

Vsevolod Pudovkin

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VSEVOLOD PUDOVKIN

Classic Films of the Soviet Avant-Garde

AMY SARGEANT

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Introduction

Vsevolod Illarionovich Pudovkin has fared comparatively and curiously badly in the annals of Soviet film history, in spite of the fame and reputation enjoyed by his major works of the 1920s and early 1930s, at home and abroad.

In spite of his artistic status but also, paradoxically, as a consequence of this popular success: as early as 1928 the avant-garde in Russia was accusing Pudovkin of betraying the principles which it had entrusted to him and of descending to outright commercialism; in the West, the indictment that Pudovkin had disappointed the hopes previously invested in him came later. According to Babitsky and Rimberg, 'Kuleshov never relinquished his artistic credo and always opposed the idea that the cinema should serve a narrow propaganda function, whereas Pudovkin devoted his great talent wholly to the service of the Party'.¹ Indeed, Pudovkin was judged and found wanting not only in particular films but also by the supposedly retrogressive trend which they announced to critics attached to a notion of a Soviet state productive of work that could be readily identified as revolutionary both in form and content. Winifred Ellerman (writing in the 1920s in Britain), Léon Moussinac (in France) and Vlada Petrić (reporting, in retrospect, American opinion of a similar date), recount that what was most valued artistically in Soviet film screened abroad was its divergence from the home-grown product, even to the extent that silent and black and white films from Russia were preferred by art-house audiences well into the 1930s.² Eugene Lyons, an American in Moscow, commented in 1935 that:

There is little question that Russia is in advance of Hollywood and most other places in the theory of film art, in strikingly original and

effective photography – above all, in making pictures socially significant rather than merely amusing and ornamental. But the general level of its picture output has been steadily declining instead of rising.³

At one stage Pudovkin's work appeared to embrace a new and promising trend, distinct from the mainstream Hollywood product; later it failed to satisfy the expectation that it would continue to change and failed to mark progress by differentiating itself clearly from precedent or in relation to whatever was happening elsewhere. Pudovkin's practice and especially his writing became increasingly conservative.

Pudovkin's oeuvre has similarly proved unwieldy and unrewarding to film historians determined to map consistent traces of current work and thinking in past practice and theory. This arguably modernist position tends also to estimate the available evidence in so far as it can be deemed to match, herald or approach current modes. Strangely, as the supposed Russian Griffith (an appellation suggested already by Eisenstein and a comparison made by Piotrovsky) Pudovkin has also been placed by his theoretical technique alongside the dominant Hollywood tradition, and then has equally been found not to sit comfortably in the place allotted to him. Certainly, much of Pudovkin's writing in the 1920s invites such a classification, and certainly his concern with clarity and economy of means is highly reminiscent of American technical manuals of the teens.⁴ Noël Burch has astutely observed a number of points at which this is contradicted in Pudovkin's concurrent film practice. Raymond Williams and Michael Orrom hint at a favourable and fruitful way of regarding this divergence, I think, when they conclude that inconsistencies in the spatial editing pattern 'appear to have been used deliberately'.⁵ It is the deliberateness with which such patterns are interrupted, the licence that Pudovkin allows himself and the particular choices that he makes in each individual case which continue to warrant his being considered experimental. Fundamentally, it seems to me, he is searching in each film to achieve a particular effect, to which end he may attempt something new or may resort to the tried and trusted (as codified in 1926 in *Kinostsenarii* and *Kinorezhisser i kinomaterial*); at best, Pudovkin's means are economical and purposeful.

Pudovkin himself has proved equally exasperating. Georges Sadoul's accusation of naïveté, made at a safe distance in time and space from

Stalin's dictatorship, is presumably prompted not only by his opinion of Pudovkin's collaboration with the regime, in his production of compliant films in which Sadoul found little artistic merit. Pudovkin acted also as something of an ambassador for his country; the artistic esteem in which the classic work of the 1920s stood later was opportunistically recognised by the Soviet authorities as endorsing Pudovkin's respectability and stature as their spokesman abroad, and he duly participated in peace congresses and cultural missions on their behalf. The British scientist Waddington met Pudovkin in 1951 and was amazed at his spirited defence of the biologist Lysenko, who was then regarded in the West as thoroughly disreputable and a charlatan.⁶ Ironically, although Pudovkin throughout the years voiced publicly his belief in artistic freedom, he was also quick to recognise and to establish himself in a politically expedient position. Certainly, Pudovkin was prepared to repudiate his previous preoccupations, formed in response to a discarded agenda, to denounce himself and the work of erstwhile colleagues. Pudovkin was consistently politically compliant, but the politics of the Soviet Union shifted such that communist and socialist correspondents in the West (such as Sadoul) found that their sympathies lay increasingly with those dissidents whose voices were silenced rather than with those who continued to work for the Soviet state.

