

The newsreel should feed on reality, and, given the slightest economic freedom, it will immediately open wide its eyes, triumph as well in art (whose creative growth is now stronger than ever before), and be supported by the broad, gesticulating throng of workers, bringing that throng closer to the iron rhythm of advancing—crawling, driven, and flying—machines.

Hundreds of thousands, millions of citizens of the RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic]—uneducated or simply hiding from the noisy advance of "today"—will have to sharpen their senses before the shining screen of Cinema.

1922

## **Kinoks: A Revolution**

### **(From an Appeal at the Beginning of 1922)**

You—filmmakers, you directors and artists with nothing to do, all you confused cameramen and writers scattered throughout the world,

You—theater audiences, patient as mules beneath the burden of the emotional experiences offered you,

You—impatient proprietors of theaters not yet bankrupt, greedily snatching at leftovers from the German, or more rarely, the American table—

You—exhausted by memories, await with dreamy sighs the moon of some new six-act production (nervous folk are requested to shut their eyes).

You're waiting for something that will not come; the wait is pointless.

A friendly warning:

Don't hide your heads like ostriches.

Raise your eyes,

Look around you—

There!

It's obvious to me

as to any child

The innards,

the guts of strong sensations

are tumbling out  
of cinema's belly,  
ripped open on the reef of revolution.  
See them dragging along,  
leaving a bloody trail on the earth  
that quivers with horror and disgust.  
It's all over.

**(From a Stenographic Record)  
To the Council of Three—Dziga Vertov**

Psychological, detective, satirical, travel film—it doesn't matter what kind—if we cut out all the themes, leaving only the captions, we get the picture's literary skeleton. We can shoot other themes to go with that literary skeleton—realist, symbolist, expressionist—what have you. This situation will not change. The correlation is the same: a literary skeleton plus film-illustrations—such, almost without exception, are all films, ours and those from abroad.

**The Council of Three.** A policy-making group drawn from the kinoks, Vertov's staff of collaborators. The Council articulated Vertov's projects and imperatives through published statements and manifestos. The group is generally assumed to have been composed of Vertov, Mikhail Kaufman, his chief cameraman and brother, and Elizaveta Svilova, Vertov's editor and wife. Georges Sadoul, in his *Histoire générale du cinéma: L'art muet*, vol. 5 (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1975), lists in addition the painter, Belyaev—ed.

**Elizaveta Svilova** (1900–1976), Vertov's wife and lifelong collaborator, began her career in film as a photographic printer and editor for Pathé Frères in Moscow, also working for other foreign film companies represented in tsarist Russia. In 1919 she participated in the nationalization of the film industry and in 1921 began work on a long-term project of collecting all available film material on Lenin. From the results of the first year's research she made a compilation film, released in 1922 in celebration of the anniversary of Lenin's birth as a special issue of the Goskino Kalendar series. From 1922 to 1924, she was chief editor for Goskino, the state film production agency. Svilova was a creative collaborator and chief editor for some of Vertov's major work. She acted as co-director on four of Vertov's later films, made during the 1920s. She worked as Assistant Director in the Mezhrabpom Studios at VUFKU, and finally, from 1940 to 1941, acted as the director of Soiuzkinokhronika. In 1944 and 1945 she directed the Central State Studio of Documentary Film. Her filmography lists a great many directorial assignments. She is an outstanding example of the interesting development and realization of careers for women in a cinematic tradition which was grounded in an aesthetically innovative and politically revolutionary era—ed.

**(From an Appeal of January 20, 1923)  
To Cinematographers—The Council of Three**

Five seething years of universal daring have passed through you and gone, leaving no trace. You keep prerevolutionary "artistic" models hanging like ikons within you, and it is to them alone that your inner piety has been directed. Foreign countries support you in your errors, sending to a renewed Russia the imperishable relics of film-drama done up in splendid, technical sauce.

Spring arrives. The film-factories are expected to resume work. The Council of Three observes with unconcealed regret film production workers leafing through literary texts in search of suitable dramatizations. Names of theatrical dramas and epics proposed for adaptation are already in the air. In the Ukraine, and here in Moscow, several pictures with all the signs of impotence are already in production.

