DREAMWORLD AND CATASTROPHE

THE PASSING OF MASS UTOPIA IN EAST AND WEST

SUSAN BUCK-MORSS

THE MIT PRESS
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
LONDON, ENGLAND

Chapter 4

Culture for the Masses

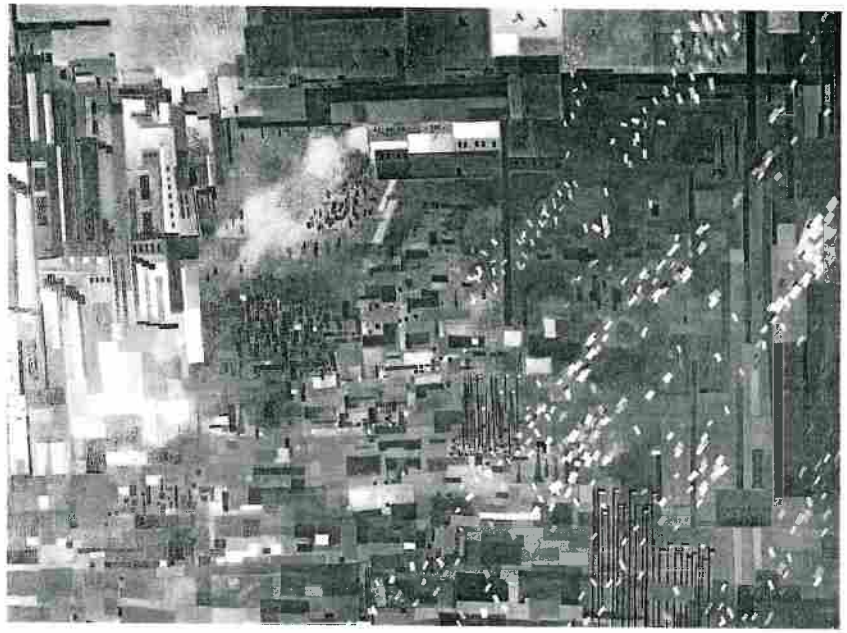
4.1

The Masses

Who are "the masses"? The word was launched in the modern era as a term of contempt. Its predecessor, the mob, was an unruly crowd occupying public space and threatening to destabilize the public order. The masses, however, unlike the mob, were not just an occasional social formation. With nineteenth-century industrialization and urbanization, processes that drew people together in large aggregates as a matter of course, the masses became a permanent presence in social life. In quotidian rhythms, they flowed through space as a spontaneous accumulation of persons, anonymous, fungible, and rootless. Organized, the masses are a physical force, a lethal weapon, and as such indispensable to sovereign power. In the nineteenth century, nation-states produced mass armies through universal conscription. And yet the explosive force of the masses could always turn against the sovereign agent of the state, which means that absolute obedience in the military was institutionally required.

Mass *society* is a twentieth-century phenomenon. How it differs from mass military institutions is an organizational question. Whereas communication in the latter follows hierarchical lines of command, society as a mass is addressed directly. Modern media technologies are indispensable here, not only for the manipulation of the masses but for mass solidarity in a positive sense. Speed is a decisive factor in media effectiveness. Books are slow organizers, producing mass predispositions but seldom inciting direct action. Newspapers are known generators of mass action, and no modern political party of any importance has been without one. Placards, banners, and posters move the word out into the street, changing its nature. When words become part of a mass spectacle and integrated into the scene, the masses speak through them rather than being addressed by them. Photographs of street demonstrations show words in this changed capacity, as identifying logos rather than logos-in-writing. How the words look matters. Letters take on modern shapes; graphic design gives the masses a revolutionary identity, and identity *is* the new means of mass organization. Mimesis replaces written argument. People become part of the collective by mimicking its look.

Mass cathexis onto one person is a powerful organizer, but it requires at least the trace of physical presence: an image, a voice, clothes worn by, objects touched by, beds



4.1 Vasilii Kuptsov, *May Day*, 1929.

Why did only revolutionary futurism march in step with the October Revolution? Is it just a question of outward revolutionary fervor, just a mutual aversion to the old forms, that joins futurism with the proletariat? . . . We maintain that there is a deeper link between futurism and proletarian creation. . . . Take any work of revolutionary, futurist art. People who are used to seeing a depiction of individual objects or phenomena in a picture are bewildered. You cannot make anything out. And indeed, if you take out any one part from a futurist picture, it then represents an absurdity. Because each part of a futurist picture acquires meaning only through the interaction of all the other parts; only in conjunction with them does it acquire the meaning with which the artist imbued it. A futurist picture lives a collective life: *By the same principle on which the proletariat's whole creation is constructed. Try to distinguish an individual face in a proletarian procession. Try to understand it as individual persons—absurd. Only in conjunction do they acquire all their strength, all their meaning.*

—Natan Altman, "'Futurism' and Proletarian Art," 1918[1]

4.2 Moscow street demonstration, 1927.

4.3 Club prepares decorations for demonstration, 1929.

occupied by the person in whom the mass's psychic energy is invested. The writte word, in contrast, is decorporealized. The materiality of the text acts like a screen, prc hibiting the author's physical attributes—gender, age, ethnicity, attractiveness—fror being seen. As a consequence, a certain kind of mass cathexis is impossible, and a though there have long been best-selling writers and popular political leaders, ther were no heroes as media stars before the photograph.

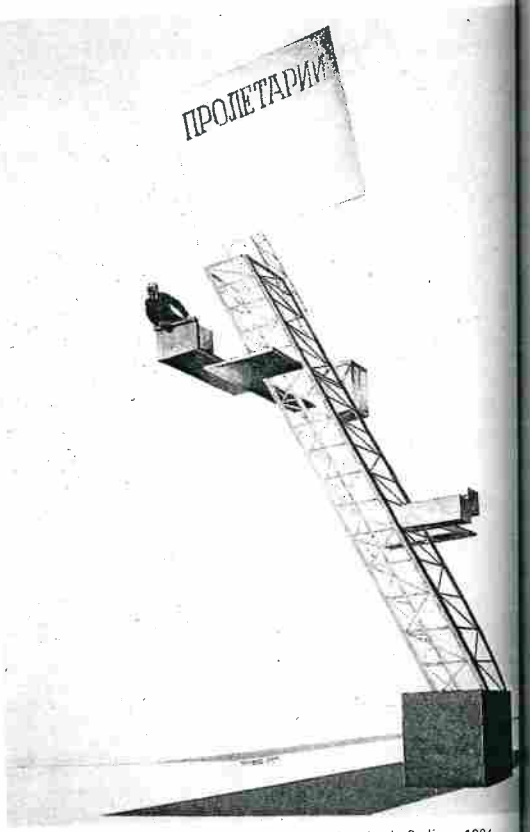
The voice as a means for organizing the masses demanded a new technolog Megaphones magnified sound by directing its focus, but still required the visual pres ence of the speaker to reach a mass audience at all. Speakers' podiums recognized th fact, and they were a common design of revolutionary artists in the early years of th Bolshevik regime, even after electronic loudspeakers increased the audio range.

Radio towers, working from totally different physical principles than that c the megaphone or loudspeaker, incidentally echoed their form. Radio produced th "universal ear," the "newspaper without paper," Lenin said, "without borders.' And although Lenin's speeches were reproduced on gramophone records for ma distribution, it was the live voice, the history-making event of its speech in present tim that carried mass-political charisma.[3] When the voice was transformed into electric surges transmitted through wire grids rather than the open air, the extension of the au ral sense became limitless, as did the visual sense through photographic reproductior Mass society was synonymous with this infinity of sense perception, achieved throug the technological prostheses of the human sensory apparatus.

