Dziga Vertov and the Film of Money

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The spectacle is the other side of money: it is the general abstract equivalent of all commodities.
—Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle


The opening sequence in Dziga Vertov's 1929 film manifesto Man with a Movie Camera invites the audience into the theater. Magically, empty chairs fold open their seats, inviting us to sit. As we shall soon witness, the movie theater would be, for Vertov, the public sphere, a place for collective and democratic consciousness and hence democratic representation, and film would be the medium for such a possibility. The postulating of such

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a significant role for cinema during the 1920s correctly suggests that the twenties was a period of radical transformation in both the nature and the function of the image. For Vertov, film is the technology that will provide the utopian inspiration and practical means for the arrival of socialism. For those of us on the other side (historically speaking) of the Soviet experiment, Vertov’s film must take on a different significance. This significance is, in part, Vertov’s provisions for the groundwork of a political economy of the visual.

Before turning to the possibility of a political economy of the visual suggested by Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera*, let us first examine the film closely. The audience experiences a journey through a day in the life of the city (an assemblage of Moscow, Odessa, and Kiev), but a journey like no other—one made possible by the advent of cinema. This visual journey through the production and reproduction of social life is above all a way of seeing through matter.

Enabling the journey through the city’s self-production are a variety of cinematic techniques: acceleration, deceleration, double exposure, rapid montage, optical printing of single frames, shots of celluloid undergoing the editing process that are then intercut with that celluloid, and the use of still and mobile cameras. These techniques are regarded not as special effects but as necessary means for the representation of reality. In a technological extension of the senses, the new capacities of film are, in the cinema, fused to the eye, hence the name “kino-eye” or “film-eye.”1 Kino-eye marks a suturing of human and machine, of corporeality and industrialized perception. The organicity of machines, as well as the machinic organization of human beings, will be rendered in and as cinema.

Vertov uses the cinematic machine to assemble the movement of matter in such a way that this movement becomes precisely the consciousness of material relations. As Annette Michelson has suggested in her introduction to Vertov’s *Kino-Eye*, this journey through matter is the cinematic equivalent of *The German Ideology*. She deftly argues that in *Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov “take[s] or reinvent[s] *The German Ideology* as his text, for he situates the production of film in direct and telling juxtaposition to that other particular sector, the textile industry, which has for Marx and

Engels a status that is paradigmatic within the history of material production.” She continues: “Now it is Vertov’s positioning of film-as-production within the cyclical and parallel structure of his cinematic discourse and his insistence on the simultaneous and related revolutions of the wheels of industry and transportation and of the cranks and spindles of the filmmaking apparatus that establishes . . . the general relation of film production to other sectors of labor” (Vertov, xxxvii–xxxviii).

Using cinematic techniques to show myriad places and temporalities consecutively or even simultaneously in order to find “the resultant force amongst the million phenomena related to [a] given theme” (Vertov, 88), Vertov foregrounds the movie camera as the condition of possibility for the production of a new moment in the history of the understanding of social relations and thus for the production of a new moment in the history of social relations. The materiality of visuality achieves a form of self-consciousness. The kino-eye (machine-body) interface is posited as a site of production; therefore, perception and consciousness are as well. This understanding of cinema’s emergent role in the dialectic of social organization is a result of the extension of industrial processes to the senses—an implicit development of Marx’s labor theory of value as a theory of montage. For Vertov, “montage means organizing film fragments (shots) into a film-object” (Vertov, 88); moreover, for him and for other Soviet filmmakers of his time, the consciousness characteristic of montage is the consciousness endemic to modernity’s assemblage process, from the assembly line to constructivism.² Through the rationalization, routinization, and standardization of certain aspects of industrial production, montage achieves new orders of particularity and expressivity in the visual. Montage as fragmentation and montage as the connecting of fragments are at once the condition of modern life and the condition for the production of meaning in modern life. In short, all objects, from trains to concepts, are combined and combining; they join function and expression in a manner realized as cinema. For this reason, Vertov represents both film technology and montage itself (what he theorized as “the interval”)—the concrete and abstract machines of cinema—as on a developmental/conceptual continuum with other productive technologies and operations of the period.³ Cinema is seen as an extension and

². For Vertov, all aspects of cinematic decision fell under the sway of montage: “Every kino-eye production is subject to montage from the moment the theme is chosen until the film’s release in its completed form. In other words, it is edited during the entire process of film production” (Vertov, 88).

³. The interval, a term derived from music that specifies the space/time between notes
indeed as a completion of the general logic of socio-industrial production. The cinematicity of production in general is realized as cinema.

The structure of *Man with a Movie Camera* is on one level very simple. However, the film’s articulation of the structure and function of the image is extraordinarily complex. The simple structure of *Man with a Movie Camera*, then, is as follows: Bracketed at the beginning by the images of the empty theater, and at the end by shots of the theater, now full, in which an audience watches the same film that we have been watching, *Man with a Movie Camera* begins in the morning with waking up, moves on to the working day, and then to re-creation. By depicting a day in the life of the city framed by the experience of cinema—made conscious by the experience of cinema—it announces the new role of cinema in society. Cinema is the becoming self-conscious of social relations—literally, the relations of production.

Although the theoretical sophistication and historico-materiality visible in the images put forth in the work of Vertov will, after Vertov, disappear from easy imaginal legibility by fading back into the unthought of the image, the terrain of production that Vertov stakes out for the image will not disappear. However, the critical theory of the image as historico-material mediation will disappear, that is, become unconscious (become the Unconscious), despite the intensification of the image’s historico-material effects.4

4. In “The Unconscious of the Unconscious” (unpublished manuscript), I argue that the unconscious is structured like a language because it is the historical result of language interrupted by images. The basic operative model for the unconscious, which according to Lacan emerges through the structure of the gap or cut, is montage. My reading of Lacan argues not only that the objet a is an image but that Lacan derives the very structure of the symbolic from the speculaty model that emerges from his consideration of this image. Furthermore, his images for the unconscious, which ought to be psychoanalyzed, are, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, most often image machines of one form or another (paintings, cameras, screens, etc.). The argument, in brief: Psychoanalytic discourse emerges simultaneously with the cinema (Freud, Auguste and Louis Lumière)—ambient (mechanically produced) images induce a crisis in the function of language, and the unconscious of the unconscious is cinema—a technological apparatus at humanity’s core.
Because film is understood by Vertov as being on a technological continuum with the rest of industrial society and the means in which a society at a certain level of development achieves a higher level of self-articulation, *Man with a Movie Camera* is necessarily about its own conditions of production. During the production of a day, the camera draws analogies between the actions of the individual, the city, and its own operation. Indeed, the parallels among tools and structures operating in different social formations or utilized at different levels or moments in the production process (for example, the train wheels, the wheels of industry and of the great weaving machines, and the film crank of the camera) are less analogies than particular instantiations or embodiments of abstract industrial possibilities. The parallels drawn between cinematic production and social production are extensions of the forms of social production into the visual field. They mark the abstraction and intellectualization of a social practice—a making of the senses theoretical. A procedure or a tool is not just a dead thing but a form of consciousness with numerous possibilities and applications. “For even where the mind is tied to matter, as in tools, works of art and books, it is never identical with that part of them that is perceptible to our senses. The mind lives in them in a hardly definable potential form which the individual consciousness is able to actualize. Objective culture is the historical presentation or more or less perfect condensation of an objectively valid truth which is reproduced by our cognition." Vertov’s cinema makes objective culture (material practices) cognitive in order that society can achieve its higher (democratic) autopoiesis.

Vertovian cinema releases what Georg Simmel sees as the condensed accretion of historical cognition in matter. This cinema provides cognitive enrichment of “an objectively valid truth.” All the tools and operations represented in *Man with a Movie Camera* are embodied structures produced and producing at a particular moment in social and technological development. They all occupy various niches in the cycle of production, and all are necessary for, on the one hand (as production), the objectification of human beings in their materials and, on the other hand (as cinema), the subjective understanding of this social process as such. Cinema is the fusion of the objective and subjective dimensions of production. The film shows that the same technologies are at work at all levels of society and that, at each level, activity can simultaneously be cognition. The levels pre-

sented may be distinguished as those that directly involve the production of society as a whole (s), the individual (i), and consciousness (c). Each of these different levels of production embodies forms of movement, that is, patterns of repetition and circulation, that are repeated throughout these levels of social production. Because these levels are all on a continuum, “the blade,” for example, functioning as an ax (s), a razor (i), and a film splicer (c), or “the wheel,” functioning as a train (s), an automobile (i), and the crank of the camera (c), indexes particular technological forms (cutting and rolling) in multiple applications that characterize production in this industrial period. Thus, “the cut” and “spatiotemporal translation” are at once abstract and historical forms, themselves the accretions of the inventive labor and consciousness of humanity. The similar forms of tools and procedures shown in operation at all levels of society establish not merely the interrelationship of different undertakings to one another but also the historicity and collective aspect of these undertakings.

By showing that particular technological forms (such as the machine-driven wheel) run through all aspects of industrial society, *Man with a Movie Camera* countermands the fragmentation and reification that is ordinarily the immediate experience of the individual alienated in the workplace. The abstract form is utilized in specific contexts by specific people. Vertov (and the viewer) builds the abstraction from the specifics, and then the abstractions inform the specifics. This collective creation of an image of society is not accomplished all at once but is painstakingly built by passing through different moments of the socius, different realms of human activity separate in place and time. This image recapitulates and extends individual and historical learning processes while dramatizing the possibilities of their synthesis. The filmic result is an extraordinary vision of integration in the complex and finely tuned music of collective life. The interdependence of each event on all is at once made present and historical. The making of all things, from cloth to knowledge to history, appears as the integrated collective activity it is in practice.

In one crescendo of this visual symphony, an aerial shot of a city plaza shows in fast motion the movement of thousands of pedestrians, streetcars, bicycles, automobiles, and horse-drawn carts. Extraordinarily, despite the speed and intensity of modern circulation, there are no collisions. Against all odds, the city is a coordinated and functioning organism. Vertov takes the movie camera as an essential element of future coordinations because social complexity is intelligibly resolved by cinema. Though the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat for which Vertov worked
never materialized, he saw the “organization of the visible world” (Vertov, 72) as its precondition. In ways that escaped him, but that did not entirely escape Stalin, Hitler, or, for that matter, Ted Turner and Bill Gates, the organization of the visual world would be decisive.6

At the climactic moment of the visual understanding of teeming urban activity mentioned above, Vertov freezes a frame and, in effect, presents us with a still of the frenetic city. This still, like the others in the film (the arrested galloping horse, for example), announces not only the difference between still photography and cinema but also the difference between reification and a vision of process, that is, vision as process. Through cinema, the frozen products of photography (and of pre-Marxist societies) are made eloquent. They speak their own process and complexity, revealing themselves as assemblages of social relationships ordinarily laminated by reification. In taking practical activity as thought, Vertov shows the integration of every aspect of society into this frenzied but rational circulation of people, images, and objects. He depicts processes as diverse as haircuts, mining, fire fighting, birth, marriage, divorce, death, cigarette packing, cloth spinning, and athletic endeavor. The common theme, however, is the collectivity in all its interdependent and productive complexity—and the possibility of the collectivity seeing itself. This is why, when the photograph of the crowd is reanimated—that is, allowed to flow again in time—Vertov uses optical printing to split the image in two. In the cinema, the metropolis faces itself. The consciousness of the city emerges here because the eye circulates through the city’s very materiality.

