

The Film Factory

Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939

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Ian Christie

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London and New York

In memory of
Leonid Zakharovich Trauberg
(1902–1990)

Eccentric
elder statesman
enfant terrible
and enthusiast

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production of theatrical art, is the old cinematograph, the cinematograph of the capitalist system of exploitation, the cinematograph of the private owner.

Cinema, as the quintessentially labouring apparatus of social technology, as the extended 'organs' of society, is a matter for the proletarian state.

Those are the two paths that are being followed on the other side of the screen.

The cinematograph or cinema?

Yesterday the cinematograph.

Tomorrow cinema!

Today we are clearing the path for tomorrow.

20 Lev Kuleshov: Art, Contemporary Life and Cinema

Source: L. V. Kuleshov, 'Iskusstvo, sovremennaya zhizn' i kinematografiya', *Kino-Fot*, no. 1, 25-31 August 1922, p. 2.

Contemporary art is in a hopeless blind alley. It is amateurish and appears to be the product of an extreme form of dilettantism. Try going to an exhibition of contemporary paintings, reading or listening to contemporary poets and writers or going to the theatre and you will have no problem detecting the triumph of dilettantism and amateurism in contemporary art. For it is only amateurs who could think of making a good product - good art - without learning their craft, without knowing how to master their material, without the proper instruments, exclusively on the basis of undue familiarity. Only amateurs could work on the preparation of a product without a scientific method of studying all the laws of its production. In so far as an artist has to deal with raw material and with methods of processing that material, he must study precisely its qualities and characteristics and all the means of processing it.

Contemporary art has no organic connection whatsoever with contemporary life.

The old art undoubtedly had that connection. (At any rate to a considerably greater degree than art nowadays.)

The attempt to establish a connection between contemporary art and life by means of all kinds of meetings, boards and commissions is simply absurd. Commissions can only establish that that kind of work is unnecessary.

Imagine, in fact, that contemporary works of art were not of bad quality and that two thousand years hence someone were to study our art. This person would learn nothing about our life, our psychology, our essence, or about us as human beings. He would be forced to turn to our technology, to our engineering, in order to find out

about us.

Contemporary man will never be satisfied by theatre, painting, literature or poetry. This is because our life does not need contemporary art and it does not need our life. People who study old museums produce perfectly valid work. People who love old art in their own life, who bewail the existence of the telephone and dream of the life of the Ancient World or the 18th century, are abnormal. The normal contemporary man is satisfied by contemporary art only when he makes demands of it that are purely matters of taste, only when he cultivates within himself some form of 'aestheticism', as it is now fashionable to say. But we know what an incredible diversity, what an incredible chaos, reigns in the tastes of our contemporaries. Tastes vary. Varying tastes demand varying products.

Hence art cannot be drawn out of this blind alley.

THE BLIND ALLEY IS INESCAPABLE.

Contemporary art, in the sense in which it exists, must either disappear completely or flow into new forms. I cannot determine what will happen to it.

But there is *no doubt* that all the energies, all the methods and all the knowledge of the laws of time and space that are intended to apply to art, must be channelled in *the way that is most organically connected with the life of our epoch.*

The plan of work is:

- 1/. Precision in time.
- 2/. Precision in space.
- 3/. Reality of raw material.
- 4/. Precision in organisation.

(The cohesion of the elements among themselves and their order.)

What is this? *IT IS CINEMA*. Not cinema that is amateurishly psychological, not cinema that fixes theatrical action, but natural cinema that is regularly ordered in time and space, a cinema that fixes organised human and natural raw material and organises the viewer's attention at the moment of projection through montage. That is the most important work at the present time. The knowledge of scholars and the enthusiasm and courage of artists must be

directed to cinema.

Down with the Russian psychological picture. For the moment, welcome *American* thrillers and stunts. Expect pictures that are based on a natural script with subjects that are naturally constructed in time and space and with the action of the necessary people, the *models*. The day when a picture like that is shown will be a glorious day for many people, *because in it they will find what in art they have lost forever.*

21

Dziga Vertov: We. A Version of a Manifesto

Source: D. Vertov, 'My. Variant manifesta', *Kino-Fot*, no. 1, 25-31 August 1922, pp. 11-12.

WE call ourselves *Cine-Eyes* as distinct from 'cinematographers' - that flock of junk-dealers who do rather well peddling their rags.

We see no link between the cunning and calculation of the profiteers and the genuine *Cine-Eye*.

We think the psychological Russo-German film-drama, weighed down with the apparitions and memories of childhood, is absurd.

The *Cine-Eye* thanks the American adventure film with its ostentatious dynamism, the dramatisations of American Pinkertonism, for their rapid shot changes and close-ups. They are good, but disorderly: not based on a precise study of movement. A cut above the psychological drama but nonetheless insubstantial. A cliché. A copy of a copy.

WE declare the old films, the romantic, the theatricalised etc., to be leprous.

- Don't come near!
- Don't look!
- Mortally dangerous!
- Contagious.

WE affirm the future of cinema art by rejecting its present.

The death of 'cinematography' is necessary so that the art of cinema may live. WE call for the *acceleration of its death*.

We protest against the *mixing* of the arts that many call synthesis. The mixing of bad paints, even those ideally matched to the colours of the spectrum, produces not white but dirt.

We are for a synthesis at the *zenith* of achievement of every art form - but not before.

WE are purging the *Cine-Eye* of its hangers-on, of music, literature and theatre, we are seeking our own rhythm, one that has not been stolen from elsewhere, and we are finding it in the movement of objects.

WE invite you:

- away -

from the sweet embraces of the romance, from the poison of the psychological novel, from the clutches of the theatre of adultery, with your backsides to music,

- away -

into the open, into four dimensional space (3 + time), in search of our own material, metre and rhythm.

The 'psychological' prevents man from being as precise as a stop-watch and hampers his desire for kinship with the machine.

In the art of movement we have no reason to devote our attention principally to contemporary man.

In the face of the machine we are ashamed of man's inability to control himself, but what are we to do if we find the unerring ways of electricity more exciting than the disorderly haste of active people and the demoralising inertia of the passive.

For us the joy of dancing saws in a sawmill is more familiar and easier to understand than the joy of human dancing.

WE exclude for the time being man as an object of filming because of his inability to control his own movements.

