

- 43 *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of art], 1919, 10 okt. no. 264.
- 44 Because of the devastating heating crisis in Petrograd, classes in the Svomas were temporarily stopped and did not take place between December 1, 1919, and February 1, 1920. Painters, sculptors, and architects were reduced to a single studio. – RGIA. F. 789. Op. 19. D. 1833. L. 17, 20-20 ob.; *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of art], 1919, 20 noyabrya. no. 297; *Ibid.* 1920. 30 yanv. no. 358.
- 45 ROSTA – The Russian Telegraph Agency
- 46 Many students had to work in various Soviet organizations to earn at least some means of living. The greatest economic crisis and food shortage was felt in the winter of 1919.
- 47 Nauchno-bibliograficheskij arhiv RAH [The Research Bibliographic Archive of the Russian Fine Art Academy]. F. 789. Op. 25. D. 122. L. 78.
- 48 *Iskusstvo kommuny* [Art of the commune] (1919) no.19, 2.
- 49 V Svomas (Into the Svomas) in *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of art] no. 274–275; by the start of 1921, Svomas included 23 studios with 489 students. – CGA SPb (St. Petersburg Central State Archives). F. 2552. Op. 1. D. 5. L. 18. We should, perhaps, remind the reader that the population of St. Petersburg by 1921 decreased to one third in comparison with 1917.
- 50 SKSO – The Union of the Communes of Northern Region
- 51 CGA SPb [St. Petersburg Central State Archives]. F. 2551. Op. 15. D. 79. L. 15.
- 52 *Iskusstvo kommuny* [Art of the commune], 1919. 26 yanv. no. 8, 3.
- 53 *Ibid.* 9 fevr. no. 10, 4.
- 54 *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of art] (1920) 4–5 sent. no. 548–549.
- 55 *Iskusstvo kommuny* [Art of the commune] (1919) no. no. 8, 9, 11, 17, 18.
- 56 Student B. Dubrovskij-Ehshke. *Pis'mo v redakciyu* [Student B. Dubrovskij-Ehshke. Letter to the Editors]. In: *Iskusstvo kommuny* [Art of the commune], 1918. 29 dek. no. 4. P. 4.
- 57 Vystavka v Svomas [The exhibition in the Svomas] in *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of art] (1919) no. 274–275. The opening of the exhibition, marking the first year since the Studios' inception, was delayed because Petrograd was besieged. no. 593. *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of art], 1919, no. 296; *Ibid.* 1920. 3 fevr. no. 361; RGIA. F. 789. Op. 19. D. 1833. L. 29; *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of art], 1920. 27 okt. no. 593.
- 58 V PGSKHUM [In the Petrograd State Independent Art and Education Studios] in *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of Art] (1920) 28-30 dek. no. 643-645.
- 59 CGA SPb [Saint Petersburg Central State Archives] F. 2555. Op. 1. D. 223. L. 9–9 ob.
- 60 V.G. Lisovskij, *Akademiya hudozhestv* [The Fine Arts Academy] (L., 1972) 120-121; I.I., Bekker, I.A. Brodskij, S.K. Isakov, *Akademiya hudozhestv* [The Fine Arts Academy] (L.-M., 1940), 128.
- 61 CGA SPb [St. Petersburg Central State Archives] F. 2816. Op. 1. D. 12. L. 56; RGIA. F. 789. Op. 19. D. 1833. L. 64 ob.
- 62 Nauchno-bibliograficheskij arhiv RAH [The Research Bibliographic Archive of the Russian Fine Art Academy] F. 789. Op. 25. D. 118. L. 16.
- 63 CGA SPb [St. Petersburg Central State Archives] F. 2555. Op. 1. D. 223. L. 9–9 ob.
- 64 RGIA. F. 789. Op. 19. D. 1833. L. 10 ob., 17 ob., 30 ob., 54, 74 ob., 79, 81 ob., 92, 93, 102, 106.
- 65 M. Spasovskij, *Akademiya hudozhestv. Ee proshloe i nastoyashchee* [The Fine Arts Academy. Its past and present] in *Argonavty* [The Argonaut Journal] (1923) no. 1, 76
- 66 The number of studios decreased because of poor economic conditions; several studios disappeared after being removed from state funding. Thus, the state could in fact which studios would carry on and which would have their supervisors fired and students dismissed.
- 67 CGA SPb (St. Petersburg Central State Archives). F. 2556. Op. 1. D. 221. L. 10.
- 68 *Ibid.*, F. 2552. Op. 1. D. 818. L. 23.

- 69 *Ibid.*, F. 2556. Op. 1. D. 221. L. 1.
- 70 *Ibid.*, L. 2–3.
- 71 *Ibid.*, L. 15.
- 72 *Ibid.*, L. 20.
- 73 V. Denisov, *Reforma ili restavraciya v byvshej Akademii hudozhestv* [The Reform or the restoration of the former Fine Arts Academy] in *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of art] (1921) 27 dek. no. 823.
- 74 CGA SPb [St. Petersburg Central State Archives] F. 8. Op. 17. D. 55. L. 1-2; A.A. Rylo, *Vospominaniya* [Memoirs]. (L., 1960), 178.
- 75 V.V. Mayakovskij, *Prikaz po armii iskusstva* [The order to the Arts Army] in *Mayakovskij 13 let raboty* [Thirteen years of work] (V 2 t. M.: Vhutemas, 1922), 224.
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Revolutionary Synchrony: A Day of the World

by Robert Bird

By initiating the process of world revolution, the Russian Bolsheviks believed they were changing the very nature of historical time. While not everyone shared the cosmic horizons of Aleksandr Bogdanov or Aleksei Gastev, even the most pragmatic revolutionaries like Lenin immediately set about reforming the very structure of time, first of all by taking the Russian Empire onto the Gregorian calendar in order to synchronize the new workers' state with the developed world. This shift meant losing thirteen days, so that January 31, 1918, was followed directly by February 14. Everyone's birthday shifted thirteen days forward; the first anniversary of the October 25 seizure of power was marked on November 7, 1918.

As Soviet power was consolidated, some stalwarts of cultural revolution continued to agitate for a more fundamental restructuring of time measurement, not merely to match modern Europe, but to surpass it. In this the most radical Bolsheviks followed the lead of the First French Republic, which introduced a decimal measurement of time in 1793. Dreams of restructuring time were not uncommon in the age of Esperanto; a 10-hour clock is featured in Fritz Lang's dystopian film *Metropolis* (1927). But the Soviet Union quickly rejected proposals for such a radical reform of the clock; in the words of one author in the aptly named journal *Vremia* (Time), "This matter will have to be taken up by the global Council of People's Commissars after other, more urgent problems have been resolved."

Despite the radical ambitions of the

First Five-Year Plan, it also did not envision a complete reform of chronometry. For Soviet planners, the main task was to maximize production by doing away with the weekend. Instead of seven named days, the week would consist of a fixed quantity of numbered ones, with no universal day of rest. This was called the *nepreryvka*, or unbroken workweek, which appealed to rationalizers because it allowed for months of uniform length: 12 × 30 + 5 additional holidays (6 holidays in a leap year). In November 1930, this short-lived calendar was replaced by one based on a six-day workweek, also with fixed days of rest. This new schedule cut everyone's regular days off by one-sixth, from 72 to 60 per year. But these free days were not coordinated among families or communities, and they were frequently changed, keeping people's domestic and social lives out of synch. (These experiments continued until June 1940, when the Soviet Union returned to the seven-day week for good, with Sunday as a

regular rest day, as part of a drive for increased productivity; perhaps this was the day the revolution ended.)

In the midst of all of these reforms, artists in various media continued their own experiments with time and space, exploring the potential and limits of global synchronization. In this article, I trace the history of the collectively written volume *A Day of the World* (Den' mira) that aimed to compile news from around the globe for a single day – September 27, 1935. The author of the concept was Maxim Gorky, who recruited the journalist Mikhail Kol'tsov as editor.

abstract

A Day of the World (Den' mira) was a documentary volume, published in 1937, that was intended to provide a snapshot of the entire globe on a single day, September 27, 1935. The tensions within and around *A Day of the World* capture some of the basic contradictions in socialist realism, the official aesthetic method of Soviet art: between publicity and intimacy and between the dream of synchronous, global revolution and the aberrant temporalities of individual experience.

KEY WORDS: *A Day of the World*, Den' mira, Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Kol'tsov, Dziga Vertov, Christa Wolf, socialist realism.



Wall calendar for 1930 in continuous work-weeks. 1929. Courtesy of Productive Arts.



The author of *A Day of the World* was Maxim Gorky, left, who hired the journalist Mikhail Kol'tsov as editor.

After Gorky's death, Kol'tsov saw the project to fruition in 1937. The resulting volume was amply illustrated by photographs, cartoons, and other images representing the day. It was a conception that was emulated at least twice – in China in 1939 and in the Soviet Union in 1961, commemorating the 25th anniversary of the original day, September 27, 1960. Through these books, the idea of “a day of the world” resonated widely, for instance, in the work of Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov and East German writer Christa Wolf. After examining the history of *A Day of the World*, I highlight the global network of revolutionary artists and thinkers that the book articulated and the tensions it framed within socialist aesthetics – between publicity and intimacy and between the dream of synchronous, global revolution and the aberrant temporalities of individual experience.

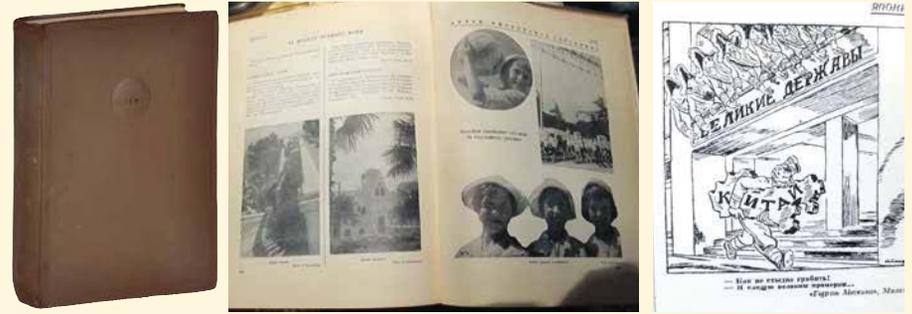
The history of *A Day of the World*

One could, given the desire and the time, trace the conception of *A Day of the World* back to the medieval notion of the *Liber universalis* or *Liber mundi*, or the earliest encyclopaediae. More proximately, the basic idea of a global literary snapshot is present in Fedor Dostoevskii's novel *The Demons* (Besy), where Liza Tushina proposes to Ivan Shatov that they begin a kind of almanac of Russian life. Liza's suggestion only raises Shatov's suspicions, because unbeknownst to her he is responsible for the secret printing press of a radical conspiratorial cell. Gorky's proposal for *A Day of the World* – like his conception of socialist realism more generally – joins Liza's documentary realism to Shatov's conspiratorial sense. Gorky's interest lies in making public the intimate factors that motivate and direct revolutionary activity, and in mobilizing public media – newspapers, photography, and political cartoons – to elucidate the politics of the intimate and the everyday.

In this respect, *A Day of the World* shares many features with Gorky's other documentary projects of the 1930s, from the journal *Nashi dostizheniia* [Our Achievements] to the infamous

volume *White Sea-Baltic Sea Stalin Canal* (Belomorsko-Baltiiskii kanal imeni Stalina, 1934) through which Gorky sought to augment the historical record of the Russian proletariat, engender a new folklore, and, at the same time, forge new cadres of writers.³ Key to his documentary method was the collective principle: “To these and many other collective works we can attract hundreds of beginning writers, and this work will provide them with the broadest opportunity for self-education, raising their qualifications by means of collective work on raw material, and mutual criticism.”⁴ Most directly, *A Day of the World* grew out of Kol'tsov and Gorky's collaboration on the weekly magazine *Za rubezhom* [Abroad], which between 1930 and 1938 provided Soviet readers with glimpses of foreign life from a Soviet perspective. Drawing on the authors and forms of *Za rubezhom*, *A Day of the World* would present a massive compendium of materials about “Abroad” together with a similar bloc of text and images about the USSR, all viewed from the standpoint of future Communism, as if from outer space. In April or May 1935, Gorky wrote to Kol'tsov that the newspaper *Poliarnaia pravda* [The Polar Truth] in Murmansk had released a special supplement “The Day of the Kola Peninsula”: “If other newspapers release such special issues they will grease the wheels of our ‘Soviet Day;’” Gorky commented, probably meaning the section of *Day of the World* that was dedicated to events in the Soviet Union.⁵

The theoretical argument of *A Day of the World* is captured in the ambiguity of its Russian title; the title means both “a day of the world” and “a day of peace.” While the former translation has become standard, in Soviet rhetoric of the time the two concepts were inseparable; peace will ensue when socialism becomes global, bringing the world-historical into synchrony with the everyday. Thus in 1935 the Soviet Union began actively to collaborate with Leftist movements abroad, seeking to create a Popular Front against capitalism and fascism. The first institutional manifestation of the Popular Front was the International Congress in Defense of Culture in Paris in July 1935, which at-



A Day of the World: cover; page spread on Soviet children; caricature about the Japanese occupation of China.

tracted such diverse participants as André Gide, Heinrich Mann, Leon Feuchtwanger, E. M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, and Waldo Frank. In some ways this event was an extension of the First Congress of Soviet Writers in August 1934, which founded the Union of Soviet Writers. For its part, the International Congress founded the International Association of Writers, with a secretariat including Il'ia Erenburg and Mikhail Kol'tsov. *A Day of the World* was to mark the debut of this organization, the germ of a global socialist aesthetic, “the first shared enterprise of Soviet and foreign writers.”⁶

In the event, it proved impossible to coordinate Soviet interests with those of foreign sympathizers, and the International Association of Writers failed to survive the year. On December 10, 1935, Mikhail Kol'tsov wrote to Stalin to warn of its collapse and also to ask for 4,000 rubles in gold to pay foreign authors “at least a modest honorarium” for their contributions to *A Day of the World*, which had begun to reach the editors.⁷ It is unclear whether and how much they were paid in the end; in his introduction to the book Kol'tsov calls them “volunteers.”⁸ The uncertain financing contributed to haphazard organization. And yet, as the closest approximation of a global socialist art project, *A Day of the World* reveals some of the tensions at the heart of socialist aesthetics.

In addition to practical complications, the project's ambition of synchrony ignored the relentless march of time. By the time of publication, much had changed. Gorky died before the volume could be completed, and his coeditor Mikhail Kol'tsov was busy fighting in the Spanish Civil War, so this snapshot of September 27, 1935, was not published until mid-1937, at the height of the Great Terror, by the large publishing concern Zhurnal'no-gazetnoe ob"edinenie, which Kol'tsov managed. The world's attention was

now focused less on Italian outrages in Abyssinia than on Spain, where Kol'tsov was preparing a new International Anti-Fascist Congress of Writers, which he called a “spectacle” intended to match the one in Paris two years earlier and to be perceived alongside the International Exposition that had just opened in Paris.⁹ What was intended as an inspiring synchronous snapshot of the entire globe in the present thus became a semi-obsolete monument to an ambivalent moment of the recent past.

The project also called into relief the tension between documentary and fiction at the heart of socialist realism. In a letter to Kol'tsov at the end of the year, Gorky expressed dismay with the uneven coverage and quality of the material gathered so far: “Where's Ireland? Why is so much space given to Palestine while 300 million Indians seem not to exist? Algeria and Tunisia are – in our days – cauldrons where major events are coming to the boil, but this is ignored. And Morocco is nowhere to be found!”¹⁰ Incensed, Gorky argues that the “material in its given form, unconnected and disorganized, has no meaning; this is throw-away material. It's entirely clear that the theme has not

excited those who have worked on it, has failed to shake their indifference. [...] Remember I said that the 27th – or any other day – is for us only a fulcrum, and that our work is not only work with concrete details, with realities, but also work of the imagination.”¹¹ Translated into the terminology enshrined by the polemics over socialist art, Gorky found the compendium of documentary material expressive of atomistic “naturalism” rather than syncretic “realism.” But how could detailed documentation of everyday life on a randomly selected day be anything but “unconnected and disorganized”? Is this not precisely what makes the labor of compilation into a visionary and revolutionary act?

“A DAY OF THE WORLD ALSO CALLED INTO RELIEF THE TENSION BETWEEN DOCUMENTARY AND FICTION AT THE HEART OF SOCIALIST REALISM.”



"Bulgaria Suffering in Poverty": A spread from *A Day of the World*.

The structure of *A Day of the World*

A Day of the World opens with a "meteorological diary," comprising brief prognoses of the weather in various countries excerpted from local newspapers and translated into Russian. We then have a section "Under the Power of Capital," which begins with a collection of materials on the Italo-Abyssinian conflict, including brief press reports, photographs, and caricatures that focus on the unsuccessful negotiations of the Committee of Five under the auspices of the League of Nations. This is followed by a section "Abyssinia under Attack," which documents affairs in East Africa, and then "Italy in Flames," documenting the situation in Italy. This opening triad is then followed by sections dedicated to each major country and territory in the world, first in Europe, then Asia, then the USA, Canada, and Latin America. Each section is given a narrative title; the section for China, for instance, is titled "Bloodied China." This is followed by a section called "A Writer's Day," which includes "notations from the day 27 September made for the book *A Day of the World*" by such writers as Rene Arcos, Julien Benda, Berthold Brecht, Alfred Döblin, Heinrich Mann, Ernst Toller, Elsa Triolet, H. G. Wells, Stefan Zweig, Karel Čapek, and others. Finally, a long section – exactly 100 pages, one-sixth of the volume – covers the USSR showcasing the highlights of 1935, including the new Moscow Metro, the Stakhanovites, the construction of workers' sanatoria in the Crimea, the conquest of the Arctic, etc. Opening with a framed portrait of Stalin and richly illustrated with photographs, the Soviet section lacks any satirical text or caricatures. The Soviet Union is held up to the rest of the world as a place where the future is now.

A cursory investigation suggests that the foreign press reports, though given only in excerpt and in Russian translation,

are relatively true to their sources. A note about the boxing match between Joe Louis and Max Baer at Yankee Stadium on September 24, 1935, credited to *The New York Times*, is derived from a much longer article about the spike in electricity usage during the fight due to the massive radio audience.¹² *A Day of the World* cuts three columns of print down to two brief paragraphs, but the information and tone of the excerpt are not tendentious in any obvious way. The note is accompanied by another brief note on Joe Louis as "the pride of his people," an "inspiration" who appeared when "people were ready to damn the Negro people for good, as unsuited to lofty joys and happiness."¹³

The Louis-Baer fight comes up again in the essay by Waldo Frank, entitled "A Day of an American Intellectual," who writes that he spent September 27 acclimatizing himself to New York after six weeks at his small farm in Truro, on Cape Cod. Frank describes the highlight of his day as going to the cinema to watch the newsreel about the Louis-Baer fight (though he had also listened to it live on the radio).¹⁴ Among the many other events of the day, this boxing match illustrates how isolated, local events become focal points for the analysis of the world's major ideological issues – here, primarily, racial inequality – and of the media systems that disseminate information and distribute affect. *A Day of the World* opposes the sensationalizing media of capitalism not only through its global coverage of events, but also by allowing for thoughtful reflection upon them. Thus random occurrences were revealed to be part of a deep global pattern.

Temporal bifurcation

The dialectical interweaving of the accidental and the intentional was another source of tension between the editors of *A Day of the World*. Gorky's letter to Kol'tsov about the book – excerpted as a preface entitled "The Tasks of This Book" – strikes a militant tone:

"*A Day of the World* is a compendium of everything that is being created by the bourgeoisie of Europe in its attempt to retain the positions it has won. It is interesting to show how the bourgeois, the creator of the psychology of banditism – of Stirnerism, Nietzscheanism – infects with this psychology the petty bourgeoisie, creates Fascism, and deepens the inhumanity of the bourgeoisie.

To show the influence of unemployment: the increase of 'crimes,' of child prostitution, of suicide, the loss of the feeling of human dignity – this last is especially characteristic of the public statements of various consolers and distractors of the bourgeoisie.

To give examples of the incitement of national and race conflict. Examples of grandiose swindles like that of Stavisky, and examples based on malnutrition, and also of dissolution. [...]

It is necessary to show with especial clarity the rehearsals of Civil War in various countries.

Knowing how to create the new world according to plan, we must be able to destroy the old, to show a picture of the death of our enemy, which we desire."¹⁵

In his longer preface, Kol'tsov paints a very different picture, one of the variety of events – and non-events – taking place simultaneously across the globe on one arbitrarily chosen day, September 27, 1935. He even acknowledges contingent events in the USSR: "Arriving in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Lev Mikhailovich Khinchuk raged over the delay in equipping butchers' shops. In Verkhnie Kotly the driver Gorshkov ran over a woman with fatal consequences."¹⁶ Kol'tsov presents the book as a culminating victory of reportage as a way of composing order from the chaos of contingent events. Kol'tsov even enlists Gorky in his own defense, citing Gorky's endorsement of collectively composed documentary volumes at the 1934 Writers' Congress:

"My certainty that this technique of collective creativity can yield absolutely original and unprecedentedly interesting books is such that I also risk proposing such work to our guests, these outstanding masters of European literature. Won't they try to produce a book that would depict a day of the bourgeois world? I mean any day: 25 September, 7 October, or 15 December; it makes no difference. Take a quotidian day just as the world press reflects it on its pages. Show the entire, lurid chaos of contemporary life in Paris and Grenoble, in London and Shanghai, in San Francisco, Geneva, Rome, Dublin, etc., in cities and villages, on water and on dry land. Show the feast of the rich and the suicides of the poor, the meetings of academies and learned societies and the facts reflected in newspapers' chronicles of wild illiteracy, superstition, crime, the facts of sophisticated culture, workers' strikes, anecdotes and everyday dramas, insolent cries of luxury, the deeds of swindlers, the lies of political leaders: show, I repeat, a normal, quotidian day with all the crazy, fantastic variety of its phenomena. This is more a job for scissors than for the pen. Show the 'artistic' work of history in the course of a single day."¹⁷

Kol'tsov avers that in *A Day of the World* the voluntary collective of writers takes the place of a Hearst or Beaverbrook, i.e. of a major media magnate. Instead of being guided by commercial or ideological interests, they are led by the logic of history itself. As evident in the editors' rival prefaces, Gorky and Kol'tsov

had radically different conceptions of planning and contingency in *A Day of the World*. Kol'tsov imagines a future reader treating the book as a kind of time capsule: "A museum of life and mores of one day of the epoch when the old capitalist world, in storm clouds and in the midst of great events wobbled and crawled off, yielding its place to the new world of socialism."¹⁸ The patterns that the capitalist world would recognize only retrospectively, the USSR was already actively planning and implementing. Thus the difference between the USSR and the rest of the world was also a temporal one. Kol'tsov remarks on this difference in his introduction; the world called September 27, 1935, "Friday," but in the USSR it was also known as "the third day of the *sheshtidnevka* [i.e., the sixth day of the work week]." Peace would arise only when the world became synchronized in revolutionary time.

Aberrant temporalities

It was not just world history that had undergone changes by the time of publication; more gravely for Kol'tsov's ambition, things had also changed markedly within world communism. Andre Gide, for instance, would no doubt have figured prominently in the volume had he not committed apostasy in late 1936 with his book *Retour de l'URSS*. Not all such fractures were so conspicuous, however. In the intervening year American writer Waldo Frank had broken with the Communist Party of the USA and sided with Trotsky. The Soviet editors appear not to have caught this news, so Frank's text was included in the printed volume. (Kol'tsov himself would be arrested and executed in 1940.)

The revolutionary temporality was also subject to more subtle disruptions. One of the cute details that Kol'tsov highlights in his introduction is the diary account for September 27 by writer Mikhail Prishvin, known as a poet of landscape and nature. Sure enough, Prishvin writes that Kol'tsov's request has found him preparing for a duck hunt.

"Your telegram forced me to reflect deeply on my entirely empty day today (last night I slept badly, this morning I was traveling from Moscow and dozed on the train, and now, while awaiting lunch, I am knocking the percussion caps out of empty cartridges in order to refill them with gunpowder).

Everyone has such empty days and hours, but everyone hides it carefully. Your telegram upset me – what do I do, lie or reveal my emptiness? – I even quit refilling my cartridges and lay down to sleep after lunch."¹⁹

Thankfully for Kol'tsov, Prishvin turns his emptiness into an inspiring parable:

"A DAY OF THE WORLD OPPOSES THE SENSATIONALIZING MEDIA OF CAPITALISM NOT ONLY THROUGH ITS GLOBAL COVERAGE OF EVENTS, BUT ALSO BY ALLOWING FOR THOUGHTFUL REFLECTION UPON SUCH EVENTS."

"I want to tell you now that the writings that issue from my pen, to remain for many decades and affect people beneficially in my native land, and then to cross borders and there, in these other countries, also have an effect for decades – these writings are created by the power that acts against physical, territorial, geographical and other external borders between people."²⁰

In a line omitted from *A Day of the World* but surviving in Prishvin's voluminous diary, in the entry for September 27, 1935, Prishvin adds: "and real art is precisely the art of peace" – the peacefulness of the empty moments, even, it seems, if they are spent in such a violent occupation as loading a rifle.²¹

Prishvin proceeds to meditate on the coincidence in Russian of the words for "world" and "peace." The homophones were distinguished in pre-revolutionary orthography, and Prishvin describes the teacher's strategy for making the difference clear to schoolchildren:

Teacher: Write for me *mir* with an 'i' number eight!
The pupil writes: M/P
Teacher: What is the meaning of this *mir*?
Pupil: As peace and quiet, Vasilii Vasil'evich."

Now, however, the word for "peace and quiet" has become the name of a global struggle. Prishvin concludes that now, in 1935, "a smart boy will guess for himself that he should define this *mir* as the time in which we gather all our forces in order to direct them against war."²²

Prishvin's rather discordantly intimate note injects a rare pensive moment, a moment of suspension amidst the otherwise bombastic reports. He appears to endorse emptiness and idleness as a source of international peace. We read the note quite differently if we know – as Soviet readers of the time generally did not – that Prishvin was an obsessive diarist (the notation for September 27 runs over four pages in the printed edition of his complete diaries) – who invariably based his fictions on his diaries, thereby producing an extensive body of autobiographical literature. One of Prishvin's favorite motifs was his period at school under the tutelage of Vasilii Vasil'evich Rozanov, an idiosyncratic thinker known for his anti-Semitism, who died in 1919 as one of the new regime's most colorful critics. Needless to say, Rozanov was anathema to the Soviet authorities, not least to Gorky, and would never have been allowed to emerge from oblivion onto the pages of such a celebrated volume. What is he doing there?

Prishvin, I would argue, is suggesting not only that world peace is born in moments of personal "emptiness," but that this emptiness is deeply embedded in an ambivalent personal history, one that cannot be sanitized of elements that are alien and even resistant to the future global synthesis. Historical peace is incompatible with ideological purity.

Horror vacui

Prishvin's negative account of peace, however, is precisely what Gorky and Kol'tsov could not countenance. A case in point is the contribution of W. E. Du-Bua, or W. E. B. Du Bois as he is more commonly known. Du Bois spent the day traveling from New York to Atlanta, where he was teaching at Atlanta University. He describes discriminatory treatment at a "tourist camp for automobile drivers" (maybe a motel) and a restaurant at Penn Station, where he goes because it might be the only place in Philadelphia where he can count on being served, however reluctantly. He stops in Baltimore to see his daughter and describes segregation in Maryland and then Washington D.C. He visits Phelps Stokes and mentions *Encyclopedia of the Negro*, which he was supposed to be editing.²³

Comparison of the published text with the typescript held at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst reveals significant cuts to the text – approximately two-thirds of the original. Readers of *A Day of the World* do not hear Du Bois's account of a mass meeting at Madison Square Garden to protest "Italy's aggression against Ethiopia" or of his visit to a black physician in Philadelphia.²⁴ We do not hear of his encounter with a black man on the way to Baltimore, who wants to ride with him and talk about the Louis-Baer fight, or about the dismissal of students from his daughter's school, or about all the African American academics he visits in Washington. Most egregiously, though, we miss Du Bois's narration of his journey through the deep south, from Washington down to Atlanta, where Du Bois describes the parallel worlds inhabited by white and black populations. Instead, the Russian text adds paragraphs, not present in Du Bois's typescript, describing segregation in Baltimore and Washington, including an account by the Haitian ambassador, the president of Liberia, and the wife of an African-American congressman.

One wonders why. Possibly the Soviet editors requested changes and Du Bois sent a new version. Possibly they objected to Du Bois describing a trip that took more than a single day.

Most probably the Soviet editors chose to underscore the problems in and around the US capital city, producing a more black-and-white picture of the seat of the American government.

