
- And to them the man slowly spoke, wept . . .
- And screamed
- As tho questioning them
- "The father is dying! He asks me what you have invented, you men? Can we foresee a new life? Or, like the father, will I too be afraid to live?"
- The water . . .
- On the other distant shore
- The horsemen stop suddenly;
- and an open-hearted guy
- who answers
- over the vast water
- toward the precipice, toward the man who questions; he howls, enthused and indignant . . .
- "You'll remain here!"
- Enthusiastic, indignant, our partisan, open-hearted fellow, howls . . .
- "It will be hard during the first hundred and twenty years . . .
- but after that, it will be easy!"
- then the man of the precipice goes towards the izba.
- disappears.
- here he is in the izba, near the father, an emaciated, bony muzhik, agonizing.
- the son speaks, he speaks at length about something, he relates something to his dying father . . . then he is silent.
- the old muzhik who is agonizing turns on his side. Stubborn, whimsical,—he says with simplicity:
- I will not die today!

Here the power of the words does not serve to indicate how, where and what is to be photographed; the word serves only to convey the emotion which will be felt by the spectator before the future montage. Rjchevsky who possesses the **Verb**, does not abandon his director to the free play and hazard of the camera's findings. What he says in the scenario presides over the work of the director. All the technical work of the director, all the ingenuity of the man who handles camera, film and scissors, must be directed towards preserving the general tendency and inte-



grality of the work, beginning with the very moment the latter passes from the word into purely cinematic composition.

Rjechevsky does not concern himself with foreshortenings, lengths, close-ups, or background; and, nevertheless, in reading, one feels the rhythm of the film. Forms, foreshortenings, lights, character and movements of the actors, —all this, without direct indication, is contained in the verbal composition. Moreover Rjechevsky demands ingenuity. The indication: "Perhaps blue sea"; seems at first negative. (What, in fine, river or sea?); in reality there is herein contained a precise directive for research and for shooting. The breadth, the austerity and majesty of the river which is "perhaps a blue sea" cannot be translated by a simple shot of the Volga, from a bridge. A whole montage composition is here given, which includes change of light, change of camera-position, and perhaps even the incorporation of other material having no relation to water.

Rjechevsky, therefore, works truly in the spirit of our cinema: he possesses at the same time the sense of the word and the infallible scent of visual expression, common gift of film creators and those who understand the laws of cinegraphic composition.

Here, in the scenario of the "26 Communists of Baku", is the siege of the city by the Turks. The weakened Red soldiers and the population struggle madly to hold the city. The author of the scenario in a remarkable episode, shows the desperate struggle in striking fashion. A fire. The firemen and those helping them, work frantically. Above the burning house and in the street, shells are bursting, ripping open the fire hoses and killing and wounding the firemen; the shells howl, but the people stubbornly extinguish the conflagration. Thus Rjechevsky does not show us the trenches, the two opposing sides; he does not limit himself to showing, as is the custom, the bursting shell and its ravages. He sets down, point blank, a sharp picture; the strained struggle of the people, the same as those who are outside the city in the trenches, and he rains down the enemies' shells upon them. The water sprouting out of the punctured hoses grips the mind like the blood that would flow from the torn veins of a soldier. The people ever again dashing amid the flames to save the victims is a spectacle of a power sharper and more certain than any desperate attack imaginable.

The composition of the scenarist is interesting. In his latest works: *The Sixteenth*, *It is Said in the Mountains* and *The 26*, there is no composition of the theme in the ordinary sense of the word. His films do not aim to chronologically describe the fate of the characters. The scenario is divided into a series of episodic pictures connected only by the march of the **central idea** rather than by the dramatic development of situations.

With Rjechevsky, very often, a character appears only to provoke the spectators and then to disappear forever. At times, he is incorporated in the construction of an episode to underline emotion.

In *The 26* the Soviet votes for the intervention of the British. The bloody head of a Red soldier is seen rising in the smoke of a crackling machine-gun and shouting to his dying comrade:

—We are being betrayed somewhere, Petka!

In "Life is Beautiful" there is a story and characters whose fates interests the author. His stories are characterized by the fact that they are not complicated like those

of other scenarists who, to define their characters and convey abstract notions, create complicated entanglements which distort the cinegraphic realization of the film. Indeed, in order to define a character by placing his destiny in conflict with that of others and in order to do so in a naturalistic manner with the help of multiple occurrences in a chronological order, it is generally necessary to employ an enormous quantity of descriptive material. This surplus burden (**surcharge**) forcibly makes the director's tasks very superficial. He lacks time (the film being limited to 2000-2500 meters) to deepen his work.

The story of "Life is Beautiful" is very simple and the characters are few. No complicated detail which might in itself be the expression of any idea. A few encounters, well worked out in depth.

It is interesting to note that Rjechevsky's characters are always composed of **types**. His works are always saturated with the **pathetique**. His heroes do not require any preliminary characterizations, nurtured as they are with the true heroism of our times. To him, "fighter of the Red Army" is a word of enormous significance; this type, in long cloak, red star on his cap, must move the spectator with a **certain** emotion when he appears on the screen; the reflex must be clear as might be that of a French patriot at the sight of Napoleon's hat and gray coat.

Thus Rjechevsky treats types in his scenarios. In his conception, it is a matter of principle that the character who will be photographed must not "act a part," it is not by the skill of his "acting" that he must be able to suggest what he is or is not. Rjechevsky requires that the character appearing on the screen must by that fact alone, by his exterior whole, bound to the interior picture, incarnate in the mind of the spectator a well defined type. Alexander Rjechevsky is therefore one of our best scenarists. He has completely integrated himself in our epoch. His works have a very clear **tendency** which, refracted upon the creative level, transforms itself into a broad and profound sensation of our Soviet reality (**actualite**). His emphasis is not banal propaganda but true, moving greatness; it is, in my opinion, the image of the first splendid **elan** which swept our country in the days of civil war.

**T**O those of our readers who have been waiting months for the appearance of the third issue of *Experimental Cinema*, we desire to emphasize that *Experimental Cinema* will continue to be published. In this respect, we must state, that, contrary to our earlier advertising and cover-announcement, *Experimental Cinema* will not appear under the classification of a monthly magazine, but will be published **BY NUMBER**. This, however, will in no way affect subscriptions, past, present, or future. Subscribers will receive **TWELVE** issues of the magazine, exactly as if it were being published at twelve regular intervals in the course of a year. We are emphatic to state that this "number" policy is due chiefly to our great financial difficulties. We cannot appear with any regularity and at the same time put out the type of issue which we have taken as our standard, under the present severely strained and limited status of our finances.

If our readers in this country and abroad will cooperate with us to the extent of helping us build our sustaining fund, we shall be able to appear with greater regularity.



# One Hour with Gilbert Seldes Is Too Much

THE clever sentimentality of Seldes is patent in every word he writes. He is always the infallible man of letters whether he is discoursing on the future of drink, the weather, Al Smith, love, communism or the prospects of cinema. His appalling glibness of manner appears to overcome all obstacles. The most dynamic force begins to lose its power when it comes up against his lukewarm, effortless pen. It is impossible to recognize the original substance after it has passed through his fine hands. Rock becomes as water when he says the word. All is illusion. Fancy is king, so let us exalt in kingly escape, is his password to the world around him.

His capacity in short for extracting and paralyzing the heart of a thing and leaving the shell for the reader to play with, is manifest in every sentence of the book before me on the Cinema, a book, which as an expression of the Cinema year 1929 (which unreeled the work of Eisenstein, Vertov, Pudovkin, Dovjenco) leaves about as powerful an impression on the reader as a feather floating down the sides of a skyscraper on a cloudy day.

Thus, Seldes, in his casual approach to the Soviet film, takes care to exaggerate the most obvious defects of the films,—the hammer-vendome-palace episode from "New Babylon," or the omission of Trotzky from "Ten Days that Shook the World," etc., in order to substantiate in his own confused mind, the paltry notion that cinematic principle is one thing and social concept another. As though it is possible to experience the one without the other. As though it is faintly possible for even the most exacting cinematic competence to produce a film without involving some definite social point of view.

Seldes, however, is only interested in the cake and "disdains the dough that bakes it." While the Soviet film appears to content him emotionally, he cannot let go of his crusty individualism long enough to accept the intellectual or social basis of the Soviet film, a separation that makes for compromise, cowardice and dishonesty.

It is neither expected nor desired that Mr. Seldes accept the social basis of the Soviet film but it certainly is expected and desired of him that he make clear **what social basis** he does accept—in the Hollywood film. And his inability to clarify his ideas as to why he finds the Soviet film so emotionally satisfying and yet so intellectually dissatisfying, as well as his refusal to expose the hollowness of the American "social" film, betrays not only his blindness as a film critic but clearly reveals his deep social fascism as well.

Seldes deprecates the brutality while admiring the ingenuity of the drawbridge episode in "Ten Days," one of the most powerful incidents in the film. "As a symbol, he writes, "it was brutal and overworked and ineffective; as an image of the confusion, the terror, the emotional catastrophe of the ten revolutionary days, it was equally brutal and overworked, but it did not lack effect." It is obvious that the effect of the symbol was lost on the insipid Seldes. These were "Ten Days that Shook the World." What did Mr. Seldes expect, a milkshake? Why all this distrust and fear of "background" become foreground so characteristic of intellectuals of the calibre of Gilbert Seldes. What then are the problems of the day, if not the problems of the working masses, and in what films, in what

literature of the day are these problems presented so passionately, so dynamically, as in the Soviet film, or in Soviet literature, even in the least of them. Where is social responsibility to the masses so inexorably a part of creative effort, as it should be, as in the Soviet Union? Where lies the profound emptiness of Western art, if not in its lack of **social responsibility**, the lack of which makes an individualistic painter like Picasso, milk and water; the fullness of which endows a creator like Dovjenco with almost biblical spiritual integrity. "Seeds of Freedom," the Soviet film of Jewish struggle, may be weak cinematically, yet the basis of the film is so vitally concerned with certain problems of our time that the film breaks thru the screen and becomes as important as life. How much superior is a film of this kind to the cinematically competent but socially decadent film, "Patriot" of Ernst Lubitsch.

But by his own admission Mr. Seldes has never experienced the spiritual conversion of the Russian masses. Implicit in this admission is the feeling that he has never undergone much of any conversion, otherwise his pen would have absorbed the power such a conviction would lend it. Undoubtedly "Ten Days That Shook the World" is a pretty strong dose of medicine for the child who is "puzzled by the question where the light goes when it goes out" and who wonders "whether a tree falling in the depth of a forest makes a noise when there is no one by to hear." The emptiness of Seldes is not only uncontained; it is cumulative as well.

He objects to the propaganda of the Soviet film on the basis that it is crude and bitter and naive. In New Babylon "the action is accelerated during the triumph of the Communards, so that sewing machines run faster and the whole world grows suddenly lighthearted and happy." In "Mother" he quotes the prison-guard insect sequence. Both of these episodes to this reader are emotionally exhilarating to a high degree and logically developed in the film. Propaganda when it becomes exquisitely fused in the spirit, the tone of the film, is its own justification. And to say that the omission of Trotzky from "Ten Days" cancels a good deal of the character of the film is as baseless as citing the elimination of John Brown from "The Birth of a Nation" as an instance of silly American propaganda. The reality of the film is there.

If it is true, as Mr. Seldes suggests, that great men and great art can evolve out of Fascism as well as out of any other ism, where then, are the signs, the portents of greatness, or of immanent greatness in Fascism? We would like to experience the moral fervor of a fascist film or the warmth of fascist fellowship. Where can one find such ecstasy? In "The Crowd," in the Italian film "Kiff Tebi?" Where the root is dead you cannot expect fulfillment of the flower.

To superpose "montage" on the American or European film today without a corresponding change in the social basis of the film will not make films any better or any worse than they already are. It is like giving the sun-cure to an incurable consumptive in order to give his body some semblance to the flush of life.

Seldes's book ends as though Eisenstein, Pudovkin, or Dovjenco had never existed. Only Chaplin, the quicksand in which Seldes is continually refreshing his sense of won-



der and escape, emerges out of the thin air, a winged, tragic figure.

