

## The Ear against the Eye: Vertov's Symphony

Oksana Bulgakowa (Berlin)

Vertov defined the basic qualities of his Cine-Eye by means of a simple negation: it sees what remains inaccessible to the human eye.<sup>1</sup> This means that in his films we see media-based and media-produced images that have nothing to do with the imitation of human perception. According to Vertov, such filmic, telescopic, or microscopic perception develops, educates, and expands the viewer's analytical abilities.<sup>2</sup> Thus, we have on the one hand a media-induced perception and on the other a new assemblage or montage of the fragments of this mediated perception. This new montage is based on a specific interaction and follows poetic rather than prosaic rules. It is freed from such constraints as time, space, causality, or speed. In other words it is based on properly media-specific qualities and, following the terminology of the Russian Futurists who influenced Vertov in his youth, it constitutes *zaum* or transrationality. This montage creates a new filmic, i.e., media-shaped, reality and a message or an illusion of a message—a semantic field. The seemingly contradictory division between an epistemological and analytical comprehension of media-shaped perception and the trans-rational nature of the montage structure reproduces the same split or shift that can be found in Vertov's biography (the tension between the absolute film that he envisioned and the political news reels he had to produce) and in the contradictory interpretations of his notion of “cinema truth,” which was understood both literally and as a media-specific mode of representation.<sup>3</sup>

---

1 I am grateful to Anne Dwyer for editing the English version of this text and for translating several passages. Many thanks also for help, suggestions, and ideas to David Bordwell, Hans-Christian von Herrmann, Lutz Koepnick, Philippe Langlois, David Levin, Valérie Poséner, Gottfried Schlemmer, Karl Sierek, Marc Silberman, Thomas Tode, and discussion participants in Vienna, Paris, Jena, and Madison, where I presented this paper.

“Kino-eye is understood as ‘that which the eye doesn't see,’ as the microscope and telescope of the time, [...] as a possibility of seeing without limits and distance, [...] as tele-eye, as X-ray eye...,” Vertov, “The Birth of Kino-Eye,” *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley, U of California P, 1984) 41.

2 Lucy Fisher interprets Vertov's program of the Cine-Eye as “scientific endeavor,” a combination of science and film. Fisher, “ENTHUSIASM: From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye,” *Film Quarterly* 31.2 (1977/78) 25-34. Annette Michelson defines Vertov as an epistemologist. Michelson, “From Magician to Epistemologist: THE MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA,” *Artforum*, 10. 7 (1972) 60-72. Gilles Deleuze inscribes the qualities of the cine-eye in his differentiation between natural (human, immobile) and cinematic (mobile) perception. Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) 8-11, 39-40.

3 In his first manifesto “We” (1922) Vertov defined film as “dynamic geometry,” as “the race of points, lines, planes, volumes.” In order to “represent a dynamic study on a sheet of paper,” he searched for a “film scale,” for “graphic symbols of movement.” Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye* 9. But as a director of a screen newspaper *Kinopravda* he was “bound hand and foot. ...Neither political filming

It is crucial to keep these contradictions in mind as we approach Vertov's theories of acoustic perception and his concept of the radio-ear. I will show how he defined sound within the context of his ideas about media truth and how these ideas were shaped by the process of making his first sound film, *ENTHUSIASM OR THE SYMPHONY OF THE DONBAS* (1931). In numerous interviews Vertov insisted on the authentic nature of sound, i.e., its documentary nature, distinguishing between "natural noises" and "imitative sound recorded on studio equipment."<sup>4</sup> But *ENTHUSIASM* follows a musical form and is thus related to a very specific medium. Vertov structures the film as a symphony, as program music with a narrative that employs the principles of repetition, variation, transposition, contrast, and counterpoint of visual and acoustic leitmotifs. The sounds and the images are assembled according to these principles and can be analyzed separately.

This first sound film was a strategic endeavor for Vertov: he had to prove that film would not lose its dynamic qualities when sound was added and that it was possible to record real industrial noises. Several influential Soviet technicians, directors and theorists of the 1920s doubted that one could record and reproduce such noises and proposed to create them artificially in the studio, arguing that these noises were not "audiogenic" (the term was coined in analogy to the notion of *photogénie*).<sup>5</sup> *ENTHUSIASM* was also the first of Vertov's films not photographed by his brother Mikhail Kaufman. Because of ongoing rivalry and conflict between the brothers, Mikhail left to establish himself as an independent filmmaker, and Boris Tseitlin, who had been Kaufman's assistant during *THE ELEVENTH YEAR* (1927), shot the film. The change of cameramen did not produce a stylistic break in the film's "image track" because it was shot on the same location as *THE ELEVENTH YEAR*, and Tseitlin repeated some of Kaufman's compositions.

Vertov disagreed not only with the theory of *audiogénie* but also argued against Eisenstein's notion that asynchrony between image and sound was the only real option for sound film.<sup>6</sup> He declared in several articles and interviews *before* shooting and editing started that images and sounds could enter any kind of relationship; for him, there was no difference in editing a silent film or a sound film.<sup>7</sup> These polemics notwithstanding, Vertov's work in sound was based on the same principles of counterpoint and asynchrony that Eisenstein had theorized.

---

nor filming done under economic pressure takes into account the cinematic interest of a subject, and this necessarily results in the recording of static moments together with the dynamic—which is inadmissible in the poetry of movement." Vertov, "The Fifth Issue of *Kinopravda*" (1922), *Kino-Eye* 10.

4 Vertov, "The Radio-Eye's March," *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*. Eds. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (New York and London: Routledge, 1988) 299-300; Vertov, "Replies to Questions" (25 April 1930), *Kino-Eye* 105-06.

5 Vertov, "Let's discuss Ukrainfilm's First Sound Film *SYMPHONY OF THE DONBAS*," *Kino-Eye* 107, 112. Vertov, "Speech to the First All-Union Conference on Sound Cinema (August 1930)," *The Film Factory* 302. The notion of *photogénie*, first elaborated by Louis Delluc in 1920, was widely discussed in Russia (see *Poetika kino*, 1927). *Photogénie* was defined as an intrinsic property of objects and faces whose beauty was revealed by the screen; not all phenomena of real life possessed this quality. But *photogénie* was also understood as the media-specific aesthetic quality that could express things and faces by subjecting them to filmic transformation (through lenses, light, and framing).

6 Sergei Eisenstein, Grigory Alexandrov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, "Statement on Sound" (1928), *Eisenstein. Writing 1922-34. Ed. And transl. Richard Taylor* (London: BFI, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994), 113-14.

