

**Eisenstein, Part 2: "[As] in life itself" –  
Montage from 1930**

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[Earliest version presented in class in the fall of 1967. Revision recorded in the fall of 1971 as part of one of "Nine Lectures on Film Design" under the title "Eisenstein: the Marxist as Film Designer" by WBUR FM, Boston, Massachusetts, for broadcast in the spring of 1972; rebroadcast in the spring of 1973 on WROR and WRKO, Boston, and distributed thereafter through the National Public Radio network and local stations. Revised mid-1980s, 1994-1996 and thereafter.]

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The philosophers have merely interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.

Karl Marx<sup>2</sup>

To convince someone of the truth it is not adequate to establish the truth. One has to find the *way* from error to truth.

Ludwig Wittgenstein<sup>3</sup>

I've a horror of films *de cadrages*. I detest unusual angles. I sometimes work out a marvellously clever shot with my cameraman. Everything is all beautifully prepared, and we just burst out laughing and scrap the whole thing to shoot quite straight forwardly with no camera effects.

Luis Buñuel<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase '... in life itself' is Eisenstein's own. See the quotation from "Word and Image" reproduced on pages 22 and 27 below.

The bulk of the translations of writings of Eisenstein that I shall use throughout this essay are by Jay Leyda as found within *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory and The Film Sense by Sergei Eisenstein*, edited and translated by Jay Leyda (Cleveland, Ohio and New York, New York: Meridian Books – The World Publishing Company, 1957 [Fifth Printing, 1963]. Leyda's translation of *Film Form* was originally published in 1949 by Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York, New York; that of *The Film Sense* in 1942 (new revised edition, 1947). The remaining quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the volume of Eisenstein's early works, *Selected Works: Volume 1, Writings, 1922-34*, edited and translated by Richard Taylor (London, England: BFI Publishing and Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1988).

For abbreviations of the titles of the works by Eisenstein as used within this essay, see Appendix 2.

<sup>2</sup> The eleventh of Karl Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* [1845], later engraved as the epitaph on his tombstone in Highgate Cemetery, London. The dramatist, Richard Hochhuth, was later to invert unkindly, "The Marxists have merely *interpreted* Marxism in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." (Quote taken from page 32 of Karl R. Popper's "The Two Faces of Common Sense", *Objective Knowledge: an Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> 'Bermerkungen über Frazers "The Golden Bough"', in *Synthese* 17, 1967, page 234.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by David Robinson in "'Thank God – I'm Still an Atheist': Luis Buñuel and Viridiana", *Sight & Sound*, #31 (Summer, 1962), page 118).

On 19 August 1929 Eisenstein left the Soviet Union for Germany on a journey that was to take him through parts of Europe, the United States and Mexico supposedly studying "the technique of foreign cinematography".<sup>5</sup> He was accompanied by his cameraman, Tisse, and his most trusted working colleague, Alexandrov.

On 09 May 1932 Eisenstein returned to his homeland, a month after the infamous resolution of 23 April 1932 entitled "On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organisations" had been passed at Stalin's behest, placing the activities of artists directly under party control. Had Eisenstein any illusions left, they were soon to evanesce, for neither he, his colleagues nor his country would ever again be as they had been before. Stalin was to rule with a ruthlessness unparalleled by any leader of a nation in modern times (though within a year Hitler would try to match him in Germany). Eisenstein had angered Stalin by defying a direct order to return earlier, and, upon arriving back, discovered what he may have already suspected, that he would not soon be making films again and then only at Stalin's command and under his direct supervision.<sup>6</sup>

No one at the time, of course, much less Eisenstein who had been absent from his country since 1929, could have foreseen the breadth and depth of the society of terror that he was about encounter and within which he would be obliged to live out the remainder of his life. The staggering numbers of Stalin's victims over the next two decades border on the incomprehensible even for historians accustomed to pondering

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<sup>5</sup> The description is Herbert Marshall's from his chronology at the end of his translation of Eisenstein's *Immoral Memories: an Autobiography* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), page 270. I shall hereafter refer to Marshall's translation and its Preface as IM.

<sup>6</sup> While in Mexico, Eisenstein had been labelled "a deserter" by Stalin in a telegram to Upton Sinclair, and while there he may have suspected as well that his "closest co-worker", Grigori Alexandrov, had been a spy reporting to Stalin on his activities during the journey. Although only a conjecture, it was believed to be true by others acquainted with the situation at the time. 'Grisha' Alexandrov had worked with Eisenstein on the scenarios of STRIKE, THE GENERAL LINE (OLD AND NEW) and OCTOBER, co-signed the manifesto on nonsynchronous sound of 1929 along with Pudovkin and co-written the article "An Experiment Comprehensible to the Millions" on the GENERAL LINE published in January, 1929. The assessment that he had been Eisenstein's "closest co-worker" throughout his career is Marshall's, and the record supports it. Upon returning to the Soviet Union with Eisenstein, however, Alexandrov broke off all further contact with him and, being immediately welcomed by Stalin, was given the opportunity to begin a series of safe comedies that were to become Stalin's favourites. As Eisenstein's widow, Pera Attasheva later noted, although Alexandrov thereafter had both access to Stalin and influence with him, he never lifted a finger to help his former colleague and friend. After Stalin's death Alexandrov was ostracized by the Soviet film industry. See pages x and xvii of Herbert Marshall's Preface to IM, op cit. (footnote 5 above).

the mass murders occasioned by others before and after him within the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. In simple summary,

During the quarter-century between 1929 and 1953, Stalin 'repressed' forty-million human beings within his country – a number greater than the current population of Canada – over half of them dying as a result.<sup>7</sup>

By 1932, Eisenstein had become a renowned celebrity both within and without his country not only for his movies but for his patriotism, a situation that under a dictator of common paranoia might have rendered him safe from persecution. Stalin suspicions, however, were well-nigh boundless. To read the memoirs of the notable thinkers and artists within the USSR who somehow survived Stalin and his purges is a wrenching experience, mirroring the despair of German colleagues who, under Hitler, were to witness the terror of families, friends and associates disappearing into the night, night after night.

Stalin's terror, however, differed in a singular way from that which other bullies were to impose upon other countries. With few exceptions, Stalin's victims were neither 'enemies' of the USSR, foreign or internal, nor constituents of 'minorities' within it, but rather the most obedient, law-abiding and patriotic of its citizens.<sup>8</sup>

There are ways of 'repression' and mass murder that destroy not only the wills but the identities of those who remain. Under Hitler one knew who one was, and knew that it was because of who one was that one was targeted or not. If one were 'Aryan' and German and kept one's mouth shut, one was safe. If, on the contrary, one were Jewish and German, however assimilated and unaccustomed to remembering the accident of one's ancestry, one was a target because of it. Hitler was no second to Stalin in brutality, but his viciousness, however depraved, accentuated the rooted identities of his victims. The Germans who survived to bear witness to it, however astonished at its wickedness, nevertheless in some sense *understood*, and their understanding deepened their historical consciousness, if Jewish, and their guilt if not.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Current population of Canada' as of 2020. 'Repressed' was the verb used within the official pronouncements of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s to capture Stalin's endeavour. For an amplified account of the nature and scope of Stalin's victims, see Appendix 1: "A Sketch of the Breadth and Depth of the 'Great Terror' of Stalin", drawn from Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror: a Reassessment* (Edmonton, Alberta: the University of Alberta Press, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> By 1939, for example, Stalin had effectively eliminated the delegation of nearly 2000 who had comprised the XVIIth Party Congress of 1934, as he would soon thereafter destroy the larger part of the entire officer corps of the Soviet military and the. See again Appendix 1.

Under Stalin, however, it made no difference who you were or what you had done. The brutality was seemingly random, the terror accompanied by the horror of never understanding it – of never knowing who one was or where one stood.