A strong technological lag; a loss of active thinking, lost during a period of idleness; an orientation toward the six-act psychodrama—i.e., an orientation toward what's behind you—all these factors doom each attempt [at adaptation] to failure. Cinema's system is poisoned with the terrible toxin of routine. We demand the opportunity to test the antidote we've found upon its dying body. We ask the unbelievers to see for themselves: we agree to test our medicine beforehand on "guinea pigs"—film études . . .

**The Resolution of the Council of Three, April 10, 1923**

The situation on the film front must be considered inauspicious.

As was to be expected, the first new Russian productions shown recall the old "artistic" models just as Nepmen recall the old bourgeoisie.

**"artistic".** In Russian, the fictional, narrative film is designated *artistic* in contrast to *documentary*—trans.

**Nepmen, NEP.** NEP is the acronym of the New Economic Policy instituted in 1921 after the period of War Communism with a view to stimulating the economy of the Soviet Union. The policy's emphasis on market demand and market requirements involved making concessions to private agriculture and reordering many aspects of the country's industrialization. It created, as well, a class of middlemen to organize the exchange between urban and village production and consumption. The "Nepman's" speculative ventures involving quick, high profits are often alluded to by Vertov in his castigation of the effects of a revival of bourgeois norms and practices within the film industry—ed.

The repertoire planned for summer production, both here and in the Ukraine, does not inspire the least confidence.

The proposals for broad experimental work have been passed over.

All efforts, sighs, tears, and expectations, all prayers—are directed toward it—the six-act film-drama.

Therefore the Council of Three without waiting for the kinoks to be assigned work and ignoring the latter's desire to realize their own projects, are temporarily disregarding authorship rights and resolve to immediately publish for general use the common principles and slogans of the future revolution-through-newsreel; for which purpose, first and foremost, kinok Dziga Vertov is directed, in accordance with party discipline, to publish certain excerpts from the pamphlet *Kinoks: A Revolution*, which shall sufficiently clarify the nature of that revolution.

### **The Council of Three**

In fulfillment of the resolution of the Council of Three on April 10 of this year, I am publishing the following excerpts:

1

Upon observing the films that have arrived from America and the West and taking into account available information on work and artistic experimentation at home and abroad, I arrive at the following conclusion:

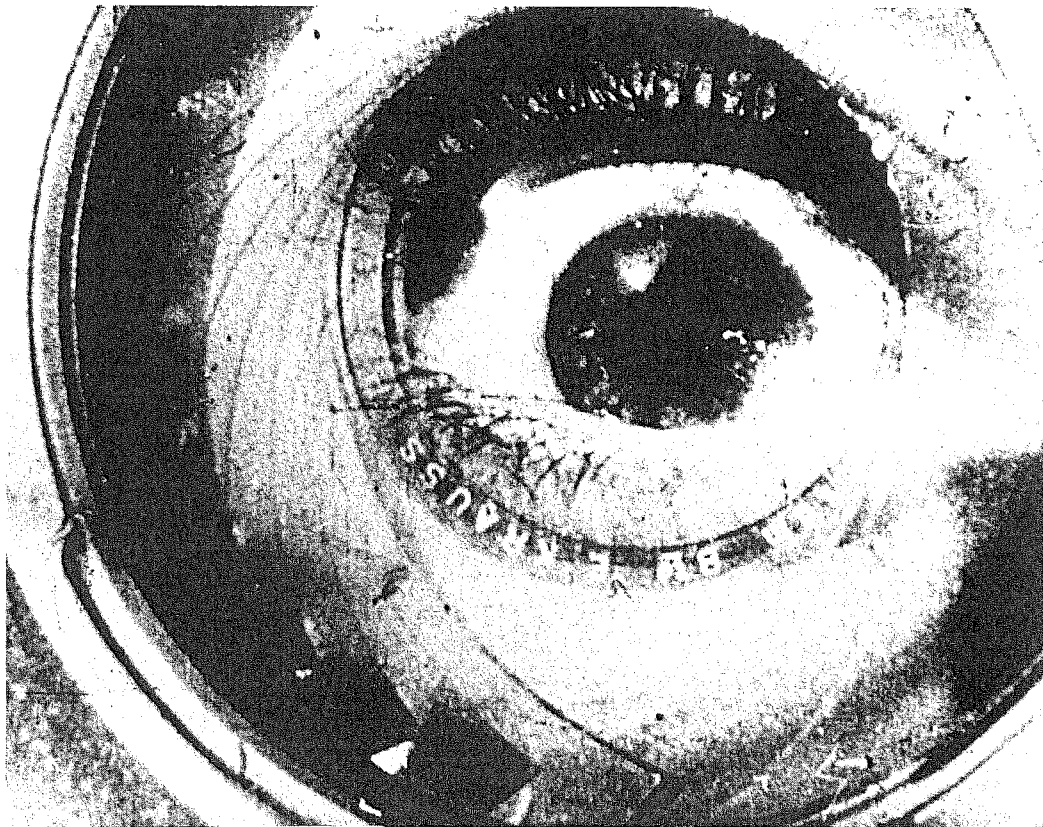
The death sentence passed in 1919 by the kinoks on all films, with no exceptions, holds for the present as well. The most scrupulous examination does not reveal a single film, a single artistic experiment, properly directed to the emancipation of the camera, which is reduced to a state of pitiable slavery, of subordination to the imperfections and the shortsightedness of the human eye.

