

successful as they may be, but in the labor and thoughts of the working class itself.

The experiment is made difficult by our technical backwardness. Unarmed technically, but relying upon the difficult experimentation of nineteen *Kinopravdas*, we nevertheless hope, beginning with this first work, to open the eyes of the masses to the connection (not one of kisses or detectives) between the social and visual phenomena interpreted by the camera.

Proceeding from the material to the film-object (and not from the film-object to the material), the *kinoks* consider it wrong, in beginning work, to present a so-called scenario. In the years to come, the scenario as a product of literary composition will completely disappear.

Allowing, however, for possible reservations on the part of Goskino or Narkompros concerning our ability to construct a film-object correct in ideology and technique without a previously approved scenario, I enclose, with this memorandum, a sketch of the cameras' offensive and an approximate list of characters and places.

1923

## On the Significance of Nonacted Cinema

We maintain that despite the comparatively long existence of cinematography as a concept, despite the large number of dramas—psychological, pseudorealistic, pseudohistorical, detective—that have been released . . . despite the infinity of movie theaters that have opened; in its present form, cinema does not exist and its main objectives have not been realized.

**Narkompros.** The People's Commissariat of Education, created by the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party in October 1917. It was charged with the enormous task of reorganizing education according to socialist methods and aims. Narkompros also served as mediator between the regime and the nation's intellectuals. Anatole Lunacharsky, the first and most distinguished Commissar of Education, was a man of exceptional culture, intelligence, and gifts. His energetic and understanding administration of this agency are indissociable from the intensity of the Soviet Union's cultural life during the first postrevolutionary decade—ed.

We venture this statement on the basis of information in our possession concerning work and creative exploration at home and abroad.

What is the reason for this?

The reason is that cinema has been and still is on the wrong track. The cinema of yesterday and today is merely a commercial affair. Cinema's path of development has been dictated solely by considerations of profit. And it's hardly surprising that the extensive commerce in motion pictures—illustrations of novels, romances, Pinkerton serials—has dazzled and attracted production workers.

Every motion picture is a mere literary skeleton covered with a film-skin. At best, some film-fat and film-flesh develop beneath that skin (as, for example, in foreign hits). We never see the film-skeleton, however. Our motion picture is merely the well-known "boneless part" impaled on the aspen stake, the goose quill of a writer.

I'll condense what I've said: we have no film-objects. We have the cohabitation of film-illustrations with theater, literature, with music, with whomever and whatever, whenever, at any price.

I want you to understand me correctly. We would wholeheartedly welcome the use of cinema in the service of every branch of human knowledge. These cinematic possibilities, however, we define as secondary, illustrative. Not for a moment do we forget that a chair is made of wood and not of the varnish covering it. We're well aware that a boot is made of leather and not of the wax which makes it shine.

The horror, the irreparable blunder is that you still consider it your aim to polish someone's literary shoes (they have high French heels, if the film's a hit) with cinematic wax.

Recently, I think it was at the showing of the seventeenth *Kino-pravda*, a certain filmmaker declared, "This is a disgrace; these are shoemakers, not filmmakers." Alexei Gan, the constructivist, who

**Alexei Gan.** Alexei Gan (1889–1942) was a founding member of the First Working Group of Constructivists. During the immediate postrevolutionary years (1918–1920), he directed the Section of Mass Presentations and Spectacles at the Theatre Section of Narkompros. Closely associated with the Institute of Artistic Culture known as Inkhuk, he turned to the design of architectural and typographical projects, posters, and bookplates in the early 1920s. The author of several important constructivist documents and manifestos, an editor of *LEF*, he was later associated with the journal *Sovremennaia arkhitektura* ("Contemporary Architecture").

was nearby, observed with reason, "If we only had more of these shoemakers, everything would be o.k."

Speaking for the author of *Kinopravda*, I have the honor to announce that he is very flattered by such unconditional recognition as the *first shoemaker of Russian cinema*.

That's better than "artist of Russian cinema."

That's better than "artistic film director."

