

*The Ideological Antecedents of the
First-Series Renminbi Worker-and-
Peasant Banknote*
or
*What Mao Tse-tung May Have Owed to
Dziga Vertov*

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*Ce qui compte ce ne sont pas les images mais ce qu'il y a entre les images.*¹

As Eugene Wang has pointed out in an unpublished paper,² the worker-and-peasant design on the one-, ten- and fifty-yuan notes in the first renminbi series of 1949 (figure 1) is an iconographic anomaly with important consequences. This design is derived in several steps, as Wang has shown, from a Soviet three-ruble note of 1938 (figure 2), and, like it, is a stock example of the canonical Socialist Realist icon of the worker, peasant, soldier, or leader viewed from below whilst gazing heroically into the symbolic dawn of

1 “What counts is not the images but what is between the images.” Abel Gance, cited in Jean Mitry, *La sémiologie en question: Langage et cinéma* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987), 19.

2 The present paper began as in a response to Wang’s conference presentation “The First Reminbi as Currency of Images: Socialist Subjectivity and Post-Socialist Mediality,” delivered at Boston University 16 June 2012. For the conference program, see <http://blogs.bu.edu/leisureproject/program/> [Accessed on 20. June 2014]. My thanks to the conference organizers, Cathy Yeh and Rob Weller, for allowing me to participate, and to Rudolf Wagner for asking me to make an article from my response, to Liz Coffey and Amy Sloper at the Harvard Film Archive for access to Vertov prints, to Yuri Corrigan for help with Russian sources, to Andrea Hacker for being a fine editor, and to Mary Ellen Alonso, Tarryn Chun, Wiebke Denecke, Sarah Frederick, Maria Gapotchenko, Aaron Garrett, Gisela Höcherl-Alden, Tim Humphrey, Wu Hung, Beth Notar, Klaus Vondrovec, Rudolf Wagner, Cathy Yeh, Jonathan Zatin, and two anonymous readers for useful comments and translation help. I am grateful to Merrill C. Berman, Daniel Leese, Eugene Wang, the Harvard Film Archive, the Münzkabinett of the Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura & Hayama, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the AFT Guild Local 1931 in San Diego, the Army Art Collection of the US Army Center of Military History, Art Resource NY, Artists Rights Society, VAGA New York, www.banknotes.com, www.chineseposters.com, kimjongillookingatthings.tumblr.com, www.masterandmargarita.eu, www.sinobanknote.com, www.vcoins.com, and www.worldmoneyshop.com for images and permission to reproduce them, and to the Boston University Center for the Humanities for generous funding to support their publication.

a Socialist future.³ It departs from earlier Chinese banknote imagery in a number of ways, informs the design of many subsequent PRC banknotes, and has recently become an object of iconic appropriation in Chinese art (figure 3).⁴ To a degree, its novelty is one of content, although, as we shall see, it is equally one of form.



Fig. 1: Renminbi (first series), ten-yuan note, 1949.

3 The 1946 issue of the Bank of Inner Chiang featured two Red Army soldiers in several denominations; the 1948 1000-Yuan note issued by of the Tung Pei Bank of China converts these to the worker and peasant who then reappear in the first-series renminbi. Both of these earlier issues were authorized by the Communist Party for use in the Northeast China Liberated area; see John E. Sandrock, "The Money of Communist China (1927–1949)," Part III, http://www.thecurrencycollector.com/pdfs/The_Money_of_Communist_China_1927-1949_-_Part_III.pdf [Accessed on 20. June 2014].

4 Xu Weixin, <http://fairbank.fas.harvard.edu/event/renminbi-faces-china-and-currency-images> [Accessed on 20. June 2014]. Admittedly, this painting was commissioned by Eugene Wang, which may rather compromise its indexical value. Eugene Wang, personal communication, 7 March 2014.



Fig. 2: Soviet three-ruble note, 1938.



Fig. 3: Xu Weixin, First Renminbi (2010). Oil on canvas, 250 cm x 150 cm.

To speak first of content: We have here a portrait, not of a leader or a historical or legendary figure, but of two characteristic citizens—a worker and peasant idealized in their pose, albeit with individual physiognomies. In China, numismatic portraits of any sort are a recent innovation. Unlike in the Greco-Roman tradition of the West, portraits of leaders dead or living did not appear on Chinese currency until the turn of the twentieth century (when pictures of ministers and living leaders, including the emperor, began to figure sporadically alongside idealized portraits of ancient emperors and sages), and realistic portraits of any sort are rare before the appearance

of Sun Yat-sen's portrait on Republican banknotes in 1923.⁵ Otherwise, landscapes, government buildings, and monuments are the usual images sharing pictorial fields on money cluttered with the ramified ornamentation and lettering of nineteenth-century steel engraving styles. From 1923 to 1948 on the mainland (and in Taiwan up to the present), Sun Yat-sen gazes directly out from many state-issued bills (figure 4), while between 1945 and 1949 regional banks under Communist control issued notes adorned with a formally similar frontal portrait of Mao (figure 5)⁶—a practice discontinued with the centralized first-series renminbi issues of 1949 by the People's Bank of China, for reasons that we shall explore. In PRC currency too, portraits remained for a time rather more the exception than the rule, though from first- to fifth-series renminbi one can chart a progression in their favor. Aside from a ten-yuan note with another, brighter worker-and-peasant two-shot (figure 6), the second series (1955–62) avoids portraits entirely. They become more prominent in third-series renminbi (1962–74), with one-, two-, and five-yuan notes showing a female tractor driver, a lathe operator, and a foundry worker, respectively (figures 7, 8, 9), while one- and ten-jiao notes multiply the heroically forward-gazing and -marching populace into small crowds of mixed vocational composition (“education and productive labor”) (figures 10, 11). The fourth series of 1987–97, however, consists almost entirely of portraits in full- or three-quarter profile, most of them double and hence recalling the first-series worker-and-peasant device, yet representing ethnic rather than class physiognomies (exceptionally, the fifty-yuan note, in what seems a post-Cultural Revolution reparative move, supplements a worker and a peasant with an intellectual—identifiable as such from his spectacles) (figures 12, 13, 14). Mao's first appearance on PRC currency occurs on a note in this series: on the 100-yuan note he is aligned, in medallic low-relief profile, with Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and—another Deng-era recuperative move—Liu Shaoqi (figure 15). Most recently, the fifth series of 1999 reproduces the same three-quarter headshot of a faintly

5 See Beth Notar, “Ties That Dissolve and Bind: Competing Currencies, Prestige and Politics in Early Twentieth-Century China,” in *Value and Valuables: From the Sacred to the Symbolic*. Society of Economic Anthropology Monograph, vol. 21, ed. Duran Bell and Cynthia Werner (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2003), 127–158, here 140; also Rudolf G. Wagner, “The Image of the Public Leader out of the Chinese Crisis,” unpublished talk delivered 18 April 2012 at Boston University (cited by kind permission). Compare the portraits of ministers on notes issued by the Qing government during the reigns of Xian Feng (p. 60) and Guang Xu (pp. 67, 70), the 1912 five-yuan note featuring Commander in Chief Chen Jiongming issued in 1912 by the Guangdong Provincial Military Government of the Republic of China (p. 77), and the portrait of General Yuan Shikai, as President, on an unissued one-yuan commemorative banknote of 1916 (p. 78), in *A History of Chinese Currency (16th Century BC–20th Century AD)* (N.p. [Beijing]: Xinhua [New China] Publishing House, 1983).

6 Helen Wang, “Mao on Money,” *East Asia Journal* 1, no. 2 (2003): 87–97, here 89–91; also Sandrock, “The Money of Communist China (1927–1949),” Part III.

smiling Mao on every denomination, thus standardizing a formerly eclectic iconography (figure 16).⁷



Fig. 4: Kwangtung Provincial Bank, one-dollar note, 1931.

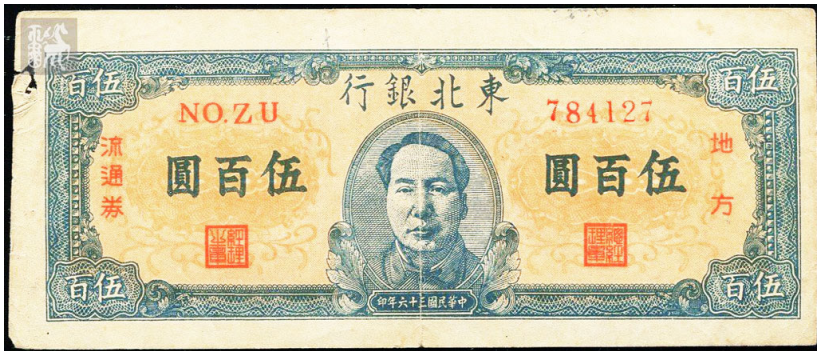


Fig. 5: Tung Pei Bank of China, 500-yuan note, 1947.

7 For color images of the first four renminbi series, see Zhongguo ren min yin hang and huo bi fa xing si bian, *Ren min bi tu ce/Picture Album of Renminbi* (Beijing: Zhongguo jin rong chu ban she, 1988); also <http://www.sinobanknote.com/> [Accessed on 20. June 2014]. All dates given are dates of issue.



Fig. 6: Renminbi (second series), ten-yuan note, 1957.



Fig. 7: Renminbi (third series), one-yuan note, 1969.



Fig. 8: Renminbi (third series), two-yuan note, 1964.



Fig. 9: Renminbi (third series), five-yuan note, 1969.



Fig. 10: Renminbi (third series), one-jiao note, 1967.



Fig. 11: Renminbi (third series), ten-jiao note, 1966.



Fig. 12: Renminbi (fourth series), ten-yuan note, 1988.

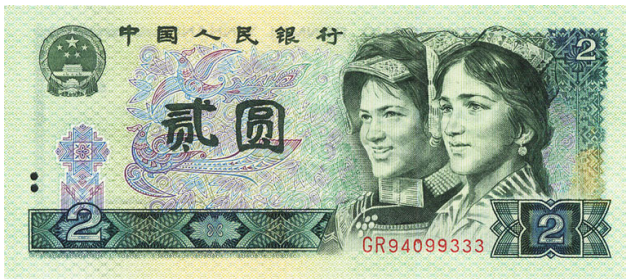


Fig. 13: Renminbi (fourth series), two-yuan note, 1988.



Fig. 14: Renminbi (fourth series), fifty-yuan note, 1987.



Fig. 15: Renminbi (fourth series), 100-yuan note, 1988.



Fig. 16: Renminbi (fourth series), 100-yuan note, 1999.

From the perspective of genre the first-series worker-and-peasant design thus looks like something of an exception. Yet its demotic subject matter participates in a program depicting symmetry in agricultural and industrial production that governs the entire series and is carried through on other notes with landscapes that include factories and shepherds, weavers and irrigation procedures, trains and bridges, electrification projects, railway stations, and harrowing, threshing and fertilization scenes. On the formal side, most of these landscapes share with the worker-and-peasant two-shot a characteristically Socialist Realist deployment of heroic foreshortening and utopian out-of-frame space: the revolutionary pathos of our worker and peasant is matched elsewhere in the series by landscapes that extend railway tracks, furrows, bridges, electrical transmission lines, and horizons of land and sea, not only into the implied utopian spaces of deep horizons or invisible areas to the right and left, but also into the viewer's own implied space (figures 17, 18). The future to which they are looking would seem to be the future to which these lines and paths lead, and, in a manner native to film since Auguste and Louis Lumière first shocked spectators with a train's movement toward the camera in 1895, this utopian future implicitly includes the space from which the viewer regards the image—as the Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's recurrent use of an onrushing train as a trope for the Revolution makes clear (figure 19).⁸ In this broader context the worker-and-peasant note is not an anomaly within the series, but rather an emblem of the issue's iconographic program as a whole, a program conceived—so Wang notes—as an alternative to designs initially featuring Mao, which the chairman is supposed to have rejected. The real novelty and lasting contribution of this image to Chinese numismatic iconography is therefore not that it is a portrait, nor even simply that it is a double portrait of laborers in a tradition slightly more accustomed to headshots of leaders, but, first, that it replaces the numismatically omnipresent portrait of Sun Yat-sen that had transfixed Chinese with its fierce frontal gaze for a quarter century with a quasi-photographic low-angle shot of two men looking not directly at us but so to speak off-screen top right and ahead into utopian space, a formal device repeated or varied in every renminbi issue afterward; and, second, that this kind of portrait – and remarkably not the otherwise ubiquitous visage of Mao – are what supplant the Republican image of Sun Yat-sen on Chinese currency.⁹

8 On the origins of this trope in a drawing of January 1925 by the cartoonist Viktor Deni featuring a train with the slogan “Full steam along the rails of Leninism” written on its engine, see Yuri Tsivian, ed., *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties* (Pordenone: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2006), 48–49. Trains appear before this in *Kino-Eye* (1924) in a way that suggests a link with the notion of Communist progress, but the symbolism is not overt and the reference to Lenin is missing.

9 Eugene Wang, “The First Reminbi.” Helen Wang likewise notes this incongruity, describing as well the deliberate omission from representations of Tiananmen on Chinese paper currency of the portrait of Mao that has adorned Tiananmen Square since 1949. Helen Wang, “Mao on Money,” 93–94. On Mao's Tiananmen portrait, see Wu Hung, “Face of Authority: Tiananmen and Mao's Tiananmen Portrait,” *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 68–84.



Fig. 17: Renminbi (first series), 100-yuan note, 1949.



Fig. 18: Renminbi (first series), fifty-yuan note, 1949.



Fig. 19: Louis and Auguste Lumière, Arrival of a Train, 1895; Dziga Vertov, Kino-Eye, 1924; The Man With the Movie Camera, 1929.

Why does Mao's image not appear on Renminbi during his lifetime?

In retrospect, Mao's stated reasons for keeping his portrait off renminbi – that as Chairman of the Party and not head of state it was inappropriate for him to figure there, and that the achievements of individuals should not be glorified¹⁰ – seem disingenuous given its eventual ubiquity in all media but the numismatic. This apparent paradox has led scholars to seek other reasons for the omission. The results have been remarkably inconclusive, as perhaps they must be, given that the conditions of numismatic production are complex, politically sensitive, and rarely well documented. Helen Wang supposes that Mao's choice may reflect the conflicted status of money in Communist ideology; Eugene Wang wonders if the Chairman shied from appearing, like Sun Yat-sen, on paper money at risk of inflationary devaluation.¹¹ One could also construe a return to the imperial poetics of absence from which – as Rudolf Wagner has shown – Sun Yat-sen's numismatic iconography constituted a radical departure.¹² Although all these hypotheses have their merits and may be accurate to some degree, none of them is quite adequate on its own, if only because they neglect certain qualities of the images in question. Building upon the mere fact of presence or absence, they fail to take into account the images' formal rhetoric; focusing on the what, they neglect to ask how. My own aim is to extrapolate the logic of Mao's omission on PRC currency from the iconographic history of the now cliché Socialist Realist type deployed in his stead, a history dependent as much upon matters of aesthetic form and media syntax as upon considerations of content.

