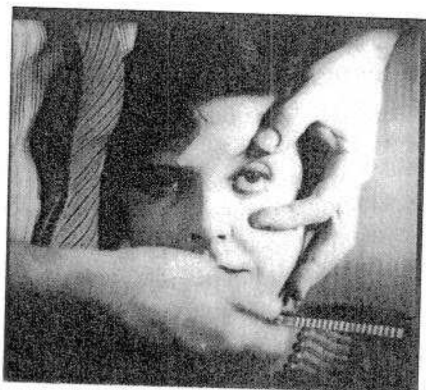

Figure 12.21 The shocking eye-slitting scene in *Un chien andalou.*

her eyes only to reveal eyes painted on her eyelids (Ray's *Emak Bakia,* 1927), and—most famous of all—a man strops a razor and deliberately slits the eyeball of an unprotesting woman (*Un Chien andalou,* **Fig. 12.21**). An Impressionist film would motivate such events as a character's dreams or hallucinations, but in these films character psychology is all but nonexistent. Sexual desire and ecstasy, violence, blasphemy, and bizarre humor furnish events that Surrealist film form employs with a disregard for conventional narrative principles. The hope was that the free form of the film would arouse the deepest impulses of the viewer. Buñuel called *Un Chien andalou* "a passionate call to murder."

The style of Surrealist cinema is eclectic. Mise-en-scene is often influenced by Surrealist painting. The ants in *Un Chien andalou* come from Dalí's pictures, whereas the pillars and city squares of *The Seashell and the Clergyman* hark back to the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico. Surrealist editing is an amalgam of some Impressionist devices (many dissolves and superimpositions) and some devices of the dominant cinema. The shocking eyeball slitting at the start of *Un Chien andalou* relies on some principles of continuity editing (and indeed on the Kuleshov effect). On the other hand, discontinuous editing is also commonly used to fracture any organized temporal-spatial coherence. In the same film, the heroine locks the man out of a room only to turn to find him inexplicably behind her. On the whole, Surrealist film style refused to canonize any particular devices, since that would order and rationalize what had to be an "undirected play of thought."

The fortunes of Surrealist cinema shifted with changes in the art movement as a whole. By late 1929, when Breton joined the Communist Party, Surrealists were embroiled in internal dissension about whether communism was a political equivalent of Surrealism. Buñuel left France for a brief stay in Hollywood and then returned to Spain. The chief patron of Surrealist filmmaking, the Vicomte de Noailles, supported Jean Vigo's *Zéro de Conduite* (1933), a film of Surrealist ambitions, but then stopped sponsoring the avant-garde. Thus as a unified movement, French Surrealism was no longer viable after 1930. Individual Surrealists continued to work, however. The most famous was Buñuel, who continued to work in his own brand of the Surrealist style for 50 years. His later films, such as *Belle de Jour* (1967) and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972), continue the Surrealist tradition.

SOVIET MONTAGE (1924–1930)

Despite the victory of the Russian Revolution in October of 1917, the new Soviet government faced the difficult task of controlling all sectors of life. Like other industries, the film production and distribution systems took years to build up a substantial output that could serve the aims of the new government.

Although the pre-Revolutionary Russian film industry had not figured prominently in world cinema, there were a number of private production companies operating in Moscow and Petersburg. With most imports cut off during the war, these companies had done quite well making films for the domestic market. The most distinctive Russian films made during the mid-1910s were slow-paced melodramas that concentrated on bravura performances by actors playing characters caught in extremely emotional situations. Such films showcased the talents of Ivan Mozhukin and other popular stars and were aimed mainly at the large Russian audience, seldom being seen abroad.

These film companies resisted the move made directly after the Revolution to nationalize all private property. They simply refused to supply films to theaters operating under the control of the government. In July 1918 the government's film

subsection of the State Commission of Education put strict controls on the existing supplies of raw film stock. As a result, producers began hoarding their stock; the largest firms took all the equipment they could and fled to other countries. Some companies made films commissioned by the government, while hoping that the Reds would lose the Civil War and that things would return to pre-Revolutionary conditions.

In the face of shortages of equipment and difficult living conditions, a few young filmmakers made tentative moves that would result in the development of a national cinema movement. Dziga Vertov began working on documentary footage of the war; at age twenty, he was placed in charge of all newsreels. Lev Kuleshov, teaching in the newly founded State School on Cinema Art, performed a series of experiments by editing footage from different sources into a whole that creates an impression of continuity. In this sense, Kuleshov was perhaps the most conservative of the young Soviet filmmakers, since he was basically trying to systematize principles of editing similar to the continuity practices of the classical Hollywood cinema. Thus even before they were able to make films, Kuleshov and his young pupils were working at the first film school in the world and writing theoretical essays on the new art form. This grounding in theory would be the basis of the Montage style.

