2. The Birth of the Russian Sound Film out of the Spirit of the Five-Year Plan

Vertov regarded *Enthusiasm* as, if not an “unfinished,” certainly a not-fully-realized film. That there were problems associated with its creation is not surprising given that this was a film made under extreme conditions even by Vertov’s standards. Indeed, *excess* is etched into *Enthusiasm* on every level.

The film at once depicts, celebrates, participates in and was shaped by the First Five-Year Plan for economic development (1928-1932), the Stalin regime’s colossal, madly ambitious industrialization campaign. “Carried out,” as one historian puts it, “as a massive military campaign, along ‘fronts,’ scaling heights, [...] vanquishing backwardness,” the Plan, like other wars, had the effect of generating all kinds of chaos in the course of trying to establish new forms of order. Extraordinary, propaganda-driven haste, accidents, chaotic administration, scapegoating, arrests of engineers and various “bourgeois specialists,” and (perhaps most importantly) the dislocation of hundreds of thousands of peasants due to the concurrent drive to collectivize agriculture, were but some of the symptoms of the Stalinist modernizing delirium. At the same time, the Plan years ultimately led, despite mind-boggling human and material costs, to enormous industrial growth; they also laid the groundwork for a society quite different from any that had existed on earth before—although not, to be sure, a socialist one.

The Donbass area of eastern Ukraine, in which Vertov and his team of *kinoks* filmed and recorded most of *Enthusiasm*, was one of the main “fronts” of the Plan. Rich in coal and iron deposits, the Donbass had been an industrial center since the mid-19th century, and its full-scale development a prime objective of Soviet leaders since the Revolution. Industrialization, anti-clerical and collectivization campaigns struck the Donbass all at once in the late 1920s/early 1930s, and Vertov and his crew—made up of Svilova, his chief cameraman Boris Tseitlin, and several other assistants—landed in the middle of all the

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2 Cf. Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*: “The annual rate of industrial growth ranged between 15 and 22 percent during the First Five-Year Plan. From 1928 to 1940 industrial output grew on average by 17 percent per year [...] and overall income (gross national product) by 15 percent. A rate of income growth of 15 percent per year over twelve years is unparalleled in history” (240).
3 The initial “shooting group,” besides the above-mentioned persons, included the producer Nemirovskii, a second operator named Okulich and his assistant (one Vofogovskii), Vertov’s assistant Ivanisov, Tseitlin’s second Semenenko, and the photographer Bogoroditskii (RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 41, l. 1). Another cameraman named Dakhno seems to have replaced Tseitlin during a small amount of the shooting in fall 1929 (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 414, l. 24), and apparently one Lishko was also involved in the production as a photographer (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 272, l. 897), but created controversy when he sold some photos he took during the shooting to newspapers (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 417, l. 21). In spring 1930, Vertov, Svilova and
commotion, although its precise impact on their progress is difficult to determine. They shot without sound in the Donbass from 21 September to 23 November 1929, returning to Leningrad after the 27th. A comparison of Vertov’s draft itinerary with Svilova’s shooting diary indicates that, while getting to most of the locales indicated in the initial plan, the group had to modify it a good deal along the way. On 29 September, for instance, an industrial accident of significant scale apparently prevented their shooting in the factory town of Gorlovka. This same Gorlovka was the site of considerable Plan-related hubbub during this time, culminating in December 1929 (after the kinoks had left the Donbass) “when 4,000 icons were ceremoniously burnt in a bonfire in the city square while a crowd of miners estimated at 15,000-18,000 danced and celebrated in the streets.”

The fall shooting was arduous enough, as evidenced by Vertov’s numerous letters of complaint to the authorities at the VUFKU (Ukrainian) studio. The complaints mostly concerned late deliveries of film, lenses, and the like, but also extended to reports of bureaucratic obstruction and accusations of falsifications in the press; the group’s progress was covered avidly in both worker- and cinema-oriented newspapers in Ukrainian and Russian, with Tsetlin’s (and less often Vertov’s) “reports from the field” appearing in print. But weightier difficulties ensued in the summer of 1930. After a crash course in Professor Alexander Shorin’s system of sound recording (involving experiments conducted both at the professor’s laboratory and in plein air), the group shot documentary sounds and images in and around Leningrad until sometime after 1 May 1930. They were in Kharkov for the Eleventh Ukrainian Party Congress (5-15 June 1930), where they filmed the crowds gathered there and took some rather charming shots of Ukrainian Party boss Stanislav Kossior—soon to be involved in covering up the appalling human consequences of the state’s

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4 See Svilova’s shooting diary, RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 414. They filmed in Leningrad during four days in January 1930 at St. Isaac’s Cathedral, at a sound movie theater and other locales around the city, while at the same time engaging in an intensive study of sound technology; see below.