In any event, the incongruity may not be quite as large as it seems. To be sure—as Daniel Leese notes—in the late 1940s and early '50s the massive leader cult that had been fostered around Mao in the mid-1940s “in order to prevent factionalism within the CCP and to compete with the publicity campaigns of Chiang Kai-shek as ‘national leader’ did not find expression in Mao statues or other monuments at this point,” while Mao is on record as having intervened personally against certain manifestations of leader cult. Yet as Leese also observes, “Mao's seemingly contradictory behavior, from fostering a leader cult in Yan'an to interdicting cult symbols in the early

10 Helen Wang, “Mao on Money,” 96.

11 See John E. Sandrock, “The Money of Communist China (1927–1949),” Part I, on the relative reliability of Chinese Communist currency, http://www.thecurrencycollector.com/pdfs/The_Money_of_Communist_China_1927-1949_Part_I.pdf [Accessed on 20. June 2014], and Part III on the postwar inflation; also Notar, “Ties That Dissolve and Bind.

12 Helen Wang, “Mao on Money,” 96; Eugene Wang, “The First Reminbi”; Wagner, “Image of the Public Leader.”

PRC and then again allowing for a most exuberant leader cult during the Cultural Revolution,” betrays the inner consistency of Mao the tactician:

He clearly understood the instrumental value of a personality cult to fend off competitors and to establish a noninstitutional link with the masses. As long as Mao’s position and political aims remained uncontested, he expressed contempt for the outer forms of worship that he later linked to ‘feudal remnants’ in the superstructure. In times of crisis, however, this criticism did not prevent Mao from relying on his public prestige and supposed proximity to the masses to circumvent the institutional restrictions posed by his office, even at the cost of destroying the party itself.¹³

If Mao was intent on reserving leader cult for strategic use as a non-institutional propaganda channel, then keeping his face off central bank issues makes sense: it is hard to dissociate oneself rhetorically from a state whose currency bears one’s portrait. I believe however that the omission may also be understood in the light of particular qualities of the images chosen instead to grace Chinese banknotes, and in relation to images of Mao concurrently in circulation elsewhere within the culture. The unifying thesis of my exposition will be that the pictorial program of Chinese Communist paper currency—both early and late, from the first series on through to the fifth—engages in manipulations of visual perception of a kind linked by media theorists to the interdependent emergence of new media and of new technologies of social and political control in the modern era.¹⁴ As I shall show, our worker-and-peasant icon uses techniques first developed in cinema to locate the viewer within a network of politically meaningful sight lines that imply a specific relationship not only to Mao, but also to other media in which his image (or voice) does appear: painting, posters, film, still photography, sculpture, radio, public announcement systems. In other words, the propagandistic function of the numismatic image derives not only from its own content, form, and medium, but also from its location within the complex imbrication of media channels characteristic of modern state propaganda.

13 Daniel Leese, “Mao the Man and Mao the Icon,” in *A Critical Introduction to Mao*, ed. Timothy Cheek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 219–39, here 228–29; also Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China’s Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 7–12.

14 See for example Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University 1986), 286–298; also Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), and Peter J. Schwartz, *After Jena: Goethe’s Elective Affinities and the End of the Old Regime* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010), 305n167.

Soviet and other iconographic sources

If in this essay I trace the techniques in question back to mid-1920s Soviet Russia, it is because these are the years in which we find all the modernist arts—photography, cinema, poster art, radio—first enlisted in concert to serve conflicting power positions in a revolutionary succession crisis; our worker-and-peasant type, it seems, is one of the images they conspire to produce. Although this iconic type—familiar not only from Stalinist but also from Italian Fascist and German National Socialist imagery—has complex historical origins, integrating elements of Hellenistic, Roman, and Christian visual tradition, the proximate cause of its invention as a distinct type would seem to have been Lenin’s death in January 1924. As Nina Tumarkin has shown, the secular cult developed that year and thereafter around the dead leader, rooted as it may have been in longstanding Russian cultural habits, arose as a consequence of his epigones’ need to consolidate their own power as his legitimate inheritors—a pattern deliberately replicated in China the next year with the funeral of Sun Yat-sen, a matter to which I shall return.¹⁵ The Soviet Politburo’s maneuvers in this direction were first provoked by Lenin’s failing health after a stroke he endured in March 1923, and then systematized during and after the funeral exequies of late January 1924, amidst conflict between a Stalin concerned to tout his (in fact somewhat tense) connection to Lenin through sacral imagery, and a Trotsky-Bukharin-Kamenev faction suspicious of this strategy and at least initially opposed to it.¹⁶ The following year brought the perception, on the part of Soviet avant-garde artists, of a need to politicize art so as to help stabilize the regime, an effort to which the development of a standardized iconography of the dead leader in the service of a developing “Lenin cult” would be crucial.¹⁷ This involved not only a consolidation of gestural tropes attaching traditionally to Western images of the leader—the divinely inspired “melting gaze” upward derived from the Hellenistic type of what has been called the “heavenward-

15 Rudolf G. Wagner, “Ritual, Architecture, Politics and Publicity During the Republic: Enshrining Sun Yat-sen,” in *Chinese Architecture and the Beaux-Arts*, ed. Jeffrey W. Cody, Nancy S. Steinhardt and Tony Atkin (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), 223–78.

16 Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*, enlarged edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 112–206; on Stalin vs. Trotsky *et al.* concerning Lenin’s embalming, see 174–75.

17 Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph, 1924–1937* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 9–34. Cf. Alexander Rodchenko, “Against the Synthetic Portrait, for the Snapshot” (*Novyi lef* 4, 1928, pp. 14–16), trans. John E. Bowlt, in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Aperture, 1989), 238–242.

gazing Alexander” (figure 20),¹⁸ the commanding raised arm of the Vatican Augustus (figure 21), and the hortatory raised arm, elevated position and crowd-encompassing gaze of the soapbox or podium speaker (figure 23), a late nineteenth-century complex with roots in ancient Roman gestural rhetoric (figure 22)¹⁹—but also their adaptation to the new expressive modalities of the photographic and cinematic arts by prominent Soviet artists such as Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein, Valentina Kulagina, Gustav Klutskis, and Alexander Rodchenko. A further significant factor was the element of political, technological, and media pedagogy encoded in the figure’s visual syntax. True to its origins in the very moment when Russia began a concerted effort to form the “new Soviet man,” not least by means of new media (radio, film, poster art, photojournalism), this is an image meant to teach viewers how to enter into new modes of relation with certain objects (lathes, tractors, radio loudspeakers, leaders) as well as to see in new ways—to read precisely images such as this, while internalizing new and politically useful modes of media reception.²⁰ By 1929, the composite icon thus produced is fully codified as a visual idiom across several media,

18 The nature of the inspiration (and the consistency of the type) has been a matter of some debate. The term “heavenward-gazing Alexander” is from H.P. L’Orange, *Apotheosis in Ancient Portraiture* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1947; reprinted New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas, 1982), 19–27; Alexander’s “melting gaze” is reported by Plutarch (*Alexander* 4.1): “The outward appearance of Alexander is best represented by the statues of him which Lysippos made, and it was by this artist alone that Alexander himself thought it fit that he should be modelled. For those peculiarities which many of his successors and friends afterwards tried to imitate, namely, the poise of the neck, which was bent slightly to the left, and the melting glance of his eyes, this artist has accurately observed.” *Plutarch’s Lives*, with an English translation by Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 7:233. On Alexander’s upward gaze as an expression of his *pothos* or “perpetual desire to do something new and extraordinary” (Arrian, *Indica* 20. 1–3), see Andrew F. Stewart, *Faces of Power: Alexander’s Image and Hellenistic Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 13, 84–86, 118–20, 141, 333–34.

19 On the history of soapbox oratory, see Thomas U. Walker, “Mounting the Soapbox: Poetics, Rhetoric and Laborlore at the Scene of Speaking,” *Western Folklore* 65, no. 1/2 (Winter–Spring 2006): 65–98. “One of the earliest artistic depictions of a gesticulating orator is the famous statue now in Florence, the ‘Arringatore,’ a bronze statue of a togate magistrate with an uplifted right arm, which is dated to the late second century or early first century B.C.” Gregory S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). On Roman gestural rhetoric see, besides Aldrete, Richard Brilliant, *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art: The Use of Gestures to Denote Status in Roman Art and Coinage* (New Haven: The Academy, 1963).

20 Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 230–311; Emma Widdis, “Socialist Senses: Film and the Creation of Soviet Subjectivity,” *Slavic Review* 71, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 590–618; Roann Barris, “The Constructivist Engaged Spectator: A Politics of Reception,” *Design Issues* 15, no. 1 (Spring, 1999): 31–48; Oksana Bulgakowa, with Dietmar Hochmuth and Gregor Hochmuth, *The Factory of Gestures: Body Language in Film* (Berlin: PP Media/Stanford: Stanford Humanities Lab, 2008), DVD; Bulgakowa, *Fabrika zhestov* [The Factory of Gestures] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2005), 44–52.

ready for regular use in the poster and film and sculptural and cinematic propaganda supporting Stalin's first five-year plan. With Stalin's imposition of Socialist Realist orthodoxy in 1934,²¹ the aesthetic vibrancy of the type's early deployment in the films of Vertov and Eisenstein, the photomontages of Klutsis and Kulagina or the photography of Rodchenko turns into the arid cliché that would pepper the visual landscape of Eastern Europe until 1989, and from which Chinese moneyers adapted the type in 1948–49. As we shall see, its export to China required the mediation of European with East Asian aesthetic and iconographic traditions within a particular set of local constraints,²² not the least of which was a need to position Mao with respect both to his ambivalent ally Stalin and to the delicate legacy of Sun Yat-sen's emphatic identifications – living and posthumous – with Lenin.



Fig. 20: *Alexander the Great, gold medallion from Abu Qir, 220–25 AD. Obverse, 56 mm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Münzkabinett, 1907/230.*

21 August 1934 marked the official declaration of Socialist Realism as an aesthetic orthodoxy in the USSR, though its principles were decided by Stalin in a secret meeting with Soviet writers in October 1932. Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China*, trans. Robert Chandler (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 84–6.

22 Leese, *Mao Cult*, 7–12.



Fig. 21 (left): Augustus of Prima Porta, first century AD. Marble. Rome, Vatican Museums.

Fig. 22 (right): "L'Arringatore," second or first century BC. Romano-Etruscan bronze. Florence, National Archaeological Museum.



Fig. 23: Soapbox speaker, San Diego, 1912.

The gaze relay: Viewer → worker → leader → utopia

At this point a distinction should be made between low-angle shots of the worker, peasant, or soldier and low-angle shots of the leader. In Soviet silent cinema, the two types may overlap in the typical worker or peasant firebrand haranguing his less dedicated cohorts to strike or mutiny or read party papers or acquire a tractor for use by the *kolkhoz*. This double type—which I will discuss with reference to Alexander Dovzhenko’s film *Earth* (1930)—is clearly modeled on Lenin. Like Lenin, Dovzhenko’s Komsomol activist hero Vasyl Trubenko (Symon Svashenko) can see beyond the screen frame to a dawning future still invisible to his fellow peasants, whom he exhorts with gestures modeled on Lenin’s (figure 24)—an oratorical gestural code diffused to the Soviet populace above all by film, as Oksana Bulgakowa has shown²³—to accept Stalin’s collectivization of Soviet agriculture, just then beginning, in the classic metonym of a new tractor. (The gestural affinity to the type of the orating Lenin is even more obvious in the Stenberg brothers’ poster for the film, which echoes a shot of Svashenko in Dovzhenko’s *Arsenal* (1928) (figures 25, 26) rather more than any in *Earth*.) When Vasyl is killed by Khoma Bilokin, a kulak landowner’s son opposed to collectivization, the film transmutes the pathos of his martyrdom into a communal desire to unite behind the program. In a shot very clearly echoing their initial wait for the tractor, we see the peasants moved in the end to direct their collective gaze to a utopian source of light above and behind our point of view (figure 27). We are thus invited to see with their eyes and to desire what they desire: the collectivized, mechanized future that Vasyl had seen and desired. Yet the peasants attain such vision only once Vasyl has died a martyr’s death at the hands of the kulak—indeed, as a consequence of his death. The peasants’ awakened vision—which cues ours—flows from the fact that Vasyl, like Lenin, is dead. (Both the kulak Bilokhin and a priest allied with him appear now in high-angle shots, Bilokhin’s head ostrich-like in the ground and the priest’s heavenward gaze clearly blind (figure 28).) The film thus inserts us, its viewers, into an affectively charged chain or relay of gazes that ends by returning us to Lenin, the original visionary, but to a Lenin marked absent. Its final scenes show the peasant mass beatifically harangued by a young party cell leader, Vasyl’s successor (figure 29).²⁴ This overall pattern obeys the logic of the cult fostered by Lenin’s successors after his death in January 1924. Vasyl’s easy leadership is plainly consonant with Lenin’s own doctrine of the revolutionary avant-garde, which invests with special foresight a leadership thereby exalted, yet in

23 Bulgakowa, “Public Speakers,” *The Factory of Gestures* (DVD); Bulgakowa, *Fabrika zhestov*, 222.

24 On *Earth*, see George O. Liber, *Alexander Dovzhenko: A Life in Soviet Film* (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), 102–113.

principle equal to the led. His martyrdom echoes the equation with the Christ-like type of the martyred hero that the cult, exploiting deep-set Russian habits of thought, imputed to Lenin,²⁵ and in him collectivization is legitimated: through an implicit identification of Stalin's vision with that of a Lenin whose guiding presence is only intensified by his absence.



Fig. 24: Alexander Dovzhenko, *Earth*, 1930. *Vasyl exhorting the peasants.*



Fig. 25 (left): Alexander Dovzhenko, *Arsenal*, 1928.

Fig. 26 (right): Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg, poster for Dovzhenko's *Earth*, 1930. Kamakura & Hayama, Ruki Matsumoto Collection Board/The Museum of Modern Art.

²⁵ Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 12–18, 83–4.



Fig. 27: Alexander Dovzhenko, *Earth*, 1930. Peasants awaiting the tractor's arrival; peasants "singing new songs." For the film excerpts [click here](#) and [here](#).



Fig. 28: Alexander Dovzhenko, *Earth*, 1930. Khoma Bilokin with his head in the earth; priest condemning collectivization.



Fig. 29: Dovzhenko, *Earth*, 1930. Vasyl and his successor haranguing the crowd. For the film excerpts [click here](#) and [here](#).

