
Reading Eisenstein Reading "Capital"

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Source: *October*, Vol. 2 (Summer, 1976), pp. 26-38

Published by: [The MIT Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778417>

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Reading Eisenstein Reading *Capital*

ANNETTE MICHELSON

If, in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.

Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*

We have always known that Eisenstein wished to make a film of *Capital*, and we now know that this was no mere wish. It was a project, carefully considered, intensively discussed, partially researched, tentatively planned. The diaristic evidence of October 1927 through April of the following year should initiate a new stage of inquiry into Soviet film theory and practice of the post-revolutionary era, sharpening and confirming speculative impulses hitherto constrained by the deliberate pace of posthumous publication.¹ Eisenstein's work is not alone in question; speculations of the widest range must now be extended or re-directed. Although one cannot, in this initial stage of reflection upon a crucial document, expect wholly to survey its contours or assess the order of its consequences, one may attempt to specify that crucial quality, situating this text within the historical moment articulated and inflected by the larger text of Eisenstein.

The work notes are begun—to all intents and purposes, as we say—while he is editing *October*, commissioned in celebration of the Revolution's tenth anniversary, not ready for release until March 14, 1928. The entries continue through the aftermath of the release, when they are undoubtedly interrupted by the order to return to work on *The General Line*, begun prior to *October*, intercepted by that anniversary commission and resumed on June 20th. This film is completed, following some further interruption and critical re-orientation from Stalin, as *The Old and the New*, in February, 1929. And on August 19th, Eisenstein, charged—together with Tissé and Alexandrov—with the investigation of the new

1. We owe the recent publication of "Notes for a film of *Capital*" in *Isusstvo Kino*, January, 1973, pp. 57–67 to Naum Kleiman, the Curator of the Eisenstein Museum in Moscow. For this and for many other intelligent and scrupulously executed instances of his scholarship, I am, like so many others, deeply grateful.

technology of sound, departs on the three-year voyage through Europe, the United States and Mexico.

October, slightly cut but swiftly passed by German censors, had opened in Berlin on April 2, 1928, under the title *Ten Days that Shook the World*, and by December of that year, Eisenstein, writing to Léon Moussinac in Paris of the misunderstandings surrounding its reception abroad, says:

“The proclamation that I’m going to make a movie of Marx’s *Das Kapital* is not a publicity stunt. I believe that the films of the future will be found going in this direction (or else they’ll be filming things like *The Idea of Christianity* from the bourgeois point of view!). In any case, they will have to do with philosophy. It is true that I won’t get to this for another year or a year and a half, since the field is absolutely untouched. *Tabula rasa*. And it will be necessary to do a lot of sketching before trying to treat such an enormous theme without compromising it.

I’d really like for you to look at *October* more or less from the point of view I’ve just outlined. You’ll see a multitude of this sort of step—beginning with the awkward, even vulgar, even shameful symbolism—and going to the Gods and Kerensky’s Rise, which, like the battleship’s lions, serves as a ladder to a completely different idea of cinema.²

Eisenstein, then, is obviously still reflecting—at a distance of eight months from the last of the work notes published here—upon the possibility of filming Marx. With *October* now completed, he is considering its implications, extending and systematizing the claims made by and for this film as “a collection of essays” on a series of themes. Cinema is now confirmed, through concrete practice, as a conceptual medium, a mode of discourse, and the freshly completed work is re-assessed as the pivotal stage of a cinematic future.

We must understand this judgment in a sense that is particular and distinct from that which generally informs our understanding of the rest of Eisenstein’s career. *October* will not merely yield themes, images or even strategies for future development or recurrence, such as we find in *Alexander Nevsky*’s re-working of elements developed for *Che Viva Mexico*; *October* generates a formal program and a method that promise to transform existing cinema.

Warning Moussinac of the sharp break between *Potemkin* and *October* (“it is the dialectical denial of *Potemkin*”), he goes on to announce that he is ready to “overturn” his “entire system.”

