Chapter Four

Christ Among the Herdsmen: From Refugee to Propagandist (1918-1922)

No bargainers’ bargains by day – no brokers or speculators – would they continue? Would the talkers be talking? Would the singer attempt to sing? Would the lawyer rise in the court to state his case before the judge? Then rattle quicker, heavier drums – you bugles wilder blow.

-- Walt Whitman, “Beat! Beat! Drums!”

_Kino-Nedelia (1918-1919): Author, Archive, Détournement, Censorship_

There were other media forms in Vertov’s time that worked to give the nation-state – its central authorities, its cosmopolitan centers, its symbolic landscape, its crises – representational coherence: newspapers and journals, of course, but also photographic compendia, public rituals, Civil War-era curiosities like agitational trains, certain kinds of novels, and no doubt much besides. Considered both as form and as experience, however, newsreel film seems unique in the way it combined mass spectacle with the seriousness of a collective encounter with the day’s great topics (“current events”). Newspaper-like in its periodicity, its public character, its episodic, headlined structure and its sober, even “scientific” claims to index and articulate the real world, or what was vital to know about that world; parade-like in the way it physically brought together masses of people largely unknown to one another to witness the Remarkable and the Important go
floating by, to musical accompaniment and as a unified whole: at least potentially, newsreel seems to wind together epistemic sobriety and collective enthusiasm (or boredom, its dialectical counterpart) in a way that no still-existing media form quite does. At the very least, we need to exert our imaginations if we are to gain an understanding of newsreel’s now obsolescent forms and modes of appeal.

Kino-Nedelia (Film-Week; 43 installments between May 1918 and June 1919) was the earliest Soviet newsreel – or “screen newspaper,” to use Boltianskii’s phrase – and although it usually leads off any Vertov filmography, it cannot be considered a Vertov work in the strictest sense. Initially employed as an office manager and bookkeeper for the Moscow Film Committee’s Photo-Kino Division, at that time (until 2 July, just prior to the onset of the major Civil War hostilities) under the direction of Mikhail Kol’tsov, Vertov did not become the acting chair of that division until 1 September. It was only after that point, but no later than the end of October, that he got involved in editing and reediting: that is, certainly not before Kino-Nedelia 14 (released 3 September) and probably not until around the time

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1 The closest contemporary equivalent might be the collective watching of a major news event on television (in a bar, for instance), though this analogy seems very approximate. The “wholeness” of the newsreel contributes part of its ideological force as spectacle. Interrupting a screening would be like stopping a parade in its tracks, at least as Louis Marin describes parades: “A parade is indeed an agent of social, political, or religious legitimation: even the popular ‘demonstration’ that might appear on the contrary to be a collective force of destabilization finds the legitimacy of political contestation in what is customarily called the ‘success’ of its march or cortège, even if none of its demands is satisfied by the actual occurrence of the demonstration” (Louis Marin, “Establishing a Signification for Social Space: Demonstration, Cortège, Parade, Procession (Semiotic Notes),” in On Representation (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 38-53; here 47).
Kino-Nedelia 22 (released 29 October) was produced. In February 1919, moreover, the Film Division apparently sent Vertov to work on the Civil War’s southern front (in Ukraine and the North Caucasus), where he may have coordinated non-fiction/newsreel filming. If this is the case, he did not supervise the editing of installments 34 (7 February) and 35 (14 February), either. Besides Kol’tsov and Vertov, G.P. Novikov, M. Ia. Shnejder, actor Vladimir Gardin, and possibly the talented photographer A.N. Savel’ev (with whom Vertov would make Anniversary of the Revolution (1918)), in addition to a host of cameramen, all worked in the Film Committee on Kino-Nedelia. This is probably not a complete list of the co-creators, and the best scholarship on the series has no doubt correctly stressed that it was collectively authored. Given that a number of gifted and experienced people worked on the newsreel, including several who had made pre-Revolutionary films, there is

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2 Magidov, Zrimaia pamiat’ istorii, 84; Michelson, ed., Kino-Eye, 40, 119; Goriaeva et al., Instituty Upravleniia Kul’turoi, 78; GARF f. A-2306, op. 36, d. 16, l. 11. Vertov indicates that he was still working as a “secretary” on a questionnaire of 21 September (Magidov, “Iz arkhiva Vertova,” 162). Kol’tsov left the Film Committee at the beginning of July; between that time and August 1918, and again after February 1919, it seems that he spent a good deal of time in his native Kiev, working for the military press agency and on the first Ukrainian newsreel, Zhivoj Zhurnal (Living Journal), none of whose four known installments have survived; it is unclear what relation Ukrainskaia Khronika (1919 [RGAKFD 10695]) might have to those issues). He shifted his base to Petrograd for a time starting in 1921 (Letopis’, vol. 1, 256; A. Rubashkin, Mikhail Kol’tsov: Kritiko-biograficheskii Ocherk (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1971), 8-9; G. Zhurov, “Pervye shagi sovetskogo kino na Ukraina,” Voprosy Kinoiskusstva 7 (1963): 187-209, esp. 190-191).

3 Listov, Istorii smotrit v ob’ektiv, 150.
no need to imagine that the virtues of Kino-Nedelia – of which there are many, as we will see – were all due to Dziga Vertov.4

At the same time, it is important not to underestimate Vertov’s contributions to Kino-Nedelia or its importance to his development, either, despite the fact that we cannot confidently attribute even one sequence in the series to his editorial hand. In early 1919, he was charged by Gardin, then head of the Photo-Film Division, with directing the restoration of the first 35 installments of Kino-Nedelia, from which Vertov and Savel’ev had taken much of the footage (primarily from issues 1-22) included in Anniversary of the Revolution and Brain of Soviet Russia. The former compilation film was prepared in time for the 7 November anniversary celebrations, while the latter was a gallery of film-portraits of regime leaders that actually comprised a section of Anniversary but was often shown independently.5 By mid-March 1919, according to a VFKO bulletin, Kino-Nedelia was in “terrible condition,” “a sauce of negatives, positives, intertitles, fragments of fiction films, and so on.”

4 On Kino-Nedelia, see Listov, Istoriia smotr i v ob’ektiv 129-153 and Rossiia, Revoliutsiia, Kinematograf, 78-94; and Magidov, Zrimaia pamiat’ istorii, 84-86. Although Evolution of Style in the Early Work of Dziga Vertov (esp. 32-51) ascribes too much editorial control over Kino-Nedelia to Vertov, no doubt due to the inaccessibility of the archival materials available to Listov and Magidov, Seth Feldman’s book contains many useful reflections on and analyses of the films themselves. On Savel’ev, see Levitskij, Rasskazy o kinematografie, 162-163.

5 See GARF f. 2306, op. 27, d. 12, l. 46; Listov, Istoriia Smotr i v Ob’ektiv, 152; Magidov, Zrimaia Pamiat’ istorii, 85-86. Both chronology and Vertov’s notes on the earliest surviving montage lists (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, dd. 1-4) indicate that Kino-Nedelia 22 (dated 29 October 1918) was the last newsreel in the series from which images were drawn for inclusion in the Anniversary film, although footage from Svobodnaia Rossiia was also used. Vertov wrote down a detailed description of the “condition of Kino-Nedelia,” still drastically incomplete, on 5 May 1919 (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 381, l. 3-8).
which Vertov was assigned to bring back into proper order.\textsuperscript{6} Thus Vertov was at least partially responsible for the shape later taken by the Kino-Nedelias, although that restored shape did not conform to their earlier (or “original”) condition, as we will see. It is also worth noting that during the period Vertov was busy working on the restoration – from around mid-March through early May – no new installments of Kino-Nedelja appeared, which might suggest that he was either running the show by then, or at least central to its operation (although shortages of film stock were endemic at the time as well).\textsuperscript{7}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{6} Listov, Istoriiia smotrit v ob’ektiv, 152. The phrase about the “sauce of negatives” may have come from Vertov’s own report on the condition of Kino-Nedelja. According to the bulletin, five issues of the newsreel had been restored by 24 March.

\textsuperscript{7} Prints of most installments of Kino-Nedelja, not all complete by any means, exist in RGAKFD. At some point in the early 1920s, probably not earlier than 1923, 18 installments (including 1, 3-5, 21-26, and 31-35, and possibly 2 and 28-30 as well) were transported to Norway under the auspices of Alexandra Kollontai, who served in the Soviet trade delegation there, most of the time as its head, from 1922-1925. They later apparently ended up in the Soviet embassy in Sweden (where Kollontai was ambassador from 1930-1945), were purchased by a Swedish TV station in the 50s, and were finally acquired by the Swedish Film Institute in 1968 (see Barbara Evans Clements, Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), 223-251; and Anna-Lena Wibom, “Der Fund der Kinonedelja in Schweden,” Maske und Kothurn 50:1 (2004): 73-76). Copies of these prints, all of which definitely postdate the 1919 restoration, were later acquired by the Austrian Film Museum and by Gosfilmofond (Listov, Istoriiia smotrit v ob’ektiv, 131). It is unclear why Kino-Nedelja was brought to Norway four years after the newsreel series had terminated, and when the events it depicted were no longer news. The Herman Axelbank Motion Picture Film Collection at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution may also contain footage from Kino-Nedelja, although the way the collection is catalogued makes it almost impossible to tell without inspecting all the material. The most important surviving montage lists – mostly but not exclusively lists of intertitles, and including some indications as to which items were excised and used in other films (see below) – are to be found in Vertov’s archive in RGALI (f. 2091, op. 2, dd. 1-5). The first 35 lists, however, also clearly date to no earlier than the restoration, as I will discuss below. A remarkable poster announcing Kino-Nedelja 4 (25 June 1918), which includes a list of items in the newsreel, was reproduced in an important recent volume (Tolstoj, ed.,
Although Vertov began to boast of his authorship of “the first Soviet newsreel” by the early 1940s – as part of an increasingly desperate effort, I would postulate, to generate much-needed cultural capital, especially after losing a number of his patron-supporters (like Kol’tsov) during the Great Terror – for many years previously he had dismissed Kino-Nedelia as “primitive,” as little more than prerevolutionary (i.e., Pathé, Gaumont or Skobelev Committee) newsreel with “Soviet” intertitles and “post-revolutionary” content, even as he acknowledged the series as the beginning of his career in film. And indeed, the images of demonstrations, meetings and parades contained in Vertov’s earliest co-authored work, the 1918 found-footage film Anniversary of the Revolution, are drawn largely from the Skobelev Committee’s Svobodnaia Rossiia as well as from Kino-Nedelia.

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Agitmassovoe iskusstvo, 122); the announcement presumably dates to 1918 and is the earliest record of the contents of this particular installment, but I have seen no other Kino-Nedelia posters. In 1965, a censored/bowdlerized catalog of montage lists for Soviet newsreel produced between 1918 and 1925 was produced as a guide to archival holdings. In this catalog, no mention is made, for instance, of the many major early Soviet leaders who appeared in Kino-Nedelia (e.g., Kamenev, Zinoviev, Trotsky above all) but were later murdered during the Great Terror; still, materials from both Vertov’s and Boltianskii’s archives (at that time still in private hands) were evidently used in creating this catalog, and it is worth consulting for that reason alone (Sovetskaia kinokhronika 1918-1925 gg.: Annotirovannyi katalog, part 1, ed. Iu. A. Poliakov and S.V. Drobashenko (Moscow: Glavnoe arkhiivnoe upravlenie pri SM SSSR, 1965), 9-38; on the use of the Svilova [Vertov] and Boltianskii archives, see p. 5). Finally, there is the online catalog of the holdings in RGAKFD (http://www.rusarchives.ru/federal/rgakfd/catalog/catalog.htm), which contains brief descriptions of the films as they exist in the archive. See also Tsivian, ed., Lines of Resistance, 403.

8 See esp. Stat’i i vystupleniiia, 320, 326, 359, 387.

9 Ibid., 49, 64, 133.
and would have no precise narrative or ideological charge independently of the
often quite lengthy intertitles in which they are nested.

Still, if they do not allude to Kino-Nedelia explicitly, a number of Vertov’s
post-1922 works – several of the Kino-Pravdas, Stride, Soviet, and Three Songs of
Lenin – make use of footage from Kino-Nedelia, mainly images from the Civil War
period (a famous shot of a soldier on guard during a blizzard, for instance, used by
Vertov to signify the suffering wrought by cold during the war) and of Lenin (e.g.,
speaking from the balcony of the Moscow Soviet after the murders of Karl
Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg). And although we know little about the
provenance of the footage used in Vertov’s early compilation films, such as the
largely lost History of the Civil War (1921), some of it, and probably much of it, came
from Kino-Nedelia.

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10 The image of Lenin appears in Kino-Pravda 21 and Stride, Soviet, among others;
that of the cold-embattled soldier, in Three Songs of Lenin as well (see image). Both
shots come from Kino-Nedelia 32 (24 January 1919). Like the Kino-Pravdas to
follow – though formally far less complex than those later, experimental works –
Kino-Nedelia is extraordinarily packed with fascinating if time-bound detail; indeed,
it could be argued that the best way to discuss the series would be a straightforward
explication de texte, shot by shot, perhaps in the form of a CD-ROM or extended DVD
essay. Such an approach would yield a volume on its own, and demand much more
historical knowledge than I possess.

11 For example, shots taken by Eduard Tisse of military action on the Kama River
(sunken ships, naval inspection) and included in Kino-Nedelia 27 (10 December
1918) found their way into the second section of History of the Civil War (RGALI f.
2091, op. 2, d. 5, l. 5). Much of the footage in that film depicting forces under the
command of Innokentij Serafimovich Kozhevnikov (1879-1931) comes from the
newsreel as well (issues 32, 33, 34, 42); see below.
Image 1: Soldier in a blizzard, from *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934/38); originally in *Kino-Nedelia* 32 (24 January 1919). Source: Yale University Film Study Center.

1. *Kino-Nedelia*, “khronika” and early newsreel

Vertov’s snubbing of *Kino-Nedelia* raises the question – never seriously posed or addressed, to my knowledge - of the concrete relationship of the series to other early newsreel in form and content, and its place within the early history of “film-journals” as such. That history has yet to be written, and thus my own tentative efforts to situate *Kino-Nedelia* are strictly confined to the framework provided by important recent research into the *Pathé Journal*, descriptions of surviving Skobelev Committee non-fiction films, and archival materials on the Committee’s post-February *Svobodnaia Rossia*.

Before doing this, however, a major terminological/translation issue surrounding the very word “newsreel” needs to be cleared up. Readers may have noticed that I have occasionally used the hybrid “non-fiction/newsreel” to describe
the kind of filmmaking Vertov was or would be engaged in. This hybrid has
functioned as my jerry-rigged translation of *khrónika* (“chronicle,” literally), the
evasive word used during these early years (particularly up to around 1927 or so,
when “documentary” starts to appear) to name this sort of film practice, and whose
accurate translation within the filmmaking context presents significant challenges.12
Most often, *khronika* is translated into English as *newsreel*, but a close look at the
uses of “*khronika*” reveals that newsreel – that is, sequences of “items” devoted for
the most part to events taken to be minimally publicly significant; often condensed
from single-subject non-fiction reels; and arranged into short films numberd
periodically (like newspapers) and typically exhibited prior to a theatrical feature –
was but one of the word’s referents in Russia from the late ’teens through the
1920s.13 (“Minimally publicly significant” events could include anything from major
disasters and political assemblies to holiday parades and sports.) Nor does the use
of *khronika* within film discourse of the time map in any important way onto the
then-current meaning of *khronika* as a category of newspaper item: that is, a brief
digest of recent events taken to be important enough to mention, but not important
enough to merit treatment in a separate article.

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12 The most important grappling with the term of which I am aware (and which has
influenced my thoughts here) is that of Maxim Pozdorovkin in his dissertation
"Khronika: Soviet newsreel at the dawn of the information age," Harvard University,
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, PhD dissertation (2012), esp. 1-12.

13 The convention of translating *khronika* as "newsreel" is observed in nearly all
English-language publications on Vertov, including in the collections *Kino-Eye* and
*Lines of Resistance*. In his *Dziga Vertov*, Jeremy Hicks briefly notes the problems of
interpretation posed by *khronika* (51), but both persists in translating the term as
“newsreel” and seriously misreads the usages of *khronika* and other non-fiction-
related vocabulary in the 1920s, in part by relying on anachronistic dictionary
definitions as evidence.
The majority of what we think of as non-fiction films, whether newsreels or not, were all referred to in Russian as *khronika* or (more rarely) *khronikal’nye fil’my*. “Journal” or “film-journal” was the readiest designator of newsreel, as we will see, but phrases like “chronicle of current events” (*khronika tekushchikh sobytij*, more often *tekushchaia khronika*), “chronicle-almanac” (*sbornaia khronika*), even “informational chronicle-almanacs of events” (*sbornye khroniki sobytij informatsionnogo tipa*) were also applied to this kind of filmmaking, even if one of the key distinguishing features of newsreel at this time was simply that its issues were numbered chronologically and bore a single name, like a newspaper.

To a considerable extent, indeed, “newsreel” during the period was constructed and regarded in light of the newspaper analogue, in the USSR and elsewhere (as we will see soon enough). In his original 1922 pitch to Soviet authorities for what would eventually (under Vertov’s supervision) become the *Kino-Pravda* series, director Fyodor Otsep praised *khronika* for its value as “the surest means of [disseminating] agitation, enlightenment and new ideas,” but used the term “journal” (*zhurnal*; or “film journal” (*kinematograficheskij zhurnal*, *kinozhurnal*) or “screen journal” (*ekrannij zhurnal*)) to name the multi-item

14 For one of many usages of *tekushchaia khronika* to distinguish newsreel (in this case the Goskinokalendar’ series) from other from other non-fictional types like the “thematic-political” or “scientific-domestic [nauchno-bytovaia],” see Vertov’s plan for the film *Proizvodstvo Goskino na grani 1924 i 1925 goda* (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 30; SV 1, 89-91). For the other usages, see G. Boltianskij, *Kino-khronika i kak ee snimat’* (Moscow: Kinopechat’, 1926), 27, 35.

15 See Vertov’s notations for *Kino-Nedelia* and the shorter films that it condensed and incorporated (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 381, ll. 9-10). Vertov would often use *khronika* to refer to the *Kino-Pravdas* when discussing the individual films as numbered items as well.
periodical format he was proposing. The important 1924 history of cinema by Nikolai Lebedev (later to appear as a protagonist in these pages) defines *kino-khronika* both as “the filming not of staged but of actual events” and as “a film showing us the day's current events”: the latter can in turn take the shape of “periodical screen newspapers” – of great use, Lebedev says, in a country where 70 percent of the citizens are illiterate – or of “special screen almanacs [sborniki]” on specific themes, into which staged agitational sequences might also be incorporated. By 1925, the Party's Agitprop division was distinguishing between “film-khronika” (kino-khronika) and “film-journals” (fil'mo-zhurnaly), while privileging them both for their presumed agitational effectiveness relative to other media forms.

Was newsreel (“journal,” “chronicle-almanac”) then simply a subset of the more general category *khronika*? Vertov's own usage often seems to confirm this proposition: particularly at the series’ outset, he usually referred to *Kino-Pravda* as a “screen newspaper,” a “periodical film journal” or a “chronicle-almanac,” while sometimes referring to it simply as *khronika*, though often in connection with specific issue numbers. Similarly, judging from Boltianskij’s usage in his 1926 book on the topic, *kino-khronika* could refer to both single-topic, event-focused non-

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16 Listov and Khokhlova, eds., *Istoriiia otechestvennaia kino*, 130-136. See Chapter 5 for more on Otsep's proposal.

17 Nikolai Lebedev, *Kino: ego kratkaia istoriia, ego vozmozhnosti, ego stroitël'stvo v sovetskom gosudarstve* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1924), 119, 124-125; Lebedev's emphasis.


19 See for instance *[SV]*, 18, 24-25, 32.
fiction films and to newsreel more narrowly considered. Where the “screen newspaper,” opines Boltianskij, has become the default form of “bourgeois kino-khronika” in the West – presumably in the wake of the early “actuality” period – many short non-fiction works of neither the “scenic” nor “newsreel” type have continued to appear in the USSR, with the non-newsreels primarily “agitational” in function, and the newsreels (he names the “weekly almanac-chronicle Sovkinozhurnal”) primarily “informational.”20 (The meanings of these two descriptors will also need to be unpacked in the pages that follow, needless to say.)

But a closer look at the term’s functions in the early Soviet period reveals that khronika did not subsume “newsreel” in at least two highly important respects. First, as we have already indicated via Lebedev’s remarks on the form, newsreel (zhurnal, sbornik) could and did incorporate staged sequences: and Otsep’s 1922 proposal explicitly made room for staged agitational numbers in his zhurnal.21 Indeed, one can find all kinds of explicitly (not surreptitiously) staged material in Soviet and other newsreel during this period, at least through the early 1930s, when even elaborate stop-action animated sequences began to appear. Just as newspapers could contain fictional sections, so could newsreels. Such sequences seem not to have raised many eyebrows among newsreel-goers, either: Boltianskij in 1926 grumbled that the Ukrainian newsreel Makhovik (Flywheel) relied almost

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20 Boltianskij, Kino-khronika, 10-12, 27. See also 19 for mention of the foreign success won by one of the non-newsreel khronika films produced by Mezrjabpom after 1922. Importantly, when offering an example for amateur workers in khronika to follow, Boltianskij explicitly discusses not an “almanac chronicle-journal [i.e., newsreel], but the more difficult-to-structure thematic-chronicle-picture” of the Kino-Pravda type (30, 35).

21 Listov and Khokhlova, eds., Istoriia otechestvennaia kino, 132.
completely on staged material – that is (in his words), it contained almost no “khronika,” here clearly signifying unstaged/non-fictional footage. Whatever else \textit{khronika} meant – and we need to be careful not to ascribe to the term too much stability or coherence - it certainly meant “non-fiction” (that is, unstaged and unscripted), although what exactly constituted “staged/unstaged,” for these filmmakers and these audiences, is far from obvious, as we will see. The important point to make for now is that Vertov’s alliance with \textit{khronika} (not newsreel) immediately and persistently raised the question of the fictiveness (or not) of his films: an old motif of Vertov studies, to be sure, but one that has not always been framed with due discursive or philological precision.

However, there is a second contrast to be drawn to \textit{khronika}, this time \textit{within} the sphere of “non-fiction,” that has been largely ignored and which, in my view, is at least as consequential for an understanding of Vertov’s films as the issue of fiction (to which it is related, in fact). Boltianskij in 1926 singles out \textit{khronika} as “the first form of filmmaking to have appeared,” but immediately draws a distinction between \textit{khronika} as devoted to capturing events on screen (“a parade in honor of Queen Victoria,” “the coronation of Nikolai II”), and “other forms of filming outside the studio \textit[s’emki natury]},” specifically the kind of film known in Russia as the \textit{vidovój}, coeval with \textit{khronika} proper. Perhaps a calque from the French “vue” or “scène” (the word “\textit{vid}” means “view”), the closest silent-era English-language equivalent of this term is probably the “scenic,” a non-fiction type which, as the name suggests,

\footnote{Boltianskij, \textit{Kino-khronika}, 33.}

\footnote{Ibid., 6.}
was devoted to representations of sights and places rather than narrated events – Moscow in winter, a marketplace, a sunny beach, mountain ranges, various “exotic” locales, and so on – and which persisted as an explicit genre marker in non-fiction films of the 1920s.

In a perceptive 1926 review of One Sixth of the World to which we shall return, critic and filmmaker Vitaly Zhemchuzhnyj clarifies the basic khronika/vidovoj distinction in passing, if not unproblematically:

Events [in One Sixth] are linked not as they follow each other chronologically (as in [khronikai]), or [in terms of their] territorial [proximity] (as in a “scenic film” [kak v ’vidovoj’]), [but] are connected by thematic features.

Along the status hierarchy of early Soviet non-fiction, the vidovoj, seemingly static photographically and merely contemplative, certainly occupied a lower rung than khronika – which in part explains, on the institutional level, Vertov’s pact with the term - even if, as we will see, Soviet newsreel (including the Kino-Pravdas) contained plenty of “views,” and Vertov’s most complex non-fiction feature film could be described without derisive intent by a New York Times writer in 1929 as a “scenic.”

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24 See for instance the “scenic [vidovaia] in two parts,” Dagestan (1926) by (cameramen) Petr Zotov, Iakov Tolchan and (editor) Sergei Liamin (RGAKFD 22016). The vidovoj was close kin to the travelogue proper, but seemed not to require any travel-narrative structural backbone: see “Travel films” in Richard Abel, ed., Encyclopedia of Early Cinema, 642.


Chronology, *pace* Zhemchuzhnyi, was certainly no distinguishing marker of *khronika* form, at least not the way it is of much fictional form. *Exposition* is clearly at least as important a discursive strategy for *khronika* as chronological narration; and as far as newsreel proper goes, I have seen virtually no multi-themed newsreels, Soviet or otherwise, that observe chronology across (in contrast to within) their various “subjects”: periodicity, not chronology, is their dominant temporal frame. Possibly already thinking about Vertov in 1926, Boltianskij insists that *khronika* montage is in no way tied to any “dry, chronological and protocol-type” norms; can be inflected by a whole range of “epic, lyrical or dramatic” genre colorations; and (in a crucial observation to which we will return in Chapter 5) can be vastly freer and more formally varied than fiction-film montage, insofar as it is not required to represent any “logically developing action . . . with specific characters.”

Yet Zhemchuzhnyj’s more basic implication – that *khronika* means effectively *historicized* or *narrativized non-fiction*, of which chronological form would be but one structural variant – accurately captures what I take to be the term’s dominant meaning. *Khronika*, unlike the *vidovoj*, presents putatively real events as unfolding within some version of public, collective time: that of the nation-state, most often. Short films as minimally historicized as, say, single-shot depictions of military parades, or even sporting events (as part of the history of the teams’ and their sponsors and fans) would count as *khronika*; “mere” panoramas of the Caucasus or close-ups of nesting polar birds would not. Thinking about the appeal of *khronika* films, it is hard to decide whether they drew audiences primarily by virtue of their

27 Ibid., 50-51.
spectacular character (i.e., as “attractions”), or because of the interest they
 generated as moments in larger historical trajectories (like wars; elections; the
 building of socialism) in which spectators were somehow invested: perhaps for both
 reasons, inseparably.

All I would emphasize for the moment is the way that the distinction
between the *vidovoj* and the *khronika* – between de-historicized presentation and
historicized structuration – becomes absolutely critical for Vertov from the *Kino-
Pravdas* onward, as a kind of line along which the films continually dance in their
explorations of (in Philip Rosen’s words) the “differentiation[s] between the
temporalities of the object and the documentary/historiographic subject.”

Everyday actions like washing and sewing and playing turn out (in *One Sixth of the
World*) not to be merely “scenic” but contributions to socialist construction itself;
the rocky profile of the Dnepr River, initially offered very much as a “scenic,” turns
out (in *The Eleventh Year*) to be the site of an epochal collective harnessing of
nature to human ends; and the exciting spectacle of filmmaking turns out (in *Man
with a Movie Camera*) to be the event that makes the event of socialist construction
visible in the first place. To be sure, the line between “scenic” and *khronika* runs
parallel to that distinguishing fiction and non-fiction as they traverse a common
territory of ideology, even if the former contrast concerns primarily spectator
positioning through filmic structure (or “montage”), and the latter the difference
between the “played” and the “unplayed” (*igrovoe/neigrovoe*), to name a binary that
becomes important around 1926 or so.

