

The background of the cover is composed of large, expressive, overlapping brushstrokes in various shades of teal and blue. A dark, textured square is positioned in the center-right area, overlapping the brushstrokes.

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

eug

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COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

TOMO I

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del origen de la modernidad
a la era digital

TOMO I

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(EDS.)

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

del origen de la modernidad a la era digital

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Building the Image of Modernity: The Interaction between Urban Architecture and Montage in Early Film Theory and Practice

Construyendo la imagen de la modernidad: la interacción entre arquitectura urbana y montaje en la teoría y práctica fílmica temprana

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Abstract

Desde el amanecer del cine, la arquitectura y el film han estado inextricablemente vinculados, configurando la imagen de la ciudad como marco de la vida moderna. La metrópolis es retratada como escenografía y protagonista. El medio deconstruye la continuidad espaciotemporal a través del montaje, proyectando una imagen fragmentada característica del lugar imaginario que sirve de hábitat a la sociedad. La teoría y práctica tempranas del cine cimentaron esta asociación, fortaleciendo el vínculo entre la estética de la ciudad y los modos de síntesis que se convirtieron en inherentes a su identidad. Las masas urbanas y su comportamiento fueron capturados y simbolizados, generando una perspectiva común de mundo que anticipa las formas de inorganicidad inherentes en la cultura mediática. La ciudad adquirió estatus privilegiado a través de las sinfonías de ciudad y proyecciones utópicas, demostrando una estrecha relación entre los recursos formales, materiales y técnicos y los contenidos y obras que dieron forma a la experiencia moderna.

Since the dawn of cinema, architecture and film have been inextricably linked, shaping the city's image as framework of modern life. The metropolis is portrayed not only as scenery but also as a protagonist character of the first films. The medium deconstructs the spatio-temporal continuity through montage, projecting a fragmented image that configures the imaginary place that contemporary society inhabits. Early film theory and practice were critical in cementing this association, strengthening the link between the aesthetics of the city and the modes of synthesis that became inherent in its identity. The urban masses and their behavior were captured and symbolized, generating a socialized perspective on the world that anticipates the forms of inorganicity ingrained in media culture. The city gained privileged status through city symphonies and utopic projections, demonstrating a close relationship between formal, material, and technical resources and the contents and works that shaped the modern experience.

Keywords

Ciudad, modernidad, filme, montaje, percepción

City, modernity, film, montage, perception

Since its origins, cinema manifested as a force that, in tandem with new media such as photography and the revolutionary image configurations proposed by the avant-garde, came to challenge how the practice of the arts had been conceived and institutionalized¹. Given its potential of technical reproducibility, cinematography posed a quandary for the continuity of the aesthetic experience². This had already been eroding throughout the 19th century for diverse reasons and through initiatives that, in the case of the visual arts, jeopardized the academic ideals predominant in the West.

Nonetheless, the introduction of new production techniques granted a historical solidity to the process by definitively and massively reconfiguring the conditions of collective perception. The introduction of technical mediality modified the construction and reception of images, establishing previously unknown forms of material work that required a reinterpretation of the relationship between sensibility and matter. The medium compromised the quality and quantity of sensible data and the possibilities of reception of the external senses, which acquired new powers with apparatusization. It required, consequently, complementary habits of imaginarity and mnemonic synthesis.

However, this view does not imply an essentialist or teleological stance toward cinema or its historical development. Cinema did not emerge with a defined form or grow toward a pre-established purpose hidden in its machinery. Instead, it had to model its conditions of production and reception within the context of an intense wave of cultural changes that characterized its own time. Through an intimate formal association with the montage procedure, the film medium became a privileged voice to express the frenetic arrival of urban and industrial culture with its shocking transitions³. Similarly, cinema acquired its identity through the works and theories that were consolidating around the actual practice of filmmaking. What can be observed in the beginnings of the theory or thought about cinema is a multiplication of divergent models attempting to define the unique aspects of a medium simultaneously with the process of its configuration. Among the theorists, the best known are those representing the Russian and French schools, joined by the German founders of "media theory" —Benjamin, Balázs, and Kracauer— and the Italian Futurist avant-garde with its vibrant manifestos.

The modification of sensibility discussed here is not a change in the biological apparatus. Following Baxandall, this represents only a primary level of the formation of an image, presenting variations since "everyone, in fact, processes the data from the eye with different equipment". In practice, these differences are, according to Baxandall, slight "since most experience is common to us all". This idea of a shared experience varies if the image is considered as visual or audiovisual conformation operating on other levels of cognitive

¹ Peter Bürger, *Teoría de la vanguardia*, trans. Jorge García, Historia, Ciencia, Sociedad 206 (Barcelona: Península, 1987), 29.