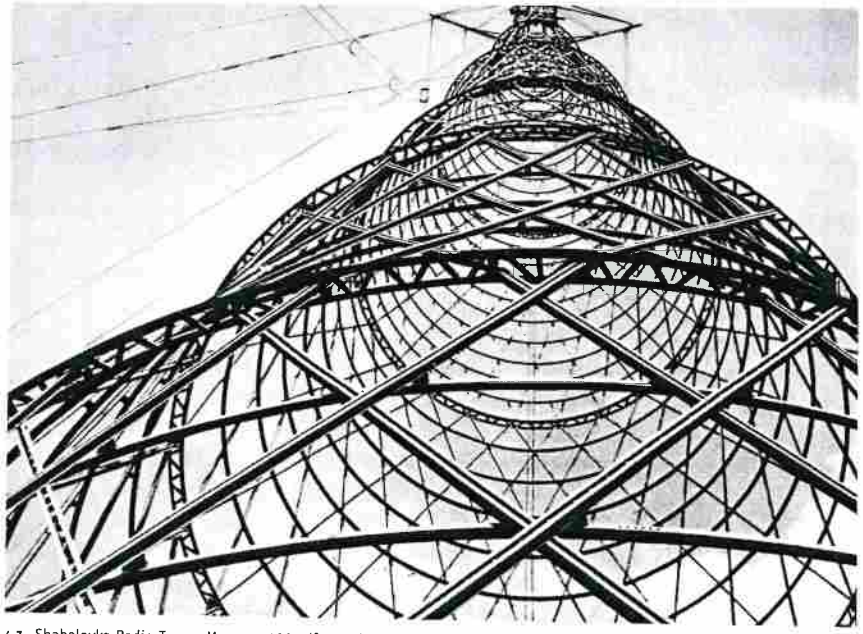
The electrical grids over which the Soviet radio voice traveled were develope as a centralized infrastructure.[4] In 1920 a plan for the electrification of the entire coun try was unveiled in an "elaborate show" to "enchanted listeners" at a congress of ex perts convened to consider it.[5] Again, rather than proposing any real alternative t capitalist energy development, socialist technology copied Western forms. With mod els like the Niagara Falls project in mind, the plan's emphasis was on hydropowe which was, notes its historian, "an interesting priority for a country with only tw small commercial hydroplants."[6] The grid system privileged large-scale high-voltag transmission networks that required an enormous investment and were fully depen dent on foreign technology.[7] A decentralized plan for local electrification and villag stations was debated and rejected despite its economic rationality for rural areas (wher it would have provided service sooner to those peasants whose exported grain was t pay for the foreign equipment). Given the preconception of what constituted progres more appropriate technologies—better hand tools and more horses, for example, i a country where as much as 70 percent of fuel consumption was provided by vegetabl fuels (wood, straw, manure)[8]—could not be seriously considered.[9] Realism in regard t energy policy meant only that "dreams should not proceed faster than the ability t

-film star Douglas Fairbanks at Wall Street, New York City,
the sale of U.S. Government bonds during World War I. His
megaphone was no match for the size of the crowd.

dspeaker. Photo by Aleksandr Rodchenko, 1929.

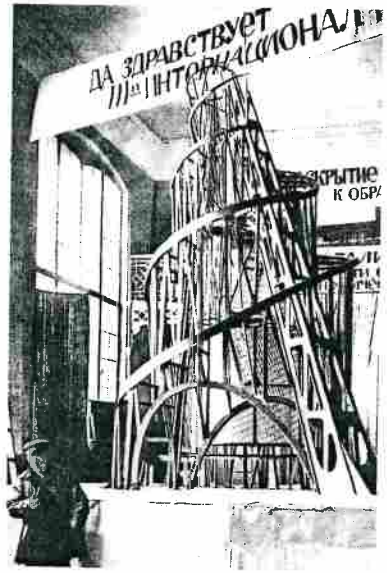


4.5 Studio of El Lissitzky and the UNOVIS collective, *Lenin Podium*, 1924.



4.7 Shabalovka Radio Tower, Moscow, 1922 (from which Radio Comintern made its first international broadcasts in 1922), designed by Vladimir Shukhov. Photo by Aleksandr Rodchenko, 1929.

Tatlin's model was exhibited at the Eighth All-Russian Electrotechnological Session in Moscow, 1920, as part of the show presenting the GOELRO plan for the country's electrification. The monument was to be built out of iron and glass; its three transparent volumes, rotating at different speeds (one completing its revolution in a year, the second in a month, the third in a day), were to house the various offices of the Comintern, while the tower acted as a transmitting station for revolutionary propaganda. It was a machine for the generation of world revolution, a working monument commemorating the future rather than the past. Maiakovskii called it "the first monument without a beard."



4.8 Vladimir Tatlin in front of his model for the *Monument to the Third International*, 1920.

fulfill them," but the nature of the dream itself was not questioned.[10] Electrification was a political program as well as a technological one, a metaphor for overcoming peasant backwardness: "GOELRO [the state electrification commission] promised that electrification would accelerate economic reconstruction while simultaneously transforming the country from a poor cousin of Western Europe into a modern, cultured society saturated with electric light and radios."[11] The kilowatt-hour was proposed as "an index of culture and progress."[12]

Not only radio receivers but cinema houses too required electricity, and cinema was central to the construction of mass society. Whereas the radio voice allowed mass identification with political leaders, cinema, traveling to towns and villages to meet audiences halfway, represented a moving image of the masses that allowed audiences to recognize *themselves*.[13] Such mirroring can be important in transforming the accidental crowd (the mass-in-itself) into the self-conscious, purposeful crowd (the mass-for-itself), with at least the potential of acting out its own destiny. But technologies that hold a mirror to the masses can also blind them, if their own image obscures the manipulating power behind the scenes.

Consider the differences between several forms of the observing/observed masses: the carnival, the spectacle, the cinema. The theatrical moments of the carnival, indifferent to technologies of mediation, are spontaneous, and the division between actors and audience is fluid. Roles constantly change as individuals are swept up in the rhythms, sounds, and fragmented images of the crowd. Social identities are transformed behind carnival masks and costumes. Social parody and mockery of power are permitted by the comedic logic of carnivals that causes antisocial emotions to lose their conspiratorial power.

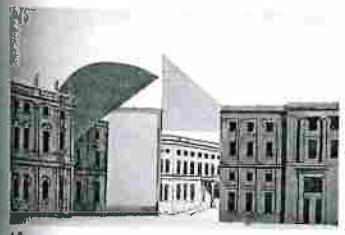
"Revolutions are the festivals of the oppressed and the exploited," Lenin wrote in 1905.[14] But the physical violence of revolutions separates them decisively from carnivalistic play. Whereas carnivals are ritual repetitions, revolutions are one-time-only events meant to change permanently the arrangement of social life. Revolutions disregard the carnival's social boundedness and overshoot parodic reversal, spilling out of the spatial and temporal constraints that are meant to contain collective discontent. To be sure, revolutionary actions are full of symbolic meanings, and their icons produce a powerful visual culture. But they lack a full sense of spectatorship because their immediate audience is the very enemy they are attempting, violently, to annihilate. Only later, with events of revolutionary commemoration, does their spectacularity come into its own. In place of firearms there are fireworks; in place of secrecy, there is display. If revolutions break from the past, their celebration returns to it, dramatized with all theatrical effects.

■

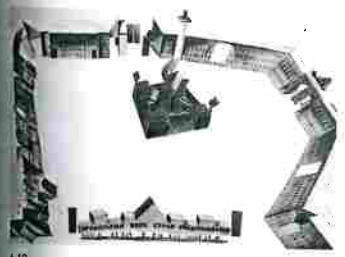
On the first anniversary of the October Revolution, production of the celebratory spectacles was assigned to artists. Buildings were decorated with huge panels painted in a myriad (critics complained, a morass) of different styles, from futurist to folklorist. Natan Altman's design for Palace Square in Petrograd superimposed giant modernist forms upon this traditional architectural space. The masses, assembled under identifying banners, paraded through the commemorative displays like a moving exhibition in an enormous public street-gallery that included the latest in contemporary art. Monuments to the "fighters for socialism" were unveiled. Public theater was provided by a group of young, leftists artists, including Altman, Malevich, and Puni, who, employing a mass of extras, staged a reenactment of the revolution.

In 1920, on the third anniversary of October, the festival atmosphere of the celebration was overpowered by the spectacle as a staged event. The *Storming of the Winter Palace*, produced that year in Petrograd, was mass street theater involving ten thousand participants and an audience of ten times that who joined in the action at the climax of storming the palace.[15]

4.9, 4.10 Natan Altman, design drawings for Uritskii (formerly Palace) Square, Petrograd. First anniversary of the October Revolution, 1918.



4.9



4.10

I set myself the task of changing the historical image of the square, and transforming it into a place where a revolutionary people would come to celebrate its victory. . . . I decided not to decorate the square. The creations of [the eighteenth-century architects] Rastrelli and Rossi required no decoration. I wished instead to contrast the new beauty of a victorious people with the beauty of imperial Russia. I did not seek harmony with the old, but contrast with it. I placed my constructions not on the buildings but between them, where the streets opened the square. . . . Only three vast paintings, almost the height of the buildings, were placed in front of the facades . . . a worker . . . unfolding a banner . . . "He who was nothing will be everything," . . . a peasant holding a banner . . . "Land to the Working People," . . . a worker . . . bearing the slogan: "Factories to the Working People."

—Natan Altman[16]

4.11

4.12

4.11, 4.12 Staged performance of *Storming of the Winter Palace,* third anniversary of the October Revolution, Petrograd, 1920. Produced by Nikolai Evreinov, Aleksandr Kugel, and Nikolai Petrov, with designs by Iurii Annenkov, organized by Dmitrii Temkin.

