

**Pudovkin's Precept, Part 2:
'This Method of Temporal Concentration'**

Evan Wm. Cameron

**Professor Emeritus
Senior Scholar in Screenwriting**

**Graduate Programmes,
Film & Video and Philosophy**

York University

[The extended version of Part 2 of the Pudovkin lectures as reproduced here, in company with amplified revisions of Parts 1 and 3, was generated between 1995-1997 with further revisions in 2005-2006 and 2019-2020. No date of origin for its contents can be given with exactness, however, for they were compiled incrementally over many years to augment Part 1 (available elsewhere within the Evan Wm. Cameron Collection). A 'date of issuance' of 1977 has nominally been assigned to it – a decade after the earliest presentation of Part 1 – to hint at the distinctive timing of its conception, development and use.]

Review Pudovkin's Precept, Part 2: 'This Method of Temporal Concentration'

Pudovkin's precept could be used by filmmakers when making movies of any kind. Pudovkin, however, had never intended to give filmmakers a tool for making movies of any kind. He had wished rather to assist them to make works of *art*.

To make films artistically, however, as some filmmakers soon sensed, they would have to deepen their understanding of Pudovkin's 'basic method of filmmaking', retraining themselves to learn how to mimic the shifts of attention to an event of an imaginary observer who was not only invisible and freely mobile (the core of the common construal) but as sensitive as possible to its social, political and thus historical import – a task far more exacting than many filmmakers could comprehend, much less undertake.

To be a work of art, Pudovkin claimed, a film must differ from life, the greater the difference, the greater the art.

Between the natural event and its appearance upon the screen there is a marked difference. It is exactly this difference that makes the film an art. (FTFA, page 86)

Some commentators, reading the above, have applauded or condemned Pudovkin for advocating surrealism or even irrealism in art.¹ Others, contrasting it with his insistence that filmmakers ought always to respect how we attend naturally to things, have concluded that Pudovkin's suggestions were incoherent at their core.

¹ Pudovkin assisted such misconstruals on occasion by unwittingly misdescribing his own work, conflating it seemingly with Eisenstein's notions of 'associative montage'. For example, he describes the episode in *MOTHER* of Pavel's joy in prison as he receives the news of his impending release as follows: "The problem was the expression, filmically, of his joy. The photographing of a face lighting up with joy would have been flat and void of effect. I show, therefore, the nervous play of his hands and a big close-up of the lower half of his face, the corners of the smile. These shots I cut in with other and varied material – shots of a brook, swollen with rapid flow of spring, of the play of sunlight broken on the water, birds splashing in the village pond, and finally a laughing child. By the junction of these components our expression of 'prisoner's joy' takes place." (FTFA, page 27). Cited by Ernest Lindgren on page 86 of his *The Art of the Film* (London, England: George Allen & Unwin Limited, second edition, 1963 [1948]) as a prelude to his sympathetic but more exact recounting of the same sequence, noting in particular that Pudovkin's description is "not accurate in its details" – having already noted on page 83 that Pudovkin has neglected to mention that he carefully places a *title* before the intercut shots, announcing that 'meanwhile outside spring has arrived', shifting the context from conceptual to perceptual association, retrenching naturalism.

Pudovkin never claimed, however, that films could differ from life *in any way at all* and still function artistically. On the contrary! As he affirmed in the next sentence, an event could be encountered more artistically by means of film only if we were thereby enabled to attend to fewer unimportant aspects of it, the event having been concentrated *temporally*.

Guided by the director, the camera assumes the task of removing every superfluity and directing the attention of the spectator in such a way that he shall see only that which is significant and characteristic. (FFTA, page 86)

As Pudovkin insisted, indeed, it is "this method of temporal concentration" that "forms the actual basis of filmic representation" – the 'basic method of filmmaking', properly understood.