When the worker, peasant, or soldier are not thus conflated with the leader, we typically see him or her gazing heroically, joyfully, fanatically at an object invisible to the viewer —often enough, a source of light whose identity both with the Leader and with his utopia is clearly suggested (figures 30, 31, 32).²⁶

26 Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, 206–7 (Nazi paintings); 212 (Stakhanov).

In cinematic reverse shots or in separate still images, we find the leader in an attitude remarkably like that of his followers, regarding the same off-screen utopian object, but with what seems a higher sort of vision. (In Eisenstein's *October* (1928), by contrast, the demonized government minister Kerensky—like Dovzhenko's kulak and priest—is shot from above, his gaze directed low, in a trope of restricted vision (figure 33).) Whereas what the mass gazes upon is the leader and through and in him the future he guarantees, the leader alone sees this future directly and calmly, without manifest signs of desire.



Fig. 30: Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye*, 1924; Alexander Dovzhenko, *Earth*, 1930; Sergei Eisenstein, *Old and New*, 1929.



Fig. 31: Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will*, 1935.

The utopian future is thus figured both as the object of the Leader's privileged vision and purpose and as his symbolic equivalent; his very person becomes both its metonym and its warrant, and hence a legitimate object of mass revolutionary desire. And the relay does not stop there, for its purpose is not just to represent such desire, but to elicit it in us, the viewers, by inviting us to want what we see others wanting—that is, by integrating us into the relay.

In the Chinese context, a 1937 woodcut portrait of Mao in the Communist Party newspaper *Liberation Weekly* (*Jiefang zhoukan*)—whose use of later cult motifs (“moving masses, flags, and sunrays”) Daniel Leese cites as evidence of the early growth of a Mao cult—does something similar not only with its sun-ray and rifle diagonals symbolically relaying power from the sun down to Mao and from the Red Army up to him, but also with our own low-angle perspective on the leader looking paternally at us. We gaze up to Mao, while his confident gaze, endowed with the force of the sun, enjoins us to march



Fig. 32: Resolutely protect the policy of the revolutionary three-in-one combination! 1967. Ink on paper, 78 x 54 cm. Stefan R. Landsberger Collection.



Fig. 33: Alexander Kerensky. Sergei Eisenstein, October, 1928.

with his troops to a utopia as yet invisible to us out of frame right, but clearly illuminated by the dawn of the Revolution (figure 34).²⁷ This configuration becomes thoroughly idiomatic in poster art of the Cultural Revolution (figures 35, 36).

²⁷ Leese, *Mao Cult*, 8–10.

(卷一第)

刊周放解

(四二)



克坦

像東澤毛

策，回到國際，使國際成爲保衛和平的有力武器，與一切民主的及人民陣線的政府成立友好同盟。法國，斯干的那雅亞，捷克斯拉夫——和世界的主要的和平保證蘇聯訂立互助的自衛同盟。希特勒統治四年後的今天，在德國成爲了人民陣線發動者以及在千百萬同胞們的心中至高

至大的那種情緒，是被我們現在生存着的最偉大的德國作家托瑪斯，曼，用最有力的字句描寫了出來，他對於德國人民陣線委員會的支持，非凡的充實了與加強了它。四月十日在給委員會的一封信中他寫着：

「在精神上對於四月十日舉行的人民陣線的

會議過程我將積極參加，從我的心裏願意你們的討論能夠幫助弄清那些影響我們如此之深的问题。必須用一切方法來構成這層一個個的，使本國國內或國外渴望着一個真正能配得上日耳曼這個名子的政府的，一切善意的德國人們，能夠在這個個領土上合作。

恢復現在他們所沒有的自由權利，及關於自由與人性的觀念，十分重要，因爲唯有如此才能支持一個新的與良好的日耳曼國家，而且唯有通過他們我們才能接近到那種現在激動着德國人民的渴望之心。在這種信念上，必須有一個能夠自立起來保衛自己的自由，和在破壞者之前知道弱點的一種人性之信念上，我認定我自己跟德國的人民陣線是統一的。」

——黃華譯自一九三七年五月四日「新草葉」

「日本帝國主義獨怕我們的這種努力——爭取千百萬羣衆，進入抗日民族統一戰線的百折不撓，艱苦卓絕的努力。我們的努力將確定地打倒日本帝國主義，並實現全部的民族解放與社會解放。」

——毛澤東——

Fig. 34: Mao woodcut in the party newspaper Liberation Weekly, 22 June 1937. Collection of Daniel Leese.



Fig. 35: Boundlessly loyal to the great leader Chairman Mao, boundlessly loyal to the great Mao Zedong Thought, boundlessly loyal to Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, 1966. Ink on paper, 76 x 53 cm. Stefan R. Landsberger Collection.



Fig. 36: Advance victoriously while following Chairman Mao's revolutionary line in literature and the arts, ca. 1968. Ink on paper, 76.5 x 154 cm. Stefan R. Landsberger Collection.



Fig. 37: Sergei Eisenstein, Strike!, 1925.



Fig. 38: Sergei Eisenstein, Strike!, 1925; The Battleship Potemkin, 1926.

Such effects are achieved as much via modernist formal devices as through an equally modernist pastiche of traditional iconographic content. The propagandistic force of the image resides above all in the way it directs the gaze and implies the position of the viewer, and these techniques of direction—the “how” of the image—are distinctly products of mid-1920s European visual culture, both in practice and in theory. Thus, for example, the sense these pictures give us that we are viewing their subject from a low-angle perspective is achieved with a version of what in cinema would be called an objective (non-point-of-view) low-angle medium shot—a device that first entered film language and photography in the early to mid-1920s, without ever having been

idiomatic in the older arts.²⁸ Soviet filmmakers' use of expressively angled shots has sometimes been traced to Eisenstein's 1925 film *Strike!*, which does use them often. Yet in fact examples of the "heroic" low-angle shot type are rare, though present, in *Strike!* (figure 37); in this film, Eisenstein more often angles shots to general comic, pathetic, or compositional effect, or—as in *The Battleship Potemkin* (1926)—to articulate unequal power relationships (figure 38). I shall argue below that it is to Eisenstein's rival Vertov (who thought himself plagiarized in *Strike!*)²⁹ that we must look for the origin of our image, for Vertov's work reflects more clearly than most the peculiar convergence of historical factors informing the image type:

- 1) The legitimization crisis following Lenin's death, to which Vertov responded in groundbreaking ways with his commemorative *Lenin Kino-Pravda* newsreel of January 1925.
- 2) The codification of new visual idioms for expressing relationships between political authority and the masses.³⁰
- 3) Improvement in the conditions of Soviet film production following major institutional changes in 1924–25.³¹
- 4) The rise to cultural dominance of a technocratic enthusiasm for social engineering and scientific management of industry that Vertov found very congenial, inspired by the thinking of Frederick Winslow Taylor and promoted in Russia initially by Lenin and then above all by Alexei Gastev, whose program achieved institutional form, with Lenin's help, between 1920 and 1924.

28 The one major exception—anamorphic imagery—develops in tandem with post-Renaissance interest in optical technology, often relying upon it as a means of construction. In recent scholarship, the quasi-photographic qualities sometimes apparent in Dutch seventeenth-century painting, above all in the work of Johannes Vermeer (views oddly sectioned by the picture's edge, composition in depth, clearly defined perspectives, a certain realism), have been linked both to use of the camera obscura as a painter's tool and to new models of subjectivity for which the camera obscura provided a popular trope.

29 Tsivian, *Lines of Resistance*, 133–34.

30 Siegfried Kracauer's essay "The Mass Ornament" (1927) is the classic formulation of this problem in its relation to cinema. Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75–86. See also Gertrud Koch, "Face and Mass: Towards an Aesthetic of the Cross-Cut in Film," *New German Critique* 95 (Spring-Summer 2005): 139–148.

31 Peter Kenez, "The Golden Age of the Soviet Cinema," in *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 195–223, esp. 205–6.

- 5) A new understanding of film editing as a matter of constructing meaning in the viewer's mind by guiding attention and response through careful juxtaposition of shots ("the Kuleshov effect," first theorized between 1919 and 1924),³² a conception easily compatible with technocratic fantasies of social engineering and from then to the end of the decade a hallmark of Soviet filmmaking.
- 6) The rise of the public radio loudspeaker as a significant conduit for propaganda in the early to mid-1920s.³³

Origins of the Heroic Low-Angle Shot

Cinematic low-angle shots are a datable import, entering Russia along with the films from the West to which Lenin's "Directive on Cinema Affairs" of January 1922 opened the USSR.³⁴ As Barry Salt notes, in the early 1920s there was a move in French and German cinema from using high- and low-angle shots "as distant POV shots, which was the only way they had been consistently used before, to shooting them without such motivation, and from closer in as well." In German "Expressionist" films especially, "there was some tendency to associate low-angle shots with the creation of an imposing impression in the

32 "The Origins of Montage," in *Cinema in Revolution: The Heroic Era of the Soviet Film*, ed. Luda Schnitzer, John Schnitzer and Marcel Martin, trans. with additional material by David Robinson (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 66–75; David Bordwell, "The Idea of Montage in Soviet Art and Film," *Cinema Journal* 11, no. 2 (Spring, 1972): 9–17; John MacKay, "Built on a Lie: Propaganda, Pedagogy, and the Origins of the Kuleshov Effect," in *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*, ed. Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 215–232. Bordwell and MacKay both note that although Kuleshov normally receives credit for the "invention" of montage, Vertov was engaged in similar experiments at the same time; according to MacKay, both filmmakers were involved in the earliest film known to use the effect, an agitprop strip of early 1919 entitled *Exposure of the Relics of Tikhon of Zadonsk*.

33 On Soviet radio propaganda, see Stephen Lovell, "How Russia Learned to Listen: Radio and the Making of Soviet Culture," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 3 (Summer 2011) [New Series]: 591–615. Lovell observes that the practical efficacy of Soviet radio propaganda fell some way short of the theoretical efficacy imagined by such advocates as Vertov (592). It is worth noting that Vertov was an early and lifelong radio enthusiast, having begun his montage experiments in the medium of sound as early as 1916; see Georges Sadoul, *Dziga Vertov*, with a preface by Jean Rouch (Paris: Éditions Champ Libre, 1971), 15–46. On the history of public address systems, see <http://www.historyofpa.co.uk/launch.asp> [Accessed on 20. June 2014]; also Frederik Nebeker, *Dawn of the Electronic Age: Electrical Technologies in the Shaping of the Modern World, 1914 to 1945* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2009), 315, and Morton D. Fagen, ed., *A History of Engineering and Science in the Bell System: The Early Years (1875–1925)* (New York: Bell Telephone Laboratories, 1975), 185–190, 292–295, 425.

34 Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, eds., *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 56.

figures so treated, despite the fact that they were never presented as the Point of View of a character in the film.”³⁵ We can trace possible sources of influence on Soviet practice in films circulated in Russia in the early ‘20s. One of the earliest German films to use low-angle shots, Arthur von Gerlach’s revolutionary drama *Vanina* (1922), was part of a package of imports in 1922; ³⁶ there are notable low-angle shots in Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922) and Fritz Lang’s *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler* (1922), a film Eisenstein and Esfir Shub edited for the Soviet market before becoming filmmakers themselves (figure 39);³⁷ the “Ivan the Terrible” segment of Paul Leni’s three-part anthology film *Waxworks* (1924) – from which Eisenstein would later copy the makeup for his own *Ivan the Terrible* (1944/46) – is shot entirely from low angles that routinely identify the despot with Orthodox icons, a visual comment on power that may well have caught early Soviet filmmakers’ notice (figure 40);³⁸ and in Lang’s two-part epic *Die Nibelungen* (1924), we find a shot from below of heralding trumpets that would enjoy a long afterlife in both Nazi and Communist propaganda (figure 41). As the French and American “apparatus theorists” of cinema perceived in the mid-1970s, like the Renaissance invention of single-point perspective in painting such camera positioning assigns a position to the viewer in ways that support specific articulations of selfhood and social power.³⁹ Moving further back in

35 Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, 2nd ed. (London: Starword, 1992), 159; see also Jean Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, trans. Christopher King (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 60-61 on Abel Gance (*La Roue*, 1923) and Jean Epstein (*L’Auberge rouge*, 1923; *Coeur Fidèle*, 1923).

36 Anna M. Lawton, *The Red Screen: Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), 33.

37 On Eisenstein, Shub and Lang, see David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*, Third Edition (New York: Norton, 1996), 145; David Kalat, *The Strange Case of Dr. Mabuse: A Study of the Twelve Films and Five Novels* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 60; Yekaterina Chlochowa, “Eisensteins erste Arbeit für den Film – die Ummontage des ‘Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler’ von Fritz Lang,” in *Eisenstein und Deutschland: Texte, Dokumente, Briefe*, ed. Oksana Bulgakowa (Berlin: Akademie der Künste/Henschel Verlag, 1998), 115-122. On German imports to Russia in the early to mid-‘20s, see Sergei Eisenstein, “Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today,” 202; also Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: George Allen and Unwin, 1960), 200-201, and Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari To Hitler: A Psychological Study of the German Film* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1959), 94-5, 272.

38 Although Eisenstein is not known to have commented on the camerawork, Pauline Kael observes that he seems to have modeled the makeup for his *Ivan the Terrible* (1946) on Conrad Veidt’s, and that the film’s decor and camerawork somewhat recall Leni’s. Pauline Kael, *5001 Nights at the Movies* (New York: Henry Holt, 1985), 375, 824. On the possible relationship of Vertov’s imagery of Lenin to the semantics of Russian icons, see Annette Michelson, “The Kinetic Icon in the Work of Mourning: Prolegomena to the Analysis of a Textual System,” *October* 52 (Spring 1990), 16-39.

39 E.g. Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus”; Jean-Louis Comolli, “Technique and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field,” *Film Reader* 2 (1977), 132-138. Cf. Schwartz, *After Jena*, 305n167.

the Western tradition, we find antecedents of such viewer positioning in classic *Herrscher- and Reiterbilder* of Alexander, Augustus (figure 21) and Marcus Aurelius, and, imitating them, ones of Louis XIV, Peter the Great and Napoleon (figure 42) – a model repeated in Vasily Iakovlev’s 1945-46 equestrian portrait of Marshal Zhukov (figure 43).⁴⁰

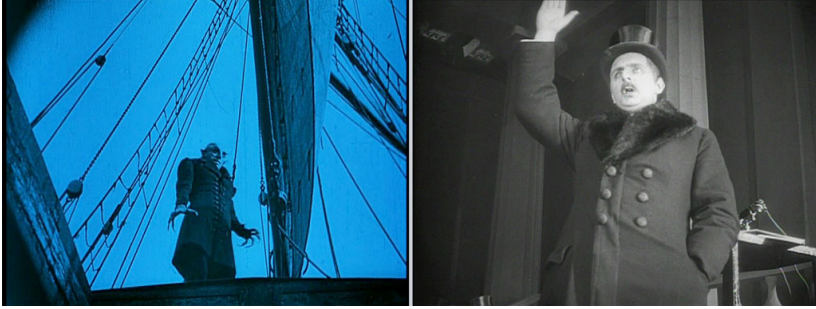


Fig. 39: *F.W. Murnau*, *Nosferatu, A Symphony of Horror*, 1922; *Fritz Lang*, *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*, 1922.