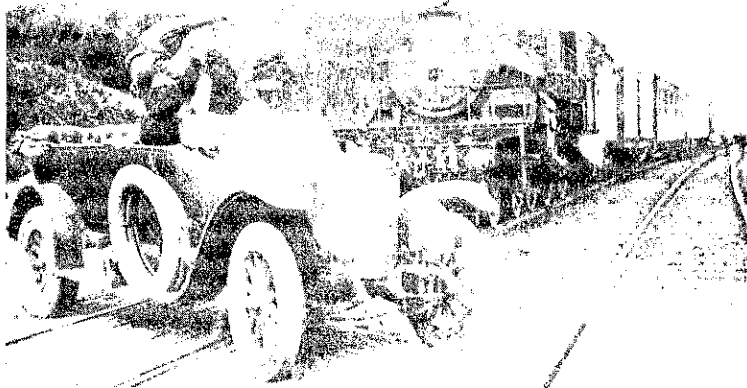
Our path - from a stumbling citizen through

ЭКЦЕН ТРИЗМ

ГРИГОРИЙ
КОЗИНЦЕВ
ГЕОРГИЙ
КРЫЖИЦКИЙ
ЛЕОНИД
ТРАУБЕРГ
СЕРГЕЙ
ЮТКЕВИЧ

1922

ЭКЦЕНТРОПОЛИС
(БЫВШ. ПЕТРОГРАД)



23 (top left) Cover for the *Eccentrism* manifesto, published by the FEKS group in Petrograd in 1922.
24 (bottom) 'Down with the Russian psychological picture. For the moment, welcome American thrillers and stunts'. Kuleshov's experience making *On the Red Front* during the Civil War in 1920, helped shape his new aesthetic of 'Americanism' (see Document no. 20).
25 (top right) Dziga Vertov in early 1921.

the poetry of the machine to the perfect electric man.

By revealing the souls of machines, by making the worker love his lathe, the peasant his tractor, the driver his engine -

we bring creative joy to all mechanical labour,
we bring men closer to machines,
we train the new men.

The new man, liberated from unwieldiness and awkwardness, with the precise, light movements of the machine, will be the grateful object of the filming.

WE openly acknowledge the rhythm of the machine, the rapture of mechanical labour, the perception of the beauty of chemical processes, we hymn earthquakes, compose cine-poems to the flame and to power stations, revel in the movements of the comets and meteors and the gestures of the searchlights dazzling the stars.

Everyone who loves his art seeks the essence of his own technique.

The unstrung nerves of cinematography need a strict system of precise movements.

Metre, tempo, type of movement, its exact disposition in relation to the axes of the shot's

coordinates, and possibly also to the axes of global coordinates (three dimensions + the fourth - time) must be studied and learned by every creative worker in the field of the cinema.

Necessity, precision and speed - three requirements for movement that is worth filming and projecting.

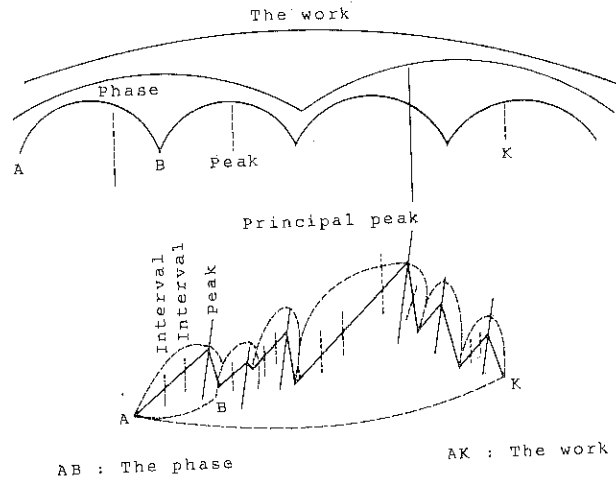
A geometric extract of movement through an exciting succession of images is a requirement for montage.

The Cine-Eye is the art of organising the necessary movements of objects in space and time into a rhythmic artistic whole, in accordance with the characteristics of the whole and the internal rhythm of each object.

The material - the elements of the art of movement - is composed of the *intervals* (the transitions from one movement to another) and by no means of the movements themselves. It is they (the intervals) that draw the action to a kinetic resolution.

The organisation of movement is the organisation of its elements, i.e. of the intervals, into phrases.

In every phrase there is a rise, a peak and a falling off of movement (manifested in varying degrees). **THE WORK**



A work is constructed from phrases just as a phrase is constructed from intervals of movement.

A Cine-Eye who has conceived a film poem or a fragment, must know exactly how to make a note of it in order to give it life on the screen if favourable technical conditions arise.

The most complete script will not of course replace this kind of note just as a libretto does not replace a pantomime or literary accounts of Scriabin's⁵⁰ works do not give us any idea of his music.

We must have graphic signs for movement so that we can represent a dynamic exercise on a sheet of paper.

WE are searching for cine-scales.

WE fall and rise with the rhythm of movements that have been slowed down and speeded up,

rushing from us, past us, towards us,
in circles, straight lines, ellipses,
to the right and the left, with plus and minus signs;

movements curve, straighten out, divide, split, multiply again and again, soundlessly

shooting through space.

The cinema is also the *art of inventing the movement* of objects in space responding to the demands of science, the incarnation of the inventor's dream, whether he is a scientist, an artist, an engineer or a carpenter, the realisation by the Cine-Eye of what cannot be realised in life.

Drawings in motion. Blueprints in motion. Projects for the future. The theory of relativity on the screen.

WE welcome the ordered fantasy of movement.

Our eyes, turning like propellers, take off into the future on the wings of hypotheses.

WE believe that the moment is at hand when we shall be able to toss into space hurricanes of movement reined in by the lassos of our tactic.

Long live *dynamic geometry*, the race of points, lines, planes, volumes.

Long live the poetry of the propelling and propelled machine, the poetry of levers, wheels and steel wings, the iron screech of movements, the dazzling grimaces of red-hot jets.

22

Lev Kuleshov: Americanism

Source: L. V. Kuleshov, 'Amerikanshchina', *Kino-Fot*, no. 1, 25-31 August 1922, pp. 14-15.

Anyone who, from 1914 to the present day, has systematically visited cinemas, watched all the films that have been released by both Russian and foreign studios, and observed which films most effectively force the public to react to cinema action, will have no difficulty in stating that:

1. *Foreign-made films are more popular than Russian ones.*
2. *The best foreign films are American-made detective pictures.*

The public is especially receptive to American films. A successful move by the hero, a desperate chase, a daring fight causes whistles of delight, howls and whoops in the cheap seats and tense interested figures jump up from their seats so that they can see the interesting action better.

