Chapter One

Province of Universality: Vertov before the War (1896-1914)

Up just as much out of fathomless workings fermented and
thrown,
A limp blossom or two, torn, just as much over waves floating,
Drifted at random. . . .

Whitman, “As I Ebb’d With the Ocean of Life”

Legend has it that classics teachers in the old German gymnasia would always
begin the school year by telling their students, “The first thing to know about the ancient
Greeks, is that they didn’t know they were ‘the ancient Greeks.’” This excellent lesson is
notoriously difficult to absorb, partly because of what seems to be a near-natural human
propensity to conceive of the past in narrative terms – complete with protagonists, acts
and scenes, and Aristotelian beginnings, middles and ends – but also because fully
accepting the classicist’s advice would mean carrying its implications forward to our own
time, thereby compromising in advance any effort we might make to understand who
“we” (in our “historical era”) are. Nor can the problem be solved through ironic
resignation to time’s peripeties, as if to inoculate ourselves against the notorious errors
and fabulating hubris of those afflicted with an over-intense – in the Soviet case, a
militantly intense – consciousness of history. For the old storyteller, endlessly sifting out
past from present from future, reasserts his prerogatives as soon as we rewrite those
earlier imprudent narrators, not as “history’s masters” (or “constructors,” or “creators”),
but as “history’s fools.”
In an insightful and witty essay, Philip Rosen has written about his efforts to identify “the Vertov we now know” in the ostensibly “pre-Vertovian” Kino-Nedelia [Film-Week] newsreels of 1918-19, on which Vertov worked in a variety of capacities, including as a sometime editor. Singling out a shot of a toy seller in Kino-Nedelia 1, where a hand holding a toy and “a figure in the background” are apparently deliberately (and, within the context of the Kino-Nedelias, atypically) arranged “in two planes of significance,” Rosen asks, “Was this the emergence of the Vertov we now know?”

This question reveals something about my own [i.e., Rosen’s] personal fascination with the retrospective, but note also the peculiar temporal logic of that sentence. It includes two tenses, past and present, a then and a now. It also designates another temporal element, a punctual point in time at which something changes – that is, a transformation which is an emergence, a beginning of a historical object that will afterward continue. This means that there is an implicit future embedded within the past – call it the Vertov of the 1920s. For it was surely in the 1920s, not 1918, that Vertov can be first identified as the Vertov we now know.¹

This problem, identified by Rosen as historiographic, can be cast more narrowly as a biographical one as well. That Vertov changed his name (from “David Abelevich Kaufman” to “Denis Arkadievich [Dziga] Vertov”) in order to mark a narrative turning point says something (but what, exactly?) about his changing self-understanding over time; yet for a prospective biographer, the renaming (and when did it occur, exactly?) erects a signpost as potentially misleading as it is clarifying. For becoming (i.e., adopting the name) “Vertov” – which happened no later than 1918 – is obviously different from becoming “the Vertov we now know,” if not, perhaps, entirely unrelated to that later

¹ Philip Rosen, “Now and Then: Conceptual Problems in Historicizing Documentary Imaging,” Canadian Journal of Film Studies/Revue Canadienne d’Études Cinématographiques 16:1 (Spring 2007): 25-38, here 28; italics in the original. We will return to the issues raised by this essay in Chapters Four and Five.
emergence. And how might the decision to become “Vertov” have emerged in turn out of the experiences of “David Kaufman”? The more intensively we reflect, the more rapidly the “beginnings of the historical object” called Vertov begin to slide away; and we are reminded of that infinitely backwards-running escalator of historical perspective described by Raymond Williams at the beginning of The Country and the City, where the quest to pinpoint the moment when the “timeless rhythms” of English rural life stopped pulsating commences in the post-World War One era only to terminate in - Eden.2 Was there a Vertov “kernel” residing within the “shell” of David Kaufman?3

For his part, Vertov had to edit his history together much like any biographer does – not that he can be counted as just “any biographer,” of course – as here in this fragment from “The Birth of Kino-Eye,” written in 1934 when he was 38 years old:

It began early in life. With the writing of fantastic novels (The Iron Hand, Uprising in Mexico). With short essays (“Whaling,” “Fishing”). With long poems (Masha). With epigrams and satirical verse (“Purishkevich,” “The Girl with Freckles”). It then turned into an enthusiasm for editing shorthand records, gramophone recording. Into a special interest in the possibility of documentary sound recording. Into experiments in recording, with words and letters, the noise


3 The answer to this only apparently rhetorical question is, of course, “no.” For the “kernel-shell” metaphor, introduced in a discussion of Hegel’s conception of history, see Marx’s 1873 Afterword to Capital, vol. 1 (http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p3.htm#3b). Louis Althusser’s critical gloss on Hegel-Marx is also relevant here: “Great men [according to Hegel] are only clairvoyants who have a presentiment of but can never know the imminence of tomorrow’s essence, the ‘kernel in the shell,’ the future in invisible gestation in the present, the coming essence being born in the alienation of the current essence” (“The Errors of Classical Economics: Outline of a Concept of Historical Time,” in Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, Reading Capital, trans. Ben Brewster (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 95).
of a waterfall, the sounds of a lumbermill, etc. And one day in the spring of 1918.

What was “it,” exactly, that “began early in life”? Although Vertov purports to be discussing “the birth of Kino-Eye,” his true topic seems to be his involvement in artistic practice as such, ranging from prose to poetry to sound collage (film would come later, though no later than “the spring of 1918”); we know that he studied music as well, at the Bialystok Musical School, and so we can read Vertov’s narrative as simple testimony to an early, wide-ranging (though not unbounded: the theatrical and visual arts go unmentioned) interest in art-making. And to be sure, the historical conjuncture during which Vertov’s autobiographical excursus appeared – the Soviet mid-1930s, marked by a turn to the testimonial and the subjective, not least in Vertov’s own films – provided the discursive occasion for fashioning this genealogical narrative. Yet except for the sound collage – a peculiar enthusiasm to which we will return – we could say that the passage tells us little besides affirming that Kaufman/Vertov was a talented and energetic person: something we could figure out on our own by watching his films.

We know very little about David Kaufman before 1918; many things about what his home city of Bialystok was like during the time he lived there; and a great many things about the Russian Empire in the years leading up to the October Revolution.

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4 “The Birth of Kino-Eye,” in Kino-Eye, p. 40. As I indicate in the introduction, the article was incorrectly (and very significantly) dated to 1924 (rather than 1934) in the 1966 Russian text from which the Kino-Eye translation comes; see Dziga Vertov, Iz Naslediia: Stat’i i Vystupleniia, eds. D.V. Kruzhkova and S.M. Ishevskaja (Moscow: Eizenshtein-Tsentr, 2008), 557.

5 See my discussion of Three Songs of Lenin (1934) in Chapter Nine, below.
What I will try to do in this chapter is less to narrate, step by step, Vertov’s early life – the verifiable details at our disposal hardly suffice for that – than to construct, on the basis of available documents and histories, the complex historical conjuncture out of which he emerged. As will be seen, this conjuncture is less a bundle of “causes” than a field of forces, offering a variety of often conflicting emotional and conceptual vocabularies, and involving the agency of the state, the claims of “enlightenment,” the circulation of written texts, the sometimes violent realities of ethnic, religious and linguistic difference, the attractions of artistic creation, and (not least) the contradictions generated by capitalist modernization.

6 In deploying the term “conjuncture,” I intend to recall its specific use by Althusser in the section of Reading Capital already alluded to: “[I]t is only possible to give a content to the concept of historical time by defining historical time as the specific form of existence of the social totality under consideration, an existence in which different structural levels of temporality interfere, because of the peculiar relations of correspondence, non-correspondence, articulation, dislocation and torsion which obtain, between the different ‘levels’ of the whole in accordance with its general structure. It needs to be said that, just as there is no production in general, there is no history in general, but only specific structures of historicity, based in the last resort on the specific structures of the different modes of production, specific structures of historicity which, since they are merely the existence of determinate social formations (arising from specific modes of production), articulated as social wholes, have no meaning except as a function of the essence of those totalities, i.e., of the essence of their peculiar complexity. [. . .] [I]t is only in the specific unity of the complex structure of the whole that we can think [. . .] so-called backwardnesses, forwardnesses, survivals and unevennesses of development which co-exist in the structure of the real historical present: the present of the conjuncture. [. . .] [T]he ultimate meaning of the metaphorical language of backwardness, forwardness, etc., must be sought in the structure of the whole, in the site peculiar to such and such an element of such and such a structural level in the complexity of the whole” (Reading Capital, 108-109, 106). For what I take to be a model of conjunctural reading, see Perry Anderson, “Modernity and Revolution,” New Left Review 1/144 (March-April 1984): 96-113.

7 I would distinguish my use of the term “modernization” from Cold War-era “modernization theory” – largely a matter of policy construction, formulated with an eye to synchronizing the world with the economic, social and cultural norms of the “First World,” though without compromising the wealth and hegemonic status of that “World”
Thus I will provide something more like a map than a narrative, although stories large and small will certainly be told, and sometimes conjectured. A single thesis, as will be seen, is difficult to extract through such a procedure, which in some ways (to add another simile) is more akin to drawing a blueprint than to fashioning a syllogism. Yet if a central dynamic were to be identified, it would have to be that of the emergence of a horizon of (secular) *universal*ity that, I postulate, came to structure the experience of David Kaufman as a youth in provincial Białystok. I use the term “universal*ity*” to point above all to the sensed reality of change touching all levels of existence, a reality that had (in the Hegelian sense) both “negative” and “positive” aspects. 8

On the one hand, during the time and in the place Vertov was growing up, older identities and particularities were coming into novel forms of contact with one another, mutating, or vanishing altogether, tossed by forces of change whose apparently shapeless ubiquity gave the new sense of universal*ity* – and of connectedness, desired and undesired – its discomposing *basso continuo*. On the other, “universal*ity*” came to be ascribed to a new kind of subjectivity - secular, literate, mobile, politically engaged, – and ally it to the description offered by Marshall Berman of “the new landscape in which modern experience takes place”: “This is a landscape of steam engines, automatic factories, railroads, vast new industrial zones; of teeming cities that have grown overnight, often with dreadful human consequences; of daily newspapers, telegraphs, telephones and other mass media, communicating on an ever wider scale; of increasingly strong national states and multinational aggregations of capital; of mass social movements fighting these modernizations from above with their own modes of modernization from below; of an ever-expanding world market embracing all, capable of the most spectacular growth, capable of appalling waste and devastation, capable of everything except solidity and stability” (Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London; Verso, 1988), 18-19).

modern - that would cohere with those forces of change, would be capable of managing them, and could be taught or cultivated: the universal as a kind of (positive) content, that is, rather than as a largely privative historical movement. (Mediating between these polarities is the negative-positive power of imagination, or the utopian impulse, made manifest when the shattering of “all fixed, fast-frozen relations”⁹ becomes an occasion for conceiving of alternatives, whether radical, reactionary, liberal or otherwise. We will return to this “power” and its effects in due course.)¹⁰

Both of these universalities remain abstract as I have just articulated them, of course, and too much like staple formulae for describing the historical matrices and experiential textures of “the modern”: it is now time to stock them with particulars.

“*The People’s Benefit*: A.K Kaufman’s circulating library in Bialystok

Bialystok, where Vertov was born as David Abelevich Kaufman on 15 January 1896, is a city of low hills, small, quietly flowing rivers (the Biała and the Dolistówka), and a deep and beautiful surrounding forest comprised of the large pine, oak and spruce trees that proliferate in this part of northeastern Poland. Founded in the 16th century as a small settlement of tenant peasant farmers surrounding the estate of Mikołaj Michnowicz,

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⁹ Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* ([http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm)).

¹⁰ The tripartite schema I offer here – the impositions of historical change; the power to shape and control; the capacity to rethink “power” in light of ongoing change – rewrites the fundamental dialectic outlined in Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). Much maligned and easily underestimated, Schiller’s construct exerted an enormous if unconscious influence on later thinkers, such as (in my view) Jacques Lacan and his triad of “real-imaginary-symbolic.”
a member of King Aleksander Jagiellonczyk’s council, by 1697 Bialystok was the site of
Count Jan Klemens Branicki’s great palace and grounds, and had become a chartered city
by 1749. The partitioning of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between Prussia,
Austria-Hungary and Russia in the late 18th-early 19th centuries brought the city first
under Prussian control (1795-1807) and then, in accord with the Tilsit treaty signed by
Napoleon Bonaparte and Tsar Alexander I, into the Russian Empire (from 1807 to
1918). At first the center of its own administrative unit, the Bialystok region was
incorporated in 1842 along with two other districts into a guberniia (roughly, “province”)
with its administrative center in the city of Grodno, now in western Belarus, about 80
kilometers northeast of Bialystok.

11 The city with its palace was still impressive in 1805, according to the memoir of
German traveler Georg Reinbeck: “The most important town in the road to Warsaw is
[Bialystok], the seat of a provincial government, a revenue chamber, and garrisoned by a
considerable body of troops. But what contributes most to the loveliness of the place, is
the residence of the late king of Poland’s sister, the princess von Cracow, who castle and
park [i.e., the Branicki Palace] display the former splendor of the Polish nobility. The
first is built in a noble style, with elegant appurtenances, and a beautiful garden of
considerable extent. The edifice itself is at present in very good condition, but the park is
going fast to ruin. . . . The space behind the castle which is occupied with an orangery,
commands a view of two hills and the open country which is prettily diversified” (G.
Reinbeck, Travels from St. Petersburgh through Moscow, Grodno, Warsaw, Breslaw &c
to Germany in the Year 1805 in a Series of Letters (London: Richard Phillips, 1807),
150; a translation of Flüchtige Bemerkungen auf einer Reise von St. Petersburg über
Moskwa, Grodno, Warschau, Breslau nach Deutschland im Jahre 1805 (Leipzig, 1806), 2
vols.).
12 The Bialystok-Grodno area also suffered considerable damage during the Napoleonic
Wars.
Home to 15,000 people in 1845, Bialystok could claim around 82,500 residents – a more than fivefold increase in population over the course of 60-odd years – by 1910. Jews made up approximately two thirds of Bialystok’s citizenry by the late 19th century, having become the city’s ethno-religious majority by no later than 1830, mainly because of in-migration. Jews had lived in the area since at least 1658, and a large Jewish community with synagogues, schools, a hospital and other facilities had been established there by the late 1760s. Georg Reinbeck, a German traveler, academic and poet, wrote with distaste in 1806 that the Minsk and Grodno provinces may, in truth, be denominated the land of Jews, whose number is here incalculable. Every town, as it is called, every village, every public house and mill, is inhabited by Jews, who are, as it is said, daily repairing with their families to this part.

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13 Adam Dobronski, Bialystok: Historia Miasta, 2nd edition (Bialystok: Zarzad Miasta Bialegostoku, 2001), 91. By 1913, the population had shot up to 98,170 (Obzor Grodnenskoj Gubernii za 1913 god (Grodno: Gubernskaia Tipografiia, 1914), 33).

14 See Rebecca Kobrin, Jewish Bialystok and its Diaspora (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 26.


16 Reinbeck, op. cit., 137. Reinbeck goes on to berate Jews as usurers and “leeches,” while allowing that “although the spirit of Israel dwells in them, yet they do not appear to be abandoned characters, nor is it extraordinary to find among them a disinterested civility towards strangers” (140). Around half of the population of Grodno, where Vertov’s father Abel Kaufman was born, was Jewish (48 percent in 1897, as opposed to 63 percent in Bialystok; see Ezra Mendelsohn, Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers’ Movement in Tsarist Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 5).
Bialystok was located in the westernmost end of the Pale of Settlement, that large region (about the size of France) on the western side of the Russian Empire outside of which Jews were for the most part prohibited from settling within Russia between 1791 and 1917. Like Grodno, Bialystok was effectively a border town, situated only a few kilometers from the line separating Russia proper with Congress Poland (in existence from 1815 to 1915), even if, in the largest political sense, the latter polity was only nominally independent of the Tsars.

Vertov’s father, Abel Kushelevich Kaufman (born 1868-died sometime between 1941-43 during the Holocaust), was born in Grodno but evidently left that city at some point in the late 1880s for Bialystok, where he found a job as a clerk in the library of the Bialystok city government. On 24 December 1892, Kaufman petitioned the city with a request to open a bookstore “with a library and a special section with useful reading for children in Russian.” Permission to open the bookstore with an adjunct “library for

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17 The boundaries of the Pale changed over time, but were basically set by an important statute of 1835. Historian John Doyle Klier provides a precise description of the Pale’s classical contours: “Jews were permitted to settle freely in the provinces of Grodno, Vilna, Podolia, Minsk, Ekaterinoslav, and in the regions of Bessarabia and [Bialystok]. Residence in other provinces was somewhat circumscribed. Jews could live freely in Kiev province, with the exception of the city of Kiev itself (where they were confined to two districts); in Kherson province, except for the port of Nikolaev; in the Tauride, excluding the naval base at Sevastopol; in Mogilev and Vitebsk provinces, excepting peasant villages; in Chernigov and Poltava provinces except for Cossack villages; Kurland province was open only to Jews who had lived there before the last census, and a similar restriction applied to Riga and Shlok, the only areas in Lifland province where Jews were permitted to reside. An anti-smuggling initiative of 1843 produced a ban on new settlement of Jews in villages within 50 versts (33 miles) of the Empire’s western frontier. [Congress Poland] was never considered part of the Pale” (Klier, Imperial Russia’s Jewish Question, 1855-1881 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9).

18 NIAB f. 1, op. 8, d. 2794, ll. 2, 7, 7ob. Kaufman’s patronymic, Kushelevich, indicates that his father’s name was Yekutiel (Kushel’, in its Russianized form).
"reading" was soon granted (on 17 January 1893), after the police had conducted a brief inquiry into Kaufman’s loyalty and political reliability, which were deemed satisfactory. The bookstore was in operation by September 1893, near the center of Bialystok on Nikolaevskai Street, and specialized in Russian, French and German books, as well as writings for children. That September, Abel successfully petitioned the governor of the Grodno region for permission to sell books in Hebrew as well, “inasmuch as Jews,” to quote the petition, “make up most of the population of the city of Bialystok.”19 By 1895, Kaufman’s establishment contained nearly as many titles as the main public library in Grodno, and he was publishing thick catalogs of his holdings.20 The business was in operation at least through 1929,21 and probably well into the 1930s.

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19 NIAB f. 1, op. 8, d. 2794, ll. 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 7ob, 11-13, 15, 16.