How harrowing it must have been, then, to have become a cultural celebrity within the USSR caught up within Stalin's terror, especially if, like Eisenstein and Shostakovich, and to a lesser extent, Pasternak, one had by its inception earned a world-wide reputation of which Stalin was well aware and who could be called upon by him, time and time again, to bolster the regime – or, if he by whim he thought otherwise, to be sacrificed as an example to intimidate others!

Eisenstein lived to see his friend Tretyakov, the playwright who had adapted the play within which his first short film appeared, and who had written *Gas Masks* and other plays Eisenstein had produced, imprisoned and murdered by the KGB; his friend Isaac Babel, who had assisted in the revision of the scenario for *BEZHIN MEADOW*, was imprisoned without trial in the Gulag where he died; of the twenty soviet students he tried to train at the VGIK between 1932 and 1935, three were imprisoned in the Gulag (two of whom died) and another killed by being sent by the party to do heavy labour despite fragile health.<sup>9</sup> Eisenstein was to survive while his teacher, Vsevolod Meyerhold, labelled "an enemy of the people", had his works banned, his theatre closed, all information about him deleted from reference works, his wife butchered and finally he himself murdered in the cellars of the KGB – the Meyerhold of whom Eisenstein was to write

I must say that I never loved, idolized, worshipped anyone as much as I did my teacher, and to extreme old age I shall consider myself unworthy to kiss the dust from his feet.<sup>10</sup>

These were but a few of the friends, colleagues and coworkers of Eisenstein who disappeared. But he also witnessed the disappearance into the Gulag of men like Boris Shumyatsky, Stalin's minister for cinema and the man who had carried out the orders that had curtailed Eisenstein's filmmaking career!

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<sup>9</sup> Five others died in the war and another five of sickness; and thanks to Stalin's policy, announced by the time of their graduation, to curtail production from 100 to 10 features a year, none of the rest were ever to work effectively as filmmakers.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted from Marshall's 'Preface' to IM, op. cit., page xii. It had been thought that Meyerhold's archives had been destroyed by the KGB. Only in Khrushchev's day was it learned that Eisenstein and Pera Attasheva had hidden them in their dacha – an act of remarkably courage, as Marshall suggests.

Sadly, then, one can both understand and acquiesce in Eisenstein's assessment of his life when, looking back on it before his death, he found it to be incomprehensible to him:

In February of 1946 I was felled by a heart attack. For the first time in my entire life I was brought suddenly to a halt, confined to a life in bed, blood circulation sluggish, thinking slow. Ahead lay several months of absolute sameness. I was even glad. I said, At last I'll be able to take a look at myself, glance backward, think things over; and I'll understand everything about myself, about life, about the forty-eight years that have been lived.

Let me say at once: I understood nothing. Not about life, not about myself, not about the forty-eight years that had been lived. Nothing – except perhaps for one thing: that life had passed at a gallop without a backward glance, in constant transit, leaving one train to chase after another, my attention riveted all the time to the second hand.<sup>11</sup>

As in the first of these lectures, therefore, I sympathize with those who have wanted to see the changes in Eisenstein's later films and writings as having arisen primarily as a response to Stalin's influence.

There is more to the story of Eisenstein, however, and why he made movies differently after returning from his long journey westward than before, than is captured in the popular political parable blaming it on Stalin – as he himself was to insist within a half-dozen years after returning to his country in 1932. For however incomprehensible Eisenstein's life may have seemed to him within writing his memoirs while hospitalised in 1946, two years before his death, the very act of writing them confirms that he knew that only by understanding somethings well enough can one find others puzzling.

By 1938-1942, Eisenstein had unequivocally come to understand three things about himself, his early filmmaking and his reasons for changing his mind about how films ought to be made. Two of them can be neatly summarized, for they are general, inferential and obvious. The third, however, of which Eisenstein wrote at length, we must delineate carefully.

1. By 1938-1942, Eisenstein knew exactly why he had been spared by Stalin and would be spared even after his knowing portrayal of Ivan (read: Stalin) as tyrant in *IVAN, PT. 2*. He was the most notable and celebrated of Soviet artists internationally, the paradigm living symbol throughout the world of the revolutionary artist, and Stalin, while perverting the revolution privately in every way possible, could not easily afford to lose him. Barring stupid heroics,

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<sup>11</sup> From Eisenstein's "Forward" to *IM*, op. cit., page 3 (footnote 5 above).

Eisenstein was to be kept alive to make ALEXANDER NEVSKY as ordered when the country was attacked by the Germans, despite his oft-expressed disdain for the subject, with two of Stalin's henchmen watching his every move to ensure compliance with the screenplay; to welcome the Germans by radio as allies two years later when the Nonaggression Pact was ratified in 1939 and to direct as ordered the Bolshoi's production of Wagner's *Die Walküre* as a sign of friendship; and then to make IVAN to order two years after than when the pact proved worthless.

Even more than Shostakovich, Eisenstein was a symbol without peer, and both he and Stalin knew it. It was Stalin's game but Eisenstein understood the rules, and, unlike his teacher, Meyerhold, he did the best he could to play with integrity within them. However incomprehensible generally and morally it may later have seemed to him, he succeeded more than most others and I respect him for it.

2. Having travelled westward a decade before, Eisenstein by 1938-1942 had come to understand as well that, *by his own criterion*, the international successes of his early films, and the especial brilliance of parts of them, had blinded him to their functional failures as artistical wholes. THE BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN, for example, had been applauded throughout the west for its cinematographical innovations, and the ingenuity of its maker had been widely noted. Eisenstein and his film, indeed, had become a *cause celebre* throughout much of Europe and America. But while audiences cheered its direction, conception, editing and photography, they failed to celebrate its subject, the revolution! Eisenstein had set out to make a point clearly, "to forge accurate intellectual concepts", and he had succeeded unequivocally: everyone seeing the film got the point. Unfortunately, having gotten it, they dismissed it while cheering everything else about the film!

Upon returning to his homeland, therefore, Eisenstein, a Marxist artist of integrity, had no choice but to reassess what he had earlier achieved and to rethink what so many had said, however insensitively, about the latent anti-Marxism of his 'formalist' tendencies. His earlier films, however clear and brilliant, had failed to convince. *Clarity* of theme, therefore, was not enough. Something was wrong with the notion of 'intellectual cinema' as he had conceived it, deeply wrong, for somehow he had failed to achieve *conviction* of theme as required.

How, then, had he failed, and what could be done about it? The answer had not come easily to him. Prohibited from making films between 1932 and 1935, Eisenstein had taught full-time at the GIK, pondering both his own identity as an artist and the relative

failure of his early films and, while rethinking both of them, working out in his mind, gradually and progressively as he tried out his ideas on his students, a new way of making films – a way linked to the old, to be sure, but new nonetheless.

By 1934-1935, however, Eisenstein had constructed a partial answer and by 1938 the whole of it – the answer encompassed within the essay "Word and Image" that he choose to place before others within his "first book of theory" – a book in English translation that appeared in New York in 1942 in the midst of World War II – the only compilation of written work that he ever authorised for publication.<sup>12</sup>

Keep firmly in mind, then, that Eisenstein was under no compulsion whatsoever to say what he said within "Word and Image", much less to approve of its appearance as the first of the four parts of the only collection of his essays that he ever approved for publication. He could have written otherwise had he understood things otherwise, or, if dangerous, he needn't have published it at all.

We must therefore take him at his word and respect the claim inherent therein, namely that the changes so obvious in his filmmaking, teaching and writing after 1930, though provoked by the constraints within which Stalin had compelled him to work, exemplified rather a deeply-rooted *reconstruction* of how better to make movies.

