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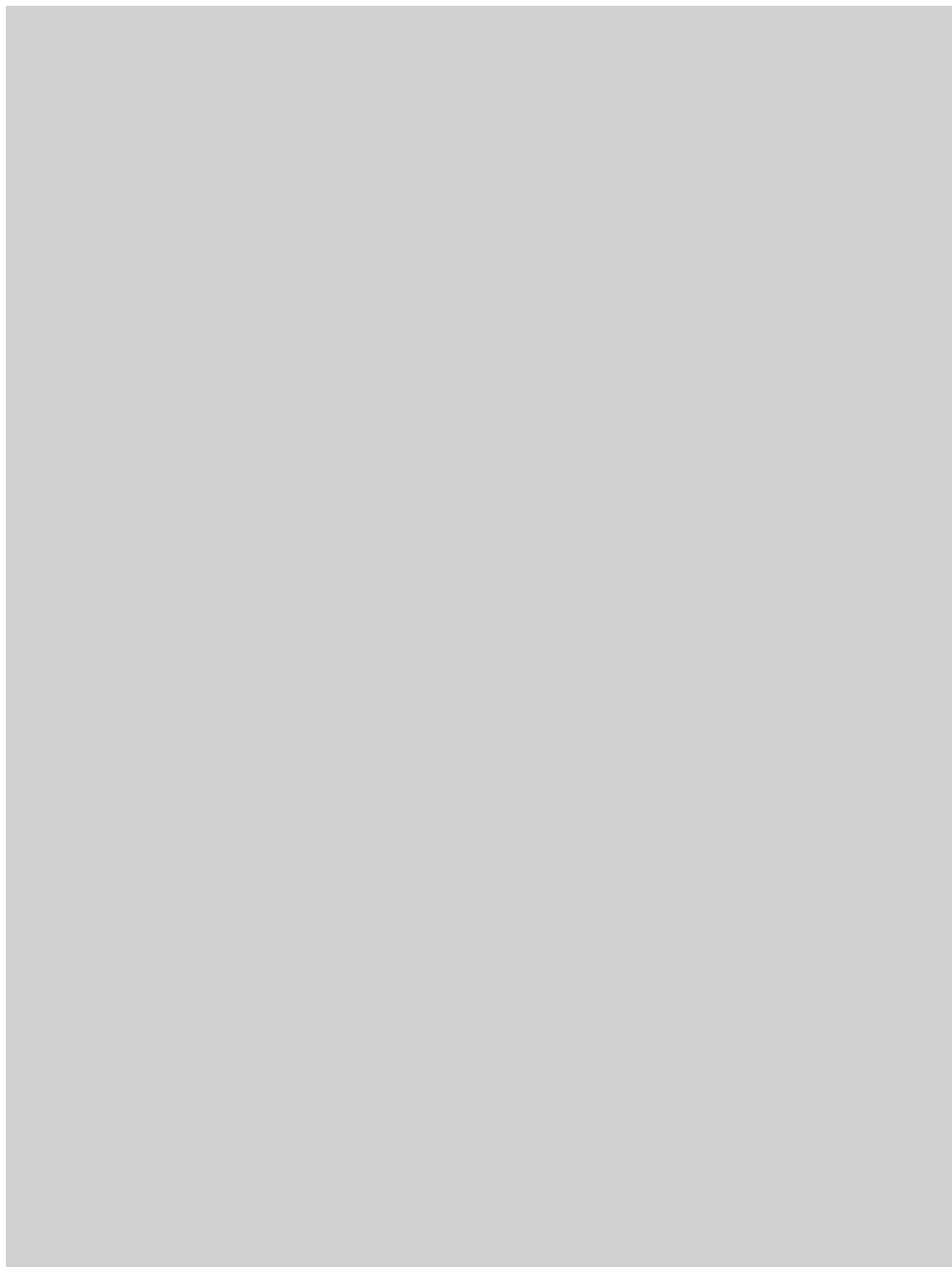

25. French poster for *The Spanish Earth*, whose French version was produced by the Popular Front organisation 'Ciné-Liberté', whose kingpin Jean Renoir wrote and spoke the commentary. Original in colour. Courtesy coll. EFJI, Nijmegen

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CHAPTER 3

Anti-Fascist Solidarity Documentary

Men cannot act in front of the camera in the presence of death.
– *The Spanish Earth*

THE SPANISH EARTH

In July 1936 when General Franco launched his revolt against the Spanish Republic, Joris Ivens, the 38-year-old Dutch avant-gardist-turned-militant, was in Hollywood showing his films to film industry progressives – in fact 1200 of them packed into the Filmarte Theatre (James, 2005, 469)! One year later, Ivens was in Hollywood again, this time officiating at the world premiere of *The Spanish Earth* (1937, USA) before a glittering cross section of the same community. A hasty, spontaneous response to the Spanish plight, directed by a Dutchman who spent only a few months in the US, this iconic 53-minute solidarity documentary was also the prototypical cultural product of the American left in the era of the Popular Front, a time when the left was closer to the American mainstream than at any time previously or since.

Spanish Earth represents also the convergence of two basic traditions of radical filmmaking in the West, of which Ivens was the chief pioneer and standard-bearer throughout his 75-year career. It is the definitive model for the 'international solidarity' genre, in which militants from the First and Second Worlds used film to champion each new front of revolutionary struggle, and of which the El Salvador and Nicaragua films of the 1980s and the Arab Spring films of the 21st century are subsequent chapters.

It is also the model for the more utopian genre in which the construction of each new emerging revolutionary society is celebrated and offered for inspiration for those still struggling under capitalism, a genre for which Nicaragua and Zimbabwe offered stimuli toward the end of Ivens's life, as I undertook this book. As I was finishing it dozens of other less-state-dominated and more community-based sites of experimentation with democracy offered other kinds of sparks, ranging from the epic of national resistance to globalisation *The Take*

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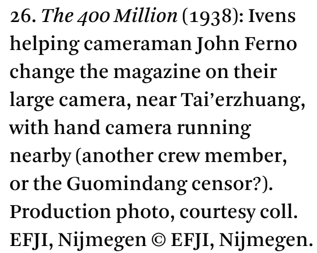

26. *The 400 Million* (1938): Ivens helping cameraman John Ferno change the magazine on their large camera, near Tai'erzhuang, with hand camera running nearby (another crew member, or the Guomindang censor?). Production photo, courtesy coll. EFJI, Nijmegen © EFJI, Nijmegen.

(Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein, 2004, Canada/Argentina, 87) to manifestos of local empowerment, green (*The Garden* [Scott Hamilton Kennedy, 2008, USA, 80]) and creative (*Art/Violence* [Mariam Abu-Khaled, 2013, Palestine/USA, 75]).

Spanish Earth, finally, has a central place within the evolution of the documentary form, aside from its strategic ideological position. It defines prototypically the formal and technical challenges of the 30-year heyday of the classical sound documentary, 1930 to 1960, in particular its first decade. It confronts, with still exemplary resourcefulness, the problems of sound and narration; the temptation to imitate the model of Hollywood fiction with *mise-en-scène*, individual characterisation, and narrative line; the catch-22's of distribution, accessibility, and ideology; the possibilities of compilation and historical reconstruction, and of improvisation and spontaneity. This list sounds so contemporary it sounds as if my film production students might have drafted it.

Joris Ivens disembarked in February 1936 in New York for what was to become a decade of work in the United States, the second decade of his career.

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He was entering a political context strikingly different from the familiar ones of Western Europe and the USSR, where his output that we have traced in Chapters 1 and 2 included avant-garde film poems (*Regen* [*Rain*, 1929, Netherlands, 16]), epics of collective labour in both his native Holland (*Zuiderzeewerken* [*Zuiderzee*, 1930-1933, 40-52]) and the USSR (*Pesn o geroyakh* [*Komsomol*, 1933, 50]), industrial commissions (*Philips-Radio* [1931, Netherlands, 36]), and militant denunciations of the capitalist system (*Misère au Borinage* [*Borinage*, 1934, Belgium, 34] and *Nieuwe Gronden* [*New Earth*, 1933, Netherlands, 30]).

The left intellectual milieu to which Ivens and his longtime co-worker-editor-girlfriend Helen Van Dongen attached themselves upon their arrival (she arrived in July 1936) was deeply concerned by the build-up to war already evident in Ethiopia, China, Germany, and soon, Spain. Their first months in the US found them toying with projects around domestic social and political issues like race in Harlem or healthcare in Detroit, as well as a few feature film adaptation ideas ranging from *Pygmalion* to the Belgian folk classic *Till Eulenspiegel* (which he would wait another two decades to make). He even made a short called *The Russian School in New York* (1936, USA) for the Soviet distributor Amkino, which did not survive (Jansen, 2002). But it would be the growing international crisis that would soon command his attention. Ivens had made his previous political films during a period when the international socialist movement had been oriented toward militant class struggle. *Borinage* and *Nieuwe Gronden* had reflected this orientation with their uncompromising political postures and their confrontational rhetoric and form. In the US, the militant newsreel work of the Workers Film and Photo League (WFPL) had matched this tendency in Ivens's work.

The militant era and the WFPL, however, were both on their last legs at the time of Ivens's arrival. The Nazis had eradicated the Workers International Relief (WIR), the Berlin-based, Comintern-sponsored parent body for radical cultural groups throughout the capitalist West. But the main reason for the about-face of mid-decade was an official change of policy promulgated by the Communist International at its 1935 World Congress and obediently followed by all the national parties including the Communist Party USA (CPUSA). The crucial political struggle of the day was to be not socialism vs. capitalism, but democracy vs. fascism. CPUSA chief Earl Browder declared that democracy in the United States was to be preserved by a vigorous defence of civil liberties, increasingly menaced by fascist reaction at home and abroad. The earlier view of Roosevelt as warmonger and of the New Deal as incipient fascism yielded to a new image of Roosevelt as champion of democratic rights and of the state as potential ally of progressive forces. Communists were to be ready to participate in joint action within popular fronts with the Socialist parties, civil libertarians, liberal intellectuals, and even clergymen. American Commu-

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nists thus allied themselves enthusiastically with the social programs of the New Deal.[1] As for Ivens, his US tour was part of this new political orientation: Schoots reveals that he continued to report to and be paid by Mezhrabpom during his tour,[2] and that his assignment was not only to brush up on American film techniques but also to stimulate independent film production and if possible to make a film (Ivens, letter to Shumyatsky 24 September 1936, quoted in Schoots, [1995] 2000, 110). The mission was accomplished.

Leftist cultural strategy in the West inevitably followed the political platform. Militant vanguardism symbolised by the WFPL and the John Reed Clubs of proletarian culture was replaced by efforts by left cultural workers to express themselves within the mainstream of American culture. They were largely successful: the last half of the decade saw the left achieve its point of maximum impact within American culture and a close interaction between the cultural and political spheres. The influx of leftist intellectuals and artists from Europe, most of whom were political refugees from fascism (unlike Ivens – yet), stimulated this interaction, and the active involvement of the state in the cultural domain sustained it. The Federal Arts project of the Works Progress Administration was launched in the fall of 1935 and the same year saw the Farm Security Administration of the Resettlement Administration move into the field of still photography. The New Deal would expand into motion pictures the following year and enlist the talents of hundreds of leftist artists, including Ivens himself, before the decade was out.

The documentary movement was another dominant influence on Ivens's American cultural context. This movement shaped not only all the arts during this period, even modern dance, but also the humanities and the social sciences, and the fields of journalism, education, and, yes, advertising. At the centre of this current was the work of still photographers, such as Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and Margaret Bourke-White, who began photographing the economic crisis in the first years of the decade. The infusion of state sponsorship into the documentary movement after 1935 ensured that still photographs of the ravages of the Depression would become its most recognisable artistic legacy, but they do not represent its full scope. Photographers and filmmakers, especially those on the left, spread out from providing local evidence of hunger, unemployment, and police repression, as the first WFPL images did, to shaping encyclopedic manifestos in which the entire politico-economic and cultural system would be analysed, challenged, and sometimes celebrated. All of this Frontier Film's *Native Land* (Leo Hurwitz and Paul Strand, 1942, USA, 80) finally did when it was belatedly released in 1942 and Ivens set out to do in his never-completed *New Frontiers* (1940). Stott (1973) is still the most comprehensive overview of the documentary movement.

At first, the left documentary constituency thrived mostly on imports. Sovi-

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et documentaries, for example, were continuously on view in New York and other large centres throughout the thirties – Vertov's *Tri pesni o Lenine* (*Three Songs About Lenin*, 62) was a hit in 1934. British films were also prestigious and popular, beginning with Grierson's *Drifters* (1929, 49), which appeared in New York in 1930.

The first documentaries by American directors to play theatrically in New York, outside of the WFPL agitprop milieu, appeared in 1934: Louis de Rochemont's unsuccessful *Cry of the World* (1932, USA, 65) and Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934, 77), produced under Grierson's British wing. However, the appearance of Time-Life's commercial newsreel, *The March of Time*, the following February (1935), injecting dramatic and interpretive elements into the traditional newsreel, precipitated a floodtide of new documentary work in the US. The non-theatrical showing of Ivens's films in the spring of 1936 added to the momentum. By this time, interest in documentary was so high that the work of the obscure Dutchman was praised rapturously, not only in leftist periodicals but in the liberal media as well. The *National Board of Review Magazine*'s discovery of *Nieuwe Gronden* led to the introduction of the nonfiction category to its influential annual ratings. Ivens's cross-country campus tour, organised by an WFPL offshoot, the New Film Alliance, is a good index of the scale of the documentary movement in 1936. It extended, as I said at the outset, as far as Hollywood.

The Rockefeller Foundation and the Museum of Modern Art were important institutional props to the growing movement. The latter sponsored the official Washington premiere of Pare Lorentz's New Deal-funded *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (25) in May 1936, presenting a program that also included five European documentaries. White House staff, diplomats, and members of the Supreme Court all showed up. Buoyed by this sendoff, *Plow* went on to 16,000 first-run showings and raves in every newspaper. The New York World's Fair in 1939 became the showcase for this first phase of the documentary movement, with Ivens's work much in evidence.

The strong popular foundation of documentary culture was essential to Ivens and other leftist filmmakers. Unquestionably a mass phenomenon, its artifacts ranged from Warner Brothers' *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1932, 92) to *Life* magazine (founded in 1936). For socialists in the era of the Popular Front, mandated to enter the politico-cultural mainstream after years of marginality, to seek out allies among 'unpoliticized' classes and groups, and to combat fascism on a mass footing, here was a vehicle for their aims. For socialist filmmakers still too distrustful of monopoly capitalism and the entertainment industry to attempt an infiltration of Hollywood, the independent documentary seemed to offer a cultural strategy that was as clear as black and white.

What was less clear at mid-decade was the direction that the socialist doc-

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umentary of the future would take. Members of the WFPL were sharply divided as to whether they should take advantage of the gathering stream of the documentary movement, as shown by the box-office success of *The March of Time*, or whether they should stick to their original 'workers' newsreel' mission, with its marginal base and confrontational aesthetics.

Leo Hurwitz, a chief architect of the decade, as early as 1934 established three priorities for radical filmmakers,[3] which ultimately became part of a new consensus during Ivens's first years in the US:

1. *Mass access for radical film work through commercial or theatrical distribution*. Leftists were greatly encouraged by the work of their colleagues in Hollywood who had contributed to such 'progressive' films as Fritz Lang's *Fury* (1936, 92) and the Warner Brothers biopics such as *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (William Dieterle, 1935, 86). The New Film Alliance, Ivens's hosts, sponsored symposia on *The March of Time* and on progressive commercial features from pre-Hitler Germany such as *Mädchen in Uniform* (*Girls in Uniform,* Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931, 87) and *Kameradschaft* (*Comradeship*, G.W. Pabst, 1931, 93). Ivens (n.d. [*c.* late 1930s], lecture notes, JIA) repeatedly praised such films on his tour and stressed the importance of 'combining our work with the mass movement', and, as he would put it a few years later, of 'break[ing] into commercial distribution [in order to] recover the social function of documentary'. Significantly, while in Hollywood Ivens contributed to the making of the WFPL-style militant short fiction about unions and scabs, *Millions of Us* (Jack Smith and Tina Taylor, American Labor Productions, 1936, 20), and for her part Van Dongen stayed behind in the dream factory to study narrative editing. Where an earlier generation of documentarists, including both Ivens and the WFPL, had assimilated the technical and aesthetic strategies of the European and Soviet avant-gardes, the generation of the Popular Front was looking west.
2. *The development of new 'synthetic' film forms*. Hurwitz ([1934] 1979, 91) argued that the form of the earlier workers' newsreels had simply been an economic and technical necessity, not an ideological or aesthetic choice per se, and that these forms must now give way to sophisticated hybrid forms including 'recreative analysis and reconstruction of an internally related visual event', or, in other words, *mise-en-scène*. He stressed the professionalism of the required new filmmakers who would replace the earlier amateur and artisanal cadres. This position was anathema to Hurwitz's opponents, who invoked Soviet authority and the name of Vertov, conveniently overlooking that reconstruction or *mise-en-scène* had long since taken a central place in the master's work. Ivens's films, screened repeatedly for the New York radicals upon his arrival, unambiguously

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bolstered the Hurwitz side with their rich mix of actuality, compilation, *mise-en-scène*, narrative, and even scripting (in his Soviet film *Komsomol*). 'We must learn', he argued in a manifesto of the early forties, 'to think of documentary as requiring a wide variety of styles – all for the purpose of maximum expressiveness and conviction' (Ivens, 1942, 299). The hybrid films brought out in this milieu alongside *Spanish Earth* also built directly on the model. Herbert Kline, the director, who acknowledged Ivens's support of his project (cited in Campbell 1982, 166), was responsible for the first of them, *Heart of Spain* (1937, 30), which followed *Spanish Earth* into release by only a month. This film would follow Hurwitz's model as closely as Ivens did, blending proto-direct 'spontaneous' material mostly on medical relief, with capsule *mise-en-scène* personalisations.