The lack of ease with which Pudovkin can be accommodated may account for the partiality of treatment that his work has received: any sustained investigation on either front can but acknowledge the theoretically dissatisfying vicissitudes of the writing and the qualitative unevenness of the films. Monographs by Barthélémy Amengual, Stefano Masi and Guido Aristarco devote themselves to the exemplary works of Pudovkin's heroic period (*The Mother*, *The End of St. Petersburg* and *Storm over Asia*) as do Karaganov and Glagoleva.⁷ Iezuitov's biography of 1937 provides a good discussion of the work thus far and is the basis for Mariamov's 1951 publication, the prevailing tone of which is amply given by the 1954 German translation *Pudovkin: Kampf und Vollendung* [Pudovkin: Struggle and Achievement].⁸ Peter Dart (*Pudovkin's Films and Film Theory*, 1974) acknowledges Pudovkin's earlier apprenticeship with Vladimir Gardin but says nothing of the work itself, appends a translation from the later writings but gives little space to the later films. There are occasional references to both periods in the reminiscences collected together by Jean and Luda Schnitzer (*Poudovkine*, 1968), by Nina

Glagoleva (*Slovo o Pudovkine*, 1968) and by Tatiana Zapasnik and Adi Petrovich (*O sebe i svoikh fil'makh*, 1975 and *Pudovkin: v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, 1989).

My research has drawn upon these secondary materials, in addition to Pudovkin's own writings in books and journals. It is based upon material in VGIK (the State School of Cinematography), in Gosfilmofond, in the Muzei Kino, in RGALI (the Russian State Archive for Arts and Literature) and in the State Library (formerly Lenin Library, Moscow). The journals consulted actively endeavoured to construct debates around particular themes: discussion of *The Mechanics of the Brain*, in *Sovetskoe kino* 1, is accompanied by items concerning similar scientific subjects; *Sovetskoe kino* 7, collects together reviews of Barnet's *Moscow in October*, Shub's *Ten Years*, Eisenstein's *October* and Pudovkin's *The End of St. Petersburg*. But, in contrast to Eisenstein, Pudovkin was increasingly unwilling to commit himself to a distinct theoretical position. In addition I have consulted various memoirs and articles written by his colleagues (Baranovskaia, Inkizhinov, Zarkhi and especially Golovnia) and Eisenstein's account of their differences of opinion. Much of Pudovkin's writing is theoretically not well considered. Pudovkin, unlike Eisenstein, seemingly was not a good apologist for his own work, nor is he comfortable with theoretical writing for its own sake. Pudovkin participates in current debates but rarely, unlike Eisenstein, initiates them himself. Pudovkin's contribution resides more in his films than in the commentary offered alongside them or in any theoretical explanation or interpretation volunteered. Regarding Pudovkin's writing as a whole it does not command the overall cohesion or articulation or intellectual scope of that of Eisenstein and has failed to attract similar extensive and rigorously probing subsequent engagement. Furthermore, Eisenstein can more readily be seen to adhere to avant-garde principles, consistently re-formulating a theory of montage, that which 1920s theory had estimated as the quintessence of film art. In contrast, Pudovkin becomes increasingly concerned with the art of acting, that which 1920s theory firmly consigned to the theatrical film-making of the past. However, it is my belief that his apparent renunciation, in theory, of avant-garde tenets was already presaged in his working practice. For Pudovkin, theory and theorising occupied a much less significant place in his practice and procedure than they did for Eisenstein; Pudovkin was more inclined to be pragmatic and utilitarian,

Eisenstein (even while denouncing it as idle indulgence in others) was given to idealistic speculation.

I am making a deliberate and pointed distinction here between Pudovkin's 'writings' and what may purport to be his 'theory' at any given time. One of the purposes of the following project is to investigate whether the writing does indeed ever constitute theory and, more generally, in the pursuit of this project, to question what criteria are thereby applied. I am concerned broadly with the place of Soviet cinema (Soviet and cinema) in a particular intellectual tradition and secondly with Pudovkin's immediate context, as both film-maker and commentator. The second chapter discusses *The Mechanics of the Brain* and the status of physiology before and after the Revolution. Discussion of *Storm over Asia (The Heir to Genghis Khan)* marks the extension to film of a scientific philosophy. The final chapter endeavours to summarise the bases of the supposed controversy between Eisenstein and Pudovkin, setting this in a climate of heated polemicising and questioning their respective use of scientific exemplars.