5 See RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 42, l. 6, and op. 2, d. 272, l. 889. There is some uncertainty here (a column in a worker’s paper indicated that they did shoot in Gorlovka (Domna 45:150 [16 November 1929]: 1), but the town certainly goes unmentioned in Svilova’s shooting diary.


7 VUFKU = “Vseukrains’ka Foto-Kino Uprava,” the All-Ukraine Photo-Cinema Administration.

8 The material shot included footage of May Day festivities; see L. Roshal’, Dziga Vertov (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1982): 213. They did not have any sound recording equipment at their disposal in Leningrad until after 21 January 1930 (RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 42, l. 2).

9 See V. Fedorchenko, Odinadtsiatii Z”ïzd KP(b)U (Kiev: Derzhavne vidavnitstvo politichnoi literaturi URSR, 1959): 43.
collectivization drive, only to be purged in 1939—trying unsuccessfully to keep a solemn
look on his face.\(^{10}\) The group went soon after that to the Donbass, where they remained until
around the end of July.\(^ {11}\)

There it turned out that their heavy and cumbersome sound equipment, in addition to
their other gear, had to be pulled around most of the time by hand. At the film’s first preview
on 1 November 1930 in Kiev, Vertov said that the recording apparatus, which he had at his
disposal for 1 month and 10 days in the Donbass, weighed 78 poods (approximately 2,808
pounds), that they had no transportation for it, and that 80 percent of the group’s work
consisted in “sheer physical labor.” Although Vertov’s shooting plan for the “spring raid” to
the Donbass included trips to at least eight different locations, the difficulties involved in the
shooting may have precluded this plan’s full realization.\(^ {12}\) On one occasion (according to
Vertov) the kinoks had to spend three days moving equipment over a distance of 80 verst (53
miles), sleeping outside in the rain. With all of this moving around, Vertov said, most of
what they recorded and shot in the Donbass was ruined; the kinoks succeeded only “by some
kind of miracle” to save and restore some of the recording.\(^ {13}\)

Meanwhile, trouble continued to simmer in the Ukrainian countryside, where the
kinoks shot and recorded the “peasant” sequences in the film’s sixth and final reel.
Collectivization—that is, the forced conversion of villages into collective farms and the
requisitioning of peasant property—began in deadly earnest in Ukraine in November 1929,
while the kinoks were still in the Donbass. No “rural” shooting was planned for fall 1929, but
we know from Vertov’s projected itinerary that he intended to do some spring filming in the
Ukrainian villages of Petrovka and Vasil’evka,\(^ {14}\) though whether he ever got to these places is
unknown. Interestingly enough, an undated page in Vertov’s hand, very roughly indicating
the spring shooting plans for four Donbass destinations, has a question mark in place of a

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\(^{10}\) Kossior (1889-1939), First Secretary of the Communist Party [Ukraine] from 1928-1938) has consistently
been misidentified in the criticism on Enthusiasm as Nikita Khrushchev (see the discussions of the film in the
above-mentioned works by Jacques Aumont and Seth Feldman, and Graham Roberts’s account in Forward
Soviet! History and Non-Fiction Film in the USSR [London and NY: I.B. Tauris, 1999]). Previously in
Ukraine, Khrushchev was in fact in Moscow by 1930. My great thanks to William Taubman, author of

\(^{11}\) Work on the montage followed in August/September; according to Vertov, Enthusiasm was “released by the
factory for the 1930 October celebrations” (“Let’s Discuss Ukrainfilm’s First Sound Film” in Kino-Eye: 112).

\(^{12}\) I have not discovered a shooting diary for the “spring raid”; perhaps none exists.

\(^{13}\) From the transcript of the discussion following the first preview at the Kiev Film Factory (1 November
1930), RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 417, l. 59 ob. This information augments the basic picture of the Enthusiasm
production difficulties already known from Vertov’s published article “Let’s Discuss Ukrainfilm’s First Sound
Film: Symphony of the Donbass (The Author on his Film)” in Kino-Eye: 108-109.