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So at the risk of irritating my readers, I propose mostly retaining the term *khronika* in untranslated form in these pages, in part because of the inelegance of any adequate English equivalent (like “historicized non-fiction”), and in part to push against the normative translation “newsreel,” which plainly will not do and has led to serious mischaracterizations of Vertov’s practice as oriented around the purveying of “news,” or what in Soviet parlance would more likely and precisely be termed “*informatsiia.*” Early on, *kino-khronika* already meant far more than that, and thus gave Vertov a more expansive range of theoretical and practical options than “newsreel” does, or did. To be sure, we will need to attend to the later vicissitudes of *khronika* and associated terms, as it is partially supplanted both as a generic marker and as a name for a certain film-industrial practice (by “documentary,” above all), re-signified (to mean “historical footage,” for instance), but never entirely superseded.

All of this does not go to say that newsreel as a practice and set of conventions is unimportant to an assessment of Vertov’s work: on the contrary, as will be seen in Chapter 5, I conceptualize my own discussion of the Kino-Pravdas largely around that series’ conformity with and departures from newsreel convention. And Vertov emphatically did begin with newsreel (to recover the thread

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29 The mischaracterization is perhaps plainest in Hicks’s *Dziga Vertov* (see pp. 2, 17-18 and *passim*) but finds significant early expression in Erik Barnouw’s designation of Vertov as “Reporter” in his *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 2nd revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 51. Perhaps the best alternative English translation of *khronika* might be thought to be “actuality,” but my sense is that term, at least as currently understood, is on the one hand too restrictive (excluding newsreel or long-form documentary, for instance) and, perhaps more importantly, too inclusive, specifically of the “scenic,” from which *khronika* seems to have been clearly distinguished. I take my sense of the contemporary meanings of “actuality” largely from Rosen, *Change Mummified*. 
with which this section began); and we need to get a concrete sense of what newsreel practice proper would have meant by the time he got involved with it in 1918.

Although the notion of a photographic “living journal” goes back at least to 1882, and single-themed non-fiction or “actuality” films had appeared as early as 1895, the newsreel or “film-journal” proper was a relatively recent invention, dating back only to 1909 and Charles Pathé’s first *Journal*. Actualities were the progenitors, to be sure: the primary innovation leading to the newsreel, as identified by film historians Jeannine Baj and Sabine Lenk, was simply the sequencing-together of several actualities in a row. Eager for more “product” to exhibit, Pathé began to market these sequences as discrete films, leading to the emergence of a daily newsreel journal in October 1913. The status of “journal” was later solidified by printing an eight to sixteen page brochure to accompany the screenings, which functioned both as program notes and as a bridge between the films and the

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31 French precedents to the Pathé Journal – a *Journal Lumineux* from 1901, Gabriel Kaiser’s exhibition from 1906 of “always-new attractions, up-to-date” (“d’actualité”) in his Gab-Ka cinema – are numerous but evidently do not display that essential newsreel characteristic of a sequence of terse and disparate “items” linked together like discrete columns in a single newspaper. The first *Pathé Journal*, entitled *Pathé Faits Divers*, appeared in March 1909 (ibid., 265).
prestigious informational dailies. The success of the new form was considerable, and by 1912, Pathé’s newsreels had attracted enough of a public to warrant opening a special newsreel-only cinema in the Rue Saint-Denis.

Judging from examples preserved in Belgium and the Netherlands, the number of items in early Pathé newsreel averaged around eight in 1909-10 and around 12 in 1911, with approximately one minute given over to each item. Each subject would open with an intertitle indicating the place of shooting, names of important figures, the occasion, and sometimes the date, thereby amplifying and situating the image. This basic newsreel format was carried over into Svobodnaia Rossiia (April-October 1917) as well, a typical installment of which included around 15 items, each prefaced by an informative intertitle; evidently, this template was standard for other Russian newsreel of the time. On average, Pathé Journal items

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32 Ibid. Indeed, an examination of Russian illustrated journals, such as Petersburg’s Niva (1870-1917), makes it clear that they were a likely source of some of the popular topics – ranging from royal pageantry to scientific discoveries to sites of disasters – of newsreel and other non-fiction films.

33 Competitors Gaumont and Éclair began producing their own journals in 1910 and 1912 respectively, and German firms began producing newsreels around the same time (ibid., 264, 266).

34 RGALI f. 2057, op.1, d. 261, ll. 10-16, 69-72. Because so few installments of Svobodnaia Rossiia have survived, it is difficult to determine their average length or average number of shots per item; however, they evidently ranged from 114 to 210 meters in length. Average length for a typical Kino-Nedelia issue is hardly easier to figure out, for related reasons, although much more footage from the series has survived. Indications on montage lists for 17 of the newsreels suggest an average of 161.3 meters (ranging from 118 to 195 meters), although that figure is probably slightly low; the lengths of the majority of the apparently more complete copies of Kino-Nedelia in RGAKFD fall within that range, although at least two are significantly longer (issues 20 (209.8 meters) and 38 (239.8 meters)). It is also worth noting that although an average Kino-Nedelia issue contained about 13 to 15 items, the number varied from a mere four (in Kino-Nedelia 11 (13 August 1918)) to
incorporated around 3 or 4 shots – as few as one, as many as eight – filmed with a fixed camera and (at least in the early years) rarely panning.\textsuperscript{35}

Generalizations about number of shots-per-item are not especially informative, however, as that number depended upon the content of the item itself, and especially on the prominence accorded it within the overall sequence. Indeed, perceived importance as well as the sheer size or scope of a given event or spectacle – aristocratic families and their celebrations, royal visits and marriages, the dedication of monuments to historical figures, military parades, events attracting large crowds, spectacular achievements like balloon flights, whopping big disasters – evidently justified not only an item’s inclusion in the newsreel, but also its placement near or at the beginning, greater length, and whether or not the person or persons onscreen were named in the intertitles. Predictably, reports on the war came to occupy more newsreel space starting in 1914, although the largest overall proportion of Pathé newsreel subjects was consistently taken up by sports (with horse racing a particular favorite) throughout these early years.\textsuperscript{36}

Pathé’s Russian division was by far the largest distributor and producer of newsreel in the country prior to February 1917, distantly followed by the Skobelev

\textsuperscript{25} in issue 43 (27 June 1919) – a far greater range than we find, for instance, in Svobodnaia Rossiia.

\textsuperscript{35} I suspect that the number of pans increased over time; certainly, Kino-Nedelia included many pans from the beginning of the series.

\textsuperscript{36} Baj and Lenk, “‘Le Premier Journal Vivant,’” 266-269. For some surviving Pathé Journal coverage of the war, see RGAKFD 22796 (French scenes) and 12240 (Russian front).
Committee, Gaumont, and the Khanzhonkov and Drankov firms. Although sporting events were sometimes depicted in Russian Pathé – boxing, bicycle racing, yachting and so on – alongside accidents and fires, the overwhelming stress was on military, aristocratic and imperial spectacle, mainly but not exclusively Russian.

The pre-1917 films of the Skobelev Committee shared this focus, although the Committee, perhaps because of its solemn affiliation with the state, avoided straightforwardly entertaining items like sports sequences or slices of life, producing instead, among other films, elaborate, two to five-reel films on battles and various military operations which contained, in Russia as elsewhere, plenty of staged sequences.

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37 Pathé newsreels began to appear in Russia already in 1909, soon after their Parisian debut; there was a noticeable falling-off of productivity after the peak reached in 1914 (Batalin, Kinokhronika v Rossii, 469-476).

38 Ibid., 252. See RGAKFD 472 for a charming newsreel fragment depicting Boy Scouts guarding boxes of film saved from a warehouse fire.

39 See RGAKFD 12867 (on the celebration of the 300th year of the Romanov dynasty) and 12083 (on the funeral of Sergei Muromtsev (1850-1910), chair of the first imperial Duma) for two typical examples. The same themes were commonplace in illustrated journals like Niva.

40 See the two-reel Padenie Trapezunda (Fall of Trebizond, 1916; RGAKFD 11535); the two-reel Padenie Peremyshlia (Fall of Przemysl, 1915; RGAKFD 11507); the three-reel Shturm i vziatie Erzeruma (Storm and Taking of Erzurum, 1915; RGAKFD 13075); the five-reel Galitsiia (Galicia, 1914; RGAKFD 810); and the descriptions in Batalin, Kinokhronika, 45, 163, 169, 392. The Trebizond film does depict military maneuvers and the firing of guns, but the "combat" narrative is entirely constructed with the help of lengthy intertitles. The proportion of staged to non-staged sequences in these films is not easy to determine (and depends on what is meant by "staged"), although it is plain that "non-fiction" battle scenes filmed during these years certainly did incorporate frequent staging; see Batalin, 192; Jahn, Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I, pp. 154-158. On ubiquitous fakery in early news film, see Raymond Fielding, The American Newsreel: A Complete History, 1911-1967 (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland and Company, 2006), pp. 25-31
Importantly for us, if the dynasts, their relatives and great military men
dilated across pre-1917 newsreel (Pathé or Skobelev), their parliamentary
counterparts – above all, members of the State Duma, intermittently in operation
between 1906-1917 – almost never appeared. A couple of appearances by well-
known figures like Purishkevich, Kadet leader Pavel Miliukov, or Octobrist
Aleksandr Protopopov made up pretty much the sum of Duma representation in
newsreel, judging from the existing films and descriptions; nor, evidently, was there
any reporting on Duma activities and resolutions. Indeed, French Prime Minister
Raymond Poincaré and British monarch George V appeared far more often than any
Duma representatives. Whether this was due to censorship, lack of access to Duma
figures, or lack of public interest is not clear; what is clear is that the Committee’s
post-February Svobodnaia Rossiia newsreels moved those new, “democratic” state
authorities front and center.

and especially (on World War I) pp. 68-70. The practice seems to have originated
with still photography; see, for example, the heavily retouched and often plainly
staged photos in Francis Trevelyan Miller, ed., Photographic History of the Great
War (New York: New York Tribune, 1914). Objectivity was a proclaimed goal
nonetheless: “This monumental ‘Photographic History of the Great War’ is being
produced to give the American people the first absolutely unbiased record
of the epoch-making events that are destroying nations and remolding the geography of
the world . . . . It will be strictly neutral in its viewpoint, according to the
proclamation of President Wilson” (I, 39; italics in original).

41 Batalin, Kinokhronika, 167, 225, 341, 384, 439, 457. More newsreel footage of
Duma members was likely taken, though in miniscule proportion to
dynastic/aristocratic items; some of it appears in Esfir Shub’s Fall of the Romanov
Dynasty (1927). It would be important to know how often “secular” state leaders
appeared in, say, British and German newsreel of the day, but I have not been able to
uncover sufficient information to make the comparison. My suspicion is that
portraiture of “parliamentary/republican” leaders began to take up much more
newsreel space Europe-wide after the Great War.
In this and other ways, as indicated in Chapter Three, *Svobodnaia Rossiia* and other pre-October non-fiction films provided crucial templates for the Soviet newsreels that succeeded them. Although the second installment of *Svobodnaia Rossiia* (April 1918) contains footage of a visually spectacular “news event” (a fire), the bulk of the newsreel presents spectators with images and intertitle identifications of leaders of the new Provisional Government (I.G. Tsereteli, M.N. Skobelev, V.N. Chernov and so on), alongside heads of the army and navy (such as General Brusilov and Admiral Kolchak), gatherings of various committees and political groups (the Petrograd Executive Committee of Soviet Workers and Soldier Deputies), and foreign dignitaries in Russia (representatives from the Italian consulate and various Italian socialists; British feminist Emmeline Pankhurst). Such “film-portraits” of state luminaries, presented either as individuals or in groups, persisted in *Svobodnaia Rossiia* and would become one of the mainstays of Soviet newsreel, beginning with *Kino-Nedelia*.

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42 Neither *Svobodnaia Rossiia* nor the short non-fiction subjects produced by the Skobelev Committee after February 1917 have been much studied, in part because only a couple of the newsreel’s 13 installments, bits and pieces of other newsreels and short films, and montage lists (essentially lists of the items in the newsreels) have survived.

43 RGALI f. 2057, op. 1, d. 261, l. 69.

44 See the discussion of early Soviet political “film-portraits” in Listov, Rossiia, Revoliutsiia, Kinematograf, 89; and (for further examples) the portrayal of Maria Spiridonova and the group portrait of peasant deputies in *Svobodnaia Rossiia* 5 (dated 3 July 1917 [RGAKFD 12377]). Vertov and Savel’ev’s *Brain of Soviet Russia* (1918) is essentially a full-scale gallery of such portraits, although it also includes images of former commissars as well as non-politicians (like poet Demian Bednyi) who occupied important positions. One finds similar portrait series in White newsreel and actuality film: for one example, see the gallery (of General Vladimir Maj-Majevskij and his lieutenants and adjutants) offered in *Vziatie goroda Poltavy*.
Sometimes entire installments were devoted to a major political event, as in the case of *Svobodnaia Rossiia* 12 (21 September), which dealt exclusively with the “democratic assembly” of 14-20 September in Petrograd, thereby presaging, in its unity, such works as *Kino-Pravda* 14 (1922; on the Fourth Congress of the Comintern). Most strikingly, perhaps, the “trial film,” which might be thought to have been a specifically post-October innovation – the Soviet examples include Vertov’s early *Trial of [Colonel Filipp] Mironov* (1919); most of his first eight *Kino-Pravdas*, which use footage taken at the trial of the Right Socialist Revolutionaries (1922; discussed in detail in Chapter Five); Grigorii Lemberg’s remarkable “Trial of the Provocateur Okladskij,” which comprised the whole of *Goskinokalendar’* 46 (1925); and the filming of some of the notorious show trials of the 1930s, conducted on occasion by ex-kinocs45 - in fact commenced no later than the account offered in *Svobodnaia Rossiia* 11 (18 September 1917) of the August-September 1917 trial of *voiskami Generala Maj-Majevskogo* (1919 [RGAKFD 12374]). Illustrated journals in the pre-revolutionary period contained much photo-portraiture of well-known writers, soldiers, and royals; politicians were less frequently represented, at least in Russia.

45 *[Protsess] Mironova* (1919; RGAKFD 384); *Goskinokalendar’* 46 (1925, filming and montage by G. Lemberg; RGAKFD 228); I. Kopalin [cameraman I. Beliakov], *Prigovor suda – prigovor naroda* (1938; RGAKFD 4140). Filipp Mironov (1872-1921) was a celebrated Don Cossack military commander on the Red side who was sharply and publicly critical of the Bolshevik’s coercive measures against peasants and Cossacks. After initiating a march against General Denikin against Trotsky’s orders in August 1919, he was arrested, sentenced to death, but soon pardoned and freed at the end of October. After returning to the battlefield and many successes against the Whites, Mironov was re-arrested in late 1920 and shot in prison, doubtless on Cheka orders, on 2 April 1921 (see Deriabin, ed., *Dramaturgicheskie opyty*, 35-39, 480-481; V. Danilov and T. Shanin, eds., *Filipp Mironov: Tikhij Don v 1917-1921 gg.* (Moscow: Fond “Demokratii,” 1997)). Ivan Okladskij (1859-1925) was tried for his work as a police double agent and agent provocateur inside the People’s Will party. See also the discussion of the representation of the Right SR trial in Vertov’s *Kino-Pravdas* in Chapter Five, below.
General Vladimir Sukhomlinov and his wife on charges of treason and abuse of power. This newsreel, which treats the trial exclusively, included depictions of guards holding him and his wife under house arrest (and demonstrating the marks placed on the outside wall of the Sukhomlinov's apartment to distinguish it), shots of defense and prosecution council, and (in its first, now lost redaction) shots of travel to the Hall of Justice and repurposed archival images of the general from 1912 and 1915. (The “historical value” of the 1912 image was intriguingly stressed in an intertitle presenting it as a “rare photograph of SUKHOMLINOV . . . taken from the German newspaper Berliner Tageblatt.”) \(^{46}\) Topics such as these – heads of state, meetings, and trials, alongside brief surveys of state institutions and achievements, and the usual parades – remained central, as we have said, to Soviet newsreel from 1918 onward.

2. *Newsreel metamorphoses*

Vertov might have felt ambivalent about claiming authorship of *Kino-Nedelia* after 1940, given that so many figures who appear prominently in the newsreel – Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Fyodor Raskol’nikov, Karl Radek, no doubt literally scores of others – had been murdered by the regime, mainly during the purges of 1937-38. All installments were securely shelved and inaccessible by that time, of course, and the very existence of copies in Scandinavia (brought over in the early

\(^{46}\) RGALI f. 2057, op.1, d. 261, l. 14; RGAKFD 12741. See also Ginzburg, *Kinematografija dorevoliutsionnoj Rossii*, 344.
1920s by Alexandra Kollontai) surely forgotten. Although many items and almost the whole of certain installments of Kino-Nedelia have gone missing, there is no clear evidence of any Orwellian retroactive excision of “enemies of the people” from the newsreel. Issue 7, for instance (16 June 1918) – dedicated to the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Worker’s, Peasant, Red Army and Cossack Deputies – has largely disappeared, and it might be thought that the high number of prominent political figures in this newsreel (as indicated in the montage lists) made it a target of vindictive censorship during the Stalin years. It is clear from the archival records, however, that it was Vertov and Savel’ev who ransacked issue 7 (among others) to make Brain of Soviet Russia back in 1918; indeed, as we will see shortly, one of the main forms of Kino-Nedelia’s posterity was its partial deployment in other films.

Given the complexity of the history of Kino-Nedelia, and the variety of uses to which it was put, we must speak of the newsreel as a set of processes – involving restoration, reuse, archiving, and so on – rather than as a set of finished film-artifacts. Kino-Nedelia is what happened to Kino-Nedelia, and following (or reconstructing) the trajectory of the newsreel helps bring to the fore a variety of conceivable practices of organizing footage, from fixing it in an authoritative place all the way to the possibility of near-infinite repositioning. My main argument in this section will be that these different practices, and the potential conflict among them,

47 See footnote 7.

48 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 381, l. 3; dated 5 May 1919. At this time, some footage was simply “missing” from the newsreels, according to Vertov’s notes; this footage, however, ranged from images of political figures (including controversial ones, like (in Kino-Nedelia 7) heads of the Left SRs and anarcho-communists) to quite commonplace shots of parades and gatherings.
constitute a horizon (or another “matrix”) for later montage work; but we need to recount the story of Kino-Nedelia and its reworking in some detail before that horizon becomes clear.

The first stage was the organization of filming and the actual shooting and gathering of dailies, procedures about which we know very little. Certainly, Kino-Nedelia was created in a far less rationalized way, at least outside of the biggest cities, than Boltianskii had advocated in his 1917 proposal for integrating technical advice (provided by cameramen), the mining of newspapers for notices of upcoming events, and overall coordination of personnel and shaping of the newsreel into a single newsreel-studio structure. Instead, it seems that much of the Kino-Nedelia footage, especially after the summer of 1918, derived from the expeditions of specific Film Committee cameramen who had joined up with Red forces traveling mainly on trains along various fronts of the Civil War. Eduard Tisse, later famous for his work with Eisenstein, worked in Moscow, Pskov, and along the Volga and Kama rivers; Aleksandr Lemberg traveled with his camera from Tver’, Nizhnii Novgorod and Pskov to Astrakhan and the Caucasus; Petr Novitskij, on the October Revolution agit-train with Mikhail Kalinin (to be succeeded by Aleksandr Levitskij and Vertov himself); Petr Ermolov, from Moscow to the Southern (Ukrainian) front, also on at least one occasion with Vertov; and Ianis Dored (who would later shoot Paramount News for 25 years in the US) filmed the graduation of Red officers in Tver’.

49 See discussion in Chapter Three.

50 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 5, ll. 5-7; d. 6, l. 3; RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 381, ll. 9-10; Listov, Rossiia, Revoliutsiia, Kinematograf, 78-79. Other cameramen (A.F. Vinkler, one Efremov, M.V. Naletnyi, numerous others) also worked on the newsreel: see
We have no records of communications between Vertov and these war correspondents, and it seems that it would have been difficult to direct them in any precise way from afar, even if certain personages and themes (major military figures; sites of destruction and construction; newly nationalized property) appear again and again and were obviously sought out systematically, as part of the cameramen’s assignments. At the same time, there seems to have been little coordination of the coverage in major Soviet newspapers like Pravda and Izvestiia with Kino-Nedelia, contrary to what has been suggested: if the leitmotif of most of the Kino-Nedelias (war and the drive for Red victory) certainly overlapped with the concerns and biases of the papers, there was little fine-grained, punctual binding of print journal with cine-journal either rhetorically or in terms of content.

RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 381, l. 11 for a list of the Committee’s cameramen, their studio affiliations and the cameras they used.

Indeed, Vertov indicated in a 1940 talk that Kino-Nedelia had no “information division” mediating between the cameramen and the editors (“Ot Kino-Nedelia k Kolybel’naia (kak vse eto nachalos’),” cited from RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 214, l. 7). See also Listov, Istoriiia smotrit’ v ob’ektiv, 135.

The link is suggested in Liliana Mal’kova, Sovremennost’ kak istoriia: Realizatsiia mifa v dokumental’nom kino (Moscow: Materik, 2001), 21. I would not exaggerate my point here, as events covered in Kino-Nedelia were sometimes written about more or less simultaneously in print journals (for examples, see Listov, Istoriiia smotrit’ v ob’ektiv, 144, and below); but it would be very misleading to think of Kino-Nedelia as a set of illustrations to Pravda, Izvestiia or other newspapers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>81% (35 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political figures, including non-Bolshevik leaders</td>
<td>63% (27 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public rituals, including parades; birthday celebrations; tearing down or raising of monuments</td>
<td>37% (16 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State achievements, including services for children; construction; provision of aid; life on communes; artistic and technological work; education</td>
<td>44% (19 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural and man-made disasters</td>
<td>26% (11 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slices of life</td>
<td>23% (10 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funerals (of soldiers, of various luminaries)</td>
<td>23% (10 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings and demonstrations</td>
<td>21% (9 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News from abroad (including Ukraine)</td>
<td>19% (8 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>7% (3 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trials and criminal proceedings</td>
<td>9% (4 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>9% (4 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agitational-propaganda activity (including agit-trains)</td>
<td>7% (3 newsreels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>2% (1 newsreel)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 1: Showing a breakdown of the topics treated in the 43 issues of Kino-Nedelia, with the approximate frequency of their occurrence (as a percentage of the total)

The footage taken by the cameramen was then organized into short actualities of greatly varying length, very much in the Pathé fashion, and integrated *en bloc* or (more often) in part into *Kino-Nedelia* or other non-fiction shorts. Thus 10 meters (out of 31) of “Tank transported from Odessa” and the full 19 meters of “Comrade Kalinin, Chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee” went into *Kino-Nedelia* 36; while 249 meters (from 376 total) of “Celebration of May 1” and 429 meters (of a total 694) of “The Journey of Comrade [cameraman Aleksandr] Lemberg on Comrade Mekhonoshin’s train-convoy” were included in *Kino-Nedelia*.
The actualities were also incorporated into other non-fiction films (such as the now-lost Cultural Work of Soviet Russia, which included “Worker’s Palace” (122 meters) and “Kindergartens” (70 meters)), or exhibited on their own, either without apparent augmentation (the 1089 meters of The Funeral of Comrade Sverdlov), or with additional footage (the films of the exposures of the relics of Sergius of Radonezh and Tikhon of Zadonsk, discussed at the end of this chapter).

Of course, actuality footage could be used to fashion newsreel and other khronika films as well, as with the 1428 meters of “The Journey of Comrade [cameraman Petr] Ermolov on Comrade Antonov’s train-convoy,” parts of which went into Kino-Nedelias 36, 40 and 41, but 431 meters of which also made up a separate (now lost) release entitled The Taking of Odessa. It may be that the severe shortage of raw film stock also occasioned these disparate uses of actuality footage, which could be made to serve multiple purposes: as material for an autonomous actuality; as incorporated into a larger non-fiction short; or as distilled to become a Kino-Nedelia item.

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53 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 381, ll. 9; the list of examples could be readily expanded, although I have no evidence about the integration of actualities into newsreel for any Kino-Nedelia issues prior to number 36. Konstantin Aleksandrovich Mekhonoshin (1889-1938) was a key member of the Revolutionary Military Soviet, active mainly on the Eastern and Southern fronts.

54 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 381, ll. 9-10. “Antonov” likely refers to the well-known military leader Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko (1883-1938). For other examples of actualities incorporated into Kino-Nedelia, see Listov, Rossiia, Revoliutsiia, Kinematograf, 88.

55 Listov suggests that cameramen may have received assignments to shoot material for specific Kino-Nedelia items starting in the fall of 1918 (Rossiia, Revoliutsiia, Kinematograf, 87). The extent to which workprints (positives) rather than negatives were used in fashioning these various actualities, and Kino-Nedelia, is unclear.
It is worth noting parenthetically that the frequent reference to cameramen – particularly in the provisional names of the actualities, but also on a number of the montage lists for Kino-Nedelia, though not in the intertitles or, indeed, in the titles under which they were exhibited – may quietly signal the beginning of the later Soviet celebration of newsreel cameramen, a highly masculinist kind of “star-making” that reached its apotheosis in the heady career of Roman Karmen (1906-1978). Starting in the 1930s, cameramen, who were virtually always credited in discreet newsreel items, frequently won major awards and honors and contributed to film journals and other publications, many of which followed their exploits as they filmed in dangerous and exciting places like the Arctic, the Far East, in the air, and on vast construction sites. As we will see later, the publicity for Vertov’s films of the 1920s helped to establish this interest, especially in reports on the work of cameramen Mikhail Kaufman (during the shooting of One Sixth of the World and The Eleventh Year) and Boris Tseitlin (Enthusiasm). Indeed, perhaps Vertov’s earliest “non-fiction script” is devoted to “The Mission of Comrade Vertov, Director [Instruktor] of Filming, under the command of Red Army Commander Comrade


See, for example, N. Kolin, ed., Zapiski Kinooperatorov (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1938). This practice may also be an extension/elaboration of illustrated magazine captioning, which also normally (in Niva, for instance) attributed specific gravures to particular artists.
Kozhevnikov,” which includes shots of a recaptured factory, speeches by various army heads, and a concluding, explicit, and apparently authentic depiction of the execution of a deserter. If the film was ever produced, it was made under a different title, and neither Vertov nor the cameraman (Ermolov) appeared onscreen; all the same, the motif of the “filmmaker’s or cameraman’s journey” seems to have been established very early, and finds its most extraordinary elaboration, of course, in *Man with a Movie Camera*, described sarcastically by Aleksandr Lemberg in 1960-61 as an “advertisement … for the work of cameraman Kaufman.”

No working notes survive from the period of *Kino-Nedelia*, and so we have no evidence on paper about the thought processes informing those condensations of actuality into newsreel. Still, close examination of the newsreels, even in their current incomplete state, reveals that they were carefully constructed, if not with anything like the kind of imagination, even abandon, that marks Vertov’s later *Kino-Pravdas*. Sometimes, entire sections of an issue were unified thematically, across several apparently disparate items, as in the first nine units of *Kino-Nedelia* 3 (15 June 1918), all of which were devoted to the theme introduced in the first intertitle, “The struggle against hunger” - a struggle that would become much more desperate by year’s end:

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57 RGALI f. 3017, op. 1, d. 20, l. 2. Vertov and Ermolov evidently did travel together; see SV, 283. Descriptions of a lost film called *The March of the Red Partisans on Ukraine* (1919) are similar to Vertov’s “mission,” and material from the expeditions of Tisse and Ermolov with Kozhevnikov’s troops appears in *Kino-Nedelias* 26, 29, 32-34 and 38 (Deriabin, ed., *Dramaturgicheskie opyty*, 478).
1. The struggle against hunger


4. Main Commissar of the Provisions Army [i.e., military units involved in food requisitioning] [Grigori] ZUSMANOVICH

5. Members of the intelligentsia working in gardens near the Butyrskaia Gate

6. Planting cabbage

7. Citizens planted potatoes across a large expanse of land

8. Lunches for the unemployed at the labor exchange

9. Lunch costs one ruble, 10 kopecks (2 shots)

The newsreel then moves on to a host of other topics, from the arrival of Russian wounded released from German captivity to the new Briansk train station in Moscow, but the thematic unity of the three broad subdivisions of this opening section – the Bolshevik leadership in charge of fighting hunger (intertitles 1-4), labor brigades at work planting vegetables (5-7), feeding the unemployed (8-9) – is quite plain. Indeed, one might go further and suggest that the sequence incorporates a causal logic as well, inasmuch as we move from the motif of requisitioning and the

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58 This intertitle, an important thematic framing device for the section, is missing from all prints I have seen of the newsreel, though not from the montage list.

