

**LINES**  
**OF**

**RESISTANCE**

**DZIGA VERTOV**  
**AND THE TWENTIES**

Edited and with an Introduction by  
**Yuri Tsivian**

LE GIORNATE  
DEL CINEMA  
MUTO









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AND THE TWENTIES**

*Edited and with an Introduction by*

**YURI TSIVIAN**

*Russian texts translated by*

**JULIAN GRAFFY**

*Filmographic and biographical research*

**ALEKSANDR DERIABIN**

*Co-Researchers*

**OKSANA SARKISOVA**

**SARAH KELLER**

**THERESA SCANDIFFIO**

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*To the memory of Nikolai Abramov, Vertov studies pioneer*



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Yuri Tsivian

## DZIGA VERTOV AND HIS TIME



This book is a selection of texts by Vertov, on Vertov, or related to Vertov, most of them written or taken down at different points in the 1920s – the decade of Vertov’s *Sturm und Drang*. There are two ways in which a student of Vertov can profit from a selection like this. One (obvious) is that it offers a variety of views on Vertov’s work from within his own epoch; the other, that it helps to explain various things about Vertov’s films and life, and it is this other – more ambitious – goal that I wanted to highlight in the book’s title. Its key word – resistance – comes from a 1928 review of Vertov’s film *The Eleventh Year* (*Odinnadtsatyi*)<sup>1</sup> penned by his friend and supporter Mikhail Koltsov.<sup>2</sup> The review starts off by saying that no movie by Vertov can be explained without it being seen as a point in his overall path, and without keeping in mind that this path always follows the line of greatest resistance. The resistance that Vertov’s films must always overcome, the review says, is triple: one, resentful film industry; two, unconcerned public; plus – Koltsov adds patronizingly – Vertov’s eternal tendency to alienate both by way of peppering his films with meaningless technical tricks. Though not as critically specific as Koltsov’s, the image this book borrows from his essay retains his (more general) sense of seeing the course of Vertov’s career as a line defined by the resistance of time – just as the resistance of the air is said to be needed to keep birds and gliders airborne.

It is with an eye to presenting this course as a complex result of various lines of resistance that the second part of my title is phrased *Dziga Vertov and the Twenties* (rather than *in the Twenties*). I want the two to be seen as juxtaposed, rather than blended in one picture. The “Twenties” this book is aimed at is not a timeframe, or context, of Vertov’s work, but its active environment, a set of 1920s-specific conditions, or, better, a system of period pressures – critical pressures, artistic or bureaucratic ones, production-caused, distribution-related, and such. To visualize the effect of these pressures on the cinema of Vertov, imagine, as Koltsov did, this cinema not as a succession of more or less isolated films, but as a single movie, continuously evolving (Vertov was the first to say this in his speech at the *Kinocs* meeting, translated in chapter 19 of this book). To plot the trajectory of this ongoing movie as it snakes its way from 1919 (the year of Vertov’s first film manifesto) to 1929 (his last silent film), taking, now and then, the shape of such and such a film – the *Kino-Pravdas*, *A Sixth Part of the World* (*Shestaia chast mira*), or *Man with a Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kinoapparatom*) – while remaining, at other times, as active and dangerous in the form of Vertov’s public appearances, his provocative manifestos, and his inevitably venomous “letters to the editor” tilted at a particularly troublesome critic, we must know not only its impetus – the Kino-Eye programme – but also the terrain: the obstacles which Vertov encountered, and the opportunities he took advantage of. In other words, if our goal is to explain Vertov

historically, we must (to smuggle another term from a different field) study the ecology of his time. If this is the goal, this collection of documents from the 1920s brings it one step closer.

### Vertov and Titling

One gain from such a larger view of Vertov's time, with its many currents and pressures – press pressures, for instance, or currents of thought (like Marxism), and currents in art (Futurism, Constructivism) – is that it makes simple things more complex and more dynamic. Ask this seemingly simple question: what was Vertov's attitude towards titling? The ready answer would be to cite Vertov's own statement from the beginning of *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), in which he declares this film “an experiment in cinematic communication”, which speaks to the viewer “without the aid of sets or actors”, without a scenario, and (here it comes) “without the aid of intertitles” – but it is exactly here that we must watch our step. To identify Vertov's attitude to titles with what he says in this little manifesto (for that is what it is, a thumbnail manifesto on celluloid) would mean to rob his work of its historical complexity, and this very manifesto of its spearhead impact. No 1929 filmgoer familiar with Vertov's earlier movies (or writings) would have been surprised to learn that *Man with a Movie Camera*, too, renounced actors, scenarios, and sets, but to learn that in his new film Vertov did without titling was a different matter, a stunt, a calculated surprise, since earlier, expressive titles were known to have been Vertov's favourite tool.

To account for this unexpected tack – towards titling, away from it – one needs to be able to step back to take in a larger view, and this is exactly where this book can prove useful. *Man with a Movie Camera* will not yield much unless we look at the films made before it, and neither will these films if they remain cut off from their surroundings. We need to start from 1922-24 – the period during which Vertov's filmmaking acquires a palpably experimental bent, asking whether perhaps some of the experiments he staged in these early films had something to do with what was happening in other arts at the time. Here two chapters of this book will be of help. Chapter 1 documents Vertov's exercises in Futurist poetry (of which later), chapter 3 his stake and interest in Constructivist art – two currents young Vertov tapped for new ideas for films.

Among Vertov's friends of that time (whose names you will encounter more than once on the pages of this book) are two very visible figures within the Constructivist movement. One of them was Aleksei Gan, an experimentally minded book designer (or book constructor, as he preferred to be called) and self-appointed theorist, whose loud book/manifesto *Konstruktivizm* (1922) was less admired for its hasty and confusingly phrased slogans than it was for the then-groundbreaking typographic contrivances (various fonts, sizes, and eccentric layout) which Gan used in order to make these slogans dash, dance, and jump off the page. Gan was also known for his interest in film (he even made one, apparently a disaster) and photography, and at one stage was instrumental to Vertov's career as the editor-in-chief of the short-lived but important Constructivist journal *Kino-fot* (1922-23), in which Vertov's first manifesto, an

interview, and a few little essays appeared – as well as Gan’s reviews of Vertov’s films, written in a Constructivist spirit.

The other friend, Aleksandr Rodchenko, though not a book designer like Gan, had his own reasons to be interested in printed letters. Involved in a leapfrog race, like many a young artist in that time-lapse era, Rodchenko had gone from figurative to non-figurative painting, then to the rejection of painting altogether (outlawed in 1921 by the Constructivist group to whose core Rodchenko belonged), and was experimenting with collages (juxtaposing texts and pictures cut out from illustrated weeklies) when it occurred to him (or to Vertov) to try his hand at constructing intertitles for Vertov’s films – a collaborative process which took root, and would remain for four years a bridge between Vertov’s filmmaking and modern art. This collaboration was not merely practical (*Kino-Pravda* needs intertitles, so why don’t I offer this paid job to a friend?),

but also creative, as we can judge from the steady flow of Rodchenko-induced innovations. Varying font sizes was one, of course, but also so-called “lit titles” (cut out from pasteboard cards, covered by tissue paper, and lit from behind; see fig. 1) and “moving titles” (lit titles gradually covered and uncovered). By 1924 titling was first on Rodchenko’s list of truly Constructivist occupations.<sup>3</sup> For a Constructivist, to work in this technically advanced field (as cinema was regarded in the early 1920s), dealing with simple, regular, geometrically defined objects (the Constructivist idea of the best font) was a matter of pride, not of price, and it is not by chance that Aleksei Gan’s review of *Kino-Pravda No. 13* (the text of which is included in chapter 3, both in English translation and facsimile reproduction) recreates typographically the effect of one of Rodchenko’s titles – the huge screen-size name LENIN – praising it as the most powerful moment of the film.

So much for the typeface of Vertov’s titles – this face was Rodchenko-made, recognizably Constructivist.<sup>4</sup> As for their peculiar wording, it grew from Vertov’s weakness for poetry, about which I must say a few words before discussing its link with Vertov’s titling. All his life, Vertov wrote poems (which to his credit he never attempted to publish), for the most part imitative of Russian Futurist poetry (primarily by Vladimir Mayakovsky) and of Russian translations from Walt Whitman. Some of these exercises are mere curios; others add bits and pieces to our knowledge of Vertov the filmmaker. One poem included in this volume – entitled “Dziga Vertov”, dated 1920 – gives an



1. *Kino-Pravda No. 21* (1924). “The Proletariat reaches out to peasantry to ensure the victory over the exploiters.” This intertitle employs the font often used for Constructivist posters and book covers, and plays with word sizes in the same way.

idea (if any of it comes across in translation) of various lexical and phonetic associations nested in his Futurist-inspired pen name: something jiggling, vortical, revolving, revolutionary. Another poem – as asyntactic and eccentric, for this was what Futurist poetics required – called “Tick-Tock”, is included in this book as a sample of the young Vertov’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* aspirations, or, as we would say today, of Vertov’s attempts to think of poetry in multimedia terms. The poem as such (that is, such as it is preserved among Vertov’s papers) features a strange room in which pieces of furniture – the table, the chairs – begin to behave like naughty puppies, in which the grandfather’s tick-tock clock is trying to bark, and the lamp that hangs from the ceiling is wagging its “one-eyed pendulum”. Such, more or less, is this room as we find it in Vertov’s 1920 notebook of poems. As we now learn from another source – a later reminiscence by cinematographer Aleksandr Lemberg (1898-1974), a member of Vertov’s *Kinoc* group – it was not to his notebook alone that Vertov confided this peculiar fancy. It so happened that in the early 1920s Vertov (who then had no place of his own to live in Moscow) was lodging in Lemberg’s apartment. One day, Lemberg remembered, he came home to discover that

Vertov had covered the apartment – the walls and the ceiling – with a thick layer of soot. Imagine the parquet floor, and pitch-black darkness above it. The black walls were all covered with clocks painted in chalk, with their hands all showing different times. Each clock had a pendulum painted under its face, and these pendulums, too, were arrested in different positions, as if captured in swing. I did not like this at all. Vertov took pains to convince me that I just was not getting it, the room was his masterpiece. Can’t you see how the black paint creates the effect of infinite space stretching in all four directions?, he asked. And the clock-faces are a poem! Poem, I asked? Recite it. All right, listen: tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock...<sup>5</sup>

Even as cursory as this book makes it, an acquaintance with Vertov’s poetry gives a new perspective on his manner of titling, with its (somewhat similar) tendency to combine words and images in a peculiar bi-media antiphony (as in the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*), which often comes in sustained periods replete with parallelisms and repetitions, as is the case in *A Sixth Part of the World*. At one point in his life Vertov was thinking of writing a long poem with the curt, sonorous, and slightly Whitmanesque title *Vizhu* (“I can see”, in Russian), of which only the prologue survives. If it is true that the rest of this poem was not lost, but, as I fancy, never written, this could have been because whatever energy would have fuelled the poem was re-routed to writing the titles for *A Sixth Part*. It is with an eye to showing this poetic affinity that this book uses the old pedagogical trick of writing out this film’s titles line by line on a sheet of paper, which makes the result look more or less like a coherent poem with a pantheist touch reminiscent of Whitman.

But the main point of this book, its prime target, is not Vertov's films, but Vertov's time, the opinionated 1920s. This was the decade during which "Do films need intertitles?" became an increasingly polarizing question, so no wonder Vertov got into cross-fire. Quite a range of opinion on this subject is to be found in the section that brings together contemporary reviews of *A Sixth Part of the World*, among whose authors you will find both those who said this film was an enormous leap into the future, and those – like Viktor Shklovsky – who perceived in its titling technique a relapse into the era when a humdrum lecturer was needed to explain every image that flashed across the screen: "When they give us an intertitle, 'The child sucks at the breast', and then show us the child, sucking at the breast, I realize that they have turned us back towards lantern slides."<sup>6</sup>

Still, a sort of feedback loops films to their critics, and in this sense – to return to the point made earlier – this book is also about Vertov's films, or, more exactly, about the behaviour of his films in response to their environment. It is not so much in order to learn more about *A Sixth Part of the World* that we need to know how different people responded to the ample number of titles in this film, as it is in order to understand the impetus behind and the impact of the title-less *Man with a Movie Camera*. It might be hard to imagine all the possible reasons that could have made Vertov go from one extreme to the other, but one thing is certain: it was not because he yielded to critical pressures, or came to realize that, after all, some of his critics may be right. Rather, the opposite is true: the path from *A Sixth Part* to *Man with a Movie Camera* was what Koltsov might call the line of utmost resistance. No sooner had the film-poet's mantle been bestowed upon him than Vertov began struggling out of it – even if ridding his subsequent movies of poetic titling was, as we have seen, tantamount to denouncing something that had become very much his own. I can almost see the sly glint in Vertov's eyes as he answers that (apparently often asked) question at a public discussion of *Man with a Movie Camera* in Kharkov: "How come you, who are so in favour of emotional (*pateticheskikh*) titles, suddenly made *Man with a Movie Camera* – a film without words or titles?" Vertov's answer was, "No, I am not in favour of emotional titles, not in favour of titles at all – all this has been invented by certain critics!"<sup>7</sup> There is little Vertov enjoyed more than picking a quarrel.

### Vertov versus Eisenstein

Vertov was an incredibly quarrelsome character. In the film press, his clash with Eisenstein reached the dimensions of the then-famous quarrel between Tatlin and Malevich (and might even have been styled after it). The coverage of attacks and counterattacks found in the main body of this book is ample enough for me not to bother recapping them in this introduction. Instead, let me adumbrate a biographical framework, and explain some Soviet-specific (and 1920s-specific) concepts and terms used by our combatants in their verbal duel.

Biographically, this duel was underpinned by emotions the likes of which had, in the past, caused many a deadlier one – as Naum Kleiman's commentary upon an autobio-

graphical note found among Eisenstein's papers cautiously suggests.<sup>8</sup> The note, dated 2 December 1943, refers to spring-summer 1922 – the earliest documented contact between Eisenstein and Vertov. Its autobiographical character notwithstanding, this note was not meant purely as memoir: it was found among Eisenstein's drafts for a book of theory entitled *Metod* (Method), an ambitious treatise that occupied Eisenstein's mind throughout the 1930s and '40s.

A few words about the train of thought that brought Eisenstein from theory to a little episode of, it would seem, exclusively personal character. The subject of *Metod* (the book was never completed) was to be art's impact on the human psyche, traced across all arts and, more or less, across all epochs. Eisenstein was convinced that even though in its progress from cave drawings to modern movies art has grown infinitely more complex than it initially was, its fundamental nature – its "method" – is always levelled at what Eisenstein believed to be pre-logical, magical, totemic, and suchlike structures dormant in every brain, ancient or modern.

The name Vertov, and a love triangle (or a love polygon, as Kleiman more accurately terms it) which he and Eisenstein (according to the latter) were part of in 1922, surfaced in Eisenstein's memory as he was rummaging for tell-tale tantrums of primitive mentality that illustrate the emotional – or "sensuous" – energy lurking in animal imagery (in this case, horse symbolism). As Eisenstein's story goes, in those days both he and Vertov were in love with Agnia Kasatkina, Eisenstein's co-student at Meyerhold's Theatre Workshop ("Agnia – *the first I slept with*"),<sup>9</sup> as was Eisenstein's friend, future Left-Front art theorist Boris Arvatov – a situation which Eisenstein claims clever Agnia was quick to take advantage of to stir up his (Eisenstein's) sense of jealousy. Vertov, however, appears in this reminiscence merely apropos: the main reason why this autobiographical anecdote remained alive in Eisenstein's memory – and why it surfaced in the course of his 1943 philosophical reflection – was his response to the image of Agnia in a riding hall (horseback riding being a class all Meyerhold students were required to take), cuddling her horse with what Eisenstein thought was more than a rider's affection ("Agnia, *weaving into one pattern Arvatov, Vertov, myself, and a big, big white... stallion*").<sup>10</sup>

We may never learn to what extent, if at all, Vertov was aware of these amorous games, and whether Eisenstein's jealousy was at that time reciprocated. The following spring, for instance, we find him helping Eisenstein (who had never dealt with film before) to shoot a short to be inserted later in Eisenstein's stage production (and, by the same token, in Vertov's own *Spring Kino-Pravda*). The battle began with Vertov's public attack on *Strike* (*Stachka*, 1925) – Eisenstein's first feature, which some critics regarded as the first truly proletarian movie – and continued through 1927 as a series of mutual attempts to play down what we might nowadays call the avant-garde edge of each other's work. To make it easier for the reader to assess the rhetorical force of the punches the sides exchanged, and get an idea of the strategy behind them, let me conjure a few ghosts from the political jargon of the past.

The term "opportunist", which Dziga Vertov deployed to pin down *Strike*, was then

a negative-only label that political revolutionaries (and, after October 1917, revolutionary politicians) used against the less radical ones among their kind. *Kino-Menshevik*, in Bolshevik party parlance (and, in our case, in Vertov's), carried the same connotation as "opportunist", even if originally *Mensheviks* (meaning, literally, "minoritists") was the name adopted by a faction of members who disagreed with the Lenin-led majority – the *Bolsheviks* – at the 1903 Russian Socialist Worker Party Congress. The "Living Church" epithet assigned to Eisenstein's work in Vertov's 1925 essay "Kino-Eye on *Strike*" (see chapter 8 of this book) may be a harder one to understand, as not too many people nowadays would have heard of this short-lived reformist movement within the Russian Orthodox Church, which sought a middle ground between Christian religion and Communist ideology.

And so on. But Eisenstein was quite a politico himself. He countered by saying that for 1927 Vertov's radicalism looked ridiculous: born in the epoch of *Wartime Communism* (the term used to refer to the drastic economic measures implemented by Lenin's government during the civil war between 1918 and 1920) and tailored to its needs, the *Kino-Eye*, he wrote, remains blind to the fact that these Red-or-White years are gone, and that now, for better or for worse, we all live in the epoch of the *NEP* (the more tolerant *New Economic Policy*, which Lenin proclaimed in his effort to revive the economy by means of re-legalizing small businesses and reverting to money as its regulating factor). All of which meant that proletarian cinema, too, must grow as flexible and *dialectic* (the term which political leaders – Lenin included – used to justify what otherwise might look like sheer opportunism). And so on.

Publicly, the polemic calmed down around 1927, but we do find Vertov-related afterthoughts in Eisenstein's later writings. It so happened that 20 years later – a whole epoch later, both in the history of film and in the political history of Soviet Russia – Eisenstein returned to his long-forgotten controversy with Vertov apropos yet another essay he was contemplating for his treatise on art, *Metod*. The task he set himself in this essay was more serious by far than its brash title, "Praise of Newsreel" (alluding, of course, to Erasmus's "Praise of Folly"), might suggest. One aspect of Eisenstein's grandiose theoretical project of the 1940s (connected, in this particular case, with the curriculum he was asked to work out as film studies professor at VGIK)<sup>11</sup> was to contextualize the history of cinema by presenting its course as a rerun, in microcosm, of the larger history of art (something which Eisenstein, with his weakness for scientific analogies, termed the isomorphism of the ontogenetic [film] and the phylogenetic [art] levels of art's evolution). Some parts of this study, like the amazing "History of the Close-Up", are more or less complete, while others are more or less drafts. "Praise of Newsreel" (a draft) is a curious attempt to define what areas of art history correlate to (what we now call) documentary cinema. There are two correlative points, Eisenstein's essay claims, both to be found at the very beginnings of art, one in the Paleolithic, and another in the Neolithic period. It is worth taking a minute here to trace Eisenstein's line of argument, for it does end up with him conceptualizing Vertov's cinema in these rather unusual anthropological terms.

According to Eisenstein's history of art, in the beginning was the imprint, and the delight of the caveman observing his hand impressed in the sand or his shadow cast upon a rock. This delight of depiction is something that relates the Paleolithic caveman to the Lumière brothers, with their delight at having photographs move, Eisenstein continues. But it was not until primitive man stepped back to discover the print of his palm or the contour of the shadow he managed to outline with whatever he found to hand, that we can talk of the beginnings of art, for it is exactly this gap, this narrow clearance, this incongruence between the depiction and the depicted, that, in Eisenstein's theory, gives birth to the *image* – the germ of future art. And it is then that the hand imprint and the contour on the rock suddenly acquire a life of their own, metamorphosing into the magical (mystical, awe-inspiring) cult object, or into the orderly ornaments found on Neolithic pottery. The Kino-Eye movies, whose formal perfection Eisenstein always admired, with their visual rhymes, their metric montage, and their reliance on parallels and repetitions, were, in his view, an amazing example of ornamental cinema, Neolithic cinema, the cinema that sealed off the era of the Lumières and opened the gates Vertov himself stopped short of entering – for there still remained, Eisenstein reminds us, some ground for the artist to cover before acquiring the kind of control over images that I had, Eisenstein writes, as I was making *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potemkin*). Therefore, "Praise of Newsreel" concludes, in cinematic evolution "newsreels of the Kino-Eye type play a transitional role replicating *exactly* the role that the ornament played in the transition from rock paintings to painting proper."<sup>12</sup>

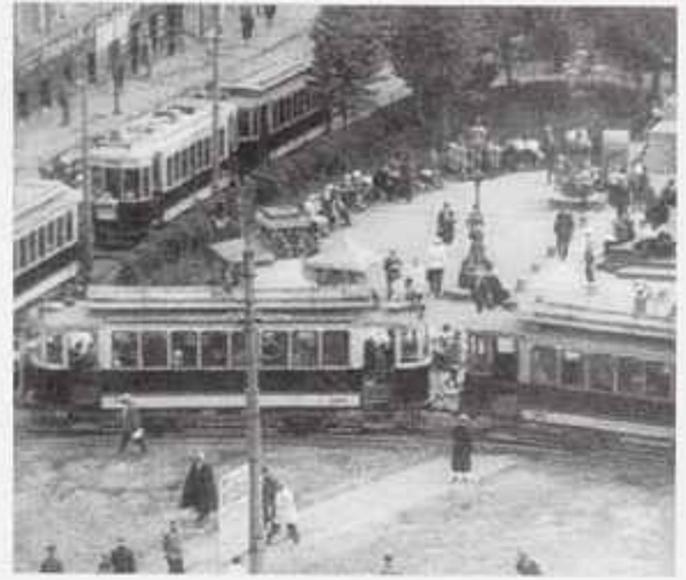
My reason for this detour into the maze of Eisenstein's thought is to highlight its contrast with Vertov's. For Eisenstein, art was an essential condition of human society, its inalienable asset, and, if we asked him, off the record, the only thing about human society he cared for (even if – it is true – during the brief period of his association with the Proletkult Eisenstein did partake of the art-denying spirit this movement then professed). In this Eisenstein was similar to his one-time close friend (and the only modern painter we know Eisenstein to have genuinely admired), Kazimir Malevich, the proponent of art as a supreme form of human existence. On the other hand, each time the word "art" was mentioned – be it with regard to film, or art in general – Vertov took the stand of an inveterate nihilist, as did Vladimir Tatlin, and, to various degrees, many Constructivist artists and designers Vertov and his *kinocs* sided with. Art, he might counter (had he read the things Eisenstein wrote in his "Praise of Newsreel"), becomes otiose in a society where everyone works, and will be banished from such a future republic, where the only form of art will be the art of the artisan. Art, he would add, may have been there from the dawn of humankind – all the worse for humankind, if, as you say, from the outset art was reduced by the exploiters to petty pottery patterns, or worse, used as an object of worship, in order, no doubt, to fool the exploited and divert them from their plight. Your art is no more than a lie, as are your "images", and, like religion, art is (to use Vertov's favourite phrase) the opiate of the people. Not of Eisenstein's philosophical ken, Vertov instead was actually a better Marxist than Eisenstein, and often a better Marxist than Marx.

## Vertov and Marxism

The goal of divorcing films from literature which Vertov relentlessly pursued was complemented by no less manifest intentions to wed them to science – social as much as natural, which in Vertov's frame of reference was the same as saying that cinema must become Marxist. As plain as daylight when stated in words, this point becomes harder to grasp when we ask what Marxism is, conceived in filmic terms. A few examples pertaining to the field called Marxist political economy will help us to get a general idea.

It is not very likely that Vertov would have had the time and patience it takes to read through *Das Kapital*, but whether he did or not, some sequences in his films demand to be viewed in the context of Marx's book and its specific style of economic analysis. In the Soviet Union of the 1920s one did not need to study Marx to get a sense of Marx's train of thought: a public lecture or a popular brochure (there was no shortage of either) would be enough to get its gist across. I will now piece together three examples from three films to show that Vertov's attempts to implant Marxism to film have one thing in common: each was, in effect, conceived as a brief public lecture of this kind, only delivered by means of silent film. I will start with the latest of the three, the 1929 *Man with a Movie Camera*, leap back to the 1924 *Kino-Eye*, move ahead to the 1928 *The Eleventh Year*, and then return to *Man with a Movie Camera* for a closing comment. This line of argument may not be the straightest one to follow, but for a reason which I hope will become evident as it unfolds, in this particular case it serves my purpose better than would a more chronological one.

The example from *Man with a Movie Camera* is more tentative than the other two. It is a brief segment of the second reel consisting of three consecutive shots. Shot one is a high-angle view of a crowded street corner (fig. 2); shot two is a factory chimney observed from a low-angle camera set-up (fig. 3); and shot three (fig. 4) is a close shot showing a worker with a shovel. Imagine for a moment a future film historian who has found these three shots in an archive, and that this fragment is all that survives (God forbid!) from Vertov's famous film. What inferences can our imaginary historian make about this succession of



2. *Man with a Movie Camera*. A high-angle view of a city square.



3. *Man with a Movie Camera*. A low-angle view of a chimney.



4. *Man with a Movie Camera*. A close-up of a worker.

random-looking shots? Apparently, this depends (to use the behaviourist term much in vogue among Left-wing artists and art theorists of the 1920s) on the viewer's mind-set (*ustanovka*) – that is, on our mind's ability to posit a feasible space that would accommodate all three. There are (to continue reasoning in convenient triads) three possible spaces one can come up with in our case. First, the space of narration: assuming they were part of a narrative movie, our three shots – a street, a chimney, a worker – could easily pass for a sequence introducing a story about so-and-so, employed at such and such a factory in this particular city. Secondly, this could be the ill-defined geographical space of the type often evoked in city-symphony films – to which genre, broadly speaking, *Man with a Movie Camera* belongs. I am certain that, asked what they made of this sequence, people familiar with Vertov's work would most likely categorize it as one of his "Kino-Eye races" (*probeg kinoglaza*) across such and such facets of the city – a perfectly plausible assumption, since such "races" were, indeed, Vertov's favoured technique (issue no. 19 of his *Kino-Pravda* is even named *A Movie Camera Race Moscow – Arctic Ocean* [*Probeg kinoapparata Moskva – Ledovitii okean*], and *A Sixth Part of the World* is, of course, nothing less than a six-reel camera race).

Thirdly, the space in which the filmmaker might have wanted the viewer to link these shots could be neither narrative, nor geographical, but a conceptual (or mental, or, to recall the term from Eisenstein's film theory, "intellectual") space – in other words, the space of the mind *par excellence*. To prove this, let us put aside *Man with a Movie Camera* for a moment, and look at "intellectual sequences" in Vertov's earlier films. But first – what made Vertov (and, for that matter, Eisenstein, for here the two antagonists were of one mind) recognize the possibility (which we know proved more wishful than real) of linking visible facts in that invisible space, the mind-space – and how exactly did he envision those facts to be patched?

Here we need to return to Vertov's rejection of literature in favour of science. Clearly, this was another way of saying that fact, not fiction, is cinema's true subject matter, but the analogy with science stretched beyond that – in Vertov's view the mission of cinema was not to present facts, but to explain them. Explain, but how? The very way in which a scientist ties facts together – something for the film editor to study – is different from a writer's ways of spinning plots. Even when they lead us along the same path, the mind of the analyst and the hand of the storyteller move in two opposite directions. Typical stories take us from causes to effects; typical explanations, from effects to causes. For instance, as I write this, my pen operates in the explanatory mode: I began with an opaque description of an obscure sequence from *Man with a Movie Camera*, and am presently moving backwards in time, as it were, towards its whys and wherefores, until the causes (Vertov's sources and intentions) behind it begin to shine through, making the sequence in question more transparent. (Conversely, were I writing Vertov's literary biography, its course would have been chronologically straighter.) As we relate things, we look ahead; as we explain them, we move backwards.

This was something that cinema could do with ease – perhaps with a greater ease than was proper to the momentous nature of such a task. It may not be immediately

evident (at least, it was not to Vertov's contemporaries) that it was the knowledge of causes – *Causarum cognitio*, to recall the lofty motto that solemn Latin ascribes to the grave-faced Muse of Philosophy – that Vertov pursued in some of his most seemingly light tricks. Eisenstein may have had his reasons to shrug off Vertov's technical games with space and time – like making things suddenly freeze or roll backwards – as “news-reel follies”, but, to be fair, he should have been the first to recognize the philosophical nature of these follies, for Vertov's folly, much like Eisenstein's own, was driven by the urge to transform the physical space-time of the film into the open space of thought. *Spaces* of thought, to be more exact, since many different spaces could be constructed for mental time-travel in films. Eisenstein's famous sequence “Gods”, from the 1928 *October (Oktiabr)*, for instance, goes back in time, god by god, from a Baroque crucifix to a shamanic log-god (tracing the essence of religion from complex forms to a primitive cult). Eisenstein's method here is much the same as that which he would use in his theoretical treatise *Metod*, in speaking about the origins of art.

Now, back to Vertov. Distinct from Eisenstein's, the space which Vertov's intellectual editing explores is the space of political economy. One such sequence is found in Vertov's 1924 *Kino-Eye*. This six-reel feature chronicles various activities of a “Pioneer unit” (Pioneers: a politicized Soviet version of Boy/Girl Scouts) during the spring-summer of 1924. At one point a few of them arrive at a Moscow market where *kulaks* (a derogatory term for richer family farmers tolerated by Lenin's New Economic Policy but not by people like Vertov or his Young Pioneers) sell their produce, and where two Pioneers are shown posting leaflets agitating against buying it. Among the buyers the *Kino-Eye* picks out a woman (who happens to be the mother of one of the Pioneers) who has come to buy a piece of meat. Wrong move: working people should buy meat from the workers' co-op. To correct her mistake, the *Kino-Eye* is compelled to reverse time: the shopper's progress is frozen in mid-movement, and she starts walking backwards – away from the marketplace, heading (back first) towards a gate with the sign “The First Red Supermarket of the Co-operative of the Handicapped”.

It is at this moment that the woman's reverse progress in physical time transforms into a Marxist object lesson. Why is shopping at the Red Supermarket better than buying the same piece of meat at the market? This has something to do with its quality, or sanitary control, or prices, our consumer instinct prompts us. Wrong answer. The true nature of meat, as of any commodity (Marxism teaches us), is defined not by qualities inherent in the end-product, but by the character of the labour involved in its production. In a country such as this (Vertov takes over), with two competing economies, meat can be either Capitalist or Socialist, even if the two pieces taste exactly alike. *Causarum cognitio*: to choose the right piece, the conscious shopper must look into its causes – collective or private farming, large-scale or cottage food industry, and so on.

The collective production of food by the combined efforts of the countryside and the city – this, or something like it, must have been the syllabus behind the reverse-bound sequence of backwards-moving shots, which show the piece of beef sitting on the counter of the co-op store being undone, stage by stage, until it is finally the bull it once was.



5



6



7



8

Here is the list of constituent shots (or brief shot-clusters), in order of appearance, with intertitles shown in capital letters:

CINEMA-EYE MOVES TIME BACKWARDS. Delivery carts driven by horses walking backwards are carrying packages with meat from the supermarket back to the cold storehouse.

WHAT 20 MINUTES AGO WAS A BULL. Inside the storehouse large chunks of meat are shown being railed away, rocking slightly (fig. 5).

WE GIVE THE BULL BACK HIS ENTRAILS. A slaughterhouse worker un-rips the bull's innards.

WE DRESS THE BULL IN HIS SKIN. Skinning in reverse.

THE BULL COMES BACK TO LIFE. Slaying in reverse, followed by a knife being whetted.

IN THE STOCKYARD. A bull's head, looking at the camera (fig. 6). More bulls and cows.

IN THE RAILROAD CARS. A bull gets on a cattle train, back first (fig. 7). The train takes the cattle back to the countryside.

BACK TO THE HERDS. The countryside. Plenty of livestock grazing; closer shots of individual cows (fig. 8).

At this point, it should not take too long to unravel the riddle of the sequence with the street, the chimney, and the worker from *Man with a Movie Camera*, for, as some less patient readers may have already guessed, it too belongs to the genre of Marxian economy excursions. I now need to fill in only a few details concerning the specifics of Soviet economic geography in the 1920s. With Lenin's blessing – immortalized in his famous political equation "Communism equals Soviet power plus the electrification (*elektrifikatsia*) of the entire country" – electricity was widely

seen as Russia's shortcut to the promised future. But if electricity was the source of modern life, what were the sources of electricity? Hydroelectric plants like the one shown in the second half of *Man with a Movie Camera* were the obvious answer, but there were also less spectacular but no less useful affairs, thermoelectric plants fuelled by coal extracted in the Ukraine, and it was this geo-economic connectedness that Vertov chose as a subject for another visual lecture about the hidden causes of things (even if visually this one was not as effective as making a live bull out of a piece of steak).

*Man with a Movie Camera* was not the first film in which Vertov tried to connect, inside the viewer's mind, the production of coal – the economic cause – with its economic effect: the production of electricity. In *The Eleventh Year* he tried to do this by cross-cutting shots taken in a coal pit (fig. 9) with some showing aerial conductors (fig. 10) – five times, back and forth, c-e-c-e-c. The three-shot sequence from *Man with a Movie Camera*

5-8. *Kino-Eye*. Beef in the slaughterhouse; beef becomes a bull; bulls returning home; back home, bulls and cows graze.

is both shorter and longer: shorter in terms of footage, longer in terms of the argument Vertov tries to get across. It connects three facts, not two: the fact of all these trams in the city centre running happily (fig. 2), the fact of coal being burned somewhere to generate electricity from heat (fig. 3), and, thirdly, the fact that somewhere else – thousands of miles away – a Ukrainian miner is working a seam of coal to make all this happen (note a sudden touch of intimacy between here and there: as he is being filmed, the faraway miner pauses to look up and smile – fig. 11).

This about sums it up, but let me add that for all their conceptual similarity there is also a notable difference between the three sequences we have just discussed. This difference, to use a favourite little phrase of Vertov (and Eisenstein), is not in what, but in how. What all three exemplify is that, early on, the ambition of Vertov's cinema becomes not to show, but to think – that is, to disclose invisible connections between things. The difference – the how – is in the speed. That the beef-to-bull lecture from *Kino-Eye* looks somewhat pedestrian today is because its editing does not stand comparison with *Man with a Movie Camera*, which moves with the proverbial celerity of thought.

Thought, not vision, was the ultimate subject of *Man with a Movie Camera*, as we read in Vertov's last manifesto of the 1920s, which he wanted to publish in *Pravda* shortly before this movie was scheduled for release:

From the montage of visible facts which are noted down on film (Kino-Eye) to the montage of visible-audible facts which are transmissible by radio (Radio-Eye).

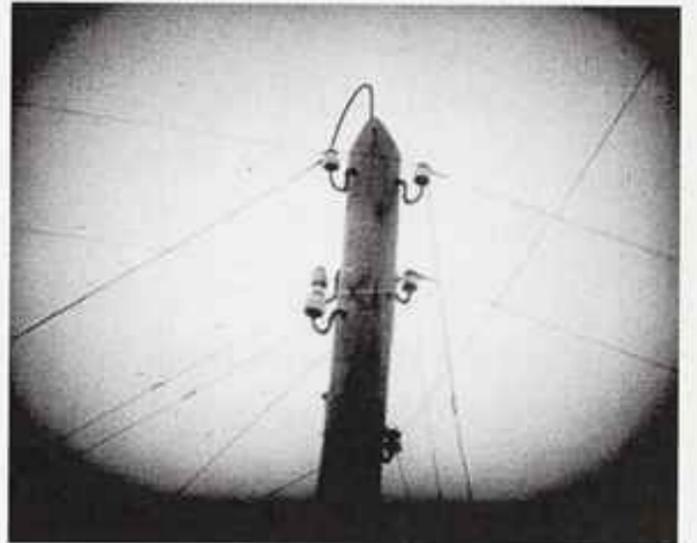
To the montage simultaneously of visible-audible-tangible-olfactory and so on facts – to the filming unawares of human thoughts, and, finally –

to the greatest experiments in the direct organization of the thoughts (and consequently of the actions) of all humanity – such are the technical perspectives of Kino-Eye, summoned to life by October.<sup>13</sup>

Sadly, but not surprisingly, *Pravda* declined Vertov's manifesto. The pretext was that its language was too



9. *The Eleventh Year*. A coal mine in the Ukraine.



10. *The Eleventh Year*. Electricity: the product of a mine in the Ukraine.



11. *Man with a Movie Camera*. If not for this Ukrainian miner, the film we are watching could not be projected.

technical for the general reader to understand, but the real truth was that it was too bombastic for the official Communist Party newspaper to espouse. *Pravda* had always supported Vertov, and would continue doing so in the future, but did he think his Kino-Eye was going to organize the thoughts and actions of all humanity? Coincidentally, it was around the same time that Eisenstein came up with his no less fantastic proposal to make a movie based on Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. It may have been that after filling a notebook with notes he simply ran out of interesting ideas as to how to realize it, but according to a credible though undocumented theory (which comes down to us via Naum Kleiman, who was told it by Eisenstein's widow Pera Atasheva), it was Stalin who stopped the project, with one of his characteristically curt remarks, "*S uma soshel'*" ("He is out of his mind"). The end of the 1920s was the dawn of the Stalinist era, in which everyone was supposed to know his place: filmmakers should make movies, and leave Marxism to the politicians.

### Celluloid Manifesto

But ink and paper were not, after all, the only support Dziga Vertov could use to make his plans known to the public: celluloid – the filmmaker's native support – could also be used for this purpose. This was exactly the means to which Vertov resorted when he learned that the manifesto quoted above had been rejected by *Pravda*. He took the beginning of it (a few opening lines), had it printed on title cards, and inserted it at the beginning of *Man with a Movie Camera* (fig. 12). While one cannot deny that this was an effective (if partial) solution, I don't think this alone would have satisfied someone like Vertov: to use intertitles to condemn the use of intertitles had about it shades of failing to live up to one's own standards. But again, words are not the only means of conveying thought: there were other, less straightforward and less word-dependent ways of making a movie proclaim its own programme, and in this sense not just the opening section, but also the rest of *Man with a Movie Camera*, can be called a manifesto written in celluloid.

In other words, there are things and images in Vertov's movies that are meant to be

read, not just seen. However, spotting those moments and reading those images may not be quite as easy as he thought. Not easy for us, which is understandable: a man of his epoch, Vertov often relied on his epoch's topical emblems, and as a rule topical emblems do not have much of a chance of withstanding the currents of time. Not easy for Vertov's contemporaries, either, for as the reviews the reader will find in this book will often reveal, most people were ill-prepared (or plainly unwilling) to attend to the screen with an eye as quick and a mind as open as Vertov thought his films deserved. Given

ЭТА ЭКСПЕРИМЕНТАЛЬНАЯ  
РАБОТА НАПРАВЛЕНА  
К СОЗДАНИЮ ПОДЛИННО  
МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО  
АБСОЛЮТНОГО ЯЗЫКА  
КИНО НА ОСНОВЕ ЕГО  
ПОЛНОГО ОТДЕЛЕНИЯ  
ОТ ЯЗЫКА ТЕАТРА  
И ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ.

THIS EXPERIMENTAL WORK AIMS AT  
CREATING A TRULY INTERNATIONAL  
ABSOLUTE LANGUAGE

12. *Man with a Movie Camera*. The introductory title.

this, I find it germane to a book concerned with the press polemic around Vertov if I conclude my introductory remarks by looking at those instances in Vertov's movies when the movie itself attempts to behave polemically.

Here it makes sense to begin with an early and relatively simple example. I take it from *Stride, Soviet!* (*Shagai, Soviet!*), the 1926 six-reel feature commissioned by the City Council of Moscow (called the Moscow Soviet, hence the film's title) in order to popularize this municipal body's achievements over the previous six years or so. It is hard to tell



13. *Stride, Soviet!* Make-shift furnace heated by burning books.

whose idea it was, Vertov's or the commissioners', but it was decided that the bulk of the film's material should be organized around that proven promotional formula, "before and after". The "before" would be the civil war years (the two or three years of hardships and desolation following the October 1917 Revolution), the "after", Moscow today. For whatever reason (it could be, for instance, the dearth of found footage), Vertov opted for shooting the "before" scenes anew. Now, there was nothing exceptional in this kind of solution: bits and pieces of purpose-shot footage are easy to spot in most of Vertov's films. The method itself, Vertov seemed to believe, did not belie his unbending stand against the cinema of fiction (though many critics thought it did): apparently for him these were not falsifications of facts (the phrase he habitually used to condemn fiction), but something like factual re-enactments. A flimsy distinction, I agree, but I doubt if Vertov's cinema could ever have achieved its much admired flexibility had Vertov not settled for this little compromise with his own theory.

In any case, the scenes re-enacted in *Stride, Soviet!* recall the following facts. No water was running from taps during the civil war years; there was no water in flush toilets, and no fuel for heating, as a result of which everything that could burn, from furniture to books, was fed by hand into makeshift home furnaces (fig. 13). It is the latter scene – the burning of books – which is of interest for the present discussion, for it was hardly by chance that the two books which an anonymous hand is shown shoving into a furnace are *The Holy Bible* (fig. 14) and *The Keys to Happiness* (*Kliuchi schastia*), the celebrated bestseller of 1913 by the fashionable novelist Anastasiia Verbitskaia (fig. 15). Critics claimed that the instant success of this book – half a million copies sold in four pre-Revolutionary years – was owed primarily to its pretentious vulgarity and the decline of public taste.<sup>14</sup> Hardly by chance – but was it on purpose? It would almost appear that, faced with the choice of what books to burn, Vertov simply availed himself of the ones which he (like many others in the 1920s) thought no one was likely to need any more, if he were not at such pains to make the title of the novel and the cover of



14. *Stride, Soviet!* Old Testament for firewood.



15. *Stride, Soviet!* *The Keys of Happiness* for firewood.

the Bible visible to us. These books are not props, they are emblems; and the fact that they are consigned to the flames is not about heating – no more than any other *auto-da-fé* of which history tells us (fig. 16).

To return to an earlier point in this discussion (and to jump ahead to a later point in Vertov's career), there are quite a few statements (or slogans) of this kind planted across *Man with a Movie Camera*. That *Man with a Movie Camera* tells its story unaided by intertitles does not mean that our reading eye is left without work. Posters and street signs shout at us from almost every corner. Smaller inscriptions of different varieties – documents, instructions, or epitaphs – swarm *Man with a Movie Camera* like so many buzzing insects. We tend to pay no more attention to them than we do in real life, but this is our mistake: the film not merely transmits these words, it transforms them into stand-ins for the absent intertitles – so much so that one review included in this book even accused Vertov of cheating.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, we do not find many instances when

such writings are neutral – more often, they either chime in ironically with the life that surrounds them, or are given the role of miniature manifestos of the kind we have witnessed in *Stride, Soviet!* I have written extensively elsewhere<sup>16</sup> on the Russian film poster for the German film *The Awakening of Woman* (*Das Erwachen des Weibes*, 1927, released in the Soviet Union in 1928) featured at various points in Vertov's film (fig. 17), and one day I plan to attempt a substantial essay on the tangle of allusions encased in that puzzling shot in *Man with a Movie Camera* in which the camera lens looks at us from under the shop sign "Expert Shoeblick from Paris" (fig. 18). At this time, however, all I can afford is a quick comment on two shots – one at the beginning, the other at the end of reel 6, the last reel of Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*.

Both shots tellingly illustrate two points: first, how porous Vertov has made the frontier between words and images; second, how ready he was to tamper with images to play with words. The shot I wish to look at first (at the beginning of the reel) is a pan

that enables the viewer to juxtapose two names: the name of a movie house (fig. 19) and the name of the movie showing there (fig. 20). The name of the theatre is the *Proletarian*, the title of the film, *The Green Manuela*.<sup>17</sup> One hardly needs to be reminded of the high status of the word “proletarian” in the Soviet 1920s, but just in case it may not quite come across in English, to the Russian ear the name “Manuela” sounds outlandish and seedy – add “Green” to it, and, regardless of what the film is about,<sup>18</sup> its title sounds like something one is more likely to come across in a bordello than find pasted on a proletarian movie theatre. We are familiar with Vertov’s usual derogatory sneer towards fiction films, but in this case the joke is less on the existence of fiction films *per se* than on their wide distribution in the territories of the USSR, whose unprincipled policy, Vertov’s swift pan tells us, sometimes makes really strange bedfellows.

I cannot refrain from adducing a curious parallel from an essay entitled “Anti-cine-dote” by Osip Brik, the editor of the Left Front magazine *Novyi LEF* in which Brik’s essay was published in early 1927.<sup>19</sup> As readers will soon learn from his reviews reproduced in this book, Osip Brik was not exactly Vertov’s friendliest critic (so little so, that two of Brik’s reviews of Vertov’s films provoked violent letters of protest on Vertov’s part), but on the general matters of art and film, and of what State policy should be in respect to film distribution, the *Kinocs* and the LEF (Levyi front iskusstv: Left Front of the Arts) – Vertov and Brik – were, if not of the same, then of like mind. The essay by Brik which I am citing was precisely about this – the poison of philistine taste dissolved through the repertoire of Soviet film theatres, and how Sovkino (Russia’s largest distribution company) was helping to inject this poison by importing the cheesiest kinds of films from the West. It is well known (at least, it was at the time) that Lenin, in a conversation with the Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky about possible State support of the arts during this period of economic hardship, once made this remark: “Of all your arts, cinema for us is the most important.” It is hard to say whether he meant important educationally, or in terms of film propaganda – perhaps both – but it is unlikely



16. Anti-religious ceremonies featured the public burnings of icons, similar to the one shown in this unidentified newsreel of the 1920s.



17. *Man with a Movie Camera*. Russian poster for a German film.



18. *Man with a Movie Camera*. The sign over the camera says: “Shoeshine specialist from Paris.”



shot from *Man with a Movie Camera*, which shows how the Bolshoi Theatre splits. Many of them, giving up in despair, declared this scene to be ‘nonsense’, ‘an optical illusion’, ‘a magician’s trick’, etc.”<sup>21</sup> Vertov’s tricks may look odd, but they are never inconsequential, the author justly objects to these unnamed scholars,<sup>22</sup> and explains: through this shot Vertov meant to convey the mental collapse of the man in the street, overwhelmed by the tempo of the modern city.

That this explanation is hardly more satisfying is not just because it is inferential, but mainly because it addresses one-half of the problem, the splitting, leaving the question of “why the Bolshoi?” not only unanswered, but unasked. If there is a solution to Vertov’s riddle shot, it is not to be found in Vertov’s film *per se*, but in the give-and-take between Vertov’s film and Vertov’s time. In the 1920s the Bolshoi Theatre was no longer what it had been in the previous hundred years of its existence. Along with some other innocuous objects and artefacts from the Imperial era, soon after 1917 the Bolshoi was caught in a process which I venture to call “revolutionary symbolization”. In some cases – like ours – this symbolization could take the form of symbolic destruction, and in some instances (less numerous than our historical imagination paints them) this symbolic destruction was reified through a physical one. Not that this kind of destructionist symbolism was something endemic to Russia, or to the 20th century. The symbolic burning of the Bible and pulp fiction in *Stride, Soviet!* to which I referred earlier was Vertov’s unintended tribute to the tradition of Savonarola (whose “bonfires of the vanities” spread to anything *but* the Bible, of course), as were the actual burnings of Church utensils recorded in Vertov’s *Kino-Pravda*. Likewise, the symbolic destruction of sculptured monuments, about which historians and history itself frequently remind us, was not invented in 1917: a French contemporary print showing the statue of Louis XIV being toppled in the Place des Victoires in Paris in 1792 bears an amazing resemblance to similar scenes we may remember from Eisenstein’s *October*, or from watching live news on CNN.<sup>23</sup>

It was less frequent, however, that public buildings – including one perceived as a notorious epitome of the old regime – would be put on Death Row, as it were. Unlike old statues, old buildings could be put to new uses, for, as revolutionary leaders were right to assume, their former authority did not undermine but rather contributed to the authority of the new. To replace a few crosses with Red stars was about all it took to turn the Kremlin, the ancient seat of the Russian Tsars, into the residence of the Bolshevik



21. *Man with a Movie Camera*. The Bolshoi Theatre.



22. *Man with a Movie Camera*. The Bolshoi Theatre implodes.

leaders. Likewise, without changing its outer appearance, the former Imperial Winter Palace in St. Petersburg could be transformed – as it was after 1917 – into an art museum (the Hermitage).

But it is here that a new problem – this one more specific to the Russian situation – crops up. Wise though the latter solution may have appeared to the prudent mind, it was bound to disappoint the radical artist. To people like Malevich or Rodchenko (and, later, to Dziga Vertov), it was just a matter of course that the political revolution of their day brought in its wake a revolution in the arts. For them, it went without saying that there is no room for art in the People's Republic – let alone the kind of art enshrined in the Imperial Winter Palace. There is hardly an easier way of illustrating this rather common presumption than by alluding to the closing lines of the poem “Too Early to Celebrate”, by Vladimir Mayakovsky (then one of the *Kom-Futs* – “Communist-Futurists”), published in 1918 in the Left-wing art paper *Iskusstvo kommuny* (Art of the Commune) – a poem in which the former Imperial Winter Palace is wishfully converted into a pasta-making factory:

We protect old junk in the name of art.

Could it be that

the tooth of the revolution

has been blunted by the crowns?

Quick!

Spread the smoke of a macaroni factory

over the Winter Palace.

We have fired our guns for a day or two,

and we think –

we'll lick the old.

Nothing to brag about so far!

To change your outer coat

is not enough, comrades!

Turn your guts inside out!<sup>24</sup>

But hardly any former Imperial institution had grown into an issue as polarizing as the Bolshoi. It even caused a heated exchange between Lenin and his otherwise loyal Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky, who later characterized Lenin's attitude towards this theatre as “very nervous”. One constantly debated question was whether the art they had inherited was worth the expense that came with it; another – not asked so much as lurking behind the debates – was whether it was of much use anyway. A theatre of this calibre was not a cheap thing to maintain; it housed a ballet, an opera troupe, and a big orchestra, to say nothing of the workforce. Formerly, all this was supported by the Crown. Now that the Bolshoi belonged to the People, the question arose whether the People could afford it – or wanted to. In 1919, when the issue was first tackled, Lenin did not insist on closing it, but its subsidy was cut significantly. The

question “whether we need the Bolshoi Theatre” (the original phrasing) resurfaced in late 1921 (the year in which Lenin inaugurated the New Economic Policy): in November the official Party paper *Pravda* (Truth) raised it three times – and in three different registers. On the 10th it informed its readers of a public discussion at the House of the Press in which some famous and less-famous figures among the workers of culture (including Mayakovsky and Vsevolod Meyerhold) expressed their opinions (from other sources we know that Mayakovsky was for, and Meyerhold against, the closing).<sup>25</sup> On the 11th it published a rather biased account of a session at the Commissariat of Enlightenment<sup>26</sup> on 9 November in which Lunacharsky – its head – is quoted as saying: “Every month around two billion roubles is spent to upkeep this theatre, which would be enough to hire four thousand schoolteachers if we pay each of them half a million a month, something which they are not getting now.”<sup>27</sup> And, on 15 November, the paper published a summary of letters ostensibly received from workers’ collectives and “Young Communist cells”, most of whom refused to acknowledge the Bolshoi as theirs.

Apparently, all this looked like the beginning of a campaign. Lunacharsky (known as a supporter of the arts) acted promptly by raising the Bolshoi question at another session of the Soviet of People’s Commissars (the equivalent of a ministerial cabinet of the Soviet government), which voted unanimously for the Bolshoi Theatre to be preserved. This prompted an angry letter from Lenin (dated 12 January 1922) to the Politburo demanding that the vote be revoked, and reminding Lunacharsky and all other People’s Commissars that resolutions involving ideological matters were the prerogative of the Party, and not of the Government. The vote was revoked, but Lunacharsky did not give up. In a long letter to Lenin, he explained that the Bolshoi was still remembered in the West; that if 2,000 people a day, including 500 workers (apparently there was a quota), were allowed to spend time in a warm lighted space listening to good music the money was well spent; and while it was true that the closing of the Bolshoi would free up funds that could be spent on education, the number of people employed at the Bolshoi was the equivalent of a small provincial town, and the State subsidy would allow them to earn their living by their specialized labour.<sup>28</sup> The Bolshoi saga lasted until 14 March 1922, when a new resolution – this time at the right level, a session of the Politburo – was finally passed, stating that the closing of the theatre was “economically unfounded”.<sup>29</sup>

Let me repeat: economy was just one of two aspects of the problem, the other being an air of ideological nervousness which surrounded the Bolshoi issue, something less easy to formulate in the bureaucratic vocabulary of directives and resolutions. This other aspect comes across in Lunacharsky’s autobiographical essay “Lenin and Art”. There were two motives, Lunacharsky claims, behind Lenin’s desire to get rid of the Bolshoi:

One he named right away. It is embarrassing, Lenin said, to waste money on a luxurious theatre like this while we don’t have enough for simple country schools. The other suggested itself at one of the sessions at which I tried to defend the Bolshoi Theatre from his attack. Vladimir Ilich

[Lenin] squinted cunningly and said: “And yet, it’s a pure piece of the gentry’s culture; no one can deny this.” He felt that the pompous and courtly tone characteristic of the opera was something that belonged to the gentry as a class.<sup>30</sup>

It might be hard to judge how widely Lenin’s attitude towards the Bolshoi and what he thought this theatre stood for was known before Lenin’s death, but it surely became known in 1924, for this was when the memoir quoted above was first published. It must have been then, if not earlier, that the name (and image) of the Bolshoi acquired that second, situational, 1920s-specific connotation, which we must keep in mind when we find them – the name or the image – used by Left-wing writers and Left-wing filmmakers alike. This explains what Osip Brik, the leading theorist of the Left Front and factual editor of the *Novyi LEF* magazine, had in mind when he mentioned the Bolshoi in his speech at a LEF meeting in 1927. We Left-wingers, Brik said, should not expect to be pampered and understood by others, and we must not become impatient and hysterical when we hear other people refuse to listen to our ideas, and see them continue to act as dictated by habit or common sense. We ought to get used to that. “We have been saying for ten years that the Bolshoi Theatre must be closed, and yet this year it is being renovated.”<sup>31</sup> This also explains why Viktor Shklovsky, another leading theorist of the Left Front, who wrote the scenario for Abram Room’s *Bed and Sofa* (*Tretia Meschanskaia*, 1927), made one of the film’s two male protagonists – Kolya, a former Red Army hero turned *petit bourgeois* through his addiction to petty pleasures of everyday life – a repair worker hired to renovate the Apollo-horsed neoclassical façade of the Bolshoi building. This also explains why this building symbolically – wishfully – implodes at the end of *Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov’s last silent film, the last of the 1920s, and arguably the last avant-garde manifesto before the new style, known as Stalinist Neoclassicism, was ushered in.

### The Kinocs

Who was Dziga Vertov, who were his wife and his brother, what was the group who called themselves the *kinocs*, and what happened to this group? I should perhaps have asked these questions earlier on, for, as Catherine Surowiec, who kindly agreed to copy-edit this manuscript, was right to remark, Vertov is perhaps the only character in this book who does not have at least a little biographical footnote. My – somewhat belated – clarification is this last-minute response to her more-than-justified request, a runaway footnote, as it were. So those people who already know about Vertov and Kaufman, or are impatient with footnotes, or do not like stories which end sadly, may wish to skip to the next section. For the rest, here is how it happened.

Dziga Vertov (Denis Arkadievich [David Abelevich]<sup>32</sup> Kaufman) was born in Bialystok (now Poland, then part of Russia) on 2 January 1896, into the family of a bookstore owner and librarian; his brother Mikhail (Moisei) Kaufman (Vertov’s cameraman until 1929) was one year his junior; the youngest son of the family (or the middle),

Boris Kaufman (not a *kinoc*, but whose filmmaking style was shaped after the work of his brothers, which he knew from the films and from Mikhail's letters), made a similar career for himself in France: he photographed Jean Vigo's films, and after World War II became a well-known cameraman in the United States. (Naum Kaufman, the critic who admired the *kinocs* and knew their work better than anyone else, is not a relative.)

Back in Bialystok, Vertov was known as a truly versatile boy. At the age of ten he began writing poems and novels; during 1912-15 he attended the Bialystok music school; in addition, he found himself fascinated by science. In several autobiographies, written at different times (1929, 1935, 1947, and 1949), Vertov described this particular combination of interests as formative for his future experiments in films. In 1929, looking back at his pre-cinematic activities, Vertov dubbed them "rhythmic montage of verbal and acoustic material". There were, he wrote, four kinds of experiments he was engaged in:

- 1) the montage of words ("Cities of Asia")
- 2) the montage of noises ("sawmill")
- 3) the projection of music fragments on words (Skriabin)
- 4) the Laboratory of Hearing<sup>33</sup>

The montage of words, as Vertov's later (1935) autobiography specifies, stemmed from an idea of arranging outlandish toponyms into rhythmic sequences ("Miletus Tegea Smyrna Halicarnassus Samos Ephesus Mytilene on the Isles of Rhodes, Lesbos and Cyprus" – when uttered in Russian, these words do form a semblance of a rhythmic *vers-libre*), something which Vertov says occurred to him in the course of a boring geography lesson.<sup>34</sup> This practice (doubtlessly inspired by experiments staged at that time by Russian Futurist poets) led him to another (this one, I am sure, inspired by Italian Futurist manifestos, available in Russian translations starting from 1913): to make music out of environmental noises (a local sawmill offered him sonic material for this). The third point – the projection of music into words – was to write poems (not songs!) that could be recited to music by Vertov's favourite composer, Aleksandr Skriabin (1871-1915). These were poems-music-pictures (two of them are reproduced in the first chapter of this book), which Vertov would paint on yellow sheets of paper and paste around the streets. The goal of these early experiments, Vertov later remembered, was to eradicate the boundaries between the different arts, and young Vertov approached this task scientifically, calling what he was doing his "Laboratory of Hearing".<sup>35</sup>

In 1915 the Kaufman family moved to Moscow, soon after which the three brothers' paths parted. Boris was sent to France, Mikhail was drafted, and Dziga Vertov (the young poet's pen name), who had a chronic lung disease, was exempted from military duty and became a student (law in Moscow, psycho-neurology in St. Petersburg, neither for too long). Vertov's film career began in May 1918 when he got a job with the Moscow Film Committee (Kinokomitet). Hired as a clerk, he became a film title writer, was then appointed head of the newsreel department, and at the end of 1918 was put in charge of *Kino-Week* (*Kino-Nedel'ia*), a weekly newsreel, whose stories he continued to assemble until July 1919, when this current-event cine-journal ceased to exist.

Its interest today lies more in the people and events which *Kino-Week* portrayed than in its manner of portraying them. Vertov's sense of discovery, his taste for the new, was only tickled, it seems, when he was faced with the task of cutting some of the *Kino-Weeks* up to reassemble them into new, larger units: *The Anniversary of the Revolution* (*Godovshchina revoliutsii*, 1918; Vertov's first feature documentary), or his 1921 *The History of the Civil War* (*Istoriia grazhdanskoi voiny*).

After Mikhail Kaufman (a technical genius and amateur photographer) returned from the Civil War, Vertov made him one of the cameramen on the *Kino-Pravda* newsreel, which he was in charge of from 1922. Kaufman also became, together with Vertov and Ivan Beliakov (cameraman, animator, and graphic artist), a member of "The Council of Three", the ruling body of the *kinocs*.

The *kinocs*: a group of documentary filmmakers who declared it their aim to abolish non-documentary filmmaking as such. This achieved, the *kinocs* were supposed to hand over their tools to the people (a planned country-wide network of amateur Kino-Eye circles) and melt into the background. Such, in a nutshell, was the *kinocs'* theoretical agenda, truly anarchist: to de-professionalize film-making, and to dismantle the film industry, that is, the very organism within which they were working. No wonder one of Vertov's worst enemies, film director Aleksandr Anoshchenko, called the *kinocs* "kinococci" (alluding to the "coccus" bacterium believed to cause tuberculosis), and that many film workers, in both production and distribution, wanted the *kinocs* out.

Three things made Vertov's films look almost as anarchical as his verbal assaults: jumpy titles, photographic trickery, and crazy montage. If Rodchenko was behind the titles, and Kaufman behind the photography, the person who made Vertov's montage madness a reality was his wife, Elizaveta Svilova. Even though – unlike Vertov – neither his brother nor his wife were too keen on writing, there exist two texts, one by Svilova, another by Kaufman, which throw light on their conceptual input into the *kinoc* aesthetic. One is Svilova's open letter/application addressed to the Council of Three (see chapter 6), in which she says that she wants to become a *kinoc*, and explains (less to Vertov than to the readers of the *LEF* magazine that published it) exactly what she dislikes about her previous work as a fiction-film editor, and what she hopes to achieve when admitted.

If Svilova's application letter marks the upward surge of the *kinocs* movement, the other text, "Film Analysis", by Kaufman (see chapter 30), appeared when Kaufman and Vertov stopped not only working together, but even talking to each other. The split between the two brothers had to do with their different creative temperaments and similar personal tempers. For one thing, Mikhail Kaufman felt his true vocation was not cinematography, but directing, and as a director, he was a success. Kaufman's directorial style was more sober than Vertov's, and was more about what he called the "analysis" of facts than about emotions and poetry. After 1926 (the year of Kaufman's first feature-long documentary), critics developed a tendency of pointing to Kaufman as the "good" brother, as it were – more modest, less loud, etc., than that intolerable Vertov. The irony of this, however, was that Kaufman's "correct" movies enjoyed considerably less press

attention than Vertov's "wrong" ones. On the other hand, Vertov was not happy when people – as sometimes happened – accused his movies of being confusing or muddled "despite" – they added – "their brilliant camera work". This kind of comment brought the two brothers to the verge of conflict after *The Eleventh Year* – see chapter 23 for Osip Brik's review of this movie, the ultimatum which Vertov sent to Kaufman, and the answer to Brik signed by Vertov, Kaufman, and Svilova.

If this time Kaufman remained loyal to Vertov, their former unity snapped during the making of *Man with a Movie Camera*. Kaufman perceived it as *his* film as much as Vertov's. This film was about the work of the cameraman, and was subtitled "A Fragment of the Diary of a Cameraman", so Kaufman assumed he would have a say in the overall design of the film, and in the way it was edited. Apparently he did not, or thought he didn't. Kaufman did not like the result, and did not appreciate the film's complexity. Being a person endowed with technical rather than poetic gifts, Kaufman liked clarity and logic (which worked to his advantage in his own films), and wished *Man with a Movie Camera* to work as an ABC, a methodical aid for beginners, a primer for "Kino-Eye circles", and not, as Vertov called it, "the higher mathematics of facts". Kaufman's essay "Film Analysis" was his answer to Vertov, an alternative to, rather than a continuation of, Vertov's poetics, as was his wonderful film *In Spring* (*Navesni* in Ukrainian, *Vesnoi* in Russian, 1929) – Kaufman's antithesis to Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, Kaufman's brainchild kidnapped by his own brother.

I promised myself not to enter the territory of Vertovian sound cinema – this is a separate story, waiting to be told, for Vertov, of course, made a number of groundbreaking sound movies, and it would be a shame to reduce them to mere titles in a biographical sketch. But I must say one thing: these were not films made by a *kinoc*, in the old sense. As for the last ten years of his life, Vertov spent them in relative anonymity, as one of the editors of the routine, humdrum ("funeral-solemn", to recall the epithet Vertov used for such kinds of newsreel-journals in 1926) *News of the Day* (*Novosti dnia*). He died in 1954, Elizaveta Svilova in 1975. Mikhail Kaufman died in 1980 in the Soviet Union, then still a sixth part of the world, Boris Kaufman in New York, the same year – an amazing coincidence if indeed, as many sources would have it, the two brothers (who always hit it off) were born in the same year (Boris was always elusive about his date of birth, an instinctive habit of actors and people who do not want to be drafted).

This book is a selection of documents; the subject it documents happens to be the work of a documentary filmmaker. As the editor of this book I knew that at one stage or other I was bound to run into a problem familiar to film editors as well: the twin problem of space and redundancy. On the one hand, there are always more documents you would like to include than a reasonably sized book will allow. On the other, there is the fear of boring the reader with texts and reviews that repeat each other or overlap. Documents grow in the wildlife of history; to work for a book (or in a film) they need to be cut. The reader of this book will find occasional references to texts not included in this volume; there are also some excerpted texts, with ellipsis dots in square brackets.

Most of these cuts and omissions were made to avoid overstocking, but I also took into account that many texts – manifestos, diaries, and drafts – already exist in English, thanks to Annette Michelson’s excellent *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*,<sup>36</sup> expertly translated by Kevin O’Brien. I decided not to include those, except for a couple of cases when the originals available to Michelson and O’Brien had been – through no fault of theirs – substantially incomplete.

In the overall design, the chapters of this book and the texts within these chapters are arranged chronologically, but I have also felt free to sidestep from chronology whenever the considerations of thematic or logical unity required it. There is no better model for keeping one’s balance between chronology and logic than Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera*: on the surface, all it seems to be showing is the life of a city from dawn to dusk, yet clearly the course of a day is not the only meaning that Vertov was after when the film was edited. What worked for Vertov should not necessarily work for a book about Vertov, of course, but the freedom with which he handles his space and time made me feel a little bolder in handling mine.

Most of the English translations from Russian for this book were done by Julian Graffy.

Translations from German are by Oliver Gayken and Stuart Liebman. In a few cases existing translations from English and German were used, with their translators credited in the notes.

Finally, I convinced Neo-Futurist poet T.S. Naivist to try his hand at Vertov’s near-Futurist poetry; he also agreed to translate Vertov’s titles for *A Sixth Part of the World*.

One last thing. Many people helped me with this volume. You will find their help acknowledged in a special section at the end, but I cannot wait to thank the Giornate del Cinema Muto – the event, and the people who run it – without whom there would be no book. Everyone knows how ambitious projects tend to grow, and there is even a chapter on this in this book. When *A Sixth Part of the World* overran its planned budget, Dziga Vertov was fired from Sovkino. When Piera Patat – my producer, my editor, my friend – got 400 pages instead of the agreed 200, she did not say a word. She just decided she would work at night. The Giornate people have the *kinocs* spirit: the harder the task, the more it empowers them. Paolo Cherchi Usai – it was your idea to screen all of Vertov in Sacile, and to publish a book to go with it. David Robinson, it was you who said, “The more the merrier,” when we all began to wonder whether we were trying to show too much. It was Livio Jacob’s silent smile which told me, without words, that at the end of the day all would be all right. I thank you all.

## Notes

1. Film titles mentioned throughout the book are straight translations and may differ from their distribution titles in English-speaking countries.
2. Mikhail Koltsov, pseud. of Mikhail Fridliand (1898-1940/42?), was a well-known Soviet journalist and Vertov's close friend. The translation of his review can be found in chap. 22 of this book.
3. See the document "The Constructivists" (*LEF*, no. 1, 1923) in chap. 3 of this book.
4. Naum Kaufman's 1929 survey, "The Intertitle and Its Evolution in the Work of the *Kinocs*", included in chap. 24, gives a detailed account of the titling techniques in Vertov's films of the Constructivist period.
5. *Dziga Vertov v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov* (Dziga Vertov as Remembered by His Contemporaries) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), p. 85.
6. Viktor Shklovsky, "Kinoki i nadpisi" (*Kinocs* and intertitles), *Kino*, 30 October 1926. An extended version of this essay, translated in chap. 20 of this volume, was included in Shklovsky's 1927 book *Ikh nastoiashchee* (Their Present Time). Compare this passage from a review by Mikhail Bleiman, a member of the Leningrad LEF: "Visually, [the film] is disappointing. It is a speech by an orator, not a picture. It is full of rhetorical devices, rhetorical repetitions. The film shouts slogans, sometimes declaims. Declamation is the film's main drawback. Too many repetitive, obtrusive titles. They turn the film into a collection of moving photographs." The review is reprinted in Mikhail Bleiman, *Kino: svidetelskie pokazaniia* (Cinema: A Witness's Report) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1973), p. 79.
7. Dziga Vertov, *Statii, dnevniki, zamysly* (Writings, Diaries, Projects) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966), p. 108.
8. Naum Kleiman, "Commentary" to Sergei Eisenstein, *Metod* (Method), vol. 2: *Tainy masterov* (Masters' Mysteries) (Moscow: Film Museum and Eisenstein Center, 2002), p. 655.
9. *Metod*, p. 514, English in the original; the italics are Eisenstein's.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 515.
11. VGIK (Vsesoiuznyi Gosudarstvennyi Institut Kinematografii): the All-Union State Cinema Institute.
12. The Russian State Archive for Literature and Art (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva; henceforth abbreviated as RGALI), archive 1923, register 2, folder 1030, p. 18 (henceforth as 1923-2-1030-18).
13. This text was first published in Russian by Aleksandr Fevralsky (a *Prauda* journalist in the 1920s, turned film and theatre historian in the 1960s) in *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 12, 1965, pp. 71-73.
14. And they had a point, as readers of English can now easily find out from a recent translation: *The Keys to Happiness*, by Anastasiia Verbitskaia, translated and edited by Beth Holmgren and Helena Goscilo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). On the multiple cultural reasons for the rage caused by this notorious book, see Laura Engelstein's excellent study of Imperial Russia and its various rages, whose title ironically echoes Verbitskaia's novel: *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 104-114. Worse – and perhaps more importantly for Vertov – there was also a film (directed by Iakov Protazanov and Vladimir Gardin) called *The Keys to Happiness* (*Kliuchi schastia*) based on this novel in 1913, the first – if not the greatest – hit in the history of Russian pre-Revolutionary cinema. On the success of this film, see Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 268-83).
15. Khrisanf Khersonsky, "Chelovek s kinoapparatom", *Kino*, 29 February 1929. See the translation of this review of *Man with a Movie Camera* in chap. 24 of this book.
16. Yuri Tsivian, "Man with a Movie Camera, Reel One: A Selective Glossary", *Film Studies: An International Review*, issue 2, Spring 2000, pp. 51-76.
17. *Die Grüne Manuela – Ein Film aus dem Süden* (1923, Gloria-Film, dir. E.A. Dupont), starring Lucie Labass as Manuela, distributed in the USSR after 1926.
18. Incidentally, the film features a patriotic Argentinian dancer who helps freedom-fighters in their struggle against the English.
19. Osip Brik, "Kinoprotivoyadie", *Novyi LEF*, no. 2, 1927, pp. 27-30.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
21. Sergei Drobashenko, "Teoreticheskie vzgliady Vertova" (Vertov's Theoretical Outlook), in Vertov, *Statii, dnevniki, zamysly* (Writings, Diaries, Projects), pp. 13-14.
22. It is likely that those scholars Drobashenko had in mind are Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov (see his "K Realistich-

- eskou iskusstvu: tvorcheskii put D. Vertova" [Towards Realist Art: Dziga Vertov's Creative Career], in *Kino*, no. 17, 30 March 1936), and Nikolai Abramov, the pioneer of Vertov studies to whose memory the present volume is dedicated (see Abramov's *Dziga Vertov* [Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk], 1962, pp. 105-13). Though neither uses the exact epithets cited by Drobashenko, both treated *Man with a Movie Camera* as Vertov's "formalist" mistake.
23. On the toppling of this statue, see E.H. Gombrich, "Sculpture for Outdoors", in his *The Uses of Images: Studies in the Social Function of Art and Visual Communication* (London: Phaidon, 1999), pp. 153-54. On a related subject in the history of Communist China, see W.T. Mitchell's "The Violence of Public Art: *Do the Right Thing*", in his *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 371-96. On the Russian case, see Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), a useful study, despite the fact that it lumps two different monuments to Alexander III into one: the Moscow one destroyed in 1917, and the St. Petersburg one, which was never destroyed. As a result of this mistake, Eisenstein, who had meticulously reconstructed the tearing down of the former in *October* (1928), is falsely accused of falsifying history (not that he does not do that elsewhere in the film, it is true).
  24. "Radovatsia rano", *Iskusstvo kommuny*, no. 1, 7 December 1918. Translated by Omry Ronen.
  25. *Kommunisticheskii trud*, 12 November 1921.
  26. The People's Commissariat of Enlightenment: Narodnyi komissariat prosveshcheniia, more commonly known in Russian in its abbreviated form, Narkompros; instituted on 26 October 1917.
  27. Yu. Larin, "Bolshoi teatr" (The Bolshoi Theatre), *Pravda*, 11 November 1921.
  28. Quoted from Albert Plutnik, "Azbuka dlia millionov" (ABC for Millions), *Izvestiia*, 23 August 1987.
  29. Vladimir Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenij* (Complete Works) (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1962), vol. 54, p. 594.
  30. "Lenin i iskusstvo: vospominaniia" (Lenin and Art: A Memoir), in A.V. Lunacharsky, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8 t. T. 7*. (Collected Works, in 8 Volumes), vol. 7 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1967), pp. 404-405. First published in *Khudozhnik i zritel*, nos. 2-3, 1924.
  31. *Novyi LEF*, nos. 11-12, 1927, p. 70.
  32. Arkadii, Denis, Mikhail were often used as Russified versions of the biblical names Abel, David or Moisei (Moses) given to children born into Jewish families in Russia.
  33. RGALI 2091-2-170.
  34. *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 2, 1986, p. 72.
  35. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
  36. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1984.

## Translator's Note

Rendering in English material that is both distant from the time of its composition, and on occasion complex in its arguments, offers many challenges to the translator, not the least of which is maintaining a balance between accessibility and fidelity to the often complex language and syntax of the original. Some of the most difficult decisions I have been faced with have concerned the translation of seemingly simple and obvious words, such as *veshch* (thing) and *plan* (shot, plan, plane). I have also tried to maintain the semantic force of some of Vertov's neologisms. Thus I use the word "kinocs" for the Russian neologism *kinoki*, the members of Vertov's group, attempting to preserve the implications of commitment to cinematic vision. In turn, the noun "kinoc" gives us the adjective "kinocular" and the abstract nouns "kinoculism" and "kinography".

Within the text I have used the familiar versions of well-known Russian names such as Eisenstein, Mayakovsky, or Meyerhold. I also simplify the transliteration of Russian names, using, for example, Khersonsky and not Khersonskii. In the translation of the titles of the original sources in the texts I have used the Library of Congress system of transliteration.

The titles of Vertov's films found in this book have been unified even when the exact way in which they were worded in the original varies. Thus, *The Man with a Movie Camera* or *A Man with the Movie Camera* of anglophone writers usually appears as *Man with a Movie Camera*.

The English translations of Russian film titles throughout the book do not reflect their distribution titles in English-speaking countries.

*Julian Graffy*



PART ONE



THE  
BEGINNING



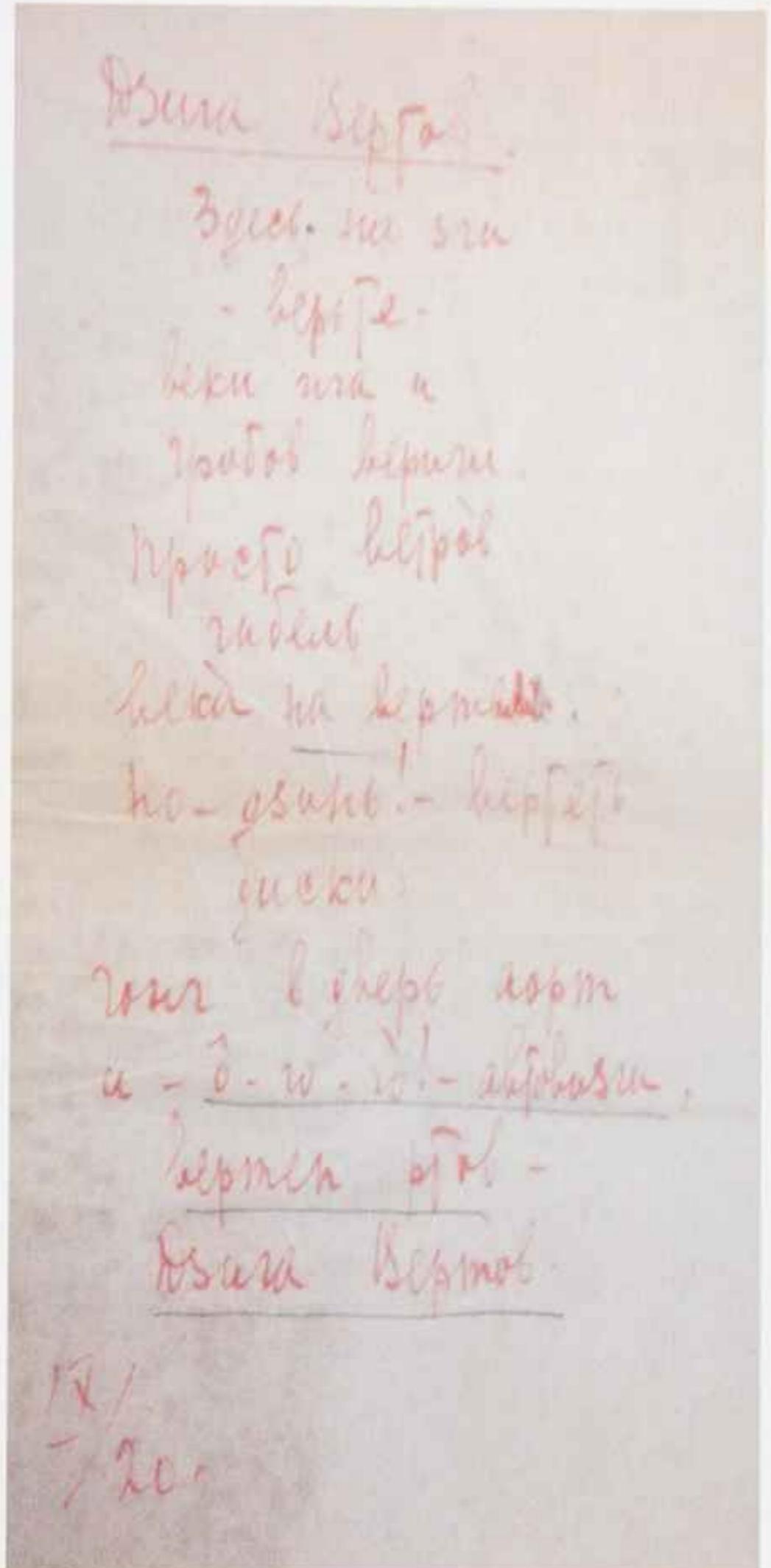


**Dziga Vertov***Dziga Vertov, "Dziga Vertov", September 1920**RGALI 2091-2-228<sup>1</sup>**Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Vienna<sup>2</sup>*

dazzling dark here  
 here the wind  
 is dead  
 but hear:  
 spits spin  
 years of yoke jigger  
 tombs topple  
 jingle – a veer!  
 spin the top  
 wehee! wheels whiz  
 jiggling vortex  
 dizzy vertex  
 Dziga Vertov

Autographs and typescripts of some of Vertov's poems are preserved at RGALI and the Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Vienna.

"Dziga Vertov" offers a range of phonetic and acoustic associations evoked by this pen-name. As sounds in poetry largely resist translation, here is a transliterated version of the original:  
 Dziga Vertov / zdes ni zgi / verte – /  
 veki iga i / grobov verigi / prosto vetrov  
 / gibel / veka na vertel / no – dzin"! –  
 vertet / diskii / gong v dver aort / i – ô-  
 go-gò! avtovizgi / vertep rtov / Dziga  
 Vertov.



**Tick-Tock**

*Dziga Vertov, "Tik-Tak", August 1920*

*RGALI 2091-2-230*

The table  
begins dancing on its hind legs  
making curtseys  
Chairs like puppies  
– their legs in the water.  
The mattress, the carpets, the pillows  
– the shabby stuff –  
are like noseless Zeppelins.  
A cue has protruded from the eye:  
HEY, ANYONE CARE FOR A GAME OF BILLIARDS?  
Nouns to laugh:  
– What a nose.  
On sale for a billion.  
And even the clock is not content with tick-tocking anymore.  
– It does its best to emit a bark.  
The lamp swings its one-eyed pendulum  
Tick-tock.

**[Untitled poem]**

*Dziga Vertov, 1920*

*RGALI 2091-2-229*

Ten stretched fingers are forked like lightning.  
Stop, you, the giant monster: the end of the trail.  
The wheel and the neck fill up the screen.  
The rectangle is cut by a diagonal, the rail.<sup>3</sup>

**Start (1917)<sup>4</sup>***Dziga Vertov, "Start"**The Laboratory of Hearing*

RGALI 2091-2-226

Not like Pathé.

Not like Gaumont.

Not how they see,

Not as they want.

Be Newton

to see

an apple.

Give people eyes

To see a dog

With

Pavlov's

eye.

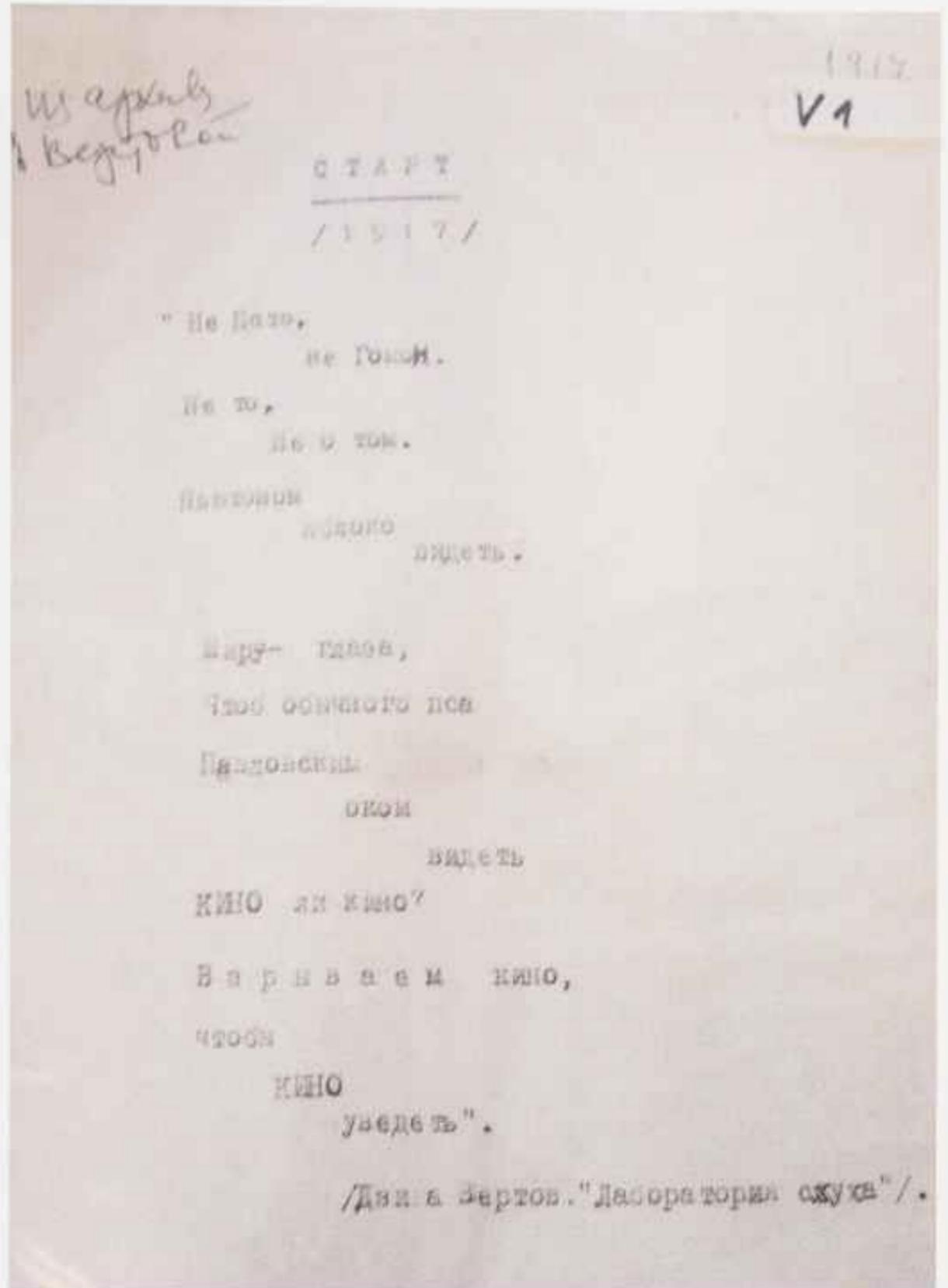
Is cinema CINEMA?

*We blow up* cinema,

For

CINEMA

to be seen.



This typescript (now at the Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Vienna) comes, as the handwritten note asserts, from the archive of Elizaveta Svilova, Vertov's wife and collaborator. It is very unlikely that the date – 1917 – reflects the year in which the poem was written. Rather, Vertov meant to tie its programmatic message – the “start” of the new, Newton-eyed newsreel – to the year of the proletarian revolution, which many people believed marked the beginning of a new era.

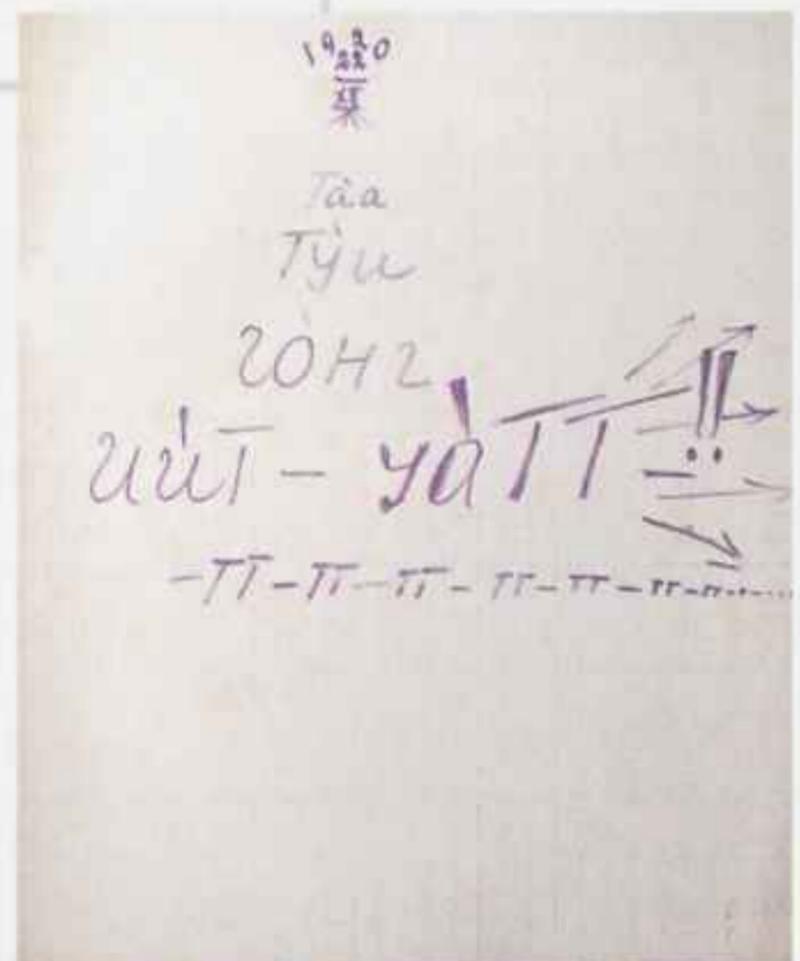
## Picture-Poems



Sometimes Vertov's poetry needs to be heard and seen, not merely read. As was not unusual among Russian "Cubo-Futurist" poets, Vertov wanted others to see his poems hand-written, hand-coloured, and richly illuminated. In addition, he attempted to crisscross poetry and music – an experiment which he refers to in one of his later autobiographies (1929) as "rhythmic montage of verbal and acoustic material", and specifically as "the projection of music fragments upon words (Skriabin)" (RGALI 2091-2-170). The one with the sunset, the owl, and a bunch of demons shown striving towards the poet's head is visibly aimed at such projection, for it is called "To Skriabin", and the inscription at bottom left specifies "Sung and recited by Dziga Vertov". The inscription at the bottom right credits a N. Smolianinov for "The music of pigments". All in all, the whole thing was clearly inspired by Aleksandr Skriabin (1871-1915), the composer whose symbol-filled music and Synesthetic theories captivated the imaginations of aspiring youth. Suffice it to say that the text of the poem, as untranslatable as a Futurist-styled poem can possibly be, is about the **SOUND** that rises from a lake, passes by the **FACE**, and disappears in the dark-red sky. The other picture-poem of the same series (adorned with a picture vaguely reminiscent of "simultaneous" art cultivated by Robert and Sonia Delaunay), entitled "The Satan of Spring", depicts the said musical Satan playing the cymbals of the Sun.



The third picture-poem (the one of 22 November 1920, whose date apparently also serves as its title) is somewhat different, though like the other two, it too belongs to the genre of exercises which Vertov used to call his "Laboratory of Hearing". To try to pronounce it as it reads in Russian, it says "Taa Tui gong iit - Watt!! - tt -", with the "- tt -" pater visibly diminishing towards the end. I showed this poem to my friend, the expert on turn-of-the-century poetry Roman Timenchik, who brought to my attention that the only meaningful word in this calligram is "Watt", which explains the energetic arrows that emanate from it. This makes this poem a curious precursor of Vertov's later films (*Kino-Pravda*, *Stride*, *Soviet!*, *The Eleventh Year*), with their recurrent odes to electricity and "Lenin's bulb" (*Lampochka Ilicha*).



## In the Cinema Committee

“*V kinematograficheskom komitete*”, *Kommunar*, 3 November 1918

The Cinema Committee (Kinokomitet) of the Commissariat of People’s Enlightenment (Narkompros) is making active preparations for the forthcoming October celebrations. The Committee is releasing the large-scale film *The Anniversary of the Revolution*.<sup>5</sup>

The film captures all the main elements of the Russian Revolution, the workers’ uprising in Petrograd, the demonstrations, the meetings, portraits of those who fought for freedom, their funerals, both in the Field of Mars in Petrograd and in Moscow.

Among other films, mention should be made of *The Enemies of Soviet Power and the Struggle Against Them*.<sup>6</sup> Examples are the crushing of the White Guard uprising in Yaroslavl, the struggle on the Czechoslovak front, and so on.

The films will be exhibited in the evening in five Moscow squares, and in most Moscow cinemas. Entry to cinemas will be free everywhere.

Films with a revolutionary character will also be widely used at the Front.

The Committee is organizing ten special trains, named after Comrade Lenin, three of which will be leaving for the Fronts at the beginning of November. The trains will also have a mobile cinema, set up in a car. Film material will also be sent to the provinces.

The forthcoming October ceremonies will also be captured on film, so as to produce a full picture of the celebrations and disseminate it not only in Russia but also abroad.

The completed revolutionary films will be sent abroad, including to Stockholm and Switzerland, where the anniversary of the Russian Revolution is also going to be celebrated.

## Notes

1. RGALI (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva): the Russian State Archive for Literature and Art. See Introduction, note 12, for an explanation of the RGALI file numbering style.
2. Slightly varying versions of this poem are found at RGALI and the Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Vienna – the source for this one.
3. This poetic exercise appears to be an attempt to convey, by means of poetry, a cinematic close-up of a railway accident resulting in death.
4. The year 1917 is not the date of the poem, but a part of the poem’s title. Its date of origin is unknown, but from its programmatic content it can be assumed that the poem was written after 1922.
5. *Godovshchina revoliutsii* (1918): for any of Vertov’s films mentioned in this volume, see the Annotated Filmography.
6. *Vragi sovetskoi vlasti i borba s nimi*: no other mention of this film is found in surviving documents from the period. Judging by the contents described, this could have been a compilation of civil war newsreels.

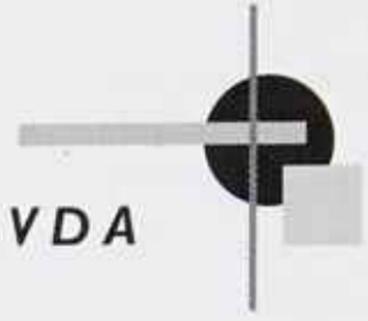
## Kino-Week



The title and the logo of Vertov's *Kino-Week*, seen both as a production sketch on paper, and the final result on film. The logo represents three smoking factory chimneys inscribed in a Maltese cross (a reference to the mechanism used in movie-camera shutters?).



## PRAVDA ON KINO PRAVDA



### The Pravda Newsreel

*Di Kei, "Kino-khronika 'Pravdy'", Pravda, 28 June 1922*

The All-Russia Photo-Cinema Committee<sup>1</sup> has burst into action. Its first step is so significant that it should be remarked upon.

Until recently, the work of the Cinema Committee was almost unnoticeable. This was due to the absence of funds, materials, and a sufficient number of specialists. Now, evidently, the situation has improved. For the first time since the Revolution we have our own film journal in Moscow, *Kino-Pravda*.

A few days ago the first two issues of *Kino-Pravda* were shown at the First Electro-Arts Theatre. These issues reflect the most important events to have happened in the Republic in recent times. The first is devoted to the removal of church valuables, the trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries, and the solemn opening of the First State Kashirka Electric Station.

Insofar as *Kino-Pravda* is a first step, so there are, in our view, major miscalculations to which attention must be drawn. So, for some reason, the picture shows the removal of church valuables only in Moscow. There is no material from the provinces or villages. The other omission in *Kino-Pravda* is in the picture of the Kashirka electric station. The viewer is shown the solemn opening of the station, but not the most important element of this ceremony – the internal working of the station. In our view this is a major defect.

But alongside these shortcomings we must note the attentiveness and love for their work demonstrated by the sector of the social newsreel.

The situation in which the work of *Kino-Pravda* is carried out is extremely arduous and difficult. There are no actors here, no sets, no props – all we have is life, with the many barriers that have to be overcome. We are convinced that Comrade Vertov, the head of *Kino-Pravda*, will overcome all these barriers and drive forward the newsreel, which is so necessary in our days.

We would like to see *Kino-Pravda* shown in the working-class districts of Moscow and the Republic.

### At an Evening of Kino-Pravda

*A.Z.,<sup>2</sup> "Na vechere 'Kino-Pravdy'", Pravda, 2 September 1922*

There is no need to speak of the huge propaganda significance of the cinema. As regards

*Kino-Pravda*, you can only put the question in this way: to what extent does it make use of the enormous propaganda material which our Soviet reality gives it, at least at its most important stages, and does it do so with sufficient skill?

Yesterday's screening of *Kino-Pravda* (eight issues) already gives a sufficient answer to this question. The picture of our life is relatively full. On the screen we saw terrible footage of places where there is starvation, the removal of church valuables, the arrival of Vandervelde,<sup>3</sup> the trial of Right Socialist Revolutionaries.

But to tell the truth, this entire picture does not become any weightier through the insertion of "Views of the Caucasus", with ladies relaxing in the sunshine, or of various horse races with betting, and the excited physiognomies of *Nepmen*,<sup>4</sup> and so forth. This film stock could have been used successfully to shoot, for example, the daily life of the workers, their rest homes, various processes of work in the factories (inasmuch as economic calculations allow), and so on.

The film is made much more lively through the insertion of elements of everyday life, though not all of these are equally successful. For example, in the picture of the trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries, the footage of two young "gentlemen" betting on whether the men will be shot or not is not at all serious, and quite inappropriate.

The footage showing comrade Iakovenko's<sup>5</sup> visit to Siberia is put together magnificently. Here we see our People's Commissar for Agriculture with a shopping bag, in a Red Army cap, rattling along on a simple village cart through endless settlements, or surrounded by trustingly attentive peasant faces, and so on.

In the film of the trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries (*The Trial of the S.R.s*), there is not a single successful shot, one that would show the real importance of the event. This is a serious failing.

All in all, our *Kino-Pravda* is very interesting to watch, and not at all exhausting.

From the external point of view (the clarity of the filming and the intertitles), the film is well made.

### In Front of the Screen

*Mikhail Koltsov, "U ekrana", Pravda, 28 November 1922*

Our Revolution looks forward, and doesn't like looking back. It looks back only for a moment, so as to watch out for mistakes, so as to grab hold of its experience for new experiments.

And so we don't see our epoch as we participate and live in it, boiling in its pot, moving and pushing. Like ants on a large, complex building site...

When people say, "Our descendants will be envious of the fact that we were contemporaries of a Great Revolution," we absentmindedly nod in affirmation, not thinking about the meaning of the words.

A great deal of energy was needed to entice a group of Soviet Party workers and journalists into the viewing theatre of the Photo-Cine Department (VFKO). They dropped

## Camera Shy

Vertov must have discovered early on that those little moments when people become conscious of being filmed have an interest all their own, and instructed his cameramen to keep cranking. It is fun to watch valiant warriors and serious diplomats or politicians portrayed in *Kino-Weeks* become bashful, or start joking, or strike a pose. Later this practice would grow into a theory known as "life off-guard" or "life unawares". The man who tips his hat to the camera is a Ukrainian politician, Khristian Rakovski (1873-1941). The bashful lady is Socialist politician Angelica Balabanova (1878-1965), the First Secretary of the Comintern Executive Committee, whose Italian disciple Benito Mussolini would (to her dismay) transform himself from a Communist to a Fascist. The man whose finger orders the cameraman to pan away is of course Lenin. The site of the open-air shaving (given for free by Red Army soldiers to local civilians) is Kazan.





## Heroes in the Snow



One of the first 1919 issues of *Kino-Week* (by then directed by Vertov) shows Red Army soldiers during a snowfall. The less some of them are dressed for it the braver they look, it would seem.

in for a minute, tearing themselves away from their work, sitting down without taking their coats off, muttering about the lack of time.

But when the lights went out and the letters lit up on the screen – *Kino-Pravda: The Fifth Anniversary of the October Revolution*<sup>6</sup> – all their hurry, all their mundane disorder, all their everyday life, the bustle, the routine, immediately floated away.

The screen has a terrible quality: everything that is most real, that has been seen a thousand times, that has even become boring, becomes, in its representation, important, significant, somehow especially clear and instructive. As you watch you seem to reassess things, to live through them again, acutely and watchfully, through the eyes not of a participant and a contemporary but of an outsider, a foreigner, someone from a later generation.

*Kino-Pravda* is made skilfully, adroitly, professionally. The time when our newsreels were made in a careless and primitive way, with exhaustingly long passages, is now past. We have already learned American montage, the variegated and dynamic packing together of scenes, elements, and intertitles.

Suddenly everything starts to move. Red Square is swaying with flags and a surge of people. The demonstrations, the speakers, the Komintern delegates,<sup>7</sup> the troops, all the magnificent attributes of celebrations in the proletarian republic. There is no music at the showing, but music bounces from the screen in the measured gestures of the orchestra as it plays, in the even rhythm of the columns of marching soldiers.

Trotsky is on the podium. He is showing his foreign guests our Army, the child of five years of struggle and torment. He is telling the foreign workers the story of those years. He points instructively at the troops, a threatening materialized morality, coming from the throats of thousands of Red Army men, tapped out through thousands of Red Army boots.

This is the way we are now. But we were very different! Darkness licks Red Square. History has started to run, living, anxious, tugging at the mind, the heart, and the imagination, all at the same time.

The Civil War. Flames, death, charred corpses, trenches in the north and the south, from the east and the west. The Urals, the Volga, the Czechs and Slovaks, the victories and the defeats. And now we see Trotsky again, first in a jacket, on the platform at the end of a train corridor, then in a leather jacket, in a car, giving orders, spreading propaganda, talking.

1920. We are fighting less, and working more. Diggers sink their teeth into black silt, excavators spew out piles of mud from their iron mouths. Factories belch out smoke, lathes move and shake. And suddenly, for a minute, for a few disappointingly brief seconds, Lenin. He smiles, he looks at some papers, he shakes someone's hand...

The Army again, already better dressed and shod, marching more harmoniously. Music... Silence. Starvation. The numb, protruding bellies of children. A pile of thin bodies in a country graveyard, under fine, indifferent snow. The viewing theatre is silent; you can hear the machinery chirring like the madly swaying pendulum of the clock of history. We are silent.

And once again, joy. Children who are not dead, but alive. A truck, full to the brim, and they're laughing, happy, waving their kerchiefs at the celebration of the Revolution.

More music, flags. Moscow, from the dizzying height of a plane. A Japanese Communist, in a Red Army cap pulled down over his eyes. The German Ambassador, a Count, shakes the hands of Bolsheviki. Chicherin in the uniform of a military chief, looking like a stout colonel.<sup>8</sup> And yet more, the big, the small, the threatening, the amusing elements of the only revolution in the world.

... The End. Lights up in the viewing theatre, and daily life returns. Screwing up their eyes, the Soviet and Party workers rush off to their next meetings. As we leave, let us firmly shake the hands of our cinema workers.

### **Kino-Pravda**

*Boris Gusman,*<sup>9</sup> "Kino-Pravda", *Pravda*, 9 February 1923

They've shown the most recent issues of *Kino-Pravda*.

In no. 14 they've made an attempt to capture events not only of an internal scale but also of an external, international one, within the frame of a newsreel. For the time being this attempt must be considered unsuccessful. After all, one cannot consider the launching of an ocean liner and some "slaves of Capitalism" breaking out into a foxtrot to be foreign newsreel footage. Success in this field can be achieved only by organizing a wide network of foreign "film correspondents", whose "correspondence" should be edited (and this is essential) here.

But why speak about this when we have not got such a network even here in the USSR...?

*Kino-Pravda* is penniless. Film workers shout about this at the tops of their voices. The most valuable, most necessary, and most interesting enterprise hasn't the means to expand its work on an appropriate scale. The significance of *Kino-Pravda* in the field of capturing the most important aspects of the history of our Revolution is enormous, and will be fully appreciated only in years to come. After all, in one of the issues of *Kino-Pravda* we see Iakov Sverdlov lying in his coffin, but we might have seen him alive and in motion, if we had thought about *Kino-Pravda* in good time. Now we have it, but still we take little care of it. There are issues which contain footage of our leaders that for lack of funds have been released in only two copies. This means that soon we shall not have even that little which *Kino-Pravda* has managed to achieve.

The Komintern, the People's Commissariats, the Istpart,<sup>10</sup> our economic organizations (which might have captured through *Kino-Pravda* the most significant successes in the battle on the economic front), help *Kino-Pravda* – it is in your own interests. On the other hand, the State Film Organization must also help itself: it must attract help in the financing of *Kino-Pravda* from places which will certainly want to be able to have fresh newsreel material, and so on.

No. 14 of *Kino-Pravda* is also extremely interesting from the technical point of view.

The application of Constructivism to the cinema gives good results: an original, strongly made script, interesting montage, moving intertitles, and so on. Vertov and Rodchenko are doing major and useful work... we must help them.

### **On Kino-Pravda**

Z.,<sup>11</sup> "O 'Kino-Pravde'", Pravda, 25 May 1923

With every new issue of *Kino-Pravda* it is becoming more and more clear that this initiative is extremely useful, interesting, and necessary. But it is no less clear that it needs to be set up correctly.

Above all, with *Kino-Pravda* you have no sense of an editor. Precisely that, an editor. After all, *Kino-Pravda* is a magazine. An illustrated, living magazine. A magazine which none of the printed illustrated magazines can compete with, since no photographs can replace film stock. In a film journal the information is exclusively visual (very full), and more accessible to the broad masses than even a personal, direct impression (since the technology of cinema enlarges a spectacle, brings out the detail in it, and, above all, brings it closer).

Thus the film journal is a journal with enormous influence. So how can it be published without an editor? Without a journalist who is informed about the life of society? After all, the life of the society of the Republic is not confined to the clothes people wear.

But *Kino-Pravda*, having filmed the May Day parade and the funeral of Vorovsky,<sup>12</sup> considers that it has done its duty, and fecklessly captures on expensive film stock models showing fashions in Petrovka Street, or some acrobatic exercises by Proletkult students which there is absolutely no need to give broad popularity.<sup>13</sup>

The second defect of the issues of *Kino-Pravda* is a motivation that is insufficiently serious (an attraction to tricks at all costs). Some of the intertitles are difficult to read.

*Kino-Pravda*, we repeat, is an interesting, necessary, and responsible enterprise. It is now being run conscientiously. You can sense that its makers love their work. But it really has to be done in a more literate way (in the sense that it is a magazine). It should reflect the extraordinarily rich life of the Republic more fully, and there is only one way of achieving this: to take on more staff at *Kino-Pravda*, and to maintain contact with our press, since the direct purpose of *Kino-Pravda* is to illuminate on screen those things which our press illuminates in print.

### **Lenin Kino-Pravda**

Boris Gusman, "Leninskaia Kino-Pravda", Pravda, 4 February 1925

For the Lenin anniversary Kultkino<sup>14</sup> has released a *Lenin Kino-Pravda* in three parts, consisting of a montage of separate episodes from earlier issues of *Kino-Pravda* and from

Leninism Rails





In his 1925 review of the *Lenin Kino-Pravda* Boris Gusman identified Vertov's train, speeding "along the rails of Leninism" (as the title in the frame enlargement says) as "Deni's drawing brought to life". Indeed, on 1 January 1925 (three weeks before Vertov released his film), the newspaper *Pravda* came out with its staff cartoonist Viktor Deni's drawing featuring a train with the slogan "Full steam along the rails of Leninism" written on its engine, "towards the alliance between the city and the countryside". A year later, in *Stride, Soviet!*, Vertov would use an image of a handshake appearing over the word "ALLIANCE" to invoke the second part of this slogan.

newsreels, both used and unused, dedicated to Ilich or thematically connected to him.

The work of Dziga Vertov, a tireless and determined champion of the idea of insinuating the Kino-Eye into the very thick of our life “as it is”, without the slightest attempts to change it or stage it, is divided into three parts: (1) “Lenin’s work”, (2) “Lenin’s death”, and (3) “Lenin has died, but his strength is with us”. These parts, in turn, according to Comrade Vertov’s plan, are subdivided into the following “thematic chains”: in Part One – Lenin is wounded, Lenin on the dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin and the Red Army, Lenin on the proletariat and the peasantry, Lenin and the Komintern, the masses to Lenin, the factories to Lenin, the fields to Lenin, the Red Army to Lenin, the children to Lenin, the East to Lenin, Lenin and electrification, and the move from War Communism to the NEP; in Part Two – Lenin’s illness, a bulletin about Lenin’s illness, Zinoviev<sup>15</sup> on the illness and death of Ilich, “Lenin is dead”, the orphaned Central Committee, Lenin and the masses, his family by the coffin, workers, peasants, workers from the East, Red Army men and sailors by the coffin, the vow of the young Leninists; and, finally, in Part Three, the Lenin enrolment, male worker Leninists, female worker Leninists, the Leninist Party, young Leninists, the mausoleum, the work of Young Pioneers in the countryside, the peasants at a workers’ meeting, and, as the apotheosis, the handshake of a worker and a peasant, and a train speeding “along the rails of Leninism” (a slogan brought to life, based on Deni’s<sup>16</sup> drawing from the special Lenin issue of *Pravda*).

We have to give Comrade Vertov and his energetic collaborators due credit: this work, which has been planned so harmoniously and with such logical correctness, has been carried out with great skill and inventiveness. The sequences which have been selected to illustrate these “thematic links” are vivid and expressive, and they gain greatly from being put together precisely in this logical order, while at the same time individually producing a strong impression.

The skill in choosing appropriate “pieces of life” is one of Comrade Vertov’s strong points, and in this work it is particularly clearly apparent, but so is his weak point: you do not sense on screen that logical coherence which is Comrade Vertov’s plan. The viewer does not sense it. The whole film collapses into its component parts.

This failing can be removed from the work under discussion by replacing the sloganizing intertitles with explanatory ones, which can be done simply, vividly, expressively, and... comprehensibly. If Comrade Vertov wants to work for worker and peasant audiences, then above all he must think about simplicity and comprehensibility. The claims that even as it is the film provokes applause from worker viewers are unconvincing. It would be strange if the working masses, stuffed to the gills with Western (and sometimes our own, national) cine-vulgarity, were not elated by such fine sequences, which are so near to them in spirit. But they must take the next step: they have to link these sequences cinematographically, and if that is impossible, then they must do so by means of literature. Comrade Vertov should not be horrified by this suggestion: there is more than enough literature in his film as it is; it’s just that it doesn’t explain things, and in places even causes more confusion.

Comrade Vertov has passed through the “antithetical”, destructive period in his work. It is time to move on to “synthesis”. And it would be a good thing if the big *Lenin* film, into which he intends to develop the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*, was made in this next stage of Comrade Vertov’s work.

### ***Lenin Is Alive in the Heart of the Peasant***

*B[oris] G[usman]*, “*V serdtse krestianina Lenin zhiv*”, *Pravda*, 3 April 1925

The latest work of Comrade Vertov is a further development of the Lenin theme, which, along with earlier and later works, will comprise one large “Lenin” film. This is a very responsible and complex task, and it requires a maximum of acuteness and care. The fact that Comrade Vertov wants to deal exclusively with living material, with hewed-out pieces of authentic life, both simplifies and complicates this task. It simplifies it in that it allows Comrade Vertov in this case to avoid the almost inevitable falsity that the necessity to use a script brings with it. It complicates the task in that the stringing of the separate parts into the unified whole which the film must represent is not always possible without *longueurs*, without mechanical pressure on the material.

These peculiarities of the task Comrade Vertov has set himself are also apparent in this work. On the one hand, there is the total naturalness of certain sections, a naturalness which in a feature film can only be achieved by means of an almost exceptional mastery, and, on the other hand, an artificiality in the stringing together of these sections, a too-sharp transfer of the viewer’s attention from one episode to another, which of course has an effect on the coherence of the viewer’s response.

The film is made in the form of the demonstration of those images which live on in the hearts of the worker and the peasant in connection with their memories of Lenin. An interesting device is used, of enlivening his speech at a meeting by means of introducing a whole series of episodes, including scenes from the lives of colonial and semi-colonial peasants. A further step has been made in the direction of increased simplicity and comprehensibility, which we must especially welcome, since the picture is undoubtedly intended for mass audiences. The picture suffers from a certain long-windedness.

#### **Notes**

1. Probably Vserossiiskii foto-kino komitet, known as VFKO. As this is an imprecise credit, please see note 2 of this volume’s filmography for an explanation of the correct style for this production company.
2. Probably A. Zorich (Vasily Lokot, 1899-1937), the *Pravda* journalist, popular satirist.
3. Emile Vandervelde (1866-1938), Belgian right-wing Socialist and one of the leaders of the Second International. He made a special visit to Moscow in 1922 to act as a defense witness in the trial of the Right Socialist-Revolutionaries.
4. Political label used for private business people under the New Economic Policy (NEP).
5. Vasilii Iakovenko (1889-1937), Soviet statesman, People’s Commissar for Agriculture in 1922-23.

## Storming of the Winter Palace

This was not for real, of course, and this was not a movie. To celebrate the third anniversary of the October Revolution an impressive mass pageant was staged at the gates to the Winter Palace in 1920, re-enacting the storming as it was believed to have happened three years earlier. These frame enlargements come from a newsreel that recorded the pageant. Some of the elements were retrofitted in the real setting of the Palace: note a white bridge that was never there, and the ugly, slightly Expressionist prison cut out of plywood. A prison in the heart of the royal palace? Symbolism-fuelled Proletkult imagination. The apotheosis: a slogan written in fireworks, "The Kingdom of Labour".





6. The author refers to the thirteenth ("October") issue of *Kino-Pravda*, which came out in November 1922, five years after the October Revolution.
7. Komintern: *Kommunisticheskii internatsional* (Communist International).
8. Georgy Chicherin (1872–1936), Soviet diplomat, Leon Trotsky's successor as Foreign Commissar. In 1922 Chicherin negotiated the Treaty of Rapallo with Germany.
9. Boris Gusman (1892–1944), critic, theatre director, and by the end of the 1920s the head of *Pravda's* theatre section.
10. Istpart: State Commission for the History of the October Revolution and Russia's Communist Party, 1920–28.
11. Possibly A. Zorich (see note 2).
12. Vaslav Vorovsky (1871–1923), diplomat, from 1921 Soviet emissary in Italy, assassinated by a White Russian *émigré* in Lausanne.
13. The *Spring* issue of *Kino-Pravda* (no. 16) included *Glumov's Diary* (*Dnevnik Glumova*), the one-reel short that Sergei Eisenstein shot to be projected during his 1923 Proletkult theatre performance, *The Wise Man* (*Mudrets*).
14. A section within Goskino, State Cinema Enterprise, in charge of non-fiction cinema (created in 1924).
15. Grigory Zinoviev, pseud. of Grigory Radomyslsky (1883–1936), politician, Communist leader, and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Komintern 1919–26. In 1923–24 Zinoviev supported Stalin in his campaign against Leon Trotsky.
16. Viktor Deni, pseud. of Viktor Denisov (1893–1946), graphic artist, creator of Soviet political posters and caricatures; staff artist with *Pravda* from 1921.

## KINO-PRAVDA AND CONSTRUCTIVISM



### The Tenth *Kino-Pravda*

*Aleksei Gan,*<sup>1</sup> "10-ia 'Kino-Pravda'", *Kino-fot*, no. 4, 1922

*Kino-Pravda* forced us to take it seriously from its very first issue.

Our Revolution is so rich in the movements of the masses, the swiftness with which events arise, their development and disappearance, that only a machine, an apparatus, can capture and record what is happening.

We need special means of expression to transmit the real world of human activity to the latecomer or the person who has not yet learned how to see reality in its concrete content.

The cinema, as a quality of our industrial age, and the cinema as a means of expression, are the only production elements which can organize our consciousness and help us to orientate ourselves in the present day.

Comrade Vertov and his assistant cameramen, after the long journeys of the Soviet film newsreel to the tenth issue of *Kino-Pravda*, have at last stepped out onto the real path of cinema, which must and is obliged to capture daily life and know how to present it in an organized way on the screen.

The tenth *Kino-Pravda* is valuable not only for the abundance of material; its value lies in the rhythm and tempo to which the film conforms, from the first shot to the last.

The international festival of the union of youth, and assembling a car, and restoring a factory – in a word, people, machines, and the material environment – all this has been presented by means proper to cinema as such, without any touches of conventional film aesthetics.

In it American montage is just a means for making it possible to construct sequences, shots, and individual scenes.

The newsreel ceases to be illustrative material reflecting this or that place in our many-sided contemporary life, and becomes contemporary life as such, outside of territories, time, or individual significance.

The whole tenth issue has screen-high intertitles.

And here too Vertov has overcome the worn-out technique of horizontal writing.

It is clear that words must be constructed onscreen in a different way.

I cannot call this attempt fully realized, but a word has been spoken.

Now it will be shameful to write "in the old way".

I and all young filmmakers await the eleventh issue of *Kino-Pravda*.

Through *Kino-Pravda* we are undoubtedly moving towards the kind of screen on

which it will be shameful to show the speculative work of film artists with their artistic productions.

The cinema must capture our daily life!

The cinema must know how to present it in an organized way.

Comrade Vertov and his collaborators are accomplishing a great cultural deed on the path to honest proletarian cinema.

### **The Thirteenth Experiment**

*Aleksei Gan, "Trinadtsatyi opyt", Kino-fot, no. 5, 10 December 1922, pp. 6-7<sup>2</sup>*

The thirteenth number of *Kino-Pravda* should be seen as VFKO's<sup>3</sup> thirteenth experiment in film production.

We have always said that the basic task of Soviet cinema, the task of the state that is in the firm grip of the workers and peasants, is registering revolutionary life on the screen.

The cinema of accursed Capitalism – the cinema of vulgar commerce – which is concerned with satisfying philistine tastes, is not the cinema for us, and we do not need it. A young and revolutionary cinema that registers events objectively day by day is essential to us, and we should work only in this field.

The creation of a *Cine-Gazette*, a *Cine-Journal* – in general terms, a *Cine-Word* for the masses – is not an easy matter.

The screen has already been badly soiled by art.

So-called "artistic" productions have crippled almost the whole of cinema's establishment of personnel. You will not achieve what is necessary with this reserve of old film specialists. That is why we welcome so warmly the strength of our youth, the fresh worker who has not been seized by the sweaty hands of the *beautiful*.

The work of Dziga Vertov seems to follow two basic directions: the attempts at pure montage (in nos. 5 and 6) that were almost realized in the tenth *Kino-Pravda*, and the attempts to join various subjects together into a single agitational whole.

The latter attempts were particularly successful in no. 13, where the Constructivist Rodchenko has managed to produce intertitles that have an impact of their own.

For instance:

LENIN

across the whole screen.

A screen word.

A talking cinema that talks in cinema language.

A title like an electric cord, like a conductor, through which the screen feeds on shining reality.

We all see in focus how our streets, squares, shop windows, posters lived and are living...

and hear how they

CALL

us all all all

TO THE WORLD-WIDE

to the proletarian

OCTOBER

We see aeroplanes, and at the same time we look down from them to the earth below and the earth flies past. Streets, houses, newspapers are conveyed in a new light, and Comrade Trotsky's words are clear in their spatial sense and temporal measure:

"We exist but people do not notice us."

"We fight", and we are fighting not for life but for death, and we hide nothing.

The graves in Astrakhan, the spades burying the bodies of our fallen heroes in Kronstadt, the banners lowered at the moment of burial in Minsk. We take off our hats. The Muscovites do the same on the embankment of the Moscow River.

The banners are raised again, and people hurry to Red Square.

A portrait of the worker Barbolin, killed in 1917.<sup>4</sup>

A poster appears: "Glory to Our Warriors".

In a restrained montage we then see in turn: our gains, our victory, and our steadfast alignment with the machine.

Yes, cinema is a great invention!

The thirteenth *Kino-Pravda* is good.

## The Constructivists

Excerpt from "Konstruktivisty", LEF, no. 1, 1923, pp. 251-52

In the First Working Group of Constructivists there is intensified preparation for the Spring Constructivist Exhibition, which in the current circumstances will have an enormous significance for clarifying the essence of Constructivism in the context of the recent appearance of "aesthetic constructivism" in the theatre and poetry. The exhibition will show all the works of the Constructivists since the time of their appearance, i.e., since 1920. Propaganda literature about Constructivism is also being prepared for the exhibition.

The Constructivists have broken completely with experimental or, more precisely, abstract activity, and have gone over to real work in the area of "socially meaningful artistic labour".

