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**Lev Kuleshov - *Proekt Inzhenera Prita*** [Engineer Prite's Project] 1918, 30  
minutes.

Ruscico. Kino Academia, 1, 2 DVDs. Hyperkino commentary by Nikolai  
Izvolov and Natascha Drubek-Meyer

**Sergei Eizenshtein – *Oktiabr', ili desiat' dnei, kotorye potriasli mir***

[October, or Ten Days that Shook the World] 1927, 115 minutes

Ruscico. Kino Academia, 2, 2 DVDs. Hyperkino commentary by Iurii Tsiv'ian

**Lev Kuleshov - *Velikii uteshitel' (O. Genri v tiur'me)*** [The Great Consoler  
(O Henry in Prison)] 1933, 91 minutes.

Ruscico. Kino Academia, 3, 2 DVDs. Hyperkino commentary by Ekaterina  
Khokhlova

**Sergei Eizenshtein – *Stachka*** [The Strike] 1924, 94 minutes.

Ruscico. Kino Academia, 4, 2 DVDs. Hyperkino commentary by Nataliia  
Riabchikova

**Aleksandr Medvedkin - *Schast'e (Stiazhateli)*** [Happiness (The Money  
Grubbers)] 1934, 62 minutes.

Ruscico. Kino Academia, 5, 2 DVDs. Hyperkino commentary by Nikolai  
Izvolov

### **The Hyperkino method**

Natascha Drubek-Meyer and Nikolai Izvolov wrote the first version of  
their proposal for a hypertextual method for the publication and scholarly  
analysis of films in 2005. As they refined their ideas, they published later  
versions of their system, gave it the name Hyperkino and presented it in

various fora.<sup>1</sup> Readers of *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* will recall the article they published in *SRSC* in 2008 (Natascha Drubek-Meyer and Nikolai Izvolov, 'Critical editions of films in digital formats', *SRSC*, 2, 2008, 2, pp. 205-16.) In it the two scholars developed in some detail their thoughtful, ambitious and exciting plans for the scholarly presentation of films on DVD (and potentially in other formats). To quote from the abstract to that article:

The last years of DVD releases have shown that there is a need for academic standards in the publication of films. The article argues that, with the advent of new technology, one should propose a new system of DVD editions as a standard for specialist academic editions. The article suggests a methodology of editing films and preparing them for publication in a scholarly environment.

[...] A hypertextual method of film publishing and publishing on film could be based on an intertwining of textual criticism and hypermedia technologies. It connects the traditional principles of annotation with digital technologies and their mark-up languages, applying hypermedia principles of commentary to the linear medium of film. Hypertextual annotations of a film are comparable to the footnotes and the commentary in historical-critical editions of texts, with the only difference being that they comprise various media forms (text, sound, images). The footnotes in these editions are linked to specific shots of a film, which the commentator wants to annotate. The annotations themselves become quotable texts, which can be referred to by other scholars.

That same year, the first practical application of the Hyperkino method, with commentaries by Drubek-Meyer and Izvolov, became available in their reconstruction of Lev Kuleshov's long invisible short film of 1918, *Engineer Prite's Project*, published in Germany by Absolut-Medien. Now *Prite* re-

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<sup>1</sup> For developments in the Hyperkino method and reactions to it see <http://www.hyperkino.net>.

appears, as the first in a continuing series of Hyperkino editions, published by the Russian Cinema Council (Ruscico) in Moscow, of which the first five 'volumes' are now available.

This first selection combines classics (Eizenshtein's *Strike* and *October*) with more ambitious (and therefore all the more welcome) choices. While it continues to be galling that Lev Kuleshov's *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (Neobychainye prikliucheniia Mistera Vesta v strane bol'shevikov), the first great film of the new Soviet era, remains inaccessible on DVD (or commercial video) to this day, it is wonderful to have these editions of two other examples of Kuleshov's engagement with an imagined America, *Engineer Prite* and the sound masterpiece *The Great Consoler*. And the set is completed by perhaps the most sensationally original and daring film of the Soviet 1930s, Aleksandr Medvedkin's *Happiness*. All of these films are presented in splendidly restored editions and in stylish plastic boxes, each with their Kino Academia number prominently displayed. Each issue in the series consists of 2 DVDs, the first of which contains the film in the original Russian edition with optional English subtitles and with the Russian and English Hyperkino commentary versions, while the second (in the estimable Ruscico tradition) contains the original edition with optional English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese subtitles. (Paradoxically, however, the cover information about all these subtitled versions appears only in Russian.)