59 The images that follow depict what is apparently gardening work made compulsory by the Provisions Commissariat and performed by non-workers. Butyrskaia Gate is near a famous (and notorious) prison in Moscow.

60 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 1, l. 8.
military approach to solving the hunger problem (intertitle 4) to a concrete example of compulsory labor in food production, to a final demonstration of the benefits brought about by the government’s “struggle against hunger.”

Processes large and small were also expertly narrated in Kino-Nedelia. An especially well-constructed sequence in issue 33 (31 January 1919) was devoted to snow removal on the front during that unusually hard winter. Across 14 shots, the film recounts three basic phases indicated on the montage list: “A train derailed [because of snowdrifts]. Cleaning the track. The first train to pass through after the snow is cleared.” The first four shots, all in long or medium long shot and sometimes involving pans rightward, offer a vista of trains sunk in snow with hordes of men digging into banks that rise to the wagon windows. These panoramas are followed by three more tightly framed shots that move from closeup to pan to reveal derailed wheel assemblies plugged with snow, thus showing how the snow not only covers the landscape, but penetrates into machinery as well. A pair of static shots then briefly depicts the organization of snow removal, as men heave snow upward from the tracks to be cleared by men on the high banks above. Three further shots then move back and forth between images of men working on now partially

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61 See also Listov, Istoriia smotrit v ob’ektiv, 134. Other examples of thematically highly unified sequences would include the section on the trial of Commander Pavel Dybenko in issue 1 (1 June 1918) and an item on the difficulties of milk distribution in hungry Moscow in issue 22 (29 October 1918). Kino-Nedelia 11 (13 August 1918) included as its final item what appears to have been a short instructional film on “how to protect oneself from cholera” (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 2, l. 10).

62 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 6, l. 3. The sequence is prefaced by an intertitle: “Along the way, Comrade Kozhevnikov’s train-convoy had to struggle stubbornly with snowdrifts along the tracks”; Ermolov provided the photography. The montage lists for issues 25 onward very occasionally include brief shot descriptions along with the texts of the intertitles.
visible track and teams just beginning to dig into the massive pile; a penultimate high-angle view of mainly cleared rails is succeeded by the triumphant leftward passage of a smoking train down the track, flanked on either side by enormous walls of shoveled snow. Interestingly, similar but less suspenseful or artful sequences about snow removal appeared in the previous two issues of *Kino-Nedelia* as well (31 (17 January) and 32 (24 January)), which might suggest that the editors of the series were rapidly gaining expertise at shaping actuality material to give it greater narrative drive. At any rate, representations of process, not all as thoughtfully constructed as this one, are to be found throughout *Kino-Nedelia*, early and late.63

63 Other examples might include the return of the Russian war invalids mentioned above (from issue 3), giving ID passes to refugees in issue 5 (2 July 1918), and the demonstration of a motorized hand cart in issue 21 (22 October 1918). *History of the Civil War* (1921) presented quite elaborate sequences about specific battles, such as the narrative in the film’s third part about the fight against Kolchak’s forces in Ufa, which moves from reconnaissance to artillery barrages, funerals, fighting on the front and finally (in some very early Soviet industrial shots) revived factories (“factories in those areas taken by the Red Army are immediately put into production”); much of this footage seems to have been taken from *Kino-Nedelia*. 
Images 2 and 3: Responses to the camera, from *Kino-Nedelia* 5 (top) and 27, both 1918. Source: RGAKFD 549, 12644.
Finally, Kino-Nedelia incorporated excellently fashioned non-narrative “slice of life” or *vidovój* sequences as well. A good example appears in the eighth item of issue 22 (29 October 1918), where we see the bustling marketplace of Kazan’ after the city was taken by the Reds and “life” (the intertitle tells us) “had settled back down to normal again.” Five shots of men getting their hair and beards trimmed manage to give a vivid impression of the activity at the bazaar by rapidly capturing both the specific motions of shaving and the energy of the surrounding crowds. As so often throughout Kino-Nedelia, the people filmed often stare back at or even seem to play (or want to play) with the camera, giving this actuality footage a haunting immediacy. This effect is especially keenly felt in the next two shots, depicting the baking and rolling-out of *bliny* (pancakes) by merchants who seem to be doing their best to demonstrate their craft as requested by the cameraman. The editors even manage to insert a moment of self-reflexivity, in a penultimate shot showing a small crowd impatient to watch moving images through a kinetoscope-like device. The intentionality behind the sequence is perhaps best revealed in the last image, a god’s-eye view of the entire marketplace, rhetorically summing up the scene as a whole (“life... back to normal”) while suggesting that what we have seen have indeed been mere views or “slices” of a complex social organism. The key point is that the sequence is clearly edited to give the impression of both variety (of

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64 My sense is that such god’s-eye view shots became (or already were) a standard way of closing-off “slice of life” sequences like this one, particularly if the topic was a bazaar or bustling urban scene. For another example, see Boris Kaufman and Jean Lods, *Les Halles Centrales* (1927).
activities: grooming, food preparation and consumption, entertainment, sheer milling-about) and of unity, particularly enforced by that final summary shot.65

To be sure, these depictions of coordinated state action (to combat hunger), of concrete efforts to secure victory (like snow removal), and of restored normalcy all worked together to produce an impression of the government’s wide-ranging and efficient involvement in the war effort and, by extension, in the country as a whole. This representation of ubiquity and simultaneity – of a sense of some great “meanwhile” joining the agents onscreen with the audiences viewing them – is, of course, one of the crucial functions of periodicals as such, as Benedict Anderson has argued, and probably of greater ideological significance than any “positive images” of the state conveyed via newsreel.66 Indeed, although the first item of the very first Kino-Nedelia was a tribute to Marx on his 100th birthday, the earliest issues contained relatively little of a tendentious, “Soviet” character: soldiers on the

65 Another excellent “slice of life” sequence, set in Petrograd, is found in issue 5 (2 July 1918), although its unity as a sequence is slightly compromised in the existing copies of the film because the opening title, “From the life of Petrograd,” is missing (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 1, l. 13). Occasionally, sections of Kino-Nedelia were tinted in order to give them greater representational charge, as in some blue-tinted shots at the end of issue 26 of Kozhevnikov’s flotilla on the moonlit Volga at night; this footage seems to have been drawn from another short film about Kozhevnikov fighting the Czechoslovak forces (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 5, l. 4).
66 “We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that. [...] The significance of this mass ceremony – Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers – is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?” (Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 1991), 35).
revolutionary side are even referred to as “Russian” (rather than “Red Army”) in the first three issues, and only in issue 4 (22 June 1918) does the term “socialist fatherland” appear.

As Kino-Nedelia progressed, however, specific issues did incorporate overtly agitational intertitle phrasing, sometimes as jolts delivered to the audience either at the beginning or end of the film. Occasionally entirely apolitical (like “Citizens, watch out for trolley cars!”: found in a Moscow slice-of-life sequence near the end of Kino-Nedelia 10 (6 August 1918)), these phrases most often inflected specific news items in a pro-revolutionary direction, such as at the conclusion of Kino-Nedelia 24 (19 November 1918), when “Soviet border patrols congratulate their German comrades on their liberation from monarchist slavery”; at the beginning of issue 34 (7 February 1919), when shots of the funeral of three fallen soldiers is preceded by the lapidary slogan “THE REVOLUTION DEMANDS SACRIFICES”; or in the 12th and penultimate title of issue 36 (1 May 1919), which greets the first post-monarchy elections in Red Vienna with “Hail the Socialist Republic.” Similarly, an image of a detachment of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets assembled to “do battle with [Admiral] Kolchak” is followed and framed by two concluding intertitles:

Under the Red Flag – against the black flag of Kolchak, the generals, and capitalists, the landowners

67 “Agitation” here means terse, sharp slogans intended to provoke immediate response or action; I reserve a more detailed discussion of agitation and its relationship to “propaganda” for later in this chapter.
68 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 2, l. 7; d. 4, l. 13; d. 6, ll. 6, 9.
Hail the world union of Republics of Labor.\textsuperscript{69}

A much more elaborate agitational sequence appears at the end of \textit{Kino-Nedelia} 25 (26 November 1918), which offers a kind of advertisement in intertitles – directly derived from a letter written by Lenin to attendees of an October 1918 meeting of various committees and soviets, published in \textit{Pravda} and \textit{Izvestiia} - for the newspaper \textit{The Armed People}, the first issue of which was about to hit Moscow newsstands:

\begin{quote}
We need an army of three million men

We will have an army of 100 million men

We will train the entire nation [shot: training workers on Strastnaia Square]

Read \textit{The Armed People}\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{69} RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 6, l. 15. By no means were such strategies found in \textit{Kino-Nedelia} alone, of course. Perhaps their most consistent deployment is to be found a couple of years later in \textit{History of the Civil War}, which juxtaposes not only images of orating revolutionary leaders like Trotsky with intertitles excerpted from speeches (“To White Terror we answer with Red Terror”), but intertitles with images of banners bearing the same messages (“Death to the bourgeoisie and their hangers-on”). Shots that had been framed in a quite neutral way in \textit{Kino-Nedelia}, such as some images of the aftermath of a conflagration at the Kursk station in Moscow in issue 31, were inflected by accusatory intertitles (“They blew up sections of trains, railway stations, railway workshops”) in the first section of \textit{History of the Civil War} (a section called “White Terror,” succeeded by “Organized revolts,” “Partisans,” “Czecholovak Front,” “Kolchak Front,” “Denikin Front,” and “Vrangel’ Front”). See \textit{Dramaturgicheskie opyty}, 48-50. The larger, fascinating story of how Soviet newsreel/actuality film was made more polemical (or less "neutral") over the course of the first years of Soviet power has been little studied. As late as June 1918, however, it was possible for an actuality about an explosion at a gunpowder warehouse to be presented as a series of "views" of the catastrophe, without any assignment of blame (\textit{Katastrofa v Kieve} [RGAKFD 12724]).
Kino-Nedelia 40 (13 May 1919) develops an agitational technique that would be much used in later Soviet silent newsreel: interspersing shots of speakers with pointed excerpts from their speeches. The first item of this issue was dedicated to the opening of the First All-Russian Congress for Extracurricular Education, and concluded with an extract from a speech by Lenin (intertitles 4-7):

N. Lenin in his speech of welcome said: “Only now that we have had done with external obstacles and broken the old institutions, does the first task of the proletarian revolution –

“truly rise before us in its full scope and for the first time: the organization of 10s and 100s of millions of people. –

“We must engage in a simple and essential task: the mobilization of the literate in a struggle against illiteracy.

“We must create an organized network of libraries, to help the people make use of EVERY BOOK WE HAVE.”

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70 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 5, l. 1; see also Feldman, Evolution of Style, 41. This newspaper may have simply been the renamed version of a venerable military periodical dating back to the post-Napoleonic period. For background on the unattributed citation from Lenin, see Listov, Istoriia smotrit v ob’ektiv, 137.  
71 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 6, l. 13. For other examples of political sloganeering in Kino-Nedelia, see Listov, Istoriia smotrit v ob’ektiv, 138.
Agitation, as we will see, was a permanent feature of Vertov’s work from the early 1920s onward. On one level, his films of the 1920s became laboratories for experimentation with agitational strategies, involving intertitles (sometimes graphically dynamized in remarkable ways), cited speech, images of posters and shouting mouths, and much else besides. Indeed, it might be argued that the most politically tendentious features of Vertov’s work – these explicit efforts to startle, to provoke, to motivate – were at times the most experimental or “formalist,” in the way they drew attention to themselves and broke up the expected unity of the filmic text.

In this regard, we might refer in passing to Vertov’s earliest truly formally innovative work, the lost “experimental etude” Battle for Tsaritsyn (Boj pod Tsaritsynom, 1919 or 1920), an intertitle-less film which employed very short shot lengths, as brief as five frames, in what was evidently an effort to convey the intensity of the battle by a direct “agitation” of vision via extremely rapid montage. (Famously – or as legend would have it – the first editor to whom Vertov presented the footage for Battle for Tsaritsyn simply threw most of it out, thinking it was but random bits and pieces not intended for inclusion in a film; Vertov duly reestablished the shots and entrusted them to none other than Elizaveta Svilova, who in a couple of years time would become his life partner and editor of nearly all his later films.)

72 Though a minority of Vertov’s colleagues, including Lev Kuleshov,
praised the experiment, the Film Committee’s Artistic Council and top brass reacted with hostility at its blasts of images unanchored by text; and Vertov wryly noted in a talk from February 1929 that although *Tsaritsyn* was a direct predecessor of the recently-completed *Man with a Movie Camera*, the response to the film at the time was such that he felt “unable to count on being able to [carry out any more] experiments.”

Given the risk, no doubt still imperfectly conceptualized, of formal footage of normal size – three or four meters in length – alternated with short, fast-moving responses [*repliki*] of 20, 10 or even five frames. It never occurred to the editor that such small blots were needed for the film, and so she just threw them into the trash. All of Vertov’s work went to naught.” Feeling sorry for him, Svilova put the pieces together as he had wanted. From then on, she wrote, only she edited his work (*Dziga Vertov v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, 66). The film was evidently shot by Aleksandr Lemberg (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 486, l. 84).

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73 *Stat’i i vystupleniia*, 165. It is not exactly clear when *Battle for Tsaritsyn* was made – the struggle for the city dragged on from the summer of 1918 to January 1920 – nor when nor why it disappeared. A brief and probably fragmentary film from 1919 (*Na Tsaritsynskom Fronte* [RGAKFD 12399]) includes a small amount of near-analytic editing - a medium long shot of an orator on a car, filmed from behind; orator gets out of the car, again in medium long shot; sudden close-up of a dead soldier and wreath in the car (which turns out to be a hearse) - but nothing resembling Vertov’s description (especially as regards shot length) and nothing about the battle itself. Tsaritsyn, it should be noted, was renamed Stalingrad in 1924 in recognition of Stalin’s role there during 1918 as a political commissar (see Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin’s Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 12-13). Although it was still possible in 1928 to write a history of the battle that barely made mention of Stalin’s role (L. Kliuev, *Bor’ba za Tsaritsyn: 1918-1919* (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo, 1928), this was not the case by 1940, when an account was published that stressed his centrality on almost every page (E. Genkina, *Bor’ba za Tsaritsyn v 1918 godu* (Moscow: Politizdat pri TsK VKP(b), 1940). Indeed, in 1937, Stalin’s leadership during the Tsaritsyn battle and his successful organization there of grain requisitioning – all in the face of Trotsky’s supposed incompetence and sabotage, of course – received semi-fictional treatment in Aleksei Tolstoy’s novella *Khleb: Oborona Tsaritsyna* (Moscow: OGlZ, 1937): a precursor, I suspect, of the famous Stalin-films of the post-war period. The defense of the city therefore became an important feature of the official narrative of Stalin’s greatness, and any approach to the topic of “Tsaritsyn” would have required exceptional ideological caution. Though we have no idea why the film vanished, it is at least
agitational strategy overwhelming message, cited political speech of the kind found in Kino-Nedelia 40 might have proven an especially effective and relatively unobtrusive agit-method, insofar as it could convey agitational content within the framework of “objective reportage” of a newsworthy event like a speech or conference.

In short, the Kino-Nedelias were no crude repositories of strung-together actuality material, but carefully fashioned works. Nonetheless, as we have already mentioned, they shared in the common newsreel fate by being mined – by Vertov, among others - as sources of footage for other films, including other Kino-Nedelia issues, and sometimes mingled with material from other sources like Svobodnaia Rossiia. Already by 1919, the relationships between Kino-Nedelia, the films made out of it, and the films out of which it was made, were very intricate indeed.74 Given worth entertaining the possibility that it represented Stalin’s role in the battle somehow inadequately, and thus, at some later point, came to be thought to merit shelving or destruction, regardless of its formal brilliance or historical importance. For more detail on the Tsaritsyn debacle, see Stephen Kotkin, Stalin, vol. 1 (New York: Penguin, 2014), 300-310.

74 As indicated above, the main destination of footage taken from Kino-Nedelias 1 through 22 was Anniversary of the Revolution, whose fourth reel was often exhibited independently as Brain of Soviet Russia (both 1918). The bulk of the footage used in Anniversary and Brain consisted of images of political figures and regime leaders – almost exclusively so, in the case of Brain, with the exception of three opening shots of the Kremlin and environs – although other material, like the above-mentioned shots of Russians returning from German captivity (from Kino-Nedelia 3), slices of Petrograd life (from Kino-Nedelia 5), and records of the taking of Kazan’ (from Kino-Nedelia 17) also went into Anniversary. Two wholly or largely lost shorts from 1918-19 in whose making Vertov may not have participated, Advance on Ufa and At the Rear with the Czecho-Slovaks, used (in Ufa) footage from Kino-Nedelia 31 of firing on enemy positions and of captured White Guards and (in At the Rear) reused an image from the same issue of Fyodor Raskol’nikov (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 2, l. 1; d. 3, l. 1; d. 5, l. 12; d. 381, l. 3-8; see also N.A. Lebedev, Ocherk Istorii Kino SSSR, vol. 1 (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1947), 76).
these complex borrowings and reshufflings, and the fact that the newsreels were largely comprised of distillations from prior actualities, we need to ask why the Kino-Nedelias were subjected to a restoration in the first place – although our answer, as so often, must remain on the level of conjecture.75 Judging from the

As if matters were not complicated enough: that shot of Raskol’nikov in issue 31 had in turn been recycled from issue 26; and indeed, Kino-Nedelia would both occasionally cannibalize its own earlier footage and (more often) borrow wholesale from earlier newsreel, Svobodnaia Rossiia in particular. For instance, the shot (mentioned in the previous chapter) of Fyodor Batkin from Svobodnaia Rossiia 10 was integrated as the 13th item in Kino-Nedelia 19, only now to indicate that Batkin had been executed “for his crimes against Soviet power.” The same issue of Kino-Nedelia contains three more shots borrowed from Skobelev newsreel, including the image from (again) Svobodnaia Rossiia 10 of Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia, included as anachronistic and dubious proof that contrary to rumor, she was alive and well in Samara (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 381, ll. 5-6; d. 3, 16; Breshko-Breshkovskaia was indeed alive, and would emigrate the following year). The other shots evidently borrowed from Skobelev newsreel for Kino-Nedelia 19 were one of Hetman Skoropadskij (item 12), and a shot of Women’s Battalion of Death leader Maria Bochkareva erroneously placed at the end of the newsreel (item 14) during the restoration. Kino-Nedelia 28 (17 December 1918) contained a final, derisive image of Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, whom some on the White side had apparently hoped to enlist as their leader, taken from an unknown Skobelev newsreel (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 5, l. 7ob).

Moreover, much of the (partially) surviving first and second parts of Anniversary are clearly made up of material taken from newsreel and non-fiction made by the Skobelev Committee and other concerns between February and October 1917. Developing a negative portrayal of the Provisional Government and making sure to offer visual reminders of its least attractive figures (Purishkevich; War Minister Guchkov), this second section also includes images of a cameraman near the Taurida Palace (possibly Novitskij) that may have been taken from Toward the Opening of the Constituent Assembly. See RGALI f. 2057, op. 1, d. 261, l. 61.

75 Reuse of newsreel in newsreel (or other non-fiction work) was, to be sure, far from unusual – it can already be found in Svobodnaia Rossiia, and no doubt earlier - although more unusual than simple discarding of the films. Surely the most remarkable aspect of Kino-Nedelia’s history was not the redeployment of its footage, but the decision to restore it. Evidently, the vast majority of newsreel films made before 1920 worldwide have been lost, although the productions of some countries (e.g., France) have been better preserved than that of others (e.g., the United States). See William T. Murphy, “The preservation of newsreels in the United States” and Michelle Aubert, “News before Newsreel,” in Roger Smither and
existing scholarship, little care was taken in these years to preserve newsreels over the long term, in any country; and restoration to the condition in which they had been released was then simply unheard of, from what I can tell.\textsuperscript{76} No authoritative decree from the higher reaches of Narkompros seems to have prompted the restoration - Gardin’s order to Vertov originated in the Moscow Film Committee itself, and is recorded only in a Committee bulletin\textsuperscript{77} – although concerns with both preservation and control over may have emanated from a variety of administrative levels, and even from concerned individuals. Certainly, simply asserting control over the Committee’s own stock of films must have been part of the motivation. With both inventory and censorship in mind, the Committee had begun surveying its film holdings in May 1918 – 420 films had been examined by mid-July, and 41 of those withdrawn from exhibition – in advance of a decree of 17 July requiring the Committee’s permission for any releases of old or new films.\textsuperscript{78}

A more widespread preoccupation among those heading up the cultural commissariats with preservation and archiving may also have exerted an influence. On 11 October 1918, the Petrograd Film Committee had issued a decree requiring the registration of all film and photographic records of the Revolution, and we might

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\textsuperscript{76} Indeed, the earliest clearly documented Soviet legislation on preserving film-documents of the Revolution dates only to 1925-26; see Deriabin, “Vremia sobirat',” and below.

\textsuperscript{77} Listov, \textit{Istoriia smotrit v ob'ektiv}, 152; Magidov, \textit{Zrimaia Pamiat' Istorii}, 85-86.

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Letopis'}, vol. 1, 257. As we will see in the next chapter, Svilova was one of those involved in making these inventories.
conjecture that the intentions informing this edict extended to Civil War-related
footage as well.\textsuperscript{79} Central to the Petrograd Committee’s operations was, of course,
Grigorii Boltianskii, who argued for the need for preservation of historical footage
when working for the Skobelev Committee in 1917, and conceivably intervened on
behalf of a restoration (although there is no record of him doing so).\textsuperscript{80} Boltianskii
certainly knew of Polish cameraman Boleslas Matuszewski’s pioneering articles
“Une nouvelle source de l’histoire” and “La Photographie animée” (both 1898),
which pointed out the value of film as a form of historical documentation, and hence
of film preservation and archiving. The arguments of this Lumière cameraman and
former photographer to the Tsar, eventually translated into Russian sometime
around 1943 by Boltianskii after he was put in charge of the film-documentary
records of the Great Patriotic War at Moscow’s Central Documentary Film Studio,

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 265; see also Deriabin, “Vremia sobirat’.” Given the timing of the restoration
(late winter-early spring 1919), one also wonders whether the Film Committee
might have had the intention of exhibiting the Kino-Nedelias as part of some First of
May celebration. \textit{Brain of Soviet Russia} was certainly shown, along with a number
of the very earliest (now mainly lost) Soviet films, on 1 May 1919 (\textit{Letopis’}, vol. 1,
291).

\textsuperscript{80} In 1917, Boltianskii was already writing about how “[film] negatives” could be
assembled to make up a “valuable collection” with “enormous value for museums”
(RGALI f. 2057, op. 1, d. 261, ll.51ob). Boltianskii struggled for the creation of a
museum of cinema in the USSR until the very end of his life, and willed all of his
cinema-related materials to that still non-existent film museum in a final statement
made a month and half before his death on 15 June 1953 (RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63,
l. 20; dated 24 April 1953). Viktor Listov has also persuasively speculated that
Boltianskii might have resented the fact that much of the Skobelev Committee’s film
archive, and therefore the capacity to use it, had been transferred to Moscow, the
new capital and institutional hegemon; indeed, Moscow Film Committee head
Nikolai Preobrazhenskij complained in late summer 1918 that Boltianskii was
ignoring his orders to send the material. Given all of this, the manhandling that
\textit{Svobodnaia Rossiiia} received at the hands of Vertov and Savel’ev might have been
especially provocative (\textit{Istoriia smotrit v ob’ektiv}, 175-176).
doubtless had some currency among the more historically aware Soviet film administrators in 1919.81

Slightly further afield, intense debates were occurring within the Visual Arts Section (IZO) of Narkompros at precisely this time (February-March 1919) about what Soviet art museums should look like, what should be collected, who should curate and so on; thus, preservation was on the minds of many cultural workers and authorities in early 1919.82 What all this suggests is that *Kino-Nedelia* was regarded and valued from an early stage as a series of *historicizations* – as a sequence of (partial) definitions of that early Soviet “meanwhile,” determinations of what might be called National Space-Time – rather than as a ephemeral platform for the dissemination of “news.”83 Still, this historicizing impulse would seem to be

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83 This may partially explain why those apparently stale issues of *Kino-Nedelia* were sent to Norway under Kollontai’s auspices; see footnote 7, above. It seems critical that the *newsreels* were restored, rather than the actualities out of which they were (for the most part) made: these cine-journals were at once the most widely shown
transected by a tension between (on the one hand) the desire to preserve as much footage as possible from a specified historical period, and (on the other) an interest in arranging the footage in order to give a face and a name to that period (“the Civil War,” “the Revolution”) and its protagonists.

The restoration was in any case never completed, and probably could not have been completed. Although a significant amount of the footage that had been used in *Anniversary* and *Brain* was evidently tracked down and put back in place, other *Kino-Nedelia* material had simply gone missing by 5 May 1919 and, judging from the condition of some of the extant issues, was never found (or at least never re-integrated into the newsreels). The absence of any original montage lists or other documentation for issues 1-35 was an equally serious matter, and surely part of the reason for the mistakes that crept into both the “restored” newsreel and the working montage lists created at the time of the restoration. Moreover, we know and prestigious of the Committee’s releases and the most capacious definitions of their “historical moment” among those releases.

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84 A blow-by-blow account of the restoration would take up numerous detail-laden pages and still contain a great many gaps. Suffice it say that many of the images of state and party leaders taken from *Kino-Nedelias* 3-5 and 8-12 for *Anniversary* and *Brain* were evidently restored, judging from extant copies. Missing footage would have been harder to track down, of course, and some issues – especially 7, 10, and 30 – had lost a great deal of footage by 5 May (all eight items, in the case of number 30). I have not seen these particular issues of *Kino-Nedelia*, but the descriptions in RGAKFD suggest that little was restored. For unknown reasons, Film Committee chair Nikolai Preobrazhenskij had also requisitioned footage from issues 19 and 25, the second of which today seems relatively complete; see RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 381, ll. 4-6.

85 Gauging the accuracy of the extant working montage lists (which date to no earlier than the spring of 1919) is difficult to be sure: that they were at least sometimes fairly accurate is suggested by the one surviving *Kino-Nedelia* poster from 1918 (for *Kino-Nedelia* 4), which contains a description of the film’s contents
that Vertov (and probably others) continued to borrow footage from Kino-Nedelia for later films, the chronicle History of the Civil War (1921) in particular, and we

conforming quite closely to both the working montage list and to existing prints (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 1, l. 10; Tolstoj, ed., Agitmassovoe iskusstvo, 122; the montage list actually gives more detail about the contents of a couple of the items, and contains one extra item at the end ("the grave of Plekhanov"), but otherwise is identical).