"The moving picture is an illusion," writes Seldes and he bases his entire esthetic of the film on the potentialities of this statement. It is no wonder then that he has failed to understand the meaning or realize the possibilities of "montage" since to him it is merely a trick, an illusion. And it

is no wonder then since he has apparently embraced social-facism, that he has failed to penetrate the Soviet film in both its cinematic and social implications. One hour with Mr. Seldes is too much—much too much.

1. "An Hour with the Movies and Talkies"—Gilbert Seldes. Lippincott, Philadelphia—\$1.00.

DAVID PLATT.



"Fragment of  
an Empire"

## TURK-SIB AND THE SOVIET FACT

by J. LENGYEL

"TURK-SIB" initiates a new stage of film-development. It is the step from the film-play to film-reality. From a finished picture of reconstructed reality to the reality of fact and deed. "Turk-Sib" has predecessors. Every educational film, every travel film, is in a way a predecessor, just as all films contain a larger or smaller kernel of reality.

In this case, however, the quantity of reality becomes an artistic quality.

"Turk-Sib" is a stretch of railroad built to make available the wealth of cotton of Turkestan for the industries of the Soviet Republic and the wealth of timber and grain of Siberia for the industries of Turkestan. The specific



reason lies much deeper. Even in capitalist countries, railroads, giant ships, airplanes and gigantic works are being built. But that alone is not a satisfactory reason for dramatizing them, for art demands the motivation of it. Art when it shows the bloody nudity of birth must also show the cause. A strategic railroad which is constructed in one of the capitalist countries for the purpose of transporting human beings like cattle, or a railroad which is built in a capitalist country to squeeze out from the sweat of the workers fat dividends for the stockholders—is, when one shows it through the camera lens, a bloody miscarriage of a despised and murderous system. But human greatness gives to the machine-epos, "Turk-Sib", the necessary purpose and goal of this colossal work. Its greatness lies in the fact that to the question "Why?" "What Purpose?" the answer is given: "Here is socialist construction in practice." The socialist construction is the creative-moral factor, of which this deed, the construction of the railroad, imparts to established reality, the sense, the strength and the enthusiasm of the film.

The picture reminds us that the world-bourgeoisie realize with bitterness that they are being confronted with a territory where they have nothing more to say. It is the territory of the world's first socialist construction, evidenced in the will of man and machine welded together in the act of creating a new world. In this case, the Russians' own version of one of the important manifestations of the 5-Year Plan in the world-scheme of things, was called TURK-SIB. . . .

"Turk-Sib 1931! Turk-Sib 31! Turk-Sib 31" . . . According to the Five-Year Plan, "Turk-Sib must be completed in the summer of 1931". But by the time it reached the German screen, it was called "Turk-Sib 1930". For Turk-Sib has been finished in 1930, and not only, as we for a short time believed, in the Fall, but already in May of this past year. What lies between Turk-Sib 31 and Turk-Sib 30 is called "socialist competition", which must not be confused with cut-throat, capitalist competition. What we see with ecstatic eyes is the unchecked, increasing speed of the Soviet working-mass, which is leading humanity, to use the words of Friedrich Engels, "out of the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom."

The film-art of the Soviet Union has traveled only one way, the way in which the reality of Communist accomplishment was reflected. In spite of the short span of time, many important periods have been traversed, the enumeration of which does not seem superfluous to us.

The first period "Polikuschka" and "Aelita." Two films, outwardly fundamentally different, and still not without inner connection. "Polikuschka", which was based on a novel by Tolstoi, deals with a poor, good muzhik with trembling soul. Here one looks backward, deeply, into the past, into the Russia that is rapidly disappearing, body and soul. In "Aelita", a Utopian film, one deals with men of the future and inhabitants of Mars. Films of this category look forward to the fantastic future, amusing but not scientific or ideologically founded.

The second period yielded unforgettable creations. It begins with "The Armored Cruiser Prince Potemkin." To this group belong also the remarkable films "Ten Days That Shook the World" and "The End of St. Petersburg", and also "Mother" and the anti-imperialist film "Storm Over Asia." Here, historical reality was reconstructed. The reflected reality of these film-creations possesses a

passion and a natural integrity that gives it the value of a deed, or a revolutionary occasion, of the present day.

Then follows a group—narrow in its historical subject-matter but great in its true-to-life quality—representing the life of the individual. Problems arose from the new order of things, problems which are still in discussion since the great Revolution of 1917. The film "Bed and Sofa" (sometimes known as "Three In a Basement") by Alexander Room, and a number of other films, which unfortunately were not shown in Germany attacked the problems which arise when out of the ruins of the older order of things a new life is in the course of creation.

The next step is "Turk-Sib". A forerunner of "Turk-Sib" was Eisenstein's "Old and New", which had for a theme socialist construction in the field of agriculture. However, this film does not sustain itself without artificialism. Other predecessors of "Turk-Sib" were the films "Pamir", "Afghanistan", "descriptive" films such as "A Trip through the Soviet Union" and the culture films in general. These educational films are all closer related to "Turk-Sib" than the kino-eye films of Vertov, where there is a very strong sense of being but a very meager sense of self-consciousness.

New problems always arise in individual life. The growth of socialist society offers such manifold problems that art can never cease creating. Inasmuch as these problems were a part of the reality of their time, they will remain works of art for the future. Let us recall "Potemkin". An artistic, deeply felt reality here connects with strong roots into the life of the individual. The role of a work of art is not ended when a new work of art of the time appears. When there are close ties established with the basic social structure of life, the work of art remains and outlives new art-works when the new are untrue and unreal.

The director of the film "Turk-Sib" is Victor Turin. If we mention him only now after we have just asserted that the directing in "Turk-Sib" was the work of the spirit of socialist construction, we believe that in this way we do honor to Turin in the highest degree. By this he is "promoted" from being the director of a great film to the status of an important member of a great deed, and he is considered on a level with the workers who in the icy cold of Siberia and in the torrid heat of Turkestan are occupied with the greatest human deeds in the world today.

"Turk-Sib" flashes on the screens of the world. But already film-technique has taken a step forward. The talking, sound and colored film of America is a technical advancement. However, in the Soviet Union, the first very promising attempts are already being made. Technical improvements cannot be a hindrance to an advancing social class in spite of the fact that the technical facilities are still numerically greater in the hands of the opponent. Very soon the sound film will signify a further gain for the Soviet kino. The civilization of the bourgeoisie has still some of its plundered riches to show. But withered, weak and demoralized as it is, it has nothing to say. Wait until the Soviet sound film shall sound! That will be the real beginning of the new, valuable, world-important sound film! The time is not far off now; one can await it with patience. The Soviet sound film will keep the promise which the Soviet silent film made. . . . Time and fate are working for the advancing proletariat.

(Translated by Eleonore Erb)



# HOLLYWOOD BULLETIN

## FOUR MORE SOVIET FILMS IN HOLLYWOOD

OUTSIDE of increased unemployment, a large number of starvation-suicides and an \$8,000,000 bank-robbery, the only events of genuine significance that have occurred in the American film-capital since the last issue of *Experimental Cinema* (June, 1930) are the successive, although widely separated, showings of four Soviet films. These four productions: *Old and New*, *Turk-Sib*, *A Fragment of an Empire* and *China Express*, were enthusiastically received. As in the case of the preceding eight Soviet showings in Hollywood (see *Hollywood Bulletin* in E. C. of June, 1930), the most whole-hearted and intelligent reception came from the lay public; the most confused, befuddled and downright stupid reactions from the film-industry—that is, from the so-called “professionals” and “technicians,” the job-holders. *Old and New*, because it had been publicized and talked about for a long time previous (under the former title of *The General Line*), and also because its screening at the Filmarte coincided with the heralded arrival of Eisenstein in Hollywood, drew the largest crowds of any of these four pictures, but it was by no means the most popular nor the best understood.

Judging by the personal reactions of individuals contacted, we should say that *Fragment of an Empire* was the most extensively admired and that *China Express* was next. *Turk-Sib* elicited applause mainly from the type of native boobery that sees “propaganda” the moment a capitalist is portrayed as a rattlesnake or a death’s-head. *Turk-Sib* had none of the sheer communist ecstasy of *Old and New*, none of the passion and bitterness of Ermier’s *Fragment* and certainly none of the violence of the younger Trauberg’s melodrama, *China Express*. This last picture aroused the most vehement bursts of applause (except for a single sequence in *Fragment*, which surpassed it in this respect) of any Filmarte picture since the showing of *Ten Days* many months ago. *Turk-Sib* is what is always taken as a “purely cultural” film, i.e., a film which, important enough in itself, makes no indictment of slavery-systems and modestly contents itself with landscapes, railroad engineering and triumphs over Nature. *Turk-Sib* is culture, but *Old and New*, incorporating a reel or two on the ruthlessness and greed of the kulaks, is not “culture,” and as to *Fragment of an Empire*—it had a sequence in which a bewildered peasant demanded to know who was running the new society of Russia and the answer given was a panorama of the workers and peasants of the Communist Republic, a sure indication that Ermier’s picture was not “culture” but “propaganda.” Nevertheless, it was this picture that made the greatest impression in Hollywood and on the largest number of individuals. “It’s propaganda,” they said, “but marvelous stuff anyway.” Even the cameramen this time forgot to insist that they had “done this sort of thing ten years ago.” It was surprising to find as many as two photographers who voluntarily stated that the battle-field scenes in *Fragment of an Empire*, which, you may remember, were taken in solid darkness broken only by a long searchlight following a fleeing soldier across the screen, should have been thought of in connection with a certain recent war-picture. This was an almost “revolutionary” advance over the arrogance and inferiority kick-up that characterized the film-colony’s reactions to the earlier Soviet films shown here.

## EISENSTEIN IN MEXICO

It will be better to pass over the hectic “career” of Eisenstein in Hollywood. We had originally planned, and had advertised to that effect, to give our readers a detailed account of what Eisenstein’s life was like in the American film-capital. We wanted to print a graphic description of his reception here, his “home-life,” as the American bourgeoisie always say, his troubles, the endless “stalling,” the rejection of story after story, either by himself or by the company, each taking its turn at this game. We wanted to have a good laugh with our readers at the hypocrisy and sycophancy of certain trade journals which adulated the man to the heavens during the initial period of his “lionization” but which suddenly changed their tone into one of cheap sneering and domestic whitewashing as soon as Eisenstein was definitely dropped from the company that had engaged him . . . It is best, however, not to touch these sores. We must, for various reasons, modestly content ourselves with a half-hearted desire to be a bit merciful to the industry that could find no place for the Russian’s genius and not one dollar out of its millions for a picture under his direction. The picture that Eisenstein brings with him from Mexico will no doubt make history enough for our Hollywood-ridden Western hemisphere.

Shortly after his severance with the company, Eisenstein was privately financed by individuals who had previously admired his work. His backers are in no way connected with the film-industry. Eisenstein is in Mexico now, working in the third or fourth month on an original project. The film Eisenstein is making in Mexico is non-political. He is producing a film on the life of an old Mexican tribe.

The recent “trouble” he encountered there while “shooting” some Mexican peasants’ hovels was more complicated than, but not half so drastic as, the outside world believed. There have been whispers from individuals who are “in” on the project about a “mysterious” telegram from a certain official headquarter in Hollywood. You can judge for yourself whose slimy hands have been spoiling the pie. But meantime Eisenstein, Alexandrov and Tisse continue to make their film. This production out of the heart of Mexico will have sound. It will be the first important film to come from that wonderful land to the South.

Certain Americans have found Mexico a good place for oil-wells, but have never thought of it for films, except of a luridly slanderous type. Eisenstein, on the other hand, finds much down there that is important and magnificent.

By all the indications, his film should be equally as important.