To hell with shoe wax. To hell with boots that are nothing but shine. Give us boots made of leather.

Match yourself against the first Russian film-shoemakers—the kinoks.

We, the shoemakers of cinematography say to you, the shoe shiners, that we do not recognize your seniority in the making of film-objects. And if the claim to seniority has any advantage, then the rightful claim is entirely ours.

However insignificant our practical achievement, nevertheless it's more than your years of *nothing*.

We were the first to make *film-objects* with our bare hands—perhaps clumsy, awkward, lacking shine, perhaps somewhat flawed, but still necessary objects, vital objects, aimed at life and needed in life.

We define the film-object in these words: *the montage "I see."*

The film-object is a finished *étude* of absolute vision, rendered exact and deepened by all existing optical instruments, principally by the movie camera experimenting in space and time.

The field of vision is life;

the material for montage construction, life;

the sets, life;

the actors, life.

Of course we do not and cannot prohibit artists from drawing pictures, composers from writing for the piano, poets from writing for ladies. Let them have their fun.

But these are toys (though they may be skillfully made), they're not what counts.

One of the chief accusations leveled at us is that we are not intelligible to the masses.

Even if one allows that some of our work is difficult to understand, does that mean we should not undertake serious exploratory work at all?

If the masses need light propaganda pamphlets, does that mean

they don't need the serious articles of Engels, Lenin? . . . The LENIN of Russian cinema may appear in your midst today, but you will not allow him to work because the results of his production will seem new and incomprehensible . . .

Our work is not in that situation, however, We have not in fact created a single work more incomprehensible to the masses than any given film-drama. On the contrary, by establishing a clear visual link between subjects, we have significantly weakened the importance of intertitles; in so doing we have brought the movie screen closer to the uneducated viewers, which is particularly important at present.

And as if in mockery of their literary nursemaids, the workers and peasants turn out to be brighter than their self-appointed nursemaids. . . .

Thus, two extremities of viewpoint are present. One—that of the kinoks—has as its goal the organization of *real life*; the other, an orientation toward the propagandistic-artistic drama of emotional experiences and adventures.

All state and private funds, all technical and material resources are mistakenly being poured into the latter end of the scales, into the propagandistic-artistic.

As for us, we're grabbing hold of work as hitherto, with our bare hands, and we confidently await our turn to control production and win our victory.

1923

## ***Kinoglaz***

(A NEWSREEL IN SIX PARTS)

The solid front of the film-drama has been broken by *Kinopravda*.

This breach must not be:  
plugged up with the NEP stopper,  
filled in with the litter of compromise.

The recent appearance of numerous surrogates—motion pictures done in the style of the kinoks (the workers of *Kinopravda*)—compels them to begin, somewhat prematurely, a



# **KINO-●-EYE**

**THE WRITINGS OF DZIGA VERTOV**

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

**Annette Michelson**

TRANSLATED BY

**Kevin O'Brien**

## Contents

- Translator's Acknowledgments, xi
- Preface, xiii
- Introduction, xv

### THE WRITINGS OF DZIGA VERTOV

#### From Articles, Public Addresses

- WE: Variant of a Manifesto, 5
- The Fifth Issue of *Kinopravda*, 10
- Kinoks: A Revolution, 11
- On the Organization of a Film Experiment Station, 21
- Advertising Films, 25
- On the Significance of Newsreel, 32
- Kinopravda* [1923], 33
- On the Film Known as *Kinoglaz*, 34
- On the Significance of Nonacted Cinema, 35
- Kinoglaz* (A Newsreel in Six Parts), 38
- The Birth of Kino-Eye, 40
- On *Kinopravda*, 42
- Artistic Drama and Kino-Eye, 47
- The Essence of Kino-Eye, 49
- To the Kinoks of the South, 50
- Kinopravda* and *Radiopravda*, 52
- The Same Thing from Different Angles, 57
- The Factory of Facts, 58
- Kino-Eye, 60
- On *The Eleventh Year*, 79
- The Man with a Movie Camera*, 82