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**Sergey Eisenstein: the use of graphic violence in *Strike* and *Potemkin***

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**Sergey Eisenstein: the use of graphic violence in *Strike* and *Potemkin***

**by**

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**Thesis**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my father, the late Pedro Nassau (b. 22 July 1952-d. 28 May 2012), who always insisted that if I put my mind into something, I can accomplish anything. Nothing is beyond the realm of possibility. Eternal memory to him.

## **Abstract**

### **Sergey Eisenstein: the use of graphic violence in *Strike* and *Potemkin***

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Being a very prominent film director with several recognisable works, Sergey Eisenstein has been studied extensively from all angles. The aim of this dissertation is to analyse his first two movies, *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin*, both of them stand out when seen in the context of 1920s cinema. Both films are known for introducing strong, graphic violence in cinema and at the same time the films shed light on sensitive social issues such as income disparity, government indifference as well as brutal repressions. Partially due to the fact that these two films come from the nascent Soviet Union and the fear that these films may promote Bolshevik-style revolutions in the West, these two movies were either heavily censored or banned altogether in numerous countries during Eisenstein's lifetime, which in some ways helped fuel interest in these two movies because censorship or prohibition made watching these two masterpieces more tempting, and therefore in later years they were given the appreciation and respected both films deserved.

The dissertation is organised in the following manner: (1) Introduction, in which a brief overview of the social and political context of both movies is discussed, (2) A brief description of Eisenstein's ideas and influences, in which the origins of Eisenstein's artistic and political vision is reviewed, (3) a summary and analysis of his first film, *Strike*, (4) a summary and analysis of his second film, *The Battleship Potemkin*, (5) Conclusions, which summarises the results that came from extensive research as well the author's personal motivation for writing this dissertation and finally (6) Bibliography and other works cited.

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## **I- Introduction:**

Eisenstein is revered as one of the most influential film directors not just within the Soviet Union, but well beyond. His influence has permeated far and wide since 1925 and his legacy lives on after his death from a heart attack in 1948. He developed a reputation in the industry, not only for his cinematic techniques that have been copied and imitated the world over, but also for pioneering the use of strong, explicit violence in his early work, most noticeably within *Strike* (*Стачка*) and *Battleship Potemkin* (*Броненосец Потёмкин*); both released in 1925. Both films are revolutionary politically and artistically, as they put his theory of montage to the test, crosscutting and intercutting sequences. Adding to the fray was explicit, bloody violence which was almost unheard of in 1920s cinema. The films' political and ideological connotations intensified the controversy surrounding their debut.

The main argument of this thesis is that Sergey Eisenstein uses strong, bloody violence in his first two movies not only as an artistic expression to merely create shock value, but also as an instrument to create sympathy for the victims who get killed and did not deserve to perish. Eisenstein aims to teach the audience that neglecting social issues such as poverty, unpleasant working conditions as well as social discrepancies can and will often trigger revolutions, or other forms of severe social discontent. Contrary to popular belief, Eisenstein did not make these to promote the Bolshevik revolution in other countries, but rather to reveal how the conditions in the old Russian Empire drastically made it possible for a Revolution to ensue and shock the world. In short, he wanted to talk



about the Russian Revolution as told from those who experienced it or actively partook in it.

The main purpose of this thesis is to elaborate on the fact that Eisenstein had no qualms using unrelenting violence in *Strike* and *Potemkin*, in fact strong imagery plays a very important role in their respective narratives, and in both films the application of shocking imagery had been employed not only to achieve a political or artistic message, but also exploit the power of human emotions to their limits. The finale of *Strike*, *Drama on Deck* and the *Odessa Steps* scenes of *Potemkin* have been praised as well as criticized partially because both, and especially *Strike* pioneered the use of blood and gore in cinema. Additionally, both originated in the Soviet Union, the first country with an openly Socialist government, and so the political leanings of these films made censorship authorities judge a book by its cover and not from its pages. Despite both films being shot in black and white, the presence of blood (and in *Strike*'s case, gore) became a key symbol of these two films as crackdowns on social upheavals and revolutions demand blood sacrifice of the innocent to restore order.

A second important aspect that links these two films together is the representation of the state (and its lackeys) vs. the people. Eisenstein started out as a costume designer in theatre before becoming a theatrical director and then a world-renowned film director. As a result of his stage experience, he found it an absolute must to differentiate the good guys from the bad guys through their attire as well as their mannerisms. These elements were particularly important in captivating the audience given the fact that these two films were

silent and hence body language was of utmost importance. This contrast in the characters' behaviour and attire are prominent in *Strike*, where the shareholders are very well groomed, tend to stay indoors and exhibit flamboyant behavior, the workers, on the other hand, have a humble attitude, dress with typical urban clothes that don't look flashy and find solace in the outdoors. In *Potemkin*, however, while the differences between the two rival camps may appear to be slightly more subdued than in *Strike*, the viewer can still tell the two sides apart through their hierarchical rank as well as their uniforms. This physical differentiation of the haves and have-nots and the oppressive high-ranking officers vs. the unhappy underlings plays a vital role in the narrative as well as the political stance of both *Strike* and *Potemkin*. The heavy contrasts of the clothes and the overall behavior of the characters are appealing to the eye, making each character have some sort of association and purpose to the storyline.

Women and children (often innocent victims), collateral to the crackdown against the revolutionary movement, are caught in the crossfire in both of these movies. The finales of *Strike* and *Potemkin*'s Odessa Steps are testaments to that senseless, unnecessary loss of life in the brutal reprisals represented in these scenes. From a political standpoint, the deliberate killing of non-combatants and unarmed civilians is an unforgivable deed and the government in charge must be held accountable for the crimes it committed against its own people.

Another common denominator of these two films is the fact that the oppressors get away with their crimes. While *Strike* leaves the audience with an outright disturbing and

gloomy ending, *Potemkin* ends with a bittersweet feeling, as if the story were bound to continue in a later film; in both cases, the oppressors are left unpunished. From an artistic and propaganda standpoint, either conclusion can be seen as more effective than the conventional happy ending found in most Hollywood movies. In other words, the gloomy ending of *Strike* and the cliffhanger-like conclusion of *Potemkin* work well as they give the audience room to think about the victims who have been swept away by the brutal tsunamis of repression, feel disdain for the unprovoked reprisals of the authorities and even encourage some people in the audience to take action against the ills of their own societies, something that Eisenstein had in mind when he was making his films.

Last, but not least, I intend to answer the question of how the Bolsheviks get involved in the events of both films. Even though both *Strike* and *Potemkin* undoubtedly are influenced by the Bolsheviks, the role of this revolutionary movement is more symbolic than a live character or a cast of characters in both of these films. Bolshevism is portrayed as an unseen force to be reckoned with, yet at the same time omnipresent, and its essence guides the actions of the protesting workers and sailors.

In *Strike* and *Potemkin*, the Bolsheviks are represented through quotes and snippets of *Pravda*. While the leaders of the uprisings in these two movies apparently are not members of the Bolshevik party (or of any political party, for that matter), they nonetheless are apparently influenced by Lenin's words and deeds, and are organised much like the militant and pro-active leftist political movement. Both the strikers in *Strike* and the *Potemkin* sailors evolve almost overnight from a ragtag group of misfits unhappy with their

plight to a cohesive political force diligently acting on clearly established goals, ready to defend those objectives when the situation calls for it, preferably with words and peaceful deeds rather than weapons.

In other words, just because the Bolsheviks are not physically present and the leaders of the protest movements do not have Bolshevik credentials in either of these two films does not mean that the aforementioned movement's works, words and deeds still inspire workers to foment demonstrations and revolution, preferably through peaceful means. This emphasis on peaceful means is also an important feature in these two movies, especially in comparison to later films such as *Aleksandr Nevsky* and the *Ivan the Terrible* series. The strikers never carry any weapons—not even knives-- but at the same time their words and protests shake the establishment, and put authorities on edge, and the latter would lash out when they get to feel cornered. While in *Potemkin*, the sailors grab the Mosin Nagant rifles during the *Drama on Deck* chapter, but they never shoot, kill or maim any of the officers.

## **II- A brief description of Eisenstein's ideas and his influences**

Before talking about Eisenstein's writings and style of work, one must look first at what was arguably the technique that influenced him the most: The Kuleshov effect, named after Lev Kuleshov, the grandfather of Soviet Cinema and the mentor of great directors such as Dziga Vertov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Aleksandr Dovzhenko and of course Sergey Eisenstein himself. This was an experiment that Kuleshov conducted with a tsarist matinee idol, Ivan Mozzhukhin. At first, he seemed to show an emotionless face; the camera then changed its focus on the tombstone of a little girl, a bowl of soup or a woman. Each image brought a reaction. A change of emotion is shown on Mozzhukhin's face - showing a face of hunger upon looking at the soup, desire when looking at the young woman, and grief when looking at the coffin.

The purpose of this short film was to show the value of character's emotions in cinema as a means for viewers to identify how two different images go hand-in-hand and enforce an idea, as the tombstone symbolizes grief, soup represents hunger, and the woman represents desire (Litvin 50). Like Kuleshov, Eisenstein also believed that the sum of the parts, that is the shots being portrayed, is greater than each one being taken separately. As such, this small film excerpt, just a few minutes long, paved the foundations of numerous filmmaking techniques that would become cornerstones of how movies are made. Since then, virtually all film directors have adopted the Kuleshov experiment as an essential filmmaking tool. Sergey Eisenstein adopted many of Kuleshov's ideas and modified them to suit his films' purposes. Having seen this short film, Eisenstein saw how powerfully on-

camera emotions used via this style of editing impacted the audience and transmitted the message he intended; he also added more depth and complexity to Kuleshov's simple, yet effective short film.