## FLAHERTY GOES TO RUSSIA

Ten years of waiting. Eight years of polite “stalling” from the Rockefeller Institute—interested, oh so interested in the “advancement” of “culture” (culture officially interpreted, of course). Years and years of crushed efforts in Hollywood. Trying to speak the language of barbarians and not succeeding. Five years of wasted energy trying to raise \$25,000 to film the culture and customs of a fast-dying tribe of American Indians. And now Robert Flaherty, the director of *Nanook of the North* (financed by a fur-company because of its advertising value) and of



Moana of the South Seas (mutilated by the producers before release), is enroute to the USSR, the Free Workers' Republic, to discuss with the Sovkino Corporation a film, or possibly a number of films, to be made by him on the tribes of Soviet Central Asia. Flaherty will attempt in these films to provide European Russia, as well as the world at large, with a clear and exact understanding of the economic organization of the Tartar and Mongolian tribes that constitute the bulwark of the Soviet Union in Asiatic Russia. A Soviet *Nanook* or *Moana* should have enormous value, in building socialism among these tribes. Sovkino couldn't have picked a better man for this job than Flaherty. The film he makes there should considerably expand the distribution of the Soviet product: it should have access to places where the dramatic films, because of fancied political "reasons," are not permitted.



ALEXANDROV AND CHARLIE CHAPLIN IN A ROW BOAT OFF CATALINA ISLAND, CALIFORNIA. Photo by Eisenstein.

## On a Theory of "Sources"

by SAMUEL BRODY

ELIE FAURE presented us with a useful term when he invented the word "cinemetaphysics." In recent years there have arisen enterprising young cinema enthusiasts in a number of countries to whose writings and activities Faure's learned term applies to perfection. All these groups and individuals may be designated as "cinemetaphysicians," the word meaning those who, having emerged from some field—usually the literary—wherein they have failed to capture laurels, seek to heap upon the comparatively virgin field of the movie a sort of high-sounding witchcraft with awes the uninitiated and nauseates the wise.

It is the belief that Mr. Potamkin has taken his place in the ranks of this tendency that prompts me to write this article.

For well over a year he has consistently expounded in *Close-Up* a theory of "sources," which has so far remained unchallenged. The deeply fallacious implications of this theory, or method, the originality of which its author is so proud, became alarmingly apparent when, commenting upon Vidor's *Hallelujah* in an article entitled "The Aframerican Cinema," he developed the thesis that a study of African origins is indispensable for a correct filmic portrayal of the American Negro.

"... I want one (a Negro) as rich as the Negroes in Poirier's documents of Africa. I am not interested primarily in verbal humor, in clowning nor in sociology. (Emphasis mine—S.B.) I want cinema and I want cinema at its source. To be at its source, cinema must get at the source of its contents. The Negro is plastically interesting when he is most negroid. In films he will be plastically interesting only when the makers of the films know thoroughly the treatment of the Negro structure in the African plastic, when they know of the treatment of his movements in the ritual dances, like the dance of the circumcision, the Ganza. . ."

I might begin by asking Mr. Potamkin since when he has learned to dispense with sociology in his cinema, when only a few months ago, in an article published in *Monde* entitled "Cinema Americain," he wrote.

"De tous les films américains, c'est le film comique qui a eu le plus grand développement. Ce phénomène est du surtout à l'impulsion donnée par un étranger, Charles Chaplin. La contribution de Charlot aux films américains a été de deux ordres: l'expression ou stylisation contrôlée, et la référence sociale ou satire." (Emphasis mine—S.B.)

Think of it! The "social reference" is here considered as one of the two main factors in the films of Chaplin, who Potamkin believes is largely responsible for the "tremendous development" of the American comedy.

Further in the same article, its author recommends as a "source" for the present-day American cinema, Sidney Drew, an early comedian "who introduced the satire of servants of the petty-bourgeoisie into the American movies."\* And again: "'Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court,' a broad and marvelous satire on the high American bourgeoisie. . . (!)" Potamkin points out in that same article that in order to perfect the "essence of its themes" the American cinema must refer back to its early history which he claims is replete with sociologically significant subjects. (What are "sociologically significant subjects," Mr. Potamkin?)

Even if the source theory be conceded, why this ardent clamor for reference to the sociological film as an American source and at the same time the assertion "I am not interested primarily in . . . sociology," when possible sources for Negro cinema are considered? Am I to accept this as a new brand of **discrimination**?

I want Potamkin to inform me how he would go about the matter of making a film on the American Negro without consideration for the socio-political motive that underlies every phase of Negro life in the United States. Mind you, I am not asking for a thesis, but consider the work of the Russians whose praise he has sung so loudly. There



is great cinema because there is real insight into its only important source, the dialectic movements of the social organism and its motor: the class struggle.

If it is Negro plastic he is after, and that only, (are you not diving headlong into the polluted waters of "art-for-art's-sake," Potamkin?) then Potamkin is deeply mistaken when he asks for a study of "Negro structure in the African plastic . . ." Capitalist America has created a new Negro who in virtue of his position in the American social structure is as far removed from his African origin as his so-called "white-nordic superiors" are from theirs. Read Prof. Reuter's essay on the subject, and you will learn that even in the sphere of plastic we have nothing to find at the African source. No, Mr. Potamkin, we "are" not "always what we were;" this is a vulgar and unscientific concept. The Negro of 1930 is not (even physiologically, take note!) what he was in 1870. In sixty years the black population of the United States has become so transformed that official figures place one third of its total in the mulatto group. The ratio of this transformation is at the present time so great that within fifty years Potamkin's "Wooly, tall, broad-nosed and deep-voiced" Negro may be somewhat of a rarity in America. The assimilative process goes on despite the fact that the American ruling-class is segregating the Negro worker and pitting his white class brother against him. The inescapable fact that a white bourgeoisie exploits both the Negro and white worker is the determinant.\*\* The class issue governs above everything else.

The almost complete metamorphosis of the Negro on American soil in a comparatively short historical period is the most instructive and essential feature to consider in any approach of the problem. While an investigation of origins can have great value both historically and in this case also anthropologically, it cannot, in the instance of the American Negro, bring us one step closer to the revelation of the laws that govern the history of the black man in capitalist America. "Aframerican" is obviously a fallacy.

The conception of "sources" in this case can only lead us back to the O'Neilian philosophy so slickly expounded in *The Emperor Jones* that even Potamkin, by his own admission, was able to swallow it whole. "We are always what we were." *Emperor Jones* says as much: Only a thin veneer separates the American Negro from his African origin (read "source"), and under primitive conditions he will revert to the fears, hysteria and superstitions of his tribal forefathers.

How strange these fairy-tales must seem to the Negroes in the steel-mills of Pittsburgh, the packing-houses of Chicago, and the coalpits of Pennsylvania! Hollywood would rather go back to all the "sources" in the world than film the real American Negro. Any documentary film on the life of the American Negro would pack more tragedy per foot of negative than a thousand falsehoods like *Hallelujah!* But Hollywood is the monster-filter of capitalism thru which is sifted American reality, and that is why we cannot expect it to give us the truth about Black America in its films.

Giovannitti's lines come to my mind:

I call you to the bar of the dawn to give witness if  
this is not what they do in America when they  
wake up men at midnight to hang them until  
they're dead.

The Negro on the screen! What a vision! I want to

take Potamkin by the hand and lead him to the hell-holes of Georgia and Alabama where "they wake up men at midnight to hang them until they're dead" . . . I want to guide him thru the slums of Harlem where black babes die by the score in pest-infested tenements. I want to show him the twelve million that King Vidor will never dare to approach. Let him then speak to me of "sources," and the "dance of the circumcision" . . .

The whole recent discovery of the Negro in art bears the imprint of Potamkin's "source" ideology. The discovery was made by respectable whites who do not understand the modern American Negro and who beneath their worship of spirituals, jazz and African sculpture, hide a deeply traditional class contempt for him.

Van Vechten in literature, Covarrubias in art, and now Vidor in the film! Never mind the yaller girl. Let us even forget the cast recruited in cabarets to interpret Southern cotton-pickers, and the "Negro" songs composed by Irving Berlin. Has not Vidor told us about "the remarkable emotional nature of the Negro?" What is this atavistic color that permeates the entire film, if not a vulgar "source" philosophy? Remember for a moment the fraudulent baptismal scene, the stagey and exaggerated revival meeting, the emphasis on the hysterical and the primitive in every move of the characters.

*Hallelujah!* is bad cinema because its director attempted to substitute the white bourgeois lie about the Negro's mystico-religious and hysterical nature for the proletarian reality of the Negro as a doubly exploited member of the American working-class. Neither the most thoro study of Poirier's films nor the closest scrutiny of African primitive art forms could have helped Mr. Vidor to give us a better document than what he has offered us in *Hallelujah!* The result might have been a more pretentious but hardly a better film.

Sociological implications can never be avoided, no matter how esthetically disinterested either a novel, a play or a film may be. Viewed in this light *Hallelujah!* is as spurious as *Abie's Irish Rose*. Unless one is working with purely abstract forms, this cannot be escaped. The construction of any concrete theme in art in which human material is involved strictly implies the drawing up of definite social relationships as a prerequisite.

Obviously, all this is very elementary. But Mr. Potamkin has skipped over these basic considerations into an impossible position where an esthetically abstracted Negro essence in the film has become the thing for him. And that is the reason why, in one of his perennial quarrels with Gilbert Seldes, after two pages of trifling on technicalities, it was only in passing that he found it necessary to mention . . . "the thematic false-rendering in the narration" of *Hallelujah!*

If we investigate Potamkin's application of the source theory to the Jew in the film, we find the same serious fallacy repeated. ". . . the importance of the Jewish physiognomy, like the Negro, an unexploited cinema plastic material, the singularity of the intensive Jewish gestures, and most outstanding, the Yiddish and Hebrew utterances as the material of the sonal film."

In the case of the Jew, Potamkin has been a little less specific and also a little less analytical of the matter. Try to go back to Jewish "sources" and you get as a result a most colorful mixture of almost every "source" in the world. May I again take the liberty to refer H. A. P. to a scientific source? Read the investigation by Karl Kautsky entitled, *Are the Jews A Race?* and you will discover that



the modern Jew is even further from his sources than the American Negro. The Jew-type that you have in mind is vanishing from the earth even faster than the "wooly, broad-nosed Negro" is disappearing from the American scene. Kautsky has pushed his research so far as to prove conclusively that even the legendary Jewish proboscis is now only a memory. Rather sad for the Jewish-plastic enthusiasts, but a fact nevertheless.

A very interesting point: In his article on the Jew as movie-subject, Mr. Potamkin makes mention of almost every Yiddish film ever produced. Every gone-and-forgotten attempt is brought up to find its place in the scheme of the investigation. Not a single word is mentioned about the film, which, its technical shortcomings notwithstanding, is in every respect the greatest one on the Jew ever made. I have in mind the Soviet production entitled *Seeds of Freedom*. It is a film in which is portrayed the struggle of the younger Russian-Jewish generation against the conservative background of Yiddish orthodoxy. It is a dramatization of the birth of a new Jew who is beginning to shed the fetters of all his "sources" to merge with his advanced (revolutionary) class surroundings. In Hirsch Lekker, the hero, we see symbolized the emergence of the Jewish worker who is being remade by his social milieu.

And I know that Potamkin has seen *Seeds of Freedom*...

The consideration of cinematic plastic by no means becomes a minor one simply because a prototype at the "source" cannot serve our purpose. On the contrary, new structures, new gestures, new atmospheres, new forms beckon the real artist.

Unlike Mr. McPherson, editor of *Close-Up*, I am of the opinion that the cinema needs more and not less theory. But let us learn to distinguish between correct theory and the eclectic humbug which results from attempts to be original at all costs. Excluding isolated and individual contributions of value to the theory and esthetics of the cinema, we may safely say that only the Russians have created a scientific system in theory which has fully proven its value in practice. This theory must be deepened and enriched with our further investigations and experiences in the cinematic field, but the creator of misleading theoretical concepts is as criminal as "the geographer who would draw up false maps for navigators." The mental gymnastics of the French bourgeois cinema esthetes gall me as much as pragmatic America's contempt for all theory. More clarity and less confusion! Less phrases and more science!

