

OF MEN AND MOVIE CAMERAS: BUSTER KEATON, DZIGA VERTOV, AND THE AESTHETICS OF POLITICAL DOCUMENTARY

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Of all of Buster Keaton's films, *The Cameraman* (1928), the last picture over which he had true creative control, is arguably the most transparent regarding his views on the filmmaking process. Keaton plays a character known simply as "Buster", an aspiring newsreel cameraman who just can't seem to master his chosen profession. Attempting to land a job with the MGM Newsreel Company, he disastrously mangles his audition reel, turning a series of simple street scenes – a boat coming into harbor, a view of the traffic at a busy intersection – into an inadvertent work of avant-garde art by double-exposing his film stock and layering the images disconcertingly atop one another. The seemingly simple act of filming the world as it unfolds in front of him – the act of creating the most basic form of documentary – proves to be a far more challenging pursuit than it at first appears, and Buster despairs that he will ever actually learn his trade. Of course, he eventually manages to make a proper film. "They'll buy any

good film [...] so photograph anything that's interesting", his sweetheart instructs him in an intertitle. Buster simply must keep shooting until he gets it right, avoiding any distracting technical errors in the process. Sure enough, at the film's climax he suddenly finds himself in a position to save the day and save his career at the same time, rescuing his sweetheart from drowning while he is in the middle of filming a boat race. The resulting newsreel roll is a hit and Buster is at last granted a job. "That's the best camerawork I've seen in years!", the head of the newsreel company declares. From the proper practice of simple cinematic technique, great rewards will inevitably ensue.

Or so it initially seems. Yet *The Cameraman* is a film laced with an irony so caustic that it borders on cynicism. Keaton made the film after his fateful and ill-advised move to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, trading in the autonomy that came with running his own production house for the greater resources and apparent economic stability that

was supposed to come with working for a major studio. It would prove to be the undoing of his career, as MGM studio executives tried to curtail his improvisatory working methods and to force him to conform to the studio's exacting production standards. *The Cameraman* would effectively be the last film Keaton could call his own, and the narrative of the film would reflect his struggles to conform to studio standards and expectations. It's no coincidence, in other words, that he set the film at a company called MGM and named his main character Buster, developing a story in which his alter ego desperately tried to impress his superiors at the studio.

Given this background, we must not take too seriously the rejection of that initial newsreel audition footage within the diegesis of the film. The great irony here is that Buster's audition reel, which is explicitly viewed as a grievous failure by the characters, is actually an extremely sophisticated filmic artifact. The reverse motion, superimposition, and split screen effects seen in that short are not actually matters of accident and incompetence; they are instead complicated forms of artistic construction, supposed diegetic mistakes that actually serve as metafilmic testimony to Keaton's cinematic craftsmanship. The newsreel audition footage is a work of innovation, ingenuity, and even beauty – evidence of an active cinematic intelligence confronting and reinterpreting the world rather than simply presenting it unadorned. And that final reel that wins Buster so much acclaim within the world of the film – the one that's called “the best camerawork I've seen in years” by the studio head? It is literally the work of a monkey. The classic Bell and Howell camera that Buster uses within the film required constant hand-cranking in order to operate – an action Buster himself cannot perform as he dives into the water to save the drowning heroine. That task instead falls to a pet primate that Buster acquired earlier in the film, who dutifully cranks the camera as his owner saves the day. The technically correct but ultimately bare-bones

THROUGH KEATON, I MEAN TO ARGUE, WE CAN BEGIN TO BETTER UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS AT STAKE IN VERTOV'S HIGHLY UNCONVENTIONAL APPROACH TO POLITICAL DOCUMENTARY AND ASCERTAIN THE REASONS BEHIND THE RUSSIAN FILMMAKER'S MARRIAGE OF AVANT-GARDE CINEMATOGRAPHY AND MAN-ON-THE-STREET REALISM

recording of the world before us may be cause for celebration and acclaim within the diegetic world of the film, but it is in itself no great feat. It requires no special technical knowledge, no great cinematic skill, and no real organizing consciousness. There is no need for an actual camera-*man* at all in such a case – a camera-monkey will do just as well.