7 Vertov, "The Radio-Eye's March" 302.

Vertov's position immediately recalls Marinetti's, Pratella's, and Russolo's Futurist program.<sup>8</sup> It resonates as well with the new Russian Bruitist music that "had to embrace all noises of the mechanical age, the rhythm of the machine, the din of the great city and the factory."<sup>9</sup> (Arseni Avraamov's *Symphony for Factory Sirens*, which was performed in 1922 in Baku and in 1923 in Moscow, is the most famous example of Bruitist practice.) Vertov insisted that the limited number of well-tempered musical sounds needed to be replaced by an infinite variety of authentic, irregular, non-tempered noises, following right in Russolo's footsteps:

Musical sound is too limited in variety of timbres. [...] Today, the machine has created such a variety and contention of noises that pure sound in its slightness and monotony no longer provokes emotion. [...] We must break out of this limited circle of pure sounds, and conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds. [...] Futurist musicians must continually enlarge and enrich the field of sound. This corresponds to a need in our sensibility. [...] 2. Futurist musicians must substitute for the limited variety of timbres that the orchestra possesses today, the infinite variety of timbres in noises, reproduced with appropriate mechanisms. 3. The sensibility of musicians, being freed from traditional and facile rhythm, must find in noises the means of expanding and renewing itself, given that every noise offers the union of the most diverse rhythms, in addition to that which predominates.<sup>10</sup>

Vertov's interest in sounds started in his youth. As a student at the Neurological Institute in Petrograd in 1916-17, he wrote Futuristic sound poems and tried to create word and noise collages. The atmosphere in Petrograd and at the Neurological Institute, where Vladimir Bekhterev set the tone, may have inspired these ideas. Russolo's program was well known in Russia. His manifestos and concerts were reviewed and heatedly debated in the 1914-15 edition of the journal *Muzyka*—the adjectives used by the critics were the same ones employed fifteen years later in the discussion of Vertov's film. Moreover, when Marinetti came to Russia in February 1914, he had noted the preeminence in Bruitism of Russian musicians and sound theoreticians like Arthur Lourié and Nikolai Kul'bin. In Russian circles the discussion about a new conception of sound was started by the distinction between music, sound (*zvuk*), and noise (*shum*), between the "music of nature" (Kul'bin) and the "music of objects" (Lourié). Helmholtz's differentiation was redefined since the hierarchy of sound and noise was dismissed.<sup>11</sup> Bekhterev's laboratory researched the

---

8 Georges Sadoul, the first scholar to examine the connections between the programs of Vertov and the Italian Futurists, convincingly compares Marinetti's program of representing noise in poetry with "mots en liberté," Balilla Pratella's manifesto of Futuristic musicians (1911), Luigi Russolo's "Art of Noises" (1913), the first performances of Futurist Bruitists, Guillaume Apollinaire's ideas and practice of words-noises recordings from 1914 with Vertov's recording and montage of words and noises. Georges Sadoul, "Actualités de Dziga Vertov," *Cahiers du cinéma* 144 (1963) 21-31 and *Dziga Vertov* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1971) 15-46.

9 René Fuegoep-Miller, a European observer of early Soviet experiments in art, described these concerts in a book from 1925: "The Bolsheviks very soon proceeded to construct special noise instruments, to form noise orchestras [...] They imitated all conceivable sounds from industry and technology and united them in peculiar fugues, in which a whole world of noise deafened the ear." He also published a photograph of the performance of a Bruitist symphony by Avraamov. See Fuegoep-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 183-84.

10 Russolo, *The Art of Noises* (1913). Transl. from the Italian and intro. Barclay Brown (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986) 24-25, 28.

11 These debates are summarized in an informative monograph by Julia Kursell, who also cites from Prokofiev's article about Russolo's concert (132). Vertov's relationship to these circles still remains to be explored. Julia Kursell, *Schallkunst: eine*

psycho-physiological and therapeutic influences of sound combinations on the “excitability and inhibition of the human cerebral cortex,” but Bekhterev’s experiments focused largely on music rather than noises.<sup>12</sup>

At this time Vertov was dreaming of sound as a powerful form of expression:

I decided to include the entire audible world into the concept of “Hearing.” It was during this time that I attempted to draw up the sounds of a saw mill. [...] I tried to describe the audio impression of the factory in the way a blind person would perceive it. In the beginning I used words to record the sounds, but then I attempted to capture all of these different noises with letters. The existing alphabet did not suffice to write down all of the sounds that you hear in a saw mill.<sup>13</sup>

Vertov founded a “Laboratory of the Ear” but had difficulty capturing sound in a mode other than that of the sound poem—namely with a wax disc recorder; not until the emergence of sound film did he find the opportunity to realize his noise collages.<sup>14</sup> Vertov was uninterested in using imitative instruments to recreate these sounds and was irritated by such imitations in early sound films. Commenting on Ruttman’s *Melodie der Welt* (1929), he noted that the “sound part of the film was composed of music and artificially imitated sounds” and that he, Vertov, had been the first to “walk out of the muffled coffin of the sound studios” and to record “authentic” sound on location, the “iron clanking and fearful roar of Donbas.”<sup>15</sup>

The principles that Vertov developed by transforming noises into a musical symphony were based on montage and relied on varying the speed of recorded sounds in post-production. Montage allowed him to combine established quantities of selected and recorded noises, which he treated like leitmotifs (to use traditional terminology) or samples (to use a more recent term). He could cut them, put them in loops, and combine them according to principles of musical composition. The repetitive structure of the rondo form was particularly appealing to Vertov. By varying the recording speed, he was able to change the sound pitch and introduce gradation similar to ascending or descending scales. Russolo and Avraamov obtained a similar kind of gradation by other means: Russolo built a machine, and Avraamov adjusted the whistles or sirens like musical instruments to obtain differentiation.<sup>16</sup> As the French scholar Philippe Langlois recently noted,

---

*Literaturgeschichte der Musik der frühen russischen Avantgarde* (Wien: Gesellschaft zur Förderung slawistischer Studien, 2003).

12 Siegfried Zielinski, *Archäologie der Medien* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2002) 288-89.

13 Speech of 5 April 1935; unpublished manuscript in the archive of the *Österreichisches Filmmuseum*. Cited in Thomas Tode, “Töne stürmen gegen das Bild. Musikalische Strukturen im Werk von Dziga Vertov,” *Cinema 49* (Marburg: Schüren, 2004) 23.