In the last year there has become noticeable a change of heart in their former attitude towards the Russian film on the part of many bourgeois intellectual cinema circles throughout the world. Some are complaining of "too much theory." A French bourgeois critic, formerly friendly to Russian films, recently wrote about his weariness of the Soviet kino. Another French cinéaste has spoken of his disgust while emphasizing what he terms "the falsehood of the Russians." (Rene Clair). The French cinema world actively boycotted Eisenstein during his stay in Paris. And, in America—

Potamkin has already said: "I do not think the Russian kino has as yet found a method that suits its profound material... the Russian films had better find a new method..."

This was said by one who only a short time ago devoted whole articles in praise of the "old method." And take note of the almost threatening "had better." I think I

can detect more sincerity in Seldes's "technical trick" formulation.

I'll wait and see...

Paris, March 1930.

\*On this point a young Hollywood critic has the following to say: "Potamkin's mention of an insignificant bourgeois actor, forgotten today even by his former admirers, Sidney Drew, is an attestation that is typical of Potamkin's writings of the last year. Who was Drew, anyway? A thousand others also satirized the servants of the petty-bourgeoisie. This type of light, gay, chuckling satire is of no more significance to the type of satire that the servants of the bourgeoisie require of film-creators than the humor of Will Rogers is like the humor of a cartoon in the "Daily Worker." It is affectations of this nature that make Potamkin's writings sterile, sophisticated to the point of nauseous glibness... He is so anxious to show that he knows every Tom, Dick and Harry that ever appeared before a camera or that ever ground out a six-reel piece of kitsch, that he misses the vital essence of his material."

\*\* This does not mean, of course, that the Negro is not faced with special problems within the working class—problems which necessitate new means of combat as part of the proletariat's broader revolutionary struggle. Lynching, for instance, is obviously a part of the oppression of Negroes as a race.

There is a bourgeois school of thought that denies the existence of a "Negro problem" on the ground that assimilation will eventually eliminate the Negro from the American social scene. This is a reactionary evasion of a sore in the capitalist system.

The fact that the Negro is changing thru assimilation does not mean that he is not now the most exploited member of the American working class.

Both the "source" theory and that of "eventual assimilation" are therefore reactionary.

The object of this article is to show that in dealing with the Negro as subject-matter for the film, Potamkin has merely reversed an old bourgeois "idea" into another just as counter-revolutionary. Instead of evading the issue by claiming a "natural" solution in some distant future, he has escaped to Africa. Between these two theories, the oppressed American Negro worker remains suspended in mid-air between his past and his future.

\*\*\*New Masses—New York, December 1929.

"What renders the influence of the motion picture extraordinarily powerful is the fact that it acts on, and thru, one's feelings; in other words, in order to be in the right, the film needs no reasoning. A story with nothing in it, provided it causes deep emotion, will succeed in modifying the conception of life as seen by a young girl or the man in the street, much more effectively than a very solid argument might succeed in doing.

"Realizing this power of the cinema as a means of persuasion, the Church could not regard the cinema as a negligible quantity. Being responsible for faith and morals, the Church owed it to its mission to direct attention to this new invention, just as it had given its attention to printing from its first appearance. It cannot remain indifferent to anything that acts upon conscience. Catholics must, therefore, in so far as they are worthy of this name, turn their attention and their activities to the problem of the cinema, and at once.

"So important is the part that the cinema already plays in our society that further delay in dealing with it would be fraught with serious consequences."

CANON JOSEPH REYMOND

(Director of the International Catholic Office of the Cinema.)

Page Father Edmund Walsh, of Georgetown University, who, before one of the Fish meetings, for the first time revealed to a horrified world that the Soviet Union made use of the film for propaganda purposes!



# VIDOR and EVASION

by B. G. BRAVER-MANN

FROM the point of view of King Vidor the functions of a film director are analagous to those of a journalist in that both report what they see, the difference between them being that the film director reports what he sees by means of camera lenses and the film strip. However, like the reporter, what the film director reveals depends upon **how** as well as upon **what** he sees. His perceptions may be so limited that he never sees what is significant. Let us see how Vidor has applied his theory in practice.

Vidor sought to deal with the late imperialist war in *The Big Parade* because he thought no one had properly reported it. He followed this film by efforts to report in *The Crowd* the experience of a white collar robot in an American metropolis, and in *Hallelujah* the life of the Southern negro. *Billy the Kid* offered an unusual opportunity for interpreting the life of the frontier. Each one of these films in construction and ideology shows that Vidor fails to see his subject matter in relation to experience.

Perhaps his mental attitude towards reality and nature may be illustrated at the outset here by this incident: Recently Laurence Stallings went to Vidor with a scenario for a picture. The first half of this scenario, entitled *The Big Ditch*, is a glorified account of how the late General Goe-

thals and his men fought yellow fever during the construction of the Panama Canal. A provision was made in the scenario script to show the close-up of an inoculation-needle being thrust into a man's arm. Vidor objected to this close-up on the score of a purely personal dislike for the scene. This is typical of his attitude towards fundamental facts.

Visually and structurally, the well-built motion picture is the **intensive objectification of subjective experience**. Moreover, it must be that if it is to succeed as cinema. In any form of imaginative art the ultimate expression must be a union of the inner experience of the artist with outward reality. This is axiomatic particularly of the cinema, the most direct of the arts. If a director is timorous about facts or does not know how to approach his subject matter so that the spectator will feel the subjective phase of action and experience, his detached attitude towards his material will result in a film incomplete or spurious in structure, scenes, implausible in meaning, and image-patterns inexpressive of visual and plastic values. This is the approach of Vidor, as of nearly all other film practitioners in American Cinema—nor it is an approach that can altogether be ascribed to the limitations of film producers.

Vidor, like many of Hollywood's film practitioners,



GLORIES OF WAR

From Fragment of an Empire



not only reveals a feeble conception of experience in his films but also one that shows an unawareness of the visual and plastic values of an action, of an object, because of his inability to relate internal and external experience. In a world grappling with the problems of unemployment, hunger and capitalist exploitation, the American cinema offers films like *Hallelujah* and *Billy the Kid*. It is to Vidor's credit, however, that unlike other directors in the American cinema, he sought to apply certain structural methods that would have helped him if his philosophy of life were different. By using the structural devices best suited to intensify the emotional content of an idea through concentration upon the plastic and visual values of an object, Vidor only succeeds in increasing the flabbiness of an already flabby approach to his material. In *Billy the Kid* he misused the detail-close-up—the most intensive visual expression of the film—by filling the screen with the hand of an unimportant character holding a hand-puzzle to suggest comedy relief, when he might have used a detail-close-up of Mrs. McSweeney's eyes revealing her anger at the rebuff she received from Col. Dudley. It explains why Vidor and many American directors do not know when to use the close-up, and accounts for much of the general disapproval of meaningless close-ups, as employed in Hollywood film practice, on the part of critics and spectators. Since Vidor's approach to his material is one of evading experience and of rendering incomplete statement it is clear why he uses the methods of a groper when directing his players on the set, why he depends upon trial-and-error methods, and leans entirely upon the reactions of his players rather than to elicit from them an expression that is consistent with the emotional content required by a scene or an image.

Vidor's idea of reporting the late war seemed to center upon introducing a French girl in *The Big Parade* as a symbol of sex appeal winding its way in and out of a long line of motor trucks loaded with men to bid adieu to her departing Yankee lover. Vidor reported the war so well in *The Big Parade* that the notion prevailed in Europe that Americans believe they alone had fought and won the war; that they alone had not known the experience of defeat; that only they had battled their way through the German trenches. Compare the comedy relief scenes of Americans larking about in Paris cafes and jesting in the trenches, with the stark scenes in *The End of St. Petersburg* and in the German film *Behind the German Lines*, whose titles were changed so as to glorify the war before the film would be shown in American film houses. Vidor did not feel intensely about war as did Barbusse the Frenchman; Latzko, the Hungarian and Pudovkin, the Russian. Many Americans who saw service behind the trenches looked upon *The Big Parade* as a visual presentation reminiscent of the good times they had in Paris.

If *The Big Parade* had been a report of the war according to Vidor's assumptions, it would have sent spectators home with a hatred of militarism and of the forces that inveigled us into the war. But Vidor centered his comment upon the war in an absurd love affair between a French peasant girl and an American doughboy while men were being blown to bits. He omitted entirely any reference to the financiers and dollar-a-year men who were amassing fortunes. *The Big Parade* followed the beat of drums, and wove a halo around flag-waving and woman-hunting instead of breeding a great hatred of war and a profound pity for the millions of war's victims. No wonder that Eisenstein pronounced *The Big Parade* as war propaganda. The chief

technical virtue in *The Big Parade* was its powerful visual percussion in the movement of men, men, men, and trucks, trucks, trucks, and the tension in which this movement broke at the parting of the two lovers. Otherwise, it was entirely negligible as a film.

*The Crowd* is Vidor's best effort. And what a poor thing it is in the final analysis! If Vidor were more of the artist and analytical thinker in matters involving social and personal relationships, this film might well have become a challenge to our cheer leaders and to those of Hollywood's production minds whose ideas of subject matter for the films are limited to the presentation of false sex emotion, prize fights, underworld life and comedy relief.

The failure of *The Crowd* is Vidor's failure to analyze and visualize reality. It supplies producers with the argument that the artistic film cannot succeed, whereas *The Crowd* did not succeed because it dealt unconvincingly with experience.

In *The Crowd* Vidor had a great theme—about an average unskilled white collar slave, wishfully believing in the certainty of the lucky break, his marriage on the winnings of a prize won in an advertising contest, the two children resulting from this helter-skelter union, the pittance of his weekly wage, the loss of his job, the animosity of a wife's lower middle class brothers, the stylized movement of the white collar robots in a large office. Although Vidor demonstrated an adept use of the moving camera, the film visualized none of the social commentaries that would have made this a great crowd picture. *The Crowd* lacked the structural treatment to make it significant as cinema. If he had possessed a greater appreciation of the plastic and visual basis of the cinema, Vidor might have given to the image-content of his scenes some of the ecstatic quality of film-poetry born of deep social convictions. Everything in *The Crowd* dealt with externals already obvious and familiar to every film spectator. Externals predominated because Vidor is, after all, a groping, shallow-minded reporter instead of an artist, a film-poet, an interpreter of experience. That is why he gave us only the surface aspects of the crowd in its Coney Island mood, its shopping expeditions, its gulping of sandwiches and pop, its deadly uniformity. Vidor neglected to show to the spectator in the film-house that as a mass the crowd might exercise the collective will to shape its own destiny. *The Crowd* left the spectator in the film house resigned to the acceptance of defeat and futility. It offered no catharsis—no emotional release to the spectator in terms of experience.

*Hallelujah* revealed the conventional viewpoint about the Southern negro, picturing him according to the lowest estimate held him by the white man, a singer of spirituals, a patron of cheap dives, a petty gambler, a fanatical revivalist. A film artist with a penetrative social outlook would have built from this material a great motion picture based upon the aspirations of the negro worker to cope with his environment in the South. Why does Vidor insist on constructing films that pretend to deal with vital social themes when his own social viewpoint and understanding of reality are so utterly bourgeois and so extremely limited? Granted that he may wish to avoid the puerilities of Hollywood, he is like a man setting out on a journey to an unknown destination and after traveling for a brief distance decides he can reach his goal by running around in circles. Vidor must know that structurally there is nothing significant about *Hallelujah*. At best it is glorified vaudeville, with the addition of a few silent scenes.



In *Billy the Kid* Vidor is at his feeblest. It is not to be wondered at, that its producers needed the assistance of seventy-nine year old Thomas Edison's name to ballyhoo the film. It was heralded as the first wide-screen film. More novelty. If the wide-screen proves anything at all, it proves that novelty cannot take the place of well-organized film structure nor of expressive images that fill the rectangle of the screen, regardless of whether the screen be standard, double or triple standard in size, round or any other shape. Some theorists have indulged in much-ado about the wide screen. Inexpressive images in the wide screen simply mean that they are several times the size they would be on the standard screen. Consequently they are several times worse as images. Some years ago, Karl Grune made a German film called *Waterloo*. It was built around the life of Bluecher and the defeat of Napoleon. In this film there were a number of sequences in which the standard screen was split into upper and lower rectangles, upper and lower triangles and in oblong areas side by side. In each of these areas were simultaneously and effectively shown the parallel actions of scenes of widely separated locales. The material in *Billy the Kid* was replete with possibilities for a similar powerful montage of parallel action of images appearing at the same time, in divisions of the screen. But Vidor had not the necessary creative vision to perceive this.

