



## **Man With a Movie Camera** **By Yuri Tsivian**

"Never had I known that these mechanical noises could be arranged to sound so beautiful," said Charlie Chaplin after he saw Vertov's *Enthusiasm* in London – a sound film, yet not a talkie, exactly the point where Chaplin wanted sound cinema to stay. "Mr. Dziga Vertov is a musician." We remember *Enthusiasm* for its exhilarating soundtrack, just as Vertov's silent films are mainly remembered for their stunning visuals. Yet Vertov's silents were not about images alone. Years before *Enthusiasm*, the Kinoki insisted that, regardless of whether you heard it or not, sound was a legitimate factor in editing (they called this factor the "Radio-Ear"). This point of the Kinoki theory was increasingly pressed as Vertov took it further into the Twenties. In various essays and interviews concerning his last silent films, Vertov would typically present *One Sixth of the World* as a film experiment with "radio-thematic words," refer to *The Eleventh Year* as a "visible-audible film" and stress that *MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA* marked a transition from the "Cinema-Eye" to the "Radio-Eye" – which term, as opposed to the "Radio-Ear," signified the future confluence of the two media, not exactly sound cinema, but rather an ideal alloy combining the immediacy of wireless with the visuality of film. As Vertov wanted this trajectory to suggest, the Kinoki's interest in images was giving way to a new interest in sound.

This shift in interest responded to the general feeling in the Soviet Union of the late Twenties that, politically, cinema was over and radio was in. The end of the Twenties saw a rapid growth of amateur crystal receivers (by 1929 the Union-wide radio network reached 4,000 installations) which, in the semi-illiterate country that Russia still was in the Twenties, made it look like a powerful vehicle for organizing the masses. If earlier it was cinema that was seen as "the most important of all arts" in its ability to triumph over distances and convert nations into communism, in 1928 the Commissar for Education Anatolii Lunacharsky relegated the task to radio: "We must gradually conquer the radio waves both inside and outside our country to promote our goal of creating a new arena in which our voice must resound and our truths ring out, and where a heightened class struggle will take place. We support and proclaim the principle of class struggle across the radio waves." The invention of the loudspeaker made this prospect look all the more real. It is the image of this recently invented radio loudspeaker that you will find appearing time and again in a central sequence of *MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA*, suggestively displayed against the background of a star-marked world map watched by a cavalryman, sometimes with Vertov's own left ear proudly superimposed on the loudspeaker's cone. Vertov knew what he was talking about: In its reliance upon the "Radio-Ear" factor, *MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA* invades the territory of sound cinema as far as a silent film can reach.

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