Between the two discs, therefore, the viewer is offered three ways of engaging with the film. You can watch the film (with or without subtitles) on the second disc. You can, using the first disc, read any or all of the Hyperkino commentaries, in any order. Or, again using the first disc, you can watch the film through, pausing it to read the commentaries, which in this version are signalled by a number appearing in red in the top right hand corner of the screen, in their filmic context. Doing so does, however, inevitably destroy your direct and continuous engagement with the rhythm of the film's narrative, especially in those cases, of which there are a large number on *Strike* and *Happiness*, where commentaries are up to five pages long. We can thus be particularly grateful for the editorial decision to present each film on two DVDs and leave the choice of approach to the viewer.

Engaging with the Hyperkino commentaries leads to thoughts about the fundamental differences between a spoken commentary, the only version most viewers will so far have encountered, and the (predominantly written) Hyperkino approach. Anyone who has ever prepared a voiceover commentary will know the formal rules it imposes. Because the commentary is spoken, because you are acutely aware that viewers (listeners) will be hearing your voice for around ninety minutes, you try to adopt an accessible, friendly tone, and, indeed, most voiceover commentators begin by introducing themselves, often adding a preamble of the ‘I’ll be your waiter for the evening’ variety. Because you know that the only way in which a viewer can access your commentary is to *watch* the film, you feel it incumbent upon you to keep in sync with what the viewer is seeing (listeners to commentaries find nothing more frustrating than having the commentator lag behind the visuals), so you sometimes find yourself speeding up your narration to keep pace with events. Inevitably there are bottlenecks, where too much is happening at once for you to cover all you want to say; and longueurs, where you wonder how to fill the space, or worry about extended periods of silence. And you must also keep in mind that the viewer who is listening to your commentary does not have simultaneous access to the film’s original soundtrack, the dialogue, music and other sounds behind the visual narrative.

None of these problems exists, of course, for the Hyperkino commentator – he or she is not time-bound, and the notes can be as short or as long as required. They can also be more scholarly – the notes on *Strike* especially are full of references to sources both printed and archival – indicating to the scholar/student viewer where to do further research. And, above all, they have the advantage of hybridity, which is why the Hyperkino notes are more than just a book on screen. In all of these editions some of the most telling and original material within the commentaries is provided by means of illustrations of paintings, drawings and icons, photographs and photocopies of original documents, film stills, film sequences, web links and even an audio file. The (American) English in the commentaries is generally very good, fluent and idiomatic, with only the occasional misprint, clumsy use of English or choice of a jarring or confusing word, such as ‘bathroom’ rather than toilet for the site of the strikers’ conspiratorial meeting on Note 11 of

*Strike* and the ban on 'congregations' rather than gatherings at the end of the same film. But given the lamentable English subtitling on some DVDs produced in Russia over the years, these are minor quibbles indeed.

For this viewer at least, however, navigation around this rich material was initially fraught with some difficulty. Unlike Criterion discs, which have long represented the benchmark for how to present first class DVD editions of films, the Ruscico discs carry no page of instructions (printed or digital) on how to navigate within and between screens. So it all had to be done intuitively, and it took time, and trial and error (and more than once resulted in an exasperating return to the Ruscico logo, the compulsory warnings in two languages and the grating and unskippable Ruscico jingle), to realise exactly how to move about within individual commentaries and how to get back from illustrations to text and from text to film. The Hyperkino commentaries themselves, numbered in red on screen, are not numbered in the commentary menu pages and the minor variations from disc to disc in the navigation of these pages also have to be assimilated. All these 'house rules' can be learnt, of course, but a further departure from uniformity more seriously diminishes the user-friendliness of these versions. On the non-Hyperkino DVDs of *Strike* and *October* (and also of *Prite* and the documentary that accompanies it, though here the short running time makes it less of a problem) there is no chapterization and the only way to move smartly to another place in the film is to fast forward or rewind. (There *are* chapters on *The Great Consoler* and *Happiness*.)