We do not object to cinema's undermining of literature and the theater; we wholly approve of the use of cinema in every branch of knowledge, but we define these functions as accessory, as secondary offshots of cinema.

The main and essential thing is:

The sensory exploration of the world through film.

We therefore take as the point of departure the use of the



*The Man with a Movie Camera*

camera as a kino-eye, more perfect than the human eye, for the exploration of the chaos of visual phenomena that fills space.

The kino-eye lives and moves in time and space; it gathers and records impressions in a manner wholly different from that of the human eye. The position of our bodies while observing or our perception of a certain number of features of a visual phenomenon in a given instant are by no means obligatory limitations for the camera which, since it is perfected, perceives more and better.

We cannot improve the making of our eyes, but we can endlessly perfect the camera.

Until now many a cameraman has been criticized for having filmed a running horse moving with unnatural slowness on the screen (rapid cranking of the camera)—or for the opposite, a tractor plowing a field too swiftly (slow cranking of the camera), and the like.

These are chance occurrences, of course, but we are preparing a system, a deliberate system of such occurrences, a system of

seeming irregularities to investigate and organize phenomena.

Until now, we have violated the movie camera and forced it to copy the work of our eye. And the better the copy, the better the shooting was thought to be. Starting today we are liberating the camera and making it work in the opposite direction—away from copying.

The weakness of the human eye is manifest. We affirm the kino-eye, discovering within the chaos of movement the result of the kino-eye's own movement; we affirm the kino-eye with its own dimensions of time and space, growing in strength and potential to the point of self-affirmation.

2

I make the viewer see in the manner best suited to my presentation of this or that visual phenomenon. The eye submits to the will of the camera and is directed by it to those successive points of the action that, most succinctly and vividly, bring the film phrase to the height or depth of resolution.

Example: shooting a boxing match, not from the point of view of a spectator present, but shooting the successive movements (the blows) of the contenders.

Example: the filming of a group of dancers, not from the point of view of a spectator sitting in the auditorium with a ballet on the stage before him.

After all, the spectator at a ballet follows, in confusion, now the combined group of dancers, now random individual figures, now someone's legs—a series of scattered perceptions, different for each spectator.

One can't present this to the film viewer. A system of successive movements requires the filming of dancers or boxers in the order of their actions, one after another . . . by forceful transfer of the viewer's eye to the successive details that must be seen.

The camera "carries" the film viewer's eyes from arms to legs, from legs to eyes and so on, in the most advantageous sequence, and organizes the details into an orderly montage study.

3

You're walking down a Chicago street today in 1923, but I make you greet Comrade Volodarsky, walking down a Petrograd street in

1918, and he returns your greeting.

Another example: the coffins of national heroes are lowered into the grave (shot in Astrakhan in 1918); the grave is filled in (Kronstadt, 1921); cannon salute (Petrograd, 1920); memorial service, hats are removed (Moscow, 1922)—such things go together, even with thankless footage not specifically shot for this purpose (cf. *Kinopravda* no. 13). The montage of crowds and of machines greeting Comrade Lenin (*Kinopravda* no. 14), filmed in different places at different times, belongs to this category.

