The films of Dziga Vertov display a persistent fascination with travel. Movement across vast spaces is perhaps the most recurrent motif in his oeuvre, and the cine-race \textit{kino-probeg}\textsuperscript{1}—a genre developed by Vertov’s group of filmmakers, the Kinoks\textsuperscript{1}—stands as an encompassing metaphor for Vertov’s own work. His cinematographic journeys transported viewers to the most remote as well as to the most advanced sites of the Soviet universe, creating a heterogeneous cine-world stretching from the desert to the icy tundra and featuring customs, costumes, and cultural practices unfamiliar to most of his audience.

Vertov’s personal travelogue began when he moved from his native Bialystok\textsuperscript{2} in the ex–Pale of Settlement to Petrograd and later to Moscow, from where, having embarked on a career in filmmaking, he proceeded to the numerous sites of the Civil War. Recalling his first steps in cinema, Vertov described a complex itinerary that included Rostov, Chuguev, the Lugansk suburbs, and even the Astrakhan steppes.\textsuperscript{3} In the early 1920s, when the film distribution network was severely restricted by the Civil War and uneven nationalization, traveling and filmmaking were inseparable. Along with other filmmakers, he used an improvised

\textsuperscript{1} This article is part of my broader research “Envisioned Communities: Representations of Nationalities in Non-Fiction Cinema in Soviet Russia, 1923–1935” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Central European University, 2004). I would like to warmly thank my teachers and friends for sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm throughout this long journey. With special gratitude to the late Neia Zorkaia, Alexander Deriabin, Anna Geréb, Péter Kenéz, Naum Kleiman, Evgenii Margolit, and Balázs Trenčesényi. I would also like to thank Yuri Tsivian for inviting me to take part in such exciting research on the polemics of Dziga Vertov’s early works. I thank Christopher Ryan, Malcolm Turvey, and Rachel Churner for their help with editing the text.

2. In Belarusian: Belastok; in Russian: Belostok. Located in northeastern Poland near the border with Belarus. After the third partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795 it belonged to the Prussian Kingdom, then after the Peace of Tilsit signed in 1807 it passed to Russia. In the years 1920–39 the city was again part of independent Poland. In September 1939 it was annexed by the Soviet Union as a consequence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and since 1945 it has been a part of Poland.
3. Russian State Arts and Literature Archive (hereafter RGALI) f. 2091, op. 1, d. 179, ll. 16–17.

\textit{OCTOBER 121, Summer 2007, pp. 19–40. © 2007 October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.}
distribution network of cine-trains [kino-poezda] and traveling projectors [pered-vizhki] to make and exhibit his films.

Traveling remained a lifelong preoccupation for Vertov. His spatially most ambitious film, A Sixth Part of the World [Shestaia chast’ mira] (1926), features a cine-race across the Soviet universe stretching from Dagestan villages to Siberian forests. It creates a highly ambiguous image of a “union of Soviet borderlands,” which earned the author both high praise as an “epic cine-poet” and vilification as an “exoticism-hunter.” In this essay, I situate this unjustly overlooked work within the context of early travel films and point to the structural and conceptual innovations introduced by Vertov into this genre. I also reinsert the work into the context of its reception and briefly outline the further development of the travel motif in Vertov’s later films and film scripts.

Local Sights, Global Visions: Exoticism and Patriotism in Early Travel Films

Long before the appearance of cinema, fascination with remote and unfamiliar peoples and places was catered to by literature, drawing, painting, and travel photography. Colonial expansion, military advances, and commercial exploitation created the ideal conditions for the merging of education, entertainment, propaganda, and advertisement in both verbal and visual travel accounts. The world seemed easily accessible via a variety of images not only to travelers, but also to those who familiarized themselves with the travels of others. By the 1910s, travel films had become a typical part of the composite programs produced and distributed by all major film companies. Early travel cinema evolved in three main


5. The contributions to the debate over the film are translated in Tsivian, Lines of Resistance, pp. 182–256. For an overview of A Sixth Part of the World in the context of construction of the Soviet space in cinema, see Widdis, Visions of a New Land, pp. 108–11.


directions that affected the construction of ethnic and national imagery: ethnographic research, popular educational films, and commercial cinema shot against an “ethnographic” background.  

Along with “exotic” lands, filmmakers also explored and recorded local contexts, motivated by the desire to educate and inspired by ongoing nation-building. This was especially true during World War I, when the cinema was viewed as an important means for encouraging patriotism and mobilizing popular support for the war. Even after the war, travel films often continued to present local cultures in national terms, ascribing a symbolic and cultural unity to natural vistas.


11. For example, Wein-Weib-Gesang (Willy Achsel, 1924) fused publicity for the wine industry with a patriotic narrative about the “Germanic” landscape. Der Rhein in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart (Felix Lampe and Walter Zürn, 1922) featured the river as a symbolic center, unifying German culture both historically and geographically: the visitor not only viewed the monuments of the past but saw history itself “coming alive” in staged episodes, ranging from the Roman Empire to the Napoleonic wars, from the Nibelungen to the life of Beethoven.
Travel and scenic films quickly became popular in Russia, and locally filmed travelogues, undertaken for commercial as well as educational reasons, appeared alongside imports. The production of travel films in Russia started in 1907, when the regional office of Pathé released the first film in the series _Travel through Russia_ [ _Puteshestvie po Rossii_ ]. Numerous other companies followed, producing short scenic films covering different towns and areas of Western and Central parts of Russia, the Caucasus, Northern Russia, and Siberia. The various peoples (“types”) also began to be recorded on film, contributing to Russia’s self-image as an imperial power.