3. *More profound political analysis*. For Hurwitz ([1934] 1977) the early WFPL newsreels of strikes and demonstrations had been too 'fractional, atomic, and incomplete' for adequate political analysis. The new 'synthetic' forms would facilitate more 'inclusive and implicative comment', and could 'reveal best the meaning of the event'. This 'meaning' was to be a deeper, materialist analysis of the class struggle within capitalist society, and the forward movement of the working class, in both world-historic and individual terms, not just in the local and collective terms that the workers' agitprop newsreels had seemed to emphasise. Once again, Ivens found himself on Hurwitz's side of the debate. Earlier films, he stated in a lecture on his tour, including his own, were 'just seeing things, not understanding'. Art must have a 'definite point of view', and must express this without 'aestheticism' or sentimentality. 'The difference between newsreel and the documentary film', he later explained, is that 'the newsreel tells us *where-when-what*; the documentary film tells us *why*, and the relationships between events', thus providing historic perspective. The new 'deeper approach', in particular the tactic of introducing identifiable characters into nonfiction filmmaking (which Ivens began calling 'personalisation' soon after his immersion in the US milieu), is capable of 'penetrating and interpreting the facts; achieving a real interrelation between the particular and the general' (Ivens, 1969, 209, 211).

The debate among leftist filmmakers was accompanied by organisational changes. Nykino, a new film production outfit, had been formed by Hurwitz and his allies as early as the fall of 1934, in order to put into practice the new priorities. The East Coast radicals were thus already set on a path closely parallel to that traced by the films Ivens showed in New York in 1936, that is, the evolution from agitational newsreel work to more systematic and ambitious explorations of new outlets, new forms, and deeper analysis. Ivens's effect,

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then, was one of reinforcement of the direction already chosen and tentatively tested, or, as Hurwitz (1975,4) would put it, 'a very important stimulus and source of encouragement'. Another Nykino leader described it as 'a turning point […] a shot in the arm […] assistance from a recognized filmmaker who confirmed the theories of Nykino' (Lerner, quoted in Campbell, 1982, 189). Ivens's Soviet credentials – he was fresh from almost two years with the Soviet film industry – added in no small way to the impact of this encouragement.

Ivens officially cemented his affiliation with the Nykino tendency in the spring of 1937 when that group inaugurated yet another production company, fully professional this time, to accomplish their goals: Frontier Films. Though in Spain at the time, Ivens joined the dazzling array of American artists and intellectuals who signed up as founding members of the Frontier production staff, board of directors, or advisory board. The Popular Front line was doing all right: both the West Coast and the East Coast were well represented, from Hollywood star Melvyn Douglas to Broadway playwright Lillian Hellman, from liberals to fellow travellers to party members. Ivens had clearly aligned himself with the winning side. In fact, he had anticipated the Frontier Films approach the previous fall when he had enlisted many of the same luminaries to provide mainstream support – both moral and financial – for his first American film, *Spanish Earth*.

As soon as it first became apparent that the Franco rebellion posed a serious threat, Ivens had got together this group of leftist artists and intellectuals who were to become the producing body for a Spanish film.[4] Their idea was to bolster American support for the Republican cause by means of a short, quickly made compilation of newsreel material. This would explain the issues to the American public and counter the already skilful Franquist propaganda. They called themselves Contemporary Historians, Inc., and had as their spokespeople the Pulitzer poet Archibald MacLeish and the novelist John Dos Passos, both well-known fellow travellers. The functioning producer was to be Herman Shumlin, Hellman's Broadway producer, with Hellman and Dorothy Parker rounding out this core group. Van Dongen was to put together the film. It soon became clear, however, that not enough good footage was available and that even the shots at hand were of limited use since they were taken from the Franco side – burning churches and the like – and were expensive and difficult to pry out of the notoriously reactionary newsreel companies. The group then decided to finish the project as quickly and cheaply as possible, which Van Dongen did using a Dos Passos commentary and relying on Soviet footage of the front. This feature-length work, called *Spain in Flames* (65), was hurriedly released in February 1937. Meanwhile, the producers decided to put most of their hopes on a film of greater scope to be shot from scratch on Spanish soil, personally underwriting a budget of $18,000. Ivens would direct.

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As the autumn progressed, the need for the film became more and more urgent: the left press began denouncing the German and Italian interventions and the Western democracies began nervously discussing neutrality. By the time Ivens arrived in Paris in the first bitter January of the war, a tentative scenario in his pocket, he had already been preceded by the first of the International Brigades, and by a growing stream of Western artists, intellectuals, and activists, including filmmakers from the USSR and England.

In Valencia, suddenly the new Republican capital because of the presumed imminence of the fall of Madrid, Ivens and Ferno got right to work, joined by Dos Passos for several days in April. They soon concluded, however, that their script was unworkable in the worsening situation. Drafted by Ivens together with Hellman and MacLeish, it had emphasised the background to the war and a diachronic conception of the Spanish revolution, calling for considerable dramatisation. The Republicans they consulted urged them instead to head straight for Madrid to find their subject in the action on the frontline. As the film's commentary would later make clear, 'Men cannot act in front of the camera in the presence of death'.

The abandoned script merits a brief look, however, as an indicator of where American radical documentarists saw themselves heading in 1936. Based largely on dramatised narrative and semi-fictional characterisation, its only American precursors would have been the films of Flaherty, some scattered WFPL shorts, and Paul Strand's anomalous Mexican *Redes* (*The Wave*, 1936, 65), completed but not yet released at this point. The more likely model was the Soviet socialist realist semidocumentary epic, of which Ivens's own *Komsomol* was an important prototype. The *Spanish Earth* script followed the chronology of a village's political growth over a period of six or seven years, from the fall of the monarchy until the fictional retaking of the village from Franquist forces during the present conflict. A single peasant family was to be featured, particularly their young son, whose evolution would be emblematic of the Spanish peasantry's maturation during those years. The village would be a diagrammatic cross section of Spanish society as a whole, and various melodramatic or allegorical touches would highlight the various social forces in play: there were to be representative fascists, militarists, landowners, clergy, intelligentsia, even German interventionists and the ex-king! Ivens was clearly intending to expand his first experiments along these lines in *Komsomol* and *Borinage*. The script called for some elements of newsreel reportage to be worked in as well.

The final version of *Spanish Earth* turned out to be much more complex formally than the original outline called for, an improvised hybrid of many filmic modes, but certain elements of the outline remained. The most important of these was the notion of a village as a microcosm of the Spanish revolution. The

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chosen village, Fuentidueña de Tajo, was ideal in this and every other respect. Its location on the Madrid-Valencia lifeline was symbolically apt, a link between village revolution and war effort. It was also visually stunning, set near the Tagus River amid a rolling landscape, and accessible to Madrid. Politically too, the village was ideal: the community had reclaimed a former hunting preserve of aristocrats, now fled, and had begun irrigating their new land. The filmmakers could thus keep their original theme of agrarian reform as well as hints of the original dramatic conflict between landowners and peasantry.

As for the original cloak-and-dagger plot about the young villager, Ivens and his collaborators attempted to telescope it into a simple narrative idea involving Julian, a peasant who has joined the Republican army. Even this scaled-down role was only partly realised since Julian disappeared in the frontline confusion after his village sequences had been filmed. Julian, an indistinctive-looking youth, appeared in only four scenes of the final film, stretched out by the editor to a maximum: a brief moment on the Madrid front where he is seen writing a letter home, the text provided in an insert and read by the commentator; a scene where he is seen hitching a ride back home on leave to Fuentidueña, with a flashback reminder of the letter; next, his reunion first with his mother and then with his whole family; and finally, a sequence where he drills the village boys in an open space. The footage was insufficient even for these scenes, so that the commentator must ensure our recognition of Julian by repeating his name and fleshing out the details of the narrative. The reunion scene would be the biggest challenge to editor Van Dongen. She was to improvise with covering close-ups of villagers apparently shot for other uses, and ingeniously fabricate a fictional mini-scene from unrelated material, where Julian's small brother runs to fetch their father from the fields upon his arrival. The family thus shown in this sentimental but effective scene would be largely synthetic. After Julian's disappearance, a symbolic close-up of an anonymous soldier was taken for the defiant finale of the film.

27. *The Spanish Earth* (1937). Julian drilling the Fuentidueña boys: 'personalisation' was a challenge on the front and the exemplary peasant soldier became a hybrid construction. DVD frame capture. © CAPI Films, Paris, and Marceline Loridan-Ivens.

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But this forced postponement of Ivens's dream of 'personalisation' did not stand in the way of other efforts to heighten the personal quality of the film. At every point in *Spanish Earth*, the filmmakers would intervene in the post-production to make individual figures come alive dramatically: through the commentary, as when a briefly seen Republican officer is identified by name and then laconically eulogised when it is disclosed that he was killed after the filming; or through complex editing procedures, as when a miniature story of two boys killed in the bombing of Madrid is chillingly wrought out of non-continuous shots and a synthetic flash-frame detonation; or through lingering close-ups of anonymous bystanders and onlookers, some of whom are even dramatised through first-person commentary. Several years later, Ivens (1969, 212) would conclude that such vignettes, 'hasty and attempted identities now and then walking through a documentary', had fallen short of his goal of continuous 'personalisation', and that his next project on the Sino-Japanese front, *The 400 Million* (1939, USA, 53), had been no less frustrating. It would not be until Ivens's third American film, *Power and the Land* (1940, 33) that the relative luxury of peacetime filmmaking would allow him to experiment with fixed characters developed consistently throughout an entire film – in this case, a wholesome American farm family.

'Personalisation' was not the only aspect of the Fuentidueña shooting that imitated Hollywood narrative. Using their heavy tripod-based Debrie camera, Ivens and Ferno developed a kind of documentary '*mise-en-scène*', a collaborative shooting style 'staging' 'real' actors in 'real' settings that eventually made up about two-fifths of the finished film. Ivens's *mise-en-scène* was an even more aggressive intervention in the events being filmed than Flaherty's collaboration with his subjects. Ivens matter-of-factly used the vocabulary of studio filmmaking such as 'retake' and 'covering shot'; on location, he set up shot/countershot constructions with his peasant subjects that aimed at the spatiotemporal continuity of studio fiction of the period, complete with complementary angles of a single action and insert close-ups of detail. This approach enabled not only a clear chronological summary of the Fuentidueña irrigation work as it progressed before the camera – Ivens's emblem of the Spanish revolution – but also the balanced and lyrical, even romantic, framings and movements that idealised the workers and their relationship to the Spanish earth.

Ivens was of course not alone in 'setting up' his subjects: the other major documentarists of the period, from Basil Wright to Pare Lorentz, all used variations of the same method. It is this element that looks most dated to our *cinéma vérité*-trained eyes. For Richard Leacock (quoted in Campbell, 1982, 413), narrative *mise-en-scène* led to the 'dark ages of the documentary' and for 1970s modernist critics like Vlada Petric (1973, 460-462), *mise-en-scène* meant the

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28. Irrigating the countryside: using their heavy tripod-based camera, the filmmakers' documentary '*mise-en-scène*' enabled romantic framings that idealised the workers and their relationship to the Spanish earth. DVD frame capture. © CAPI Films, Paris, and Marceline Loridan-Ivens.

abandonment of the concept of film as 'a genuine visual art which draws its content from those kinesthetic qualities only cinema can bring to life'.

Ivens, however, did not often have to answer to such ahistoric criticism at the time. The interventionist orthodoxy of the late thirties was no less universal than the direct cinema or '*vérité*' orthodoxy has been intermittently since the 1960s. Filmmakers and critics of the late thirties agreed on the need for a dramatisation of the factual, its 'vivification', as some put it. Ivens's *mise-en-scène*, undertaken in collaboration with the subjects was partly a reaction to the impersonality of the newsreels and the other journalistic media. 'Was I making a film or just newsreel shots'? Ivens (1969, 82) would ask of *Spanish Earth.* Truth was not a function of phenomenological scruple, but of political principle. Truth was not to be found on the surface of reality, but in deeper social, economic, and historical structures. The aesthetic of naturalist spontaneity in film was to be distrusted as much as 'spontaneism' in the arena of political strategy. The generation of filmmakers who developed *mise-en-scène* as a documentary mode believed, like their cousins the socialist realists, that their work had the purpose not only of reflecting the world but also of acting upon it, to change it. This was true even for liberals and social democrats like Lorentz and Grierson who did not subscribe to Marxist ideals. Ivens's (1942, 299) primary question was not whether he had shown the 'truth' but whether 'the truth has been made convincing enough to make people want to change or emulate the situation shown to them on the screen'. This is not to say that documentary *mise-en-scène* would have appeared to thirties spectators in the same way as fictional narrative cinema. An overwhelming network of 'documentary' codes prevented it from doing so, from non-synchronous sound to non-made-up faces, to specific marketing approaches, to the replacement of 'psychological' typing by 'social' typing.

Mise-en-scène, however, a luxury affordable in the calm of Fuentidueña, was rarely possible on the front lines. In Madrid, the filmmakers attached

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themselves to the communist-affiliated Fifth Regiment in the Casa de Velasquez. Here they shot the siege of the city from the point of view both of its defenders in the frontline suburbs and of the air raid shelters within the city itself. By the time of the key battle of Brihuega (Guadalajara) in March, Ernest Hemingway, a recent convert to the Republican cause, had replaced Dos Passos as the production's guide and literary mentor. At Brihuega, buoyed by an important contingent of the International Brigades, the Republicans won a major victory against a twelve-to-one firepower disadvantage and prevented the besieged capital from being cut off. The battle's additional political significance was the incontrovertible proof it offered that organised Italian units were taking part: Italian casualties and their letters home are shown in a particularly moving scene of *Spanish Earth* (a scene that would lead to a fruitless screening at the League of Nations). Brihuega features prominently in the last half of the final version of Ivens's film. The battle material, from both Madrid and Brihuega, as well as from one other village that the filmmakers shot under bombardment, Morata de Tajuña,[5] has a style whose spontaneity is diametrically opposite to the orderly, lyrical *mise-en-scène* of Fuentidueña.

The 'spontaneous' mode, relying primarily on the crew's two small hand-cameras, is notable for the unrehearsed flexibility and mobility required to cover the soldiers and civilian victims who could not 'act before the camera'. This proto-direct mode, as Ivens had not foreseen while scriptwriting in New York, would make up more than half of the finished film. With this style, the camera operator, rather than rearranging an event in front of the lens, follows it spontaneously – the storming of a building, a run-for-cover during an air-raid, the evacuation of children, panic in the streets of the bombed-out village. The principles of spatio-temporal continuity were left for the editor to find in the cans: it was too dangerous for the operator to think about retakes and reverse shots. 'Spontaneous' shooting provided spectators with its own distinctive documentary codes, distinct from those of *mise-en-scène* material which was often present in the same film, as in *Spanish Earth*, or even the same sequence: unmotivated and random detail of behaviour or atmosphere, the flouting of taboos on out-of-focus material, looking at the camera, illegibility, etc. The mystique of 'life-caught-unawares' was still an essential element of the documentary sensibility despite the universal acceptance of *mise-en-scène*. Because of this mystique, 'spontaneous' elements often had the greatest impact on spectators, or at least on reviewers: the reviews of the day never failed to mention a woman seen wiping her eye amid the rubble of her village. The great affect of 'spontaneous' material such as this in *Spanish Earth* would confirm Ivens's reputation as a major inheritor of Vertov and a precursor of direct cinema.

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29. *The Spanish Earth* (1937): the 'spontaneous' mode and the still essential mystique of 'life-caught-unawares'. Reviewers always mentioned this bombing victim wiping her eye. DVD frame capture. © CAPI Films, Paris, and Marceline Loridan-Ivens.

It was in Madrid also that Ivens shot some material in a third cinematographic mode that constitutes only a fraction of the finished film but deserves brief mention nonetheless. What I am referring to is static, controlled images of public events, taken with a heavy, stationary camera. I call this the 'newsreel' mode because its repertory is identical to that of the newsreel companies of the period – ceremonious long shots of files of dignitaries, cheering crowds, military parades, or beauty contests. Though Ivens and other leftists and liberals usually avoided 'newsreel' shooting, as much out of distaste for clichés and superficiality as from any ideological scruple, the opportunity to use a borrowed newsreel sound truck to record a People's Army rally was one that Ivens could not refuse. Newsreel-style cinematography was the only means by which thirties documentarists could attempt synchronous sound on location – 20 years would pass before technology would catch up, in the television age, with the aspiration to hear as well as to see 'life-caught-unawares'. In any case, the rally scene of *Spanish Earth* featured the stirring oratory of La Pasionaria and other Republican leaders (re-recorded the following day in a more controlled studio setting, with some redubbed in New York because of technical problems), and, for this reason, as well as for its skilful editorial compression, would avoid the pitfalls of the mode. It was up to Riefenstahl and the Nazis to elevate to a new art form the 'newsreel' clichés of orators intercut with cheering crowds. The only phase of Ivens's career to depend on this mode was his Cold War exile in Eastern Europe, where he presided over several official rally films of the fading Stalin era.

