

JULIA ALEKSEYEVA

Vertov and the Avant-Garde Documentary: Dreaming Reality in the 1960s, from the USSR to Japan

ABSTRACT: This article argues that the work of 1920s Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov found especially fertile ground in 1960s Japan, where critics have long discussed ties between documentary and the avant-garde. Theorists interpreted Vertov's filmmaking as fundamentally avant-gardist. That is, it was both an "experiment in a dream" and an "experiment in reality," according to Nakahara Yusuke, rather than the work of a documentarian "catching life unawares." This transnational media ecology results in a strong tradition of experimental documentary that traces revolutionary politics to editing tricks and self-reflexivity. Soviet and Japanese avant-garde documentary emerge independently, and decades apart, yet result in a fascinating confluence of political avant-garde aesthetics that overlaps significantly.

KEYWORDS: documentary, avant-garde, Dziga Vertov, Japan, transnational

The films of early Soviet avant-gardist Dziga Vertov are some of the first in media history to playfully manipulate documentary footage for political and emotional effect. One might recall, for instance, the earliest use of the reverse reel in his first feature-length film *Kino-Glaz* (Kino-Eye, 1924). Vertov's camera portrays a woman buying meat from a non-union, non-co-op butcher, so the film reverses her pathway to the shop and brings the meat back to the bull, and the bull back to life. Using nothing but actuality footage and editing tricks, the film corrects—and indeed, reverses—a behavior deemed improper in the context of Soviet policy. Yet the trick appears far from didactic; this results in the communist whimsy typical of Vertov's avant-garde productions. This trick tickles the senses, yet reminds the viewer of the camera's ability to shift reality to suit its own devices. The reverse reel draws attention to film as a thing both *caught* and *created*; that is, Vertov's film uses actuality footage captured in the real world, but his myriad cinematographic techniques craft something entirely

new. One can also describe Vertov's film technique as fundamentally *animated*, connecting to the Latin origins of the term *animare*—to refresh, to revive, or to bring to life.¹

Reverse reel and other tricks of editing and cinematography, including animation, are prevalent in *Kino-Eye* since it is a film manifesto that encapsulates Vertov's film theory. Vertov's films aim to emancipate the viewer's political sensibility, heretofore chained to the "ballast of habit" (in the words of Samuel Beckett's 1930 essay on Proust) through a series of disruptive and playful aesthetic techniques. What Vertov called the kino-eye is meant to produce a more active viewer, released from the drudgery of everyday life. Although Vertov's films were virtually ignored in the USSR after socialist realism emerged as the single Soviet international aesthetic par excellence, his films recirculated after the death of Stalin—thanks in large part to Vertov's widow, editor, and *kinok* (cine-eyes, Vertov's neologism for his creative collaborators), Elizaveta Svilova, and the French communist film critic Georges Sadoul.

That 1960s France experienced a veritable Vertovophilia is now well-known. First, Edgar Morin used the French translation of Vertov's newsreel series *Kino-Pravda* (Cinema-Truth, 1922–25) to describe a new style of documentary filmmaking called *cinéma vérité*.² Next, in the wake of May 1968, the media philosopher-theorists of the ultra-left journal *Cinéthique* viewed Vertov as a precursor, with *Cinéthique* favorite Jean-Luc Godard even using the name the Dziga Vertov Group for the post-May radical filmmaking collective he created with Jean-Pierre Gorin. Godard's reason for using Vertov's moniker is tied to his understanding of Vertov's iconoclasm, fervent experimentalism, and apparent anti-Stalinist politics.³ He chose the name Dziga Vertov to "indicate a program, to raise a flag, not just to emphasize one person."⁴

Japan, the leading film industry in 1960, was immersed in its own new-wave movement by the time François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard released their cataclysmic debuts. At the time, Vertov's films and theories were less available in translation. However, as I will demonstrate, Japan's comparatively piecemeal interaction with Vertov's films was highly fruitful—not despite its distance from the mediation of the French Vertov scholars, but because of it. The films and theories of the Soviet avant-garde were recirculated for the first time since the early 1930s at an exciting and highly political moment where discussions of both documentary and experimental film technique already held court in film community debates, especially via theorists such as Imamura Taihei, Hanada Kiyoteru, and Matsumoto Toshio. This atmosphere created an especially fertile ground for the reception of the Soviet avant-garde, and of Vertov in particular, who was interpreted as an avant-gardist rather than a forerunner of *cinéma vérité*. Indeed, Vertov was even linked to surrealism.

The research of John MacKay and Séverine Graff has given us some knowledge of international, especially French, reception of Vertov's films.⁵ Yet Vertov's reception outside of Europe and North America is scarcely addressed. This is particularly true of Japan, which was by far the most prized and lauded non-European film culture in 1960, where postwar film production peaked at 547 films.⁶ As Masha Salazkina notes, Japan's status as the world's leading film producer persisted until it was overtaken by Bollywood in 1972.⁷ Indeed, France and Japan were two of the most renowned film cultures in the world, symbolizing the ultimate art-film departure from Hollywood.

Japan's highly successful narrative film production in the 1950s postwar golden era is common knowledge. Nonetheless, a veritable renaissance of documentary form and analysis followed this era: first with Hani Susumu's short documentaries for Iwanami Productions starting in the mid-1950s, and then with the emergence of other renowned documentarists such as Matsumoto Toshio, Ogawa Shinsuke, and Tsuchimoto Noriaki. Likewise, in the sphere of film theory, Matsumoto helmed the journal *Kiroku eiga* (Documentary film, 1958–64), one of the most theoretically rigorous and internationally engaged documentary journals ever issued. The journal had an extremely capacious understanding of documentary, publishing everything from analyses of Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) to poetry manifestoes by future filmmaker and poet-iconoclast Terayama Shūji to roundups of Eastern European animation. Given Japan's privileged status in the arena of global film culture and the importance of documentary in its film theoretical ecology, Vertov's reception in Japan is especially worthy of study and reveals the prophetic importance of Vertov's films in transnational, socialist filmmaking practices. As I will show, the revival of Vertov's films in the 1960s did not *directly cause* a rebirth of experimental documentary, but his films and theories appeared alongside burgeoning political avant-garde movements and gave significant legitimacy to innovative works.

Indeed, 1960s Japan witnessed a flourishing of avant-garde documentary form that rivaled the 1920s Soviet Union in its audacious experimentation. By first analyzing Vertov's playfully affective filmmaking experiments—oriented around what he termed *kinooshchushchenie* (cinematic sensation)—and then juxtaposing Vertov's work with the history of the Japanese avant-garde documentary, I will show significant overlaps between the two. This work therefore expands significantly on a connection that has already been noted by Yuriko Furuhashi and Naoki Yamamoto, both of whom describe an alignment between Japanese avant-garde documentary and the Soviet avant-garde. Yet as I will demonstrate, although Japanese avant-garde documentary certainly did not develop in a vacuum, this is no case of simple influence. Japanese critics in

the 1960s, in contrast to French contemporaneous scholarship, perceptively interpreted Vertov's filmmaking practices and film theory as fundamentally avant-garde rather than documentarian "catching life unawares" (in Vertov's Russian, *zhizn' v rasplokh*)—in large part by evading the connection between Vertov and *cinéma vérité* in the French 1960s. Instead, I argue that Vertov's films and theories arrived in a 1960s Japanese media landscape *already* primed to understand experimental documentary as an inherently political practice. Vertov-like films appeared on Japanese screens even before his films were screened en masse; moreover, it is precisely because Vertov's works arrived in such fragmentary fashion, and with comparatively little engagement with Vertov's French interpreters, that the interpretation of Vertov's films in Japan became more thoughtful and capacious. In fact, Vertov's affectively oriented political aesthetics mirrored, *ex post facto*, the political, artistic, and ethical concerns of Japan in its turbulent and revolutionary season of politics. Thus, some of the most important works of Japanese film theory in the late 1950s and 1960s often reflect Vertov's arguments, despite rarely referring to him by name, and Japanese films from the 1960s astonishingly echo his avant-garde documentary film practice.