### **The discs**

But on to the commentaries themselves: Nikolai Izvolov has not only reconstructed Kuleshov's *Engineer Prite*, of which no historically authentic version exists, but has been working on commentaries to the film for a number of years. The 27 commentaries on this edition (the same number as on the Absolut Medien edition of 2008) take the viewer from a contextual note on the situation of Russian film in 1918 and (usefully) the full libretto of the film to its life in Soviet archives and the two reconstructions, the first of which was made in the 1950s, when a copy was received by Gosfil'mofond (the State Film Archive) from VGIK (the All Union State Film Institute). Along the way

there are fascinating notes on the film's formal innovations (particularly interesting are Note 5, on the repeated foreground images of smoke, Note 13 on the choice of character names and Note 20 on Kuleshov's strategies for evoking his American setting). A running subtext concerns Kuleshov's relationship with Evgenii Bauer and his role as a figure who straddles two cinematic epochs. In this context the long Note 15, on 'light creation' is particularly welcome. The Bauer connection is also illuminated by a rich selection of extracts from Bauer's films, from *In Pursuit of Happiness* (*Za schast'em*), *Children of the Age* (*Deti veka*) and *The King of Paris* (*Korol' Parizha*). It is wonderful to watch, in Note 21, a brief extract from Semen Raitburt's 1969 documentary on Kuleshov (on which more below) in which the director himself recalls the making of the film. But best of all is the 1 minute 17 seconds on Note 27 in which Vera Khanzhonkova reminisces about her work as a film editor and the shock caused by the depositing of 'a couple of tons' of assorted pieces of film at Goskino in the mid-1950s. To see *and hear* Kuleshov and Khanzhonkova talking brings a lost epoch to vibrant life.

It may seem paradoxical, given the innovative Hyperkino approach, that the commentaries for *Prite* were also made available earlier this year in traditional form, with their publication in *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* (Nikolai Izvolov and Natascha Drubek-Meyer, 'Annotations for the Hyperkino edition of Lev Kuleshov's *Engineer Prite's Project* (1918), Academia series, RUSCICO, 2010', *SRSC*, 4, 2010, 1, pp. 65-93). In fact this publication draws precise attention to the advantages of the Hyperkino method. For though the printed version contains all the notes and almost all the printed illustrations, it cannot, perforce, include the film extracts, which so enhance the points being made in the commentaries. And in the printed medium the immediacy of the connection of the commentary note with the element in the film itself which has provoked it is also, inevitably, lost.

A further seeming paradox about the edition of *Engineer Prite* is that (in part to compensate for the 30 minute running time of the film as reconstructed, with intertitles, by Nikolai Izvolov) disc 2 contains both the version that Khanzhonkova put together in the 1950s (15 minutes, no intertitles) and Semen Raitburt's 54 minute documentary, *Effekt Kuleshova*, (The Kuleshov Effect), made for the Tsentrnauchfil'm Studio in Moscow in

1969. The inclusion of 'conventional' extras on Hyperkino editions is, however, envisaged by Drubek-Meyer and Izvolov in their 2005 article and offers further proof of the broad possibilities they see their approach as offering. As Note 27 suggests, the different choices made by Khanzhonkova and Izvolov as they attempted, separated by a period of half a century, to reconstruct a major lost film are themselves instructive and revealing.

Raitburt's film (available in the Absolut Medien edition with optional German subtitles, but here offering optional English subtitles) provides a mass of riches both to researchers and to fans of Kuleshov. Structured chronologically, it lets Kuleshov reminisce at length about his life and his career, occasionally interrupting him with the memories of the film's other interviewee, Viktor Shklovskii. Kuleshov begins by recalling the first time he set foot in Khanzhonkov's studio (and saw three films being made simultaneously in different parts of the studio). He then remembers his work as a newsreel cameraman during the Civil War. He was struck by the extraordinary bravery of Eduard Tisse when they were filming together on the Kolchak Front. After this come memories of work on his major films, dictated over lengthy sequences from them. The wonderful image quality of the print of *Mr West*, time after time bringing out details lost in the version broadcast on Channel 4 in the UK in the early 1990s but still widely used for study of the film, and the similarly classy print of *By the Law* (*Po zakonu*), again make the viewer pine for the day when these films will be given the Kino Academia treatment. Kuleshov tells of returning to his native Tambov from a visit to Moscow as a schoolboy 'in 1913 or 1914' and boasting, falsely, of having met Maiakovskii, before going on to describe his later friendship with the poet. Mention of the letter that Eizenshtein was writing to him on the night on which he died leads to memories of their work together as teachers at VGIK. The film ends with Kuleshov giving the opening speech at the First Congress of the Union of Film Makers of the USSR and with Shklovskii recalling the words he had shouted from the hall: 'At last I see Lev Kuleshov in his rightful place.'

