

*To see and show the world in the name of the worldwide proletarian revolution*—that is the most basic formula of the kinoks.

1924

## The Birth of Kino-Eye

It began early in life. With the writing of fantastic novels (*The Iron Hand, Uprising in Mexico*). With short essays ("Whaling," "Fishing"). With long poems (*Masha*). With epigrams and satirical verse ("Purishkevich," "The Girl with Freckles"). It then turned into an enthusiasm for editing shorthand records, gramophone recordings. Into a special interest in the possibility of documentary sound recording. Into experiments in recording, with words and letters, the noise of a waterfall, the sounds of a lumbermill, etc. And one day in the spring of 1918 . . . returning from a train station. There lingered in my ears the sighs and rumble of the departing train . . . someone's swearing . . . a kiss . . . someone's exclamation . . . laughter, a whistle, voices, the ringing of the station bell, the puffing of the locomotive . . . whispers, cries, farewells. . . . And thoughts while walking: I must get a piece of equipment that won't describe, but will record, photograph these sounds. Otherwise it's impossible to organize, edit them. They rush past, like time. But the movie camera perhaps? Record the visible. . . . Organize not the audible, but the visible world. Perhaps that's the way out?

Just then—a meeting with Mikhail Koltsov, who offered me work in cinema. At no. 7 Mal'yi Gnezdnikovskiy Lane I begin work on *Kinonedelia*. But this is initial training. It's far from what I'm after. After

**Mikhail Koltsov.** A Soviet writer and journalist, Mikhail Koltsov (1898–1942) joined the staff of *Pravda* in 1922, publishing a satirical column for many years in that newspaper. He also served as editor of the journal *Ogonek* and worked in cinema during the first postrevolutionary years. He fought in the Spanish Civil War and published a *Spanish Diary* based on his experiences. Arrested during the purges of the late 1930s, he was executed in prison.

**no. 7 Mal'yi Gnezdnikovskiy Lane.** The address of the newsreel section of the Cinema Committee of the People's Commissariat of Education. Vertov began work here in the spring of 1918. It was during the move to this location that he made a leap from another building, across roof tops, filmed in slow motion and later projected. In his account of that incident and of its central importance, he says, "Didn't recognize my face on the screen. My

all, the eye of the microscope penetrates where the eye of my movie camera cannot. The eye of the telescope reaches distant worlds, inaccessible to my naked eye. What about the camera then? What's its role in my assault on the visible world?

Thoughts about kino-eye. It arises as high-speed eye. Later on, the concept of kino-eye is expanded:

kino-eye as cinema-analysis,  
 kino-eye as the "theory of intervals,"  
 kino-eye as the theory of relativity on the screen, etc.

I abolish the usual sixteen frames per second. Together with rapid filming, animation filming and filming with a moving camera, etc. are considered ordinary filming techniques.

Kino-eye is understood as "that which the eye doesn't see,"  
 as the microscope and telescope of time,  
 as the negative of time,  
 as the possibility of seeing without limits and distances,  
 as the remote control of movie cameras,  
 as tele-eye,  
 as X-ray eye,  
 as "life caught unawares," etc., etc.

All these different formulations were mutually complementary since implied in kino-eye were:

all cinematic means,  
 all cinematic inventions,  
 all methods and means that might serve to reveal and show the truth.

Not kino-eye for its own sake, but truth through the means and possibilities of film-eye, i.e., *kinopravda* ["film-truth"].

Not "filming life unawares" for the sake of the "unaware," but in order to show people without masks, without makeup, to catch them through the eye of the camera in a moment when they are not acting, to read their thoughts, laid bare by the camera.

Kino-eye as the possibility of making the invisible visible, the unclear clear, the hidden manifest, the disguised overt, the acted nonacted; making falsehood into truth.

Kino-eye as the union of science with newsreel to further the

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thoughts were revealed on my face—hesitation, vacillation, firmness (a struggle within myself), and again, the joy of victory. First thought of the kino-eye as a world perceived without a mask, as a world of naked truth (truth cannot be hidden)"—trans. and ed.

battle for the communist decoding of the world, as an attempt to show the truth on the screen—Film-truth.

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## On *Kinopravda*

*Kinopravda* is, on the one hand, linked to the old type of newsreel. On the other hand, it is the present-day organ of the kinoks. I shall have to examine both these aspects in my report.

After the October Revolution, the Pathé and Gaumont newsreels and the newsreels of the Skobelev Committee were replaced by *Kinonedelia*, issued by the All-Russian Photo-Cinema Department.

*Kinonedelia* differed from the newsreels which preceded it perhaps only in that its subtitles were "Soviet." The subject matter remained the same, the same old parades and funerals. These were precisely the years when, still unfamiliar with the techniques of cinema, I began to work in cinema. By that time, despite its youth, cinema had already established unshakeable clichés, outside of which you were not allowed to work. My first experiments in assembling chance film clippings into more or less "harmonious" montage groups belong to this period.

It seemed to me then that one such experiment was a complete success, and for the first time I began to doubt the necessity of a literary connection between individual visual elements spliced together. I had to halt the experiment temporarily to work on a picture for the anniversary of the October Revolution.

This work served as the point of departure for *Kinopravda*. It was precisely during this period of experiment that several of us who had lost faith in the possibilities of "artistic" cinema and had faith in our own strength, sketched the first draft of the manifesto that later caused such commotion and brought our cinema-apostles so many unpleasant moments.

**Skobelev Committee.** Originally founded as an agency to assist veterans of the Russo-Japanese War, the Skobelev Committee established a Military Film Section in 1914. The Committee survived the Revolution and fell under the control of the Ministry of Education under the provisional government, producing short documentary films and becoming an agent of propaganda for the regime. It was later controlled by the Moscow City Soviet and produced short agitation films—ed.