All the same, it is clear that the early lists cannot be relied upon as a guide to what Kino-Nedelia’s first 35 issues originally looked like. According to the lists, for instance, issue 3 contained a pre-revolutionary newsreel image of Admiral Kolchak, indicating his new role as the “commander of the counterrevolutionary forces in Siberia”; and indeed, all extant prints of the film contain this shot. At the time of the release of Kino-Nedelia 3, however (15 June 1918), Kolchak was been domiciled at a resort in Japan (where he had been since May), having left Russia in the summer of 1917. He would arrive in Vladivostok only on 8 September 1918, and then not initially as a commander-in-chief (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 1, l. 8; Listov, Istoriia smotrit v ob’ektiv, 150-151; Jon Smele, Civil war in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 74, 76).

In the preceding item in the same issue, an image of a bearded man standing next to a car on a wintry day is labeled “Delegate of the Caucasian Government [Iraklij] Tsereteli.” Not only is there no historical record of Tsereteli - then involved in the formation of the short-lived Menshevik government in his native Georgia - traveling to Moscow at this time (or a few months earlier, during the winter), but such a journey seems highly unlikely, given that he had left for Georgia after the murders of Kokoshkin and Shingarev in January 1918 on the advice of Lenin, who evidently feared for his safety (Rabinowitch, The Bolsheviks in Power, 119; the image in question is not clearly of Tsereteli in any case). In a sequence devoted to the graduation of Red Army officers in issue 24, Lev Kamenev is misidentified in the intertitles at least twice in the extant prints (he appears at other points in the sequence, without identification), while a lengthy shot of Aleksei Rykov, then head of no less important a body than the Supreme Soviet of the National Economy (Vesenkha), improbably receives no identification in the film or on the montage lists.

There are, finally, some fairly gross linguistic errors in the intertitles as well, all of which suggests that the restoration was hastily made (although the errors might have been carried over from the original). Just two examples for readers of Russian: in issue 5, the phrase “v Ukraine” (rather than the then normative “na Ukraine”) in item 2; in issue 23, “miting nad rukovodstvom Torganova” (rather than “pod rukovodstvom”) in item 6. Both of the phrases are written correctly in the extant montage lists (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 1, l. 13; d. 4, l. 10).
have little evidence as to how much care was taken to preserve the source material in its “restored” order.\footnote{A difficult film to discuss because so much of it was lost, the originally 13-reel \textit{History of the Civil War}, for which both Vertov and Boltianskii claimed authorship, is close kin to the many photographic, illustrated and occasionally cinematic compendia produced during this period in Russia and elsewhere. Some of these were very general (like the century overview \textit{XIX vek: i\!l\!l\!u\!s\!t\!r\!i\!o\!v\!a\!n\!n\!y\! obzor minuvshago stoletia}, ed. L.Z. Slonimskij et al. [supplement to \textit{Niva} 52 (1901)]), but many were packaged as annals of war, such as Francis Trevelyan Miller, ed. \textit{Photographic History of the [American] Civil War in ten volumes} (New York: Review of Reviews, 1911); Francis Trevelyan Miller, ed., \textit{Photographic History of the Great War} (New York: New York Tribune, 1914); and Capt. Donald C. Thompson’s remarkable \textit{Blood Stained Russia} (New York: Leslie-Judge, 1918). Among the major film documents produced during the war, Geoffrey Malins and John McDowell’s \textit{The Battle of the Somme} (UK, 1916) would be the preeminent point of comparison. In a somewhat enigmatic remark from the late 1970s, Mikhail Kaufman describes a civil war film made by Vertov that arranged its exclusively archival material “without regard for chronology, but for the expressiveness which lay within each frame” (Kaufman, “An Interview with Mikhail Kaufman,” October 11 (Winter 1979): 54-76; here 61); it is not entirely clear that \textit{History of the Civil War} is the film he is referring to, not least because he mentions \textit{Stride Soviet} (with its opening collage of archival footage) in the same paragraph. As regards \textit{History’s} borrowings from Kino-Nedelia: shots of conflagrations at Simonovo station and the Kursk station in Moscow from \textit{Kino-Nedelias} 6 and 31 respectively; of the funerals of Volodarskii and Uritskii from \textit{Kino-Nedelias} 6 and 16; of the aftermath of the Iaroslavl’ rebellion of June 1918 from \textit{Kino-Nedelias} 10, 14 and 16; of Fyodor Raskol’nikov and Larisa Reisner from \textit{Kino-Nedelia} 26; of the recovering Lenin from \textit{Kino-Nedelia} 22 (1918); and the animated map of the Eastern front from \textit{Kino-Nedelia} 20 were all included in \textit{History}. Years later, Vertov indicated that it was put together (though not fully finished) in three weeks, in time for exhibition at the Third World Congress of the Comintern in June-July 1921; one can only wonder, and worry, about the consequences of such haste for \textit{History’s} source material (\textit{Stat’i i vystuplenija}, 165). The short film \textit{Trial of Mironov} (\textit{Protsess Mironova}, 1919) was also extensively recycled for use in the fourth and final section of \textit{History}. See Deriabin, ed., \textit{Dramaturgicheskie opyty}, 48-53, 480-484.}
Thus, Kino-Nedelia’s history involves a complex set of processes and procedures wrought upon filmed footage, including selection, extraction, compression, rearrangement, restoration, reuse, and sometimes suppression. It is plain enough that these processes should also be regarded as decisions concerning whether or not, to whom, and in what context images will be *made visible*. These modes of working with and legislating upon images and their visibility are genuinely complex and interwoven, and it might be clarifying to roughly spatialize their interrelationships, with the help of the famous Greimasian “semiotic rectangle,” in terms of a basic dynamic pitting the *moving* of filmed footage on one hand – from actualities to newsreels; from newsreels to other, longer films, and back again – against, on the other hand, its *stabilization*: in specific, meaningful sequences in newsreels; as a legitimate or “original” version; and so on. This elementary opposition yields a set of variants on montage practice that are useful for thinking about Vertov’s work, early and late.87

87 The rectangle has become well known in the English-speaking world mainly through its use by Fredric Jameson in a number of books and essays. Motivated by the desire to give conceptual shape to a complex discursive field without resorting to typological reifications, its basic principle can be summarized as follows: If one can identify, within a given discursive situation, a dominant two-term tension or binary structuring that situation (e.g., male/female), then those same two *contrary* terms, considered independently, also imply the existence of two additional terms that stand in a logical relation of *contradiction* to each of them (e.g., not-male/not-female). These four terms – an initial contrary and its derived contradiction, along with their tertiary implications (e.g., male/not-female = “hypermasculine,” “macho”; female/not-male = “hyperfeminine”) articulate a field of discursive potentials emerging out of an apparently dominant “original” binary, demarcating thereby both the logical possibilities generated by the original binary that were left half- or un-thought, and the logical limits beyond which a field generated by that binary cannot go. The best and most detailed explication I have found of the semiotic rectangle (or square) is in Joseph Courtés, *La sémiotique narrative et discursive: méthodologie et application*, intro. A.J. Greimas (Paris: Hachette, 1993), 53-86.
“Authored” film (e.g., Vertovian unplayed “film-objects”)

*Editing as mobility (structuration-process)--------Editing as fixation (fixed structure)*

Play, *détournement*  

Restored/archival film

*No proper place (infinite mobility) ------ no mobility (archived)*

Censorship, excision

**Chart 2: Dynamics entangling mobility and stability of film footage**

As an institutionalized practice, restoration determines what should or should not be visible (in a given “film”) in accordance with a presumably objective, impersonal standard (such as the shape of the film as it was originally exhibited or purchased for exhibition; or the intent of an author, as determined by historical evidence like montage lists, posters, reviews, correspondence, oral testimony and so on), even if specific persons, normally legitimized by canons of expertise or otherwise credentialed, are plainly involved in fixing that standard. For the individual or collective agent creating an “authored” work, by contrast, their “subjective” or autonomous decisions as to what should be visible or invisible in
that work are taken to be objective – that is, definitive of the work – whether the specific practices in question involve the stringing-together of a whole series of radically *sui generis* choices (as in Schoenberg’s earliest atonal compositions, for instance) at one extreme, or the preliminary selection of some “objective” template on the other (as when, for example, a filmmaker settles on a fixed mathematical paradigm or logarithm in advance, which then determines how “footage” of unpredictable content is to be distributed; or in the very rare form of the shot-for-shot remake, such as Michael Nyman’s *NYMan with a Movie Camera* (2011-2015); or the even rarer “re-photographing” of authored works *à la* Sherrie Levine; or the Duchampian readymade).

The two other categories generated by the square, however, are of a slightly different conceptual order, insofar as they concern less *how* (or to whom) principles of structuring footage might be attributed than the presence or absence of those principles as such. The possibility of complete mobility of footage – a possibility inherent in the well-known Situationist procedures of *détournement*, or free recontextualization – implies the absence of any standard for determining what should or should not be visible, except perhaps for the physical boundaries presented by the sheer mortality of image and sound on one side, and the limits of the human perceptual apparatus on the other. (Superimpositions and multiplication of screens cannot be infinitely dense or unlimited: we can’t see everything at once, regardless of what Vertov sometimes seemed to think.)

On the other end of the spectrum, *censorship*, occupying a seemingly “impossible” fourth slot uniting non-mobility and non-stability, involves the power
both to change the standards by which visibility/invisibility are determined, and to absolutize those standards by legislating not only upon the visibility of images (or audibility of sound), but upon their very existence: a filmic “zone of exception” that remains nonetheless parasitic upon its dialectical opposites, and compels creative responses. (Censors might be regarded as the ultimate “authors,” except that they always need a work and an author to exploit, even if that work and author are produced largely by their own paranoia; at the same time, considerations of censorship almost always figure into creative decisions from the get-go – certainly so, in the setting we will be discussing – and thus have their own powerful formal effects.)

Most importantly, the diagram must not be read as a typology, whether of filmed footage or of specific practices of signification. Rather, it outlines a dialectic coursing through these practices as socially apprehended, one that has the capacity to turn them into their putative counter-terms. Authored films, including Vertov’s to be sure, can take from (or détourné) other authored works – as Vertov-the-author would learn in 1929, during his scandalous encounter with Albrecht Viktor Blum’s In the Shadow of Machines (1928), a found-footage work that not only incorporates (without attribution) edited footage from The Eleventh Year, but inverts its meaning, celebratory in Vertov, into a critique of industry’s soullessness and inhumanity.88

The entanglement of authored film with censorship will be a leitmotif of Vertov’s career, but is perhaps best illustrated by Three Songs of Lenin, whose

88 See Chapter Seven, below, and Lines of Resistance, 377-382.
successive versions (1934, 1938, 1970) all censor both the “Lenin” visual archive in
general as well as their own previous iterations, in accord with changing political
paradigms. Here, however, we will need to attend to censorship not simply (in
Heather Hendershot’s words) “as a reified, prohibitory force but as a dynamic,
productive force” – an aspect of censorship largely ignored in existing scholarship
on Soviet cinema, though not in film studies generally\(^89\) – as when, in Three Songs
for instance, the enforced authority of the Lenin myth generates a specifically Soviet
kind of comic allegory, where history and present individual experience alike are
hierarchized around and coordinated with a heroic center, in a grand monument “to
a revolutionary change, from political chaos to political cosmos.”\(^90\)

In turn, authored film requires archival protection and validation to remain
itself, and Vertov, as we will see, would often have good cause for anxiety about the
fate of his own films (from the Kino-Pravdas onward), as they came under full
control of the studios for which he worked (and which were highly mutable
institutions themselves) and of the censors, who could \(\textit{détourne},\) in a largely
privative sense, as part of their professional duties. (Of course, even partially or
entirely “lost,” destroyed or unrealized films can become the object of research and

\(^89\) See in particular Annette Kuhn’s demonstration of the role of censorship in the
emergence of the British propaganda film in her \textit{Cinema, Censorship, and Sexuality,}
1909-1925 (New York: Routledge, 1988); Lea Jacobs on the “fallen woman” film in
\textit{The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942} (Madison:
University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); and Heather Hendershot’s \textit{Saturday Morning
Censors: Television Regulation before the V-Chip} (Durham and London: Duke
University Press, 1998); here quoted from p. 2.

\(^90\) Angus Fletcher, \textit{Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode} (Ithaca and London:
“restoration” of a sort, and thereby reabsorbed into circuits of valuation: what was the complete Greed like? Can we recover a sense of Vertov’s original 1926 idea for Man with a Movie Camera? His never-produced The Girl and the Giant? And so on.\textsuperscript{91}

To be sure, archives are also shelving facilities, and can and do function as repositories for suppressed material, and thus as instruments of censorship: out of sight, out of mind. And if archivists and preservationists are to function in part as guardians of authored films, their restoring function can require that they, too, ransack other “complete” films in order to finish a given restoration. (Such would certainly be the case, as we will see, for any restoration of a number of Vertov’s films, as well as Kino-Nedelia, whose footage is scattered in who-knows-how-many different places.) Finally, the ordinances of the censor can act on occasion to preserve, through shelving, films or parts of films that otherwise have disappeared – as in the case of Vertov’s History of the Civil War and Anniversary of the Revolution, the extant versions of which were withdrawn from exhibition in 1926\textsuperscript{92} - even as the détournisseur Blum turns out to have saved, through his pillage, the concluding section of Vertov’s Eleventh Year, inexplicably missing from all prints of that film.

What both arrests and impels the motion through and across these various possibilities – and what stands outside of my diagram, and marks its conceptual limit – is of course law and the effective legitimation of certain practices, and de-

\textsuperscript{91} See the writings collected in Thomas Beard, intro. and ed., The Unfinished Film (New York: Gladstone Gallery, 2011).

\textsuperscript{92} See Deriabin, “Vremia sobirat’.” The first state film archive – today, the Russian State Archive of Film and Photo Documents (RGAKFD) in Krasnogorsk – was founded in 1926.
legitimation of others. Indeed, on one level, the history of Vertov’s films (and not only his) could be written in terms of the dialectic between these concrete, interwoven practices of moving or fixing images and sounds, and the various ordinances pertaining to them (about which we know far, far too little), chronologically arranged: the introduction of a new censorship structure after the Civil War;\(^{93}\) the formation of the state documentary film archive in 1926; the 8 October 1928 law giving copyright to the studio producing a given film, and the director the right to the status of “author”; the revision of the same law at the beginning of 1939; and so on. To be sure, we will be tracking this dialectic, already operative in the *Kino-Nedelia* story, as it unfolds across the history of the increasingly despotic and repressive Soviet regime from the 1920s until Vertov’s death, even as we take note of those moments – such as when Vertov and Svilova reused images from the *Enthusiasm* shoot for their own photomontages at the beginning of the 1930s – when creative decision-making was made at a greater distance from state or studio policy.

Obstacles of a concrete, material sort – the exigencies of war, severe shortage of film stock – put an end to Kino-Nedelia’s run after issue 43 (27 June 1919).

Although small numbers of non-fiction and fiction films continued to be produced in the capital cities, newsreel would not be revived until the emergence of Kino-Pravda in 1922, and of Goskinokalendar’ in 1923. Soviet filmmakers, now (after Lenin’s decree of 27 August 1919) working in an officially nationalized industry, were also
working in conditions of severe deprivation.\textsuperscript{94} For one thing, over the course of the previous two years, much of the equipment hitherto at the disposal of newsreel makers, including some belonging originally to the Skobelev Committee, had evidently been pillaged, and the facilities at the disposal of the new All-Russia Film and Photo Division (VFKO) remained inadequate for a long time.

Cameraman Aleksandr Levitskii recounted how, in 1920, VFKO’s non-fiction (still called “\textit{khronika}”) division was housed in a former film distribution office near the Moscow Soviet, whose only adornments were “an empty inflammable cupboard, a torn-up armchair … and a rickety table with a big teapot on it.” All of these items, in addition to a corner of the office itself, were appropriated later that year as amenities and living quarters by Grigorii Boltianskii, who had been transferred (along with his wife Olga and their children) from Petrograd to Moscow to head up non-fiction filmmaking there.\textsuperscript{95}

Although he continued to make films during this period, including \textit{Battle for Tsaritsyn}, \textit{History of the Civil War}, and two films about mobile agit-work,\textsuperscript{96} Vertov

\textsuperscript{94} On 27 August, Lenin signed the decree nationalizing all cinema enterprises; the process of nationalization was entrusted to the All-Russian Cinema Committee, soon to be reconfigured into the VFKO (Richard Taylor, \textit{The Politics of the Soviet Cinema 1917-1929} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 27-28, 49-50).

\textsuperscript{95} A. Levitskij, \textit{Rasskazy o kinematografе} (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), 161, 169. Levitskij does not indicate the year of Boltianskii’s move, but it seems that Lunacharsky ordered his transfer to Moscow in 1920 (RGALI f. 2639, op. 1, d. 63, ll. 9, 17). See also Listov, Rossiia, Revoliutsiia, Kinematograf, 109.

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{The Red Star Literary-Instructional Agit-Steamer of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee} (1919; to be discussed in Chapter Five); \textit{The Agit-Train of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee} (1921; no longer in existence). See \textit{Lines of Resistance}, 406.
was primarily occupied with administration of film shooting and exhibition on trains and other “mobile units” from the fall of 1919 through 1921. Initially involved with coordinating filming and perhaps exhibition for the military,\(^{97}\) he moved on to work with the famous agitational trains established by the All-Russia Central Executive Committee (VTsIK)\(^ {98}\) at the beginning of 1920.

More than a few plumes of romantic leafage have grown around these early Soviet agit-trains, boats and other vehicles, despite – or perhaps, because of – the absence of anything like a full-scale historical treatment of them in any language.\(^ {99}\)

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\(^{97}\) See certificate from the Moscow Military Commissariat releasing “Denis Arkad’evich Vertov” from military service (required to work on the military trains) from 17 November 1919 (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 384, l. 1); RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 499, l. 43; and Stat’i i vystupleniia, 165. Special mobile cinemas for the Political Administration of the Revolutionary Military Soviet were established in mid-April 1919 (Iu. N. Flakserman, Voge zhizni i bor’by: vospominaniia starogo kommunista (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoj literatury, 1987), 142).

\(^{98}\) Abbreviation of “Vserossiiskii Tsentral’nyi Ispolnitel’nyi Komitet.”

One of the routes of the famous *October Revolution* train, on which Vertov traveled and worked in early 1920, was ceremonially recreated in the Voronezh area in 1969 under the auspices of the local Communist Party committee (the train was renamed *Great October* for the occasion); and many in the West first learned of Soviet “film-trains” through Chris Marker’s now well-known film-essays on the topic – although Marker’s films dealt principally with the later revival of train-based cinema agitation, in the form of Aleksandr Medvedkin’s very different “kino-trains” of the early 1930s and, at least in the second redaction, took a far from naively reverential (if also undeniably romantic) attitude toward them.


before its banalization as a fixture of everyday commodified existence – and an exploratory jettisoning of familiar norms of exhibition, by moving cinematic experience out of theaters and onto trains, boats, under the open sky – into “life,” in short. Yet both the novelty and the liberating “experimentalism” of the Soviet trains are easy to exaggerate as well. We have already learned of Tsarist-era mobile film exhibition, and certainly the agit-trains can be seen as part of a much larger, indeed global history of mobile moving image exhibition associated with traveling fairs, lectures, educational projects and much else. At the same time, mobile film has historically been promoted as an important step toward making certain kinds of administration (educational, commercial, state) permanent in areas where they hadn’t existed before, and therefore as a colonizing and normalizing practice or, to use a phrase employed ad nauseum by Soviet agit-train activists, as a way of “linking the localities to the center.” The sense of novelty associated with traveling cinema


103 Ia. Burov, Instruktorsko-agitatsionnye poezdky na poezdkakh i parakhodakh VTsIK (tezisy Ia. Burova) (Moscow: Otdel Instruktskikh-agitatsionnych poezdov i parakhodov VTsIK, 1920), 1. My thoughts on the agit-trains in this regard have been influenced by Brian Larkin’s important study of the British-imperial mobile film units that operated in Northern Nigeria from the late ’30s through the 1950s (called majigi: a derivation from “magic lantern”) in his Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 73-122. Larkin stresses the state- (as opposed to capital-) driven character of the majigi modernization project, in language that could be applied to the Soviet agitjig efforts without much strain: “Majigi was a machine of the state traveling away from the political center and into the margins of the territory, pulling
is generated in part by that linking, which helps to concretize the difference between established center and soon-to-be-tamed localities.

The building of links was also an assertion of the capacity of the Bolshevik regime to make its presence felt throughout the still contested territories of the war-torn and notoriously “undergoverned” country.\footnote{The term is S. Frederick Starr’s in Decentralization and Self-Government in Russia, 1830-1870 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).} The first agit-train, the 

\textit{V.I. Lenin Mobile Military Front Train}, sent to the Kazan’ front in the early fall of 1918, did its work primarily among Red Army men, but later trains carried out propaganda work in all sections of the population.\footnote{It is not clear exactly when the Lenin train departed Moscow for Kazan’. Some sources (e.g., Maksakova, \textit{Agitpoezd “Oktiabr’skaia Revoliutsiia,” }9) indicate a journey beginning in August; Viktor Listov gives a more precise and documented date of 14 September 1918 as the time of departure (\textit{Istoriiia Smotrit v Ob’ektit}, 201). The first major VTsIK decrees on the trains, issued by the committee’s chair (Iakov Sverdlov) and secretary (Avel Enukidze) date to 11 January 1919 (\textit{Dekrety Sovetskoi Vlasti}, vol. 4 (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politcheskoi literature, 1968), 289-291); the decrees called for the trains to be engaged in “organizational, instructional and informational work” among local institutions and representatives, both gathering information about those institutions and representatives, and acquainting them with the plans and projects of the central government and Party (ibid.). Items two through four of \textit{Kino-Nedelia} 29 (24 December 1918) are devoted to the Lenin train (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 5, l. 9).} Trotsky ordered five more of them to be outfitted at the end of 1919, and under the auspices of VTsIK, the trains traveled all over the country until around the fall of 1921, by which time Bolshevik victory was more or less complete, and administrative disorganization within Glavpolitprosvet (Main Political-Enlightenment Committee of the Republic, formed in November 1920),

these margins into a state project. It was an institutional form of cinematic production that was, in essence, a bureaucratic instantiation of state power” (105-106).
which brought the trains under its auspices, had badly undermined the efficiency of
the mobile film units in any case.\textsuperscript{106} (The White forces, incidentally, had set up their
own mobile agitprop units in spring 1919, and also exhibited propaganda films,
mainly newsreels and non-fiction shorts. Agit-train \textit{Ataman Kaledin} and the \textit{General
Denikin} agit-barge began work that summer and made the rounds of White-
controlled areas for about six months.)\textsuperscript{107} Some of the names of the trains, and the
remarkable murals that covered them (to be discussed below), reflected their
itineraries and target audiences: \textit{Red Cossack} (which passed through the Don region
and the Kuban' and about which a now-lost film seems to have been made), \textit{Red East}
(to Turkestan and other Central Asian locales), \textit{Soviet Caucasus}, \textit{Red Railway
Worker}, and so on.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Taylor}, \textit{The Politics of the Soviet Cinema}, 53; \textit{Listov}, \textit{Rossiia, Revoliutsiia, Kinematograf}, 99. In a report of 20 March 1922 to Gospromat head A. Anoshchenko, Vertov noted that mobile cinema work much declined in magnitude and
effectiveness after the union with Glavpolitprosvet (which he had helped oversee),
moving from six film train-wagons, three steamship film units, three film carts, one
automobile-cinema, and a well-equipped photo lab at the end of 1920 to the loss of
most of its equipment, staff and films by the end of 1921. For a while, the film
wagons became stationary, attached to \textit{agitpunkty} (stationary propaganda outlets)
to help disseminate propaganda about the terrible famine that began ravaging large
parts of the country in 1921 (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 389, ll. 1-9; LRK 1863-1929,
346-347.). See also Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Letopis'}, 294, 297. See also \textit{L.A. Molchanov, “Deiatel'nost' informatsionnykh
uchrezhdений ‘beloj’ Rossi v gody grazhdanskoj vojny (1918-1920 gg.), in T.G
Arkhipova, ed., Gosudarstvennyj apparat Rossi v gody Revoliutsii i Grazhdanskoj
Vojny} (Moscow: RGGU, 1998), 150-171, esp. 156. Some of these films were standard
newsreel and actuality films, devoted to sports (e.g., \textit{Khronika "Globus" no. 2 from
1919 [RGAKFD 12029], on a kind of triathlon event involving boxing, jumping and
a race from Kharbin to Vladivostok) and other beloved newsreel themes.

\textsuperscript{108} See \textit{Tolstoj}, ed., \textit{Agitmassovoe Iskusstvo}, vol. 2 \textit{[Tablitsy], passim}. On the \textit{Red
Cossack} film, see RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 389, l. 5. According to Vertov, the other film
Initially housed in single compartments, the agitational units expanded quickly to occupy, first, a full wagon, and then an entire train. The agitators had “emergency [pozharnaia] assistance” as their goal, and were designed to get to places beyond the reach of the more sparsely distributed and stationary propaganda outlets (or agitpunkty: agitational points).\textsuperscript{109} They also set out to organize the agitation in accord with Taylorist models, in contrast to the supposedly “crude, primitive” methods involving single agitators attempting to influence the local population. Perhaps the most important agitational strategy on the trains involved organizing the appearance of major regime figures like Nadezhda Krupskaya, Viacheslav Molotov, Lunarcharsky, and Mikhail Kalinin at mass meetings all over the country; indeed, as we will see, Kalinin was the primary public exhibit on the October Revolution train, with which Vertov was centrally involved.

Organizationally, the trains were comprised of a number of divisions and subdivisions, including an office that accepted complaints and petitions; an information division that prepared propaganda and agitational materials; the ROSTA division (Rossiiskoe telegrafnoe agenstvo [Russian Telegraph Agency], devoted to both publishing and dissemination of publications and to broadcasting from the train’s radio station); staff involved in the supervision and inspection of local bureaucracies (a function known in Russian as kontrol’); a shop and warehouse for printed materials; a section devoted to organizing special exhibitions; made by the mobile film unit in 1920 was The Work of the VTsIK Instructional-Agitational Trains (ibid.).

accounting, technical and maintenance units that took care of budgets, repairing phones, maintaining sanitary facilities for those on board, and so on; and the cinema division, about which I will say more below.110

Vertov’s time working on and for the agit-trains was an intense one, both professionally and personally. Although it is not clear when Vertov met his first partner, Estonian pianist Olga Toom (1895-1979), their acquaintance certainly did not postdate his involvement with the agit-trains. Toom, who had resided in Moscow since 1914 and worked as a nurse during World War One, headed up the film division onboard the October Revolution on its fifth and seventh journeys; like Vertov a few months later, she was mainly involved in film exhibition and oral commentary during and after screenings, although she also provided what was probably unusually good piano accompaniment.111 Vertov and Toom, possibly never officially married in any case, had broken up well before 1923 (when he married Svilova),112 but they evidently kept in touch, and seem to have been involved at least through the fall of 1920, judging from Vertov’s poetic tributes to Toom and her pianism (the first dated September 1920):

110 V.M. Kleandrova, Organizatsiia i formy deiatel’nosti VTsIK (1917-1924 g.g.) (Moscow: Iuridicheskaia Literatura, 1968), 89-91. For data on the radio station onboard the October Revolution train during its 10th journey, see GARF f. 2313, op. 2, d. 131, l. 4.

111 GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 20-30; f. 1252, op. 1, d. 62, l. 165 (Toom’s reports on daily screenings). Though the “head of cinema” (zaveduiushchij kinematografom), Toom often refers to herself on her daily screening reports as “pianistka.” The train’s fifth (24 October to 19 November 1919) and seventh (6-27 January 1920) journeys took it to the Central Black Earth and central and southern regions (from Tula to Rostov-on-Don) respectively (GARF archival list for f. 1252, op. 1).