Fig. 40: *Paul Leni*, *Waxworks*, 1922.

40 Stewart, *Faces of Power*, plates 21-23 and text pp. 123-130 (Alexander on horseback); Diana E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), fig. 42 (Augustus of Prima Porta, Vatican Museums) and 236 (bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in the Museo del Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome); Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), figs. 50-53 & text p. 115 (equestrian bronze statue of Louis XIV by Girardon); Anita Brookner, *Jacques-Louis David* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), fig. 74 (Napoleon crossing the Saint-Bernard, 1801); Brookner, 147 on this painting’s debt to Falconet’s bronze equestrian statue of Peter the Great in St. Petersburg (1782) – which would later figure as Pushkin’s “Bronze Horseman” – see Alexander M. Schenker, *The Bronze Horseman: Falconet’s Monument to Peter the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 298-304; 66-69 on the place of Falconet’s statue in the tradition of equestrian leader portraits. Oksana Bulgakowa observes that “the statues of the new [Soviet] leaders adopt the imperial language of the statues of tsars. The statue of Lenin in Leningrad [in a significant scene in Friedrich Ermler’s film *A Fragment of an Empire*, 1929], is given a distinctly pointing (horizontal) hand gesture – correcting the hand of the Bronze Horseman, which is raised vertically toward the sky, an emblem of old Petersburg.” Bulgakowa, *Fabrika zhestov*, 177. Significantly, Iakovlev’s portrait of Zhukov (now in the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow) was used by Khrushchev and others at a Central Committee plenum in 1957 to task Zhukov for his “Napoleonic ambitions.” See A.N. Iakovlev, ed., *Georgii Zhukov: Stenogramma Oktiabr’skogo (1957 g.) Plenuma TsK KPSS i Drugie Dokumenty* [Georgii Zhukov: Minutes of the October 1957 Plenum of the CPSU and other documents] (Moscow: MFD, 2011), 637.



Fig. 41: Fritz Lang, *Die Nibelungen*, 1924; Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will*, 1935; *East German Young Pioneers*, 1953, from Wolfgang Kissel, *Kinder, Kader, Kommandeure (Strictly Propaganda)*, 1991.



Fig. 42 (left): Jacques-Louis David, *Bonaparte crossing the Great Saint Bernard Pass*, 1801. Oil on canvas. Reuil-Malmaison, Chateaux de Malmaison et Bois-Preau.

Fig. 43 (right): Vasily Iakovlev, *Victory (portrait of Marshal Zhukov)*, 1945–46. Oil on canvas. Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery.

***Ustanovka* and Viewer Positioning**

If the upraised arm of the orating Lenin (which Mao would also adapt, also incorporating what looks to be a Sinified version of what has been called the ancient “Cosmocrator’s sign” (figures 44, 45))⁴¹ echoes that of surviving statues of Augustus, this is thus an echo amplified in the resonance chambers of several historical strata of media practice. The mid-20s add to an older semantics

41 H.P. L’Orange, “The Gesture of Power. Cosmocrator’s Sign,” *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co., 1953), 140–170.

of leadership the visual geometries of a Taylorist program of biomechanical positioning (Gastev's term: установка, *ustanovka*; the equivalent term in German is *Einstellung*) and of associated techniques of directing attention designed initially to train workers in workplace efficiency but soon extended in the direction of political pedagogy, as techniques developed to position workers in relation to their machines are used to orient them to the media channels of state authority.⁴² We see the beginnings of a new aesthetic of attention in illustrations to Gastev's 1923 book *Kak nado rabotat'* (How to Work, 1923), in designs by Gustav Klutis for combined public radio stands and projection screens (1924), and in El Lizzitsky's "Lenin tribune," designed for a square in Smolensk (1924) (figures 46, 47, 48).⁴³ The way the joyful gaze of our renminbi worker and peasant signal a willingness to follow and work would thus reflect their origin in the intentions of the aesthetics of *ustanovka*: for Mao's goal, like Gastev's, is to integrate the New Man by "training through drills" (тренаж, *trenazh*), within a mechanized and militarized collectivism attached to authority and to work. Taylorism's affinity with the war machines of the late '30s is clearly visible in the Soviet 3-ruble note of 1938, our Chinese banknote's immediate model (figure 2). This transposition from the Soviet to the Chinese design is consistent with Mao's original conception of the Red Army as a workers' and peasants' militia. Beginning in 1955, two years into Mao's First Five-Year Plan, the third series of renminbi returns emphatically to the technocratic roots of the *ustanovka* aesthetic with its Stalinist images of a female tractor driver, a lathe operator, and a foundry worker (figures 7, 8, 9).

We can attribute a similar orientating function to the upward gaze of our subjects, which enlists a reflex essential to human cognitive development—the response known to psychologists as “gaze following” whereby one is

42 On Gastev and Soviet Taylorism, see Charles S. Maier, “Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity in the 1920s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 1 (1970): 27-61; Kendall E. Bailes, “Alexei Gastev and the Soviet Controversy over Taylorism, 1918-24,” *Soviet Studies* 29, no. 3 (July, 1977): 373-394; Mark R. Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 19-90. On the aesthetic consequences, see Leah Dickerman, ed., *Building the Collective: Soviet Graphic Design 1917-1937; Selections from the Merrill C. Berman Collection* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 47-51; Richard P. Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 145-164; and Barbara Wurm, “Gastevs Medien: Das ‘Foto-Kino-Labor’ des CIT,” in *Laien, Lektüren, Laboratorien: Wissenschaften und Künste in Russland 1850-1960*, ed. Matthias Schwartz, Wladimir Velminski and Torben Philipp (Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main, 2008), 347-390. For intimations of how the proto-cybernetic notion of *Einstellung* current in the mid-1920s could become a component of propaganda *per se*, see Karl Marbe, “Über Persönlichkeit, Einstellung, Suggestion, und Hypnose,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 94, no. 1 (1925): 359-366.

43 *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932* (New York: The Guggenheim Museum/State Tret'iakov Gallery/State Russian Museum/Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 1992), plates 111-113 and 142.

cued by the gaze of another to seek out with one's own eyes what he or she may be looking at—in the service of a legitimation strategy that depends paradoxically on the absence of the thing looked at, a point to which I shall



Fig. 44 (left): Gold solidus of Valens, 364–378 AD. Reverse: Valens and Valentinian, with haloes, frontally seated on thrones, right arms raised, with globes; the inscription reads *GLORIA ROMANORUM*. 73 mm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Fig. 45 (right): Mao reviewing the Chinese Army at Tiananmen, 1966.



Fig. 46: Alexei Gastev, *Kak nado rabotat'* (*How to Work*), 2nd ed. Moscow: Tsentral'nyi institut truda, 1923.

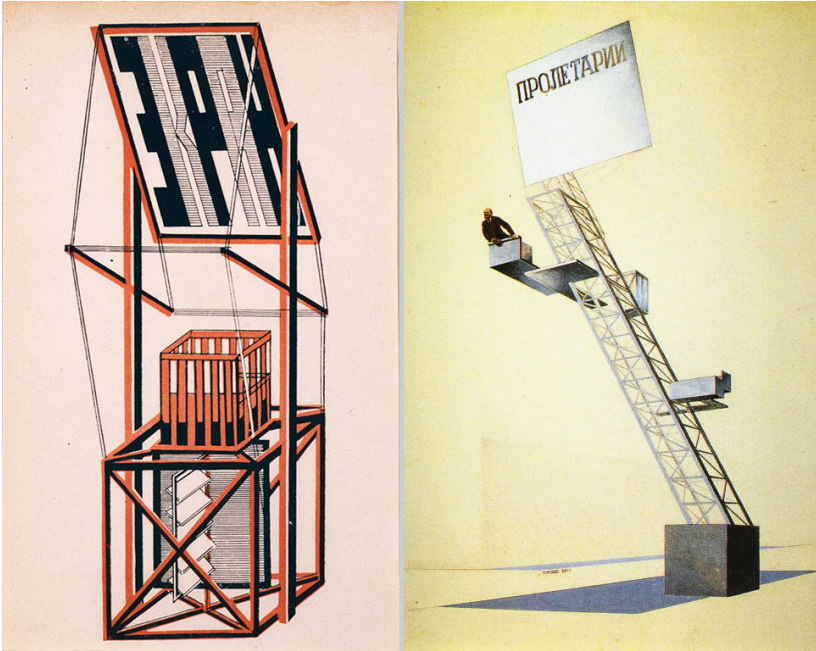


Fig. 47 (left): Gustav Klutsis, Ekran (Screen), 1922. Linocut, 23 x 9.3 cm. Merrill C. Berman Collection.

Fig. 48 (right): El Lissitzky, Lenin Tribune, 1924. Gouache, india ink, and photomontage on cardboard, 63.8 x 48 cm. Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery.

return. (Pointing gestures, also plentiful in propaganda, have been classed, with gaze following, as a form of “joint attention,” a phenomenon thought to be a *sine qua non* of human forms of cognition and social interaction, including language acquisition.)⁴⁴ The earliest known political use of such a device may be seen in the type of the “heavenward-gazing Alexander,” derived from a sculptural type of Lysippos proclaiming what has been variously interpreted as the Macedonian’s *pathos* or “perpetual desire to do something new and extraordinary” (Arrian, *Indica* 20. 1–3) or his divinely inspired right to rule, and widely disseminated on coins and in statuary throughout the Hellenistic

44 Jeremy I.M. Carpendale, Charlie Lewis, Ulrich Müller, and Timothy P. Racine, “Constructing Perspectives in the Social Making of Minds,” in *Making Minds: The Shaping of Human Minds Through Social Context*, ed. Petra Hauf and Friedrich Försterling (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 163–178, here 164. See also the essays in Naomi Eilan, Christoph Hoerl, Teresa McCormack, and Johannes Roessler, eds., *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds; Issues in Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).



Fig. 49: Shepard Fairey, Obama Hope, 2006.

period.⁴⁵ From the Greek East, the type migrates to Rome, where it informs late republican images of Scipio and Pompey and (skipping Caesar and Augustus, whose legitimization strategies worked differently)⁴⁶ imperial iconography from Nero onward, continuing into the Christian era, in which “the inspired

⁴⁵ On Alexander’s upward gaze as an expression of divine inspiration, see L’Orange, *Apotheosis*, 19–27; as an expression of his *pothos*, see Stewart, *Faces of Power*, 13, 84–86, 118–20, 141, 333–34.

⁴⁶ L’Orange, *Apotheosis*, 52–56. On Caesar’s rejection of Alexander’s “melting gaze” in his own iconography, see Diana E.E. Kleiner, *Cleopatra and Rome* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 126–28. On Augustus, see Dietmar Kienast, “Alexander und Augustus,” *Gymnasium* 76 (1969): 431–56; on the propaganda strategies of Augustus generally see Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988).

relation of the emperor to Christ [took] the place of the emperor's relation to the gods of antiquity."⁴⁷ The leader's *pathos* and/or his relation to the divine, as intimated by his look upward to objects unseen by the rest of us, has remained part of the iconography even of democratic leadership, as Shepard Fairey's iconic *Obama Hope* poster for the 2008 US presidential campaign demonstrates (figure 49). The delight of conservative bloggers in discovering a debt to Socialist propaganda that Fairey has never denied attests to the continuity and versatility of this iconographic tradition: as a Google search of the phrase "Communist Obama" will demonstrate, the genealogy of Fairey's image passes quite clearly through Lenin.

Décadrage and the Kuleshov Effect

If these two devices (low-angle heroic perspective and visionary gaze upward) have their ultimate origins in antiquity, two other techniques informing our banknote seem properly modern—indeed, datable fairly precisely to the early to mid-1920s, and initially rooted in cinematic rather than still photographic practice. One of these is what the film theorist Pascal Bonitzer has called deframing or *décadrage*: the use of "out-of-field" (out-of-frame, off-screen, *hors-cadre*) spaces (or, later, sounds) not "pragmatically" justified by subsequent shots or by context to indicate referents that do not belong to the realm of the visible, or to the normal order of space and time.⁴⁸ The horrified stares off-screen of the doomed first mate and captain in *Nosferatu* (figure 50) or Murnau's telepathic eyeline matches between a hyena and the horses and peasants spooked by it, or between the vampire in Transylvania and his distant eventual victim Ellen (figure 52), can stand as classic early examples of the practice, which spawned an eternal cliché of the horror genre (figure 51). The other is the psychological understanding of film editing as

47 L'Orange, *Apotheosis*, 119. The problem of long-term influence here is naturally complex and controversial. See for example Agnieszka Fulińska, "The God Alexander and His Imitators: Alexander the Great's 'Afterlife' in Art and Propaganda," *Classica Cracoviensia* XIV (2011): 125–135, and the essays in J.M. Croisille, ed., *Neronia IV: Alejandro Magno, modelo de los emperadores romanos; Actes du IV^e Colloque international de la SIEN* (Brussels: Latomus, 1990).

48 Tupitsyn, *Soviet Photography*, 70–74; Pascal Bonitzer, "Deframings," in *Cahiers du Cinéma: Volume 4, 1973–1978; History, Ideology, Cultural Struggle*, ed. David Wilson (London: Routledge, 2000), 197–203; Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16–17. Although it is probably first with photography that the frame in Western visual culture begins to dissolve outward, to become (in André Bazin's terms) less centripetal and more centrifugal, still there is little emphatic investment of the photographic (or painterly) *hors-cadre* with legible meaning until the 1920s, and then it is film that takes the lead. "Le cadre est centripète, l'écran centrifuge" (A frame is centripetal, the screen centrifugal"), André Bazin, "Peinture et cinéma," *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2000), 187–192, here 188.

a matter of constructing meaning in the viewer's mind by guiding attention and response through careful juxtaposition of shots, developed theoretically by Lev Kuleshov between 1919 and 1924 and thereafter a hallmark of Soviet silent filmmakers.



Fig. 50 (left, middle): F.W. Murnau, *Nosferatu, A Symphony of Horror*, 1922. *For the film excerpt click here.*

Fig. 51 (right): Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho*, 1960.