\(^{14}\) RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, f. 415, l. 14.
fifth destination, where a “kolkhoz” (collective farm) was to be filmed—suggesting that it wasn’t entirely clear to Vertov where the rural footage would or could be shot (see Image 1). What is certain, however, is that there were serious anti-collectivization uprisings in both Vasil'evka and Petrovka in March 1930, around the height of the state’s war against the peasantry. In Petrovka on 20 March, a group of women organized a revolt that eventually had to be suppressed by the cavalry.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, hundreds of violent clashes occurred all over rural Ukraine between November 1929 and March 1930,\textsuperscript{16} and continued even after Stalin published his famous and cynical “Dizzy with Success” article in \textit{Pravda} on 2 March, in which he blamed the excesses of collectivization on overzealous local bureaucrats.\textsuperscript{17} Although (in one historian’s words) “by the summer the countryside was virtually pacified”\textsuperscript{18}—if not for long\textsuperscript{19}—the memory and after-effects of the winter conflicts surely lingered into June and July 1930, despite that year’s exceptional harvest. It is within this environment, too, that Vertov and the \textit{kinoks} conducted their “spring raid.”

\textbf{Image 1:}
Rough sketch by Vertov of documentary subjects to be filmed in four Donbass towns in spring 1930: engine-building works, palace of culture, and mines in Lugansk; machinery factory and school in Kramatorskoe; the electrification of the Donbass in Shterovka; and workers’ leisure in Sviatogorsk. The fifth destination, where a kolkhoz was to be filmed, is left as a question mark. Source: RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 415, l. 61.

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\textsuperscript{15} See Valerii Vasil'ev and Lynne Viola, \textit{Kollektivizatsiia i krest'ianskoe sprostitviennie na Ukraine (noiabr’ 1929-mart 1930 g.g.)} (Vinnitsia: Logos, 1997): 353; also 330. On Vasil'evka, see 322, 359, 365.

\textsuperscript{16} See Andrea Graziosi, \textit{The Great Soviet Peasant War: Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1917-1933}: 52: “[I]n 1930 there were 13,754 disturbances [in the Soviet Union] (10 times the figure of the previous year) with 2.5 million participants in the 10,000 disturbances for which data were gathered. 402 of them, with four real revolts, took place in January; 1,048, including 37 revolts, in February; 6,528, with 80 revolts, in March and 1,992, with 24 revolts, in April.”

\textsuperscript{17} Suny, \textit{The Soviet Experiment}: 224.

\textsuperscript{18} Graziosi, \textit{The Great Soviet Peasant War}: 55.

\textsuperscript{19} The horrors of collectivization culminated in the famine of 1932-33, in which nearly seven million people died, mostly in Ukraine; see (among other sources) Fitzpatrick, \textit{Stalin’s Peasants}: 69-79. Although there was collectivization-related famine in Ukraine prior to 1932 (see Suny: 226), it is chronologically inaccurate to imply (as Graham Roberts clearly does in \textit{Forward Soviet! History and Non-Fiction Film in the USSR}) that the
The result was, as Vertov put it, “a film somewhat maimed in battle. Torn apart. Grown hoarse. Covered with wounds.” In a diary entry from 1934/5, Vertov mourned that he made [a] mistake when [he] gave in, submitted to management’s demands and began to edit Enthusiasm even though [he] knew full well that all the human documents [zasniatyi chelovecheskii material] were ruined due to technical reasons.

It is indeed clear from the planned itineraries for spring 1930 that Vertov intended Enthusiasm to encompass far more diverse “material”—including footage of schools, nurseries, sanitoria, the activities of cultural centers—than that which eventually made it into the film. On the studio end, Vertov complained bitterly to VUFKU administrator Orelovich about poor synchronization, late preparation of prints, and lifting of images from Enthusiasm for use in other films. At the same time, Vertov’s description of the film as “battle-scarred” not only reveals pride in his accomplishment—as we shall see, he defended the film vigorously—but shows just how much the filmmaker saw Enthusiasm as participating in the self-sacrificing heroics of the Five-Year Plan, as carrying out the Plan on the sound-cinema “front.”

