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from the aesthetic context of the complete *Songs* and is therefore omitted from this discussion.
3. "The Birth Film," in *FCR*, p. 231.
4. "Interview with Stan Brakhage," *FCR*, pp. 208-10.
5. See, for example, Sheldon Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* (New York: Dutton Paperbacks, 1967), p. 122; and Sitney, *Visionary Film* (New York: Oxford U. P., 1974), p. 191.
6. "Interview with Stan Brakhage," pp. 202-03.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 208-09.
8. Just so, Carol Emshwiller pointed out to me that the beauty of "The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes" ("Autopsy"), the third segment of *The Pittsburgh Trilogy*, derives from the patterned rituals of dissection opposed to the nearly intolerable vision of humans reduced to meat.
9. Sitney, *Visionary Film*, p. 189. Subsequent references to this edition will be included in the text.
10. "The Birth Film," pp. 232-33.
11. "Interview with Stan Brakhage," p. 225.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 225. See also *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue No. 6* (New York: Harry Gantt, 1975), p. 27.

STEVEN KOVACS

Kuleshov's Aesthetics

Any discussion of experimentation in Soviet film in the twenties begins with the "Kuleshov effect" to illustrate the power of editing. It was an illusion achieved through time which demonstrated that the succession of one shot by another would alter the apparent meaning of the component shots. The experiment had been conducted with the shot of the actor Mozhukhin's expressionless face followed by shots of a bowl of soup, a child in a coffin, and a sunny landscape. The audience applauded the subtle variations of his face to show alternately hunger, pity, and joy. It was the "Kuleshov effect" that triggered Eisenstein's and Pudovkin's work with montage. While the experiment has become a familiar milestone in the development of the language of cinema, its author has remained a near unknown.

Yet that oblivion is greatly undeserved. Lev Kuleshov was not simply the originator of experiments with montage, but also a director in his own right and a teacher of film who had taught half of all Soviet directors by the time of his death in 1970. It was in his workshop that Eisenstein learned the trade of film-making in three months of diligent work, proving only too well his own maxim that "Anyone can become a film director, but one man needs to study for two years, another for two hundred years." His students of the twenties, including Pudovkin, recognized him as the most influential practical theoretician of cinema when they wrote in the foreward to his book *Art of the Cinema*, "We make films—Kuleshov made cinematography."

Kuleshov was the only major figure of the young Soviet cinema who had worked in the industry before the revolution. In 1916 he became a set designer for Yevgeni Bauer, one of the progressive directors of Czarist Russia. The following year he directed his first feature which deliberately used the principles of montage. Once the revolution came, he was sent to the Eastern Front to shoot documentary footage of the battles with the interventionist armies, which he combined with acted sequences upon his return to make the first film of its kind in the Soviet Union. He began teaching at the State Film School and, as soon as conditions allowed, he returned to making films. As for most of his colleagues, so for him the twenties proved to be the most fruitful period both in the development of his theory and in its practical implementation. That creative period was succeeeded by the beleaguered thirties, when Kuleshov struggled simultaneously with the new demands of sound film and with intensified political criticism. He made a few artless films in the early forties, but

From Kuleshov's BY THE LAW

his career as a director was over. Appointed head of the Film Institute, Kuleshov resumed the education of future Russian directors. With the passage of time, his ideological transgressions were forgiven, and he became enshrined as one of the giants of Soviet film with the awarding of the Order of Lenin not long before his death.

Kuleshov's most lasting contribution was made during the twenties, both in his teachings and in his films. Of his several books and scores of articles, it is his *Art of the Cinema* which is the most complete reflection of that creative work. Written in 1929, it is an informed manifesto and workbook, for it sets out Kuleshov's theories of film-making at a time when those ideas had been freshly tried in the films of his workshop. Published in its entirety with a dozen representative essays chosen from the period between the October Revolution and the establishment of Socialist Realism, Kuleshov's investigations in the aesthetics of cinema are finally made accessible to the English reading public by Ronald Levaco's *Kuleshov on Film.**