Excellent opportunities were missed to develop sound images in counterpoint to visualize images of scenes in parallel action. For instance, when in *Billy the Kid* Mrs. McSween returned from a fruitless interview with Co. Dudley, she sat down at her piano while the shooting and the flames raged about her. The flames were reflected in the surfaces of the piano as she played "The Star Spangled Banner" and the strains wafted over the town. Alongside the scene of Mrs. McSween playing, there could have been a scene of the town as it lay in the canyon. Then, following, another scene taken from a different angle could have shown Mrs. McSween playing the anthem and in the area alongside that scene, flashes of the townsmen and of their frightened faces as they sat in their homes listening to the sounds of the music and of the shooting; flashes of the faces of the hired gunmen in the Murphy camp, of Col. Dudley in his tent, his men and cannon. By this montage on a split screen, a powerful tension could have been built up all the time that "The Star Spangled Banner" was being played. That, however, would have been too much within the realm of vital experience.

As subject matter the *Saga of Billy the Kid*, if treated without evasion, should have made an epic film of the Southwest during its transition period from the pioneer stage to the beginnings of centralized control in the cattle business. Its material and characters were admirably adapted to the scope of an analytical, image-minded director, for the real drama was built around two strong characters, Murphy and McSween, who staged one of the bloodiest cattle wars of the Southwest. There is irony, too, in the circumstance that Murphy had studied for the priesthood and McSween for the ministry. In this bitter conflict, which is known to have dominated life in Lincoln County, New Mexico, during the seventies, *Billy the Kid* was merely an incident, just one more among the numerous desperadoes in the most lawless section of the Southwest. Historical and social values of the material were eliminated to feature a conscienceless young gunman—an evasion of experience that made the Kid incredible as a character and mere a comic opera outlaw. Players should always be in-

struments for the director, but in this film, Vidor, like the rest of his fellow practitioners in Hollywood, makes no use of the film's structural elements to build up that biting characterization which could make this period in American history live for the spectator. There is no emphasis upon Murphy and McSween, on the drama in the economic and social aspects of their conflict; and the important character of Col. Dudley is omitted. Yet, any film purporting to deal historically and truthfully with the early West must show the amazing activities of the officers of the army in those days. If American film producers and directors insist upon evasion in the treatment of historical facts, we need never expect to have any authentic historical films.

In *Billy the Kid* it is clear that if Vidor knew how to intensively objectify subjective experience through the visual, plastic and structural means of the film, he might have built a remarkable motion picture. But one cannot interpret the subjective without relating it to outward experience. The evasion of experience on one hand and the inability to cope with the structural demands of the motion picture on the other, has made Hollywood the laughing stock of the world among those who understand the film's possibilities and necessities. Evasion of experience, combined with limitations in creative ability explain the insipidity of the American film and the reasons for its diminishing hold upon the film-going public in America and in Europe. In view of the facts, it's just a swell joke that Vidor and other Hollywood film "regisseurs" continue to be called our "first" directors!

Had Vidor ever deserved the rank of a "first" director, he would not have issued this condescending statement on the little film theatres of France.

"The foreign producers are more courageous and are making more headway than in the past. This progress, however, has not been from a solid foundation of sound production methods as was the development of the film industry in America . . . There are any number of "little theater" movements to be encountered, and it is in these houses that the unique productions being made abroad are to be found. I saw one in which the entire story was told in close-ups, a daring experiment that is admirable in effort, but scarcely to be considered anything more than a very well done novelty . . . These pioneering steps are laudable and hold much promise. They are interesting and worthy of attempt but as earnest competition to American films they are woefully lacking . . . They are more intent it seems, upon a cinematic fishing expedition that might net them something worthwhile, but in all probability will be quite unproductive."

Instead of using his name to give publicity to the efforts of the trail blazers and experimenters in the European film movement, so that American audiences and producers might develop a strong impetus in this direction, Vidor did precisely what other American practitioners have done; i.e., he dwelt upon the "superiority" of American films. If directors whose names may mean something to the film public fail to use their influence with that public towards the establishment of a film-art, how can the spectator, unaided, arrive at these conclusions himself? Had Vidor looked upon the work of the film experimenters of Europe with the eyes of an analyst and an artist, he would have discerned that they are intent upon relegating all film practices smacking of the conventional film, that the



efforts of European as well as of American film experimenters are certain to doom the false film practices of Hollywood. Had the production methods of American film studios been as sound as Vidor claimed, he would not have been among the few American directors in 1928 who publicly criticised the panicky flight to dialog films. With all the millions at their disposal American producers and directors can point to but a few accidental pictures that contain at the most touches of intrinsic merit in film structure. However, they may live to learn that the "cinematic

fishing expeditions" of proletarian film groups in Europe and America will inevitably produce a film revolution that will force American producers to return to the cloak and suit business whence they came.

1 There was no need for sound in this film. None of the scenes were helped by sound or dialogue. Reference to sound images is made here only because sound happened to be used.

2 Ostensibly, Vidor had in mind Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, the sharpness of whose patterns he tried to emulate in several scenes in *Billy the Kid*. The statement quoted appeared in *Closeup*, Oct. 1928.

# Principles of the New World-Cinema

by SEYMOUR STERN

## PART II. The Film as Microcosmos

Section stressing the cinema as a new instrument of human consciousness. As the form of that consciousness itself.

**R**EVOLUTIONARY film doctrine emphasizes the cinema as the instrument of perception and domination of labor-philosophy and world-meaning: as an instrument which has the power to hammer incessantly on certain dominants.<sup>2</sup> In the psychological sphere (analyzing forms, manifestations, motivations, reflexes, etc. of behavior), it has the power to expose the subtle overtones and nuances of outstanding types of a class—for example, the dinosaur, the millionaire, the "virtuous," self righteous middle-class girl, the "humanist" liberal, the American business-man, etc. . . . In respect of these qualities, the cinema, to the spectator, has the character and function of a scalpel. But the film-creator simply and scientifically accepts it as the instrument of selecting, organizing, (co-ordinating, associating, etc.) the dominant psychic qualities and external characteristics and significant overtones (singly and as interpenetrating image-complexes) of the individual, both as an individual and as the manifestation of an entire type or group.

Indisputably, the nature of the cinema is microcosmos. This term is advanced unreservedly. I bring to the attention and consideration of the American prolet-kino Lenin's vigorously defined conception of the cinema as "the microcosmos of proletarian reality." That is why Lenin repeatedly urged the "natural or non-fictive film"—an injunction out of which later developed the wonderful Soviet news-reel and Vertov's films of the "kino-cye". They were taken "on the spot"—(events, accidents, etc.) However, they have not proved emotionally half so moving or even so convincing, as the deliberately fictive dramatic works of Pudovkin, although this is an incidental point.

The significance of the cinema as microcosmos is great. The cinema is the most powerful instrument devised by mankind for the expression, in highly concentrated form, of the dialectic world-struggle of the classes.

No other means or agency of expression has one-tenth the power of the cinema for creating a consciousness (visual and auditory) of the dialectics of world-history in proper time and space perspective.

The cinema has the unequalled capacity to present people with not only the perspective, but also the relative di-

mensions, of all previous, world-historical struggles of the exploited class against the power-class, and to present these perspectives and dimensions in montage of film time and film-space, a microcosmos-concentration of world dialectics. Such is the significance of the cinema as microcosmos!

By power of montage!

By power of time-and-space concentrations and associations!

Take the cinema Leninistically as the microcosmos of world-dialectics. To use an image: It can best be characterized as an **inexhaustible field of action-energy**, in which the montage-dynamic operates like a tractor ploughing the field of a Russian "collective," an inexhaustible field of effects and of changes (dynamics, motion-variations, etc.) . . . Montage-philosophy is the **dialectic** of this cinematic action-energy.

Synthetic montage is the central "switching station" of the "mechanism of domination" . . . The possibilities of cinematic plasticity and relativity are endless . . .

The character of the film as microcosmos is the most important creative-esthetic consideration of the present century. A wholly new, radical approach to creativeness is being based in Soviet Russia on this dominant consideration. It is a deeper and more startling challenge to Western bourgeois civilization (to its philosophies, its notions of behavior, its misconceptions of human relationships, etc.) than even the most violently antagonistic doctrines of Marxist-Leninist economics. With its advancement, all bourgeois conceptions of esthetics and creativity are being forever swept away . . .

The character of the film as microcosmos necessitates a new creator: the **scientist-artist laborer**,—the Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko artist type. More than that the completely **dialectic-minded thinker**. Thus, the present revolution in cinematography, which successfully stamps out the disease of Hollywood, marks the beginning of the joining, in cinematography, of **radical-revolutionary esthetic philosophy** with **radical-revolutionary science** towards the attainment of an ultimate exposition of radical-revolutionary world-meaning.

And it is historically inevitable that in the future, in the coming Proletarian World-State, no esthetic science, no conception of creativeness, will be possible or will bear within itself the potentiality of fruition, unless it be rooted





From ARSENAL

in **dialectic materialism**,—in a fully apprehended **materialistic** interpretation of life, history and humanity.

The character of the film as microcosmos forces a consideration of the **relativity-association** of **dominant images** as the technique for the establishment of radical, **dominant image-ideas**, which in themselves hold the key to the philosophy of the film. This consideration may be non-categorically stated: **Out of the conjunction of two images, the third image, THE RADICAL IMAGE-IDEA (mental), emerges. Out of the conjunction (in montage) of many image-elements, is created the synthesis of which the final-definitive radical image is the essence.**

The art of defining and creating image-ideas, the art of hammering image-ideas into the mentality of the spectator by the persistent ingenious manipulation of aggressive, violently emotional montage-forms, can be said to be largely dependent on the genius of creating synthetic images which embrace the cardinal philosophical points of the underlying image-idea.

Before going into the question of synthetic imagery, I would like to stress one important, if somewhat incidental point. For the eventual success of this type of cinematography—the cinema based on entirely revolutionized radical conceptions of esthetics and structure, that not only successfully defies the bourgeois weaknesses of all past esthetics and all “classically enshrined” notions of art, but even indicates how absurd these notions are in their relation to absurd forms of society—for this cinema, it is absolutely essential to have films of **passion**. The passionate film, that is to say, the film of overcharged emotional intensity, violent, incisive, psychologically surprising and **sustained**, can alone give adequate expression to the peculiar form of

action-energy that characterizes the cinema. Already we have films geared up to a high degree of emotional intensity: **Potemkin** (particularly in the massacre-episode), **The End of St. Petersburg**, (particularly where the worker-hero, in a frenzy of rage, hurls Lebedoff, the munitions-capitalist, to the floor), **China Express**, **Storm Over Asia**, **The New Babylon**, the explosive **Ten Days That Shook The World** and the bitterly vehement **Arsenal**. The film of vehemence depends on the skillful manipulation of aggressive, penetrating montage-methods to achieve the maximum possible intensification and release of emotional energy in the spectator. **The part played here by the principles of the conditioned reflex, as an instrument of emotional agitation, is of course colossal.** One the purely esthetic side, the simplest and most striking time and space and movement forms have proved useful (through the aid of photographers such as Tisse, Golovnia, etc.) to heighten the excitement of the content and the cutting. In these respects, the Russian films, from Eisenstein's **Strike** to Pudovkin's **Storm Over Asia**, which are based on deeply thought-out principles of agitation and visceral-motor excitation, are not a consummation, but only a beginning.

The film of passion is the only film which has a right to be considered a social film; that is, a **passionate** expression of the **dialectics** of historical world-processes. It is the only type of film than can adequately meet the demands of mass emotional necessities of the present century.