Pudovkin in Context

Until comparatively recently, Soviet cinema has been broached as a clearly defined 'school', conducted by a small number of monolithic directors, politically committed to the Revolution, producing canonical masterworks exemplifying well-honed tomes of written theory. Eisenstein and Pudovkin have been yoked together as 'revolutionary' film-makers by dint of their historical coincidence, at the expense of further discussion of the disagreements documented by Eisenstein himself (see chapter eight, below) and by well-informed contemporaries (such as Meyerhold) and by later biographers (such as Marie Seton).⁹ Nor has there been much negotiation of the particular relevance of the term 'revolutionary'. Grierson reiterates the familiar comparison of Pudovkin with Griffith, saying that, stylistically, he was no revolutionary at all.¹⁰ Peter Kenez doubts the suitability of the appellation, given their adherence to and conformity with the aspirations of the new regime;¹¹ Renato Poggioli doubts that such an association can ever be more than provisional:

... every avant-garde movement, in one of its phases at least, aspires to realise ... the ideal of 'tabula rasa' which spilled over from the

individual and artistic level to that of the collective life. There is the reason why the coinciding of the ideology of a given avant-garde movement and a given political party is only fleeting and contingent ... identification of artistic revolution with social revolution is now no more than rhetorical ... Sometimes it may, though ephemeral, be sincere, a sentimental illusion ... more often we are dealing with an extremist pose or fashion.¹²

This complacent, generalising, commonplace Western view of a Soviet avant-garde, as Brandon Taylor observes, extends across a range of artistic activity:

The revival of modernism in Britain and America in post-war years ... coincided with a hardening of attitudes towards the Soviet Union and posture of downright dismissal towards 'official' Soviet culture of the authoritarian years of Stalin's rule after 1932 ... until recently European and American scholars produced a flood of publications devoted to Soviet abstraction and 'modernism', linked to utopian interpretations of the events of 1917.¹³

Boris Groys, from whom I am adopting the apparent oxymoron 'Classic Avant-Garde', offers a polemically revisionist thesis, countering the received wisdom of a Great Break in all Russian culture marked by the rise of Stalin:

The myth of the innocent avant-garde rests upon the view that totalitarian art of the 1930s and 1940s is a simple return to the past, a purely regressive reaction to the new art that was unintelligible to the masses ... I argue that the relevant distinctions arose not because the avant-garde project was abandoned but because it underwent a radicalisation that the avant-garde itself was unable to accomplish.¹⁴

But certainly, artists themselves (notably Mayakovsky) found a direct correlation between the vanguardism advocated by Lenin for the correct conduct of the revolution and the self-proclaiming avant-garde in art.¹⁵ Poggioli notes the tendency of modern art to 'express the avant-garde as its own extreme or supreme moment',¹⁶ but again finds the assumption of an automatic connection between political and artistic activity not only facile but doomed to disappointment: '... the

hypothesis (really only an analogy or a symbol) that aesthetic radicalism and social radicalism, revolutionaries in politics, are allied, which empirically seems valid, is theoretically and historically erroneous'.¹⁷ The sentimental view here characterised tends also I would suggest, to seek analogies between film and concurrent 'fine' art practice rather than anything more common in its appeal, although distinctions are somewhat blurred by the fascination of certain high-art forms of the 1920s with popular culture (circus, jazz, cinema itself) and the genuine intentions of academically trained artists to serve the proletariat through popular and readily accessible material (posters, industrial design, textiles, photography and so forth).¹⁸

In the past decade there has been more exposure and discussion of pre-Revolutionary cinema, for its own sake and as a means of countering what Ian Christie has identified as 'the still prevalent view that Soviet cinema was borne ex-nihilo with the Revolution'.¹⁹ There has also been a number of complementary studies, resurrecting for a modern audience the popular cinema of the 1920s and its continuity with its pre-Revolutionary precursors, especially acknowledging the long service in the industry of certain personnel (such as Protazanov and Gardin)²⁰. (see chapter one, below) These necessarily confront the embarrassment of the avant-gardists that such state-sponsored films as Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* [Bronenosets Potemkin, 1925] had been, at time of release, unpopular with the proletariat for whose benefit they were intended and proved, as even contemporary foreign supporters observed, more popular abroad than with domestic audiences.²¹ These films were nevertheless advertised as having enjoyed enormous popularity as an enticement to future attendance.²² Indeed, the course of state policy in the film industry in the 1920s is explicable only in terms of its admitting the failure of such films as *Potemkin* to do good box office and compete successfully with the imported product. For instance, *The Battleship Potemkin* was replaced within days of release in Moscow by Fairbanks' *Robin Hood*.²³ Cinema playbills of the NEP period (1921–1925) list an extraordinary range of films being shown alongside one another. In 1928, Viktor Shklovsky voices a view by then generally and expediently acknowledged (see chapter six, below):

We still entertain the notion of the spectator as something contained and yet universal. We are surprised when mounted police are required to disperse the queues for Harry Piel; when the peasants of

Novosibirsk spent the night in town to see *Peasant Women of Ryazan*. We are surprised by the financial collapse of *The Mother* and *The End of St. Petersburg* and by the total success of a *Queen of Spades* made ten years ago.²⁴