By 1938-1942 Eisenstein was ready to proclaim to everyone not only that he had been *mistaken* early on about what works of art ought to do and hence how movies ought to be made, but that he now understood his mistake and knew how to correct it.

To his new understanding we must turn.

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<sup>12</sup> *Film Sense*, translated and edited by Jay Leyda (New York, New York: Harcourt, Brace (1942)). The four parts of the book consist of translations of work that Eisenstein wrote between 1938 and 1940. Part I, the essay entitled "Word and Image", had been published in 1939 in Russian within *Iskusstovo Kino* and had appeared later the same year in an English translation by Stephen Garry (checked by Ivor Montagu) in *Life and Letters Today* (June, July, August, September, October, November) under the title "Montage in 1938". Leyda's version is a 'reprint with alterations', approved by the original publisher, of the Garry translation.



### The Differences

Eisenstein's films after 1930 (after 1938, actually, for he completed none in between) appear so differently from those before 1930 that an uninformed observer might be forgiven for thinking that they must have been made by different human beings. We must trace the genesis and reason for those differences. Firstly, however, let's summarize them sharply.

Prior to 1930, Eisenstein had insisted that:

- (1) Filmmakers ought to avoid stories and plots and therewith individual protagonists, compelling us rather to see only masses of ordinary people doing those ordinary productive things that distinguish them as members of conflicting economic classes;
- (2) Filmmakers ought to enable us to see such things solely by sequencing *shots* that, by their *conflicting* juxtaposition (that is, by *montage*), would generate within us *ideas* accurately reflecting the class struggle; hence
- (3) Filmmakers ought to ensure that their films were permeated in every nuance of their being by *conflict*.

... for art is always conflict ... according to its social mission ... according to its nature ... according to its methodology. (DAFF [1929], page 46)

One need only glance in hindsight at the continuities of ALEXANDER NEVSKY or IVAN THE TERRIBLE, while recalling those of THE BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN or OCTOBER, to gasp in wonder at the changes Eisenstein had wrought. Clearly, this was no ripple passing over the surfaces of his filmmaking, but rather a revolution in practice and precept pervading its depths. Let's specify the differences, step-by-step.

### Stories, Plots and Individuals

In 1925 Eisenstein had condemned unequivocally the use of stories and plots, invoking STRIKE as a paradigm of how to show masses of human beings in "dialectical opposition" to the "individual plot material of the bourgeois cinema" (MAF; 1925, page 62). A decade later, however, in 1934, he could write of the same film,

Our first film opus, STRIKE, reflected, as in a mirror in reverse, our production of GAS MASKS. But the film floundered about in the flotsam of a rank theatricality that had become alien to it. At the same time, the break with the theatre in

principal was so sharp that in my 'revolt against the theatre' I did away with a very vital element of theatre – the story.

At that time this seemed natural. We brought collective and mass action onto the screen, in contrast to individualism and the 'triangle' drama of the bourgeois cinema. Discarding the individualist conception of the bourgeois hero, our films of this period made an abrupt deviation – insisting on an understanding of the mass as hero. ...

But our enthusiasm produced a one-sided representation of the masses and the collective; one-sided because collectivism means the maximum development of the individual within the collective, a conception irreconcilably opposed to bourgeois individualism. Our first mass films missed the deeper meaning. ...

In 1924 I wrote, with intense zeal, 'Down with the story and the plot!' Today the story, which then seemed to be almost 'an attack of individualism' upon our revolutionary cinema, returns in a fresh form to its proper place. In this turn towards the story lies the historical importance of the third half-decade of Soviet cinematography (1930-1935). (TTC [1934], pages 16 and 17)

Eisenstein never explained how the "maximum development of the individual within the collective" differs from "bourgeois individualism", and it was probably better that he didn't try.<sup>13</sup> Stories involve individuals *essentially*. By the middle 1930s, Eisenstein had accepted the *story*, and with it unique *individuals*, as essential to his art, thereby rejecting his earlier objections to it as mistaken. By the late 1930s, as we shall see, he was to recognize more fully that a story had to be "a connected story", and hence his earlier conception of montage as the combination of conflicting shots had been mistaken as well. Small wonder that every one of Eisenstein's later films was to

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<sup>13</sup> Eisenstein may well here have had his tongue in his cheek when emphasizing the distinction, a master debater scoring points within the recognized rules of a Marxist game. Having travelled widely in the west with universal recognition as a unique artist, having witnessed his western projects thwarted by the actions of other individuals, and having then had his own uniqueness everywhere reinforced at home through exclusion from the working collective of filmmakers by order of that towering particular antagonist, Stalin, it seems likely that Eisenstein's renewed sense of the importance of *individuals*, bourgeois or otherwise, arose from a growing conviction of his own uniqueness whose breadth and depth knowingly blurred the distinction. A paragraph inserted after the third of those above, for example, is either wishful thinking on Eisenstein's part, or more likely a countermove in a game of Marxist historical reconstruction – an understandable attempt to have one's cake and eat it, too: "Still, I am sure that for its period this deviation [avoidance of stories; focus on mass actions] was not only natural but necessary. It was important that the screen be first penetrated by the general image, the collective united and propelled by one wish. 'Individuality within the collective', the deeper meaning, demanded of cinema today, would have found entrance almost impossible if the way had not been cleared by the general concept." (TTC [1934], page 17)

encompass a highly dramatical story of uncommon events, subtly and intricately plotted, focused upon the motivated actions of a single, unique protagonist.

Eisenstein's uncommon events were uncommonly *stylized* as well, for having been freed by using stories from the constraints of showing only mass action, economically construed, he was now free to extricate himself as well from the confusion of realism with naturalism. From the middle 1930s onward, as we shall see, Eisenstein was gradually to reinterpret Marxist 'realism' to mean that a viewer ought to be enabled, by means of film, to encounter events *naturally* (that is, as "in life itself"), however uncommon or uncommonly stylized they might be. Filmmakers were to be *realistically* constrained, so to speak, not by restricting the kinds of things seen but by how they were perceived. If perceived naturally, they could as uncommon as connected and historically-rooted stories about human beings would permit.

The events of ALEXANDER NEVSKY and especially IVAN THE TERRIBLE, astonishingly stylized in every respect (acting, decor, mise-en-scène, lighting, camera positioning, dialogue), were unrealistic by any reasonable criterion prevailing either in the west or in the Soviet Union before or after 1930. Their highly uncommon events, however, were uniformly perceivable as *naturally* as if one were encountering them "in life itself", as the events of THE BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN and OCTOBER had never been.

### Shots and Montage

From his earliest writings on filmmaking in 1924, Eisenstein had maintained consistently that *shots* were to show common things, and *montage* was to be construed as the cutting between them for ideational effect.

For the exposition of even the simplest phenomena cinema needs comparison by means of *consecutive, separate presentation* between the elements which constitute it; montage in the technical, cinematic sense of the word is fundamental to the cinema ... the film's purpose requires [thematic] associations that are aroused by the *separate elements* of the stated fact (in practical terms, in 'montage fragments') ... . (MFA, 1924, page 41 [italics: EWC])

By 1929 conflict had been melded, seemingly inextricably, to the concepts of *shot* and *montage*.

The shot is by no means an *element* of montage. The shot is a montage *cell*. ... By what, then, is montage characterized and, consequently, its cell – the shot? By the conflict of two pieces in opposition to each other. ... from the collision of two given factors *arises* a concept. (CPI [1929], page 37)

Prior to 1930, therefore, a shot in and of itself, like a biological cell, could have no meaning except within a context of other shots united through montage; hence no shot, for Eisenstein, was to show anything so complex that assimilation of it would require it to be held for long upon the screen. Complexities were to arise only through montage, the juxtaposition of short shots, not the juxtaposition of elements within a shot. Shots were montage "fragments", not *containers* of it.