Kuleshov understands film to be a realistic medium: "the material of cinema must unconditionally be realistic." As a result, he sees those objects and activities to be filmic which issue from real life. Furthermore, reality is the domain of the proletariat: their environment and their activities offer the models, if not the subject matter, for the film-maker. Thus, Kuleshov contrasts a railroad bridge with a ramshackle cabin in the countryside to prove that shots of a modern technological content are inherently more cinematic than those of traditionally lyrical subject matter. Other early advocates of the cinema shared this point of view, but they argued that movies were best at showing technology because film itself was one of the products of advanced technology. Films about machines were testimonials to the new technological age both in form and content. But Kuleshov justifies his proclivity for products of technology by citing their simplicity of line. Because the shape of a modern object makes it more readily recogniz-

*Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975.

able, it lends itself more to the cinema. A simple object can be apprehended more quickly, and as a result, shorter pieces of film can convey the intended visual information. That brevity is essential for a cinema whose syntax is actively determined by montage, for the success of a juxtaposition of varied pieces of film depends on a sufficiently rapid cutting which focuses viewer attention on the connections between the shots, rather than the shots themselves.

For Kuleshov the screen was a two-dimensional field that should be organized with meticulous attention to the shape and placement of objects to render the visual impression readily accessible to the viewer. Many of his specific recommendations as well as his general theoretical formulations are in line with that organizational intent. He argues against superfluity in the shot, ruling out both picturesque subjects and effects which would heighten that picturesqueness, such as "the use of light for beautification." He asserts that "Decor and its background ought to be as simple as possible in construction." In discussing the range of movement of actors, he sets up a table for the possibilities of action of each part of the human body along three axes to determine how those movements will be translated to the flat surface of the screen. As he puts it, "if the action can be schematically conceived in terms of some characteristic, it will then be perceived by the viewer substantially more easily." It is this schematization which is one of the pillars of his film theory: the screen as a grid, "an unfilled, empty white rectangle" which must become the arena for action which remains clear when translated into two dimensions.

Kuleshov's interest in the formal possibilities of the new medium is related to the contemporaneous investigations of the group of Formalist literary critics. Indeed, he counted among his friends Victor Shklovsky and Lily Brik, with whom he collaborated on three of his screenplays. He considered the editing process to be a structuring of elements which shaped the meaning of the images. His assertion that "The shot is a sign, a letter for montage," reveals the linguistic model that he used in the building of his own theoretical framework. He criticized Eisenstein for his use of actors and mass scenes, "as they are not always *structured*, and if they are structured, then not always grammatically." Even the development of his actors' body language echoes the Formalists' preoccupation with the discovery of fundamental rules that govern the artistic product. While Kuleshov's work was clearly related to that of the Formalists, it was rather in its general approach than in its specific method. Amidst today's fervent semiological activity, it is all too tempting to make him out to be the first Formalist theoretician of film, which he was not. Such an argument would neglect other, more significant sources of his theoretical outlook.

As would be expected of one of the chief practitioners of Soviet cinema, Kuleshov's aesthetics correspond to some of the basic principles and concerns of Marxist thought. Marx had defined labor as the fundamental activity of man, "the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence." Kuleshov attempts to incorporate the labor process into his recommendations for actors in front of the camera. Like so many innovators of film in the silent era, he, too, condemns the adaptation of the theatrical to the screen. Thus, he asks that theatrical actors not be used in film, that either laborers take their place or actors who have perfected the movements of workers. Why does he place such emphasis on their activity? Not simply because the worker was the main focus of the new order, although that was certainly his starting point, but because in observing workers he discovered certain fundamental traits of the nature of film. In their movement he recognized an efficiency and organization which was the result of years of repetition of the same task. It was this simplicity which he attempted to transfer to the screen, recognizing in economy of action the same order of beauty as in the economy of props and decor. His aesthetic is therefore predicated upon a search for the fundamental elements of human existence, upon a demystification of reality through the elimination of the superfluous, the accidental, the nonessential. He sees his art not merely as a vehicle for representing reality, but as a means of discovering reality. Life and art are not separate

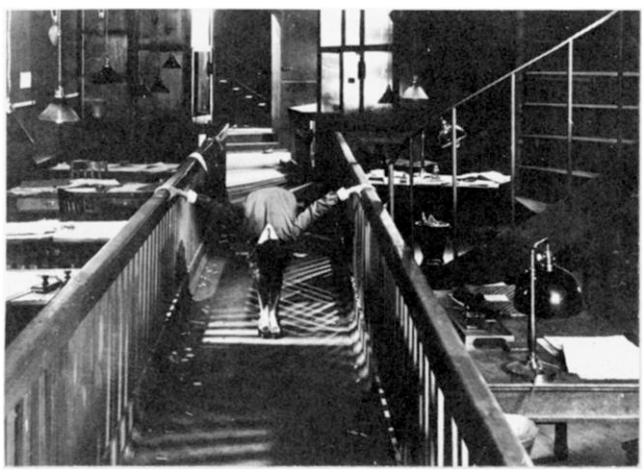
realms, but two aspects of the human experience. His ultimate criterion of what is filmic is a function of his view of reality. Only that which reveals to us the real nature of things is the appropriate material of cinema.