Conversely, Soviet silent films continued to be popular with foreign art-house audiences well into the sound period, perhaps slightly because of their 'revolutionary' aura. The films of Eisenstein and Pudovkin were dealt with differently, and differently abroad according to particular censors' sensitivities.²⁵

Pudovkin is not conveniently contained by any of these given parameters. While no less a figure than the critic Galvano della Volpe would declare Pudovkin his 'aesthetic paradigm in cinema', Pudovkin's *The Mother* was nevertheless not as unimpressive commercially as Shklovsky alleges.²⁶ Richard Taylor suggests that the press reviews of *The Battleship Potemkin* and *The Mother* indicate the qualities in his work which equipped Pudovkin all the better to survive under Stalin.²⁷ Pudovkin was increasingly isolated by the avant-gardists even amongst his contemporaries, possibly lending substance to Moussinac's 1928 analogical classification: 'Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Vertov ... one could say, for the sake of discussion, that on the same line of activity Eisenstein finds himself in the centre, Pudovkin on the right and Vertov on the left'.²⁸ Iutkevich says that even with *Storm over Asia* contempt for his perceived abandonment and betrayal of 'pure' cinema was being expressed (see also chapter five, below):

Pudovkin was definitely rejected and excommunicated by ... a group of theoreticians, partisans of montage cinema, 'grand' and 'pure'. *Storm over Asia* was considered as regressive, contrary to the general direction of cinema, submissive to its subject and to mere chances of fortune, and other reprehensible things ... there was a conspiracy of silence around this film.²⁹

Many of Pudovkin's contemporaries were ostracised, even eventually driven into exile by Stalin's rise to power and the concomitant restrictions on artistic freedom: even Boris Groys admits as much. Accusations of formalism and modernism were then to become a code 'for a high intellectual level not suitable for propaganda purposes'.³⁰ Pudovkin survived, continuing to direct films almost to the last.

Pudovkin's writings: Western approaches

Writing to Ralph Parker in 1958, Ivor Montagu says that '*Film Technique* and *Film Acting* in the English-speaking world have been reprinted again and again ... because they have been the only simple materials on deep fundamentals available. There is just as much interest in them, as basic classics, as ever'.³¹ Even in the 1980s, Ivor Montagu continued to argue for the 'value to the present generation' of his translations of Pudovkin.³² According to Paul E. Burns, writing in 1981, 'Pudovkin's present reputation primarily derives from his theoretical writings, which are straightforward and accessible'.³³ If this claim is to be accepted, it seems worth enquiring in what form his writings were received in the West, to what extent this corresponds to their original publication and whether the vicissitudes of his career as a director are consistently represented in print.

Pudovkin's first article, 'Time in Cinematography', was written while he was with the Kuleshov workshop and appeared in *Kino* in February 1923 (see chapter one, below).³⁴ Mostly, Pudovkin applied himself to subjects which were of popular concern and which were commonly addressed elsewhere. In 1926 he published in Moscow *The Film Director and Film Material* [Kinorezhisser i kinomaterial] and also *The Film Scenario* [Kinostsenarii]. Both very slim, very small volumes contributed to a 'popular science' series of some twenty titles, including also Turkin's *The Cinema Actor* and Gavriushin's *I Want to Work in Cinema*; forthcoming attractions included a couple of items by Osip Brik, also a *History of Cinema* and *Cinema City and the Work of the Film Studio in America*. Neither of Pudovkin's 1926 publications were illustrated or referenced. Ivor Montagu translated and amalgamated them under the title *Film Technique*. Pudovkin gave the project his blessing:

Your proposal to translate my book into English pleased me greatly. I consider it of the utmost urgency to draw together ideas, in order that cinema workers of all countries may stand with one another in close alliance. Not many important and interesting thoughts emerge during the course of work, just for want of such a union. In so far as my book demonstrates the main theoretical principles I will look forward especially to the appearance of the book in English.³⁵

Throughout the 1920s, Pudovkin gave academy lectures at home and abroad and produced articles for newspapers and periodicals: *Kino*; *Sovetskoe kino*; *Kino-gazeta*; *Sovetskii ekran*; *Kino-zhurnal ARK*; *Kino i kul'tura*. A selection of these were incorporated into the 1935 and later editions of *Film Technique* and, as a matter of courtesy, Montagu continued to send Pudovkin a share of the royalties.³⁶

By the early 1930s, Pudovkin's writings for domestic and foreign consumption accommodate the shift in emphasis urged by the state. Articles in *Experimental Cinema* denounce the preoccupation of Soviet directors in earlier years with montage at the expense of all else, notably plot and character development.³⁷ In 1934, Pudovkin's *The Actor in Film* [Akter v fil'me] was published in Leningrad with an introduction by Iezuitov (see chapter six, below). Pudovkin is praised for his warmth and sincerity towards people and to the cause of the working class. Iezuitov, remembering his first encounter with Pudovkin in *The Mother*, hotly contests accusations from the intelligentsia, expressed in scholarly journals, that Pudovkin's films serve a bourgeois ideology, are merely schematic and lacking in dialectic.³⁸ The book's illustrations include Pudovkin in his roles in Kuleshov's *The Death Ray* [Luch smerti, 1925] and Otsep's *The Living Corpse* [Zhivoi trup, 1929], of Nikolai Batalov and Vera Baranovskaia in *The Mother* and Valeri Inkizhinov in *Storm over Asia*.³⁹ Pudovkin cautioned Montagu before he embarked upon the translation:

I must warn you that this book has been done peculiarly. It has not been written but dictated, therefore I am very much afraid that it lacks the requisite continuity and line. Some questions have been set in the beginning and not solved, simply because I had forgotten about them towards the end of my speech ... at all cost when publishing the book make mention that it has not been WRITTEN BUT TAKEN DOWN from my speeches in the Academy ... write to me about all the unclarities which you will come across when translating (e.g. you probably do not know what the meaning of the 'rehearsal period of Kuleshov' is etc.). I shall send you at once the necessary amplifications and explanations. If a special foreword is necessary for the English edition I shall also write this.⁴⁰

There is little new personal development in Pudovkin's later writing, nor does he make an innovative contribution to a general debate (see

chapter seven, below). Much he seemingly arrives at second-hand: for instance, writing in *Iskusstvo kino* in 1938, Pudovkin acknowledges the usefulness of Rudolph Bode's system of gymnastics (which Eisenstein had discussed in 1924 and included in his curriculum) and of Delsarte (familiar to all erstwhile pupils of Gardin and Kuleshov and, similarly, a film school staple).⁴¹ (see chapter one, below) His later articles tend to harp upon a single, safe theme: 'Realism, Naturalism and Stanislavsky's "System"', ['Realizm, naturalizm i "sistema" Stanislavskogo', 1939]; 'Stanislavsky's Idea and Cinema' ['Idei Stanislavskogo i kino', 1948]; an introduction to Aleinikov's book *The Paths of Soviet Cinema and the Moscow Art Theatre* [Puti sovetskogo kino i MKhAT, 1946] and 'The Actor's Work in Cinema and Stanislavsky's "System"' ['Rabota aktera v kino i "sistema" Stanislavskogo', 1952].⁴² Pudovkin continued to publish articles into the 1940s and 1950s, allowing his name to be attached to proselytising state publications intent upon the promotion of current Soviet film practice elsewhere and the denunciation of bourgeois formalism. In *Soviet Films: Principal Stages of Development* (1951), he declares that:

... the first works of Kuleshov idealised American detective films with their empty and only superficial dynamics ... FEKS ... expected to produce cinema actors and films which first of all would strike spectators by the unusualness of their affected form. Young Eisenstein produced ... *The Strike* filled with mere formal tricks. Instead of showing a serious and important stage in the history of the Russian labour movement, the formalistic freaks of the author led spectators away from real life, confused and sometimes distorted the link of the film with actual historical reality.⁴³

Meanwhile, Ivor Montagu's original translation of *Film Technique and Film Acting* was pirated and published without his permission in the United States. The USSR was not party to international copyright agreements, making it possible for material to be taken without consent. Montagu intended a new edition as a counter-attack, to which Pudovkin provisionally agreed; he could have proceeded in the absence of Pudovkin's authorisation but felt 'morally bound not to do so'.

Pudovkin is very interested to bring out an edition but only in the following form. With a new critical preface by himself or by himself

and myself jointly; possibly adding an essay he has written on the history of Soviet film and . . . delivered as a speech a short while ago; and possibly the iconography brought up to date . . . It is my feeling, though, that he will not get down to the critical preface and notes side of the work until he is pressed.⁴⁴

In subsequent years, Montagu and Herbert Marshall continued to badger Pudovkin into producing the new material, which was in turn repeatedly promised. Montagu's despatch of 27 June 1952 runs as follows:

Dear Vsevolod Illarionovich

I am writing to send you what has almost become an annually repeated letter of reproach.

You promised me some time ago that you would write a new preface for the famous work 'Pudovkin on Film Technique', written to apply to silent days, placing it in perspective; and you said that until you had written this preface you did not wish it to be reprinted.

When last we met I told you, and it is still the case, that there is great interest in this book all over the world. This is not because people are under any illusion that the book is the last word on film art as it is understood today, or in its realist application, but as a classic of silent cinema and therefore part of the complete storehouse of culture with which all intending students should make themselves familiar.

I am constantly being pressed to allow a reprint and up to now have always had to refuse because waiting for the preface which you promised. The result is that the Americans, after vainly trying to get our permission, have already stolen the book and published their own reprint without any benefit to us and destroyed part of the market for any revised authorised edition which we might eventually publish.