The Constructivist Rodchenko is leading work in the following fields:

CINEMA

Cinema intertitles for *Kino-Pravda*, to which he has taken a production approach, treating them as a part of the film itself, proceeding in his work on them from the demands of the montage and the script. He has produced three new types of cinema intertitles: a garish intertitle in large letters filling up the whole screen; three-dimensional intertitles; and intertitles which move through space. The intertitle has changed from being a dead point in a film to an organic part of it.

## Gan's 13th Experiment



This is Aleksei Gan's Constructivist layout for his "Thirteenth Experiment", the review of the 13th issue of Vertov's *Kino-Pravda*. The word "Pravda" is placed over "Kino", both inscribed in a geometrical figure reminiscent of a paper page. The huge word "Lenin", which competes in size with Aleksandr Rodchenko's intertitle, is meant to illustrate the impact the large font can exert on the film viewer (and, in this case, on the reader).

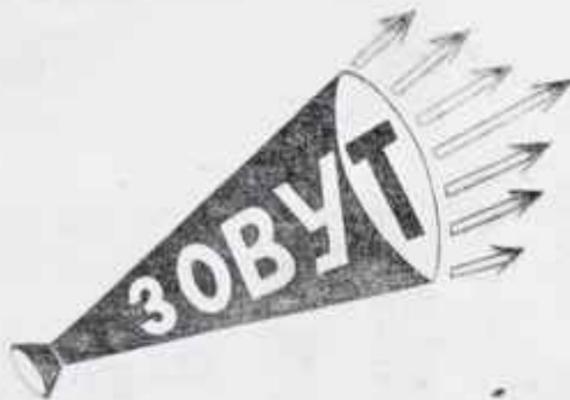
The second page is even more fanciful: the picture-words are part of the text and at the same

№ 5

7

Надпись как электрический шнур, как проводник, через который питается экран светящейся действительности.

И мы все—видим в фокусе, как жила и живут улицы, площади, витрины, плакаты... и слышим как они—



Всех, всех, всех



к пролетарскому



И мы видим аэропланы и одновременно смотрим с них вниз на землю, а земля бежит, несется в новом плане улицы, дома, газеты и четкая с пространственным смыслом и временным тактом слова товарища Троцкого:

„Мы существуем, а они нас не замечают“ „Мы боремся“, и боремся не на жизнь, а на смерть и не скрываем ничего.

Гробы в Астасхани, донаты ампьющие тела наших погибших героев в Кронштаде, склоненные знамена в момент погребения в Минске. Мы снимаем головные уборы. Это делают москвичи на набережной Москвы-реки.

Снова знамена вост и люди стремительно идут по Красную площадь.

Портрет рабочего Варболина, убитого в 1917 году.

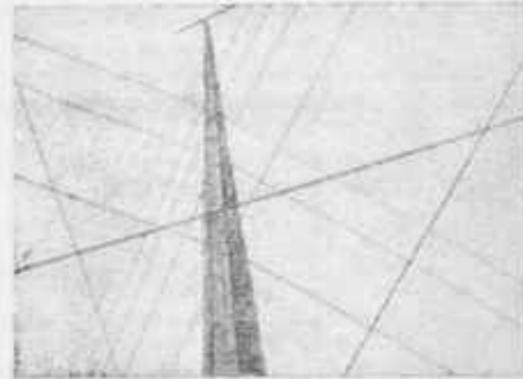
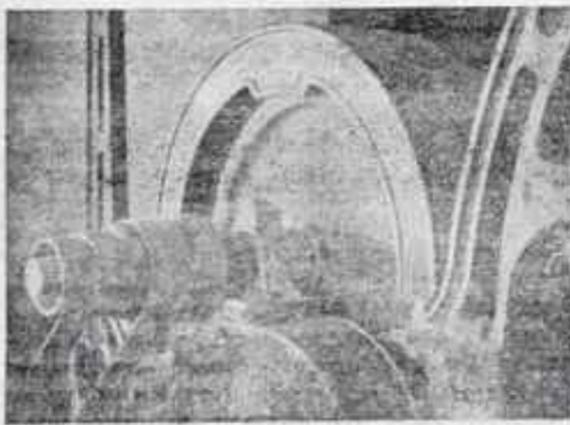
Наплывает плакат „Слава борцам“.

А дальше разворачивается в спокойном монтаже: наши завоевания наша победа и наше неколебимое равнение на машину.

Да, великое дело кинематография! Хороша тринадцатая Кинс-Правда.

А. Г.

## Натура Кино-Правды



time illustrations to it. The word “Zovut” (“They call”) is shown emerging – and expanding as it does so – from a megaphone of the type used by film directors. The word sitting in the geared wheel is “world-wide”, the big K to the left of it, “to”, and the one that runs through the star is “October”. Much like the titles in Vertov’s *Kino-Pravdas*, these three picture-words not only interact with the texts of the essay, but also form a coherent picture-phrase: “They call to the world-wide October.”<sup>5</sup>

## Titles

In his detailed and competent 1929 survey "The Intertitle and Its Evolution in the Work of the *Kinocs*" (see chap. 24), Vertov's staunch supporter Naum Kaufman (no relation) speaks of various innovative titling techniques which Vertov (and, we must add, Aleksandr Rodchenko and the *Kinocs* cameraman and animator Ivan Belikov) tried out in various issues of *Kino-Pravda* (1922-1925) and in *Kino-Eye* (1924): different (and differing) font sizes, cut-out letters lit from behind, in-picture titles, moving titles, and the like. The type of Constructivist font used here (as elsewhere at the time), known as *blochny* (block-like), was believed to work best in reaching peoples' minds. The long phrase "The Proletariat liberates peasantry of exploitation, leadership, and influence by the bourgeoisie" looks less mind-numbing thanks to two varying sizes and the use of boldface for the keyword. The tallest possible characters are reserved for two words, "Lenin" and "masses", inventively worked in between funeral images in the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*. "May is with you", says the title superimposed on the sleeve of Lenin's jacket. Later we follow the rapid decline in Lenin's health, represented in what can be seen as a *tour de force* of Vertov and Rodchenko's animated titling: a table of sorts, with a calendar for dates and a clock for counting the hours, temperature, pulse, and breath rate. The bottom-line inscription says "General state satisfactory", but the last word is split by an ominous slit.

ПРОЛЕТАРИАТ  
ОСВОБОЖДАЕТ  
КРЕСТЬЯНСТВО  
ОТ ЭКСПЛУАТАЦИИ, РУКОВОД-  
СТВА И ВЛИЯНИЯ БУРЖУА-  
ЗИИ.

МАССЫ



## POLYGRAPHIC PRODUCTION

Work on the design of book covers in the context of the most expedient use of the paper format for the particular text (gaudy advertisements) and also the working-out of a clear script, which the production process can justify. [...]

Work in the area of book illustration: – a new method of illustration has been introduced, involving the assembling of printed and photographic material on the particular theme, which in the wealth of its material and the vividness and reality of reproduction makes any “graphic-artistic” illustration pointless. You can see examples in *Kino-fot* no. 1.

THE METALWORK FACULTY OF VKHUTEMAS<sup>6</sup>

Work with the students is carried out in the context of Constructivism. The tasks Rodchenko gives his students for their practical work demand inventive solutions. An example is a bed which is also a chair and a working table – that is to say, one object must perform several different functions.

All the practical tasks are carried out through models. At present he has given them the following tasks: illuminated advertisements and spatially moving ones; also objects for light industry.

**Kino-Pravda**

“*Kino-Pravda*”, *Kino*, no. 1/5, 1923, pp. 31-32

On 29 January in the First State Cinema (The Arts) there was a showing of a number of issues of *Kino-Pravda*, released by the State Cinema Organization (Goskino).<sup>7</sup> They showed issues 1, 10, 13, and 14 (the last of these for the first time). In addition, they showed an issue of a foreign (German) newsreel, obviously with the secret intention of comparing the work of the State Cinema Organization with foreign work. Moreover, this comparison was in all respects to the advantage of the State Cinema Organization. The screening of several issues of *Kino-Pravda* (and specifically of the four listed above) had the aim of showing the basic stages of the development of *Kino-Pravda*, from the initial simple form of issue 1 to the complex montage constructions of its most recent issues. This “historical” survey of *Kino-Pravda* allows us to conclude that the workers who make it suffer no loss of energy from issue to issue; they do not stop experimenting, and keep on searching for a form for *Kino-Pravda* that will satisfy them. This, at least, is worth noting. But from our point of view *Kino-Pravda* still has one very weak point, which stops it being a real “film-thing”, and a “material construction”.<sup>8</sup> For all the wit in the selection and use of material, it is weak in content (material for “construction”), and because of this it approaches the border of “subjectlessness”, degenerates into the “fruitless” play of the mind and the fantasy, which for the aims of *Kino-Pravda*, that living, real newsreel of events, that mirror of our life, is not permissible. Moreover, this is not the fault of the authors of *Kino-Pravda*, but an economic and material failing. In order to make

*Kino-Pravda*, this living newspaper of contemporary life, you have to have sufficient technical apparatus, and, if not a whole corps, then at least a good, mobile workforce of cameramen-correspondents, spread as far as possible throughout the main points of the territory of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic. Only when things are set up in that way will *Kino-Pravda* have at its disposal the current material that it needs, and not be forced, as it is now, to engage in the more or less witty, more or less successful re-editing of old material, accumulated over a number of years, lightly refreshed by new filming, producing in the end not newsreel but something more like newspaper articles, editorials, satirical articles of a retrospective character. We are not against having this kind of "article" in *Kino-Pravda* too, and we are not against the use of old material, but that is only part of a real paper, one section in it. Its most lively part must, after all, be current "announcements", a daily chronicle. We think that when *Kino-Pravda* has the necessary resources to set things up in the appropriate way, it will also become more impressive stylistically, and will have less inclination to deviate in the direction of attention-grabbing experiments, which are instructive and interesting for every cinema craftsman, but which do not always correspond to the tasks of *Kino-Pravda*.

### **Goskino and the Capturing of Daily Life (At the Showing on 25 February)**

*Ex.*, "Goskino i fiksatsiia byta (na prosmotre 25 fevralia)", *Izvestiia*, 29 February 1924

Like the earlier issues of *Kino-Pravda*, the issue under review has been put together in the Constructivist method. The "Responsible Editor" for the most recent issue of *Kino-Pravda* is the Technical Director of Goskino, Comrade Goldobin,<sup>9</sup> but the Editor remains, as before, the *kinoc* Dziga Vertov.

This particular approach to cinematic montage has already been checked in two years of work. The *kinoc* method is based on the rejection of "aesthetic cuisine", and follows the aim of introducing natural daily life into cinema. Goskino has displayed great inventiveness in this direction, gluing together separate bits of daily life (not only parades, meetings, and congresses) into a meaningful film-thing. This is an undoubted achievement by Goskino. The path they took was thorny. The first issues of *Kino-Pravda* consisted of random sequences commissioned by trusts and state organizations without any link to topical concerns. The most recent issue of *Kino-Pravda*, the eighteenth, is already an attempt to capture the events of recent days with an intention worked out in advance. It is already "a run by the camera in the direction of contemporary life over so many metres in so many seconds".

Among the shortcomings of *Kino-Pravda*, one should mention the fact that it is overloaded with "simple" daily life, something which is caused by the out-datedness of certain of the political motifs that it includes (the episode at the agricultural exhibition should have been cut on the grounds that it is dated).

The photography is brilliant.

## Festivities



The Red Calendar (as it was called) brought people out for annual events (the October Anniversary and the First of May were the main ones), and special occasions like the Congress of the Communist International, for instance. The group with a film projector depicted on their banner in the Petrograd Photo-Cine Section are posing intentionally (I believe) under an old-time street sign for "Photographie Charles" – a shop or atelier which (I am sure) then no longer existed. The triumphal arch with the inscription "Workers of All Lands, Unite" has been decorated in honour of the Comintern Congress (place: Petrograd; date: find it in the picture). In another shot, even the children shown marching under this arch carry a slogan: "Labour is the joy, not the damnation of life."



Goskino has coped very well with the *Calendars*.<sup>10</sup> They include the most recent news: the ski run from Archangel to Moscow, the dedication of the Lenin monument in Bogorodsk, a cinematic portrait of Comrade Rykov,<sup>11</sup> the arrival of the Italian ambassador, the arrival of Comrade Nogin,<sup>12</sup> Revolutionary Students' Day, the sixth anniversary of the Red Army, and so on. The humorous episodes were deservedly very popular.

Let us express the wish that Goskino will continue to capture bits of our fast-moving life with the same care, and that it will soon give us the pleasure not only of run-of-the-mill productions, but also of hits.

### Recognition for the *Kinocs*

*Aleksei Gan, "Priznanie kinokov", Zrelishcha, no. 77, 1924 p. 12*

#### *Kino-Pravda*, issue 18

How does *Kino-Pravda* issue 18 differ from earlier issues? Above all, in that this issue has shown most fully and clearly in practice everything the *kinocs* have spoken and written about, everything they have been so intensely and unrestrainedly criticised for by their opponents.

299 metres, the length of this film-thing (*kino-veshch*), should pass before the viewers in 14 minutes and 50 seconds. If the projectionist projects it with an arbitrary speed, or if even a single metre is removed from this film-thing, it will be difficult to watch, it will become incomprehensible.

The film-thing, built and edited by the *kinocs*, should not be treated in the same way as you treat any artistic film concoction. The latter can be cut about, re-made, have bits cut out of it, and it makes no difference: it becomes neither better nor worse. It remains as unprincipled and illiterate as it was in the first place.

The montage in *Kino-Pravda*, both in individual subjects and in the thing as a whole, is constructed clearly and irreproachably.

The rhythm within each subject is even, emerging from the fullness of the shot and its content, and swings well with the general pulse of the thematic construction. For example:

one – pipes	
two – a head	union
three – hands	

or: the departure of a tram:

one – a cord	
two – a bell	two movements
three – a lever	

– all this in a single general sweep turns into the movement of the tram, with a cyclist racing along beside it, and a pedestrian quickly falling behind, and so on.

The movie camera is also finally introduced into the theme of the whole thing. The

camera is no longer a simple instrument for capturing, but a mechanism acting alongside all the others, which cannot be removed and cannot be forgotten.

The technique of the *kinocs*, built on precise calculation and reckoning of their kino-technical means, opens up the broadest opportunities for capturing surrounding reality in a new way and presenting it fully and interestingly.

Dziga Vertov has proved this most successfully with his “Octobriines”.<sup>13</sup>

Starting with an announcement in his studio about the “Octobriines”, whose theme is cinematically linked with his previous theme by a “deaf and dumb guest”, he consistently and actually “runs around with a camera”, around people, lathes, and things, taking them in now fully, now in part, and gathers it all together, giving living pieces of everyday life in a clear and constantly moving true story.

The most complicated thing, in my view, about the “Octobriines” is “The Internationale”. It’s not just people who participate in it, but machines, too. But we have to admit that not everything here is successful.

## Reviews

Of the reviews, I have so far managed to read in *Izvestiia* about “Goskino and the Capturing of Daily Life”. The writer of the note takes a positive line. He finds that *Kino-Pravda* issue 18 is made according to the Constructivist method, and that Dziga Vertov has proved the value of his approach to film montage in the two years that he has been working.

“Let us express the wish that Goskino will continue to capture bits of our fast-moving life with the same care, and that it will soon give us the pleasure not only of run-of-the-mill productions, but also of hits.”

And so the idea of “demonstrating daily life” and the works of the *kinocs* are beginning to be recognized. We must brace ourselves, and work.

## Notes

1. Born in 1885, 1889, or 1893 (sources differ), Aleksei Gan died in 1940. Gan’s theories of Constructivist art and ideas of future cinema had a considerable impact on Vertov’s theory and practice, but the two men fell out in 1923. That year Gan published a book-long Constructivist film manifesto, *Da zdravstvuet demonstratsiia byta!* (Long Live the Demonstration of Daily Life!) (Moscow: V.N. Pozdlniakov’s Printing Press, 1923), whose cover featured the face of a shouting man in extreme close-up – a still from Vertov’s *Kino-Pravda No. 13*. The cover (now known more widely than the text inside) worked well with the book’s “loud” title, which more or less sums up Gan’s idea of the task of cinema in Socialist society. The book (most of which concerns the first 16 issues of *Kino-Pravda*) tries to theorize Vertov’s path as a route towards this somewhat uninspiring task, and declares on page 1 of its opening statement: “21 May 1923 – is the first anniversary of *Kino-Pravda*. This anniversary of the *Kinocs*’ film production coincides with the anniversary of Constructivist involvement in filmmaking.” The book’s didactic tone angered Vertov. Besides, for all his friendship with Rodchenko, and Rodchenko’s role as the title designer for *Kino-Pravda*, Vertov resisted being labelled a Constructivist in the movies.
2. Translation by Richard Taylor: see *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939*, edited and translated by Richard Taylor, coedited with an introduction by Ian Christie (London: Routledge / Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 78-79.

### 3. KINO-PRAVDA AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

3. VFKO (Vserossiiskii foto-kino otdel): All-Union Photo-Cine Department. As this is an imprecise credit, please see note 2 of this volume's filmography for an explanation of the correct style for this production company.
4. Sergei Barbolin (1897-1917), one of the organizers of the proletarian youth movement.
5. We are fortunate Rodchenko's rebus is reproduced in Gan's review, because the sequence in which these titles belonged is missing from existing prints.
6. VHUTEMAS (Vysshie khydozhestvenno-tekhicheskie masterskie): Higher Artistic and Technical Workshops, at which Rodchenko was teaching.
7. Goskino (acronym from "state" and "cinema"): Russia's State Cinema Enterprise, into which VFKO was transformed in 1922.
8. *Kino-veshch*, *veshchnaia konstruktsiia*: two terms from the Constructivist vocabulary implying that the artwork must be a palpable object (*veshch*, literally, "thing"), and part of what Vladimir Tatlin used to call "material culture".
9. Aleksandr Goldobin (1882-1927), technical director and the head of the production department at Goskino; supporter of Vertov.
10. *Goskinokalendar* (*State Kino-Calendars*): regular newsreel issues that Vertov and the *kinocs* were producing in 1923-25 (57 issues were released).
11. Alexei Rykov (1881-1938), politician, Communist leader. In 1923 he was the deputy chair of the Soviet of People's Commissars.
12. Viktor Nogin (1878-1924), politician, Communist leader, People's Commissar of Labour.
13. *Oktiabrin*: Soviet ritual invented to replace the baptizing of babies.

## LIVING HISTORY

**Living History**

[D.] Pestrovskii, "Zhivaia istoria", *Izvestiia VTsIK*,<sup>1</sup> 1 February 1923

On 29 January there was a showing at the First State Cinema Factory of *Kino-Pravda* – material shot in October, in the New Year, and so on.

If until now the Soviet cinema has been lame in both legs, then as regards newsreel material, skilfully supplied to the viewer, significant results have been achieved.

On the screen is the living, tragic poem of the five years of existence of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic.

Blazing cisterns of oil, set on fire by the Whites. Sverdlov in his coffin.<sup>2</sup> Trotsky looking at burning Kazan through a telescope. Trotsky again, darting from Front to Front by train or car. Red Army soldiers running to the attack. And our military progress: from machine-gun carts and ill-assorted semi-partisan gatherings to smart, well-drilled rows marching before the faces of the Komintern in Red Square, to crawling tortoises – the terrifying tanks, to tractor artillery. And the black days along the Volga: the living, half-naked little skeletons of children, rummaging through rubbish heaps. The same little skeletons, only dead now, ossified, like logs piled up in a village graveyard among the grieving, slanting crosses...

And – today. Moscow – with its bustling anthill of streets, with its exultant little kids riding in trucks, with its squadrons of planes in the air, with its endless columns of workers, greeting the young Republic, which has survived all its torments, which has been carved out by the heavy hammer of History.

A peaceful renaissance. The burning milk of molten metal. The iron jaws of excavators, swallowing earth. An electric lamp under the eaves of a hut. Tractors turning over virgin soil. And then the Fourth Congress of the Komintern. The blue Astrakhan hat of Kalinin,<sup>3</sup> chopping wood at a *subbotnik* [a day of voluntary unpaid labour], and then having a smoke with his worker neighbour.

And a wonderful parallel. The West: rows of New York skyscrapers, the launching of a new super-battleship. And the lacquered shoes of the "slaves of America", effortfully breaking out into an American tap dance. An arch with the archaic words, "Oh God, Protect the Tsar", the result of the patriotic activities of Russian emigration.

The work creates a powerful impression. The montage is skilful and artistic. There are shortcomings, but you can see the work and the effort. The headings are constructed successfully. A comparison with the German newsreel shown afterwards was far from flattering to the latter. It is no surprise that the audience were applauding all the time. They were not just applauding Lenin, Kalinin, Trotsky, Chicherin. A Red Army sentry, shiver-

Danton



*Kino-Week No. 34* shows a monument to Danton sculpted by Nikolai Andreev (1873-1932) being unveiled in the centre of Moscow (across the street from the Bolshoi Theatre). Erected in February 1919, the monument soon fell apart (for want of more stable material, it was made of plaster), which hardly anyone felt sorry about. The joke circulated at that time that the monument was not really to Danton, but to Danton's guillotined head.

ing in the snow, and a worker chauffeur driving a tractor were greeted with the same ovation. And this is significant. To these men, who made and defended the Republic of Soviets through their arduous suffering and their labours, this *Kino-Pravda* can be dedicated.

### **Lenin Kino Pravda, a Work by Dziga Vertov, Goskino**

M.B.,<sup>4</sup> "Leninskaia 'Kino-Pravda', rabota Dzigii Vertova, Goskino", *Kino-zhurnal ARK*, no. 3, 1925, p. 34

The *Lenin Kino-Pravda* is the first experiment in bringing a certain systematization to the chronicle work of the *kinocs*, but since there is not, in point of fact, a precisely worked-out plan of production here, what has resulted is a picture that is multifarious and lacks consistency. Parts with action which maintains a high tension (such as the second part), which are sufficiently clearly and graphically worked out, and which are excellent in respect of their montage, give way to parts and episodes which drop the tempo and lose the attention of the viewer, so that then a certain number of shots have to be wasted on overcoming the inertia they have introduced. Examples are the introduction of animated cartoons into the most lively parts of the film, and sticking shots of ordinary tempo in among the "tractor pathos" of the preceding elements.

But we are justified in making broader demands of the *Lenin Kino-Pravda* than those of a narrowly formal character. The worker audience who are going to watch it is not at all bothered about the contrivances of the filmmakers; they are going to assess it purely with regard to its content. And in this respect one should be fair to the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*. The choice of socially essential material is not bad in general, and its treatment, and the fact that there are very few (almost no) newsreels of this kind make it the best thing done in this direction in this country so far.

And precisely with regard not to the formal aspect but to the inner significance of the content, certain scenes reach the consciousness of the viewer far more convincingly than scenes which are technically well made but have no content. The scene of the last farewell to the coffin of Ilich is so alive that it forces everyone to experience that moment anew.

The *Lenin Kino-Pravda* underlines once more the practical necessity of the *kinocs'* works, but it also stresses how essential it is that their content be perfected.

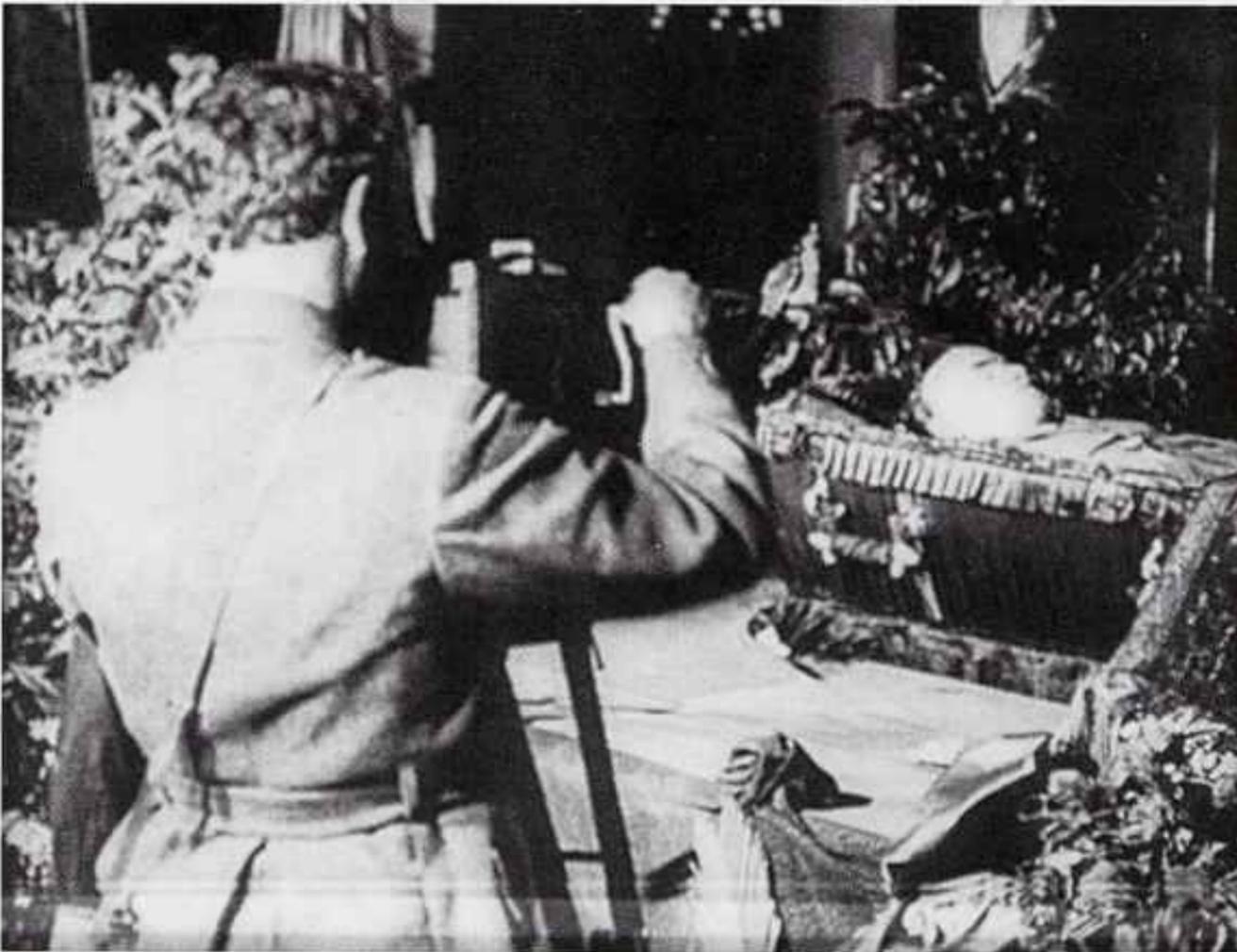
### **Lenin Kino-Pravda: For the Anniversary of the Death of Vladimir Ilich Lenin, 1924-1925 (A Goskino Production)**

Military Correspondent Pavel Afanasev, "Leninskaia 'Kino-Pravda'. K godovshchine smerti Vladimira Ilicha Lenina, 1924-1925 (Postanovka Goskino)", *Kino-nedelia*, no. 7 (54), 10 February 1925, p. 8

The viewer sees a worker from the Lenin Factory talking about Kaplan's<sup>5</sup> attack on Lenin's life, which happened here in the Lenin Factory. Then the events of 1918-1919

## Lenin Dead

In 1918 Lenin was wounded by an assassin, Fanny Kaplan, a member of the Socialist Revolutionary party. The assassination attempt set off a wave of Cheka reprisals known as the Red Terror, repeated in 1919 when Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were murdered in Germany. The inscription surrounding the death's-head on the banner held by the officials of the Petrograd region Soviet reads: "Death to the bourgeoisie and its underlings. Long live the Red Terror." The *Lenin Kino-Pravda* tells the story of Lenin's death in 1924 and the national mourning that followed. Shots of the dead Lenin come back in Vertov's later films as well.





unfold. Lenin among the masses. He is speaking about holding on to the positions we have won over the years.

1920-1921. New misfortunes for the Republic. Industry has ground to a halt. Failure of the harvest, hunger, epidemics. Each of these misfortunes unfolds more and more terrible pictures before the viewer. You watch it, and you can't even believe that the young Republic has had to endure all this. And once again, the masses. The masses... The masses... And all the time, among the masses is Lenin. He is speaking... He is inspiring them... Alone. Like a giant, all through this part of the film he is pushing everything forward.

NEP, the Nizhny Novgorod fair, the course set for machine building, electrification... And still him... Him with the masses...

The second part of the film resounds with bulletins about the state of Lenin's health. And then the leader Lenin in the Hall of Columns, in his coffin... The screen is silent. But somehow, looking at the faces of the people who pass across the screen, you feel their plangent, scarcely controllable grief.

Here is the orphaned Central Committee, his wife, his sister, Clara Zetkin...<sup>6</sup> all the old Bolsheviks. There is no weakness, no tears about their loss. But on the faces is a concealed, hidden grief. The masses begin to flow by. Those masses among whom Lenin lived and worked. Here the simple grief of many is openly visible... The sobs... the tears... the hysteria.

And the masses keep flowing past, paying their last respects to the Leader; the workers, peasants, and Red Army men move in a wall.

The third part shows how close the ideas of ILICH were to the people, and how dear he was to them. Thousands of people have moved to fill the empty space in the Party.

There is a very good cartoon of Poincaré,<sup>7</sup> rejoicing after the death of the Leader, but then beaten down into a plank at the news of the wave of Leninists. We must make mention of the successful shot under the carriage of a train, speeding along the rails of Leninism.

Of the film as a whole, we can say that it has enormous significance, since it serves as a vivid memorial to the gigantic work of the leader in the last years of his life.

### ***Kino-Pravda* No. 22 (A Showing in Kultkino)**

*N.V., "Kino-Pravda' N° 22 (Prosmotr v Kultkino)", Trud, 28 March 1925, p. 6*

*Kino-Pravda* No. 22 continues the task set by the previous issue of gathering together and arranging material on Lenin. This time the subject is the visit to Moscow by 500 peasants on the anniversary of Lenin's death. The peasants visited the mausoleum, looked round the Kremlin, spent time with the heads of factories and works, and attended a special meeting.

The director, Comrade Vertov, had the undoubtedly difficult task of developing this essentially actionless newsreel in a way that would not be boring for the average viewer.

Vertov had recourse to various interesting devices to get around this problem. He made the film livelier by alternating sequences with contrasting subject matter. Then he gave close-ups of the most typical worker and peasant faces, and finally he successfully interpolated into the general fabric specially chosen illustrations of the fact that the name of Lenin resounds throughout the world. There is also an interesting attempt to “stage” “The Internationale” through depicting how individual singers sing it. Here one particularly remembers a woman’s face which is suffused and illuminated by the melody which her lips are reproducing.

But of course it is not possible to bring action-less material (meetings, a procession) fully to life. All the same, the newsreel drags rather slowly at times, and in places your attention weakens. However, even now a series of corrections could be introduced: shortening the beginning, reducing the number of repetitions, especially with regard to the visits to the mausoleum. On the other hand, it would be good to add a few architectural shots of the Kremlin and, if possible, to film the interior of the mausoleum.

It would also be a good idea not to name this issue of *Kino-Pravda* with the slogan “Lenin Is Alive in the Heart of the Peasant”. This loud and demanding title just does not find sufficient support in the material in the film. It would be far better to come up with more simple, more “Leninist” words, without revolutionary phrase-making.

The shortcomings we have pointed to do not, of course, deprive the issue of *Kino-Pravda* under review of great and serious interest. It is essential that Comrade Vertov continue his interesting experiments in making the Soviet newsreel more profound.

At the end of the programme a film showing the funeral of N. Narimanov was screened.<sup>8</sup> This material was filmed differently, inasmuch as the cameramen worked exclusively from strictly set positions, without the freedom to move around. The experiment was successful. The short film gives an interesting account of all the basic stages of the burial ceremony, starting with the farewell in the Hall of Columns and ending with the lowering of the coffin into the grave. There are some wonderful general shots of Red Square, shot for the first time from the Kremlin wall.

It should also be entered to the credit of the Kultkino group that it managed to edit material shot on a Sunday in a single night and send it into distribution on the Monday. This swiftness is worthy of every praise.

### Notes

1. VTsIK: Vserossiiskii tsentralnyi ispolnitelnyi komitet, the All-Union Central Executive Committee.
2. Iakov Sverdlov (1885-1919), politician, Bolshevik leader.
3. Mikhail Kalinin (1875-1946), politician, Bolshevik leader.
4. Probably journalist and film critic Mikhail Belia(e)vsky, who worked for the newspaper *Kino* in the 1920s.
5. Fanny Kaplan, pseud. of Feiga Roitblat (1887-1918), shot and severely wounded Lenin on 30 August 1918.
6. Clara Zetkin (1857-1933), German Communist; first visited Russia in 1920.
7. Raymond Poincaré (1860-1934), the French prime minister.
8. Born in 1870, Azerbaijani Communist leader Nariman Narimanov died on 16 March 1925, and was interred in Moscow’s Red Square, near the Kremlin wall. His burial was filmed by Mezhrabpomfilm, Goskino, and Proletkino, but all the cameramen’s names are unknown.

Rations



Civil War rule of thumb: come for milk with your own milk can, teapot, whatever. Soup was sometimes served in buckets, as the soldier who helps to ladle it explains to the movie camera using his index finger.

## KINO-PRAVDA, WHERE ARE YOU?

### The VFKO Mobile Cinemas

*"Peredvizhki VFKO",<sup>1</sup> Kino-fot, no. 2, 1922, p. 7*

At the very beginning of the Revolution, film compartments were organized in the steam trains of VTsIK,<sup>2</sup> and there were waterside cinemas on steamships, and film-carriages, and one film-car.

The compartments and steamers showed specially prepared films on their trips, and the film-carriages waged campaigns in the areas of production propaganda, electrification, and the struggle against famine.

When the steam trains of VTsIK were disbanded, part of their film material and technical equipment was transferred to VFKO. But VFKO received very little, since the majority stayed in the vaults of the Central Board of Political Enlightenment, and remains there to this day.

This is the explanation for the narrow scale of activity of the VFKO mobile cinemas. Recently there was a two-week campaign for the removal of church valuables (by the Moscow Committee of the Russian Communist Party) and a peat campaign on the instructions of the Provincial Board of Political Enlightenment.

The work of the mobile cinemas is demonstrated in issue 9 of *Kino-Pravda*.

### The work of the VFKO Mobile Cinemas over the 1922 summer season

In May there was a campaign about the struggle against famine on the instructions of the Moscow Committee of the Russian Communist Party, which lasted over two weeks, with three to five mobile cinemas working every day in the squares and workers' clubs of Moscow. The only films that were shown were ones about hunger, filmed by VFKO. The bureau, in the person of its head, Comrade VERTOV, received official thanks from the Moscow Committee for the work it had done.

At the end of June and throughout July the mobile cinema worked in the peat works of Moscow province, in the Boloshenskii, Shchelkovskii, Bogorodskii, and Orekhovo-Zuevo regions. In all they carried out 49 showings, each of them lasting from three to five hours. The films were about agriculture, the peat works, and some comic propaganda. We were asked not to show any dramas. They watched it everywhere, in each and every one of the peat works, the entire population (not only the workers but also the peasants from the surrounding villages).

On 20 June, on the day of a demonstration against the Socialist Revolutionary Party, four mobile cinemas were working in Moscow squares. They showed *The Trial of the S.R.s* and *Kino-Pravda*. Around 10,000 people saw it.

### Kino-Train



This is one of the railroad propaganda vehicles known as “Agit-trains” or “Kino-trains” (if equipped – like this one – with a film camera and a projector). Vertov used to work on trains like this, and even made a one-reel travel movie called *The Agit-Train* (1921). These three shots (found in the Swedish compilation *Rysk Journal*) may come from this somewhat mysterious film, whose title is known only from Vertov’s writings. At least the train belongs to VTsIK (the All-Russia Central Executive Committee), as is written on the car, from which fresh newspapers were handed out for local people to read. “Workers of all lands, unite!” reads the marquee to the left of the leather-jacketed woman shown giving a public speech on the roof of one of the cars, the phrase almost looking like a scroll title rendering her message. The third shot is taken from the train in motion. The cameraman is filming local peasants running behind the train, who are attempting to catch the newspapers being thrown off. Even propaganda can sometimes be fun.

Beginning from July of this year, twice a week, mainly on Thursdays and Sundays, two mobile cinemas are working in Moscow squares. They are showing all the current newsreels and *Kino-Pravda*. Each time the audience numbers two to five thousand people.

### **Kino-Pravda Is Being Exported to America**

“*Kino-Pravda*’ eksportiruetsia v Ameriku”, *Kino-fot*, no. 3, 1922, p. 7

The VFKO has concluded an agreement with representatives of the Kuzbass<sup>3</sup> about the exploitation of the *Kino-Pravda* journal and a number of other VFKO newsreels in the territories of North and South America. The first load of issues of *Kino-Pravda* has been sent to America. There is a plan to create a film laboratory in Berlin for printing the necessary number of positives of *Kino-Pravda* and the newsreels for showing in America.

### **So Let Us See It!**

*Village Correspondent Ilya Kopalin.*<sup>4</sup> *By order of the village Komsomol cell.*<sup>5</sup> *Address: Moscow province, Baltic-White Sea railway, Manikhino station, village of Pavlovskaia, Komsomol cell. “Daite zhe posmotret!”*, RGALI 2091-1-86, sheets 66-67

Every Sunday in our October Factory in the Resurrection district of Moscow province we have film shows, and it’s always such rubbish, such garbage, that you can’t help asking: do we really have none of our own proletarian pictures in the Soviet Union?

Can Soviet power really allow the villages to be fed with various adventures of various Mr. Wests?<sup>6</sup> Where are the good pictures? But there really are such pictures. On 23 November, on the anniversary of the village detachment of Pioneers, we managed to get hold of our first *Kino-Pravda*, numbers 19 and 20. Just think about it, they’re already up to no. 20, but we in the countryside know nothing about it. Where are these pictures? Does Goskino keep them hidden away? We know that the film *Kino-Eye* was recently released – they wrote about it, and we know that it is a remarkable picture, everyone wants to watch it, so we ran around all over the place, we went to a lot of trouble, but the picture doesn’t exist. It’s as if it has fallen into a hole in the ground. So once again we get *Mr. West* and similar rubbish.

Now that we have seen *Kino-Pravda* for the first time, we are even more eager to say that there are good pictures for the countryside, pictures with no made-up mugs and obscene grimaces, pictures which do not corrupt the countryside, but which show real life. So give us these pictures, don’t hide them, bring them to the countryside. The countryside is waiting for pictures like this. It’s sick and tired of watching all sorts of rubbish.

Orators





Speeches gain in interest when captured in silent films. One outdoor shot portrays Lenin straining his voice to reach the crowd below. Another one shows the dedication of the Column to Revolutionary Heroes: the elegant lady speaking is Olga Kameneva (1881-1941), head of the Theatre Section at the Commissariat of Education, Leon Trotsky's sister, and the wife of Lev Kamenev (another top figure in the Soviet government and the Communist Party). The indoor shots represent the Second Congress of the Communist International: Lenin's keynote address (the text below is not a subtitle, but a plea not to smoke, written in five languages); Karl Radek (1885-1939), the speaker with long whiskers; the same day, 3:20 P.M.: his arms stretched forward in an attitude soon to become iconographic, Lenin addresses the attentive audience (note Radek attending to something funny happening behind Lenin's back). Identically poised and identically unbuttoned are two other Communists, the German Paul Levi (1883-1930) and (with the beard) Giacinto Menotti Serrati (1872-1926).

## Kino-Pravda, Where Are You?

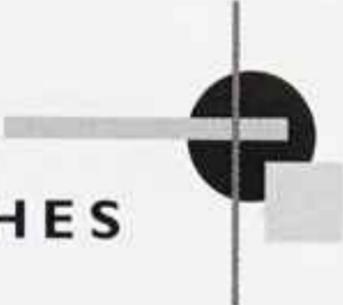
*Unskilled worker Biurobina, "Kino-Pravda, gde ty?", Pravda, 19 July 1924*

A month ago I happened to be in a cinema where they were showing *Kino-Pravda*, which created an enormous impression on the viewers. In it we saw our dear Ilich, Krupskaiia,<sup>7</sup> a male worker, a female worker, and a peasant – in a word, in this picture I met my beloved worker family, the father of which was our great teacher and leader, Vladimir Ilich Lenin. Naturally I was drawn to watch another *Kino-Pravda*. I wanted to meet my dear family again, but, to my great distress, however much I did the rounds of the film theatres, all I encountered on the hoardings was these various German-American women with billions, air pirates with Harry Piel,<sup>8</sup> and so on and so forth. But these pictures, in which you see nothing other than banditry, leave nothing but wind in the viewer's head. So why isn't *Kino-Pravda* showing anywhere? Why don't they disseminate it in several hundred copies and show it in workers' clubs, in the workers' gardens and film theatres all over our Republic which everyone has access to? After all, *Kino-Pravda*, as well as providing the union of the worker and the peasant, gives us the most absorbing newspaper and helps increase political literacy.

Goskino, where are you hiding *Kino-Pravda* after the demonstration viewings?  
Answer!

### Notes

1. VFKO (Vsesoyuznyi foto-kino otdel): the All-Russia Photo-Cine Department, of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros).
2. VTsIK (Vserossiiskii tsentralnyi ispolnitelnyi komitet): All-Union Central Executive Committee, the Soviet equivalent of a governmental body.
3. Coal-producing region in the Ukraine.
4. Ilya Kopalin (1900-1976), documentary filmmaker, a *kinoc* from 1925; co-directed the documentary feature *Moscow (Moskva, 1926)* with Mikhail Kaufman.
5. Komsomol: acronym for The Union of Communist Youth, country-wide organization of politically active young non-Party members.
6. Reference to Lev Kuleshov's film *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks (Neobychnyye prikliucheniia mistera Vesta v strane bolshevikov, 1924)*.
7. Nadezhda Krupskaiia (1869-1939), Soviet educator, Communist Party and government figure, and the wife of Vladimir Lenin. "Ilich" was Lenin's pet name.
8. Harry Piel (1892-1963), the German film star.



## THE FIRST CLASHES

### On Filming Newsreel Subjects

*Dziga Vertov, excerpt from "O s'emke kinosiuzhetov v khronike", 1922, RGALI 2091-2-154*

What must and can be done now in Russia?

- a) Tricks and a maximum of invention during all kinds of filming.
- b) Improvement and invention in laboratory work, trick printing of the positive from the negative (dual and triple printing), printing various negatives into the positive (aperture inventions – laboratory montage).
- c) Innovation and tricks in the area of our own montage.
- d) The repertoire: (1) production and machine studies; (2) Trick comic studies both today and tomorrow (through the method of the hyperbolic trick); (3) Newsreel from montage studies to montage of events. In particular, VFKO: using production orders for productions about contemporary life. A complete refusal to stage literary works.
- e) Preparation of the viewers and the reception of new things.
- f) The exposure of cinematography, instilling a feeling of revulsion towards *kino-drames* and *kino-dames*.

#### 3. What kind of an organization is the *kinocs*?

It is a group of people who are separated territorially and work separately under the same slogans. Their aim is to oppose cinematography (the trade in and production of marketable but unnecessary goods) to *kinoculism* – the world-view of the mechanical eye, a more perfect perception of the world [—] the world from a new angle of vision, a fresh world.

The *kinocs* group was organized at the end of 1919, at the arduous time of starving queues and dark stoves;

in the dark evening of dead electricity,

by the light of a potato lamp.

Even then we warmed ourselves in the warmth of our first manifesto, which for technical reasons could be published only in August of this year, in the first issue of the *Kino-fot* journal.

#### 4. What are your methods of work?

The methods of research proposed by *Kino*:

1 / Observation.

2 / Experiment.

3 / Measurement, applied to the study of complex movements and their subdivision into an alphabet, the selection of as large as possible a number of naturally determined correlations, on the basis of which is created 4 / a kino-hypothesis, kino-theory, and after checking it in all life phenomena, 5 / kino-law.

This is the general instruction, which is compulsory for all *kinocs*, wherever they may be.

The theory of mechanical reception, the law of continuation of motion, the law of simultaneity of action, the system of consistent movements, require substantiation, require material proof of their existence / theorems are preferable to axioms/

Dynamic art, the cinema with a perfected model actor, cinema without actors and without model actors, are a boundless area of experiment and measurement. The *kinocs* are now going through the first stage of their research – observation. The first experiments will be shown in 1923.

6. How do you react to the attacks from the old men?

“It is better to be a young pup than an old bird of paradise,” Mark Twain’s slogan, which was taken up by the Eccentrics,<sup>1</sup> consoles us in situations of this kind.

7. Your attitude to the Film School?

Extremely favourable. The State Film School is making the first attempt to produce half-way literate model film actors, or in the worst case literate film viewers.

I would advise everyone who was enquiring about joining the research and reconnaissance group of the *kinocs* to acquire a general cinematic education in the State Film School.

### **A New Current in Cinema**

*Dziga Vertov, “Novoe techenie v kinematografii”, Pravda, 15 July 1923*

We publish here (retaining the style of the original) a note by Comrade Vertov, with the aim of familiarizing our readers with a new current in the area of cinematography and provoking an exchange of opinions on this subject on the part of comrades working in cinema.

OUR POINT OF VIEW.

WHICH IS:

All films, those of the past and those of the present, our films and foreign films, whether they are psychological films or detective films, are a literary skeleton plus film illustration.

The basic role of the cinema in the general context of the renewal of a stagnant understanding of the world has been squeezed out by its peripheral illustrative functions.

The orientation of the Russian cinema towards the psycho-drama in six acts is an orientation towards its own backside.

Five years of revolution have passed to no avail for the cinema. Daydreams about literary production and the studio as a way of saving our cinema – the mad delusion of people who have lost the capacity to think actively – also threaten to bring state film production to its last inglorious gasp.

WHAT IS NEEDED.

Instead of music, art, theatre, cinema, and other castrated effusions, for the start we need:



Camera Proud



Everyone knows that cinema captures people in motion, but the instinct almost universally is to freeze, as one does for a still photograph. The many frozen horsemen are Czechoslovak cavalry in Penza. "Huge selection of ready-made clothing" reads – and shows – the sizable advertisement of M.G. Fridman's store, seen in the background. Neither the store nor its former owner Fridman were likely to be around at the time this shot was filmed. The three-tiered arrangement of the field commanders in another shot probably has to do with their respective ranks. The carefully unfolded and rather fanciful flag the man in the middle (the one with the Mauser in his right hand) is shown holding reads: "We bring death to the Old World."



1. The radio-ear – a montage “I hear!”
2. The kino-eye – a montage “I see!”

Instead of fake copies of life, the montage of life itself.

1. Radio-newsreel – the organization of the observations of the mechanical ear.
2. Kino-newsreel – the organization of the observations of the mechanical eye.

Not the Pathé or Gaumont film newsreel (a newspaper chronicle) and not even *Kino-Pravda* (a political newsreel), but a real *kinocs* newsreel – a headlong survey of visual events deciphered by the movie camera, pieces of real energy (not theatrical energy) reduced at intervals to an accumulator whole by the great mastery of montage... (from the book “The *Kinocs*: A Revolution”)... “The extraordinary flexibility of montage construction allows us to bring any political and economic motifs into our film-study...”<sup>2</sup>

This is the only means by which the Great Russian Revolution can be seen in an organized way, interpreted for the masses and handed down over the centuries.

And the most pinchingly propagandist kino-dramas will then seem to be stupid mockery and caricature of the Revolution. This has been brilliantly confirmed by the films produced in Russia by various companies in 1921, 1922, and 1923, including even *The Actress* (Sevzapkino)<sup>3</sup> which we saw a few days ago.

#### THE KINOCs

The *kinocs* are masters of vision and organizers of seen life, armed “from their feet to their head” by the Kino-Eye.

Our programme: the organization of the observations of the human eye, plus the emancipation of the apparatus, plus the organization of the observations of the mechanical eye, is the kino-sensation of the world.

A revolution in seeing, and therefore in man’s reception of the world in general. A free, which means an active, conception of even the most mundane things.

Adventure dramas, sentimental dramas, pseudo-historical dramas, and pseudo-dramas of ordinary life may be needed by the bored and languorous eyes of the Western *bourgeoisie* and of our *bourgeoisie*, *Nepmen* gone to fat.

The sharp eyes of the workers and the untouched eyes of the peasants should not, in a workers’ country, be offered either *bourgeois* dramas or theatrical simulacra of worker and peasant life.

All attempts in this direction are absurd and irritating.

We put everything into a new understanding of film newsreel and, resting on today, we decisively turn the rudder of world cinema.

#### On “A New Current in Cinema”

“*Novoe techenie v kinematografii*”, *Pravda*, 24 July 1923

##### 1. Intellectual Cine-Sophistry

*V. Shentiapin*

In the six years of our Revolution we have not yet managed to outlive our cinematic dis-

Processions



Movements of crowds and soldiers, banners in different languages and colours – all this makes revolution fun for kids and filmmakers.



order, to gather together all our strength, means, and film workers, to work out a single plan for film work and to bring it to life in a co-ordinated way – in a word, in the area of cinema we have not yet properly managed to regulate the old and to use it in new revolutionary forms and constructions, and yet certain film workers are proposing completely smashing up the old and beginning to create some new movements in cinematography. This is the title of the article by Comrade Dziga Vertov which appeared in issue 157 of *Pravda* on 15 July.<sup>4</sup>

Of course even in our state of complete confusion the cinema should not be alien to new movements, but these movements should be healthy, sensible, and, above all, not in the shadow of any “*kinocs*-castrated” and “montage” effusions. We should not forget that the cinema is a purely proletarian art, an art for the masses, for the workers and peasants. It is only thanks to the cinema that workers in the most far-flung corners and the countryside can be familiarized with the productions of the world’s best artists of stage and screen, with the best plays of the world repertoire, and in this way can be introduced to cultured life, given a healthy, rational means of entertainment, and thus turned away from drunkenness and home-brew. And it goes without saying that film-plays should above all be realistic, precise, vivid, clear, and comprehensible by the masses. There is absolutely no need here for any intellectual sophistry, which would be utterly inappropriate.

The cinema has a very valuable advantage over the ordinary stage, which is very important and should be protected and used cleverly; the cinema is not constrained by the artifice of the theatrical stage, it does not need sets which pretend to be nature. Nature itself can be cinema’s stage set. The less we use artificial sets, the more we use real, authentic “uncastrated” nature, the more beautiful and attractive is the film-play. But mangling, disfiguring, “castrating” nature is not something that intellectual wise guys can achieve.

## 2. On the *Kinocs*

*Nikolai Lebedev*<sup>5</sup>

The Russian film industry, as is well known, is going through a serious crisis. Production is at a standstill (with insignificant exceptions). In the soil of this crisis a hummock of cinematic nihilism, the *kinocs*, has burst out.

This is the situation. There are no funds to make films, so we shall have to confine ourselves to shooting newsreels. This is the source of the theory of the Kino-Eye member Dziga Vertov (*Pravda*, no. 157). “Instead of music, painting, theatre, the cinema and other castrated (!) effusions (!!)... we have the real newsreel of the *kinocs* – a headlong survey of visual events deciphered by the movie camera, pieces of real energy (not theatrical energy) reduced at intervals to an accumulator whole by the great mastery of montage.”

But from the shell of the words of the *kinocs* comes a tiny little *kinocs* thought: “Art must be put to one side. Nothing but the film newsreel!”

A newsreel, in the cinema as in a newspaper, is a useful thing. But if someone took it into his head to replace all newspapers, magazines, *belles lettres*, poetry, and so on – to replace all printed matter by the newsreel alone, and to replace all feature films, production films, scientific films, and so on (not to speak of all art), exclusively by the film

newsreel, then I am afraid that this someone would very soon find himself in the loony bin, in “the kinocular madhouse”...

The Party and the State are now faced with an important question in the sphere of cinema – to create the material and organizational base for proletarian production.

### 3. A Healthy Kernel in an Unhealthy Husk

*Boris Gusman*

If we remove the pompous and confused phraseology and get to the basic thoughts of Comrade Vertov that lie within their shell, then perhaps we shall find it impossible not to agree with some of them. After all, can our Soviet cinema, which in a period of cultural construction has turned fully and utterly towards the worker and peasant masses, really, for example, orientate itself on a “psycho-drama in six parts”, on the tiresome sufferings on predominantly intimate themes, which are so firmly rooted in the cinema? Can our cinema, in a period of the sharp posing of questions of the scientific organization of labour, and of life itself, walk past them, and not place on its daily agenda what Comrade Vertov calls, in his original formulation, “the montage of life itself”? Can our cinema get stuck in its old dynamics, and not attempt to provide a “headlong survey of visual events, interpreted by the film camera”, and so on?

Of course not.

So, let us repeat, there undoubtedly are healthy ideas in Comrade Vertov’s note, but they suffer a great deal from being unhealthily “surrounded” by such thoughts, for example, as the replacement of all art by “radio and film newsreel”, or of a “revolution in vision” (?), and so on; but the main thing is that they drown in the torrents of noisy “manifesto” words (“we... are turning the rudder of world cinema,” “the *kinocs* are masters of vision, organizers of seen life,” and so on), which are a feature of all pseudo-revolutionary statements (compare, for example, the booklet by Enchmen on the “Theory of New Biology”).<sup>6</sup>

Film workers are faced with a lot of stubborn, painstaking, and intense work; a boundless (and so far almost untouched) field of activity lies before them, and now is not the time to “deafen” people with manifestos, but to work, work, and work; they must gather their forces and their material means, and construct a new cinema brick by brick, making use of everything that is healthy about the New World, but not rejecting that which is good in the Old.

### To the Council of Three: An Application<sup>7</sup>

*Elizaveta Svilova,*<sup>8</sup> *Goskino editor, “V sovet troikh. Zaiavlenie”, 19 October 1923, LEF, no. 4, 1924, pp. 220-21*

I have been working in the cinema since 1910. I have worked with a number of directors and for a number of firms. I have had a number of films in my hands, mainly dramas, since newsreel scarcely existed; you didn’t hear anything about it, as you heard

nothing about editing. Every director who was making a film drama would put it together in the order of the scenes, give instructions where to stick in the intertitles, look at it on screen, and the picture would be considered ready, that is to say edited. The set was filmed from a single spot 25-30 metres away, or in rare cases from ten metres away. Consequently the director had nothing to edit, and every experienced editing woman, reading the script, could have created the film without the help of the director. I personally put together a number of productions by the directors Malikov and Soifer<sup>9</sup> from the script when I was working in Gardin's studio. In the Khanzhonkov studio the editor V.D. Popova<sup>10</sup> used to edit the directors' productions without any difficulty. Other editors were just as negligent in their approach to editing.

I can boldly say of newsreel that no attention was paid to it; in my opinion it never occurred to a single director that newsreel could be edited, and that it is more important and more interesting than any film drama, with its actors whose acting fails to inspire you with any confidence, and that newsreel is life, and no actors can replace it. If you film a real worker in a factory, or an actor made up to look like him, which is better, the actor-worker or the real worker? Of course the latter. Look at the film [*Tale*] *About Pankrat the Priest*,<sup>11</sup> where the priest is played by an actor with a stuck-on beard, and you will realize that it is absurd and incomprehensible, or look at *The Unsealing of the Remains of Tikhon Zadonskii* or *of Sergii of Radonezh*,<sup>12</sup> where the priests are real, and you will understand the difference. I do not remember a single director who would turn to newsreel and release something in his name. It's true there was the Pathé and Gaumont newsreel, which was put together by cameramen, and moreover the scenes they were filming (the people, a show) were shot from one spot about 40 metres away, the intertitles were stuck in, and that was how they released them. Anyone can look at newsreel like this; there is some of it in Goskino, it would be useful to have a look at it to compare it with contemporary newsreel. And so, I repeat, I personally had no conversations and no concept of editing newsreel until now.

I have been working at Goskino since 1918, and I still have had no concept of it, but in 1922 I saw *Kino-Pravda* on a Goskino screen. It set me to thinking, here was something different, and maybe it was better than a drama. I watched it with enormous interest. I watched the same issue several times, and it didn't bore me, unlike a drama, which you like the first time but then you don't even want to watch it, but with *Kino-Pravda* the more you watch it the more interesting and comprehensible it becomes. How can this be? I applied to Vertov, the editor of *Kino-Pravda*, with a request to involve me in the work. I understood that the difference from earlier montage was enormous, that there was no comparison, the approach to editing newsreel is completely different from editing drama. The first edited newsreels which I watched without getting bored were issues of *Kino-Pravda*. There have been seventeen of them, and each one was unlike the one that came before, and each one was a step forward. Suddenly everyone has woken up, and they are all still saying that there was nothing to do and nothing to talk about. Now they have started persecuting the correct work of the *kinocs*, but they themselves even in their current productions copy the technical devices and the mon-

tage approach of the *kinocs*. *Brigade Commander Ivanov* itself is in part a retreat by the feature film drama under the pressure of newsreel,<sup>13</sup> and overall there will be no new productions which do not show the effect of the year-long existence of *Kino-Pravda* and the *kinocs*. Having had some acquaintance with the work and the programme of the *kinocs*, having understood it, having become familiar with it, I align myself with it, and I request the Council of Three to accept me into the ranks of the *kinocs*, whose work I trust. I understand that making engaging works without actors, solely by means of newsreel, is difficult, and that in the current conditions it is almost impossible. But still I am with you, and I shall struggle against the persecution, I shall walk arm in arm with you, to maybe distant but certain victory.

### The Theory and Practice of Comrade Vertov

*Aleksandr Fevral'sky*,<sup>14</sup> "Teoriia i praktika tov. Vertova", *Pravda*, 19 July 1924

Comrade Vertov has the distinct advantage over others who write about the cinema that at the same time he is carrying out highly significant practical work. His theory is a way of ideologically registering his own practice.

The programme which has been set by Comrade Vertov is a task of enormous experimental significance. But besides this programme he sees nothing. And that is his mistake.

To show life as it is – that means to make propaganda for the proletarian revolution – this is the basic and absolutely correct thought of Comrade Vertov. Of course, the struggle of the working class emerges out of real life. From the struggle of different elements of this reality emerges the resultant force that its development follows. But the proletariat is not an observer: it is striving to regulate the process by stressing those elements which will lead to its victory by the shortest path. It follows a particular tendency. That means that when you show life as it is you should select particular elements. That means that you should have a plan of "campaign". In *Kino-Pravda* Dziga Vertov managed to choose those most important aspects of life which themselves provide revolutionary propaganda. But who can guarantee that tomorrow some less socially acute cameraman, guided by the principle of the unknown ending, will not whip up a film which turns out to be objectively anti-revolutionary? There are enough examples of this kind in the area of "fellow traveller" literature.

Comrade Vertov rejects so-called features, that is to say plotted, scripted films. And that is not correct. If there is all the evidence to affirm that in the developed Communist society this form of cinema, along with other forms of art (which, by the way, is also rejected by Comrade Vertov), as an independent form of human activity will die out, then, on the other hand, it seems clear to us that in a period of transition art, and consequently feature films, are more needed by the proletariat than ever before. There is also the enormous task of affecting the emotions. This task defines the work of the cinema as the tendentious montage of life material. It is still too early to renounce scripted agit-films. We know what an enormous and undoubtedly healthy impression

films such as *Red Imps*<sup>15</sup> make on the proletarian viewer. Surely we are not going to renounce such an opportunity. The revolutionary plotted film is just as needed as the revolutionary newsreel.

With his *Kino-Pravda* Comrade Vertov has undoubtedly earned the full right to the special attention of our Party and Soviet public community. The broadest scope must be allowed to his continued work. Even accepting that his theory is intolerant and one-sided, his practice provides evidence that this experimental work, which has grown out of the process of the proletarian revolution, is a big step along the path to the creation of a genuinely proletarian cinema.

### The Kinococci

*A[leksandr] Anoshchenko*,<sup>16</sup> "Kinokoki", *Kino-nedelia*, 19 February 1924

Moscow *Pravda* published a note, "A New Current in Cinema", with an editorial comment in which film workers were invited to exchange opinions on the issue it raised. Since then more than a hundred issues of the paper have appeared but no specialist has risked getting involved in a polemic about the content of the note. How could things be otherwise, if it is written in such original language that all you can understand from it is that certain "kinocs" are the salt of world cinema?

Expressing his opinion on "what is" in the name of the unknown plural personage "the kinocs", the author establishes with revulsion that "all cinema-pictures are nothing other than a literary skeleton plus kino-illustration", and affirms completely without motivation that this contemporary direction in Russian cinema is "orientation towards their own backsides".

It's true that an image sometimes helps make a thought clear, but in this case you really cannot work out what he is talking about: about a reactionary quality, or about historical continuity in our cinematic renaissance.

Answering the question of what "is necessary", the author considers that instead of all the arts in general, including cinema, what is needed is:

*The montage-radio-ear – "I hear!"*

*The radio-newsreel organization of the observations of the mechanical ear.*

*The montage-kino-eye – "I see!"*

*The kino-newsreel organization of the observations of the mechanical eye.*

What does all this mean? And the author of these incomprehensible lines goes on to explain that the newsreel that is needed is not the kind that was made in the past or is being made now, but "real kinocs newsreel", pieces of real life "reduced at intervals to an accumulator whole by the great master of montage"...

But where are they, these great masters of montage? Even though there is no definition of what montage is, there is a "convincing" answer to the question: the kinocs are masters of vision and organizers of seen life, armed "from their feet to their head" with the Kino-Eye.

I can imagine some short-sighted *kinoc* with a pince-nez in an inappropriate place. However, having taken their word for the “long-sightedness” and the talents of the *kinocs*, it is interesting to learn how they are going to put their newsreel system into practice. Here is their programme: the organization of the observations of the human eye, plus the emancipation of the apparatus, plus the organization of the observations of the mechanical eye, is the kino-sensation of the world. The author concludes the programme of the *kinocs* in this way: resting on today, we decisively turn the rudder of world cinema.

It has long been known that great ships need to make great journeys, but in this case even the Atlantic Ocean would undoubtedly be too shallow for the battleship of the *kinocs*. However, the *kinocs* are rescued by their “kino-sensation of the world”, which reveals to them more than America, even interplanetary space and otherworldly wisdom.

But what is this nonsense, and what are the “*kinocs*”, and what are they like?

“The *kinocs*”, or the “*kinococcus*”, are a contemporary form of the bacterium of Futurism, weakened by its degeneration during the Revolution, but one which has managed to get into the nutritious and turbid milieu of our revitalised cinema and started to ferment in its still weakened organism. For all their threatening appearance, the “*kinococci*” bacteria are not lethal, but their activity does cause harm, and sometimes produces an original pathological result.

Even the most ordinary person, if he is struck down by “kinoculism” (*kinochestvo*) suddenly becomes covered by “kino-eyes” instead of corns on his feet, and “kino-eyes” erupt in all the full places of his body, until finally the very head of this unwilling phenomenon turns into a many-sided eye, although with accompanying loss of common sense and a sense of proportion. And such a “*kinoc*” sees life around him without dividing it into the right and left sides, or into the tops and bottoms of objects; he sees everything as if through a many-faceted crystal egg.

When you step on the corn of a “*kinoc*” of this kind, he reacts by saying: “You have stepped on my eye,” and the culprit, begging his pardon, thinks to himself, “The poor fellow, everything is head over heels in his head.”

But sometimes, as is apparent from the aforementioned essay, a case of “*kinococcus*” completely unexpectedly produces the effect of philosophical aphorisms, that causes someone who is struck down by these bacteria to consider himself a genius and a prophet, who has a monstrous power, since he is convinced that he is “organizing the seen world”.

The *kinoc* insists that a picture exists only when he can see it, and if he goes blind, that means the picture is destroyed and disappears. But if you take his pictures away from a *kinoc*, or take away some other things that have ceased to “exist” while he was asleep, then he will lose his style and start a polemic with you in the language of ordinary people, who understand that you can feel and know things without seeing them. The authentic organizer of “seen life” must know it not visually, but as an engineer who invents a machine by calculating the power which in material form gives seen life, imprinting the psyche, and not the “mechanical eye”, blind and unreceptive to the content of the form.

Tell a *kinoc* that the most important thing in a machine is not always the flywheel, and that an “unseen” valve can be small but crucial, and even more valuable for the life of the machine, and the *kinoc* will stop talking to you, since you “are orientated towards your own backside” and lack a “kino-sensation of the world”.

Preventing an illness is easier than curing it, and the guardians of the young Soviet cinema, including *Pravda*, should take care about protecting its health from the penetration of “*kinococcus*” into the production process, or else it will become infertile, or it will produce the degenerates of Futurism.

### **Dziga Vertov Answers “Directors About Themselves (A *Kino-gazeta* Enquiry)”**

*“Rezhissery o sebe (Anketa Kino-gazety): otvechaet Dziga Vertov”*, *Kino-gazeta*, no. 10, 4 March 1924

I wrote you an answer to your three questions. I have been forbidden by the Council of Three (the organizing organ of the *kinocs*) to give it to the *Kino-gazeta*. Here is an extract from their resolution: “... We shall dedicate ourselves to the cause of capturing and organizing through the Kino-Eye (the electrified eye) the daily life of the world proletariat. We do not accept into our milieu either the cinema owners or the puppet-cinema-directors and so forth; we accept no one other than the workers of film production (the editors, the electro-technicians, the cameramen, the laboratory workers...)”

And further:

“... Comrade Vertov’s reply is so sharp and uncompromising that it will cause the defenders both of *bourgeois* and of ‘salon-proletarian’ agit-drama to slobber with fury; the loquaciousness that this answer would arouse in various hen-blind Anoshchenkos<sup>17</sup> may increase the print-run of *Kino-gazeta*, but all this would have distracted us from our main job.”

### **An Answer to Five Questions**

*Dziga Vertov, “Otvét na piat voprosov”*, *Kino*, 21 October 1924

Having made a summary of the written and oral questions I have received in the last two weeks, I am selecting the most significant, and I answer:

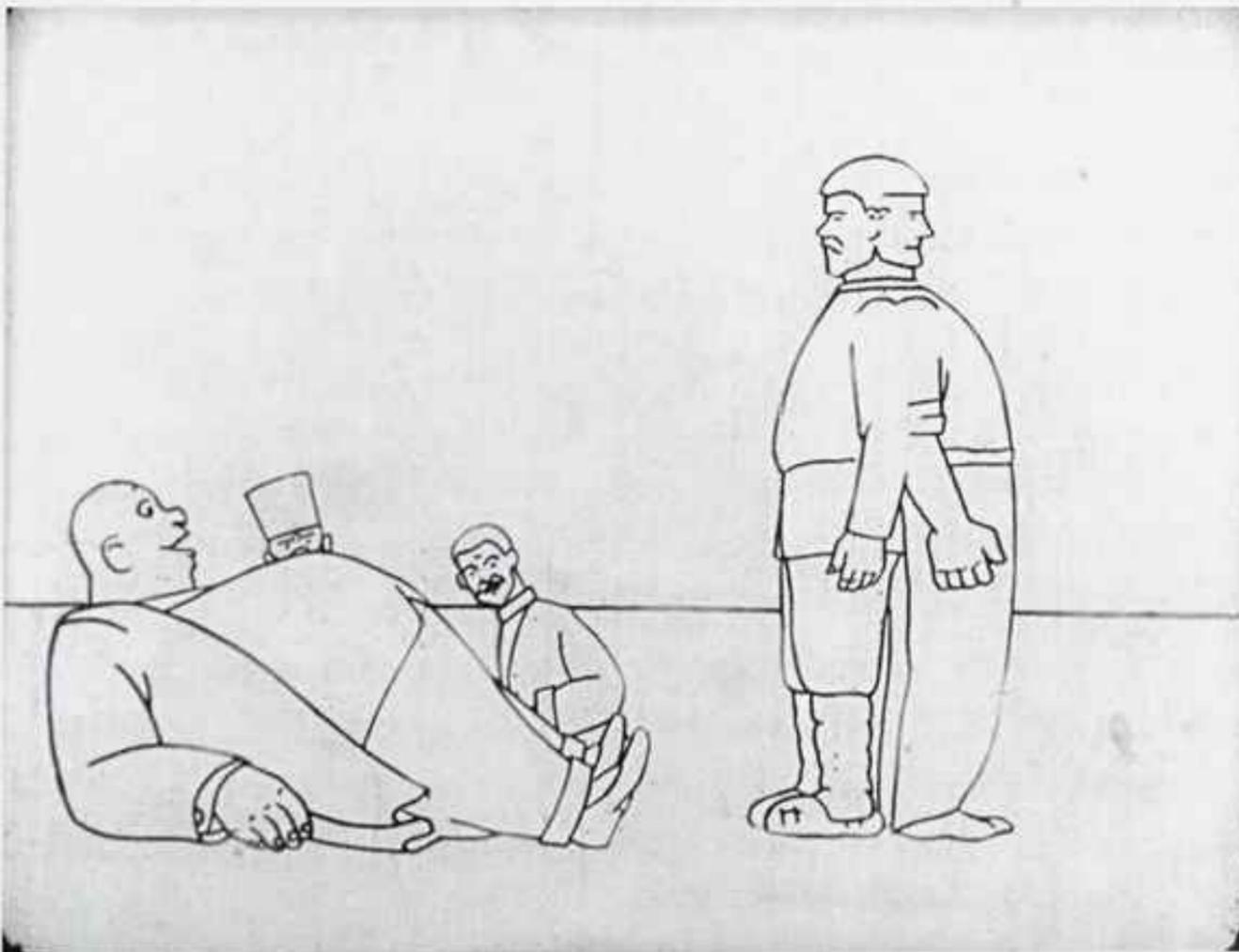
**Your attitude to art?**

One-millionth part of the inventiveness which every man shows in his daily work in the factory, the works, in the field, already contains an element of what people single out as so called “art”.

The very term “art” is counter-revolutionary in essence, since it shelters a whole caste of privileged people, who imagine themselves to be not people but the miracle workers of this same “art”. Inspiration, or rather an enthusiasm for your work, is not the pre-

## Soviet Toys

It was not unusual for Vertov to take a commercial commission and turn it into a politically charged movie. The original brief behind *Soviet Toys* – which begins with the inscription “Kino-reklama” (Film advertisement), above the logo of a face armed with two lenses and a shutter, which the Kinocs used for their commercial shorts – had been simply to advertise toys. What came out of it looks more like a political cartoon, with a gluttonous bourgeois (backed up by cowardly clergy) confronted by his historical class enemy, the Janus-faced union of peasants and workers.



rogative of these “Magi”, but also of every worker on the Volkhov Hydro-Electric Plant, every driver in his train, every turner at his lathe.

Destroying once and for all the term “art”, we should not, of course, bring it back in another form, let’s say under the sauce of “artistic labour”. It is essential that we establish definitively that there is no border between artistic and non-artistic labour.

#### What is Aleksei Gan’s mistake?

The fundamental mistake of the official opponent of art Aleksei Gan is that, turning away from the “professional spirit of all-powerful acting”, he forces Pioneers to be actors, under the slogan of “the rationalization of artistic labour”.<sup>18</sup>

Gan’s fundamental mistake is that, overcoming the bureaucratic formalism of criticism, he “inveigles the perfectly innocent Young Pioneers into art”, and he permits himself to do so for victory “in the cinematic sector of artistic labour”.

We, of course, would prefer dry newsreel to the interference of a script into daily life and into the work of the people living on our planet. As regards the planet Mars it is less dangerous, especially if we assume that this is a dream inspired by the sets of the Chamber Theatre. But still, to the piquant proposal “Anta... Odeli... Uta...” the *kinocs* radio station responded less piquantly: ... D... A... C... that is to say, Down with Artistic Cinema!, or, Give us Good Cinema Newsreel!<sup>19</sup>

#### What is the relationship of the words *kinocs*, Kino-Eye, and “kinoculism”?

Our movement is called Kino-Eye. We who fight for the idea of Kino-Eye call ourselves “*kinocs*”, or, what is the same, Kino-Eyes.

The term “kinoculism” is scarcely used by us, since it is a meaningless and arbitrary neologism. For some reason it is enthusiastically used by our opponents.

#### Can you not speak in simple terms about your aims in cinema and in other areas?

I can:

We do not prevent anyone else living.

We only film facts, and we transmit them through the screen into the consciousness of the workers. We consider that explaining the world as it is is our main task.

The paths through which we transmit contemporary reality into the consciousness of people are:

the five human senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch. The Kino-Eye and the Radio-Ear are only the first stages on this path. In the area of the external senses we have to hand so far only our more or less successful laboratory experiments.

The Kino-Eye has managed to walk out on to the broad road of struggle with *bourgeois* cinema, and we strongly doubt whether the latter (despite its world position at present) can long resist our revolutionary onslaught.

The task of all workers is to follow the battle that is just beginning attentively, always to distinguish the real from the false, and not to mix up sugar-coated surrogates with their stern originals.

After the seen world, we attack the heard, tangible, and other worlds. And in the first

instance we shall knock out the arrogance of so-called music, by bringing forward in its place the organization of the heard world, the *radio newsreel*.

What do you yourself think of the picture *Kino-Eye*, in particular about its first part?

Above all, I think that it is not a picture (in the generally used sense of the word), but a great deal more. It is the next stage in the campaign that we were waging in *Kino-Pravda*. It is a striving even further away from art cinema, even deeper into life.

One of the *kinocs* very correctly called the first part of *Kino-Eye* "Kino-Eye feeling its way".

It is a careful reconnaissance mission by one movie camera, the main purpose of which is not to get entangled in the chaos of life and to orientate itself in the circumstances which the Kino-Eye has got into.

One step has been made, one sixth of the journey. We needed a colossal amount of expenditure of energy and iron patience to bring the work to a conclusion in our technical conditions without giving up on a single point in our programme.

When I see these simple little pieces of life on the screen, so closely linked together, I myself do not believe that in order to film them as they are (and not to act them out) the cameraman needed enormous tension and self-control and sometimes unrestrained boldness.

The task of the following parts is to widen the reconnaissance to the maximum possible degree, and, arming ourselves technically, to deepen our observation constantly.

1,000 metres of *Kino-Eye* is already a foundation, which we are establishing on the ground that was cleared by *Kino-Pravda*. It is already a basis for the mass attack of the movie-cameras on the seen world. It is already near to the storming of world cinema and the accomplishment of the idea of the Kino-Eye.

## Notes

1. Vertov quotes Twain after *Ekstsentrizm* (Eccentricism), the pamphlet of film manifestos edited by Grigory Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg (FEKS) in Petrograd in 1922.
2. Initially planned to be a book, this text appeared as a separate manifesto in *LEF*, no. 3, 1923. See the English translation by Kevin O'Brien in Annette Michelson, ed., *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 11-21.
3. *Komediantka* (1923; produced by Sevzapkino): Aleksandr Ivanovsky's screen version of Nikolai Leskov's story "Tupeinyi khudozhnik" (The artist wigmaker). The film contains a sequence showing a 19th-century peasant mutiny.
4. See previous article.
5. Nikolai Lebedev (1897-1978), film critic and documentary filmmaker. In 1923 he co-founded (together with Vladimir Erofeev) the *Kino-gazeta* (*Kino*, from 1925), and was one of the founders of the ARK, *Assotsiatsiia Revoliutsionnoi Kinematografii* (Association of Revolutionary Cinema) in 1924. In 1947 Lebedev wrote one of the first Soviet film histories. In the 1920s he was one of the most hostile critics of Vertov's work.
6. Gusman refers to *Teoriia novoi biologii i marksizm* (Theory of New Biology and Marxism) (Petrograd: Politprosvet studkoma rabfaka, 1923) by Emmanuel Enchmen, whose reflexology theory was officially condemned (specifically by the Party's main ideologist, Nikolai Bukharin) as a loud and vulgar profanation of Marxism and science.

**Tedium**

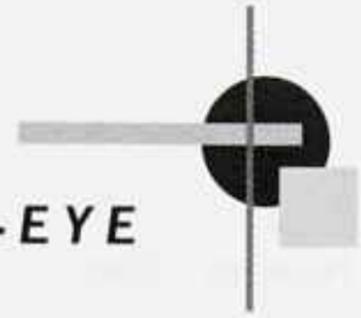




It could be the heat, or the tedium of political routine, but no high spirits show on his face as Grigory Zinoviev (1883-1936), a top Soviet Communist leader, is shown walking to one of the many official events timed with the Second Congress of the Third Communist International in Petrograd after its first session was over. This event, held on 19 July 1920, was the stone-laying ceremony for a monument to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, next to the former Winter Palace. Lenin and, among others, the Italian delegate, Communist-later-Fascist Nicola Bombacci (the man with a long beard), address the crowd during the stone-laying ceremony. Lenin's speech, as printed in *Petrogradskaia Pravda*, no. 59, 21 July 1920, was pretty short: "Comrades, in all countries Communist leaders are suffering unimaginable sacrifices. They are dying by the thousands in Finland and Hungary and other countries. But no persecutions can arrest the growth of Communism, and the heroism of fighters like Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg gives us courage and faith in the complete victory of Communism. (Comrade Lenin's speech was drowned in thunderous cheers. 'The Internationale' was sung.)" Vertov's *Kino-Eye* homes in on the sea of heads as "The Internationale" is sung.

## 6. THE FIRST CLASHES

7. The Council of Three, the executive council of the *Kinocs* group, was composed of Vertov (the head), Mikhail Kaufman, and Ivan Beliakov.
8. Elizaveta Svilova (1900-1975), film editor, *kinoc* as of 1923, and Vertov's wife.
9. Nikolai Malikov and Iosif Soifer, Russian pre-Revolutionary film directors.
10. Vera Popova (1892-1974), film editor at the Khanzhonkov studio, later Aleksandr Khanzhonkov's wife, and one of the first Russian film restorers.
11. *Skazka o pope Pankrate* (1918), atheist agit-film by Nikolai Preobrazhensky, with himself as the priest.
12. The unsealing of the remains of the saints canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in the presence of members of the clergy, forensic experts, and film cameras was an official atheist campaign in 1919. A two-reel film of *The Unsealing of the Remains of Sergii of Radonezh* (*Vskrytie moschei Sergiia Radonezhskogo*) is believed to have been edited by Vertov; *The Unsealing of the Remains of Tikhon Zadonskii* (*Vskrytie moschei Tikhona Zadonskogo*) was shot by the cameraman Petr Novitsky.
13. *Kombrig Ivanov* (1923), a fiction film by Aleksandr Razumny, integrated actual civil war newsreel footage into its story.
14. Aleksandr Fevralsky, pseud. of Aleksandr Jakobi (1901-1984), theatre and film critic, writing mainly for *Pravda* (since 1923); befriended Vertov in 1924 and became his unfailing supporter.
15. *Krasnye diavoliata* (1923), adventure serial directed by Ivan Perestiani.
16. Aleksandr Anoshchenko (1887-1969), film director, screenwriter, and journalist.
17. The author of the previous article.
18. Vertov refers to *The Island of Young Pioneers* (*Ostrov iunykh pionerov*, 1924), a documentary feature directed by Aleksei Gan, widely criticized for its rehearsed sequences enacted by non-professionals.
19. The joke here is on Iakov Protazanov's science-fiction movie *Aelita* (1924), which begins with a scientist receiving a mysterious radio message from Mars: "Anta... Odeli... Uta...", which acronymically contains the name of the title's extraterrestrial princess.



### **Kino-Eye (On a Forthcoming Goskino Production)**

O.T., "Kino-Glaz' (K predstoiashchei postanovke Goskino)", *Trud*, no. 220, 27 September 1924, p. 4

The *kinocs* Vertov and his cameraman Kaufman have spent two weeks in a randomly chosen Pioneer camp, following the entire active working day of a Young Pioneer with a movie camera. Their eye – a movie camera, which has the wonderful capacity to see, to capture what it sees, and to reproduce it as it saw it – got up at the same time as the people it was observing, rushed off to have a wash, cooked its breakfast, did its morning exercises, went to work, attended the other games, and so on. No scriptwriter can invent something greater than what happens in real life. And no director can force people to act, even their own life, as unrestrainedly as they lived it yesterday.

And the Kino-Eye – the movie camera and two or three people – has gone off on a journey from the Pioneer camp, through the peasant courtyards, through the fields, through the markets and slums of the town, with an ambulance car to a dying man, from there to workers' sports grounds, and so on and so forth, peering into all the little corners of social life. It has looked at and captured life, which has not been changed by its presence, has not smoothed down its hair or taken up a pose, because it has not noticed it.

Those pieces of *Kino-Eye* which we have been able to watch, in the form of raw, as yet unworked material, are full of incomparable interest, because it is that real life, which our eye in its daily life usually does not notice.

Their authenticity is not accessible to any other demonstrator of ordinary life (literature, painting and so on) to the same degree as it is to the movie camera.

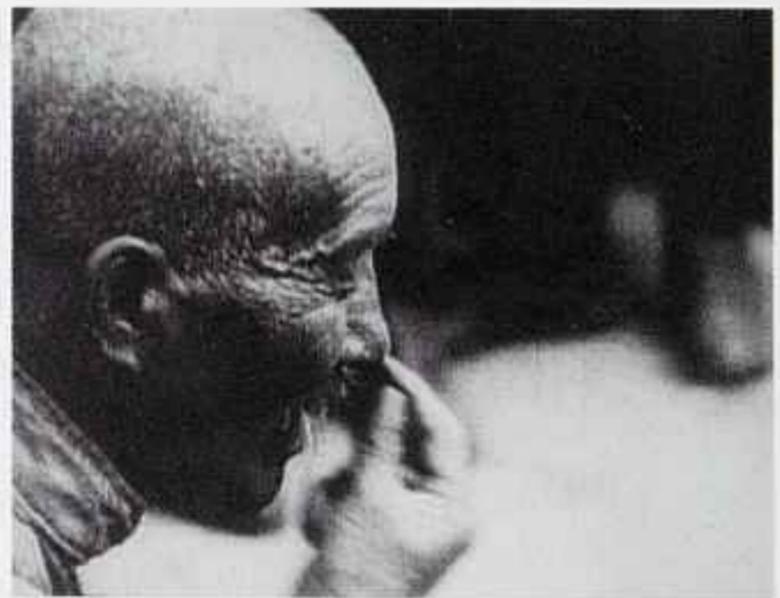
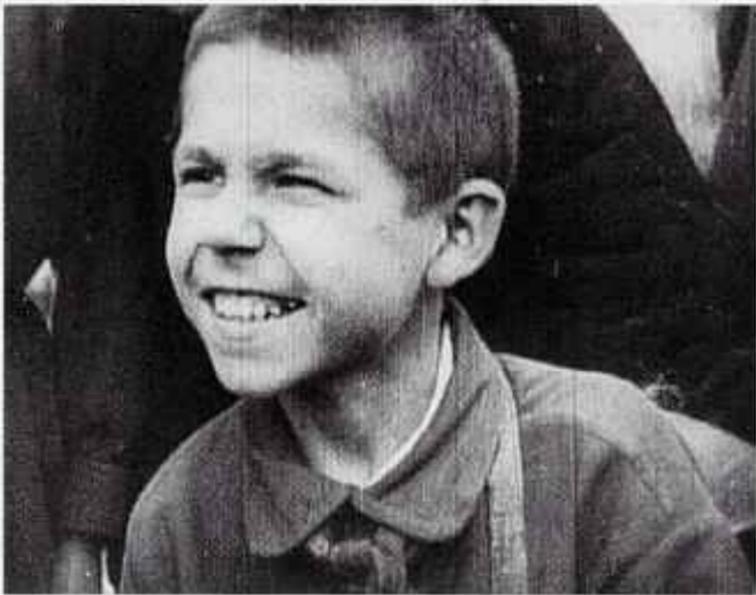
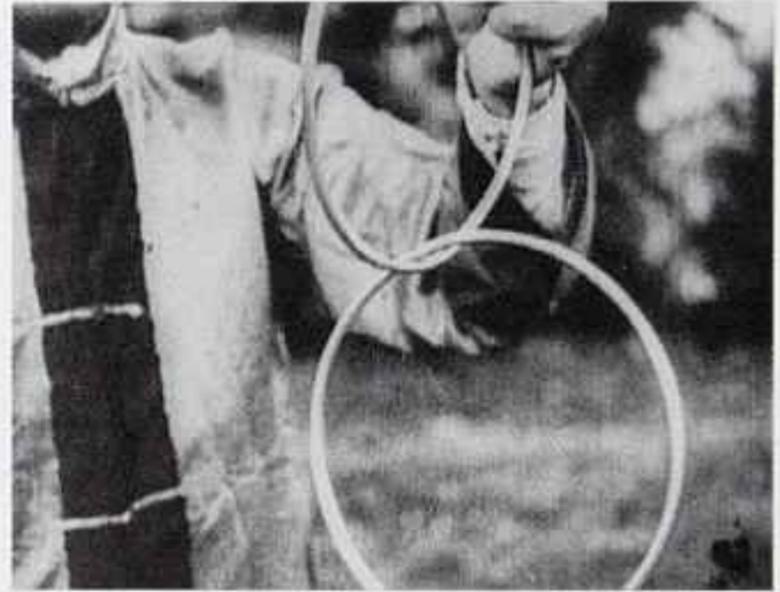
### **An Introductory Speech before a Showing of the First Part of Kino-Eye**

Dziga Vertov, "Vstup[itelnoe] slovo k prosmotru 1-i s[erii] 'Kino-Glaza'", 13 October 1924, RGALI 2091-2-193

We are still being accused of using incomprehensible slogans. I think that is rather an unwillingness to understand – our programme is so simple and clear. But, just in case, I shall repeat it for the thousandth time, in completely childlike words:

Our eye sees very badly and very little. And so people invented the microscope, in order to see invisible phenomena. And so people invented the telescope, in order to see and study distant unknown worlds.

Moving Titles



ЛУКА

ЛУКА ЦЕЛА

"Wook! A whole arm!"

/РУКА ДЫРА/...

In *Kino-Eye* direct speech is rendered in real time, by using moving titles, that is, words that appear one by one. In the scene showing the Chinese conjurer performing a trick, the spelling of words, the rhythm of their emergence, and the fact that the sentence starts at bottom left and walks on upstairs, as it were – all these graphic means are mobilized in an attempt to communicate, visually, the acoustic peculiarity of his Chinese accent. The Chinese have problems with the Russian rolling “r” – Vertov thus spells “ruka” (hand) as “luka”. The Chinese raise the tone towards the end of the sentence – to simulate this, Vertov makes words climb left to right. This is where Vertov’s ideas tested in his old Laboratory of Hearing came in handy.

And so people invented the movie camera, in order to penetrate more deeply into the seen world, in order to study and note down visual phenomena, in order not to forget what is happening and what it will be essential to take into account in future.

But the movie camera was unfortunate. It was invented at a time when there was no country in which Capital did not reign. The hellish idea of the *bourgeoisie* was to use the new toy for entertaining the popular masses, or more precisely for diverting the workers' attention from their basic aim of struggling against their bosses. The starving and semi-starving proletarians, the unemployed, unclenched their iron fists in the electric fog of the movie theatres and succumbed without noticing it to the corrupting influence of the Bosses' cinema.

Theatres are expensive, theatres have few seats, theatres are not an easy place to introduce workers to *bourgeois* ideology. And so they force the movie camera to disseminate theatrical productions which show how the *bourgeoisie* love, suffer for, care for their workers, and in general how the "higher" beings of the aristocracy differ from the lower ones (workers, peasants, and so forth).

In Pre-Revolutionary Russia, the Bosses' cinema also did its work, along with Tsarist vodka. After the October Revolution the cinema adapted to the new slogans; the actors who used to play Tsarist bureaucrats have begun to play workers; actresses who used to play the ladies of the Court now make Soviet grimaces; but there are still few of us who realize that all this grimacing is the legacy of the *bourgeoisie*, and cannot be separated from *bourgeois* theatre in its most conservative form.

I know many opponents of the contemporary theatre who consider the theatre to be a *bourgeois* vestige and are at the same time enthusiastic supporters of the cinema in its current form. There are few people who realize yet that non-theatrical cinema (apart from a few scientific films and newsreels) does not exist. Every theatrical performance and every film is constructed in exactly the same way: a dramatist or a scriptwriter, then a director or a film director, then actors, rehearsals, sets, and a performance. The basic thing in theatre is the acting. And so every film based on a script and on acting is a theatrical performance. That is why there is no difference between a production by Sabin-ski,<sup>1</sup> a production by Lev Kuleshov, and, however difficult it may be for me to say so, a production by Aleksei Gan.

All this in whole and in part relates to theatre irrespective of currents and directions, irrespective of attitudes to the theatre as such.

All this is outside of independent cinema. All this is outside of the true purpose of the movie camera, the investigation of life phenomena.

*Kino-Pravda* helped us to understand clearly that you can work outside theatre and in step with the Revolution.

*Kino-Eye* continues the task, started by *Kino-Pravda*, of creating a Soviet Red cinema.

You will be disappointed if you have come here to see an enthralling love story. You will be disappointed if you are expecting an absorbing detective story, disappointed too if you think you are going to see some extraordinary tricks and stunts. But if you take note that what we are going to show you now is just a reconnaissance by a single movie

camera feeling its way, if you bear in mind that it's only the first part, one-sixth of the first journey of the Kino-Eye, then even these simple little pieces of life, filmed as they are and not acted out, will give you a certain satisfaction.

### **Kino-Eye by Dziga Vertov (I)**

*Aleksandr Belenson,<sup>2</sup> excerpt from "Kino-Glaz' (Dzigi Vertova)", in Kino segodnia (The cinema today) (Moscow, 1925), pp. 40-42*

Here, by the way, is the content of the film *Kino-Eye*. The New struggles with the Old. In the struggle of the New with the Old, the Revolution promotes children, the Young Pioneers. Against the background of village darkness and a flowing river of home-brew, the peasant Pioneers, against the will of their fathers and mothers, participate in every step of Soviet construction, and in this particular case help the village co-operative get on its feet.

In the town the Young Leninists, the children of workers, in their struggle for the co-operative, take on the inspection of a little corner of the Old World, the inspection of the market. "Little Smoked Sprat" and "The Gypsy Kid" (these are their nicknames) hang up posters everywhere, calling for support for the cause of the co-operatives. "Little Smoked Sprat" has hung up one of the posters in the Tishinsky Market, where her mother has come to buy meat. The mother of "Little Smoked Sprat" has gone round a number of private traders looking for meat, but hasn't bought any: it's either too expensive, or the meat isn't fresh. She approaches the poster that her daughter has hung up: "Don't give profits to the merchants; buy in the co-operative." The effect of the poster on the woman turns out to be so powerful that she rushes backwards to the co-operative. *Kino-Eye* shows us that the co-operative gets its meat straight from the abattoir, and putting time into reverse, it turns the meat into a bull and sends it off to graze in the country.

In the village the Pioneer camp has become very active in catering to the needs of the poorest peasants. The soldering workshop and the hairdresser's are loaded with work, the postman rushes around all day long, the Pioneers reap, thrash, and so on. Sheaves grow in the field. Threshing. Grain pours from ears of corn. A factory of bread.

At the same time in the town, the Chinese, Chan-Gi-Uan, performs tricks to earn his bread. A Pioneer thinks the bread back into the bakery, turns it into dough, flour, and so on, until he sets it back in the field, where it forms ears of ripe rye, and where, from morning to night, without straightening her back, a peasant woman reaps it. All the male and female peasants are in the field. Who will take care of the infants? And so the urban Pioneers nurse and feed the children in the peasant nurseries. A poor peasant widow has a pile of children, her hut is falling down, and it is impossible for her to cope single-handed with the work in the field. The Pioneers come to her aid. After the working day, the Pioneers bathe in the stream, and some of them jump into the water from a tower. *Kino-Eye* shows the Pioneers how to jump correctly.

Meanwhile, a detachment of village Pioneers is easily organised in the village of Sannikovo. The children are enthused by the example, and rush to get the drawings and books that their urban friends have brought them.

In the town too there is struggle. The Pioneers try to force the adults to give up smoking and drinking. This is what leads to the skirmish between the Pioneer club and the beer hall. The children present the adults with an ultimatum: "You smoke and drink. You are the friends of tuberculosis!"

The struggle is taken to the Sukharev market.

The Old is still very strong, and the New, in the person of "Little Smoked Sprat", with a collecting box, is literally lost among the cocaine addicts, pickpockets, male and female traders, the gramophone, the tram, the blind, the legless cripples, and so on.

Here are the representatives of the Ermakovka<sup>3</sup> (dark dealings, gambling), and representatives of the Kanatchikova Dacha<sup>4</sup> ("Ten-Rouble Note"), legless cripples, and so on.

"Little Smoked Sprat" asks a butcher to make a contribution to the struggle against tuberculosis. We see a few metres of the tuberculosis sanatorium. Near the Sukharev market is the "First Aid Institute". The tuberculosis sanatorium, the Sukharev market, and "First Aid" are unexpectedly linked by an accident that happened to the watchman at the tuberculosis sanatorium. He suffocated in a well from asphyxiating gases.

### **On Kino-Eye**

*Boris Gusman, "O 'Kino-Glaze'", Pravda, 15 October 1924*

A group of young filmmakers united under the name of *kinocs* (Vertov, Kaufman,<sup>5</sup> and others) has carried out an experiment in creating a film without a script, a director, or actors, under the slogan "Life Caught Unawares". The first part, which they have shown, consists of a series of episodes filmed in the town and the countryside on the subject of the struggle of the young with the old. On the one hand there is home-brew, beer halls, tea houses, private trading; on the other, Pioneers in town and village, leading the struggle for the co-operatives, for the new way of life.

This theme is treated in a very lively manner, and illustrated through fairly striking episodes which are very interesting to watch. But the basic shortcoming of the film is that these episodes are totally unconnected. There is no single pivot which all these episodes can revolve around. The viewer's train of thought, aroused by the beginning of an episode, is disrupted when the film moves on to the next subject, only to be aroused again for some other reason. Jolts of this kind exhaust the viewer's attention, and this is exacerbated by tricks with montage and editing. The film uses the device of reverse shooting (turning meat back into a bull, bread back into ears of rye, jumps out of the water), and there are also sequences where the film speeds up (the tram, the car) or slows down (the swing). Without sufficiently comprehensible explanatory intertitles, these sequences create a strange impression, which has not had sufficient time to be dispersed before the shots of a new episode begin to flicker on the screen. There are also signs of

excess in the montage. Certain places, thanks to the montage, take on a tempo which is completely alien to our life (and yet isn't this supposed to be life caught "unawares"?). I'd also like to point out the total lack of connection between the episodes in the last and penultimate parts. What can be the significance of the episodes in the Kanatchikova Dachka madhouse and the ambulance car? What relationship do they have to the struggle of the New and the Old which we observe in the first parts? This remains incomprehensible, and it makes it possible to consider the picture to be simply news-reel, whereas its significance is undoubtedly wider. Of course, such a method of filming makes it possible to capture more authentic and livelier bits of life than you could with scripted work. Take, for example, the scene with the peasant women drunk on home-brew, or the episodes in the market. All they need is more simplicity in putting it all together, less bias towards trick photography, more of a link between the episodes, and greater variety in their selection. This, by the way, can be achieved by increasing the number of cameras filming "life caught unawares". Of course, one camera is not capable of coping with such a big subject. This is what causes the failings, the gaps between the episodes, and the monotony in their selection.

Moreover, the authors of *Kino-Eye* pose the question in such a way that their method eradicates other forms of cinema production, in particular feature films. To this we have to reply bluntly that as yet there are not sufficient grounds for posing the question in this way. We have major tasks in the area of cinema which we have scarcely begun to address, and we shall have to resolve them by using all the means we have at our disposal, including through feature films. But in the area of the "demonstration of daily life", this is the first successful film, which, with certain alterations in the directions indicated above, will have a great success in worker and village cinemas. Here we have elements which for the first time give a clear demonstration of the union of the town and the country.

As for urban cinemas, then here too we have to replace the vulgar foreign "hits" with honest Soviet productions, if not 100 percent (the box office has its demands!), then at least in part.

### **Kino-Eye**

Vladimir Erofeev,<sup>6</sup> "Kino-Glaz", Kino, 21 October 1924

*Kino-Eye*, the first big piece by Dziga Vertov, has provided clear evidence, on the one hand, of the entire lack of foundation of his *kinocs* "theory" and, on the other, of his significant successes in the field of purely formal research.

Dziga Vertov rejects fiction films, and with them the need for the participation in a film of actors, a director, and a scriptwriter. And yet, as one might have expected, most of the scenes in his *Kino-Eye* are staged (not, it's true, by professional actors, but that is not imperative). This staging is carried out more subtly than in the work of Aleksei Gan, but any filmmaker can see it. If there is staging, then there is a director.

That role is played by Dziga Vertov, who hides behind his Kino-Eye all the time.

But the film does lack one essential pivot of the feature film: there is no theme, plot, or script. And that is precisely the weakest aspect of the film.

The film was intended to provide a “demonstration of daily life”, “life caught unawares”, but this has succeeded only on a very small scale. Instead of the demonstration of daily life we have a cinematographic *Kunstkamera*:<sup>7</sup> an elephant on the streets of Moscow, a watchman gasping for breath, the Kanatchikova Dacha, and so on.

All these *unusual* elements, alternating with technical tricks, provide the basis of the film and make it entertaining.

While shouting about daily life, Vertov has replaced it with a chronicle of events and with tricks. And he had to do this, because otherwise his 1,000 metres of film would have sent the audience to sleep in half an hour.

From the technical point of view there are a number of successful things in *Kino-Eye*. As an editor Vertov has made definite progress, and he has produced a series of brilliantly edited episodes. The moment when the Pioneers lift the flag is particularly memorable. In places Kaufman's photography is extremely successful. Some of the tricks are curious: showing the film in reverse, speeded up, and in slow motion, although there is nothing new in any of this. Unfortunately Vertov has overdone things a bit with these tricks.

Let us move on to the most important thing, to the assessment of the film from the ideological point of view. This is Vertov's Achilles' heel. The absence of a script or even a theme makes the film meaningless. The moments of propaganda with the Pioneers drown in the chronicle of events and the tricks, and the whole thing turns into an unimaginable jumble.

It is more than frivolous to imagine that this lightly Sovietized vinaigrette can give anything to the workers – the best it will be is useless.

After watching this film it becomes absolutely clear that the sharp kino-eye of Vertov and his nimble hands lack a guiding Communist head.

### **The Artistic Drama and the Kino-Eye**

*Dziga Vertov, excerpt from “Khud[ozhestvennaia] drama i ‘Kino-Glaz’ (Vystuplenie na dispute ‘Iskusstvo i byt’)”*, a speech at the “Art and Daily Life” discussion, 15 July 1924, RGALI 2091-2-192

The Kino-Eye is a mass eye, which unites on the screen the proletarians of all countries against the capitalists of all countries, that is the goal which we kinocs aim for.

Clarity in understanding the goal has helped us to retain boldness and certainty at the most difficult moments when we were being boycotted by everyone, and it helps us now in the days of a shameful, forced lull.

Neither the seductive proposals of firms, nor the orgy of celebration of the *opportunists*, nor the boycott, nor the mockery, nor hunger – none of this can stop our striving to struggle against the 100 percent artistic drama for the 100 percent Kino-Eye.

The struggle for the Kino-Eye has already been going on for several years, and has its own history. I won't dwell on the various stages of this arduous struggle. For even now, chained hand and foot, taking an enforced rest after the first issue of *Kino-Eye*, I am fated to listen to the hypocritical remarks of that same Erofeev: "Your theory is at odds with your practice."

I recall that once Comrade Erofeev assured me that he could jump over his editorial chair without difficulty.

I tied his legs, took away the chair, and became convinced that his "theory was at odds with his practice".

This did not happen, but I can do this experiment with everyone who wants to get into my skin and jump with their legs tied.

What is *Kino-Pravda*?

It is strong jumps with your legs tied.

### **Kino-Eye by Dziga Vertov (2)**

*Aleksandr Belenson, excerpt from "‘Kino-Glaz’ (Dzigi Vertova)", in Kino segodnia (The cinema today) (Moscow, 1925), pp. 44-47*

Of course the *kinocs* do not recognize the script: the literary script, linked to the montage system I have outlined, would immediately annul all its sense and meaning. The *kinocs'* things are not constructed by the pen, but by montage; they are constructed by the organization of material. Is this work done at random, without a guiding thought and without a plan? On the basis of the despatches of their kino-observers, the "headquarters" of the *kinocs* works out a plan of orientation and attack by the cameras in the constantly changing situation of life. The work of the movie cameras, in Vertov's striking comparison, recalls the work of GPU agents, who do not know what awaits them but who always have a definite task: from the thick tangle of life they must single out and investigate such and such a question, such and such a matter.

"The script is the invention of a single person or a group of people," says Vertov. "It is a story which these people desire to embody on screen. We do not consider this desire to be criminal, but singling out this kind of work as the basic task of cinema, and dislodging real film-things with these film-stories, crushing all the remarkable potential of the movie camera in the name of obeisance before the God of the art drama, this we absolutely cannot understand, and of course in our view this is a crime. A crime not before the sated *Nepmen* and not before the cocaine-snorting intelligentsia, but a crime before the working masses and before the peasantry.

A Komsomol scarf, two kisses, three tears, moonlit clouds scudding by, and a dove, "Long Live" written at the end of the picture, and everything ending with the singing of "The Internationale". All our cine-art-propaganda pieces are like this, with minor adjustments... It's always a little embarrassing to hear the hymn of the proletariat in this *bourgeois* setting."

Thus it is clear that montage understood in this way excludes the use of a preliminary literary script, while at the same time requiring the presence of certain tasks, certain themes. Which tasks, which themes are the *kinocs* guided by in their work? "We carry out the tasks not of a single head, even if it is a Communist one (I have in mind here the head of Comrade Erofeev)," says Vertov, "we are guided by the decisions of the Congress of the Russian Communist Party, the resolutions of the Komintern, the decrees of the Council of People's Commissars, the slogans of the press, the letters of worker correspondents... and we do not need other, better scripts."

Even in the area of technical demands the *kinocs* carefully disassociate themselves from the feature film, referring to their own particular tasks. Thus Vertov has "absolutely no need of enormous studios, or grandiose sets, or grandiose film directors, or great actors, or 'amazing' photogenic women". On the other hand he demands: (1) quick means of transport, (2) the highest sensitivity film, (3) light, manually-operated movie cameras, (4) equally light lighting-apparatus, (5) a staff of lightning-fast kino-reporters, and (6) an army of kino-correspondent observers.

The *kinocs* organization consists of: (1) observers, (2) cameramen, (3) constructors, (4) editors, and (5) laboratory workers. The *kinocs* teach their devices of film work exclusively to members of the Komsomol and to Pioneers, transferring their skill and their technical experience into the "reliable hands" of the growing generation of young workers.

In particular, as regards *Kino-Eye*, the montage of the first part has been carried out according to a montage schema, shown in the first extract. In this first part you can distinguish the following themes: (1) the New and the Old, (2) children and adults, (3) the co-operatives and the market, (4) the town and the village, (5) the theme of bread, (6) the theme of meat, and (7) a big theme: "home-brew – cards – beer – dark deeds – the Ermakovka – cocaine – tuberculosis – madness – death", contrasted with the themes of health and cheerfulness.

Besides the montage of themes together and the montage of each theme individually, one should point out the montage of individual moments (the mock attack on the camp, the summoning of the ambulance, and so on). As an example of a montage element that is not limited in time or space, we should point to the dance of the drunken peasant women in the first part of *Kino-Eye*: they are filmed at various times in various villages, and they are extraordinarily artfully edited into a single whole. The same montage approach is used by Vertov for the beer hall, the market, and many other things. All my final remarks mainly have in mind Vertov the editor: individual points about him will be presented in connection with the exposition of his system of the "montage of film attractions".

As a model of the montage moment limited in time and space we shall mention an extremely impressive moment, the raising of the flag on the day of the opening of the Pioneer camp. In Vertov's table, which we attach here, this 17.5-metre section looks as follows. (Perhaps this table, which is undoubted evidence of Vertov's inventiveness, is the simplest way of leading the viewer into his "dark" – dark as the fates of Russian cinema – "mysterious" editing laboratory.)

## Dziga Vertov's Montage Tables of the Flag-Raising Sequence in *Kino-Eye*

[The montage table prepared by Vertov in order to illustrate his meticulous method of editing appeared in Aleksandr Belenson's 1925 book *Kino segodnia* laid out and printed on one large sheet of paper. Even though the existing print of *Kino-Eye* (1924) does not correspond to Vertov's breakdown exactly, and notwithstanding some omissions and possible imprecisions in Vertov's calculations, no changes have been made in this 1925 document other than breaking it down into four consecutive tables.]

### Shots 1-14

numbers:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Leader's head	11			7		9				14				
2. Girl Pioneer at the mast		14					28					10		
3. Mast and flag			31					24			10			10
4. Intertitle: "Raise the flag!"					24									
5. Trumpeters									16					
6. Face no. 1													10	
7. Face no. 2														
8. Face no. 3														
9. Face no. 4														
10. Hand shielding the sun														
11. Peasant children's hands raised														
12. Peasant woman with her hands raised														
13. Face no. 5														
14. Unit aligned														
15. Flag's shadow														
16. Feet of the girl Pioneer on duty														

### Shots 15-27

numbers:	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1. Leader's head							[?]						11
2. Girl Pioneer at the mast		10			8					20			
3. Mast and flag			17					26				10	
4. Intertitle: "Raise the flag!"													
5. Trumpeters											14		
6. Face no. 1													
7. Face no. 2		10											
8. Face no. 3				10									
9. Face no. 4						10			15				
10. Hand shielding the sun													
11. Peasant children's hands raised													
12. Peasant woman with her hands raised													
13. Face no. 5													
14. Unit aligned													
15. Flag's shadow													
16. Feet of the girl Pioneer on duty													

7. KINO-EYE

Shots 28-40

numbers:	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
1. Leader's head								10					
2. Girl Pioneer at the mast													
3. Mast and flag	10		10		9				10				
4. Intertitle: "Raise the flag!"													
5. Trumpeters							10						
6. Face no. 1											10		
7. Face no. 2												10	
8. Face no. 3													10
9. Face no. 4		10											
10. Hand shielding the sun													
11. Peasant children's hands raised				28									
12. Peasant woman with her hands raised						13							
13. Face no. 5										10			
14. Unit aligned													
15. Flag's shadow													
16. Feet of the girl Pioneer on duty													

Shots 41-52

numbers:	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	fpi <sup>2</sup>
1. Leader's head													62
2. Girl Pioneer at the mast													183
3. Mast and flag			93									48	208
4. Intertitle: "Raise the flag!"													24
5. Trumpeters													40
6. Face no. 1						7					5		32
7. Face no. 2							7						27
8. Face no. 3								5					25
9. Face no. 4	10								5				40
10. Hand shielding the sun													10
11. Peasant children's hands raised													28
12. Peasant woman with her hands raised													13
13. Face no. 5										5			15
14. Unit aligned		73											73
15. Flag's shadow				65									65
16. Feet of the girl Pioneer on duty					60								60

TOTAL ..... 905 frames, i.e., 17.5 meters.

1. Nos. 1, 2, 3, and so on until 52, depict the order in which the shots follow each other.

2. The numbers inside the cells refer to the number of frames per shot.

3. The first column on the left lists characters and objects.

4. The column labelled "fpi" summarizes the total number of frames per image – i.e., spent on the corresponding character or object. The total footage of 17.5 metres of film was used to accommodate 52 shots and 16 characters and objects.

## The Flag-Raising Sequence

The flag-raising sequence in the print now available of *Kino-Eye* differs (though not significantly) from the one Vertov meticulously registered in his 1925 "montage table" (perhaps the first known post-analysis a filmmaker performed on his own work). Most of the 16 shots listed in the sequence are easy to identify in the film, though there are more shots than the table mentions. The Leader's head is the one with wheat-white hair. The girl Pioneer at the mast is the one with the face turned away from the camera as she prepares to raise the flag; later on we see her face turned our way (here in profile). The mast is first shown flag-less; then the flag goes up, and we see its shadow on the grass. Face 1 is a little incredulous, face 2 ecstatic, face 3 solemn, face 4 serious, and face 5 blinded by the sun. The girl, with her hand shielding her face, is also there. There are two groups of children, one with hands raised (these are clearly our city Pioneers); the other, whose hands are not raised, are peasant children. Evidently Vertov worked on his table using editing notes, not the film proper, since in the film we see a peasant with a hand raised, but this is man, not a woman. It helps to know that the close-up of bare feet belongs to a girl, since this is the only part of this person shown in the film.

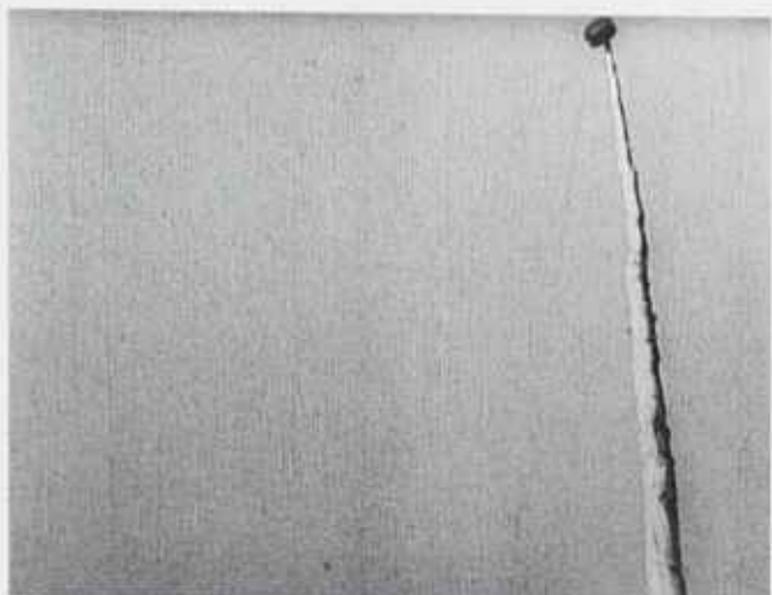
*До торжества*

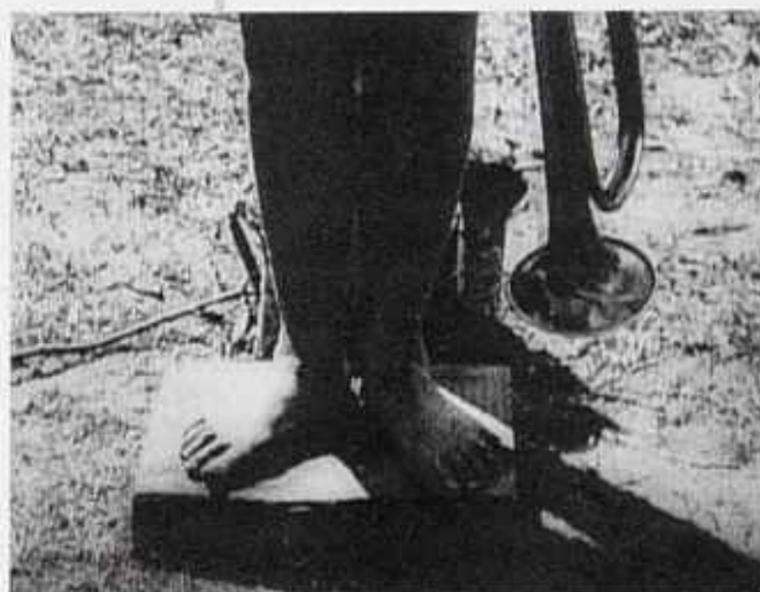
A few minutes remained until the opening ceremony.

*До торжества  
открытия лавра  
оставалось несколько  
минут*









### Kino-Eye and the Kinocs

Grigory Boltiansky,<sup>8</sup> "Kino-Glaz' i kinoki", *Kino-nedelia*, no. 39, 1924

The first public screening of *Kino-Eye* was preceded by a long period of firing by the *kinocs* at the "art cinema" and its apologists from the heavy armour of its loud sloganizing, sharp propaganda articles, and other noise that we are so used to hearing about any thing and any step in Soviet film production that aspires to be a "landmark", to open up an "epoch", and so forth.

In its pure objective basis, that is absolutely not that bad. It means that we, the backward "barbarians" of film art, in our youthful insolence and youthful naiveté, stubbornly want to announce our word everywhere to the world, to change the universe. Of course in this sense *kinoculism* (*kinochestvo*) and the *kinocs* are children of the Revolution, who grew up in its crucible, who were forged by its slogans. The path of the *kinocs* is that same path of revolution. From torn-up sparkling pieces of the heroic period of the Revolution in the newsreel, to the montage pieces of *Kino-Pravda*, which reflect that same montage-constructive period of the Revolution. From *Kino-Pravda*, which gathered and cemented socio-political phenomena with revolutionary feeling, to *Kino-Eye*, that sharp striving to penetrate into today's revolutionary creation, its Red daily life, which is now taking shape.

The movie camera of the *kinocs* is here in step with life. The whole significance of the idea of the Kino-Eye as a new approach to the work of chronicling the Revolution, is precisely in the way that it catches mobile and fresh daily life which has not yet become stable. In catching it correctly, something of which only the method of the real montage shooting of an entire picture, a method which has grown out of the work of the newsreels, is now capable.

If we turn to the contemporary "art drama", which has come under such stern criticism from the *kinocs*, then in this respect matters there are utterly dismal. But dismal because – and this the *kinocs* do not grasp – a feature film on a contemporary theme, life transfigured by the creative activity of an individual artist, can be produced only at some distance in time, only retrospectively, from those elements which have already been shaped in life into definite, clear, crystallized forms, assimilated and digested by the consciousness. For the artist is a human being, and being determines his consciousness. For authentic, and already possible artistic creation, *there exists*, for example, separated by a certain expanse of time, still overgrown with real life but already fanned by legend, lofty emotion and romanticism, *the period of the Civil War*. That is why the cinema in the basic mass of its feature films tries so determinedly to capture this period. And even – you can say this without exaggeration – the cinema, which loves to hurry, has begun this task rather too early. The great, real works of art of the heroic epoch of legendary October are undoubtedly still ahead of us. And the "art drama" is completely hopeless when it takes on pieces of contemporary life. An ordinary life which has not yet crystallized, a director and actors who are completely ignorant of it, scriptwriters who for the most part are very far from this ordinary life in their thinking and know lit-

tle about it, all this means that such attempts *en masse* are made with inappropriate means. That is why the filming of the real material of life as it takes shape, *with the movie camera following at its heels*, should be accorded enormous significance in general and for studying and getting to know this life in particular.

This is a difficult task both for the cameraman and for the leader of the filming, and therefore it would be completely unserious to approach this first journey of the Kino-Eye into our daily life as it is taking shape with exaggerated demands. It is important enough that in this first film we note a striving to catch, to grab hold of *the very kernel* of daily life as it is taking shape. And, moreover, in the authentic creation of life, in the authentic grimaces of living people, in their real day-to-day life, work, and activity. And the deeper and more successfully the very kernel of such moments of daily life, its innermost essence, its psychology, are captured, the more the ice of the viewer's indifference to such pictures will melt.

If... but this work will be done seriously, correctly, broadly, and not in an arbitrary manner. You can understand and explain all the "why's" in *Kino-Eye*. The women in the village who have gotten drunk on home-brew, which the first part of *Kino-Eye* starts with, and the work of the urban Pioneers in the country – these are paths to the revelation of life in the country in general: *the Old in the New and the New in the Old*. Such is life and its dialectic. And in this plan to show real life, where there is a variegated mix of the Old and the New, where there is a struggle and a usually invisible creative transformation, you can understand the scenes in *Kino-Eye* at the Sukharev market, with its speculators and old, dark sores, with the Pioneers inspecting the markets and the Mosselprom beer hall, where there is the same battle between the Old and the New, between the adults and the Pioneer children, and even the Ermakovka and the Kanatchikova Dacha. But this is where we come to the shortcomings of *Kino-Eye*, which come about not so much because of the novelty of the work and the difficulty of capturing the material as because of the *kinocs'* theorizing. If the theme and the work were created according to the plan we have suggested, it would appear before the viewers as a vivid and prominent, sharp, interesting, and significant film. But that would demand an ideological understanding of the theme, a plan, a script, if you like, in the serious, not the formal, meaning of that word. But that is what the *kinocs* deny, in love with their work as they are, waving their childish sword at all the accessories of the "art drama", including a planned approach. Struggling *in essence with the contemporary "art drama"*, which does not yet know how to display daily life and the Revolution, they come to the complete repudiation of the "art drama". From the methods of their work, from the capabilities of the wonderful technique of the movie camera, from real filming, capable of moving us, they come to the fetishization of the movie camera and film newsreel.

The fetishization of the movie camera is at the root of their entire world view, the theory of the Kino-Eye, with its mystic knowledge and its different, new vision of the entire world. That is why they are ready to start their new chronology of the world from themselves. They forget that the filming apparatus, like all the technology of other areas, like their own way of thinking, is just a product of the development of productive forces.

Of course the technology of the industrial period, including the movie camera, which is constantly being perfected and which we are constantly getting to know better, has colossal significance, since it signifies the beginning of the almost complete victory of man over nature.

Of course the film newsreel (*Kino-Pravda*, *Kino-Eye*, and all the rest, if it is well done) for *our* time, when the whole mass of our life represents something rearing up, something extraordinary and new, is one of the works which must occupy an important place in our film production. But as time passes, when the Pioneers, the "Octobrines", and all the rest will become ordinary, mundane phenomena (and that is what we strive for), newsreel will no longer occupy the special place it occupies today.

Since human beings have imagination and an ineradicable capacity to transform life creatively and to make sense of it, with the passage of time, with the consolidation of our way of life, as has always happened in human history, the dialectic of struggle will inevitably bring out the authentic artistic-revolutionary creative work of the epoch on the crest of its wave, and consequently the feature film too. I am not speaking here of the form, which can change, and be enriched, and so on. But it will be a real feature film, not like the ones of today, one that is informed by the emotion and romanticism of the proletarian struggle, by legend and invention.

What that epoch's ordinary day-to-day life will not have is the emotion of today's days of construction, which is reflected in today's real filming of newsreel. And newsreel will lose its succulence, its exclusive place on the screen, will occupy its usual secondary position until the next call of the "unusual", the call of world revolution.

But for the time being there is a lot of work ahead for the newsreel, montage, thematically worked out filming of the real daily life of the Soviet town and village. And we should not complicate this necessary and important work by placing under it an unnecessary and naïve socio-philosophical foundation.

### **Kino-Eye**

*Khrisanf Khersonsky,*<sup>9</sup> "Kino-Glaz", *Kino-zhurnal ARK*, no. 1, 1925, p. 25

Leaving a detailed examination of this interesting direction in our cinema for a special discussion in our journal, in connection with general questions of Soviet cinema and a critical examination of Dziga Vertov's theoretical programme, we dedicate in this first issue just a few dense lines to the assessment of the first part of *Kino-Eye*.