For Enthusiasm is indeed a “breakthrough” work, and a quality of strain, of deliberate overreaching, was virtually explicit in the project from the start. For Soviet filmmakers the main “target” to be reached in 1929/30 was, of course, sound film as such; Vertov’s own kino-eye convictions immediately led him beyond this goal toward the truly “impossible” feat of documentary sound/image recording, including live sync sound. Documentary sound film had widely been dismissed as a fantasy, most famously by critic Ippolit Sokolov, who claimed that sound recording outside the studio would yield nothing but unlistenable registrations of chaotic noise and “caterwauling.” For Vertov, what had earlier been the

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Ukraine depicted in Vertov’s film was “experiencing one of the worst famines in the history of the human race” (100); the kinoks did not shoot Enthusiasm during the 1932-33 famine.

20 “First Steps” (1931) in Kino-Eye: 114.
23 Letter of 17 August 1930 from Vertov to Orelovich; RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 415, l. 44.
24 See “First Steps” in Kino-Eye: 112. On the issue of documentary sound, Vertov had to fight studio executives (as usual) to get his way. He initially asked to use the sound system designed by Pavel Tager rather Shorin’s, on the grounds of the former’s superiority in “natural recording” (in letter of Vertov to Nemirovskii of 14 October 1929; RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 415, l. 25). VUFKU director Garber wrote back that they had already contracted Shorin’s system (which sync-recorded at 24 frames a second rather than Tager’s 19 frames), and that Vertov would have to use artificial industrial sounds created in a studio just as Abram Room was doing then with his Five-Year Plan (a lost film, also called The Plan of Great Works [1930]) (letter of 3 November
topic of largely theoretical debates now became an obstacle or “immobility”
(nepodvizhnost’)\textsuperscript{25} that had to be overcome in practice.

After \textit{Enthusiasm}’s release, the affinities between the “great plan” and Vertov’s
project as a project were noticed immediately. This was especially true in Germany, where
critics at once may have felt freer to discuss the “aesthetics” of the Plan, and no doubt had
both a political and a semi-ethnographic interest in figuring out what the Plan meant in the
field of culture.\textsuperscript{26} Reporting on a talk that Vertov gave in Berlin around 22 July, Heinz
Luedecke directly links the film’s achievement to the Plan, and borrows the title of a famous
German book to make his point:

[When Vertov began making \textit{Enthusiasm}] sound-film technology was
not advanced enough to allow for sound recording outside of the
studio. Nonetheless Vertov, true to his principles, wanted to stick to
“documentary sound” and thus resolved, despite all difficulties, to
attempt a technical advance. He went into an area where there’s no
shortage of industrial and natural sounds—to the iron- and coalmines
of the Donbass. The experiment worked, and thus occurred the birth of
the Russian sound film from out of the spirit of the Five Year Plan!\textsuperscript{27}

Luedecke’s statement is more accurate than he could have known, for (as Ian Christie has
written) “a crucial link was forged in 1930 between the new technology and the new themes
of ‘cultural revolution,’” with the result that “the first [Soviet] sound films all dealt with
aspects of construction.”\textsuperscript{28} Clearly himself an “enthusiast” of the Plan, Luedecke could not
have been pleased when, a month later, Hermann Sinsheimer, theater critic and

\textsuperscript{25} Vertov, \textit{Stat’i i dnevnik}: 125.

\textsuperscript{26} Vertov went to Germany in July 1931, followed by trips to Amsterdam, London, and possibly Paris.
According to Lev Roshal’ (\textit{Dziga Vertov}: 218), he brought \textit{Enthusiasm} with him, although it’s clear from the
publication dates of the reviews that the film was not officially released until around 21 August. A government
decree banned the film in Germany on 8/9 October 1931, a prohibition that elicited a strong and organized
protest from a number of cultural figures, including Hans Richter, Joris Ivens, Béla Balázs, and Moholy-Nagy;
see John Willett, \textit{Art and Politics in the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety, 1917-1933} (NY: Pantheon Books,
1978): 257; and RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 43.

\textsuperscript{27} Heinz Luedecke, “Der \textit{Mann mit der Kamera} erzählt: Dsiga Werthoff in Berlin,” \textit{Berlin am Morgen} 3.168
(22 July 1931) in RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 96, l. 91. Luedecke wrote on many different culture-related topics,
and continued his journalistic work in the DDR after the war.