Following the European pattern as well as the ideology of “enlightening” [ _prosvetitelstvo_ ] of the 1860–70s, which championed spreading the values of reason and knowledge among the masses, numerous organizations in Russia attempted to turn cinema into “useful entertainment.” Scenic films “advertising” national landscapes as healthy and rich environments were produced and distributed by the most diverse institutions. Along with such established studios as Pathé, Gaumont, and Khanzhonkov, film theaters often purchased and released films by amateurs. Furthermore, noncinematographic organizations became involved in film production. For example, the sector of Hygiene, Upbringing, and Education of the Society for Preserving National Health in Nizhnii Novgorod reedited footage by A. Digmelov, P. Kobtsov, and N. Efremov to make _Baku, Batum and the Caucasian Seashore_ [ _Batum i Kavkazskoe poberezhe’_ ] (both 1911) and _Over the White Sea_ [ _Po Belomy moryu_ ] (1913); the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Science released the five-part expedition film _Travel to Kamtka_ [ _Puteshestvie po Kamchatke_ ] (1911); and the Agricultural Museum of the Ministry of Agriculture and State Property produced the four-part educational film _Peasant Riches of South Russia_ [ _Krestianskie bogatstva yuga Rossii_ ] (1912) demonstrating the success of the Stolypin agrarian reforms.

Some scenic films fused nonfiction footage with staged episodes: a company called Prodafilm released a film on St. Petersburg entitled _On the Deserted Shores_ [ _Na beregu pustynnykh voln_ ] (1911), in

which the city was featured in the dream-sequences of Peter the Great. Not only Russian imperial sites were presented in the early travel films. In 1913, the Jewish film company Mizrakh in Odessa released a feature-length documentary called *Life of the Jews in Palestine* [*Zhizn’ evreev v Palestine*], which consisted of 250 fragments showing a journey to Palestine from Odessa and various aspects of the everyday life of the settlers.

World War I restructured the existing film market, put an end to numerous successful enterprises, and inspired many former employees of large transnational companies to start their own businesses. As in other countries, the state viewed cinema as an effective means of promoting patriotism, and travel films expanded their itineraries to include the front lines and battlefields: *Caucasus, Turkey, the Balkans: Montenegrin Army at War* [*Kavkaz, Turtsia, Balkany. Chernogorskaia armia na voine*] (1914); *Russian Galicia* [*Russkaia Galitsia*] (1914); *The Bloody Path of Our Heroes* [*Krovaavyi put’ nashikh geroev*] (1915); *Under the Russian Flag* [*Pod russkim znamenem*] (1915). The border between “educational” cinema and propaganda became virtually nonexistent: films were supposed to evoke patriotic feelings by depicting the war as a national mission. Many war films combined footage from the front with staged scenes and carried a consoling message of “civilizational dominance” to viewers. The victory they depicted on screen seemed not merely possible but real.

The Soviet state also viewed film as a means of education, and the production of “enlightening” cinema was listed among the primary goals of nationalized film production. When the Soviet authorities took control of the film industry, they found dozens of travel films in the storehouses of Khanzhonkov, Drankov, the Skobelev Committee, and other Russian film studios. Of nonfiction films expropriated from the Khanzhonkov studio alone, 87 negatives out of 337 were locally produced or imported travel films. Yet the “scenic patriotism” of the early Russian travelogues initially seemed irrelevant to Soviet ideology: emphasizing class over nation as a unifying principle, the new ideologists had no need to endorse national landscapes. The expropriated materials were rarely put to use, and most of the negatives and positives, probably already in poor condition, remained improperly stored until they disappeared. While some reels were found later, the majority, according to the 1923 report, “most probably went to make

17. Ibid., p. 107.
21. The decree on the nationalization of the film and photo industry was issued on August 27, 1919, by the Sovnarkom RSFSR. Viktor Listov, *Rossia, Revolyutsia, Kinematograf* (Moscow: Materik, 1995).
In the first years of Soviet production, travel films were conspicuously absent from the market, replaced by the straightforwardly political agitki and pragmatic educational films on hygiene or the use of agricultural and industrial equipment. The thematic shift clearly testifies to the priorities of the new regime: in 1922, only 30 films out of 134 distributed by the central Goskino studio could be classified as belonging to the scenic or traveling type.

The representational strategies of early Soviet cinema were greatly influenced by Soviet nationality policy, in particular Lenin's proclamation of the nations' right to self-determination. The Nationality Commissariat headed by Stalin promoted national coexistence rooted in the utopian image of an organic harmony, where "all nationalities are the blooming trees of one garden of humankind." The concepts of proletarian internationalism, national specificity, organic unity, and cultural backwardness were all incorporated into Soviet national policy. The resulting approach, articulated by 1923, was named nationalization [natsionalizatsia], later renamed indigenization [korenizatsia], and concentrated on the creation of new national elites and the preparation of local administrative cadres from the representatives of the titular nationality in each autonomous national unit.

