Chapter Two

Social Immortality: David Kaufman at the Psychoneurological Institute (1914-1916)

Have you guess’d you yourself would not continue?
Have you dreaded these earth-beetles?
Have you fear’d the future would be nothing to you?

-- Whitman, “To Think of Time”

The period 1914 through 1921, a formative one for Vertov, comprised years of uninterrupted crisis, and almost uninterrupted war, in Russia. Vertov was fortunate enough not to have been directly involved in combat,¹ but World War One (1914-1917) and the Russian Civil War (1918-1921) furrowed every dimension of his existence nonetheless, whether by virtue of the horizon of fear and despair they generated, the occasions they provided for revolt and commitment, or the opportunities for new forms of camaraderie and creativity that they offered. War and its consequences, singularly dire in Russia during these years, thus have to be regarded as among the determining instances in Vertov’s biography. Those consequences blew through a whole array of other relatively independent life-variables - ranging from family and school to artistic and career aspirations - and slammed many doors shut along the way, blasting others off their hinges.

For these years and places, a naked listing of historical and biographical events is dramatic enough. Between 1914 and 1921, David Kaufman left Bialystok, attended one of the most important and innovative institutions of higher learning in Russia, became

¹ See Vertov’s brief autobiography, written in 1947 as part of a petition to be awarded the title (which he received in June of that year) of Meritorious Artist of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic: RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, l. 48.
one of many thousands of war refugees, was drafted and released from the draft, frequented avant-garde cafés in Moscow during the revolutionary year of 1917, conducted literary and sound-transcription experiments in his “laboratory of hearing,” got a job in the new Soviet cultural administration working on (and sometimes restoring) newsreel film, showed films on agitational trains that traversed the war-torn country, and changed his name. Still, we have very little precise documentation about Kaufman/Vertov’s activities between 1914 and 1918, and the sketchy information we possess about the succeeding period (1918 to 1921) seems full and illuminating only by comparison with the relative blank of the earlier. Much can be said about his social and cultural surroundings, however, and at a high level of specificity; perhaps a certain density of description, animated as much as possible by swift movement from one moment to the next, is the best strategy for recreating the terrifying or exhilarating turbulence of this time, the time of Kaufman’s transformation into “Vertov.”

The present chapter on David Kaufman’s years at the Psychoneurological Institute and the two that follow are best thought of as a single long section dealing with this transformation. At the Institute, as I hope to show, Kaufman acquired (without realizing it!) both some of the practical instruments and some of the ideologies and formal preoccupations that enabled him later on to construct “Vertov.” Personal connections that he made (or might have made: the mood in this chapter will often be hypothetical) at the Institute were the most important of the instruments, to be sure, especially as means of entering into Soviet cultural institutions as they were forming after 1917; his probable involvement in scientific filmmaking at the Institute gave him both some concrete preparation for his later work and a stake in cinema itself as a means of exploring the
world (rather than of staging fictions); and his likely exposure to then-current ideologies that identified material energy as the universal substrate of existence, and rhythm as a medium that bound the realms of intellectual (musical-artistic) and non-intellectual labor, furnished tropes and concepts that would, I suggest, prove fertile for an artist who sought to make films that were “scientific,” “proletarian” and “symphonic-poetic” all at once.

Again, a temporal or narrative paradox haunts my choice of these themes, insofar as they are identifiable as salient only in relation to Vertov’s later work in cinema; if we were to confine ourselves to “1914-1916,” none of them could be isolated from among the infinitely tangled web of factors and influences through which David Kaufman moved. But Kaufman did become Vertov, after all – that is, he didn’t become anyone else, much as he might have wanted to at various points – and so we need to determine which of those pre-Vertovian experiences equipped Kaufman for that “becoming.” His years at the Psychoneurological Institute, largely ignored in the existing Vertov scholarship, are an important place to start.

War, Bekhterev, and the Psychoneurological Institute

After completing an extra, supplementary year of study at the Modern School – necessary for entry into an institute of higher learning - David Kaufman left Bialystok sometime late in the summer of 1914 to study at the Petrograd Psychoneurological Institute, where he remained through the spring of 1916. At least initially, he lived in Petrograd with Masha Gal’pern (by now a practicing M.D.), although he returned to
Bialystok in the early summer 1915 to prepare for his Latin exam. That city had been the target of intensive German bombing raids since late April 1915, however, and conflict terminated David’s summer sojourn by early August at the latest. He and his family would have fled by that time, along with many if not most other Bialystokers, partially in anticipation of occupation by German forces (13 August 1915) but mainly prompted by the scorched earth and anti-Semitic policies of the Russian Army itself. Now among many hundreds of thousands of other war refugees, the Kaufman family went by train to Petrograd, where they were installed, no doubt in less-than-optimal living conditions, by the fall of 1915.

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2 TsGIA SPb f. 115, op. 2, d. 4048, ll. 2-5, 13-16.

3 Dobronski, op. cit., 112. These policies, as historian Peter Gatrell indicates, indeed had a distinct anti-Jewish coloration: “Within the extensive theater of operations, the Russian high command was accused of pursuing a scorched earth policy and driving civilians from their homes. Archival evidence supports this view. . . . The army went out of its way to target vulnerable minorities, in an attempt to find scapegoats for military failure. Jews suffered most acutely. The negative association between Jews and frontier security had been deeply ingrained in military consciousness ever since Nicholas I had decreed that they could not live within 50 kilometers of the western frontier. Russian generals confidently asserted that ‘the complete hostility of the entire Jewish population toward the Russian army is well established’ . . . . Population displacement was ultimately caused by the advance of German and Austrian troops into Russian territory. But this explains little of the intensity and character of displacement. Although those who found an explanation in terms of ‘spontaneity’ deliberately or unwittingly camouflaged the active intervention of Russia’s own armed forces, the part played by the Russian army in this dramatic upheaval was evident to any objective observer. Jews and Germans left involuntarily by order of Russian military commanders, who were acting out of a warped belief in the political unreliability of these ethnic minorities . . . .” (Peter Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia During World War I (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 16, 31). See also Eric Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 137-150; and Chapter Three, below.

4 TsGIA SPb f. 115, op. 2, d. 4048, l. 12.
After this point, the family began to split apart, never to be fully reunited: Moisej (by now designated “Mikhail” in official documents) left in September for gymnasium study in Mogilev (now in Belarus, then the headquarters of the Russian Imperial Army), which he completed on 15 May 1917. The Kaufmans moved to Moscow sometime before the summer of 1917, remaining there before returning to Bialystok, possibly as early as 1918 and doubtless not beyond the fall of 1920, by which time the Poles had emerged victorious in their war against Soviet forces. It seems that this Moscow sojourn was the last time Abel, Chaya and all their sons – the two oldest were grownups now – lived in the same city. Meanwhile, Masha Gal’pern left Petrograd in January 1916 to carry out medical relief work in war-torn Minsk for the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jews, where she remained until sometime in 1918.

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5 RGALI f. 2896, op. 1, d. 112, ll. 1-2. It was evidently Moisej who was the first of the older brothers to select a Russian first name.

6 It seems that the Kaufmans moved to Moscow sometime during the revolutionary year (see Simon Kagan’s “Entretien avec Boris Kaufman,” Beinecke Library, Yale University, Boris Kaufman Papers, Gen MSS 562, Box 16, file 336, p. 3); Mikhail Kaufman was certainly there by 4 July 1917, living near Sretenka Street (RGALI f. 2896, op. 1, d. 112, ll. 2-2ob).

7 German forces left the city in February 1919, but fighting in the area against the Bolsheviks under Marshal Tukhachevsky ended only at the end of August 1920; see Dobronski, op. cit., 118, 129-130.

8 Miriam Halperin-[Proginin] [Masha Gal’pern], “The Work of OZE in the Minsk District in the Years 1916-1918,” Minsk, ‘ir va’em: korot, ma’asim, ‘ishim, ha’vai, ed. David Cohen and Shlomo Even-Shoshan ([Tel-Aviv]: Association of Immigrants from Minsk and Its Surroundings, 1975), 602-604. This article, about which more below, was originally published in He’avar (May-June 1968), and I am grateful to Zohar Rotem for translating it for me.
For his part, David was drafted in the fall of 1916 – into the musical division of a military school in Chuguev, Ukraine, which I will mention again in the next chapter – but not before completing the two-year “basic” course at the Petrograd Psychoneurological Institute, a remarkable school of higher learning that had a lasting impact upon him, both intellectually and as regards the social connections he forged there. To be sure, the war and poor living conditions would have exerted their unsettling long- and short-range effects upon David at the Institute; in this respect, however, his situation would have been the same as that as virtually of all his fellows, and superior to that of many.

The Institute had been formed in 1907 by the aforementioned Vladimir Mikhailovich Bekhterev (1857-1927), one of the founders of Russian neurology and a major figure in the history of education in Russia in the early 20th century. A student of Wilhelm Wundt and Jean-Martin Charcot, Bekhterev was a world expert in brain anatomy whose articles frequently appeared in foreign journals, a prize-winning luminary in the Russian scientific world, a member of the prestigious Military Medical Academy in St. Petersburg, and an active teacher whose pupils included, among many others, Masha Gal’pern, who had had studied “nervous illnesses” for two semesters in 1910 with Bekhterev at the Women’s Higher Medical Institute in St. Petersburg. Building on

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9 TsGIASPb f. 115, op. 2, d. 4048, ll. 8, 17-18; Mikhail Kaufman, “Poet neigrovogo,” Dziga Vertov v Vospominaniakh Sovremennikov, ed. E.I. Vertov-Svilova et al. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), 76. Kaufman’s mention of Vertov’s study at this military school has gone oddly unnoticed by nearly all writers on Vertov; his claims are plainly substantiated by external documentation. For more details, see Chapter Three, below.

10 TsGIASPb f. 436, op. 1 d. 2552, l. 5ob. On the Women’s Medical Institute’s ties to other medical institutes in St. Petersburg, see A.E. Ivanov, Vysshaia Shkola Rossii v kontse XIX-nachale XX veka (Moscow: Akademiia Nauk, 1991), 109. On Bekhterev and
donations from well-to-do patrons, including a grant of crown lands, Bekhterev founded the Institute on an exceptionally broad structural and intellectual basis that incorporated research and clinical treatment, humanistic, jurisprudential and scientific study, and a policy of “unrestricted admission to women and Jewish students.”

11 Joravsky, Russian Psychology, 83. Interestingly, the Psychoneurological Institute kept no statistics about the social estate (soslovie) of the students enrolled there (Ivanov, Vysshaia Shkola Rossii, 279). The noble Alafusov family was the Institute’s main financial patron (Wartenweiler, op. cit., 200).
Students began their studies there with a two-year “basic” program that included courses in chemistry, physics, general biology, general and experimental psychology, geology, mathematics, modern languages, world history, history of philosophy, history of culture and art, history of political economy, literature, sociology, logic and epistemology, anatomy of the nervous system, and comparative and experimental psychology among many other topics; and it is this wide-ranging program that David
Kaufman would have completed.\textsuperscript{12} Three higher-level divisions or “faculties” – pedagogical, juridical, and medical – each offered an additional three years of intensive study in those disciplines, while continuing to stress what we would now call “interdisciplinarity” through the inclusion of science courses (in psychology, especially) into the more humanities-oriented tracks.\textsuperscript{13}

The teaching faculty, which drew on a number of other universities in St. Petersburg, was one of the finest in Russia, and included (besides Bekhterev himself) the physiologist and psychologist Prince Aleksei Ukhtomskij, physiologist Nikolai Vvedenskij, chemist Lev Pizarzhevskij, philosophers Semyon Frank and Nikolai Losskij, linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, lexicographer Max Fasmer, the left-wing scholar of government Mikhail Reisner (father of Larisa Reisner, herself a star student at the Institute and soon to become one of the legends of early Soviet journalism), and the evolutionary biologist and animal psychologist Vladimir Vagner, about whom more below.\textsuperscript{14} The diverse student body, extraordinary faculty, low cost of attendance, and (for Russia) uniquely wide-ranging curriculum made the Institute a crucible of pre- and post-Revolutionary Russian culture and among the most remarkable sites of learning in the

\textsuperscript{12} See A.V. Gerver, ed. Otchet o deiatel’nosti Psikho-Nevrologicheskago Instituta za 1912-j god (St. Petersburg: Gramotnost’, 1914), 176; Ivanov, Vysshaia Shkola Rossii, 113; Pozner, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{13} See Wartenweiler, op. cit., 202.

\textsuperscript{14} Gerver, ed. Otchet o deiatel’nosti Psikho-Nevrologicheskago Instituta za 1912-j god, 176-177; Ivanov, Vysshaia Shkola Rossii, 116.
Empire, one which enjoyed enormous popularity among young *intelligentsia*, who would often audit courses there even when not officially enrolled.15

The Institute’s liberal-to-left-tending political culture was surely part of this appeal as well. A number of major figures in the Institute, Bekhterev among them, had a history of taking independent, anti-authoritarian positions vis-à-vis the Tsar and his ministries. When the War Ministry threatened to close the Military Medical Academy in response to the student uprisings there during 1906, Bekhterev distinguished himself from his colleagues by his forceful insistence on the Academy’s autonomy.16 His uncompromising exculpatory testimony during the Beilis trial in 1913 – widely reported and discussed in newspapers across the Empire, including (as we know) in Bialystok17 – was no doubt part of the reason that the conservative education minister L. A. Kasso refused that year to approve Bekhterev’s re-appointment as the director of the Psychoneurological Institute.18 Indeed, the following year, Kasso tried unsuccessfully to close the Institute, still not an official “institute of higher education,”19 on the grounds that its focus had shifted to education from scientific research, and that those pedagogical

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16 Joravsky, op. cit., 84.

17 *Novosti Belostoka* 16 (19 October 1913): 3; and *Golos Belostoka* 240 (20 October 1913): 2 (NIAB f. 15, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 62, 69ob).

18 Joravsky, op. cit., 83-84. Joravsky notes that “[Bekhterev] continued to direct [the Institute] in fact, though another person took over the title” (84). Bekhterev wrote that the trial was of “great historical significance” for Russia, in that it provided the occasion (as I indicated at the end of Chapter One) for the “struggle between two ways of thinking about society” (V.A. Bekhterev, *Ubijstvo Iushchinskogo i psikhiatro-psikhologicheskogo ekspertiza* (St. Petersburg: Prakticheskaia Meditstina, 1913), 56).

19 It would achieve that status only in 1916 (Ivanov, *Vysshaia Shkola Rossii*, 114).
functions, now conducted entirely outside the control of the Ministry of Education, had helped spawn various student disorders, none of which had been opposed by the Institute’s “anti-government” professoriate.