Iurii Tsiv'ian, who has provided the commentaries on the second film in the series, Eizenshtein's *October*, is, of course, not just a staggeringly well informed and incisive scholar of early Russian cinema, but an acknowledged

master of voiceover commentaries. His *Strike* for Image Entertainment and his *Man with a Movie Camera* (Chelovek s kinoapparatoom) for the BFI are brilliant examples of how an acute intelligence and an acute eye can combine to transform a viewer's understanding of a complex and multi-layered film. He is also the author of an impressive filmed essay on 'Eisenstein's visual vocabulary', on the Criterion DVD of *Ivan the Terrible* (Ivan Grozny) and of the book on that same film in the *BFI Film Classics* series. Here he turns his attention to Eisenstein's third feature, *October* (covered in the *Film Classics* series by Richard Taylor). Many of the 44 commentary notes are short, some of them, frustratingly, little more than a sentence, but once again they draw upon a store of knowledge and insight to bring the film and its context into sharp focus. They are particularly effective in drawing our attention to Eisenstein's subtle and sophisticated formal devices – Note 15, on 'special cinematic temporality' and Note 21, on 'the problem of metric montage' are especially suggestive. The commentaries make frequent comparison (often illustrated by film extracts) with Eisenstein's other films and ample use of his theoretical and other writings, both printed and from archives. The incisive and not always enthusiastic reactions to the film's exuberant innovations by Osip Brik, Viktor Shklovskii and Boris Arvatov are woven into the analysis. Note 43 startlingly compares the dance of the glasses on the table of the Provisional Government with Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*. It informs us about the latter film's early showing in Soviet Russia and includes a brief extract from it for comparison. Most remarkable of all, perhaps, is Note 1, which tells the story of the ill fated Moscow Monument to Aleksandr III. Unveiled on 30 May 1912, it was toppled immediately after the Revolution, provoking the memorable sequence with which Eisenstein opens his film. The story of the statue has been widely told, but once again this note strikingly vindicates the Hyperkino system, since the textual information is followed by 3½ minutes of the Pathé newsreel of troops marching and Nicholas II saluting at the ceremony of the statue's unveiling.

Third in the sequence is *The Great Consoler*, which, we learn from Kuleshov himself in Semen Raitburt's documentary, was his favourite among his own films. It is also perhaps his most complex and sophisticated and its



formal complexity and its Russian sources have recently been explored in a characteristically fascinating article by Oleg Kovalov.<sup>2</sup> It gets the Hyperkino treatment in 30 absorbing notes by Ekaterina Khokhlova. Khokhlova's commentaries are particularly interesting on the formal aspects of the film, for which her main source is Kuleshov's own writings, from the early articles to the books *Iskusstvo kino. Moi opyt* (The Art of Cinema. My Experience, 1929) and *Praktika kinorezhissury* (*The Practice of Film Direction*, 1935) and the late memoir, written with Ekaterina Khokhlova, *50 let v kino* (50 Years in Cinema, 1975). She writes about the very detailed work Kuleshov put in before filming began (Note 1); about the importance of lighting and the role of the cinematographer (Note 4); about sound experiments (Notes 6 and 8); about the role of things (Note 7 and Note 16, in which she quotes Kuleshov on his understanding of the *dikovinka* (in English here as the 'curiosity'), a concept central to Bauer's films); and about the way Kuleshov taught his actors to move in a certain rhythm (Note 18). She tells us that in the 'presentation copies' (paradnye ekzempliary) of the film one episode was shot in colour, the only practical experiment with colour Kuleshov ever made (Note 22). Several of these notes contain quotations from Kuleshov's early articles and it is a cause of regret for Anglophone students of the film (and a sign of the Russocentric nature of this project overall) that the references to them in the English Hyperkino notes are all to Russian editions, even in the cases when they have been translated in *The Film Factory*, a book which is easily accessible to, and extremely widely used by English and American students of Russian cinema of this period<sup>3</sup>.

Khokhlova is also extremely illuminating on the other participants in the film, on the cinematographer Konstantin Kuznetsov, for whom this was his sixth collaboration with Kuleshov (Note 4), the sound designer, Leonid Obolenskii (Note 6), the costume designer, the legendary Nadezhda Lamanova (Note 19), and the actors Konstantin Khokhlov, a minor 'king of the screen' from the pre-revolutionary period, here cast again in a leading role

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<sup>2</sup> O. Kovalov, 'Myshelovka', *Iskusstvo kino*, 2009, 7, pp. 109-20; 8, pp. 117-25.

<sup>3</sup> *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by R. Taylor and I. Christie, London, 1988 and later editions.