6. “Of course, we do not want to underestimate film as a great and penetrating mass art, but it must also serve primarily as entertainment. . . . Therefore, entertainment cannot be merely on the fringe of public affairs, and cannot be neglected by the political leadership. . . . In this connection, film is one of the most valuable ingredients in utilizing the little time, aside from work, that is left to each German to renew his spiritual strengths. . . . Beyond these considerations, however, modern-day film is a foremost national instructional tool. In its influence, it can almost be compared with elementary school. . . . Film . . . continuously influences and educates adults and mature people on a national level. That is why the state cannot ignore the inherently tremendous possibilities” (“Film as Teacher: Goebbels’ Speech for the Opening of the Film Project of the Hitler Youth,” trans. Richard S. and Gerda Geehr. Film and History 14, no. 2 (May 1984): 37–38). Goebbels’s description of the pedagogical value of visual media for the infantalized masses, along with that of the occupation of excess or leisure time for the purposes of spiritual renewal coupled to state hegemony, points to the value-producing character of the image underpinning the existence of any of the media magnates mentioned above.

“Kino-Eye,” according to Vertov, is “the documentary cinematic decoding of both the visible world and that which is invisible to the naked eye” (Vertov, 87). The manifesto from which this phrase is drawn has affinities with the filmic aspirations—inspired in part by Vertov—in the surgical cinema discussed by Walter Benjamin.7 “Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended.” Benjamin continues, “The camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and lifttings . . . its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to an unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.”8 For Vertov, the unconscious of objects that can be revealed optically is the relations of production. Political economy, as a set of necessarily unthought relations, is the unconscious of the objective world of capital. Like the political economist, the psychoanalyst, and the author in modernist literature, the camera breaks apart the objective world and enters into it in order to bring forth the repressed or the unconscious elements and thereby bring them to the level of consciousness. The objective world is revealed as frozen subjectivity; it is seen to be composed of historically sedimented, subjective practices and activated by subjective application. Thus, as Benjamin notes, “By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieu under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action.”9 With Benjamin, Vertov’s film theory

8. Benjamin describes cinema in a way that, for me, always brings James Joyce’s Ulysses to mind. See Benjamin, Illuminations, 236–37.
utilizes scientific precision and “the dynamite of the tenth of a second” in an effort to liquidate the aura or, what in mass production will become the fetish character that accompanies objects in bourgeois society. 10

In a series of observations that corroborate both Vertov’s “communist decoding of reality” and Georg Lukács’s reification theory, Simmel shows in *The Philosophy of Money* that the transformation noted by Benjamin in aesthetic objects pertains, under mechanical reproduction, to objects in general.

The sense of being oppressed by the externalities of modern life is not only the consequence but also the cause of the fact that they confront us as autonomous objects. What is distressing is that we are basically indifferent to those numerous objects that swarm around us, and this is for reasons specific to a money economy: their impersonal origins and easy replaceability. The fact that large industrial concerns are the breeding ground for socialist ideas is due not only to the social conditions of the workers, but also to the objective quality of their products. Modern man is so surrounded by nothing but impersonal objects that he becomes more and more conditioned into accepting the idea of an anti-individualistic social order—though, of course, he may also oppose it. Cultural objects increasingly evolve into an interconnected enclosed world that has increasingly fewer points at which the subjective soul can interpose its will and feelings. 11

For Marx, the social conditions of wage workers and the objective quality of their products are not two distinct features of the social; rather, they follow one from the other in alienated labor—impersonal objects are so because they embody workers’ severed, that is, alienated, subjectivity, or labor-time, which then confronts workers as a power over them, as something alien. 12 Simmel seems to consider reification and the anti-individualistic character of socialism as being of a piece—not a contradiction but a confirmation—of

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10. I develop a theory of the relation between aura, commodity fetishism, and visual circulation under capitalism in more detail in “Cinema, Capital of the Twentieth Century,” *Postmodern Culture* 4, no. 3 (May 1994), available at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/toc/pmcv004.html#v004.3.


12. “If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, this can only be because it belongs to some other man than the worker. If the worker's activity is a torment to him, to another it must be delight and his life's joy” (see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker [New York: Norton, 1978], 78).
the autonomy of objects and thus seems to find in the relation between the social conditions of wage workers and the objective quality of their products an inexorable condition rather than a legitimate scene of contestation. Nonetheless, as a phenomenologist of money, he provides a useful account of the character of objects flowing in capital. Vertov works to combine the idea of an anti-individualistic social order with an increase in the number of “points at which the subjective soul can interpose its will and feelings” and can therefore intervene in the “immense and unexpected field of action” opened up by cinema. The interval, which is the negative space between the montage fragments, emphasizes not the shock or the conflict, as in Sergei M. Eisenstein’s “montage of attractions,” but the connections—call it a montage of abstractions. This unconscious scene of formation, emerging through the structure of the gap Vertov calls the interval, is made of connections that dismantle the phenomenological (reificatory) effects of capital circulation and create a new relation to the social product at once collective and personal. The objectively repressed content of social interaction appears. To counter the mediation of objects by money, cinema endeavors to remediate their relations.

In positioning cinema as that which remediates social relations, the image is posited as a necessary moment in the circulation of social materials (though not yet as a relation of production). Just as Vertov allows concrete material practices to become modes of cognition through a repetition of instances (the concept emerges as the link between two distinct processes), the concept of the social totality appears as the summation of the intervals between the various social moments. “Totality” posits the connective human tissue in object(ive) relations in a way not visible when viewing the circulation of objects from the standpoint of money. This central point suggests that Vertovian cinema works both with and against money. Man with a Movie Camera emerges directly out of industrial technologies and takes industrial modes of operation as a means as well as an end for expression. In this sense, the film is like money—an eloquent, highly nuanced, highly differentiated, multivalent, organizing form for giving expression to the forces of social mediation that develop out of capitalist industrialization. And yet Vertovian cinema works against money; it is a strategy of remediation.

13. “What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of ‘Society’ as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual is the social being” (Marx-Engels Reader, 86).

14. Simmel, Philosophy of Money, 460.

15. Benjamin, Illuminations, 236.
Although Vertovian cinema makes explicit the (world-historical) transformation of the status of objects (their becoming-image) and articulates what we can begin to discern as the commodity structure of the image, the affect of circulation conferred on objects by Vertovian cinema precisely opposes the effect of circulation that advances commodity reification. The presentation of the consciousness of matter, a consciousness that is lost to the worker/consumer in alienated production, constitutes Vertov’s dialectics of seeing. Under capital, the human processing that constitutes an object is sealed off by the sheen of the commodity-form. By unpacking the object and revealing it as an assemblage of individuated processes, the subjectivity impacted in its form comes to life. This analysis is the unique content of Vertov’s phrase “I see.” Vertov discovers an “art” in which there is no irresolvable contradiction between technology and the body, materiality and consciousness, base and superstructure. Instead, these generally opposing moments are conceived by him as nodes in a coextensive cybernetic system that finally, through full creative utilization, can be made self-conscious. The cinema represents a dialectical convergence of men and machines—a materialization of thought. By making social practice cognitive, cinema might oppose the logic of reification by creating a circulatory form alongside capital circulation. Vertov shows humanity on a continuum with mechanization—machines are human, the historical product of human sensuous labor, and potentially function in accord with, rather than in contradiction to, human potentiality. Vision of the kind Vertov produces, via the cinema of kino-eye, registers and results from the flow of industrial production/circulation, yet opposes its capital logic. Thus kino-eye locks vision into a struggle with capital over the phenomenological appearance of the commodity. It is precisely here, in the field of objective appearance, that revolutionary cinema images its combat with capital. And it is precisely in the mediate, the sensual, and predominantly the visual that this struggle is waged most intently.


17. “Kino-eye plunges into the seeming chaos of life to find in life itself the response to an assigned theme. To find the resultant force amongst the million phenomena related to the given theme. To edit; to wrest, through the camera, whatever is most typical, most useful, from life; to organize the film pieces wrested from life into a meaningful rhythmic visual order, a meaningful visual phrase, an essence of ‘I see’” (Vertov, 88).

18. In *Man with a Movie Camera*, consciousness can no longer maintain capital’s institutionalized division between mental and manual labor, nor, as Marx acerbically quipped
Vertov attempts to demystify the commodity by showing the social relations embedded in the reified object. Consequently, \textit{the relations of production are shown to be internal to the image}. Images are consequences of the development of the relations of production and are constituted precisely by passing through these relations. Though these relations are explicitly \textit{visible} in the film of Vertov (images are assembled like commodities and appear as processes), they nonetheless \textit{inhere} in other kinds of cinema \textit{in which these relations again become invisible}. What we learn from Vertov is that \textit{the image is constituted like an object}—it is assembled piece by piece like a commodity moving through the intervals of production—and it is a (technological and economic) development of the relations of production.

Within the space of capital logic, the social object takes on the commodity form. It is constituted as a use-value and an exchange-value, and exhibits a fetish character that is derived in part from this internal contradiction manifest as its indifference to us, its power over us—its autonomous excess as exchange-value and its irreducibility as a signifier of our general relation to social production. In a capitalist social space in which objects circulate as commodities, images exhibit precisely these same properties.\textsuperscript{19} The task is to show why. Though Vertov’s images do not exactly exist with the characteristics of commodities—since they induce a (self-)consciousness of existing practice—the endeavor to de-reify the commodity necessarily reveals the general commodity-structure of the image. Vertov articulates from a Marxist standpoint an implicit relationship between images and objects under late capital, a relationship that, like the primal scene, does not have to be witnessed in order to be deduced. In capital, the object and the image, both resulting from the relations of mechanical reproduction

\footnotesize{in \textit{The German Ideology}, “flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice” (\textit{Marx-Engels Reader}, 159). Consciousness is \textit{literally} consciousness of existing practice and sees itself as such. Consciousness recognizes itself as at once produced by social conditions and in the process of producing them. Mental and manual labor fold into one another and are, in the last instance, indistinguishable—this is an ethic as well as an aesthetic. Thus, Vertov’s phrase “man with a movie camera” expresses in the concrete reality portrayed by the film the abstract idea of the potentiality of humanity with a movie camera.}

\textsuperscript{19} Unless, perhaps, they relentlessly endeavor to decode the conditions of their own formation, but even then they may still retain their fetish character. Do the images of Jean-Luc Godard, for example, which do indeed try incessantly to decode the conditions of their own formation in a historical moment quite different from Vertov’s, avoid the fetish, the seduction of the commodity? Perhaps only in his latest: the unbelievably boring yet fantastic \textit{Historie(s) du Cinema}. 

and the affective dimensions thereof, are on a convergence course. The image as a social relation is a direct consequence of advances in industrial production. At present, the object has a tendency to become the image (think, for example, of a Mercedes-Benz), and the image, assembled like a commodity, elaborates and intensifies the character of the commodified object, taking on and indeed often surpassing the inductive agency of conventional material objects. I will call these emergent forms image-objects, object-images, or image/commodities, depending on which aspect of these circulating entities is to be emphasized in a given situation.

To grasp how deeply the logic of production infuses objects and images, recall that, in Man with a Movie Camera, perception’s journey circulates through and is made possible by the material and technological resources of a particular historical juncture. Objects and images are formed by the same means. Vertov’s trains, with their wheels, cranks, and tracks, are understood to be at once assembled by a society from and for its own conditions, and to embody the same technology (both abstract and concrete) as that of cinema, with its corresponding gears, cranks, and perforated film. The image runs through the sprockets as the train runs through the track. Each functions as a sign of the other. Both are objects and images simultaneously; both are media. However, cinema is the higher media form here because, like money, it has the greater capacity (greater even than trains) to put all objects in circulation.\(^{20}\) With its capacity for self-consciousness in the hands of Vertov, but more importantly because of its capacity to instrumentally induce consciousness by converting industrial process to sensory affect, cinema is the greater mobilizing force.


Vertov’s most important film, when read as an analysis of the composition and a critique of the phenomenology of the image, stands as one of the intellectual triumphs of the twentieth century. A political economy of the spectacle must show its achievements and limits.

According to Marx, “Each form of production produces its own legal relations, forms of government, etc.” In the Vertovian dialectic, the production of consciousness through kino-eye was predicted to have its effects on these realms.