It is a reconnaissance by the eye of the movie camera, "feeling its way" into the area of observation of our contemporary life, an attempt to demonstrate the movements of the living, spontaneous processes which make up our day-to-day phenomena. The reconnaissance is done interestingly, and it displays quite clearly both its virtues and the "childhood" illnesses and mistakes that are natural at this initial stage.

The best section in the first part is the one that is dedicated to the life and work of the Young Leninist Pioneers. Here out of the well-chosen "trivia" of everyday life he

has consistently sculpted a single well-thought-out theme, and displayed a good, organic piece of life; to the ideological plotlines – the questions of daily life (the union of the Leninists with the village, their struggle with certain social sicknesses of the town), the Leninists give an immediate answer. The thought is pursued right up to its resolution in practice. Things worked out differently with, for example, the filming of the mad people. Here he only hints at the questions of the social causes of psychic illnesses, and therefore all these scenes are ideologically unresolved, and just look like a *Kunstkamera* of effects. Here all we have so far is an *inquisitive* approach to social themes. This is the first “childhood” illness of Vertov, inquisitiveness, sometimes superficial observations, a fascination only with externally diverting spectacle. Vertov has not yet been able to be completely serious and intellectually curious at all times. He has not sustained a serious tone and careful thoughtfulness throughout the first reconnaissance of *Kino-Eye*, and therefore certain of his “dispatches” are merely entertainment and play. We observe the same thing in his attitude to cinematic technique (montage, showing the film in reverse, showing it in slow motion, the wit and boldness of the camera operator Kaufman, and so on). Vertov still does not always subordinate his technical refinement, his young talent, to the well-considered ideological content of the film and the demands that it be comprehensible for the masses. In this way he himself prejudices his influence on the masses and pokes the stakes of his desire to be original at all costs and the rubbish of trivia into the wheels of popularity and the intelligible presentation of the subject as a whole.

These qualities could be observed throughout the first part of *Kino-Eye*, but I also observed all the time Vertov’s struggle to overcome this childhood illness and the growth in him of a serious ideological master, his striving to straighten out his enthusiasms into the serious path of thought and work.

I think that Vertov’s method of work has a future of enormous social significance (we shall have a special conversation about that), and that Vertov himself also has very significant work ahead in his hands. By the way, it seems to me that other filmmakers underestimate the drive and skill of Vertov in the artful use of the filming apparatus itself, his skill in directing the camera operators. They underestimate both the questions that Vertov raises and his achievements in the mastery of the “film-thing” as the organization of factual visual material.

### The Literary Year

*N[ikolai] Osinsky,<sup>10</sup> excerpt from “Literaturnyi god”, Pravda, 1 January 1925*

In 1924 the second crisis of our literature since the Revolution continued...

A new way of life is being formed. But if you only try to describe this new way of life in proportion, to photograph the situation that is dominant today, you get a preponderance of dark sides, of mud, poverty, lack of discipline – the thing the struggle is being waged against. And if you try to describe “New” and “bright” phenomena, it comes out

unreal and sugary. If you try to put the will to the New at the head of what you write, you get pamphleteering instead of *belles lettres*. We need a writer who can combine all this in the appropriate proportion and in the appropriate place. He should start from the wish of the working class (this is not at all the “will not to see”, as Pilniak<sup>11</sup> thought, it is the will to “overcome and put things in their correct place”, the will to re-make life); he should, perhaps, in the first place be a pamphleteer. He should mix pamphleteering with satire, with the depiction of everyday life and lyric feeling (when he writes about the “New” and the “bright”).

In order to understand this we can find an example in Soviet cinema: we have in mind *Kino-Eye*. Here they have the slogan: neither an unbiased *Pathé-Journal*, not linked by any “intrigue”; nor, on the other hand, a picture of ordinary life, reflecting the dominant situation and using the old springs of “intrigue” that characterize it; nor fleshless tendentious pamphleteering on the screen. But the other approach is as follows: I take my social will; I use it to link those pictures which I want to observe; I take something dirty and skilfully offer it for mockery; I draw attention to it while standing craftily to one side; I take a stroke of will being implemented in life; I release the sun’s ray of a new idea and so on. And I get a new kind of picture, which did not exist before the Revolution and cannot exist abroad.

To avoid misunderstanding, I add that what I have just formulated has not been fully implemented in the concrete example I took: this is just the idea of this new type of cinematic picture. But it is a correct idea, which shows a new path.

### **Kino-Eye**

*Dziga Vertov, “Kino-Glaz”, RGALI 2091-2-158*

We, the *kinocs*, are not keen on calling *Kino-Eye* a film – we say that *Kino-Eye* is the first “film-thing”.

This film-thing does not satisfy any of the demands made of a fiction film. It is made as if the studios, the directors, Griffith, Los Angeles, had never existed.

In constructing this film-thing the following people were superfluous:

- (1) scriptwriters (a film without a script)
- (2) directors (a film without a director)
- (3) designers (a film without sets)
- (4) actors and cinematic model actors (a film without actors and model actors).

So who did make this picture?

- (1) the *kinocs* observers (they saw it)
- (2) the *kinocs* cameramen (they captured it)
- (3) the *kinocs* editors (they organized it).

We began with five observers. By the end of the first part the number had grown to a hundred. “Circles of the Friends of the *Kinocs*” were formed, and they also developed their activities on a large scale, under the slogan *Kino-Eye*.

The first part was shot by the youngest cameraman, but also the most perceptive, Mikhail Kaufman. The shooting itself was completely different from the shooting of ordinary films.

Shooting, and simultaneously inventing methods of shooting, by the end of the first part we had worked out a whole system of such methods, which will undoubtedly make the shooting of the later parts easier.

The editing of *Kino-Eye* is also unusual. It is not like the editing of feature films, but it is also very different from the editing of *Kino-Pravda*. The aim of this kind of editing is to grab the attention of the viewer, and to cool his thirst for “detective stories”.

The film is gripping to watch, so as well as the experimental and ideological value of the work we should add its commercial value.

Of course, we should not take a clichéd approach here – we should bear in mind the peculiar properties of the film, and use these properties to arouse general interest and to break through to the mass audience.

In our life, in our personal relationships, or in our actions, it is not only the “WHAT” which plays an important role, but also the “HOW”.

For example, other things being equal, it is more comfortable and tastier to sip your soup from a bowl with a spoon than to gulp it straight from a sweaty cap with holes in it.

To the question, WHAT. We reply: the film-thing, which is unlike anything that has been done before; the film-thing, for every metre of which we take responsibility as for a life-fact; the film-thing, which is being copied, whose achievements are already being borrowed in order to forestall it – the film-thing, which when it is shown to the viewer rivets his attention and arouses in him feelings and thoughts that have never been touched by the screen before.

Let us bear all this in mind. In the end not one viewer can be sure he has not been captured on film in this part of *Kino-Eye* or another – let’s bear this in mind too, and ask ourselves “HOW”?

How do we offer this kind of film to the public; that is to say, how do we deliver it to the viewing theatres?

And we answer: this “HOW” must differ from the way an ordinary film drama is delivered, in the same way as the thing itself, the *Kino-Eye*, differs from the ordinary film drama.

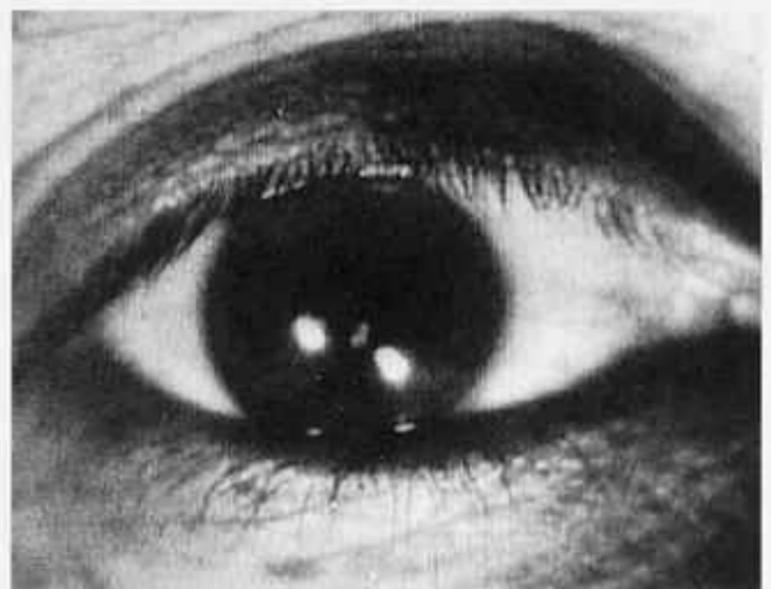
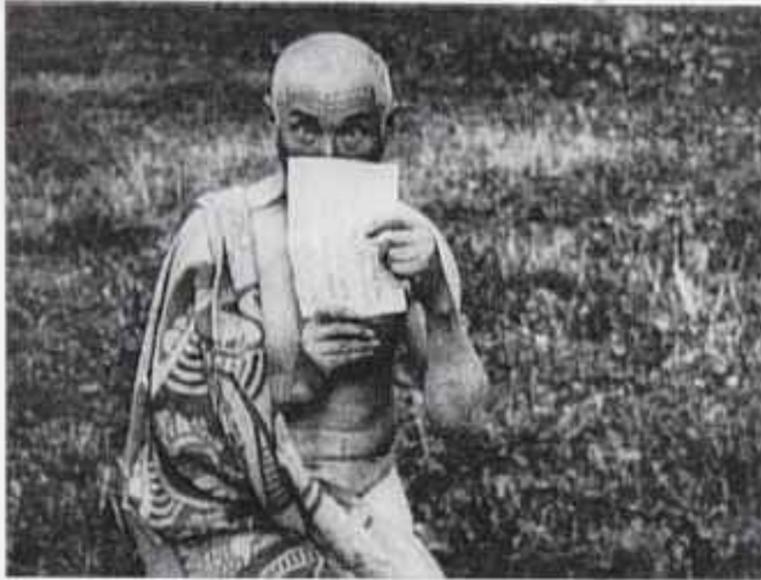
### **Where Is It?**

G. Petrenko, “Gde zhe on?”, *Kino*, 6 April 1926

Almost every issue of the newspaper *Kino*, or of *Sovetskii ekran*, speaks of the successes and achievements of Dziga Vertov in his work with the *Kino-Eye* group. Experts have been speaking about *Kino-Eye* for some time, and they have had a lot to say, but the broad masses of viewers still don’t have the slightest idea about it.

We want to see and assess the work of Dziga Vertov. Give us *Kino-Eye* on the screen.

“Kanatchikova Dacha”



One of the reels of *Kino-Eye* takes us to the “Kanatchikova Dacha”, the colloquial euphemism for a mental hospital in Moscow. Vertov was clearly amazed at the way one of its inmates responded to the camera, mimicking the cameraman who was filming him while calling out “Memento Mori!” Then Vertov’s signature close-up of an eye appears. It is hardly surprising that Vertov’s opponents would pun upon this, as they often did, calling the *Kinoc* group “*Kinocheskaya dacha*”.

Where is it? Is it marinating on a shelf somewhere? It's too early for that.

If you don't know the taste of the viewers you should not immediately pour a marinade over *Kino-Eye*. Maybe viewers will want to eat it with a white sauce or sour cream?

### Notes

1. Czeslaw Sabinski (1885-1941), film director, set designer.
2. Aleksandr Belenson (1890-1949), poet, journalist, and critic.
3. Shady black market area in Moscow.
4. Tongue-in-cheek allusion to a mental hospital in Moscow.
5. Cinematographer Mikhail Kaufman (1897-1980), Dziga Vertov's brother.
6. Vladimir Erofeev (1898-1940), documentary film director, critic, and journalist. He co-founded (together with Nikolai Lebedev) and edited (until September 1925) the newspaper *Kino*. In the mid-1920s Erofeev was known as an active and serious opponent of Vertov's theory. One of Erofeev's methods of disproving Vertov was to start making documentary movies on his own (starting in 1927), in which he treated the cinema eye not as the all-powerful tool of vision, but as a *weak* tool incapable of penetrating reality fully and profoundly. Erofeev's criticism of Vertov's work as lacking "a guiding Communist head" led him to making movies quite different from Vertov's in their aversion to tricks, montage effects, and their attention to reality untainted by the presence of the camera. In the history of Soviet documentary, Erofeev is the only director whose films live up to Vertov's in talent and ideas.
7. The name of a chamber of curiosities in St. Petersburg.
8. Grigory Boltiansky (1885-1953), documentary film director, film historian, and journalist. He began directing newsreels in 1917, and in 1931 founded the Documentary Department at the All-Union State Cinema Institute (VGIK: Vsesoiuznyi Gosudarstvennyi Institut Kinematografii).
9. Khrisanf Khersonsky (1897-1968), critic and screenwriter; on the staff of *Sovetskii ekran*. A stalwart supporter of Vertov.
10. Nikolai Osinsky, pseud. of Valerian Obolensky (1887-1938), politician, economist, and diplomat; People's Commissar of Agriculture in 1921-1923. He published on political and literary questions in *Izvestiia*.
11. Boris Pilniak, pseud. of Boris Vogau (1894-1938), Soviet novelist.

PART TWO



THE  
MIDDLE





## VERTOV VERSUS EISENSTEIN



### Kino-Eye on Strike

*Dziga Vertov, "Kino-Glaz' o 'Stachke'", Kino, 3 February 1925 (translated from the original typescript preserved at RGALI 2091-2-158)*

We consider *Strike*<sup>1</sup> to be an attempt to graft certain methods of construction from *Kino-Pravda* and *Kino-Eye* onto feature filmmaking.

Given the exceptionally favourable material and technical possibilities (by comparison with what is the norm for us), the experiment has produced interesting results.

The *kinocs* find common ground with: the montage constructions, the choice of sequences to film, and the construction of intertitles in this film.

The *kinocs* find profoundly alien: the actorly material from which the film is constructed;

all the theatrical and circus elements in the film;

all the high art and decadent fractures, all the tragic poses of "silent howling" (even when they are cut back by the scissors);

and we also find certain allegories in the picture unacceptable, for example the visual comparison of the proletariat with a bull which is being slaughtered in an abattoir, and a whole series of other qualities and particulars which are taken not from "life as it is", but from the so-called "theatre for fools".

*Strike* is a step in our direction by the feature film, and we are grateful for that.

But why is such a gradual step, and one furnished with every comfort, still made under the same brand name of theatrical cinema?

Why do the people who made *Strike*, having led the film almost to the fence of the theatre, not let it go out of the gate of the sacred garden of "art"?

There, beyond the fence, where *kinocs* viewers swarm like ants, hour by hour, minute by minute, there is struggle, humiliation, the black routine of stubborn unrewarding work.

Here is a festival of money and film stock.

And a "solemn ritual" with full attention from all animate and inanimate objects.

Comparing *Strike* with *Death Ray*,<sup>2</sup> we can see clearly that the rudder of feature-film cinema has been turned from the "tap dance of yesterday" (*Ray*) to "strategic today" (*Strike*).

But what we need is not the reform of the autocratic art drama, but for it to be cast down from its golden pedestal.

With the money earned from the exploitation of foreign junk, we should not build our own, even super-magical junk, but we should open the way to the mass cinema viewer, to the class viewer from the proletariat.

IT IS NOT THROUGH SOVIET MAGIC AGAINST *BOURGEOIS* MAGIC BUT THROUGH THE UNIFIED VISION OF MILLIONS OF EYES THAT WE SHALL STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITALIST SORCERY AND DECEIT. OUR CINEMA WEAPON IN THE STRUGGLE WITH THE *BOURGEOIS* WORLD MUST BE AND WILL BE THE ALL-UNION, AND THEN THE UNIVERSAL KINO-EYE.

If even a year ago various comrades still had doubts, then by now the inevitability of setting cinema in the direction of *Kino-Eye* has become obvious to everyone. Art cinema is victoriously retreating. One of the brilliant stages of its retreat under the onslaught of the idea of the Kino-Eye is the release of the film *Strike*. Cut and filmed in imitation of *Kino-Pravda* and *Kino-Eye*, it quite incompetently sets the course of art cinema towards the destruction of the actor, the script, the set, and so forth.

*Strike* is the heaviest defeat for the methods and principles of art cinema, delivered not directly by Kino-Eye but at the hands of those art workers themselves.

What is worst in *Strike* is what remains from the "Kino-Church", the manure of actors, the circus tricks and the decadent slobbering.

What is best in *Strike* has been taken from *Kino-Pravda*.

When, between the rejection of the kino-church (Kino-Eye) and the affirmation of the kino-church (artistic drama) there grows the "Living Church",<sup>3</sup> even in exclusively revolutionary pose (*Strike*), we, the *kinocs*, consider this phenomenon to be the result of the decomposition of the artistic drama, give it an appropriate public assessment, and confidently continue our struggle.

### The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form

*Sergei Eisenstein, excerpt from "K voprosu o materialisticheskom podkhode k forme", Kino-zhurnal ARK, nos. 4-5, pp. 5-8, 1925<sup>4</sup>*

All this gives us grounds to apply to *Strike* the appellation that we are accustomed to using to mark revolutionary turning points in art: "October".

"*Strike*" is cinema's October.

An "October" that even has its own "February",<sup>5</sup> because what are the works of Vertov if not the "overthrow of the autocracy" of fiction cinema, and nothing more? Speaking of which, my only forerunner was *Kino-Pravda*. But *Kino-Eye*, released when the shooting and part of the editing of *Strike* were already completed, could not have exerted any influence, and by its very essence *there was no way in which it could exert any influence*, because *Kino-Eye* is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the technical methods that are valid for newsreel only. Vertov claims that these methods *suffice* for the creation of a new cinema. In fact, Vertov's "movie camera races" are *merely an act of denial* of one particular aspect of cinema.

I am not denying a certain genealogical link with *Kino-Pravda* (the machine-guns fired just as much in February as they did in October: the difference lay in the target!):

*Strike*, too, descends from the newsreel, but I consider it all the more necessary to point to the *sharp distinction in principle*, that is, the *difference in method*. *Strike* does not “develop the methods” of *Kino-Eye* (as Khersonsky says), and it is not “an experiment in grafting certain methods of construction in *Kino-Pravda* onto fiction cinema” (as Vertov says). Whereas, in terms of the *external form* of the construction you can point to a certain *similarity*, in precisely the most essential part, the *formal method of construction*, “*Strike*” is the *direct antithesis* of “*Kino-Eye*”.

My starting point is that *Strike* has no pretensions to being an escape from art, and in that lies its strength.

In our conception a *work of art* (at least in the two spheres in which I work: theatre and cinema) is first and foremost a *tractor ploughing over the audience's psyche with a class purpose in mind*.

The work that the *kinocs* produce has neither this characteristic nor this mind-set, and, owing to their somewhat outdated negativism, we are faced with their *denial* of art instead of a *recognition of its materialist essence*, or at least of its *utilitarian applicability*.

This flippancy puts the *kinocs* in a ludicrous position, for if we look at its formal aspects we will have to diagnose their work as belonging very much to art, *and, worse, to one of its most useless manifestations for ideology, primitive Impressionism*.

*With a montage of fragments of real life* (the Impressionists called them *real shades*), whose effect has not been calculated, Vertov weaves the canvas of a Pointillist painting.

This is of course the most “felicitous” form of *easel* painting, whose “revolutionary” quality resides in the subject-matter alone, much as it does in the paintings by the AKhRR artists who take pride in their affinity with the Wanderers.<sup>6</sup> Hence the advantage of the *Kino-Pravdas* that are always topical, i.e., *thematically effective*, over *Kino-Eye*, which is thematically loose and which, when it comes to non-primitive, agitational moments, by and large *miscarries due to the impotence [and] ineffectiveness of its form*.

Vertov takes from his surroundings the things that impress *him* rather than the things with which, by impressing the *audience*, he will plough its psyche.

The practical distinction between our approaches emerges exactly in the material that *Strike* and *Kino-Eye* have in common. Vertov considers this partial overlap to be virtual plagiarism (though there's not much in *Strike* that would make your mind rush to *Kino-Eye!*); in particular, the abattoir that is merely *recorded* in *Kino-Eye* and *gorily effective* in *Strike*. (This extremely powerful effect – “pulling no punches” – is responsible for 50 percent of the opposition to the film.)

Like the proverbial Impressionist artist, *Kino-Eye*, sketchbook in hand (!), runs after events as they are, *yielding to their “cosmic” pressure* instead of *forcefully disrupting the causal links between them*, instead of *defying their inevitable stasis of real events*, instead of *making a powerful social-organizational motive prevail over their inert flow*. In Vertov's works the external dynamic of events masks the stasis of their manifest pantheism (a position that in politics is characteristic of opportunism and Menshevism).<sup>7</sup> Vertov's idea of the dynamics, his methods of alogism,<sup>8</sup> is in effect a purely aesthetic concept. Such are the winter-to-summer tricks in *Kino-Pravda No. 19*, such is his rapid montage

of short fragments which in actual fact is dutifully in sequences of the impassive order of things.<sup>9</sup>

All this instead of (as we did in *Strike*) snatching fragments from our *surroundings* according to a conscious and predetermined plan calculated to launch them at the audience in the only correct combination that would subjugate this audience, infect it with the appropriate associations with an eye to motivating it ideologically.

You should by no means conclude from this that I am not prepared to eliminate the remnants of the theatrical element that is organically inconsistent with cinema from my future works. What I want to say by my *apology for a predetermined plan* – the “production” plan – is that *film direction* is not just an organization of *optically recorded material*, even if this material as such can produce a certain effect, but *the organization of the audience through organized material*. If in *theatre* the director recarves the material provided by the dramatist, the actor, and the rest into a *socially effective construction*, here in *cinema* he does so *by selective treatment*, by recarving *reality* and real phenomena. But, even so, this activity is still *directing*, and has nothing to do with the *passionless representation* of the *kinocs*, whose recorded phenomena goes no further than *fixing the audience’s attention*.<sup>10</sup>

The Kino-Eye is not just a symbol of *vision*: it is also a symbol of *contemplation*. But we need *not contemplation, but action*.

*It is not a “Kino-Eye” that we need, but a “Kino-Fist”.*

Soviet cinema must cut through to the skull! It is not “through the combined vision of millions of eyes that we shall fight the *bourgeois* world” (Vertov) – they’d rapidly give us a million black eyes if this were so!

We must cut with our kino-fist through to skulls, cut through to final victory, and now, under the threat of an influx of “real life” and philistinism into the Revolution, we must cut through as never before!

Make way for the kino-fist!

### **Kino-Eye by Dziga Vertov (3)**

*Aleksandr Belenson, excerpt from “‘Kino-Glaz’ (Dzigi Vertova)”, in Kino segodnia (The Cinema Today) (Moscow, 1925), pp. 10-11*

Whether *Kino-Eye* is, in a certain sense, just a particular case of *Strike*, or whether, on the contrary, *Strike* is, in a certain sense, just a kind of generalization of the basic elements of *Kino-Pravda*, all the same Eisenstein was in complete agreement with my opinion that Vertov, to whom he invariably gave his due, is nearer to him than anyone else, and that the difference between them is only, as it were, one of quantity, while the difference between Eisenstein and even Kuleshov, who is perhaps (on another front) “the first among equals”, no more, is one of a different kind, to be precise, one of quality. It would not be superfluous to mention that *Strike* was in production at the same time as *Kino-Eye*, which as the director of *Strike* affirms, undoubtedly excludes the possibility of “borrowing” from there by Eisenstein (who has never denied that the decisive influ-

ence on his work in cinema has been that of the high technical level of Vertov's issues of *Kino-Pravda*), and it seems that we can content ourselves with the fact that, since it is essential that some one thing necessarily "determined" something else, then the "being" of Vertov the *kinoc* in a certain way determined the "consciousness" of the highly talented director Eisenstein, who was completely consciously and completely independently searching out new paths in film art.

As for Vertov, then, bearing in mind that my "prophecies" are so far proving to be correct, I shall express the conviction that we should expect a great deal more that is interesting and engaging in a completely new way from his future work, especially if he wants to use the most valuable experience of *Strike* in the appropriate way. "*Strike* is an undoubted step forward," writes a worker correspondent in the newspaper *Kino*, "but we should not stop at this point and should strive in every way to reveal authentic revolutionary truth in our films." And among the responses of worker correspondents to the *Lenin Kino-Pravda* are the following: "When they see the film, workers will set about carrying out Ilich's precepts more firmly" (*Rabochii zritel*), and "The film creates an extremely strong impression, the film is the most valuable and most necessary one we have" (*Izvestiia*). Vertov will not, of course, stoop to the "fiction film" (his heroic steadfastness in this respect is sufficiently tried and tested), but perhaps at the necessary moment he will find the ability and the means to raise it to his 23 issues of *Kino-Pravda*?! "The best evenings spent in front of a cinema screen were the evenings of current *Kino-Pravda*," affirms the cinema writer Louis Delluc,<sup>11</sup> who is renowned in the West (as his Russian translator assures us), in his, it has to be said, extremely lightweight *Photogénie*, and we have to confess that this affirmation is the best thing Delluc has said on the theme of *photogénie*.

Delluc prefers the "life" in American films to the "beauty" in European pictures. But our *kinocs*, led by Vertov, are no longer satisfied by this "life" itself, even in its American version: they insistently and inexhaustibly search out and show life as it is.

It is an extremely significant fact, not without its usefulness for the *kinocs* when they are polemicizing with their enemies, that it seemed even to Leo Tolstoy that "in time people will completely stop making up works of art. They will feel ashamed at making up a story about some invented Ivan Ivanovich or Maria Petrova. Writers, if they continue to exist, will not make things up, but just relate the significant or interesting things they happen to have observed in life" (quoted from Boris Eikhenbaum's *V poiskakh zhanra* [In search of genre]).<sup>12</sup> The future abolition of "making things up" is in any case more probable on screen than in literature; "the theory" of Vertov, which liquidates all kinds of invention, of making things up in cinema, is extremely simple, but this circumstance does not make it less significant and fruitful – in the broadest plane of social pedagogy.

The cinema is full of contradictions. Its philosophy is suspect. Its dialectics are ambiguous: on the individual scale it gives the repudiation by Eisenstein of his own cinematic methods, which he used to make *Strike*, and in its broad collective sweep it has brought Vertov to the repudiation of all film art; the very scope of the theses which they deny can-

not be compared, and therefore their antitheses are also not open to comparison. In this way even the dialectics of cinema, treated as an art form, are relatively suspect.

### **Agit-Kino and Kino-Eye<sup>13</sup>**

*Boris Arvatov,<sup>14</sup> "Agit-kino i kino-glaz", Kino-zhurnal ARK, no. 8, 1925, pp. 3-4*

An absurd struggle, which plays into the hands of right-wingers, has begun among Left-wing film workers, or more precisely between Vertov and Eisenstein, in connection with the production of *Strike*.

If you remove all the personal elements (competition, self-promotion, conversations about plagiarism), this struggle comes down to the affirmation on the part of Vertov that the film *Strike* is reactionary because of its representational plot, and to the affirmation on the part of Eisenstein that *Kino-Eye* is reactionary because of its passivity.

Let us sort this out.

The film *Strike* is conceived as an agit-piece, which should affect the audience's psyche in a precise direction which has been calculated in advance and which goes beyond the boundaries of film as such, that is to say that it should have an agit-political and broadly ideological influence – in short, that it is conceived thematically. Every shot in *Strike* is therefore selected by the director to create the greatest impression, to create the attraction (which should not be confused with the stunt), and to create dynamic action. This is what causes the plot shifts, the parallelism, the poster character of the shots, the stepped build-up of homogeneous shots, and so on.

Yet all this does not yet in itself define Eisenstein's manner. *Strike* is a propaganda piece not only through its combination of devices, but also through its material, and this latter consists, in the main, of location shots, objects, and phenomena in their real, actual existence (as is well known, Eisenstein intends in future to reduce the actorly, figurative material to a minimum). But such real location material in fact represents the most precise means of propaganda, if it is presented not under the veil of romances to feast your eyes on, but openly: the viewer sees real life, understands that here in this particular sequence nothing has been made up, remains within the confines of the real, is not carried off into the mists of fantasized beauty, and therefore turns out to be capable of applying the conclusions drawn in the film to his practical social activity. And if we speak of the tendencies of the propaganda cinema of a class which for the first time is consciously organizing its life according to a plan, and consequently does not need the figurative mirages of aesthetics, then it is precisely an agitational power of real locations, which does not conceal but reveals the means by which it impacts the viewer (the self-sufficient presentation of attractions), which answers the aims of the proletariat more than anything else.<sup>15</sup>

It is understandable that the value of the location-attraction propaganda manner is completely limited to the general extent of the need of the contemporary working class for art which exerts influence through plot. There is no point in discussing whether this need is great and whether it is objectively necessary. However much individual intellec-

tuals might chatter about the immediate overthrow of all art except production art, the working class needs to bear in mind in practice that its achievements have not yet reached the stage of society being fully organized and like-minded – it has to convince, and to convince concretely, that is to say by means of art. The point is only that artistic propaganda should be carried out in ways that seek in the end to liquidate easel painting and figurative art, and not in the style of “novels about life”. This work is being carried out insofar as he is able, insofar as he can resolve it, by Eisenstein, and it is a good thing that he is doing so. Just as in art painting has been replaced by photo-montage and other forms of poster, which are needed for the time being alongside the construction of objects (industrial production), so in the cinema we should move from the fiction film to the agit-location film and to the pure production-oriented demonstration of life, to studying and capturing it for the purposes of information.

I pass on to the tasks of Kino-Eye.

All figurative art from the primitive to the contemporary has arisen and developed out of spontaneous social forces. Dissatisfied with reality, incapable of experiencing it concretely and controlling it, people compensated for their insufficiency with the help of socially designed fantasy. There, in those pictures, statues, novels, verses, plays, life was altered subjectively according to a person's desires; running away from grey reality he created bright, impressive illusions for himself. And the more he got used to taking in the concrete through figurative and invented art, the less he had a sense of the concrete in reality. It was like this in the time of feudalism, which was dependent upon the external natural elements, and it was like this at all stages of capitalist society, which is dependent upon the elements of its own development. The working class has no reason to run away from life: on the contrary, its historical successes are inseparably linked to the degree in which it has control of life, a control which is profoundly practical and therefore concrete. But this presupposes a real instinct for life, the proclamation of the primacy of the real over the illusory. If the *bourgeois* found out about other *bourgeois*, about the way they lived and so forth, if he got first-hand wisdom of life from novels, then the proletarian, this collectivist of both thought and action, must know and see another proletarian and in general all the real life that surrounds him and that is really linked to him. And that is not all, he must, if he wants to prevail, know how to see the bright, strong, typical, and characteristic in life, and not in some illusory composition; he must work out in himself a sense of a particular concrete object, a piece of nature, his comrade, an event he witnesses, and so on; he must distinguish one object from another, taking in their particular qualities and not losing a sense of purpose. And this is so as to direct his transformative energy not along the line of fantasy (finding everything “beautiful” and “poetic”), but along the line of reality. The forces of history are working in the interests of the proletariat: he has no reason to try to save himself from them, like the *bourgeoisie*, which is doomed to destruction both as a whole and in the person of each of its individual members taken separately. The real future of the proletariat is more powerful and grandiose than the most unbridled fantasy, and the germs of that future are large enough today to provide rich material to re-educate those psy-

chic and practical attitudes to reality which remain in the working class from the classes which created it, and to develop a reserve of feeling born in the production process and the class struggle.

As for practical activity, the forms of putting the *kinocs'* programme into practice, here Vertov is absolutely right when he says that it is impossible to achieve his aims to the necessary degree through a plotted film, and that only pure demonstration is capable of presenting a thing as such. Every film with a theme, even an agit-location one, every influential and therefore narrative attraction, diverts attention from the thing to the event; the thing turns out to be one of the compositional means, and loses a fair share of its real quality as material. On the other hand, skilfully done demonstration reveals a thing, and makes it the object of a conscious and concrete cognition which, despite Eisenstein's opinion, cannot be passive; what is passive is feasting your eyes on some invented aesthetic picture and not getting to know reality. The latter, like every real cognitive process, is completely active – and it responds to the healthy demands of the psyche (compare scientific films). But to feed the viewer on a constant diet of influence and rearrangements of reality would be not simply to shake up the psyche, but to chafe it, and to chafe it not without causing pain. Vertov and Eisenstein do not exclude each other, they complement each other.

There is one point about which both “enemies” show solidarity and in which they are both mistaken, thanks to their clear lack of sociological grounding.

Both Vertov and Eisenstein sagely propose that in the final analysis one must destroy all art, including production art, and leave naked production, technology. Vertov even imagines that what he is doing now is not art, or at least, is ceasing to be art. This unanimity exposes the inveterate artists in them<sup>16</sup> (which is not at all bad), but also the intellectuals, who in their manner of thinking and desiring (which, it goes without saying, *is* bad) have bowed down fetishistically before industry, which for the worker is something perfectly ordinary.

I shall add that apart from Agit-Cinema and Kino-Eye, one other kind of film art is essential, and that is experimental cinema. To the exerting of influence and the showing of life we should add demonstration which transforms daily life, a kind of laboratory, passed through film montage, of new forms which are being invented now (clothes, architecture, furniture, gestures, and so forth).

But that – anti-artistic artists and experimental cinema – is a special topic.

Such is the theoretical basis of the programme of Kino-Eye and its chief worker, Vertov.

### **On the Newsreel**

*Dziga Vertov, “O kinokhronike”, speech at the ARK, 19 March 1926, RGALI 2494-1-49<sup>17</sup>*

In instructions for the Kino-Eye circles, under the heading “WARNING”, we read “... very soon, perhaps even before our next works appear, you will see on Soviet screens a

series of surrogates, a series of films made in imitation of the *kinocs*. In some of them actors will portray real life in an appropriate setting; in others real people will perform roles following the most refined screenplay. These will be the works of opportunists, 'kinomensheviki'. They will be as like our works as a false banknote is like a real one, as big mechanical dolls are like little children..."<sup>18</sup>

Our suppositions have turned out to be absolutely correct. The "cinematic Parnassus" has trembled. Twenty-two issues of *Kino-Pravda* – twenty-two battering rams against the impregnable wall of the art drama – have created a breach which no Russian Fairbankses have been able to plug; the laws and the canons have become unsteady. The art-film directors have started to speak. The silence has been broken, and their perplexed words hang in the air. The Russian "Griffithians" have stopped shaving, and in their search for their lost and worn-out thrones more than one venerable figure has lost his head.

"Down with directors", "Down with sets", "Down with actors and fairy-tale scripts" – "Long live the Leninist proportion", "Long live propaganda through facts", "Long live newsreel and scientific films", "Long live Kino-Eye" – these *kinocs'* slogans stretched like antennae over Soviet cinema.

And then those who were bolder and more cunning decided, under the brand of "typage naturel",<sup>19</sup> to use their privileged positions (money, equipment) to make a little blood transfusion from the healthy body of *Kino-Pravda* into their "high art" but nevertheless utterly rotten organism. We shall not linger over these petty operations, we shall pause only at the major ones, at *Strike* and *Potemkin*.

Both of these films were made by the theatre worker Sergei Eisenstein. He came to the cinema from theatre, where he jerked his legs in a fairly "propagandist" way and forced others to do likewise. Eisenstein brought his actors to the cinema and, since he had no profile of his own, was forced either to copy some foreign or Russian art drama, or to transfer his theatrical-circus devices to the cinema, or to work in the *Kino-Pravda* style and say goodbye to his actors. Eisenstein chose the last course, with the one difference that he did not say goodbye to his actors. He could not bring himself to face life head-on, and chose instead to act out a few historical scenes in a theatrical manner, while giving them the mass form of *Kino-Pravda*.

Having chosen the path of least resistance, the path of borrowing, Eisenstein does not stop halfway. He takes from *Kino-Pravda* the montage construction of the film-thing, the principle and form of its intertitles; he "decomposes" his intertitles, almost copying *Kino-Pravda* at particular points, and, just like us, he uses close-ups, and constructs his film phrases not according to the schema of inserting this or that application of close-ups into a general view (the art drama), but according to the schema of independently coupling these pieces together (*Kino-Pravda*).

He further borrows from *Kino-Pravda* and *Kino-Eye* the device of showing "objects", a device we applied on the grounds that objects don't act; he takes from us the device of the montage of parts of a machine, the showing of meetings, and so forth. Specifically, he constructs the film *Potemkin* under the influence of the Lenin *Kino-Pravda*,

which he himself admits to have exerted a strong influence, and, perhaps without himself noticing it, he falls under its very strong influence.

The *Lenin Kino-Pravda* starts with elements of the struggle of the insurgent proletariat; the middle of the film is constructed around (an event) the death of the Leader; and it finishes on an element of victory and cheerfulness, shots of the train of Revolution bearing down on the auditorium and sweeping over the viewers' heads. *Potemkin* also starts with the struggle of the insurgents; the middle of the film is constructed around the death of Vakulinchuk; and it ends with an element of victory and cheerfulness, the shots of the battleship bearing down on the auditorium. But that is by the by.

What is important to me is to show the colossal influence newsreel has acquired in its organized presentation (*Kino-Pravda*, the film *Kino-Eye*). How great has been its significance, and its influence on art cinema alone. I should also like to point out, against a background of the constant healthy inventiveness of *Kino-Pravda* and *Kino-Eye* workers, the acquisitive character of Russian art cinema. Writer and critic comrades will have to attribute to newsreel much of what they ascribed to *Potemkin*, even including the painted red flag, which was used over a year ago by the cameraman Novitsky<sup>20</sup> in a newsreel dedicated to the anniversary of the October Revolution. Now that cinema employees have already taken off the sailors' trousers they wore as advertisements, we shall do the picture no harm if we confess that the elements with the squadron, which we all liked so much, were also taken directly from a newsreel, shot, I think, in 1910.

Comrade critics and other defenders of *Potemkin*, we are defending newsreel, pushing cinema on to the path of *Kino-Eye*, and therefore we consider ourselves obliged to direct your rapture to the correct address. This address is 24, Tverskaia Street, Moscow, a basement half flooded with water, where we, the *kinocs*, work, and where *Kino-Eye* correspondents have now gathered from various corners of the Soviet Union.

Here, comrades, new forms of film production are being constructed, here every step is an invention, every metre shot is a search, every edited piece is an experiment, every film-thing is an arduous struggle and a victory.

Don't look at the flowers, comrades, look at the root, look at where and on what the "rejuvenated art dramas" are growing. You can't see the tree of *Kino-Eye* for the parasitic creepers. The tree has grown deeply rooted in the soil, and it is growing broader and stronger, come what may.

If even a year ago there were doubts, then now the inevitability of the course of cinema towards the *Kino-Eye* has become obvious to every attentive and unbiased worker. The "film church" cannot exist in a country in which socialism is being constructed. And if between the negation of the "film church" by *Kino-Eye* and the affirmation of the "film church" by the art drama stands the "Living Church", "*typage naturel*", *Strike*, *Potemkin*, we understand this to be a result of the decomposition of the art drama, we give this the appropriate public assessment, and we confidently continue our struggle.

### To Kh. Khersonsky, from Dziga Vertov

*Excerpt from a letter to Khrisanf Khersonsky, May 1926<sup>21</sup>*

I have noted in your article only those elements which need, in my opinion, to be corrected or made more precise. [...] With the exception of this, the article is very useful. Where you are not quite in agreement with me, you can refer to what I have written here as if it were published. I shall not refuse. Greetings. Dz. V.

If you want to show someone this note, I shall object. Dz. V.

[...] The *kinocs* do not struggle against “art”, but deny the existence of “art”. You are mixing us up with the Constructivists. For comparison [atheists] do not fight against “God”, “the Devil”, but deny the existence of “God”, “the Devil”. You can say that the *kinocs* struggle against a belief in the existence of “art”. To put it even more clearly, the *kinocs* do not divide people into “people of art – makers of art” and “people not of art – craftsmen”. The *kinocs* refuse to draw up a barrier between “artistic” and “non-artistic” labour.

Eisenstein took the harvest of what Vertov had ploughed up – I shall not argue. But he did not plough up a single metre. Compare inventing a gramophone and acquiring a gramophone, solving a problem with a piece of coal on a wall or copying out the ready-made solution with a “noble” drawing-pen on pink paper.

A simple nut or a gilded nut.

Every metre of the opportunist *Strike* was covered in gold. That is where you get “much brilliance” and crackling. *The Eccentric art drama in the coarse trousers of Kino-Pravda* – that is *Strike*.

7. Eisenstein did not stride over Vertov. He strode towards Vertov from his theatrical cage but he did not stride far enough, and so he remained in the position of “To Ours and to Yours”. Eisenstein used a hack version of Vertov’s method to make a form that was acceptable for the art drama and the philistine.

8. The only thing that is correct is that in *Strike* the actors are cut back just as far as is necessary to affirm that it is the mass that is at work.

10. I do not advise you to repeat Eisenstein’s extremely coarse mistake and make a subdivision between “seeing and showing” and “convincing and proving”.

KINO-EYE means “convincing and proving” by means of “seeing and showing”.

Art drama means “convincing and proving” by means of “inventing and showing”.

*Strike* is in the second category.

11. Eisenstein is bogged down up to his head in the theatre / the cinema theatre, it’s all the same. He holds tight to the theatrical tightrope and is most of all afraid of being carried off into the open sea of life. Kino-Eye cuts through the ocean of life in a sailboat. Eisenstein in his *Battleship* cannot bring himself to sail away from the theatrical shore.

Is this not the height of timidity?

Try to swap us over. Bring him into my basement and take me into his “unlimited

possibilities". It is unforgivable that you do not understand that it is easier and safer to act out *a hundred* scenes you consider essential than to shoot *one* in *actual life*.

12. It is impermissible to introduce confusion into the concept of the *fiction* (the art drama) and the *non-fiction* (Kino-Eye) film. Influence through facts (Kino-Eye) and influence through invention (the art drama) are POLAR OPPOSITES. An "*invented fact*" is as useless as an "*Attraction*".

The *kinocs* have been consciously using associative montage and montage by means of the juxtaposing of *facts* for as long as they have been working in film production. As far as I can recall, this has been noted both by you and by other press workers.

When you speak of an "attraction" you have to be silent about facts.

*The fact is no comrade for invention.*

"The montage of attractions" is a conscious selection of the most effectively *performed elements*, calculated to *arouse* the viewer straightaway.

That is how you get such an incredible attention to murders, worms, shootings, and so forth.

Critics have been confused and stupefied by the fact that the opium of art drama has here been encoded and intentionally shaped to look like *Kino-Pravda*.

13. You have seen what has been shown instead of 1905, the episode of the rebellion on the ship, shaped to look like the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*. The power of this "historical" picture to arouse is directly proportionate to the number of people who get beaten, killed, shot, and to the number of the other attractions in the film, and is in reverse proportion to the authenticity of the episodes that have been filmed.

### Landmarks of Revolutionary Film Culture

*Khrisanf Khersonsky, excerpt from "Vekhi revoliutsionnoi kultury kino", Novyi mir, no. 10, 1926, pp. 169-76 (173-75)*

It is completely pointless for people to try to dissociate the *kinocs* from art. Their "anti-art" slogan should be understood as an incitement to wage a struggle not with art as a whole, but with a certain current in art which is "opium for the people". This struggle is not outside the bounds of art but within the very sphere of art, it is a struggle between two social and artistic worldviews. The *kinocs* speak out against a mystic "priestly rite", against idealism in art, against the thickets of theatricalized "idle" fabrication and "obedience before the God of art drama", against falsity in the simulation of fictions which are abstracted from real life, against dualism, for *Kino-Pravda* which is realistic in form and materialist in ideology. But the work of the *kinocs* remains a work of art.

While affirming the primacy of the real over the illusory, they still "artificially" and of their own will shape and construct the factual materials of this reality into a thematic artistic composition (an agit-piece), and this is what involves art.

Vertov backs away from the usual devices of theatrical art, but inasmuch as he moves forward he is forced to be an artificer. And he is a talented master of art, although he

impoverishes and limits his formal means by the choice of a narrow path. But this path, thanks to its novelty, its contemporaneity, and the directness of its worldview, could not have failed to fertilize the contiguous currents in cinema. And if Vertov does not himself reap the whole harvest of what he has sown, but prefers to continue to plough up virgin soil like a tractor, then in that lie both his positive role and his limited possibilities. All the same, the harvest has to be reaped.

Different forms and currents in art are always mutually enriching. It is a characteristic of our time that the so-called minor forms of art are rising to the level of the greater ones, and are fertilizing them with new devices. In recent years, the years of Revolution, we observe the new theatre has been fertilized by the circus, painting by the poster, whereas *belles lettres* and the drama are fertilized by the newspaper chronicle and topical sketch, revolutionary poetry by the popular street song, and so on. This happens because the minor forms of art are democratic; they sense the throbbing of the pulse of the new day more directly, and seize upon its themes and colours more quickly. They are the first to respond to the new topical requirements of the artistic instinct of the masses; they are the first to shape new thoughts and melodies. They are nearer to the "current moment". The lyrical, heroic, and epic mood of the day finds its first direct expression in them. When the topical becomes generalized, when the socio-cultural strata of the life of an epoch settle down, then the wave also reaches the major compositions which are less mobile, more stable, and conservative. The themes of the time become classical, the new colours and artistic devices found "below" renew the antiquated canons of Parnassus. The social revolution brings its democratic spirit into art.

"Film Newsreel" and *Kino-Eye* were the first to bear this new revolutionary wave within themselves, and they transferred it to more complex artistic compositions. What is taking place is the assimilation of the methods and themes which have been attained by a "minor art".

A rich harvest from Vertov's ploughing has been reaped by Sergei Eisenstein in his *Strike* and then *Battleship Potemkin*. He has used the achievements of Vertov's methods to make a large-scale artistic dramatized composition. He has unfurled the historical themes of *Strike* and *Battleship* into broad canvases about the events of the historico-revolutionary epoch. The deep breath of the struggle of the masses, the awakening and growth of the revolutionary proletarian movement, the powerful development of the social process, the first birth pangs of the Russian Revolution are portrayed on screen by Eisenstein so convincingly and with such concentrated enthusiasm that the Fascists were right to sound the alarm. In Europe *Battleship* is arousing the masses to revolution! *Strike* and *Battleship* are filled with an enormous will to live and an enormous desire for revolution. Mikhail Koltsov was right to note in *Pravda* that the Bolshevik attitude to life and things was on show as early as in *Strike*. Eisenstein cast the ideological propaganda of the content in a masterly artistic form.

*Strike* is the first of these two films which became, after the works of Dziga Vertov, new landmarks in Soviet revolutionary cinema.

Through the historical model of a typical workers' strike in a Russian factory in the Tsarist epoch he investigated and narrated the inevitability of social conflict and the formation of mass proletarian action. Through the materials of historical newsreel he revealed the basic social forces that were at work. The process of the growth and destruction of the strike is shown as the production of social action. Eisenstein used the methods of newsreel and the methods of the "production" film for an artistic, generalizing film. In *Strike* it is the collective of the masses which acts, and not individual heroes. The film keeps as close as possible to the factory. People and things act as participants in a merged social process. It is the real material itself which moves and unfurls the dynamism of events, and not a narrative, which is what is usually introduced.

Workers themselves, not actors, persuade the viewer through the naturalness of what they are going through, and their external expression does not even say much, which it is difficult to get an actor to do. (The screen persuades through the directness of socio-biological types, it rips off the mask of make-up.) The small number of professional actors who are introduced into the ranks of the workers in *Strike* came with Sergei Eisenstein from Proletkult; they are themselves from a worker background, and are closely related to the masses who surround them. A certain theatrical element in their acting was frankly admitted by Eisenstein to be a weakness of his *Strike*. He even announced (during a conversation at the ARK) that in future he will strive to work without professional actors.

These methods are moving along the same channel as *Kino-Pravda*.

But Eisenstein does not limit his devices as narrowly as Vertov. Everything that could not be caught directly from life in a film newsreel is inaccessible to Vertov. Neither the past nor the future is accessible to Vertov. And much that is happening today outside the field of vision of film news reporters is inaccessible. With his poor material it is exceptionally difficult for Vertov to develop a plot composition on some freely chosen theme. He does not have enough variety of material at his disposal, and he cannot achieve thematic breadth and flexibility. This is where Eisenstein is helped by the use of artistic devices of theatricalization, which he does not want to relinquish. Art, with its endless variety of devices, the art of images, symbols, theatrical convention, invention, dramatization, and illusion, is boldly used by Eisenstein. Taking what is best in Vertov's *Kino-Pravda*, Eisenstein also sups freely from the potential of artistic illusion, which creates its own transfigured life – artistic truth about life. Vertov does not want to make anything up, but only to see and to show. But alas, the camera of the film news reporter does not yet see everything, cannot yet prove everything.

Eisenstein makes it his aim to influence the viewer as strongly as possible, and it is here that he gains his best results. He freely deforms the material and activates it through artistic devices. He advances powerfully on the viewer and propagandizes him not only through ready-made facts but also through artistic invention. The power of art does not lie in material photographed from life, but in the very art of expressively reproducing life. Art is not only a "mirror of life", but also the creation of life. Vertov has remained with the primitive material of art. He shows talent in proving that you can use art to do a great

deal with this primitive material. That may be so, but it is only one of a few possibilities. This does not mean that we should disdain the other, more complex forms.

*Strike* was made along the path to supplementing the series of devices of the earlier art-cinema with a series of new devices taken from other forms of art. Vertov introduced the method of the production film into newsreel. Eisenstein transferred it into the feature film. Vertov developed the orientation of the vision of the film camera, its attentiveness to factual material, the art of montage of details, the dialectical representation of the theme. Eisenstein used these successes and also introduced a series of the achievements of new currents in contemporary painting and theatre.

The influence of contemporary painting is apparent, among other things, in the fact that Eisenstein constructively builds the composition of every shot so brightly and vividly, in which aim he is accompanied by his talented cameraman Eduard Tisse.

The influence of new "Left" theatre is apparent in the transfer from theatre to cinema of a device which Eisenstein calls "montage of attractions".

As an artist Eisenstein consciously chooses his material from a socially utilitarian point of view. He weighs up what emotional influence each juxtaposition of details has on the viewer. In this way the material is chosen both thematically and formally after taking socio-psychological stock – the degree of pressure of a particular effect on the viewer's emotions is verified. The attraction is achieved by the juxtaposition and combination of discrete demonstrated elements. By means of associative montage, which is to say the conscious composition of a chain of attractions, he achieves consistent thematic influence on the viewer in a particular direction.

This artistic method is applied, to a greater or lesser degree, always and in all the arts. But usually the artist follows it intuitively, and he by no means always has a clear recollection of his aim and of the means of influencing the viewer – he seems to be creating "for himself". What Eisenstein introduces into his work is taking greater conscious and verified account of the viewer than of his personal emotions. Inspiration, blind, fumbling guesses without seeing the viewer, are replaced by a system of open struggle with the viewer, face to face, swift and accurate as an emotional mechanism – this is the mechanics of reflexes.

We see its success in *Strike*, and especially in *Potemkin*.

### **Sergei Eisenstein and "Non-Fiction" Film**

*Viktor Shklovsky, "Sergei Eisenstein i 'neigrovaia filma'", Novyi LEF, no. 4, April 1927, pp. 34-35<sup>22</sup>*

The problem of so-called "non-fiction" film is very complicated.

In the infancy of Soviet cinema people maintained that a non-fiction film was "life caught unawares".

In fact it transpired that "non-fiction" film was above all "montage" film. But montage fragments need to be arranged and stopped in order to be filmed.

In the issue of Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Pravda* that was devoted to radio<sup>23</sup> I saw one of Vertov's assistants impersonating a peasant. According to the film he was an owner of a moderately prosperous farm.

Even if we were able to "catch life unawares" the very act of catching would nevertheless be artistically directed.

In the works of Stendhal and Dostoyevsky we find "non-fiction" fragments included, but these are nevertheless aesthetic works. Hence a rejection of staging and an approach involving the composition of raw fragments are neither a necessary nor a sufficient basis for judging a work to be non-fiction and non-aesthetic.

More than that, we may presume to say that it is precisely in the newsreel that we find a good deal of played material.

I know that elements of the February Revolution, such as the passage of the armoured cars, were staged because I myself watched the staging. I have seen newsreel footage of Leo Tolstoy, and it seems to me that even this self-assured man was playing to the camera a little. It is very difficult to teach someone to walk in front of a camera without noticing it.

There are only two conclusions that we can draw from this: either every single person must be taught film acting (but that would be as ridiculous as driving a wall into a nail), or we must select people with professional skills who could work on these skills until they were so perfected and standardized that they could not change during filming.

But, if we are going to choose a selected seed to sow, if in the countryside we are now, in introducing pedigree breeding stock, castrating all the non-pedigree bulls and stallions and not allowing them, in Sergei Tretyakov's phrase,<sup>24</sup> to cultivate a sexual aesthetic, why should we not have a selected person on the screen who in ideal circumstances should be an actor?

Nowadays the film actor is usually both biologically and socially the ideal of his audience, and substituting a passer-by for the actor would mean retreating from industrialization.

I do not reject the magnificent work done by Dziga Vertov. I only reject the places where he uses large print. What makes Vertov's work valid is not that he prefers real people to actors, but that he sees the film form not as a plot composition but as the pure juxtaposition of facts.

Sergei Eisenstein is not making a non-fictional film at the moment, but he is trying his hand at a non-plot film. There is an old saying that the dead grab the living. This grabbing is nowadays a *petit bourgeois* idyll, because nowadays the dead does not grab the living, he travels on him like on a tram.

Once upon a time someone invented the method of joining semantic fragments through the fate of a single hero. But this is not the only possible method, and in any case it is a method and not the norm. Only certain things can be treated well in this way, through this technique.

It is easiest of all to use it to treat the story of boy-meets-girl, and that is why so many plots end with a wedding.

But now is not the time for families.

Nevertheless the dead ride on the living.

I have recently been commissioned to turn some stories sent in by worker correspondents into a scenario. In the story there was a man and a woman. The woman was then expelled from the Komsomol cell. When I had written the scenario I gave it to a group of worker correspondents on a newspaper to read. One of them made a suggestion: "Shouldn't the secretary of the cell be the girl's husband as well?" The director asked, "Is it really plausible that a husband would expel his wife or admit her without anybody raising an objection?" No, they said, it does not happen. But people are used to thinking in terms of kinship.

Eisenstein says that if you commission a scriptwriter nowadays to show a war from seven different viewpoints, he has to invent a family with seven brothers.

At the same time, the technique of art shows us that compositional devices can replace semantic ones and produce the same effect. Even in literature, for instance, we can resolve the composition of a novella by introducing parallelism. Or we can create a plot enigma with the aid of "missing documents" or simply by rearranging chapters.

Cinema nowadays is not short of traditional plots. Eisenstein's *The General Line, Battleship Potemkin* (let it get used to second place), *October*<sup>25</sup> – are not films that are held together by kinship; these are actor-played films that are composed of raw material without a plot. And the latter qualities in this division are much more important than the very enigmatic first one.

The difficult tasks which non-fiction films were solving have turned out to have a subsidiary usefulness, for they helped to create a new technique for resolving the fiction-film problem. But plot-cinema proper, the commercial scripts that people write, have already become like a mummy. Unfortunately, mummies are very durable.

### Kino-Eye

Oleg Voinov,<sup>26</sup> excerpt from "Das Kino-Auge", *Film Technik*, no. 4, 1927, p. 62

The *kinocs* today represent only one direction in Russian cinema. Most of the other directors are still on the path of traditional fiction film. But one cannot fail to recognize the growing influence of the new principles, and it is precisely on the great directors that it is exerted most strongly. Eisenstein's first film, *Strike*, and also *Potemkin*, bear clear traces of the influence of the *kinocs*. Moreover, Eisenstein himself admits this. Both these films are the first attempts to apply the methods of this new movement to "staged", that is to say fiction, films. Eisenstein's last, recently completed film, *The General Line*,<sup>27</sup> is already substantially closer to the principles of the *kinocs* than his earlier films. If in his first films the characters were represented by types, rather than individuals, and the masses took the place of characters, which worked better for propaganda, then in *The General Line* the peasants are already filmed at their daily work.

### Sergei Eisenstein's Reply to Oleg Voinov's Article

*Letter to the Editor of Film Technik, 26 February 1927, RGALI 1923-1-910*

I am not acquainted with Oleg Voinov, but I assume that he is a foreigner and does not know Soviet Russia. Because what is lacking in his article is precisely the most crucial thing, which is inherent in our theoretical thought. He considers *kinoculism* as an achievement which grew up all on its own, completely independently of the general artistic tendencies of the time when *kinoculism* arose. Besides, he considers it independently of the social factors which alone explain, as usually happens with art movements, this or that tendency in the art of an epoch. This also makes it impossible for him to give a correct assessment of *kinoculism* with regard to the present day, a time that in the social aspect is completely and utterly different.

Ultimately Mr Voinov's views on art would leave me indifferent if it were not for the fact that near the end of his article he makes bold conclusions about my own work and its links to the *kinocs*.

This last circumstance obliges me to shed some light on this question, and, at the same time, to place the greatly over-rated phenomenon of *kinoculism* in the appropriate historical context.

This movement, which allegedly "gives the tone" to our art, arose, as Voinov has correctly noted, around 1922. What kind of a time was that? That and the preceding years were the most remarkable time in recent decades. The Revolution, in its stage of unconcealed civil war, was exposing class hatred in all its nakedness and throwing the adherents of the different sides into mortal combat. All the masks were falling. All that remained was either-or. Either a friend, which means a comrade-in-arms, or someone who thinks differently, which means a mortal enemy. Diplomacy, pose, eloquence, out-flanking manoeuvres, political refinement give way to an open combat. The social primitivism of the Red-White conflict spreads into administrative primitivism. The Revkom. The Revolutionary Committee. This short word replaces all the organs of power. The death sentence, and the registering of marriages. Requisition and mobilization. The military defence of the town, the district, and straight after it a meeting about refuges for mothers and children.

The task is not the piling up of facts but working out the audience's attitude to particular facts and events. The bare piling up of facts was appropriate when the fact decided everything, in the epoch of feverishly getting to grips with the economy, which reigned immediately after the Civil War.

Just as, during the Civil War, speeches and explanations that lasted several hours, were ousted and replaced by the formulae of agitators, and the primitive propagandistic opposition of Red to White was a more than adequate approach, so in that epoch (1922-1923) the pure demonstration of facts was more than adequate, facts which showed that despite the intervention, the starvation, typhus, and the inhuman sufferings which we had endured in the struggle for the young Soviet Republic, we *nevertheless* have factories, we have possibilities and boundless prospects. This thought was so

captivating that a bare subtitle, a simple intertitle, was enough to move hearts and to raise the workers' mood over and over again.

And then... the death of Lenin. What work of art could compare in its tragedy and its tension with the film record, the newsreel sequences of the 100,000-strong crowd standing in temperatures of 25 degrees below zero? When every heart was overflowing with pain and sorrow. What could compare with the bitter tears of his dear ones, imprinted on film?...

And here is the apogee of *kinoculism*, and its decline.

Because the way in which a fact which is historically exceptional – the death of the Leader of the Proletariat – influences people at a *single* specific stage in history (and, to be precise, the stage at which the class war turned completely to open conflict, which from the political point of view – that is to say the parliamentary point of view! – also looks like something primitive), cannot be considered a method for art at all times, without reference to later changes in social relations. This was and remains a historical mistake.

I watched the *Lenin Kino-Pravda* (the newsreel of the funeral of Lenin, given this name after the second largest newspaper in the USSR, *Pravda*) exactly a year after it appeared. And what is remarkable is that now that, after a year spent in creative construction in accordance with the Leader's teaching, the immediate grief has been blunted, the effect of this film has been reduced to... sheer curiosity. The emotional effect has become insignificant. A badly edited film journal, with purposely speeded-up shots of people who are too familiar as statesmen, captured in a moment of too intimate emotion... The film is a "special edition", breaking news which we chase after with all our might at the moment at which it is issued, and which three days later will be of interest only to researchers and collectors...

The public at large shared this opinion. If you are a director, you should know how to influence this demanding mass, how to understand what moves its spirit.

Because if, in a situation when "your heart is overflowing", when all you need is a single match, when "you feel a lump in your throat", that is to say when emotional tension has reached its peak in the viewer, who is moved by the theme itself, all you would need would be a string of facts, in a situation when emotional capital has subsided, the question arises of... yes, yes, of art. The formal record is no longer enough! You have to create an emotional breakthrough. Advance a premise, strengthen your premise, add something, turn your camera away to something that seems of secondary importance and then suddenly plunge the viewer back into the very heart of the theme, higher, higher, higher. And so on – every professional knows that. That is what is called art. Or engineering – if by art you understand not impressionistic "creativity" but cold-blooded and calculated construction.

Controlling the emotions of the viewer, provoked by a particular kind of effect, is a purely artistic problem. This is precisely what is denied by the *kinocs*, who oppose their *kinoculism* to art as such. And when Mr Voinov softly evades this point, he falls decisively under the banners of Dziga Vertov.

That same evening there was a showing of *Potemkin*, and I had the opportunity, using the example of the scene of mourning for Vakulinchuk in Odessa, to compare the

effect on the audience of invention and truth. And I have to say that mathematically constructed invention defeated untouched truth. This was all the more unexpected for me because a year previously, in the months after Lenin's death, I frankly admit, the *Lenin Kino-Pravda* had made an enormous impression on me, too. But precisely because of the circumstances I have outlined.

This factor – one which is almost arbitrary, so unusual was the drama of the Revolution which gave birth to them – has been over-rated by the *kinocs* in the historical plane, and, instead of analyzing the historical context and their dependence on it, so as to continue to act in accordance with the movement of history in their later battles, they have become stuck at the point they initially selected.

Their Kino-Eye is like the stiff eye of the Gorgon from the primitive Red-White martial year of 1920 – instead of following the cunning and wise eye of Ilich, which was constantly changing tactics and adapting them to new social conditions!

Today we are not living in 1920, and not living in 1923. Today problems are not resolved by the sword or the cudgel. Today the problem of marriage is not decided by bestial coition in some alien hayloft, as it was in the time of the countless marches of the First World War and the Civil War, as it was in the years after the war. Today the legal position of women is recognized, even if not all the proposed formalities have been realized. Today research is being done with the aim of clarifying how far marital freedoms can extend in our predominantly peasant republic, and how far they will come into conflict with the running of households and the way of life in the country, even though they conform fully to the way of life in the towns.

Today we allow co-operatives to enter into free competition with private enterprise. Our struggle against private enterprise is not carried out through administrative means, but through the self-knowledge of the proletarian co-operator. And this weapon will turn out to be more fatal for it than the requisitions of wartime. The New Economic Policy is giving birth to new forms of tactics in the unending class struggle between the eternally inimical class forces. In the new conditions the artistically primitive tactical pluperfect misfires.

And the formal pluperfect of *kinoculism* cannot cope with the conditions of today.

It is a long time since *kinoculism* gave a direction to our art. Although they have a relatively strong block of journals at their disposal, which are ready to defend such a premise.

Yet there is a misunderstanding here. Because when it outlives its time, decisive primitivism – the spinal cord of the art of primitive epochs – takes on a more complex form than simply that of one of the primitive directions. In our case, than the film journal and the culture film by comparison with full-length films and artistic propaganda.

And again Mr Voinov tries to avoid the sharp corners. Because the second mistake of the *kinocs* is their insufficient attention to this circumstance.

Instead of perfecting and working out their own area, the newsreel and the *Kultur-film*, they film what they themselves call “emotional hits”.

And these hits miss the target!

Let us take, for example, the lauded *A Sixth Part of the World* and *Stride, Soviet!* Instead of one remaining a propaganda film and the other an educational film, they make a pathetic attempt to move their audiences emotionally, which, if you ignore the almost rhyming and rhythmic intertitles which take up 50 percent of the films' length, is attempted by means of the images interpolated between them, which are like post-cards with views, and not like *Nanook* or *Moana*.<sup>28</sup> The influence of *Nanook* on *kinoculism* is very apparent. Presenting a survey of how all the Russian nationalities, by means of hunting, fishing, and so forth, are taking part in state trading, or showing the genuinely remarkable forms of urban administration of the Moscow Soviet, all this amounts to more and more variations on the songs of 1920-1923.

Kaufman's brilliant work *Moscow*<sup>29</sup> stands apart from all this. Without any lofty emotional claims, beautifully shot, well edited, this film, naturally, resolves the task it has set itself – showing Moscow – by means of location shooting (whereas the philosophy of *A Sixth Part of the World*, in the absence of artistic means, is bound to sink and does sink into extensive speaking through intertitles). *Moscow* shows *kinoculism* the healthy path and the area – newsreel – which it should occupy in the construction of Soviet cinema.

And finally, the third mistake of the *kinocs*. Their wilful “marriage of convenience” with me.

Which is rooted in the fact that the material which we use and which we need is similar. This is a social question. There is nothing to be done about it. However differently we may work, we are working for the same audience and in the interests of the same Party questions.

And what is decisive here is not the *what*, but the *how*. I too often have recourse to material which art has not touched, and here again the question of *how* arises, along with the question of *for what*.

Machines. In themselves they are not yet an artistic phenomenon.

How they are *applied*, that's the crux of the matter.

And I can best show the sharp distinction between information and emotional urging with the help of the same material – machines – by means of a single example.

Compare the impression made by any culture film about mechanics with the “play” of machines in the last act of *Potemkin*.

*Figaro qui, Figaro là*. Machines here, machines there. But the difference between the two artistic directions is clear.

The difference lies in the *emotional* use, and not in the pure demonstration of visual elements. Whether it is machines, seascapes, worms in meat, or cannon. The emotional arrangement of visual elements taking into account and making use of the emotional reactions of the public, which arise through these elements by association.

Such was the starting point for the principle of theoretical construction of all my works. It has existed as a principle from 1920 or 1921. But it exists as a method, and not as a particular usage of particular material in the *kinocs'* manner. *Manner* and *fashion* are passing phenomena, but method and views contain within themselves passing fashion and manner as component parts.

In accordance with my views in those years (which have not changed even today), the formula of a work of art consists in the quality of the series of emotional shocks through which the author consciously leads the viewer from the very start in order that his final emotional state should be consistent with what was initially planned. These elements of impact may be plot-related or exist separately from the plotline (*einzelne behandelte Gegenstände*), or be just individual shots. A close-up of a pair of elegant women's legs or a long shot of 10,000 extras are essentially the same elements of impact, even if their "tone" is different.

Tone is the best word. Because it is precisely the interaction between tonal elements, and not a succession of plot-related actions, which decides the final symphony of shots. Even if they coincide with the plot as a whole – it is the tone that defines the quality of the visual dimension.

This is a constantly changing recipe. Because the means which arouse and heighten the emotions (I call them "attractions") are in constant flux. Either because of the political configuration of the audience, or in accordance with the times in which we are living.

I recall in the first place how variously certain "attractions" in *Potemkin* were received (most sharply of all the slaughter of the officers) in differently oriented political circles. For example, by the Nazis or by supporters of the Workers' Parties.

This concerns the elements themselves (the attractions). Here it is a question of what arouses the strongest response, what causes the greatest emotional stimulus.

And the use of this or that material is *not a question of principle, but a purely tactical question*. And for this reason it is unstable. Like symbolism in poetry (let us compare the graphic quality of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, the figurative quality of ancient lyricism, and the symbolism of Apollinaire or Whitman, or even of the Expressionists). What will be decisive today *for emotional purposes* – extra-aesthetic machines (of course, framed in the essential context of other montage elements), or the nightingale of our grandmothers – this is purely a question of the calendar. If today the strongest response in the audience is aroused by symbols and comparisons with machines, we film the "heartbeats" in the machine room of the battleship, but if, tomorrow, the day before yesterday's false noses and rouge come back to replace them, we shall go over to rouge and false noses.

Such an understanding of the question of art will inevitably show that *kinoculism* is an utterly isolated group, holding fast to the positions of "attraction-1923". The attraction of "seeing in oneself and for oneself" has now become very dated, and the 1923 stance of "influencing by the *showing* of material *itself*" has also been subjected to the law of relativity, and now needs to be worked through in a slightly different and more complex way. That is, if it aspires to be more than newsreel.

Now a few words about my actors. Mr Voinov has seen fit to discover in them, too, proof that I am drawing close to the *kinocs*. In the light of what I have said above, such closeness would itself have to be understood as the backwards movement of a crab. Voinov proves it (1) by pointing to *The General Line*, in which "peasants are *already* (let us note this *already*) filmed at their daily work", and secondly with the help of my two

earliest films, in which the actors represent “types, rather than individuals”, and “the masses took the place of characters, which worked better for propaganda”.

In my view these proofs completely and utterly miss the point! To begin with, the type is the next, artistically condensed stage of the individual. And to be precise, the extraction of the universal from the random, that is to say life “in greater concentration than happens in reality”, whereas the *kinocs* are completely satisfied with *life as it is glimpsed just once*. As for my habit of filming *simply people*, and not actors, that does not change the situation, since the main tool at my disposal remains the characterization of the actor’s action. Whether you use actors or non-professionals is of no significance in principle.

And all they are talking about is the search for naturalness! My God! After all, everyone is after naturalness, from the down-at-heel director to the famous producer of hits. The use of [Lev Kuleshov’s] model actors in the aims of naturalness is only the Taylorization<sup>30</sup> of the striving towards the natural. As is the choice of a performer who already has the right physical data, instead of making up an actor with a neutral appearance.

And when we spy out moods, which are always very clear in people who are distant from art, and splice their *physical manifestations* together out of strips of celluloid, half a metre long each, so that they bring us to the necessary emotional experience, then this work of ours is very far from the fabrication of the professional behaviour of agitators in the “life as it is” of the *kinocs*.

As for my new, “recently finished” film *The General Line*, then the data advanced by Mr Voinov are simply wrong.

And for the simple reason for which the world-famous *bourgeois* in the anecdote could not fire a cannon in honour of [Kaiser] Wilhelm’s arrival in his little town – of the 66 reasons the pettiest was that there was no cannon in the town.

*The General Line* is not yet ready. Only 65 percent of the shots have been filmed. Nobody (and especially nobody from the circle of the *kinocs*!) has seen any of the preliminary material. And therefore to use it to draw decisive conclusions appears, to put it mildly, excessively bold!

As does defining the place of the film in the new Soviet cinema as a whole.

And my alleged admission of the influence of the *kinocs* on my creative work is the pure “invention” of this standard-bearer of “truth”!

### Activist Cinema

*Aleksandr Kurs*, “*Aktivistskii kinematograf*”, in *Samoe mogushchestvennoe (The Most Powerful Art)* (Moscow/Leningrad: Teakinopechat, 1927), pp. 45-54

Vertov’s and Eisenstein’s cinema stands in opposition to Chaplin’s cinema of triumphant illusions.

It is hard to gain recognition here. It became *bon ton* to go into raptures about Eisenstein after he conquered Berlin with *Battleship*. There is even a danger here. There is the

possibility that people will start to express their rapture about his films but without watching them.

In this way many people bow down before Meyerhold, but prefer to go to the operetta.

Vertov has not yet been recognized. His films frighten the exhibitors with their novelty, as a new object frightens a nervous horse. The public are frightened off by Vertov's declarations.

Vertov is Kino-Eye, *Kino-Pravda*, and the *kinocs*.

Kino-Eye frightens you, it looks like a Masonic or theosophical sign. *Kino-Pravda* makes you think of a newspaper supplement. "*Kinocs*" sounds enigmatic and incomprehensible.

The fumes of an argument about who has the preferential right to a patent emerge from the narrow circles of devotees. It would be more useful to abandon this argument and conclude that both were born of the Revolution.

Eisenstein and Vertov are the antithesis of Chaplinism, not only through their active mind-set (*ustanovka*).<sup>31</sup> They are united by their shared lack of Chaplin's modesty about his own work.

Of his film *A Sixth Part of the World*, which has not yet been exhibited, Vertov has announced in print that it is "a great epic poem of facts" and "record-breaking in its revolutionary ideological content".

Eisenstein has written about his unrealized Chinese film: "For the first time, perhaps, the cinema would have become as terrible a tool as a flame-thrower."

We are familiar with this energetic way of proclaiming shattering concepts.

It rings with the victorious individualistic shriek of a person who is activating the world. The same sound has been made by all the representatives of Left-wing currents in art. It was meant to signify a protest against the *bourgeois* and his worldview, but it then transpired that it signified merely the desire of the *petit bourgeoisie* to express its artistic attitude to the world in forms which corresponded best to changed technology and social relations.

The latest and strongest expression of *petit bourgeois* rebelliousness in art was the literary current of Activism (see Matsa,<sup>32</sup> "The Art of Contemporary Europe"). This movement also tore the mystical rags off the old art, proclaimed that it was striving to activate the reader, considered it essential to "politicize" art, advanced the principle of agit-art, and even became close to the struggle of the proletariat.

The posing of artistic problems by Vertov and Eisenstein has a lot in common with Activism. We are completely ignoring the hostility that exists between them, for there is no serious basis for it, at least in the current stage of their work. What Vertov (incorrectly) formulates as the repudiation of the script is expressed in Eisenstein by the term "the jump from the theme to montage". And Vertov's demand, "down with staging daily life – film us unawares, the way we are," is itself confounded by those sequences in *A Sixth Part of the World* where he shoots scenes in a *bourgeois* interior, a car driving off, that is to say those sequences where the cameraman, without any doubt, had to

replace his “unawares” approach with a directorial appeal: “permit us to shoot you in precisely this way.”

The basic and shared thing in Vertov and Eisenstein is the organization of new material which the cinema has not made use of before, in creating “socio-influential constructions” (Eisenstein).

What a senseless squandering of useful artistic energy there is in the fruitless argument between Vertov and Eisenstein, in Vertov’s reproaches that Eisenstein’s work “borrows” from *Kino-Eye*, in Eisenstein’s emotional *kino-fist*, which is intended to convince us that his work “has nothing in common with the dispassionate representationalism of the *kinocs*, with their capturing of phenomena in a way which goes no further than capturing the viewer’s attention”.

This laying of hands on each other by our artists, who are working in the same direction, conceals nothing other than the individualistic tendency of two competing inventors. The insistence with which the self-sufficient personality of the artists leaps to the fore in these scarcely principled arguments makes one think that *activity* in their conception of film art refers in the main to the way they treat the material and not to transferring a particular active mind-set to the viewer.

With regard to the film he is now working on, *The General Line*, Eisenstein has written that “the cinema is a factory of mind-sets in relation to the facts”. This affirmation (which is directed against Vertov, but, in its essence, is not very different from Vertov’s “Long live the world insurrection of facts”) needs to be made a little more precise in order to become a slogan of Soviet and not individualistic cine-activism.

There can be two interpretations of the formula “the cinema is a factory of facts”. The first is that the film director fabricates certain mind-sets in the film, and presents them to the viewer in a ready state. The second is that the film as a whole represents the organization of a group of stimuli which arouse the appropriate mind-set in the viewer. In point of fact, neither the former nor the latter interpretation (it seems there are no others) reveals anything new in the theory of cinematic influence. This will become clear if we use the term “mind-set” in the sense it has of a kind of behaviour which defines the mutual influence between instinct, emotion, and practical skill.

Our first interpretation covers the primitive propaganda films in which the viewer is offered a ready-made relationship to phenomena which, naturally, he cannot stomach, and instead of the expected mind-set it provokes in him the “mind-set of boredom”. I have no doubt that this interpretation will be rejected by Eisenstein.

The second interpretation includes the works of Vertov, Eisenstein, and... all feature films, including *arch-bourgeois* ones, for they do nothing other than to create in the viewer a mind-set of various kinds: a mind-set of humility, a mind-set of passivity, a patriotic mind-set, an erotic mind-set, and so on.

So what then remains of the argument between Vertov and Eisenstein? What remains is a piling up of heavy and sometimes effective words, which do not even enable us to establish useful terminology.

We will get closer to our target if we change Eisenstein’s formula in this way: the cin-

ema is a factory of artistic stimuli which create a mind-set in the viewer. This leads naturally to the most crucial question for us: what mind-sets and what stimuli? Eisenstein and Vertov resolve this question through their practical work, and, it has to be said, more successfully than the theoretical question.

So what is a film from our point of view? Modestly introducing a term from the psychology of behaviour, we should speak of the film as a montage of *situations*. "It is convenient to speak of the general mass of stimulating facts which provoke actions in a person as some sort of a whole, as a situation" (John B. Watson).<sup>33</sup> Then we can consider individual sequences in a film which stimulate particular emotions as "situations", just as we can the picture as a whole, which defines its "mind-set".

LIFE AS IT IS (Vertov) is an unachievable desire to jump forward to a time when labour, the arts, and science will merge into a single human activity. Until life itself becomes art and science, art will remain an activity which fills in "life". Even the art of Vertov, which denies the cinema of illusions.

Vertov does not at all show life as it is, but life as a camera which has been placed in a particular place and is controlled in a particular way catches it. "Life" is the same kind of material for Vertov's films as the techniques of the film studio and the situations of the "little fellow" are for the films of Chaplin.

The difference in the choice and means of working on the material by the cinema of triumphant illusions and the cinema of victorious facts is determined by the differences in their so-called social commissions. In the first case, the client is mainly the *bourgeois*, whose social nature drives him to fill up his precarious life with dreams. The client for the latter is becoming, in the main, the vanguard worker and the intellectual who has drawn close to him, who look for art to stimulate their active constructive endeavours.

It is of course quite premature to proclaim that our activist cinema is proletarian. It is quite sufficient for us that it responds to the strivings of the active mind-sets of the vanguard part of the working class and the intelligentsia who are working alongside it for the "remaking of life as it is".

It is not the lullaby of individual self-assertion which the viewer perceives in Vertov's *A Sixth Part of the World*, but the multi-voiced noise of unseen life, the unheard rhythm of the stream of life which throws open the borders of the individual personality.

We want Vertov's cinema to become the cinema of the masses, but the workers vote as they like when they buy their tickets. It is not enough to dump all the blame on the exhibitors, who stand no higher than the unconscious tendencies of the ordinary viewer. That is probably the law of exhibition.

The viewer sticks to the line of least resistance. The artist works along the line of greatest resistance. How can he bring the viewer to him? Evidently in a roundabout way.

The viewer thinks about relaxation, and when he goes to a show he wants to enjoy himself. Even if he knew that a particular show would sap his energy rather than restoring it, he would still not say no to enjoyment. We must therefore proceed from the pleasure principle.

Within Vertov's field of activity lies perhaps the most fruitful but difficult to reach sphere of this moving principle: the instinct, or striving to broaden your horizons. He senses that when he shows the viewer situations full of constructive possibilities and says to him: all this is yours, on this you are building your personal and social life.

The power of this instinct demands the presentation of an unlimited amount of material, which plays a more important role here than the device, which in Vertov is exclusively limited to the contrasting of situations in various planes – temporal, ethnographic, and social. The limitations of this device inevitably provoke repetitions. Vertov repeats himself within *A Sixth Part of the World* itself, and in addition he repeats in it certain things from his *Kino-Pravda* issues (the shots with the colonial slaves). This is where the greatest danger lies for Vertov.

You can overcome repetitions either by introducing new devices or by asserting the appropriateness of repetition. This latter course is possible only if you eradicate the other shortcoming of Vertov's work, its monumentality.

Vertov makes only revolutionary-emotional hits. This is as advisable as for all the tailors in our Sixth Part of the World to start making only dress uniforms. But work clothes, despite their repeatability, correctly fulfil their social function. The unlimited variety of the fields of their activity makes up for their formal limitations.

If we were to replace the monumentality with the less elevated style of periodical films (what is discredited here as film newsreel), then the repetitions disappear, and perhaps new devices will arise and supplant the excessive use of contrast.

The fragility of Vertov's monumentality is given away by his intertitles in *A Sixth Part of the World*. He takes them in the highest of keys, and therefore more than once his voice breaks. "I see you, and you, and you" – although this sounds elevated, it is in tune with the emotional significance of the sequences. But when this tone is maintained through several reels and the central stimuli "your factories, your works, your deer" – turn into "your pears", there is a dislocation, which the viewer interprets as a triumphantly striding man suddenly falling over after slipping on the juicy skin of a pear.

But the sickness of Vertov's intertitles is not even in their dislocations, but in their general construction. They are made out of naked political material and worked over with didacticism. This is why the film as a whole forces the person watching it to do an impossible double job: the sequences are directed at the emotional sphere, whereas the intertitles are directed to the logically-conscious sphere. This provokes excessive waste of energy and splintered attention. The viewer is not in a position to take in two pictorial situations and the quotation from a political speech between them in the same way.

It would be more correct if the intertitle became the same kind of emotional stimulus as the shot is. But would the emotion then disappear? Absolutely right. You cannot work on emotion. Emotion must arise from the action of the film; it cannot be prompted.

## Vertov's Attack on Eisenstein

*Excerpt, circa 1928, RGALI 2091-2-205*

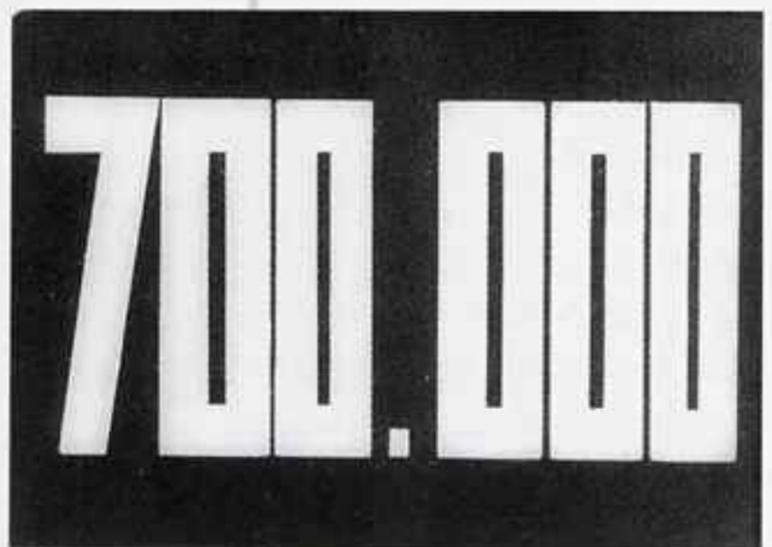
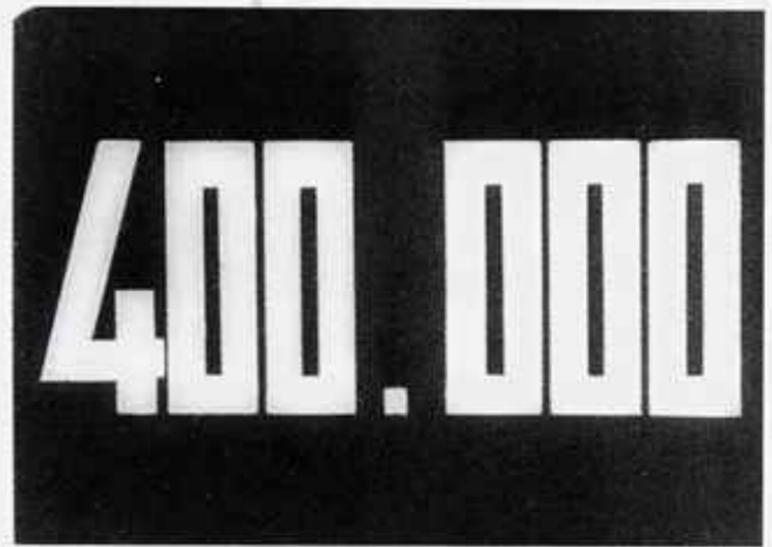
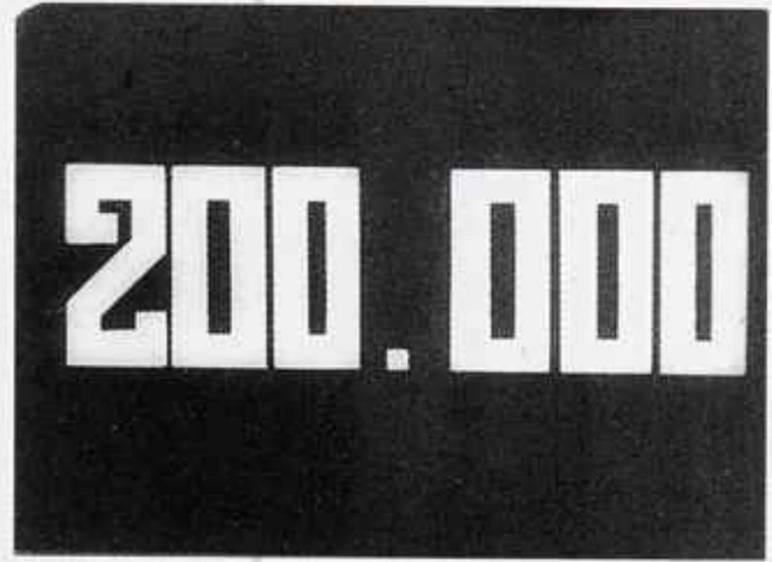
Eisenstein's next work, *October*, in which he went back from the [external] shaping [of the Kino-Eye] to the models of fiction film, brought him, despite all the millions that were spent on it, a complete flop. Why? Because the method of the theatrical fiction film cannot sustain any significant theme, and this theme is squandered for fictional, toy-shop trivia. [...] Only newsreel stands outside of theatre and is not subject to the fictions of the *littérateurs*. Only newsreel insinuates itself into the thick of daily life and walks in step with the Revolution. Long live the newsreel of the eye of the proletarian revolution. Long live the first *kinoc*, the leader of the Communist Party Vladimir Ilich Lenin, who did not understand and did not want to understand art, and demanded the immediate removal (at least the half-removal) of artistic programmes from the cinemas in favour of proletarian newsreel!

### Notes

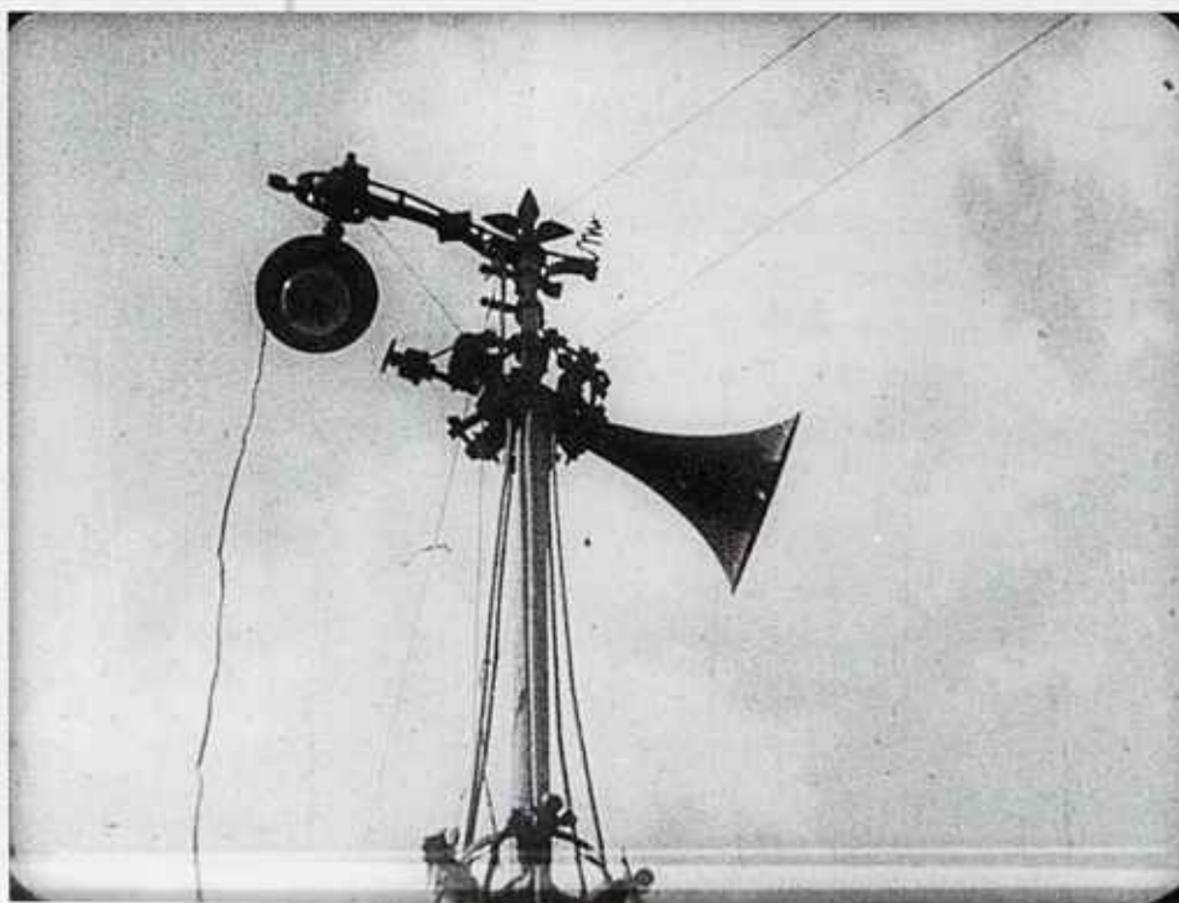
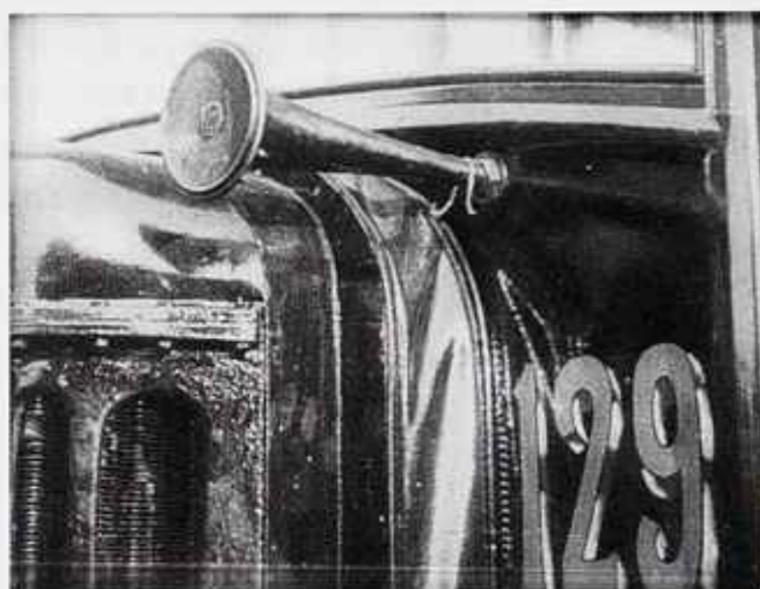
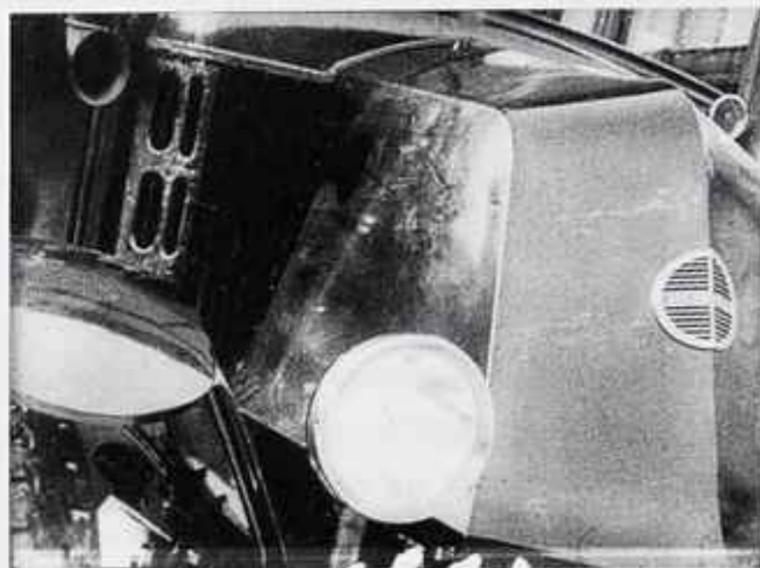
1. *Stachka* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1924).
2. *Luch smerti* (Lev Kuleshov, 1925).
3. The "Living Church" was a reformist movement within the Russian Orthodox Church after 1917.
4. Translated by Richard Taylor for his book *The Eisenstein Reader*, London, BFI, 1998, pp. 53-55. This is a revised translation based on the text according to Eisenstein's *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh* (Selected Works in 6 Volumes), vol. 1 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), pp. 78-82.
5. In February 1917 the Russian autocracy was overthrown and replaced by the Provisional Government, which was unseated, in its turn, by the Bolshevik Revolution in October.
6. The Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR [Assotsiatsiia khudozhnikov revoliutsionnoi Rossii]), formed in 1922, consisted of artists who adhered to the traditions of 19th-century social realism exemplified by the Wanderers (*Peredvizhnikī*). (*Richard Taylor's note*)  
Alternative names for this group are the Itinerants, the Ambulants, or the Itinerant Circle (see also chap. 24, n. 21).
7. A less-radical faction within Russia's Social Democratic Workers' Party (as distinct from Bolshevism).
8. Alogism: an art movement declared by Kazimir Malevich in 1913. Apparently, Eisenstein refers to the "reverse time" sequences in *Kino-Eye*, finding in them an affinity with Malevich's Alogist paintings.
9. Justice requires me to note that Vertov is making attempts at a different, an *effective*, organization of material, particularly in the second reel of the *Lenin Kino-Pravda* (January 1925). It is true that here he is still groping towards ways of "tickling" the emotions, by means of creating "moods" with no consideration of the use that they might be put to. But when Vertov progresses beyond this first stage of mastering effect, and learns to provoke the states of mind he requires in his audience and, through montage, supplies the audience with a pre-determined emotional charge, then ... there will be scarcely any disagreement between us – but then Vertov will have ceased to be a *kinoc*, and will have become a *director* and perhaps even an "artist". Then we could raise the question of the use by someone of certain methods (but by whom, and which?), because it is only then that we shall be able to speak *seriously* of Vertov's method as method, which at the moment is merely intuitive; of the making of a method he has expounded of the course of the practical building of his constructions (of which, in all probability, Vertov himself is only faintly aware). We must not call *practical skills a method*. In theoretical terms, Vertov's doctrine of "social vision" is nothing more than an unconnected montage of high-flown phrases and commonplaces, that in montage terms yield easily to the simple montage "sleight of hand" that he is attempting with conspicuous lack of success to substantiate and extol. (*Eisenstein's note*)
10. With reference to Vertov's static quality, in the final analysis it is interesting to note one instance from one of the most abstractly *mathematically* successful places in the montage: the raising of the flag over the Pioneer camp

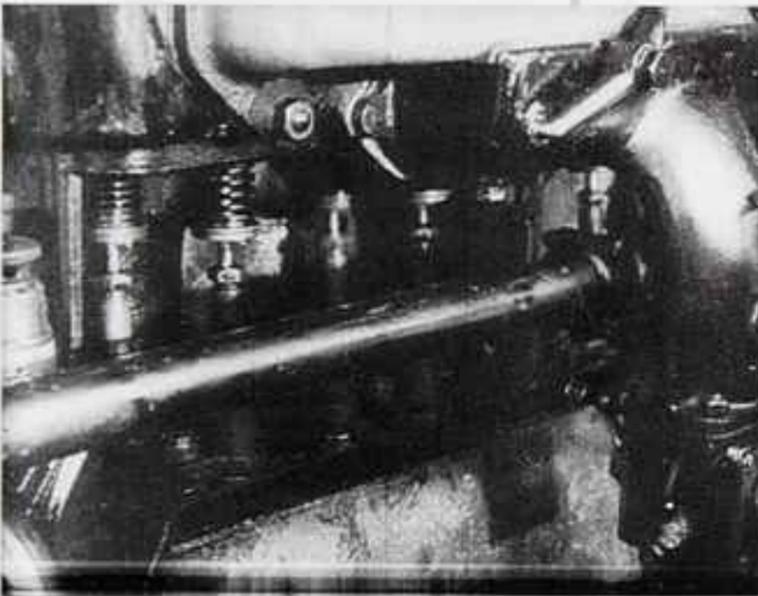
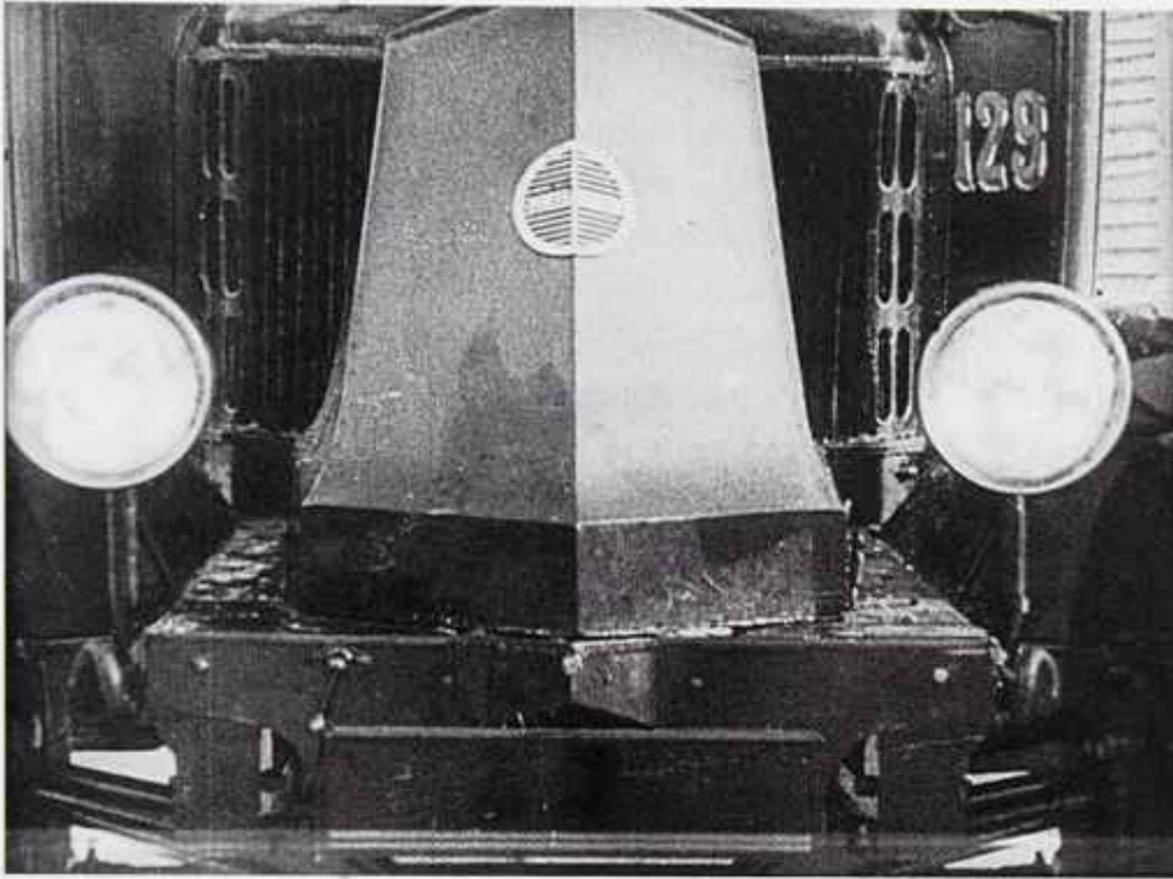
## Numerals

Vertov (not unlike most young left-wing artists) was very particular about his priority in inventing this or that technique, and often jealous when he saw them used in others' films. The only Vertov film, however, that Eisenstein half-heartedly admitted influenced him at the time was the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*, without specifying what and how. One such influence could have been Vertov's idea of translating quantity into size: the bigger the number of people joining the funeral procession, the larger the font. Eisenstein hit upon the same thing when announcing the number of members joining the co-op in the separator scene from *The Old and the New* (1927/29).

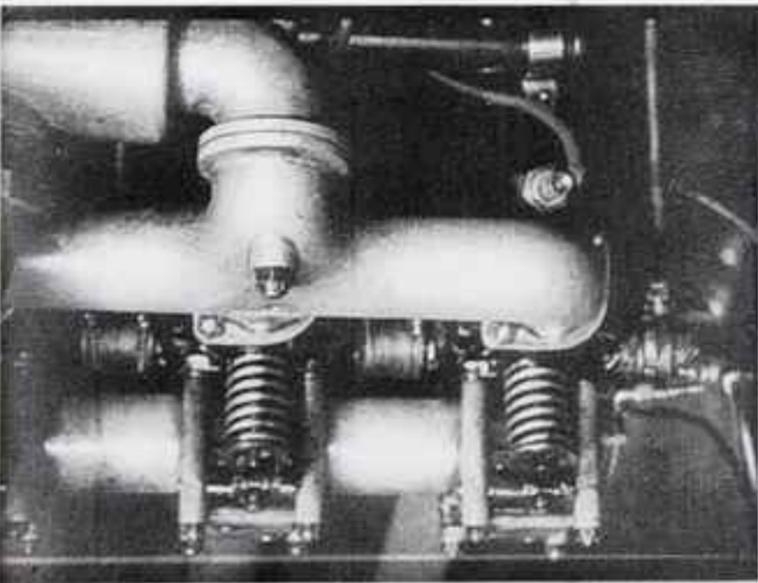


The Hearts of  
Machines





ТОЛЬКО СТУЧАТ  
СЕРДЦА  
МАШИН



On the other hand, if Eisenstein were interested in the question of who took what from whom, he could have found things in Vertov that he could argue had been borrowed from his films. In *Stride, Soviet!*, released in July 1926, there is an imaginative sequence showing cars and buses (not people) that have arrived at a square in Moscow in order to vote for the new Moscow Soviet. Much like the heart of the battleship in the last reel of Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, the hearts of Vertov's vehicles (represented by their valves and pistons moving rhythmically) beat faster as they listen to speeches delivered to them by (not over) the tall, giraffe-like loudspeaker. "The hearts of machines are beating," explains the title.

- (I don't remember which *Kino-Pravda* it is in). This is a token example of Vertov's work in which *the emotional dynamism* of the actual fact of the flag being raised is complemented by *the statics of the examination* of this process. The actual technique of montage of (for the most part, short) *static* (and, what is more, *contemplative*) *close-ups*, sometimes three or four frames per shot, belies the complete absence of dynamics within the shots. This particular instance (and it should be noted that, generally speaking, this method is very widespread in Vertov's "style") epitomizes Vertov's relationship to the external world that he is examining. Vertov's montage is a dynamic "elaboration" of static fragments. We should also bear in mind that in this case, and in the cases when Vertov edits found-footage materials, the result depends on montage, and montage alone. (*Eisenstein's note*) Eisenstein refers to the flag-raising sequence from *Kino-Eye* (see chap. 7 for Vertov's own analysis of it).
11. Belenson makes a mistake: *Photogénie* by the French director, critic, and scriptwriter Louis Delluc (1890-1924), came out in 1920 (the Russian translation in 1924), and the first *Kino-Pravda* appeared in 1922.
  12. Boris Eikhenbaum (1886-1959), critic, literary historian.
  13. All the articles printed in this section are published in order to provoke discussion. ("*Kino-zhurnal ARK*" editor note)
  14. Boris Arvatov (1896-1940), critic and art theorist; active member of Left Front of the Arts (LEF), and Eisenstein's friend in the early 1920s.
  15. It is difficult to say to what extent pure location shooting is capable of providing material for propaganda, and whether we need in this case to combine location and fictional forms. (*Arvatov's note*)
  16. A non-artist always values art more highly than an artist. (*Arvatov's note*)
  17. A cut version of this speech has been reprinted in *Istoriia stanovleniia sovetskogo kino* (A History of the Beginnings of Soviet cinema) (Moscow: VNIIC, 1986), pp. 62-64.
  18. What Vertov has in mind here is not the "temporary instruction to Kino-Eye circles", but his article "O 'Kino-Pravde'" (On *Kino-Pravda*): see Dziga Vertov, *Statii, dnevniki, zamysly* (Writings, Diaries, Projects) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966), p. 79.
  19. A mock reference to Eisenstein's theory of *tipazh* (from the French *typage*), the use of non-professional socially marked types instead of actors.
  20. Petr Novitsky (1885-1942), documentary cinematographer.
  21. The letter was written apropos of Khersonsky's article in *Novyi mir* (no. 10, 1926) "Vekhi revoliutsionnoi kultury kino" (see the excerpt translated here as "Landmarks of Revolutionary Film Culture"). Apparently, Khrisanf Khersonsky sent a copy of the manuscript of his essay to Vertov for a preliminary revision. This is the latter's response, the draft of which is preserved among Vertov's papers.
  22. Revised version of Richard Taylor's translation for *The Film Factory* (London, 1988), pp. 161-62.
  23. *Kino-Pravda* No. 23, subtitled *Radio-Pravda*, issued in 1925.
  24. Sergei Tretyakov (1892-1939), poet, writer, playwright, and LEF member.
  25. *Oktiabr* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1928).
  26. Oleg Voinov (Woinoff) (?-1970), Russian émigré poet; lived in Poland and Germany. His essay "Kino-Eye", which appeared in the German magazine *Film Technik*, caused Eisenstein to write a letter of protest to the editor, since he found the picture of Soviet cinema that Voinov painted Vertov-biased and Vertov-inspired. In the copy of *Film Technik* preserved among Eisenstein's papers, the excerpt is highlighted (RGALI 1923-1-950). Both Voinov's texts and Eisenstein's letter have been translated from German jointly by T.S. Naivist and Julian Graffy.
  27. Almost completed in 1927, Eisenstein's *The General Line* (*Generalnaia liniia*) was not released until 1929 – as *The Old and the New* (*Staroye i novoye*) – after *October* was finished.
  28. Robert J. Flaherty's documentary features *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Moana* (1926).
  29. *Moskva* (1926), documentary feature by the *kinocs* Ilya Kopolin and Mikhail Kaufman.
  30. In the Soviet Russia of the 1920s the system of labour efficiency developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915) captured the imagination of industry reformers and art reformers alike.
  31. *Ustanovka*, or mind-set, was a term from behaviourist psychology often borrowed by Soviet art and film theorists to explain the impact of artworks. In the text by Kurs it is often interchangeable with "approach", "attitude", or "aim". (*Translator's note*)
  32. Ivan Matsu (1893-1974), Soviet Marxist art theorist.
  33. John B. Watson (1878-1958), American psychologist, the founder of Behaviorism.

## STRIDE, SOVIET! IN REVIEWS



### **Stride, Soviet!**

*V[ladimir] Blium,<sup>1</sup> "Shagai, Sovet!", Izvestiia, 6 April 1926*

You might call this a triply Soviet film: it's a Soviet production, it "illustrates" the work of the Moscow Soviet, and... it will have no success among the administrators of Soviet movie theatres. Its other title, for abroad, is *2,000 Metres in the Land of the Bolsheviks*.<sup>2</sup>

The film has no actors, no theatrical tricks, no "studio", no clumsy and tasteless "propaganda". Only the truth and only location shooting. And yet it is packed full, it seems to boil with a content which cannot fail to excite anyone whose eye and brain have not yet been completely ruined by American and other cine-hack-work.

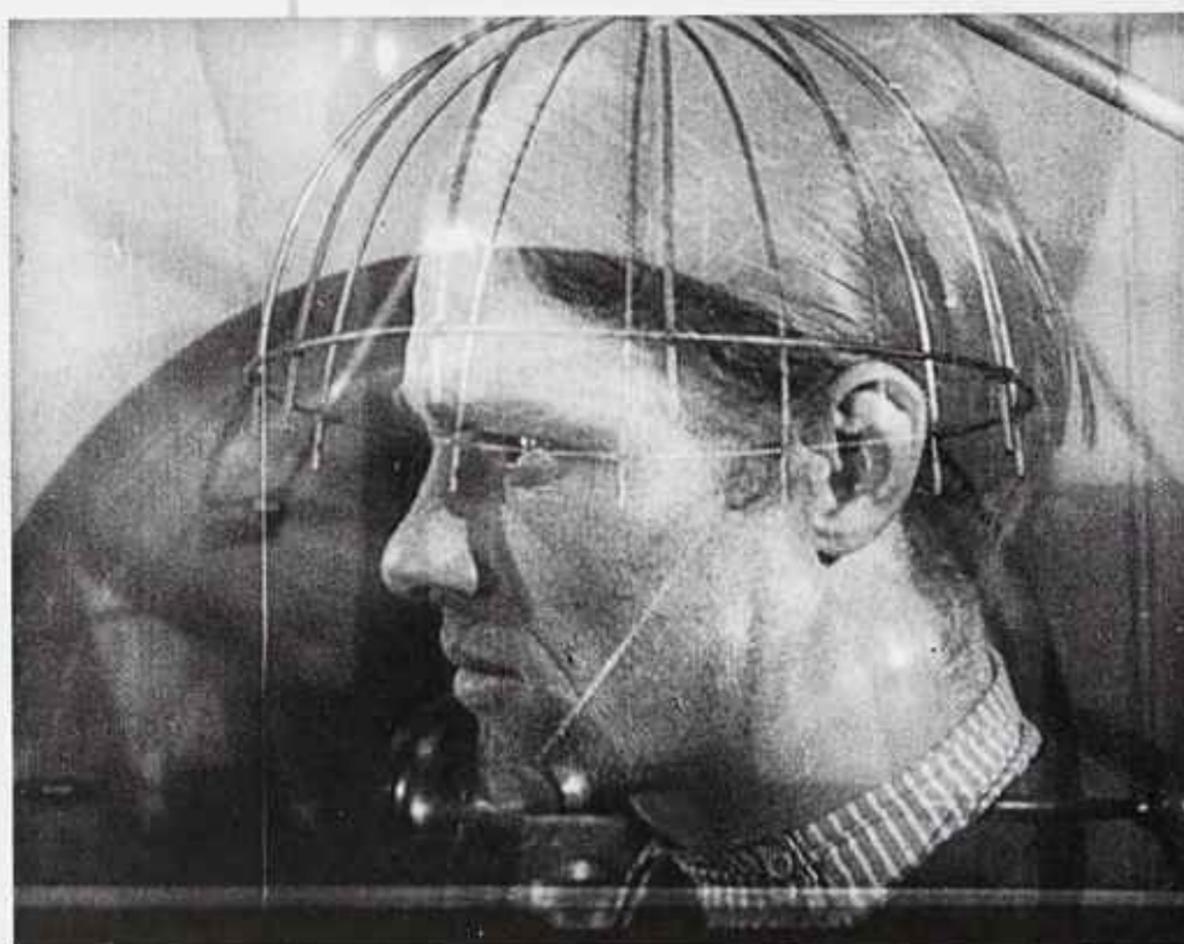
Comrade Vertov was commissioned to work on the film by the Moscow Soviet. But *Stride, Soviet!* has nothing in common with those bureaucratic films we know so well, which usually present a gallery of portraits of responsible workers and institutional offices with their counters that all look the same. The Moscow Soviet is shown here as a collective setting work in motion, as a spring which brings into action and organizes the "elemental force" of the feverish growth of construction. Not the Soviet as some sort of "authorities", but the mass itself, in the grip of a passion for construction, the wild play of productive and producing forces – this is the plot of the film, and this gives it its dynamism.

Of course you get the feeling that at times Vertov is hampered by the official task he has been given: he has to observe "protocol" in places where the material really urges him to blow up an episode into a whole cinematic poem. Two or three episodes suffer from obscurity: the (symbolic?) ice-breaker which alternates with the sequences of the homeless children is unclear; there is a noticeable desire to avoid cliché by juxtaposing scenes of Moscow at work and Moscow at play, but it has come out unclear and blurred...

But the overwhelming majority of these 2,000 metres are expounded brilliantly and enthrallingly. The *kinocs* have a wonderful sense of the cinematic nature of a phenomenon as it unfurls in time and space, and they know how to capture it sharply. We have seen a very large number of factory machines on screen, but it was all dead photography. But Vertov writes: "The hearts of the machines beat too," and unfurls an amazing crescendo of all these trembling, quivering, then beating and jumping, and finally whirling valves, pistons, gears, and whatever else they're called, these "parts" of a living and wondrous creature, a machine...

Successfully combining administrative efficiency with artistry, the temperamental *Stride, Soviet!* plays in the broadest range, from lofty revolutionary emotion (shots are edited in of Ilich, both in death and in life), to a light smile (the shots in the children's home)

**Metallization**





From the outset through the end of the 1920s Vertov's writings keep talking of what his one-time friend Aleksei Gan termed the "metallization of man". "Our path," as an italicized passage from Vertov's 1922 manifesto "We" asserts, "leads through a poetry of machines, from the bungling citizen to the perfect electric man."<sup>3</sup> There are sequences in *Stride, Soviet!* which make this prospect chillingly visual. Two workers are shown playing checkers. As they do so, Vertov superimposes details of mechanisms on the players' heads, so that one of them is inscribed in a rounded metallic frame, while the other appears to be wearing an electric helmet of sorts. Or take three frames from another such sequence, in which a worker is – almost literally – dissolved in a spinning part of his machine-tool. Another cyborg is born!

and an eccentric grimace (“Where are you rushing off to?”). He shows great resourcefulness in the almost unnoticed way in which he “foists” on the viewer at the start of the film some dry but extremely eloquent figures about the work of the Moscow Soviet.

And as for the photography and the skill in filling the plane of the screen, that is the *kinocs'* forte!

There are two general lines of the development of the shape of our cinema: one is a thick and already long line, one end of which rests on Hollywood; the other is an authentically Soviet line, and is as yet very short. After *Stride, Soviet!*, this latter line has grown noticeably longer.

### **2,000 Metres of Events**

*P[etr] Neznamov,*<sup>4</sup> “2000 sobyti”, Kino, 23 March 1926

The latest work by the *kinocs* is, in essence, a report, a simple report on the activity of the Moscow Soviet. But why then has it come out this way: without a scriptwriter, but absorbing; without a director, but well constructed; without actors, but impressive?

It's because the *kinocs* have constructed their film according to faultless methods. Because they proceeded from the material and its qualities. Because they put a lot of skill, obstinacy, and, above all, inventiveness into their cause. And they were victorious.

From the very first shot, when Moscow is revealed in the person of one of its streets, with an amazingly profound, joyous, completely un-Muscovite perspective, so that you get the impression of some other, unrecognizable, future Moscow, you can speak of their exceptional mastery and their skill in using the camera lens. And using it in such a way as to force the viewer to respond anew and afresh to things that he has seen many times.

After all, this is the secret of every profession and every skill, “revealing a thing from a new angle”.

This is precisely how the *kinocs* filmed the work of the Moscow Soviet. Much that each of us walks past every day automatically and without stopping has come to life and shouts from the screen.

A report is always a report. A report is always dry bones. But the *kinocs* have filmed the results of the activity of the Moscow Soviet (the struggle with hunger, with economic destruction, with lack of culture) so dynamically that the report changes into a real whirlwind of events.

2,000 metres of film sweep past as 2,000 metres of animated machines, victorious workers, awakened buildings.

Life filmed unawares, without a preliminary plan, has been edited into the film in the way that a single hero would be, and has created a greater impression than all the invented heroes and all the ones who are going to be invented.

Again and again, fact has conquered anecdote.

2,000 metres of the activity of the Moscow Soviet, very well linked with film of the Civil War, have made their case well.

**Stride, Soviet!**

A[leksandr] Fevral'sky, "Shagai, Sovet!", Pravda, 12 March 1926

The Kino-Eye group has won a new victory. This time its field of observation was the work of the Moscow Soviet. The group of *kinocs* who worked on the film (the camera operator, Comrade Beliakov,<sup>5</sup> the assistant, Comrade Svilova,<sup>6</sup> film reconnaissance, Comrade Kopolin), led by Dziga Vertov, has skilfully negotiated the age-old stumbling blocks that lie in the path of our report and survey films. Above all, the film completely lacks the ill-fated "bureaucratic" spirit which can dry out the most interesting theme. We see the work of the Moscow Soviet as a whole: there are no departments and sub-departments, no offices and chancelleries, no bosses and deputies. All that, of course, is of no interest to the mass viewer. But, on the other hand, there is one not insignificant omission: insufficient stress is laid on the organic link between the Moscow Soviet and the masses of its voters. The "driving belts" of this link should have been shown in greater relief – those representatives of the masses who, as workers, Red Army men, and peasants, are building the Soviet State. It is good that there are no exhausting narrative intertitles and figures. Comrade Vertov has managed to display the work of the Soviet to the viewers using only authentically cinematographic, that is to say visual, means. A strict calculation of the way the film will work makes it interesting and absorbing, and in this respect it is quite capable of competing with many "art dramas".

*Stride, Soviet!* is a model of the dialectical construction of a film. The activity of the Moscow Soviet is shown in motion. After a few introductory elements, giving the flavour of contemporary Moscow, Kino-Eye turns its gaze backwards, to the time of the Civil War and economic destruction. Moscow is the heart of the revolution, which is defending its right to exist on the military fronts. Lenin encourages the Red regiments leaving for the Front from the balcony of the Moscow Soviet. At the same time the Soviet struggles against economic impoverishment, hunger, illiteracy. The Civil War is over, and the Soviet puts all the more effort into the economic struggle. The factories and plants come to life; electricity comes to the countryside; schools, workshops, hospitals, and public dining rooms spring up. For the first time there are lines of buses on the streets of Moscow. Finally, the contrast of the Old and the New. The church and drunkenness on the one hand, and on the other a workers' club and physical exercises. But it is clear how the struggle between these two principles will end: the Soviet is striding confidently and leading Moscow to the socialist future. And the film says that Moscow is the most pronounced reflection of the growth of the entire Soviet Union. Behind it is an enormous country, moving along the same path.

The film is made with great skill. The filming shows high technical expertise (for example, in elements of the demonstration on Red Square and in a number of nocturnal sequences). The intertitles are splendidly constructed; instead of providing a commentary on the film they increase its emotional effect, which is due, in the main, to the montage. The montage achieves a remarkable rhythmical quality, almost a musicality in the development of the film. But if in Comrade Vertov's previous works the viewer's

reception of the film was sometimes impeded by too swift a tempo, here he makes the opposite mistake: there are a number of elements (in the central parts of the film) which are too extended.

This film is going to be shown abroad under the title *2,000 Metres in the Land of the Bolsheviks*; it will be enormously useful as a visual refutation of the lies which are constantly being spread there about the Soviet Union. But we must particularly insist that our exhibition organizations immediately launch this film upon the widest masses of viewers. If even this time the work of the Kino-Eye group, despite the categorical demands of Soviet public opinion, will be made to languish on the shelves of the cellars of the exhibitors' offices, then the question of premeditated, criminal sabotage will have to be raised.

### ***2,000 Metres in the Land of the Bolsheviks (The Kino-Eye Review of the Work of the Moscow Soviet)***

*N. Makovskaia, "2000 metrov v strane bolshevikov (obzor kino-glazom raboty Mossoveta)", Trud, 17 March 1926, p. 4*

You have to be inventive people to make such an interesting piece. You have to be capable people to achieve such a high level of artistry. You have to be completely Soviet people, to show so clearly, vividly, and dynamically the very essence, kernel, and soul of the Soviet.