(Note 10), Andrei Fait (Note 15), Galina Kravchenko (Note 20), Petr Galadzhhev (Note 21), Ivan Novosel'tsev (Note 23) and Aleksandra Khokhlova, allusions to whose own life she finds in one of Dulcie's speeches (Note 29). Finding allusions to Soviet experience is a key element of Ekaterina Khokhlova's analysis and one in which she takes a line similar to Kovalov. In Note 2 she finds the film's hidden meaning in another speech of Dulcie's 'I'm dreaming of another life. But when I wake up I get scared'; while in Note 5 she suggests that a reference to '16 years of rotting', in a film made in 1933, would not be lost on Soviet audiences. A similar point is made in Note 9, on Wayland Rudd (here given as Weyland Rodd), who plays a black prisoner, though there are no black characters in the O Henry (rendered here erroneously throughout as O. Henry) stories on which the film draws. She finds the inclusion of a black character a 'concession to the times' (the Russian title of this Note is 'The racial problem in *The Great Consoler*') but notes that he plays a very minor role, concluding: 'This proves once again that the film's authors were not at all interested in faraway America', an approach which could be profitably adopted with regard to Kuleshov's other 'American' films, in particular *Mr West*.

The English translations on *The Great Consoler* (starting from an unfortunate typo on the disc's top menu page) are not as fluent as on some of the other commentaries, and this disc also suffers by comparison with the other films in the series by having no film extracts, even when, as in Note 14, an allusion to the fight scene in *Mr West* would seem to make the case for its inclusion. But it does have a number of remarkable illustrations ranging from Kuleshov's drawings and a Lamanova design to striking photographs of the film's actors.

Eizenshtein's *Strike*, the fourth film in the series, offers a first, fascinating chance to compare a Hyperkino commentary with an existing voiceover version. Iurii Tsiv'ian's audio-commentary is so dense, so original, so alert to detail and nuance, so full of intellectual energy, that it sets a standard that few could aspire to emulate. Nataliia Riabchikova's 28 Hyperkino notes do not have Tsiv'ian's dazzling panache, and it is perhaps inevitable that overall they provide a less complete engagement with the film.

But they draw upon an impressively wide range of Eizenshtein sources both published and archival, and are amply furnished with intratextual source references, enabling readers to follow up her quotations in their context. It is once again an opportunity missed, however, when in the English version of the Hyperkino commentaries the source reference given is to the six-volume Russian *Sobranie sochinenii* (Collected Works), which is both difficult to get hold of and useless to non-Russian speakers, even in those cases (such as Note 2) when an excellent English-language translation of the source essay is in print. Likewise, in Note 3, mention of ‘attractions’ leads to the bathetic bracketed injunction to ‘see his “The Montage of Attractions”, 1922’, rather than to direct quotation from the article itself.

Nevertheless, there is much that is valuable here. A dense group of early Notes (numbers 1-6) tell us about the place of the film in Eizenshtein’s early ambitious scheme, about the script, about the First Workers’ Theatre Collective, about the cameraman Tisse and the production designer Rakhali’s. Once this context has been established Riabchikova moves on to engagement with the film’s formal devices, discussing intertitles as attractions (Note 8); the agents as animal types (Note 10, which provides further illuminating context through reference to the use of animal comparisons in Eizenshtein’s later films; a similar trajectory for Eizenshtein’s use of child imagery is provided in Note 25); the remnants of the eccentric theatrical style (Note 14); and the ‘acting’ of inanimate objects such as a table-bar and a typewriter (Note 17, with the memorable aside from Shklovskii, himself a connoisseur in this area, that Eizenshtein knew how to treat things in films.) The real settings of the film are placed in cultural and historical context – Note 21, on the Khitrovka area of Moscow even contains (in another coup for the Hyperkino method) an image from Google Earth showing the area as it looks now, while Note 24, on the barrel cemetery in the Khamovniki (Luzhniki) area describes the original use of the barrels as a way of marinating cabbage in a pre-revolutionary sauerkraut factory. The stories of the worker unrest in the pre-revolutionary period in the places which are listed in an intertitle at the end of the film are fully elucidated in Note 27. Note 16 gives the full words of the revolutionary song ‘Smelo, tovarishchi, v nogu’ (Boldly in Step, Comrades), an allusion to which audiences would recognise in an intertitle, and follows it with

an audiofile of a 1947 performance of the song. The ambition and range of the commentary reaches a happy culmination in Note 28, which reminds us of some of the more bizarre alternative endings of the film (first published from Eizenshtein's notes by Naum Kleiman in 1994), in the most intriguing of which young pioneers play football on the site of the former killing field. The ball flies through the air towards the camera, becomes a globe and bursts through the screen (an approach that was later refined in *Battleship Potemkin* [Bronenosets Potemkin]).