I am kino-eye. I am a builder. I have placed you, whom I've created today, in an extraordinary room which did not exist until just now when I also created it. In this room there are twelve walls shot by me in various parts of the world. In bringing together shots of walls and details, I've managed to arrange them in an order that is pleasing and to construct with intervals, correctly, a film-phrase which is the room.

I am kino-eye, I create a man more perfect than Adam, I create thousands of different people in accordance with preliminary blueprints and diagrams of different kinds.

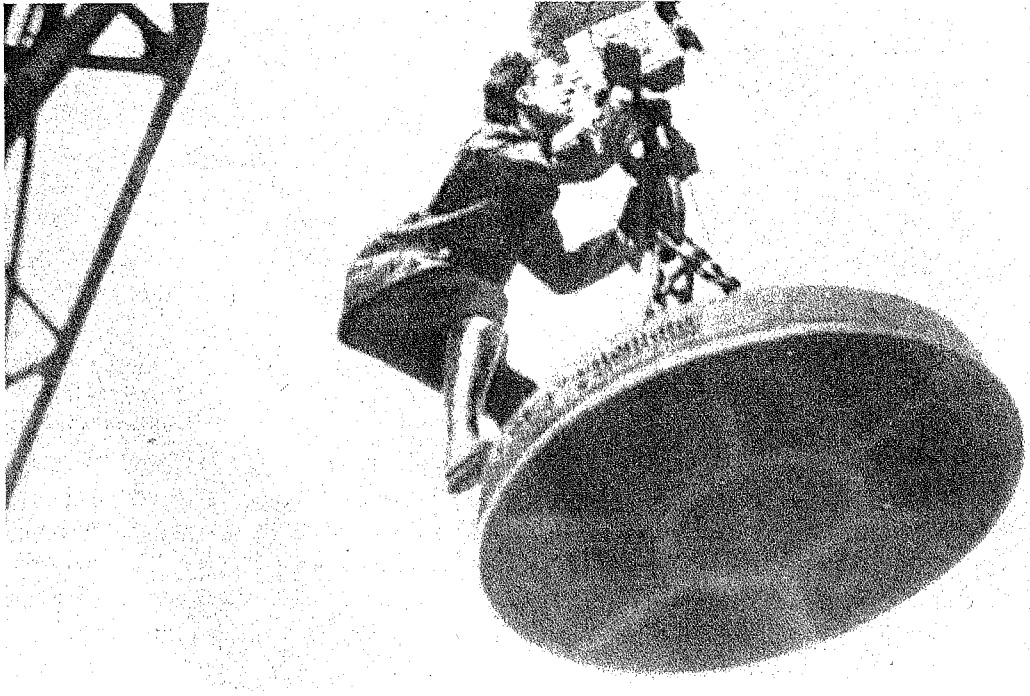
I am kino-eye.

From one person I take the hands, the strongest and most dexterous; from another I take the legs, the swiftest and most shapely; from a third, the most beautiful and expressive head—and through montage I create a new, perfect man.

I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it.

Now and forever, I free myself from human immobility, I am in constant motion, I draw near, then away from objects, I crawl under, I climb onto them. I move apace with the muzzle of a galloping horse, I plunge full speed into a crowd, I outstrip running soldiers, I fall on my back, I ascend with an airplane, I plunge and soar together with plunging and soaring bodies. Now I, a camera, fling myself along their resultant, maneuvering in the chaos of movement, recording movement, starting with movements composed of the most complex combinations.

Freed from the rule of sixteen–seventeen frames per second,



Mikhail Kaufman

free of the limits of time and space, I put together any given points in the universe, no matter where I've recorded them.

My path leads to the creation of a fresh perception of the world. I decipher in a new way a world unknown to you.

5

Once more let us agree: the eye and the ear. The ear does not spy, the eye does not eavesdrop.

Separation of functions.

Radio-ear—the montage "I hear!"

Kino-eye—the montage "I see!"

There you have it, citizens, for the first time: instead of music, painting, theater, cinematography, and other castrated outpourings.

Within the chaos of movements, running past, away, running into and colliding—the eye, all by itself, enters life.

A day of visual impressions has passed. How is one to construct the impressions of the day into an effective whole, a visual study? If one films everything the eye has seen, the result, of course, will be a jumble. If one skillfully edits what's been photographed, the result will





Mikhail Kaufman

be clearer. If one scraps bothersome waste, it will be better still. One obtains an organized memo of the ordinary eye's impressions.