As David Joravsky has pointed out, Bekhterev’s own position was of necessity ambivalent, inasmuch as he was at once a much-bemedaled beneficiary of state and private patronage and a critic of both autocracy and capitalism. (The privilege, of course, provided the platform for the critique, in a fertile paradox familiar to academics still today.) Bekhterev was a scientist of positivist cast who evidently believed that the backwardness and obscurantism of the Tsarist regime worked together with the chaos and selfishness that came with incipient capitalism to prevent the emergence in Russia of rationally organized modern institutions (including scientific ones) and mature, mentally

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20 The Institute indeed conducted its affairs in remarkably autonomous fashion, as David Wartenweiler points out: “According to statutes, the institute was established as a research and teaching institution, open to students of both sexes regardless of their nationality or religious convictions. To an even greater extent than was customary for academic scientific societies attached to universities, the institute was granted wide-ranging autonomy over internal matters. Thus, although formally it fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, the direct influence of the statute bureaucracy was limited to the confirmation of the director, chosen by the institute’s council. Moreover, the institute was required to send the Ministry a copy of the list of its teaching staff and, in conformity with the Temporary Rules of 1906 on Societies and Unions, to submit annual accounts. Otherwise, its ruling body, the council (that is, the assembly of all full professors), was basically free to develop its activities within the framework of the statutes, according to its own judgment and plans” (Wartenweiler, op. cit., 201).

21 Ivanov, Vysshia Shkola Rossii, 114. Evidently, the Ministry backed away from Kasso’s proposal, fearing the public outcry that the closure of this (mainly privately funded) institute would elicit (ibid., 115).

22 Joravsky, op. cit., 85-87.
healthy, socially engaged individuals alike. Thus his left-wing sympathies – he was to endorse the Bolshevik government after the October Revolution, and retained his privileged status under the new regime until his death in 1927 – were prompted not merely by concerns for intellectual autonomy, but by a sense of his (in Joravsky’s words) “professional mission to society at large,” of a project realizable only if “state and society were completely transformed.”

23 His most open polemics were, to be sure, directed against capitalism, as here in a speech delivered at the third Russian congress of psychiatrists and neurologists in 1909: “The basis of our civilization lies in the significance of capitalism in the life of contemporary society, which has led to [a] struggle for existence. The golden idol, that fearful enemy of humanity, paralyzes all strivings toward mutual aid. . . Thanks to it, [we find] the gravest exploitation of poor folk, leading to every sort of deprivation, to the rise of poverty and an extreme over-exertion of the physical and moral powers of the population, especially among the working class. . . On the other hand, this struggle for existence, conditioned by the significance of capitalism in the life of contemporary society, leads the population into larger centers, [which in turn] leads to the sanitary conditions of the community becoming exceedingly unfavorable. . . The capitalist system: that is the basic evil of our time. We must in every way concern ourselves with achieving higher norms of social life; instead of capitalism, we must place labor and service to truth and goodness in the foreground” (V. Bekhterev, Voprosy Nervno-psikhicheskago Zdorov’ia v Russkom Naselenii [originally published in Obozreniia Psikhiatrii] (St. Petersburg: Pervoj Sankt-Peterburgskij Trudovoj Arteli, 1910), 16, 22; see also Joravsky, op. cit., 87). At the same time, he was given to proposing bureaucratic measures for social improvement, such as (in the speech just quoted) forbidding epileptics, the “mentally ill,” and even chronic alcoholics to marry (20). Other positions he took were securely in the mainstream of public opinion, as when he added his voice to the choir of patriots opposing “Germanism” during World War One, although he also strongly advocated the creation of an international parliament (or “a kind of United States of Europe,” as he put it) upon the war’s conclusion (V.M. Bekhterev, “Moral’nye Itogi Velikoj Mirovoj Vojny,” Vestnik Znaniia 10-11 (October-November 1915): 657-671; see esp. 670).

24 Claims that Bekhterev was done away with at Stalin’s orders, after the neurologist supposedly diagnosed the dictator as clinically “paranoid” (see, for instance, Vladimir Lerner, Jacob Margolin and Eliezer Witztum, “Vladimir Bekhterev: his life, his work and the mystery of his death,” History of Psychiatry 16:2 (2005): 217-227), are, in my view, too feebly substantiated to be taken seriously.

25 Joravsky, op. cit., 85-86.
Although never a member of a left-wing political party, Bekhterev stocked the Institute’s faculty with a number of affiliated radicals, including the aforementioned Mikhail Reisner – a fellow-traveler and (later) member of the Social Democratic Party who taught courses on law and state-church relations and led proseminars on utopian thought – and historian Evgenij Tarle (1874-1955), a Social Democrat who lectured on modern history and conducted wide-ranging seminars on Rousseau’s political philosophy and other topics. And there is good reason to believe that these and other freethinking...

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26 See Gerver, ed. Otchet o deiatel’nosti Psikho-Nevrologicheskago Instituta za 1912-j god, 44, 188; M.B. Kejrim-Markus, Gosudarstvennoe Rukovodstvo Kul’turoi: Stroitel’stvo Narkomprosa Noiabria 1917-Seredina 1918 gg. (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 160; http://www.biografija.ru/show_bio.aspx?id=111353. Reisner’s major two volume work on government (Gosudarstvo (Moscow: I.D. Sytin, 1911) attempts to demonstrate how “humanity strives toward realizing the ideals of unity, justice and economic well-being,” in a process that “is born out of social struggle and logical contradiction,” and leads to “the creation of newer and newer forms [of social life]” and to “a new earth and a new sky” for human beings (Gosudarstvo, vol. 2, 290). Openly opposed to any participation in World War I from the outset of that conflict, Reisner (1868-1928) was later to work as a publicist for the Soviet regime after 1917, producing defenses of “Soviet power” written in simple, stark language (Chto Takoe Sovetskaia Vlast’? (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Narodnogo Komissariata Zemledeliia, 1918), atheistic propaganda pamphlets (Nuzhno li Nam Verit’ v Boga, 2nd ed. (Kursk: Knigoizdatel'skoe tovarishchestvo pri Kurskom Gubkome RKP(b), 1922), and a collection of short revolutionary plays (Bog i Birzha: Sbornik Revoliucionnykh P’es (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo, 1921), among other works. Larisa Reisner was a participant in her father’s seminars on comparative utopias, and one of her earliest works, the play Atlantis (1912), was clearly inspired by her utopian readings (Galina Prizhiborovskaiia, Larisa Rejsner (Molodaia Gvardiia: Moscow, 2008), 100-101).

27 Tarle had first been arrested at a political meeting, along with the students in attendance, in April 1900 (Ivanov, Vysshaia Shkola Rossii, 116, 240). Later a major historian of the 1812 and Crimean Wars, he suffered arrest and official censure a number of times during the 1930s and 40s; see B.S. Kaganovich, Evgenij Viktorovich Tarle i Peterburgskaiia Shkola Istorikov (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1995).
professors had an impact upon the political viewpoints of their students, particularly during the lead-up to the February Revolution.28

The Institute must have been an exciting place for young people to study, especially given its openness to auditors and breadth of field coverage, a range hardly smaller in the humanistic than in the scientific divisions. In addition to proseminars (at which students would present original work) on topics ranging from modern and ancient philosophy to the psychophysiology of sense organs to Pushkin, there were student-organized study circles (at which professors would often present their work as well) on epistemology, the study of religion and ethics, monism, Schopenhauer’s philosophy, folktales from around the globe, Esperanto, physical education and classical music among other subjects.29

During the war years, regrettably, students would have had much on their minds besides study, particularly after the defeats of early 1915, which set in motion that colossal wave of refugees, mainly from the Empire’s western provinces,30 of which many students and their families (including the Kaufmans, as we know) found themselves a part. Over six million people were made refugees in Russia during World War I, in a


30 Pskov, Smolensk, Vitebsk, Minsk, Mogilev, Kovno, Kurland and Grodno provinces were among the worst afflicted, although there were considerable problems in the Caucasus (Yerevan and Tiflis provinces) as well (“Soiuz Gorodov v dele pomoshchi bezhentsam i vyselentsam,” Bezhentsy i Vyselentsy: Otdel’nye Ottiski iz No. 17 Izvestij Vserossijskago Soiuza Gorodov (Moscow: Moskovskaia Gorodskai Tipografiia, 1915), 17).
population displacement that “on this scale and at this intensity,” as historian Peter Gatrell notes, “was unprecedented in Russia’s recent history.”31 The civic activist Sergei Bakhrushin– later an important Soviet historian known for his participation in Stalin-era debates about Ivan the Terrible, at this time active in the relief effort carried out by the Union of [Russian] Cities – succinctly captured the reality of the situation in a report from 1915:

The conditions under which the migration of the refugees occurred are only too well known. Caught entirely unaware by the invasion, [. . .] people moved unconsciously forward like some giant, natural stream, moved in any direction and any which way, on foot and with supply trains, trampling down fields and crops as they went, drinking wells down to the bottom, hungry and ill-clothed, sowing the path [behind them] with corpses.32

The Kaufman family was relatively fortunate compared to the thousands seeking food in Dvinsk or Vitebsk,33 or to those standing around in large, hungry crowds in cities as far away as Orenburg, Samara and Cheliabinsk,34 although their situation was hardly

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31 Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking, 3. That figure of six million comprised “something like 5 percent of the total population.” “In 1917, ‘refugees’ (bezhentsy) outnumbered the industrial proletariat. . . [The displacement] would be exceeded only by the Nazi invasion of 1941, which displaced around 10 million people” (ibid.). As we will see, Vertov would be one of those 10 million as well (see Chapter Eleven, below).

32 S. Bakhrushin, “Bezhentsy,” in Bezhentsy i Vyselentsy, 1. Vertov would many years later meet Bakhrushin when both men, were in failing health after World War Two, were visiting a southern sanatorium (DVVS, 240). For powerful descriptive accounts of the refugee crisis and the state’s attempts to respond, see Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking; and W. Bruce Lincoln, Passage Through Armageddon: The Russians in War and Revolution, 1914-1918 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 156-158, 161, 177, 188, 218.


34 “Sdvig bezhentsev s mest,” in Bezhentsy i Vyselentsy, 54.
enviable. On the way to Petrograd from Bialystok – which had been made one of the
two first isolation points in the Grodno gubernii for refugees sick with cholera in the
summer of 1915 – the Kaufmans lost all of their luggage, which was traveling
separately to the capital on a train destined to be captured by the Germans. Abel
Kaufman, now living with Chaya and Boris (and possibly David as well) in the apartment
of an engineer named Z.M. Begun, was compelled to petition the Institute to cover
David’s tuition fees for fall 1915.

The Institute obliged, and monies for the tuition were drawn from the “Jewish
fund,” one of the “mutual aid funds” (kassy vzaimopomoshchi) that had for some years
existed at the Institute but which began to operate on an entirely new scale during the war
years. Across Russia, student and external aid organizations came to the assistance of
students, refugees and victims of the war, all much burdened by severe inflation and a
dire housing shortage, while the Institute itself was partially converted into a military
hospital with a neurosurgical unit. Jewish organizations, whether in institutions of
higher learning or not, were among the most active “national” organizations during the
war, both because of ongoing discrimination in universities, the military and in the wider

35 “Soiuz Gorodov v dele pomoshchi bezhentsam i vyselentsam,” Bezhentsy i
Vyselentsy, 12-13.

36 Kaufman wrote his petition in October 1915, when Mikhail was already in Mogilev
(TsGIASPb f. 115, op.2, d. 4048, l. 12; Pozner, op. cit., 15). Before the war, the
Institute’s mutual aid fund for Jewish students had received funds from the Jewish
Committee for the Spread of Higher Learning (Gerver, ed., Otchet o deiatel’nosti Psikho-
Nevrologicheskago Instituta za 1912-i god, 239).

37 Kassow, op. cit., 378-380; Lincoln, Passage Through Armageddon, 373-374.

society, and in response to the stark exposure of Jewish communities to the fighting, given that the Pale of Settlement largely overlapped with Russia’s western front.

The Pale, to be sure, was in the end one of the conflict’s more welcome casualties, when a decree of 4 August 1915 allowed Jews to settle outside of its bounds, thereby basically liquidating it under pressure of war and forced displacement. Yet Jewish students (as a less than fully “suitable” social group, alongside Poles and those suspected of political radicalism) could not be recruited into the officer corps, and the regime never gave up attempting to impose quotas on the numbers of Jews allowed to attend university. Those quotas, significantly alleviated in state universities and institutes during the war, were hardened in non-state institutions starting in March 1916: on 8 March, the old three-percent limit was re-imposed, with the Tsar’s blessing, for Jewish

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39 Anatolij Evgen’evich Ivanov, “Rossijskoe Evrejskoe Studenchestvo v Perod Pervoj Mirovoy Vojny,” in Mirovoy krizis 1914-1920 godov i sud’ba vostochnoevropejskogo evreistva, ed. O.V. Budnitskij et al. (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005), 142-161; here 145. Gatrell summarizes the change: “Nowhere was the reconfiguration of space more evident than with respect to the empire’s Jewish population. So much has been written about the disabilities, indignities, and violence that Jews suffered at the hands of tsarist state and the tsar’s Russian subjects that it is easy to overlook the extraordinary change in their status that the war brought about. Unlike other refugees, Russia’s Jews had previously enjoyed little scope to choose their place of residence. The war did not weaken the stereotype of the ‘wandering’ Jews, but it largely wrecked the capacity of the tsarist state to dictate where Jews should and should not settle. In distributing themselves across large parts of the empire, Russia’s Jews broke the bounds of imperial Russia and walked toward a kind of freedom. . . . Government ministers, albeit reluctantly, conceded that the Pale of Settlement had disintegrated” (Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking, 200).

40 Ivanov, “Rossijskoe Evrejskoe Studenchestvo v Period Pervoj Mirovoy Vojny,” 144, 151. Those percentage limits were nonetheless the subject of considerable debate at the state level. On 24 July 1915, the restrictions were lessened for Jews who had served in the war, and a further decree of 10 August 1915 giving first preference to the children of veterans and war invalids “regardless of nationality and confession” led to a rapid surge in the number of Jewish students in many state institutions of higher learning (ibid., 151-153). See also A.E. Ivanov, Evrejskoe Studenchestvo v Rossijskoj Imperii nachala XX veka: Kakim ono bylo? (Moscow: Novyj Khronograf, 2007), 75-76.
applicants to the Psychoneurological Institute, previously “one of the most democratic of the non-state institutes of higher learning.”