In 1920 Sergei Eisenstein worked briefly in a train carrying propaganda to the troops in the Civil War. He returned that year to Moscow to stage plays in a workers' theater. In May 1920, Vsevolod Pudovkin made his acting debut in a play presented by Kuleshov's State Film School. He had been inspired to go into filmmaking by seeing Griffith's *Intolerance,* which was first shown widely in Russia in 1919. American films, particularly those of Griffith, Douglas Fairbanks, and Mary Pickford, which kept circulating to fill the void left by the low output of new Soviet productions, were a tremendous influence on the filmmakers of the emerging Soviet movement.

None of the important filmmakers of the Montage style was a veteran of the pre-Revolutionary industry. All came from other fields (for example, Eisenstein from engineering, Pudovkin from chemistry) and discovered the cinema in the midst of the Revolution's ferment. The Czarist-era filmmakers who remained active in the USSR in the 1920s tended to stick to older traditions. One popular director of the Czarist period, Yakov Protazanov, went abroad briefly after the Revolution but returned to continue making films whose style and form owed almost nothing to the theory and practice of the new filmmakers.

Protazanov's return coincided with a general loosening of government restrictions on private enterprise. In 1921 the country was facing tremendous problems, including a widespread famine. In order to facilitate the production and distribution of goods, Lenin instituted the New Economic Policy (NEP), which for several years permitted private management of business. For film, the NEP meant a sudden reappearance of film stock and equipment belonging to the producers who had not emigrated. Slowly Soviet production began to grow as private firms made more films. The government attempted, with little success, to control the film industry by creating a central distribution company, Goskino, in 1922.

"Of all the arts, for us the cinema is the most important," Lenin stated in 1922. Since Lenin saw film as a powerful tool for education, the first films encouraged by the government were documentaries and newsreels such as Vertov's newsreel series *Kino-Pravda,* which began in May 1922. Fictional films were also being made from 1917 on, but it was not until 1923 that a Georgian feature, *Red Imps,* became the first Soviet film to compete successfully with the foreign films predominant on Soviet screens. (And not until 1927 did the Soviet industry's income from its own films top that of the films it had imported.)

"Everyone who has had in his hands a piece of film to be edited knows by experience how neutral it remains, even though a part of a planned sequence, until it is joined with another piece, when it suddenly acquires and conveys a sharper and quite different meaning than that planned for it at the time of filming."

Sergei Eisenstein, director

The Soviet Montage style displayed tentative beginnings in 1924, with Kuleshov's class from the State Film School presenting *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks.* This delightful film, along with Kuleshov's next film, *The Death Ray* (1925), showed that Soviet directors could apply Montage principles and come up with amusing satires or exciting adventures as entertaining as the Hollywood product.

Eisenstein's first feature, *Strike,* was released early in 1925 and initiated the movement proper. His second, *Potemkin,* premiered later in 1925, was successful abroad and drew the attention of other countries to the new movement. In the next few years Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Vertov, and the Ukrainian Alexander Dovzhenko created a series of films that are classics of the Montage style.

The theoretical writings and filmmaking practice of these directors were based on editing. They all declared that a film does not exist in its individual shots but only in their combination through editing into a whole. We should remember here that since the primitive cinema, no national film style had yet appeared that depended on the long take. The great films that inspired Soviet filmmakers, like *Intolerance* and some French Impressionist efforts, were based largely on editing juxtapositions.

Figure 12.22 *Storm over Asia:* After a close-up of a servant placing a necklace around the neck of the officer's wife, there is a cut . . .

Not all of the young theoreticians agreed on exactly what the Montage approach to editing was to be. Pudovkin, for example, believed that shots were like bricks, to be joined together to build a sequence. Eisenstein disagreed, saying that the maximum effect would be gained if the shots did not fit together perfectly, if they created a jolt for the spectator. He also favored juxtaposing shots in order to create a concept, as we have already seen with his use of conceptual editing in *October* (pp. 284–287). Vertov disagreed with both theorists, favoring a "cinema-eye" approach to recording and shaping documentary reality.

Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia* makes use of conceptual editing similar to that of Eisenstein's *October.* Shots of a military officer and his wife being dressed in their accessories are intercut with shots of the preparation at the temple **(Figs. 12.22–12.25).** Pudovkin's parallel montage points up the absurdity of both rituals.

The Montagists' approach to narrative form set them apart from the cinemas of other countries. Soviet narrative films tended to downplay character psychology as a cause; instead, social forces provided the major causes. Characters were interesting for the way these social causes affected their lives. Films of the Soviet Montage movement did not always have a single protagonist. Social groups could form a collective

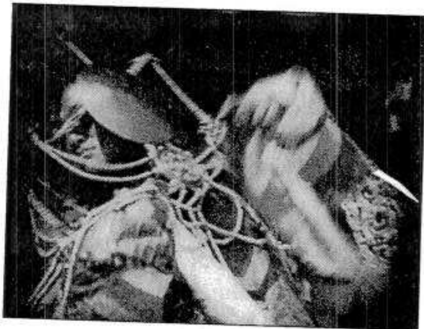

Figure 12.23 . . . to a medium close-up of an elaborate piece of jewelry being lowered over the head of a priest . . .