Superficial people and deep-thinking officials are terribly frightened of Americanism and detective films and they explain away the success of these pictures by the unusual depravity and the

poor 'tastes' of the younger generation and the people who sit in the cheap seats.

There is no point in saying anything here about the unashamedly literary subjects of the films or about the depravity of the audience.

We should focus the main attention of our observations on the audience in the cheap seats because the majority of the audience in the more expensive seats goes to the cinema for psychopathic or hysterical motives.

In cinema there have never been so many of the refined artistic constructions or complex 'investigations' that might be unintelligible to a less cultured audience: the reaction of the spontaneous audience to basic primitive impressions is much more striking, more interesting for the current epoch.

In detective literature, and to an even greater extent in the American detective script, the basic element of the plot is an intensity in the build-up of the action - the dynamism of the construction - *and for cinema there is no more damaging manifes-*

tation of literariness than psychologising, i.e. the external inertia of the plot.

The success of American films lies in their maximum degree of cinema specificity, in the maximum amount of movement, in primitive heroism, in an organic link with contemporary life.

Secondly: the Americans, thanks to the way of life in their country and to their particular commercial methods, try to show how much plot you can get into a very short film and they strive to achieve the maximum number of scenes and the maximum effect with the minimum waste of film.

Naturally this means that the length (in metres and in time) of the individual scenes that go into the composition of every film is reduced to a minimum and that is why the scenes in an American picture follow one another more rapidly than in a Russian one.

In attempting as far as possible to reduce the length of each constituent part of a film, the length of each individual sequence, the Americans have found a means of resolving complex scenes simply by shooting only *the element of movement without which the necessary action would not take place at a particular moment*, and the camera is placed in such a position vis-à-vis nature that the very theme of a particular movement is conveyed more rapidly and in a simpler and more intelligible form to the audience and perceived by them. (The 'close-up' is an individual cell of film.)

Thus the sum of the constituent parts of an American film is — thanks to the method of shooting each individual scene in a whole series of the moments that constitute it — still further enhanced.

If we study American films and juxtapose our observations with the results of the unsuccessful attempts to achieve greater 'cinema specificity' and not a reproduction of 'theatricality' in films by using the well-known methods of our Russian directors, we cannot fail to appreciate the particularly strong impression left by films that are consciously composed of combinations of a series of rapidly changing scenes. Cinema is not able to register every individual scene (or fragment). The method of transcending cinematic raw material, the essence of cinema, lies in composition, the change from one filmed fragment to another. In

organising the effect the important thing on the whole is not what has been filmed in a particular fragment, but how one fragment replaces another in the film, how they are constructed.

WE MUST LOOK FOR THE ORGANISATIONAL BASIS OF CINEMA, NOT WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THE FILMED FRAGMENT, BUT IN THE WAY THESE FRAGMENTS RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER.

In order to clarify what I have said let me point out that in any construction from raw material the most important element is that of organisation: it clarifies the relationships of the parts and the raw material and their organic, spatial and temporal connection. The juxtaposition and the interrelationships of the various elements reveal more clearly and convincingly the essence and the significance both of each element in isolation and of the construction as a whole.

The same is true in cinema: in the combination of filmed fragments the important thing is the dependence (the relationship) of the first filmed fragment on the second and this dependence is the principal organisational element in the construction of a film.

We must observe that, as work increases in cinema on the principles of the expression of its essence in the relationship between the filmed fragments, the first lesson of American pictures is often forgotten: the concentration of the necessary movement in an individual shot and the compilation from these concretely expressed fragments of a single scene played out before the camera. This has particular significance for the achievement of regulated cinematic construction.

This kind of method is technically known as 'American shots' and joining together the fragments that constitute the film is called MONTAGE.

Genuine cinema is a montage of 'American shots' and the essence of cinema, its method of achieving maximum effect, is montage.

Because the field of similar interpretations of cinema is drawn from a selection of American films it is natural that these films should appear to be 'classics' to film innovators, and our enemies designate our explorations in cinema with a word that for them has an 'anti-artistic' meaning — AMERICANISM.

Sergei Eisenstein: The Montage of Attractions

Source: S. M. Eizenshtein, 'Montazh attraktsionov', *Lef*, 1923, no. 3 (June/July), pp. 70-1, 74-5.

(On the production of A. N. Ostrovsky's *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man* at the Moscow Proletkult Theatre.)⁶¹

I Proletkult's Theatrical Line

In a few words: Proletkult's theatrical programme consists not in 'using the treasures of the past' or in 'discovering new forms of theatre' but in abolishing the very institution of theatre as such and replacing it by a showplace for achievements in the field of the *level of the everyday skills of the masses*. The organisation of workshops and the elaboration of a scientific system to raise this level are the immediate tasks of the Scientific Department of Proletkult in the theatrical field.

The rest we are doing under the rubric 'interim', carrying out the subsidiary, but not the fundamental tasks of Proletkult. This 'interim' has two meanings under the general rubric of revolutionary content:

1. The *figurative-narrative theatre* (static, domestic - the right wing: *The Dawns of Proletkult*, *Lena* and a series of unfinished productions of a similar type. It is the line taken by the former Workers' Theatre of the Proletkult Central Committee).

2. The *agitational theatre of attractions* (dynamic and Eccentric - the left wing). It is the line devised in principle for the Touring Troupe of the Moscow Proletkult Theatre by Boris Arvatov and myself.

This path has already been traced - in outline, but with sufficient precision - in *The Mexican*, a production by the author of the present article and V. S. Smyshlyayev (in the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre).⁶² Later, in our next collaboration (V. Pletnyov's *On the Abyss*)⁶³ we had a complete disagreement on principle that led to a split and subsequently to our working separately, as you can see by *Wise Man* and . . . *The Taming of the Shrew*, not to mention Smyshlyayev's *Theory of Construction of the Stage Show*,⁶⁴ which overlooked all the worthwhile achievements of *The Mexican*.

I feel that I must digress because any review of *Wise Man* that tries to establish a common link with other productions completely ignores *The Mexican* (January-March 1921), whereas *Wise Man* and the whole theory of attractions are a further elaboration and a logical development of my contribution to that production.

3. *Wise Man* was begun in the Touring Troupe (and finished when the two troupes combined) as the first work of agitation based on a new method of structuring a show.

II The Montage of Attractions

This term is being used for the first time. It requires explanation.

