

**A Filmic Map of Moscow:  
Traveling through Mikhail's Kaufman's City Symphony *Moscow***

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VES 288  
"Dziga Vertov and His Time: Left-Wing Art, Avant-Garde Filmmaking, Radical Politics"  
Spring 2008

## Introduction

The concept of the "city symphony" is critical to understanding the historical and contemporary intersections between documentary arts and urbanism. This is an exploratory paper marking the beginning of a larger research project into the history of this highly evocative, yet amorphous term most commonly used to describe a genre of avant-garde documentary film from the 1920s in Europe and New York City that focuses upon the day-in-the-life of the modern metropolis. Formally, the city symphony is typically identified by a temporal structure, where the film begins with morning and ends at night; rapid montage; shots of individuals and crowds caught unaware by a concealed camera; and the treatment of a cityscape itself as the main character and actor as opposed to individual personalities. I am interested in expanding the discursive, aesthetic, geographical, and social history of the city symphony, aiming to uncover the details of its shifting conceptions and formal mutations over time and place. As a first step, this paper explores the dynamics of urban representation in Mikhail Kaufman's *Moscow* (1927), a lesser-known documentary produced in the Soviet Union.

The two films most consistently referenced in the city symphony discourse are Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin - Symphony of a Great City* (1927) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), directed by Kaufman's brother Dziga Vertov (born Denis Kaufman). Kaufman also shot *Man with a Movie Camera*, and is its star, as the film also documents his work as a cameraman actually filming the movie itself. In contrast to these two canonical works, Kaufman's *Moscow* represents an under-recognized strain in the history of the city symphony that privileges architectural and geographic specificity over abstract spatial representation. *Moscow* exhibits many of the city

symphony's common traits, including a chronological structure, montage, and concealed camera footage, but it also eschews the tradition of a generalized representation of place. Instead, Kaufman uses simple intertitles to create a filmic map of Moscow, guiding the spectator through the distinct spaces, pointing out the city's important monuments, political representatives, and municipal achievements. Such an approach is indebted as much to the legacy of actualities and travelogues from the early cinema, as much as the avant-garde milieu of Constructivism, Suprematism, Futurism, Cubism, Surrealism, and Dadaism that infused the classic city symphonies. While *Berlin* and *Man with a Movie Camera* are both concerned with urban life, neither film addresses the particularities of individual urban spaces. Instead, both of these films use the built environment as raw material for realizing each filmmaker's distinct theoretical experiments.

Ruttman was a pioneer of abstract, Cubist film in the early 1920s, concerned with how to realize purely filmic representation with abstract form, color and rhythm, much in the same way that Malevich and others had pushed painting to its boundaries. He called this exercise "painting with time."<sup>1</sup> In *Berlin*, Ruttman aimed to adopt these formal and aesthetic principles for a film using documentary footage. *Berlin* was, in a sense, his manifesto for a new mode of documentary that viewed the real world as material for visual experimentation. As Ruttman writes, "During the long years of my development through abstractionism, I never lost the desire to build from living materials and to create a film symphony out of the myriad moving energies of

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<sup>1</sup> "Malerei mit Zeit" (i.e. *Painting with Time*), is the title of at-the-time unpublished set of essayistic notes by Ruttman from 1919/1920. The text can now be found in Jeanpaul Goergen, *Walter Ruttmann: Eine Dokumentation*, (Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek, 1989): 73-74.

a great city."<sup>2</sup> Tempo, rhythm, and formal patterns — classic characteristics of music and the symphonic form — are the driving force behind Ruttmann's film.

Vertov's larger project was to create a revolutionary documentary cinema in opposition to the bourgeois literary and theatrically-inspired narrative drama, in his mind, embodied by Eisenstein. For Vertov, cinema was integral to the larger Soviet project of creating "the new man" necessary for the new society under construction. He believed film enabled the acquisition of essential knowledge through "the sensory exploration of the world" with "the kino-eye," the camera "more perfect than the human eye."<sup>3</sup> While *Man with a Movie Camera* is ostensibly about the life of Soviet cities, Vertov's primary inspiration was to create a film illustrating his theory of the cinema and its epistemological role in Soviet society. The film follows the narrative of the opening of a movie theater, the projection of a film called "Man with a Movie Camera," and we then follow the exploits of the cameraman filming the film we are watching. Moreover, *Man with a Movie Camera* is a composite of three cities — Moscow, Odessa, and Kiev — never explicitly distinguished, further distancing the film from a specific inquiry into the concrete details of a single city. Of course, *Berlin* and *Man with the Movie Camera* are both city films, but neither serves to record and represent a detailed analysis of their respective city's architecture and geographies. As James Donald writes, "Vertov's film should be seen neither as a record nor a portrait but, following the precepts of formalism, as an *analysis* which makes our normal perceptions of the city strange by laying bare the device of the cinema."<sup>4</sup> (79) In contrast,

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Standish D. Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema* (New York: New York University Press, 1975): 57.

<sup>3</sup> Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): 14-15.

<sup>4</sup> James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 74.

Kaufman's *Moscow* intends to be a record and portrait, guiding the spectator on a mobile journey through the historic Moscow and its landmarks to its Revolutionary present and future.

## Film History, Documentary and the Modern City

The history of film is intimately entwined with the modern city. The emergence of the new technology of moving image recording and projection in the late 19th century coincided with the massive industrialization and growth of the West's major cities, with millions of people moving from rural provinces and overseas to rapidly expanding metropolises such as Berlin, New York, Moscow, Buenos Aires, and São Paulo, among many others. In early cinema, the transformation and bustling life of the metropolis became a central subject. The cityscape was a testing ground for experimentation and interpretation of the new perceptual possibilities offered by film.

As Tom Gunning writes, "The first films were primarily 'big city' affairs... Nearly all early film documents present a *mise en abîme* of audiences filling vaudeville halls from busy city streets in order to see projected on the screen — busy city streets. The transfer to film allowed the city street to become another sort of spectacle, one mediated by an apparatus...the street is endless with endless attraction."<sup>5</sup> The city was the main sight to be seen in the "cinema of attractions," that period until 1906 that Gunning describes as fascinated with visibility and exhibitionism before the dominance of narrative integration.<sup>6</sup>

One of the earliest genres of urban documentary that developed in this context, originating

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<sup>5</sup> Tom Gunning, "Images of the City in Early Cinema," an unpublished paper presented at the Getty Center 'Cine-City' conference, Santa Monica, California, 28 March, 1994. This quotation is taken from Helmut Wehsmann, "The City in Twilight: Charting the Genre of the 'City Film', 1900-1930," in *Cinema and Architecture: Méliès, Mallet-Stevens, Multimedia*, eds. François Penz and Maureen Thomas (London: British Film Institute, 1997): 8-9

<sup>6</sup> Tom Gunning's most famous essay on this subject is "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: space - frame - narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990): 56-62.

around 1903 and evolving up through 1914, was the "actuality," a form of short film shot on location documenting basic urban phenomena, such as urban infrastructures (e.g. train station), events (e.g. the arrival of immigrants on the shores of Lower Manhattan) and foreign locations. Most actualities consisted of a few shots and minimal editing.