This connection to avant-garde documentary is especially salient when considering the films of self-styled neodocumentarist Matsumoto Toshio, whose most famous film *Bara no sōretsu* (Funeral Parade of Roses, 1969) uses a typically Vertovian film-within-a-film trope to reveal the creative and edited aspects inherent to all filmmaking, both narrative and documentary. In *Funeral Parade of Roses*, the diegetic world of the fictional collapses into the nonfictional, producing a powerfully exuberant and carnivalesque avant-garde documentary style. Contemporary Japanese film critic Ōishi Masahiko connects Matsumoto's film explicitly to the work of Vertov, noting that *Funeral Parade* is the true inheritor of Vertov's techniques, as both entail an "Ouroboros-like" structure and rejuvenate the techniques of the avant-garde documentary.⁸

What Ōishi describes as Ouroboros-like—a perpetual self-reflexivity symbolized by a snake consuming its own tail—also reflects debates between avant-garde film and documentary that were especially heated during the Japanese postwar period. Theorist and art historian Hanada Kiyoteru was central to Japanese theories of the avant-garde documentary and greatly influenced Matsumoto. Hanada was especially interested in surrealism, where, as he wrote in 1950, one "could feel the discontinuity between the inner world and the outer world"⁹—the interior world of the personal and the exterior world of the sensible and political. However, surrealism did not go far enough for Hanada, who aimed for the "artist's avant-garde" to approach the "politician's avant-garde" and to

“pour the same gaze toward the outside world [*gaibu no sekai*] as they [artists] have hitherto directed toward the inner world [*naibu no sekai*].”¹⁰

Given Hanada’s interest in the connection between the political and artistic avant-gardes, it is no surprise that Furuhashi claims that Hanada was influenced by the Soviet avant-garde and held Vertov in especially high regard among European filmmakers.¹¹ However, my research indicates that Hanada was less interested in the Soviet avant-garde than in the Western European artists and filmmakers of the same period, such as Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí, and Germaine Dulac. The Soviets do not appear extensively in his 1953 summary of the 1920s avant-garde movements.¹² In fact, Soviet avant-garde films would only reemerge *as* avant-gardist in Japan almost a decade later—and for the first time since the early 1930s.

The theory of Japanese avant-garde documentary in the 1960s therefore did not begin with a long-standing influence from the Soviet Union. Instead, it emerged independently, buttressed by an additional influx of avant-garde films and newly translated media theories riding the political new waves from Western Europe. These films and theories often enjoyed a much more receptive audience in 1960s Japan than they had in the early 1930s, when the influence of Stalinist socialist realism had already begun to take hold. What emerged from this 1960s transnational media ecology was a strong tradition of experimental documentary that traced revolutionary politics to tricks of editing and cinematography and disorienting self-reflexivity. While Soviet and Japanese avant-garde documentary developed independently, they nonetheless demonstrated significant theoretical intersections, resulting in a fascinating confluence of political avant-garde aesthetics. First, however, it is important to examine Vertov’s film theory—especially its less-discussed but vitally important connection to Soviet affect and *chuvstvennost’* (feeling-ness)—before delving into the Japanese political, industrial, and philosophical context.

Dziga Vertov’s films are full of explosive tricks of editing and cinematography—a barrage on the senses. With the use of these techniques, Vertov’s films, from the film-manifesto *Kino-Eye* to the now-ubiquitous *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* (Man with a Movie Camera, 1929), and even to his formerly popular *Tri pesni o Lenine* (Three Songs about Lenin, 1934), strive to sharpen sensibilities and awaken radical political beliefs in their viewers. As MacKay contends, Vertov’s kino-eye philosophy of experimental nonfiction filmmaking “is nothing less radical than a Communism on film.”¹³ Vertov and his followers, the fellow *kinoks*, “believed that such an approach to film would create new ways for a revolutionary society to represent itself to itself, by breaking away from the tropes, templates, types, and canons of ‘art’” and generating “endlessly novel,

sensuously captivating representations of the world.”¹⁴ As Vertov claimed, the dizzying range of experimental editing techniques in his films “[challenges] the human eye’s visual representation of the world” and declares its own, distinct, defamiliarizing *svoe* “*vizhu*” (“I see!”).¹⁵ Fast cuts, playful and experimental editing, and lack of narrative coherence in Vertov’s films create an avant-garde distancing effect but one that is profoundly sensorial and affective. In so doing, Vertov’s films exemplify a new type of direct, unmediated sensuality, or *chuvstvennost*’, as opposed to cold and restrictive bourgeois art. As he declared: “We need conscious men, not an unconscious mass . . . submissive to any passive suggestion.”¹⁶

For Vertov, revolutionary consciousness necessitated a pedagogy that was more affective than didactic. As Joshua Malitsky notes, specifically discussing the bull-animation reverse-reel effect described earlier, the scene “is not a dry, intellectual illustrated lecture of Marxist concepts” but is instead “jarring and speaks to the creative force capable in cinema.”¹⁷ Edward Tyerman, following Emma Widdis, ties the importance of the affective interconnectivity of *chuvstvennost*’ with Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky’s celebrated concept of *ostranenie* (estrangement). *Ostranenie* served as a device inherent in all art, one that estranges the familiar to create a way of perceiving that looks at the world anew. Tyerman identifies Vertov as a filmmaker prioritizing *oshchushchenie* (sensation), writing: “Just as Viktor Shklovsky celebrated the power of art to give back the ‘sensation’ (*oshchushchenie*) of things, so Dziga Vertov conceptualized film as offering a new mode of ‘cinematic sensation’ (*kinooshchushchenie*). . . . [A]rt’s task explicitly links politics and aesthetics, connecting the revivifying powers of *oshchushchenie* to new forms of sociopolitical consciousness. A new sense of the world mediated through avant-garde cultural production transforms the individual’s understanding . . . producing the contours of a new political subjectivity.”¹⁸ Shklovsky and Vertov, despite their differences,¹⁹ intersect through their prioritization of *oshchushchenie* as a mode to link politics and aesthetics through “new forms of sociopolitical consciousness”—a connection that Malitsky made as well.²⁰ This sensation, which was a *cinematic-specific sensation* for Vertov, creates the foundation for “a new political subjectivity” that avant-gardists understood to be vitally important for the new Soviet era.²¹ As Oleg Aronson notes, Vertov’s “microrevolutions in the frame” are meant to overcome human attitudes and “return [human beings] to a perception not held captive (*zakhvachenom*)’ by ideology.”²²

The key to this liberation from the captivity of ideology is found in avant-gardist techniques. Widdis notes that Vertov’s aforementioned bull-animation reverse-reel sequence in *Kino-Eye* creates “an affinity [that] works outside language, and through the body . . . the spectator is led to feel an embodied

affinity with the commodities of meat and bread: a specifically communist relationship with the products of consumption.”²³ Techniques such as reverse reel thus join an embodied and primarily affective mode of understanding with a higher, intellectual understanding, a Marxist hermeneutics.

As MacKay argues, the study of Vertov has been plagued by “serious mischaracterizations of Vertov’s practice as primarily oriented around the purveying of ‘news.’”²⁴ In reality, however, Vertov’s filmmaking is full of avant-gardist *triuki* (tricks) of editing and cinematography: fast motion, freeze frame, slow motion, split screen, stop-motion animation, superimposition, drawn advertisements, animated intertitles, shouting mouths, and any number of other tools and techniques of technological manipulation. Additionally, the films show the process of their production, à la *Man with a Movie Camera* (this latter technique, importantly, will be hailed by enthusiasts of the Soviet avant-garde in Japan). As Vertov declared, these machinations served to “prepare the viewers” for “the reception (*vospriiatie*) of new things.”²⁵ The playfulness of tricks, whether through printing, montage, or other editing techniques, leads to a more robust, entirely new Soviet mental activity and mode of perception—one that rejuvenates the senses and leads to a clarified understanding. MacKay argues that “these explicit efforts to startle, to provoke, to motivate . . . drew attention to themselves and broke up the expected unity of the filmic text.”²⁶ Vertov’s myriad tricks overlap with agitational strategies; they engage the affective potential of the cinematic medium to harness the viewer’s political understanding, leading to proper political action (buying meat from a union-affiliated co-op butcher, for example). Vertov’s “laboratories for experimentation” are precisely where agitational processes are most effective: avant-gardist tricks lead to what Widdis describes as a “revolution in sensory experience,” “an alternative psychological model in which the psyche would be formed in direct relation to a sensory, embodied encounter with the world.”²⁷