We have the right to be proud: of course such people exist in the Land of the Bolsheviks: it's Dziga Vertov, the head of Kino-Eye, and his assistants, or, more precisely, his companions-in-arms on the path he has chosen himself.

This path is generally a difficult one, but especially so in this case, when in the course of a single hour they had to show what had been done by the Moscow Soviet, the Soviet of the heart of the Union, of the Red capital, to show it not in figures, portraits, offices, meetings, and discussions, but in a way that every viewer, whether an intellectual, a worker, a peasant, a Russian, a Tartar, a Turk, an Uzbek, a European, or a Chinese, in all corners of the boundless Union, Europe, and the East, could see quite clearly, could feel, sense, what the power of the workers, embodied in the Soviets, really is. They had to show this convincingly, without propaganda, without tendentiousness, using only artistic images.

The task was complicated, but the Kino-Eye team coped with it, and coped with it brilliantly, only because the work of the Moscow Soviet was shown in motion, dynamically, in the process of creation.

From the terrible days of famine, when people looked like living skeletons and perished in torment on the streets of towns and villages, when children looked like a terrible, unforgettable spectacle of terrifying little freaks, from the days of cold, darkness, mud, serious illnesses, the terrible and all powerful louse, from the distressing pictures of factories at a standstill like dead giants, deprived of life by the unprecedented Civil

War, from the blown-up bridges and railway lines, from the destroyed steam engines and railway carriages – to the lines of buses, the brightly shining Ilich lamps, casting their light not only over the outskirts of Moscow but also over the villages, to the noisy trams, the merrily working factories and plants, to the new bridges, hospitals, kindergartens, nurseries, heads of factory education, schools, worker faculties, and colleges. From destruction to reconstruction and creation – such is the path of the victorious proletariat shown by Comrade Vertov.

As well as having a well-thought-out and well-executed idea, the film is technically splendid. Very skilfully constructed intertitles, good montage, calculation of audience reaction, and the capacity to influence the audience – these are the distinguishing features of Comrade Vertov's work.

Kino-Eye as an organization has existed for some time. But strange as it may seem, for some reason the broad masses do not have the opportunity to see the fruits of its great work.

Who is to blame for this?

If such a fate is also visited upon Vertov's latest work, this will be a huge and unforgivable mistake: *2,000 Metres in the Land of the Bolsheviks (Stride, Soviet!)* must reach all the towns and villages of the USSR, all the points where there are cinema screens, or where screens can be set up.

Our working masses have the right to demand that this profoundly interesting film be shown to them. We propose that the cultural section of VTsSPS<sup>7</sup> must take appropriate measures to push this film into workers' clubs.

### **Stride, Soviet!**

*Izmail Urazov,<sup>8</sup> "Shagai, Sovet!", RGALI 2091-1-87<sup>9</sup>*

The film has no plot. Despite this, you watch *Stride, Soviet!* with enormous interest; there is enormous propaganda through facts; facts propagandize and move the viewer. Dry commissioned newsreel has grown into a heroic chronicle of the Revolution. You watch with strong emotion sequences depicting our recent past, the epoch of destruction, hunger, the Fronts. And then straightaway there is the enormous constructive work of our days. Dziga Vertov has shown with great skill the multifarious work of the Moscow Soviet: schools, health protection, communal building, and so on. The epoch of construction and growth is shown clearly and graphically by the *kinocs*; their masterly skill in capturing and showing "life as it is" absolutely stuns you.

You cannot fail to notice the amazing simplicity of the film. And there is a reason for this: a derelict tram park or a dying horse move the viewer more than all the experiences of "heroes".

Dziga Vertov always and everywhere retains a sense of measure. We shall not find in his work either voluptuousness or Guignol (as in *Tragedy in Tripoli*,<sup>10</sup> of blessed memory). His skill in presenting scenes to the viewer is evident in the scenes of childbirth,

of the appearance of water in a toilet – in all these scenes you feel healthy simplicity, strength, and vivacity.

In *Stride, Soviet!*, just as in the earlier *Kino-Eye* and in the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*, there is the most amazing montage, magnificently linking all the sequences and the intertitles (which, by the way, are extremely successful) into a single monolithic film in which you have absolutely no sense of interruptions of the flow. I could spend a long time enumerating all the merits of *Stride, Soviet!*, but one thing is indisputable: this film is undoubtedly a great achievement of film art, which must be forcefully promoted in the USSR and abroad. A brilliant, moving film.

### **Stride, Soviet!**

*S[ergei] Ermolinsky*,<sup>11</sup> "Shagai, Sovet!", *Komsomolskaia pravda*, 29 July 1926, p. 4

For three days, in a second-rank Moscow cinema (the Forum, near the Sukharev Tower), *Stride, Soviet!* has been shown to the broad mass of viewers for the first time. You could find out about this from scant announcements in the newspapers, and from a single, palely executed, and late little poster. In the dull summer season, lost among the many "artistic hits", an authentically Soviet picture was "released". The insistent demands of the press that this picture be shown on screen have been "satisfied". Yes, of course, but the film remains as unknown as before.

This is why our earlier demands must be repeated with greater stubbornness and greater insistence: the greatest attention must be paid to the "commercial release" of the film, and this release must be achieved.

The convincing propaganda newsreel *Stride, Soviet!* has been made by the young group of *kinocs* under the leadership of Dziga Vertov (cameraman Beliakov, assistant Svilova). The work of the *kinocs* differs sharply from the working methods of other filmmakers. Vertov does without actors, without a script (in the ordinary sense); he grabs out facts with his camera, and tries to imprint on film not the external side of life but its mundane manifestations, its daily processes. This is exactly how Vertov constructed his *Lenin Kino-Pravda*, his *Kino-Eye*, and now his *Stride, Soviet!*

But we should not allow excessive elation to let us pass by a series of failings and mistakes in the *kinocs* work under review. Vertov's remarkable method, his great and subtle sense of the screen, have not in this instance shaped the film into such a skilfully coherent work as could be rightly be called a finished achievement.

*Stride, Soviet!* is made of 7 parts (2,000 metres), and is made far more illustratively. And moreover, the skill he has in printing facts, in taking them on to film, suggests that Vertov should go down the path of showing things, and not only the path of successive illustration. *Kinocs* newsreel can show things dynamically, full of its own particular intensification and unwavering energy.

In the film under review Vertov wanted to show all the variety of the Moscow Soviet's activity: schools, health services, communal building, the care of women, and so forth.

But Vertov did not manage to avoid a certain exhausting overloadedness. If earlier filmmakers obsequiously filmed a gallery of authorities and boards having their meetings, then the *kinocs* have committed the “sin” of excessive optimism. Vertov shows the Moscow Soviet as a kind of antediluvian God – peace and good order arise instantaneously out of chaos. Moreover, Vertov has far more means at his disposal. He can show a completely objective picture, a picture of the heroic, difficult, stubborn days of our life, fraught with defeats and victories. And, of course, such a picture will be a hundred times more useful propaganda, since it will be driven by the victorious truth of our life.

Vertov is on an interesting path towards the pointed “picture of facts”. Vertov is still using argument; he is not yet fully showing things. He has a terrible enemy – the indifference towards him of the commercial cinema. But inasmuch as we greet the creative daring of the young Soviet cinema with rapture, so we must find a way to making the viewer broadly familiar with such striking representatives of Soviet cinema as the *kinocs*.

### **Stride, Soviet!**

G. Osipov, “*Shagai, Sovet!*”, *Novyi zritel*, no. 30, 27 July 1926, p. 16

A report on the activities of the Moscow Soviet would seem to be a very dry and official subject. Dziga Vertov, the author of the film under review, has managed to reveal the enormous emotional power in this theme and to create a very strong film. The viewer sees images of civil war and destruction. The Moscow Soviet begins its activity; the first days of unpaid voluntary labour. Blow by blow – all Moscow is taken up in a fever of construction. Factories are repaired, model schools appear, sanatoria are built, new tram-lines are laid out. Every new factory is an advance post for the Moscow Soviet in the struggle against destruction. Every new school is a volley of shots aimed at ignorance.

The huge emotional power of the film is based on a firm plot skeleton, and every sequence is a development of the given theme. Here newsreel stops being newsreel – a plotless succession of pictures, like in a *Sovkino-Journal*,<sup>12</sup> and turns into a narrative, into a film lecture, where every sequence proves something; it turns into a harmonious whole, with a beginning, an intensification of the action, and a denouement.

The future is in the hands of *this kind of newsreel*. Out of it is growing the new Soviet cinema, which will amaze foreigners time after time with its simplicity and power.

### **Stride, Soviet!**

R., “*Shagai, Sovet!*”, *Rabochii klich*, 8 February 1927

Today, when all the forces of the country are thrown into economic construction, into the strengthening of our industry, it is very timely to remember what we had and what we have.

Kino-Eye under the leadership of Dziga Vertov gives us in this film the basic landmarks of the path we have taken these last ten years. You cannot even believe now that once there were days when there were queues, when factories were at a standstill, when people fought for a quarter of a loaf, and at the same time the best sons of our factories, our villages, went off to the countless Fronts, and perished from bullets, hunger, and cold.

The film is made in such a way that you can't take your eyes off it. The human memory is fragile; a great deal has been erased, has disappeared, but the screen leads the memory unwaveringly over the pot-holes of a forgotten road; it gives birth to half-decayed images, pictures, and events, where every person who is a citizen of the USSR has left a part of himself.

Famine along the Volga, swollen bodies, the skeletons of people rotting in the fields, cut down by pitiless death.

But at the same time...

On the balcony of the Moscow Soviet, Lenin is summoning the working masses to new battles for Soviet power against the brutal *bourgeoisie*.

The years pass in continuous succession. Time beats out the steps of revolution and construction. The Fronts have disappeared. The fever of building work begins. The factories belch out smoke, houses are built, and sanatoria, hospitals, clinics, dining rooms – it's not possible to recount it all.

Let us repeat, the film is thrilling, stirring. It is magnificently made. The footage is clear and original. The appearance of Lenin, the living Lenin before a crowd of several thousand members of the Moscow proletariat, aroused a storm of elation. During the reporting campaign before the elections *Stride, Soviet!* is the best kind of propaganda, the best proof of the power of the proletarian state, supported by the spontaneous activity of the workers themselves.

### **Stride, Soviet!**

*Mikhail Bleiman,*<sup>13</sup> "Shagai, Sovet!", Leningradskaia pravda, 26 August 1926

This film is not only a memorable report of the work of the Moscow Soviet. It is a demonstration of a method that is so fruitful that the viewer watches a simple, plotless newsreel with great interest and attention.

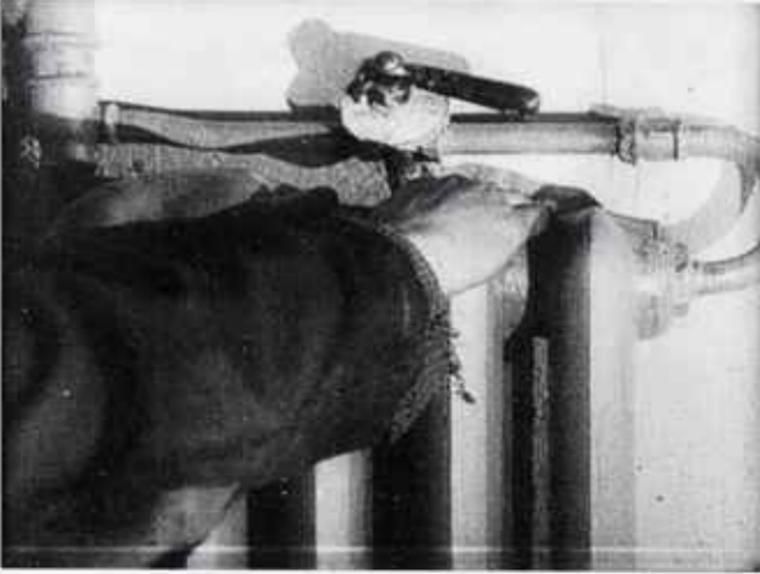
It is not without faults. Some bits are untypical, some bits are clichéd, some bits are unjustified, or even carelessly shot.

But this is all trivial in comparison with the great tension of the organized material. The film is made from various pieces of either re-shot material or material taken from film storerooms. The cinema has become a serious, thoughtful, and convincing propagandist.

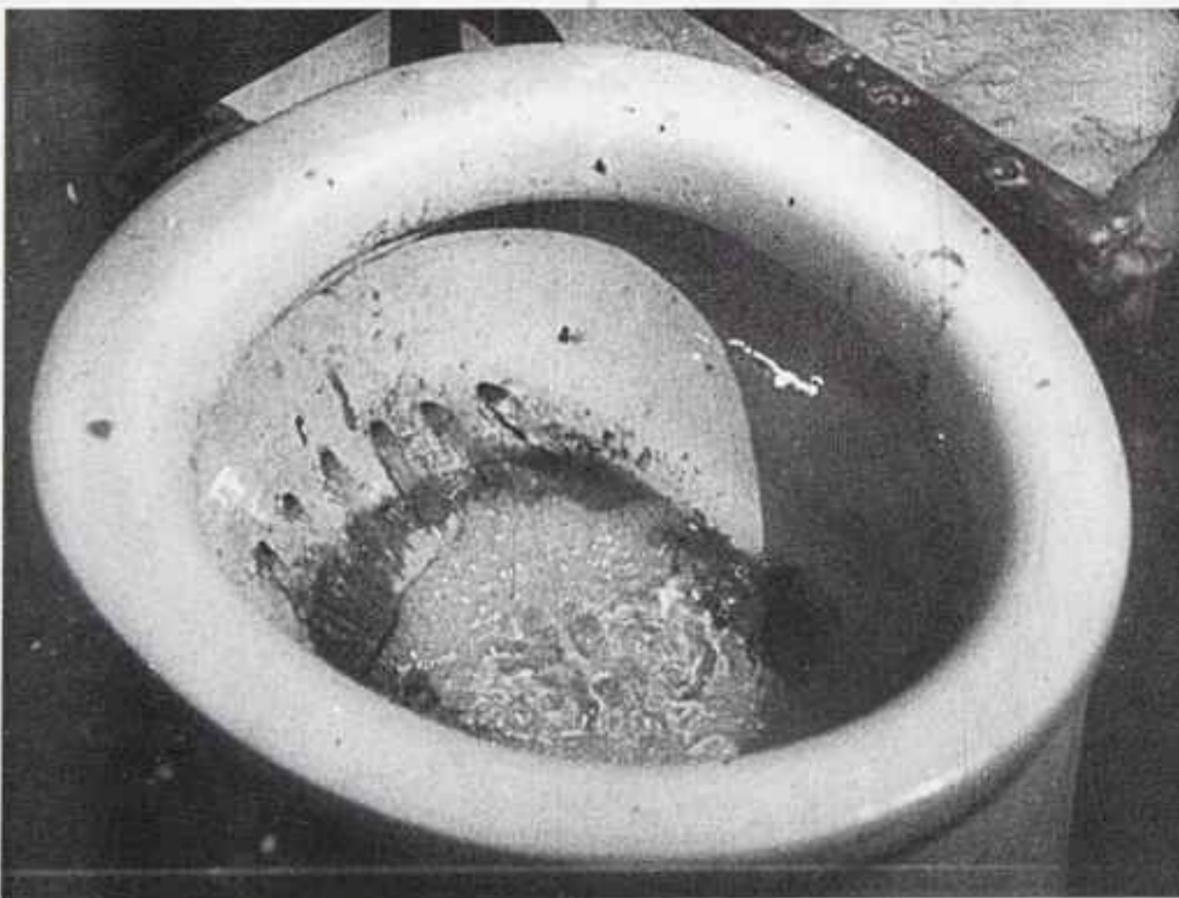
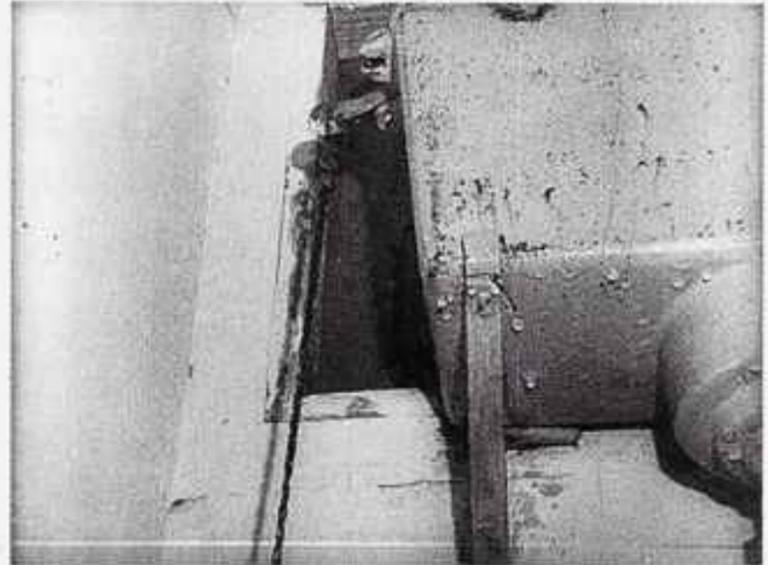
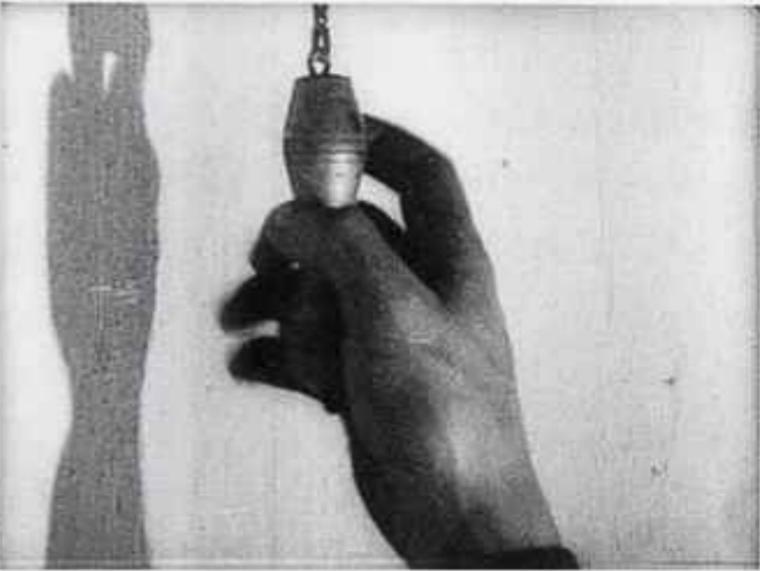
The victory of the *kinocs* lies both in the fact that the material is organized, and in the fact that seemingly random footage is combined in a strict system.

It often happens that feature films, which ought to be shot within the frame of a pre-

## Plumbing



Even when he felt there was a need to show events re-enacted instead of being captured unawares, Vertov would try to limit himself to showing a hand, rather than the whole person or a face. In *Stride, Soviet!*, a hand indicates that, after the lean years of the Civil War, water is running again everywhere one needs it.



determined plot, turn out to be an empty collection of photographs. So what can you expect from a newsreel which has no plot framework?

But in the clear language of contrasts *Stride, Soviet!* shows, by means of footage taken from the thick of daily life, how Moscow was reconstructed, how the factories were repaired, and how the cerebral apparatus of the huge city, the Moscow Soviet, works.

From the too-complicated *Kino-Pravda* and the laboratory experiment of *Kino-Eye* the *kinocs* have moved on to the real mass film, which poses in a serious and broad way the question of the “factory of facts” as one of the basic working methods of Soviet cinematography.

And this is a victory. A victory for organized will and a clear social purpose over the flabby “artistic temperament”, wandering around in search of plots.

### Notes

1. Vladimir Blium (1877-1940), journalist, film and theatre critic.
2. A polemical paraphrase of the title of Lev Kuleshov's film *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (*Neobychnyie prikliucheniia mistera Vesta v strane bolshevikov*, 1924).
3. “My. Variant manifesta”, *Kino-fot*, no. 1, 1922.
4. Petr Neznamov, pseud. of Petr Lezhankin (1889-1941), poet and critic, Left Front member.
5. Ivan Beliakov (1897-1967), *kinoc* (as of 1922), cinematographer, graphic artist, animator, and director. A member of the *kinoc* “Council of Three”.
6. Elizaveta Svilova, Vertov's wife.
7. Vsesoiuznyi tsentralnyi soiuz profsoiuzov, the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions.
8. Izmail Urazov (1896-1965), poet and critic.
9. The original is a newspaper clipping from Vertov's archive (source not indicated).
10. *Tripolskaia tragediia* (Aleksandr Anoshchenko, 1926).
11. Sergei Ermolinsky (1900-1984), writer, playwright, screenwriter, journalist, and critic. He wrote mainly for *Pravda* and *Komsomolskaia Pravda*. Vertov's friend.
12. *Soukino-Zhurnal*: a periodical newsreel begun in 1925, which continued under variously changed titles to the 1980s.
13. Mikhail Bleiman (1904-1973), screenwriter, critic, and film theorist.

## WHERE IS DZIGA VERTOV STRIDING?



### Where Is Dziga Vertov Striding?

Viktor Shklovsky, "Kuda shagaet Dziga Vertov?", *Sovetskii ekran*, no. 32, 1926, p. 4<sup>1</sup>

The inclusion of real material in a work of art is an accepted phenomenon, and it has happened repeatedly.

In *Melmoth the Wanderer*, which is alluded to in *Evgenii Onegin*,<sup>2</sup> the horrors of the novel are provided with annotations: this happened to this person and that person.

You got a sort of montage of attractions; the reader's mind was set to the shot, to information. The plot (*siuzhet*) was needed to motivate the stunt.

A stunt is not just Harry Piel jumping from roof to roof wearing white spats. A trick is a piece of material experienced aesthetically.

The montage of attractions (Eisenstein) sets the mind to material.

In a good article called "The Emotion of the Separator", Sosnovsky<sup>3</sup> expressed his surprise at an original shot with an address, at a hero with a surname.

This will happen in cinema. And of course this is not confined to separators. It will happen in literature. It will probably be called a "novel".

Saltykov-Shchedrin<sup>4</sup> protested in his letters to Nekrasov<sup>5</sup> about the fact that "he labels my essays stories and novels".

So far the history of literature has been the history of labels, not works.

The novel has been dying for some time.

Great Russian literature is a great disaster for the present day.

Because it causes people to expect a "broad canvas", with Kitty Levin as a Komso-mol girl.<sup>6</sup>

Dziga Vertov is a straightforward and tough man. He seems to be among those who interpret a change in art as the end of art.

He is for non-artistic, non-aesthetic cinema. His group seems to be against the actor. But since the non-actor is not capable of behaving calmly in front of the camera, the following problem arises: how to teach everyone how to be filmed. This is a complicated method, like hammering a wall into a nail.

Dziga Vertov has done a great deal in Soviet cinema. Thanks to him different paths have appeared.

I happened to see *Stride, Soviet!*

Most of the shots in this film are not shot by Vertov and not according to his instructions.

He takes newsreel as his raw material. But it has to be said that Vertov's own shots are much more interesting than what he has found in newsreels. They show evidence

of a director. They show evidence of aesthetic calculation and invention.

The best sequences are of the streets being cleaned, the shot of a train from under the wheels, the old and new life, filmed not without a hint of Impressionism.

Vertov's talent is a general cinematic talent, and is not to be doubted.

Now we turn to the question of the film's artistic tendency.

The montage of daily life? Life caught unawares? This is not material of world importance. But I consider that the newsreel material that has been worked over by Vertov has been deprived of its soul, its documentary quality.

Newsreel needs a signature, a date.

There is a difference between an idle factory in general and a specific reference to the Trekhgorny manufacturing workshops standing idle on 5 August 1919.

Mussolini talking interests me. But just a fat and bald man talking – let him talk off-screen. The whole meaning of newsreel lies in the date, the time, and the place. Newsreel without that is a card catalogue in a gutter.

Dziga Vertov cuts up newsreel. In this respect his work is not artistically progressive. In essence he behaves like those of our feature film directors – may the monuments be stolen from their graves! – who cut up newsreel so as to put bits of it into their films. These directors will turn our film archives into piles of broken film.

I want to know the number of the steam-engine lying on its side in Vertov's film.

I want from Vertov what we had from Maturin. Of course, Vertov has taken on a very arduous task: 2,000 metres without a plot. This task should definitely be shortened by 500 metres. And the whole work needs to be streamlined, like on a factory assembly line. It needs a script. It needs a plot, but not one based on the fate of a hero. After all, plot is only the semantic construction of a thing.

There is no shame in that.

It seems to me that Vertov's work needs not compromise, but a more consistent application of principle.

And above all it needs an auditorium.

In this country we sometimes leave a director off the screen for a couple of years.

And then people are surprised: he has lost touch with the masses.

A director must be sensitive to his consumer. The cinema auditorium. Vertov needs exhibition. Without exhibition there is no ideology; no real achievements.

### **He Is Striding Towards Life as It Is**

*Izmail Urazov, "On shagaet k zhizni kak ona est", Sovetskii ekran, no. 32, 1926, pp. 5-6*

Shklovsky likes mocking; he likes to give the plot to an entire book in a single casual phrase, flinging out two or three words hurriedly, at one fell swoop as associative markers for the reader, starting about one thing and telling lots of interesting things about something else, while intentionally not saying a word that is on the subject. He knows how to shock you, how to flash with wit, and how to share his knowledge.

Shklovsky doesn't know how to be delighted or to be objective.

He started about *Stride, Soviet!*, and related a chapter from the theory of prose.

He decided to be objective, and listed all the merits and shortcomings of *Stride, Soviet!* and of Dziga Vertov. Five (or however many) merits and five (or however many) shortcomings.

I read Viktor Shklovsky's article, and it seemed to me that it gives a negative assessment of the film. I sensed that Viktor Shklovsky had not liked the film.

A merit: "Thanks to Dziga Vertov different paths have appeared."

A shortcoming: "I want to know the number of the steam-engine lying on its side."

There is an imbalance here.

I shall not be "objective". Dziga Vertov is the greatest phenomenon not only in Russian cinema but in culture in general. He is not an individual case.

I have already written about the film, and I shall have to repeat much that has already been printed. Since readers are not obliged to know about Vertov's working principles, I shall begin by making corrections to Viktor Shklovsky's article.

1. Vertov has absolutely no intention of "hammering a wall into a nail" and "teaching everyone how to be filmed". What he would like would be that nobody hammered walls into nails and that nobody "knew how to" be filmed. That is the basic thing about his work. His task is to catch life unawares, and to film in such a way that nobody knows they are being filmed, to strip life bare, to sweep away the lies and the posing, and to show life as it is.

2. There is no "aesthetic calculation" in Dziga Vertov. Maybe there is aesthetic effect. But it is involuntary and happens by chance; it is a by-product of his production. There is an orientation towards showing the essence of things and phenomena. Not a judicial protocol, but the analysis and the scientific examination of the forensic study. The basic thing is the angle of vision.

3. It emerges from what has been said that there can be no Impressionism. I won't argue whether it would be more correct to say "there must be no Impressionism". Perhaps Viktor Shklovsky has seen some; I got no sense of it. If there has to be an "ism", then it's more likely to be Expressionism. This is what causes the element of abstraction noted by Shklovsky.

4. Vertov is a director only in the conventional use of the word, since we call the creator of a picture a director. His films are without a director but with an editor. Vertov is an editor of film and of daily life. And besides, even in so-called feature films, the editor is surely no less important than the director.

*Stride, Soviet!* has the task of propagandizing through facts, but you watch this "agit-film" with emotion. It has no plot, but it is more entertaining than so-called feature films. What was commissioned was newsreel and a report, that is to say an individual case, but the film grows into the heroic chronicle of our days.

No one in the film grabs their head and acts out tragedies, but the empty tram park, the hundreds of overturned wagons, the solitude of things, grow into the tragedy of yesterday's destruction.

You are struck by the tact, the sense of measure, the angle of vision. Our films are full of Guignol and physiology. There is a morbidly impressive sweetness in such details. But it arouses revulsion in the viewer: the pressure, the relish with which it is shown give it a specific unhealthy erotic colouring.

But then in Vertov you get the belly of a pregnant woman in the process of giving birth. You get a close-up of the huge, swollen, trembling yellow belly. And in the way it is portrayed – and in why it is necessary – you sense a healthy simplicity and strength.

They bathe the new-born baby, which is still smeared with its mother's blood. Or, water starts to flow in a flat. You have a close-up of the toilet bowl through which merrily, like a spring torrent that has burst its way through a dam, joyously seething and foaming, pours a torrent of victorious water. Water in a tap would have been a cliché. Vertov, playing on a semantic contrast, has managed to portray the emotional power of the victorious water mains.

There are other such places which might have been slippery.

This epic, strict simplicity is the main thing in the film.

In many issues in a row of *Sovetskii ekran*, foaming at the mouth, making witty comments at each other's expense, people have been arguing about intertitles.

Do you need intertitles at all, and if you do, then what kind – literary ones, self-sufficient ones, explanatory ones, or some other kind? But somehow it turned out that intertitles were being discussed in the abstract, metaphysically.

In *Stride, Soviet!* there are a lot of intertitles, a great number of them, but you do not notice them.

Here is one of the principles of their construction.

You have, for example, a long phrase: In the factories, in the fields, in the towns, in... there happened this, and that, and the other.

On screen you have an intertitle: "In the factories". Then you get pieces showing the factories, not views but the essence, what makes a factory a factory. A lot of pieces at once – jerky montage, so that you get the factory from all sides. Then a three-word intertitle, "In the fields". And you get the fields in the same way: sowing, peasants, again a number of fragments.

And so he makes a long enumeration. Then in the same way there follows an explanation (also in single words) of what has happened.

What is important in these intertitles is their shortness (mainly a single word). This makes it possible for both good and bad readers to read them in the same length of time. The difference in the time it takes to read a single word is so insignificant (the necessary time is allowed) that you don't get what you almost always get in the cinema: either you don't have the time to read a long intertitle, or you read it and then wait for a long time for the film to continue. That is one thing.

The second thing is that these factories, fields, towns are presented accompanied by short explanatory fragments. Therefore the groups of shots verge into a single concept – the factory, the town, and so on. The details don't crush you.

The combination of such intertitles and such shots gives you the impression that the

film has no intertitles. Or no, it seems that it is just thoughts (intertitles?) sweeping by, but in visual images. If you have breaks, *longueurs*, jumps between the intertitles, there is no film.

What the film does have is quite amazingly powerful shots.

From the very first shot, Moscow filmed from above, a sharp perspective in depth and in length, Moscow near and unusual, Moscow in a new way, the town striding in step with the Soviet.

What gives life to the *kinocs* will not be given by any staging. Individual shots literally shake you.

“They use archive material.”

So what, if they use archive material?

After all, you need to know how to use archive material. But the basic thing is the montage.

Montage, like footwear, must be the kind that the viewer doesn't feel, doesn't notice.

That is why the montage of long fragments is bad: it exhausts you, you begin to feel that you are in the theatre, not in the cinema; here they are not using all the possibilities of the cinema, its rhythm, its tempo.

Fragmentary “American” montage is also bad: it jerks you about; you don't have time to digest everything, to merge it together; you feel feverish. It irritates you.

That's why people looked for a “golden mean”.

But Dziga Vertov's montage goes beyond the “American” version. It is shorter and more fragmentary.

And yet you don't notice it. Vertov knows how to find the necessary point of view: one, a second, a third... He knits everything into a whole; he gives you what he wanted to give you; he edits everything himself in your consciousness.

In this way construction bricks are knitted into a single whole with the belly of a pregnant woman.

A meeting of trucks, the speech of things become fantastic reality.

Molten streams of pig-iron become an epic poem of labour and metal.

You suddenly sense another Moscow, Moscow by night, the hidden phantasmagoria of the city: the blazing eyes of a prostitute, reflected in the window of a beer hall; in a stuffy room a gramophone and legs, only lots of flashing legs dancing the foxtrot, in silk stockings enveloping their thighs; before your eyes, as if in a fog, a couple drift by in a horse-drawn cab; dead snow, illuminated by dim gas burners; again, the beer hall, with an aureole of light reflected on bottles. It's almost delirium...

I have purposely developed my note to Shklovsky's article into a big article, and have purposely written only about the virtues of the film. I confess that I took advantage of the opportunity to write once again about Vertov and *Stride, Soviet!*, of which, along with *Potemkin*,<sup>8</sup> Russian cinema should be proud.

There *are* shortcomings – Shklovsky has written about them. In particular, of course, the wearying *longueurs* should be excised.

And as for the number of the steam engine lying on its side, here it is: 353.

Engine Number



Critical debates about Vertov's *Stride, Soviet!* went beyond the assumed merits or drawbacks of this film. The question raised in two mutually polemical essays by Viktor Shklovsky and Izmail Urazov included in this chapter concerned the nature and methods of documentary filmmaking in general, and the goal towards which Dziga Vertov was "striding". The position put forward by Shklovsky dovetailed with the Left Front theorists' agenda, which claimed that the epoch of fiction in literature had come to an end, and was being replaced by what they termed the "literature of facts": memoirs, diaries, reportages, even personal letters. It is this position that made Shklovsky rhetorically exclaim: "I want to know the number of the steam-engine lying on its side in Vertov's film." Shklovsky's opponent Izmail Urazov ended his defense of Vertov with this line: "As for the number of the steam engine lying on its side, here it is: 353. And I found that number out not by phoning Dziga Vertov, but by seeing it on screen. You can see it clearly." We can indeed, but the attentive viewer will notice that both our critics are right (and wrong): the film shows us two steam engines lying on their sides, one with the number, the other without one.

And I found that number out not by phoning Dziga Vertov, but by seeing it on the screen.

You can see it clearly.

### Notes

1. Revised translation from *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939*, edited and translated by Richard Taylor, coedited with an introduction by Ian Christie (London: Routledge / Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), document 58, pp. 151-52.
2. *Melmoth the Wanderer*, "post-Gothic" novel (1820) by the Irish novelist and dramatist C.R. (Charles Robert) Maturin (1780-1824), is mentioned in Aleksandr Pushkin's novel in verse *Evgenii Onegin* (1831).
3. Lev Sosnovsky (1886-1937), journalist and critic. The example Shklovsky adduces here is the central character in Eisenstein's film *The General Line / The Old and the New* (*Generalnaia liniia / Staroye i novoye*), Marfa Lapkina, whose name was the same as that of the peasant woman who played her. The film was not finished by the time Shklovsky's essay appeared, but was already being discussed in the press and interviews.
4. Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826-1889), writer.
5. Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1877), poet.
6. Kitty Levin, a character from Leo Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*.
7. Unusually for such polemics, Urazov's answer was printed in the same issue of *Sovetskii ekran*, directly after Shklovsky's essay.
8. *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potemkin*, Sergei Eisenstein, 1925).

## STRIDE, SOVIET TO THE SCREEN!



### Discussion of Vertov's Film *Stride, Soviet!* by the Presidium Committee of the Moscow Soviet

*Excerpt from the minutes of the Presidium Committee Meeting, 18 March 1926, RGALI 2091-1-6<sup>1</sup>*

1. [Rogov]

The pictures of the period of destruction are very condensed.

In the clubs, the schools, and even the institutions people are sitting in fur hats, which is not the way things really are.

The struggle against fires gives the impression that there are so many of these fires that the struggle with them has to be waged continuously.

There are lots of horrors, which should be cut back. The examination of the pregnant woman and the scene of a woman giving birth should be cut out.

It's too kaleidoscopic; you can't follow it.

There's more destruction than positive work in the film.

2. [Gordeev]

The houses are being faced with old brick (he objects!). The building work should be extended, there should be more achievements, the health service. The pace of the film is very fast.

3. Popov

The film is melodramatic [sic]. They show microscopic details. The film is full of tricks. It doesn't give the general picture. There are too many buses in the square.

4. Dodonova

[The film] has a number of brilliant sequences. It cannot serve as a film to acquaint the viewers. It should be shown after a businesslike and full report; it could be additional. It does not solve the task of acquainting the viewer with the activity of the Soviet. It will be incomprehensible to peasants, but the workers will understand, so it should be shown to them.

5. Goncharova

Kultkino has not fulfilled its task.

6. Vinogradov

You can't let this go abroad. You must show it here.

You don't get a full impression because it's all shown too fast.

Proposals:

Cut back Part 1.

Strengthen the positive elements: construction, machines, the Commissariat for Health, clinics, wards, sanatoria, houses, and palaces of rest.

Arrange to slow down the running speed and the montage.

### **Vertov's Response to the Cuts Suggested by the Presidium Committee**

*March 1926, RGALI 2091-1-8*

A memorandum from Vertov to the Head of the Board of Kultkino about corrections made to the film *Stride, Soviet!*, in the light of the remarks made by the Committee of the Moscow Soviet.

1. I am replacing the shot with the fire with the departure of the fire brigade, and the intertitle has been changed: instead of "we fight fires" – "we conquer fires".

2. The former Hermitage is now the House of the Peasant and the Proletkult.

3. I'm throwing out the old brick (although according to the cameraman's information this is not old brick but new yellow fireproof brick).

4. I'm taking out the radio station (a general view) (file no. 7 includes a report from the cameraman Beliakov, describing why it is not possible to shoot more original sequences: the town through glass. The glass in the radio station is old and cracked, and you can't film inside the radio station because there is no light and no wiring).

5. Instead of the intertitle "In the state farm" I'm putting in an intertitle saying "In the Lotoshino state farm". (I don't agree with this correction, but I'm giving in.)

6. I'm cutting back on the pregnant woman.

7. I'm making minor cuts in the footage of the destruction and the camel (you can't throw out these bits).

8. I'm adding certain industrial elements.

9. Instead of the intertitle "The Moscow Soviet helps a worker to move to a new apartment", I'm ordering an intertitle "The Moscow Soviet provides a worker with a new apartment."

I cannot fulfil your instruction to add in chronological data (the time of year) since this would go against the way the film is constructed and is essentially impossible.

### **An Enquiry from Goskino Is Requested**

*"Zapros Goskino", Pravda, 16 May 1926*

About two months ago a number of Moscow newspapers and magazines carried reviews of the film *Stride, Soviet!*, made by the *kinocs* group under the leadership of Dziga Vertov (a Kultkino production). All the reviews recognized the great political significance of the film and the high amount of skill that had gone into making it. Nevertheless, *Stride, Soviet!* has still not appeared on a single screen; not only that, but work has not yet begun on printing the film. At the same time, cinemas are being flooded with such

“exemplary” productions from various Soviet studios as *Alien*, *The Career of Spirka Shpandyr*, *The Rivals*, *The Eyes of Andozia*,<sup>2</sup> and so on. This is obviously a “struggle for quality”, is it?

On the other hand, the completed film, lying motionless in storage, is a dead weight and a burden on the budget of our cinema industry. This is obviously the introduction of an “economy regime”, is it?

The review of the film *Stride, Soviet!* which appeared in *Pravda* no. 59 for 12 March included the following passage:

“But we must particularly insist that our exhibition organizations immediately launch this film upon the widest masses of viewers. If even this time the work of the Kino-Eye group, despite the categorical demands of Soviet public opinion, will be made to languish on the shelves of the cellars of the exhibitors’ offices, then the question of premeditated, criminal sabotage will have to be raised.”<sup>3</sup>

We therefore ask Goskino to reply clearly and simply: why have measures not yet been taken for printing the film and getting it on to screens, and when will this finally be done?

### ***Stride, Soviet! to the Screen!***

*Gertik*,<sup>4</sup> Chairman of the Board of Goskino, “*Shagai, Soviet! na ekran!*”, *Pravda*, 6 June 1926

Issue 111 of *Pravda* for 16 May included an “Enquiry from Goskino” about the delay in releasing the Kultkino film *Stride, Soviet!* The Editorial Board has received the following reply, dated 29 May.

Information about the film *Stride, Soviet!*

The film *Stride, Soviet!* (a control copy) was completed in draft on 13 March and shown to the Presidium of the Moscow Soviet at the Second Goskino Theatre. The Moscow Soviet did not accept the film in this form, and introduced various corrections. The corrections were made, and the film was shown once again to the representatives of the Moscow Soviet, Comrades Goncharova and Pletnev, on 18 April. After the screening they said that artistically and technically the film was not at all bad, but that the Moscow Soviet needed a review copy. Although *Stride, Soviet!* was made according to a plan that was accepted by the Moscow Soviet, and according to the Kino-Eye method, which was also accepted by the Moscow Soviet, the aforementioned comrades, in contravention of the agreement, started proposing that the film be given a commercial release. Agreement on this question was achieved in the days following 20 May 1926. Then discussions began with Sovkino about the release. Sovkino, considering that the film would do badly in commercial cinemas, decided to take only twelve copies, instead of its usual 20 or 30, and without the normal advance, in view of the fact that money had already been received for the film from the Moscow Soviet. So Kultkino was put in a difficult position. On the one hand, the Moscow Soviet had not accepted the film,

and was demanding the return of the money it had put forward for the production, and on the other hand Sovkino was not providing the normal advance.

It was only on 23 April that the film was approved by the Chief Repertoire Committee and Kultkino began work on editing the negative, which was edited in its final cut on 13 May. On 15 May the film was sent to the laboratory of the First State Film Factory, where it is now in production; as soon as positive copies have been made the film will be sent to Sovkino, and the time and place of the release depend on that.

### **Stride, Soviet! Has Been "Released"**

"*Shagai, Sovet! 'poiavilsia' na ekrane*", *Pravda*, 24 July 1926

The film *Stride, Soviet!*, about which so much has been written in *Pravda*, has finally appeared on screen. But the outrages which it has had to suffer on the way have by no means ceased. The film is being shown in a single second-rank Moscow cinema (the Forum). Whereas the release of all other films is preceded by appropriate preparatory work, in this case none of this happened. Usually, either the producers or the exhibitors issue posters before a film is released (sometimes several posters for the same film) and make special announcements in the newspapers. In this case there was absolutely nothing of the sort. The cinema itself just put up a billboard (and even there the name of the author of the film wasn't indicated) and put random small announcements in the papers. But given that the film is being released in the dead summer season, what was needed was a far wider notification that it is being shown. And the perfectly acceptable attendance figures which the film is achieving even in these conditions show that viewers are interested in the films of the Kino-Eye group.

The appearance of the film at the Forum is not at all an adequate response to the demands that *Stride, Soviet!* be shown in cinemas, and it really cannot be considered that the film has been released. We therefore have to repeat our demand: Give *Stride, Soviet!* to the broad viewing masses!

### **Stride, Everyone**

*K[irill] Shutko*,<sup>5</sup> "*Shagaite vse*", *Sovetskii ekran*, no. 32, 1926, p. 1

The manager of one of the best cinemas in Moscow, trying to get hold of *Stride, Soviet!* for his cinema, was preparing to do some energetic propaganda work for this *kinocs* production, since he considered that the film was worthy of being insistently advertised to viewers, of arousing their attention which had almost been lulled to sleep in the summer calm. The cinema administrator didn't manage to get the film *Stride, Soviet!*; the film was quietly released with a very poor quality companion (just another scenic picture!), *Fantastic India*.<sup>6</sup>

Whether this was a case of caution on the part of the cinema administration, afraid of

offering the public a demonstration of Soviet life, or whether we should interpret this combination as a subtle calculation by the exhibitor, who resolved in his own mind the task of promoting the Soviet film without harming the foreign one, it is difficult to say. But the first appearance of *Stride, Soviet!* happened precisely like this. It's true that this showing was preceded by some administrative-pamphleteering debates in the press, though they were not particularly intelligible to the public in their administrative dimension. Yet the work of Dziga Vertov and his friends on the theme of the work of the Moscow Soviet is of course worthy of becoming a "good" programme for any cinema.

In the first place, the title of the film: invocatory, encouraging, welcoming. In the second place, the work of the Moscow Soviet is linked to the work of promoting Soviet construction throughout the country.

In the third place, the technical side is far better achieved than in most pictures which do not benefit from the patronage of all sorts of "artistic" guardians.

In the fourth place, ideological correctness and clarity is confidently achieved and sustained, something which does not always accompany "cinema programmes", especially in first-run cinemas.

If it were necessary to write a review of *Stride, Soviet!*, you could point to a whole series of places in the film which lead the consciousness of the viewer along the true path from destruction, defeat, the difficulties of our wild life, to overcoming them, to a real step forward, which is dearer than any dozen declarations and apparently-well-intentioned resolutions. You could also point to places in the film where its cheerful, practical stride becomes laboratory square-bashing or takes the form of a bombastic, clanking procession.

But we are not concerned with writing a review, but with stating that this good quality film-thing, of which there are desperately few around, is threatened with plunging into the abyss of mundane circulation without even scratching the consciousness of those who produce films and disseminate them, as a means of enlightenment or entertainment, among the broad public; what we are concerned with is the fact that *Stride, Soviet!*, has taken a step forward along the path of creating clearly articulated conclusions from the raw material of facts, conclusions which will allow us to make sense of the hubbub of our daily life, which will allow everyone to stride further in the direction of the re-making of life.

One more work has been made in which it is demonstrated, obviously and for everyone to view without exception, how, despite the enormous difficulties which stand like walls around us, even now, today, this minute it is possible to destroy them.

*Stride, Soviet!* is a film of our new standard, higher than the dubious, unreliable walking round in circles over the slopes of aesthetics that you get in all kinds of fiction films.

It is no surprise that our viewers (young working people), having tasted six inordinately long parts of the allegedly fantastic (as seen by the imperialist cinema) but in fact oppressed India, were so heartened by *Stride, Soviet!* that they cried out: "This is our film, one that it is dear to us; how many people recognize themselves in it!"

It is no surprise that Sergei Eisenstein is moving towards cinema of exactly this kind

when he proposes to make a film that would demonstrate new steps in the slowly moving field of agriculture.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to register the appearance of *Stride, Soviet* not only in the cash-books and other books; in the context of this film we must look over all our production tastes, assessments, rules. Nor must we reveal ourselves to be a gloomy stall-holder, waiting for another one of his regulars from the block to turn up; we must learn how to interest consumers in a new, fresh product. We must link one person's step forward with the forward movement of all the ranks of cinema.

If we are striding, then let's all stride.

### Notes

1. As a film that had been commissioned by the Moscow Soviet, *Stride, Soviet!* was subject to cuts and alterations suggested by a special Presidium Committee, composed of officials of the Moscow Soviet. The excerpts from the minutes taken at the Presidium meeting, with various suggestions regarding the re-cutting of *Stride, Soviet!*, are followed by Vertov's answer, concerning what alterations he agrees to.
2. *Alien (Chuzhnie, 1926)*, *The Career of Spirka Shpandyr (Kariiera Spirki Shpandyria, 1926)*: films directed by Boris Svetlov; *The Rivals (Soperniki, 1926)*: a film by Sergei Shishko; *The Eyes of Andozia (Glaza Andozii, 1926)*: a film by Dmitry Bassalygo.
3. Review by Aleksandr Fevralsky, included in chap. 9 of this book.
4. Possibly A.M. Gertik, a journalist in the 1920s, who worked in publishing in the 1930s.
5. Kirill Shutko (1884-1938), journalist, the Central Party Committee representative in charge of cinema.
6. Nothing is known about this title other than that it was a scenic or travel picture about India (possibly English).
7. This comment concerns Eisenstein's decision to make his next film, *The General Line (Generalnaia liniia)*, on an agricultural theme.

## A SIXTH PART OF THE WORLD: MORE THAN A FILM



### ***A Sixth Part of the World (A Conversation with Dziga Vertov)***

*"Shestaia chast mira (Beseda s Dzigoi Vertovym)"*, Kino, 17 August 1926, p. 3

My thoughts about this cine-work are grouped around the following five propositions:

In the first place: *A Sixth Part of the World* is more than a film, than what we have got used to understanding by the word "film".

Whether it is a newsreel, a comedy, an artistic hit-film, *A Sixth Part of the World* is somewhere beyond the boundaries of these definitions; it is already the next stage after the concept of "cinema" itself.

In the second place: this film has, strictly speaking, no "viewers" within the borders of the USSR, since all the working people of the USSR (130-140 million of them) are not viewers but participants in this film. The very concept of this film and its whole construction are now resolving in practice the most difficult theoretical question of the eradication of the boundary between viewers and spectacle.

*A Sixth Part of the World* cannot have critical opponents or critical supporters within the borders of the USSR, since both the opponents and the supporters are also participants in the film.

The only enemy of the film (one that is isolated from the emotional action) is the enemy of the Soviet State, World Capitalism.

In the third place: *A Sixth Part of the World* obviously finally resolves the question of the complete victory of the Kino-Eye method over the methods of "actorly", "played" cinema.

Whether it is considerations of economy, considerations of entertainment, considerations of quality or political considerations – whatever you have in mind – everything will be on the side of this work against any kind of "actorly" or "semi-actorly" film.

The complete victory of the factory of facts over the factory of grimaces – that is what I expect from *A Sixth Part of the World*.

In the fourth place: independently of any currents and directions, *A Sixth Part of the World* is establishing its own kind of cinema record, a Soviet cinema record, a record for revolutionary ideological content, and, in the opinion of comrades who are familiar with this work, a genuine world record.

In the fifth place: the question of the appropriate preparation for showing this film, the question of putting it on as widely as possible (more precisely, the question of distribution) resolves itself.

It is hardly likely that anyone among those who are in charge of this process will bring himself to take responsibility before the broad masses of workers and peasants,



before the Party, for the non-demonstration, or the artificially weakened demonstration of this very great “poem of facts”.

And yet, how can you tell?! Who is in charge of it?

After all, there are people in this country too for whom “there is no God but God, and Fairbanks is their prophet”.

These people can remain in their position of servility and pious genuflection before the rotten catechism of Capitalist film production.

So, just in case, we need –

all fighters for Soviet cinema, all friends of

Kino-Eye,

in fact, everyone who hopes to see *A Sixth Part of the World* on screen –

to be on guard, to be ready at the decisive moment to combine efforts to lead this film through the ranks of the servants of Mary Pickford<sup>1</sup> on to all the screens of the Soviet land.

Our slogan is:

All citizens of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics from 10 to 100 years old must see this work.

By the tenth anniversary of October there must not be a single Tungus who has not seen *A Sixth Part of the World*.

### ***A Sixth Part of the World***

*Izmail Urazov, excerpts from Shestaia chast mira (A Sixth Part of the World) (Moscow, 1926)<sup>2</sup>*

#### **1. The Content of the Film**

People pass by, trams clank. From the outskirts, where the factories are, stretch streams of smoke, like clouds. In the evening there are lots of fires, the clatter of horses' hoofs is duller, and there is a sharp, damp cold. This is the town.

Fields, a drowsy expanse of fields. A cart creaks its boring way along country roads, wading through mud, crawling, swaying from side to side in the pot-holes. Sometimes the expanses are white, sometimes they are green and yellow, sometimes black and brown. The roofs are of straw, or red brick, but from the windows of a train compartment, on the pages of magazines, it is all the same Russia, all the same USSR.

We know a lot: about merry accordion players on the streets of villages, about working factories, about trams and smoke and fields.

We know the country through statistical tables, novels, and newspapers.

A boring country! Is it because everything is familiar, is it because we do not see the town – it is too near, and the village is too far away?

Is it because the exoticism of Uzbekistan was reflected aesthetically, badly – and we did not believe the operetta dressing-gowns and hookahs?

Is it also because we saw everything in bits, separately – the town is alien to the village, the polar snows are connected to the sands of Central Asia only by the Revolution?

The country as a specific concept, the country as a whole, a sixth part of the world, a real living body, a single organism, and not only a political unit – this is what it was difficult to feel.

There is and was the emotion of Revolution. Everyone left for the Front, went hungry, believed, and conquered.

There is not the emotion of a sixth part of the world.

There are people who are touchingly in love with the spectral fogs of Leningrad, with the severity of the houses and the precision of the bridges. There are those who are proud of the Donbas;<sup>3</sup> the reflection of red glows on black clouds, the trains loaded with coal, and the growing curve of coal production. There are those who are drunk on the rainbow-tinted patches of oil on the surface of the sea in the harbour, the enormous elevators, and the creak of the winches.

But they are alien to each other; those who are in love with engraved, precise, silent Leningrad, and with the jazz band of hoarse cries, creaks, and hoots of the port town.

And it is not only in its formal achievements, not only because *A Sixth Part of the World* is a new word in cinema, the victory of fact over invention, that this film is valuable.

It has managed, perhaps for the first time, to show all at once the whole sixth part of the world; it has found the words to force us to be amazed, to feel the whole power, and strength, and unity; it has managed to infect the viewer too with lofty emotion, to throw him onto the screen.

In the dusty steppes there are herds of goats. In the polar snows, where you can find no traces of people for hundreds of miles, the Zyriane<sup>4</sup> graze herds of deer. In the towns there is the noise of machines, thousands and thousands of machines, and the fires of the illuminated advertisements burn. In the Far North, at Matochkin Shar, Samoyeds sit on the shore and look at the sea. Once a year, the steamer of the State Trading Organization comes here, bringing dogs, building materials, cloth, and news of the world of the Soviets and Lenin, and takes away furs. In the English colonies, an overseer urges on his Negro workers with a stick, like cattle.

Machines resound in the towns, but behind the walls of the houses of the other world, old life and old ways are still hiding: to a gramophone, reflected in mirrors, jerking with a monkey's swagger, calves sheathed in silk stockings glide in the shimmy, only these well formed legs – you cannot see their faces, you don't need to; the jazzman from the Negro orchestra writhes in a fever.

Along the rails of the thousand-kilometre-long lines, trains take the goods; ice-breakers cut through the frozen ice of the Baltic Sea with their breasts.

And all this is like some fantastical phenomenon – one thing dissolves into another; you see things and through things; you see sands and through sands, polar owls and a single skier going off into the snows; you see yourself, sitting in the cinema watching people in the North eating raw venison, dipping it into still-steaming warm blood.

Was this not a miracle! You shave every other day, you go to the theatre, you ride on a bus – you stand at the other end of the cultural ladder – and *A Sixth Part of the World* has somehow managed distinctly and indisputably to link you with these people eating

raw meat in the North. It is almost like a phantasmagoria. To look through things, and to see the iron logic, the connection of such things – the common character of which cannot be proved by any calculations.

There is no plot in the film, but you sense your emotion growing, you feel yourself becoming more and more enthralled by the unfolding of the concept of “a sixth part of the world”, being thrown onto the screen, to the Lapps, Uzbeks, and lathes (*stankam*); you feel all this coming down from the screen, into the auditorium and into the town, and becoming close, becoming yours.

At the start there was a heading “The Content of the Film”: you expected me to tell you the plot here. But try to reveal the “content” of the poetry of the greatest lyric masters, Pasternak<sup>5</sup> and Aseev.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps you have not read those poets. Then do not try to relate the “content” of the verses of the poets whom you do know. Even a poet as helpless as Nadson.<sup>7</sup>

You will scarcely be able to copy from there even such phrases as we have copied from *A Sixth Part of the World*.

You cannot relate the music of Prokofiev.<sup>8</sup>

If you have been in battle, you cannot relate it in such a way as to force someone to experience the picture of battle.

[But Vertov and the *kinocs* do not relate. They throw you into life. Together with the movie camera you see it through other eyes, wide-open eyes, hypnotized by the cheerful emotion of construction and victory. [...]

### 3. How They Film

In *A Sixth Part of the World* there are shots the equal of which for the power of verisimilitude of the “acting” you will not see in any picture. At the showing the writer of these lines heard, for example, people in the auditorium insisting that the scene in which girls in a hut are spinning thread was staged, that the people in the film could see the camera, and were posing and making an effort.

Those who were amazed by the “acting” did not have the boldness to decide that truth has greater verisimilitude than lies. Nevertheless, this scene was shot unawares. The cameraman climbed into the attic and made a hole in the ceiling for the camera lens.

Overall the *kinocs*, as in war, make wide use of the practice of masking the lens: they sit in an advertisement booth, they distract attention with a second, “false” camera, and so forth.

The angle of vision in the film is also stunning. There are shots filmed by the cameraman from under a train; lying between the rails he filmed a train rushing over him.

For the filming of the ice-breaker they tied the cameraman to the ship’s ladder and swung it to the side, over the breaking blocks of ice. Cameramen climbed onto the minaret of the mosque of Tamerlane, lay in snowdrifts, rushed along on the backs of deer, and turned the handle of the camera in the centre of a scrap-heap at a game of goat polo in Bukhara. But the main thing in the film is the montage.

#### 4. Vertov's Montage

Vertov can find the necessary point of view: a first, a second, a third. He knits it all into a whole, he gives you what he wanted, he edits for you himself in your consciousness.

This is how the bricks on a construction site are knitted together with a dead squirrel.

The rustle of poured grain, the speech of things, become fantastic reality. Molten streams of pig-iron become a poem of labour and metal.

Vertov edits sequences like a composer.

That is the cause of the emotion which the film arouses. You cannot relate it; there is no plot, no intensification of the action, but there is an intensification of emotion. Like in music.

That is where the emotion comes from. Vertov leads the "melody", returning to it, playing with dissonances, using the exoticism of the polar snows and the burning hot sands, almost like something beyond sense, almost like a composer using the texture of sounds.

And within Vertov's sequences there is a rhythm, with which he infects the viewer: a Negress with a child on her back, hammering into your consciousness the tempo and rhythm of the montage of dancing legs, linked to the rhythm of the dance, of the movement of machines and straps, of sacks of grain sliding down a slope, of the quivering backsides of deer – perhaps an unconscious stress of rhythm, a love for sequences which stress the rhythm.

Rhythm within the sequence – that is the formula.

The same thing when waiting for the Eskimos, in the towering icebergs, in the steps of the skier, in the strokes of an axe. Vertov the editor delays sequences like these.

Remember that dances don't usually work on screen. It is not only that the musical accompaniment doesn't manage to adapt to what is happening on screen. You need rhythm within the film, even if it's just, for example, through the clapping hands of those who are not dancing. Its own unit of time, included in the film, and therefore its own rhythm.

In Vertov this rhythm permeates the entire film.

#### ***A Sixth Part of the World – List of Intertitles***

In the land of Capital / I see / the golden chain of Capital / the foxtrot / the machines / and you / and you / I see you / and you / and you / and you / it is you I see / in the service of Capital /<sup>9</sup>

more machines / more / and more / but no less hard is it for the worker / no less... / hard / I see / the colonies / Capital / the colonies / the slaves / Capital / the slaves / from the Negroes / for the fun of it / it makes "The Chocolate Kiddies" /<sup>10</sup>  
Capital / the toys / the guns / hatred / cramps /  
on the verge of its historical perishing / Capital / is having fun

You,  
 who bathe  
 your sheep  
 in the surf of the sea /  
 and you,  
     who bathe  
 your sheep  
 in a brook /  
 you /  
 in Dagestan villages /  
 you /  
 in a Siberian virgin forest /  
 you /  
 careful not to get lost /  
 you /  
 in the tundra /  
 on the Pechora river /  
 on the ocean /  
 and You /  
 who have overthrown the power of Capital in October /  
 who have opened  
 the road  
     to new  
     life /  
 for the nations earlier oppressed in this country /  
 you / you Tartars / you / you Buriats / Uzbeks / Kalmyks / Khakkass /  
 mountaineers of the Caucasus /  
 you, Komi people  
 of the Komi  
     region /  
 and you,  
 of a distant  
     village /  
 you / taking part in the deer race / and you / playing goat polo /<sup>11</sup>  
 as the steamships whistle /  
 as the zurna plays<sup>12</sup> and the drum beats /  
 you with your grapes /  
 you with your rice /  
 you,  
 who are eating  
 your venison  
     raw... /

you,  
 who suckles  
 at your mother's breast /  
 and you, hale hundred-year-old /  
 you the mother  
 playing  
     with her child /  
 you the child playing  
     with the captured  
     polar fox /  
 you  
     who unharness  
         the deer /  
 and you  
 that use your feet  
     to do  
         the laundry /  
 and you  
 that are sitting in this  
 viewing  
     hall /  
 you / who are up to your knees in grain /  
     up to your knees in the water /  
 you  
 who spin flax  
 at  
     sit-round gatherings /  
 you  
     who spin  
     wool  
 up in the mountains /  
 you, the owners of the Soviet land / hold in your hands a sixth part of the world

From the Kremlin /  
 to the border with China /  
 from the Matochkin Shar / to Bukhara /  
     from Novorossiisk / to Leningrad /  
 from the lighthouse beyond the polar circle /  
 to the Caucasus mountains /  
 from the golden eagle perched on the hand of a Kirghiz /  
 to the terns perched on the rocks of the Arctic Ocean /  
 to the northern owls /

to the seagulls of the Black Sea /  
 all this is in your hands /  
 your / *[image: cows]*  
 your / *[image: pigs]*  
 buffalo / goats of Ulu-Uzen / camels from the steppes of Kirghizstan / the deer / the  
 squirrel / the trapped polar fox / the marten / the brown bear / the sable tracked in the  
 Far North / the Astrakhan /  
 all yours /  
 your factories / your plants / your oil / your cotton / and sheep / wool / wool / wool /  
 your butter / fish / your flax / your tobacco /  
 and your main currency... /  
 your / *[images: sowing, ploughing, and other bread production operations]*

export goods are moved along all the roads of the Soviet land /  
 along dirt roads / along mountain paths / by caravans of camels /  
 and there / where bullock carts creak / there, where nomads drive their herds / there /  
 where the herds cross the rivers / there, where the fruits are packed into boxes / and  
 there / where the Vogul uses his teeth to untie a knot / there, from where the flax goes  
 for export /  
 in the port / where the cisterns and tanks of vegetable oil are sitting / where the caviar  
 is loaded / the cows / cement / where the grain ... / in a non-stop ribbon... / flows into  
 foreign ships /

and there / where no roads exist at all / where in the span of hundreds of miles / you  
 may not encounter a single soul / through severe frosts / through the snow-drifted lim-  
 itless tundras / they are moving towards the nearest post of State Trade / to submit their  
 pelts / to be exported to the lands of Capital /

far away/  
 beyond the Polar Circle /  
 where  
 the sun  
 does not set  
 for half a year /  
 and  
 for half a year  
 lasts  
 the night /  
       Samoyeds  
       sit  
 motionless /  
 tensely

looking  
 into the ocean /  
 each year State Trade ships  
 come  
 to their  
 Novaya Zemlya /  
 bringing dogs /  
 flour /  
 lumber /  
 manufactured goods /  
 Samoyeds come to visit the sailors /  
 to listen to sound records "of Lenin himself" /  
 the next day the ships sail away /  
 taking away the furs of animals /  
 ... and now these furs are at the trade show in Leipzig ...  
 ... and now in the land of Capital ...  
 the furs obtained by the Tunguss, Ostiaks, and Samoyeds are exchanged for machines  
 needed for the Soviet Union /  
 for machines that produce machines /  
 thus in the country of the dictatorship of the proletariat /  
 even the tribes that still live under patriarchal rule /  
 helped by the ramified network of State Trade /  
 however far away they should live /  
 they build Socialism /  
 as one  
 with poor and less-poor peasants who submit their grain to the co-operative /  
 as one  
 with the peasants that are helped by the co-operative to obtain a tractor /  
 and work the land collectively /  
 as one  
 with the workers employed at a Socialist factory /  
 as one  
 with the women workers employed at a Socialist factory /

The Black Sea / and you, the sea that is frozen at the Baltic Coasts / the ships stuck in the  
 ice / and someone departs into the distant icy unknown / someplace people still plough  
 the field with a stick / someplace women still cover their faces with a yashmak / someone  
 is still counting his rosary / in some places they are raving / someplace the shaman is danc-  
 ing / there are still places / observing the ritual of woman's purification / there are still  
 places where / the god Menkve expects his sacrifice / the old departs slowly... / like you  
 who departs into the icy unknown / there still is a belief in the help of Mohammed / a  
 belief in the help of Christ / in the help of Buddha / the belief of this Tunguss...

I see you / the Black Sea / and you, the sea frozen at the Baltic Coasts / the ships stuck  
 in the ice / and you / the ice-breaker *Lenin* / who breaks the ice with her breast / we  
 break the way... / for our ships / to trade our grain... / to trade our furs... / for  
 machines that are necessary for us / for machines that produce machines / for our con-  
 struction to grow even faster / our own construction of machines /

I see /

the woman

has cast away

her yashmak /

another woman

educates

the women of the East /

young Communist Samoyed

is reading

the newspaper *Northerner* /

Buriats and Mongols

are reading

the *Buriat-Mongol Pravda* /

the Mongol children become members of "The Young Pioneers" /

The deer-shepherds

are assisted –

by the Polar

laboratory /

Irrigation canals /

help the waterless steppes /

The electric

bulb –

lights the peasant

hut /

the reading hut /

and the radio-report /

The Volkhov electric plant /

The plants / more plants /

I see / Stalin: /

we want to produce by our own means / not only the chintz / but also the machines  
 needed to produce the chintz / we want to produce by our own means / not only the  
 tractors / but also the machines that produce the tractors / we are building in our coun-  
 try / a full-fledged Socialist society / we are becoming the source of attraction / for the  
 workers of the West / the source of attraction / for the nations of the East / who are  
 already rising for the struggle / against the yoke of Capitalism / the oppressed countries /

which fall off one by one from international Capital / will flow into the channel of unified Socialist industry /  
 into the channel  
 of unified  
 Socialist  
 industry

### **On the Cusp between 1926 and 1927, at the Start of the Tenth Anniversary of the October Revolution**

*Dziga Vertov, "Na grani 1926 i 1927 goda, v nachale 10-go Oktiabrskoi Revoliutsii", introductory speech before a showing of A Sixth Part of the World, January 1927, RGALI 2091-1-68*

The workers of Kino-Eye, and with them all Soviet cinematography, are experiencing unforgettable, breakthrough days.

It has come about that the work of Kino-Eye, which spawned so many movements, directions, and groupings in Soviet and partly in foreign cinema, has broken through all barriers and climbed out of the prison cellar and through the barbed-wire barriers of the higher administration, the simple administration and exhibition, through the ranks of the managers of cinemas, and has burst onto the screen.

Everything was against their success:

New Year's Eve. 25 degrees below zero. 100 percent frost of distrust from the entire army of exhibitors. 100 percent frost on the part of those who stand at the top of the administrative ladder. The theatres shout out: in a couple of days there's *Kean*,<sup>13</sup> in a couple of days there's *Mozhukhin*.<sup>14</sup> (In full this sentence sounds like this: "Don't go and see *A Sixth Part*, when in a couple of days there's *Mozhukhin*.")

Standing on one side are those who are importing, praising, and pushing the *émigré* *Mozhukhin*. And on the other side are those who care about *A Sixth Part of the World*.

And so those who drowned *Kino-Eye* in their distrust, those who suffocated the *Lenin Kino-Pravda* with their blunt indifference, and those who clumsily persecuted *Stride, Soviet!* are now faced with the fact of full houses at the Malaia Dmitrovka,<sup>15</sup> on the most inconvenient and inauspicious of days for this to happen.

Whatever box-office receipts we take in the future, we already have thirteen successful screen days. Against the background of the failure of a number of recent "artistic" films, this is a cause for pride.

*This is our first big victory*, both because we did manage to get onto the screen at all, and because we did not suffer a commercial disaster.

It is also a victory because it opens the way to the screen for our later works; it opens the way to the 100 percent non-fiction film; it destroys the demand for the surrogate, compromising 50 percent half-played film.

*Our second victory* is putting a stop to film workers running from the area of non-fic-

tion film into the area of the “artistic” film. On the contrary, we can now see them streaming in the other direction, from the studio to newsreel, to the scientific film. This phenomenon cannot be considered to be anything other than a sign of the strength of our position, a sign of the rightness of our line.

We have to admit that the large number of refugees from the area of acted film simultaneously represents a not-inconsiderable danger of clogging up our non-fiction front.

It is difficult to avoid this difficulty. We shall struggle against this difficulty. We shall decode and expose all the half-acted works, and shall continue to stand guard in defence of the 100 percent film of facts.

*And, finally, our third victory* (and this is the most important thing for us) is the growth of sympathy towards our work in all corners of the Union; it’s the formation of an ever-increasing number of “photo-eye” and “kino-eye” circles; it’s the move to independent work of those who have risen through the ranks of these circles; it’s the ubiquitous reviews of our works; it’s the provincial reviews; it’s the letters we are receiving from the various towns, villages, and hamlets of our country.

*People are beginning to understand us* – now that is the most important thing of all. *People want to help us* in our difficult task – that is what encourages us, strengthens us, pushes us on to further struggle.

Comrades, the days of our victory, unfortunately, have coincided with the days of the worst campaigns against us on the part of the administration of the very institution in which we work. A lot of slander, not a few provocations, and, above all, an abyss of ignorance, conservatism, and dull immobility. I am not going to speak about individuals now. In fact, I am not going to say anything more about it at all, so as not to overshadow the great days which are beating with hammers against the empty heads of our conservative comrades.

Now you will see on screen one of our works, made on a commission from the State Trading Organization. I stress that it was on their commission, since we have not yet had any major commissions from the world of cinema.

The film is already being shown in an altered state, and in my opinion in a considerably weaker state. The changes have mainly affected the sixth part, which they have made one and a half times longer, weakening the ending.

Those comrades who saw the film when it was shown at the Malaia Dmitrovka ought to be able to work out what changes have been made.

Besides this, after the censors passed the film the names of those who worked on it were removed.

In conclusion, in the name of everyone who worked on it, I want to thank the State Trading Organization, which gave us the opportunity to make this film.

## Notes

1. Mary Pickford and her husband Douglas Fairbanks visited Moscow in July 1926.
2. This promotional booklet for *A Sixth Part of the World* was designed by Aleksandr Rodchenko.
3. Donbas: acronym for Donetskii Bassein, the coal-producing region in the Ukraine along the Don river.
4. Ancient name of the Komi people.
5. Boris Pasternak (1890-1960), the Soviet poet and novelist.
6. Nikolai Aseev (1889-1963), Soviet poet.
7. Semen Nadson (1862-1887), Russian poet.
8. Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953), the Soviet composer.
9. This list was made from the Gosfilmofond version of the film. Slashes indicate shots that separate the titles. The strophic arrangement reflects semantic groupings and sequences. Graphic figures reflect the graphic arrangements of lettering in the space of the title card. This list ignores the variety of font sizes in the film.
10. "The Chocolate Kiddies", a 35-man black American troupe of dancers, singers, and jazz musicians led by Sam Wooding, staged a three-month tour of the USSR in 1926, and appeared in Vertov's film *A Sixth Part of the World*. See S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 54-56. (Note in Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, eds., *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1929* [London: Routledge / Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988], p. 419.)
11. Kozlodraniie (literally, "goat-tearing"), a very popular game (of sacrificial origin) among the nomads of Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and Afghanistan, a type of "goat polo" played with a freshly-decapitated goat instead of a ball. Two teams of from five to ten horsemen compete to hit a goat carcass into their opponents' goal. The playing field is 300-400 metres long and 20-30 metres wide. The game lasts 15 minutes. If the score is tied, the teams play another 15 minutes. If at this point the score is still tied, a final game of single combat between individual riders decides the winner.
12. Zurna: a type of Transcaucasian bagpipe.
13. *Kean ou Désordre et génie* (1924), the French film by Aleksandr Volkov (known in France as Alexandre Volkoff), starring Ivan Mozhukhin.
14. Ivan Mozhukhin (1889-1939), the Russian film actor who worked in France as Ivan Mosjoukine.
15. The Malaia Dmitrovka film theatre (opened in 1922) was an important centre for film culture in Moscow, where Soviet and foreign films often premiered and various discussions were held.

## A SIXTH PART OF THE WORLD AS VIEWED AT HOME



### **A Sixth Part of the World**

*A[leksandr] Fevralsky, excerpt from "Shestaia chast mira", Pravda, 12 October 1926*

*A Sixth Part of the World* owes its enormous power to affect the viewer to the exceptional skill with which it has been constructed. There can scarcely be a so-called "artistic" film which creates such a powerful impression as this work, which has been made without a script, without actors, without sets, and is, moreover, a cinematic illustration of a theoretical problem. Comrade Vertov has revealed here a completely original dramaturgy for a plotless film. This new dramaturgy is applied through different devices in each part, and therefore each part is constructed differently. In *A Sixth Part of the World* the traditional framework of a film is destroyed by introducing into the structure of the film devices taken from other arts, from music and poetry. It is not just the case that the montage of the film, and that of individual sequences, is based on rhythm. The whole work is constructed like a piece of music (a contrapuntal structure, recurring themes, crescendos and diminuendos, prestos and lentos, and so on). It is an authentic cinema symphony. A verbal montage has been projected out of a film made without intertitles – an individual epic poem, not without a certain refinement, and sometimes with a tinge of Impressionism.

This work is the first cinematic attempt to fuse the film with its viewers. This aim is achieved by means of such devices as having shots within the film of its own viewers, who are among those who hold a sixth part of the world in their hands; having, at an emotional moment, a shot of the applauding masses; and including intertitles such as "I can see". These are the first steps, but they are very significant.

### **A Sixth Part of the World**

*V[itally] Zhemchuzhny,<sup>1</sup> "Shestaia chast mira", Novyi zritel, no. 42 (145), 19 October 1926, p. 16*

The release of *A Sixth Part of the World* must be recognized as a huge event in Soviet cinema. Here is a film which is 100 percent ours, Soviet! Here not only the ideological aim, not only the material, but the very method of construction, the formal devices – are ours.

As in all their works, in *A Sixth Part of the World* the *kinocs* operate exclusively with factual material. People and things are taken in their real production and life relations. Every shot is a piece of reality, transferred to film by the lens.

Dissolves



A person is what he does. In *A Sixth Part of the World* this Marxist maxim is delivered by slow dissolves: the face of an idle *Nepman* dissolves into a picture of a nude, the faces of workers into what they are working at.

Despite this, *A Sixth Part of the World* cannot be called newsreel. It is true that in both cases real events are filmed. But in newsreel the events are always individualized. Mention of the place and time, stress of characteristic details are compulsory.

In *A Sixth Part of the World* the showing of an individual event is subordinated to the thematic intention of the entire film. They select from every filmed fact only what lies in the plane of this intention. Events are linked not as they follow each other chronologically (as in newsreel), or through territorial closeness (as in a "scenic film"), they are connected by thematic features. So the shots of the Krupp factories, the fox-trot, a Fascist parade, a Negro musical number, colonial peoples, are united into the thematic complex of "Capitalism".

It is clear that when you construct a film in this way the factual material is to some degree generalized; it loses its concrete (documentary) character. The ordinary viewer does not even recognize that after the intertitle "Fascists" he is shown Mussolini "himself", or that among the Chinese troops he sees Marshal Feng Yeu-Xiang.<sup>2</sup>

That is not information but an editorial.

*A Sixth Part* is not newsreel. But neither is it an ordinary "feature" film. It would be naïve to assert that in *A Sixth Part* the usual method of feature films is applied to the treatment of the newsreel material. The use of exclusively "non-fiction" material has required a particular, original method of working on it. The absence of *intrigue*, the montage treatment of the newsreel shots, make this film a completely original phenomenon, profoundly different, of course, from an acted feature film.

In *A Sixth Part* fact has stood up for itself. Despite the factual material being generalized, and treated through montage, nevertheless it is precisely this "realness" of every event shown on screen which has given the whole film its great and influential charge. This "realness" has allowed Vertov both in the intertitles and in the montage to give a lofty emotion that no feature film director, working with actors and sets, would risk.

It is characteristic of feature films that in "intense" moments they very often use newsreel footage of military parades, demonstrations, meetings, working machines, and so on.

We have to admit that *A Sixth Part* does not fit into any of the customary rubrics and that the work of the *kinocs* has affirmed in cinema a new "type" of film, a film in which newsreel material is treated in a particular montage method.

The production of films of this type opens great new opportunities for Soviet film. The *kinocs'* method allows them to translate into the language of cinema questions of a kind that has never yet been susceptible to cinematic treatment. A film of this kind allows them to expose through the material of their documentary footage the major political and economic questions which face us.

But this work requires a large amount of "raw material", a large quantity of documentary footage, from which a selection of necessary material could be made for each individual film. The lack of this raw material was sharply apparent in *A Sixth Part*. Despite the large amount of work by ten cameramen, far from all the material which connects this particular theme was used in *A Sixth Part*. The only solution here is to shoot newsreel footage regularly, and not just when occasion demands it. Only as we accumu-

late this kind of newsreel archive will the release of films like this become possible.

It is crucial that this situation should be acutely understood both by the production organizations and by the *kinocs* themselves. Breaking with the constant daily work of shooting newsreel, and the use of random material, can lead the *kinocs* to a kind of “cinematic phrase-making”, to the loss of respect for the film fact, the film document.

The problem of film newsreel is not eradicated by *A Sixth Part*, but posed with a new sharpness.

### **A Sixth Part of the World**

G[rigory] Boltiansky, excerpt from “*Shestaia chast mira*”, *Zhizn iskusstva*, no. 42, 19 October 1926

This new film by Dziga Vertov, which has been awaited with such interest both by his friends and by his enemies, has finally had a public showing.

The newsreel material which Vertov uses in *A Sixth Part of the World* is difficult to shape into a plot, to cement into a single whole, and Vertov takes the only possible path here – he presents the material on the basis of a chosen theme and an idea which is pursued throughout the material, realized by means of intertitles and the montage of pieces which are not connected by the plot. [...]

All this is given in fragments, in bright, graphic pieces. Through a demonstration that is conventional, to some degree indirect, but completely appropriate for a work of art. For *A Sixth Part of the World* is a work of art.

What, in fact does the film represent in formal terms? It is absolutely not newsreel. Nor does the term “revolutionary-emotional hit” define it. It’s more like a poem, a poem about the Earth, about its two gigantic struggling blocks.

Vertov is a poet, a poet of newsreel. He works through newsreel, but by working over the material, and by the selection and editing of individual pieces, he creates an artistically impressive object. And, moreover, this is all done by means of a conscious half showing, by intriguingly flashing pieces, by contrast which runs up against contrast, subjectively, impressionistically, lyrically. The intertitles are lyrical and impressionistic. The lighting of the shots and the shots themselves, filmed by his *kinocs* cameramen, are lyrically aesthetic and impressionistic.

Vertov acts in newsreel by consciously or unconsciously impregnating it with the methods of art, of artistic cinema. Here, in this picture, there is aestheticism, and formal searching, and imitative influence, which makes you recall the Left-wing French directors, and the film *Nanook*, and much besides.

Vertov’s path is being defined. It is not what he propagates in his theory. His element is the monumental poem, constructed of newsreel material. It does not matter how, but Vertov achieves his aim.

And victors are not judged. And we have just one doubt. With such elegant montage and design, will this first monumental poem constructed out of real material manage completely to capture the consciousness of the broad masses?

### A Sixth Part of the... Potential

*Nikolai Aseev,<sup>3</sup> excerpt from "Shestaia chast... vozmozhnostei", Kino, 26 October 1926*

The work of Vertov, his cameramen, his "scouts", his editors, in a word the work of the entire collective of the *kinocs*, without any equivocation of course deserves approval of every kind, not only for the technical side, but, in the main, for the very fact that it has been realized. At last we have a thing which we can set against all possible compromising evasions of the definition of cinema as an art form which works exclusively through factual material. We have a thing with which to beat all those references to the interest of the broad masses in an imaginatively and artificially constructed plot, in contrast to the allegedly dry and unimpressive information through factual material.

The audience filling the auditorium at the Malaia Dmitrovka, which, it seems to me, did not consist entirely of fans and fellow-thinkers of Vertov, watched with unflinching interest and in places with enthusiasm the whole seven parts of *A Sixth Part of the World* without an interval, and it was neither bored nor exhausted by the mass of varied and unusually associated impressions, united only by being stitched together spatially, geographically. But over this spatial unity, over this geographical list of episodes, stood the only possible cinematic way of summarizing the episodes that had come under the camera lens – the truth and conviction of an un-invented plot.

The correctness of this path was confirmed once more – this time not for us but for the public who filled the auditorium – not only through the individual most effective sequences of *A Sixth Part*, but even through those mistakes without which, strange as it may seem, *A Sixth Part* would be less significant, less original in its direct aim.

To take even the weakest elements in the "State Trading Organization" part of the film. The objects we export are listed. There is an intertitle: "Butter." The barrels being rolled along by dockers in the sequence give no indication of the quality of the goods that have been sealed inside them, and leave the viewer to "imagine" the butter they contain. Something else. An intertitle: "Carts roll along country roads with goods for export." In the shot you see a moonlit landscape and, obviously dragged from a meadow, three badly tied, half-full, jolting carts of hay, or maybe of manure. For the same intertitle, a pair of strapping Ardennes horses rattle their way at a heavy trot along a mountain path. What they are carrying is unknown; you cannot see the load itself. The viewer again has to "imagine" goods, which this time are completely unknown to him.

Another thing: there is a list of all the things which the citizens of the worker-peasant country own, which are in their hands. An intertitle: "Polar owls". You want to see them. After all, it's not every day that you clap eyes on a polar owl. But the shot on screen lasts no more than a second. Your eye doesn't have time to assimilate the type of bird; your eye doesn't manage to take the impression to the stage of remembering it.

These and similar seemingly petty "misprints" in the *kinocs* text are evidence not so much of lack of attention to details; they also speak of the generally low level of

our production, whether it drags along in the wake of the artistic *Three Million Lawsuit*,<sup>4</sup> whether it announces itself in the work that is nearest to contemporary life, that of the *kinocs*, or whether it goes on its travels to Hamburg and back, like Rubber Trust galoshes not accepted by a client.

We would not wish to be paradoxical, but we seriously think that the dialectics of production is the same as the dialectics of the historical movement of things. And therefore we think that the sincere and most organized film workers should, putting aside all their personal dissatisfactions and grief, consider their work in a sober fashion as a large part of the potential which accords with their efforts, efforts which consist, like those of the whole economic growth of the country, in the potential significance of their and the country's only path. Therefore, leaving immoderate enthusiasm and tearful reverence to dilettantes and the "fellow travellers" of Left art, we must say: *A Sixth Part of the World* is a significant film; it is, for the time being **our only weapon** against the "immanent laws of art"; but it really can only be as yet a sixth part... of the potential which the *kinocs* have.

### **The Strategist and His Soldiers (A Sixth Part of the World – A Film by Vertov)**

Mikhail Levidov,<sup>5</sup> "Strateg i ego soldaty (Shestaia chast mira – filma Vertova)", *Vecherniaia Moskva*, undated clipping [1926], RGALI 2091-1-87

If it is fair to say that every film director must, to some degree, be a strategist; then that means that every film director must to some degree be Vertov. For Vertov is a strategist of completely exceptional talent.

What is this work of his which – there can be no doubt – will enter the history of world cinema alongside the productions of Griffith, Chaplin, and Ingram?<sup>6</sup>

He has taken separate, chance sequences, a large number of sequences shot by his collaborators, or torn out of newsreels, even from some films, sequences which are 99 percent location sequences, that is to say shot in the open air and not in a studio, not staged, portraying various aspects of the working life of the peoples of the USSR, and out of these sequences he has constructed – like an architect out of bricks – a grandiose...

– Film?

No, this work by Vertov is completely unlike a usual "fiction" film, with a plot, a narrative, a hero. Rather, Vertov has "sung" a grandiose song on screen, has hurled onto the screen some epic poem of mad sweep and powerful tempo... With his stunning strategic gifts he has arranged the ranks of his troops, has marched his troops on the viewer, and has conquered him, impressed him in a way in which, according to film theory, only an artistic feature film "should" influence him, and not a "newsreel" film, which is what Vertov's work is, in formal terms.

But the point is not what it is called, but what it is like. Vertov has said of himself that his work is a factory of facts. That is not true: *A Sixth Part of the World* is a sym-

phony of facts; it is a film which thunders with the powerful emotion of labour. And in this lies the enormous propaganda significance of Vertov's work.

Now, however, I am obliged to pour a spoonful of tar into my review. For in addition to Vertov there is "Vertovitis" (*Vertovshchina*). Vertov has a little theory about the task of the film director being only to organize his strategic sequences, and that these sequences can be taken from anywhere you like, but that they must be "shots of life caught unawares", and not staged by the director...

Vertov's own work shows the bankruptcy of this theory. For the soldiers of this strategist, the sequences themselves do not display the level of talent of the strategist himself. The sequences in this film are only partly successful, and in a significant part they are pale, helpless, plucked out at random; and the only impressive thing about them is the exceptionally clever manner of their juxtaposition. It is absolutely clear that if the material itself had been more valuable the director's work would have been easier and more productive. But in order for the material to be more valuable you must not rely on "life caught unawares", but must organize this life, which an ordinary film director does, along with his cameraman. Vertov denies "fiction" film; he does not want invented people and invented events. That is fine. But the principle of the selection of real facts under the angle of vision of his camera lens is something that he should not renounce.

### On the First Words

Vladimir Korolevich, "O pervykh slovakhi", October 1926, in *Zhenshchina v kino (The Woman in Cinema)* (Moscow: Teakinopechat, 1928), pp. 90-93<sup>7</sup>

Have you a wife, a sister, or at least a sweetheart?

She does not put on a headscarf *à la paysanne*, a leather jacket, or a lace peignoir. She takes a briefcase only when she goes to work. You have not seen her on the screen. You want to see her. The woman of today. Whom we meet at tram stops. Whom we see setting type in a printing works, washing the diapers of our children, or at a typewriter. Not a heroine in *décolleté*. Not a poster in a leather jacket. Just a woman: a mother, a wife, a comrade. She's not there.

All our films are historical legends, historical reality, or vaudevilles. *Potemkin* and *Mother*<sup>8</sup> are heroic tales of 1905. But what about today? They haven't yet had time to tell its tale. They have not yet gathered together the separate little features of the New Woman, walking in step with the nine years of Revolution. The person. Features which we encounter in the words, in the actions, in the suffering and joys of the contemporary woman, in life.

Theatre actresses, who are not used to technical training, and whose work cries out "get out of my soul". New actresses just springing up, for whom the paths have not been cleared, on the road to self-perfection. They have come to our screen and begun to speak in a simple and comprehensible language, alien to the slack poses of the "Golden Series".<sup>9</sup> Alien to the amazing falsifications of skilled American actresses. But

words about the New Woman have not yet been born, have not yet taken shape in their language.

They all have a greater or lesser degree of expertise. They have all not yet learned not to represent things. The dying fine lady, collapsing like a gilded chapel – Massalitino-va;<sup>10</sup> the mother, rebelling with a Red flag – Baranovskaia;<sup>11</sup> the dynamic mathematician – Khokhlova;<sup>12</sup> the photogenically smiling Malinovskaia;<sup>13</sup> the photogenically suffering Vachnadze<sup>14</sup> – they are all actresses with a greater or lesser specific gravity, but actresses whose mastery has not been developed to the point where you do not notice it, where it does not get in the way. At the most pointed, most impressive moment in their work, you find yourself thinking: how well this scene is being performed.

There are good and bad actresses, but there is no person on screen. A person of today, a person who is close to you.

But remember, maybe you have seen her? The person on the screen. Remember the woman in the pince-nez, with the shattered pit of her eye, spurting with blood, the woman in the pince-nez in *Potemkin*. Do you remember that cry which shattered your nerves – that cry of unbearable physical pain? Surely you could not think about the actress's "work" at that point? When a living person, a real person, one who comes from us, from life, cried out in such a way that you could only respond with a cry and throw yourself through the screen to help her.

Or the hunger of the small woman suffering from rickets, with a child at her breast, and with gnarled, pricked, worn hands. A woman with a large head from the Mémil-montant area of Paris.<sup>15</sup>

Or not the White Guard woman in lace, but today's lost girl, with enormous burning eyes, looking hungrily through the sated revelry of the *Nepmen* in *A Sixth Part*.

The person on screen. The woman of today. We already see her eyes. Hear her cry. By chance, unexpectedly, not yet by means of perfected mastery. Where does it come from?

In the editing room at the Third Film Factory, bending her large strong body over the film, with scissors in her hand, Svilova is at work. One of the creators of *Stride, Soviet!* and *A Sixth Part of the World*. Vertov's assistant. She cuts and glues what then seems to be life. I asked her: how did you make *A Sixth Part*; is the world of the *Nepmen* staged? Svilova started laughing. She doesn't know how to answer, to explain, or to speak. She only knows how to work – and confusedly she told her tale. Vertov gives the thought. We all work. The cameramen shoot what they see, life. I connect it up according to instructions. We are all together, united by a single thought.

It is absurdly simple. To go into life to shoot. All you need is to know how to see life. All you need is to know how to find it. To know how to connect it. We could not see the person on screen. And suddenly. Immediately. Samoyed women, feeding their little children on bloody raw venison. Uzbek women, throwing off the *chavchag*.<sup>16</sup> Girls with drunken eyes, in the foxtrot of the Moscow *Nepmen*. Women at lathes. Women today. People on the screen. Nuts, levers, screws, of a single machine. Of life. It is all *A Sixth Part of the World*.

Why these importunate conclusions? Why cry out – we need a film without actors, the montage of facts? Let's be like the viewer. We shall respond to what they show us, and not think about how it's done. Respond to what has been achieved. The woman of today, the person, is shown for the first time, as she is in *A Sixth Part of the World*. Where they went into life with their camera and filmed. Where it wasn't just the leader working, but the collective, led by a shared idea. The collective is a sum, a sum total – leader plus cameraman plus editor. All of them have equal rights. Among them is a woman. But is it not all the same to us – now? In the collective in which everyone has full rights, where they edit facts.

Maybe actors and their leaders will manage to come to the same thing. To the same mastery of life. We believe it, we expect it.

From its mother's womb, a child is born. In torment. With cries. With convulsions. Our cinema is like that. The first cry of the child – in a loud, strong voice, which means that the child is healthy – is *Red Imps*,<sup>17</sup> the first steps; unexpectedly, without crawling on all fours, it went straight to walking upright – that means the child is strong and vigorous – *Potemkin*.

The first words of the child, when its eyes have made sense of things, and it recognizes people and has feelings, when the person is being born out of the ball of flesh – the first words are – *A Sixth Part of the World*.

### **A Sixth Part of the World**

*Osip Beskin*,<sup>18</sup> "Shestaia chast mira", *Sovetskoe kino*, nos. 6-7, 1926, pp. 16-17

Dziga Vertov has come an enormous way from *Stride, Soviet!* to *A Sixth Part of the World*. His means of presenting fact have been sharpened and perfected. His montage has become much more convincing and self-justifying. If in *Stride, Soviet!* you saw the real essence of the film (that is to say, the work of the Soviet) being sacrificed to this montage, if the thematic elaboration left a great deal still to be desired and was in essence made too narrow, then in *A Sixth Part of the World* there is evidence of the opposite, extremely gratifying phenomenon. Here he has turned the narrow task of advertising the State Trading Organization and its ramified trading network into large-scale, scientific, and propagandist film, in the best sense of those words, about the life of the peoples of the USSR, about their work. Heated debates are presently taking place about children's films; there are some extremely institutional and moralizing proposals on the matter: to create some sort of special children's film (creatively reduced, lisp[ing]!). The only correct resolution of this question is to make films that would be equally interesting to children and adults, and which would also contain good quality educative, enlightening (in the sociological sense of the word) material. In this context, particular emphasis must be laid on *A Sixth Part of the World*. With exceptionally sharp powers of selection, Kino-Eye has grabbed hold of an enormous amount of ethnographic and production material and rendered it convincingly on screen. The film acquaints us with

facts with which we were insufficiently familiar because of the enormous territory, the absence of new ethnographic literature, the insufficient emphasis laid on the question of the study of the country. And one has to say that *A Sixth Part of the World* genuinely is a picture for the widest audience, for adults and for children, for the ill-prepared and the qualified viewer, for commercial and club screenings. This film hits the target, and for this reason it will be welcome and useful everywhere.

But of course the film is not without defects, and defects which particularly don't suit Dziga Vertov, since they distort his social and formal purpose.

Above all there are political mistakes. The biggest is the incorrect, frivolous game of contrasting the working life of the peoples of the USSR with foxtrotting Europe (an old mistake, which should have been outgrown long ago).

The foxtrot is a pleasant way of relaxing in the intervals between... the Dawes Plan,<sup>19</sup> Locarno,<sup>20</sup> and the crushing of the English miners. You should not turn the enormous world-scale enemy into a little boy, for, if it were like that, the delay in the world revolution would not be our "misfortune" but our "fault". But the film makes an even bigger mistake in failing to give us a sense of all the power and the huge scale of European technology, its individual trading apparatus. If this was there in the film, then by contrasting these sequences with the excellently presented sequences about the USSR, you could draw the correct political conclusion: the superiority of the poor but planned socialist economy in construction over the richest, most powerful, enviably mechanized, but anarchic, competitive, and therefore declining economy of Western Europe. The second political mistake, which results from the formal structure of the film, is that you do not get enough sense of the enormous socio-educational significance of our State trade, of the co-operatives. Despite the fact that at one point there is an intertitle saying something like (I don't guarantee to have it precisely) – "... and so the most remote peoples, through the ramified trading network of the State Trading Organization, are being introduced to socialism..." – despite this (an intertitle remains an intertitle), you are not convinced of this truth through what you are shown cinematographically. Here, I repeat, the formal and the political mistake get tangled together.

What is particularly amazing with regard to the film's defects is the fact that Vertov, the pioneer of film fact and the enemy of film aestheticism, pays a certain tribute to nothing other than real lyrical aestheticism. This is the only way to qualify his desire to give the picture a lofty emotional tone through the intertitles, which are executed in the style of bad prose poems. These exclamatory addresses to the sea, to the steppes, to wild animals, as if they were good comrades, sound "Hamsunesque", false in relation to the principles by which the film itself has been constructed... The point is not "good relations" with nature, but using it, subduing it through enormous human energy. Here in the intertitles you need simple, precise, unpretentious words, clarifying what is going on on-screen. And there was absolutely no point in chasing after some poem in prose. Not only did this not bring an increase in emotion, it undoubtedly diminished it. But if the political elements which I pointed out earlier were correctly resolved, the emotion of the film would come from the very fact of its being shown. There are other "irritating

details"... How else could you describe the stranger walking off into the unknown snowy distance? Who is this, why, and for what? Why wedge into the film this element of some sort of mystic understanding of infinity?

But you can only speak about the defects of this film following the principle of "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required,"<sup>21</sup> because what is evident is a great achievement, which should be unanimously welcomed and warmly recommended, both for commercial screens and for clubs, not forgetting showings for children. What a pity that such films emerge only in the form of an advertising commission from the State Trading Organization (it's true, the expertise on show has enormously extended the frame of the commission).

It is a pity, not because I wish to allege some sort of humiliation – advertising is a very interesting thing, and a brilliant arena for showing your expertise. It is a pity because Sovkino has not yet found time to think through the question of stimulating the production of socio-educational films, and in the first instance films devoted to the study of the USSR. Can we not take this opportunity to ask *The Girl from the Bar*<sup>22</sup> to step to one side?

We need these films not to work covertly, as they have done so far, but with the full support of the centre of production and distribution. Film fact must be liberated from the underground. We must stimulate worker film audiences to express clearly and precisely their views of film like the one under review.

### **A Sixth Part of the World**

*Gr, excerpt from "Shestaia chast mira", Uralskii rabochii, 25 January 1927*

The appearance of *A Sixth Part of the World* has provoked rapturous reviews from a good half of our Soviet press, who solemnly proclaim the "cinematic revolution" which has allegedly been achieved by this "gigantic, emotionally powerful work" by Dziga Vertov.

Is that the case? Does this "*kinocs*" production really discover some new "cinematic America"; does it represent a new and significant stage in the development of Soviet cinema?

[...] The "*kinocs*" make their films exclusively out of newsreel, out of location filming of life and people, linking un-coordinated pieces of filmed newsreel around a basic theme by means of editorial montage.

But, alas, this, these principles which the *kinocs* observe in their work, is what causes all the shortcomings of their films, including *A Sixth Part of the World*, which, despite all the testimonials given to it by our critics, cannot be said to be a perfect Soviet film in a technical sense, or one that is irreproachable with regard to its content.

The fact that Dziga Vertov was the first man to bring the "non-fiction", ethnographic slice-of-life view, and scientific film into the focus of our attention should be welcomed in every way. But we should not forget that newsreel alone, without the bright colours of artistic invention, cannot reflect the epoch in its full extent.

Newsreel remains newsreel, a mundane illumination of life that cannot aspire to summarize, and even when hundreds of news reporters' notes are gathered together without any use of the facts for purposes of art or plot, they just remain scraps of an epoch, relatively variegated, bright and interesting as they may be.

*A Sixth Part of the World*, which consists of cuttings from various kinds of films, has no unity, and utterly fails to reflect the epoch, for all its author's desire to show the process of drawing our backward peoples into the channel of socialist construction. This is the main shortcoming of the film.

According to Dziga Vertov it transpires that the new Soviet life is entirely based on deer, pigs, and goats, and on those who "still drink the warm blood of animals, who play goat polo (*kozlodranii*)", whereas the basis of our construction lies above all in the expansion of our industry and the process of industrialization, which is being realized by the proletariat.

There is no working class in the film, and that is its second and perhaps its main ideological shortcoming.

The third shortcoming of the film is its technique, that celebrated montage which is the whole point of a work by Dziga Vertov. This montage is so feverish, or, to put it more precisely, so disordered, that it irritates the viewer by introducing confusion, and mixing Samoyeds, and the hands of a pianist, and the legs of dancers, and deer, and the snows of the Tundra, and the levers of machines, and so forth, into a single heap. This montage forces the viewer to strain his eyes and memory all the time, and to brush away Vertov's importunately emotional intertitles.

Overall, the film does not create a particularly strong impression, and it disappoints the viewer who was expecting so much from it after the laudatory reviews and advertisements.

Nevertheless, of course the film should be seen, because it represents the new strivings of Soviet cinema and provides interesting ethnographic material, which gives a good picture of the far-flung corners of our broad Union.

### ***A Sixth Part of the World***

*Mikhail Bleiman, "Shestaia chast mira", Leningradskaia pravda, 3 February 1927*

You always await a new work by Dziga Vertov with particular attention. This master is the organizer of a new kind of cinematography, perhaps the kind we need most of all. The convincing display of real facts – that is his task.

But *A Sixth Part of the World* is disappointing as spectacle. It is the speech of an orator, not a film. The film is made through oratorical devices, with oratorical repetitions. It seems to shout out slogans, and sometimes to declaim. This declamation is the failure of *A Sixth Part of the World*. There are too many boring, monotonous intertitles. They make the film a collection of moving photographs.

It's true that the cultural significance of the film largely compensates for its technical shortcomings, and the unsuccessful though bold devices it uses.

In *A Sixth Part of the World* there is a great deal that is real. The real East, the real North. Some parts of the film engage you with their extraordinary details, and with the magnificent cinematography. And the political significance of *A Sixth Part of the World* is in this extreme breadth of scope. The viewer in a cinema in the capital interacts with the entire country. He begins to sense the scale of the USSR.

The film destroys the clichéd, “resort” interpretation of our peripheral areas. *A Sixth Part of the World* is an unsuccessful picture. But the success of its principles is indubitable.

### Soviet Cinema

*P. Krasnov, excerpt from “Sovetskoe kino”, Uchitelskaia gazeta, 5 February 1927*

The person who has aroused a particular amount of fuss recently is Dziga Vertov. Some intemperate enthusiasts were quick to place him among the ranks of the “pillars” and the “geniuses”. This would be witty if it did not at the same time arouse a feeling of embarrassment... Dziga Vertov is the enemy of fiction films, the enemy of a plot created by a scriptwriter, the enemy of actors. Dziga Vertov is for Soviet newsreel, for photographing life from nature. Dziga Vertov is a film correspondent. He has an insatiable thirst for everything seen by the hunter’s eye of his lens, and a keenness of observation, an agility, and a fearlessness which would do honour to the most celebrated of American reporters, seekers after sensations.

His most recent work is *A Sixth Part of the World*. Although it is a departmental film (commissioned by the State Trading Organization), thanks to a cannonade from the newspapers it is being advanced as the latest Soviet “film triumph”.

Is this fair? In my view it is unfair. Declaring himself to be an unconditional enemy of feature films, in *A Sixth Part of the World* Dziga Vertov exposes himself utterly as a lover of exoticism, as a fan of artistic nature photography. He films things, the animal and plant world, machines, everything – only in a “pose” and from an angle from which it looks more beautiful, more interesting, and more attractive. This is the admiration of phenomena without purpose. So he shows you a man in the North. Snow. And against this background a figure in black, walking off somewhere into the endless lyrical distance... The man and his shadow in the snow. Is this not a shot from a good feature film?

Vertov’s intertitles are lyrical. But sometimes they are strongly reminiscent of quotations from Nietzsche. WE and THEY. The letters are enormous, like symbols. And this naïve juxtaposition: with US machines in the motion of labour, in a joyous dance, but with THEM people dancing the foxtrot...

While not denying Vertov’s talent and his great and original skill in sharply capturing nature, we nevertheless consider that his aspirations to conquer cinema with artistic chronicle are in no way justified.

There were several other reasonable films in the past year: *The Collegiate Assessor*,<sup>23</sup>

thanks to the wonderful acting of Moskvín; *Mother*, directed by Pudovkin, *The Bay of Death*, by Room, *The Devil's Wheel*, by Kozintsev and Trauberg.<sup>24</sup>

This year there was an exceptional harvest of film from the national studios: there were Armenian films, Kurdish films, Tartar, Georgian, and Jewish films, and so on. Their quality is not yet very high, but their cultural significance for the peoples of the USSR is indisputable.

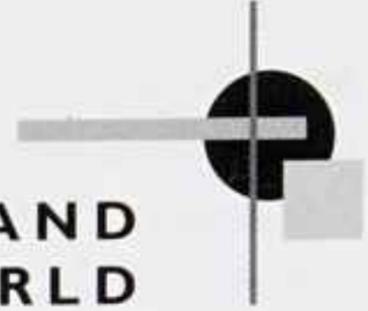
There is still a lot of rubbish in Soviet cinema, something which is inevitable during any period of construction, a lot of experiments and trials, and too-high praise which sometimes verges on excessive self-admiration.

But at the same time we can register the large-scale growth of Soviet cinema, a sort of youthful cheerfulness which permeates its first works and a sense of their being imbued with profound, socially significant content, something which raises it above foreign cinema, which is more perfect technically, but petty, amusing, and empty inside.

### Notes

1. Vitaly Zhemchuzhny (1898-1966), film and theatre director, actor, screenwriter, and critic. He was close to LEF.
2. Feng Yeu-Xiang (1882-1948), military commander with the First National Army of China.
3. Nikolai Aseev (1889-1963), Futurist poet, LEF member, and screenwriter.
4. *Protsess o triokh millionakh* (Iakov Protazanov, 1926).
5. Mikhail Levidov (1891-1939/1942?), writer, critic, and journalist.
6. Rex Ingram (1893-1950), the Irish-American film director.
7. Vladimir Korolevich (1895-1969), poet, theatre and film director, and critic; his 1928 book on the woman in cinema is one of many he published on film.
8. *Mat'* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1926).
9. Quality films produced by the pre-Revolutionary Russian film company Thiemann and Reinhardt.
10. Varvara Massalitinova (1878-1945), theatre and film actress.
11. Vera Baranovskaia (1885-1935), theatre and film actress.
12. Aleksandra Khokhlova (1897-1985), film actress.
13. Vera Malinovskaia (1900-1988), film actress.
14. Nata Vachnadze (1904-1953), film actress.
15. Evidently, Nadia Sibirskaiia in *Ménilmontant* (1926), French film by Dimitri Kirsanoff.
16. An Islamic garment.
17. *Krasnye diavoliata* (Ivan Perestiani, 1923).
18. Osip Beskin (1892-1969), writer and theatre critic.
19. A plan for the collection of the German war debt presented in 1924 by a committee headed by the American Charles G. Dawes to the Reparations Commission of the Allied nations.
20. The Treaty of Locarno, negotiated in October 1925, guaranteeing the frontiers of Germany with France and Belgium, enabled Germany to be admitted to the League of Nations.
21. A citation from the Gospel of St. Luke 12:48 quoted in the King James Version translation. (*Translator's note*)
22. *Devushka ikz bara*, Soviet distribution title of *Camille of the Barbary Coast* (1925), an American film directed by Hugh Dierker, starring Mae Busch.
23. *Kollezhskii registrator* (Yuri Zheliabuzhsky and Ivan Moskvín, 1925).
24. *Bukhta smerti* (Abram Room, 1926); *Chertovo koleso* (Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, 1926).

## A SIXTH PART AND THE REST OF THE WORLD



### In VOKS

“V VOKSE”;<sup>1</sup> *Novyi zritel*, no. 42 (145), 19 October 1926, p. 16

The representatives of foreign states gathered on 1 October for a showing of two new films, *A Sixth Part of the World* and *The Traitor*.<sup>2</sup>

“*A Sixth Part of the World* is one of the best films I have seen,” said the University of California lecturer Schilkins.

“A very interesting film which shows unity in variety,” wrote the Canadian Hoskins in the Sovkino visitors’ book.

“The film shows the scale of the natural resources of the USSR,” such was the impression of Falkenstein, a lecturer at Canton University.

The film *The Traitor* was evidently less popular. There was no comment at all on the showing of this film.

### Moscow Diary

Walter Benjamin, two excerpts from *Moskauer Tagebuch (1926-1927)*<sup>3</sup>

*December 29.* Russia is beginning to take shape for the man on the street. A major propaganda film, *A Sixth Part of the World*, has been announced. On the street in the snow lie maps of the USSR, piled up there by street vendors who offer them for sale. Meyerhold uses a map in *Europe Is Ours (D.E.)*<sup>4</sup> – on which the West is a complex system of small Russian peninsulas. The map is almost as close to becoming the centre of a new Russian icon cult as Lenin’s portrait.

*January 25.* [...] I had just hit upon an unhappy idea of acquiring stills from *A Sixth Part of the World* from Gosfilm [*sic*] and I conveyed this request to Pansky. Whereupon he began feeding me the most abstruse line: the film was not to be mentioned abroad, its footage contained clips from foreign films, their precise provenance was not even clear, and complications were to be feared – in short, he was making an enormous issue out of it.

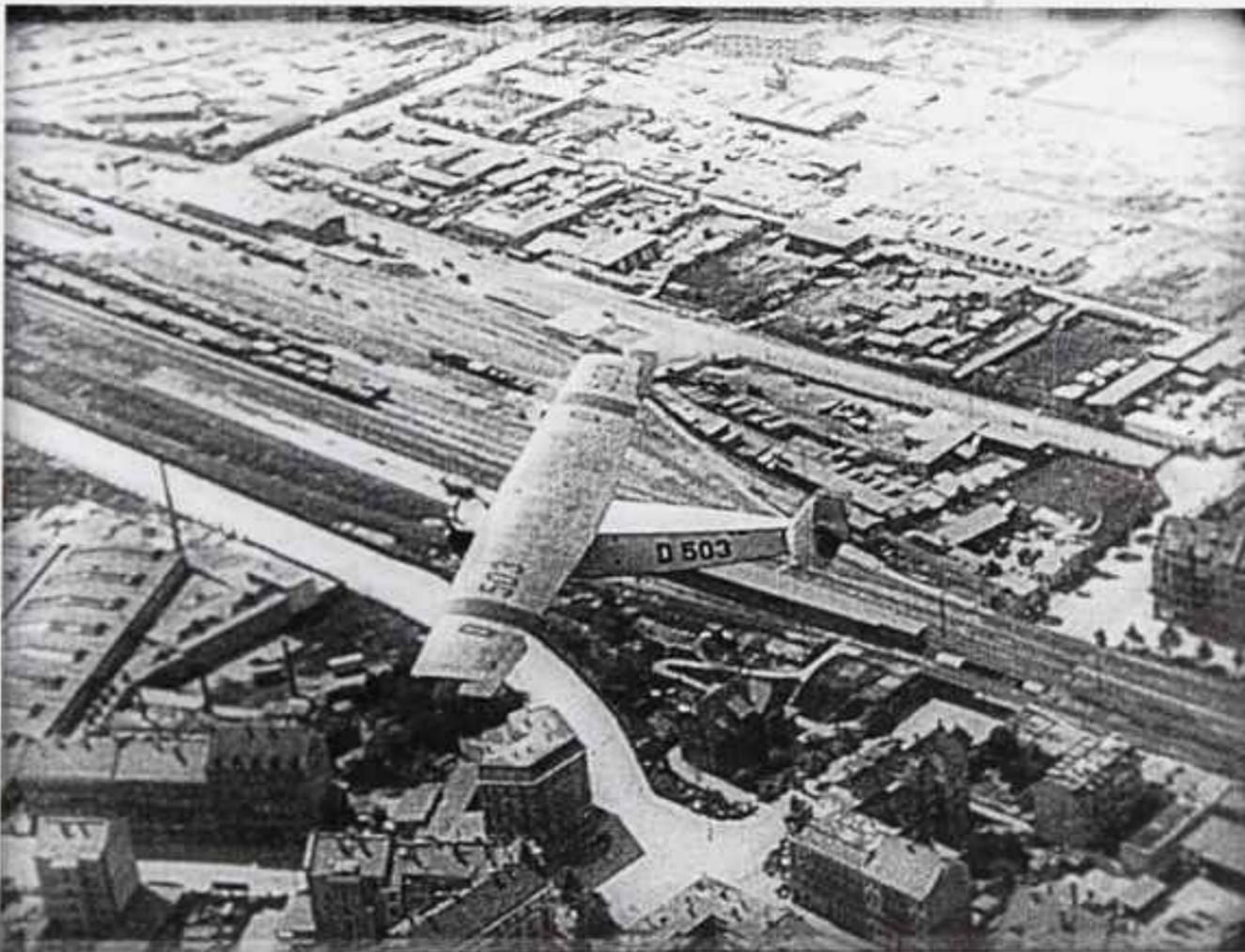
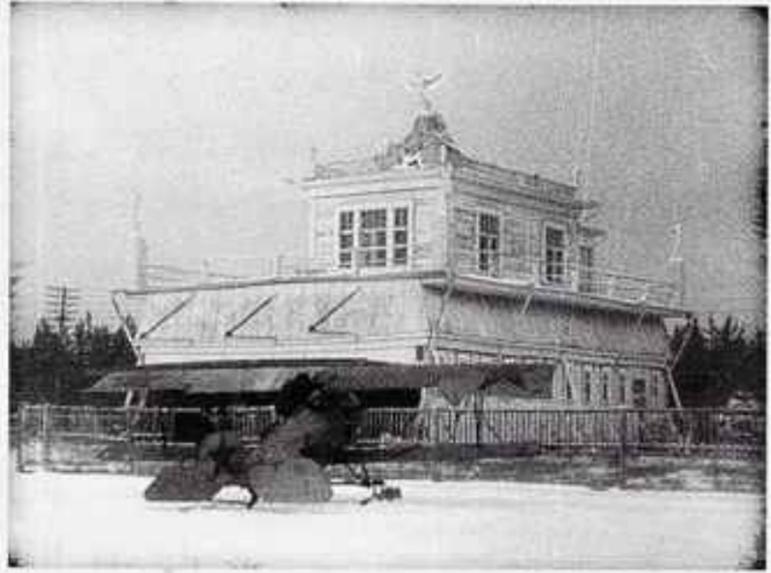
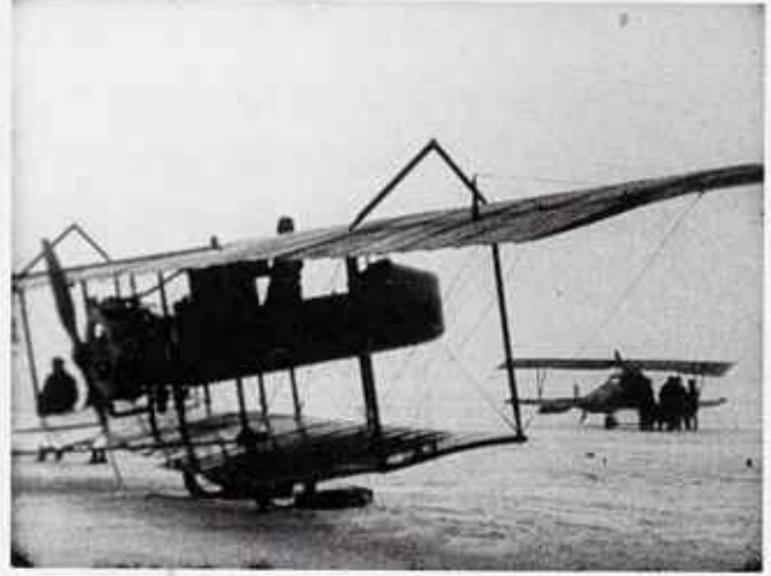
### On the Present Situation of Russian Film

Walter Benjamin, “*Zur Lage der Russischen Filmkunst*”, *Literarische Welt*, vol. 3, no. 10, 11 March 1927, p. 6<sup>5</sup>

The greatest achievements of the Russian film industry can be seen more readily in

## Aerial

In 1923 (the take-off year of Soviet civil aviation) Vertov made three "special issue" films on the subject of flying and fliers, and we find aerial shots in his earlier films as well. The undated wintry shots of a Soviet airport (note the Icarus on top of the wooden building) could be from as early as 1921. There are fewer aerial shots in his later films, and none in *Man with a Movie Camera*, which is surprising given that this film is so keen on showing the cameraman making use of all possible camera angles and positions. Ben Brewster has suggested that perhaps special permission was required from counter-intelligence authorities for taking a camera up in the air (I have not had a chance to check this). The shot that opens *A Sixth Part of the World* was not filmed in Russia, but was taken from a German newsreel. I am pretty certain that a couple of brief aerial shots in *The Eleventh Year* are found-footage as well.



Berlin than in Moscow. What one sees in Berlin has been pre-selected, while in Moscow this selection still has to be made. Nor is obtaining advice a simple matter. The Russians are fairly uncritical about their own films. (For example, it is a well-known fact that *Potemkin* owes its great success to Germany.) The reason for this insecurity in the matter of judgment is that the Russians lack European standards of comparison. Good foreign films are seldom seen in Russia. When buying films, the Government takes the view that the Russian market is so important for the competing film companies of the world that they really have to supply it at reduced prices with what are in effect advertising samples. Obviously, this means that good, expensive films are never imported. For individual Russian artists, the resulting ignorance on the part of the public has its agreeable side. Ilinsky<sup>6</sup> works with a very imprecise copy of Chaplin, and is regarded as a comedian only because Chaplin is unknown here.

At a more serious, general level, internal Russian conditions have a depressing effect on the average film. It is not easy to obtain suitable scenarios, because the choice of subject matter is governed by strict controls. Of all the arts in Russia, literature enjoys the greatest freedom from censorship. The theatre is scrutinized much more closely, and control of the film industry is even stricter. This scale is proportional to the size of the audiences. Under this regimen the best films deal with episodes from the Russian Revolution; films that stretch further back into the Russian past constitute the insignificant average, while, by European standards, comedies are utterly irrelevant. At the heart of the difficulties currently facing Russian producers is the fact that the public is less and less willing to follow them into their true domain: political dramas of the Russian Civil War. The naturalistic political period of Russian film reached its climax around a year and a half ago, with a flood of films full of death and terror. Such themes have lost all their attraction in the meantime. Now the motto is internal pacification. Film, radio, and theatre are all distancing themselves from propaganda.

The search for conciliatory subject matter has led producers to resort to a curious technique. Since film versions of the great Russian novels are largely ruled out on political and artistic grounds, directors have taken over well-known individual types and built up new stories around them. Characters from Pushkin, Gogol, Goncharov, and Tolstoy are frequently taken over in this way, often retaining their original names. This new Russian film is set by preference in the far eastern sections of Russia. This is as much as to say, "For us there is no 'exoticism'." "Exoticism" is thought of as a component of the counter-revolutionary ideology of a colonial nation. Russia has no use for the Romantic concept of the "Far East". Russia is close to the East and economically tied to it. Its second message is: we are not dependent on foreign countries and natures – Russia is, after all, a sixth of the world! Everything in the world is here on our own soil.

And in this spirit the epic film of the new Russia, entitled *A Sixth Part of the World*, has just been released. It must be admitted that Vertov, the director, has not succeeded in meeting his self-imposed challenge of showing through characteristic images how the vast Russian nation is being transformed by the new social order. The filmic colonization of Russia has misfired. What he has achieved, however, is the demarcation of Rus-

sia from Europe. This is how the film starts: in fractions of a second, there is a flow of images from workplaces (pistons in motion, laborers bringing in the harvest, transport works) and from capitalist places of entertainment (bars, dance halls, and clubs). Social films of recent years have been plundered for fleeting individual excerpts (often just details of a caressing hand or dancing feet, a woman's hairdo or a glimpse of her bejeweled throat), and these have been assembled so as to alternate with images of toiling workers. Unfortunately, the film soon abandons this approach in favor of a description of Russian peoples and landscapes, while the link between these and their modes of production is merely hinted at in an all-too-shadowy fashion. The uncertain and tentative nature of these efforts is illustrated by the simple fact that pictures of cranes hoisting equipment and transmission systems are accompanied by an orchestra playing motifs from *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*. Even so, these pictures are typical in their attempts to make film straight from life, without any decorative or acting apparatus. They are produced with a "masked" apparatus. That is to say, amateurs adopt various poses in front of a dummy set, but immediately afterward, when they think that everything is finished, they are filmed without being aware of it. The good, new motto "Away with all masks!" is nowhere more valid than in Russian film. It follows from this that nowhere are film stars more superfluous. Directors are not on the lookout for an actor who can play many roles, but opt instead for the characters needed in each particular instance. Indeed, they go even further. Eisenstein, the director of *Potemkin*, is making a film about peasant life in which he intends to dispense with actors altogether.

The peasants are not simply one of the most interesting subjects for a film; they are also the most important audience for the Russian cultural film. Film is being used to provide them with historical, political, technical, and even hygienic information. Up to now, however, the problems encountered in this process have left people feeling fairly perplexed. The mode of mental reception of the peasant is basically different from that of the urban masses. It has become clear, for example, that the rural audience is incapable of following two simultaneous narrative strands of the kind seen countless times in film. They can follow only a single series of images that must unfold chronologically, like the verses of a street ballad. Having often noted that serious scenes provoke uproarious laughter and that funny scenes are greeted with straight faces or even genuine emotion, filmmakers have started to produce films directly for those traveling cinemas that occasionally penetrate even the remotest regions of Russia for the benefit of people who have seen neither towns nor modern means of transport. To expose such audiences to film and radio constitutes one of the most grandiose mass-psychological experiments ever undertaken in the gigantic laboratory that Russia has become. Needless to say, in such rural cinemas the main role is played by educational films of every kind. Such films range from lessons in how to deal with plagues of locusts or how to use tractors, to films concerned with cures for alcoholism. Even so, much of the program of these itinerant cinemas remains incomprehensible to the great majority and can be used only as training material for those who are more advanced – that is to say, members of village Soviets, peasant representatives, and so on. At the moment, the establishment of

an “Institute for Audience Research” in which audience reactions could be studied both experimentally and theoretically is being considered.