One of the revolutionary aspects of Man with a Movie Camera is that, in the film’s construction of an image of social life, concrete social relations take on an abstract significance because of their dialectical presentation; particular moments in social life and social production take on a definite relationship to the totality of social production. Each shot in Vertov has a literal and an abstract dimension; it is a sign of itself (one of the various “film-facts”), and it signifies a moment in the totality of social production. This is why, for Vertov, it is not the montage fragments themselves that alone carry the significance of a particular shot but the spaces between the fragments, the abstract links. “Intervals (the transition from one movement to another) are the material, the elements of the art of movement, and by no means the movements themselves. It is they (the intervals) which draw the movement to a kinetic resolution” (Vertov, 8). The question of the intervals between movements here is precisely the question of the circulation of production, the connective tissue of each filmed instance that cumulatively constitutes the totality of social relations. It is the image in circulation that gives the image its dual character, its specific content, and its general significance, or, to make a point that I shall return to, its use-value and its exchange-value.

The quintessential image of the Vertovian manifesto, the seeing eye reflected in the camera lens and projected on the screen, is a dialectical image that contains a vision of the conjunction of humanity and the machine in a circulatory system that produces consciousness precisely by passing through materiality. This image presupposes the history of humanity. It is the intervals between the eye and the camera, and between the camera and the screen—society in its entirety—that Vertov wishes to account for. Each journey through a particular strand of social production to the screen of consciousness, like the threads teased out on the film’s great spinning machines, can be woven into the production of the social fab-

ric. Society becomes visible as materialized subjectivity. At the broadest level, this analysis of materialized subjectivity is an investigation into the conditions of possibility of cinema and for the cinematic production of the future.

For Vertov, showing objects and states as processes creates sites of potential action. He depicts all moments of social production as both part of a conscious process and part of a process becoming conscious. The consciousness specific to a particular process—say, the packing of cigarettes—is, through montage, put in relation to other processes, such as the switching of phone lines or of train tracks. The glaze of the commodity form of cigarettes, media, transport, and so forth is revealed to be the hidden integration of bodies and machines—an amalgamation of labor, consciousness, and materials. In Vertov, we see the labor in the object as we see the labor in the image, because we are made aware of the process of integration, the integral of the commodity and its calculus. Thus are previously individualized consciousnesses—the people who work on their products and who formerly disappeared into them, as well as the people who enjoy the use of aspects of the social product—seen in the theater by all in their collective interdependence.

In the unprecedented technology of cinematic representation lies, for Vertov, the potential solution to the problem of self-conscious democracy. Since the films were meant to be renewed every day (Vertov envisioned teams and resources that would multiply his efforts a hundredfold—quite a different concept of the evening news), they were intended to achieve a new order of auto-poiesis, the emerging Soviet's form of self-consciousness. Properly utilized, cinema was, for Vertov, the perceptual apparatus that extended the range of the senses through space and time. Though in a way quite different from his primary competitor, Eisenstein, who believed that

23. "The main and essential thing is:
  “The sensory exploration of the world through film.
  “We therefore take as the point of departure the use of the camera as a kino-eye, more perfect than the human eye, for the exploration of the chaos of visual phenomena that fills space.
  “The kino-eye lives and moves in time and space; it gathers and records impressions in a manner wholly different from that of the human eye. The position of our bodies while observing or our perception of a certain number of features of a visual phenomenon in a given instant are by no means obligatory limitations for the camera which, since it is perfected, perceives more and better.
  “We cannot improve the making of our eyes, but we can endlessly perfect the camera" (Vertov, 14–15).
cinema was “the organisation of the audience through organised material,” cinema was, for Vertov, “the organization of the visible world” (Vertov, 72). Eisenstein had an avant-gardist approach to social organization, in which ideology outpaced materiality, while Vertov worked from the truth told by materials. By means of the historico-technological extension of the senses,


This is one of the primary differences between Vertov and Eisenstein: Vertov’s assemblages are analyses that leave open the question of society for its members—the films were not to be once and for all but were to be continually renewed. Human activity might pass through other channels and impact the image. Though Eisenstein also made films for occasions, his were machines designed to impel the audience in a particular and precisely calculated direction. In short, Vertov utilized the materiality of machines to treat the viewer like a subject, while Eisenstein utilized the materiality of subjectivity to treat the viewer like a (Pavlovian) machine.

25. To portray Vertov and Eisenstein as diametrical opposites may be overstating the case somewhat. If one reads through the film theory of Eisenstein and Vertov, proceeding year by year, their constant influence and competition with each other becomes quite legible. Indeed, each takes several occasions to publicly denigrate the other while borrowing some of the other’s best ideas. While there can be little doubt that Eisenstein, as a writer at least, was the more massive intellect, he borrowed often from Vertov, on occasion presenting a Vertovian idea as his own. The opposite may be seen in Vertov’s rearticulation of the “theory of intervals” in the 1929 “From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye” (Vertov, 85–92), which shares much with Eisenstein’s far more highly articulated 1929 essay, “Beyond the Shot” (Eisenstein, Selected Works, 138–50). Though Vertov takes pains to state that the theory of the interval was first put forward in 1919, he also refers to “the mutual attractions and repulsions of shots” (Vertov, 91), language that was absent in the earlier version. Similar though the theories of montage put forth by Vertov and Eisenstein may at times seem, fundamental differences necessarily exist, as can be gleaned directly from the most obvious implications of their theoretical musings: the films. Though Vertov believes that a montage fragment is a “film fact,” while Eisenstein claims that a fragment “has in itself no reality at all” (Sergei M. Eisenstein, “The Dramaturgy of Film Form,” in Selected Works, 178), their differences necessarily extend beyond their conceptualization of the building blocks to the manner in which they produce concepts. To be a bit simple-minded, Eisenstein believed that the concept must be induced by the collision and hence was limited only by the filmmaker’s imagination for juxtaposition, hence his filmic practice was inductive. Vertov, on the other hand, believed that it was the job of the filmmaker to derive the resultant vector of a given theme, “to find amid all these mutual reactions, these mutual attractions and repulsions of shots, the most expedient ‘itinerary’ for the eye of the viewer, to reduce this multitude of ‘intervals’ (the movements between shots) to a simple visual equation, a visual formula expressing the basic theme of the film-object in the best way: such is the most important and difficult task of the author-editor” (Vertov, 91). Hence, Vertov’s filmic projects were primarily deductive.
society, for Vertov, became potentially transparent. In the Vertovian logic, such transparency was itself the necessary instrument of democratic social action.

Without going into the insidious side of transparency, let me explore further the utopian strains of Vertov’s work in the endeavor of seeing. Vertov’s work sets out to demonstrate that each moment of the real is informed by a logic of totality that encompasses all moments of social existence. “Nothing is accidental,” writes Vertov. “Everything is explicable and governed by law” (Vertov, 287). The basic figure of this law is circulation. As noted, in Man with a Movie Camera, Vertov makes each image in the film both a signifier of its object (what he calls a “material document”) and a moment in the larger flux of totality (an “interval”). An alternative mediation between use-value (quality) and exchange-value (circulativity) induces

26. Vertov placed even higher hopes in the possibility of what we today call television: “The method of radio-broadcasting images, just recently invented, can bring us still closer in our cherished basic goal—to unite all the workers scattered over the earth through a single consciousness, a single bond, a single collective will in the battle for communism.

“This objective of ours we call kino-eye. The decoding of life as it is. Using facts to influence the workers’ consciousness” (Vertov, 49).

27. “FOUCAULT: I would say Bentham was the complement to Rousseau. What in fact was the Rousseauist dream that motivated many of the revolutionaries? It was the dream of a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts, the dream of there no longer existing any zones of darkness, zones established by the privileges of royal power or the prerogatives of some corporation, zones of disorder. It was the dream that each individual, whatever position he occupied, might be able to see the whole of society, that men’s hearts should communicate, their vision be unobstructed by obstacles, and that opinion of all reign over each. . . .

“Bentham is both that and the opposite. He poses the problem of visibility, but thinks of a visibility organised entirely around a dominating, overseeing gaze. He effects the project of a universal visibility which exists to serve a rigorous, meticulous power. Thus Bentham’s obsession, the technical idea of the exercise of an ‘all-seeing’ power, is grafted on to the great Rousseauist theme which is in some sense the lyrical note of the Revolution. The two things combine into a working whole, Rousseau’s lyricism and Bentham’s obsession. . . .

revolutionary consciousness. Here, the exchange-value system manifest in the abstraction of Vertov’s images has its gold standard in the concept of totality. It is the concept of totality that allows the spectral recuperation of capital’s fragments by the people. The film traces the complexly mediated multiple relationships of individuals to each other and to the totality of social life. The film makes individuality and social relations self-consciously dialectical by producing each visual moment (image) from an object or an objective relation. This objective relation is, in the last, abstract instance, exchange-value, the system of exchange-values that actively constitutes the totality of capital/society. The concept of totality is the specter of capital, its antithesis. Therefore, each object as an image becomes a medium, a mediator; that is, each object expresses its concrete (object) existence as well as its dynamic (and impacted) relations to totality. This is the dialectical materialism of the image, the (re)mediation of use-value and exchange-value, that, like other Marxisms before it, endeavors to remediate the very form of the commodity, meaning the relations that constitute capital itself.\(^{28}\)

Lukács, who could well have been commenting on Vertov’s visual destruction of reification, notes that the goal of Marxism in relation to quotidian reality

is not a condition which can be happily forgotten in the stress of daily life and recalled only in Sunday sermons as a stirring contrast to workaday cares. Nor is it a “duty,” an “idea” designed to regulate the “real” process. The ultimate goal is rather that relation to the totality (to the whole of society seen as a process), through which every aspect of the struggle acquires its revolutionary significance. This relation informs every aspect in its simple and sober ordinariness, but only consciousness makes it real and so confers reality on the day-to-day struggle by manifesting its relation to the whole. Thus it [consciousness] elevates mere existence to reality.\(^{29}\)

28. Though for Vertov social relations available for remediation meant primarily orthodox notions of relations of production and the consciousness thereof, there was, in theory, no limit to the kinds of relations that could have been represented. Decades later, Godard’s own Dziga Vertov group would dismantle conceptions concerned with the unity of bodies, of bodies and voice, of narrative, of images, and of desire—all cinematic conventions that develop in the imaginary and function in art and life as relations of production. For polemical purposes, one might even say that it was Vertov’s failure to develop a Marxist theory of sexuality (desire without fetishes?)—and hence of the unconscious—that predestined the general failure of his orthodoxy.

The interval, as the consciousness that "elevates mere existence to reality," utilizes the dialectical structure of the commodity in order to make the commodity self-conscious.

In Vertov's words, "Man with a Movie Camera represents not only a practical result; it is, as well, a theoretical manifestation on the screen" (Vertov, 83). In Vertov, dialectical consciousness is achieved through vision: The eye becomes theoretical. Vertov situates his camera along the lines of sight specified by Marx: "The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can be verified in an empirical way." The abstraction made in the imagination of Vertov's viewers is a dialectical vision of the dialectical structure of the commodity.

The relation between the production of the image (of consciousness) and social production in general will take on greater importance for us as we deepen our exploration of the relationship between the image and the commodity. Though dialectical vision will not become de rigueur, the image as a media byte with one time in its content and one time in global circulation will grow to express nondialectical, yet nonetheless instrumental, affects of totality (the world-system). These cinematic affects remain dialectically functional (for capital) though not dialectically perceived (for socialism). However, it is apparent that in the age of mechanical reproduction there occurs a confluence in the techniques for the production of the image and the object, and, furthermore, that all the social relations that inhere in the object also inhere in the image. Vertov's brilliant articulation of the relationship between the formation of the image and the formation of what will, despite his best efforts, remain the commodity foretells not the end of prehistory and the historical victory of communism but the emergence of new laws of exchange. The image in circulation will indeed carry the logic of exchange-value, but for capital.

