11. Historical-Materialist Narration

The Soviet Example

In its widest scope, leftist political cinema has no pertinence as a mode of narration. Political fiction films can appeal to classical narrational norms (e.g., the work of Costa-Gavras) or to conventions of the art-cinema mode (e.g., *Man of Marble*, 1976). But within left-wing filmmaking we can discern one clear-cut narrational tradition. Although this tradition has influenced both classical and art-cinema norms, it possesses a distinct set of narrational strategies and tactics. These originate in the Soviet "historical-materialist" cinema of the period 1925–1933. I will take twenty-two films as prime instances of this mode: *Strike* (1925), *Potemkin* (1925), *The Devil's Wheel* (1926), *Mother* (1926), *Moscow in October* (1927), *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927), *October* (1928), *Zvenigora* (1928), *Lace* (1928), *Storm over Asia* (1928), *Arsenal* (1929), *The Ghost That Never Returns* (1929), *The New Babylon* (1929), *Fragments of an Empire* (1929), *Old and New* (1929), *Goluboi Express* (1929), *Earth* (1930), *Mountains of Gold* (1931), *Ivan* (1932), *A Simple Case* (1932), *Twenty-six Commissars* (1933), and *Deserter* (1933). (Certainly *By the Law* (1926), *Bed and Sofa* (1927), *Alone* (1931), and others might be added to the list, but the above seem to me the least disputable cases.) After considering the Soviet variant, I will sketch out how the mode changed in later years.

Narration as Rhetoric

Like much Soviet art of the 1920s, the historical-materialist film has a strong rhetorical cast. It uses narrational principles and devices opposed to Hollywood norms for purposes that are frankly didactic and persuasive. Within Soviet culture generally, artists and political workers debated how aesthetic practices could be translated into utilitarian ones. One position, exemplified by the extreme left wing of Constructivism, called for an end to "art," a hopelessly bourgeois category. But on the whole, both artists and politicians wanted to maintain "the aesthetic" as a distinct (if subordinate) space. Some, like Kuleshov, saw their work as part of a long-range process of basic research; pursued in the scientific spirit, their experiments could eventually reveal the laws of socialist art. Other creators made art obedient to "social command." Here the artwork was endowed with immediate utility as "agitprop." Patriotic music, the mass spectacles celebrating the October Revolution, and much of Mayakovsky's poetry are examples. No matter how practical the end, the social-command view clung to a conception of the distinctly aesthetic. "Art," wrote Lunacharsky and Slavinsky in 1920, "is a powerful means of infecting those around us with ideas, feelings, and moods. Agitation and propaganda acquire particular acuity and effectiveness when they are clothed in the attractive and mighty forms of art."[1] Thus, the instrumental aim provided—at least for a time—an acceptable framework for experiment.

In Soviet cinema, the double demand of poetic and rhetoric shapes basic narrational strategies. There is the tendency to treat the syuzhet as both a narrative and an argument. Soviet cinema is explicitly tendentious, like the *roman à thèse*; the fabula world stands for a set of abstract propositions whose validity the film at once presupposes and reasserts. *Strike* offers a very clear instance. Not only is this the story of a single strike, it is a discourse on all the Russian strikes that occurred before 1917. The exact locale and time are unspecified; instead, the film is broken into six parts explicitly labeled as typical stages: seething in the factory; "Immediate Cause of the Strike"; "The Factory Stands Idle"; "The Strike Is Prolonged"; "Engineering a Massacre"; "Liquidation." The film concludes:

Extreme close-up: Eyes stare out at us.

Expository title: "And the strikes in Lena, Talka, Zlatovst, Yaroslavl, Tsaritsyn, and Kostroma left bleeding, unforgettable scars on the body of the proletariat."

Extreme close-up: Eyes stare out at us.

Expository title: "Proletarians, remember!"

The film's argument works by appeal to example; the narrative cause and effect demonstrate the necessity for the working class to struggle against capital. While later films did not utilize the nakedly argumentative structure of *Strike*, they did rely on the presupposition that the narrative should constitute an exemplary case for Marxist-Leninist doctrine.[2] Furthermore, *Strike*'s example is a historical one; the fabula is based on fact. Other Soviet films take up this referential impulse, creating a "realistic" motivation for the fabula events.

The most obvious result of "rhetoricizing" the fabula world is the changed conception of character. Narrative causality is construed as supraindividual, deriving from social forces described by Bolshevik doctrine. Characters thus get defined chiefly through their class position, job, social actions, and political views. Characters also lose the uniqueness sought to some degree by classical narration and to a great degree by art-cinema narration; they become prototypes of whole classes, milieux, or historical epochs. Diego's existential crisis in *La guerre est finie* would be unthinkable in Soviet historical-materialist cinema. As M. N. Pokrovsky put it, "We Marxists do not see personality as the maker of history, for to us personality is only the instrument with which history works."[3] The single character may count for little, as seen in some films' attempt to make a group of peasants or workers into a "mass hero." Such an approach to character had already been evident in Soviet revolutionary literature and theater of the 1918–1929 era.[4]

True, the Soviet cinema recognized degrees of individuation: the anonymous agents of *Moscow in October*, Eisenstein's physically vivid but generally apsychological characters like the sailor Vakulinchuk, the more detailed delinea-

tion of individual behavior in Pudovkin, and the intensely subjective characterization in Room's films. Nonetheless, psychological singularity remains quite rare. Sometimes, as in *October*, the more psychologically motivated the character (e.g., Kerensky, with his Napoleonic lust for power), the surer the character is to be denigrated as a bourgeois.

Character types find their roles within specific generic motivations. There is the genre of "studies of revolution," either in historical or contemporary settings. Here the film tells a story of successful struggles (*Potemkin, October, The End of St. Petersburg, Moscow in October, Zvenigora*) or currently emergent ones (*Storm over Asia, Mountains of Gold, The Ghost That Never Returns, Goluboi Express, Twenty-six Commissars*). The revolution film may also pay tribute to heroic failures (*Strike, Mother, Arsenal, The New Babylon*). A second genre portrays contemporary problems in Soviet life, usually involving remnants of capitalist or feudal behavior (*Fragments of an Empire, Lace, The Devil's Wheel*). There is also a genre that matches the literary formula of the "production" novel: a dam must be built (*Ivan*), or the countryside must be collectivized (*Old and New, Earth*). Some films combine genres: *A Simple Case* (historical revolution and problems of contemporary life) or *Deserter* (emergent revolution plus production goals). All these genres evidently give the film an opportunity to create a fabula that will make each character emblematic of forces within a politically defined situation.

One task of tendentious narrative art is to create conflicts that both prove the thesis and furnish narrative interest. In these films, the viewer is likely to know, or quickly guess, the underlying argument to be presented and the referential basis of the fabula world. (There can be no doubt that the October Revolution will succeed.) Most of our interest thus falls upon the question of how history takes the course it does.

In a general sense, the Soviet historical-materialist film answers this by adhering to the two schematic patterns which Susan R. Suleiman identifies in the *roman à thèse*. There is what she calls the "structure of confrontation," in which a psychologically unchanging hero represents a group in his struggle against adversaries.[5] Such is Marfa in *Old and New*, or the Chinese coolie in *Goluboi Express*. This structure provides a fairly traditional curve of dramatic conflict. There is also the "structure of apprenticeship" in which the typical individual moves from ignorance to knowledge and from passivity to action.[6] The specific shape which this dramatic development takes in Soviet literature of the period has been summarized by Katerina Clark. She points out that the Socialist Realist narrative often centers on a character who moves from a spontaneous, instinctive form of activity to a disciplined, correct awareness of political ends and means.[7] *Mother*, as both novel and film, is the canonic instance. The mother acts spontaneously but incorrectly, and her positive qualities are offset by the danger she poses to the revolution. By accepting the tutelage of her son and the Party, she is able to become a martyr to conscious revolutionary activity. The result of this pattern is that potentially affirmative characters are shown initially in a rather bad light: they may be naive (Mother, the sailor in *The Devil's Wheel*, Filiminov in *Fragments of an Empire*) or worse—cowardly (Renn in *Deserter*), lascivious (Pavel in *A Simple Case*), rowdy (the delinquents in *Lace*), treacherous (the peasant in *The End of St. Petersburg*) or greedy (the peasant in *Mountains of Gold*). The cause-and-effect chain then works to convert the character(s) to disciplined socialist activity. The drama—and the spectator's hypotheses—come to be based on how and when the apprentice's conversion will take place.

To some extent, the didactic aim of the Soviet cinema created a storehouse of topoi or argumentative commonplaces, which the filmmaker could use to structure the syuzhet. But these were not so narrow that they stifled experimentation. The narrative-plus-argument pattern was open to poetic exploitation in many ways. The use of character prototypes—the sturdy worker, the activist woman, the bureaucrat, the bourgeois "man out of time"—allowed stylistic embroidering. "The figure of a cinematic character," declared Pudovkin, "is the sum of all the shots in which he appears."[8] It was up to the director not to give the character individuality but to use film form to make the type vivid.

Pudovkin could draw on the techniques of poster art and contemporary fiction, Eisenstein on theater and caricature, Dovzhenko upon cartoon art and Ukrainian folklore. Commonplace rhetorical points could be sharpened by stylistic devices. The opening sequence of *Arsenal* powerfully demonstrates how, given the topos "The czar's war destroys the Russian peasantry," a film's shot-to-shot relations could still be made highly unpredictable. Similarly, in *Old and New*, Marfa's decision to organize a collective is presented so that her misery in the fields ("Enough!") is alternated with her oratory before her friends; impossible to say where one scene leaves off and the other begins. Rhetorical demands provided generic and realistic motivation for an experimentation with the medium akin to that in Soviet avant-garde art generally. Thus *Old and New*'s localized breakdown of classical order and duration is motivated by the whole film's juxtaposition of past and present. In Russian Formalist terms, the rhetorical aim enabled the films to "defamiliarize" classical norms of space and time.

Once the film uses poetic procedures for rhetorical ends, the narrational process becomes quite overt. The narration comes forward as a didactic guide to proper construction of the fabula.

There is an especially clear index of this. In the classical Hollywood cinema of the silent era, the narration almost invariably employed many more dialogue titles than expository ones—usually four to twelve times as many. In some films of the late 1920s, there are no expository titles at all. The reason is obvious: an expository title creates a self-conscious narration that is only occasionally desirable in the classical film. But the Soviet films I am considering here have a much higher proportion of expository titles. In most of these films, dialogue titles outweigh expository ones by a ratio of only four to one, and some of the films actually contain more expository than dialogue titles. In later years, the Soviets' use of nondiegetic or "contrapuntal" sound montage had a comparably overt effect.

Overt narration is also signaled through nonlinguistic means. Some cinematographic techniques—the dynamic camera angle that creates many diagonals; the abnormally high or low horizon line; slow and fast motion; the extreme close-up that picks out a detail; the 28-mm lens that distorts space; vignetting and soft focus—were quickly identified with the Soviet cinema, but despite their often clichéd employment, we must see them as striving to suggest a narrational presence behind the framing or filming of an event. It is here that Pudovkin's concept of an "ideal observer" has some relevance. Critics were quick to spot and personify this camera eye; one wrote of *Potemkin*: "It is like some grotesque record of a gargantuan news photographer with a genius for timing and composition."[9]

"Realistic" though such films as *Potemkin* and *The End of St. Petersburg* were often felt to be, the staging of the action tends to create highly self-conscious narration. The set may present a perspectivally inconsistent space, as in the warden's office in *The Ghost That Never Returns* or in the cafe in *The New Babylon*. Lighting may also be manipulated, as when in *Storm over Asia* the cut-in close-ups of the fox fur are lit in ways completely unfaithful to the overall illumination of the Mongol home. Figures are often placed against neutral background, either realistically motivated ones (a peasant or worker fiercely silhouetted against a cloudless sky) or more stylized ones, as in the initial attack on the woman on the Odessa Steps (fig. 11.1) or the abstract cut-ins from *The End of St. Petersburg* which we examined earlier (fig. 7.50–7.55). The figures will often be placed in unnaturally static poses as well. While Dovzhenko made the most systematic use of this, we find the device in other films as well: in *The Ghost that Never Returns*, characters freeze in place during an attempted suicide; in *Twenty-six Commissars*, a crowd listens to a speech while standing in abnormally fixed postures. In contrast, the figure behavior may be what was called at the time "grotesque" or "eccentric"—stylized figure movement that makes the scene difficult to construe as a real event. *Strike*'s dwarfs and clownish bums are usually cited here, but we could add the petty thieves in *The Devil's Wheel*, Kerensky and company in *October*, the priest in *Earth*, and the prison warden in *The Ghost That Never Returns*.

What gives the narrational presence away completely is

the propensity for frontality of body, face, and eye in these films. We have seen how the classical film favors a modified frontality of figure placement; our sight lines are marked out, but the characters seldom face or look directly toward us. The Soviet cinema tends to stage the action much more frontally. Furthermore, the characters frequently look out at the camera. Sometimes this is motivated as another character's point of view, but not nearly as often as it would be in Hollywood. And at some point, frontality becomes an unabashedly direct address to the camera. Again and again characters turn "to us" without the slightest realistic motivation. The end of *Strike*, with its staring eyes, is probably not the best example, since such concluding confrontations form a minor convention of classical epilogues too.[10] But when, in the middle of a scene, a soldier gazes out and asks us, "What am I fighting for?" (*End of St. Petersburg*), or when a character confides in us (*Zvenigora*), or mugs and winks at us (*Lace*), or asks whether it is all right to kill the enemy (*Arsenal*), or turns to us for help during a fistfight (*Twenty-six Commissars*), we must acknowledge that narration is not simply relaying some autonomously existent profilmic event. Now the narration overtly *includes* the profilmic event, has already constituted it for the sake of specific effects. Ideas of montage within the shot, montage "before filming," and montage "within the actor's performance," so current in the late 1920s, testify to filmmakers' notion that narration should include self-conscious manipulation of the profilmic event, the material that normally pretends to go unmanipulated. This narration is not only omniscient; it announces itself as omnipotent.

