

hybrid aesthetics mingle Hollywood continuity codes and production values with the anti-illusionist values of Hindu mythology, to a mere mimicry of Hollywood. Even the branch of cinema studies that is critical of Hollywood often recenters Hollywood as a kind of *langue* in relation to which all other forms are but dialectal variants; thus the avant-garde becomes little more than the shadowy alter ego of Hollywood, a festival of negations of dominant cinema.

Early Silent Film Theory

Reflexion on film as a medium began virtually with the medium itself. Indeed, the etymological meanings of the original names given to the cinema already point to diverse ways of "envisioning" the cinema and even foreshadow later theories. "Biograph" and "animatographe" emphasize the recording of life itself (a strong current, later, in the writings of Bazin and Kracauer). "Vitascope" and "Bioscope" emphasize the *looking* at life, and thus shift emphasis from recording life to the spectator and scopophilia (the desire to look), a concern of 1970s psychoanalytic theorists. "Chronophotographe" stresses the writing of time (and light) and thus anticipates Deleuze's (Bergsonian) emphasis on the "time image," while "Kinetoscope," again anticipating Deleuze, stresses the visual observation of movement. "Scenarographe" emphasizes the recording of stories or scenes, calling attention both to decor and to the stories that take place within that decor, and thus implicitly privileges a narrative cinema. "Cinematographe," and later "cinema," call attention to the transcription of movement.

One might even expand the discussion to examine the proto-theoretical implications of the etymologies of the words for *pre*-cinematic devices: "camera obscura" (dark room) evokes the processes of photography, Marx's comparison of ideology to a camera obscura, and the name of a feminist film journal. "Magic lantern" evokes the perennial theme of "movie magic" along with Romanticism's creative "lamp" and the Enlightenment's "lantern." "Phantasmagoria" and

"phasmotrope" (spectacle-turn) evoke fantasy and the marvelous, while "cosmorama" evokes the global world-making ambitions of the cinema. Marey's "fusil cinématographique" (cinematic rifle) evokes the "shooting" process of film while calling attention to the aggressive potential of the camera as a weapon, a metaphor resurrected in the "guerrilla cinema" of the revolutionary filmmakers of the 1960s. "Mutoscope" suggests a viewer of change, while "phenakistiscope" evokes "cheating views," a foreshadowing of Baudrillard's simulacrum. Many of the names for the cinema include some variant on "graph" (Greek "writing" or "transcription") and thus anticipate later tropes of filmic authorship and *écriture*. The German *lichtspiel* (play of light) is one of the few names to reference light. Not surprisingly, given the "silent" beginnings of the medium, the appellations given the cinema rarely reference sound, although Edison saw the cinema as an extension of the phonograph and gave his pre-cinematic devices such names as "optical phonograph" and "kinetophonograph" (the writing of movement and sound). The initial attempts to synchronize sound and image generated such coinages as "cameraphone" and "cinephone." In Arabic the cinema was called *sura mutabarika* (moving image or form), while in Hebrew the word for cinema evolved from *reinoa* (watching movement) to *kolnoa* (sound movement). Otherwise, the names themselves imply that film is "essentially" visual, a view often buttressed by the "historical" argument that cinema existed first as image and then as sound; in fact, of course, cinema was usually accompanied both by language (intertitles, visible mouthings of speech) and by music (pianos, orchestras).

In the earliest writings on the cinema, theory is often only an implicit embryonic presence. We find in some journalistic critics, for example, a discourse of wonderment, a kind of religious awe at the sheer magic of mimesis, at seeing a convincing simulacral representation of an arriving train or of the "wind blowing through the leaves." Responding to an 1896 screening of the Lumière films in Bombay, a *Times of India* (July 22, 1896) reporter remarked on the "life-like manner in which the various views were portrayed on the screen . . . [with] something like seven or eight hundred photographs being

thrown on the screen within the space of a minute."¹ A 1989 article in the Chinese paper *Yo-shi-Bao* (The Amusement Journal) speaks of one reporter's initial experience of cinema:

Last night . . . my friends took me to the Chi Gardens to see a show. After the audience gathered, the lights were put out and the performance began. On the screen before us we saw a picture – two occidental girls dancing, with puffed-up yellow hair, looking rather silly. Then another scene, two occidentals boxing. . . . The spectators feel as though they are actually present, and this is exhilarating. Suddenly the lights come on again and all the images vanish. It was indeed a miraculous spectacle. (Quoted in Leyda, 1972, p. 2)

Responding to a Lumière screening in Mexico City in December 1895, Luis G. Urbina noted not only the deficiencies of the "new contraption" which "entertains us by reproducing life" but which "lacks color,"² but also the cultural "lacks" of the popular audience:

The popular masses, uncouth and infantile, experience while sitting in front of the screen the enchantment of the child to whom the grandmother has recounted a fairy tale; but I fail to understand how, night after night, a group of people who have the obligation of being civilized can idiotize themselves [in movie theaters] with the incessant repetition of scenes in which the abberations, anachronisms, inverisimilitudes, are made ad hoc for a public of the lowest mental level, ignorant of the most elementary educational notions. (Mora, 1988, p. 6)

Much of the early writing on cinema was produced by literary figures. Here is the Russian novelist Maxim Gorky responding to an 1896 screening of a film:

Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows. If you only knew how strange it is to be there. It is a world without sound, without colour. Everything there – the earth, the trees, the people, the water and the air – is dipped in monotonous grey. . . . It is no life but its shadow. . . . And all this in a strange silence where no rumble of wheels is heard, no sound of footsteps or of speech. Not a single note of the intricate symphony that always accompanies the movements of people. (Quoted in Leyda, 1972, pp. 407–9)

Many early commentators, like Gorky, were ambivalent about the cinema. From the beginning, there were simultaneous tendencies to either over-endow the cinema with utopian possibilities, or to demonize it as a progenitor of evil. Thus while some promised that the cinema would reconcile hostile nations and bring peace to the world, others gave expression to "moral panics," the fear that film might contaminate or degrade the lower-class public, prodding it toward vice or crime. In such reactions, we sense the convergence of the long shadow of three discursive traditions: (1) Platonic hostility to the mimetic arts; (2) the puritanical rejection of artistic fictions; and (3) the historical scorn of bourgeois elites for the unwashed masses.

A common leitmotif in early film writing was the cinema's potential for democratization, a perennial theme which emerges with every new technology up through the computer and the Internet. A writer for *Moving Picture World* argued in 1910 that "The motion picture brings its note of sympathy alike to the cultured and the uncultured, to the children of opportunity and the sons of toil. It is literature for the illiterate. . . . It knows no boundary lines of race or nation." In tones that point back to Walt Whitman and forward to cyber-discourse, the writer continues:

[The spectator] goes to see, to feel, to sympathize. He is taken for the time out of the limitations of his environment; he walks the streets of Paris; he rises with the cowboy of the West; he delves in the depths of the earth with swartly miners, or tosses on the ocean with sailor or with fishermen. He feels, too, the thrill of human sympathy with some child of poverty or sorrow. . . . The motion picture artist may play on every pipe in the great organ of humanity.³

A cognate theme was the celebration of film as a new "universal language," a theme which resonated, as Miriam Hansen points out, with sources as diverse as the French Enlightenment, the metaphysics of Progress, and Protestant Millennialism (Hansen, 1991, p. 76). The cinema could thus "repair the ruins of Babel" and transcend barriers of nation, culture, and class. As a contributor writes in *American Magazine* (July 1913), there is in the cinema

no bar of language for the alien or the ignorant . . . for a mere nickel, the wasted man . . . sees alien people and begins to understand how like they are to him; he sees courage and aspiration and agony, and begins to understand himself. He begins to feel himself a brother in a race that is led by many dreams. (Quoted in Hansen, 1991, p. 78)

Despite this theoretical claim of universality, some community groups protested against the actual representations of their communities in Hollywood movies. The August 3, 1911, issue of *Moving Picture World* reports on a Native American delegation to President Taft protesting against erroneous representations and even asking for a Congressional Investigation.⁴ In the same vein, African American newspapers like the Los Angeles-based *California Eagle* protested against the racism of films like Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*. It was only in the late 1920s, as we shall see; that we find an in-depth discussion of cinematic racism in the avant-garde journal *Close Up*.