One of the first actualities shot in Russia was *Moscow Clad in Snow* (1908). The film opens with an intertitle reading "Kremlin - Marshal's Bridge." After a long shot framing a view of the Moscow River and its monumental banks, we cut to a series of medium long shots inside Red Square. The first is of St. Basil's cathedral in the back left with foot and sleigh traffic moving across the snow in front of large statue; the second shot shows a guard pacing in front of a cannon; the next shifts further around the square, showing some of the area's impressive historic façades, with our view momentarily interrupted by a march of soldiers past the camera. From Red Square, we move with the camera into the heart of city, positioned on one of the Moscow's major commercial avenues. We witness through multiple shots from a similar vantage point the consistent passing of horse-drawn sleighs across the snow-covered pavement and the frequent activity of pedestrians. The next intertitle in the film reads: "Two months out of the year a big trade in mushrooms and fish is carried on." We then see traders at a market, selling strings of exotic mushrooms and large dried fish. All the characters are clearly aware of the camera and fascinated by its presence, heads occasionally popping into view to stare into the lens. Another intertitle announces our next stop: "Petrovsky Park." The common motif of horse-drawn sleighs reappears, now sliding in front of a statue with trees in the background. The trip progresses further into the park, where snow piles up multiple feet around wooden cabins and a thin, shoveled-out footpath. After a man walks by, we cut to another shot inside the park, witnessing

a group of men and women approach and then proceed past the camera on skis. The final intertitle reads "General View of Moscow." The camera now rests above the city, likely at the top of one of the largest churches in the center. The first panoramic pans across a densely packed historic fabric, with many onion-shaped church domes and steeples, eventually ending on a view framed with a church in the foreground and the 17th century Sukahrev Tower, one of the city's best known landmarks at the time and its tallest building, to be later destroyed by the Stalin in 1934.<sup>7</sup> The final shot, very likely from the top of the Sukahrev Tower itself, is a view over the Moscow River, back to the site of the film's opening frame.

*Moscow Clad in Snow* is not a film shot by Russians for a Russian audience, but instead is one of the earliest travelogues created by the Pathé brothers, at the time the largest film equipment and production company in the world, after having acquired the patents of the Lumiere brothers in 1902. The film's development and motifs are clearly an early evocation of the now classic touristic representation of a city, focusing upon its key monuments, an exotic marketplace, a nice recreational park, and finally, an all-encompassing view of the city from atop one of its major landmarks. Such early actualities and travelogues were also concerned with the archival potential of the film. As Jon Lewis writes, "*Moscow Clad in Snow* reveals the medium's peculiar ability to capture time and place and preserve it forever."<sup>8</sup> Kaufman's *Moscow* is also motivated by a similar desire towards preservation, his meticulous documentation of the metropolis in service of recording the state's achievements and aiming to provide a record to gauge historical perspective and judge future progress.

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 265.

<sup>8</sup> Jon Lewis, "Review of *The Last Vaudevillian* by Jeffrey Ruoff," in *Western Folklore*, Vol. 60, No. 4, (Autumn, 2001): 326.



## The City Symphony: A Preliminary Genealogy of the 1920s and early 1930s

Before performing a close reading of *Moscow*, let us first diverge into a historical sketch of the established city symphony discourse and its commonly associated media texts. The subsequent survey aims to establish the cultural-filmic context in which *Moscow*, completed in 1927, was created. Despite its production in this milieu and significant contribution, *Moscow* is almost never included in the standard historiography of the city symphony.

Although it has received extensive scholarship, the definition of the city symphony is ambiguous in film history. Moreover, what films are to be considered city symphonies and which are not is highly transitional territory. Edward Dimendberg identifies the city symphony as a "genre," but he acknowledges the difficulty in categorizing the works most commonly associated with the term. He writes,

Few episodes in cinema history appear more secure than the genre of the city symphony that emerged in the 1920s and whose best-known examples remain *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* and *Man with a Movie Camera*. Encompassing around twenty titles, city symphonies rely heavily upon montage to represent a cross-section of life in the modern metropolis. They typically are set in one or more identifiable metropolises whose population, central thoroughfares, and places of residence, employment, and leisure they depict over the course of a day.... Yet such works resist categorization as documentary, experimental, or narrative film. Their interest resides in the cinematographic preservation of ephemeral urban life no less than an aesthetic structure itself that evokes the rhythms, parallels, and contrasts of metropolitan civilization.<sup>9</sup>

Despite singling out Ruttmann and Vertov, Dimendberg also recognizes the plurality of films and media experiments involved in the discursive history of the city symphony of the 1920s.

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Dimendberg, "Transfiguring the Urban Gray: László Moholy-Nagy's Film Scenario 'Dynamic of the Metropolis'," in *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*, eds. Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003): 109.

Dimendberg reminds readers of the significance of László Moholy-Nagy's unfinished film scenario *Dynamik der Groß-Stadt* (Dynamic of the Great City) to the history of urban documentary. Began in 1921, but not published until 1924 this thirteen page sketch outlines a short, experimental film using the city itself as the vehicle for a "purely visual" effect whereby "photographic, visual relationships" are "knit together into a vital association of events in space and time," bringing "the viewer into the dynamic of the city."<sup>10</sup> The thirteen-page manuscript is designed like a sequence of film negatives, illustrating Moholy-Nagy's concept through the organization of photographs, captions, textual descriptions of pacing, and ideogramatic diagrams indicating shot angles. Ranging from circus clowns to industrial smokestacks, steel-frame construction sites to zoo animals, the proposed film presents a model for the compilation of urban phenomena into a rapidly montaged film emphasizing the rapid speed and movement of the metropolis. Although Moholy-Nagy's experiment was never realized, it marks a key instance in the development of documentary urban aesthetics.

At the same time as Moholy-Nagy was working in Germany, across the Atlantic Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand produced *Manhatta* (1921), what many consider to be both America's first avant-garde film and the first city symphony. Starting in 1920, the two artists began documenting the life of the Lower Manhattan, and the final result is an eleven-minute work that traces the passage of the day from the arrival of commuters on the Staten Island Ferry to the setting of the sun over New York Harbor. Unlike Moholy-Nagy's proposition, *Manhatta* does not deploy rapid montage, but instead cuts a series of shots together between poetic intertitles.

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<sup>10</sup> László Moholy-Nagy, "Dynamic of the Metropolis," in *Painting, Photography, Film*, trans. Janet Seligman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969): 122.

The history of the city symphony is not only bound up with documentary experiments, but also the world of fiction filmmaking. René Clair's 1924 *Paris qui dort* (The Crazy Ray) is an early science fiction comedy that tells the story of a man who wakes up in the Eiffel Tower, descends to the streets of Paris, only to find them empty, with all human life frozen in time, all clocks froze at three twenty-five. The protagonist finds an airplane pilot and his four passengers who have escaped the spell cast over the city. After reveling into the joy of having the city great plazas and boulevards to themselves, eventually the group finds the source of the mystery behind the city's stasis. Dr. Crase has developed a special ray that can pause the progress of time.<sup>11</sup> It was in relation to this film that Annette Michelson introduced Georg Simmel's now classic work on modernity and urban psychology into cinema studies, reading his 1903 "The Metropolis and Mental Life" in relation to Claire's film. Simmel writes, "The technique of metropolitan life in general is not conceivable without all of its activities and reciprocal relationships being organized and coordinated in the most punctual way into a firmly fixed framework of time which transcends all subjective elements."<sup>12</sup> Michelson argues that "it is indeed 'the fixed framework of time' which insures the dreamless sleep of Paris."<sup>13</sup> Clair reveals "the topography of a great city" and "temporality, apprehended as movement in space, is the vital current of metropolis."<sup>14</sup>

Seeing Clair's *Paris qui dort* in Brussels in 1926 was a deeply disappointing experience for Vertov. In his diaries, he writes: "I saw *Paris qui dort* at the Ars Cinema. Two years ago I

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<sup>11</sup> My narrative summary of Clair's film is a summary of the one so nicely articulated by Annette Michelson in her essay "Dr. Crase and Mr. Clair," in *October*, Vol. 11 (Winter, 1979): 33-34

<sup>12</sup> Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Metropolis: Center and Symbol of Our Times*, ed. Philip Kasinitz (New York: New York University Press, 1995): 34.