[The director] can, in the composition of the filmic form of any given appearance, eliminate all points of interval, and thus concentrate the action in time to the highest degree he may require. ... This method of temporal concentration, the concentration of action by the elimination of unnecessary points of interval, occurs also, in a more simplified form, in the theatre ... In the film this method is not only pursued to a maximum, it forms the actual basis of filmic representation. ... [The film director] can concentrate in time not only separate incidents, but even the movements of a single person. This process, that has often been termed a 'film trick', is, in fact, nothing other than the characteristic method of filmic representation. (FTFA, pages 84 and 85)

Pudovkin could hardly have written more clearly, yet readers, blinders in place, continue to disregard what he said as aberrant or insignificant, confusing the severe constraints of his programme of *eliminative naturalism* for others of little or no consequence.

Pudovkin's conception of constructive editing, for example, differed from the montage advocated by Eisenstein circa 1926 in both its aims (that ought to have been obvious, though many have lumped them together) and its processes. For Eisenstein, montage was the joining together of shots to compel viewers to experience a uniquely cinematically event, much as an artist working in clay might construct a uniquely sculptural object that could never have existed if the clay had never been lumped together by the fabricator. For Pudovkin, however, the joining together of shots was only the last step in a three-step process, the first two of which had necessarily to be free of imagined cinematically constraints. (1) One had to imagine an event, and then (2) think of how one would attend to it, aspect by aspect, if freely mobile in space and time. Only then (3) could one reckon properly how to use the tools of filmmaking to enable viewer's to attend thusly to them.

To Pudovkin, unlike the young Eisenstein, an event had to be attendable imaginatively prior to its cinemactical conception and generation (whether it be an animated event, a segment of coloured music, a documentary or an experimental sequence).

When the work on the general construction has been finished, the theme molded to a subject, the separate scenes in which the action is realized laid down, then only do we come to the period of the hardest work on the treatment of the scenario, that stage of work when, already concrete and perceptible, that filmic form of the picture that will result can be foreseen; [then only] do we come to the period of the planning out of the editing scheme for the shots, of the discovery of those component parts from which the separate images will later be assembled. (pages 129 & 130; italics: EWC)

Filmmaking, to Pudovkin, was therefore a process of eliminating unessential aspects of an imagined event, followed by a capturing and presentation of the remainder by means of the tools of filmmaking. The event had to be imagined as existing apart from the constraints of the cinemactical tools that would be used to present aspects of it, much as a carved figure of granite, now an object of admiration, once lay envisaged but embedded within a larger block awaiting the elimination of unessentials by the carver.

I have here contrasted fabricators with carvers, lumping Eisenstein with the one and Pudovkin with the other.² Eisenstein, late in life, was to revise his earlier misconception of montage, and therewith the process of filmmaking, to accord with Pudovkin's. As they confronted one another in the 1920s, however, the difference between them was profound, mirroring the distinction among sculptors between fabricators and carvers, but focused upon a medium wherein, as Eisenstein would later confirm, the inherent naturalism of the tools would ensure that carving and not fabricating would prove fundamental.

An Ideal, Perspicuous Observer

² Pudovkin preferred to compare the process of making a film to a task in which mathematicians often engage, namely *differentiating* (that is, analyzing into parts) followed by *integrating* (that is, combining the parts analyzed into a whole). "In the work of the mathematician there follows after dissection into elements, after 'differentiation', a combination of the discovered separate elements to a whole – the so-called 'integration'. In the work of the film director the process of analysis, the dissection into elements, forms equally only a point of departure which has to be followed by the assemblage of the whole from the discovered parts. The finding of the elements, the details of the action, implies only the completion of a preparatory task. It must be remembered [however] that from these parts the complete work is finally to emerge ..." (FTFA, pages 96 and 97)

It was Pudovkin's second restriction upon the scope of his precept, however, that was to distinguish his theory of film design from every other in the history of the art, elevating it from a maxim of craft into profundity.

To filmmakers, Pudovkin had proposed a precept that could seemingly be applied regardless of the kind of event being imagined. It seemed so, however, only because they had inadvertently presumed that the events a film ought to present should be identically attendable by everyone. They had presumed, as we have seen, that the question posed by Pudovkin in his precept should read as follows:

To what aspects of the event, in what order, from what perspective and for how long would you attend were you to witness it, earnestly but unobserved, as would a being of only ordinary discernment, wisdom and awareness, if free to move instantaneously to any viewpoint in space and time as the event unfolds?