At the opposite end is the sickly-sweet emasculation and degenerate sentimentalism of the Hollywood “entertainment” film (including, perhaps more than anything, the so-called “dramatic” films of Hollywood), based on a gross and perverted falsification of the vital facts of human exist-



ence. But the anti-social tendencies of the Hollywood film exemplify a complete antithesis to what the vehement film of visceral-motor excitation should try to achieve.

Even the subtle film, that deals with complicated social conditions without the revolution-dominant as a basis of its imagery, even this film can possess a kind of **intensive vehemence**, mounted in the overtone implications of gross social and economic inequalities. Passion, as the final degree of intensity of montage-violence, of explosiveness, should be the standard "temperature" of the social film. With regard to its seriousness, the "temperature" of the social film,—its "heat" and the vehemence of its expression of the underlying image-idea—should be a constant irradiation, a constant discharge of the kinetic energy of its fast-moving images. And the films enjoyed by the "escapists" and esthetes of the Western world, films of "release" and "escape", praised to the skies by such people as J. G. Fletcher, G. Seldes, Rotha & Co. and other intellectual hoodlums, have of course no place whatever in the mass-cinema of the Proletarian Revolution.

As regards the philosophical end or "purpose" of the image-play of radical-revolutionary cinematography, this end, the image-philosophy of the image-whole, is expressed in the outstanding synthetic images themselves. The montage-methods of analysis (differentiation and objectification) and of synthesis (integration, association, etc) are likewise the methods used in the construction of such synthetic images to endow them with the broadest variations and possibilities, as key-words of film language.

### PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS TO SYNTHETIC IMAGERY

A number of elementary considerations must be advanced prior to discussing synthetic imagery. Several of these were already stated in categorical form (see *Principles of the New World Cinema*, Part I, especially section on *Principles of the Image-Idea*). Although previously mentioned, however, they can be accepted here as a fresh phase of the montage of image-relationships.

1. Every film based on a correct montage-form is the expression of its dominant, radical image-idea. In this connection, it can be added that the persistence with which the film-creator builds up and significantly defines (through the film) the dominant, radical image-idea basically underlying the film, determines the degree of esthetic integrity and the spiritual-intellectual strength of the film.

The definition of montage (Part I, *Principles of the New World Cinema*) as "THE COMPLETION OF THE IMAGE-IDEA THROUGH THE FILM IN VISUAL AND DYNAMIC FORM," is valid for this aspect of montage-ideology and cannot be too strongly insisted upon.

2. The sum and substance of Eisenstein overtone conceptions can be expressed in the terminology of the present dialectic as follows: The image-idea (of the sequence, of the episode, etc.) is as much the mathematical resultant of overtone cumulations arising out of the conflict between the single images themselves (which collectively form the image-idea) as it is the product of these images in a purely montage sense.

3. In the same sense, taking the ultimate impression of the film from the point of view of the spectator (the receiving brain), the radical dominant image-idea underlying the film is the mathematical

resultant of the sum total of the overtone cumulations of all the images of the film, as well as it is the product of the image-ideas of the sequences, episodes, etc.

4. Every image of the film has the possibility of realizing its significance in the total image-structure in three ways:

(a) As a purely descriptive agent, illustrating an event. In other words, as a unit in the development of a continuity of action (of any happening whatsoever, actual or imaginary);

(b) As the symbol of the deeper image-idea that is expressed by the descriptive action, of which this particular image is a part (the symbol). Or, in conjunction with this same possibility, the image may be used (recurrently) as the symbol of any other action whatsoever to which its relationship is purely and definitely symbolical and not a continuity-relationship in the sense of immediate joining to preceding and succeeding montage-pieces.

(c) Because of its dual employment, both as description and as symbol, each image has the possibility of being, besides the symbol of an image-idea, the fundamental root-image of this idea.

Obviously, in the most advanced types of cinema, the majority of images operate simultaneously in both a descriptive and a symbolical capacity. This is the richest, fullest and most startling method of expression now at the disposal of cinematography.

In connection with the above resume of the possibilities of the ways in which images can be utilized, consider the following fragment of an original continuity, which illustrates many of the points of this essay:

### SECTION OF A CONTINUITY (CONDENSED)

(Note: Owing to lack of space, the complete montage cannot be rendered in the following continuity. Only the most important elements, illustrating the principle of root-images and association, are presented.)

SCENE:	A park. A square. A street-car line. Steps leading up to the main entrance of a twenty or thirty-story skyscraper—the City Hall. A church.
SITUATION:	Crowds. Working masses, working-class sympathizers, by-standers, business-men, "saintly" priests, jeerers . . . Agitators on soap-boxes. Cossack police on proud horse. Workers with banners, slogans, etc., etc. Hired thugs, plainclothesmen, etc., paired off with foot-cops. A street-car held up by the crowd. A street-cleaner shoveling gutter-garbage on a street opposite the park. Chief of Police and staff watching from the steps of the City Hall. The Chief is tailored in stylish, immaculate plain clothes. The police attack on workers begins.

### SYNTHETIC ROOT-IMAGE:

1. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT OF Chief of Police on steps.  
Composition-grouping of Chief and several surrounding members of the staff in uniform and heavily armed.  
The Chief gives a direction to those standing about him.  
They hurry off, out of frame.  
The Chief stands alone—glowing with the pride of a general.



CAMERA-FOCUS SHARPENS INTENSELY ON HIS FIGURE.  
CAMERA PANS UP FROM HIS FIGURE TO THE SKYSCRAPER BEHIND HIM.  
CAMERA FOCUSES ON TOP OF SKYSCRAPER AT EXTREME ANGLE PERSPECTIVE.

(Focus-timing here in accord with finally worked-out montage-tempo.)

CAMERA PANS DOWN FROM TOP OF SKYSCRAPER TO ORIGINAL ANGLE ON CHIEF OF POLICE.

2. CUT TO CLOSE-UP OF mounted Cossack-police. (Taken from below). A burly cop. He raises his mob-stick and brings it down. (CUT ON THE MOVEMENT).

3. CUT TO CLOSE-UP OF an undersized Jewish worker. (Taken from above, opposite angle.) He starts to run. (MOVEMENT ON THE CUT). The mob-stick descends crushingly on his head. (Note movement—association of shots 2 and 3, establishing rhythm-graph of entire episode).

4. CLOSE SHOT OF a modishly attired "modern" priest with a "sweet and saintly" face, standing in the projected shadow of a cross before a church-building. He crosses himself and pronounces a "blessing" . . . (MOVEMENT ON THE CUT).

5. Men, women and boys with banners running en masse towards sidewalk. The throngs of spectators on the curb form a solid wall.

6. MOVING CAMERA SHOT of small group of workers with banners, running. The shadow of a mounted policeman races over them.

7. MEDIUM RANGE SHOT OF crowd of onlookers, mostly American business-type. They wear straw hats. They are neatly dressed. They have cynical and contemptuous sneers on their faces.

8. CLOSER SHOT OF same group. A young enterprising business-man, characteristic of his class, makes a "wise-crack" to his companion. Then he cups his hands, as if at a baseball game, and calls out at a passing cop (not visible in this take) . . .

TITLE: "Kill the damned Reds, Mike!"

9. CLOSE UP OF the business-man taking his hands from his mouth and grinning good-humoredly" . . . FLASH CUT.

10. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT OF cop ("Mike") running past. He half-turns, as he hears his friend call. Laughs: a brutal, ruthlessly sadistic physiognomy. Waves his mob-stick. Runs on . . .

11. MOVING CAMERA SHOT (taken from above) OF group of workers with banners, placards and papers. Running. The shadow of the mounted policeman deepens over the crowd, with which it races in pace. PAN CUT.

12. FLASH CLOSE-UP OF a woman, screaming.

13. FLASH CLOSE-UP OF the woman, hurled to the gutter.

14. FLASH CLOSE-UP OF the hoofs of a police-horse, prancing on the fallen woman's body.

15. ANGLE CLOSE-UP OF mounted cop's face, bending low into lens. He curses and yanks his horse into frame.

16. MEDIUM CLOSE-UP (horizontal plane) OF a worker mixing with a group behind the prancing horse . . . He sees . . . and starts . . . He stands stock-still, frozen with horror!

17. ANGLE SHOT (extreme perspective) OF police-horse, TAKEN FROM BELOW (the woman's viewpoint), rising on the two hind-legs . . .

The fore-legs rise before the camera and tower above it . . .

The horse attempts a momentary balance on his hind-legs, and then . . .

The fore-legs suddenly come down. CUT ON THE MOVEMENT.

18. CUT IN ASSOCIATION CLOSE-UP OF the body of the unconscious woman, as the fore-legs of the horse pitch upon her. MOVEMENT ON THE CUT. CUT ON THE MOVEMENT.

19. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT OF the worker. He yells.

Out of his pocket he jerks a piece of lead-pipe and hurls it with all his might at the mounted Cossack-police.

20. CLOSE SHOT OF mounted Cossack, from behind. The hurled chunk of lead strikes him at the base of the neck. Jumping, he wheels about in his saddle . . .

\*21. IDEATIONAL SYNTHETIC GROUP:

(a) The mounted cop tottering in his saddle and falling. CUT ON THE MOVEMENT.

(b) FLASH CLOSE-UP OF Police Chief yelling in dismay. (Special effect close-up).

(c) "TRICK" SHOT OF the City Hall building appearing to sway, tremble and fall . . .

(d) The mounted cop fallen to the street.

22. COMPOSITION-GROUP OF four mounted police wheeling their horses about in regimented movement. Into action!

23. PARALLEL CAMERA-MOVEMENT (taken from slight angle above) OF the worker fleeing across the square. In a frenzy of haste . . . Pushing man, woman and child out of his way . . . Pushing through groups and crowds . . . Breaking into the crowd on the curb.

(HORIZONTAL AND ZIG-ZAG MOVEMENT-LINES).

24. FLASH SHOT OF the four mounted police sweeping fiercely across the square.

25. CLOSE SHOT OF two burly cops manhandling protesting worker near a fire-pump. A closely packed crowd forms a close semi-circle on the side-walk.

26. CLOSE UP OF the brutal face of one policeman.

27. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT OF the scuffle. Suddenly with a quick, clever move, one of the cops, stepping back and "ducking" low, trips the fighting worker, who starts to sprawl and topple backward. The worker's loss of balance is completed and his fall to the pavement is



made a "knock-out" by a well-delivered blow in the face from the other cop.

28. CLOSE UP OF the horrified and indignant face of typical American "liberal". The liberal cries out sharply:

TITLE: "Shame! Shame! You bullies! Such needless brutality! Why don't you employ decent methods?"

29. FLASH CLOSE UP OF the indignant face of the liberal.

30. The worker sinks in a heap before the lens. The cops bend down and start to lift him OUT OF FRAME.

31. HEAD-ON MOVEMENT SHOT OF the worker who threw the piece of lead pipe, racing INTO CAMERA. The four pursuing mounted cops THUNDERING FAST ON HIS HEELS! The fleeing worker runs close into immediate focus-foreground and then swerves suddenly to one side, OUT OF FRAME.  
CUT ON THE MOVEMENT.

32. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT OF street-car conductor and motorman on motorman's platform, consulting. The motorman manifests his impatience. The conductor gestures to "go ahead", and walks back into the car. The motorman puts on his big white glove and turns to the switch.

33. FLASH CLOSE-UP OF fare-register of street-car . . . A fare is registered.

34. SHARP CLOSE-UP. A mob-stick brutally crashes a worker's head. CUT ON THE MOVEMENT.

35. FLASH CLOSE-UP OF fare-register. Another fare is registered.

36. SHARP CLOSE-UP. A mob-stick crushes another worker's head. CUT ON THE MOVEMENT.

37. FLASH CLOSE-UP OF fare-register. Another fare is registered.

38. SHARP CLOSE-UP. A police fist smashes a worker's face. CUT ON THE MOVEMENT.

39. SHARP CLOSE-UP OF fare-register. Another fare is registered.

40. SHARP CLOSE-UP. A police club is brought crushingly down on another worker's head. CUT ON THE MOVEMENT.

41. FLASH CLOSE-UP OF fare register. Another fare is registered.

42. SHARP CLOSE-UP. A mob-stick across a worker's face. FLASH CUT.

43. FLASH CLOSE-UP OF fare-register. Another fare is registered.

44. A fist savagely wields a mob-stick. FLASH CUT.

45. IDEATIONAL CUT-IN GROUP:  
(a) ANALYTICAL MONTAGE-FLASHES OF the register clicking successive fare.

(b) FLASH CLOSE SHOT OF priest radiating blessings and fatherly love . . .