What brings together film techniques like intertitles, cinematography, and mise-en-scène is the key concept of Soviet film theory and practice: editing, usually called montage. As conceived in Soviet artistic practice during the 1920s, montage in any art implies the presence of a creative subject actively choosing how effects are to be produced. Summarizing the views of many practitioners, Félicie Pastorello writes aptly: "Montage is an act (and not a look), an act of interpreting reality. Like the engineer and the scholar, the artist constructs his object, he does not reproduce reality."[11] In objecting that Soviet montage "did not give us the event; it alluded to it," Bazin was putting his finger on exactly this refusal to treat film technique as a neutral transmitter.[12] The didactic and poetic aspects of Soviet cinema meet in a technique which insists, both quantitatively and qualitatively, upon the constant and overt presence of narration.

It comes as no news that Soviet montage films rely upon editing, but some comparative figures may spruce up the obvious. The Soviet films I am considering contain between 600 and 2,000 shots, whereas their Hollywood counterparts of the years 1917–1928 typically contain between 500 and 1,000. (I am counting intertitles as shots.) Hollywood canonized the average shot length as five to six seconds, yielding a common figure of 500–800 shots per hour. The Soviet films, however, average two to four seconds per shot and contain between 900 and 1,500 shots per hour. This means that only the very fastest cut Hollywood films of the teens (such as *Wild and Woolly*) approach the Soviet standard, while the fastest-cut Hollywood films of the 1920s fall at the slower end of the Soviet scale. And nowhere in Hollywood filmmaking of any period can one find editing as quickly paced as in

the most rapid montage films: an average shot length of under two seconds in *Potemkin, Deserter, Goluboi Express,* and *A Simple Case.*

The reliance on cutting has qualitative consequences. In the Hollywood film, especially after the coming of sound, a few sequences will be fairly heavily edited while others will contain longer takes. By rejecting such a "crossbred" decoupage, the Soviet films provide a ubiquitous and constant level of rhetorical intervention. This cinema goes beyond those narrational asides which we found in the art cinema; these films do not offer a reality (objective, subjective) inflected by occasional interpolated "commentary"; these films are signed and addressed through and through, the diegetic world built from the ground up according to rhetorical demands.

Thus there are always more cuts than needed for lucid cueing of fabula construction. Even the simplest gesture may be broken into several shots. Crosscutting endlessly juxtaposes actions in different locales. By virtue of what the Soviets called "concentration" cuts, a simple transition from long shot to medium shot gets splintered into several shots. Jump cuts break up a single camera position. Montage also operates on intertitles: in *October*, the narration chops speeches into brief phrases. The relentless presence of montage in these films aims to keep the spectator from construing any action as simply an unmediated piece of the fabula world. Whereas Bazin worried that cutting changed the profilmic event from something real into something imaginary, the Soviet filmmakers believed that *not* cutting would change the syuzhet from a rhetorical construct into something (falsely) descriptive.

Montage makes the narration self-conscious in yet another way: through rhetorical tropes. The Soviet films furnish an anthology of both "tropes of thought" and "tropes of speech." The former are buried or ellided formal arguments, such as the schematic argument-from-example that undergirds the Soviet film and the tendency of the narration to argue by analogy (as when crosscutting links two social agents and makes us infer a shared motive or political view: bourgeoisie/police, proletarian/peasant). Tropes of speech, or figures of adornment, can be mimicked by editing too. These films teem with rhetorical questions, metaphors or similes (the bull and the strikers in *Strike*), synecdoches (a general's medals substituting for the general in *The End of St. Petersburg*), personifications (the squirming concertina in *Arsenal*), understatements, hyperbole, antitheses, and many other classical figures. *October* uses paranomasia, or punning, when the narration presents Kerensky's political rise as a climb up an apparently endless flight of stairs; the play is based on the Russian word *lestnitsa* (stairs), as used in the phrase *ierarkhicheskaia lestnitsa*, or "table of military ranks." In the same film, the intercutting of Kerensky with a Napoleon statue cites the simile Lenin used in a 1917 *Pravda* article, "In Search of a Napoleon," while the montage of statues and artillery probably is meant to revive Lenin's synecdoche "With icons against cannons."[13] The prominence of stylistic organization in these films cannot be read as sheer artistic motivation; the didactic ends often make film style operate as compositionally justified ornamentation.

All these techniques invest the narration with a high and consistent degree of overtness in all the respects we have been considering since Chapter 4.

Degree and depth of knowledge. The narration of these Soviet films is omniscient. The conventional knowledgeability afforded by crosscutting is particularly visible in these works because the crosscutting is not only that of a last-minute rescue: crosscutting is constantly drawing marked comparisons. Firing cannons are likened to popping champagne corks (*Goluboi Express*). While a boy is borne to his grave, his lover is at home, in an ecstasy of despair (*Earth*). More unusually, the syuzhet will "flash back" without the motivation of character memory, as when at the close of *Old and New* the narration gives us glimpses of earlier scenes of Marfa's struggle. The narration may also overtly anticipate what will happen later in the film. The most striking example comes from the opening of *Storm over Asia*, where shots of landscapes are interrupted by near-subliminal flashes of the saber that the protagonist will wield in the *last* scene. The narration likewise has no need to justify spatial manip-

ulations by character knowledge: we can cut to any locale. In *Potemkin*, as the marines prepare to fire, the narration cuts away to the bugle, the imperial crest, and other objects which yield ironic juxtapositions. In *The End of St. Petersburg*, the narrator can situate the political activity in relation to lyrical landscapes. In *The Ghost That Never Returns*, when the police agent fires his pistol, the narration prolongs suspense by holding on such details as drifts of sand and a hat rolling in the wind. In *Lace*, a quarrel is interrupted by cutaway shots of a poster on the wall.

Communicativeness. The narration's authority rests in part on its refusal to withhold what the mode defines as crucial fabula information. Such information includes the story's historical context, political arguments, and character background. The film's fabula action consists either of the struggle of a protagonist to achieve a goal or of the growth of a spontaneous protagonist to socialist discipline and awareness. It is this linearity that the narration respects. The syuzhet does not equivocate about characters' motives or behavior. The exposition is concentrated and preliminary, furnishing relevant and valid information about the characters' pasts; there will never be what Sternberg calls "anticipatory caution," let alone a "rise and fall of first impressions." The narration, in fact, takes the opportunity to be "overcommunicative" by using many devices that ensure redundancy: conformity of character to type, of type to situation, or of situation to historical-political presuppositions. In *Ivan*, a street loudspeaker will often reiterate the narrational information already supplied by other means. The celebrated overlapping editing of Soviet practice displays not only the narration's authority (ability to restage the profilmic event, to "remount" it in editing) but also the narration's urge to insist on certain gestures. Scenes like that of the woman running through the doors in *Ivan* and the cream separator test in *Old and New* resemble traditional oratorical amplifications of set topics (grief, success).

Self-consciousness. We have already seen the extent to which camera position and lens length, frontality of figures, static poses, to-camera address, and the constant use of montage all create the sense of a self-conscious address to the audience. The expository title can focus this effect. The narration can interject maxims (a quotation from Lenin in *Potemkin*), slogans ("All power to the Soviets!" in *October*), and rebuttals (in *Goluboi Express*, a reactionary cries, "Stop the train!" and an expository title shoots back: "But can you stop a revolution?"). The narration will also usurp the characters' own voices. In many Soviet films, information that could easily be given in dialogue titles will be supplied by expository titles, as in the beginning of *The End of St. Petersburg*, when the peasant family must send some members to work in the city. In one episode of *Twenty-six Commissars*, the narration becomes a witness's testimony to the action. And some titles could plausibly come from the fabula world but, because they are not signaled as quotations, instead suggest that the words are routed through the narration. *Moscow in October* intercalates an orator and expository titles, while in *Arsenal*, we cannot locate a speaker for such lines as "Where is father?" Nothing could be stronger evidence for this tendency than the insistence on retaining exhortatory expository titles after the arrival of lip-synchronized sound. In the remarkable *Mountains of Gold*, expository titles repeat what we have already heard a character say, and they even argue with a speaking character! Unlike their contemporaries in Europe, who envisioned the titleless film as the goal of a "pure" experimental cinema, the Soviet filmmakers saw the linguistic resources of the expository title as an instrument for rhetorical narration.

Attitudinal properties. The very constitution of genres and the didacticism of the narration in this mode make the narration openly and unequivocally judgmental, often satirically and ironically so. Judgments can be carried by intertitles, especially in the exposition: how many Soviet films begin by rendering an oppressive state of affairs in the images and then interjecting ironic titles ("All is calm . . ." etc.)? The narration throws its voice to cheer for the opposition or quotes characters to mocking effect (the figure known to classical rhetoric as "transplacement"). In *Goluboi Express*, decadent bourgeois proclaim, "Ah, Europe, culture, civilization"; later the narration intercuts the same phrases with statues, policemen, and troops. In *October*, the

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11.2. Mountains of Gold

Bolsheviks arrested during the July Days are called traitors and spies; later, when Kerensky releases them to defend Petrograd, the narration sarcastically recalls the epithets. The ne plus ultra of this process may be seen in the intercutting of battlefield and stock exchange in *The End of St. Petersburg*, in which the same phrases ("Forward!" "The deal is over!" "Both parties are satisfied!") apply with brutal irony to both milieux. Once this "tone of voice" has been established, the images can reinforce it by typage (grotesque costumes and demeanor of the bourgeois types, valorization of protagonists), camera work (the low angle as connoting power or solitude), lens length (the wide-angle lens for distortion and caricature; see fig. 11.2), and music (e.g., comic music to parody the opposition). The specific rhetorical tropes already mentioned will often, of course, work to judgmental effect as well.

Predictable Fabula, Unpredictable Narration

By treating the syuzhet as an argument by example, and by gathering a powerful rhetorical thrust, the Soviet historical-materialist cinema created a distinct organization of narration, with effects on cinematic style already discussed. Another result was an idiosyncratic approach to the spectator, one that is neither as "totalitarian" as liberal-humanist critics often assume nor as radical as some recent theorists of textuality have claimed. The films' mixture of didactic and poetic structures calls for viewing procedures which deviate from classical norms yet remain unified by protocols specific to this mode.

Broadly speaking, the viewer brings to these films a few highly probable schemata. Already-known stories, drawn from history, myth, and contemporary life, furnish a fairly limited range of options for the overall cause-effect chain. Knowledge of the different genres, especially when the film treats a historical subject, further limits what can plausibly happen. The viewer also possesses a sense of how the mode creates character and signals salient conflicts. And the ending is likely to be known, at least in general outline. In syuzhet terms, the narration further strives to eliminate any ambiguity at the level of causality (motives, goals, preconditions) or at the level of the rhetorical point made. Most narrational difficulties presented by these films cannot be explained under the rubrics of realism or subjectivity; the problems are clearly marked as proceeding from the self-conscious narration. On the whole there is little room for the gamelike equivocations and the interpretive subtlety valorized by art-cinema norms.

These films therefore sacrifice many resources of other narrational modes. There is relatively little curiosity about how events came to be as they are; macrosocial historical causes are often taken for granted. Suspense is limited to questions of how the inevitable will occur or, in the case of characters who are not "public" personages, whether the character will survive, move to correct consciousness, and so forth. The syuzhet may assume that because the historical event or rhetorical point is already known, not all of the links need to be shown. In *Deserter*, the process of converting the German worker Renn from a traitor to a good proletarian is completely skipped over; the narration simply assumes that a stay in the Soviet Union suffices to bring him around. The

end of *Potemkin* neglects to mention that the rebelling sailors were eventually captured, but the viewer is supposed to understand that whatever the outcome of this episode, the entire 1905 revolution was a harbinger of 1917. Moreover, if there are political disputes within Soviet communism about the case considered, it is often wiser for the filmmaker to omit explanation than to risk being criticized. Vance Kepley has shown that many elliptical moments in Dovzhenko's films result from skirting sensitive issues.[14] We shall later see how *The New Babylon* tries to avoid disputes about why the Paris Commune failed. Again, the omnipotent narration works as a reliable guide: any "permanent" breaks in the causal chain signal not a lack of communicativeness but a tacit appeal to the audience's referential schemata.

The historical-materialist film compensates for its limited narrative schemata by unusually innovative spatial and temporal construction. If the story outline is often predictable, stylistic processes often are not. At the barest perceptual level, narration will jolt the spectator. Consider the opening of *Twenty-six Commissars*:

1. Long shot: Oil field
2. Title: "Baku"
3. Explosion
4. Title: "1918"
5. Explosion
6. Explosion

This is our introduction to the revolutionary brigade. *Strike* begins with abstract shots of the factory, including silhouettes and an upside-down, reverse-motion reflection of the factory in a puddle. The narration of *Deserter* establishes the river docks in a lyrical tranquillity before startling us with shots of chains dropped from ships—shots that intersperse black frames with bursts of imagery and thus create an almost annoying flicker. The conventionality of the large-scale narrative articulations promotes a moment-by-moment "microattention" to the unfolding syuzhet. Like the orator embroidering a commonplace, the narration takes for granted that we understand that part of World War I was fought around Baku, that *Strike* will be about a workers' walkout, that *Deserter* is set in a dockyard. The task is to make these givens vivid, or as the Soviet directors were fond of saying, *perceptible*.

What renders these stylistic processes more unpredictable than the procedures of classical narration? Most obviously, the Soviet films I am considering define themselves against many spatial and temporal norms of classical Hollywood narrative. All the procedures of titling, cinematography, editing, and mise-en-scène I have already mentioned constitute an alternative stylistic paradigm. Eyelines will not necessarily cut neatly together; characters will not necessarily ignore the audience; framing will not necessarily be symmetrical or centered. Similarly, principles of spatial and temporal continuity, of tight linkage of cause and effect, and so forth do not hold in this mode. As in the art cinema, style becomes more prominent here because of its deviation from the classical norm.