But Pudovkin had nowhere suggested that one ought by means of film to access events as an ordinary observer might do, with ordinary care and attentiveness, if freed from the constraints of embodied participation. On the contrary!

The viewpoint of the camera is scarcely ever the exact viewpoint of an ordinary spectator. The power of the film director lies in the fact that he can force the spectator to see an object not as it is easiest to see it. (pages 154 and 155; italics EWC)

Indeed, as Pudovkin insisted, one ought never to present an event by means of film as "everyone" would see it, for to do so would "accomplish nothing".

The camera, as it were, forces itself, ever striving, into the profoundest deeps of life; it strives thither to penetrate, whither the average spectator never reaches as he glances casually around him. ... To show something as everyone sees it is to have accomplished nothing. Not that material that is embraced in a first, casual, merely general and superficial glance is required, but that which discloses itself to an intent and searching glance, that can and will see deeper. (FTFA, pages 91 and 92)

Pudovkin is here making his most remarkable claim, namely that a viable cinematic encounter can only occur when the event being encountered (the material, that is) is rich enough to permit discriminatory access by a freely-mobile being of extraordinary sensitivity and awareness. Reconstrued accurately, therefore, Pudovkin's precept reads as follows:

Pudovkin's Precept Reconstructed: A film ought to be a work of art. To enable viewers to encounter an event by means of film that will engage them as artistically as possible, answer the following questions:

To what aspects of the event, in what order, from what perspective and for how long would you attend were you to witness it unobserved as a being of extraordinary discernment, wisdom and awareness, if free to move instantaneously to any viewpoint in space and time as the event unfolds?

Do those aspects differ from those to which an "average spectator" would have attended, enabling you to "penetrate" distinguishably to the "profoundest deeps of life"?

If so, then, by means of the tools of filmmaking, construct a film that will enable viewers to attend only to those aspects, in that order, from that perspective and for that duration. If not, stop!

Pudovkin's precept, therefore, unequivocally subordinates the form of a film to its matter (the pattern of its structuring, that is, to the material being structured), and we can sense from the difference between his precept and the common misconstrual of it by filmmakers how they put the cart before the horse when restricting its application to making of films within the "classic Hollywood cinema". The material encompassed by such films does not derive its superficiality from the use of Pudovkin's precept in shaping its presentation. On the contrary, the coarseness of the material precludes application of the precept! The precept, accurately construed, cannot even be applied to the material of the such films without subverting the questions Pudovkin required filmmakers to ask. To blame Pudovkin's precept for the superficiality of mainstream filmmaking is to blame it for failing to make a silk purse from a sow's ear.

To say so, however, is only to scratch the surface of the provocation that Pudovkin presented through the materiality of his precept, for it implies the most radical revision of the task of filmmaking ever put forward by any thinker. To see how, we must work through its implications, deriving from it a host of connected insights about the history of filmmaking to which too few have attended, much less understood, each of them, in its way, reaffirming an aspect of the disposition toward naturalism inhering in the cinematically tools when used most simply, directly and powerfully, distinguishing them from the tools used by other artists when creating coherent events in their arts. By doing so, we shall come to understand much that would otherwise be inexplicable in film design.

An Historical Witness

Pudovkin's (and Eisenstein's) insistence that every film resonate historically has often been trivialized as a parochial residue of their Marxist commitments. To North Americans, swept up in the ahistorical sweep of a civilization determined to consume everything in the name of progress, including itself, it could hardly have appeared otherwise.³

To be a witness of extraordinary discernment, wisdom and awareness, however, free to encounter an event from any perspective in time, is, as Pudovkin insisted, to be necessarily an observer having historical insight and sensitivity, for, free to move in time, a witness may access the event from the perspective of the past. A filmmaker must therefore be capable of imagining to which aspects of an event an historically cognizant observer would attend, whether the film be enacted, documentary, animated, colour music or experimental. Makers of profound films, therefore, must not only be aware of the historical context of the events they present, but of their own identities as historical beings attending to them.