21 See http://data.jewishgen.org/jri-pl/1929/1929top89.htm, at the website of the Jewish Business Project.
Almost exactly a year after opening the bookstore, Abel Kaufman married Chaya-Ester Rakhmielievna Gal’pern (Halpern) (b. 1873-d. sometime between 1941-43 during the Holocaust).22 Chaya’s family hailed from Zabludovo, a small, relatively well-to-do

22 These dates and names are derived from a comparison of the wedding registration of Abel and Chaya Kaufman of 30 January 1894 (in fund 155, book 3 in the Jewish marriage registries housed in the State Archive in Bialystok) with the only partially accurate records provided by Masha (Miriam) Halpern-Proginin, Chaya’s sister, to the Yad Vashem Archive of Shoah Victims’ Names on 23 January 1960. Grodno is indicated as Abel Kaufman’s birthplace both in the marriage registration and in the birth registers of his sons; see registries for Jewish births (in the “Old Style” or Julian calendar) for 3 January 1896 (David Abelevich (Dziga)), 24 August 1897 (Moisei Abelevich (Mikhail)), 6 December 1899 (Semyon Abelevich; died as an infant approximately six months later) and 30 December 1892 (Boris Abelevich) in the State Archive in Bialystok, Poland. See also NIAB f. 1, op. 9, d. 890, l. 85ob. Chaya Kaufman’s parents’ names were Yerakhmiel and Hinda; she had at least one brother (Yaakov, dates of birth and death unknown) and three sisters (Masha (Rivka-Miriam) Halpern [Halperin]-Proginin (born 1883-died 1970), Dina Lipman (born 1884-died sometime between 1941-43 during the Holocaust), and
town southeast of Bialystok. By 1900, Abel and Chaya had two sons – David (later Dziga/Denis Arkadievich Vertov: born 15 January 1896) and Moisej (later Mikhail: born 5 September 1897) -- and the bookstore had become one of the largest and best supplied in Bialystok. (The family was completed in 1903 – after a third son, Semyon (born 25 June 1899), died in infancy - with the arrival of Boris (born 12 January 1903).)

What sort of business was a bookstore with a “library for reading”? Usually called “circulating libraries” in English, these libraries were book-lending outlets with a fund of books that would be lent out for a subscription fee plus a deposit, the latter often equal to the cost of the book. Historian Abram Reitblat, in his study of Russian reading practices in the 19th and early 20th centuries, describes this system of acquisition,

Chana-Sora (dates of birth and death unknown); see entries under Chaja Kaufman, Abram [sic] Kaufman, and Dina Lipman for Bialystok in the Yad Vashem Archive of Holocaust Victims’ Names (www.yadvashem.org).

23 NIAB f. 1, op. 8, d. 2794, l. 20. It has been suggested that Chaya was the daughter of a Bialystok chief rabbi (e.g., in Bela Gershgorin, “Chetyre Izmereniia Brat’ev Kaufman,” Russkij Bazar 50/556 (14-20 December 2006): http://www.russian-bazaar.com/Article.aspx?ArticleID=9852; in Evgeny Tsymbal’s 2002 film Dziga and his Brothers; and regrettably, in my own “Vertov before Vertov: Jewish Life in Bialystok,” in Dziga Vertov: The Vertov Collection at the Austrian Film Museum, ed. Thomas Tode and Barbara Wurm (Vienna: Österreichisches Filmmuseum/SYNEMA, 2006), 9-12). There is, however, no documentary evidence to support this claim, and it is almost certainly false. Bialystok did have two chief rabbis with the last name Halperin (Yom Tov Lipman Halperin (d. 1882), and later Chaim Hersh Halperin), and Chaya had relatives with the last name Lipman, but these names were common and provide no proof of any direct connection. On Yom Tov Lipman Halperin, see Kobrin, op. cit., 41-42.

24 The Russian “biblioteki dlia chteniaia” is a calque from the French “bibliothèques de lecture,” and indeed France seems to have been the place of origin of this form of library; the first German instance (founded by French immigrants) dates to 1704, with the earliest English and Russian examples appearing in 1725 (London) and 1770 (St. Petersburg) respectively (A. Reitblat, Ot Bovy k Bal’montu: Ocherki po istorii chteniiia v Rossii vo vtoroj polovine XIX veka (Moscow: MPI, 1991), 51). Evidently, they were slowly replaced, starting in the 1880s, by growing numbers of city public libraries and free “libraries for the people,” though they persisted in importance well into the first decades of the 20th century (ibid., 63-64).
accumulation and distribution of books as a kind of “collective purchase of the books by
subscribers . . . none of whom individually was able to buy all the books that interested
him.” In Russia at the end of the 1850s, there were only about 15-20 such libraries,
with between five and seven thousand registered readers. As with so much else in Russia,
they began to really flourish only in the decades following the Great Reforms of the
1860s, during which time they became an established part of urban life.

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25 Reitblat, op. cit., 48-49.

26 By 1882, of the roughly 517 libraries in the empire, 286 (or 55 percent) were
circulating libraries, most of which (66 percent) were, like Abel Kaufman's, affiliated
with bookstores; about 100,000 people frequented them (Reitblat, op. cit., 57-58, 62).
Каталогъ
русскихъ книгъ
и периодическихъ изданий
Библиотеки
(при книжномъ магазинѣ)
А. К. Кауфмана
въ г. Бѣлостокѣ.

Изданіе второе

Библиотекою полученъ новый выборъ отборныхъ сочинений на русскомъ, немецкомъ, польскомъ, французскомъ, древнемъ и ново-еврейскомъ языкахъ.

Бѣлостокъ, паровая бумаго-лит. Ш. М. Белебицкаго.
Abel, at any rate, became confident enough about his business and his clientele to preface his 1900 catalogue with the following programmatic statement, one that evinces swagger and exasperation in equal measure:

Over the course of our seven-year experience at the Library, we have very often heard:

“Give us an interesting book to read!”
“Give us something new!”

As far as possible, we try to satisfy our readers by uniting for them the pleasant with the useful. On the one hand, [we avoid] cheap printed editions,27 dominated as they are by a seductive title concealing a lack of content and absence of ideas. On the other hand, attending to the indications offered by criticism and the most intelligent of our readers, we have equipped the Library with the works of outstanding writers and the best journals.

However, we do not believe that we succeeded in “making everyone happy,” inasmuch as we try to satisfy only the best of our dear readers, those who seek in books not only nervous stimulation, leisure and pleasant somnolence, but food for the mind and the heart.

We permit ourselves to observe, that our readers vainly persist in asking the librarians for the best or the newest books, because (as they explain it) they are too lazy to dig into catalogues.28 But notwithstanding all his best intentions, the librarian cannot satisfy the requests of all subscribers for one simple reason: one person praises a given book, and another criticizes it severely . . . and so on, ad infinitum.

It all depends on the level of development, the character, the abilities and the mood of the reader.

In order that the reader might to some extent orient himself in this regard, we would suggest looking at the following: How to Read Books by Richardson

27 In Russian, lubok: here meaning not “folk woodcut illustrations,” but rather cheaply printed and highly popular adventure stories about great heroes, robber barons, princes and so on. For a fascinating edition of lubok narratives with an excellent introduction, see A.I. Reitblat, ed. and intro., Lubochnaia Povest’: Antologiia (Moscow: O.G.I., 2005).

28 “The librarians” included, besides Abel Kaufman himself, his wife Chaya and her brother and sister, Naum-Iakov [Yaakov] and Chana-Sora Gal’pern; the latter two worked there both from September 1894 and then again for some time after July 1896, when Chaya, who frequently worked in the library, was busy taking care of the six-month old Vertov (NIAB f. 1, op. 8, d. 2794, ll. 20-21).
There is a proverb: “For the lazy and insensitive mind, a whole library can seem an infertile desert.” Perhaps this serves to explain why “many” in the reading public so fervently pursue the newest (fashionable) novels, and almost never ask for the “dusty” classics on the shelves of the Library.30

What kind of person, living in Bialystok in 1900, would have written something like this?

The first thing to note here is that although Bialystok was a multilingual (if predominantly Yiddish-speaking) city,31 and although Kaufman sold books in a variety

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29 Kaufman has in mind the Russian translation of Charles Richardson’s 1881 The Choice of Books (Charl’z Richardson, Kak Chitat’ Knigi, Chtoby Oni Prinosili Nam Pol’zu?, trans. A.P. Valueva-Munt (St. Petersburg: M.M. Lederle, 1893)).

30 Katalog Russkikh knig i periodicheskikh izdanii biblioteki (pri knizhnom magazine) A.K. Kaufmana v g. Belostoke, 2nd edition (Bialystok: Sh. M. Volobrinskii, 1900), V-VI. The scare quotes are all in the original.

31 Mainly Yiddish-speaking Jews comprised the majority of the city’s population (around 65 percent in 1913, out of a total of 98,170), followed, in descending order, by Belorussians (26 percent) and various “others,” primarily Germans (4 percent), Poles (3 percent), Lithuanians (1.5 percent) and ethnic Russians and Ukrainians (less than 1 percent). The raw numbers for 1913 are: 63,699 Jews, 25,343 Belorussians, 3832 “others,” 2829 Poles, 1477 Lithuanians, 874 Russians, 116 Ukrainians. The Jewish population was heavily concentrated in the city, and represented a far lower percentage of the total in the surrounding area (less than 10 percent) (Obzor Grodzenskoi Gubernii za 1913 god (Grodno: Gubernskoi Tipografiia, 1914), 33, 81). By 1913, the proportion of Jews in Bialystok had fallen by 10 percent from 1896 levels, in spite of high birth rates, no doubt in large part due to emigration; the city’s population had meanwhile risen by over 35,000, from 62,600 to 98,170. Grodno, Abel Kaufman’s hometown, was likewise a mainly Jewish city (65 percent in 1896, out of a total of 37,579). Besides Judaism and Russian Orthodoxy, Catholicism was strongly represented in both Bialystok and Grodno; some Protestants and even a few Muslims lived there as well (Pamiatnaya Knizhka Grodnenskoj Gubernii na 1898 god (Grodno: Grodnenskii Gubernskii Statisticheskii Komitet, 1897), 4-5, 10-11, 14).
of languages\textsuperscript{32} and even wrote pamphlets in Yiddish attacking alcohol and tobacco use,\textsuperscript{33} his was clearly a Russian-language bookstore. By the time of the 1897 Russia-wide census, a significant percentage (24 percent) of Jewish adults – slightly higher, indeed, than the percentage of ethnic Russians literate in their own tongue (19.7 percent) – could read Russian.\textsuperscript{34} Although only 29.2 percent of Jewish men and 16.6 percent of Jewish women in the entire Grodno guberniia in 1897 were literate in Russian, we can assume that the percentages were somewhat higher in an urban center like Bialystok.\textsuperscript{35} Newspaper advertisements reveal that Kaufman stressed Russian-language

\textsuperscript{32} Except for some Ukrainian entries, no catalogues of Abel Kaufman’s non-Russian-language holdings have survived, though we know from advertisements that he sold works in French, German, Yiddish and Hebrew.

\textsuperscript{33} Katalog Russkikh knig, XIII.

\textsuperscript{34} Russian rates were lower due both to the peasant character of much of the population and extremely low literacy levels among women. In 1897, around 96.9 percent of Russian Jews indicated that Yiddish was their native language, followed by Russian (1.28 percent), Polish (0.9 percent) and German (0.44 percent). 32 percent of all adult male Jews could read Russian, however, and 17 percent of adult female Jews could as well. Only the Germans among Russia’s ethnic groups had higher levels of Russian literacy (O.V. Budnitskij, Rossijskie Evrei Mezhdu Krasnymi i Belymi (1917-1920) (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005), 42-43; B.D. Brutskus, Statistika Evreiskago Naseleniia, vyp. III (St. Petersburg: Sever, 1909), n.p. (diagram VI, indicating Jewish literacy in Russian as compared to that of Germans, Russians, Lithuanians, Latvians and Poles)). Over 99 percent of Jews in the Grodno guberniia indicated that Yiddish was their native language in the 1897 census (Brutskus, op cit., n.p. (table 5, indicating self-ascribed native language among Jews in the Russian Northwest)).

\textsuperscript{35} I would estimate that around a third of the city’s Jewish population was literate in Russian. In the Northwest region of the Pale, where Bialystok was located, literacy rates among urban Jews in 1897 were 38.2 percent for men and 23.1 percent for women, as opposed to 26 percent for men and 13 percent for women outside the cities (Brutskus, op. cit., n.p. (table 6, indicating Russian literacy among Jews in Russia)). Interestingly, however, on a comparative scale ranking Russian literacy rates among city-dwellers in the Empire divided by ethnicity, Jews fared poorer than Germans, Russians, Balts or Poles (ibid., n.p. (diagram VII)).
texts and Russian language learning when making his selections, and various guides and “companions” to Russian grammar and vocabulary were especially prominently featured in his newspaper and catalogue ads.36 As Yiddish was almost certainly his first language – and the first language of his parents – under what circumstances did Abel Kaufman learn Russian, and develop his Russian bibliophilia (or bibliomania)?37

Any answer to these questions is of necessity conjectural, as almost nothing is known about Kaufman’s life before he petitioned to open the bookstore in 1892. To be sure, the Russifying of (some) Russian Jews, always an uneven and fragmentary process, did not occur because of attractions exerted by Russian culture, at least not until the end of the 19th century. Pragmatic goals such as personal advancement, conditioned by pressures to acculturate that sometimes (as I will discuss below) emanated from within

36 Kaufman was active in selling and promoting Russian grammars, with titles like Companion and Comrade, written by local Białystok authors like A.S. Veisberg; see the extant catalogues.

37 As regards the Russophilia of the Kaufman family, it is also worthwhile noting that Abel and Chaya gave their last two sons (Semyon and Boris) Russian first names, both of which would have been unusual among Białystok Jews. 3.29 percent of Jewish boys born between 1885 and 1905 in the city were named David, and 5.64 percent bore the name of Moisej; by contrast, only .08 percent were named Boris, and a mere .04 percent had the name Semyon (as opposed to the much more common variant Shimon; see Zofia Abramowicz, Imiona chrzestne białostoczan w aspekcie socjolingwistycznym (lata 1885-1985). Białystok: Uniwersytet Warszawski Filia w Białymstoku, 1993), 390, 394, 417, 426, 428). In this, the Kaufmans were not unusual. In his superb essay on Marc Chagall’s early years, Benjamin Harshav notes of the painter’s family that, for them and many like them, “joining Russian culture seemed a natural act. The Chagall siblings are registered in the official Russian birth certificate by their Yiddish names only, but among themselves they used Russian names – the reverse of what one might expect” (Benjamin Harshav [with Barbara Harshav], Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 50-51).
the Jewish community itself, were of greater importance.\(^{38}\) Yet by the close of the century, Russia could no longer be regarded as a blank in “the intellectual order,” as the great philosophical provocateur Petr Chaadaev had put it in 1836.\(^{39}\) Leo Tolstoy, alive until 1910, was possibly the most celebrated author in the world, and figures like (among many others) the writers Turgeniev, Dostoevsky and Chekhov, the chemist Mendeleev, the mathematician Lobachevsky, and the participants in the country’s extraordinary musical culture (the violinists and pianists produced in the conservatories founded by the Rubinstein brothers; composers like Tchaikovsky and the members of the “Mighty Five”) had all helped give Russia a global cultural prestige unprecedented in its history.\(^{40}\) And if the country as a whole at the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century might still be characterized as a vast sea of rural “backwardness” studded with islets of “modernity,” those islets – Moscow and especially St. Petersburg, but also smaller centers like Bialystok – were in many

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\(^{38}\) Michael Stanislawski stresses a tenet “uneanimously endorsed by all segments of the new [Jewish] intelligentsia: every Jew is obliged to learn at least one foreign language in order to be a civilized human being; while any pure tongue is permissible, including German, the most preferable language is that of the state in which one lives, hence Russian. This must be read, written, and spoken fluently, and taught to children in the schools” (Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, 115).


\(^{40}\) See Eric Hobsbawm’s comments on Russia as a cultural “great power” (if an economically weak one, relative to the West) at the end of the 19\(^{th}\) century in his The Age of Empire: 1875-1914 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 19. It should be added that Russian literature provided powerful models for Jewish secular literature as it was developing in the late 19\(^{th}\)-early 20\(^{th}\) century in both Hebrew and Yiddish; on this, see Benjamin Harshav, Language in Time of Revolution (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993), 37, 71; and Harshav, Marc Chagall and His Times, 49-55. For reflections on the relationship between Jewish education in the non-Jewish vernacular (Polish, in this case) and practical concerns with training and career in the interwar period, see Ezra Mendelsohn, The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 65-68.
ways truly modern. Thus “Russia,” thought of at once as cultural space, sometime career opportunity, and world-imperial power, with “Russian” as a common medium, swept the Jews of the Pale into its crowded, wayward and elliptical orbit.

Abel Kaufman’s trade, his cultural aspirations and his evident orientation towards Russian allow us to surmise a good deal about the milieu from which both he and Chaya, who worked alongside him in the library for years, emerged. This milieu, as I will describe it here, was a dynamic conjuncture involving at least three intricately interacting historical forces: the impact of Russia’s Great Reforms of the 1860s; the continuing importance of the Jewish Enlightenment, which came to have a significant effect upon Jewish life in the first half of the 19th century; and the explosive development of commerce and transportation links in the western Russian Empire from the 1860s onward.

The Great Reforms, which took place in the 1860s and 1870s during the reign of Tsar Alexander II, changed Russian society in fundamental ways. The most significant reform was the 1861 emancipation of the 23-million-strong serf peasantry, but others – of educational, judicial, political, military, and censorship-related institutions and organs – had their own far-reaching, and often unforeseen, results. As historian Benjamin Nathans has shown, the Reforms had mixed consequences for Russian Jewry. On the one hand, Jews were prohibited from buying land on an equitable basis with non-Jews after the emancipation of the serfs; they remained confined to the Pale of Settlement; Jews in the military did not enjoy the same opportunities for promotion as non-Jews; and the new

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41 For an excellent overview of the reforms, see Ben Eklof, John Bushnell, and Larissa Zakharova, eds., Russia’s Great Reforms, 1855-1881 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).
local government bodies known as the *zemstvos* were not introduced into the far Western sections of the Empire, “for fear of electoral domination by Poles and Jews.” At the same time, however, the excitement over the prospect of reform in the early 1860s spread to sections of the Jewish community as it did to educated Russian society as a whole, and Jewish newspapers sprang up as venues for debate and discussion.

Of equal importance was the November 1861 decision to give Jewish graduates from universities the same rights as non-Jewish graduates, “including unrestricted residence and choice of occupation.” Despite persisting barriers confronting Jews in search of employment in the Tsarist civil service, the Reforms themselves created new institutional settings in which university-trained Jewish professionals, such as lawyers and engineers, could find work. The result was an upsurge in the number of Jews in universities and gymnasia (high schools) throughout the Empire, such that by the 1870s, as Nathans notes, “Jews were flocking to educational institutions more enthusiastically than any other group.”

