COM 321, Documentary Form in Film, Television, & Interactive Media

**Intertextuality and *The Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1929)**

Note Dziga Vertov’s saying, that he shot “Life caught unawares.”—True??

**Typical of Soviet Montage films, we see:**

“Kuleshov Effect”: each juxtaposition of 2+ disparate shots creates a new meaning (e.g., the juxtaposition of shots of train tracks, man’s legs on tracks, speeding train shot with a canted camera angle, all contribute to the perception of a man being run over); the inclusion of the actual film editor (Vertov’s wife, Yelizaveta Svilova) is important—she’s shown editing film, intercut with footage of women sewing.

**In addition to its clear Soviet Montage roots, the film seems to reference already-existing forms, techniques, and even specific films (i.e., intertextuality); this film seems to “document” the power of the filmic medium at that point in history:**

Muybridge: action freezes into stills... even a running horse is frozen in mid-stride!

Lumiere actualities: the train arrives... and “runs over” the cameraman!

Melies: a magician “appears” and takes a tarp off the carousel

Phantom ride films: at times, the camera speeds along on a vehicle

The City Symphony film: many sequences emulate this genre, with the city waking up, featuring machines without visible human operation, etc.

Quick cutting a la French film pioneer Abel Gance (e.g., *La Roue*, 1923): throughout (of course, this is also a hallmark of Soviet Montage)

Cubism (e.g., *Ballet Mecanique*, 1924): the sequence about coal, steel, etc.; also, use of open form (we don’t see a woman’s head at one point)

Early animators (e.g., J. Stuart Blackton, Winsor McCay): use of stop-motion, as in the sequence in which the camera mounts the tripod all by itself and walks around

Other manipulations of the medium that had already been shown: Film run backward (pigeons landing), film speeded up (women folding boxes, stuffing cigarettes into boxes), slomo (high jumpers), iris shot, rack focus, composite shots (ballet/piano)

Forced perspective, as demonstrated by Fritz Lang (*Siegfried, Metropolis*) and others: Man with the movie camera (i.e., Mikhail Kaufman) appears to be gigantic atop a building

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