The fictional conflict around the fictional newsreel documentaries presented in *The Cameraman* would prove remarkably prescient to the actual ideological conflicts and material struggles that lay behind an actual work of urban documentary – Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kino-apparatom*), released one year after Keaton's film, in 1929. To view the two films alongside one another is illuminating. Through Keaton's fictional newsreel and fictional struggles, I mean to argue, we can begin to better understand what was at stake in Vertov's highly unconventional approach to political documentary, and we can begin to ascertain the ideological reasons behind the Russian filmmaker's marriage of avant-garde cinematography and man-on-the-street realism. That is, we can begin to understand just why Vertov took so seriously the kind of highly experimental documentary form dismissed as ludicrous by the characters within Keaton's film. Vertov undoubtedly knew Keaton's work well. As the slapstick comedian once remarked in an interview, “I was a box-office draw in the darnd-

est country in the world.... Russia. I was a bigger box-office attraction than Chaplin in Russia" (BISHOP, 2007: 57). Vertov's brother, cameraman, and close collaborator Mikhail Kaufman – literally the man with the movie camera in Vertov's film – even once described himself as "the Buster Keaton of documentary filmmaking" (NORTH, 2009: 32). So far as we can know, Keaton had little or no awareness of Vertov's struggles within the nascent Soviet film industry or of the ideological debates among the new nation's most prominent filmmakers, Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein most especially. Yet *The Cameraman* and *Man with a Movie Camera* would share far more than just a similar name; they would share an outlook on the process of cinematic construction – and specifically documentarian construction – that set them at odds in their respective film industries with those who favored a more uninflected manner of film recording, a direct presentation of diegetic material rather than an interpretation of that material via the specialized techniques and unique capacities of the camera. For Keaton and Vertov both, the medium of film held far greater promise than that.

MAKING FILMS "INTELLIGIBLE TO THE MILLIONS"

For these views, both Keaton and Vertov found themselves embroiled in conflict relatively late in their careers, beset by powerful figures who questioned their methods despite the directors' many years of successful filmmaking. For Keaton, the fictional conflict in *The Cameraman* was made all too real in his struggles against the MGM executives who sought to control his filmmaking, the famous producer Irving Thalberg most especially. "Like any man who must concern himself with mass production, he was seeking a pattern, a format". Keaton later wrote of Thalberg. "Brilliant though he was, Irving Thalberg could not accept the way a comedian like me built his stories... Our way of operating would have seemed hopelessly mad to

him" (KEATON, 1960: 207). For Vertov, his conflict would lie not with the capitalist executives of a major motion picture studio but with the communist ideologues of the Soviet state. A year before Vertov's film was released – in the same year that *The Cameraman* debuted – the Communist Party Conference on Cinema produced a statement of artistic purpose with ominous overtones for Vertov's work. Officially, the party committed itself to an open artistic position on questions of filmic construction, declaring, "In questions of artistic form the Party cannot support one particular current, tendency or grouping: it permits [...] the opportunity for experimentation so that the most perfect possible film in artistic terms can be achieved". Yet in the very next paragraph, the statement also declares, "The main criterion for evaluating the formal and artistic qualities of films is the requirement that cinema furnish a 'form that is intelligible to the millions'" (TAYLOR, 1988: 212). Stripped of its particular ideological and revolutionary purposes, it is a statement with which Thalberg and any other Hollywood executive would surely agree – that the purpose of film is to "furnish a form that is intelligible to the millions".

Like Keaton in his pre-MGM days, Vertov had no small measure of success within the Soviet film industry before making *Man with a Movie Camera* and falling under official criticism and scrutiny. From 1922 to 1925, he was the leading force behind the *Kino-Pravda* newsreels, which served an important role in helping Soviet cinemas to meet the dictates of the so-called "Leninist proportion", the party rule requiring cinemas to show at least twenty-five percent documentary subjects (LENIN, 1988: 56). During the early 1920s, it was difficult to go to a cinema in the Soviet Union and *not* see an issue of the *Kino-Pravda* newsreel along with the other shorts and features. Yet even despite this nationwide prominence, Vertov remained a figure of some suspicion among certain members of the political and cultural elite for his aestheticizing tendencies. As Vertov writes of the reception