The adverbial conclusion that how one encounters events by means of film must be historical to be profound, regardless of whether the events themselves are historically significant, is a deep derivative of Pudovkin's principle rather than a Marxist aberration. To imagine things most profoundly, filmmakers must be historically aware of themselves, of the things they observe and of their observing of them.

To those of us living through the collapse of the cultural, educational and artistic enterprises of North America, and of filmmaking and its teaching in particular, Pudovkin's insistence is sobering.

We can now understand, as well, a consequence of the historicity of the encounter with an event that Pudovkin's precept prescribes for filmmakers, namely why, for most viewers of only ordinary discernment, wisdom and awareness, great films date, whereas great performable works of musical art, for example, do not?

³ Besides, Pudovkin, like Eisenstein, often misplaced the historical resonance, misconstruing it *adjectivally* rather than *adverbially* by insisting that the *events* one encountered by means of film had to be historical rather than *how* one attended to them. See, for example, Pudovkin's discussion of "The Theme" and its "Action-Treatment", *FTFA*, pages 35-45, where he presupposes not only that every profound film must have an articulatable theme, but that the theme must be a focused general proposition about human beings in historical context in accordance with Marxist realism.

Events long past re-presented by means of film may prove engaging to viewers interested in others, and hence capable of being interested in others who lived in the past, even though they cannot be encountered by means of film in the present as naturally as they were once encounterable; for we, attuned to events in a later time, can bring to our encounters with them at best only an abridged understanding of the nuanced historical identities of the things we see and hear. We see and hear them as they were, whereas our habits and intuitions are attuned to the things among which we live and move as they are, and no imaginative effort can fully bridge the gap.

Godard's films of the 1960s, for example, were remarkably powerful when released, for they presented events of a uniquely nuanced interest to many living through the decade. Today, however, they are of interest only to cinematically connoisseurs and will never again engage general audiences profoundly, for the events they encompass so exemplify their unique and subtle historical identities that they would require a matching historical consciousness to be fully appreciated.

For all viewers, the dating of the events encountered by means of a film entails a reduction in its power and interest, a feature unparalleled in other arts. Some films may garner increased interest amongst historically-adept connoisseurs as their date, and a very few may sustain interest amongst a wider audience for exceptional and subtle reasons perplexing even their makers (*CASABLANCA*, for example, and *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*).

The exceptions prove the rule, however: persons and other things seen by means of film invariably exemplify their historical identities, whereas a plagal cadence, for example, when heard in a live performance, need have none. A plagal cadence, like all musical structures, can be recreated by performers at any time and anywhere, and is then heard as it is, not as some other exemplification of it was once was. However resonant it may be of its ancestral exemplifications, it is encountered as the new and unique event it is rather than, as with films, as a presentation of an event that was. (Recordings of past musical events, of course, just like films, present historical events to us as they were, and hence date. They degenerate less in general interest, however, for the events they present carry less historical baggage in their appearance to us.)

Reattending to Events

Pudovkin's imagined observer was to be as discerning, wise and aware as possible, to be and freely mobile in time. Obviously, therefore, the observer must be as discerning, wise and aware as a being freely mobile in time could be! But this implies that filmmakers

must enable us to attend to events as if we had encountered them before, a startling consequence upon which neither Pudovkin nor anyone else, to my knowledge, has remarked.

Profound films (be they documentaries, westerns, musicals or romps with animated bunnies) deepen our engagement with the things we encounter upon repeated viewings! But how is that possible? How, having already attended to the events, aspect by aspect, can re-attending to them enlighten us?

To answer the question, consider how we are constrained to attend to the events that occur around and about us as compared to how differently we remember them, and how differently, could we do so, we would reattend to them as freely mobile observers. The events we encounter about us cannot be reattended, only remembered. Were we able to reattend to them as beings freely mobile in time, however, knowing what we now know of them in hindsight, we should undoubtedly choose to attend to different aspects of them than we were compelled initially to do as participants, and were we able to do so recurringly, we should eventually discover which aspects in which order repay repeated attention.

Pudovkin's principle, therefore, implies a provocative answer to our question unrecognized by its author.

To encounter an event by means of film as evocatively as possible, we must attend to it as a profound and freely-mobile observer would have done if recurringly familiar with it!