Although this aspect shall be discussed later in the course of this thesis, there are numerous examples in which Eisenstein applies Kuleshov's experiment in *Strike* and *Potemkin*. For instance, at the very beginning of *Strike*, the opening scenes show shots of the factory chief, grinning and even laughing, intercut with shots of workers walking around the factory and showing factory equipment. The intercutting of these shots gives the impression that the factory is his property, and the editing of images gives the impression that he apparently has the place under control. At the same time, a play on words or pun would come from the chapter's title "всё спокойн**о** на заводе" or "*All is quiet at the factory*", which is then cut with another intercard that says "но" or "*but*", which tells the audience that not everything is what it seems, and that trouble is brewing deep below the surface and will eventually boil over.

In *Notes of a Film Director*, Eisenstein mentions the importance of *juxtaposition*, which consists of linking two ideas, concepts and/or objects in a sequential pattern, to "focus our attention on that which determines both the content of every frame and the compositional juxtaposition of these individual contents with one another—that is, on the whole, the general, and the unifying." (70) These concepts undergird Eisenstein's *modus operandi* in his films as he starts with the *unifying* factor, shooting the *whole* idea and then editing the shots according to the *general* factor.

According to the *The Film Sense*, the unifying factor takes center stage, as it is the factor that determines both the content of particular shots, how well they connect together and the content that results from their juxtaposition or careful merging of ideas. Secondly, the whole, which Eisenstein sometimes described as a “third something” (65), determined the quality of each shot and montage as well as the content conveyed. The general refers to the idea that several seemingly disconnected or even disjointed shots create a philosophical or intellectual statement. In other words, the general is more concerned about the intended message rather than the nature of the shots. In a nutshell, the *whole* is mainly interested in the composition and quality of each shot. *The general* is concerned with the messages that those shots want to convey. The *unifying* is concerned with connecting those ideas, those messages into moving images.

This theory arguably influenced many popular scenes in film, among them the Baptism scene from *The Godfather*, which is a crosscutting of two different scenes, in which Michael Corleone’s henchmen assassinate rival mafia leaders while he becomes godfather to his new niece. At first sight, the two scenes look totally disjointed and may seem like a waste of celluloid only connected by church music and the baptism vows, but when one takes a deeper look, it becomes clear that the images convey that Michael Corleone has been *baptised* into a life of crime, and the assassinations of all his rivals is the required trial of becoming a Don.

The aforementioned example may not come from Sergey Eisenstein, but it nonetheless captures the juxtaposition of different images, produces the generality, the

synthesis of an idea that embodies the theme. In a nutshell, Eisenstein reiterated that an action is effective if it is presented in montage pieces, in which the sum of its parts creates a strong emotional attachment to the events and a reaction rather than focusing, separating or dissecting each part independently (*The Film Sense* 76). With regards to *The Godfather*, the general factor is the fact that Michael Corleone is officially baptised into the world of organised crime at the same time that the baby is baptised into the Catholic Church. The unifying factor is the church music, the Latin blessings and the fateful questions of renouncing Satan and all of his works. The whole in this scene refers to how the murders of the major crime bosses are carried out. I shall apply examples to *Strike* and *Potemkin* later in the thesis.

*Eisenstein's Writings Vol.1*, a collection of Eisenstein's essays written between 1922 and 1934, gives the reader ideas he developed while he was making and promoting the two aforementioned movies, thereby highlighting the techniques he was implementing in the movies while they were still fresh in his mind. In *Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form* essay, written in 1925 after the release of *Strike*, Eisenstein described his debut film as a "revolutionary victory not merely for the work itself but also as an ideological victory in the field of form" (*Writings Vol. 1* 26).

Arguably some of his harshest criticisms of western cinema were that it was (and still is to a great extent to this day) fixated on the emphasis of a *star*, the one all-encompassing figure who somehow makes all the apparently disjointed ingredients of a film stick together like glue, almost to the extent that he or she single-handedly can make



or break a motion picture. This usually refers to the lead actor, but sometimes it could also be the film director, the producers, the cameraman or even the lighting technician. Eisenstein countered this by describing how he made his first two films, *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin*, as truly collective experiences from beginning to end, from the storyboards to the cutting room. Both films differ from western films and even tsarist cinema due to the fact that there's not one single person involved in the project that makes or breaks the film, nor does it overemphasize the main character or characters from the standpoint of their respective stories. The sum of these two films' respective parts—the actors, the script, the montages, the lighting and the cinematography—is greater than each of them taken separately.

Eisenstein enforced this point by emphasising the massness, that is, the importance of group thinking and the collective mindset that comes from working in a team over just one individual's vision. Again, written with regards to how he developed *Strike* vis-à-vis his later films and conventional cinema at home and in the West, his debut stands out from the other films due to a lack of a conventional storyline -- there's no one character who stands out from the rest in terms of screen time or relevance to the film's plot. The film treats each character as equally important, therefore giving the viewer the emphasis of group thinking and organisation. In fact, for the opening titles Eisenstein borrows a quote from Lenin written circa 1905, which mentions that organisation is a must for the working classes to succeed and become a force to be reckoned with; being organised equals unity of action, and practical activity. When seen from the context of the movie, the workers'

movement develops a coherent whole, in which large groups of people are united because they all share a common purpose -- to improve their lot as well as to make abuses of the factory administration be held accountable. This is one of the most important reasons why the workers demanded a 30% increase in wages, limiting the work schedule to a regular 9 to 5 for workers who are 18 years and older, limit the working days to 5 or 6 days a week, and fewer hours for under-aged workers.

In *Potemkin*, the concept of strong violence to enforce political and artistic points is depicted in the famous scene on the Odessa Steps. Soldiers formed a straight line across the stairs and made it all the way from the top down to the base of the steps, killing and wounding scores of civilians. While this may not have happened in real life in Odessa, it does give the viewer an idea of how the tsarist regime cracked down on protests with excessive brutality after Bloody Sunday. The lighting and shadowing of the film's photography give the audience a strong feeling that this happened in real time, even though Eisenstein never claimed to be historically accurate in his movies. He gave the viewer some room to fill in the blanks on purpose in order for them to use their imagination or encourage them to do research on their part. The crackdown in *Strike* and the Odessa steps in *Potemkin* exemplify the heavy contrast of lighting and shadowing. Both of these scenes take place in broad daylight, but the soldiers' faces are deliberately blurred in shadows to give the impression that this is an impersonal, shapeless force that shows neither mercy nor discrimination in any way, shape or form. From an artistic standpoint, it can also be said that the concept of deliberately blurring the soldiers' faces shows that these men are turning

into ruthless killing machines who do brutal things on the pretext that they're devoid of responsibility for their actions by blindly following orders.

Before proceeding any further, both *Strike* and *Potemkin* are organized in reel-length acts for a reason: At the time of their release, most Soviet film theatres still had only one film projector per movie, which made it impossible to air an entire motion picture in one stroke. As such, Eisenstein used this limitation to clearly highlight states of plot action, to define each act or chapter by an important event in the story (Bordwell 51).

Eisenstein was also a consummate dialectician. He saw art in all its forms, whether via literature, theatre, music, film (just to name a few), as a powerful tool to show and create conflict, whether it meant showing images that at first glance don't seem to connect because they seem to be disjointed or even portray contrasting emotions or ideas. But that is exactly what Eisenstein had in mind in his early films. He carefully edited his scenes in a manner so that the audience could try to decipher them and provide their own inferences due to a deliberate placement of mixed messages as well as motifs being used for opposing ends. This became evident in *Strike*, whose motifs of animals and water represent an important symbol for both the victims and the victimisers alike (Zholkovsky "Eisenstein's poetics: Dialogical or totalitarian?").

### **III- Strike:**

This is Eisenstein's debut film, and it could not have been released at a better time in the context of Soviet and world cinema. Prior to making *Strike*, Eisenstein had directed several theatre productions such as *The Mexican*, *The Wise Man*, and *Can you hear me, Moscow?* In 1924, the nascent Soviet Union was still recovering from the aftermath of the Great War, the Revolution, the gruelling Civil War, and a trade blockade from the West that was only partially lifted by the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922. As such, film stock, which was rather hard to come by between 1914-1922, became progressively more available. Much-needed film equipment such as lighting, cameras as well and rolls of film were being imported, setting the stage for a boom in film production. This movie became a pioneer, thanks to an array of ground breaking artistic and technical achievements that shall be explained later on.

After an arduous nine months of shooting and cutting, the movie would be released in April 1925 in the Soviet Union and since then abroad. It tells the story of factory and family in an unspecified location during the upheavals of 1905. A worker is falsely accused for stealing a micrometre, which was three weeks' pay worth and hangs himself as he was unable to provide evidence of his innocence. But he left behind a note next to his body, in which he encourages fellow workers to be conscious of the abusive factory administration and take action against them by demanding the administrators to reduce their work shift to 8 hours a day, 6 hours for under-aged workers, and increase wages by 30%. A series of convulsions follow, culminating with a notorious bloodbath in the finale, in which

government troops disperse the crowd, killing and injuring a large number of them, cross-cut with a brutal scene of a bull being slaughtered.

The movie was meant to be the first part of an anthology of films called *Towards the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, which was at first conceived to be a total of seven films that would chronicle the spirit of rebellion in the Russian Empire from 1905 up until the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Eisenstein, due to time and budget constraints, only managed to make three films, all of which dealt with the social upheaval of the people: *Strike*, *Battleship Potemkin* and *October*.

The last ten minutes of the movie are two eerily disturbing, back-to-back scenes that maintain a really bloody and shocking tone throughout. After a failed attempt to disperse the workers by trying to incriminate them in acts of sabotage, the shareholders, with support from the imperial government, resort to desperate action; they forcefully disperse them with the army. A platoon of Cossacks cavalry arrives at the scene and stands in front of the striking workers. After a long standoff, in which a mother and child are caught in the fray, the Cossacks finally make their move and raid the factory. This scene is definitely creepy and barbaric, as the soldiers try to corral the workers and force them out of their homes and into the street, culminating in an ugly image of a child being held up and dropped from a balcony onto the street below.

Then, we cut to the precinct, where the strike leader has been held captive, is coerced to cooperate with the police and gets into a fight with the police chief, who eventually punches the desk and ink sprays on the district map, an image indicating that

the factory will be flowing with blood and bodies. Indeed, the finale delivered on that regard. After the Cossack attack, the main army moves in on the outskirts of the factory, and fire indiscriminately at the workers. At the same time, the scene gets cross-cut with images of a slaughterhouse, in which butchers slaughter a bull, slitting its throat and blood comes out of it, and even traces of its intestines as the cut runs so deep. These are not special effects; a real bull was being slaughtered. The movie finally cuts to a close-up of a man who implores the audience to remember this brutal massacre, in which all the strike leaders were killed and scores of people found dead in the open fields.

In this gruesome final scene, one can see the unifying, whole, and the general. The general factor of these scenes is the fact that the workers and the slaughtered are livestock who turn against their masters and, as such, reprisals must be made to put things back in line. The unifying factor is the blood, the fact that both the workers and the bull are living beings; they bleed when injured. The whole factor refers to the fact that Eisenstein preferred to use medium and long-range shots of the workers fleeing in panic, and saved the close-ups for the bull.

One of the main things that made *Strike* (and also *Potemkin*) stand out from contemporary films was the fact a large number of children—some of them infants-- were killed and mowed down en masse during the brutal crackdown by government forces. This victimization is manifested in the film. As the strike goes on, shops temporary close down due to goods not coming into the factory as the workers protest the labour conditions, therefore creating a totally desperate situation for the workers' families and the factory

leaders. The shareholders decide to take desperate and brutal action regardless of the consequences that these might bring to their image or even to their profits; the only silver lining is to get the machines back in line at all costs. First and foremost, Cossacks raid the factory and plunder and pillage the place. It is during this scene that an infant is standing under an army cavalryman's horse, which creates a stand-off moment between the Cossacks and the workers.

The mother picks the baby up and faces a whiplash from the cavalryman before fellow workers rush up to her and her child's defense. The victimization becomes even more profound as the Cossacks break into the factory and start behaving like brutal, wild animals. All this culminates with the Cossack leader's grabbing of a child by the shirt three floors from the ground and dropping it down to the street. The images connote that these soldiers were doing outright carnage rather just following orders, due to the fact that their superiors refused to punish their behaviors or at least ensure that the Cossacks didn't resort to deeds that bordered on psychopathy, or killed just for their own amusement. The child being held up and then dropped down to the street below shows that the murderer was extremely callous and unshaken by the terror he inflicted on the child, and it seems that he actually relished the victims' pain and suffering.

Eisenstein refers to the victimisation of children in his memoirs, published in English as *Beyond the Stars*. In *The Boy from Riga* chapter, he describes his childhood in a rather cryptic manner, his tense relationship and eventual rift with his father and his later obstacles. Eisenstein gives his reader the impression that he used part of his personal

dramas to infuse a strong message in his films. In both movies, the underlying tone is that the innocent ones die because of the unnecessarily cruel actions of those in power, whose growing desperation compels them to use extreme measures devoid of compassion or remorse (Eisenstein 17-19).

Taking a page from Alexander Zholkovsky's essay, "Eisenstein's Poetics: Dialogical or Totalitarian," Eisenstein saw the ideal composition of his works as something merciless, implacable and stabbing (Zholkovsky 2). From this standpoint, the children were the most unfortunate collateral damage of the Cossacks' actions, yet at the same time, no remorse is felt on the part of the authorities as the endgame was to restore order at all costs. In many ways, the children killed, such as the one being thrown from 3 stories high into the street, are arguably the most tragic of victims, as these have yet to understand or become aware of the social and political contexts that happen around them, and would never find out why they were swept by the tide. From a psychological standpoint, the killing of children and infants, who symbolize innocence and naiveté, is the epitome of cruelty, a most unforgiveable deed. This further sheds light on why Eisenstein suddenly, and sometimes without warning, shoves strong, brutal, unrelenting imagery upon the audience because through the presentation of those moving images the viewer is caught off-guard. In this way, Eisenstein was able to elicit a response of shock or agitation on the audience's part.

In the end, the victimizers get away with their crimes and abuse despite the fact that the movie ends with a call to remember the victims of the crackdown, from the strike



leaders to the innocent children who were swept away by this bloody massacre. From a propaganda and artistic standpoint, the ending is very effective because it encourages the audience to show sympathy for the victims who did not deserve to undergo such gruesome and impersonal reprisals, and even inspires them to take action against abuses in their everyday lives.

Eisenstein also makes his case for the use of strong violence in “The Method of making a Worker’s Film,” which was written in the spring of 1925, as *Strike* debuted in cinemas and before he went on to shoot *Battleship Potemkin*. In this essay, Eisenstein talked about two concepts that he considered important in his first two movies: the choice of stimulants and series of shocks. These concepts convey the deliberate use of strong imagery and emotionally charged scenes edited properly into montages. In order to evoke a very strong emotional reaction on the viewers’ part, for instance, he described how the audience of different social strata reacted to the gruesome finale of the bull being slaughtered intercut with the massacre of innocent civilians. In many ways, this essay is an extension of Eisenstein’s “Montage of Film Attractions,” which was comparatively more descriptive and technical and clarifies how montage editing is implemented in this movie. In this scene, Eisenstein clearly stated that the workers in *Strike* were, in the eyes of the shareholders who controlled them, mere cattle, assets to be used and exploited with extravagant, willful neglect. The controversial finale did shock people for being uncompromisingly explicit as well as stimulated them to show sympathy for the victims (*Eisenstein’s Writings Vol. 1* 65-66).

Eisenstein no doubt left the reader some important notes about his films. This pattern was established in 1924's "Montage of Attractions," which was published shortly after the filming for *Strike* wrapped. In his own words, "the method of the montage of attractions is the comparison of subjects for dramatic effect" (*Writings Vol. I* 43) as he referred to *Strike* as his prime example, in which he used the association of a mass shooting with the slaughter of a bull in the finale. He described this as the "most brilliant death scene" (*Writings Vol. I* 68), and also cites it as an example of bloody horror, due to the scene's explicit representation of what is happening onscreen complemented by Eisenstein's carefully placed human and animal analogies. Eisenstein mentioned that he deliberately used only long and medium shots of the workers being slaughtered en masse and saves the close-up shots for the bull being slaughtered, and as such, gives the audience what would later become a staple example of juxtaposition between two different scenes happening at the same time that would be applied in later films.

Arguably, Eisenstein's most straightforward testament on the use of strong, shocking violence and imagery can be found in "The Illustrious Memory of the Marquis," a chapter in his memoirs. This chapter was named after the infamous Marquis de Sade, the man who put the words "sadism" and "masochism" into our everyday vocabulary. In this essay, Eisenstein recalled his first encounter with references to brutal, sadistic violence in the form of a newspaper article that left him traumatised and eventually shaped his artistic vision. When he was seven years old, he read a section of the *Petersburgskaya gazeta*, and stumbled upon a horrifying article in the satire section. The article was about a group of

savage butchers who decided to get rid of a shop assistant who apparently had either threatened to complain about their abusive conduct at work or already had. They dragged him into the back room, stripped him and hung him by his legs with a hook from the ceiling, and he was brutally ripped apart. It seems that the butchers were either members of or influenced by the Black Hundreds, a brutal, extreme nationalist and also pro-tsarist group that was intolerant of ethnic and religious minorities and who often incited bigotry and violence against them. (*Beyond the Stars* 526-530)

It is not known whether this was based on an actual event or not, but the images were permanently ingrained into 7-year-old Eisenstein's memory. As he further mentions, the passages of that article gave him nightmares and imprinted in him the impression that the state was not only capable of inflicting sheer, unprovoked and senseless brutality to preserve its place and power, but even takes some sort of perverted pleasure with such unbridled acts of violence. It is of no surprise that Eisenstein, once grown up, saw this newspaper article as influential in his use of graphic violence as a tool to create a message. Hearing about the gruesome deeds of the Black Hundreds, which at that time were tolerated by the state to crack down on left-leaning groups, and especially this graphic reading, inspired Eisenstein to create the bloody finale of *Strike* (*Beyond the Stars* 532). While Eisenstein never explicitly mentions what aspects of this reading inspired him to make films, judging by how Eisenstein described the gruesome passages, one can see that there is a visual match between this reading and the finale of *Strike*. The man being mutilated alive in that article was translated into the slaughter of the bull, who was cut so deep that

traces of intestines are seen on camera as the butchers carry out the execution coldly, devoid of any emotion, much like the soldiers who mow down the workers. Since then, Eisenstein became an avid reader of this newspaper, to the point that during his university days he even got to work there drawing satirical cartoons.

Although Eisenstein was of Jewish descent, he was nominally raised Russian Orthodox, which he would not practice as he grew older. In some ways, the stories of the Black Hundreds made it all the clearer to him how brutal the Tsarist regime was, preying on innocent, unarmed civilians without any provocation so long as they helped to preserve the regime's power and translated the atmosphere of savage cruelty in *Strike*, *Potemkin*, and also *October*. He developed a political consciousness as a result of the political upheavals and reprisals of the 1905 Revolution. During this time he began to develop left-wing sympathies that would eventually cause a rift with his father 12 years later, as Eisenstein joined the Bolsheviks while his father joined the Whites prior to emigrating to Germany. In any case, the newspaper article reminded him of the horrors and the follies of political and religious extremism, something that he would make fun of in *Potemkin*, where Eisenstein himself would play a priest, with a heavy beard, make-up and thick robes. David Bordwell stated in *The Cinema of Eisenstein* that Eisenstein used religious-like motifs in the movie which, in some ways, promoted the workers' cause and socialism in general, as a righteous cause, and that the tides are on their side. The suicide of the worker who is framed is portrayed as a socialist representation of the Crucifixion, the Descent from the Cross. The writhing and screaming and falling bodies of the slaughtered workers echoed

those of the Christian martyrs who were persecuted by Nero following the burning of Rome in 66 AD and in other instances in which the early Christians faced persecution by the Roman authorities (Bordwell 57).

In another chapter in the memoirs called “Monsieur, Madame et Bebe,” Eisenstein talked about his childhood in Riga and how the events of the 1905 Revolution in the Russian Empire gave him his first signs of political consciousness and an interest in socialist political movements. It also ingrained in him a penchant to create strong imagery at a very young age. While the essay may be a bit convoluted and difficult to follow, it gives the reader a backstory as to how the shocking images Eisenstein saw as a child inspired him to pass that shock on to his early films, particularly *Strike* and *Potemkin*. In the essay, he describes the first motion picture he saw as a child.. In that picture, a blacksmith is enraged that his young wife has had an affair with a young sergeant in the Napoleonic army and plots his revenge. Then he kidnaps the sergeant, ties him up, throws him down to the hay loft, rips his coat and leaves him there to be branded alive with an iron rod. As the scene becomes more frightening and shocking, it’s the image of the man being burnt alive and left unconscious that attracted the attention of the 7 year-old Eisenstein. It was somewhat coincidental that his encounter with this film coincided with the timing of the uprisings and unrest that swept the Russian Empire that year.

As such, one could see a meshing of two elements: strong, gruesome images interposed with a political leaning or objective. The graphic newspaper passages that gave Eisenstein nightmares as a child made him sympathetic for the person who was brutally slaughtered and victimised for his political convictions. Eisenstein indirectly adapted this

reading into the brutal images found in his early movies, especially *Strike* and *Potemkin*. In that way, the brutal repressions represented in both films were inseparable from the themes of fighting against social injustice, which is very often a trigger for revolution (*Beyond the Stars* 493-497).

In some ways, this political upheaval of 1905 and 1917 were mirror images of the family troubles he went through as a child and as he came of age. 1905 was also the same year in which his parents fought incessantly, which would culminate in their divorce, and because of that, Eisenstein felt unwanted, marginalised and bereft of friends, finding solace in reading literature about revolution, especially the French experience. With the left-leaning political movements resurging once he was grown-up in 1917, Eisenstein felt he had found a new purpose in life, a sense of belonging to a family that was bound by unshackling the chains of tradition, the chains of days gone by. Eisenstein felt surrounded by people who did not seem to care about his sometimes eccentric behaviour (Zholkovsky, "Eisenstein's Poetics: Dialogical or Totalitarian?"). In short, political differences as well as resentment over numerous aspects of his behaviour were some of the underlying factors that triggered a rift with his father in that fateful year.

James Goodwin, author of *Eisenstein, Cinema and History* made an interesting point regarding Eisenstein's use of symbolic references and mockery of the monarchy and how power can corrupt a person. This was illustrated when members of the secret service sought out people to incriminate the strikers, and recruit homeless people, unemployed workers and hooligans. In this ugly stratum of society, the secret police found a criminal only known as the King. Living up to the title in a mocking manner, Eisenstein made this

character a farcical, deliberately over-the-top authority figure who reigned over a place full of sunken liquor caskets that housed his entourage of thieves and prostitutes. While Eisenstein himself never explicitly stated this King figure as an analogy to the Tsar, he definitely gave the impression that this became an abstract representation of the tsarist political system, which was already rotting and decaying at the time the movie debuted, to the point of the debauchery being portrayed in this scene (Goodwin 46).

Backtracking to *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, David Bordwell mentions other scenes that may seem somewhat unimportant, yet nonetheless give the audience either a strong sense of anxiety, or outright shock. For instance, early in the film when the striking workers are harassed by cavalrymen and almost corralled, the scene cross cuts with another in which the factory chiefs and shareholders, all with outlandish clothes and outlandish behaviour, first read the workers' demands with sarcasm and a dismissive attitude, followed up by one of them crushing a lemon. The cross cutting of the strikers being rounded up and the crushing of the lemon gives the audience an early foreboding warning of things to come. Yuri Tsivian, explains in the DVD commentary section of *Strike* that the Russian idiom of "squeezing the juice," also has more immediate and direct connotations as the cross cutting of the workers sitting down to disorient the horses, while showing the mill owner pleurably crushing a lemon. This idiom is obviously a reference for exploitation, and as such the squeezing of juice out of the lemon alternated with the apparent corraling of the workers gives the impression that the workers are livestock for them, tools to get money or power. However, in an ironic, even comical, twist of fate, the horses do not follow

through trampling on the workers and instead stay back, but this would be the only time the workers were spared from crackdowns. It can also be said that the shareholders have a hard time taking the workers' demands seriously, and are portrayed in the film as indifferent to the workers' plight.

The crushing of the lemon symbolises the shareholders's desire to preserve the status quo and willingness to resort to extreme measures in order to keep things from falling apart, making them in effect power-hungry sociopaths who lash out when "cornered" or placed in a position in which their power and influence is threatened. Another tell-tale sign worth mentioning that gives a stronger, more immediate warning is the interrogation scene, in which the leader of the strike is arrested and coerced to blow the whistle on his fellow comrades, but he doesn't budge. As a result, the police chief loses his temper and pounds on his desk, which coincidentally causes the ink bottles to spill across a map of the workers' district. The ink then spills in a very peculiar fashion: the liquid spills across roads and streets and then through building and blocks, giving the viewer another warning that the factory district is bound to run with blood very soon (Bordwell 53-61).

Another source also worth mentioning is Oksana Bulgakowa's *Sergey Eisenstein: A Biography*. Although the chapter dedicated to *Strike* may be very short, the book gives emphasis to the film's violence in somewhat subtle ways. Bulgakowa argues that the film has sort of a fatalistic view in a manner reminiscent of Greek tragedies. Everything is determined by destiny and even the unexpected changes of circumstances, be they positive or negative, are determined by an unforeseen force of human nature that foretells a terrible



outcome, regardless of their efforts to avoid it. Eisenstein, like many filmmakers of his generation, realized the strong potential of images to arouse emotions, to stir up reactions that he believed matched what he was trying to convey. While I do not necessarily agree wholeheartedly with Bulgakowa, it makes some sense as Eisenstein himself loved the tales of the French Revolution, especially the guillotine, which, much like *Strike*, would take the lives of many of the leading Revolutionaries in an ironic twist. In *Strike*'s case, the prolongation of the strike eventually tilted against the workers' favour as the factory conditions were in lockdown mode.

While the resulting film is gruesome in its own right, the early drafts were even gorier and more graphic; at one point, Eisenstein considered making a scene in which one man would be sliced and dismembered by a machine while another one would fall and get burned into a cauldron of molten steel, the latter being intercut, in a manner reminiscent of the juxtaposition of the police crackdown with the slaughtering of the bull, with a woman bathing in champagne. Another scary scene that was considered for the film involved one of the workers noticing an ox eye in his soup. This scene was supposed to be intercut with one of the shareholders looking through a monocle, giving reference to the motif of the *all-seeing eye* that would become a staple of Eisenstein's upcoming films, especially the *Ivan the Terrible* series. Although both of these scenes were shot and the negatives were either lost or were discarded from the final draft all together, it really gave the impression that Eisenstein was putting his theory montage of attractions into an array of shocking, but cleverly placed images. In any case, from the get-go, *Strike* was never meant to be a film

for the faint-hearted (Bulgakowa 45-55). The earlier drafts also demonstrated, especially with regard to the man being sliced by a machine, the heavy influence of the article he read back in 1905., almost to the point of adapting it word by word.

In *Savage Junctures*, author Anne Nesbet offers an interesting analysis of Eisenstein's films, in particular *Strike*. Nesbet argues that *Strike* may seem to be somewhat overshadowed by the more popular and more successful *Potemkin*, but *Strike* is still far from an obscure, art-house film. She dedicates most of her analysis to the last 15-20 minutes of the film, in which the strike is crushed with exceptional brutality. Nesbet mentions that the main idea of the cross cutting of civilians being shot down en masse with the slaughter of a live bull represents not just the fact that the workers are just treated as mere cattle, but also as tools for the authorities, and they do not tolerate having their tools working against them (Nesbet 28-31). In her analysis, she describes the importance of the all-seeing eye, whether it's the camera's eyes or the eyes of particular characters in close-up. The eye is an important symbol in virtually all of Eisenstein's movies, according to her, as is the organ in which the abstract ideas match the concrete facts. Initially, the gruesome finale was meant to end with a close up of the slaughtered animal's eye, but instead it pans into a worker (a close-up shot on Eisenstein himself) who apparently survived the massacre, imploring the audience to "Remember, Proletariat," to remember the people who were slaughtered like cattle, and the movement of his eyes expresses both shock and rage to this tragic event.

Furthermore, Nesbet observed that the juxtaposed scenes are edited and composed in the following manner: Eisenstein used medium to long shots for the workers being mowed en masse in the forest near the factory district, and used close-up shots of the bull being slaughtered. Eisenstein wanted to cut this scene in such a manner to emphasize the bloody slaughter of the bull as analogous with the slaughtering of innocent, whose medium-range shots are meant to symbolize the fact that crackdowns do not discriminate nor pick out a specific number of people to die. The faces of both victim and victimizer are not shown due to the deliberate implementation of chiaroscuro lighting, again to show the viewer how inhumane and debasing the government and the shareholders were as the strike was something they could not tolerate and their patience had worn thin (29). In his 1924 essay, "Montage of Attractions," Eisenstein further justifies the association of the crowds being slaughtered with the slaughterhouse because he wanted to avoid overacting on the part of the extras, as overtly expressive emotions on their part would spoil the seriousness of the scene and almost make it into a farce (*Eisenstein's Writings vol. 1*, 43).

One motif that is seen in his early films, and especially in *Strike*, is the animal theme, which is the notion of animals trying to escape chaos, animals borne by the flood, drowning, or struggling to live side by side with beings of different origins, species or even rivals of their own kind. Carcasses of dead animals and humans are a motif in various Eisenstein movies, especially *Strike* and *Potemkin* (*Notes of a Film director* 76). In *Strike*, for instance, the factory workers are seen as cattle, mere hands to be exploited and used for profit's sake. This idea explains why the finale of the film became all the more gruesome.

That scene alone could merit an “R” rating in the U.S. and/or similar ratings in other countries where the film was officially released for the first time decades later.

Another motif that is more present in *Strike* than in subsequent films is water. In the introduction, agitational workers who are smuggling *Pravda* into the factory are reflected in a puddle of water on the pavement; soon after, these workers alongside other striking workers, begin to plan and make preparations for the strike while swimming in a river near the factory. Once the strike began and the workers made efforts to reach the whistle cord to inform the workers that it was time to walk off the plant, they sprayed water through a hose to keep the guards off-balance. Two managers got caught by the workers and were shoved down into the river, which became the striking workers’ first show of strength. But then water turned against the strikers late in the film as the strike dragged down. One of the leaders of the strike was arrested during a night of heavy rain. During the scene of sabotage at the liquor store, the firemen eventually controlled flames and then indiscriminately hosed away both the saboteurs and the workers alike with devastating force (Bordwell 55). In *Potemkin*, being shot mostly in the sea, the presence of water is that of a more subtle, yet also omnipresent figure.

The very first shot of the gruesome finale of *Strike* shows a man wielding a knife (actually, it’s only his hand) and moving it as if it were stabbing something or someone, immediately followed by an intercard saying “Carnage!” (*Бойня*, which also means *rampage* or *slaughter*) and people running downhill in panic. The “Carnage” title card is the first common denominator between these two juxtaposed scenes. Then the bull gets

knocked unconscious by the butchers, followed by a shot of hands, which gives us the impression that the workers are drowning and falling down to their doom. Then, we cut to another butcher, whose apron is washed with blood, and is carrying a rope in order to strangle the bull, cross-cut with a shot of soldiers firing away their Berdan rifles, then followed by a shot of the bull's throat being slit. Just before the scene ends, we see the title card of "Defeat" (*пaзпoм*), which shows the most gruesome shots of the film, symbolising the apex and climax of the violent crackdown.

Eisenstein edited these two scenes by crosscutting and alternating them back and forth in a consistent pattern, alternating the scenes of a bull being slaughtered with that of workers being mowed down en masse—in that order. Eisenstein wanted to show the audience that both juxtaposed scenes have a common denominator: not so much the fact that humans can be inherently or circumstantially brutal to fellow living things, but the fact that the people who run the factory and the state see the workers as livestock, which can be discarded and killed if it proves to be no longer useful or even irksome to their ends. Although Eisenstein would use similar techniques in *Potemkin* and other films, they would become more conservative in scope and in structure due to outside pressures. This especially holds true in *Aleksandr Nevsky*, Eisenstein's first successful film since *October*, which does borrow some traits of his previous works such as the use of shocking images of innocent people being methodically executed, but the storytelling returns to a conventional style, with emphasis on a Messiah-like hero found in the title character.

Tsivian mentions in the DVD commentary of *Strike* that Eisenstein discards or tries to counteract the so-called Stanislavski paradox: “if you want to double the number of people onstage, dismiss half of your extras,” and justifies the large number of extras in this film with the use of medium and long shots in this scene. Eisenstein, not willing to cut down the already large crowd of extras in the film, decided to use those ranged shots, as well as shaded lighting, to give the illusion that the crowd is faceless, that fear encompasses and swallows everything in its path. In contrast, the shareholders’ meeting is composed primarily of close-ups which often show the characters from the hair to the waist.

As Tsivian mentions, strikes also have a flip side: the plant’s long period of inactivity forced nearby shops to be indefinitely closed due to goods not arriving. Such shops were the lifeline for many workers, therefore creating an atmosphere of anger and desperation that would eventually boil over. Two spies, nicknamed the Owl and the Fox, would try to track down the leaders of the strike and find ways to place the strikers in a bad position and frame them for acts of looting and sabotage, which would cost them popular support and hopefully break up the disruption without having to resort to extreme measures.

And this scene is the cue for the last two chapters of the film, in which the atmosphere of doom and gloom is semantically expressed with the images of several cats strung up in the gallows, where several homeless and unemployed people are being recruited by the Okhrana, the tsarist secret police, to create rampage and pin the blame on the strikers, in the hopes that the strike would lose support and disperse. In a Marxist way

of thinking, bums or unemployed people are not seen as part of the working class because they are not in touch with the means of production, even though Marxist leaders place eradicating homelessness and pervasive unemployment as a priority. The Okhrana—the Tsarist security service-- sees the homeless as a fifth column, the useful idiots whose acts of sabotage and looting would create a siege, a situation in which the army would be forced to be called in to restore order and, in the end, crush the strike. Even though the bums were hosed out by firemen and prevented the arson from spreading, news of these acts of sabotage attracted the attention of the central government and the factory administration, and they readily embraced the use of deadly force to quell the strike after attempts to incriminate the movement failed. In the DVD commentary at the final chapter, Tsivian mentions something Eisenstein said during a Soviet film class, describing art as “a very subtle specimen... but sometimes, the crudest device works best.” I don’t know from what source he got this quote as he never mentions where, but the interesting fact is that he interprets Eisenstein’s words as a direct blow to the eyes of the viewer. At the end of the film, he says there are at least 2 direct blows: the images of a kid being thrown and the animal being slaughtered, with the pile of corpses at the very end of the scene arguably being a third direct blow.

The role of the Bolsheviks in this film is that of an invisible nature, but at the same time its presence and influence can be felt throughout the course of the film. Having already mentioned Lenin’s introductory quote, another abstract cameo of the Bolsheviks can be found about 17 minutes into the film, when workers smuggle some copies of *Pravda*, the

Bolshevik's main newspaper which would later become the most popular newspaper of the Soviet Union. The newspaper prints an article that encourages the workers in the factory to spread the word and cause of social unrest. They would smuggle and place copies of *Pravda* by hiding them in desks and factory equipment, therefore making them accessible to workers at plain sight. This happened just before the ill-fated worker was framed by the administration for stealing the micrometre.



### III. Battleship Potemkin

Not long after the release of *Strike*, Eisenstein had already been given the green light to make a second film that was to be a part of his seven-film anthology leading up to the Revolution of 1917. This movie was originally meant to chronicle the events of the tumultuous year of 1905, simply titled *1905*, even doing scenes that represented the Bloody Sunday of January 22<sup>nd</sup> of that year, and shooting would span virtually every large city of the Soviet Union. However, time, weather and budget constraints forced Eisenstein to rethink the concept from scratch and instead focus on an episode that had been often overlooked at that point: the tale of the Battleship Potemkin. This is where the story of *Potemkin* begins.

As in *Strike*, the movie opened with a quote by Lenin that described Revolution as the only lawful and just war worth fighting for. But unlike the previous film, this was the only time the Bolsheviks make an appearance in *Potemkin*, but just like in *Strike*, their words inspired the actions of the masses and are their spiritual guide. The first people who brought these words into deeds were Vakulinchuk and Matyushenko, the first two characters who appeared in the movie, and apparently the only ones who were fully conscious of the revolutionary activity that was taking place in the mainland throughout 1905. In comparison to *Strike*, *Potemkin* is a lighter affair in terms of graphic content, yet it is still one of the first films to use blood and still contains some pretty gruesome images that definitely were not meant for the faint of heart. In this film, the most violent scenes are the Drama on Deck and the Odessa Steps. In the former, Vakulinchuk stirred up fellow

sailors to take arms and seize control of the ship, before getting shot by a captain and dying from his wound. The audience could see Vakulinchuk bleeding from the neck area, dangling on an anchor and then falling to the water below. This is somewhat tame in comparison to *Strike* or modern films, but still shocking in the 1920s.

The second and even more violent scene is the Odessa steps, which is arguably a loose representation of the Bloody Sunday massacre in St. Petersburg on 22 January 1905. In this scene crowds get mowed down en masse by soldiers soldiers who were descending upon them from the top of the stairs, ending with a brutal shot to a lady with blood flowing on the right side of her face. As the soldiers descended upon the protesters step by step and shot at random people, the unarmed civilians tried to run away from them in a frenzied panic, with the exception of a handful of women who tried to reason with them. The soldiers stopped for a few seconds before resuming their assault, and marched all the way down to the bottom of the steps. This scene took two full weeks to film, and surprisingly, no accidents were reported when the extras frantically were running down those large and wide steps. Eduard Tisse, the film's cameraman, had to be chained to a rope tied to a plank that slid down on wooden rails, and much of the scene was shot without a tripod.

