

from it. Vertov's subjects did not all have equal rights over the means of representation, even though some of them famously looked back at the camera, thus displaying an awareness of its presence and, implicitly, some degree of agency over their own portrayal.

The hidden camera, a literalized version of a cinema that catches life off guard, is the very negation of the gaze into the camera. The prostitutes and speculators ostensibly filmed by Vertov with the hidden camera could not return his gaze. Vertov's camera was deliberately not the medium through which these people represented themselves but the medium that caught them off guard and exposed them. While his criminal subjects may have (mis)appropriated the "means of production," they certainly did not appropriate the means of mechanical reproduction. It is most emphatically the "film troika"—director, cinematographer, and editor—who portray people without their consent or even against their will. Annette Michelson wrote about the politically subversive and "destabilizing effect" of Vertov's assertion of "the truth value of cinema in its converting of the invisible into the visible, in its rendering of the hidden manifest, in its revelation of disguise, and in its conversion of falsehood into truth."<sup>39</sup> His "decoding of communist reality," she cogently argues, explains much of the establishment's hostility towards him, a hostility that later in his career turned into outright harassment. But while priding itself on bringing criminals to light, creating them when they appeared in short supply, or approaching the whole city as a criminal subject under the gun, Vertov's hidden or artfully exhibited cameras brought out a more problematic side of his cinematic conversion of the invisible into the visible, one that self-consciously emulated, rather than subverted, the work of the police.

### The Original Show Trial Film and Its Audience

Vertov was one of the first filmmakers to record political prisoners. He used large parts of the first eight editions of his newsreel *Kino-Pravda* to cover the 1922 trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries (SR). The trial was a major Soviet and international media spectacle, "the reigning model of the Soviet show trial throughout the 1920s."<sup>40</sup> At first the authorities found little use for cinema in the courtroom. Vertov had to fight hard for permission to film and was initially refused.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the first *Kino-Pravda* showed only street scenes of demonstrators requesting drastic measures against the SR. But once he finally received permission to film inside the court, Vertov produced a memorable coverage of the trial. As opposed to the drawn-out footage of 1930s show trials, where the camera droned as mechanically as the other participants in the

trial, Vertov's 1922 coverage engages through its sharp structure and dynamic editing. It presents in swift succession the defining moments of the trial: the arrival of the defendants and members of the court, witness testimonies, and defense and prosecution speeches. The terse intertitles effectively punctuate this narrative and identify the key players. Vertov had already experimented with the trial newsreel in the very beginning of his career. His *The Trial of Mironov* (*Protsess Mironova*, 1919) showed deft appropriation of the courtroom drama into a well-structured filmic narrative.<sup>42</sup> The early film already exhibited the striking focus on the audience that would define Vertov's coverage of the SR trial, while also presenting a sight that would be carefully edited from the later trial: the image of the defiant defender.<sup>43</sup>

Watching Vertov's newsreels taught the audience how a trial proceeded, and that it was fascinating to be at one. The latter impression was reinforced by the strong focus on the reactions of the courtroom audience. In *The Trial of Mironov*, a group of men climb on top of one another to get a better view, in a spectacular shot that was probably staged for the camera. In the *Kino-Pravdas*, a spectator jumps out of his seat from excitement at the prosecutor's speech while another watches intently through opera glasses. Even the court secretaries forget about professional distance and excitedly delve into a thick file, likely the work of the secret police (see the first photograph in the Introduction). A woman stretches herself forward to get a better look. The extreme close-up of her back, which allows us to count the minuscule buttons that keep her blouse together, unambiguously and temptingly places us in the seat right behind her. The camera both lures and enables its audience to see the trial from the position of the courtroom audience. Further assisted by the design of the courtroom, which was "modeled on a theatrical stage," the film's identification of the on- and offscreen audience was less innocuous than it might seem.<sup>44</sup>

Julie Cassiday has documented the state's extreme preoccupation with the population's reaction to the SR trial. The courtroom audience was handpicked from loyal trade union and party members. "Common Soviet citizens interested in attending the trial found it impossible if their names did not appear on a predetermined list of audience members."<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, OGPU agents were deployed among the trial's spectators with the task of modeling the right reactions while at the same time monitoring the audience.<sup>46</sup> The authorities also made great efforts to extend outside of the courtroom this manipulation of the trial's reception. Together with carefully orchestrated mass demonstrations and partisan newspaper coverage, Vertov's film played a major role in this molding of the public's opinion about the trial. The last scene of Vertov's trial coverage explicitly addresses his concern with bringing the trial to the general public, as well as his willingness to work together with the newspapers. The



Trial audience. *Kino-Pravda 8*, 1922, frame enlargements.

scene dramatizes precisely the relationship between the courtroom and the outside audience: a group of smiling stenographers takes down the speech of the prosecutor, which is immediately printed in *Pravda*. The camera leaves the courtroom and positions itself in front of a newsstand in expectation of *Pravda*'s arrival. As the newspaper arrives, our film crew is there to pick up the first copies. A man, who turns out to be no one else but Dziga Vertov, leans out of a tram to buy his copy of *Pravda* from a running newspaper boy. He opens the newspaper and, turning to a beautiful woman seated next to him, excitedly shares the news while pointing at the paper. The trial news turns out to be the perfect pick-up line: the woman smiles, flattered and self-conscious, tilting her head toward Vertov and his paper. The camera discreetly leaves them as they launch into an animated conversation.