In this way, film has taken up one of the great slogans of recent times: “With our faces toward the village!” In film as in writing, politics provides the most powerful motivation: the Central Committee of the Party hands down directives every month to the press, the press passes them on to the clubs, and the clubs pass them on to the theatres and cinemas, like runners passing a baton. By the same token, however, such slogans can also lead to serious obstacles. The slogan “Industrialization!” provided a paradoxical instance. Given the passionate interest in everything technical, it might have been expected that the slapstick comedy would be highly popular. In reality, however, for the moment at least, that passion divides the technical very sharply from the comic, and the eccentric comedies imported from America have definitely *flopped*. The new Russian is unable to appreciate irony and skepticism in technical matters. A further sphere denied to the Russian film is the one that encompasses all the themes and problems drawn from *bourgeois* life. Above all, this means: *They won't stand for dramas about love. The dramatic and even tragic treatment of love is rigorously excluded from the whole of Russian life.* Suicides that result from disappointed or unhappy love still occasionally occur, but Communist public opinion regards them as the crudest excesses.

For film – as for literature – all the problems that now form the focus of debate are problems of subject matter. Thanks to the new era of social truce, they have entered a difficult stage. The Russian film can re-establish itself on firm ground only when Bolshevik society (and not just the State!) has become sufficiently stable to enable a new “social comedy” to thrive, with new characters and typical situations.

### Notes

1. VOKS (Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo kulturnykh svyazei): All-Union Society for Cultural Links (with foreign countries).
2. *Predatel* (Abram Room, 1926).
3. The English edition of Walter Benjamin's *Moskauer Tagebuch* – a journal of an actual trip he made in the winter of 1926/27 – was published in 1986: *Moscow Diary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press); translation by Richard Sieburth; the excerpts reprinted here are from pp. 50-51.
4. *Daesh Evropu* (D.E.), a play by M. Podgaetsky adapted from Ilya Ehrenburg's novel *Trest D.E.* (Trust D.E.) and Bernhard Kellermann's novel *Der Tunnel*, was produced in Moscow by Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) in 1924.
5. English version: Benjamin's *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 12-15. Translated by Rodney Livingstone.
6. Igor Ilinsky (1901-1987), Russian film and theatre actor.

## A SIXTH PART: DEBATES AND DISCUSSIONS



### ***A Sixth Part of the World* (A Discussion in the Association of Revolutionary Cinema – ARK)**

*“Shestaia chast mira (Obsuzhdenie v ARKe)”*,<sup>1</sup> Pravda, 18 January 1927

There are rarely such stormy and passionate debates at the ARK as those aroused by the film *A Sixth Part of the World*. And not just because of the number of orators, but because of their composition.

Comrade Barshak (ODSK):<sup>2</sup> The film shows vividly how the USSR collects raw material and sends it abroad, but it doesn't show what the town, in its turn, gives back to the countryside. But there are also many pluses in the film. Vertov has taken all the little corners of our country. *Sovkino-Journal*<sup>3</sup> has never been able to show all of this. We should congratulate Comrade Vertov and the *kinocs* group.

Comrade Bulakh (Tashkent): The provinces will greet films like this with rapture; we need such films.

Comrade Shikhvatov (a propagandist from the Krasnaia Presnia area of Moscow): The Party is now faced with the task of explaining the circulation process in the country to the workers. The film shows this. It also shows the difficulties in our path. You see and understand clearly what kind of transport system we must have. The propaganda significance of the film is enormous, and we should be amazed at the delays it has experienced. There is something wrong here.

Comrade Potemkin (MGSPS):<sup>4</sup> Strictly speaking, the film is no masterpiece. You shouldn't have intertitles like “I”... “You”... And there is a departure from Kino-Eye here in the direction of the scripted film. It's not a hit but some sort of cinematic soup.

Comrade Asilov (Khamovnikov Regional Party Committee): You cannot grasp the ungraspable. Vertov has taken as his subject the industrialization of our country, and on the way he has opened up a whole series of sub-themes. *A Sixth Part of the World* is a film-book about political literacy. In the film we see the face of the USSR. The film has the character of an enthusiast. This film should be supported, and we must strive in the future to make product like *A Sixth Part of the World*.

Comrade Paushkin (Gosplan):<sup>5</sup> There is not a single politically literate intertitle in the film. The intertitles are not political but poetic, individualistic. There is no internal logical connection of the material. It shows random facts. So we get some large image which gives us nothing and associates us with nothing.

Comrade Ilin (the head of the Party Circle at the AMO factory):<sup>6</sup> There are achievements in the film. But Capital is shown incorrectly in it. This is not Capital,

but the Moscow NEP. And yet the worker needs to explain to himself that Western Capitalism is still strong and that it will have to be fought seriously. The intertitles will have to be re-done, making them simple and clear. And you can't show Socialism just through the State Trading Organization. The film must be offered up to the public opinion of the working masses.

Comrade Donskoi (ARK):<sup>7</sup> Vertov has shown us bits of construction from end to end of the USSR. The film is good, and will help any of our propagandists. Vertov is particularly strong in this film in the skill of the montage. In this sense he is a pillar of Russian cinematography.

Comrade Sokolov (ARK):<sup>8</sup> The film is technically bad. The film is a deformation of facts, and a digression in the direction of bad fiction film. The material is offered as dubious exoticism, linked by intertitles. The montage is unpretentious, and all based on the intertitles. All in all it's not a bad landscape film, spoiled by the montage.

Comrade Boltiansky (ARK, a newsreel worker): The film can't be a political poster. It can't cover all angles of the major political theme it has set itself of the paths to the industrialization of the country and the building of Socialism. We should not forget that this film is a commission from the State Trading Organization, but Vertov has managed to make its significance greater. The value of this film lies in the fact that, as a non-fiction film, it has managed to pose in visual form such big questions, which no fiction film is in a position to raise and embrace.

Comrade Skachkov (ARK): Creative work is lyricism, poetry. And this is present in *A Sixth Part of the World*. This film is a world record.

Comrade Tsvelev (a propagandist from the Rogozhsko-Simonovsky region): The virtue of the film lies in the fact that it casts a correct light on the trading process. The State apparatus and the question of the construction of socialism are shown correctly. Vertov has shown that in our country both the working class in the towns and the backward patriarchal farms on the periphery are participating in this construction process.

Comrade Iasny (The State Trading Organization): There are faults in the film, but they are insignificant by comparison with the difficulties encountered while it was being made. We have 42 positive reviews of the film in the Party press.

Comrade Iukov (Responsible Secretary of the ARK):<sup>9</sup> In Vertov the montage is the strongest point. He has created an emotional film. We see such a lot of material in the film that the individual elements get lost. Besides, all our peripheral areas are large, and there are a lot of peoples living there, and it would be difficult to include them all in one film. Therefore there are a lot of things missing in the film. We don't see the Ilich lamp, the reading huts, and so on. On the State Trading Organization alone is there a great deal of material.

The discussion underlined the great interest which *A Sixth Part of the World* has provoked not only among filmmakers, but also among Party workers.

### **A Sixth Part of the World (A Separate Opinion)**

D. Borisov, "*Shestaia chast mira (osoboe mnenie)*", Kino, 15 January 1927<sup>10</sup>

The Editorial Board, having expressed their attitude to *A Sixth Part of the World* in a series of articles before the public showing of the film, is publishing this article as a contribution to discussion. The Editorial Board requests Worker Correspondents to express their views on the film now that it is being shown in clubs.

The main aim of the film was to show the opportunities for our exports abroad. There are many interesting ethnographic details in the film, and details of day-to-day life, the distant and most backward parts of our Union, its inhabitants, the ways they earn their living, and so on. Alongside his basic aim, the leader of the work on the film, Comrade Vertov, wanted to reveal the difference of our Union from Capitalist states, and the process of drawing backward peoples into the channel of Socialist construction. And this is where the many defects and simply naïvety lie.

In the first part the *bourgeoisie* are shamed by the Negro dances filmed... in the Soviet State Circus, and the foxtrots in a *bourgeois* drawing room; in the other parts the film shows the encompassing of backward peoples by the state trading apparatus, and the intertitles speak of involving them in Socialist construction. The objects we export are shown: grain, hemp, skins; it shows how these skins go to the Leipzig Trade Fair, and the intertitles add that the money they earn will be used to buy machines, machines which produce machines... Sequences show the technique of exchange (which hardly differs from the capitalist technique), and at the same time the intertitles proclaim that "so the most backward peoples are involved in the construction of Socialism". The process of involving these people in the higher forms of life and economy, and through them in Socialist construction, is not itself shown.

On the contrary, Vertov uses his intertitles to relate how even "You, who play goat polo (*kozlodranii*)" (a custom which is being eradicated in the East, just like fist-fights in the centre) and "You, who still drink the warm blood" – "All of you are masters of the Soviet land, one sixth part of the world." Of course, this sounds very "democratic", but all the same it is "tailism" (*khvostizm*),<sup>11</sup> or simply demagogy in its loftily emotional form, because under the dictatorship of the proletariat we recognize the will of the working class, which is building Socialism and which is, of course, the most progressive element not only in our country but in the whole world.

The speech of Comrade Stalin about industrialization which is illustrated at the end of the film has scant logical connection to the earlier material. Comrade Stalin has in mind, of course, not "tailism" of this kind but political, cultural, and economic development, which even among the most backward peoples, among, say, those Samoyeds, has found expression in new administration (Samoyed Executive Committees), and in new culture (schools, sending students to special educational institutions in Leningrad, and so on), and in a new way of life (co-operatives, and so on). But at the base of this industrialization lies our developing industry. Can you see this in the film?... No! It is absurd and naïve to propose that just through deer, pigs, goats, through those who "play

goat polo” and “drink warm blood” you can be persuaded of the construction of Socialism. More likely the opposite; if you throw out the film’s intertitles, then the visual material would lead you into the channel of those tendencies who insist that we cannot even think of building Socialism in our country.

The formal features of the film are its refined montage. This writer once saw a comrade using scissors to cut up twenty lead articles from a certain newspaper to make a twenty-first. What is this, art? No – it’s just a trick.

In *A Sixth Part of the World* about 30-40 percent of the whole film are so-called duplicate positives (*kontratipy*), that is to say, extracts from various films; then there are the pieces of footage by ten cameramen who shot at their own discretion (usually the director struggles alongside the cameraman over the composition of a sequence), not linked by a single artistic inclination. The final directorial work consisted here in using scissors to do the montage of other people’s material, in the shooting of which the director had not participated. Thus here too we get the same trickery.

And yet the work of such an experienced editor as Vertov could not give the film any degree of unity. Usually intertitles play the same auxiliary role in the development of the action of a film as, for example, railway switches for a train travelling at full speed. But with Vertov it is the other way round; the intertitles, which, moreover, are stuffed with propaganda emotion, play a commanding role. The shots are just a sort of illustrative supplement to the intertitles, the way it is with slides.

We must express the wish that Vertov will get over as soon as possible his “childhood illness” of all sorts of fractures and intricacies, and that a literately worked-out plan should be at the base of his future work; then he will make a large contribution to non-fiction (ethnographic, slice-of-life, and scientific) film.

We must also express the wish that he abandon cosmic and vague themes for more concrete ones.

Better less, but better!

### ***A Sixth Part of the World***

*Sergei Ermolinsky,<sup>12</sup> excerpt from “Shestaia chast mira”, Komsomolskaia pravda, 20 November 1926*

The film is arranged into six distinctly finished parts. The first is Capital. Capitalist states. A worker for whom “everything is equally arduous”. A foxtrotting *bourgeois*. The second part is a contrast with the first part: the Soviet land. The masters of this Soviet land; the various peoples who inhabit it. The third is the riches of the Soviet Union, what we all own. And the most important thing – our grain. The most important object of our export trade. The fourth is export goods beginning to move, gaining sense and purpose. They are on the move: along waterways, along railways, along country roads, and “in places where there are no roads”. The fifth part is a logical approach towards a conclusion: through the network of state trade all the peoples of the USSR are being

involved in the construction of Socialism, for they are participating in the preparation of those goods which go abroad to be exchanged for the machines which our industry needs. The sixth part brings the idea of the whole film to a conclusion: our general line. An ice-breaker breaks a way through to the West for Soviet goods. We strive to get into Western markets so as to turn the USSR into a country which "in a situation of Capitalist encirclement absolutely could not turn into an economic appendage of the Capitalist world economy" (from a resolution at the Fourteenth Congress of the All-Union Communist Party [Bolshevik]).<sup>13</sup>

The ice-breaker, which in the final analysis plays the modest role of clearing the way for our ships, grows into a symbol of the victorious procession of the new life. The previous chapters have provided a preliminary outline of a series of cultural and political problems. They have shown pieces of the old, undisturbed way of life – "the shaman" is still "raging and shamanizing"; unshakeable prejudices, superstition, slavery, and poverty are still alive. This is all revealed in the final part, in the context of the country's cultural development.

Impassive newsreel has been turned into a film whose aim is not just to show but also to prove and to persuade: facts taken on to film are a means for Vertov, the Leader of the film. With the help of kino-facts Vertov unfurls his grandiose content, approaching the most complex problem of our day head-on. The clarity of the exposition, which gives a clear understanding of how socialism is being built in the Soviet land, this clarity of exposition has been united with an amazingly full-blooded cinematic language, which makes this film an intensely interesting spectacle. Despite the fact that Vertov is working on the basis of newsreel material which has far from always been produced according to the author's first-hand instructions, the film is impressive and enthralling. Often Vertov has to use old and random pieces of old newsreel. Therefore, for example, the "foreign" sequences in the first part were inevitably bound to turn out weak. The absence of the necessary "foreign" pieces did not allow Vertov to reveal the theme of "Capitalism on the brink of its historical demise" more profoundly and more broadly. But beginning your assessment of *A Sixth Part of the World* by discussing individual unclear and unsuccessful photographs means not understanding *A Sixth Part of the World* as a whole. The degree of influence of this film, its rousing emotion and the clarity with which it makes its idea manifest – all this is fully based on the fact that what has been found here is a brilliant form of dramatic composition which welds together film material of various kinds into a unified piece of work.

Every part of the film, as we have already seen, forms a precise logical circle. The basic organizing principle of the film is the intertitle, or what is normally called an intertitle. "The intertitle" grips the cinematic content tightly, while having its own tension, its own development, and its own resolution. This method of a single framing "intertitle" will be widely used, and, if you wish, vulgarized by our producers, because this means of organizing newsreel material into a film is unusually firm, opportune, and simple.

With Vertov the intertitle "does not consume" the cinematographic material; it does not turn the film photographs into a series of consecutively interspersed illustrations. In

Vertov's earlier works, and in particular in *Stride, Soviet!*, the photographs were similar to illustrations to a marked degree. In *A Sixth Part of the World* every photograph shows and persuades, demanding further development. Of course, this is helped to a large degree by a series of brilliantly captured elements, because a great deal of it was shot expressly for *A Sixth Part of the World*. Almost for the first time Vertov's cameramen set off on a journey around the Union, to its most distant corners. They brought back extremely valuable material, which is used (not fully) in this film.

But all these brilliant photographs acquire a particular power, thanks to the rhythmical organization of the whole film. The film is constructed to a sharp rhythmical design. Musical rhythm is one of the means through which it has its effect.

### ***A Sixth Part of the World***

*L. Sosnovsky, "Shestaia chast mira", Rabochaia gazeta, 5 January 1927*

At one time the managers of our industry conceived some sort of passion for production filming. Money was allotted, and films were churned out. What concerned them most was to film various kinds of administration. The skill in capturing the essence of production processes themselves was scarcely ever revealed.

The author of the film *A Sixth Part of the World*, Comrade Vertov, has also given us a production film on the theme, What does the State Trading Organization trade abroad? Since the author is more cultured and skilful, he has made something bigger than his predecessors managed out of a semi-production, semi-advertising theme.

You see the boundless expanse of the USSR – not for nothing does our country occupy a sixth part of the world – and the endless variety of the conditions of the life, economy, and culture of the peoples who inhabit the USSR. You are captivated by the beauty of the harsh North and the sun of the hot South. The expanses of ocean, and the meagre paths of the Caucasus mountains. The products of our economy are also various. The skins of the wild animals of the North, and the roe of the fish of the Caspian. The wheat of the Kuban, and the tobaccos of Abkhazia. All this flashes on the screen at a furious pace, and produces a certain impression. Against a background of the variety of nature and economic activity, the variety of the levels of human culture is also revealed. Here is a tractor ploughing the land, and here is a Samoyed eating raw reindeer meat and dipping the pieces into the fresh warm blood of the animal. Orthodox, Moslems, and pagans. And alongside them are Pioneers, members of the Komso-mol and the Women's Departments, newspapers in the languages and dialects of the peoples. All this is hugely, stirringly interesting.

But the author wanted to turn an energetic, lively production film into a stunning "hit" (as it is customary to say in film-speak). And that is not all; the author aspires to overthrow all existing currents in film and to set against them his own method – a film without an actor, without acting, a film where, allegedly, things act more than people. Alas, Dziga Vertov's aspiration is without foundation. Dziga Vertov has produced a

very interestingly conceived cinematic price-list for export goods with illustrations. He has not given us anything more than that.

Dziga Vertov tries to make up for the absence of an expressive link between the goods on the State Trading Organization price-list with his own cinematic shouts and cinematic declamation. The most enormous letters filling the entire screen shout:

You, who... and you, who... and to you, who... and you, who...

This becomes naïve and a little risible. Letters, even when they do fill the whole screen, cannot excite the viewer. This is a stage which propaganda posters passed through long ago. But, on the other hand, in his eagerness to eclipse other film directors, Dziga Vertov has wandered into such a dense forest of cinematic inventions that he has lost a sense of measure.

Everything flashes up on the screen so quickly that there is no chance of stopping. One thing rushes up against another. Here we have an orator speaking on a rostrum, but here we have the enormous wheel of I-don't-know-what machine rushing up and grinding the orator down, so that not a trace of him remains. At any rate, the orator makes no further appearances. At one and the same time on screen two or three different pictures are moving in different directions. Maybe this is a clever stunt from the point of view of a cinematic competition for an amusing idea. But the viewer feels dumbfounded, a bit stupid, because he cannot explain either to himself or to others what is going on. Some sort of mechanisms turn and quiver on the screen, but exactly what they are and what they are doing is not known to anyone except the film's author. Now you see a whole huge factory floor full of machines, now some gigantic wheel bears down on the viewer, and through the wheel protrudes a human head. It looks as if Vertov is hoping to have as viewers people who know all this no worse than he himself does, and who are interested only in tricks of cinematic technique.

No, dear Comrade Vertov, you have not made both ends meet. You have forgotten who the film is intended for. You need to explain what is going on a little more clearly, just a fraction more intelligibly, to our mass viewer, who may be learning for the first time from your film about the life and work of the many peoples of the USSR. Our peasant or Red Army man will find the flashing of some mechanisms completely incomprehensible without an explanation of their significance. When you show simultaneously a view of Leningrad from a plane, and the plane itself, and a normal view of Leningrad shot from the ground, and all this is moving simultaneously in different directions on the screen, then this trick may be engaging, but it does confuse the viewer.

But the first part of the film is completely muddled. Some black female dancers flash past, some young lady with a cup of coffee, a portrait of some pensive man (they say it's Vertov himself), a pianist, another shot of Vertov looking pensive, another shot of the young lady with the cup, another shot of the women dancers jerking their backsides, and all this is seasoned with enormous letters on the screen. All this gives rise to is painful bewilderment.

Certain comrades have got carried away, and have already written that *A Sixth Part*

*of the World* has eclipsed Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin*. Anyone who has seen both films will have no difficulty in appraising this naïve enthusiasm. *Battleship Potemkin* captured viewers through the simplicity, clarity, and logic of its construction. It is accessible even to a child, and it excites even old and experienced revolutionaries. But *A Sixth Part of the World* keeps on reminding you all the time that it is a wonderful stunt by a film director who tugs at your attention with various fanciful tricks. Artifice – that is what distinguishes Vertov's film from *Potemkin*. But artifice and art are completely different things. Real art is always simple and accessible. Artifice is always mannered, fanciful, and difficult to understand.

It is not worth lingering on small blunders. A great deal of space in the list of the goods we export is taken up in Vertov's film by wool. Sheep which are bathed in the sea. Sheep which are bathed in a river. A show is made of how they are sheared, and the wool is cleared away, and so forth, by whole ranks of female workers. All this is fine, of course, but in fact we import wool from abroad, to our great irritation, and in relatively large quantities. We even import pedigree sheep, so as to breed herds with fine fleeces. The viewer will receive the fallacious impression that we supply Europe with wool. This is already the fault not of Vertov but of the State Trading Organization, which participated in drawing up the script.

Such tricks as the following can also be put down to a lack of attention to the simple viewer: He shows the export of our fruit. To the amazement of the viewer the fruit gets into the crate without the help of human hands and without the help of machines. Just like that, simply: the apples climb into the crate of their own accord, they arrange themselves into orderly rows of their own accord, then the wood shavings cover a layer of fruit of their own accord, the lid of the crate lies down and fastens itself with nails of its own accord, and finally the crate, which is ready for dispatch, gets up "on end" of its own accord and does a little bit of jumping for joy, circling round on the spot as if it were alive.

As literate people we know that this is achieved with the help of a device called animation, that apples do not climb into crates of their own accord, and that shavings do not cover them of their own accord. Putting it simply, the viewer is being shown a jokey staging of a process which is impossible in reality. But in this particular case such an approach is inappropriate. Either the viewer will seriously believe that in our country fruit pack themselves in some miraculous way without the intervention of hands or machines. Or, guessing that this is a joke, the viewer will ask himself: but the loading of cows onto a steamship with a crane – is that not a joke? And all those Eskimos, Dagestanis, and so forth – are they not film actors in disguise and make-up? Let's have one thing: either a race by Kino-Eye through real life, or the tricks of animation. To mix the two devices in this film is incorrect. It subverts trust in the entire work.

And yet – *A Sixth Part of the World* is an interesting film. There are many vivid and striking elements in it; it creates a cheerful mood. But one should not look in it for the revelation of a new era in cinema. It does not have enough simplicity, persuasiveness and logic.

### **On A Sixth Part of the World (A Film Made by Dziga Vertov)**

A. Zorich, "O 'Shestoi chasti mira' (Kino-film raboty Dzigy Vertova)", Gudok, 8 January 1927

They say that he who does nothing makes no mistakes. In Comrade Vertov's work there are a sufficient number of mistakes, which detract from the quality and the significance of the film, and, undoubtedly, weaken the impression which *A Sixth Part of the World* should make on the viewer. In the first place, he should not have made a "hit" out of newsreel which is excellently shot, excellently finished, and interesting for the precise reason that, bereft as it is of any theatricality, it shows us the life of the country "as it is"; pieces which are imported into the film without foundation from foreign footage and films, the inevitable and irritating foxtrot, the pretentious and pompous intertitles which are calculated precisely in terms of their theatrical effect ("you, who bathe... you, who shear... you, who graze") of course only reduce the quality of a film which is simple and clear both in its theme and in its design. The raucousness and artificiality introduced into the film for cinematic effect sully it. The second crucial defect of *A Sixth Part of the World*, it must be confessed, is the kaleidoscopic speed with which scenes, views, and faces flash up on the screen. You see a winch in the port, for example, and you are very interested in taking a good look at the arc which its trunk describes, and at the hatchway and the platform and the belt which holds the cow fast as it is hoisted into the air; you see a team of deer in the tundra – and you want to examine the path through the snow which the sledge is speeding along, and the extraordinary sledge and the team themselves, such as you have never seen in nature, and the running and the horns and the muzzle of the beast; but the winch and the port and the snows and the deer disappear instantaneously, and you can already see hands and scissors, shearing wool from a sheep. This is also very interesting; you are in a hurry to take a good look at it, but the sheep has already been replaced by crates with shavings in them, into which fruit is being packed for export. A second later the crates have disappeared, but a steamer is moving through boundless expanses of sea towards Novaya Zemlya. Of course the very nature of the cinema is such that it cannot stand sluggishness and immobility, but in the dynamism and tension which the cinema demands some sort of measure must be observed, which would after all let you concentrate your attention on the individual objects which pass by the viewer on the screen. And this must apply in the first place and particularly to ethnographic film. In *A Sixth Part of the World* this barrier is crossed and this measure is not observed: the viewer feels a little lost and irritated by the impossibility of examining (and not just seeing) the interesting things which pass by him on the screen.

For all that, however, it must be admitted that *A Sixth Part of the World* is an extremely interesting experiment and an undoubted achievement for our cinema. Above all, it is almost the first remotely significant ethnographic and newsreel film which our cinema has to show for itself after the roughly seven full years of its existence. We have released enough minarets of love and death, all sorts of "Aelitas" and mysteries of lighthouses and pearls of the harem, but as for good newsreel, as for films which would show the real day-

to-day behaviour, the real life, the real nature of our boundless country, then they do not exist, as they did not exist five, seven, and nine years ago. From this point of view, *A Sixth Part of the World* is the first swallow, which, if it does not alone make a summer, opens up clearly before us the prospects of those rich opportunities which are so stubbornly hushed up and trampled by our cinema organizations, despite all society's attempts to reveal them. In fact this swallow is not the first, but I shall say a few words below about what Sovkino does to swallows.

It should also be said of *A Sixth Part of the World* that it has a correct political aim in the first place, and in the second place that it is almost irreproachably made technically. I do not agree with Comrade Sosnovsky<sup>14</sup> when he writes that the series of brilliant technical devices which Comrade Vertov applies in the film are not necessary because they will remain incomprehensible for the mass viewer. In the first place there is some question whether they will remain incomprehensible for the mass urban viewer, who has become extremely broadly accustomed to the cinema in recent times and has undoubtedly already grasped the majority of its "mysteries"; as for the countryside, well the film, as is usually the case, will not get there, or will get there only when the copy is shot to ribbons, and will anyway be a non-stop incomprehensible trick-film on a mobile cinema. But even if we concede that to some degree these devices will, like much else in the domain of art, remain incomprehensible for the mass viewer, they must nevertheless be counted not as a fault but as an achievement of Comrade Vertov, because every one of them opens up, in the business in which Vertov is working, some new possibility, without which the growth of our cinema is unthinkable.

That, in a few words, is what one can say about *A Sixth Part of the World* with regard to the substance of the film itself.

Now, about "swallows". Comrade Vertov, the author of *A Sixth Part of the World*, is, as is known, the head of a current in our cinema which denies the so-called "fiction" film, that is to say, the film with a plot, a script, actors, sets, and a director. He considers, and in his work he brings this to life, that the most valuable and interesting films for us are the ones which depict "life caught unawares"; no scripts, no actors, no studio, make-up, and costumes; the operator shoots unawares a view, a scene, people, who may not even know that they are standing, or working, or crying, or rejoicing under the eye of the lens: out of scenes from such "locations" the film is composed, a film about a piece of real life.

Of course, one can argue about the substance of the principles of Comrade Vertov, who completely repudiates the film with a plot and actors, and I personally, for example, think that Vertov is getting carried away and is wrong; you can find many mistakes both in *A Sixth Part of the World* and in Vertov's other works; these mistakes should be corrected and not hushed up, and corrections should be introduced into his works rather than just becoming enraptured about them, as our press does to some degree. But we must, in the first place, recognize Comrade Vertov as a master of his business (the newsreel), and recognize that no one has yet given us better newsreel than what he has given us; we must recognize Comrade Vertov as a major worker in cinema, who moreover concentrates all his creative attention on a completely naked and most vulnerable area of our cinema; we

must recognize, finally, that the very principles of Comrade Vertov, which people have argued and talked about so much recently, are now being borrowed and applied in practice, to a greater or lesser degree and with reservations and variations which do not, however, alter their essence, by very major directors of "fiction" films in our cinema.

Meanwhile, the films which Vertov makes (*Stride, Soviet!*, for example) are, in the most mysterious manner, disappearing from Moscow immediately after they have been released, without appearing on open screens and thus remaining an undoubted and interesting achievement of our cinema which is completely unknown to the public at large. Meanwhile, on the basis of "fire-safety precautions", Vertov has for years not been given a room to work in at Sovkino. Meanwhile, extremely responsible Sovkino employees publicly make false statements which discredit Vertov as a worker and create a situation within Sovkino which in practice deprives Vertov of the possibility of doing any productive work. Meanwhile, finally, at the moment when for the first time a work by Vertov, has, so to say, seen the light of the screen, an order has been given at Sovkino for him to be dismissed.

We should like to know and to hear, even once, from Sovkino an exhaustive answer as to what precisely all this might signify. On the one hand, you get the impression that the struggle against Vertov is a struggle against newsreel in general, since newsreel which makes propaganda through facts, and which should cause us to remember once again how essential it is to get it on to our screens – that was said by Comrade Lenin – is still absent here; on the other hand, since no one, we repeat, has yet given us better newsreel than that provided by Vertov, we have to assume in the fact of his expulsion the absence of practical considerations.

Sovkino, by orientating itself towards foreign salon exoticism, treats our viewer to things which he absolutely should not be eating. The incident with Vertov, inasmuch as here they are removing a useful and talented man from his work because he is trying to introduce a refreshing jet of air into the dubious atmosphere of our cinema, is a part of this big question, a question that should not longer be addressed by one institution, but by our society.

And society will obviously be required to look into it.

### **On A Sixth Part of the World**

"O 'Shestoi chasti mira'",<sup>15</sup> Komsomolskaia pravda, 31 December 1926

Perhaps we are illiterate, perhaps we cannot do so as comprehensibly as specialists, as film workers, but as simple viewers, in our simple, rough language, we want to express our thought about the film. In your newspaper which we like so much, *Komsomolskaia pravda*, we have read the articles by Comrade S. Ermolinsky<sup>16</sup> and Comrade Komarov about the film *A Sixth Part of the World*, put out by Dziga Vertov. We have understood that our film workers have finally achieved what should have been given long ago to the peasant, who so loves the cinema and who so far gets so little from it. Our film workers have got used to feeding us, and still feed us, with films which contain a lot of adventures and even

more long and unnecessary intertitles, which any illiterate person can't manage to read in time. And that's not all; our film organizations throw large sums of money at foreign films with stunts, in which the viewer sees just one thing: banditry, banditry, banditry. You ask yourself what a film like that can give our viewer. Precisely nothing. But what has our Soviet cinema given us? Very little. There isn't the thing which they should be giving the peasant, that is to say himself, his farmer brothers, who live in various corners of our boundless Union: how they work, how they live their lives, how in all these corners they are building Socialism... So far, it seems, none of our viewers have met this in our cinema, although there are very, very many people who are thirsting to see it.

Such a picture turns out to be both useful and not boring. In our paper they wrote: "The picture (*A Sixth Part of the World*) is very easy to watch and the viewer is moved by it, it forces him to live through it involuntarily and to follow every movement of the film." What does this prove? It proves that only films like this can interest us, the worker-peasant youth, can teach us, the worker-peasant youth, while at the same time serving as entertainment in our daily life. In a film like this we shall see with pride what we have done, what path we have taken, and what further paths the Communist Party is pointing out to us. Broaden the road for *A Sixth Part of the World*! Let every worker see it, since this picture is the first major step to our Soviet cinema.

A Group of Red Army Soldiers:

I. Svillo, T. Zhuravlev, G. Melnikov, T. Arsenev, G. Vlasov, Chikenov

The 25th Moldavanka Border Detachment of GPU Troops

#### From the Editor

In connection with the showing of *A Sixth Part of the World* on Moscow screens, the Editorial Board asks readers to send us their responses to this film.

#### **Dziga Vertov "Builds Socialism" (On the Film *A Sixth Part of the World*)**

*Detsenko, "Dziga Vertov 'stroit sotsializm' (o kino-filme 'Shestaia chast mira')", Komsomolskaia pravda, 5 January 1927*

There is an old folk tale. A cunning tailor offered to sew clothes of the finest material in the world for an unknown king, for a big sum of money. There was, in fact, no material; the tailor only pretended to sew. After a certain time he announced that the clothes were ready. He managed to persuade the not particularly far-sighted king that the material from which the clothes had been sewn was so fine that it was invisible to the naked eye. The tailor personally arrayed the king in the clothes that had been sewn "out of air". The king strolled around the royal apartments in his birthday suit. The pages held up an imaginary train, and the amazed courtiers rapturously assured each other:

"Can you see? What marvellous clothes!"

And although nobody could see anything but the elegant protuberances of the royal body, everyone reiterated, over and over again, in one voice: wonderful, charming!

In the film *A Sixth Part of the World* the author and director Dziga Vertov wanted to show us an island of Socialism, the country in which Socialism is being built. Taking up the stance of an ancient prophet, every two or three shots Vertov throws the public the oracular words “I see”. Vertov looks at his film, sees the country in which socialism is being built, and tries to convince us, the viewers, that we too can see it. But we do not trust the “cunning tailor”. You won’t catch us out with “fine material”. We trust only our own eyes: and our own eyes, however hard they tried, did not notice any Socialism in Vertov’s film.

*A Sixth Part of the World* is in turn divided into six parts. In the first part we are shown the Capitalist system. They show us enormous factories, machines that crush you with their massive size, enslaved colonial peoples, and beside them – Negro foxtrots for the entertainment of the *bourgeoisie*; and beside them, they show the Capitalist themselves, the representatives of a corrupt society.

Vertov makes his first stop here, and then he turns to the other five parts of the film, which are intended to describe our Socialist country. Factories and works stretch out in a long line: they are replaced by the Caucasus mountains, the Siberian taiga, the Arctic Ocean. Kirghiz horses are replaced by Caucasian ones, the Caucasian ones by a team of reindeer, then again you get works, again factories, again reindeer... To ring the changes there is a stately procession across the screen of... well-fed pigs; they are replaced by a picture of breakers on the Black Sea, then again there are deer, again there are horses, and the tedious, “deeply meaningful” intertitle “I see”.

It’s true, people are shown, too. But they are not living people, they are appendages to the machines, the horses, and... the pigs. Is this really enough to show that in the country being depicted on screen Socialism is being built? Are the machines and tractors really building Socialism by themselves – without the people who are the owners of these machines? If so, all of you, with a touch of Vertov’s magic wand, could with the same, if not greater success, have turned America into a Socialist country. There they have even better machines, even better tractors. But there at the same time there are living people, or more precisely, two classes of people: some people enjoy all the good things in life at other people’s expense; others pay the bill for all this and live in damp and dark hovels. We saw such people from the land of Capitalism in Vertov; we saw the relations between the various strata of these people; we saw it, and we said: yes, this is Capitalism. People who are struggling, breaking up the Old World, overcoming obstacles, building the New, people who are building Socialism, Vertov does not show us. Vertov is “building Socialism” himself. In point of fact, Vertov is not even building. He shows everything in its already built state. He does not show how things were built, whether anything is being built now; there is nothing of the process of construction.

You cannot tell that he is speaking of our Soviet Socialist country from the perfected machines in the film. There are machines like them in Capitalist countries. Machines can be equally associated with shameless exploitation and with Socialism. There *is* a difference in this sense between machines here and machines in the countries of Capitalism. There the proletarian is the slave of the machine and its owner; here in our coun-

try the proletarian is the owner of the machine. Did Vertov show this difference? No, he did not. But the machines themselves cannot show it.

Thanks to Vertov, we can learn that the film is talking about our country (if you ignore the intertitles) mainly because it shows the continuing existence of the wooden plough, and the Samoyeds who eat raw meat, that is to say, it shows what remains of the legacy of the Old World.

Why does *Cement* inspire us (I am speaking not of the play, but of Fedor Gladkov's novel)?<sup>17</sup> Because here we have the lofty emotion of construction, here we have real people, the builders themselves. They believe in their aim, they inspire us, they call us.

*A Sixth Part of the World* is, at best, an original cinematic geography of the USSR. Here the approach is not social but ethnographic. But with such an approach you cannot, in our opinion, show on screen the country in which Socialism is being built.

Of the technical aspects of the film we shall not speak here.

### *Vale*

That *A Sixth Part of the World* is a necessary and extremely valuable work – this is a truth that demands no proof. To be convinced of that, all you have to do is to watch the film. But we also have to note the defects in this utterly new form of film work, since without our indicating them Dziga Vertov will have some difficulty in moving forward.

For all its virtues, *A Sixth Part of the World* has an extremely exhausting effect on the viewer. Vertov has filmed nature in three segments of the USSR, and has stretched it out into six extremely long parts. In all six parts the viewer sees the same sequences with fir trees, deer, and minarets, interspersed with an exotic Negro musical number and excessively monotonous intertitles. This is the first defect of the film.

Its second great defect is that Dziga has paid far too much attention to the broken rhythm. Shots flash past at such a lightning speed that the viewer does not manage to capture their meaning. Besides that, the complexity of the montage overshadows the basic theme of the film.

Dziga Vertov should avoid such mistakes in future, or else it may be the case that the ordinary viewer, for whom the impression he gets from a film is what is important, and not its technical merit, will prefer to go to an ordinary view-film about the USSR. Someone has said of *Stride, Soviet!* that:

“The Soviet was striding fast,  
the public was striding past...”<sup>18</sup>

Dziga Vertov must take all measures to make sure that the working public does not stride past *A Sixth Part of the World*.

### From the Editor

These articles are being published for discussion purposes. The Editorial Board asks readers who have seen the film to express their opinion on the pages of *Komsomolskaia pravda*.

## Viewers on *A Sixth Part of the World*

"Zritel'i o 'Shestoi chasti mira'", Komsomolskaia pravda, 14 January 1927

### We Trust Only Our Own Eyes

R. Maimina

In an article entitled "Comrade Vertov Builds Socialism", Comrade Detsenko develops the idea that the author of the film *A Sixth Part of the World*, Vertov, has not shown the viewer the essence – the process of the construction of Socialism. "We trust only our own eyes," writes Detsenko,<sup>19</sup> "and our own eyes, however much we tried, did not notice any Socialism in Vertov's film." And he continues: "Vertov himself 'builds Socialism'. In short... he shows everything in already constructed form." Is that the case, we ask ourselves. We shall not be wrong if we say that in his short-sightedness Comrade Detsenko did not fully notice what Vertov so brilliantly proved and showed. The USSR is the authentic master of a sixth part of the world. He shows clearly and vividly what we own. Are not the Kirghiz and the Samoyed, making their way across the steppe, through snow and frost, to the State Trading Post with their riches, and the Turk, loading his goods onto vessels, and the worker, turning the wheel of a machine, are these not the builders of Socialism? This is shown clearly. We cannot understand why Detsenko is indignant when a long line of factories and works (all of them ours! R.M.) stretch across the screen, when a picture of nature in the Caucasus gives way to a picture of the Siberian taiga, when "well-fed pigs cross the screen in stately procession". This convinces us that we not only know how to own things, but also how to increase our possessions; we know how to feed up pigs, and... to construct the Volkhov Hydro-Electric Station. We really "see" the life and achievements of the proletarian USSR – a sixth part of the world! Yes, the Volkhov Hydro-Electric Station is working; it is not a myth. It's true that there is a great deal about our days that Vertov has not shown us, but still, when you get up out of your seat at the end of the film you cannot stop yourself from saying, loudly, firmly, and confidently: "Yes, on such foundations the greatest building in the world, Socialism, will stand firm!"

### A Film from Pieces and Scraps

[Genrikh] Lenobl<sup>20</sup>

It's not a bad scenic film. You will see all the various peoples who inhabit our Soviet Union. You will see the power and riches of our country. You will read (that is why the film has intertitles), that with the help of State Trade we are sorting out the production of the means of production in this country. All of this, I repeat, is not bad, and is useful. But there are also a number of shortcomings in *A Sixth Part of the World*.

The first shortcoming. You see raw materials (wheat, wool, butter) being pumped out of the villages and then being exchanged abroad for machines for the towns. But what does the town give the village? If the film is to be believed, very little. If things really were the way they are represented in *A Sixth Part of the World*, then what we would have in our country would not be the union of the town and the village, following Lenin, but their disunity, following Preobrazhensky.<sup>21</sup>

The second shortcoming. The class struggle in our Soviet Union is not shown at all. It is utterly incomprehensible how in a film commissioned by the State Trading Organization the struggle of State Trade and the co-operatives against private traders has been omitted.

The third shortcoming. We are shown the world *bourgeoisie* enjoying itself (the inevitable foxtrot and a Negro musical number), but we are not shown World Capital at work.

The fourth shortcoming. *A Sixth Part of the World* consists of pieces and scraps. The only link between them is the intertitles. You can swap these pieces around, you can jettison some of them completely, you can replace the second part with the third or the fourth, and nothing will change. You involuntarily find yourself wanting to compare *A Sixth Part of the World* with *Potemkin* or *Mother*.<sup>22</sup> There you can't change anything; there one thing follows from another with iron necessity.

### I Peeped at All of That Myself

*A. Shevich*

*A Sixth Part of the World* is undoubtedly a fine film. It should be put on in the working-class areas too as soon as possible. It would do no harm to precede the film with a small lecture, and here is why. After all, this film is remarkable for the fact that it never departs from the principle of being cinematic: in an hour or an hour and a half, the viewer manages to visit not only many distant corners of the USSR, but Europe, too. In this way the whole film consists of pieces illustrating the viewer's notions about the USSR. It is understandable that if he does not have even a superficial knowledge of the customs, the rituals, the way of life of this or that Soviet nationality, the viewer will not understand the film and not accept it. In general, though, the film is enormously interesting to watch.

Comrade Detsenko is not right when he calls the intertitle "I see" irritating: this is the main way the *kinoc* aim is achieved – after 15 or 20 minutes I myself was already involuntarily repeating the word, and it seemed to me that I had seen all this myself. Had seen it without drowning out the measured steps of life with my enthusiasm. It is only a pity that this film has had its premiere in a cinema on the Arbat, which is mainly patronized by people from the Petrovka and Kuznetskii, most out for a good time.

Nor is it superfluous to point out the fact that the "smart public" goes to this film unwillingly, or does not go at all, but the people who really want to see it "can't afford to do so". As a result the cinema is no more than 25-30 percent full, and the First State Cinema Theatre does not sell reduced-price tickets.

Get this film into working-class areas as soon as possible!

### We See Things, But We Do Not See People

*M. Bekker*<sup>23</sup>

The film *A Sixth Part of the World* is absorbing, for all its lack of a plot. Its artistic and

socially educative significance are also beyond doubt. But I should like to point out certain blindingly obvious shortcomings.

I recently wrote in *Komsomolskaia pravda* about the external, poster-art approach of Komsomol writers to our new way of life. This method has found its way into Dziga Vertov's picture. What we get are bits of daily life linked by the idea of Socialist construction. Machines, trams, factories flash past... In short, we see things, but we do not see living people.

The film does not contain propositions which we might find psychologically interesting; it has no psychological dynamism. And something else. The film is superficial. It displays only the positive sides of our contemporary life. Why is the New Economic Policy not shown? He should have shown a *Nepman*; he should have shown Socialism beating this *Nepman* over the head. I repeat, the film does not maintain a balance between light and shadows. To be more precise, the shadows are scarcely shown. For this reason it cannot be entirely satisfactory.

### From the Editor

Out of the responses of Comrades M. Mariengof, V. Smirnov, M. Rozanbaum, A. Grigorev, D. Nikolsky, A. Slaviansky, I. Svillo, T. Zhuravlev, G. Melnikov, T. Arsenev, G. Vlasov, Chikenov, R. Maimina, A. Shevich, Lenobl, M. Bekker, A. Davydov, A. Cherenkov, St. Svintsov, and others, we are, for lack of space, publishing only the reviews of the four comrades who formulate the merits and the shortcoming of the film *A Sixth Part of the World* in the most interesting and serious way.

### Notes

1. ARK (Assotsiatsiia Revoliutsionnoi Kinematografii): the Association of Revolutionary Cinema, founded in 1924; in May 1929, re-named the ARRK (Assotsiatsiia Rabotnikov Revoliutsionnoi Kinematografii), the Association of Workers of Revolutionary Cinema.
2. ODSK (Obshchestvo druzei sovetского kinematografa): the Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema. Oskar Barshak: journalist, a Sovkino functionary, deputy chairman of ODSK, and board member of the ARK.
3. *Sovkino-Zhurnal*, the periodical newsreel begun in 1925.
4. MGSPS (Moskovskii gorodskoi sovet profsoiuzov): Moscow City Council of Trade Unions.
5. Gosplan: State Planning Committee. Mikhail Paushkin: head of the Gosplan cinema department.
6. AMO factory: Automobile factory.
7. Mark Donskoi (1901-1981), the Soviet film director.
8. Ippolit Sokolov (1902-1974), journalist, poet, and screenwriter. One of the least friendly critics of Vertov's work.
9. Konstantin Iukov (1902-1938), critic, board member of ODSK, Responsible Secretary of the ARK.
10. Vertov suspected that this essay was authored or inspired by his adversary, Ilya Trainin, the head of the Sovkino film studio (see chap. 18, "Vertov Is Fired from Sovkino").
11. In Soviet political jargon, this term is used as the opposite of progress.
12. Sergei Ermolinsky (1900-1984), playwright, screenwriter, and journalist (writing mainly for *Pravda* and *Komsomolskaia pravda*).
13. The Fourteenth Party Congress (dubbed "The Industrialization Congress", for its resolute decision to industrialize the rural economy of Russia) took place in 1925.
14. See previous entry.

## 15. A SIXTH PART: DEBATES AND DISCUSSIONS

15. Published without alteration. (*"Komsomolskaia pravda" editor's note*)
16. See earlier entry.
17. Fedor Gladkov (1883-1958), Soviet writer. His realist novel *Tsement* (Cement), 1925, appeared in stage and film versions.
18. The author quotes an epigram by "Argo" published in *Sovetskii ekran*, no. 37, 1926, p. 5.
19. See earlier entry.
20. Genrikh Lenobl (1906-1964), screenwriter.
21. Possibly, the reference is to the agronomist Petr Preobrazhensky (1817-1900), the author of the six-volume Popular Guide to Practical Farming, *Obshcheponiatnoe rukovodstvo k prakticheskomu selskomu khoziaistvu* (1857).
22. *Mat'* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1926).
23. Mikhail Bekker, critic.

## A SIXTH PART: A QUARREL



### On the Film *A Sixth Part of the World*

Ippolit Sokolov, "O filme 'Shestaia chast mira'",<sup>1</sup> *Kino-front*, no. 2, 1927, pp. 9-12

**The Method.** Dziga Vertov has struggled stubbornly for Kino-Eye and "the montage of facts", for non-fiction film.

*A Sixth Part of the World* is a mixture of methods of artistic and scientific film. Vertov has retreated from his Kino-Eye method. In terms of principle *A Sixth Part of the World* is real eclecticism. The sociological method in art criticism has more than once exposed the social bases of all eclecticism.

The mixing of the methods of artistic and scientific film has led to the fact that *A Sixth Part of the World* is neither art nor facts. It is not "life as it is", but "life as it seems".

Factual material has turned into artistic material in the film. Real fact has become aesthetic illusion, convention. The distortion of facts was achieved through montage.

In *A Sixth Part of the World* all the facts are not facts as such, but symbols. Sequences are constructed in such a way that their sense can be broadened with the help of intertitles. The abstract word has a far wider logical scope than any concrete shot. The turning of fact into symbol is easily achieved by means of montage. The man with a dog in the shot is not simply a man but a symbol – "You who walk off into the icy distance"<sup>2</sup> – and, in the end, even a verbal metaphor – "The old world is passing away, just like you walking off into the icy distance." The ice and the ice-breaker in the shot are not just ice and an ice-breaker, but symbols – the ice is the Old World, and the ice-breaker is Lenin.

The montage devices in *A Sixth Part of the World* are taken from fiction film. The montage of scientific film is logical montage, which strives for the calm and coherent clarification and intensification of concepts. The montage of a feature film is emotional montage, built on the quick and unexpected succession of "chance" associations. In *A Sixth Part of the World* the montage distorts the facts. When the pieces are swapped around their meaning changes. When there is a montage of nocturnal Berlin with the "Chocolate Kiddies", this is a "falsification of the facts", which is quite usual in art. "The Chocolate Kiddies" were filmed in Moscow, at the State Circus. In the first part of the film the shot in which Negroes are sitting calmly on the platforms at the end of train corridors signifies "slaves of Capital", but in the last part the same shot signifies "the colonies are flowing into the channel of a single world economy".

Besides that, there are many clear and hidden staged sequences in *A Sixth Part of the World* (the foxtrot, the departure of a car, the fox hunt, the renewal of woman, and so on).

It has only now become clear that Vertov hardly ever strove for "life as it is", for raw fact, for the quality of documentary and chronicle, for the newsreel method, but

engaged in the artistic shaping of chronicle. The Kino-Eye method is midway between film-art and film-newsreel.

**The Theme.** The title of the film, *A Sixth Part of the World*, is wider than its theme. You do not get a sixth part of the world, the USSR, in *A Sixth Part of the World*, you get only export. You do not get the USSR, you do not get the industrial, cultural, and political centre in *A Sixth Part of the World*, you get only the periphery. And even more, commodity circulation is shown in a one-sided way; export (sending things abroad) is shown, the path of goods from the countryside, but import (the bringing in of machines) is not shown, the path of goods from the town to the countryside.

The approach to the USSR in *A Sixth Part of the World* is not economic and social (one or two shots of demonstrating crowds and meetings do not count), but geographic and ethnographic (seas and rivers, flora and fauna, backward “exotic” peoples, their customs and habits). The gallery of peoples is presented in the form of close-up and foreground shot portraits.

The theme is constructed not through economic or social contrasts, but only through territorial and climatic contrasts. (South and North – “You in the villages of Dagestan” and “You in the Siberian taiga” and “You in the tundra”.) In the five parts of the film the theme is not developed logically, systematically: the USSR is not shown in economic, technical, social, cultural, and political cross-section; what is presented is disparate ethnographic elements without any connection or coherence.

**The sequence material.** In *A Sixth Part of the World* the sequence material is unimpressive, emotionally un-infectious, and technically weak and grey.

All the world *bourgeoisie* (neither more nor less!) is shown through some midwife and some dentist. The historical demise of the corrupt *bourgeoisie* is shown by means of an ordinary foxtrot (!) – people stamp about to a pathetic portable gramophone in a spatially reduced Soviet flat. A distance of hundreds of miles in the taiga is shown by means of naïve dolly shots.

Often the sequences are so inexpressive photographically that during montage they were obliged to have recourse to a naïve device from medieval art, to an intertitle saying: “This is a lion and not a dog.”<sup>3</sup> Many sequences are incomprehensible without explanatory intertitles: “buffalo”, “a snowy owl”, “an Arctic fox”, “a marten”, and so on.

The few sequences which show the New, the construction of Socialism, are utterly insipid: people read newspapers, a woman discards her yashmak, Pioneers line up, people listen to the radio, a lamp in a hut, the Shatura Hydro-Electric Plant, and the Volkhov Hydro-Electric Plant – and that is all.

The shooting was random, without a precise plan and a calculation of the montage. Ivan Perestiani’s<sup>4</sup> method of directing without a script and Vertov’s shooting and editing a film without a plan have by now become equally discredited. Despite the many thousands of metres of shot film, you get the impression that Vertov is being required to edit the film out of some sort of garbage, and that he always emerges heroically from the situation. Improvisation in shooting and editing is impermissible. You need above all a plan, estimation and calculation.

Ten expeditions in different remote parts of the USSR shot almost nothing on 26,000 metres of film. Of the 26,000 metres of negative, only 1140 metres made it into the film.

To shoot a “close-up” of a man’s legs and a dog in the tundra, the northern forest, a few ears of corn, a snowy owl, to shoot rocky ground and the sea’s breakers from above, it was not necessary to make expeditions into the tundra, the taiga, the Black Sea, or the Caucasus. It is perfectly possible to shoot legs “close-up” in the snow and a panoramic shot of a forest (to give the impression of hundreds of miles) in [Moscow’s] Petrovsky Park in winter, and to shoot rocky ground from above there in summer. And in the film archive you can find lots of interesting sequences of the sea’s breakers, with the Caucasus mountains, with views of Turkestan and the tundra, with frozen seas, with ice and ice-breakers, and so on. In film art we do not fetishize the sequence.

The use of other people’s material from old newsreels and films means that the first part (the dance, Krupp, the priests, the Fascists, Mussolini, and so on) includes extracts from Nikolai Lebedev’s as yet unreleased film *Through Europe*,<sup>5</sup> and the entire film is full of sequences from *The Great Flight* (China),<sup>6</sup> *Sovkino-Journal* (Turkestan),<sup>7</sup> from A. Dubrovsky’s film *The Kremlin*,<sup>8</sup> and so on.

**The montage design.** Montage is not just the change (the splicing together) of sequences, but the succession of sequences and the link of movement in the sequences. In the emotional montage of the fiction film, the most important and difficult thing is not the physical tempo of the succession of pieces and the tempo in the movement of the sequences, but the abstract, psychological rhythm of the action in the script and the acting.

In *A Sixth Part of the World* the montage relies on the purely external, physical tempo of the succession of sequences and of motion in the sequences. The best-edited parts are the first and the sixth parts of the film, which are constructed on pure tempo.

The montage is ultra-American: torn, often cut up to the final degree. In the first part the pieces are cut up so small that it is even difficult to make out the shots.

A sharp montage device, the accelerating tempo of the interruptions, is not given dramatic meaning. Vertov likes to “play”, “to play the fop” with montage devices, without any purpose. He often uses “the device for the device’s sake”. The ever-accelerating interruptions in a number of short sequences with machines and with Stalin at the end of the film are poorly justified psychologically (both for the mass viewer and for the qualified viewer).

The type of montage in *A Sixth Part of the World* is literary montage. Literary montage is anti-cinematic, very elementary, and creates little impression.

The intertitle is a montage device (re-editing of films, thinking up a plot for shot footage, smoothing out the holes and jumps in a script with intertitles, using intertitles to fill gaps which are the fault of the cameraman or the laboratory – wastage or loss, and so forth).

The montage of *A Sixth Part of the World* is montage not of the sequences but of the intertitles. The intertitle is the most important thing; it is the backbone of the film. The plastic, dynamic intertitles are made to fill the entire screen. Randomly shot sequences cannot be edited together. The fact that export goods are on the move is not visible in

the poorly expressive sequences; it is presented in the form of intertitles – “along country roads”, “along mountain paths”, and “with caravans of camels”. The whole construction of the montage – the distribution of all the material among the different parts and the construction of individual parts – is based on words. After a second viewing everyone can see the white threads of the montage.

The basic montage device in *A Sixth Part of the World* is verbal contrast, enumeration and comparison.

The first part is built on the word “I see” (enumeration and comparison). Comparison – “the foxtrot” and “machines”, “Capital” and “slaves”, “cannon” and “toys”, and so on. Enumeration – “priests”, “Fascists”, “kings”, and so on.

The second part is built on climatic contrast, relying on the word “You...” (enumeration plus comparison): “I see you, Black Sea” and “... Baltic Sea”, “You, who bathe rams in the sea’s breakers” and “... in a stream”, “You in the villages of Dagestan” and “... in the Siberian taiga” and “... in the tundra”, “You on the Pechora River” and “... in the ocean”, “You with a bunch of grapes”... “You, eating rice” and “You, eating raw venison and dipping it into still warm blood”, “You, sucking your mother’s breast” and “You, a cheerful old man of a hundred”, “A mother, playing with a child” and “A child, playing with an Arctic fox he has caught”, and so on.

At first the third part, which is built on territorial contrast, relies on the words “from – to” – “from the Kremlin” – “to the Chinese border”, “from Matochkin Shar” – “to Bukhara”, “from Leningrad” – “to Novorossiisk”, “from the lighthouse beyond the Arctic Circle” – “to the Caucasus mountains”, “from a golden eagle in your hands...” – “to the diving sea birds of the icy Northern Ocean”, “from snowy owls” – “to seagulls on the Black Sea”, and so on.

Then the third part is built on the word “Your” (monotonous enumeration) – “Your... sheep, camels, deer, Arctic fox, martens, bear, oil, factories, wool, cotton...”, and so on.

The fourth part is built on the words “in the place where” – “in the place where... fruit are packed, ... cisterns and tanks... cows... cement... grain...”, and so on.

The fifth part is built on the enumeration of gods and godlets – Buddha, Mohammed, Christ, little wooden gods, and so on.

There is no coherence, connection, or intensification in the succession of sequences. The first part – “You” – divides into the comparison of bathing rams (in the sea and in a stream), of climate (in the villages and in the tundra and in the taiga), of environment (on the river and in the ocean), food (a bunch of grapes, rice, and venison), age (a baby and an old man), play (a playing mother and a child). The second part – “from – to” – is literally built on the famous lines of Pushkin. The endless enumerations of “Your” and “in the place where” in the third and fourth parts are just exhausting. Chance, chaos is not a system for editing a non-fiction film.

The intertitles (like “I see you...”) are in the sustained Whitman-Derzhavin style.<sup>9</sup> “Cannon” (*pushki*) and “toys” (*igrushki*) is a rhyme out of some children’s gag. The intertitles are not always grammatically correct.

The devices through which the montage has its effect are the naïve and bombastic

devices of the agit-film. ("You are all masters of the Soviet land," or "In your hands is a sixth part of the earth's globe.")

The best montage element – the ice and the ice-breaker at the end of the film – is done according to the finale of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*.

The anti-cinematic, elementary quality and the monotony of using one or two montage devices throughout the entire film have turned an "emotional hit" into emotional boredom.

It is surely neither necessary nor even possible to show *A Sixth Part of the World* abroad, since re-editing it to make it interesting and understandable for foreign viewers (with all those *I sees, Yours, from – tos, and in the place wheres*) is completely impossible.

**The working conditions.** According to Vertov himself the work on *A Sixth Part of the World* took place in very difficult conditions: chaos, the re-organization of the cinema enterprises, expeditions which did not get any funding, dreadful old equipment, and so on. Instead of the contracted time of eight months, work dragged on for nineteen months (the conclusions of the production meeting of the united Sovkino factories).

**The cost of the picture.** Despite the fact that the overall cut of the film at 1713 metres contains only 1140 metres of negative, 280.9 metres of fine grain positive material, and 292.1 metres of intertitles, the film cost, instead of 80,000 roubles, as had been contracted, around 130,000 roubles (with the usual 35 percent of overheads), making it run 60 percent over the estimated budget.

**Advertisement.** The self-advertisement of *A Sixth Part of the World* on the initiative of interested parties (according to the statement of Comrade Shvedchikov,<sup>10</sup> without the knowledge or the agreement of Sovkino) was exceptional in its scale, its tactlessness, and its tastelessness – "A world super-hit", the wager on a world film record, and so on. The unhealthy advertising of *A Sixth Part of the World* undoubtedly subverts the authority of Soviet film advertising.

**The press.** The fact that we have a film press but no film criticism, and that whoever wants to writes whatever he wants about film (these are now truisms), often leads to the immoderate and sometimes even ignorant under-estimation of many good Soviet films (for example *The Devil's Wheel*,<sup>11</sup> *The Traitor*,<sup>12</sup> *Bed and Sofa*,<sup>13</sup> and so on) and to the immoderate over-estimation of weak films (for example, *Namus*<sup>14</sup> or *A Sixth Part of the World*).

Chance phrases with little authority, to the effect that *A Sixth Part of the World* is, if you please, "a revolution in world cinema", or that it, as it were, rubs noses with the best pictures by Griffith, Chaplin, and Ingram, have, thanks to this unhealthy advertising, grown to a monstrous scale. All the critics and reviewers have praised it, but no one has argued the case. Many people have spoken but little has been proved. Not even a single weak attempt has been made at the political, artistic, or technical analysis of *A Sixth Part of the World*. Nothing has been said except trans-rational and sometimes irrational definitions like "music", "an epic poem", "verse", "a symphony of facts", or "emotion in action". A lot has been written about the non-fiction film *A Sixth Part of the World*, for the simple reason that you can write about it even if you know and understand nothing about cinema.

Soviet film criticism, in order to educate the viewer and influence film production, to

push Soviet film culture forward, and to make artistic policy in cinema, must provide, above all, a correct assessment of Soviet films, must create in the viewer and the production worker reliable notions of the character, the aim, and the scale of films. Our dilettante film critics have clumsily, over several years, without any proof, just because of a certain bad kind of inertia, created a legend that Vertov is being "stolen from" by all directors, almost including Sergei Eisenstein, and have, over several months, immoderately over-estimated *A Sixth Part of the World*. Dziga Vertov has always exaggerated in his public statements that he is "persecuted" and a "victim", but this time he has greatly over-estimated the power of the press (as he himself proudly says, 50 positive reviews). One has to say bluntly that our film press, by making such a fuss these last several months, has created an unhealthy atmosphere around *A Sixth Part of the World*, and has created sufficient psychological conditions for the unpleasant and unnecessary "incident" that was the enforced dismissal of Vertov by the Board of Sovkino. The kind of unhealthy and unfounded ballyhoo in the press that surrounded *A Sixth Part of the World* undermines the authority of Soviet film criticism among the broad mass of viewers.

**The public assessment.** The broad public praised in essence not the film *A Sixth Part of the World*, but our country and a sixth part of the world.

At public showings the picture played to the sound of applause. In the main they were applauding the double and triple exposures, which were technically wretched (different densities) and not psychologically justified, and the absolutely simple cartoon trick with packing the fruit. Besides that, it often turned out that cameramen were applauding their own footage, which had gotten into the film by chance. It wasn't the elementary and monotonous montage that created the emotional atmosphere at the public showings, but the deafening roar of the jazz band, which caused everyone to feel almost like a horse in a circus arena prancing to the sound of a brass band.

The discussion showing at the ARK was very tense. A large number of *kinocs* and their supporters in the hall kicked up an incessant din at every word of the speaker who criticized the film and loudly applauded every word of praise from any speaker. A number of film people (comrades Barshak, Potemkin, Paushkin, Sokolov, and others) criticized the film (the preponderance of backward peoples over the industrial centre, the one-sided representation of commodity circulation, the misuse of intertitles, the "montage of intertitles", and so on). The only virtue the supporters of the film could advance was the fact that it can serve as a primer for agit-prop work. If you use a laboratory and complex method of study, then not only *A Sixth Part of the World* but any street or factory can be the object of study at political classes. The political aim of *A Sixth Part of the World* is quite muddled and imprecise.

At the production meeting of the united Sovkino factories, after Vertov's speech, a whole series of speakers (the lecturers, comrades Veremienko<sup>15</sup> and Malinin, and the respondents, comrades Room,<sup>16</sup> Sheffer,<sup>17</sup> Kuznetsov, and others) criticized the film with regard to the Kino-Eye and newsreel method, its political aim, its technical design, the montage, the intertitles, the organizational and financial aspects of the film's production, and so on.

**Commercial success.** According to early attendance figures *A Sixth Part of the World* was not commercially successful. Instead of the 12-13 thousand roubles for 5-6 days exhibition of an average film (like *Namus*), *A Sixth Part of the World* in 6 days, including two public holidays, New Year's Day and Sunday, took only 8.5 thousand roubles in the First Goskino Theatre and 6.5 thousand in the Malaia Dmitrovka cinema. The film was released in the most auspicious circumstances. The films that were released before it were bad, and the film that was on at the same time was *True Friends*, with Pat and Patachon,<sup>18</sup> which has been shown several times in cinemas in the centre and the suburbs in the last two years. Besides this, a large part of the audience had been taken in by the large amount of advertising, the ballyhoo, and the press, and went, especially in the first days, expecting to see a plotted fiction film.

**Dziga Vertov's path.** Vertov as a filmmaker is better and greater than his world film record *A Sixth Part of the World*. His path as an innovator in the past (*Kino-Pravda* and *Kino-Eye*) is more significant than all the unfounded praise of *A Sixth Part of the World* in the film press.

After all the discussion of *A Sixth Part of the World*, Vertov should, as a master, draw several conclusions for his future work.

Even though Vertov has now been dismissed from the studio, of course he should be working, and of course he will be working.

## A Letter to the Editor

Dziga Vertov, "Pismo v redaktsiiu", *Kino-front*, no. 4, 1927, p. 32

Ippolit Sokolov's article about *A Sixth Part of the World*, which appeared in issue 2 of the ARK journal, requires not so much discussion as refutation.

1) The information about the cost of the film is incorrect. Comrade Sokolov indicates not the cost of a single film but the total cost of six films: two full-length films (*A Sixth Part of the World* and *Man with a Movie Camera*) and four mid-length films (*Furs*, *Flax*, *Fishing*, and *Gut Production*),<sup>19</sup> not to mention the ethnographic films (*The Pechora River*, *The Crimea*, *Novaya Zemlya*, and so on)<sup>20</sup> which are ready for montage (from the same material), and some short films on which production has started, such as "the tractor", "grain",<sup>21</sup> and so on.

I quote from the document received by the Goskino liquidation commission from the former head of production at Kultkino.

"All the expenses for the expeditions and the production of the film *A Sixth Part of the World* should be apportioned to six films: *A Sixth Part of the World*, *Man with a Movie Camera*, *Furs*, *Flax*, *Fishing*, and *Gut Production*, approximately in proportion with their length, since the nature of the work on all the films, according to the conditions of production, was identical."

2) When he informs us that ten expeditions in various distant parts of the USSR shot 26,000 metres of film, Comrade Sokolov fails to mention the fact that I was contrac-

tually obliged to shoot 20,000 of them, and that they were shot not for a single film, but in the first place for the six films mentioned above, and in the second place for adding to the stock of newsreel footage.

3) Speaking about the use of other people's material, Ippolit Sokolov uses incorrect data: we took nothing from the *Sovkino-Journal, Turkestan*. There is no such film as Dubrovsky's *The Kremlin*. As for the film *Through Europe*, this film was compiled out of material shot according to my instructions for *A Sixth Part of the World* (funded and commissioned by the State Trading Organization).

4) Ippolit Sokolov's conclusion that *A Sixth Part of the World* was compiled according to its intertitles is also incorrect. The intertitles (or, more precisely, the "word-theme" to *A Sixth Part of the World*) were planned from the already edited film. All the people who participated in the making of the film and all the witnesses of my work can confirm this.

Ippolit Sokolov's unwillingness, or rather his inability, to understand the structure of *A Sixth Part of the World* should cause no surprise: a specialist in the study of the lace on Mary Pickford's knickers<sup>22</sup> is absolutely not required to understand anything about the process of constructing a non-fiction film.

5) The malicious gossip about some sort of staged sequences, "the distortion of the facts", the montage of the film without a plan, and so on, should be counted among the shortcomings of an over-zealous "Sovkino critic", and certainly not among those of the film.

In conclusion, I would ask all genuine friends of Soviet non-fiction film not to put particular trust in the supporters of actorly cinema, when these latter hypocritically take on the role of "guardians" of newsreel (non-fiction) films.

Dziga Vertov

Moscow, 16 February 1927

### **A Letter to the Editor**

*Ippolit Sokolov, "Pismo v redaktsiiu", Kino-front, nos. 7-8, 1927, pp. 31-32*

Respected Comrade Editor!

In his Letter to the Editor, Vertov has attempted to repudiate not my article about *A Sixth Part of the World*, but the figures and facts of his work. Besides this, Vertov, despite his own insistence, could not refrain from discussing my article, although he could find no objection to my method of analysis and my arguments.

In my "attempt at an extended review", I tried, calmly and exhaustively, with a large number of facts and examples, to prove that:

1. in principle the Kino-Eye method is a mixture of the methods of the scientific and the fiction film and that

2. *A Sixth Part of the World* is not a "revolution in world cinema", as the unhealthy advertising and self-advertising tried to persuade the viewer and the production worker, and that

3. with regard to production *A Sixth Part of the World* is an expensive film: in non-fiction film *A Sixth Part of the World* is what *The Decembrists*<sup>23</sup> is among feature films.

Of course Vertov is very unhappy that I have not senselessly repeated that his film is a "revolution in world cinema".

#### In repudiation of a "repudiation"

1. I took the sum of 130,000 roubles (in round figures) as the cost of *A Sixth Part of the World* not out of thin air, but from a speech by the special production commission at the production meeting of the united Sovkino factories (the speaker was Comrade Malinin).

Vertov in his "repudiation" purposely does not write how much *A Sixth Part of the World* did cost. A few medium-length films of views (*Fishing, Flax, and Gut Production*) shot along the way, and some short films (*Novaya Zemlya, The Komi Region, The Crimea, Dagestan, and Bukhara*),<sup>24</sup> of which some are lying in pieces on shelves, others are being worked on and are unfinished, and which cannot be assessed in the technical, scientific, and commercial sense, and one full-length film, *Man with a Movie Camera*, which does not exist at all yet, cannot significantly diminish the large sum of 130,000 roubles.

Taking the usual production cost of a metre of usable negative, all the medium-length view films and the short films, with a total length of 4,000 metres (approximately), should have cost 16,000 roubles, or, as a maximum, 30,000 roubles. *Michurin's Selection Garden or The Artificial Breeding of Queen Bees* by B. Svetozarov,<sup>25</sup> which can be taken as models of the construction of a serious scientific film, cost 3-4 roubles per metre of usable negative.

It is quite wrong if the Goskino liquidation commission wants to write off 130,000 roubles on a series of medium-length and short films shot along the way "approximately in proportion with their length". This is the obvious cinematic illiteracy of book-keepers. Yes, "the nature of the work on all the films, according to the conditions of production, was identical", but the aim and the purpose of the work was utterly different. What can be spent on an expensive hit cannot be spent on a cheap film of views.

A production cost for one metre of negative of 100 roubles is a monstrous figure for a non-fiction film for the present day. The production cost of one metre for feature films begins at 3 roubles, normally hovers around 25-30 roubles, and rarely reaches 80 roubles (see my article about cinema economics in *Kino-front*, no. 7-8, 1926). If you compare the cost of fiction and non-fiction film, *A Sixth Part of the World* does not have the usual 30 percent of expenditure on actors and sets, and consequently does nevertheless cost 130,000 roubles. In a non-fiction film, the production cost of a single metre of negative cannot approach the records set by "chefs-d'oeuvre" of feature film-making like that triumph of the tailor's art *The Decembrists*.

2. What was shot was 26,000 metres. For some reason the contract said 20,000 metres had to be shot. The total length of useable negative is approximately 4,000 metres in the opinion of the editors I asked. Wastage, outtakes, and useless bits left over come to 22,000 metres of film, or more than 500 percent of the usable material. If

for a feature a proportion of 1:3 wasted material is now considered normal, then for a scientific film there should be considerably less waste. The waste incurred in shooting and editing on *Michurin's Selection Garden* or *The Artificial Breeding of Queen Bees* is only 5 percent of shot film. Of course, we have to prefer a wastage rate of 5 percent to one of 500 percent.

Vertov's Kino-Eye method rejects shooting according to a precise preliminary plan. Material shot without a precise plan cannot have a purposeful aim and a screen value. Shooting without a plan is uneconomic. There is no point in concealing your economic inefficiency with the lofty principles of *kinoculism*.

3. Although 26,000 metres were shot for *A Sixth Part of the World*, Vertov also had to use material from other people's films. In his letter Vertov denies the use of other people's material. First of all, he denies the existence of Dubrovsky's film. Maybe he also denies the existence of A.M. Dubrovsky himself? Nevertheless, the effective shot of the Kremlin by night was shot by the director Dubrovsky for the film *October in Everyday Life*,<sup>26</sup> at 3:00 A.M. on 7 November 1925. Vertov goes on to say that nothing was taken from *Sovkino-Journal*. The fine sequences of a canal filling with water, of the sandy desert, of a meeting of Kirghiz, and, it seems, of playing goat polo, were taken from V.L. Stepanov's film *Kazakhstan*, and besides, we all saw a canal filling with water in *Sovkino-Journal* even earlier, in August or September of last year. Then, N.A. Lebedev could not have filmed abroad according to Vertov's instructions those sequences which he simply bought for his film *Through Europe*. Let Nikolai Lebedev himself in his Letter to the Editor defend his author's rights to the film *Through Europe*. Finally – one characteristic detail – in the *kinocs'* non-fiction film there is a sequence from Karin's fiction film *Through Iron and Blood*,<sup>27</sup> in which the actors Pankryshev and Lessing are walking along. It would be interesting to know what further objection Vertov might make to that point.

#### For discussion purposes

1. In *A Sixth Part of the World* the basic montage device is the intertitle. Without the intertitles the sequences have no meaning and no link. But I did not deny the fact that – as always happens and with everyone – first the montage pieces were spliced together and then the intertitles were prepared and inserted.

2. The Kino-Eye method in words is “life caught unawares”, no stagings. But in fact the Kino-Eye method is deprived of the features of the documentary and the record of events. In *A Sixth Part of the World* there is undoubtedly staging (surely nobody would suggest that the foxtrot and “renewal of woman” are not staged?). I am absolutely not against staging in a scientific film; on the contrary, I am even in favour of staging. With the present state of the technology for shooting a film, it is almost impossible to shoot a scientific (chronicle, view, or special) film without staging. Can you really film any phenomenon or event with analytical editing without repetition? Every repetition or adaptation of an event or movement for the filming at the request of the cameraman is, of course, a staging, even when it is called “organizing the filming”.

3. The sequences were distorted in the montage by the free composition of the film. The sequences in the montage with the emotional intertitles signified something different from what they in fact were.

4. The most important thing is that in terms of principle the method of *A Sixth Part of the World* is now definitively discredited.

*A Sixth Part of the World* is not a lofty specimen of the non-fiction film, but a very low specimen of art-cinema.

After the first scientific films – Vsevolod Pudovkin's *The Mechanics of the Brain*<sup>28</sup> on the one hand, and Zheliabuzhsky's *Through the Mountains and Glaciers of Svanetia*<sup>29</sup> on the other – the Soviet non-fiction film could not have and did not take the path of *A Sixth Part of the World*. The best non-fiction films, *Michurin's Selection Garden* and *The Artificial Breeding of Queen Bees*, by B. Svetozarov, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*,<sup>30</sup> by Esfir Shub, or even *Moscow*,<sup>31</sup> by the *kinocs* Kaufman and Kopalín, have been made according to principles that are completely opposed to those of *A Sixth Part of the World*. These films are made not only well but both cheaply and quickly.

Struggling against Naturalism, I was opposed to the introduction of the methods of scientific film into film art in the form of so called “scientific-artistic films” (in a series of articles and speeches at discussions at the ARK and in my book *Kinostsenarii* [The Film Script]).

Struggling against the harmful “entertainment factor” in scientific films, I am opposed to the introduction of the methods of artistic films into scientific films (news-reel, geographical, ethnographical, and special films).

You must not mix the methods of science and art, the methods of scientific and artistic cinema.

On the film front we must struggle against all unhealthy eclecticism.

### The personal aspect

1. Vertov saw in my very restrained article “malicious gossip about some sort of staged sequences, the distortion of the facts, the montage of the film without a plan, and so on”, but he permitted himself to use abusive language (“an over-zealous Sovkino critic” and “hypocritically”).

2. Vertov called me “a specialist in the study of the lace on Mary Pickford's knickers”. I personally have never written either about lace or about the knickers of “film stars”. But on the other hand Vertov himself in his articles and declarations has been talking obsessively for years about the knickers of “film stars”. For a long time he was known mainly for his “knickers-prima donna” theory of film art. If, working as he does in essence on the Left wing of artistic cinema, he reduces all film art, with little profundity, to the knickers of “film stars”, then that is not his fault but his misfortune.

3. Taking into account the irritated state of a director who has been dismissed by Sovkino, one might not take offence at the expression “Sovkino critic”. There is nothing bad about my being simultaneously a Soviet film journalist and a consultant for the united Sovkino factories. But what is unconscientious is the fact that Vertov, in

his desire to defame me as a film critic, has without any foundation linked my negative opinion of his film with my work in Sovkino (“counted among the shortcomings of an over-zealous Sovkino critic”), although he himself knew full well that there is no connection.

My principled point of view about *A Sixth Part of the World* was determined many months before my work in Sovkino; my negative attitude to the “world film record” of *A Sixth Part of the World* took shape five minutes after the first public showing in the autumn of last year (the literal accuracy of my expression can be confirmed by a whole series of filmmakers with whom I exchanged opinions). I have more than once expressed my opinion about the film in conversation, and even in lively personal discussions with Vertov and one other *kinoc* (whose name I do not remember), who at that time were making repeated visits to editorial boards, and, besides that, at a discussion at the ARK. In my article and at the production meeting I repeated what I have always said about *A Sixth Part of the World*. One should make refutations or objections of substance, and not have recourse in one’s impotent malice to unideological and unethical forms of struggle – to the dissemination of gossip.

One should not polemicize with any criticism one gets by means of insinuations.

Ippolit Sokolov

17 March 1927

### A Letter to the Editor

Nikolai Lebedev, “Pismo v redaktsiiu”, *Kino-front*, nos. 7-8, 1927, p. 32

In his “Letter to the Editor” (*Kino-front*, no. 4, 1927), Dziga Vertov gives the following information about the film *Through Europe*.

“This film was compiled out of material shot according to my instructions for *A Sixth Part of the World* (funded and commissioned by the State Trading Organization).”

I hereby announce that this information does not correspond to the facts.

*Through Europe* was shot by me as an independent newsreel film according to my plan, approved by Kultkino and funded by them.

I never took on any obligations with regard to the State Trading Organization or to Vertov.

The appearance of a whole series of bits of this film in *A Sixth Part of the World* was completely unexpected for me, and can be put down exclusively to Vertov’s unceremonial approach and to the imperfect state of Soviet legislation in the area of cinematic plagiarism.

With Communist greetings.

Nikolai Lebedev

Batum

28 March 1927

Visual Pun



The enraged wolf from *A Sixth Part of the World* which a *Nepwoman* is shown cautiously fondling is stuffed. Suspended class struggle, or just an innocuous film attraction? Vertov was fond of images frozen in mid-movement. This same stuffed wolf is shown again (without the woman) in *Man with a Movie Camera*.

## Notes

1. A discussion piece. (*"Kino-front" editor's note*)  
Ippolit Sokolov (1902-1937), critic, journalist, screenwriter, and poet. Author of many books about cinema. One of Vertov's sworn enemies.
2. The intertitles are quotes from memory. (*Sokolov's note*)
3. Proverbial literary reference to some bad artist who used this caption to save his unconvincing picture of a lion.
4. Perestiani inserted improvised sequences in his fiction film *Red Imps* (*Krasnye diavoliata*, 1923).
5. *Po Evrope* (1926), travel film by Nikolai Lebedev.
6. *Velikii perelet* (1926), travel film by Vladimir Shneiderov.
7. *Sovkino-Zhurnal*, the newsreel begun in 1925.
8. Aleksandr Dubrovsky (1899-1940), director and screenwriter. The date of the film Sokolov refers to, *Kreml*, is unknown.
9. Gavriila Derzhavin (1743-1816), Russian poet known for his lofty odes.
10. Konstantin Shvedchikov (1884-1952), high-ranking official in the Russian film industry, in 1926-29 head of the board of directors of Sovkino.
11. *Chertovo koleso* (Grigory Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, 1926).
12. *Predatel* (Abram Room, 1926).
13. *Tretia Meschanskaia* (Abram Room, 1927).
14. *Namus* (Amo Bek-Nazarov, 1926).
15. Mikhail Veremienko, literary figure, a functionary with the Department of Political Education (Politprosvet).
16. Film director Abram Room (1894-1976).
17. Leo Sheffer (1894-1987), director and screenwriter.
18. Screen names of popular Danish film comedians Carl Schenstrøm and Harald Madsen (known as Long and Short in the US). *Vernye družia*, whose English translation is *True Friends*, is probably a Russian distribution title for their film *Vore venner vinter* (*Our Friends' Winter*), 1923.
19. *Furs: Pushmina; Flax: Len* (1927): educational films by Ilya Kopalín; *Fishing: Rybolovstvo*, possibly the documentary short by Mikhail Kaufman also known as *Malorossiisk* (1927); *Gut Production: Proizvodstvo kishok*, an educational short by Elizaveta Svilova.
20. *Pechora; Krym; Novaya Zemlia* (1927).
21. Proposed working titles for films.
22. A reference to Sokolov's series of booklets on American film stars.
23. *Dekabristy* (1926), costume film by Aleksandr Ivanovsky.
24. *The Komi Region: Oblast Komi; Dagestan* (1927), a travel short by Iakov Tolchan and Petr Zotov; *Bukhara* (1927), documentary short photographed by Yakov Tolchan and edited by Elizaveta Svilova.
25. Boris Svetozarov (1892-1968), director, made fiction and non-fiction films, among the latter *Michurin's Selection Garden* (*Michurinskii pitomnik*) and *The Artificial Breeding of Queen Bees* (*Iskusstvennoe razvedenie pchelinykh matok*), both 1926.
26. *Oktiabr v bytu*: possibly another title for Aleksandr Dubrovsky's film *Life as It Is* (*Zhizn kak ona est*, 1925).
27. *Zhelezom i kroviiu* (Vladimir Karin, 1926).
28. Pudovkin's feature-length *Mekhanika golovnogo mozga* was shot in 1926.
29. Here Sokolov mistakenly blends two films, both made by Yuri Zheliabuzhsky in 1926: *Through the Mountains and Glaciers of the Caucasus* (*Po goram i lednikam Kavkaza*) and *Svanetia* (*Svanetiia*).
30. *Padenie Dinastii Romanovykh* (1927).
31. *Moskva* (1926), the documentary feature by Mikhail Kaufman and Ilya Kopalín.

## WHERE IS THIS FILM?



### Our School of Filmmaking

Izmail Urazov, "Nasha shkola kino", *Sovetskii ekran*, no. 42, 1926, p. 1

Campaigns can be waged gradually, without the reader noticing. We made no attempt to conceal the fact that we were waging a campaign for *A Sixth Part of the World*, for this unique film. We published articles about it, we printed photographs, we reminded readers about this film with our covers. We are not afraid to admit: "Yes, it was a campaign."

And just as in its time the campaign raised by the film press for *Battleship Potemkin*, in the days when people were mistrustful of the film, when the "authority" of the West and America, which *had* recognized the film, had had no effect on our viewers, had a substantial effect in promoting the film, so now we can note the first results of the struggle of *Pravda* and *Sovetskii ekran* for *A Sixth Part of the World's* right to life.

Up until now none of the works of the *kinocs* have reached the screen. The viewer has just not known about them. They were watched by film specialists who learned a lot from them, sometimes took more than just devices from them, and then these works – for eight years! – were placed on the shelves.

History was delivered to the archives.

And yet the works of the *kinocs* and their leader Dziga Vertov, which are exceptional in their mastery, are also exceptional in their methods, their approach, and their results.

At the base of all their works lie facts, and only facts. Not one of the films contains filmed staged elements.

This has frightened the exhibitors. "Newsreel." But Vertov's films are "newsreel" only for those who know their articles about their working methods but haven't seen their films. Facts lose nothing from the fact that they have not been altered; their "factual" quality even grows stronger, but thanks to the *kinocs'* skill, they stun and enthrall you: thanks to the strong emotion, they force you to be moved. There is a reason why *A Sixth Part of the World* has the subtitle: "A revolutionary-emotional hit".

If they saw *A Sixth Part of the World* in the West, the name of Vertov and the *kinocs* would become louder than the names of the renowned world directors, and books would be written about the film.

For the West it would be a revolution in cinema. Perhaps it would be the same for us. And this school, which is precisely that – a school, they would call the Russian School.

It is difficult not to write about *A Sixth Part of the World* with the same elation with which you watch the film. But a leading article must be businesslike: our task is to note the date of the film's victory, the victory of a film which could be created only in our Soviet land, the victory of this real film of ours.

A showing of *A Sixth Part of the World* was arranged on 6 October. A major role in this was played by the press, something we should be proud of. A role in ensuring that it was a large-scale showing, and, finally, an “open” one.

Now the first film in this group will reach the screen. It cannot fail to do so after the six parts were shown to the accompaniment of applause, in the way that in cinemas films have a musical accompaniment. The applause came from workers and writers, students of the Worker Faculty and filmmakers, Party workers and Red Army men.

The *kinocs* will get the opportunity to speak in a loud voice, and the viewer will see the romance, the all-conquering romance of facts, the poetry and heroism of labour, and the exciting emotion of life, truth, and the present day.

The majority of so-called “feature films” amuse and entertain.

The lofty emotion of facts in *A Sixth Part of the World* cannot fail to move people, cannot fail to force the worker viewer to feel that he too is a small part of *A Sixth Part of the World*, cannot fail to throw the viewer out of his calm seat and onto the screen.

### **A New Victory for Soviet Cinema**

V[ladimir] Blium, “*Novaia pobeda Sovetskogo kino*”, *Zhizn iskusstva*, no. 44, 1926

The Soviet cinema has made another major contribution to world cinema. This contention does not sound so “brazen” if we remind ourselves that 90 percent of world cinema is made up of piles of stupidity and vulgarity, that cinematic-theatrical rubbish which the cigarette girls and young ladies of all countries call the “art” film.

If this film gets into the foreign market then it will make no less an impression there than *Battleship Potemkin*. But will *A Sixth Part of the World* get into the film market at all? – that is still under question. Does the reader remember the story of the “fall and rise” of *Battleship Potemkin*? This is a very typical story, and it will do no harm to remind the appropriate people of it once more here.

When it was shown publicly, *Potemkin* had an enormous, elemental success. But the little people running our cinema business were embarrassed, and tried, in their press and their organizations, to dull this success through discussions and criticism. They were aided in this by our film traders, who confess relatively frankly that the “ballerina’s knickers” are more interesting for them (from the point of view of profit) than good “ideological” films of this kind. *Battleship Potemkin* was hidden away. And it was only when, a few months later, *Pravda* waged a systematic campaign for *Potemkin*, and started asking from issue to issue “Where is *Potemkin*? Why aren’t they showing *Potemkin*?”, that Sovkino was reluctantly forced to release into the market this remarkable work of Soviet and world cinema.

*A Sixth Part of the World* is being released in what seem to be more favourable circumstances. In the first place, the experience with *Potemkin* ought to have taught the film people something. And besides, this time, our film press, which is in noticeably ruder health recently, has (headed by the newspaper *Kino*) greeted the new film with

rapture. And finally, the trading organs, pinched by financial cutbacks, are forced merely to lick their lips at the “ballerina’s knickers”, blowing in the wind abroad, and, whether they like it or not, to squeeze everything they can out of any Soviet film... And still there is no certainty that *A Sixth Part of the World* will not be buried alive!

The film was made to a commission from the State Trading Organization. This organization had the happy idea of filming Soviet export opportunities for advertising purposes. The hot-blooded *kinocs* seized upon this task with a passion – and instead of producing a businesslike documentary “report”, they presented their client with a whole film poem, which was simultaneously stirring (“propagandist” in the best sense of the word) and documentary. It is not a catalogue but a bill of fare for the State Trading Organization’s foreign clients. And it is greatly to the honour of the client that it understood that *A Sixth Part of the World* is an immeasurably better advertisement for the State Trading Organization than the most detailed bill of fare – but our people do not always understand this: the last analogous work by the *kinocs*, *Stride, Soviet!*, came up against a lack of understanding on the part of the client (the Moscow Soviet) precisely because of the originality of its approach to fulfilling the task.

Throughout the six short parts Dziga Vertov uses vivid and broad cinematic “brush-strokes” to produce a picture of the enormous economic power and the pulsating economic and other construction going on in the “Sixth Part of the World” – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. To do this the artist does not need all the facts, only the most typical, vivid, and impressive ones, impressive precisely because, obviously, they are routine, mundane, “trivial”. The molecular process of our growth, which we only guess about from time to time from the results which sometimes make themselves felt, is here, in this magnificent film, held in the palm of our hands.

At the start there is an effective short “cinematic description” of the land of Capital – in the most general and condensed form. The second part “lists” the owners of the Soviet land, “in whose hands is a sixth part of the world” – mainly the national minorities on the periphery (as the most typical in respect to export). After this there are “specimens” of their wealth.

The fourth part is devoted to the movement of this wealth. Then the “movement theme” becomes more precise and detailed, and the viewer sees how “in the country of the dictatorship of the proletariat even the people who still live according to a patriarchal way of life are being drawn into the construction of Socialism through the branches of State Trade” (three intertitles which cover a series of documentary shots). In the final part the dynamism of the film reaches its apogee. Here the New is presented in contrast with the Old which is passing away, and the pledge of victory is clearly brought to the fore: “the general line of our construction” – “we want to produce not only the tractors, but also the machines that produce the tractors ourselves” (three intertitles).

As the viewer sees, a film constructed in this way cannot fail to be interesting, and engaging, even for a viewer who is not Socialistically minded.

The high photographic technique, the skill in filling and lighting the frames, the careful planning and the fitting together of the sequences, the purposeful reflexology of the montage, the elevated mood of the whole film – all these qualities make *A Sixth Part of the World* an outstanding phenomenon of world cinema.

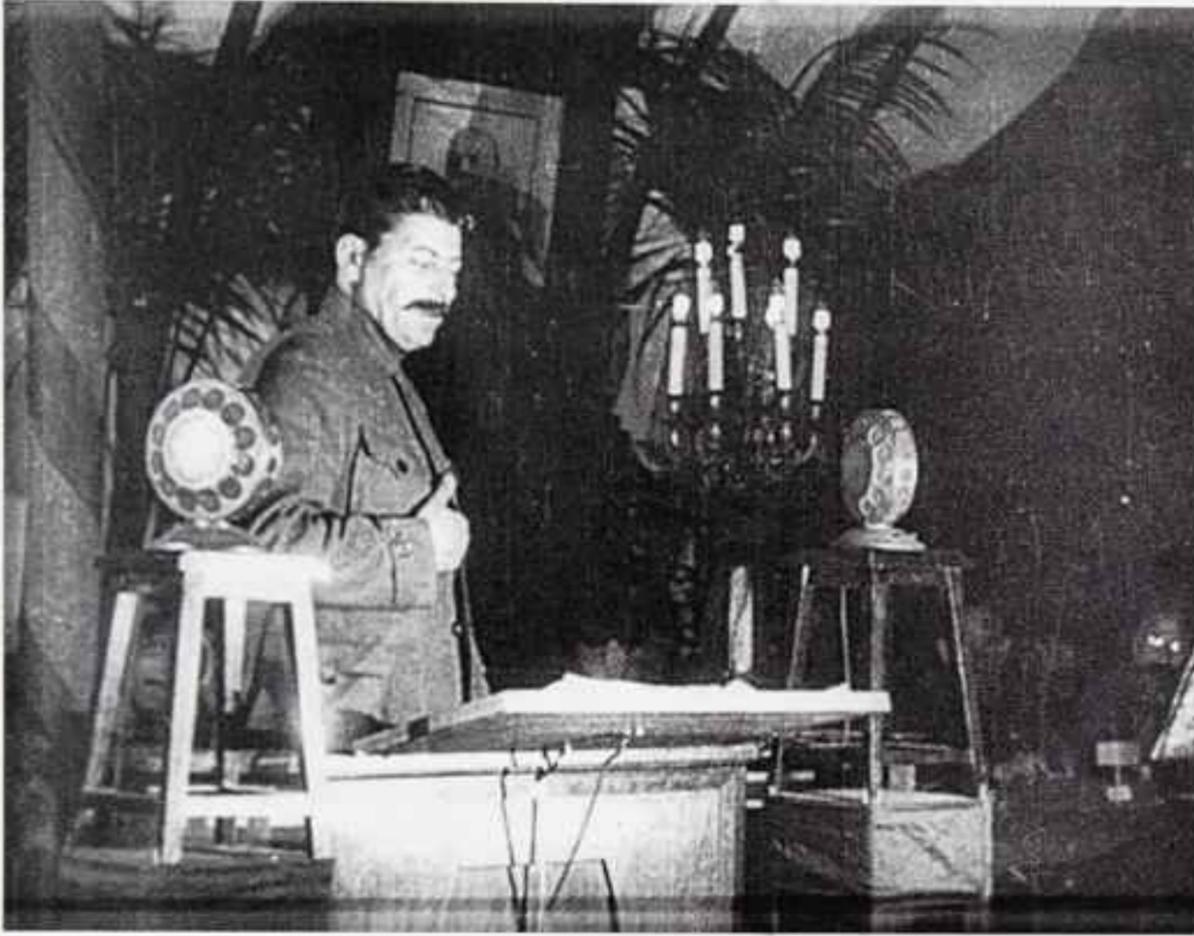
Taken separately, the intertitles provide a sort of skeleton for this film-poem. But their general “lyrical”, uplifting tone makes them comprehensible only when the shots are shown. We are used to intertitles “explaining” the shots; here everything is the other way round, and this is really valuable, since it returns film art to its real path, to the “non-fiction” film.

The “non-fiction” film has won a brilliant victory. Dziga Vertov has this time given an undoubted model of a non-fiction artistic film (not “newsreel”!).

This is all the more timely, since recently the front of our “Hollywoodizers” has begun to lose its footing. In the first place, each of the Soviet films they release is worse than the one before, and they have now sunk to such depths of vulgarity as *The Traitor*. And secondly, in the search for types, they more and more often force their actors... to grow beards – this is symptomatic!

But Vertov has made another excellent work, *Kino-Eye*, which two years ago *was not released on to the market* by our film exhibitors. *Where is this film?*

Stalin Speaks, Vertov Shows



Rather than promoting Soviet goods abroad, as commissioned by the State Trading Organization, *A Sixth Part of the World* was trading in ideologies. The last section of the film is structured around quotations from Stalin's speech, and is addressed not to foreign importers, but to foreign workers and Communists.

## VERTOV IS FIRED FROM SOVKINO



### A Letter to the Editor

*Dziga Vertov, "Pismo v redaktsiiu", RGALI 2091-2-165*

On 13 September [1926] at a discussion at the House of the Press (*Dom pechati*), I was stunned to hear the statement by Comrade Trainin<sup>1</sup> that, in the first place: Vertov is in charge of *Sovkino-Journal*;<sup>2</sup> in the second place: Vertov has released two issues of *Sovkino-Journal*, and nothing has changed for the better; in the third place: I, Trainin, think that nothing will come of having him in charge, and we should appoint a new manager.

Since this statement was made before an audience of representatives of the press, I must demand that all newspapers print the following information: in the first place: I have never been in charge and am not now in charge of issues of *Sovkino-Journal*, and consequently, in the second place: I know nothing at all about my having released two issues of *Sovkino-Journal*; in the third place: I do not understand how I can be removed from a post which I have not yet taken on, which I am only now being asked to take on.

As far as I know, before a man is hanged, he is asked to stand on a chair or a stool. Then the stool is pulled out from under his feet.

Politely. Nicely.

It is not that easy to hang me, but I have to ask why Comrade Trainin is opening his "perspectives" so far into the future.

I am not an enemy of Comrade Trainin.

And I am not his rival for the publication of *Sovkino-Journal*.

If I see, on the part of Comrade Trainin, genuine counter-measures (without a rock concealed inside his shirt) for the improvement and expansion of the enterprise of making newsreels, I shall, of course, do all in my power to help this enterprise, which is so profoundly dear to me. For now, however, I have to *consider* the statement that has burst from the tongue of Comrade Trainin as a step in the opposite direction, as a serious *warning*.

REQUEST FOR OTHER NEWSPAPERS TO REPRINT.

D.V.

### A Letter to the Editor

*"Pismo v redaktsiiu", an open group letter to the Editorial Board of Pravda (1927)<sup>3</sup>*

On 4 January Comrade Trainin, a member of the Board of Sovkino, issued a directive for the dismissal from Sovkino of Comrade Vertov, the author of *Kino-Pravda*, the *Kino-*

*Eye* newsreel, and the films *Stride, Soviet!* and *A Sixth Part of the World*. The dismissal of Comrade Vertov is the final act in a struggle that has been waged for some time now against him and, which is almost as important, against newsreel in general, by the Sovkino Board. We affirm this as more or less outsiders on the basis of the utterly simple and irrefutable fact that there is no newsreel to be seen on Moscow screens, and that all the works of Comrade Vertov, for example, after their press previews disappear from cinematic horizons and from Moscow as a whole (or, at least, from the best cinemas in Moscow).

You can argue over the positions of principle which Comrade Vertov advances when he refutes "played" film as a whole; you can speak of the corrections which his works need; you can, after all, use any means to assess and establish the attitude of the viewer to these pictures. But what is indubitable is that none of the workers of Soviet cinema has so far produced newsreel that is better than that produced by Comrade Vertov. What is indubitable is that the principles which Comrade Vertov promotes are, with alterations, variations, and reservations, now being taken up and to a certain degree being put into practice by the leading directors of "played" films. What is indubitable is that films such as *Stride, Soviet!* and *A Sixth Part of the World*, for all the desire to hide them away, and for all the shortcomings that you can find in them, are nevertheless an achievement of our cinema which for incomprehensible reasons is being hidden from viewers. What is indubitable, finally, is the fact that Comrade Vertov, independently of those questionable principles which he places at the base of his work, is a leading worker in our cinema, who has moreover concentrated all his attention on an extremely important and extremely exposed sector of our cinema.

This worker, by the way, for reasons which remain utterly enigmatic, has for some time now (intentionally or unintentionally, this needs to be clarified) been placed in conditions which have absolutely deprived him of the capacity to do any productive work. The story of the struggle which has been waged against Comrade Vertov has included everything, starting with the fact that for years, "for reasons of fire safety" they would not let him have a room to work in at Sovkino, and ending with the false declarations which absolutely responsible Sovkino workers publicly made against him, and such "unexpected occurrences" as when they suddenly proposed to him "from above" that he give up everything he was doing and immediately leave Moscow on holiday.

We consider that the struggle which is being waged against Comrade Vertov has two sides: the first side consists of the struggle against Soviet newsreel, of which Comrade Vertov is a master, as a whole; the second side is a struggle against Comrade Vertov personally, and this side of the struggle has no practical motivations.

We consider both sides of the struggle to be questions that go beyond the competence of the department, and propose that the time has come for our society as a whole to get involved in this whole story and bring it to an end one way or another.

We propose to the Sovkino Board an arbitration investigation of the question of newsreel as a whole, and of the question of the dismissal of Comrade Vertov (who, by

the way, was supposed to be making a film for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution), about the practical and non-practical reasons for this dismissal, enlisting the involvement in this matter of representatives of Party, social, and professional organizations and representatives of the press, who have more than once but with relatively little success raised these questions in the pages of newspapers.

A. Zorich, Vl. Sarabianov, Mikhail Koltstov, V. Dubovsky, A. Zuev

“We the undersigned completely echo the opinions expressed in the letter to the Editorial Board by a group of political and newspaper workers, concerning the actions of Sovkino with regard to Comrade Vertov.” G. Boltiansky, S. Ermolinsky, A. Fevralsky, Kh. Khersonsky, Vs. Meyerhold

### **Why Dziga Vertov Has Been Dismissed from Sovkino**

*“Pochemu Dziga Vertov uvolen iz Sovkino”, Vecherniaia Moskva, 14 January 1927*

With regard to the dismissal of Dziga Vertov (the author of the films *Stride, Soviet!* and *A Sixth Part of the World*) from Sovkino, we asked them to explain to us the reason for the dismissal.

This is what Sovkino replied:

The Board considers that film is not only an art, but an industry, which requires a planned approach and strict financial accounting. Vertov did not stick to a plan, he worked without a script, and despite our repeated requests he did not provide either a script or a shooting plan, announcing that the “success” of *A Sixth Part of the World* allowed him to work without a script or plans. Vertov also put down his failure to present plans to his fear of being plagiarized by the people who copy everything he does.

Our experience with *A Sixth Part of the World* convinced the Sovkino Board even more of the imperative need for Vertov to work according to a plan. This film’s political semi-literacy and its high cost (the picture cost 130,000 roubles) can be put down to the fact that when work began on the film there was neither a thematic nor a financial plan. The loss which Sovkino will incur on *A Sixth Part of the World* will come to approximately 60-80,000 roubles. If this film had been made according to a plan it would have cost no more than 30-40,000 roubles.

*Stride, Soviet!*, a picture around which there has been a lot of fuss about its not being released and about this being a persecution of Vertov, was not accepted by the Moscow Soviet.

The Board of Sovkino, after a month and a half of negotiations with Vertov, was forced to set Vertov a condition: either he presented a plan for the filming of *Man with a Movie Camera*, or he could consider himself free of all obligations with regard to Sovkino.

Failure to accede to this demand has led to the dismissal of Dziga Vertov.

## How Much Did *A Sixth Part of the World* Cost?

"*Skolko stoila 'Shestaia chast mira'*", *Vechernee radio*, 15 January 1927

Moscow, 14 January (Our Correspondent). *Vechernee radio* (Evening radio) has already reported on the film *A Sixth Part of the World*, which aroused a lot of responses in the press. It turns out that the director of the film, Dziga Vertov, was dismissed from Sovkino at the time the film appeared. Reproaches rained down on Sovkino about this. Comrade Zorich wrote a satirical piece in the newspaper.

Sovkino has finally responded to the press reports. It turns out that the reasons for the dismissal were as follows: Vertov was working without a plan, thanks to which the film *A Sixth Part of the World* was very expensive to make. It cost 130 thousand roubles, whereas it could have been made for 30 thousand. The loss on the film ran to 60-80 thousand roubles. Sovkino therefore set a condition to Vertov that he either work to a plan or leave Sovkino. Vertov refused, and was dismissed.

## Dziga Vertov Refutes

*Dziga Vertov, "Dziga Vertov oprovergaet"*, *Nasha gazeta*, 19 January 1927

Dziga Vertov refutes the Sovkino announcement about the reasons for his dismissal.

1) The plan for the film *A Sixth Part of the World* was presented in good time, and was approved both by the Board of the State Trading Organization and by the Board of Kultkino. The financial plan was also presented and approved. A certain broadening of the theme was approved at a special meeting.

2) The accusation of refusing to present a plan (a script, a scheme) for *Man with a Movie Camera* is incorrect. The disagreement consisted only about whether to present the plan before the film material had been studied (that is, to present an invented plan, a preliminary content, a script), or, as I proposed, to present a plan once we had finished studying the film material (which is the only advisable approach, and which conforms to the strict system of our work on non-fiction film). This is obviously a case of fault-finding.

3) The sum of 130,000 roubles (Sovkino's calculations) or half of that sum (the State Trading Organization's calculations) should be proportionally divided into six parts, in accordance with the number of films shot for this sum: *A Sixth Part of the World*, *Man with a Movie Camera*, and four short films. If you calculate correctly, it makes 20-25,000 roubles for *A Sixth Part of the World*.

So as to justify my dismissal, they make a misplaced attempt to dump responsibility on me for the economic catastrophe that has struck Kultkino. Administrative and financial responsibility for the film expedition [for *A Sixth Part of the World*] was not entrusted to me. My responsibility was "direction" at a distance, ideological and production participation in filming in the most urgent places.

4) The announcement about the “political semi-literacy” of *A Sixth Part of the World* puts the Sovkino Board itself in an embarrassing position. In the first place, the picture was accepted by the Board of Sovkino. In the second place, Comrade Shvedchikov<sup>4</sup> expressed his positive opinion after a showing in the presence of a number of people. In the third place, the Board member Comrade Bliakhin<sup>5</sup> found the film politically correct, and even took upon himself the political defence of the film.

In conclusion, I express my sympathy that incorrect information from the member of the Sovkino Board Comrade Trainin is inevitably causing confusion both within the Board of Sovkino and with the Soviet public.

I simultaneously protest against the impending confiscation of the rushes for the film *Man with a Movie Camera* and other unfinished works.

### Notes

1. Ilya Trainin (1886-1949), journalist; in 1924-30 the head of the Repertkom (Repertoire Committee, in charge of political censorship of plays and films); during 1926-29 the head of the Sovkino film factory. Trainin was opposed to documentary cinema as such, which he considered useless and profitless, and was extremely hostile to Vertov. In January 1927 Trainin accused Vertov of overspending on *A Sixth Part of the World*, and in failing to provide the scenario for *Man with a Movie Camera* in the three days he was given to do so. This made Vertov accept an offer from VUFKU (the All-Ukrainian Photo-Cinema Directorate), and move to Kiev.
2. *Sovkino-Zhurnal*, the newsreel.
3. See the signatures at the end of the document. The co-signers (aside from Vsevolod Meyerhold, the famous theatre director) were *Pravda* journalists. *Pravda* refused to publish the letter. The refusal was motivated by the paper's policy not to interfere in specific administrative conflicts. The letter was published by Aleksandr Fevral'sky in *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 12, 1965, p. 65.
4. Konstantin Shvedchikov, Party functionary responsible for the Soviet film industry; in 1926-29 chairman of the Sovkino board of directors.
5. Pavel Bliakhin (1886-1961), Soviet writer.

## THE BATTLE CONTINUES



### Who Will Make Film Newsreel?

*Aleksandr Kurs,*<sup>1</sup> "Kto sdelaet kinokhroniku?", *Sovetskii ekran*, no. 32, 1926

Let other people answer this question. I want to speak about the work of Dziga Vertov.

Vertov is *Kino-Eye*, *Kino-Pravda*, and the *kinocs*. *Kino-Eye* is a little terrifying, and for some reason it reminds you of either a Masonic or a theosophical symbol. *Kino-Pravda* immediately makes you think of a newspaper supplement. The term *kinocs* is enigmatic and incomprehensible.

It is difficult to achieve recognition in Russia. That is where Vertov's eccentricities come from.

Vertov has made a mistake. Before the Revolution the public loved being dumbfounded by incomprehensible and unexpected things. This was Madame *Petite Bourgeoisie* with her nerves shot to ribbons.

The present-day public has different nerves and a different pace of life. You won't move them with shouting or enigmas. Vertov's theories have not won him attention. But Vertov's work is much more interesting than his theories.

Vertov wants to breach some Front, the *kinocs* are falling upon someone's final redoubt, *Kino-Eye* is building the barricades of kino-October – why frighten people when the situation is much simpler? Is it worth piling up barricades when the gates are wide open: please, come in and receive a commission from the State Trading Organization.

It's true that the State Trading Organization is not the public. But the public – the Soviet worker-peasant public – is frightened off by incomprehensible words. It therefore does not demand Vertov's works from Sovkino.

The situation is relatively simple. Vertov is a remarkable master of cinema. He is against art cinema, and therefore we shall not call him an artist, although he has more right to such a title than many other people.

His art is of a special kind. If we take our comparisons from another field of art, then we can say that Vertov's art occupies in cinema the same place that the art of journalism occupies in literature. Many people, it is true, will not believe that journalism is art. But I do not intend to draw up a Front on that account.

Practical Germans understand the situation. With regard to the film *The Face of Red Russia*,<sup>2</sup> shown in Berlin, the commercial newspaper *Film-Kurier* wrote: "This film poses once again the problem of cinematic journalism." The aforementioned film was constructed by a German film master from pieces of Soviet film newsreel.

Vertov is a constructor. He is a talented organizer of cinematic material, grabbed

by his journalist cameramen. He knows how to direct the cameras of his collaborators, and from the pieces of life gathered on film he makes a thing which penetrates through the eyes of viewers into their consciousness – and still deeper.

Vertov repudiates sets, a script, studios. This does not mean that in cinema we do not need sets, a script, or studios. It only means that for his, Vertov's, journalistic-cinematic art none of this is necessary.

But what is indisputable is that he is an artificer. He constructs his photographs artificially so that the viewer can see them as natural.

The viewer has already stopped seeing a train shot with the aim of showing that someone has gone somewhere. Vertov finishes one issue of his film journal with the roar of a train. To do so he puts the cameraman under the train, and the thousand-pound compartments roll over you, pouring into your eyes with the mad turning of the wheels. You sense terrible motion through Revolutionary Russia.

In order to make things and phenomena visible, Vertov dismembers them and creeps up on them from an unexpected angle.

The best use that can be made of photographic views is for people to look at them and say: I know this place, or I know these people. But they do not reveal to you the essence (either social or otherwise) of things in motion; they do not burst into you with ideas about streams of other life phenomena. Vertov does not produce postcard views, which are usually stuck with a glue which is apparently called montage glue. This passes itself off as film newsreel.

How many times have we seen crowds of people in pictures, one of whom is agitatedly moving his lips and waving his arms? From various signs we have recognized this as a meeting. And, seeing nothing new in it, we have felt miserable.

Vertov breaks the meeting into bits and glues into it fragments from old films from the life of the natives in the colonies. And he constructs the film in such a way that you see a stirring speech about the struggle against imperialism. Vertov shows the rhythm and the sounds of "The Internationale" being performed by an orchestra – by illuminating individual instruments and by the movement of the lips or the fingers of the musicians.

One of the *Lenin* issues of Vertov's *Kino-Pravda* sounds like the *Symphonie Pathétique*. It does not have the quality of a lachrymose photograph; it is constructed on a manly rhythm, and the intertitles in it are as dynamic and expressively emotional as its whole construction.

Vertov says that he made his *Lenin* issues of *Kino-Pravda* out of pieces that had been thrown out of the newsreel of Lenin's funeral. This is entirely possible. It confirms my thought about Vertov's cinematic journalism. You can also make a real work of journalistic art out of material which does not find room in the majority of our newspapers and journals.

Vertov is a master of the film-journal. Is this not what the public want to see under the name of film newsreel?

## Kino-Eye

*Dziga Vertov, excerpt from "Kino-Glaz", speech at a meeting of kinocs, January 1926, RGALI 2091-2-196*

Kino-Eye is not a cinema film, not a group of film workers, not some current in art (of Left or Right).

Kino-Eye is a gradually spreading movement for exerting influence through facts, against exerting influence through invention, however strong the impression created by the latter might be.

The situation of the church service, drunkenness, the sexual act, the hypnotic séance, the theatrical or kino-theatrical performance, really is a favourable situation for short-lived hypnosis and for long-term hypnosis, if they are "welded" systematically.

Kino-Eye was not called to life by the October Revolution for this.

When the curtain of religion has been torn down, when the pink fog of art is dissipated, and we are approaching life phenomena head-on, that is when "public prayer" ends and Kino-Eye begins.

We say that Kino-Eye is the documentary deciphering of the visible world.

We say that Kino-Eye is the establishment of a visual link between the workers of all countries on the basis of the exchange of facts, kino-documents captured by the film camera.

The clarity of the aim which Kino-Eye has set itself distinguishes all the works of the *kinocs* (the workers of Kino-Eye) from the works of the workers in Kino-Theatre.

No external imitations of *Kino-Pravda* with regard to the form and organization of the film material (*Strike, Potemkin*) will merge Kino-Eye with Kino-Theatre, since in the latter case it is not facts that are being organized, but discrete elements of the playing of the actors and directorial invention.

There are no *Goskino-Calendars*.

There are no twenty-three *Kino-Pravdas*.

There is no film *Kino-Eye*.

There are no films about the Moscow Soviet, the State Trading Organization, and so on. You just think there are.

There is the Kino-Eye movement,

there are the articles and public speeches of Kino-Eye,

there is the constant scientific and experimental work of Kino-Eye,

but there are no individual films,

there are no fulfilled commissions,

there is the stubborn capturing and organization of facts and random labels on individual exercises.

Against the background of the stabilization of all forms of art, out of the damp cellar (where the *kinocs* now work) grows the staircase of Kino-Eye,

an iron staircase of facts,

the constant threat of KINO-OCTOBER.

The comrades who are dancing unconfidently in the embrace of art look with envy at the clear, confident face of Kino-Eye. Some of them, when they appear on screen, even hide their “face” under a mask which recalls Kino-Eye.

But not one of them has yet had enough decisiveness to exclaim, as Comrade I. exclaims in his application to join the *kinocs*: “... I am for the union of science with film newsreel. I am for the peaceful revolt of facts against the unlooked-for guardianship of “art-religion”. I am for the Leninist ratio for cinema theatre programmes.<sup>3</sup> I am for Kino-Eye.”

### The Battle Continues

*Dziga Vertov, “Srazhenie prodolzhaetsia”, Kino, 20 October 1926*

The rumours to the effect that the victory of *A Sixth Part of the World* will cause all the *kinocs* to move into working exclusively in the area and on the scale of emotional film-hits are false, and are being disseminated by the alarmed inhabitants of “art cinema”.

The *kinocs* will continue to work in five directions: 1. Current newsreel of events (*Sovkino-Calendar* and *Sovkino-Journal*). 2. Thematic newsreel (summaries of facts over a month, or two, as in *Kino-Pravda*). 3. Complex newsreel (summaries of facts over six months, over several years – in the form of a Kino-Eye race,<sup>4</sup> an epic poem of facts, or even a chronologically concentrated film report). 4. Scientific, slice-of-life, research, or even educational-demonstration film works, and, lastly, 5. Experimental film studies, laboratory research, laying down new paths for all the Kino-Eye movement as a whole.

Equally false is the information to the effect that by the film factory of facts we imply something different from “the factory of non-fiction film”.

Both definitions are taken from us, agreed with us, and signify one and the same thing. We are talking (see *Pravda*, no. 168 [3397])<sup>5</sup> about the filming, accumulation, organization, and dissemination of facts, and not of the “fabrication of facts”, as one female representative of actorly cinema put it.

The real danger is the fabrication of intentionally false rumours. The distortion on the pages of the press and by a whisper in the ear of the basic ideas of the tasks of Kino-Eye.

The fear that Kino-Eye will move from the situation of “a movement exploited by theatrical cinema” to the situation of “a movement striding through the cemetery of so-called art cinema” has united all the opponents and well-placed enemies of Kino-Eye.

From the popular scriptwriter to the prominent administrator, from the talkative lady re-editor to the inimitable film director – they have all started whispering sympathetically about the old, inoffensive, funeral-solemn film newsreel. About the newsreel which did not interfere with your digestion of the art drama, which did not threaten a cinematic revolution. We, the workers of Kino-Eye, experienced fighters for fact, for film newsreel, caution all our friends, all the friends of non-fiction film, against sympathy for this hypocritical cinematic liturgy.

We shall pass through this wave of gossip, cutbacks, denunciations, and provocative statements as steadfastly as we have walked this far.

And if someone starts talking in your presence about the monopoly of the *kinocs*, remind him that none of us has ever spoken out in defence of our monopoly in battling desperately in the cinematic underground, or our monopolistic right to work for days and nights in a cellar that is half flooded with water.

### Blood on the Screen

"*Krov na ekrane*", *Sovetskii ekran*, no. 32, 1927

If American films are easily recognizable by now just from the long kiss of the hero and heroine who have finally found each other, then in nearly all our films directors show death, torture, and horrors. The history of the Civil War is rich in the sad pages of Petliura's pogroms, the mass shootings of workers by Denikin's and Kolchak's<sup>6</sup> troops, the floggings of peasants, and the violent acts of various bands of Whites – but is that really all our directors have seen? Are they not too carried away by Guignol, which sometimes provokes only revulsion in the viewer (for example, driving nails under fingernails – in close-up – in *Aurora Borealis*).<sup>7</sup> We receive a huge number of letters from readers about this, and we therefore decided to question participants in the Civil War, professors, leading Soviet figures, directors, and writers.

We are printing here some of the replies we received.

[Dziga Vertov's reply]

Two answers:

1) In relation to film-theatre, that is to say, in relation to fiction film.

The misuse of blood on the screen should be interpreted as an admission by theatrical workers of their impotence, as a result of the failure of a whole series of attempts to present the Revolution on screen in the context of so-called "art cinema".

The exploitation of death (*The Bay of Death*, *Minaret of Death*, *Battleship Potemkin*, *Tragedy in Tripoli*, *Aurora Borealis*, *Cross and Mauser*,<sup>8</sup> and so on) has come along to replace the exploitation of "love" across the entire front of art dramas, psychological, detective, peasant, and artistic-educational ones.

"Naked women" or "a relish for murder", that is what our fiction films revolve around.

*The Beauty and the Bolshevik* (the American title for *Brigade Commander Ivanov*)<sup>9</sup> or "*The Soviet Zero Banknote*"<sup>10</sup> – that is the approach to the construction of the Soviet fiction film.

The artificial, false arousal of the viewer, that is what the interests of our film exhibitors and film producers amount to.

For some of our directors, arousing the viewer at all costs is an end in itself. That is what leads to speculating in blood, in rapes, in freaks, in sadistic kinks.

2) In relation to Kino-Eye, that is to say, in relation to non-fiction film.

The Kino-Eye method itself is the best guarantee against filling film-things with bloody horrors.

Life itself controls the accumulation of this or that material.

Facts are captured in proportion to their visibility, and not in proportion to the ideas of the scriptwriter, the actor, or the director.

Kino-Eye, protected from the many mistakes, conventions, and contradictions of so-called feature films, occupies a healthy, clear position with regard to this question, too.

Uninterested in the artificial arousal of the viewer, Kino-Eye is satisfied with that healthy enthusiasm which is provoked in the viewer by every *Kino-Pravda*, every part of *Kino-Eye*, the film *A Sixth Part of the World*, *Stride, Soviet!*, or another film constructed according to the same method.

### Notes

1. Aleksandr Kurs (1892-1937), critic, journalist, screenwriter, and Communist Party functionary. At the time he wrote this essay, Kurs was the editor-in-chief of *Sovetskii ekran*. Kurs is also the author of the book *Samoe mogushchestvennoe* (The Most Powerful Art), a chapter of which has been translated for this volume on pp. 147-151.
2. *Liki krasnoi Rossii* (1926), propaganda film about the USSR using "found-footage", made by the Mezhrabpom studio for foreign distribution.
3. In his 1922 conversation with Anatoly Lunacharsky, Lenin suggested that a fixed ratio between entertainment pictures and scientific ones be established in movie theatre programmes: *Samoe vazhnoe iz vseh iskusstv* (The Most Important of the Arts) (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1963), p. 123.
4. The term "race" (*probeg*) refers to geographical surveys of the kind Vertov used in *A Sixth Part of the World*.
5. The reference is to Vertov's manifesto "Fabrika Faktov" printed in *Pravda*, 24 July 1926, included, as "The Factory of Facts", in Annette Michelson, ed., *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 58-59.
6. Simon Petliura (1879-1926), Anton Denikin (1872-1947), Aleksandr Kolchak (1874-1920): anti-Bolshevist commanders who fought against the Red Army during the Civil War.
7. *Severnoe sianie* (1926), film by Nikolai Foregger.
8. *The Bay of Death: Bukhta smerti* (1926), film by Abram Room; *Minaret of Death: Minaret smerti* (1925), film by Vyacheslav Viskovsky; *Cross and Mauser: Krest i mauzer* (1925), film by Vladimir Gardin.
9. *Kombrig Ivanov* (1923), film comedy by Aleksandr Razumny, which was indeed distributed in the US as *The Beauty and the Bolshevik*.
10. In the original Russian, "Sovetskii Gosznak Zero", a complicated pun. "Gosznak" (literally, "state mark") means "banknote". "Zero" must be a misprint (possibly intentional) for "Zorro", referring to Fred Niblo's film *The Mark of Zorro* (1920) with Douglas Fairbanks, the frequent target of Vertov's sarcasm after 1926, when Fairbanks and Mary Pickford visited Soviet Russia to the worshipping attention of film buffs, film people, and the general press. "State Mark Zero" is thus a mock title referring to commercial Soviet films imitative of American action movies.