Spanish Earth, then, unexpectedly became a cinematic hybrid in the uncontrollable laboratory of war and revolution. In this, as a compendium of different filmic modes, it was typical of most documentaries of the late thirties. Other national traditions were varying the hybrid model according to local factors. Grierson's British directors tended to use *mise-en-scène* more than Ivens, even resorting to studio work on occasion; Henri Cartier-Bres-

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30. *The Spanish Earth* (1937): the 'newsreel' mode. A static, controlled image of a public event, the People's Army rally featuring the Republican heroine La Pasionaria thanks to a borrowed newsreel sound truck. DVD frame capture. © CAPI Films, Paris, and Marceline Loridan-Ivens.

son's cinematography for Frontier Films' second Spanish project, *The Fight for Life* (Lorentz, 1940, USA, 69), was predictably more 'spontaneous' than any other comparable film. However, the general trend was towards greater and greater use of *mise-en-scène*. In this respect, Ivens's evolution paralleled the work of almost every documentarist of the period. Wherever circumstances and resources permitted – which was not always the case as the build-up towards world war continued – documentarists almost unanimously built up the *mise-en-scène* components of their hybrid works, experimenting more and more with characterisation, narrative vocabulary, and even scripting. Writers became standard crew members, not only for commentaries, but to provide plots, continuity, and dialogue. During the forties, this mode became the basic component of most documentaries, rivalled only by the compilation mode for which the War had created a special market, and the dominance of *mise-en-scène* would continue right up until the explosion of direct cinema in the late fifties.

Meanwhile Van Dongen had begun assembling the consignments of rushes in New York as they arrived from Spain, wiring the filmmakers whenever she thought that a given topic was now well covered or that another was weak. Ivens left Spain at the end of April and Ferno wound up the shoot in May, whereupon Van Dongen began the edit in earnest, shaping images shot according to each of the three modes outlined above according to the methods of narrative continuity that she had perfected in her recent Hollywood apprenticeship. Individual sequences began emerging – the Fuentidueña irrigation project, civilians under bombardment, the Madrid and Brihuega fronts – each built strictly with the sequential and temporal logic of short fictive units. Obviously, the 'spontaneous' rushes presented the most challenge since they had not been shot for the editor. But she responded with ingenuity, building up to each split-second bomb impact with systematic precision, and then having the clearing smoke reveal the rubble and the panic, or following each Repub-

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lican artillery shot with an image denoting an ontarget hit. Part of her skill was in picking out visual motifs to assure a narrative fluidity; images of children in a bombed out street, or a repeated glimpse of an ambulance or an artillery shell, for example, would underline an implied continuity. Sometimes a minor but identifiable bystander would function as a hinge for a continuity: her choice to cut at the point when a background figure in the People's Army rally blows his nose has drawn the admiration of at least one critic. Seldom before had the principles of fictional narrative editing been so skilfully and unobtrusively adapted for the purposes of nonfiction. The abandonment of the modernist-derived editing strategies of the young Ivens in his avant-garde days – for example, unsettling contrasts in scale, angle, and movement direction, or ironic or dialectical idea-cutting, often Soviet-inspired – was a price that Ivens and Van Dongen were willing to pay to achieve the Popular Front goal of speaking the narrative film language of the people.

Within the emerging film as a whole, Van Dongen alternated short scenes of the military struggle and the social revolution, interweaving the themes of the combat in Madrid and Brihuega with the progress of the Fuentidueña irrigators. Two stunning scenes depicting the bombardment of civilians were placed at a climactic point about two-thirds of the way through the 52 minutes, so that the concluding movement, the victorious battle interpolated with the completion of the irrigation system, seems like a defiant riposte of the people against their oppressors. A coda alternates single shots of water rushing through the new irrigation trough and images of a lone rifleman firing, so that the two themes, defence and revolution, are summarised and fused, two dimensions of a single struggle. This montage finale would be widely echoed, though not necessarily imitated. *Heart of Spain*, edited in an adjacent room, would substitute a similar fusion of the clenched fists of the blood donor and of the Republican salute for Ivens's images of irrigation.

The alternating pattern of civilian and military struggles was therefore not just an effective editing device but a crucial ideological statement. In countering images of victimisation with images of resistance and revolution, *Spanish Earth* articulates a world view that sees people as agents of history, not its casualties. The final word is given, not to the airborne mercenaries and their bombs, but to the people rooted in the central symbol of the film, the earth. And in alternating the military resistance with the civilian struggle, *Spanish Earth* equates them, merges them into the ideological concept of the people's war. Ivens would return again and again to this visual and ideological construct as he continued to chronicle the people's struggles of the century from China and the USSR to Cuba and Vietnam, each time echoing the *Spanish Earth* equation of peasants in their fields and soldiers on the frontlines, of hoes and guns.

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Ivens and Van Dongen brought to the soundtrack of *Spanish Earth* the same embrace of popular narrative film language as was evident in the shooting and editing, and the same creative resourcefulness in integrating it to their political task. The modernist virtuosity and clamorous experimentation of Ivens's early sound documentaries yielded to the subdued purposefulness of the Popular Front. The sound effects were innovative to the extent that Van Dongen experimented with more convincing laboratory synthesis (on-location sound effects were still primitive) and varied the newsreel cliché of wall-to-wall noise with moments of well-chosen silence and subtle transitions. However, the sound effects functioned essentially as support for the narrative thrust of the film, heightening the especially powerful scenes such as the bombardment episodes, injecting dramatic and informational energy into scenes that were less interesting visually, such as the long-shot Brihuega ones, and in general providing 'realistic' background texture to each of the films' narrative lines.

Continuing the Popular Front practice of lining up prestigious contributors, Ivens recruited two of the best-known East Coast composers to handle the music: Marc Blitzstein, the in-house composer of the New York left, and Virgil Thomson, who had been widely acclaimed for his brilliant folk score for *Plow*. Blitzstein and Thomson, pressed by the filmmakers' tight schedule, compiled Spanish folk music, both instrumental and choral, for the score. This choice reflected not only their haste but also the influence of the documentary movement on musical taste of the late thirties and the impact of *Plow*. The filmmakers fit the music to the images with discretion and sensitivity, with expressive pauses that contrast sharply with the 'wall-to-wall' tendencies of the period, even of 'prestige' films like *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*, Leni Riefenstahl, 1935, Germany, 120) and *Man of Aran*. The tedious over-synchronisation that is also noticeable in these two films was likewise avoided, with general atmospheric matching being the guiding principle instead: sprightly dance rhythms accompany the villagers at work in the field and a soft dirge-like choral piece follows the village bombardment with just the right understated elegiac touch.

It was the commentary, however, that attracted more attention than any of the other soundtracks, and not only because of its star author. Hemingway's text is a high point in the benighted history of an art form of dubious legitimacy, the documentary commentary, and unusually prophetic in its anticipation of future developments in documentary sound. What was most striking to contemporary spectators was its personal quality. Ivens, Van Dongen, and Hellman made a last-minute decision to replace Orson Welles's slick reading with a less professional recording by Hemingway himself. This voice, with its frank, low-key roughness, added to the text's aura of personal involvement. It was a striking contrast to the oily, authoritarian voice-of-God for which *The*

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March of Time was famous and which most documentaries imitated. Instead of an anonymous voice, the commentator became a vivid character on his own terms, a subjective witness of the events of the film, a participant. Though this function of the narrator was already common in Popular Front print journalism, Hemingway's contribution to *Spanish Earth* set off a trend in documentary film that would last throughout World War II, with filmmakers as different as Flaherty, John Huston, and Humphrey Jennings benefiting from his example. It was an effective substitute for the still impossible ideal of using sound to make subjects come alive on location.

Hemingway's text had other innovative aspects too: its obliqueness, its variations in tone, its detail and immediacy, its multiplicity of postures towards the spectator, its ability to be at times dramatic and at times lyrical or reflective without being overbearing. Most remarkable, perhaps, was its restraint. Ivens and Hemingway concentrated on 'let[ting] the film speak for itself', on avoiding words that would duplicate the image-continuity, on providing 'sharp little guiding arrows' of text, 'springboards', often at the beginning of a scene, to invite the audience's involvement (Ivens, 1969, 128). The commentary's role as information and exposition was secondary. Not surprisingly, it is in the strongly narrative *mise-en-scène* passages set in Fuentidueña that the commentary intervenes least, and in the extreme long-shot accounts of artillery and infantry combat where it is, of necessity, most present, and, arguably, most effective. Hemingway's text was ultimately laid over only one-fifth of the image-track. This was an all-time record for conciseness in the classical documentary (during the war, Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* films would sometimes approach four-fifths and the Canadian National Film Board films did so regularly), but Ivens's record was often rivalled by some of his more visually oriented contemporary documentarists.

A careful look at the commentary in *Spanish Earth*, as well as in most films by the 'art' documentarists of the day, undermines a prevailing myth of how sound operated in the classical documentary. This myth depicts the classical sound documentary as an 'illustrated lecture', a film whose dominant diegesis was a direct-address commentary to which images played a mere supporting role.[6] Trained within the silent avant-garde cinema, Ivens and Van Dongen had nothing but contempt for this 'illustration' approach, and usually succeeded in avoiding it, commissioning commentaries only after an autonomous image-continuity had been established and then reducing them ferociously. Most of the British directors in the Grierson stable did the same, as did Flaherty, Lorentz, and Vertov. Jennings and Riefenstahl did away with the commentary almost completely. Van Dongen had her own simple test of silencing the soundtrack to test the visual sufficiency of a given film. *Spanish Earth* must be seen as a highlight of a whole tradition of experiments in sound-im-

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age structures that fought against the voice-of-God tedium of the newsreels (and the later wartime compilation films) in search of creative alternatives for the still new audio-visual art form. Our sense of documentary history must be revised to accommodate this tradition, just as the dream-factory assembly-line model of Hollywood history has long since been shaped to account for the Capras, the Welleses, and the Fords as well as against-the-grain institutional resistance.

Hemingway's commentary was delivered live at a June preview of *Spanish Earth*, in silent rough-cut, at the Second National Congress of American Writers, a grouping of leftist and liberal writers. Hemingway (1963, 533-534) declared to the assembly that 'Spain is the first real battlefield in an evil and international conflict that is certain to recur elsewhere', something presumably most of those present already knew. In order to ensure that the film would reach those who did not already know this, a massive publicity campaign got underway. That same month, a major coup saw *Life* magazine (12 June 1937) run a series of stills from the film along with Robert Capa's soon-to-be immortal action shot of the falling Republican soldier. In July, a White House preview led to a plug in Eleanor Roosevelt's column, the impossible dream of all Popular Front filmmakers. Immediately thereafter, Ivens and Hemingway arrived in Los Angeles for huge sell-out premieres and private fund-raising screenings within Hollywood's progressive circles, where $20,000 was collected for Republican medical relief.

The glitter and the publicity photos with Joan Crawford were not for the sake of vanity. The West Coast connections were deemed essential to the filmmakers' hopes for commercial distribution. Political documentaries had never received distribution by the 'majors' up to this point, but the overwhelming feeling was that a breakthrough was imminent, thanks to Lorentz's obstinate and successful campaign the previous year to distribute *Plow* through independent exhibitors. But the fanfare was deceptive. *Variety* summed up Ivens's predicament on 21 July:

> This can make money where any picture can make money but it won't make it there. It won't make it there because it won't get in there. It will have to depend as it did here in its world premiere, on lecture halls which are wired for sound and can gross enough in one performance to justify a week's build-up. (Scully, 1937)

Nothing is new under the sun. The filmmakers resigned themselves to the traditional marginalised distribution that political, documentary, and Soviet films had always relied on. The premiere had taken place in July in the Spanish pavilion of the Paris International Exposition of 1937. There, with felic-

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itous synchrony, it competed for space with that other iconic testimony to the great collective trauma of the war, Picasso's new mural *Guernica*. Shortly thereafter a Los Angeles preview attracted 6000 viewers (Stufkens, 2008, 212). But the US opening was 20 August at New York's 55th Street Playhouse. This art house, managed by Herman G. Weinberg, functioned as a showplace for prestige foreign features, including much of Renoir's work and most non-Soviet documentaries that achieved a New York airing: *Heart of Spain* played immediately before and after the *Spanish Earth* run respectively, the latter on a double bill with Renoir's *Les Bas-fonds* (*The Lower Depths*, 1936, France, 95). While this art house was one level above the usual Soviet purgatory downtown, Ivens's disappointment was profound, and record-breaking capacity crowds scarcely consoled him. However, the film's small leftist distributor, Garrison Films, still tried to repeat *Plow*'s success. The ads played up the Hemingway name so much that *Spanish Earth* was often called a Hemingway film, a prestige-oriented tactic that was buoyed by the film's inclusion in the National Board of Review 'ten best' list for 1937. Audiences more interested in entertainment were assured how undocumentary the film was: it was 'The Picture with a Punch', and a 'Dramatic Story of Life and People in a Wartorn Village in Spain'. Further publicity resulted from short-lived censorship squabbles in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania. A review in the liberal *The Nation* (20 November 1937), appearing during the film's third New York month, while acknowledging the bind of independent distribution, optimistically reported that Ivens was making progress and announced that more than 800 theatres across the U. S. had been signed up. The real figure was closer to 300. In other words, the film made an enviable splash in the art house political circuit, but a mere ripple in the commercial sea. Ivens would not achieve his breakthrough until his own New Deal-sponsored film, *Power*, in 1940.

Looking back at his most famous film for *Cinéma politique* (Raverat et al., 1978) from the vantage point of the late seventies, Ivens felt that he could identify a certain impact that *Spanish Earth* had exerted on its own period:

> Of course you must not think that you are going to change the world with a film; all the same, there have been examples in history of films that have helped the revolution, like the Soviet films at the beginning of the October Revolution. In my own life, I saw the influence of *Spanish Earth*. [...] It really provided information about a problem that spectators were not very familiar with, and it helped the anti-fascist movement enormously [...] directly even. People gave money for the International Brigades. There are militant films that have enormous power, and that is linked to the moment at which they are shown.

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Ivens's estimation is not unreasonable. Although his film along with the other Spain films in circulation like *Heart of Spain*, had no impact on the League of Nations or Western governments, they were part of the expanding cultural and political movement of the Popular Front period, providing an impetus while it was still growing in influence and expanding its base.

As part of this movement, *Spanish Earth* reflected many of its cultural and ideological tactics that were not directly related to the Spanish subject. The agrarian theme, for example, with its basic icons of bread, earth, and water, was central to the Depression imagination. Ivens's climactic image of water rushing through a new irrigation trough had already appeared in King Vidor's *Our Daily Bread* (1934, USA, 80) and Vertov's *Three Songs About Lenin*; impoverished migrant workers and sharecroppers had been the focus of countless photographic essays and books, as well as Lorentz's first two films. The Fuentidueña peasants were thus recognisable, universal, as were Hemingway's vague references to the 'they' who 'held us back'. Yet Ivens's socialist realist-tinted vision of the cheerful collective work of his villagers lacks the plaintive, almost defeatist feeling of most American or Western European agrarian imagery. The primitive irrigation project of *Spanish Earth* will seemingly feed an entire besieged capital. What is more, the collective, non-hierarchical initiative of the peasants is behind this success, not the expertise of the New Deal agronomists who dispense their advice on crop rotation upon the helpless denizens of Lorentz's films from on high.

All the same, Ivens's refusal of socialist realist dogmatism in his vision of collective work has a certain Popular Front ring to it. There is a clear division of responsibilities among the workers, and the Mayor displays a kind of leadership, even delivering a subtitled speech announcing the project. Ivens carefully avoids all possible innuendos of collectivisation, forced or otherwise; authority springs, spontaneously, out of an implied tradition of folk common sense. Though the Fuentidueña scenes establish a full catalogue of the material terms of the village collective, with impeccable Marxist attention to the forces of production[7] – with even a close-up of the union stamp on the bread distributed by the smiling village bakers – they do so in a way that lets the signals of tradition, exoticism, and patience, conventionally attached to the peasant icon in Western culture, overshadow the signals of revolutionary change. Discretion is the distinguishing feature of this vision of the agrarian revolution taking place in the Spanish countryside during the Popular Front.

Another theme emerges in *Spanish Earth* for virtually the first time in Ivens's career since his juvenilia: the family. This theme revolves primarily around Julian's homecoming sequence, but it is also notable elsewhere: in the images of two distraught mothers, one trying to load her children on an evacuation truck in besieged Madrid, the other in the bombed village inconsolably

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bewailing her slaughtered children and in a young soldier's good-bye to his wife and child before the final battle, elevated by Hemingway into a symbol of the strength, courage, and tragedy of the family unit at war: 'They say the old good-byes that sound the same in any language. She says she'll wait. He says that he'll come back. Take care of the kid, he says. I will, she says, but knows she can't. They both know that when they move you out in trucks, it's to a battle'. Compared to later American populist-agrarian films like Flaherty's *The Land* (1942, 43), Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940, 129), or Renoir's *The Southerner* (1945, 92), the family accent in *Spanish Earth* is decidedly minor. Nevertheless, it clearly points to Popular Front strategy of recuperating the values of mainstream culture (and as we have seen, Ivens's party advisers urged him to play it up): idealised families were highly visible in Frontier Films productions as well.