<sup>13</sup> Michelson, 49.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

conceived a plan coinciding in every way with the technical form of this film. I repeatedly tried to get permission to make it, but that chance was denied me. And so now the film has been made abroad. Kino-Eye has lost one of its positions of attack; the delay between idea, project plan, and realization is too long. Unless we are allowed to carry out our innovations as they are produced, we risk spending our time on inventions that are never put into practice."<sup>15</sup> Although Vertov was such a fervent opponent of the fictional feature "art" films of such directors of Eisenstein, Clair's film garnered his adoration for its transformation of the cityscape into a symbolic actor, the use of mobile tracking shots, and the critical stance towards the domination of money and capitalism inherent in Clair's comic reflection on time.<sup>16</sup> Shortly after Clair's intervention in 1924, another city film emerged in Paris that has become a staple of the city symphony.

In 1926 Alberto Cavalcanti completed *Rien que les heures* (Nothing but the Hours, 1926). Combining documentary footage and a narrative strain centered upon the life of a young woman, Cavalcanti's film focuses upon the contrast between the lives of the "humble classes" and the rich. Ruttmann began working on *Berlin* in 1926 and saw Cavalcanti's film during production. Despite his interest in abstraction and rhythm, *Rien que les heures* made a major impact on him, but he did not shift the focus of his film to the lives of individuals. Whereas Moholy-Nagy's *Dynamic of the Great City*, Sheeler and Strand's *Manhatta* and Ruttmann's *Berlin* are focused upon the general life of the city, focusing upon populations en masse and the physical characteristics of the urban environment, Cavalcanti defines the city by its people as individuals. This contrast between the representation of individuals or a collective, becomes a central pivot

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<sup>15</sup> Vertov, 163.

<sup>16</sup> Michelson, 51-53.

for the discourse on the political dimensions of the city symphony. Jay Chapman succinctly summarizes these now-standard positions: "*Rien que les heures* is a homage to the lower-class people of the city. *Berlin* is a formal exercise, a reflection on the rhythm of the city."<sup>17</sup> With these two films as radical poles, the debate around the politics of the city symphony becomes the relationship between abstraction and documentation, formal experimentation and the direct address of social issues.

Sigfried Kracauer was a major critic of Ruttmann's film both at the time of its release in the 1920s and in his later writings following World War II. For Kracauer, the fundamental issue was that he saw Ruttmann's film as a purely formalist experiment, an embodiment of a "surface approach" that indicated "an utter withdrawal from the outer world."<sup>18</sup> Kracauer writes, "Does [*Berlin*] convey the reality of Berlin? No: it just as blind to reality as any other feature film, and this is due to its lack of political stance.... There is nothing to see in this symphony, because it has not exposed a single meaningful relationship."<sup>19</sup> Despite the similarities of aesthetic experimentation and tempo between Ruttmann and Vertov, Kracauer championed *Man with a Movie Camera* because of its condition of production in the Soviet Union. He believed Vertov's approach was justified as a catalogue of the progress of Socialism, whereas the political conditions of Weimar Germany require that Ruttmann use narrative to extol the lives of individuals and the class conflicts of the West. Kracauer's reading of Ruttmann's individual political visions might have been quite incisive: Ruttmann ultimately sympathized with the NAZI's,

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<sup>17</sup> Jay Chapman, "Two Aspects of the City: Cavalcanti and Ruttmann," in *The Documentary Tradition*, ed. Lewis Jacobs (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971): 42.

<sup>18</sup> Sigfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004): 68 in footnote.

<sup>19</sup> Sigfried Kracauer, "Film 1928," in *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 318.

deploying his experimental documentary style for propaganda, and died on the Eastern front while shooting a film about the life of a German tank.

Despite Ruttmann's personal political choices, Kracauer's political critiques of his have in recent years come under significant scrutiny from film historians. The most nuanced rebuttal of Kracauer's argument is offered by Wolfgang Natter, who writes, "Read today, Kracauer's critique appears insufficient because of this implicit denigration of space as inert, undialectical, and immobile. Kracauer sees an empty formalism uniting images that, by staying on the surface, have failed to penetrate social reality. When, by contrast and following Ed Soja's understanding of Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, space is viewed as fecund and dialectical, *Berlin - Symphony of a City* appears in light of the socio-spatial dialectic as more than a simple presentation of objects and facts; it is, instead, a film that stages them as simultaneous and synchronic juxtapositions. The 'single most significant context' that Kracauer himself failed to discern is that of cinematic space."<sup>20</sup> Kracauer's reading of *Berlin* is beholden to a form of social criticism driven by a blind faith in the ability to represent reality, and moreover, a methodology blind to the implications of spatial dialectics.

Another major figure commonly associated with the city symphony of the 1920s in Dutch experimental filmmaker Joris Ivens. His films *De Brug* (The Bridge, 1928) and *Regen* (Rain, 1929) do not adhere to the morning-to-night arc of the city symphony, but are representative of a strain in the history of the form concerned with the detailed study of specific places and ephemeral urban phenomena. *De Brug* is an eleven-minute investigation of a large iron

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<sup>20</sup> Wolfgang Natter, "The City as Cinematic Space: Modernism and Place in Berlin, Symphony of a City," in *Place, Power, Situation, and Spectacle: A Geography of Film*, eds. Stuart Aitken and Leo Zonn (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1994): 221.

bridge in Rotterdam. The film opens with a classic reflexive moment, as we see a shot of the camera itself turning, followed by the revealing of the cameraman holding the device, and then we zoom into the other subject of the film, the bridge. This rhetorical reflection on filmmaking and literal identification of the spectator with the filmic eye is, of course, later fully developed in Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*. The British film magazine *Close Up* described Ivens's lyrical portrait of this modern infrastructural monument as a "pure visual symphony." *Regen* is a twelve-minute documentary "whose object is to show the changing face of a city, Amsterdam, during a shower."<sup>21</sup> Ivens and his team always traveled with their cameras, even sleeping with them at bedside, ready to capture the effect of the weather on puddles, pedestrians, and buildings at any moment. Ivens was friends with Ruttmann, and his films illustrate a similar drive towards abstract visual experimentation and poetry using the raw material of the real world. However, Ivens was a passionate Marxist, and was deeply involved in left-wing politically driven documentary, maintaining allegiance to aesthetic experimentation but arguing for its social value as a challenge to bourgeois illusionism.<sup>22</sup>

A final signpost in the conventional narrative of the city symphony's history in the 1920s is Jean Vigo's *À propos de Nice* (About Nice, 1930). The film was shot by Boris Kaufman, the third brother in the Kaufman/Vertov family, and the influence of Kino-Eye cinematography is evident. The film is twenty-two minutes long, and uses the luxury resort on the French Riviera as a subject to deliver a critique of class relations. Like Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures*, *À propos de Nice* illustrates stark contrasts between the privileged classes, in this living the good life on the

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<sup>21</sup> Joris Ivens, "The Making of *Rain*," in *The Documentary Tradition*: 60.