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42 Nathans, op. cit., 71; see also 182.

43 Ibid., 70.

44 Ibid., 215.

45 Ibid., 218. “By 1886, one in seven university students in the Russian Empire was Jewish, and at universities like Kharkov and Odessa, that figure was closer to one in four or even one in three” (ibid.). Zipperstein notes how the 1874 military reform, “which required universal military service but also drastically reduced the length of service required of those who held higher education degrees,” also led many more Jewish families to send their children to Russian schools. “The number of Jewish students in gymnasiurns more than doubled between 1870 and 1879 (from 2,045 to 4,913) and rose nearly eightfold between 1865 and 1887 (from 990 to 7,657). Jewish university enrollment rose thirteen times (from 129 to 1,739)” (Zipperstein, op. cit., 19). See also Budnitskij, op. cit., 26.
Although Judeophobic ideologues began to fret publicly about the proliferation of university-educated Jews from the mid-1860s onward, and severe *numerus clausus* quotas on Jewish admission into gymnasia and other institutions of higher education were established in 1887 – partially as a reaction to perceived participation by Jewish students in demonstrations and other subversive political activities – young Jews continued to study in Russian universities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (though many sought education abroad as well). Among them was Masha (Rivka-Miriam) Gal’pern (b. 1 June 1883 in Zabludovo-d. 5 June 1970 in Acre, Israel), Chaya Kaufman’s younger sister and Vertov’s aunt, who studied at the prestigious Women’s Medical Institute in St. Petersburg from 1903 to 1906 and again from 1908, receiving her medical license in 1912. The family clearly took pride in Masha’s academic success, and as we shall see, she provided a powerful motivating example to her young nephews, the Kaufman boys.

46 Ibid., 257-307. “Quotas were set at 10 percent for institutions within the Pale (corresponding roughly to the Jewish population of the total population of the Pale), 5 percent outside the Pale (corresponding roughly to the Jewish proportion of the total population of the empire), and 3 percent in Moscow and St. Petersburg (where the most prestigious and arguably most ‘Russian’ universities were located, along with the most rebellious students)” (ibid., 267). See also Budnitskij, op. cit., 47-48. As Nathans shows, the involvement of young Jews in both student groups (some of which were self-identified as Jewish) and in political movements, particularly in the wake of the 1905 revolution and the ensuing *Russia-wide pogroms*, was another major consequence of these restrictions; see below.

47 TsGIASPb f. 436, op. 4, d. 906; op. 1, d. 2552; Boris Kaufman Papers, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, GEN MSS 562, Box 12, folder 183. The Institute was founded in 1897, and was one of only three (out of 65) state institutions of higher education attended by women only (61 were all-male). The standards for admission were high and included proficiency in Latin; about half the students came from the upper (noble or civil-service) social estates (A.E. Ivanov, *Studenchesstvo Rossii Kontsa XIX-Nachala XX Veka: Sotsial’no-Istoricheskaia Sud’ba* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1999), 102, 150, 193).
To be sure, this enthusiasm for secular education and even political participation was conditioned by long-term changes occurring within Russian Jewry itself, not least those introduced by the Haskalah or Jewish Enlightenment, whose adherents, the maskilim, promulgated a belief in the compatibility of Jewish life and secular modernity, including non-religious learning and literacy in a given dominant national language. Yet the influence of Haskalah was itself enabled by the ways in which the Russian state, from the late 1820s onward, interfered with traditional patterns of Jewish life. Two interventions, both complexly interacting, stand out in particular. The foundational one, and doubtless the most traumatic, was the 1827 Recruitment Statute of the Jews, which enforced the conscription of boys as young as eight into the Russian Army for 25 year terms. Four out of every thousand subjects in any given social estate (sosloviia) were to be recruited; in the case of Jews, conscription generally meant forced assimilation and the coerced abandonment of Jewish religious practice. As historian Michael Stanislawski has demonstrated, the conscription had a deeply fragmenting effect upon Russian Jewish communities: Jewish families used

48 Historian Steven Zipperstein provides an excellent summary of the main Haskalah tenets: “The Haskalah movement, stimulated by the German Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn . . . was characterized by the belief that the fundamental features of Judaism were entirely reconcilable with the modern world and that Jewish life could be judged by outside standards; it was also marked by a hunger for ideas and a readiness to sacrifice for their sake. It assumed somewhat different forms in the various regions of Eastern Europe, but it was consistently pedagogic in character and optimistic in tone. It stressed the centrality of those aspects of Jewish life that non-Jews presumably considered positive: the purity of biblical Hebrew, the stability of Jewish family life, Jews’ financial aptitude, their agricultural past, and Judaism’s philosophical legacy. The followers of the Haskalah, called maskilim, did not simply mimic the larger society; they subscribed, at least in part, to its values. The Haskalah denounced aspects of contemporary Jewish life at variance with the beliefs of the larger society (and presumably with the true character of Judaism as well), such as mystical speculation, disdain for secular study, and ignorance of the vernacular” (Steven J. Zipperstein, The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 11).
whatever resources they had to keep their sons out of the army, with the result that tensions developed between wealthier and more privileged sectors of the community and those less fortunate and therefore more vulnerable to conscription.49

Clearly enough, the recruitment policy was part of a larger effort on the part of the Tsarist state under Nicholas I and later to manage what was perceived as an alien and (especially given the co-presence in the Pale and to the immediate West of the unruly Poles) potentially disruptive mass.50 The Jews’ “antisocial tendency” and their “perspicacity, caution and cunning,” surmised an army-produced statistical study of the Grodno guberniia from 1863, were unfortunate consequences of the dark centuries of persecution. In their place, a “civilized” spirit of belonging and hard work was to be promoted:

It is strange to see [the Jews’] vain attachment to themselves and their blind, ignorant opposition to a people [i.e., the Russians] who have every right to their love and respect. Labor and enlightenment are the general and unavoidable tasks of today. Only through labor guided by enlightenment can our Jews free their land


50 As historian Theodore Weeks has written, “the loyalty of the Jewish population was seen as an important weapon against the most dangerous foe in the region: the Poles.” The Jews in the Western region “were seen as a problem sui generis. . . . They presented not so much an immediate threat to the government (unlike the Poles) as a feared foreign influence that was believed to have detrimental economic and moral . . . effects on the surrounding population.” At the same time, “Governors frequently pointed out the role of Jewish youth in socialist agitation, especially in the Bund [The General Jewish Labor Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia].” (Theodore R. Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914 (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 64, 73-74). For more on socialist politics in Bialystok and its environs, see below.
from oppression, self-interest and self-love . . . Civilization alone, rational and expansive, will show the Jews their true field of action, which has up till now gone against the general good and paralyzed [their] finest powers. . . .51

Indeed, in 1840, well before the reforms began, Count P.D. Kiselev, Tsar Nicholas I’s minister of state domains, established a government “Jewish Committee” to develop policy in regard to the status of Jews, and a number of the officials on that committee helped preside over the Great Reforms as well.52 The Committee’s policy on Jews focused on undoing what Kiselev called “the estrangement of the Jews from the civil order,”53 and effectively began by abolishing the kahals (local Jewish executive bodies) in 1844.54 That the kahals did not in fact vanish - the local bodies were still needed, after all, to enforce state recruitment and taxation statutes – was but one of the symptoms of the overall incoherence of Tsarist policy regarding Jews. That policy writhed within a dialectic that bound innovation to conservation, assimilation to rigid separation, and the

51 N. Bobrovskii, ed., Materialy dliia geografii i statistiki Rossii, sobrannye ofitserami general’nogo shtaba. Grodnenskaia guberniiia. Chast’ pervnaia (St. Petersburg: General’naia Shtaba, 1863), xxii, 849, 866. The book was apparently compiled on the basis of statistics gathered in the Grodno guberniiia by the army’s general staff between 1837 and 1854.

52 Benjamin Nathans, Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), 69.

53 Quoted in Nathans, op. cit., 33.

54 Nathans, op. cit., 34; Stanislawski, op. cit., 47.
selective “modernization” of part of Russian society to restrictions on the kinds of social and geographic mobility that such modernization made imaginable and desirable.\textsuperscript{55}

One of the Committee’s central proposals – and this is the second important intervention – involved the creation of specifically Jewish but state-run schools in the Pale of Settlement, through the agency of which, it was hoped, Jews would be integrated into Russian society. Although the long-term impact of these schools throughout the wider Jewish community was probably not large – and certainly less significant than those later reforms that led to high levels of Jewish university enrollment\textsuperscript{56} – the school project did help create the myth, evidently believed by both modernizers and traditionalists, of a “royal alliance” between adherents of the Haskalah, hitherto entirely marginal within Jewry in the Russian lands, and the Russian state. Entering into the breach opened up by the conscription, the “Haskalah-based Jewish schools,” Stanislawski has argued, helped to exacerbate social and cultural distinctions, which had taken on a marked class tincture, within the Jewish community:

A very common reaction to the abuses of the conscription system was a turning against the Jewish establishment, not an increase in alienation from the Russian government. As a result of the opening of the state schools, a significant segment of the poorer elements of Russian Jewry who had no voice in the communal decision-making process protested against their leaders by ignoring threats and prohibitions and enrolling their children in the “heretical” schools. In the last years of Nicholas’s reign, Haskalah became the ideology not only of an


intellectual or economic elite but also of a vocal portion of the destitute and dispossessed.\textsuperscript{57}

Significantly, one of these schools was founded in Grodno, Abel Kaufman’s home city, sometime between 1847 and 1853.\textsuperscript{58} The strong initial resistance among local Jews to the Grodno school was apparently quite soon broken down:

At the beginning, the wealthy and traditional Jews of Grodno refused to send their children to the school and enrolled only the poorest and least intelligent of the local children. After a short while, however, many of the [in the words of an official report] “reasonable and not-so-prejudiced” Jews noted that the unfortunates in the state school had achieved great progress in their studies and decided to send their own children to the school, raising the enrollment to 62 in

\textsuperscript{57} Stanislawski, op. cit., 97-8, 106. Stanislawski summarizes his argument as follows: “In the first decades of the nineteenth century, currents of Jewish enlightenment thought and practice had infiltrated into Russia. A few small pockets of maskilim [adherents of the Haskalah] appeared in the Pale; a larger number of Jews seem to have been attracted to the Haskalah but were unable or unwilling to join forces openly with the combative new movement. Soon, Nicholas’s government – or rather, his minister of national enlightenment – began to support the purveyors and purposes of Haskalah. This alliance intensified the predisposition of Russian Jews to view the maskilim as powerful, well-connected friends of the authorities and hence a grave danger to traditional Jewish life. Although these fears quite probably were exaggerated, the intervention of the government was decisive. It led, on the one hand, to strengthen the Haskalah in Russia in size and in prestige and, on the other, to intensifying the opposition to enlightenment on the part of the bulk of Russian Jewry. . . By the 1840s Russian Jewry was split into two new groups – the traditionalists and the enlightened. . . Traditionalist Jewry in Russia began to transform itself into an Orthodoxy, united in a new militant defense against the danger it perceived from the outside. . . The maskilim, on the other hand, were convinced that the march of history was on their side. And so they solidified their alliance with and dependence on the government, which they identified with the beneficent and progressive forces of modernity and civilization” (186-187). See also Stanislawski’s “Russian Jewry, the Russian State, and the Dynamics of Jewish Emancipation,” in Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship, ed. Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 262-283; esp. 272-273.

1853. Among the new students were children of prosperous families and even the son of the local rabbi.59

For its part, Bialystok also proved hospitable to the Haskalah, perhaps even earlier than Grodno. As historian Rebecca Kobrin notes, “more traditionally minded rabbis” denounced Bialystok “as a ‘heretical city, filled with haskalah and bildung’” that “should be avoided at all costs.”60

It is not unlikely that the Russophilic Abel Kaufman, born in 1868, attended some sort of Russian-language school in Grodno, whether this was a “state school” or (more likely) one of the later gymnasia. (It also appears probable – although I cannot prove this – that he was among those effectively barred from higher education by the numerus clausus of 1887, promulgated when he was 19 years of age.) If we go further and examine Kaufman's circulating-library holdings, we find that they were at once overwhelmingly “secular” in character and typical of other Russian bookstore-libraries in the Empire in terms of both range of subject matter and the relative dominance of Russian-language belles lettres and writing for children,61 if also marked by a linguistic

59 Ibid., 105.

60 Rebecca Kobrin, Jewish Bialystok, 25-26. Haskalah-inspired groups, such as the “Society for the Spread of Enlightenment among the Jews in Russia” (founded 1863) were active in Bialystok as well; in the 1870s, this organization created a “Society for the Promotion of Industry,” intent on establishing “an exclusively Jewish craft school” in Bialystok (Klier, op. cit., 244-248, 260).

61 Focusing on library catalogues from the period 1879-81, historian Abram Reitblat has found that most of the circulating libraries had around 2-3 thousand titles, with belles lettres and children's literature making up 60-70 percent (A. Reitblat, Ot Bovy k Bal’montu: Ocherki po istorii chteniiia v Rossii vo vtoroj polovine XIX veka (Moscow: MPI, 1991), 58).
diversity (Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, Ukrainian, German, French) that reflected Bialystok's own.

Kaufman’s circulating library was regularly replenished by new books and, especially, by new periodicals. All the classics and much new writing (Artsybashev, Gorky, Bunin, Leonid Andreev, Kuprin, Korolenko, Boris Zaitsev, great quantities of Chekhov) in Russian were well represented, alongside Russian translations of foreign works by writers both older (Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Schiller, Scott, Hoffmann, Balzac, Cooper, Dumas), recent (Hugo, Dickens, Sand, Stowe, Flaubert, Louisa May Alcott) and contemporary (Twain, d’Annunzio, Ibsen, Björnson, Edward Bellamy, Wilde, Hardy, Gissing, Hamsun, Zola, Kipling, Maupassant, Strindberg, Schnitzler, Frank Norris, Bertha von Sütterl). The relatively small “scientific section” was a mix of popular science, science-fantasy, nutrition, history, religion, philosophy, politics, and psychology, and included the writings of, among many others, astronomer and scientific popularizer Camille Flammarion, biologist Ernst Haeckel, psychologist Nikolai Lange, Marxist political theorist Karl Kautsky (his early book on the origins of marriage), designer and utopian socialist thinker William Morris (News from Nowhere (1890)), and criminologist Cesare Lombroso, alongside Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Max Nordau, Ernest Renan, Edward Tylor (Anthropology (1881)), Friedrich Engels (The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State (1884)), and large helpings of Darwin. Finally, all sections of the circulating library incorporated many books by Jewish writers and on Jewish themes, including the Jewish Encyclopedia and works by authors like Lev Levanda (his attack on the infamous blood libel against Jews and much of his fiction), Sholem Asch (translations of some of his early work, such as “A Shtetl” (1904),
into Russian), Theodor Herzl (The Jewish State (1896)), and historian Semyon Dubnov, among others.\textsuperscript{62}

Although we should not be tempted to conclude too much about Kaufman's self-conception based on his choice of profession, we can entertain certain assumptions about him based on that choice and on a scrutiny of his catalogs and his way of presenting his business to the public. On the one hand, as Reitblat argues,

circulating libraries were pleasant and “proper” ways for people of the more privileged estates to earn money: the nobility, the bureaucracy, and the intelligentsia. They enabled a conjunction between earning one’s livelihood and a sufficiently prestigious, “honest” and, often, educational function.\textsuperscript{63}

To be sure, journalists in Moscow mocked the circulating libraries for the low quality of their offerings (popular literature instead of Karamzin, Pushkin, Gogol and so on), and it is not surprising, given their commercial orientation, that these libraries aimed at immediately pleasing their clientele in ways that contrasted with the educational focus of the public libraries. Yet in cities with an adequate concentration of educated readers, the

\textsuperscript{62} The library’s holdings changed over the years, of course, though not the overall proportion of literature, children’s literature, and “science” represented on its shelves. See its three surviving catalogues, compiled by Abel Kaufman: Katalog Russkikh Knig Biblioteki dlia Chteniiia (Pri Knizhnom Magazine) A. Kaufmana v g. Belostoke, 1\textsuperscript{st} edition (Bialystok: Sh. Volobrinskii, 1895); Katalog Russkikh knig i periodicheskikh izdanii biblioteki (pri knizhnom magazine) A.K. Kaufmana v g. Belostoke, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition (Bialystok: Sh. M. Volobrinskii, 1900), Dobavochnyi Katalog Russkikh Knig Biblioteki A.K. Kaufmana v g. Belostoke (Bialystok: Oppengeim, 1909); all in the State Library of the Russian Federation, Moscow.

\textsuperscript{63} Reitblat, op. cit., 58. In 1882, 50 percent of the proprietors of libraries were of the higher classes and professions (nobles, civil servants, military men, teachers, doctors etc.); 37 percent were merchants and townspeople, and 13 percent derived from other groups like peasants, the clergy, and foreigners. A high percentage (29 percent) were women, many of whom apparently opened their libraries with explicitly educational motives in mind (ibid., 56, 58).
circulating libraries often did possess a good supply of scholarly and older, classic works, and Kaufman’s was certainly one of those.64

Indeed, “educational function” seems to have been a major motive behind Kaufman’s decision to open the circulating library. Though a common townsperson (meshchanin) and not a member of any elite, Abel Kaufman had earlier elected to serve in the city administration (specifically, in its library), rather than participating in the business world so overwhelmingly dominant in Bialystok, and about which I will have more to say in a moment. In the 1860s and 70s, there had been a Russia-wide surge in the number of libraries with a largely educational orientation,65 and Kaufman’s bookstore-library was also established with “enlightenment” rather than profit exclusively in mind; in 1896, he petitioned to be allowed to call his library “The People’s Benefit,” a name selected to associate the library with popular uplift.66 It is obviously impossible to infer any specific educational program out of the catalogues of the holdings in Kaufman’s library, not least because those holdings answered to the diverse requests of his customers as well as to his own tastes and outlook. Clearly, however, he did regard his establishment as an instrument of public enlightenment, and must have selected many of the library’s offerings in that light.