of the fourteenth issue of *Kino-Pravda*, in which he first started to employ avant-garde techniques: “Friends didn’t understand and shook their heads. Enemies raged. Cameramen announced that they wouldn’t film for *Kinopravda*, and the censors wouldn’t pass *Kinopravda* at all (or rather they passed it, but cut exactly half, which was equivalent to destroying it)” (VERTOV, 1984: 44). Tricks of process photography, elements of rapid and suggestive analytical editing – the very tactics of filmic composition highlighted in Keaton’s supposedly failed newsreel in *The Cameraman* – were all regular features in the *Kino-Pravda* newsreel shorts. And they would be the defining cinematic features of *Man with a Movie Camera* as well, features that have since become iconic in the memory of that film – in the canted-angle, split-screen depiction of street cars moving in opposite directions, for instance, or the apparent bending in half of the Bolshoi Ballet building via a similar split-screen inversion. Such aspects of Vertov’s filmmaking were inexcusable according to Eisenstein, childish instances of what he called “newsreel follies” and certainly not in keeping with the idea of furnishing “a form that is intelligible to the millions” (TSIVIAN, 2004: 11).

Yet Vertov fervently believed in the documentary mission as he conceived it; more than that, he believed he was fulfilling the party’s directive to craft films “intelligible to the millions.” Vertov utterly rejected the idea that the carefully staged, reenactment-based documentaries then prevalent among other Soviet filmmakers made anything truly intelligible to the masses: “The viewers – illiterate and uneducated peasants – don’t read the titles. They can’t grasp the plot... These still unspoiled viewers don’t understand artificial theatricality” (VERTOV, 1984: 64). It was documentary grounded in the lived realities of everyday life that the workers and peasants most desperately needed, he said. Whenever “real peasants appear on the screen, they all perk up and stare at the screen”, he observes. “On the screen are their own

kind, real people. There isn’t a single false, theatrical movement to unmask the screen” (VERTOV, 1984: 64). Documentary’s true mandate, he said, was simply to “show us life” (VERTOV, 1984: 62).

Yet at the same time, Vertov did not believe that this imperative eliminated the need for an interpretive rendering of the documentary material captured on camera. Just the opposite: the very fact that the filmmaker was obligated to record the actual happenings of the world in front of him meant that he had a duty to then interpret that material for his viewers via the techniques of cinematography and editing. In Vertov’s words, the true documentarian regards editing “as the *organization of the visible world*” (VERTOV, 1978: 118). Or, to frame the debate in the terms set out in Keaton’s film: the very need to “photograph anything that’s interesting”, as Buster’s sweetheart tells him to do *means* that the specialized techniques of cinematic arrangement he mistakenly deploys are so essential. Those techniques are what make the material meaningful, presenting us with an interpretation of the world: in the words of the Party Conference on Cinema, they are what make that interesting material *intelligible*. Everything else might have just as well been shot by a monkey – a being with the physical dexterity to record a film but not the mental dexterity to arrange it.

GERMAN IDEOLOGY AND RUSSIAN DOCUMENTARY

In taking this approach, Vertov had on his side an alibi of far greater renown than Buster Keaton and his pet monkey. He had Karl Marx himself. As a number of commentators have noted in passing, Vertov’s views on filmmaking seem to derive at least in part from the doctrines of *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engel’s manuscript on history and human nature from 1846¹. The connections deserve to be mined in greater depth, as in many ways Marx’s text offers an intellectual blueprint to the mechanics of Vertov’s method of documen-

tary filmmaking. In fact, the emergence of *The German Ideology* as a major text of Communist literature is almost entirely contemporaneous to the heyday of Vertov's documentarian career in the 1920s. For nearly a hundred years, *The German Ideology* was considered a relatively minor work in the Marxist canon until around the time that Vertov began actively making films. As Charles Barbour has argued, "It was the Soviets [...] who first began to treat *The German Ideology* as a pivotal text" (2012: 49).

THE VERY FACT THAT THE FILMMAKER WAS OBLIGATED TO RECORD THE ACTUAL HAPPENINGS OF THE WORLD IN FRONT OF HIM MEANT THAT HE HAD A DUTY TO THEN INTERPRET THAT MATERIAL FOR HIS VIEWERS VIA THE TECHNIQUES OF CINEMATOGRAPHY AND EDITING AVAILABLE TO HIM