To the extent, however, that the Soviet devices function within a paradigm, the viewer can apply schemata based on *this* extrinsic norm to make sense of the films. But this process is more difficult than in the classical mode because of the great emphasis the Soviets placed upon deviating from extrinsic norms. Again as in the art cinema, variations often proceed from authorial differences: Dovzhenko is more likely to use slow motion than Eisenstein is, Room is more apt to match shots "classically" than are his contemporaries. Still, nothing in *Strike* prepares us for the alternating of two successive scenes in *Old and New*; nothing in *Mother* anticipates the montage of black frames in *Deserter*. It is not just that the filmmakers developed; the search for ever more "perceptible" effects pushed them to try new devices in every film. In general, narration became more elliptical, images became briefer, gaps became greater, fabula events underwent more expansion and amplification. Virtually any device—soft focus, slow or fast motion, upside-down camera positions, single-source lighting, handheld camera movement—could create a film's distinctive intrinsic norm. It would be up to the viewer to make sense of the unpredictable procedure by slotting it into accustomed syuzhet functions and patterns. We have already seen this at work in our examples of spatial discontinuity in *Earth* and *The End of St.*

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Petersburg in Chapter 7. Because each film strives to attain great stylistic prominence—the intrinsic norms marking significant differences within the "Soviet style" itself—the viewer must use the extrinsically normalized principles as guidelines. The task, as in art-cinema narration, is to grasp each film's unique reworking of the paradigm. This is done by calling on procedural schemata that urge: when in doubt, construct a fabula event as perceptually forceful and politically significant.

Faced with the shocks of this jarring style, the spectator can, at least up to a point, deal with it cognitively. The important strategies are those of "filling in" and "linking and distinguishing." Such activities form a part of the viewer's task in any narrational mode, but, with Soviet montage cinema, they play a major role at the level of temporal and spatial construction.

The very idea of montage demands that we fill in gaps. As Shklovsky put it in describing intellectual montage, the editing works "through its non-coincident components—its aureoles."[15] Every shot change offers the filmmaker a chance to create a break in time and space. Classical editing usually avoids perceptible gaps at this level; at most they are suppressed or temporary. Soviet montage flaunts its spatiotemporal gaps and will not always plug them. The Soviet tendency to minimize or omit establishing shots asks the spectator to fill in the overall milieu. For similar reasons, the Soviet directors never canonized the over-the-shoulder reverse shot; instead of this extra cue that the classical style provides we are often presented with no clear information about characters' distances or angles of interaction. Thus when the cutting pattern violates the 180-degree rule of Hollywood practice, the viewer must construct a set of hypotheses about character position. Entire sequences (e.g., Pavel's trial in *Mother*) or whole films (*Earth*) can make sense on the basis of comparatively few cues for characters' placement.

From the elimination of the establishing shot the Soviet directors drew two conclusions, one quite radical. First, you need not find or create an entire profilmic event: partial views can create a locale that need never have existed in front of the lens. The spectator will infer a unified space based on assumptions about real spaces and about the sort of space that films usually present. The more radical discovery was that viewers could be asked to unify spaces in physically impossible ways. Supplied with strong spatial cues, such as character eyelines or earlines, the spectator will infer an "abstract" space that could not exist empirically. In *Twenty-six Commissars*, the Bolshevik prisoners are massacred in the desert. A wounded man staggers to the top of a hill and shouts: "Be calm, comrades!" There is a cut to the oil fields of Baku, many miles away. Suddenly workers in the fields freeze in place, as if hearing his cry. There follows a series of shots in which a striker at Baku "watches" the execution of the commissars. And after the massacre, the workers stand in silent homage before a spectacle they could not possibly see or hear. Comparably "abstract" spaces can be found in many Soviet films; as we shall see, *The New Babylon* relies on them to a considerable degree.

11.3. Earth

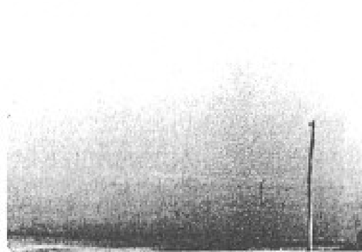
The spectator must fill in temporal gaps too. Here is a passage from *Earth*:

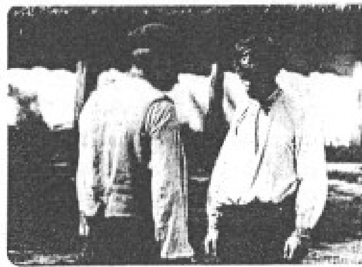
1. Medium shot: In his house the father bellows (fig. 11.3).

11.6. Earth
11.7. Earth

11.10. Earth
11.11. Earth

2. "Ivan!"
3. Long shot: Against sky, he calls, rightward (fig. 11.4).
4. "Stephen!"
5. Medium shot: He calls, rightward (fig. 11.5).
6. "Grigori!"
7. Medium close-up: He calls, leftward (fig. 11.6).
8. "Have—"
9. "you killed—"
10. "my—"
11. "Vassily?"
12. Long shot, as (3): The father looks straight out (fig. 11.7).
13. Extreme long shot: Empty landscape (fig. 11.8).
14. Medium shot: Over father's shoulders, two men together (fig. 11.9). Track back with father as he strides to the camera, revealing a third man in the background (fig. 11.10).
15. Medium shot: The father walks up to Khoma (fig. 11.11).





The narration has created a spatial gap—the abrupt transition from the house to the outdoors in shots 1–3—and some temporal ones. If the father shouted "Ivan!" in the house, we must assume that he consumed time in getting out to the hillside. Yet the rhythmic alternation of title and image suggests that perhaps "Ivan!" was shouted outside too. This yields an ambiguity about the frequency of the fabula event. Later, after the father has hollered and apparently gotten no response (shots 12–13), another cut takes us immediately to a group of three men (shot 14)—presumably those he summoned by name. Without warning, the cut has skipped over the fabula duration required for the group to assemble. But when the father turns and walks away, shot 15 reveals that a fourth man is present—Khoma, the youth who did kill Vassily. His arrival has been withheld for the sake of surprise. Dovzhenko's style is unusually oblique, but his reliance on ellipses is only an extension of a general Soviet tendency to ask the spectator to see any cut as embodying a possible break in fabula time.

Because these Soviet films suggest that we fill in missing pieces of space and time, the spectator must tolerate a degree

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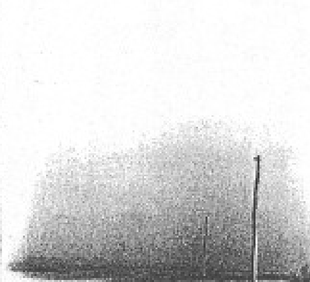
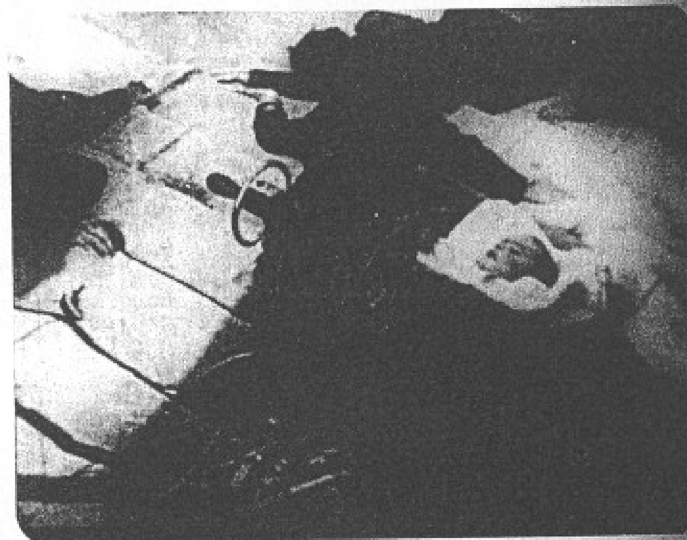


11.12. Potemkin
11.13. Potemkin



of cognitive strain. At the start of a sequence, we may be uncertain about exactly what is happening; the narration has plunged us abruptly into a stream of details. We must patiently trust that the narration will eventually clarify or justify what seems unsettled. Early in *Old and New* we see men sawing timbers while families look on; only gradually do we grasp (thanks chiefly to an intertitle) that brothers are dividing their property by sawing the family house in two. In *Arsenal*, the fight for possession of the locomotive is interrupted by a series of very close shots of a woman turning to the camera and leaping up; cut back to the locomotive; only after this do we get a shot that establishes the woman at the telegraph key in a railroad office. It is as if the narration, rushing to give us the emotional core of the situation, later takes the opportunity to flesh out time, place, and causality. In Chapter 7, we have already seen how sequences in *Earth* and *End of St. Petersburg* create "open" spatial relations that only eventually get closed: father and son quarreling (back to back or not?), troops firing (on the Bolsheviks or on the general?). In sum, the stability of broad causal schemata in these films allows the narration to create a process of hypothesis testing in a film's moment-by-moment unfolding. Film style works to retard the likeliest meaning, and the spectator adopts a wait-and-see strategy.

Occasionally we wait and never see. Some spatiotemporal gaps we can never close at any denotative level. At the end of the Odessa Steps sequence in *Potemkin*, the baby carriage jitters down the steps, intercut with shots of the staring woman with the pince-nez. Then:

1. Medium shot: The carriage begins to flip over (fig. 11.12).
2. Medium shot: A swordsman starts to swing his saber (fig. 11.13).
3. Close-up: He slashes downward (fig. 11.14).
4. Close-up jump cut: He slashes (fig. 11.15).
5. Close-up jump cut: He draws back and starts to slash again, shouting (fig. 11.16).
6. Close-up: Blood runs from a woman's eye, and her pince-nez is shattered (fig. 11.17).

We can, I think, construct the fabula action in several ways. (A) The soldier has slashed at the woman with the pince-nez. Reasons: shots 2–6 can be construed as a group, making shot 6 a reaction shot; the frontality of the soldier's attack (perhaps a subjective point of view) is congruent with that of the woman's orientation. (B) The soldier has slashed

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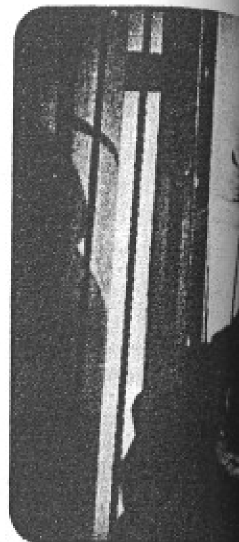
11.14. Potemkin
11.15. Potemkin

11.17. Potemkin

at the baby in the carriage. Reasons: shots 1–5 hang together; the cossack is observed from a low angle, befitting his assault on the carriage; the woman has earlier been seen some way up the steps; the woman's wound is not plausible as coming from a saber. (C) The baby carriage overturning, the cossack slashing, and the wounding of the woman are unconnected events, crosscut. Reason: all the inadequate and incompatible cues present in (A) and (B). (D) The cossack slashes at both the carriage and the woman: an "impossible" profilmic event. Rather than decide on a single



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11.18. Potemkin

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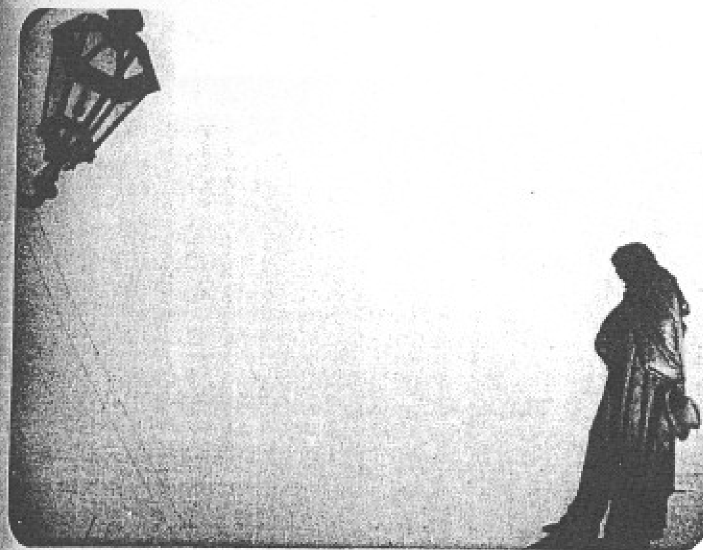
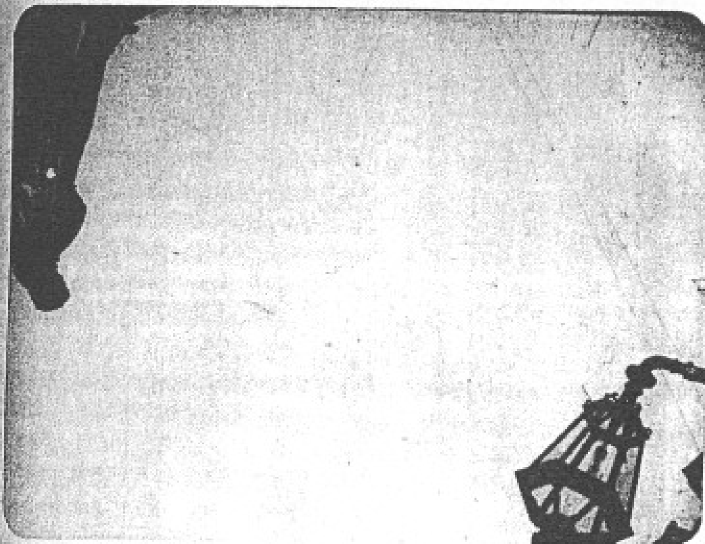
construction, we should recognize that exactly this mixing of cues, this shaking of scenic components loose from a univocal fabula world, enables the narration to create an "open" space from which can be selected maximally forceful images of brutality—with five of the six addressed directly to the viewer. The spatial gaps become permanent ones, creating vivid rhetorical effects.