² Peter Bürger, *The Decline of Modernism*, trans. Nicholas Walker, 1. publ. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 20- 21.

³ Cristopher Phillips, *Introduction*, ed. by Maud Lavin et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Boston: MIT Press; Institute of Contemporary Art, 1992), 22.

experience⁴. When Benjamin refers to a world that has exploded with film, he proposes a modification related to the sensory organs but surpasses the biological understanding of sensible experience. In Benjamin, film is a medium whose “most important social function” is to “establish equilibrium between human beings and the apparatus”⁵. And this balance is achieved “in terms of man’s presentation of himself to the camera but also in terms of his representation of his environment by means of this apparatus”⁶. Cinema, according to Benjamin, “further insight into the necessities governing our lives by its use of close-ups, by its accentuation of hidden details in familiar objects, and by its exploration of commonplace milieux through the ingenious guidance of the camera” and, on the other hand “manages to assure us of a vast and unsuspected field of action [*Spielraum*]”. This subverts the inherent dwelling of everyday existence that unfolded in the city: “our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories” seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris”⁷.

It is possible to draw a correlation between the cinematic medium and the daily experience of the city based on the hypothesis that space is not conceived independently of its characteristic modes of representation. According to Pierre Francastel, intellectual representations modify the material environment of human beings as “every society lives in a factual frame that is systematically elaborated and represents the essential values to which it is attached, and in the basis of which it builds its duration”⁸. Socially shared habits of representation constitute world images and organize configurations of a habitable world rooted in historically and culturally fluctuating poetic forms⁹. Thus, the modern city, as the *Spielraum* of a contemporary dwelling, is an entity mediated by the apparatuses that capture and project it imaginatively and by the form of organization or administration of the images in a medium that establishes the spatiotemporal conditions and organizes the sensible experience.

⁴ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, 2nd ed., Oxford Paperbacks (Oxford, Oxfordshire; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 29.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version”, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. by Michael William Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, and Howard Eiland (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 37.

⁶ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age...”, 37.

⁷ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age...”, 37.

⁸ “Todo cambio en sus representaciones intelectuales lleva a los hombres a modificar su medio ambiente material. Toda sociedad vive dentro de un cuadro facticio, sistemáticamente elaborado y representativo de los valores esenciales a los cuales ella se apegas, sobre los cuales funda su duración”. In Pierre Francastel, *La figura y el lugar: El orden visual del Quattrocento. Ensayo*, trans. Alfredo Silva Estrada (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1969), 296.

⁹ Andrés Claro, *Imágenes de mundo: tres poemas a los antecesores literarios y tres concepciones de lo real* (Santiago de Chile: Bastante, 2016), 9-10.

Since cinema and city are born in a mutually determining relationship, the modern city is not the Renaissance one represented in the idealizing model of 15th century architecture. The latter emerges under the law of symbolic space *diseño* —homogeneous, mathematical, and centralized— which Panofsky attributes to artificial perspective as a representational habit¹⁰ *vedutas* (fig. 1).



Figure 1. *Ideal City*, oil and tempera on panel. Attributed to Piero della Francesca, Luciano Laurana, Francesco di Giorgio Martini or Melozzo da Forlì. Source: Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

How should one aspire to an ideal world during one's earthly life, and what visual form might such aspiration take? One answer was architecture, and its depiction in painting, marquetry and relief sculpture was improved by the relatively new tool of perspective, used to organize a composition and lend it what was to become an almost standard format; the key to much of this lay in the rediscovery of Euclidian geometry and the humanist inspired view that its application could express political stability.¹¹

The contemporary city has varied because its representation is conformed through an industrial assembly mechanism at the base of the era's imaginary. The montage modifies “the ways of feeling, thinking and inhabiting a shared world, constituting itself in the most widespread and enduring response to the excess with which reality is once again experienced after the crisis of the metanarratives of modernity”¹². If “the Urbino Ideal city owes its charisma

¹⁰ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 1st ed. (New York: Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books; Distributed by the MIT Press, 1991), 28-30.

¹¹ Frank Dabell, “The Ideal Renaissance City: Urbino”, *The Burlington Magazine* 154, n.º 1312 (2012): 515.