Of course, Vertov’s work was not created in a historical vacuum, and MacKay contends that censorship could be regarded as the ultimate author.²⁸ In MacKay’s Greimassian semiotic rectangle charting the “dynamics entangling mobility and stability of film footage” in Vertov from the first volume of his *Dziga Vertov: Life and Work* (fig. 1),²⁹ censorship is directly opposed to “authored film,” showing a dichotomy between editorial control by the author versus the Soviet bureaucratic and ideological superstructure. More importantly for our purposes, MacKay opposes “play, *détournement*” (referring to the Situationist International’s simultaneously playful and political “hijacking/rerouting” of images) to “restored/archival film.” He thus shows a productive, dialectical tension between play and archive, between the newsreel image and the relentless process of editing, which extracted the image from its original context and

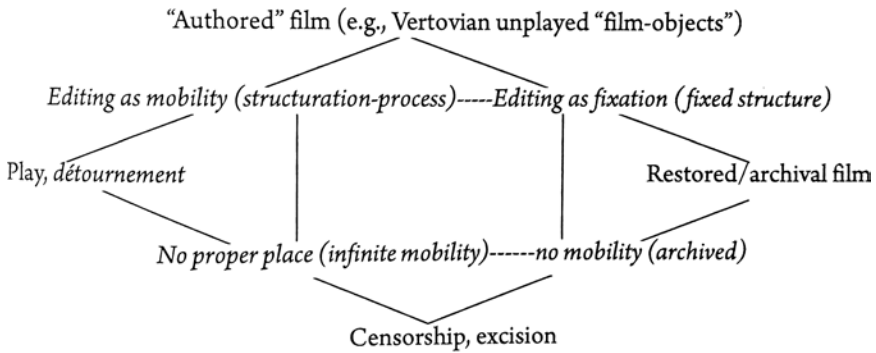


Chart 2: Dynamics entangling mobility and stability of film footage.

Fig. 1: MacKay’s Greimasian semiotic rectangle charting the “dynamics entangling mobility and stability of film footage” (John MacKay, *Dziga Vertov: Life and Work*, vol. 1, 1896–1921 [Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018], 229)

imbued it with entirely new and more complex meanings. In addition, “*editing*” is neither mobile nor fixed, and *mobility* itself intersects with play, whether structured or infinite (“*no proper place*”).

MacKay’s semiotic rectangle echoes the theories of critic Hanada Kiyoteru. Despite the powerful effect of Soviet censorship—which might banish Vertov’s cinematic play to “no proper place,” or render his use of archival footage immobile—Hanada’s interpretation of the dialectic between avant-garde and documentary unveils key commonalities between Russian and Japanese theories of the power and possibility of avant-garde techniques to cause revolutionary transformation. Yamamoto summarizes Hanada’s “cinematic worldview,” which is greatly informed by Marxist-Leninist thought, with a chart that is strikingly similar to MacKay’s (fig. 2).³⁰ For Hanada, “contingency is the modality of the present,”³¹ and *actuality* is located at the intersection of two axes: between newsreel and fiction, and between naturalist theater and the avant-garde. Hanada’s neologism and film theoretical construct of *sur-documentary* is placed between the newsreel and the avant-garde; *possibility* emerges between these coordinates. This possibility aligns with a similar chart, also formulated by Yamamoto,³² on Hanada’s philosophical worldview, in which actuality is now located between contingency and the present, and between history and revolution. Possibility here is nestled within contingency and revolution, while in the cinematic worldview, possibility lies between the newsreel and the avant-garde. The dyads of newsreel/contingency and avant-garde/revolution resonate with MacKay’s dialectic between *détournement* and archive and between mobility and stasis.

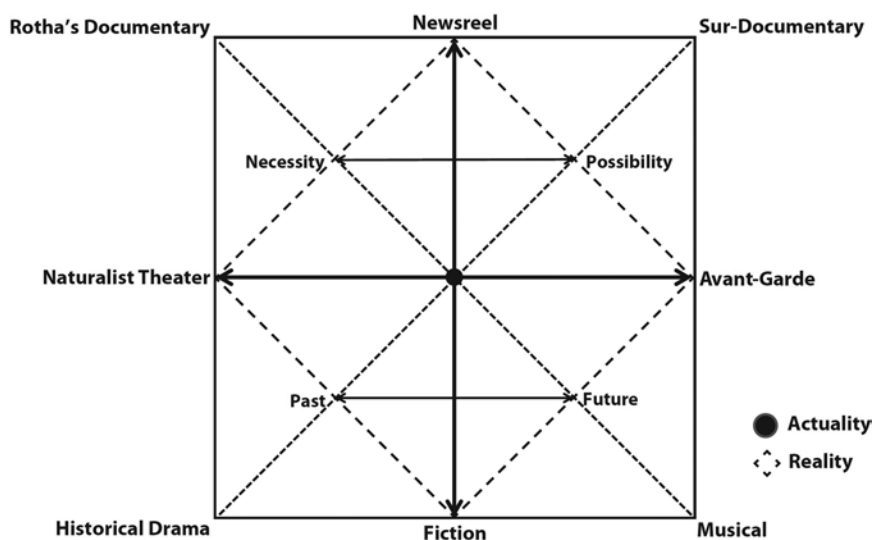


FIGURE 14. Hanada's cinematic worldview.

Fig. 2: Yamamoto's chart of Hanada Kiyoteru's cinematic worldview (Naoki Yamamoto, *Dialectics without Synthesis: Japanese Film Theory and Realism in a Global Frame* [Oakland: University of California Press, 2020], 178)

Importantly, a much less experimental documentary style is connected to Paul Rotha. His 1935 *Documentary Film* was the most important text in Japan associated with documentary (far more so than John Grierson),³³ and his style is placed in the top-left corner, between newsreel and naturalist theater, alluding to Rotha's definition of documentary as a "dramatization of actuality." One might call this a conventional or traditional documentary, in contrast to sur-documentary, which, for Hanada, was not a dramatization of actuality, but much more aligned with techniques of surrealism. Yamamoto writes that the traditional documentary method must be "self-negated" "by consciously incorporating . . . the legacy of the 1920s avant-garde as both [an] artistic and political movement."³⁴ While the *sur* prefix aligns Hanada's new avant-garde documentary style explicitly with the European surrealists, observing Yamamoto's chart alongside MacKay's invites us to compare the sur-documentary with Vertov's films as well. The legacy of the 1920s avant-garde thus extends beyond the French surrealists and into Soviet territory. Vertov's filmmaking, like Hanada's, finds revolutionary potential in the interstices of actuality and play, emerging from a dialectic between the newsreel and the avant-garde.

However, the connection between Vertov and the Japanese postwar filmmakers and critics is far from simple, and quite unusual. The archival work of Yamamoto, Furuhashi, and myself illuminates the reception of Vertov's work in Japan prior to the postwar period. It also demonstrates that even though the prewar archival records seldom refer to Vertov explicitly, the film theoretical landscape of Japan created especially fertile ground for the reception and reinterpretation of Vertov's work in the 1960s. Film critics in other countries aligned Vertov with conceptions of cinema-truth, or *Kino-Pravda*, whereas the Japanese associated Vertov's films with montage theory and the avant-garde. Vertov was less a progenitor of *cinéma vérité* and more a surrealist whose films showed a dialectical movement between experiment and actuality without clear synthesis—what Nakahara Yūsuke would call both “an experiment in a dream” and “an experiment in reality.”³⁵

Even in the 1960s, though, Japanese filmmakers were less interested in Vertov as an auteur; instead, he represented a larger theoretical trajectory affiliated with the Soviet avant-garde as a whole. I use Vertov as a case study, and one might feasibly draw similar connections to other figures—for instance, Lev Kuleshov or Sergei Eisenstein. Undeniably, the latter was better known, and thus more frequently discussed, in Japanese film theoretical circles. My contention here, however, is that Vertov is unique among Soviet avant-gardists (especially when compared to Eisenstein) for connecting the (prototypical) avant-garde documentary with unique revolutionary possibilities in the cinematic medium. Despite how relatively unknown and unseen Vertov's films and theories were in the Japanese context between the early 1930s and the 1960s, Vertov's films became quite influential and almost prophetic in light of 1960s experiments. For this reason, tracking his reception and influence is important and deserving of study.