Nikolai Izvolov is the world's leading expert on the films of Aleksandr Medvedkin, and is responsible, among other things, for the restored versions of Medvedkin's early short films *Stop, Thief!* (*Derzhi vora*, 1930) and *Tit, or the Tale of the Big Spoon* (*Tit, ili... Skaz o bol'shoi lozhke*, 1932). The forty notes that he supplies for Medvedkin's *Happiness*, the fifth film in the Kino Academia series, and the latest to appear so far, offer a profound and evocative engagement with this remarkable work, showing the breadth and depth both of Medvedkin's own culture and of Izvolov's responses to it. The very first note, for example, provides a subtle assessment of the ambiguities, lexical and otherwise, to be found in the film's two titles, the names of the characters and the language of the intertitles (see also Note 9). The second, equally long and detailed, tells the bizarre story of the film's withdrawal from circulation at the end of August 1937 after an article in a village paper deep in the Russian hinterland deemed it a 'Bukharin-style libel against the Russian peasantry'. Izvolov adds, however, that Medvedkin was convinced that Shumiatskii took advantage of this obscure diatribe to take revenge for Medvedkin's support for Eizenshtein's *Bezhin Meadow* (*Bezhin lug*), another excessively radical engagement with the lives of the Russian peasants. Izvolov is particularly illuminating about the film's visual and formal means, finding sources for the character of Foka both in Gogol's story 'Christmas Eve' ('Noch' pered Rozhdestvom') and in icons of St Nicholas the Miracle Worker (Note 3); and drawing attention to the visualisation and literalisation of metaphor and the use of hyperbole (Notes 4, 7 and 21); to the film's strange spatiality (Note 6, in which he reminds us that the critic Viktor Demin, himself responsible in his time for the initial reclamation of Medvedkin, described

Medvedkin's use of space as 'non-perspectival', before himself drawing parallels with Pavel Florenskii's theory of reverse perspective); to the plundering of theatrical sources and folk theatre traditions (Notes 7 and 15); to the slowing down of time (Note 13); and to the significance (Note 33) of the circular motion of tractors, both here and in Eizenshtein's *The Old and the New* (Staroe i novoe), from which he supplies an extract. He tells us (Note 19) that the sequence of 'royal life' was in colour in the original print; and insists in Note 30 on the 'clear distinction' that can be drawn between the viewpoints of the film's implied narrator and its author (a particularly suggestive point given the arguments that continue to rage about the film's tone and Medvedkin's authorial position). This same note ends with Medvedkin's bracing assertion, taken from a document in the VGIK archives, that he had a 'deep aversion to the mimetic representation of everyday life.'

Once again, the commentaries are enlivened by a succession of sophisticated and sometimes surprising parallels, to a range of Medvedkin's own works, both earlier and later, to the animator Aleksandr Alekseev's 1933 version of the Musorgskii / Rimskii-Korsakov *Night on a Bare Mountain* (Noch' na Lysoi gore), to the Bible and to icon painting, to Gogol' and Platonov, to *Aerograd* and *The Battleship Potemkin*. And, in a feature that is one of the key strengths of these Hyperkino commentaries, there are illustrations (from icons and from documents) and film extracts, most notably from Kuleshov's documentary *Forty Hearts* (Sorok serdets; Note 13) and a great comic sequence from another Medvedkin masterpiece, *The Miracle Worker* (Chudesnitsa; Note 16, in a note about animal actors). Not for the first time, the picture quality and the English subtitles on this extract engender the hope that it will not be long before this film too has the Izvolov / Ruscico treatment.

All five of these sets of exemplary Hyperkino commentaries display extraordinary erudition, lightly worn. Thought and discernment have gone into their selection and the result in each case is a significant advance in our understanding of these films. If *Strike* and *October* have long been on film studies syllabuses, the work of Kuleshov and Medvedkin can now take its rightful place. And further issues in the series are already being promised, including major films by Barnet, Dovzhenko and Protazanov. Both students

and teachers of Russian cinema and those who 'merely' want to learn more about the workings of these great films are greatly indebted to Natascha Drubek-Meyer and Nikolai Izvolov, to the Ruscico company and to Hyperkino.

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