64 Ibid., 48-49, 54.

65 Ibid., 56.

66 NIAB f. f. 1, op. 8, d. 2794, l. 21, 22, 22ob. The request was dated 31 July 1896, and permission was granted 23 October 1896. I have not seen any advertisements billing the library under this name, although it is clear that circulating library and bookstore owners quite commonly gave their establishments such monikers. A St. Petersburg library and press that had existed since ca. 1860 was called “Society’s Benefit” (Katalog Knizhnago Magazina i Biblioteki Tovarishchestva “Obshchestvennaia Pol’za” (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia Pol’za, 1905).
In sum, and based on what we can read out of Russian-Jewish history on the one hand, and the evidence we have about Kaufman’s bookstore and its probable clientele on the other – particularly the bookstore’s secular and Russian-language emphasis, but also the high proportion of books on Jewish controversies it contained – it seems safe to describe Kaufman as representative of what John Klier, Benjamin Nathans, Michael Stanislawski and others have called the “Russian-Jewish intelligentsia,” that public that began to form in the 1860s from the matrix that precipitated out of the Reforms and the Haskalah, and which stressed at once participation in Russian society and concern for issues touching upon Russian Jewry specifically. To be sure, this was now a true intelligentsia that, however secular, took a determinedly (if not radically) critical attitude toward the Russian state’s policies and prejudices, in contrast to their maskilim forbears.

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67 Klier offers the following description of this intelligentsia: “They . . . were invariably the products of the state Jewish school system, and they often remained dependent upon the system created by Nicholas I for employment as teachers or Jewish experts. . . . they campaigned overtly for Jewish emancipation as a basic human right which did not need to be earned. They neglected significant features of the Haskalah schema, such as the civilizing power of the study of Biblical Hebrew. For them the customary Haskalah emphasis on the use of the vernacular became a virtual passion for Russia as an emblem and pledge of citizenship. While the maskilim . . . were inwardly directed in their efforts at reform – albeit willing to call upon the Russian state for support – members of the Russian Jewish intelligentsia considered themselves part of Russian society, entitled and obligated to participate in public debate, an attitude fostered by the atmosphere of the Reform Era.” “The Russian Jewish intelligentsia,” he adds, “early on confronted the challenge of defining a Jewish identity – and identifying a role for Judaism – in modern Russian society,” but also stresses that the differentiations between various branches of what we might call the intellectual hegemons within Jewish society – traditionalists, maskilim, assimilationists, the intelligentsia – “cannot be considered hard and fast” (Klier, op. cit., 26-28).

Boisterous, rich Bialystok

It is important to note, finally, that the Bialystok-Grodno area was the site of a great deal of large-, middle- and small-scale capital investment and exchange, which turned Bialystok into both a boomtown and (later) one of the cradles of the Russian labor movement. Although sometimes described as “out of the way,” a backwards “shtetl,” and so on – and may well have been perceived as “provincial” by many of its youngest, most restless inhabitants69 – Bialystok was in fact the second largest industrial city in the western Russian Empire (after Łódź), and thus roiling with all the activity, prosperity, inequality and conflict that capitalism always generates. Already by 1862, the great Russian writer Nikolai Leskov in his “From a Travel Diary” reported that Bialystok was known, at least locally, as “the Lithuanian Manchester.”70 In contrast to other provincial centers such as Grodno, wrote Leskov,

The streets of Bialystok were filled with people. Jews were swarming everywhere. There was noise, chatter, quarreling, and barter: the whole city was like a marketplace.71

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69 The city is seriously mischaracterized in just this manner in Evgeny Tsymbal’s 2002 Dziga and his Brothers, an otherwise informative documentary film. Viktor Listov’s pioneering article on Vertov’s early life and career does justice to the contrast between the impressions of memoirists (specifically, cartoonist Boris Efimov and polar explorer Ernst Krenkel’) recalling the “boondocks” of Bialystok, and a social reality that only superficially appeared “quiet and stagnant” (Listov, “Molodost’ Mastera,” in E.I. Vertova-Svilova and A.L. Vinogradova, eds., Dziga Vertov v Vospominaniakh Sovremennikov (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), 88-89).

70 Łódź, the greatest industrial city in the western Russian Empire, was well known as “the Polish Manchester.”

Bialystok’s position as a border town became important in 1831 when the tsarist government increased duties from 1 to 15 percent on goods coming into Russia from Congress Poland, prompting entrepreneurs in Poland to set up shop across the frontier in the Bialystok-Grodno area, which was appealingly positioned relatively near to Prussia and on roads leading east. The economic improvements that began in the wake of the serf emancipation, together with intensifying marketing for exports, led in turn to a general upsurge in trade and industrial growth in the 1860s and early 1870s. Bialystok became a major cloth producer – the Russian Army was the largest client – and its competitiveness in textiles was enhanced by the city’s position at the junction of three important railway lines: the St. Petersburb-Warsaw line (built in 1862), the Odessa-Królewiec (built in 1873: the main conduit of Ukrainian grain to East Prussia), and the Bialystok-Baranowicze (built in 1886: offered access to Moscow and points east through Minsk and Smolensk). These tracks, main arteries within a web of ancillary rail, linked Bialystok to Congress Poland and beyond in the West, to the Baltic Coast and St. Petersburg.

Although Leskov saw “no large buildings” in Bialystok, he noted that the hotel service was far superior to that offered in nearby cities. Just as English factories developed their own specializations, he added, Bialystok, where cloth manufacture had begun 20 years earlier, now had textile factories focusing just on the production of particular fabrics like tricot. Reflecting on the city’s prospects, Leskov’s host at the Hotel Warszawsky complained only that Bialystok had no good rail connections (the St. Petersburb-Warsaw line had just been built), a situation that was to change over the next 20 years.

Dobronski, op. cit., 73.
Petersburg in the Northeast, to the Crimea and Ukraine in the South, and to the Russian heartland in the East.  

As might be expected, the presence or absence of railway connections “significantly affected the degree to which a particularly setting was influenced by modern currents, either economic or cultural.”  

A remarkable passage from Israel Weisbrem’s Haskalah-inspired novel Between the Times celebrates the modernizing force of the train in terms that seem almost proto-Futurist:

. . . from the day the railway was laid down through [the] town, the spirit of Haskalah began to infect its youth . . . The flutelike sounds of those chariots of fire were like manifestos for a nation walking until then in darkness, prompting it to come out and be enlightened, so that the glory of the Haskalah might shine upon it. . .  

To be sure, “Haskalah” is here a figure for modernization as such, which, in Bialystok’s case, involved rail and much else besides. The colossal surge in the city’s population in the sixty years after 1845 was largely due to an economic dynamism truly exceptional within the western Russian Empire. Although only 260 of the Grodno guberniia’s 3565

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73 Adam Dobronski, Bialystok: Historia Miasta, 2nd edition (Bialystok: Zarzad Miasta Bialegostoku, 2001), 74, 81-83. In 1914, between 23 and 84 trains passed a day through the city on the St. Petersburg-Warsaw line (ibid., 81).

74 Zipperstein, op. cit., 16.

75 Quoted in Zipperstein, op. cit., 16. Weisbrem’s novel Bein ha-zemanim was published in Warsaw in 1888.

76 Home to 15 textile factories in 1860, the city had 36 more ten years later (Dobronski, op. cit., 84), and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 provided a major stimulus to production, ending the major recession of 1872-76 (Dobronski, 84; Ezra Mendelsohn, Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers’ Movement in Tsarist Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 17). As Theodore Weeks writes, “Industry in the [Northwest Region of the Empire, comprising Kovno, Vitebsk, Vilna, Mogilev, Minsk and Grodno guberniias] was small and underdeveloped. In 1911-
factories and plants – many of them very small concerns, employing only a handful of people – were located in Bialystok in 1896, the city’s industry produced a full 4,029,821 rubles out of the 14,041,854 rubles-worth produced by factories in the guberniia as a whole, by far the largest share generated by any municipality.\textsuperscript{77} By 1913, Bialystok was home to 52\% of the factory workers in the guberniia, and accounted for 54\% of its textile production; 75\% of workers involved in non-textile industry labored and resided there as well.\textsuperscript{78}

A regional banking center by the 1890s, Bialystok’s wealth was reflected in its many modern facilities and amenities, especially as compared with the surrounding area. In 1896, most of the stone-built private homes in the guberniia were in Bialystok (977 out

\textsuperscript{77} In 1896, according to official records, Bialystok’s 256 factories employed 3012 male laborers (out of a total 13,930 in the guberniia), 1600 females (out of 4876), and 117 children (out of 838) (Pamiatnaia Knizhka Grodnenskoj Gubernii na 1898 god (Grodna: Grodnenskij Gubernskij Statisticheskij Komitet, 1897), 28-29).

\textsuperscript{78} Dobronski, op. cit., 86. Even as a textile center, however, Bialystok manufactured only eight percent of what Lodz produced in 1914 (ibid.).
Medical alumni from Vilna University and other prestigious schools began to appear in the city in the wake of the construction of important hospitals (a 30 bed district hospital built in 1853; a 48 bed Jewish hospital in 1862), and the influx of both wealth and educated professionals meant the city was soon hosting performances by well-known musicians and theatrical troupes. By 1913, the year before Vertov left to go off to St. Petersburg/Petrograd for university study, the city had seven pharmacies – the only ones in the district (uezd). The physical, transport and communications plants were all modernized between 1890 and 1910, which required a few preliminary feats of drainage to stabilize the city’s marshy territory. A water supply system was built in 1892 to the northeast of the city; an electric power plant rose on the banks of the Biala River in 1910; a local telephone network started operations in 1891; and by 1895, Bialystok was transected by three lines of horse-drawn trams. At the same time, the city’s economic growth brought with it serious zoning problems – shops and warehouses proliferated in every backyard, on every riverbank and even in the gaps between buildings – making daily life difficult for workers and non-workers alike.

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79 Pamiatnaia Knizhka Grodnenskoj Guberni na 1898 god (Grodna: Grodnenskii Gubernskij Statisticheskij Komitet, 1897), 16.

80 Ibid., 76.

81 Obzor Grodnenskoj Gubernii za 1913 god (Grodna: Gubernskaia Tipografiia, 1914), 81.

82 Dobronski, op. cit., 100.

83 Dobronski, op. cit., 103.

84 Dobronski, op. cit., 101.
Cinema, “born” in France just prior Vertov’s own birth in January 1896, naturally found its way to Bialystok as well.85 Although it is not clear when the first cinema appeared in the city, in the years preceding World War I, there were apparently six movie theatres in operation there – The Modern, The Whole World, Fantazia, Eden, The Bio Express, and The Palace – with The Modern and The Whole World first in rank in terms of size, repertoire and attendance.86 In 1915, when The Modern decided to show films

85 The Lumière Brothers held the first public screenings of the “cinématographe” in Paris on 28 December 1895.

86 NIAB f. 15, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 59, 61, 63, 67, 67 ob; f. 8, op. 2, d. 1917, l. 1; f. 8, op. 2, d. 2190, ll. 1-16; f. 8, op. 2, d. 1971, l. 25; f. 103, op. 1, d. 106, l. 30a. See also V. Listov,
out of doors in an adjacent garden during the hot summer months, this exhibition novelty was reported in film journals published as far away as Riga:

The garden is located next to the theatre and creates a very good impression due to its multitude of fruit trees, under which it is so pleasant to relax after the day’s labors and listen to the theatre’s neatly dressed orchestra.87

Film going was popular in Bialystok, and The Palace and The Whole World both expanded their premises in the pre-World War I years.88 As far as repertoire is concerned, The Modern showed recent serials produced by Denmark’s Nordisk studio, Max Linder comedies (Le Chapeau de Max (1913) was much publicized), and Pathé newsreels, while Fantazia exhibited the Italo-French actor Ferdinand Guillaume’s “Polidor” comedies soon after their initial release, a fresh World Journal every week or so, and curiosities such as Rhythmic Drawings from Nature.89 The theatres were well integrated into the town’s central business district; for some years, Arkadij Pokhon’skij’s


88 NIAB f. 8, op. 2, d. 1971, l. 25; f. 8, op. 2, d. 2190, ll. 1-16.

89 NIAB f. 15, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 59, 61, 61ob, 63, 67, 67ob. Guillaume's Polidor ha caldo, for instance, was released on 4 August 1913 and was playing in Bialystok no later than mid-October (see NIAB f. 15, d. 155, l. 59; and Elena Mosconi, ed., L'Oro di Polidor: Ferdinand Guillaume alla Cineteca Italiana (Milan: Il Castoro, 2000), 96). I have not seen evidence that any pre-Revolutionary newsreel was distributed in Russia under the title World Journal; perhaps this title came from the exhibitor, rather than the distributor. Listov indicates that The Whole World showed Pathé and Gaumont newsreels presenting everything from the Eiffel Tower and Cuban sugar plantations to conflicts in the Balkans and “the production of Cadbury cocoa” (Listov, “Molodost’ Mastera,” 89).
Eden theatre evidently shared a building in Nikolaevskaia Street (the three-story Markus Building) with Abel Kaufman’s bookstore.90

Image 4: The façade of Bialystok’s The Whole World movie theatre in 1915, from a set of architect’s drawings made in preparation for an expansion of the building. Source: NIAB f. 8, op. 2, d. 1971, l. 25.

Finally, in 1895, Bialystok could boast five of the 15 circulating libraries in the Grodno gubernia, more than twice as many as in any other city, alongside a number of smaller stores and photo/print related businesses.91 Abel Kaufman’s bookstore-library was not the only one in Bialystok – he had a number of large rivals even in the 1890s,

90 NIAB f. 8, op. 2, d. 1917, l. 1. The Bio Express was in Nikolaevskaia Street as well (NIAB f. 103, op. 1, d. 106, l. 30a). Home to two library-bookstores and four bookbinderies, as well as the city’s top hotels (the Warszawski and Hamburski), Nikolaevskaia Street was obviously one of Bialystok’s more prestigious commercial arteries.

91 In 1898, the other four circulating libraries were owned by Mojsej Milanovskij, Iosel’ Kagan, Sh. Lipshits, Kaplan, and Indirskij. There were in addition one bookstore without a library, two smaller bookshops (and numerous booksellers’ stalls), a sheet music store, five photo studios (one dating from 1888), three lithographic shops, nine printing shops, and four printmakers (NIAB f. 1, op. 9, d. 890, ll. 85-870b).
and the bookstore was but one of 12 by 1929 – but it was one of the most centrally located, best-stocked, and largest in the city, known broadly through word of mouth, connections with local schools, and through advertisements in papers in Russian, Yiddish and Polish. By the 1880s, argues Reitblat, the clientele of a circulating library like Kaufman's would be drawn from virtually the entire reading public of the city, with the likely exceptions of the very well to do and the utterly indigent:

In the 19th century, especially during its second half, the number of readers of modest means, unable to buy the books they needed on their own, grew sharply. Libraries of other kinds (scientific, school- or club-based, and so on) were as a rule closed to the wider public, and indeed often did not contain the kinds of literature that interested that public. The basic readership of [circulating libraries] was made up of civil servants, students (university and high school), those involved in service in private enterprise or in stores, army officers, and members of the so-called “free professions.”

A given circulating library could have anywhere from 100 to 300, or even more, subscribers, and Reitblat suggests that the heterogeneity of the public that made use of

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92 Kaufman’s “library for reading” was one of five in the city in 1896 – there had only been three when he set up shop in 1893 -- all of which were attached to bookstores (Pamiatnaia Knizhka Grodzenskoi Gubernii na 1897 god (Grodno: Grodzenskij Gubernskij Statisticheskij Komitet, 1896), 59 (section 4); Pamiatnaia Knizhka Grodzenskoi Gubernii na 1898 god (Grodna: Grodzenskii Gubernskii Statisticheskii Komitet, 1897), 74); for 1929, see footnote 21. He supplied books to the local Talmud-Tora, among other schools (Iu. Kaletskii, ed., Otchet Belostokskoi Talmud’-tory s remeslennym uchilishchem za 1901 i 1902 gg. (Bialystok: Ts. Mishondzink, 1903), 9, 18, 21), and also purchased books from students “with a permission slip from the parents” (see, for instance, the Bialystok paper Svobodnaia Mysl’ 8 (1-2 July 1922): 4). Judging from the newspapers I have seen, Kaufman advertised more than his competitors, at least in Russian-language papers: see his ads in Belostoskaja Gazeta (8 January 1910): 4 (NIAB f. 103, op. 1, d. 106, l. 30a); Golos Belostoka 240, 242, 243 (20, 23-24 October 1913), always on p. 4 (NIAB f. 15, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 66ob, 68ob, 70ob); Svobodnaia Mysl’ 5 (10-11 June 1922): 1; Svobodnaia Mysl’ 18 (10-11 June 1922): 1; Svobodnaia Mysl’ 5 (17 February 23): 4; among others. (Svobodnaia Mysl’ can be found in the library of the University of Warsaw.)

93 Reitblat, op. cit., 61.
the libraries is reflected in the wide variety of their offerings, ranging typically (and
certainly in Kaufman's case, as we have seen) from the Russian classics (Pushkin,
Tolstoy, Turgenev, many others), foreign prose works (from Homer to Hamsun),
children's literature (Jules Verne, Mayne Reid), adventure novels (often by forgotten
favorites like Fortuné du Boisgobey and Xavier de Montépin) and works of mostly
popularized science and scholarship (Camille Flammarion, Darwin, Henry Buckle,
Samuel Smiles, J.S. Mill, Hyppolite Taine, even Proudhon were all mainstays Russia-
wide).94

Reitblat convincingly inserts the libraries for reading into the history of “media of
mass communication, inasmuch as they sought to enable the widest possible circle of
readers to become acquainted with a new journal or a new book,” thus approximating the
function both of bookstores -- to which (as with Abel Kaufman’s establishment) they
were often attached in any case – and of periodicals as such, the latter being,
unsurprisingly, among the libraries’ most popular offerings. As a hybrid of library and
bookstore, the circulating library emerged as a kind of “unification of autonomous
readers [otherwise] unconnected with one another,” and to whose desires the library’s
owner, motivated at least to a considerable degree by commercial goals, was bound to
respond in some way.95 At the same time, Kaufman’s “address to his clientele” suggests
that the bookstore’s commercial identity – an identity shared, as we have seen, with many
enterprises in Bialystok unconnected in such a direct way to knowledge – was to some
extent at odds with its owner’s evident concern with “uplift” and promotion of “the best

94 Ibid., 58-60.

95 Ibid., 50.
“books” rather than the “newest (fashionable) novels.” Not only the circulation, but also the management of texts and their reception was the common concern of circulating library owners, publishers, booksellers, and, not least, the censorship, which sent out long lists of prohibited books every month to the libraries.96

In Bialystok, to be sure, the constitution of a Russian-language reading public was complicated by the city’s multilingual, multi-confessional and (as we shall see) politically complex character. We shouldn’t forget that the inventor of Esperanto, Ludwik (Eliezer) Zamenhof (1859-1917), lived in Bialystok from 1859 to 1873, and reputedly was provoked to devise a universal language because of the disunity occasioned by the “Babel” of tongues in his hometown.97 Besides Russian-oriented establishments like Kaufman’s, there were other kinds of bookstores and circulating libraries in Bialystok, some of which catered primarily to Yiddish readers, or to minority groups.