112 Dziga Vertov v vospominaniakh sovmennikov, 66.
With a bow
Olga Toom
At a gallop¹¹³

Beat the keys of the brain
Hurl noise after noise
That God, or whoever rules up there
Might choke from a riot of thoughts¹¹⁴

¹¹³ RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 228, ll. 20ob-21. The poem is titled “Olga Toom,” and on the reverse side of one of the manuscript pages is the poem “Dziga Vertov,” discussed earlier. “Bow” here means “a ribbon [or something similar] tied into a bow [bant].”

¹¹⁴ RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 228, l. 10ob. The fragmentary shooting diary for Kino-Eye (1924) indicates that Mikhail Kaufman took some footage of Toom’s sister Lidia smiling at the camera during that film’s production, though it seems that this shot did not make it into the final cut (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 26, l. 22ob); Vertov also mentions Olga Toom in a long list of names and addresses of accomplished Soviet women he compiled in early 1937 in preparation for making Lullaby, which suggests that he considered including her in the film in some way (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 254, l. 17). In the 1920s, Toom worked in the offices of Pravda with Lidia, and later as the secretary of Maria Ulianova (Lenin’s sister) in the Petitions Bureau. She then worked in the libraries of the music conservatories in Moscow and Sverdlovsk, continued to play the piano, did occasional translations from Estonian, and raised a family. She was married to and eventually divorced the well-known musicologist Daniel’ Zhitomirskij (1906-1992), corresponded with the famous pianist and pedagogue Heinrich Neuhaus from 1943 to 1963, and was apparently well connected within the Soviet music world; see Daniel Shitomirski, Blindheit als Schutz vor der Wahrheit, trans. Ernst Kuhn, intro. Oksana Leontjewa (Berlin: Verlag Ernst Kuhn, 1996), 25; Laurel E. Fay, Shostakovich: A Life (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 315; and G.G. Neigauz [Heinrich Neuhaus], Pis’ma (Moscow: Deka-VS, 2009). (Some of the information here comes from Professor Andrei Toom, Lidia Toom’s grandson; my heartfelt thanks to María Soliña Barreiro González for providing me with it.)
These lines suggest that spectators onboard the October Revolution’s film-car must have been treated to some pretty wild piano playing – some of it Vertov’s own, perhaps – alongside the pictures.

On the professional side, Vertov was occupied with the agit-trains, according to his own accounts, in 1920 and 1921, and the earliest documents we have concerning his work on the train date to January 1920, though there may have been some prior, tangential involvement.¹¹⁵ We know that he was aboard the October Revolution during its eighth trip in March 1920, was involved with organizing and maintaining the cinema unit on the Red East in January 1920 (though he probably did not travel on that train), and continued to receive official mandates to lead film-related work on various agit-trains and boats through October 1920 and no doubt beyond.¹¹⁶ He came into contact with numerous highly gifted people during his agit-train period, some of whom became well-known (like director Lev Kuleshov, who began to work for the Moscow Film Committee at the end of 1918 and headed up the Cultural-Enlightenment Section on the Red East in 1920),¹¹⁷ and some who did not, like Olga Toom or the October Revolution’s implacably harsh Cheka

¹¹⁵ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 499, l. 43 (an autobiographical chronology from 1947). In a document of 2 March 1922, Vertov indicates that he was enlisted by VTsIK to manage the trains’ film and photo divisions in January 1920 (RGALI f. 2019, op. 2, d. 389, l. 1).

¹¹⁶ RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 386, ll. 3-11. On the Red East train, see LRK 1863-1929, 21. A mandate of 21 October 1920 indicates that Vertov may have been involved more generally in “literary-musical” work in the area of “agitation and artistic education of the broad masses of the population” (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 386, l. 11). See also Listov, Istoriia smotrit v ob’ektiv, 210.

¹¹⁷ L.V. Kuleshov, Stat’i. Materialy, ed. V.P Mikhailov et al. (Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1970), 57; GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 162, l. 2.
representative, Ivan Ivanovich Skrameh (1893-1954), who also happened to be, according to Aleksandr Levitskii, a remarkably talented violinist and declaimer of poetry.\footnote{Levitskii, Rasskazy o kinematografe, 202-202; V.A. Goncharov and V.V. Nekhotin, “‘Durylin soglasen dat’ podpisku, chto on nikogda ne budet prikhodskim sviashennikom’: Iz materialov arkhivno-sledstvennogo dela po obvineniiu S.N. Durylina,” Vestnik PSTGU II (2008): 126-139; here 131, 137. Like Toom, Skrameh was an Estonian; more on his agit-train activities below. Mayakovsky and El Lissitzky were involved in the trains as well, mainly as graphic artists and providing texts for ROSTA, although I have no evidence that they crossed paths with Vertov during this period (Taylor, Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 55).}

Although still a filmmaker, Vertov became more and more involved in the administration of mobile cinema through March 1922, until he received the assignment to begin the Kino-Pravdas sometime in the spring of 1922. By that time, Vertov was the head of VFKO’s mobile cinema division with two assistants and a full staff, but was struggling to keep the units going; indeed, under the new, market-driven conditions of NEP, he was apparently moving toward converting the operation into a base for renting out projectors, prints and technical help to theatres and workers’ clubs, and might have gone fully into administration had the Kino-Pravda opportunity not appeared.\footnote{RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 389, ll. 6-9 (from report to Anoshchenko of 20 March 1922); RGALI f. 989, op. 1, d. 249, l. 4; GARF f. 2313, op. 1, d. 13, ll. 46-59, 61-61ob; Listov, “Molodost’ mastera,” 98-104, esp. 100-101. For the later history of mobile cinema in early Soviet Russia, see Tode, “Agit-trains, Agit-steamers, Cinema Trucks,” 149-153.} At any rate, as with newsreel production, much of the structure of train-based agitation had been established before Vertov came onboard, and it is difficult to know whether he contributed any specific innovations to the cinema part of the enterprise.
Throughout the history of their operation, the trains’ primary immediate authority was the Political Division, which was divided into sections designated as “instructional” (devoted to more intensive on-site inspection and propaganda work with specific groups and institutions such as schools, hospitals, local party affiliates and so on) and “agitational-lecture” (focused on demonstrations, organizing public lectures, and other shorter-term efforts at mobilizing the population, including film screenings). This distinction – between more in-depth and pedagogical propaganda work and the more spectacular and punctual job of agitation – has been slighted or ignored in some of the historical literature on “Soviet propaganda,” where “agitprop” tends to be seen as a diffuse cluster of practices of persuasion, political pedagogy and/or mind control. For the close analysis of early Soviet media practice, however, the distinction is crucial, not least (as I will later argue) as it is reflected in Vertov’s films.

1. Agitation and Propaganda

Historian Matthew Lenoe, in an important recent study, offers a succinct account of the differences between “agit-“ and “-prop” as articulated in social-democratic theory from the 1870s onward, and particularly by Lenin:

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120 See, for instance, Peter Kenez, The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 7-8; Taylor, The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 28. This is not to say that the distinction between the terms was always rigorously maintained, but rather that there was a distinction to be maintained, as we will see below.
According to Lenin, propaganda involved extended theoretical explanations of the socioeconomic processes that underlay surface phenomena such as unemployment. By appealing to audience members’ reason, the propagandist aimed to cultivate in them a whole new worldview. Propaganda was a process of education that required a relatively sophisticated, informed audience. Agitation, on the other hand, motivated the audience to action by appealing to their emotions with short, stark stories. The agitator did not seek to change his listeners’ worldview, but to mobilize them. Agitation was the tool of choice for unsophisticated, even ignorant audiences when quick action was required. Definitions from the first edition of *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* link propaganda with education and agitation with organization/mobilization.121

As we will see, Vertov in his mature films (particularly in some of the *Kino-Pravdas* and in 1924’s *Kino-Eye*, but in later works as well) directly thematizes the discursive contrast between agitation and propaganda. If the distinction is largely invisible to us today – if also clearly related to the now-familiar opposition between a “cinema of attractions” and narrative cinema, or even “intellectual montage”122 – it

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122 The contrast was established by Tom Gunning in a classic essay from 1985: “[T]he cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supply pleasure through an exciting spectacle... Theatrical display dominates over narrative absorption, emphasizing the direct stimulation of shock or surprise at the expense of unfolding a story or creating a diegetic universe” (Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,” in Thomas Elsaesser, ed., *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 56-62; here 58-59). Gunning indicates that he derived the term “attraction” from the early writings of Eisenstein, of course; and although I
was fully in effect for the agit-train activists, and finds expression in a variety of ways.

The murals that adorned the sides of all the post-1918 agit-trains carried the initial agitational jolts that the trains delivered to audiences, and as such they provide an excellent occasion for examining how the agitation-propaganda distinction, which their forms both mobilized and allegorized, worked in practice.\(^{123}\)

Originally, the sides of the trains were plastered with posters that soon washed away, faded, or shredded in the wind.\(^{124}\) Murals directly painted on the wagons proved to be the solution, and as much as their visual content borrowed heavily from the established iconographic repertoire of the revolutionary left, the form may have been more immediately inspired by circus or carnival caravans, and/or by commercial signage. One insightful observer referred to the atmosphere created by the trains as akin to that of an “artistic-political marketplace,”\(^{125}\) and the murals, cannot develop this line of inquiry here, this Eisensteinian pedigree strongly suggests the rootedness of “attraction,” at least in its Soviet manifestations, in social-democratic ideas about the agitation-propaganda distinction – recoded by Eisenstein as the contrast between “attraction” and “intellectual montage” – as much as in popular entertainments and fairground displays.

\(^{123}\) Strictly speaking, the murals would have been seen as primarily “agitational” in function, but as I show below, their forms and rhetoric do help to illustrate “propaganda” functions as well (and thereby, perhaps, the porous divide between the two categories).

\(^{124}\) Karpinskii, ed., *Agitparpoezda VTsIK*, 1.

\(^{125}\) Ivan Ol’brakht, *Puteshestvie za poznaniem: Strana Sovetov*; quoted in Tolstoj, ed., *Agitmassovoe Iskusstvo*, vol. 1 [Materialy i dokumenty], 64.
none of which have survived but which were quite extensively photographed, clearly contributed to this bright and festive impression.\textsuperscript{126}

At least initially, they also provoked disputes among agitators as to the kinds of representation best suited to propaganda within a “Soviet” context. In 1920, Iakov Burov, one of the founding organizers of the trains, complained of the earliest murals that they were

\ldots extremely unsuccessful. The panels of the wagons were covered in Futurist-Symbolist pictures, depicting enormous monsters devouring the Revolution. The majority of these images were incomprehensible, and the local population frequently responded with perplexity. The \textit{agit-train} organization had no experience in this matter, and artists were allowed nearly total freedom of action.

\textit{Now, the panels \ldots are illustrated with pictures with realistic content; Futurism has been completely driven out.} \textsuperscript{127}

That the murals provided the occasion for early conflicts over realism versus modernism/formalism is not surprising: already during the Civil War, regime leaders, not all of them officials charged with fashioning cultural policy, expressed hostility to what was perceived as incomprehensible experimentation on public display.\textsuperscript{128} Even though it is clear that both “realists” and (as in the case of Vertov)

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{126} The best film record of the look of the agit-vehicles (in this case a steamship-plus-barge) is in The Red Star Agitational-Educational Steamer (1919-1920), a remarkable film by Vertov to be discussed in Chapter Five.

\bibitem{127} Karpinskii, ed., \textit{Agitparpoezda VTSIK}, 9; his emphasis.

\bibitem{128} In Petrograd, the struggle over the incorporation of Futurist visual practices reached such a pitch that Zinoviev, the chair of the Petrograd Executive committee, demanded the destruction of all copies of an art album entitled “Heroes and Victims of the Revolution” because it contained “left” or Futurist drawings. Similarly, Lunarcharsky had suggested that Italo Orlando Griselli’s Futurist monument near Petrograd’s Moscow Station dedicated to People’s Will member and regicide Sofia Perovskaia probably needed to be removed, “so incomprehensible was it to the
"Futurists" rode the trains, their opposition was nonetheless not simply based on a straightforward contrast between “utilitarian” and “pure” approaches. Burov asserts, for instance, that the “successful” realist murals also functioned as “art galleries” that “would [help] develop an understanding of art among working people.”\(^{129}\) The mural paintings indeed presented a diversity of representational approaches, sometimes offering flat, caricatural representations (often of various “class antagonists”: peasants and workers on one side, bourgeois and priests on the other), Soviet coats-of-arms, or other two-dimensional designs, but also incorporating elaborate perspective, offering “realistic” portrayals of bridges and railways receding into the distance, landscape panoramas, and so forth. In any event, it is clear that agitation-propaganda were common impulses among all artists working on the murals, regardless of painterly orientation.

proletariat.” “Modernist monuments,” such as Andreev’s to Danton and Korolev’s to Bakunin – the latter, “it was claimed, even frightened passers-by and their horses!” – were similarly controversial (Krusanov, Russkij avangard, vol. 2, part 1, esp. 67-68; Robert Russell, “The Arts and the Russian Civil War,” Journal of European Studies 20 (1990): 219-240; here 225).

\(^{129}\) Karpinskii, ed., Agitparpoezda VTsIK, 9.
One typical mural on the October Revolution train (Image 5) consisted of a tetraptych extending across the length of a single passenger wagon, depicting from left to right the narrative of a bridge destroyed during the Civil War and its reparation. Above the wagon’s windows, on the first, third and fourth panels of the tetraptych, were painted two classically agitational slogans: “Repair the bridges!” and “Restore transportation links.” The mural images proper, occupying the whole central section of the panels and composed artfully (and of necessity) around the wagon’s windows, depicted (from left) a cantilever bridge with a collapsed central...
span; a large team of hammer-wielding uniformed workers constructing supports for a new span; the bridge under repair, with piles of makeshift supports holding the span; and finally, in the fourth panel, a celebration in the foreground of the repaired bridge, depicted now from an angle shifted almost 90 degrees to the left, with a train making its way across the restored span and into the mural’s perspectival depths. [NOTE: I CAN PROVIDE DETAILS THAT SHOW THESE ELEMENTS MORE CLEARLY.]

Across the bottom of the wagon extend, in lettering about a third to half as large as that of the slogans, more detailed *propaganda* explanations of the content of the pictures: “White Guards blew up the bridge”; “The Labor Army\textsuperscript{130} raises up the stricken proletariat”; “The bridge is reconstructed” and so on. (To be sure, in terms of the ways that "propaganda" was employed during the Civil War, these small-font explanations were doubtless regarded as “agitational” in character; “propaganda” in the strict sense would have been a kind of “instruction,” involving detailed oral explanation of a given theme by an activist, followed by questions and answers. And indeed, activists would have sometimes engaged in oral propaganda explanations of the content of the murals (there is photographic evidence for this). On my reading, the smaller lettering, the explanatory character of the text, and the proximity and attention it requires, are best thought of as a kind of *simulation* of that “instructional” *propaganda* situation, an absorption of oral pedagogy into another (typographic) medium.) The separation and partial overlap of functions is thus made quite clear: the slogans emit sharp and clear messages – commands, to be precise, given an “oral” texture by their imperative mood and typographic boldness

\textsuperscript{130} *Trudovaia Armiia*: sections of the Red Army mobilized for labor and reparation purposes during the Civil War (specifically, from 1920-21).
– surely visible even to those observing the train *en passant*. The smaller text along the mural’s lower edge, much of it illegible in the existing photographs and no doubt requiring a more attentive scanning from passersby, offers historical explanations, rationales for policy, and names of the relevant protagonists. For their part, the mural’s images provide both an attractive agitational spectacle and visual aids helping to concretize and elaborate the regime’s message.\(^{131}\)

As I have already indicated, Vertov made use of the rhetorical forms offered by the agit-train murals often in his mature work. I will discuss the famous “beef-to-bull” sequence of his *Kino-Eye* in their light in the next chapter, but now need to mention three brief examples from *Stride, Soviet* (1925), in order to make what I have just described more cinematically concrete.\(^{132}\) *Stride, Soviet* is a campaign film – specifically made to promote the re-election of the current members of the Moscow City Soviet – and as such can be seen as a sublimation-in-film of the agit-train’s rhetorical tasks, insofar as it works to acquaint and connect the bulk of Moscow’s population, extending out to the city’s peripheries, with the activities of the “center.” Indeed, that discursive labor of connection or “going to the people” is directly thematized in the film.

The before-after structure typical of agit-train murals is central to *Stride, Soviet*, which strings together rapid contrasts of decrepit Old with recuperating New like a long line of agit-wagons (the intertitles are in italics):

\(^{131}\) To be sure, similar structures are apparent in other trains, including those that went to the Caucasus and Soviet Central Asia and included Georgian, Arabic and other languages on their murals; see Tolstoj, *ibid.*, 163 for an example from the Red East train.

\(^{132}\) *Stride, Soviet* will be discussed further in Chapter Five.
From ruined buildings

[Fade-in to single shot of ruined building]

To new homes for workers

[One shot of large new apartment building, panning downwards]

And worker settlements

[Two shots of a settlement under construction framing five other shots (a dog, children, a pig and so on) of life at a settlement]

From overturned streetcars

[Two shots of overturned streetcar]

To new streetcar lines

[Four shots of men working on a new streetcar line just outside the Kremlin walls]

On the outskirts of the city

[Shot of streetcar rounding a corner on a village street; shot of someone buying something on a city street; shot of streetcar either heading to or returning from the village]

From a quarter slice of bread

[Six shots of a piece of bread being meticulously weighed]

To . . . .

[Complex stop-action animation showing small slices of bread coming together into a full loaf, and a large pile of loaves rising around a lone loaf on a table]

To a cafeteria providing nutritious meals for workers
[Four shots, including trick dissolves, of workers eating and being served in a cafeteria]

*From crippled plants and factories*

[Two shots, joined by a dissolve, of ruined factories]

*To an upsurge in industry*

[Sixteen shots of factory work (iron smelting) framed at the beginning, middle and end by shots of industrial chimneys]

*From an oil-lamp in the city center*

[Three shots of a table with a small oil-lamp on it, next to a dreary meal of potatoes and smoked fish; the final shot depicts someone reading a newspaper to the lamp’s faint light]

*To the electrification of the city’s outskirts*

[Four shots of stringing electrical wires in a village, along with two inserted shots of a factory and its smoking chimneys]133

Such a sequence essentially replicates a larger narrative-rhetorical shape typical, as we have seen, of the murals, even as it inserts effective agitational “attractions” in order to make its relatively simple points more striking and memorable (the pig, the children; the trick dissolves; and especially the animated multiplication of bread, a fanciful if precise allusion to the severe rationing that began in 1917).

133 This sequence corresponds to intertitles 53 through 65.
Image 7: (Animated) bread scampering away from a hungry person, in Stride Soviet (1926). Source: RGAKFD 10257.

At other points, however, the agitation-propaganda distinction becomes clearly perceptible, as though the film were suddenly alluding to the distinction itself, rather than simply organizing its discourse in accord with it. A few minutes earlier in the film, the following sequence of intertitles is offered, in an ensemble designed to articulate the struggle of workers, peasants and soldiers with the social catastrophes brought about by the Civil War (I will withhold a detailed description of all the accompanying shots):

Workers

Peasants

Soldiers of the Red Army

Through ruin
Through cold
Through typhus
Through hunger
Through cholera
Through death
Toward victory over cold
Toward victory over hunger

The intertitles “through ruin” and “through cold” are followed by images of grim wreckage and bodies huddled in cold, alternating with Red Army soldiers on guard or on the march. But a less predictable series of images succeeds the intitle “through typhus”: a single louse crawling across a piece of coarse cloth; two fingers apparently crushing the bug; a truly startling moving microphotographic image of (presumably) the typhus-causing *Rickettsia* bacteria; and back to the cloth, now home to two lice.

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134 The sequence comprises intertitles 25 through 33. No doubt due to inadequate information or archival notation, this sequence is unfortunately misidentified as belonging to Vertov’s *History of the Civil War* (1921) in Seth Feldman, *Evolution of Style in the Early Work of Dziga Vertov*, 41-42.
Clearly, the point of the very brief sequence – or sub-sequence: almost an aside – is a
terse revelation of the cause of the disease and its dissemination, rather than simply
presenting its consequences (those appear soon enough, in the terrible images of
heaped corpses that follow the intertitle “Through death”). Indeed, the sequence is
so brief that it conveys less any explanation of typhus than the idea of explanation –
of propaganda – as such. This impression might have been felt even more strongly
by contemporary viewers, who would surely have been reminded, in watching this
sequence, of innumerable lectures, pamphlets, exhibits and newsreels about typhus
and other diseases (and their prevention) heard and seen during the Civil War and
earlier.135 Vertov’s strategy here can be thought of as a kind of absorption of oral

135 On pre- and post-1917 medical hygiene propaganda in Russia, see Michael
Zdenek David, “The White Plague in the Red Capital: The Control of Tuberculosis in
narration, largely through visual allusion, into the image track – related to the ambiguous efforts elsewhere, especially Japan, to “purify” cinema of oral narrators in the silent period\textsuperscript{136} – even as the sequence seems to allude to the lecture format as well, in part because its digressive compactness seems to require some imaginative “filling in the blanks” if its place in the whole is to be understood.

Finally, and as what I imagine to be a belated and oblique critical response to Burov’s dismissal of “Futurist” influence upon agitprop practice, the unrepentant Futurist Vertov incorporates one sequence toward the end of Stride, Soviet that manages to maintain the binary structure of the murals (now/then, good/bad) while experimentally complicating it to the verge of incomprehensibility. Following a no less remarkable sequence involving a “meeting of machines” (to be discussed in Chapter Six), a classically Vertovian false match links the motion of buses shot from a high angle to the forward movement through Moscow streets of a single bus captured through its windshield. Four shots of city commotion in winter follow – including two of a policeman directing traffic, a motif later taken up in Man with a

Movie Camera – punctuated by the bold, quasi-vocalized intertitle query “where are you rushing off to?” A single undercranked overhead shot of a city square (perhaps Sukharevka), now an emblem standing for “urban bustle,” is succeeded by a series of catechistic questions contrasting “bad” and “good” kinds of activity, in accord with familiar propaganda conventions:

*To the church?*

[Four shots, including two of priests or monks walking leftwards through snow, and one of a church bell]

*Or to the evening school?*

[Two shots: a teacher at a blackboard; students in a classroom]

*To the [workers’] club?*

[Five shots, showing workers entering a doorway, and a game of chess being played]

*Or to the bar?*

[Four shots of evening carousing in a bar]

*To the evening clinic?*

[Four shots, including images of a shirtless man getting medical attention]

*Or to the Ermakovka [notorious Moscow flophouse]?*¹³⁷

[Three shots: people entering the flophouse; a poor man in ragged clothes on a bed; a rightward pan across a lively group in the flophouse in medium close-up]

¹³⁷ For more on the Ermakovka, see the discussion of Kino-Eye in Chapter Five.
At this point appears the intertitle “The evening is full of contrasts,” a text bearing lyrical-poetic (rather than oratorical) associations that unleashes an unusually complex and disorienting chain of images, one that pushes the tension between sheer juxtaposition and evaluation or judgment to the breaking point.

The sequence, to which I will return briefly in Chapter Five, could be parsed in various ways, but it incorporates approximately 62 mostly very short shots (for a total of about 1 minute and 38 seconds, 1.5 seconds per shot on average) into a twisting thematic skein that resolves, upon scrutiny, into motifs of “communication/connection/traffic” (shots 1-2 (telephone), 5 (buzzer), 22-25 (telegraph), 28-29 (traffic and newspaper), 33 and 35 (car and carriage respectively)); “dance and (healthy) physical activity” (shots 3 (depicting a group of women dancers standing in a row “fused” into a multi-armed being rather like the Hindu goddess Kali), 18-21, 26, 30, and 32 (dancing and ice skating)); “poverty/homelessness” (shots 4 and 46, seemingly taken inside the Ermakovka); “bar and billiard hall” (shots 6-9 (billiards), 16, 34, 36, 47, 51-52, 58-59 (bar)); “shady dealings/crime” (shots 10-15, depicting a gun being loaded)); and “foxtrot” (shots 37-43, 45, 48-50, 60-62).

When subdivided into “themes” in this way, the sequence fairly clearly breaks down, on the level of content, into a generalized contrast of what in Soviet terms would be “good” (healthy physical activity; modern transport and communication) versus “bad” (poverty, tavern, crime, the fox-trotting bourgeoisie). Spectators do not enjoy this kind of clarity as the sequence unfolds, however, and

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138 Ilya Kopalgin, who worked intensively on the film, writes about shooting there; see RGALI f. 3081, op. 1, d. 297, esp. ll. 1-2ob.
only in part because of the rapidity of the shot changes and absence of intertitles.

Equally important is the intricately interwoven, syncopated relationship between the various thematic series, and the sense that formal matching of shots in relation to movements of feet and (especially) hands is what really pulls the sequence along, rather than thematic or narrative development.
As regards the latter, we might note the way the arching movement of the hand picking up a telephone receiver (shots 1 and 2) hypertrophies into a web of sinuous arms in shot 3, continues with the twisting hand and arm of the ragged Ermakovka-dweller wiping or shielding his or her face, before volatilizing into a whole array of other hand movements (typing, piano playing, loading a gun).\textsuperscript{139} Indeed, it almost seems that the “goddess Kali” provides a repository of mobile hands and arms – not entirely unlike the “clusters” of hands in Vertov’s early Scriabin poem, or like the categories ("databases") from which Man with a Movie Camera draws its material – that then circulate throughout the sequence. In terms of the interrelations between the series, consider how the shot of hands playing a piano (shot 17) seem to pertain\textit{ either} to the ("bad") tavern (shot 16) or to the ("good") gymnastic dancing (shot 18);\textsuperscript{140} or how the scenes of traffic apparently represent some general nighttime bustle, until the sub-sequence from shot 51 onwards clearly links that traffic (or at least the horse-drawn carriage) with the life of the tavern. Indeed, the series “communication/connection/traffic” might be read as a figuration of Vertov's own cinematic practice here, inasmuch as that practice is but another work of interconnection, a reflection on the uncertain direction of, and the “intervals” between, messages and movements. In the end, the sequence

\textsuperscript{139} See also the draft plans for short films on the themes of “hands” and “legs,” written between 1922 and 1924 and incorporating literally scores of different hand and leg positions in what seems like almost random order, in Dramaturgicheskie opyty, 79-85.
\textsuperscript{140} Two split screen images of dancing-training-piano playing that appear later in the sequence (30 and 32) show a different instrument and pianist.
generates a didactic meaning only by suddenly arresting the contrasts (with the introduction of the cliché of fox-trotters in shot 37), condensing into a single-themed blast of images legible in terms of “decadence and waste,” and hammering the point home with an intertitle (shot 44) that makes the shift from sheer “contrasts” to value-laden “oppositions” completely clear: “In a fight to the death with a rotten, outmoded way of life.”

On some level, it would seem, the sequence also allegorizes what Vertov must have meant by a “Communist decoding of the world”: cinema, confronted with the chaos of social reality, plunges into it only to emerge with a vision of order, a useful paradigm for organizing that reality, in line with a technocratic notion of documentary practice that would become familiar in the English-speaking world through the work of John Grierson. Nothing is in fact “decoded” here, of course; indeed, we might just as easily argue that Vertov re-codes the footage in terms of early Soviet value hierarchies. If any lesson emerges from the sequence – of which Vertov seems to have been quite proud - it concerns the basic theoretical and practical question of how to keep moving from one distinct theme, shot or movement to another – that is, to incorporate the full mass of worldly detail – while generating some kind of satisfying, useable, or just comprehensible closure. What on

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141 The next sequence shows how “the [Moscow] Soviet promotes physical education.”

142 Kino-Eye, 42.

143 See Rosen, Change Mummified, 247-263.

the agit-train murals were static panels devoted to oppositions of good/bad and past/present become, at this point in *Stride, Soviet*, a well-nigh Whitmanian magma of images susceptible to articulation only through abrupt narrative arrest (“...a fight to the death...”). Seen from the other direction, it turns out that the primitive binaries used on the murals could be deployed to generate sequences of extraordinary complexity, even as, when rigorously applied to the units of which films are composed, they could shake the expectation that sheer “transitions from one movement to another” (Vertov’s definition of the “interval”) would terminate in a decoding of any kind.\textsuperscript{145}

2. *An enormous front of destruction*

The murals were but one aspect of agit-train activism, of course, and their effects on Vertov’s thinking about film becomes discernable only years after the trains themselves had come to a halt, and the murals painted over or discarded. It will not be possible here to provide a detailed survey of all the activities associated with the agit-trains once the murals, activists and local organizers had pulled in the crowds, but some general outline of the physical, social and discursive environment

\textsuperscript{145} Kino-Eye, 8. Liliana Mal’kova usefully summarizes the dialectic at work here when she notes that “the development of film documentary’s own expressive and visual capabilities [in the service of developing more effective propaganda] meant its growing independence, enabling it in some cases to wrest itself from the general propaganda context” (Sovremennost’ kak istoriia, 21). This may also be one way of defining what Soviet aesthetic dogma meant, from the 1930s onward, by the term “formalism.”
in which the trains operated needs to be sketched before moving on to agit-cinema specifically.

A remarkable account written sometime after mid-March 1919 by L.K. Likhterman, who headed up the early Lenin agit-train, offers one of the few first person testimonies – not uninflected by euphemism, as we will see – that indicate what on-the-ground agitation was like:

Work on the train never stopped during the day, and even continued on into the night during nocturnal stops at small stations. [The agitators] took advantage of even the shortest occasional stop, and when the train went past some platform or temporary stop, from the windows they threw leaflets, telegrams, and newspapers, all of which were eagerly picked up or grabbed in the air by chance passersby.

After the arrival of the train, the remotest and most desolate stations became unrecognizable. Within minutes, all the buildings, signposts, and cars of trains headed the other direction were plastered with posters and appeals. An orderly row of buyers appeared at [the train’s] store; literature […] was distributed to various organizations; the movie screening began; and an open-air meeting was organized, attended by peasants, Red Army men and local young people, all of whom ran up to look at the “weird” train, attracted by its unusual appearance.

These improvised meetings were lively and successful; the speakers were posed the various kinds of questions (about land, about the new order, about communes and so on), to which they replied with full and exhaustive answers. … At every station one of the agitators got out and explained the goals of the train, and the meaning of its murals, to those gathered around. …

The peasantry met the train with great interest and amity; such was the general impression of everyone who participated in the first journey [of the Lenin train]. … But the main spectators were children, who everywhere were the first to meet the train, and the last to follow along when it was departing. A special screening for children took place at almost every stop; they were given booklets, postcards, and writing accessories.

In larger centers where they had been informed about the train’s imminent arrival by telegrams sent from nearby stations, the local party committees and executive committee greeted the train (sometimes this was an organized and highly festive affair, as for instance in Rezhnitsa,146 where Red Army soldiers came out to the train with music and torches); there they held meetings together with the train’s [propaganda] instructors where

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146 Today, Rezekne: a city in eastern Latvia.
they’d develop a work plan, figure out the length of time the train would remain in the city, and so on….\textsuperscript{147}

Thus upon their arrival, the trains became the immediate vortices of an immense amount of activity, ranging from agitation (pasting up posters), propaganda (explaining the murals and “the goals of the train”), organizing and supervising meetings and demonstrations, distributing printed material and (extremely scarce) writing utensils, and so on. They were displays of power as well as sources of diversion and information, and provided occasions for local Party and Army authorities both to appear before the local citizenry and to assert their connection to the “center,” as represented by the agit-train and its emissaries.

On the October Revolution, the most important emissary was certainly Mikhail Kalinin (1875-1946), former peasant, Old Bolshevik, chairman of VTsIK from 1919 to 1938, and a pillar of the Stalin regime from 1926 until his death. Although (as we will see) the film screenings might have pulled in more spectators than any other agit-train events, Kalinin’s speeches were certainly the main attractions from the agitators’ point of view. Those speeches, sometimes transcribed on the spot (along with responses from auditors), provide a remarkable glimpse not only into the agit-train meetings and the topics that dominated them, but into the rhetorical strategies the Bolsheviks used to bring people in the war-stricken areas

\textsuperscript{147} In Tolstoj, ed., Agitmassovoe Iskusstvo Sovetskoj Rossii: Materialy i dokumenty, vol. 1, 50-51. The report was written no earlier than 11 March 1919.
Four of the *October Revolution*’s 16 journeys were made to southern Russia and Ukraine, and during 1920 the train’s activists spent much of March, August, October and part of May and June in that large and devastated area, especially in the neighborhood of the city of Kharkov and the far eastern provinces that make up the Donbass (short for Donets Basin) coal mining and industrial region (see Map). The train’s eighth journey (1-26 March 1920) took Kalinin, Vertov, Levitskii and their colleagues from Moscow through the Russian cities of Kursk and Belgorod and on into Ukraine (Kharkov, Slaviansk, Gorlovka), deeper into southern Russia (Taganrog, Rostov-on-Don and Novocherkassk), then back north through the Donbass towns of Debal’tsevo and Kupiansk to Belgorod and the capital. This borderland, dominated topographically by the Donets and Don Rivers and (underground) by enormous coal deposits, was at the physical epicenter of the Civil War; during the turmoil, at least 20 different political regimes were established in the Donbass prior to the Red victory. Indeed, when Vertov arrived in the region at the beginning of March, the Red Army had taken Novocherkassk, the headquarters

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148 Kenez, in his excellent summary of agit-train propaganda, refers to B. Sergeev’s 1938 collection of transcripts of Kalinin’s speeches on the train (*Birth of the Propaganda State*, 61). As I show below using material from GARF, Sergeev’s selections were evidently distilled to make the meetings, and the interactions between activists and audiences, seem more harmonious than they really were.

149 Maksakova, *Agit-poezd “Oktiabr’skaia Revoliutsiia,”* 31-34. The area has become internationally well known recently due to the unrest in eastern Ukraine, alas.

150 GARF f. 1452, op. 1, d. 63, l. 81; Maksakova, *Agit-poezd “Oktiabr’skaia Revoliutsiia,”* 32.
of the White counterrevolutionary forces in the South, just a little over a month and a half before.\textsuperscript{151}

The economically crucial Donbass region, whose very large working class was notoriously volatile and unpredictable in its political commitments, had been occupied by the end of October 1917 by counterrevolutionary forces that subjected pro-Soviet workers to appalling repression, later to be answered by Red reprisals equivalent in brutality and mindlessness. The independent Soviet republic briefly formed in the Donbass and adjoining Ukrainian and Russian industrial areas in February 1918 was swept away by German and Austrian troops, who occupied much of the territory in consort with the new and short-lived Skoropadskyi regime in Kiev from April until the German surrender that fall. Workers sympathetic to the Soviets and peasants who had seized landlords’ property were terrorized by this new regime, most notoriously by means of savage corporal punishment (lethal floggings, beatings with ramrods and so on). The same pattern continued after the fall of Skoropadskyi in November 1918, during the frenzied fighting between Reds, Whites and other groups between December 1918 and May 1919, and later during the White occupation (May-December 1919). Cameraman Alexander Levitskii recalled how he and Vertov directly encountered victims of the violence as late as March 1920, when the agit-train was making its way south from Kharkov:

\begin{quote}
While the train was loading up with water, Vertov and I stepped off to stretch our legs. Stepping over piles of railroad ties, broken stone and rails, we noticed a cargo train on the siding. We were taken aback by the strong smell emanating from the wagons; forcing open one of the doors, we recoiled in horror. Out reeked a sepulchral chill and stench. Judging from the bits of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{151} Mawdsley, \textit{Russian Civil War}, 221. Both Rostov and Novocherkassk were taken on 7 January.
clothing that partially covered them, these were the corpses of Red Army soldiers. The traces of machine-gun bursts were evident on the naked bodies; some were horribly disfigured by saber blows.

We moved away from that frightful train and spontaneously removed our caps.  

The area had also been the site of anti-Jewish brutality perpetrated by every combatant force, including the Whites, Reds, the Petliura Directorate (which replaced Skoropadskyi), and various armed bands. The majority of the pogroms, however – in the most savage anti-Jewish violence prior to the Holocaust, involving 1500 pogroms in 1300 settlements, 50 to 60,000 killed, 200,000 crippled and wounded, 1000s of women raped, and around 300,000 children orphaned – occurred slightly further to the south and west in the Ukrainian heartland. We

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152 Levitskii, Rasskazy o kinematografie, 213.

153 Budnitskij, Rossijsskie evrei, 275-276. A number of powerful, now rarely-seen films were made about the pogroms, including Les pogroms juifs en Ukraine 1919-1920 (1920 [RGAKFD 13964-I]), made by the Berlin-based "Historic Archive of Ukrainian Jews"; The Jewish Pogroms in Ukraina 1919-1920 (1920 [RGAKFD 13962-II]; Evrejskie pogromy (1920 [RGAKFD 13961-III]). I know nothing about their distribution, but evidently they were made for French and English-language audiences as well as Russian. The films are largely comprised of horrifying still photographs, among the earliest examples I know of still-photography-based documentary. On violence and anti-Semitism in the Kharkov-Donbass area, primarily in reference to the period June-October 1919, see Rossijsskie evrei, 325-327; and L.B. Miliakova, ed., Kniga pogromov: Pogromy na Ukrainе, v Belorussii i evropejskoj chasti Rossii v period Grazhdanskoj vojni 1918-1922 gg. (Moscow: Rosspen, 2007), 177-192, 261-265, 776-784; and on pogroms committed later in 1920 in the area by Red forces (Budyonny's army, specifically), 423-424. Although only 1/5 of the total number of pogroms were carried out by White forces – first place was taken by the Directorate (40%), followed by various rebel bands (25%), the Whites (17%), the Reds (9%), and the "Grigor'ev" rebels (4%) – White anti-Jewish violence was concentrated in just a few months, during which time they “broke all records” for pogromist savagery (quoting Budnitskij, Rossijsskie evrei, 276, 279). On pogroms committed by the Reds, see Rossijsskie evrei, 118-134; on White anti-Semitic ideology and propaganda, 221-249.
know nothing of Vertov’s direct response to these atrocities, but do know that people in his circle were outraged by the frequent and detailed reports they received about them.\textsuperscript{154}

Although Donbass workers and peasants were by no means uniformly sympathetic to the Bolsheviks – the at-gunpoint grain requisitioning and forced mobilization practiced by the Reds, not to mention their violent anti-clericalism and their unforgettable “revolutionary defeatism” during the war against the Germans, stirred strong opposition from many working-class patriots – it seems clear that the Whites, with their ferocious antagonism toward worker autonomy and desire to restore the pre-February order, were regarded as a non-option by the majority.\textsuperscript{155} Nonetheless, the victorious Bolsheviks regarded Donbass workers with suspicion after January 1920, not only because of their well-known independence and unpredictability but also because they had lived under “old regime” occupation during the Civil War, a misfortune that evidently called into question both their loyalty and their political maturity.\textsuperscript{156} Civil servants were suspect as well, of course: an activist who inspected schools in towns visited by the \textit{October Revolution} in

\textsuperscript{154} For just one example, see Olga Boltianskaia’s diary notes about “Black Hundred and White Guard” atrocities in a Jewish village in Ukraine in 1919 (RGALI f. 2057, op. 2, d. 26, ll. 575-576). Descriptions of White and Petliurist atrocities were also a staple of Bolshevik propaganda materials during the war: for an example, see V.A. Karpinskii’s \textit{S kem zhe vy, krest’iane? S kem idete? Komu pomogaete?} (Moscow: VTsIK, 1918).

\textsuperscript{155} My account here relies on Hiroaki Kuromiya, \textit{Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s-1990s} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 71-117. To be sure, the Whites practiced forced grain requisitioning as well.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 115-117.
March 1920 growled that the teaching staff at the few functioning schools he discovered were tainted by a "Menshevik tendency."\textsuperscript{157}

Certainly, the daily on-the-ground work of all the agit-train divisions took place in an environment wracked through and through by the war's effects. The following description by Levitskii of the situation in and around the main train station in Kharkov, where the October Revolution was parked from 8-10 March 1920, gives a good sense of the conditions in which the agit-train activists did their work:

A train was near the station, its firebox smoking, apparently ready for departure to Moscow. It had a few passenger cars, with freight cars making up the rest.

It was a kind of human anthill, comprised of bags and people. They hung from and clutched to the roofs, the carriage platforms and the buffers . . . Endless crowds of bag-people, shouting and swearing, climbed through the open doors of the cargo cars; they were forced back, shoved away, struck over the head, while they in turn would grab those standing in the cars by the legs and try to pull them off.

Red Army men from the food procurement squads \textit{[prodotriady]} wandered through the crowds, dragging people off the buffers. Dozens of others streamed in to take their place. A woman cried out in a heart-rending voice; her two children followed suit, clinging to her sleeveless, ragged coat.

The train began to move, emitting whistles of warning. This did not frighten the crowd, but rather intensified the commotion. Shouts, noise, swearing, the whistling of the train all combined in a wild cacophony. Several people were struck off the buffers and the roof of the train, a few falling directly under the train. This didn't stop the crowd, and many ran behind the train as it was gathering speed, dragging their sacks behind them.

I stood on the tracks, looking at the departing train, and for a long time could hear the sounds of voices mingling with the wheels as they rumbled and the train as it whistled.

When I finally got to the station, I was struck by a revolting smell of carbolic acid, sweat, and who knows what else. The huge hall was filled with mist, the respiration of masses of people. It was damp, and the sun's bright rays barely penetrated the dirty windowpanes. Women with children and

\textsuperscript{157} GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, l. 113. Most of the reports focused on the terrible conditions at the schools and of the students: hunger, filth, and lack of clothing (l. 109).
men, most wearing ragged overcoats and sheepskin jackets, sat and lay on benches and on the floor. Some, having taken off their outerwear and wrapped it around their shoulders, were beating their shirts to rid themselves of bugs. On the filthy floor, in the heat, people sick with typhus tossed back and forth. One man, clutching a bag containing his belongings, cast his lifeless gaze at the ceiling. Beside him several people had settled down on their sacks, calmly drinking hot water from cups and mess tins and lustily eating bread and lard. The weeping of children, someone sobbing and keening, incoherent mumbling and the sounds of an accordion, drunken shouting and a brawl somewhere on the far side of the hall...[...]

It occurred to me that the horrors of Dante’s Hell were less terrifying than the reality of the Kharkov train station.158

Later the same day, very probably 8 March 1920, Levitskii encountered Vertov in the city, and they ended up walking back to the agit-train together, making a “wide berth” so as to avoid passing through the station.159

Vertov went off to show films to a group of children, probably in one of the local theaters. “A roar of children’s voices, explosions of laughter,” especially while watching Starevich’s 1913 animated adaptation of Pushkin’s Tale of the Fisherman and the Little Fish, was the response Vertov recorded.160 It seems that on that day, and on many days, the agit-screenings functioned in part as distraction from the surrounding horrors, as Vertov suggested in a later report on the train’s eighth journey:

Almost every screening was accompanied by a general improvement in the mood of adults and children; the exchange of approving or hostile

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158 Levitskii, Rasskazy o kinematografe, 205-206. Levitskii reports going with Vertov later that day into downtown Kharkov and finding mainly closed shops filled to bursting with produce which the Soviet authorities soon began requisitioning (206-207). This is not a claim that can be taken at face value, however.

159 Ibid., 206-207.

160 GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, l. 149.
exclamations; exhaustion dispelled, excitement, noise; the laughter of a crowd that had been dead with melancholy only a moment before.\textsuperscript{161}

Levitskii, when not fulfilling orders from Vertov or from one of the train’s political commissars to shoot specific footage, was mainly an observer, not an activist engaged in direct propaganda, \textit{kontrol'}, or inspection.\textsuperscript{162} Those who were involved in those activities filled out report after report describing terrible conditions and utter material deprivation. At a meeting in Gorlovka on 12 March 1920, for instance, teachers bitterly complained that they “had not received a single dime from Soviet power.” When filling out his inspection reports on local hospitals and clinics, the October Revolution’s medical commissar often simply wrote, “complete absence of everything, even the basic necessities.” And a railroad commissar onboard the train in March indicated in his report that the situation was so bad that, apart from giving a few urgent directives, he was more engaged with photographing local conditions in order to convey to the relevant commissariats a concrete sense of the magnitude of what needed to be done.\textsuperscript{163}

The crowds that gathered around the October Revolution in March 1920 were, of course, all too aware of all of this. The disasters – destruction, disease, disease, disease...
poverty, ongoing violence, requisitioning – would have been palpable to anyone in
the immediate environs of the train, and Kalinin did not flinch from discussing them:

We are carrying out a whole series of exactions that are very hard on the
peasantry. We are taking from the peasant all extra grain; we will confiscate
butter and chickens . . . and in essence, we are giving nothing in return.\footnote{GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, l. 73; from an address to soldiers in Iuzovka (later
Stalino, today Donetsk, Ukraine) on 14 March 1920.}

Comrades, our situation is outstanding militarily speaking. Victory is almost
complete. But before us lies an enormous front of destruction and [the task]
of restoring [destroyed] transportation lines. There is not a single building
that has not been contaminated; not one city where the garbage [lying
around in the streets] measures less than in the hundreds of wagon loads;
not one city or region where the stores are stocked with goods. Almost no
factories are operating anywhere in Russia. The northern part of Russia is
starving . . . and there are regions . . . where almost everyone has been felled
by illness. Before us stretches an enormous task, work on an
incomprehensible [scale].\footnote{GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, l. 77ob; from an address to 2500 people (mainly
railway workers) in the Ukrainian city of Slaviansk on 11 March 1920.}

Indeed, the transcripts – extraordinary records of direct interactions between a
member of the Bolshevik hierarchy and ordinary citizens – indicate that auditors,
uniformly stricken by manifold calamities, confronted Kalinin regularly with
complaints and petitions during the agit-train meetings. I would like to dwell on
them for a page or two, primarily because they give a concrete sense of the
discursive atmosphere into Vertov had been plunged (vastly different from anything
he’d encountered before 1918), to which he had to adapt, and within which (at
times, at least) he would thrive.

Sometimes these petitions gave Kalinin the opportunity to appear
magnanimous, as at a meeting in the Taganrog area when he promised to restore
land to a peasant woman, single with a small child, after another villager had
allegedly stolen her family property. Other requests were harder to satisfy. Peasants
pointed to the problems brought about by the draft, and urged (for instance) that
tailors and shoemakers be exempt from mobilization: “without them, it’s difficult to
live [in the village].” They bombarded Kalinin with questions about stolen horses,
complaining that both the Reds and the Whites had taken so many that they had
none left with which to farm:

Kalinin: We have to solve this problem somehow. We need to get tractors [to
the farms]; and the peasants with horses should plow communally on
Sundays for those without.

Peasant: And will any more horses be requisitioned?

When a local Communist official interjected that there would not be, the peasant
immediately contradicted him, and insisted that horses were still being seized.166

These simmering animosities generated an atmosphere of high tension
around the agit-train meetings and presentations, and the possibility of violence
accompanied them like a background hum. According to Levitskii, the October
Revolution’s highly-strung Cheka head Skrameh wandered through the crowds with
his hand on his Mauser, and Levitskii certainly had no doubts about his willingness
to use it. When one of their colleagues – an overzealous orator who openly
threatened peasants in one Ukrainian village with armed violence if they did not
submit to the food requisitions – sparked a near-riot, Skrameh came very close to

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166 These examples are from a meeting of 16 March 1920 at the Nikolaevka slobodka
in the Taganrog region (GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, ll. 20-21). Much effort was
expended on generating propaganda justifying Red food requisitioning: see, for
example, Karpinskii’s S kem zhe vy, krest’iane?
shooting him at point-blank range in the chest, were he not prevented (again, according to Levitskii) by Kalinin’s direct and fatherly intercession.167

Given these problems, it is not surprising that Kalinin’s most rhetorically effective arguments seem to have involved generalities and prophecy, rather than specifics. He spoke at length and in a progressive spirit about a range of policy-related topics, including equal rights for women and nationalities, gender relations in households, and ridding schools and government of the influence of religion. His concrete suggestions for a future rationalized peasant economy, however, seem to have been met with open skepticism:

Kalinin: We consider that, for instance, if one day of labor is expended on the manufacture of one arshin [71 cm] of chintz, then [the equivalent] for the peasant should be the amount of grain he produces in a day. Keeping in mind, of course, an eight-hour workday for both peasants and workers.

Peasant: Yes, but if you work by the hour [on the land], you’ll end up not producing anything.

Kalinin: We haven’t set anything up yet, but in the future we must anticipate a time when we produce the same amount in a day that we used to put out in a week [due to the organization of production].168

The majority of his speeches, by contrast, mobilized an array of more general and emotional appeals, from inflaming national and class animosities to visions of a bright secular future. The charge of “treachery” was a common theme of White anti-Bolshevik propaganda, and Kalinin did his utmost to reverse this charge, arguing that the aristocracy loved Russia as long it sustained their “drunkenness and

167 Levitskii, Rasskazy o kinematografe, 231. Contrary to what Levitskii thought (ibid., 203-204), Skrameh left the Cheka/GPU in 1926, after suffering heart trouble and a nervous breakdown (Goncharov and Nekhotin, “Durylin soglasen dat’ podpisku,” 137).
168 GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, l. 18.
debauchery” and remained in servitude to “the American and English bourgeoisie.”169 This was a rhetoric that identified “the Russian people” as a nation with “the Russian people” as the working masses and, conversely, associated the upper classes with class enemies abroad, making them the real “traitors” (predateli) of Russia: a “social patriotism” that predictably reversed that Bolshevik “revolutionary defeatism” so notorious during the Great War, and which eventually ossified into a figurative equation of "foreign" (or "Western-foreign") with "bourgeois" often visible in the films (fiction or non-fiction) of the 1920s and later.170

Even the appalling suffering then endured by Soviet citizens could be converted, by dint of a figurative machinery of “redemption,” “sacrifice” and the like, into a source of future greatness that would be acknowledged by humankind at large:

The English and the French come visit us now and see poverty, famine, and cold. But comrades, not all great ideas appeared in stone palaces: the idea of Christian doctrine occurred to Jesus Christ himself when he was among herdsmen. And all great ideas emerge out of suffering. I am certain that all the great ideas that have appeared as the result of great sacrifices will [eventually] earn the honor they deserve from future humanity.171

169 GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, ll. 4-5. See also Sergeev, “Agitpoezdkii M.I. Kalinina,” 137.

170 See, for example, the typically satirical portraits of foreign (in this case Argentine) visitors to the USSR ("curious bourgeois") in Sovkinozhurnal 32/5 (1926 [RGAKFD 826]); similar portrayals in Torzhestvo otkrytiia vsesoiuznoj sel’sko-khozajstvennoj vystavki (Otkrytie sel’sko-khozajstvennoj vystavki v Moskve 1923 [RGAKFD 706]); or Vertov’s One Sixth of the World.

171 GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, l. 65; at a congress of teachers in Maloarkhangel’sk, probably on 5 March 1920.
In speaking to Red Army soldiers – many of whom were of peasant origin, of course, and would have had relatives living and suffering in the villages – Kalinin made a point of linking the action of the Army itself to the eventual alleviation of rural plight through industrialization:

We see that our Red Army, which has . . . defeated the enemy, is now coming again to the Donets Basin to commence its military campaign,\(^{172}\) so that the paralyzed Donets Basin can be turned into a place of creativity, a place for an enormous extension of [the powers of] human labor, so that coal and iron might flow thence like a river, to make it possible to start up the factories and plants.

This, Kalinin promised, is when the peasant will feel relief, and “all sacrifices will be justified.”\(^{173}\)

Most intriguingly, Kalinin sometimes appealed not to immediately “collectivist” sentiments, whether class or nationality-based, but rather to notions of *individual* wellbeing and happiness, albeit linked to a wider social struggle:

I believe that victory is good not only in the results brought about by that victory, but that individual participation in the process of struggle leads to the greatest happiness for each person. Then, there will be no room for whining and boredom; life will become so broad and deep, that a person living at that time could over the course of a year, or half a year, experience far more than one could in 70 years today.

And I believe that each person . . . who wants to forge his own happiness will find it in this work. He will, without fail, find complete satisfaction for his own “I” [*polnoe udovletvorenie sobstvennomu ja*] (applause).\(^{174}\)

\(^{172}\) This apparently refers to the military actions in and around the Donbas (Donets Basin) area (in southeastern Ukraine and southwestern Russia) starting in February 1920.

\(^{173}\) GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, l. 73.

\(^{174}\) GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, l. 66 (at the Maloarkhangel’insk congress of teachers). To be sure, appeals to the *kollektiv* over the individual appear as well, though not as consistently or unambiguously as might be assumed; see Sergeev, “Agitpoezdki M.I.
To be sure, all or most of Kalinin’s rhetorical devices derive from familiar tropes and values of the Russian (and especially, revolutionary) intelligentsia, the ethos of sacrifice above all. They faithfully reflect the discursive arsenal of the agit-train activists, and would eventually permeate the rhetoric of Vertov’s films as well, whether in affirmations of the need for military readiness on the part of the whole population to “defend the gains of the Revolution” (in The Eleventh Year), in celebrations of industry as “extensions of human labor” (in Enthusiasm), in careful fusing of the iconographies of nation, class and individual subjectivity (in the 1930s, and above all in Three Songs of Lenin), or, more complexly and consistently, by foregrounding women as builders of the new society. Vertov would retain the haunted backdrop of catastrophe as well, often alluded to through archival images, especially in some of the Kino-Pravdas. Stride, Soviet, and Three Songs of Lenin. Indeed, I believe this backdrop kept hanging there, in the back of Vertov’s mind, for the rest of his life.

3. A lure to gather any kind of meeting

[NOTE: FROM “IF WE REALLY” TO “TALKING ABOUT” IS AN EPIGRAPH TO THIS SUBSECTION.]

Kalinina,” 148. See also Oleg Kharkhordin’s discussion (building on research by N.A. Mel’nikova) of the ideology of Kalinin’s speeches in terms of the individual-collective dialectic, in The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), 198.
If we really want to understand the effect the motion picture has on the viewer, then we must first settle two things:

1. which viewer?
2. What effect on the viewer are we talking about?¹⁷⁵

More important than these tropes and commemorations, however, would be the oratorical or “meeting” context as such, as a communicative setting that Vertov would counterpoise to that of cinema. Vertov, as we will see in a moment, was intensively involved in film exhibition on the October Revolution, not least as a bonimenteur giving direct oral explanations during and after the projections. I will argue here that the frequency with which Vertov incorporates explicit figures for the film-going audience into his mature films, from Stride, Soviet through Lullaby, can be productively thought about in terms of his work as a film presenter on the agit-trains. Whether through second-person address (as in One Sixth of the World), the inclusion of audiences “inside” the films (One Sixth, Stride, Soviet, Enthusiasm, pre-eminently Man with a Movie Camera), or a more intent focus on the experience of specific viewers (especially in Three Songs of Lenin), Vertov’s attention to spectators seems at once to force an awareness of the mediated character of cinematic experience, and (paradoxically) to aspire to simulate a well-nigh immediate co-presence of audience with film. This concern emerged, I believe, on the trains, although spending time in Abel Kaufman’s bookstore-library-reading room might have pre-conditioned it, to be sure.