¹² [las maneras de sentir, pensar y habitar un mundo compartido, constituyéndose en la respuesta más difundida y duradera ante la desmesura con que vuelve a experimentarse lo real tras la crisis de los metarrelatos de la modernidad] Andrés Claro, “The Contemporary Revolution of Montage (A Translative Genealogy: Poetry - Film - Architecture - History)”, *Diseña*, n.º 10 (June 2016): 119. The view of Benjamin can complement the quote of Claro. Cinema as a medium is characterized by the multiplicity of the image, which fluctuates in its creative and variable interaction with matter and movement, ultimately fracturing the cohesion of experience and the artistic work as an organic unity. The cinematic image emerges as montage, an avant-garde technique that is not a mere stylistic principle but rather “emerged around the end of the war, when it became clear to the avant-garde that reality could no longer be mastered. The only means we have left, for gaining time and keeping a cool head, is, above all, to let reality have its say - in its own right, disordered and anarchic if necessary.” Walter Benjamin, “Garlanded Entrance”, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, by Walter Benjamin, ed. Michael William Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, and Howard Eiland (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 63. Cinema is a sign “of an old world shattered and a new world self-consciously in construction, of the fragmentation of the once reigning unities of life and an everyday reality that has suddenly burst the frame of experience” (Phillips, *Introduction*, 31).

as much to its deserted appearance and its apparent suspension of time and place,”¹³ the cinematic city is interwoven in a dynamic perception that Christa Blümlinger assimilates to the experience of the train arriving at the city in the Lumière’s first films:

Like the railway, cinema constitutes a new temporality which is not only dependent on the destruction of traditional temporalities, but also bound up with a new value system, the enjoyment of speed, the discovery of foreign places and the loss of roots. [...] As an immobile traveler watching the passage of a framed spectacle —the landscape traveled through— the train passenger of the nineteenth century pre-figures the mass audiences of the cinema. This traveler, confronted with dynamic, moving, panoramic views must accept the loss of foreground on account of the speed. The railway appears as a force eradicating space and time.¹⁴

To approach the space of the city in the project of the creation of a new imaginary within a filmic spatiotemporal matrix, it is not sufficient to assume a purely abstract point of view of space, whose unique and specific possibilities of motion pictures can be defined “as dynamization of space and, accordingly, spatialization of time”.¹⁵ Francastel asserts that the artwork is inserted in a broad collective imaginary that is not monopolized by an abstract intellectual model but includes materials, techniques, and the formation of the figurative field of works through the appropriation of fragmentary elements, of figures and places available in specific contexts.¹⁶ In this framework, cinema presents an interesting duality: “the film is both a manufactured thing, it’s a medium, and on the other hand, it’s an automatic, mechanical recording of reality”¹⁷. On this basis, we can approach the cinematic city’s imaginary in the early theory and practice of the medium from two aspects. Firstly, the introduction of film at the end of the 19th century implies a mediation that produces new ways of constructing the figurative field, among which montage will have particular relevance and, secondly, the form of cinema that is intertwined through montage is inseparable from the represented objects and implies the introduction of a multiplicity of new contents that had never before been part of the imaginary.

A new world of objects

In *The Visible Man*, Béla Balázs observes that a new art “would be like a new sensory organ” because “we can discover a thousand new things with telescopes and microscopes,

¹³ Dabell, “The Ideal Renaissance City: Urbino”, 515.

¹⁴ Christa Blümlinger, “Lumière, the Train and the Avant-Garde”, in *Cinema of Attractions Reloaded (Film Culture in Transition)*, ed. by Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 246, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46n09s.18>.

¹⁵ Erwin Panofsky, “Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures”, in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 154.

¹⁶ Francastel, *La Figura y El Lugar: El Orden Visual Del Quattrocento. Ensayo*, 292-93.

¹⁷ “... le film est à la fois une chose fabriquée, c’est un médium, et d’autre part, c’est un enregistrement automatique, mécanique du réel.” In Pierre Francastel, “Cours du 2 février 1956” (manuscrit dactylographié, fonds Francastel, INHA, 1956), 10-11.

but what is enlarged as a consequence will only ever be the range of the visual"¹⁸. According to Balázs, the visual culture inaugurated by cinema implies the expansion of the range of the sensory world, and for Benjamin, equivalently, the introduction of a new realm called the "optical unconscious"¹⁹. The filmic imaginary does not originate from an empty, a priori formalism that precedes the objects projected within it but together with this new sensory realm. This explains why early writings on cinema emphasize the medium's affinity with new actors who identify with what is regarded as essentially cinematic: the most archetypal examples being the gesture of the face, the masses, the machine, and the city. However, cinematic objectivity is inconsistent with the conditions that rule the experience of the physical world. Early film theorists recognize that the appearance of content cannot be separated from its mode of appearance. When Léger celebrates the introduction of the machine as a main character in Abel Gance's *The Wheel* (1923), he states: "The mechanical element plays a major role, and where the machine becomes the leading character, the leading actor"²⁰. He then instantly points to the filmic form of representation: "This new element is presented to us through an infinite variety of methods, from every aspect: close-ups, fixed or moving mechanical fragments, projected at a heightened speed that approaches the state of simultaneity and that crushes and eliminates the human object, reduce its interest, pulverize it"²¹. Film introduces a selective observation and capture of contemporary phenomena, as well as the method by which these phenomena are transformed into filmic objectivity through a constructive process that, according to Vertov, occurs at every stage of production: "Every kino-eye production is subject to montage from the moment the theme is chosen until the film's release in its completed form. In other words, it is edited during the entire process of film production"²².