Spanish Earth, the first of the major anti-fascist films with wide distribution, initiated a preoccupation with military imagery that would dominate the screens of the next decade, and does so in a specifically Popular Front manner. Beyond Ivens's respectful treatment of soldiering as work, not surprising in the vision of a filmmaker who had romanticised the construction of North Sea dikes and Soviet blast furnaces, his emphasis is on the humanity of the Republican troops. The soldiers are presented as little men, non-professionals. Shots showing 'unsoldierly' signals – untidiness, awkward drilling, grins at the camera – are present throughout. In one sequence about life in camp, the emphasis is on everyday non-military activities such as getting haircuts, eating, reading newspapers; the implication is that the stake of the war is the quality of everyday life. In the parade scenes, there is more interest in the rawness of recruits eagerly joining up than in the precision of seasoned troops, more interest in small irregular groups than in the symmetrical formations of Riefenstahl's films. The Nazi ballets of banners and boots have nothing in common with the 'human' scale and detail of Ivens's People's Army.

At the same time, Ivens's attitude towards the Communist Party, its participation in the Republican government, and its leadership of the People's Army follows the usual Popular Front practice of 'self-censorship'. Specific political affiliations, whether of Ivens's subjects, his hosts, or of Ivens himself, were not a topic for discussion. A film courting mass distribution and Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as following the CPUSA line, declined of necessity to identify the lineup of Communist speakers during the People's Army rally scene: for example, Communists La Pasionaria, José Diaz, and others appear as 'the wife of a poor miner in Asturias', a 'member of Parliament', etc. Explicit political labels complicated the broad-based popular coalitions that were the mainstay of the Popular Front, as well as the effectiveness of Republican propaganda within the Western democracies. The existence of the International

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Brigades, composed primarily of Western leftists, passes unmentioned. Other important gaps in Ivens's coverage of the war are conspicuous: Soviet aid to the Republicans; the question of the Church, a major focus of pro-Franquist propaganda; the identification of the enemy – the Italians and the Moroccan mercenaries are discussed in surprisingly respectful or pitying terms, but the Spanish classes who supported Franco's insurrection are omitted, as is the name of Franco, and even the word 'fascist' (other than in one excerpted speech); and finally, acknowledgement of the political struggle going on within the Republican camp at the time, which would later come to a head in the Communist-Anarchist showdown in Barcelona near the end of the war. Although this latter decision to underline Loyalist unity is hardly surprising, there are works, André Malraux's novel *L'Espoir* (1937), for example, that reflect the diversity within the Republican ranks in a positive way (unlike the 2012 TV movie *Hemingway & Gellhorn*, which depicts Comintern agents in fur hats prowling and growling menacingly around the Spanish landscape in a huge black sedan, 'disappearing' sympathetic and handsome young friends of the eponymous couple).

Of course, all of Ivens's elisions can be justified in terms of dodging domestic red-baiters, religious groups, and censors (who had the habit of cutting hostile references to 'friendly' powers such as Italy), but they are also part of a systematic effort to depict the war as a simple non-ideological struggle of 'little people' against 'rebels' and invaders. The stakes of the war came across as 'democratic' in a very loose sense, rather than those of class struggle. Ivens was perfectly consistent with CPUSA policy, which preferred in the late thirties to call its ideology 'Americanism', stressing 'democracy' and 'civil liberties' rather than class allegiance, and soliciting the support of non-left allies.

Ivens's carefully constructed image of the Spanish war and civil revolution succeeded on that level without a doubt. *The New York Times* was persuaded after seeing the film that the 'Spanish people are fighting, not for broad principles of Muscovite Marxism, but for the right to the productivity of a land denied them through years of absentee landlordship' (McManus, 1937). *Spanish Earth* was the first film to formulate the concept of the people's war, a concept that would gain considerably in currency over the next generations of world history, and to insert this concept into mainstream public discourse. The film also quickly acquired 'classic' status as the memory of the Spanish Civil War faded: while the Mannheim Festival poll of 1964 classed it as one of the best twelve documentaries of all time (Vernon, 2011), and at the height of the New Left the Swedish authors Leif Furhammar and Folke Isaksson ([1968] 1971, 114) defined it as not only Ivens's most important film but also one of the best of its kind ever made, tastes would change and by the 21st century *Spanish Earth* would no longer be on the lists. Of course, Ivens and his collab-

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orators were not shooting for immortality, and the price they paid for their achievement in its contemporary context – the soft-pedalling of specific radical programs and identity, the adoption of popular filmic forms – is fiercely debated even to this day. But it was a price that the filmmakers of the Popular Front paid in full conscience.

What of Spain? How successful were the filmmakers in their short-term pragmatic objectives? The commercial success of their film in its art-house, political circuit was not only a likely contributor to a slight Gallup upswing in US pro-Republican sentiment (Van Hensbergen, 2005, 106, quoted in Stufkens, 2008, 214), but also responsible for quickly accumulating the funds to buy eighteen ambulances, which were sent to Madrid for assembly and deployment. The premiere of an unauthorised French version, *Terre d'Espagne*, produced under Jean Renoir's supervision with additional commentary and an increased emphasis on the agrarian theme (Stufkens, 2008, 214), took place seven months after New York, and it played elsewhere in the European democracies, heightening anti-fascist alarm as the continent geared for war. As the situation became increasingly hopeless in Spain (for ambulances save lives, not wars), Hemingway presided over a special launch of the Spanish version in May 1938 in Barcelona, where a real air raid temporarily interrupted Van Dongen's synthetic ones. The film was revived in New York in February 1939, just in time for the final triumph of Franco. Its next revival came upon the death of Franco in 1975, throughout Europe and nowhere more eagerly than in Spain, a monument to the struggles two generations earlier of the Popular Fronts of both the Old World and the New, inspiration and instruction for the struggles that were still ahead.

THE 400 MILLION

The Marco Polo Bridge incident in Manchuria in July 1937 was the pretext for the Japanese to resume their invasion of China just as Ivens and his collaborators were finishing *Spanish Earth*. Soon, the Western media and the US left were as preoccupied with the renewed aggression in Asia as they had been the preceding year with Spain, though the newsreel companies were not as ready to connect the two conflicts as leftist analysis, and were much more accustomed to treating catastrophes visited upon Asian millions than the bombings of white European civilians.[8]

As the editing for both *Spanish Earth* and *Heart of Spain* came to an end, another team of filmmakers from Frontier Films was editing a film that suddenly seemed much more current – *China Strikes Back* (Harry Dunham, 37). This film premiered in October 1937 one month after the Guomindang (Kuo-

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mintang)[9] had reluctantly agreed to form a United Front with the Red Army to fight the invaders. *China Strikes Back* had undergone as many last-minute changes as feasible to include the rapid developments in the Chinese defence strategy; because of its topicality it fared extremely well in the theatres, saturating the New York market and becoming a major title in the documentary 'boom' of late 1937. At the same time, American interest in China had been stimulated by an influx of new journalism dealing with the Communist-controlled areas of northwestern China – namely Agnes Smedley's (1938) writing on the subject and Edgar Snow's 1937 book *Red Star over China* and publicity lecture tour of the same year accompanied by a 16mm film of Yanan (Yenan). Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's well-timed box-office and prestige hit, *The Good Earth* (Sydney Franklin, 138), premiering February 1937, also contributed to the phenomenon.

It is not surprising that discussions about a new film on China by Joris Ivens began even before *Spanish Earth* had settled into its distribution pattern, nor that the discussions involved the same group of New York intellectuals as had formed Contemporary Historians, Inc. The group recruited some important new blood, namely Dudley Nichols, then at the peak of his career as John Ford's favourite screenwriter. Another important recruit was Luise Rainer, the expatriate German actress and veteran of Max Reinhardt's Berlin theatrical troupe; Rainer was then riding the short-lived crest of her fame as the 1936 Academy Award Best Actress and star of *The Good Earth*, and, not incidentally, solidly linked to the New York radical intelligentsia by virtue of her marriage to playwright-screenwriter Clifford Odets. Rainer's role in *The Good Earth* endeared her to the Chinese-American community (it brought her second Oscar during the final preparations for *400 Million*) and enabled her to secure the financial backing for the film from Chinese-American businesspeople in New York, instead of from the producers themselves. Her help turned out to be essential since one major underwriter, K.C. Li, a leading New York import merchant, was a strong supporter of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-chek) and did not see eye-to-eye with the producers on the political situation in China. Another Hollywood supporter was Frank Tuttle, a prolific director of Bing Crosby hits among other accomplishments and member of Tinseltown's CPUSA network, who had hosted Ivens the previous year, and would now act as film industry point man, ensuring that the negative would be developed at his studio, Paramount.[10] Herman Shumlin continued to function as producer, and Hellman and MacLeish continued to be mainstays of the support group, which re-incorporated under the name of History Today, Inc.

The group considered that another fuller film on the Chinese defence was needed for several reasons. *China Strikes Back,* for one thing, rapidly became dated, not only because of the United Front between Jiang and the Commu-

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nists, but because of the lightning Japanese advance throughout the fall: by the end of September both Beijing (Peking) and Tianjin (Tientsin) had fallen, by November Shanghai and Tai-yuan, and in December, as the film preparations drew to an end, it was the turn of Nanjing (Nanking), the capital throughout the thirties. Each new reverse came after brutal, widely publicised sieges and bombardments.

China Strikes Back, furthermore, was only 23 minutes long. It was thought that a less superficial, medium-length or feature film would attract more attention, deal more thoroughly with the situation, rally more support for the Chinese defenders, and reinforce the growing agitation against US isolationism. One particular reason that *China Strikes Back* was outmoded was that it had been centred around footage secretly taken in 'Soviet China' in late 1936 or early 1937; since 'Soviet China' and the Red Army had now become the 'Special Administrative District' and the Eighth Route Army, integrated with the forces of the former arch-enemy, the Guomindang, a new orientation was needed.

The target for the film, once again, was western public opinion and relief support. Though the newsreels were not unsympathetic to the Chinese, and though the US neutrality policy did not prevent the sale of arms to China in this undeclared war, public opinion and the sentiment in Congress were both strongly opposed to intervention and even to proposed sanctions against Japan. In October 1937, 40% of the American public considered themselves neutral, according to one poll, and 63% of China supporters were against an embargo of war materials for Japan, despite Roosevelt's pronouncement of his support for a 'quarantine' against the aggressor nation the same month.[11] The US left was conducting a major campaign in support of sanctions against Japan, an issue not broached by *China Strikes Back;* it was therefore an important theme of *400 Million* with its images of US scrap metal bound for Japanese munitions factories. Garrison Films was to distribute another film originating in the US left early in 1938, specifically on the subject of the proposed boycott, entitled *Stop Japan.* Ivens's (1969, 141) more general aim was 'to tell America about a China which they had never before been told about truthfully and completely',[12] a China that was certain to include the 'Special Administrative District' nonetheless.

The projected outlay for the film was $50,000, more than double the budget for *Spanish Earth*. Ivens had now had full exposure to wartime filmmaking conditions, had encountered enough Hollywood amusement at his miniscule Spanish budget, and was tired of having to comb desperately through his rushes for useable material even to the extent of having to repeat shots. He was ready to make the next film at the professional level. This also meant increasing his crew. In addition to hiring Ferno once again, he arranged for another assistant, Robert Capa, the now-famous photographer whom they had met in

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Spain. Capa was not only another 'big name' lending his name to the project (officially he would be covering the war for *Life*, who could partly cover expenses). A third crew member with miscellaneous duties was considered a necessity after Spain, where the assistance of first Dos Passos and then Hemingway, and other Americans and Spaniards, had been invaluable in making logistical arrangements (Ivens, 1969, 142). Spain had convinced Ivens of the importance of having a writer on location as well, a conviction also connected to the mode of *mise-en-scène*, and Nichols was to accompany the crew in this capacity. The period of the shoot was indeterminate but the crew was apparently ready to stay longer than they had in Spain, though not so long as the seven months they eventually took. Arrangements were made for Paramount to develop the rushes in Hollywood and to provide some advice on subtropical filming. Fredric March was to be the commentator, another Academy Award winner, who would bring to the film the prestige of the leading man to Garbo, Hepburn, Shearer, Sidney, and, most recently, Gaynor and Lombard. Yet despite the numerous 'big name' Hollywood connections and the increased aura of professionalism surrounding the project, contacts with the Frontier Films milieu were still strong: WFPL stalwart Ben Maddow would be credited as 'assistant', a credit referring to a supportive role in the editing and narration, and Garrison would distribute.

In November 1937, Ivens made a trip to Europe to recruit Fernhout and Capa for the project. This time Ferno would receive equal billing, though there is no evidence that his role was substantially different from what it was on *Spanish Earth* nor that he participated in the editing of the film. Hankou, the current Chinese capital, was much further than Madrid from the sources of supply, so the technical preparations were especially thorough – extra equipment was purchased in addition to the two men's hand-cameras and Ferno's large Debrie. One result was that the crew was perhaps over-equipped and would have to be accompanied by, in addition to the censor and censorship assistant imposed by the Guomindang, a business manager, a personal assistant, a servant, and, on frequent occasions, a file of as many as 24 'coolies' (Ivens, 1969, 160). One apparently typical shooting excursion on the Shandong front would involve a truck and only six porters (Grelier, 1965, 151). This factor was to contribute no doubt to the problems of immobility and official interference that would plague the project in China, of which the filmmakers had not yet had a taste. In New York, Ivens discovered that K.C. Li was attempting to stall the project and therefore had to undertake further last-minute fundraising activities. In California, just before boarding his Pan-American China Clipper flight, he encountered a further reversal: Dudley Nichols backed out of the trip to China, but agreed to continue as writer.

After a long calamitous trip, which is documented vividly in the dia-

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ry excerpts in *Camera,* Ivens arrived in Hong Kong on 8 February. There he secured additional supplies with the help of an experienced Dutch expatriate and visited Soong Ching-ling (Madame Sun Yixian [Sun Yat-sen]), who was spearheading the campaign to raise support for China in the West. She provided him with an orientation to China somewhat different from that which her brothers-in-law Jiang and Kong, the Guomindang leaders, would later provide, and agreed to be filmed on the filmmakers' passage back out of China. The filmmakers' China headquarters was to be Hankou (Hankou and Guangdong [Canton] were to fall in October, shortly after the crew had filmed the bombardment of this latter city and had returned to the US).

Ivens's frustrating seven months in China, as recorded in his notes, diaries, and correspondence, involved 'one hundred times more difficulties' than in Spain (Ivens, draft letter to Shumlin, n.d. [*c.* winter 1938-1939], JIA). Not only did the Guomindang interference, bureaucracy, and censorship cause disruption and delays and seriously affect the shape and content of final film, but they also prevented him from realising a major professional and political goal, a pilgrimage to Shanxi (Shensi) province, where most of the Communist areas were. Everywhere in China, Ivens remembers seeing streams of young people moving north to Yanan but was prevented from following them and thus from linking the military struggle to social revolution as he had in Spain (Devarrieux, 1978a, 108). Instead of the exhilarating record of political inspiration and high morale found in the Spanish accounts, the China documents reveal anger and disappointment.

As Leyda (1972, 115) recounts, the Guomindang seemed more afraid of leftist filmmakers than they were of the Japanese and successfully prevented Ivens from even meeting the dynamic Hankou community of filmmakers, many of whom had similar political sympathies. Although Ivens attributed the interference to the routine Guomindang supervision of all foreign film production in China, and provides innumerable anecdotes of his hosts' apparent misunderstanding of the project, it seems highly unlikely that the Jiangs and their representatives would not have been more aware of what was at stake than they let on. Both Leyda (1972, 110-112) and Dorothy Jones (1955, 40) provide lengthy accounts of the Chinese diplomatic service's detailed and effective monitoring of Western film projects involving China. They must certainly have been aware of *China Strikes Back* and must have smarted at that film's homage to their rivals in the northwest. They surely could not have been unaware that Ivens was affiliated with the community that had sponsored that film and had vilified the Guomindang continuously throughout the thirties. The Guomindang's conveyed impression that the Ivens group were 'third-rate artists' unworthy of official sponsorship, has, in retrospect, the air of a ploy (Ivens, 1969, 152-153).[13] For once, Ivens's official diplomatic and Hollywood

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connections may have been a hindrance and actually prevented him and his huge retinue from slipping in and out of Shanxi unnoticed, the way the author of the prized footage in *China Strikes Back*, Harry Dunham, had done.[14] In any case, in preventing Ivens from filming the Communist areas and the Eighth Route Army, the Guomindang did win a major propaganda battle. As for winning the war, it is another question: another detail of the episode, also elevated now to the status of legend, is that Ivens slipped his hand camera and some stock to Wu Yinxian, a member of the Eighth Route Army, told the Guomindang he had dropped them in the river, and thus participated vicariously in some of the first film shot in the revolutionary state, entitled *Yanan and the Eighth Route Army* (Yuan Muzhi, 1939). He eventually returned to find his old Kinamo enshrined in the Museum of the Revolution in Beijing (Leyda, 1964, 71).