¹⁷⁵ Kino-Eye, 62.
In two famous essays published in 1924 and 1925 – the second of which, at least, was responding to a rather brusque provocation from Vertov¹⁷⁶ – Sergei Eisenstein both identified the audience as the basic “material” of film practice, and distinguished his own work upon audience from that of Vertov and the kinocs:

If we regard cinema as a factor for exercising emotional influence over the masses (and even [Vertov’s kinocs], who want to remove cinema from the ranks of the arts at all costs, are convinced that it is) we must secure its place in this category and, in our search for ways of building cinema up, we must make widespread use of the experience and the latest achievements in the sphere of those arts that set themselves similar tasks. The first of these is, of course, theatre, which is linked to cinema by a common (identical) basic material – the audience – and by a common purpose – influencing the audience in the desired direction through a series of calculated pressures on its psyche.¹⁷⁷

... the important element – the direction (the organization of the audience through organized material) is, in this particular instance of cinema, possible, and not just through the material organization of the effective phenomena that are filmed but optically, through the actual shooting. Whereas in theatre the director, in his treatment, recarves the potential dynamics (statics) of the dramatist, the actor and the rest into a socially effective construction, here in cinema, by selective treatment, he recarves reality and real phenomena through montage in the same direction. This is still direction and it has nothing in common with the passionless representation of the [kinocs], with the fixing of phenomena that goes no further than fixing the audience's attention.

The [kino-eye] is not just a symbol of vision: it is also a symbol of contemplation. But we need not contemplation but action. It is not a [“kino-eye”] that we need but a [“kino-fist”].¹⁷⁸

Eisenstein’s criticism of Vertov – one that presages in intriguing ways the pro-realyst, anti-montage/collage arguments that Georg Lukács would make in the

¹⁷⁶ See Lines of Resistance, 125-126; and Chapter Five, below.


¹⁷⁸ “The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form” [1925], in The Eisenstein Reader, 53-59; here 57-59.
1930s\textsuperscript{179} – takes the position that Vertov’s rejection of “art” (acting, organized mise-en-scène and so on) limits the resources that should be available to filmmakers if they are to “influence the audience in a desired direction.” Passively relying on unstaged images of “real” things, naively assuming that “unspoiled” spectators (like peasants) react far more forcefully to non-fiction newsreel than to “the sugary actors of a film-drama,”\textsuperscript{180} Vertov precludes from the outset much of what enables cinema to exert “calculated pressures.”

Indeed, there can be little doubt that Vertov, judging from his writings and particularly when compared to Eisenstein, spent relatively little time thinking in precise ways about the cognitive effects his films would have upon spectators. Affirmations of the need to (for instance) “[‘carry’] the film viewer’s eyes . . . in the most advantageous sequence . . . into an orderly montage study”\textsuperscript{181} are actually very unusual in Vertov’s written corpus, are often derivative (in this case, of Kuleshov) and even perfunctory. Where Eisenstein would refer, in his quest to understand and manipulate spectator response, to a host of psychophysiologists from Pavlov and Klages to Bekhterev – the latter scientist was never mentioned, incidentally, by


\textsuperscript{180} Kino-Eye, 61.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 16.
Vertov in any of his writings\textsuperscript{182} – Vertov hardly ever draws upon such science and pseudo-science.\textsuperscript{183} In 1948, he provided an intriguing gloss to his now well-known line from the early poem “Start,” where he announces his wish to

\begin{verbatim}
Give people eyes
To see a dog
With
Pavlov’s
Eye.\textsuperscript{184}
\end{verbatim}

This means, writes Vertov, “to see what the ordinary eye doesn’t see . . . to penetrate into the mysteries of conditioned reflexes, into the mysteries of the brain . . . to see the law of gravity in Newton’s falling apple.”\textsuperscript{185} In other words, it refers not to any application of Pavlovian conditioning to film practice, but (yet again) to cinema’s scientific vocation, its capacity to give us new knowledge about the world, rather than endlessly propagate reality-clouding narrative fictions.

Yet it seems indisputable that Vertov and Eisenstein agree on a fundamental (if apparently obvious) point: namely, that cinema cannot be thought without taking audiences into account. In Vertov’s case, this conviction is far more easily detectable in his films (and in his working notes, as we will see) than in his theoretical writings.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[182] We should also note that Vertov never began higher medical-scientific training at the Psychoneurological Institute prior to being drafted; nor had Bekhterev’s often absurdly reductive “collective reflexology” been fully conceptualized in any case. There are, in other words, few grounds for assuming any direct “reflexological” influence on Vertov’s work.


\item[184] “Start (1917),” in Lines of Resistance, 35.

\item[185] Stat’i i vystupleniia, 451.
\end{footnotes}
Indeed, it is a minor scandal that, as concerns the two features most often associated with Vertovian filmmaking and film-thinking – the politicized defense of non-fiction against fiction film on the one hand, and a radical demand for self-reflexivity, on the levels of filming, editing, exhibition and reception, on the other – the latter finds no effective theorization anywhere in his writings (with the partial and feeble exception of his mythologies about the kino-eye’s perceptual powers). In no way does this mean, as some crude nominalist historical empiricism might have it, that the problematic of self-reflexivity is therefore irrelevant to Vertov’s work; rather, it needs to be pursued through the films themselves. My own sense – writing here somewhat preemptively and cursorily about the Vertov-Eisenstein conflict, but also as a way of introducing Vertov’s agit-train film work – is that the two filmmakers have different though not unrelated theoretical preoccupations, and assumptions, about audiences. In each case, those assumptions had a crucial double aspect, which we will be able to elaborate in full only in later chapters.

Eisenstein, it seems, maintained throughout his career that audiences were at once bundles of psychophysical resistances and endowed with the capacity, if properly stimulated, to “dialectically” or “ecstatically” transcend those resistances.\textsuperscript{186} Think, for instance, of how he conceptualized planes, volumes and lines as discrete units which, placed in dynamic juxtaposition (or “conflict”) with contrastingly oriented planes, volumes, or lines, could generate through those juxtapositions powerful cognitive responses (due to the “analogy” between that

\textsuperscript{186} Bordwell, The Cinema of Eisenstein, 190-195.
formal patterning and “human psychological expression”).

Eisenstein thought about audiences within the framework of an evolving and increasingly complex cognitive-formalist rhetoric of filmmaking, an effort to understand the relationship between artistic form and cognitive effect.

For his part, Vertov seems to have regarded spectators on the one hand as objects of perception and knowledge – that is, as entities to be scrutinized and categorized, not least in class terms, both by the “kino-eye” and by audiences themselves – and on the other as capacities or powers of perceiving and knowing, always thought of differentially, in relation to the various media-instruments at their disposal (voice, text, cinema, agit-train, “unarmed” human perception, and so on). Again, this binary is thematized above all in the films themselves, not in a theoretical methodology exterior to the films: in all those representations of human subjects (and sometimes non-human objects) – identifiable in terms of class, ethnicity, gender and so on – being identified, and identifying in turn; and on the other hand but inseparably, in all those representations and allegories of looking and being looked at, addressing and being addressed, through eye, ear, speaker, loudspeaker, earphones, intertitle, newspaper, camera lens, or screen, across varying ratios of time and space.

Considered on this level, Vertov’s practice is also a kind of rhetoric, I believe, but (even) more idiosyncratic than Eisenstein’s, and more difficult to name. My awkward and provisional descriptor would be: a social-technological rhetoric focused on media practice. ("Media practice" is not his term, obviously: my reasons

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187 “The Dramaturgy of Film Form” [1929], in The Eisenstein Reader, 93-110; here 98.
for adopting this anachronism will, I hope, become clear soon enough.) Where Eisenstein takes the salient “resistances” – on which his artistic practice would exert calculated pressure – to be ultimately psychophysical, Vertov finds his various inert givens primarily in the realm of social “reality” itself: in discrete representations of identity (class, ethnic, gender, local, etc.) to be sure, but also in dominant practices of social representation, that of mainstream fictional cinema above all.

“Resistances” – that is, those existing conditions in relationship to and against which the revolutionary filmmaker must work – are largely the consequence of social development, and can be undone with the instruments at society’s disposal. If Eisenstein promises to “dialectically” go beyond cognitive resistance through careful work on the visual and aural form taken by the diegesis, Vertov believes that media technology itself, properly deployed, could undo that social inertia and generate the New: by connecting, on an experiential and intellectual level, subjects normally dispersed and alienated; by altering the circuitry of human perception as such, by finding ways to bring to it the (for Vertov) superhuman perceptual powers of the mediating technology, and specifically of cinema; and most importantly, by exposing the contingent and limited character of fictional conventions relative to what technologies of representation are capable of. Plainly enough, the viewpoints of both filmmakers are subtended by some ideology of progress or transcendence – even if, at least in Eisenstein’s case, that progress often seems to unfold in immensely slow-moving, Hegelian spirals; Vertov, runner of "cinema races" (*kino-probegi*), is more impatient – and as such must be read not only as rhetorics, but as
alegories of the revolutionary situation in which they hope to intervene, as we will see later on.

We will return, on somewhat different terms, to the Eisenstein-Vertov debate over the course of the next two chapters. My point in introducing it here is simply to provide a broader conceptual framework for Vertov’s work with spectators on the agit-train, work that, I hope to show, exerted powerful influence on his later ideas about audience. Most important was the imperative to categorize audiences – in terms of the representational schemata of state activists, and derivative of older notions of class, gender, and ethnus – and conversely, the direct encounter with spectators as subjects endowed with their own powers of discernment, and with the cinematic medium’s powers of attraction and revelation.

Because relatively little work has been done (in English, at least) on the non-film-related divisions of the agit-trains, it is easy to be led into thinking that film exhibition was what the trains were all about. Judging from the available documents, the Narkompros officials who oversaw the trains were much more concerned with the conditions of local schools than with showing films, and specifically cinema-related papers take up a very small portion of the agit-train archives. Yet if the trains’ Cinema Divisions were not, from what I can tell, ranked

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188 Reports by the main political commissars on the October Revolution barely mention film; see GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 62, ll. 30-34; d. 64, ll. 81-137. Agit-cinema was under the auspices of both VTsIK and the cinema side of Narkompros’s Cinema and Photo Division (or VFKO: Vserossijskij Foto-Kino Otdel). VFKO at this time was divided into four subsections dealing with filming (of agitki and newsreel), production, distribution-exhibition, and supply (of positive and negative film, equipment, films for distribution, chemicals for developing and so on). The production subsection was comprised of the lab (involved in both editing and the developing and printing of completed films) and filmmaking workshops.
among the most important, they were clearly crucial in drawing audiences, often of colossal size, to the trains and their environs. According to one source, an astonishing 2,216,000 people attended 1962 agit-train screenings over the course of around 659 days in 1919-1920.\textsuperscript{189} The October Revolution alone had shown films to more than 620,000 spectators by the end of 1920,\textsuperscript{190} and agit-train reports indicate that individual outdoor screenings often attracted extraordinarily large crowds: two screenings in Ranenburg on 13 June 1919 that attracted a total of 5300 people, for instance, or another on 3 August in Tambov that drew an incredible 13,000 spectators.\textsuperscript{191} Vertov reported that 63,520 people attended the October Revolution’s screenings during the eighth journey alone: that is, over a mere 25 days (at most: screenings did not take place every day), and organized by just one train.\textsuperscript{192}

Interestingly, the three main forms of mobile cinema – agit-trains and barges, film-carts, and automobiles equipped with film projection equipment [avto-kino] – were apparently associated with the production workshops rather than directly with the distribution unit, at least around 1921-22 (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, f. 386, l. 39). This was possibly because the mobile cinema units usually had cameramen associated with them as well, and thus were considered arms of production rather than (or at least as much as) distribution and exhibition. Although it is sometimes rumored that there were mobile film labs on the agit-trains, I have not found any documentary evidence that this was the case. Photo labs, yes (see RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 386, l. 20); but motion picture film was evidently sent to larger labs in the cities. Nor have I seen proof that the film presenters exhibited any film that had been freshly shot by agit-train cameramen during the course of a given journey.

\textsuperscript{189} Karpinskii, ed., \textit{Agitparpoezda VTsIK}, 18.

\textsuperscript{190} Taylor, \textit{Politics of the Soviet Cinema}, 58.

\textsuperscript{191} GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 47, ll. 2, 8.

\textsuperscript{192} RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 386, l. 19ob. Many more examples could be provided, to be sure; the cinema agitator in charge of statistics for the October Revolution indicated that 102,142 people attended 87 screenings between 13 June and 3 August 1919 (GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 47, l. 46ob).
into account the likelihood of sheer statistical exaggeration – although it may also be that the cinema activists included as “spectators” all those who momentarily passed by the outdoor cinema shows on their way to some other meeting or spectacle (the *plein air* “seating arrangements” were not the rationalized and countable ones of contemporary movie theaters, of course) – it remains clear that the numbers attending the screenings were enormous.

Other evidence of a more qualitative character testifies to the appeal of the agit-screenings as well, if not to their long-term effects. In a report of 3 March 1920, Vertov wrote of the “astonishment” experienced by a group of 100 mainly peasant children of five to 10 years of age “who found themselves in the cinema for the first time” (the biggest hit was, as so often, Starevich’s The Grasshopper and the Ant (1911)).193 His report on the October Revolution’s eighth journey strongly affirmed the superiority of film as an agitational tool:

> The films shown, in spite of their wretchedness, had a more vivid and convincing impact upon the broad masses than the speeches of orators. . . . An illuminated screen, set up outside the train, is a lure around which one can get any kind of meeting to gather.194

Mobile cinema was evidently so popular that groups with access to equipment and films sometimes (though no doubt rarely) established their own units. In September 1921, the Party cell of the Iakov Sverdlov Armored Car Detachment requested that the Detachment’s projector and other film-related items be returned to it, after having been requisitioned, apparently without sanction, by Glavpolitprosvet (the

193 GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, l. 145.

194 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 386, l. 19ob.
Central Committee of the Republic for Political Education: Narkompros’s main agitation-propaganda section from 1920-1930) and passed on to the October Revolution’s cinema unit. It turns out that the Detachment had created its own agit-train, complete with film exhibition capability, which was sent to the Donbass area on orders of the Revolutionary Military Soviet to work among soldiers; the Detachment wanted that equipment back now that space had been set aside in the larger battalion quarters for “exhibition of films,” where “the battalion’s Cinema Club will be set up.”

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195 GARF f. 2313, op. 2, d. 151, l. 94; letter of 12 September 1921 to the film section of PUR RVSR. Kino-Nedelia 23 depicts a Red Army unit in Gzhatsk with its own film theater (Dawn), showing what looks to be a very un-revolutionary film called The Mother-in-Law. Jurisdiction over the army’s cinema units had passed over to Narkompros on 11 January 1921 (LRK 1863-1929, 332.).
The screenings themselves took place either onboard the train’s cinema-wagon (Image 13), which could hold around 250 people; outdoors if weather permitted; or in local theaters. The larger audiences were certainly those at outdoor séances or in the theaters, although Vertov, already fluent in Sovietese, noted that theater owners resented having their establishments used for free screenings, “having become accustomed, under [General] Denikin [i.e., under White occupation], to making a fortune with bourgeois film programs.”

Inside the October Revolution’s cinema car and in theaters, films were generally projected with accompaniment from either a piano or a gramophone record player; outdoors, they were shown without music, although Vertov considered organizing “contests of potential [local] musicians” to provide outdoors accompaniment as well. The gramophones were also used during intermissions to play the speeches of Lenin and Trotsky and recitations of the verses of Demyan Bednyi and others, recordings which “became tiresome to listeners when played one after another” according to Vertov, who requested a better selection of records.

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196 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 386, l. 19; from the report to Grigorii Lemberg, which dates to around April 1920. Vertov indicates that they showed film in local theaters in Kursk, Belgorod, Gorlovka, and Rostov during March 1920 (GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, ll. 146–149, 152, 154, 157). Theaters, especially those outside the “center,” had by no means been nationalized by this point, and it is not clear that the VTsIK trains requisitioned theaters with armed force, or indeed were capable of doing so; perhaps some kind of nominal fee was given to the theater owners for renting their premises, although given the context, the possibility of coercion was surely always on the horizon. Theaters were used for meetings without film exhibition as well (GARF f. 1252 op. 1, d. 64, l. 352).

197 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 386, l. 20.
The film presenters were to offer oral explanations and commentary, though it is far from clear that all of them did so, or at what point during the screening (before, during, after, all three) the commentary was provided, or that film presenters were given any sort of script to follow (as they were later on, for instance, during the First Five-Year Plan period when conducting film agitation among Young Pioneers or collectivized peasants).\(^{198}\)

Judging from the extant daily film registers that I have seen, Vertov was more loquacious than the average presenter during the screenings, and took his role as on-site explicator very seriously:

> I had to provide explanations of the films for nearly every audience. Most of the films were made crudely and carelessly, and an average viewer seeing them for the first time cannot understand them completely. Solving the riddles with my glosses made the films understandable even to the nearly illiterate.\(^{199}\)

Of the four major (and interconnected) reasons for providing oral explanations of the films – the need to control message, the unfamiliarity of at least many of the spectators with cinema, deficiencies in the construction of the films themselves, and technical issues – it is not clear which would have been the most important at a given screening, although control of message was certainly the rationale for the explanations in the first place. When Vertov writes of the films’ “wretchedness” (ubogost’), it is hard to tell if he is referring to their badness as films or to the quality

\(^{198}\) See Kino v pionerskom lagere (Moscow: Soiuzkino, 1931); Kino – v pomoshch’ vesennomu sevu (Moscow: Soiuzkino, 1931), esp. 30-40; Kino v pomoshch’ vypolneniiu programmy tret’e go da Piatiletki (Moscow: Soiuzkino, 1930), esp. 34ff.

\(^{199}\) RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 386, l. 190b (from report to Grigorii Lemberg).
of the prints; and although Vertov put in requests not only for “more agit-films” but for projector and curtain repair, permanent screens, and coating the interior of the cinema car with dark paint,\textsuperscript{200} the October Revolution’s cinema section does not seem to have been plagued by technical issues the way other mobile cinemas were:

A film projector was sent to a village in Ingushetia [in the North Caucasus]. Gathered there were not only all the men young and old, but all the women of the village, in a huge break with tradition . . . the women stood there, touchingly, for five hours, never dropping their eyes from the white screen, across which spots were swimming murkily. You couldn’t make anything out . . . \textsuperscript{201}

In any case, it was the situation (or \textit{mise-en-scène}, if you will) of oral narration-plus-cinema that would remain important for Vertov, as he went on to speculate, on paper and in film, about the relationship between verbal and visual “messages,” the extent to which cinema required verbal supplements, and (conversely) the capacity of cinema to replicate the intensity and immediacy of the agit-train setting.

As far as the films themselves go – a small number of them have survived - the film presenters divided them into three categories: Soviet themes (\textit{Their eyes were opened}, \textit{Glory to the Strong}, \textit{Deserters} [all short fictional agitation films, or \textit{agitkas}]),\textsuperscript{202} \textit{The Victory of May}, \textit{Holiday of Communist Youth}, \textit{Labor Commune}, \textit{The Exposure of the Relics of Tikhon of Zadonsk}, \textit{The Brain of Soviet Russia}, \textit{Anniversary of the Revolution}, installments of \textit{Kino-Nedelia}); children’s films (especially the

\textsuperscript{200} RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 386, l. 20 (request of 9 April 1920).

\textsuperscript{201} GARF f. 2313, op. 2, d. 131, l. 6; from a report on agit-cinema from mid-1920. A version of this report appeared in \textit{Pravda} as well (A. Serafimovich, "Milliony v prorvu," \textit{Pravda} 191 (31 July 1920)).

\textsuperscript{202} On the \textit{agitka} productions, see Taylor, \textit{The Politics of the Soviet Cinema}, 48-58; Listov, \textit{Rossiia, Revoliutsiia, Kinematograf}, 113-118.
famous Starevich films *Tale of the Fisherman and the Little Fish*, *The Grasshopper and the Ant*, and *The Night before Christmas*); and scientific-educational films (*Birds’ Nests*, *Life in Canada*, *A Dairy Farm in the Alps*, *On the Bottom of the Sea*). A small number of agitational films (one entitled *For the Red Banner*, for instance) were occasionally shown to children as well as adults, and Narkompros ordered that at least one “revolutionary” film shown to each adult audience.\(^{203}\) Vertov had about 25 films at his disposal on the September Revolution in March – including five in whose making he participated (*Kino-Nedelias* 40 through 42, *Brain of Soviet Russia*, and *Anniversary of the Revolution*) – and presumably this was a typical size for an agit-train film arsenal.

These film categories corresponded in rough to categorizations of audience that film presenters included on each of their daily reports, particularly the distinction between children and adults, and between the most “revolutionary” elements (especially soldiers) and the rest:

*October Revolution* train, journey no. __

*Cinema questionnaire* no. __

[Date] 1920

Daily register

\(^{203}\) RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, f. 386, l. 26 (which explicitly distinguishes the three categories, though without naming them); GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 20–30; d. 62, ll. 145–162; RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, f. 386, l. 19. I give the titles of only some of the films here. Levitskii mentions showing *Brain of Soviet Russia* on the trains (*Rasskazy o kinematografe*, 204).
1. Place where train stopped
2. Where did the screenings take place
3. How many screenings
4. Which films were shown at each screening
5. Approximately how many spectators attended each screening
6. Make-up [sostav] of the audience
7. Who provided explanations of the films
8. What impression did the films make on the spectators, and how was it expressed
9. Which film or films did the audience like the most

Cinema Head: [signature]204

It is clear that determining the “make-up of the audience” was one of the cinema unit’s most urgent tasks, although they were presumably aided in this by other activists and by local Communist organizers. In his report on film exhibition during the eighth journey, Vertov began not with what was shown or with attendance figures, but with a list of the various categories of spectator to whom films were exhibited: specifically, passing echelons of Red Army soldiers, railroad workers, workers in nearby factories, peasants from the area, children who were invited

204 GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 63, ll. 145-160. The forms filled out by Olga Toom (GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 47, ll. 20-30) were only slightly different.
onboard the cinema car after discussion with the “local organizations,” and local Communist workers.205

His reports on audience reaction, therefore, need to be considered in light of who (in the estimation of Vertov and other activists) is reacting, or which specific mix of constituencies:

Kursk, 4 March 1920, Red Army soldiers: “Clearly expressed understanding of the films shown; witty and precise commentary by spectators.”

Belgorod, 6 March 1920, Red Army soldiers, local residents, peasants, children: “General interest in the films, conflicting remarks directed toward Soviet Power during the screening of Brain of Soviet Russia, Glory to the Strong and The Day of Communist Youth.”

Slaviansk, 11 March 1920, audience of railroad workers, students in the railway school, Red Army soldiers: “Ardent thanks, lengthy shouting of ‘hurray!’ and singing ‘The International.’”

Nikitovka, 12 March 1920, audience of children: “I note the orderliness and good organization of the children’s groups . . . .”206

What Vertov is engaged with here is certainly surveillance as historian Peter Holquist has conceptualized the term: not merely “the collection of information,” but “an instrumental endeavor, aimed at reshaping society and transforming every individual in it.”207 In the case of the agit-trains, it would seem that the fundamental tool of “transformation” is the act of categorizing as such, the determination of a

205 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 386, l. 19.

206 Quoted from GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, ll. 146, 148, 150, 151.

207 Peter Holquist, “‘Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work’: Bolshevik Surveillance in its Pan-European Context,” Journal of Modern History 69:3 (September 1997): 415-450; here 448-449. Holquist’s superb essay discusses primarily the 1914-1921 period, while considering the later persistence of and rationale behind surveillance practices in the Soviet Union and elsewhere.
given audience’s (or polity’s) salient units. We will see that Vertov later carried out a good deal of pre-production surveillance of his own subjects as well, most notably of the various women who appear so prominently in Man with a Movie Camera.

However, as regards the important question of whether these categorizations were interestingly reflected in different programming for different audiences – especially for adult peasant audiences – at this early date in the history of Soviet cinema, I lack sufficient data to provide an answer. Children, of course, watched mainly “children’s films,” adults more serious and “revolutionary” works, although grownups sometimes got to see the Starevich animations as well; but these differentiations are too obvious to be interesting. The small number of prints carried on the agit-trains would have limited programming variety, to be sure, although the all-pervasive Soviet “social engineering” ambitions did lead to more specific targeting of segments of the film-going population: by 1926, no less important a body than the Party’s Central Committee was formulating parameters for “films for the village,” stipulating that they should be (predictably enough) “short, with uncomplicated montage and an uncomplicated narrative.”

It is worth noting, however, that Vertov’s summary report about the journey as a whole (probably dating from April 1920) offers a distillation of what were clearly more diverse descriptions of audience make-up set down in the daily registers. Those included groupings like “peasant children,” “local residents,” “peasants,” “students in the railway school,” “children from zemstvo schools,” “workers,” “children of workers,” and “peasant children from the ages of five to 10

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208 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 271, l. 132. This statement evidently appeared in the journal Sovetskij Ekran on 26 April 1926; I will return to it in Chapter Six.
with their teachers.”\textsuperscript{209} The varied metrics used to categorize audiences – age, occupation, educational status, Party membership (“Communist workers”), age-and-class (“children of workers”), simple locality (“local residents”), and categories hovering between “class” and older “estate” identities (“peasant”) – suggest that the process of discerning the make-up of audiences involved an initial perceptual and ideological grappling with a mass whose internal differentiations were not apparent: rather like the “editing during observation” that Vertov would later incorporate into kino-eye methodology. Categorization, the imposition of order, implies initial uncertainty, even disorientation: it could not have been immediately clear to Vertov and other activists who was coming to see the films, or what their seeing amounted to.

Most strikingly, Vertov’s daily registers contain far more detailed comments on audience reaction than any others that I have seen. Indeed, many film presenters wrote nothing about reactions at all, although audience “make-up” was always indicated. Even if Vertov’s summaries concern mood (“noisy excitement,” “general elation,” “continuous cheering”) more than critical, verbal response (e.g., “conflicting remarks directed toward Soviet Power”), and stress positive mood at that, his unusual preoccupation with response, and sheer intensity of response, stands out among the mass of other reports and registers.

\textsuperscript{209} GARF f. 1252, op. 1, d. 64, ll. 145-161.
As is well known, Vertov eventually applied what he called his “observations” of audience response on the agit-trains\textsuperscript{210} to his larger defense of non-fiction film practice:

1920.
I’m in charge of a cinema-train car. We’re showing films at a remote station.

There’s a film-drama on the screen. The Whites and the Reds. The Whites drink, dance, kiss half-naked women; during the interludes they shoot Red prisoners. The Reds underground. The Reds at the front. The Reds fighting. The Reds win and put all the drunken Whites and their women in prison.\textsuperscript{211}

The content’s good, but why should anyone want to show film-dramas based on the same old cliché used five years ago?
The viewers – illiterate and uneducated peasants – don’t read the titles. They can’t grasp the plot. They examine individual details, like the drawings on the decorated train.\textsuperscript{212}

Coolness and distrust.

[...]
A real tractor, which these viewers know of only from hearsay, has plowed over a few acres in a matter of minutes, before their very eyes. Conversations, shouts, questions. There’s no question of actors. On the screen are their own kind, real people. There isn’t a single false, theatrical movement to unmask the screen, to shake the peasants’ confidence.

This sharp division between the perception of film-drama and newsreel has been noted every place where film has been shown for the first, second, or third time – every place where the poison had not yet penetrated, where the addiction to the toxic sweetness of artistic drama and its kisses, sighs and murders had not yet set in.\textsuperscript{213}

\textsuperscript{210} “To the Kinocs of the South” (1925), in Kino-Eye, 50-51; here 51.