The act of filling in must then include our willingness to accept, in the name of perceptibility, very great violations of conventional or internally consistent space and time. What else can explain the spectator's assimilation of shots in which the film strip is flipped side-to-side or upside down? The fabula event may be presented not as ambiguous but as contradictory: an officer sits in inconsistent positions from shot to shot (*Storm over Asia*); a coolie is slapped once, but in a different way from shot to shot (*Goluboi Express*); a worker assaults his boss in two locales at once (*The End of St. Petersburg*); a priest raps his cross in one palm, then—or rather also—in the other (*Potemkin*; see figs. 11.18–11.19). The Soviet directors assumed that if syuzhet material cannot be unified at the denotative level, the spectator will look for ways to unify it connotatively. Thus ideologically defined argumentative schemata and the explicit and constant presence of a narrator allow the viewer to place incompatible presentations within a larger affective dynamic.

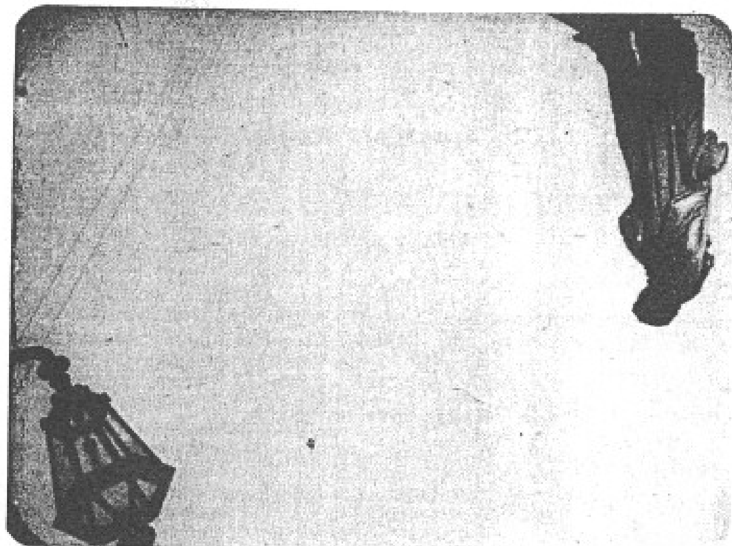
Besides filling in gaps, the spectator must link and distinguish elements. One consequence of Soviet film's stress upon "perceptibility" is that we are expected to fine tune our sensitivity to the representation of space and time. Similarities and dissimilarities among images weigh more in this mode than in the classical narrative. Soviet directors are fond of calling on short-term memory in order to permute images in palpable ways, as Dovzhenko does in the *Earth* segment (figs. 11.3–11.11) or as Boris Barnet does in *Moscow in October* by varying the same shot (figs. 11.20–11.22). In *Potemkin*, the narration frequently cuts from one character to another as each executes a similar gesture (making a fist, running a machine); denotatively we must pick different individuals out of a smooth passage of movement (even while connotatively we must see them as linked in the performance of similar actions). By using editing to achieve temporal dilation, these films rely on the viewer's ability to construct one movement out of several overlapping representations onscreen. And some films, in particular Pudov-





kin's, utilize devices which lie on the very threshold of perceptual discrimination, such as sporadic black frames, single-frame montage, and barely discernible jump cuts.

The spectator's ability to draw likenesses and contrasts can work closely with the rhetorical aims of the mode. *Storm*



over Asia features a celebrated sequence in which the British commander and his wife prepare to visit the Buddhist temple. The narration crosscuts the couple's preparation—shaving, washing, dressing—with functionaries scurrying around cleaning the temple. More than temporal simultaneity is evoked here. The narration draws analogies between objects in each line of action: the temple feather duster is likened to the wife's powder puff, the priest's collar to her necklace. Expository titles remark ironically, "There are ceremonies / and rites / among all races." Since the immediate causal function of the scene is minimal, the fact that it is given extensive treatment invites the viewer to dwell on its rhetorical implications. The spectator must take the visual similarities between the British and the Buddhists as cues to a conceptual likeness; the intertitles reinforce the link. The rhetorical effect is double: to satirize fastidious upper-class hygiene, as solemn and self-righteous as a religious ritual; and to mock the church as a thing of this world, as vain as the decadent imperialists. Like many crosscutting episodes in Soviet film, this sequence asks the viewer to liken "unlike" things. Conceptual parallelism replaces causal logic as the basis of the syuzhet. Ultimately, however, these argumenta-

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tive connotations "feed back" into the causal nexus, since the similarity between imperial and Buddhist authorities anticipates the complicity of rulers to be exhibited during the colonialists' visit to the temple.

The locus classicus of this abstract tendency is the notorious "intellectual montage" of Soviet cinema, of which the *Storm over Asia* sequence could count as a fair example. But note that the narration can achieve high-level "intellectual"—that is, rhetorical—judgments in two ways. The possibility that entranced Eisenstein was what Metz has called the nondiegetic insert—one or more images that possess no denotative reality in the fabula world. The slaughter of the bull intercut with the massacre of the workers (*Strike*) is a pure case, as are the Kerensky/peacock comparisons and the "God and Country" sequence in *October*. More common Soviet practice, however, was the rhetorical combination of images taken from the diegetic world. The sequence from *Storm over Asia* is an instance: both the commander's household and the temple exist on the same level of fabula "reality." In fact, this second possibility proves to be the richer one, since it allows the narration to present images initially designed to denote fabula information and then to recall them for more connotative purposes. Eisenstein had a penchant for repeating identical shots in very different situations across the film. In *October*, images hailing the February revolution—for instance, troops with upraised rifles—are repeated during the October Revolution. After the *Potemkin*'s crew has pitched Smirnov overboard, the narration inserts an image of the maggoty meat that had precipitated the mutiny. Such a shot becomes what one theorist of the time calls a "refrain."[16] At the start of *Arsenal*, a worker is shown in a very disjointed series of images; much later in the film, as urgings to strike sweep through the arsenal, the same worker suddenly looks up. The use of the refrain multiplies the potential functions of each montage fragment, making the film a collection of intrareferential bits frozen in a mosaic, a total "spatial" order.

It may seem odd that I have said so little about what is for most viewers the salient quality of Soviet montage: the speed of the cutting. All of the films I have picked out contain passages of rapid editing, and some present shots only one frame long. Often this technique is motivated by violent action or by tense emotional confrontations; the rapidly cut battle scene or police attack is a convention of these works. Just as often, though, accelerated rhythmic editing functions as the narration's instrument. Fast cutting not only embodies causal climaxes but creates rhetorical ones. Any rapidly cut sequence becomes ipso facto significant (not least because fast cutting tends, paradoxically, to stretch out the syuzhet duration devoted to an episode). For the spectator, rapid editing is the most self-conscious effort of the rhetorical narration to control the *pace* of hypothesis formation. We have repeatedly seen that any rapid flow of fabula information, via editing or other means, compels the spectator to make simple, all-or-nothing choices about story construction. Under the pressure of time—certainly long before half a second—we must give up trying to predict the next image and simply accept what we are given. Soviet fast cutting takes care to combine and repeat shots or actions that we have already seen, so that we can gather a total impression from repeated bursts. Far from being passive subjects inundated by the film's spray of imagery, we continue to apply rhetorical and narrative schemata; we continue to fill in, to liken, to discriminate; but we do so at a suprashot level, unifying the sequence from the top down by using prototypes like "battle," "strike rally," "police attack," or whatever—all the while registering the sheer perceptual force of the style.[17]

The New Babylon

The film work of Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg grew out of their experimental theater group, Factory of the Eccentric Actor ("Feks" for short). These young men were initially interested in achieving grotesque effects by manipulating the profilmic event. Feks's *The Cloak* (1926) transposes verbal grotesquerie (Gogol's *skaz* style) into visual terms through setting, costume, and acting. The stylization of the profilmic event serves to emphasize narrational in-

tervention and thus links Feks to more montage-oriented directors. *The Devil's Wheel* (1926) was an attempt to integrate such staging with Soviet editing techniques. By the time of *The New Babylon* (1929), Kozintsev and Trauberg were able to achieve original effects within the norms of the Soviet historical-materialist mode.

That one of the two books which Lenin carried into hiding in Finland was Marx's *Civil War in France* suggests the importance he attached to the lessons of the 1871 Paris Commune. After 1917, the Commune passed into official mythology as a principal antecedent of the Bolshevik Revolution. The subject was thus eminently suited for a Soviet film. *The New Babylon* portrays highlights of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and the Commune which sprang up the following year. The film's opening presents the war hysteria manifesting itself in emotional farewells to the troops, buying sprees in a department store, and frenzied celebration in a cabaret. In the first two sequences the narration introduces Louise, a salesgirl at the New Babylon store; her boss; various workers; a cabaret singer; a member of the Chamber of Deputies; and a journalist who bursts into the restaurant with news of French defeat. Eventually the French capitulate to the Prussians, but proletarian women prevent the French soldiers from taking the cannons to Versailles. Later, after the Commune occupies Paris, the boss, the deputy, and the singer encourage the Versailles troops to fire on the city. Soon the Commune takes to the barricades, and after a fierce battle the French forces capture Paris. Communard prisoners are assaulted by the bourgeoisie, with the boss leading the charge. At the film's close, Louise and her comrades are executed.

The film shares with others in its mode a use of historical referentiality and stock types. Louise the salesclerk resembles Louise Michel, the "Red Virgin" of the Commune. The emphasis on women as active fighters is faithful to most accounts of the civil war. The film's very title plays on a historical reference: there apparently was a New Babylon department store, but at the time Paris itself was known as the "Modern Babylon," celebrated for decadence and frivolity. More generally, the film expects the viewer to supply historical background and to identify emblematic moments. When the boss catches the deputy wooing the singer backstage, his pledge of silence in exchange for a state subsidy can be taken to symbolize what Marx denounced as the Second Empire's "joint-stock government . . . the undisguised subservience of government to the propertied classes."[18] Nonetheless, the conventional roles of bourgeois, politician, and worker are given more vividness by the film's referential exactitude. Kozintsev and Trauberg drew ideas for costume and typage from caricatures of the period. The tableau of Victorious France in the cabaret is especially evocative of the spirit of Commune and anti-Commune broadsides of 1870–1871.[19]

The New Babylon is notable for the episodic quality of its organization. The syuzhet's eight parts correspond to the film's projection reels (common enough in a country whose theaters often had only one projector), but most Soviet films which divide themselves into distinct acts remain somewhat tighter-knit than this. Sequences skip from the autumn of 1870 to January of 1871 (the moment of surrender) to 18 March, when crowds swarm over the Montmartre troops, and the film concludes in late May, with the battle for Paris and the execution of the Communards. The first two parts concentrate on depicting the decadence of the Second Empire, while the later portions show the Commune as doing little more than meeting, fighting, and suffering. These gaps in referential time can be explained by the fact that Soviet thinkers were not agreed upon the Commune's political significance. By 1929, historians had begun to quarrel about whether the Commune overrated purely democratic reforms, whether it paid too little attention to military strategy, and whether it failed for want of a central state machinery (this last being a favorite Stalinist view). On these points of controversy the film remains silent, choosing simply to condemn the bourgeoisie and eulogize the revolutionaries according to generic convention. (The film is more direct in drawing on already-canonized interpretations. In one very brief scene, a worker suggests to the leaders that the Commune seize the factories and banks, but the proposal is rejected in favor of a peaceful solution. This inter-

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change puts into the mouth of the proletariat exactly the criticism made by Engels in 1891 and Lenin in 1917.)

There is, however, one occasion where realistic motivation makes the narrative swerve from conventional lines. Another contemporary debate centered on the Commune's failure to forge links with the peasants in the French army; as a result, the peasants took the side of the bourgeoisie. *The New Babylon* makes reference to this issue by including as a major character Jean, a country lad who comes to know Louise and her family. Jean is characterized as tense and fearful in his soldier's role. When he meets the workers, Louise gives him bread and her father mends his boots. Louise and other Communards extend offers of solidarity throughout the film; she even follows him in a drenching rain to beg him to desert the army. Nonetheless, Jean is always wavering. Again and again he halts, as if on the brink of understanding his class allegiance, but then—motivated by a desire to end the war and go home—he sides with the oppressor. Once the Communards have seized the cannons, Jean refuses to join them. Encamped at Versailles, he is haunted by memories of Louise, but once the battle for Paris begins he participates frenziedly. Jean searches for Louise among the prisoners and is thrown out of the cafe of the class for whom he has fought. In a cemetery, Jean stares frozen as Louise defies the officer; then he joins other soldiers in digging graves for the victims. The usual pattern would be for Jean to shift from spontaneous feeling to political consciousness, as Louise does; but instead Jean remains impotent and terrified, more romantically interested in Louise than politically aware of the situation. Jean's progress conforms to the "negative" apprenticeship Suleiman finds in the *roman à thèse* generally, the pattern whereby a character moves from naive ignorance and passivity to an obstinate blindness and a refusal of action.[20] More specifically, Jean poses an ideological difficulty for the film. To portray him as utterly villainous would be risky at a moment when Stalin was at pains to celebrate the peasantry; to portray him as joining the Commune would gainsay a historical interpretation going back to Marx. The solution is to make Jean an unstable element whose presence conforms to ideological necessity but whose exact function lacks some narrative and rhetorical clarity.

In *The New Babylon*, the narration foregoes many devices—overlapping editing, static poses—that are common in other Soviet historical-materialist films. Instead, the film amplifies the sort of abstract, empirically false scenographic space I have mentioned in connection with *Twenty-six Commissars* and the Odessa Steps. *The New Babylon* raises one tendency of the extrinsic norm to the level of an intrinsic one. The film uses crosscutting, "Kuleshov effect" editing (that is, the omission of the establishing shot), the eyeline match, double-voiced intertitles, and figure frontality to produce a loose, "open" space that can forge rhetorical connections. Some fairly static fabula situations are thus dynamized by the narration's constant manipulation, and the spectator's task is not only to fill in the missing spatial connections but to liken and distinguish the fabula elements shown.