In the meantime, however, the Guomindang interference ensured that the Communists make only a minor, unacknowledged appearance in the final film, and that Ivens's style and subject matter as they were evolving in *Spanish Earth* were radically affected, as my analysis will demonstrate. The crew had to spend their first six weeks in Hankou before being allowed to head for the combat zone (in Spain the initial delay had been only three days), their crew by now infiltrated with Guomindang spies. They then spent much of the first half of April filming on the Shandong front, where they managed to witness and film aspects of the only Chinese victory in 1938, Tai'erzhuang, which comprises the final climactic sequence of *400 Million.* After returning to Hankou via Zhengzhou, they devoted May to fruitless attempts to get close to the Communists in Shanxi. This not unamusing episode landed the group in Lanzhou on the Mongolian border because they had requested to shoot near the Great Wall in the belief that this would take them into Shanxi. Outsmarted once again, they saw another distant portion of the very long Great Wall, but used this occasion profitably to film the site of the supply route to the USSR. The film's dust-storm sequence was also shot in this desert region. At this point the remarkable exchange of telegrams with Hankou took place in which Madame Jiang encouraged the filmmakers to return to Hankou to 'take advantage of the June weather' (Ivens, 1969, 175). Finally the group succeeded in reaching Xi'an, on the edge of the Special District they were so anxious to reach, but to no avail. Here, trailed night and day by detectives, they met Agnes Smedley, and by accident, Christopher Isherwood and W.H. Auden.[15] Further delays resulted when Ivens contracted the mumps. Upon their return to Hankou, the Guomindang, now having confirmed their suspicions that what Ivens was really interested in was Shanxi, tightened the clamps even more, and henceforth prevented the processing of any shot before a 16mm duplication of it had been developed in Hong Kong and approved officially. During this last vis-

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it to Hankou, the group's only official contact with the Communists occurred: without permission they filmed a meeting of the National Military Council at which an Eighth Route Army delegation was present and a brief portrait of Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai) resulted.[16] The final phase of the shoot was in Quangdong, where the crew, filming from a high hotel that the Japanese command were sparing for their eventual headquarters, took the material on civilian bombardment required for the film. They then returned to Hong Kong to film Soong Ching-ling and made a hasty retreat to Hollywood in September. There the rushes had been developed and the cutting had already been commenced by Van Dongen.

The whole project moved to New York after a month or so, followed by Nichols, who had to abandon his Hollywood work to finish the commentary. The dramatic voice-track was post-synchronised with Chinese-American actors in New York. Advance previews began taking place as early as November, though the final sound-editing lasted well into February 1939, with distribution problems causing further delays and disappointment. Ivens was reportedly at one point ready to destroy everything (Zalzman, 1963, 66-67).[17] The film was released by Garrison on 7 March, the producers having failed once again to find a mainstream distributor, though this time the shock did not overwhelm the already low morale. As with the Spanish film, the world situation tended once again to upstage the premiere: attention had once again returned to Europe. Herbert Kline's and Hanns Burger's film *Crisis* (1939, USA, 95) on Czechoslovakia opened at the same time, and, of course, Hitler chose the same month to take over whatever parts of Czechoslovakia had not been absorbed the previous autumn following Munich.

Ivens's conception of the project evolved continuously during this tortuous itinerary and it is relevant to this study to analyse the various stages of the evolution. During the enforced idleness of the Pacific fight, Ivens applied himself energetically to the planning of the film, hoping all the while that the Chinese situation would permit the kind of heightened personalisation of the documentary form that had eluded him in Spain, 'the logical development of the documentary' (Ivens, 1969, 211).

Once more, Ivens was armed with a story outline by Hellman and MacLeish, aided this time by their Nationalist backer K.C. Li, that would prove as impracticable in the field as their earlier version of *Spanish Earth* had been. Later in Hankou, Ivens summarised the original outline in his notes:

> Central figure young man. new China. cotton mill, cotton purchased by Japs. for Chinese mill, necessary road building. also girl...road is symbol of New China, struggle with Japanese buyers. building road coincides with invasion. war approaching village. air raid on road and bridges.

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> mobilization of village, defence of villager and troops. boy-girl. New China. New spirit of construction. Jap. danger. road symbol. war fight. (handwritten note, 23 April 1938, JIA)

The echoes in this sketch of the original Spanish project, not only the exemplary focus on village and road, but the chronological symbolic narrative that would require considerable fictionalisation, are surprising considering that History Today could hardly have been under the impression that it would be any easier in China to execute such a conception than it had been in Spain, regardless of whatever commercial advantages would accrue from the addition of 'boy-girl' elements. Isherwood ([1939] 1972, 54) reports hearing from the filmmakers on 9 March of plans 'to make a film about the life of a child-soldier, a little red devil, in one of the mobile units of the Eighth Route Army'. It is likely that the filmmakers, even at this early date, had an official film conception and a slightly different private one.

Ivens's Hankou note (written after he had returned from the Shandong front) indicates why he was coming to the conclusion that such an outline was not feasible:

> too much accent on reconstruction and history – could be done in Hollywood, needs focus on war, concentration of all forces for war. Show new China in organization of resistance, uniting of all classes, history of aggression. (handwritten note, 23 April 1938, JIA)

All the same, he had not completely abandoned narrative elements involving personal characterisation, despite the hardships of the front and the virtual impossibility of undertaking this kind of filmmaking in these circumstances:

> We try to get some more story or personal angle on the development of the battle from General Zhu. Many military people do not think in those terms. Too dry or too cagey. Our liaison and censorman, General Du, does his utmost to stop us getting close to the officers or men. (Ivens, [1938] 1969, 160)

Thus the inherent difficulties in filming combat at close range were compounded by the officers' interference, with the result that the battle material, as with *Spanish Earth*, would lack definition: at least one reviewer found the Tai'erzhuang battle sequence very flat compared to newsreel coverage while another (Nugent, 1939) even complained that battle coverage was missing.

At first, unsure of the quality, if any, of this Tai'erzhuang material, Ivens ([1938] 1969, 160) did not know whether it would be a separate sequence or fit

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into the main continuity. Eventually, to compensate partly for the difficulties at the front, Ivens evolved a 'triptych structure' idea, of which the final part still clung to the idea of a personal narrative:

> First a broad general section to say that the Japanese did not begin today, that the War is part of a plan which has been in the shaping process for over thirty years – hundreds of years if you like – and was specifically formulated in 1927 in the Tanaka Memorandum. This is our political and economic background of this historic period. The central panel of the triptych will be the war itself and the battle of Tai'erzhuang and future battles. Out of that must come the third section, a personal story of a young Chinese defending his country. (Ivens, [1938] 1969, 170)

This idea is visible in the final film except that the final two panels are combined; the third panel of *400 Million* is devoted to the battle of Tai'erzhuang and at the same time focused around an apparently fictional exemplary narrator-protagonist, Sergeant Wang. The other two panels have also been reshaped, with the first one treating the historical China (historical background and the Japanese aggression), and the second one treating 'modern' China (united resistance and national construction). However, it is clear from the somewhat peripheral and contrived role of Sergeant Wang as internal narrator, functioning primarily as a narrative device without achieving any real definition as a character, that the circumstances continued to mediate drastically as late as April between Ivens's increasingly realistic conceptions and the rushes he was continuing to shoot daily.

I have already suggested that another essential element in the original conception of the film was to add to the views of the Eighth Route Army and the new Soviet zones of Shanxi that had been the basis of *China Strikes Back.* A number of the fictional characters considered in the early stages of the project were to encounter or to be part of this milieu. A journal entry from the Pacific flight sets forward this element that Ivens, leaving the Shandong front, would have to attempt soon or never:

> It is good to think about the coming work. Guerilla warfare, one of the most important things. Maybe follow the activities of a guerilla general with the camera for three months... When the people produce their own commanders from among themselves, out of their own ranks, then they are good. I saw Lister and Campesino leading divisions of the People's Army in Spain. Great people. I'll find them in China too. (Ivens, [1938] 1969, 144-145)

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The vagueness of this entry, possibly written with non-communist backers or censors in mind, does not conceal the specificity of the intent – the guerillas in which Ivens was interested acted in the northwest. On 15 May, while in the remote Lanzhou area, in a desperate attempt to be permitted to move beyond Zhou to the northwest district, Ivens drew up and presented to the Guomindang official, Colonel Huang, an outline for a strongly narrative episode including dramatic characters to be shot there and featuring the Great Wall and Madame Jiang. The sincerity of this proposal is questionable, followed as they are by an assurance that Americans were very interested in the Eighth Route Army, and possibly formulated at the time when Ivens thought that a visit to the Wall would automatically bring him among the guerillas.

However, Ivens probably no longer believed that such an admittedly melodramatic emphasis was feasible or desirable. This treatment may simply have been an attempt to mollify his guides, who were exerting a 'terrific pressure [...] to get a full script of our film' (Ivens, 1969, 174). Notes written three days previously to this, in Dutch significantly, are in obvious despair at the constant surveillance, and possibly at the news that they were being taken towards Mongolia. They suggest the splitting up of the group, and recommend the shooting of more straight documentary material because of the impossibility of the original story and the futility of looking for an actor in Xi'an while under surveillance. The notes go on to hope that later on there might be contact with the guerillas, since a story without them would have no sense, and to express, reassuringly, just a glimmer of 'mad inspiration' in the landscape (Ivens, [1938] 1969, 173).

Yet another detailed formulation of a film outline for work in the Communist areas, dated 15 May, possibly written as notes for Ferno in the event that he would able to detach himself from the excursion, has almost completely dropped the narrative, personalised orientation. Complete with student groups moving on foot towards Yanan, an encounter with Mao playing basketball with students and soldiers, re-enacted material on guerillas sabotaging a railroad, and much soldier-peasant interaction, it documents Ivens's emphases and strategies in the shooting of the hybrid style of this period, as well as the ideological, formal, and topical accents he was hoping for at this time. This 'Plan for Shooting Film of 8th Army' concludes:

> Emphasize in the pictures the important and excellent relation and close contact between army and population – Also the new and human discipline during the service, the warm and comradely relation in contrast to the other armies and schools. film in Y not too much. We need most material of the 8th Route Army. Make only minimum of re-enacted scenes. (handwritten notes, Xi'an, 15 May 1938, JIA)

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If this scenario was submitted to Col Huang, as seems to have been the case, it may have been a last-minute gesture of suicidal defiance. In any case, it too had no effect, except that echoes are visible in the final film. Of interest, however, beyond its technical instructions, and its emphasis on preconceptions of the western audience, whether over the Great Wall or missionaries, is the caution Ivens advises on ideological and aesthetic grounds with regard to the personal narrative line and *mise-en-scène*. There is stress throughout on group activities and the specification that the images of young heroes and brave girls should not be 'portraits' of individuals but of groups at work. Undoubtedly, the de-emphasis on re-enactment in this proposal has been influenced by a reaction against the Guomindang insistence on *mise-en-scène* throughout; probably this outline if filmed would have resulted in a mix comparable to that of *Spanish Earth* with the 'spontaneous' mode greatly enriched by the intimacy of living and working within small groups for extended periods.

In terms of specific content, the 'plan' is clearly designed to complement Dunham's material in *China Strikes Back* in the same way that the Spanish films had avoided overlapping each other's scope. The spontaneous flavour would have added a personal resonance to Dunham's footage, which was elegant, but formal and impersonal. The actual combat footage would have corrected Dunham's inability to photograph any military activity beyond manoeuvres. Ivens's emphasis on the civilian constituency of the army and their interaction would have filled out Dunham's meager coverage of the district as a functioning social order rather than a military stronghold.[18] As with Spain, the military aspects were of no importance to Ivens without their social correlatives. It is tempting to speculate about the cinematic qualities and inestimable historical relevance of this film that was never to be made. A letter drafted to Shumlin after the completion of *400 Million* summarised Ivens's view of the Chinese experience. He bitterly complained that he had been prevented from making a film with a 'story' in China and had had to turn to a 'straight documentary film'. His unrealised goal, he said, had been to prove to himself and to others where the new documentary film was to go, but instead he had been forced to give up his 'original conception and styles'. Most angry about the censors and spies, he listed scenes that he had been prevented from filming, including images of a blind mother. Hinting about possible damage done to his own career by the episode, Ivens closed by affirming his conviction that the narrative idea, though still theoretical, is 'ten times right' (Ivens, draft letter to Shumlin, n.d. [*c.* winter 1938-1939], JIA).

Looking back after the completion of *Power*, Ivens was less bitter about the failure of the project of personalisation in China. He still hoped, however, that the goal had been partially achieved insofar as 'after seeing the film you could think you know one or two Chinese; you could like them or dislike

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them' (Ivens, 1969, 212). Ivens was presumably referring not only to Sergeant Wang, but also to the portraits of the Guomindang leaders (clearly in the 'dislike' category), to the even more fleeting encounters with Soong Ching-ling, to the historian and writer, Guo Moruo, who speaks at a public ceremony in one sequence, and to a few other minor dignitaries, some anonymous. Perhaps more memorable for Ivens was a couple depicted searching for their belongings in the ruins of their house near Tai'erzhuang, too distant from a camera that is understandably discreet, but decidedly discernible as 'characters'. Towards the end of the post-production, Ivens made an attempt to step up the personal quality of this short scene by adding to the commentary the names of the husband, Li Bo, and of the village, plus the judicious revelation not provided by the image that the husband had first searched for his hammer but that the wife had tried to uncover her grinding-stones. The random concreteness of this revelation adds greatly to the personal effect of this scene. The vignette method that had been Ivens's last resort in Spain, then, served him in China as well. One reviewer declared that the personal vignettes were the highlight of the film and that they should have been extended, a prescription with which Ivens would have been in complete agreement. The Li Bo episode for this reviewer 'dwarfed' the entire battle scene:

> Ivens does his best war correspondence with portraiture. The faces of China unite the soundtrack. They tell the whole story of the war. He could have made it a better film, I think, and made a more potent brew from the bitter caldron of war, had he studied those faces longer. (Nugent, 1939)

31. *The 400 Million* (1939): vignette of Li Bo family searching for their belongings in the ruins of their house, accenting the personal quality of the film. DVD frame capture. © CAPI Films, Paris, and Marceline Loridan-Ivens.

It would only be another film on China 35 years later that would permit the detailed portraits Ivens was seeking.

The final structure of the 'straight' documentary that Ivens made 'against his will', when all was said and done, was not dissimilar in very general terms

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to that of *Spanish Earth*. The same propaganda structure of idyll-threat-resistance is still present, though in modulated form. An initial exposition of the Chinese historical, geographical, and cultural context, extolling Chinese contributions to human society, leads into the presentation of the history of Japanese aggression and the current attack. Next, a long series of sequences detailing the unification of the country and its modernisation under the Guomindang's 'New Life' Program follows, and finally the climactic battle of Tai'erzhuang that shows the people triumphing over the aggressor. As in *Spanish Earth*, there are two vivid atrocity sequences showing synthetically edited civilian bombardment. One is located at the beginning of the film, as a kind of prologue, apparently a late addition to the film to enliven the original beginning's lyrical exploration of Chinese landscape and culture. The second bombing sequence, placed near the end, purports to show Japanese revenge for the Tai'erzhuang defeat, coming between the victory and an exultant torchlight celebration that concludes the film. This latter placement was apparently intended to qualify the euphoria inherent in the victory and in the overall structure of the last movement of the film. As in *Spanish Earth*, there is also a basic alternating rhythm of positive and negative sequences, aggression and resistance, denunciation and affirmations of calm and endurance.

With *400 Million*, Ivens continues the same basic hybrid mix of cinematographic modes that characterised *Spanish Earth*, though there are significant inflections arising from the shooting situation. The proto-direct 'spontaneous' mode, which had dominated *Spanish Earth* in proportion to its running time and spectator impact, is significantly reduced in this film. Two anecdotes from *Camera* suggest the reason for this:

> We are waiting for a refugee train. We have often seen them, but haven't filmed one yet. But one doesn't come in today. It is the old lesson: film a certain thing the moment we see it even if the light conditions are not exactly right. The censors also try to stop us when we attempt anything spontaneous and then we discuss away the freshness. Discussions with censors and light metres are dangerous. (Ivens, [1938] 1969, 171)

The other anecdote describes a spontaneous demonstration that the group came across by accident in Xi'an, a kind of spontaneous musical street-theatre organised by four students:

> The whole market place was alive. The elementary latent force in these people – found all over China – was being brought to life by these students. It was a great manifestation. But we were not allowed to film it

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> because it would give the impression that the Chinese mass was dirty and not well organized! We argued with the censor. No luck. [...]
>
> The next morning about seven o'clock our Chinese company hurried us out because they had arranged something terrific for us. On the great square, without anything typically Chinese, they had lined up about 10,000 people. All nicely arranged. Children with children, men with men, bicycles with bicycles. Four shiny loudspeakers and forty students instead of yesterday's four were facing the crowd. 'Here's your chance', they said. (Ivens, 1969, 176)

These anecdotes suggest several reasons for the suppression of the 'spontaneous' mode in *400 Million* at the instance of the censors. The Chinese insistence on the propaganda value of images of organisation and modernisation is not incomprehensible. In fact, it seems even very contemporary in its instinctive understanding of the complicity of the code of the 'exotic' in China's historic colonial humiliation, a code that Ivens's ([1938] 1969, 173) innocent phrase 'typically Chinese' hints may be more residually present in the project than his disavowals of 'tourist' attitudes elsewhere would suggest.[19] It is clear at the same time that the class identification of the Guomindang hosts was threatened by the filmmakers' interest in the proletariat and the peasantry (natural subjects for the 'spontaneous' mode in their presumably widespread media innocence), a threat not necessarily related to the Chinese elite's conscious fear of the filmmakers' communist sympathies.