Theatre's basic material derives from the audience: the moulding of the audience in a desired direction (or mood) is the task of every utilitarian theatre (agitation, advertising, health education, etc.). The instrument of this process consists of all the parts that constitute the apparatus of theatre (Ostuzhev's⁶⁵ 'chatter' no more than the colour of the prima-donna's tights, a roll on the drums just as much as Romeo's soliloquy, the cricket on the hearth⁶⁶ no less than a salvo under the seats of the auditorium) because, despite their differences, they all lead to one thing - which their presence legitimates - to their common quality of *attraction*.

An attraction (in our diagnosis of theatre) is any aggressive moment in theatre, i.e. any element of it that subjects the audience to emotional or psychological influence, verified by experience and mathematically calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole. These shocks provide the only opportunity of perceiving the ideological aspect of what is being shown, the final ideological conclusion. (The path to knowledge encapsulated



29 (top) *Glumov's Diary*, the short film insert which Eisenstein created for his Proletkult production, *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man*, 1923.
 30 (bottom left) Sergei Eisenstein in 1923.
 31 (bottom right) Members of the Cine-Eye group c. 1923
 From left to right: Elizaveta Svilova, Ilya Kopalín, Boris Kudinov, P. Zotov, I. Bushkin and Mikhail Kaufman, Vertov's brother.

in the phrase, 'Through the living play of the passions', is specific to theatre.)

Emotional and psychological, of course, in the sense of direct reality as employed, for instance, in the Grand Guignol, where eyes are gouged out or arms and legs amputated on stage, or the direct reality of an actor on stage involved through the telephone with a nightmarish event taking place dozens of miles away, or the situation of a drunkard who, sensing his approaching end, pleads for protection and whose pleas are taken as a sign of madness. In this sense and not in the sense of the unravelling of psychological problems where the attraction is the theme itself, existing and taking effect *outside* the particular action, but topical enough. (Most agit-theatres make the mistake of being satisfied with attractions solely of that sort in their productions.)

I regard the attraction as being in normal conditions an independent and primary element in structuring the show, a molecular (i.e. compound) unit of the *effectiveness* of theatre and of *theatre as a whole*. It is completely analogous to Grosz's 'rough sketches',⁶⁷ or the elements of Rodchenko's photo-illustrations.

'Compound'? It is difficult to distinguish where the fascination of the hero's nobility ends (the psychological moment) and where the moment of his personal charm (i.e. his erotic effect) begins. The lyrical effect of a whole series of Chaplin scenes is inseparable from the attractional quality of the specific mechanics of his movements. Similarly, it is difficult to distinguish where religious pathos gives way to sadistic satisfaction in the torture scenes of the mystery plays, and so on.

The attraction has nothing in common with the stunt. The stunt or, more accurately, the trick (it is high time that this much abused term was returned to its rightful place) is a finished achievement of a particular kind of mastery (acrobatics, for the most part) and it is only one kind of attraction that is suitable for presentation (or, as they say in the circus, 'sale'). In so far as the trick is absolute and complete *within itself*, it means the direct opposite of the attraction, which is based exclusively on something relative, the reactions of the audience.

Our present approach radically alters our opportunities in the principles of creating an 'effective structure' (the show as a whole) instead of a static 'reflection' of a particular event dictated by

the theme, and our opportunities for resolving it through an effect that is logically implicit in that event, and this gives rise to a new concept: a free montage with arbitrarily chosen independent (of both the PARTICULAR composition and any thematic connection with the actors) effects (attractions) but with the precise aim of a specific final thematic effect - montage of attractions.

The path that will liberate theatre completely from the yoke of the 'illusory depictions' and 'representations' that have hitherto been the decisive, unavoidable and only possible approach lies through a move to the montage of 'realistic artificialities', at the same time admitting to the weave of this montage whole 'illusory sequences', and a plot integral to the subject, not something self-contained or all-determining but something consciously and specifically determined for a particular purpose, and an attraction chosen purely for its powerful effect.

Since it is not a matter of 'revealing the playwright's purpose', 'correctly interpreting the author' or 'faithfully reflecting an epoch', etc., the attraction and a system of attractions provide the only basis for an effective show. In the hands of every skilled director the attraction has been used intuitively in one way or another, not, of course, on the level of montage or structure but at least in a 'harmonic composition' (from which a whole new vocabulary derives: an 'effective curtain', a 'rich exit', 'a good stunt' etc.) but essentially this has been done only within the framework of the logical plausibility of the subject (it has been 'justified' by the play) and in the main unconsciously and in pursuit of something entirely different (something that had been enumerated at the 'start' of the proceedings). What remains to us in reorganising the system we use to structure a show is merely to shift the focus of attention to the essential (what was earlier regarded as attendant decoration but is in fact the principal messenger of the abnormal intentions of a production and is not logically connected with the run-of-the-mill reverence of literary tradition), *to establish this particular approach as a production method* (which, since the autumn of 1922, has been the work of the Proletkult Workshops).

The school for the montageur is cinema and, principally, music-hall and circus because (from the point of view of form) putting on a good show means constructing a strong music-hall/circus

programme that derives from the situations found in the play that is taken as a basis.

As an example here is a list of the sections of numbers in the epilogue to *Wise Man*:

1/. The hero's explanatory monologue. 2/. A fragment from a detective film. (A classification of 1/., the theft of the diary). 3/. An Eccentric music-hall entrée (the bride and her three rejected suitors – all one person in the play – in the role of best men: a melancholy scene reminiscent of the song 'Your hands smell of incense' and 'May I be punished by the grave' (we intended that the bride would have a xylophone and this would be played on six rows of bells, the officers' buttons). 4/.5/.6/. Three parallel two-phrased clowning entrées (the theme: payment for organising the wedding). 7/. An entrée with a star (the aunt) and three officers (the theme: the restraint of the rejected suitors), punning (by reference to a horse) on a triple volte number on a saddled horse (on the impossibility of bringing it into the room, traditionally, in 'triple harness'). 8/. Good agit-songs ('The priest had a dog') accompanied by a rubber priest like a dog. The theme: the start of the wedding ceremony. 9/. A break in the action (A paper-boy's voice announcing that the hero is leaving). 10/. The villain appears in a mask. A fragment from a comedy film. (A résumé of five acts of the play summarised. The theme: the publication of the diary). 11/. The continuation of the (interrupted) action in another grouping (a simultaneous wedding with the three rejected suitors). 12/.