Two weeks before 7 November 1920 there appeared over the gates of the Winter Palace a sign "Headquarters Organiser of October Celebrations." . . . From first thing in the morning a queue of people stood waiting at the entrance to the Headquarters: drama schools, theater studios and clubs en bloc, representatives of military units, detachments of Red soldiers and sailors. This vast horde of manpower was sorted out in a special allocation section and everyone was given work appropriate to his qualifications in the task of staging The Storming of the Winter Palace. . . . *Dozens of producers, writers, stage-designers and technicians worked out an overall scenario for the production, splitting it into five parts: "White," "Red," "Bridge," "Square" and "Palace.". . . The "Bridge" was a real bridge which joined the 64 metre long Red and White platforms, a junction between two worlds, two groups—the Kerenskyites and the Bolsheviks. The "Square" was reserved for the immense battle scene: the assault on the Winter Palace by the people and the insurgent troops who entered through Red Army Arch. . . . The intended scale of the performance ruled out any scenes dealing with individual characters. The entire action was condensed into group movements, animated tableaux and dynamic crowd scenes. The masses were treated as masses. The sole exception was the small figure of Kerensky, which served to emphasise his insignificant role in the events as they were unfolded. . . . It was all combined to produce a single great panoramic review, filled with satire, tragic fervour and historic grandeur. . . .*

A group of young composers wrote the music. . . . Army instructors taught young girls from theater studios marching and rifle drill in order that they could play the Women's Battalion. Hundreds of morning suits, top hats, Generals' uniforms and ball gowns were obtained for the actors on the "White" platform. The Red Army was busy setting up field artillery batteries in Workers' Gardens. The producers, their assistants and everybody else on the production side worked round the clock, living on kasha, tea and frozen apples.

The searchlights installed on the roofs of the buildings surrounding the square lit up the area of action, and one after another, like the episodes in a film, the scenes began to unfold on the Red and White platforms. From the command tower signals were issued by telephone, using a numbered code to refer to the various episodes. Right up to the moment when the troops at the front rebelled and when the masses on the Red platform invaded the White the action developed just as it might have done in the theater. But the moment when the signal rocket sped up from the Square and exploded in the night sky the spectators and the participants too witnessed one of the most astonishing sights imaginable, a sight which burst the narrow confines of the traditional stage, and rose above those earthbound blanks, boldly mixing recent reality with a vivid, audacious, theatricalised interpretation of that reality on a scale hitherto undreamed of.

—K. N. Derzhavin, 1925[17]

The cognitive experience of this spectacle affected the masses in two ways simultaneously. On the one hand, this street theater demanded strict discipline, the subordination of all participants to the will of the director. It was no accident that "the military provided not only the original idea and much of the cast for these productions but also the organizational models: actors were divided into platoons whose leaders were rehearsed by directors according to a detailed score or battle plan and deployed by the use of military signals and field telephones."[18] On the other hand, although this was acting, not reality, and although the rifles were not loaded, the soldiers and sailors were playing themselves. Drawn from the dramatic studios of the Red Army, they were simultaneously involved in the real battles of the Civil War that were raging in the near vicinity of Petrograd, a city under siege and suffering from shortages of food and material goods. It was all the more remarkable, therefore, that they participated in this mock battle with such gusto. A contemporary commented about the general situation: "The quantitative side is staggering. The future historian will record how, throughout one of the bloodiest and most brutal revolutions, all of Russia was acting."[19] And according to the author Viktor Shklovskii, "drama circles are propagating like protozoa . . . all Russia is acting; some kind of elemental process is taking place where the living fabric of life is being transformed into the theatrical."[20]

The reenactment of the Revolution in the precise place of the original events brought the past into the present directly. When the audience-as-mass was drawn mimetically into the performance in a lived repetition of the "act" of revolution, the spontaneity of this street euphoria threatened a breakdown of control that understandably made the authorities nervous. This mass theater staged not only the revolution, but the *staging* of revolution, with all the ambiguous relations to power that such political theater implies. A mass of citizens, by reenacting the revolutionary overthrow that is the legitimating moment of present power, disrupts the sequence of history and exposes the contradictory logic of democratic sovereignty. Are the masses the source of political sovereignty or its instrument? Does revolutionary sovereignty work in collusion with historicism in relegating the revolution to the "once upon a time" of the past? Is this an attempt to insure that, once the revolutionary event has occurred, it is over in more than a temporal sense? Can revolution have any other time but the present?

The Bolshevik response to mass spontaneity was to assert sovereign control. Lunacharskii stated his approval of mass festivals in the tradition of the French Revolution, but he echoed Lenin's concern for limiting the spontaneity of these celebrations. Discipline from the outside was necessary, he wrote, because the mass of the people "lacked its own peculiar instinctive obedience to a higher order and rhythm; it was impossible to expect more from it than joyous clamor and the colorful surging of festively dressed

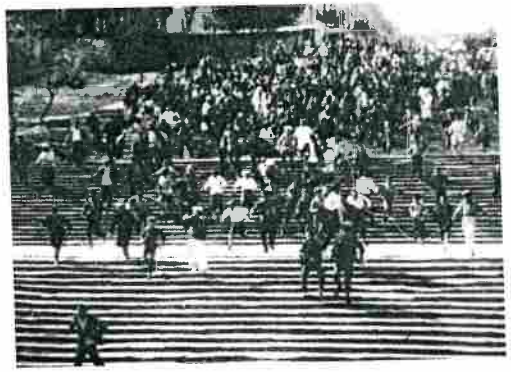
4.13 Kliment Redko, *Uprising*, 1924–1925.

people."[21] He described two means by which this ordering "rhythm" might be achieved, military command and cinema direction. Strikingly, he treated these two as one:

> *Those art forms that have arisen only recently as, for example, the cinema or rhythmics, can be used with very great effect. It is ridiculous to enlarge upon the propaganda and agitational strength of the cinema—it is obvious to anyone. And just think what character our festive occasions will take on when, by means of General Military Instruction, we create rhythmically moving masses embracing thousands and tens of thousands of people—and not just a crowd, but a strictly regulated, collective, peaceful army sincerely possessed by one definite idea.*[22]

With cinema in mind, the directors of the 1920 street theater version of *Storming of the Winter Palace* treated the palace as a "gigantic actor," producing ingeniously from its architectural form the rhythmic effect of montage. The idea was to present

4.14 Hundreds of dead bodies of workers shot down by the police. Still from Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (USSR, 1924).



4.15 Scene of the Odessa steps. Still from Sergei Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin* (USSR, 1925). "The immense sweep of the rising Odessa steps fills the screen . . . crowded with civilians rushing down the stairs to escape from the troops above."[23]

4.16 Police fire on demonstrators during the July Days, 1917. Still from Sergei Eisenstein, *October* (USSR, 1927). "People rushed out of every crevice. . . . Ever new masses poured across the square."[24]

the scenes as sequential "shots" in the palace window frames: "Each one of the fifty windows of the first floor will in turn show a moment of the development of the battle inside. . . . In the form of silhouetted groups, pieces of the immense action will light up and vanish in the darkness."[25]

If the directors of this mass production adapted cinema techniques to the old form of street theater, the next step was for cinema to replace the form of street theater itself. The revolution-as-spectacle was superseded by the virtual reality of the revolution filmed. Sergei Eisenstein was the great director of the crowd and the great controller of its rhythms through montage, showing "the mass" as the heroic protagonist of historical events.

■

It has been argued that "the mass" as a coherent visual phenomenon can only inhabit the simulated, indefinite space of the cinema screen.[26] Cinema creates an imagined space where a mass body exists that can exist nowhere else. "No reality could stand the intensity of the mass shown in cinema," writes the Russian philosopher Valerii Podoroga.[27] He describes Eisenstein's film images of the crowd of people as a composite form, a "protoplasmic being in the process of becoming," a "flow of violence" that fills the screen, with close-ups of faces overwhelmed by shock, extending the human countenance to the "limit of its expressivity."[28] Even more than the civil war newsreels of 1918–1921, Eisenstein's feature films—*Strike* (1924), *Potemkin* (1926), *October* (1927)—gave an experience of the mass that became the reference point for future meaning. At a time when Western directors were filming the crowd as a negative image,[29] Eisenstein glorified the mass as an organic force. In 1927 Walter Benjamin (to whom Podoroga is indebted) described Eisenstein's cinema mass as "architectonic" in character: "No other medium could transmit this turbulent collective."[30]

When later Soviet generations "remembered" the October Revolution, it was Eisenstein's images they had in mind.[31] The particular characteristics of the screen as a cognitive organ enabled audiences to see the materiality not only of this new collective protagonist, but also of other ideal entities: the unity of the revolutionary people, the idea of international solidarity, the idea of the Soviet Union itself. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the Soviet experience would have been possible without cinema, and Lenin turned out to be more right than he could have anticipated when he called cinema, of all the arts, "for us" the most important.[32] Soviet collective identity, like the revolutionary mass, was a phenomenon that needed the cinema world to be perceived. Vertov's *A Sixth of the World* (1926), which synthesized old newsreels and new material, was commissioned by Gorstog (the Government Trade Agency) for international

circulation,[33] but its impact was greatest within the Soviet Union, where it gave a simulated immanence to the idea of "socialism in one country" by introducing a pleased public to the myriad of ethnic types as the new Soviet "we."