By the mid-1920s, filmmakers gradually began to record the plurality of the cultures and peoples of the Soviet state. While consistently emphasizing the national diversity of the Soviet Union, however, the authorities did not provide

23. GARF f. 4085, op. 12, d. 712, l. 262ob; GARF f. 4085, op. 12, d. 712, l. 75ob. Some of the prerevolutionary films, however, were re-released by the Soviet studios in the mid-1920s—among them Altai Natural Resort [Altaiskii Zapovednik] (1913); The Crimean Grand Canyon [Bol'shoi kanion Kryma] (1913); and Everyday Life of Some Crimean Ethnicities [Kartina byta nekotorykh narodnostei Kryma] (1913). Vishnevskii, Dokumental'nye fil'my, pp. 162–63.

24. Characteristically, the 1925 list of films acceptable for the workers' clubs did not include a single Russian-produced nonfiction travel film. Only one fiction film from the list, Valley of Tears [Dolina slez] (1924), was filmed in the Altai region. It was presented as "interesting only for illustrating ethnographic lectures." See "Fil'my, priemlennye dlia rabochikh klubov," ARK 2 (1925), pp. 41–42.

25. GARF f. 4085, op. 12, d. 714, ll. 43–75.


them with clear directions on how to represent this diversity. Indeed, it was not easy to combine the depiction of cultural variety with the advancement of a universal Communist culture. The first rounds of discussion concentrated on “adequacy” and “anti-exoticism” in Soviet cinema. Yet “showing the East without embellishment” proved to be a difficult task. Filmmakers working on national material were often not familiar with the cultures they were filming, and their films received legitimate criticism.

The appearance of the first films representing the new multinational state was accompanied by a debate in the press about the need for travel films and arguments for the inclusion of nonfictional, nonstaged footage. These arguments squared perfectly with Vertov’s insistence on “life caught unaware,” the credo of the Kinoks. Following Vertov’s “cine-races,” the first Soviet feature-length expedition film, The Great Flight [Velikii perelet] (1925), was made by Vladimir Shneiderov and the young cameraman Georgii Blyum and covered Moscow-Beijing travel. Featuring a flight with stops throughout Mongolia and China, the film’s linear itinerary and straightforward ideological stance was complemented by attention to ethnographic details; it enhanced the role of cinema in visualizing the centrifugal expansion of Soviet ideology. The success of The Great Flight showed that there was interest in nonfiction expedition films in the Soviet Union. Within this context of growing interest in further “discovering” the Soviet Union and making ideologically compliant, educationally useful, and financially profitable films, Vertov set out to “embrace” in his next film the whole Soviet universe.

A Sixth Part of the World: Advertising the Soviet Universe

A Sixth Part of the World was not only a turning point in Vertov’s personal career, it also revised and challenged the previously established genre of travel cinema. According to the director, it was envisioned as being “more than a film . . .
was] the next stage after the concept of ‘cinema’ itself.”

Originally commissioned by the State Trade Organization (Gostorg) as an advertisement, the film was to depict Gostorg’s place in the extensive networks of the Soviet and world economy; such an undertaking was rather common in the 1920s, when state corporations emerged as a new patron of nonfiction cinema. Yet the feature-length film released in December 1926 did not in the least resemble a typical promotion film. Its original plan began with the peasants producing food and Gostorg selling the products and using the profit to buy machinery so that the peasants could produce ever more food. Gostorg was thus to feature as a crucial link between the Soviet producers in the countryside and the foreign industrial world, and the entire Soviet Union appeared to be organically incorporated into the world economy, even if the opposition of the “two worlds” was emphasized on the ideological level. What finally emerged differed markedly from a company advertisement and was called at once a monumental, epic, lyrical, and poetic vision of the Soviet Union. The idea of marketing the state trade monopoly was transformed into the “wholesale” promotion of the ideological and political foundations of the new regime, combining its economic rationale with a progressivist discourse. While corresponding to the mercantile ideology of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the unorthodox idea of “selling” the image of the developing Soviet Union to the broadest possible audience required, from the director’s point of view, an equally revolutionary visual form.

33. The cameramen of the film were Ivan Beliakov, Samuil Bendersky, Nikolai Konstantinov, Alexander Lemberg, Nikolai Strukov, Iakov Tolchan, and Petr Zlotov. See “Vertov’s Silent Film: An Annotated Filmography,” in Tsivian, Lines of Resistance, p. 408.

The Soviet Union in Vertov’s film is a mosaic, a multinational union of borderlands, opposed to the hostile external world with which it nevertheless remains economically connected. The director consciously selected sites and cultures that would seem remote, unknown, and exotic to the majority of urban viewers, and discarded the familiar contrasts of town versus village and center versus periphery. The film’s structure consists of loosely connected parts, each with a different focus. The first part represents the external, alien, distant “land of Capital.” Opening up with an aerial shot, this world is introduced by an omnipresent narrator, whose “voice” speaks by way of the intertitles: “I see you.” A petit bourgeois party, a jazz performance, a dance hall, and the daily routine of the steel factory are edited so as to contrast leisure with work, spending with construction, and the exploiters with the exploited. The structure of the episode reminds one of the plan for Vertov’s unrealized études “Hands,” “Legs,” “Eyes.” As in these sketches, Vertov “dissects” his characters, only to paste them back together into phantom images of the bourgeoisie, consisting of a moving collage of hands, legs, and heads. They are contrasted with the solemnity of a panoramically shot steel factory, where the movements of the machines almost completely replace individual workers. Demonstrating in practice the constructive potential of cinema in line with his earlier statements, Vertov “take[s] the most agile hands of one, the fastest and most graceful legs of another” and creates not “a man more perfect than Adam,” but his exact opposite, the people of the passé world of capitalism.