On some occasions, as Reitblat reports, the circulating libraries went beyond any relatively general “media” function to become more punctual counter-cultural (or

96 Tolstoy, Zola, Kautsky, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and Bebel – but also Heine, Rimbaud and Mallarmé – were among the prominent names encountered on the lists of books censored within the Grodno gubernia (NIAB f. 1, op. 9, d. 890, ll. 10-28; f. 1, op. 9, d. 17, ll. 8-150). It is clear from these lists that publications in Polish and Ukrainian were scrutinized more assiduously, and banned more frequently, than those in Russian, at least in the Pale.

97 Zamenhof lamented this disharmony in a well-known 1895 letter to his friend Nikolai Afrikanovich Borovko. In Bialystok, according to Zamenhof as paraphrased by his biographer, “there were only Jews, Russians, Poles, Germans . . . not people, but only races” (“ne homoj, sole gentoj”). Quarrels in the marketplace, strife on the street, and even pogroms (Zamenhof had in mind the 1906 massacre in Bialystok, discussed below) had a single cause: “Poles would hate Russians, Russians would want nothing to do with Germans, Germans wouldn’t tolerate the French, the French wouldn’t accept the English.” Only a “neutral language” (“neutrala lingvo”) could unite the peoples and bring about universal understanding (Edmond Privat, Vivo de Zamenhof (Leipzig: Ferdinand Hirt & Sohn/Esperanto Fako, 1923), 16-19). See also Kobrin, Jewish Bialystok, 52-55.
“counterpublic”) loci for the dispersal of radical, revolutionary writing, to the extent of offering space for circles of revolutionary youth to gather and discuss contemporary political problems.\(^9\) As is well known, by the early twentieth century, Jews were participating in disproportionately large numbers in revolutionary parties Russia-wide (the Social Democrats, the Socialist Revolutionaries, above all the Bund); and Bialystok’s Jewish population, unusually proletarian and radicalized in any case, was certainly no exception to this powerful critical and activist tendency.\(^9\) Though I have no reason to believe that Abel Kaufman provided sanctuary for any subversive meetings, his bookstore-library surely was a popular spot among Bialystok’s students – some of whom would soon become quite radical indeed – who would have encountered there not only diversion, but also much incitement to thought and critique. Indeed, as of 1898, the only circulating library in Bialystok that included a public reading room was Kaufman’s, suggesting that his establishment might have been a gathering place unique in the city.\(^1\) And an intriguing anecdote from a later era helps illustrate the attachments, sentimental as well as intellectual, which formed around a circulating library like Kaufman’s.

\(^{9}(\text{Ibid., 56). Reitblat mentions “radical” libraries operating in St. Petersburg, Viatka, Perm’ and Irkutsk. Though the revolutionary character of these libraries was clearly exceptional, it is interesting to note that almost two-thirds of the libraries circulated copies of the first volume of Marx’s Capital (ibid., 60); Engels and Kautsky, as I have already indicated, were on Kaufman’s own shelves.}

\(^{9}\) See Budnitskij, op. cit., 53-54; and below.

\(^{10}\) See the 1898 police report on reading rooms in Bialystok in NIAB, f. 1, op. 9, d. 890, l. 85ob.
Among the many small entrepreneurs in the city at the turn of the century was a merchant of the Second Guild named Chaim Movshov Fridliand, originally from a shtetl in the Minsk gubernia, and the owner of a footwear store in Kiev and a leather warehouse in Bialystok. Fridliand and his wife Rokhlia raised their two sons in Bialystok, and the boys became classmates of David and Moisej Kaufman at the Modern School there. As it turns out, the younger Fridliand would become famous as Boris Efimov (1899/1900-2008), perhaps the most celebrated of all Soviet political caricaturists; the elder, originally named Moisej, would grow up to be the even better known, globetrotting Soviet journalist Mikhail Kol’tsov (born 12 June 1898 in Kiev-executed 2 February 1940 in Moscow). Kol’tsov/Fridliand grew up with David Kaufman in Bialystok, studied in Petrograd with him at the Psychoneurological Institute (described in Chapter Two), and would in spring 1918 give David his first job in film, at the beginning of eventful and peripatetic careers for them both.101

At any rate, sometime around 1930, Kol’tsov was evidently passing through Poland, and managed to make a brief stopover in his old hometown. In a postcard to Efimov, he indicates (adopting a female persona, curiously enough) that he paid Abel Kaufman’s establishment a tributary visit:

My dear sister!

I’m walking along Nikolaevskaia and Lipovaia streets, recalling our school years. . . I dropped by Kaufman’s bookstore (it still exists!), and by the women’s gymnasium where we studied. Nothing’s changed . . . A strange feeling – pleasant and sad.

101 See Kol’tsov’s student records from the Petrograd Psychoneurological Institute: TsGIA SPb f. 115, op. 2, d. 9788, ll. 6, 12, 16, 21; and below. Although Kiev was not located (except for two districts) within the Pale, Jews played “a particularly visible role in the economic and social life” of the city (Budnitskij, op. cit., 27).
Kisses,
Your M.102

By the time this letter was written, of course, both Kol’tsov and Efimov were contributing to (Soviet) libraries and bookstores as authors in their own right, writing above all for periodicals in highly public forums. And it seems legitimate to speculate that the circulating library’s role as a “media outlet,” as a site visited by a wide variety of people in order to find out what was new and interesting in the world, exerted a decisive effect upon the consciousnesses of Abel and Chaya Kaufman’s three sons – all of them future workers in newsreel-documentary and/or fictional film – by making them aware of the heterogeneity of the local public, of the need to categorize and organize texts, and of the circulation of texts (or the suppression of that circulation) as constitutive of publics.103

At the same time, the library’s prominence in the community would have given the family, if not wealth or power, then at least a certain social centrality and a reputation as one of the sustainers (and managers) of the city’s cultural level, and thus might have impressed upon the Kaufman boys the importance of what we now call “cultural capital,” and its relationship to other kinds of capital. If all this is true – and we will have other

102 From Boris Efimov’s memoir in H.Z. Beliaev, B.E. Efimov, M.B. Efimov, eds., Mikhail Kol’tsov, kakim on byl (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel’, 1989), 36. Kol’tsov, who was a famous wit and lover of verbal play, probably adopted a female persona to disguise himself – he was already very famous – from the anti-Soviet Polish authorities (though possibly he wished to distract the Soviet ones, too).

occasions to reflect on this question – it suggests that we might add the modest circulating library to the array of media forms – like museums, exhibitions, traveling lectures and the like – in relation to which emergent cinema, in its “public-building” role, ought to be considered.104

104 Certainly, the range, variability and organizability of the library both as an archive and as a physical space for the (intellectual, affective) encounter with texts seems to relate, at least in an analogous way, to the formal and enunciative capacities of cinema as described in 1987 by Eric Hobsbawm: “The movement of the camera, the variability of its focus, the unlimited scope of trick photography and, above all, the ability to cut the strip of film which recorded it all into suitable pieces and to assemble or reassemble them at will, were immediately obvious and immediately exploited by filmmakers who rarely had any interest in or sympathies for the avant garde arts. Yet no art represents the requirements, the unintended triumph, of an utterly untraditional artistic modernism more dramatically than the cinema. . . . There is no doubt that the revolutionary innovations of films as art, practically all of which had been developed in the USA by 1914, were due to its need to address a potentially universal public exclusively through the – technically manipulable – eye, but also that innovations which left the high-cultural avant garde far behind in their daring were readily accepted by the masses, because this was an art which transformed everything except its content” (The Age of Empire: 1875-1914, 238-239). For elaborations on this idea, see Miriam Bratu Hansen, Babel and Babylon, esp. 101-114; and “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,” in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, eds., Reinventing Film Studies (London: Arnold, 2000), 332-350).
David’s arrival in the Kaufman household in 1896, followed by Moisei’s in 1897, took his mother Chaya away from her work in the bookstore for a few years, though she and Abel probably sent the boys off to school when they reached five years of age. It is not clear where David studied between the ages of five and nine, though it seems unlikely, given the family’s evident secularity, that he went to a traditional Jewish cheder, which the majority of Jewish boys in Bialystok would have attended starting from the age of five. We do know that on 2 September 1905, the nine-year-old David became a student at the Bialystok Modern School [or Realschule: real’noe uchilishche], where he remained until graduating, after a supplementary year of pre-postsecondary work following the full eight years of regular study, in June 1914. His school years thus began with the Russia-wide tumult of the years 1905 to 1907 – the “First Russian Revolution,” ignited by the Imperial Guard firing upon unarmed worker-demonstrators on “Bloody Sunday” (22 January 1905) in St. Petersburg – and concluded a little more than a month before the beginning of World War One.

105 See note 28, above.

106 There was a four-grade “Bialystok Pushkin School,” as well as a number of one and two-grade Jewish elementary schools of a secular cast, that he might have attended (Pamiatnaia Knizhka Grodenskoj Gubernij na 1910 god (Grodno: Grodnenskij Gubernskij Statisticheskij Komitet, 1909), 203-205).

107 TsGIASPb f. 115, op.2, d. 4048, ll. 5-6.
Image 7: The Kaufman family, ca. 1906-7. Back row from left: Moisei (Mikhail), Chaya,
“Modern Schools” were junior high/high schools that stressed training in mathematics and the natural sciences, and whose graduates often went on to advanced study, mainly in engineering, agronomy, and medicine. David took the regular course of study at the school, receiving good though not outstanding grades in all subjects (including Russian, German, French, science and math) except drawing and drafting, where his performance was deemed only satisfactory. He evidently studied at the Bialystok Musical School as well, a prestigious institute – bearing the imprimatur of the Imperial Russian Musical Society – that provided students with instruction in piano, violin, cello, singing, brass and woodwinds, certification as teachers of music, and even professional training in choir direction and accompaniment. David seems not only to have acquired musical performance skills there (including the ability to play the piano and violin) but also to have developed a life-long interest, which we will discuss in more detail later, in musical structures and the organization of sound.


109 TsGIASPb f. 115, op.2, d. 4048, ll. 5-5ob. See also Valérie Pozner’s “Vertov before Vertov: Psychoneurology in Petrograd,” in Tode and Wurm, eds., Dziga Vertov, 12–15.

110 See, among other sources, Dziga Vertov v vospominaniakh sovremennikov, 79; RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 499, l. 49; and an advertisement for the Musical School in Katalog Russkikh knig i periodicheskikh izdaniy biblioteki (pri knizhnom magazine) A.K. Kaufmana v g. Belostoke, 2nd edition (Bialystok: Sh. M. Volobrinskii, 1900), XIV. Vocal and instrumental training was offered at the Modern School as well (V. Angel’skij, Otchet o Sostoianii Belostokskago Real’nago Uchilishcha za 1901-2 uchenyj god (Belostok: Sh. M. Volobrinskij, 1902), 27-28).
The Modern School on Alexandrovskaia Street was a well-established institution in Bialystok, having just celebrated its 100th anniversary in high official style in 1902.111 A gymnasium until 1873, it became and remained a strictly Russian-language-only school following the January Uprising of 1863, after which time all Poles teaching there were dismissed, surveillance of students was intensified, “Polish [faded] entirely from use,” and even the teaching of religion to Roman Catholic students was conducted exclusively in Russian.112 Around three-quarters of the student body, which comprised on average around 400 pupils in the early years of the 20th century, were made up of Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic students, with Jews and Lutherans more or less equally constituting the remainder: in other words, not a typical cross-section of the

111 The school was founded in 1802 as a gymnasium [i.e., a high school], on the basis of an earlier three-class institute created around 1770 by Countess Branicki. It became a “Modern School” in 1872-3 (Opisanie Prazdnovaniia 100-letniago iubileia Belostokskago Real’nago Uchilishcha (Vilna: A.G. Syrkin, 1903), 3), and had been renovated and reconstructed over the years (V. Angel’skij, Kratkiie Istoricheskiie Svedeniia o Belostokskom Real’nom Uchilishche (Bialystok: Sh. M. Volobrinskij, 1902), 31-32). At the time David Kaufman was studying there, it was directed by one Aleksandr Efimovich Egorov, who oversaw the work of over 30 teachers (2 of whom were women) and two instructors in singing and gymnastics (Pamiatnaia Knizhka Grodnenskoj Gubernij na 1910 god, 201-202; V. Angel’skij, Otchet o Sostoianii Belostokskago Real’nago Uchilishcha za 1901-2 uchebnyj god (Belostok: Sh. M. Volobrinskij, 1902), 3).

112 V. Angel'skij, Kratkiie Istoricheskiie Svedeniia o Belostokskom Real'nom Uchilishche (Bialystok: Sh. M. Volobrinskij, 1902), 16-17. All school prayers were recited in Russian as well. Classes in Jewish religion were also offered at the school during the early 20th century by one Perets Kliachko (V. Angel'skij, Otchet o Sostoianii Belostokskago Real’nago Uchilishcha za 1901-2 uchebnyj god (Belostok: Sh. M. Volobrinskij, 1902), 6), but David Kaufman apparently opted out of those classes (TsGIASPb f. 115, op.2, d. 4048, ll. 5-6).
population of Bialystok as a whole. Its student population had grown rapidly in the last years of the 19th century, an expansion due, according to the city council, to “the mounting significance of Bialystok as a center of light and heavy industry in our region.”

Indeed, the Modern School’s technical emphasis early on led to the arrangement of field trips to local factories, including those owned by the school’s patron, the Lodz-based manufacturer Adolf Buchholtz. By the late 19th century it had developed a small trade school as well, training mainly Polish and Jewish turners and metal workers in drafting and sketching. The school had become seriously overcrowded by the turn of the century and, according to the record of the anniversary celebrations, “unhygienic” by 1902; an additional wing was constructed sometime after 1903 to accommodate the crush of new pupils, who were soon to include Moisej and Boris Fridliand (aka Mikhail Kol’tsov and Boris Efimov) and all three of the Kaufman brothers.

113 Angel’skij, Otchet o Sostoianii Belostokskago Real’nago Uchilishcha za 1901-2 uchebnyj god, 12. Around 40 percent of the students were from the noble and civil-service social estates, just under 35 percent from the urban estates (mainly petty townspeople or meshchane, like the Kaufmans), around 20 percent from the peasantry, and the rest either from the priestly estate or foreigners (Ibid.).

114 Opisanie Prazdnovaniia 100-letniago iubileiia Belostokskago Real’nago Uchilishcha, 12-13. An adjoining Orthodox chapel was apparently also constructed (27).

115 Angel’skij, Otchet o Sostoianii Belostokskago Real’nago Uchilishcha za 1901-2 uchebnyj god, 5.

116 Angel’skij, Otchet o Sostoianii Belostokskago Real’nago Uchilishcha za 1901-2 uchebnyj god, 40. This is not to say that the Modern School was an exclusively “tech” school by any means. Literature and language learning were taken seriously, and much effort was expended on celebratory evenings dedicated to major Russian writers like Nikolai Gogol’ and Vasilii Zhukovskij (Ibid., 49-59).
In an interview published in the 1980s, Boris Efimov indicated that both he and Mikhail Kol’tsov began their publishing career at the Bialystok Modern School, drawing and writing for satirical student-produced leaflets. The school, described by Efimov as “a panopticon of maniacs and sadists in blue uniforms,” evidently provided rich fodder for caricature, although these student publications probably did not confine their attacks to unpopular teachers. Kol’tsov, for instance, who wrote satirical sketches under the pseudonym “Mikhail Syndeticonov” - the last name came from a well-known brand of glue, later used in Dadaist collage – also distributed illegal pamphlets and, according to Efimov, attended banned discussion circles. These activities continued even after a less stormy social climate had settled in the city (and in Russia) following the tumult of the years 1905-1907, which in Bialystok as in many other places was marked by colossal strikes, firefights in the streets, police brutality, terrorism, and, on 17 September 1905, the imposition of martial law. It is certain that the satirical papers, especially those emanating from Bialystok’s student population during this period, would have included political commentary on their pages. Nine-year-old David Kaufman was obviously too young to participate in the student demonstrations and meetings that were also

117 Not without tendentiousness, Efimov compared the atmosphere of the school to that of the Rovno gymnasium as described in Vladimir Korolenko’s autobiographical History of My Contemporary, where the author depicts most of his teachers as cruel, strident and capricious, and the students as carrying out “an intriguing war with the bosses” (H.Z. Beliaev et al., Mikhail Kol’tsov, Kakim On Byl, 30; V.G. Korolenko, Istoriia Moego Sovremennika, ed. A.V. Khrabrovskij (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1965), 152).

118 H.Z. Beliaev et al., Mikhail Kol’tsov, Kakim On Byl, 30-32.

119 Dobronski, op. cit., 89.
undoubtedly taking place in the Bialystok Modern School around the time he enrolled in 1905. Already at this early date, however, he was immersed in a student environment seething with political passion and debate.

Although I have not uncovered any examples of activist student publications from Bialystok in this period, I did find a few fascinating radical school brochures from the men’s gymnasium in its rather less politicized sister-city of Grodno. One carbon-copied broadsheet simply entitled School (Shkola) featured caricatures of major state figures (like Tsar Nicholas II, who had made a royal visit with his family to Grodno and Bialystok in 1897)\(^\text{120}\) and institutional enemies (like the police) alongside allegorical representations of the students’ own political ideas and aspirations.

\(^{120}\) V. Angel’skij, Kratkiie Istoricheskiie Svedeniia o Belostokskom Real’nom Uchilishche (Bialystok: Sh. M. Volobrinskij, 1902), 35.
Image 8: Allegorical drawing from Shkola, issue no. 4 from 1905 (no day or month indicated), page 3. A young man in a student uniform saying “Toward light and freedom!” emerges from a coffin-like box labeled “The Regime” and “The old school.” Source: State Library of Poland, Warsaw.
Another leaflet that appeared 6 November 1905121 – 16 days before the gymnasium students went on strike, and in the immediate wake of the vast October general strike – contained the following programmatic statement:

We are living through a time of revolution. All levels of society have risen up in defense of the individual human being’s profaned rights. All of Russia thirsts for a new life constructed on a new basis – on the basis of freedom. The struggle is at its very height. The proletariat, strong in organization, is carrying the entire burden using its own powers. Thousands of warriors have fallen victim to Tsarist despotism. In their ranks is included that part of the intelligentsia which has not yet been so suffused with the spirit of Mammon that it would reject the luminous ideals of the future in the name of satiety.