Fig. 52: F.W. Murnau, *Nosferatu, A Symphony of Horror*, 1922. *For the film excerpt click here.*

Dziga Vertov's amusing integration of show window mannequins into Kuleshov-style reaction sequences in the "morning" sequence of *The Man With the Movie Camera* (1929) characteristically exploits the utopian potential of combining *hors-cadre* shots with the Kuleshov effect: we see the mannequins gaze off-screen, presumably at the still sleeping city; reverse shots pick out objects and sites that will awaken to figure significantly in the film (figure 53). Located as they are in shop windows—a favored interwar cinematic locus for tropes of commercial and scopic desire, access and unobtainability, transplicity and reflection—Vertov's models imply a relay of gazes (film viewer to mannequins to city) that implicitly places us, as viewers, within the metropolis while prompting our affective involvement. We become interested denizens of the new Soviet city; its utopian story, it is suggested, will include us. In *Triumph of the Will* (1935), a seminal work of Nazi propaganda whose stylistic debt to Soviet cinema is obvious if unavowed, Leni Riefenstahl

deploys a similar technique to show Nuremberg's medieval architecture, public statuary, children, and even cats greeting Hitler (figure 54).⁴⁹ These reaction sequences direct the gaze of the Nazi faithful to a blind spot somewhere above and behind the viewer; the gaze relay (film viewer to devotee to Leader) ends with us always already located in the leader's utopian space, our affection primed by what René Girard calls triangular or mimetic desire.⁵⁰



Fig. 53: Dziga Vertov, *The Man With the Movie Camera*, 1929. For the film excerpt click here.



Fig. 54: Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will*, 1935. For the film excerpt click here.

Here we may recognize an effect for which film theory has coined the word “suture.” This somewhat contested term is used to describe a mode of viewer identification structured by the shot/reverse shot editing pattern typical of classical narrative cinema (but whose utility to propaganda is manifest), in which we see in one shot an actor looking off-screen at an undisclosed object or view and in the next that object or view (or, alternatively, first the view and then the actor presumed to be viewing it). Such sequences prompt an identification with the actor flowing from reflexive mimesis of his desire for, and ability to see, the (to us) invisible object of his gaze. Although suture theory construes as this effect's motive force the capacity of film editing alternately to provoke and assuage the unending sense of lack and desire for “being” that Jacques Lacan named as the price of man's life in the realm of the Symbolic, for our purposes it may be adequate to remark that people will

49 On the place of *Triumph of the Will* in Nazi film propaganda as a whole, see Stephan Dolezel and Martin Loiperdinger, “Hitler in Parteitagfilm und Wochenschau,” in *Führerbilder: Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt, Stalin in Fotografie und Film*, ed. Martin Loiperdinger, Rudolf Herz and Ulrich Pohlmann (Munich: Piper, 1995), 77–100.

50 René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 1–52.

generally want to see what they see others seeing and want what they see others wanting, especially if such seeing or wanting is marked with affect. Every shot in a film both shows what it shows and makes us want to see what it omits. If what it shows is a figure looking off screen, then what we long to see is the object of its gaze, which is what the classic reverse-angle shot in narrative cinema will normally give us. As viewers, we have thus been subtly stitched or “sutured” into a relay of gazes, identifications, and desires organized by the film’s editing patterns. The relay is unending because “every attachment of a shot to its reverse shot compensates for an absence but at the same time evokes the void it is trying to fill once again. [...] Suture refers to the ongoing process of supplementation in which each reverse shot presents itself as an answer to a missing perspective while at the same time summoning a new absence. In this way, films become an endless chain of images that can end only with rather arbitrary statements like ‘the end’.”⁵¹

Of course, if what is to fill such narrative absence is a utopia, the propagandist has a problem. Utopian futures are always, by definition, the product of progress as yet unrealized. Unachieved futures are hard to describe concretely, especially in volatile political situations, and as a consequence revolutionary propaganda typically points out directions—indicates vectors of vision—without presuming to represent in detail just what is envisioned. The efficacy of Shepard Fairey’s *Obama Hope* poster (2006) relied in precisely this way on the semantic open-endedness of both image and text, as Fairey, an astute student of Socialist propaganda, freely admitted: “The American public is generally pretty superficial, so an image like that just allows them to project whatever limited idea they have onto it.”⁵² In this image as in its precursors, the icon of the leader becomes a placeholder for the utopia, his visible envisioning of the invisible a symbolic warrant for its possibility, its vague description an ecumenical commonplace on which all can in principle agree.⁵³

The serviceability to propagandists of such patterning through point-of-view sequences—actual, as in film, or implied, as in paintings, medals, posters, banknotes, and still photography—is readily evident, and indeed ideological manipulation by levers of scopis desire is a major focus of the broader field of “apparatus theory” to which the notion of suture belongs, as is the idea that the lens of the movie camera positions (and thus defines or

51 Peter Verstraten, *Film Narratology*, trans. Stefan van der Lecq (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 89.

52 <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/shepard-fairey/> [Accessed on 20. June 2014]. Fairey on his choice of the word “HOPE”: “I actually initially used the word PROGRESS.”

53 Cf. Schwartz, *After Jena*, 206.

constructs) the viewing subject in ideologically determinate ways.⁵⁴ Despite fundamental differences between the editing styles and aims of the classical Hollywood films mainly theorized by apparatus theorists and those of Leni Riefenstahl or the Soviet avant-garde, in all of these styles it is in point-of-view shot/reverse shot sequences that we find special propagandistic value—a convergence that may partly be explained by a common debt to the editing practices of D.W. Griffith.⁵⁵ If Weimar Germany’s approach to the legacy of Griffith is distinguished by a peculiar relation of on- to off-screen space, as Thomas Elsaesser observes—“While motivated views are very frequent, the reverse-field shot is in fact rather rare, and off-screen space retains its powers of suggestion, menace, dread”—and if Fritz Lang’s version of this in *Mabuse* associates such off-screen space with a personified source of control whose power resides in its vision—“what typifies this cinema is that power is equated with vision, and vision with knowledge, and knowledge with control, and control with anxiety in a power/anxiety/knowledge nexus almost entirely mapped on the axis seeing/unseen/being seen”⁵⁶—then we may also observe that Leni Riefenstahl’s editing installs Hitler at the locus of power where Lang placed *Mabuse*. She reverses, however, the valence: where *Mabuse* was a source of the chaos troubling Weimar Germany, Hitler is the antidote to that chaos—an effect anticipated in a Nazi poster for the 1932 elections, which, echoing Lang, implicitly equates Hitler’s vision with hypnotic control (figures 55, 56).⁵⁷

What Nazi and Communist film propaganda achieve with such sequences is to amplify the suggestiveness of the *hors-cadre*—its implication that answers to questions posed on screen may be found off-screen—with the self-conscious didactic potential of Soviet-style montage. If in one shot a gaze off-screen appears to ask: “Who is (or should be) in charge here?” the next shot will

54 See also André Bazin, “Montage interdit,” *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2000), 48–61.

55 Thomas Elsaesser, “Fritz Lang’s Traps for the Mind and Eye: Dr Mabuse the Gambler and Other Disguise Artists,” *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000), 145–194, here 175–76; Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker, “Introduction,” in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI Publishing, 1990), 293–317; Sergei Eisenstein, “Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today,” in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory and The Film Sense*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (Cleveland: Meridian/World Publishing, 1957), 195–255.

56 Thomas Elsaesser, “Caligari’s Family: Expressionism, Frame-Tales and Master Narratives,” in *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000), 61–105, here 61.

57 On *Mabuse* and the theme of hypnosis in Weimar cinema, see Stefan Andriopoulos, *Possessed: Hypnotic Crimes, Corporate Fiction, and the Invention of Cinema*, trans. Peter Jansen and Stefan Andriopoulos (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 91–127.

answer the question, so to speak catechistically. Yet whereas in the Nazi case the answer is dictatorial, clear and direct—the *hors-cadre* is quickly occupied by the Führer—Soviet cinema’s articulation of meaning is by necessity rather more subtle, at least initially. After Lenin’s death, the symbolic construction of Communist authority necessarily reflected complex and changing relations among 1) an official source of state legitimacy in workers and peasants already in theoretical tension with Lenin’s idea of the Party as a political vanguard; 2) a developing leader cult begun shortly before Lenin’s death and advanced with great energy thereafter by Party cadres concerned with the transfer of power, and 3) Stalin’s increasing subordination of the cult’s symbolism to his own goals.⁵⁸ In Vertov’s films of 1924–1929, political authority is identified with orators, flags, posted Party directives, radio loudspeakers, and the legacies of Marx and—especially—Lenin. Not until around 1930 does the figure of Stalin become the requisite answer to every question (a requirement Vertov failed to meet in *Three Songs of Lenin*, 1934, displeasing Stalin)⁵⁹—as for example in posters of

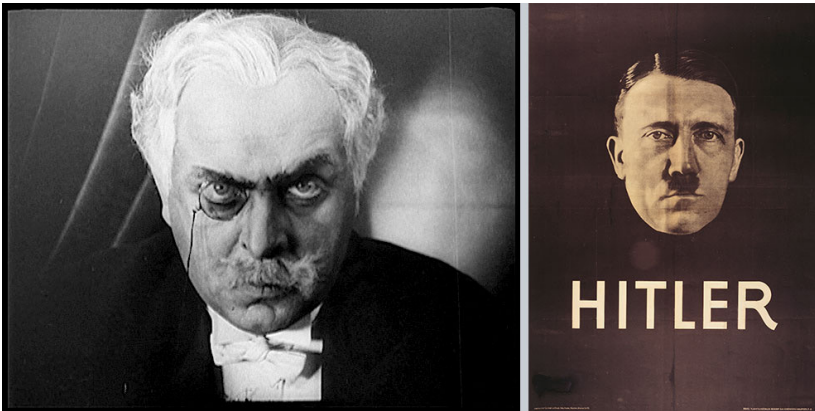


Fig. 55 (left): Fritz Lang, *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*, 1922.

Fig. 56 (right): Hitler election poster, 1932. Washington, DC, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Photo by Heinrich Hoffmann.

58 Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 207–251.

59 Jeremy Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 91–2. Oksana Bulgakowa observes that Stalin’s image in documentary film involved a complex dialectic of absence and presence that she compares with the Islamic cultural tradition “in which the Prophet may not be shown, and thus remains invisible, yet is everywhere present and alluded to through a series of substitutes,” while his presence in fiction films tends to be mediated non-photographically—e.g., through oral report, telephonic communication, or images of his name, or of plastic representations of him. Oksana Bulgakowa, “Der Mann mit der Pfeife oder das Leben ist ein Traum. Studien zum Stalinbild im Film,” in *Führerbilder: Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt, Stalin in Fotografie und Film*, ed. Martin Loiperdinger, Rudolf Herz and Ulrich Pohlmann (Munich: Piper, 1995), 210–231, here 213 and passim; on Vertov, see 215–216.



Fig. 57: Heinrich Knirr, Portrait of Adolf Hitler, 1939. Fort McNair, U.S. Army Center of Military History. Courtesy of the Army Art Collection.



Fig. 58: Fedor Shurpin, The Morning of Our Fatherland, 1946–1948. Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery.

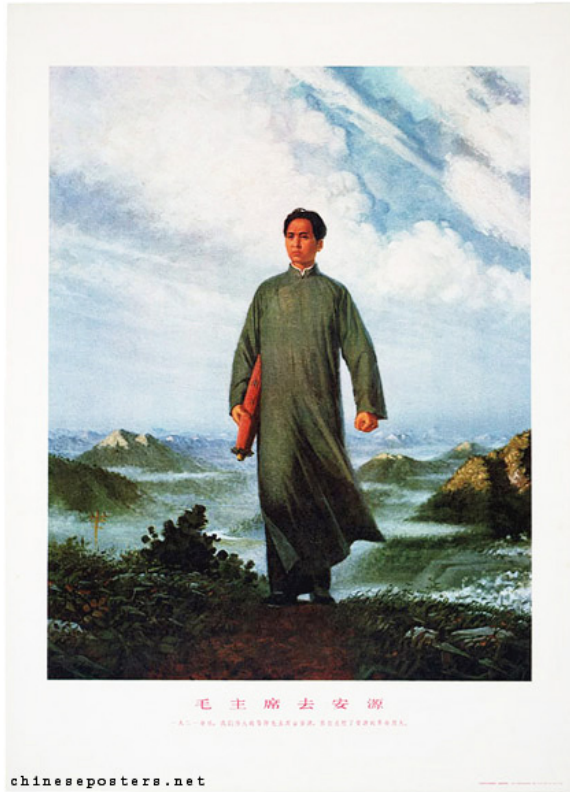


Fig. 59: Liu Chunhua, Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan, original painting 1967; poster, 1968. Ink on paper, 106 x 76 cm. IISH Collection.

1930 by Klutsis and Kulagina whose visual hierarchies would later be echoed in China. Now we have the solitary leader gazing at a future whose visibility to him justifies his leadership (figures 57, 58, 59, 60a);⁶⁰ we have him exhorting the masses to follow him into this future, his eyes surveying them from above while also fixed beyond them upon his utopian vision (figures 60b, 60c, 61).⁶¹ In

60 See for example the paintings *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* (1967) and *Man's Whole World is Mutable, Seas Become Mulberry Fields: Chairman Mao Inspects Areas South and North of the Yangtze River* (1968), in *Art and China's Revolution*, ed. Melissa Chiu and Zheng Shengtian (New York: Asia Society, 2008), plates 19 and 78.

61 Margaret Tupitsyn, *Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina: Photography and Montage After Constructivism* (New York: International Center of Photography/Göttingen: Steidl, 2004), plates 102, 104, 108 (Lenin), plates 114, 117, 120 and figures 76 and 77, p. 63 (Stalin); Chiu and Shengtian, *Art and China's Revolution*, plates 1, 33, 52.

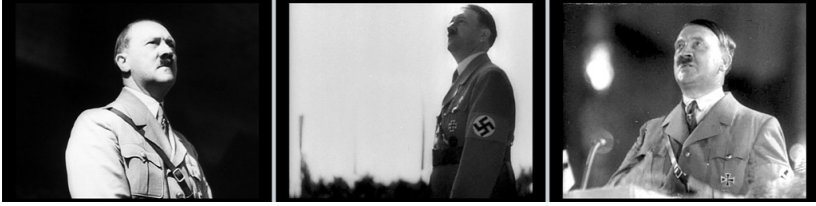


Fig. 60 a-c: Leni Riefenstahl, Triumph of the Will, 1935.



Fig. 61: Dong Xiwen, The Founding Ceremony of the Nation, original painting 1953; modified poster version 1964. Ink on paper, 53 x 77 cm. Stefan R. Landsberger Collection.