<sup>22</sup> For more on *Joris Ivens and the Documentary Context*, ed. Ivens Bakker (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999) and Carlos Böker, *Joris Ivens, Film-Maker: Facing Reality* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981).

beach, and the working folks in the back alleys of the city. Instead of emphasizing the narrative of an individual, the film uses highly effective hidden camera footage to categorically show the distinct personages lining the waterfront promenade. Kaufman says, "The method was to take by surprise facts, actions, attitudes, expressions, and to stop shooting as soon as the subject became conscious of being photographed."<sup>23</sup> At points, Vigo and Kaufman cut from the street scenes to extra-filmic references to make sly points, such as inserting a quick clip of a dog promenading in the same fashion as the women, and then a more outrageous juxtaposition of the head and neck of a running ostrich. In what is probably the film's most infamous sequence, Vigo and Kaufman cut between a series of women sitting in similar chairs on the beach, ending with two fades and dissolve into a woman who is totally nude. With the fades and dissolves, this sequence has clearly been drawn out in contrast to the other montage sequences of the film, as it here that the social commentary reaches its peak. As William Simon writes, "The notion of ostentation, of display, is reduced to the sexual exhibitionism that underlies it."<sup>24</sup> The superficiality of the upper classes is revealed. Immediately following the nude woman, the film jumps to a series of sculptures of nude bodies in the city, thereby extending the social critique the physical fabric of public space and the urban environment at large.

This condensed journey through the 1920s is an attempt to summarize some of the key issues and films commonly referenced in the city symphony discourse. In this standard narrative, what is often forgotten is that beyond the canonical films discussed above, there were many more films produced in the 1920s and 1930s along similar lines in Europe, North America, South

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<sup>23</sup> Boris Kaufman, "Jean Vigo's *À propos de Nice*," in *The Documentary Tradition*: 78.

<sup>24</sup> William Simon, *The Films of Jean Vigo* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981): 24.

America and Asia, including many that explicitly identified themselves as city symphonies. In my preliminary research, I have come across Adalberto Kemeny and Rudolf Rex Lustig's *São Paulo, Sinfonia da Metrópole* (São Paulo, a Metropolitan Symphony, 1929), Iwasaki Akira's *Asufaruto no michi* (Asphalt Road , 1930) and one of Manoel de Oliveira's first films, *Douro Faina Fluvial* (Labor on the Douro River, 1931).

## The City Symphony: An Expanded Temporality and Definition

Beyond a definition tied to a historical period, the term city symphony has also proved remarkably elastic, with artists and critics using it consistently since the early 20th century up through today to describe not only films, but also radio, literature, television and other media arts. Ruttmann himself created a radio drama in 1930 called *Weekend*, that translated the method of documentary recording developed in *Berlin* into a purely sonic arena, editing together a montage of on-location sound recordings into a symphony of the passing of a weekend in the city. While Scott MacDonald traces the origins of the city symphony back to the 1920s, in particular to Cavalcanti, Ruttmann, and Vertov, he draws attention to the evolution of the city symphony in New York City in the 1930s with such films as Jay Leyda's *A Bronx Morning* (1931), Irving Browning's *City of Contrasts* (1931), Herman G. Weinberg's *Autumn Fire* (1933), and Ralph Steiner and Willard van Dyke *The City* (1939). In the 1940s and 50s, Swiss photographer Rudy Burckhardt created *Down the Waterfront* (1946), *The Climate of New York* (1948), *Under the Brooklyn Bridge* (1953). Later, there was Francis Thompson's *N.Y., N.Y.* (1957), Marie Menken's *Go! Go! Go!* (1964), Mekas's *Cassis* (1966), Hilary Harris's *Organism* (1975), Peter Hutton's *New York Portrait, Part I* (1976), *New York Portrait, Part II* (1980), *New York Portrait, Part III* (1990). MacDonald draws upon this history to argue for Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) as one of the New York City's greatest city symphonies.<sup>25</sup>

In a highly inventive interpretation, MacDonald illustrates how *Do the Right Thing* is

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<sup>25</sup> This is drawn from the section "The New York City Symphony" in Scott MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 150-182.

structured in the same morning to night temporal framework as *Berlin* and others. However, in contrast to *Berlin*, Lee's film focuses intensely upon the lives of individual characters, aligning the work more with Cavalcanti's *Nothing but the Hours*. Lee focuses upon a single block of the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in Brooklyn, using this microcosm of the city to reflect on the history of racism and lived experience of multi-ethnicity in the city. Like Ruttmann's *Berlin*, the "typical day" of *Do the Right Thing* ends with fireworks, but these are by no means an enthusiastic of the city. They are the indices of destruction, but also only a momentary setback. As MacDonald writes, "Lee is quite clear...that this one block...remains not only an exciting, colorful place to live but a quintessentially American place as well."<sup>26</sup> The last parallel MacDonald draws with the city symphonies of the 1920s is around self-reflexivity. He argues that Vertov's analytical exploration of the cinematic medium is echoed in the way in which Lee complicates his own film through his performance as one of the main characters, Mookie. "Just as Mikhail Kaufman functions as an alter ego for Vertov, Mookie is an alter ego for Lee. But while Kaufman and Vertov are two representatives of the *same* process, basically ideological mirror images of each other, Lee and Mookie represent two, very different possibilities. Though his pizza delivery job is enough to keep him alive..., this job can take him nowhere, especially since he works halfheartedly. However, while Mookie is going nowhere, his alter ego, Spike Lee, *is* in business, as a filmmaker. Indeed he's in business in the same neighborhood, and *his* efforts are anything but half-hearted."<sup>27</sup>

Beyond extending the historical frame of reference for the city symphony, MacDonald

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 178-179.

offers another crucial contribution to the discourse by illustrating the continuously porous nature between documentary and fiction. In the avant-garde this distinction was clearly blurred, but MacDonald illustrates the ongoing ambiguity and interrelationships that persist despite the Hollywood system. By insisting upon *Do the Right Thing* as a city symphony, the term's conventional associations with documentary are drawn into relief, in process, problematizing the historical definition of documentary itself. As Dimendberg's definition suggests, one of the most evocative dimensions of the term city symphony is its position at the intersection of "documentary, experimental, [and] narrative film."<sup>28</sup> In reality, the traditional historiography of documentary film in the English-speaking world, initiated by Grierson, is a direct outgrowth of the complex issues at stake in the city symphony. While attracted at first to Soviet montage, Grierson ultimately developed his vision of documentary in opposition to the aesthetically experimental trajectories of filmmakers such as Ruttmann and Vertov. In attempting to establish his own definition for the documentary form, Grierson writes, "Documentary was from the beginning — when we first separated our public purpose theories from those of Flaherty [read: Soviet cinema] — an 'anti-aesthetic' movement."<sup>29</sup> Grierson, a staunch Calvinist now credited with coining the term "documentary" in English, wanted documentary to serve as a pulpit for social reform, and it is precisely his intervention in this moment of history that conditioned the legacy of documentary's assumed function as social realism in the West and the marginalization of experimental documentary.

One of the most expansive contemporary definitions of the city symphony has been

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<sup>28</sup> Dimendberg, 109.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Bill Nichols, "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde," in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 27, No. 4, (Summer, 2001): 602.

provided by Marsha Kinder, who argues,

Every mass medium that has emerged in an urban setting has generated a new form of city symphony — one that captures the urban rhythms and networked stories that characterize a specific cityscape. It was true of the 18th century English novel, with its picaresque flows between town and country. And it became more prominent in the urbanized context of modernism where the novel's mixed form depicted the distinctive voices, designs and movements of a particular city — like James Joyce's *Dublin*, or Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*, cities which became central characters in their respective fictions. It was true of the early days of radio, where programs like "Grand Central Station" reminded us that compelling stories could be plucked at random out of this vibrant narrative field. It was true of the early days of television, where local Los Angeles stations like KTLA developed a City at Night format, one you can still find in Toronto, Madrid, Beijing and other major cities throughout the world. And above all, it was true of cinema with its indexical photographic ties to reality and its early mobilization of montage to replicate distinctive urban rhythms. Though this film genre is deeply identified with modernism, its fast-paced repetitions and episodic structures make it a precursor of database narrative.<sup>30</sup>

Kinder's interest in the city symphony is driven by her academic and creative work with the Labyrinth Project, an experiment at the USC Annenberg Center in "database documentary" and "digital city symphony." Her work in this capacity has produced a series of interactive DVD-Rom's and gallery installations portraying the shifting history of Pasadena, downtown Los Angeles and other urban areas.