We must attend to it, that is, as if we had recurringly encountered it in the past and were now able to attend only to those aspects of it most worthy of sustained and repeated attention. Only then could repeated viewings of an event, aspect by aspect, continue to engage and enlighten us.

Few thinkers have pondered the puzzle, for example, of how it is possible for suspenseful films to be worthy of repeated reviewing. The answer, I suggest, derives directly from Pudovkin's principle, namely that if a suspenseful film is to be recurringly engaging, the suspense must arise from our attending to aspects of things to which a discerning, wise and aware observer would choose to attend, seeking further enlightenment, having attended to them often in the past and hence knowing already what is to occur.

Again we sense the incipient power of Pudovkin's admonition that filmmakers must not present things to us as an observer would attend to them in

... a first, casual, merely general and superficial glance ..., but that which discloses itself to an intent and searching glance, that can and will see deeper. (FTFA, pages 91 and 92)

The film spectator is an ideal, perspicuous observer. And it is the director who makes him so. (FTFA, page 91)

Pudovkin's "ideal, perspicuous observer" must be able to move freely in space and time to achieve the most resonant perspectives on the events encountered. Being thus able to re-encounter events as profoundly as possible, his imagined observer is compelled to do so. To do anything less would be to encounter things less profoundly than possible, contrary to Pudovkin's precept – through Pudovkin never knew it.

An Art without Rules

From Pudovkin's precept, we may draw a complex conclusion of remarkable subtlety: (a) when envisioning a film, the material must determine the form; hence (b) films should be made only of material that can determine its form; hence (c) films should be made only of material that precludes the use of rules when determining its form.

Think again of the event upon which we focused in Section 1: the young woman, about to retire, sitting on the edge of her bed, taking off her shoes. To what aspects of the event, in what order, from what angle and for how long would an observer of extraordinary discernment, wisdom and sensitivity attend were they no killer in the closet? Clearly, there is no single answer, for there could be many attentive who, given subtle differences in their cultural, political, religious, educational, sociological and psychological backgrounds, and the freedom of choice inherent in a dramatically unbiased event, might attend to subtly different aspects of it as it unfolds.

How, for example, might a neurotic with a foot fetish attend to it? As Stroheim presented it in *THE MERRY WIDOW*? Or how might a Zen master attend to it? As Ozu might have enabled us to encounter it had he put his mind to it? Possibly, but not exclusively, and assuredly not by rule. As even a cursory working acquaintance with Pudovkin's precept will attest, not even maxims (that is, handy empirical generalizations useful most of the time) independent of the material can be derived from it – and yet the precept applies! (The most that can be said in general is that filmmakers would court failure were they to try to use Ozu's "style" with a killer in the closet, or the "classic Hollywood" style without one. To speak of a "style" without specifying maxims

of use, however, as so many have done with Ozu and others for whom none can be given, is to suggest nothing practical about the films were made.)⁴

Persistence of Form

Filmmaking, being a material art, can have no unexceptional rules of formation. From this some have assumed that we must therefore be formally unconstrained when making films: anything goes!

As Pudovkin could have predicted, however, exactly the contrary is the case. Powerful films, Pudovkin insisted, must enable us to attend naturally to the events we encounter by means of them. By all the evidence, however, human beings since the dawn of history have attended to things about them in remarkably consistent ways. The epic of Gilgamesh, for example, could today be credibly re-enacted by actors in modern dress; the battle-scenes of Homer are screenplays awaiting transcription; and the comments of Job or Socrates can be as thoughtfully pondered today as ever.

How we are habituated to attend naturally to things, therefore, even the most discerning, wise and aware among us, has changed little if at all since the dawn of recorded history. The time scale of our perceptual evolution is so long (the time it takes, that is, to shift our genetic codings for perception) when compared to the brief span of our recorded history that it is hardly surprising that over the past 3000 years or so no fundamental changes in our human habits of attending to things have been discernible.