Vertov was not screened in Japan during the 1920s, and very few works of Soviet avant-garde film made the journey to Japan before the notorious restrictions of the 1930s. Nonetheless, Yamamoto argues that Vertov's theoretical writings were an enormous source of influence for Japanese art historian Itagaki Takao, especially in his 1929 monograph *Kikai to geijustu to no kōryū* (Exchanges between machine and art). As Yamamoto notes, Itagaki's text introduced Japanese readers to the work of contemporary European artists, architects, and filmmakers such as Le Corbusier, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and, indeed, Dziga Vertov.³⁶ Even the cover of the book features the famous film lens/eye superimposition shot from *Man with a Movie Camera*.³⁷ However, Itagaki was at the wrong place at the wrong time: the Japanese government began using increasingly brutal measures to censor leftist critics, so he refrained from discussing Vertov after 1932.³⁸ Still, the Japanese interest in a juxtaposition between the

artful and the machinic remained; Hanada would publish an influential article titled “The Machine and the Rose” (*Kikai to bara*) in 1951,³⁹ which we will soon discuss in the context of Matsumoto’s work.

Outside of Itagaki, there was little critical analysis of Vertov in this early period, although Japanese scholar Iwamoto Kenji notes that *Man with a Movie Camera* had been screened in Japan beginning in 1932.⁴⁰ At this point, the film received negative reviews from many critics, and Yamamoto argues that this reception resulted from specific conditions within Japanese discourse. Within the three years between its completion in 1929 and the original Japanese release date of March 1932, “radical shifts occurred both in the cinematic apparatus (from silent to sound) and in the official Soviet discourse on art (from constructivism to socialist realism).”⁴¹ Likewise, the film’s Japanese title became awkward and declamatory: *Kore ga Roshia da* (Here Is Russia!). This title is not only a mistranslation but also inaccurate, as most of the film was shot in Soviet Ukraine. Yamamoto posits that the title *Kore ga Roshia da* might have led critics to expect a more “faithful” documentation of the Soviet project,⁴² rather than the film that Lev Manovich describes as a veritable “orgy of cinematography.”⁴³ However, it is important to note that this now-universally lauded film was heavily criticized even during its first release in the Soviet Union. It would not be praised so effusively until after the deaths of both Stalin and Vertov, and after the Thaw era’s ease of censorship restrictions was well underway.

Returning to prewar Japan, information about Vertov’s films and theories was woefully piecemeal and translated from communist French critics, especially Léon Moussinac. At this time, Japanese critics seldom mentioned Vertov compared to Soviet filmmakers Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Eisenstein.⁴⁴ In 1929, *Kinema Junpo* editor Iijima Tadashi noted Vertov’s name in the appendix of *The Art of Cinema: Film Montage* by Soviet director Semyon Timoshenko; this reference included a detailed and complicated shot list of Vertov’s *Kino-Eye*. Iijima was so intrigued by this shot list that he included it in his own book with no additional commentary.⁴⁵ Overall, prewar Japanese film journalism rarely mentions Vertov, except in regard to montage experiments. Even oblique references to his work decrease steadily and noticeably in the lead-up to the Pacific War.

This tendency aligns with the changing political climate in both Japan and the USSR, especially the increasing fascism in the former and Stalinism in the latter.⁴⁶ Despite this, some Soviet avant-garde films were well received in 1930s Japan by leftist critics such as the young Nakai Masakazu. An attentive reader of Vladimir Lenin, Karl Marx, and György Lukács,⁴⁷ Nakai developed a philosophy that integrated politics and aesthetics, frequently drawing comparisons to Walter Benjamin. Nakai was famously impressed by *Vesnoi* (In Spring,

1929)—by none other than Mikhail Kaufman, who was Vertov’s brother, *kinok* cinematographer, and the eponymous cameraman of *Man with a Movie Camera*. Nakai, who loved Kaufman’s quick edits so much that he brought a stopwatch to the screening, used the film to develop his burgeoning ideas of technology as the revelation of a noninstrumental, more imaginative time.⁴⁸ He described the film ecstatically as an “aesthetics of abandon, something that flows in a crystalline way,”⁴⁹ with all the strange and beautiful contradictions the terms entailed. There is also some speculation that Nakai became familiar with Vertov when reading German sources on Soviet art.⁵⁰

And indeed Nakai’s philosophy, especially as interpreted by sociologist and media theorist Kitada Akihiro, bears much resemblance to Vertov’s theories. For Nakai, the camera “enforces . . . a reflection on a renewal of the very relationship of humanity and nature.” It is not mere techno-utopian romanticism but rather “detects in the machine a possibility of overcoming the human.”⁵¹ In addition, for Nakai, film images can have no fixed meaning since “film is not a tool for transmitting messages” but rather “intrude[s] into the senses themselves.”⁵² Nakai’s emphasis on film’s sensorial and liberatory qualities aligns him *with* Vertov and *against* the majority of Marxists of the period, in both Japan and the USSR. Nakai, however, was arrested in 1937—one of the many victims of a regime that banned all overt criticism.⁵³ Although he was eventually released and continued to publish after the war, Soviet film no longer entered the conversation.

Nonetheless, other film theorists—notably, the documentary theorist Imamura Taihei—were laying the groundwork for a particularly Japanese flavor of art and film theory that rejected claims to objectivity and invited comparisons to creative repurposings of the cinematic medium—even to animation. As Thomas Lamarre argues, Imamura’s 1940 essay “A Theory of Documentary Cinema” emphasizes “documentation [as] a form of subjective expression, not objective recording.”⁵⁴ Imamura’s film theory is indispensable for recognizing what one might call both the *animated* qualities of documentary and the surprisingly documentarian qualities of animation. Contrary to the commonplace understanding that documentary is “objective” while cartoons are “fantastical,” Lamarre argues that “Imamura’s film theory . . . stresses subjective expression in the context of documentary, while his cartoon theory lingers on the realism stemming from photographic methods.”⁵⁵

Meanwhile, Hanada linked documentary and animation in a similar vein, contemporaneously with his writings on sur-documentary in the immediate postwar period. Describing *Bambi* (1942), Hanada notes that “Disney’s visual imagery assumes the existence of the documentary image as a premise for its establishment,” and that “*Bambi* is nothing more than a documentary film about

the ecology of a deer.”⁵⁶ Like Imamura’s prewar film theory, Hanada’s 1952 notes on *Bambi* provocatively reject an immediate alliance between nonfiction and documentary film. For Hanada, the form of the film—its emphasis on the “documentary image” as the premise of the animal’s drawn movement in space—and the content, with its emphasis on ecological realism (despite obvious fantastical elements), both demonstrate a Japanese documentary media ecology that resists the primacy of conventional approaches to alleged documentary objectivity.

Margaret Key notes that Marxism was key for these thinkers, and surrealism was their primary aesthetic.⁵⁷ Hanada believed avant-garde documentary was key to the development of new possibilities—both internally and externally, leading to new political futures. For Hanada, as for other intellectuals and artists such as Abe Kōbō and Teshigahara Hiroshi, the two genres of avant-garde and documentary film were in fact complementary, and Furuhata notes that both sought to address, analyze, and transform the conditions of the working class.⁵⁸ These figures formed the *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* (Association for Documentary Art) which aimed to reinvent the concept of documentary as something that could, and should, be essentially avant-garde in the late 1950s.

As fellow member Tamai Goichi declared, the “booming popularity of documentary” in postwar society problematically instilled stereotyped conceptions of the documentary in public consciousness.⁵⁹ By the immediate postwar period, very few types of documentary films were shown in Japan; often, these were public-relations films with expository voiceover. Audiences, having seen only this variant of the documentary form, eventually viewed these allegedly objective modes as inherently more truthful than others. For filmmakers and theorists of the time, this was a critical problem. Hanada therefore promoted the idea of a dialectic of the avant-garde and documentary to rupture these stereotyped conceptions of documentary truthfulness.

Such thinking permeated the world of Japanese art film of the 1960s, producing many filmmakers who attempted a more subjective iteration of the documentary format. Theorists such as Hanada, and later Matsumoto, described sur-documentary, “semi-documentary,”⁶⁰ and Matsumoto’s neologism *neo-documentary* as the most important and vital movements for nonfiction film. These trajectories, all of which can be encompassed under the umbrella term “avant-garde documentary,” opened up new pathways within film history. Leftist theorists such as Hanada and Nakai Masakazu considered these pathways both the most crucial for their present political moment and the most suitable for the cultural and intellectual zeitgeist.