As evidenced in part by Kinder's work, over the last ten years city symphonies have experienced a sort of resurgence. Ruttmann's *Berlin* was re-made by Thomas Schadt in 2002 and this year the media artist Perry Bard began *2008: Man with a Movie Camera*, a participatory re-interpretation of Vertov's classic where people around the world upload their own video clips in relation to the original shots, and the whole database is re-compiled anew for each festival

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<sup>30</sup> Marsha Kinder, "'Cultivating Pasadena' as Database Documentary and Digital City Symphony," From the original catalog copy published online in *Vectors Journal*, Issue 2 (Fall 2006). Retrieved on May 26, 2008 at <http://www.vectorsjournal.org/index.php?page=8|5&pageContinue=810&projectId=55>.

screening.<sup>31</sup> Mark Street's *Hidden in Plain Sight*, "a peripatetic city symphony" with footage from Santiago, Hanoi, Dakar and Marseille, was featured in the 2008 Tribeca Film Festival.<sup>32</sup>

To date, there has been no comprehensive history of city symphony films and related works in other media. And the more nuanced and detailed of the existing histories of city symphonies remain engrossed with only a few works, often obscuring the remarkable heterogeneity of approaches to representing the city. Moreover, as a paradigmatic instance of the intersection of the avant-garde and documentary, historians have tended to utilize the city symphony films as vehicles for larger, theoretical arguments, while foregoing close, comparative readings tied to the actual urban spaces represented in the films. In the next section, I hope to offer an initial step in this larger project.

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<sup>31</sup> To see this project visit <http://dziga.perrybard.net/>.

<sup>32</sup> For more on this film visit [http://www.tribecafilmfestival.org/filmguide/Hidden\\_in\\_Plain\\_Sight.html](http://www.tribecafilmfestival.org/filmguide/Hidden_in_Plain_Sight.html).

## Seeing and Reading Moscow in *Moscow*

In the city symphony discourse, Kaufman's *Moscow* is rarely included. Michelson does mention the film in her introduction to *Kino-Eye*, giving it significant agency and a prominent position in the history of city symphonies. She writes, "The structure of Mikhail Kaufman's 1926 documentary film *Moscow*...seems to have influenced both Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) and Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*."<sup>33</sup> While our historical sketch has shown that Kaufman by no means innovated the day-in-the-life temporal framework of the city symphony, it is correct to include his film on equal footing with Ruttmann and Vertov's long recognized masterpieces. Unfortunately, Vlada Petric's response to Michelson represents the more common approach to Kaufman's film. He writes, "Even a superficial comparison of [*Moscow* and *Man with a Movie Camera*] reveals that the structure of Vertov's film is light-years ahead of the conventional manner in which Kaufman depicts a city."<sup>34</sup> *Moscow* is not a theoretical reflection of the epistemology of the filmic medium, but it is a sophisticated representation of a city that is concerned with the lived experience of specific places and buildings.

Kaufman's *Moscow* combines the architectural focus of such actualities as *Moscow Clad in Snow* with the experimental tendencies of the city symphony. However, unlike the Pathé brothers' travelogue, *Moscow* is a film directly addressing a national Soviet audience. The film operates as a filmic map, literally charting the geographical, industrial, and political infrastructure

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<sup>33</sup> Annette Michelson, "Introduction," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*: xxiv.

<sup>34</sup> Vlada Petric, *Constructivism in Film: The Man with a Movie Camera. A Cinematic Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 71.

of the USSR's capital. The first three parts of the film operate with the traditional temporal arc of the city symphony, moving from morning to night. The fourth and five parts present a political cartography of the city, showing the buildings of major foreign embassies, the arrival of diplomats, and the faces of the city's municipal leaders during government meetings. The last section catalogues the city's public achievements, ranging from the worker's clubs to the university to the children's foster homes. The spectator's interpretation of these distinct movements is directed through the film's methodical use of intertitles.

The history of intertitles in the silent cinema is extremely heterogeneous. As the new art form of film sought to define itself in relation to the other traditional arts, especially theater, painting, and literature, the role of text on the screen became a key point of debate. Within the domain of documentary alone, there were widely diverging approaches and fervent opinions. In Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta* (1921), the intertitles are taken directly from poetry. Eleven phrases from Whitman's poems about "the city of the world" structure the unfolding of shots portraying the life of Lower Manhattan from morning until evening. Here, the film illustrates the text. We read, "High growths of iron, slender, strong, splendidly uprising toward clear skies." And then we see a shot from atop a skyscraper overlooking the city and panning down across the façades of other towering downtown buildings. By simply reading *Manhatta's* eleven intertitle "stanzas," the viewer is able to imagine all of the shots in the film.<sup>35</sup>

In his list of the most important factors in *Berlin*, Ruttmann definitively declared: "Every

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<sup>35</sup> I am deeply indebted to colleague Ana Olenina for this argument.

scene speaks for itself - therefore: no titles!"<sup>36</sup> Vertov performs a similar gesture in the manifesto-like frames at the outset of *Man with a Movie Camera*, stating it is "a film without intertitles." However, the film-goer familiar with Vertov's previous work would be shocked by this declaration, as only three years earlier he created *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926), an epic poem turned film driven by Whitman-inspired intertitles. Vertov used the commission of the national department of fur trading and commerce, to produce *A Sixth Part of the World*, a sprawling attempt to represent the diversity of the Soviet Union in its entire cultural and geographical expanse. Whitman's poetic approach provided a useful framework for a personalized, catalogue-style documentary. The intertitles function both internally and externally to the film's diegesis, as Vertov uses the frequent refrains "you" and "I see" to address both the distinct populations in the film (e.g. Tartars, Buriats, Uzbeks, etc.) in a call for national unity and to draw the viewer into identification with the camera. The film not only catalogues the multiple ethnicities of the USSR, but also the new nation's spatial boundaries. A portion of the intertitle poem reads: "From the Kremlin / to the border with China / from the Matochkin Share / to Bukhara / from Novorossiisk / to Leningrad." Beyond the catalogue-style, the text interlaced through *A Sixth Part of the World* features frequent poetic deviations, described by Aleksandr Fevralsky in *Pravda* at the time as "a verbal montage...sometimes with a tinge of Impressionism."<sup>37</sup> However, not everyone applauded Vertov's use of intertitles. Viktor Shklovsky wrote, "When they give us an intertitle, 'The child sucks the breast,' and then show us the child, sucking at the breast, I realize

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<sup>36</sup> Walter Ruttmann, "Berlin? - Berlin!" in *Der Filmspiegel*, Berlin, Nr. 5, May 1927. Re-printed in *Walter Ruttmann: Eine Dokumentation*: 79.

<sup>37</sup> Aleksandr Fevralsky, "A Sixth Part of the World," *Pravda*, 12 October 1926. Quoted in Yuri Tsivian, ed, *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, trans. by Julian Graffy, (Sacile/Pordenone: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2004): 196.

that they have turned us back towards lantern slides."<sup>38</sup>

Kaufman would have been aware of Shklovsky's damning critique of the use of intertitles, but nevertheless elected in opposition to this tendency of avant-garde theory at that moment to make them the driving force of *Moscow*. Titling in his film works in ways similar and also significantly different from *Manhatta* and *A Sixth Part of the World*. Reflecting on growing up together, Kaufman acknowledges that even then Vertov gravitated towards poetry. In a 1970 interview shortly before his death, Kaufman says, "Even as a child I was attracted to different forms of representation than [Vertov]. I studied photographs, I drew — and since we're discussing the early stages of our collaboration, we can say that it began our beloved Aunt Masha graduated from medical school. Vertov wrote a poem for her, and I drew a sort of congratulation picture of a dove in flight."<sup>39</sup> Kaufman's passion for the visual, combined with his more sober philosophy of documentary, is evident in the language of *Moscow's* intertitles.