Up to 1930, indeed, Eisenstein had been openly contemptuous of filmmakers who used long shots of complex content.

In 1924-25 I was mulling over the idea of a filmic portrait of *actual* man. At that time, there prevailed a tendency to show actual man in films only in *long* uncut dramatic scenes. It was believed that cutting (montage) would destroy the idea of actual man. Abram Room established something of a record in this respect when he used in THE DEATH SHIP uncut dramatic shots as long as 40 meters or 135 feet. I considered (and still do) such a concept to be utterly unfilmic. (DAFF [1929], page 59)

As in that 'prehistoric' period in films (although there are plenty of instances in the present, as well), when entire scenes would be photographed in a single, uncut shot. This, however, is outside the strict jurisdiction of film-form. (CPI [1929], pages 38 and 39)

Eisenstein could hardly in 1933 have shocked his students at the GIK more, therefore, when, having returned from the west, he read to them the extended passage from Dostoevsky's *Crime & Punishment* in which Raskolnikov confronts the old money lender in her room and then chops her to death with a hatchet, assigning them the task of restaging it to be photographed "within the confines of one single camera position". When the students, echoing his own precepts of two years past, objected that the result would be "uncinematical ... unexciting ... the shot will be much too long ... It'll be dull", Eisenstein responded bluntly:

If this piece turns out very long, and even, from the viewpoint of *your* principles, 'uncinematic' that doesn't matter – it is not such considerations that are the main things for us at the moment. It is important for us to learn how to dispose the action in the space of the shot regardless of its length. When you become film directors, you will be called upon to move people about *in the shot* regardless of its footage, bringing them toward the camera and moving them further away in accordance with given principles different from those obtaining on the theatre stage. Hence our job now is this, to do this work interestingly in the form of a teaching-exercise. We have to discover the maximum planning

possibilities within one single camera-angle, without breaking-up the scene into shots, for the latter is the object of a different *special* exercise.<sup>14</sup>

Eisenstein was not joking! This was no scholastical exercise divorced from filmmaking. As ALEXANDER NEVESKY and IVAN THE TERRIBLE were soon to confirm, techniques of construction that to him had once been "utterly unfilmic", standing "outside the strict jurisdiction of film-form", now lay at its centre. It was montage itself, as previously construed, that now occupied an extraordinary and "special" status.<sup>15</sup>

Eisenstein's students could surely be forgiven for being flabbergasted! What had happened to the *shot* as a "montage cell?" What had happened to *montage*, the juxtaposition of "colliding" shots, as the sole source of authentic *ideas* through *conflict*? We must unravel what Eisenstein had done to his conception of montage and its relation to concepts.

Before doing so, however, let's pause briefly to pay our last respects to the notion of *conflict*, for, like Eisenstein, we shall never need to focus upon it again.

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<sup>14</sup> The incident as recalled by Vladimir Nizhny, one of Eisenstein's students, in his *Lessons with Eisenstein*, translated and edited by Ivor Montagu and Jay Leyda (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1962), page 97. [Italics: EWC]

<sup>15</sup> Readers must here be careful. Eisenstein, now as before (and with Vertov principally in mind) would continue to distinguish "the montage principle" from "the principle of representation", characterizing the films of the latter, accurately enough, as those built upon "representations shot from a single set-up" ("Word and Image", pages 34 and 35, for example). As the contexts make clear, however, Eisenstein was not now objecting, as he had formerly, to *any* use by filmmakers of long-shots from a single set-up when making films, for that would have rendered his writings inconsistent with both his teaching and his filmmaking practices after 1930. Rather, he was objecting to the use of such shots by filmmakers who, unlike "Leonardo da Vinci's notes for The Deluge ... would not have taken into consideration as he did the various scales and perspectives to be distributed over the surface of the finished picture *according to the calculations of the trajectory of the spectator's eyes*" (WI [1939], page 34 [italics EWC]). He was objecting, in short, to long takes from a single camera set-up that failed to permit spectators to derive *images* from the unfolding event through *a natural sequential attention to aspects of it*, thus, in his words, giving only an "affidavit-exposition" of the event conveying "bare documentary information not raised by means of art to a created exciting force and emotional affect".

Eisenstein was here clearly and accurately pointing to the emotional detachment possible through the use of extended long-takes – a possibility in which he had no interest whatsoever but of which *cinéma vérité* filmmakers were to make much use 25 years later.

## Conflict

In 1929 Eisenstein had baldly asserted that "CONFLICT [is] the fundamental principle for the existence of every art-work and every art-form", and had vowed to make it central to what his films were, what they did and how they were put together. Filmmaking was the structuring of montage sequences, and montage was conflict.

By the middle 1930s, however, Eisenstein had ceased to use the word 'conflict': it appears *nowhere* in *The Film Sense*, and only incidentally in any of his subsequent writings! The term once deemed necessary to define the centre of artistic practice, and hence filmmaking, had been abandoned as too misleading to resuscitate even when reconstrued. Unlike 'montage', that could be broadened to encompass any connection, 'conflict' was precise and had to be junked.

Why? Eisenstein, on the surface, may seem to have been simply reflecting the Stalinist revision of Marxism now mandatory within the Soviet Union: 'socialism in one country' required *unity* in support of Stalin rather than generation of conflict. More profoundly, however, Eisenstein had finally come to understand that the order of means to ends in art, if authentic, had to be the *reverse* of their order in the world. If the progression of human history was dialectical, arising from the conflicts of contending economic classes, then what was required for an understanding of it was an intellectual reflection upon those conflicts, not a *conflictual* intellectual reflection upon them. Conflict's proper place was within world history rather than within one's ideas, or one's art, about it.

Eisenstein thus abandoned conflict as a principle of art without ever again looking back. Not being a philosopher, it never occurred to him that his insight was equally applicable to the complementary Marxist endeavours of philosophy. Dialectical materialism, when conflictually construed, was as inconsistent and fruitless as conflictual art, and by its own criteria, though it would take Marxists a long time to comprehend this.

### **The Roots of the Mistake: Montage Reconstrued**

Eisenstein had changed both his practices and his precepts as his films, his teachings and his writings from 1930 attest at every hand. Why? What mistake had he made early on? How had he corrected it? What precepts had taken its place? By 1938 Eisenstein was ready to give the full answer. He had been mistaken, he said, in construing montage as the juxtaposition of *conflicting shots*, and then taking such juxtapositions to exhaust the resources of authentic film design.

Eisenstein had already noticed in 1935 that his notion of "intellectual cinema" had been faulty, encompassing

... a self-reductio ad absurdum when it laid claim to exhaustive style and exhaustive content. (FFNP [1935], page 147)

By 1938 he had come to recognize as well that montage, when construed as 'conflict', was not only inexhaustive but atypical in "normal film construction and film composition" (WI [1939], page 9). If reconstrued, it might become "just as indispensable a component feature of film production as any other element of film" (WI [1939], page 3), but that was as different as night and day, and was to require a reconstrual so major as to render its former self unrecognizable.

How did the reconstrual emerge? We can do no better here than let Eisenstein speak for himself, for he could hardly have been more forthright.

Of what omission were we guilty when we first remarked upon the undoubted importance of the above phenomenon to an understanding and mastery of montage? What was true, and what false, in our enthusiastic declarations at that time?

The basic fact was true and remains true to this day, that the juxtaposition of two separate shots by splicing them together resembles not so much a simple sum of one shot plus another shot as it does a *creation*. It resembles a creation rather than the sum of its parts because in every such juxtaposition *the result is qualitatively* distinguishable from each component viewed separately. ...

What was the 'distortion' in our attitude at that time to this indisputable phenomenon? The error lay in placing the main emphasis on the possibilities of juxtaposition while less attention seemed to be paid to the problem of *analyzing the material* that was juxtaposed. ...