Upon receiving the news of the massacre, the *Potemkin* decided to take action against the people who ordered the brutal crackdown on Odessa. This eventually led to a standoff at the film's finale between the *Potemkin* and another battleship sent to track them down and retrieve them. Ironically, the ship that was supposed to retrieve and/or destroy the *Potemkin* ends up joining them, and this is where the film ends, rather abruptly, as in a

cliff-hanger because it gives the viewer the impression that the *Potemkin* story is about to continue in a sequel in the next chapter of the *To the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* series that, for some reason failed to materialise. Curiously, Eisenstein himself did not shoot the finale because he was busy editing the rest of the movie, which meant trimming down forty-five thousand metres of film, but he left the crew clear instructions on how to run this last scene, which they followed to the letter.

While Zholkovsky never really explains what he means, he mentions the presence of a recoil process in Eisenstein's films every action is followed by a reaction to a certain event, activity or transfer of energy ("Eisenstein's poetics, dialogical or totalitarian?"). When applied to *Potemkin*, one can see that the sailors of the battleship were enraged by the brutal events at Odessa, and as such, they felt emotionally prepared to engage another battleship that was sent to retrieve them, even though they were also aware that there was a high chance they may not survive the assault.

In his "Fourth Dimension in Cinema," published in 1929, Eisenstein mentioned the types of montage he used in his films: the metric, rhythmic, tonal and overtonal. However, he mainly cited examples of rhythmic and tonal montage in *Potemkin*. While metric montage is mostly used to describe the absolute length of the shots, the *rhythmic* montage is concerned with the pacing and speed of those shots. In this case, he cited the *Odessa Steps* as a rhythmic montage because the scene was essentially shot and edited in tandem with the clicking of the soldiers' boots and then suddenly stopped for a moment, leading to a brief pause and a break in rhythm, only to be resumed once more as the soldiers

completed their descent down the steps, with Cossacks corralling the protesters who were now on the base of the steps (Writings *Vol. I* 188).

In real life, the eponymous battleship from which this film was inspired defected to Rumania, but the Rumanian government impounded the ship in Constanța, a city on the Black Sea and returned it back to the Russian Empire not long afterwards. But the mutineers abandoned ship and most of them refused to return to the Russian Empire, at least not until after the Revolution of 1917. The real-life Matyushenko returned in 1907 to Russia, falsely promised amnesty for him and his fellow mutineers, but was arrested and then executed soon after his arrival. The ship changed hands during the subsequent 12 years, until it was destroyed by White forces during the Soviet Civil War in 1919. For the purposes of the film, Eisenstein was granted permission to use two Navy ships for his movie which had a similar design and layout to the *Potemkin*, even though they were not as large nor as sophisticated. Whatever the outcome might have been, if a continuation to *Potemkin* were filmed, the oppressors still got away with their crimes scotch-free in the film. Unlike *Strike*, the movie's ending gave the impression that the sailors would eventually avenge the death of Vakulinchuk and the massacre that took place in Odessa, so it gave a glimpse of hope, that the next chapter would include their retaliation.

Like *Strike*, *Potemkin* resorted to the victimisation of people who by default were indifferent to politics, but suddenly became swept by a bloody tide they did not bargain for. Another example of victimized children was the now-famous carriage sliding down the steps, which eventually stopped at the base of the steps and the next couple of shots

which showed a Cossack slashing and killing either the infant or the woman who stopped the carriage from going any further. The film didn't portray exactly which of the two were killed and the spurt of blood on the woman's right eye further deepened the mystery on the final victim of the Odessa Steps: was it the woman or the baby? This scene has been given homage in numerous films, most noticeably the baptism by fire scene in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) and the train station shootout in Brian de Palma's *The Untouchables* (1987).

As the scene further unfolds, the viewer can see some shots of lion statues, which are the lions found in the terrace of the Vorontsov Palace in Alupka, a town that is located at the base of the Crimean Mountains. One statue shows a lion that looks like he's waking up from his slumber, as the women get slaughtered, and then on the next shot, he looks like he's already fully awake with combative body language. The cross-cutting of these images gives the impression that the peoples of the Russian Empire are rising up in rage to the brutal crackdown of the Odessa Steps, as the oppressors have committed the totally unforgiveable crime of killing unarmed fellow countrymen, women and children, none of which seemed to have shown any interest in revolution prior to that point (Bordwell 75-77).

Anne Nesbet highlights a curious mistake on the part of Jay Leyda, himself a popular and prominent expert on Sergey Eisenstein, calling for a rather significant error in translation on what Eisenstein tried to convey in his 1929 essay *A Dialectical Approach to Film Form*. Jay Leyda initially translated Eisenstein's use of lion shots in the following

manner: “In the thunder of the *Potemkin*’s guns, a marble lion leaps up in protest against the bloodbath on the Odessa steps” (Nesbet 65) when, according to Nesbet, a more accurate translation should be: “the marble lion leaps up, surrounded by the thunder of the *Potemkin*’s guns firing in protest against the bloodbath on the Odessa Steps (66). Nesbet does not consider it a simple mistake. Rather, she considers this a lack of foresight on Leyda’s part, because he apparently overlooks the fact that it’s the eponymous battleship that wakes up the lion with the cannons firing in protest, and thus becomes a key symbol, giving the impression that the lion was turning against its creator in a manner reminiscent of the bull in *Strike*.

Nesbet also mentions that Eisenstein was apparently fond of mythological references and used them in many of his strongest scenes, most noticeably on the *Odessa Steps*, in which the mother of the infant in the baby carriage gets shot by historical and political forces she does not understand and clutches her waist, which shows a belt with a swan. At first glance, this shot seems like an Easter egg referring to the *Leda and the Swan* Greek tale in which Zeus makes advances and as an affair with Leda, a beautiful mortal. Nesbet interprets Eisenstein’s little tribute to the tale as intertwined with this violent scene. In the aftermath of this terrible violence, just as that of Leda’s fall into temptation, beauty and history is born. This is also represented by the baby in the carriage, who ends being pushed down the steps in the same rhythm as the iron boots descend right behind him in a heartless manner. This symbolises the cruel and impersonal march of historical events, as

the baby in the carriage cries because he does not understand the brutal forces around him nor does he know where he is headed (69).

A second mythological reference that Eisenstein was fond of and made a rather subtle reference to was the Medusa, whose snaky and terrifying locks and a stare that turns anyone into stone were part of the iconography of revolution since 1789. Considering Medusa's negative connotations in Greek mythology, her slithering hairstyle and her intimidating gaze made her into an icon of terror and of the guillotine during France's Great Terror of 1793-1794. This analogy between the Medusa and Terror in *Strike* and *Potemkin* is not a coincidence. In *Beyond the Stars*, Eisenstein described how his interest in violence as well of political revolution was further cemented. On December 24, 1910, Eisenstein got two books with yellow spines, called *History of the French Revolution*, written by François Mignet. While Eisenstein still remembered vividly the tumultuous and brutal events of 1905 in the Russian Empire, he was yet to understand what caused social discontent and, eventually, revolutions to flare up until he started reading this book, and learned how the conditions of France in the 1780s paralleled to those in Russia at the opening years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Eisenstein described that he would read this book again and again because of the passages as well as the images of the guillotine and the images of people protesting on the street and even at the front door of the Versailles Palace. (*Beyond the Stars* 552-560)

Eisenstein also described in the same chapter that he was intrigued by revolutions, especially the French one, because of their "rarity, their romance, their colour" (562) as

well as the brutal reprisals that ensued during the revolution and their immediate aftermath. He also mentioned that he got first quasi-cinematic encounter with that Revolution in the Musée Grevin in Paris, where he saw wax figures of King Louis XVI who seemed to be running for cover from the mob, a Marie Antoinette hiding in the Concierge, and their heir Louis XVII under custody of a drunken cobbler and the head of Princess of Lamballe on a pike, whose hair is combed just like the Medusa (561-562).

The deceased Vakulinchuk himself is a metaphor of the Medusa motif; a great portion of the scene is shown from the perspective of the late heroic sailor, whose now cold gaze attracts the attention of the mourners who pass by, unable to resist the feeling of grief, as his immortal essence galvanises the revolutionary spirit and ensures that the man risked his life for a good cause, and now it is up to others to continue what he had begun (Nesbet 72). In that regard, Eisenstein, according to Nesbet, describes this scene as a deathly pause. Like the Medusa, Vakulinchuk's cold, lifeless gaze hypnotizes the mourners, especially those who end up standing in the podium and protest the unjust conditions and ills of their society. So in that way, the Medusa motif in *Potemkin* is represented through an initial stage of hypnosis that is then translated from a transition of uncontrolled, sudden grief into an outburst of anger and a spirit of justified rebellion.

In his "Dramaturgy of Film Form" (also known as "A Dialectical Approach to Film Form") essay, Eisenstein provides the reader some examples of conflict represented by how particular shots in key scenes are laid out, and he highlights a handful of shots of those scenes which show awkward, diagonal camera angles that seem to defy geometrical logic.



Among these would be the graphic conflict, which Eisenstein exemplifies with the child limping on the Odessa steps. The shot is made on a northwest to southeast trajectory, in which the wounded child extends his right hand and cries to his mother, who later turns around to pick up her wounded son. Then the next shot he cites as an example is a conflict of planes, which shows a carefully placed example of trick photography: The shot shows the soldiers pointing their Mosin Nagant rifles at the mother, but the shot is composed from a southwest to northeast trajectory, which gives the illusion that the soldiers, despite being on slightly higher ground, are aiming high as the woman appears as if she's on a higher surface than they are (*Writings Vol. I* 168-169). The impression of this latter shot is that the woman who carries her wounded son represents righteousness and good morals and is placed on the upward side of the shot, while the angle in which the soldiers are portrayed show that they are descending into depravity, due to their cold and calculating deeds.