The existence of purely cultural factors in the Guomindang's repudiation of the 'spontaneous' mode cannot be discounted, nor is it easy to confirm. Ivens was not the first nor the last of Western filmmakers to encounter in China what was to western thinking an incomprehensible aesthetic of photography, or to imply that purely cultural variants were responsible.[20]

Over the last generation, there has been a consensus within the discipline of film studies about the ideological pitfalls of Euro-American cinematic depictions of the postcolonial 'other' (Rony, 1996). This includes the specific perils, both ethical and aesthetic, posed to roving artists filming in 'exotic' locations, even paradoxically those most well-intentioned projects that are produced 'in solidarity' with postcolonial peoples. These liabilities of the foreign filmmaker's gaze, ranging from 'unthinking Eurocentrism' to paternalism, exploitation, and cultural damage, are of course sometimes balanced by a potential for a Bakhtinian cultural interaction, mutually enriching, and an opening of a space for transnational knowledge (Richards, 2006, 55-64). The solidarity genre exemplified by Ivens's Chinese work (his final 1988 project *Une histoire de vent* [*A Tale of the Wind*, France, 78] is less typical of the genre than his earlier three initiatives of the 1930s, the 1950s,

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and the 1970s, all more explicitly political) calls for a nuanced reflection on this potential paradox and balance.

Ivens provides a third anecdote that illuminates the problem from yet a different perspective:

> About a hundred badly wounded soldiers arrive at the station. [...]
>
> We decide to film this in detail. I asked Jack [the business assistant] to try and have the bearers and wounded not look too obviously at the camera. He doesn't respond in his usual manner and I can see that the directions he gives are vague. I worry because the picture will not give the audience the feeling of naturalness so I ask him to be more to the point with the bearers. He refuses and runs away. John and I continue the picture as best we can. And I use the only Chinese words I know: *Bu Yao Kan – Don't look at the camera*. Works all right, but it is a little mechanical. Later, on the way home, I find Jack and have a long talk with him.
>
> In a way he is right. He says, 'I couldn't yell at my own people. They have fought so hard and they are so badly wounded. I have too much respect for them, and therefore I am silent. Directing them to look or not to look would be cruel. I would like to help them in some way'.
>
> There it is! But our way of helping is to make a good film. To move people by its professional quality so they will feel and understand that the wounded soldier needs a good stretcher for his very life. John, Capa and I have the same respect as Jack for the wounded Chinese; but we cannot allow it to influence us when we are doing our work. (Ivens, [1938]1969, 168-169)

The cultural dynamic is displaced in Ivens's analysis by the ethical, the political, and the aesthetic, but it is still present. Ivens is asking his subjects to pose but in a different way from the posing preferred by the Guomindang in the street-theatre incident. The codes of the 'spontaneous' mode called into question in the incident with Jack, 'professional quality' and 'the feeling of naturalness', are not 'natural' in the least but culturally determined and as dependent on artificial conventions of representation as the variation of the 'newsreel' mode preferred by the Guomindang and not a few occidental filmmakers and governments. The Chinese elite's visual culture, rather than being 'the first stage of camera culture', as Sontag (1978, 71) might have inferred, may, ironically, simply be a variation of Ivens's own camera culture based on related styles of 'posing' and conceptions of 'the feeling of naturalness'. After all, in the sequence treating Guomindang government, military, and ladies' council meetings, a perfect familiarity with Ivens's code of 'naturalness' is displayed.

As late as 1963, Hugh Baddeley in *The Technique of Documentary Film Pro-*

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duction makes explicit the code of representation that Ivens was assuming unquestioningly 25 years earlier:

> One of the documentary producer's greatest problems is to make the ordinary people that he films appear natural on the screen. They should look as though they are unaware that a camera is anywhere in the vicinity. [...] Most people are capable of appearing perfectly *natural* in front of a camera while they are doing their normal job on some everyday action. But they must be given clear instruction. Their instinct is to look at the camera – which is exactly what they should never do. As soon as a character is seen glancing, even momentarily, at the lens, all *the illusion of naturalness* is gone. The camera should be the unseen eye and the audience should have the impression that they are observing the natural world *without a mechanical barrier intervening between them and it*. (Baddeley, 1963, 99-100, emphasis mine)

Baddeley adds details of camera placements, ruses, and long-focus lenses that can aid in creating 'the illusion of naturalness'. It is surprising that more documentarists of the thirties did not attempt to challenge these codes, since it was very much the fashion for still photographers to incorporate their subjects' camera-conscious posing into their work, and especially since a small number of filmmakers as diverse as Vertov (both *Entuziazm: Simfoniya Donbassa* [*Enthusiasm: The Donbass Symphony*, 1931, USSR, 67] and *Three Songs About Lenin*), the GPO unit (*Housing Problems* [Arthur Elton and E.H. Anstey, 1935, UK, 13]) and Flaherty (*Land*) do the same (Vertov and the GPO were encouraged to do so by the primitive mechanics of direct sound recording). In the last named of these films, one character who is so alienated that he does not take note of the camera becomes the pretext for the narrator to comment upon this unusual phenomenon with pity! It is interesting that Ivens's third and most successful documentary filming excursion to China, in the seventies, would be built almost entirely on his subjects' eagerness to 'pose' for the camera, though *Yukong* also included, as we shall see, transitional and establishing scenes that seem mildly jarring because they use the classical codes of illusion that Ivens insisted on in 1938.

This curious tangle of cultural politics should not obscure the essential fact that the perceived 'immediacy' and 'intimacy' of much of *Spanish Earth*'s 'spontaneous' material – the scenes of the evacuation of the children, the after-effects of the bombardments, the farewells before battle – are by and large missing from *400 Million*. Here the visual characteristics of this mode as I have isolated them in *Spanish Earth* and earlier films appear only in glimpses: in some of the bombardment, battle, and refugee sequences, for example,

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where trauma and other preoccupations have interrupted the dynamics of illusionism and censorship, and an instantaneous nuance of improvisation is legible in a foreground blurred figure or a sudden or jerky pan. The scene derived from the incident of the wounded soldiers in the station includes a few of these nuances. Not all of the bearers' glances at the camera have been removed. One senses that the out-takes from this material might have provided even more 'spontaneous' nuance in the form of 'unnatural' stares, but it is of course anachronistic to make a hindsight demand of Ivens so much in contradiction of the prevailing camera culture of the day. The Li Bo vignette also stands out for its 'spontaneous' resonance, an example of an event too poignant even for the intervention of *metteur-en-scène* and censor, and as I have stated, even for the approach of the camera:

> We accomplished a lot of fine work in Tai'erzhuang today. Three hundred and fifty refugees have returned to the places where their houses once stood. Out of three thousand that once lived there, we filmed the first to come back, a man and his wife. They paid no attention to the camera, they paid no attention to anyone except themselves. They remained close together. The man finds a hammer and the woman a small millstone and shows it to her husband. They will have to start all over again, staying close together. (Ivens, [1938] 1969, 164)

It is no accident that virtually all of the 'spontaneous' moments in *400 Million* have some calamity as their pretext.

With the reduction of the 'spontaneous' mode, the *mise-en-scène* mode has correspondingly grown to dominate the *400 Million* text. This increase of *mise-en-scène* in the film was not the only subject of Ivens's bitter complaints: an even more serious complaint was that the filmmakers themselves were not often enough the *metteurs-en-scène*. Ivens's conception of his hybrid style from this period put the emphasis on balance – neither 'naturalism' nor 're-enactment' should dominate (Ivens, 1940, 35). That he had intended to increase the proportion of the latter in the Chinese film is clear from the various early treatments that have already been discussed and from the expanded crew and the plan for an accompanying writer. However, instead of the customary interaction of filmmakers with subjects that he was counting on, the sponsors and censors attempted to impose their own conception of *mise-en-scène* interaction onto the situation. For example, Ivens approached the filming of the site of the famous Jiang kidnapping[21] by stationing two children looking up at the inscriptions on the site. Their censor replaced the children with three 'stiff' soldiers, which the filmmakers refused to shoot, rejecting a change of content

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rather than a change of principle (Ivens, 1969, 176). Elsewhere Ivens used an identical tactic of animating an object by having subjects look at it within the frame, usually a poster or a map. Another aspect of the problem around the kidnapping site is used elsewhere as well: on other occasions Ivens used *mise-en-scène* involving children as a means of ensuring a flavour of naturalism, for example a shot of a group of children running quickly towards the camera, a frequent device in Ivens's work. Shots such as this, where Ivens had a relative amount of control over the *mise-en-scène* stand clearly apart from those affected by the Guomindang meddling.

The Ivens *mise-en-scène* material stands out either because of a clearly visible interaction based on the shared and consensual understanding of the process, as in the brief encounter with Soong, or because the customary Ivens visual style or iconography is recognisable. Some of the most elegant sequences of the film belong in this latter category: a view of a field-telephone operator on duty at the base of a blossoming fruit tree introduced by a slow pan down from the mass of flowers, a shot that dazzled reviewers; or a precisely articulated sequence of recruits doing Taiji (Tai-chi) warm-up exercises in a sunny courtyard, established by a symmetrically composed long-shot pan and then detailed at medium range; some shots treating the country's mobile inland cottage industries, in which shoemaking is studied as carefully as work in any previous film, with concise pans from the object to the worker's face and vice versa; or, a whole narrative sequence depicting a group of peasants in a rice field being summoned to battle and picking up their hidden weapons to fall into formation. This latter sequence, also held up for praise in the reviews, is a unit of twelve shots, including the customarily scrupulous continuity and intricate pan reframings.

In contrast, the three formal Guomindang meeting sequences appear stiff and inauthentic. Though Ivens halfheartedly claimed that such scenes had never before been filmed, reviewers were unimpressed: one critic found the Guomindang 'neither cinematic nor illuminating' (Nugent, 1939). Ivens and Van Dongen solved the problem of the stiffness of the Guomindang-orchestrated Xi'an demonstration in the editing – they intercut it with the encounter with Soong.

With regard to the actual combat material, Ivens used *mise-en-scène* as well, partly because he was almost always relatively far from the heat of battle, unlike in Spain. At one point, his diary describes a fairly productive day of shooting on the front in the vocabulary of the studio: 'Today we took 585 feet of film, about eighteen set-ups. Practically no retakes. You can't do many retakes at the front' – details for which 'spontaneous' shooting would hardly be conducive. The following day, 'the battery fired twelve shots especially for us' and the crew learned the key phrase, already mentioned, 'Don't look at the

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camera'. On the day after the battle (8 April), the entry notes with relief that the filmmakers can use their large camera again (the normal equipment for *mise-en-scène*) because the danger is past (Ivens, [1938] 1969, 160-164).

In short, *mise-en-scène* had become the dominant mode in Ivens's hybrid form of documentary. Though he assured an interviewer for *The Herald-Tribune* that the film included 'no staging', it is clear that he meant outright fabrication of events through scripting and actors, rather than the border regions between fiction and non-interventionist 'spontaneous' shooting that comprised the bulk of his work on this project (Barnes, 1939). As he himself described this mode in a pencil note during the filming, it is 'halfway between Hollywood and newsreel'.

The reader will already have observed the similarities between the Guomindang style of *mise-en-scène*, with its ceremonial stiffness and self-consciousness, and the mode I have defined as the 'newsreel' mode. Nevertheless, there are several sequences that stand out by themselves as corresponding precisely to this mode as it appeared in *Spanish Earth*, a higher proportion, not surprisingly, than in the Spanish film. The Guomindang's reliance on public ceremony and the trappings of power for their legitimacy is reflected in three major such sequences in the film: a public ceremony commemorating the sacrifice of the unknown soldier, featuring youthful orators, addresses by literary and military dignitaries and mass pageantry; the aforementioned street rally in Xi'an, a scene that occupies more attention in the film with its processions and chorus lines than Ivens implies in *Camera* and which drew the note at the rough-cut stage, 'danger of repetition' (Ivens, outline, 15 December 1939, JIA); and the final torchlight demonstration to celebrate Tai'erzhuang. The mode is discernible elsewhere in the film in various other processions and troop parades, in arrivals of officials at meetings of various sorts (a favourite cliché of the newsreel companies), and in an arms-display procession as competent and uninspired as any tank-parade in film history. Much of this material recapitulates the shot/counter-shot structures of performers and spectators as they are used in *Triumph of the Will* and the 'rally' sequence of *Spanish Earth*. Since Ivens did not have synchronous sound recording equipment, the 'newsreel' sequences structured around oratory were all post-dubbed.[22]

Three additional modes make a limited appearance in *400 Million*. Absent in *Spanish Earth*, the 'compilation' mode is conspicuously important in the following film. Several sequences, most importantly the initial synthetic bombardment sequence, rely extensively on newsreel library shots. The filmmakers undoubtedly found this necessary because they had managed to film only the Quangdong bombardment, yet the theme of civilian bombardment was fundamental to anti-Japanese propaganda. Ivens (1969, 209) himself mentions

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that he uses a famous newsreel shot of a baby in the middle of a bombed railway station in this sequence.[23] Some reviewers complained about the recourse to compilation: one recognised that 'a few thriller shots from the newsreels have been cut into the continuity', adding that '*The March of Time* did a better job of showing the China that Japan decided to crush', and that 'the newsreels have been able to show more of the war' (Winsten, 1939); a second said that the shots of the bombardment of Shanghai and of the decimation of Tai'erzhuang were 'not unfamiliar to those who stay to see the newsreels' (Barnes, 1939b), a sentiment echoed by two others (*Variety* 1939; Cameron, 1939); a final one protested the 'overenthusiasm for old newsreel shots' (*Time* 1939). The first of these is the most perceptive. The word 'thriller' accurately reflects the use to which Ivens put most of the stock shots, the heightening of the intensity of certain 'action' scenes, risking both the danger of overkill that he had carefully avoided in *Spanish Earth*, and, at the other end of the spectrum, the danger of not being able to beat the newsreels at their own game. The editors blended the borrowed shots seamlessly into the continuity, as the same critic mentioned, so that the compilation material does not stand apart as a discrete mode as it had in, say, *Borinage, Nieuwe Gronden,* and in the Frontier production *People of the Cumberland* (Elia Kazan, Jay Leyda [as Eugene Hill], Sidney Meyers [as Robert Stebbins], and Bill Watts, 1937, 18), where the visible juxtaposition of actuality and archival shots created such dialectics as here/elsewhere, then/now, and workers/bosses. The only explicit articulations of the compilation made in *400 Million* are the use of a stock shot of Sun Yixian from the days of the founding of the Chinese republic, a shot that functions within the historical exposition within the film, and a few minor ones in the chronology of Japanese aggression, including the one of Hirohito on horseback that appeared in every film of the period. Otherwise, the archival material is imperceptible within the overall texture of the film, undoubtedly because that texture is complex and hybrid in itself. However, the practice of welding archival shots into a fluid exposition was profitable training for both Ivens and Van Dongen, who would be employed for much of the imminent war as director and editor for American compilation propaganda films.

Note must also be made of a fifth mode – animation – that had been visible in Ivens's work since the beginning, albeit on a minor scale, for example the diagrams and maps recounting the progress of the dikes in *Nieuwe Gronden*. On two significant occasions, animated maps carry the diegetic function of *400 Million*, presumably filling lacunae in the available footage. One illustrates the chronology of Japanese aggression in the Far East and the other demonstrates the tactics of guerilla warfare over a map of China. These sequences anticipate a basic method of the wartime films, as does some similar material in *China Strikes Back,* though the work appears somewhat less dramatic than

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the later animations by the Capra group, who, after all, would have the Disney studios at their command.

Finally, a component discussed previously because of its subordinate presence in *Spanish Earth* here deserves separate but brief comment – landscape. At a few points this particular mode or sensibility is given the diegetic function, or at least a significant role in it, with effective results. Early in the film, lyrical visual meditations on huge funerary monuments serve as the ground for the commentary's homage to Chinese history and culture, and an equally suggestive evocation of a dust storm functions in similar symbolic terms as the commentator describes the ravaging of modern China. The undoubted inspiration of such passages may be the fact that the censors did not interfere with mere landscape cinematography, but it seems that the new landscape struck a responsive chord in Ivens the erstwhile and future lyricist as well:

> Here the green foothills, the villages, and the trees don't seem very different from other places. It is the same grass, the same telephone poles that everyone knows. But still the sum of all these things is different. It is this unexpected something that makes the landscape Chinese. Something unexpected about a heavy stone or a tree bending in a strange direction. Or a curious combination of colours. I lean out of the window and soak myself in it. (Ivens, [1938] 1969, 173)

Despite this clear anticipation of the stunning natural beauty of *Histoire* 50 years later, not all spectators were impressed by the landscape components. One reviewer (Lorentz, 1939) complained of the irrelevance of the landscape digressions and another (Nugent, 1939) objected to the symbolic exposition that the filmmakers imposed upon them. Later in the film, the landscape articulations seem less distinct as a mode and more interconnected with the other modes of the film, that is, less engaged in the 'exotic' code: the hills, rivers, and rice fields are settings for resistance; the same elegant pans as earlier this time decry the desolation of a social environment by the enemy; and this time the traditional statuary frowns upon real corpses.

In summary, then, the components of *400 Million*'s hybrid form are not radically dissimilar to those used in *Spanish Earth*, but the proportional realignment of these components is profound. The heir of both Flaherty and Vertov has been forced to suppress almost entirely the legacy of Vertov. Though the shooting ratio of seven-to-one might suggest a higher proportion of 'spontaneous' material, this is not the case.[24] At the front on 13 April, Ivens estimated that up to that point, about 30% of the shooting had been with the hand-cameras, a figure that can be taken roughly as the proportion of 'spontaneous' shooting; this figure is higher than the final proportion for 'spontane-

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ous' material, reflecting front conditions that encouraged more 'spontaneous' cinematography than normal.