Like in *Manhatta*, the intertitles in *Moscow* set up the viewer's interpretation of the following shots. The logic is always predictive, not retroactive, as the intertitles serve to prepare the spectator for what is to come, never leaving a sense of ambiguity of what is being seen that is resolved through text. However, the text is far from the Whitmanesque poetry of *A Sixth Part of the World*. Kaufman's phrases are either very short statements describing general categories of urban activity such as "the day begins," "to work," "at the station," or "leaving the station"; geographical markers naming streets, squares and major public spaces such as "Red Square," "Zoo," or "Hippodrome"; or the names of political figures whose images will soon follow.

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<sup>38</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, "On the Fact That Plot Is a Constructive Principle, Not One from Daily Life," chap. 6 in *Ikh nasoiashchee* (Their Present Time), 1927. Quoted in Tsivian, 268-269.

<sup>39</sup> Mikhail Kaufman, "An Interview with Mikhail Kaufman," in *October*, Vol. 11 (Winter, 1979): 59.

Almost exclusively, verbs are omitted. Viewed together, the intertitles read as a laundry list of Moscow's major thoroughfares, squares, monuments, parks, businesses, factories, and politicians, similar to the geographical catalogue of *A Sixth Part of the World*. There are only a few even slightly poetic frames (e.g. "the life of the city boils") or longer phrases. The contrast of this use of intertitles with *Man with a Movie Camera* and *Berlin - Symphony of a Great City* is, of course, even starker than with *Manhatta* or *A Sixth Part of the World*.

Kaufman uses intertitles to establish individual sections within *Moscow*, moving from the general to the specific.<sup>40</sup> The film opens with the abstract statement "the day begins," of course, a classic trope in the city symphony genre, setting up a larger temporal structure progressing from morning to evening. Similar to an establishing shot, this intertitle frames the section that follows. After being situated temporally, we see images of cats in the garbage, waste clean-up crews, a woman pasting up a new poster, and the washing down of the streets.<sup>41</sup> While the film's title has told us we are in Moscow, we do not know where exactly we are standing in these initial shots. Following the opening sequence, there is a series of three intertitles proclaiming "to work." After the first, we travel with the camera for an overhead shot of trams, pedestrians, and horse-drawn carriages crossing at a major intersection. After the second "to work," the camera moves to the street-level and we see cars exiting a garage from the left side of the frame onto the street on the right. After the next "to work," the frame is reversed, and we see buses leaving a station from the right of the shot to the left. Lastly, we read "ALSO to work," and are taken to a street-level shot of pedestrians walking into the center city. This is followed by a cut to an overhead shot of

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<sup>40</sup> My reading of the meaning and geography of intertitles in *Moscow* is deeply indebted to my colleague and teacher Nataliya Kun.

<sup>41</sup> These are all common features of city symphony films, as well as some fictional films from the time, including Boris Barnet's *The House on Trubnaya Street* (1928).

another pedestrian, bringing us full circle to the initial overhead shot of the trams and carriages. Next, we move to the Moscow river and then on to the city's train stations. This opening sequence establishes Moscow as the center of a network of circulation, each shot differentiating the key modes of public and private transportation that will later serve to mobilize Kaufman's camera — and by extension the viewer.

After being introduced to the city's awakening and its transportation networks, we read the next generalized title denoting a new section: "On the streets." Having created an overall sense of place, now Kaufman will use the intertitles in *Moscow* to establish detailed, geographical specificity. In this way, the titles can be read as a map overlaid on Kaufman's filmic footage. The camera is brought back to street-level for a quick shot of the historic Red Gate surrounded by circulating trams. Then, there is the title "Past the Red Gate." The shot establishes spatial continuity with a similar view of the Red Gate, and now we are in motion. Clearly, Kaufman has stepped onto one of the many circulating trams we have just seen and the cityscape begins to pass by. Where are and where are we going?

The Red Gates were located on the northeastern corner of the *Sadovoye Koltso* (Garden Ring), the peripheral ring road built in the early 19th century along the path of the city's 16th century ramparts. In the 1920s, this ring marked the border between the pre-industrial and industrial Moscow. The Red Gates were two of many gates from the 18th century along the city's ramparts, but the Red Gates were the only ones to survive into the 20th century and at the time of *Moscow* were very significant landmarks of the city's pre-Revolutionary past. They were actually flashpoints of the city's conflicted relationship between the Tsarist (i.e. bourgeois) past and the Soviet present and future. Many urbanists in 1920s Moscow favored historic

preservation, and envisioned the Soviet city as a mixture of the old and the new, yet others strongly supported the demolition of pre-Revolutionary landmarks to be replaced by new architecture true to the Revolution. The gates embody this ambivalence.<sup>42</sup> The gates were renovated in spring 1926, during the filming of *Moscow*, and were actually demolished to make way for the expansion of the Garden Ring on June 3, 1927. By choosing to start his mapping journey at this symbolic juncture, Kaufman creates another temporal structure beyond the standard morning-to-evening city symphony narrative. *Moscow* uses the history of the city's architecture and landmarks to establish a historical trajectory from the pre-Revolutionary period up to Soviet Modernism, beginning with the Red Gates and the *Sadovoye koltso*, ending with the Shukov Radio Tower, one of the city's most important post-Revolutionary landmarks.

Moving from the Red Gates, we travel with Kaufman down busy Myasnitskaya Street to Lubyanka Square, the edge of the city's first ring, the *Bulvarnoye kolto* (Boulevard Ring). When we arrive at the square, the camera moves from the tram to an elevated position above the square, pausing to take in the area's traffic. A pattern has been established for this section of traveling shots: a mobilized camera from the perspective of the tram up to a major square, followed by elevated, static panning shots of the plazas. This pattern continues on our next drive.

This time we begin further from the center, moving from *Tverskaya zastava* (near the Belorussky Rail Terminal in the northwest of the city), through the Triumphal Gate — a 19th century landmark. Passing through the gate, the camera pans up to the marching horses atop the gate, and then dissolves to a static shot from the perspective of the horses overlooking Tverskaya. We then read "Along Tverskaya" and return to motion along one of the tram's heading

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<sup>42</sup> Colton, *Moscow*: 29,30, 164, 230, 420, 579.

down the major avenue. We arrive at Strastnoy Square, marking the edge of the *Sadovoye kolsto*, where we stop for an extended overview of the square. We then turn right down Tverskoy Boulevard to Nikitskie Square, before moving on to Arbatskie Square.

Following these two drives from the northeast and northwest to the center, we read: "from Zamoskvorechye over the Moscow river along the bridges." We see an elevated view from the southern bank of the Moscow river to the center, followed by intertitles introducing footage showing the two major bridges: *Krymsky most* (Crimean Bridge), the city's first steel bridge built in 1873 by Armand Struve and *Moskvoretsky most*. Now, we have reached our ultimate destination, the absolute center of the city: Red Square and the Kremlin, along with Sverdlova Square and the Bolshoi Theater. As opposed to *Man with a Movie Camera* or *Berlin*, Kaufman uses montage not to displace the spectator into multiple spaces, sutured within the cinema but disjointed geographically. Instead, Kaufman's uses the first part of *Moscow* to guide the viewer on continuous, geographically specific tours through the city, in the process establishing two temporal structures: the progression from morning to night, and the evolution of the city from its pre-Revolutionary up through its Soviet present.