Anti-religious songs ('Allah-Verdi' – a punning theme tune on the need to bring in a mullah because of the large number of suitors that one bride is marrying) from the choir and a new character used only in this scene, a soloist dressed as a mullah. 13/. General dancing. Some play with a poster inscribed: 'Religion is the opium of the people.' 14/. A farcical scene. (The bride and her three suitors are packed into a box and pots are smashed against the lid.) 15/. The marital trio – a parody of life. (The song: 'Who here is young?'). 16/. A precipice. The hero's return. 17/. The hero's winged flight beneath the big top (the theme: suicide in despair). 18/. A break. The villain's return. The suicide is held up. 19/. A sword fight (the theme: enmity). 20/. An agit-entrée involving the hero and the villain on the theme of NEP. 21/. An act on a sloping wire (crossing from the arena to the balcony over the audience's heads. The theme: 'leaving for Russia'). 22/. A clowning parody of this number (with the hero). Descent from the wire. 23/. A clown descends the same wire from the balcony holding on by his teeth. 24/. The final entrée with two clowns throwing water over one another (as per tradition), finishing with the announcement: 'The End'. 25/. A volley of shots beneath the seats of the auditorium as a finale. The connecting features of the numbers, if there is no direct transition, are used as linking elements: they are handled with different arrangements of equipment, musical interludes, dancing, pantomime, carpet-clowns.

31

Dziga Vertov: The Cine-Eyes. A Revolution

Source: D. Vertov, 'Kinoki. Perevorot', *Lef*, 1923, no. 3 (June/July), pp. 135–43.

... I only wanted to establish that what we have so far done in cinema is 100 per cent mistaken and the direct opposite of what we should be doing ...

Dziga Vertov.

FROM OUR PROCLAMATION AT
THE BEGINNING OF 1922

... You, the cinematographers:

directors *without a cause* and artists *without a cause*,
confused cameramen
and scriptwriters *scattered* across the world,
you, the patient public of the cinemas with
the staying-power of mules burdened by the
experiences that have been placed before you,
you, the impatient owners of the cinemas that
have not yet gone bust, *greedily picking up the*
crumbs from the German or, more rarely, the
American table –
you are waiting

their historic sequence, with their similarity of ritual. The cinema amuses, educates, strikes the imagination by images, and liberates you from the need of crossing the Church door. The cinema

is a great competitor not only of the public-house, but of the Church. Here is an instrument which we must secure at all costs!

33

Russfilm Script Competition

Source: Advertisement in *Zrelishcha*, no. 54, September 1923, p. 13.

The newly established photographic and cinematographic industrial limited company, 'Russfilm', announces a big competition for ideas and scripts and invites both Russian and foreign authors to enter.

The competition is open both to original scripts and to adaptations from Russian and world literature. This gives authors great scope in their choice of subject. The theme may reflect the past and present of revolutionary and old-world Russia or contemporary life in either a realistic or a romantic treatment. But we do require fullness of content, clarity and entertainment in the plot, drawn in cheerful and wholesome tones, complexity of action unfolding within the framework of the beauties of nature, and a variety of experiences for the heroes.

We shall accept both fully elaborated scripts and short scripts and plot outlines but the main criterion for the award of the prize will be the degree to which the author has elaborated his script and the breadth with which he has treated his particular theme.

THE THEMES MAY BE:

- 1 The Russian folk epic.
- 2 Historical and epic tales with a heroic flavour.
- 3 The everyday life of the workers and peasants past and present.
- 4 Contemporary everyday life (not workers' and peasants').
- 5 Modernised daily life.
- 6 The everyday life of Nepmen.
- 7 Adventure films and films of everyday life 'on a USSR-wide scale'.
- 8 Wholesome revolutionary detective films.
- 9 Utopian films, such as a look into a happier future.

These themes may be treated in either a dramatic, tragi-comic or purely comic form.

The board of 'Russfilm' reserves the exclusive right to film the prize-winning ideas.

THE CONDITIONS OF COMPETITION

- 1 The scripts must be typewritten or written clearly by hand.
- 2 Every manuscript must bear the author's mark, with no reference to his name or surname.
- 3 The name, surname and patronymic and exact address and telephone number must be attached to the manuscript in a specially printed envelope with the author's same mark.

The deadline for submission is no later than 15 October 1923.

THREE PRIZES WILL BE AWARDED TO THE BEST SCRIPTS:

FIRST PRIZE	1,500 gold roubles
SECOND PRIZE	1,000 gold roubles
THIRD PRIZE	500 gold roubles

The Jury will consist of: Chairman: A. V. Lunacharsky, Chairman of the Artistic Council of 'Russfilm'. Members: V. N. Meshcheryakov, Yu. Yurin, F. N. Shipulinsky, S. Gorodetsky, V. A. Turin. The Secretary of the Jury will be Yu. N. Ginzburg.

Manuscripts should be sent to: The Artistic Bureau, 'Russfilm', Mokhovaya 26, Moscow.

The results of the competition will be announced no later than 15 November 1923.

Declaration of the Association of Revolutionary Cinematography

Source: *Pravda*, 27 February 1924.

The colossal significance of cinema as a powerful ideological weapon in the struggle for communist culture is indisputable.

It is an inexcusable historical incongruity that in the world's first Soviet Socialist state cinema has not so far been utilised in this capacity.

Seven years after October revolutionary cinema does not exist.

While, in the bourgeois countries of Europe and America, cinema, with its immense technical and artistic resources, serves the ruling classes by distracting the proletariat from revolution and dimming the popular consciousness, in our country we have not even achieved a resolution of the fundamental questions of organisation and production.

The nationalised studios are either idle or working at less than ten per cent of their capacity. The films released do not, in the overwhelming majority of cases, meet the ideological and artistic needs of the proletariat. There is no scientific or educational cinema. Our screens are packed with productions from the bourgeois West.

The time has come to raise the question of creating a revolutionary cinema and of finding the means to develop it.

Bearing in mind the fragmentation of our limited resources and having recognised the need to initiate a militant campaign for the rapid organisation of a revolutionary cinema, the action group of active film workers deems it opportune to form an Association of Revolutionary Cinematography.

The action group considers the fundamental tasks of the Association to be as follows:

1 Drawing the attention of broad Party and

- 2 Soviet public opinion to cinema questions.
- 2 Exerting pressure on film-producing organisations with a view to correcting their ideological and artistic line.
- 3 Preparing the ground for the organisation of a broad all-Union Society of Friends of the Soviet Cinema [ODSK].
- 4 Working out measures aimed at raising the qualifications of members and creating new cadres of film workers.
- 5 Organising a campaign to create scientific, educational and rural cinemas.
- 6 Organising grouped units of film workers in the separate branches of production to examine cinema's problems on a scientific and practical basis.
- 7 Establishing links with professional and scientific organisations in the USSR and abroad that are interested in film work.