14 Georges Sadoul believed that Vertov could produce these sound collages, however Seth Feldman remarked that Vertov did not have the technical capacities for it: “Working with a Pathephone wax disc recorder, Vertov attempted to record sounds both inside and outside the studio, and to re-edit them into entirely new compositions. He was, in essence attempting to create the concrete symphonies that would be heard in his films in the 1930s and would become technically feasible for composers only with the introduction of tape recording in the 1940s. The result obtained with the equipment available in 1917 must have been discouraging. As a result, the stage was set for the frustrated young artist to try his hand at another medium.” Seth R. Feldman, *Dziga Vertov: A Guide to References and Resources* (London: G. K. Hall, 1979) 2.

15 Vertov, “Speech to the First All-Union Conference on Sound Cinema” 302-03.

16 See Russolo: “Giving pitch to [to attune] noises does not mean depriving them of all irregular movements and vibrations of time

Vertov transformed the simple deceleration of the sound of a whistle (recorded at different speed, then reproduced at 24 images per second) into the distinctly heard notes G, B, and C.<sup>17</sup>

With *ENTHUSIASM* Vertov proved that it was possible to record actual noises. His film did not lose its dynamics, but since he shot some of the images and sound separately, it was in some sense a “fraud.” From late September to early November 1929 Vertov shot in Donbas with a silent camera. During this time he filmed the transformation of a church into a workers’ club. This means that he produced the images of the first part of *ENTHUSIASM*, “The Birth of the Radio-Ear,” by means of silent film.<sup>18</sup> From late November to late December he and the composer Nikolai Timofeev developed a musical score that integrated the noises and their transformation, distortion, and variation.<sup>19</sup> The score defined which noises would be used as leitmotifs and established a precise structure of repeated patterns of different lengths in analogy to musical measures. The images in the sequence were to follow the rhythm of the sound score. In early March Vertov took a crash course at the lab of inventor Alexander Shorin, a key figure in Soviet sound recording who developed special portable equipment for Vertov’s use. Shorin’s system of radio microphones allowed him to record actual urban sounds: industrial noises in the harbor, sounds of the railroad and the railway station, streets, trams, the Eastern Church service, and the May First rally. These sound recordings were screened without images at the “House of Film” movie theater in Leningrad. The critic Rafailovich described the event:

The screening was unusual. In the dark room the rectangle of the screen was shining in its white virginity. But nobody was interested in the screen. The bells sounded, a choir sang a religious choral, a glass was broken, somebody was beaten, and when, in this symphony of a drunken scandal, a traditional Russian word of insult was heard clearly, nobody doubted the documentary nature of the filmed material. We saw a recording of authentic sound.<sup>20</sup>

---

and intensity, but rather assigning a degree or pitch to the strongest and most prominent of these vibrations.” *Art of Noises*, 27. About Avraamov’s *Symphony of Sirens*, see “The Symphony of Sirens,” *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-Garde*. Eds. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1992) 245-52. The tuning of the sirens was described by Avraamov’s son in a television interview with Nikolai Izvolov: *Dinamicheskaja grafika*, Channel 4 of the Russian TV (now NTV), 1996.

17 “Ce son de sirène, lui-même constitué de trois notes distinctement entendues (Sol, Si, Do), est utilisé de manière saisissante (avec un diapason accordé à 435 Hz). [...] Rythme irrégulier de la sirène (thème A) / Trame figée du son de sirène suivi d’un léger effet de *portamento* vers le registre grave puis remontée vers le son initial exécuté trois fois, (Thème B) / thème A / Thème B’ répété trois fois transposé à demi-vitesse (une octave plus basse) / Thème A’ à demi-vitesse (une octave plus basse) / Thème B’ transposé à demi-vitesse (trois fois) / Thème B” transposé au quart de la vitesse soit deux octaves plus basses auquel s’ajoute le son d’un télégraphe en morse inspiré du rythme initial de la sirène / Courte rupture (silence).” Philippe Langlois, *Les procédés électroacoustiques dans les différents genres cinématographiques, une étude transversale au XXe siècle*. Thèse du doctorat (Dépt. Musicologie, Université de Paris IV Sorbonne, 2004) 67-68.

18 See Vertov, “The Radio-Eye’s March” and “Speech to the First All-Union Conference on Sound Cinema” 299-300, 302-03. Vertov’s plans for shooting and Elizaveta Silova’s production diary allow us to reconstruct what was filmed where and whether the footage was silent or synchronous. RGALI [Russian State Archive for Art and Literature], 2091-2-240 and 414.

19 Vertov’s archive also includes other notes: an elliptical diagram of the screenplay; a graphic map of the sounds, being an exact record of the contrapuntal connections between image, music, and noise; a notebook with notes about synchronization; and the musical score. RGALI, 2091-2- 40, 240, 241, 415 and 2091-1-37.

20 D. Rafailovich, “Novaia pobeda tonfilma,” *Krasnaia gazeta*, 26 April 1930, quoted in Vertov, “Tvorcheskaia kartochka” (published by Aleksandr Deriabin), *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* 30 (1996) 178.

Vertov was able to carry out the first synchronous shooting in Kharkov in early June; from July on he filmed in Donbas. The team “filmed” noises in the mines and foundries: whistles, lorries, shunting engines, sirens—all very noisy objects, but they never had an opportunity to listen to the rushes. Vertov used three types of recording without giving preference to any single method. He recorded image and sound separately, image and sound at the same time but with different cameras (image with the silent camera and sound with the sound recording apparatus), and image and sound synchronously.<sup>21</sup> Some of the filmed material turned out to be defective, so if the sound could not be used, then the visual sequences were thrown out as well.

Next the sounds and the images were joined together generally in an asynchronous way: the noises of the party convention were paired with the images of the iron foundry; the sounds of church service accompanied a group of drunks, etc. In this context each synchronous image functioned as a surprise, and a special value was attached to each synchronous object (a bell, a factory siren, drums, and crowds). Vertov filmed in Donbas for one month. By late August he started post-production in Kiev. He noted in his diaries that he needed 50 days and nights.<sup>22</sup> But the film premiere, scheduled for October, was deferred until February 8, and the film was released only on April 1, 1931. (There was one preview in Kiev on November 1). This three-month delay was probably caused by problems with the sound equipment in the movie theaters. The film was literally deafening, and projection difficulties were predictable: in most cinemas ENTHUSIASM’S Bruitist symphony could be presented only in a distorted way. Vertov aimed at a grand scale—his film ranged from very low to very high sounds, from very intense noises like buzzing to extremely quiet ones. But the loudspeakers in the movie theaters were adjusted to “golden average” frequencies, so high and quiet sounds remained imperceptible while low sounds and excessive volumes mutated into undifferentiated rattle.<sup>23</sup> This noise was perceived as a defect not of the projection, but of the recording, and Russian critics spoke of the film’s unbearable cacophony.

After the first public screenings in 1931 numerous reviews and lively discussions formulated the reproaches against Vertov. (The first screening took place in Kharkov in January; the second in Moscow in February.) The critics stressed the chaotic nature of the film that failed to give the spectator any political guidelines or any aesthetic (in this case acoustic) organization. It was said that the film represented the production process as hellishly difficult forced labor and that the industrial noises exceeded the capacities of human perception. These noises were likened to screeching, buzzing, thundering, shaking, or a horrible roar. They were labeled inhuman, mechanical, monotonous, primitive, confused, exhausting, soporific, aggressive, irritating, deafening, overladen.<sup>24</sup> Viktor Shklovsky wrote in his review that the film “crushed the spectators

21 Vertov, “Speech to the First All-Union Conference on Sound Cinema” 303.

22 Vertov, “Let’s discuss,” *Kino-Eye* 110. The Review *Proletarskoe kino* gave the following data: 40 days shooting in Donbas, 40 days shooting in Leningrad, 40 days for the post production. The filming lasted so long because the sound recording equipment had to be rebuilt and readjusted. During post-production Vertov worked with four positive prints and two negatives. *Proletarskoe kino* 3 (1931) 12.

23 Vertov, “Tvorcheskaia kartočka” 181.

24 The most vehement public criticism came from Karl Radek in *Izvestiia* 112 (23 April 1931) 4, and Nikolai Lebedev in *Literatura i iskusstvo* 9/10 (1931) 15-16. The reviews in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, where the debate continued through February and March, and *Proletarskoe kino*, which discussed the film for an entire year, repeat the same adjectives to describe the film. The transcripts of the

physically.”<sup>25</sup> Foreign critics, however, were enthusiastic. During the screenings in London and Hamburg Vertov was able to regulate the sound. Thorold Dickinson describes a comic battle between him and the sound engineer over who would sit at the sound desk and regulate the volume.<sup>26</sup> Vertov himself admitted that he had heard his film for the first time abroad. Hanns Eisler wrote: “It is spectacular—the way the music attacks the image, the way the contradictions emerge between these two dimensions. This is all completely new, the most brilliant innovation that the sound film has delivered.”<sup>27</sup> Chaplin was also filled with enthusiasm and sent a telegram to Vertov: “Never had I known that these mechanical sounds could be arranged so beautifully. I regard it as one of the most exhilarating symphonies. Mister Vertov is a musician.”<sup>28</sup>

As viewers and listeners today, we find ourselves in a difficult situation. Much of the sound track to *ENTHUSIASM* was destroyed and has been only partly reconstructed. We do not really know which passages should be asynchronous. Peter Kubelka’s restoration (which is the version known in the United States) has followed the principle of synchrony.<sup>29</sup> The version suggested by the prints from the Russian film archive Gosfilmofond and from La Cinémathèque Française is, however, much more radical.

It is remarkable that this film, which breaks with the “limited circle of well-tempered sounds,” is structured as a programmatic four-movement symphony in which leitmotifs and refrains develop a musical narration. The four movements are as follows:

First Movement: desacralization of a church (Overture; allegro). (This is a sonata-form movement built on a contrasting first main theme and a second subdominant theme: the bell and the factory whistle function as main and subdominant themes on the level of noises; the liturgy and the march fulfill these roles on a melodic level.)

Second movement : work in the coal mines (moderato)

Third movement : work in the foundry (Rondo; allegro vivace)

Fourth movement : harvest in the country side (Pastoral; andante cantabile)

---

public discussions are currently being prepared for publication (RGALI, 2091-2-208 and 417). The satirists Il’f and Petrov spoke of “castrated music” and “Donbas-cacophony” and recommended that the film be withheld from the theaters. Radek also spoke of “exhausting cacophony” and recommended that the film be withdrawn. See Lev Roshal, *Dziga Vertov* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1982) 215.

25 Viktor Šklovsky, “Est zvuki, net lenty,” *Govorit Moskva* (10 May 1931), quoted in Roshal, *Dziga Vertov* 215.

26 See Vertov. *Tagebücher/Arbeitshefte*. Eds. Thomas Tode and Alexandra Grammatke (Konstanz: UVK Medien, 2000) 23. Vertov, “Charli Chaplin, gamburskie rabochie i prikazy doktora Virta,” *Proletarskoe kino* 3 (1932) 40-45. Vertov, “Tvorcheskaia kartochka” 187-91.

27 “Musiker und Maler über Dziga Wertoff,” *Die ungewöhnlichen Abenteuer des Dr. Mabuse im Lande der Bolschewiki. Ein Buch zur Filmreihe Moskau-Berlin*. Ed. Oksana Bulgakowa (Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek, 1995) 157.

28 Chaplin quoted in Vertov. *Kino-Eye* 170.

29 Kubelka tried to establish the synchrony of the visible impacts, the basic asynchrony of the film is retained. See Lucy Fisher, “Restoring *Enthusiasm*. Excerpts from an interview with Peter Kubelka.” *Film Quarterly* 31.2 (Winter 1977/78): 35-36. Kubelka recently explained his principle of restoration in an interview made for the bonus material of the DVD *Enthusiasmus* released by the Austrian Film Museum, 2005.

These four movements, which are not treated similarly (the overture lasts 21 minutes and the pastoral only 10 minutes), are both united and separated by the rallies that accompany the various production processes. The rallies and the people participating in them suggest different places and different times. But similar patterns of framing and filming transform the movement of the masses into a visual compositional bracket. (The camera always shoots the masses just slightly from above or below; the direction of the files of people in the diagonals remains the same.) The rallies act like homogeneous caesuras and refrains: after the first appearance of the march in the ninth minute, it returns every three minutes. The four movements illustrate the program of the first Five-Year Plan (1928-1932), also known as the “impious” plan. Industrialization and the elimination of religion go hand in hand: in this period innumerable churches were turned into clubs, closed, and destroyed, their icons burned. Seen from this perspective, the film’s four movements follow the party’s four elementary directives: 1. Down with religion! 2. Go for coal! 3. Overtake America in steel production! 4. Collectivize the country on the basis of industrialization (coal, steel, tractors, etc.)!

The film establishes both causal and purely formal relations between the movements. The formal connections include the contrast of tempo (quick, slow, quick, slow) and of luminosity (light, dark, chiaroscuro, light). The overture introduces a contrapuntal relationship between visual and aural leitmotifs, which helps us understand how Vertov conceived of sound in his media program. The first trace of his sound theory can be found in the two scripts that led up to the film.<sup>30</sup> Vertov wrote the sound script in December 1929; the visual script followed later. In the sound script he worked out the conflict between two sonic worlds that coincide with the symbolic systems of the sacred and the secular and were attributed to the collective bodies of the church and the factory. He also elaborated a second conflict between the sounds of the collective body and the individual body. He staged a confrontation between the subjective noises of a heart, a clock, and a piano—sounds that do not exceed the dimension of human perception—with noises of the crowds and industrial noises that can be perceived only by means of a technical apparatus. The industrial noises (a siren, a factory whistle) absorb both the sacral noises (the church bell) and the individual noises (a piano melody) and take power from both. The sound scenario’s narrative can be interpreted as a filmic adaptation of Russolo’s manifesto *The Art of Noises*:

Among primitive people, sound was attributed to the gods. It was considered sacred and reserved for priests. [...] Thus was born the concept of sound as something in itself, as different from and independent of life. And from it resulted music, a fantastic world superimposed on the real one. [...] Let us cross a large modern capital with our ears more sensitive than our eyes. We will delight in distinguishing the eddying of water, of air or gas in metal pipes, the muttering of motors that breathe and pulse with indisputable animality, the throbbing of valves, the bustle of pistons, the shrieks of mechanical saws, the starting of trams on the tracks, the cracking of whips, the flapping of awnings and flags. We will amuse ourselves by orchestrating together in our imagination

---

30 Vertov, “Sound March (from SYMPHONY OF THE DONBAS),” “SYMPHONY OF THE DONBAS (ENTHUSIASM),” *Kino-Eye* 289-95.



the din of rolling shop shutters, the varied hubbub of train stations, iron works, thread mills, printing presses, crowds, electric power stations and subways.<sup>31</sup>

Vertov's visual script had two parts: the transformation of a church into a club and a set of interdependent actions around the three basic elements of coal, steel, and grain. These visual dynamics were represented like the results of the impact of energy. First came the vertical movement down and up: the crosses move down from the churches, ore comes up from the depth of the mines to the furnaces. Next expansion occurred on the horizontal level of the rails (the connections), the fields (the harvest), and the city squares (the rallies). The collective body of the crowd was designed as a unit that incorporated both individual melodic sounds and industrial noises. The contradictions of the sound script, where human sounds clashed with machine sounds, were organically resolved in this collective body.

Vertov foresaw in neither of the scripts the semantic oppositions and confrontations produced by the film—ear/eye, sound/image, radio/church, Constructivism/Naturalism. They were formed in the film and by the film while he was exploring the associative potentials of sound and image, playing with the possibilities of their equivalence, and testing strategies of substitution by replacing image with sound and vice versa. By combining sounds and images and creating a Futurist noise collage, he produced a shift that perhaps he himself had not conceived and that even today evokes contradictory evaluations of the film as either Stalinist or avant-garde.<sup>32</sup> A close reading of the film's overture shows how Vertov arrived at this shift.

The overture adapts "The Birth of the Radio-Ear" to the screen. Vertov exposes the media-induced character of sound: at the beginning we see a girl tuning a radio and putting on headphones; there is a close-up of her ear. The sonic worlds of the church and the radio are juxtaposed, and each has a magic force. The magic force attributed to sound transforms the content of the image: the stroke or percussion of a bell brings forth a series of old, emblematic objects such as a crown with the monogram of Nicholas II, a statue of Christ, a cross. These images are extinguished by the metronome, which functions as a sign of the radio. The sacral world, represented by the baroque church and icons, has a sumptuous visual presence; the secular, urban, industrial radio world is at first introduced without images and represented only by a disembodied voice. The studio is black; we see a conductor, but the orchestra that produces the music remains invisible. By the end of the overture the leitmotiv of the march will drown out the church service, and the church's visual splendor will be destroyed.

---

31 Russolo, *Art of Noises* 26.

32 For a reading of the film as "Stalinist," see Jacques Aumont, "Avant-garde: de quoi? A propos d'*Enthousiasme* (1930)," *Vertov: l'invention du réel. Actes du colloque de Metz*. Ed. Jean-Pierre Esquenazi (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997) 41-57. Laurent Jullier considers the film to be a Futurist and Constructivist work and compares it with Pierre Schaffer's *musique concrète*. Jullier, "Enthousiasme! Travail de l'ouvrier, travail du cinéaste." *Vertov: l'invention du réel* 97-112.

The woman without the “radio-ears” listens to the old sounds (or remembers them), and the radio-ear opens her ears to a new sound world that consists of industrial noises and the march music that will become the leitmotiv of the crowd. This woman with earphones functions as the mediator of filmic hearing just as the man with the camera acted as the mediator of filmic vision in Vertov’s preceding film (*MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA*, 1929).<sup>33</sup> In the attribution of senses he follows the traditional distribution of gender roles as suggested by Adorno: vision is male, and hearing is female. The eye demands analytical concentration, while the ear is undifferentiated, chaotic, emotional, and passive. This is why girls always take music lessons and boys learn to draw.<sup>34</sup>

In this sequence, however, Vertov produced a non-traditional, media-related switch: his film starts by broadcasting the sound track, but we, the spectators, see what the girl-mediator is hearing, as if the circuits of perception were incorrectly connected. The eye and the ear exchange places so that the ear “sees.” This exchange of the aural and the visual encapsulates “The Birth of the Radio-Ear as the Cine-Eye” as described by Vertov in his diaries. In remembering how he came to the idea of the Cine-Eye, he resorts not to visual but to aural impressions—noises, sentence fragments, sighs. It was sound that had originally inspired him to think about destroying totality and reassembling the fragments in a new totality.

One day in the spring of 1918... returning from a train station. There lingered in my ears the sighs and rumble of the departing train...someone’s swearing... a kiss... someone’s exclamation... laughter, a whistle, voices, the ringing of the station bell, the puffing of the locomotive... whispers, cries, farewell... And thoughts while walking: I must get a piece of equipment that won’t describe but will record, photograph these sounds. Otherwise it’s impossible to organize, to edit them. They rush past, like time. But the movie camera perhaps? Record the visible. Organize not the audible, but the visible world. Perhaps that’s the way out?<sup>35</sup>

The exchange is characteristic: only the apparatus that records images can retain these fragmented impressions. The gramophone, which was invented before the cinematograph, was incapable of producing a new assemblage of fragments. Vertov’s note may be interpreted as an admission of the technical difficulties in creating a sound montage using a wax disc recorder. Sound montage only became technically possible with optically recorded sound. But we can approach this text from another point of view and read it from within the framework of a theory of the senses. It is the eye’s prerogative to find and create a totality, for it is an analytical organ, while the ear’s underdeveloped capacities of differentiation push the recipient into a

---

33 Fisher writes: “Just as in *MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA* we are made aware of the Cinema-Eye, so in *ENTHUSIASM* (or “Woman with the Earphones”) we are forced to be conscious of the Cinema-Ear.” Lucy Fisher, “*ENTHUSIASM: From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye*” 29.

34 Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Komposition für den Film* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1977) 56-58

35 Vertov, “The Birth of Kino-Eye,” *Kino-Eye* 40. In his talk of 5 April 1935 (see note 13) Vertov described this process in the following way: “Once, when I was sitting in the theater staring at the screen where they were showing the collapse of a mine shaft and other events in chronological order, the idea came to me that I could switch from hearing to seeing. I came to the following conclusion: here we have an apparatus that offers the possibility of recording this waterfall for the eye even though I cannot record it for the ear.”

chaos of sensual data. In the overture, however, Vertov reverses the established hierarchy between analytical vision and undifferentiated hearing: the sound destroys the image in its sacral visual splendor. The Imperial Russian anthem (“God Protect the Tsar”) tunes in, but the director distorts the melody, decelerating the sound. The eccentric deformation is interrupted by a tolling bell that opens the acoustic channel for the liturgy, but the liturgy is in turn destroyed in the exact same manner—by a modification of sound speed. The bell is then “killed” by a factory siren that opens the aural channel for the march.

The sounds are imposed on the image like independent variables. They build an ironic, alienating, and analytical distance toward the images, while the camera imitates the movements of drunks and the subjective view of the praying people: it sways back and forth like an alcoholic and bows as if in prayer. The camera is mimetic, and in the Soviet discourse of the 1920s the (film) image is related to drugs.<sup>36</sup> The radio’s sonic world is introduced as an anti-drug, though Vertov elsewhere attacked Soviet radio for broadcasting the same narcotic idiocy as the old cinema, namely *Carmen*, *Rigoletto*, and gypsy songs.<sup>37</sup>

The overture introduces the radio in place of the visually splendid church. When the radio celebrates a victory over the church acoustically, the factory whistle gives a signal to start the action of disassembling sacral images. The overture that begins by switching the circuits of perception now stages the struggle between visual and aural media as an iconoclastic battle. The non-naturalistic sound, which is disembodied, distorted, superimposed, reversed, and used in abrupt contrasts or mismatchings both of sound and location and of sound and distance, emasculates and weakens the sound of the old world.<sup>38</sup> The new sound silences the old sonic world and demystifies the world of the traditional image. In Vertov’s film the church’s destruction becomes a complicated semiotic operation embedded in his film technique: the church is dismantled, but the filming devices actually produce and reinforce the dismantling. Using the technique of multiple exposures, he shows how several crosses are wiped out, one after another. The camera “splits” or pulls down the church. The film’s reverse motion raises the red star to replace the cross on the church roof. (In actuality, of course, the star falls down.) The film proclaims itself as a new visual art that reigns over the old images of icons, emblems, statues, and buildings. However, while the author created the aural chain, and sound can be silenced or distorted according to Vertov’s will, the (documentary) image remains ambivalent. This ambivalence is also maintained in language. The title of the march is *Poslednee voskresenie*, which can be translated either as “The Last Sunday” or “The Last Resurrection”: the destroyed church celebrates its

---

<sup>36</sup> Kazimir Malevich argued that the materialist consciousness was linked with abstract expression but the religious consciousness – with the realm of the images; he illustrated the difference between the two by phenomenon of Lenin’s cult created after his death. In his view, an artist in a materialist proletarian society should be not an image-maker, not a painter of its sacred images or its daily tripe – see Kazimir Malevich, *The White Rectangle. Writings on Film*. Ed. Oksana Bulgakowa (Berlin/San Francisco: PotemkinPress, 2002) 37-44. The alcohol (and the opium) was a very common synonym for the fiction films, see Trotsky’s “Vodka, the Church and the Cinema” (*Film Factory* 94-97), Vladimir Mayakovsky’s poem “Kino i vino” [Film and Alcohol] or Vertov’s attacks against the fiction films in all his texts of the 1920s.

<sup>37</sup> Vertov, “*Kinopravda and Radiopravda*” (1925), *Kino-Eye* 56.

<sup>38</sup> Fisher, “ENTHUSIASM: From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye” 30-31.

resurrection as a workers' club. The building maintains its old function by establishing a community and assigning new symbolic meanings to the profane objects.

A ballet of the masses accompanies the transformation of the church into a club and underlines the action's ritual and magic gesture: Komsomol members in white replace black-clad observers. We see the sites of the new community: a cinema, an urban square, and a club. The factory whistle replaces the bell as a semantic sign (*smyslovoi znak*) that structures daily life. The whistle, like the bell before it, marks the transition from profane time to sacred time, from work to relaxation, from everyday life to festivity.<sup>39</sup> A truck transports a new Bible—the twelfth volume of Lenin's collected works—and we see the female listener once again. Thanks to the “sonic” initiation, she can now change her position and become the film's protagonist. She is a sculptor who forms a Lenin statue to replace the statue of Christ that we saw at the beginning. Filmic and non-filmic realities come together. Following Lucy Fisher's lead, we may interpret this scene in a Brechtian sense: the recipient passes from the role of consumer to the role of producer. But the episode can also be interpreted within a magical frame: the girl transgresses non-filmic reality and steps into a filmic one. The moment she forms the image of the new sacredness, the iconoclastic gesture of the overture—which had pitted ear against eye, sound against image, radio against the church, film against the old visual arts—collapses. The overture destroys the old emblems and replaces them with new ones by assigning symbolic qualities to profane objects and sounds (such as the factory whistle). The action really does turn into *The Last Resurrection*.

The oppositions (sound vs. image, church vs. club) implode and are transformed: sound becomes image, the church turns into a club. The radio demystifies the visual abundance of the imperial sacred sphere. In this frame the usual hierarchy of senses is reversed, and the ear triumphs over the eye. The sound film with its non-illusionist acoustic and optical tricks or devices celebrates a victory over the nineteenth century's illusionist visual arts and their representational techniques. In the film's second, moderato movement the statue of a worker starts to speak, and the camera finds new sacred places and bodies in the factory, city, and the crowd. The new media—cinema and radio—with their new representational techniques become the agents of this new sacred sphere. The epistemologist Vertov turns out to be a magician. The overture, meanwhile, examines whether a visual element can be replaced by a sound—in the form of an association, a rhythmic pattern, or a sign of subjectivity. The auditory sense is visualized and becomes an image. In essence Vertov transfers onto the level of sound the same principles he had used when working with images: 1. deformation; 2. change of speed (acceleration, deceleration) and direction (reverse sound); 3. montage of contrasting sounds using abrupt, hard cuts (Vertov avoids dissolves); 4. leitmotifs and their contrapuntal transposition.

---

<sup>39</sup> Avraamov's choice of the siren (alongside foghorns, machine guns, hydroplanes, choirs, and locomotives) as one of the main instruments of his symphony was not an accident. Gastev and Mayakovsky put his thought process into words, as paraphrased here by Fueleop-Miller: “The factory whistle was, in their opinion, best adapted to the new and predominant orchestral instrument, for its tone could be heard by whole quarters and remind the proletariat of its real home, the factory,” *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* 183.

The overture's images of carnivalesque exchange are followed by visions of the future in Part Two (moderato). An electrically lit model of a blast furnace dissolves the church. The confrontation of two melodies—one march-like and the other in a syncopated jazz rhythm—introduces the theme of rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States. The two melodies blend with each other and increase in speed. The slogan “Overtake America!” is thus expressed acoustically and causes a shift in meaning: we will not only supersede America in the production of steel and tractors, we will not only displace their system of production, but we will also replace their jazz music. A musical citation from Aleksandr Mosolov's composition *The Iron Foundry* (1928) foregrounds the symphonic imitation of machine sounds. The synchronous shots in Part Two (the workers in the mines) are cut parallel to the miners' gymnastic exercises. The gymnastics, which Aleksei Gastev elaborated at the Central Institute for Labor, follow the same principles as Meyerhold's new biomechanical school of acting and are similarly executed: rhythmically, slowly, synchronously, carefully choreographed in an eccentric style.<sup>40</sup> Work leads to the acquisition of a new body language that rivals the machine in its precision. This method creates a mechanical ballet, executed by human bodies, that visualizes the sounds and rhythms of machines.

The film's further development demands an increased intensity that the dynamics of human bodies cannot achieve. The mineshaft's darkness gives way to a blinding fire (the “frontline” has now been rechristened “line of fire” in the intertitles), and the film reaches a high level of abstraction in its representation of the production process. Part Three, the most elaborate example of Vertov's work with sound, is structured as a rondo: a limited number of visual and sound motifs repeat and combine to form a montage composition (AA-B-A-B-A and A-B-C-A-B-C-A) out of two symmetrical sequences of nearly the same length (120m and 130m).

In the first sequence the visual motifs (images with synchronous sound) are organized in rondo form. In the second sequence the sounds make up the rondo form, and the images are asynchronous. A caesura, the “march of the enthusiasts” (Vertov's usual refrain) separates the two sequences.

Three visual elements comprise the rondo's first sequence: 1. fire; 2. three men raising a hammer; 3. trucks (shot from below) that cross the sky in a diagonal (A-B-C-A-B-A...). The motion of the three men is always interrupted before the hammer arrives at its point of impact; the framing causes their bodies to become increasingly fragmented and abstract. The spectators do not experience where the raised hammer lands, a fact that is reinforced by the asynchrony between the image and the sound. (This asynchrony is corrected in Kubelka's version). The fragments of the men's movements form a mechanical ballet, and the visual rhythm can put the spectator in a trance. This principle is repeated in the second sequence, and the steelworkers' repetitive movements gradually lose their meaning until they become abstract parts. The sequence reaches its

---

<sup>40</sup> Vertov cuts toy models of cars and tractors with close-ups of sweat-drenched faces. The false proportions make the workers appear like giants; the labor is staged as a mechanical theater with the toy models.

culmination when brilliant lines of metal move independently in black space—an abstract film. The asynchronous sounds in this sequence are organized in an A-B-A-B-A form. Over the course of one minute, four seconds of engine noise coinciding with the rhythm of a 2/2 march alternate with two seconds of a piercing whistle. In Part Two (*moderato*) the human bodies had visualized the machine's rhythm by creating a biomechanical ballet. Then, in the rondo's first sequence (almost) synchronous noises accompanied the images of the different machines. The image played the part of a "guide dog for the blind" that helped the viewer perceive and differentiate among the noises. Finally, in the second part of the rondo asynchronous noises are combined in a musical form without any "visual help." Step by step Vertov demonstrates the principles of the film's construction. By the end the viewer has learned the principles and understands.

In Part Four (the pastoral) a village idyll replaces these perfectly moving machines. Long synchronous shots dominate the section and underscore its illusionist character. Vertov is apparently unconcerned with feminine and masculine cultural types (i.e., the agricultural sphere vs. warrior nomadism). He is also uninterested in showing collectivization or the suppressed knowledge of its tragedy. Instead, he represents the styles of art that produced these cultural types: Naturalism and Constructivism. The songs—like the bell in Part One—are the collective's old forms of organization. In the new collective body they are replaced by marches that follow the same 2/2 rhythm as the machines.

Vertov used principles of program music in *ENTHUSIASM*, but he substituted noises for the melodies. He began his film with the destruction of icons—non referential images—and replaced these objects with asynchronous sound that remained without reference on the screen.<sup>41</sup> The second and fourth parts of the symphony soften this radical approach. Since the machines and the masses embody the programmatic music, they also make it diegetic: the sounds are visualized and seem less abstract. By the end of the film march music has pushed out the noises altogether; the abstract qualities of the non-referential sounds have been replaced by music that is perceived as "pictorial" in relation to the noises. Vertov's symphony thus moves from abstract to diegetic sound, from noise to music. This progression is reminiscent of Shostakovich's *Third Symphony* ("The First of May"),<sup>42</sup> a composition that is announced in the opening credits to *ENTHUSIASM*, but is never actually played during the film. The credits indicate however that the film quotes not the symphony's futuristic beginning but its melodic finale, the choir.<sup>43</sup>

---

41 The film can be read within the context of Pierre Schaffer's *musique concrete* but this difference—"abstract" versus "concrete" noises—should be taken into account. Bernard Eisenschitz writes in the preface to Sadoul's book that Sadoul reworked the chapter on Vertov's early sound experiments following Pierre Schaffer's request: Sadoul, *Dziga Vertov*, 9.

42 Remark by David Levin during the discussion in Madison/Wisconsin, February 2005.

43 Thomas Tode has pointed out that Shostakovich's music is never heard in the film. Comparing the lengths of the copies, he noticed that more than 200 meters were missing but was unable to discover in which part the symphony was supposed to be heard: "Today's copies are 1830 meters (67 minutes) long, but a consignment note from the 1931 European tour shows that the film shown in England and France was 2083 meters (76 minutes) long." Tode, "Musikalische Strukturen im Werk von Dziga Vertov" 27. Another note from 1931 offers different information about the film's length: the first version was 3000 meters long, the distributed version was 2000 meters long, *Proletarskoe kino* 3 (1931) 12. Valérie Poséner found in the Russian Film Archive Gosfilmofond a censorship card from 6 November 1931 that indicates a length of 2600 meters.

In the 1920s the domains of image and sound were being defined in new ways. Modes of perception, production, and theoretical description needed to include new oppositions (seen/unseen, conscious/unconscious, micro/macro vision) as well as new qualities of visual and aural perception: fragmentation, discontinuity, shifts, distortion, ruptures, and the ephemeral. The era witnessed the development of utopian ideas about the new connection between nature, machines, and the human being. Vertov remained a Futurist in his approach. A pioneer who had worked on a new approach to hearing, he meant to broaden and enrich the human senses. The Futurist mission aimed at expanding the human senses, discovering new visual and aural dimensions that would train modern eyes to perceive simultaneity and speed and modern ears to register non-tempered sounds. Vertov's previous films had seized upon the visual phenomena of modernity: speed, fragmentation, simultaneity, pulverization.<sup>44</sup> Now he focused on similar work with sound, educating the ear to perceive and differentiate among noises that it is not usually trained to hear. The radio-ear isolated these noises and presented them alongside a visual correspondence and in a musical composition (developing the leitmotifs, constructing a rondo form) that facilitated acoustic perception and allows to tame, control and formalize the noises. Vertov insisted that his industrial noises were unfamiliar only to an inexperienced ear and claimed that workers could differentiate among these noises precisely because they experienced machine noises as comprehensible signs with an emotional meaning. (He used the term *smyslovoi znak*, coined by his eternal opponent Viktor Shklovsky.<sup>45</sup>)

The notion of a new kind of hearing as staged in Vertov's film may be interpreted as an appeal to a new sensuality and to new bodily experiences, an appeal to create a utopian, "techno-equipped" human being endowed with cine-eyes and radio-ears who develops a synaesthetic apperception of the fragmented world of modernity.<sup>46</sup> As in earlier films, the perfect spectators and listeners are created in the course of the film as the film's consumer and producer (the conductor, the girl listening to the radio and sculpting the statue, the masses). The use of sound in *ENTHUSIASM* tested the possibilities for equivalence and prepared the way for Vertov's next film, *THREE SONGS ABOUT LENIN*, which develops the principle of equivalence on the levels of writing, voice, and image. In *CINE-EYE* (1924) he tried to substitute one recording technology with another by using intertitles in a new way. He employed titles not only as writing and graphic signs, but also as a set of sound associations, representing, for example, the sounds of stuttering and Chinese accents. The *Donbas* film defined itself as well in the switching between channels of perception and recording techniques. Only the free exchange between image, sound, and writing enabled Vertov to give a tight structure to the chaos of acoustic and visual impressions. Sounds provoke visual associations—this is why the sound of the bell can magically produce the image of the crown. Like the *Cine-Eye*, these sounds are freed from time, space, and causality, and they are able to create connections that we cannot actually experience. Vertov thus establishes a magic (and false) causality between sound and image.

---

44 For a discussion of dynamics, simultaneity, and pulverization in Vertov's films, see Malevich, *The White Rectangle*, 77-84.

45 Vertov, RGALI, 2091-2-417. Viktor Shklovsky, "Sound as a Semantic Sign" (1930), *The Film Factory*, 305-07.

46 Oksana Bulgakowa, "The Merry Apparatuses—Russian and German Fantasies of the Prosthetic Bodies, 1913–1927," *Homo orthopedicus. Le corps et ses prothèses à l'époque post moderniste*. Eds. Nathalie Roelens and Wanda Strauven (Paris: Harmattan, 2002) 349-69.

Critical assessments of ENTHUSIASM usually consider the overture as a separate entity. Aside from the process of asynchronicity, critics fail to identify semantic links between the overture and the rest of the film. I would argue that the overture not only provoked the film's further development, but also radically changed Vertov's way of thinking. The formal opposition between sound and image, eye and ear, determines the overture's structure. These elements can be transformed. That heard can also be seen; the opposition of sound and image dissolves in the counterpoint of the sound film. The various elements can also replace one another. Vertov semanticizes this operation and transfers it to other oppositions in the film so that the confrontation between church and club, coal and metal, metal and fire, grain and the masses, can be experienced as the transformation of the elements: coal turns into metal, metal into fire, grain into the masses. Since a mass collective body appears as a refrain at the end of each section, the overall structure of the film's four movements produces the following diagram:

1. Sound → Image, Eye → Ear, Radio → Sound film; Church → Club → Masses
2. Coal → Metal → Masses
3. Metal → Fire → Masses
4. Grain → Masses.<sup>47</sup>

This semantic chain is propelled by a new orientation of the senses that has in turn been provoked by sound. THREE SONGS ABOUT LENIN translates this newfound principle to a semantic level. That film develops like an uninterrupted multiplication of binary oppositions. The oppositions eventually resolve by transforming into each other: a blind woman learns to see; the arid becomes wet; the infertile becomes fertile; water turns to light; death becomes life.<sup>48</sup>

---

47 Vertov himself emphasized in his contribution to the discussion of the film that these three elements—crowds, marches, and the sound of machines—constituted his film and that the connection between the parts was established by the same rhythm. *Kino-Eye* 111.

48 Oksana Bulgakowa, "Die Gartenbank oder wie ein ikonischer Diskurs entsteht," *Kultur in Stalinismus. Sowjetische Kultur und Kunst der 1930er bis 1950er Jahre*. Ed. Gabriele Gorzka (Bremen: Themmen, 1994) 198-205.



**Empfohlene Zitierweise:**

Oksana Bulgakowa: The Ear against the Eye: Vertov's Symphony.

In: *Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung* 2, 2008.

URL: <http://www.filmmusik.uni-kiel.de/beitraege.htm>

Datum des Zugriffs: 1.10.2008.

Kieler Beiträge für Filmmusikforschung (ISSN 1866-4768)

Copyright © by Oksana Bulgakowa. All rights reserved.

Copyright © für diese Ausgabe by Kieler Gesellschaft für Filmmusikforschung. All rights reserved.

This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and „Kieler Beiträge für Filmmusikforschung“.