If the consolidation and growing self-consciousness of Jewish student organizations during these years did provoke a greater interest in Jewish culture – the Jewish history and literature study circle at the Psychoneurological Institute, active since 1910, became considerably more so during the war – the basic concern of the groups, whether of majority “universalist” or minority Zionist cast, remained civilian relief. In this, of course, the Jewish organizations were like many others, and it seems that this aid work, carried out through a variety of state and non-state agencies and bringing together large numbers of people of differing background and political persuasion, helped to bring about that active, discursive sharpening of political consciousness that was emerging, as Gatrell argues, in part as a consequence of the refugee crisis itself. Experience in providing organized aid, not to mention the experience of being a refugee, would have been personally and politically formative for many young people at the time.

Masha Gal’pern, for instance – 32 years old in 1916, but out of school for only four years – left Petrograd, as I have indicated, in January 1916 to work for the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jews (or OZE: Obshchestvo Zdravookhranenia)

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41 Ibid., 154.

42 Ibid., 156.

43 “The constitution of . . . ‘refugeedom’ helped not only to undermine established notions of social status and social control, but also to give shape to an emerging public sphere in Russia, whose spokesmen challenged established political, social, and cultural practices” (Gatrell, op. cit., 4).

44 She was awarded the general medical practitioner’s diploma from the Women’s Medical Institute on 2 May 1912 (TsGIASPb f. 436, op. 4, d. 906, l. 5).
Evreev) as their representative in Minsk, then the main city of the war’s northwestern front, organizing “medical assistance to the refugees and expellees who found their way to [that] region.”45 I have already suggested that she may have been engaged in medical relief work in Bialystok following the pogrom of 1906; ten years later, a far larger national calamity brought her into direct working contact with an array of important civic organizations.

In a 1968 article, Masha, by then long since resident in Israel, recalled how her first tasks in Minsk, after protecting the Society’s small apartment-headquarters from confiscation by the zemstvo, involved linking together all the various groups providing aid in the city (the Red Cross, the Union of Cities, the Association of Zemstvos, the Northern Aid Center, the OZE itself) into a single organized confederation. Only after this coalition of local governmental, private and “national” (Jewish, Polish, Lithuanian) interests was realized, she wrote, could the urgent and immediate problems be adequately addressed:

The entire refugee population (about 25,000) lived in synagogues and in other public facilities. These buildings did not provide even the most basic necessities for human habitation. Hundreds of families, including children and the elderly, were living together [in a single space] with no dividers. . . . . The crowding and lack of sanitary conditions contributed to the accumulation of trash in these spaces and outside of them.

The medical, nursing and sanitary staff working with this population came from all over Russia: both from the center and the provinces. Some of the nurses were from the Caucasus and Siberia. And everyone, everyone, including the physicians, the nurses, and the sanitation staff, worked loyally and devotedly for the public cause.46

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45 Halperin-Pruginin, op. cit., 602.
46 Ibid., 603.
To be sure, Masha regarded this work not only as an immediate task of relief, but as an opportunity permanently to establish better health and sanitary conditions for Minsk’s Jewish community, even if under considerably straitened circumstances – that is, as a chance to act decisively in accord with a modernizing ethic of improvement:

It was my honor to organize the maternity and pediatric stations in the Jewish settlements generally and in Minsk especially. Since I had no ready-made equipment I had to go to local artisans, who used drawings and sketches I showed them to produce the sterilizers, pasteurizers and the other equipment we needed for our work. For the first time, the Jewish mother was given the opportunity to receive medical advice on the correct feeding and care of her children from birth to the age of two. Those who needed additional food or artificial food were supplied bottles with pasteurized milk. Our sealed bottles shone in the dark corners of our refugees’ dreary abodes like icons of hygiene and cleanliness.  

An intriguing anecdote near the end of her brief memoir finely captures the intertwining of individualist, corporatist-cooperative and “national” idioms within the public that formed around the refugee crisis:

The Jewish public organizations sent young people from the center [of Russia, i.e., from Petrograd and Moscow], with many women among them. Many of them lacked experience. The seriousness of the tasks and the great responsibilities helped in their development. It was here that they found the power of initiative, the might of execution, the deep gratitude and the joy of creation. . . . In the midst of the worries and tension our members would burst with an outpouring of joy and cheerfulness. They would show up in their best clothes, the tables were festively set, songs were sung and we would dance the Israeli horah with loud stamps of the feet. Stamping alongside us were the feet of our colleagues from the different Russian associations. They were caught up in the fiery horah and danced enthusiastically. Did these gentiles know that this was the dance of the free Jew in his homeland?

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Masha wrote this, in Hebrew, fifty years after she left Minsk behind; she had probably been in Palestine since sometime in the 1930s, and so her description of the festive gathering is inflected by her knowledge of all that had occurred in the interim, by her relationship to her new country, and by the shading, fading and highlighting wrought by memory itself. These qualifications should not prevent us from perceiving in her words some of the subtly differing registers of public awareness that seemed to co-exist during the war years: a national-ethnic self-consciousness emerging out of an active enterprise linking Jews (men and women) of varying classes and backgrounds (“the dance of the free Jew in his homeland”); the no less intense consciousness of participating in equality as a respected civic organization among others (“stamping alongside us . . . the feet of our colleagues from the different Russian associations . . . caught up in the fiery horah’’); and a more generalized assertion of collectivity within the framework of a common project (“the power of initiative . . . the joy of creation”).

All of this was elicited, for at least some young educated professionals and students, by the refugee crisis, which by no means ended with the conclusion of Russia’s

48 Zohar Rotem, translator. Vertov apparently saw her during his last trip to Bialystok in mid-July 1931 (RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 71, l. 1), and Boris Kaufman wrote to Masha in Palestine shortly after he arrived with his family in the US in January 1942 (Boris Kaufman Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, GEN MSS 562, Box 12, folder 214). The early 1930s saw a sharp jump in the rate of Jewish emigration from Europe (especially Poland and Germany) to Palestine, due above all to the rise of anti-Semitism. It seems likely that Masha made her passage between 1931 and 1936, during the immigration wave known as the fifth aliyah (1929-1939), which “brought close to 200,000 new immigrants to Palestine - more than all the other aliyot combined” (James L. Gelvin, The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 120; see also 103). The vast majority of emigrants left before 1936, when Great Britain imposed restrictions on Jewish migration to Palestine (Ezra Mendelsohn, The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars, 78).
involvement in World War I in 1917. Much of Vertov’s early work in cinema, and
particular his work on the Civil War agit-trains (to be discussed below), has clear
affinities to these earlier relief projects, to their accompanying politics of modernization,
and to the way they brought normally separated groups of activist professionals-
intellectuals and non-intellectuals together in a unified mass. It hardly seems incidental
that Vertov’s first relatively mature effort as a filmmaker – in Kino-Pravda 1 (1922), to
be discussed in Chapter Five – begins with a direct appeal for aid in response to yet
another calamity, the 1921-22 famine in the Volga region.\(^49\) Considering early Soviet art
more generally, one might indeed wonder whether the famous Constructivist turn at the
end of 1921 to Productivism – that is, to “real, practical work in production,” thoroughly
aligned with state projects of modernization and industrialization, and involving such
major figures as Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova and Karl Loganson – might have been at
least in part a reaction to the famine’s harsh lessons.\(^50\)

\(^{49}\) For a study that touches on the dialectic between the “experience of administering
welfare relief to refugees” and the training of “national elites in the conduct of politics
and administration,” see Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell, “Population Displacement, State-
Building, and Social Identity in the Lands of the Former Russian Empire, 1917–23,”
Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 4:1 (Winter 2003): 51–100; here
\(^{73}\). Food shortages and relief were major themes in some of the Kino-Nedelia newsreels
as well, especially numbers 3, 5 and 22 (all 1918). On early Soviet efforts to deal with
refugee problem during and after the Civil War, see N.V. Lazareva, “Gosudarstvennyj
apparat Sovetskoy Rossii po evakuatsii naseleniia v 1918-1923 gg.,” in T.G. Arkhipova,
ed., Gosudarstvennyj apparat Rossii v gody Revoliutsii i Grazhdanskoj Vojny (Moscow:

\(^{50}\) On the shift to Productivism, see Maria Gough, The Artist as Producer, 101-106; I have
cited here p. 102.
The deepening crisis brought about by the war led to increasing restiveness among both students and the public at large, groups that had in the main – though not universally - supported the war effort when it began in the fall of 1914. Although students, like the rest of Russian society, remained understandably concerned with national defense, their own worsening living conditions, the declining enrollments at the universities, and the anti-democratic and anti-Semitic policies of their own government and army began to provoke strikes, meetings, and the formulation of demands, the latter primarily of a liberal rather than radical character. To be sure, radicals had been active among students for some time – the Socialist Revolutionary Party had a cell at the 

51 A student call-up on 8 October 1914 was met the next day with a large pro-war rally in front of the Winter Palace. Anti-war activism among students dates to October 1914 as well (N.G. Zavadskij, *Ispytanie Vojnoj: Rossijskoe studenchestvo i politicheskie partii v 1914 – Fevral’ 1917 gg.* (St. Petersburg: Nestor, 1999), 14). See also Kassow, op. cit., 378-379.

52 Historian N. G. Zavadskij has noted that November 1914 saw speeches and demonstrations at the Psychoneurological Institute and elsewhere to demand release of political prisoners, and suggests that the anti-government and early anti-war movements were linked. Due to the draft, bad student living conditions, institutional speeding up of time-to-graduation to fulfill military needs, and the harsher attitude of the regime to student politics, the number of students in institutes of higher education dropped sharply between 1913 and 1916 – from 2276 to 1053 in Petrograd's Technological Institute, for instance (Zavadskij, op. cit., 5, 17). As Kassow writes, “In September 1915 a massive one-week strike broke out in Moscow’s larger institutions of higher education – the university, the commercial institute, and the technological institute – to protest the proroguing of the Duma, the anti-Semitic policies of the high command, and repression of workers’ organizations. The *skhodki* [illegal student assemblies] demanded the reconvening of the Duma, the replacement of the Council of Ministers by a government answerable to the Duma, and a general amnesty.” At the same time, students on the whole “[showed] greater readiness to support mainstream liberal rather than extreme revolutionary demands” (Kassow, op. cit., 379-381).
Institute, and the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party
organized speeches there during the war – but far-left parties had limited impact at the
universities, not least because many of their agitators (Bolsheviks above all) were more
engaged with organizing soldiers at the front. The January 1916 decision to annul the
exemption from military service that students in their early years of study had previously
enjoyed provoked demonstrations at the Psychoneurological Institute and other schools;
by 13-14 February 1917, students at the Institute were resolving to stage a two day strike,
a mere two weeks prior to the Tsar’s abdication – an event met with joy by students,
faculty, and the public alike – and about six months after David Kaufman’s studies had
been cut short by the draft.

We know nothing about David’s relationship to these events and situations, apart
from the fact that his studies took place in an atmosphere profoundly conditioned by
them. Any attempt to describe what he took away from his years at the Institute will
necessarily involve a combination of “hermeneutic circularity” – that is, a reading of
what we know was going on at the Institute from 1914-16 in light of what we know
Vertov did later on (and vice versa) – and sheer guesswork; indeed, the former may just
be another, more fully articulated name for the latter. Still, it is necessary to hazard that
guess, and I would therefore isolate three features of David Kaufman’s time at the

53 Zavadskij, op. cit., 6, 18, 31. On the radicalization of soldiers at the front, see also
University Press, 1980), xvii-xix and passim. Of course, the pre-1917 years did see
increasing if localized student radicalism, including involvement in active party politics:
at St. Petersburg University in December 1907, for instance, Social Democratic students
elected as their representatives three Bolsheviks, three Mensheviks, and two Bundists
(Ivanov, Vyshchaia Shkola Rossii, 311).

54 Zavadskij, op. cit., 4, 29, 35. See also Kassow, op. cit., 382-383. On David Kaufman’s
experience in the Chuguev Military School, see Chapter Three, below.
Institute that, in decreasing order of importance and increasing order of presumptiveness, left their marks on him in a relatively permanent way, including in his work as that “kinoc” he was soon (unknowingly) to become.

1. Connections, connections

First and most crucially, Kaufman/Vertov would have made contacts at the Institute that were to be important for him later on. The most significant such link, with Mikhail Kol’tsov, had already taken shape in Bialystok, of course, but sustaining it over the war years in Petrograd was not without consequence for future filmmaker David Kaufman. Kol’tsov (still Moisei Fridliand, of course, at least on official papers) entered the Psychoneurological Institute in the fall of 1915, a year later than Vertov did, and remained registered there until September 1918, by which time he was already much involved in journalistic and non-fiction/newsreel work for the fledgling Soviet regime. Kol’tsov was apparently kicked out of the Institute (briefly) in the summer of 1916, but in spite of this and his mediocre grades, he evidently finished the basic course and was preparing, at least in principle, to go on to medical study.

55 TsGIASPb f. 115, op. 2, d. 9788, l. 10.

56 It is not clear why the Institute dismissed Kol’tsov (on 8 June 1916): he requested certification of his student status in March 1916 for presentation to the police, but this could have been for any number of banal reasons. His transcripts from the Institute indicate that he took exams in inorganic chemistry, physics, general biology and medical zoology, and was transferred to the medical faculty on 27 September 1916 (TsGIASPb f. 115, op. 2, d. 9788, ll. 8, 11, 13).
Kol’tsov in Petrograd was already writing, and even at this early stage exhibited remarkable acumen and the capacity, doubtless due in part to personal charm, to establish ties to important people. During his time at the Institute he wrote articles for the student paper Put’ Studenchestva [The Students’ Path], and demonstrated his journalistic ambition and savvy by conducting and publishing an interview sometime in 1915-16 with then-Duma deputy Aleksandr Kerensky, the future head of the post-February Provisional Government.\(^57\) While back in Kiev in 1916 (where his parents moved in the summer of 1915) Kol’tsov made the acquaintance of poet and early cinema pedagogue Aleksandr Voznesenskij (whose wife, the famous actress Vera Iureneva, would leave Voznesenskij for Kol’tsov, over 20 years her junior, in 1918) and the important theatre and literary critic and translator Aleksandr Deich, who became a prominent and much-respected member of the Soviet cultural intelligentsia from the 1920s onward and (after World War Two) a good friend of Vertov.\(^58\) Kol’tsov was evidently based at the Psychoneurological Institute until at least the February Revolution, after which point he began moving between Kiev and Petrograd, eventually (after October) becoming acquainted with both Commissar of Enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharsky and Commissar of Foreign Affairs Georgii Chicherin, joining the Bolshevik Party, and finding journalistic work with the papers Izvestiia and Vechernaia Zvezda [Evening Star].\(^59\) In the early days of the Soviet


\(^{58}\) Beliaev et al., op cit., 170; Fradkin, op. cit.; E. Dejch, "Nezabyvaemoe," DVVS, 237-244.