All active film workers who share the platform of 'Cinema is the most powerful weapon in the struggle for communist culture' and who are ready to participate actively in the resolution of the tasks we have set out are invited to join us.

Action Group:

B. Martov, I. Kobozev, N. Lebedev, A. Goldobin, V. Erofeyev, B. Gusman, M. Koltsov, N. Plastinin, A. Razumny, A. Anoshchenko, A. Ermolayev, Kh. Khersonsky, Ya. Dvoretzky, M. Levidov, N. Dobrokhotov, P. Voyevodin, L. Kuleshov, L. Nikulin, M. Smelyanov, V. Blyum, N. Bravko, A. Retling, I. Trainin, Ya. Yakovlev, B. Kotsyn, Eisenstein, E. Beskin, S. Gusev, A. Goldman, Gorshkov, I. Sychev, V. Kasyanov, B. Mikhin, E. Ivanov, Erde, B. Romashov.

which were successful with the philistine public, have given inspiration to our reactionary film makers. They do not even want to hear about a film that reflects the Revolution: they think that the classical repertoire should furnish the basis of our cinema's work.

A group of revolutionary workers in cinema

is now joining together for an organised rejection of this trend. The battle has begun. Its outcome will to a significant extent depend on the Party's final say on this matter. We are convinced that the Party will speak its mind and that the campaign against Soviet films will be halted.

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Béla Balázs: The Future of Film

Source: B. Balash, 'O budushchem fil'my', *Kinogazeta*, 6 July 1926.

Film can become a work of art only when photography itself ceases to be mere *reproduction* and becomes the *work itself*. When the work, the decisive creative expression of the emotions and the spirit, is realised not in staging and acting but *through the mediation of the photograph in actual shots*.

When the cameraman who does in fact make the picture also becomes its author, the poet of the work, the real film artist for whom acting and staging are the mere 'occasion' to which he relates, like a painter to a landscape (preferably the most beautiful one!), to a life only through his brush in a work of art, in the expression of his spirit. As long as the cameraman is last in line, cinema will remain the last of the arts. But the reverse is also true!

In insisting on the artistic integrity of the photograph itself I by no means have in mind the decorative beauty of the shot which, incidentally, you encounter very often and which is not infrequently accorded much greater significance than it deserves. The decorative charm of individual shots gives them something that is statically pictorial, immobile and wrapped up in itself: their 'beauty', as if petrified, is killed by a headlong rush of events in the form of a series of 'living pictures' through which the film as a whole staggers staccato fashion from one pictorial shot to another. Whereas the whole essence of cinema lies in the scope of the general rhythm of the passing events of real life.

No! I have in mind the hidden symbolic expressiveness, the poetic significance of the shot that has nothing to do with 'decorativeness' or 'beauty', that is not produced either by play or by the object (subject) of the photograph but is created exclusively by the methods and possibilities of photography.

I want to explain this through two recent examples, two wonderful shots from *Battleship Potemkin*.

The enthusiasm of the population of Odessa is shown by the increasing rhythm of the groupings of the enthusiastic masses and you begin to wonder: where do we go now? How can they possibly show more enthusiasm, joy or ecstasy?

Suddenly you see a sumptuous picture. Like a hymn of ecstasy that resoundingly interrupts what has gone before you see the skiffs sailing to meet the battleship. According to the plot they are carrying foodstuffs to the mutinous sailors. In the film it seems as if they are hurrying towards them with millions of hearts.

This delicate winged flight of hundreds of billowing sails evokes an image of the *collective display* of enthusiasm, joy, love and hope that no single face, even that of the greatest artiste, could express. It is not the plot motif but the photograph, the photograph itself taken beyond the bounds of the greatest lyricism and of such powerful *figurative* and poetic force that you can scarcely compare poetry itself with it!

It is in this *hidden figurative quality* of the shot, that has nothing in common with 'decorative' beauty, that the creative poetic opportunities for the cameraman lie concealed.

Then we see the sailing-vessels filmed from the deck. As if by some command they all lower their sails at once. The logical 'content' is that the boats have stopped near the battleship. The action of the picture suggests that a hundred sails, a hundred banners have been lowered before the hero. It is this figurative quality of the pictures that contains their *original poetry, something that can occur only in a film, only through photography*.

For two photographs on the same subject

would be deprived of any symbolic or poetic expressiveness if they were merely part of a vast landscape. Then they would not define the expression or physiognomy of the shot.

It is only through an undoubtedly conscious design that crams the whole shot full to its very edges with sails that these photographs acquire the unity of mimic expression and the significance of gesture that become the depth of experience and the sense of the film. There is not even any room for argument here: the poetic expressiveness of the scene is created not by the motif but by the photography.

But this is the only way that can help cinema

to stop being a servant of art and become an independent art.

People say to me: both the camera positions in *Potemkin* that you have described were determined by the director and were not the original and independent ideas of the cameraman.

So be it. It does not matter in this context who is in charge of the photography. It makes no difference whether the director or the cameraman is the creator of such a work of art. The decisive factor is that *cinema art of this kind emerges only through the lens; it can only be produced through photography.*

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Sergei Eisenstein: Béla Forgets the Scissors

Source: S. Eizenshtein, 'O pozitsii Bela Balasha', *Kino*, 20 July 1926 and 'Bela zabyvaet nozhnitsy', *Kino*, 10 August 1926.

Balázs's article will surprise some people. Without its concluding stipulation: 'The cameraman is the alpha and omega of film.'

We have such respect for foreigners that we might consider this a 'blessing'. The idiots on the Moscow evening paper who accorded recognition to the exercises by young Frenchmen that Ehrenburg brought from Paris have declared it to be a 'revelation'. These are sheer *enfantillages* – 'children's playthings' – based on the photographic possibilities of the photographic apparatus. I am not exaggerating when I say that: if we have these 'children's playthings' today, tomorrow they will be used to refurbish the formal methods of a whole branch of art (for instance, the 'absolute': the plotless film of Picabia, Léger or Chomette).

We are taking our conviction that light can come only from the West to the point of absurdity.

Professor Meller journeyed to London, to the egg market. To seek out standard eggs.

He found unusual ones.

A search began.