30. Michelson uses a passage from The German Ideology as the epigraph to her introduction to Kino-Eye: "The supersession of private property is, therefore, the complete emancipation of all the human qualities and senses. It is such an emancipation because these qualities and senses have become human, from the subjective as well as the objective point of view. The eye has become a human eye when its object has become a human, social object, created by man and destined for him. The senses therefore become directly theoretical in practice" (xv).

Because the underpinnings of a historical phenomenon are often more easily grasped from the artifacts produced during its formation than from those produced during its more fully realized form, we may discern from Vertov, who was working in a society that was not yet fully capitalized and, in retrospect, undergoing the vertiginous process of modernization, that certain technology needed to be available before cinema could come into being. Also, it was not until capital circulation had developed to a certain point (both via technologies of circulation and as technologies in circulation) that cinema was possible as an abstraction (and as a calculus of abstraction). Before this moment in the developmental trajectory of capital, cinema’s particular form of movement and time had not yet arrived. It is well known that cinematic technology preexists the cinema. But just as the Roman steam engine (of little use in a precapitalist slave economy) was a mere mechanical curiosity until the industrial revolution, capital circulation (churning out ever more complex pathways under the sway of exchange) had to develop to a certain point—as an industrial form (routinized mass production) and as a visual phenomenon (fetishism)—before cinema was possible. Capital circulation is, in Gilles Deleuze’s vocabulary, the abstract machine of cinema; circulation itself develops cinema’s form of abstraction.

Likewise, Man with a Movie Camera demonstrates, in its resistance to the visual effects of capital circulation, through its decodification process, the fact that cinema is an extension of capital’s circulation. By filming various moments of production, Vertov shows that cinema, like capital, implies the coordination of nonsynchronous temporalities and the montage of space. In the present situation of multinational capital, modes of production in Latin America, Asia, and Africa are coordinated with those of the United States and Europe, despite the radically differing ways in which the local economies articulate space and modulate time. This is also true at the local or national level of the economy, where the coordination of temporalities becomes necessary for the coordination of labor in various factories, in agri-

culture, and in the production of crafts (each of which might be understood as groups of shots in the multiform fabric of the total film of capital). As Ernst Bloch eloquently describes the phenomenon of nonsynchronicity, “Not all people exist in the same Now.”33 Such nonsynchronicity does not necessarily posit a temporal continuum, that is, a necessary process of social evolution through various temporalities of increasing speed, but rather the introduction—in advanced societies—of a gear system for the differential coordination of various temporal speeds.

In Marx’s analysis of economics, this gear system is capital itself, or, rather, the circulation of money against exchange-value; in Vertov, it is film—the circulation of film against object codification. This parallel does not limit itself to the fact that in cinema different scenes are shot at different times, nor does it limit itself to the fact that temporal flow—what Andrey Tarkovsky later called “time-pressure”34—is different from scene to scene in Vertov and must be coordinated into a production that is the film. Rather, it can be generalized to read that film, at the level of form, is the most articulate iteration of the basic relations of nonsynchronicity and fragmentation that inhere in capitalist production. Cinema raises the montage of capital to a new level of expressivity. This is true of cinema qua technology and occurs precisely because the moving image arises out of the logic of capital circulation. As Vertov’s work eloquently reveals: (1) cinema arises out of industry and industrial processes; (2) in industrial society, the construction of the image recapitulates the construction of the object/commodity; (3) the confrontation among times running at different speeds is nowhere more directly expressed than in the cinema; (4) spatial contiguity can be manufactured; and (5) the resultant effects of the combinatory logic of matter in circulation include utopian affects. It is just such a battle with nonsynchronicity, along with a similar struggle over the contiguity of space, that engages both capital and Vertov. Vertov wages a battle with capital over the logistic question of how to organize the fragments of social life to produce a commodity, an image, a civilization.

If it is true that Man with a Movie Camera expresses the material relations with a camera that is “an eye in matter,”35 and that matter is in circulation, it is equally true that capital circulation is precisely the montage of

capital. The process of capital is itself cinematic. Material in an assembly-line process is transmogrified at each station: Materials pass through an editing process to become a car; money, in its endless exchange, takes on the form of the commodities it passes through. Capital as exchange-value passes through all things; in cinema, capital logic addresses the eye. Material and money circulate in an endless metamorphosis. This metamorphosis produces and is produced by the myriad temporalities, movements, objects, and now images of and for social production and reproduction. Capital, then, as abstract value with concrete instantiations, is the paradigm of cinema as abstract representation with particular images composing particular elements in particular films.

This idea, it should be noted, goes far beyond the fact that film, like capital, is itself a commodity that must circulate and be valorized through the extraction of surplus-value (from somewhere—it will be necessary to show from where). The cinematic image is a new technology of social production and, under capitalism, of exploitation (value-extraction). It also goes beyond the idea that film provides a return on investment in many separate instances spread out over space and time. Clearly, the returns given to cinema cannot only be money paid, given the interest in form and content taken in cinema by audiences, corporations, and the state. Although these latter two shadow institutions for securing concrete bodies for spectatorship presently lack an economic theory that explains their existence with respect to cinema, their effects are no doubt at the cutting edge of capitalist economics. The film, in some way or another, has been required to produce its own audiences, its own markets, and, explicitly in Soviet and Nazi cinema but implicitly in “free-market” cinema, the state. All the psychoanalytic, ideological, Third World, ethnic, feminist, and queer criticism of Hollywood testifies to the fact of the production of audiences, precisely through its interrogations and indictments of the role of film in the production of hegemony and, in some cases, of its role in the production of the resistance to hegemony. What films did (and continue to do) was to provide a vehicle, a cinematic industrial complex, through which workers, or, more precisely, spectators, could produce the practices of the socius and of the state both objectively and within themselves. Indeed, an increasingly precise coordination of interiority with the requisites of production is, from an economistic point of view the raison d’être of the cinema.

Cinema as an abstract figure, as a conceptual possibility, represents, for Vertov’s period, the concrete limit of the period’s ability to think its mode of production, that is, the unconscious limits of the period to figure the work-
nings of capital in the dynamics of its production process. *The conceptual figure of cinema was already the conceptual figure of capital.* The rise of commercial cinema means the subsumption of these conceptualizations by capital. In Vertov’s case, the film is at once analogous to capital circulation and alternative to it since it retains the trace of the flow of its objects in a manner ordinarily “known” only to capital itself and necessarily invisible to labor under capitalism. We see in Vertov the flow of capital from the standpoint of Marx. Put in vulgar terms that we will have to revise immediately, cinema in general is the superstructural form of basic global organization. A revision of this statement is necessary because, as Vertov’s cinema proves, cinema as a form of consciousness is simultaneously a material practice—the consciousness of material relations—that was to impact social-material organization. Material in organized motion has a visual effect; cinematic vision, however immaterial it may be in appearance, is a material practice with material effects. It depends for its very existence on the historical development of a complex material infrastructure. The abstract machine of capital drives itself through the visual field to become the abstract machine of cinema; cinema is the abstraction and intensification of the general socioeconomic process.

Cinema in its fully capitalized form moves capital through the two ostensibly distinct but dialectically related realms that have been hypostasized utilizing the false dichotomy “base and superstructure.” In Vertov, we apprehend directly that the movement of capital through the “base” *circulates* as consciousness in the “superstructure.” In other words, the circulation of capital in and as consciousness *is cinema.* This isomorphism of capital circulation as material and capital circulation as consciousness is no mere echo or analogy—it is the materialization of the consciousness of capital through an ostensibly immaterial, affective medium. The image is a cybernetic interface. Cinema as the organized flow of image/commodities means the productive coordination of human perception and material process.

In general, capital, at each moment in its circulation, is edited, that is, is made to take one route rather than another, and is constantly creating new pathways. Vertov makes perceptible the extension of the form of capital circulation to the visual arena. Thus, cinema as a potential set of new pathways through the senses must also be understood as an *extension* of the logistics of capital at once across space, through time, and into the sensorium.

These new pathways result in new commodities, new needs, and, of course, new images. They also produce multiple temporalities—times
running at different speeds—and different spatial conjunctures. In addition, they produce functional relationships to these disjunctive perceptual shocks, intensities, and spiritualities. Capital's orchestration of the relationships among space, time, images, and finally bodies, in a flexible yet systemic coordination of the productive movement of exchange-value, strives to reorganize and control the new capacities of technological bodies struggling against domination. This shift, in which all relations tend toward the cinematic, inaugurates the cinematic mode of production.

Vertov's choice to intervene directly in the dialectic, in the materiality of history, shows that the image has become a necessary site of regulation (and production) in the capitalized flow of value. Furthermore, the image—which is always moving, if at highly differentiated speeds—becomes the paradigmatic social relation. Consequently, capital, as the standpoint from which to interrogate, understand, or regulate human reproduction and world history, functions as the aperture/screen through/on which the machinations of human reproduction and world history become visible. With Vertov, capital as an analytic standpoint becomes the equivalent of the movie screen. In the circulating frame, all that is solid melts into air. Thus, we could say that Vertov grasps cinema as the standpoint of capital and assembles it dialectically, while cinema in general is becoming assembled from the standpoint of the capitalist.

Because I will have to defer the analysis of how value is transacted across the image (hypothesis: the image-commodity bypasses the direct mediation of money as wage in the extraction of necessary labor), the following claim cannot at this time be fully substantiated: The logistics of cinematic production (the production of society via cinema and cinematic technologies and effects) embodies the logistics of capitalist production but raises it to a higher level of abstraction; cinema is, in effect, the very form of late capital, the highest stage of capitalism (to date). Nonetheless, the productive dimensions of this assertion's general outlines are already visible. The present consideration of Vertov and of Man with a Movie Camera accounts only for the production and circulation of object-images, not explicitly for their productivity. A further account must discuss their valorization. As we know, Vertov failed; the images weren’t valorized. It is for this reason (kin-eye’s failure to reproduce its conditions of production) that the rest of my discussion here confines itself primarily to film and money rather than to cinema and capital.
5. Film:Money::Cinema:Capital. Film as Measure; Price as Proto-Image. Film as Medium of Exchange. Judgment of Wilhelm Wurzer’s “Filming.” Toward a Materialism of Dematerialization.