Kuleshov's Marxism encompasses other aspects of movie-making. He attacks the psychologism of previous movies, seeing in them a reflection of isolated inner states of mind, rather than a confrontation with a commonly experienced reality. He asserts, "The biggest, most important error of our scenarists consists in the fact that they write scenarios not derived from existing material, but rather from 'within oneself'—they simply fantasize." For Kuleshov film is a microcosm of the world. Just as Marx pointed out "an endless maze of relations and interactions" in nature, the history of mankind, or man's intellectual activity, so Kuleshov emphasizes the relations that exist within the cinematic work: "in the case of the construction of any material, the crucial moment is the organizational moment, during which the relationship of parts to the material and their organic, spatial, and temporal connections are revealed." Finally, Kuleshov recognizes the direct didactic potential of film, a vehicle for the transformation of consciousness. Echoing Marx's call to change the world, rather than merely interpret it, he writes, "For the main point is not the poor shoes of the worker and not his dismal shirt, but rather his energy and his labor."

Kuleshov's application of Marxist principles to cinematography might lead those unfamiliar with his work to assume that his films were direct illustrations of the workers' struggle. Nothing could be further from the fact. For Kuleshov's emphasis on technology was a way of liberating himself and Russian film-making from the confines of the picturesque, theatrical components of bourgeois tastes, without ensnaring it in tedious portrayals of modern life. His interest in the labor process was more as a model for his actors than as the subject matter of his films. The perfection of concise acting was necessitated as much by the circumstances of film production in the Soviet Union in the early twenties as by aesthetic demands. No less affected by shortages than the entire nation, Kuleshov was placed in the curious position of being a film director without film. He improvised by creating "films without film" in his workshop—performances based on film scenarios, acted out as if an audience were watching, and approximating cinematic techniques like cutting and close-ups by the use of curtains and spot lights. Once film was made available, it still remained a precious commodity. His troupe of actors continued to repeat their performances until every gesture was mechanical, every scene choreographed to perfection. Thus, Kuleshov discovered the advantages of a performance rehearsed to the point of automatism in trying to make films with limited stock. His upholding the labor process as a model for his actors was not simply lip service paid to revolutionary ideals, but a lesson learned from the material constraints placed upon him.

These methods of acting and principles of composition became incorporated into a number of his films in the twenties which are as entertaining and visually striking today as they were half a century ago. In *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks, The Death Ray,* and *By the Law,* made one after the other between 1923 and 1926, Kuleshov demonstrated his abilities as an innovative director of the first order. In *The Death Ray* he compiled what he considered to be a "catalogue of devices" to display his profound understanding of the film medium and introduce the results of his troupe's long months of practice. In it he ran the gamut of cinematic techniques—different angles, depths of focus, speeds, associa-

A. Khokhlova (Kuleshov's wife) in YOUR ACQUAINTANCE/FEMALE JOURNALIST.



tive and rhythmic montage, negative image, split screen—applied to carefully composed and illuminated shots and utilizing the energetic non-psychological acting style pioneered by Meyerhold in the theater. If *The Death Ray* fails in the end, it is a failure through experimental abundance which even muddles its story line. Both *Mr. West* and *By the Law* use technique more judiciously and, as a result, remain Kuleshov's finest works. (Unfortunately of all of his films only *By the Law* is regularly available for viewing in the United States. Currently *Mr. West* and *The Death Ray* are part of a series of early Soviet films on tour through the Museum of Modern Art and the American Film Institute.) All three films testify to Kuleshov's sense of the cinema both as art and as entertainment and they exemplify the strongest foreign influence acting on Kuleshov, indeed on all Soviet film-makers, in the twenties—that of the American film.