Evidently, a teacher named Shimanovskii had forcefully exhorted the students to “be reasonable” rather than vocally express their displeasure with the regime. Shimanovskii’s plea immediately came to stand for a kind of passivity that many if not most of the students rejected:

“Be reasonable!” This means that we must above all “reasonably” close our eyes to everything now going on in Russia; that we must calmly and dispassionately watch (just as people have watched up to now) as the unarmed proletariat is fired upon on the streets of all the cities of Russia – that same proletariat that struggled and is struggling in the first ranks of the great revolutionary Russian army122 for a better future, for universal happiness and freedom. It means that we must silently [watch with] anger involuntarily rising in our breasts [. . .] at how the barbaric government deals with peasants, workers, with our fathers and brothers, who openly conceive of announcing, in words and actions, that they are dissatisfied with the existing injustice and oppression, with the arbitrariness of the police and the rule of the billy club.

121 Shkola 1 (22 November 1905): 3.

122 That is, as part of the revolutionary movement (not as part of any official “army”).
“Be reasonable!” This means that we mustn’t pay any attention to the bestial and foul acts of the “Black Hundreds”\(^\text{123}\) who have been mobilized by the government, those faithfully mobilized thieves and conmen, scoundrels and pimps – in a word, we mustn’t pay any attention to the “madness and horror”\(^\text{124}\) now at large in Russia. [. . . .]

We will study, but will not turn away from life. We will try to bring life into our dead gymnasium; we will try with the best of our powers to hold ourselves high in the struggle against the common foe, the current regime; and [. . . .] having reduced to dust that entire edifice of falsity, we will build a new temple, a temple of science and knowledge, a temple of freedom and truth.\(^\text{125}\)

This rhetoric might seem breathless and naïve today, but the anonymous youthful authors were certainly right about theirs being a “time of revolution,” and a time of oppression as well, from which students could hardly feel themselves to be detached. Despite their rarity, the surviving school leaflets neatly reveal the main preoccupations of this highly politicized student environment: national-ethnic rights (Polish and Jewish above all), the rights of students themselves, and (as in the excerpts just quoted) the rights and political prerogatives of the working class.

\(^\text{123}\) “\textit{Chernaia sotnia}”: movement formed in 1905 of ultra-reactionary, monarchist, ferociously anti-Semitic politicians, intellectuals, nobles, clergy, merchants and (in some cases) workers who organized, propagated and did physical battle against those whom they perceived to be the enemies of the Tsar, of Orthodoxy and of the established order (revolutionaries, reformists, Jews). They were affiliated with such rightwing organizations as the Union of the Russian People and the Union of the Archangel Michael, and were certainly involved in pogrom violence, including the Bialystok pogrom of June 1906; see below.

\(^\text{124}\) “\textit{Bezumie i uzhas}”: a famous phrase from Leonid Andreev’s anti-war story “Red Laughter” (1904), an appalling depiction of wartime violence inspired by Russia’s defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. Andreev (1871-1919) was arrested in 1905 for his involvement in anti-government agitation. He later opposed the Bolshevik regime and died in Finnish exile.

\(^\text{125}\) \textit{Listok Grodnenskikh Uchashchikshiia} 1 (6 November 1905): 3-4. The leaflet, in carbon copy, is preserved in the State Library of Poland, Warsaw.
That students in the Grodno guberniia would be aware of workers’ movements in 1905 is hardly surprising, given that Bialystok had been by this time a center of proletarian activism in the western Russian Empire for 25 or more years. Socialists had begun agitating in the city in the 1870s, but workers themselves started to organize remarkably early, with the result that, by the 1880s, Bialystok had become (in the words of historian Ezra Mendelsohn)

the chief center of agitation during the “prehistory” of the Jewish labor movement. Being the most industrialized city in Belorussia-Lithuania, Bialystok had a labor force of thousands of Germans, Poles and Jews who were among the first in Russia to conduct major strikes. “In those quiet, still times,” a socialist journal boasted, “when Jewish workers throughout Russia were sound asleep, dreaming of the messiah and the world to come, we Bialystok workers were already waging economic battles, beating up the industrialists, breaking looms, striking, struggling.” As early as 1882 Jewish weavers [in Bialystok] staged a strike which was exceptionally well organized for that period. Supported by funds collected both by other Jewish workers and by German weavers, the workers not only achieved their end, but, according to one expert, theirs was the first strike in Russia “that demonstrated the existence of a trade union organization among the workers.”

To be sure, terrible working conditions – long hours, meager wages, poor ventilation, lack of medical facilities, discourteous (and worse) treatment by managers and supervisors – were major incitements to indignation and collective action. Beyond

126 Ezra Mendelsohn, Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers’ Movement in Tsarist Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 28. Mendelsohn mentions a host of other early meetings and struggles in Bialystok: a enormous strike (involving 8,500 Jewish and non-Jewish weavers) against factory administration in 1895; the first Russian conference of tanners in 1898; a successful boycott against the cigarette factory owner Janovsky ca. 1903; a strike of bakers in 1901 (Ibid., 92, 78, 90-91, 89). In my account of the Bialystok workers’ movement here, I rely heavily on Mendelsohn’s remarkable work. On Bund activity in Bialystok, see Kobrin, Jewish Bialystok, 42-48.

127 Mendelsohn, op. cit., 12, 18-19, 86, 88.
this, much of the work, particularly in the textile industry, was seasonal and comprised mainly of piece-work, placing laborers at the whims of employers and especially of middlemen known as loynketniks (lonkietnicy in Polish), who “received looms and raw materials from the factory owners and put the weavers to work in small shops,” shops much less mechanized and more noisome than the larger industrial concerns.128 Those larger factories were frequently off-limits to Jewish workers, who were regarded with particular suspicion and anxiety by employers due to their well-earned reputation for organized resistance.129 With the large-scale economic downturns that began to ravage the local and global economy from the early 1870s, Bialystok workers’ fortunes came to fluctuate even more drastically – despite net increases in production over the same period, both worldwide and in the western Russian Empire – with the result that many, particularly Jewish craftsmen and weavers whose livelihoods were threatened by the newer mechanized factories, decided to emigrate, primarily to the United States.130

Though I have no primary evidence of direct involvement by Modern School students in the workers’ movement in Bialystok, it can be assumed, I think, that the more senior and radicalized students, particularly those sympathetic to the Social Democratic Party (like the Grodno students who produced School),131 would have at the very least

128 Ibid., 18-19. See also Dobronski, op. cit., 84, and Kobrin, op. cit., 36-38.
129 Mendelsohn, op. cit., 22; Löwe, op. cit., 92; Budnitskij, op. cit., 35.
130 Hobsbawm, The Age of Empire, 35; Mendelsohn, op. cit., 15, 113. Fierce competition from larger industrial centers, Lodz above all, also adversely affected Bialystok’s economy; see Dobronski, op. cit., 84.
131 The Social Democratic Party was the party out of which emerged both the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks (in 1903). It was evidently the preferred party of many
debated the possibility of association. As historian Samuel D. Kassow has shown, students across Russia were conflicted about activism, weighing as they did their desires for education and career against the more dangerous urge to participate in political movements, whether on behalf of students or of workers. The student groups, though linked by a common antagonism to the regime and by specific demands for reform— including right of assembly, better funding structures, improved physical conditions at schools, and permission for students to attend concerts, go to theaters and visit reading rooms—were at once politically heterogeneous and deeply bound by a corporate university students in larger centers like Saint Petersburg as well; see Samuel D. Kassow, Students, Professors, and the State in Tsarist Russia (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1989), 314.

132 Kassow, op. cit., 11, 238. Kassow argues that the student movement gave the majority of students a framework within which they could at once effectively protest, feel themselves part of an active and progressive collective, and avoid “making an extreme and dangerous commitment to the revolutionary movement” (11), while still pursuing an education.

133 In his study of the events of 1905, Abraham Ascher gives a summary of the main student demands: “In many localities of the empire, students submitted petitions for educational reform. Although there were variations among them, some themes appeared in almost all of them, and they can be summarized as follows: elimination of police surveillance; abolition of obligatory attendance at religious services; improvement of sanitary conditions; provision for parents to be allowed to select accommodations for their children; reduction of educational costs and fair distribution of stipends; permission for students to visit theaters, concert halls, libraries, and public reading rooms; access to all books authorized by the censorship; the granting to parents of the right to vote in pedagogical councils and to participate in the administration of schools; establishment of honor courts to settle disciplinary cases; and freedom for students to hold meetings in school buildings and to organize mutual-aid societies. In ethnically non-Russian regions of the empire, students and many of their parents wanted schools to be mindful of local cultural traditions. Thus, to cite just one example, a petition in Vilna and Kovno asked that students be permitted to speak Polish and Lithuanian at school and that the language of instruction be in those languages.” On 27 August 1905, well after the protests began, the government “issued a decree restoring to universities and advanced institutes the autonomy they had been deprived of in 1884” (Abraham Ascher, The Revolution of 1905: A Short History (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004), 63).
student identity not always easily reconcilable with commitment to “external” causes like those of the workers.\textsuperscript{134}

We know that students in Grodno, for instance, were well aware of the organizational, school-related resolutions taken by their peers in Saint Petersburg, and that they published some of them in their own student brochures.\textsuperscript{135} Workers, for their part, were often skeptical about the involvement of sympathetic, educated outsiders in proletarian struggles. Yet it also seems that many students saw the school and university-based demonstrations and strikes, which caused considerable disruption in their own right,\textsuperscript{136} as part of a larger, relatively informal, coalition-based politics of protest of unified tendency if not party affiliation.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{134} Kassow, op. cit., 94, 118, 149, 184.

\textsuperscript{135} Students in the Grodno gymnasium learned of the following resolution taken on 27 October 1905 by the three most senior classes in the Second Saint Petersburg gymnasium only a week later: “In light of the fact that the political strike at the middle schools which has just ended very clearly showed the full insolvency of the organizations which have existed up to now, our complete fragmentation, and the lack of solidarity among individual students, we believe that the most urgent need at the present moment is for the complete unification of all educational institutions. Keeping all of this in mind, we students at the Second gymnasium [propose that] all high school students in Saint Petersburg elect from each educational institution five delegates to the strike committee, both for the gathering-together and decision of issue concerning the high school [political] movement, and that they might lead this movement. Only through unification in a single elected center, and strengthened by that unification, can we be truly useful to that general movement which we have joined” (Listok Grodnenskikh Uchashchikhsii 1 (6 November 1905): 7ob).

\textsuperscript{136} Of the disruption – whose scale eclipsed that of any later European student movement, including May 1968 - Ascher provides an incomparable account (Ascher, op. cit., 49, 62, 64, 66).

\textsuperscript{137} In his excellent study, Kassow notes how the earlier hard-line “economists” of the workers’ movement had “rejected the notions of establishing political coalitions between the workers and other social groups, allowing nonworkers to lead the labor movement,
The ethnically and religiously diverse character of the student body in the Modern School, and the students’ lived proximity to the dominant political struggles of the time, contributed to an awareness of the multiple possibilities, resistances and restrictions conditioning social life in Russia. As regards Jewish students, Bialystok’s very “frontier” location and its consequent incorporation into various polities – now Poland, now Prussia, now Russia – may have enabled them to resist specifically Polonizing, Germanizing or Russifying pressures, even as those pressures would have been exerted and registered in a plural, non-exclusive way.\(^\text{138}\) Thus, the city’s students were probably excellently positioned to perceive and even feel capable of mapping out the contours of Russia’s complex political, socio-economic and multi-ethnic settings.

To be sure, the status of both Poles and Jews in the guberniia was an object of continual concern and indignation. The illegal School, for instance, published documents about arrests and even brief transcripts of overheard conversations to illustrate the authorities’ contempt for national and language rights:

Recently:
Teacher [in Russian]: What is your last name?
Student [in Polish]: Dziękuję panu. Mama i tato są zdrowi. [Polish for “Thank you, sir, my mother and father are healthy”].
Teacher [in Russian]: Swine! Good for nothing! No speaking Polish!
Student: Kiedy ja nie umiem mówić po rosyjsku! [Polish for “But I don’t know how to speak Russian!”]
Teacher [in Russian]: Then you'll have to stay here until six.

Just as frequently, School and other illegal student publications in the guberniia ran articles and anecdotes, serious or satirical, about anti-Semitism and the realities of Jewish life in the Pale:

Teacher: What was [the biblical] Adam's nationality?
Student: Jewish. He was, after all, the first to lose his residence permit!

Jewish issues took on a particular urgency, and not only for students, after the June 1906 Bialystok pogrom, the major event in the city during the 1905-7 upheaval. The massacre was arguably the culmination of a series of incidents of anti-Jewish violence within the Pale, including the major pogroms that had occurred in Kishinev (1903), Odessa (1905), Ekaterinoslav (1905), Gomel (January 1906) and many other places in the preceding years and months. Locally, Bialystok and environs had seen numerous acts of violence against Jewish workers between 1903 and 1905, capped by street fighting

139 The “joke” here is that the Polish student has misinterpreted the Russian word “familiia,” which means not “family” but “last or family name.” In the original, the Polish words are transcribed into Cyrillic.

140 Shkola 5 (April 1906): 8. My thanks to Krystyna Illakowicz for help with the Polish in this text.

141 Shkola 2 (1906): 8.

142 657 pogroms occurred in Russia between October 1905 and January 1906 (Budnitskij, Rossijskie Evrei Mezhdu Krasnymi i Belymi, 57).
between soldiers and workers on 30 July 1903 that left 13 dead and provoked a city-wide 
strike on the following day. On the eve of the pogrom itself, the May 1906 
appointment of notorious anti-Semite S.D. Sheremetev as Bialystok’s police chief was a 
further omen of impending trouble, one that elicited protest from the city’s Jewish 
leadership; yet the scale of the June brutality – in a city where “[Jews] enjoyed 
demographic and economic dominance” – still came as an immense shock, as we will see 
in a moment.

Students in the Grodno guberniia’s major cities were of course aware of the 
pogrom wave, and commented upon it in their illegal publications, as in this mock 
“reportage” from School (1905):

_Telegrams from the theatre of war_

Odessa. The soldiers are bursting to go into action. The troops are in excellent 
spirits. [. . .]
Rostov-on-Don. Killed: Iakov Finkel'shtein, two years old, and Sora Kremer, 
three years old. No casualties on our side.

As is well known, the last years of the 19th and first years of the 20th centuries were 
marked by fierce anti-Jewish rhetoric, legislation and violence in Russia, and 
concomitantly by the emigration of millions of Russian Jews, mainly to the United 
States. A large number of anti-Semitic articles, some of them widely discussed, began

143 A.D. Kirzhnits and M. Rafes, eds. 1905: Evreyskoe Rabochoe Dvizhenie (Moscow 
nad Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo, 1928), 62, 121-123.

144 Kobrin, Jewish Bialystok, 59.

145 Shkola 2 (1905): 4. The cover page of the issue depicted police trying to stop the 
distribution of Shkola.

146 See Budnitskij, op. cit., 30.
to appear in the Russian press at the turn of the 1880s: that is, following the 1881 assassination of Alexander II, which popular rumor attributed to Jewish revolutionaries. ¹⁴⁷ The first wave of pogroms – forecast by an 1871 massacre in Odessa, but largely taking place during 1881-1882 in Elizavetgrad, Kiev, Odessa and a host of other areas – led to soul-searching among many maskilim, who became more skeptical about the possibility or desirability of rapprochement with a Russian society characterized by such open and violent anti-Semitism. ¹⁴⁸

Jews, whose status within Russian society was indeed changing rapidly and in complex ways, became convenient scapegoats for those antagonistic to the social and economic mutations the country was undergoing – mutations in which the Tsarist state was deeply implicated, as we have seen. It might be said that Jews were structurally and even geographically positioned at the vulnerable and fraught juncture of a number of the contradictions driving historical motion in Russia at this time, that pit burgeoning capitalism (whether small or large scale, industrial or financial) against the old quasi-feudal landowning system, religious exclusivity against secularism and pluralism,

¹⁴⁷ Nathans, op. cit., 258; Löwe, op. cit., 59.

¹⁴⁸ Zipperstein, op. cit., 128, and (here) 20: “... the pogroms quickened the migratory process that had begun the late 1860s and that by 1914 saw nearly one-half of Eastern European Jewry migrating within the region or beyond it. The flow of some Jewish youth into the revolutionary and Zionist movements created close ties, familial and otherwise, between sections of the Jewish masses generally unsympathetic to radical ideals and new political movements. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the heroism of Jewish radicals (especially the Bundists), their organization of Jewish self-defense, their participation in philanthropic activities throughout the Pale, even their conspiratorial form of internal organization, conferred on them an almost legendary aura. Mass migration, radically new political formulations, and chronic underemployment all challenged the foundations of traditional Jewish society before the 1917 revolution.” See also Nathans, Beyond the Pale, 186.
revolutionary workers’ egalitarianism against social and economic oligarchy, and nationalism (sometimes of an imperialist variety) against cosmopolitanism. Add to this the tinder provided by centuries of accumulated prejudice, and many of the combustibles required for the appalling anti-Semitic wildfire of the years 1881 to 1920 were in place.  

Many Jews were provoked to immigrate by the notorious May Laws of 1882, which forbade “all new Jewish settlement outside of cities and towns,” and led to demographic congestion in urban centers in the Pale, already reeling from the effects, noted above, of global economic recession. During this time, some of Abel Kaufman’s relatives, bearing the last name Freeman, left for the States. One of them, a cousin named Nathan Freeman, founded a highly successful men’s wear manufactory in Philadelphia in 1885. Many years later, Nathan’s son Benjamin (1894-1973) would send money on a regular basis to Abel and Chaya in Poland, starting as early as the mid-1920s; he would also be instrumental in getting Boris Kaufman and his family out of Nazi-occupied Europe at the end of 1941, and in helping Boris find a job as a cameraman at the National Film Board in Ottawa in early 1942. Other relatives, apparently mainly on the Kaufman side of the family, immigrated around this time as well, in the first phase of what would

149 For more reflections on these dynamics, see Löwe, op. cit., 409-420; Budnitskij, op. cit., 36-40. When I write “juncture” here, I mean to indicate that individual Jews could be located, in terms of both material and political interest, on either side of these intensely conflictual polarities, given locale within the Empire, occupation, educational level, political or confessional commitment, and so on. Geographically, “nearly 87 per cent (575) of all pogroms took place in the southern [Ukrainian] provinces of Chernigov, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav, Kherson, Podolia, Kiev and [outside Ukraine] Bessarabia” (Antony Polonsky, The Jews in Poland and Russia, vol. 2 (Oxford and Portland: Littmann Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 57).

be a classically tripartite migration for (some members of) the Kaufman-Gal’pern families out of the territories of the Pale of Settlement: to America, to Palestine and, as would be David Kaufman’s case, to the Russian heartland and the Soviet Union.  