This conclusion of the trial newsreel is most unusual: Vertov, the adamant champion of unplayed film, stages a dramatization where he himself plays the lead role. The director of the trial newsreel poses as just another passer-by getting his news of the trial from the newspaper. Vertov's act literally models the reception of the trial by the man in the street and seduces others into sharing his reactions. Watching his excitement and the woman's giddy laughter, it is almost impossible to remember that their reactions are provoked by a prosecutor's speech asking for no less than the death sentence for all the accused in a political show trial. Even the (actual) *Pravda* reviewer considered that the other elaborate dramatization which ends the coverage of the trial, "the footage of two young 'gentlemen' betting on whether the men will be shot or not is not at all serious, and quite inappropriate."<sup>47</sup> This was ungrateful, since "the two young gentlemen" modeled the excitement of the man in the street for the trial *and* for the reading of the *Pravda* itself. Indeed, the sequence should be adopted by any campaign promoting reading, since never has reading in general, let alone reading the soporific *Pravda*, appeared as such adrenaline-boosting fun as in this sequence: the two men grab the newspaper from each other as close-ups of the typed verdict—the SR were condemned to be shot, but their sentence was conditionally commuted—give their suspense-building bet a dramatic turning of the tables. As we have seen, this is the third episode of two people excitedly reading together in this newsreel, and there is more than just an air of flirtation here around reading, even if a (secret police?) file and the *Pravda* have replaced Francesca and Paolo's Arthurian romances as the Soviet Gallehaut. For those in the know, the excitement must have been boosted by the recognition of two dashing members of Vertov's crew, Mikhail Kaufman and Ivan Beliakov. But for most men in the street, these crew members probably remained a better-dressed, charismatic, and in a word, cinematic, version of themselves.

Cassiday cogently argues that Vertov worked with the Soviet authorities to

script the response of the audience to the SR trial by censoring the defiant self-presentation of the accused in the SR trial. "It proved a simple task of editing to delete the SR's denunciations [of the Bolsheviks] from newsreels distributed across the Soviet Union."<sup>48</sup> I believe that Vertov went far beyond manipulating the image of the accused to mold the audience's response to the trial: he artfully manipulated the image of the audience.<sup>49</sup> His trial coverage stands out for the large number of audience reaction shots, most of them repeated at least twice in different *Kino-Pravdas*. The repetitions raise questions about editing. What is this man trying to hear by cupping his ear: the attorney's speech, as shown in *Kino-Pravda No. 4*; the contrite defendant's testimony, as shown in *Kino-Pravda No. 8*; or the defiant defendant's speech, edited out of all the *Kino-Pravdas*? Maybe this eager listener even belonged in a different trial, or in a theater hall; it is hard to know. The close-ups of members of the audience make the shots more arresting, and also allow the editor to insert them as reaction shots whenever they are needed rather than where they originally belonged. Furthermore, the film rallies its most sophisticated and original cinematic moves—such as the dramatic modeling of the trial's reception by Vertov himself and his crew—to entice its audience to identify with the courtroom audience and view the trial as an entertaining spectacle.

The significance of this artful casting of the audience comes into sharper relief when compared to the roles attributed to the audience in other films. Carol J. Clover has shown that the norm in Hollywood trial films is to assign the audience the role of jurors.<sup>50</sup> The audience watches the debate of the two sides from a distance and deliberates the verdict. As we will see, Soviet kino police casts its audience in a much wider variety of roles. Indeed, the ever-changing interpellation of the audience defines kino police as much, or more, than the interpellation of the criminal subject. With his knack for cinematic pioneering, Vertov breached different directions to be taken by kino police: his camera caught criminals/enemies off guard, indexed them, edited their public images, and maybe even made them up when in short supply, while also casting the audience in a carefully scripted role.

### Alexander Medvedkin: Cinema as Public Prosecutor

Alexander Medvedkin launched his artistic career in the military. A soldier in the Red Army, he rose through the ranks because of his success directing the army theater. In 1930, Medvedkin joined the military studio Gosvovoyenkino, where he started making military training films.<sup>51</sup> Soon after he became a key player in one of the most fascinating cinematic experiments of the 1920s: