

# THE METHOD OF ENTHUSIASM<sup>1</sup>

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**E**nthusiasm: *Symphony of the Donbass* (*Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*) (1930) by Dziga Vertov was made at a time of a triple historical turning point, which this film reflects and by which it is at the same time structurally determined.

1. At the turning point in the organisation of Soviet society, following the introduction of a centrally planned economy, accelerated industrialisation and the collectivisation of the countryside – following the initiation of a very radical and very violent process that was conceived as a new stage in the revolution and which Stalin had named “the decisive offensive of socialism against the capitalist elements in the city and the countryside”.<sup>2</sup> This “offensive” took place on “all fronts”<sup>3</sup> – one of them also in film industry. *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, which consistently presents production processes as a struggle (for example, steel production as a “battlefront of fire”), was filmed in the context of a propaganda campaign for the first Five-Year Plan; by presenting new methods and rhythms of work, intertwining various sites (coalmines, steel factories, kolkhozes) into a single “symphony” of production dynamics, it was supposed to have a stimulating effect on production. At the same time, it was also part of the “antireligious front” context. Vertov’s stand towards industrial production proceeded from his awareness that, as a film worker, he was himself part of the industrial production process and that, as a medium, film can appropriately thematise the production process only by reflecting on its own place in it. He most declaratively pointed this out in *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* (1929). In this paper, we shall try to show, among other things, how we can connect the reflection on the (non)relation between the logic of a religious cult and the logic of a production process as conceived in *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)* with the reflection on the fundamental

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Joseph STALINE, *Les questions du léninisme*, Éditions en langues étrangères, Moscow 1941, p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> On the organisation and course of the “socialist offensive” cf. Lewis SIEGELBAUM, Andrei SOKOLOV, *Stalinism as a Way of Life. A Narrative in Documents*. Abridged Edition, Yale University Press, New Haven, London, 2004, p. 27sq.

questions concerning the relation between film and ideology – specifically: the battle of revolutionary film against film as “an opium for the masses”.

2. At the turning point in the structure of Soviet and world film industry in view of its technological presuppositions. *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)* experimentally introduces the sound era of Soviet film (it is the first Soviet feature-length unacted sound film<sup>4</sup>) and is at the same time its first great achievement. In this film, Vertov reflects on the structural turning point in the history of film brought about by the invention of sound film – but in this, he does not aim at a simple application of the invention, on the contrary, the mode of introducing sound stems from the structural laws of his silent films<sup>5</sup>, in a certain sense even realising its *principles*. Namely, Vertov turned to film because of his intense research into sound, i.e., the research into the relations between sound, word and image; these relations had inspired him since his childhood. *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)* is not only a *sound film* but also a film on sound; more precisely: a film that analytically examines the ideological effect of sound in relation to a moving image. This demanded a conception of an extraordinarily complex audiovisual structure. The mode of this conception is connected to the thematisation of the turning point in the organisation of society and in production methods – with the declarative reference to the dialectical method. The use of sound in this film is not conceived as a simple application of new possibilities but rather as their breaking through the impossibility. For Vertov, the invention of sound film meant the possibility of posing the question as to the new limit of the possible and impossible in sound film: the question of the possibility or impossibility of an unacted documentary sound film. As he himself wrote about *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, the possibility of the kind of filmmaking that this film opened broke through the presupposed impossibility (the controversy with the stand of Ipolit Sokolov that the use of sound recorded outside the studio could only be “caterwauling”) and thus meant a

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<sup>4</sup> The first important Soviet sound feature film is *Putyovka v zhizn (Road to Life)* (1931) by Nikolai Ekk. The pioneer era of Soviet sound film lasted until 1934 when Sergei and Georgi Vasilyev filmed *Chapaev* which is considered to be the first film realisation of “socialist realism”. Cf. France BRENK, *Zapiski o filmu, Založba Obzorja, Maribor* 1951, p. 70. How, even in the mid 1930s, sound film as such appeared as an astounding novelty can be best seen in the poem *От сырой простыни говорящая* by Osip Mandelshtam from his *Voronezh Notebooks*, written in 1935 after seeing *Chapaev*.

<sup>5</sup> That with his silent films Vertov set the basis for the development of Soviet sound film was admitted even by his greatest rival Eisenstein: “Soviet sound cinema was born not from the ear, but from the eye of the silent film (and perhaps even from the ‘Film-Eye’)”. Cf. Vlada PETRIĆ, *Constructivism in Film. The Man with the Movie Camera. A Cinematic Analysis.*, Cambridge University Press, 1987 (paperback edition 1993), p. 57. It should be added here that Vertov’s *film-eye* was born out of the research into sound – more on this later.

“negation of that negation”<sup>6</sup> (To do this, Vertov used a portable sound recording system developed by Aleksander F. Shorin.)<sup>7</sup>

3. At the turning point in the cultural politics of the Soviet Union – at a time of the historical defeat of the Russian avant-garde, which Vertov belonged to with his working methods and his fundamental productivist conception of film (in many ways, his ideas were closest to the positions of people gathered around the LEF magazine, although he at times engaged in controversies also with them). Precisely in the year when this film was made, the shot was fired – also symbolically - by which Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose poetical devices had an important influence on Vertov’s film devices, took his own life; Vertov himself emphasised that he “discovered the key to recording documentary sounds while analysing the musical rhythms of Mayakovsky’s poems”.<sup>8</sup> The film was made as an announcement of a new era, as an anticipation of the new possibilities of film language, but it was at the same time a dying away: some things that became possible for the first time were, in the atmosphere of an increasing bureaucritisation of Soviet society, possible also for the last time. The irony is that it was precisely the centralised planning in film industry in connection with the general restructuring of production in the 1930s that made it impossible for the always radically nonconformist Vertov, who during the NEP (New Economic Policy) years persistently pleaded for the rationalisation of Soviet film industry on the basis of centralised planning which would curb the NEP commercialisation of film, to continue with his work.<sup>9</sup> In relation to the “socialist offensive” front in film industry, it was already with *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)* that, against his will, Vertov had found himself on two sides: he acted as a propagator of the five-year plan and as an enthusiastic fighter of this “offensive” while, with his conceptions of film, he at the same time found himself under attack in the field of the ideological battle, for in the context of the

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *Kino-Eye. The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Edited and with an Introduction by Annette Michelson, translated by Kevin O'Brien, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1984, p. 113.

<sup>7</sup> In connection to the conception of sound film that Vertov introduced with *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, there is another thing to be pointed out: if Walter Benjamin connected the introduction of sound film into the capitalist film industry to the Fascist emphasis on national interests during the economic crisis, which is in principle supposed to mean that the audience of a particular film becomes limited by language barriers, so a partial deinternationalisation of film art (cf. Walter BENJAMIN, *Izbrani spisi*, Studia humanitatis, Ljubljana 1998, p. 155), with Vertov the introduction of sound is not bound to such tendencies and remains bound to international communicability of film.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Vlada PETRIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> In relation to this process, we can point out a certain fundamental contradiction already at the starting point. In *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, Vertov glorifies the system of centralised planning whereas his own method of work was the exact opposite of planning, for he insisted on his work being an exploration that does not allow even for the script to be written beforehand. In his diary from 1938, he particularly emphasises how planning that determines the expected results beforehand blocks exploration and makes it meaningless. Vertov stresses that in a battle the enemy does not follow our plan but has his own – we should act so as to take into consideration the enemy's behaviour. Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

“socialist offensive” the art field was facing a liquidation of the avant-garde in the name of an aesthetical ideology that, in future years, was elaborated as the doctrine of “social realism”.

In this paper, I shall attempt to give an analysis of the relation between sound, moving image and ideology in *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)* at this triple turning point.

## 1.

The film’s subtitle already indirectly points to a certain inner tension that determines its structure: we could characterise it as tension between productivism (Donbass) and pure music (symphony).

We have to be aware here that, at the time this film was made, it was precisely the purely “musical” structure as such that could by no means be perceived as something extra-ideological and/or independent of the logic of the whole production process. It was precisely during the first Five-Year Plan that, for example, *rhythm* became a concept that could be found in the midst of everyday political agitation. One of the tasks of the first Five-Year plan that Stalin defined was: “*to carry out the politics of rhythms accelerated to the utmost*”.<sup>10</sup>

Vertov, who defined the gaze of the *kino-eye*, through which the viewer is supposed to appropriate the technologically mediated possibility of a collective seeing that analytically penetrates into the very structure of reality, as the “communist deciphering of the visual world”, advocated a cinema that, with its procedures, was supposed to be part of the socially transforming production process which for him meant a deaesthetisation, deaureolisation and a radical demystification of everything “artistic” in film – even more: a radical problematisation of art as such, the exploding of “art’s tower of Babel”.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, it was precisely his

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Joseph STALINE, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

<sup>11</sup> This formulation dates to 1924. Cf. Dziga Vertov, *op. cit.*, p. 47. In the 1920s, Vertov declaratively fought against artisticness: film-truth comes into being only with the destruction of film-as-art (his doubtlessly most fierce attack on the very concept of art, which was supposed to be counter-revolutionary in its essence because it presupposed the caste of privileged “miracleworkers”, separated from the usual production process, was formulated in the interview for the magazine *Kino* on 21 October 1924; the text was reissued in: Yuri TSIVIAN (ed.), *Lines of Resistance. Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, Le giornate del cinema muto, Sacile/Pordenone, 2004, p. 92-94). In the 1930s, on the other hand, he quite on the contrary defended his position by defining it (also) as the position of *true art*. This (seeming) turn was probably partially conditioned by the change of the whole cultural and political context in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. But we should not understand the “anti-art stand” in a vulgar sense that would drown art in utilitarianism; quite the opposite, I think we should understand Vertov’s view in the direction that Mayakovsky set for poetry in his poem “A Conversation With the Inspector of Taxes

insisting on such a stand towards the world, which is supposed to have a transforming power already at the level of seeing itself, that led him to the kind of treatment of film material that organises documentary material according to laws that are essentially musical. By doing this, he actually brought film art, precisely in the context of the productivist problematisation of art, to a point close to the symbolist consideration of it as an ideal mode of existence, music being an ideal model for every other art. (It is no coincidence that one of the starting points of his early explorations into the relations between sound, word and image was Scriabin's music.<sup>12</sup>) In the film *Restoring Entuziazm* (2005), Peter Kubelka even says about *Entuziazm* (*Simfoniya Donbassa*): "The main message is the music of events."

But, by no means, do I have in mind only and above all the role of sound in this film which is so important that we can actually consider the sound structure of this film as a whole also an extraordinarily innovative musical work,<sup>13</sup> arising from the equal treatment of tones (fragments of live music recorded on location, for example, orthodox liturgy or the singing of *The Internationale*), noise (especially the sounds of production processes) and talking. (In November 1932, Charlie Chaplin, who was a musician himself, said enthusiastically about this film: "Never had I known that these mechanical sounds could be arranged to sound so beautiful. I regard it as one of the most exhilarating symphonies I have heard. Mr. Dziga Vertov is a musician."<sup>14</sup>) The introduction of sound interacting with the moving image is, as I have already implied, a logical consequence of the fundamental techniques in the director's film poetics, with the "theory of intervals" serving as the basis of his montage technique back from the era of silent film (he developed it already in 1919, and he additionally elaborated it

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About Poetry"; Mayakovsky says: "My work is like any other work" – but precisely from this, from the belief that poetry is as serious a work as for example the work of an industrial worker, he deduces the consequences about poetry's quite particular mode of being which cannot be measured by utilitarianism but only by the universe.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> In his film *Restoring Entuziazm*, Peter Kubelka sees in Vertov's treatment of sound, which he characterises as "music of the world, music of things", the foretelling of Cage. On the other hand, we could see in this sound an echo of proletkult's "machine concerts" and "symphonies" performed with industrial sounds before a million audience of large cities in the first years after the October Revolution; a famous example was the "symphony of work" performed in Baku where, in addition to factory sirens, there cooperated the Caspian fleet with sound signals, the artillery, plains, machine guns and huge choirs; the sounds were coordinated by conductors giving flag signals from the tops of high rising buildings. (Cf. Richard LORENZ (ed.), *Proletarische Kulturrevolution /1917 – 1921/*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München 1969, p. 13.) As a reminder of this era, we could perhaps understand the siren included in Shostakovich's Second Symphony. I mention Shostakovich also because the concluding chord of his Third Symphony is included in *Entuziazm* (*Simfoniya Donbassa*). But we could search for the direct source of Vertov treating industrial sounds as music even further back, directly in the music aesthetics of Italian futurists that Vertov followed in his sound experiments before he started working on film. (Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 23.) On the other hand, we can find in the musical structure of *Entuziazm* (*Simfoniya Donbassa*) also approaches that could be structurally related to the older Russian musical tradition; the way the symbolical battle between the orthodox liturgy and *The Internationale* takes place is reminiscent of the battle between the French Marseilles and the Russian tsarist hymn in the overture of Tchaikovsky *1812*.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

precisely at the moment of switching from silent to sound film – 1929). The “musical” organisation of visual material in Vertov’s films was something that many critics were explicitly pointing out already in the 1920s – especially after his film *Shestaya chast mira* (1926) (“film symphony”, etc.).<sup>15</sup> The highpoint of this “musical” organisation from the era of silent film is of course *Chelovek s kino-apparatom*, a “mathematically regulated musical construction” (as Naum Kaufman characterised it when it was made),<sup>16</sup> which in many places explicitly suggests also the visualisation of sounds and which, in his precise formal analysis, Vlada Petrić already expressly understands as a “conceptual exploration of the relationship between montage and sound, an idea fully realised in his next work, *Enthusiasm* (1930), the first avant-garde Soviet sound film.”<sup>17</sup> Vertov himself characterised *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* as a “visual symphony”.<sup>18</sup>

Actually, there is an interesting paradox established here: among all of Vertov’s works, *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* can be seen as the purest “musical construction” precisely in being conceived as the most radical manifestation of – as Vertov himself says – “absolute kinography”<sup>19</sup> within his work. (It should be stressed that it is precisely such “absoluteness” that is the complete opposite of every art for art’s sake; “musical” structure as an “advanced mathematics of facts” is a way of thematising the dynamics in the formation of the new socialist society traversing the uncompromisingly presented contradictions of the still class ridden social reality. It is precisely the absolute “musical” construction that is, for Vertov, the way of exposing the logic of the production process as a socially transforming process. Breaking the logic of “common sense” that includes the “condensation and deconstruction of time” through a “concentrated way of seeing”<sup>20</sup> is used as a method of seeing through the historical process. In this sense, Vertov’s “absolute kinography” is very far from the purely abstract aestheticistic visual plays in the early attempts of Walter Ruttmann and the related manifestations of the so-called “absolute film”.) In the sense of the “musical” structuration of the visual itself, the introduction of sound into *Entuziazm (Simfonyai Donbassa)* meant a partial moving away from “absoluteness” which is, of course, also directly linked to the propagandistic and mobilising function of this film. Precisely because the introduction of sound in Vertov’s work logically proceeds from the preceding mode of visual structuration in silent film, it cannot mean a simple addition to this visual structuration. Rather, in filling the

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-187, p. 196. p. 220.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Vlada PETRIĆ, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.* pp. 318 – 319..

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Vlada PETRIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

emptiness constitutive for it, on which this visual structuration was based and around which it was constructed, it already comes forth as a demand for its radical redefinition. This already introduces a division of asynchrony into the image - sound relation, precisely at the moment when it comes to their synchronous union in the visual-sound event, but at the same time this division evokes their synchronous union at a higher structural level. For Vertov, the sound structure is not a simple completion of the visual structure, what he aims at is establishing a complex interaction between the two (as he wrote in 1931 in a text where he commented upon this film: “We did not limit ourselves to the simplest concurrence of image with sound, but followed the line of maximum resistance – under existing conditions –: that of *complex interaction of sound with image*”<sup>21</sup>). More than ten years after *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, Vertov wrote that, in sound film, he aims at the union of sound and image in a way that eliminates the “independent existence of image or sound line”.<sup>22</sup> But precisely this non-independence does not mean establishing a single line, quite the opposite, it is a matter of establishing the inseparability of the visual and sound structure through their mutual tension, originating from the inner tensions that run through each of them. Vertov extended his theory of intervals, which he had developed for silent film, to *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, not by simply combining sound and image but by editing sound according to the same interval principle he also used in editing images, placing both montages in a counterpoint;<sup>23</sup> more precisely: he placed the counterpoint in the editing of visual material in a counterpoint with the counterpoint in the editing of sound material.

Such a procedure is not any sort of a free manipulation of the recorded visual and sound material that would aestheticise this material, but follows that fundamental conceptual line according to which, for Vertov, film is the exploration into the structure of reality. The fundamental principle that determines such a procedure is – if we now focus on sound – precisely the understanding of sound-as-an-event. The combination of synchrony and asynchrony is not arbitrary, but is founded on the structure of the sound-as-an-event that the film explores. The asynchronous editing of the recorded documentary visual and sound material spreads out from their precisely synchronised intersections and, yet, such a combination of synchrony and asynchrony is the only possible strategy of achieving a structural and not only a surface synchronisation. Namely, if we wish to give a visual analysis of the sound-as-an-event, then the relations between the seen and the heard cannot be determined only in one direction. Let us take the simplest example from the beginning of the

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Vlada PETRIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

film (we shall return to this again): the believers automatically cross themselves upon the sounds of church bells. The sound is the sound made by the swinging of church bells – at a certain point, the film shows these bells (sound as the sound of an image) – but it is at the same time something that has an effect on people (the image of people crossing themselves as a "visualisation" of sound). The same sound is, in relation to the seen, a consequence of something we can see and at the same time triggers something we can see, it is at the same a consequence of a gesture (someone set those bells swinging) and a cause of a gesture (crossing). Here, of course, things are still very simple. (The *sound* → *gesture of crossing* relation itself is of course *strictly one-way*, complemented with a one-way effect at the visual level, coming from above downwards.) But there are already given *in nuce* the seeds for their complication in the audiovisual exploration of the relation between ideology and the production process.

We have to point out, though, that, in Vertov's work, the introduction of sound is a logical consequence of the structuration of silent films also in a way different to the one we have already set out. It is not only a matter of the preceding "musical" organisation of visual material: what Vertov was interested in, in the process of visualisation, already in the era of silent film, was *sound*, which is as such thematised in the visual structure.

Although, in the last years of silent film, Vertov realised the "absoluteness" of film structure by letting the visual structure reach the level of "musical" organisation, it was already then that the visual structure was not perceived as something self-sufficient. Already in the era of silent film, Vertov opted for the inseparable connection between the exploration of the visual and the audio world in his conception of the parallel development of *kino-eye* and *radio-ear*, formulated in his programme text "A New Current in Cinema", published in *Pravda* on 15 July 1923.<sup>24</sup> (Like some other avantgardists – for example, the visionary Hlebnikov, Vertov saw in the radio-transmission of sound communicational potentials whose use in the emancipatory socially transforming project would open possibilities, in many regards, closer to the communication possibilities offered today by the internet than the ones offered by radio.) But this two-wheeled conception already presupposed the visualisation of sound. In 1929, Vertov explicitly stressed that in his silent film *The Eleventh Year* (1928) we "already see montage connected with sounds."<sup>25</sup> (It is interesting that he stresses this in regard to a

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 82 – 84.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 98. In his silent films, Vertov tried to visualise the absent sound in various ways – which the contemporary critique registered; cf. the description of the sequence of singing *The Internationale* in the critique (by an unknown author) in *Kinopravda* no. 22, in the magazine *Trud*, 28 March 1925, which especially mentions "an interesting attempt to 'stage' 'The Internationale' through depicting how

sequence that, with the greatest boldness, thematises the immense spans of *time*: he is referring to the parallel montage of the recordings of the industrial construction of the present striving towards the future and a Scythian grave excavated by archaeologists during preparatory works for the construction of the dam.)

It was not only retrospectively, following the invention of sound film, that Vertov reflected upon the visualisation of sound in the structure of silent film. In his text *The Birth of Kino-Eye* from 1924, he described his decision to go into film prompted by his experience of sounds at a train station in 1918 (with a sensibility we can connect to futurism); it was then that there arose in him the desire to “photograph these sounds” which was, with the state of recording technique at the time, something impossible.

“But the movie camera perhaps? Record the visible... Organize not the audible, but the visible world. Perhaps that’s the way out?”<sup>26</sup>

The way out of what? The way to arrive... (indirectly also) at the “photographing of sounds”. And sound film with the application of Shorin’s system of recording documentary sounds meant for Vertov a realisation of that tendency that brought him into film in the first place.

It is interesting how the impossibility of “photographing sounds” redirected Vertov to the filmic “organisation of the visual world”. After all, the possibility of sound recording had then been in existence for quite some time – but the recording of sounds was possible only in a studio, the technology at the time did not allow for sound recordings on location.

Even more: Before this, in 1916, when he studied at the St. Petersburg Psychoneurological Institute, Vertov had himself been working on studio experimental sound recording. And this was only part of his experiments with sound in this period that he, in the same year, synthesized into the idea of the “laboratory of hearing”. The young Vertov, who attended a music school in Białostok between 1912 and 1915, had intensely experimented above all with the relations between sounds, visuality and meaning. First, following the example of Italian futurists, he experimented by making noise, later focusing particularly on the connection of words and music (which he in 1929, so precisely at a time when the problematic of sound film became actual, retrospectively characterised as “rhythmic montage of verbal and acoustic

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individual singers sing. Here one particularly remembers a woman’s face which is suffused and illuminated by the melody which her lips are reproducing.” Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

material”) and also painting (Vertov was a talented drawer) – especially through applying the already mentioned Scriabin’s music in his enthusiasm for its synesthetic potentials (which, as is known, Scriabin theoretically considered himself).<sup>27</sup> Studying these relations, later led him to experiments in poetry, in the sense of the avant-garde abstruse (*zaumna*) poetry.

It was precisely his interest in these relations that diverted Vertov from the isolated studio experimenting with sound: following his experience of sounds at the train station, he saw a greater possibility of approaching the essence of a sound event in working with documentary visual material. Vertov saw the essence of sound in the sound-as-an-event which is as such not reducible to the perception of a single – auditory – sense; in turning to the silent visual orchestration of *events*, he saw the possibility of a greater faithfulness to the sound-as-an-event than would be possible in the studio research of *sound* itself.

But the “organisation of the visual world” in relation to sound in no way meant a simple substitute for sound itself; the visual fascination was present from the very start: in the phrase “photograph sounds”, there is a strong visual note that is later complemented by the phrase “radio-eye”. Sound film is for Vertov a complex interaction between sound and image that enables a new way of *seeing sound*.

This is best shown at the very beginning of *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*. A young woman with headphones, all happy and amazed, is listening to the radio and her eyes move: her gaze is following the sound. Surprised, she is watching sound.

We can see this as a thematisation of the image-sound relation in this film and at the same time as a self-reflective reference to the previous conceptual stage: here, after all, we can *see the radio-eye*. (At the same time, the self-referring moment lies in the girl listening to sounds that are the sounds of this film. Vertov emphasises this right at the beginning with an expressly disillusionive move: in this film, Radio Leningrad broadcasts the music – the march by composer Timofeev – that is on the radio explicitly announced as the music from this film.)

In this, the sound events are, regardless of their origin, external *and* internal. Vertov describes the sound of the clock that we hear in this sequence as an analogy to the beating of a heart.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, pp. 289 – 290.

Vertov does not present this moving of the eyes caused by the sound as a metaphor but as the ground for the necessity of precisely the sort of sound structuration of a sound film which he is attempting to establish; on hearing the recorded sound, the gaze looks for a certain causal relationship; it looks for the source of the sound in an event – but is at the same time itself an event triggered by the sound; it is the audiovisual complex that first gives the full perception of sound-as-an-event.

In seeing sound-as-an-event, enabled by sound film, Vertov, as I have already mentioned, aims at ultimately abolishing the “independent existence of image or sound line”.<sup>29</sup> If we search for the genealogy of such a conception – also in the context of his personal evolution –, we can discover at its starting point a tendency to realise the symbolist synesthesia or to synthesise art into a “*gesamtkunstwerk*” – which is after all what Scriabin aimed at.<sup>30</sup> But the consequences of Vertov’s procedure are the exact opposite of a blending together which is supposed to be the point of a *gesamtkunstwerk*: with Vertov, it is a matter of an analytical procedure (that enables the demystification of the visual as well as the demystification of the auditory): a matter of sound events receiving, in the interaction of sound and image, that analysability that the visual events received before through the kino-eye procedures. (In her introduction to Vertov’s texts, Annette Michelson denotes Vertov’s fundamental montage procedure in *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)* as the “discourse of analytic montage”.<sup>31</sup>)

For Vertov, the filmic research of sound was a stage in the process of the filmic research into the structure of human thought – in the process of attempting to “film thought”. Already before the introduction of sound film, he, with a genuine avant-garde pathos, delineated the far-reaching programme in which the introduction of sound into film would be a middle stage on the way to the “greatest experiments in the direct organisation of the thoughts (and consequently of the actions) of all humanity”.<sup>32</sup> Vertov saw the beginning of experimenting with film-thought and the next stage of sound film in his film *Three Songs About Lenin (Tri pesni o Lenine)* (1934); but the Soviet bureaucracy prevented his further work. At this time, he was especially interested in filming interior monologue<sup>33</sup> - a consequence following from the possibilities opened by sound film. It is interesting that we can find a parallel here with Eisenstein who was, in the early 1930s, also utterly fascinated by (Joycean) interior

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>30</sup> It is interesting that Vertov mentions Scriabin in his famous manifesto *We: Variant of a Manifesto (Mi: varianta manifesta)* (1922); cf. *ibid.*, p. 9. Indirectly, this mention refers to the failure of the early experiments by Vertov himself.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. lix.

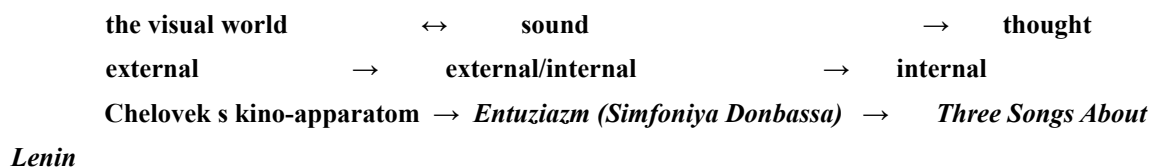
<sup>32</sup> Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

monologue – in his theoretical texts, he related it to his film conceptions although he had not actually realised this relation. In 1932, he even wrote: “The real material of sound film is of course – the monologue.”<sup>34</sup>

Eisenstein here suggests a line of thought close to Vertov at the time. It is a line in exploring thought that goes from the exploration of the external – visuality (“visual symphony”) – towards the exploration of the internal, and from the exploration of the social process itself towards the exploration of human individuality as the result of this social process. (Vertov turned from the epic of collectivism as realised in *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)* towards an exploration into the structure of individual thought processes mediated through a collectivised social structure – in which he especially wanted to examine the thematisation of women in Soviet society.)

In a simplified manner, we could represent this direction thus:



According to Vertov, the interaction between the visual and sound structure (the arrow between the visual world and sound points both ways; Vertov discovered sound after his period of examining the visual while he was led to the examination of the visual by the problematic of sound) opens the possibilities of exploring the structure of thought. But we have to emphasise that this basic direction in the transformation of his research leading from the external to the internal, and from the collective to the individual, must not be mistaken for the redirection from a collectivist conception to the individualistic one as might seem at first sight. Quite the opposite: it is precisely this line that is the greatest opposite of bourgeois individualism because it does not presuppose an “abstract individual” that is collectivised, but follows the process in which individualism arises from social origins. (But in the principles of certain vulgar Soviet conceptions glorifying the process of collectivisation in which individuality is supposed to become unimportant because it is supposed to drown in the

<sup>34</sup> Sergei Mikhailovich EISENSTEIN, *The Eisenstein Reader*, British Film Institute, London, 1998, p. 132.

collective mechanisation, we can actually recognise precisely the phantasm of bourgeois individualism. The extreme examples of such vulgar conceptions were the ideas of proletkult poet Aleksei Gastev who affirmatively announced the transformation of the collectivised proletariat into a “social automaton”.<sup>35</sup> I mention Gastev here because, at the time when *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)* was made, he was in charge of the Central Institute of Labour, which worked on the application of the Taylorist method of work explicitly presented in *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*.) For Vertov, studying individuality is not a pre-stage of studying collectivism, but just the other way round, for he is interested in individuality as the most internally differentiated social – collective – product. The way Vertov conceived the exploration of thought as the exploration of sound internalisation and the exploration of the individualisation of social interaction corresponds to the contemporary research on the relation between speech and thought in the field of experimental psychology. On the basis of this, Lev Vygotskii explained the genesis of internal monologue in a child’s development as the internalisation, individualisation and differentiation of the speech that first occurs in the social function. As Vygotskii says: “Speech-for-oneself arises with the differentiation of the primary social function of the speech for others. The main direction of a child’s development is not a gradual socialisation entering the child from outside but a gradual individualisation arising on the basis of the inner sociality of the child.”<sup>36</sup> What is essential here is the following: only from the theoretical standpoint that had, in its essence, broken away from the postulation of bourgeois individualism was it possible to recognise internal dialogue, i.e., the most individualised form of thought speech, compared to the social function of speech, as structurally “higher”, as a more differentiated stage and not the other way round.

## 2.

In 1931, Karl Radek had severely attacked *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*. He indignantly declared it a useless bluff. As a model of how not to make propaganda. His objection was that, despite there being constant movement in the film, its structure is essentially static because it does not reflect the dynamics of the social process – which he immediately related to the effect on the audience: the film is filled with red flags, but nobody in the cinema was moved by this.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Richard LORENZ (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Lav VYGOTSKII, *Mišljenje i govor (Thought and Language)*, Nolit, Beograd 1977, p. 342.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. LVII – LIX. Radek’s attack on Vertov is described by Annette Michelson in her introduction; she particularly emphasises the context in which Radek launched this attack: after the liquidation of Trockism, he, as a former member of the Left Opposition, tried to show his loyalty to Stalin’s ideological “general line”.

It is interesting that Radek's emphasis on the static core within Vertov's external dynamism corresponds precisely to the critique that Eisenstein aimed at Vertov in the famous polemic a few years before. Eisenstein mentions the sequence of lifting the flag in the newsreel film about a pioneer camp and notes:

“This is a striking example of resolution, not in favour of *the emotional dynamism* of the actual fact of the flag being raised, but in favour of *the statics of the examination* of this process.”<sup>38</sup>

In the cited statement, the following duality is very interesting: dynamics is for Eisenstein on the side of emotionality and statics on the side of exploration; and the position of exploration is a position that ultimately belongs to the “old world”; what is actually problematised is precisely the position of exploration and (as Eisenstein stresses in the passage we will cite further on) observation.<sup>39</sup>

In the very dynamics, which Vertov, in the avant-garde spirit, unconditionally affirmed – in 1923 writing: “I am in constant motion”<sup>40</sup> –, he always recognises also a static moment: for example, in *Chelovek s kino-apparatom*, he decomposes the illusion of a moving image into the sequence of still photographs, according to the constructivist principle of “revealing the procedure”. It is precisely through this exposing of the static moment inherent in the film material itself, which the projection first makes dynamic, that he presents the dynamics as an effect of the social process and not as some kind of magic; such presentation of the static is a way of “alienating” the awareness of the dynamic and at the same time a way of presenting dynamisation, how something is set in motion. The thematisation of what is potentially static in the dynamic enables Vertov the thematisation of the potentially dynamic in the static. Instead of the emphatic immersion in the dynamic, Vertov thematises the mechanics of this dynamics. *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)* is a film that analyses even the emotional experiences it triggers. *It does not move the viewer, it shows them the mechanisms that move them. It deals with psychological automatisms but not so as to control the viewer through*

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<sup>38</sup> Sergei Mikhailovich EISENSTEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 57 (note).

<sup>39</sup>It is interesting that before this Aleksander Fevral'sky had already criticised Vertov precisely on this point in his article *The Theory and Practice of Comrade Vertov*, published in *Pravda*, 19 July 1924. Fevral'sky first emphasises that the proletariat is not an observer and has to be offered only selected details instead of the observation of “life as it is” – that there has to be a “campaign” plan. Then he continues: everything is all right with Vertov, but what would happen if someone who was not so socially acute attempted such observation and perhaps made a film that was objectively anti-revolutionary? Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Susan BUCK-MORSS, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe. The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 2000, p. 122. When we watch *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, we can observe that in it there is actually no moment of rest. More precisely: even rest is presented as wild movement – cf. The extatic dance of kolkhozniks after having finished work.

them, but so as to enable the viewer to recognise them. This is why the position of *observation-and-exploration* is in Vertov put forth as the key one: in *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, this is done quite declaratively, right at the beginning with the already mentioned listener-observer who listens to the radio with her headphones during which her eyes move. “The communist deciphering of the visual world” presupposes the class struggle in the very mode of seeing and presenting-to-be-seen; it fits into the socially transformative process by not trying to work “magic” upon the viewer’s psychological automatisms through emotional *einfühlung*, but presents these automatisms through the alienation effect (in the sense of *остранение* - a concept in Russian formalism) and thus consequently shows the viewer the practices of everyday life as the material existence of ideology.

In the first part of the film, Vertov is especially interested in the conditional reflex, so precisely that effect that (not directly via Pavlov but rather via the “reflexology theory” of Vladimir Bekhterev) exceedingly interested Eisenstein.

The film shows how the banging of church bells triggers, in the believers in the street, automatic gestures of crossing, taking off hats, even kneeling, etc.

The irony is quite obvious, since Pavlov made his dog salivate upon hearing the bell and it is precisely bells that are at work here.

That Vertov actually had Pavlov in mind – he was acquainted with his theories during his studies at the Psycho-Neurological Institute<sup>41</sup> – is confirmed by his poem *Start /1917/* (the year next to the title is probably meant in a symbolic way; the poem was created in the 1920s); in this poem, Vertov refers to Pavlov in the programme principle (“*start*”) of his exploration of the visual world; in his own conception of cinema he aims at giving:

“eyes –  
to the world  
to see  
the ordinary dog  
with Pavlov’s eye.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Vlada PETRIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

If Eisenstein explored the conditional reflex as an effect which makes it possible to perform certain emotional and ideological investments into the viewer through film means (by the way: in the Soviet Union, they inferred from Pavlov's discoveries the possibility of changing the fundamental "character" of a being by making use of conditional reflexes; somewhat jestingly, the famous trainer and clown Vladimir Durov spectacularly demonstrated this by a mouse chasing a cat, rabbits leaping through Marx's *Capital* and afterwards heroically firing a canon<sup>43</sup>), Vertov, as I have already emphasised, aimed at enabling the viewer an insight into this mechanism – he, thus, also treated ironically certain practices of everyday life; it was precisely the "scientific" exact observation that he recognised as the best method of irony, much better than the declarative ridiculing.

(In this approach to antireligious propaganda, Vertov actually exactly follows Lenin's principles; Lenin explicitly advocated filming religious phenomena with a "scientific approach" that was supposed to have an incomparably greater propagandistic effect than any declarative ridiculing, etc.<sup>44</sup>)

First, the images of churches and the sound of liturgical music appear as something that could be fascinating. Vertov counts on the viewer-listener being moved by these images and sounds. *But he uses this moment of (potentially) being moved precisely for its systematic decomposition.* He achieves this by enabling the viewer a long enough observation.

One of the particularly subtle moments in the introductory part of the film is when we see on the face of the radio listener how, upon hearing the music reminiscent of a liturgy, she is, we could say, moved for a moment and then passes into critical reflection. (Here, Vertov

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<sup>43</sup> This and other training ventures of Durov are magnificently described by Ilya Ehrenburg. Cf. Ilya EHRENBURG, *Portreti. Odlomki iz knjige »Ljudje, leta, življenja«*, Državna založba Slovenije, Ljubljana 1970, pp. 135 - 141.

<sup>44</sup> As Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич reports:

“Vladimir Ilyich always asked: 'Do they film the discovering of relics of various saints?'

'To show with what the priests stuffed these scare-crows, to show what rested, what 'relics' were in these rich coffins, what for so many centuries people looked upon with such devoutness, and what the servants of the altar so skilfully used to shore the wool off simple people – merely this would suffice to deter hundreds of thousands of people from religion!' – said Vladimir Ilyich numerous times.”

Cf. LENIN, *O kulturi in umetnosti*, prevedel Josip Vidmar, Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana 1950, pp. 128 –129. In view of such Lenin's suggestions we could understand the film *Vskrytie moschei Sergeia Radonezhskogo* ( *Exhumation of the Remains of Sergius of Radonezh* ) (1919). It is not completely clear whether it was really Vertov who made this film. Of course, there is a big difference between the point of Lenin's suggestion and Vertov's procedure in *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*. Lenin understands antireligious propaganda in the sense of revealing the inappropriate cult object – in the sense of recognising something that was an object of worship as an ordinary pile of dirt – but with which he, in the enthusiasm of this revelation, fights against religion within a logic that is in the last instance structurally religious – in the sense determined by Althusser in his text *On Feuerbach*. By observing the effects of church bells on the gestures of believers, Vertov, on the other hand, thematises the material existence of religion-as-ideological-practice.

foreshadows what preoccupied him more and more in the following years: film as the possibility of putting thought processes on screen.) This transition is encouraged also by the transformation of music that has an ironic effect.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the rest of the introductory part, the clanging of the bells and the sounds of liturgy are repeated *ad nauseam*. Through the close-ups of the emblems on ecclesiastical buildings the parallel analytic montage suggests a structural connection between the Russian Orthodox Church and Czarism (cf. immediately at the beginning of the film, there is a crown above Maria's monogram that has its stylistic origin in Western European baroque). Vertov particularly explores also spatial relations: statues and the sounds of bells are devised so as to control the people from above downwards. The automatic gestures of believers seem more and more absurd. Among the people crossing themselves, a drunkard is wandering who drinks spirits upon hearing the sounds of liturgical music. We can read this as a very clear ideological point: *religion = intoxication*<sup>46</sup>, but it is equally important that the scene suggest the recognition of Orthodox Christianity as a relic of the old social structure that *at the same time* produces the crowd of crossing individuals and the lost drunkards.

Even more: in the person whom the sounds of bells and liturgical music affect so as to trigger conditional reflexes the film discovers a structural connection between the reflex gestures of religious worship and a seemingly completely different reflex gesture: the woman who is automatically kissing the cross by the way equally automatically pushes aside a beggar right at the moment of kissing.

(With such shots of “unknowingly caught life” that were one of the principles of his filming conception, Vertov was in a sense a pioneer of “hidden camera” already in the 1920s – but, as a method of exploration, such revealing filming of persons who did not know they were being filmed in principle did not function as a transgressive pleasure in invading one's privacy but as a problematisation of privacy as such – although from his notes we can also make out distinctly voyeuristic traits.<sup>47</sup>)

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<sup>45</sup> A brilliant example of an ironic use of a modified liturgical citation in early Soviet film music is the use of the formula “Gospodi pomilui (Lord have mercy)” in the music of Dimitri Shostakovich for the unrealised childrens' film by Mihail Cehanovski *The Tale of the Priest and of His Workman Balda* (1933).

<sup>46</sup> A similar point can be found in Vertov's work already before in the film *Forward, Soviet! (Shagay, Sovet!)* from 1926.

<sup>47</sup> A very similar fascination with observing people when they think nobody is watching as a method of penetrating the hidden truth of their psyche can be found in Maxim Gorky's short text *Sami s seboj*; in: Maxim GORKY, *Spomini na sodobnike*, Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana 1955, p. 199 – 204.

At this point, the relation between sounds and gestures is no longer a simple causal relation (sounds causing gestures), namely, from the revelations at the visual level there follow certain consequences for the understanding of the sounds themselves. Vertov executes a parallel montage of the howling liturgical sounds and the sounds recorded in a pub with an untuned howling singing of drunkards. What we see contributes to the discovery of the comparableness of the two sound events that would not become present merely at the sound level. Through what Eisenstein would call “intellectual montage”, Vertov quite wittily combines the shots of drunkards accompanied by the sounds of liturgy and the shots of crossing and kneeling believers accompanied by the sounds of drunken howling.

Vertov very concisely described his procedure in his text entitled *Sound March (From the Film Symphony of the Donbass)*:

“Fragments of the church service (the better known motifs) are commingled with the sound of the bells. The chimes, mixed with the motifs from the service, cannot maintain solemnity for long. A note of irony appears. The solemnity is continually undercut.”<sup>48</sup>

The *einfühlung* cannot last, but is through self-problematisation used in the strategy of alienation. When, with the *kino-eye* procedures, we observe a certain ideological practice long enough, this observation produces a critical distance to our own potential *einfühlung* (for example, to our fascination with the beauty of orthodox liturgy).

And into this situation, a break intervenes announced by a sound event – the sound of a factory steam whistle followed by the recordings of a procession of pioneers and komsomols, then another blast of the steam whistle introducing the sequence of a solemn desacralisation of a countryside church.

In parallel montage, the shots of desacralisation are accompanied by the suggested symbolic shaking of church towers and the implosion of the cross that vanishes into itself (which is achieved through a split screen shot that Vertov had used already in *Chelovek s kino-apparatom*, where similarly the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre - a symbol of bourgeois culture - symbolically implodes). But, next, it is precisely a church tower (not the tower of the church whose desacralisation was shown before, but the tower of an architecturally more imposing desacralised church) that appears as a glorified symbol of entering the new era (not of the new

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.* p. 290.

era!)<sup>49</sup>, only that instead of the cross it bears a red star and a red flag. When the red star and the red flag are fixed to the church tower from which the cross had been pulled down, the question of religion is not simply done away with, but is posed in a new and much more pointed way. The ideological fight is only starting. Here, begins also the polemic about the role and procedures of film in a society that is supposed to build socialism.

After showing the church transformed into a club for factory youth, Vertov, for a brief moment, also shows the building of the local cinema. This reminds us of Trocky's statement that, in socialist society, cinema will replace the church and the pub. This statement is by all means ambivalent: it can also mean that, in the organisation of the new society, cinema takes over the function that the church and the pub had performed before but in the interest of another ideology.<sup>50</sup> Vertov himself emphasises that, as a weapon of bourgeois society, film (in the context of art considered as a way of production, separated from the sphere of "magic" creation) is a narcotic – "an electric narcotic of the movie theatres"<sup>51</sup> – that it, in a sense, performs a similar role as religion if, in accordance with the Soviet doctrine, we consider religion a narcotic – "an opium for the people". (In the 1926 instructions for the groups of "kinoks", Vertov explicitly names film-drama "opium of the people" and, together with religion, defines it as a deadly weapon in the hands of the capitalists.<sup>52</sup> At another point, he

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<sup>49</sup> The merely transitional role of this tower-as-a-symbol is - in addition to it being filmed with moving clouds above it so that the illusion of the tower itself moving is established - explicitly emphasised by being placed between the church tower that still bears the cross (the symbol of the old world) and industrial objects (the symbol of the new world) in the scene where three shots are comingled. This symbolic exposition of the ideologically changed church tower as an intermediate stage between the "old" and the "new" (in the structure of the film, the tower has the role of the Jamesonian "vanishing mediator") emphasises the influence of ideology on the production itself in opposition to the mechanistic conception of the relation between base and superstructure. But the message is more than clear: in the following scenes, a fire arises in the industrial future that undoubtedly destroys the transitional symbol: this fire symbolically cuts the tower in half. And it is only at this moment that the film narration about the five-year plan can begin, introduced by the narration of an acousmatic voice, heard over a black screen: "It happened in the Donbass, during the five-year plan, in 1930..." (Note that the actual date of making the film is evoked as an almost mythological past!) And we see a new vertical symbol: the factory chimney shot from down upwards in the manner of constructivist photography.