\textsuperscript{28} Ian Christie, “Making Sense of Early Soviet Sound,” \textit{Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian
\textit{Enthusiasm}, those films include Abram Room’s lost Five-Year Plan (1930), Esfir Shub’s KShE (KShE
[Komsomol: Shef elektrofikatsii] [1932], Nikolai Ekk’s \textit{A Start in Life} (Putevka v zhizni [1930]), Dovzhenko’s
\textit{Ivan} (1932), and Aleksandr Macheret’s \textit{Men and Jobs} (Dela i liudi [1932]). Room’s Five-Year Plan was the
first feature sound film on which inventor Aleksandr Shorin worked, followed by \textit{Enthusiasm}. His memoir
contains an entertaining account of the efforts of his sound recording team (together with Vertov) to record a
nightingale’s song on Leningrad’s Elagin Island; see A.F. Shorin, \textit{Kak Ekran Stal Govoriashchim
(Vospominaniia Izobretatelia)}, ed. B.N. Konoplev (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1949): 82-94.
Feuilletonchef for the Berliner Tageblatt, asserted the same connection but evaluated it very differently by asserting a homology between film and Plan:

[In Enthusiasm] the heroism of the machine is shown too clearly and exaggeratedly; the humans that they serve are too zealously and tendentiously placed into the commotion. This results, on the level of both image and sound, in a brittle style lacking in any soul—precisely without soul, which in this context means the organic, and therefore the will to art. But the despotic will to effect [Wirkung], that causes everything static and statue-like about humans and the world to shake—this tendency takes the breath out of the film (and out of the spectator). [...] The images groan under the task they must fulfill, just as Russia surely groans under the giant tasks of the Five-Year Plan. The marvelously rabid faces and minds eventually freeze into the goal they’ve been assigned: ore becomes plaster, and heat becomes cold.29

Though Sinsheimer had no doubt that the film was significant—“significant to the point of exhaustion!”—his comments distantly but surely resonate with the Lukácsian precepts discussed above: Enthusiasm engages in no “organic” labor upon its materials, no painstaking linkage of their interrelations to a wider understanding, opting rather for their spectacular resettling into patterns imposed with the aim of achieving pure effect. The political-aesthetic implications of his critique of “the despotic will to effect” are quite unmistakable, and raise crucial questions for any evaluation of the film. What is the perspective taken by Vertov in this film; how can one describe the will informing it? Is Vertov’s method in Enthusiasm (and perhaps elsewhere) a kind of cinematic equivalent of the Plan in the worst sense, a capturing of real life only to “freeze it into a goal”? Most importantly, do the giant perceptual-cognitive tasks demanded by Enthusiasm, Vertov’s Five-Year-Plan-In-Film, prove too much to ask of the spectator?

To be sure, the keywords of the First Five-Year Plan—“shock work,” “socialist construction,” and, of course, “enthusiasm”—pepper Vertov’s correspondence during the entire period of work on the film. In a February 1930 letter to the VUFKU administration Vertov indicates that he had been assigned to add music (in the form of a “sound-march” he constructed with the composer N.A. Timofeev) to 500 meters of film. Confident in his ability to apply sound to film already by that time, he reports in the same letter that he plans to extend the “sound-march” across double that amount of footage while in Leningrad, announcing that he hopes to achieve this goal “by way of shock labor, in order to exceed the task assigned [him] for Leningrad.” He adds that he will ask the other members of the group

29 Hermann Sinsheimer, “Enthusiasmus— Der Erste russische Tonfilm,” Berliner Tageblatt 23 August 1931 in RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 96, l. 139.
if they’ll agree officially to declare their labor “shock work” (*udarnaia rabota*), that is, production of the greatest urgency and intensity. By 24 March, the *kinoks* had a more mobile Shorin sound recording system at their disposal; the following month, after “listening on screen” to the results of their experiments, Vertov and virtually the entire “shock troop” signed a testimonial document attesting that their work both theoretically and practically “had resolved [in the *kinoks*’ favor] the vexed question of the [possibility of] sound documentary filming.” Like those of countless other brigades, this attestation was later summarized in *Pravda*, a no doubt gratifying sign that the *kinoks* were receiving genuine recognition as authentic shock-laborers.33

There can be no doubt, moreover, that what Vertov achieved on the “sound front” was, in spite of all sorts of imperfections, extraordinarily forward-looking. The composition of the “sound-march” apparently preceded what eventually became the film’s scenario, and is best known in its prose formulation (I give a fragment of the opening section here):

The first sound of a tolling church bell. The reverberation dies out, giving way to the ticking of a clock. The second stroke of a church bell. The reverberation dies out, giving way once more to the ticking of a clock. The third stroke of a church bell, gradually expanding into a feast-day carillon.