¹⁸ Béla Balázs, *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. by Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 5, 93. The position does not belong exclusively to Balázs. Vertov proposes a very similar idea: "The eye of the telescope reaches distant worlds, inaccessible to my naked eye. What about the camera then? What's its role in my assault on the visible world? [...] Kino-eye is understood as 'that which the eye doesn't see,' / as the microscope and telescope of time, / as the negative of time, / as the possibility of seeing without limits and distances, / as the remote control of movie cameras, / as tele-eye, / as X-ray eye, / as 'life caught unawares,' etc., etc." In Dziga Vertov, "The Birth of Kino-Eye", in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. by Dziga Vertov and Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley, Calif; Los Angeles; London: University of California press, 1984), 41. Dulac also talks about cinema as a new organ: "The cinema is a big eye open to life, an eye more powerful than ours, which can see what we do not see." Germaine Dulac, *Writings on Cinema: 1919- 1937*, ed. Prosper Hillairet, trans. Scott Hammen, 2nd ed. Eyewash Books Collection (Paris: Paris expérimental, 2021), loc. 1,296, https://read.amazon.com/?ref_=dbs_p_ebk_r00_pcb_rnvc00&_encoding=UTF8&asin=B07LFJHT6C.

¹⁹ Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version", 37.

²⁰ Fernand Léger, "A Critical Essay on the Plastic Quality of Abel Gance's Film the Wheel", in *Functions of Painting*, The Documents of 20th-Century Art (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 20.

²¹ Léger, "A Critical...", 20.

²² Dziga Vertov, "From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye", in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. by Dziga Vertov and Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1984), 88.

The cinematic city results from the relationship between film form and urban architecture, with montage as its underlying formal principle of synthesis. The urban environment is articulated not only as a setting or stage for human action. At the turn of the 20th century, there was a proliferation of works whose primary concern was the representation of the urban landscape as a complex, heterogeneous, and omnipresent territory in the so-called “city symphonies” and as a utopian and dystopian future in works such as Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927)²³.

Through the techniques and operations of cinema, the omnipresent city is transformed into a space for formal experimentation. City symphonies²⁴ aim directly to display the internal dynamism, cycles, structures, and relationships of the capital cities:

In the 1920s, the ‘city symphonies’ identified the modern dynamism and luminosity of large cities with the versatility of cinema for the coverage of the real and the plastic montage of its images, particularly through photographic techniques such as fades, double exposures, and the kaleidoscope effect, which formalized the purpose of simultaneous attention as a control objective.²⁵

It is possible to enhance four aspects of the city as a contemporary territory in early urban films: the reflexivity of a thematized media space, the formal framework created by montage, its interaction with a new realm of objects that were not previously part of the collective or artistic imagination, and light as a material of cinema and of contemporary experience.

Initially, city symphonies thematize the foundation of a new space via reflective cues that bind the territory to the filmic *medium*²⁶. With critical gestures, these films show the impact of cinema’s introduction on the development of urban space that is transformed into a rhythmic

²³ To this, we can add the explorations of social coexistence and abstract urban space in the case of the “The Glass House” project that Eisenstein plans, inspired by Lang’s work, according to Soo Hwan Kim, “A Cultural Genealogy of The Glass House: Reading Eisenstein with Benjamin”, *E-Flux Journal*, (March 2021), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/116/378537/a-cultural-genealogy-of-the-glass-house-reading-eisenstein-with-benjamin/>.

²⁴ Explicitly belonging to this genre are *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstad* (1927) by Walter Ruttmann, and *São Paulo, Sinfonia da Metrópole* (1928) by Rodolfo Rex Lustig and Adalberto Kemeny. However, Corro adds works like *Rien que les heures* (1926) by Alberto Cavalcanti, and *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) by Dziga Vertov to the genre. Through this expansion of the category, he proposes the analysis of Chilean works such as *Santiago* by Armando Rojas (1933); *Día de Orgánillos* (1959) by Sergio Bravo, and *Ningún lugar en ninguna parte* (2004) by José Luis Torres Leiva.