Which farms, which ranches, which plantations? Where did this unusual breed of hens come from? Through a chain of Dutch egg wholesalers, agents, contractors and intermediaries they were traced to . . . the Novokhopyorsk district. This 'Sirin', 'Alkonost', 'Firebird' turned out to be a peasant's hen.

A peasant's hen from the Novokhopyorsk district. And a London market. . . .

But the hen is not a bird and Balázs is a great authority. Such a great authority that at a stroke his book is translated, published and paid for by two publishers. Why not, if it's all right to make two films from the same material? One set at sea, one in the mountains, and so on.

To understand Béla Balázs's position you have to bear two things in mind: the first and the second. The first is the basis (not the economic one), *where and for whom* his report was written. *Filmtechnik* is the organ of the German cameramen's club. Give the cameraman his due or, more exactly, give him the position of respect that he deserves – that is its fighting slogan.

But that is already an integral feature of the economic basis.

The cameraman achieves. He is obliged to achieve 'self-determination'. To us this kind of programme sounds somewhat savage.

What? In the cultured West?

Yes. In the cultured West. The steel jaws of competition in the Western metropolis are not accustomed to thinking of the 'service staff' as individuals. The director is just acceptable. But in fact the hero is of course the commercial director. And the cameraman? Round about where the camera handle ends, that's where this . . . mechanic apparently begins.

In the advertisements for *Potemkin* even the heroic Prometheus wanted at first to leave Eduard Tisse out altogether. So strong is the tradition. That is not surprising because in the UFA-Haus – the multi-storey headquarters of Universum-Film-Aktiengesellschaft – they don't even know men like Karl Freund or Rittau by sight. That's how it is. They told us themselves. Whereas even we know them by sight. They are like the Novokhopyorsk eggs . . . only from the Cöthenerstrasse, where UFA shares its enormous building with the 'Vaterland', the largest café in Berlin. And not for nothing. It is not coincidental that this corner is swarming with swastika-wearers (German Fascists) distributing news-sheets and leaflets. UFA will follow suit.

The *Tägliche Rundschau* of 12 May 1926 writes: 'The declaration by the board of the leading German film organisation UFA of its truly national and common-sense interests is undoubtedly a slap in the face for the Committee of Censors: "In view of the character of the political inclinations of the film we decline to include *The Battleship Potemkin* in the distribution plan for UFA theatres.'" On the same subject *Film-Kurier* writes that, 'The wrath of a businessman who has missed the brilliant commercial success of the season is understandable.' But in other ways UFA remains true to itself. And not only UFA but Phoebus and the others, whatever they are called.

The cameramen are setting up a union to defend the character of their activity.

That is the first thing. It explains the emphatic nature of Balázs's positions.

The second thing concerns that same economic basis. Balázs is unaware of collectivism not just in film but also in its production, in work. There is nowhere that he can have seen it. He is due in the USSR in July. Then he'll realise. In Germany man is to man as wolf to wolf and the link between the director and the cameraman is the bank-note. Unity through non-material interest is unknown there.

Balázs's 'starism' is the individualism of bourgeois countries in general. They do not think beyond this in the West. Someone has to be the 'star'. One person. Yesterday it was the actor. This time let's say it's the cameraman. Tomorrow it will be the lighting technician.

The idea that a film is the result of collective efforts goes to the devil.

What about the man who is nearly dying from the heat of the burning sun, who has to be sponged down, the man Kivilevich whom nobody has ever heard of, who is bent down under the weight of a lighting mirror and dares not move in case a shaft of light should run across little Abraham while he's being trampled on the Odessa steps?

Or what about the heroism of the five striped assistants?! The 'iron five', taking all the abuse, shouting in all the dialects spoken by the crowd of 3,000 extras who were unwilling to rush around 'yet again' in the boiling sun. Leading this human current behind them. Regardless of its mood. By their own example. And what about the Odessa crowd itself?!

What of Kulganek, Stepanchikova, Katyusha, Zhenya, who stayed up *three nights in succession* to edit the negative for the demonstration copy that was shown on 28 December in the Bolshoi. Do you realise *what* it means to edit a negative of 15,000 metres down to 1,600?!

Who remembers them? . . . Even in our own country. Cheap overtime workers who were viewed with suspicion by the work inspectorate. Their collective enthusiasm a mere debit in the 'administrative plan'.

Balázs cannot yet conceive of the idea of the cameraman as a free member of a *union of equally creative individuals*, not of the cameraman as a 'star' but of the camera operator as a co-operator. There the camera crew is a transient pact between self-seeking individuals, here it is a 'creative collective'.

In his approach Balázs makes the same mistake in his theoretical principles as he makes in his section on creative organisation. Because he dissociates himself from a rigid view of the *externality* of the shot, from 'living pictures' but bases his view on the *figurative quality of the shot as the decisive factor*, he falls into rigidity himself in his definition of methods of influence.

It cannot be the decisive factor. Even though it responds to such an undeniable sign as the specific result of specific (i.e. peculiar to it alone) characteristics of the instruments of production, i.e. it corresponds to the possibilities that are the exclusive prerogative of cinema. But Balázs's individualism encourages him to dwell on this.

The shot itself as 'star'.

His stipulation about the *staccato* effect between 'beautiful shots' is extremely woolly even

in the case of 'symbolic shots' because for Balázs the compositional harmony would be preserved in the film as a whole. He does not mention the conditions for a 'genetic' (constructive) amalgamation of the shots.

A long time ago, before *The Strike* was released, we wrote in Belenson's ill-fated book *Cinema Today*⁹⁷ opposing the individualism of the West: 'a). down with individual figures (heroes isolated from the mass), b). down with the individual chain of events (the plot intrigue) – let us have neither personal stories nor those of people 'personally' isolated from the mass. . . .' It remains to add one more 'down with' – the personification of cinema in the *individualised shot*. We must look for the essence of cinema not in the shots but in the relationships between the shots just as in history we look not at individuals but at the relationships between individuals, classes etc.

In addition to the lens Balázs has forgotten another *defining* 'instrument of production': the scissors.

The expressive effect of cinema is the result of juxtapositions.

It is *this* that is specific to cinema. The shot merely *interprets* the object in a setting to use it in juxtaposition to other *sequences*. That is characteristic. Balázs always says 'picture', 'shot' but not once does he say 'sequence'! The shot is merely an extension of selection. That is, the selection of one object rather than another, of an object from one particular angle, in one particular cut (or *Ausschnitt*, as the Germans say) and not another. The conditions of cinema create an 'image' [*obraz*] from the juxtaposition of these 'cuts' [*obrez*].