Fragments of the church service (the better known motifs) are commingled with the sound of the bells. The chimes, mingled with the motifs from the service, cannot maintain solemnity for long. A note of irony appears. The solemnity is continually undercut. The religious motifs seem to dance about.34

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30 Letter from Vertov in Leningrad to Radchenko (VUFKU) in Kiev, 12 February 1930; RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 42, l. 2. See also RoshaL’, *Dziga Vertov*: 210.

31 As indicated in an article in *Literaturnaia gazeta* (24 March 1930); RoshaL’, *Dziga Vertov*: 211.

32 Attestation of 5 April 1930; RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 42, l. 5. Vertov’s elation over this success is “enthusiasm” in the more ordinary sense: an undated telegram from the same time expresses his joy at having recorded “sound shots” of “factory equipment, a steam-engine and other documentary material” (RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 42, l. 4).

33 *Pravda* 107:4552 (18 April 1930): 5. The announcement appeared in small print in a compendium of news from around the USSR under the title “Successes in Sound Cinema,” alongside news of the construction of the first Soviet combine harvesters, successes and failures in the fishing industry, and coverage of Mayakovskiy’s funeral (the poet had killed himself four days earlier). See also RoshaL’, *Dziga Vertov*: 212.

34 “Sound-March (from the film *Symphony of the Donbass*)” in *Kino-Eye*: 290.
However, the archive reveals that in early 1930 Vertov plotted out a working version of the “sound march,” complete with timings and structurally “blocked out” into a form that plainly presages the notational procedures of early electronic and concrete music (see Image 2). It seems possible that a version of the “sound march” based on this schema was actually recorded during the kinoks’ apprenticeship with the Shorin system between January and May 1930, although I have found no trace of such a recording as yet. Plainly enough, however, parts of the “sound march,” of the musical score, and of the opening section of the film as it finally emerged were conceptually calibrated already by early 1930, as analysis of a single brief sequence from the first reel (here called Sequence A) demonstrates. The second shot in the sequence (Image 4) is accompanied by creeping, step-like music, guided by the conductor in the studio and marked out by the clock-like ticking of a metronome; it corresponds roughly to the “A” section of the schema, “steps and clock.” We had seen the radio-operator in the previous shot (Image 3) apparently listening to the same music some moments earlier, at the very beginning of the film, following the brief ticking of a clock or metronome; “apparently listening,” because the sound is not clearly diegetic, or rather seems to hover between the diegetic space of the film and our own spatial/temporal encounter with the film. In Image 4, the studio “source” of the sound is revealed, along with (in the upper left half of the screen) the microphone apparatus that makes the sonic connection between the spaces possible; at the same time, the sound remains uncannily “decentered” because neither the players of the

Image 2: Schema with timings and sound indications, corresponding in rough to the prose “sound march.” Source: RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 415, ll. 63ob-64.
music nor the instruments they play are shown. This not merely formal “baring of the device,” together with the repetition of the music, now perceived as produced rather than merely played, and disseminated (all at once), produces a classically Vertovian “de-reification,” a theorizing of film sound comparable to what the “frozen motion” sequence at the end of Man with the Movie Camera’s second reel does with the image.

The technical and intellectual intricacy of these effects—at such an early date for Soviet sound cinema—is considerable. At the very end of that second shot, just as the conductor raises his hand, the sampled sound of a church bell is heard, in a sudden sonic gesture exactly corresponding to the “B” section of the schema: “ringing of a bell.” This is followed immediately by clamorous churchy-sounding music to which the radio-operator listens (Image 5); her visage is replaced by a shot of women praying and crossing themselves
in a church square (Image 6) while the “religious” music continues, though soon to segue into a broadly carnivalesque and satiric cacophony of instruments.

This sequence corresponds quite nicely both to a point at the beginning of the musical score, where there is a clear succession from “music plus ticking clock” to “bell” to the “religious” theme (Image 7), and to the beginning of the working schema for the “sound march,” which moves from “A. steps and clock (40 sec.)” to “B. ringing of a bell” to “C. religious service, until the clock (15 sec.”) (see Image 2). These correspondences and partial correspondences pertain, needless to say, only to the first three “blocks” of the sound-schema; a full analysis, impossible here, would stretch over many detail-laden pages, though we will return to specific sections of the film later on. Conceived as a multi-layered artifact involving prose scenario, image, music, and non-musical sound—and fashioning the subtlest conjunctions and disjunctions among these elements—Enthusiasm was undoubtedly an “over-achievement” in 1930.