It is evident that Du Bois's and Prishvin's contributions might have provoked Gorky's criticism of writers' stories of "how they spent 27 September, what they felt, what they thought about." Gorky wrote to Kol'tsov around the end of 1935 or the beginning of 1936 that he wouldn't dare to call them "empty, but would call them deserted. They are not all like that, but in their majority they summon the image of desert hermits, people living far from the bloody outrages of Fascism, from the predators' preparations for war, that they live in some Thebaid and regard life distant from them through some kind of fog. It's possible that this is the fog of the hermits' consciousness of their wisdom, their majesty."²⁵ Gorky's emphasis on planning goes along with an irrepresible belief in action, posing *A Day of the World* as an activist intervention in political struggles, and

"HISTORICAL PEACE IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH IDEOLOGICAL PURITY."



Screenshots from the movie *Lullaby* (Kolybel'naia) from 1937. The film celebrates the progress of women in the USSR.



undermining the notion of it as an imaginative space (if not a Thebaid) where alternative worlds – worlds of peace and equality – can be contemplated.

A Day of the World on film

After learning about Gorky and Kol'tsov's *A Day of the World* from the newspapers, in the summer of 1936 Dziga Vertov decided to make a film version. He had already made one such film over ten years earlier, when he had travelled the entire Soviet Union to shoot the feature film *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926), documenting the economic system in action as a kind of NEP-era advertisement for the state trading company. But the new film would be vastly different. In the intervening decade, Stalin's Great Breakthrough (industrialization and collectivization) had completely changed the face of the USSR, especially its economic organization. Advertising was no longer a major mode of artistic production. Beginning in 1932, the arts had been comprehensively reorganized under the banner of socialist realism, requiring the development of new methods of representation that were hostile to the naked registration of fact, what Vertov had previously called "life caught unawares." The emergence of sound cinema helped to stimulate this reorganization, which made it possible to imagine a truly popular socialist art. Vertov had debuted a new paradigm for his filmmaking – and for sound documentary filmmaking in general – in *Three Songs about Lenin* (Tri pesni o Lenine, 1934), which he classified as a poetic documentary and described as a form of folklore.

Even more than the book *A Day of the World*, Vertov's eponymous film was to be based on a stark opposition between the two worlds, East and West, and to project an entire media system in opposition to the capitalist one. It was in fact to be two films – one about the USSR, shot by Vertov himself, and another about the capitalist world (that is, the remaining five-sixths of the world) based on footage from Western film archives. In his proposal, Vertov spends far less time on his methods of shooting new material in the USSR than on the importance of his personal participation in the "artful" selection and arrangement of the found footage abroad. This editing – "no less tense than filming" – needed to "provide the possibility of bringing shots made

by capitalist firms into a combination that would be directed against capitalism" (what later would come to be known as *dé-tournement*), and also to "select those precise shots which in the artist-author's foresight will form an image-based artistic work, together with Soviet material."²⁶

As in *Three Songs about Lenin*, but unlike Kol'tsov's book, in his film project *A Day of the World* Vertov proposes to focus on the experiences of women under both systems. This film eventually became *Lullaby* (Kolybel'naia), released only in late 1937 to a very limited audience. *Lullaby* was a film celebrating the progress of women in the USSR and the promise this advancement brought to the new generation that they were raising; a film that attributes this progress to Stalin at the moment he was subjecting the Soviet population to mass arrests and executions; and yet a film that also allows a young female parachutist to speak unscripted in an unbroken, two-minute take with synchronous sound recording.²⁷ Nowhere does one feel so strongly the tension in socialist realism between the real and the imagined, the contingent and the planned, the synchronous and the obsolete.

A Day of the World redux

Twenty-five years after Maxim Gorky initiated *A Day of the World*, the editor Aleksei Adzhubei produced another vast encyclopedia of Soviet civilization at another moment of its international expansion, at least as it was seen through official eyes (in addition to editing the newspaper *Izvestia*, Adzhubei was Nikita Khrushchev's son-in-law). *A Day of the World: The Events of Tuesday, September 27, 1960*.²⁸ One of the lasting legacies of this project is that it stimulated East German writer Christa Wolf to begin making annual notations of her everyday life on or around every September 27, a practice she continued until her death in 2011, resulting in a fantastically spontaneous and nuanced series of snapshots of history-in-the-making.²⁹

On the first September 27 – a Tuesday in 1960 – Wolf deals with her four-year-old daughter's sore foot, argues with her husband about Lenin's polemic with Gorky ("Are we free [...] to have arbitrary experiences that are perhaps socially desirable, but for which our origins and personal nature make us unsuited?"),³⁰ researches her novel-in-progress at the Party committee of a