In the silent period we sometimes find a colonized mentality in the film journalism of countries like Brazil. The film magazine *Cinearte* (founded in 1926), for example, was a tropical version of Hollywood's *Photoplay*. Largely financed through advertisements for Hollywood films, the magazine proclaimed its cinematic and social ideals in an editorial:

A cinema which teaches the weak not to respect the strong, the servant to respect his boss, which shows dirty, bearded, unhygienic faces, sordid events and extreme realism is not cinema. Imagine a young couple who go to see a typical North American film. They will see a clean-faced, well-shaven hero with well-combed hair, agile, a gentleman. And the girl will be pretty, with a nice body and cute face, modern hair-style, photogenic . . . the couple which sees such a film will comment that they had already seen such images twenty times before. But over their dreaming hearts, there will not fall the shadow of any shocking brutality, any dirty face which might take away the poetry and enchantment. Young people today cannot accept revolt, lack of hygiene, the struggle and eternal fight against those who have the right to exercise power.⁵

Here the notion of *photogenic*, later developed by French filmmaker-theorists like Jean Epstein to advance the specific potentialities of

the "seventh art," becomes a normative epidermic notion of beauty, associated with youth, luxury, stars, and, at least implicitly, whiteness. Although the passage does not mention race, its call for "clean" and "hygienic" as opposed to "dirty" faces, and its generally servile stance toward the lily-white Hollywood model, suggest a coded reference to the subject.⁶ At times, the racial reference becomes more explicit. One editorialist calls for Brazilian cinema to be an "act of purification of our reality," emphasizing "progress," "modern engineering," and "our beautiful white people." The same author warns against documentaries as more likely to include "undesirable elements:"

We should avoid documentaries, for they do not allow for total control over what is shown and therefore might allow for the infiltration of undesirable elements: we need a studio cinema, like that of Hollywood, with well-decorated interiors inhabited by nice people.⁷

Thus racial hierarchies impact even on issues of genre and production method.

The film theory of the silent period was concerned, albeit in an intuitive manner, with what turned out to be perennial questions about the cinema: Is cinema an art or merely a mechanical recorder of visual phenomena? If it is an art, what are its salient characteristics? How does it differ from other arts such as painting, music, and theater? Other questions had to do with film's relation to the three-dimensional world. What distinguishes reality in the world, as it were, from reality as presented in the cinema? Still other questions bear on spectatorial processes. What are film's psychological determinants? What mental processes are involved in spectatorship? Is film a language, or a dream? Is cinema art, or commerce, or both? What is the social function of the cinema? Is it to stimulate the perceptive intelligence of the spectator, to be beautifully useless, or to promote the cause of justice in the world? Although these questions have been transformed and reformulated by contemporary film theory, they have never been completely discarded. On the other hand, there has been a clear evolution in preoccupations. While the early theorists

were very much concerned with *proving* cinema's artistic potentialities, for example, later theorists, less defensive and less elitist, take film's status as art for granted, as not in need of proof.

Much of the early film criticism/theory had to do with defining the film medium and its relation to other arts. Drawing on Lessing, Wagner, and the futurists, Riccioto Canudo, in his (1911) manifesto "The Birth of a (Sixth) Art," envisioned the cinema as absorbing the three spatial arts (architecture, sculpture, and painting) and the three temporal arts (poetry, music, and dance), transforming them into a synthetic form of theater called "Plastic Art in Motion" (Abel, 1988, Vol. I, pp. 58-66). Anticipating Bakhtin's notion of the "chronotope" – the necessary relationality of time and space in artistic representation – Canudo saw the cinema as the redemptive *telos* of the antecedent spatial and temporal arts, that toward which they had been tending all along. Rather than Bazin's later "myth of total cinema," Canudo promoted the "myth of the total art form."

In the first few decades of the cinema much of the theorizing about film was unformed and impressionistic. A good example of this kind of ad hoc, unsystematic theorizing is found in the work of American poet-critic Vachel Lindsay. In *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915, revised 1922), Lindsay ruminates over a number of issues, mingling personal anecdotes with speculations about literature and film. Writing against an assumed backdrop of high literary scorn for film as a medium, Lindsay defends popular film to his specified target audience: the directors of art museums, the members of English departments, and "the critical and literary world generally" (ibid., p. 45). Film, for Lindsay, is a democratic art, a new American hieroglyphic in the Whitmanesque tradition. Some of Lindsay's speculations have to do with genre, defined, rather imprecisely, on the basis not of structure but of content and tone. Lindsay cites three "genres": action, intimacy, and splendor. Lindsay appeals to the example of other arts to define the cinema, seeing it as at once "sculpture in motion," "painting in motion," and "architecture in motion," with "motion" forming the common substratum of definition (Lindsay's visual orientation is not surprising given his painterly training at the Art Institute of Chicago). Lindsay thus adopted a differential approach to film

specificity, defining the cinema in opposition to other media. In one chapter, for example, he inventories the differences between photoplays (i.e. films) and theatrical performances: while the stage has its exits and entrances at the side and back, "the standard photoplays have their exits and entrances across the imaginary footlight line"; and while the stage is dependent on actors, movies depend on "the genius of the producer" (ibid., pp. 187-8). A decade later, Gilbert Seldes (1924) showed himself to be a partial heir of Lindsay in his enthusiastic defense of cinema as a popular art in *The Seven Lively Arts*.

However quirky in his argumentation, Lindsay did anticipate a number of later currents. His fascination with the analogy between film and hieroglyphics foreshadows both Eisenstein and Metz, and his vision of Thomas Edison as a "new Gutenberg" anticipates McLuhan's claims about new media and the "global village." His suggestion that spectators should talk during films, meanwhile, anticipates Brecht's notion of a "smokers' theater" and a "theater of interruptions." Lindsay also pays a kind of ethnographic attention to audience reaction. Action pictures, for example, "gratify the incipient or rampant speed-mania in every American" (Lindsay, 1915, p. 41). "People love Mary Pickford," he argues, "because of a certain aspect of her face in her highest mood" (ibid., p. 55). Anticipating Vertov's later comparison of film to narcotic drugs ("cin-nicotine," "cine-vodka"), but without Vertov's censorious tone, Lindsay compares the gregarious pleasures of the movie theater to those of the saloon. Since many of Lindsay's somewhat scattershot ruminations are highly speculative, even frivolous – at one point he posits Rimbaud-style correspondences between filmic genres and specific colors – it makes more sense to read him largely in terms of issues raised and possibilities opened up.

Systematic film theory *per se* traces its origins to the first comprehensive study of the film medium: *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* by Harvard psychologist and philosopher Hugo Munsterberg (1916). Drawing both on the categories of neo-Kantian philosophy and on research in perceptual psychology, as well as on his knowledge of what was then a relatively small corpus of films – the author was ashamed to be seen at the movies – Munsterberg's book argued

for film as an "art of subjectivity" which mimics the ways that consciousness shapes the phenomenal world: "The photoplay tells us a human story by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely space, time and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely attention, memory, imagination and emotion."⁸

In his introduction, Munsterberg distinguishes between "inner" and "outer" developments of the cinema, with the former referring to aesthetic principles and the latter referring to the evolution from pre-cinematic devices such as the kinoscope to the first "real" films. (In this sense, he anticipates an intense area of interest for contemporary historians of silent cinema.) On the technological origins and future potential of cinema, Munsterberg takes a refreshingly non-teleological position:

It is arbitrary to say where the development of the moving pictures began and it is impossible to foresee where it will lead. . . . If we think of the moving pictures as a source of entertainment and aesthetic enjoyment, we may see the germ in that camera obscura which allowed one glass lid to pass before another . . . on the other hand if the essential feature of the moving pictures is the combination of various views into one connected impression, we must look back to the days of the phenakistoscope which had scientific interest only. (Munsterberg, 1970, p. 1)

But what really interests Munsterberg is the cinema's "inner forms," i.e. the advances in film language which transform "trite episodes" into "a new and promising art" (ibid., pp. 8-9). The filmmaker's selection of what is significant and consequential, for Munsterberg, turns the "chaos" of sense impressions into the "cosmos" of film.

Munsterberg is thus concerned with both aesthetics and psychology. The filmic deployment of space and time, for Munsterberg, transcends theatrical dramaturgy through such devices as the close-up, special effects, and quick changes of scene through editing. For Munsterberg, it is precisely film's *distance* from physical reality which brings it into the mental sphere. Working out of the tradition of philosophical idealism, where thought shapes reality, Munsterberg argues that film reconfigures three-dimensional reality according to

the "laws of thought." Unlike the theater, the cinema creates pleasure by triumphing over the material principle, freeing the palpable world from the heaviness of space, time, and causality, decking it out instead in the forms of our own consciousness. Yet there is an aesthetic tension within Munsterberg. On the one hand he calls for the "perfect unity of plot and pictorial appearance" and "complete isolation from the practical world," phrases evocative of Hollywood illusionism; but on the other hand he calls for a more open-ended and unpredictable "free play of mental experiences," evocative of art film subjectivism.

Munsterberg can be seen as the spiritual father of a number of currents within film theory. Munsterberg's emphasis on the active spectator, who compensates for cinema's lacunae through intellectual and emotional investments and thus participates in the "game" of cinema, anticipates later theories of spectatorship. In Munsterberg's notion that the spectator accepts the impression of the depth offered by the filmic image, despite his or her knowledge of its factitiousness, for example, we find the germ of the later psychoanalytic notion of "split belief," the "je sais mais quand meme" of 1970s film theory. Munsterberg's notion that films generate mental events, that the film exists, ultimately, not on celluloid but in the mind that actualizes the film, similarly, anticipates the "reception theory" of the 1980s. Munsterberg's work on the "phi-phenomenon," the process by which the mind makes kinetic sense out of static images, finally, makes him the granddaddy of the cognitivists, for whom mimetic processes do not reflect a link between film and "reality" but rather between filmic processes and those of the mind itself. And as a trained philosopher turning his attention to the cinema, Munsterberg anticipates such later figures as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze.