The Soviet Union as simulacrum! But it was not alone. Precisely in the same period, the United States, laden with new immigrants, was promoting a melting-pot ideology that relied on the silent cinema as it could rely on no other cultural institution. Churches, theaters, schools, holiday rituals, political organizations all embodied specific linguistic and ethnic traditions that worked against this goal. In contrast, Hollywood movies that screened *out* the past became a cultural force for mass assimilation. In John Ford's film *The Iron Horse* (1925) the building of the transcontinental railroad symbolized national unity among the Polish, Chinese, and Italian workers who "can put aside labor conflict for the great opportunities of industrial America."[34] Not only cinema but mass culture generally had a positive meaning in both the United States and the Soviet Union that it lacked in the ethnically constructed imaginaries of Western European nations, where "masses," a visual phenomenon, and "culture," a literary one, tended to be viewed as antithetical extremes. For the USSR, it was being part of the same historical struggle that created the unity of the masses. For the United States, it was being part of the same territorial space. But for both, with increasing technical realism, the cinematic prosthesis shaped political identifications.

Hollywood created a new mass figure, the individualized composite of the "star." It can be argued that, like Eisenstein's protoplasmic mass, this new being could only exist in the super-space of the cinema screen. The star, quintessentially female, was a sublime and simulated corporeality. Close-ups of parts of her body—mouth, eyes, legs, heaving breast—filled the screen in monstrous proportions. She was an awesome aesthetic spectacle, like a huge church icon, surrounded by the symbolic clutter of the objects of conspicuous consumption.[35] The Hollywood star, with a new, nonethnic name, with rhinoplastic surgery on the nose and orthodontic surgery on the teeth, fulfilled her mass function by obliterating the idiosyncratic irregularities of the natural body. The star was a product for mass consumption whose multiplying image guaranteed the infinite reproduction of the same. The deeper the camera penetrated, the more it gave back a universal visage, whose features (like those of Eisenstein's crowd) became surface, ornamental lines and contours on the screen. Of course, a true star had to have a particular, identifiable "look." But this was the opposite of the accidental luminescent quality of the natural face. It was a standardized image, a cliché that, like an advertising logo, was instantly identifiable. This mark of "presence" did not refer to the individual, actual person. Rather, the star's body was itself a sign, and its meaning was erotic sexuality. If the Soviet screen provided a prosthetic experience of collective power, the Hollywood screen provided a prosthetic experience of collective desire.

In Hollywood movies, class movement meant social mobility, the revolution wa sexual, the decisive events were marriage and divorce. But the star was as much an in digenous inhabitant of the cinema screen as the revolutionary mass. Both, as simulacri corporealities, were given as an object of cognition only on the surface of the screen reflecting back to the viewing audience a perception of the mass-as-image which i internalized. The crowd in a movie theater not only experienced the masses; it had mass experience. The movie audience, more than an assembly of individual viewers was *one* viewer, infinitely reproduced. The potential power of this mass viewer wa enormous, but so was the potential for its manipulation. With cinema as with othe media, the means of social control was not organizational but mimetic. In the Sovie Union and in the United States, a certain doubling of the image world occurred as so cial life rematerialized cinema's virtual forms. Phenomena that at first existed only a images (on the cinema screen, in advertisements, in propaganda posters) began to im pinge on reality, a development with important political consequences.

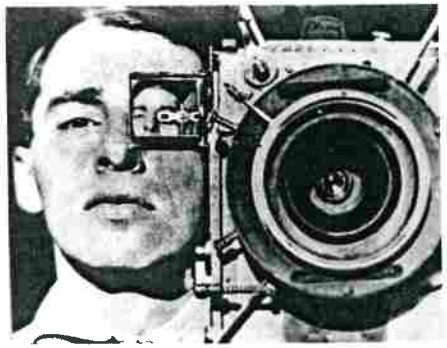
It is enlightening to compare the construction of Hollywood, "Home of th Stars," with the construction of the super-projects of socialism in the time of Stalin In both cases there was an attempt to create a material environment whose larger than-life proportions would allow the new super-bodies to move in and take up res idence. Hollywood's movie stars and Eisenstein's movie masses begin to leave traces ir reality, as signs that these phantasmagoric forms in fact exist: the stars leave their hand prints on Hollywood's sidewalk cement; the revolutionary mass haunts the expansiv boulevards of Soviet cities. The individual can feel lost in these heroic stage sets. Thei larger-than-life proportions make actually lived reality appear impoverished in com parison. The Soviet citizen, like the Western man in the crowd, is exposed to a spe cifically modern anxiety of the meaninglessness of the individual that leads tc enthusiastic endorsing of this process of doubling.

If the collective imaginaries of both capitalism and socialism are virtual worlds making them real becomes the social project. But the fact that this project is the dou bling of a dream image lends to its material construction a phantasmagoric quality Movie stars had Hollywood homes, but Mr. and Mrs. America too were promised a dream house which, despite its mass production, was studded with superficial luxuries and signs of distinction meant to confer specialness onto its fungible inhabitants. Under Stalin the fantasy of the mass body influenced social projects to the point that enormity of size became the overarching criterion of construction, whether of a factory or a collective farm, a university or a subway system, a hydroelectric project or a canal system. This awesome hugeness was reincorporated within the sublime body of the leader, the gigantically proportioned image of Stalin himself.

"Doubling" duplicated virtual realities as material phantasmagorias that could be really experienced. This gave a special dream character to industrial production in the case of the USSR, and to commodity consumption in the case of the United States. It was when existence was just like the movies, just like the advertising or propaganda image, that one felt truly alive.

4.17 Leonid Sokov, *Stalin and Marilyn Monroe,* 1992.
(color plate 5)

Phantasmagoric doubling: "When Stalin emerged, all we could do was scream with joy. . . . I lift my hand for the Constitution and Stalin lifts his hand for it. What happiness there is, comrades. Honestly, I feel like I am eighteen years old."[36] (Woman worker, delegate to the Congress of Soviets, December 1936.)



4.18 Mikhail Kaufman, cameraman for *Man with a Movie Camera,* directed by Dziga Vertov (USSR, 1929).

4.2

Aesthetics of the Surface

In articles written in 1925–1926, Malevich criticized Russian filmmakers for giving way on the revolutionary artistic goal of leaving representation behind. "Images triumph on the screen," he wrote scoffingly of what he saw as the tendency even among avant-garde directors of treating camera stills as oil paintings, pictures of something.[37] The film surface, he argued, should itself be the content of cinema. His foray into filmmaking with Hans Richter in 1927 put this theory into practice.[38] Black forms moved on a white background, suggesting nothing so much as the movie version of his own suprematist paintings. In 1929, when Malevich had already made his surprising return to representational painting, Dziga Vertov produced *Man with a Movie Camera,* a tour-de-force of cinematic technique. *Man with a Movie Camera* celebrated the productive process of filmmaking as a form of epistemological experimentation, in ways that still have power to challenge cognitive conventions in our time. The film demonstrates the full range of technical possibilities of the camera, which itself plays the leading role, allowing the audience to learn about moviemaking from the position of expertise of the cameraman. In contrast, Malevich's interest in an abstract aesthetics of the surface connects him, surely against his intent, to a very different tradition of films and photographs that treat the mass as geometric pattern of the surface.

Although there was little left to accident in the shooting of Eisenstein movies, the amorphous flows of his silent-film cinema-masses gave the impression of spontaneity even when they were carefully rehearsed. But in the 1930s, when sound films

4.19 "Training." From Aleksei Gastev, *Kak nado rabotat'* (How to Work), 1922.

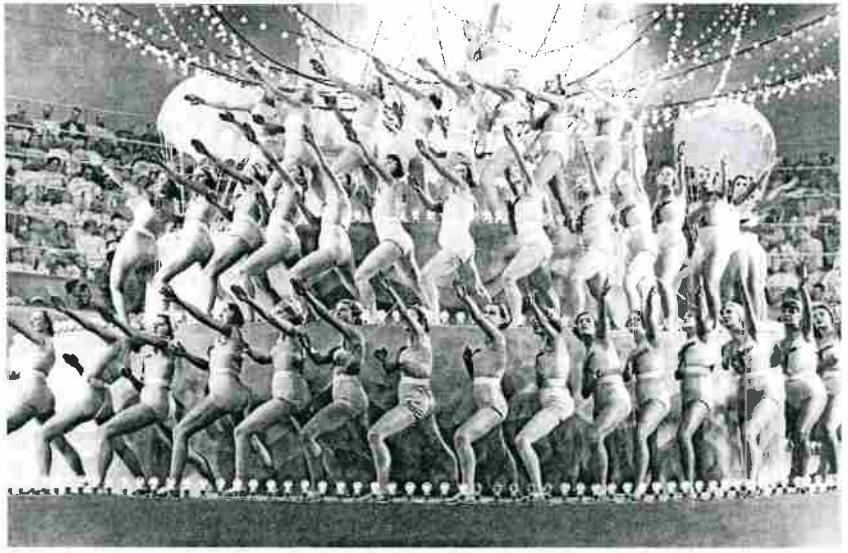
4.20 Tiller Girls, Berlin, Weimar period (1920s).

used music to provide the organizing rhythms, the masses danced onto the screen surface as an animated, formal design. This choreography of the mass as "ornament," to use Siegfried Kracauer's felicitous phrase, originated in the capitalist West, where it was standard practice on the vaudeville stage. Kracauer believed that the precisely ordered, repetitive moves of the chorus line (his example, in a 1927 article, was the Berlin Tiller Girls) could be deciphered as an image of the epoch: their performance was a mimetic replication—"similarly become flesh"[39]—of the modern assembly line. The Tiller Girls' legs corresponded to the workers' hands in the Taylorist production process.