Bialystok, it turns out, had a special prominence in the anti-Semitic propaganda of the time – beyond its notoriety as a bustling industrial city with a Jewish majority – inasmuch as it was the seat of the legend, and for a time (after 1910) of the relics, of the Holy Martyred Infant Gavriil [Gabriel] (d. 1690). According to an edition of saints’ lives from 1875, the six-year-old Gavriil, son of pious Orthodox believers from a village near Chaya Kaufman’s hometown of Zabludovo, was abducted by Jews and brought to Bialystok. There, on or around 20 April 1690, they tortured him, crucified him, punctured him through on one side and drained him of all his blood. His corpse was then thrown onto a field, where dogs protected it from predatory birds until it was discovered three days later. Eventually, the body was found to be miraculously exempt from decay, and Gavriil’s relics were transported to various monasteries in the area until they ended up in St. Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral in Bialystok in 1910.  


152 The relics reposed in Moscow and in various “museums of atheism” during the Soviet period, and returned to Bialystok only in 1992. For the story of the “martyrdom,” see Zhitia sviatykh semli rossijskoj: letopis’ istorii otechestva X-XX vv. (St. Petersburg and Priozersk: Pokrovskij Dar, 2004; based on an 1875 edition), 451; see also I. Bukharev, ed., Zhitia vsekh vviatykh prazdnuemykh pravoslavnoiu greko-rossijskoiu tserkoviiu (Moscow: I.D. Sytin, 1896), 206. The legend of Gavriil was repeated not only in compilations of saints’ lives but also in works of anti-Semitic propaganda like lexicographer V.I. Dal’s Investigation into the killing of Christian babies by Jews and the use made of their blood (printed by order of the Minister of the Interior) (Rozyskanie o
ritual pilgrimages and was memorialized as dedicatee of various chapels in the area, and so Bialystok Jews would certainly have known that the Church was spinning this monstrous, absurd and dangerous yarn, which made their city an important relay point in the circulation of the notorious “blood libel.”

On 1 June 1906, crowds were assembled on the streets of Bialystok awaiting two separate religious parades: an Orthodox procession honoring the founding of St. Nicholas Cathedral, and (a bit later in the day, though overlapping with the former) a Catholic one celebrating Corpus Christi. The disturbance started when a carter blindsided his team into the crowd just before the Corpus Christi march was to begin. Two shots suddenly rang out in Bazarnaia Square (near the Catholic cathedral), someone shouted “a bomb!” – though only four of 50 witnesses interviewed after the events said they heard anything like a bomb - and a large group began attacking Jews and pillaging Jewish stores, animated by their familiar chant of “Beat the Jews!” (bej zhidov).

The shooting intensified on the central Alexandrovskaya Street, moving from there to Nikolaevskaya Street, where the Kaufman bookstore was situated and where

ubienii evreiami khrishtianskikh mladentsev i utpotreblenii krovi ikh (naprchateno po prikazaniu g. Ministra Vnutrennikh Del (1844)). Dal’s text was reprinted in 1995 as Zapiska o ritual’nykh ubijstvakh (Moscow: Vitiaz’, 1995), a volume in the “Little Library of the Russian Patriot” series, which includes Dostoevsky on “The Jewish Question” and Henry Ford’s “International Jewry”; the story of Gavriil is on page 45. For an instance of the story’s unfortunate contemporary dissemination, see http://www.pravenc.ru/text/161257.html.

153 For background on the libel itself – that is, the accusation that Jews incorporate the blood of freshly killed Christian infants into Passover matzos – see Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, Antisemitism: Myth and Hate from Antiquity to the Present (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 43-72; and the discussion of the Mendel Beilis case, below.
many of the victims met their deaths.\textsuperscript{154} The Jewish defense units began their desperate counterattack on Nikolaevskaia as well, eliciting return fire from army dragoons, who had been conspicuously absent up to that point in the melee: this, when Bialystok was a major garrison town during the pre-World War One years, with an average of five thousand soldiers (infantry and cavalry) quartered there at any one time in various barracks scattered throughout the city.\textsuperscript{155} Indeed, an attempt of 25 March 1907 to take the life of General Bogaevskii, the guberniia’s chief army officer, which spared the general but killed his coachman, may have been in retaliation for the army’s action and inaction during the pogrom.\textsuperscript{156}

At any rate, around 200 people, including six non-Jews, were killed during the three days of the pogrom, around 700 were wounded, and at least 169 businesses were pillaged and wrecked.\textsuperscript{157} Much of the damage occurred on Nemetskaia Street (including the destruction of the Kaplan bookstore) and Surazhskiaia Street, populated by poorer working-class Jews; Nikolaevskaia was among the six other streets devastated, and although I have no documentation regarding the fate of Abel Kaufman’s store during those days, it stands to reason that a bookstore of secular orientation owned by a Jew

\textsuperscript{154} See V. Vladimirov, Ocherki Sovremennykh Kaznej (Moscow: A.P. Poplavskii, 1906), 42-47.
\textsuperscript{155} Dobronski, op. cit., 100-101; Ascher, op. cit., 149.
\textsuperscript{156} Dobronski, op. cit., 89.
\textsuperscript{157} Ascher, op. cit., 149; Kobrin, Jewish Bialystok, 58; Polonsky, Jews in Poland and Russia, vol. 2, 62. For names, ages and descriptions of the dead, see Vladimirov, op. cit., 42-47.
might have proved an enticing target for the pogromists.\textsuperscript{158} The pogrom was of extraordinary savagery even by the standards of such events, and in the extensive global newspaper coverage, outraged reports of people hurled from windows, tongues amputated, nails pounded into eyes, and legs sawed off gave added pungency to the by now familiar descriptions of beatings, rapes, and shootings.\textsuperscript{159}

The events in Bialystok prompted fierce arguments in the chambers of Russia’s first State Duma (parliament), which had been formed only 34 days earlier.\textsuperscript{160} Although an Internal Affairs investigation discovered that government administrators and soldiers had participated in the pogrom, the eventual prosecution of the case, which placed exculpatory stress upon the supposed revolutionary-terroristic proclivities of Jewish youth in Bialystok, was deeply disappointing to all concerned observers:

The government . . . took two years before preferring charges against thirty-six rioters in Bialystok. Several of the accused failed to show up in court, and fifteen were acquitted. Of the rest, one received a jail sentence of three years, and thirteen were handed lighter jail sentences, ranging from six months to one year.\textsuperscript{161}

\textsuperscript{158} Delo o pogrome v Belostoke 1-3 Jiunia 1906 goda, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition (St. Petersburg: Trud, 1909), 40, 41, 46; Kobrin, Jewish Bialystok, 58.


\textsuperscript{160} See Rechi po pogromnym delam, intro. I.V. Luchitskii (Kiev: S.G. Sliusarevskii, 1908), 117, 119, 124.

\textsuperscript{161} Ascher, op. cit., 151. See also Rechi po pogromnym delam, intro. I.V. Luchitskii (Kiev: S.G. Sliusarevskii, 1908), 119.
Even if the imperial regime did not organize the violence, as many early commentators thought, those who committed the atrocities found sympathy from many high government and state officials, not least from Tsar Nicholas II himself, who “approved all petitions for pardon submitted by members convicted for participation in pogroms,” whether in Bialystok or elsewhere.\textsuperscript{162}

It is worth noting that Masha Gal’pern, already in St. Petersburg at the Women’s Medical Institute for three years at the time of the pogrom, evidently took a break in her studies between 1906 and 1908. No reason is offered in the existing documentation for the hiatus, but it seems entirely possible, indeed likely, that she returned to Bialystok in the summer of 1906 to use her medical training to tend pogrom victims. If so, it would have been at this time of crisis that she first became truly acquainted with her nephews – then 10 (David), nine (Moisei) and three (Boris) respectively – and formed that vital lifelong emotional bond with all of them.\textsuperscript{163} As we will see in Chapter Two, Masha was certainly involved in relief work among Jews during World War One; whether she

\textsuperscript{162} Richard S. Wortman, Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 400. “Nicholas remained convinced that the majority of the people remained personally loyal to him. He had written to his mother on October 25, 1905, defending the pogroms. He claimed that ‘nine-tenths of the troublemakers are Jews’ and that the people had turned against them violently for that reason. ‘But not only the kikes suffered; so did the Russian agitators, engineers, lawyers, and all kinds of other bad people.’ Because of his hatred of Jews and any group opposed to the monarchy, he regarded the pogroms as an expression of the unity of tsar and people and sympathized with the extreme right anti-Semitic organization, the Union of Russian People” (ibid., 399-400).

\textsuperscript{163} See TsGIASPb f. 436, op. 4, d. 906, l. 2; op. 1, d. 2552, l. 1. Masha certainly returned to Bialystok during her holidays, as Mikhail Kaufman indicated in a major reminiscence (see below). Medical sanitariums for Jewish children in the Pale in the years after the pogrom wave treated children for “traumatic neurosis, brought about by the pogrom,” along with tuberculosis and other maladies (Otchet Poptetchitel’stva o Evreiskoj Detskoi Kolonii v Druskenikakh (Otdeleniia Vilenskogo O[brochstva Evreiskikh Dets[ikh] Kolonii) za 1910 god (Belostok: Dubner and El’ian, 1911), 4).
actually returned to Bialystok after the pogrom or not, the violence must have enduringly impressed upon her the vulnerability of Jews within Russian society.

She would eventually emigrate to Palestine, in the 1930s, after the Pale of Settlement had vanished and Bialystok become part of newly independent Poland, and long after Zionism had emerged as a vital political force in the city. The Hibbat Zion (Love of Zion) movement took root in Bialystok in 1883 when its founder, Rabbi Samuel Mohilever, became the city’s chief rabbi. Hibbat Zion took the resettling of East European Jews in Palestine as its express goal – over 15 years before the consolidation of “Zionism” proper in 1899 – and drew an energetic minority of Bialystok Jews into its fundraising and promotional efforts.\textsuperscript{164} To be sure, attacks on Russian anti-Semitism also came from leftwing, non-Zionist quarters in response to the pogrom wave; those critics blamed the violence and intolerance on widespread ignorance, and characterized it as a way of undermining the general struggle for democracy.\textsuperscript{165} But it is clear that even before June 1906, the violence gave new force to Zionist arguments in Bialystok and elsewhere in the Pale. The pro-emigration Jewish Voice, for instance, began publication in Bialystok in January 1906, taking as its slogan “independence and land for the Jewish people!”

\textsuperscript{164} See Kobrin, \textit{Jewish Bialystok}, 48-52.

territories of “settlement”\textsuperscript{166} – which would better be termed [territories of] “wandering” – and which have shown that attempting to “bind” the fate of our people \textit{as a whole} with the fate of other peoples means to long (hopelessly, of course) for an act of historical violence. It means failing to reckon with Jewish reality, every manifestation of which demonstrates to us that we have remained “a people among other peoples.”\textsuperscript{167}

The paper’s ideology is well summarized in this verse from the poem “Homeland” by M. Rivesman, which appeared in the second issue:

\begin{quote}
O, my poor people! Go and wander anew!  
Seek out other fields, seek out another sky. . .  
Do not await happiness from the old hearth and home,  
And remember the bitter poison in a piece of another’s bread. . . .
\end{quote}\textsuperscript{168}

Though the paper’s editors expressed serious doubts about the viability of Palestine as a homeland for Jews, they had only contempt for the Bund and other internationalist (or “cosmopolitan,” in the terminology of the period) organizations for imagining that the non-Jewish “patriots” of the countries they live in “look upon the Jew as their brother.”

Even the offer of open higher education to Jews after October 1905 was dismissed by the paper as a “Mephistophelean” gift.\textsuperscript{169} Eventually, 20,000 Bialystok Jews would emigrate to Palestine between 1920 and 1950: less than a third of the 65,000 who had already left

\begin{flushright}\textsuperscript{166} I.e., in the Pale of Settlement. 
\textsuperscript{167} Evreiskii Golos 1-2 (22 January 1906): 5. This passage was possibly composed by the paper’s editor, L. Paperin. 
\textsuperscript{169} Evreiskii Golos 6 (17 February 1906): 184-188. \end{flushright}
for the Americas (mainly New York and Buenos Aires) after 1870, but a significant
number all the same.\footnote{Kobrin, Jewish Bialystok, xvi.}

In the years following the pogrom – only eight of them remained before David
Kaufman would leave Bialystok for higher studies in Petrograd, and the World War
would begin – the city would continue to bob along waves of social and economic
turbulence. The industrial downturn of the post-1907 period turned out to be relatively
brief, and Bialystok factories modernized their production practices from 1908, in time to
take advantage of the deluge of new orders (for military uniforms, especially) that arrived
even before the summer of 1914.\footnote{Obzor Grodzenskoj Gubernii za 1908 god (Grodno: Gubernskaia Tipografiia, 1909),
26-28; Dobronski, op. cit., 108. Already in the fall of 1913, Bialystok newspapers were
writing in melancholy spirit about the “unavoidability of war between Austria and
Russia” (Novosti Belostoka 18 (22 October 1913): 1).}

At the same time, automation destroyed the
livelihoods of growing numbers of hand weavers, even as many gains made by workers
during the 1905 struggles, such as higher wages and a 10-hour workday, were
retained.\footnote{Obzor Grodzenskoj Gubernii za 1908 god (Grodno: Gubernskaia Tipografiia, 1909),
27-28.} Jewish migrant workers continued to move to Bialystok: astonishingly,
despite emigration, the city’s Jewish population increased by 20,000 (from 41,905 to
61,500) between 1906 and 1914.\footnote{Kobrin, Jewish Bialystok, 62.}

Yet as European interstate relations grew tenser, Russian national chauvinism
increasingly infected public discourse and state policy, with both predictable and
unpredictable consequences. Various ordinances, directed above all at Bialystok’s Poles,
forbade political organization, restricted fundraising efforts and the display of “national”
flags, and cracked down on the establishment of bookstores and reading rooms.\textsuperscript{174} Polish
nationalists became increasingly restive in the city, and organized a boycott of Jewish
businesses in response to perceived Jewish opposition to their national cause, presaging
more economically damaging anti-Jewish boycotts to come in independent Poland,
especially in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{175} On the national level, rightwing, anti-Semitic politicians
began to strut about more confidently on the floor of the Duma and in public forums, and
more and more anti-Jewish legislation came into effect: voting rights for Jews were
severely curtailed in 1911, Jews were removed from any role in the judiciary in 1912, and
large numbers of Jews, including many in the Grodno guberniia, were expelled from
villages now deemed technically outside the Pale of Settlement.\textsuperscript{176}

On the eve of David Kaufman’s graduation from the Modern School, the most
significant media event for Russian Jewry as a whole was certainly the notorious blood
libel trial of Menahem Mendel Beilis, a Jewish clerk accused of murdering a Christian
child for his blood in Kiev in 1911, and tried (and acquitted) in 1913. The details of the
investigation and trial have been extensively researched, and need not be recapitulated
here.\textsuperscript{177} Suffice it to say that the Beilis case was indeed intended, by the extremist

\textsuperscript{174} Dobronski, op. cit., 108; on surveillance of the reading rooms and libraries, see
NIAB f. 103, op. 1, d. 106, 28-56ob.

\textsuperscript{175} Dobronski, op. cit., 108; Kobrin, Jewish Bialystok, 138-140, 172.

\textsuperscript{176} For an extraordinary litany of anti-Jewish (and often illegal) ordinances promulgated
during these years in Russia, see Löwe, op. cit., 290-293.

\textsuperscript{177} The trial lasted 34 days, from 25 September to 28 October 1913. See Delo Beilisa:
Stenograficheskii Otchet, 3 vols. (Kiev: Kievskaiia Mysl’, 1913); Vladimir Bonch-
politicians, judicial officials and journalists who promoted it, as a “media event,” with an eye both to disseminating anti-Semitic sentiment and ideology and to publicly testing just how far their persecution and prosecution of the Jew Beilis – whom virtually all of them knew to be innocent – could go. The trial was clearly conducted with Tsar Nicholas’s blessing and approval, and evidently the Tsar, who also believed Beilis to be innocent, took pains to ensure that those who prosecuted the case were duly rewarded with gold watches, promotions and so on. The success of the enterprise was considerable, as measured by the number of officials (including the Justice Minister, Ivan Shcheglovitov) who helped pursue the case, the ambiguity of the verdict (which affirmed that a ritual murder had actually occurred, though not committed by Beilis), and the publicity the trial received, not all of it, alas, negative.

It was reported on extensively in papers in Bialystok, with the famous writer S. An-sky providing much of the coverage printed in the Jewish Russian-language Voice of Bialystok (founded 1909). The arguments of the prosecution were carefully recorded:

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178 Wortman, op. cit., 505-506.


180 See Novosti Belostok 16 (19 October 1913): 3; 18 (22 October 1913): 3-4; 22 (26 October 1913): 3; and Golos Belostoka 240 (20 October 1913): 2-3; 242 (23 October
“We are standing,” said [prosecutor A.S.] Shmakov, “before an international kahal with limitless resources. Jewry has always known how to use those weapons able to annihilate its enemies with the greatest force. Today, those weapons are machine-driven printing presses.”

Prominent among the Beilis-baiting reactionaries tracked and cited by Bialystok dailies during the trial was Vladimir Purishkevich, an anti-Semitic and monarchist Duma deputy (since 1906) from Bessarabia, landowner, poetaster, organizer of the pogromist Black Hundreds, and a scandal-mongering loudmouth and thug later implicated in the murder of Romanov family favorite Grigorii Rasputin. For his antics – which included outbursts of colorful language in the Duma and provoking riots in movie theaters – Purishkevich had long been an object of derision among Russian progressives. Indeed, sometime after 1908, after the deputy had founded the extreme rightwing “Union of the Archangel Michael,” none other than the young David Kaufman dedicated a verse epigram to him, one that almost made it to Bialystok’s Russian-language readers:

In school, from around the second grade, I was engaged in writing epigrams and satirical verses. I sent one such poem, “The Original Clown-Soloist Vladimir Mitrofanovich Purishkevich Makes an Appearance” . . . to the editor of the local paper. Without indicating the author’s age, of course. I impatiently checked the


182 See, for instance, Novosti Belostoka 22 (26 October 1913): 3. Those in search of a contemporary (postmodern) Russian analogue to Purishkevich, at least on the level of ideology and comportment, might look to LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskii. For an amusing account of Purishkevich’s goonery and buffoonery, see S.B. Liubosh, Russkii Fashist Vladimir Purishkevich (Leningrad, Byloe, 1925). For a sample of his verse, see Vladimir Purishkevich, Soldatskie pesni (Petrograd: K.A. Chetverikov, 1914).
paper every day. On the third day a note appeared on its pages, entitled “From the 
editors to someone or other”: “With this note the editors declare that, 
unfortunately, they are not able to publish this satirical composition, for reasons 
beyond their control, although they find it interesting. They ask the author to drop 
by to chat with the editors.” At the time, I was twelve years old. Not wanting to 
reveal my age and being very shy in any case, I didn’t go visit the editors. I 
maintained my anonymity. A while later I wrote a short poem whose name I don’t 
call. Once again, I sent it to the editors, but this time – there was nothing 
dangerous in the poem – I was surprised to find it published in the paper. They 
again asked the author to appear and drop his incognito. . . .