The trouble arose from my having been charmed primarily with that newly revealed feature of the film strips – that no matter how unrelated they might be, and frequently despite themselves, they engendered a 'third something' and became correlated when juxtaposed according to the will of the editor. Here I was preoccupied by a potentiality untypical in normal film construction and film composition. ...

What should have been the proper emphasis, what should have received the principal attention, in order that neither element would be unduly exaggerated? It was necessary to turn to that fundamental basis which equally determines both the content enclosed by single frames and the compositional juxtaposition of these separate contents with each other, that is, to the content of the *whole*,

of the general and *unifying* needs. ... We should have occupied ourselves more with an examination of the *unifying principle* itself. This is precisely that principle which should determine both the content of the shot and that content which is revealed through a given *juxtaposition of these shots*. (WI [1939], pages 7-10)

What would such an examination entail? Firstly, as noted above, the irrevocable decentring of montage as conflict. Lest he be misunderstood, Eisenstein now put it explicitly: the examples he had once commended as central were to be reconstrued as extraordinary, indeed "paradoxical cases"

But with this in mind it was necessary for the researcher's interest to be turned primarily not in the direction of paradoxical cases where this whole, general and final result is not *foreseen* but emerges unexpectedly. We should have turned to those cases where the shot-pieces are not only not unrelated to one another but where this *final*, this *general* and this *whole* result is not merely foreseen but itself predetermines both the individual elements and the circumstances of their juxtaposition. Such cases are normal, generally accepted and frequent in occurrence. In such cases the whole emerges perfectly as 'a third something'. The full picture of the whole, as determined both by the shot and by montage, also emerges vivifying and distinguishing both the content of the shot and the content of the montage. It is cases of this kind that are typical for cinematography.

With montage considered in this light, both single shots and their juxtaposition fall in a correct mutual relationship. In addition to this, the very nature of montage not only ceases to be divorced from the principle of realistic film delineation, but serves as one of the most coherent and practical resources for realistic narration of film content. (WI [1939], pages 10 and 11)

From now on Eisenstein was to use the word 'montage' in two senses depending on context, one particular and the other general, but neither equivalent to his earlier construal of it as *conflict*. Sometimes, in keeping with its particular and customary use by other filmmakers, he would use it as equivalent to 'editing' (that is, to the joining together of shots); at other times he would use it in the most general sense to refer to the connecting of anything with anything else within any of the arts, including thereby all the connections made by filmmakers *within shots* as well. He was to speak consistently in context, having reconstrued montage in filmmaking as only a particular example of the montage principle basic to art in general, and having reconstrued *montage as conflict* as only an extraordinary special case of the former, for, as he put it when summarizing, he had discovered that



... the montage principle in films is only a sectional application of the *montage principle in general*, a principle which, if fully understood, passes far beyond the limits of splicing bits of film together. (WI [1939], pages 35 and 36)

### The "Image of the Theme"

With montage thus broadly reconstrued, the purpose of filmmaking could no longer be "to forge accurate intellectual concepts" from conflict. What then was the goal of montage? What was the goal of filmmaking, or the goal of art, for that matter? In particular, what function should *thematic* material now have within filmmaking (the material that Eisenstein had envisaged as central to filmmaking as early as 1924 and had never forsaken)?

Eisenstein's answer was remarkable: the goal of filmmaking was no longer to generate an authentic theme in the minds of viewers (that is, authentic *ideas*) but rather to compel them to *experience* the theme – to perceive and to feel, as he put it, an *image* of the theme itself.

What is essentially involved in such an understanding of montage? In such a case, each montage piece exists no longer as something unrelated but as a given *particular representation* of the general theme that in equal measure penetrates *all* the shot-pieces. The juxtaposition of these partial details in a given montage construction calls to life and forces into the light that *general* quality in which each detail has participated and which binds together all the details into a *whole*, namely into that generalized *image* wherein the creator, followed by the spectator, experiences the theme.

If *now* we consider two pieces of film placed together, we appreciate their juxtaposition in a rather different light. Namely, piece A, derived from the elements of the theme being developed, and piece B, derived from the same source, in juxtaposition give birth to the image in which the thematic matter is most clearly embodied. ... [that is] *Representation A* and *Representation B* must be so selected from all the possible features within the theme that is being developed, must be so sought for, that their *juxtaposition* – that is, the juxtaposition of *those very elements* and not of alternative ones – shall evoke in the perception and feelings of the spectator the most complete *image of the theme itself*. (WI [1939], page 11)

So far, so good. We have come a long way from the confusions of the "intellectual cinema". The goal of filmmaking is no longer to evoke ideas but rather to engage the deepest and most holistic perceptions and feelings of viewers by evoking an *image* of

the theme itself. But of what does an *image* of a theme consist? How does one perceive and feel when one is doing so *imagistically with respect to a theme*?

Readers will recall that in 1929, at a comparable point in his exposition of the hierarchies of montage aimed at the "intellectual cinema", Eisenstein had refused to give an example. Five years later, when commenting upon the "errors" of the intellectual cinema, he had explained *why* within a notable understatement.

... because in unity it is complicated to follow exactly how an affective embodiment for ideas is built. (FFP, 1935, page 147)

Now, however, having specified in general what the goal of filmmaking ought to be, Eisenstein gave a comprehensive, detailed and thorough set of examples of what he meant by an *image* of a theme. More than that, he went beyond what he had said above to say precisely how such images had to be created, and in so doing delivered the death blow to whatever lingering hopes anyone might have had for a semiotical cinema.

Having given the general specifications of "representation" and "image" noted above, Eisenstein announced that he now wanted "to define the demarcation between these terms before we proceed further." (WI [1939], page 12) He then embarked upon a detailed eight-page exposition of what he meant by the notion of an *image* by means of two examples unprecedented both in detail, relevance and freedom from wishful thinking. Through them he explained how acquiring an image differed from the simple registering of the presence of objects (that is, "representation"), how it was generated and retained in life itself and how works of art had to imitate this process to be effective. He then deepened the argument that the generation of such images was essential to art, both structurally and methodologically, by following his preliminary exposition with nearly *fifty pages(!)* of derivative examples, again considered with unprecedented care and sustained pertinence, drawn from the writings of Maupassant, da Vinci, Pushkin, Keats, Shelley and Milton, treating every passage as if it were part of a *shooting script* rather than a conveyer of propositions.

One may assuredly quibble with details of these latter analyses, but, as Eisenstein well knew, he had for the first time the target in his sights and need make no apologies whatsoever. For the first time he could have justifiably echoed Warren McCulloch, the great perceptual physiologist, who once remarked,

Don't bit my finger, look where I'm pointing.<sup>16</sup>

#### 42nd Street at 5:00 p.m.

Eisenstein first paradigm, briefly but memorably put, consisted of a description of how we derive our *images* of the different times of the day, the kind of awareness through which I respond, for example, when someone says to me that she has lately become accustomed to walking home alone from the office 'at five o'clock in the afternoon'. Her comment evokes within me a host of affective imaginings, and it is exactly this kind of bundling of connected associative affects, unified within the feelings of a self-conscious human being, that, as Eisenstein was to insist, films ought to evoke.

Under some circumstances, of course, it is quite possible to hear such a comment, or to register perceptually the position of the hands on a clock at 5:00 p.m., without a cohesive image being evoked: one then, in Eisenstein's terminology, has simply encountered the clock as an object, a "representation". Tolstoy gives a grand example after Anna Karenina tells Vronsky that she is pregnant, an example with which Eisenstein commences his discussion:

When Vronsky looked at his watch on the Karenins' verandah he was so agitated and so preoccupied that he saw the hands and the face of the watch without realizing the time. (WI [1939], page 13)

As Eisenstein will insist later, it is exactly such "representations" without "images" that are meaningless in art as well as in life.

Conversely, then, what happens under normal circumstances when such a separation does not occur? What process occurs when we perceive the face of a clock at 5:00 p.m. with a cohesive *image* evoked?

A given order of hands of the dial of a clock invokes a host of representations associated with the time that corresponds to the given order. Suppose, for

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<sup>16</sup> Warren S. McCulloch, quoted by Seymour Papert in his Introduction to a collection of McCulloch's papers, *Embodiments of Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1965), page xx.

example, the given figure be five. Our imagination is trained to respond to this figure by calling to mind pictures of all sorts of events that occur at that hour. Perhaps tea, the end of the day's work, the beginning of rush hour on the subway, perhaps shops closing, or the peculiar late afternoon light ... In any case we will automatically recall a series of pictures (representations) of what happens at five o'clock. The image of five o'clock is compounded of all these individual pictures. (WI [1939], page 14)

Eisenstein seems here to be suggesting that every time we encounter the face of a clock at 5:00 p.m. that evokes within us a full-blown *image* of that time of day, we entertain consciously a stream of imaginings. As he hastens to explain, however, his description is not meant to be taken as a literal account of what passes consciously through our minds on each occasion when an image is evoked. Rather, it is meant to indicate the range of encounters at 5:00 p.m. that we have "assimilated" into our nonconscious memories while living our lives and that lie "condensed" and thus unapprehended consciously beneath the *image of 5:00 p.m.* that we feel when looking at the clock.

This is the full sequence of the process, and it is such at the point of assimilating the representations formed by the figures which evoke the images of the times of day and night. Thereafter the laws of economy of psychic energy come into force. There occurs 'condensation' within the process above described: the chain of intervening links falls away, and there is produced instantaneous connection between the figure and our perception of the time to which it corresponds ...

To recapitulate: between the representation of an hour on the dial of the clock and our perception of the image of that hour, there lies a long chain of linked representations of separate characteristic aspects of that hour. And we repeat: psychological habit tends to reduce this intervening chain to a minimum so that only the beginning and the end of the process are perceived [that is, only the face of the clock and the image it evokes].

But as soon as we need, for any reason, to establish a connection between a representation and the image to be evoked by it in the consciousness and feelings, we are inevitably compelled to resort again to a chain of intervening representations which, in aggregate, form the image. (WI [1939], pages 14 and 15)

Notice that Eisenstein has chosen to begin his exposition of the notion of *image* and its relation to art with a discussion of how images are created and evoked *in everyday life*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Note, as well, that he will be doing so by using words like 'chain', 'aggregate' and 'link' – the very notions upon which Pudovkin, echoing his teacher, Kuleshov, had relied a decade

As Eisenstein hastens to assure us, and will confirm over and over again throughout the essay, this is no accident of style. Eisenstein, for the first time in his life, is intentionally and inextricably linking authentic artistical perception to our natural perception of things about us!

These 'mechanics' of the formation of an image interest us because the mechanics of its formation in *life* turn out to be the prototype of the method of creating images in art. (WI [1939], page 14)

He emphasizes the point as he moves to his second paradigm, "an example approximating closely the other example from everyday life":

In New York City most of the streets have no names. Instead, they are distinguished by numbers – Fifth Avenue, Forty-second Street and so on. Strangers find this method of designating street extraordinarily difficult to remember at first. We are used to streets with names, which is much easier for us because each name at once brings up an image of the given street, i.e., when you hear the street name, this evokes a particular complex of sensations and, together with them, the image.

I found it very difficult to remember the *images* of New York's streets and consequently to recognize the streets themselves. Their designations, neutral numbers like 'Forty-second' or 'Forty-fifth', failed to produce images in my mind that would concentrate my perception on the general features of one or the other street. To produce these images, I had to fix in my memory a set of objects characteristic of one or another street, a set of objects aroused in my consciousness in answer to the signal 'Forty-second', and quite distinct from those aroused by the signal 'Forty-fifth'. My memory assembled the theatres, stores and buildings characteristic of each of the streets I had to remember. (WI [1939], pages 15 and 16)

Eisenstein now invokes the process of 'condensation' earlier noted, though without mentioning it by name, for he wishes here to concentrate on its principal effect, namely the uniting of these discrete memory images into a *single affective whole*, exactly as an authentic work of art unifies its elements into a whole.

This process went through definite stages. Two of these stages should be noted: in the first, at the verbal designation 'Forty-second Street', my memory with great difficulty responded by enumerating the whole chain of characteristic elements, but I still obtained no true perception of the street because the

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before and for which Eisenstein had then condemned him. See pages 25-27 below for the conclusion to be drawn from his having done so.

various elements had not yet been consolidated into a single image. Only in the second stage did all the elements begin to fuse into a single, emerging image: at the mention of the street's 'number', *there still arose this host of separate elements, but now not as a chain but as something single* – as a whole characterization of the street, *as its whole image*.

Only after this stage could one say that one had really *memorized* the street. The image of the given street began to emerge and live in the consciousness and perception exactly as, in the course of creating a work of art, its single, recognizable whole image is gradually composed out of its elements.

In both cases – whether it be a question of memorizing or the process of perceiving a work of art – the procedure of entering the consciousness and feelings through the whole, the whole *through the image*, remains obedient to this law. Furthermore, though the image enters the consciousness and perception *through aggregation*, every detail is preserved in the sensations and memory *as part of the whole*. This obtains whether it be a sound image, some rhythmic or melodic sequence of sounds, or whether it be a plastic visual image embracing in pictorial form a remembered series of separate elements. In one way or another, the series of ideas is built up in the perception and consciousness into a whole image, storing up the separate elements. (WI [1939], pages 16 and 17)

What then distinguishes the evocation of an image in art from life? In life an image is instantaneously evoked by an encounter, or nearly so, condensation having removed from conscious awareness the associations derived from earlier encounters upon which the feelings of which we remain conscious rest. A work of art, however, works inversely: its principal aim is to generate *new* images by mimicking the prolonged "process" by which images are generated in life, not to evoke old ones quickly through condensation.

We have seen that in the process of remembering there are two very essential stages: the first is the *assembling* of the image while the second consists in the *result* of this assembly and its significance for the memory. In this latter stage it is important that the memory should pay as little attention as possible to the first stage and reach the result after passing through the stage of assembling as swiftly as possible. Such is practice in life in contrast to practice in art. For when we proceed into the sphere of art, we discover a marked displacement of emphasis. Actually, to achieve its result, a work of art directs all the refinement of its methods to the *process*.

A work of art, understood dynamically, is just this process of arranging images in the feelings and mind of the spectator. It is this that constitutes the peculiarity of a truly vital work of art and distinguishes it from a lifeless one in which the spectator receives the represented result of a given consummated process of

creation instead of being drawn into the process as it occurs. This condition obtains everywhere and always, no matter what the art form under discussion. (WI [1939], pages 17 and 18)

Eisenstein pulls no punches: since the imminent aim of a work of art is to permit us to synthesize an original, deep and whole *image* (that is, a unified complex of fresh feelings of which we are self-consciously aware), a work of art must be structured to permit us to encounter its aspects through a perceptual process *analogous to that by which we should have derived such an image in life itself!* His linking of the structures of art to the processes of natural perception is unequivocal.

Consequently, in the actual method of creating images, a work of art must reproduce that process whereby *in life itself* new images are built up in the human consciousness and feelings.

We have just shown the nature of this in our example of the numbered streets, and we should be correct in expecting an artist, faced with the task of expressing a given image by factual representation, to resort to a method precisely like this 'assimilation' of the streets of New York. We also used the example of the representation formed by the dial of a clock and revealed the process whereby the image of time arises in consequence of this representation.