The mass ornament was politically promiscuous, having no particular party allegiance. In 1933, the right-wing German author Ernst Jünger wrote the introduction to a book of photographs in which the patterns of city streets and tractor-plowed furrows form a surface ornament of abstract orderliness that is the hallmark of instrumental technology. That same year, Busby Berkeley's musical number "Remember My Forgotten Man," choreographed for the Hollywood film *The Gold Diggers of 1933,* used a similarly abstract aesthetics, composed this time of the human body, to lend visual support to a real political event. It was the "Bonus March" of 1932, when a mass of unemployed veterans came to Washington and squatted in a tent village in order to protest against the federal government's inactivity in addressing the hardships for the working class caused by economic depression.[40] In 1936 Leni Riefenstahl captured, in her visually powerful pseudo-documentary *Triumph of the Will,* the aesthetics of the surface of Hitler's mass rally of German fascists in Nuremberg, staged by the Führer as a media event. But this year also saw the release of Grigorii Aleksandrov's *The Circus,* the enormously popular Soviet musical that used a mass-ornamental musical number at the climax of the story of an American circus performer, Marion Dixon, who, persecuted in her own country because she has an interracial child, runs away to join the Russian circus.[41] Here, among the multiethnic audience, she finds acceptance for the baby and herself. It is clear that Aleksandrov, like most Soviet film directors in the 1930s, had Busby Berkeley in mind for this work. And yet the tableau vivant of the mass as ornament had a specifically Bolshevik precursor as well. It had been scripted into the earliest spectacle celebrations of the October Revolution.

Pro-Berkeley commentators have struggled valiantly to separate the mass ornaments composed by this master craftsman of Hollywood musicals from all the rest. Whereas totalitarian variants celebrated the mass as such, Berkeley's musical numbers are said to rescue the individual, who is submerged within the crowd only to appear again.[42] Perhaps more significant in determining the political effect is the fact (it connects him with Vertov) that Berkeley's camera provides a systematic interruption of the dance portrayed. Through the montage of paradoxical points of view and image proportions, as well as the timing of shots, the filmic rhythm supports a counterdance to

4.21 "Remember My Forgotten Man," choreography by Busby Berkeley, from *Gold Diggers of 1933* (USA, 1933).



4.22 Grigorii Aleksandrov, *The Circus* (USSR, 1936).

4.23 "Apotheosis of the Fraternity between Peasants, Workers, and Soldiers," anonymous, 1918.

the one performed, allowing the viewer two experiences of time and space, one representational and one purely cinematic. The latter makes us aware of the process by which the illusions of the former are produced, hence undercutting its phantasmagoric effects. The fact that one can also discover this use of the camera in Aleksandrov's *Circus* is not the point, which is rather that any attempt to make clear distinctions between Soviet, fascist, and Hollywood cinema must close its eyes to the fact, as important as any other at the time, that the "culture" of cinema had a life of its own regardless of political regimes.

■

Cinema was born mute. Its first language was gestural. The propagation of silent film relied on mimetic appropriations, and these occurred remarkably easily across national boundaries. People who made movies shared a passion. People who watched movies shared an experience—including directors who learned internationally from each other, producing what Miriam Hansen has called the first "global vernacular" of modern experience.[43] The world of cinema was a real space as well as a virtual one. Films

could be shipped abroad, they could be stopped at borders, but their gestural language defied the barrier of spoken words. American films began to dominate Russian screen even before the Revolution, a trend that continued throughout the period of NEP. The Soviet film pioneer Lev Kuleshov admitted to being infected with "Americanitis," and he was not alone.[44] Hansen describes the increasing "American accent" in Soviet film work generally in the 1920s: faster cutting rate, closer framing, breakdown of diegetic space: "Hyperbolically speaking, one might say that Russian cinema became Soviet cinema by going through a process of Americanization."[45]

"Americanitis" among filmmakers was not limited to technique. Under the influence of Hollywood, Soviet films veered away from "art" as the model and, like their capitalist counterparts, strove to become popular. Iakov Protazanov returned from years of emigration in the West to produce Aleksei Tolstoi's *Aelita* (1924), a science fiction fantasy that combined Western cinematic sensibilities with suprematist costume designs. It tells the story of a Soviet space expedition that incites a revolution against tyrants on Mars and returns to earth via a splashdown in Lake Michigan, complete with a love interest between the Martian princess (Aelita) and a Soviet engineer (who may have been dreaming the fantasy all along).[46]

In the 1920s, the Soviet actress Nina Lee received Soviet acclaim as "the Russian Mary Pickford." Pickford herself visited enthusiastic fans in Moscow in 1926, providing the occasion for the filming of a Soviet domestic production, *The Kiss of Mary Pickford*.[47] She came with Douglas Fairbanks, already famous in the Soviet Union for adventure movies like *Son of Zorro* (1925) and *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924). The latter film filled Moscow's largest (1,000-seat) theater for months, and was ranked in a 1928 survey of Soviet audiences as fifth among their ten all-time favorites.[48]

Up until the First Five Year Plan, foreign films accounted yearly for well over half of total box office grosses in the Soviet Union.[49] It was the Soviet film industry's conscious and successful policy to reverse the logic of import substitution: rather than protecting domestic production from for-

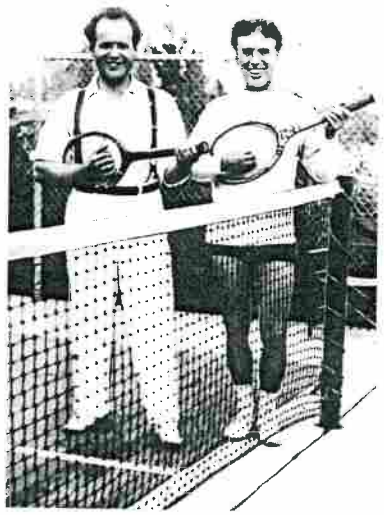
4.24 Poster for 1929 Russian screening of *Son of Zorro* with Douglas Fairbanks (USA, 1925).

eign competition, the box office revenues from foreign films were used to build a financial base for an autarchic domestic industry.[50] By the 1930s, foreign films shown in the Soviet Union had dwindled to a very few (all of them previewed personally by Stalin).[51] The need to continue drawing large audiences to keep the industry going financially, however, meant that conscious mimicking of Western moviemaking became if anything more pronounced. The 1934 box office success *Chapaev* (by Vasiliev and Vasiliev), a brilliantly filmed story about fighting the White Russians in the Civil War, was artistically superior to most Hollywood versions of "cowboys and Indians," the U.S. genre of foundational fiction, but it was still an action film about nation-building heroes, in which good triumphs violently over bad.[52] Aleksandr Medvedkin's *Happiness* (1935), often compared with Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), was a satirical comedy that pokes fun at the modernizing process including collectivization: the newly collectivized peasant-hero, missing the point, dreams hopefully of owning his own barn and horse.[53]

■

If Hollywood influenced Soviet filmmaking, it was the Soviet avant-garde that had an impact on cinema in the West. Eisenstein's *Potemkin* was shown in Paris at the 1926 International Exposition, where it received more acclaim than it had in his own country, influencing not only the work of French directors Jean Epstein and René Claire but also Hollywood productions.[54] Eisenstein's extended travel in 1929–1932 to Europe, the United States, and Mexico made him the most widely interviewed and cited Soviet director in the West—despite the hostility shown to him by both French and U.S. government authorities.[55] Political suspicion was behind the cancellation of Eisenstein's contract with Paramount to make a film version in Hollywood of Theodore Dreiser's novel *An American Tragedy*.[56] Anti-Communist groups demanded that the U.S. government expel Eisenstein. At the same time, ironically, Stalin notified Upton Sinclair (who was a financial backer of Eisenstein in Hollywood) that he suspected the filmmaker was disloyal to the Soviet regime and intended to defect.[57] The footage shot by Eisenstein on location for *Qué Viva México!* was reclaimed by his Western backers (including Sinclair), so that in the end Eisenstein produced nothing in the West. But the sense of a shared moviemaking community was established nonetheless, a fact that fanned the paranoiac fires of Congressional investigations into Hollywood's "Red plot" in 1947 and the early 1950s—the U.S. version of political purges against cultural subversives.[58]