While Munsterberg emphasized the psychological dimensions of film, other theorists saw film as a kind of language, with its own grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. For Vachel Lindsay (1915), film constituted a new language of picture-words and hieroglyphs, a kind of Esperanto. We also encounter the notion of film language in the 1920s writings of Riccioto Canudo and Louis Delluc in France, both

of whom saw the language-like character of the cinema as linked, paradoxically, to its non-verbal status and its capacity for transcending the barriers of national language.⁹ Hungarian film theorist Bela Bálázs, meanwhile, repeatedly stressed the language-like nature of film in his work from the 1920s through the late 1940s. Film spectators, Bálázs argued, have to learn the “grammar” of the new art, its conjugations and declensions of close-ups and editing.¹⁰ (The trope of film language, as we shall see, was also developed by the Russian Formalists and, much more rigorously, by the film semiologists of the 1960s.)

Another strand of theory can be teased out of the commentaries on their craft by filmmakers themselves. Griffith’s claim that he borrowed his chiaroscuro lighting techniques from Rembrandt, for example, implied a quasi-theoretical stance on the relation between film and painting. Louis Feuillade’s description of his films as “slices of life” representing “people and things as they are rather than as they would like to be” surely implies a stance on artistic realism.¹¹ Brazilian filmmaker Humberto Mauro’s aphorism that “the cinema is waterfalls,” similarly, suggests that the cinema should privilege natural beauty, in this case Brazilian natural beauty. Non-filmmakers also offered embryonic “theories” of the cinema. Woodrow Wilson’s praise for *Birth of a Nation* as “history written with lightning” could be seen as making a theoretical claim about the cinema’s potential for historiographical *écriture*, albeit one with disturbingly racist implications. Lenin’s proclamation that “film was for us the most important of all the arts,” in the same way, could be seen as making an implicitly theoretical claim about the political-ideological uses of film.

Many incipient “theories” built on pre-existing traditions concerning other arts. The idea of the filmmaker as “author,” for example, was inherited from millennia of literary tradition. Although auteurism came into vogue only in the 1950s, the root idea itself emerged in the silent period, a function of cinema’s search for artistic legitimation. Already in 1915, Vachel Lindsay anticipated auteurism by predicting in *The Art of the Moving Picture* that “we will some day distinguish the different photoplay masters as we now

delight in the separate tang of O. Henry and Mark Twain” (Lindsay, 1915, p. 211). In 1921 the filmmaker Jean Epstein, in “Le Cinéma et les lettres modernes,” applied the term “author” to the filmmaker, while Louis Delluc analyzed the films of Griffith, Chaplin, and Ince in what Stephen Crofts has called a “proto-auteurist” manner (Crofts, in Hill and Gibson, 1998, p. 312). The characterization of the cinema as the seventh art, similarly, implicitly gave film artists the same status as writers and painters.

The Essence of Cinema

Since the beginning of film as a medium, analysts have sought its “essence,” its unique and distinguishing features. Some early film theorists argued for a cinema *par excellence* by the other arts, as in Jean Epstein’s notion of “pure cinema.” Other theorists and filmmakers proudly asserted cinema’s links to the other arts. Griffith claimed to have borrowed narrative cross-cutting from Dickens while Eisenstein found prestigious literary antecedents for cinematic devices: the changes of focal length in *Paradise Lost*; the alternating montage of the agricultural fair chapter in *Madame Bovary*. The often-cited definitions of cinema in terms of other arts – “sculpture in motion” (Vachel Lindsay); “music of light” (Abel Gance); “painting in movement” (Leopold Survage); “architecture in movement” (Elie Faure) – simultaneously established links with previous arts while positing crucial differences: cinema was painting, but this time in movement, or it was music, but this time of light rather than notes. The common point of agreement was that cinema was an art. Indeed, Rudolf Arnheim in 1933 expressed astonishment that the cinema had not been received with open arms by art lovers. The cinema, he wrote, is “the art *par excellence*. With unrestrained exclusivity it served to entertain and distract; it won out over all the older arts in the beauty pageant; and its muse was as scantily clad as could possibly be desired” (Arnheim, 1997, p. 75). The insistence on both the differences and the similarities between cinema and the other arts provided

a way of legitimizing a fledgling medium, a way of saying not only that the cinema was as good as the other arts, but also that it should be judged in its own terms, in relation to its own potentials and aesthetics.

With its many specialized film journals and important figures (Jean Epstein, Abel Gance, Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac, and Riccioto Canudo), France became a privileged site of reflection on both commercial and avant-garde cinema. A constellation of institutions (a "cultural field" in Bourdieu's terminology) facilitated the exhibition and discussion of films. Many of the theorists of this period, despite their manifold differences, were preoccupied with the status and essential nature of the cinema as an art. Already in 1916 a futurist manifesto ("The Futurist Cinema") called for recognition of cinema as "an autonomous art" which must never "copy the stage" (quoted by Hein, in Drummond et al., 1979, p. 19). Within "pure cinema," the goal, as Fernand Leger put it, was to "break away from the elements which are not purely cinematographic" (ibid., p. 41). Still another expression of this concern was the theme of *photogenie*, which Delluc called the "law of cinema," and which Epstein, in *Le Cinématographe vu de l'Etna*, called the "purest expression of cinema": "With the notion of *photogenie* was born the idea of cinema art. For how better to define the indefinable *photogenie* than by saying that it is to cinema as color is to painting and volume to sculpture, the specific element of this art" (Drummond et al., 1979, p. 38). Elsewhere, Epstein defined *photogenic* as "any aspect of things, beings, or souls whose moral character is enhanced by filmic reproduction."¹ *Photogenie* was thus that ineffable quintessence that differentiated the magic of cinema from the other arts. In another sense, the emphasis on the generation of new knowledge linked the cinema to artistic modernism as a project of challenging conventional perception and understanding.

The impressionists were also concerned with the cinema's relation to other arts. In his *L'Usine aux images* (The Image Factory, 1926), Canudo suggested that cinema, as a "sixth art," would be like a "painting and a sculpture developing in time, as in music and poetry, which realize themselves by transforming air into rhythm for the duration of their execution."² In Canudo's gregarious concep-

tion, this "plastic art in motion" fulfilled the rich utopian promise of the Festival – a notion akin to Bakhtin's "carnival" – redolent of ancient theater and contemporary fairgrounds. Louis Delluc in his *Cinema et cia* (1919) spoke of the cinema as the only truly modern art because it used technology to stylize real life. Germaine Dulac invoked the musical analogy of a "visual symphony:"

Should not cinema, which is an art of vision, as music is an art of hearing . . . lead us toward the visual idea composed of movement and life, toward the conception of an art of the eye, made of a perceptual inspiration evolving in its continuity and reaching, just as music does, our thought and feelings. (Quoted in Sitney, 1978, p. 41)

Movement and rhythm, for Dulac, formed "the unique and intimate essence of cinematic expression" (Drummond et al., 1979, p. 129).

Many of the early theorists displayed what Annette Michelson calls a "euphoric epistemology" (Michelson, 1990, pp. 16–39). Filmmaker Abel Gance proclaimed in *L'Art cinématographique* (1927) that "the time of the image has arrived!" The cinema, for Gance, would endow human beings with a new synaesthetic awareness: spectators "will hear with their eyes."³ Anticipating Bazin's epiphanic view of the cinema, Delluc saw the cinema, and especially the close-up, as providing us with "impressions of evanescent eternal beauty . . . something beyond art, that is, life itself."⁴ Within a kind of transcendental iconophilia, the cinema was envisioned as delivering up life itself in its felt presence and immediacy. Jean Epstein spoke in *Bonjour cinéma* (1921) of the cinema as "profane revelation," a means of mobilizing the spectator's sensibility through direct contact with the human organism (hands, faces, feet). For Epstein, the cinema is "essentially supernatural. Everything is transformed" (quoted in Abel, 1988, p. 246). The cinematic experience, for Epstein, was embodied, visceral. Thanks to the cinema

we experience hills, trees, faces in space as a new sensation. Given motion or its appearance, the body as a whole experiences depth. . . . The cine-camera, more than the car or the airplane, makes possible particular, personal trajectories that reverberate through the entire physique. (Quoted in Williams, 1980, pp. 193–4)

Epstein
de la part

Anticipating Bazin, but on a different register and in a distinct, more mystical vocabulary, Epstein took what he imagined as the automatic, non-mediated nature of the cinema to be a guarantee of its ineffable "sincerity." For Epstein, the close-up was the "soul of the cinema:" "I will never find the way to say how I love American close-ups. Point blank. A head suddenly appears on screen and drama, now face to face, seems to address me personally and swells with an extraordinary intensity. I am hypnotized."⁵ At the same time, Epstein was not opposed to manipulation of the image. In a 1928 text, he argues that

Slow motion actually brings a new range to dramaturgy. Its power of laying bare the emotions of the dramatic enlargements, its infallibility in the designation of the sincere movements of the soul, are such that it outclasses all tragic modes at this time. I am certain and so are all those who have seen part of La Chute de la maison Usher, that if a high-speed film of an accused person under interrogation were to be made, then from beyond his words, the truth would appear, writ plain, unique, evident; that there would be no further need of indictment, of lawyers' speeches, nor of any proof other than that provided from the depths of the images.⁶

In his survey of impressionist usages of the term *photogenie*, David Bordwell speaks of the "bewildering compendium of variants" of idealism in which "Baudelairean theosophy mingles with Platonic idealism with Bergsonian movementism" in an "assemblage of various assumptions never raised to theoretical self-consciousness" (quoted in Willemen, 1994, p. 125). The concept of *photogenie* enabled the impressionist critics to speak of the ways the cinema can not only highlight the poetic movement of things in the world but also render the transmuted perceptions generated by contemporary urban life, namely speed, simultaneity, multiple information. At the same time, Epstein believed the cinema could explore "the non-linguistic, non-rational operations of the 'unconscious' in human existence" (Liebman, 1980, p. 119).