\(^{59}\) TsGIASPb f. 115, op. 2, d. 9788, l. 15, 22, 23, 39; A. Rubashkin, Mikhail Kol’tsov: Kritko-biograficheskij ocherk (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1971), 8.
regime – and later on as well - possessing affiliations of this order was no small matter; as I have already indicated, it was Kol’tsov’s patronage that would bring Vertov into the film profession in the first place.
Other connections Vertov might have made at the Institute are both harder to establish and less immediately significant, but still worthy of consideration. Already as a student, Larisa Reisner (1895-1926) attracted the attention of painters (Vasilii Shukhaev crafted a memorable portrait), and poets (Sergei Kremkov, Nikolai Gumilev, Osip Mandelstam), and was acquainted with a whole range of writers and academics in Petrograd. Energetic, brilliant, argumentative and magnetically attractive, Reisner began her publishing career during her years at the Institute with a pamphlet on Shakespeare’s Female Types (1913) and the short-lived journal Rudin (1915-16), co-produced with her father Mikhail, in which Mandelstam among others published some early work. Shortly afterwards (1917) she began writing (about Rilke and children’s theatre, among other
topics) for Maksim Gorky’s journals Novaia Zhizn’ [New Life] and Letopis’ [Chronicle], where her associates would have included Kol’tsov, Isaak Babel’, Mayakovsky, Viktor Shklovsky, and Lunacharsky.

In 1918 she both joined the Bolshevik Party and married the Bolshevik journalist and activist Fyodor Raskol’nikov (1892-1939), soon to become Trotsky’s deputy in charge of the navy. Raskol’nikov later participated in the famous Civil War battle for

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60 Raskol’nikov and Reisner can be seen together onboard a boat on the Volga in Kino-Nedelia 26 (3 December 1918; shot by Eduard Tisse (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 5, l. 5)).
Tsaritsyn in 1918 – the subject of Vertov’s first (now lost) “experimental” film, The Battle of Tsaritsyn – on which Reisner reported as an Izvestiia correspondent in her “Letters from the Front.” Now a celebrated correspondent, she travelled with Raskol’nikov in 1921 to Afghanistan after he took on diplomatic responsibilities for the Soviet government, still later (after she and Raskol’nikov drifted apart in 1923-24) travelling to Germany, where she became acquainted with Karl Radek, who was there helping to organize German communists. The books in which Reisner recounted her travels and war experiences were among the most celebrated works of early Soviet journalistic literature, and her reputation took on a legendary glow after her premature death from typhus in 1926. Reisner, whether she knew David Kaufman or not, was near the epicenter of that nimbus of high-level connections at whose perimeters Kaufman/Vertov, mainly through the intercession of Kol’tsov (who wrote an obituary for Larisa, his acquaintance and journalistic rival), would have hovered; thus, she can be thought of as belonging to his circle of connections, real or potential.61

Three other fellow students at the Institute – Abram Room (1894-1976), Georgii Nikolaevich Tasin (Rozov) (1895-1956) and Grigorii Boltianskii (1885-1953) – were to become, like David Kaufman, significant figures in the history of Soviet cinema. Room apparently studied there between 1914 and around 1917, breaking off his studies briefly during the World War to assist Jewish refugees in his native Vilnius, later going on to

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61 See Galina Przhiborovskaia, Larisa Rejsner (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2008), esp. 92-143, 196-266, 415-432; and Larisa Rejsner, Izbrannoe (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1980).
further medical study in Saratov. After 1917, he served in the Red Army as a doctor on the Kazan’ front, and worked extensively in revolutionary-experimental theater in Saratov before moving to Moscow and to filmmaking in 1924.62 As a fiction filmmaker – and thus an artistic opponent, from Vertov’s point of view, in the 1920s – Room would not have figured as a collaborator on any of Vertov’s projects, to be sure. Yet the two were in significant institutional proximity in Leningrad in 1930, when Room was working on The Plan of Great Works – the earliest, now lost Soviet sound film ADD FROM SOVIET SCREEN? – and Vertov was fashioning the soundtrack for Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass. More interestingly, the affinities between the “documentary” overture to Room’s great Bed and Sofa (1927) and the “morning” sequence near the beginning of Vertov’s Man with a Movie Camera (1929) are too striking to be ignored, Vertov’s probable disdain for Room’s film notwithstanding; and we will reflect upon the relations between those films when we examine Vertov’s masterpiece in Chapter Seven.

Of the three figures mentioned here, Tasin is by far the least known. Born in the Mogilev guberniia, Tasin completed his studies at the Institute in 1917, specializing in law. Like Kol’tsov, he began work in journalism and (later) photo and cinema journalism in Kiev in 1918, and became a major figure in the development of Ukrainian cinema in the early Soviet period, working in studios in Yalta, Khar’kov and especially Odessa (where he made his best-known film, 1929’s The Night Cabman [Nochnoj Izvozhik]). After World War Two, Tasin worked (like Vertov) in newsreel, directing the series Soviet Ukraine (Radjianska Ukraina) and a number of documentary features. Vertov was

62 See student records from the Psychoneurological Institute for Abram Mordkhelevich Rom [Room], TsGIASpb f. 115, op. 2, d. 366; Viktor Shklovskii, Room: Zhizn’ i Rabota (Moscow: Tea-Kino-Pechat’, 1929), 3-6; I. Grashchenkova, Abram Room (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977), 231-244.
based in Ukraine between 1927 and 1931, as we will see, and worked in Odessa and Khar'kov on a number of occasions; it seems likely that he would have crossed paths with Tasin at some point during those years, and perhaps later as well.63

It is not clear whether David Kaufman actually met Tasin, Room or Grigorii Boltianskii at the Institute; in the case of Boltianskii, however, we know that history and common interests would bring his trajectory into alignment with that of Kaufman soon enough. Boltianskii (1885-1953) is a crucial, understudied figure in the history of the development of Soviet non-fiction film, and himself one of the most important historians of Russo-Soviet film and photography. Born Iosif Berkov Boltianskii in 1885 in the Ukrainian village of Slavianka (located near the town of Pavlograd and the city of Ekaterinoslav (now Dnepropetrovsk) southeast of Kiev on the Dnepr)64 into a Jewish family, Boltianskii was involved in education, socialist politics and cinema from an early age. His mother was a schoolteacher, and Boltianskii himself was giving lessons in local villages to make extra money for the family from the age of 16.65 Similar in background in many ways to Vertov, that he was 11 years older gave him time to become far more


64 TsGIASpb f. 115, op. 2, d. 965, l. 8. There is some doubt about both the name and the birth date, which I have derived from his student file from the Psychoneurological Institute, his own 1952 resumé, and other biographical sources. His application to the Institute indicates that he was born on 7 February 1889, but a police report from 20 September 1913 gives his real name as Girsh Abramov-Moiseev Boltianskii and his age as 28, putting his birth year back to 1885 (RGALI f. 2058, op. 1, d. 223, l. 1); similarly, the Central Documentary Studio in Moscow marked Boltianskii’s 60th birthday in 1945, again making 1885 the true year of his birth (RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, l. 6). He gives 24 February 1885 (NS) as his birth date in his 1952 account.

65 RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, l. 17.
politicized prior to 1917. Even before entering the fifth year of private high school in Pavlograd in 1907, he was the organizer of a social-democratic discussion circle (kruzhok) that included both factory and office workers. Indeed, he was exiled for about three years (in 1905-6 and again perhaps from 1908-9) from the Ekaterinoslav province for his revolutionary activities.66

![Image 5: Grigorii Boltianskii, ca. 1920. RGALI f. 2057, op. 2, d. 26, l. IIa](image)

66 See the testimony of Boltianskii’s old comrade A. Shved from 25 March 1930, on the occasion of one of Boltianskii’s several unsuccessful attempts to join the Communist Party, in RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, l. 2. Boltianskii was never admitted into the Bolshevik Party, I suspect, because of his known Menshevik background. For the 1913 police report on Boltianskii, see RGALI f. 2057, op. 1, d. 223, ll. 1-1ob; it indicates that Boltianskii completed eight years at the high school, and wrote for the radical papers Krasnaia Zaria and Utro. For his own autobiography, see RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, l. 17. Part of his high school study may have taken place in Ekaterinograd (TsGIASPb f. 115, op. 2, d. 965, l. 15), where it seems he may have been involved in socialist activism as well.
He continued his involvement in Russian Social Democratic Labor Party circles on its Menshevik wing, while working as a teacher in Pavlograd in Ukraine from 1911 until 1914, when he successfully applied for admission to the Psychoneurological Institute in Petrograd, no doubt at least in part to avoid the draft. He studied at the Institute through the fall of 1916 – an older classmate of Kaufman and Kol’tsov – all the while continuing his underground political activities and sending information about the Zimmerwald Conference and other events of concern to socialists back to comrades in Ukraine.

While all this was going on, Boltianskii was also actively involved in film in a variety of ways. In 1910 he began to work on the distribution and exhibition of educational cinema under the auspices of the zemstvo of the Pavlograd district. This was by no means a personal project of Boltianskii’s: as we will soon see, there was considerable interest in and use of scientific film in Russia before 1917, and the zemstvo

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67 RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, l. 2; and f. 2057, op. 1, d. 223, l. 1ob. For more on the Party’s activities in Ukraine, see Ralph Carter Elwood, Russian Social Democracy in the Underground: A Study of the RSDRP in the Ukraine, 1907-1914 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974). On Boltianskii’s likely connection to Menshevism, see Chapter 3.

68 TsGIASPb f. 115, op. 2, d. 965, l. 38; RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, l. 2. Boltianskii’s efforts to evade the draft were apparently aided by petitions from his cousin Aron Boltianskii, a decorated soldier who had received the Order of St. George (4th level) (TsGIASPb f. 115, op. 2, d. 965, l. 37). As late as August 1917, Boltianskii seems to have been considering further medical study, probably in Ekaterinoslav, no doubt partially due to uncertainty about how long the war would continue (TsGIASPb f. 115, op. 2, d. 965, l. 38).

69 RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, l. 17.
of the Ekaterinoslav province was one of those councils particularly interested in promoting educational films in schools.\footnote{See S. Ginzburg’s still-remarkable chapter on pre-revolutionary educational film in Russia in his Kinematografiia Dorevoliutshionnoi Rossii (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1963), 67-98, esp. 83; and Lev Roshal’, Nachalo Vsekh Nachal: Fakt na Ekrane i Kinomysl’ “Serebrianogo Veka” (Moscow: Materik, 2002), 43-55, 62-79; and below in the present chapter.}

At the same time, Boltianskii occupied himself writing both scripts and articles about cinema.\footnote{RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, l. 17. I have not seen any of the scripts; apparently, they were never produced.} Always interested in the technology of film, Boltianskii in 1910 published a piece about a scientific lecture given by S. Lifshits on “Photographing Sound,” which discussed a method of using light rays to inscribe and then reproduce sound. Following a very technical account of the lecture, complete with diagrams, Boltianskii immediately and imaginatively applied the new ideas to cinema, managing both to show his fascination with cinema as a tool for assuring “realistic” representation and to offer a foretaste of one of Vertov’s best known slogans:

If, to what has already been said about the new device, we add the great perspectives offered by simultaneously photographing movement and sound, and at the same time reproducing them via cinema and the photophone,\footnote{Evidently the name of the device described by Lifshits. Boltianskii’s idea about simultaneous reproduction/transmission seems to point to television as well.} in order to achieve a complete illusion . . . this will then be the true triumph of photography in its reproduction of life as it is \[v vosproizvedenii zhizni, kak ona est’.\] \footnote{RGALI f. 2057, op. 1, d. 3, ll. 1-3ob. The article was published in Vestnik Fotografii 4 (April 1910): 97. Sound cinema was an important topic in film journals during the 1910s in Russia as elsewhere: see, for instance, “Govoriashchiia kinematograficheskie lenty,” Vestnik Znania 3 (March 1915): 204.}
Boltianskii also contributed more general commentary on the educational function of cinema to journals, from a perspective typical of the socially conscious intelligentsia of the time. In the pages of the important film journal *Sine-Fono*, he wrote that those who denounced cinema in the name of preserving the theatre – the theatre vs. cinema debate was raging in Russia just as it was elsewhere⁷⁴ -- would do better if they tried to make the theatre a more open and democratic institution. Yet he acknowledged that radical criticisms of cinema, and of its potentially negative effect upon the theatre and theatre audiences, were justified, inasmuch as

. . . in relation to society, cinema is, in its present form, harmful, amoral and reactionary. . . . By virtue of its technical nature, cinema . . . must strive to give the popular masses cultured and, in the social sense, healthy nourishment.

Many note that among the people there is an attraction to authentic art – to the theatre, and not to its cinema-surrogate – and see that attraction in the establishment of peasant and worker’s theatres, and in the popular interest in music and declamation.

And this is so. But . . . [authentic] theatrical art is seen neither by the deprived masses, nor even by the middle class bourgeois public in all the tens of thousands of populated areas in the provinces.

. . . . . . . . . . . .

It’s time for democratic thought to free itself from the bonds of tradition. A love for theatre should not prevent us from seeing the enormous – but, as yet, potential – educational role that cinema is destined to play, one that goes well beyond the role to be played by theatre.⁷⁵

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⁷⁵ RGALI f. 2057, op. 1, d. 3, l. 4. The article, entitled “Otkliki,” was apparently in *Sine-Fono* 27; Boltianskii’s archive does not indicate a precise date or issue number, but it was probably published sometime between 1911 and 1914.
Preoccupations typical of the formative years of Soviet cinema – an interest in advanced technology; a belief that working people thirsted after “culture,” however defined; worries about the quality and “healthfulness” of that culture; an awareness of cinema’s potential ubiquity and impact – were thus directly of concern to Boltianskii well before 1917.

His more radical opinions on film, expressed in the pages of the left-wing press from 1913, offer explicit class-based analysis of the reasons behind the “harmfulness” of much cinema, and formulate proposals for alternatives, as here in “Cinema and the Proletariat”:

. . . Thousands of workers dedicate an hour of their leisure time to the cinema, in order to satisfy their spiritual thirst for knowledge and for aesthetic pleasure.76 The low cost and the convenience – that is, the possibility of attending a screening pretty much anytime – have essentially made the cinema into a democratic theatre.77

But just as the boulevard, penny and other bourgeois press have poisoned and continue to poison the consciousness of workers, so the bourgeois cinema poisons it, falsifying life as it does.