Stalinist imagery—including Mao’s—the leader may march with the workers and peasants, but he is larger than them and noticeably in their vanguard (figures 62, 63).⁶² Unlike Hitler, however, the Communist leader cannot dispense with a quasi-egalitarian nod to the people as the ultimate source of his authority, and some form of *pietas* with regard to his revolutionary predecessors: while the Nazi relay stops short at Hitler, the Communist one must negotiate a longer chain of identifications. This can be seen in the difference between the medallion low-relief image known in China as the “five immortals” (Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin-Mao, figure 64) and a Nazi plaque showing Goebbels, Goering, and Hitler in similar formation (figure 65): whereas the Communist

62 Tupitsyn, *Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina*, plate 112; Dickerman, *Building the Collective*, plates 92–93; Chiu and Shengtian, *Art and China’s Revolution*, plates 8, 56, 57, 131.



Fig. 62: Gustav Klutsis, Real'nost' nashei programmy (Reality Group), maquette, 1931. Collage with vintage gelatin silver prints and gouache, 22.5 x 17 cm. Merrill C. Berman Collection.

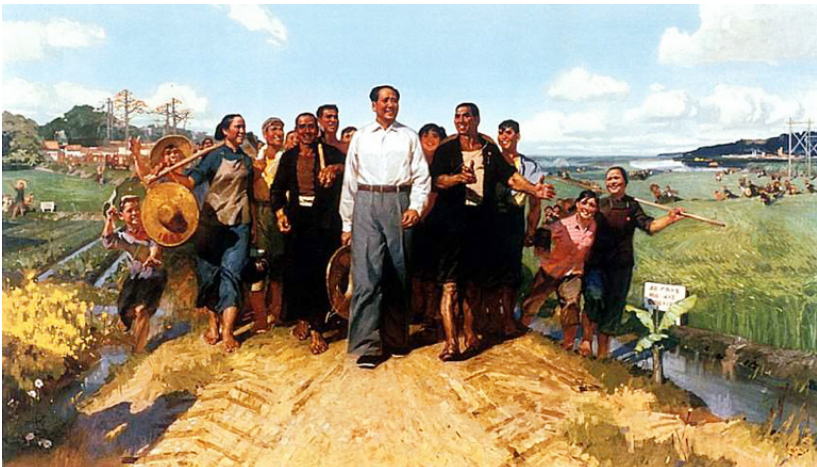


Fig. 63: Chen Yanning, Chairman Mao visits Guangdong country, 1972. Shanghai, Long Museum.



Fig. 64 (left): Long live Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought! Ca. 1968. Ink on paper, 77 x 109 cm. Private collection.

Fig. 65 (right): *Leben heisst Kämpfen (To Live is to Struggle)*, c. 1935. Bronze, 15 x 9.5 cm. Collection of Peter J. Schwartz.

image legitimates Mao by locating him at the vanguard of a genealogical sequence, the Nazi medal indicates Hitler's supremacy by placing him at the forefront of his ruling clique.⁶³ (The posthumous relief image of Mao, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and Liu Shaoqi on the fourth-series 100-yuan note of 1988, mentioned above, strangely mixes these modes (figure 15).) If we compare such images with, for example, Napoleon's triple portrait with Alexander I and Friedrich Wilhelm III on a medal commemorating the Treaty of Tilsit (1807, figure 66), we perceive not only that Hitler emulates Napoleon by letting juxtaposition signify as alliance and not pedigree, but also that even in



Fig. 66: Bernard Andrieu, Vivant Denon and Jean Pierre Droz, *The Treaty of Tilsit*, 1807. Bronze, 40.2 mm.

⁶³ And, perhaps not incidentally, above the word "Leben" (life).

medallic art the *hors-cadre* has a newly acquired utopian function: Mao and company, the “Five Immortals” and Hitler’s men seem to gaze past the edge of the portrait at an object of common vision in a way that Napoleon and his allies do not.⁶⁴

The idioms of Soviet montage differ from German editing as well as from Soviet filmmaker to Soviet filmmaker—Vertov and Eisenstein, for instance, spilled a great deal of ink attacking each other’s technique, while Eisenstein took issue with certain sequences from Dovzhenko⁶⁵—but among these three filmmakers, at least, such debates obscure a common dependence on the (often utopian) semantic potential of off-screen or out-of-frame space. The semantic openness of such off-screen space is however severely curtailed under Stalin. As Margarita Tupitsyn has shown with help from film theory, after about 1930 Soviet photography—encouraged and intimidated by official criticism—tends rather to frame determinate realities as desirable than to deframe given reality with an eye to utopia; indeed, one can say much the same of Soviet film.⁶⁶ There is in fact an argument to be made for the primacy of cinema in the invention of *décadragé*:

After all, was it not cinema that invented empty shots, strange angles, bodies alluringly fragmented or shot in close-up? The fragmentation of figures is a well-known cinematic device, and there has been much analysis of the monstrosity of the close-up. Deframing is a less widespread effect, in spite of movement of the camera. But if deframing is an exemplary cinematic effect, it is precisely because of movement and the diachronic progress of the film’s images, which allow for its absorption into the film as much as for the deployment of its ‘emptiness effect.’⁶⁷

64 Medallic reliefs depicting multiple aligned figures in profile would seem to derive originally from ancient cameos and the portrait medals of the Renaissance whose idiom cameos influenced; the form becomes clearly propagandistic with the *histoire métallique* of Louis XIV, which Napoleon imitated. Dena Marie Woodall, *Sharing Space: Double Portraiture in Renaissance Italy*. Diss., Case Western, 2008. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/ap/6?3428812136358:P0_SEARCH:NO: [Accessed on 20. June 2014]. On Napoleon’s *histoire métallique*, see Lisa Zeitz and Joachim Zeitz, *Napoleons Medaillen* (Petersberg: Imhof, 2003); this medal, pp. 174–75.

65 Eisenstein, “Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today,” 241–2.

66 Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, 66–98; also Dickerman, ed., *Building the Collective*, 35. For a nuanced though admittedly incomplete account of the relationship of German and Soviet filmmakers’ use of off-screen space in the 1920s to the legacy of Griffith, see Thomas Elsaesser, “Time, Space and Causality: Joe May, Fritz Lang and the Modernism of German Detective Film,” *Modernist Cultures* 5, no. 1 (2010): 79–105.

67 Bonitzer, “Deframings,” 199.

It may be true generally, as Jean Mitry argues, that unlike in still photography, in film the meaning of camera angles depends to a large degree on how shots are edited together—that is, on montage; much the same can be said of the use of off-screen space.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, our peasant-and-worker two-shot does seem somehow to prompt expectation of, desire for, a reverse shot, just as their gaze into out-of-frame space makes us want to know what they are looking at. To the extent that they thus imply their own position within a sequence one could perhaps call such still images cinematic. In any event, it appears that the earliest objective low-angle shots in Soviet photography that show figures gazing into utopian space are used in photomontages of



Fig. 67: Gustav Klutsis, *Elektrifikatsiia vsei strany* (Toward the Electrification of the Entire Country) 1920. Ink, gouache, continuous tone photographs, colored paper, pencil, printed letters, paste, 46 x 27 cm. Merrill C. Berman Collection.

68 Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, 85.

1924 to articulate in space relations articulated in space and time by Soviet filmmakers the same year. This development may perhaps be dated by comparing Gustav Klutsis's poster *Electrification of the Entire Country* (1920) (figure 67) with his photomontages of 1924 for the periodical *Young Guard* (figure 68).⁶⁹ Whereas the image of 1920 already conjoins angled perspectives with a heroic image of the still-living Lenin, this is not yet the heroism of the visionary, but of the acting leader achieving particular tasks. Despite the picture's split perspective, our view of Lenin is frontal, and his gaze, with the viewer as its clear object, remains contained within its frame. By contrast, the photomontages of 1924 repeatedly show Lenin gazing (and sometimes speaking) with unspecified intent into an out-of-frame space with unspecified content. Worth noting beyond this is the shift from a live, active Lenin who looks at us with a certain humor in 1920 to a dead, absent one whose gaze and activity are directed out-of-frame, with a pathos quite lacking in humor, at an indeterminate object. Although Rodchenko's photomontages of 1923 for Mayakovsky's poetry volume *Pro Eto* (*For This*) employ photographic



Fig. 68 (left): Gustav Klutsis, photomontage from *Molodaia gvardiia. Leninu* (*Young Guard: Lenin*), 1924. Ink on paper, 26 x 17 cm. New York, The Museum of Modern Art.

Fig. 69 (right): Alexander Rodchenko, cover for *Toward the Living Ilyich*, 1924.

⁶⁹ For other images from the series, see Tupitsyn, *Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina*, plates 4–12.

angles and gazes directed to unseen objects, they do so only irregularly and with no consistent significance.⁷⁰ By contrast, Rodchenko's 1924 cover for the book *Toward the Living Ilyich*, using the same photograph as Klutsis of Lenin making a speech in Red Square on 1 May 1919, articulates a clear message: "Lenin speaks from all sides to the Communist world" (figures 69, 70).⁷¹ The photograph also recurs on a poster in footage of a German Communist parade used by Vertov toward the end of *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934) (figure 71). It may not be an exaggeration to see in this photograph of 1919 a seed kernel of our image type, which then required the sequential syntax of cinema as a seedbed for hybridization with a new visual rhetoric of inspiration and mass response. Indeed, despite the broad dissemination of this raised-hand gesture in Lenin's posthumous iconography—including scenes in two feature films widely viewed in China, Mikhael Romm's *Lenin in October* (1937), in the last scene of which the gesture is quite emphatically repeated (figure 72), and *Lenin in 1918* (1939)⁷²—the extant photographic and documentary corpus includes relatively few images of Lenin with his arm upraised.⁷³ In any event, by the time Chinese moneyers adapted their worker-and-peasant device from Stalin's currency, this sort of sequence had had twenty years to become formulaic, not only in film—where, in the mid-1930s, it easily jumped from Soviet cinema to Riefenstahl's seminal *Triumph of the Will* (1935)—but also in posters, photomontages, still photographs, and, in the Nazi case, books

70 Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Pro Eto/It/Das bewusste Thema* (Berlin: Ars Nicolai, 1994), 79–93; Selim O. Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 120–122.

71 Cf. Dickerman, ed., *Building the Collective*, plate 25; Magomedov, *Rodchenko*, 118–145; also Tupitsyn, *Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina*, plates 9, 105, 106, and figures 71–73, pp. 61–2.

72 On showings of Romm's films in China by the Yenan Film-Projection Team in 1939, see Leyda, *Dianying*, 295; on the distribution of Soviet films (including Romm's) in China more generally, see Tina Mai Chen, "Socialist Geographies, Internationalist Temporalities, and Traveling Film Technologies: Sino-Soviet Film Exchange in the 1950s and 1960s," in *Futures of Chinese Cinemas: Technologies and Temporalities in Chinese Screen Cultures*, ed. Olivia Khoo and Sean Metzger (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2009), 73–93, here 77–80. Thanks to Cathy Yeh for alerting me to the relevance of these films.

73 Even among the few extant images of Lenin with his arm upraised, this precise gesture is never repeated. To judge from the photographs, he seems to have preferred to prop both hands on the podium while speaking. See the following plates in A.M. Gak, A.I. Petrov, and L.N. Fomicheva, ed., *Lenin: Sobranie fotografii i kinokadrov* [Lenin: Collection of Photographs and Stills], (Moscow: Ikusstvo, 1980), Volume 1 (photographs): 137 (right arm upraised; this is the photograph used by Klutsis and Mayakovsky); 281 (left arm upraised); 152–154 (right hand outstretched, grasping cap); 156 (left hand outstretched, palm up, fingers splayed); 39 (both hands raised); 68–72 (hands in pockets, apparently on a cold November day); 121 (hands in pockets); 24, 38, 40, 85–88, 129–134, 186, 198, 202, 203–205 (hands on podium); 264, 275–277 (holding a manuscript with one or both hands); 273 (hands clasped behind back); 136, 138, 139, 274, 278 (hands at sides); 279 (hands touching at chest); 280 (arms crossed [?]). The corpus of film stills (Volume 2) shows gesticulation with the right arm on two occasions (film 3, shot 2, stills 5–14, fist clenched; film 10, shot 18, stills 11–14; film 10, shot 20, stills 1–6; film 10, shot 21, stills 5–9); compare however film 14, shot 2; film 15; and film 16, shot 10.

incorporating collectible stills from Riefenstahl's film.⁷⁴ The propagandistic effect of the image type thus relies on accumulated cultural knowledge of the sequential filmic formula from which it migrated. Thanks to this codified



Fig. 70: Grigori Petrovich Goldshtein, Lenin in Red Square, 1 May 1919.



Fig. 71 (left): Dziga Vertov, Three Songs of Lenin, 1934.

Fig. 72 (right): Mikhail Romm, Lenin in October, 1937.

⁷⁴ See the album *Adolf Hitler: Bilder aus dem Leben des Führers* (Hamburg/Bahrenfeld: Cigaretten/Bilderdienst, 1936), which required the reader to collect the photographs illustrating it by sending in coupons from cigarette packages. Many of these photographs are stills from Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), suggesting a propaganda strategy not unlike that of movie tie-ins, which were already established practice in the movie industry by the mid-1910s. Cf. Ben Singer, "Marketing Melodrama: Serials and Intertextuality," *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 263–287.

visual idiom, the viewer of the single image already knows what the sequence implies: Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, or Mao—the state’s central legitimating icon or transcendental signifier, its significance only intensified by delay, deferral, and absence.⁷⁵

Cinematic origins of the gaze relay: Dziga Vertov

It is difficult to say whether this type of relay began in film and moved from there to poster and book art or vice versa, or whether it developed simultaneously in several media. (One could perhaps also relate the still images’ synchronic articulation of sequential events to techniques of continuous narration used in visual art since antiquity, including their use in Orthodox icons.)⁷⁶ Vertov’s interest in “typically Constructivist” angles of perspective has sometimes been attributed to his association with Rodchenko, whose sculptures of the early 1920s explore eccentric angles of vision, but whose photographs using such angles (eventually named “Rodchenko angles”) in fact date mostly from the later 1920s (figure 73).⁷⁷ Certainly, there were Constructivist angles in Constructivism before they were applied photographically to the human figure or the human face—Vertov’s heroic low-angle shots of Soviet bridges and factories have clear aesthetic antecedents in earlier Futurist- and Cubist-inspired painterly and sculptural work by Tatlin, Malevich, Rodchenko, Naum Gabo, and Gustav Klutis.⁷⁸ Yet it appears that

75 Compare David McDonald’s analysis of David Hare’s 1975 drama of the Chinese Revolution, *Fanshen*: “Secretary Ch’en appears as a representative for the one transcendental signifier (unutterable referent) whose name is omitted from the play, Chairman Mao. Hare carefully omits any reference to Mao in the entire play. In the summary speech he even performs a slight but telling misrepresentation by omitting a reference to the authority of Mao included in Hinton’s record of the speech. Hinton records Ch’en citing Mao along with Lenin, Marx, and Stalin, as icons whose words should be faithfully followed, copied to the letter as sources for the ultimate truth.” David McDonald, “Unspeakable Justice: David Hare’s *Fanshen*,” in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 129–145, here 139.