It follows, therefore, that innovation in filmmaking, unlike in other arts less naturally constrained, will accrue to filmmakers largely as they conceive of the *events* that are to be encountered by means of their films (that is, as they design their screenplays in master-scene form) rather than as they solve the cinemactical problems of how to

⁴ The attribution to Stroheim of having a 'foot fetish' is due to his enemy, Thalberg. Although I have thought often of the ponderings of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson with respect to the work of Yasujiro Ozu and accept entirely their conviction that Ozu was not working within the "Hollywood" style, I counter here what I take to be an inference that many have drawn from their work and which they seem to share, namely, that no precept encompasses both fruitfully. Pudovkin's assuredly does. Indeed, it is only from *within* Pudovkin's principle that we can understand how Ozu's practice, or Stroheim's, differs from that of John Ford or George Roy Hill. (See David Bordwell *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988; and pages 276-278 in particular of Thompson and Bordwell's *Film History: An Introduction* (New York, New York: McGraw-Hill, Incorporated, 1994).

present them, reaffirming Pudovkin's insistence that filmmaking is a material rather than a formal art.

As one would expect, therefore, and as the history of filmmaking confirms at every turn, the most powerful films of today are sequenced almost exactly as were the most powerful films of yesterday. What has changed are the kinds of events that fascinate us today in contrast to the kinds of events that were of interest, say, to others in the 1920s, but how the events are presented is largely identical (whether within enacted, documentary, animated or any other kind of powerful films), as one would expect from Pudovkin's precept and the capacities of the cinemactical tools.⁵

As filmmakers, Pudovkin implied, we are formally free, but only to the extent that the material permits! No event, considered in isolation, is by its nature prohibited from being effectively presented by means of film; hence no shot or sequence of shots, no pattern of movement or lighting or acting, etc., considered in isolation, is by its nature impossible to encompass within a worthy film. It is a question of context (i.e., of the material). Whether or not we encounter an event coherently by means of a film depends upon the context of events within which it is perceived, not the kind of event it is. If, in context, what we see and hear accords with what a maximally attentive yet mobile being would have seen and heard, having seen and heard what we saw and heard before, then our integrity as enlightened witnesses will have been maintained. If not, incoherence will result. As Augustine once said of filmmaking (or almost so): anything goes, but not always or everywhere!⁶

⁵ It is remarkable how exactly that great student of the history of art, Erwin Panofsky, writing in 1934, came to comprehending this difference between filmmaking and other arts. "It is the movies, and only the movies, that do justice to that materialistic interpretation of the universe which, whether we like it or not, pervades contemporary civilization. ... the movies organize material things and persons, not a neutral medium, into a composition that receives its style, and may even become fantastic or preter-voluntarily symbolic, not so much by an interpretation in the artist's mind as by the actual manipulation of physical objects ... All these objects and persons must be organized into a work of art. They can be arranged in all sorts of ways ("arrangement" comprising, of course, such things as make-up, lighting and camera work); but there is no running away from them. ... To prestylize reality prior to tackling it amounts to dodging the problem. The problem is to manipulate and shoot unstylized reality in such a way that the result has style. This is a proposition no less legitimate and no less difficult than any proposition in the older arts." Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures", *Bulletin of the Department of Art and Archaeology* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1934)). Passages quoted are from pages 31 and 32 of the essay as reprinted on pages 15-32 of Daniel Talbot's anthology, op. cit. (see footnote 2 above).

⁶ When Augustine admonished us to "Love God, then do what you wish", he was reminding us that anything goes, but only *in context*.

Once again we must recognise that nothing in Pudovkin's precept precludes us from perceiving coherently by means of film events, or aspects of them, of any particular kind. We may encounter animated rabbits, lying politicians, moving patterns of colour music, nonnarrative mood pieces or even verité documentaries calculated to disengage us emotionally in the service of rational assessment, and perceive all of them coherently.

Two Tendencies of Filmmaking

Of all the tools available to artists, the cinemata are those by means of which we may perceive things as identically as possible to the ways in which we perceive things about us. From this simple consequent of Pudovkin's principle, one might have predicted two tendencies to which filmmakers have consistently reverted throughout the history of filmmaking, and to which we may anticipate they will continue to revert, neither obligatory but both coincident with the most compelling capacities of their tools.