Many of the silent-period theorists warned against the temptation of verism. In his essay "A New Realism: The Object" (Jacobs, 1960, p. 98), experimental filmmaker Fernand Leger complained that most

films waste their energy in constructing a recognizable world, while neglecting the spectacular power of the fragment. Another experimentalist, Hans Richter, argued that the "main aesthetic problem for the movies, which were invented for reproduction is, paradoxically, the overcoming of reproduction" (ibid., p. 282). Germaine Dulac foresaw a cinema freed of the responsibility of telling stories or realistically reproducing "real life." "Pure" cinema could be inspired by dreams, as with Epstein, or by music, as with Abel Gance and Germaine Dulac in France, and Mario Peixoto in Brazil, all of whom spoke of film as essentially rhythm, or better, a "visual symphony made up of rhythmic images."⁷ Purity thus implied a rejection of plots. Anticipating the existential skepticism of Sartre's *La Nausée*, Jean Epstein called cinematic stories "lies:" "There are no stories. There have never been stories. There are only situations without tail or head; without beginning, middle or end."⁸ Germaine Dulac accused those who promote narrative of a "criminal error."⁹ As something promiscuously shared with many other arts, narrative was thought to form a very fragile basis for establishing film's special qualities. Usually associated with written texts, narrative could not provide the basis for the construction of a purely visual art form.

The Soviet Montage-Theorists

What might be called the *bricolage* style of the film theory of the early silent period gave way in the 1920s to the more thoroughgoing reflexions of the Soviet montage-theorists/filmmakers. These theorists worked against the backdrop of the remarkable flowering of diverse avant-garde tendencies in theater, painting, literature, and cinema (much of it state-financed) in the Soviet Union. As practitioner-intellectuals linked to the State Film School founded in 1920, these filmmaker-theorists were concerned not only with grand ideas but also with the practical questions of constructing a socialist film industry which reconciled authorial creativity, political efficacy, and mass popularity. They asked such questions as: what kind of cinema

should we promote? Fiction or documentary? Mainstream or avant garde? What is revolutionary cinema? They also had in common a view of themselves as "cultural workers" forming part of a broad social spectrum engaged in revolutionizing and modernizing Russia. Trained in practical fields like engineering and architecture, their emphasis was on technique, on construction, on experiment.

Despite the diversity of their film styles - ranging from the pragmatic clarity of Pudovkin to the epic-operatic density of Eisenstein - these theorists all emphasized montage as the basis of cine-poetics. Montage, as Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov put it in their 1928 manifesto on sound, "has become the indisputable axiom on which the worldwide culture of the cinema has been built" (Eisenstein, 1957, p. 257). "Montage" is the ordinary word for editing, not only in Russian but also in the romance languages. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith points out, the word has strong practical and even industrial overtones (for example *chaîne de montage* for "assembly line" in French). The alchemy of montage, for the Soviet theorists, brought life and luster to the inert base materials of the single shot. The montage-theorists were also, in a sense, structuralists *avant la lettre*, in that they saw the filmic shot as being without intrinsic meaning prior to its placement within a montage structure. The shot gained meaning, in other words, only relationally, as part of a larger system. In film as in language, to paraphrase Saussure, "there were only differences."

For the practically minded Kuleshov, founder of the world's first film school, the art of cinema consisted in strategically managing the spectator's cognitive and visual processes through the analytic segmentation of partial views. What distinguishes the cinema from other arts, for Kuleshov, is montage's capacity to organize disjointed fragments into meaningful, rhythmical sequence. In the early 1920s Kuleshov devised a series of experiments to show that editing could engender emotions and associations that went far beyond the content of individual shots. One experiment, later dubbed the "Kuleshov effect," juxtaposed the same shot of the actor Mosjoukine with diverse visual materials (a bowl of soup, a baby in a coffin, and so forth) to convey very different emotional effects (hunger, grief, etc.).

It was film technique, rather than "reality," then, that generated spectatorial emotion. Kuleshov suggested that film actors should become "models" or "mannequins," or even "monsters" who could train the body to "achieve complete mastery of its material construction." As for Hitchcock later, meaning was generated less through the expressive performance of actors as "cattle" than through the manipulation of performance through editing. (Mark Rappaport performs a brilliant filmic excursus on the Kuleshov effect in his film *From the Journals of Jean Seberg*.) The success of American films, for Kuleshov, derived from their clear, rapid storytelling, their invisible cutting, and the efficient matching of montage techniques with lively action sequences: fights, cavalcades, chases.

While Vertov's work was aesthetically ambiguous, pointing both to the experimentalism of Eisenstein and to the efficacy of the mainstream, the work of Kuleshov's student Pudovkin was more conventional. In books like *Film Technique* and *Film Acting* Pudovkin elucidated the basic principles of narrative and spatiotemporal continuity, largely from the point of view of the practicing filmmaker. (Pudovkin's books were translated and used in film schools and even studios throughout the world.) For Pudovkin, the key to the cinema lay in its protocols for organizing the look and managing the perceptions and feelings of the spectator through editing and staging and through such rhetorical devices as contrast, parallelism, and symbolism (Pudovkin, 1960). Editing, for Pudovkin, both resembled and engendered the shifts in focus and attention typical of ordinary, everyday perception. Pudovkin's account of these mechanisms anticipates, in some respects, later cognitive accounts of what came to be called "classical cinema."

The most influential of the Soviet montage-theorists was Sergei Eisenstein; here the prestige of the films and the prestige of the theory went hand in hand. A prodigious thinker of encyclopedic interests, Eisenstein's theoretical discourse was a high-flying amalgam: part philosophical speculation, part literary essay, part political manifesto, and part filmmaking manual. Indeed, Eisenstein's writing often gives the impression of a constellation of remarkable insights in search of an overarching theory. Within Eisenstein's inspired

eclecticism, a technician, reductive approach – filmmaker as engineer, or as Pavlovian lab technician – coexisted with a quasi-mystical approach emphasizing “pathos” and “ecstasy,” an oceanic feeling of oneness with others and the world. Although Eisenstein’s theories evolved over two decades of theoretical production – Jacques Aumont in *Montage Eisenstein* (1987) suggests that there are “several Eisensteins” — he always favored a highly stylized and intellectually ambitious cinema. Within Eisenstein’s millennial approach, the cinema not only inherited but also transformed the achievements of the history of all the arts and of “the entire experience of mankind through the ages” (Eisenstein, quoted in Bordwell, 1993, pp. 492–3). Rather than “purify” the cinema, Eisenstein preferred to enrich it through synesthetic cross-fertilization with the other arts, whence his citations of artists as diverse as da Vinci, Milton, Diderot, Flaubert, Dickens, Daumier, and Wagner. Eisenstein’s thinking was also what would nowadays be called “multiculturalist,” in that he showed a more than exotic interest in African sculpture, Japanese kabuki, Chinese shadow plays, Hindu *rasa* aesthetics, and American indigenous forms, all seen, in a relatively non-primitivist manner, as germane to the forging of a “modern” cinema. (He also wanted to make a film called *Black Majesty*, based on the Haitian revolution.)

In an early stage, Eisenstein, fresh from his experience with the politicized avant-garde theater, stressed the “montage of attractions” — the image was drawn from the circus and the amusement park — and the reflexological shock effects of what he called the “kino-fist” as opposed to Vertov’s “kino-eye.” Eisenstein’s “montage of attractions” proposed a carnival-like aesthetic favoring small sketch-like blocks, sensational turns, and aggressive moments such as drum rolls, acrobatic stunts, sudden bursts of light, organized around specific themes and designed to administer a salutary shock to the spectator. Eisenstein opted for an anti-naturalistic cinema based on the powers of pictorial composition and stylized acting. He also stressed the value of *typage*, a casting technique designed to evoke social stratifications through the choice of performers based on the connotations of their physiognomies as easily recognizable social types. Where Kuleshov spoke of “linkage,” Eisenstein spoke, in “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,”

MONTAGE OF ATTRACTIONS
KINO FIST

TIP

of “conflict.” “In the realm of art this dialectical principle of dynamics is embodied in conflict as the fundamental principle for the existence of every art-work and every art-form.”