This cannot be helped, but I am reminded of the situation by the fact that I have today received a request from Japan to be allowed to publish a translation and have once again to give the reply that this cannot be allowed . . . But is it not possible for you to turn out even if only just a little brief introduction, that will enable us to take control of all these proposals once again? Our failure to do so does not act as

a dam to the flood of editions, only diverts them into unauthorised forms ...⁴⁵

Eventually, in 1955, a new selection of Pudovkin's writings was published posthumously in the Soviet Union and Ivor Montagu asked for advice as to its potential merit in translation.⁴⁶ His old friend Sergei Nolbandov was not encouraging:

Here is my general opinion. Frankly I was disappointed. There is nothing new or exciting from a film technique point of view. A great deal is polemical, on the defensive, public self-criticism which sounds a little false and is in a way rather unpleasant. So is the self-justification. The style is rather turgid and pompous, studded with 'educated long words' and often loaded with pious political orthodoxy. This was of course absent in Pudovkin's earlier work. In many instances you will find political statements in the approved manner ... 'Towards the Communist Target' – high faluting and pompous; 'How I became a film director' – which unfortunately tells very little of 'how' – I would recommend a foreword ... On the whole I do not feel that any of this material, except Pudovkin's radically changed views on 'typage' and professional acting (versus the Stanislavsky system) and his more interesting and developed theories of montage would add any lustre to the old edition. There is a general aura of fossilisation over the whole thing. It may be that his elephantine style and heavy humour just get me down. I was rather bored.⁴⁷

The edition under discussion was out of print by 1960. Currently, the most complete collections of Pudovkin's writings are available only in Russian: *The Collected Works* [Sobranie sochinenii, 1974–1977] edited by Karaganov with Zapasnik and Petrovich; the second volume of this, *About Myself and My Films* [O sebe i svoikh fil'makh, 1975], edited by Zapasnik and Petrovich, is partly available in German as *Time in Close-Up* [Die Zeit in Grossaufnahme, 1983].

For leftist film-makers and artists of the 1920s, producing works of theory was a required corollary to practice. More crucially, theory was required in order that things could be made and made effective (see chapter eight, below). Mayakovsky stated the ground rules of his own practice, more craft perhaps than art:

Poetry is a manufacture. A very difficult, very complex kind, but a manufacture.

Instruction in poetical work doesn't consist in the study of already fixed and delimited models of poetical works, but a study of the procedures of manufacture, a study that helps us to make new things.⁴⁸

Through their writings they entered into fierce debate with one another (for instance, the damning by Mayakovsky in *Kino* and by others of Eisenstein's depiction of Lenin in *October*) and with commentators abroad. The journals construct debates around particular themes. Discussion of *The Mechanics of the Brain* in *Sovetskoe kino* 1 is accompanied by items concerning similar scientific subjects (see chapter two, below); *Sovetskoe kino* 7 collects together reviews of Barnett's *Moscow in October*, Shub's *Ten Years*, Eisenstein's *October* and Pudovkin's *The End of St. Petersburg*. Petrov's *What the Cinema Actor Needs to Know* (1926) and likewise Pudovkin's *The Actor in Film* (1934) address themselves to the need to familiarise oneself with the whole collective film-making process. Kuleshov dedicates his *The Art of the Cinema* (1929) to cinema audiences, executives and film-makers, seeking to engender a discussion between these parties and to engage a larger public in the issues raised.⁴⁹ Pudovkin speaks of the need for a popular audience to be schooled in film-watching as it is becoming in literature. However, even in the journal articles, Pudovkin's early writing adopts a measured form and lacks the predominant political thrust and angry polemicising which characterises the self-styled manifestos of the period. He never presumes for himself or for his practice an exclusive prerogative on correctness:

The film is yet young and the wealth of its methods is not yet extensive; for this reason it is possible to indicate temporary limitations without necessarily attributing to them the permanence and inflexibility of laws.

Everything said here regarding simple methods of taking shots has certainly only information value. What particular method of shooting is to be used, only his own taste and his own finer feelings can tell the scenarist. Here are no rules; the field for new invention and combination is wide.⁵⁰

Pudovkin's writing is tempered and qualified by the recognition of the potential in film yet to be discovered: Dziga Vertov sets the tone against which I am casting Pudovkin:

WE call ourselves Cine-Eyes as distinct from cinematographers: that flock of junk-dealers who do rather well peddling their rags . . . WE declare the old films, the romantic, the theatricalised etc., to be leprous.⁵¹

This haranguing of the reader was not confined to film criticism. 'Everyone who feels himself capable of doing so', jibes Zamiatin, 'is required to compose treatises, epic poems, manifestos, odes or other compositions dealing with the beauty and grandeur of One State'.⁵² However, privileged by its comparative youth, its popular and transnational appeal and its documentary attachment to contemporary events as they happened, film was credited with particular effect and impetus.