<sup>50</sup> When the procession takes the icons from the church, these are replaced by new images: for example, the film shows the statue of a worker and the bust of Lenin (that a komsomol is just making). We could see in this a simple exchange of one set of icons for another. But precisely here Vertov is quite intentionally showing a certain difference: he emphasises, for example, the opposition between women kissing the cross (an active subjection to the image), and the woman making the bust of Lenin (an active making of an image). Such emphasis on the opposition between the active stance of people towards the new symbols and the passive one towards the old ones was very characteristic of the antireligious campaign during the first Five-Year Plan also in other media. A nice example is the contemporary poster *The Cross and the Tractor* by M. Cheremnikh. On the level of thematising the change in the production mode, the poster shows the opposition between the outdated cultivation of land by horses harnessed to a plough and the new mechanisation. But, at the symbolic level, it is not a matter of the opposition between a tractor and a plough but *between a tractor and a cross*. A peasant is "harnessed" to a plough under the weight of the cross he is carrying on his back and on it also the clergy. His opposite is an autonomous active driver of the new production means and symbol in one – the tractor. And it is no coincidence that it is precisely a woman that is represented in this active role.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 71.

juxtaposes the church service, drunkenness, the sexual act, hypnotic séance and the theatrical or kino-theatrical performance, i.e., an acted film.<sup>53</sup>) He was not alone in this comparison. In 1927, for example, Mayakovsky rhymed *kino* and *vino* in his witty epigram.<sup>54</sup>

Vertov poses the question of class struggle in film procedures themselves. As a declared Marxist, he understood cinema as a weapon in class struggle, in the sense of “deflecting darts” that had already been fired if I may borrow Nerval’s metaphor in a different context. The question that was driving Vertov from the very beginning of his film work was how to turn the invention of bourgeois entertainment industry against the bourgeoisie, to transform it into an instrument of truth and at the same time poetry and thus turn it into a weapon for achieving working-class goals (Vertov insists throughout on the experimental and scientific value of film and, at the same time, on film ultimately being poetry – poetry as the true opposite of every “artisticness” and especially “literature”). The question of how to use the hypnotic power of film so that it serves to awaken the viewer from hypnosis, the question of distinguishing between a film’s mode of existence and the mode of existence of religious and other drugs is for him a fundamental question regarding the epistemological value of film.

The question is: is there not a danger also in the way that, for example, the fight against religion is being carried out through film, namely, that in this fight there are actually religious mechanisms at work? Is there not a danger of the antireligious pathos – which is in this film summed up in the writing: “The struggle against religion is the struggle for new life.” – becoming a new form of religious ecstasy?<sup>55</sup> Antireligious propaganda that was very characteristic of the early Soviet film very often shows an open fascination with religion. Eisenstein, for example, never hid his fascination with the aesthetic of liturgy and in general with various religious phenomena – even more, with all magical and archaically mystical. But

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Vlada PETRIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>55</sup> Also in the concrete procedures of the antireligious fight shown in Vertov's film: after all, the desacralisation of the church with the removing of the icons is reminiscent of the early medieval religious practice of iconoclasm. But we could hardly say that it is really a matter of ecstasy. If we take a good look at the recordings, we see that the expressions on the faces of some of the women present at the ritual of removing the icons from the church are evidently enraged, exasperated ... Even more: we can notice all but enthusiastical faces also among the very actors of the desacralisation ritual that is taking place under the evident guidance of supervising bodies. We can notice therefore that the ritual is for the most part carried out forcibly. (In fact such desacralisations of churches were accompanied especially by the loud protests and the revolt of women */bab'i bunty/*; cf. Lewis SIEGELBAUM, Andrei SOKOLOV, *op. cit.*, p. 11.) As a documentarist, Vertov never tries to conceal such things. But what transforms the situation into a triumphant march of the new against the old is a factor that “subjectivises it from the outside”: music. It is interesting to note another thing here: it is exceedingly interesting the way that the antireligious ritual is performed so that it actually activates religious emotions. The antireligious procession appears with the comical puppet of the pope chained to the capital’s money bag. Fight against the Orthodox Church carried out through ridiculing the Roman Pope – antireligious emotions are stimulated with a content originating from the very structure of the Orthodox Church (antipopeism).

not only this: the very procedure of disclosing religion as a cult of invented idols ideally sums up the way religion itself works. As Althusser very concisely formulated in his text *On Feuerbach*: every disclosing of religion as an inverted reflection of reality, etc., performs an operation that is immanent to the mode of functioning of religion itself; this is not a problematisation of religion but precisely a way to let it function religiously – here, Althusser particularly apostrophises the practices within communist parties.<sup>56</sup>

It seems that Eisenstein and Vertov have essentially the same goal when it comes to religion: to show religious phenomena with the aim of fighting religion. In unmasking religion, Eisenstein, as Vertov, uses the procedure of “analytical montage” – the classic example is the sequence about gods in *October*. But, here already, there is an essential difference between Eisenstein and Vertov: Eisenstein attempts to disclose the genealogy of the concept of deity, to disclose that what we worship is in its essence an idol. Vertov is not interested in proving the truth or falsity of a deity (as an atheist he does not even pose that question, for him it is not something that could be posed as a relevant question) but lets us see how religion grabs us through seemingly so innocent a reflex gesture as is responding to church bells.

The following question arises: after having made out the ideological mechanisms at work in religion, should we use these same mechanisms to achieve goals opposite to the religious ones – should we then use them for a conscious stimulation of the viewer’s subconscious for the goals of our own ideological propaganda (whose effects are, contrary to the narcotising effect of religion, supposed to incite action)? Or should we persist in a radically critical situation that does not offer the viewer religious ecstasy through another positive content, but endeavours to strengthen in them a fundamentally different attitude towards the world?

In his film *The General Line (Old and New)* (*Generalnaya liniya (Staroye i novoye)*), Eisenstein disqualifies the rogation procession that does not bring rain. In showing religious hysteria of the superstitious people led by calculating priests, he actually creates a real mystical atmosphere. Eisenstein shows superstition, he shows that there was a deception in religious emotions – but at the same time he works on how to give these same emotions another basis that would not deceive them. When this emotion loses its support in religion, it has to find it somewhere else. This is most clearly shown in the sequence about a cream separator. Eisenstein himself compared the kolkhozniks staring at this cream separator to the medieval religious staring at the Holy Grail. (What is essential here is Eisenstein’s finding that

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Louis ALTHUSSER, *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, tome II, Stock/IMEC, Pariz 1997, p. 229.

there is the *same authentic* religious emotion in both cases: the cream separator in relation to the Grail is in no way a substitute; as regards religious rapture, it is the same thing.) Eisenstein consciously uses such effects to affect the viewer. In this, not even the obvious elements of irony diminish the religiousness of such effects. One of the best examples is the sequence when the kolkhoznik throws herself at the ground in desperation because the kulaks poisoned the kolkhoz pedigree bull, but then a little calf comes to her, its son, and touches her with its mouth. And then come the solemn titles: IT IS ALIVE! We encounter here an altogether religious effect of a miracle, “rising from the dead”: this scene actually triggers the same effect that the scene of Mary Magdalene meeting the risen Christ has on the imagination of Christian believers. Of course, we clearly see that these are not Mary Magdalene and Christ but a kolkhoznik and a calf – and although we are aware that this pathos is somewhat comical, the emotional charge of the effect does not decrease in the least. By systematically using techniques which in perception cause what he named the effects of ecstasy, Eisenstein succeeded, at the level of form, in transferring with all force the supercontentful and supertemporal religious effect into a certain positive content where we would least expect such an effect.<sup>57</sup>

Eisenstein’s basic principle is, if I somewhat simplify, the following: religion takes advantage of certain ecstatic modes of experience that in themselves are not bound to any positive content to thus manipulate the person experiencing them. The task of Soviet film is to channel such experience into the process of building new social structures, to use such an “ecstatic formula” – through “emotional shocks” – in the transformation of the world in the direction of communism.

Vertov, on the other hand, does not want to change the viewer into an object of ideological manipulation, but wants to arm them as subjects with the procedures enabling them to discern the ideological *effects*, help them to persist in the “analytical” stance. “Communist” is for him precisely the “deciphering of the visual world” that establishes conditions for a transformative intervention in it.

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<sup>57</sup> It is very interesting that, following the same logic, Eisenstein produces also “blasphemous” effects that are immanent to the logic of “religious” worship: an extreme example is the moment when in the same film the picture of Lenin hanging in the office of the “nepman” appears to the labourers’ inspection as the picture of a disgusting “nepman”. Of course the point is in the thematisation of the danger that the new bourgeoisie will dirty Ilyich’s legacy but structurally it is by all means a “blasphemous” note that is triggered by the logic of “religious” worship itself.

With his procedures, Eisenstein tries to set the viewer into a motion that will be followed by the viewer's thoughts; he tries to affect the viewer through ideological interpellation. Vertov, on the other hand, in no case wants to assume the role of church bells. He tries to affect the viewer at the level of analysing ideological interpellation.<sup>58</sup>

This is precisely the stand in the name of which he, already in 1924, formulated his famous attack against Eisenstein as an attack against the "kino-church"; in the text where he used this phrase, he wrote among other things (the capital letters – including the italics – are his):

“IT IS NOT THROUGH SOVIET MAGIC AGAINST *BOURGEOIS* MAGIC BUT THROUGH THE UNIFIED VISION OF MILLIONS OF EYES THAT WE SHALL STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITALIST SORCERY AND DECEIT. OUR CINEMA WEAPON IN THE STRUGGLE WITH THE *BOURGOIS* WORLD MUST BE AND WILL BE THE ALL-UNION, AND THEN THE UNIVERSAL KINO-EYE.”<sup>59</sup>

Eisenstein's answer is very well known, quite brutally pointed into a conclusion that a viewer has to be organised and set into action with the help of film, whereas Vertov's procedures are founded on observation that is as such a retarded position – in art, it corresponds to “impressionism” and, in politics, to “opportunism” and “menshevism” (in the political situation at the time, such pointing of course bordered on a denunciation).

“The *Cine-Eye* is not just a symbol of *vision*: it is also a symbol of *contemplation*. But we need *not contemplation but action*.”

*It is not a Cine-Eye that we need but a 'Cine-Fist'.*

Soviet cinema must cut through to the skull! It is not ‘through the combined vision of millions of eyes that we shall fight the bourgeois world’ (Vertov): we'd rapidly give them a million black eyes!

We must cut with our cine-fist through to skulls, cut through to final victory and now, under the threat of an influx of ‘real life’ and philistinism into the Revolution we must cut through as never before!<sup>60</sup>

Reading these words, we are immediately surprised by the violence of Eisenstein's diction – but we have to be careful here: Eisenstein explicitly ironises Vertov's statements – his writing about the “*fist of facts*”, etc.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Vertov establishes this level precisely by the complex interaction of the visual and sound montage which transfers the discerning of the effect that by itself could remain at the level of biolism (the conditional reflex) to the level of interpreting social practice.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>60</sup> Sergei Mikhailovich EISENSTEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Vlada PETRIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 55-56.

But what is essential is something else: in the ideological struggle against the enemy, Eisenstein uses the affirmation of an active position against a passive one (according to Eisenstein, Vertov is supposed to represent the bourgeois position that submits to the “cosmic” pressure of the static causal relation among things), the affirmation of acting against observing, which we could indirectly understand also as a reference to Marx’s famous 11<sup>th</sup> thesis on Feuerbach, to simultaneously carry out another act: he imperceptibly changes the object of the proposition, the object against which we must fight.

The eye is the eye of the viewer (of the viewer that subjectivises the position of the proletariat: “the sharp eyes of the workers and the untouched eyes of the peasants”,<sup>62</sup> as Vertov wrote) and the fist is the fist that bashes the viewer over the head. Vertov takes the side of the collective of viewers that has to be ideologically armed to fight the bourgeoisie. For Eisenstein, the one whose head the film has to break is the viewer him/herself. The viewing subject that has to be controlled is therefore on the side of the enemy, as the one that is potentially always infected. Cinema is supposed to fight for the viewers’ actual class goals by fighting against the viewer as a potential inner enemy (“infection”). This is of course the reflection of the specific situation of bourgeois ideas spreading in Soviet society at the time of NEP, but, on the other hand, this formulation already introduces the logic of the fundamental Stalinist obsession of searching for the ones guilty of betraying the revolution.

The question regarding the passive or active position therefore conceals another question: should film be a weapon of the viewers themselves or a weapon used against the viewer? If we put this question into the context of the Soviet social reality, it is a matter of nothing less than the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat or a dictatorship over the proletariat if I paraphrase Brecht. (In *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, there is an excellent moment when the marching procession of strike workers looks up to a point from where a shouting of slogans is coming, among others “Hail the dictatorship of the proletariat!”)

For Vertov, as well as Eisenstein, the aim is film as an organisation of the viewer’s consciousness. And both are interested in the relation between this consciousness and action. But if Eisenstein is interested above all in acting upon the viewer, Vertov is interested above all in the action of the viewer. Which is not supposed to be reflex but reflexive. Vertov insists on having to “arm” the viewers themselves, the viewers whose subjectivity is transformed by objective conditions of the new socialist society, in which their gaze is the gaze of a collective

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<sup>62</sup> Vertov's formulation from 1923; cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

experience, the *kino-eye* (which gives the viewing mass “*Pavlov’s eye*”; already in 1923, Vertov had written that he aims at “a revolution in seeing and therefore in man’s reception of the world in general”<sup>63</sup>).

The cameraman in *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* functions explicitly as the representative of the viewer’s gaze. In the famous edited shot in which the cameraman (Mikhail Kaufman, Vertov’s brother), as an enormous figure, overgrows the mass, he takes precisely the same position in relation to the mass as the figures of Lenin and Stalin usually took in Soviet propaganda iconography at the time.

Contrary to Eisenstein, there is actually *no fascination with religion* (or religious experience) in *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*. Vertov is not interested in ways of applying the “extracontent core” of religious experience to the building of a socialist society, but tries to insist in his film procedures on the affirmation of a certain mode of experience *that is structurally not supposed to be religious*. He is actually not fascinated by that mystical dread, that magical ecstasy that so occupied Eisenstein, but is interested in the awakening of a “dormant consciousness” into an active participation<sup>64</sup> with the help of “film without magic”,<sup>65</sup> through the complete break with the “hypocritical cinematic liturgy”.<sup>66</sup>

This of course has quite far-reaching ideological implications: to such a way of watching as Vertov expects from the viewer some of the procedures of Soviet ideological practices must *appear as structurally “religious”*. In *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, the most striking examples having a “liturgical effect” are the solemn vows of strike workers that they will exceed the norm and fulfil the plan before the set term. But it is something that was present in the very foundations of Stalinist structure; let us only consider how, in his famous speech at Lenin’s coffin, the former seminarist Stalin used the formulae of orthodox liturgy for the apotheosis of Lenin and the Party. But Vertov by no means wants to simply equate the “liturgy” of the new Soviet reality with Christian liturgy; he is more interested in posing questions - and in endeavouring to discover a structural difference in what we can see and hear. At the beginning of the film, for example, he thus shows sculptures which in combination with the sound of church bells symbolically control the people from above downwards. When he shows the party delegates singing *The Internationale*, he edits the shot

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Vlada PETRIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 260.s

with the shot of a statue of a worker with his fist lifted whose placement structurally corresponds to the placement of the church sculptures shown before. But a difference is suggested: in opposition to the church sculptures, this sculpture is presented as a symbol arising from the song sung by the mass. We must not overlook, though, that this is a mass of “leading people” - which again evokes the spatial relation “from above downwards”.

In short: if Eisenstein tried to problematise Vertov’s position by reproaching him on interpreting the world instead of transforming it, Vertov thematised something else in the ambiguity of the static and the dynamic: how can a declarative transformation be a way to keep a certain structure unchanged – how can the declarative substitution of interpretation with action serve as an alibi to preserve the magical and religious logic in the very *way* of acting. Precisely through thematising this problem, there arises the question: *what sort of* action can produce real change?

It is therefore also a matter of the necessity of the radical reflection on the production process itself. The question of the “communist deciphering of the visual world” is directly related to the question of the “communist method of work” that this film strives for (this phrase appears on a propagandistic writing documented in the film.)

### 3.

The question of how to use the inventions of capitalist entertainment industry to fight capitalism is determined by the question regarding the relation between the procedures of “the communist methods of work” and the capitalist working procedures, which the communist method appropriated in a way that was supposed to change them into a weapon for the struggle against their principles. When Vertov thematises this relation in *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, the procedural conception itself, regardless of the film’s propaganda orientation, does not allow for a simple application of ideological postulates. He attempts to reach an affirmation of these postulates through examining ideological *effects*. This brings with it distinctly critical implications, despite the declarative propaganda affirmativeness which was, of course, a presupposition without which such a film could not even have been made. Namely, the film’s propaganda strategy is based on the thematisation of mechanisms that weave the material existence of ideology-as-a-practice. This refers to the ideology against which Vertov is fighting as well as the ideology that he affirms.

Another thing Karel Radek obviously found problematic was also the following: instead of the film “exposing the conditions under which the masses lived under capitalism, and demonstrating the way which leads to industrialisation and to socialist collectivisation”<sup>67</sup>, instead of, for example, as Eisenstein in *The General Line*, showing the miserable cottages that the village poor give up freely to create a magnificent modernly equipped kolkhoz, Vertov posed the question regarding the practice of building socialism as a question about the practice of ideology – which he did on the basis of a seemingly most simple relation between gesture and sound. Vertov analysed how, through automatised gestures, ideology controlled people in Czarism – and: how it still controls them through the remains of the “old world” in new times – and posed the question about the relation between the automatised gestures and ideology, in new times. Is it a matter of simply transforming certain useless automatic gestures (crossing) into useful ones (Taylorist training)? Does the revolutionary march (the woman listening to the radio stands up when the revolutionary song comes on) affect people in the same way as liturgy did before? Is it that *The Internationale* takes over the role of church bells? Or is there now something structurally different in the very ways that sound and action connect?

If Vertov actually shows the production process without thematising production conditions and not clearly placing it into a context of the whole social dynamics, this only means that he is focusing on the question of how we can recognise this dynamics within the minimal determination of the new relations between sound and gesture. What is it that actually makes these relations new? And, in the end, what role can *sound itself, the song itself* play in this? Vertov is interested in the structure of sound and the structure of song. One of the questions he poses is: can there, in the sound itself, in the song itself, not perhaps actually be present a transformative moment? And on the other hand: in what way can the structure of this sound, this song originate from the production process itself? What does it actually mean that instead of the liturgy, *The Internationale* is sung? Is it possible that, as a song, *The Internationale* already initiates some radically differently structured relation between sound and gestures – or that it originates in it? When Vertov poses this question, he is aware that it is precisely this differently structured relation that is only in the process of creation. And that he himself is part of this process. Precisely as the documentarist of the five-year plan, Vertov is not in a simple position of an observer, but is aware that if he wants to be a documentarist of the sounds - production relation, he first has to invent the structure of this relation for film. By

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<sup>67</sup> Radek is cited by Annette Michelson in her introduction to: *Dziga VERTOV, op. cit.*, p. lviii.

placing *The Internationale* against liturgy, and the metal sounds of production, the “factory’s heart”<sup>68</sup>, against church bells (as I have already mentioned, we can sense, in the orchestration of these sounds, the memory of the booming proletkult “machine concerts” from the first years after the October Revolution), he wants to show the qualitative difference between sound related automatisms in the old society and sound related automatisms in the new society of building socialism. Namely, the sound-movement automatisms in the old society are determined one-way (sound → gesture) and are in the function of perpetuating the extant relations; whereas the sound-movement automatisms in the society of building socialism are directed towards the radical *transformation* of all social relations. In order to even be able to document the relation between “new sounds” and the socially transformative process, Vertov first has to invent the formula of this relation through the procedure of “intellectual montage” (despite the grandeur of the theme, Vertov’s procedure in showing the production process is sooner “intellectual montage” than a production of emotions).

In some ideal sense – so it appears – the rhythm of “liberated” work is supposed to comprise the sounds that make work rhythmical, the sounds that with their rhythm trigger work gestures, the sounds of work itself. The sound that triggers an act is supposed to be the sound of this act. But we do not come full circle that simply; to establish an approximation of such a relation, we need to keep investing enthusiastic music into the work process. In addition to this, the film structure needs interventions of an acousmatic voice that, in the viewer’s perception, transform the seen and the heard. The sounds of production are not self-sufficient but are in a constant relation to the revolutionary songs that initiate the work-process-as-the-building-of-socialism and at the same time come from and are grounded in it. The whole presentation of the production process exists with this relation between the way music enters the work process as a stimulator and then comes out of it as its symbolic product.

Because they ran out of coal, which caused a standstill in industrial production, the coalmining has to be intensified. When the Party delegates sing *The Internationale* at the meeting where they adopt the decisions about the implementation of the five-year plan, the singing is stopped just before the chorus line and, instead of this, we hear the real sound of a locomotive. Only then, can we hear the chorus. The train will take the newly mobilised work force to their posts and, with its strike work, it will make up for the stagnation in production. A sort of workers’ representative appears explaining with a serious all but enthusiastic face how they will have to start the strike work and at the same time mobilise all the work force,

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

also the komsomols. There follow the vows of strike workers who, in the end, fulfil the five-year plan in four years. The film presentation of work processes opens a real maze of interactions between rhythms that are invested into production by the enthusiastic charge of music and the rhythms of production itself. At a certain point the sounds of production are transformed into a revolutionary march. (Which can happen only after the intervention of the acousmatic voice, about which I will talk further on.) And when, in the end, the train carries away the full wagons of excavated coal and produced steel, at a certain moment there occurs an unusual blending: we hear the rhythm of the revolutionary march in the very sound of the train's wheels. Vertov formulates the way revolutionary music instigates a process and comes from it transformed, as its result, in his text on this film.<sup>69</sup> The song evokes a new era and simultaneously appears as its result. At the end, everything blends into a single musical euphoria: the archaic folk songs of the kolkhozniks, the music of marching processions and the sounds of the industrial process. Vertov himself talks about the “waves of enthusiastic sound”.<sup>70</sup>

As the sounds of struggle, these waves no longer battle the magic of liturgy, church bells, etc. (all this seems irrevocably defeated), but neither do they battle the capitalist class enemy but those forces of nature that seemed untamable: what people now battle are the “rivers of fire”, red-hot melted metals, etc. “We are fighters in the front-line of fire” At moments, the apotheosis of the “socialist offensive” acquires cosmic dimensions.

But on the other hand, it unusually quietens down towards the end – the film ends without a climax, it is more a matter of the powerful music charge slowly wearing out: at the very end, we see on the screen quite an ordinary procession of Red Army soldiers playing music and carrying rifles with shining bayonets. The film ends with this brass music and bayonets.

The process of transforming music into production and production into music is not complete. Just as, at the beginning of the film, Vertov lets us indulge in the possible religious emotions *ad nauseam*, only for the matter to appear problematic when we take a closer look at it, he also lets us watch the labourers' work long enough to see it is tormenting, exhausting drudgery, all but any sort of dancing. Radek's objection to the film was that Vertov limited himself to showing “fatiguing” and dispiriting episodes accompanied by music.<sup>71</sup> Although Radek (probably intentionally) overlooks the analytic value of the film's audiovisual

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 295-296.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. The foreword by Annette Michelson in: Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. lvii.

structure, he is here in a sense extraordinarily precise: he actually described the relation between the torment of the shown work and the “enthusiastic sound”. At a certain point, we become aware of the contrast. Or at least of the tension.

Here, the following question necessarily arises: at the level of presentation, what is the difference between this way of work and the way of work in exploiting capitalist conditions? When, in his famous article *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* (1918), Lenin<sup>72</sup> recommended the study of the Taylor system and its application in building socialism (what is bizarre and at the same time telling is that the management of the institute taking on this task was entrusted to a certain poet – the already mentioned Gastev, who was before an industrial worker himself<sup>73</sup>), he particularly emphasised that this system combines “the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements in the field of analysing mechanical motions during work”.<sup>74</sup> In what Vertov’s film shows us, what is it that, at the level of representation itself, concretely establishes the difference between a worker subjected to the “refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation” and a worker involved in the emancipatory project that is supposed to abolish every exploitation. In his film, Vertov explicitly presents the Taylor system itself, which presupposes motions that are automatised precisely in the way the crossing of believers upon the clanging of the bells is – and very graphically shows *that it is a matter of automatism and drill* – but he still does not show these motions as simple conditioned reflexes but as something accepted in the process of previous reflection. When he shows how there came to a standstill in production because of the shortage of raw material, he lets the already mentioned workers’ representative speak, explaining that they will have to make up for the shortfall by a general mobilisation of workers and strike workers – and then follow the shots of learning the mechanised work motions according to the Taylor system in parallel montage with the shots of the application of these motions to hard labour in a mine. (Meanwhile, we can notice that the motions are no

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<sup>72</sup> By the way, one of the things that had inspired Lenin in film already before WWI was precisely the mode of its application in the Taylor system; cf. *ibid.*, p. lvi.

<sup>73</sup> About Gastev and his application of the Taylor system and about the way Taylorism influenced the Russian avantgarde - Meyerhold and in film Lev Kuleshov – ,but above all, about how strike workers break with the norms of Taylorism see: Susan BUCK-MORSS, *op. cit.*, p. 104 – 111.

<sup>74</sup> “The task that the Soviet government must set the people in all its scope is—learn to work. The Taylor system, the last word of capitalism in this respect, like all capitalist progress, is a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements in the field of analysing mechanical motions during work, the elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, the elaboration of correct methods of work, the introduction of the best system of accounting and control, etc. The Soviet Republic must at all costs adopt all that is valuable in the achievements of science and technology in this field. The possibility of building socialism depends exactly upon our success in combining the Soviet power and the Soviet organisation of administration with the up-to-date achievements of capitalism. We must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system and systematically try it out and adapt it to our own ends.” In I. LENIN, *Lenin’s Collected Works*, Volume 27, 4th English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972, pp. 235-77.

longer – can no longer be – the same; the Taylor method of rationalising work motions originally applied to work done with machines whereas, here, the Taylor drill is applied to manual work in primitive conditions.) Although the actual decisions were adopted through central planning, the subjection to the relentless drill was, in the structure of the film, justified as a sort of “selfgoverning” decision for the concession to the capitalist way of work in the process of the anti-capitalist offensive. But the question remains: what is then the difference in the work process itself, in the course of the “offensive”? The only answer that the film itself offers can be: *enthusiasm*. Precisely such an answer would not be too far from the official Soviet definitions of the relation between the capitalist and socialist way of production as regards the “style of work” itself; let us just remember the famous, at the time ceaselessly repeated Stalin’s definition about the Leninist style in work from his *Foundations of Leninism* (1924): the Leninist style in work consists in combining Russian revolutionary sweep and American efficiency.<sup>75</sup> The difference then is precisely in the sweep, therefore enthusiasm. If, on the basis of what the film shows us, we wanted to define what the “*communist method of work*” that the already mentioned writing glorifies consists in, we could come to the following formula: *fordism as the fundamental ideal of system production + taylorism as the ideal of the methods of work within this system of production + strike work as an element of enthusiasm that first even enables everything and at the same time sets new coordinates for the whole system*. (Here we can largely agree with the fundamental thesis of Susan Buck-Morss from her book *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*: the anti-capitalist project of the Soviet Union failed /also/ because it was directed towards the realisation of the productivist “dreams” of capitalism itself; as Immanuel Wallerstein would say, the reality of the Soviet attempt at building socialism remained in the bounds of the capitalist “world system”. It is interesting that when Vertov contrasts the old and the new in this film, he actually, in what he shows, nowhere explicitly contrasts capitalism and socialism but rather opposes, in a structural sense, the pre-capitalist social practices /Orthodoxy/ and modernisation.) What is essential is the following: in this formula, it is not a matter of a simple adding of the elements but of the tension between them. At the level of film structure, Vertov actually thematises how, in facing the hardest tasks, the rhythms of strike work replace the rhythms of Taylorist procedures as something that is at the same time older and newer; as the tension between the past and the future, similarly to what Susan Buck-Morss writes about the difference between the motion structure of the Taylorist system and shock work:

“Shock work, the favoured organization form of labour during the first Five Year Plan, was precisely *not* Taylorist. Rather than standardizing rhythms based on scientific calculation of individual body

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Joseph STALINE, *The Problems of Leninism*, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1975, p. 123 – 124.

performance, it was executed in rushes, or “storms” by teams of workers. Its origins were said to have been “the very old, rural, rhythm-setting work cry (*vziali*),” the goal of which was higher productivity through extra human effort *without* machines. Whereas Taylorist rhythms set “norms” of labour, the purpose of shock work was to break them.”<sup>76</sup>

But what is it in this film that *subjectivises* enthusiasm at the level of film structure itself? Is not the sole bearer of the difference that transforms capitalist exploitation into socialist enthusiasm in the film precisely the “enthusiastic sound”? Sound as the real *subject* of enthusiasm...

The workers we see on film are evidently in pain – the mere glance at their hard labour in no way evokes the feeling of enthusiasm suggested by the music. (In itself, this does not mean that they are not perhaps *really* enthusiastic in their work – we know that a few years later a mass Stakhanovite movement arose precisely in Donbass. But we also know that almost all the fronts of the “socialist offensive” of the first Five-Year Plan met with more or less energetic resistance among the people.<sup>77</sup> All in all, Vertov does not even try to retouch the obviousness of the constraint connected to the work process; for example: in the shot of the kolkhozniks singing archaic songs while eagerly stacking hay, it is quite clearly seen that a /male/ supervising body is standing next to them, watching over their every move. It is really not strange that Vertov was no allowed to film any more after the mid thirties!) It is exhausting work that does not exactly entice the viewer sitting in the cinema to get up and do the same – in this sense the impression Karl Radek got seems justified.

And into this situation, Vertov intervenes with the acousmatic voice that – here and at some other places – breaks the main structure of the audiovisual relations in the film. Over the shots of drudgery reaching the limits of human strength, concretely over the famous shots of the three workers who without the help of machines together lift an enormous tool, there appears the acousmatic (male) voice saying:

“An affair of honour. A point of glory. A matter of courage and heroism.”

The appearance of this voice is calculated to the second. It appears precisely upon the completely unembellished presentations of the hardest labour in close-up; precisely at the moment when even so enthusiastic a viewer stops being fascinated with the aesthetic of the

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<sup>76</sup> Susan BUCK-MORSS, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Lewis SIEGELBAUM, Andrei SOKOLOV, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

work process and starts asking questions about the difference between a concrete worker exploited in his work and a concrete worker that this same work is supposed to save from exploitation. And precisely at the moment that also the fascination with the shock music and the sounds of production lessens. On the other hand, it is precisely this intervention that is the ground for the following sequences of production being accompanied by music – as if this music arose from the production process itself.

If, according to the inner logic of the film's presentation, the aversion that the long enough observation of the "beauty" of Orthodoxy stirs up in the viewer is used for the intervention against the Church,<sup>78</sup> then at the moment when the viewer could similarly stop being fascinated with the magnificence of the exhausting production process, the intervention of the acousmatic voice from the outside establishes a difference.

(Other interventions of the acousmatic voice also have the explicit role of establishing a difference; also in another direction: over the shots of playful kolkhozniks, riding in a sort of a procession of carted horses, dancingly waving their work tools, the acousmatic voice points out that it is a matter of a – *fight*.)

But the question is: what does Vertov actually accomplish with this intervention of the acousmatic voice?

By this, Vertov in no way aestheticises hard labour – rather, precisely by this voice that is supposed to transform the tormenting work into something magnificent in the mind of the viewer, he most underlines the SPLIT between the painfulness of a certain reality, which he does not conceal in the least, and the process of truth that is supposed to traverse this reality in the revolutionary project (which Vertov felt part of).

At the same time, this split is substantiated also visually: the diagonal pan of the camera, which intensifies the feeling of gravity when turning the verticals of the workers' bodies along the diagonal downwards, further increases the feeling of the burden's weight that the three workers are lifting and shows the overcoming of this weight as an almost superhuman effort – in this, we can sense the avant-garde dream to overcome gravity. The point at which the maximal exertion of workers, all the painfulness of their real existence is shown is at the same

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<sup>78</sup> If we draw a parallel to the first part of the film, the moment when the acousmatic voice appears in the second part structurally corresponds to the appearance of the factory steam whistle sound after showing religious automatisms.

time the point at which the outrageousness of the transformative potential of the revolutionary project as an emancipatory process, which Vertov aimed at, is symbolically most emphasised – and the point at which the DISTANCE that has to be overcome in this process is most relentlessly shown.<sup>79</sup>

An analogous - although not that drastic – split is suggested by Vertov at other places with interventions merely at the visual level: especially with the diagonal shift of the camera – usually in the other direction – so by way of composing the frame characteristic of Soviet avant-garde photography, which Alexander Rodchenko introduced him to in 1920s<sup>80</sup> (who was Vertov's close collaborator – he created the intertitles for his films in the era of silent film – and also the posters for *Kino-eye*). Thus, for example, the shot of workers learning mechanised production motions is composed diagonally. The pan of the camera showing an armed procession towards the end of the film, suggests that the procession is marching along the diagonal upwards. On the one hand, this is a typical “alienation effect”, on the other hand, a metaphoric transformation: the “ordinary” walk is through the gaze of the camera transformed into a communist “charge to the sky”. The same approach is especially suggestively used already with the model train in the context of the propaganda exhibition that mobilises the work force for the five-year plan. What is very interesting regarding this train is the following: it is accompanied by the writing *Towards Socialism*, but it rotates which could also bring to mind strange connotations. Saving it from this inertia, is precisely the shift of the camera angle that “propels” its rotation upwards along the diagonal.<sup>81</sup> “The communist deciphering of the visual world” propels the seeing from the static to the dynamic – thematising precisely the span between the inertia of reality and the dynamics of truth. *At the same time*, it is a matter of a relentless observation *and* transformative intervention on the basis of this observation.