Eisenstein was less interested in linear cause-effect plot construction than in a disrupted, disjunctive, fractured diegesis, interrupted by digressions and extra-diegetic materials like the shots of the mechanical peacock in *October* that metaphorize the vanity of Prime Minister Kerensky. Eisenstein saw the cinema as potentially stimulating thought and ideological interrogation through constructivist techniques. Rather than *tell* stories through images, Eisensteinian cinema *thinks* through images, using the clash of shots to set off ideational sparks in the mind of the spectator, product of a dialectic of precept and concept, idea and emotion.¹

Later commentators found Eisenstein’s approach totalitarian and suffocating. Andrei Tarkovsky, for example, complains in *Sculpting in Time* that “Eisenstein makes thought into a despot; it leaves no ‘air,’ nothing of that unspoken elusiveness which is perhaps the most captivating quality of all art.” Arlindo Machado (1997, p. 196) suggests that Eisenstein’s dream of an audiovisual spectacle made up of concepts and sensations is more appropriate to contemporary video than to the cinema. When shorn of its dialectical basis, moreover, Eisensteinian “associationist” montage could easily be transformed into the commodified ideograms of advertising, where the whole is more than the sum of its parts: Catherine Deneuve plus Chanel No. 5 signifies charm, glamour, and erotic appeal.

The essays gathered in *Film Sense* (1942) and *Film Form* (1949) show an extraordinary range of interests. In “The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram,” Eisenstein modeled his alternative filmmaking on ideogrammatic (mistakenly called “hieroglyphic”) writing, i.e. stylized vestiges of an ancient pictorial language. The appeal both to “attractions” and to ideographic writing facilitated a theoretical end-run around conventional dramatic realism. For Eisenstein, a shot signified largely through its relationships to other shots within a montage sequence. Montage was therefore the key to both aesthetic and ideological mastery. For Eisenstein, the cinema was above all transformative, ideally triggering social practice rather

ibid

than aesthetic contemplation, shocking the spectator into consciousness of contemporary problems. Appealing to the analogy of contemporary technology, Eisenstein compared film to a tractor, which "plows" – the word has sexual as well as agricultural connotations – the spectatorial psyche. While dismissive of avant-garde "trickery," Eisenstein favored a popular, experimental avant-garde cinema, one intelligible to the masses of people.

Eisenstein was also the theorist of the contrapuntal use of sound, an idea developed in a 1928 manifesto signed by himself, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov, where the three directors warned against the temptation of synchronous phonetic sound, arguing instead for a counterpoint of sound and image. Indeed, notions of counterpoint, tension, and conflict are central to the Eisensteinian aesthetic. For Eisenstein, influenced both by Hegel and Marx, a dialectical struggle of contraries animates not only social life but also artistic texts. Eisenstein aestheticizes Hegelian/Marxist dialectics, while temporalizing, as it were, the essentially spatial juxtapositions of Cubist collage. His ideal in montage is that of a dissonant sound-image concatenation, where tensions remain unresolved. If any single trope characterizes Eisenstein's way of thinking, it is the oxymoron, the yoking of opposites, a trope in evidence in many of his most famous expressions, such as "sensuous thinking" or "dynamic of opposites." Indeed, it is hard to write about Eisenstein without reaching for oxymoronic formulations – "Pavlovian mysticism," "Marxist aestheticism," "Hegelian formalism," "disruptive organicism," "transcendent materialism" – in order to capture the contradictory impulses contained in his thought.

In "Methods of Montage" Eisenstein developed a full-scale montage typology consisting of progressively more complex forms: metric (based solely on length); rhythmic (based on length and content); tonal (based on dominant mood generated by manipulation of light or graphic form); overtonal (based on more subtle expressive resonances); and intellectual (a complex overlay of all the strategies). Each of these types, for Eisenstein, generated specific spectatorial effects. The schema is less interesting as a descriptive paradigm for the cinema than as a suggestive cornucopia of formal

possibilities. In "The Filmic Fourth Dimension" Eisenstein suggested that filmmakers work with "overtones" as well as with the "dominant" to create a filmic "impressionism" reminiscent of that of Debussy in music. Eisenstein, as David Bordwell (1997) points out, often makes implicit appeal to musical analogies, whence the frequent recourse to musical concepts such as meter, overtones, dominant, rhythm, polyphony, and counterpoint. (Eisenstein shared this musical orientation with many of his contemporaries: Bakhtin, who was also working out ideas of artistic "polyphony" and "tact" in his late 1920s work on Dostoevsky; writer Henri-Pierre Roché, who spoke of "polyphonic novels"; and Brazilian artist Mario de Andrade, who spoke of "polyphonic poetry.")

Drawing on his vast knowledge of languages, cultures, arts, and disciplines, and working always in a synergistic dialectic of theory and practice, Eisenstein privileged artistic discontinuity, seeing each fragment of film as part of a powerful semantic construction based on principles of juxtaposition and conflict rather than organic seamlessness. In Eisenstein, phenomenal appearances of volume, shape, light, and velocity became the energetic raw material for a subtle form of alchemical, ideogrammatic writing which could shape thought, affect the senses, and even convey abstract or recondite forms of reasoning, consciousness, and conceptual analysis (Eisenstein famously contemplated adapting both Marx's *Capital* and Joyce's *Ulysses*). Eisenstein left a rich intellectual legacy. We find echoes of Eisensteinian principles in Metz's "Grande Syntagmatique," in Burch's *Praxis au cinéma*, in Roland Barthes's "third meaning," and in countless other later reflections on the cinema. Marie-Claire Ropars made Eisenstein a key figure in her notion of a filmic *écriture* based on montage, and in the 1980s Cuban filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, in his *Dialectica del Espectador*, attempted to synthesize Eisensteinian *pathos* with Brechtian *verfremdung* (estrangement).

Dziga Vertov, meanwhile, was in many ways even more radical than Eisenstein. (By calling his late 1960s collective with Jean-Pierre Gorin the "Dziga Vertov group," Jean-Luc Godard opted for the more politically and formally radical Vertov over the putatively "re-

visionist" Eisenstein.) In a series of incendiary essays and manifestos, Vertov pronounced a "death sentence" on a "profiteering" commercial cinema. Here is Vertov's "We: Variant of a Manifesto."

We declare the old films, based on the romance, theatrical films and the like, to be leprous.

*- Keep away from them!
Keep your eyes off them!
They're mortally dangerous!
Contagious!*

(Vertov, 1984, p. 7)

Inviting readers/spectators to "flee the sweet embraces of the romance / the poison of the psychological novel / the clutches of the theater of adultery" (ibid.), Vertov called instead for the "sensory exploration of the world through the kino-eye." With Whitmanesque projective glee, Vertov anthropomorphized the camera:

I am kino-eye. I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it.

Now and forever, I free myself from human immobility. I am in constant motion. I draw near, then away, from objects. I crawl under, I climb onto them. I move apace with the muzzle of a galloping horse. I plunge full speed into a crowd. (Ibid., p. 17)

In his "Provisional Instructions to Kino-Eye Groups" Vertov points out that the human eye is inferior to the camera:

Our eye sees very poorly and very little - and so men conceived of the microscope in order to see invisible phenomena; and they discovered the telescope in order to see and explore distant, unknown worlds. The movie camera was invented in order to penetrate deeper into the visible world, to explore and record visual phenomena. (Vertov, 1984, p. 67)

Editing, for Vertov, could assemble a man "more perfect than Adam." The dominant social structures, unfortunately, prevented the cinema from realizing its potential:

But the camera experienced a misfortune. It was invented at a time when there was no single country in which capital was not in power. The bourgeoisie's hellish idea consisted of using the new toy to entertain the masses or rather to divert the workers' attention from their aim: the struggle against their masters. (Ibid., p. 67)

Vertov's basic, programmatic objective, as he put it in "The Essence of Kino-Eye," was to "aid each oppressed individual and the proletariat as a whole in their effort to understand the phenomena of life around them" (Vertov, 1984, p. 49).

Vertov also called for "kino pravda," literally "cinema truth" but also an allusion to the communist newspaper *Pravda*. There is a tension, in Vertov's writing, between his emphasis on film as a medium of truth and fact and his emphasis on film as a form of "writing," a tension captured in his designation of his own films as "poetic documentaries." On a practical level, Vertov advocated documentary filming in the streets, far from studios, in order to show people without masks or make-up and to reveal what lurks beneath the surfaces of social phenomena. Influenced by the Italian futurists, but wary of that movement's fascist politics, Vertov lauded the "poetry of machines" and the perfectible "cine-eye" (*kino glas*) as a means of celebrating the brave new world of speed and machines - "epics of electric power plants" - to be placed in the service of socialism.