Pudovkin's principle implied that we must encounter things *naturally* by means of films if we are to perceive them most coherently and hence powerfully. Nowhere, however, did he imply that the things that we encounter naturally must be natural things! As already noted, we may encounter objects by means of films that are as fantastical, extraordinary and atypical as we can imagine. We must perceive them naturally, however, to engage with them deeply.

Obviously, however, the cinemata tools can present natural things to us naturally as well, and can do with unique fidelity, ease and power. Most filmmakers, unsurprisingly, have been prompted to spend most of their time making either historical films (fictional or otherwise) or documentary ones encompassing natural objects naturally seen.

No one who has worked sensitively, respectfully and comprehensively with the tools available to filmmakers could be either surprised or angered by this tendency. Indeed, the capacity to present natural things naturally so clearly distinguishes the cinemata from all other artistic tools that the claim that filmmaking was the first of the natural arts is hardly hyperbolic. Rather, it is trivially true, as every perceiver of natural things can naturally attest.⁷

The second tendency, unobligatory but compelling, derives as well from the distinguishing capacity of the cinemata tools to present natural things naturally.

⁷ I construe photography here as a forerunner of filmmaking.

Pudovkin's principle was applicable far beyond the limits of his examples. His examples, mirroring the practices of Griffith and the propensities of his Russian colleagues, were selected from films that compelled viewers to attend sequentially to aspects of events exclusively by cutting between shots.

As Pudovkin himself had emphasized, however, cutting between shots was simply a means to an end, namely the "compulsory and deliberate guidance of the thoughts and associations of the spectator" (FTFA, page 73). However restricted his examples, therefore, his principle left open the possibility that other means might be found to the same end.

Filmmakers before and after Pudovkin have often tried to compel the attention of spectators to successive aspects of things within shots by selective lighting, movement of camera or actors or alternating shifts of conversation, and some of them, when extraordinarily careful, have succeeded. When wishing to engage us most subtly and deeply, however, our greatest filmmakers, including those like Kurosawa quite capable of using moving cameras in extended takes effectively, have tended recurrently to ensure our successive attention to aspects of things by simply cutting between shots photographed from stable camera positions, exactly as Pudovkin's examples would suggest.

As Luis Buñuel once put it, echoing a sentiment expressed at some time or another by almost every other filmmaker of comparable power from Flaherty through Ford to Fassbinder,

I've a horror of films *de cadrages*. I detest unusual angles. I sometimes work out a marvellously clever shot with my cameraman. Everything is all beautifully prepared, and we just burst out laughing and scrap the whole thing to shoot quite straight forwardly with no camera effects.⁸

The tendency of exemplary filmmakers to respect the restrictions of Pudovkin's examples as well as his principle, especially during moments of deep and quiet subtlety in enacted films, is hardly accidental. Because a screen is a flat surface, things encountered by means of film are seen two-dimensionally. When encountering events by means of film, therefore, our attention can be diverted more easily to peripheral things than otherwise, for we need only shift focus laterally to attend to them, never in depth.

⁸ Quoted by David Robinson in "Thank God – I'm Still an Atheist: Luis Bunuel and Viridiana", *Sight & Sound*, #31 (Summer, 1962), page 118.

However carefully things may be controlled within a shot, therefore, perceptual clutter is inevitable. Lengthy shots, encompassing more things, encompass more clutter. Sensitive filmmakers, therefore, at moments when clutter, if attended, would be most disastrous, have always tended to guide our attention most simply and naturally by cutting between shots rather than playing games within them, and will continue to do so, behaving not only as Pudovkin said they should, but as he showed as well.

A Feminist Perspective

Pudovkin's precept, as intended, severely restricts the behavior of filmmakers. Nowhere, however, does it prohibit filmmakers from bringing to the making of their films whatever uncommon attributes of discernment, wisdom and awareness they may possess because of their gender, race or sexual orientation. On the contrary!

Members of disadvantaged groups within every society have consistently been denied the opportunity to make movies. Unsurprisingly, when a few among them have been permitted to do so, they have often rejected not only the kinds of things shown in the movies of the repressive culture, but how they have been shown as well. Having failed to think through the tool Pudovkin gave them, they have confused it with the precepts of the "Hollywood" style or the maxims of the pseudo-documents of 60 Minutes, misconstruing it as a convention that could be disregarded for alternatives.

