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THE SOUND FILM

A STATEMENT FROM U.S.S.R.

The cherished dream of a talking film is realised. The Americans have invented the technique of the talking film, and have brought it to the first stage of practical utilisation. Germany, too, is working strenuously in the same direction. All over the world people are talking of the dumb thing that has learnt to speak. We who are working in the U.S.S.R. are fully conscious that our technical resources are not such as to enable us in the near future to achieve a practical success in this direction. For the rest, we judge it not inopportune to enumerate a number of preliminary considerations of a theoretical nature, the more so that, judging from the information that has reached us, attempts are being made to put this new perfection of the cinematographic art to a mistaken use.

A misconception of the possibilities of this new technical discovery may not only hamper the work of developing and perfecting cinematography as an art, but also threatens to ruin its present actual achievements.

Contemporary cinematography, operating as it does by means of visual images, produces a powerful impression on the spectator, and has earned for itself a place in the front rank of the arts.

As we know, the fundamental (and only) means, by which cinematography has been able to attain such a high degree of effectiveness, is the *mounting* (or cutting).

The improvement of the mounting, as the principal means for producing an effect, was the undisputed axiom on which was based the development of cinematography all over the world.

The world-wide success of Soviet films was largely due to a number of mounting-devices, which they were the first to discover and develop.

1. Therefore, for the further development of cinematography, the only important factors are those calculated to reinforce and develop these mounting-contrivances for producing an effect on the spectator.

Examining each new discovery from this point of view, it is easy to demonstrate the trivial significance of coloured and stereoscopic cinematography, as compared with the huge significance of *sound*.

2. The sound film is a two-edged invention, and it is most probable that it will be utilised along the line of least resistance, that is to say, the line of satisfying *simple curiosity*.

In the first place, there will be the commercial exploitation of the most saleable goods, i.e. of *speaking films* – of those in which the record of the sound will coincide in

the most exact and realistic manner with the movement on the screen, and will convey the 'illusion' of people speaking, of the sound of objects and so on.

This first period of sensations will not prejudice the development of the new art, but there will be a terrible second period, which will come with the fading of the first realisation of new practical possibilities, and in its place established an epoch of automatic utilisation for 'high cultural dramas' and other photographic performances of a theatrical nature.

Utilised in this way, sound will destroy the meaning of mounting.

For every addition of sound to portions of the mounting will intensify the portions as such and exaggerate their independent significance, and this will unquestionably be to the detriment of the mounting, which produces its effect not by pieces, but, above all, by the *conjunction* of pieces.

3. Only utilisation of sound in counterpoint relation to the piece of visual mounting affords new possibilities of developing and perfecting the mounting.

The first experiments with sound must be directed towards its pronounced non-coincidence with the visual images.

This method of attack only will produce the requisite sensation, which will lead in course of time to the creation of a new *orchestral counterpoint* of sight-images and sound-images.

4. The new technical discovery is not a chance factor in the history of the film, but a natural outlet for the advance guard of cinematographic culture, by which they may escape from a number of seemingly hopeless blind alleys.

The first blind alley is the film text, and the countless attempts to include it in the scenic composition as a piece of mounting (breaking up of the text into parts, increasing or decreasing the size of the type, etc.).

The second blind alley is the explanatory items, which overload the scenic composition and retard the tempo.

Every day the problems connected with theme and subject are becoming more and more complicated. Attempts to solve them by 'visual' scenic devices alone have the result either that the problems remain unsolved, or that the manager is seduced into employing over-fantastic scenic effects, which lead one to fear a reactionary decadence.

Sound, treated as a new element of the mounting (as an item independent of the visual image), will inevitably introduce a new and enormously effective means for expressing and solving the complex problems with which we have been troubled, owing to the impossibility of solving them by the aid of cinematography operating with visual images alone.

5. *The contrapuntal method* of constructing the talking film not only will not detract from the *international* character of cinematography, but will enhance its significance and its cultural power to a degree unexperienced hitherto.

Applying this method of construction, the film will not be confined within any national market, as is the case with the theatre dramas, and will be the case with the 'filmed' theatre dramas, but there will be an even greater possibility than before of circulating throughout the world those ideas capable of expression through the film, and the universal hiring of films will still be practicable.