For Vertov, montage permeates the entire process of film production, taking place during observation, after observation, during filming, after filming, during editing (the search for montage fragments) and during the definitive montage. Vertov spoke of musical-style montage "intervals," i.e. the movement and proportional relation between frames. In "We: Variant of a Manifesto" (1922), Vertov spoke of "Kinokism" and of the "kinogram," the filmic counterpart to the musical scale which maps out the figural combinatorial of filmic construction:

Kinochestvo [Kinokism] is the art of organizing the necessary movements of objects in space as a rhythmical artistic whole, in harmony with the properties of the material and the internal rhythm of each object.

The Intervals (the transitions from one movement to another) are the material, the elements of the art of movement, and by no means the movements themselves. It is they (the intervals) which draw the movement to a kinetic conclusion. (Vertov, 1984, p. 8)

The obligation of the filmmaker, for Vertov, was to decipher mysteries and expose mystifications, whether found on the screen or in three-dimensional life, as part of the "communist deciphering of the world" (ibid., p. 79). Vertov defined his kind of cinema diacritically, in opposition to the mystifications of the "artistic drama," a cinematic form designed to intoxicate the spectator and insinuate certain reactionary notions into the unconscious. Echoing simultaneously the Bolshevik fight against Tsarism and the Kino-Glas struggle against the Hollywood star system, Vertov called for the overthrow of the "immortal kings and queens of the screen" and the reinstatement of "the ordinary mortal, filmed in life at his daily tasks" (ibid., p. 71).

Apart from tropes of royalty, Vertov's denunciations of illusionistic cinema drew on three other families of tropes: (1) magic ("the cinema of enchantment"); (2) drugs ("cine-nicotine," "electric opium"); and (3) religion (the "high priests of cinema"). (The revolutionary Trotsky had written an essay entitled "Vodka, the Church, and the Cinema.") Against a Kantian valorization of "disinterested" art, Vertov argued for films as "useful as shoes." Film, for Vertov, did not transcend productive life: rather, it existed on a continuum of social production. Vertov's film *The Man with a Movie Camera*, as Annette Michelson points out, treats cinema as a branch of industrial production, systematically juxtaposing virtually every aspect of cinematic activity with labor as it is conventionally conceived.² Despite his emphasis on montage at every stage of film production, Vertov's condemnation of "fairytale scripts" as merely a form of bourgeois representation makes him, ultimately, a realist (although not an illusionist). Vertov's theories had international impact. He was admired in the United States by such leftist groups as the Workers Film and Photo League, and in 1962 the New York journal *Film Culture* published a selection of his writings, prior to

entire translated volumes in French in the 1970s and in English in the 1980s.

All the supposed differences between the diverse montage-theorists meant little in the eyes of the official Stalinist regime, since virtually all of them got into political trouble after 1935, when "socialist realism" was adopted as the official aesthetic of the Soviet Communist Party, at which point they came under attack for their "idealism," "formalism," and "elitism."

Russian Formalism and the Bakhtin School

The work of the Soviet filmmakers in theorizing their own practice coincided with, and was concretely influenced by, another important source-movement for film theory – the Russian Formalists – who, like them, were also subsequently denounced as "idealists." Eisenstein had personal contact with key Formalists like Shklovsky and Eikhenbaum as well as with the Futurist poets who were their mutual friends, and he shared with the Formalists a fascination with film/language, montage as construction, and inner speech. The Formalist movement, which flourished roughly from 1915 through 1930, revolved around two groups: the Linguistic Circle of Moscow and the Society for the Study of Poetic Language. The Formalists, some of whom were involved in the cinema as scriptwriters and consultants, hoped to construct a sound foundation or "poetics" for film theory, comparable to their poetics for literature. (The title of their most ambitious collection – *Poetika Kino* [The Poetics of Cinema, 1927] – echoed not only Aristotle's *Poetics* but also *Poetika*, an earlier Formalist volume on literary theory.) In *Poetika Kino* and in other important essays on the cinema, most notably Shklovsky's "Literature and Cinema" (1924) and Tynyanov's essay "Cinema-Word-Music" (also 1924), the Formalists explored a wide range of issues, laying the groundwork for much of subsequent theory. The cinema, then in the process of establishing itself as a legitimate art,

provided the Formalists with an intriguing arena to extend the "scientific" ideas that they had already developed in their work on literature, in a field they variously called "cinematology" (Kazanski), "cinopoetics" (Piotrovsky), or "cine-stylistics" (Eikhenbaum). The cinema offered an ideal terrain for testing the intersemiotic translation of Formalist concepts such as story, fable, dominant, materials, and automatization.

The Formalists shared with Eisenstein a kind of "techicism," a preoccupation with the *techne*, the materials and devices, of the artist/artisan's "craft." Rejecting the belletristic traditions which had dominated previous literary study, the Formalists favored a "scientific" approach concerned with literature's "immanent" properties, structures, and systems, those not dependent on other orders of culture. In this sense, the Formalists sought a scientific basis for what would seem to be a highly subjective field: aesthetics. The subject of this science was not literature as a whole or even individual literary texts but rather "literariness" (*literaturnost*), i.e. that which makes a given text a work of literature. "Literariness," for the Formalists, inhered in a text's characteristic ways of deploying style and convention, and especially in its capacity to meditate on its own formal qualities.

Downplaying the representational and expressive dimensions of texts, the Formalists focused on their self-expressive, autonomous dimensions. Shklovsky coined the terms *ostrenanie* ("defamiliarization" or "making strange") and *zatrudnenie* ("making difficult") to denote the way that art heightens perception and short-circuits automatized responses. The essential function of poetic art, for Shklovsky, was to explode the encrustations of customary, routinized perception by making forms difficult. Defamiliarization was to be achieved through unmotivated formal devices based on deviations from established norms, the way Tolstoy, for example, could probe the institution of property through the surprising perspective of a horse. Literary evolution was shaped by the perennial attempt to disrupt regnant artistic conventions and generate new ones. The contemporaneous "Bakhtin School" mocked this kind of literary Oedipalism, with its perpetual adolescent rebellion against whatever

happened to be the dominant, preferring to take a much longer and more tolerant view of artistic history.

The early Formalists were, as their name implies, rigorously aestheticist; for them, aesthetic perception was autotelic, an end in itself. Art was largely a means for experiencing what Shklovsky called the "artfulness of the object," for feeling the "stoniness of the stone." Their consistent emphasis upon the *construction* of artworks led the Formalists (particularly Jakobson and Tynyanov) to an understanding of art as a system of signs and conventions rather than the registration of natural phenomena. Formalists believed in what Eikhenbaum called the "inescapable conventionality of art" (Eagle, 1981, p. 57). Indeed, the role of art was to call attention to the conventionality of all art, including realist art. Naturalism in the cinema, Eikhenbaum argued, "is no less conventional than literary or theatrical naturalism" (Eikhenbaum, 1982, p. 18). Shklovsky extended the notion of literariness to the cinema by analyzing the structure of Charlie Chaplin films, seeing the tramp figure as constructed by a series of devices (pratfalls, chases, fights), only some of which were motivated by plot. In a neo-Kantian language, Tynyanov argued that art "strives toward the abstractions of its means" (Eagle, 1981, p. 81).

The Formalists were (the first) to explore, with a modicum of rigor, the analogy between language and film. Following the cues offered by the Swiss linguist de Saussure, the Formalists sought to systematize the apparently chaotic world of filmic phenomena. "The visible world," wrote Tynyanov, "is presented in cinema not as such, but in its semantic correlativity . . . as semantic sign." In *Poetica Kino*, with contributions by Eikhenbaum, Shklovsky, Tynyanov, and others, the Formalists stressed a "poetic" use of film analogous to the "literary" use of language they posited for verbal texts. For Tynyanov, montage was comparable to prosody in literature. Just as plot is subordinate to rhythm in poetry, so plot is subordinate to style in cinema. The cinema deployed cinematic procedures like lighting and montage in order to render the visible world in the form of semantic signs. While Eikhenbaum compared the syntax of film to that of narrative prose, Tynyanov saw poetry as a more appropriate model.

(Pasolini picked up this theme in his "Cinema of Poetry" essay four decades later.) In "Problems in Film Stylistics," Eikhenbaum, meanwhile, saw film in relation to "inner speech" and "image translations of linguistic tropes." Inner speech, for Eikhenbaum, completed and articulated what was only latent in the on-screen images and thus facilitated spectatorial comprehension. Verbal language was thus implicated in the "readability" of the filmic image. Inner speech also mediated between what Lev Vygotsky called "egocentric speech," on the one hand, and "socialized" discourse on the other, as well as between the written and the oral, thus opening the way for another kind of expression – elliptical, fragmentary, dislocated – linked to the "rhetoric of the Unconscious." At the same time, the Formalists were not insensitive to what might be called the phenomenology of spectatorship, as in Eikhenbaum's remarks in "Problems of Cinematography" on the necessary solitude of spectatorship:

The spectator's condition is close to solitary, intimate contemplation – he observes, as it were, somebody's dream. The slightest outside noise unconnected with the film annoys him much more than it would if he were in the theater. Talking by spectators next to him (e.g. reading the titles aloud) prevents him from concentrating on the movement of the film; his ideal is not to sense the presence of the other spectators, but to be alone with the film, to become deaf and dumb. (Eikhenbaum, 1982, p. 10)

Here Eikhenbaum anticipates a number of later theoretical currents – Merz's metapsychology of spectatorship, comparative media study, the metaphor of film as dream, and cognitive theory.

Eikhenbaum saw montage as a stylistic system quite independent of plot. The cinema, for Eikhenbaum, was a "particular system of figurative language," the stylistics of which would treat filmic "syntax," the linkage of shots into "phrases" and "sentences." The "cine-phrase" grouped a string of shots around a key image such as a close-up, while a "cine-period" developed a more complex spatio-temporal configuration. Analysts could use shot-by-shot analysis to identify a typology of such phrases – a project taken up some four decades later by Christian Metz in his "Grande Syntagmatique

of the Image Track." While Eikhenbaum did not develop a full-blown typology, some of his principles of syntagmatic construction – such as contrast, comparison, and coincidence – resemble in embryo the conceptions later developed by Metz. But the Formalist focus, unlike that of Metz, was in the end less linguistic than stylistic and poetic. "Anti-grammatical" and anti-normative, the Formalist aesthetic valorized not the correct rules for selecting and combining elements but rather deviations from aesthetic and technical norms of the kind proffered by avant-garde movements like Futurism.

During the later period of Russian Formalism, the so-called "Bakhtin Circle" or "Bakhtin School" developed a provocative critique of the Formalist method, a critique rich in implications for film theory. In *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928), Bakhtin and Medvedev dissected the underlying premises of first-phase Formalism. On the one hand, Bakhtin and Medvedev's "sociological poetics" shared certain features with Formalist poetics: the refusal of a romantic, expressive view of art; the rejection of the reduction of art to questions of class and economics; an insistence on art's self-purposeful specificity. Both saw "literariness" as inhering in a differential relation between texts, which the Formalists called "defamiliarization" and which Bakhtin and Medvedev refer to under the more comprehensive rubric of "dialogism." Both schools rejected naively realist views of art. An artistic structure does not reflect reality, Bakhtin and Medvedev argued, but rather the "reflections and refractions of other ideological spheres." Bakhtin and Medvedev praised the "productive role" of Formalism in formulating the central problems of literary scholarship, and doing so "with such sharpness that they can no longer be avoided or ignored." But they engaged critically with Formalism on the question of artistic "specification." Recognizing this issue as a legitimate one, they proposed a translinguistic and materialist approach. In most cases, Bakhtin and Medvedev argued, the Formalists simply reverse pre-existing dyads – practical/poetic language; material/device; story/plot – turning them inside out in an undialectical manner, enthroning intrinsic form, for example, where extrinsic content had once

been supreme. But for Bakhtin and Medvedev every artistic phenomenon is simultaneously determined from within and without; the barrier between "inside" and "outside" is an artificial one, for in fact there is great permeability between the two.

Formalism, for Bakhtin and Medvedev, fails to discern the social nature of literature even in its specificity. By dissolving history into an "eternal contemporaneity," Formalists created a model which was inadequate even to the immanent evolution of literature, not to mention its relation with the other "series" – ideological, economic, political. The Formalist fetishization of the artwork as the "sum of its devices" left readers with nothing more than their own empty sensation, the hedonistic pleasure of "defamiliarization" experienced by the individual consumer of the artistic text. The purpose of art, the Formalists argued tautologically, is "about" being aesthetic, about renewing perception, about making the reader/spectator feel the "stoniness of the stone."

The critique of Formalism as mechanistic, ahistorical, and hermetically sealed-off life began to be addressed by the Formalists themselves in Tynyanov's notion of "dynamic structure" and later in the Prague School work of Jakobson, who spoke of "dynamic synchrony," and others who tried to correlate the literary and the historical "series." Indeed, many of the fundamental positions of Russian Formalism were adopted and elaborated by Prague structuralism in the late 1920s and early 1930s, with Roman Jakobson as a key figure linking the two movements. The Prague School was especially concerned with "aesthetic functions," an idea that formed the basis for important essays on the cinema by Roman Jakobson and Jan Mukarovsky. In his essay "Art as a Semiotic Fact" (1934) and in his book *Aesthetic Function* (1936), Mukarovsky outlined a semiotic theory of aesthetic autonomy, whereby two different functions, communicative and aesthetic (roughly comparable to the Formalists' "practical" and "poetic" language), coexist within a text, but where the aesthetic function serves to isolate and "foreground" and "focus attention" on the object. Writing in the wake of the advent of sound, Jakobson, in an essay entitled "Is the Cinema in Decline?," argued that (1) the presence of sound does not alter the

fact that the cinema still transforms "reality" into sign, and (2) the use of sound has historically evolved into a highly conventional system with only a remote connection to real sound (see Eagle, 1981, p. 37).

Russian Formalism and its cognate movements have left a vast legacy within film theory. Later film theory extrapolated Formalist formulations concerning literary specificity into cinema theory, especially when Christian Metz expanded and synthesized the insights of Saussurean linguistics and Formalist poetics in his *Langage et cinéma* (1971). David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, meanwhile, drew on some aspects of the defamiliarization theory of the Formalists and the "norms" and "schemata" theory of the Prague structuralists to construct their version of "Neo-Formalism" as a basis for "historical poetics" – the word "poetics" goes back not only to Aristotle but also to the Formalists' *Poetica Kino* as well as Bakhtin's "chronotope" essay – notably in Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985), Thompson's *Ivan the Terrible: A Neo-Formalist Analysis* (1980) and *Breaking the Glass Armour* (1988), and their jointly written (and widely used) *Film Art* (1996). But even if the Formalists had not written about the cinema *per se*, their conceptualizations would have been influential. Bertolt Brecht subsequently politicized the Formalist concept of "defamiliarization," reconceiving it as his *verfremdungseffekt* (variously translated as "alienation effect" or "distanciation"), whereby the work of art would simultaneously reveal its own processes of production along with those of society. The structuralist project of "denaturalization," i.e. revealing the socially coded aspect of what was taken to be "natural," was anticipated by the Formalist project of *ostrenanie* or "making strange," even if the Formalists themselves saw such devices in a purely formal way.

The distinction between "story" (*fabula*) – the putative sequence of events in their "factual" order and narration – and "plot" or "discourse" (*sjuzet*) – the story as narrated within an artistic structure – also came to influence film theory and analysis indirectly via such literary theorists as Gerard Genette, and directly in the work of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in their (generally non-semiotic)

work. The issue of "inner speech," meanwhile, lay dormant until the 1970s, when it was "rediscovered" by theorists like Paul Willemen, Ronald Levaco, and David Bordwell. Willemen, for example, argued that inner speech was not just relevant to silent cinema as Shklovsky had suggested, but rather ultimately formed a kind of Unconscious substratum of the filmic system in general.

Also crucial to subsequent film semiotics was the Formalist view of the text as a battleground between rival elements, as dynamic systems structured in relation to a "dominant." Although first conceptualized by Tynyanov, the concept was further developed by Jakobson, who argued in his landmark 1927 essay ("The Dominant") that artistic works are constituted by a constellation of interacting codes governed by the "dominant," i.e. the process by which one element, for example rhythm or plot or character, comes to regulate the artistic text or system. As "the focusing component of a work of art," the dominant manages to rule, determine, and transform the remaining components.¹ As Jakobson elaborates it, the notion applies not only to the individual poetic work, but also to the poetic canon and even to the art of a given epoch when seen as a totality. In the 1980s Fredric Jameson adopted the term when he called postmodernism the "cultural dominant" of the era of transnational capitalism.

Yet another current within Formalism was formed by Vladimir Propp's work on narrative in his *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968). Propp examined 115 Russian folk tales in order to discern common structures based on minimal units of action, called "functions," such as "leaving home." Propp discerned a relatively small number of 31 such functions, as opposed to a much larger number of persons, objects, and events (corresponding to the traditional "motif"). Propp's legacy for film theory is evident, for example, in Peter Wollen's analysis of *North by Northwest* and in Randal Johnson's analysis of *Macunaima*. Finally, Formalist ideas on film were also developed in the 1970s by the "semiotics of culture" groups in Moscow and Tartu. In *Semiotics of Cinema* (1976), Juri Lotman, the most active member of the school, discusses cinema as both language and "secondary modeling system," while trying to integrate

the analysis of cinema into a broader cultural theory in ways that clearly echo but also reinvoice Formalist formulations.