While Eisenstein resumed work in Moscow in 1932 under a shadow of suspicion, the organizational chief of Soiuzkino (Soviet Cinema), Boris Shumiatskii, was planning



4.25 Charlie Chaplin and Sergei Eisenstein in Hollywood, 1930.

a reconnaissance trip of his own to the West, as head of a commission charged by Stalin with examining the nuts and bolts of the Hollywood entertainment industry. In his book *A Cinema for the Millions* (1935), Shumiatskii criticized the "art films" of the Soviet avant-garde as "typically bourgeois" in their continuation of the "blind alley of prerevolutionary cinema," and attacked their "overvaluation of montage" for leading to an "isolation of aesthetics from politics."[59] He considered their depiction of the masses as protagonist to be ill-conceived, based on the "petit-bourgeois notion of equality."[60] (In 1937 he intervened to stop the shooting of Eisenstein's *Bezhin Meadow* for indulging in "harmful Formalist exercises.")[61] Shumiatskii considered Hollywood a model far more relevant for socialist realism than the experiments of the avant-garde, praising it for its desire to produce "joyful spectacles" accessible to the masses and its realistic style of conventional narrative, including the *khepi end* (happy ending). He appreciated the preponderance of positive heroes, approved of the star system which depended on professional actors, and praised Hollywood's efficient factory-like production methods and centralized studio organization.[62] In the summer of 1935 Shumiatskii's commission visited Paris, New York, Rochester (the Kodak company headquarters), Hollywood, and (Fascist) Berlin in order to study Western film production. The commission launched a programmatic attempt to revitalize Soviet cinema in the late 1930s, including as the focal point the building of a Soviet Hollywood (*sovetskii Gollivud*) in the Crimea, where the climate was warm enough for outdoor shooting and the scenery resembled that of southern California. Shumiatskii projected production figures of Soviet films in numbers comparable to Hollywood's, with rapid increases from 200 to 800 per year. But in fact production numbers fell in the Soviet Union, and even finished films were discarded as "ideological rejects." In 1935, of 130 films planned 45 were completed; in 1937, of 62 films planned only 24 were released to the public.[63] Shumaiatskii was denounced in the party press for sabotaging the Soviet film industry. In 1938 he was arrested and shot. The construction of a Cine-City in the Crimea never went beyond the planning stage.[64]

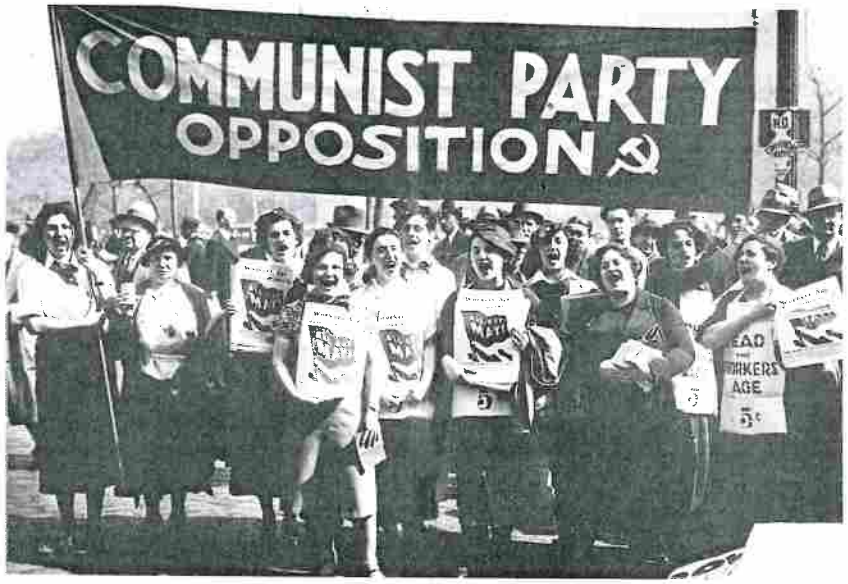
4.26 Liubov Orlova, who played Marion Dixon in *The Circus*.

4.27 Mae West in *Belle of the Nineties* (USA, 1935).

Both Hollywood and Soviet cinema in the 1930s were mass entertainment. litically, both affirmed official culture and denied certain bleak realities of social de opment. But when one considers the athletic builds of the female mass ornament *Circus* (1936), or compares its star Liubov Orlova to her Hollywood counterparts, example Mae West in *Belle of the Nineties* (1935), it is clear that the erotics of attract were differently produced.[65] There is nothing seductively languid in the Russian s representation, which is more about theatricality than sexuality. Orlova's vital ene is productive rather than consuming, suggesting a very different economy of des The American public was as hero-needy as the Soviet public in the 1930s, but whe the personal feats of Soviet heroes—the aviator-explorers who were "Stalin's falco for example—were officially sponsored and performed for the glory of the collect those structuring the imagination of U.S. mass culture were loners—the aviation p neer Charles Lindbergh, the movie character Superman—figures whose individu ized power benefited society from outside of the conforming mass, although they w no more capable of challenging the social order than their Soviet counterparts.[66]

Images circulate within a specific context. They are "framed," first by the pho graphic or cinematic medium itself, and then by the socio-historical context in wh they are shown.[67] The former is fixed; the latter constantly changes. Both are neces ily implicated in the truth of the image, not just (and not primarily) as it existed in past, but also as it survives in the present. The image is thus subject to a third frame, narrative structure that connects the past to the present. Typically, the parameters of structure are policed by the academic disciplines of the humanities, the narrative g res of which cordon off specialized areas of the past (social history, art history, hist of technology, etc.) in ways that produce blindness as to their connections with e other. It is this third frame, institutionalized in the universities, that so often obscu the present political significance of the cultural inheritance.

Because framing counts, we need to know that photographs of machine parts Rodchenko, familiar in our time from gallery shows where they hang like so many stract designs, were originally published in workers' newspapers where they pictu the site of the readers' daily labor. We need to juxtapose Eisenstein's eroticized, utop celebration of machine cultivation and peasant collectivization in the cinema cla *Old and New* (1929) with the world into which it was released, when the brutal p cess of dekulakization was beginning in earnest.[68] And we need to ask what was behi Margaret Bourke-White's caption for the photograph in her book *Eyes on Ru* (1931) that reads: "An American Disc-Harrow."[69] What is a U.S.-made tractor doing the center of attention in this photojournalist's documentation of the second larg state farm in the Soviet Union?



4.28 May Day celebration, Union Square, New York City, 1936.

4.29 Aleksandr Rodchenko's photograph in a story on the AMO automobile factory, published in *Daesh'* (Forward), 1929. Rodchenko's photographs are framed by short texts by factory-based "worker-correspondents" (nonprofessional journalists) describing the production process.[70]

4.30 Margaret Bourke-White, *An American Disc-Harrow,* 1930, photo taken at the Verblud State Farm in southern Russia. The 272,000-acre farm was devoted mainly to wheat production and included an experimental station and agricultural school. One of its organizers was George McDowell, an American farmer from Kansas who was the first U.S. citizen to receive the Order of Lenin.

SOVIET INDUSTRY GETS AMERICAN AID

Contracts Involving Millions With Industry Here Are Disclosed.

FORD COOPERATION LAUDED

Details of Soviet contracts with more than fifteen American concerns, involving millions of dollars, were made public yesterday in a joint statement issued by Valery I. Meshlauk, vice chairman of the Supreme Economic Council of the Soviet Union, and Saul G. Bron, chairman of the board of the Amtorg Trading Corporation, 261 Fifth Avenue.

Among the outstanding of these contracts is the one with the Ford Motor Company, signed at Dearborn, Mich., last Friday, at which time it was announced that this agreement calls for the purchase of $30,000,000 worth of Ford cars and parts by the Russian interests within the next four years. The other contracts call for designing of plants, technical assistance and exchange of patents.

The statement issued yesterday at the offices of the Amtorg Trading Corporation which was one of the parties to Ford Motor Company contract, said that "it is significant that American engineering skill is being utilized on many of the principal Soviet industrial projects now under way."

The I
term c
technic
Ford M
Automc
after ti
Nizhni-
to be
years,
nally
This pl
than pa

The s
Soviet
cars "
vanced
large
stateme
that th
quate
year $
priated
Soviet
Other
with th
high l
sulting

52

4.31 From the *New York Times*, June 4, 1929.

4.3

A Cosmopolitan Project

At the start of the First Five Year Plan, Soviet engineers came to visit Albert Kahn Co., Inc., of Detroit, the famous industrial architects who had built Henry Ford's River Rouge plant as well as factories for General Motors, Packard, Oldsmobile, Chrysler, and De Soto.