Much of early film theory, in Soviet Russia and elsewhere, is concerned with establishing the equal status of film with the ancient arts (Caciotto, Canudo, Arnheim, Harms, Lindsay et. al.) and also with delineating its distinct parameters. Although Kuleshov, Pudovkin and Eisenstein elect to practise montage differently, true to type as a Soviet 'school', in the 1920s at least, they agree that editing is the technique by which film distinguishes itself. Pudovkin stresses also the nature of its material base, the substance which the artist/director handles and crafts in the editing process:

. . . the active raw material for the film director is those pieces of celluloid on which, from various view points, the separate movements have been shot.⁵³

This emphasis on the materiality of film and its origins in photography placed its claims qua art in an arguable position, amply articulated by the various polemicising factions. The cameraman Vladimir Nilsen reports the unanimity with which the congress of 'Russian Artists and Amateurs of Art' in 1894 disqualified photography's artistic ambitions: 'Photography may serve as a simple substitute but not as an independent means of artistic creation'.⁵⁴ Photography was rejected as a merely mechanical record. Pudovkin implicitly responds to the extension of this dismissal to film. In *The Film Director and Film Material*, he

stresses the distance in the relationship between the fabricated product (the film) and its various subjects in nature, the happening of real events in real space and real time: 'To show something as everyone sees it is to have accomplished nothing'.⁵⁵ Pudovkin prioritises editing as the process of synthesis and transformation of material required in order that film should attain accreditation as art, but also acknowledges that the most basic element of film, the individual camera set-up, is fundamentally analytical, selective and estranged from natural perception:

Normal human vision can embrace a little less than 180° of surrounding space ... the field of the lens is considerably less ... already the director begins to leave behind the normal apprehension of real space ... picks out from it only a part ... Not only does the small view angle set bounds to the space in which the action develops both in height and in width but ... the depth of the space picked out is also limited.⁵⁶

In this straightforward acknowledgement of the formal implications for film imposed by the camera's technical properties, Pudovkin at once marks himself out from the cultish commentaries of many of his contemporaries. The camera and camera lens appear as a frequent motif on film posters, often superimposed on a bespectacled or naked eye (for instance, the posters by Rodchenko and the Stenberg brothers for Vertov, and the Stenbergs' poster for Ruttmann's *Berlin* [Germany, 1927].⁵⁷ Anatoli Golovnia, Pudovkin's cameraman, was photographed framed by a lens for Lily Brik's *Eye of Glass* [1929]. 'I am the Cine-Eye', proclaimed Vertov:

I am the mechanical eye. I the machine show you the world as only I can see it. I emancipate myself henceforth and forever from human immobility. I am in constant motion. I approach objects and move away from them I creep up to them I clamber over them I move alongside the muzzle of a running horse. I tear into a crowd at full tilt I flee before fleeing soldiers I turn over on my back I rise with aeroplanes I fall and rise with falling and rising bodies ... Freed from any obligation to 16–17 frames a second, freed from any restraints of time and space I juxtapose any points in the universe regardless of where I fixed them. My path leads

towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. I can thus decipher a world that you do not know.⁵⁸

The recurrence of the image asserts the primacy of the camera as an instrument of vision itself, but also asserts the camera-derived image as the product of a machine, and, as such, an object of veneration. Vertov, like Mayakovsky, urged that material be drawn from the street, constantly mobile and constantly changing.⁵⁹ Vertov argued that, by recording life as it was, by making films of fact rather than of constructed fiction, he was closer to an authentic view of the world and that this authenticity constituted an art more appropriate to a revolutionary society. Indeed, Vertov was with extraordinary alacrity and facility simply turning the old academicians' objection to photography on its head: the mechanical, documentary functions which had hitherto denied its artistic status were now pronounced its crowning glory.

Pudovkin's films: Western approaches

Devotees of Pudovkin's films, as of his writing from the Heroic Age of Soviet Cinema, have, for the most part, disparaged his later work for its want of inventiveness and the apparent willingness to comply with an orthodox cultural and ideological agenda. However, the spirit with which Pudovkin launched himself into the early experiments with montage and 'close-ups in time' is not entirely lost: the French critic Pierre Billard was sufficiently generous to find something worthwhile amidst the routine dreams of tractors in *The Harvest* [Vozvrashchenie Vasiliia Bortnikova, 1952], praising it for its adventurous use of colour.⁶⁰ During the war, *Suvorov* (1941) was praised in some unlikely quarters in the Allied Nations, for its portrayal of an historic Russian victory against Austria.⁶¹ *Nakhimov* won Pudovkin a prize at the 1947 Venice Festival for his direction of crowd scenes. Meanwhile, Georges Sadoul, like Nolbandov, accuses Pudovkin of naiveté, intending, I think, his style and temperament and his complicity with the state.⁶² Dmitri and Vladimir Shlapentokh say that Pudovkin was sufficiently astute to supply Dukelsky, head of Soviet cinema from 1938, 'with new "evidence" of the criminal activity of the previous leadership. At the same time, as a good friend, he tried to exploit this discussion in favour of his colleagues by suggesting that they were also victims of "enemies