\textsuperscript{211} A reference to an agitka, whose title I have not been able to determine. It may well be a composite of several: in some marginal notes, Vertov gives the titles Red Partisans, In the White Rear, In the Whirlwind of the Revolution, Ukraziia, Red Gas, adding “and others” (Stat’i i vystupleniia, 498).

\textsuperscript{212} Earlier in the passage, Vertov discusses the peasants’ amusement at the ill-shodden horses represented in the agit-train murals, and claimed that the peasants referred to them as “actors” (actually “akhtery” in the original Russian (Stat’i i vystupleniia, 70)).

\textsuperscript{213} “Kino-Eye” (1926) in Kino-Eye, 60-79; here 61. The essay is clearly composed at least in part of bits and pieces written earlier than 1926 (Stat’i i vystupleniia, 498).
Vertov’s insistence on the “sharp division between the perception of film-drama and newsreel” among unspoiled spectators can be regarded as largely ideological and certainly as unsubstantiated, even by his own daily agit-train reports. Anyone familiar with Russian reflections on art and education will immediately note the affinities between Vertov’s remarks here and Leo Tolstoy’s well-known pronouncements on peasant intolerance of artificiality and pretension, and the well-nigh natural capacity of untutored country folk to discern the authentic, the healthy and the lasting in works of art; Vertov’s ideas, in this respect, are far more Tolstoyan than Leninist. This cinematic Tolstoyism, if we can call it that, seems to share a certain amount with the doctrines and attitudes of the Constructivist-factographic avant-garde, surprisingly enough: in particular an intolerance of representational cliché and convention; a realism paradoxically charged with suspicions regarding mimesis; and a focus on “individual detail,” on the material and on the construction of the image. (The enthusiasm for tractors is less Tolstoyan.) Moving photography emerges as a kind of fulfillment of humankind’s primordial perceptual capacities, rather than their replacement or supersession; indeed, we might take the passage as evidence of what Balibar has called the “extreme tension” in “the ideology of Soviet Communism” between anti-modernity and “ultra-modernity,” antitheses that often

\[214\] See, among many other texts, Tolstoy’s 1862 essay “Who Should Teach Whom to Write, We the Peasant Children or the Peasant Children Us?”; and the 1896 What is Art? I briefly suggested in Chapter One that the vegetarian and teetotaler Abel Kaufman might have been a Tolstoyan; a deeper Tolstoy-Vertov linkage (on the level of thought about audience and representation) would be worth pursuing, though it will not be developed in these pages. For evidence regarding Tolstoy’s enthusiasm for film, see Seth R. Feldman, Evolution of Style in the Early Work of Dziga Vertov (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 16-17.
and strangely coexist, as we will see.\textsuperscript{215} What is crucial in relation to the agit-train experience, however, is Vertov’s ascription – however ideological its motivations may be – of discernment rather than limitation to peasant viewers. It is an acknowledgement of their power as spectators, rather than of the way they lag behind more “modern” subjects, even if, dialectically, it ends up categorizing them in another manner: that is, as well-nigh “naturally” repulsed by fictions, and accordingly drawn to “unplayed” film.

The other significant perceptual capacity at play during the agit-train screenings – that of cinema itself – is most clearly revealed in a kind of film shown on the trains that seems to thematize cinema’s powers of revelation more or less directly. I have in mind the propaganda subgenre of “exposure-of-saints’-relics” films that were made during the Civil War period, depicting how the remains of saints - which were not subject to decay, according to Orthodox lore\textsuperscript{216} – were removed from the arks containing them and exposed, as fully decayed, to surrounding spectators and to the movie camera. At least 65 such exposures occurred between 23 October 1918 and 1 December 1920, and at least three of

\textsuperscript{215} “The most interesting thing [in regard to ‘the ideology of Soviet Communism and “real socialism”’] would be to analyze the extreme tension running through this ideology (which to a large degree doubtless explains its attraction), between a project of resistance to capitalist modernization (if not indeed of a \textit{return to the communal modes of life that modernization destroys}), and a project of \textit{ultra-modernity}, or of the supersession of modernity by a ‘leap forward’ into the future of humanity (not just ‘electrification plus soviets,’ as Lenin’s slogan of 1920 had it, but the utopia of the ‘new man’ and the exploration of the cosmos)” (Balibar, \textit{The Philosophy of Marx}, 87).

\textsuperscript{216} On the Orthodox deification of the remains of deceased saints – a more complex matter than the Bolsheviks imagined – see Kenworthy, \textit{The Heart of Russia}, 196.
them were filmed.217 The one “exposure” film that was definitely shown frequently on the agit-trains was the earliest, Exposure of the Relics of Tikhon of Zadonsk (filmed by Petr Novitskii on 28 January 1919),218 much of which consists of one shot depicting the chairman of the Zadonsk Cheka, watched by (according to an intertitle) “members of the Cheka, the [local] Executive Committee, doctors . . .

Archimandrite Aleksandr, Father Innokentii, the brotherhood of monks, parishioners and Red Army soldiers of Zadonsk,” as he unwraps Tikhon’s remains and demonstrates the findings to those assembled and to the camera. The discoveries are recounted in a series of intertitles that preserve a dispassionate tone:

217 Exposure of the Relics of Tikhon of Zadonsk (1919; RGAKFD 416); Exposure of the Relics of Sergius of Radonezh (1919; RGAKFD 423); and the lost Exposure of the Relics of Mikhail of Tver’. (In an undated document, probably from the first half of May 1919, Vertov indicates that 93 meters on the theme “Exposure of the Relics of Mikhail of Tver’” were shot but not used (RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 381, l. 9); they seem to have been released at some later point.) Although Exposure of the Relics of Aleksandr Nevskij (RGAKFD 12717) and Exposure of Relics in the Aleksandr-Nevskij Monastery (RGAKFD 26) evidently date from 1921, they make reference to an earlier opening of Nevskij’s elaborate silver ark on 24 July 1917, when clergy at the monastery decided that it might be best, during that time of military and political crisis, to move the ark elsewhere and transfer the relics to a wooden container. The 1921 films propose to verify the results of that 1917 exposure, carried out by churchmen, and are thus perhaps better termed "re-exposure" films. A few more were made during the anti-religious campaigns of 1929-1930. My historical information on the exposures comes from Jennifer Jean Wynot, Keeping the Faith: Russian Orthodox Monasticism in the Soviet Union, 1917-1939 (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004); here 47; Robert H. Greene, Bodies like Bright Stars: Saints and Relics in Orthodox Russia (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 122-159; Scott M. Kenworthy, The Heart of Russia: Trinity-Sergius Monasticism, and Society after 1825 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Listov, Istoriia smotrit v ob’ektiv, 188-199; Listov, Rossiia, Revoliutsiia, Kinematograf, 105-106.

218 Greene, Bodies like Bright Stars, 153. This film was also shown with great success in Budapest on 19 June 1919, during the Bela Kun period (Letopis’, 295).
Let us go on to expose what was beneath the clothing... The bones of the chest cavity and backbone had been replaced by an iron carcass, beneath which, in a pile of wadding and rags, they found a handful of decayed bones.

In the wadding were discovered fragments of shinbone which had disintegrated into powder.

Through what was no more than an opening cut into a glove, devotees had been kissing [wadding] wrapped in flesh-colored cardboard.

The version I have seen concludes with an ironic citation from the Holy Synod's Anniversary Collection on Tikhon of Zadonsk -

“...The body of St. Tikhon, notwithstanding its 78-year stay in the ground, was preserved without decaying thanks to the benefaction of God.”

- and adds that this quote appeared in the Collection’s 20th edition, “published by the Most Holy Synod in 1911... on page 27,” thus contributing to the “scientific” demeanor of the entire presentation.219

The film incorporates a couple of shots of crowds gathered in the monastery square, presumably during or in anticipation of the exposure. They are filmed with backs turned to the camera, imparting a sense of the intensity with which those witnesses were awaiting the results of the procedure. A penultimate image of a skull, with eye, nose and mouth cavities stuffed with cotton wadding, is matched by a final image of a largely expressionless crowd, apparently “reacting” in some hard-

219 The film I have seen is somewhat illogically arranged, with material introducing the city of Zadonsk and the main protagonists appearing at the film’s midpoint; there is, however, no original montage list with which to compare it. Exposure of the Relics of Aleksandr Nevskij (RGAKFD 12717) strongly emphasizes the presence of experts (medical, cultural, religious, juridical, historical) at the exposure, and incorporates still more documentary citation, including an image of a handwritten official church statement about the relics apparently from 1917.
to-read way to the exposure. In fact, “general,” uninvited audiences were almost
certainly not present at the exposure, though they did file past the unsealed
remains, usually kept inside a church or chapel, in the days following. It is difficult
not to take these images of audience as figures for those watching and responding to
the Tikhon of Zadonsk film itself, and specifically to the way that moving
photography corroborates, preserves and propagates the exposure’s anti-theatrical
lesson: what were thought to be timeless remains are revealed by cinema to be but
clothed wadding, carapace, and “flesh-colored cardboard” on top of bones.
The Exposure of the Relics of Sergius of Radonezh - in whose production Vertov was controversially involved, as we will see in a moment – presents an unsealing carried out on 11 April 1919 at the Trinity-Sergius Lavra, most famous of all Russian Orthodox monasteries, and adopts a more tendentious manner from the outset. After providing a view of the town of Sergiev (later Zagorsk, today Sergiev Posad) – "built on a lie," an intertitle informs us – and of stock footage of a religious procession, the film depicts a huge crowd outside the Trinity Cathedral, waiting to see the results of the exposure. After members of the local Executive Committee and other representatives arrive, Archimandrite Ioann is shown, filmed from the top or
head-end of the coffin, meticulously unwrapping the body of the saint, until “Doctor Popov” steps in to examine the entirely unsealed remains. The film concludes more polemically than does Tikhon:

Swindling the wretched, poor and ignorant people out of their last hard-earned cent, for five hundred year the priests and monks nasally intoned: “And here as the sun rose, your good remains were found to be imperishable . . .” - above this heap of decayed rags, dirt, dead moths and traces of bone.220

Throughout the brief film, shots of the exposure are intercut with images of the crowd outside the church – again, presumably “looking on” but in fact not actually observing the procedure.221 The film’s image track culminates with a view of Sergius’s exposed skull, followed by a “reaction shot” of the crowd of mostly female faces, gazing in uniformly frontal if oddly varied directions (Image) and a final image of the “decayed rags . . . traces of bone” and so on referred to in the intertitle.

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220 Similar denunciations of clerical deception appear in a couple of places in Exposure of the Relics of Aleksandr Nevskij (RGAKFD 12717).

221 The authorities brought in a few clergy and some local peasants (who had not been informed of what was about to take place) to witness the actual exposure (Kenworthy, The Heart of Russia, 315).
Images 16 and 17: Exposure of the Relics of Sergius of Radonezh (1919). Source: RGAKFD 423
The films and photographs of the exposures were shown widely and free of charge in cities and towns in Central Russia, and (on the agit-trains) beyond as well, especially from 1919-21. The Sergius film was readied in time for an Easter week screening in Moscow in 1919, as requested by Lenin, and “souvenir postcards with pictures of the exhumed saint” were sold in theater lobbies.222

Fundamentally, of course, these films are displays of power – specifically, of the capacity and willingness of the regime to carry out the desecrations, and of cinema’s ability to capture and disseminate “truth” – and of powerlessness, insofar as the theatrics of religion prove incapable of preserving anything.223 It is worth recalling, in this connection, the popular atheistic pamphlet published right around this time (1920) by Mikhail Reisner, Bekhterev’s old colleague at the Psychoneurological Institute – entitled Must we believe in God? – and its optimistic arguments about film as both a cancellation and fulfillment of religion:

If one compares what we achieve today with the help of science and technology with the miracles [wrought by] some old gods or other, then it turns out that we have long since surpassed all these creators and makers and their powers. The briefest overview of our achievements will provide sufficient proof to show who is stronger now, the new human being, or the old God. … And if it’s necessary, to prove the power of humanity, to call up the dead from their graves - to make them speak and to display them to our sight as though alive - then that, too, has been achieved. On the gramophone record, human speech is recorded for an eternity. A reflection of our lives is laid upon cinematic film. And it is only a matter of placing the images of those

222 Greene, Bodies like Bright Stars, 154. Anti-religious museums continued to display the films and photos of the exposures after the Civil War had ended.

223 It should be noted that even some Bolshevik agencies expressed opposition to the exposures. The Narkompros Department of Museum of Affairs protested the unsealing of Sergius’s remains, complaining that “the impending opening of Saint Sergius’s relics caused such anxiety in Sergiev Posad that it was interfering with the work of the Commission for the Preservation of the Lavra in restoration and study” (Kenworthy, The Heart of Russia, 314).
long silent and forgotten into an electrical machine, and they will rise before us as though alive, speaking to us again in their authentic voice and language. It’s not necessary now to turn to the prophetess or the sorcerer; there’s no need to pray to God. We ourselves resurrect the dead for our eyes and ears.224

Reisner’s rhetoric was not unique: a Glavpolitprosvet project for setting up an agitational steamboat in the Volga region in 1921 underscored the need to maintain a photographic lab on the boat in order to demonstrate “the miracle of photography” in a struggle against those “other miracles” that commanded the faith of people in “the most backwards areas.” Photos, the project suggested, would show peasants the ability of image technology to capture large swathes of the past, including images of the village, of village families, speeches by orators, and the boat’s own journeys.225

At the same time, the great effort taken to arrange, carry out and film the unsealings, at considerable expense and during a time of war, suggests that anxiety about the power of religious-theatrical deception also motivated the exposure wave: would these disguises, which had retained their hold over the popular imagination for so long, not continue to do so? The test, of course, would be the actual response of audiences to the exposures; but how was that to be measured, and (still more importantly for us) registered silently on film? Not surprisingly, perhaps, the exposures seem to have generated ambiguous effects, beyond the unrest that


225 GARF f. 2313, op. 2, d. 130, l. 2. Nor were such notions exclusively Russian by any means: see Joseph Landau’s "Mechanized Immortality" (1912) in Kaes et al., eds.,"The Cinematographic Archive," October 148 (Spring 2014): 33-35.
accompanied many of the actual procedures (at Trinity-Sergius, for example). Sources indicate responses ranging from “instantaneous conversion” to atheism to a “religious upsurge,” although the absence of disinterested reportage on the events makes evaluation almost impossible. Cinema’s value as a token of humankind’s superior “strength,” to use Reisner’s vocabulary, nevertheless needed to be underwritten by spectators: thus, the careful suturing-together in the Sergius film of evidence of the saint’s bodily decay with the crowd’s response of . . . dismay? Sadness? Shock? Perplexity? Fear? (Even boredom?) Of course, that penultimate image of the crowd is no document of immediate “response” to the sight of the relics in any case, but rather a constructed “reaction shot” taken from material filmed that day and incorporated into a rhetorical structure: indeed, the image might well register response to the camera, rather than to the exposure.

It becomes important to recall, at this point, that both Vertov and Lev Kuleshov claimed to have made the Sergius film. Clearly, both were involved in some way with its making, although the exact proportions of their respective contributions will probably never be known. It was around this time (probably in 1919) that Vertov took a supervisory role, with Kuleshov handling the shooting and the montage. Vladimir Gardin gave Vertov authority over the shooting in Trinity-Sergius on 10 April 1919, assigning Kuleshov and cameramen Eduard Tisse and Sergei Petrovich Zabazlaev among others to work with him (Listov, Istoriia smotrit v ob’ektiv, 194; “Molodost’ mastera,” in Dziga Vertov v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov, 92). Kuleshov later claimed, however, that several of the assigned cameramen feared violence and did not show up, something confirmed by Gardin in his memoirs (V. R.

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226 Wynot, Keeping the Faith, 46. Sovnarkom acknowledged that numerous priests and monks were killed during the exposure wave (ibid., 47).

227 Greene, Bodies like Bright Stars, 159; Kenworthy, The Heart of Russia, 318.

228 My own conjecture is that Vertov was primarily involved with the film in a supervisory capacity, with Kuleshov mainly handling the shooting and the montage. Vladimir Gardin gave Vertov authority over the shooting in Trinity-Sergius on 10 April 1919, assigning Kuleshov and cameramen Eduard Tisse and Sergei Petrovich Zabazlaev among others to work with him (Listov, Istoriia smotrit v ob’ektiv, 194; “Molodost’ mastera,” in Dziga Vertov v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov, 92). Kuleshov later claimed, however, that several of the assigned cameramen feared violence and did not show up, something confirmed by Gardin in his memoirs (V. R.
1920-21) that Kuleshov conducted his famous experiments with associative montage – which demonstrated how a single, emotionally neutral shot of the face of actor Ivan Mozhukhin was interpreted by spectators as expressing grief, sexual desire or hunger when juxtaposed with (respectively) a shot of a corpse, a woman, or a bowl of soup – and it is hard to avoid reading the intercutting of that crowd at Trinity-Sergius with the relics as another, unsung (but perhaps the earliest?) instance of the “Kuleshov Effect,” regardless of whether Kuleshov or Vertov was responsible for it.229 Not a single face, but a multitude of faces, whose juxtaposition

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with the relics seems to fuse their expressions into a single attitude of stunned
disappointment: or does it?

Why was the shot of the crowd included in any case? To begin with, it affirms quite simply that the exposed relics were seen, then and there (or then- and thereabouts). Exposure for the “camera eye” alone would be insufficient, insofar as the real event sought out – or staged – by the authorities was not mere unwrapping of dust and rags, but an analogous reduction of religious belief to dust and rags, predicated on the notion that the sight of the saint’s intact body had been the material support for that belief. Indeed, the event of exposure would not be complete, as the referent of the film, without an audience’s regard, even a “constructed” one.

If we go on to assume that the film audience, or at least part of it, was perfectly aware of the construction – given that the exposure itself is clearly filmed in the dark interior of a church, while the crowd is seen outside in the Lavra’s square – an intriguing identification effect may have been created here by confronting the film audience with another audience, also temporally (though not geographically) out of sync with the actual exposure, but positioned as “responding” to it within the rhetoric of the film. (If we postulate that the audience in the film was anticipating the exposure, then it appears that Kuleshov-Vertov are generating a peculiar kind of Hitchcockian suspense-effect as well: the onscreen crowd, filmed in the (then) recent past, would be “reacting” to a sight that they will see but which we

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have already seen in the film.) Though physically located in Sergiev, and thus tied “indexically” to the day’s events, that onscreen audience is also a displaced – that is, cinematic – observer of the exposure.\textsuperscript{230}

What this means, additionally, is that both audiences, onscreen and off, are linked by virtue of seeing – entirely figuratively in one case, less so in the other – through the implacable, “objective” gaze of the movie camera. It is far from clear that this can be called an \textit{identification} with the camera. The results of the camera’s gaze are presented confrontationally, as a challenge, as though human powers of sight had suddenly and jarringly been supplanted by other, greater ones that made those earlier powers seem like blindness. Importantly, the audience depicted in the film is primarily made up of women – that is, one of the groups most susceptible to the blandishments of mere image, according to age-old iconoclastic prejudice, and whose vision, therefore, is least trustworthy.\textsuperscript{231} That this audience literally

\textsuperscript{230} The narrative of the \textit{Exposure of the Relics of Aleksandr Nevskij} (RGAKFD 12717) mobilizes strategies of suspense more explicitly and ironically: prior to the actual exposure, an intertitle reads, “The last seals and bolts are removed”; we see a shot of the ark, followed by the title “The ark’s been opened! /Where are the relics?”; and a shot of the empty ark. Ellipsis marks at the end of intertitle phrases also generate that sense of “what’s next.”

\textsuperscript{231} Art historian David Freedberg, discussing the iconoclasm of 2\textsuperscript{nd}-3\textsuperscript{rd} century Christian author Tertullian, notes how women and the illiterate are regarded by this theology as those most susceptible to idols: “[The glory of material images] is worldly, and they seduce. They attract, directly, like the cruel spectacles of the arena and the common and cheap appeals of the theater. Their attractiveness, in short, is like that of women – with respect to whom Tertullian naturally proceeds to advise moderation and caution. But who are the people who are seduced by the obviousness of colors and materiality? Not, of course, those for whom God is the Word, not the intellectuals who live in – or aspire to – so spiritual a realm that they do not need the crutch of the senses or material sensuality in general. Rather, it is women themselves, and the large body of ignorant people – the illiterate above all”
confronts the camera rather than the relics can stand as another figure, not for revelation, but for revelation of the power to reveal.

None of this makes any difference unless the audience’s “response” is the correct one, of course; and we might well feel reluctant to read a response out of that crowd of faces, although we are certainly prompted (or being trained!) to do so associatively, in order to formulate and affirm our own response. It would seem (though it is not certain) that the crowd is gazing intently, even curiously, and most of the faces bear an expression we might call “anxious concentration,” though we might have trouble getting more precise than that, or extracting any sense of their positive or negative evaluation of what is/has been/will be seen. The task of the Kuleshov Effect is to narrow those interpretive choices, by taking inchoate, latent features of the image and activating them in specific ways through carefully chosen juxtapositions: thus, “anxious concentration” on these (local women’s) faces is to be read as causally (and not merely rhetorically) linked to what they now can see – or rather, to what the film audience has seen – and as part of a longer causal chain of observation and reaction that would lead, according to those organizing the exposures, to skepticism.232


Applying the skeptical lesson in reverse, we might be tempted to say that Kuleshov-Vertov are staging a response, through the as-yet-to-be-named “Effect,” in much the same way that the clerics staged Sergius’s bodily persistence: one falsifying “montage” replaces another. And I believe that they are indeed doing this, guided by the assumption that 1) audiences like the one depicted in Sergius are deeply bound by religious particularity (i.e., superstition); and 2) that the representational powers of cinema have the capacity of undoing that inertia even (or perhaps especially) in “simple” spectators like these ones. They are, in other words, staging their own desire, what they want cinema to be able to do to people they assume to be a certain way.

However, it is crucial to recall that the Kuleshov Effect, vulgar exegeses of it notwithstanding, in no way posits a human cognition that mechanically links A to B to C to produce the required interpretation, as though tied to a leash. On the contrary, it presupposes a spectator actively seeking out meaning within texts that are held, at least provisionally, to be coherent.233 (No meaning in Mozzhukhin’s face would be sought at all, if spectators were not concerned to discover it using the clues provided within that array of visual signs to which the “face” belongs.) Because the crowd’s expression(s) remain unreadable, I would argue that it is with an impression of that activity, rather than any articulated expression, that we are left with when looking at those faces in Sergius. Indeed, the capacity to perceive is thematized – for us, if not for Kuleshov-Vertov – at least as much through an exposure of the limits of cinema’s ability to discern and affix meaning, as it is

demonstrated through any confident filmic presentation of “objective evidence,” or by artfully linking and articulating disparate images. The crowd is looking, like the audience watching Sergius, like the camera and cameraman; and all of these looks remain heterogeneous powers, even as they seek to assign a meaning and identity to the looks that surround them.\textsuperscript{234}

These motifs will be taken up, over and over again, in Vertov’s films and writings, in all that counterpoising of “revelatory” non-acted cinema to the artifice of theatre, fiction film, and even the “theatricalization” of everyday bourgeois life; in the plentiful demonstrations of the capacity of editing to direct interpretation; and (in \textit{Man with a Movie Camera} above all) in a meticulous unsealing of the ultimate fetish objects, cinematic images themselves. Just as importantly, he will incorporate countless figurations of individual and collective spectators, as they perceive through the mediation of cameras and projectors, recording and playback devices, newspapers, photographs, or naked eyes and ears. (It may seem strange to designate “naked eyes and ears” as instruments of \textit{mediated} perception, but we will see how Vertovian logic leads to that designation: in the wake of the emergence of technological media, and especially after cinema, no perception can be understood as unmediated. Corneas and cochleas themselves are “machines” of perception – inadequate ones, as it turns out!)

From the magic show in \textit{Kino-Eye} and the simulated meetings of \textit{Stride, Soviet} to the internalized memorial spectacles of \textit{Three Songs of Lenin} and even the

photograph linking the separated married couple at the center of *To You, Front* (1943), the *idea* (and the trope) of audience with all its affiliated terms – reception, enunciation, response, concentration and so on – is central to all of Vertov’s work (this list of examples could be greatly lengthened). Indeed, sometimes Vertov seems to remake the *Sergius* film, and replicate its ideology, in fairly transparent fashion, as in the scene of the Saami people listening to the phonographic and enlightening “voice of the living Lenin” – once again, a listening created by montage - in *One Sixth of the World*. The persistence of audiences in his work may also bear witness to some nostalgia for the immediacy of the agit-train viewing situation, or even (as we will speculate in Chapter Six) to a fear that cinema, by eliminating the possibility of direct interaction between the viewer and the viewed, might be inimical to a truly collective mode of reception.

But what, finally (and as a brief pendant to this long chapter) of the specific juxtaposition of cinema with religion – or rather, of film viewing with religious adoration – in the exposure films? Mikhail Reisner claimed that cinema was capable of resurrection; and although Vertov famously spoke of film as an instrument to be put at the disposal of a demystifying “consciousness” –

> Stupefaction and suggestion – the art-drama’s basic means of influence – relate to that of a religion and enable it for a time to maintain a [person] in an excited unconscious state. […]
> Only consciousness can fight the sway of magic in all its forms.235

-- he also attributed to it a creative power that might be called demiurgic:

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235 *Kino-Eye*, 63, 66.
I am kino-eye. I create a [person] more perfect than Adam...236

Six years after Vertov traveled on the October Revolution, the witty Aleksandr Kurs would note of Vertov’s pet symbol,

*Kino-Eye* is a little terrifying, and for some reason it reminds you of either a Masonic or a theosophical symbol.237

Surely, the exposure films propose a new authority, and new authoritative images, to replace the old, though whether or not the authority (film plus Communism) and those images are themselves “religious” in some sense depends on what meaning attaches to that adjective. That the authority seems to derive from human praxis rather than anything beyond it – “*We ourselves resurrect the dead for our eyes and ears*” – might seem a distinguishing feature, although we will have the chance later to reflect on the salience of “religion” more deeply, when we look at Vertov’s Lenin iconographies. We might suggest, again preemptively, that Vertov will create not a religion, but a *myth* of cinema, but now in philosopher Hans Blumenberg’s sense: a device for managing, and even incorporating all those often brutally recalcitrant differences – of geography, of culture, of language, of class and so on – into a single representational frame that will articulate them all (“a visual bond between the workers of the whole world”).238

236 Ibid., 17.


In the meantime, to be sure, the tropes of religion – transcendence and sacrifice above all – will enter Vertov’s discourse as they did Kalinin’s, and indeed that of early Soviet culture as a whole, partially as a reaction to that hurling-together of disaster with revolutionary triumph that characterized the period.239 I conclude with this cryptic verse dated 1 October 1921, written by Vertov in the midst of the devastating famine that had begun in the spring of that year, would ultimately take five million lives, and on which Vertov would report in his first Kino-Pravda about nine months later:

To whistle.
A death-\textit{khronika}.
Wan
With leaves.
A two-step of events.
Funerals of centuries,
Primers with yats, 240
Tsarist civil servants with whips,
Archbishops with crosses,
Alleluia in an eight-voiced canon
And through
Intestinal worms of German measles
\ldots
and through
the dim honeycombs of sadness
Christ the mechanic gazes
Intently,
With an electric eyelid.
“Enter!”241

\footnote{239 On sacred language in the early Soviet period, see Mark D. Steinberg, Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), esp. 224-281.}

\footnote{240 Here, “primers” refers to school textbooks (e.g., primers in poetry, social science, etc.); “yat” refers to a Russian letter that was replaced by “e” in the first Soviet spelling reform of 1918.}

\footnote{241 RGALI f. 2091, op. 2, d. 228, ll. 23ob-24.