The expository norm gets locked into place during the first segment, which depicts war fever gripping Paris. The film's first block of shots ranges over four locales, all of which will be intercut throughout the scene: the railroad station, as the troops depart; a cabaret; the New Babylon department store; and an unspecified group of settings I shall call the workers' spaces. The chart shows the film's first thirty-one shots, grouped by locale. The shifts from place to place proceed overtly and unambiguously from the narration. (Contrast the way that the opening of *La guerre est finie* motivates its imagery by the play of Diego's consciousness.) Crosscutting conventionally signifies simultaneity, but the sequence makes the viewer downplay temporal considerations and connect fabula events by purely connotative similarities and differences. The cabaret repeats the railroad scene by use of what will become a central motif: spectacle. As crowds cheer the troop train, so the couples in the cabaret applaud the skit enacting France's crushing of Prussia (figs. 11.23–11.24) and one slogan—"Death to the Prussians!"—appears in both. The train and the cabaret are linked to the department store by the stress on buying (titles 10, 20); later, chants of "Bargain!" and "Buy!" will echo through the New Babylon's aisles. At the same time, the store's display of parasols and

The New Babylon: Opening

1. "War!"
2. "Death to the Prussians!"

Railroad Station	*Cabaret*	*Department Store*	*Workers' quarters*
3. Locomotive 4. Four women applaud 5. One woman cheers 6. "Scatter their blood to Berlin!" 7. Cheering women 8. "Scatter their blood!" 9. Long shot: Train and crowd 10. "War! All the places are sold!"	11. Couple applaud 12. Stage: France victorious 13. Stage: Prussia crushed 14. "Death to the Prussians!" 15. Stage: Three singers 16. Stage: France 17. Long shot: Stage and crowd 18. Stage: Woman and crown 19. Couple applauds	20. "War! Prices have risen!" 21. Displays of umbrellas 22. Fans on display 23. "The Department Store 'New Babylon'" 24. Stairs and goods for sale	
	25. "The boss" 26. Drumroll 27. Medium close-up: The boss, seated		28. Young women at sewing machines 29. Cobbler 30. Washerwomen 31. Woman at suds

fans (fig. 11.25) and the frantic women customers (fig. 11.26) recall the cheering women at the station.

From the New Babylon we cut back to the cabaret; the shift is motivated by the fact that the store's owner is there, finishing his meal. Finally, the shots of workers—seamstresses, cobbler, and washerwomen—are justified not only as an expected antithesis in this mode but also by the fact that these workers make and maintain the clothes sold at such stores and worn at the cabaret and the station: they form the infrastructure of the fashion-conscious Second Empire. Although the workers we see will become causally significant (the cobbler is Louise's father, one washerwoman her mother), they are introduced as prototypes of exploited labor; their class identity overshadows their personal individuality, as is suggested by lining up the figures in ranks into the depths of the shot (figs. 11.27–11.28). In general, the effect of the crosscutting is to create an omniscient survey of a society that treats war as spectacle and commodity consumption. The tone of the exposé is of course accusatory: shots 21 and 22 (figs. 11.29–11.30) compare the objects on display with those wielded by the customers, a drumroll announces the entry of the boss (fig. 11.31), and the first two expository titles make the narration participate, by ironic ventriloquism, in the war whoops.

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The rest of the first reel builds upon the intercutting of elements defined in the initial portion. Two locales become principal stockpiles of imagery—the department store and the cabaret. We shift between Louise hawking lace ("It's a good buy") and her boss idly studying the menu, between Louise furtively gnawing a piece of bread and the boss ordering dessert. Louise works before an immense mannequin, who in stance and drapery recalls the cabaret tableau of Victorious France (fig. 11.32). (The shallow focus makes the dummy in fact a backdrop for Louise.) Then the manager

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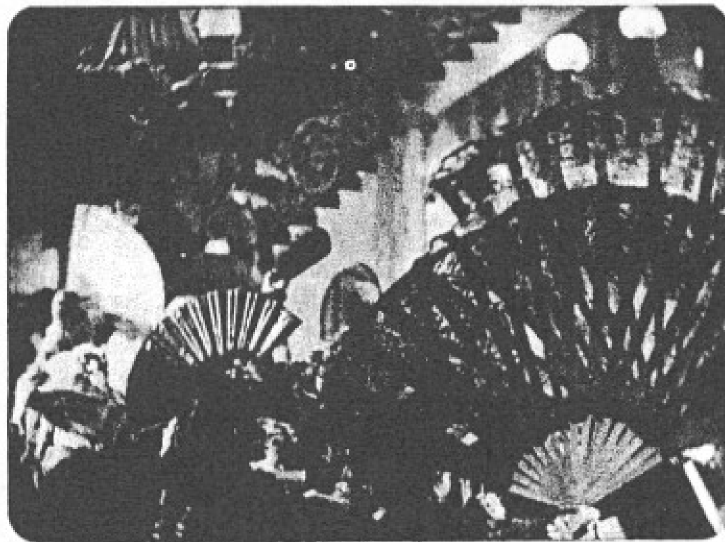
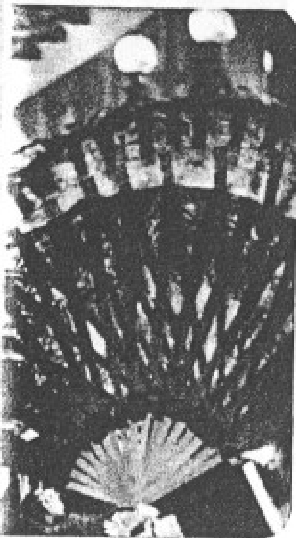


invites Louise to join the boss at the ball later; significantly, the omniscient and self-conscious narration has explicitly linked the saleswoman and her boss long before the two will meet.

Louise, the manager, and a salesman take up a frantic spiel, which becomes the occasion for the most rapid shifts so far. From one salesman's "Buy!" we cut to the railroad station, repeating the analogy between commerce and war. Then back to another salesman shouting, "For sale!"; back to the cabaret skit personifying France—now also an object



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of commerce. Customers at the New Babylon fight for the goods on sale; cut from the daemonic salesman to men in the cabaret; "Buy!" Cut to the laundress, exhausted over her steaming tub; her image reiterates the contrast between rich and poor, and the following shot of the boss reinforces it. Then a couple in the cabaret applaud. Cut to the crowd at the station applauding the soldiers with the old cry, "Scatter their blood!" The sequence closes with a shot of the train identical to the opening image (shot 3).

My description makes crosscutting the most obvious device here, but the abstraction of the fabula space is accomplished by other means as well. Within locales, characters are never defined in an establishing shot, so that even the long shots of the cabaret or the station do not unequivocally "place" the characters. Louise and the sales staff are never situated with respect to the customers, and the workers are never shown in any single locale. What links characters within most settings is one component of the Kuleshov effect: the eyeline match. On the basis of glances, we assume that the train (shot 3) is the object of the women's applause (shot 4), that Crowned France (shot 18) is the object of the couple's delight (shot 19), and that Louise is addressing the customers in her harangue. This cue is somewhat helped by a frontality of figure position even more self-conscious than in most Soviet shots. Characters' bodies and faces are turned almost completely to us; only their eyes "just miss" addressing the camera. Consequently, when we see Lady France very frontally and then see a shot of a couple, also frontal, we will construct an eyeline running "between" them, on which we sit. But since the space within locales is defined only by eyelines and figure position, it becomes possible for crosscutting to exploit these cues to create *an abstract space of spectacle*. Hinted at in shot 11, the effect emerges most clearly near the close of the sequence. The narration cuts from the department store salesman to cabaret customers, looking off slightly left and laughing and rocking as if watching the sale that occurs in a wholly different place. The narration cuts from an applauding couple at the cabaret to applauding women at the station, creating a metaphoric sign of equality—as if the couple were cheering the train, as if the women were egging on the performance (figs. 11.33–11.34).

In this respect, Feks was carrying on approved precedent. *The Civil War in France* portrays the Second Empire bourgeoisie as entranced by spectacle. Marx describes polite

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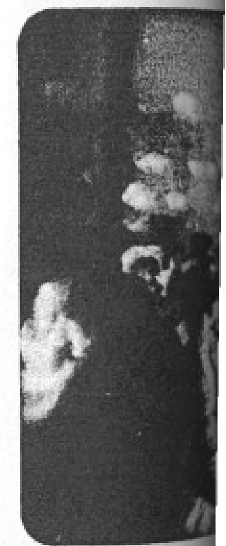
ladies watching mob atrocities from a balcony. He cites an English reporter on the bourgeoisie's addiction to cabaret, even under shellfire. And Kozintsev has quoted one scathing passage as the source of Feks's approach:

> The Paris of M. Thiers was not the real Paris of the "vile multitude," but a phantom Paris, the Paris of the *francs-fileurs*, the Paris of the Boulevards, male and female—the rich, the capitalist, the gilded, the idle Paris, now thronging with its lackeys, its blacklegs, its literary *bohème*, and its *cocottes* at Versailles, St.-Denis, Rueil, and Saint-Germain; considering the civil war but an agreeable diversion, eyeing the battle going on through telescopes, counting the rounds of cannon, and swearing by their own honor and that of their prostitutes, that the performance was far better got up than it used to be at the Porte St. Martin. The men who fell were really dead; the cries of the wounded were cries in good earnest; and besides, the whole thing was so intensely historical.[21]

By creating "eyeline matches" across impossible spaces, the opening sequence of *The New Babylon* depicts the bourgeoisie as Marx did: as feckless spectators.

The film's second segment reinforces the intrinsic norm while presenting some amplifications. The setting remains, almost to the end, the cabaret. The viewer must now construct a more concrete sense of place out of the fragments supplied by montage: men and women toasting "Gay Paris," dancers on and offstage, the singer's act, the boss's table, couples sitting at various tables, and the boss and the deputy striking their bargain backstage. Thus when the chanteuse sings, "We all need love," and the narration cuts to a series of couples—old rake and young woman, young man and old woman, a girl ravenously eating while an old man slobbers over her neck (fig. 11.35)—we are to understand these commentaries on the cash nexus of romance as arising from the depiction of a fairly stable narrative space. These couples are all in the cabaret. Moreover, Louise's presence helps anchor the scene: the shots of her and the boss approach conventional long shots and over-the-shoulder reverse angles (figs. 11.36–11.37). Against the quite conceptual space of the opening sequence, the relative contiguity of these elements becomes apparent. But the narration still opens up this space to a considerable extent by exploiting devices which were subordinate during the first episode.



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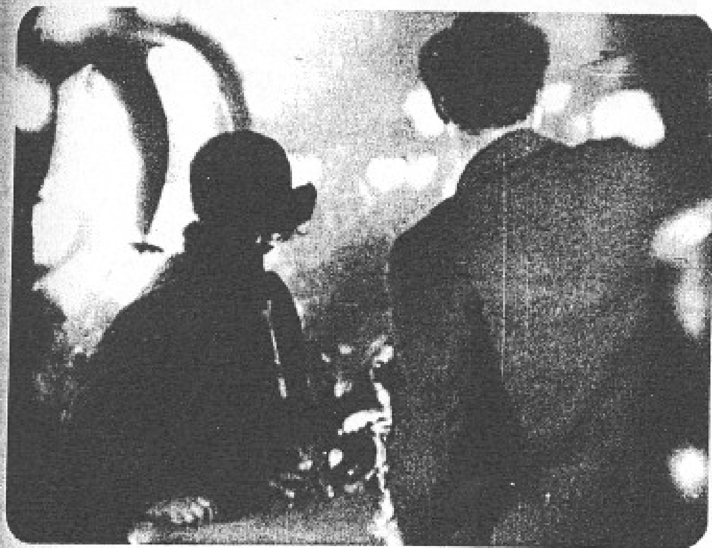
For one thing, the sharp disparity of foreground and background is given new emphasis. No matter what character we see, she or he is in the foreground and the rest of the cabaret forms a vague flat. (There is never anything *between* the camera and the figure.) So absolute is the split between the plane of action and the rearward space that we cannot get any sense of where couples sit or stand in the set. (In this respect, the uniformly blurred backgrounds constitute the functional equivalent of the neutral sky in other Soviet films or the bleached walls of Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*.) The narration strives to keep all action played to us: so that when the journalist is informed of the French defeat (fig. 11.38), he rises from his table to address the crowd in the background, turning from the camera (fig. 11.39). But then we cut to a frontal shot, with as great an extent behind him now as there was in the previous shot (fig. 11.40). In the absence of an establishing shot, the cabaret becomes indefinitely large, elastic, always stretching out to infinity behind whatever we see; and yet a paucity of depth cues makes the cabaret hang as flatly behind the characters as does the sunbeam backdrop setting off Crowned France.

The cabaret sequence goes beyond frontality of body and face by making characters look more or less directly to the camera. The very first shot (fig. 11.41) announces the saliency of the device, which recurs almost every time a customer toasts Paris (fig. 11.42). By combining relatively flat backgrounds with self-conscious eye contact, the se-



quence makes the cabaret a very "open" locale. This is most evident when Louise is watching the frenzied dancing:

133. Women dance the cancan to the camera.
134. Top-hatted men dance to the camera.
135. Louise turns to look behind her.
136. As (133): Women dance to the camera.
137. Louise turns to look off right.
138. Men and women dance the cancan diagonally left.
139. An old man and some women dance diagonally left.
140. Medium close-up: Louise turns to look left.

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141. Medium shot: A diner raises his glass to the camera.
142. "To well-fed Paris!"
143. Medium shot: An old man nibbles a woman's neck while she eats.
144. Medium shot: An old man raises his glass.
145. "To carefree Paris!"
146. A man dances with a bottle in his arms.
147. Medium shot: Louise, still looking left, shrinks back.
148. As (134): Men dance to the camera.
149. As (133): Women dance to the camera.

