

イデオロギーと表象——

ジガ・ヴェルトフの理論と実践について

——Kino-Eye, Ideology. Representation: On Theory
and Practice of Dziga Vertov——

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“If, in *The Man with a Movie Camera* it’s not the goal but the means that stand out, that is obviously because one of the film’s objectives was to acquaint people with those means and not to hide them, as was usually considered mandatory in other films. If one of the film’s goals was to acquaint people with the grammar of cinematic means, then to hide that grammar would have been strange. Whether or not this film should have been made at all is another matter. That is a different question; let others answer.”

Dziga Vertov, 1958

When Jean-Luc Godard in 1968 came to proclaim his “political cinema” and broke with the dominant mode of film production, he had two basic models in his mind, the kino-eye documentary of Dziga Vertov and the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht. In 1969 and 1970, Godard made six films (completed five) under the collective name of the Dziga-Vertov Group. It is of course not merely a matter of personal preference or coincidence that Godard chose Vertov over any other filmmakers to indicate his effort to create his own Marxist/materialist film language. Indeed, both Godard’s notion of counter-cinema and Brecht’s theory of epic theatre derive from a similar theoretical impulse as the concept of kino-eye, constructed by Vertov. It is my intention to investigate parallels between the theory and practice of Vertov and those of Godard, between Vertov and Brecht in the context of the post-1968 film theory that links them as the primary figures of radical filmmaking.

When Godard officially named Vertov as his role model in 1969, he appropriated the basic strategies of Vertov’s filmmaking. For instance, his claim for the collective authorship that continued after the demise of the Dziga-Vertov Group was directly prompted by Vertov’s refusal to employ the authorship of the single director (Vertov

claimed that the mass authorship would accelerate the destruction of bourgeois, artistic drama and its attributes¹.) and his view of filmmaking as a political activity of the worker's collective. Godard also appreciated Vertov's notion of editing that it should be done before the shooting (during and after the "observation") and during the filming as well as the actual editing in the editing room. It is also known that Godard was especially fond of Vertov because of his continual insistence that the filmmaker's prime concern should be the current state of the class struggle. However, Vertov's most important influence on Godard's political cinema is, I would argue, his insistence on the breaking down of the dramatic illusion of cinematic representation, in another words, the political displacement of the dominant mode of representation through the camera-eye. It is not a coincidence that Godard, who expressed his critique of representation more radically and effectively than any other filmmakers, made films that most rigidly attacked the existing system of representation in the name of Dziga Vertov, whose continual insistence on breaking down the illusion of representation is evident in his films as well as in his writings.

In 1969 in the Oct-Nov. issue of *Cahiers du Cinema* ("Cinema/Ideology/Criticism"), Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni claimed that any cinema which was intended to operate against the prevailing ideology should attack its ideological assimilation on two fronts, in form (on the level of the signifiers) and content (on the level of the signified), because the direct political action on the level of the signified "only becomes politically effective if it is linked with a breaking down of the traditional way of depicting reality²." This emphasis on the signifiers and concern for the problem of representation are derived from the recognition that the cinema is a function of ideology, an economical product which is produced and distributed within the dominant ideology. Thus, they claim that the first task of the filmmaker is to "show up the cinema's so-called depiction of reality³," in another words, to elucidate and challenge the system of representation/ideology/illusion/mystification. This *Cahiers* position, which is most significantly influenced by Louis Althusser's Marxist theory and which became the turning point in French film criticism, has been supported by the majority of radical filmmakers and theoreticians in England and America in the 1970's, and Godard became the central figure of the contemporary political cinema. Another important filmmaker for this anti-illusionist position is Eisenstein, who once dismissed Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* as the "formalist jackstraws and unmotivated camera mischief⁴." How-

ever, contrary to Eisenstein's opinion, the film is, like any other Vertov film, far from unmotivated. In fact, it is a film with a strong political motivation in which Vertov challenged the dominant system of representation in the most radical manner and successfully transformed reality into a revolutionary film language. Eisenstein's dismissal of *The Man with a Movie Camera* echoes in the way the film has been perceived over the years as a "formalist avant-garde." While it is not totally mistaken in its labeling however, it is an inadequate description because it tends to ignore the highly political content of the film, and more importantly, because it fails to recognize the political significance of Vertov's "action on the level of the signifiers." It is indeed important to see it both as an avant-garde film and as a socialist documentary. Like Godard, whose filmic language is decidedly anti-naturalistic while insisting upon the concept of cinema-verite in the production of a film, Vertov's film language works against the codes of realism/naturalism, while his subject is always the real people and reality.