Cinema . . . depicts capitalists and the power of property holders as noble and wonderful, and workers as barbarians.

76 Boltianskii was no doubt right about this, although little research has been done on worker-peasant cinema attendance in the pre-revolutionary years. For an exception, see V.S. Listov’s discussion of a fascinating survey done in 1913 of workers in Kiev that showed that, once basic needs of food, shelter and clothing had been met, “theatre, spectacle, pleasure gardens, and cinema” occupied fifth place in an average proletarian budget, after (in this order) “tobacco and alcohol,” “bodily hygiene,” “money sent away [back to home villages, presumably],” and “the education of children,” but before “medical treatment” and “cultural-educational needs” (Rossiia, Revoliutsiia, Kinematograf: K 100-letiiu Mirovogo Kino (Moscow: Materik, 1995), 14-16).

77 For an account of Louis Delluc’s comparable celebration of cinema as a popular art in France in the post-World War I years, see French Film Theory and Criticism, Volume I: 1907-1929, ed. and intro. Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 101. Delluc’s ideas were well known among film aficionados in early Soviet Russia; see Chapter Five, below.
Yet there are not a few films where the conflicts between workers and capitalists are directly represented. Here... the undisguised desire to inject “culture” into the working masses comes forward in all its nakedness through the representation of a strike breaker as a hero, and a striking worker as the devil incarnate.78

“The consciousness of workers is poisoned by the hypocritical bourgeois morality of all these stupid and vulgar cinematic dramas,” writes Boltianskii, and he insists that the only way workers can fight against this is with their own proletarian cinema practice. It will be difficult to mount such a challenge in Russia, he admits, and suggests that workers in Western Europe (Germany and Belgium especially), who are already involved in organizing theatres, sporting societies and other groups for workers, will have to take on this project.79 Meanwhile, “for [politically] conscious Russian workers,”

... the issue is already awaiting them. The beginning of a solution is offered by the fact that culturally enlightened societies, taking into account the enormous educational role of cinema – [in the form of] travelogues, non-fiction [khronika], historical films accompanied by explanatory lectures...; [films on] geography, ethnography, medicine, and scientific film in general – will find ways to create at least a rational,80 educational cinema, thereby deflecting workers from the bourgeois boulevard cinema, which clouds the class consciousness of workers.81

78 It sounds like Boltianskii is writing about a specific film, but I have not determined its identity. Boltianskii acknowledges in the article that few films of this type are shown in Russia, due to the censorship.

79 As we have seen, workers’ organizations in Russia during this period and earlier also organized cultural events of their own; however, Boltianskii seems to be intimating, no doubt rightly, that the greater intensity of state hostility to the workers’ movement in Russia would preclude any thought of creating a proletarian cinema network there.

80 The phrase “rational cinema” [razumnyi kinematograf] was a common designation for “scientific-educational cinema” in the pre-revolutionary years; see Ginzburg, op. cit., 84-95; and my discussion later in this chapter.

81 RGALI f. 2057, op. 1, d. 3, ll. 5-6. The article “Kinematograf i Proletariat” was first published under the pseudonym “Gam-Beta” in the Menshevik Novaia Rabochaia Gazeta [St. Petersburg] 91 (26/XI: 1913): 2.
Already, we find not only that insistence on the need for a specifically “proletarian” cinema that became familiar in the 1920s, but a suggestion, clearly presaging and predating Vertov, that it is precisely non-fiction film, as promoted by the zemstvos and philanthropic societies, that will best serve to undo the stupefying effect of “vulgar cinematic drama” upon proletarian subjectivity. Scientific film is evidently affiliated with the universal – with truth, with knowledge and the undoing of convention, rather than with the class-bound tropes and mystifications of cinematic narratives – and as such belongs to the laboring multitudes as a symbolic authority in a way that fictions, largely inherited from the past, cannot.

Boltianskii, though he would soon cease to be a hard-line opponent of fiction film, was serious about creating an alternative proletarian cinema, and in 1914 seems to have attempted to organize “the first international factory for newsreel about the life of workers” in Belgium. But his true career as a filmmaker, and as a “revolutionary” filmmaker, began only after the February Revolution. His connection with the post-

82 Vertov acknowledged as much in a talk he gave on 3 March 1945 at a celebration in honor of Boltianskii’s 60th birthday and 35 years of work in cinema: “[Boltianskii] divined before others did the significance of documentary cinema, the significance of non-fiction/newsreel film as a new form, previously unknown, of the history of humankind, of history on film, history on the screen, leaving behind events for future generations in a living and exciting form” (RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, ll. 7-14, here l. 8; emphasis in the original. See also Stat’i i Vystuplenii, 349.)

83 From a tribute lecture delivered by Vertov on the occasion of Boltianskii’s 60th birthday on 3 March 1945 (“O tvorcheskoj deiatel’nosti G.M. Boltianskogo”: RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, l. 7; Dziga Vertov, Iz Naslediia vol. 2 (Moscow: Eizenshtein-Tsentr, 2008), 348). I write “seems to have attempted” only because I have found no other affirmation that Boltianskii was involved in this remarkable project. He evidently did know French, and published translations from that language (RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, l. 14).
February Provisional Government, on which I will elaborate in Chapter Three, seems to have been forged by virtue of the fact that he was a representative in the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, and was able to find administrative work in the Skobelev Committee, the sole state-run film enterprise in Russia and the kernel (as will be discussed in the next chapter) of what would later become Soviet newsreel. Boltianskii headed up the Committee’s new “Social Newsreel” section from the end of March 1917, and was one of those who shaped non-fiction filmmaking during this crucial period. Many of the cameramen with whom Boltianskii worked – such as A. Vinkler (from the Gaumont studio), Aleksandr Levitskii, Petr Novitskii and others – would be working with Vertov on Kino-Nedelia, the first Soviet newsreel series, a year later. Boltianskii, who was already celebrated as one of the grand old men of Soviet cinema by 1923, will appear again and again in these pages in various guises – not least as a frequent and vigorous critic of Vertov – and should be counted, along with Kol’tsov (who really did know anyone who was anyone), and far more demonstrably than either Room, Tasin or Reisner, as one of the most significant stars in the constellation linking “David Kaufman” to “Dziga Vertov.”

2. A Rational Cinema

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84 Taylor, op. cit., 21-22; Ginzburg, op. cit., 338-347; V.M. Magidov, Kinofotofonodokumenty v Kontekste Istoricheskogo Znaniia (Moscow: RGGU, 2005), 120; RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 5, l. 7; d. 6, l. 3.

85 See the tribute to Boltianskii on the occasion of his tenth year in cinema, and fifth in Soviet cinema, by H.I.K., “G.M. Boltianskii: desiatiletie kino-deiatel’nosti,” Zrelishcha 46 (1923): 9. The article describes Boltianskii as one of the first to advocate a “workers’ cinema.”
In contrast to the left-wing cinephile Boltianskii, it might seem that David Kaufman had little relationship to or interest in cinema prior to the spring of 1918. There is some evidence to suggest, however, that his earliest work in film production might have taken place at the Psychoneurological Institute as well, under the supervision of important scientists working there at the time. The hints are few, but worth investigating all the same.

In an interview conducted by film scholar Donald Crafton in January 1978, Vertov’s youngest brother Boris Kaufman gave an account of the origins of his elder sibling’s work in cinema that contains an astonishing mention of Bekhterev’s Institute:

My earliest memory of my brother Dziga Vertov and myself was while we were still in Russia [in Petrograd] and he was just starting to become fascinated with cinematography. He took me twice to the Institute …. I forget the name of it. We had some screening there and he showed me what could be done by this miraculous means. I still remember the time-lapse photography with plants growing out of the soil into full growth, and especially flowers opening before your eyes, in time-lapse photography. That is how early I was already aware of his early camera work.86

The period referred to here must be 1915-16, when David/Dziga was around 19 years of age and Boris, 12 or so and living with his refugee parents in Petrograd. The last sentence, which implies that this time-lapse photography was the product of Vertov’s own “early camera work,” is at the very least a tantalizing suggestion. What we can say with certainty is that, at this time, several major figures at the Psychoneurological

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Institute were writing about scientific-documentary cinema, and that at least one of them was involved in making scientific films.\textsuperscript{87}

This was not in itself surprising, for as we have already indicated \textit{à propos} of Boltianskii’s early involvement in film, the development of educational-scientific cinema was of considerable concern to many writers and pedagogues in the pre-revolutionary years. Film journals like \textit{Sine-Fono} carried articles extolling the educational and scientific potential of film from their earliest issues (ca. 1907), with some writers already pitting the seriousness and utility of popular scientific cinema against the “mindless diversion” of fiction film, even arguing occasionally for the need to give more proportional representation in commercial theaters to “scientific footage” and “footage from nature” (as against “comic films” and “dramas”).\textsuperscript{88} A large number of the articles, however, focused on school and university use of film, and many were responses to resolutions taken at teachers’ congresses.\textsuperscript{89} Other commentary of a more scientific (if still “popular”) character speculated, as in other countries, about the capacity of film to generate new knowledge. An article by V. Verner in the Riga journal \textit{Kino} from 1915 discussed the application of cinema to physical science in a proto-Vertovian spirit:

\begin{quote}
Making the filmstrip move at this or that speed, forward or backward, it is possible to study all phases of movement with complete thoroughness. . .
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{87} None, to my knowledge, have survived.


\textsuperscript{89} Roshal’, op. cit., 63.
Theoretical mechanics received, in the cinema, a remarkable instrument for the analysis of movement, inasmuch as, in the words of the famous physicist Ernst Mach, “it gives us the possibility to change the magnitude and direction of movement at will.”

Still other authors reflected on the insights film might offer into the life of microorganisms and into the invisible stages comprising natural processes.

But educational-scientific film was also a practical matter in Russia during these years, not only a theoretical one. As in other countries, travelling lecturers and organizers of public readings, whether local or from abroad - polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen enriched his Petersburg lectures on his travels with moving images in 1913 - used films on a regular basis in Russia, both inside and outside the twin metropolises. One source indicates that hundreds of film-accompanied lectures (mainly at factories) took place in the Ekaterinburg region in 1910 alone. Teachers’ organizations discussed using films in classrooms as early as 1902 – though only in 1913-14 did the use of film in primary and

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secondary schools begin to spread to the provinces - and philanthropic organizations (known as “people’s universities”) managed to establish “scientific cinemas” in Odessa (1908), Samara (1910), Nizhni Novgorod (ca. 1912) and other centers, attended mainly by students. In Moscow and St. Petersburg, some educational institutions like modern schools, gymnasiums, military academies and universities had scientific films and even projectors at their disposal; commercial cinemas were rented in smaller cities (like Riga, Tartu, Orel and Kharkov) to present film-accompanied educational lectures to students.

In one of the most ambitious (and apparently never-realized) proposals, the Tsarist government apparently planned to set up mobile cinemas, based in trains decked out as full-scale agricultural institutes, to show educational films about agriculture to the peasantry – presaging in a more pacific key the agit-trains of the Civil War period to come.

Doubtless, the efforts of film entrepreneurs were critical to the spread of educational-scientific cinema, or what in later Soviet parlance would be called “popular

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94 Ginzburg, op. cit., 78. Practical applications of cinema to medicine were also frequently discussed in film journals; for one instance, see “Kinematograf na sluzhbe khirurgii,” Vestnik Kinematografii 91/11 (7 June 1914): 26.

95 Roshal’, op. cit., 54-55. Evidently, the Moscow Society for the Struggle against Alcoholism prepared a steamboat dedicated to itinerant propagandizing against alcoholism, in part with the help of film, in 1914 (“Bor’ba s p’ianstvom” [in section “Po Rossi”), Vestnik Kinematografii 92/12 (21 June 1914): 32; “Parakhod-muzej,” Vestnik Kinematografii 91/11 (7 June 1914): 33). On the agit-trains, see Chapter Three, below.
scientific” film, in the immediate pre-revolutionary years. In 1912, Pathé began to sell its new “Coq” (later “Coq d’Or”) 9.5mm projectors in Russia, along with acetate films made especially for this narrow gauge. A good proportion of the non-fiction films distributed in Russia for the “Coq” were educational films devoted to physics, zoology, botany and especially various branches of agricultural science; provincial zemstvos and various philanthropic societies were among the main clients.96 Yet commercial venues successfully exhibited science films as well. Pathé’s series of “ultramicroscopic” films – offering startling views of microbes and blood cells – drew the praise of the Russian cinema press, as did Gaumont’s science-and-hygiene film The Plague (1911).97

Nonetheless, the majority of commercial-theater films belonging to the rubric “rational cinema” (razumnyi kinematograf) – a peculiar locution of the period, perhaps a calque from another language - were geographic and ethnographic in focus. Most of these “scenic” (vidovye) films were devoted to Europe, Asia and Africa, and were purchased mainly from foreign firms like Pathé, Gaumont, Bioscope and Edison, although domestic producers like Khanzhonkov and Drankov also made and collected them.98 Short documentary subjects about various (mainly exotic) places – Hunting Elephants, Catching Snails in France, From the Life of the Arabs (all 1911) - were widely advertised and included in regular commercial cinema programs. Some of the Russian-made non-fiction short subjects, like the film made of Georgii Sedov’s 1912 polar expedition and the wide-ranging travel footage shot by cameraman V.N. Bremer aboard the ship

96 Ginzburg, op. cit., 87-88.

97 Roshal’, op. cit., 57.

98 On the collections of geographical films, see Roshal’, op. cit., 49-50.
Kolyma, anticipated the popular Soviet “documentary-adventure” film of the 1920s and (especially) 1930s, as we will see.\textsuperscript{99}

Pioneering producer Aleksandr Khanzhonkov took an additional step and established in 1911 a “scientific division” in his studio that made educational films until 1916. Khanzhonkov recruited important scientists as consultants along with skilled filmmakers, including animation pioneer Vladislav Starevich. The Khanzhonkov production of \textit{Tuberculosis} (1914), a “frightful spectacle” according to one account, was successfully exhibited at Moscow’s Polytechnical Museum on 17 April 1914.\textsuperscript{100} Another of the Khanzhonkov films, \textit{Drunkenness and its Consequences} (1913), starred Ivan Mozzhukhin and included a Starevich animation in which a tiny devil crawled out of a half-empty bottle of vodka – presaging a famous shot in \textit{Man with a Movie Camera} by some 15 years! – and then proceeded to tease and torment the drunkard (played by Mozzhukhin).\textsuperscript{101}

Surely, this kind of fictionalizing and/or lyricizing of “science” was also enabled by the audience’s familiarity with popular scientific writing, which often leavened otherwise dry and forbidding material with humor or sublime grandeur. I am thinking

\textsuperscript{99} Ginzburg, 84-85, 89; Roshal’, 49, 52.