Kuleshov opens his *Art of the Cinema* with the scientific investigation he conducted with his group to determine the tastes of the movie-going public with the aim of finding out what were the essentially cinematic elements of movies. They found the largest, most enthusiastic crowds at American movies. It was in them, especially in the films of D. W. Griffith, that Kuleshov discovered the power and potential of editing. He pointed to Griffith and Chaplin as models for acting, for while the former had his actors communicate their emotions with their entire bodies, the latter did so by creating a relationship to various objects. It seems then that the acting of the Kuleshov troupe owes as much to the masters of American silent film as to Meyerhold's explorations of body language. But he discovered something more—a dynamism in action and editing, in content and form, which belonged to the best films. In an essay written in 1922 he shrugs off officials' fears of "Americanitis" and "detectivitis," praising American films for including the greatest "intensity in the development of action."

How much he took the American example to heart is evidenced by his own films. In *Mr. West* he introduces the gullible American president of the Y.M.C.A. who comes to visit the Soviet Union filled with all the cliché terrors of the "barbaric Bolsheviks" that 50 years have done little to allay. His worst fears seem to materialize when his cowboy bodyguard Teddy mysteriously disappears and he falls into the hands of an opportunistic gang masquerading as the Soviet police. A fusion of American detective stories and comedies, *Mr. West* is a delightful spoof of Western misconceptions about the new Soviet state. Equally exemplary of American models is *The Death Ray*, an involved story of cloak-and-dagger intrigue in a Western country between Fascists and workers in the pursuit of a laser-like "death ray" invented by a Soviet scientist. It seems that Kuleshov was as interested in American literature as in American film, since two of his works are adaptations of American fiction: *By the Law* based on a Jack London short story and *The Great Consoler* being an adaptation of the life and selected stories of O. Henry. It was as much his American orientation as his formal experiments that made him the target of such vehement criticism during the artistically arid, spiritually chauvinistic thirties.

How Kuleshov reacted to the censure directed against so many artists whose work had not satisfied the rigid requirements of Socialist Realism is revealed by a number of essays he was forced to write in his defense. They are at once a chilling reflection of the strait-jacketing of the arts, and an encouraging view of one man's unswerving loyalty to the revolution and a concomitant willingness to apply those new guidelines to both his theory and practice of film work. As early as 1926 when he found himself

MR. WEST IN THE LAND OF THE BOLSHEVIKS

without work, Kuleshov was forced to defend himself against charges of "obsession with 'Americanism.' " He justified the ideologically objectionable content of *The Death Ray* by reminding his critics that he had been interested in producing an inexpensive film of Western technical virtuosity and that the conditions of that task had been so burdensome that the thematic side of the work had suffered. By 1935 the defense of formal experimentation had become an untenable position. In that year Eisenstein had renounced the mass hero in favor of the individual hero, and proposed the enlarging of his intellectual cinema to include the emotional-sensual elements carried by inner monologue. In that same year in an article on "The Principles of Montage" Kuleshov also recanted. Speaking of his work in the twenties, he wrote: "I still placed all my emphasis on montage, perfecting the entire conception of my theoretical work on it; and here lay my deepest mistake. The fact is that film material is the live person working on the screen, real life filmed for the screen. This material is so variegated, so significant and so complex that to render it by mechanical juxtaposition through 'film-specifics'—by means of montage—was utterly incorrect."

Kuleshov still tries to justify the reasons for his initial concern for montage by referring to the fact that American films had elicited the greatest audience response at the time. As a result, that technical element was a progressive concern of Soviet film-makers concerned with quickening the pace of their films in order to hold the interest of their audience. The mistake lay partly in adopting not merely the structural elements of American films, but also their ideological baggage: the energy and competitiveness of the "heroes" of capitalism resulted in "educating one to the fact that with corresponding energy a person can achieve individual fortune, can provide rent for himself, and can become a happy landowner." Furthermore, it resulted in an excessive concern with editing, that "apart from montage, nothing exists in cinema, that the work of the actor is absolutely irrelevant, that with good montage it is immaterial how he works." He warns that "when the director constructs the basis of his picture principally on montage, he gradually loses confidence in his work with the actor." He resolves the apparent imbalance of his early work by arguing for a proper concern for both structure and content, montage and acting, even though he had always stressed both: "We must remember once and for always that all artistic sources are fine for the achievement of a correct ideological position in a film . . . " Despite these attempts to reconcile himself to the Party position, Kuleshov's career as a director was just about over. He was to spend most of the rest of his life teaching at VGIK, Moscow's All-Union Institute of Cinematography.