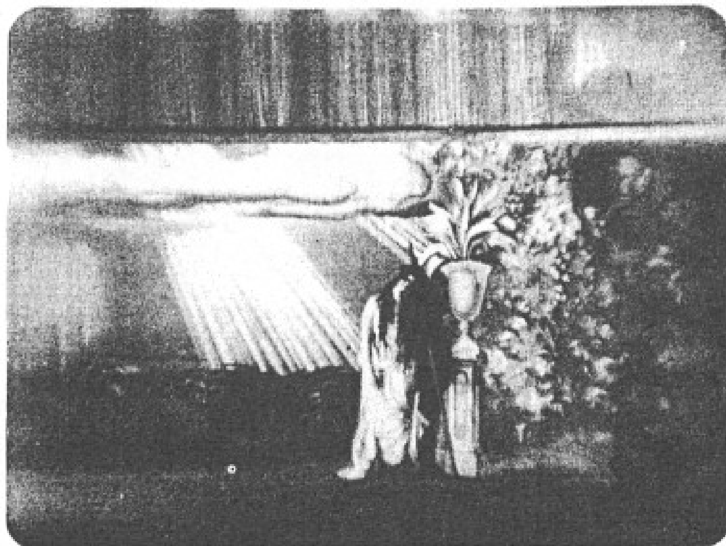
By classical principles of point of view, the to-camera movements in this passage cannot be justified. Louise cannot be watching behind her (shot 136) what she will see in front of her and to the left in shot 149. Rather than take this as a transcription of her subjective experience interrupted by overt narrational commentary (e.g., from "Well-fed Paris" to a man's lecherous appetites in shot 143), the best hypothesis is that Louise is simply the approximate center of a fluid, circular space. Her eyelines do not furnish cues for the precise location of each element but rather heighten the vividness of the swirling dance: the revelry is taking place

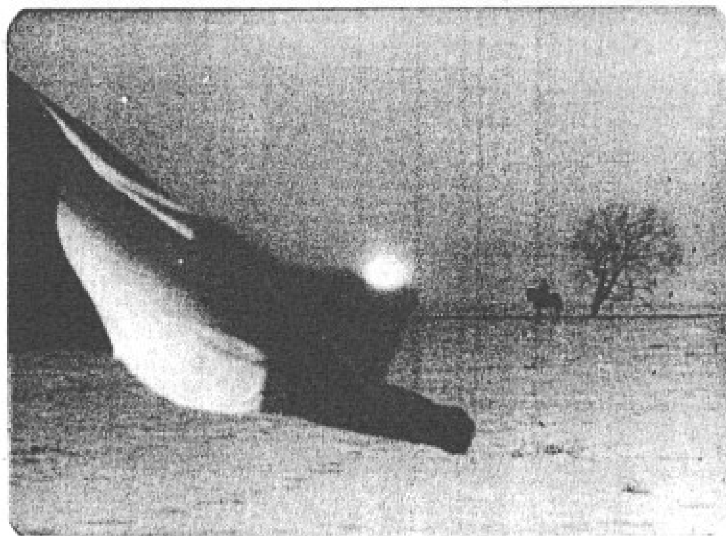
As the second sequence develops, its space is further opened up by a return to crosscutting. The journalist's announcement that the French army has been beaten is interspersed with shots of the crowds at the train (with whip pans linking this locale to the cabaret), and then shots of the Prussian horsemen charging. The narration now asks us to distinguish among several lines of action: the smiling dancers juxtaposed with the shocked bourgeois customers, the ironic refrain "To Paris!" no longer a toast but a battle cry. After treating the cabaret as the bourgeoisie's dream of Paris, Marx's phantom Babylon ("the misery of the masses was set off by a shameless display of gorgeous, meretricious, and debased luxury"), the narration opens that phantasmagoric space onto a wider political context: a class dancing on the edge of a precipice. The cabaret empties out, and our one establishing shot comes too late to reveal anything but a solitary drunkard (fig. 11.43). Cut to the tableau of victorious France, woefully clinging to the set as the curtain falls (fig. 11.44). Since we have seen other acts occupy the stage since this one, we are entitled to doubt that this image has an unequivocal story "reality" here. It functions as a spatially and temporally abstract reprise of the jingoist spectacle of

the first reel and as a self-conscious narrational aside. (The comedy is over.) The device of plucking an image from an earlier moment in the film, creating a flashback without benefit of character memory, will become emphasized in later segments.

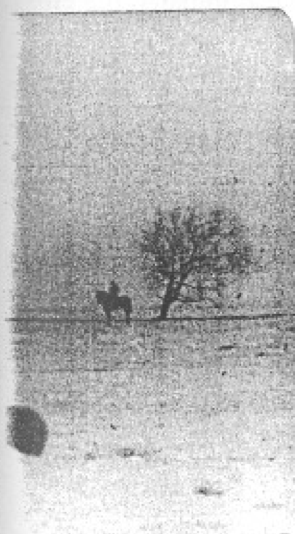
"Paris is under siege." The film's third sequence displays a clear obedience to Soviet montage norms. The fabula action consists of an account of life under the siege and a lengthy scene in which the peasant Jean, as a member of the National Guard, meets Louise and her family. The narration is constantly overt, employing many extrinsically conventionalized processes. Crosscutting juxtaposes the battlefield, life in the streets, the sufferings of a washerwoman and her daughter, and a meeting of the journalists and Louise's family. The narration ironically recalls phrases from the previous scene: "Gay Paris" / A woman washing clothes / "Carefree Paris" / A sick girl lies in bed. The narration also permutes the cutaway image of the battlefield landscape, adjusting the composition each time (e.g., fig. 11.45). And the narration routes its own commentary through character speech. When the French surrender is announced, warnings issue first from the journalist. Then subsequent dialogue titles link characters in different spaces, so that we have to assume a collective reaction manifested by the narration. In general, however, the space of proletarian life is more unified than that of the bourgeoisie in earlier scenes. Now, contrary to the most probable expectations in this mode and this film, a medium shot is placed within a total space (figs. 11.46–11.47). Later, Jean's troubled acceptance of the workers' comradeship is rendered in a coherent 180-degree space with homogeneous eyeline matches (figs. 11.48–11.49), even though, à la Kuleshov, there is no establishing shot.

Segment 4, "18 March," initiates a return to the more conceptual space and time of segment 1. On a hillside, proletarian women confront the army and strive to keep the Montmartre artillery in Paris. Meanwhile, in the cabaret the boss and the deputy watch the chanteuse rehearse a new operetta. The narration is able to exploit all the double meanings latent in the parallel situations, asking us to draw out rhetorical analogies and differences. Moment-by-moment





uncertainties in the syuzhet issue from our realization that any piece of information may reinforce or undercut what went before, or may operate in different rhetorical senses. For instance, after three shots of the rehearsal, the title "Preparations" refers back to the show and forward to the



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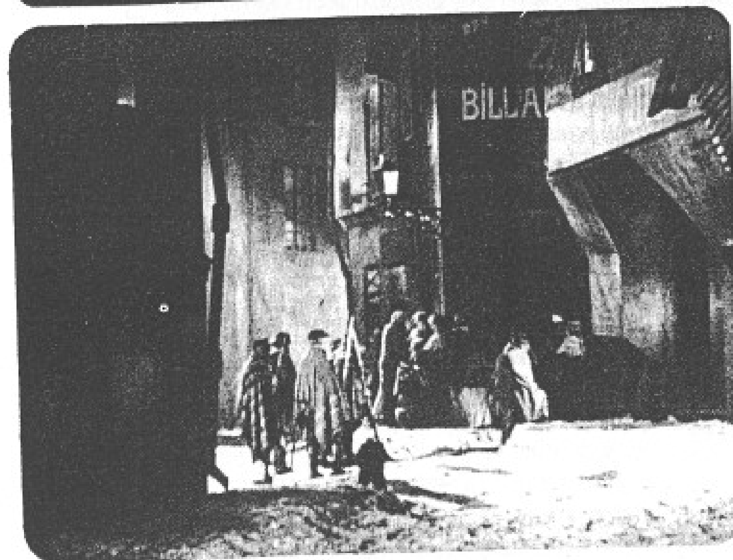

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next image, the beginning of the army's attack on the cannon guards. Again, exploits in the political sphere are likened to spectacle and associated with bourgeois manipulation. As the singer croons, "We all need love," the cannon sentry falls dead. The spectacle motif will come to a climax when, as the workers' militia succeeds in seizing the cannons, the boss will shout that the show is done for.

This sequence also prolongs the "false vision" we glimpsed in the first sequence when cafe clients seemed to be applauding the troop train. Now a sustained "dialogue"

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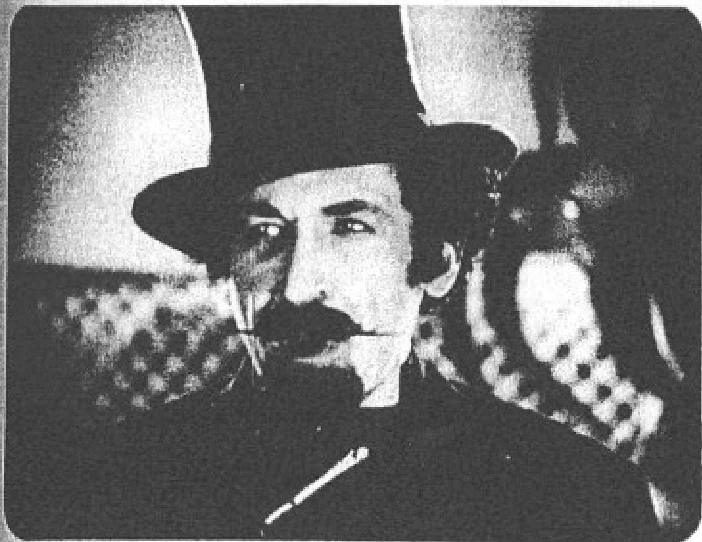

arises between disparate spaces. When the officer says, "More horses and we're ready," the narration cuts to the boss and the deputy applauding, as if congratulating him on the capture. Soon Louise's mother asks the officer, "Whom do you serve?" He turns abruptly, and the narration again cuts to the boss and the politician. When an old soldier flings down his rifle to join the workers' militia, there is a cut to the boss, furiously rising from his seat. Later the journalist looks right and shouts, "To the Hôtel de Ville!" (fig. 11.50), and the deputy answers (in a perfect if impossible eyeline match) by shouting, "To Versailles! We have to start over!" (fig. 11.51). Denotatively, the deputy means that they must retire to Versailles for more rehearsal, but the narration asks us to construe this as an emblem of the bourgeoisie's emigration from Paris. Overall, we must be prepared to accept physical impossibilities—such as the causal interplay of independent locales—for the sake of intensified narrational comment.

In the art cinema, overt narration emerges intermittently to play a game of ambiguity with the spectator. In the Soviet historical-materialist cinema, thanks to the pervasiveness and the discontinuity of the montage, the narration tends to be constantly overt; but it seldom creates connotative ambiguity. In general, the Soviet films choose simply to vary their narrational tactics within well-defined bounds, recombining them in different portions of the film. *The New Babylon* is a good example. We have already seen how sequence 1 relies upon crosscutting to establish the possibility of an abstract conceptual space, while sequence 2 uses frontality and foreground/background interactions to create an "open" space within the cabaret. The third sequence develops a more intimate and less disjunctive space, associated with the workers and the future Communards. And we have seen how sequence 4 goes further than any earlier episode by building character interactions across impossibly great distances. Because each narrational option was latent in the first scene, we cannot say that later foregroundings startle or puzzle the viewer (in the way that, say, Diego's ambivalent conversation with Nadine in *La guerre est finie* is foregrounded as a deviation from the film's norm). In the same way, the last half of the film develops and recombines devices that we have already encountered.

The fifth segment, that of the Commune's occupation of Paris, is structurally and substantially similar to the first episode. Seven distinct locales are crosscut: Paris exteriors, the workers' space, the Communards' meeting room, a bar at

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Versailles, the army's hillside camp, the cabaret, and the department store. The characteristic narrational tone of Soviet historical-materialist cinema is present from the start. After a title, "Paris survived for centuries," we get several tourist views of the city, ending with close-ups of gargoyles on Notre Dame. Immediately another expository title challenges the earlier one. "Paris is no more!" In extreme close-up a hammer strikes. The Vendôme column topples. After a series of shots of the washerwomen and seamstresses (as in the first segment), we discover that the hammer that "felled" the column is that of the cobbler (Louise's father). The narration's rhetoric has shown the Paris of boulevards and monuments transformed by the proletariat's seizure of power. Workers raise their heads in praise: "Why do we work with such gaiety? . . . We work for ourselves, not for a boss! The Commune has decided so!" As in the first segment, the characters' direct address is presented very frontally. Finally, by quickly crosscutting the workers' labor with debates in the Commune, the narration makes the Commune the official leadership of the struggle. This portion of the sequence concludes with more shots of the gargoyles that had initiated the crosscutting.

The scene shifts to Versailles, where the boss, the deputy, and the cabaret singer join some French soldiers in a bar. The boss and the deputy address the men in tones of patriotic fervor, while the singer approaches the moping Jean and revives his memories of Louise. Now the narration juxtaposes the boss and deputy with the gargoyles before cutting back to a rapid montage of the men's harangues. While the journalist advocates peaceful methods, the deputy and the boss lash the soldiers into a violent mood. And once more the bourgeoisie represents war hysteria as spectacle. The singer leads the men in the "Marseillaise" while a dazed Jean becomes dimly aware of the band's frenzy. The boss is intercut with the band's side drum, a refrain of the drumroll that had introduced him in the cabaret. The narration now reverts to two devices: the spatialized, mosaic form and the "dialogue" between disparate spaces. As the sequence develops, the cutting begins to integrate material from earlier episodes, treating the first portion of the film as a repository

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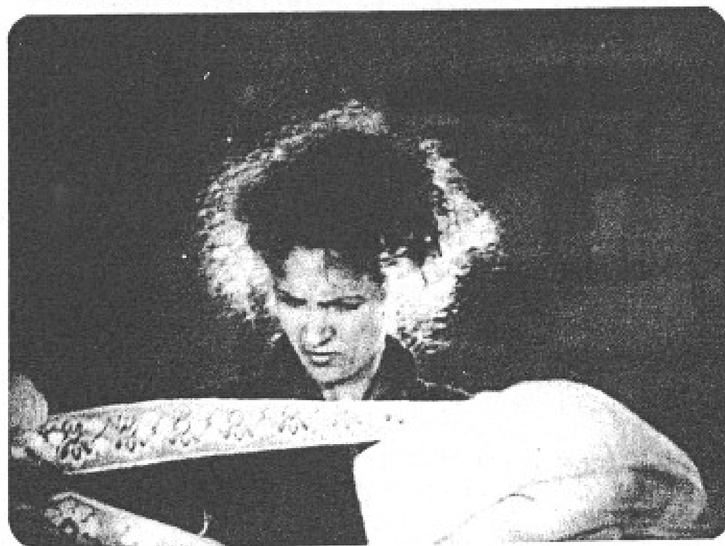
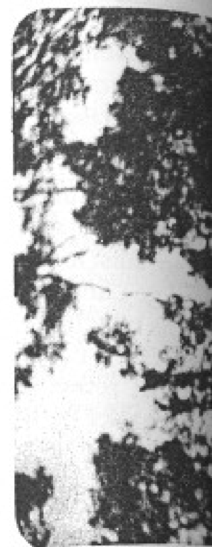
of images. The narration crosscuts the trumpets with the stage tableau of Victorious France in the cabaret (scenes 1 and 2); it intercuts the singer in this bar with the bourgeois women fighting for lace at the New Babylon; it then juxtaposes her with the flashing cancan legs of scene 2. Thus this



chauvinist spectacle is firmly classified with the earlier ones. The singer then kisses the bayonet and calls for blood (fig. 11.52). The officer on the hillside, as if hearing her call (fig. 11.53), turns abruptly from the camera and orders his troops "on to Paris" (fig. 11.54), an echo of the Prussians' cry in scene 2. The narration gives us three shots of the target—the women workers—before a quick montage of firing cannons, blaring trumpets, roaring drums, and the boss's expression concludes the sequence.