At this precise moment, coterminous with Nikita Khrushchev’s Thaw, works of the Soviet avant-garde were relaunched into the Japanese film landscape. First, on September 30, 1958, *Chapaev* (1934) was screened at the Sōgetsu

Art Center in Tokyo.⁶¹ This was one of the last films of Vertov, Eisenstein, and Pudovkin's generation, a kind of nexus between the avant-garde and socialist realism and massively popular in the USSR. Then, slowly, film journals in Japan began printing works by and about Vertov.

First, the June 1960 issue of *Kiroku eiga* published an article on early documentary history by the leftist documentary filmmaker Atsugi Taka, one of the few women directors from the period and central to Japanese documentary of the 1930s and 1940s. As Michael Raine and Marcos Centeno-Martin point out, she was a member of Prokino until its dissolution and continually questioned the dominant ideology of the period.⁶² She also translated Paul Rotha's *Documentary Film*, finding, as Abé Mark Nornes describes, Rotha's work "inspirational" for her Marxist politics and her commitment to the critique of "everything from class discrimination to totalitarian political systems."⁶³ In her article, Atsugi describes Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* and Kaufman's *In Spring* in depth, as well as the kino-eye theory. She cites her translation of Rotha, summarizing his viewpoints and adding her own, writing that Vertov's "*Kino-Eye* . . . is different from the way news articles treat material. The lens of the camera . . . is like a human eye in motion. It has power, it can go anywhere, into anything . . . [Vertov's and Kaufman's films] make use of the excellent powers of cinema, and are astonishing examples of technical achievement."⁶⁴ Although Morin's article that defined Vertov as a prototypical filmmaker of *cinéma vérité* had already been published (in French) in January 1960, here Atsugi uses not Morin or Sadoul but Rotha, who was by far the most common reference for documentary film in Japan, as Yamamoto and Nornes have shown.⁶⁵

Reading Rotha rather than Morin primes Atsugi to see Vertov as a filmmaker who demonstrates "the excellent powers . . . of technical achievement" and his and Kaufman's films as fundamentally different from mere newsreels. This kino-eye is ecstatic and expansive. The delayed reception of Jean Rouch's and Morin's *cinéma vérité*, indeed, led to a Japanese understanding of Vertov as an avant-garde filmmaker. Yet, interestingly, Nornes argues that Atsugi's translation was a "misprision" operating in a "gray area" that may have emphasized a more explicitly socialist understanding of the mission of documentary film.⁶⁶ One wonders, then, if Atsugi would have paid greater attention to Vertov had his films been *less* avant-garde and less defined by "technical achievement."

Atsugi's article was published in *Kiroku eiga* at the very peak of the protests against the US–Japan Security Treaty (ANPO) in June 1960, that is, directly before the treaty's forced ratification and the death of student protester Kanba Michiko. The discussion of the Soviet avant-garde, including Vertov, thus coincided with one of the most politicized and turbulent months in modern Japanese history. This was not a coincidence; in fact, this entire issue of *Kiroku*

eiga addressed politics more explicitly than almost any other. Vertov and the Soviet avant-garde writ large therefore represented the potential of the political avant-garde during an era of great social upheaval.

The next reference to Vertov in Japanese film journalism is a direct translation of one of his articles in the May 1961 issue of *Kiroku eiga*.⁶⁷ The journal *Isskustvo Kino* (Film Art) published “On Love for the Living” in June 1958 and offers a posthumous reflection on his films and film theory near the end of his life.⁶⁸ The article attempts to reconcile Vertov’s oft-described machinic and futurist film theory of the 1920s with his more humanistic works in the 1930s, such as *Three Songs about Lenin*, which MacKay describes as a compromise between socialist realism and the avant-garde.⁶⁹ Here, Vertov defends *Man with a Movie Camera* against claims of formalism, noting that it was a crucial step leading to *Three Songs*. It is important to remember that at this point in Vertov’s writing—predating, in fact, the death of Stalin—*Man with a Movie Camera* was not the highly regarded work that it is today, gracing endless top world-cinema lists and appearing on the majority of early film syllabi worldwide. Rather, *Three Songs about Lenin* was considered Vertov’s masterpiece. The publication of this article points to an important revisitation of Vertov’s work and contextualizes his filmmaking within, and in contradistinction to, Stalinism.

By this time, most films of the Soviet avant-garde were still not easily accessible in Japan—with the notable exception of Eisenstein’s *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (Battleship Potemkin, 1925), which enjoyed a celebrated re-release after August 1958. It had over 220,000 viewers, which was by all accounts very impressive for an avant-garde film.⁷⁰ However, as the 1960s progressed, Japanese film critics and cinephiles attained a more nuanced understanding of Vertovian cinema and its techniques, as well as many other works of the early Soviet period. In 1964, *Eiga hyōron* (Film Criticism) published a translation of an article by Sadoul in which he juxtaposes and contrasts the first cinéma vérité film *Chronique d’un été* (Chronicle of a Summer, 1961), by Morin and Rouch, with Vertov’s filmmaking, and to works of Direct Cinema.⁷¹ Interestingly, this text was written in 1962 but not published in France before Sadoul’s death in 1967. In a strange turn of events, Japanese film enthusiasts received Sadoul’s most updated interpretation of Vertov’s films *before* the French film public—and it is important, indeed, that this article criticizes an interpretation of Vertov as documentarian, emphasizing his difference from French and North American practitioners of “film-truth,”⁷² especially his avant-gardist properties. The youthful New Leftists viewed Sadoul as a representative of the Communist Party–aligned Old Left, which tended to see Vertov as more documentarian, but as his study of Vertov progressed, Sadoul began to increasingly align Vertov with

the avant-garde—and with surrealism. As we shall see, Japanese critics shared this trajectory as the 1960s advanced.

In March and April 1966, the Sōgetsu Art Center held a massive *Retrospective of World Avant-Garde Cinema*. Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* was shown on March 18, still translated awkwardly as *Here Is Russia!* Other filmmakers screened during this retrospective included Man Ray, Jean Renoir, Jean Epstein, Joris Ivens, Hans Ritter, Jean Cocteau, Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, Francois Truffaut, Jean Rouch, and Chris Marker. The majority of these filmmakers were not strictly documentarians, and all tended to interweave fiction and nonfiction in unusual ways. Whereas most of these filmmakers had several films exhibited, Vertov had only one, even though the event's organizer, arts administrator Nakahara Yūsuke, held Vertov's film in such high esteem that it was the subject of one of only two articles in the retrospective's catalogue.

In this article, Nakahara claims that the art of cinema can be divided into two waves: the fantastical and fictive wave of Georges Méliès, of which the most typical representation is in surrealist cinema, and the news film of the Lumière Brothers, actualized in documentary practices. Nakahara writes, paraphrasing Jonas Mekas, "Within experimental film there are also two waves: the former being the 'experiment within a dream,' the latter being the 'experiment within reality' . . . However, today, viewing film with a macroscopic eye, this division between the 'experiment within a dream' and the 'experiment within reality' is actually not very clear. Take, for example, Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*."⁷³ Nakahara goes on to describe his first viewing experience of Vertov's film in the Cinemathèque in Paris. He marvels that although Vertov was clearly a documentary filmmaker, even Vertov's documentary film was "nothing less than an 'experiment within a dream'" —in other words, a deeply aesthetic and avant-garde experiment and one tied to surrealist art-making practices. Nakahara also notes that prior to his actual viewing of Vertov's film, he had quite a different conception of the filmmaker and was thus surprised by his own reaction to the film, claiming "I was taken aback many times, laughing and feeling strange" (*warainagara igai na kanji ga shimashita*). This specific Japanese variation of the word "strange," *igai*: 意外, includes *imi*, the word for "meaning," "idea," or "mind," as well as the radicals for "sound" and "heart," plus *soto*, or "outside." It connotes something surprising—outside of "idea" or "thought." One might productively, again, compare this feeling outside to estrangement, a similar feeling outside, created by the metacinematic framework of Vertov's film in which the relentless reflexivity of the film constantly draws attention to its own creation—indeed a strange feeling.