Marx's main concern in *The German Ideology* is with the manner by which Communists should best understand and present questions of history and society in their writings, and it is easy to see how his remarks as to how one should textually represent the world might be readily adapted to questions of representation in the age of cinema. "The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas", Marx writes. "They are the real individuals, their activity, and the material conditions under which they live" (MARX, 2004: 42). The Communist observer must focus his eye on the actualities of lived experience and nothing else, according to Marx. "We do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh", he writes. "We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real-life process we demonstrate the devel-

opment of the ideological reflexes" (MARX, 2004: 47). Yet this focus on the real does not mean it is the Communist's mandate to simply record the material facts before him without substantial interpretation. Marx actively chides the idea of history as "a collection of dead facts as it is with the empiricists" (2004: 47). Neither should the Marxist interpreter allow himself to spin off into a realm of airy abstractions and ideological impositions that are not grounded in the actual facts of material life – for Marx is equally critical of history as "an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists" (2004: 47). The perfect point of Communist representation is the point between the two extremes of unadorned factuality and ideological fantasy, the point "where speculation ends" and gives way to "the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men" (MARX, 2004: 48). In fact, although Marx's essay was written and published nearly half a century before the advent of modern film technology, his text does in one moment actually anticipate the cinematic adaptation of his ideas that Vertov would undertake. Describing the work of non-Communist ideology, Marx writes that "men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*" (2004: 47). It is the work of the Communist interpreter to set the world right-side up again, to take the material transmitted in the *camera obscura* and arrange it for us properly – in Marx's words, to "facilitate the arrangement of historical material, to indicate the sequence of its separate strata" (2004: 48).

This is the mission that Vertov undertakes for himself in *Man with a Movie Camera*, a film that is self-consciously set at the point of equipoise that Marx identifies between the polarities of "a collection of dead facts" and "an imagined activity of imagined subjects". Vertov's documentary is not so much a presentation of the world as a highly self-conscious arrangement of it. This is true even in the most literal sense. While Vertov's film is often compared to city symphony films like Walther

Ruttman's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt, 1927) or Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand's *Manhatta* (1921), the film actually presents no single city at all. The footage used in the film, which gives the impression of presenting a unified urban location, is combined from reels taken in Kiev, Kharkov, Moscow, and Odessa. The same act of compositing can be seen even with regards to the people depicted on screen. Per Vertov's own imperatives to "show us life", most of the figures shown in the film are actual city-dwellers going about their daily lives. Many are entirely unaware that they are being filmed: through telephoto lenses, Vertov's camera often surreptitiously captured from far away scenes of great intimacy – the scenes of mourners in a graveyard, for instance, or of vagrants sleeping on the street. Others are all too aware that they are on camera, as with the couples at the city clerk's office who smile for the camera as they sign their marriage papers or try to hide their faces as they fill out their divorce paperwork.

In what seems like a contradiction to Vertov's own prescriptions, however, the film also includes select moments of staged action, most notably in the early scenes where a young woman (Vertov's wife and editor, Elizaveta Svilova) awakens in the morning, washes herself, and gets dressed. Yet Svilova's presence in the film can be read as another interpretive tool deployed by Vertov in arranging and presenting the documentarian footage that is the film's core, another attempt to set right the material that Marx says is initially shown upside down in the *camera obscura*. She models for the viewer a process of awakening from slumber and confronting the world in daylight, the self-same processes that the film itself will ask its spectators to metaphorically undergo. She is, in this sense, a human version of the superimpositions and frame speed changes that will accent other moments in the film; in other words, she positions and contextualizes the material just as surely as any camera trick.

Ultimately, Vertov's film is about the process of breaking one's apparent consciousness of the world and radically reformulating it – of waking from the dream world of prior ideologies and confronting the actual material conditions of experience in revelatory daylight. Hence the distancing effects of so many of Vertov's visual techniques, the making strange of what might otherwise seem overly familiar. The filmmaker asks us constantly to look again at what we see before us, to catch ourselves falling into easy patterns of viewing and understanding and instead to try to see the world anew. What we recognize when we do so is a realm that has been very carefully rearranged for us into a universe of labor and leisure and of ultimately little else. There are the workers in the textile factory, and there are the bathers on the beach. There are the women rolling cigarettes, and there are the men relaxing and playing chess. There are the workers at the telephone station and there are the children watching the magician. These are not contrasting groups, a laboring class and a leisured class. The figures on the beach and the figures in the factory are all one, engaging in the basic pursuits of life.