Thematically as well as formally. I think that we shall find our cinematography on ‘the other side’ of the acted film—that is, in the film

2. Léon Moussinac, *Sergei Eisenstein*, trans. D. Sandy Petrey, New York, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1970, pp. 28-9.

as newsreel, as well as in the film as itself.³ And most amusing of all, this cinematography will be genetically ideological, for its substance will be the screening of . . . Here's a kind of *coup de théâtre*: the one essential word in all this hodgepodge doesn't come to mind, my explanation becomes a charade. And no dictionary at hand. Okay, take the German word *begriff* (concept, Idea). But there is no absolute *begriff*. They are always 'classical'. (From the word 'class' and not 'classicism'.)⁴

The consequences of that break between *Potemkin* and *October* were envisaged as momentous. The 19th century's proto-cinematic fascination with the prospect of "the philosophical toy" is to be realized and transformed in a filmic enterprise which will subject the productive structure subtending that toy, its technology and its claim of absolute objectivity to rigorous critical analysis. Film will indeed be philosophical or it will not, in any but a trivial sense, be. The function of the celebratory work just completed is discovered by its maker, reading *Capital*, to be propadeutic. The filmic translation of the *Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* that must follow will establish the level and the mode of a truly revolutionary cinematic consciousness. Eisenstein's intuition that the projected work might anticipate or confront a bourgeois effort whose function is analogous to that of Feuerbachian analysis seen in relation to that of Marx, is extremely interesting. He seems, by implication, to propose the new film as combining, for that reason, the theoretical functions of *The German Ideology* and of *Capital*. To this we shall return.

*

Throughout his working life and irrespective of the episodic deviations or reversals enforced by specific historical circumstance, Eisenstein was at pains to ground his conceptions of montage in the dynamics of the dialectic and, further, to specify the manner in which the former is the concrete film form of the latter. Although he will ultimately declare that "montage thinking is inseparable from the general content of thinking as a whole,"⁵ he works, in the 1920's toward an articulation of montage as the formal instantiation of cinema's triadic rehearsal of the dialectic. Its essentially dynamic character derives from the spectator's constant

3. I am indebted to Jay Leyda for the information that the sequence of "Kerensky's Rise" in *October* was derived from a newsreel sequence shown to Eisenstein by Esther Shub. This gives a somewhat ambiguous character to Eisenstein's remark, as one might also interpret it, within the context of the immediately preceding proclamation of being "ready to overturn my entire system," as a rejection of the techniques developed in the acted film in favour of a documentary method of the sort advocated by Vertov throughout their long, intermittent debate.

4. Moussinac, p. 28.

5. Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today," in *Film Form*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1949, p. 234.

resolution, solicited by the style of 1924-29, of “conflict” between “colliding shots.” The parameters of that synthetic resolution, of those “collisions” are subjected to a constant extension, so that the rhythmic oppositions—or antitheses—of shot size, camera angle or directionality proliferate into the later all-over structure of the overtone style, in which the system of montage “built on particular dominants” is, by virtue of a totalizing principle, extended to all parameters susceptible to organization.⁶

It is, of course, this constant and progressive radicalization, together with its persistent theorization, which distinguish him not only from Griffith, but from colleagues such as Kuleshov and Pudovkin. Searching recent history for the clarification offered by some parallel endeavor, one thinks of the manner in which the Schönbergian row, as developed by Webern, was extended by Boulez in the 1950s, from the serial organization of pitches to that of timbre, attack, *etc.*

The function of montage, in the hyperbolic instances of the heroic era, was maieutic. Its strength is judged to reside “primarily in the fact that the desired image is not fixed or ready-made, but arises—is born . . . assembled in the spectator’s perception.”

. . . . it includes in the creative process the emotions and mind of the spectator. The spectator is compelled to proceed along with self-same road that the author traveled in creating the image. The spectator not only sees the represented elements of the finished work, but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image just as it was experienced by the author.⁷

And for Eisenstein, as for Marx, “not only the result, but the road to it also, is a part of the truth. The investigation of truth must itself be true, true investigation is unfolded truth, the disjunct members of which unite in the result.”

October had been Eisenstein’s most elaborate and sophisticated effort in the direction of the radically maieutic cinema, and in at least two different ways. Its spatio-temporal distensions and syntheses had, as in the celebrated sequence of *The Lifting of the Bridge*, reordered action in a multiplicity of aspects and positions thus altering the temporal flow of the event and of its surrounding narrative structure.⁸ The result was a declared disjunction of constituents, soliciting a new quality of attention and eliciting inferences as to spatial and temporal relations. Perception of the disjunction within the distended moment and fragmented space, had to be cognitively resynthesized by the spectator into the order of an event. The recaptured unity of constituents that were experienced as discrete

6. Among the texts in which this development is discussed is “Methods of Montage,” *Film Form*, pp. 72-83.

7. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Sense*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., p. 32.

8. For a detailed discussion of this sequence see my “Camera Lucida/Camera Obscura,” *Artforum* XI, (January, 1973), 30-37.

was heightened by the apprehension of a temporal wedge, driven into the flow of narrative, a temporality exceptional, *momentous*, epic in form.