Nakahara then goes on to compare the film not to other documentary films but to 1920s avant-garde films. He leaves the discussion of documentary

to the other article in the catalogue, which was on cinéma vérité and written by Michel Mesnil, who had worked on Chris Marker's *Mystère de Koumiko* (The Koumiko Mystery, 1965). Nakahara's interpretation of Vertov goes against the grain of a common misconception of Vertov as a machine-obsessed documentarian "catching life unawares" and in fact remarks on the difference between his viewing experience and his prior knowledge of his films. Rather than observational recordings of truth, Vertov's films were experiments hovering between dream and reality, joining the seemingly disparate worlds of surrealism and documentation.

Nakahara views Vertov's film as an example of one that disrupts, or perhaps synthesizes, the division between the avant-garde and the documentary. He connects this frequently discussed dialectic of two film historical waves to Jonas Mekas and Joris Ivens, but in reality it suffused 1960s film theoretical circles and was also posed by Siegfried Kracauer, Jean-Luc Godard, Pascal Bonitzer, Serge Youtkevitch, and even that first theorist and creator of cinéma vérité, Edgar Morin.⁷⁴ He also implicitly refers to avant-garde filmmaker and theorist Matsumoto Toshio, one of the most important inheritors of Vertov's and Hanada's theories. Just a few years earlier, Matsumoto had described his own dialectic of fiction and nonfiction, the neodocumentary, by analyzing film history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He links this dialectic to the politics of surrealism and connects it to earlier film, art, and literary works, notably listing *Guernica* (1950) as an important precursor to his own work.⁷⁵ Matsumoto claims that early cinema saw two competing tendencies: "discovery," or nonfiction, on one hand, and "creation," or fiction, on the other. These existed in a quintessential Hegelian dialectic, where the fictional, avant-garde creation of the fantastical films of Méliès, such as *Le Voyage dans la lune* (A Trip to the Moon, 1902), became the antithesis to the nonfictional discovery of the Lumière's actuality films.

Matsumoto names the tension between Méliès and Lumière "the dialectic of the discovery and creation of the moving image" (*ugoku eizō ni yoru hakken to sōzō no benshōhō*). Such writing immediately and consciously echoes Hanada's "dialectics without synthesis." As Matsumoto explains: "[The Lumières'] camera 'finds' from among existing things, while Méliès 'creates' from those that do not exist."⁷⁶ The enfolding and interweaving of these is what Matsumoto describes as a "neodocumentary" or "documentary-like avant-garde film" (*kirokuteki zeien eiga*). This resulted in a productive and curious folding of nonfictional elements into fictional film and fictional elements into nonfictional film in a variety of uncanny ways. Fiction and documentary aren't entirely subsumed into one another, and both elements result in a productive and dialectical tension.

What Nakahara described as “feeling strange” or “feeling outside” when viewing Vertov’s film becomes an aspirational effect for Matsumoto, although he aligns it more closely with an idea of chaos in the later 1960s. Indeed, Sakamoto Hirofumi argues that his film *Tsuburekakatta migime no tame ni* (For My Damaged Right Eye, 1968) is “similar to [the concept of estrangement] in Russian Formalism, for it functions as an irrational and illogical interruption or disturbance to the automation of reality.”⁷⁷ In this same year, Matsumoto describes a “sense of vertigo” in the pages of *Eizō geijutsu* (Image Art), his next film magazine project after *Kiroku eiga*. On one hand, Matsumoto has a feeling “of being at the mercy of an almost psychedelically convoluted environment, and on the other hand, a sense of entrapment, of being alienated by the details of daily life.”⁷⁸ Amy Poncher argues that Matsumoto’s drive to “liberate the senses” aligns with the phenomenology of perception as described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who greatly influenced Matsumoto.⁷⁹ For Matsumoto, as for Vertov, experimental film technique in documentary is singularly capable of returning the viewer to a “cinematic feeling,” or what the Soviets called *kinooshchushchenie*.

The rhythmic and extremely varied editing, seemingly using every possible technique, here and in all of Matsumoto’s short documentaries of the 1960s—from *Anpo Jōyaku* (ANPO Treaty, 1960) to *Nishijin* (The Weavers of Nishijin, 1961) to *Haha-tachi* (Mothers, 1967)—recalls Vertov’s exuberant editing. For Nakahara, who would likely have read Matsumoto’s words before penning his own in 1967, Vertov actualizes, prophetically, the dialectic proposed by the neodocumentarist Matsumoto: an entanglement of documentary and avant-garde practices, an experiment that arises simultaneously “from a dream” and “from reality.” Although Vertov is not directly named in Matsumoto’s writing, his films respond to many of the same concerns as Vertov’s.

Matsumoto’s work became more unabashedly experimental as the 1960s progressed, from the oneiric advertisement *Ginrin* (1955) to the highly abstract *Ecstasis* (1969), several minutes of which were folded into the diegesis of *Funeral Parade of Roses*. Experimentation, it appears, became increasingly important. An article in 1967 penned by Matsumoto even lists the importance of cinematographic and editing tricks as both a form of expression and a rejuvenation of thought and consciousness. He praises “experiments that go beyond the established form of expression” (*kisei no hyōgen keishiki ohamidasu jikken*), listing them as fast-motion or high-speed photography, time-lapse photography, rotation of still photographs, jump cuts or frame skipping, stop motion, unusual montage, repetition of frames, double (and triple/multiple) exposures, utilization of photo negatives, and transformation of a frame using a distorted glass or mirror (as in Abel Gance’s 1954 *La Folie du Docteur Tube*).⁸⁰ Such an exhaustive list of editing tricks recalls Vertovian editing and the importance of “tricks and

a maximum of invention during all kinds of filmmaking,” which prioritized the question of what must and can be done now in Russia in 1922.⁸¹ The unusual manipulation of newsreel footage “prepared viewers for the reception of new things”—a mantra and purpose strikingly similar to that of Matsumoto, who desired his tricks to “rebel against the reproducible character of images” and “stimulate the imagination.”⁸² For Matsumoto, experiments such as his own *Song of the Stone* provide meaning to images that mere documentation cannot allow. Although Matsumoto goes beyond Vertov in his criticism of reproducibility, despite their geographic and temporal distance, both share a belief in the ability of film form to transform human perception, creating space for new imagined possibilities.

Matsumoto believed that surrealistic and experimental film techniques have a strong liberatory and even antifascist potential. As Nornes describes, Matsumoto saw the suppression of subjective procedures at the heart of filmmaking as “fundamentally irresponsible and dangerous because it inevitably involved a veiling of politics as well. The realist agendas of nonfiction filmmaking ‘for the people’ hid an authoritarianism.”⁸³ This authoritarianism was associated with Stalinism in particular. Although Vertov was not, in reality, always as anti-Stalinist as the 1960s revisitation of his work claimed,⁸⁴ Matsumoto and Vertov’s early work and theories especially share a deep concern with perception and its impact on the human sensorium. Armed with experimental tricks, filmmakers thus become engineers of the mind, liberating human thought away from authoritarianism in content as well as in form, what Nornes terms “the realist agendas of nonfiction filmmaking,”⁸⁵ and what Matsumoto calls “ready-made expressions.”⁸⁶ By contrast, the avant-garde documentary had the capacity to disorient, destabilize, and unveil, that is, to revolutionize perceptive capacities and train the eye to look at the world anew.

Perhaps it comes as no surprise, then, when Ōishi argues that Matsumoto’s *Funeral Parade of Roses* rejuvenates Vertov’s techniques.⁸⁷ The film loosely adapts Sophocles’s Oedipus myth in the queer counterculture of late 1960s Tokyo, with Oedipus rebranded as Eddy, a trans gay boy who unknowingly sleeps with her father, the owner of a gay nightclub. Eddy also stars in avant-garde films, adding to the film’s kaleidoscopic metacinematic universe. Like Vertov’s films, *Funeral Parade* is a jumble of media, a frenetic mix of techniques: fast-forward, warped footage, overexposure, quick strobe-like shots that appear in rapid succession, freeze-frame, a film-within-a-film, stills, advertising posters, lens flare, curtains on a make-believe stage, cartoon word bubbles with curse words during freeze-frame, and the use of film negatives.