To create an image, a work of art must rely upon a precisely analogous method, the construction of a chain of representations. (WI [1939], pages 18 and 19)

If, however, the imminent aim of a work of art is to generate an image within a spectator, how does the *image* relate to the *theme*?

An authentic theme, to Eisenstein as to every Marxist artist, was a sentence expressing a general truth about the class struggle encompassing, however implicitly, a moral imperative. As Marx and Engels had insisted, such general moral truths ought to be transparent. They should be directly and obviously apprehendable by anyone encountering *naturally* the transpiring events of the world – encountering them, that is, with perception ideologically unclouded.

For Eisenstein, therefore, as noted above (page 16), the ultimate goal of a work of art was to enable a viewer to "*experience* the theme" [italics: EWC] by "giving birth to the image in which the thematic matter is most clearly embodied". The juxtaposition of the elements of a work of art were to "evoke in the perception and feelings of the spectator the most complete *image of the theme itself*" (WI [1939], page 11), compelling those

encountering the work not only to *comprehend* the theme (and therewith its moral implications) but to be *convinced* of its truth.<sup>18</sup>

Consequently,

Montage has a realistic significance [only] when the separate pieces produce in juxtaposition the generality, the synthesis of one's theme. This is the image incorporating the theme. (WI [1939], page 30)

This esthetic growth from the *cinematographic eye* to the *image of an embodied viewpoint on phenomena* was one of the most serious processes of development of our Soviet cinema in particular ... (DGFT [1944], page 233)

A decade before, montage as the juxtaposing of *conflicting* pieces had been understood by Eisenstein to exhaust the cinematal means of generating the *theme itself*. Now, through the juxtaposing of *connected* pieces (conflicting with one another only on extraordinary occasions), montage was to be reconstrued as the means of synthesizing one's theme by generating an *image* of it.

Beneath and behind this summary, therefore, was the inversion and gigantic expansion in Eisenstein's construal of *montage* from *conflict* to *connection*. By linking our perceiving of works of art to our perceiving of the common things about us, Eisenstein was insisting, as Kant would have put it, that works of art must be perceived *synthetically* if we are to derive engaging images from them, just as the things of the world must be so perceived. But then, as Kant could also have told him, the word 'synthesis' ceases to be of any *practical* use, for it distinguishes nothing importantly from anything else within either art or the world (even 'analysis' becoming a means to synthesis).

### Conclusion

Throughout the remainder of "Word and Image", Eisenstein elaborates in detail how the processes of natural selection when perceiving and thinking were reflected in the creative acts of artists of all kinds. In so doing, he broadened his construal of montage, identifying it with those processes, reflecting natural perception, by which any of the fragmentary aspects of a work of art are united into an image-generating whole (whether it be aspects of the performance of an actor in a drama, areas of colour in a painting, features within a shot in a film or sequences of shots within a film).

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<sup>18</sup> Though Eisenstein could hardly have commended the analogy, works of art were to 'work' in larger scale as the *parables* of Jesus had done for centuries.



He devotes especial attention, for example, to assimilating montage to the process by which actors unify their performances through imaginative exercises reproducing the processes of natural perception, whether for drama or film. In general,

It is entirely incorrect to assume that if an actor acts in a single unbroken strip of film, uncut by the director and cameraman into different camera-angles, that such a construction is untouched by montage! By no means! In such a case all we have to do is look for montage elsewhere, in fact, *in the performance of the actor*. (WI [1939], page 23)

And, after nearly sixty pages of case-studies, he concludes the essay by insisting,

The conclusion is that there is no inconsistency between the method whereby the poet writes, the method whereby the actor forms his creation *within himself*, the method whereby the same actor acts his rôle *within the frame of a single shot*, and that method whereby his actions and whole performance, as well as the actions surrounding him, forming his environment (or the whole material of the film) are made to flash in the hands of the director through the agency of the montage exposition and construction of the entire film. At the base of all these methods lie in equal measure the same vitalizing human qualities and determining factors that are inherent in every human being and every vital art. (WI [1939], page 64)

How far we have come from the aberrant notion of montage as *conflict (or collision) between shots*, the misconstrual from which Eisenstein had once hoped in vain to derive precepts distinguishing authentic from unauthentic filmmaking! Montage, no longer conflictual or primarily powerful in filmmaking, has now been reconstrued to encompass every step of connected artistic construction, each in turn a mirror of natural processes of 'montage' by which we derive images *in life itself*.

No wonder Eisenstein found the words 'conflict' and 'montage' to be increasingly useless. Except when reporting within "Word and Image" upon his early errors enroute to correcting them, the entirety of *Film Sense* could have been written without using them, and most of it was. By 1938, not even the vocabulary of Eisenstein's early errors remained.

'Conflict' (and therewith 'collision') had disappeared from Eisenstein's vocabulary because it applied to *nothing* useful.

Montage' had disappeared because it applied to *everything* useful.

What terms had taken their place? With resonance of astonishing and unwitting irony, Eisenstein now insisted that the processes of artistical creation in filmmaking had to be described unexceptionally as ways of *linking* things – of *connecting* them one to another as *in life itself* – exactly as Pudovkin had insisted a decade before.

In 1928, Eisenstein had insisted that

To determine the nature of montage is to solve the specific problem of cinema. The earliest conscious film-makers, and our first film theoreticians, regarded montage as a means of description by placing single shots one after the other like building-blocks. The movement within these building-block shots, and the consequent length of the component pieces, was then considered as rhythm.

A completely false concept!

... According to this definition, shared even by Pudovkin as a theoretician, montage is the means of *unrolling* an idea with the help of single shots: the "epic" principle.

In my opinion, however, montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots – shots even opposite to one another: the "dramatic" principle. [To which Eisenstein appends an amplifying note: "Epic" and "dramatic" are used here in regard to methodology of form – not to *content* or *plot!*]

A year later, in 1929, he had pronounced arrogantly that

In front of me lies a crumpled yellowed sheet of paper. On it is a mysterious note:

"Linkage – P" and "Collision – E."

This is a substantial trace of a heated bout on the subject of montage between P (Pudovkin) and E (myself).

This has become a habit. At regular intervals he visits me late at night and behind closed doors we wrangle over matters of principle. A graduate of the Kuleshov school, he loudly defends an understanding of montage as a *linkage* of pieces. Into a chain. Again, "bricks." Bricks, arranged in series to *expound* an idea.

I confronted him with my viewpoint on montage as a *collision*. A view that from the collision of two given factors *arises* a concept.

From my point of view, linkage is merely a possible *special* case.

Recall what an infinite number of combinations is known in physics to be capable of arising from the impact (collision) of spheres. Depending on whether the spheres be resilient, non-resilient, or mingled. Amongst all these combinations there is one in which the impact is so weak that the collision is degraded to an even movement of both in the same direction.

This is the one combination which would correspond with Pudovkin's view.

Not long ago we had another talk. Today he agrees with my point of view. True, during the interval he took the opportunity to acquaint himself with the series of lectures I gave during that period at the State Cinema Institute ... (CPI [1929], pages 37 and 38)

By 1938, however, Eisenstein had managed to do something that only the most determined, self-critical and honest of thinkers have ever been able to do. After trying again and again to render his earlier misconstruals workable, he had jettisoned them, replacing them with others erected upon a firmer foundation – the very foundation that he had previously deemed contemptable.<sup>19</sup>

Prevented by Stalin from making movies from 1932 to 1936, Eisenstein had been obliged to teach students within the GIK, the Soviet Union's principle school of filmmaking.<sup>20</sup> Having the time and opportunity to ponder what he had done, and the obligation to rethink how he and his students could thereafter do better, he recentred his thinking about filmmaking, and therewith about the making of art in general, upon the notions of 'linkage' 'chain', 'aggregate', 'built up ... brick by brick' [as] in life itself' – the very notions that he had a decade earlier condemned Pudovkin for using!