The result, sadly, has too often accentuated their disadvantage within the society, rendering both themselves and others who share their interests increasingly marginal, for rather than showing things that ought to have been seen, and seen naturally enough to compel others to engage deeply and profoundly with them, they have shown things less naturally and hence less simply, directly and coherently than they might have been shown, limiting unwittingly the possibility of pervasive engagement by anyone.

Consider, for example, the challenge facing feminist filmmakers in North America as I write.⁹ They wish to make films and, if so, must do it within a society controlled by men who denigrate the importance or even the possibility of their endeavour, marginalize their unique encounters as women with the things about them, trivialize or misrepresent the things that they value, and hence deny their significance as human beings.

⁹ A comparable case could be made for filmmaking by Blacks, Chicanos, Métis, Inuit or any others of the disadvantaged.

We noted above that a filmmaker cannot follow Pudovkin's precept without having become the profound and discerning observer they are imagining. Identities are non-transferable. From which it follows, of course, that no one can imagine profoundly how another would attend to an event. In particular,

No male can imagine profoundly how a female would attend to an event.

Within a culture within which women have been summarily deprived of the opportunity to make significant films, the male bias in how we are compelled to perceive things by means of the films we see, whether as men or women, must therefore be far more subtly, pervasively and deeply entrenched and thus will prove far more difficult to counteract than even the complaints of Laura Mulvey would allow.¹⁰

Assuredly it has something to do with the kinds of things we are compelled to see, and feminist filmmakers striving to show us other things have my thorough-going sympathy. But therein lies a danger, for it will make no difference if women make films of other kinds of things having mistrained themselves to think of them as men have done, denigrating the things already about us while attempting to put other, different things in their place. That's how males have long conceived of the world, as a place into which to put the different things they make in the name of progress. To assert, "I can put into the world the different things I have made and compel you to attend to them!" is as masculine a sentiment as I can imagine, whether voiced by an artist or a politician, a woman or a man.

It will never be enough, therefore, to show different things (though surely we oughtn't to wallow in violence and sadism, and the feminists complaints on this issue are spot-on). The aim must rather be to show things differently.

But therein lies a second danger, for again it will make no difference if women make films that compel themselves and others to attend to things unnaturally and thus superficially. The goal must therefore be to show things as differently as a woman would perceive them from a man, and yet as naturally as either would. When feminist filmmakers began collectively to ask themselves how they would attend differently but naturally to the same events being attended to by men (how, for example, a wife would

¹⁰ See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen* 16, No. 3 (Spring, 1975); reprinted in the anthology *Women and the Cinema: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary (New York, New York: E. P. Dutton Company, 1977); and also 'afterthoughts' in "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*", *Framework*, Nos. 15-17 (Summer, 1981), pages 12-15.

attend to a child playing in a park differently from her husband sitting on the bench next to her), films of uncommon power may be conceived.

They will not differ from other films in stark or obvious ways, but rather in ways as subtle as the difference in how a wife and a husband attend to their child playing in the park. The differences will be only non-consciously and cumulatively ascertainable over the entire course of a film or perhaps even collections of films, akin to the differences that distinguish Bresson from Ozu, to none of which one can easily point or even consciously attend but can only sense by having absorbed the hesitancy of a cut here, a slight extension of attention there, etc..

If and when such films are made, the differences between them and the common run will accrue exactly to the point that Pudovkin pressed upon us so long ago, namely that powerful films will enable us to encounter things as our most profound and sensitive observers would naturally attend to them.

We can now begin to sense, I think, how intrinsically restrictive yet compelling are the implications of Pudovkin's precept when correctly construed. We have yet to register clearly, however, their moral dimension. To understand comprehensively what we have been discussing, we must turn again to Kant, for Pudovkin's precept for the experiential coherence of films, implying the primacy of matter over form, reaffirms the transcendental constraint on human construction recognized by Kant a century and a half before, and with it the primacy of ethical reason.