²⁵ “En la última década del cine mudo, la del veinte, las ‘sinfonías de ciudad’ identifican el dinamismo y la luminosidad modernas de las grandes ciudades con la versatilidad del cine para la cobertura de lo real y el montaje plástico de sus imágenes, esto especialmente a través de las técnicas fotográfica del fundido, la sobreimpresión y el efecto de caleidoscopio, que formalizan el propósito de la atención simultánea como objetivo de control” in Pablo Corro, “Sinfonías de ciudad en el cine chileno: imágenes de modernidad, efectos de luz”, in *Enfoques al cine chileno en dos siglos*, ed. by Mónica Villarroel et al., 1st ed. Santiago: LOM Ediciones: Centro Cultural La Moneda, Cineteca Nacional de Chile, 2013), 23.

²⁶ I take the notion of “Medium” from the way Benjamin uses it in relation to the technical apparatus, a concept that Somaini has further developed in Antonio Somaini, “Walter Benjamin’s Media Theory: The Medium and the Apparat”, *Grey Room* 62 (January 2016): 6-41, https://doi.org/10.1162/GREY_a_00188.

matrix. In *São Paulo, Sinfonia da Metrópole* (1928), the opening titles express the purpose of showing the magnificent metropolis built with vertiginous rhythm due to the constructive power of its people. This introduction approaches the great city through a *medium* that manifests itself in the concept of a "symphony", appealing to the rhythmic patterns that emerge from the visual contrasts produced by the assembly of the material components and the passage of the cycles of the day's changing activity. Vertov begins *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) by stating that he will proceed "without the help of a story," through a cinema devoid of theatrical and literary language. In an experimental and self-reflective gesture, the opening shot of Vertov's documentary is a montage of the cameraman carrying and operating his equipment while standing on a large movie camera (fig. 2).



Figure 2. *The Man with the Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929), photograph of the film's opening.

The man carrying his instrument passes across the theater's curtains in a subsequent shot. Subsequently, the act of starting the film projection is paralleled by the audience's entrance

into the empty theater and the succeeding start of an orchestra's performance²⁷. Therefore, the opening sequence implies that the cinematic city is not recognizable through narrative but instead through musicality, which has been visually translated into a silent medium. Rhythm is conveyed in the spatial dynamism since the beginning of Ruttmann's *Berlin*. The opening image of water waves expanding is followed by a train moving towards the city platform, a quote that celebrates the era of the machine and mechanical progress, and the film tradition whose origins can be traced back to Lumière's moving pictures. The advancing locomotive is alternated with views from the window in tracking shots that, in some moments, due to their speed, make the objects indistinguishable: tree branches, wiring, train lines, and distant buildings dissolve in the velocity as the musical notation becomes evanescent sound in the interpretation of a partiture.

Secondly, the framework that produces the rhythm is constructed by the formal operation of montage. Rhythm is a product of the interval or difference in a sequence time that Vertov will identify as the fundamental element of the *medium*²⁸. As a shared material property of the audible and the visual, the interval between contrasting particles of light, motion, and photographs generates the conflicts and relationships required to create the patterns that constitute cinematic tempo. Through montage, this constructed tempo is transferred to the depicted city, and both enter a circular relationship that identifies with the style of contemporary urban life. In order to inhabit a modern environment, a cinematic rather than a pictorial synthesis is required. However, the medium does not introduce the rhythm unilaterally when external content is captured. According to Kuleshov, the kaleidoscopic juxtaposition of multiple impressions as the form of modern experience and the principle of montage were introduced by the American capitalist culture, with its fast pace and commercial expectations.

The American film, on the other hand, at that time consisted of a large number of short shots filmed from various positions, because, it might be explained, for the price of admission the American viewer demands in return the maximum impressions, the maximum entertainment, and the maximum action. [...] Thanks to this commercial determinant of the American film, thanks to the very tempo of American life, much more accelerated than the tempo of Russian or European life, thanks to all this, what caught our attention in the American film is that they consist of whole series of very short shots, of whole series of brief sequences joined in some predetermined order, as opposed to the Russian film, which at that time consisted of a few very long scenes, monotonously following one after another.²⁹

²⁷ It should be highlighted that Vertov's interest in cinema is framed within a broader project of sensorial apparatusization that begins with his experiments with sound. Vertov's project is carefully developed by Antonio Somaini in Antonio Somaini, "Enregistrer, monter, transmettre, organiser. Dziga Vertov et la théorie des médias", in *Le ciné-œil de la révolution, écrits sur le cinéma*, ed. by Dziga Vertov, François Albera, and Antonio Somaini, trans. Irina Tcherneva (Dijon: les Presses du réel, 2018), 649-768.