PART THREE



THE  
END





## THE KINOCS AND LEFT FRONT OF THE ARTS



### What the Eye Does Not See

*Osip Brik,<sup>1</sup> "Chego ne vidit glaz", Sovetskoe kino, no. 2, 1926, pp. 22-23*

Vertov is right. The task of the film and photographic camera is not to imitate the human eye, but to see and capture what the human eye usually does not see.

The kino- and photo-eye can show us things from an unexpected point of view, in an unusual configuration, and we should make use of this capability.

There was a time when it was considered sufficient to film things on the level of the eye of a person standing firmly on even ground. Then man started to move, began to climb mountains, to travel on trains, on steamships, in cars, to fly in aeroplanes, to sink to the bottom of the sea. And everywhere he went the camera followed him, capturing what man saw.

The point from which shooting took place became more complicated, more varied, but its link with the human eye, with its usual circle of vision, was not broken.

And yet this link is not essential; more than that, it unnecessarily limits and impoverishes the possibilities of the camera. The camera can act independently. It can see in ways in which man is not accustomed to see. It can suggest a point of view to man. Suggest looking at things in a different way.

Comrade Rodchenko made an experiment of this kind when he filmed a house in Moscow from an unusual point of view.

The results which he obtained were extremely interesting. A familiar thing (a house) seems a construction the like of which has never been seen before; the fire-escape looks like some monstrous structure, the balconies like an architecturally exotic tower.

Looking at these shots, it is not difficult to imagine how action might be developed in such a setting, and how spectacular it would be – with a greater effect than usual location footage.

The monotony of the forms of cinematic landscape has provoked some people to seek a way out in cinematic sets, cinematic props, and cinematic displacements.<sup>2</sup> They wanted to force artists to "think up interesting locations", to build "imaginary houses", to create "non-existent" nature.

This is a hopeless enterprise. The camera cannot stand props; it mercilessly exposes every piece of theatrical cardboard that people try to pass off as the real thing.

This is not the solution. There is one solution. We have to emerge from the customary circle of ordinary human vision; we have to learn to capture things with the camera outside of this circle. Then the usual monotony will immediately disappear,

and we shall see our real life, not one made up out of props, but we shall see it in a way in which we have not yet been able to.

The kino- and photo-eye must create for themselves their own point of filming, not imitating but broadening the usual circle of vision of the human eye.

### **On the Fact That Plot Is a Constructive Principle, Not One from Daily Life**

Viktor Shklovsky, "O tom, chto siuzhet poniatie ne bytovoe, a konstruktivnoe", chap. 6 in *Ikh nastoiashchee (Their Present Time)*, 1927

On the fact that plot is a constructive principle, not one from daily life. The *kinocs* were wrong to renounce it. The result has only been that they have moved from complex film-construction to *simple parallelism*, which is also a plot device. But with this device the shots are not fully used. You cannot take complete control over the viewer's approach.

The *kinocs*, headed by Dziga Vertov, are against the fiction film, and, moreover, here they deny and affirm several things at the same time. They are against the fiction film, above all, because it is a plotted film, and, moreover, plot seems to them something which has come to cinema from literature.

Let me quote the report of the Council of Three:

Dziga Vertov:

... The psychological film, the detective film, the satirical film, the landscape film (it doesn't matter what kind) – if we tear out all the plots and just leave the intertitles, we'll get the literary skeleton of the film. To this literary skeleton we can then film other film-plots – realistic ones, symbolic ones, expressionist ones, whichever we like. The position will not be changed by this. The correlation remains the same: a literary skeleton plus kino-illustrations.

Almost without exception all films, both ours and foreign ones, are like this...<sup>3</sup>

Thus the *kinocs* began by protesting against literariness in the cinema and about shots that paralleled intertitles. At the same time they were for the shot as such, considering that the shot exists outside of its semantic significance, that its resolution is given within the frame of the screen. Therefore the plot, as a complex organization of shots, as some sort of everyday motivation of their links, seemed to them to be extracinematic. And yet plot is only a particular case of construction. It is the construction of semantic, everyday situations. At the base of the plot there is usually the fate of a man, and within the story of one man's life, or of one aspect of a man's life, there is usually one plot. But this is only the European understanding of plot, and the contemporary European one.

For Indian poetics, for the poetics of Persian and Arabian fairy tales, plot is something else. In the most ordinary children's song the plot consists of the transfer of movement from one actor to another, with the acceleration of movement. So in children's tales they crack an egg and pull out a turnip.

**ТЫ,  
СОСУЩИЙ  
МАТЕРИНСКУЮ  
ГРУДЬ**

Parallelism



“When they give us an intertitle, ‘The child sucks at the breast’, and then show us the child, sucking at the breast, I realize that they have turned us back towards lantern slides. Of course, Dziga Vertov is not so naïve as not to understand the parallelism of intertitle and shot here. But since for him this parallelism is lyrical, heroic, he bribes you with it and attempts to increase the emotional significance of the shot,” wrote Shklovsky about *A Sixth Part of the World* in his book *Ikh nastoiashchee* (Their Present Time). In his other essay, “Poeziia i proza v kinematografii” (Cinema’s Poetry and Prose), published in *Poetika kino* (Poetics of Cinema),<sup>4</sup> Shklovsky writes that Vertov’s bent for parallelisms and his tendency to repeat the same images in a different context towards the end makes his film similar to the triolet, a 13th-century French poetic form (an eight-line poem in which the first line is used three times and the second line is repeated once).

Dziga Vertov's works have been oriented towards fact. They have been on the side of the fact against the anecdote. Correctly bearing in mind the initial character of cinematic photography, its turn from generalizing and its link to fact, they said: "We shall make our works from the montage of facts." In this they coincided with several parallel phenomena in contemporary art.

In my other books I have pointed out that the success of the diary, the travel book, the writer's notebook can be put down to the fact that today the writer and the viewer experience facts aesthetically, that today there is an orientation towards the engaging narration, towards information. The satirical journalist puts pressure on the fiction writer; the fiction writer packs a real fact into his work. Novels edited out of facts appear: that is the way Yuri Tynianov's novel *Kiukhlia* is made.<sup>5</sup> But this does not mean that such works will be devoid of semantic construction. The very fact of the existence of two facts side by side, in the context of human beings having memory, gives birth to their correlation; as soon as we begin to be aware of that correlation, composition begins and its laws begin to work.

In Dziga Vertov's most recent work, *A Sixth Part of the World*, something very curious happened. Above all, the factual nature of the shot disappeared; scripted shots appeared. They were not secured geographically, and were weak in comparison. In this film we learned with interest that in one place they bathe sheep in the sea's breakers, and in another they bathe them in the river. This is very interesting, and the breakers are well shot, but where they are shot is not precisely established. Nor is the washing of laundry with your feet established precisely; it's shown as a curiosity, as an anecdote, not as a fact. The man going off into the snowy distance on his broad skis is no longer a man but a symbol of the disappearing past. The thing has lost its materiality and become transparent, like a work by the Symbolists.

And, as in Dziga Vertov's previous work, *Stride, Soviet!*, the composition of the piece has been reduced to simple parallelism; before and now, or there and here. What is more, by renouncing novelistic and dramatic composition, Dziga Vertov has gone over to lyric composition and called the thing an emotional hit. The intertitles turned out to be strictly literary, raised on tiptoes in large letters. All these capital I SEEs and YOU, WHOs, remind me of *Slovo o polku igoreve* (The Tale of Igor's Campaign), retold by Karamzin.<sup>6</sup> Dziga Vertov also needed repetitions to be lyrical. *A Sixth Part of the World* is completely constructed on repetition at the end of the sequences at the start of the work. This is a purely lyrical device.

What is the reason for the *kinocs'* failure here? One of the reasons is the fear of long journeys. We are almost all walking on tiptoe now. Turning one art into another art, we do not let it die on the way, we preserve the emotional value of the old art, we hold on to our wealthy relatives.

In *Stride, Soviet!* and *A Sixth Part of the World* there is a plot, but it's very weak. The falsity of the intertitles in these works is very closely linked to the poverty of the plot; all this comes down to the incomplete and uneconomic use of the shot.

When they give us an intertitle, "The child sucks at the breast", and then show us

the child, sucking at the breast, I realize that they have turned us back towards lantern slides. Of course, Dziga Vertov is not so naïve as not to understand the parallelism of intertitle and shot here. But since for him this parallelism is lyrical, heroic, he bribes you with it and attempts to increase the emotional significance of the shot. And Dziga Vertov needed an actor. Of course, this is absolutely correct, because although at the basis of cinematography lies photography, the very moment of choosing a shot and the choice of the moment, the moment of cutting in time and space, this very act is an artistic act.

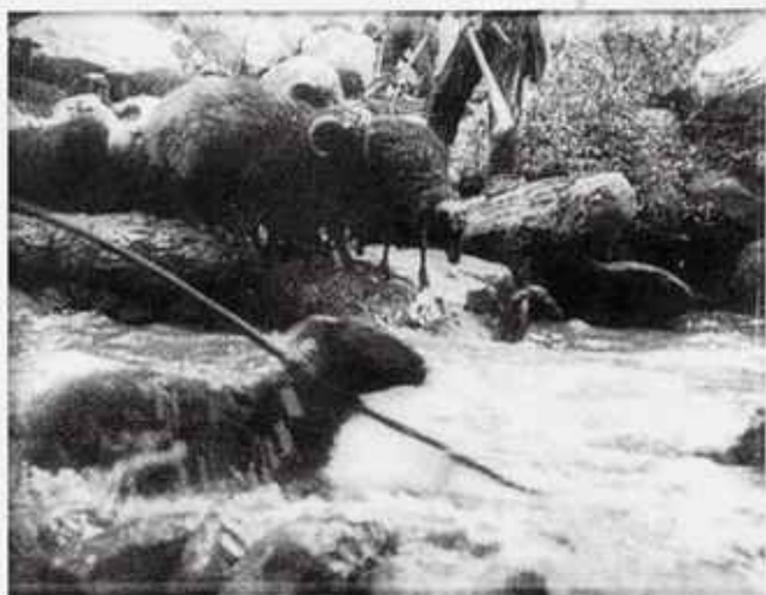
The shots of the *bourgeoisie* being corrupted and dancing the foxtrot have a purely fictional character. It is being corrupted badly, the *bourgeoisie* is petty; it's probably our NEP *bourgeoisie*, it's very trampled upon. It dances the foxtrot on a carpet, and this makes things difficult. It dances badly. The setting is also bad. But the "Chocolate Kiddies", Dziga Vertov's Negroes, dance well, because they haven't been invited to take part in a staged reconstruction; they are just doing their work. And in the cinema it is extremely useful to choose the most select movements, the most constructed ones.

Often in verse a poet says "this cannot be said in verse", and calmly goes on speaking in verse. If the actor during a drama climbs over the footlights, then that means that he is Lev Gurych Sinichkin, and that the actor is now going to play the dulcimer in the orchestra, but it does not mean that the play is over.<sup>7</sup>

The work of Dziga Vertov is art, and not construction. His renunciation of plot construction has only weakened his work. His orientation towards fact is artistically correct, but it is not followed through to the end. So we get just verses, Red verses with kino-rhymes. His shots, thanks to the fact that the artistic quality of the work has been reduced to lyrical parallelism, are under-used. We do not have the time to see the Tungus eat some raw meat and then rub their lips and hands against the ground, because with Dziga Vertov's method showing this would mean immediately showing the *bourgeoisie* rubbing their lips against some extremely delicate napkin.

For Dziga Vertov, the screen is equally valuable in all its points. He does not have details with emphatic significance, and at the same time there is a lot of purely cinematographic work – the double, triple, quadruple exposure, which after all the cranks of the handle turns back into the usual or slightly unusual cinematography of the present day. It is pleasant when the audience sees itself almost reflected on the screen, and applauds as if applauding itself. But the audience which is shown on the screen, and shown on the screen watching the very sequence which has just been shown in the theatre, this is something we saw in Perestiani's *Red Imps.*<sup>8</sup> This shows us that Dziga Vertov has turned around 370 degrees; that is to say, he has turned around in a circle twice, and ended up only 10 degrees away from where he started. His paths have coincided with the paths of art cinema. But the intentions of Dziga Vertov are extraordinarily fruitful, and in the future those who shoot real newsreel, who show the latitude and longitude of the place and day of filming, who shoot real fields, will owe their ideas to the ideas of a man who passed this way, Dziga Vertov.

**Symbols or Facts?**



**КАК ТЫ  
УХОДЯЩИЙ  
В ЛЕДЯНУЮ  
ДАЛЬ**



In the second half of the 1920s some critics began noticing a paradoxical curve in the *Kinocs'* development: having declared that cinema must be the factory of facts, not dreams, Vertov seemed to be heading towards the factory of symbols. This is what Victor Shklovsky wrote in *Ikh nastoiashchee* (Their Present Time): "In Dziga Vertov's most recent work, *A Sixth Part of the World*, something very curious happened. Above all, the factual nature of the shot disappeared, and scripted shots appeared. They were not secured geographically, and were weak in comparison. In this film we learned with interest that in one place they wash sheep in the sea's breakers, and in another they wash them in the river. This is very interesting, and the breakers are well shot, but where they are shot is not precisely established. Nor is the washing of laundry with your feet established precisely; it's shown as a curiosity, as an anecdote, not as a fact. The man going off into the snowy distance on his broad skis is no longer a man, but a symbol of the disappearing past. The thing has lost its materiality and become transparent, like a work by the Symbolists." Indeed, spliced after the title "You who depart into the icy unknown", the shot of the skier and his dog do look less factual than eternal, as does the image of the man plowing the land with oxen, when it comes after the title "The old departs slowly..." – even if his young son is visibly enjoying the ride.

### The Screen Today

Lev Kuleshov, "Ekran segodnia", *Novyi LEF*, no. 4, 1927, pp. 31-34

The greatest cinematic impression on our screens, after Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* [1923], has been produced by two non-fiction films, *Moscow*, by the cameraman Kaufman, and *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, by Esfir Shub.<sup>9</sup>

You watch both films, particularly *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, with unwavering interest; you literally can't take your eyes off them.

Of course, no feature films have been as interesting, as truthful, and as convincing as these two non-fiction films.

Lovers of film dramas, comedies, and filmed stage productions should definitely watch these two best Soviet works, in order to realize that the impression created by newsreel can be not only equal to the impression created by an art film, but even greater.

Soviet newsreel has existed since 1918, and "got on its feet" in 1919-1920. At that time the best cameramen and directors were working on it, funds were assigned to it, and it was given all possible attention.

This happened because the film factories were empty; there was no production of feature films, and newsreel was easier to make and more achievable.

When the feature-film studios started gradually [re-]opening, newsreel began to wane; its best workers went over into art cinema, and attention to non-fiction film weakened.

Since then, there has been a struggle in support of the demonstration of our daily life, for newsreel as opposed to feature films, which are completely imbued with the old theatrical devices of "Yermoliev feature films".<sup>10</sup>

A particular part in this struggle has been played by the journal *Kino-fot*, edited by Aleksei Gan, which has constantly propagandized and supported the non-fiction demonstration of our daily life. This was only after that the *kinocs* began to make their statements, both theoretical and practical.

LEF has also fought, and continues to fight, for the non-fiction film, and besides it, Gan, and the *kinocs*, no one has spoken out, seriously and responsibly, in support of newsreel, or shown any desire to do so, and no one is doing so now.

The cause of the newsreel seemed to have "croaked". Only now has its "unprofitability" been brilliantly refuted by the two Sovkino films mentioned earlier.

The non-fiction films released up to now had a very serious shortcoming, which had a very negative effect on their quality and persuasiveness. This shortcoming consisted of their incorrect montage.

Newsreel is the demonstration of filmed events. The events must be shown in such a way that we can examine them properly: the most important aspects must be demonstrated especially clearly, separately, from special points of view.

The events must be convincingly combined; that is, the material must be revealed to a maximum degree by the montage, served to a maximum degree by the montage, and presented expressively.

Up to now, subjective-artistic montage has been predominant in our newsreels. Newsreels were edited expressionistically. The montage did not serve the material in the cause of its best possible presentation, but was an individual creative element of the work of the editor.

This is what led to the flashy montage of newsreels. The significance of most of the shots was to provoke a sharp impression, effects of a purely rhythmical character with minimal semantic significance.

The films turned into a combination of gaudy shouts or a succession of symbolic sequences, not into a calm demonstration of events which used montage to present its material convincingly.

The non-fiction film should not show the subjective impression the artist has of events, however correct the artist's convictions may be.

Newsreel must show events correctly, and the form of the montage of the newsreel is defined not by the author, but by the material.

In the film *Moscow* this typical montage shortcoming is still there, as an inherited trait, but to an insignificant degree.

It is amazing to see this film about Moscow in 1927. It should have been filmed considerably earlier.

I myself more than once proposed filming this kind of thing, and I was always met with scepticism. The fact that Kaufman persuaded them to make this crucial film is greatly to his credit; the fact that it has only been made now is the unforgivable fault of the leaders of our cinema. If we had filmed earlier, we would have been able to see Soviet Moscow being gradually constructed, which would be far more interesting than just seeing it in its present state.

But even what is shown here opens our eyes to the routine Moscow that we see so often; we walk around and pay no attention to the remarkable parts of the town, to the large amount of traffic, to those unexpected shots which Kaufman has managed to see and film.

The cityscape part of the film is the best.

The shots taken from above and below achieve amazing effects, and give us a new sense of landscape material. It is especially valuable that the new points of view that Kaufman uses are not used in order to show his originality, from a desire to show everything in an unusual way, but really are the best and clearest way to show contemporary Moscow.

In the quality of the filming, and in the skilful choice of the camera's point of view, such sequences as the crossing tram lines, the repeated piece of roadway, and the pavement with the lamp-post are remarkable not only for us, but even for European and American cinema.

In this part of the film the main shortcoming is the failure to abandon a penchant for rapid montage. The best bits are too short – you don't have time to examine them.

Moscow by night is filmed in an interesting way.

But the miserliness of Sovkino, and their lack of belief in newsreel cinema, are clearly visible in these nocturnal sequences.

They are shot without any auxiliary light, without a travelling camera, in an amateurish way, without even minimal use of contemporary cinematic technology.

If Sovkino had released one or two thousand roubles for filming Moscow by night, the film would have been a thousand times better.

The film is shot better than it is edited. But its sequences, along with the notable simplicity of its montage construction, are a big step forward for Soviet newsreel.

Esfir Shub, who made *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, has not only produced a magnificent film in terms of montage and content, but she has also created a new stage in the development of the non-fiction film. Her work should be seen as one of the steps forward in our cinematic culture.

The main virtue of Shub's film is the high technical quality of its montage, which is cultured and used not as an aesthetic device to transmit the subjective emotions of the editor, but as a means to express and organize the material, to bring out its thematic essence.

This is why the Tsar, the churches, the priests, filmed in their time with brilliance and conviction, have been turned by the editor into a striking propaganda film.

It is only through montage and through the skilful choice of material that *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* could have been made into such a significant film.

The material out of which Shub had to make the film was cinematographically very poor: badly shot, badly preserved, extremely mixed up, and the work she has done in selecting the sequences is the basic achievement of the editor.

The shots in *Dynasty* are not only no worse than those in contemporary feature films, but in most cases they are more expressive and more skilfully filmed.

The cameraman Tisse,<sup>11</sup> who came to fame shooting material of this kind, can envy the shots of warships, cannon, explosions, and so forth. But this is just an individual case. The overwhelming majority of the sequences at Shub's disposal not only are not finely shot, they are, simply, badly shot.

So, what work must have been done by the editor to produce as a result a magnificent selection of the best sequences, even for our time?

No single actor guided by the very best director could show the bankruptcy of the Tsar and the people surrounding him as persuasively as Nicholas II does in this film in his own person.

The scene of a mazurka performed by the daughters of the Tsar, who wipe the sweat from their foreheads when it finishes, could have become a model for the satirical society sequences in films by Erich Von Stroheim, a specialist in this kind of shot.

The montage skill of the film's author is most evident in the episode with the Governor of Kaluga.

There were some inexpressive bits: the Governor with his wife and his bulldog, coming down the stairs and having breakfast in the garden.

Combining them with a village, with swans swimming in ponds, and the landowner poking his stick into earth being worked by a peasant, Shub has expressively shown not only the Governor who was being photographed, but also his social connection to all who surround him.

The Governor, that is to say, the landowner, the owner of the land, is absolutely clear in the correct montage of the aforementioned sequences.

Cinematographically, the strongest part of the film is the war. It is edited not as chaos or as a sum of expressionist impressions, but as a logically developing process.

In this case, semantic montage turned out to be most convenient, and it is magnificently carried out by the author of the film.

Just like Nicholas II, the Duma deputies make an “effective” contribution to the plot in a purely actorly sense, giving out presents at the Front to wan, grey little soldiers. These shots are stunning in their vileness!

For feature films by our directors to achieve what is shown here so briefly and persuasively by the presents at the Front, would require more than one reel of an entire picture to achieve dubious results.

Shub’s triumph is the triumph of cinematography relying on real material.

The cold attitude to non-fiction films and the crude incompetence of our fiction filmmakers are stubbornly reducing Soviet cinematography to the depths of expressiveness and culture.

The material of cinema is not acting, not theatrical productions, but reality: newsreel, or the demonstration of man’s behaviour in the daily life that surrounds him.

Because of a failure to understand the basics of cinema and because of the low culture of the leaders of cinema, an attraction to acting, productions, and reincarnations has reached its maximum development in this country.

The actor does not let the model actor develop; the fiction film squeezes the non-fiction film to the point of frenzy.

Even a master so dedicated to correct cinematography as Pudovkin surrenders the positions of the new cinema in his first film.

Before the film *Mother*<sup>12</sup> starts, he shows the actress playing the leading role as a pretty woman – watch her transform herself, he seems to be saying.

This is too theatrical a device even for a feature film!

You should film a model actor, because he himself, as he is, represents material for filming and showing behaviour.

In fiction films you should work the way Chaplin works on himself, and how he demonstrated work with model actors in *A Woman of Paris*.

The victory of our non-fiction films teaches filmmakers the correct understanding of the material. But the material of cinematography is real events, real things, real people, and the demonstration of their behaviour in the daily life that surrounds them.

### **Against Genre Pictures**

*Osip Brik, “Protiv zhanrovyykh kartinok”, Kino, 5 July 1927*

We often hear film workers saying: “Here we’ll put a few bits of newsreel, here we’ll show the work of a factory, life in hostels, street life. We’ll play up a whole series of

the trivia of daily life." These words contain an extremely important misunderstanding. People are making a very big mistake if they think that filming the work of some factory or life in some hostel means making film newsreel, and that the footage they get from this filming will be newsreel footage.

By newsreel, we must mean very precisely and strictly the capturing of real fact by the film camera. Footage of such and such a pilot who has flown across such and such space is newsreel, but footage of pilots in general flying through aerial space is not newsreel. In exactly the same way, the work of a given factory which manufactures given objects is newsreel, but a factory at work in general is not newsreel, but a genre picture.

Newsreel should be understood in the strict, literal sense, just as it is understood by a newspaper. The newsreel fact is always dated; it always has a specific name, place, and time; it is an individual, unrepeatable document. Everything that can be filmed outside of this documentary fact will be a genre picture, and has a completely different cognitive value.

People who have found a film fact interesting think that if there are more of these film facts, then their interest will be even greater. They think that if it is interesting to look at a pilot who has crossed the Atlantic Ocean, then it will be even more interesting to look at a whole series of pilots flying around on screen. These people forget that the main interest in newsreel is its documentary quality, its factual existence as a historical phenomenon.

As soon as we remove this documentary quality, facts stop being facts, and merge into a single, general background of everyday life, in which phenomena characteristic of this background are possible, but the phenomena themselves no longer exist. A criminal and the criminal milieu are not one and the same thing from the point of view of capturing them in newsreel. The criminal milieu is only the possibility of a real criminal. But the individual criminal is already a realized fact.

When they show us on screen a journey across the island of Borneo or in the land of cannibals, then of course there is no newsreel here. This is a demonstration of exotic phenomena: people, animals, landscapes; but there are no facts requiring capture in newsreel here.

The mistake of the most recent works by Dziga Vertov (*A Sixth Part of the World*) consists precisely in the fact that he has departed from his task of making film newsreel and taken it into his head to build pictures in a film-"genre". Avoiding scenic effects and dramatizations, he simply filmed a whole series of pictures of everyday life, and edited these pictures of everyday life in such a way that we got the outward appearance of a finished film. In point of fact, we didn't get a finished film at all; what we got was some individual pieces of footage forcibly glued together.

The montage of newsreel does not require any of the devices that characterize the fiction film; it does not require the creating and resolving of mysteries, or other methods of dramatization. Pieces of newsreel are valuable in themselves. No montage work can save a piece of newsreel, if the fact captured in it is not interesting. The

montage of newsreel requires only the extremely careful and attentive presentation of the fact, playing it through to the end, and linking it with other pieces through an extremely subtle semantic link. Shub's exemplary work in the film *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* can serve as an example of montage of this kind.

The actorly fiction film cannot be satisfied with montage of this kind. In a fiction film, where everything is built on conventional dramatization, each shot, each piece of footage, has no value in itself. It is important and interesting only in the context of the other shots and sequences. A piece thrown out of a film is destroyed, because there is no point in preserving it in any film archive; its significance is exclusively connected to the film for which it was made, and if it is of no use in that film then it can be of no use anywhere else. Therefore, in order for the pieces of footage of a feature film to be connected into a single whole, it is essential to apply a whole series of complex montage methods.

For if this shot is put in another place, it will have an utterly different meaning and significance.

In newsreel every individual piece is comprehensible and finished in itself. If you swap pieces around in a newsreel film, all you change is the ease and readability of the entire material, but the meaning of the material itself does not depend on this. The difference is the same as that between the record of a search and a fictional description of the room in which the search took place. In the first case, the order in which the things are enumerated is not crucial; in the second, the sequence of the description of the features of the room is crucial for creating the general impression.

In his work *A Sixth Part of the World* Dziga Vertov has confused the two methods.

For example, he has allowed himself to break up the single sequence of the herds of deer into several pieces and to use them to interrupt other sequences in various parts of the film. Just by doing this he has turned real footage in a real genre into a conventional cinematic sign, which in its particular place in the film must have its own particular meaning. Instead of a real deer, we get a deer as a symbolic sign with a vague conventional meaning. But since these deer were filmed without any thought about their possible use as conventional signs, their real nature as deer has resisted this turning them into symbols, and as a result we get neither a deer nor a sign, but a blank space.

Dziga Vertov's example has turned out to be contagious. Filmmakers have believed that the true path of cinema is film newsreel, and, not wishing to engage in film newsreel in the literal sense of the word, have decided to combine so-called newsreel material, which in fact is genre material, with the methods of artistic montage. Their thinking has begun to work in the direction of, on the one hand, preserving all the effects of art cinema, and, at the same time, using as material not dramatizations and studios, but "life as it is".

The results of this have been and continue to be lamentable: either the material is resistant to a method of montage which is alien to it, or it is rendered so insipid that it loses its meaning as real footage, while at the same time not achieving the effect of dramatized footage.

This grossest of errors, which is dictated by a compromise between the demands of real footage and the practices of art cinema, must be fully recognized.

It must be understood that such a forced combination of material and an alien method cannot have any positive effect.

Film newsreel and art cinema are moving along opposite paths, and no intermediate positions, no attempts at a union, are appropriate here; they can only put a brake on the natural development of film culture.

Either it is film newsreel or an artistic dramatization; there is and can be no third way.

### Against Leftist Phrases

*Dziga Vertov, "Protiv levoi frazy", RGALI 2091-2-162<sup>13</sup>*

IT IS TRUE that "newsreel and art cinema are moving along opposite paths, and no intermediate positions, no attempts at a union, are appropriate here; they can only put a brake on the natural development of film culture" (*Kino*, 5 July 1927, from Brik's article).<sup>14</sup>

I am very satisfied that my constant affirmation has finally been repeated by Comrade Brik.

The pole of Kino-Eye (the non-fiction film; that is, newsreel-scientific-educational-scientific-landscape films) is opposed to the pole of "artistic cinema" (the fiction, acted film); that has been my consistent position, by contrast with the former position of Comrade Brik, who until only recently supported not just newsreel films but also intermediary, compromising movements (for example, the movement represented by Eisenstein).

At discussions, in *Pravda*, in the newspaper *Kino*, in the *LEF* journal,<sup>15</sup> everywhere we could, we have always spoken out sharply against any compromise between fiction and non-fiction film.

This is precisely where we broke with Gan and with Shub, that re-editor of fiction films which stubbornly defended the position of *enacting everyday life*, acting out little scenes before the camera to look like reality. Brik's latest trick with a change of clothes therefore seems to us extremely "strange" (his hypocritical fairy tale about some documentary documents), a trick played at the very moment that Kino-Eye came under administrative attack.

Comrade Brik should not have taken this bait after his rapturous responses to the film *Stride, Soviet!* and other Kino-Eye works.

Devoting his article to one of the forms of non-fiction film – the film with a date on it – Comrade Brik could have given as an example not the illiterate (completely unedited) *Dynasty*, but dozens of Kino-Eye films, dated in time and space, consistently, not in contradiction to Brik's article.

Comrade Brik did not do that.

Comrade Brik for some reason (why?) hid from the readers of *Kino-gazeta* the fact that: 40 issues of *Kino-Week*, about 50 of *Goskino-Calendar*, all the issues of *Kino-Prav-*

da with very few exceptions, the chronologically constructed film *The Anniversary of the Revolution* (12 reels, from the February Revolution to the first anniversary of October), *The History of the Civil War* (13 parts), *Five Years of the Red Army*, *Without Ilich*, the first episode of *Kino-Eye*,<sup>16</sup> and so on and so forth, that all of these are various models of the documentary film (even according to Brik's own standards).

These first cinematic models were established by Kino-Eye, along with such monuments as the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*, *Stride*, *Soviet!*, *A Sixth Part of the World*. [...] The work of Kino-Eye has embraced the horizon of the non-fiction film so widely (from the most simple works like *Bukhara*, *Novorossiisk*, *Flax*,<sup>17</sup> *Moscow*, to such complex works as *Man with a Movie Camera*, *A Sixth Part of the World*) that each such little model evolved into a separate type of non-fiction film, with its advocates of precisely that type.

This does not mean that some individual or a group of filmmakers who copycat, disseminate, and popularize this or that specific type of non-fiction film, can play it against the rest of the films that come from the Kino-Eye movement.

Kino-Eye, which has been struggling determinedly since the days of the October Revolution for the non-fiction film as a whole, and has established a whole series of new models of newsreel film-things (*kino-veshchei*), does not have the right to limit its activity to any one type of these models, and Comrade Brik should have the courage to admit that his proposal to narrow the activity of Kino-Eye only to the production of clearly dated films is a mistaken and profoundly incorrect proposal.

### **From Varvara Stepanova's Diary, November 1927**

*Excerpts from Chelovek ne mozhet zhit bez chuda. Pisma. Poeticheskie opyty. Zapiski khudozhnitsy (A Person Cannot Live without Miracles: Letters, Poetic Experiments, Artist's Notes) (Moscow: Sfera, 1994)*<sup>18</sup>

*From the diary entry of 11 November 1927, pp. 205-206*

It is difficult to deceive us Constructivists with anything, because in accordance with the law of the unequal development of technical means and consequently the various speeds in various field of art we gave up painting earlier than other people and went off into production.<sup>19</sup>

One good thing is that they are no longer talking about Meyerhold. But now there is a new "Kino-Meyerhold"<sup>20</sup> – Eisenstein's montage of attractions.

I have just been saying to Vitaly [Zhemchuzhny] on the telephone how Serezha<sup>21</sup> keeps saying that this "Kino-Meyerhold" is nearer to newsreel than to fiction film. Serezha's talk at the previous kino-meeting at LEF<sup>22</sup> was constructed along the same lines, where he divided non-fiction film into five sections:

- 1) Newsreel that is shot "flagrantly" (Serezha's term – shooting things impromptu);
- 2) Shooting when the object being filmed knows that he is being filmed, but acts in his usual functional milieu;

3) Shooting functionally performed work after it is finished. The work is repeated specially so that it can be filmed;

4) Filming of processes that are inherent in the given object but which are selected at random;

5) Enacting genuine processes in front of the camera by using “*typages*” if they visually meet the purpose better than the authentic object.

That is to say, everything is being done by Serezha to make Eisenstein fit LEF. But Eisenstein, who has achieved such exceptional working conditions, is striving for the opposite; LEF is harmful for him. When Eisenstein gets a bashing over *October*, that's when he might sink as far as LEF.

We have got one hint of such an attitude to LEF – Eisenstein was invited to that meeting but he did not come; so that now Serezha and Osia<sup>23</sup> have decided to call a smaller meeting (So that none of us can insult Eisenstein! That is to say, without me, Rodchenko, and probably Vitaly), and to try once again to entice Eisenstein into LEF.

They are wasting their time. After all, he is not Dziga Vertov. Because of him I completely unexpectedly had a row with them yesterday. After the discussion of Osia's talk (what cinema has produced for the anniversary of October), Serezha started discussing cinema from the vantage of the LEF platform, railing at “Shubism”,<sup>24</sup> and defending Eisenstein in various eccentric ways. Well, I couldn't stand any more of it, I started saying separately to Vitaly that it was illegitimate to make no mention of Dziga in this way. Then Osia pronounced that there must be no speaking in corners, and announced that I had the floor.

At first I was a bit lost, because I am no good at making speeches and they had caught me completely unawares: and of course it all came down to my starting to swear and saying simply that they had forgotten about Vertov and that this was outrageous. Everyone attacked me, saying, look what kind of a defender he's found himself, and that we were not talking about people's merits in general but about concrete films that were ready now (it was Osia who found a way of wriggling out of it, although it was quite clear what was going on). Well, they had all sorts of fun at my expense. And Serezha, of course, announced that I was a Vertovite and an Anti-Eisensteinite, and that that was all understandable since it came down to personal relations (for him everything is personal relations).

I got furiously angry, and blurted out that not only do I not meet Vertov, I don't even talk to him – that brought down a hail of mockery. So that they then teased me by saying that I am that kind of woman in general – I drink vodka, I play mah-jongg... some sort of nonsense. Vertov turned out to be too Left-wing for LEF, and for Serezha he is an unpleasant person because Serezha's “flagrant” theory loses its freshness.

Vitaly was right to say to me yesterday that everything they scolded Vertov and his *A Sixth Part of the World* for (his “hit-ism” – making a full-length film, having a predetermined theme, demanding naked, honest newsreel), Esfir, for example, is now being forgiven, and thematic filming is getting all sorts of support, since, in the

final analysis, it requires a worked-out script (that is to say, literary work), and Volodia, as a steadfast and stubborn craftsman, yesterday brilliantly used ideology to back it all up.<sup>25</sup>

And now you understand yourself, what kind of short newsreel film can there be, if it needs a plan worked out in advance like this; it's clear that it will be a complete full-length film.

It is only Osia who put the question correctly – at the last film meeting – when he spoke specifically about how we need to learn to produce short films, learn how to produce 100-metre-long newsreels. Now *that* it is a correct LEF aim. Solving a task of this kind now, precisely at this point, is a genuinely revolutionary aim.

*From the diary entry of 12 November 1927, pp. 208-209*

We were at Mishka [Mikhail] Kaufman's; Dziga, Liza [Elizaveta Svilova], and Osia were there.

Why Osia arranged a meeting with the *kinocs* is completely incomprehensible. I understood it was done with the aim of pulling the *kinocs* into LEF. But the word "LEF" was not even mentioned. Osia had a tedious institutional conversation about the Party film conference, what were the demands of the *kinocs*, how much money they needed, what equipment, what films to put on.

Rodchenko first took part intensively in the conversation, but then he stopped. Dziga and Mishka mumbled something in official *kinocs*-speak. Then Osia, after he'd been there no more than an hour, suddenly split.

This made a painful impression on me. It's clear that Serezha and Osia would talk to Eisenstein in a completely different way. For LEF the *kinocs* are too Left-wing a group; they have not been recognized yet, and therefore they might compromise LEF. And this disparity between LEF conversations about newsreel and non-fiction film and their support only of the more Right-wing workers in this field already reeks of provocation and speculation on newsreel.

That Kuleshov<sup>26</sup> is filming newsreel is being described as an extraordinary event, but the *kinocs*, who have been working on the front line of non-fiction film for so many years, and who are still holding their position, pass completely unnoticed by LEF.

Near the end, after Osia had left, we started talking about Kuleshov and Khokhlova.<sup>27</sup> Svilova turned out to be an ardent defender of Khokhlova, saying that she was such an original and interesting woman, and a remarkable actress...

But Dziga evidently likes Khokhlova; he considers her an interesting and rare example, and could film her: "Khokhlova as she is". He considers Kuleshov to be one of the most cultured directors. He told us how he first met Kuleshov: Kuleshov was then completely "sniffed out" on cocaine, and dreaming of a green woman, unbelievably thin and terrible... How he found Khokhlova, and how he was smitten by her.

Rodchenko related to them Osia's script for *Cleopatra*, which was written specially

for Khokhlova. Then they talked a lot more about her. Rodchenko related in a terribly vivid and engaging way how he got her into a “Christian” state while they were working on *Our Acquaintance*,<sup>28</sup> and how absolutely nothing came of it. Everyone was dying of laughter, really, he spoke about her terribly interestingly and with graphic images.

Dziga’s attitude to Kuleshov is, as they say, very warm. He congratulated him on his “legal matrimony” with Lili;<sup>29</sup> Kuleshov accepted the congratulations with the words: “Better late than never.”

Dziga is terribly amazed that in the 7-8 months he’s been away “film newsreel” has become a perfectly ordinary word; he did not expect that newsreel would be universally recognized so quickly.

*From the diary entry of 24 November 1927, p. 210*

Rodchenko said that you can film in the LEF manner:

1. The story of a single object; for example, a ten-ruble note. Try to show it without people.
2. Just hands. You can also combine it with some love story.
3. A whole film out of close-ups, very close ones. Even not showing an entire face, but just parts of it. With absolutely no long shots. So that the notion of the person is created in the viewer by the parts. So, never fully showing the whole person.

## Hands

*Dziga Vertov, “Ruki”, étude, 1927?, RGALI 2091-2-22<sup>30</sup>*

1. Hands of people with nothing to do – on the stomach – thumbs turning.
2. Hands on a piano.
3. Hands listening to a concert.
4. A hand attacking someone’s teeth (a drill) a company commander another hand boxing.
5. A hand salutes.
6. A soldier standing, his left hand on his rifle, his right is stretched down.
7. A hand pushes someone into prison
8. A policeman’s hand – by the scruff of the neck – to the police station.
9. A hand twirling a moustache.
10. A hand raising champagne to a mouth.
11. A hand uncorking a bottle.
12. A hand sending an air kiss.
13. A hand stroking a woman’s leg.
14. A hand stroking a woman’s back.
15. A hand opening a cigarette case.

16. Hands parting hair.
17. A manicure.
18. A lady powdering herself.
19. Hands lace up a dress.
20. Food – lots of plots.
21. The hands of a drummer.
22. A hand scratches the back of a head.
23. The hand of a thief slips into someone else's pocket.
24. Handcuffs are put on the thief's hands
25. They lead them – hands with lowered revolvers, the chained hands of prisoners.
26. The hands of a driver on a steering wheel.
27. Hands crank up an automobile.
28. Hands and a propeller.
29. Flying a plane.
30. Hands in a trench – fighting.
31. The hands and whip of a landowner.
32. Fingers wrung in grief.
33. A nervous hand on a table.
34. Hands crumple a cap.
35. A hand summons.
36. A hand shows 12 o'clock.
37. A hand unbuttons the collar of a shirt.
38. The hands of a peasant, tied to a wattle fence.
39. Hands making notes in a notebook.
40. Hands tying sheaves.
41. The hands of a girl drawing.
42. A hand with a stick-staff.
43. A hand with a little whip.
44. Hands rubbed with joy.
45. Hands suffocate.
46. A hand plunges a dagger.
47. A hand wipes a dagger clean.
48. Hands wiped with a towel, a manicure (The hands of a dead man).
49. An attempt to remove a ring from a finger.
50. Hands up! – hands with a Browning [pistol].
51. Upraised hands.
52. A hand taking out a wallet, wallets placed on a table.
51. A hand and a lap-dog. [Incorrectly numbered in the original.]
52. At a ball – kissing hands. [Incorrectly numbered in the original.]
53. 6 hands of young people at a single book.
54. A hand around a waist.
55. A hand and an eye – looking into the distance.

56. A hand pulls on gloves.
57. A hand sprinkling holy water, a hand with a censer.
58. A hand makes the sign of the cross.
59. Hands light a lamp before an icon.
60. Literacy – the alphabet – writing by syllables.
61. She partakes, he scoffs, a worker eats.
62. Hands beat with fists against the walls of a prison.
63. The hands of a mother rock a child.
64. Hands wash laundry.
65. Hands count money (the stock exchange).
66. The hands of a cigarette vendor and a tray.
67. The hands of a typist.
68. Hands – play – clapping hands.
69. Hands and top hats.
70. Hands milk cows.
71. Hands applaud – *Kino-Pravda* 19.
72. Hands to a mouth – whistling.
73. Hands wipe sweat from a face.
74. The hands of a woodcutter.
75. The hands of a mower.
76. The hands of a bell-ringer.
77. A hand with a hammer.
78. Hands a broom, Hands and a spade.
79. The hands of a miner.
80. We vow to be the first to enter Samara – Hands.
81. A hand in greeting – the hurrah of hands.
82. The hands of a balalaika player – The hands of a pianist – The hands of a drummer.
83. The hands of a drummer with a Red star on the drum – The hands of a conductor – The hands of violinists.
84. Hands charging a weapon – a shot – an explosion.
85. A hand begging for alms.
86. A hand throwing change, a hand wiping with a silk kerchief.
87. Hands and scissors.
88. A hand and a key.
89. A hand and a switch.
90. A hand and a telephone receiver.
91. Hands set up type.
92. Hands holding newspapers (an event).
93. Hands taking money from a till.
94. A search – Hands a revolver.
95. A hand with a clock.

96. A hand and a spyglass.
97. Hands clasped in prayer.
98. Biting fingers.
99. The hands of a drowned man out of the water.
100. The hands of a swimmer.
101. The hand of a policeman.
102. A hand with a reticule.
103. Of a palm-reader.
104. Of a gypsy fortune-teller.
105. The hands of an orator.
103. Hands with little flags (Morse Code).
104. A hand with a bouquet of flowers.
105. A hand with an umbrella.
106. Hands under a chin.
107. A hand turning someone else's button.
108. A hand and a horse's muzzle.
109. Hands and a banner.
110. A hand an inscription on a fence.
112. A hand gluing a poster.
113. Hands and a saw.
114. Hands searching in rubbish.
115. Hands and a newspaper.
116. Hands and sacks of flour.
117. A syringe – injects.
118. A cobbler – hands.
119. Hands make sweets.
120. Hands make shells.
121. The hands of a tailor.
122. A shoe-shiner.
123. The hands of woman editor.
124. The hands of an organ-grinder.
125. The hands of a cameraman.
126. Hands in a water closet “the cleanliness of a closet is a sign of the culture of its visitors” Lassalle<sup>31</sup> a day later a postscript.
127. A hand smacks a little girl.

## Notes

Left Front of the Arts (Levyi front iskusstv) known as LEF (1922-29): association of writers (Vladimir Mayakovsky, Boris Pasternak, Nikolai Aseev, Osip Brik, Pert Neznamov, and others), and artists (Vladimir Tatlin, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, and others), as well as philologists, art theorists, and critics (Osip Brik, Boris Arvatov, Viktor Shklovsky, and others). Left-wing filmmakers (Vertov, Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Esfir Shub) were close to LEF, and often took part in LEF meetings and publications. An heir to the Futurist movement in poetry and art, which had been part of Russia's cultural life since 1912, LEF sought for ways to combine the avant-garde programme in the arts with the social goals declared by the Communist Party.

1. Osip Brik (1888-1945), writer, critic, screenwriter; one of the founders of Left Front of the Arts, and the factual editor of its journals *LEF* and *Novyi LEF*.
2. "Displacement" (*sdvig*) was the term used by Russian Futurist poets and Formalist scholars to refer to various artistic techniques as a result of which familiar objects (words in poetry, or visual images in films) acquire a less-familiar look.
3. Shklovsky quotes Vertov's manifesto "Kinoki: perevorot", published in *LEF*, no. 3, 1923; translated – as "Kinoks: A Revolution" – in Annette Michelson, ed., *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1984).
4. Moscow/Leningrad: Teakinopechat, 1927, p. 141. The English translation of "Poeziia i proza v kinematografii" can be found in Richard Taylor & Ian Christie, eds., *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema Documents 1896-1939* (London: Routledge / Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), document 70: "Poetry and Prose in Cinema".
5. Yuri Tynianov (1894-1943), Formalist scholar. His biographical novel *Kiukhliia* (1925), devoted to the life and works of the writer and revolutionary Vilgelm Kiukhelbeker (1797-1846), was based on previously unknown facts and documents.
6. *Slovo o polku igoreve* (The Tale of Igor's Campaign), a work of Russian 12th-century literature believed to be based on a real historical campaign, was retold by the writer and historian Nikolai Karamzin (1766-1826) in his *Istoriia Gosudarstva Rossijskogo* (History of the Russian State) (St. Petersburg: Eduard Prats, 1842), vol. 3, book 1, chap. 7, cols. 132-134, with several quotations translated into modern Russian.
7. The 1839 backstage musical comedy by Dmitry Lensky (Vorobiev) (1805-1860), *Lev Gurych Sinichkin ili provintsialnaia debiutanka* (Lev Gurych Sinichkin, or A Provincial Debutante), contains a scene in which the actor of the play's title climbs over the footlights and continues to act in the orchestra pit.
8. *Krasnye diavoliata* (Ivan Perestiani, 1923).
9. *Moskva* (1926), by Mikhail Kaufman and Ilya Kopalín. *Padenie Dinastii Romanovykh* (1927) by Esfir Shub (1894-1959), Soviet documentary filmmaker who specialized in found-footage features.
10. Iosif Yermoliev (1889-1962), distributor and producer.
11. Soviet cameraman Eduard Tisse (1897-1961), who shot newsreels before his career as the cinematographer of Eisenstein's films.
12. *Mat'* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1926).
13. Another part of this text (omitted here) appeared in English under the title "The Same Thing from Different Angles" (Michelson, ed., *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, pp. 57-58).
14. See previous entry.
15. The organ of Left Front of the Arts, the journal *LEF* was published in Moscow during 1923-25, with Vladimir Mayakovsky acting as its editor-in-chief. The publication was stopped as financially unviable, and was renewed as *Novyi LEF* during 1927-28, with its programme largely unchanged except for its new emphasis on what LEF theorists dubbed the "literature of fact" – roughly, the literary equivalent of the *kinocs* programme of de-fictionalized cinema. Even though in 1923 Vertov was close to LEF, and published in the *LEF* journal, Shklovsky's and Brik's mixed reviews of the *kinocs*' work hurt him, and he did not hesitate to answer LEF criticisms in print.
16. For original Russian titles and other filmographic information for these films by Vertov, see the filmography at the end of this volume.
17. *Bukhara* (1927), documentary short photographed by Iakov Tolchan and edited by Elizaveta Svilova; *Novorossiisk* (1927), a short by Mikhail Kaufman; *Flax: Len* (1927), educational film by Ilya Kopalín.

18. Varvara Stepanova (1894-1958), Constructivist painter and designer, member of LEF, and wife of Aleksandr Rodchenko.
19. Production of textiles, photographs – in other words, “real things” – as distinct from the creation of art objects *par excellence* (in this case, easel paintings) was the Left Front programme shared by Constructivist artists like Stepanova, Tatlin, or Rodchenko.
20. Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), avant-garde theatre director; teacher of Sergei Eisenstein.
21. Sergei Tretyakov (1892-1939), poet, critic, playwright, and LEF member.
22. The minutes of this meeting (including the full version of Tretyakov’s points, summarized by Stepanova) appeared in *Novyi LEF*, nos. 11-12, 1927, and were partly translated into English in *Screen*, vol. 12, no. 4, Winter 1971/72, pp. 74-77: “LEF and Film: Notes of Discussion”.
23. Osia: Osip Brik.
24. Esfir Shub’s method of making found-footage documentaries.
25. Volodia: poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930), the leader of LEF. An author of a number of film scenarios, Mayakovsky was for scripting films before shooting them.
26. Film director Lev Kuleshov (1899-1970), close to LEF.
27. Aleksandra Khokhlova (1897-1985), film actress; Lev Kuleshov’s wife.
28. *Nasha znakomaia*, working title of Kuleshov’s film *Journalist* (*Zhurnalistka*, 1927), with Khokhlova, and sets designed by Aleksandr Rodchenko.
29. Lili (Lilya) Brik (1891-1978), Osip Brik’s wife, the muse of Mayakovsky’s poetry. Lili Brik also tried her hand at cinema as an actress, screenwriter, and director. In 1927 Lili Brik was said to be having an affair with Lev Kuleshov.
30. The exact date and purpose of this manuscript is unclear. A reference to *Kino-Pravda*, issue no. 19 (line 71), allows us to date it as no earlier than 1924. It is tempting to assume, however, that Vertov jotted down this list of “shots” in response to Rodchenko’s idea of the kind of LEF movie we find recorded in Stepanova’s diary entry of 24 November 1927 (see previous entry). The list indeed looks like a “theoretical” movie, a “film without film” étude of the kind practiced earlier on in Lev Kuleshov’s workshops. There are occasional errors in shot numbering.
31. Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864), German Socialist.  
Line 126 was added later, in different ink: the words “a day later a postscript” could be Vertov’s own remark, or a handwritten note made by Elizaveta Svilova much later when she handled the Vertov archive.

## THE ELEVENTH YEAR ACCORDING TO ITS MAKERS



### The Kino-Eyed Eleventh Year

Dziga Vertov, "Kino-Glazyi Odinnadtsatyi", in *Odinnadtsatyi (The Eleventh Year)* (Kiev: VUFKU, 1928)<sup>1</sup>

1.

Kino-Eye = kino-I see (I see through the lens of the kino-camera) + kino-I write (I take notes on film with the camera) + kino-I organize (edit).

2.

To edit is to organize kino-pieces into kino-speech, to note down kino-speech in filmed shots, but not to select pieces for some "scenes" (theatrical deviation) or pieces for the intertitles (literary deviation).

3.

Kino-Eye = the kinography of facts = the movement for non-fiction film.

4.

Kino-Eye was born in the October Revolution. The rails of Kino-Eye are the rails of *kino-October*.

5.

Kino-Eye is not a kino-film, not a group of kino-workers, not some direction in art (of left or right).

Kino-Eye is a movement for influence through facts, and not influence through invention, however strongly it might influence. Kino-Eye is the documentary deciphering of the seen world.

6.

Kino-Eye is the visual link between the workers of the whole world on the basis of the exchange of facts, kino-documents as the kino-camera has captured them (instead of the exchange of kino-theatrical notions of a more or less ordinary kind).

7.

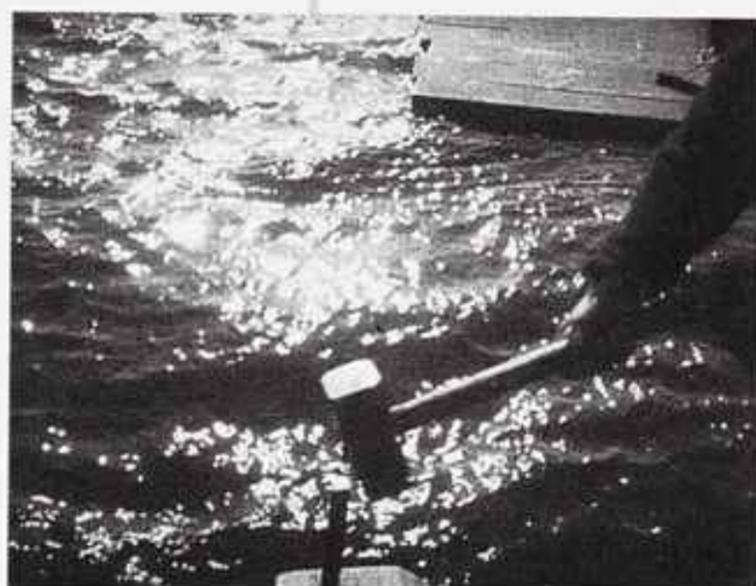
*The Eleventh Year* – the most recent work of Kino-Eye – is realized, like all the previous works of the *kinocs*, without a studio, without actors, without sets, without a script, without acting.

*The Eleventh Year*, a documentary film, made on the threshold of the second decade of October, has as its aim to open a new revolutionary stage in the history of the development of non-fiction cinema.

8.

*The Eleventh Year* develops the vanguard experience of Kino-Eye, writing with a kino-camera operating through pure kino-language.

Hammering



Hammering – actual, figurative, rhythmical, or symbolic – is instrumental in *The Eleventh Year*. Note (when watching) how the actual blows dictate the montage of the film.



*The Eleventh Year* is calculated actively and entirely on the viewer, calculated on the viewer's reception, on "visual thinking". The viewer is relieved of the necessity of translating the film from the language of the eyes into the language of words. Not word-documents, but kino-documents. The 100 percent language of cinema.

9.

*The Eleventh Year* is film at its Socialist post.

10.

*The Eleventh Year* is the kino-banner with which we cross over the threshold beyond which lies the eleventh year of the proletarian revolution.

11.

*The Eleventh Year* should help to understand that the line of Kino-Eye – from *Kino-Calendar* and *Kino-Pravda* through the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*, *Stride*, *Soviet!*, and *A Sixth Part of the World*, to the summary film *The Eleventh Year*, to the education of the film workers who have spoken out for non-fiction film, who enter together into the non-fiction front – is the correct line, the line of which Lenin spoke.

### **Speech at a Discussion of the Film *The Eleventh Year* at the ARK**

*Dziga Vertov, 16 February 1928, RGALI 2091-2-201*

Comrades, *The Eleventh Year*, just like the first part of *Kino-Eye*, just like *Stride*, *Soviet!*, like *A Sixth Part of the World*, is one of the models, one of the types of non-fiction film. As the author of the film-thing which you have seen today, I should like to draw your attention to the following aspects of the film: In the first place: *The Eleventh Year* is written in the purest film language, in the language of the eyes. *The Eleventh Year* is designed to be perceived visually, to be thought about visually. In the second place: *The Eleventh Year* is written by the film camera in the language of documentary, in the language of facts noted down on film. In the third place: *The Eleventh Year* is written in the language of Socialism, in the language of the Communist deciphering of the seen world. Before we move to a discussion of the film, I should like to answer a few of the most interesting questions which I have been asked in recent days in connection with the showing of the film at the Hermitage.

Question no. 1: Do not certain shots in the film *The Eleventh Year* rely on symbolism? No. We do not rely on symbolism. But if it turns out that certain shots or montage phrases, brought to perfection, acquire the meaning of symbols, then this does not cause us to panic and does not force us to throw these shots out of the film. We consider the symbolic picture and shots which are constructed on the principle of achieving a particular aim, but which acquire the meaning of symbols, to be two completely different concepts.

Question no. 2: Why do you use complex shots, kino-photo-montage? We use complex shots either with the aim of showing simultaneous action or with the aim of singling out details in a general view, or with the aim of juxtaposing two or several facts. Defining this device as a trick device does not conform to reality.

Question no. 3: Does it not seem to you that the first few parts are better edited than the last ones? This question has been put to me particularly often in recent days. This impression is deceptive. The first part is obviously on a level at which it is easier for the viewer to take it in; the fourth and fifth parts are constructed in a more complex way. They contain far more montage inventiveness than the first two parts; they are looking more to the future of cinema than the second and third parts. I have to say that the fourth and fifth reels have the same relation to the first reel as an higher education does to a secondary school. It is natural that more complex montage forces the viewer to experience more tension, and demands greater attention in order to be taken in.

Question no. 4: Was *The Eleventh Year* made without a script? Yes, *The Eleventh Year*, like all the Kino-Eye films, was made without a script.

You know that, speculating on this repudiation of the script, our many opponents have tried to represent the matter as a case of our being opponents of working to a plan. And yet, despite the ideas that people have, the *kinocs* put far more effort into a preparatory plan and pay far more attention to it than do workers in fiction film. Before they start work they make an extremely careful study of the set theme in all its manifestations; they study the literature on the given question; they use all the sources, so as to have the clearest understanding of the matter in hand. Before filming starts they draw up thematic, route- and chronological plans. How does this plan differ from a script?... In that it is a plan of action for the film camera for revealing a given theme in life, and not a plan for the dramatization of the same theme before the film camera? How does the plan for filming a real battle differ from the plan for dramatizing a series of separate battle scenes? That is the difference between a Kino-Eye plan and a script in fiction film.

The final question concerns the intertitles, and many comrades put it in this way: How do you explain the abundance of intertitles in *A Sixth Part of the World* and the shortage of them in the film *The Eleventh Year*? In *A Sixth Part of the World* we were concerned with an experiment in taking the intertitles out of brackets by means of creating a word-radio-theme. In the film *The Eleventh Year* the word-theme is destroyed; the significance of the intertitles is almost reduced to nil; the film is constructed through the interweaving of film phrases without the participation of intertitles. The intertitles have almost no significance in the film *The Eleventh Year*. What is better, the first experiment, or the second? I consider that both experiments, both the experiment in creating a word-theme, and the experiment in destroying the word-theme, are equally important, and have extremely great significance both for Kino-Eye and for all of Soviet cinema.

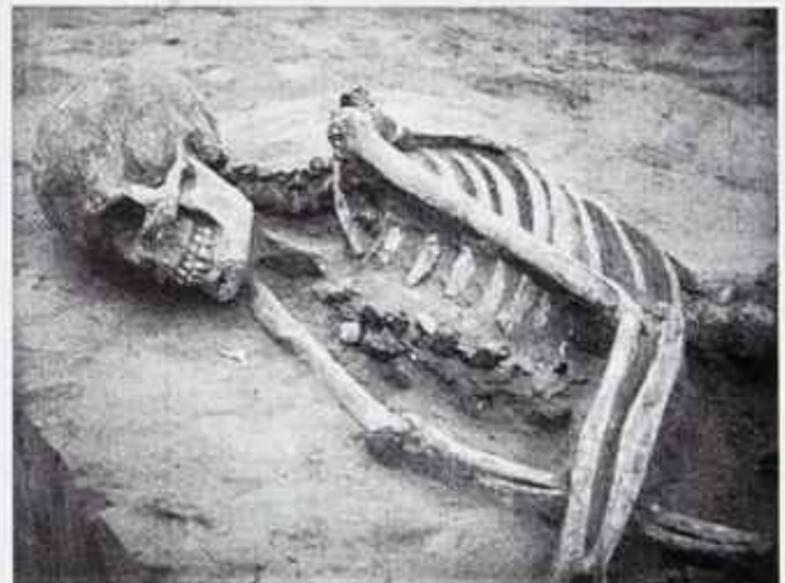
### **Where Is *The Eleventh Year*?**

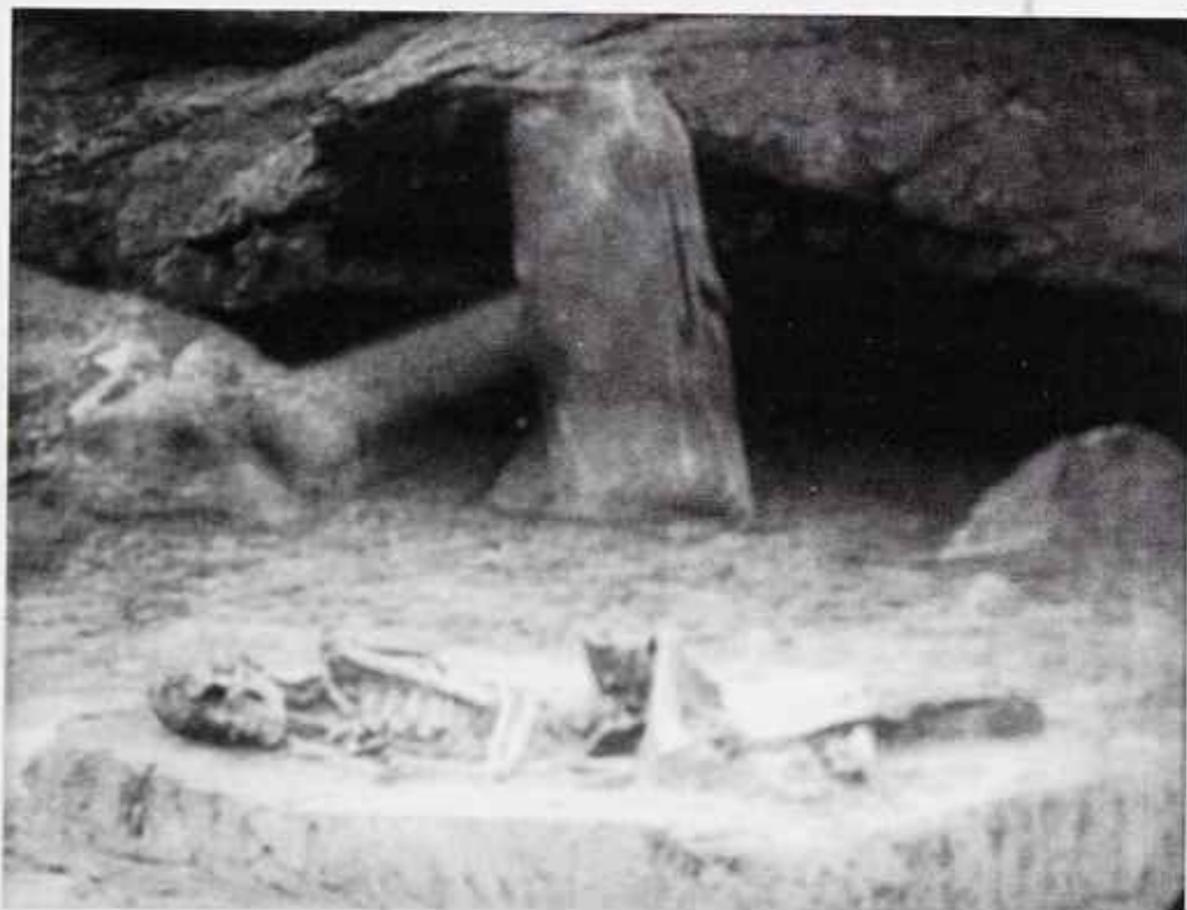
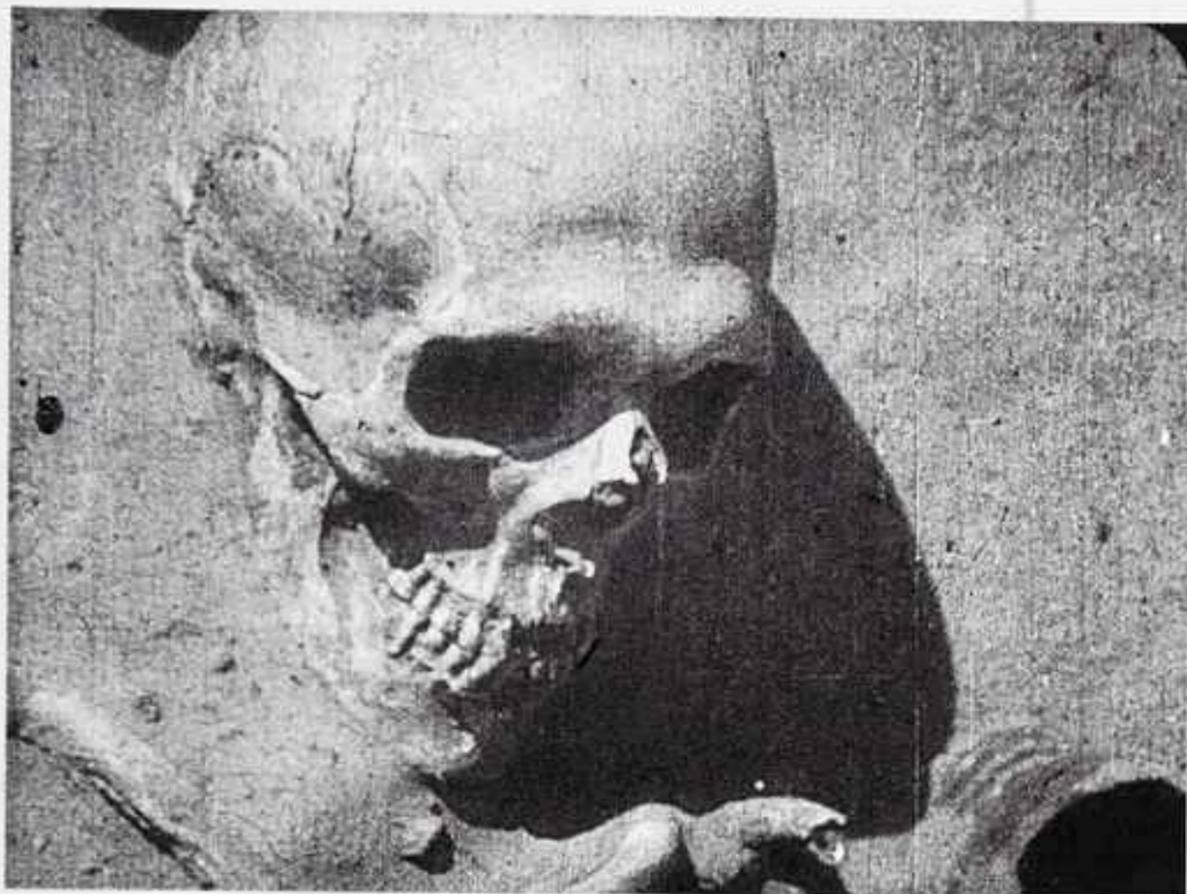
*E[lizaveta] Svilova*, "Gde 'Odinnadtsatyi'?", *Kino*, 17 April 1928

The *Trud* newspaper writes: "The fate of *The Eleventh Year*, for all the obvious interest that the public has shown in it, gives cause for concern. This is all the more annoying in

## Skeleton

It was an unplanned event that after the ground was blown up to create a foundation for a future dam, an archaeological discovery was made at the site, which Vertov immediately worked into the conceptual structure of *The Eleventh Year*. A fragment from Vertov's shooting diary, published in *Sovetskii ekran* in 1928 (no. 9; translation included in Michelson's *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, p. 169): "Fragments fly into the distance ... They fly as far as an opened grave where a Scythian has lain asleep for the last two thousand years ... The Scythian stares from his eye sockets through the black holes of his skull. As though he's listening to the explosions ... The Scythian in his grave – and the din of the new offensive." This discovery (both in the sense of archaeology and as the newly discovered film image) adds a mythological touch to Vertov's documentary film, which suddenly becomes a little like Aleksandr Dovzhenko's thousand-year-spanning parable *Zvenigora* (made at the same studio the same year). Note the close-up of a hand with a hammer superimposed on the shot of the Scythian's grave.





that through his working methods *Vertov* has influenced even French and German cinematic innovators like Cavalcanti and Ruttmann (*Symphony of a Great City*) and others.<sup>2</sup>

In point of fact, after a few closed showings, and despite the brilliant responses to the film by the press and the public, the film has disappeared. Summer is already in sight, the exhibition season is coming to an end. But where is the film?

Perhaps exhibitors again want to speculate on the “commercial unprofitability” of showing non-fiction films?

But then how do you explain the film’s success on the first-run screens of Ukrainian commercial cinemas?

Let’s take Kiev. The best cinema in town, the “First State Cinema”, announces: “An unheard-of success! 10,000 viewers have seen the film *The Eleventh Year* in three days. Because of this unheard-of interest, the run is being extended.”

The Kiev newspaper *Proletarskaia pravda* writes:

“We are convinced that the viewer will force VUFKU to show the film ‘for weeks and months’.”

And in fact, despite the lack of attention from exhibitors, despite the exiguous amount of advertising, *The Eleventh Year* has been not only a public but a “class” success on the Kiev screen. A man in the street said to the exhibitor:

“Of course I am bad, I like a tear, a kiss, and a murder, but you, exhibitor, are even worse than I am. You stubbornly don’t show me anything else.”

People write from Kharkov that there, too, *The Eleventh Year* is showing in the best cinema, the Karl Liebknecht, to well-chosen music. It is being well received by viewers. Exhibitors may point to the fact that it is “not our audience”.

“Not our audience” means that when *The Eleventh Year* was showing, the composition of the audience in first-run cinemas changed in the direction of an increase in the number of people in caps and people with briefcases and a diminution in the number of people wearing Astrakhan and sealskin.

We must forthwith and categorically demand the immediate showing of the film *The Eleventh Year* on the Moscow screen.

### Notes

1. VUFKU: Vseukrainskoe foto-kino upravlenie, the All-Ukrainian Photo-Cinema Directorate, at whose film studio Vertov was employed from 1927 to 1931.
2. *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (*Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, 1927), by Walther Ruttmann, and the French-made *Rien que les heures* (1926), by Alberto Cavalcanti, were thought by many to have influenced Vertov’s style of filmmaking, and by some to have been influenced by Vertov’s work.

## THE ELEVENTH YEAR IN REVIEWS



### Vertov

*N[aum] Kaufman,*<sup>1</sup> "Vertov", *Sovetskii ekran*, no. 45, 1928, pp. 6-7

"They shoot us, but they steal from us," the famous expression of the French painter Edgar Degas, could not be more applicable to Vertov, too.

Vertov has been harshly criticized: kino-aesthetes from literary cliques have given him condescending reprimands, the directors of factories have not loved him, production workers have considered him a "dead duck". But on the sly, people have robbed him. Consciously or unconsciously.

"Robbery" in art is a relative thing. It is not even always offensive. The robber is sometimes doing something culturally worthwhile, because he is popularizing the new thing that the person he is robbing has invented, thought up, nurtured in himself, but has for some reason been unable to take out to the masses.

But Vertov has always been robbed, to the sound of argument with him, or while he has been ignored.

Vertov is remarkable in that he was the first person to begin to work on pure cinematic material; in other words, he purified this material, chose and selected what was best.

People have learned from Vertov the selection of material, the devices of montage, the use of intertitles. Vertov is an inventor of ascetic bent. Many of the devices which he has long since left behind him will be chewed over for years to come.

Vertov is above all the organizer of our vision.

Our ability to take things in visually is poor and conventional. The only things that have a sharp effect on us are an unusual linear construction or foreshortenings, but they do not persuade us; rather, they frighten us off, since they are unusual. In the area of colour, we need to take a good look at things in order to notice and remember colours. Ask an ordinary person the unexpected question of what colours, hues, and lines he can see before him, and you will put him in blind alley. It is only then that he will start looking around him. The poverty of our vision leads us to see things at best from one single point of view.

The eye of the film camera is more absolute and perfect. Seeing from different points of view, it grasps things better. And not only things, but people. In Vertov's theory of filming "life caught unawares", you can discern a frankly scientific method of observing life and accumulating experience, from which you can create all sorts of concepts, even psychological ones.

Vertov created the theory of the Kino-Eye; that is to say, the ideal eye of the camera, which organizes our visual capabilities on the material of life, not invention.

Let us take the factory as an example. The viewer imagines the factory associatively as a building with a large number of windows, chimneys, and machines. This is the standard, clichéd image of the factory.

Vertov's approach is unusual. Using the same details, Vertov distorts them spatially and presents them from various points of view, using foreshortening of the most various kinds. We see very tall chimneys, shot from below, from the side, from the top of the building, falling away in a ricochet, and machines in which connecting rods, pistons, shafts, and drives live a rhythmic life.

But do we need these foreshortened chimneys, these distorted cranes, these parts of machines which rush upon us from we know not where? Do they really exist, or are these attempts at aestheticizing distortion?

Of course we need them, because this is life, reality, and not sets out of *Caligari*.<sup>2</sup> Vertov constructs his montage images out of the complexes of these details of things. For Vertov, to see means to live. To see the life going on around you means to imbibe it into yourself, to experience it.

A distinctive forerunner of Vertov in the history of art was the French painter of the Second Empire Constantin Guys.<sup>3</sup>

Guys was one of the most gifted French illustrators. His drawings are classic works; the young generation studies them.

For Guys the day only had meaning when he could still see. But living in a time of licentious fast living, the time of the coquettes, shady deals, wars, and public balls of the Second Empire, Guys naturally sought out those spectacles which seemed most colourful and impressive to him as an artist. When he was confined to bed by illness, he famously regretted that he could not go out into the street, because he still needed to see.

In our day, those words could be spoken by Vertov, if he were prevented from seeing some dam being built, or some crane being raised...

Sometimes natural phenomena or the structures of things are captured and reflected especially acutely by artists. The artist reveals himself stylistically in them. And we involuntarily begin to look at this part of nature through his eyes. For example, the paths through parks in the work of Rousseau, the rainy urban squares of Marquet,<sup>4</sup> the evening fields of Levitan...<sup>5</sup>

There are things in our time whose beauty Vertov was the first to be able to reveal in film, and we look at them through his eyes.

The analogy with painting here is, of course, only an external one. The way things are shown is different, and it is done via different means. What is important here is only the completeness with which the artist or director shows things, and the choice of material, for products made of iron and steel are more interesting for us than a field in the evening...

Vertov's style is unusually pure and tense. The life from which he draws his material in large handfuls acquires a kind of brilliant, moulded monumentality in his work for the screen.

When they show a worker in our feature films, he is hardly ever like a real worker, but always like an actor in make-up. Everyone who has worked on a factory floor knows that real workers have their own visible culture, which is expressed in their behaviour, their movements, their customs, and the rhythm of their work. You cannot imitate this straightaway; you have to study it for a long time.

In *The Eleventh Year*, Vertov has shown the character of the worker vividly. Vertov worked only with light, but certain types of his workers in the coal mines and the forge shops are comparable in their expressiveness only with Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*.

You cannot assess Vertov indifferently. When you speak about him you have to become indignant and resort to polemic. The persecution of Vertov is a shameful mistake on the part of our critics and production workers.

Vertov is an experimenter. As early as *Kino-Eye*, which was shot with a hidden camera, he used extended and speeded-up filming, animation, reverse projection, stop-motion, dolly shots, and so on. Vertov never stops, and is never satisfied with what he has done.

Vertov's creative work is built upon mathematical calculation and on being thought out in a strictly logical way.

After *The Eleventh Year*, our critics accused him of editing the parts of machines in such a way as to infect the viewer with his own aesthetic emotions, and of showing the external beauty of the rhythmic movement of a machine, without its semantic significance.

Besides this, he was accused of being insufficiently politically literate, and of therefore understanding our Revolution mechanically and not sociologically.

The critics underestimated the fact that Vertov is creating a new film language, that on the basis of his montage of kino-observations he is creating a new kinography.

Vertov gives us the synthetic image of the machine, constructing it out of its parts and forcing these parts of machines to live their own cinematic existence on the basis of a mathematically calculated rhythm. From these semantic segments of rhythm he can create a notion of the growth of our industry or our construction.

Vertov organizes his material on the basis of movement and light. The political emotion is contained in the formal graphic completeness of his material, which is Soviet life, Soviet reality.

The social emotion of Vertov comes from his enormous emotional charge, and, like *Battleship Potemkin*, it can inflame both friend and foe.

Eisenstein creates heroism from the material of the Revolution. Vertov creates it from the material of daily life. He raises the Moscow City Soviet to *Stride, Soviet!*, the USSR in the cross-section of the State Trading Organization to *A Sixth Part of the World*; he infuses the peaceful construction of *The Eleventh Year* with intense and lofty emotion.

Vertov is not alone. He is strong through his unity with his whole collective, which works according to his instructions. But in his arduous work, Vertov is the first to pave the way. He is the leader.

**The Eleventh Year**

Ia. Belsky, "Odinnadtsatyi", *Kommunist*, 6 January 1928

The moon in the hills is presented exceptionally beautifully; the skeleton of a Scythian is presented skilfully, demonstrating the violation of the thousand-year peace of these parts. The montage is excellent – a worker beats the hill with a hammer, but once or twice would have been enough. This really should not be endlessly repeated. When a trick is shown twice it loses its effect.

The shots of the flooding of Kichkas are beautiful, and the windmill disappearing under the water...

You can say the same thing about the sequences of agricultural work and the wonderful montage of the machines. It is all shot superbly.

But if there is a "but", it must refer to the muddled montage. The "Electrical Co-operative" and the smiling peasant woman come in for no reason. She smiles when the electrician climbs a post to fix the electricity supply, and she smiles in the same sequence, only a little more merrily, when Petrovsky<sup>6</sup> and Kaganovich<sup>7</sup> speak on a platform.

Some sort of peasant households with sheaves come in for no reason, and the high side of the ship *Red Ukraine*. It is also strange that the entire fleet has one sailor and one ship.

One and the same close-up of the Dnieper Hydro-Electric Station is repeated often and intrusively in all the parts, and this is all mixed up with the army and the mines of the Donbas. I think that this mistake can be easily corrected. You can throw out some of the sequences, shortening the film by one part, or you can replace these sequences with new ones, without shortening the film, and put the whole thing in order.

The endless alternation of shots filmed in different places forces the viewer to experience some sort of psychological *gopak* [Russian folk dance].

The conclusion is simple: it is beautifully filmed, and there is enough material overall to make a fine and necessary film out of *The Eleventh Year*.

**The Eleventh Year**

L. Shatov, "Odinnadtsatyi", *Zhizn iskusstva*, 21 February 1928, p. 14

Of course it is difficult to cover fully in a single film the extremely rich and broad factual material which the theme of *The Eleventh Year* provides, the emotion of Socialist construction in the eleventh year of October. At the base of the film lies one of the most important sectors of this construction, the construction of power stations, and in particular the Dnieper Hydro-Electric Station; but Vertov has not managed to remain within the limits of just this relatively broad theme, and has made his film too disjointed, too various in the character of its material, and therefore scrappy in your reception of it. He has, moreover, obviously failed to bear in mind that an artistic syn-

thetic image is beyond the capabilities of a non-fiction newsreel film, and throughout *The Eleventh Year* Vertov unsuccessfully attempts to counterfeit such an artistic synthesis either with the help of semantic associative chains which grow at a frantic rate, or through refined multiple exposures and other similar photo-tricks, which are often whipped up into a cheap symbolism which has outlived its time. Neither thing achieves its aim, or organizes the emotions of the viewer in the necessary direction, for all the abundance of emotionally charged intertitles.

All these obvious mistakes in the film are provoked, in the main, by an underestimation of the viewer's response, which is a kind of creative blindness. They confirm the rule which is doubly true for the cinema, that the greatest, even the most "sensitive" effect in art can be achieved only by that "cold" mathematical calculation, without which the organization of emotions is as unthinkable as the organization of any industrial process would be... the "Extremely Left Wing" Vertov must have known that.

But the basic fault of the film does not lie here, but in the monstrous, perhaps unconscious distortion of the concept of Socialist industry, industrial culture, industrial art, which Vertov reveals in this work. The strictly organized construction and motion of every contemporary machine, something which is utterly directed towards its aim and shows utter firmness of purpose, inevitably also provokes a series of aesthetic impressions in the city-dweller. The complex and precise structure of the machine and the stable rhythmic quality of its movements are externally very effective, "photogenic" from the point of view of the cinema. Nevertheless, a self-sufficient, purely aesthetic demonstration of a large number of machines without any connection to their real meaning and purpose, their industrial significance – a kind of approach which fills at least two-thirds of Vertov's film – is extremely far from a Socialist understanding of industry and art.

By means of extremely complex montage and photographic tricks Vertov and his cameraman Kaufman achieve the demonstration on screen of almost absolutely non-objective, abstract movement "in its pure form", which smells strongly of the idealistic, non-objective "Constructivism" of the Western European Dadaist innovators and their ilk. It cannot be gainsaid that all these quadruple exposures, reverse filming, and so on and so forth, are very pleasant, often externally stunning, effected with great "taste" and skill, but what, besides an easy-on-the-eye "spectacle for spectacle's sake", can such an October anniversary film give the viewer?! For what reason do these utterly beautiful machines move, what is their purpose in Socialist industry? – this is not only not shown in the film, but is not even said in the intertitles. Surely it would have been possible to find less pointless forms for expressing the essence of the life caught "unawares" by Kino-Eye, the life of the only country in the world where Socialism is being constructed!

We have to do justice to the authors of the film: it does also contain completely comprehensible sequences – the demonstration of the Dnieper Hydro-Electric Station and the Donbas, which let you sense in Vertov an outstanding and inventive filmmaker, and in Kaufman a brilliant cameraman, even apart from his trans-rational-aes-

**They Are Looking at Us**



Spliced between shots showing Soviet achievements, these happy faces from *The Eleventh Year* are nothing less than trans-continental reaction shots.



thetic constructions. But unfortunately they both – this often happens with talented people – have gotten too carried away with the very process of working on *The Eleventh Year*, and their self-sufficient though possibly lofty mastery has dragged them along behind it, so that for the sake of a “tasteful” shot they have lost sight of the most important thing: what the viewer they are working for needs, and what he can cope with, especially the viewer of a film about October.

### **The Eleventh Year**

Vitaly Zhemchuzhny, “*Odinnadtsatyi*”, Vecherniaia Moskva, 4 February 1928

The most recent films of the *kinocs* have aroused a sharp divergence of views.

Some people have considered them an enormous achievement for Soviet cinema, while others have not recognized any value in them. The new work by Dziga Vertov and Mikhail Kaufman, *The Eleventh Year*, will undoubtedly arouse no less sharp a discussion.

The reason for such a divergence of opinion lies, it seems to us, in the unusual and original method which the *kinocs* have applied in their most recent works. They make their film, as they used to, from newsreel material, from film documents. But the film as a whole no longer has the character of a “film newsreel”.

The individualization of an event, the designation of place and time, the stress of typical details – things which are essential in film newsreel – are absent here. We are shown on screen not a specific factory or machine, but some generalized abstracted factory – “a factory in general”. This generalized material is not arranged through the film in a temporal or spatial sequence, but is gathered into thematic parts: electrification, “people of coal”, “the Red Army”, and so on.

Is such a method legitimate in cinema?

Watching *The Eleventh Year* forces you once again to give an affirmative answer to this question. Although the footage of the Dnieper Hydro-Electric Station and the Volkhov Hydro-Electric Station is presented in the film in an abstract way, you watch it with exceptional interest. These sequences attain an enormous power to influence people. This is a great victory for documentary filming, and at the same time for the *kinocs*' method.

But the method of generalizing newsreel material conceals great dangers. It is very easy to slide down into cheap symbolism, when a real filmed factory turns into a symbol of industrialization, and a real man into “Man” with a capital letter. Nor is the danger excluded of excessive enthusiasm for “beautiful”, effective shots and montage combinations, independently of their semantic content, that is to say, an enthusiasm for the cheap aestheticism that the *kinocs* themselves are struggling against.

Watching *The Eleventh Year* convinces us that these misgivings have a real foundation. It seems to us that a way of insuring against these “deviations” would be a turning to thematic contexts other than those on which the *kinocs* have worked recently.

For that to happen they would have to renounce that over-intense emotion on which *A Sixth Part of the World* and *The Eleventh Year* are constructed. This emotion is directed only towards the viewer's feelings, and has no effect at all on his reason. But we need films which not only stir us, but also prove things convincingly. The *kinocs* method provides the opportunity to create films of this kind. They can be original film-essays on political, economic, and cultural questions.

If *The Eleventh Year* is an event in Soviet cinema, then it is more of an internal production event than a mass event. It is still a laboratory experiment, and not a product for broad usage. But that does not lessen the significance of the inventive work of the *kinocs*.

Among the film's successes, one should note particularly the work of the cameraman, Mikhail Kaufman. The footage in *The Eleventh Year* places him in the ranks of the first-class masters. His footage stuns the viewer not only through its technical perfection, not only through its brilliant construction of the shot, but also by its virtuoso inventiveness.

### **The Eleventh Year**

*Mikhail Koltsov, "Odinnadtsatyi", Pravda, 26 February 1928*

In the general movement of Soviet cinema, the Kino-Eye group is moving along its own particular path. You really could not say that this path is smooth or strewn with roses. On the contrary, Dziga Vertov and his comrades have chosen the path of greatest resistance in their work.

This resistance should be seen as triple. In the first place, Kino-Eye has to struggle against the enmity and inertia of film workers, who consider the Vertovians to be "savages" among them. Secondly, there are the consequences of the enormous inertia of the public, who demand only entertaining fiction plots from a film. Thirdly, Kino-Eye has to contend with the effect of its own specific and not always justified devices.

Despite all this, we can affirm without fear of contradiction that the Vertov group is moving constantly forward, that the quality of its work is getting stronger, and that while they may not be that numerous, the number of its loyal supporters among filmgoers is growing.

Pushed out of Moscow by the coldly bureaucratic attitude of Sovkino, Kino-Eye made its new film, *The Eleventh Year*, "abroad", among the "friendly foreigners" of VUFKU. If this is the film because of which Vertov was forced to leave Sovkino, then in its completed form it is a vivid reproach to the people who tried to prevent it being made.

*The Eleventh Year* has as its theme the industrialization of our country: the strong point of the film is the technical miracle now being created on the River Dnieper. Besides the Dnieper Hydro-Electric Station, the film's "actors" are the Volkhov Hydro-Electric Station, the metal works of the Ukraine, grain elevators, and other powerful actors made of steel, stone, and iron. The leader of the filming of *The Eleventh Year* has made full, perhaps excessive use of these actors...

Miners



It is not quite true what critics said about the absence of live people in *The Eleventh Year*. We notice them, as they notice us – Vertov never tells them not to look at the camera, and as they do some of them smile. Note the touch of intimacy between the young woman with a bucket descending the stairs and the young man climbing them: it is clearly not the first time they have met.



The film spectacle begins with calm epic chords. The ancient island of Khortitsa, the seething rapids over granite banks, the skeleton of a primitive man covered in sand. Into this place that has remained untouched for centuries, into the torrent of this boundless pulverizing energy, bursts human reason as an organizing force. A horn blares to summon the men. A gigantic worker places his anvil over the Dnieper rapids and wields his hammer. The complex, heroic symphony of labour begins. It ends with the victory of the armed power of Socialist technology.

Photographically the theme is worked out impeccably. The cameraman Kaufman has had an enormous triumph. The dissolves, the double exposures, the use of light, individual shots, put the young artist of the lens into the front ranks of Soviet cameramen. But the montage of the film, to which the author and leader of the film justly ascribes decisive significance, has not fully justified the method he has used. Sometimes the frequent repetition of particular scenes and shots, instead of strengthening the image, creates, on the contrary, a lessening of the tension and a certain irritating impatience. The sections where there are people as well as machines are too cut back. This gives the film a certain mechanical dryness; you start pining for people, for the living builders of Socialism who, the devil take it, are standing behind these machines. The intertitles need to be properly edited.

Overall, while *The Eleventh Year* does retain certain old failings from Vertov's earlier works, it is an original, more adult, and creatively stronger work. With it the Kino-Eye collective has once again and definitively affirmed its right to exist, to continue its line and, in order to implement it, to have full access, along with other groups of filmmakers, to the resources and capabilities of Soviet cinema.

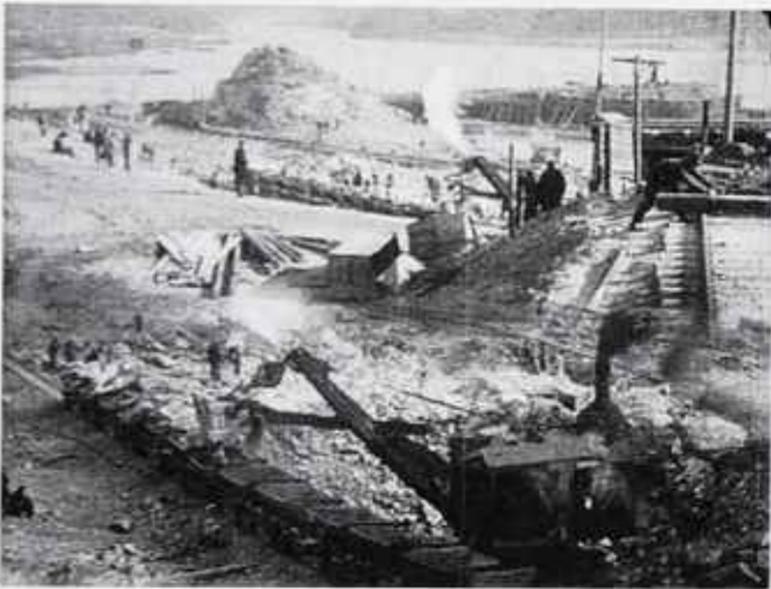
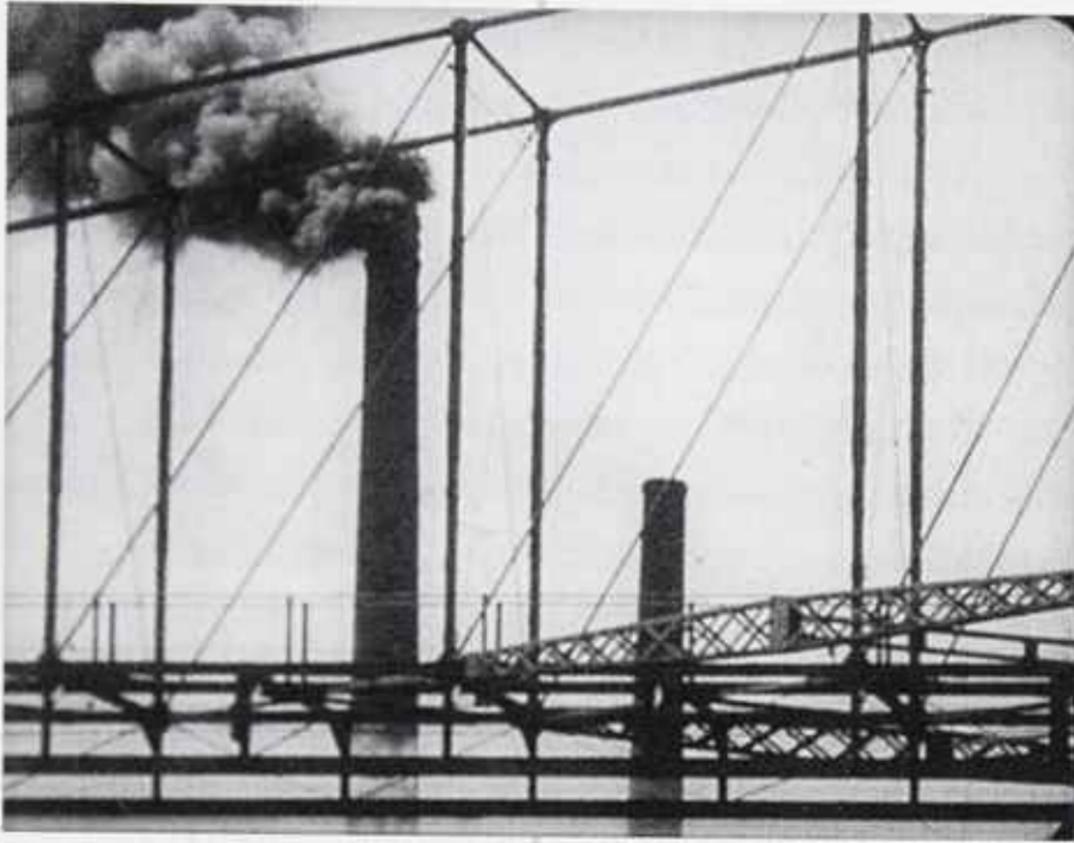
### **Dziga Vertov's *The Eleventh Year***

V[ladimir] Fefer,<sup>8</sup> excerpt from "‘Odinnadtsatyi’ Dzigi Vertova", Chitatel i pisatel. Ezhenedelnik literatury i iskusstva, no. 4, 1928

In *The Eleventh Year* there is a disjunction between the thematic task and the form of expression. The aim of the film is to sum up our achievements over ten years. Achievements on the earth, under the earth, on the water, and in the air. The material for such a film should have been treated according to the principle of a simple sequence that was easier to take in (even a chronological one). But fearing over-simplification Vertov also avoids the necessary simplicity. He is afraid of lowering the level of his achievements, and as a result the film remains only an experiment, interesting for production workers and incomprehensible to the masses.

Though the film is not experienced as a unified whole, it is still interesting even for the mass viewer to a certain degree. Interesting for the freshness with which the beautifully filmed shots have been seized out of reality: shots of the Dnieper Hydro-Electric Station, of electric machines, of factories, a threshing machine, the faces of peasant women, the figures of workers and Red Army soldiers. But since all of this is linked

## A Dovzhenko Accent?



Vertov's idea of beauty lay in the making, not with the made, and industrial landscapes fit well with this Productionist and Constructivist taste. This high-angle landscape is hard to appreciate in a still, but on the screen it becomes apparent that it is a process shot composed of multiply-exposed segments, some of them filmed with a moving camera. Critics noticed, however, Vertov's (and Kaufman's) new interest in more conventional (but not less convincing) "lyrical" compositions, perhaps inspired by the fact that when they made *The Eleventh Year* the *Kinocs* were working in the Ukraine, with its more rural, softer, more "poetic" tradition in photography.



together lyrically and emotionally, and not logically, the viewer quickly gets exhausted, loses the line of sequence, and simply takes in only individual sequences, without linking them together. The viewer dismisses the importunate intertitles with their propaganda and hurrahs. Let's take an example. A sequence in which little pieces of coal crawl endlessly by, and a woman worker loosens them. The intertitle says: "Forward to Socialism" (?). Here, as in other places, the author has lost the correct perspective of perception. This is also apparent in the symbolism. The author gets carried away with aesthetic contrasts; he takes a part from one machine and edits it with a part from another out of an entirely different production process. The material loses its individuality, and becomes only a toy in the director's hands.

The result turns out to be paradoxical. Vertov – the creator of newsreel, the initiator of the Soviet cinema of facts – begins to distort his factual material.

"An epic cinematic poem", "a cinematic song" – all this should remain outside the sphere of non-fiction cinema. The gatherers and organizers of facts should not have armed themselves with a lyre and grown long hair.

Newsreel workers must be sober materialists, dialecticians, authentic people of today.

### **The Eleventh Year**

*D.B., "Odinnadtsati", Tambovskaia pravda, 7 June 1928*

The film is constructed according to the principle of the non-fiction film, of which the director of *The Eleventh Year*, Dziga Vertov, is a master.

The film depicts the achievements of Soviet power, mainly in the Ukraine, in the eleventh year of the Revolution.

The first parts of the film are successful. The theme of the construction of the Dnieper Hydro-Electric Station is treated in an absolutely correct way for depicting our achievements: after all, electrification is the achievement that best typifies Soviet power. They should have stopped at that point. But the director decided to capture a series of achievements. So he began to intercut his material, with the swift flashing across the screen of production and organizational elements, the crumpling of sequences, and, as a result, disruption. Because of this, the second part of the film has turned out smudged and fractured.

People occupy second place in the film. In the forefront are machines, defeating the stagnant elements of nature and water. If in *October* things are actors, characterizing the dying past (statues, monuments, and so on), then in *The Eleventh Year* machines are actors, defining our future. Too much stress is perhaps laid on these machines.

The play on a Scythian skeleton is interesting, as a comparison of two distant epochs: in the place where two thousand years ago wild Scythians wandered in darkness, the greatest achievement of culture, Ilich's electric lamp, is now shining brightly.

In conclusion, it has to be said that individual parts and sequences of *The Eleventh Year* are very good, but that as a whole the film has to be called unsustainable.

### **The Eleventh Year**

"*Odinnadtsatyi*", Molot, 26 June 1928

*The Eleventh Year* [at the Kino-Sad theatre, Rostov-on-Don]. However annoying it may be to do so, one has to admit that this film is a failure. The valuable material characterizing the scope of our construction work in the eleventh year of the Revolution (the Dnieper Hydro-Electric Station, the Donbas, metallurgy, Red Army manoeuvres) is presented so chaotically, with such intricacies of montage, with such deliberate complexity, and is divided in such a cumbersome and unsystematic way, that as soon as the first part, which is the most acceptable, finishes, the film becomes an incredibly exhausting spectacle. The endless monotony of the sequences one after another sends you to sleep. And besides, even the sequences themselves (machines in motion, the smoking chimneys of factories, seething cascades of water) have already been over-used for showing our creative enthusiasm, so that it really is time to think about employing some new expressive means to achieve this aim. Otherwise, the loud slogans which the intertitles in *The Eleventh Year* are full of are not supported by a living screen picture and are all to no avail.

The film is also depressing in the almost total absence of people, living people, the authentic builders of the new life. All the time there are whimsical combinations made up only of things, and, for all the exceptional skill of the cameraman, this people-less desert very quickly becomes boring. The directorial methods of the author of the film (the famous proponent of the non-fiction film, Dziga Vertov) have suffered a fiasco here because of their formal dryness and abstraction.

### **Workers about The Eleventh Year**

"*Rabochie ob Odinnadtsatom*", undated clipping, RGALI 2091-1-89

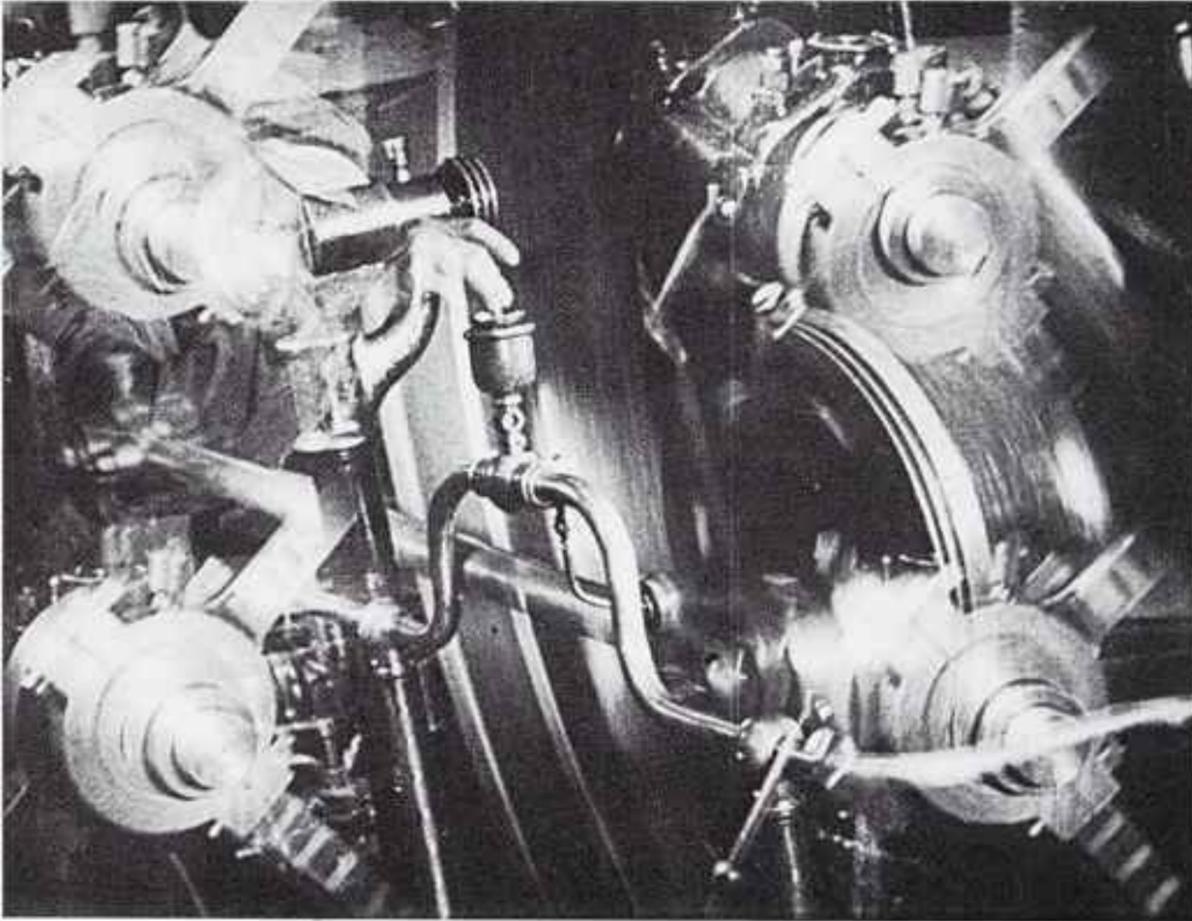
In the "Red Railway Worker" club in Kiev, workers from the GEM, the main workshops, the depot, and other works attended a showing of *The Eleventh Year*.

Here are some of their assessments of the film:

Comrade Tsygankov (a foreman) says that the film is a vivid index of our growth. It shows that we are moving industrialization forward, that "the wheel of Socialism is set in motion". *The Eleventh Year* makes you cheerful. The film does have shortcomings, which relate to the filming, technical shortcomings, as it were, but overall it is so good that there is no need to talk about them.

Comrade Pasechnik (a guard) says that the film does not reflect everything that we have. We have some achievements which should have been shown in a film like this. You do not see collective labour in the film, the great organized labour of people. You only see machines. The village should also be shown on a broader scale, although the offshoots (*rostki*) of new initiatives are reflected in it. But despite all that, the film is a major achievement. It is many times better than all sorts of other films with romance,

## Worker-Machine



In *The Eleventh Year*, as in Vertov's earlier film *A Sixth Part of the World*, the shots in which a worker is shown dissolving into his or her machine-tool are a "semantic trick", to use the Formalist jargon of the 1920s. Man and machine become one (note the hand that lingers in the centre of the shot, while the rest of the body is invisible).

love, intrigues, and so on. Not all parts of the film are comprehensible. It needs good music, which will make understanding the film easier.

Comrade Ovsienko (a railway worker) believes that the film should have shown more than it does. We would like to see not one steam locomotive but hundreds of them, hundreds of Lomonosov and Hackel diesel locomotives, but there are none of them in the film! The same thing applies to the village; the life of the village is not shown fully. It is a good thing to make films like this, but you have to show our life more fully in them.

Comrade Lodyzhenskaia (a group leader in the Workers' Circle) considers that the film is innovative; we have not seen one like it before. And we have to pronounce it a success. But like every new achievement, it has shortcomings. The connections are not always logical; there are no transitions from showing one sphere of activity to another. The beginning, electrification, is shown better than the mines and factories, which are done worse even in a technical sense. It does not show the extraction of ore, but this is something which should not be overlooked. It does not show oil, which has a major significance in our economy. If you see an exhausted worker, bent over his work, then you should show him relaxing, but there is none of that in the film, and that is a major omission.

Comrade Korolenko (a worker) deflects some of these reproaches with the comment that if they were to show everything that has been demanded here, you would need not ten, but twenty episodes, probably. Everything that *is* shown is shown very well. About the repetitions. What are they there for? They are there so that you can remember everything better. And it is a good thing that the film contains these repetitions. The film should be considered very good.

### Notes

1. Naum Kaufman, critic and journalist, in 1927 the head of the information bureau of the Kinopechat publishing house.
2. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, Robert Wiene, 1920).
3. Constantin Guys (1802-1892), French realist illustrator.
4. Albert Marquet (1875-1947), French Fauvist painter.
5. Isaac Levitan (1860-1900), Russian landscape painter.
6. Grigory Petrovsky (1878-1858), Soviet Ukrainian official.
7. Lazar Kaganovich (1893-1991), top-ranking Soviet official.
8. Vladimir Fefer (1901-1971), journalist; the head of Mezhrabpomfilm's press office.

## DZIGA VERTOV VERSUS OSIP BRIK: THE ELEVENTH ROUND



### Vertov's *The Eleventh Year*

Osip Brik, "‘Odinnadtsatyi’ Vertova", *Novyi LEF*, no. 4, 1928, pp. 27-29

The film *The Eleventh Year*, a work by Dziga Vertov and Mikhail Kaufman, is a revealing phenomenon in the front line of the struggle for non-fiction film. The pluses and minuses of this film are equally important and interesting.

The film represents a montage of non-fiction footage, shot in the Ukraine. Purely in terms of camera work, Kaufman's footage is brilliantly done. But when it comes to the montage, the film has not become a single whole.

Why? Above all because Dziga Vertov has not found it necessary to place a precise, strictly worked out thematic script at the basis of the film. Vertov frivolously repudiates the need for a script in a non-fiction film. This is a big mistake.

The non-fiction film requires a script to an even greater degree than does a fiction film. By script, we should not understand the simple exposition of events through a narrative. The script is the motivation for the film material, and non-fiction material demands this motivation to an even greater degree than fiction material. To think that newsreel footage, glued together without an internal thematic link, can make a film is more than frivolous.

Vertov tries to replace the script with intertitles. He tries to give the shots meaning through the word, but nothing coherent comes of this. Meaning cannot be appended to a film-shot from outside; meaning is contained in the shot itself. If there is no meaning in the shot, then no verbal intertitles can provide it. And the reverse is also the case: if there is a particular meaning in a shot, then no verbal intertitles can alter this meaning.

Vertov takes individual shots out of a whole piece of footage, combines them with shots from other pieces of footage, and links all this by a shared intertitle, thinking that this shared intertitle will merge the different meanings of the shots into one new meaning. But in reality these shots unravel, reach out towards their basic pieces of footage, and the intertitle dangles over them without uniting them at all.

In the film *The Eleventh Year* there is a long sequence presenting work in the coal mines. This entire sequence has its own meaning; and there is another sequence which presents work in a metallurgical plant, which has its own distinct meaning.

Vertov cuts a few metres out of each sequence, links them together, and writes over them: "Forward to Socialism", but, in reality, when the viewer is taking in the shots of coal mining he recalls the meaning of the entire coal sequence, and when he is taking in the metallurgical sequences he recalls the entire metallurgical sequence – and no association with the theme of "Forward to Socialism" arises in his mind. In order to present

a new theme called "Forward to Socialism" it was essential to present new footage which had not been used before.

The absence of a thematic script is also apparent in the excessive poverty of the thematic tasks given to the cameraman.

Vertov intended to make a film for the tenth anniversary of October, and the only themes he found were footage of the work of the metallurgical plant, the work of the coal mines, and the Dnieper Hydro-Electric Station (water and earthworks). It is obvious that to make a jubilee film about our construction on the basis of these three random themes is completely unthinkable.

It must be firmly established that a brake is being put on the forward movement of non-fiction film by its workers' neglect of the script and of preparatory thematic elaboration of the whole plan. This is why non-fiction films crumble into separate pieces of footage, which are poorly glued together by emotional intertitles.

It is curious that Shub's film *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*<sup>1</sup> constructed out of old pieces of footage, produces a far more unified impression, thanks to the careful working out of a thematic montage plan.

Of course the absence of a thematic plan also influences the work of the cameraman. For all the brilliant qualities of Kaufman's footage, it never goes beyond the demonstration of spectacle. It is shot only because of its interest as pure spectacle. It could have been included in any other film. It completely lacks the element of reportage and polemical journalism. They are excellent location shots, non-fiction sequences for a fiction film.

This happens because Kaufman did not know what theme he was producing his footage for, or from what semantic position he should be doing his location filming. He shot things in the way that seemed most interesting to him as a cameraman, and from this point of view, the point of view of the taste and mastery of the cameraman, they are superb, but they are shot with an eye to aesthetics and not newsreel.

One has to assume that a major role in this absence of a thematic plan was played by the abnormal conditions in which workers in non-fiction film have to work. Fiction film, feature film has at its disposal factories, scriptwriters, money, but non-fiction film feeds on the leftovers. And yet the preparatory elaboration of a thematic plan for a non-fiction film demands enormous expenditure of labour and attention. Appropriate conditions should be created for this; a factory of non-fiction film should be established. Without this, non-fiction film will not emerge from its amateurish state, and will not be able to develop the potential which it contains.

### **Dziga Vertov's Letter to Mikhail Kaufman Requesting He Repudiate Osip Brik's Review of *The Eleventh Year***

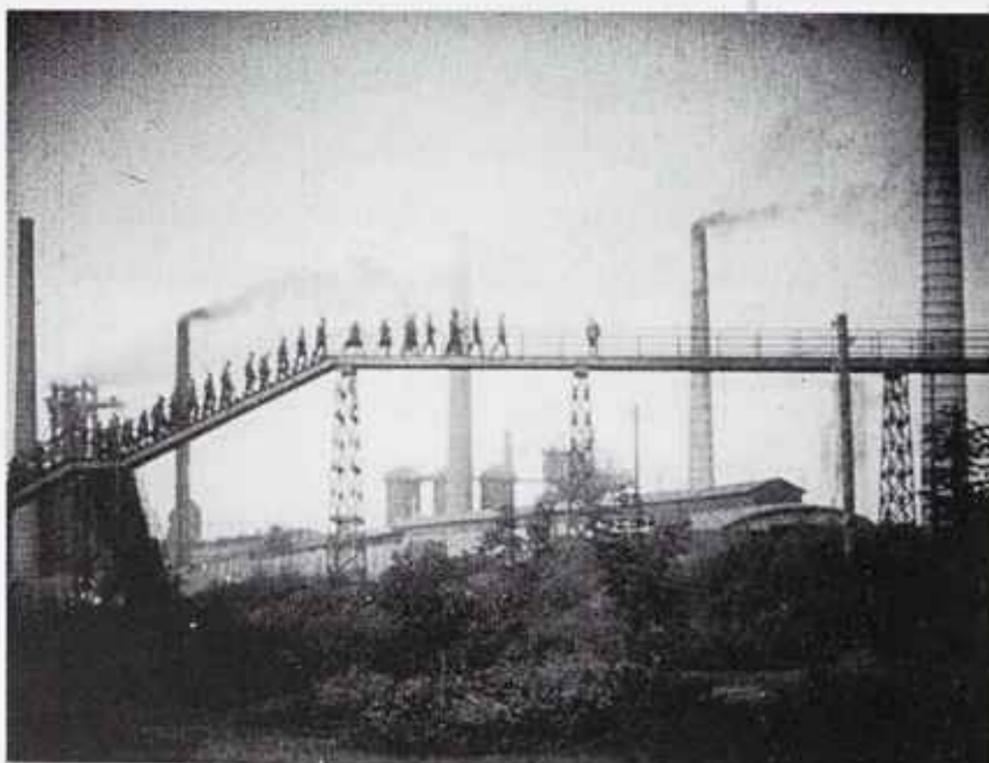
*Original at RGALI, copy courtesy of Vladimir Nepevny<sup>2</sup>*

To the chief camera operator of the Kiev group of Kino-Eye, Mikhail Kaufman.

The appearance in the fourth issue of the journal *Novyi LEF* of Osip Brik's outra-

## Tiers of Space

This selection of frame enlargements illustrates Mikhail Kaufman's new tendency to think of the shot space as consisting of tiers, or levels, with people and vehicles moving in different directions. Even those (or, rather, mainly those) who did not like *The Eleventh Year* said that Kaufman's cinematography was truly astounding. To say this was not merely a critical cliché, but also (or so it seemed to Vertov) an attempt to bring about a gulf between the two *Kinoc* brothers. Three documents printed in this chapter record a chain reaction which Osip Brik's review of *The Eleventh Year* had caused: Vertov wrote an ultimatum-like letter to Mikhail Kaufman requesting him to renounce what he thought was Osip Brik's attempt to pit him against Vertov, and the resulting answer to Brik signed by three *Kinocs*. In reality, however, there was more bad blood between the two brothers after *The Eleventh Year* than before, as the first two documents in the last chapter ("The Last of the *Kinocs*") show. *Man with a Movie Camera*, which Kaufman disliked, was the last film on which the brothers worked together.





geous article under the heading “[Vertov’s] *The Eleventh Year*” puts the Kino-Eye group in the following position:

1) Either the group (and in particular the group’s camera operator) publicly announces its monolithic character and sharply disassociates itself from the said article, which it considers to be provocative, intentionally based on false information and absolutely incorrect data, and an article which has the single and clear aim of breaking the group up from within,

2) or the group comes to the conclusion that a traitor has wormed his way into the Kino-Eye milieu; that among the members of the group there is a person who is consciously and from base motives slandering the group; that one of the members of the group is a man who is secretly betraying the interests of Kino-Eye as its worst and most unworthy enemy.

In the first case, the group immediately publishes in all the newspapers a declaration which exposes the real motives of Brik’s article in the spirit of the first point of this memorandum. At the same time, individual members of the group (and in particular the group’s camera operator) give a signed undertaking that in future they will have no independent dealings with the enemies and half-enemies of Kino-Eye, and in particular with the group whose interests are represented in the aforementioned article.

In the second case, in the case of clear proof of provocative actions by one of the members of Kino-Eye, the latter must be immediately excluded both from membership in the group and from membership among the workers of Kino-Eye, as someone who has “betrayed the cause of Kino-Eye from base motives”.

This question is so urgent and important that a decision must be taken in the course of the next 24 hours, that is to say, no later than [—] o’clock on 27 April 1928.

I request all members of the Kiev group to appear at that time with a prepared draft of a newspaper declaration (in the spirit of the first point).

I request that you consider this memorandum to be quite official.

The founder and leader of the Kino-Eye group, Dziga Vertov  
Kiev, Palace Hotel, Room 144, 26 April 1928

### **Dziga Vertov’s Letter to Aleksandr Fevralsky (1928) Requesting That *Pravda* Publish the Kinocs’ Repudiation of Osip Brik’s Review of *The Eleventh Year***

*From Aleksandr Fevralsky, “Dziga Vertov i pravdisty” (Dziga Vertov and the Pravda Journalists), Iskusstvo kino, no. 12, 1965, p. 70*

Dear Comrade Fevralsky,

I urgently request, if it is possible, that you publish the attached Letter to the Editor,<sup>3</sup> written by the main members of the Kino-Eye group, in connection with the most recent statements by Brik, in particular his most recent article in *Novyi LEF* about *The Eleventh Year*.

If you cannot yourself publish the letter, then perhaps *Komsomolskaia pravda* or some other paper will find room for it? The most terrible thing for someone who has been accused and provoked is to have his mouth stuck up with clay. Have you received the little book about *The Eleventh Year*<sup>4</sup> which came out in the Ukraine? If the information department of VUFKU has not sent you a copy, I shall get hold of one and send it to you.

My address is Dziga Vertov, Palace Hotel, Boulevard Shevchenko, Kiev.

I hope to visit you on my way abroad. Thank you for the past.

Yours devotedly, Dziga Vertov

28 April 1928

### **Kinocs' Letter to the Editor (1928) Repudiating Osip Brik's Review of *The Eleventh Year***

*From Aleksandr Fevralsky, "Dziga Vertov i pravdisty" (Dziga Vertov and the Pravda Journalists), Iskusstvo kino, no. 12, 1965, p. 70*

With the present letter the workers of the Kiev Kino-Eye group (and in particular the group's cameraman) decisively condemn the article by Comrade Brik devoted to the film *The Eleventh Year* in the fourth issue of *Novyi LEF*.

This article, while deviating from the discussion of the film itself, at the same time sets itself the aim of consolidating and disseminating the groundless rumours directed towards concealing a correct understanding of the Kino-Eye method as a method of the planned capturing and planned organization of facts shot on film.

In this attempt by Comrade Brik to distort a series of Kino-Eye positions, we distinguish three clearly expressed points:

Distortion no. 1. The attempt to present the repudiation by Kino-Eye of the normal fiction script (in application to the non-fiction film) as a refusal by the group on principle to work to a plan.

And yet every work by Kino-Eye (including work on *The Eleventh Year*) was and is preceded by careful study of the question being addressed, followed by the composition and elaboration of a detailed thematic plan, which is then discussed and corrected by a series of bodies: the production department, the Artistic Council, the Board, and, finally, the Higher Repertory Committee.

In addition to this, we also draw up a route plan and a chronological plan, and also detailed estimates – in a word, we implement everything required by the conditions of planned work.

Distortion no. 2. The suggestion that Vertov, by repudiating the script, "tries to replace the script with intertitles". Is this true or false? No, once again it is a deception. Once again, an attempt to confuse the reader and the viewer.

Comrade Brik knows full well that the montage of a Kino-Eye film (let's say the film *The Eleventh Year*) has taken place without any participation of and in the complete absence of any intertitles whatsoever.

The film was constructed visually; it was “written” directly in sequences and shots, and only when the edited film was completed were a few cheerful slogan-intertitles inserted. (*The Eleventh Year* is a record-breaking film in the USSR among both fiction and non-fiction films for the small number of intertitles.)

To shed full light on the question of the role of intertitles in the various models of Kino-Eye films which have existed at various times requires a special article.

For the time being, we shall set against the dubious hit-and-run attack of Comrade Brik the opinion of Comrade Shutko, who comes to completely opposite conclusions on this question:

“In *The Eleventh Year* the intertitles occupy exceptionally little space (their modest role is also expressed through their graphic execution) – to such a degree that an intertitle can be removed without any violation of the film’s power to influence.

“In its specific gravity and practical significance the intertitle in an authentic film-thing (and *The Eleventh Year* is one such) is the same thing as the quotation about gold from *Timon of Athens* in the analysis of money in Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*. By the way, for the most part these intertitles are precisely that, quotations, which could be added to a book’s text when it is being proof-read.” (*Kino-front*, no. 2, February 1928)

Distortion no. 3. Brik’s wild supposition (served up as fact) that the cameraman on *The Eleventh Year*, who was not shooting the film beyond the Arctic Circle, but under the direct supervision of the author of the film, did not know what he was filming, and for what purpose.

This meaningless “assertion”, directed personally against the leader of the Kino-Eye group, alongside the praise poured upon the film’s cameraman, can only be interpreted as an attempt to set the members of the group against each other, with the aim of causing the group to disband.

So, building distortion upon distortion, the esteemed critic skilfully confuses the reader and the viewer, and finally confuses himself, no longer noticing that he is not criticizing the method and practice of Kino-Eye but criticizing himself, his own fabrications, and his own “Brikian” Kino-Eye, which does not exist in real life.

With the present letter, the workers of the Kiev Kino-Eye group are attempting to put an end to the pointless discussion of gossip and rumours about Kino-Eye, and they call upon comrades to offer serious criticism of the original source, to offer criticism of our articles, our film-things, to offer criticism of real and not imaginary quantities.