This world was created from a variety of sources, fragmented and pasted together with the intention of creating a new unity. Vertov’s “recycling” of material starts already at the level of sources—the director uproots the footage from its

original context and attributes a new meaning to it. Such appropriation did not pass without controversy: Vertov was accused by beginner-filmmaker Nikolai Lebedev of using footage from his forthcoming film Through Europe [Po Evrope] without permission.37 Vertov not only used footage by local filmmakers but also integrated fragments of imported films, among them industrial films from Germany, which was a source of worry for the studio functionaries seeking to export the film.38 Leaving aside the legal issues of using film fragments from other sources, it is important to emphasize that this “pastiche aesthetic” was a crucial element of the film’s structure. In contrast to linear expedition films, whose forward-moving itinerary helped create an identifiable unity of time and space at each particular moment, Vertov sought to ascribe symbolic significance to spaces, identifying them not by their geographical locations but by political and economic conditions. His image of the “World of Capital” represents an economic system, geographically loosely covering Western Europe, the U.S., and the colonies. Following this logic, the first part is built on dissonant contrasts: slavery and exploitation, poverty and abundance, work and leisure.

The remainder of the film uses contrasts very differently. Opposite “Capital” the Soviet World is presented as a site where spatial variety, economic diversity, and cultural richness never threaten the unity of the variegated parts. Vertov’s film was produced in the heyday of the indigenization policy; Francine Hirsch identifies the year 1926 as a crucial moment in the “conceptual conquest of lands and peoples.”39 A Sixth Part of the World embraces Soviet federalism, transforming it into a utopian space with a mosaic of cultures. The one-time advertisement film strives to create a new unity, based on the announcement of a paradigmatic declaration of collective rights, addressing the whole population of the USSR:

YOU, WHO BATHE YOUR SHEEP IN THE SURF OF THE SEA
AND YOU, WHO BATHE YOUR SHEEP IN A BROOK
YOU IN DAGESTAN VILLAGES
YOU IN A SIBERIAN VIRGIN FOREST

37. The footage used, according to Lebedev, included “1 Mexican foxtrot, 2 fascists, 3 fascist cavalry, 4 Mussolini, 5 Italian king, 6 Catholic priests, 7 magnetic crane, 8 mechanic unloading of wagons, 9 clips for transporting blanks, 10 Bavarian police, 11 night footage of Berlin, and so on.” See a detailed complaint about Vertov’s “borrowings” from Lebedev’s footage in Archive Muzei Kino, Moscow, dossier 26, file 120, written on November 6, 1926. See also Nikolai Lebedev, “A Letter to the Editor,” Kino-front 7–8 (1927), p. 32; trans. in Tsivian, Lines of Resistance, p. 244. Lebedev is not credited among the cameramen for A Sixth Part of the World.

38. See Benjamin’s diary entry about discussion of the possibility of exporting the film to Germany: “I had just hit upon an unhappy idea of acquiring stills from A Sixth Part of the World. . . . Whereupon he [Pansky] began feeding me with the most abstruse line: the film was not to be mentioned abroad, its footage contained clips from foreign films, their precise provenance was not even clear, and complications were to be feared,” from Moskauer Tagebuch (1926–27); excerpt trans. in Tsivian, Lines of Resistance, p. 210.

YOU
CAREFUL NOT TO GET LOST
YOU IN THE TUNDRA
ON THE PECHORA RIVER
ON THE OCEAN
AND YOU
WHO HAVE OVERTHROWN THE POWER OF CAPITAL IN OCTOBER
WHO HAVE OPENED THE ROAD TO NEW LIFE
FOR THE NATIONS EARLIER OPPRESSED IN THIS COUNTRY
YOU TATARS
YOU BURIATS
UZBEKS
KALMYKS
KHAKKASS
MOUNTAINEERS OF THE CAUCUS
YOU, KOMI PEOPLE
OF THE KOMI REGION
AND YOU, OF A DISTANT VILLAGE

YOU, THE OWNERS OF THE SOVIET LAND
HOLD IN YOUR HANDS A SIXTH PART OF THE WORLD

Bringing together various localities and nations, Vertov creates a structure that preserves cultural variety while looking forward to a future when old patriarchal systems will give way to more egalitarian communities. This spatial variety contrasted

40. Tsivian, Lines of Resistance, pp. 188–89. Vertov cooperated with Rodchenko on intertitles of the film, which were made in Constructivist style. See Petric, Constructivism in Film, p. 11. [See also Yuri Tsivian’s essay elsewhere in this issue of October.—Ed.]
with the mainstream image of the Soviet Union of the period, which was reinforced during almost every public celebration: Vertov downplays the prominent center in his narrative, addressing mainly the peoples of the Soviet borderlands. Furthermore, he challenges the original meaning of the “one sixth of the world” metaphor introduced in Sergei Esenin’s late poem Soviet Russia, written in 1924. Esenin’s notion of Rus’ refers to a homogeneous Russian space, and expresses sadness about the disappearing rural-patriarchal world of traditional culture. As if speaking on behalf of the “other youngsters who sing other songs,” the generation that Esenin refused to understand, Vertov rejects this Russified homogeneity, emphasizing instead a new unified mosaic that stretches in his film “from the Kremlin to the Chinese border . . . from the beacon beyond the Arctic Circle to the Caucasian mountains.” The world in A Sixth Part of the World is not only geographically heterogeneous, but also culturally fragmented, with the Kremlin walls becoming one geographical reference among many.