By 1938, Eisenstein had concluded, as noted above (pages 19-22), that

... to establish a connection between a representation and the image to be evoked by it in the consciousness and feelings, we are inevitably compelled to resort again to a chain of intervening representations which, in aggregate, form the image. (WI [1939], page 15)

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<sup>19</sup> Notable examples: Kant and Wittgenstein, the two philosophers after Plato who managed to 'revolutionise' the discipline.

<sup>20</sup> Eisenstein was allowed in 1935 to begin work on the screenplay for a movie to be entitled *Bezhin Meadow*, but production was suspended in March 1937. The film was never completed.

To create an image, a work of art must rely upon a precisely analogous method, the construction of a chain of representations. (WI [1939], page 19)

Consequently, in the actual method of creating images, a work of art must reproduce that process whereby *in life itself* new images are built up in the human consciousness and feelings. (WI [1939], page 18)

Eisenstein had come to realise, that is, unwittingly, or so it seems, and assuredly without acknowledgment to others, that Pudovkin had been right all along.

## Appendix 1

### A Sketch of the Breadth, Depth & Singularity of the 'Great Terror' of Stalin, 1929-1953

In 1990, following the explicit admission by the Soviet Union in 1987-89 of the magnitude of Stalin's terror, Robert Conquest published a second edition of the classic account of it that he had given in 1968. I can do no better than quote directly from it.<sup>21</sup>

Khrushchev himself told us in his memoirs that "ten million or more of our citizens paid with their lives in Stalin's jails and camps"!

In *The Great Terror* [1968] I gave estimates of approximate casualty figures for 1937-1938. My rough totals, arrived at through the examination of a number of separate trains of evidence, were

Arrests, 1937-1938	about 7 million
Executed	about 1 million
Died in Camps	about 2 million
In prison, late 1938	about 1 million
In camps, late 1938 (assuming 5 million in camp at the end of 1936)	about 8 million

I also concluded, from much Soviet and other testimony, that not more than 10 percent of those then in camp survived.<sup>22</sup>

The new Soviet figures required the author to amend slightly the first and last of the above categories [( 'Arrests, 1937-1938) to read '8 million' and ('In camps, late 1938') to read '7 million'], but confirmed the conclusion to which he had come two decades before:

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror: a Reassessment* (Edmonton, Alberta: the University of Alberta Press, 1990), pages 485. I have eliminated the footnotes to the sources given by Conquest for the various passages quoted.

<sup>22</sup> From page 485 of the Epilogue entitled 'The Terror Today' of Conquest's text, page 485.

[The first edition] was only peripherally concerned with the total casualties of the Stalin epoch. But it reckoned the dead as no fewer than 20 million. This figure is now given in the USSR. And the general total of 'repressed' is now stated (e.g., in the new high-school textbooks) as around 40 million, about half of them in the peasant terror of 1929-1933 and the other half from 1937 to 1953 [the year Stalin died].<sup>23</sup>

Among the 'repressed' were the highest-ranking members of the Communist Party itself.

The XVIIIth Party Congress on 10 to 21 March 1939 ... was the scene of the complete consolidation of all that Stalin had striven for since that of 1934. The changes were extraordinary.

Of the 1,966 delegates to the previous Congress, 1,108 had been arrested for counter-revolutionary crimes. Even of the residue lucky enough to survive, only 59 now appeared as delegates. Of these, 24 were old Central Committee members, leaving *only 35 of the 1,827 rank-and-file delegates of five years previously – less than 2 percent! ...*

The list of the Central Committee membership now elected shows that 55 of the 71 who had been full members in 1934 had gone, and 60 of the 68 candidate members. Of the 115 names no longer appearing, which included some natural and some possibly natural deaths, 98 had been shot, as Khrushchev later stated in the 1956 Secret Speech. The most recent official account gives the total sooner or later killed by an executioner, by a murderer (Kirov), or by their own hand as 107.<sup>24</sup>

Stalin's purge of the officer corps of the military was of comparable kind, and its effects were soon apparent.

... in 1941 to 1945, the country had felt the effects of the measures taken by Stalin against its military leaders.

Figures give over the past years vary slightly, depending on (for example) whether they refer to those holding ranks at the time of the original appointments in 1935, or include promotions later. As now given in the Soviet press, the Purge accounted for

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., page 486.

<sup>24</sup> From the section entitled "The XVIIIth Congress" of part 14, the "Climax", of "Book II, The Yezhov Years", page 438.

3 of the 5 Marshals  
13 of the 15 Army Commanders  
8 of the 9 Fleet Admirals and Admirals Grade 1  
50 of the 57 Corps Commanders  
154 of the 186 Divisional Commanders  
16 of the 16 Army Commissars  
25 of the 28 Corps Commissars  
58 of the 64 Divisional Commissars.

All 11 of the Vice Commissars of Defense went, as did 98 of 108 members of the Supreme Military Soviet. Nor was the effect confined to the upper echelons. Between May 1937 and September 1938, 36,761 Army officers and "over three thousand" Navy officers were dismissed (of whom 9,579 had been arrested even before dismissal). But from 1939 to 1941, we are told, some 13,000 of these dismissed were re-enrolled, so that the total permanently repressed may be as low as 27,000. (This omits, of course, those repressed after September 1938, for which Soviet figures almost as high as those for 1937 and 1938 have been given, for a total over the whole period of 43,000.) As Khrushchev later said, the Purges started "at company and battalion commander level". And the chances of the repressed seem to have been lower than those in any other field: of one group of 408 Army men tried by the Military Collegium, 401 were shot and 7 sent to labour camp. ...

As is confirmed by Russian military writers, the Purge had indeed led to "inexperienced commanders" being promoted. As early as 1937, 60 percent of the commanding cadres in rifle units, 45 percent in tank units, and 25 percent in air units were given in this category. Moreover, "the care of leaders who had gained military experience in Spain and in the Far East was almost completely liquidated." ...

Mekhlis, in his report to the 1939 XVIIIth Congress, expressed horror and sorrow at "incorrect expulsions" from the Party which had taken place in the Army in 1935, 1936, and 1937, on the basis of "slander", instead of the correct method of "documents and facts".<sup>25</sup>

From the few passages of Conquest's text quoted above, one can only glimpse as through a glass darkly the enormous yet singular scope of Stalin's 'achievement'. Every reader would do well to read the whole of his book – an 'object lesson' in why and how understanding is 'historical'..

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<sup>25</sup> From the section entitled "The Purge and the War" of part 15, "Heritage of Terror" of "Book III: Aftermath", pages 450 and 451.

## Appendix 2

### Abbreviations of titles of works by Eisenstein as cited within this Essay

#### Essays edited and translated by Jay Leyda:

From *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, pages 1-272 [first volume] of *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory and The Film Sense by Sergei Eisenstein*, edited and translated by Jay Leyda (Cleveland, Ohio and New York, New York: Meridian Books – The World Publishing Company, 1957 [Fifth Printing, 1963]).

- CPI [1929]: "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" (pages 28-44)
- DAFF [1929]: "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form" (pages 45-63)
- DGFT [1944]: "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today" (pages 195-255)
- FFNP [1935]: "Film Form: New Problems" (pages 122-149)
- TTC [1934]: "Through Theater to Cinema" (pages 3-17)

From *The Film Sense*, pages 1-295 [second volume] of the book of Leyda's translations cited above.

- WI [1939]: "Word and Image" (pages 1-65)

#### Essays edited and translated by Richard Taylor:

From *S. M. Eisenstein: Selected Works – Volume I: Writings, 1922-34*, edited and translated by Richard Taylor (London and Bloomington-Indianapolis: BFI Publishing and Indiana University Press, 1988).

- MFA [1924]: "The Montage of Film Attractions" (pages 39-58)