> *It was in 1928 . . . [that] the most extraordinary commission ever given an architect came in the door unannounced. In that year a group of engineers from the U.S.S.R. came to the Kahn office with an order for a $40,000,000 tractor plant [at Chelyabinsk], and an outline of a program for an additional two billion dollars' worth of buildings. About a dozen of these factories were done in Detroit; the rest were handled in a special office with 1,500 draftsmen in Moscow.*[71]

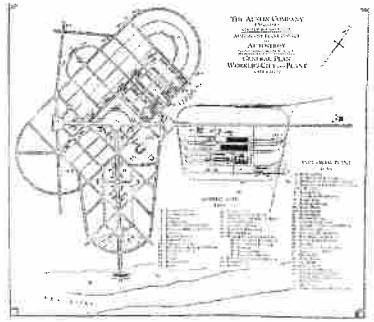
According to Anthony Sutton, the Cold War historian who documented this case, "The 'outline of a program' presented to the Kahn organization in 1928 was nothing

less than the First and Second Five-Year Plans of 'socialist construction'."[72] In authorizing this act of extreme cosmopolitanism, Stalin envisioned a U.S. capitalist firm as designer of Soviet socialist industrialization.[73]

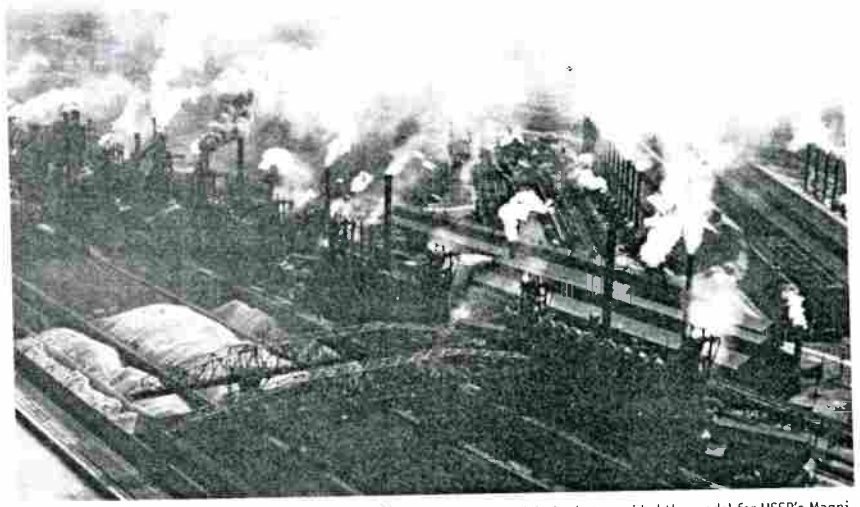
A factory to produce Fordson tractors was prefabricated in Detroit by the Albert Kahn Company and shipped to Stalingrad in 1929, where it was assembled under the direction of American engineers.[74] A contract "under which the Kahn Company became consulting architects to the Soviet Union" was signed in early 1930.[75] "The Kahn group undertook design, architectural, and engineering work for all heavy and light industrial units projected by Gosplan. Kahn's chief engineer in the U.S.S.R., Scrymgoeur, was chairman of the Vesenkha building committee."[76] Scrymgoeur wrote:

> *The Albert Kahn unit was engaged to control, teach and design all light and heavy industry. . . . By the end of the second year we controlled in Moscow, and from Moscow branches in Leningrad, Kharkov, Kiev, Dniepropetrovsk, Odessa, Sverdlovsk and Novo-Sibirsk 3,000 designers and completed the design of buildings costing (these are Soviet figures) 417 million rubles.*[77]

The Soviets seem to have taken advantage of competitive bidding, however, and the Albert Kahn Company did not retain a monopoly. Henry Ford, already a figure of heroic proportions in the Soviet Union, was included in the Soviet plan, given six months to design an assembly line for the Gorky Auto Plant to be built at Nizhni Novgorod.[78] The agreement, signed on May 31, 1929, was for Ford to furnish technical assistance (until 1938) for the plant, which was to be completed by 1933 and which would produce the Model A (called by the Soviets Gaz-A), the Ford light truck (Gaz-AA), and the heavy truck (AMO-3). Soviet engineers were to be provided facilities at the River Rouge factory for the study of Ford production methods.[79] In the economically depressed years of the early 1930s, U.S. firms and personnel were grateful for the Soviet business.[80] "Ford was happy to sell $30 million worth of parts and throw in invaluable technical assistance for nothing. Technical assistance in production of axles, tires, bearings, and other items required payment but, as the marginal cost to American companies was



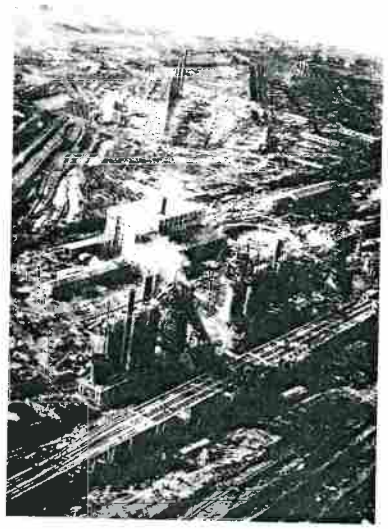
4.32 General plan for Worker's City and plant, Autostroi, Nizhni Novgorod, prepared by the Austin Company under technical assistance contract of August 1929.



4.33 Steel plant at Gary, Indiana (construction begun in 1906 by Freyn and Co.), that provided the model for USSR's Magnitostroi. Photo ca. 1950.

slight, the Soviets reaped a gigantic harvest of technological knowhow for almost no outlay."[81] The Austin Company of Cleveland designed not only the plant at Nizhni Novgorod but the "Worker's City" that surrounded it, complete with community housing, nursery, public bath, Palace of Culture, and crematorium.[82]

> *In mid-1929 the A. J. Brandt Company of Detroit undertook an extensive two-year reorganization and expansion of Amo [the automobile plant in Moscow]. . . . The production equipment was entirely American and German. In late 1929 Amtorg [the Soviet trade organization in New York] placed an order on behalf of Amo with the Toledo Machine and Tool Company for $600,000 of cold-stamping presses. In 1932 an order was placed with Greenless Company of Rockford, Illinois for multi-cylinder lathes. In 1936 a second technical-assistance agreement was concluded for Amo with the Budd Manufacturing Company of Philadelphia and the Hamilton Foundry and Machine Company of Ohio to produce 210,000 chassis and bodies per year for a new ZIS-model automobile.*[83]



4.34 Steel mills at Magnitostroi under construction by Arthur McKee and Co. Photo ca. 1930.

The technology transfer included traine personnel high up in the Soviet econom administration: "Soyuzstroi [the All-Unic Construction Trust] had responsibility f about one-quarter of new construction [i the Soviet Union] until 1933 when was broken into smaller units attached t individual combinats. The Director Soyuzstroi was Sergei Nemets, formerly a engineer with the Philadelphia construc tion company of Stone and Webster, In The Chief Engineer of Soyuzstroi was Zar Witkin, whose early projects included th Hollywood Bowl and several large Los An geles hotels."[84]

Even the Soviet "Dream City" c Magnitogorsk was built according to de sign specifications created in the Unite States and supervised by a team of Ameri can engineers.[85] In March 1930, Arthu McKee and Co. of Cleveland won the foreign bid to turn the building site at Magni togorsk, an iron lode in the middle of an empty steppe in southern Russia, into th largest mining-energy-chemical-metallurgical complex in the world. It was to b modeled after the U.S. Steel Company's plant in Gary, Indiana, an integrated desig that provided a linear flow from raw materials to finished products.[86]

> *McKee undertook to design the entire steel plant, including all auxiliary shops and the iron-ore mine . . . [and to be] responsible for directing work on the site until the factory and mine were put into operation, for consulting on equipment orders, for building an electric power station and a dam, and for training Soviet engineers both at the site and in the United States. The Soviet government agreed to pay McKee 2.5 million gold rubles.*[87]

The fact that the United States had no diplomatic relations with the USSR was an obstacle to doing business. Germany, which had recognized the Soviet Union and established trade relations with the Rapallo Treaty in 1922, continued to provide serious competition until Hitler came to power in 1933—not coincidentally the year that the United States finally granted recognition to the Soviet regime.[88]

Although design and layout during this period [1929–1932] was American, probably one-half of the equipment installed was German. Of this, a large amount was manufactured in Germany to American design on Soviet account. In quantity, American-built equipment was probably second and British third. . . . Cement mills were largely from one firm in Denmark, ball bearings from one firm in Italy and another in Sweden, small ships from Italy, and aluminum technology from a French company.[89]

Sutton concludes that "for the period from 1930 to 1945" Soviet technology *was* Western technology "converted to the metric system."[90] The fact that Stalin's First and Second Five Year Plans amounted to the largest technological transfer in Western capitalist history was not something that either side advertised, nor did they care to remember this collaboration during the Cold War years. Although part of the public record, it remained an embarrassment for both the United States and the Soviet Union as superpower enemies.

And there is more to the story.