Contrary to the enclosed spaces in the section on “Capital,” the Soviet sites are vast outdoor spaces. Fields, rivers, mountains, seas, oceans, forests, and other natural vistas constitute the new organism. The unity of this mosaic world is created through montage, making the structure of the film a perfect example of Vertov’s “interval theory,” derived from the contrapuntal structure of a musical phrase: “The organization of movements is the organization of intervals in each phrase. Each phrase has its rise, peak, and decline. A film is, therefore, composed of phrases [shots] as each phrase is composed of intervals.” Vertov’s critics pointed to the unusual rhythmic organization of the film, described on various occasions as “musical” or “poetic.” While using musical or poetic structures, however, Vertov remained loyal to the Constructivist principles he also expressed in writing: “Using bricks, one can make an oven, the Kremlin wall, and many other things. From filmed material, one can construct various films. Just as one needs good bricks to make a solid house, so one needs good film material to organize a good film.”

A Sixth Part of the World exploits to the full the potential of the camera “to see without limits and without distance.” The main principle in the construction of

42. “But even when / The tribal enmity will pass / And lies and sorrow will disappear / All over the world / I will sing praise / With my whole poetic essence / To a sixth part of the world / With a brief name Rus’” (my translation—O. S.).
44. On the visual analogies and rhythmic segments that make Vertov’s films similar to Futurist poems and further on the concept of the rhythm of cinematographic poems, see Anna Lawton, “Rhythmic Montage in the Films of Dziga Vertov: A Poetic Use of the Language of Cinema,” Pacific Coast Philology 13 (October 1978), pp. 44–50. For some explorations in the pictorial context relevant to Vertov’s work, see Alexandra Shatskikh, “Malevich and Film,” The Burlington Magazine 135, no. 1084 (July 1993), p. 472; and Petric, Constructivism in Film, pp. 13–44.
46. Ibid., p. 34.
unity is movement. Movement serves as the main source of thematic and visual rhyming in the editing. While the second part is structured by the address “You,” calling on the variety of nationalities and ethnicities of the Soviet universe, the next episode concentrates on the possessive pronoun “Yours,” visually “enumerating” the natural and industrial resources that have come into the possession of the new Soviet collective. The intertitles are paralleled with the images of the enumerated resources: “your factories / your plants / your oil / your cotton / and sheep / wool / your butter / fish / your flax / your tobacco. . . .”

Vertov’s use of technical “tricks” in A Sixth Part of the World is sparing and always conditioned by the internal logic of the film. Contrary to the speeded-up motion of the first part, intended to represent the agony of “Capital,” the rest of the film unfolds in the standard tempo, with the only other use of fast motion coming in the episode when ships are being loaded with natural resources for export. While “the West” is presented via the fragmentation and artificial assemblage of the phantom-figures of the bourgeoisie, the abundance of the Soviet Union is illustrated by the use of split screens and superimpositions in the scenes portraying factories, agricultural technology, and harvesting, as well as the extensive Gostorg network. Portraying the world of Capital, Vertov uses animation to draw parallels between people and toys, while in the representation of the Soviet world animation is used as a demonstration of technological advancement of the regime: in the fourth part, during the fruit harvesting scene, Vertov makes apples “pack themselves” into boxes and “pile themselves up” in preparation for shipment. Contrary to some critics’ complaints that the viewers are invited to believe this operation does not involve human labor, Vertov envisions the automatization and mechanization of the process that is yet to come.

The director’s next step is to connect all these fragmented images—this is where Gostorg, the main commissioning organization, comes in, as the provider of the vital communication infrastructure without which all of the country’s treasures would remain scattered, isolated, bringing no benefit to the whole entity. The communication network is introduced in the first shot of the fourth part via a close-up of the rolling wheels of the steam engine—a favored modernist image—and intertitles: “Export goods are moved along all the roads of the Soviet land.” Gostorg emerges as the engine and the demiurge of this perpetuum mobile. It triggers the union’s motion and secures its smooth functioning and further development: “where no roads exist at all / where in the span of hundreds of miles / you may not encounter a single soul / through severe frosts / through the snow-drifted limitless tundras / they are moving towards the nearest post of State Trade / to submit their pelts / to be exported to the lands of Capital.”

47. Tsivian, Lines of Resistance, p. 190.
49. Ibid., p. 190.
the intertitles and the image merge into a single composition: the large letters of Gostorg are presented within the frame featuring the railways, with the extended central “T” letter becoming part of the railway line, thus literally turning into a primary means of communication within the USSR.