76 On Tatlin and Russian icons, see Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 11; on Malevich and icons, Tat’jana Vilinbachova, “Alpha and Omega: From Icon-Painting to Malevich,” in *Kazimir Malevich e le Sacre Icone Russe: Avanguardia e Tradizioni*, ed. Giorgio Cortenova and Evgenija Petrova (Milan: Electa, 2000), 94–101; on continuous narration in ancient visual art see Jocelyn Penny Small, “Time in Space: Narrative in Classical Art,” *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 4 (Dec. 1999): 562–75, and Richard Brilliant, *Visual Narratives: Storytelling in Etruscan and Roman Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). The term “continuous narrative” is from Franz Wickhoff, *Die Wiener Genesis* (1895); see Small, p. 568, at note 54.

77 See for example *The Great Utopia*, plates 453–458. On Rodchenko’s interactions with Vertov, see Yuri Tsivian, “Turning Objects, Toppled Pictures: Give and Take Between Vertov’s Films and Constructivist Art,” *October* 121 (Summer, 2007): 92–110; on Rodchenko’s high- and low-angle shots, see the documents of the debate of 1928 in *Novye lef* between Rodchenko, Boris Kushner and Sergei Tret’iakov translated in Phillips, ed., *Photography in the Modern Era*, 243–272.

78 Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 7–46.



Fig. 73: Alexander Rodchenko, *Pioneer Girl*, 1930. *Moscow House of Photography*.

this application did not occur before 1924, and when it did, it did so in contexts that gave such angles new meaning. The new context was that of modernist photomontage⁷⁹ and of the post-Lenin power vacuum, which seems to have encouraged a focus on leader figures and their correlation with representations of mass response. In any event, I have seen no clearly heroic low-angle photographs, still or moving, antedating 1924, the year in which Vertov composed his first systematically articulated montages of agitation and crowd response in the feature-length newsreel compilation *Kino-Eye*, while Klutskis and Rodchenko produced comparable images in the medium of photo collage (including Rodchenko's poster for Vertov's *Kino-Eye*, a film for which Rodchenko also designed the intertitles) (figure 74).⁸⁰ Nor are such angles in evidence in Vertov's

79 See Matthew Teitelbaum, ed., *Montage and Modern Life, 1919–1942* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); also Bordwell, "Idea of Montage."

80 *The Great Utopia*, plate 416.

earlier newsreel series *Kino-Nedelja* (*Film Week*, 1918–19),⁸¹ though they are already to be seen in the earliest issues of *Kino-Pravda* that I have had access to: tentatively in *Kino-Pravda* #5 (July 1922), and emphatically in *Kino-Pravda* #18 (March 1924), though without clear utopian overtones.⁸²



Fig. 74: Alexander Rodchenko, poster for Dziga Vertov, *Kinoglaz* (*Kino-Eye*), 1924. Lithograph on paper, 93 x 70 cm. Merrill C. Berman Collection.

81 Nearly the entire series can be streamed at: https://www.filmmuseum.at/en/collections/dziga_vertov_collection/kinonedelja__online_edition [Accessed on 20. June 2014].

82 The longer film *Kino-Eye* reuses footage from both of these newsreels. Georges Sadoul notes that Vertov's brother Mikhail Kaufman did not become the project's principal camera operator until *Kino-Pravda* #6. Sadoul, *Dziga Vertov*, 154.

In *Kino-Eye*, released in October 1924, no political leader in fact appears as such: all the film's low-angle sequences route crowd response not to the figure of Lenin, but to a disembodied party authority whose communications media are as much Vertov's focus as is their message. (We do see hints at an integration of the *ustanovka* aesthetic with coaching in media use and a relay to Lenin in *Kino-Pravda* #18 (figure 75).) Thus one segment in *Kino-Eye* intercuts low-angle shots of Young Pioneers posting on a wall a broadside with high-angle shots of reclining workers and peasants apparently looking up to it (figure 76); a directive to buy groceries at the cooperative market elicits similar reaction shots from a female shopper (figure 77), while attentiveness to the party message is modeled with pioneers' reaction shots to their troop flag (figure 78).⁸³ There is also a low-angle sequence in which a youth leader demonstrates to a crowd of Young Leninists (and a somewhat confused-looking toddler) how to read the new Communist youth journal *Pioneer* (figure 79). Beginning with the commemorative *Leninskaia Kino-Pravda* newsreel of January 1925 (*Kino-Pravda* #21), however,⁸⁴ Vertov regularly models mass receptiveness to party communications in low-angle reaction sequences that relay the viewer's gaze eventually to the dead father of the revolution.⁸⁵



Fig. 75: Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Pravda* #18, March 1924.

83 <http://www.followthethings.com/kinoeye.shtml> [Accessed on 20. June 2014].

84 Sadoul, *Dziga Vertov*, 160.

85 On Lenin's importance to Vertov generally, see §120 of Vertov's "Artistic Calling Card," in *Dziga Vertov: Die Vertov-Sammlung im Österreichischen Filmmuseum/The Vertov Collection at the Austrian Film Museum*, ed. Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Thomas Tode, Barbara Wurm (Vienna: Österreichisches Filmmuseum, 2006), 148–150. On the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*, see especially Annette Michelson, "The Kinetic Icon."

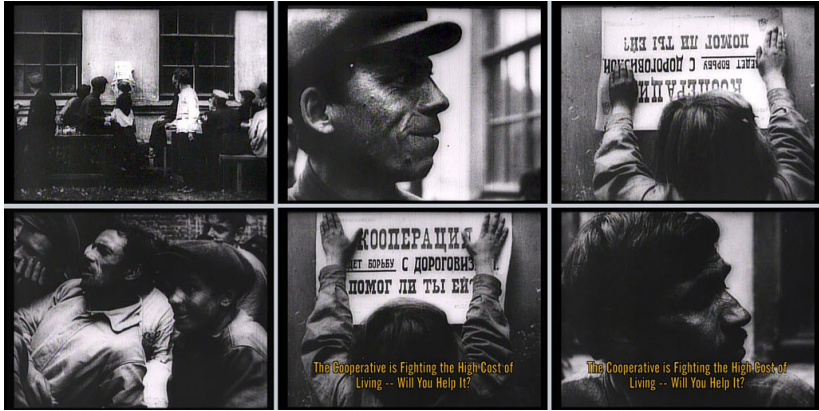


Fig. 76: Dziga Vertov, Kino-Eye, 1924. For the film excerpt click here.



Fig. 77: Dziga Vertov, Kino-Eye, 1924. For the film excerpt click here.



Fig. 78: Dziga Vertov, Kino-Eye, 1924. For the film excerpt click here.



Fig. 79: Dziga Vertov, Kino-Eye, 1924. For the film excerpt click here.



Fig. 80: Dziga Vertov, *Leninskaia Kino-Pravda* (*Kino-Pravda* #21), January 1925. 35 mm projection print. Cambridge, Harvard Film Archive.

The *Leninskaia Kino-Pravda* anchors its only such sequence to Lenin via the story of Russia's electrification—two themes linked a priori by Lenin's dictum of 1920 "Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country."⁸⁶ We see newsreel footage of Ilyich signing instructions to bring electricity to the Soviet countryside; then a shot of a rural couple's hut, followed by a low-angle close-up of electrical wires attached to an insulator under its eaves. Cable is spooled from a truck, and then from below we see a man up a pole hanging wires. The wires are attached by another man to one wall of the hut; there is a low-angle shot of one insulator above a window, and then the camera follows the current into the house with a slight low-angle close-

86 On Soviet electrification, see Jonathan Coopersmith, *The Electrification of Russia, 1880–1926* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), esp. 192–257; on the accelerated progress of rural electrification during the years 1924–26, see 236–44. On the representation of electrification in Soviet film, see Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 21–29.

up of a single light bulb. From outside we see a window lit from within, and then, in a medium shot, an old woman seated indoors before the same window, sharply illuminated by a light source off-screen left and looking intently at an undisclosed off-screen object top right. Now we have what initially seems a reverse shot, from below, of an icon of the Madonna, also lit from the left: our peasant woman—so it seems—has been praying. But the next shot reveals her wearing radio headphones and smiling at us, bemused; we see we've been tricked by our own assumptions, and that, thanks to Lenin, the Russian peasantry may be farther along than we'd thought on the path to successful modernization (figure 80). The sequence finishes with a return to the single light bulb—an icon of electrification—and with the glow of electric-cum-media enlightenment spilling out through the windows onto snow outside. A similar conjunction of metaphors is to be found in seventeenth-century portraits of Faust and Nostradamus, which figure the utopian vision offered by a relatively new medium, the printed book, with a gaze upward through windows to light (figures 81, 82).



Fig. 81 (left): Rembrandt van Rijn, Faust, ca. 1652. Engraving, ink on paper, 212 x 162 mm.

Fig. 82 (right): Portrait of Nostradamus, from the frontispiece of a volume of his prophecies published in 1666.

Vertov's *Stride, Soviet!* (1926) ends its catalogue of Soviet accomplishments with an attention-modeling sequence that includes members of a workers' club gathered around a radio loudspeaker and then workers and peasants



Fig. 83: Dziga Vertov, Stride, Soviet!, 1926.



Fig. 84: Dziga Vertov, Stride, Soviet!, 1926.

gazing attentively off-screen at an orator’s recollection of Lenin’s “vow of electrification” being fulfilled in a row of bulbs lighting up (we see these from below) and in Lenin’s name written in lights on the side of the building of the Moscow Soviet (figure 83); this is followed by the intertitle comment “unforgettable,” a soldier standing sorrowfully at attention, and then a shot of the corpse he guards—Lenin’s (figure 84).

In *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926), not low- but high-angle shots predominate, perhaps as a consequence of the work’s somewhat condescending ethnographic intention as a paean to ethnic diversity in the USSR. Near the end of the film, however, we have a sequence of mostly low-angle shots that function similarly

to those in the other films. First suggesting the retrograde nature of religion by alternating footage of ethnic religious practices with shots of a ship stuck in Arctic ice, Vertov intercuts a proudly advancing “Icebreaker Lenin” with evidence of Soviet economic, technological, and intellectual advancement, much of it shot from below (figure 85). This is followed by a low-angle shot of a radio loudspeaker intercut with reverse high-angle views of listening multitudes and happy children (figure 86). We then have an expository relay from the loudspeaker via overhead wires (conduits, the montage suggests, of radio signals and current) to the Dniepr Dam, to factories powered by it, and to their products; the sequence is capped with a low-angle shot of the enormous portrait of the dead leader suspended above Lenin’s tomb in Red Square in 1924 (figure 87). In a further scene modeling media reception, we see Russian sailors play Lenin’s voice on a gramophone to doubtful-looking Samoyeds (figure 88).



Fig. 85: Dziga Vertov, A Sixth Part of the World, 1926.



Fig. 86: Dziga Vertov, A Sixth Part of the World, 1926.

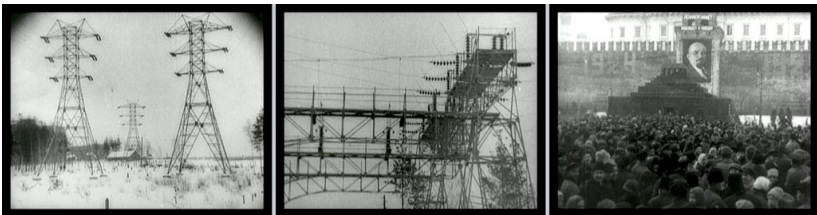


Fig. 87: Dziga Vertov, A Sixth Part of the World, 1926.



Fig. 88: Dziga Vertov, *A Sixth Part of the World*, 1926.

Vertov's first sound film, *Entuziasm* (1930), refers in its opening sequence not to Lenin but to Leningrad: here a female radio listener (shot from below, gazing over our heads) fights the aural and visual (implicitly ideological) cacophony of church bells and icons to catch the enlightening strains of Nikolai Timofeyev's *Symphony of the Don Basin* (figure 89). Like the radio peasant woman's grin, her mimic expressions alternately of annoyance and pleasure indicate the correct source of truth, not in a light bulb, but in the line to Radio Leningrad.



Fig. 89: Dziga Vertov, *Entuziazm (Symphony of the Don Basin)*, 1930.

Similarly, a sequence in *The Man With the Movie Camera* (1929), in which the camera drunkenly sways when aimed up at a church but then rights itself on discovering Lenin's portrait over the door of a Workers' Club, conveys the same message, while in *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934), nearly every close-up on a person functions implicitly or explicitly as a reverse-angle reaction shot to Lenin or to some aspect of his significance. The dead Lenin thus symbolically anchors each sequence as alpha and omega, as the ideal source and goal of all revolutionary effort.

These films of Vertov's show with special clarity how the political and aesthetic constraints of Communist life after Lenin could lead to visual strategies involving symbolic deferral or relay. The logic of Lenin's cult built the legitimacy of his successors on incessant reminders of his absence, on a repeatedly emphasized lack for which they, and Stalin in particular, were implicitly the supplement.⁸⁷ The proliferation of Lenin-linked relays that I have described—their enchaining of images in an “ongoing process of supplementation in which each reverse shot presents itself as an answer to a missing perspective while at the same time summoning a new absence,”⁸⁸ stitching or suturing the viewer into the narrative via affective identification encouraged by several kinds of pathos (revolutionary pathos, mourning, the pathos of the direct gaze at the viewer or of the gaze beyond him)—may thus be understood as a consequence of a mid-1920s legitimation crisis that would stabilize with Stalin's consolidation of power, yet remain endemic to this and other Communist systems thanks to ambiguities in defining the sources of Communist legitimacy and a related lack of clearly defined succession mechanisms.⁸⁹

Mao's omission from renminbi and his posthumous reappearance

The Lenin cult's strategy of anchoring unstable present claims to authority in iconic, mythologized memories of an undisputed dead Leader may have its earliest precedent in the coinage of the Diadochi of Alexander the Great. Despite early development in sculpture, Alexander's image (including the “heavenward-gazing” iconic type noted above) may not have appeared at all on coins in his lifetime, and it is certain that its proliferation after that was meant

87 Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 112–206.