■

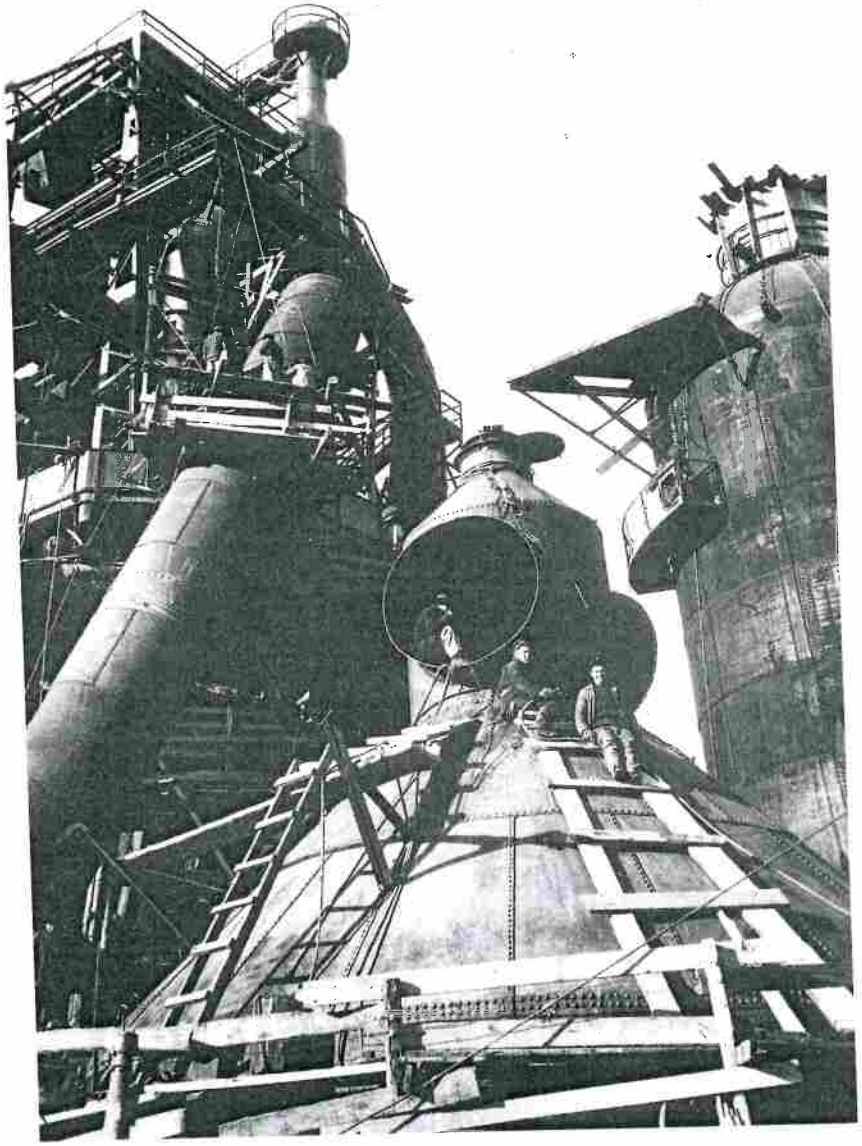
Payment for the technology transfer demanded hard currency. Soviet grain exports fell precipitously during the early 1930s, due to the intense famines caused by forced collectivization. The Soviet government found an alternative commodity in the European oil paintings and "household goods" of the aristocracy that had been confiscated after the October Revolution. In 1928 the Soviet government embarked on a major effort to sell Russian art abroad in order to gain hard currency to pay for the imports of the First Five Year Plan. The story of this extravagant international exchange was not documented until 1980. In the words of its historian, Robert Williams, "American buyers have been as reluctant to discuss their purchases as the Soviet government has been to discuss (or even admit) their sales."[91] Yet the Soviet decision was clearly made at the top: "Tractors were needed more than Titians, Fords more than Fabergé."[92] Millions of dollars' worth of masterpieces of art and thousands of tons of antiques—jewelry, icons, porcelain, rare book manuscripts, Easter eggs, silver, brocades—were sold abroad, and the largest buyers were U.S. citizens.[93]

In the twelve months between April 1930 and April 1931 alone, Andrew W. Mellon, Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, bought close to seven million dollars' worth of Hermitage paintings from the Soviet government, a figure that equals half of what the Soviet Union paid in hard currency for imports during that year and "roughly one third of the official total of Soviet exports to the United States in 1930."[94]

Included were two Renaissance masterpieces of Jan van Eyck, five Rembrandts, four Van Dycks, two Halses, as well as paintings by Botticelli, Chardin, Perugino, Poussin, Rubens, Titian, Velásquez, and, the most expensive purchase, Raphael's *Alba Madonna,* for which Mellon paid almost 1.7 million dollars, at the time the highest price ever paid for a single painting.[95] These purchases were kept secret, laundered through a complex web of American entrepreneurs and Soviet officials, at the heart of which were M. Knoedler & Company (art gallery and dealer) and Amtorg (the Soviet trade representative), both based in New York City.[96] Knoedler was owned by the entrepreneur Armand Hammer, whose pencil and asbestos factories in the Soviet Union were nationalized in 1930 but who, with his special Soviet connections, turned to selling Russian art objects through department stores in the United States, including, in January 1933, Lord and Taylor.[97]

Because the Soviet Union lacked diplomatic recognition in the United States, Amtorg, the delegation for the Commissariat of Foreign Trade, had to maintain the legal fiction of being a private corporation of the state of New York, where it was based.[98] As for the Secretary of the Treasury's part in the major deal, "for five long years there were only rumors of such a purchase and denials by Mellon."[99] According to his lawyer, "Mr. Mellon wanted to keep the thing a surprise until the right moment. It probably would not have been good politics for the Secretary of the Treasury to spend millions for rare paintings at a time when the government was swamped with unemployment, bank failures, and general distress."[100] The "right moment" was forced upon Mellon in 1935 when, for years suspected of a conflict of interest, he was charged by the Internal Revenue Service for failing to pay over three million dollars in taxes in 1931.[101] "At issue was the taxable status of Andrew Mellon's paintings [donated to his own charitable trust] which he claimed as a deduction on his 1931 income tax return."[102] Only after Mellon had written to President Roosevelt that he planned to bequeath his paintings to the government and offered to build a museum for them did the Board of Tax Appeals dismiss charges of tax fraud.[103] "In March 1937, five months before Andrew Mellon's death, President Roosevelt accepted his donation of this entire art collection and a National Gallery of Art in which to house it in the name of the American people."[104] With the opening of the National Gallery in Washington, the Hermitage paintings were once again on public display as "nationalized" property—this time on the other side, and in the capitalist manner.

The British art dealer Joseph Duveen, testifying at Mellon's trial, criticized the Soviet government for its policy, as a result of which "the Hermitage is no more the greatest collection in the world, it has gone to pieces. I do not see how a nation could sell their great pictures of that kind. . . . [Art objects] are not a commodity. You cannot buy a picture like you buy a load of copper or a tin mine."[105] From the Soviet side the



4.35 Margaret Bourke-White, *Magnitogorsk*, 1931.

4.36 Raphael, *Alba Madonna*, at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C.

The General Form of Value: Relative Design Costs
1 Raphael painting = ½ Magnitogorsk[106]

argument was not convincing. A Soviet museum curator was quoted as saying that such sales were a perfectly acceptable socialist method to "turn diamonds into tractors."[107] There was a strange poetic justice in this economic circuit. Mellon, who made an early fortune from steel mills in Pittsburgh, spent it on oil paintings the sale of which enabled construction of the steel mills at Magnitogorsk.[108] Thus the profits of capitalism (surplus value withheld from the wages of American workers) moved (via the Mellon family fortune) to finance (via the capitalist firm of McKee Construction Company) the building of technologically advanced socialist factories, an increase in what Marx called "constant capital" that in turn increased the value of Soviet labor. Meanwhile, in the counterdirection, cultural "treasures" that had been owned by the Russian aristocracy and nationalized by the Bolsheviks became (via Mellon's "philanthropic" cover-up of tax evasion) the property of the United States government—and the American public received socialized culture in the form of a national museum. How should this strange merging of supposedly antithetical systems be reckoned? What is the proper accounting, when the sale of one Raphael (at 1.7 million gold dollars)[109] buys more than half of the design of one Magnitogorsk (at 2.5 million gold rubles),[110] which translates into jobs for tens of thousands of Soviet workers, and the production (by 1938) of millions of tons of finished metal?[111] How does one make political sense out of an economic exchange whereby the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury uses his private millions to "build socialism" in Stalin's Russia—at the same time as the output of steel mills in the United States is falling precipitously due to a Great Depression that, to Stalin's delight, affects capitalism alone?[112] How does one square with ideological rhetoric the irony of the fact that pre-1929 production levels in the United States were not recovered until World War II when, to Stalin's surprise and against the intent of the Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact, the steel mills of Magnitogorsk and Pittsburgh, again at full throttle, found themselves producing weapon materials for the same warring side?