What can be called Vertov's anti-realist stance is clearly stated in his theory of kino-eye, in which he repeatedly attacks the dominant representation. In "Kinoks: A Revolution." Vertov expresses his dissatisfaction with the classical realist approach and proposes a new approach in the opposite direction:

Until now, we have violated the movie camera and forced it to copy the work of our eye. And the better the copy, the better the shooting was thought to be. Starting today we are liberating the camera and making it work in the opposite direction—away from the copying⁵.

Vertov challenges the realist notion of "the impression of reality" and the law of verisimilitude (Vertov calls it "the imitation of reality." "the appearance of truth" or "the copy of the copy," and declares that "A day of visual impression has passed⁶.")) and demands to create "a fresh perception of the world⁷" through the camera which is "free from the limits of time and space⁸." He writes;

1. Kino-eye, challenging the human eye's visual representation of the world and offering its own "I see" and
2. the Kinok-editor, organizing the minutes of the life-structure seen This Way for the first time⁹.

Vertov's kino-eye is the concept of the use of a camera (with all the available optical devices and filming techniques) to render "the life as it is," not the life seen by the imperfect human-eye, but the life grasped by the liberated and perfected camera-eye.

This camera-eye challenges the vision of the human-eye by creating its own "I see," offering a new perception of reality, which is critical and analytical of the bourgeois version of reality. Serge Daney states: "(The cinema) postulates that from 'real' to the visual and from the visual to its filmed reproduction, the same truth is reflected infinitely without any distortion or loss. And in a world where 'I see' is automatically said for 'I understand,' such a dream has nothing of the fortuitous. The dominant ideology — which poses real=visible — has every interest in encouraging it¹⁰" For Vertov, kino-eye is a cinematic analysis that employs "all method and means that might serve to reveal and show the truth¹¹," hidden under the fabrication of the dominant ideology and excluded from its "I see." Vertov repeatedly states in his writings his view of kino-eye as "the possibility of making the invisible visible, unclear clear, the hidden manifest, the disguised overt, the acted nonacted; making falsehood into truth¹²." It is evident that Vertov was clearly aware of the invisible workings of the dominant ideology within the existing system of representation that falsely renders the capitalist social formation as natural and eternal, and the function of the realist conventions as the main instruments in that process of falsification of reality. Insisting upon the task of kino-eye, "the elucidation and decoding of the world as it is" through the camera-eye, Vertov aims to expose the operation of ideology within the representation and to reveal the truth (the reality which is free from mystification) hidden under the ideological fabrication, and to "see and show the world in the name of the worldwide proletarian revolution¹³."

Vertov's theory and method of kino-eye, which aims for "the communist decoding of the world¹⁴" in a form that is decidedly anti-realist/naturalist, parallel the influential voice of Brecht whose concept of distancing were most impressively appropriated by Godard. Brecht was too, aware of the element of realism that tend to render the bourgeois notion of realism as natural, fixed and timeless. In "The Popular and the Realistic." Brecht argues for a type of realism that work against the premise of the dominant realist approach:

Our conception of realism needs to be broad and political, free from aesthetic restrictions and independent of convention. Realist means: laying bare society's causal network, showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators, writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting

human society, emphasizing the dynamics of development, concrete and so as to encourage abstractions¹⁵.

Brecht, like Vertov, seeks to reveal the formation of representation which capitalist society/bourgeois culture constructs and to expose, for and from the standpoint of the class struggle, the operation or ideology within that formation, and to show the world as alterable and historical.

As the theorist/practitioner of Marxist art, Vertov and Brecht share not only the same revolutionary goal, but also the common method and approach as well. Both Vertov and Brecht, like their successor Godard, see the film/theatre as a production of meaning, as a site of work in the viewer's consciousness; therefore, the question of spectatorship becomes the focal point of their work as well as their main theoretical concern. For Vertov, whose objective of filmmaking is "to influence the worker's consciousness¹⁶" and "to aid each oppressed individual and the proletariat as a whole in their effort to understand the phenomena of life around them¹⁷," to make the audience/workers understand the bourgeois structure of the world is essentially important; it is the first step toward the goal of kino-eye, the worldwide proletarian revolution. To construct a truly working-class audience means to make the basis of the kino-eye's purpose of "establishing a visual bond between the workers of USSR and the proletarians of all nations in the entire world¹⁸." Vertov's persistent concern with the spectatorship also stems from the fact that the Soviet cinema after the revolution failed to adopt itself to a new life and continued to perpetuate the bourgeois notion of the world through its technique and form. To use Vertov's words, "it remained within the framework of bourgeois technique and theatrical form¹⁹," thus, the audience of the Soviet cinema remained as a passive acceptants of the bourgeois ideology. Even after the revolution they remained as the passive audience of the capitalist cinema.