Contributing to this confusion of real and fantastical spaces is the inclusion of significant documentary footage in *Funeral Parade of Roses*, such as

interviews with gay cast members and Tokyo youths. The film shifts frequently from documentary to fictional spaces to the film's own creation, all of which encourage the audience to break down these boundaries. Likewise, the film's use of the film-within-a-film trope reveals the creative and edited aspects inherent to all filmmaking, both narrative and documentary—a battle against the “ready-made expressions” of conventional fiction as well as nonfiction film. One is reminded of Hanada's article on “The Machine and the Rose” of 1951; just as *Funeral Parade* juxtaposed the queer “roses” with an almost utopian technological exuberance, Hanada's article argued for the confrontation of the personal and corporeal body with the political and social external body, and for laying bare their differences. He says, “Unless we confront the body, we are eternally ignorant of our inner world. You cannot grasp the identity of the sensible. There are extreme differences between the unconscious and the ideological.”⁸⁸ Matsumoto's film likewise rejects the very possibility of “grasp[ing] the identity of the sensible” and points to the gaps between interior and external worlds, between “the unconscious and the ideological.” This is a film that echoes Vertov's *kinooshchushchenie*, reviving the sensorial through cinematic technique and generating a renewed and refreshed sociopolitical consciousness.

While some critics, such as Nakahara and Hanada, may have looked to Vertov as an explicit inspiration, others, like Matsumoto, may not have referred to Vertov by name, but nonetheless developed their distinct theories of experimental documentary in an atmosphere and film theoretical ecology already primed to emphasize the revolutionary possibility of experimental forms in film. Hanada and Matsumoto believed strongly in the possibilities of aesthetic form as inherently revolutionary, or a space of possibility between play and archive, in MacKay's words. For theorists in the 1960s who looked to Vertov directly, Vertov represented a trajectory of “dream-like” nonfiction: a “dialectics without synthesis” of “creation” and “discovery,” of dream and reality, fiction and nonfiction, the world “created” by Méliès and “discovered” by Lumière.

Vertov did not directly induce Matsumoto's filmmaking, but prewar and postwar transnational media ecologies laid the groundwork for a Marxist political aesthetics that prioritized avant-garde documentary above all else. Examining Vertov's reception in Japan therefore demonstrates a different way of thinking about film history: less as a mapping of clear-cut influences (although these still existed, as we've seen with Nakahara), and more as a tracing of correspondences and profound connections. As we have seen, paradoxically, it is through the gaps of knowledge and misprisions of texts where some of the most intriguing interpretations and formal strategies can emerge.

Importantly, both Vertov and the Japanese filmmakers of the 1960s draw a connection between liberation, both political and on the level of consciousness,

and experimental documentary practices. The affects and effects of Vertov's playful and estranging experiments are meant to transition into social practice by provoking, disrupting, and reorienting our preformed ways of thinking and feeling. After all, Vertov is not really catching life unawares; objects cannot move on their own. Bulls do not come back to life after slaughter, nor do photographs spontaneously return to negatives. Both Vertov and figures like Matsumoto use the camera to create a new, fantastical world with the aid of tricks that allow us to perceive our own environments anew.

Notes

1. *OED Online*, s.v., "Animate (v.)," accessed February 17, 2022, PennLibraries, University of Pennsylvania.
2. Edgar Morin, "Pour un nouveau cinéma-vérité," *France Observateur*, January 14, 1960, 23
3. As John MacKay has shown, it would be somewhat anachronistic to call Vertov an anti-Stalinist, given that some of his films seem aligned with growing Stalinist and socialist-realist trends. See John MacKay, "Allegory and Accommodation: Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934) as a Stalinist Film," *Film History* 18, no. 4 (2006): 376–91.
4. Kent E. Carroll, "Film and Revolution: Interview with the Dziga Vertov Group," in *Focus on Godard*, ed. Royal S. Brown (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), 50.
5. See John MacKay, *Dziga Vertov: Life and Work*, vol. 1, 1896–1921 (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018); and Séverine Graff, *Le cinéma-vérité: Films et controverses* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014).
6. Masha Salazkina, *World Socialist Cinema: Alliances, Affinities, and Solidarities in the Global Cold War* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023), 45.
7. Salazkina, *World Socialist Cinema*, 91.
8. Ōishi Masahiko, *Higa toi: Nihon modanizumu / Roshia avangyarudo* (Tokyo: Suisei-sha, 2009), 269–70, 277–78.
9. Hanada Kiyoteru, "Ringo ni kansuru icikōsatsu" [A thought on apples], in *Abangyarudo geijutsu* [Avant-garde art] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1994), 138.
10. Hanada, "Ringo ni kansuru icikōsatsu," 141. Furuhata notes that Hanada conceived of a new kind of documentary, what he called a *sur*-documentary, which "needed to dialectically sublimate the achievements of the historical avant-garde from the 1920s." Naoki Yamamoto demonstrates Hanada's conception of the *sur*-documentary as a "dialectics without synthesis." In this article, I use the traditional last name–first name format (i.e., Hanada Kiyoteru) when referring to scholars of Japanese ancestry based in Japan, and the American format (first name–last name) when referring to scholars of Japanese ancestry based in Anglophone regions. Yuriko Furuhata, *Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 63; and Naoki Yamamoto, *Dialectics without Synthesis: Japanese Film Theory and Realism in a Global Frame* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 20.
11. Yuriko Furuhata, "Refiguring Actuality: Japan's Film Theory and Avant-Garde Documentary Movement, 1950s–1960s" (PhD diss., Brown University, 2009), 23.
12. See Hanada Kiyoteru, "20 nendai no 'aban-gyarudo'" [The 1920s "avant-garde"], in *Abangyarudo geijutsu*, 249–60

13. John MacKay, "A Revolution in Film: John MacKay on the Cinema of Dziga Vertov," *Artforum* 49, no. 8 (April 2011): 198.
14. MacKay, "A Revolution in Film."
15. See Dziga Vertov, "Postanovlenie Soveta Troikh" [Decree of the Council of Three], in *Iz nasledii*, tom. 2, *Stat'i i vystupleniia* (Moscow: Eisenstein Center, 2008), 43.
16. Quoted in Annette Michelson, "'The Man with the Movie Camera!' From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum* 10, no. 7 (March 1, 1972): 66.
17. Joshua Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Nonfiction Film: Building the Soviet and Cuban Nations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 92.
18. Edward Tyerman, *Internationalist Aesthetics: China and Early Soviet Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 22.
19. For an analysis of the interrelationship between Vertov and Shklovsky, see Julia Alekseyeva, "A Stony Stone, a Cinematic Cinema: Shklovskian Estrangement in Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Eye*," in "Strangeness/Estrangement," ed. Bill Kroeger, special issue, *Oxford Research in English*, no. 9 (Autumn 2019): 1–30.
20. Notably, Malitsky also ties Vertov's work to *ostranenie*. See Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Nonfiction Film*, 11.
21. Malitsky, 11.
22. Oleg Aronson, *Metakino* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 2003), 86.
23. Emma Widdis, *Socialist Senses: Film, Feeling, and the Soviet Subject, 1917–1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 127–28.
24. MacKay, *Dziga Vertov*, 204.
25. Dziga Vertov, "O s'emke kinosiuzhetov v khronike," in *Iz nasledii*, 22–23; see translation by Julian Graffy in Yuri Tsivian, ed., *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties* (Pordenone: La Giornate del Cinemato, 2004), 81.
26. MacKay, *Dziga Vertov*, 221.
27. Widdis, *Socialist Senses*, 1, 6.
28. MacKay, *Dziga Vertov*, 230.
29. Figure from MacKay, 229.
30. Figure from Yamamoto, *Dialectics without Synthesis*, 178.
31. Yamamoto, 178.
32. Yamamoto, 177.
33. Yamamoto, 173.
34. Yamamoto, 179.
35. Nakahara Yūsuke, "Zen'ei eiga ni tsuite: Vertov no koto nado" [On avant-garde film: Vertov and others], in *Sekai zen'ei eigasai* [A retrospective of world avant-garde cinema] (Tokyo: Sōgetsu Art Center, March–April 1966), 106.
36. Naoki Yamamoto, "Eye of the Machine: Itagaki Takao and Debates on New Realism in 1920s Japan," *Framework* 56, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 368.
37. See Yamamoto, *Dialectics without Synthesis*, 55.