The mediation that occurs between commodity and commodity in Marx’s description is performed by money:

At first sight, circulation appears to be simply a never-ending process. The commodity is exchanged for money; money is exchanged for the commodity, and this is repeated ad infinitum. This constant renewal of an identical process does indeed constitute an essential feature of circulation. But on closer examination, it reveals other phenomena as well: the phenomena of closing the circle or the return of the point of departure into itself. The commodity is exchanged for money; money is exchanged for the commodity. So, commodity is exchanged for commodity, except that this exchange is a mediated one. (Grundrisse, 28:132)

The commodified contents of general cinematic circulation, however, are not, materially speaking, objects but images; the mediation between “objects” is between abstractions from objects. In Man with a Movie Camera, the mediation between the interval of image-commodity and image-commodity is film. It is the film frame (the screen) that allows the images to circulate; film is the money of cinema (and the frame is the unit). The affective dimensions of capital circulation are distilled and experienced in their most purified form in the cinema—in the enchanted registration of everything by money. This spectacularity, which is the mark of achievement in American films, is what Guy Debord refers to as “the epic poem” of the commodity.36

36. Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle (Detroit, Mich.: Black and Red, 1983), 66. That films can be bought for money, that is, made for money, should not deter us or cause us to think that film is somehow a lesser entity than money. Money can also buy factories, labor, and banks. One can buy money, debt, and other instruments of production with money. The question is: Can one buy money (and all that it implies) with cinema? The problem before us, then, is to find expression for the purchase film has on the material world. “Being the external, common medium and faculty for turning an image into reality and reality into a mere image (a faculty not springing from man as man or from human society as society), money transforms the real essential powers of man and nature into what are merely abstract conceits and therefore imperfections—into tormenting chimeras—just as it transforms real imperfections and chimeras—essential powers which are really impo-
That film is the money of cinema is true in at least two senses. First, *it posits objects as images*. This parallels Marx’s idea of the notional function of money, what he refers to as the first determination of money, “money as measure” (Grundrisse, 28:123). The frame seizes an object and transforms it into an image. But the mere existence of the frame marks, and indeed makes, the notional transformation of an object into an image without actually filming it. Consonant with Vertov’s kino-eye project, the frame becomes built into perception itself. Money also posits objects as images of themselves, as prices—the money-image of their exchange-value. As is well known, the fetishistic excess of the commodity, its alien allure, is a necessary component of this act. Price, then, appears as a proto-image—the abstracted silhouette of a commodity (Figure 1). In this way, both the film frame and money capture a ghost of the object—abstract, ethereal, and metaphysical, certainly, but nonetheless real for all that. Indeed, one could say that the specter of the object that results from traditional capital circulation (the tidal attractions of the exchange-values lurking in use-values) decrees that the object is already becoming an image, and that *cinema is immanent in the flow of objects existing in the field of exchange*. The circulation of industrial capital along with its perceptual pyrotechnics (objectification, fetishism) is the general form of cinema. The proprietorship that always earmarks exchange-value will become the perspective of the object: the Lacanian economy of the shot.

Second, not only does film posit objects as images, but it converts them into images; fetishistic capture induces a displaced flow. Once converted, *film allows these converted objects (images) to circulate*. This circulation corresponds to Marx’s second determination of money, “money as a means of circulation” (Grundrisse, 28:128) or money as a medium
of exchange. “For circulation, two things above all are necessary: firstly, the premise of commodities as prices; secondly, a circuit of exchanges, rather than isolated acts of exchange; a totality of exchanges in constant flow and taking place over the whole surface of society; a system of acts of exchange” (Grundrisse, 28:123). Here, with Vertov, we have, analogous to the premise of commodities as prices, the premise of objects as images (the whole project of kino-eye) and the effort to construct a viable circuit of exchanges. The “vanishing mediator”—in Vertov’s case, film, not money—subjects visual objects to the laws of cinematic exchange by abstracting them into the medium of exchange and putting them into circulation. The proprietorship of exchange-value is attacked because other relations of production are made visible. But it is the general case that the abstraction of things (qualities) as monetary quantity or as cinematic image introduces new orders of indeterminacy and flow.

This act of filming, which is already immanent in the logic of the circulation of commodities, is the historical condition of possibility for Wilhelm S. Wurzer’s claim, in his startling book Filming and Judgment, that “the entire history of metaphysics can be viewed as a genealogy of ‘filming’ in which reason ‘films’ the ground of all beings.” 37 Though Wurzer’s important contribution merits far more attention than I can give it here, I take it up in part because it will help me show that the cinematicity of capital circulation is an “invention” in no way confined to Vertov and that capital confers the cinematic process itself. My use of Wurzer here is also designed to raise questions about the trajectory he posits for consciousness.

The principal claim of Wurzer’s study is that it “inaugurates a reading of capital that opens an epoch, beyond the power of production, to a filming which judges freely” (Wurzer, 7). Despite the fact that I cannot remain with Wurzer in his Hegelian heights of Heideggerian rapture, in which filming becomes the absolute form of self-consciousness, exceeding the ground of subject and object precisely through a purported transcendence of the dialectic (the freedom from production), Wurzer’s accomplishments are exceedingly illuminating. I do not disagree with him that filming restructures what might be called the architectonics of reality, but I do argue that this restructuring emerges at the end of one epoch of capital expansion and inaugurates another. What he calls “filming” develops the relations for a shift

in the mode of production and in no way achieves a release from the global violence that undergirds its phenomena. For Wurzer,

Filming, as it is named here, is not disclosed in Leonardo da Vinci’s notion of camera obscura, nor in Thomas Edison’s invention of the first workable motion picture camera. Indeed, filming does not belong in the archives of cinema and detailed studies of filmmaking. A historical and cultural theory concerning the very possibility of filming would certainly include such studies and many other cinematographic considerations. But our focus in this investigation is to expose filming as a non-photologocentric mode of judgment which accounts for the postmodern interplay of Denken [thinking] and Einbildungskraft [imagination]. (Wurzer, 31)

Wurzer’s account is one that views filming as a historical tendency of consciousness. He continues:

In modern metaphysics, we encounter the beginning of this mode of thinking in Kant’s Critique of Judgment, in Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy, and, more recently, in Heidegger’s writings of the 1920s and 30s. From a genealogical perspective, we may also discover filming in the epistemic, ontologic, and aesthetic issues of a metaphysics of subjectivity. The hidden history of filming, however, goes back much further and may initially have been presented, somewhat negatively, in the configurations of Plato’s discourses on Eros in the Symposium. We can see that the question of filming is one that has not been raised explicitly with regard to a metaphysical text. In short, the history of philosophy, at least from Plato to Spinoza, has consistently repressed the notion of imaging and confined its importance to a logocentric view of reason. (Wurzer, 31–32)

Though I am in substantial agreement with this passage, I would like to suggest that logocentrism, which finds its concept only in the twentieth century, is itself built on the continuing exclusion of the rise of filming. The reason that the question of filming has not been raised in the manner that it is raised here by Wurzer is that political economy had not developed its impending cinematicity. The transhistorical elision of “filming,” suddenly grasped and revealed by Wurzer, is utterly unconceptualizable without the materiality and

technology, the camera obscuras and early film machines, he dismisses. Wurzer’s retroactive apprehension of thought freeing itself from reason and apprehended as cinema, or what he calls “filming,” does not involve the transcendence of dialectics but is itself, as “filming,” the phenomenological outcropping of a dialectical transformation. “Filming” is not a phenomenological shift, a new capacity of mind, brought into being by the striving of spirit for absolute self-consciousness under the sign of philosophy, nor can its significance be understood as the latest showpiece in some museum of the human intellect (however glorious) displaying a genealogy of concepts that finally transcends materiality, narrative, and reason itself; it is a historico-material displacement of the imagination, the extension of instrumental rationality into the visual. It is the increasing calculus of the image, bent on the rational organization of the imagination and necessary to the development of political economy through the intensification and elaboration of commodity fetishism. There are new affects, yes, but none is beyond the reach of History. The fact that, for Wurzer, the affectivity of cinema is not experienced as a dialectical shift in the structure of political economy tells us no more than the fact that, for most people, buying a Valentine’s Day card for a loved one does not feel like a critique of commodification and of the capitalist mode of production in its entirety.

Wurzer places filming in the metaphysical tradition and views it as the completion of the deconstructive project: “Filming thus deconstructs the dialectic empire in the genealogy of metaphysics. One can venture to say that it emerges in a philosophical discourse for which judgment is no longer under the spell of the identity of reason and ground, and in a time when judgment (Ur-teil) moves forward to a radically different terrain” (Wurzer, 2). This terrain is one of “radical disinterestedness” (Wurzer, 3). “Even in its withdrawal from dialectic, deconstruction cannot break out of the process of critique. So long as its mirror of reflection is unbreakable, it merely deflects from metaphysics. Filming, on the other hand, is the very shattering of the mirror. . . . Even the general text is erased as a new dynamics of power comes on the scene, a power which does not extend the hermeneutic desire of interpretation into a terrain of grafting one form of writing onto another” (Wurzer, 99). Wurzer is again correct in identifying the new order of abstraction he calls filming as the completion of the deconstructive project, but for the wrong reasons. Deconstruction’s slow dissolve into the filmic is not the epic migration of higher consciousness seeking freedom. Deconstruction itself must be historically grasped as a crisis in the subject-function and its medium, that is, language—a crisis induced by a new politico-economic
agent known as the image (and, it must be said, the antithesis of the image, which is the Third World). Like traditional society before it, the subject-form must be fragmented and redeployed selectively and instrumentally in contemporary political economy. Deconstruction is the linguistic registration of a profound shift in the visual, that is, the rise of the visual economy. It is the death throes of the domination of language, an echo within language of its historically achieved inadequation to the new organization of the Real by capitalized visual technologies. Despite the fact that Wurzer must perform just the type of linguistic grafting he criticizes deconstruction for to posit the terrain of filming, he makes his point: Filming exceeds dialectics and judges “capital as apparition” (Wurzer, 100).

With filming there commences a radical questioning of the dialectic script imposed upon capital by infra/superstructural modes of interpretation. Breaking with this tradition, filming undertakes to expose capital differently. One may venture to say that capital is a prolepsis of filming. *Prolepsis*, derived from the Greek words *pro* (“before”) and *lambanein* (“to take, to seize”), is an anticipatory movement which seizes representation before it (representation) imposes a metaphysical script upon time, a time that is to come (*Zukunft*). Capital, then, is a proleptic domain within filming, which disrupts the schematic power of images in order to release time from the imaginal. Breaking out of the genealogical space of continuity and discontinuity, capital sets the stage for a thinning out and fading of imaging, while simultaneously providing in advance the “promise” of a radically different time. In brief, capital “takes possession” of the gap subsequent to the filmic lapse and slippage of images. This postmodern seizure of a disjunctive space within imagination transposes imagination into filming, where filming’s transformative modes of judging open up ways of seeing untainted by the prosaic relations of our epoch. (Wurzer, 83–84)

Though Wurzer claims that his “filming” can inaugurate a new critique of capital, the unqualified claim that there appears to be ways of seeing that are “untainted by the prosaic relations of our epoch” vitiates the relevance of any such critique. Film’s dehiscence from that which is language bound is not a sudden illumination but a process that has been developed and structured by language and economy for centuries. Wurzer’s announcement of a new kind of consciousness, a consciousness as filming, indexes a historical shift in the character and possibilities of consciousness for the next
century. In this he is quite correct. But as long as there are systematically excluded, suffering bodies on planet Earth, the idea of a radical disinterestedness is patently absurd. Disinterestedness, no matter how radical a departure it purports to make from the history and the philosophy of the subject, is nothing more, and can be nothing more, than bourgeois—art for art’s sake. Wurzer correctly sees “filming” as an algorithm of capital and correctly grasps the emergence of a new order of visuality. The idealist move—a ruling idea in the making—is a good example of the way in which the prosaic relations of our epoch work themselves back in to filming. Is Heidegger’s “higher acting” of Gelassenheit operative in filming’s prolepsis? In light of the sublime seizure of the imagination by capital, is the designation “higher acting” still appropriate? A glance at capital’s genealogy illuminates filming as an “event of the head.” It is therefore not unusual to speak of capital (caput, “head”) in terms of the futural flux of reason. Capital is not regarded as a master concept dominating the relation of forces; it stands ahead of “events” only in the sense that it is a “coming-toward,” a proleptic mode of thought. A moving texture which cannot be captured or reduced to an unequivocal concept, capital “consists” of diffuse scenes of filming without a theory gripped within practical reflections. If “higher acting” is complicitous with an overturning of the rigid interests of a theory/practice hermeneutic, it accords with the effacement of a normative dominance of images.