(c) FLASH CLOSE-SHOT OF Police Chief on City Hall steps, his hand to his brow, like a sunshield.

(d) PERSPECTIVE EFFECT SHOT OF City Hall building (Tentative suggestion: camera movement montage).

(e) CLOSE-UP OF fare-register, registering at greatly accelerated speed. Faster . . . faster . . .

(f) Water flooding into a street sewer.

46. CLOSE-UP OF the motorman's foot, stamping the bell . . .

47. CLOSE-UP OF the motorman's hand slowly beginning to turn the motorman's switch.

48. DIAGONAL ANGLE SHOT OF one of the four mounted police suddenly checking his horse before the camera.  
(MOVEMENT ON THE CUT).  
Levelling his revolver, he fires.

49: ANALYTICAL CUT-IN: FLASH CLOSE-UP OF the fare-register. Another fare is registered.  
MOVEMENT ON THE CUT. CUT ON THE MOVEMENT.

50. CLOSE-UP (from above) of the track-fender of the street-car, in slow movement. The body of the shot worker pitches on to the fender, sprawled across it. His arm and head lie at the edge, almost on the track. His eyes stare upward into the down-looking lens . . .

51. ANALYTICAL CUT-IN OF ROOT-IMAGE:  
The Chief of Police on the steps before the City Hall building.  
CAMERA PANS QUICKLY UP ON STRUCTURE, TO TOP. CUT.

52. ANGLE SHOT OF motorman. (Taken from fender, looking up).  
He gestures excitedly with his gloved hand, and yells to the dead worker to get himself off the fender.

53. MEDIUM SHOT OF one of the four mounted police, motioning violently to the motorman. He brings his horse close to the car.

TITLE: "Ride that body out of the district! About three blocks down!"

54. MEDIUM CLOSE-UP OF the motorman. Nods to the cop and salutes in a friendly way.

55. CLOSE-UP OF the motorman's switch, the gloved hand turns . . .

56. VERTICAL ANGLE SHOT (looking down from motorman's window) OF the dead worker stretched out on the car-fender. The fender in movement.

57. "FLANK" SHOT OF the front of the car with four mounted police riding parallel on either side.

58. CLOSE SHOT OF the wheels of the street-car, legs and feet dashing parallel. As the car gains in movement, the CAMERA, MOVING PARALLEL, slightly widens its focus and gets in a mass of feet, legs and finally (in full view) parallel-running bodies—men, women and children.



59. ANGLE CLOSE-UP OF the fender, (taken from opposite side), bearing the dead worker.

60. FROM BEHIND THE MOTORMAN'S WINDOW:

Yelling, threatening, angry workers rush in a huge mass up the track, and from all sides and streets in the near distance, in an increasing throng, into the advancing street-car.

61. FROM TRACK-LEVEL: (At a distance) The advancing street-car with the dead body. Like a gigantic Machine-Moloch.

62. CLOSE-UP OF the motorman's switch, being pushed to the "full" pole.

63. Squadron of mounted police marching horse horizontally, in a flank movement into the mass of advancing workers . . .

64. A street-cleaner pushing his shovel along the curb.

65. CLOSE-UP OF street-cleaner's shovel. CAMERA MOVING PARALLEL.

66. CLOSE-UP OF street-car fender with dead worker.

67. COMPOSITION-PERSPECTIVE SHOT OF regimented line of mounted police sweeping into mass and clearing the track.

68. CLOSE-UP OF the street-cleaner's shovel sweeping up the refuse along the curb-line. **Faster.**

69. CLOSE-UP OF motorman's switch, at the "full" pole.

70. CLOSE-UP OF street-car fender, faster . . .

71.—72.—73.—etc . . . Acceleration, image-exaggeration, etc. of the foregoing, reinforced by timed recurrence of the dominant root-images, etc., until the total montage-structure reaches its synthetic static point, namely: PERSPECTIVE-COMPOSITION IMAGE OF the City Hall tower, with the figure of the Police Chief standing small and solitary on the steps. The shadow of the cross overspreads the tower . . .

Manifestly, this represents an advanced montage-form, the full significance of which cannot be altogether appreciated when it is separated from the total structure of the film. In the above continuity, not only was there a vast condensation of the various montage-elements (which in the original bring the number of scenes up to more than 150), but the parallel sound-montage was completely omitted. Montage students can clearly recognize the possibilities and position of sound-image counterpoint in such a dynamic conception as the foregoing.

The second half of Part II of Principles of the New World-Cinema will be published in the fourth number of Experimental Cinema. Following it, in the fifth number, will appear Part III, which deals with The Bases of Reflexes and Associations.

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1 Further investigation and analysis of the film as microcosmos will be made in later papers especially devoted to this revolutionary phase of cine-dialectics.

2 "Dominants" and "overtones," Eisenstein terms, used by him in *The Fourth Dimensions in the Kino*, April 1930 of *Close-Up*, as well as in articles on the same phase in German periodicals.

By "dominant" he means the radically predominant characteristic, and cites, as an example, the "sex appeal" of the beautiful Amer-

ican heroine . . . By "overtone," he means the "additional appeals or attraction-stimulants," and in the same example names the artificially constructed "stimulation-provokers" which create the "overtone complex" around the dominant,—in this case, items such as the material of the heroine's dress, the degree of light and shade used in photographing, polished finger-nails, etc. . . . These form the "overtone complex." To which could also be added, almost endlessly, for the benefit of revolutionary cinematography, which analyzes and exposes all such overtone artifices of the bourgeoisie, stimulation-provokers like the conscious, deliberate pose of innocent virtue of the American middle-class girl and the whole stock of attraction-effects which constitute the complex the Americans call "appearance": shrewdly calculated manner of bearing, tailoring of all kinds (of this it can actually be said there is a definite "Anglo" appearance-complex!), "suave" mannerism, "twinkling" eyes, "loving" gestures, parlor-cultivated voice, "cuteness," the entire battery of effects of American "propaganda-posing" (of the women, especially in American military films), "sweetness and light" (*Seventh Heaven* formula) and so on.

In using the expressions "overtone" and "overtone cumulation" in this article, I mean, specifically, the overtones (of a single dominant) and the overtone cumulations (through a complete series of images) of just these "additional appeals" which exhibit psychological traits and notions of a social class and which constitute a "complex" around a "central stimulation" or nucleus. Reference here is not made to the overtone-montage method as a systematic device of construction. That consideration will be dealt with in a later section.

#### EDITORS' NOTE

Elsewhere in this issue there appears an article by Samuel Brody entitled "On A Theory of 'Sources'." This article has an interesting history, involving as it does the "loss" of our New York correspondent, attacks upon us in other publications and the making of an active enemy.

Originally, "On A Theory of 'Sources'" was submitted to *Close Up* as a letter criticizing certain reactionary ideas expressed in H. A. Potamkin's monthly American correspondence for that magazine. The criticism was neither personal nor in any sense malicious. The sole intention of its author was to open a discussion on certain debatable points set forth by Potamkin. This was considered all the more urgent as Potamkin at the time consistently persisted in asserting the correctness of the "source" idea. The editors of *Close Up* refused to print the letter, stating that to print an attack on an "accredited foreign correspondent is not in accord with English journalistic ethics." A copy of the article was then sent to the editors of *Experimental Cinema* who submitted it to Potamkin with a request for a reply to be printed in the magazine as a discussion. He refused. This refusal appeared at the time to have no bearing whatsoever on Potamkin's relations with *Experimental Cinema* nor was there the least intimation that it would affect his status as the magazine's New York correspondent.

About seven months later *Close Up* printed a slanderous attack on our group by Potamkin which for unprovoked, savage vituperation has no equal. "Novices," "mystified mystics," "truncated boobs," were but a few of the select terms used to describe us. Our Hollywood correspondent, Seymour Stern, was "frenzied." Braver-Mann was called down for having changed the spelling of his name and for having dared to "wastefully repeat" certain sound ideas expounded by Munsterberg twelve years ago. We were accused of having "trekked to Hollywood—the land of frustrated esthetes . . ." To explain his former association with *Experimental Cinema*, he wrote: "I have been the New York correspondent for it, out of personal sympathy for its editors . . ." And finally, our "aspirations emit a malodor which is even worse than the stench of the west coast marshes." Etc. Etc.

This sudden effusion on the part of one so closely associated with us in our work came like lightning out of a blue sky. It remains a mystery to us until this very day. And apparently this is not the end of Potamkin's campaign against us. We have been notified by him that the *New Freeman* will soon print an article on movie criticism in which we are further "criticized."

The question is: What are Potamkin's intentions and where is he travelling to? How, for instance, are we to explain a recent attack by him on none other than comrade Leon Moussinac, the greatest figure in the international workers film movement? "Leon Moussinac has not realized his full value to the social understanding of the cinema by neglecting to scrutinize his attitude for a set of values." To those who have followed the writings and activities of Moussinac for many years, such statements will seem fantastically malicious. No less malicious, in fact than his puerile castigation of *Experimental Cinema* and those of us who are straining every tendon to create a theoretical and practical basis for a workers film movement in America. What are we to make of the fact that Potamkin refuses to repudiate or answer "On A Theory of 'Sources'" in our columns when we have invited him to do so? Why the intrigue, the slander, the venom?

*Experimental Cinema* will live and grow stronger. It will grow with the strengthening of the revolutionary labor movement in America with which its lot has been cast. We will correct the errors of inexperience in our struggle against the reactionary film and for workers' movies in America. We are pledged to work hand in hand with those who see in the cinema a class weapon which must be exposed and employed by the working class. The foundation for the carrying out of our program has already been laid. The present stage of the class struggle calls for an unequivocal stand on the field of battle. It is daily becoming more and more a question of—for or against?

Harry Alan Potamkin, where do you stand?



# The Position of the Soviet Cinema

by LEON MOUSSINAC

## The Economic Duel of The Cinema

**I**N the Soviet Union, as in every other country in the world, the cinema today reflects the general economic situation.

The absolute independence of the Soviet cinema from the great electrical trusts is due to the fact that the Socialist state possesses its own economic life, completely detached (insofar as the relations of international exchanges will permit) from the process of industrial and commercial development in capitalist countries. In this connection it is necessary to recall that the cinema of the world (with the exception of the Soviet cinema) finds itself more and more in the hands of a few giant combines. Not so long ago there were some fifteen of these trusts. Today RCA Photophone, Western Electric, Allgemeine Electrizitats Gesellschaft, and the Siemens Company have in principle divided among themselves the motion picture hegemony of the capitalist world. This division is at best temporary. There is already talk of new mergers.

If the present negotiations are successful we shall witness a striking verification, a typical illustration of the marxist theory of the concentration of capital in the hands of a handful of people. At the same time, the motion picture is of all industries the one which most strikingly serves what we might call the imperialism of thought.

There are two great stages to be noted in the evolution of the Soviet cinema. Firstly, in 1925, the founding of SOVKINO.

At the conclusion of the Russo-Polish war in 1923, the Soviet Union undertook the production of films aiming to carry the revolutionary idea to the four corners of the vast empire by means of a living and striking representation of the most essential oppositions in the struggle of two classes. Both the art of the motion picture and the theatre had received special attention from the Soviet government in the early days of the revolutionary struggles. Those were the days when the great Meyerhold covered Russia with his "theatrical shock troops," which were often substitutes for the revolutionary newspapers, then inaccessible to the illiterate peasantry.

The founding of SOVKINO was the first important step in the direction of the concentration and centralization of the cinema in the hands of the Soviet state. The SOVKINO of 1925 foresaw in its statutes an annual plan of production proportionate to its budgetary allotment.

The second important date of the Soviet cinema's progress towards concentration is 1929.