An obvious fascination with the variety of local customs coexists in *A Sixth Part of the World* with a linear progressivist worldview. According to Vlada Petric, Vertov’s theoretical stance differentiated between the recorded image and its structural role within the film: “Vertov wanted the screen image of man to be truthful to his prototype in reality on an ontological level, while the new vision of man (different from that existing in reality) had to be conceived on the structural level.”50 A combination of reality footage and visionary structure is achieved via editing and intertitles. Advocating active seeing, “Vertov argued that the filmmaker should organize life facts into new cinematic structures which would reflect his own ideology.”51 In this cinematic reality, “the spectacular value of each distinct image in its relations to all the others engaged in the ‘montage battle’” becomes crucial.52 “The main role of Vertovian observation is to penetrate the very core of the events in reality, and at the same time to approach reality bearing in mind the ‘film-thing,’ to be constructed of many ‘film-facts.’”53

Movement across space is further complemented by envisioned changes in time. A vision of a new reality in the future is offered in the final part of the film. There, Vertov marks some existing cultural practices as belonging to the world of the past, only temporarily surviving in the present. The closing episode of the film points to the centrifugal expansion of the Soviet ideology and economic model, spilling over the borders of the Soviet Union to incorporate the rest of the world, from the advanced West to its colonies. The break with old customs is introduced by the following intertitles: “I see the woman has cast away her *yashmak* [veil] / another woman educates the women of the East / young Communist Samoyed is reading the newspaper *Northerner* / Buriats and Mongols are reading the *Buriat-Mongol Pravda* / the Mongol children become members of the Young Pioneers / The deer-herds are assisted by the Polar laboratory / Irrigation canals / help the waterless steppes / The electric bulb lights the peasant hut / the reading hut / and the radio-report / The Volkhov electric plant.”54 The edited sequence illustrates each statement with a short visual account, directly following the intertitles. Similar to changes within the Soviet Union, Vertov attempts to point to—although obviously struggling with a lack of “visual evidence”—changes in the world at large: sympathy for the Soviet Union is illustrated by images of large meetings in Germany, and anticolonial movements are depicted by somewhat haphazardly
Images from A Sixth Part of the World. 1926.
spliced unidentified footage, most probably taken from imported travel films. While the fragment showing a train with indigenous workers passing the camera evoked criticism as inadequate for the purpose it was intended to serve, a somewhat larger question emerges in relation to Vertov’s film as a whole. Even though avowedly anticolonial, was it able to fully escape the colonial “gaze” that dominated early cinematic representations of “exotic” peoples and places?

The heterogeneous image of nations and peoples was the foundation of the Soviet nationality policy. From its very outset, geographical concepts were translated into social and cultural policies, and the categories “East” and “West” were ascribed “developmental” meaning. The declared policy of presenting the “unembellished East” perfectly corresponded to Vertov’s ideas of renouncing the exoticism and stereotypes of fiction film; yet Soviet cinema could not fully escape the use of colonial stereotypes. Approaching colonialism not as a fixed practice but rather as a set of rhetorical topoi used in fiction as much as in nonfiction, Vertov’s film does not square well with the notion of the “savage Other.” But it contains a “confusion of identity and difference, a simultaneous avowal and disavowal of its own authority.” In David Spurr’s opinion, “[t]his fundamental instability makes for a rich profusion of rhetorical forms which often clash with one another, and yet which all enter equally into the matrix of relations of power that characterizes the colonial situation.” While Vertov’s text continuously emphasizes the equality of the represented subjects, as well as repeatedly portraying the world on behalf and from the perspective of the ethnic Other, an analysis of the camera’s “gaze” demonstrates that his modernist ideology nevertheless perpetuates a number of colonial prejudices.

The fifth part of the film exemplifies both the Soviet image of “national hierarchy” and Vertov’s interpretation of the nationality question through a focus on the Samoeds, who inhabit the shores of the Arctic Ocean. It was not the first time this northern people had appeared on the screen: already in the early 1910s a number of travelogues featured the Samoeds’ everyday life and customs. While earlier films concentrated on the daily life of the community, in Vertov’s film the Samoeds appear sitting on the deserted shore of a boundless ocean, motionlessly facing the water. They are described as living in a semi-mythical place “where the sun stays in the sky for half a year and the night lasts for the other half.” Waiting

58. Here I disagree with the argument of Emma Widdis, who argues that in A Sixth Part of the World, “hierarchy was abolished.” See Widdis, Visions of a New Land, p. 111.
59. On the deserted shores (Arctic Ocean) [Na beregy pustynnyh voln (Severnyi Ledovityi Okean)] (1913); Life in Russian Tundra and Everyday Life of the Samoeds [Zhizn’ v russkikh tundrakh i byt samoedov], (1915); Life of the North [Zhizn’ severa] (1914); Fragments from the Samoeds’ Life [Snimki iz zhizni samoedov] (1915); Samoeds and Their Life [Samoedy i ikh zhizn’] (1916). Vishnevskii, Dokumental’nye fil’my, pp. 177, 210, 259, 275.
for the ship, which once a year brings necessary food supplies and other goods in exchange for furs, the Samoeds are portrayed as fully dependent on external supplies, as non-self-sustaining providers of natural resources. The day they spend on the ship is presented as their sole contact with the external, distant, and “progressive” culture. The “primitive” Samoeds embody remoteness and backwardness within the Soviet evolutionary narrative.

The power relations are clearly unequal: the Samoeds are dependent, backward, merged into nature, while the Soviet world enters their patriarchal life as a technologically advanced, progressive, and modern force, “conquering” the space by means of industrial goods and technical equipment and bringing ideological dominance at the same time. As the Samoeds listen to the gramophone recording of Lenin’s speech, the film creates a sender-recipient, active-passive relationship, establishing a cultural hierarchy and a normative direction for development both technologically and ideologically.60 Yet contrary to a structurally similar episode from Nanook of the North (Robert Flaherty, 1922), where an Eskimo family is introduced to the wonders of the gramophone, the Samoeds are represented not as being awed by the technological “miracle,” but rather as being subsumed by the ideology of the Soviet mission civilisatrice, securing the development and prosperity of ethnicities and cultures.