Marx fails to highlight the possibilities of imaginal dehiscence, in that his reflections on capital are entirely governed by a “repressive hypothesis,” that is, by the idea that capital is essentially deleterious so long as it cannot be unfastened from the production of commodities. (Wurzer, 85)

As Benjamin remarks about a passage detailing the futurist aestheticization of warfare, “This manifesto has the virtue of clarity.” The dialectical imperative of Marx entails understanding capital as simultaneously the best and the worst thing to happen in human history. Each document of

39. “The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance” (Marx-Engels Reader, 172–73).
civilization is simultaneously a document of barbarism. The overturning of a theory/practice hermeneutic that quickly (d)evolves into a postdialectical fantasy (common in France, though probably less common in the Murora atoll) is here followed by a disposition toward forgetting what insists on not being forgotten. Here, class hatred (for the bourgeoisie that informs everything of Marx’s) is suppressed; even the discourse that speaks this essential kernel of hatred to the realm of thought is nearly forgotten, reduced, rather, to a repressive apparition. Capital is not something to be understood from some nowhere in which one might decide that it is not essentially deleterious. It is deleterious, if you live on the working edge of its production, if you experience its logic as the continual diminution of your existence. The release of productive forces is not in and of itself deleterious, but inasmuch as these forces exist for a privileged few and drive the majority of the world’s population to a status outside of representation and into the unthought of the image, the release of the productive forces, even as “pure” thought, can be understood only if that understanding understands the violence presupposed in its very act of composure. Wurzer’s eugenics of judgment rests on a forced elimination of all that threatens its purity. One would be hard-pressed to find a more brilliant endorsement of the poetics of the spectacle:

Filming’s contribution is only that of a question: What about spirit in an epoch that lets capital be? Its demand on judgment is complex not because capital is perceived to be a scene that films well but because capital leaps ahead of its time in search of a spirit whose time is yet to be. Does Gelassenheit become Verlassenheit [loneliness]? Does composure turn into destitution in the wake of the apparition of capital, the felling of ground and meaning? Is com-posure of spirit the complete erasure of history, of substance, of foundation? Is filmic excision poverty of life and being, a universal destitution? (Wurzer, 103)

Wurzer’s answer is that “only a strict adherence to the principle of ground would make it possible to incriminate some relation of Gelassenheit to Verlassenheit” (Wurzer, 103), and film purportedly sweeps away all ground. Though it does so, it does so only as film, not as cinema. That is, only from an understanding of film as pure circulation can such an absence of ground be sanctioned or even imagined. “Filming,” in Wurzer’s usage, is revealed as the aesthetic counterpart to the circulation of capital, which, in appearance (consumerism), has broken away from the mode of produc-
tion. This elevated aspect in the cycle of production “in search of a spirit whose time is yet to be” is embraced, while the rest (dissymmetrical exchange) is forgotten. But cinema recalls consciousness supposedly freed from materiality and historicity to its body. It shows filming to be the phenomenological pyrotechnics of the intensification of a capitalism that, no matter how treacherously difficult to apprehend from the standpoint of its apotheosis, still and always has its ground in the violation of bodies, the extraction of surplus-value. Thus, the postmodern mode of judgment that “denote[s] thinking without a metaphysical emphasis on the relation of the particular and the universal” (Wurzer, 102), and that is the triumphant realization of filming, depends on the universal violation of particular individuals. The particularization of the many oppressions, and the separation of bodies from each other and from the fruits of the historical amalgamation of human production and the universal process of “globalization,” has its aesthetico-philosophical counterpart in “filming.” Dialectics forces aesthetics to recall the conditions of its being, no matter how much we try to ignore them. And these conditions, conditions of systematic violation, rattle their chains even in the discourses that prefer, in an analogous systematic way, to exclude them. The moans are audible in the very language that strives to count them out.

“Filming,” then (and here we begin our return to Vertov), is an inadequate account of production. Filming is a phenomenological formation with real effects. One such reality is that bodies, which are reduced to their pure particulars, mark their disappearance from materiality with their reappearance as images. Having conferred nearly all of their subjectivity, all of their living labor on a world that sweeps it away from them, they are, in their absolute impoverishment, not even present as subjects, therefore their objectivity fades into the state of relative non-being called the imaginary. They exist for others as images, as that which can be utterly appropriated and/or discarded. Filming, as Wurzer uses the term, is the abstraction of this course of events, the de-subjectification, and hence de-objectification, of the spectral masses. It is an ideal(ized) expression of the dominant material relationships. Cinema, as I am attempting to configure it here, restores the historicico-material development of filming.


I have said that film, as a new iteration of money, first posits objects as images and, second, circulates them as such. Thus, film takes on many of the functions germane to money—it develops the very properties of money. Money in Marx’s third determination, that is, money as capital, in which money “is itself posited as an instrument of production” (Grundrisse, 28:152), has its corollary in the screen—that is, in film as cinema, where film is understood as an instrument of production. For here, finally, we reach the scene of the interface of images and bodies. And it is this scene that becomes the new, now de-territorialized factory of production. Vertov, who feared the unconscious and had an unsophisticated theory of the spectator, thought that his “factory of facts” would assemble the facts in the film, on the screen: “Shoots enter into organic interaction; they enrich one another, combine their efforts, form a collective body, thereby releasing surplus energy” (Vertov, 272). Vertov did not fully grasp that to complete his facts, to give them the character of objectivity that is conferred only through belief and practice, the surplus energy would have to come from the spectator. As becomes clear even with Eisenstein, film as an instrument of cinematic production does not refer merely to movie production: Cinema as “the organization of the audience through organized material” is utilized for social production in the largest sense of the word, for social production and reproduction, that is, for social organization and development.\textsuperscript{42} It takes labor to build a world—the labor of the masses, for the first time systemically coming on-line through a visual pathway.\textsuperscript{43}

Two convergent trends must therefore be grasped in Vertov’s work. Cinema is well on its way to becoming a complex medium of value transfer, while money realizes an ever increasing expressivity. Vertov’s film of money—at once made of money and operating as an alternative medium of exchange—arises as film becomes money and money becomes film. Although one might want somewhat more nuance here, this dialectic is fundamental. Money’s coverage of the human sphere interposes a unique

\textsuperscript{42} Sergei M. Eisenstein, “The Materialist Approach to Form,” in Selected Works, 63. In the same essay, Eisenstein writes, “‘The Strike’ is the direct antithesis of ‘Kino-eye’” (62).

\textsuperscript{43} In Eisenstein, one finds the development of the worker-spectator as the dialectical antithesis of the commodity-image. For more on this, see my essay “The Spectatorship of the Proletariat, boundary 2 22, no. 3 (fall 1995): 171–228.
distance between persons and things, and posits the image as the fundamental relation between subject and object. Put another way, the relation known as private property, which removes things from the grasp of the masses through abstract means, achieves a first-order dynamism in the money economy. In this economy, objects are already images. They signify the will of another (an owner) and cannot be reached in their materiality except through the exchange of a discrete quantity of the general equivalent. Objects can be extracted from this relation and “belong to me” only through money. Furthermore, only in their complete amortization do they lose their abstract, imaginary dimension—they have no more exchange-value when they are used up. The flow of money itself is already filmic; that is, in tying the world together in a material array dependent on abstraction, it places a film between the world of things and persons, a film that converts things into images and renders their materiality inaccessible (mediate). As one can surmise from Descartes, it is the relation known as the image (the hand before the face, the radical alienation of the visible) that constitutes the modern subject as well as the universe of mathematical objects. Film proper becomes the technological abstraction and intensification of this relation, a second-order dynamism of property relations that gives them simultaneously greater penetration and higher orders of expressivity—to the point where values in the human sense and values in the economic sense become indistinguishable not only in the last but also in the first instance. One cannot overestimate the necessity (for capital) of the amalgamation of the imagination and therefore of concrete bodies by media.

In Marx, the figure of circulation institutionalizes the commodity form because the exchange of two qualitatively noncomparable objects requires some abstract standard of equivalence (from which Marx derives the concepts of exchange-value and of abstract human labor time) in order that they be quantitatively compared and circulated. However, the perpetuation of the exchange of object for coin (commodity for money) cannot be explained from the standpoint of circulation alone:

The repetition of the process from both points, money or commodity, is not implied in the conditions of exchange itself. The act can only be repeated until it is completed, i.e. until there has been exchange up to the amount of the exchange value [that is, until the resources in circulation are used up]. It cannot rekindle itself. Circulation therefore does not contain in itself the principle of self-renewal. Its moments are presupposed in it, not posited by itself. New commodities must
continually be thrown into it from without, like fuel into fire. Otherwise, it goes out in indifference. It would be extinguished in money as the indifferent result. For in so far as it no longer related to commodities, prices, circulation, money would cease to be money and to express a relationship of production; it would now continue to exist only as a metal but not economically. Circulation therefore, which appears as that which is immediately present on the surface of bourgeois society, exists only in so far as it is continually mediated. Considered in itself, it is the mediation of presumed extremes. But it does not posit these extremes. Hence it must itself be mediated not only in each of its moments but as the totality of mediation, as a total process. Its immediate being is therefore pure semblance. *It is the image of a process occurring behind it.* (Grundrisse, 28:186)

For circulation to continue, there must be production, that is, labor. *Man with a Movie Camera*’s “image of a process occurring behind it” would *seem* to bring production into its sphere of visual circulation, and yet it does not. As Marx says, “Circulation therefore presupposes both the production of commodities by labor as well as their production as exchange-values” (Grundrisse, 28:186). Labor that produces exchange-values is the source that feeds the fire of circulation. In the case of Vertov, the *representation* of production is not enough to sustain his film work; “it goes out in indifference” (Grundrisse, 28:186). Or perhaps it was squashed out. In any case, the power that sustains the fire was missing. Circulation cannot sustain itself by itself but requires production, that is, productive labor. What Vertov did not figure out (and the question that Wurzer does not see) is how to get (enough) productive labor into the system of cinematic circulation to valorize the medium—a national currency works only if people work for it. Vertov’s effort, though enormous, was incomplete. Like the bourgeois economists who wanted to circumvent crisis in capital—inflation, overproduction, and so forth—by issuing chits for objects (Marx points out that these would immediately behave like money and be traded on their own accord, like options), Vertov tried to alter the mode of production by intervening in circulation. He lacked an adequate theory of production, and yet one still hopes, as Michelson does, that history could have taken a different course. It is not that he lacked a theory of film production, but rather that he lacked an adequate theory of social production with the cinema—of the cinema as a productive relation.

The greater instrumentality and greater success of Eisenstein, who
trained as an engineer and saw himself as engineering consciousness, and the still greater success of Disney, of Hollywood, and of Microsoft are instructive here. Each had, and, in the case of the latter three, has, a quasi-national or state endorsement and an “audience” interactive with their modes of production. They have inscribed themselves in the realm of necessity. Vertov struggled to achieve a circulation in *Man with a Movie Camera* alternative to capital circulation and therefore could not utilize circulation in accord with the phenomenology of its dominant appearance. The image (commodity) that is in circulation in daily life under capitalism is never experienced as Vertov represents it; rather, one experiences the phenomenal appearance of objects (and money) and their disappearance under the spell of reification, or, as Jean Baudrillard would have it, seduction. Vertov counters the phenomenological appearance of the commodity-image but cannot counter other emergent elements of the mode of production, specifically the emerging commodification of vision itself: the libidinal dimensions of the economization of perception and affect, and the subsequent de-territorialization of production.

If circulation “is the image of a process occurring behind it,” and that process is production, then within the resolution of that image are the processes that sustain and amalgamate the world. As Marx writes, commodity production “presupposes circulation as a developed moment and appears as a constant process positing circulation and continually returning from circulation back into itself, in order to posit it anew” (*Grundrisse*, 28:186). The production depicted in Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* was not adequate to sustain the form of circulation it deployed. Therefore, we must posit a realm of production, of cinematic production, that was somehow unavailable to Vertov and his films. The film itself must achieve a relation with spectators that can sustain its form. As with Marx’s analysis of capital, production in this sense must take the form of labor-power released into the medium.