\textsuperscript{100} Roshal’, op. cit., 57; N. Prokof’ev, “V bor’be s tuberkulezom,” \textit{Vestnik Kinematografii} 89/9 (7 May 1914): 14.

\textsuperscript{101} Ginzburg, 96. See the description of the film (still shown in the late 1920s, evidently) in L.M. Sukharebskij, \textit{Obzor sanprosvetitel’nykh kinofil’m za 10 let proletarskoj revoliutsii (1917-1927)} (Moscow: Moszdravotdel, 1928), 24-25; and Roshal’, op. cit., 58. \textit{Drunkenness and its Consequences} was released for public exhibition only after a scene involving a rabbit and another displaying the beating heart of a live dog were excised (“Spisok kinematograficheskikh kartin, kotorye dopushcheny k publichnому demonstrirovaniiu,” \textit{Vestnik Kinematografii} 87/7 (1 April 1914): 51).
above all of the writing of the immensely popular Camille Flammarion (1842-1925), the Carl Sagan of his day, whose works were widely read all across Russia (including, to be sure, in Abel Kaufman’s reading room).\textsuperscript{102} Here is Flammarion rhapsodizing about the power of optical instruments, in a distinctly proto-Vertovian key:

\begin{quote}
The sky's expanse is limitless, and you must not imagine that those 7000 stars that delight our vision and decorate the sky, and without which our nights would be sad and empty, contain all of the universe. They are but the threshold to the temple. There, where our vision stops, an eye more powerful, more all-encompassing, becoming greater with every century, directs its curious gaze into the infinite and reveals the light of numberless suns to the curiosity of scientists. This eye is the lens of optical instruments. With binoculars we can see stars of the seventh magnitude; a small telescope can reach the eighth. Stronger instruments bring us the ninth or even the tenth magnitude. All is expanded, the sky transmogrifies before the eyes of the astronomer. . . . Humans will continue to develop, the power of optics will increase, and one after another, stars of the 11th or 12th magnitude, four million in number, will be exposed to our eyes . . .\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

And to be sure, fantastical mixing, genre-bending and/or bricolage – whether of (animated) comedy with science film and medical propaganda, or of exposition with lyric description – was perceptible in films of a very straightforwardly “scientific” cast, as evidenced by this review of the widely screened \textit{Wonders of the Plant World} (Timen and Reingad, 1911):

\begin{quote}
Not one detail slipped away from the vigilant and loving gaze of the cinema. Yes, loving! Hitherto, a certain unnecessary precision and dryness often harmed cinema. . . . But now the cinema takes on a new, unexpected role. It becomes a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{102} See all extant catalogs (cited in Chapter 1).

\textsuperscript{103} Kamill’ Flammarion, \textit{Populiarnye lektsii po astronomii}, trans. and ed. V.V. Bitner (St. Petersburg: Vestnik Znanija, 1905), 24. In addition to his serious astronomical work and popular science writing, Flammarion wrote important pieces of science fiction. For similar passages in Flammarion, see his \textit{V nebesakh i na zemle} (Moscow: I.D. Sytin, 1908), esp. 115-122.
lyric poet. It would have been difficult to imagine such tenderness in the cinema. It would be most accurate to characterize this film as a poem without words.\textsuperscript{104}

Thus, that union of science, fantasy, whimsy and lyricism that, as we shall see, characterized Vertov’s films and (even more) his writing from 1922 onward, can be traced back in part to certain pre-revolutionary educational films and pop-scientific discourses, some of which Vertov undoubtedly encountered, and which continued on into the Soviet period.\textsuperscript{105}

A “scientific cinema,” equipped with mobile projectors and about 150 films, appeared in Petrograd in 1915, but the city’s educational institutions, including the Psychoneurological Institute, had been incorporating cinema into teaching for some time before that.\textsuperscript{106} An article in the Petrograd film journal \textit{Kinematograf} from early 1915 indicates that Professor Vladimir A. Vagner of the Institute had “resolved to use cinema for scientific purposes,” and to that end was having many zoological and natural-science samples filmed.\textsuperscript{107} Vagner, the vice-president of the Psychoneurological Institute and head of the Petrograd Imperial Commercial Training School, was one of the founders of “comparative psychology” and “animal psychology”: what we would call today the study of animal behavior, though with a strong physiological inflection. He was also a major scientific popularizer who produced educational books for children on the scientific observation of nature well into the 1920s, and it was no doubt this public-directed aspect

\textsuperscript{104}Roshal’, op. cit., 74, citing \textit{Vestnik Kinematografii} 8 (1911): 17.

\textsuperscript{105}For a good example that mentions Flammarion several times, see P.A. Rymkevich, \textit{Chudesa XX veka (trud i tekhnika)}, 3rd edition (Leningrad, Priboj, 1925).

\textsuperscript{106}Ginzburg, op. cit., 80.

\textsuperscript{107}Fri-Dik, “Kinotrazhnia [sic],” \textit{Kinematograf} 1 (1915): 12.
of his work that drew him into filmmaking, as his own major 1915 article on cinema
(“The role of cinema in the area of phenomena in motion”) suggests:

The invention of cinema has been compared with the invention of the printing press. In this comparison lies the inarguable truth that both inventions have the capacity to serve both as a means of educating people, and as a means of vulgarizing or even bestializing them. In both respects cinema has the advantage insomuch as it achieves its goal [of communication] more easily and more quickly than print. . . Print is more subjective than cinema and in this respect has the same advantage over the latter that an artwork has over the most perfect . . . photograph. On the other hand, cinema is not simply a device to represent events, but, . . . directed by a researcher, can be turned from an instrument for the dissemination of existing knowledge into an instrument that facilitates the discovery of new knowledge which, without its help, would be inaccessible.108

“Cinema would lead to a revolution in science,” Vagner insisted – right at the time David Kaufman was studying at the Institute – “and would leave to future generations a large supply of scientific explanations.”109

True, Vagner confessed, most science films have been dreadful; but a few promising ones have appeared, like the study of the spider Sparassus viridissimus, which revealed “the means by which the spider affixes his . . . web to a spot from which he jumps onto another . . . plant.” As the title of his article suggests, he stresses the application of cinema to the study of movement, particularly extremely slow or rapid movement.110 He mentions the Norwegian Carl Størmer’s use of motion pictures to study


109 Fri-Dik, op. cit., 12.

the slow fluctuations of the northern lights; he discusses filming the growth of leaves, the development of eggs, and the rapid motion of the wings of insects. Indeed, the central power of the cinema, he asserts, lies in its ability to reveal otherwise invisible aspects of phenomena in motion: “cinema literally opens up a new world of phenomena . . . entirely new points of view on these phenomena, and, in the end, new possibilities for grasping them.”

Vagner’s colleague Bekhterev weighed in on “Cinema and Science” about a year later, though he noted that it was hardly new by then to observe how “cinema can be applied to the scientific study of various nervous disorders connected with motion.” “Only the cinema,” he affirmed, “can reproduce all the separate moments of a given movement, like an act of walking, derangement of gait, or gestural expression. . . .” Bekhterev discussed more directly pedagogical uses of scientific cinema as well, emphasizing the clarity with which cinema can show the details of “pathological phenomena. . . during scientific demonstrations in auditoriums.”

We cannot claim with certainty that David Kaufman was actually involved in scientific filmmaking at the Psychoneurological Institute, as much as Boris Kaufman’s recollections might seem to warrant our doing so. We can claim, however, that David in Petrograd was studying in a place where scientific filmmaking was going on and was valued; that he was part of a milieu (including Masha Gal’pern, his parents, possibly Grigorii Boltianskii and other students) excited and activated by science and education as social projects; and that he would have had the opportunity to view sophisticated

111 Ibid.; the emphasis is Vagner’s.

educational and scientific films, including semi-fictional or “experimental” ones, in the years before the Revolution. And of course, Dziga Vertov’s writings a few years later would often claim a scientific, as well as a “revolutionary,” vocation for cinema:

The main and essential thing is:
The sensory exploration of the world through film.

... The kino-eye lives and moves in time and space; it gathers and records impressions in a manner wholly different from that of the human eye.

... The mechanical eye... experiments, distending time, dissecting movement, or, in contrary fashion, absorbing time within itself, swallowing years, thus schematizing processes of long duration inaccessible to the normal eye. 113

... I advise you to make every effort, even in your first newsreel works, to create a slant toward the scientific illumination of reality.114

... The kino-eye workers... are working in the area of newsreel... and in that of scientific film... or on the scientific part of a given film.115

... Kino-Eye is understood as “that which the eye doesn’t see,” As the microscope and telescope of time.116


114 “To the Kinoks of the South,” Kino-Eye, 51.

115 “Kinopravda and Radiopravda,” Kino-Eye, 52.

116 “The Birth of Kino-Eye,” Kino-Eye, 41. This article is dated 1924 in Kino-Eye (and in the original Soviet edition of Vertov’s writings), but in fact dates from 1935.
3. Energy and Rhythm

We will have occasion to reflect on Vertov’s scientific aspirations, and their consequences for the form and content of his films, a few times over the course of this book. In the meantime, however, it will be important finally to consider the scientific ideas that Kaufman/Vertov might have absorbed during his studies at the Institute, and that might have had an effect upon his cinematic work. Those lurid “might haves” are, alas, unavoidable: we know virtually nothing about Vertov’s specific reading during those years, beyond his completion of the “basic course” (for which I have no syllabi) and his extracurricular interest in poetry (to be discussed in the next chapter). Thus, the speculations I offer here are even-more-than-usually subject to amendment and augmentation, and do not pretend to outline a kind of pensée sauvage from which Vertov’s later work might be deduced. Nonetheless, at least two currents of thought of importance at the Institute in those years – a major ideology that saw “energy” as the universal substrate of the material and mental worlds, and a minor one that affirmed a close genetic relationship of labor processes to (musical) rhythm – are worth discussing at some length, both because of their suggestiveness vis-à-vis Vertov’s later work, and because of their relative obscurity or obsolescence today.

One of the doctrines central to pedagogy and research at the Institute was what the intellectual historian Anson Rabinbach has identified as “productivism,” “transcendental materialism” or (my own preferred term) “energeticism.” This was a 19th-century scientific ideology, grounded in the thermodynamic discoveries and models offered by Lord Kelvin, and Rudolf Clausius, and above all Hermann von Helmholtz, which held
that “human society and nature are linked” by virtue of that fact that underlying “all productive activity, whether of laborers, of machines, or of natural forces” is “a single, universal energy . . . that cannot be either added to or destroyed.” In later physical and physiological research that took its premises from Helmholtz – particularly research into fatigue suffered by laboring bodies - energeticist monism was bound to the pessimistic implications of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which adumbrates what we know as “entropy,” the notion that not only organic being but the universe itself slowly but inevitably declines into “heat death.” Helmholtz, however, downplayed these grim prognoses, especially in his later work, stressing instead the capacity of the universe to “replenish itself”; and it seems that this optimistic reading of energeticism was the one bequeathed to Russian psychophysiology, at least in its Bekhterevian redaction.

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119 Ibid., 62.

120 The centrality of Helmholtz in Russian writing on psychology at the turn of the 20th century can hardly be exaggerated; he is crucial for the work of Ivan Pavlov, I.M. Sechenev, and Bekhterev among many others. As Rabinbach shows, Helmholtz should “be credited as a major contributor to social thought” for his “elaboration of the modern concept of labor power as the quantitative equivalent of work produced, regardless of the source of the energy transformed. Helmholtz was the first to demonstrate explicitly the equivalent between natural, inorganic, and social conceptions of labor power” (Rabinbach, op. cit., 57). For one important popular source, see V. Ostwald’s (Wilhelm Ostwald), Energicheskij imperativ, trans. V.M. Pozner, intro. V. Verner (St. Petersburg: 1913 [supplement to the journal Za 7 dnei]). The movement’s monism was matched by its secular internationalism and efforts to create an global language; see Ostwald’s O mezhdunarodnom iazyke (Moscow: Esperanto, 1908). Popular energeticist works such as Ostwald’s The Mill of Life continued to be published into the Soviet period (Mel’nitsa zhizni, trans. R. Kh. Makstys (Moscow: Latizdat, 1925).
Whatever modifications he may have brought to the basic energetic theory through his neurological research and speculative ambition, Bekhterev, whose views were dominant at the Institute, was clearly always an orthodox Helmholtzian who regarded all phenomena as manifestations of a single, not-directly-representable energy, as he indicates in his 1902 essay on “The Psyche and Life”:

…our entire inner world is … one of the manifestations of a general universal energy which serves, through the conversion of latent energy, as the origin for the self-determining activity of organisms with their particular goal-directed effects upon the external world; the whole variegated nature of the external and internal world is conditioned by many and varied conversions of a single, general, unified universal energy, the specific forms of which we call luminous, thermal, electrical and so on, including the latent energy of organisms.

121 I have in mind here his late and not infrequently absurd theory of “collective reflexology,” an effort to understand the totality of human behavior in terms of various displacements and conversions (“reflexes”) of energy; see V. M. Bekhterev, Collective Reflexology: The Complete Edition, ed. Lloyd H. Strickland, trans. Eugenia Lockwood and Alisa Lockwood (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001). After the 1917 revolution Bekhterev worked on questions of labor efficiency, fatigue and many other topics at the institute, now renamed the State University of Medical Science. “Bekhterevism” was officially disapproved following the so-called “reflexological discussion” of 1929, and Bekhterev’s reputation revived in the USSR only very gradually after Stalin’s death in 1953, although his hidden influence persisted in the intervening years through the work of his many students.