What Vlada Petrić says about *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* goes indirectly – as far as the tension in the span he emphasises is concerned – also for *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*:

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<sup>79</sup> In a sort of paradoxical way, the Stakhanovite movement that appeared in Donbass in the following years tried to embody precisely this distance that I thematised here. “The potency of the masses channelled into the cosmocratic body creates an endless creativity of more and larger. There is no limit to this escalation. It is the logic of Stakhanovism, which replaced Taylorism as the model of Soviet labour in the 1930s. The Stakhanovite body is not a machine; it feels pain. The physical suffering that hollows out the individual for the sake of the collective is the ecstasy of the Soviet sublime. The triumph of the body is its destruction as well.” Susan BUCK-MORSS, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>80</sup> Rodchenko's influence on Vertov's composition has been noticed many times; cf. Vlada PETRIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>81</sup> It then returns to “normal” position but is multiplied in it and across this multiple rotation the writing itself, that this is the way to socialism, is diagonally placed.

with his procedures, Vertov creates “a 'grand metaphor' about a society free of any exploitation of workers. At the same time, however, this cinematic trope discloses all the contradictions of an undeveloped and/or badly managed socialist state.”<sup>82</sup> Although *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, was made only a year after *Chelovek s kino-apparatom*, the social situation as shown in *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)* is already quite different to the one in *Chelovek s kino-apparatom*: “the socialist offensive” was supposed to abolish precisely those contradictions that are critically shown in *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* – it meant a radical cut into the inertia of NEP that the avantgardists hated so, but precisely in this state of emergency of the “offensive”, the tensions are only escalated and aggravated.

For Vertov, the simultaneous creation of the “grand metaphor” about the future society and the relentless presentation of the hard social reality accompanied by an emphasis on the split between the two does not mean giving in under the weight of reality, but precisely the opposite, a condition to try and really revolutionarily overcome this split. As he wrote in 1927 in his personal notes – this excerpt refers to the filmmaking process itself but also to the social production process in the building of socialism as a whole:

“No concealment of the shortcomings, injustices, crimes, obstacles encountered in work, no fear of showing, speaking of them, and so forth – so as to overcome and eliminate them – that is a truly revolutionary objective, that’s the springboard for vigour, for optimism, for the will to fight. [...] here is the difference between feigned and real optimism: making our way through the most difficult obstacles put in our path, not by hiding behind a veil of prosperity, but rather in full view; and – no matter how hopeless the situation – emerging victorious into the arena of a new struggle. Against imaginary optimism, the stupid mask of invariable prosperity, we offer genuine optimism of revolutionary struggle.”<sup>83</sup>

The tension thematised by Vertov is precisely that insufferable tension that Mayakovsky points out in the concluding verses of the poem *To Sergey Yesenin* (1926) – after crying out that “the word is a commander in chief of human forces”. Vertov introduces sound into his film, through the tension between the level of reality and the level of the truth of the revolutionary process, in which it seems that, at critical moments, the future can depend on sound, song, one single slogan... At least this is the way Vertov understands and uses sound in this film.

I cite the verses by Mayakovsky:

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, pp. 166 – 167.

“Our planet  
is poorly equipped  
for delight.  
One must snatch  
gladness  
from the days that are.  
In this life  
it's is not difficult to die.  
To make life  
is more difficult by far.<sup>84</sup>

Is this not the ultimate formulation of the symbolic value of the *interval* as is understood in the dynamisation process of film material by Vertov?

### ***Annotation: Vertov and Truth***

Vertov understands film as a procedure of truth.

And that is also the basis for his rejection of fiction. And the basis for his way of using sound in film.

In view of this, what is essential for his stand is that he wants to reach truth only by way of truth. Vertov declaratively refuses to use lies – fiction – as a method of speaking truth. He thus consciously chooses the path of facing the problematic aspects of reality – “life as it is” – by taking “the line of the greatest resistance”. Vertov is unwavering: “The worst truth is still the truth.”<sup>85</sup>

The question that arises here is: does Vertov thus not remain captured in the substantialist conception of truth which we reach by a simple process of disclosure: does he not remain trapped under the idea that, behind the mask of appearance, “that which is real” is hiding – so

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<sup>84</sup> Vladimir MAYAKOVSKY, *Pesmi*, Državna založba Slovenije, Ljubljana 1977, str. 94-95.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

under the idea which embodies precisely the way the mask itself works? Many of his statements make us think so. (I am referring here to his frequent statements about his film procedure as a tearing away of the mask in order to reveal the real faces, etc.) Does Vertov then conceive truth as something that is hidden in things beforehand and has to be revealed, separated from appearance – something that exists as a metaphysical category and not as a process or a result of that process, something that has yet to happen by way of enlightenment? After all, we can read Eisenstein’s fundamental objection to Vertov also in this way: that Vertov is attempting to reveal the truth of reality by deciphering the metaphysical structure of this reality, instead of producing truth as affecting reality through those mechanisms that always structure this reality as ideological (which are, as Vertov had known very well, the mechanisms of fiction)? In other words, this would mean that Vertov remains blind for the ideological construction of reality. (This is precisely Eisenstein’s objection.) Is not Vertov in his insistence on reaching the truth only by way of truth, contrary to Eisenstein, caught in – Lacanianly put - “error of the non-duped”?

But Vertov rejects the use of fiction precisely *because reality is already acted*. He aims at the process of defictionalisation – which is conceived as a *transformation* of reality through perception transformed with technology (the transformation of “life facts” into “film facts”); as he says: to change the invisible into the visible, falsehood into truth... *The reality of everyday life is an acted reality. It is only the montage and the radical intervention into it that produces the negation*. The unactedness becomes unactedness only *as the result of the intervention* into reality-as-fiction. *For Vertov, fiction-as-the-procedure-of-art is problematic precisely because, in relation to reality that is itself structured as fiction, it has a role of a mere duplicate, a role of a (false) copy*. For Vertov, the transformative relation to reality is possible only in documentariness – but precisely because it is only the *transformation* of the filmed reality – concretely: montage – that *produces* documentariness. Already in *A New Current in Cinema* he sets his goal: “Instead of fake copies of life, the montage of life itself.”<sup>86</sup> (Which implies life-as-language, reality-as-language; in this sense, this is a very similar conception of the film - reality relation as we find later in Pier Paolo Pasolini – although, of course, Vertov and Pasolini had extremely different approaches to actual filmmaking.) A document is a result of creative innovation.<sup>87</sup> Vertov speaks of film as a “factory of facts”.<sup>88</sup> In the process of film-truth, he does not aim at verifying facts but

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>87</sup> Vertov most pointedly reflected on this in his diary notes *On My Illness* from 1934, in which he among other things deals precisely with the objections that his films are not artistic. Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 58-59.

realising *film facts*. These are produced precisely by montage: the truth is not in the continuity of the filmed life but in the cuts made by the editing process: not in the substance but the interval.

In his notes justifying why he cannot write scripts, Vertov emphasises his preparations for filming “life as it is” in the form of poems, “zaum” texts, etc.<sup>89</sup> Regarding “zaum”: the most “giddy” paradox that we can make out in the structuration of a film such as *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* is that – as I have already indicated – it is precisely the transformations of the visual material which are most contrary to “common sense” that prove to be an epistemological instrument (something “giving sense to chaos”/cf. Vertov’s notes to *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* / – and recognising class struggle in the seemingly most self-evident and “natural” phenomena); Vertov uses *zaum* as *causarum cognitio*.<sup>90</sup> With its treatment of the material, film gives sense to chaos precisely by breaking “common sense” which is recognised as chaos. Fiction is so problematic for Vertov precisely because it remains – in its imitativeness – caught in the limits of “common sense” and in these limits thwarts the reflection on the ideological mediation of reality.

In this respect, it is extraordinarily telling that when Vertov was prevented from further documentary filming in the mid 1930s, he began toying with the thought of making films that would be closest to – sci-fi. This was the only way that would enable him to keep using procedures he used before in filming “life as it is”. Vertov saw a greater similarity between his way of documentary filming reality and the sci-fi exploration of transcending the bounds of the possible than between his way of documentary filming and the usual acted film. For example, there is preserved a draft script (in the end he nevertheless conceded to drafting scripts) for his film about a girl who playing the piano, daydreams about falling asleep while reading a book by Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, “the father of Soviet cosmonautic” and then dreams about a world in which suddenly gravitation loosens.<sup>91</sup> (Vertov thus thematised

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<sup>89</sup> Vertov on the preparations for *Three song of Lenin*: “I covered many hundreds, perhaps thousands of blank pages with writing as we shot and edited film. And all merely to destroy what I’d written the moment a resolution – as clear and simple as the smile of Belik, the woman cement worker – would arrive. I had to write poems and short stories, dry reports, travel sketches, dramatic episodes, and *zaum* word-combinations; I had to make outlines and diagrams – and all this to achieve the graphic, crystalline combination of a particular sequence of shots.” Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>90</sup> This was implied by Tsvivan in his commentary on the relation between Vertov and Marxism. Cf. Yuri TSIVIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 14 – 19.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Dziga VERTOV, *op. cit.*, p. 299 – 309. Since Vertov’s idea for this film was inspired by Tsiolkovsky, it is interesting to point out the special interference of fiction and reality in the principles of Tsiolkovsky’s research: as a youngster Tsiolkovsky was supposedly decidedly influenced by reading a book by Jules Verne *From the Earth to the Moon* – sci-fi was an important encouragement for his research of the real problems of flying in space that actually meant the beginning of the Soviet cosmonaut programme. An even more important influence on Tsiolkovsky later was of course the completely fantastic speculation of the “biocosmic” philosopher Nikolay

something that was not just one of the central obsessions of the Russian Avantgarde but of the Soviet civilisation as such.<sup>92</sup>) As a dream within a dream, the film would show a fantastic transformation of the world in which people and things started flying in the air...

But precisely such motifs already appear in Vertov's "documentary" films. In *Entuziazm (Simfoniya Donbassa)*, there is a moment of inverted gravitation when the red star and flag fly to the tower of the desacralised church. But this is also one of the shots in which we see that, despite swearing to unactedness, Vertov still occasionally had to use moments of previously directed "acting": someone had to throw the red star and flag from the tower to the ground so that in the rewinded shot they are freed of gravity and fly up to it.

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Fyodorov.

<sup>92</sup> A very condensed presentation of this tendency can be found in a booklet on the most famous installation by Ilya Kabakov: Boris GROYS, *Ilya Kabakov: The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment*, Afterall Books, London, 2006.