Figure 12.24 . . . then a cut back to a close-up of a tiara being set on the wife's head . . .

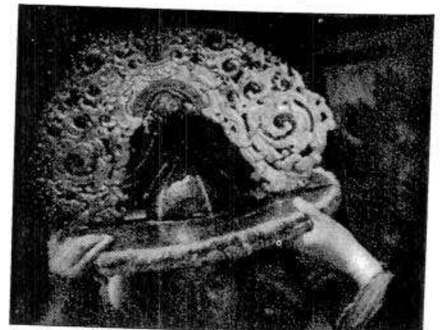

Figure 12.25 . . . juxtaposed with a similar framing of a large headdress being positioned on a priest's head.

hero, as in Eisenstein's films before *Old and New* (1929). In keeping with this deemphasis of individual personalities, Soviet filmmakers often avoided well-known actors, preferring to cast parts by searching out nonactors. This practice was called *typage,* since the filmmakers would often choose an individual whose appearance seemed at once to convey the type of character he or she was to play. Except for the hero, Pudovkin used nonactors to play all of the Mongols in *Storm over Asia.*

By the end of the 1920s, each of the major directors of this movement had made about four important films. The decline of the movement was not caused primarily, as in Germany and France, by industrial and economic factors. Instead, government political pressures exerted a strong control which discouraged the use of the Montage style. By the late 1920s, Vertov, Eisenstein, and Dovzhenko were being criticized for their excessively formal and "esoteric" approaches. In 1929 Eisenstein went to Hollywood to study the new technique of sound; by the time he returned in 1932, the attitude of the film industry had changed. While he was away, a few filmmakers carried their Montage experiments into sound cinema in the early 1930s. But the Soviet authorities, under Stalin's direction, encouraged filmmakers to create simple films that would be readily understandable to all audiences. Stylistic experimentation or nonrealistic subject matter was often criticized or censored.

This trend culminated in 1934, when the government instituted a new artistic policy called Socialist Realism. This policy dictated that all artworks must depict revolutionary development while being firmly grounded in "realism." The great Soviet directors continued to make films, occasionally masterpieces, but the Montage experiments of the 1920s had to be discarded or modified. Eisenstein managed to continue his work on montage, but occasionally incurred the wrath of the authorities up until his death in 1948. As a movement, the Soviet Montage style can be said to have ended by 1933, with the release of such films as Vertov's *Enthusiasm* (1931) and Pudovkin's *Deserter* (1933).

THE CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD CINEMA AFTER THE COMING OF SOUND

The introduction of sound technology came about through the efforts of certain Hollywood firms to widen their power. During the mid-1920s Warner Bros. was in the process of investing a great deal of money to expand its facilities and holdings. One of these expansions was the investment in a sound system using records in synchronization with film images **(Fig. 12.26).**

By releasing *Don Juan* (1926) with orchestral accompaniment and sound effects on disc, along with a series of sound vaudeville shorts with singing and talking, Warner Bros. began to popularize the idea of sound films. In 1927, *The Jazz Singer* (a part "talkie" with some scenes accompanied only by music) had a tremendous success, and the Warner Bros. investment began to pay off.

The success of *Don Juan, The Jazz Singer,* and the shorts convinced other studios that sound contributed to profitable filmmaking. Unlike the early period of filmmaking and the Motion Picture Patents Company, there was now no fierce competition within the industry. Instead, firms realized that whatever sound system the studios finally adopted, it would have to be compatible with the projection machinery of any theater. Eventually a sound-on-film rather than a sound-on-disc system became the standard and continues so to the present. (That is, as we saw in Chapter 1, the sound track is printed on the strip of film alongside the image.) By 1930 most theaters in America were wired for sound.

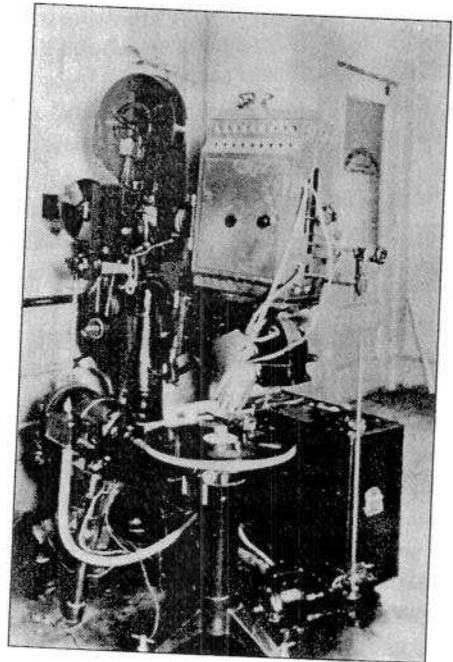

Figure 12.26 An early projector with a turntable (lower center) attached.