Furthermore, this time, the filmmakers were less successful than with *Spanish Earth* in uniting these disparate cinematographic modes in a fluid narrative and expository continuity. Amid the praise for the film, which was not lacking, were observations, mostly 'commiserative not critical', as one critic put it, that the film was 'superficial and gap-toothed', 'episodic', 'sketchy and unresolved', 'less fluent' in its narrative than the previous film', somewhat diffuse and episodic', and lacking in 'unity' (Nugent, 1939).[25] *Spanish Earth* had achieved its compelling structural impact through the simple narrative momentum of its component parts and their ensemble; this had been reinforced by the simplicity of its major expository proposition, the link between village and war effort, itself given narrative dimensions through both the Julian story and the symbolic role of the road. *400 Million* lacks such strong structural principles, narrative or otherwise. The only purely narrative material was the climactic battle sequence that lacked a real battle, and scattered individual scenes.

In addition, the geographical reference must have been so bewildering to lay spectators as to be unintelligible (this factor has ideological dimensions that will be analysed shortly); one consequence of this is that the landscape does not serve as a unifying setting as the simple coordinates of village-road-river-bridge did in the Spanish film. Finally, a baffling array of information is transmitted, both visually and verbally: cultural and political history, information about modernisation that covers road building and education, and both conventional and guerilla defence. Yet, since Ivens was unwilling to let the commentary bear the full weight of this informative function and since the visuals themselves cannot support it, the film sags under the weight of its encyclopedic mission. The critics were quite perceptive of these structural problems, perhaps because they had all seen many more documentaries between the release of the two films. *Variety* (1939) expressed it in terms of product classification – the film was an unprecedented mixture of marketing categories, 'newsreel, travelog, and educational'. *The New York Times*'s critic put it more sympathetically: 'Had he simplified his story, admitted the impossibility of saying everything and trying to show everything, Mr. Ivens paradoxically might have said and shown a great deal more than *The 400 Million*' (Nugent, 1939).

Yet such reviews told Ivens nothing he did not already know. His innumerable plans for personal stories as a focus for the film had been designed to get around just these problems. Van Dongen struggled valiantly to solve them as well, but the material resisted her ever-increasing skills. The *mise-en-scène* sequences, particularly the more Ivensian ones, display the same

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graceful classical continuity that characterised those parts of the previous film. The Guomindang *mise-en-scène* did not materialise quite so gracefully on the screen, though the editing is functional throughout and occasionally inspired. Frequently, quite disparate images are linked successfully through some kinetic or graphic principle discovered by Van Dongen in the rushes: for example, a shot of running children is matched with a procession of youths through a directional echo. The same principle smoothly effects several other transitions in the absence of Ivens's concise bridging shots of *Spanish Earth*. Yet the most accomplished editor could not ease the radical and jarring shifts in action, geography, and tone that the outline seemed to require, and the narrative impulse that might have compensated was not present.

As for the soundtrack for *400 Million*, this was undertaken with the enterprising spirit of Ivens's and Van Dongen's work since *Philips-Radio*. On this occasion, they undoubtedly sensed that a particularly effective soundtrack might in some way compensate for the disappointment they felt in the images. The soundtrack that resulted was unusually complicated for the period and included from four to five tracks, of which two alone were sound-effects tracks, and many different voices on the commentary track beyond that of the commentator. Van Dongen innovated a recording system based on colour-coded re-recording logs for the purpose.

The writing of the commentary was in itself complicated. Ivens was still resisting the non-stop, voice-of-God tradition of the newsreels, though some tactical retreats had to be made, among which was the increase (more than doubling of the *Spanish Earth* ratio) of the proportional running time of the commentary to 43%. Dudley Nichols's overlong and redundant text had to be pared down to even this length, a reduction of about one-half, as well as drastically revised in consultation with Hemingway and Maddow. A tactful letter from Ivens to Nichols gallantly accepted responsibility for the initial failure, but Ivens was clearly frustrated by the scriptwriter's cancellation of his on-location collaboration and at not having had a writer in China despite the conviction that this was now indispensable. Among the deletions was some political analysis such as several detailed references to European fascism.[26]

The final version of the text, as Ivens admits, is much more 'descriptive and explanatory' than the commentary for *Spanish Earth*, however, it also retains the broad range of interpretive functions that Hemingway's text had assumed (Ivens, 1969, 180). Among these, Nichols's original tendency to provide a symbolic gloss for the images is preserved, for example focusing on landscape tropes in the images, for example, the superimposition of the remark, 'China is robbed', over an image of a bare tree buffeted in the wind. At the same time, important additions were made, most significantly heighten-

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ing the commentary's personal component. For example, the Li Bo episode is fleshed out and another brief encounter with a dazed refugee wounded by the Japanese is amplified by his personal point of view (the 'grenade' that wounded him becomes 'a thing with a tail shaped like a fish'). Most substantially, the filmmakers sharpened and personalised the character of Sergeant Wang, the internal narrator for the Tai'erzhuang episode. In the first Nichols version, he had been merely 'one of the ten thousand who marched on Tai'erzhuang', but in the final version, he not only has a name, but has become a southerner who comments on the different landscape and agriculture of the northern battle region and inflects the script with his point of view. 'Our flag was on the wall again – Tai'erzhuang was ours', became 'I saw the flag on the walls – we had taken back Tai'erzhuang'.

Nevertheless, these additions could not compensate for the loss of the quality of personal eyewitness testimony Hemingway had achieved in the previous film. Ivens himself might have injected that quality into the film; but, if this occurred to him, he did not depart from his habitual avoidance of appearing in his own work despite the numerous precedents for this in the documentary movement as a whole.[27] As for the narrator's voice, March's conscientious delivery, praised dutifully by every reviewer, perhaps made up in star quality for the lack of personal elements. In short, Nichols and March may have understood the importance Ivens was attaching to the subjectivity of the commentary when he provided a note explaining his conception, but they were powerless to comply: 'You must trust him from the first word he says. You like him. He is asking Goya questions' (Ivens, pencil note on 'Sound picture outline', 20 December 1938, JIA).

An experiment in *Spanish Earth* expanded in *400 Million* was that film's multiplicity of voices within the text. Sergeant Wang, though still somewhat wooden in his final effect as a character, represents an important stage in a gradual proliferation of internal narrators in comparable experiments in documentary films. He and *Spanish Earth*'s Julian were ancestors of a tribe that would become quite visible in the forties, a period in which such challenges to conventional narrators were frequent and imaginative even in mainstream documentary. In *400 Million*, in addition to the Sergeant Wang narrative, there are a number of shorter scenes where the commentator likewise assumes dramatic voices, a dialogue between artillery soldiers finding their range, for example, or the instructions of a guerilla officer. On another occasion, more obtrusively, actors' voices create a soundtrack dramatisation of an enemy general and a radio announcer, soon a racist cliché of wartime filmmaking: over images of Japanese coastal shelling, the general's voice enunciates the enemy strategy, 'If the Chinese cowards resist, we will bomb their cities', and the oily-voiced announcer replies in his broadly caricatured accent ('very sweet', Ivens

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recommended in a note on the découpage), 'Good evening friends in America. Today in Nanjing, the Chinese women welcomed our Japanese army with flowers'.

The effect is heavy irony, for the 'flowers' in question are visualised as artillery explosions. The virtue of discretion was perhaps another lesson of *Spanish Earth* that would be reconsidered the following year, but it was not entirely forgotten. An additional such sequence, even more rhetorical, cut from the original Nichols version, called for a Japanese general's gold-braided sleeve jabbing at a map of Tai'erzhuang, and a voice, intercut with the drone of bombers, hysterically demanding vengeance for the Japanese setback in such terms as

> More terror! (drone, full volume)
> Kill a thousand at a time! (drone)
> What did we learn from Spain?
> From Italy!
> From Germany!
> Destroy Democracy! (drone)

Such devices may have been developed in response to the perception after a preliminary projection for Hellman and Shumlin that the producers, though 'warm and polite', had been expecting 'more excitement and plot action' (Ivens, letter to Nichols, 27 February 1939, JIA).

Less dramatised voices in greater numbers appear less jarringly within several 'newsreel' sequences as vocal coefficient for silently filmed public oratory. The long central sequence about united resistance in modern China has as many as eighteen individual dubbed voices accompanying figures as they appear on the screen, including those of the Jiangs and the anonymous Zhou Enlai. Several are paraphrased in English by the commentator, most memorably the celebrated poet-scholar Guo Moruo at the ceremony in honour of the unknown soldier whose remark is relayed: 'In the old days people said, "Do not use good iron for nails or good sons for soldiers". In these times the best sons become soldiers'.

The multiple textures of the voice-tracks may have contributed to the widespread reaction that the film was sketchy or episodic. Lorentz ([1939] 1975, 165), for one, laid the blame squarely on the commentary. In the eyes of this authority on documentary coherence, the commentary was 'confusing', and 'meander[ed]' from 'newsreel interpretation to symbolism to first person narration', and thus 'did not have a concise and straight design'. A more accurate and supportive assessment would be that the voice-tracks did not solve the film's basic structural problem, but did constitute nonetheless a valiant

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and partly successful endeavour to heighten visually weak portions of the film and to enrich in general its sound-image relationships.

For the score, Ivens turned to his old friend and collaborator, Hanns Eisler, then a political refugee in the US and an ideal candidate to write an anti-fascist score. Ivens was not alone in his high regard for his friend's work. Eisler would soon be immersed in Rockefeller-funded 'theoretical and practical investigations' in the field of film music.[28] However, Eisler's research and his composing practice did not, brilliant as they were, represent future trends at least as far as documentary was concerned. The era when independent musicians were commissioned to compose scores for documentary films and were engaged in theoretical debates about the relationship of music and image were numbered, at least in the US.[29] Musical strategies using concrete sound and the collage of reworked popular sources, pioneered by *Plow*, or scores based on folk themes, would gain the upper hand among more creative documentaries during the 20 years before the arrival of direct cinema – and would even buoy up several of Ivens's lyrical essay films thereafter. The prestige non-objective scores approved of by Eisler's co-author and fellow refugee Theodor Adorno[30] would cede to a progressive minority of films during this period building on the example of *Plow*, of which the Jennings's sound-collages are the most famous. The non-objective score simply did not correspond to the other formal and cultural goals of the Popular Front period.

Ivens and Eisler agreed that the function of music should be 'strengthened' (*verstärken*), and that the combination of Western and Chinese musical elements seemed an intriguing possibility for *400 Million* (Wegner, 1965, 89).[31] As Eisler put it, Ivens had a 'progressive and cooperative attitude' and their working relationship was indeed so close that several sequences were cut to Eisler's music, for example the first bombardment sequence and the dust-storm sequence; on the other hand, the sequence with the children required that the music be cut to fit it. Eisler employed a method in his composition that he claimed he had used only once before:

> After a careful analysis of picture details, a musical form was suggested which gave me the opportunity to change the character of the music without interrupting its flow and logic: the 'theme and variation' form, a method similar in principle to that used by Thomson and Aaron Copland in their scores of the same period. (Eisler, 1947, 8)

For Eisler this method was diametrically opposed to the predominant Hollywood method, the 'leitmotif' method (which he professed to 'detest'), and by which he meant the system that assigns individual characters or themes a distinctive musical 'motif' layered mechanically over their appearances (Eisler,

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1947, 10, 18). In documentary, this method became extremely popular during the war; in the Capra series, for example, scenes dealing with religion would be accompanied by 'religious music', whereas references to France would usually get an echo of 'The Marseillaise' (Bohn, 1968, 180).[32] For *400 Million,* Eisler's 'theme and variations' method meant that a single theme and its variations would 'bring together' sequences dispersed throughout the film with different subjects but with comparable tonal qualities (Ivens, 'List of Sequences for Music', typescript, 8 January 1939, JIA);[33] Eisler (1947, 35) describes this method, also pejoratively, wherein 'waterfalls rustle and sheep bleat' in *Composing for the Films.* There are blunt programmatic tendencies in the scores for both *Man of Aran* and *Triumph of the Will.* For *400 Million*, Ivens suggested that the dust-storm music be thin, shrill, without nuances and rendered with the Chinese instrument, the pipa; 'reconstruction' music was to be energetic, not so shrill, and lyrical in the middle; 'refugee' music was to be driving and sad, 'thin at the end', yet 'warm'. Eisler followed the suggestions more or less closely, though many passages, due to their very 'non-objectivity' in interaction with the commentary, are open to a 'programmatic' reading, particularly some of the battle music and the 'dust-storm' theme. In the editing of the music, several of the tactics anticipated in *Spanish Earth* were applied even more systematically, for example the isolation of a single instrument, violin at one point, to make it stand out as an exceptional element,[34] the play with silence and the withholding or anticipation of the music, modulations of tempo (Ivens, handwritten note, 20 December 1938, JIA), and the 'dovetailing' of music and concrete sound similar to that attempted in the previous film, in this case the dissolve of sound effects into music.

The problem of potential 'misreading' of non-objective elements of the score is symptomatic of Eisler's and other 'intellectual' approaches to film music of the period. The mainstream audiences aimed at, in keeping with Popular Front policy, would seldom have the training to listen to such elements according to conventional musical codes, that is, either as unobtrusive 'background' (in fact this means 'not hearing') or programmatically. Eventually such music, atonal, 'cold', and 'intellectual' acquired codes of its own for the mainstream audience, not unrelated to the stigma of 'serious' or 'educational' documentary already acquired by this time; postwar generations of schoolchildren would learn to associate such music with this stigma.[35] It is undoubtedly for this reason that alternative approaches, such as Jennings', began to seem fresher and more promising during the forties – those that extended, reworked, or 'alienated'[36] already accessible musical codes. Lorentz's use of jazz in *Fight for Life* fits into the first or second of these categories, Thomson's devastating use of the hymn tune over *The River*'s (Lorentz, 1938, USA, 31) sharecropping scene into the last – as did,

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32. *The 400 Million* (1939): Dubbed or paraphrased voices heighten the personal drama, e.g. poet-scholar Guo Moruo declaiming 'In the old days people said, "Do not use good iron for nails or good sons for soldiers". In these times the best sons become soldiers'. DVD frame capture. © CAPI Films, Paris, and Marceline Loridan-Ivens.

of course, Vertov's pioneering 'alienation' of liturgical and Czarist patriotic music in *Enthusiasm*.

The greater success of the Chinese-inspired elements in the score for *400 Million* must also be seen in this light. These elements, a plaintive, unadorned vocal piece over the episode of the refugee's grenade wound, and the pipa solo over the dust-storm sequence, were particularly striking because they appealed to and extended already accessible codes, particularly the code of the 'exotic'. Admittedly, the musical codes denoting the mysterious (and treacherous) Orient were among most ignominious in American film culture: Capra's composers, for example, predictably attached the same menacing 'Oriental' music to virtually every reference to Japan in the *Why We Fight* series. In *400 Million*, however, the Chinese musical elements derive also from 'travelogue' codes, wherein authentic indigenous music functions as part of the documentary text, as it does in *The Song of Ceylon* (Wright, 1935, UK, 38) and most of the films on the Spanish Civil War. These elements are introduced with discretion and restraint (no gongs!), held for appropriate durations, and juxtaposed with other audio-visual elements in non-clichéd relationships. Therefore, they ultimately subvert and dignify the 'exotic' codes that they initially propose. Eisler's score, in sum, though it was considered worthy of a separate rave review in *The New Masses* by the music critic (Sebastian, 1939), was an achievement whose success was as mixed as that of the film as a whole.

As for the sound-effects track, the configuration is even more elaborate than in *Spanish Earth*, with the tendency throughout towards heightened naturalism. Careful studio synthesis and the additional track unobtrusively support the codes of illusion with planes that drone, crowds that cheer, and shells that explode. The classical repertory of synthetic sounds pioneered by Ivens and Van Dongen in the early thirties and as late as *Spanish Earth* is now fully established (Rotha, 1952, 167).

The late release of *400 Million* in March 1939, a point when the basic con-

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tours of the war less than six months away were clear enough, permitted the filmmakers an explicitness in their geopolitical analysis that the earlier Popular Front films had not ventured. Compared to the evasiveness of the earlier films, Nichols's preface does indeed seem bold – it is the first major film to use the vocabulary and themes of the next six years, the terms of 'democracy' vs. fascism and the Axis:

> The war in the Far East is no isolated conflict between China and Japan. [...] On one side, the Japanese military machine, ally of the Rome-Berlin axis, brutal and merciless. On the other side, just as in Europe, the peaceful masses of humanity – victims of fascist attack.
>
> Europe and Asia have become the western and eastern front of the same assault on democracy.

Ivens's editorial juxtaposition of Nazi planes and Italian dead in *Spanish Earth* had been one of the first cinematic denunciations of the Rome-Berlin axis: his condemnation of a Rome-Berlin-Tokyo axis the following year was even more prophetic and clear.

All the same, the film is characterised by many of the same elisions, tensions, and ambiguities as in earlier films, primarily concerning the internal political situation in China and the American stakes in the war. Much of this can be traced to the filmmakers' initial conception of their audience as mainstream uncommitted Americans who might be persuaded to support an anti-Japanese embargo and contribute to the Chinese defence. However, by the spring of 1939 these specific goals were less urgent, having already been largely achieved: by June 1938, 84% of the American public were now opposed to continued export of military materials to Japan; that December saw the finalisation of a major US loan to China; by the time of the film's release, the movement for sanctions was overwhelming, with Roosevelt endeavouring to do away with legislative hindrances to direct support for the Allies and moving towards the abrogation of the US commercial treaty with Japan in July (Dallek, 1979, 194). The filmmakers even decided that it was no longer necessary to retain the word 'quarantine' in the commentary, with its implicit invocation of Roosevelt to legitimise the sanctions campaign.