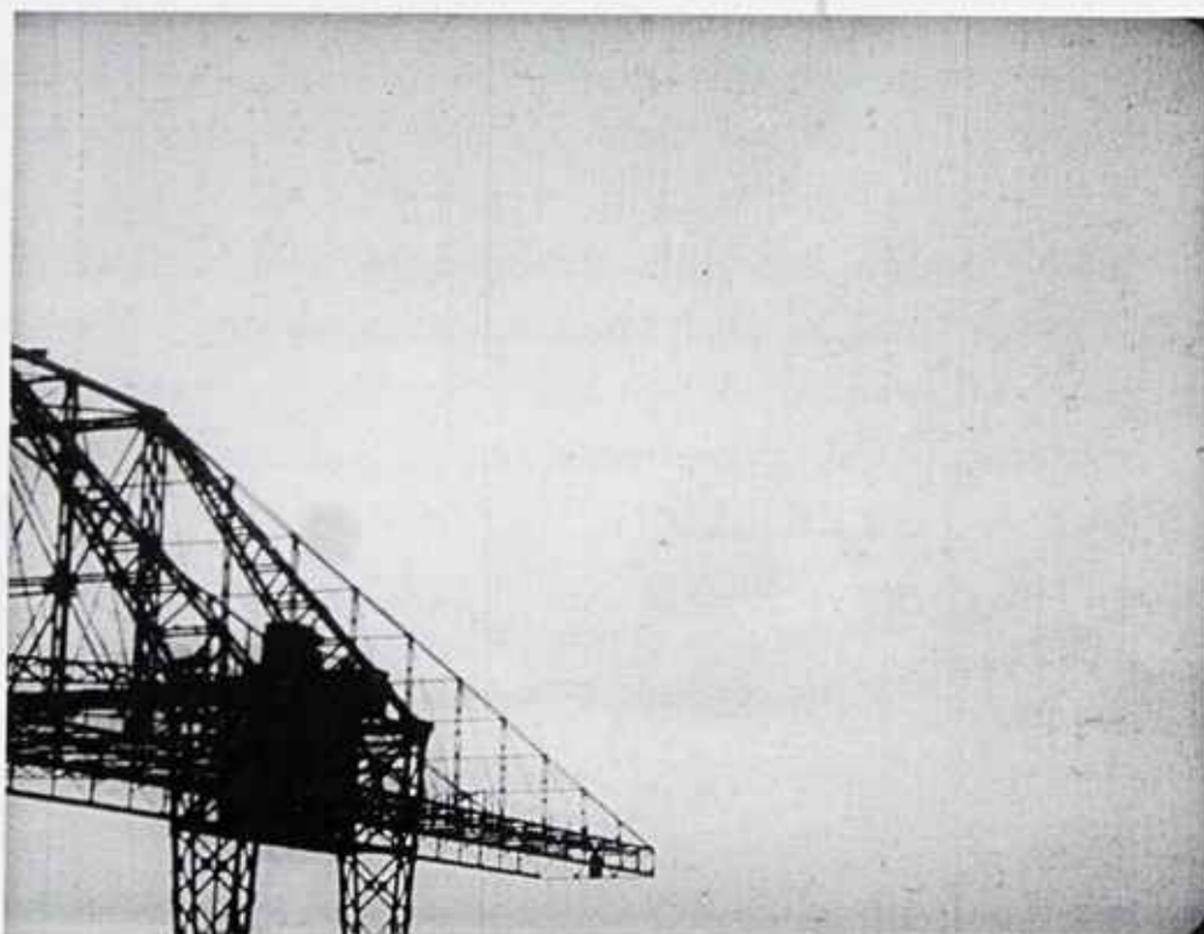
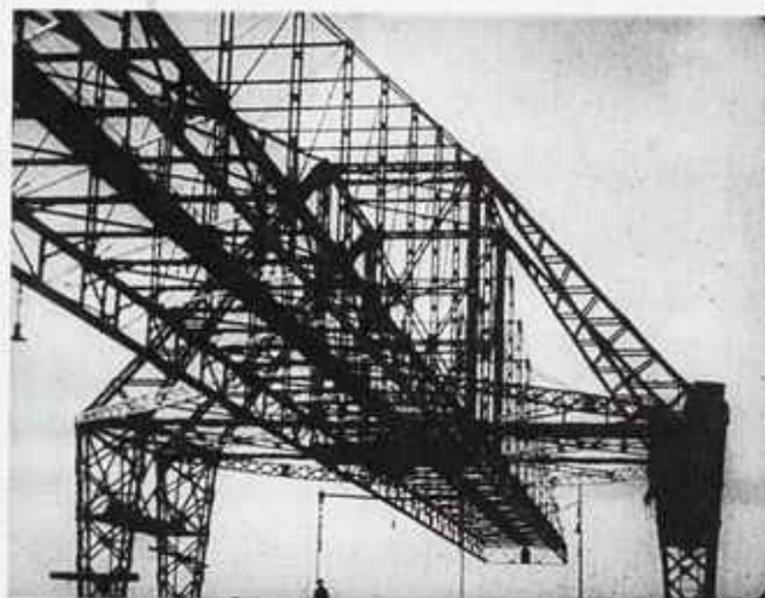
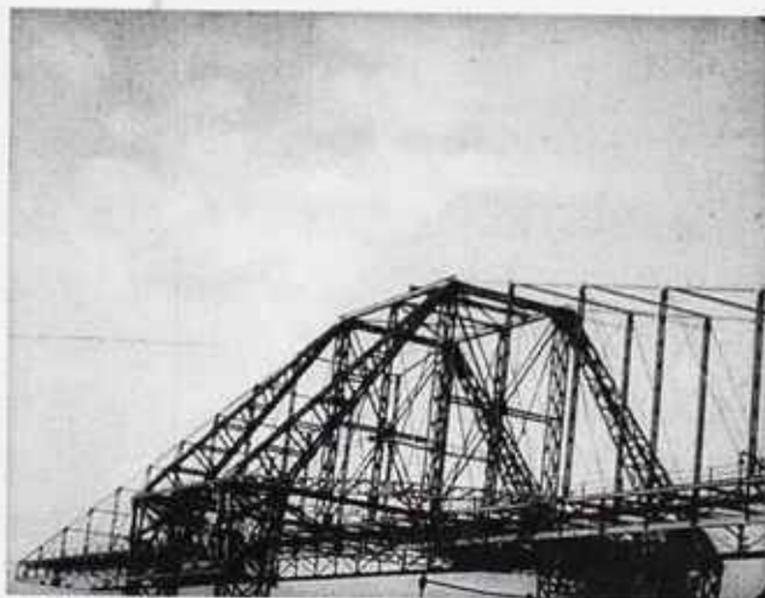
Dziga Vertov, M. Kaufman, E. Svilova

#### Notes

1. *Padenie Dinastii Romanovykh* (1927).
2. As reproduced in Nepevny’s documentary *All Vertovs* (*Vse Vertovy*, 2002).
3. Vertov intended the *Kinocs’* “letter to the editor” to be published in *Pravda*, where Fervralsky was in charge of the theatre and cinema section, but it was rejected. Vertov’s repudiation remained unpublished until 1965, when it appeared in *Iskusstvo kino*, together with this letter.
4. The VUFKU promotional booklet in which Vertov’s “The Kino-Eyed Eleventh Year” appeared (see chap. 21).

Giant Crane

These frames are from one shot – a lateral tracking shot from *The Eleventh Year*. Watch the camera travel under the belly of this huge Constructivist dinosaur.



## MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA



### Correspondence between Vertov and Pravda

*Aleksandr Fevralsky, documents from "Dziga Vertov i pravdisty" (Dziga Vertov and the Pravda Journalists), Iskusstvo kino, no. 12, 1965, pp. 71-73*

#### Document 1

### Dziga Vertov's Letter to Aleksandr Fevralsky Requesting He Publish a Statement about *Man with a Movie Camera*

Kiev, 8 November 1928

Respected Comrade Fevralsky,

I ask you to do everything in your power to place the statement attached to this letter in one of the forthcoming issues of *Pravda*. The very existence of the film which I am finishing depends to a significant extent upon the publication or non-publication of this statement. The film *Man with a Movie Camera* is an experimental film, and as such may not immediately be understood and may be destroyed in the days immediately following the completion of the authorial montage. That is why I am in a great hurry to publish this anticipatory and clarifying statement. I shall be very grateful for express or telegraphed (of course at my expense) notification as to whether and when the statement will be printed. Either answer will make my subsequent actions easier for me.

With comradely greetings, D. Vertov

Until publication it is best to show this only to those who need to know about it. D.V.

#### Document 2

### *Man with a Movie Camera*, *Absolute Kinography*, and *Radio-Eye*

*Dziga Vertov, "Chelovek s kinoapparatom, absolutnaia kinopis i 'radio-glaz'"*<sup>1</sup>

The film *Man with a Movie Camera* represents

AN EXPERIMENT IN THE CINEMATIC TRANSMISSION

of visual phenomena

WITHOUT THE HELP OF INTERTITLES

(a film without intertitles),

WITHOUT THE HELP OF A SCRIPT

(a film without a script),

WITHOUT THE HELP OF THE THEATRE

(a film without actors, without sets, etc.).

This new experimental work by Kino-Eye is directed towards the creation of an

authentically international absolute language of cinema – ABSOLUTE KINOGRAPHY – on the basis of its complete separation from the language of theatre and literature.

On the other hand, the film *Man with a Movie Camera*, just like *The Eleventh Year*, is already coming very close to the period of Radio-Eye, which is defined by the members of Kino-Eye as the next stage in the development of non-fiction cinema.

As early as their first declarations about the coming of sound cinema, which at that point had not yet been invented, the *kinocs* (now the *radiocs*) defined their path as the path from Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye, that is to say, to the audible Kino-Eye which is transmissible by radio.

My article “Radio-Eye”, which was published in *Pravda* a few years ago under the title “Kino-Eye and Radio-Eye”,<sup>2</sup> speaks of Radio-Eye as the destruction of the distance between people, as the capacity of workers of the entire world not only to see but simultaneously to hear one another.

In their time the *kinocs*' declarations about Radio-Eye were heatedly debated in the press. I remember a big article by Comrade Fevralsky, “Tendencies in Art and Radio-Eye”.<sup>3</sup> I remember a one-day newspaper, *Radio*, especially devoted to Radio-Eye.<sup>4</sup>

After a while people stopped paying attention to the question of Radio-Eye, considering it a question for the distant future. Yet the members of Kino-Eye, not confining themselves to the struggle for non-fiction film, were simultaneously preparing themselves for meeting in full armour the transition, which the *kinocs* expected, to work in the context of Radio-Eye, in the context of non-fiction sound cinema.

As early as *A Sixth Part of the World*, intertitles were replaced by the contrapuntal construction of a word-radio-theme. *The Eleventh Year* is already construed as a visible-audible film-thing, that is to say, that it is edited not only in visual but also in noise, sound terms.

*Man with a Movie Camera* is being constructed in the same way, that is to say, in the direction from Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye.

In such a way, the theoretical and practical works of the *kinoc-radiocs* (unlike fiction film, which has been caught unawares by the coming of sound) have defined their technical capabilities, and have long been waiting for their belated (by comparison with Kino-Eye) technical base from sound cinema and television.

The most recent technical inventions in this area put into the hands of the supporters and workers of Radio-Eye, that is to say, into the hands of the supporters and workers of sound documentary kinography, the strongest of weapons in the struggle for non-fiction October.

From the montage of visible facts which are noted down on film (Kino-Eye) to the montage of visible-audible facts which are transmissible by radio (Radio-Eye).

To the montage simultaneously of visible-audible-tangible-olfactory, and so on, facts – to the filming unawares of human thoughts, and, finally –

to the greatest experiments in the direct organization of the thoughts (and consequently of the actions) of all humanity –

such are the technical perspectives of Kino-Eye, summoned to life by October.

Kiev, 6 November 1928

Alice



Much like Lewis Carroll's Alice (the book was well known in Russia), people in Vertov's films can shrink or grow – as does the eponymous man with the movie camera, or the Cyclopean blacksmith from *The Eleventh Year*. Later in his life (1940) Vertov would begin (but never finish) an entire film with this theme, called *The Girl and the Giant*.

### **Man with a Movie Camera (At Discussions)**

*Vak-Zal*, "Chelovek s kinoapparatom (na disputakh)", Kino, undated clipping [1929], RGALI 2091-1-90

*Man with a Movie Camera* is the latest work by Dziga Vertov's *kinocs* group.

A master of so-called non-fiction film, the champion of the complete purification of the language of cinema from the language of theatre and literature, Vertov has completed the formal path of his group with the creation of *Man with a Movie Camera*.

The unusual nature of the film, which is made without a single intertitle, the doubts before it was shown, the arguments, the praise, aroused a colossal interest in the film.

#### **At ODSK [The Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema]**

The discussion became extraordinarily sharp only around the middle of the evening. It was the film's ideological aim that suffered the greatest bombardment.

"The authentic life of the country is not shown in the film," said the Editor of the magazine *Ekran*, Comrade Berezovsky.<sup>5</sup> "This comes about because the predominant role in the film is played exclusively by the form, good stunts, excellent montage, and... nothing else."

Comrade Berezovsky's words were disputed by Comrade Gan. This film poses the problem of the way of thinking of man in society far more seriously than it is posed in all our feature films, with their deliberately emphatic interpretation of the world.

The journalist Levidov<sup>6</sup> "revealed" that Vertov is the most fictional director in the USSR. "People say that there is no hero in the film!" Comrade Levidov exclaims. "It's not true! The hero is the cameraman. The cameraman Kaufman. Where is the beauty whom this 'Russian Fairbanks' wants to conquer? This beauty is life, which Kaufman captures with the ubiquitous Kino-Eye. Vertov's great achievement is to transfer the fiction film from the old league to the highest league."

The next speaker after Levidov was Comrade Shirman, who had a completely different point of view. Without contesting the formal merits of the film, he nevertheless affirms that the film is physiological through and through, that it does not leave the viewer with a coherent impression. "The formal quality of many shots is exceptionally high. In a non-fiction film, with the cameraman Kaufman as an 'actor', Vertov plays into the hands of fiction film with these remarkable shots."

A worker at the Moskvoshvei [Moscow clothing] factory, Comrade Shvartsman, made an interesting speech.

"The film made an enormous impression on me," she announced. "The most interesting thing is that life is caught unawares. But a major shortcoming of the film is the sliding over the surface of our contemporary reality. Our daily life is not captured by the film. The flashing of the shots is very exhausting."

The speeches by later speakers generally confirmed the thought that the film is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to cinema, thanks to its formal qualities.

The cameraman, Comrade Kaufman, has displayed exceptional skills as a cameraman.

The social significance of the film is significantly reduced by the apolitical nature of its thematic aim (an experiment constructed on random material in the diary of a cameraman).

The ODSK meeting considers it essential to afford all possible support to the Kino-Eye group, and calls upon all film production organizations to do so.

### **In the ARK [Association of Revolutionary Cinema]**

There was a harsh struggle between the "fictionites" and the "non-fictionites", between the supporters of a social aim in films and the formalists.

Comrade Kirshon<sup>7</sup> says that the film is undoubtedly interesting, and marks a certain stage in our cinema. But the presentation of the material, which is exceptional in its mastery, represents naked aestheticism, admiration of the material, without any social significance, without any psychological co-ordination. Kaufman is a brilliant cameraman, but not because he works with Vertov and according to his principles, for Vertov does not want art, but Kaufman produces exceptional art. In this film Vertov deviates from his principles. He is no longer filming simply life, he is making generalizations, and that is already art.

Comrade Khersonsky says that "Vertov uses Kino-Eye to struggle against *bourgeois* ideas about life, the world, about art. This experiment in improving our visual perception harbours within itself great potential."

Comrade Shutko remarks that whatever school the film might be associated with, it is the work of great master. "Vladimir Ilich said that we should begin to make new films, imbued with Communist ideas, by making newsreels. Why? Because colossal changes are being accomplished in our life, and yet through inertia, instead of pointing out new directions, we do the-devil-knows-what. This was all written by Comrade Lenin in 1920. We are extremely inattentive to what is being accomplished in practice in our cinema. Vertov has been walking along a single path for ten years, studying and organizing the work of the film camera. His work is good because he turns directly to reality itself; he films everything which can be best expressed with the help of the cinema."

### **The Cinema and Aristotle**

*K[onstantin] Feldman*,<sup>8</sup> "Kino i Aristotel", *Sovetskii ekran*, no. 5, 1929, p. 6

With the greatest of difficulties, the cinema is working out its language. The development of the independent new art of cinema is being interrupted all the time by the interference of the thousand-year traditions of theatre, painting, and literature.

One step forward, two steps back. After every victory of the new cinema we observe a retreat to the old, well-trodden paths. In Germany the director Murnau felt no embarrassment about offering an operatic *Faust* on screen. In recent years literature is beginning to conquer even that citadel of cinema, American film (*Salome*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and in part *Chicago*).<sup>9</sup>

Recently we have observed the penetration of theatrical devices even into the purely cinematic zone of non-fiction film.

*Symphony of a Great City*<sup>10</sup> is, in essence, a transposition of the methods of the Moscow Art Theatre into the cinema. And finally, only a month ago, the press made a “stunning discovery”: the crisis in Soviet cinema can be put down to the fact that we are insufficiently attentive to the three principles of Aristotelian drama: the unities of action, time, and place.

It is therefore understandable why we rejoice at every new film by Dziga Vertov: they explore cinematic forms of expression, all the more fruitful in that Vertov's group works only on material from life. Vertov starts from one extremely simple premise: the film camera enables us to see life with an armed gaze. In consequence the film camera broadens our knowledge of visible life.

But vision alone provides nothing: we have to make sense of and organize the life that has been revealed to us anew. This is achieved with the aid of montage on a narrowly thematic level.

The propaganda impact of a work of art depends on the clarity of the artist's attitude to the life he has shown, and not only his attitude, but the attitude of his contemporary society and the forces behind it. This is achieved in drama by the device of “unity of action”: the artist studies people in the spotlight of a certain single event. Yet even the dramatist himself senses the inadequacy of this technique; with the help of the “chorus” in ancient tragedy or the narrator (*rezonior*) in a contemporary play, he regulates the attitude of the viewer to the events. Yet any theatregoer senses the inadequacy of these devices, as well as that of a whole series of purely theatrical devices (make-up, grotesque portraiture, set design, and so on), which are set in train for the same purpose.

In his film *Man with a Movie Camera* Vertov brilliantly refutes the need to employ the first premise of Aristotelian aesthetics (the unity of action) in the cinema. The factual material in the film is unfurled along several parallel lines. Vertov shows the cinema viewer the work of a man with a movie camera and the pieces of life he has filmed. At the same time another camera films the viewer, capturing his impression on screen. In this way, as it were, two points of view of events are established: that of the artist, and that of the viewer.

For example, in one sequence (“the man under a train”), Vertov shows a moving train from the point of view of the artist who is filming it, and in parallel to this he shows the train and the act of its being filmed as perceived by a simple unarmed eye. Through the contrast of these points of view, the propaganda power of cinematic perception stands out clearly.

In addition to these two lines, a third line of action is developed: Vertov's woman editor (shown in the film) observes life caught on film at the editing table.

All these through-lines are so thematically organized and co-ordinated with the help of the montage devices, and the transitions between them are so unnoticeable that they are taken in easily and harmoniously, without a sensation of jolts and disruption.

The cinema renounces just as simply and confidently the second Aristotelian law, the

law of unity of place. Vertov begins a sequence in Moscow, continues it in Kiev in a way that is visually utterly convincing, and finishes it in Odessa. These experiments are not new, of course; they have been carried out both by Kuleshov and other film artists. Vertov's achievement is that he has managed to construct fully articulate montage phrases out of them. A church wedding, a wedding and a divorce at a Registry Office, a funeral and a birth, filmed at different moments and in different places, are edited as an abstract and extraordinarily eloquent cycle of occurrences.

Finally, with the help of accelerated and slow-motion filming, the cinema produces a "temporal explosion", which allows the human eye to comprehend slow or accelerated motion which is invisible to the simple eye. Special laws of cinematic time appear.

So what remains of Aristotelian aesthetics?

It would be extremely stupid if out of politeness to Aristotle we declined those advantages which the film camera and montage give us: to see more, further, and deeper than simple human vision allows us to.

It is a good thing that the *kinocs* are not like those cinematic Archimedes who cry out to life, which has already raised its sword over them: "Stop – you will ruin my blueprint!"

Vertov renounces the devices of theatre, literature, and painting. Does he have enough expressive means left at his disposal? Vertov reminds you least of all of a poor relation, and he does not stop before the resolution of the thematic tasks he has set.

*Man with a Movie Camera*, like all Vertov's films, is an epic poem about contemporary life. Here above all is the theme of work, easy work and difficult work, above the earth and below the earth, the theme of rest and enjoyment, of physical exercise and radio broadcasts, of the club and the beer hall (the montage battle between the club and the beer hall – the shooting of beer bottles with chess pieces), the theme of the viewers and of production elements in the cinema, the theme of relationships in daily life, of religious and civic relationships.

For two hours this film shows us complex and vivid life caught on film... This is possible because the cinema has put new and rich means of expression at our disposal.

### **The Intertitle and Its Evolution in the Work of the *Kinocs***

*N[aum] [Kaufman], "Nadpis i ee razvitie u kinokov", Sovetskii ekran, no. 7, 1929, p. 12*

The novel does not fundamentally need to be illustrated, nor the sonata or the symphony to be explained verbally, nor the study or picture to be re-told in words.

This last sometimes needs annotation of a geographical or historical kind.

The intertitle came to fiction film from the theatre, and it is usually treated as an element which has the same value as the shot, and which clarifies it. It is like the lines which a viewer hears in the theatre: there the lines get different colouring, depending on the actor who is speaking.

The explanatory intertitle has become firmly established in film, and has received full

rights of citizenship there. Nevertheless, in reality an intertitle of this kind is an inorganic element which is inimical to the shot, since it often destroys the influence of the visual element. But there are intertitles which expand the shot, which contradict or supplement it. They are more organic in a film, especially when it is employed in a non-fiction film. They are typical for the experiments in the construction of intertitles found in Vertov's films, and we shall attempt to trace them from his first creative steps.

The reworking of intertitles began only with the first issues of *Kino-Pravda*, for in Vertov's prior newsreels of 1918-1919 the intertitles were only a literary annotation and they were printed in a printing house. In the first issue of *Kino-Pravda* the intertitle is already taken away from the control of the printing house, and "constructed" in the shot. For this a simplified font is chosen, and key words are picked out and arranged in a specific design (*konstruktsiia*). The aim here is that the intertitles should be absorbed from the screen as fast as possible, bearing in mind that they should occupy as short an amount of footage as possible. Intertitles of this kind could be defined as "expressive intertitles".<sup>11</sup>

The next experiment was with the so-called "lit intertitles", which work like transparencies. The letters were cut out in black paper, then covered with tissue paper and lit from behind before they were filmed. For example, the illusion of a searchlight picking out in the dark the inscription "On guard" was created this way.

And the reverse – the appearance of ordinary black intertitles on a bright screen. This experiment gave interesting results, but it turned out to be unsound for technical reasons, because of the wear and tear on the white background. In general, your attention in the dark is usually directed towards the white spots, and not the reverse.

Later, we have the printing of the intertitles into the shot, that is to say, "intertitles inside the image", as, for example, the intertitle in issue no. 15 of *Kino-Pravda*, "The Representative of Poland", and so on.

Motionless intertitles are replaced by "moving intertitles". The latter were set in motion in co-ordination with the motion in the preceding and following shots. Intertitles moved towards the camera, went away from it, floated past, rotated in a circle. Or the camera floats past, approaches the intertitle, which remains in place, and so on. Intertitles of this kind were mainly made by the device of animation.

To set intertitles in motion, they also used special mechanical contraptions to which they fastened individual letters and words, which meant that they could move; for example, the word "End", whose letters were fastened to a book binding and then opened. These are "construction intertitles".

In the "self-writing intertitles" employed in the first reel of *Kino-Eye*, every letter was written out individually, and then individual letters, syllables, and words jumped out one by one, forming whole lines; for example, "To Soviet Ukraine and the whole Red USSR".

So an intertitle could better interact with visual images, they employed "broken-up intertitles". Intertitles were inserted between visuals, splitting up their flow, and being split in their turn, too. In this way individual words interacted with the title, and even

if the whole phrase sounded grammatically incorrect, this did not lessen its emotional effect. For example:

“They call –  
LENIN –  
to world October.”

A more complex variant of this technique is the word-shot; for example, the intertitle “When...” in *Stride, Soviet!* In themselves these word-shots signify nothing, but when they are coupled with the following shot they acquire the meaning reflected from the shot.

In order to eliminate explanatory (*avtorskie*) intertitles, we can observe how they were replaced by actual documents related to what is happening on screen. These “document-intertitles” are encountered in the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*, in the form of quotations from Lenin’s speeches relevant to the events happening on screen, or in the *Pioneer Pravda*,<sup>12</sup> in the form of extracts from the diaries of Pioneers.

In *A Sixth Part of the World* we observe an experiment in replacing the intertitle with the “word-radio-theme”, and in *The Eleventh Year* we have the elimination of the word-theme and the reduction of intertitles to a minimum.

In the film *Stride, Soviet!*, Vertov for the first time makes a bold attempt to switch from the screen to the auditorium. This is how it is done. People, trams, and cars, and so forth, move swiftly past on screen. There is an intertitle, “Where are you rushing?” The viewer interprets this intertitle as a question which he himself poses to the people who are moving on film.

In *A Sixth Part of the World*, the screen turns to the auditorium with a cheerful speech: “And you, sitting in this auditorium – you are the masters of the Soviet land!!” Or, “A mother, breast-feeding her baby!”, “You, who drink blood, who join co-operatives, who receive tractors!!”...

Or in *Kino-Pravda*, when a worker emerges and turns to the viewers with the words: “I am a worker in the Lenin factory. Lenin was assassinated here!!” The aim of intertitles of this kind is to make the impulse coming from screen meet the direct perception by the viewers, who are, as it were, pulled into the cinematic action.

The way an intertitle influences the viewer sometimes depends on a change in the length of footage it occupies. In *A Sixth Part of the World* you see the intertitle “I see”. It usually requires a quarter or half a metre of film. By occupying in some places from a half to two metres of film it strengthens its influence, as if placing itself in the mouth of the viewer himself, who says to himself “I see”.

In addition, there are “hint-intertitles”, that is to say, materialized thought about what is happening, which thus becomes one of the elements of the montage sequence. In *The Eleventh Year* the difficulty of work in the mines is hinted at by the intertitle: “At their Socialist post”, or “People of coal are the masters of coal”.

An important section in the field of intertitles is the “broken-up, contrapuntally constructed intertitle”.

So, for example, among the intertitles in the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*:

- |                     |                      |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| I "Lenin"...        | II "But not moving." |
| III "Lenin"...      | IV "But silent."     |
| V "The masses"...   | VI "move."           |
| VII "The masses"... | VIII "are silent."   |

Here one line of the sequence consists of shots depicting Lenin and the second line consists of the word(s).

This was later repeated in *Battleship Potemkin* (intertitles by Sergei Tretyakov):

- |              |                   |
|--------------|-------------------|
| I "One"...   | II "Against all." |
| III "All"... | IV "Against one." |
| V "One"...   | VI "For all."     |
| VII "All"... | VIII "For one."   |

Having done all this work on intertitles and exhausted all their potential, Vertov constructs his most recent film, *Man with a Movie Camera*, completely without intertitles, approaching the creation of "Absolute Kinography" on the basis of complete separation from the language of literature.

### **Man with a Movie Camera**

*Khrisanf Khersonsky, "Chelovek s kinoapparatom", Kino, 12 February 1929*

Vertov and his group announced their programme and began to make their first film-things in 1920-1922, that is to say, in the direct context of the impressions taken from the Revolution by the section of the "Left" flank of artists which was most sympathetic to it and most receptive of it.

What engrossed Vertov most in the Revolution was the observation of the facts of living reality. A man with a sharp vision and a particular "musical experience" of what he saw, Vertov started hungrily "looking at the Revolution".

He fell passionately in love with the action of the Revolution, with its childhood, and with the enthralling dialectic of facts which were rapidly and vividly changing and growing before people's eyes. Along with the torrent of Revolution, Vertov, an artist full of *joie de vivre*, rushed out with his camera into the streets, into the trenches of the Front of Civil War, into the factories, into the stormy current of processions and demonstrations, to the places where the new life was in fullest swing, and to the places where its labour, its difficulties, and its struggle were most visible.

He rushed out to see everything, and to share with society his visual finds, things he came up with in a way that the normal theatre- or cinema-goer does not know how to seek or to see.

One has the sense that his work in the visual investigation of life can have a completely exceptional social usefulness. Vertov declared "holy" war on any theatrically-staged cinema, and worked out his own "implacable" theory.

This is how his theory starts:

The film camera gives man the possibility of seeing life better and more fully than

the simple eye. The film camera arms the eye of man in a way that is similar to the way he is armed by a telescope and a microscope in other spheres of activity. And therefore the direct, the best assignment of the film camera is "without falsehood", without dramatization, to show reality itself realistically. In this very way Kino-Eye will help the viewer to take control of reality and rid himself of established false *bourgeois* and *petit bourgeois* notions. By showing our daily life and the revolution in our daily life in a materialist way, the film camera can not only organize and revolutionize our consciousness, but can incite us to absolutely concrete actions, to the reconstruction of daily life.

The start of the theory is good. But this is not yet enough for his cause to succeed, because the organizing role of the author of the film remains unclear. After all, for him "seeing" is not enough, he must also comprehend. Facts in themselves cannot be transferred into a film; what is transferred is the way an artist sees them. And visual facts themselves cannot be edited into a logical plot – that is the task of the consciousness of the author of the film.

No film has value in itself until it has some influence on the viewer. But its influence depends entirely on the coupling of "facts", and on the content received in this way. Unlike the "external" narrative, the internal logic of this coupling is what strictly speaking comprises the "plot" of the film. A film cannot be completely without a plot – it would be nonsense, chaos, a scrap-heap, unedited sequences. The plot can be more or less rational, or emotional, but there has to be one!

The social significance of a film is defined not only by the material which it contains but mainly by the way it organizes it. And this organization is the work of that very "art" against which Vertov speaks out. He cuts down the branch which he himself is sitting on. This "art" consists in the fact that for a particular aim, and according to his own will, the author forces individual "facts" and "images" to work in a some specific direction on the consciousness of the viewer, which is to say that he forces his material to play the role which it has been assigned and which has been "invented" by the author. Vertov does not want to admit this simple truth fully, and therefore in his declarations he wages an absurd "life or death" war against "artistic creation" in general. He himself has never been, nor could he have been, outside this art.

But Vertov does not do enough work on the plot. This is apparent, above all, in the fact that he sometimes tries to replace the consciousness and the feelings of the author and the viewer with a certain abstract mechanical logic of the Kino-Eye, which in fact does not exist independently.

The formula "I look through the Kino-Eye" turns into the narrowly formalistic and for us absurd "I look only in the way that the Kino-Eye looks". Human dignity is reduced by the fetishization of technology, the exaggeration of the role of the film lens. We can be amused by such "looking", we can play with it, but we cannot understand life by it alone. A bias towards such an amused, inquisitive gazing must naturally lead to naked formalism and pure aestheticism.

That is exactly how it is: Vertov, who vividly declares his anti-aestheticism and who

really does de-aestheticize the "beauty" which has been established by the *petit bourgeois* and *bourgeois* way of life and consciousness, can become a source of aestheticism, and is already aestheticizing facts, phenomena, objects, and in the main the technical side of contemporary life.

Taken to the point of logical absurdity, the formal idea of Kino-Eye can lead to a hypertrophic role for this organ at the expense of the others. A person's Kino-Eye will be remarkable, but there may be a shortage of everything else. The same thing happens with an excessive enthusiasm for the technical, substantive material of daily life... There are lots of trams, but scarcely any sign of people.

The best proof of all this is provided by the film *Man with a Movie Camera*, which is utterly autobiographical for Vertov both in its plot and in its language.

Vertov says: this is a film without actors. This is not true. The cameraman Kaufman works and acts in it no less than an actor in any other film. And if we are provided with little evidence of what Kaufman is feeling as he does so, of what motivates his actions and what aim he is striving for (that is to say, the things that an actor usually demonstrates), then this turns out to be not a merit but a major shortcoming of the film.

The film shows the work of the cameraman. Technically, the language of *Man with a Movie Camera* is brilliant, inventive, vivid. It enthrals you emotionally. His passionate *joie de vivre*, his thirst for visual observation is more forcefully apparent here than in many of Vertov's films. But the plot of the film has not been given enough social significance. What is the purpose of the work of the cameraman? What is the social benefit of this film language and Kino-Eye? The viewer remains in the dark about what he can and should do with all this technical skill and all these visual riches.

The only answer, which emerges logically from the film, is to look, to admire, to enjoy himself, to feel the seen world as acutely as we hear sound, and on equal terms with sound. This is what he must do. But if you stop at that point, then you will go no further than aestheticism. With his film Vertov also adds: you must also love, love Soviet reality with *joie de vivre!* That is good, but that too is not enough. What is lacking is a conscious critical attitude to Socialist reality.

A film without intertitles, says Vertov. But this is not true either. There are various kinds of intertitle, and what, if not intertitles, are the shots of, for example: a sign on a church saying "Workers' Club", an urn with the words "Citizens, Keep Things Tidy", edited into a sequence of a girl washing, shop signs, and so forth. All these words have a decisive significance in the development of the plot, and they are not translated from verbal language into any other. Besides, there is a lot in the film that a viewer who is not able to read the Russian and Ukrainian words will not understand, just as there was a lot that Muscovites did not understand in Ruttmann's film *Symphony of a Great City*, where a lot of work is also done by the German intertitles within the shots (the signs).

When you study music it is useful to learn the scales. Exercises in film language without words are equally useful. But if we examine *Man with a Movie Camera* as a finished work of art, then it becomes obvious that with the introduction of intertitles the film

## Intertitles Undercover



Khrisanf Khersonsky was right, in a sense, when he wrote this in his review of *Man with a Movie Camera*: "A film without intertitles, says Vertov. But this is not true either. There are various kinds of intertitle, and what, if not intertitles, are the shots of, for example: a sign on a church saying 'Workers' Club', an urn with the words 'Citizens, Keep Things Tidy', edited into a sequence of a girl washing, shop signs, and so forth. All these words have a decisive significance in the development of the plot, and they are not translated from the verbal language into any other." Indeed, the Lenin Workers' Club appears here as an antithesis (an antidote, even) to drinking pinned down by the sign of a beer pub in one of the earlier shots, and the urn with its hygienic slogan is inserted in the middle of the face-washing and window-washing sequence, and at this moment is itself being washed.



would be more comprehensible, more vivid, would create a greater impression and have a greater influence on the viewer.

A film without a script? That's not the case either. Of course there was a plan for the filming, which is to say, a script; the only difference is in when it is worked out – before filming, during filming, or after filming. But it is definitely a pity that in this plane the plot of the film is insufficiently developed and given insufficient meaning.

These contradictions reduce the quality of the film. And nothing good comes of Vertov's stubbornness in renouncing the devices of "artistic art": he still uses these devices, he just does not have sufficient control of them. He subconsciously has recourse to artistically primitive devices.

Vertov the talented viewer lacks a wise organizer of what he sees. He lacks that conscious "art" which he is struggling against.

### ***Man with a Movie Camera***

*Naum Kaufman, "Chelovek s kinoapparatom", Sovetskii ekran, no. 5, 1929, p. 5*

In a certain novel dedicated to America, three people are arguing about [Walt] Whitman. A poet; a king of industry; and his son, a kleptomaniac and glutton.

The poet reads Whitman's poetry; the king recalls how when he was a young man they went fishing together; and the glutton melancholically remarks: "He wrote about everything, he just didn't write about food, he must have been well fed."

Vertov is a Soviet Whitman, only he is insatiable in his grasp of life. He sees more and further than Whitman. But that is a feature not of his personality but of the epoch.

Soviet cinema is going through sombre days. People are shouting – crisis, panic, fire! Mediocrity is weighing us down, like the air before a storm.

Help comes from all sides – in the form of discussions, questionnaires, thematic plans, newspaper campaigns. Everything is mobilized, but they don't ask Vertov, because he is an inventor of slogans, of high-flown emotion, an old-fashioned knight of the propaganda films.

But standing to one side Vertov creates a thing which conceals within it those healthy principles which can give new blood to Soviet cinema.

*Man with a Movie Camera* is an experiment, but an experiment which confirms Vertov's line and brings something new into the etymology of film language.

A series of thematic constructions intersect on the semantic plane in *Man with a Movie Camera*.

The basic theme is the parallel alternation of facts with their depiction on film and during the montage process.

The film creates a sort of frame for the chaos of phenomena of which a slice of life consists. Through visual means it anchors the continuous flow of life, its sounds and noises, its rhythmic dissonances, the intersection and coupling of facts, thoughts, sounds, the interaction and mutual penetration of its most heterogeneous elements.

The film broadens vision; it destroys the difference between the concepts of “seeing” and “looking”. When we look at some object we simultaneously also see what is next to it, to the side, and, besides that, we also have a sort of impression of what we have just seen, or seen recently.

*Man with a Movie Camera* unites those who are participating in this observation. It shows a viewer watching the screen, a woman editor working on the film, a cameraman filming.

An enormous part of our mental notion about the processes of life is occupied by analogies, parallels, the building rhythm of repetitions, the dissonance of contrasts.

*Man with a Movie Camera* shows us machines at work. Their dynamism is purely visual. While they have been working we have not been conscious of their noise. But then they stop. When they stop a current of sound seems to pass through a visual conductor.

In the rush of day-to-day phenomena, among the most mundane actions with which the day begins and which we do not notice – for example, getting up, washing, getting dressed – we suddenly saw, our eyes stopped on, a wonderful lilac bush.

In the film the shot with the lilac introduces a sharp sensation into the mechanics of customary movements.

In the stagnant heat of the day, women smear themselves with mud, or swim, while men do exercises. They are moving, and suddenly – they stop in mid-air.

Or – the motion of the street stops. The crowds in the streets allow themselves to be comprehended by our gaze. Allow us to note down mentally how many there are of them.

And yet the eye is so poor that it sees only chaos, without discerning directions. But when the motion speeds up to a monstrous rate, when a temporal segment of five minutes is shown in a single minute, when people, trams, street crowds start a mad rush, then the chaos of motion breaks down into diagrams, lines, directions which our eye can now catch.

These memorable elements in *Man with a Movie Camera* are only grains of sand in the extraordinary wealth of filmed material reflecting the many sides of life, sometimes its poles, in order to produce a single coherent sensation – life.

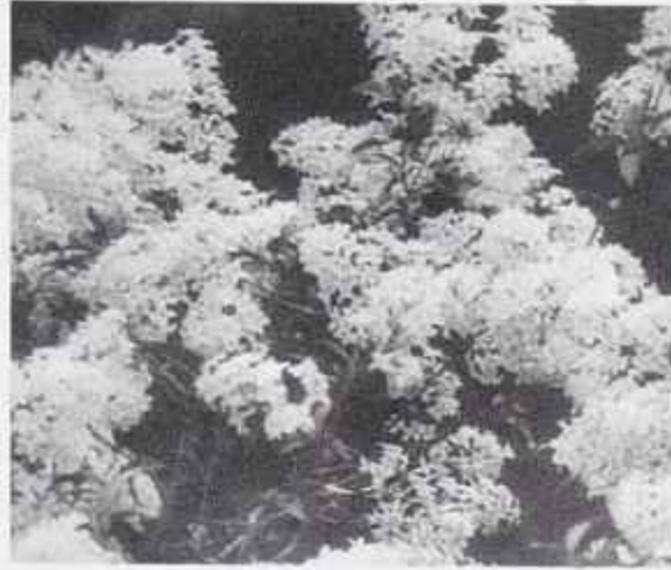
While *Man with a Movie Camera* shows the activity of the cameraman, it seems to give him guiding instructions, to point out the place to him.

How much more impoverished do the cameraman and the director of a fiction film seem – they get brought heaps of life with congealed blood and an embalmed shell.

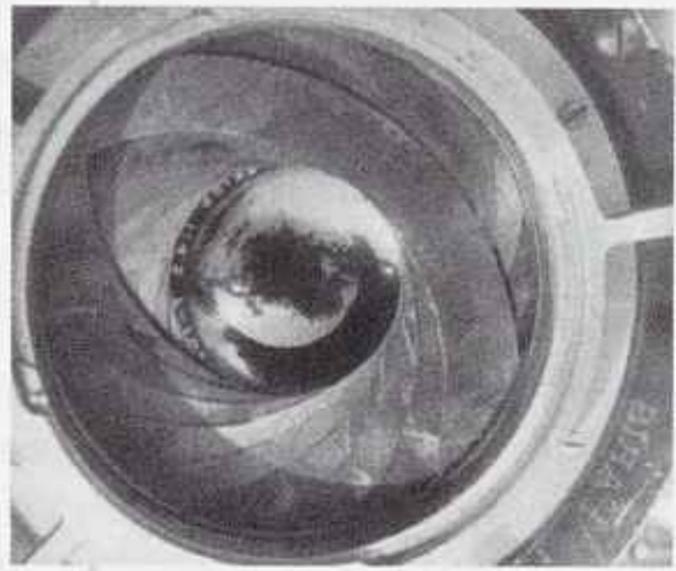
Technically, the most varied kinds of filming are applied in *Man with a Movie Camera*, all sorts of stunts by the cameraman, the most refined deformation of the material. It is some kind of firework display of the most complicated camera devices.

The power of the film to influence people lies in its montage, which is carried out according to a mathematically regulated musical construction.

*Man with a Movie Camera* is the cry of life. The capturing of life’s most elusive phenomena. The cinematic materialization of the pulsating rhythm of life.

**Lilacs**

The flowers that critics found fresh and lyrical are also reflected in the lens of the camera filming them.



### **Man with a Movie Camera**

*Khrisanf Khersonsky, "Chelovek s kinoapparatom", Sovetskii ekran, no. 18, 1929, p. 5*

It was in the first days of the infancy of cinema: the people who saw a horse running and a man moving on screen for the first time were enraptured by the very sight of it.

The most entertaining thing about this spectacle was the fact that animals and people were "just like in life", and at the same time their movements were imprinted with an expressiveness and accuracy that we do not see and do not notice in life. The form and mechanics of all movements became distinctly visible on screen.

The power to bring things close to people (magnification) or to make them strange (observing them from one side, from an unaccustomed point of view) meant that man could now observe himself and the surrounding world better, with an independent and critical stance on what he saw. In this way the cinema screen was not just a means of "reproducing" life (though it seems that this alone still quite satisfies many people). It also became a new and powerful means of the revealing investigative demonstration of life – which is far more crucial.

It is this feature of cinema that brought about the enormous influence it exerts on contemporary visual culture in general. But the traditions and influence of the theatre, and then of painting and literature, have weighed the cinema down with alien methods, trans-

ferred from elsewhere. The cinema has begun to provide an engaging demonstration not of contemporary life itself, but mainly of its representation, which has been pre-formed in the (sometimes crooked) mirror of the theatre, or in the already numb sketches of painting, or in the clichéd images of literature... The misfortune is not that cinema has been studying art, that is to say, a distinct skill, here among its neighbours. The mistake and the misfortune are that the products of these arts were almost always transferred into cinema in the form of material that was already ready and had already been shaped...

Vertov returned cinema to its infancy, to its primitive state; he restored to it the sense of rapture at the very sight of a running horse or a man washing.

The film *Man with a Movie Camera*, the most typical and, one might say, intimate of Vertov's works, speaks eloquently about this. It is completely autobiographical. It is the pages of a diary where the quintessence of the visual experience of the artist is warmed by the most sincere expression of his world-view. And for this reason it is precisely from *Man with a Movie Camera* that one can understand the entire path of Vertov's work, and draw a kind of balance sheet...

The appearance of Vertov's first works and of his programme belongs completely to the time that called them into being – the first years of the cultural revolution after October. That was a time when the works of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Dovzhenko could not yet appear; they were brought to the fore later, by the more complex circumstances and development of our culture.

Vertov appeared before them...

At a time when every new social fact, even a small one, could, in itself and through its very appearance, create enthusiasm. The acuteness with which the fracture of daily life and the coming of the new were experienced was communicated by the visual impression. Every seen fact of the Revolution immediately aroused in the viewer a large and coherent complex of completely comprehensible social moods and desires.

Newsreel, those facts which Vertov simply showed, themselves carried and transmitted to the viewer a social "content" which aroused no doubt, required no explanation, and was always visually infectious.

At that time, deliverance from many artistic traditions of the theatre, painting, and cinema signified above all a joyous and essential deliverance from the *bourgeois* and *petit bourgeois* "heritage". Vertov started his work in the artist's struggle for liberation from priestly and salon art. He was the initiator of the formal struggle which at that time already itself expressed the need for a social struggle in all the "arts".

The final point is that the epoch which brought Vertov to the fore also justified his "technical" programme. In the period of the struggle of the new hegemonic class for power, for taking control of the production process, for construction and industrialization, it is only natural for a man and an artist to feel enthusiastic about the task of gaining the greatest technical control of his instrument. It is by no means by chance, and is utterly typical of his time that Vertov enthusiastically pronounced the slogan:

"Kino-Eye, that is to say, the lens and the film of the movie camera, is a remarkable technical tool, which serves to perfect human vision, and we must learn to arm ourselves

and use this tool in such a way that we can make a better visual investigation of life.”

But time does not stand still; the social setting changes, and it has become ever more complicated in recent years. Every seen fact of everyday life requires complex explanation. So as to influence the viewer in a specific social direction, it is now essential to find new and skilful methods. The struggle with the ideology of the *bourgeoisie* and the *petite bourgeoisie* has become extremely complicated. Technical skill is now becoming just the customary means for achieving the enormous and complex social tasks which have arisen...

But Vertov has not yet grown out of the stubborn and monotonous repetition of what he has done before... The film *Man with a Movie Camera* provides us with very vivid evidence of how an artist can develop the technical devices of his art, but it also tells us that its author undervalues all the social complexity of the setting, and of his task.

The filming and the montage of *Man with a Movie Camera* are very skilled. The content of the observations of the film is completely defined by Vertov's passionate love for examining contemporary Soviet reality, and in that respect his film is healthy, joyous, and infectious. It is also interesting in the exceptional wealth and good quality of the elements of daily life that it captures. People really should not attempt to assign this film to the category of non-fiction, documentary newsreel. Facts here are deformed and made abstract – it is the purest fictional, inventive art film. Here Vertov is already leaving the Primitive behind. But all his passionate and skilful inventiveness is in essence directed not towards a profound social theme, but only towards the demonstration of the technique of seeing, to a game with it and to obeisance before it... Vertov is, as it were, industrializing vision, but for what purpose? His aim remains unclear!

What we have here is not a man controlling a film camera, but Kino-Eye completely carrying and rushing a man along, and the very technique of seeing begins to define almost the entire meaning of the thing. In this way cinematic technique is almost fetishized, which is to say that it is cultivated almost as an end in itself. This is why Vertov always faces the incipient danger of falling into pure formal aestheticism and into “art for art's sake”.

Life begins to flash past in a colourful, endless, luxurious, sparkling stream, full of movement and change... In the film you can see the swift and absorbing mechanism of this life. As in the years of cinema's infancy, the artist is most absorbed by the demonstration of this mechanism, the movements of horses and people, but does not yet know how to reveal and display all its social process, its authentic and profound dialectic.

One might say that the talented Vertov is still a “child-artist”, an “artist of the childhood” of Soviet cinema.

**The Editorial Board**, while publishing Comrade Khersonsky's article, cannot express solidarity with the contention that the creative work of Dziga Vertov represents only the “infantile” stage of Soviet cinema. Dziga Vertov's artistic methods and paths are distinctive, but this does not make his work less rich in terms of content and form. Dziga Vertov's creative work is growing and becoming broader, and his cultural role is extremely significant for Soviet cinema.

**Man with a Movie Camera**

*Nikolai Iudin*,<sup>13</sup> excerpt from "Chelovek s kinoapparatom", *Komsomolskaia pravda*, 30 January 1929

The authors of *Man with a Movie Camera* strive, not without success, to prove the enormous potential of the cinema in the area of managing to see life in all its daily manifestations in a particular way. In its essence the film is a temperamental and poetic hymn to the modest person and the arduous profession of the cameraman. Together with the indefatigable, merry, resourceful, and witty cameraman-chronicler, the viewer goes on a wonderful stroll: into the darkness of coal mines, where the struggle is waged for black gold for industry; to the Registry Office, where with the stroke of a pen and an official stamp human joys and sadnesses are ratified; along with the "ubiquitous Kino-Eye" the viewer eavesdrops on two fashionable scandalmongers chatting at the hairdresser's, spies on someone waking up, sweats under a heavy weight, dives headlong with athletes, takes a new-born baby from its mother, accompanies patients to a resort, throws himself under a train in search of an effective shot, or finally freezes into the urban bustle, thanks to a "temporal magnifying glass".<sup>14</sup>

The viewer cannot tear himself from the screen for a minute or a second; he is bewitched by the power of cinema; he follows the cameraman everywhere; he watches life as it is seen by the perfected Kino-Eye.

The authors do, however, pay a price for the one-sidedness of their film. In their enthusiasm for a purely formal idea they have once again greatly reduced the social significance of the theme. *Man with a Movie Camera* signifies a certain danger that the Kino-Eye will get stuck in scientific experiments. The process of the preliminary accumulation of experience is clearly already complete for this group, and we must provide an outlet for this experience. This will be to the advantage of Soviet cinema.

We consider it essential that *Man with a Movie Camera* should be presented for broad discussion by the mass of worker-viewers. The advisability of such a verification of this extremely interesting artistic experiment does not need to be proved.

**Man with a Movie Camera**

*G[enrikh] Lenobl*, "Chelovek s kinoapparatom", *Kino*, 1 May 1929

The title *Man with a Movie Camera* is inexact. The originality and significance of Vertov's film consists in the fact that the movie camera takes control of the man, subordinates him to itself, turns him into its appendage, its implement. From being a means of materializing a system of images which reproduce reality, in Vertov the cinema becomes an end in itself, a means of expressing its own essence.

This is what brings complete emancipation from man as such, from that "living man" at whom our contemporary proletarian literature directs its gaze.<sup>15</sup>

It is not man who comes into the field of vision of Vertov's film camera, but only the

human body, which comes in as material, with the same rights and on the same grounds as, for example, the wheel of a machine or an urn at the corner of a street.

It is curious that Vertov prefers to show even the body not as a whole but through individual parts. There is a montage of hands, legs, backs, eyes, more hands, more legs, rarely – a face.

At best, a person is taken as a sign of a profession: a policeman, a miner, a telephonist. And, moreover, they are only shown for a few seconds; they do not get a foothold before they disappear once more. The “retainers” of the movie camera, the woman editor and the cameraman, are in a special position. And yet even they are no more than functions of their work.

Absence of psychology (*antipsihologism*) and a technical approach (*tekhnitsizm*) are the most vivid, the most salient and perceptible features of Vertov’s creative work. The repudiation of a script, which forces film cameras to play a subordinate role, that is to say, the repudiation of plot principles for the construction of a film, inevitably leads to a broadening of the “raw material base” of cinema, to the inclusion in the film of a large quantity of material.

Whatever one may say about other things, Vertov is always rich in material.

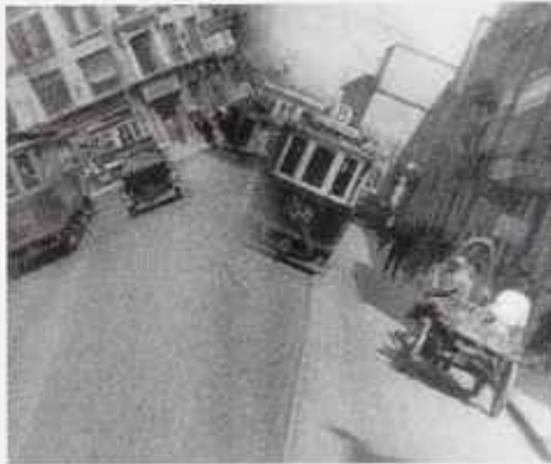
Vertov wonderfully exposes the conventionality of the material. One and the same sequence is given motionless and in motion; one and the same shot is given full screen and on the editor’s table. What is normally shown seriously, as absolutely authentic reality, in Vertov’s hands reveals its dependence upon cinematic technique and is interpreted in an unexpectedly comic way.

The point here is not, of course, that Vertov does not know how to work with quantities that have full value in terms of emotion and plot. We find in his work both the tender lyricism of flowers in bloom and the drama of a love that has failed (the scene of divorce), and even certain, not particularly profound, it’s true, philosophical generalizations (the juxtaposition of birth, marriage, and death). But none of this gets any independent development. It all serves a single aim, to reveal the omnipotence of the film camera.

It is interesting to compare *Man with a Movie Camera* with Ruttmann’s *Symphony of a Great City*. Despite their external similarity, they are profoundly different works, works that are different in principle. Ruttmann organizes material of different kinds thematically; it is contained within the circle of a single day. Vertov constructs the thing in a completely different way. He begins (and here he coincides with Ruttmann) with simple, traditional shots of the sleeping town, and then he gradually complicates the devices of the filming and the montage. There is a constant charging-up of motion. At the end the tempo is so furious that it is not strange to see the Bolshoi Theatre break in half. Vertov’s film is organized cinematographically in the most direct and literal sense, but scarcely in the sense that makes for the greatest ease of assimilation.

But our understanding of *Man with a Movie Camera* would be over-simplified if we supposed that it is a simple demonstration of material. *Man with a Movie Camera* really is a demonstration, not of material but of the free treatment of material.

Divorce



To marry and to divorce in the Soviet Union of the 1920s was almost as simple as we see in *Man with a Movie Camera*. “Davai raspishemia” (“Let us sign it”) was (and still is) the colloquial formula routinely used in marriage proposals. Even though this same formula was not used in proposals to divorce, all it took was to go through the same procedure at the same counter at which the marriage had been formalized. Look at the drama of a love that has failed, wrote Genrikh Lenobl about these two scenes of divorce. Look at the way, we may add, in which Vertov makes this drama echo in the visual language of the street: in one neighboring shot a street is split in the middle, in another two trams that have just crossed each other’s tracks exit in two opposite directions.

To understand a work of art fully, it is essential to understand the social conditions of its existence. Of course, the scope of a short review is insufficient to reveal such aspects of *Man with a Movie Camera*; what we need here is a large-scale and careful analysis. I am therefore obliged to add specificity to the approximate and crude formulation that I offered above.

Speaking of the absence of psychology and the technical approach to the perception of cinema as an end in itself, I was attempting to characterize not only *Man with a Movie Camera*, but also that psycho-ideology, the expression and a particular instance of which is provided by Vertov's film.

In which class, in which social groupings, can this ideology be observed?

It is obvious that this is not the ideology of the proletariat, which does not repudiate a psychological approach in film art, and which has absolutely no inclination to fetishize technique. Nor is it the ideology of the *petit bourgeois* strata of society, who go to the "kinema" as a means of escape from reality and in search of "beautiful life". But Vertov's work comes very close to the perception of the world and the outlook on the world of the technical intelligentsia, who are characterized by precisely the anti-psychological and technical approach that I noted above.

### **The Hero of the Film Is the Camera**

*E[zra] Vilensky*,<sup>16</sup> "Geroi filmy – apparat", Kino, 8 January 1929

The story of *Man with a Movie Camera* is not new. Its sources go back to the period when Vertov and his group were making *A Sixth Part of the World*. Even then, in 1925-26, Vertov was accumulating material for this film, making "raids" on the Sovkino factories, filming people shooting fiction films, preparing the ground for the exposure of fiction cinema which was to take up an honoured place in this work. In 1926 the film was almost ready. But the "plot junctions of life" are interwoven extremely capriciously. Vertov did not manage to finish his work: on the solemn day when the blockade of non-fiction film was broken, on the day when *A Sixth Part of the World* penetrated the first-run cinemas of Moscow, Vertov received... notification of his dismissal from the Sovkino factory.

The film *Man with a Movie Camera* is an extract from the diary of a cameraman. This diary is not related in words but shown as the camera's notes on film over a certain period of time. A characteristic feature of this film is the fact that you cannot read it. When he is watching the usual films which exist at present, even the best ones, the viewer looks at the screen and mentally translates his perception of the spectacle into verbal images (in those places where there are no intertitles). Where there *are* intertitles he simply reads them. As a result of this translation the viewer as it were re-establishes the basis on which the film was constructed, that is to say, the verbal basis, the script. When he watches *Man with a Movie Camera*, the viewer cannot read this film. This happens because the film does not contain a single intertitle, and also because the film retains

only those semantic couplings between individual sections which fully coincide with the visual couplings. Every attempt by the viewer to translate some part of the film (by force of habit) into the language of words immediately ruptures the link between him and the screen, as if the “visual current” is being automatically switched off.

In *A Sixth Part of the World* the camera’s task was a race around the USSR, with the aim of showing how on the basis of the co-operative activity of State Trade we are destroying our dependence on foreign capital. In that film the camera was able to stroll from pole to pole. Here the camera has chosen different planes, depth instead of breadth. Here the camera moves through the tiniest phenomena of our daily activity and of our lives. The camera is present at a person’s birth, it accompanies him to the cemetery, it follows people visiting a Registry Office to register a marriage, and it also manages to film them when their paths through life are diverging. The camera contrives to steal a look at the journey the newly-weds make from the Registry Office to a church, to secure their “holy union” before God. The camera looks into a hairdresser’s and into a factory, forcing the viewer to watch the hairdresser “beautify” women’s faces and a woman worker smearing a coke oven. The camera goes underground, to a dirty, wet miner, squatting to break off pieces of black gold. The camera swims in the air, looks down, passes through the fire of blast furnaces and Bessemer ovens, and makes you remember Vertov’s story about filming these sequences:

“Covered in red dust, showered in sparks of cast iron, tired and drenched in sweat, we become related to the blast furnaces and Bessemer ovens, to the molten metal, to the rivers of fire, to the blazing, scorching rails”...<sup>17</sup> Here, truly, are sets the like of which you could not build.

The sensations of a policeman are experienced by the cameraman. He stands in the middle of street traffic, surrounded by cars, trams, carts, the curses of cab drivers, signals, the panting of machines. It begins to seem as if his head is spinning. The viewer’s head is spinning already.

Looking at the shots of the mine, you again recall Vertov’s story: “We are very tired and frozen. Some of us have a fever. We are filming near the ‘mine-shaft’, under a constant cold shower. The cameraman is asleep on his feet. The lighting man is warming himself up by embracing a rheostat which hasn’t yet gone cold. The administrator is sitting on another one. He is remembering Moscow, and steam-heating”...<sup>18</sup>

The film aroused heated debate at showings in Kharkov and Kiev. It is a long time since film production has delivered such sharp material. It is a long time since the Ukrainian public was so agitated.

From the contrapuntal construction of the word-radio-theme in *A Sixth Part of the World*, through the montage of noise in *The Eleventh Year*, to the experimental *Man with a Movie Camera* – this is the path of Dziga Vertov and his group, directing the movement of Kino-Eye into the second stage of its development – into the stage of Radio-Eye. Vertov’s most recent works can be translated into the language of sound cinema without any re-editing. It is just a question of the technical equipment.

The conquering of Moscow first-run cinemas by *A Sixth Part of the World* was attend-

ed by the heroic efforts of its authors. One has to fear that *Man with a Movie Camera* may suffer the fate of the majority of non-fiction films. *Man* is complete, and we must not allow it to lie on a shelf until some unspecified time. The centre of the cinematic life of the USSR, Moscow, must see this film as quickly as possible.

*Man with a Movie Camera* must be made accessible to more than just the Ukrainian public.

We must create good conditions for the release of this film. We cannot allow the people from the exhibition apparatus to arrest *Man with a Movie Camera*.

### Arguing about Vertov

*K[onstantin] Feldman, excerpt from "V sporakh o Vertove", Kino i kultura, nos. 5-6, 1929, p. 16*

Very often Vertov has recourse to the device of the deformation of material. The other arts use this same device widely to achieve their emotional aims. A classical example of deformation in architecture is the deformation of a column in a Greek temple (the Parthenon). The completely harmonious form of the temple, built according to precise mathematical calculations, acquires a special expressiveness through this distortion. The deformation of various objects – trams, the Bolshoi Theatre building – in Vertov's film *Man with a Movie Camera* has aroused a great deal of argument. This was provoked by attempts to ascribe semantic meaning to this device. There were people who maintained that through this Vertov wanted to express an idea about the downfall of the Bolshoi Theatre. And yet what we see here is a simple emotional means of impact. Though he had used all the other filming devices, the author sensed that he had not yet transmitted the full sensation of the traffic to the viewer. So then he turned to the deformation of the Bolshoi Theatre. In the same way in Japanese Kabuki theatre, when an actor on stage has reached the very limits of his expression but the artist has not yet expressed all the fullness of life, the actor on stage falls silent and an invisible actor enters the action: you hear singing off stage, an orchestra, and so on.<sup>19</sup>

### Pictorial Laws in Cinematic Problems

*Kazimir Malevich, "Zhivopisnye zakony v problemakh kino", Kino i kultura, nos. 7-8, 1929, pp. 22-26<sup>20</sup>*

An article with this title would, by rights, be a detailed analysis, copiously illustrated, of a vast array of films, documenting the influence of pictorial representation on the structure of motion pictures.

Such a project could only result in a brochure unfit for publication.

For this reason I will limit myself to a short article, touching on the subject specifically in connection with the work of Dziga Vertov.

Pictorial laws in cinematic problems, although exploited by all, have not yet been formally discovered either by directors, critics, or students of film.

Everyone considers cinema an independent art. Film directors believe themselves to be new luminographers, completely uninfluenced by painting, whose unique pictures could not be expressed through any medium except the cinematic art.

True, film people are aware of the bad theatricality which has been creeping into motion pictures, and which it is necessary to oppose. In particular, what one needs to oppose is the application of theatrical method and principles to expressing a given theme in film.

The method of theatre is, of course, decorative, with a two-dimensional unfolding of the action on a flat plane. That is theatre's lawful domain. In theatrical expression, the theme inevitably develops on a flat front plane. This two-dimensional space wholly determines the actor's performance. The actor is, moreover, not merely an actor, but also a decorative spot. His costume, like his movements, must in every detail fit into the single established direction and rhythm of the picture.

Film develops its theme also in time, or, to be more exact, it strives to develop its theme over a longer span of time than the theatre.

Yet current story-oriented productions make it nearly impossible to employ expanded time in its different varieties; the picture is still contained within a three-dimensional illusionistic pictorial plane. Like theatrical art, the pictorial "display" also must be met with resistance, because it interferes with film and undermines its composition, that is, the montage of the shots into a whole.

Kinetics alone is not enough to lead film away from the illusionistic state of a painted picture.

Having watched a great number of motion pictures, my only impression has been of the advances in film's technical capabilities. Of all the films I have seen, not one poses the problem of cinematic form as such, inherently peculiar to film.

Instead, recent innovations in film fall entirely into the more general plane of pictorial problems. Thus, the problems made up in painting have come to be the problems of cinematic art as well.

As a result, cinematic productions develop in conformity with the pictorial materials that already belong in the archives of the history of painting. The newest films of everyday life bear the stamp of the archival historical epoch of the Itinerants.<sup>21</sup>

For example: Eisenstein the innovator is but an old artist of the Itinerant school, who wishes not simply to bring novelty into cinema but rather to give expression to an old Itinerant picture by using all technical means available to film.

One concedes that his Itinerant pictures are not vulgar, but can be placed on a par with the paintings of Makovsky.<sup>22</sup>

The study of the types of pictorial representation is necessary because the influence that painting continues to exercise over the composition of the shot and overall expression of the theme originates in easel painting.

Studying pictorial forms of representation, we shall encounter a great many new

devices in the methods of expression, which will open new horizons in the perception of new phenomena previously hidden from sight.

Study of trends in pictorial representation, by enabling us to organize the material systematically, will afford an escape from the confusion plaguing both composition of the shot and the law of contrast – especially in film forms with pretensions to new discoveries.

Study of the latest painterly material will reveal a crucial boundary: the boundary at which the theme collapses and diffuses, and new, unfamiliar phenomena come to light. We would see not an image of the object, but its new content.

The painting of the Itinerants was a Great Wall of China impeding any access to the problems of painting. This wall still stands: the cracks made in it by the storm of the latest trends in painting are being mended successfully.

Contemporary cinema has its own Great Wall of China, which protects the “problems of Monty Banks”<sup>23</sup> from the penetration of new problems.

How else to explain that Dziga Vertov should face the Great Cine-Wall of China of non-recognition at a moment when inquiry into new cinematic problems ought to be widely encouraged?

I know nothing of Dziga Vertov’s hopes and aspirations; I have not discussed the matter with him. But I have familiarized myself with his two works, *The Eleventh Year* and *Man with a Movie Camera*. *The Eleventh Year* impressed me with its uncorrupted sincerity, and a whole range of moments that distinctly set it apart from the security of the Itinerants.

In *The Eleventh Year* – which is, after all, still a picture, whose elements (that is, shots) are united by a single theme – one cannot fail to notice new, “additional” elements: they indicate that somewhere deep in the creative core of Dziga Vertov, new perceptions have come into being that call for a new mode of expression.<sup>24</sup>

No other director has so much as begun to surmise the issues that Vertov’s new perceptions are now bringing to light.

*The Eleventh Year* contains a significant number of “abstract” moments stemming from these new perceptions, of which the director himself is not yet fully conscious. Even so, this will suffice.

In *The Eleventh Year*, we witness the birth of new, “additional” elements which will ultimately be arranged into a cohesive whole. These elements will give expression to a new form for conveying a new kind of perception: a new, completely unprecedented film.

Such portents can be discerned and appreciated only by a spectator who understands their source, and knows from what sphere they originate and to which system they belong...

I may add that, in order to make sense of *The Eleventh Year*, one must also understand the Futurism of Boccioni and Balla,<sup>25</sup> and indeed the entire system of Futurism in painting. Any critique carried out “from the point of view of cinema alone” is not going to be sufficient, but may result in gross errors in the appraisal of *The Eleventh Year* and similar films.

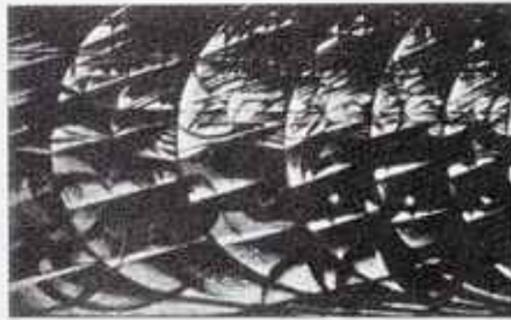
Thus, for instance, Paul Cézanne – a first-rate weaver, not of stories, but of paintings – was underestimated by the Impressionists. Mauclair,<sup>26</sup> the ideologue of Impressionism, firmly consigned Cézanne to the category of the third-rate. This happened because he measured and evaluated him solely from the Impressionist point of view.

Looking at Cézanne from this particular viewpoint, we will surely be unable to appraise his work as 100 percent Impressionist.

But this means of evaluation is flawed. To be evaluated correctly, Cézanne ought to be considered from the point of view of painting as a whole.

By the same token, if *The Eleventh Year* were judged from the perspective of “Monty Banks and his problems”, Dziga Vertov would be utterly destroyed; but if we consider *The Eleventh Year* from the perspective of Futurism, we will find in it much valuable material for a film to come.

Viewing *The Eleventh Year* from the perspective of Futurism, I was able to find a wide array of Futurist elements. I do not have all the particulars on hand, but I do



**A frame from Dziga Vertov's *The Eleventh Year*, and Giacomo Balla's painting *Abstract Speed* (1913).**

have enough material to give some idea of the Futurist influence. I reproduce a frame from the Dziga Vertov film and a painting by the Futurist Balla, in order to demonstrate that Vertov has been guided by Futurist perceptions, that

the elements of dynamic tensions are present in his work, and that his and Balla's images convey the same sense of power.

If Dziga Vertov now came to know Futurism in depth, he would promptly synthesize Futurist elements from different films into a new, dynamic film of the purest form.

Already his achievement in *The Eleventh Year* distinguishes him as the pioneer of new possibilities in kinetic art.

*Man with a Movie Camera* is a step forward.

Of course, this step must be understood properly, that is, in terms of analogous phenomena in other arts, such as Futurism and Cubism. A spectator familiar with these movements will discern marks of similarity.

I have discovered in *Man with a Movie Camera* a great many frames with precisely Cubo-Futurist qualities. I do not have these elements on hand, but those who have seen *Man with a Movie Camera* will remember a whole array of moments: a shift in the street's current, the multidirectional motion of trams, with every possible shift in the movement of objects, wherein the structure of the motion develops not only in depth, toward the horizon, but vertically as well.

The man who edited the film has marvelously grasped the idea or task of the new montage, which gives expression to a new, unprecedented shift.

Like *The Eleventh Year*, *Man with a Movie Camera* contains valuable material for the cinematic problem. But this value needs to be unmasked and displayed in a consistent, new, dynamic work.

In comparison to *The Eleventh Year*, *Man with a Movie Camera* is a step forward, for it no longer offers a single theme that maintains its integral form throughout the film: what it offers is the fragmentation of a theme, and even a diffusion of objects in time, through dynamic expression. True, there is no clearly defined single trajectory in either film. Both productions are still eclectic. In them, two elements, or two images, are intertwined: garbage and dynamism. Thus, neither film can be viewed as something whole or complete. Both films will, moreover, cause much indignation, which could undermine Vertov's work as a whole. This would amount to a failure of experimental work that in the future would have yielded important innovations. These innovations are contingent upon Vertov's immediately purging his films of the aforementioned dualism. This should be Dziga Vertov's next task.

Of course, if Dziga Vertov is going to advance further, the Monty Bankses will not let him off. Still, let us hope that Vertov will nonetheless be understood and supported.

Thus Dziga Vertov moves inexorably toward a new form for expressing contemporary content. We must not forget that the content of our epoch is not exhausted by showing how pigs are fed on a state farm, or how the "golden crops" are harvested.<sup>27</sup> Our epoch has yet another content – its pure force and dynamics.

This content provides perhaps the most powerful charge for our new, young organization, which increases the energy of the whole century.

In order to master the dynamics of our re-formative epoch, young cinematic workers would do better to study Balla, Boccioni, Russolo,<sup>28</sup> Braque, et al., rather than the Monty Bankses, the Pats and Patachons.

My suggestions will certainly cause indignation; I will be told that it is necessary first and foremost to study the achievements of film directors.

I agree – on the condition that these directors be masters of a fully independent cinematic art. Since no such thing exists at present, the best teachers are still the masters of painting mentioned above – mostly Cubo-Futurists,<sup>29</sup> since they have more potential than the Itinerants. There is more contemporaneity in the dynamism of Russolo than in how *Monty Banks Gets Married*.<sup>30</sup>

The achievements of Monty Banks are identical to the achievements of a painting à la *Kitten under an Umbrella*.

Let me make clear that my idea is not to turn all film directors into painters. I am proposing only material for study to avoid blind imitation. I also propose to select the elements that are necessary for the cinematic art.

Our architecture used to be a Great Wall of China, but modern painting has managed to force a crack in it. Architects have borrowed much from contemporary Constructivist painting to put into the latest architectural form – without having turned into painters.

Dziga Vertov is the first to raise the new problem of dynamics in film. All cham-

pions of film's honour must take the risk of producing at least one new, dynamic film, to see for themselves that dynamism is the true nourishment and essence of cinema.

I will agree that a cow can be used to carry water – but I will not agree that carrying water is a cow's proper occupation. I am not arguing that cinema cannot be used to show the achievements of the Monty Bankses – but I will not agree that Monty Banks is cinema's proper nourishment and essence.

Thus: make way for the newest phenomena, so that film does not expire from a chronic catarrh of the stomach, and from the achievements of the Pats, Patachons, and Bankses.

A few words now about *Symphony of a Big City* and *Man with a Movie Camera*. I overheard a whisper at the showing that some elements of *Symphony of a Big City* are to be found in *Man with a Movie Camera*.

Yes, they are, to an extent, but nothing is to be deduced from that: for these two pictures achieve very different things.

It is possible that *Symphony of a Big City* essentially pursued the same task as *Man with a Movie Camera*: namely, the expression of a dynamic force. For the former film, the dynamics of a city; for the latter, dynamism as such.

Thus, the “cine-dynamist” director of *Symphony of a Big City* aimed in principle to show the development of dynamics from the moment of stasis – the city asleep – to the moment of highest intensity.

But Ruttmann turned out to be a trash collector. Instead of dynamics, he showed how daily rubbish wakes up and goes to sleep. He, a cinematic trash dealer, with the help of film technology, displayed all the garbage he had collected in Berlin at the flea-market of spectators – in a “symphonic mode”.

In its essence, *Man with a Movie Camera* does not share this tendency. Its tendency is, rather, to rid the urban centre of its object-ness, without relating a single element to one consistent idea. His film is all displacement and surprise. Here, for the first time in any film, the elements are not shackled together in a whole in order to convey the gossip of existence.

Dziga Vertov does not rationalize or justify a machine by the fact that it manufactures cigarettes or milks a cow. He shows the movement itself, the dynamics whose force had been previously overshadowed by the cigarette-holder or by Monty Banks's back. *Symphony*, by contrast, relies entirely on rationalization, spiced, moreover, with an unmistakable moral.

Thus in their essence, the two productions stand miles apart. Dziga Vertov severs film-objects from trash and transports them into the world of dynamics, whereas *Symphony* invariably deals with garbage, however “symphonic”.

By directing the camera lens toward the unexamined dynamics of the metallic industrial-Socialist life, we may glimpse a new world, as yet completely unexplored.

## Notes

1. *Pravda* declined Vertov's statement. It was not printed in Russian until 1965, when Fevralsky published it in *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 12, 1965 (the source of the present translation). At the time, the statement appeared in Ukrainian as "Liudina z kinoaparatom: absoliutnyi kinopis i radio-oko" (*Man with a Movie Camera: Absolute Kinography, and Radio-Eye*) in the Left art journal *Nova Generatsiia*, vol. 3, no 1, 1929. As for *Pravda*, Vertov sent it another, less ambitious statement, entitled "Man with a Movie Camera", which the paper published on 1 December 1928.
2. Vertov has in mind his essay "*Kino-Pravda i Radio-Pravda*" (*Kino-Pravda and Radio-Pravda*), published by *Pravda* on 16 July 1925.
3. Aleksandr Fevralsky, "Tendentsii iskusstva i radio-glaz", *Molodaya gvardiia*, no. 7, 1925, pp. 167-72.
4. *Ukrepim sovetskoe radio* (Strengthen Soviet Radio), a special single issue devoted to Radio-Eye (11 August 1925).
5. Grigory Berezovsky, film musician, head of the music section of Moscow's Malaia Dmitrovka film theatre, and the composer of the score for *A Sixth Part of the World*.
6. Mikhail Levidov (1891-1939/1942?), writer, critic, journalist, screenwriter, and playwright.
7. Vladimir Kirshon (1902-1938), playwright, critic, and journalist.
8. Konstantin Feldman (1881-1968), journalist, screenwriter, and staunch supporter of Vertov.
9. F.W. Murnau's *Faust – Eine deutsche Volkssage* came out in 1926. *Salome* (1923), directed by Charles Bryant and starring Alla Nazimova, and *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1925), by Ernst Lubitsch, were both screen adaptations of Oscar Wilde's stage plays; Frank Urson's 1927 film *Chicago* was based on a play by Maurine Watkins.
10. *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Walther Ruttmann, 1927).
11. The "reworking" of intertitles to which Naum Kaufman refers was linked to Aleksandr Rodchenko's work for Vertov's *Kino-Pravda* (starting from issue no. 7, 25 July 1922). For more on this collaboration, see chap. 3, "Kino-Pravda and Constructivism".
12. The title of issue no. 20 of *Kino-Pravda*, 1924.
13. Nikolai Iudin, journalist who wrote mainly for *Komsomolskaia pravda*.
14. Temporal magnifying glass: "A technical cinematic device which allows you to film motion quickly and show it slowly." (*Note by Iudin or the newspaper's editor*)  
Iudin appears to confuse slow-motion photography (sometimes called "temporal magnifying glass" in the 1920s, from the German *Zeitlupe*) and the freeze-frame technique referred to in the text of his review.
15. A reference to the "Living Man Theory", put forward by the VAPP group (Vsesoiuznaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei: All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers) to defend what they considered to be realist literature from what they thought were the dehumanizing tendencies of Left Front of the Arts (LEF) and avant-garde art.
16. Ezra Vilensky, journalist, affiliated at the end of the 1920s with *Nasha gazeta*.
17. Vilensky quotes from Vertov's "11-i. Otryvok iz semochnogo dnevnika" (*The Eleventh Year: Fragment from a Shooting Log*), printed in the February 1928 issue of *Sovetskii ekran*. One section of this publication is translated in Annette Michelson, ed., *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 169.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Performances given by a Kabuki company which visited Moscow in 1928 caused a lively discussion in theatre and film periodicals. The synoptic effect Feldman evokes here had been discussed in Eisenstein's essay "Nezhdannyi styk" (Unexpected Juncture), published in issue 34 of the magazine *Zhizn iskusstva*, 1928.
20. Translated by Elif Batuman and Lyubov Golburt for *The White Rectangle: Writings on Film*, edited by Oksana Bulgakova (Berlin: Potemkin Press, 2002), pp. 77-84.  
Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935), Russian avant-garde painter and art theorist, one of the pioneers of abstract art and the founder of Suprematism. Malevich was marginally interested in cinema, published a number of film-related texts – collected and translated in Oksana Bulgakova, ed., *The White Rectangle* (2002) – and even wrote a screenplay for a planned Suprematist movie.
21. The Itinerant Circle (Peredvizhniki), also known as the Wanderers or the Ambulants, a movement in narrative painting in 19th-century Russia which derived its name from itinerant exhibitions, thought to be a more democratic venue than the salon. The literary and thematic propensities of the Itinerant school were a frequent target among 20th-century modernist artists.

22. Vladimir Makovsky (1846-1920) or Konstantin Makovsky (1839-1915). Both were genre painters, members of the Itinerant Circle.
23. Monty Banks (Mario Bianchi, 1897-1950), Italian-born film comedian and director, who worked in America and Britain. In Malevich's parlance, the phrase "problems of Monty Banks" stands for trivial anecdotal tasks that run-of-the-mill filmmakers set for themselves.
24. By "additional elements" Malevich used to refer to changes in space perception, to which he ascribed the emergence of new schools and movements in art history.
25. Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916) and Giacomo Balla (1871-1958), Italian Futurist artists.
26. Camille Mauclair (1872-1945), French critic and writer, the author of articles and books on French painting.
27. An allusion to Eisenstein's film *The Old and the New* (*Staroye i novoye*, 1929).
28. Luigi Russolo (1885-1947), Italian Futurist painter and composer.
29. Cubo-Futurists, the Moscow group of painters and poets (formed sometime after 1910) to which Malevich briefly belonged.
30. Possibly the Soviet distribution title of *Wedding Bells* (1924), an American two-reel comedy directed by Harry Edwards starring Monty Banks.

## THE FILM IS IN DANGER



### **The Film Is in Danger (An Interview with Dziga Vertov)**

*Excerpt from "Filme grozit opasnost (beseda s Dzigoi Vertovym)", Novyi zritel, no. 5, 27 January 1929<sup>1</sup>*

In conclusion, I want to warn you of a certain danger. The Chairman of the Board of Sovkino (the exhibition monopoly), Comrade Shvedchikov, finds that *Man with a Movie Camera* is a very interesting scientific experiment, which, however, there is no basis to show widely, since the film, allegedly, will be comprehensible not to hundreds of thousands but only to tens of thousands of viewers. What does this mean? It means that the film will go into storage, into a museum, or will be used by other directors as a "bottomless well of montage inventions" (in the words of one of the critics), from which it will be possible to draw endlessly. This means that between the film and the viewers for whom it is intended there will be other filmmakers, "popularizers", who will pilfer pieces, individual montage devices, kino-phrases from it. In conclusion, this means that the film will not be placed face-to-face with the viewer, but will be dissolved in the sweet treacle of Soviet "kino-romances" released by our cinema industry.

### **For Harold Lloyd's Beautiful Eyes: The Results of a Certain Act of Sabotage**

*K[onstantin] Feldman, "Dlia prekrasnykh glaz Garolda Lloida. Itogi odnogo sabotazha", Vecherniaia Moskva, 18 April 1929*

Our readers remember the campaign which *Vecherniaia Moskva* had to wage so as to achieve the cinematic release of Dziga Vertov's film *Man With a Movie Camera*. Our exhibitors and cinema administrators – experienced specialists and connoisseurs of public taste – peremptorily decided that this film would not "get through" to the mass viewer.

When it was finally put on in two large Moscow cinemas, Dziga Vertov's film brilliantly refuted all these gloomy prophecies. For a whole week the film did good box office at both theatres, competing successfully against foreign "hits". What is most indicative of all is that the flow of viewers was greatest at the end of the week, when advertising of the film was on a noticeably smaller scale. On Sunday you could see long queues of viewers wanting to see Vertov's film at both cinemas. Every exhibitor well understands the meaning of this phenomenon: it means that the film was well received by the public in the first days of the run, and that the word of mouth of hundreds of viewers advertised Vertov's film.

To err is human. Of course, even the cinema administrators could make a mistake.

But a mistake is forgivable only if it is honestly corrected when you become persuaded of the incorrectness of your actions.

But evidently some axioms are not compulsory for a certain category of our cinema administrators. Despite its great success, the film *Man with a Movie Camera* was immediately withdrawn from the screens of the two aforementioned cinemas. Of course, if we had been talking about *Behind the Nunnery Wall*,<sup>2</sup> or *Riddle of the Mill*,<sup>3</sup> everything would have been arranged immeasurably better, and the public would have had the opportunity to behold these coarsest of confections for a second and third week. But we are talking here of a brilliant work by a Soviet cinematic innovator. Moreover, the film *Man with a Movie Camera* is guilty of the greatest crime: it has refuted all the predictions of the wise specialists of our cinematic exhibition.

The film is being taken off the screen by force. We must hurry and expedite the release of such a significant film as *Grandma's Boy*,<sup>4</sup> with Harold Lloyd himself!

The mistake goes beyond the bounds of the permissible. We have before us the fact of stubborn opposition to bringing a work by a Soviet master to the mass viewer. It is time to draw conclusions from this whole long drawn-out story.

### **So What Is the Matter?! Once Again, About *Man with a Movie Camera***

*"V chem zhe delo?! Snova o Cheloveke s kinoapparatom"*, Kino, 23 April 1929

Readers of our newspaper probably remember the heated struggle between the public and the film exhibition organizations which had to take place before the release of the film *Man with a Movie Camera*.

The representatives of commercial exhibition affirmed that the film was doomed to be shown to empty halls, that viewers would not accept the film, and that, consequently, it was completely pointless to waste money on advertising it and to lose money by showing it. Society, for its part, retorted by attempting to prove that the pessimistic prophecies of the exhibitors were completely unfounded, and that even if the film did do relatively worse at the box office, then it would abundantly compensate for that by the very fact of popularizing an interesting, cultured, and relevant work of film art among wide circles of viewers.

The public won a partial victory. On 9 April the film began a run on the screens of two central cinemas, the Hermitage and 46 Tverskaia Street. The first week of the run showed that the fears of the cinema businessmen were completely unfounded. In material terms *Man with a Movie Camera* did normal box-office: at the Hermitage it was higher than average (more than 4,000 roubles in a week), and at the Tverskaia it was average (over 7,000 roubles). If you bear in mind that this is a non-fiction, experimental film, which the viewer is not used to and may even find difficult to take in, then these figures would seem to provide evidence of a great victory for our cinema: they reveal the heightened cultural demands of our viewers, and in consequence the film should continue to be shown.

And yet the exhibitors stuck to their earlier positions, this time openly revealing their stagnant, maybe even reactionary position of principle in isolation from commercial considerations: despite the protests from representatives of the public and the press, after a single week *Man with a Movie Camera* made way on the screens of the Hermitage and 46 Tverskaia Street for such an obviously philistine film as *Grandma's Boy*, with Harold Lloyd.

Let us hope that exhibitors will take no time in correcting their completely obvious mistake and providing a substantial explanation for such a strange exhibition "policy".

### Who Whom?

*K[onstantin] Feldman, "Kto kogo?", Vecherniaia Moskva, 26 March 1929*

"In *bourgeois* countries the cinema has been definitively taken over by tradesmen. The further development of artistic cinema is therefore completely out of the question here. The only hope is in Soviet Russia, where the cinema has passed into the hands of enlightened state officials."

This was not written by a Communist, but by a *bourgeois* film critic, the Frenchman Louis Delluc, five years ago.

But now a danger has begun to threaten our reputation as the home of high culture. People who are carrying out a policy of destruction of the cultural values of our Union with no less zeal than the foreign tradesmen have taken up positions in our State apparatus. I am speaking of our exhibitors and cinema administrators. At a meeting called by Sovkino, the officials responsible for exhibition at the Moscow office of VUFKU and the administrators of Moscow cinemas passed a resolution on the alleged complete worthlessness of Dziga Vertov's film *Man with a Movie Camera*, in consequence of which the doors of the large Moscow cinemas should be hermetically sealed against it. This is incredible, but it is a fact! The entire Moscow press, along with a whole series of public organizations, unanimously recognized Vertov's film at discussion showings as a remarkable achievement of Soviet cinema. But the judgements of Soviet society and the Soviet press are just a scrap of paper for our exhibitors and the administrators of our cinemas. The Board of VUFKU assigns funds for Comrade Vertov's work, but the Moscow section of VUFKU puts in every effort to frustrate the exhibition of the film! The conspirators have given themselves away completely. Only the dull conservatism of people who are full of hatred for new forms could have dictated this outrageous decision.

And yet the argument is not yet over. It is going beyond the bounds of the question of the exhibition of Comrade Vertov's film. The argument is now over the right of Soviet cinema to create new forms. "Vertov is doing something that will be comprehensible to the viewer in 50 years; so let him start making his films in 50 years," was the cynical reaction of one of the representatives of VUFKU's Moscow office.

Who will defeat whom? Soviet culture, or the troglodyte conspiracy (*poshekhoskoe podpolie*)? The Soviet artist, or the exhibitor?

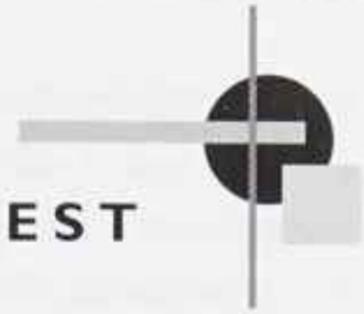
“Comrade Editor, support Dziga Vertov, and let us look at his most recent achievement; organize a campaign to mobilize public opinion around Comrade Vertov. Or else his talent will be ruined for no reason by those... and Comrade Vertov will not be able to stand it and will give up,” the worker Kapustin writes to us from Sverdlovsk.

“Or else Vertov will not be able to stand it and will give up”: these simple words by a working man contain a whole programme of public action. Kuleshov has already given up: they have made him sink as low as *The Merry Canary*.<sup>5</sup> Are we really also going to sacrifice Dziga Vertov to the tastes of our exhibitors?

### Notes

1. The part of the interview omitted here appeared in English under the title “*The Man with a Movie Camera*”, in Annette Michelson, ed., *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 82-84. We only include the part censored out in the 1966 Soviet edition used as the source for the English one.
2. *Za monastyrskoi stenoj* (Petr Chardynin, 1928).
3. *Zagadka melnitsy*: date and director unknown.
4. Harold Lloyd comedy directed in 1922 by Fred C. Newmeyer.
5. *Veselaia kanareika* (Lev Kuleshov, 1929).

## VERTOV IN THE WEST

**Dziga Vertov on Kino-Eye: Excerpts from a Lecture Given in Paris in 1929**

Filmfront, no. 2, 7 January 1935, pp. 6-8<sup>1</sup>

(This article, to our knowledge, was the first of any utterances or writings by Dziga Vertov to appear in the English language.)<sup>2</sup>

The history of KINO-EYE has been a relentless struggle to modify the course of world cinema, to impose on all cinematic production the preponderance of the film in which there is no “play” upon the played film, to substitute the document for “direction” (*mise-en-scène*), to break out of the arena of the theatre, and to enter the arena of life itself.

Let me attempt to sum up the results obtained in this direction by the KINO-EYE:

1. The manifesto of the “kinoki” on the cinema freed from the playing of actors was published and later developed and popularized in a number of articles and in several public discussions.

2. In order to confirm the contents of the manifesto, there were produced and exhibited about one hundred examples of films without actors. These were of a wide variety, from primitive newsreels to extremely complex documentary films of “cine-things” (*ciné-choses*). We can cite for example the *Weekly Reels*, *History of the Civil War*, *Calendars of Goskino*, and the *Cine-Translations*. Outstanding among those films which were responsible for heavy blows at the theatrical cinema must be mentioned: *Battle under Tsaritsyno*, *Life Caught Unawares*, *Lenin’s Truth*, *Forward Soviets!*, *The Sixth Part of the World*, *The Eleventh Year*, and, finally, *The Man with a Movie Camera*.<sup>3</sup> Among the films produced by some of my pupils may be mentioned: *Moscow*, *Nursery*, *For the Harvest*, *A Holiday of Millions*, and many others.<sup>4</sup>

3. We have developed a language proper to the cinema, special methods of shooting and montage which are not those of the enacted film. The language of the film has become absolutely distinct from that of the theatre and literature. We have created the conception of “Documentary Cinematography.”

4. We have established the project of an experimental studio for the recording of facts, and later *Pravda* on the 24th of July, 1926, published plans for a “factory of film without play”, of a “factory of facts”, that is to say, purely documentary.

5. At an open meeting which took place in Moscow in 1924, the followers of KINO-EYE REVEALED THE EXISTENCE OF A DIRECTIVE BY LENIN WHICH HAD NOT YET BEEN PUBLISHED, POINTING OUT THE NECESSITY OF CHANGING THE REPERTORY OF THE CINEMA (my emphasis – translator). Finding support in this directive, the followers of KINO-EYE declared that

they demanded an immediate reorganization of all Soviet film production, of all production and of all exhibition; they requested an internal apportionment, that is to say, a certain proportion between the theatrical cinema, the enacted film, the cine-play-thing on the one hand, and on the other the cinema which is not played, the cine-eye, the documentary.

It is that which was boldly called the "Leninist proportion". Attempts were made to publish this proposal in the cinematographic press, but in vain. In particular, N. Lebedev, the editor-in-chief of the only movie magazine appearing at that time, *Kino-Journal*, returned the manuscript to me, declaring that he protested the term "Leninist Cine-Proportion", and that he was against this attempt to utilize an "accidental" phrase by Lenin, and to present it as a sort of testamentary directive. The proposal of the "kinocs" rejected by the cinema press, was nevertheless published later by *Pravda* in Moscow on the 16th of August, 1925. The very term itself, "Leninist Proportion", was not current for very long, and it is only today, in 1929, that it has been taken up again a little everywhere in the Soviet Union.

6. KINO-EYE has exerted considerable influence on the theatrical film, the language of which it has modified. More and more our cinema has borrowed the methods of KINO-EYE, superficially, at least, to create what is known as the "artistic" film. We cite as examples: *Strike*, *Armored Cruiser Potemkin*, etc., but these borrowings have been sufficient to arouse attention and have created quite a stir at home as well as abroad in the domain of the theatrical cinema, of the film played by actors.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, these directed (*mise-en-scène*) films, the methods of which were superficially taken from KINO-EYE, present only a particular and incidental facet of the KINO-EYE movement, the spread of which continues uninterrupted.

7. KINO-EYE has exerted a considerable influence on almost all arts, notably in the sphere of music and the word. We will recall here that in their manifesto of the unacted film, the exponents of KINO-EYE ask workers in the word, workers in letters, to initiate a first number of oral chronicle, radio chronicle. We recall that following this, in *Pravda* in 1925 N. Ossinski [Osinsky] asked that literature engage itself upon the road traced by KINO-EYE, that is to say, that it attempt to present in an organic form, facts, documentary elements.

"Vertov is right," wrote O. Brik in *Soviet Cinema* (no. 2, 1926), and he demanded of photography that it follow the example set by Kino-Eye: "It is necessary to get out of the circle of ordinary human vision," reality must be recorded "not by imitating it, but by broadening the circle ordinarily encompassed by the human eye."

In their earliest declarations on the subject of the sound film, which was not yet even invented then but which was soon to come, the Kinoki, who now call themselves the *radiocki*, that is, followers of radio-eye, traced their path as leading from the kino-eye to the radio-eye, in other words, leading to *the sound Kino-Eye transmitted by radio*.

A few years ago I wrote an article entitled "The Radio-Eye", which appeared in the *Pravda* of Moscow under the general heading *Kino-Pravda* and *Radio-Pravda*; I stated in that article that Radio-Eye was a means of abolishing distances between men, that it

offered an opportunity for the workers of the world not only to see themselves but to hear themselves, SYNCHRONOUSLY.

This declaration of the “kinoki” provoked at the time most passionate discussions in the press. I remember a long article by Fevralsky: “Tendencies in Art and Radio-Eye”. I recall a special publication *Radio*, which, in the form of a newspaper, was one day devoted to Radio-Eye.

Shortly afterwards, interest in this question began to lag, the general opinion being that it was a problem concerning an as yet distant future.

Meanwhile, the followers of KINO-EYE, not confining themselves solely to a struggle for the triumph of the unplayed film, were preparing themselves for an entrance into the period of transition which they foresaw. They prepared to work in the plan of Radio-Eye, on the plan of the talking and sound film without the play of actors.

Already in *The Sixth Part of the World*, the subtitles are replaced by an oral theme, by a radio theme, counterpointally adapted to the film. *Eleventh Year* is already constructed like a VISUAL and SONAL cine-thing, that is to say, that the montage was done IN RELATION NOT ONLY TO THE EYE, BUT ALSO THE EAR.

It is in the same direction, in passing from KINO-EYE to RADIO-EYE, that our film *The Man with a Movie Camera* was mounted.

The theoretical and practical work of the “kinocs-radiocs” (differing in this respect from theatrical cinematography which found itself caught off guard) have run ahead of their technical possibilities and for a long time have been awaiting a technical basis the advent of which will be late, in relation to KINO-EYE; THEY AWAIT THE SOUND-CINE AND TELE-VISION.

Recent technical acquisitions in this sphere lend powerful arms to the partisans and workers of DOCUMENTARY SOUND CINEGRAPHY in their struggle for a revolution in the cinema, for the abolition of play, for an October of KINO-EYE.

From the montage of visual facts recorded on film (KINO-EYE) we pass to the montage of visual and acoustic facts transmitted by radio (RADIO-EYE).

We shall go from there to the simultaneous montage of visual-acoustic-tactile-olfactory facts, etc.,

We shall then reach the stage where we will surprise and record “human thoughts” (*les pensées humaines*), and finally,

We shall reach to the greatest experiments of direct organization of thoughts (and consequently, of actions) of all of mankind.

Such are the technical perspectives of KINO-EYE, born of the October Revolution.

### ***Man with a Movie Camera***

*Siegfried Kracauer, “Der Mann mit dem Kino-Apparat”, Frankfurter Zeitung, 19 May 1929<sup>6</sup>*

We have recently seen some Russian films – Pudovkin’s *Storm Over Asia*<sup>7</sup> is pre-eminent among them – that unquestionably are signs of a certain stagnation. It is not as if any

one of these films were not superior to all contemporary German productions, but compared with *Potemkin* or *The End of St. Petersburg*,<sup>8</sup> neither their content nor their editing has presented anything fundamentally new. *Storm Over Asia* assumes the role of a festival play consecrating the Revolution; it is Bayreuth stood on its head. (Perhaps that is why it has aroused such aesthetic rapture for us.)

Now a new Russian film has arrived in Berlin that proves that the Russians have not remained stuck at the level they had already reached. I had the opportunity to see it in the offices of the Russian Trade Mission. It is called *Man with a Movie Camera*, and the public will view it for the first time at the Stuttgart "Film and Photo" exhibition. Dziga Vertov, the director, began his career as a mechanic. Today he is the foremost representative of the "Kino-Eye" (*kinocs*) group, and he works hand in hand with Mrs. Esther Shub, the leader of the "Constructivists". Both these avant-garde groups have rejected the fiction film and despise studios, actors, and constructed sets. They choose – and it could not be otherwise – social themes; their material is reality. And since reality has not been artistically altered prior to filming, they put their greatest stress on montage.

*Man with a Movie Camera* wishes to represent nothing less than life itself. The collective life of a city. In the hour before dawn, the man with his camera wanders through the city and eavesdrops on people sleeping and the fragments of life that stir, silently. The city awakes, and stretches. Teeth are brushed and shop shutters are raised. Trams and other vehicles announce the start of a new day. All is movement, a single powerful movement that encompasses the heretofore fragmented aspects, and all the elements – connecting rods, people on the streets, the labour pains of a woman giving birth – flow together and fuse so completely with each other that they enter into the rhythm of the whole. At the end of the workday, the flow does not stop, but instead changes direction. Working people swim and try out various team sports. Then the evening follows, with its shooting stalls, Chinese magicians, beer halls, and cinemas. A day has ended. Tomorrow, it will start anew; year in, year out.

That is the life that the cameraman, the "Man with a Movie Camera", shoots. But he also films himself, since without him, the Subject, life, would not be an Object for us, for Object and Subject belong together. We see him in desperate situations: how he digs a hole for himself and his movie camera in order to film a train from below; when he hangs out the side of a tramcar in some unbelievable way; as he operates the camera while standing in a car. And the cinema also appears, in which the life he has hunted down returns as a film for spectators.

There are, therefore, two principal actors in the film: the ensemble of things and people in the city, and the "man with a movie camera" who takes control of them all. The material world on one hand, and on the other, the "cinema-eye". The relationships between them determine the content of the film. The results are utterly remarkable; in any case, the cameraman presents anything but mere copies of objects.

One may leave aside for an instant the cameraman and his manipulations, and then contemplate only the world and its objects on film. The rest of the film consists of nothing but associative patterns. Ruttmann had something similar in mind in *Berlin: The*

## Posters

Vertov never missed an opportunity to make fun of other people's films. Fictional life depicted on movie posters is often used in *Man with a Movie Camera* to create visual puns with life as it is. A face from a poster for an unnamed movie acquires a somewhat seedy expression when juxtaposed with real bottles of beer held in a man's hand. Buses peacefully leaving their depots rhyme with the poster for Nikolai Okhlopkov's *Sold Appetite* (*Prodannyi appetit*, 1928; see Oswell Blakeston's essay in this chapter for the description of this lost film), which ends with a bus crashing into a phone booth, the dramatic moment depicted on the poster. Or take two hush-hush faces from the poster for the German film *The Awakening of Woman* (*Das Erwachen des Weibes*, 1927; released in the USSR in 1928), looking at a sleeping young woman in Vertov's film. It is this combination that caused Siegfried Kra-cauer to write, in his review of *Man with a Movie Camera*: "The secret of this strange time [the pre-dawn hours] in which the relationship between life and death is reversed has never been figured so surely before. It is revealed to the Surrealist artist who listens to the conversation that life's disparate, inanimate aspects conduct with the living. It is a dream-like relationship, one that later returns to the dream's darker realms as soon as the poster changes back into an ordinary poster seen in broad daylight."



*Symphony of a Great City*.<sup>9</sup> While Ruttmann's associative linkages, however, are purely formal throughout – in his sound films he also seems satisfied with superficial, un-illuminating combinations [of images] – Vertov uses montage to extract a meaning from the connections between the fragments of reality. Ruttmann presents unenlightening juxtapositions; Vertov elucidates them by the very way in which he represents them.

How well the pre-dawn hours are captured! Disconnected fragments follow each other: an empty garden, the chest of someone sleeping, display window mannequins, faces on a poster. The secret of this strange time in which the relationship between life and death is reversed has never been figured so surely before. It is revealed to the Surrealist artist who listens to the conversation that life's disparate, inanimate aspects conduct with the living. It is a dream-like relationship, one that later returns to the dream's darker realms as soon as the poster changes back into an ordinary poster seen in broad daylight.

The significance of other times of day is also broached. After the early morning hours, the best is the incredible stretch of time before night falls. Vertov does not do nearly as good a job on the day itself as with its temporal edges. Many scenes are rather banal schemas based on literary conceits and theoretical notions. The sports episodes, whose length probably results from the pressure of pedagogical over-zealousness, could be shortened, as could others as well. Mingling with the shouts of the crowd, a primitive existential passion runs through these sports scenes, which stand in curious opposition to the remote Surrealistic gaze trained on spheres located on the nether side of day. East and West meet in the film.

The cameraman's presence draws them together even more closely. Time and again, he plunges into the unselfconscious masses who are going about their business, and thereby disturbs their innocence. He uses slow motion, shows details so enlarged that they become unrecognizable, and by and large deals capriciously with objects throughout. The normal pace of events is continually disrupted.

Does he break the rules out of a technician's desire to show off his skills? This explanation is unsatisfying because it is too obvious. One might more readily hypothesize that these demonstrations of technique are a new form of Romantic irony. Like the Romantic who ironically questions his creations, Vertov again and again penetrates the seemingly self-contained collective realm. The cinema eye fulfills, one might say, a metaphysical function for him. It probes beneath the surface, dispels any sense of certainty, and brushes against the underside of daily routine. Particularly strange are the images in which the ordinary movement of life suddenly comes to a halt. Masses of people have just surged across the square, and a second later, contrary to all probability, they freeze, as if rooted to the screen. A simple trick has conjured up a vision of death dwelling in the midst of life. The emotional jolt that the cinema apparatus provokes here is not wholly congruent with that other shock earlier revolutionary films aimed to produce.

If Vertov's film is more than simply an isolated case, then it must be regarded as symptomatic of the inroads universal human categories have made in Russia's rigid political thinking. Perhaps Vertov really only wanted to depict accurately the officially

approved state of contemporary Russian society; but then, behind his back and contrary to his intentions, he succeeded in doing something else. In a curiously timid, almost ashamed way, the film once more raises age-old questions about the meaning of collective existence, as well as the significance of individual human beings. These were hardly ever raised before in Russian films. That their universal import has been grasped once more, despite the narrowing of consciousness imposed by party doctrine, testifies to their irrepressible essentiality.

### Look at Life through Dziga Vertov's Kino-Eye

*Sophie Küppers[-Lissitzky], excerpt from "Schaut das Leben durch das Kino-Auge Dsiga Werthoffs", Das Kunstblatt, no. 5, May 1929, pp. 141-46<sup>10</sup>*

We are forced to admit that we know nothing about our daily life when we see what *Man with a Movie Camera* has secretly observed. But life here is not only observed and fixed. It is experienced – formed deeply and chastely, and with a heart burning with poetry. Never before was womankind shown with such restraint, never before has the martyrdom of birth in art revealed itself as a drama of a few seconds. The whole range of human emotions is touched upon – quietly and with great dignity. Agony and an effervescent vitality are brought in the rhythmic flow of time. The happenings grip us, breathless. The artist is inexhaustible; he does not let us out of the suggestive tension, and at the end? – We are confused, are seduced, no longer know where we were. It matters to all of us – the whole wide world belongs to all of us – for all of us the child's laughter, and the tears at the grave. It is no use to be only director, cameraman, or inventor. It takes knowledge of all of humanity to make these sorts of films.

Vertov's optical tricks catch us unawares – if he has mystified us, so in the next moment he will laughingly explain his trick to us. Even as the wild chaos of the street is barely no longer whirring before us, he already shows us the assistant at her laborious editing work. He brusquely employs the antithesis, allows us fully to savour the differences in tempo. The rhythm of life with its hectic pace, its presto and andante, is brought to a fermata (the visual fermata [*Sehfarmate*]) as the image comes to a standstill in order to become empty, impoverished photography – until the velvety motion then comes in again and the magic of the dynamic grips us.

Because it is not an advertisement but poetry, it will be difficult for those who are accustomed to the noisy everyday language (*Tagessprache*) to sense the deep psychology of these social films. Much too often one still confuses trends with these unsettling questions of humanity. Everywhere in the world, inventions have been experienced as affronts and have been pushed away. The feature film is threatened to its core through the power that emanates from these unstaged films; the industry clings to its proven formulas. Nowhere is it easy to eradicate the intellectual *bourgeois*. It is unpleasant to be shaken up so, and small souls always save face by suppressing something whose surplus value they certainly sense.

Vertov has received complete appreciation and enthusiastic acclaim from all progressive-minded people. His valiant co-workers loyally support him in his struggle for his work. A new language has truly been created, that cannot be imparted by any other communications medium other than the cinema apparatus.

No written history, no verbal poetry, and no image will be able to give the following generations a truer testimony of the experience of life in our time than these film records of Dziga Vertov. Through his instrument he has rhythmized seeing; seeing resounds; the theatre broke into pieces – what we experience through him is only – REALITY.

### Three Russian Films

*Oswell Blakeston, Close Up, vol. 5, no. 2, August 1929, pp. 144-50<sup>11</sup>*

Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*. In Paris. Can we see it? Naturally. And would you like to see *The Eleventh Year* and *L'Appétit vendu*?<sup>12</sup>

Thus we were received by Mr. Carlovitch, who looks after Russian films in Paris, and we want to thank him specially for his great courtesy and kindness.

*The Eleventh Year* opens with shots from an aeroplane; rocks and sea drifting by. Mines. Three lines of movement; men and lorries on a road, bridge, and under an archway. That is so careful there must have been a reason for taking us up in the air. Ah! we are going under the ground. Humping up into the skyline a hillock, belted with machine band of workers carrying lanterns and picks. We are going under the ground. The flapping mouth of a coal scoop swings by us. We had to go up into the air to realize what it means to go under the ground. Above black and white smoke from the furnaces a giant miner hammering; time that is passing but not time that is lost. These men are working for their own ideal (whether we agree with it or not), working for a land of new codes. There is something fine and beautiful, caught chronographically in the sweat gleaming arm of a stoker; indeed these machines do not ask for our opinion.

The screen is split horizontally into two long shots; one moves away, the other is static. It is magnificently done. Men walking home; away from the mines but the ideals in their homes. They are building an electric station for their state. The black and white smoke is building. (Women and children in the hay fields are building by releasing men for the more skilled work.) There are no obstacles to the willing; rocks are blasted to black and white smoke; smoke that builds.

Waters of the river rise to augment the electricity; rise by means of constructed dams. The town is seen under water; the one unifying idea. Windmill is seen under water. (You remember the still?) The village that has set out with one purpose; any village of the new order.

It is surprising how long we can watch, how long we can watch the women making hay and the electrician climbing a telegraph pole with knives clamped to his boots. Perhaps we are already taking a personal interest in the village?

Then we see the factory chimneys through the corn, in case we forget the linking-up. Factory chimneys are themselves a corn field, with black and white ripples of smoke.

A ballet of telegraph wire (you remember the still?) suggesting the work inside the factory.

We must not forget, either, the activity under the ground. Pit ponies are as sturdy as the heavy rafters in the roof. Change of camera angle makes the rafters wrench with the ponies, drawing the eye to the quiet workers as the beasts draw the loads. And the lifts go up, to emphasize the men who stay below.

We leave them with a man with a drill, it brings vitality and truth to the abstract arrangements of the avant-garde.

Women at the pit-heads lustily wheel away the trucks.

A sub-title says, "The flag of Lenin". Courageous workers hidden in masks. So the flag of Lenin is a bright shower of sparks. No silk to drape across Utopia of ease and content; something searing, dangerous and alive.

Watching over the workers, the sentinel.

Wake of a boat, taken romantically from sea level. Sailors. A head and rifle against the cylinder curve of a waterfall. *One picture one turn* shot of the sky gives shredded clouds.

A sub-title says, "The Flag of Lenin". Light from the home and the clubs. The flag is always light, light to kindle or to welcome; never silk.

*We build with golden light.* That is the message of the picture. Streaked fingers of light sweeping over the factory floor. Bars of red hot metal, and coiled metal shavings doing things one finds in the work of Bruguère.<sup>13</sup>

Men marching up skyline, up the hillock; and smoke from the factory chimneys balancing the corner of the composition. Where there is no smoke the tripod is tilted to give balance.

It is grand propaganda; We are quite impartial but only a stone could remain unmoved. The machinery and men working in harmony for something which they believe to be better. "Towards Socialism," says a title. The factories, the women, the children. "Towards World Socialism," says a title. The art of the director does the rest. Final, clashing chords of a symphony. There it is, whether you like it or not.

*The Man with A Movie Camera* is lighter than *The Eleventh Year*. M. Kaufman is again the operator and Svilova again helps with the cutting.

*Berlin* and *Rien que les heures!* Forget all that. To begin with here is a Russian typewriter. Russian customs and habits, that alone puts it apart. Then there is a freedom from the usual smirkiness. The birth of a child is shown without the coyness of *Nature and Love*. Birth and death are being contrasted; the face of the mother is cross-cut with the linen face of the corpse; the mother's twitching lips and nostrils, the calmness of death. It is brought out that death is terrible and birth a conquest. It would be a joy to any new woman, not a shock.

Forget the other documents, for Vertov has the idea of making you conscious of the camera. The lens racks out and in, the scene comes into focus; the lens racks out and

the eye of the cameraman is in the lens. The eye of the camera, the eye of the cameraman, and the eye of the camera recording it all.

We were reminded of a scene in *The Postmaster*,<sup>14</sup> where the daughter is dressing for a party in front of an oval mirror which the cameraman frames in the black circle of an iris: another mirror, the mirror of the screen.

An accidental effect; Vertov's are minutely devised. He stops the film at a certain point to show a photograph of the film, cutting to a joining girl at work on the first copy. Rolls of the scenes we have just seen glint from the neat shelves. A woman driving along the streets, petrified to a single frame in the film strip of the woman driving along the streets. Long shot from the roof of a house; a camera pans down into the picture. A cameraman climbs a girder. We see him taking a picture, we see the picture he has taken. We are frightened for his safety and frightened for the safety of the unseen cameraman. Astral projection of self!

The film is different! A doll in a shop window; so, so threadbare. Vertov catches shadows from a tree outside which put breath into the china throat. Shutters and views through the slats; so, so threadbare. Vertov cross-cuts with a young lady blinking sleepy-dust eyes; eyes open and shut in a twinkling, slats twinkle.

Vertov's first reel is devoted to people entering a cinema; to the projectionist threading up his apparatus; to seats in the cinema being occupied, one by one, by invisible patrons.

A girl is asleep. There is a ring on her finger. Wind stirs in an empty café. The café where she gained the ring? She sleeps. Children sleep. Down-and-outs sleep. The town sleeps. They all have a right to sleep.

The cameraman sets out for the day. He stretches himself across a railway line. There is a thrill as the train swoops down. The woman still sleeps.

The streets are washed, the girl washes. A relaxation for the cameraman. Not for long. He rides on a fire engine. He finds an attractive fountain. Because we are constantly reminded of the camera we cannot complain of the contrived; for instance, of the way in which the fountain is turned on a moment after it is discovered by the eye of the camera.

As in *The Eleventh Year* there is a good deal of footage devoted to factories, light splashed tunnels of miners, and great chimneys blowing smoke rings.

We come back to the morning streets. Hand of policeman, hand of motor horn, in lightning cuts; mixed first, with the lens of a camera, then with a gigantic eye.

Finally, we watch the audience, watching the screen on which are scenes we saw being taken by a cameraman whom we knew was being himself taken by Vertov's Debie. The *montage* is stupendous and leaves most of the accredited masterpieces in some vague category with the Asquith person. The propaganda, without the stern beauty of *The Eleventh Year*, is a little too stormy, the contrasts between the wealthy woman enjoying a manicure, and the manual worker being obvious and tiresome.

The work of Vertov is no longer legendary. We have seen it, others have seen it. Everybody must fight till they do see it!

*L'Appétit vendu* is what Henry Dobb called a custard-pie melodrama. We began by wondering, "Will the Russians laugh at this?" Two men after the girl in the cafe, giving musical twiddles to their hats and canes. Does this amuse Russians? The poor man wants to marry the girl... The scenario livens up when a millionaire, with bad digestive organs, offers the poor man a sum down for his stomach.

Every kind of garnished dish is offered by Folies-Bergèresque girls to the re-stomached capitalist. The worker, meanwhile, is taken ill mysteriously in the train. He hangs out of an open-door, managing to lodge his feet pretty firmly.

Exercises and doctors fail to alleviate his pains. He attempts suicide. The girl hopes to revive his interest in life by forcing him to return to his old occupation, that of a bus driver.

Four men crowd into a telephone box, the bus charges straight for it. Pedestrians dive into a fountain, a policeman continues to direct the traffic with his head half out of the water.

The peculiar end of it all is that the bus heads into a wall, the driver is killed and the capitalist dies at the same moment.

We understand that the picture has been booked for the Vieux-Colombier, we hope that some of the French critics may be able to tell us if it is a comedy, satire, tragedy, propaganda or WHAT? With the trade papers we can merely call it *good entertainment*.

### **Man with the Camera: No Appeal for American Fans**

*Raymond Ganly, Motion Picture News, 26 October 1929, p. 31*

This Soviet importation doesn't mean a thing for American theatres. It is really a camera solo, there being no story, titles, settings, or actors – a difficult fare for the average American audience to down. Surnamed "Living Russia", the picture will appeal only to those of Slavic extraction, to those who support the "arty" film theatre. Fan after fan will pass this one up in favor of more appealing Hollywood films. Looking at camera pyrotechnics for a solid hour is more than they're accustomed to and they won't consider it entertainment. The film strikes one as being just a titleless newsreel embellished with trick photography. Of course, it exhibits discrimination and skill in the weaving of the continuity – done entirely by the camera, the only titles being five at the beginning where the film is mentioned as "an experiment in projecting visual phenomena purely by the means of the camera... thus creating an international cinema language." This purpose is a worthy one, but the film cannot be said to have entirely succeeded in its high pursuit of camera art. To make it anything of a box office venture, some sort of story should have been injected. As it is the average theatre-goer will be entirely justified in terming it hodge-podge.

The picture is composed of scenes taken by a cameraman in Russia, the shots opening with the dawn and closing after the day has gone. Into it are packed all sorts of shots showing modern Russian life at long and close range.

### Vertov, His Work and the Future

John Lenauer,<sup>15</sup> *Close Up*, vol. 5, no. 6, December 1929, pp. 464-68

As one of the most significant events of the year there comes to my mind Frankfurt and Dziga Vertov at a matinée explaining the theory of the *Kinocs* (the Kino-Eye) of which he is the inventor, not in words alone, but with the help of clear examples of his work amply demonstrating his ability to translate his theory into practice. *Kinocs* is unposed film, independent both of actors and of studio. Vertov watches human expressiveness, gestures, incidents, and when he succeeds in surprising these at their characteristic moments he registers them and produces results that are extraordinarily valuable.

But this is not enough for him. In his last film, *Man with a Movie Camera*, he shows us the ropes of artistic creation. When he has aroused our emotions and carried us away with a powerful scene, he shows the operator filming the scene or the mistress joining the strips of film.

One might imagine that his films can be no more than intelligent reporting. They are nothing of the kind. They are complete creations. And Vertov, moreover, in what he calls *Radiocs* (the eye of the radio), presented sound before speech-films had been heard of. He has some remarkable ideas as to the future of the cinema: foreseeing the time, which he believes not far distant, when films will be presented not only in colour and relief and with the odours proper to what is shown, but also telepathically. A film *thought*, for example by Vertov himself, would appear simultaneously upon all the screens in the world, probably by that time installed in private apartments rather than in public cinemas. The forecasts of this genius (I am chary of the word but in this instance its full meaning is applicable) seem fantastic until we take the trouble of considering them carefully, when the possibility of their realization becomes undeniable.

Vertov will have nothing of films he classes as theatrical, that is to say, films acted either by professionals or others.

The ingenuity of his method is worthy of illustration by an example of his work. On one occasion he was taking shots in an all-night cabaret. Naturally anxious to disguise his operations he explained to his clientèle the presence of strange lamps by telling them that the management wished to experiment with a fresh lighting system and that later on a film would be taken. While the many "experiments" were being made his camera-men were at work. One was in the street just outside a window, another concealed in the roofing, and a third, using an automatic camera, pretended to help the electrician to shift the lamps, and registered everything indicated by Vertov. When at last the company supposed a picture was about to be taken, Vertov and his assistants made off. He had secured all he wanted. The possibilities of this method are immediately evident, and I need not insist upon the vital sincerity of the resultant strips. Vertov is, moreover, a past master in the art of the angle of vision, partly no doubt because the nature of his work moves him to take almost unconsciously

exactly the right, intelligible point of view. And upon this I would lay stress because for some time past all the incapable film directors have been gleefully on the look-out for interesting angles; an absurdity the more irritating for the pretentiousness of its origin. One is reminded in this connection of G.W. Pabst, whose camera angles are ruled by rigorous necessity: by the logic of the action. Hence the enchanting, magnificent power of his films.

In the evening I was glad of the opportunity of talking to Vertov, for my sincere admiration of his ideas does not exclude certain reservations. His films, in my opinion, must necessarily be limited. There are for example certain emotions which his method, repudiating artifice, is incapable of handling. I suggested to him the following scene: a woman in a darkened room at night, tormented by her thoughts. How, without special lighting, could such a scene be registered? After a brief hesitation he extricated himself: "I cannot discuss all my methods. They would be imitated by other producers." This, I fancy was a jest. Vertov knows that such a scene could be produced only in a studio. He admitted besides that the emotional film does not interest him. So be it. But the limitation is incontestable. The problems and conflicts which we call "emotional" are of enormous importance in our lives and no form of artistic expression can ignore them.

Vertov is wrong in setting these aside. His method is that of a formidable genius, and his ideas for the future of the cinema are consistent and, in my opinion, logical and matter-of-course. Nevertheless, he is mistaken in inferring that the set scenes and deliberate contrivances of to-day are on the wrong track, and that producers will sooner or later accept his formula for cinematic creation. His attitude is understandable when one realizes the difficulties he has encountered and still encounters in the way of driving home the importance of his idea. His work is surrounded by an uncomprehending silence. Hardly anyone outside Russia has yet seen his films. And I am convinced that when he is free to pursue his ideas to the uttermost he will at once recognize that his system can never be the sole means of visual creation. As it is he is forced to some extent to be unfaithful to his own theory in so far as he uses projectors and montage. For montage at least introduces the personal element, wilful interference with the raw material. Moreover, the direct, unacted film is a simplification deriving from literature, and Vertov rejects the literary cinema.

But of more importance than all the battles of the theorists is the fact that a cinematic genius of the first order is at work in Vertov. The suppleness of his technique is simply stupefying, his sense of montage and the rhythmic value of images is perfect. The silent film, apparently at the end of its resources, has much to learn from him, though I will not go so far as to say that his films shake my confidence in speech-films; and he himself is waiting only for the evolution of a reliable apparatus for registering sound to give us a speech-film for which we may well wait in all eagerness – not only for the pleasure to be derived from it, but for the tremendous forward impetus it will give to the conception of the uses of sound in film.