In another, more generally familiar sense (it is explicated in his writings), Eisenstein worked in *October* to develop, as “a ladder to a completely different idea of cinema,” the technique which could induce a cognitive grasp, not only of abstract concepts as such, in the material concreteness of their class determination, but of the very forms and methods of discourse. This was to be the “intellectual montage” proposed in “the dance of the Gods about Korniloff,” an atheological argument demanding or impelling logical deduction.⁹

Now, the common feature of these two forms of maieutic cinema is their analytic mode, developed and intensified by the varieties of disjunction facilitated by the montage style. And it is Eisenstein’s emphasis on the analytic function of cinema that sustains his work—theoretical and practical—of the 1920s. The last of the notes for *Capital* records the bleak intimation that this direction within innovative cinema—and indeed, within much of the advanced art of the Soviet Union—is destined to defeat by the close of the decade: “The tragedy of today’s ‘leftists’ consists in the fact that the still incomplete analytic process finds itself in a situation in which synthesis is demanded.”

*

When one turns from Moscow to consider the larger context within which Eisenstein must be read, one discovers that his sense of film as cognitive instrument and mode of discourse is shared or echoed in the concerns and intuitions of the major theorists of bourgeois Europe at that time. It is, in fact, during this period (1920–29) during the swift re-organization and acceleration of the industry following the First World War, that unprecedented hopes for cinema crystallize in an early theoretical literature. It is then, prior to the intervention of sound, that converging expectations and achievements produce the intimation of cinema as a unique, a privileged mode of analytic investigation. The acceleration of formal and technical development within the intensified rationalization and expanded market of the film industry, is attended by a buoyant expectancy, articulated in the speculative rhetoric of that early literature. (The writings of Elie Faure are among its most euphoric instances.) The sense of cinema as a possible agent of social transformation is general and will persist throughout the crises of the next half-century. What is particular to the theoretical and critical sensibility of that time is the recognition—not by Eisenstein alone, but in the theory and practice of Clair, Epstein, Vertov, Faure, Artaud, Benjamin, Balasz, Fondane, Léger and to some extent Delluc—of a new critical instrument, facilitating an epistemological inquiry of unprecedented immediacy and power. Before settling, however, for the notion of Eisenstein as a man of his time, it is instructive, for our purposes, briefly

9. This sequence is analysed in Noël Carroll’s “For God and Country,” *Artforum* XI (January, 1973), 56–60.

to compare the nature and consequences of his intuition and its articulation with that of another film-maker, Jean Epstein, whose practice and theoretical efforts are exactly contemporary with his and similarly subject, once the sound barrier had been passed, to periods of stress and silence.¹⁰

Epstein had started in 1921 to produce a body of theory which was co-extensive with his film-making career. Originating, like Eisenstein, in an Eastern European bourgeois milieu, he had, before turning to film, studied medicine and then turned to a literary career. His scientific and literary culture provided the terms of the sustained theoretical endeavor which, like Eisenstein's, stands in an intimately dialectical relationship to his film-making. Like Eisenstein, he was at every point concerned to ground his speculation in contemporary theoretical developments and thereby to intensify the sense of each fresh stage of his work as a matter of present, functional necessity, while aspiring, at the same time, to the constitution of an ontology of cinema. Like the Soviet artist, he was both reserved and innovative in his attitude to sound, and his eventual use of it, involving a slowed tempo consistent with his experiment in slow motion, parallels Eisenstein's insistence on the new parameter's disjunctiveness as a guarantee of the preservation of the montage technique into the period after 1929.

Epstein is concerned to account for and to preserve the initial sense of wonder elicited by the appearance of the medium, threatened with extinction through the intensive development of the narrative codes during that decade. His insistence on the productiveness, the inventiveness inherent in this attitude derives, no doubt, from a traditionally empirical stance. He is the advocate of the revelatory power of specifically cinematic techniques and processes as such. The modifications of spatial and temporal experience provided through slow, accelerated or reverse motion will provide fresh access to the true, concealed nature of the phenomenal world. The revisions of perception and judgment impelled by that access would confirm scientific discovery and redirect epistemological inquiry. Like Vertov, Epstein is, of course, a member of the generation fascinated by developments in quantum physics and by the theory of relativity. They play something of the structural role in the formation of his thinking that Pavlovian theory assumes in Eisenstein's earlier theoretical efforts.¹¹

10. "If Epstein knew particularly hard times around 1935, as the history of his film-making shows, he learned very quickly what conclusions to draw from them. Forced to play second fiddle to men who no longer understood him, he rapidly learned how to recover, to take refuge in short features rather than to stop making true cinema. How many others have had that kind of courage?" Henri Langlois, "The Creative Work of Jean Epstein," *Cinemages*, No. 2 (1955), trans. Bob Lamberton, New York, Anthology Film Archive. This detail of Epstein's career, contemporary with Eisenstein's difficulties as they culminated in the public humiliation at the Conference of the All Soviet Union of Film-Makers in 1935, produced similar results—the stoical decision to relocate effort in another context, less subject to the pressures and contradictions of the developing industry of the 1930's. The option open to Epstein was the short film; in Eisenstein's case, it was an intensified teaching schedule. These parallel circumstances suggest that the work—and the problematic careers—of both men must be considered as part of a larger historical moment whose contradictions were intensifying in both East and West.