The Historical Avant-Gardes

The 1910s and 1920s were the period of "historical avant-gardes," the zenith of experimentalism in the arts: Impressionism in France, Constructivism in the Soviet Union, Expressionism in Germany, Futurism in Italy, Surrealism in Spain and France, Muralism in Mexico, and Modernismo in Brazil. Modernism, according to Perry Anderson, emerged as a cultural force-field with three coordinates: "(1) the official art of regimes still linked to the old aristocracies; (2) the impact of the new technologies of the second industrial revolution; and (3) the hope of social revolution" (Anderson, 1984). The film theory of these movements was expressed not only in manifestos and in occasional essays in journals like *Close-Up* and *Experimental Cinema*, but also in later filmic manifestos like *L'Age d'Or* (1930) and *Zéro de Conduite* (1933). The films of the avant-garde were defined not only by their distinct aesthetics, but also by their mode of production, usually artisanal, independently financed, without links to studios or the industry. Yet the avant-garde was hardly a monolith. Ian Christie usefully distinguishes between three distinct movements: (1) the Impressionists (Abel Gance, Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein, and early Germaine Dulac), who are closer to a kind of national "art cinema;" (2) the partisans of "pure cinema" (Fernand Leger, later Dulac); and (3) the Surrealists (Christie, in Drummond et al., 1979). In political terms one can distinguish between a high-modernist avant-garde preoccupied with autotelic form, and a "low," carnivalized, anti-institutional, and anti-grammatical avant-garde which attacked the art-system (see Burger, 1984; Stam, 1989). Although modernism grows out of "high art," as Patrick Brantlinger and James Naremore (1991) point out, it is also deconstructive of certain high art values. Indeed, Michael Newman posits two artistic modernisms, one derived from Kant and stressing the absolute

autonomy of art, the other deriving from Hegel and stressing the dissolution of art into life and praxis.¹ It is also possible to see the more irreverent avatars of modernism as renewing a carnivalesque tradition going at least as far back as the medieval period.

The Surrealists, for their part, stressed what they saw as the deep affinities between moving images and the metaphorical processes of *écriture automatique*, in a movement defined by André Breton as "psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express . . . the actual functioning of thought." This link to automatic writing prompted Philippe Soupault, for example, to write "cinematographic poems." Despite the erudite origins of some of their concepts, the Surrealists were also passionate fans of popular films. Even the worst films, Ado Kyrou suggested, could be "sublime." The Surrealists discerned subversive undercurrents in the films of such artists as Mack Sennett, Buster Keaton, and Charlie Chaplin. Antonin Artaud, meanwhile, lauded the anarchic energies of the Marx Brothers. Robert Desnos spoke of the "madness" presiding over Sennett's scripts, while Louis Aragon developed a "synthetic criticism" designed to extract intense, libidinal meanings from ordinary sequences. Even American crime films, for Aragon, "speak of daily life and manage to raise to a dramatic level a banknote on which our attention is riveted, a table with a revolver on it, a bottle that on occasion becomes a weapon, a handkerchief that reveals a crime" (quoted in Hammond, 1978, p. 29).

For the Surrealists, the cinema had the transcendent capacity to liberate what was conventionally repressed, to mingle the known and the unknown, the mundane and the oneiric, the quotidian and the marvelous. Luis Buñuel and Robert Desnos took positions opposed both to Hollywood narrative cinema and to the Impressionist avant-garde of filmmakers like L'Herbier and Epstein. While they were enthusiastic about the cinema, they expressed disappointment with both of these modes for not exploiting its subversive potential and opting instead for bourgeois love dramas and what Buñuel called "the sentimental infection." By opting for narrative logic and bourgeois decorum, Buñuel argued, conventional cinema had squandered its potential for creating an insurrectionary, convulsive, anti-canon-

cal art which would visualize the "automatic writing of the world."² The Surrealists used specific techniques to distance themselves from the spell of narrative cinema, whether through Man Ray's device of watching the screen through outstretched fingers or through the Surrealist habit of interruptive spectatorship, whereby the artists would visit a series of films in twenty-minute stretches, picnicking as they watched. Cinematic techniques such as superimposition, the dissolve, and slow motion were ideally suited not only for representing dream but also for mimicking its procedures of figuration. Surrealism's cheerfully creative, utopian misreading of Freud, meanwhile, proposed a cinema which would unleash, rather than tame, the anarchic, liberating energies of the Unconscious.

It is well known that the "pope" of Surrealism, André Breton, was partially inspired by Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, even though Breton's various attempts to form an alliance between Surrealism and Freudianism led nowhere. Buñuel was one of many Surrealists concerned with the relation between film and other states of consciousness. For Robert Desnos, cinema was the anticipatory site of "poetic liberation" and "intoxication," a magical time-space where the distinction between reality and dream could be abolished. It was the desire to dream that generated the "thirst for and love of the cinema."³ Speaking of the "marvel of cinema," Breton wrote that "From the instant he takes his seat to the moment he slips into a fiction evolving before his eyes [the spectator] passes through a critical point as captivating and imperceptible as that uniting waking and sleeping" (quoted in Hammond, 1978, p. 11). Further elaborating the comparison, Jacques Brunius wrote:

The arrangement of screen images in time is absolutely analogous with the arrangement thought or the dream can devise. Neither chronological order nor relative values of duration are real. Contrary to the theater, film, like the dream, chooses some gestures, defers or enlarges them, eliminates others, travels many hours, centuries, kilometers in a few seconds, speeds up, slows down, stops, goes backwards. (Ibid.)

Antonin Artaud, in a 1927 text, was even more categorical. "If the cinema is not made to translate dreams or all that which, in con-

scious life, resembles dreams," he argued, "then the cinema does not exist."⁴ These analogies to what would later be called the "dream state" were subsequently taken up by theorists such as Hugo Mauerhofer, Suzanne Langer, and Christian Metz. The Surrealist-inflected work of Jacques Lacan later continued the tradition of "subversive Freud," a tradition which was to have a strong impact on film theory. Later avant-gardist artists such as Maya Deren, Alain Resnais, Stan Brakhage, and Alejandro Jodorovsky would also continue the intertextual dialogue with Surrealism, as would the latter-day theorists of the avant-garde such as Annette Michelson, P. Adams Sitney, and Peter Wollen.

The Debate after Sound

The advent of sound cinema generated considerable debate about the relative merits of sound versus silent cinema. In the United States Gilbert Seldes denounced sound cinema as a regression to theatrical modes (Seldes, 1928, p. 706). In France Germaine Dulac, even before the advent of sound, saw cinema as a necessarily silent art.¹ Marcel L'Herbier and Leon Poirier were also hostile to sound, while others, such as Abel Gance, Jacques Feyder, and Marcel Pagnol, cautiously embraced it. "The talking film," Pagnol argued "is the art of recording, preserving, and diffusing theater" (Pagnol, 1933, p. 8). For Epstein the *phonogenie* of sound could potentially complement the *photogenie* of the image. But Artaud, in "The Premature Old Age of the Cinema" (1933), warned that sound might prod the cinema to adopt outmoded conventions, while René Clair proclaimed that "the cinema must remain visual at all costs."² In Russia Eisenstein, Alexandrov, and Pudovkin in their 1928 manifesto called for the non-synchronous use of sound, warning that the inclusion of dialogue might reestablish the hegemony of outworn methods and trigger a flood of "photographed performances of a theatrical sort" (Eisenstein, 1957, pp. 257-9). Synchronous sound, they feared, would destroy the culture of montage and thus the very

basis of the autonomy of cinema as an art form. In Germany Rudolf Arnheim, in the name of the plastic specificity of the cinema, enshrined silent cinema as the definitive, paradigmatic form of the seventh art. In what now seems like a counter-intuitive move, Arnheim argued that sound detracts from visual beauty. "When real sounds are emitted by the filmed virtuoso's violin," Arnheim lamented, "the visual picture suddenly becomes three-dimensional and tangible" (Arnheim, 1997, p. 30). The introduction of the sound film, for Arnheim, aborted the progress of film art by tempting filmmakers to submit to "the inartistic" demand for a superficial "naturalness" (ibid., p. 154). Ultimately, the sound/silent debate had to do with notions of the putative "essence" of cinema and the aesthetic and narrative implications of "realizing" that essence. (It took 1960s semiotic theory to suggest that "essence" and "specificity" were not coterminous, that the cinema could have some dimensions that were "specifically cinematic" without those traits dictating any single style or aesthetic.)

In 1933 Arnheim published in German his book *Film* (a revised version of which appeared in English as *Film as Art* in 1957). Arnheim had in common with Munsterberg a fondness for Kant and an interest in psychology, although the psychology that interested him was of the Gestalt variety. The Gestaltists under whom Arnheim studied experimented in the areas of "visual field" and "perception of movement." Influenced by neo-Kantian thought, they stressed the active role of the mind in shaping dumb matter into meaningful experience, a perceptual process hyperbolized and foregrounded by art. Arnheim's work on film thus forms part of a larger project in which the visual arts provide a kind of proving ground for the study of visual perception (Arnheim's own 1928 dissertation was on perception).

Gestalt theory, like aesthetic modernism, as Gertrud Koch points out, is constructivist; it sees the relation between art and the perceptual world as one not of imitation, but of shared *structural* principles.³ Arnheim's *materialtheorie* emphasizes what he sees as the essential traits of the film medium and the means by which those traits might be deployed for artistic ends. According to Arnheim,