²⁸ Dziga Vertov, "We: Variant of the Manifesto", in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. by Dziga Vertov and Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1984), 9.

²⁹ L. V. Kuleshov, "Art of the Cinema", in L. V. Kuleshov, *Kuleshov on Film: Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 46.

The accelerated beat of contemporary life that Kuleshov associates with montage develops in the cinematic metropolis as a framework comprised of discontinuous pieces of celluloid, with a maximum number of impressions in a sequentially organized series of shots. The mediated city is an archive or memory of fragments whose duration and position are determined by musical and dynamical criteria. In this framework, the architectural experience is deconstructed and transformed. The structure does not await a patient or functional traversal by a viewer moving at her own pace. The observer is fixated as explosive sensorial collisions stimulate her nervous system. The landscape's momentary stillness is intended to be contrasted and interrupted by movement. The morning view of a deserted street is imprinted in the viewer's memory to be juxtaposed, after an elliptical progression of time, with avenues traversed by crowds and trams flowing in choreographed straight lines that cross and interject each other's paths. The façade of a building, the window presented in a static shot, or the complex networks of streets unfolding through a bird's eye angle are relativized by the parallel montage—the valued resource whose poetic use was inherited from Griffith, along with the close-up—. City symphonies alternate flat frontages and deep shots of deserted streets, combining later their stillness with the mechanical cadence of industrial assemblages exerting their ceaseless movement at a progressively accelerating rate.

The Renaissance's architectural structures were immutable and almost divine due to the stability of geometrical laws projected in a visual field by a static observer. However, these structures depended on a collective reception of the represented space, which relied on malleable habits of synthesis. City symphonies deconstruct edifices and bombard the spectator with a fragmentary multiplicity of angles, durations, and speeds, revealing that habitable space has exploded, is in movement and can be controlled, traveled, and examined in a new fashion through the innervation of technical apparatuses and procedures.³⁰ With montage, the city is shattered and recomposed with *shocking* transitions that stimulate the body and sense organs³¹. Architecture becomes compartmentalized, modular, and reconceived as a

³⁰ Film's omnipresence and ability to establish diverse sets of associations and conditions when recording, adding, and exchanging its material demonstrate its omnipotent relationship to the territory. This power is exercised in the act of perceiving through a technical mediation, as the machinery has amplified the sensory organs' natural faculties and they can administer and access the data in a novel way. This changes the relation between human beings and the material world because it alters the perception of the action field and its objects.

³¹ The ideas are developed by R. Domínguez: "Gracias a Benjamin sabemos que los cambios en la sensibilidad contemporánea hay que buscarlos menos en la contemplación paciente y meditativa de obras singulares por parte del individuo, que en la penetración y bombardeo implacable de contenidos e imágenes reproducibles en el cuerpo colectivo. Lo que el cine inaugura para Benjamin es una sensibilidad, que de manera similar a ese arte antiguo y multitudinario que es la arquitectura, se define por la exposición consuetudinaria y distraída del cuerpo colectivo a sus estímulos (los edificios, las superficies, las sombras y el espacio en la arquitectura; el movimiento, los colores, el contraste y el montaje en el cine), pero que, a diferencia de la arquitectura, que penetra lentamente en el la colectividad, inerva rápidamente, es decir predispone y educa a ésta para una estética de shock. Si la contemplación para Benjamin es ante todo óptica, el shock es a su vez físico, táctil" in Román Domínguez, "De cómo el shock se hizo cósmico. pequeña historia fílmica de la sensibilidad", *Política* 6, n.º 1 (2018): 65". According to Benjamin, the medium generates a distracted and even hypnotic perception among the masses, in Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version", 38-39.

serial shot-by-shot composition. Eisenstein compares the cinematic experience to the architectural because of this way of reconstructing a multidimensional totality through the juxtaposition of partial views³², but now the views are not generated by spatial displacement of a subject in a fixed domain, but the relation is inverted. In *The Man with the Movie Camera*, Vertov celebrates the novelty of a superior machinic human who, when perceiving, has the analytical and synthetic capabilities to recompose the material world. The film draws analogies between cinema and other techniques that dissolve the limits of natural physiology generating new junctions within the city: transports, secretaries typing their machines, telephonic operators connecting the cables, and triumphing over the intervals of time and place³³. Through the assemblage of shots made possible by cinema, perception becomes a machine for constructing new structures. The city comprises apparatused sensible connections and procedures of second order that generate new medial space- time panorama.

Thirdly, urban space includes a set of objects and characters that become part of the city's imaginary and were never before present in the representational field. The insertion of mannequins, shop windows, industrial workers, mechanical devices, streetlights, trolleys, and automobiles suggests the emergence of a new community based on the ambiguity between matter and the human, which was previously separated by a hierarchical structure that favored the subject (fig. 3).