The powers of SOVKINO are increased. It achieves absolute unity of direction by effectively centralizing all the cinematographic organisms of the Union.

Before 1929 the number of these cinematographic organisms was rather small in the various Republics of the Soviet Union. The coexistence of important studios such as the WUFKU in Ukraina and certain organizations in federated republics could proceed without very serious inconveniences.

However, the Five Year Plan, gigantic program of in-

dustrial and cultural achievements, was soon to result in the springing up in many places of new motion picture centers. The unity which governs the political economy of the Soviet Union required an absolute concentration of the "leviers de commande."

Competition being non-existent in the Soviet Union (at least as conceived in capitalist countries), it became necessary for budgetary purposes, to avoid the danger of possible duplication and overlapping of functions. Moreover, the same Five-Year-Plan that created new cinema centers is centralizing these same centers in the hands of SOVKINO.

Here, in the official decree's own terms, is the extent of this centralization:

"As a result of the new centralizing reorganization of the Soviet cinema industry, the optico-mechanical trust (camera factories), the photo-chemical trust (film, plate and sensitized paper factories), and the new trust for general production, distribution and exhibition of films shall be grouped into a single organism."

The centralization of the production and distribution of negative film and cameras will permit the development of all branches of the industry on a larger scale than heretofore. It will also make for a broader and better satisfaction of the needs of distant populations in the great localities.

A particularly important fact in the matter of the general qualitative level of production is the creation of "artistico-political soviets in establishments of cinematographic production."

The main tasks of these artistic soviets are: The examination and appreciation of production programs and the control of the work; criticism of finished films or of those in the process of production; relations with the Press; preparation of reports to the central Soviet on the artistic as well as political aspects of films, etc., etc.

The Soviet state monopoly of the film has often been attacked by outsiders.

Here is an example, and, I think, a decisive proof of its efficacy for a country on the road to socialization.

I have in mind the introduction of the sound film in Europe. The great electrical trusts mentioned above have made of the sonorization of films a formidable instrument of speculation. The alleged purpose of the American products was "to act as a palliative to the public's weariness." Thrown on the market in considerable quantities, these films provoked a formidable crisis in European movie houses.

It is only thru its state monopoly that the Soviet Union has been able to avoid the disaster created in capitalist countries by the financial policies of the American sound and talk film. This was possible only in a country where a methodical and rational progression prevails in the economic sphere.

## Soviet Union versus United States

In the USSR the role of the cinema is, above all, to por-



tray life, or to defend, to exalt or to criticize an ideology. It is impossible, unless perhaps as an exception, to find in the Soviet Union so-called "pure" or abstract cinema, in which the picture has been created for the picture. This type of film no longer leaves the secrecy of the laboratory.

The cinema, in the Soviet Union, is a concept of reality. Reality is richer and more feverish there than anywhere. The Revolution is a permanent and inexhaustible source of inspiration. It will remain so until socialism shall have triumphed definitely and its aims been fully realized.

In Russia, therefore, there is more social lyricism than elsewhere, a new idea, more constant than in the capitalist cinema and than in the American cinema in particular. One of the great privileges of the Soviet cinema is the absence of all diplomacy, in the expression of the revolutionary ideology.

We have seen that the logical evolution of capitalism on one hand and the growth of Socialism on the other, creates two diametrically opposed economic forms of the cinema: America and USSR. Need it be said that it is at the same time a merciless struggle of two opposed ideologies, of two basically different art principles.

In his "Scenes of Future Life" George Duhamel has spoken in terms of lyrical despair but with somewhat romantic sentimentality of his disgust with the American cinema. His alarm is, however, only too well justified in the presence of the formidably organized besottedness of the current cinema, and that not only in the United States.

In periods of decadence art becomes purely formal, emaciated. Its radiation, its prolongation into the mind of the masses becomes nil. Production, even refined and interesting in certain aspects—an interest of details and purely relative—testifies as a whole to an absence of any real direction. Art is not truly mastered; at every step it finds itself arrested by contingencies of various orders. Nor is it master. That is the case today in the cinema of capitalist countries.

In the same connection it may be said that the judgments (good or bad) of Occidental critics of the Soviet cinema have no value whatever. Whether they praise or attack, they express a viewpoint exclusively esthetic or nationalistic. It is less the artistic than the social quality which impregnates it which must interest one in the Soviet films. That is logical.

We can, if necessary, easily find in the USSR twenty directors whose pure esthetic value,—leaving out of consideration all questions of a political order—is equal, if not superior to most of the Occidental directors. Moreover, it is undeniable that there are in Russia as elsewhere,—neither more nor less—bad films. The very assumption of an infallible production should send shivers down one's back. But all this is, for the moment, of but secondary importance, I think.

To reasonably judge Soviet cinematic production, as well, in fact, as any form of present Russian activity, it is necessary above all to remember that the USSR (as long as it shall have to maintain its dictatorship) remains—in a state of revolution.

The Soviet Cinema must not be considered as a static phenomenon, a realized ideal, for it is, in its present stage, a passing phenomenon.

Obviously, the bourgeois democrat, staid and conservative, and who sees in parliamentary institutions the eternal

symbol of his own stability, will find it difficult to grasp this.

But for a Russian communist the form of the cinema, like the political form, is not definitive. It will reflect its transitory requirements and its substance will be primary and govern its form until such time as the Revolution shall have achieved its fundamental tasks.

\* \* \*

Marxist doctrine teaches that science can indicate the authentic tendencies of the future. In the light of this I say: that the silent cinema is incomplete, that the sound film is incomplete, and likewise the talking and stereoscopic films. All these cinematographic forms have nothing definitive. Their role is to be stages in the progress of science towards one of the first perhaps definitive formulas of the cinema: television and consequently telecinema.

The arrival of television is not far off, I believe. In less than five years there will be television stations almost everywhere. Already now, there are many in Germany and in the United States. The delay which we foresee in their universal diffusion is dependent only upon an economic opportunity: Too much capital has been invested in sound apparatus; almost every movie house in the world has been "wired."

Not before money so invested shall have brought its owners 1000% in returns can there be reason to figure on a sufficiently large number of television stations being built by Americans and Germans, who alone at the present time dispose of the material means to do so.

Ah! If the Soviet Union possessed the technical equipment and especially the indispensable financial resources necessary, television would be an accomplished fact. Science has solved the problem, and the question of an economic opportunity for eventual fruitful speculation does not exist in the USSR. Unfortunately, the future of telecinema depends on the interests of business,—or of the gigantic American trusts.

The Five-Year-Plan, conceived and adopted at a time when it was not possible to foresee the realization, evidently precocious, of cinema from great distances, has assigned (the word is not exaggerated) formidable sums of money to assure cinematographic circuits everywhere on the vast territory of the Union. All actual indications point to the fact that by the time these important circuits will be completed, the perfection of television and telecinema shall have been accomplished. Thus considerable and draining financial sacrifices will perhaps have been out of proportion to their final result.

At any rate, telecinema is an invention of which it may be said that it is on the level of a country like the USSR. For its absolute cohesion,—a requirement *sine qua non* of an efficacious application of television,—is much more realizable there than in countries where cutthroat competition makes unification impossible. State monopoly of telecinema in a country marching towards Socialism represents the propaganda instrument of our dreams.

The telecinema,—at last!—will mean the end of artistic sects, of clans, of esoteric chapels. Thanks to it, we shall witness, on the ideological level, the open struggle of two classes. On the one hand it will be the most powerful means that the bourgeoisie will possess to attempt to avoid the Revolution. For the Socialist State it will be the instrument used, among other things, to pass from the transition period it is now in, into a definitive and Socialist position.



## Workers Films in New York

**T**WENTY-FOUR years ago the first American motion-picture studio was opened at 11 East Fourteenth Street in New York by the Mutoscope and Biograph Company. It served as one of the foundations in the building up of a vast machine to supply the American masses with cheap escape from their misery, from the drabness of long days in the shops, factories and mines. "The movies could make their dreams come true," admits Terry Ramsaye, a bourgeois film historian. An artificial dream-world to supply workers with the necessary **cultural minimum** and at the same time build up one of capitalism's most prosperous industries. And at number 11 were born the "stars," indispensable cogs in the machine: Griffith, Pickford, Sennett, the Gishes, Sweet, etc.

1930—A group of class-conscious workers organize the Workers Film and Photo League only two doors away from the old Biograph brownstone house. It is 7 East Fourteenth Street. Twenty-four years separate 7 from 11. The bourgeoisie has developed the screen into a more efficient weapon of reactionary propaganda and decadent "entertainment." It is no longer Fourteenth Street. It is now Hollywood and Long Island. No longer the timid flicker of the silent film. Sound. Talk. Color. Grandeur. Stereoscopes.

But there has been a proletarian revolution in Russia. The Soviet Union has created a cinema that has taught us the fraud and the vulgarity of film productions in our country. The Soviet cinema is the cinema of a class that has achieved its historical task in conquering power. Its films are class films, just as the American film is that of a class in power—a reactionary class doomed to destruction.

The American workers are learning from their Soviet brothers that the film must be used as a weapon in the class struggle. Their own misery and oppression is driving them away from a screen that offers "Love Parades" and "Movietone Follies" while their children stand in breadlines and their wages are cut.

The movie must become our weapon. It must spread the message of struggle against unemployment, starvation and police clubbings. It must reflect the workers' lives and problems.

This task has been assumed by the Workers Film and Photo League, the first organization of its kind in America. It summarizes its program as follows:

To struggle against and expose the reactionary film.

To produce documentary films reflecting the lives and struggles of the American workers.

To spread and popularize the great artistic and revolutionary Soviet productions.

## Soviet Photography

The countries of Western Europe, America and Japan have only been able during the last year or two to acquaint themselves, through VOKS exhibitions with the new formations, tendencies and special features characterizing and crystallizing Soviet photography.

Until recently Soviet photography abroad was represented by the best known Soviet photographers, regularly exhibiting in salons and exhibitions, where their work was highly praised for its formal and technical triumphs. In the U.S.S.R. itself, however, the work of these photographers was not so popular. Their methods had been studied and their knowledge made use of, but the social life and cultural demands of the masses in a country building socialism, demanded something more.

The events and facts of the Revolution provided Soviet photography with new, fascinating and rich documental material. Social-economic conditions and cultural-political circumstances and the extraordinary effective value of this material stimulated photographic thought to the mastery of this new subject matter, hence he search for new forms determined by the new theme.

The styles of the old masters—the portrait, lyrical landscape, still lifes, and exhibition studies—lost their hold on the imagination of the public. These styles became obsolete through the inertia of dust traditions with roots in the formal methods of studio painting.

The easel picture or individual studio painting underwent utter catastrophe after the revolution, losing many of its best representatives to photography and the cinema, because of its inadequacy to satisfy modern demands. The static nature of art photography, aping the art of painting, the calm balance of the elements of composition, soft tonal transference, lyrical diffused contours and misty light and shade, the stereotyped "picturesque," static perspectives and construction—all this was not in accord with the new world outlook. Life brought new material and dictated a new form. The tempestuous new life drew the art photographer also in its whirlpool, away from mannered exhibition studies, narrow, studio work. Soviet actuality itself provided the themes in infinite variety, for Soviet photography.

The Revolution helped photography to emancipate itself from the art of painting earlier and more thoroughly in the Soviet Union, than in other countries and photography in the USSR no longer depends slavishly upon the emulation of art, but has already found its own methods as an independent art.

The dynamics and pace of modern life in capitalist countries have already created, formally, an artistic revolution in the sphere of photography in other countries too. The legitimate cannons for painting have already been rejected by many of the most prominent European photographers, but the isolation of the individual artist in Western Europe leads him to merely formal investigations and abstract photography.

The richness, the exuberance of Soviet social life provide the Soviet photographer with vital subjects and in working upon the subject matter, struggling to attain the utmost expressiveness, he photographer is stimulated towards the search for new, adequate forms and solutions for these problems. Thus documentary or "chronicle" photography is at the present stage of photographic evolution in the USSR, the most characteristic form in which vital social experience and penetrating photographic experiment meet.

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