88 Verstraten, *Film Narratology*, 89.

89 Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 208–212, citing Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary, 1879–1929: A Study in History and Personality* (New York: Norton, 1973), 304–324. On China, see Yongjing Zhang, “The Successor's Dilemma in China's Single Party Political System,” *European Journal of Political Economy* 27 (2011): 674–680.

primarily to support his successors' claims to legitimacy.⁹⁰ In this respect its legitimating function (both political and economic) may be compared with that of Lenin in Soviet visual culture after 1924—Illich's image does not appear on currency until 1936, on the three-ruble note—or to Mao's posthumous appearance on fifth-series renminbi, in 1999.⁹¹ Both of these dates connote moments of economic and political flux. In China, 1999 marked not only the eightieth year since the May Fourth Movement, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the PRC, and the tenth of the protests in Tiananmen Square—occasions “more than merely commemorative” in their liability “to remind people of unresolved issues and new tensions in the country”—but also a phase of transition in party leadership and in economic behaviors, both international and domestic.⁹² 1937, the worst year of Stalin's purges, saw Lenin's face on a new issue of the alternative chervonets currency whose notorious instability is acidly satirized in Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* (figure 90);⁹³ additionally, this issue included language vaguely tethering its value to the assets of the state bank rather than to a gold standard, as heretofore. These bills were withdrawn from circulation in 1947 as part of a Soviet effort to curb postwar inflation;⁹⁴ Mao's decision shortly thereafter to keep his portrait off the new centrally-issued banknotes⁹⁵ may thus have had as much to do with this Russian precedent as with avoiding association with Sun Yat-sen's unstable currency.



Fig. 90: Soviet chervonets, 1937.

90 See Stewart, *Faces of Power*; Carmen Arnold-Biucchi, *Alexander's Coins and Alexander's Image* (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 2006); Fulińska, “The God Alexander;” also <http://alexanderthegreatcoins.reidgold.com/portrait.html> [Accessed on 20. June 2014].

91 This is his first *solo* appearance; as noted above, he appears alongside Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and Liu Shaoqi on the fourth-series 100-yuan note of 1988.

92 Li Cheng, “China in 1999: Seeking Common Ground at a Time of Tension and Conflict,” *Asian Survey* 40, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 2000): 112–129, here 112.

93 <http://www.masterandmargarita.eu/en/09context/chervonets.html> [Accessed on 20. June 2014].

94 B. Alexandrov, “The Soviet Currency Reform,” *Russian Review* 8, no. 1 (January 1949): 56–61.

95 As Helen Wang notes, Mao made the same decision as early as a banknote issue of 1932; a portrait of Lenin was used instead. Wang, “Mao on Money,” 88–89.

For Mao in 1949, the matter was doubtless complicated by Chiang Kai-shek's prior claim to the political and iconographic heritage of Sun Yat-sen. Rudolf Wagner has demonstrated how closely Sun Yat-sen's funeral exequies of 1925 were modeled on Lenin's: mummification, glass-lidded coffin, mausoleum, and much of the ritual of the corpse's display were adapted directly from strategies developed in Russia the year before at a comparable moment of crisis and perhaps transmitted partly through limited Chinese screenings, in March and April 1924, of the six-reel memorial film *Похороны Ленина* (*Pokhorony Lenina*, "Lenin's Funeral," which included footage later used by Vertov in his own *Lenin Kino-Pravda*) to a government elite. (This was not the only Soviet film shown in China at this juncture: Eisenstein's *Potemkin* was a great favorite with the revolutionary elite in 1926. The pronounced influence of Soviet cinema style on Chinese cinema in the early 1950s was however a consequence not of memories of the 1920s, but of the flood of Soviet films into China following the Sino-Soviet treaty of 14 February 1950.)⁹⁶ Just as the Lenin cult originated in factional conflict within the Politburo he left behind, so too did the Sun cult spring from a power struggle between several factions in the remaining Chinese government.⁹⁷ Yet however useful Sun's image may have seemed to Chinese Communists in 1925, by the late 1940s (indeed, by the late 1920s) too many symbolic markers had shifted for this association to serve them well. Firmly claiming political continuity with Sun Yat-sen and

96 Wagner, "Ritual, Architecture, Politics and Publicity," 234; Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), 56. Both Leyda and Wagner assume that a documentary on Lenin's burial that was shown in China in 1924 was Vertov's, but this is impossible, as Vertov's film was not released until January 1925 (Sadoul, *Dziga Vertov*, 160). The Chinese film journal *Dianying zhoukan* 4 (1924) reported public and private screenings of a six-chapter Soviet documentary film, *Lenin's Burial*, in Tianjin and Beijing in late March and early April 1924, on the occasion of Chinese mourning ceremonies following Lenin's death; cf. Jihua Chen, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi* (History of Chinese Cinema) (Beijing: Dianying chubanshe, 1994) 137–139. This will have been the film *Похороны Ленина* (*Pokhorony Lenina*, "Lenin's Funeral"), a collective effort commissioned by the Central Presidium of the USSR and released by Goskino on 5 February 1924. According to a memoir by one of the cameramen, Aleksandr Razumnyi, the film incorporated footage by a total of eighteen cameramen, including Eisenstein's cameraman Eduard Tisse and possibly Vertov's brother Mikhail Kaufman (if so, his name is misspelled "Каумфан" in the memoir); see Aleksandr Razumnyi, *U istokov... Vospominaniia kinorezhissera* (At the Source... Memories of a Filmmaker) (Moscow: "Iskusstvo," 1975), 94–101. In the *Leninskaia Kino-Pravda* Vertov does credit several of this film's cameramen (see Sadoul, *Dziga Vertov*, 160; Tsivian, *Lines of Resistance*, 405), which suggests that some of the footage was likely the same; visual comparison of Vertov's work with a clip of the collective film available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IgTs5OFr5nA> and with portions available here: <http://yroslav1985.livejournal.com/127980.html> [Accessed on 20. June 2014] shows that this is indeed the case. See also <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2007/2/proshchanie-s-mertvym-telom> [Accessed on 20. June 2014]. On the influx of Soviet films into China in 1950 see Leyda, *Dianying*, 191. My thanks to Cathy Yeh and Rudolf Wagner for help with the Chinese sources, and to Yuri Corrigan for aid with the Russian ones.

97 Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 112–206; Wagner, "Ritual, Architecture, Politics and Publicity," 223–78, esp. 227–35.

lodging his portrait on its paper currency, from 1927 on Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang would tap much of the symbolic value of identification with Sun (and of Sun's identification with Lenin). This would reduce the symbolic value of both Lenin and Sun for Chinese Communists, who continued to claim descent but also distanced themselves from Sun's "bourgeois" revolution, while rather restricting his visual presence. Although a party directive of 7 October 1949 instructs placement of portraits of Mao and Sun in state buildings, Sun's portrait was not mandatory,⁹⁸ and Sun's image appears only rarely on posters alongside Mao's. (The only one I have found, from 1950, represents banners of Mao and Sun being carried together in a National Day parade; an exception that perhaps proves the rule, in that it demonstrates Sun's special function as one of two fathers of the nation (figure 91).)⁹⁹ Mao also follows Stalin's lead in relegating Lenin to the status of a legitimating ancestor of his own cult: when Lenin is aligned with Mao in Chinese propaganda, it is most often simply as one of the "five immortals" of Marxism-Leninism.¹⁰⁰



Fig. 91: *Su Guojing*, Celebrating the People's Republic of China's National Day, December, 1950. Ink on paper, 42 x 57 cm. IISH Collection.

98 Leese, *Mao Cult*, 38.

99 On the revival of attention to Sun in mainland China in 1979, see Marie-Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1.

100 On Stalin and the waning of the Lenin cult, see Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 244–51.

The history of the great portrait of Mao that has hung in Tiananmen Square since 12 February 1949 suggests both the necessity of negotiating this iconographic legacy and the significance of the problem of gaze direction. As Wu Hung has shown, five different versions of this painted image were produced between 1949 and 1967. The first, unofficial image, replacing a full-frontal portrait of Chiang Kai-shek (1945–49), itself a replacement of one of Sun (1929–45), showed Mao gazing frontally out at the viewer, much as he does on the pre-renminbi local currency issues of the mid-1940s.¹⁰¹ A second image—the first official portrait, hung 1 October 1949—reproduced a low-angle photograph of the chairman looking upward in three-quarter profile. A third image, presented on 1 May 1950, did likewise. Significantly, it drew criticism for avoiding eye contact with the people: “With his eyes turned upward the Chairman seems to disregard the masses.”¹⁰² The fact that the painter Xin Mang and his colleagues at the Beijing Fine Arts Academy responded to this critique by only slightly lowering Mao’s gaze in a fourth version (1 October 1950), without quite detaching it from out-of-frame space, implies a certain investment in Mao’s line of sight that cannot be explained in terms of disregard for the masses; its utopian charge—or a certain aversion to replicating the full frontality of prior portraits of Sun and (especially) of Chiang, whose portrait had been a target of protest as recently as May 1947—may have been at issue. This version was followed by three very similar variations on a fully frontal portrait with eyes staring straight at the viewer (1952, 1963, 1967).¹⁰³ In this context, how are we to interpret the fact that the portrait of 1950 is the basis for Mao’s image on fifth-series renminbi (figures 92, 93)? The moneyers’ modifications to the portrait suggest an answer. Mao’s oft-noted slight Mona Lisa smile on the currency, coupled with what appears a reduced attentiveness in the eyes to the usual out-of-frame space, make for a benign, non-activist Mao more or less consonant with the denatured pop-culture icon of the early 1990s “Maocraze,”¹⁰⁴ while the recursion to an image of 1950 turns back the iconographic clock to a moment safely preceding the Cultural Revolution.

As noted above, the fourth renminbi series of 1987–97, which includes Mao’s first posthumous numismatic portrait on the 100-yuan note, already undertakes a significant departure from prior iconographic practice: although its double

101 See especially Helen Wang, “Mao On Money,” 89–91.

102 Hung, “Face of Authority,” 76.

103 On the Tiananmen portraits of Sun and Chiang, see Hung, “Face of Authority,” 69–72; on the Mao portrait sequence, 68–84.

104 On the “Maocraze,” see Francesca Del Lago, “Personal Mao: Reshaping an Icon in Contemporary Chinese Art,” *Art Journal* 58, no. 2 (Summer, 1999): 46–59.



Fig. 92 (left): Xin Mang, Zuo Hui, Zhang Songhe, Chairman Mao Zedong, 1951 (printed reproduction of the Tiananmen portrait of October 1950). Ink on paper; 39 x 27 cm. Stefan R. Landsberger Collection.



Fig. 93 (right): Renminbi (fifth series), 100-yuan note, 1999.



Fig. 94: Renminbi (fourth series), one-jiao note, 1988.



Fig. 95: Renminbi (fourth series), two-jiao note, 1988.

portraits initially recall the first-series worker-and-peasant device, with one exception (the fifty-yuan note) they represent ethnic and not class pairings of Gaoshan and Manchu men, Buyei and Korean women, and so on (figures 12, 13, 94, 95). What is more, the fourth-series ethnic pairs gaze not so much upward as outward, while our point of view is placed not below them but at their level; even the class-indexed group on the fifty-yuan note in this series gazes rather more forward than up. These differences cast a suggestive light on the canons they modify. One can certainly take the change from class to ethnic figurations as a reflection of the minority cultural revival of the 1980s, which Susan McCarthy has read as a way of repudiating the Maoist politics of class struggle,¹⁰⁵ but I would suggest in addition that this newly lateral gaze network may reflect both the Deng regime's shift from a hieratic semantics of charismatic legitimation to a more sober strategy of legitimation by political and economic rationalization and legalization (in a delayed Chinese version of the switch from "red" to "expert" that followed the second de-Stalinization of Communist Europe in 1961),¹⁰⁶ and television's eclipsing radio and PA loudspeaker announcements as a dominant propaganda channel in mid-1980s China.

As Rudolf Wagner has noted, traces of a similar transition may be found in plans of 1976–77 for the architectural and sculptural program for the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall in Beijing. The hall's central statue represents Mao sitting in an armchair at our eye level, book in hand, legs crossed, with a benign smile on his face. The rejected option is telling: "Down to the last round of discussions about the hall, there had been several proposals to sculpt Mao in [his usual] stern position," standing and pointing ahead. "The relaxed Mao decided on instead symbolizes the words of the 1978 Constitution that people should 'feel both unity and ease of mind and liveliness,' implying a promise by (or a compromise of) the Hua Kuo-feng leadership that the tension and the hectic activity of the Cultural Revolution with its feverish adoration of Mao and its persecutions were over."¹⁰⁷ This choice was accompanied by a redirection of the viewer's

105 On the politics of the minority cultural revival see Susan McCarthy, "Gods of Wealth, Temples of Prosperity: Party-State Participation in the Minority Cultural Revival," *China: An International Journal* 2, no. 1 (March 2004): 28–52.

106 Yang Zhong, "Legitimacy Crisis and Legitimation in China," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 26, no. 2 (1996): 201–220; David M. Lampton, *Following the Leader: Ruling China, from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 13–44; Stephen White, John Gardner and George Schöpflin, *Communist Political Systems: An Introduction*, Second Edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 152.

107 Rudolf G. Wagner, "Reading the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall in Peking: The Tribulations of the Implied Pilgrim," in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, ed. Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 378–424, here 405–406. Thanks to Rudolf Wagner for spotting this analogy.

attention from a concept identifying Mao with the red sun in the revolutionary style to a more distributed image of the sources of state legitimacy. This was effected first with a somewhat conflicted decoupling of Mao's legacy from its former location in his charismatic physical presence (the product of evolving tensions within China's ruling cadres, as Wagner has shown), and then with the dedication in 1983 of four new memorial rooms to Mao, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Zhu De, the quadrumvirate represented as well on the fourth-series 100-yuan note of 1988—a progression that clearly tracks Deng Xiaoping's consolidation of power while reflecting his reorientation of China's structures of government away from Mao's charismatic model.



Fig. 96: Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un looking at things.

Shepard Fairey's *Obama Hope* poster (figure 49) can remind us of the degree to which the "what" of the Socialist Realist image is always qualified by its optical "how": Obama's image differs from Lenin's in that we are not emphatically placed by it in such a way as to make us feel we are looking upward at him. Set as he is so to speak democratically at our level, he is not divinized, nor was this image accompanied, in its cultural moment, by representations of mass adulation. It is therefore worth noting that the portrait of the Great Helmsman on fifth-series renminbi not only tweaks Mao's smile and turns his gaze inward, it also places us at eye level with him—or, at least, not quite as much below him as with the portrait of 1950 on which it is based. Even in North Korean propaganda photographs today, the gaze of Kim Jong-un (like that of his father Kim Jong-il) is more often directed downward or laterally to industrial products at factories than upward, and the habitual sunglasses of both men suggest a disregard for the traditional auroral iconography (figure 96).¹⁰⁸ Thus it would seem that by the end of the 1990s, the visual idiom transferred in 1949 from Soviet to Chinese money was finally superseded.

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