The mechanical eye, the camera, rejecting the human eye as crib sheet, gropes its way through the chaos of visual events, letting itself be drawn or repelled by movement, probing, as it goes, the path of its own movement. It experiments, distending time, dissecting movement, or, in contrary fashion, absorbing time within itself, swallowing years, thus schematizing processes of long duration inaccessible to the normal eye.

Aiding the machine-eye is the kinok-pilot, who not only controls the camera's movements, but entrusts himself to it during experiments in space. And at a later time the kinok-engineer, with remote control of cameras.

The result of this concerted action of the liberated and perfected camera and the strategic brain of man directing, observing, and gauging—the presentation of even the most ordinary things will take on an exceptionally fresh and interesting aspect.

How many people, starved for spectacles, are wearing away the seats of their pants in theaters?

They flee from the humdrum, from the "prose" of life. And mean-

while the theater is almost always just a lousy imitation of that same life, plus an idiotic conglomerate of balletic affectation, musical squeaks, tricks of lighting, stage sets (from daubs to constructivism), and occasionally the work of a talented writer distorted by all that nonsense. Certain masters of the theater are destroying the theater from within, shattering old forms, and advancing new slogans for theatrical work; to further their rescue they've enlisted biomechanics (in itself a worthy pursuit), and cinema (honor and glory to it), and writers (not bad in themselves), and constructions (there are some good ones), and automobiles (how can one not admire the automobile?), and gunfire (something dangerous and impressive at the front); and by and large not a damned thing comes of it.

Theater and nothing more.

Not only is this no synthesis; it's not even a legitimate mixture.

And it cannot be otherwise.

We kinoks, as firm opponents of premature synthesis ("For synthesis must come at the summit of achievement!"), understand that it's pointless to mix scraps of achievement: the little ones will immediately perish from overcrowding and disorder. And in general—

The arena's small. Come out, please, into life.

This is where we work—we, the masters of vision, the organizers of visible life, armed with the omnipresent kino-eye. This is where the masters of word and sound, the most skillful editors of audible life, work. And I make bold to slip them the ubiquitous mechanical ear and megaphone—the radiotelephone.

This is:

newsreel,

radio-news.

I promise to drum up a parade of kinoks on Red Square on the day when the futurists release the first issue of a radio-news montage.

Not the newsreels from Pathé or Gaumont (newspaper chronicle), not even *Kinopravda* (political newsreel), but a real kinok newsreel—an impetuous survey of visual events deciphered by the camera, bits of real energy (as opposed to theater) joined through intervals into a tectonic whole by the great craft of montage.

Such structuring of the film-object enables one to develop any given theme, be it comic, tragic, one of special effects, or some other type.

It's entirely a question of the particular juxtaposition of visual details, of intervals.

The unusual flexibility of montage construction enables one to introduce into a film study any given motif—political, economic, or other. And therefore:

- As of now, neither psychological nor detective dramas are needed in cinema,
- As of now, theatrical productions transferred to film are no longer needed,
- As of now, neither Dostoyevsky nor Nat Pinkerton are to be put on the screen.
- Everything is included in the new conception of the newsreel. Into the jumble of life resolutely enter:

1. kino-eye, challenging the human eye's visual representation of the world and offering its own "I see," and
2. the kinok-editor, organizing the minutes of the life-structure seen *this way* for the first time.

1923

## On the Organization of a Film Experiment Station

The film office and editorial staff of *Kinopravda* are being eliminated. A small nucleus of workers, united by inner discipline, is being formed—the first film experiment station.

By organized work, the agency aims to break through the front of despair caused by idleness, among other factors, if only on one sector of this front—that of the newsreel and of experimentation. In addition, experimentation is also to be regarded as a kind of ferment that involves interested colleagues in intensive cooperation—a method that is tried and true.

Prospects for the future (a high objective): an institute for continuous invention and perfection, a stake in the worldwide quality of production, the cinema-lighthouse of the USSR.

Let those inclined to smile take note: the higher the objective, the



# KINO-EYE

THE WRITINGS OF DZIGA VERTOV

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

**Annette Michelson**

TRANSLATED BY

**Kevin O'Brien**

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