Given the complex construction of Soviet film audience, Vertov divides them into two groups of viewers: (1) "the steady viewer of the artistic drama" that may include the bourgeois or the working-class audience (Vertov explains the subtle effect of kino-eye on this group of viewers: "A film object made of newsreel footage will do much to sober this viewer who is poisoned by the film-drama and, if we're speaking of taste, will seem to him an unpleasant antidote²⁰"); (2) "the untouched viewer." the working-class audience who has never seen the film-drama, whom Vertov hopes to condition with kino-eye so that when he sees a film-drama, it would taste bitter like "a strong

cigarette to someone smoking for the first time²¹." In either case, kino-eye creates a new bleed of audience and viewing attitude.

He writes:

Film-drama tickles the nerves. Kino-eye helps one to see. Kino-drama clouds the eye and the brain with a sweet dog. Kino-eye opens the eyes, clear the visions²².

It is tempting to view Vertov's kino-eye as the equivalent of Brecht's epic theatre, and the film drama as the equivalent of the dramatic theatre. Indeed one can easily find the common theoretical interests between Vertov and Brecht in their writings. For instance, on the general notion of distanciation:

Vertov: "If it's a question of reading someone's thoughts at a distance (often what matters to us is not to hear a person's words but to read his thoughts), then you have that opportunity right here. It has been revealed by kino-eye." (1934)

Brecht: "A representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject.....²⁴ (1948)

On acting:

V. : "according to kino-eye, to show Ivanov playing Petrov means showing him as a person in real life and as an actor on the stage—not passing off his stage acting as his behavior in life and vice versa. Complete clarity. Before you, you have not Petrov but Ivanov plaining Petrov²⁵." (1936)

B. : "The actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is playing. He is not Lear, Harpagon, Schweik; he shows them²⁶." (1940)

On the conscious and subconscious state of the viewer:

V. : "Musical, theatrical, and film-theatrical representations act, above all, on the viewer's or listener's subconscious. completely circumventing his protesting consciousness²⁷." (1926)

B. : "Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious²⁸." (1936)

On the the titles as quotations and footnotes:

V. : "In its specific weight and practical significance the intertitle in a genu-

ine film-object is just like the quotation about gold from Timon of Athens in Marx's analysis of money in Capital. Incidentally, for the most part these titles are precise quotations, which might stand for the text during the layout of a book²⁹." (1928)

B. : "The orthodox playwright's objection to the titles is that the dramatist ought to say everything that has to be said in the action……But this way of subordinating everything to a single idea — is something that the new school of palywriting must reject. Footnotes, and the habit of turning back in order to check a point, need to be introduced into play-writing too³⁰." (1931)

Slightly before Brecht, Vertov was using the notion of distanciation in his concept of kino-eye. Like the Brechtian alienation, Vertov's distanciation breaks down the identification mechanism and works against the illusionist effect, and turns the "intoxicated, bewitched public" that the film-drama created into a conscious and actively thinking audience. The main task of kino-eye distanciation is : (1) to encourage an viewing attitude that is analytical and to enable the audience/workers to understand the bourgeois structure of the world and the historical/economical process that is shown on the screen: (2) to create a critical audience that is resistant to the art-drama and ultimately block the development of the art-film that represents the bourgeois notion of reality.

Another significant parrallel between Bertov and Brecht is their insistance on the separation of the elements/functions. Brecht, calling for the radical separation of the elements, argues against the prevailing notion of fusion and unity of the elements that reinforces the dominant representation and encourages a passive viewing position:

…… so long as the arts are supposed to be "fused" together, various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere "feed" to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art …… *words, music and setting must become more independent of one another*³¹. (emphasis by Brecht)

Like Brecht who argued against the dominant aesthetic notion of the dramatic unity (that the elements of the art should be united and integrated), Vertov was also aware of the ideological implications of the unitary homogeneous construction of the world, and called for the separation and the independent functioning of the elements: "Once more let us agree: the eye and the ear. The ear does not spy, the eye does not eaves-

drop. Separation of function/Radio-ear — the montage 'I hear!'/kino-eye — the montage 'I see!'"³²

Vertov's refusal to see one element of the film-object (the visual) as the dominant over the other can be recognized in the way he describes his sound film as the "radio-eye" film. Vertov, who was committed to showing the invisible as well as the visible, intended to do the same to the audible and inaudible. Vertov's radio-eye works against the representation where the "I see" is the dominant factor of construction, and criticizes the prevailing ideology's tendency to place the sense of the eye in the center of the world. In "Technology and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field," Jean-Louis Comolli writes about "the dominant ideology of the visible" which is the basic conception of the established system:

The image produced by the camera could not fail to confirm and reinforce "the code of specular vision that is defined by renaissance humanism" that places the human eye at the center of the system of representation, that centralization which simultaneously obstructs all other systems of representation, assuring the domination of eye over all the other organs of sense and puts the eye (the subject) in the place of the divine.³³

One can see Vertov's concern with every element of filmmaking as a critique of the domination of the camera that perpetuates the dominant ideology of the visible. In *The Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov challenges the existing film language that reinforces "the hegemony of the eye"³⁴ on two levels: first, by showing the supposedly invisible part of life—the camera, camera man, and the shooting process—on the screen, he criticizes the domination of the visible, and secondly, by showing the "invisible part (technique) of filmmaking"—the editing process, he challenges the domination of the camera over other instruments of filmmaking. In *The Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov ventured into a new realm of cinematic representation by demystifying the process of filmmaking itself.

Comolli in his essay argues that "the materialist history of the cinema must bring out ideological heritage of the camera and ideological investments that have been made in the camera"³⁵. Vertov is a theorist/filmmaker who was fully aware of the ideological problems of film technology that was "invented at a time when there was no single country in which capital was not in power"³⁶ and of the way bourgeoisie constructed and established a cinematic representation which aimed to protect its own culture and

class. He knew that the film technique was never “innocent” or ideologically neutral; he understood that the camera only grasped the apparent truth of the dominant ideology. Realizing the ideological problem of the cinema, what Vertov tried to do is to challenge every notion of dominant ideology that was constructed and built with/in the film technique/technology in the course of history and to decode the mystification both of the real life and of the film.

In his 1958 essay, “About Love for the Living Person,” Vertov describes *The Man with a Movie Camera* as a film “that begets films” and claims that “films of this sort do not pass without leaving a trace, for one’s self, or for others. They are as essential as a pledge of future victories³⁷.” This statement, Vertov’s own evaluation of his most controversial and influential film, couldn’t turn out to be more precise or correct. *The Man with a Movie Camera* (in which Vertov carried out his insistence on making a film that is “correct in ideology and in technique³⁸” in a most radical manner), more than any other films by Vertov, speaks directly to the issues of contemporary film practice and theory, and indeed, it has begeted new films and filmmakers over the years. The films made by Dziga-Vertov Group, or even some other films Godard made before and after the period, are the direct descendents to this most innovative and experimental film by Vertov, in which he, with the radical reflexivity that rigidly interrogated the language of film, attempted to create a totally new cinema that fitted the revolutionary reality of the proletariat. Godard and his colleagues not only followed the path of Vertov’s avant-garde documentary, but also appropriated concrete methods of his political filmmaking. It is significant that some of this appropriation were done through the use of the Brechtian method of distanciation. Like Brecht who recognized the problem of representation and tried to politically displace it, Vertov saw the importance of the political action on the level of the signifiers, which enabled him to challenge the basic frameworks of bourgeois culture and in doing so, to transform the image of reality as well as the reality of that image-making.

Vertov’s persistent attack on the artistic drama and equally persistent claim for the socialist decoding of reality through the camera-eye echoes in the theory and practice of today’s political avant-garde cinema that aims to challenge the bourgeois reality and its on-going effort to create an alternative film language. In the context of contemporary film theory, it is now possible for Vertov to be appreciated as he really is, the most influential figure in the history of political cinema, and within that context, it

is important for us to recognize the real significance of his theory and practice and to understand the meaning of his impact on the political film practices over the years.

NOTES

1. Dziga Vertov, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien, *Kino-Eye: The writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 71.
2. Jean-Louis Comolli; Jean-Narhoni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," *Cahiers du Cinema*, Oct-Nov. 1969, reprinted in *Screen Reader*.
3. Ibid.
4. Sergei Eisenstein, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (New York: 1949), p. 43.
5. Vertov, p. 16.
6. Ibid., p. 18.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 21.
10. Jean-Louis Comolli, "Technology and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field," *Cahiers du Cinema*, No. 229 (May 1971), p. 4-15. trans. Christopher Williams.
11. Vertov, p. 41.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 40.
14. Ibid., p. 50.
15. Bertolt Brecht, ed. and trans. John Willett, *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Hethuen, 1964), p. 138.
16. Vertov, p. 49.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 50.
19. Ibid., p. 68.
20. Ibid., p. 62.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 48.
23. Ibid., p. 124.
24. Brecht, p. 192.
25. Vertov, p. 198.
26. Brecht, p. 137.
27. Vertov, p. 63.
28. Brecht, p. 63.

29. Vertov, p. 63.
30. Brecht, p. 44.
31. Ibid., p. 38.
32. Bertov, p. 18.
33. Comolli.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Vertov, p. 67.
37. Ibid., p. 155.
38. Ibid., p. 35.