Judging from this passage – presented, we must remember, for public evaluation during 
the Soviet 1930s – David Kaufman had not only absorbed the values and tropes typical of 
illegal student publications by around 1908 or so, but also aspired to participate, even if 
pseudonymously, in Bialystok’s emergent public political culture. The Beilis case, 
despite its outrageously cynical motivations and primitive squalor, offered a major 
occasion for the development of that culture: the famous neurologist Vladimir Bekhterev, 
one of the many experts who testified powerfully in Beilis’s defense (and who were 
quoted extensively in Bialystok periodicals), insisted at the time that the trial was of 
“great historical significance” for Russia as a whole, in that it provided an arena for the 
“struggle between two ways of thinking about society.”

183 Vertov, “Kak rodilsia i razvivalsia Kino-Glaz” (1935), Stat’i i Vystupleniia, 288. 
There is some doubt about whether the poem appeared in print or not: in a note written in 
1928 to Pera Atasheva (when Atasheva was working as a secretary for the Union of 
Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations [VOKS]), Vertov indicated that the 
Purishkevich satire had in fact been published (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 236, l. 104). See 
also RGALI f. 2852, op. 1, d. 537, l. 1.

184 V.A. Bekhterev, Ubijstvo Iushchinskogo i psikhiatro-psikhologicheskogo ekspertiza 
(St. Petersburg: Prakticheskaia Meditstina, 1913), 56. For his testimony, see Golos 
Belostoka 240 (20 October 1913): 2; 242 (23 October 1913): 3. For similar reflections on 
the public-building role of the trial, see G.M. Aleksandr, Posle suda Beilisa (Odessa: 
S.M. Tencher, 1913), 7.
1914, to be precise – David would begin his studies at Bekhterev’s Psychoneurological Institute in Petrograd, one of the most forward-looking educational institutions in Russia, where he would experience both a full immersion in the period’s most vital modes of “thinking about society,” and the metamorphosis of that society as it began to change, under pressure of war and revolution, into something very different from the milieu in which he grew up.

David Abelevich Kaufman

David Kaufman, about whom specifically we know so very little (before 1918), grew up in the midst of these events, these barriers, these pressures, and these possibilities. If they gave shape to the conceptual, ideological and affective repertory available to him, that shape was a complex, topological one. At once relatively privileged (especially if evaluated according to a “modern” template of value), and a member of a dishonored, often terrorized, but singularly dynamic group (Jews) from whose traditional yet still vital beliefs, language and practices he was sundered from the outset; at once born in a “provincial” city, and attached, by virtue of the occupations and aspirations of his relatives and the capitalist energies of “boisterous, rich Bialystok,” to an increasingly global economy and culture; at once resident in an autocratic peasant empire, deeply furrowed by lines of class, estate, language, confession and ethnicity, and surrounded by ideas for change (and forces of change) ranging from “enlightenment” and emigration to Esperanto and socialist revolution: David Kaufman received a complex social inheritance during his years in Bialystok, one that, while in no way generic, might have been
expended in various ways, and funded all sorts of life-journeys. In what follows, in part, we will see how that inheritance came to be expended as it was.

Yet what of the things we do know about him, David Kaufman the person, before 1914? Allow me to give his brother Mikhail, unduly ignored up to now, the floor for a page or two. For one thing, Mikhail was the only person who really knew Vertov from childhood through youth into adulthood (despite rancorous hiatuses, about which more in later chapters). For another, what he had to say in 1976 about Vertov as a boy has never been translated into English (I will try to keep the annotations to a minimum):

[Vertov] began composing poems in childhood. Usually they appeared in response to some strong emotional experience.

When he was nine or ten years old, Dziga was really crazy about the works of Fenimore Cooper, Mayne Reid, Jack London and Conan Doyle. He read them avidly, often at the expense of his studies. So that no one would bother him about homework, he would disappear somewhere pretty much every day after dinner, and in the mornings on holidays. Attempts were made to find him, but without success. It never occurred to anyone that he’d withdrawn to one of the sheds in the backyard. This became clear only after Dziga caught a chill one cold autumn day while in his secluded corner and fell ill with lobar pneumonia. Dziga was bedridden for a long while during his recovery; he was very sad and wrote poems.

By the time he graduated from the Modern School, Dziga had amassed a lot of poems. I recopied some of them and became their active popularizer. Dziga was shy about reading his poems to outsiders (he didn’t rate them very highly); so when Mother was eager to boast in front of guests, I was called upon to huff and puff. Obviously, that’s why some of my brother’s verses stuck in my mind for many years. The better part of [my] archival materials was destroyed in 1941, when my first-floor room was flooded.185 Thus I am presenting my brother’s poetic exercises partially by memory, partially on the basis of pages that were preserved.

I recall how once, when we still little boys, we were strolling on the outskirts of the city, and wandered into a slaughterhouse where we saw how they kill cattle. We returned home dispirited. Neither Dziga nor I would touch meat for a long time. Mother was upset about this, as she thought that children wouldn’t grow without eating meat. Father, however, was an adherent of vegetarianism,

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185 That is, in Moscow during World War II, probably after Kaufman had left during the evacuation.
and was pleased. Thus it wasn’t surprising that he was delighted to read what Dziga wrote after visiting the slaughterhouse:

Little cow, brown one,
My good cow!
Oh, my brown one,
Oh, how I love you.

Little cow, you give us
Cheese, butter, milk.
You go to the nearby meadow
To feed on grass.

Oh, brown one,
How do I show my gratitude?
I lead you to the slaughterhouse,
And kill you there with a knife . . . .”

My mother’s sister, aunt Masha, played a big role in Dziga’s and my development. When we were just beginning to go to school, she was already studying in St. Petersburg at the Women’s Medical Institute. She was purposeful, energetic, strong and sociable, and liked by everyone who came in contact with her. Despite being very busy, she spent a lot of time with her nephews. Aunt Masha loved us, and we loved her back. She was our very own confidential agent, and gave every stimulus to her nephews’ creative initiatives. Having noticed that I was mad about photography – I’d been experimenting with a homemade camera obscura – aunt Masha gave me a real brand-name camera. I still remember my boundless joy. I began to spend all my free time on photography, and aunt Masha was the main evaluator of my experiments.

For his part, Dziga shared his literary exercises above all with aunt Masha. Of course, this all happened during her holidays. Young students surrounded her every time she visited from St. Petersburg, and I recall the meetings where they would discuss current political events. Naturally, we began to understand what they were about only later. Not without aunt Masha’s participation did we formulate our first conceptions of revolutionary ideas, about the struggle with Tsarist oppression, and about the worker’s movement.

Later, Dziga began composing verses on political themes. They were like pamphlets in which the conservatives who stood in defense of the Tsarist regime were mocked. One of the poems was written especially sharply. It was called “The Solo Performance of the Clown V. Purishkevich at a Session of the State Duma.”

I can’t repeat even one of the pamphlets Dziga wrote. I remember well, however, how they all got burned up in the stove, when we heard rumors about a general search being conducted [by the police] in the city.

Now a few words about the poem “Masha.” DzigaVertov recalled this composition in his diaries. It was a poem dedicated to aunt Masha on the occasion
of her defense of her medical doctor’s diploma. In the poem, life was compared with the ocean, which accordingly would bring surprises in the form of storms and tempests. The poem’s hero was a brave helmsman, expertly guiding his boat. It remains a shame that “Masha” wasn’t preserved.

Setting aside for the moment the question of Kaufman’s own storytelling strategies, his reflexes, exclusions, and boldfacing – although what he writes is certainly credible on the whole – how should we assess and situate these reminiscences? David came from a book-and-education-oriented family, supportive of his (and his brothers’) early artistic explorations, and possessing enough resources to be supportive of such interests. His father was an erudite and a moralist – perhaps a Tolstoyan? – who rejected drinking, smoking, meat-eating, and the reading of substandard literature; his mother, co-librarian of one of the city’s (and the region’s) largest circulating libraries. Masha was the family’s exemplum and foremost success story, possessing charisma, intelligence, courage, drive, curiosity, personal warmth, and a distinguished record of study at one of the country’s foremost medical institutes. That she was also politically somewhere on the left is unsurprising for someone in her structural position in Russian society, whether or not she really led political discussions, or returned to Bialystok to assist victims of the June 1906 pogrom (though I believe she did both). And David, of course, became an artist – despite “Dziga Vertov’s” intricate chafing against that label, to be discussed in later chapters – and so it’s not surprising that Mikhail stresses his brother’s early

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186 Masha received her diploma with distinction on 13 November 1912, when Vertov was 16 (TsGIASpb f. 436, op. 4, d. 906, l. 1).

“creative impulses” above all else, in this embryonic artist bio. Yet those impulses, as outlined in the memoir, have certain limitations and preconditions.

Some of these are fairly obvious. To be sure, what a later interviewer called the “division of labor” between Mikhail Kaufman and Vertov, with photography and direct visual “experiment” on one side and poetic articulation on the other, finds reflection (or retrospective anticipation) here.¹⁸⁸ The importance of Masha Gal’pern, not only as inspiration but also as evaluative authority and standard-setter, is at once immense and more difficult to account for in an un-reductive way. Rooted in both academic/professional success and personal charisma, her centrality to Vertov’s imagination is eventually revealed, I would postulate, in an aspect of his cinematic work that all serious commentators have noted, if not always with full comprehension or sympathy. I am thinking, of course, about Vertov’s feminism, which distinguishes him sharply from most Soviet filmmakers (male or female!) of the 1920s and ‘30s, and which imposes itself as a theme with greater force the more often and more closely his films are scrutinized. For the mature Vertov – and here I am, no doubt, leaping ahead on paper wings of speculation, but also to analyses to follow in later chapters – women very often

¹⁸⁸ The interviewer was Annette Michelson:

[Kaufman]: Ever since childhood Vertov had the ability to perceive things through images and to communicate them in poetic form. It’s interesting, by the way, that even as a child I was attracted to different forms of representation than he. I studied photographs, I drew – and since we’re discussing the early stages of our collaboration, we can say that it began when our beloved Aunt Masha graduated from medical school. Vertov wrote a poem for her, and I drew a sort of congratulation picture of a dove in flight. There was already a certain . . .

October [Michelson]: Division of labor.

Kaufman: Division of labor, and a form of collaboration – even though I did not always feel that Vertov perceived the material I shot quite as I did, even when something was missing. (Mikhail Kaufman, “An Interview with Mikhail Kaufman,” October 11 (Winter 1979): 54-76; here 59.)
stand in as exemplary (Soviet) subjects, as those agents best able to build and live within the New; and Masha Gal’pern, along with Elizaveta Svilova and (who knows?) Chaya Kaufman, provided Vertov with a kind of prototype for such women as they appear in his films.

However, surely the most striking feature of Vertov’s early artistic work as recalled by Kaufman is its occasional quality: that is, the way that it was prompted by relatively punctual events like an illness, the gory sight of an abattoir, Masha’s graduation, or even the pogrom wave, figured by the absurd and sadistic Purishkevich (but perhaps by the slaughtered cattle as well). Neither artistic practice nor the “materials” of art – media, tropes, textures and so on – but rather the use of art to deal with, articulate or memorialize occurrences, is what is stressed here. In a sense, of course, we notice this because Kaufman’s recollections are doing what all “artistic biography” does: that is, they link specific events to specific works, binding the history of the artist’s production along a single timeline with larger (family, national, international) history. And it is worth remembering that nearly all of Vertov’s major films, with the exception of Man with a Movie Camera, were “occasional” themselves: that is, films made-to-order, in accord with some Soviet policy initiative, public ritual, or development project. However, in an intriguing 1935 talk that I have already cited, Vertov gives a suggestive hint as to the deeper motivations behind this responsive, or reactive, creative labor.

Although the lecture was entitled “How Kino-Eye was born and developed,” in it Vertov offers an account, not only of his early years in newsreel, but also of his
childhood attempts at novel-writing and, more surprisingly, his strategies for learning what was assigned to him in school:

[In school] I was never able to learn anything by heart. I found subjects like grammar – where you had to cram in all the exceptions – or history – where you have chronology – the most difficult, and in general, had difficulty with any academic assignment, where one had to not only grasp the idea, but also cram stuff in.

I began looking for a way out of my difficulties. Let’s say I had to immediately and quickly answer, without looking at the map, which are the cities and islands of Asia Minor? Normally one would go up to the map, find the cities and name them. But that was not an option.

Once, going through the names of those cities and islands, I had the idea of arranging them in a rhythmical series that could be memorized immediately. With the cities of Asia Minor, in particular, this is how I proceeded. I arranged their names and noticed that as soon as I read through them in a specific order, I immediately memorized the whole series – that is, I freed myself from the need to cram them into my head.

25 years have gone by, and although I haven’t repeated them to myself once, I still remember the arrangement: Miletus, Phocaea, Smyrna, Halicarnassus, Samos, Ephesus, and Mytilene on the islands of Lesbos, Cyprus and Rhodes.

[. . .]

What did these experiments lead to? These experiments (that I was forced to carry out) led to my becoming interested in the organization of discrete elements of the visible and audible world.

The next phase involved my being occupied with stenographic recordings. Here it wasn’t a matter only of the formal binding of these fragments [of sound], but of the interrelationships of the concepts [associated with] the discrete pieces of the stenograph recording. The same can be said of my experiments with gramophone recordings, where a new composition was created out of discrete extracts, from recordings on gramophone records.

But I wasn’t satisfied by experiments with already recorded sounds. Within the natural world I heard a significantly greater quantity of varied sounds . . . I hit upon the idea that it was necessary to expand our capacities to hear in an organized way. Not to limit those capacities within the bounds of ordinary music. Within the concept “I hear,” I included the entire audible world. To this period belongs my experiment in recording the sounds of a sawmill.189

189 Vertov, Stat’i i Vystupleniia, 290-291.
An external imperative – to assimilate facts, to “cram stuff in” – leads to efforts to bind that raw “stuff” into a form, to master it. We can legitimately doubt that Vertov independently hit upon “the idea” of rhythmical organization of words (or sounds, or images), given the long history (to which we will allude later) of the use of rhythm and rhyme in practical mnemonics; perhaps the bookstore contained primers on memorization strategies, or perhaps his parents offered him some pointers. It would seem, moreover, that the structural requirements of the school exercise long continued to shape Vertov’s imagination, if we consider the tightly enumerated outline-form of some of his essays, or the report of Benno Reifenberg, Feuilletonchef of the Frankfurter Zeitung, on one of Vertov’s 1929 German talks – irritatingly presented, according to Reifenberg, in the way one constructs high-school composition exercises – in chunks arranged according to roman numeral 1 and 2 with lots of a and b and d, and with that youthful optimism that wants to be at once entirely clear and as complete as possible.

(The talk’s style was matched in naiveté, added Reifenberg, by the director’s “Romantic” and old-fashioned belief in the possibility of “a stock taking of the entire world” through cinema.) In any event, a task that young David Kaufman “was forced to carry out,”

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190 It is worth recalling here that locations and place-names are among the classic objects of mnemotechnic practice and speculation: see Jules Didier, Traité Complet de Mnémonique (Lille: Thomas Naudin, 1808), 164-198; Mnemonik oder praktische Gedächtnisskunst zum Selbstunterricht nach den Vorlesungen des Herrn von Feinaigle (Frankfurt am Main: Varrentrapp und Sohn, 1811), 78-108; and of course Frances Yates, The Art of Memory (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

that threatened him with the possibility of significant failure and dishonor, is executed by fashioning a technical procedure of “formal binding”: a procedure that, by virtue of both the anxiety informing it and its at least partial success, provokes experimental inquiry into a more general “expansion of capacities,” into the “formal binding” of words, concepts, sounds. . . . everything.

Emerging out of both Vertov’s and Kaufman’s reminiscences is a conception of “art” as a way of dealing with change and with shock, to create structures of cognition that would help one to coincide with that change and fend off that shock. And I will be arguing throughout this book that such a conception explains a great deal about Vertov’s mature experimental documentary work, although it cannot account on its own (obviously enough) for the full subtlety and range of that work. Aficionados of Vertov, for instance, will have already recognized the affinities between Kaufman’s slaughterhouse-story, Vertov’s tribute to brown cows, and the great “beef-to-bull” backwards motion sequence in Kino-Eye (1924; to be discussed in Chapter Five), a sequence that, while bearing an expository function – a specifically economic one, that hopes to demonstrate the irrelevance of middlemen to the production of useful commodities – also aspires to fashion a (secular and visible) notion of resurrection, as

Vertov wasn’t the only one who practiced blunt enumeration in his speeches and articles: Stalin was famous for the same, as Stephen Kotkin has pointed out.

grisly, lacerated slabs of meat are reanimated into a joyously corporeal and collective existence.

Such montage procedures signal the provisional character of our conceptions of reality – even in the face of the reality principle itself – and therefore our capacity to re-conceive. To be sure, that capacity can never encompass the “entire . . . world,” whose metamorphoses and resistances outstrip all subjective attempts at mastery (and the latter very much include, I would stress, today’s tediously familiar “ironic” and “play-centered” theoretical postures, as well as all the dialectically affiliated but more obviously reactionary and anti-intellectual appeals to timeless wisdom, or the newer scientismic fundamentalisms). And in this study, we will need to account for all the “discrete elements” that elude such attempts, that find no place within the modern and universal memory palace, whether through censorship, self-censorship, the collision of conflicting models of “capacity,” or sheer mutability and destruction.

I don’t think we should doubt, for instance, that Masha Gal’pern – the family’s spiritual helmswoman – spoke to the Kaufman boys about “the workers’ movement”: this was Bialystok, after all, in the early 1900s. But did she also talk to them about Zionism? About feminism? Mikhail Kaufman, writing in the Soviet 1970s, in the wake of seven decades of de- and re-racination, probably wouldn’t have even remembered; we’ll probably never know.

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193 On this, see also Rosen, “Now and Then,” 36.
Image 9: David Kaufman (Dziga Vertov) and Masha Gal’pern, ca. 1914. Image courtesy of Andre Kaufman.