There are elements besides labor and leisure shown on screen, of course. These elements are made up mostly of the great milestones and traumas of human existence: the couples preparing to get married and the couples preparing to get divorced, a scene of childbirth, a scene of mourning, firemen racing to a fire. But what is missing from the film is even more striking than what is present. There are no politicians depicted in this world. Aside from the fire brigade and the civil clerk at the marriage office, there are in fact no government officials of any kind. Neither are there soldiers, nor police. There are no leaders, no speech-makers, not even any foremen in the factories. We are, it seems, already in the realm of the worker's paradise, the condition that comes after the demise of the state. Or rather, Vertov has uncovered from within the datum of his countrymen's daily lives the conditions of this place. The apparatus of gov-

ernment and the operations of the state beyond the level of its basic civil functions are ultimately all superfluous, he shows. Through the process of cinematic arrangement and visual estrangement, Vertov reveals a world that belongs first and foremost to the people themselves, an inheritance that is already right there before them for the taking if only they would recognize it.

Even the cinema itself belongs to them as part of this inheritance, Vertov says. Hence his insistence throughout the film on foregrounding the methods of its own production: not just in the constant appearance of the titular man with a movie camera (Kaufman) throughout the film but also in the depiction of the film's actual editor (Svilova) and in the direct presentation of the actual process by which film stock used in the final picture was edited by her hands. Film itself is hereby demystified and revealed to be a product of human labor, in deference to Marx's famous warning in *Capital* against "the fetishism of commodities" and the processes by which "the products of labor become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible" (1936: 83). In Vertov's vision, the whole of modernity – the skyscrapers, the trains, the trollies, the cinema itself – belongs fundamentally to the people, and his film is offered as a declaration of that inheritance. It is potentially the most political of gestures. Vertov makes a point of showing to his viewers a world that goes beyond politics, a world that they have every right to demand as wholly their own and in which, in truth, they actually already live.

CAPTURING MODERNITY

Vertov bequeaths to his viewers, in other words, a vision of modernity as the product of their own labor, a creation of their making, and an inheritance that's theirs for the taking. It is a revelation that can only be made in and through the so-called "newsreel follies" that Eisenstein and other Soviets so despised in his work. It is here that Ver-

tov reconnects to Keaton, who was no Marxist but who shared with Vertov a perspective on the profound ability of film to capture and in some sense tame the forces of modernity. Keaton's films fundamentally concern a struggle with the industrial and mechanized forces of modernity, which literally threaten to overcome or destroy Keaton's character in nearly every one of his films. Yet Keaton the filmmaker shows a remarkable command of modernity at its most epic scale, harnessing trains and ocean-liners to his will. As a director, the industrial products of modernity are his playthings to control, even if as an actor he must mime fear and submission to these elements. It is this dynamic that is so pivotally at play within the narrative of *The Cameraman*. Buster's newsreel bosses want their cameraman only to obsequiously capture the modern world as it unfolds around him. Their ideal newsreel is nothing more than some aspect of the modern world directly depicted on film. But Keaton aims for something else in his filmmaking: to arrange, to interpret, and to control the forces of that world. The true intent of that vision is illegible to the newsroom bosses in *The Cameraman*; they are only able to view his early newsreel attempt as a series of accidents and mistakes. It is in truth a clearer expression of Keaton's actual cinematic vision than anything else in the film, for although Keaton rarely engaged in the specific manner of cinematographic expressionism there depicted – double exposures and superimpositions and the like – they represent an approach to cinematic construction that is active rather than passive, interpretive rather than reactive, and wholly in control of the modern world there shown.

For Vertov, his techniques and his intentions in *Man with a Movie Camera* were just as illegible to the Soviet elites as were Keaton's newsreels to his bosses in *The Cameraman*. Seeking to publish a cinematic manifesto that explained the visuality of that film and was timed to coincide with its release, Vertov found his submission rejected by *Pravda*, the main

party newspaper. It was quite a blow to the former editor of *Kino-Pravda*, which was meant to be the newsreel analogue to the print publication. Reaction to the film itself would be similarly hostile – “in the Soviet Union”, Jeremy Hicks writes, “it would long be criticized as the way not to make a film” (HICKS, 2007: 70). Ostensibly, the film was too experimental, too visually baroque. Its meaning was not overtly and immediately “intelligible”. Yet the film was also, in another sense, too assuming, too convinced of the power of cinema, too presumptuous in making film the chosen vehicle for the delivery of Marx’s vision of a world properly interpreted. From the documentary cinema, Vertov had written, would come “the greatest experiments in the direct organization of the thoughts (and consequently of the actions) of all humanity” (TSIVIAN, 2004: 13). Film undoubtedly had an important place in the revolutionary vision of the Soviets. It was even, as Lenin once said, “the most important of all arts” (KENEZ, 1992: 29). But it was a tool only, and not the singular instrument of ideological revelation that Vertov dreamed it to be.