The sixth principal episode brings to a climax the specta-



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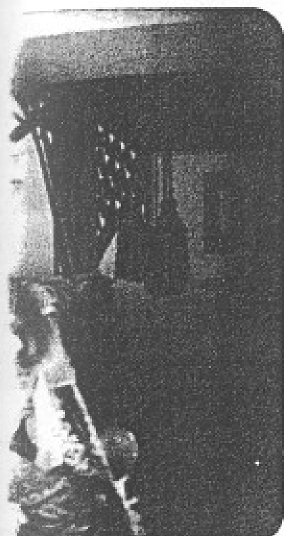

hots of the target—the
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cle motif that has run through the film. The Communards, realizing that all is lost, take to the streets. The Battle of Paris is rendered through another recombining of intrinsically normalized devices—crosscutting and the "impossible" eyeline match. The result at first seems only another narrational analogy. Louise is ransacking the New Babylon for material for the barricades.

798. Long shot: Louise looks for goods (fig. 11.55).

799. Medium close-up: The mannequin is lifted out of the store (fig. 11.56).

800. Louise grabs lace and begins to unwind it (fig. 11.57).

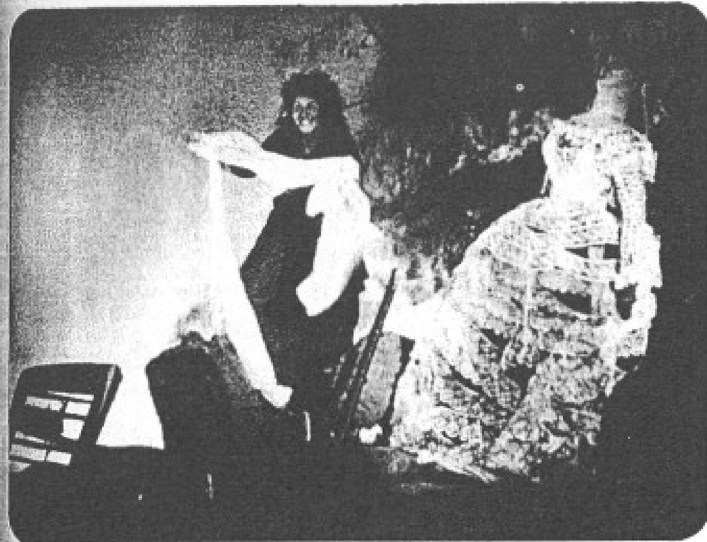
801. *Plan américain*, low angle: A young woman wearing lace and twirling a parasol looks left (fig. 11.58).

802. "On the hill of Versailles, the bourgeoisie watched."

803. Medium shot: The boss looks down to the left, holding a parasol (fig. 11.59).

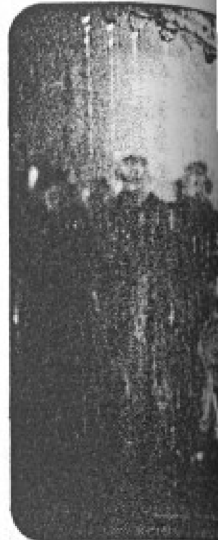
804. Medium shot: The singer, seated, watches through binoculars (fig. 11.60).

Shots 798–801 build toward an equation of the dummy in white and the bourgeois woman (shot 801), with lace as a connecting factor. But the intertitle and subsequent shots emphasize that the bourgeoisie are literally watching—if not Louise's pillaging of the store, then at least the Commune's activities. (Again, the citation is to Marx, who described the bourgeoisie as "considering the civil war but an agreeable



diversion, eyeing the battle going on through telescopes . . .") No small-scale spectacles now; the civil war becomes the ultimate cabaret show, to be enjoyed from a distance. Correspondingly, the narration produces the most grandiose conceptual space in the film—at once concrete (the locales are for once proximate) and abstract (the bourgeoisie could not, on empirical grounds, see all the incidents that we see).

And the battle indeed becomes both spectacle and dialogue. The bourgeoisie call across the chasm for blood, and



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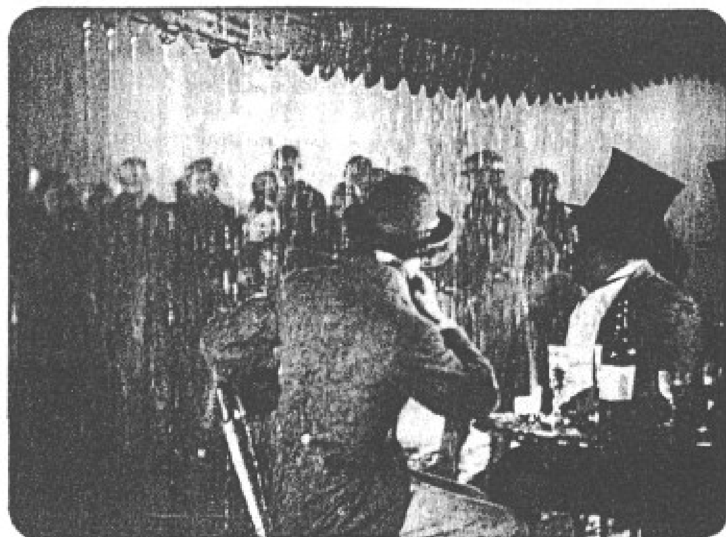

11.66
11.67

the soldiers obey, attacking the barricades. Motifs from the first two parts recur, in parodic form: the lace wraps wounds, Louise rolling it out as if for sale (fig. 11.61) before taking up a rifle; a pianist entertains the Communards during a break in the fighting. As the Commune dies, it creates its own participatory spectacle: the pianist plays, the women sing. An old man shouts: "You want Paris? . . . The old Paris? . . . For the bosses?" and we cut to the boss raging, as if he heard the dying Communard. Once the ramparts are overrun, Jean is on the scene and the sequence concludes with him in the foreground, turning slowly to look out at the camera (fig. 11.62) and to "see" and "hear" the boss and his friends applauding his performance (fig. 11.63).

The last two segments develop the film's narrational norm in more modest and conventional ways, probably because these scenes aim to evoke the most sympathy and the smallest amount of conceptual "distance." The Communard prisoners are marched past a cafe, where the boss recognizes Louise and begins to beat her. This precipitates a riot in which the bourgeoisie attack the prisoners. There are echoes of earlier narrational procedures: the ironic title ("Peace and order rule Paris"), the interjected shots of "Vive la Commune" scrawled on a wall, intercutting within a locale, and frontality with foreground/background stylization (even during a massacre; see fig. 11.64). On the whole, however, this is the most concrete space yet depicted in the film, defined by an establishing shot (fig. 11.65) and plausible

eyeline matching (fig. 11.66). The geographical exactitude is appropriate, for this is the first time that the narration has shown workers and bourgeoisie concretely inhabiting the same locale.

The last segment, "The Judgment," again swerves from its immediate predecessor in creating a fluid and "open" space within a circumscribed setting, as sequence 2 had done with the cabaret. In Père-Lachaise cemetery, as Communards are questioned and executed in the savage rain, the narration return to almost total frontality and foreground/background planification (fig. 11.67), while connecting portions of the space by Kuleshovian eyeline matching. As Jean watches tensely, Louise refuses to betray the Commune. Sentenced to death, she cries out in agony, but then turns and looks off, laughing. "We will return, Jean!" As the group is executed, a man cries, "Vive la Commune!" and the film ends with three quick shots, one per word, of the same phrase scrawled on a wall. The narration has fused character voice and narrational commentary into a simple rhetorical flourish.

The New Babylon asks the viewer to undertake activities I have argued to be characteristic of its mode: filling in spatial constructs of various degrees of abstraction, likening and differentiating juxtaposed elements, submitting to a texture of abrupt disjunctions, and wrestling with cognitive incompatibilities (e.g., characters watching what they cannot see) for the sake of perceptual and didactic vividness. The film's syuzhet and style create a constantly overt narration, knowledgeable to the point of omniscience, highly communicative, self-conscious in its address to the viewer, and unambiguous in its attitudes and conclusions. At the same time, *The New Babylon* innovates within its mode not only by introducing new subjects (the Paris Commune) and motifs (the spectacle-centered bourgeois life) but also by varying its exploitations of narrational conventions. In particular, the film's intrinsic norm—the abstract, empirically impossible space—gets developed in unique ways to fulfill rhetorical ends.

Toward an Interrogative Cinema

It would take a volume to explore the various aspects of Soviet culture and politics that shaped the development of the historical-materialist mode. We would have to survey two decades of debate about the role of agitprop art; a range of experiments in painting, literature, sculpture, theater, and architecture; the growing Party control of the Soviet film industry; the experience of studying and recutting American films of the teens and early twenties; developments in literary theory, such as Formalism (Kozintsev has claimed that the critic Yuri Tynianov was the major influence on Feks at the time of *The New Babylon*);[22] and the influx of European experimental films of the 1920s, especially from France. We would also need to consider the seminal importance of Lev Kuleshov's writings and teachings, especially in their "Sovietization" of principles of Hollywood découpage. We would have to spread our net to include those films in other genres—comedy, adventure, and literary adaptation—that exploited some aspects of historical-materialist narration (chiefly, of course, montage). A chapter alone could be devoted to the emergence of models and prototypes of the mode. (*Pravda* called *Strike* "the first revolutionary creation of our cinema.")[23] It would also be necessary to stress both authorial differences and the uniqueness of each of these extraordinary films. Finally, a complete survey should consider the extent to which many films, while aiming at ideological clarity, became subject to debate; the didactic schemata for construing the films were never as neat or unqualified as an overview tends to make them.

Here I want only to suggest the extent to which the historical-materialist mode of narration has gained some purchase beyond its use in the USSR between 1925 and 1933. These Soviet filmmakers permanently affected film history—not only by making influential films but by forging an approach to storytelling that has remained a strong, if minority, alternative to classical narration.

Hollywood's fast cutting and analytical approach to the scene had prompted Soviet filmmakers to explore montage; soon, however, classical Hollywood filmmaking drew upon

some stylistic resources of the Soviet mode. American films had already borrowed superimpositions and prismatic optical effects from the German cinema in order to create special transitional sequences, and it was through these devices that montage was assimilated. One could present a violent spectacle, such as the earthquake in *San Francisco* (1936), with a Soviet-style montage technique. More usually, one could present a significant lapse of time by means of a rapid series of symbolic images linked by dissolves, wipes, or superimpositions. We have seen that *Say It with Songs* (1929) offers many instances. (Hollywood's use of canted setups, low angles, and rapid rhythm seems clearly influenced by such films as *The End of St. Petersburg*.) By the mid-1930s, "montage" had passed into Hollywood jargon, but the force and deeper implications of the Soviet conception were lost. Shots were never very short, the perceptual impact of cutting was softened by the ever-present dissolves, and the whole procedure was relegated to a transitional role, becoming an isolated and stereotyped gesture.[24]

If the Hollywood cinema drew the argumentative and perceptual sting from montage, Soviet socialist realism after 1933 abandoned the technical basis. In general, the historical-materialist films paved the way for Socialist Realism in their use of referentiality, exemplary heroes, and the apprenticeship pattern. What was lost was the constant narrational presence and overt rhetorical address of the historical-materialist style. At the level of fabula structure, Socialist Realism is significantly different from the classical Hollywood cinema; but its narrational principles and procedures do not vary drastically. *Chapayev* (1934) is the conventional example here, but a more technically proficient work like Vera Stroyeva's *Generation of Conquerors* (1936) shows just as clearly how the rhetorical impulses of the narration pass wholly over to the characters (here, a band of student revolutionaries from czarist days) and how classical technique is at the center of the style. (Only one scene, in which a police chief addresses his staff but is presented as addressing the spectator, faintly echoes the self-consciousness of earlier works.) What remains is a story of typical individuals, each given one humanizing idiosyncrasy and each exemplifying some aspect of the prerevolutionary situation in Russia.