With Eisenstein, the labor that sustains cinematic circulation is provided by the spectator. This insight can be derived from the Pavlovian circuitry that Eisenstein built into his films. For every image, so the theory ran, there is a programmed response: It is the spectator who returns living labor to the medium. As with workers in factory work, spectators must be formed in such a way, trained in such a way—that through history and education, and through the movement of the world of objects (through production)—that they can work in the image-machines, the attention factories, present(ed) to them. For a variety of reasons, Vertov’s images could not be valorized,
at least to the degree required for their continued production and reproduction. Communism was not (yet) a viable virus. Its failure has to do with the lack of consideration of interiority and of psychosocial experience. Because everything in Vertov is geared toward the production of consciousness, we might say that Vertov did not adequately anticipate capital’s total penetration of the sensorium. Despite the fact that Vertov thematizes production, he fails to grasp the unconscious visual component of production that develops hand in hand with the phenomenology of capitalist circulation.

When Vertov made *Man with a Movie Camera*, there were many other forms of production extant from feudal times and bourgeois industrialism that also produced persons. It is arguable that though Vertov was able to make a conquest of space and time, he was unable to (dis)engage other circuits of perceptual and corporeal regulation that were protocapitalist, or becoming embroiled in the libidinal economy of capital. However, to imagine the kino-eye project realizing its proposed expansion and stated goals remains like an effort to solve a single equation with two unknowns. We know neither what the films should have looked like nor what the world should have become. What we do know, however, is that their production, and the production of the world they implied, could not be sustained. Vertov was correct to regard the visual as the next arena for the battle against the encroachment of capital on human becoming, but the relations of value transfer necessary to both an anticapitalist cinema and an anticapitalist universe—that is, relations that could at once do battle with capital and be self-valorizing—were not developed. To avoid creating a radical instrument destined to become a subroutine of capital was a tall order and remains so today. *Man with a Movie Camera* was a momentary arresting and revealed what cinema was already becoming—a new moment in the consciousness of production necessary to production.

In a section of “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” excised from the English edition, Benjamin writes:

Primitive art, in the service of magic, set down certain notations that served praxis. It probably did so fully as much as for the sake of practice and rehearsal of magical procedures as for directions and indications, and also finally as the very objects of a contemplative meditation to which magical effects were ascribed. The objects of such notations showed human beings and their environment, and were represented according to the demands of a society in which technology as yet existed only in the form of ritual. Such a society stands at the antipodes of the present one, whose technology [tech-
nik] is the most emancipated. Yet such emancipated technology now stands over against contemporary society as a second nature and indeed, as economic crises and wars testify, a nature no less elemental than the one that confronted primitive society. Faced with this second nature, human beings, who invented it but have ceased to master it, are thrown back on a process of learning and pedagogical appropriation of much the same kind that earlier human beings had to summon in the face of original nature itself. Art once again places itself in the service of such a learning process. And film does so in particular. Film serves to train human beings in the practice of those apperceptions and reactions required by the frequentation of an apparatus whose role in their daily life ever increases. To make this whole enormous technological apparatus of our time into the object of human interiorization and appropriation [Innervation]—that is the historic task in whose service film has its true meaning.44

If, as Benjamin suggests, the historical task of cinema is to aid in the internalization of “second nature,” that is, to produce the internalization of the logistics of the industrial revolution as the development and completing of the industrial revolution, then it is fair to say that cinema as an effect of the industrial revolution dialectically produces the consciousness of (necessary for) the industrial revolution, and moreover, it produces, dialectically again, those now reconfigured and fundamentally original sensate elements that marginalize, exceed, or transcend consciousness: affect, imagination, desire, proprioception, intensity, and so forth. These affective dimensions of industrial society—which challenge language’s ability to process experience and throw us “back on a process of learning and pedagogical appropriation of much the same kind that earlier human beings had to summon in the face of original nature itself”—are the new modes of appropriation and the equipment for survival, and therefore are part of the reproduction of the worker. They take on an ever increasing importance for late capitalist production. Cinema, grasped as a total, social process, ordains twentieth-century social production.

Vertov’s work embodies and extends the logistics of the industrial revolution and produces them as a form of consciousness. His conversion of industrial process into vision, and thus into consciousness, is an effort to

44. This fragment (unpublished translation by Fredric Jameson) can be found in Walter Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften, I, 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972–1989), 444–45. In the English translation of “The Work of Art,” the fragment would follow what is section 5, p. 225.
convert the totality of circulation into vision and consciousness. His visual production of the concept of totality, though a theoretical tour de force, was a practical failure inasmuch as it did not bring about the hoped-for end of prehistory or even its own continuation. Communism was the meaning of kino-eye, but not its significance. To laud Vertov's theoretical achievement in *Man with a Movie Camera*, while critically noting its failure, is not to lament the stupidity of the masses for not “getting it” but to critique a (historical) lack of imagination or preparedness and to investigate the historical limitations in the revolutionary production of the period. From a hermeneutic standpoint, Vertov succeeded spectacularly, but from an affective one, he did not. Indeed, the failure in Vertov to generate the necessary affective force was precisely the critique of Vertov offered by Eisenstein and the problem Eisenstein sought to remedy. The great question remains: Was there any (other) way for Vertov to *appeal* to the senses and remain Vertovian? What Benjamin refers to as “the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values,” took, for Vertov, the form of the acted cinema.\(^{45}\) Was his total rejection of the acted cinema necessary?

Speculations on Vertov’s failure to develop a more viable phenomenography would lead us far afield, demanding, as noted, that Vertov invent a new sexuality. Eisenstein’s “solutions” to the problem of vision as a productive force are plagued by their own failures. If, as Antonio Negri puts it, “antagonism is the motor of development of the system, the foundation of a continuous resurgence of antagonism each time that the project, the history of capital, progresses,”\(^{46}\) then perhaps it is only in an inventory of the failed efforts and strategies of human liberation that the forces of oppression can be effectively identified and fought. Is such not the legitimate task of the historian?

Vertov endeavors to span the totality of circulation, but circulation is ordinarily perceived through only a limited window into it—be it subjectivity, art, daily life, one’s bank account, or television. The analytic perspective of capital (I should say, the analytic perspective of *Capital*) is clearly not what libidinally drives the majority of individual bodies; it is, in capitalist society, at

\(^{45}\) Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 241. After a mocking description of the director’s cinema (“According to your strict schedule, people fight and embrace. Marry and divorce. Are born and die”), Vertov writes, “We are at a film studio where a man with a megaphone and script directs the life of a fake land” (Vertov, 283).

any rate, the stirrings caused by partial phenomena, a momentary perception or a half-conceived idea, that drive the imagination: narratives, desires, attractions. Though Vertov clearly shows that orchestrated matter creates consciousness in ever fuller and more efficient ways, and that cinema, in its immanence and ostensible immateriality, organizes consciousness par excellence, his proof that cinema as such is “the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships” does not a revolution make. Despite Vertov’s aspirations, cinema as the new medium for the “ruling ideas” a revolution breaks. This is perhaps because the ruling ideas are no longer ideas. We are dealing with a calculus of the image.

The connection between the reproductions of the relations of production and cinematic reproduction brings both consciousness and material relations to a new stage of development. “In the act of reproduction itself are changed not only the objective conditions—e.g. village becomes city, the wilderness becomes cultivated clearings, etc.—but also the producers, who transform themselves in that they evolve new qualities from within themselves, develop through production new powers and new ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs, and new speech” (Grundrisse, 28:418). In many ways, Vertov emphasizes the objective aspects of the development of cinema as “speech,” hence his emphasis on both the external (objective) world and the cinematic apparatus proper. Movement becomes consciousness. It will take Eisenstein to formally consider the speech of film as a language and to self-consciously concern himself with (re)organizing the interiority of spectators through movement. By the time cinema becomes the lingua franca of capital, all attempts to think visuality as language will be buried by electronic snow.


If, as Vertov’s cinema can be understood to reveal, cinema is quite literally a form of capital, then it can, and indeed must, do other things than become self-conscious. In many respects, Man with a Movie Camera

47. Marx-Engels Reader, 172.
is for Vertov what *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat* is for Lukács, because self-consciousness (for Lukács, the moment when the proletariat grasps itself as the subject-object of history) marks the dissolution of the capitalist order. Although it is a necessary technique of capitalism to obscure the conditions of its own production and reproduction, and hence of its history, what Lukács and Vertov have in common (in addition to the tenet that in capitalism, social transparency equals revolution) is the principle that revolutions are matters of consciousness. In 1844, Marx could write, “Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.” 48 The twentieth century teaches us that revolution is not a matter of consciousness alone.

Although technology has extended the range of our perception, it has also—in intimately related ways—extended the range and extent of our subjugation. The conquest of space and time by cinema and by cinematic technologies that enables the utopian aspirations of Vertov also creates the conditions for a shift from an imperialism played out geographically and spatially (geographic domination as the pathway to the spatial containment of the body) to an imperialism played out physiologically and psychologically: The administration of space and time becomes sensual. Individual bodies continue to suffer terribly, but the economy of means has changed. Territories are still dominated, but they are dominated by a de-territorialization that renders each of them affectively “global,” a de-territorialization that occurs through the direct (local) entry of new logics into bodies through technological mediation. The conquest of geographical regions is not over, by no means, but the vanguard weapons of the postmodern conquistadors are computers, televisions, fax machines, cell phones, and films—technologies that work by inserting the spatial and temporal exigencies of the First World into Third World bodies and organizations, instantiating a juridical subject-function, altering their proprioception, infusing new aspirations and desires, proposing new groupings, and so forth, through what a century ago was called “the civilizing effect of foreign trade” (*Grundrisse*, 28:187). Trade is not just the movement of money and objects; it is the movement of capital through sensoriums. Bodies give time for image in a new totalitarianism of the sensual. Like any other wage, the subsistence level pleasure received in exchange for sensual labor is enough for survival, not justice. The capitalization of mass perception and consciousness is taking place on an unprecedented scale. Such an infusion of “culture” always accom-

48. Marx-Engels Reader, 84.
panies the installation of export processing zones, the tolerance of World Bank and IMF lackeys as national leaders, and so forth. Capital ingrains new rationales and promotes new strategies of domination. Furthermore, it solicits our participation, our rejoicing, at every turn.

But I am getting ahead of myself, speaking drearily about products before having really undertaken the analysis of production. Vertov has helped us to begin such an analysis of the transformation of production by cinema by showing that the space, time, and movement of industrial production are all impacted in the image, that is, that industrial production circulates through the image and becomes a machine for the production of consciousness and, by implication, of social participation in all its myriad forms. The image becomes a form that results by passing through the totality of the spatial, temporal, and motional territories of the socius. These aspects of the social terrain are at once internal to the image and the condition of its circulation as an image. Thus, the cinematic image is precisely the abstraction of capitalized matter and the instrumental reassembly of its space-time movements within the sensorium and the viscera of the spectator.

If we recall from Marx that “production is not only particular production, but it is invariably a definite social body, a social subject that is active in a wider or narrower totality of branches of production” (Grundrisse, 28:24), and, further, that the instruments of production are “also past, objectified, accumulated labor” (Grundrisse, 28:23), then the cinematic image not only as Vertov fabricates it but in general contains, as it were, the social totality. It is invariably a monad, a crystal of the socius, the totality of society registered in a crystalline form. Just as Edward W. Said can show how the micropolitics of a Victorian parlor novel depends on the British in India, one ought to be able to show how a still from, say, Pretty Woman is linked to concrete histories of patriarchy, the feminization of labor, and the formation of global commodity chains. Each image, like each commodity, potentially leads to the totality of the relations of production.

The crucial difference between the commodity-object and the image-object lies in the distinctive character of the image-object’s circulation and consumption. The cinematic image is a sensualized abstraction with no physical content beyond its intellectual and sensual appeal, at least as far as the consumer of the image is concerned. It is a material formation emptied of its material, the label without the can—in some respects, the realization of what was once called the commodity’s ersatz value. Thus, as cinema is a dematerialized form of circulation, the image is a dematerialized
form of the commodity, the commodity without its material content. Indeed, 
this immaterial character might lead us to believe that the image is not a 
commodity at all, at least to the extent that it has no readily apparent use-
value other than something that erupts in the zone of pleasure (use) and 
its psychic-ideological labyrinth, that is, until one considers its use-value for 
capital. In this usefulness for the valorization of capital, then, it is for the 
waige earner like money—the company scrip of U.S. Incorporated, a means 
to subsistence.