In *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, the sequence displaying the alternation of paper and pen and mechanical typewriters alludes to the passage of writing a cultural foundation of society and tradition. In *The Man with the Movie Camera*, the cart and horse alternate with the car as the modern mode of transportation. Their movement is altered in the frames showing the editing table managed by Svilova: reduced to photograms, frozen, ralentized, and accelerated. This implies that the new objectivity also emerges as a result of the analytical procedure of assemblage, which projects a collection of fragments from what was previously conceived as a whole: perspective and movement are deconstructed, and now it is even possible to build an artificial human from the pieces of different individuals³⁴.

³² "Painting has remained incapable of fixing the total representation of a phenomenon in its full visual multidimensionality [...]. Only the film camera has solved the problem of doing this on a flat surface, but its undoubted ancestor in this capability is architecture", in Sergei M. Eisenstein, Yve-Alain Bois, and Michael Glenny, "Montage and Architecture", *Assemblage*, n.º 10 (December 1989): 117, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3171145>.

³³ Somaini, "Enregistrer, monter, transmettre, organiser. Dziga Vertov et la théorie des médias", 723.

³⁴ Kuleshov affirms: "By montage alone we were able to depict the girl, just as in nature, but in actuality she did not exist, because we shot the lips of one woman, the legs of another, the back of a third, and the eyes of a fourth. We spliced the pieces together in a predetermined relationship; and created a totally new person, still retaining the complete reality of the material. This particular example likewise demonstrated that the entire power of cinematic effect is in montage. With the material alone one can never achieve such unique, seemingly incredible things. This is impossible in any other spectacle excepting cinema, in addition to which none of this is achieved through tricks but solely by the organization of the material, solely by bringing the material together into this or that order", in Kuleshov, "Art of the Cinema", 52.

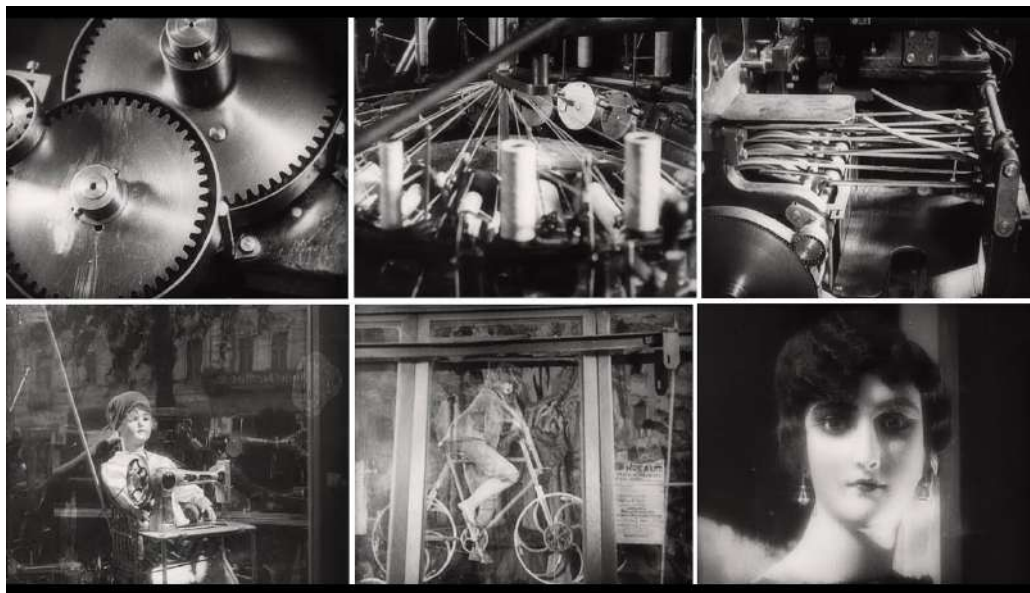


Figure 3. *The Man with the Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929), mannequins and machinery in photograms of the film.

Additionally, the properties of the physical are challenged. With motion montage, the solidity and weight of the buildings are diminished, the scales are lost, and the contemplative distance necessary for appreciating ancient monuments is rendered impossible by the fugacity of time. The filmic city as an archive combines monumental structures with precarious and quotidian incidents, giving political significance to what was previously deemed insignificant. The buildings are fleeting images rendered in electronic light before the indifferent machinic eye, which equalizes, atomizes, and divides. In *The Man with a Movie Camera*, the colossal occupies the same proportion of the frame as a woman putting on her stockings or beggars sleeping on benches. As prominent as the skyscraper is the industrial machine. The proportions of detail in the frame are the same as a human face or a train. Neither can be represented as a whole; rather, they consist of concrete, incomplete parts that can be connected in infinite ways.