Ironically, Vertov’s representation has a great deal in common with nineteenth-century colonial travel accounts, in which, as Mary Louise Pratt has shown, there is a three-part rhetorical convention: “the landscape is first aestheticized, then it is invested with a density of meaning intended to convey its material and symbolic

60. Compare, for example, with Rudolph Pöch’s “Bushman Speaking into the Phonograph” (1908) and the discussion of it by Assenka Oksiloff in Picturing the Primitive: Visual Culture, Ethnography, and Early Cinema (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 43–57.
richness, and finally it is described so as to subordinate it to the power of the speaker.”61 Apart from the rhetorical claims in *A Sixth Part of the World*, the appropriation of the landscape is undertaken by the camera: panoramic high-angle shots establish the power relations before they are verbally introduced. Yet despite this hierarchy, a mutual dependency underpins the film: the Samoeds, whose life is seen as conditioned by external supplies, also feature as a necessary element in the Soviet Union’s economic machine. According to Vertov, they “advance the future” by trading furs, which are later exchanged for the machinery and equipment needed for the country’s development.

Similar traces of a power hierarchy are found in other parts of the film; *A Sixth Part of the World* fuses Soviet teleological dominance over the variety of the nations with active promotion of national development, emphasizing the importance of education and vernacular languages in line with Soviet nationality policies and worldwide trade in line with the mercantile logic of the NEP. The film features both intrusions into private space and domination over the masses (close-ups of the embarrassed Caucasian women or a high-angle panorama over the marching crowd) along with the equal “camera-subject” relationship, returning to the filmed subjects their right to an autonomous gaze (inclusion of the cinema audience in the narrative, straight looks into the camera). While the mixture of styles is partially explained by the need to use materials from a variety of sources (shot by numerous cameramen who did not always work under Vertov’s direct guidance), the ambiguity is inherent in the very structure and logic of the film, which is both visionary and contains the seeds of Soviet “neo-colonialism.”

The consequences of this experiment affected the rest of Vertov’s career. Having actively relied on intertitles in this film, he later reconsidered his use of both them and “borrowed” material. After *A Sixth Part of the World*, Vertov abandoned the “recycling” of anonymous footage (a “path” revived by Esfir Shub in her composite jubilee film *The Great Road* [Velikii put’] [1927]). For his subsequent films Vertov preferred to work closely with his brother and fellow-Kinok Mikhail Kaufman.62 Clearly, his visual and narrative innovations, as well as the film’s inherent ambiguities, could not but inspire debate among critics and the audience.

**Rhetorical Battles: A Sixth Part of the World Seen by Professionals and a Broad Audience**

Vertov was right to regard his film as groundbreaking; he was nevertheless painfully mistaken in stating that “*A Sixth Part of the World* cannot have critical opponents or critical supporters within the borders of the USSR, since both the

---

62. Their paths parted after *Enthusiasm*. On the following film—*Three Songs of Lenin*—Vertov again worked with different cameramen.
opponents and the supporters are also participants in the film.” The film was released in December 1926, with the first reviews appearing in the press prior to the official premiere. Film critics and filmmakers praised the work as an achievement both formally and thematically in various central and professional newspapers and journals. Among the most enthusiastic early viewers was Izmail Urazov, who stated that the film “has managed, perhaps for the first time, to show all at once the whole sixth part of the world; it has found the words to force us to be amazed, to feel the whole power, and strength, and unity; it has managed to infect the viewer too with lofty emotions, to throw him into the screen.” Yet soon the discussion of the film took an unexpected turn: in January 1927 the first critical articles appeared in regional and thematic newspapers, often written anonymously or under pseudonyms. Following this intensified debate, Vertov was fired from the Sovkino studio.

The film succeeded in polarizing its audiences. While Grigorii Boltianskii, a veteran of newsreels, did not hesitate to declare it the birth of a new film type, “a poem about the Earth,” another critic saw in this work “the first remotely significant ethnographic and newsreel film.” Yet the role of “ethnographic” material was evaluated in different ways. Some saw it as the main value of the film. Others saw the opposition between “us” and the developed “West” as the primary focus, and were disturbed by signs of Soviet backwardness. While many spoke of the authenticity, spontaneity, and genuineness of the recorded episodes, there were also accusations of “artificiality” that qualified them as “pretentious, fanciful, and obscure.” Most critical viewers even accused Vertov of “dragging at the tail end” [khvostizm], stating that “it is absurd and ridiculous to believe that the example of deer, pigs, goats, and those who ‘slash live goats’ and ‘drink warm blood’ could be

65. Izmail Urazov, “Shestaia chast’ mira” (Moscow, 1926); trans. in Tsivian, Lines of Resistance, p. 185.
66. At times, Vertov believed that the critical articles were commissioned by the Sovkino studio management in order to justify his removal.
a convincing construction of socialism.” In a similar vein, other critics protested the film’s “unnecessary exoticism,” claiming that “Samoeds, furs, camels, and Uzbek robes are not the core of our economy.”