**“Was Your Film Understood in Berlin?”: An interview with Dziga Vertov***“Hat man Ihren Film in Berlin verstanden?”, RGALI 2091-1-6815<sup>16</sup>**Answer*

To judge by the newspaper clippings, it was not understood. The film *Man with a Movie Camera* is a dissertation on the theme: “The 100 percent language of the cinema.” It is yet another (the one-hundred-and-first) manifestation of the Kino-Eye group that shows that the language of the cinema is on its way to separating itself completely from the language of the theatre and of literature. It is a theoretical and at the same time a practical manifestation of documentary (*dokumentalen*)<sup>17</sup> film writing. The documental material of the film is distributed along three intersecting lines: (1) “life as it is in reality” on the screen, (2) “life as it is in reality” on the strip of film, (3) simply: “life as it is in reality”.

Naturally, this does not mean that the entirety of “life as it is” is shown. In the film *Man with a Movie Camera* only particular moments of life are shown. The selection of these moments is subordinated to a basic problem: to show a model of the work of the cinema cameraman who has ventured out from the cage of the atelier into the sea of life. Then again, “life as it is” is not shown from the standpoint of the unarmed human eye, but from the standpoint of all the technical possibilities of an eye equipped with a cinema apparatus. This – both in relation to space as well as in relation to time.

*Man with a Movie Camera* overcomes space. It visually connects various, spatially separated points of life by way of the uninterrupted exchange of visible facts, the cine-documents. This in distinction to the exchange of cine-theatrical presentations that are of a more or less ordinary sort.

*Man with a Movie Camera* overcomes time. It visually connects the phenomena that are temporally separated from one another. *Man with a Movie Camera* enables us to see the processes of life in any timeframe inaccessible to the human eye, and at any speed inaccessible to the human eye.

*Man with a Movie Camera* utilizes all the recording devices available to the cinema apparatus, whereby time-lapse, slow-motion, reverse-motion shots, shots from a mobile point of view, shots with unexpected abbreviations, etc., are understood not as methods of trick photography, but rather as normal, widely applicable shooting methods.

*Man with a Movie Camera* utilizes all conceivable means of montage. Juxtaposes all possible points of life and brings them together; breaks, when necessary, with all laws and norms of previous filmmaking.

The clash between normal vision and cinematic vision (seeing through the cinema apparatus),

The clash between space and cinema-space,

The clash between time and cinema-time,

– that is what the documental material of the film *Man with a Movie Camera* sets into motion.

By annihilating the boundaries between spectators and spectacle and by making the

process of film production visible to the viewer, *Man with a Movie Camera* navigates life's chaos. *Man with a Movie Camera* is the result of millions of the tiniest appearances of life. These are pieces plucked from life that are organized into a visual-obvious order, in a visual-obvious formula, in an extracted I SEE! (I see, I kino-see).

A part of the Berlin press did not understand the film *Man with a Movie Camera* primarily because the title of the film contains that nonsensical caption, made up by someone-or-other, "The film shows a day in Kiev and Moscow." And of course the entire film was seen in the light of this absurd caption. Therefore it is easy to understand the spectators who wonder why it is daytime when the film ends, while in the middle of the film it is night-time, and so on.

Moreover, the Berlin press unfortunately ignores the fact that *the history and chronology of world cinema does not always coincide with the order of the appearances of films in large Berlin cinemas*. For example, not everyone knows that *Man with a Movie Camera* was made twice, in two versions, in the years 1926 and 1928. It is not known to everyone that *Man with a Movie Camera* is the successor of another Kino-Eye film, *Kino-Eye (Life Off-Guard)* (1923-1924), which won a prize at the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. It is not known to everyone that the Kino-Eye group has released more than 100 experiments in documentary filmmaking of various kinds since the year 1918; and it is not known to everyone that much has been written about the Kino-Eye movement – not only articles, but also books have been dedicated to this issue.

Only by a total ignorance of the work of Kino-Eye can one explain why, for example, the last part of the *Kino-Eye* film *The Eleventh Year* or the fifth part of the film *Zvenigora* are shown unpunished in all of Germany under the title *In the Shadow of the Machine* and for some reason with the signature of a Herr Blum.<sup>18</sup> It does not look right to me that to steal a part of a Kino-Eye film should suffice to become known as a predecessor to the "Kino-Eye," to become known as a predecessor to Vertov, as certain newspapers claimed.

I can provide precise information about the ten-year work of Kino-Eye as soon as such an opportunity presents itself.

## Notes

1. According to Thomas Tode's chronology of Vertov's trip to Europe, the lecture could have taken place during the last ten days of July 1929.

The American Left-wing journal *Filmfront* was published by the National Film and Photo League, of New York City. A reprint edition is available in book form: *Filmfront*, annotated by Anthony Slide, with a new introduction by David Platt (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1986). Vertov's lecture, translated by Samuel Brody (who is credited as the translator of "Russian Cinema Before Revolution" and "Dziga Vertov on Film Technique" in *Filmfront*, vol. 1, no. 3), appears on pp. 34-38 of the reprint edition.

2. Anthony Slide's annotation for the reprint edition of *Filmfront*. But see Herbert Marshall, *Masters of the Soviet Cinema: Crippled Creative Biographies* (London/Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 60 and p. 236, n. 1: "I happened to meet him [Vertov] with my friend Lionel Britton, writer and linguist, who luckily knew Russian. This was at the International Avant-Garde Film and Photo Conference in Stuttgart, Germany. [...] Britton and I were the first to bring to the English-speaking world news about this unique film director." "Britton's article and translation was published in 1930."

3. *The Struggle Under Tzarism*: translator's error: Vertov had in mind his *Battle of Tsaritsyn*; *Life Caught Unawares*; *Kino-Eye*; *Lenin's Truth*; *Lenin Kino-Pravda*; *Forward Soviets!*; *Stride, Soviet!* (for original titles and details of these Vertov films, see the filmography at the end of this volume).
4. *Moscow* (*Moskva*, Mikhail Kaufman and Ilya Kopalin, 1926); *Nursery* (*Iasli*, Mikhail Kaufman, 1928); *For the Harvest* (*Za urozhai*, Ilya Kopalin, 1929); *A Holiday of Millions* (*Prazdnik millionov*, Ilya Kopalin and Ivan Belikov, 1928).
5. It is of this method (Kino-Eye) that Eisenstein inspires himself, in part. It is especially the results obtained by Vertov in the *Kino-Pravda* films that he ceaselessly attempts to approach. Hence the "documentary" impression of *Potemkin*. That is why Eisenstein tries to make one forget the studio, acting, and the preconceived plan of realization. This anxiety he has carried to its maximum in *The General Line (The Old and the New – S.B.)*, Léon Moussinac in *Le Cinéma Soviétique*, Paris, 1928. (Note added by Moussinac)
6. In the 1920s film theorist Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966) was on the staff of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The translation of his article is by Stuart Liebman.
7. Also known as *Heir to Chingiz-Khan* (*Buria nad Aziei / Potomok Chingiz-Khana*, Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1929).
8. *Konets Sankt-Peterburga* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1927).
9. *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927).
10. Sophie Küppers-Lissitzky (1891-1978), German art critic, wife of the Russian/German Constructivist artist El Lissitzky, Vertov family friend. Excerpt translated by Oliver Gayken.
11. Oswald Blakeston (Henry Joseph Hasslacher, 1907-1985), British artist, writer, film reviewer, and film director; held an editorial position with the small yet influential film magazine, *Close Up* (1927-1933).
12. *Sold Appetite: Prodannyi appetit* (Nikolai Okhlopkov, 1928); screen version of the book by Paul Lafargue. *Un appétit vendu*.
13. Francis Joseph Bruguière (1879-1945), photographer, filmmaker, painter, sculptor, and designer.
14. Also known as *The Collegiate Assessor* (*Kollezhskii registrator*, Yuri Zheliabuzhsky and Ivan Moskvina, 1925).
15. John (Jean) Lenauer (1904-1983), Austrian-born film critic, in Paris from the mid-1920s; the Paris editor for *Experimental Cinema*, and the French correspondent for various publications on cinema, including *Close Up* from November 1928. Emigrated to the U.S. in the mid-1930s; later a film exhibitor, editor, and producer.
16. Translated by Oliver Gayken. It is not clear where the interview was published, if at all. According to Thomas Tode, a similar though not fully identical interview appeared as Vertov's article entitled "Mein Film", in *Weltbühne*, no. 30, July 1929, p. 140.
17. The word "dokumental" does not exist in German. It was either invented by Vertov or resulted from his imperfect German. (Translator's note)
18. See chap. 28, "Vertov Versus Blum".

## “MR. WEST WAS SO IMPRESSED”: VERTOV AND FILM STUDENTS

### Russian Cutting

*Orlton West, Close Up, vol. 4, no. 6, June 1929*

“We will do some Russian cutting on those scenes!” (yards, or rather inches, of it)... The phrase sounds so clever. It has a magic significance for many amateurs, whom, as yet, seem to have devoured but the skin from the milk. They have missed the meaning of Russian film *construction*.

Take a dozen shots from an express train, or, should road traffic fill you with keener delight, of taxis, omnibuses, and “One Way Street” signs. Sprinkle a liberal dose of “unusual angles” over the conglomeration, measure your film to the nearest centimetre, and stick the pieces together. You have achieved “Russian Cutting”.

But have you?

Take a couple of close shots showing just how angry two people can become with each other, cross cut them at an increasing tempo to suggest the rising excitement of fury – and you have achieved “Russian Cutting”.

But again, have you?

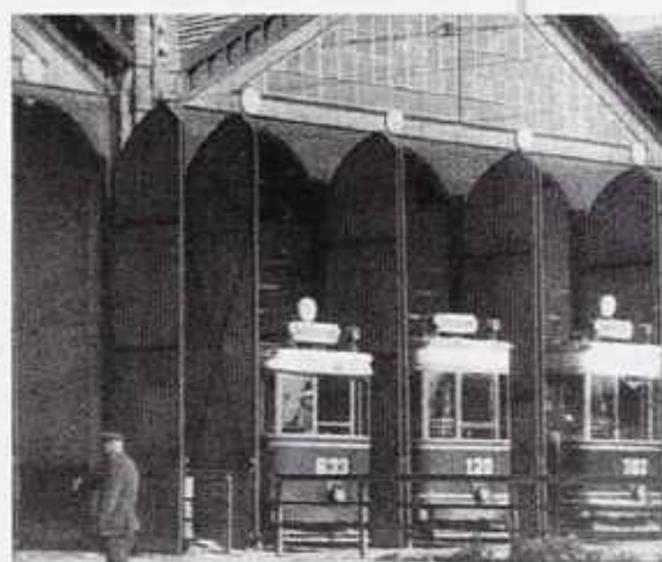
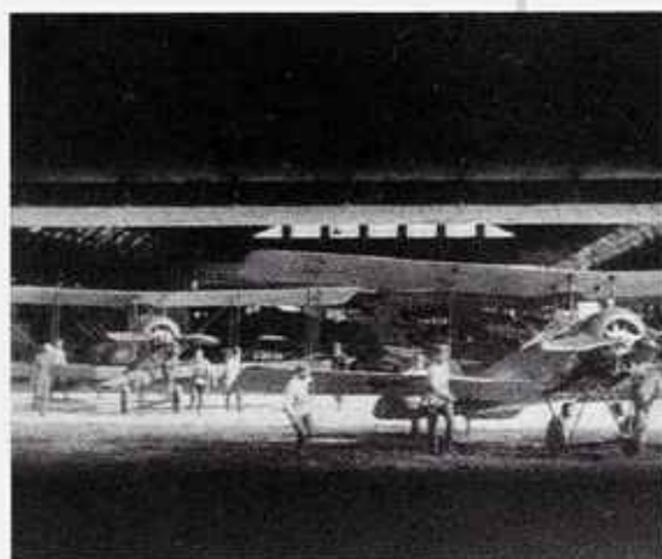
Not at all. This kind of thing is merely clever. Do we not strive to be something more than clever? We must get beyond the stage where we utilize a mechanical device, which, like the automatic telephone, becomes ordinary, accepted fact, as soon as the polish of its novelty has worn off.

We can blame our own mechanical age for the fact that, as soon as a technical development in films arrives, its mechanical or “clever” aspect is seized upon, while its intellectual depths remain untouched. And so we get “rhythm cutting” on traffic, cross-cutting of train and car chases, and summer lighting displays of close shots.

True, Russian film construction is built upon a foundation of psychology, yet many really keen amateurs are unacquainted with the words of such thinkers as Freud... The psychological processes of symbolization and association are mostly *visual* (as a film thinking friend has pointed out to me), and therefore one of the highroads to intelligent cinemas. A little reading of Freud, and a little more thought in the application of his principles to film construction, together with a course of really good films (Shaftesbury Avenue Pavilion) and one suddenly sees light and feels brilliantly rewarded. “Russian cutting” no longer remains a magic phrase, but comes to signify a developed cinema.

Let us then cut out some of these traffic shots, releasing ourselves from these playful externals, which mean nothing. Let us, instead, try joining up our shots in a form with which the human brain would, or might, associate its mental visions, then we shall begin to achieve meaning.

## Simultaneity



Simultaneity or, in French, "simultanéité", was one of the key terms of modernist artist parlance. We hear about "simultaneous paintings", read about "simultaneous books", and are often faced with "instances of simultaneous montage" in experimental documentaries. Simultaneity overrides continuity in *Man with a Movie Camera*: three events may take place at three different locations, but they are all morning events, and so, for Vertov, they need to be played simultaneously, like the notes of a chord.

Before we commence, we must know what psychological effect we aim at achieving, or what our definite idea is, then we can construct our film on its foundation, as Pudovkin has said, and done. Our idea need not be anything so tremendous as a new social order, it may be simply to convey a certain state of mind. It may be to present an aspect of modern life, to compare the dash of the City with the calm of the Countryside, and here you do not need much traffic, but persons, symbols with a meaning, associations, sudden little comparisons, all working towards – and directed by – your definite idea.

The definite aim, a little knowledge of psychology, a few good films, seen in a new light as a result of the psychology, that is the diet which, I am sure, many amateurs will find as nourishing as I myself have found it to be.

### **This Montage Business**

*R[alph] Bond, Close Up, vol. 5, no. 5, November 1929<sup>2</sup>*

The Film Guild of London, an amateur organization, is suffering from a bad attack of "this montage business". The phrase in quotes is not mine; one of the members of the Guild aptly but thoughtlessly employed it at their meeting last month when several recent productions of the Guild were screened.

Chief among these was *Waitress*, produced on 9mm stock by Mr Orlton West.<sup>3</sup> *Waitress* is a bad film, very bad. Originally it was made as a one-reeler, but after he had made it Mr West went to the Continent and saw the work of Vertov. He was so impressed with Vertov's montage that he came back, added another reel to his film, and endeavoured to cut the whole production in the Vertov manner.

Now cutting, or montage as some people prefer to call it, is something more than clipping every possible shot to a couple of frames. Cutting should be composed, and Mr West has neither composed his film nor his cutting. The result is a striving after effect purely. If the director had paid a little more attention to his lighting and photography (which were terribly poor), and to his story construction, and less to stunts, *Waitress* might have been a better film. The very long and almost unintelligible double exposure sequence which attempts to express the mental collapse of the girl in the café could well have been dispensed with, or, at least, shortened considerably.

This desperate endeavour to be clever in order to be different also spoilt *Fade Out*, a first effort by Miss Norah Cutting. (The name is quite genuine, I believe!) This short has possibilities, but again is almost ruined by "this montage business". Its climax, when the man who is helping an amateur company on location falls from the tree and dies, is killed by a rapid succession of closely cut shots which the mind positively refuses to follow. The weather conditions under which the film was made were obviously bad, and this should have been taken into consideration when *Fade Out* was edited. If Vertov had been working under similar conditions, he would never have attempted to do what the director of *Fade Out* has done. Film Guilders, please note!

In case I be misunderstood, let me say that the members of the Film Guild are hon-

estly endeavouring to do good work, but they are afflicted with an attitude which can best be described as posing. Everybody recognizes the difficult conditions under which the British amateurs have to work to-day. But these difficulties cannot always be used as an excuse for careless work. Carelessness is impermissible in amateur production.

The Guild is certainly working towards something, and most of its work is experimental, but in doing so it is wasting a terrible amount of time and energy. *Gaiety of Nations*, an amateur film reviewed by me in *Close Up* last month, took over six months to make, and it was worth it. I am not suggesting that every amateur film should take a similar length of time, but the lesson to be learned from *Gaiety of Nations* is that adequate care, thought, and attention must be given to all amateur productions if the British amateur film movement is to compete successfully with similar movements on the Continent and in the U.S.A.

Hastily conceived and shoddily constructed work will only bring discredit.

### **The Montage Film**

*Harry Alan Potamkin, Movie Makers, February 1930<sup>5</sup>*

The French word, *montage*, is perhaps the most internationally accepted term for the film process which we call "cutting," or "editing." It refers to the arranging of images into a unified organic relationship. In Europe there has evolved, under the influence of the Russians, a special group of film creators whose work is known generically as "the *montage* film". The best-known of these workers is the Ukrainian, Dziga Vertov, who made *The Eleventh Year* and *Man with a Movie Camera*, the latter known in America as *Living Russia*.

Actually, this type of picture has its ancestry in the newsreel and the travel picture. Before the advent of the organized *montage* film we had, as we still have, films assembled or faked from the celluloid clippings of film libraries. Frequently, excerpts of newsreels are inserted in feature films but, instead of giving authenticity to the whole, they often intrude disturbingly different light densities and movements.

An amateur might learn an enormous amount in film construction by assembling a film made up of diverse clippings, selected because of a relative unity of light, movement, imagery, and theme. The *montage* film offers the amateur an independent opportunity. He takes his camera and does one of two things. He either collects a variety of unrelated shots which he may later join selectively into a film, or he decides upon a film and goes forth to discover the details which will comprise it. In the former instance, while there is no guiding intention of relationship, the amateur will probably find on looking through his library that he has enough shots which can be made into a short film. When he begins to "edit" this film he will be guided by the same method that controls the *montage* of the amateur who has chosen his theme prior to the shooting of the scene. However, the latter amateur will have acted more deliberately and wisely. He will first have prepared himself for the actual shooting by surveying his locale without his camera,

recording in his mind's eye types of faces, categories of groups, settings, etc. Serge [*sic*] M. Eisenstein, the great Russian director of *Potemkin* and *Ten Days that Shook the World*,<sup>6</sup> keeps a notebook in which he records types and their addresses so that he may reach them on need. Hollywood does the same with professional performers and the amateur can keep a similar notebook recording friends, scenes, and other possible shots.

Three professional films may serve as a starting point for a consideration of the *montage* film. The first is Alberto Cavalcanti's *Only the Hours*.<sup>7</sup> I chose this first because it preceded the others in production, because it expresses best the principle of rhythm which defines the good *montage* film, and because it has deeply influenced many young Parisian amateurs. Cavalcanti has three motifs in his film, alternating progressively – a news vendor moving through the streets, a drunken hag drawing herself to the waterfront, the city about them. The interrelationship is fluid. One cannot separate the motifs while they are in progress. The amateurs who have been influenced by this film have often missed this principle of fluid inter-weaving. They have usually had a two-motif film – a simple undetailed story or episode with characters; the workaday city. But these two motifs are usually not dovetailed so that one feels they are inseparable. Moreover, the human episode is usually too insignificant for the proportions of the environment. This false scale of the motifs inflates the episode or crushes it.

The second film is *Berlin, a Symphony of a City*,<sup>8</sup> by Walter Ruttmann and Karl Freund. Here the sequences are sharply delineated one from the other. There is no motif that tells a story as in *Only the Hours*. Not individual human episodes but the City is the pattern. *Only the Hours* is romance; *Berlin* is document. *Only the Hours* is subjective; *Berlin*, is objective. Both, however, are more than matter-of-fact records; they are compositions. In *Berlin*, the city day is shown chronologically, the tempo increasing gradually to full speed, then closing abruptly. This is the city of human details but in the pattern, repeated at points, is a moving spiral, a store's ensign, which brings an abstract but moving detail into the human activity and provides an effective motif for the whole.

Vertov, in his *Man With a Movie Camera*, has produced, upon the objective principle of *Berlin*, a film of amazing fluidity with successive images which do not always connect directly with each other. He has, in the typical Russian way, sought to make the images symbolic of the land and has endeavored to include in the film all the various contrasts of the city's life, of human existence – work and pleasure, birth and death. In films of not single continuous narrative the piling up of diversified scenes may increasingly obscure the underlying movement of the picture.

Amateurs frequently attempt to include too much in their films, too many images of too many different categories. Not only does this prolixity work against the memory of the spectator and, thereby, defeat the intention of the film itself but it is also very fatiguing. Mlle. Lucile Derain blundered thus in *Harmonies of Paris*. The very title indicates a too ambitious intention. Mlle. Derain attempted not one harmony but several, succeeding finally in getting less of harmony than of wearisomeness. Had she limited the film to one phase of Paris, the beautiful opening with the Montmartre byways, she would have produced a lyric of the cinema. Similarly the work of Lods and Kauffmann<sup>9</sup> defeats its

expert photography and rhythmic reiterations by going in for too many sequences. The final caption of the film, "Etc.", neatly characterizes its interminable succession of scenes.

For the amateur's first attempt in the film of *montage*, it would be wise for him to select a simple theme, a document. It might be a romantic document in which the details tell the story of the life of a particular people. Such is George Lacombe's film of the ragpickers of the Flea Market, the locale of *The Innocents of Paris*.<sup>10</sup> In this film, *The Zone*,<sup>11</sup> Lacombe follows the ragpickers from the early hours, when they hunt their wares, to the Sunday, when they sell them at the Clignancourt gate, recording as he goes the rare personalities of the quarter, the unusual sign-boards, the amusements, the incidents of family life, etc. It is a unified document in which the regular sequence of the actual details of the ragpickers' lives form a tale. This film, which will be shown in America, is a fine example of simple, sincere, direct documentation, an excellent model for the amateurs.

The American movie maker can find splendid ideas for films of documentation in the exceptional instances of American life or, better, in typical instances – an American lunch hour, American markets, an American Sunday. Every amateur ought to attempt to film his city or a part of it. It would be interesting to compare the data. Humor is possible in the documentary film. André Sauvage in his *Studies of Paris*<sup>12</sup> couples his scenes so that the second comments on the first. A lay-figure in a shop window comments upon a preceding scene of a girl in the street. Often these are obvious but the principle is worth consulting.

The film of *montage* and document offers fundamental, manifold, and independent opportunities. One need not trouble with human beings at all; there is subject matter in the natural elements. Franken and Ivens found such material in the oily rains of Holland;<sup>13</sup> Blum in Europe and Steiner in America found it in the qualities of water,<sup>14</sup> while Silka<sup>15</sup> in France found it in the barnyard.

The movement of clouds, grasses, grain and treetops in the wind and the motion of machinery are all open to this treatment. There are many untried possibilities in the simplest relations of motion in familiar subjects. Your reel might not have any other purpose than the presentation of the beauty of motion as portrayed in varied patterns.

### ***Man with a Movie Camera***

*John Grierson, The Clarion, vol. 3, no. 2, February 1931*<sup>16</sup>

With Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* we are at last initiated into the philosophy of the Kino Eye. Some of us have been hearing a great deal about the Kino Eye and it has worried us considerably. Only the younger high-brows seemed to know anything about it. They have dashed back from their continental rambles with hair more rumpled, neck more open, and tie more non-existent for gazing on it. But on the whole articulation has failed them, and it has been difficult to gather from their wild young words what particular mesmeric virtue this Kino Eye possessed.

Now that Vertov has turned up in the original, it is easier to see why intelligent students of cinema were betrayed into their extremity. The Vertov method of film-making is based on a supremely sound idea, and one which must be a preliminary to any movie method at all. He has observed that there are things of the every-day which achieve a new value, leap to a more vigorous life, the moment they get into a movie camera or an intimately cut sequence. It is at that point we all begin; and, backing our eye with the world, we try to pick the leapers. The secret may be in an angle, or an arrangement of light, or an arrangement of movement, but there is hardly one of us but gets more out of the camera than we ever thought of putting into it. In that sense there is a Kino Eye. In that sense, too, the Kino Eye is more likely to discover things in the wide-world-of-all-possible-arrangements which exists outside the studios.

Vertov, however, has pushed the argument to a point at which it becomes ridiculous. The camera observes in its own bright way, and he is prepared to give it his head. The man is with the camera, not the camera with the man. Organization of things observed, brain control, imagination, or fancy control of things observed: these other rather necessary activities in the making of art are forgotten. *Man with a Movie Camera* is in consequence not a film at all: it is a snapshot album. There is no story, no dramatic structure, and no special revelation of the Moscow it has chosen for a subject. It just dithers about on the surface of life picking up shots here, there, and everywhere, slinging them together as the Dadaists used to sling together their verses, with an emphasis on the particular which is out of all relation to a rational existence. Many of the shots are fine and vital; some of the camera tricks, if not very new, are at least interesting; but exhibitionism or, if you prefer it, virtuosity in a craftsman does not qualify him as a creator. *Man with a Movie Camera* will, however, bring a great deal of instruction to film students. The camera is a bright little blackbird, and there are rabbits to be taken out of the hat (or bin) of montage which are infinitely magical, but...articulacy is a virtue which will continue to have its say-so. Here by the *reductio ad absurdum* is proof for the schoolboys.

I have just been watching an Atlantic liner putting to sea, from – I am happy to say – the liner's point of view. Shots have been cropping up for an hour that I would describe as sheer cinema. The patterns of men rolling up the cargo net, the curve of the rope shot in parabola to the tug, the sudden gliding movement-astern of the tug, the plume on the *Mauretania* high up in the dry dock, the massed energy of the black smoke pouring in rolls from the funnel and set against the rhythmic curve of the ship against the sky – they have all, possibly, a visual virtue in themselves. But the dramatic truth, and therefore, finally, the cinematic truth too, is that the ship is putting to sea. She is in the process and continuity of something-or-other. Say only that she is setting out to cross an ocean and has the guts for it; or say, by the Eastern European emigrants in the steerage, that a bunch of people are going with hope to a new world; say what you like, according to your sense of ultimate importances, the necessity is that you say something. The Kino Eye in that sense is only the waiter who serves the hash. No especial virtue in the waiting compensates for a lunatic cook.

## Notes

1. Reprinted in James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus, eds., *Close Up, 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 277-78.
2. Reprinted in Donald, Friedberg, and Marcus, eds., *Close Up, 1927-1933*, pp. 278, 280.  
Ralph Bond (1904-1989), British Left-wing documentary director and producer.
3. The author of the previous essay.
4. Reprinted in Lewis Jacobs, ed., *The Compound Cinema: The Film Writings of Harry Alan Potamkin* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1977), pp. 70-73.  
Harry Alan Potamkin (1900-1933), American critic, writer, and poet, who began working for the British/Swiss cinema journal *Close Up* as its New York correspondent in September 1929. He was also the New York editor of the American cinema journal *Experimental Cinema*.
5. American distribution title of Eisenstein's *October* (*Oktiabr*).
6. *Rien que les heures* (1926).
7. *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927).
8. Jean Lods (1903-1974), French avant-garde documentary filmmaker, who later specialized in films on art; co-founder (with Léon Moussinac) of the ciné-club "Les Amis de Spartacus" (1926-28).  
Boris Kaufman (1897?-1980), Russian-born French/American cameraman, brother of Dziga Vertov and Mikhail Kaufman. The similarity in the camera style between the brothers may not be coincidental: the three of them corresponded and occasionally met. Boris also saw *kinocs'* films.
9. The film Potamkin refers to here may have been *La Marche des machines* or *Champs-Élysées* (both 1928).
10. *Innocents of Paris* (1929), early Paramount musical film directed by Richard Wallace, marked the American film debut of French star Maurice Chevalier, who played a junk dealer in the Paris flea market.
11. *La Zone* (Georges Lacombe, 1928). The film's subtitle was *Au pays des chiffonniers (Etude des coins ignorés de Paris)*.
12. *Études sur Paris* (1928).
13. *Regen* (1929), film by Mannus Franken and Joris Ivens.
14. Apparently Potamkin is referring to *Kreislauf des Wassers* (aka *Wasser und Wogen*) by Albrecht Viktor Blum and *H2O* by Ralph Steiner (both 1929).
15. Possibly S. Silka, Vienna-trained sound engineer who worked in early French talkies as soundman, documentary short director, and assistant director. He was an engineering consultant for the French company Melovox, as well as Radio-Vitus, a local Paris radio station bought by Pathé Cinéma. He also taught courses by correspondence at the Ecole Universelle, a (still-active) French adult education-via-correspondence school. (Information kindly provided by Lenny Borger.)
16. Reprinted in Forsyth Hardy, ed., *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber, rev. ed., 1966), pp. 126-28.  
John Grierson (1898-1972), the British film director, producer, and theorist; spearhead of the British documentary movement.

## VERTOV VERSUS BLUM

**Dziga Vertov Abroad**

"*Dziga Vertov zagranitsei*", *Kino i kultura*, nos. 7-8, 1929, p. 75

Up until now, only France has had a certain notion about Vertov and the *kinocs*, thanks to the fact that in its time *Kino-Eye* was shown and won a prize at a French exhibition,<sup>1</sup> and also thanks to a few articles by Léon Moussinac<sup>2</sup> which appeared in the French press. But this notion did not make it possible to assess Vertov's role as regards his influence on Western avant-garde films. In the eyes of the West the last word in Soviet experimental film was spoken by Pudovkin and the FEKS.

And so now, when, in connection with the Essen and Stuttgart exhibitions, the Germans have taken on the task of bringing together and summing up the achievements of cinematic innovators on an international scale, the role of Vertov, who has had a great influence on the world cinematic avant-garde in a formal sense, should have become absolutely clear.

Vertov, who has always anticipated or consolidated his achievements in his clear theoretical premises, has this time also chosen the absolutely correct path of popularizing the Kino-Eye movement and its methods in the West by means of lectures. In parallel with the showing of extracts from his films, Vertov has given ten lectures on the Kino-Eye in various towns in Germany and in Paris.

The extensive press response is evidence of Vertov's success. People are arguing about Vertov, organizing discussions in the pages of newspapers; the most authoritative representatives of Western criticism and avant-garde film, such as Léon Moussinac, Gaston Thierry,<sup>3</sup> Kracauer, Kosowski, Moholy-Nagy,<sup>4</sup> Hans Richter,<sup>5</sup> Jean Tedesco,<sup>6</sup> and others, are enraptured by him. Summing up the conclusions of two hundred reviews in the French, German, and English press, we must note that the European critics have recognized Vertov as a new step in Soviet film, the founder of new, international experimental film, a brilliant master who is completely in command of the cinematic language of the camera.

In Germany, Vertov encountered the appropriation of his film (the last part of *The Eleventh Year*) by the German director Blum,<sup>7</sup> who passed it off as his own work, and thus won himself enormous success as an innovator.

Thanks to the fact that a "patriotically" inclined part of the German press refused to admit the possibility of borrowing, Vertov had to put a great deal of effort into exposing the nimble plagiarist. After his exposure the "director" Blum was severely criticized by part of the German press (*Tempo*, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and others). While he was abroad Vertov received a string of proposals from foreign firms to shoot films in Europe.

### Vertov in Frankfurt

Siegfried Kracauer, "Wertoff in Frankfurt", *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 21 June 1929<sup>8</sup>

The well-known Russian film director, Dziga Vertov, the pioneer of the unstaged film, about whose *Man with a Movie Camera* we recently gave a detailed account, will give a public lecture early Sunday in Frankfurt and show clips from the above-mentioned film, additionally from his films *Lenin Kino-Pravda*, *A Sixth Part of the World*, *The Eleventh Year*, and *Kino-Eye*. I take this opportunity to note that a film edited by V. Blum, *In the Shadow of the Machine*,<sup>9</sup> which played in a number of German cities some time ago, incorporated entire sections from Vertov's here still-unexhibited *The Eleventh Year*, without Vertov's knowledge or approval. This unfortunately has led the uninformed public here and there to the incorrect conclusion that Blum is a precursor of Vertov's, an opinion that is all the more baseless since the latter had developed his own film language over ten years ago. The lecture is recommended for all friends of the new Russian cinema.

### A Letter to the Editor, *Frankfurter Zeitung*

Dziga Vertov, RGALI 2091-2-169

I arrived in Germany for the first time after working on documentary film for eleven years. Here I immediately encountered a strange fact:

Part of the Berlin press, while noting the cinematic virtues of the works of *Kino-Eye*, at the same time stresses that in essence *Kino-Eye* is, as it were, a more "fanatical" continuation of the principles and practical works of a certain Blum (the film *In the Shadow of the Machine*) or Ruttmann (*Symphony of a Great City*).<sup>10</sup>

This half-supposition, half-affirmation is absurd:

In the first place, because the history of *Kino-Eye* stretches not from 1929 but from 1918 (see the appendix); in the second place, because neither Ruttmann nor Blum is in any sense either a theoretician or a practitioner, or even an absolute supporter of documentary film; in the third place, because Blum's film *In the Shadow of the Machine* does not exist as such, and never did. The last reel of the *Kino-Eye* film *The Eleventh Year* was shown in Germany under this false title, with a piece added on from another Soviet film, *Zvenigora* (see the clarification of this point in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, no. ...).<sup>11</sup>

So as to wrest from Soviet Russia primacy in the question of *Kino-Eye*, of documentary film, you would have to turn the wheel of history back 10 or 11 years; to wipe more than a hundred *Kino-Eye* films from the face of the earth; burn the *Kino-Eye* manifestos of 1919 and 1929; destroy the thousands of reviews and articles devoted to *Kino-Eye*; remove from circulation a series of Russian and even French books; and so on.

It is hardly likely that anyone will take on such a bold operation. From our point of view, this makes the appearance in print of certain attempts to hush up and distort the history of *Kino-Eye* even stranger. Only through incorrect and false information, or the absence of any information at all on this question, can you explain the circumstance

that part of the Berlin press is not aware of the chronological development of Kino-Eye, not aware of its ten-year offensive against the fortress of fiction film.

One should stress particularly that the majority of Kino-Eye films were constructed either as a symphony of labour, or as a symphony of the whole Soviet country, or as a symphony of a particular town, and so forth. Moreover, in these films the action often unfurled from early morning to evening. This is the way the town wakes up and begins to live in the first reel of *Kino-Eye* (which won a prize at the international exhibition in Paris). This is the way day gradually moves into evening and ends at midnight in the film *Stride, Soviet!* The action in the Kino-Eye films *Nursery* and *Moscow* unfurls in the same way, from morning to the depths of night.<sup>12</sup> For the members of Kino-Eye there is no doubt that the theoretical and practical works of Kino-Eye, which are not shown sufficiently widely, but which are perfectly well known to the majority of Russian and foreign specialists, inevitably encourage the latter to make individual trial runs in this still-controversial direction. The recent experiment by Ruttmann, along with the most recent experiments of certain members of the avant-garde, should therefore be interpreted as the result of the prolonged pressure of the works and statements of Kino-Eye on the workers of abstract film (and absolutely not the reverse, which is chronologically absurd, and absurd in essence). It is not out of any egotistical or "patriotic" motives, but only with the aim of re-establishing the historical truth that I ask you to publish this letter. I attach to the letter a short historical summary of the theoretical and practical works of Kino-Eye.<sup>13</sup>

Dziga Vertov

8 July 1929, Berlin

### **Letter from Siegfried Kracauer to Dziga Vertov**

*RGALI 2091-2-340*

12 July 1929

Dear Mr. Vertov,

We have published your open letter with a few shortenings in this evening issue. I hope it will satisfy you.

With sincere greetings,

Your Kracauer

### **Memorandum Concerning the Blum/Vertov Affair**

*Albrecht Viktor Blum, RGALI 2091-2-169*

5 August 1929

Present: Mr. Blum, Mr. Kosakowski, Mr. Zöhrer, and Mr. Steinhardt

When I received the assignment in the middle of October 1928 from Weltfilm to

assemble a short propaganda film for the comrades of the delegation returning from Russia as well as for the unions, I attempted, from the material that had been put at my disposal, to give the short film the following content:

“Machines invented by humanity for the purpose of serving humanity more and more are becoming the rulers of humankind. Yes, in the final analysis humanity becomes nothing more than a helper, a slave of the machine itself.”

Since I could make this idea only partly clear from the German material that was at my disposal, I turned to the Photo-Cinema Department of the Russian Trade Mission with the request to provide Russian material, chiefly from the two films *The Eleventh Year* and *Zvenigora*, which contained very rich and effective images of labour. I did not receive this permission immediately, since the Photo-Cinema Department believed it necessary first to obtain the consent of the VUFKU. Meanwhile, as my deadline for delivery of the film was very close, it was possible, again through the intercession of Comrade Münzenberg,<sup>14</sup> to animate the Photo-Cinema Department to place ca. 120 metres from the aforementioned films at my disposal. I took ca. 53 metres from the film *Zvenigora*, which I incorporated via montage into the film *In the Shadow of the Machine*, and I took ca. 86 metres of already-edited sequences from the film *The Eleventh Year*, with only very minor changes, since these already contained the idea that needed to be expressed. I was aware that the question of intellectual property must arise from such an appropriation of an artistically completed montage, and I tried to make my sources known in the programme at the Tauentzienpalastes – where the premiere took place – but was prevented, since the law does not allow one to use a single metre of foreign material in a short submitted as a German production. My honest intent to grant the creator of this montage his intellectual property failed as a result of existing category quotas (*Kontingentfrage*).

When Mr. Vertov came to Berlin and screened parts of *The Eleventh Year* in the Phöbus-Palast, I immediately went to him after the screening and drew his attention to the aforementioned facts, so that he was fully aware of the above-mentioned information. Mr. Vertov said to me that he would see the film in the following days, and that he would decide after seeing the film if the parts I had used should be taken out of the film and replaced by others, or if he would be satisfied with a declaration in the press to the effect that the parts of Vertov's work that I had inserted were taken with his permission from his film *The Eleventh Year*. Mr. Vertov saw the film while I was absent from Berlin (I was in Holland to shoot exteriors for the film *The Other Side of the Street*,<sup>15</sup> and only after my return did I find out that Mr. Vertov, contrary to all arrangements, had let himself get carried away into making hostile statements that injured me personally in the press, which is evident from the enclosures from the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, *Tempo*, and the *Weltbühne*. Since I neither previously nor afterwards had the intention to ascribe Mr. Vertov's intellectual labour to myself, and to the contrary can

prove my desire to publicize his authorship, this action by Mr. Vertov is suited to damage a common idea of socio-political propaganda in film, and in addition to inflict incalculable harm to me as a private citizen that I do not at all believe I deserve.

### Dziga Vertov's Letter to Siegfried Kracauer

Berlin, 7 August 1929

Dear Mr. Kracauer!

I am very grateful to you for your kind wishes and your assistance with the unpleasant incident with Herr Blum. The publication of my letter in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (Evening Edition, 12 July 1929) is very important to me, since it somewhat protects me in the future from sympathy with my work of this sort on the part of unembarrassed directors.<sup>16</sup> Now I will go to Moscow for two weeks, from where I will return to Berlin, and thereafter I will travel to Switzerland to the International Congress of Independent Cinema, to which I have been invited as the representative of Soviet Russia. I had much success in Paris with my presentation of excerpts from my films. In the meantime, I have received a request from a large Swiss company to make a film for three months about Swiss industry and, in addition, a series of other requests from assorted countries and cities.

I would be very glad if you could send a few lines to Moscow. My address is: Moscow. Tverskaya. Kozitski pereulok 2 kw. 141.

I will write to you from Moscow. In case you should need to contact me urgently, you can turn to my friend, Dr. Marianoff (member of the Russian Trade Mission, and son-in-law of A. Einstein),<sup>17</sup> whom you know. His address is: Berlin-Charlottenbg., Sophie-Charlotte-Str. 67/68. I thank you once again for everything!

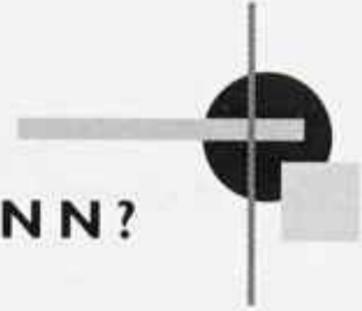
Yours truly,  
Dziga Vertov

### Notes

1. The Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris (referred to in an interview with Vertov: see "Was Your Film Understood in Berlin?" in chap. 26 of this book).
2. Léon Moussinac (1890-1964), French critic and film theorist.
3. Gaston Thierry (1886-1955), journalist; founder of *Cinéma* (Oct. 1928), one of the leading French film weeklies of the 1930s-50s; he also wrote for the daily *Paris-Midi*.
4. László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), the Hungarian/American artist, photographer, and filmmaker.
5. Hans Richter (1888-1976), the German/American artist and filmmaker.
6. Jean Tedesco (1895-1959), French filmmaker.
7. Albrecht Viktor Blum (1888-1959), Austrian-born German stage actor and found-footage film director whom Vertov accused of plagiarism. See following entries for more on the Blum case. See also Thomas Tode's "Albrecht Viktor Blum", in Hans-Michael Bock, ed., *CineGraph: Lexikon zum deutschsprachigen Film* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1997), vol. 29, and his "Ein Russe projiziert in die Planetariumskuppel: Dsiga Wertows Reise nach Deutschland 1929", in Oksana Bulgakowa, ed., *Die ungewöhnlichen Abenteuer des Dr. Mabuse im Lande der Bolschewiki, Buch zur Filmreihe "Moskau – Berlin"* (Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek, 1995).

8. Translated by Oliver Gayken.
9. The 1928 found-footage film *In the Shadow of the Machine* (*Im Schatten der Maschine*), directed by (Albrecht) Viktor Blum and Leo Lania, was part of the pro-Soviet propaganda campaign sponsored by International Workers Relief (an organization founded by the Communist Party of Germany in 1921) and its film branches Prometheus-Film (Weltfilm) in Germany and Mezhrabpom in Soviet Russia. Besides the last reel of Vertov's *The Eleventh Year*, Blum's compilation includes sections from Aleksandr Dovzhenko's *Zvenigora* (1928). Like Vertov, Dovzhenko publicly protested against what he thought was a clear case of plagiarism: see "ARK pod ognem chistki" (The Association of Revolutionary Cinema is being purged), *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 15 March 1930.
10. *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927).
11. No. 456, 21 June 1929 (see previous item).
12. *Nursery* (*Iasli*, 1928), a short made by Mikhail Kaufman in the Ukraine; *Moscow* (*Moskva*, Mikhail Kaufman and Ilya Kopalín, 1926).
13. The summary survives at RGALI 2091-2-169.
14. Willie Münzenberg (1889-1940), German Communist, founder of International Workers Relief in Germany.
15. *Jenseits der Strasse* (1929), film by Leo Mittler, for which Blum photographed the exterior shots.
16. The text of Vertov's open letter as it appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was significantly abridged compared to the draft copy printed earlier in this chapter. Specifically, any mention of Blum and his found-footage film was taken out.
17. Dimitri Marianoff, husband of Albert Einstein's stepdaughter Margot Einstein.

## IS VERTOV LIKE RUTTMANN?


**Fleeting Glimpses of Russia: *Living Russia or The Man with the Camera***

*Mordaunt Hall, The New York Times, 17 September 1929, p. 36*

Around the clock in a Soviet city is depicted by camera flashes in a film known as *Living Russia or the Man with the Camera*, which is now at the Film Guild Cinema. It is much like *Berlin, a Symphony of a Big City*,<sup>1</sup> only it hardly matches its German rival in interest, principally because its glimpses are too fleeting. It is a disjointed array of scenes in which the producer, Dziga Vertov, does not take into consideration the fact that the human eye fixes for a certain space of time that which holds the attention. In the German film there was a suggestion of poetry, but in the Russian offering there is only originality to redeem it. As a matter of fact it becomes quite tedious and the hour that it lasts seems at least an hour and a half.

It is also somewhat confusing. The individual who pops up every now and then with his camera has really little if anything to do with the picture, for what he photographs is not shown. One sees him at work, it is true, but he is no more interesting than a number of other persons in this kaleidoscopic stream.

Another muddled notion is that of beginning the twenty-four hours with the night before, and where the Germans would have pictured a variety of persons partaking of their meals, dancing, or enjoying a theatrical entertainment, this Russian producer contents himself by depicting a throng of persons sitting in a small motion picture theatre. The screen is set and one hopes for some denouement, but it does not come.

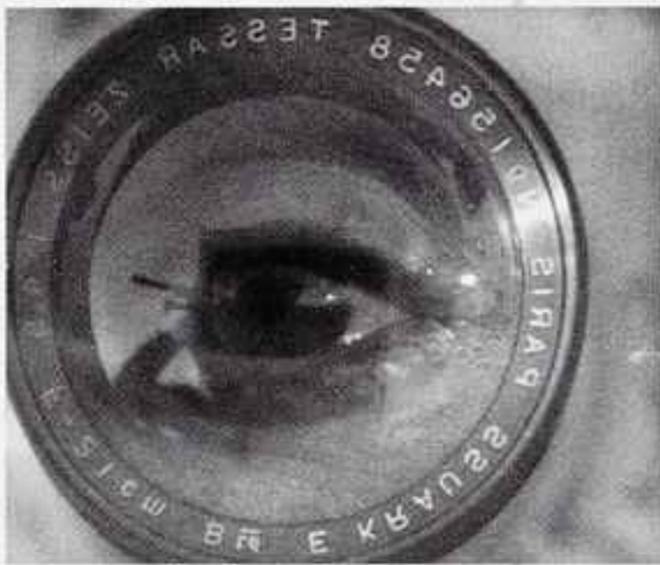
There are undoubtedly clever stretches in this picture, which was photographed in Odessa, Kharkov, and Kiev. The notion of having everything come to a sudden stop is ingenious, especially when one discovers that the reason is that a motion picture film joiner is pausing at her work. The slow-motion passages of athletes diving, throwing the shot and other physical exercises are well conceived. The wheels of business and industry being set in motion is another laudable phase of this feature. But often one would like to dwell upon some of the doings.

M. Vertov, however, is in a hurry, and he may show a traffic policeman, and while one is studying his smock, off goes the minion of the law and on comes something else. Glimpses of a poster come on the heels of living persons.

At the end of the day's work the director shows one factory machine after another coming to a stop, and this is followed by the hour or so of recreation.

On the same program is another Russian film called *When Moscow Laughs*.<sup>2</sup> It is evidently typical of Russian humor and nothing that is likely to stir an American to any great degree of mirth.

Life Off-Guard



“Life unawares”, says the translator of this book, Julian Graffy, is an imprecise translation of Vertov’s famous motto “Zhizn vraslpokh”. A better phrasing, he says, would be “life off-guard”, for the *Kinocs* enjoyed and used the moments when people became aware of being filmed. Embarrassed by the camera eyeing her legs, this homeless woman will wake up and run. Note the reflection of an arm which is cranking – what? One is tempted to answer: the Eye. Such shots – these come from *Man with a Movie Camera* but there are more of them in many *Kinocs’* films – sometimes alienated some viewers and critics, for they looked like enigmatic Masonic symbols, wrote Aleksandr Kurs in 1927. The one he had in mind is the God’s Eye, like the one depicted over an Egyptian pyramid on the American dollar bill.

## Vertov and Ruttmann

*K[onstantin] Feldman, "Vertov i Rutman", Sovetskii ekran, no. 18, 1928*

Dziga Vertov's works occupy a special place in the system of Soviet cinema. There are heated arguments around these works, and the people engaging in the arguments get themselves thoroughly confused.

This has happened partly through Vertov's own fault, since though he is a very good artist he is completely incapable of theorizing his own achievements (this often happens with artists). Vertov began his work in 1922, when he drew up his battle programme "Down with Fiction Film". Maybe then, when Vertov was beginning his work, this programme did have a certain foundation; it was dictated, in the first place, by the helplessness of Soviet fiction film, and secondly by Vertov's own need to justify his works and to get them recognized. Since then we have made *Potemkin*, *Mother*,<sup>3</sup> and dozens of other good fiction films; since then Soviet fiction film has achieved world recognition. And at the same time, over those years Vertov himself has made a whole series of fine documentary films, which have even provoked imitation abroad. To argue about the pre-eminence of fiction film or documentary film now, when both genres have proved their right to exist, means to engage in pure "scholasticism".

That is absolutely not the point.

The significance of Vertov and his students is that they have taught all our film directors without exception how to work on material. Vertov has proved that material in film can be effective only when the artist shows his point of view on the material.

This is where the difference between mechanical photography and film art lies. Nobody is touched by cheap postcards with views of the Caucasus, precisely because they do not show how an artist sees the Caucasus.

Vertov films the things among which we live, which we have walked past without noticing, and suddenly we notice a new beauty in these things. But Vertov is not just an artist, he is also a SOVIET ARTIST. This is expressed, above all, in the mathematics of the things he films. Vertov is not interested in all objects – his attention is drawn to the tools of production, the means of communication; he is only stirred by events which have a direct connection with the life and the behaviour of the Soviet State. Secondly, it is expressed in the assembly, which is to say the montage, of the material he has shot, where Vertov's attitude to the pieces of filmed life is apparent.

It is sufficient to see the remarkable film by the German director Ruttmann, *Symphony of a Great City*, to be convinced, by contrasting it with the work of Vertov, of the rightness of what I have just said. In his film Ruttmann shows the life of Berlin from morning to evening; he is interested in everything: a sheet of paper carried along a still deserted street, and machines in a factory, and newspaper sellers, and a street crowd, and a wet asphalt pavement. He strolls along the streets of a great city and he notes down with the same degree of interest everything he sees, always expressing his formal relationship to the material, showing the beauty of things, but never expressing his attitude to life as such. He strolls equally dispassionately past a street prosti-

tute and a *bourgeois* at dinner, past a labour exchange and a chic dance hall, past a prison and a factory, a barracks and a street demonstration; he registers sadness and joy, idleness and labour equally lovingly. This lack of passion reduces the social significance of *Symphony*.

On the other hand, with the help of skilful montage, Vertov shows his attitude to life every minute; he stirs us with the emotion and joy, the heroism and routine of Soviet labour. And the viewer senses that this is not some dispassionate *flâneur*, but an artist, who himself lives through these events and forces him [the viewer] to do the same.

Of course those Soviet critics who accuse Vertov of not being aimed towards people in his films are profoundly wrong. These reproaches were made to Vertov in particular with regard to his latest film, *The Eleventh Year*. In the first reel of this film (the Dnieper Hydro-Electric Station) you really can hardly ever see masses of people; here shots of a grandiose construction project alternate with shots of the powerful, elemental force of waterfalls on the Dnieper. Yet here the artist was faced with an exceptionally important formal task in terms of volume and line; masses of human beings, made of a different material, would have complicated the artistic resolution of this task. That this is the case is best of all proved by the mistake Vertov himself made when he showed an allegorical man in this reel – a worker with a hammer who floats out in a haze on the top of some hill. This man sounds false, and besides there is no need for him, he reduces the significance of another unseen man. For in the rhythm of the moving shots the viewer does not for a moment stop sensing the presence of a collective man, whose powerful organized force controls all this mass of things, earth, and elements, directs their movement towards a single goal, creates order out of chaos. The presence of this man is the basic leitmotif of the film: the charm of his great ideas warms the movements of all these cold masses of things and objects. This is where the human and political significance of Vertov's documentary film lies.

### **Is Ruttmann Like Vertov?... And How Sovkino Is Failing *Symphony***

*Khrisanf Khersonsky, "Pokhoz' li Rutman na Vertova?... I kak Sovkino provalivaet Simfiiiiu", Kino, 28 August 1928*

People have already written more than once that the German director Walther Ruttmann's film, *Symphony of a Great City (Berlin)*, is one of the best examples of the camera operator's art in the world. But there is a fundamental misconception in one widespread opinion about the character and method of this film. Reviewers write that "the film represents newsreel filming using the Kino-Eye method".

This is a backhanded compliment to the *kinocs*!

Walther Ruttmann worked to a script. The script hangs over the entire film; it dictates the choice of shots and forces him to do quite a lot of dramatization; it shapes the composition of the film in advance by analogy with a piece of music. Not one single

fact is shown fully and in its essence. This is not newsreel, but a kaleidoscope of ephemeral impressions about the external appearance of life in Berlin. From the point of view of the man in the street, who treats everything with the same unprincipled good cheer. It is a montage of his impressions and moods during a stroll around Berlin – moods which are sentimentally rapturous or compassionate, and fanned by the haze of Romanticism. Shots are gathered together in bundles, according to segments of time – morning, noon, towards evening, dusk, night – and edited together into visual-musical phrases “by mood”, by formal-aesthetic features, and only on rare occasions by scarcely sketched semantic episodes.

As “we” now see, the entire ideo-artistic cuisine of *Symphony of a Great City* is completely inconsistent with the Kino-Eye method, if we are to speak seriously about it. For Ruttman to become a *kinoc*, he would have to become a Bolshevik in art, or at least to work under the direct influence of a militant, revolutionary, realistic world-view.

The difference is that what Vertov strove to show through the Kino-Eye method was by no means somebody’s sentimental moods and ephemeral impressions, but the flow of facts themselves in their own organic causal connection. The production process of the formation of events and daily life.

Vertov took “newsreel”, perfected its filming with more intent and sharp eyes, and started to edit it into a plot, basing his work, above all, on *Socialist* semantic and not aesthetic considerations.

Confusing newsreel and the *kinocs* with Ruttman, reviewers put a brake on the development of a conscious relationship between viewers and the ideas and mastery of Soviet cinema.

So how, for its part, is Sovkino failing *Symphony*?

Ruttman’s film is interesting, and deserves to be presented and registered coherently.

It is interesting because it shows, although far from fully, typical features of contemporary Berlin. Technically it is shot superbly, and almost every shot in it can be eloquent, if only a little bit is said about it... But the film has been released without a single intertitle.

Here Sovkino is making a big (and still correctable) mistake. In Germany this film could be shown without subtitles. In the first place, because they are very familiar with the characteristic features of their daily life and the types of people to be found in their big cities. But secondly, within the shots of his film Ruttman provides a very great number of verbal signals which clarify the action (shop signs, newspapers, door plates, various kinds of shop advertising, and so on). The Soviet viewer who cannot make out these semantic signals in German and does not know the German way of life finds much in the film incomprehensible, and it says little to his “mind and heart”.

But with good intertitles it could have been successfully and usefully distributed throughout the Soviet Union, including the villages, where at present, in its wordless form, there is no point in showing it.

There is no profit in this! The use we can make of *Symphony* with just the German text is extremely narrow. One might have sacrificed the purity of the “musical montage” for the sake of intelligibility.

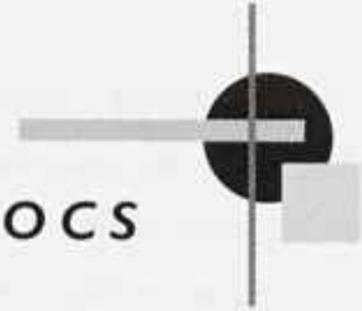
And why have they released it with so little notice, without advertising it?

What is this, the exhibition arm of Sovkino’s fear of the newsreel? A philistine fear of “Kulturfilm” and innovation?

#### Notes

1. *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Walther Ruttmann, 1927).
2. *The House on Trubnaia Square* (*Dom na Trubnoi*, Boris Barnet, 1928).
3. *Mat'* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1926).

## THE LAST OF THE KINOCs

**From Varvara Stepanova's Diary, November 1928**

*Excerpts from Chelovek ne mozhet zhit bez chuda. Pisma. Poeticheskie opyty. Zapiski khudozhnitsy (A Person Cannot Live without Miracles: Letters, Poetic Experiments, Artist's Notes) (Moscow: Sfera, 1994)*

*From the diary entry of 5 November 1928, pp. 239-240*

Mikhail Kaufman brought stills for the 10th, 11th, and 12th issues of [*Novy*] *LEF*.<sup>1</sup> He spoke of how he is being oppressed by Vertov, how boorish the behaviour of the press is (see the article "Vertov" in *Sovetskii ekran*;<sup>2</sup> the film *Man with a Movie Camera* is expressly the work of a cameraman, and yet there is not a word about him, his name isn't even mentioned. We tried to persuade him to write something himself, while he's off at the rest home, to write a kind of diary of his work. If he would write it we could find somewhere to publish it!

*From the diary entry of 7 November 1928, p. 242*

Osip Brik proposes to write about Kaufman after he has seen the film... he is embarrassed and he doesn't believe that you can make a very interesting film by Kaufman's skill as a cameraman alone...<sup>3</sup> Osip Brik has the greatest respect for Mikhail Kaufman's work, but he is afraid that without overall leadership and without preparatory montage instructions for the filming, you will get a good *Kulturfilm*, but it will not be special enough to do well at the box office. He intends to support Kaufman in every way, but he would like to persuade him to go off and film on location and then add fictional elements... Brik understands that you can't just depict things with good footage but without sharp content and semantic links, you won't get a film – so Brik even thinks that *Chang*,<sup>4</sup> which has exceptional material in it, could have been even more significant overall if it had been edited less simply and shot according to a plan. This is undoubtedly true. But it will be difficult to work with the *kinocs*, and in particular with Kaufman... they have not yet acquired even the primitive forms of cultural intercourse... they do not know the methods of acquiring cultural experience by means of conversation about your own work and the work of others.

It's the same with Misha [Mikhail] Kaufman – he still, as in the time of the Civil War, divides people into enemies and friends, and, moreover, the enemies are the ones who criticize you, whereas the friends have to praise everything you do... But you can't behave like that... After all, not every piece of work is resolved in the only

and best way; it's not so much that we make mistakes (there is no question of that), but that we simply fail to implement some interesting task brilliantly... and it is precisely there that we need to make use of the experience and the assessments of our work comrades, or of people who are working in adjacent areas.

...To discuss, to show – this is something that the *kinocs* are completely incapable of. Their low level of general social culture prevents closer contact with them and does a lot of harm to their work... The only subject of conversation which livens them up is tales about various troubles and difficulties of a purely bureaucratic nature, the rudeness of the administration, and so forth – the kind of thing that members of LEF know how to speak of in a light and semi-anecdotal way, as a jolly break in the conversation, is presented by the *kinocs* in the weighty form of a detailed complaint to the RKI,<sup>5</sup> and the conversation becomes tedious and you want to escape as quickly as possible... They can't even talk simply about their adventures on location; they torment you with references to administrators and propaganda for Kino-Eye! They are difficult people, who don't know how to treat other people as work comrades... You can't regard everyone as either a film factory executive or a potential recruit for *kinocs* sympathizers!

### **To the Editorial Board of the Journal *Novyi LEF***

*Dziga Vertov, "V redaktsiiu zhurnala Novyi LEF", RGALI 2091-2-168*

I hereby bring to the attention of the Editorial Board of *Novyi LEF* and, simultaneously, I ask them to bring to the attention of the readers of this journal, that the film *Man with a Movie Camera*, like the previous Kino-Eye works, has its author and leader, its assistant and its cameraman, and not just a cameraman, as would seem to be the case from the inscriptions below the shots from *Man with a Movie Camera* included in issue 11 of *Novyi LEF* for 1928. The same issue included shorts from another Kino-Eye work, *Struggle for the Harvest*, and here both the author-leader of the film, Kopalín, and the cameraman Zotov are mentioned by name.<sup>6</sup> This last circumstance indicates that not mentioning the names of the author of a film or of his assistant [Elizaveta Svilova], is not typical of *Novyi LEF*, and is only, in this case, personally directed against the author of this film. This fact is unprecedented in the history of Soviet cinema, and can only be interpreted as a sign of hidden persecution, as the result of collusion, a deal between people who have a vested interest in carrying out this persecution.

### **Film Analysis**

*Mikhail Kaufman, "Kinoanaliz", Proletarskoe kino, no. 4, 1931, pp. 8-117*

The analytical approach which I have taken as the basis of my work with film-things is,

as a result of my analysis of my earlier and present experience, gradually crystallizing an ever more precise methodology of working on a film.

The orientation towards film language, as the richest and most rational means of expression, and one that it is more comprehensible than any other, is undoubtedly correct. This conviction has been even more strengthened by the results of my most recent work on the film *In Spring*.<sup>8</sup>

Speaking in pure film language, without recourse to the help of literary explanations (intertitles), the film turned out to be comprehensible to a broad audience.

So, what is film language?

So, what is film literacy?

If we take as our starting point the existing literary alphabet, then what should we consider a film-letter, a film-syllable, a film-word, a film-phrase, a film-object?

For this we should first of all examine whether a parallel can be drawn between the language of literature and the language of cinema.

The letter, the syllable, the word, as elements of literary expression, are conventional concepts, and therefore accessible only to a literate person, while every shot, every sequence of a film speaks in concrete terms, provides a copy of those life phenomena among which a person lives and matures. Thus, the elements of film expression are comprehensible even to an illiterate person.

The film element is its own adjective and its grammatical object at once; it speaks simultaneously about form, quality, and dynamism, and about a whole series of other signs, which in literature would require a longer exposition.

In some respects one could make a parallel between film language and the "language" of music (if you can talk at all about the language of music), as, for example, in questions of rhythm and tempo.

The work of creating a film-thing is closest of all to the work of an engineer or a chemist.

The only difference is that an engineer or a chemist knows in advance precisely what material he will use for building. An engineer can make precise calculations about the construction material he needs, can take its qualities and functionality into account. A chemist can calculate in advance the elements he needs to create this or that substance.

When you amass materials for a film-thing, by no means can all the elements which you are going to need for building material when you are creating it be calculated in advance. In other words, the presence of concrete elements cannot be ensured. Instead, you have a large assortment of elements of film expression which are uniform in their functionality for every individual case.

The final point neutralizes the disadvantage of not having the opportunity of envisaging the concrete material in advance and confidently making sure that you get hold of it. I consider the getting hold of the material from which the film-thing is going to be built, and the building of it from that material, to be the primary and secondary analysis, plus synthesis. In other words, I place analytical investigation at the base of my work.

I use my sense of vision for preparatory orientation (pre-filming), and then I introduce the film camera, as a piece of equipment with more perfect vision which has the capacity to capture things.

Approaching the phenomena selected by the pre-filming with my movie camera with the aim of analyzing them further and capturing them is the second period of primary analysis – the filming. So the primary analysis consists of two stages of work: the pre-filming and the filming.

The pre-filming serves, on the one hand, to select from the sum of phenomena those necessary in this particular case, and on the other hand to subdivide the phenomena into the basic ones, and those basic ones into derivative ones, and so on.

Thus, the analyzed phenomena already serve as material for the last stage of the work, filming and capturing. The means of capturing is influenced in the first place by: the aim for which the primary analysis is being carried out, and the result of the analysis, the character of the phenomena needing to be captured, the environment in which these phenomena are situated, and the individual qualities of the phenomenon.

The word “environment” should be taken to mean: lighting conditions, the general background of the phenomenon, the individual phenomena which make up the background, the influence and effect of surrounding phenomena on the phenomenon which is to be captured, and so on.

The individual features of phenomena are: texture, colour, the character of the surface, the size, the ordinariness or rarity of the phenomenon, the animation or lack of animation, whether they are dynamic or static, the susceptibility to the influence of the film camera or the lack of susceptibility to such an influence. Whether a phenomenon belongs to this or that group is established through the first part of the primary analysis, the “pre-filming”. When introducing the film camera into a particular environment, one has to be fully armed so as to capture by this or that means the maximum number of elements necessary for shaping a particular theme, even those elements which for some reason were omitted in the pre-filming.

Through the filming we carry out the further subdivision of the phenomenon into its component elements, and capture them by one means or another depending on their thematic orientation and the particular form of organization of the material which we have envisaged.

To give a clearer picture of how the theoretical approach I have outlined is applied in practice, I shall give examples from the film *In Spring*.

The funeral meal in the cemetery.

The pre-filming gives:

1. Priests scurrying about the cemetery.
2. They hire a priest to perform the funeral service.
3. The funeral service.
4. Payment.
5. Drinking.
6. Eating.

7. Drunkenness.

8. A fight.

At this point the pre-filming can be considered complete. We turn to capturing it. Let us examine some of the points.

The scurrying priests.

By analyzing this phenomenon I can establish that:

1. It is necessary to shoot this invisibly, since it is a phenomenon which is susceptible to the influence of the movie camera.

2. We must make it possible to examine the scurrying priest as a dynamic phenomenon, one which passes by quickly.

3. We must film it against as distinguishable a background as possible, or against a background which helps sense the theme.

The first point is resolved by filming with a long-focus lens from a tent. The second by panoramic shots, while keeping the passing priests all the time in the centre of the shot.

This device of using a telephoto lens gives the complete illusion of shooting in motion, that is to say, it gives a better possibility of watching a moving phenomenon. The same device in this case resolves our third point, that is to say, it distinguishes the phenomenon under observation against a moving background, and even creates a partial illusion of stereoscopy.

The Funeral Service.

Observation of this phenomenon over a relatively long period of time has led me to the conclusion that it has a defined and finished shape from beginning to end.

We don't perceive this shape, since its particular elements are situated too far away from each other in time for our visual memory to take it in. For this same reason we do not see the motion of the hour-hand of a clock, and we do not see slow processes of destruction, such as the weathering of rock, landslides, and so on. Slow-motion filming shortens the distance between the separate elements of a slowly evolving process, and in this way it reveals to us the kinetic shape of a phenomenon, and even deciphers the laws of the process that is unfolding.

When streets and passages are being planned in a contemporary city, the laws of the movement of liquids are taken into account. In narrow passageways where there is a maximum concentration of passers-by and vehicles, you get jams, and when they emerge the flow is increased, and so on.

On one of the anniversaries of October I had to film a passing demonstration in slow motion because of the overcast weather. The speeded-up process of the demonstration revealed the shape of the movement of the human flow.

In the film *In Spring*, by capturing the long-winded funeral service in slow motion, I got the opportunity to show the outline of a little part of that puppet comedy to which all religious rituals as a whole belong.

Here the movie camera made it possible for me to examine a life phenomenon with an eye that was fore-armed, just as a microscope opens our eyes to phenomena that are invisible to the unarmed eye.

In this brief exposition, I am pausing to refer only to the most vivid devices, displaying an analytical approach to the use of the capabilities of the movie camera.

Rapid (speeded-up) shooting, which arms our vision for the analysis of quickly moving phenomena.

Filming from points which are inaccessible or barely accessible to the human eye.

Breaking down the overall view of phenomena, and capturing their component parts in close-up.

The further subdivision of a phenomenon and its capturing through macro-filming, micro-filming, tele-filming, and so on.

All this is an analysis by means of those possibilities which the technology of the movie camera gives us.

The result of this is that we have material on the montage shelf for the future filming, material which still does not consist fully of its elements, which still has a preponderance of complex phenomena requiring further analysis. We should bear in mind that what we call an element here is an entity, and this entity is not constant.

Our relation to this or that part of the material, as to an element or a substance, depends on our thematic orientation and on the form of film expression that is envisaged.

And so our notes have taken us to the point of the secondary analysis, to the analysis of the material we have acquired. In point of fact, the analysis goes on without a break. I am dividing the primary analysis from the secondary, subdividing the two stages of the work, only by means of the character of the production processes. It would therefore be a mistake to consider that the searching out of the elements of film language is limited to primary analysis.

Through our primary analysis, we have, in essence, acquired the raw material (the semi-finished products), but in this raw material we will find a maximum quantity of the elements that we need.

So what will an element be in the secondary analysis?

What was considered an element during the primary analysis turns out to be raw material during secondary analysis.

In this way we create a planned and deeper study of life phenomena. But to what depths and to what lengths can secondary analysis go?

In the primary analysis, both in the pre-filming and in the filming, everything was comprehensible: the extraction from the sum of phenomena of those needed for their thematic features, the detailing of the phenomena that had been extracted, their subdivision into their component elements as far as the telephoto-macro-micro-filming allowed...

So what further analysis can we speak of?

It would seem that all we could be speaking of here would be sorting the elements of the "primary analysis" and of their thematic "coupling", to use Pudovkin's term, or "clash", to use Eisenstein's term.<sup>9</sup>

Let us turn to the sorted material.

We take sequence *A* from the montage cage. All the shots in this sequence turn out

to be identical in terms of composition and content. But then we take another sequence, sequence *B*. Examining the shots in this sequence, we see that each shot is different from those around it, since in the primary analysis we captured a dynamic phenomenon, and the variety of individual shots contain all the kinetic qualities of the given sequence.

If we consider the shot to be an element of the sequence, then in sequence *A* we have a series of identical elements, as opposed to sequence *B*, which consists of a series of elements which differ the one from the other.

If when we synthesize, that is to say, when we build the film-phrase we use sequence *A*, then we shall take the quantity of shots we need from either end. If we use sequence *B*, we must first analyze it, since it consists of a series of elements of movement from transitional and culminating points. Without consideration of these elements there is no film language. I shall offer as an example a few moments from the film *In Spring*. As a result of the primary analysis, we got a series of sequences showing a football match.

Examining the material, that is to say, dividing the sequences in groups with identical functions, we get:

Group One. The work of the goalkeeper.

Group Two. A leg hitting the ball.

Group Three. Faces reacting.

Let us take a sequence from the first group and analyze it. We see that this sequence contains the static element of the goalkeeper standing guard.

A defensive lunge.

Catching the ball.

In this way this sequence from the first group, while remaining an element of primary analysis, has provided a series of new elements during the secondary analysis.

We then carry out the same work with a sequence from the second group and we get:

Running up to the ball.

Kicking the ball.

The player runs on by inertia.

Let us assume that for the means of transmission of the football study which we have chosen further subdivision of these two groups is not necessary.

Let us now analyze a sequence from the third group – faces reacting to the game.

In each of the sequences in this group we find a series of elements which are different in their functional role. Some of them relate to a response to a goal being scored, others react to an unsuccessful shot, a third group express unease, a fourth tense expectation, and so on.

When we subdivide the elements we have received, we get considerably shorter scraps, that is to say, sequences which consist of a very small number of shots, but ones which are more saturated.

In the montage version of the football match for the film *In Spring*, I continue the analysis of these scraps, and find the culminating frame, which characterizes this or that

reaction to the maximum degree. By freezing this frame I get maximally dynamic stasis.

In another part of the film *In Spring*, I speak about Easter as a feast of gluttony and drunkenness.

One of the elements acquired by the primary analysis is a woman drinking vodka.

On secondary analysis we find a whole series of elements in this sequence:

the woman has emptied the glass into her mouth,

the woman drinks,

she takes the glass from her mouth,

the distorted expression on her face as a reaction to something bitter.

In this way we have divided the sequence into a series of separate instants, and each of these instants is taken into account as an element of the construction of the future sequence.

But even this is not all.

Let us make a further study of the instants we have acquired, and here we see a series of frames, of which almost every one can serve as an independent element of the montage.

In this particular case, I used the culminating points of the elements acquired by the secondary analysis, by freeze-printing the culminating frames.

Thanks to this, the process of the organism's instinctive resistance to poison was revealed.

This device should be considered as a method for the scientific study of a phenomenon, corresponding to slow-motion shooting, rapid shooting, and macro- and micro-shooting in the primary analysis.

I used this device for the first time in the film *Moscow*, where, in the subject of "Moscow at rest", at the height of the merrymaking I stop a girl on a swing at the highest point of her arc by freeze-printing a culminating frame and using it as an element.

In the film *In Spring* there are a series of instants created out of the use of a freeze-frame.

At the end of the fifth part I create an extract of laughter, consisting of culminating frames, and I get a montage-made kino-laughter.

It may seem that in reaching the frame we have already arrived at the simplest element of film language. But when we analyze the frame itself, and study the elements which it consists of, we shall often find what we need for the construction of this or that kino-phrase. We might be given a hint of how these elements are acquired by the technique, widely used in still photography, of blowing up only a part of the negative.

In the very same way, during the secondary analysis we can break up the frame into its component elements.

And so, after studying the material we have acquired in the primary analysis, and after dividing it into its component elements in the secondary analysis, we can move on to synthesis – the construction of the film-thing.

## A Few Remarks on the Elements of Cine-Language

*Alexander Brailovsky, Experimental Cinema, vol. 1, no. 4, 1932, pp. 24, 39<sup>10</sup>*

*Experimental Cinema* has asked me to clarify certain ideas and terminology propounded in M. Kaufman's article. While agreeing to do this, I wish to emphasize that I take full responsibility for the interpretation of M. Kaufman's ideas and if my interpretation is wrong – the fault is entirely mine. – A.B.

1. Suppose you read the word "horse". As a means of literary expression, it is only an abstract and very general symbol. It is left to your imagination to decide upon a whole series of qualifications for a "horse". It might be a big horse, small, harness, race, young, old, with a fluffy tail, or tail-less, an Arabian stallion or a French Percheron, or a half-starved Russian peasant *seevka* [workhorse]. Now, when you see the horse on the screen, all these qualifications are given to you in a visual image all at once, immediately. Let's call this visual image a "cine-word". We see that to render adequately just a single "cine-word" by the means of written words we should need a page of description.

On the other hand, suppose you read the word "war". It is perhaps impossible to render it by a single image: we need a series of images, the sum of which suggests to us the idea of a "war".

So, "cine-language" has its own nature, different from literary language. Now, to continue.

2. What is a single "cine-letter"? Again, we resort to the analogy with the written letter. I write a single letter *m*. It hardly has any meaning by itself. Taken by itself, it is only a mere phonetic symbol. It acquires meaning only in definite connection with other letters. It might be a part of a word: "mother", or "miner", or "mushroom", or "bum", or "Omaha", or "Potemkin", etc., etc.

Accordingly, an isolated elementary image has no cinematographic "meaning". Suppose I see an image of "a bottle". Only in connection with other images do I perceive whether it is a bottle of whiskey, confiscated by Prohibition agents – or a bottle thrown into the ocean by people from a sinking boat, containing important information – or a bottle used as a weapon in a drunken brawl of sailors in a Shanghai saloon, etc.

The same as the word "Potemkin" cannot be written without an *m*, so a certain situation cannot be expressed through images without presenting the image of a "bottle".

Let us call such a single image a "cine-letter".

3. Now, suppose you want to express cinematographically the following *literary sentence*: "Ivan's childhood passed in the family of a poor shoemaker, with a drunkard father, while his mother was a timid, God-fearing woman." The series of corresponding concrete visual images – let us call them a "cine-sentence". Taking up a previous example, the single literary word "war" on the screen would correspond to a whole "cine-sentence".

The choice of words (as Hamlet says, we read only "words, words, words"...) – their disposition in a sentence, their rhythmic flow, their recurrence, or vice versa, the expression of the same idea by different words – in short, the manipulation of *words*, as mate-

rial, is what we call a literary manner, or style, (school, etc.). The analogical choice, disposition, rhythmical outline, manipulation of single, elementary, visual images, "cine-words" (or mechanically speaking, certain sets of frames, or, as Kaufman suggests, even parts of a frame) is the montage (or mechanically speaking, "cutting").

4. Of course, the above is only the first approximation. Styles, as the most synthetic characteristic of the art of certain epochs, have always been the expression of the psychology, and, in particular, of the ideology of definite social groups. This refers to the cinema and its montage-style. The relation of the style to social class is a problem passionately discussed in present Soviet film literature. In the Soviet Union it is not a problem of pure theory. Soviet cinematographers are trying to discover the constituent elements of a proletarian style in the art of the film. The treatment of the problem in this sense is outside the purely technical article of Kaufman.

Kaufman's article discusses only visual, "silent" films. The advent of sound, or the spoken word, brings, of course, additional elements to the problem.

5. Micro-, macro-, tele-shooting, etc., ... Kaufman calls the camera "an apparatus of more perfect vision". This is true, but with the following reservations: our vision is stereoscopic; a camera gives us rather flat images, perceived at two slightly different angles – whence the feeling of "depth". But a camera has a single eye. A man one-eyed from birth will probably be more satisfied with our present flat screen "images" than a person with normal vision. In this sense, our natural vision is perhaps more perfect than a mechanical eye.

With this reservation, a camera-eye, a lens, *is* a more perfect apparatus of vision. Furthermore, different systems of lenses add to our natural eye artificial "eyes" of tremendous power: the microscope, the telescope. Artificial eyes can see – through sensitive plates that can be adjusted – extremely small details and processes (the life of microbes), as well as extremely distant cosmic objects. The adaptation of microscopic or telescopic lenses is an immensely enriching reinforcement of our visual imagery. They open up a new world of "cine-letters" and "cine-words". They enable us to "shoot" what is happening on the summit of a mountain, to "shoot" from afar a naval battle, the eruption of a volcano, or the surface of the moon – as well as the "class struggle", the inside of a drop of blood, etc.

Such is the field for "macroscopic", "microscopic", and "telescopic" shooting.

I wish to add that it is also possible to apply the X-Ray tube to cinematographic uses, and thus, with the camera, to pierce through the walls of a house, or to see the inside processes of an organism. Furthermore, a plate sensitive to infra-red rays could even "see" through mist and night.

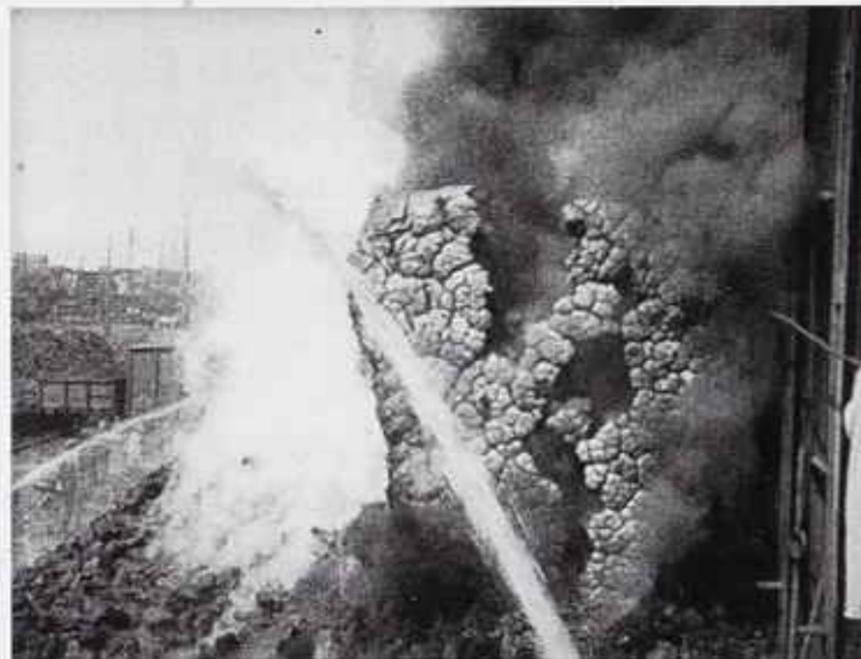
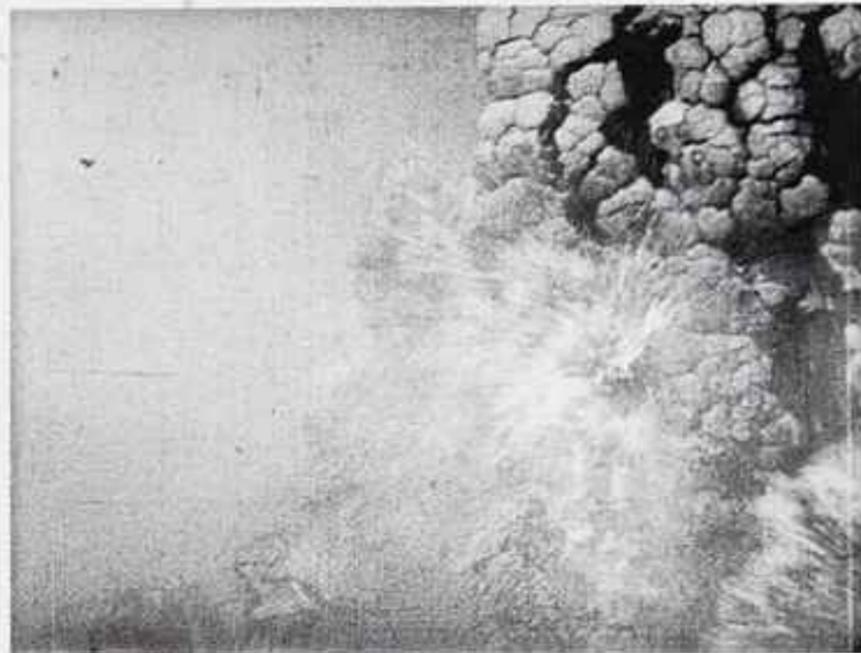
6. To conclude: One of the many fundamental differences between the typical "Hollywood" and Russian film workers is this: while in Hollywood they work relying on instinct, "horse sense", the empirically acquired knowledge of tricks, camera angles, and situations regulated by the indications of the box office, in Russia, on the other hand, the Soviet film worker strives to build a rational theory of his art, analyzing it in its infinitesimal formal elements, analyzing at the same time the structure of society. For to reflect it on the screen – and to transform it into reality – is the function of cinema art.

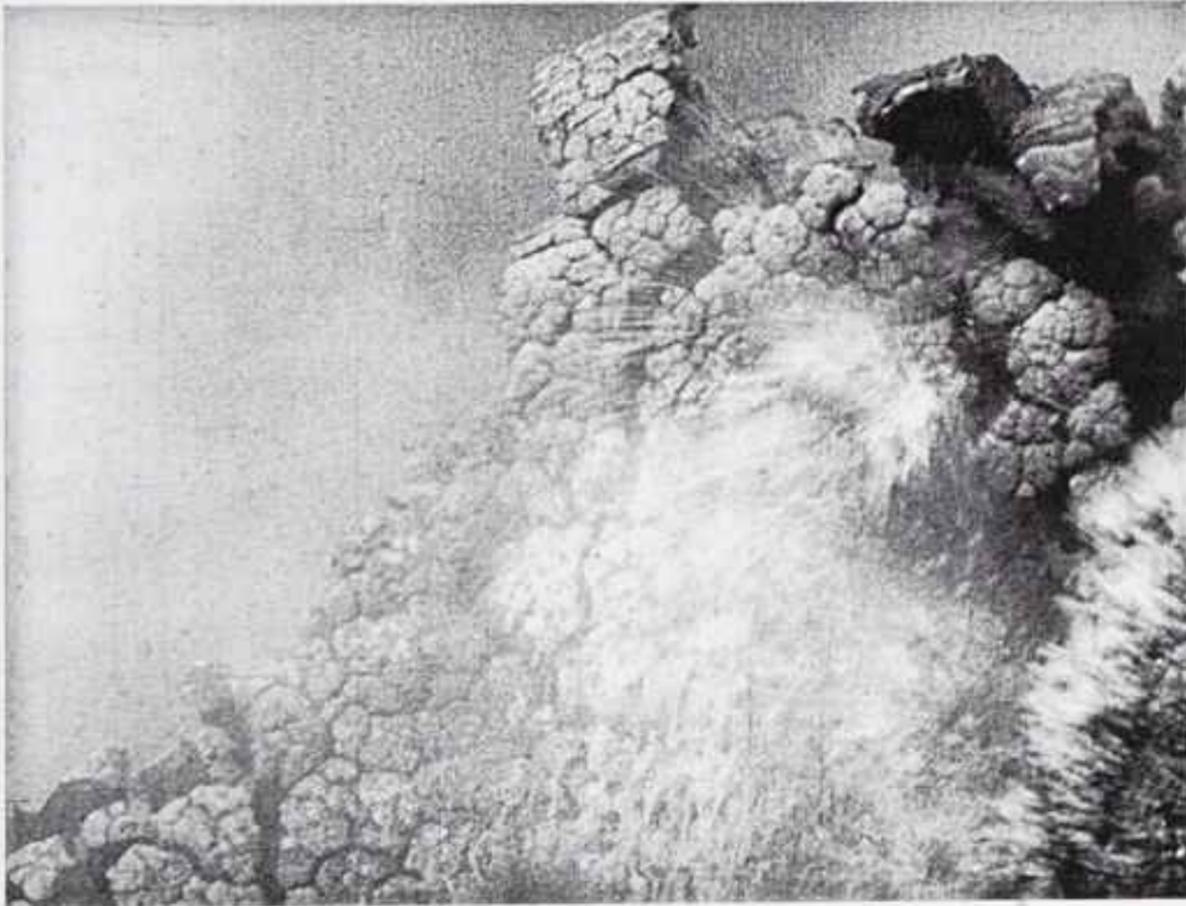
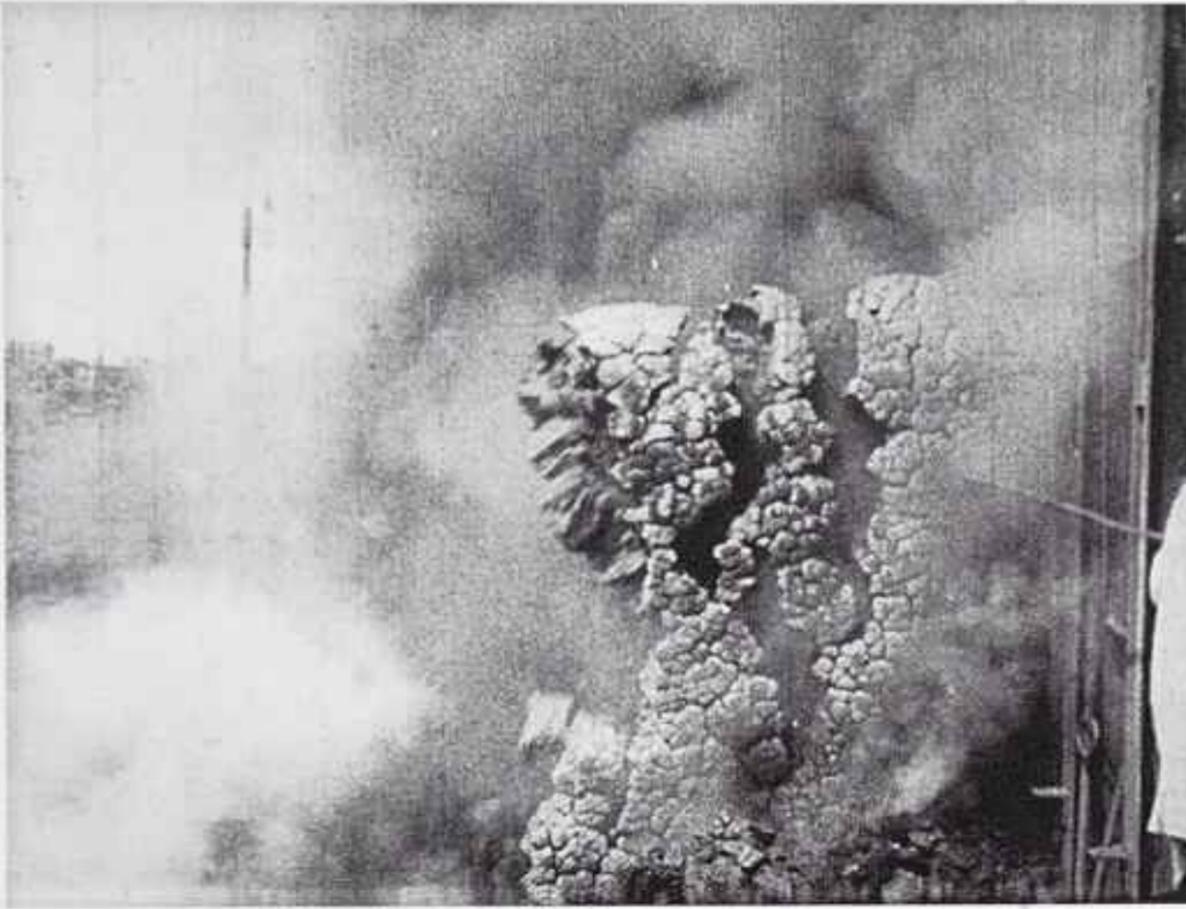
## Notes

1. Stills from *Man with a Movie Camera* were printed in the journal *Novy LEF* without Vertov being credited in the captions, which fact caused his vehement letter to its editor (see next entry).
2. Naum Kaufman's essay "Vertov", which caused Mikhail Kaufman's complaint, recorded in Stepanova's diary, appeared in *Sovetskii ekran*, no. 45, 1928 (see the translation of it in chap. 22 of this book). The following year, the same Naum Kaufman would publish two more essays, "The *Kinocs*" and "The *Kinoc* Cameraman" (*Sovetskii ekran*, no. 4, 1929), in which Mikhail Kaufman's work is duly credited.
3. As it follows from the context, Brik was planning to see one of the films directed by Mikhail Kaufman – probably his 1928 film *Nursery (Iasli)* – in order to write about Kaufman's work and consider the possibility of collaborating with him on a future production.
4. *Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness* (1927), the fictionalized documentary by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack.
5. RKI: Raboche-krestianskaia inspeksiia ([Commissariat for] Worker-Peasant Inspection).
6. *Struggle for the Harvest / For the Harvest: Borba za urozhai* (Ilya Kopolin, 1929). Petr Zotov (1898-1979), cinematographer and film director, a *kinoc* as of 1923.
7. Note from the Editors of *Proletarskoe kino*: "Comrade Kaufman's article was written for the journal *Kino i kultura*, and is appearing in our journal with a very great delay. Nevertheless, in the light of the arguments about questions of creativity, it has not lost its interest. The author feels that the article needs to be added to and developed in accordance with the tasks which now lie in the path of 'non-fiction' film, and this will be done in issue 8 of this journal."
8. In a 1967 interview (published in 1994), Kaufman said he conceived *In Spring (Navesnil Vesnoi, 1929)* as an answer to Vertov's artistic conception in *Man with a Movie Camera*, which Kaufman said he did not agree with (see *Novy mir*, no. 1, 1994; also [http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi\\_mi/1994/1/kaufman01.html](http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1994/1/kaufman01.html)).
9. The discussion of two competing principles of montage, Eisenstein's "clash" (*stolknovenie*) and Pudovkin's proposed "coupling" (*stseplenie*) of shots, became known through Eisenstein's essay "Za kadrom" (Beyond the Frame), printed as a foreword to Naum Kaufman's book *Japonskoe kino* (Japanese Cinema) (Moscow: Teakinopechat, 1929), pp. 72-92.
10. Alexander Brailovsky (1884-1958), Russian émigré poet (in Paris and New York), critic, and translator. Brailovsky's "Remarks on the Elements of Cine-Language" appeared as a supplement to his translation of Mikhail Kaufman's essay "Film Analysis", published in the same issue of *Experimental Cinema* (pp. 21-23). See this essay in Julian Graffy's translation (previous item).

## Leftovers

These five frame enlargements from one of the final shots of *The Eleventh Year* show what looks like red-hot leftovers (of ore?) erupting from a blast furnace at a steel-making plant somewhere in the Ukraine. It is a rather long take, and as I was making frame enlargements for this book I could not help running this shot back and forth on the viewing table, making more and more stills which are nevertheless hardly able to render its strange fascination. Someone who believes in the idea of *photogénie* (like Jean Epstein, who used to compare the impact of cinema with the impact of a working volcano, like Etna) might try to explain the fascination of this shot by the fact that what we are watching here is the clash of four elements: earth, fire, the jet of water that hits the erupting substance to help it disintegrate, and the steam into which this water turns as soon as it hits the hot surface. Some of this is certainly true, but there is also a poignant overtone of finality in this shot, so I thought the right place for it is here, in the chapter entitled "The Last of the Kinocs".







# VERTOV'S SILENT FILMS AN ANNOTATED FILMOGRAPHY



The documents upon which this filmography is based come from: Vertov's personal archive, as well as those of Aleksandr Lemberg, Grigory Boltiansky, and Sovkino (all preserved at RGALI); the press of the day; existing Russian-language filmographies compiled at different times by Elizaveta Svilova, Veniamin Vishnevsky, Vladimir Magidov, and Viktor Listov.

Georges Sadoul's French-language "Bio-Filmography", which has served as a source for some Western filmographies, includes a number of films which most likely were not made by Vertov. These titles are not included in this filmography.

Footage and credits quoted in this filmography (whenever available) come from contemporary documents, and may differ from the data derived from actual prints. Archival annotations give a preliminary idea to what degree and where Vertov's legacy survives. Data have been gathered from Russian archives by Aleksandr Deriabin, from Western ones by Yuri Tsivian. More archival research is needed before we can call Vertov's filmography finished and complete.

## I. Film Journals

### 1. *Kino-Week* (*Kino-Nedelia*)

Weekly newsreel film journal.

Produced by Kinokomitet Narkomprosa (Moskva), the Moscow Film Committee of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment.

A total of 43 issues were released, from 20 May 1918 to 27 June 1919. Dziga Vertov was the author of the text and the director of several issues. The journal was initially released by Mikhail Koltsov, then by Nikolai Tikhonov, Yevgenii Shneider, and others. Apparently, Vertov began making *Kino-Week* in the second half or even at the end of 1918. A large number of the issues of the film journal were destroyed by Vertov, who cut subjects out of them for his November 1918 film *The Anniversary of the Revolution*. The then-head of film newsreel, Vladimir Gardin, forced Vertov to restore *Kino-Week*. This initiative was not particularly successful, since the subjects of a number of issues turned out to be definitively lost, and Vertov was forced to fill in the gaps with other subjects, which were sometimes even anachronistic. Because of the lack of information it is now very difficult to establish which versions of *Kino-Week* we are dealing with: the originals, or

the versions that were reconstructed in 1919. All the issues of *Kino-Week* exist in the Russian State Archive of Kino and Photo Documents (RGAKFD) in whole or in part (issues 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 22, 31, 35, 40, 42, and 43 exist in fragments; in issues 7, 9, 10, 16, 20, 21, 28, 29, 35, 36, and 37 the intertitles have been completely or partly lost). According to the list found among Jay Leyda's papers held in the Tamiment Library collection at New York University, 18 *Kino-Week* issues (apparently brought to Norway in 1922 by the then-Soviet ambassador Aleksandra Kollontai [1872-1952]) exist at Sveriges Radio in Stockholm. These are issues 1, 2, 4, 5, 21-25, and 28-35, some with Russian, some with Norwegian intertitles. These prints are also available at the Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Vienna. Some of these issues, plus some additional materials from Soviet Russia, exist as part of the compilation film *Russian Newsreel* (*Rysk Journal*) preserved at the film archive of the Swedish Film Institute.

### 2. *Kino-Pravda* (*Kino-Pravda*)<sup>1</sup>

Newsreel film journal.

Produced by Goskino,<sup>2</sup> Moscow.

A total of 23 issues appeared, from 5 June

1922 to March 1925. Vertov was the director and the author of the plans and the intertitles. 21 issues of *Kino-Pravda* are preserved in the RGAKFD at Krasnogorsk: No. 12 for 1922 is missing, and No. 16 for 1923 is only preserved in fragments (there is a fuller version at Gosfilmofond, the Russian State Film Archive). Four issues of *Kino-Pravda* can be found at the Österreichisches Filmmuseum (16, 20, 21, 22), plus a compilation of *Kino-Pravda* subjects from issues 1-9, with subtitles in English. Many issues of *Kino-Pravda* lack titles and subjects, and the authorial montage has been destroyed. Some of the most ambitious issues are listed below.

**Kino-Pravda No. 10**

1 reel. 323 metres.  
Released September 1922.  
Directed by Dziga Vertov.

**Kino-Pravda No. 13**

*Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow. A Film Poem Dedicated to the October Celebrations / October Kino-Pravda (Vchera, segodnia, zavtra. Kinopoema, posviashchennaia Oktiabrskim tozrzhestvam / Oktiabrskaiia Kino-Pravda)*  
3 reels. 900 metres.  
Released November 1922.  
Script and montage: Dziga Vertov.  
Intertitles produced by Aleksandr Rodchenko.

**Kino-Pravda No. 14**

1 reel. 209 metres.  
Released end of 1922.  
Experiment in newsreel by Dziga Vertov.  
Intertitles produced by Aleksandr Rodchenko.  
Footage showing the Profintern (the International Organization of Trade Unions) is by cameraman Vasilii Bystrov.  
Editor: Elizaveta Svilova.

**Kino-Pravda No. 15**

2 reels. 456 metres.  
Released 1923.  
Experiment in newsreel by Dziga Vertov.  
Intertitles processed by the cameraman Boris Frantsisson.  
Moving intertitles: Ivan Beliakov and Mikhail Kaufman.

**Kino-Pravda No. 16**

*Spring Kino-Pravda. A Lyrical View Newsreel (Vesenniaia Kino-Pravda. Vidovaia liricheskaia khronika)*  
3 reels. 1110 metres.  
Released 1923.  
Directed by Dziga Vertov.

**Kino-Pravda No. 17**

Experiment in newsreel.  
1 reel. 332 metres.  
Released 1923.  
For the first Soviet Agricultural, Handicraft, and Industrial Exhibition.  
Kinoc: Dziga Vertov.  
Intertitles and general plan of the exhibition produced by the kinoc Ivan Beliakov and filmed by the kinoc Mikhail Kaufman.  
Editor: Elizaveta Svilova.

**Kino-Pravda No. 18**

*A Movie Camera Race over 299 Metres and 14 Minutes and 50 Seconds in the Direction of Soviet Reality (Probeg kinoapparata v napravlenii sovetskoi deistvitelnosti 299 metrov 14 min. 50 sek.)*  
1 reel. 229 metres.  
Produced by Goskino, Moscow.  
Released March 1924.  
A work by Dziga Vertov.  
Responsible Editor: Aleksandr Goldobin.  
A movie camera race from Paris to Moscow.

**Kino-Pravda No. 19**

*Black Sea – Arctic Ocean – Moscow / A Movie Camera Race Moscow – Arctic Ocean (Chernoe more – Ledovityi okean – Moskva. Probeg kinoapparata Moskva – Ledovityi okean)*  
1 reel. 358 metres.  
Released 9 May 1924.  
Produced by Goskino, Moscow.  
Responsible Editor: Aleksandr Goldobin.  
A work by Dziga Vertov.  
A movie camera race from Moscow to the Arctic Ocean.

**Kino-Pravda No. 20**

*Pioneer Pravda (Pionerskaia Pravda) Kino-Pravda No. 20 in 5 dispatches.*  
1 reel. 352 metres.

Produced by the filming office of Goskino and by kino-observers.

Released 12 December 1924.

A work by Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Mikhail Kaufman.

#### Kino-Pravda No. 21

**Lenin Kino-Pravda. A Film Poem about Lenin** (*Leninskaia Kino-Pravda. Kinopoema o Lenine*)

3 reels. 800 metres.

Produced by Kultkino,<sup>3</sup> Moscow, 13 January 1925.

For the anniversary of the death of Vladimir Ilich Lenin, 21 January 1924 - 21 January 1925.

Released 22 January 1925.

A work by Dziga Vertov.

Cameramen: Grigorii Giber, Aleksandr Levitsky, Aleksandr Lemberg, Petr Novitsky, Mikhail Kaufman, Eduard Tisse, and others. Prints of this film are available in the West.

#### Kino-Pravda No. 22

**Peasant Kino-Pravda / Lenin Is Alive in the Heart of the Peasant. A Film Story** (*Krestianskaia Kino-Pravda / V serdtse krestianina Lenin zhiv. Kinorasskaz*)

2 reels. 606 metres.

Released 13 March 1925. First public showing: 26 March 1925.

Directed by Dziga Vertov.

Cameramen: Mikhail Kaufman, Aleksandr Lemberg, Ivan Beliakov.

#### Kino-Pravda No. 23

**Radio Pravda** (*Radio Pravda*)

4 reels. 1400 metres.

Released March 1925.

First issue.

Director: Dziga Vertov.

Cameramen: Mikhail Kaufman, Ivan Beliakov. Animation Design: Aleksandr Bushkin.

#### 3. State Kino-Calendar (*Goskinokalendar*)

Daily and weekly topical newsreel.

Appeared from April 1923 to 5 May 1925.

A total of 57 issues of *State Kino-Calendar* were released onto the country's screens. Vertov was the director of 56 of them.

All the issues exist in the RGAKFD.

## II. Films

**The Anniversary of the Revolution** (*Godovshchina revoliutsii*)

Historical newsreel.

12 reels. 2710 metres.

Produced by Kinokomitet Narkomprosa (Moskva), the Moscow Film Committee of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, 1918. Released 7 November 1918.

Directors: Dziga Vertov, Aleksei Savelev.

Exists in part (4 reels, 922.1 metres) in the RGAKFD. At the time, the last part of the film, *The Brain of Soviet Russia* (*Mozg Sovetskoi Rossii*), was often also shown as an independent film (see following entry).

**The Brain of Soviet Russia** (*Mozg Sovetskoi Rossii*)

1 reel. 210 metres.

Produced by Kinokomitet Narkomprosa (Moskva), the Moscow Film Committee of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment. Released 1 May 1919.

Director: Dziga Vertov.

Exists in the RGAKFD.

See previous entry.

**The Battle of Tsaritsyn** (*Boi pod Tsaritsynom*)

A study.

1 reel. 350 metres.

Produced by Revvoensovet, the Revolutionary Military Soviet, and Kinokomitet Narkomprosa (Moskva), the Moscow Film Committee of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, 1919. Film probably not released.

Director: Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Aleksandr Lemberg.

No print of this film is known to survive.

**The Trial of Mironov** (*Protssess Mironova*)

A study.

1 reel. 300 metres.

Produced by Revvoensovet, the Revolutionary Military Soviet, and Kinokomitet Narkomprosa (Moskva), the Moscow Film Committee of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, 1919. Director: Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Petr Ermolov.

Only fragments of the film (317 metres) exist in the RGAKFD.

**The Unsealing of the Remains of Sergii of Radonezh** (*Vskrytie moschei Sergiia Radonezhskogo*)

A film essay.

2 reels.

Produced by Kinokomitet Narkomprosa (Moskva), the Moscow Film Committee of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, 1919.

One reel of this film exists in the RGAKFD; some of its shots also survive as found footage used in *Opium* (1929) by Vitaly Zhemchuzhny. The authorship of this film is a contentious issue. Vertov claimed the film was shot under his supervision, and so does Lev Kuleshov. Permits survive that authorize Kuleshov, Vertov, and Eduard Tisse (plus a number of other cinematographers and technicians) to film the unsealing, but evidence exists that Vertov failed to show up. It could have been that Kuleshov supervised the shooting and Vertov edited Kuleshov's footage, but (as film historian Nikolai Izvolov contends) it is rather unlikely that a director like Kuleshov would entrust anyone else with the editing of his footage. In any case, this film is the only one included in this filmography whose attribution to Vertov has a shadow of doubt.

**The Red Star Literary-Instructional Agit-Steamer of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee** (*Literaturno-instruktorskii agit-parokhod VTsIK "Krasnaia Zvezda"*)

2 reels.

Produced by Kinokomitet Narkomprosa (Moskva), the Moscow Film Committee of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, 1919.

Director: Dziga Vertov.

Cameramen: Petr Ermolov, Aleksandr Lemberg.

Exists in the RGAKFD.

**The Agit-Train of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee** (*Agitpoezd VTsIK*)

A film travelogue.

1 reel.

Produced by VTsIK, the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, and Kinokomitet Narkomprosa (Moskva), the Moscow Film Committee of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, 1921.

Author-Director: Dziga Vertov.

No print of this film is known to exist. This film is mentioned only by Vertov himself; it has not proved possible to find information about its existence in any other source. It perhaps existed under another title. Some shots featuring a train called "Agit-Train of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee" found in the Swedish collection of *Kino-Week* may contain parts of this mystery film.

**The History of the Civil War** (*Istoriia grazhdanskoi voiny*)

Historical newsreel.

13 reels. 3643 metres.

Produced by VFKO, the All-Russia Photo-Cine Department, and Narkompros, the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, Moscow, 1921.

Director: Dziga Vertov.

Exists in part (573.8 metres) in the RGAKFD.

**The Trial of the Right S.R.s / The Trial of the S.R.s** (*Protsess pravyykh eserov / Protsess eserov*)

Historical newsreel.

3 reels. 671 metres.

Produced by VFKO, the All-Russia Photo-Cine Department, and Narkompros, the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, Moscow, 1922.

Released 7 November 1922.

Author-Director: Dziga Vertov.

Cameramen: Aleksandr Levitsky, Mikhail Kaufman.

Assistant Director: Elizaveta Svilova.

Exists in the RGAKFD.

**You Give Us the Air!** (*Daesh vozdukh!*)

First special issue (A film study).

2 reels. 652 metres.

Produced by Goskino, Moscow, 1923.

Leader: Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Mikhail Kaufman.

**You Give Us the Air!** (*Daesh vozdukh!*)

Second special issue (A film study).

1 reel. 280 metres.

Produced by Goskino, Moscow, 1923.

Leader: Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Mikhail Kaufman.

**You Give Us the Air!** (*Daesh vozdukh!*)

Third special issue (A film study).

1 reel. 280 metres.

Produced by Goskino, Moscow, 1923.

Leader: Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Ivan Beliakov.

Intertitles and diagrams produced by Ivan Beliakov.

The issues exist in the RGAKFD, with the montage mixed up. One of the issues carries the original credit: "Composition and montage by the leader Dziga Vertov. Filmed and edited by Mikhail Kaufman."

**Today** (*Segodnia*)

Animation.

1 reel. 195 metres.

Produced by Goskino, Moscow, 1923.

Director: Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Mikhail Kaufman.

Design: Ivan Beliakov, Boris Volkov.

A small fragment (40 seconds) exists in the RGAKFD.

**Automobile (GUM)** (*Avtomobil [GUM]*)

Advertising film commissioned by GUM (State Department Store in Moscow)

2 reels. 600 metres.

Produced by Goskino, Moscow, 1923.

Directed by Dziga Vertov and Mikhail Doronin.

No extant prints of this film are known.

**Soviet Toys** (*Sovetskie igrushki*)

Graphic animation.

1 reel. 350 metres.

Produced by Goskino (Kultkino), Moscow, 1924.

Author-Leader: Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Aleksandr Dorn.

Animation Design: Ivan Beliakov, Aleksandr Ivanov.

Exists in the RGAKFD. Prints of this film are available in the West.

**Humoresques** (*Iumoreski*)

Animated short stories: "Grimaces of Paris" ("Grimasy Parizha"), "Poincaré" ("Puankare") "The Ten-Rouble Note" ("Chervonets").

1 reel. 60 metres.

Produced by Goskino (Kultkino), Moscow, 1924.

Screenplay and Direction: Dziga Vertov.

Production Design: Aleksandr Bushkin.

Cameraman: Ivan Beliakov.

Artists: Boris Volkov, Boris Egerev.

Exists in part, in the RGAKFD.

**The 1st of May in Moscow / The 1st of May Celebration in Moscow** (*Pervoe maia v Moskve / Prazdnik pervogo Maia v Moskve*)

1 reel. 403 metres.

Produced by Proletkino, May 1923.

Person in charge of filming: Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Petr Novitsky.

Exists in the RGAKFD.

**Kino-Eye on Its First Reconnaissance: First Episode of the Cycle "Life Off-Guard"** (*Kino-Glaz na pervoi razvedke: pervaiia seriia tsikla "Zhizn vrasplokh"*)

6 reels. 1627 metres.

Produced by Goskino, Moscow, 1924.

Released 31 October 1924.

Author-Director: Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Mikhail Kaufman.

Film Organizer: Abram Kagarlitsky.

Editor: Elizaveta Svilova.

Exists in the RGAKFD.

The subtitle "First Episode" points to Vertov's original plan, according to which this film was supposed to be a six-part documentary series, *Life Off-Guard*.

Prints of *Kino-Eye* are available in the West. For reasons which are unclear, most prints come with an extra two minutes of footage at the end, which looks like a trailer for two films released later. Since this footage cannot be part of the original *Kino-Eye*, it makes sense to omit it when screening.

**The First October without Ilich** (*Pervyi Oktiabr bez Ilicha*)

3 reels. 895 metres.

Produced by Goskino (Kultkino), Moscow, 1925.

Released November 1925

Director (Leader): Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Mikhail Kaufman.

Assistant Director: Elizaveta Svilova.

Exists in the RGAKFD.

**Stride, Soviet!**

**The Moscow Soviet in the Present, Past, and Future / The Moscow Soviet** (*Shagai, Sovet! Mossovet v nastoiashchem, proshlom i budushche / Mossovet*)

Alt. title: **2,000 Metres in the Land of the Bolsheviks** (*2000 metrov v strane bolshevikov*).  
Newsreel.

7 reels. 1650 metres.

Produced by Goskino (Kultkino), Moscow, 1926. Released 23 July 1926.

Author-Leader: Dziga Vertov.

Cameraman: Ivan Beliakov.

Assistant Director: Elizaveta Svilova.

Film Reconnaissance:<sup>4</sup> Ilya Kopalín.

Exists in the RGAKFD. Prints of this film are available in the West.

The *2,000 Metres* alternative title presumably was devised for foreign distribution; but judging from contemporary reviews, it was also used in some Russian prints.

**A Sixth Part of the World. A Kino-Eye Race around the USSR: Export and Import by the State Trading Organization of the USSR** (*Shestaia chast mira. Probeg Kino-Glaza po SSSR: Eksport i Import Gostorga SSSR*)

A film poem.

6 reels. 1718 metres.

Produced by Goskino (Kultkino), Moscow, and Sovkino, Moscow, 1926.

Released 31 December 1926.

Author-Leader: Dziga Vertov.

Assistant Director: Elizaveta Svilova.

Assistant to the Author-Leader and Chief Cameraman: Mikhail Kaufman.

Cameramen: Ivan Beliakov, Samuil Bendersky, Petr Zotov, Nikolai Konstantinov, Aleksandr Lemberg, Nikolai Strukov, Iakov Tolchan.

Film Reconnaissance: Abram Kagarlitsky, Ilya Kopalín, Boris Kudínov.

Exists in the RGAKFD. Prints of this film are available in the West.

According to Dziga Vertov, he also shot an animated advertising study dedicated to *A Sixth Part of the World*, but it has not proved possible to find a copy of it in the RGAKFD.

**The Eleventh Year** (*Odinnadtsatyí*)

Newsreel.

6 reels. 1600 metres.

Produced by VUFKU, the All-Ukrainian Photo-Cinema Directorate, Kiev, 1928.

Released 15 May 1928.

Author-Leader: Dziga Vertov.

Chief Cameraman: Mikhail Kaufman.

Assistant Director: Elizaveta Svilova.

Assistant Cameraman: Konstantin Kuliaev.

Laboratory Technician: I. Kotelnikov.

Exists in the RGAKFD. Prints of this film are available in the West.

**Man with a Movie Camera** (*Chelovek s kinoaparatom*)

A film feuilleton.

6 reels. 1839 metres.

Produced by VUFKU, the All-Ukrainian Photo-Cinema Directorate, Kiev, 1929.

Released 9 April 1929.

Author-Leader: Dziga Vertov.

Chief Cameraman: Mikhail Kaufman.

Assistant Director: Elizaveta Svilova.

Exists in the RGAKFD.

Most of the 35mm prints available in the West lack animated reel numbers, and are not full-frame owing to the fact that they have been printed using sound-film equipment. The full-frame print preserved at the Netherlands Film-museum has the birth-giving shot censored out. Good full-frame 16 mm prints are available in the West (e.g., in David Shepard's collection).

**Three Songs of Lenin** (*Tri pesni o Lenine*)

Silent version. 6 reels. 2100 metres.

Produced by Mezhrabpomfilm, Moscow, 1935.

Released 1935 (first version), 1938 (second version).

Author-Leader: Dziga Vertov.

Cameramen: Dmitrii Surensky, Mark Magidson, Bentsion Monastyrsky.

Assistant Director: Elizaveta Svilova.

The film exists in the RGAKFD in two versions, silent and sound. Only the sound version is available in the West.

The silent version was edited by Vertov after the sound version, in 1935, and differs from it quite strongly in terms of composition and editing, and in the use of particular takes of the same sequences. In 1938 the editor was forced to re-edit his authorial cuts of both the sound and the silent versions.

**Abbreviations**

Narkompros: Narodnyi Komissariat Prosveshcheniia.

Revvoensovet: Revoliutsionnii Voennii Sovet.

RGAKFD: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv kino-foto-dokumentov.

VTsIK: Vsesoiuznyi tsentralnyi ispolnitelnyi komitet.

VFKO: Vserossiiskii foto-kino otdel.

VUFKU: Vseukrainskoe foto-kino upravlenie.

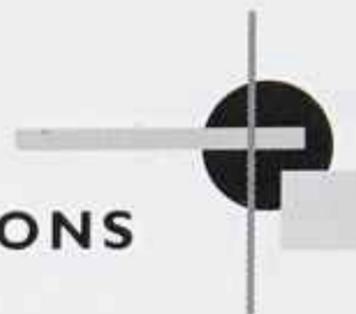
**Notes**

1. The title *Kino-Pravda*, literally meaning "Kino-Truth", signals an association between Vertov's newsreel and the official Party daily *Pravda* (Truth).
2. The production company which issued all the *Kino-Pravdas* was named Goskino (State Cinema Enterprise). This was Russia's state film production com-

pany, freshly transformed from the VFKO (Vserossiiskii foto-kino otdel Narkomprosa), the All-Russia Photo-Cine Department of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros). Some reviewers still continued to call it by its old acronym, VFKO, while others even referred to it as the All-Russia Photo-Cinema Committee (Vserossiiskii foto-kino komitet), confusing it with the Narkompros Film Committee, under which Vertov released his *Kino-Weeks*. All these infrastructures were constantly in flux, and it was no easy task to keep up with the various bureaucratic restructurings and reshufflings; thus the discrepancies and imprecisions regarding production credit references for these films in the texts in this volume and other sources.

3. The documentary section of Goskino.
4. Preparatory research and location scouting.

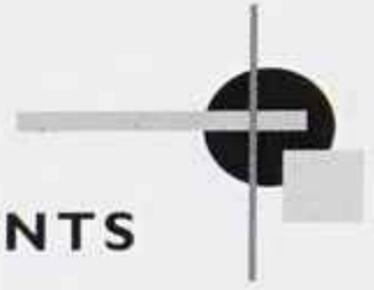
## SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS



- Autograph and typescript of Vertov's poems, pp. 33, 35: Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Vienna.
- Picture-Poems, pp. 36-37: RGALI, Moscow.
- Kino-Week*, p. 39: frame enlargements from *Kino-Week No. 31* (1919); drawings: Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Vienna.
- Camera Shy, pp. 42-43: all, *Kino-Week No. 22* (1918), except the frame enlargement showing Rakovski: *Kino-Week No. 34* (1919).
- Heroes in the Snow, p. 44: frame enlargements from *Kino-Week No. 31* (1919).
- Leninism Rails, pp. 48-49: frame enlargements from the *Lenin Kino-Pravda*; drawing from *Pravda*, 1 January 1925.
- Storming of the Winter Palace, pp. 52-53: frame enlargements from the Swedish compilation film *Russian Journal (Rysk Journal)*; this footage probably comes from *Storming of the Winter Palace (Vziatie zimnego, 1920)*.
- Gan's 13th Experiment, pp. 58-59: *Kino-Fot*, no. 5, 1922.
- Titles, p. 60: frame enlargements from *Lenin Kino-Pravda* (1925).
- Festivities, p. 63: May Day and Photo-Cine Section frame enlargements from *Russian Journal (Rysk Journal)*; the frame enlargements showing the triumphal arch and the children are from *The 2nd Comintern Congress (2-i kongress Komintern, 1920)*.
- Danton, p. 68: frame enlargements from *Kino-Week No. 34* (1919).
- Lenin Dead, pp. 70-71: all, *Lenin Kino-Pravda* (1925), except the frame enlargement showing Lenin dead: *Stride, Soviet!* (1926).
- Rations, p. 74: frame enlargements from *Russian Journal (Rysk Journal)*.
- Kino-Train, p. 76: frame enlargements from *Russian Journal (Rysk Journal)*; this footage probably comes from Vertov's lost 1921 film *The Agit-Train of the All Russia Central Executive Committee*.
- Orators, pp. 78-79: all, *The 2nd Comintern Congress (2-i kongress Komintern, 1920)*, except the frame enlargement showing Kameneva: *Russian Journal (Rysk Journal)*.
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- Processions, p. 85: two frame enlargements from *Russian Journal (Rysk Journal)*; the frame showing the boy holding a star is from an unidentified anti-religious film.
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- Main title, p. 183: drawing from *Sovetskii ekran*, no. 7, 1927; frame enlargement from *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926).
- Dissolves, p. 197: frame enlargements from *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926).
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- Giant Crane, p. 317: frame enlargements from *The Eleventh Year* (1928).
- Alice, p. 320: frame enlargements from *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), except the frame showing the Cyclopean blacksmith, which is from *The Eleventh Year* (1928).
- Intertitles Undercover, p. 330: frame enlargements from *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).
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- Posters, p. 357: frame enlargements from *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).
- Simultaneity, p. 370: frame enlargements from *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).
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- Leftovers, pp. 400-401: frame enlargements from *The Eleventh Year* (1928).

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This index comprises film titles, personal names, production companies for which Dziga Vertov worked, and periodical titles. The production companies can be found under "Vertov, employed at". Indexed periodicals include all those used as sources for the published texts, or mentioned in the course of the book.

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Le Giornate del Cinema Muto  
c/o La Cineteca del Friuli  
Via Bini, 50  
33013 Gemona (UD) Italy

[gcm@cinetecadelfriuli.org](mailto:gcm@cinetecadelfriuli.org)  
[www.cinetecadelfriuli.org/gcm](http://www.cinetecadelfriuli.org/gcm)

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While Dziga Vertov's uncompromising writings and his experimental features, such as *Man with a Movie Camera*, are known and discussed in the West, less is known about the other films he made in the 1920s, and still less about the response they provoked in the Soviet Union and abroad. Vertov liked to call his films and his essays his "bombs" – and indeed the public reaction to them was nothing short of explosive. It is not easy to find another figure in film history whose every step could attract as much attention, from friend and foe alike.

This book is a collection of little-known writings by and about Vertov. It follows the development of his work and opinions from 1917 to 1930, and chronicles contemporary reactions to them – from critics whose names are now forgotten, as well as such prominent personalities as fellow directors Lev Kuleshov and Sergei Eisenstein, artists Aleksandr Rodchenko and Kazimir Malevich, and theorists Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer.

Like Eisenstein, Yuri Tsivian was born in Riga, Latvia, of a Latvian Jewish father and a Russian mother. Currently professor of film at the Art History Department of the University of Chicago, in 1989 he collaborated on the *Giornate del Cinema Muto's* revelatory retrospective of pre-revolutionary Russian cinema, and co-edited the associated book, *Silent Witnesses: Russian Cinema, 1908-1919*. His other books include *Istoricheskaja recepcija kino* (Zinatne, 1991) translated as *Early Cinema in Russia and Its Cultural Reception* (Routledge, 1994; Chicago University Press, 1998) and *Ivan the Terrible* (BFI, 2002). He is also involved in the restoration and video mastering of silent films. His CD-ROM *Immaterial Bodies: Cultural Anatomy of Early Russian Films* (USC, 2000) received the British Academy of Film and Television's 2001 award for the best interactive learning project.