122 V.M. Bekhterev, “Psikhika i Zhizn’”, in Psikhika i Zhizn’: Izbrannye trudy po psikhologii lichnosti v dvukh tomakh, ed. G.S. Nikiforov and L.A. Korostyleva (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 1999), vol. 1, 73. Helmholtz provides a constant fulcrum of authority for Bekhterev in his works on space perception (e.g., Teoriia obrazovaniiia nashikh predstavlenij o prostranstve, 1884), neurology, and psychiatry. See especially the remarks in his 1902 Die Energie des lebenden Organismus on “latent energy” as the common basis for both psychic and physical phenomena in the body: “… with the designation ‘energy’ we are by no means linking it to the common notion of ‘physical energy’ . . . . According to our interpretation, energy or power [Kraft] is in its essence nothing less than an active ubiquitous principle within the nature of the universe itself.” Bekhterev adds that we cannot perceive this energy in itself, but only its “expressions … in the constant transmutations of material things around us” (W. v. Bechterew, Die Energie des lebenden Organismus [number 16 in the series Grenzfragen des Nerven- und Seelenlebens, ed. L. Loewenfeld and H. Kurella] (Wiesbaden: J.F. Bergmann, 1902), 31).
With “latent energy,” Bekhterev is here referring to that energy, partially derived from the brain and partially from external stimuli, which within the conscious subject is actively converted into the two interlocked aspects of the psyche: the “nervous current” produced by the firing of neurons, and “psychic or subjective changes,” associated with “material changes in the brain which occur in parallel with psychic processes.”¹²³

Clearly enough, Bekhterev’s energetic conception is radically monistic: there is ultimately no difference, on his account, between mental entities and processes and physical ones. We find a particularly forceful articulation of this position in his lecture on “The Immortality of the Human Subject as a Scientific Problem,” delivered at a ceremonial speech-day before the entire Psychoneurological Institute in February 1916, when David Kaufman was a student there. Bekhterev’s chosen theme was a topical and painful one: he begins by noting how the question of immortality becomes particularly acute at times like the present, “when almost every day brings news of the deaths of many hundreds and thousands of people on the fields of battle.”¹²⁴

Part of the Institute, as we know, had already been turned into a military hospital; many in attendance at the lecture had been directly touched by the war, often by being made refugees; thus, the war’s devastation would have been physically palpable in the auditorium as Bekhterev spoke. His goal, as it turns out, was to bring consolation to his

¹²³ Bekhterev, “Psikhika i zhizn’,” 71.

¹²⁴ “Bessmertie chelovecheskoi lichnosti kak nauchnaia problema,” in Bekhterev, Psikhika i Zhizn’, 225-252; here 225. The lecture was first published as a special supplement to the important journal Herald of Knowledge (Vestnik Znaniia, otdel’nyi otnisk 2 (1916): 1-23), and was reprinted several times. Bekhterev’s arguments seem to derive in part from Wilhelm Ostwald’s 1906 Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard, Individuality and Immortality (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), esp. 53-74.
audience within the terms of his own scientific outlook, and thus he appeals to the law of conservation of energy – which states that the total amount of energy in a closed system, like the universe, remains constant, that energy considered within the bounds of such a system can neither be created nor destroyed – to fashion an idiosyncratic defense of the belief in immortality.

After reasserting that “all phenomena… including the internal processes of living creatures or the manifestations of ‘spirit,’ may and must be regarded as derivatives of a single universal energy,” Bekhterev goes on to argue at once for the perishability of all things and for their paradoxical persistence as “traces” left by their activity within the total continuity of energy exchange in the universe:

Everything in the world is in motion, everything is flowing; the world is an eternal movement, the unceasing conversion of one form of energy into another: thus declares science. There is nothing constant; one thing always succeeds another. People are born and die, kingdoms appear and are destroyed. Nothing stays the same even for a minute, and it only seems to the human being that upon death he decays and vanishes, turning into nothing . . . . But this is not so. The human being is an actor and participant in the overall universal process. It’s obvious that any new step forward in science, technology, art and ethical life remains eternal . . . . But even the everyday activity of the person does not disappear without a trace.

The reason for this persistence of “traces of activity” seems, again, to be the conservation of energy through its various conversions. (That energy might be indeed imperishable while its legible “traces” remain fully subject to decay seems not to occur to or concern Bekhterev.) What Bekhterev has in mind is a kind of grand cosmic developmental

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125 “Bessmertie chelovecheskoi lichnosti kak nauchnaia problema,” 230.

126 Ibid., 242.
trajectory – he referred to his own outlook, tellingly, as an “evolutionary monism”127 – in which each individual subject would participate actively, while recognizing both the contingency of her “individual” existence and its necessary consequentiality for the future. (Again, the problem of the absolute unpredictability and illegibility of those “consequences,” given the complexity of the universe, is not addressed.)

In profoundly utopian fashion, quotidian material existence is regarded through an optic that inflects it upward, in an immensely slow but still evolutionary arc:

When a person dies, the organism decomposes and ceases to exist – that is a fact. Through the decomposition of complex protein and carbon-based substances the body breaks down into simpler substances. Thanks to this process, the energy is partially freed, partially again bound to serve as the basis for the growth of the vegetable kingdom, which in turn serves as nutritional material for life, and as a consequence as the condition for the development of energy in new organisms. In this way, that which is called the physical side of the organism, that which bears the name of the body, breaks down and decays, but this does not mean that it is destroyed. It is not lost, but is merely converted into other forms and serves the creation of new organisms and new creatures, which through the law of evolution are capable of endless metamorphoses and perfection. Thus, the cycle of energy does not end even after the death of the organism, and assists in the development of life on earth. . . . not one human act, not one step, not one idea, expressed in words or even with a simple look, gesture, or mimicry in general, disappears without a trace. This is because every act, word or gesture whatsoever or mimetic action is inevitably accompanied for the person himself by specific organic impressions, which in turn must have an effect on him as a subject, turning into new forms of activity in the succeeding period of time.128

Even if Bekhterev never uses the word “sacrifice,” instead speaking of “disinterested service of . . . all of humanity to the point of forgetting oneself, to the point of

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127 Ibid., 232. See also Rabinbach’s remarks on the “unmitigated optimism of a synthesis between evolution and thermodynamics” among German energeticists (Rabinbach, op. cit., 68).

128 Ibid., 233-234.
annihilation of one’s own personal interests,” his evolutionary monism implies a continual sublating absorption of “individuals” into the evolving collective. In a passage whose general relevance to David Kaufman’s later activities will be obvious, he clarifies that he is talking not about individual immortality but rather social immortality, in view of the indestructibility of that psycho-nervous energy which constitutes the basis of the human subject. Or, to use the language of philosophy, we are speaking of the immortality of the soul, which in the course of its full individual life, through mutual interactions passes as it were into thousands of surrounding human subjects; through specifically cultural attainments (such as writing, the press, telegraph and wireless, telephone, gramophone, various works of art, tools of various kinds, and so on) as well, it spreads its influence far beyond the bounds of the immediate relation of one subject to another – this, not only if these subjects exist simultaneously, but also if they exist at various times, that is, in the relationship of the oldest generations to the newest.

The question of the validity of Bekhterev’s dubious defense of belief in immortality will not detain me here; more interesting by far is the demonstrable extent to which the influence of these notions can be recognized within Vertov’s later creative and theoretical work.

I strongly suspect that Vertov’s preoccupation with movement and with labor, particularly obvious in early manifesta like “We: Variant of a Manifesto” (1922) and “Kinocs: A Revolution” (1923) – with their call for “the organization of movement,” “the ordered fantasy of movement,” “the revelation of pure movement, the celebration of

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129 Ibid., 251.

130 Ibid., 238.

131 To be sure, similar and indeed far more elaborate applications of energeticist thinking to ethical and political questions, often produced by distinguished scientists, preceded Bekhterev’s. For perhaps the best example (which could be read as proto-environmentalist), see the aforementioned Ostwald’s Die Philosophie der Werte (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner, 1913), esp. 263-344.
movement on the screen,” for letting the camera “be drawn or repelled by movement” and so on\textsuperscript{132} – derives in part from his immersion in energeticist materialism. Certainly, within the Helmholtzian framework dominant in Russian scientific thought during the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, “movement” would invariably have been conceptualized in terms of energy flow.\textsuperscript{133}

Yet by the time Vertov began to work in cinema, this “scientific” perspective had already had a major effect upon artistic practice and aesthetics as well, making both “art” and “science” reservoirs of energeticist ideology. As Charlotte Douglas has shown, energeticism exerted a profound influence upon both Russian experimental artists (from Malevich and Matiushin through the Stenberg Brothers and Konstantin Medunetskii) and theorists (especially Proletkult founder Aleksandr Bogdanov, but Nikolai Tarabukin, Nikolai Punin and Boris Arvatov as well) in the pre- and early post-October periods.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{132} See Michelson, ed., \textit{Kino-Eye}, 9, 10, 19.

\textsuperscript{133} I have not come across Russian scientific writing from the period that radically dissents from the energeticist perspective on movement; even those who reject it (like O.D. Khvol’son in his \textit{Znanie i vera v fizike} (Petrograd: F.R. Fetterlein, 1916), 14-15) criticize the materialist monism of the paradigm, its reductiveness and refusal to countenance non-material realities, rather than its account of movement as such. Indeed, movement had been analyzed in terms of energy exchange and conservation in Russia since at least the 1870s; see \textit{Istoriia mekhaniki v Rossii}, ed. I.Z. Shtokalo et al (Kiev: Naukova Dumka, 1987), 223-258.

\textsuperscript{134} Charlotte Douglas, “Energetic Abstraction: Ostwald, Bogdanov, and Russian Post-Revolutionary Art,” in Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson, eds., \textit{From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 76-94. “[These] artists and theorists,” writes Douglas, “spoke of and attempted to represent energy itself, the energy of gases, of electromagnetic forces, and of the cosmic flux. The study of energetic systems, which was a major topic of discussion in Russia during much of the 1920s, led to paintings of graphs and painted diagrams of relationship, and to the presentation of organization paradigms as works of art. The primary visual element these artists had in common was an avoidance of depicted objects, objects in this view of the world being merely
We will later affirm the importance of the Russian Futurist influence as well, while bearing in mind the centrality of Helmholtz disciple Etienne-Jules Marey to the Futurists (as well as to Duchamp) in their efforts to “represent the energy of the body in action.”¹³⁵

If we leap ahead to Vertov’s mature works, it is obvious enough that in at least three of them – One Sixth of the World (1926), The Eleventh Year (1928) and Man with a Movie Camera (1929) – processes of energy conversion, with human labor as a central relay point, provide crucial representational pretexts for the films’ rhetoric, in whole or in part. As we will see in Chapter Six, it is in The Eleventh Year -- a film about (hydroelectric) energy, the harnessing of energy, and the forms that energy takes, as

transitory webs or nodules of energy. In major part, this artistic trend was the product of the immediate ideological demands on artists created by the October Revolution, which required an art based on materialism, science, and analysis, rather than an idealist of essentialist abstraction” (76-77). I was regrettably unaware of Douglas’s important work when writing an earlier version of the present discussion of energeticism (published as “Film Energy: Process and Metanarrative in Dziga Vertov’s The Eleventh Year (1928),” October 121 (Summer 2007): 41-78; esp. 49-56). See also the discussion of Malevich’s anti-representational and energeticist account of Vertov’s late-20s films in Chapter Seven, below.

¹³⁵ Rabinbach, op. cit., 115. In addition to Duchamp (in the 1912 Nude Descending a Staircase), Rabinbach mentions Anton Giulio Bragaglia and Umberto Boccioni as among the artists directly influenced by Marey. “In rendering visible ‘movements that the human eye cannot perceive’ and in converging with Bergson, with cubism, and with Futurism, Marey entered the vocabulary of modern art” (ibid.). Marey had been known in Russia at least since 1875, when a translation of his 1873 Machine Animale: Locomotion Terrestre et Aérienne appeared (Mekhanika Zhivotnago Organizma: Peredvizhenie po zemle i po vozdukh (St. Petersburg: Znanie, 1875), and he was regularly recalled in pre-revolutionary film journals (e.g., “Pamiatnik frantsuzskomu uchonomu Zhiuliu Marej, - pervomu izobretateliu kinematografa,” Vestnik Kinematografi 92/12 (21 June 1914): 13); a 1930 book on scientific uses of the movie camera mentions Marey as the first to use the camera in physics, singling out his work on “le mouvement des liquides étudié par la chronophotographie” (L. Sukharebskii and A. Ptushko, Spetsial’nye sposoby kinos’emki (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1930), 3). See also B.S. Likhachev, Istoriiia Kino v Rossii (Leningrad: Academia, 1927), 15-16.
registered across changing material surfaces – that an “energeticist” model, or myth, of cinematic signification finds fullest expression within Vertov’s oeuvre. But the shapes of other major Vertov works are also conditioned by energy exchange, in ways we will elaborate in later sections. In One Sixth of the World, which is essentially a cognitive map of the NEP economy’s structural basis in state coordination of innumerable small productive enterprises as a means of slowly accumulating industrial capital and (thereby) of modernizing the USSR, the “evolutionary conversion” of energy is nothing less than the governing conceit of the entire film. In a more anthropological spirit, the great “marriage-death-burial-birth” sequence in Man with a Movie Camera manages, without intertitles, to impart with extraordinary intensity a sense of the very cyclicality of life, inflected to be sure in the direction of birth and the New. In these works, as we will see, the task of documentary moving photography becomes to a significant extent one of registering as vividly as possible the traces of energy as manifested by human, animal or

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An initial discussion of energeticism in that film appears in “Film Energy.” Malcolm Turvey has illuminatingly discussed the relevance of Rabinbach’s work on energeticism to interpretations of Vertov in “Can the Camera See? Mimesis in Man with a Movie Camera,” October 89 (Summer 1999): 25-50; esp. 35-37.

Cf. John MacKay and Charles Musser, “Shestaia Chast Mira / [La Sesta Parte del Mundo/A Sixth Part of the World],” in 23rd Pordenone Silent Film Festival Catalogue, 55-58. One of a number of “flow charts” Vertov drafted for One Sixth indicates the steps of energy conversion under NEP: the natural wealth of the USSR is converted by the labor of workers, peasants and members of national minorities into useful products which are then processed and sold abroad in the foreign market by the State Trade Organization. The same organization then imports materials that go into developing Soviet industry, which in turn makes “perfected instruments of production” to be purchased and used by workers, peasants and members of national minorities to increase their output (RGALÍ f. 2091, op. 1, d. 91, ll. 2-3). I will return to this and other charts in our discussion of One Sixth in Chapter Six.
mechanical bodies; the job of montage, by extension, is to narrate the trajectory of that energy and the conversions it undergoes.