In fact, when *Man with a Movie Camera* opened in Moscow, its run was cut short after only a week. It was replaced in the cinemas where it had been playing by Harold Lloyd’s *Grandma’s Boy* (Fred C. Newmeyer) – a slapstick film from 1922 that features at its climax a long chase in which the hero, riding in a car, pursues a villain traveling on foot down a country road, following him to the point at which he finally collapses of exhaustion, overwhelmed by this unstoppable new machine. There could be perhaps nothing farther from the idea of the workers claiming ownership and control over the forces of modernity that was so much a part of Vertov’s vision of political documentary. Yet Lloyd’s was a film that, without a doubt, was “intelligible to the masses”. ■

NOTES

- 1 See MICHELSON, Annette (1984). Introduction, *Kino-eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Berkeley: University of California Press; BELLER, Jonathan (2006). *The Cine-*

matic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle. Dartmouth: Dartmouth College Press; and BEN-SHAUL, Nitzan (2007). *Film: The Key Concepts*. London: Bloomsbury.

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Abstract

As cinematic stylists, contemporaries Dziga Vertov and Buster Keaton had little in common, yet they shared a remarkably homologous vision of the cinema's unique role in interpreting the sometimes overwhelming condition of modernity. This article offers a comparison of Keaton's *The Cameraman* and Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, released within one year of one another, as complimentary testaments to the active interpretive power of the cinema in the face of modern social and industrial forces. Through this comparison, the article aims to illuminate the artistic and ideological motivations behind Vertov's unique combination of documentarian footage and avant-garde cinematographic technique and link his filmmaking to Keaton's efforts in the United States. Composed in the face of strenuous resistance and criticism from Hollywood executives and Soviet elites, respectively, and fortified by a commitment to the camera's powers of analysis and arrangement (derived, in Vertov's case, from his engagement with Marx's *The German Ideology*), both *The Cameraman* and *Man with a Movie Camera* make a lasting case for the documentary power of the cinema as an instrument of interpretation uniquely conditioned to the social and political challenges of the modern age.

Key words

Dziga Vertov; *Man with a Movie Camera*; Buster Keaton; *The Cameraman*; documentary; Karl Marx; *The German Ideology*.

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DE HOMBRES Y CÁMARAS DE CINE: BUSTER KEATON, DZIGA VERTOV Y LA ESTÉTICA DEL DOCUMENTAL POLÍTICO

Resumen

Como estilistas cinematográficos, los contemporáneos Dziga Vertov y Buster Keaton no tenían mucho en común, pero compartían una notable visión homóloga del exclusivo papel que desempeña el cine a la hora de interpretar la condición en ocasiones abrumadora de la modernidad. Este artículo ofrece una comparación de *The Cameraman*, de Keaton, y *El hombre de la cámara*, de Vertov, estrenadas con un año de diferencia, como testimonios complementarios del poder interpretativo activo del cine de cara a las fuerzas sociales e industriales modernas. A través de la misma, se pretende dilucidar las motivaciones artísticas e ideológicas tras la combinación única de metraje documental y técnicas cinematográficas vanguardistas de Vertov y relacionarla con los esfuerzos de Keaton en Estados Unidos. Compuestas ante la extenuante resistencia y crítica por parte de ejecutivos de Hollywood y miembros de la élite soviética, respectivamente, y afianzadas gracias al compromiso con los poderes de análisis y reordenación de la cámara (derivados, en el caso de Vertov, de su afinidad con *La ideología alemana* de Marx), tanto *The Cameraman* como *El hombre de la cámara* constituyen ejemplos duraderos del poder documental del cine como instrumento de interpretación especialmente acondicionado para los desafíos sociales y políticos de la era moderna.

Palabras clave

Dziga Vertov; *El hombre de la cámara*; Buster Keaton; *The Cameraman*; documental; Karl Marx; *La ideología alemana*.

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