In the same essay, he also provides another angle to the violent scenes. He describes an array of compositional possibilities, divided into logical and a-logical. A logical compositional montage is found in the shots of the woman with the pince-nez glasses near the end of the *Odessa Steps* sequence. This shot represents a sudden and spontaneous action that has a logical, direct message. The first shot shows the woman screaming or crying out after seeing a woman with the wounded child get shot. The next shot shows, without a transition or warning, the woman with the glasses in agony, with blood on her right eye and her pince-nez glasses now shattered, giving the impression that she was shot as well. The next example he cites in the movie is the lion statues of Alupka, which he

considers to be an a-logical composition. He calls it that because it does not convey an obvious direct message but rather a symbolic, even philosophical, expression. The shots give the illusion that the lion is awakened from the gunfire in Odessa, and is rising up in fury, demonstrating rage towards the unjustifiable assault.

Backtracking to what Eisenstein wrote in his memoirs, he explains that the use of strong imagery in *Potemkin* is prevalent even before the bloody Odessa steps massacre. Eisenstein describes Vakulinchuk's funeral as an "explosion," (*Beyond the Stars* 523) an outburst of anger in which the mourners realise the injustices that Vakulinchuk was fighting against. It is in that scene where mourners clenched their fists, tempers would escalate and the passion of the mourners became more intense, giving the impression that protests or even outright revolution could break out and the consequences could be, at worst, bloody.

And the protests did turn out bloody, but it is not the demonstrators who shed first blood. Another so-called detonator mentioned is in Odessa itself, when the peace and quiet of the city becomes rudely interrupted; the title card "Suddenly!" becomes the detonator, the cue for the soldiers high above the steps who march down in a mechanical fashion, mowing down anyone who stands in their path (Eisenstein *Beyond the Stars* 524-525). Living up to the meaning of the word "suddenly," the soldiers' call to fire on random civilians comes completely out of the blue, which is a stark contrast to the crackdown in *Strike*. In *Strike*, the crackdown at the factory was preceded by a period of tension, a standoff before the state forces made the first move and started the fire. In this case, the repression of the soldiers was entirely unexpected; in fact, the Odessa soldiers were not

even seen on-screen prior to this scene, as if they were ghosts that came out of nowhere and without warning. This is arguably one of the most important aspects that made *Potemkin* stand out from *Strike*, because almost no one expected this scene.

In “The Twelve Apostles” chapter of *Beyond the Stars*, Eisenstein mentions that he used the rotten meat not just as an obvious plot device to trigger a mutiny, but also as a symbol. The meat, infested by maggots and worms, symbolizes the unpleasant conditions that not only soldiers lived through at the time, but also workers of the “great army of labour” endured, to the point of being reduced to nothing more than a tool to be used from high above and then discarded once it is worn out and rusty (125). He also mentioned that Vakulinchuk’s funeral is partially based on the real life revolutionary, Nikolay Bauman, who took an active part in the Revolution of 1905 and would eventually be captured and hanged by the authorities on 31 October 1905. Nikolay Bauman was the first official Bolshevik to become a victim of the tsarist regime, and as such, his funeral, much like that of the fictional Vakulinchuk, became a major, if brief, political gathering that the government did not want to allow but could not suppress, as thousands of people showed outrage over his murder.

Oksana Bulgakowa mentions that the director’s train of thought in the course of *Potemkin* was influenced by reading a dissertation written by a psychologist friend, Lev Vygotsky, who was working at the Moscow Psychological Institute. Vygotsky’s dissertation, *Psychology of Art*, mentions the power of catharsis as an affective reaction, the yearning to right a wrong that took place when one was not looking or was merely

indifferent. Throughout the course of this movie, Eisenstein shows a very ambivalent picture of the Revolution, in which violence only triggers more violence and spills into a chain reaction. Sailors began to take action after one of them gets whipped by a clumsy guard who vents his anger on a sleeping recruit. The seeds of mutiny and uprising would eventually get sown by protesting the rotten meat in their soup. One of the officers patrols the kitchen to check if any of them are eating their soup, only to find out that a large number of sailors refuse and apparently go on hunger strike (in reality, they get smuggled foodstuffs in the backroom). When the officer reports to the Admiral about the strike, the Admiral decides to take action by ordering the crew of the *Potemkin* on deck, paving the way for the *Drama on Deck* chapter.

In comparison with *Strike*, the presence of social issues tends to be more symbolic than direct. In *Strike*, the workers clearly go out on strike with a series of demands, therefore making their economic protest to demand numerous political concessions. In *Potemkin*, however, the soldiers seem to spread the revolution into the armed forces, but their proposals are otherwise not so explicitly stated. They never state that they want an improvement in living conditions or give the people more say in matters of government. But one can see the presence of acute social divisions, in which the well groomed, better fed officers are in stark contrast with the burly, commonly dressed sailors. In comparison with *Strike*, the authority figures are far less flamboyant and instead look more like bureaucrats mired in the status quo and are willing to do anything to keep it that way (Goodwin 65). Nonetheless, they do express body language that makes them stand out from

the sailors; the officers tend to be uptight, cold, almost devoid of any significant emotion, almost like machines, with the Admiral demonstrating a volcanic temper and willing to step on others to enforce conformity.

Much like his previous film, *Potemkin* was met with a lot of controversy when released in December 1925 and 1926. In Britain, for example, it was banned from cinemas because of a general miners' strike in May 1926. While the film had nothing to do with mining or even Britain itself, its political message and its coincidental release prior to such a sensitive event, made *Potemkin* a hard sell for the British Board of Film Classification. In his lifetime, Eisenstein fought to have the decision appealed to no avail, and both films (as well as much of his other work) would not be officially released in Britain until 1954. The film's reception in the US in 1926 was rather interesting, and also encountered controversy there. It was released and distributed in large cities, yet it was banned in other places like Pennsylvania, under the pretext that the film was "a blueprint for American sailors on how to conduct a mutiny" (Jones 220-223).

In the Soviet Union itself, the film was met with much of the same scepticism as did *Strike*, in which criticism ran the gamut from being "incomprehensible to the masses" to "a glorified documentary" (Jones 225). With the rise of Stalin to power in 1928, the graphic violence of both films had to be trimmed in order for it to stay in circulation, in an atmosphere in which the government began taking stringent controls on the arts and media (225).

Bulgakowa mentions that Eisenstein was further criticised for the way he used the shots of the lion statues at the height of the *Odessa steps*, a scene that was perceived to be a confusing collage of images. Critics apparently misunderstood the message as they asked whether these lions represented the reaction of the people's anger or a representation of the reactionary forces' fury, as the lion also represents a symbol of royalty. Nonetheless, Eisenstein rebuffed criticism that the shots of the lion waking up as a literal representation of the popular idiom of "and the stones rose" (Bulgakowa 61), and mentions that the emotions could not have been intensified even further than what they already were without abstract representations of what was going on. In other words, the perceived movement of the lion statues (edited to give the audience the illusion that it is one and the same lion) speaks where words fail to convey a strong, effective message (Bulgakowa 62). Furthermore, Nesbet reiterates that the lion itself is a symbol of bravery and courage, which would make it the opposite of the cowardly misdeeds of the soldiers marching upon the Odessa Steps, killing and maiming indiscriminately. (Nesbet 82)

Another criticism aimed at Eisenstein was the fact that after Vakulinchuk's death, there was no strong central character that continued the story. Even Matyushenko, his right-hand man, was greatly subdued and didn't seem to carry the weight of the film like Vakulinchuk. Eisenstein also got a few jabs from fellow filmmakers and directors, including his mentor Kuleshov, who considered the film's montages mediocre at best. Vladimir Gardin considered Eisenstein and Tisse's camerawork choppy and saccharine, while Abram Room criticised the film because it did not deal enough with the lives of the

main characters, as in not being able to explain their motivations in leading this uprising (Bulgakowa 62).

*Potemkin* is a somewhat lighter affair than *Strike*, but that does not mean that the former is devoid of any suspense or moments of strong tension in which anything (most likely bad) could happen at any time. In fact, *Potemkin* makes up for the somewhat toned down violence with a heavy use of standoffs in many of its key scenes, even in non-violent, yet equally tense situations such as in the *Men and the Maggots* scene. In this scene, the sailors complain to their superiors that they're fed up with the worm-ridden meat they've been eating for all this time, and supposedly they've already washed it out with seawater. The music and the body language of the actors suggest a slow but consistent crescendo, and seem to reach a climactic moment when the captain orders them to put aside the rotten meat (or at least the body language suggests), while one of the cooks salvages the better ones for later. The point of this scene was to accustom the viewer to long and suspenseful standoffs, the periods of tension and uncertainty in which impending doom, a surprise twist or just a red herring would ensue.

The *Drama on Deck* scene, like the preceding *Men and the Maggots*, is for the most part, a stand-off akin to those of Westerns, a scene in which the music and the body language of the parties involved create a slow but progressively foreboding situation and the fear of an ugly climax -- a long, agonizing suspense in which one of the two camps would make the first move at any time. In fact, the suspense builds up very slowly through a period of nine minutes; from the moment the Ship's admiral asks who enjoyed the soup

to the moment in which the death squads refuse to shoot the mutineers. As in *Strike*, the battle between the state (and other established institutions such as religion) and the people is manifested in a very visual manner, starting with the clothing and behaviour patterns. The officers are dressed with navy jackets, with the Admiral wearing a coat, while a bearded and hairy priest (coincidentally played by Eisenstein) sends prayers to those who are about to be executed..