It should be stressed that energeticism was a strictly mechanical (rather than historical) materialism that had profound effects upon left-wing social thought, as well as upon physical and biological science, in the last quarter of the 19th century. A more culturally grounded, if still “scientific” influence was exerted at the Institute (and possibly upon David Kaufman) by the now largely forgotten theories about the relationship between the histories of economic production and of music developed in the work of Karl Wilhelm Bücher (1847-1930). Bücher was a German economist who, along

138 The effect of materialistic ideologies on the “pre-October” generation of Marxist thinkers – Kautsky, Plekhanov, Bernstein, Lenin, etc. – has been usefully described by Lucio Colletti: “[The generation that came of age in the 1880s and ‘90s] had grown up into a world profoundly different from that of Marx. In Germany the star of Hegel and classical German philosophy had long since set. Kautsky and Bernstein were formed in a cultural milieu dominated by Darwinism, and by the Darwinism of Haeckel rather than that of Darwin himself. [. . .] Plekhanov too was at bottom rooted in positivism – think of the place he accords [Henry] Buckle in his The Monist Conception of History, for example. The cultural mentality common to this whole generation, behind its many differences, reposed upon a definite taste for great cosmic syntheses and world-views; the key to the latter was always a single unifying principle, one explanation embracing everything from the most elementary biological level right up to the level of human history (‘Monism,’ precisely!)” (Colletti, “Introduction” to Karl Marx, Early Writings, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin, 1992), 8-9). The twin “worldviews” of historical and mechanical materialism can be seen as overlapping, to be sure, and materialist monism was in part politically motivated by a post-1848 struggle against obscurantism and superstition (see Rabinbach, op. cit., 49, 69-83; and Douglas, “Energetic Abstraction,” 77); yet the fundamental Marxist categories of class conflict and mode of production seem irreducibly historical rather than transhistorically “physical,” and the role they play in Vertov’s work will have to be addressed in later chapters. On the contrast between historical and mechanical or “eliminative” materialism – the latter a position I regard as philosophically incoherent – see Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1945), 200-210; and Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 45-46; and “Pleasure: A Political Issue,” in The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 61-74, esp. 69-70.
with (but working independently of) the better-known Karl Polanyi, founded the
discipline of non-market economics, a major branch of economic anthropology.\(^{139}\) In the
course of his historical study of “pre-modern” production practices, Bücher – continuing
traditions begun in the 18th century by Herder and Bishop Percy - collected a large
number of work songs from societies across the globe. Comparing these songs both
chronologically and across national-linguistic borders, Bücher came to the conclusion,
elaborated at length in his 1896 Arbeit und Rhythmus [Labor and Rhythm], that rhythm
as such – musical, poetic or otherwise – emerged out of the application of the human
body to labor processes.\(^{140}\)

In a very early instance of an argument for the reciprocal action of culture upon
economics (or of “superstructure” upon the “base,” to use the Marxist terminology),
Bücher maintained that rhythm had to be considered an important historical factor in
production and therefore within economics more generally. Musical sounds, percussive
ones in particular, have their origin, according to Bücher, in the use of hand tools to
process raw materials: pounding seed, scything wheat, hoeing gardens and so on. Poetic
meters, meanwhile, find their roots in the contraction and extension of muscles at work –
codified, he argued, in the arsis and thesis of ancient prosody.\(^{141}\)

\(^{139}\) See Bücher’s Industrial Evolution [Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft, 1893-1921], trans.
S. Morley Wickett (New York, B. Franklin, 1967); and K. Bücher, J. Schumpeter and Fr.
freierr von Wieser, eds., Wirtschaft und Wirtschaftswissenschaft (Tübingen: J.C.B.
Mohr, 1914). Bücher is also a foundational figure in the history of the scholarly study of
journalism; see Unsere Sache und die Tagespresse (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1915).

\(^{140}\) Karl Bücher, Arbeit und Rhythmus (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1896). Later editions appeared in
1899, 1902, 1909, and 1919.

\(^{141}\) Karl Biukher [Bücher], Rabota i ritm: Rabochiia pesni, ikh proiskhozhdenie,
esteticheskoe i ekonomicheskoe znachenie, trans. I. Ivanov, ed. D.A. Koropchevskii (St.
Crucially, “rhythm” for Bücher emerges out of the need to labor collectively, to amass and apply the energy of a group. Rhythm, especially as reinforced by group singing, is a tool, a means of connecting my movements with everyone else’s: it is a mode of corporeal communication, and thus possesses the power both to ease the burden of labor on individuals and to increase productivity. Finally, it also unites workers “organically,” rather than through the imposition of some external disciplinary schema.

Yet the evolution of work rhythms, says Bücher, seems to have reached a terminal point in the contemporary period - that is, in Bücher’s own epoch of industrial capitalism – even as productive capacities have increased exponentially:

In their earliest phases, machines took over . . . only specific motions of labor; it is remarkable that . . . many of the oldest machines moved at a rhythmic pace because they . . . simply imitated the movements made by the . . . hand in previous labor processes. . . . But [the] new rhythms of labor differ greatly from the old ones. The working person is no longer master of his movements; the tool, [previously] his servant and supplement to the limbs of his body, now becomes

Petersburg: O.N. Popova, 1899), 65-87. Here I will cite throughout the Russian translation that Vertov would most likely have encountered, rather than the German original.

142 Ibid., 12-20, 87-88. It is worth noting that Henri Bergson had made a related argument about the “communicative” powers of rhythm in his slightly earlier Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience (1889), although he concerns himself not with labor but with the way rhythm can infect the relatively passive observer of a moving spectacle: “If curves are more graceful than broken lines, the reason is that, while a curved line changes its direction at every moment, every new direction is indicated in the preceding one. Thus the perception of ease in motion passes over into the pleasure of mastering the flow of time and of holding the future in the present. [Another] element comes in when the graceful movements submit to a rhythm and are accompanied by music. For the rhythm and measure, by allowing us to foresee to a still greater extent the movements of the dancer, make us believe that we now control them. As we guess almost the exact attitude which the dancer is going to take, he seems to obey us when he really takes it: the regularity of the rhythm establishes a kind of communication between him and us, and the periodic returns of the measure are like so many invisible threads by means of which we set in motion this imaginary puppet” (Time and Free Will, trans. F.L. Pogson (London: Macmillan, 1910), 12).
his master. It dictates the measure of his motions. . . . In this lies the exhausting, oppressive effect of factory labor: the person becomes the servant of a never-relaxing, never-tiring instrument of labor, almost a piece of the machine. . . Along with these developments, the work song also disappeared. The human voice is powerless before the crash of flywheels, the rush of motorized belts, and all the indeterminate noises which fill . . . factory spaces and which drive away any feeling of pleasure!

Art and technology are now moving along entirely different paths of professional development, and the mobile arts [dance, drama] in particular have almost no relationship to science and technological practice and play virtually no role in the lives of workers . . . Thus, the life of each person has become duller, more boring; work for laborers has ceased to be accompanied by music and poetry . . . Standardized commodities are what is required, and . . . art itself goes to market for profit.

Thus, economic production has developed into a distinct “sphere,” sundered from other kinds of life-practice, and indeed from the human body as such. But after drawing these melancholy conclusions, Bücher ends his treatise with a qualification and a utopian aspiration:

Technology and art, through the differentiation and division of labor, have achieved gigantic levels of productivity; labor has become more productive, and household goods more abundant. And we should not lose hope for some possibility of fusing technology and art in that higher rhythmic unity that will again return good cheer to the soul and harmonious development to the body, in the way that distinguishes the best of the primitive peoples.

Perhaps paradoxically, Bücher’s writing stimulated psychophysiological inquiry, of a proto-Taylorist character, into the best, most efficient ways of rhythmically organizing

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143 Rabota i ritm, 99-100.

144 Ibid., 101.

145 Ibid.
labor processes and working bodies. Yet it is at least as important to insert Bücher into
the history of reflection on the differentiating, dialectically alienating capacities of
modernity, a line that would include Marx, Rousseau, and perhaps above all the Schiller
of the letters On the Aesthetic Education of Mankind (1794). Indeed, the technocratic
and the Romantic fascination with rhythm sometimes overlapped, as in the occasional
illustration, in Soviet textbooks devoted to the "scientific organization of labor" (or NOT:
nauchnaia organizatsiia truda), of the importance of rhythmized labor via the example
of Konstantin Levin discovering the rhythmical secret of scything in a famous passage
from Tolstoy's Anna Karenina (1877).

Arbeit und Rhythmus is also a significant moment in the history of ideologies of
folk music, which stretches back at least as far as those aforementioned pre-Romantic
ancestors and extends to Bartók and Kodály, Alan Lomax, and indeed to Vertov’s own
folk song collecting during the production of Three Songs of Lenin (1934). As far as
thinking about more recent art is concerned, at least one author, the Argentine critic and
great defender of the avant-garde Jorge Romero Brest, applied Bücher to a fascinating

146 See Margaret Keiver Smith, Rhythmus und Arbeit [Ph.D. dissertation, University of
Zürich] (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1900) [available at the Open Source
bibliobazaar.com]; Dobri Awramoff, “Arbeit und Rhythmus: Der Einfluß des Rhythmus
auf die Quantität und Qualität geistiger und körperlicher Arbeit, mit besonderer
Berücksichtigung des rhythmischen Schreibens,” in Wilhelm Wundt, ed., Philosophische
Studien, vol. 18 (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1903), 515-562; and Michael Cowan,
Cult of the Will: Nervousness and German Modernity (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania
State University Press, 2008), 188-198.

147 See especially the account of modern “fragmentation” in the Sixth Letter, in Friedrich
Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man, ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A.

148 For this Tolstoyan Taylorism, see V. Bekhterev et al., eds., Voprosy organizatsii
truda: sbornik statej (Peterburg: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo), 55.
study of cinematic rhythm (comparing it to the rhythms of athletic activities);\textsuperscript{149} and eventually, Georg Lukács made considerable use of Bücher’s work in his own writing on musical-poetic-rhythmic art in the late Æsthetik.\textsuperscript{150}

It was precisely under the rubrics of aesthetics and the study of folk songs that Bücher’s study was integrated into the curriculum at the Psychoneurological Institute. At least two proseminars on those topics, offered at the Institute in and around the years David Kaufman was there, dealt regularly with Bücher’s theories.\textsuperscript{151} The book had been translated very early (in 1899) into Russian, and quickly became and long remained well known; indeed, Bücher’s work kept its place in literary-encyclopedia entries and other works on folk poetry, work songs, and prosody for the rest of the Soviet period and even beyond.\textsuperscript{152} Given Vertov’s education, his bookstore upbringing and his interests in music,


\textsuperscript{151} See A.V. Gerver, ed. Otchet o deiatel’nosti Psikho-Nevrologicheskago Instituta za 1912-\textsuperscript{j} god (St. Petersburg: Gramotnost’, 1914), 203. The seminars on aesthetics at the Institute had a distinctly materialist cast: another topic discussed was “various interrelations between musical tempi and processes of breathing and blood circulation” (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{152} See for instance the encyclopedia article at http://feb-web.ru/FEB/LITENC/ENCYCLOP/le2/le2-0511.htm. Arbeit und Rhythmus was never translated into English, which might account for its relative lack of resonance in the Anglo-American world. (But see Michael Golston, Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 23; and Michael Cowan’s study, cited in footnote 146.) A second Russian translation of book appeared in
in work processes, and especially in the relationship between musical and non-musical sound (to be discussed in detail in later sections), it seems likely that he would have encountered or osmotically absorbed Bücher, though he never mentions him anywhere, to my knowledge.

As for rhythm itself – initially sonic, then visual, then visual and sonic – Vertov’s preoccupation with it, as we have already learned, emerged early and never flagged:

We invite you... to flee... out into the open, into four-dimensions (three + time), in search of our own material, our meter and rhythm.

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

... the poetry of machines, propelled and driving. 153

We will have occasion to discuss Vertov’s cinematic-rhythmic practice, and its affinities with Soviet “noise music” of the 1920s, in some detail later on, especially in the course of analyzing Man with a Movie Camera and Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass. 154

Suffice it to say for the moment that Vertov in his mature work organized his footage the USSR in 1923 (Rabota i Ritm, trans. S.S. Zaiaitskii (Moscow: Novaia Moskva, 1923)).

153 “We: Variant of a Manifesto,” Kino-Eye, 7-9; italics in the original.

154 See B. Iurtsev’s remarkable article on the Proletkult “Orchestra of Things” – an attempt to generate music out of mass-produced objects – in Zrelishcha 6 (1922): 22; and chapters Six and Seven, below. For a sweeping overview of French thinking about cinematic rhythm during the silent period, see Laurent Guido, L’age du rythme: Cinéma, musicalité et culture du corps dans les theories françaises des années 1910-1930 (Lausanne: Editions Payot, 2007), esp. 19-300.
with extraordinary metrical precision – taking single film frames, the quanta of the mechanical camera-eye, as his basic rhythmic units – and with his rhythmical cinema seemed to be aiming at a restoration of “that higher rhythmic unity” of technology and art that lies at the center of Bücher’s own ideology of rhythm. The sound of industry is intolerable, and yet there is no going back: how can the proletariat master its own surroundings, how can it survive, without entering into those inhuman vibrations?

Or, to use Vertov’s language from the early ‘20s, without bringing

the broad, gesticulating throng of workers . . . closer to the iron rhythm of advancing – crawling, driven, and flying – machines.155

This “bringing closer” should also recall for us David Kaufman’s early efforts to gain mnemonic control over his school assignments through rhythmic arrangements (the “cities of Asia Minor”). School administers trauma in a softer, perhaps more predictable and scheduled way than the industrial workplace does; accordingly, it affords more time and space for fashioning defenses, whether those involve collective organization or (as in the case of Kaufman’s memorization strategies) technologies of management. Yet what the ideologies of energy and rhythm make imaginable is precisely a linkage between physical labor and intellectual “formal binding”: energy, whose ubiquity can be traced in the passage of one movement into another, in the systole and diastole of what philosopher Gilles Deleuze termed “[Vertov’s] material system in perpetual interaction,” where everything is work in the strict physical sense (“Work = Force x Distance”); rhythm, the

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binding strategy itself, inseparable from labor, that can shape what Bücher called “indeterminate noises” into perceptually graspable and even pleasurable cadences.\textsuperscript{156}

It might even be said that energy and rhythm constitute the substance and the form, respectively, of the universal, now that “spiritual” entities have fled and the grounding of all social life in work – the formative and self-formative energy of the proletariat – has been revealed. Such, at any rate, will be Vertov’s artistic gambit in his mature films: that is, after 1921, by which time a new, specifically Soviet and historical power, the Party-State, will have come into being, and even found a temporary place for Vertov’s experiments, and made possible his finding a place, within the perimeters of its increasingly universal authority.

\textsuperscript{156} Deleuze’s deeply perceptive comments on Vertov are worth citing here, though we will return to them later: “Whether there were machines, landscapes, buildings or men was of little consequence . . . They were catalysts, converters, transformers, which received and re-emitted movements, whose speed, direction, order, they changed, making matter evolve towards less ‘probable’ states, bringing about changes out of all proportion to their own dimensions . . . [M]ontage itself constantly adapts the transformations of movements in the material universe to the interval of movement in the eye of the camera: rhythm” (Gilles Deleuze, \textit{Cinema 1: The Movement-Image}, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 39-40).