The interest of Soviet film for the rest of the world, however, lies at the other end of Kuleshov's career, in the creative atmosphere that prevailed in the years immediately following the October Revolution. Those remarkable years of self-sacrificing energy and ingenious creativity are brought alive by Kuleshov's fresh recollections. He recalls the superhuman effort of his troupe of actors working with inadequate equipment, often to the point of feverish exhaustion. Enduring burning carbon falling on their faces for lack of spot lights, acting in the cold with a fever, receiving serious cuts in the performance of tricks, standing still as a rickety door fell on someone's head not to waste a shot, were some of the trying moments his actors experienced which appear today only as curiosities of a bygone era of film production. The ingenuity born of those limitations is perhaps most vividly illustrated by the plan for an experimental rehearsal film-theater drawn up by Kuleshov and Eisenstein. Concerned with the conservation of film stock, they envisioned a theater which would allow the precise recreation of cinematic effects on a special stage before the shooting began. Three stages were to be built, one in front and two on the side, with a disc for spectators in the middle whose rotation would duplicate the effect of cutting from one scene to the next. Another rotating disc in the central stage would permit the director to decide the best angle from which to cover the action. Sliding doors behind the stages were to allow for the inclusion of exterior landscape and massive scenes when the script called for them. A

bridge was to connect the central stage with the space of the audience in the tradition of the Japanese theater which, when used in conjunction with lights, could approximate close-ups, medium shots, and long shots. A moving sidewalk in front of the main stage would reproduce either the effect of a man running or panning with the action. Screens and orchestra pit were also included in the efficient design. Like Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the IIIrd International* this project exemplified a possible practical application of the artistic ingenuity of the post-revolutionary years. Like Tatlin's monument, this stage was never built.

Kuleshov's greatest contribution to the nascent Soviet cinema was in his experimentation grounded in theory. Those ideas were an amalgam of different strains of thought, indicated as a matter of course in one of Kuleshov's earliest writings on film. In "Americanitis" he observes that "The success of American motion pictures lies in the greatest common measure of film-ness, in the presence of maximum movement and in primitive heroism, in an organic relationship to contemporaneity." Those three factors reveal different, though harmonious aspects of his personality. He is talking at once as a film-maker drawn to movement, a youth of the revolution imbued by its heroism, and a Marxist recognizing the organic relationship in all phenomena. His indelible impact on the course of Soviet cinema is due to the coincidence of these elements.

Reviews

EUPHORIA

A film by Vincent Collins. 1976. Filmwright, 4530 18th St., San Francisco, Calif. 94114.

Since in animation anything is literally possible, the animation film-maker faces options that expand almost exponentially, and are limited only by the animator's persistence and endurance in drawing cels, within the finite length of running-times. But the very openness of the animation form poses problems of coherence.

Space in *Euphoria* is infinite and omnidirectional; gravity is either placidly absent or tyrannically directional. The elusive and seductive possibilities explored by Collins are more empirical than similar forms used by Tatsuo Shimamura in *Fantasy City* (1970). *Euphoria* is a series of disorienting, vertiginous and usually violent transformations; its themes are of fertility, birth, traumatic metamorphosis and rebirth. There is a constant plastic imperative of irresistible change and renewal. Sprouting, stretching, flipping, multiplying and consolidating in initially unpredictable ways, Collins's forms somehow always resolve themselves, in cycles and processes that might seem to remind us of the ecology of some alien planet.

While Collins is not a neophyte, he does not yet have an extensive filmography, and we must deal with *Euphoria* pretty much on its own. From rough sketches to final photography, the production time was six months, with Collins doing everything himself, unlike the collective activity of the studio production teams that have brought us the theatrical cartoons. In *Euphoria*'s three and a half minutes there is such a density of imagery, delivered at such high velocity of change, that one's fascinated attention is hard pressed to resolve it all into an audiovisual text that can be read, let alone remembered. But, while the screening experience verges on optical overload and iconic oversaturation, *Euphoria* does not belong among the militant collage films which barrage the retina with comparatively random patterns and colors. Rather, it displays an uncommonly strong transformational continuity, skilfully articulated in a good, if often flashy, example of animation dynamics.

Consistent stylistic-thematic structures link and merge throughout the film's bewildering event