Although at first glance it may seem the presence of facial hair is somewhat correlated with rank or authority, as virtually of the sailors are clean-shaven or with stubbles (with the noticeable exception of Vakulinchuk, who sports a distinguishable moustache), while at the same time some of the officers have moustaches and beards while the Admiral has a full beard. However, this visual aspect may not be clear-cut or completely consistent as some of the officers don't have facial hair, but one cannot deny its presence. Vakulinchuk is the leader of the rebellion, and in that manner, his level of responsibility is symbolised by his distinguishable, bushy moustache that is more pronounced than most of the officers themselves, giving the impression that he cares more about the sailors than do these self-serving officers. It is not known whether Eisenstein consciously or deliberately considered the use of facial hair as a symbol of authority and hierarchy, but in *Potemkin*, this seems to be the unwritten rule rather than the exception.

In the scene of Vakulinchuk's funeral, there is a moment of escalation and heightening of tensions in the atmosphere. Like *The Men in the Maggots*, this scene would have its climax, its eruption delayed until the sudden, unexpected arrival of the Cossacks



of the subsequent scene, *The Odessa Steps*. Vakulinchuk's funeral naturally begins with grieving, where the citizens get to see the martyr of the *Potemkin*, and eventually their sadness is replaced with an outburst of anger and discontent because on his corpse, a letter reveals what cost the man his life: "he was killed for a plate of soup." Upon reading this note, one lad angrily stands up on the platform, demanding answers for his death and for the government to accept responsibility for its actions and misdeeds. This eventually reaches a mild climax when a bourgeois gentleman in the background screams "Death to Jews!" (arguably a symbolic reference to the pogroms of the brutal Black Hundreds and other extremist groups), only to get mauled, cast aside and is never seen or heard from again. Eventually the anger subsides, at least temporarily, as the surviving sailors of the *Potemkin* invite the Odessan crowd into their ship, and these men are given a heroes' welcome, and the sailors invite the civilians into the ship for a visit and to ensure that if something happens, the *Potemkin* will always be on their side, a promise they would live up to later.

Eisenstein also cites the Vakulinchuk's funeral scene as an example of tonal montage. In contrast to rhythm montage, tonal montage tends to encompass vibrations that that derive from the shot rather than just the pacing of the characters' movements and the tempo of the music. As the scene begins, the shores of Odessa have a dark, foggy sky that evolves to misty white and then a clear sky, giving the message that a new day has begun, a new era is ready to dawn and it is up to the protesting mourners to ensure that Vakulinchuk's deeds shall be honoured (*Writings Vol. I* 190).

In comparison to the *Drama on Deck* scene, the *Odessa Steps* massacre seems to come out of nowhere, preceded only by the “However...” intertitle and virtually no immediate build-up prior to this scene, which is one example in which Eisenstein created a random, out-of-the-blue burst in order to surprise audiences and keep their eyes open. In contrast to the *Drama on Deck* chapter, the suspense actually takes place in the *middle* of the scene, when the Cossacks finish descending upon the first wave of stairs followed by a slab of pavement before pausing. It is at this moment in which a number of women decide that they should reason and negotiate with these soldiers, leading to a very brief, but very nerve-wracking period of uncertainty until one of the soldiers draws fire, and then the shooting resumes.

This scene applies the whole, general, and unifying factors mentioned in his “Montage of Film Attractions” in the following manner: The general factor of the scene is that both the soldiers and the civilians descend down the steps at their own rhythm, at radically different speeds; the civilians run down the steps in a frenzy, panicked fashion while the soldiers move down in a mechanical, slow and steady approach akin to those that would be used later in *Godzilla* or villains from slasher films such as *Halloween*. No matter how fast or how far the prey tries to run away or hide, the predator always manages to catch up and inflict great pain. The unifying factor is applied in this scene through the height of the steps as well as the dramatic music. The whole is measured by the alternation between the scenes of the steps with those of the lions waking up to the bloody atrocities, the

deliberate blurring of the soldiers' faces, as well as the tilted angles of numerous shots of the scene.

The last standoff that would be seen in this movie is in the final chapter, in which the *Potemkin* is waiting for another battleship that's been ordered to retrieve it. Eisenstein realized the importance of having a music score in his movies, and always wanted his films to get a new score every 20-25 years. The original score was made hastily by Edmund Meisel because the film commission approved the film's official release almost at the last minute and as such he was forced to recycle sections of his compositions, and did not have time to record the music on tape for the film's premiere on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1925, therefore performing it live as the film progressed. Years later, his score was replaced by Dmitriy Shostakovich's music, which was more polished and refined and is the one that most people know.

## V- Conclusions

I chose *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin* because these movies paved the way for Eisenstein's reputation as an innovative, eccentric and daring filmmaker, but also because his later films—even *October*, which came out in 1928-- were less violent and more conservative in story-telling as well as in content. This especially holds true with *Alexander Nevsky* and the *Ivan the Terrible* series, which were epic in scope, but strict government regulations compelled Eisenstein to tone down the gruesomeness found in his first two films. Despite that handicap, Eisenstein never lost his skill of exploring new ways of filmmaking and still preserving a penchant for enforcing subliminal messages in his movies, such as the animal motifs and the all-seeing eye.

Eisenstein, being a sympathiser of the Revolution, unsurprisingly turned to romanticism and powerful drama not so much to promote the cause of socialism at home and abroad, but rather create a statement that defies previously established social notions as well as artistic techniques. For instance, one of the innovations he implemented and avidly promoted in his first two movies is the so-called “plotless cinema” (Bordwell 49), a phrase that Bordwell heavily emphasised. It does not mean that his movies do not have a plot or a storyline, but rather they do not carry a conventional plot in the sense that they do not spin around a central hero and a main villain or the conflicts they have with one another. Rather, the *event*—in these cases, the strike, the mutiny and the uprising—is the star, and all the characters in these two movies share a fairly equal part in the event; not one character or actor is above the marquee title. More importantly, “plotless cinema” refers to the

construction of the film's actions around a historical process, a network of motifs that link the processes of the film as well the foregrounding of style and montage (Bordwell, 50). *Strike* laid the foundations of many ideas that would be used time and again, in tweaked forms, in his later films.

In a manner akin to the official Bolshevik viewpoint of the upheavals of 1905, the events of *Strike* and *Potemkin*, both of which take place during that tumultuous year, were seen as “dress rehearsals” for the great victory of Socialism that would come twelve years later. With that attitude in mind, both movies were made with a rather fatalistic, defeatist mindset akin to those of Greek tragedies such as *Oedipus*. In *Strike's* case, as noble and well-meaning as the people's intentions may be, they are destined by fate to become martyrs for generations to come no matter how hard they try to avoid the inevitable. They are martyrs who shall be honoured for their selfless sacrifice after the Bolshevik's rise to power in November 1917. Although Eisenstein only made three out of seven movies that were supposed to chronicle the years of socialist revolutionary activity up until the Bolshevik Revolution, he made a smart decision in making three well-made and innovative movies that stood the test of time, rather than let his ego and his ambition blind him from the difficulties that he would have faced with the gargantuan task of making seven movies in such a short time with dubious quality.

Eisenstein was a fan and good friend of Isaac Babel, a prominent writer best known for the *Red Cavalry* novel. That book's dark and unforgivingly violent passages about the Russian Civil War, which spilled over into neighbouring Poland, influenced Eisenstein's

way of storytelling in *Strike*, *Potemkin*, and even in *October*, as he showed scenes of unforgiving, gruesome violence that, in comparison to contemporary films, looked life-like. At one point, Eisenstein considered adapting *Red Cavalry* into a film, but circumstances forced him to postpone and eventually give up the project, especially after the novel was withdrawn from circulation in 1933 and would not resurface in stores until after Stalin's death in 1953. Nonetheless, the novel's gritty, downbeat atmosphere, alongside his passionate interest in the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848, influence the way Eisenstein showed the audience the paradoxes that come with revolution and social upheavals as well as reprisals from both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces.

Considering Eisenstein's popularity and influence, he naturally was widely studied, admired and many (including the authors I've already cited) have tried, with varying degrees of success, to understand his mindset, the circumstances that surrounded him, his tumultuous relationship with both American and Soviet film studios alike, and the mysteries that surround his personal life, from childhood to adulthood. When comparing these two films, *Strike* tends to be more straightforward in graphic imagery as well as a reference to social issues, as it involves workers protesting the unfair, unpleasant conditions in a factory. In *Potemkin*, the sailors are protesting the rotten meat—in itself an implicit symbol of neglect on the part of the authorities, which spills over to the protesting of political reprisals throughout the Empire.\_

It is no easy task to attempt to write something particularly new or innovative about a very popular film maker, as authors such as David Bordwell, Ion Barna, Jay Leyda, Oksana Bulgakowa, James Goodwin, Anne Nesbet, and Aleksandr Zholkovsky would agree when they wrote their respective works on Eisenstein. But when I first saw *Potemkin* and *Strike*, the first thing that struck me before I knew anything substantial about Eisenstein was the strong imagery in those films, which undoubtedly created a lot of stir when they were released back then and even to this day. The films reveal that the human nature of social conflict and inequality are recurrent and these are often the primary motives of events that take the world by storm. I do not claim to write anything particularly groundbreaking, nor propose any insights that may seem completely new or out-of-the-blue but rather explain how one particular detail that attracted my attention eventually matured into a thesis over time.

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