While concrete “technical breakthrough” was Vertov’s real object, the ideas and rhetoric of the Plan also entered the film’s conceptual framework from the very outset. In September 1929, while working on the shooting itinerary, Vertov drafted a number of “idea
charts” (*skhemy myslei*) designed to help answer the questions “how to shoot and with what purpose.” The idea chart, he wrote, is both an outline of “the ideas of one person, the author” and “a montage of the ideas-documents of the leaders of the Communist Party, the leaders of the construction of socialism in our country.” Vertov’s most developed ideological outline for the film is a large chart with “DONBASS” in the center surrounded by texts (including quotes from Lenin, Stalin, and others), organized around and subordinated to central official watchwords of the first Plan period: “the great plan,” “the most important link,” “pace [of labor],” “the great epoch and the new people,” “socialist competition,” “enthusiasm.” The Donbass, great source of energy and metal, becomes in this scheme a kind of Archimedean point or sun around which the entire modernizing Soviet Union revolves.

Vertov wrote some of the texts on the chart himself, including this one about “the new people”:

> The great plan changes the conditions under which people work, changes the pace of life itself, and changes people themselves. If quiet, serene development, if development under conditions of economic and social stagnation creates within the human the inertia of stagnation, then under conditions of gigantic and furious construction, under conditions of extreme technical and economic speed, the human is refashioned, is regenerated, and acquires the inertia of rapid forward movement.

Through the pastiche of Plan rhetoric, we can readily identify a convergence of the old “transformative” aspirations of Vertov—especially the early Vertov with his polemics about “*the new man*, free of unwieldiness and clumsiness”—with the state’s attempt to submit the USSR to a total and rapid economic and social metamorphosis. Surely, all those murmurings about Vertov’s inattention to the “soul” in his pursuit of the New, his excess and hubris (cinematic and otherwise), would seem to be amplified to a shout here, as the language of political modernism appears to flow without strain into that of early Stalinism. It is indeed tempting to substitute “*kino-eye*” for “*great plan ... gigantic and furious construction*”—and likewise, “*acted film*” for “*conditions of economic and social stagnation*”—to yield a Vertov

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35 RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 40, l. 1.
36 The trope of the Donbass as absolute center seems to derive from a passage in a speech Lenin gave at the 11th Congress of the Russian CP in March 1922, a passage quoted verbatim on Vertov’s “idea chart”: “[The Donbass] is the center, the real basis of our entire economy. There can be no question of any renewal of heavy industry in Russia, no question of any real construction of socialism (for there is no way to build it except through heavy industry), if we do not revive the Donbass and bring it back up to the mark” (V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, vol. 45 (Moscow: Politicheskaia literatura, 1964): 105). Securing the Donbass had been one of Lenin’s major strategic concerns during the Civil War.
37 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 415, l. 65 (1929).
whose artistic radicalism amounts to mere allegorical covering for a less reflective, more dangerous intransigence.

Tempting—but inadvisable. Certainly, Vertov, early and late, is concerned (as Michelson asserts) with “transformation,” and though not a Party member,39 his “enthusiasm” for the modernizing goals of the Plan cannot be doubted. But the “idea scheme” and its slogans relate largely to *Enthusiasm*’s historical occasion, and say almost nothing specific about the film’s actual small- or large-scale structure. Moreover, as some of Vertov’s critics would point out, the film hardly foregrounds the Party as the defining agent, opting instead to construct a space where various fields of sound and image—from above and below ground, from the street and from the factory, from art and from labor—could surge into each other and even exchange their properties. The “class warfare” rhetoric so characteristic of the Plan years is virtually absent from the film, replaced by a well-nigh utopian vision of sensory collectivity, up to and including an implied elimination of the distinctions between intellectual and manual labor. As it turns out, it was precisely this utopian element that official opinion found intolerable.

38 “We: Variant of a Manifesto” in *Kino-Eye*: 8.
39 Vertov underscores this fact in a letter of 2 December 1930 to Radchenko in Kiev, where he indicates (“contrary to the established opinion”) that he would be very glad to have two communists (Stefanovich and Cherniavskii) participate in the “shock work” during the sound recording, adding: “I consider myself non-Party [bespartiinyi] neither in terms of my political convictions, nor in regard to my previous practical work in 100 percent polit-film. Despite the absence of a Party card” (RGALI f. 2091, op. 1, d. 42, l. 2ob).