of the people” who controlled cinematography. In this way he was able to protect both himself and his friends’,⁶³ but the Shlapentokhs hold Pudovkin significantly accountable, though certainly not alone, in the denunciation under Stalin of himself and former colleagues. It is beyond the scope of the present enquiry to attempt to estimate the sincerity of Pudovkin’s service after the so-called Great Break, or, for that matter, to question his original adherence to the ideological and cultural ideals of the 1920s. Gabrilovich probably comes near to a truth by which I, at least, am persuaded: ‘In order to understand so many of the puzzles, secrets and absurdities of our complicated life, it is necessary to comprehend most of all, the real significance of fear’. Gabrilovich places himself, along with Eisenstein, amongst those who managed to glorify reality ‘but with various reservations and innuendoes’. Eisenstein, for instance, sought an ‘expert’ opinion from Stalin as to the exact length of Ivan the Terrible’s beard.⁶⁴ Nor was Pudovkin, although managing to continue to work, exempt from criticism from officials and onetime colleagues: Rotha, writing in 1951, reports the criticisms levelled at Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Vertov and Dovzhenko ‘for the pursuit of barren intellectualism’;⁶⁵ certainly there was much wrangling with the censors over *The Deserter* and the actor Mikhail Bleiman says that he well remembers Pudovkin pleading his case ‘in the blue room’.⁶⁶ *Life is Very Good* was drastically re-worked; *Suvorov* was the subject of a letter to the director from Stalin himself and was publically vilified⁶⁷ (see chapter six, below).

Pudovkin’s *The Actor in Film* and the journal articles of the early 1930s appear already to endorse what had by then become official doctrine. It may be that Pudovkin was prepared to compromise the previous theoretical principles in order to survive but I should like to suggest that the ease with which he seemingly acclimatised himself to a revival of ‘psychologism’ in film was equally presaged in his direction in the 1920s of *The Mother* and *Storm over Asia* and in his performance in *The Living Corpse*: that is to say, the writing expressed a practice in which he already felt comfortable. In his portrayal of the unloved and unloving husband Theodore, Pudovkin adopts a minimalist style: the slow lowering and raising of the eyes as a gesture of resignation; the merest hint of a shrug of the shoulders to indicate the tedium and indifference with which he now meets the world and accepts the sole prospect for his own redemption.

Peter Dart’s monograph, *Pudovkin’s Films and Film Theory* (1974),

takes it for granted that the selected writings of Pudovkin under consideration constitute a work of theory. There is no discussion of what might be usefully deemed a film theory nor yet what might be construed as theory per se. Given that Pudovkin is frequently tagged 'the Russian Griffith', there lacks any consideration on Dart's part that Pudovkin's chief purpose may have been no more than to codify and lend testimony to techniques which he judged had proved themselves already efficacious elsewhere. Pudovkin's *The Film Scenario* and *The Film Director and Film Material* appeared shortly after the premier of *The Mother*; *The Actor in Film* appeared after the much delayed completion of *A Simple Case (Life is Very Good)* and *The Deserter* and refers also to the performance in *The Living Corpse*. Both Pudovkin and Eisenstein quote practical work in which they have been engaged in order to illustrate and clarify the argument presented. Pudovkin frequently refers to his experiences on set with Doller, Golovnia, Baranovskaia, Batalov, Inkizhinov, Zarkhi and others. He is willing to share credit and says that ideas could be volunteered by any one of them, to be taken up by the group. Indeed I venture to suggest that, for the most part, Pudovkin's writing would be better represented as a collection of workshop 'receipts'. In comparison to Eisenstein, Pudovkin's output of theoretical material was not large, and unlike Eisenstein, he seemed to lack the temperament (or the stomach) for theoretical writing for its own sake (see chapter eight, below). While Pudovkin later balked at Montagu's request for new material, perhaps restrained by a reluctance to fall foul unwittingly of the authorities, and confined himself to the repetition of safe and pious platitudes, Eisenstein continued ever to elaborate and revise the theoretical basis of films he would not live to realise; Eisenstein seemingly enjoyed theoretical endeavour as a distinct enterprise.

In conclusion to his 1974 thesis, Peter Dart conveniently invokes Bazin's preference for depth of field and the expansive, uninterrupted spaciousness of full-focussed shots as more cinematic than the fragmented analysis necessary for montage; he draws from Bazin the moral that such means are inherently less intentional on the part of the director, more democratically involving of the spectator. Dart sets up Bazin in opposition to the Soviet 'school', whose filmic methods he then facetiously suggests are concomitant in their marked intentionality with a dictatorship over the film audience and the wider public. 'According to Bazin', says Dart, 'montage as used by Kuleshov,