However, the original 1937 Popular Front orientation can be seen in many other emphases of the film. One such emphasis is the theme of China's cultural heritage, first mentioned in the preface: 'On one side – China – which has enriched the world for 4000 years with its treasures of art and wisdom. [...] China was forced into this war to protect its national independence, its freedom and its precious culture'. A theme that does not have an equivalent in *Spanish Earth* except for one perfunctory scene, the idea of cultural preservation

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becomes prominent in *400 Million.* This was perhaps felt to be a safe emphasis for liberal American audiences, nervous about the Communists and embarrassed by the Guomindang – or in case the plight of 'one-fifth of the world's population' in itself was not enough to justify intervention! The last version of the commentary even adds to the accent on China's philosophical and artistic legacy in Nichols's original text, inserting, for example, a reference to ancient 'artists who could paint the wind'.[37] This emphasis was undoubtedly due in part to the censors' greater willingness to let the filmmakers shoot innocuous cultural monuments than any other subject, the cultural theme thus serving to mask the film's significant lacunae for both filmmakers and censors. Yet, despite these considerations, the 'cultural' theme does function structurally in relation to the other important theme of modernisation. The images often stress the adaptation of ancient traditions to the challenges of contemporary society and the war, for example, in the *mise-en-scène* sequence where ancient Taiji Movements become a military drill.

The 'cultural theme' must also be seen as part of a system of appeals to the preconceptions of the American public, a system that underlines the image of China as the exotic, unknowable 'Other', but at the same time interprets China in American terms, to imply that American values and way of life are threatened by the Japanese aggression. The appeals to American terms are explicit. Sun becomes 'the Washington of their republic'; women college students become 'co-eds just like in America'; soldiers even look like 'football players'. To implicate the American spectator even more in the war, a graphic scene shows scrap metal being loaded for Japan in San Francisco (though the suggestion that it may include 'the Ford you sold last year' was dropped from the final version), and a brief 'newsreel' scene depicts a fundraising parade in New York, where contributions to the Chinese defence are gathered in a huge Chinese flag. Above all, the US media image of the Jiangs is perpetuated in the film, with their westernised aura and their individual charisma accented at close but respectful range.[38] A final appeal, added at the last minute over the penultimate sequence, the second bombardment scene, makes a direct appeal to Americans to abandon their neutrality: 'These are not easy things to look at. But as Americans, we had to see them'.

The spotlight on the Jiangs and the Guomindang in *400 Million* is a chief difference between this film and its influential predecessor *China Strikes Back.* This difference was of course largely a matter of circumstances rather than choice; indeed it is easy to understand the filmmakers' great disappointment at having to replace their intended images of a people's war and a social revolution by images of ministerial and military councils, political hierarchy, and shot/countershot sequences of platform orators addressing uniform masses. As if the images were not enough, the commentary repeatedly reminds the

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spectator that the country is united under the Generalissimo, or that all military responsibility rests on him. The Guomindang propaganda rally in Xi'an, stiffly organised by the project's censors and reluctantly filmed by Ivens, must have seemed a painfully symbolic contrast to the dynamic aura of the group meetings recorded by Dunham in Yanan and included in the earlier film.[39]

Likewise, instead of the people's guerilla army that Dunham had featured and that Ivens had wanted to capture even more thoroughly, *400 Million* concentrated on the Guomindang's conventional army and conventional warfare. Instead of Dunham's images of soldiers interacting with the peasants, the beneficiaries of their campaign, the soldiers of the second film operate more or less in a political void, with their columns of new armored vehicles and tanks that are not seen in battle and their uniforms that are curiously tidy. The commentary's assertion that the soldiers know what they are fighting for is nowhere confirmed in visual terms as similar assertions were in *Spanish Earth* and *China Strikes Back*. To replace the guerilla units that Ivens was prevented from reaching, *mise-en-scène* was used with regular units to evoke a guerilla crossing of the Yellow River and militia fighters being summoned from their plowing; but such scenes, as effective as they are on their own terms, do not have the thoroughness, the concrete sense of actuality, nor the ideological aptness that Ivens had at one time hoped for. Only Ivens's presence at Tai'erzhuang, the sole Chinese victory in 1938, permitted him to salvage his military theme with its images of Chinese confidence and effectiveness, and of Japanese defeat. The only actual combat seen is the successful light arms ambush of a distant Japanese patrol during the build-up to Tai'erzhuang; the patrol is seen scattering from the extreme high-angle vantage-point of the Chinese column that Ivens was accompanying along a mountain trail (shots recycled 50 years later in *Histoire*). The actual battle itself had to be merely implied in the images and narrated on the soundtrack. There is undoubtedly an implied comment on the waging of the war under Jiang's united command in the manner of the film's presentation of Zhu De (Chu Teh), the commander of the Eighth Route Army: a brief subtitled stock shot provides a glimpse of the man and the commentator describes him as 'a general whose headquarters are on the field of battle', before going on to the continued treatment of the generals whose headquarters are in Hankou boardrooms.

The overwhelming control of the shooting of the film by the Guomindang and the obstruction of Ivens's plans for Shanxi shooting obviously dictated a downplaying of the role of the Communists in the United Front, but the extent of the invisibility of the Communist partners goes even beyond what can be accounted for by this. The film demonstrates the same systematic 'self-censorship' as was evidenced in *Spanish Earth* and the Frontier films. The filmmakers permitted a single explicit reference to the Communists, a mention of the

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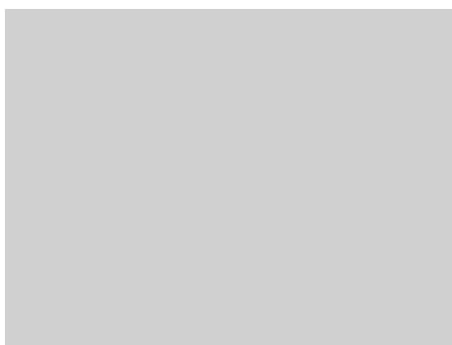
'former Red Army' in the 'Military Council' sequence (in which it would also be possible for a sharp-sighted spectator to pick out a hammer and sickle banner in the background alongside the Guomindang flag). Otherwise, allusions are vague and oblique. In the same sequence, a pensive Zhou Enlai is shown in close-up discussing military strategy, but not identified. At a sequence devoted to the National People's Council, the Communist representatives are shown arriving but they are identified only as 'delegates from the northwest', and guerilla warfare is described as being used especially in the northwest without further details. Another significant omission is the issue of Soviet aid – the 2000-mile road to the northwest is described as the 'lifeline' of China, but the destination of the lifeline is elided. Finally, the text also elides the political affiliation of Soong Ching-ling, whose relationship to the Communists was warm (though ultimately ambiguous), but whom *Camera* describes as believing in a 'socialist future for her country': she is described simply as a brave woman typifying the spirit of the nation, a description that, along with the intercutting of her portrait into the lifeless Xi'an political rally, must surely be read as a vengeful veiled taunt at her archrival younger sister Soong Meiling (Madame Jiang).



33. *The 400 Million* (1939): strategic elisions around the political affiliation of communist ally Soong Ching-ling (left), described simply as a brave woman typifying the spirit of the nation. DVD frame capture. © CAPI Films, Paris, and Marceline Loridan-Ivens.

All of these discreet references constitute a subtext for the specialists in the audience, the informed spectators who would be able to identify Zhou and would know Zhu's and Soong's reputations. Ordinary American spectators however, would not recognise these figures or realise that the 'Special Administrative District' and 'the northwest' were code words for what had been Soviet China until the formation of the United Front. And it was even less likely that they would recognise the 'March of the Volunteers' heard in the film, a film song well known in China for its leftish aura and defiance of Japanese occupation (and eventually as the National Anthem of the People's Repub-

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lic) (Stufkens, personal communication, 2014). For initiated spectators, the intended message of a united China was overridingly, even simplistically clear. The need for political analysis of the basis of that unity was felt to be secondary. Ivens's filmic practice at this point of his career is still definitely shaped by his fear of red-baiting and its possible consequences for theatrical distribution, and by the Popular Front strategy of consolidating a mainstream base through appeals to the non-partisan ideals of 'democracy', 'Americanism', and 'anti-fascism'. It is not surprising that his confident prophecy of an early draft was omitted from the film's final version despite its seemingly innocuous vagueness: 'A democratic republic is coming after the war' (Ivens, *400 Million* commentary, early draft, JIA).

The image of Chinese unity as presented in *400 Million* is much more monolithic than that in *China Strikes Back,* where Communist-Guomindang tensions had been elided only at the last minute in support of the newly established United Front, and where the tension is still legible in the structure of the film and the dichotomy in visual quality between the sections dealing with the two factions. Ivens, on the other hand, presents the United Front as based on a popular consensus and a commonality of interest among all Chinese, minimising regional differences and completely passing over ideological ones. It is an image of an entire society united under the banner portraits of Sun and Jiang, a strong visual motif throughout the film. An earlier inclination at least to acknowledge the tensions within China had been abandoned by the final version. Ivens's early suggestion to Nichols that the commentator 'must mention much interior troubles – not yet united' (Ivens, pencil note on undated final découpage, 'Tabulation of Shots and Footage', 6, JIA) was not pursued nor was the even more specific early idea to admit 'difficulties: inertia of gov't apparatus and pro-Jap elements and Trotskyites' (Ivens, handwritten note, 26 November 1938, JIA). Other references to the varying political elements that had recently formed the anti-Japanese alliance were retained right until the next-to-last version of the commentary and were likely even recorded by March before being dropped: a reference to Guo Moruo's political past as a dissident in exile, a general comment that 'The idea of resistance has united all provinces, all the different parties of China', and a significant detail added to the presentation of the Guomindang general Chen Cheng – 'side by side with his former opponent'. The only hint of previous disunity is an oblique statement that the founder Sun knew that before his ideas would be accepted among the people, there would be 'years of quarreling and even civil war'.

This deceptive impression of monolithic unity is bolstered by the film's structure and geographic reference. Whereas *China Strikes Back* had clearly set Shanxi, the Communist province, apart from the rest of China, Ivens elides for the most part any sense of regional and political-cultural disparity, other than

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a few commentary references to the wheat-growing north and the rice-growing south. He effects this elision by moving back and forth between the areas within or adjacent to Shanxi and the rest of China, not only without acknowledgment but as if to imply full geographic integration. For example, the military council involving the Eighth Route Army is shown and their guerilla tactics are described: what follows is by implication a dramatisation of these tactics (which of course Ivens was not permitted to film), the *mise-en-scène* sequence depicting farmers leaving fields for militia duty. The fields, however, are rice fields and the material was apparently filmed near Hankou on the Yangzi (Yangtze) in central China. The volunteers are shown assembling, and once again there is a sudden, unacknowledged geographical leap with the recruits suddenly appearing in similar formation in Xi'an on the edge of Shanxi, then at drill in the vicinity, and then at manoeuvres back down near Hankou. This blurring of geographical and consequently political distinctions is typical of the film as a whole.

The effect is reinforced by the editing between sequences through which the filmmakers were clearly intent on unifying a film that was scattered and episodic. The directional and kinetic bonds between sequences are often at the expense of expository clarity. The most striking example is the already mentioned subversive intercutting of the Xi'an demonstration and the encounter with Soong, in virtual political exile in Hong Kong, an elision of about 1,000 geographical miles and an even greater political distance.

One reviewer's reaction to the film is symptomatic of a further possible ideological problem with the film: the final victory procession reminded Herman G. Weinberg (1939) of images from Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937, USA, 97), presumably the prologue scenes of frenzied Asiatic mobs from which Ronald Colman and his little band of whites barely escape. Indeed it is certainly questionable whether Ivens's images of Guomindang modernisation and self-reliance are sufficient to offset others of the film's images that reinforce western visual stereotypes of China, namely the newsreel-based civilian bombardment sequences at the start and the conclusion of the film. Weinberg's reaction and the impression of yet another reviewer (Barnes, 1939b) that it was a film of throngs instead of individuals suggest that spectators tended to view such images as an extension of the newsreel conventions of China: suffering hordes and patient starving millions, victimised by warlords, bandits, famines, floods, and earthquakes, sorely in need of Western colonial intervention, missionaries, and relief. Western spectators had surely been immunised against the newsreel overkill use of such images and *Spanish Earth* had recognised this immunisation in avoiding conventional atrocity images. The throngs of traumatised refugees simply fit too easily into the established patterns of perceiving China in the West:

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there was far more pathos in the Li Bo episode with its two solitary figures searching the ruins and its slow understated pans over other isolated victims of the battle – a donkey, two ducks, and a small boy, watched over, through the intervention of the editor, by an angry demon statue. The title of the film itself, and the expression spoken in the commentary 'one-fifth of humanity', were also common phrases, if not clichés, in the popular journalism of the day and had lost their power to impress.

In the balance, despite the overwhelming obstacles that prevented the realisation of the intended film, despite the filmmakers' perceived need to Americanise, simplify, and sanitise the Chinese political situation, and despite the film's ultimately ambiguous stance regarding western preconceptions of China, *400 Million* does succeed in taking certain significant steps forward in terms of the complex political-cultural conjuncture in which it intervened. Throughout the film, there are sequences, such as the Li Bo episode, that mediate and interrupt the dominant exposition, sequences showing resistance in individual and authentic terms to counter 'throng' clichés, or providing a material analysis of Chinese society to counter past travelogue and newsreel views. One example is the sequence where shoe manufacture in the interior cottage industries is shown in close-up detail and linked in visual terms to the construction of new roads and the war effort.[40] In addition, an anti-colonial text is present in the film, which, while discreet, is legible all the same. En route to China, Ivens's ([1939] 1969, 145-149) impressions of Hawaii and Hong Kong heightened his sensitivity to the colonialist overtones of the Chinese war. Though the articulation of these overtones in the commentary appears mild ('She is robbed by Japan and by the western powers without resistance' – the word 'colonial' is deleted from an earlier version), this must be seen as forthright in its context, considering the fact that the 'democracies' whose intervention was being solicited were all major colonialist powers whose concessions in Shanghai had as yet been unaffected by the Japanese occupation. The appeals for Western support of the united Chinese defence, visualised in terms of its own self-reliance and its capacity for victory over the invader through its own power rather than a Western rescue, must also be seen in this light. All the same, Ivens's symbolic gesture of passing his camera onto the Red Army so that cinematic self-reliance would also become a part of the defence against Japan, must ultimately be seen as the most significant anti-colonial statement within, or rather beyond, the text of *400 Million*.

Ivens's evaluation of this film in his letter to Shumlin stressed his work's continuing ultimate relevance, despite the insurmountable problems he had encountered. *400 Million* seems consistent with this stress only in terms of its submission to the Popular Front strategy of 'self-censorship' within

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mainstream anti-fascist alliances. At the same time, *400 Million* through its elisions, structural flaws, subtexts, and overstatements, foregrounds the contradictions of this strategy more than any other Popular Front film. The following August, only five months after the film's release, the Nazi-Soviet pact was to bring those contradictions into even sharper focus.

Meanwhile, the commercial career of the film was a disappointment to Ivens and the History Today group, though their hopes had not been as high as with *Spanish Earth*, almost two years earlier. The overshadowing of the release by the events taking place in Europe was reflected in the distribution arrangements. Herbert Kline's *Crisis*, a well-timed chronicle of the disintegration of Czechoslovakia following Munich, not only appeared the same week, but secured the prestigious art house where *Spanish Earth* had premiered, the Fifty-fifth Street Playhouse, leaving the Ivens film to share the double bill at the Cameo, the customary ghetto showcase for Soviet and left films, with an obscure Soviet feature, *Bogataya Nevesta* (*The Country Bride*, Ivan Pyryev, 1937, 98).[41] *Crisis* also got the better of the comparisons that the reviewers were inevitably prompted to make – even the *New Masses* reviewer (R.T. 1932) found *400 Million* 'not half so brilliant as *Crisis*', in its content-oriented coverage.

Despite a top-price Hollywood premiere the same month, followed by a party at Miriam Hopkins's,[42] Ivens seemed further than ever from his goal of mass distribution. *Variety* reported that the audience was composed primarily of Chinese and sympathisers. The New York showplace soon shifted downtown to be closer to this audience (to the small rooftop Roosevelt at Second Avenue and Houston). At the Los Angeles press conference, Ivens bravely repeated his conviction that the documentary should be a part of regular theatre fare (*Motion Picture Herald* 1939), and right after the outbreak of war in Europe he optimistically wrote that he had reached two million spectators (Stufkens, 2008, 250). But by this time, it was already clear that the film's most important distribution was on the non-theatrical circuit, as had usually been the case with Frontier and other political films for the previous decade. Marginal theatrical distribution prevailed in Europe also, because of censor problems that had been surprisingly absent in the US. In France, G.L. George prepared a French version for an encouraging July premiere through *Ciné-Liberté,* but censors delayed the release there as well as in London until after the outbreak of war, at which point the Pacific arena held little interest for audiences faced with more pressing preoccupations closer to home.[43]

Though it had been the extraordinary topicality of *Spanish Earth* and *China Strikes Back* that had apparently guaranteed their theatrical splash, this logic now appeared vulnerable; it now seemed that semi-journalistic topicality was an inadequate means of securing reliable commercial distribution for

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independent filmmakers, simply because the world situation was capable of changing so rapidly that even newsreels could scarcely keep apace, not to mention documentaries. It was a lesson that few political filmmakers realised or could afford to realise throughout the ensuing war when the principle of topicality would continuously guarantee a prominent place for documentaries on Allied theatre screens.

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