The final intertitles and shots of *Moscow* are centered upon one of the city's legendary Revolutionary landmarks, the Shukov Radio Tower. Constructed from 1919-1922 by engineer Vladimir Shukov, this 150-meter conical "hyperboloid turned steel" broadcast the Moscow city and Comintern radio stations and "symbolized the revolutionary future."<sup>43</sup> The building exemplified tremendous technical achievement, as its structure was at the cutting-edge of

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<sup>43</sup> Blair Ruble, "Moscow's Revolutionary Architecture and Its Aftermath: A Critical Guide," in *Reshaping Russian Architecture*, ed. William Brumfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 126.

engineering progress worldwide, and it signaled the adoption of modern mass media. Of course, Kaufman's choice to culminate his temporal map of Moscow here is no accident.

The shots of the Shukov tower are distributed between four intertitles, which together form one of the few complete sentences in *Moscow*: "And every day radio station 'Great Comintern' tells the whole world about the life of the Soviet Union." The first title fragment is "And every day," and it is followed by a head-on shot of the tower from the outside, the camera slowly rising up from the bottom emphasizing the builder's height. This shot feels like it is from the perspective of the person on the ground. The second title is "radio station Great Comintern," and the illustrating shot picks up from the low-angle view of the tower and begins spinning, creating a series of oblique perspectives emphasizing the dynamism of the building's structure and the movement inherent in medium of radio. The third title is "tells the whole world." Now, we move inside the tower and the camera is pointed straight up, while moving slowly in a circle. From this angle, the spines of the tower mimic in steel the invisible forms of the radio waves emanating out to the world. The last title is "about the life of the Soviet Union," and following this completion of the film's culminating sentence, the camera moves back outside Shukov's structure. The shot is positioned slightly farther the opening image and askew, with a significant portion of the frame devoted to the sky and the rapidly moving clouds.

This final sequence can be read as Kaufman's mini-manifesto on filmmaking and urbanism. As other buildings and spaces throughout *Moscow*, Kaufman treats the Shukov Tower as lived architecture. By this, I mean he recognizes it as an individual building imbued with form, function, and program. The Shukov Tower is not just a symbol or an image, it is also an actual building at a specific place in a specific city where people perform a set of ongoing activities in

service of a central organ of the national communications system. This literal labeling and mapping is combined with sophisticated visual techniques. Kaufman's four shots serve to position the spectator as both a media producer and listener. At first, as spectators we are static visitors to the site, but we are then mobilized, enter the apparatus, identify with the inner-workings of the building and its outgoing radio broadcasts, and finally exit to hear our creations. The sequence is at once distinctly utopian in the message of its titling, but also in the upward-view of its camera angles. The slow spinning of the camera emphasizes the tower's spiral structure, evoking Hegelian dialectics and the other great tower of the Soviet avant-garde, Tatlin's unrealized Monument to the Third International. The combination of static and moving shots draws out the contrast between still and motion photography, the particularity and potential of each medium. As a culminating instance, this monumental symbol of the new serves as a bookend to the film's early reverence for the old, embedded within a direct verbal political address.

Aleksander Rodchenko was a leader of the Constructivists, pioneering experimentation in architecture, graphic design, sculpture, and photography. Rodchenko was close with Kaufman and the Kinoks, as he explored the place of Constructivism in film, contributing to various Vertov films, including the intertitles and animation sequences in *Kino-Glaz* (1924), and the intertitles for *Kino-Pravdas* 13 and 14 along with *A Sixth Part of the World*. Rodchenko also designed the famous poster for *Kino-Glaz*, which he included on the wall in his 1925 Worker's Club interior exhibition in Paris. Rodchenko's philosophy of photography insisted upon shooting from odd angles in opposition to standard eye-level representation. In manifesto-like tone he declared: "Photograph from all viewpoints, except the 'navel,' until all viewpoints are recognized. And the most interesting points of today are the viewpoints 'from the top down,' the 'bottom up,' and

their diagonals."<sup>44</sup> Kaufman's cinematography also echoes this approach. Throughout *Moscow*, he consistently works to present the city from all perspectives, and many of his shots are similar to Rodchenko's photographs.<sup>45</sup> In particular, Kaufman's treatment of the Shukov Tower illustrates his affinities with Rodchenko. The two artists even engaged in a written and visual dialogue around the monument.

In a letter entitled "The Paths of Contemporary Photography" to Boris Kushner, a member of the *LEF* editorial board, Rodchenko defends Kaufman's representation of the tower against Kushner's characterization of it as looking "more like a bread basket than a truly marvelous structure."<sup>46</sup> Kushner's criticism was based on a 1926 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*, in which there was a layout illustrating Osip Brik's polemic "What the Eyes Does Not See" that featured a series of Rodchenko photographs from Miasnitskaia street and a still image shot underneath the tower from Kaufman's *Moscow*. Rodchenko pushes Kushner to recognize Kaufman's work in the context of cinema instead of strictly still photography: "Kaufman's picture is only one of the frames he shot around the tower from various viewpoints, and for that matter, in the cinema his viewpoints are in motion; the camera turns and the clouds pass over the tower. *Sovetskoe foto* talks about the 'photo-picture' as though it were something closed and eternal. On the contrary. The object must be seen in several different photos from different viewpoints and positions, as though looking around it, and not as though peeking through one keyhole."<sup>47</sup> Driving home his point and his affinity with Kaufman, Rodchenko photographed the Shukov Tower himself a few

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<sup>44</sup> Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Experiments for the Future: Diaries, Essays, Letters, and Other Writings*, trans. Jamey Gambrell (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005): 212.

<sup>45</sup> In particular, I am thinking of: Kaufman's spiraling shot of a fire escape ladder at 27:04 and Rodchenko's *Fire Escape* (1925) and Kaufman's diving shots starting at 36:48 and Rodchenko's *A Jump into Water* (1934).

<sup>46</sup> Rodchenko, 211.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

years later in 1929, shooting the now famous image *Guard, Shukov Tower*. The photograph is characteristically skewed on a diagonal, a similar perspective as a frozen moment from Kaufman's final spin around the great structure at the end of *Moscow*.

## Conclusion

*Moscow* received praise at the time of its release from such figures as Eisenstein and Kuleshov. Eisenstein champions "Kaufman's brilliant work *Moscow*"<sup>48</sup> in a 1927 letter to the editor of *Film Technik* in response to an article "Kino-Eye" by Oleg Voinov. Eisenstein takes issue with Voinov's praise for Vertov and the *kinocs* as the "one direction in Russian cinema" and that that Eisenstein's *Strike* and *Potemkin* "bear clear traces of the influence of the *kinocs*."<sup>49</sup><sup>50</sup> For Eisenstein, while during the Revolution and immediately afterwards there might have been value in a the "bare piling up of facts," the circumstances in the late 1920s demand "working out the audience's attitude to particular facts and events."<sup>51</sup> He argues that while Vertov and the *kinocs* are aiming for "emotional hits", such films as *A Sixth Part of the World* fail miserably, and it is in contrast to this and the *Lenin Kino-Pravda* that Eisenstein praises *Moscow*. He writes, "Without any lofty emotional claims, beautifully shot, well edited, [*Moscow*], naturally, resolves the task that it has set itself — showing Moscow — by means of location shooting (whereas the philosophy of *A Sixth Part of the World*, in the absence of artistic means, is bound to sink and does sink into extensive speaking through intertitles). *Moscow* shows *kinoculism* the healthy path and the area — newsreel — which it should occupy in the construction of Soviet cinema."<sup>52</sup>

Lev Kuleshov praises *Moscow* in his 1927 review of the film in the *Novyi LEF* journal. He

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<sup>48</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, "Letter to the Editor" of *Film Technik*, 26 February 1927. Quoted in Tsivian: 145.