Finally, the relationship with artificial light is of fundamental importance for photographic and cinematic apparatuses. The city symphonies establish luminous parallels that correspond to the variations of daylight. But modern cities do not fade at night, because as cinema they are impulsed with electricity. The films insistently show the neon illuminating the bars, streets, theaters, and brothels where nightlife unfolds³⁵. The rapid succession of shots and resources as fading superimposing images convey a sense of vertigo. In *The Man with the Movie Camera*, day and night converge in a movie theater, where the screen displays a group

³⁵ Corro, "Sinfonías de Ciudad...", 26.

of airplanes traversing the sunny sky. The connection between the shots of the planes and the audience watching from their seats is established by the intermediate shot of the cameraman pointing at heaven, which reunites the past with the future effects of his work. Thus, cinema triumphs over nighttime's darkness and historical and chronological distance by artificial light.

Moral parables

With the introduction of new supporting characters, the moral significance of the imaginary realm of the city as the scenery of modern lifestyle is developed. *The parable of Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* by Murnau (1927) is well-known, as it contrasts the simplicity of rural life with the confusing accumulation of stimuli of modern urbanization. The city is the residence of the libertine woman who entices the protagonist into her shadowy world, tempting him to deceive his angelic wife and even consider murdering her. The temptress, introduced in the title as "a woman from the city," dresses in black and seductively glides or dances frenetically. Her arrival for an extended vacation in the country induces corruption, doubt, and the loss of control of the protagonist's passions, who once lived happily with his family (fig. 4).

"The farm" unfolds under the open sky, housing the wife in a setting of prolonged and idyllic shots illuminated by natural light, associating her existence with the sunrise that gives the film its title and resurfaces at the end. In contrast, "the city's turmoil" is the territory of the artificial and the evanescent described by Baudelaire, highlighted by makeup, dance, brightness, cigarette and train smoke, and the endless crowds entering amusement parks in dense shots overloaded with activity. Like in city symphonies, Murnau's urban environment is deconstructed and fragmented. The work dissolves the distinctions between objects through parallel editing, accelerated movement, and superimposition. Electricity overthrows the laws of natural cycles. Additionally, metallic scaffolding and glass as materials generate a collapse of the depth of shots, resulting in a whirlwind of dancing legs, balloons, alcohol, and excess (fig. 5).



Figure 4. *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (F. W. Murnay, 1927), movement, montage and superimposition to showing the woman for the city's rhythm in a photograph of the film.



Figure 5. *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (F. W. Murnay, 1927), city night in a photogram of the film.

As the culmination of this overload, a pig running through the establishment of a party reveals two lovers kissing behind a curtain.

This moral dimension suggests that the imaginary realm of the city is not limited to a fascination with the present but acquires a symbolic character. It takes on a different form in utopian, dystopian, and political projects such as Eisenstein's "The Glass House"³⁶. The power of image mediation gives a sense of actuality and real consistency to a hypothetical scenario. As Sontag affirms, "Reality has bifurcated, into the real thing and an alternative version of it, twice over. There is the event and its image. And there is the event and its projection". In this duality of reality, Sontag argues that "real events often seem to have no more reality for people than images" and "there is what is happening now. And there is what it portends: the imminent, but not yet actual, and not really graspable, disaster".³⁷ Due to this quality, the city anticipates itself as the prophecy of an apocalyptic future that emerges from the consequences of modernity in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, as well as in subsequent works like Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) and Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995), among many others. *Metropolis* can still be seen today as an imaginary anticipation of contemporary urban architecture, as well as a reflection of a mentality that reduces human beings to a collection of objects, to a mass that is treated as machinery (figs. 6-7).

³⁶ Antonio Somaini, *Les Possibilités Du Montage*. Balázs, Benjamin, Eisentein (Paris: Mimesis, 2012), 96.

³⁷ Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989), 90.



Figure 6. *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), architecture and lights in a photograph of the film.



Figure 7. *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), the masses in a photograph of the film.

In conclusion, the cinematic city stands as an intricate web that mediates and reshapes the relationship between human beings and the material world constituting the space where human societies inhabit since the dawn of the 20th Century. This dynamic realm restructures the urban landscape capturing the pulsating rhythm of modern life through the lens of montage and modifying sensibility and social habits. As architecture and humanity coalesce within its frames, the cinematic city unveils its dual role: it is both a reflection of the immediate present and a prophetic projection of potential futures. Through its kaleidoscopic lens, cinema inaugurated and gave an identity to modern space and early theory of film recognized the status of this new media realm.



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