Because the symbolism (in the decent sense of the word!) of cinema must not be based on either the *filmed symbolism of the gesticulation* of the filmed person, even if there is more than one (as in theatre) or the autonomous pictorial symbolism of the emerging shot or picture (as in painting).

However strange it may seem, we must not look for the symbolism of cinema – for its own peculiar symbolism – in the pictorial or spatial arts (painting and theatre).

Our understanding of cinema is now entering its 'second literary period'. The phase of approximation to the symbolism of *language*. Speech. Speech that conveys a symbolic sense (i.e. not

literal), a 'figurative quality', to a completely concrete material meaning through something that is uncharacteristic of the literal, through *contextual confrontation*, i.e. also through *montage*. In some cases – where the juxtaposition is unexpected or unusual – it acts as a 'poetic image'. 'Bullets began to whine and wail, their lament growing unbearably. Bullets struck the earth and fumbled in it, quivering with impatience.' (Babel.)

In cases other than those of traditional juxtaposition the meaning acquires its own autonomous sense, distinct from the literal, but no longer featuring as an element of its figurative quality (no literary Darwinism!). The notion of 'swine' has its own independent legitimacy and nobody thinks of the figurative fascination of the results of 'swinish' behaviour. Why? Clearly there is little demand. But figurative expression, generally speaking, forever represents a 'mutation' that emerges only in context. When someone says, 'I feel crushed', you still do not know whether 'grief' or a 'tram' is responsible. It becomes obvious from the context.

But Balázs gets bogged down in skiffs and his own definitions which are far removed from ours: the effect of hauling down the sails (simultaneously) appears to have been *created* by the symbolism of the collective gesture (*Gebärde*) and not by the lens. The way the image is cut [*obrez*], of course, is here exactly as decisive – no more, no less – in the final analysis as the Sebastopol fishermen's union *in toto* once they are resolved and able to 'symbolise' this scene!

Nevertheless we must welcome Balázs for his good intention of constructing a cinema aesthetic on the basis of the possibilities that are unique to cinema, i.e. on pure raw material.

In this respect he has, of course, rather fallen behind the USSR. But we must not expect a man to discuss the 'montage shot' when this concept is generally unknown in Germany.

There are 'literary' shots and 'pictorial' shots, i.e. those that tell us what is happening (an acted sequence), and those that constitute a *performed* intertitle (the scriptwriter's responsibility) or a series of easel paintings (the cameraman's responsibility).

Germany is unaware of the *director's shot that does not exist independently but is a compositional shot, a shot that, through composition creates the only effect specific to cinema thought.*



49 (top) Tisse filming *Potemkin*. Eisenstein rejected Balázs's elevation of cinematography and the individual shot, insisting instead on the collectivity of his group's work and on the primacy of montage.
 50 (bottom left) Esfir Shub.
 51 (bottom right) Pudovkin's *The Mother* (1926) confirmed the promise of 'a remarkable blossoming of Russian cinematography'. But Lunacharsky warned against excessive avant-gardism: 'We must know how to attract our great public to our own films.'

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People still speak of 'American montage'. I am afraid that the time has come to add this 'Americanism' to the others so ruthlessly debunked by Comrade Osinsky.

America has not understood montage as a new element, a new opportunity. America is honestly narrative; it *does not 'parade' the figurative character of its montage but shows honestly what is happening.*

The rapid montage that stuns us is not a construction but a *forced portrayal, as frequent as possible, of the pursuer and the pursued.* The spacing out of the dialogue in close-ups is necessary to show one after another the facial expressions of the 'public's favourites'. Without regard for the perspectives of montage possibilities.

In Berlin I saw the last two reels of Griffith's 1914 film *The Birth of a Nation*: there is a chase (as always) and *nothing* formally different from

more recent similar scenes. But in twelve years we might have 'noticed' that, apart from its *narrative* possibilities, such, 'if you'll pardon the expression, montage' could offer the prospect of something more, something effective. In *The Ten Commandments*, where there was no special need to portray the Jews separately, the 'Flight from Egypt' and the 'Golden Calf' are shown without recourse to montage but, speaking technically, by long shots alone. Hence the little nuances of the composition of the masses, that is the action of the mass, go to the devil.

In conclusion, a word about Béla Balázs's style. His terminology is unpleasant. Different from ours. 'Art', 'creativity', 'eternity', 'greatness' and so on.

Although some prominent Marxists write in the same dialect and this counts as dialectics.

It looks as if this style has become acceptable.

56

Alexander Dubrovsky: The Soviet Cinema in Danger

Source: A. Dubrovskii, 'Sovetskoe kino v opasnosti', *Pravda*, 20 July 1926.

The Soviet cinema is now undergoing a major crisis. Suffice it to say that a number of film-producing organisations in Moscow and Leningrad have either ceased production altogether or reduced it to insignificant levels. In Leningrad the state film factory has been closed (laid off). Leningradkino (formerly Sevzapkino), one of the earliest Soviet cinema organisations, is now in a state of depression, awaiting its merger with the Moscow organisations in the limited company that is now being formed. In Moscow the position is no better. Of the Moscow film-producing organisations both Proletkino and Kultkino – organisations whose very names indicate the great tasks confronting them – have ceased to exist since the spring. The remnants of these organisations have been transferred to Goskino. In the meantime Goskino is also suffering from a serious illness.

Goskino is curtailing production in one (the third) of its two Moscow factories. The first state film factory is still alive. But all its productions (*The Traitor*, *The Wind* and *The Chestnut-Tree*) have been completed and the new productions

have not yet quite begun, despite the fact that half the summer shooting season has passed by. Thus, instead of Proletkino, Kultkino, the first, third and Leningrad film factories, which during the current season produced approximately fifty feature-length films, there remains in fact only the first Goskino factory, because the Goskino production plan envisages no more than ten films. This situation can only be described as catastrophic. Only Mezhrabpom-Rus and Gosvovkino are in a healthier state.

The consequences of the crisis in film production will be felt in distribution in the immediate future. By the end of this year the entire existing supply of unreleased Soviet films (around twenty titles) will have been exhausted. Even now Sovkino, whose purchases abroad are limited, has been forced to re-release on to the market old rubbish like *The Headless Rider*, *The White Moth*, and so on.

It is first and foremost the network of cinema installations in workers' clubs and of mobile rural projectors for the peasants that has grown in such an extraordinary way during the last year that will