<sup>49</sup> Michelson writes, "*kinoks* ('cinema-eye men'). A neologism coined by Vertov, involving a play on the words *kino* ('cinema' or 'film') and *oko*, the latter an obsolescent and poetic word meaning 'eye.' The *-ok* ending is the transliteration of a traditional suffix used in Russian to indicate a male, human agent." (Michelson, ed. *Kino-Eye*).

<sup>50</sup> Oleg Voinov, "Kino-Eye" in *Film Technik*, no. 4, 1927. Quoted in Tsivian: 141.

<sup>51</sup> Eisenstein, 143.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

writes, "It is amazing to see this film about Moscow in 1927. It should have been filmed considerably earlier.... If we filmed earlier, we would have been able to see Soviet Moscow being gradually constructed, which would be far more interesting than just seeing it in its present state....But even what is shown here opens our eyes to the routine Moscow that we see so often; we walk around and pay no attention to the remarkable part of the town, to the large amount of traffic, to those unexpected shots which Kaufman has managed to see and film.... The cityscape part of the film is the best.... The shots taken from above and below achieve amazing effects, and give us a new sense of landscape material. It is especially valuable that the new points of view that Kaufman uses are not used in order to show his originality, from a desire to show everything in an unusual way, but really are the best and clearest way to show contemporary Moscow."<sup>53</sup>

While Eisenstein and Kuleshov's enthusiastic remarks for *Moscow* are certainly sincere on one level, there were likely other motives for their praise. Eisenstein had invited Kaufman to work as a cameraman for him, trying to steal him away from his brother Vertov. And generally, there was a concerted effort during the hot debates of this period to draw a wedge between the two brothers. In Osip Brik's review of *The Eleventh Year*, he derided Vertov's editing, while praising Kaufman's cinematography. After *Man with a Movie Camera* was completed in 1929, the two brothers never worked together again. Kaufman had become increasingly frustrated with Vertov's poetic tendencies at the cost of direct, sober politically clear documentary.

As a cameraman overshadowed by his brother the director, Kaufman's own directorial effort *Moscow* has been overshadowed in the history of the city symphony by *Man with a Movie Camera*. Unfortunately, neglect of Kaufman's work has limited the historical

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<sup>53</sup> Lev Kuleshov, "The Screen Today," in *Novyi LEF*, no. 4, 1927. Quoted in Tsivian: 273.

understanding of the city symphony form's myriad incarnations and diverse methods of urban representation. The film is a hybrid production, influenced by Kaufman's long-standing engagement with the avant-garde and its experimental tendencies, and the tradition of actualities and travelogues of early cinema that emphasize geographical and architectural specificity. While using many of the techniques of the Ruttmann's *Berlin*, the paradigmatic city symphony, Kaufman instead creates a filmic map of the Soviet capital that eschews abstraction in favor of absolute particularity. Combining the classic day-in-the-life temporal structure of the city symphony with the progression of urban history from the city's pre-Revolutionary past to its post-Revolutionary future, Kaufman illustrates the potential for urban documentary to understand architecture as the symbolic and functional fabric of the modern city.

## Filmography

- Moscou sous la neige* (Moscow Clad in Snow). *Dir.* Joseph-Louis Mundwiller, *Prod.* Pathé (France), *Release* 1908.
- Manhatta*. *Dir.* Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, *Prod.* Film Arts Guild (USA), *Release* 1921.
- Paris qui dort*. (The Crazy Ray or Paris Asleep). *Dir.* René Clair, *Prod.* Films Diamant (France), *Release* 1924.
- Rien que les heures*. (Nothing but the Hours). *Dir.* Alberto Cavalcanti, *Cam.* James E. Rogers, *Prod.* Néo Film (France), *Release* 1926
- Shestaia Chast Mira* (A Sixth Part of the World). *Dir.* Dziga Vertov, *Ass. Dir.* Elizaveta Svivlova, *Cam.* Mikhail Kaufman, *Prod.* Goskino Kultkino (USSR), *Release* 1926.
- Moskva*. (Moscow). *Dir.* Mikhail Kaufman and Ilya Kopalin, *Prod.* Sovkino (USSR), *Release* 1927.
- Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*. (Berlin. The Symphony of a Great City) *Dir.* Walter Ruttmann, *Prod.* Fox Europa (Germany), *Release* 1927.
- Odinnadtsatyi* (The Eleventh Year). *Dir.* Dziga Vertov, *Cam.* Mikhail Kaufman, *Ass.* Elizaveta Svivlova, *Prod.* VUFKU (USSR), *Release* 1928.
- De Brug*. (The Bridge). *Dir.* Joris Ivens, *Prod.* CAPI (Netherlands), *Release* 1928
- Chelovek s Kinoapparatom* (Man with a Movie Camera). *Dir.* Dziga Vertov, *Cam.* Mikhail Kaufman, *Ass.* Elizaveta Svivlova, *Prod.* VUFKU (USSR), *Release* 1929.
- Regen*. (Rain) *Dir.* Joris Ivens, *Scr.* Joris Ivens and Mannus Franken, *Prod.* CAPI (Netherlands), *Release* 1929
- São Paulo, Sinfonia da Metrópole*. (São Paulo, a Metropolitan Symphony). *Dir.* Adalberto Kemeny and Rudolf Rex Lustig, *Prod.* Brazil, *Release* 1929
- À propos de Nice*. (About Nice). *Dir.* Jean Vigo, *Cam.* Boris Kaufman, *Prod.* France, *Release* 1930.
- Asufaruto no michi*. (Asphalt Road). *Dir.* Iwasaki Akira, *Prod.* Japan, *Release* 1930.
- A Bronx Morning*. *Dir.* Jay Leyda, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1931.
- City of Contrasts*. *Dir.* Irving Browning, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1931

*Douro, Faina Fluvial.* (Labor on the Douro River). *Dir.* Manoel de Oliveira, *Prod.* Portugal, *Release* 1931.

*Autumn Fire.* *Dir.* Herman G. Weinberg, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1933.

*The City.* *Dir.* Ralph Steiner and Willard van Dyke, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1939.

*Down the Waterfront.* *Dir.* Rudy Burckhardt, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1946.

*The Climate of New York.* *Dir.* Rudy Burckhardt, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1948.

*Under the Brooklyn Bridge.* *Dir.* Rudy Burckhardt, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1953.

*N.Y., N.Y.* *Dir.* Francis Thompson, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1957.

*Go! Go! Go!.* *Dir.* Marie Menken, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1964.

*Cassis.* *Dir.* Jonas Mekas, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1966.

*Oganism.* *Dir.* Hilary Harris, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1975.

*New York Portrait, Part I.* *Dir.* Peter Hutton, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1976.

*New York Portrait, Part II.* *Dir.* Peter Hutton, *Prod.* USA, *Release* 1980.

*Do The Right Thing.* *Dir.* Spike Lee, *Prod.* 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks (USA), *Release* 1989

*New York Portrait, Part III.* *Dir.* Peter Hutton, *Prod.* USA, *Release*, 1990.

*Berlin: Sinfonie einer Großstadt.* (Berlin: Symphony of a Great City). *Dir.* Thomas Schadt, *Prod.* teamWorx (German), *Release* 2002

*2008: Man with a Movie Camera.* *Concept,* Perry Bard, *Release* 2007.

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