What is the use of the image? One cannot eat it or sleep in it; in the 
cinema, one cannot even take it home. If it is true that an image has no 
use-value in the practical, material sense, then it is pure exchange-value. 
Its use-value is its exchange-value. It circulates commodities through our 
sensoriums and exchanges itself for us. When we incorporate the image, 
we ourselves become exchangeable; we have/are social currency. In this 
respect, the commodity that the image most closely resembles is indeed 
money, the vanishing mediator, which, from the standpoint of the consumer, 
is the most general form of pleasure, the general form of social wealth, 
the means to life; and yet it is not money. One does not spend image; one 
performs it. As with money, the circulation of the image and its related phe-
nomenological effects, along with the subroutines these imply, are essential 
for the valorization of capital.

To say that the spectator extracts subsistence use-values in a rela-
tion to exchange-value mediated by the image and valorizing capital is to 
reissue Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s formulation, “Amusement 
under late capitalism is the prolongation of work.” The next moment in the 
transformation of the interactivity of the image, cinema’s legacy in email and 
the World Wide Web, makes this tendency patently obvious. The residual 
effects of money, so scrupulously noted by Simmel, are, in the moment of 
cinema, given a new turn: The residue of the circulation that is the moving 
image is the internalization of the consciousness of the industrial revolu-
tion and the subjugation of social performance to the logic of capital. This 
consciousness, and the array of affective states necessary to it, is itself 
necessary to the development of industry. Thus, Adorno and Horkheimer’s 
assertion that the spectator’s experiences “are inevitably after-images of 
the work process itself” describes not just the culture of industry but the 
political economic trajectory of industrial culture.49 Circulation, then, is no

49. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John 
Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1991), 137. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the culture in-
film frame $\leftrightarrow$ money
film $\leftrightarrow$ circulation
cinema $\leftrightarrow$ capital
image (-object) $\leftrightarrow$ commodity (-object)
image $\leftrightarrow$ price
spectatorship $\leftrightarrow$ consumption/production

**Figure 2.** Dialectical Trajectories

longer simply “the image of a process occurring behind it,” for in becoming image, circulation becomes ever more completely part of production.

As the emergent interface between the body and the industrial revolution, the image is at once a consequence of and a prerequisite for the continuing development of capitalist exchange/domination. Like banking, it is at once an artifact of capital circulation, necessary to the process of circulation itself, and a point of capitalization. As an exchange-value, the image facilitates exchange, that is, the translation of forces. It scripts praxis through abstraction. As a capitalized fragment, that is, as a form of production for exchange, the image will introduce a new dimension to our old category “labor,” shifting labor itself toward the province of mediation. The cyborg called the spectator comes on-line as the productive flesh in the emerging visual pathway of the capitalist machine.

If in the development of capital the object leans toward money, aspires to be money, then the next dialectical level of this iteration is a symmetrical leaning of the image toward the film frame. Each element of each pair has a proclivity toward the other element, and the two pairs resemble one another. Yet there is also a relation of intensification between the pairs: Objects strive to become photogenic, while images strive to become money, that is, the object tends toward the image, and money tends toward film (Figure 2).  

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50 Dusty “bring[s] culture within the sphere of administration . . . [b]y subordinating in the same way and to the same end all areas of intellectual creation [and] by occupying men’s senses from the time they leave the factory in the evening to the time they clock in again the next morning with matter that bears the impress of the labor process they themselves have to sustain throughout the day” (131).

50. If in the twin pairs of money/object and film frame/image it is money and image that seem to be the terms steeped in mystery, that is because the frame and the object appear inert, lifeless, reified. The object as an existential entity (existentialism as the experiential thrill (nausea) of the autonomous object wrenched from exchange in an act of perception
If money stirs the spectral heart of exchange-value within the object, the film frame brings forth from it the image. These two related extractions (abstractions) are notional practices more often than they are realized, which is to say that they are internalized as experience, incorporated into mental function as a form of apprehending the world. One does not need to have the price of a commodity in one’s pocket to experience commodity fetishism, nor does one have to have a camera to frame an image, to experience the subjective affect, or the whatever, of the cinematic. Money frames objects as images, or, to put it another way, money frames the image of an object as its price. Money provides the aperture through which one grasps the (alienated) objective world. This statement brings us to a fundamental relation: Price is money’s spectral representation of an object, and image is the film frame’s spectral representation of an object. Price, therefore, is a proto-image, the image of the object’s exchange-value. It is the meeting point of the object and money locked into capital circulation, the moment of exchange, the quantification of affect. Inasmuch as price implies a subject of exchange, the image implies the collapsing together (the tandem function) of these formerly discrete acts of production and subjective agency. The image delimits the fiduciary relation implicit in circulation by bypassing money, that is, by bypassing the need to realize the commodity’s price in money, a process that was, in classical economics, the greatest moment of anxiety for the capitalist. The image, as a technology, extracts sensual labor (attention) directly in the moment of its apprehension. This cybernetic collapse is, from an economic point of view, the more efficient administration of the potential crisis zone marked off by the classical gap between production and consumption.51 In the regime of the cinematic, to recognize an image is to constitute a self and a world: To see is already to buy, to

consequent on social disenchantment) has all but disappeared (eroded by money), and the frame/screen has not yet achieved its full ascendancy as the cybernetic extension of all senses and sensibilities. These two, frame/object, fuse as surface and reappear as image/money. Yet as we have seen, objects, even before becoming images, are objectified humanity, and, as we know from experience, everything changes in the presence of a camera, just as previously everything changed in the presence of money. Like the commodity, the camera and film stock, that is, the early components of the frame, are also objectified subjectivity, but with a difference: They have a higher technological coefficient for the production of subjectivity than does the simple commodity. In this the frame resembles money. Among its functions is precisely the creation of subjectivity, or, to employ the contemporary term, intensity, through circulation.

51. “The quality of money as mediator, the separation of exchange into two acts, already contains the germ of crises” (Grundrisse, 28:133).
Figure 3. Enlistments of the Imaginary at the Nexus of Price and Image

look is to labor. The separation between buying and selling (one “buys” a commodity and “sells” one’s labor in the same act of spectatorship) would be reconciled in the cinematic image. Vertov’s film takes on a different cast when we can retrospectively assess that money in circulation is the film of the prices of objects, that is, the film of the processes of exchange. In Man with a Movie Camera, Vertov catapulted what was already the techno-historical tendency of material exchange toward the visible. Cinema is the evolution of this numismatic film into something like an operating system of the visual (Figure 3). The development of cinema appears as the historical trace of the dialectical development of capital, the material history of capital’s binding of perception, of bodies, and of performative belief to its articulation of reality. To fully grasp this is to glimpse the totalitarian character of contemporary life.

For the moment, let me say that the moving image represents an intermediate state, a synthesis, between money and other commodities. This synthetic space is the scene for the valorization of capital through the realization of surplus value. Money-Commodity-Money becomes Money-Image-Money as capital seeks a new armature to administer the extraction of surplus value.\footnote{A number of writers besides me have been working on a mediatic reformulation of the Marxian formulations C-M-C and M-C-M. See, for example, Richard Dienst, \textit{Still Life in Real Time: Theory after Television} (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994). See also Brian Massumi, \textit{A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari} (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).} As with the commodity’s price in money, the image is the contact point between the general medium and its specific local con-
tent. The moving image (the shot), in its abstracting capture and circulation of particular objects, plays the same function as price, lubricating the flow of money against the gradient of commodities, because it itself is a representative of exchange-value. In ways still to be derived, the active consumer/viewer of the cinematic circulation of capital performs an element of this circulation with his or her own body. He or she transports the commodity to (through) the scene of its valorization and provides this transportation to capital at a discount. This performance, exchanging time for image, provides the counterflow to the image and is itself productive of value. This claim will lead to what I call the attention theory of value, along with a theory of cinema as a de-territorialized factory. Vertov’s factory of facts gives way to the de-territorialized factories of affect functioning in accord with the theory of the productive value of human attention.

I have put forth a description of the circulation of image-objects in a visual economy but have given only the briefest account of the means for the production of value in this economy. Kino-eye itself did not produce self-valorizing exchange-value or any other viable alternate productive organization that could allow it to develop as a historical practice along the vector of its own aspiration. Because Man with a Movie Camera does not achieve a self-valorizing perpetuation, the film as I have described it here constitutes only a form of circulation, a nonrenewable redistribution program.

Vertov saw capitalist cinema as having a hold over the unconscious. For him, it was at once a distillation and a refinement of state ideology. “Stupefaction and suggestion—the art-drama’s basic means of influence—relate to that of a religion and enable it for a time to maintain a man in an excited unconscious state” (Vertov, 63). While the spectator remained in that “state of intoxication,” cinema could “cram some idea, some thought or other, into his subconscious” (Vertov, 63). Though I have remarked that

53. Does cinema as the representative of exchange-value exceed the economic limits of money? Or, to put it another way, has money become such a complex form of mediation that it has become cinematic? The outline of the answer to this question can be discerned in the figure of sublation, the annihilation without destruction of dialectical categories. The commodity, like money, is not the highest form of capital; each is an iteration that derives its properties from a higher law that bursts forth from the shattering of the apparent unity of the lesser categories. Yet despite this shattering, the former categories nonetheless remain. So it is with the relation between money and cinema. In the largest business deals, managers work out the nitty-gritty while directors of nations traffic in images. Like virtual reality, an image provides a screen for a visceral imagining of the summation of a complex of relations. Such image making, however, is today at work at every level of economic endeavor. It is capital’s imaginative projection.
Vertov’s distrust of the unconscious might well begin to explain his failure to adequately theorize production, the fault is not his alone. Kino-eye was finally to have established new conditions for the relations of production, to have become a new mediation of production itself. By making all relations conscious relations, seeing was intended to overcome money. The mediation of dialectics was to become practicable. Inasmuch as Vertov shows that “every form becomes immediately dissolved in the very moment when it emerges; it lives, as it were, only by being destroyed; every consolidation of form to lasting objects—no matter how short they last—is an incomplete interpretation that is unable to follow the motion of reality at its own pace,”54 his cinema, albeit distantly, was approaching the logistic capacity of money. However, despite his efforts to remediate the geographical dispersion and nonsynchronous temporalities of object production, his form of cinematic circulation did not insert itself as an indispensable force endemic to production and capable of reshaping both production and distribution.

Though Vertov’s Man with a Movie Camera challenged capital, it did not overcome its organizational force. This perhaps constitutes both its failure and its spirituality. Though it strove to set up an alternative circulation of value, it was not a viable one. It did not, finally, effectively remediate the circulation of matter. Vertov’s failure to do so, however, does not imply the general failure of cinema to do so. Indeed, it is the point here to show that cinema transforms all aspects of political economy, including production, distribution, circulation, labor, value, the senses, bodies, and consciousness. Cinema is their very transformation. Despite the many noteworthy acts of resistance and the myriad contestatory appropriations, the remediation of the circulation of capital by and as the cinematic has only increased the degree of uneven development in the world today.

With all the images of daily life in motion, the cinematic mode of production orchestrates the mise-en-scène for the production of consciousness and the consciousness of production. We cut, edit, produce, and direct; we watch, we process, we wait. You think all those movements, all that time, is your own consciousness, even though what plays on the screen in your theater comes somehow from beyond you. Vertov lives no longer, but the filmic production of everyday life continues.

54. Simmel, Philosophy of Money, 510.