Outside the Soviet Union, the historical-materialist mode had an influence on political filmmaking. Charles Dekeukeleire's *La flamme blanche* (1930) owes a good deal to Pudovkin (and Vertov). It intercuts documentary footage of demonstrations by the Flemish People's Party with staged footage of battles between demonstrators and police, framed against white backgrounds and edited in rapid montage. The most famous example of Soviet influence is, of course, *Kuhle Wampe* (1932), a film which shows a fascinating mingling of conventions drawn from the more radical silent films and from the emerging canons of Socialist Realism. The German left had strong ties with the Soviet Union between 1929 and 1933, and Brecht visited Moscow for the world premiere of *Kuhle Wampe*. In many respects the film is quite "classical," but its first part, "One Unemployed Less," displays a remarkable synthesis of Soviet devices. Unable to find a job, the young Bonicke son has come home for lunch, and his mother remarks: "If you don't try at all, you're bound to fail." Cut to a shot of men on bikes pedaling down the street looking for work. Later, after the boy has committed suicide and the neighbors are gathered around, there is a shot of a woman speaking to the camera: "One unemployed less." And at the end of the chapter, an old woman remarks: "He had his loveliest years before him"; cut to the next portion, entitled "The Loveliest Years," which portrays the family's eviction. Such uses of intellectual montage, direct address, and ironic interplay of character dialogue and overt narrational intervention all demonstrate that the lessons of Soviet historical-materialist narration were not lost on Brecht and Slatan Dudow.

Just as influenced by this mode was *La vie est à nous* (1936), supervised by Jean Renoir for distribution by the French Communist Party. Like *Kuhle Wampe* and *La flamme blanche*, this is a mélange of newsreel footage and staged scenes, but the constant direct address intertitles, the asynchronous sound, and the abstract and figurative editing reveal a direct borrowing from the Soviets. Rich idlers fire pistols at cardboard cutouts with workers' caps; cut to ranks of French fascists on the firing range. When Hitler rants, we

hear a dog bark; Mussolini looks around him and "sees" his bombing of Ethiopia. One of the film's three episodes sketches the familiar movement from spontaneity to consciousness: with the backing of a PCF cell, exploited factory workers confront the boss and win concessions. The film concludes with a series of speeches by party leaders, addressed both to us and to a fictional audience composed, impossibly, of characters from the various episodes we have seen. At the close, several groups of workers march toward us singing, while "refrain" shots from the film's start create a Kuleshovian space that is nothing less than the entire landscape of France.

At the level of theory, the Soviet historical-materialist films had strong appeal to a European intelligentsia already interested in montage in a broad sense. Novels like Johannes R. Becher's *Levisite* (1926) and Alexander Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1930) and dramatic productions like Piscator's *In Spite of Everything* (1925) and Brecht's *Mahagonny* (1930) also laid claim to montage as a modernist and socially critical practice.[25] By 1935, Ernst Bloch was identifying montage as the formal means for attacking petit bourgeois normality.[26] As is now well known, Georg Lukács objected to such elevations of montage, criticizing the technique as a principle of subjectivist self-expression and calling for a holistic art that manifests true essences "as immediacy, as life as it actually appears."[27] Lukács charged naturalistic techniques of description with fragmenting point of view and thus whittling reality down to atomic data and isolated episodes.[28] From this angle, montage becomes the culmination of naturalistic description, assembling scraps of fact and judgment and exposing disparities. Lukács rejects the overt narrational presence implied by the artist as *monteur*: "The slice of life shaped and depicted by the artist and re-experienced by the reader should reveal the relations between appearances and essence without the need for any external commentary."[29] Lukács advocates a return to the technique of classical realism, in which an omniscient author establishes the correct proportions of an event and integrates all aspects into a larger whole.

On the particular issue of montage, it is of course Brecht who stands most clearly opposed to Lukács. He cites Döblin's definition of the "epic" *Berlin Alexanderplatz*: a work which "lets itself be cut up, as if with scissors, into parts capable of continuing to lead their own life."[30] *Kuhle Wampe*, he claimed, constitutes "a montage of quite autonomous little plays."[31] As if in retort to Lukács, Brecht writes in 1939 that didactic elements must be introduced into a play by means of montage. "They would have no organic link with the totality but would find themselves in contradiction with it; they would break the course of performance and actions; cold showers for sensitive souls, they would block all identification."[32] More generally, we can see Brecht's early theory of drama as quite congruent with the narrational model established by Soviet historical-materialist film.

By 1930, Brecht had clearly formulated a conception of "dialectical" theater. One source was Piscator's "epic" theater; another was Döblin's conception of the "epic" novel, which was indebted to Joyce and Dos Passos. Yet another source was the Soviet cinema. Brecht's epic theater was to be overtly pedagogic and didactic. As in Soviet cinema, the epic theater's syuzhet was to exhibit a "non-Aristotelian" causality by breaking with the depiction of isolated individuals. "The spectator must perceive the masses behind the individual, consider the individuals as particles which manifest themselves as a reaction, a way of behaving, a development of the mass."[33] Most significantly, the Aristotelian "mimetic" theater was to be, in our terms, "diegeticized." In epic theater, "the stage begins to narrate. The fourth wall no longer makes the narrator disappear."[34] Projections, films, titles, and captions create abstract discussions confirming or contradicting what the characters say and do. The "literarization" of the theater consists in a narration that is constantly "punctuating 'representation' with 'formulation'"—a good description of what happens with many Soviet intertitles.[35] In a move recalling the Soviet film's use of "refrain images," Brecht proposes that "footnotes, and the habit of turning back in order to check a point, need to be introduced into play-writing too."[36] Performance can be "diegeticized" by processes that make the actor appear to be quoting the words and deeds of an absent character. Just as Soviet films had created an all-powerful narration governing the very constitution of the filmed event, Brecht seeks to install an overt

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narration at the center of the theatrical experience, mediating between the imaginary fabula world and its presentation on stage. And as the film required constant montage to keep the spectator from taking the image as a simple record of a preexistent event, so epic theater requires montage to interrupt the performance, to break up scenes, to proceed "by fits and starts."[37] In 1947 Brecht followed Lukács in contrasting naturalism to realism, but the terms were almost exactly reversed: the naturalist lets events "speak for themselves," but in true realism, the author interrupts to make them intelligible.[38]

It was chiefly through the theory, practice, and example of Brecht that norms of the historical-materialist mode were perpetuated. Brecht's Berliner Ensemble productions remained influential models of modernist political theater: one French critic wrote in 1955 that "for Brecht, the stage narrates, the audience judges."[39] Brecht indeed constitutes the link to the historical-materialist cinema of the late 1960s. In Germany, around 1960, the "documentary theater" movement emerged under the auspices of Piscator (especially his Berlin production of *The Deputy* in 1962) and of Peter Weiss, both influenced by Brecht.[40] This movement was greatly to affect the work of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. In 1962, Godard made *Vivre sa vie* in conscious imitation of Brechtian methods. Not until somewhat later, however, did filmmakers and theorists turn to a scrutiny of the Soviet cinema of the 1920s. In France, Althusser's reinterpretation of Leninism, the impact of structuralism and Russian Formalism on intellectual circles, the new availability of films by Vertov and Feks, the efforts of journals like *Tel Quel* and *Change* to link Marxism to a literary avant-garde, and crucially the revolutionary activities of May 1968 all intensified interest in Soviet silent cinema. Writing of the Etats généraux du cinéma, René Micha predicted in the summer of 1968 that the Soviet directors would become the model for a revolutionary cinema.[41] In January of 1969, Eisenstein's essays and memoirs began to appear in *Cahiers du cinéma*; the series would run for over two years. In a special 1970 number on Soviet cinema of the 1920s, Jean Narboni wrote: "This is the only cinema capable of comprehending itself as a signifying practice, aware of its materiality, detaching itself at last from the ideology of 'lived experience.' . . . A cinema which belongs not to the prestigious silence of the archives but is active *today*, before us and with us."[42]

One theoretical consequence of the rediscovery of Soviet historical-materialist cinema was a broadening of the concept of montage. Thanks partly to Bazin, "modernity" in cinema had come to imply long takes and intrashot effects, but New Wave films forced theorists to reconsider editing as a significant technique. Moreover, films like *Not Reconciled* (1965) and *Méditerranée* (1963), not to mention Godard's work, made the question of montage quite pressing. A 1969 *Cahiers* panel defined montage as "all notions of liaison, juxtaposition, combination (and their corollaries: difference, rupture, analysis)."[43] The political efficacy of montage emerged in its ability to shatter the homogeneity of the spectacle. J.-L. Comolli put it emphatically, if circuitously:

> All montage, even formalist montage, produces at least some *effects of work*: it multiplies traces, cuts, gaps, fractures, in short the signs of writing [*écriture*] which affirm it as being an operation by which, again at the very least, it shows that there is a work of signifying production: it *watches* itself. . . . Reworking the status of the images in the signifying network, redistributing their positions, reorganizing their relations according to systems of opposition or recurrence, dividing and denaturalizing their mechanical linkup, montage *superimposes* upon that flowing emergence of an impression of reality, which every series of images (edited or not) necessarily produces, another movement, that of meaning, of reading.[44]

Montage thus became absorbed into the general issue of what I have been calling self-conscious narration.

Such theoretical developments were preceded and paralleled by filmmaking practice. The Soviet directors had forged a tendentious "Socialist Formalism." The 1960s and 1970s saw a movement, within the conventions of the historical-materialist mode, toward an interrogative cinema. Films such as those of Straub and Huillet, Jancsó, the Dziga-Vertov Group, and more recent British independent filmmakers preserve basic tenets of the Soviet model: the

refusal of a psychologically defined, individual-centered syuzhet; the emphasis upon typicality and historical referentiality; the insistence upon continuous transformation of the fabula by an overt and politically conscious narration. But these films also refuse the fixed doctrine and clearly didactic purpose that had informed the Soviet approach. Here the narration stages an inquiry into political issues. The characters and/or the narration pose questions about political theory and practice—including the practice of cinematic representation. In these works, the need for revolutionary change is often posited, but a film's own capacity for social analysis and change is subjected to a scrutiny that was never undertaken in the Soviet films we have considered.

That political issues tend to be questioned, and not solved by fiat, is explicable by the fact that no fixed doctrine serves as a point of departure. After 1956, with the Soviet Communist Party's denunciation of Stalin and the USSR's suppression of the Hungarian uprising, the European left was in disarray. In no country was there an official "line" that these filmmakers could promote without falling into some version of realism. "The cinema," remarked Godard in 1970, "is a party instrument and we find ourselves in countries where the revolutionary party is far from existing."[45] The Dziga-Vertov Group, sometimes believed to be the most tendentious element of "left-wing modernism," had no fixed ties to a Maoist organization (Althusser comes in for criticism in *Vent d'est*),[46] while Jancsó's work constitutes a steady critique of centralized power within actually existing socialism. Thus the films raise political problems: the return of fascism (*Not Reconciled*), Soviet revisionism (*Pravda*), spontaneous revolutionary outbursts (*The Confrontation*, *Vent d'est*), the relations of ideology to the economic infrastructure (*British Sounds*). This is not to say that these films can be seen as utterly open-ended; as one critic remarks of *The Confrontation*: "It certainly does not accept any alternative to socialism."[47]

Given an interrogative political stance, some films use a "collage" principle to create forms incorporating debate and dialogue. Entire films will be staged as debates or discussions. *The Confrontation* lays out various positions—anarchist, humanist, sectarian, democratic centrist, and party centered.[48] Similarly, Godard's *Un film comme les autres* frames its footage of May 1968 within a conversation among unseen students and workers who argue about the failures of May. Besides such moot forms there are more pedagogical attempts to analyze a problem or period. Straub and Huillet treat *History Lessons* (1972) as an assemblage of representations of Caesar's reign; *Le gai savoir* (1969) proposes a three-year curriculum concentrating on decomposing images and sounds from a Marxist perspective. At a local level, the narration can juxtapose texts or voices to map out arguments surrounding an issue, as when, in Jonathan Curling and Susan Clayton's *Song of the Shirt* (1979), a Parliamentary debate is recreated on two video monitors. Or the sound track can interrogate the image, as in Godard's Dziga-Vertov Group films. Rethinking Soviet montage as a collage of documents created a looser, still more conceptual texture, seen perhaps at the limit in Godard's work, as Serge Daney describes it:

> It consists of taking note of what is said (to which one can add nothing) and then looking immediately for the *other* statement, the *other* sound, the *other* image which would counterbalance *this* statement, this sound, this image. . . . More than "Who is right? Who is wrong?" the real question is, "What can we oppose to this?"[49]

This cinema also interrogates cinematic representations. Here is its "Brechtian" heritage. The work of Straub and Huillet constitutes a running violation of dominant figures of style: shot/reverse shot, eyeline matching, the framing of figures, the use of landscape, sound/image relations.[50] Similarly, what Ferenc Feher has called Jancsó's synthesis of parable and pantomime (which owes something to Brecht's theatrical parables) also serves to question socialist-realist demands for a plausible and homogeneous diegetic world.[51] The Dziga-Vertov Group emphasizes crude, obviously constructed images and overloaded sound tracks, thus challenging the supremacy of the visual in cinema. Noël Burch's *In the Year of the Bodyguard* (1982) juxtaposes primitive cin-

ema's staging and shooting practices with more modern alternatives (e.g., to-camera interviews, volumetric space, *cinéma-vérité*) in order to suggest comparisons between suffragist struggles and contemporary feminist acitivity.

Central to the interrogation of cinematic representation is another link to Soviet cinema: the overtness of the narrational operations. The marked angles and empty frames in Straub and Huillet's films and our pervasive awareness of manipulation in Jancsó's camera movements encourage the viewer to construct a constantly present narration. The film's own operations will not necessarily escape observation, as in the recording sessions in *Introduction to Arnold Schoenberg's Accompaniment for a Film Scene* (1972), the black frames which create spaces for reflecting on the preceding shots in *Luttes en Italie* (1970), and the critique of one part of the film by another in *Pravda* (1969).

It seems likely that the interrogative tendency has an ambivalent relation to another set of extrinsic norms—that of art-cinema narration. Certainly the psychologically complex protagonist and the crisis of individual values have been effectively countered by such films as *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1967), *Not Reconciled* (1965), *Tout va bien* (1972), and Jancsó's *Allegro Barbaro* (1978). Nonetheless, the ability of art-cinema narration to maximize ambiguity for symbolic effect has suggested avenues for an open-ended political cinema. Thus the recent interrogative strain in the historical-materialist mode of narration has selectively absorbed some norms of its rival.