Criticisms thus concentrated either on the film’s formal/aesthetic aspects or on its content. The former targeted its complex structure, fast montage sequences, and a discrepancy between the intertitles and the visuals, lamenting its “oratorical repetitions,” “monotonous intertitles,” “moving photographs,” and misplaced “artistic nature photography.” The latter focused on the schematic portrayal of both the capitalist system and the Soviet world, which was seen as lacking “shadows” (no criticism of the NEP, no class struggle) and failing to show enough achievements (no town life, no industry, not enough development within the Soviet Union). Osip Beskin was particularly critical of the “frivolous game of contrasting the working life of the peoples of the USSR with fox-trotting Europe. . . . An even bigger mistake [is] in failing to give us a sense of all the power and the huge scale of European technology, its individual trading apparatus.” Furthermore, Vertov was severely criticized for working without a script. The absence of an approved written text eclipsed Vertov’s insistence on the close editing process, on montage that “does not stop from the very first observation to the finished film.” The absence of a strong narrative coordinating the verbal and the visual was considered a primary sin.

Yet even many of those who praised Vertov’s work overlooked its aim: to demonstrate—with “iron logic”—the emerging construct of unity in diversity of the multinational state. The conceptual power and novelty of Vertov’s work constituted a revision of the conventions of the established genres of both traveling and advertising films; A Sixth Part of the World is a unique example of the advertisement of a new political entity wrapped into an economic rhetoric.

Vertov actively entered the polemic, although his aggressive claims about the “great days which are beating with hammers against the empty heads of our conservative comrades” did not make him any more popular, or win his work any more

appreciation among wider circles. While the representation of a multicultural and multinational Soviet Union became a standard feature of nonfiction, *A Sixth Part of the World* did not go into broad distribution, undermining Vertov’s hope that “by the tenth anniversary of October there must not be a single Tungus who has not seen *A Sixth Part of the World*.”81 This first brave experiment was followed by a growing number of expedition and ethnographic films aimed at familiarizing the audience with the diversity of the Soviet Union.82 However, it was not the film’s formal aspects that provided the final reason for Vertov’s dismissal from Sovkino. Importantly, the primary justification for this decision was the budget overrun and the director’s refusal to work within imposed limits on future projects.83 In the NEP years, financial considerations often won out over ideological ones.

**Conclusion: On Travels Forced and Desired**

After the failure of *A Sixth Part of the World* in distribution, movement acquired different overtones for Vertov: having lost his job at Sovkino he had to move to Kiev, where he began working at the VUFKU studio,84 further experimenting with the traveling pattern. All three films made in the Ukraine—*The Eleventh Year* (1928), *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), and *Enthusiasm* (also known as *Symphony of Donbass*, 1930)—are “cine-races,” uniting diverse sites into a single filmic space. Vertov continued working on developing cinematographic language in accordance with Constructivist aesthetics, seeking to elaborate a purely visual language that would not depend on intertitles.

The end of the 1920s brought Vertov a deserved reward: he traveled to Germany and France, where his films enjoyed a warm reception and where—in Paris—he saw his second brother Boris Kaufman.85 Despite, or perhaps due to, his international success, during this trip Vertov came under fire from Soviet officials who demanded his immediate return to the Soviet Union, after which he was never allowed to go abroad again. Yet the less dynamic the director was forced to

85. Boris Kaufman (1897–1980) was the youngest brother of Dziga and Mikhail Kaufman. He emigrated to France where he worked with Jean Vigo on *A propos de Nice* (1930), *Zéro de conduite* (1933), and *L’Atalante* (1934). After serving in the French army, Kaufman emigrated to Canada as a war refugee. He was hired by John Grierson to be a cameraman for the National Film Board of Canada. Kaufman moved to the United States in 1942, where he shot short subjects and documentaries before being chosen by Elia Kazan as the cameraman for *On the Waterfront* (1954).
become—not only in physical but also in artistic terms—the more his filmed subjects began to move, making up for the immobility of the author with a spectacular conquest of space and time. While the spatial component remained central even in his films about the evolving cults of Lenin (Three Songs About Lenin, 1934) and Stalin (Lullaby, 1937), the centrifugal movement of the early films was replaced by a centripetal structure. His later projects are nevertheless dominated by the travel motif: among them are Three Heroines (1938), a film on female pilots and their nonstop flight from Moscow to the Far East; an unrealized idea for a montage documentary called Day of the World, intended to cover events all over the globe by using foreign and Soviet footage; an unfulfilled plan to film his native Bialystok advocating its incorporation into the Soviet Union; fantasy pieces that featured travels to the moon, and a giant crossing the whole Soviet empire with a few steps. In his last film, To You, Front (1942), the camera crossed the vast steppes of Kazakhstan, uniting into a single entity West and North, Center and East of the republic, as well as connecting it directly to Moscow, following a previously established pattern.

In contrast to the homogenizing expectations of Socialist Realism, the Soviet space in Vertov’s films remained diverse and heterogeneous. Racing to be ahead of time, of expectations, and of others, he perceived the world as open with possibilities and filled with dynamism. He embraced this variety in his works, of which A Sixth Part of the World stands as a paradigmatic yet overlooked attempt. Vertov also sought to give voice to those previously deprived of cinematic expression, albeit occasionally reproducing the dominant and hierarchizing rhetorical devices of colonialism. From its inception to the present day, travel cinema has been haunted by the question “when the world comes within one’s imagistic grasp so tightly, is squeezing the only option?” A Sixth Part of the World stands out as a profoundly different way of seeing the world, offering an important alternative to an affirmative answer.

88. Ibid., p. 237.
89. Ibid., p. 497.
90. See the film proposals “A girl playing the piano” [Devushka igraet na royale] and “Fairy-tale of a giant” [Skazka o velikane], respectively. Ibid., pp. 277–84 and 302–27.