38. Yamamoto, "Eye of the Machine," 382.
39. Hanada Kiyoteru, "Kikai to bara" [Machine and rose], in *Abangyarudo geijutsu*, 191–202.
40. Iwamoto Kenji, *Roshia avangyarudo no eiga to engeki* [Film and theater of the Russian avant-garde] (Tokyo: Suisei-sha, 1998), 330.
41. Yamamoto, *Dialectics without Synthesis*, 75.
42. Yamamoto, 75.
43. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 58.
44. Shimizu Hikaru's seminal 1941 article on montage theory traces it to the Soviet Union; he separates the analysis into sections on Kuleshov, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein but does not name Vertov. See Shimizu Hikaru, "Eiga montajuron no tenbō" [The outlook of film montage theory], in *Eiga to Bunka* [Film and culture] (Tokyo: Yumani Shobō, 2003), 235–77.
45. Iijima Tadashi, *Eiga no kenkyū* [Film study] (Tokyo: Yumani Shobō, 1995), 97.
46. Iwamoto, *Roshia Avangyarudo*, 312.
47. Michael Lucken, "Possibilité et limites d'une philosophie photographique: Une lecture de Nakai Masakazu," *Archives de Philosophie* 1, no. 85 (2022): 74.
48. Aaron Stephen Moore, "Para-Existential Forces of Invention: Nakai Masakazu's Theory of Technology and Critique of Capitalism," *positions* 17, no. 1 (2009): 144–45.
49. Lucken, "Possibilité et limites," 77. Original text in Nakai Masakazu, *Nakai Masakazu zenshū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Nijutsu shuppan, 1981), 47.
50. Iwamoto, *Roshia Avangyarudo*, 332.
51. Kitada Akihiro, "An Assault on 'Meaning': On Nakai Masakazu's Concept of 'Mediation,'" trans. Alexander Zahlten, in *Media Theory in Japan*, ed. Marc Steinberg and Alexander Zahlten (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 282.
52. Akihiro, "An Assault on 'Meaning,'" 292, 294.
53. Moore, "Para-Existential Forces of Invention," 69.
54. Thomas Lamarre, "Cartoon Film Theory: Imamura Taihei on Animation, Documentary, and Photography," in *Animating Film Theory*, ed. Karen Redrobe (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 231.
55. Lamarre, "Cartoon Film Theory," 235.
56. Hanada Kiyoteru, "Viva," in *Abangyarudo geijutsu*, 216–17.
57. Margaret S. Key, *Truth from a Lie: Documentary, Detection, and Reflexivity in Abe Kobo's Realist Project* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 9.
58. Key, *Truth from a Lie*, 23.
59. Key, 69.
60. See Julia Alekseyeva, "Butterflies, Beetles, and Postwar Japan: Semi-Documentary in the 1960s," *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 9, no. 1 (May 2017): 14–29.
61. Unless otherwise noted, I discovered much of the information regarding the Sōgetsu Art Center with the great help of Uesaki Sen, archivist at the Sogestu Art Library at Keio University in Tokyo in November 2015.
62. Marcos P. Centeno-Martin and Michael Raine, "Tracing Tendencies in the Japanese Documentary Mode," *Arts* 9, no. 98 (September 2020): 5.

63. Abé Mark Nornes, "Pōru Rūta: Paul Rotha and the Politics of Translation," *Cinema Journal* 38, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 96.
64. Atsugi Taka, "Dokuyumentarī eiga no keifu" [Geneology of documentary cinema], *Kiroku eiga* [Documentary film] 3, no. 6 (June 1960): 11.
65. Yamamoto, *Dialectics without Synthesis*, 173–74; and Nornes, "Pōru Rūta."
66. Abé Mark Nornes, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 85.
67. Dziga Vertov, "Ikitaningen e no aijō ni tsuite" [On love for the living], trans. Keita Hijikata, *Kiroku eiga* [Documentary film] 4, no. 5 (May 1961): 34–37.
68. The article would also be published in a French translation, but not until May–June 1972, after a series of articles on Godard and Gorin's Dziga Vertov Group. See Dziga Vertov, "L'amour pour l'homme vivant," trans. Sylviane Mossé and Andrée Robel, *Cahiers du cinéma*, nos. 238–39 (May–June 1972): 58–63.
69. See MacKay, "Allegory and Accommodation," 376–91.
70. Yamada Kazuo, "Senkan Pochomukin jouei undō" [*Battleship Potemkin* screening movement], *Kiroku eiga* [Documentary film] 2, no. 10 (October 1959): 26–29.
71. Georges Sadoul, "Shinema vuerite to eiga me jiga vueritofu kara Jan Rushu" [Cinéma vérité and the kino eye: Dziga Vertov to Jean Rouch], trans. Sadamu Maruo, *Eiga hyōron* [Film criticism] 8, no. 21 (August 1964): 63–72.
72. Bernard Eisenshitz, "Avertissement," in *Dziga Vertov*, by Georges Sadoul (Paris: Champs Libre, 1971), 11. How it was published in Japan before ever being published in France remains a mystery.
73. Nakahara, "Zen'ei eiga ni tsuite: Vertov no koto nado," 106.
74. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 30; Jean-Luc Godard, interview in "Nouvelle Vague," special issue, *Cahiers du cinéma* 23, no. 138 (December 1962): 27; Daniel Fairfax, *The Red Years of Cahiers*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 750; Sergei Yutkevich, interview by Louis Marcorelles and Eric Rohmer, *Cahiers* 21, no. 125 (November 1961): 6; and Edgar Morin, *Le Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire: Essai d'anthropologie sociologique* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1956), 58.
75. For an analysis of Matsumoto's interest in *Guernica* as well as an excellent translation of this chapter from *Eizō no hakken*, see Matsumoto Toshio, "A Theory of Avant-Garde Documentary," trans. Michael Raine, *Cinema Journal* 14, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 146.
76. Matsumoto Toshio, *Eizō no hakken* [Discovery of the image]: *Avant-Garde Documentary* (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobo, 1963), 11–12.
77. Sakamoto Hirofumi, "Hakushironbun zen'ei kiroku eiga-ron no sengo-teki imi 1970-nen made no matsumoto toshio no sho katsudō o moto ni" [Postwar meaning of avant-garde documentary film theory: Based on Matsumoto Toshio's activities up to the year 1970] (PhD diss., Kyoto Seita University, 2016), 64.
78. Toshio Matsumoto, "Jikan teki eiga jōkyō ron" [Discussion on the situation of cinema], trans. Shu Xu, *Eizō geijutsu* [Image art] 1, no. 3 (February 10, 1968): 26–29, quoted in Amy Poncher, "On Matsumoto Toshio's 'Phenomenological Technique'" (master's thesis, California Institute of the Arts, 2023), 65–66.
79. See Matsumoto, "Jikan teki eiga jōkyō ron."

80. Matsumoto Toshio, "Hyōgen keishiki no jikken" [Experiments in forms of expression], in *Gendai eiga jiten* [Contemporary encyclopedia of cinema], ed. Okada Susumu et al. (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1967), 155.
81. Dziga Vertov, "O s"yemke kinosiuzhetov v khronike," in *Iz Naslediya*, 22–23.
82. Matsumoto, "Hyogen keishiki," 155.
83. Markus Nornes, *Forest of Pressure: Ogawa Shinsuke and Postwar Japanese Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 20.
84. See John MacKay, "Allegory and Accommodation."
85. Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, 20.
86. Matsumoto, "Hyōgen keishiki no jikken," 155.
87. Ōishi, *Higa toi*, 277–78.
88. Hanada, "Kikai to bara," 199.

Julia Alekseyeva is assistant professor of English and a core member of the Cinema and Media Studies Department at the University of Pennsylvania. Her multimodal work analyzes the intersections between global media and radical leftism, especially in Japan, France, and the former Soviet Union. She has recently completed her first academic monograph, "Antifascism and the Avant-Garde: Radical Documentary in the 1960s," and is finishing a second, tentatively titled "Cinema-Truth and its Discontents: Vertov's Afterlives in France." Along with her academic writing, she is also an author-illustrator of graphic essays as well as the award-winning graphic memoir, *Soviet Daughter: A Graphic Revolution* (Microcosm, 2017).

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