11. Pavlovian theory is influential in the early development of the theory of "attractions," and in

Little or no attention has been paid until now to the many unique qualities film can give to the representation of things. Hardly anyone has realized that the cinematic image carries a warning of something monstrous, that it bears a subtle venom which could corrupt the entire rational order so painstakingly imagined in the destiny of the universe.

And the subversion of that “rational” order is seen as akin to that of science itself.

Discovery always means learning that objects are not as we had believed them to be; to know more, one must first abandon the most evident certainties of established knowledge. Although not certain, it is not inconceivable that what appears to us as a strange perversity, a surprising nonconformity, as a transgression and a defect of the screen’s animated images might serve to advance another step into that “terrible underside of things” which was terrifying even to Pasteur’s pragmatism. . . . Now, the cinematograph seems to be a mysterious mechanism intended to assess the false accuracy of Zeno’s famous argument about the arrow, intended for the analysis of the subtle metamorphosis of stasis into mobility, of emptiness into solid, of continuous into discontinuous, a transformation as stupefying as the generation of life from inanimate elements.¹²

And Epstein’s wonder—it is a kind of *terreur sacrée et savante*—culminates in a later text, of 1928, contemporaneous therefore with Eisenstein’s planning of *Capital*:

Slow motion actually brings a new range to dramaturgy. Its power of laying bare the emotions of dramatic enlargements, its infallibility in the designation of the sincere movements of the soul, are such that it obviously outclasses all the tragic modes at this time. I am sure, and all those who have seen certain parts of *La Chute de la Maison Usher* are also sure, that if a high-speed film were made of an accused person during this interrogation, then from beyond his words, the truth would appear, unique, evident, written out, that there would no longer be any need of indictment, or of lawyers’ speeches, or of any other proof than that provided by the deep images.”¹³

Eisenstein’s concern with inducing states of maximally intense response in the spectator. The transition from this concern to later preoccupations, abundantly documented in late texts such as “Non-Indifferent Nature,” deserves careful study.

12. Jean Epstein, “The Universe Head over Heels,” *Ecrits sur le Cinéma*, Paris, 1974, pp. 257-263. The section here quoted is extracted from a translation by Stuart Liebman to be published in issue no. 3 of OCTOBER.

13. Jean Epstein, “A Conversation with Jean Epstein,” *L’Ami du Peuple*, May 11, 1928, trans. Bob Lambertson, New York, Anthology Film Archives.

This sense of cinema as revelatory of truth is, of course shared by Marxists such as Vertov. Compare with these remarks, Vertov's account of the revelation afforded by seeing himself filmed, while in a perilous leap, in slow motion, and Benjamin's observations on the same process considered as a technique for the psychoanalysis of gesture. Epstein's notion of cinema as a critical instrument is, however, couched in terms that are wholly innocent of an awareness of social or class determination. Cinema is, for him, never glimpsed as a form of production, subject to the material conditions of production. The ground of his theory is identical to that described by Marx as that of Feuerbach:

Feuerbach speaks in particular of the perception of natural science; he mentions secrets which are disclosed only to the eye of the physicist and chemist; but where would natural science be without industry and commerce? Even this 'pure' natural science is provided with an aim, as with its material, only through trade and industry, through the sensuous activity of men. So much is this activity, this unceasing sensuous labour and creation, this production, the basis of the whole sensuous world as it now exists, that, were it interrupted only for a year, Feuerbach would not only find an enormous change in the natural world, but would very soon find that the whole world of men and his own perceptive faculty, nay his own existence, were missing.¹⁴

For Vertov, the systematic exploitation of cinematic processes (or "anomalies," as he called them), of slowed, accelerated and reversed motion, of split-screen and of superimposition, of disjunctions in rhythm and in cutting were to be put to the service of revelation—but that revelation, was a "Communist decoding of the world," inseparable from the heightening of class consciousness. Vertov wished to make films that had the same basically necessary qualities as shoes or other useful objects, films "that would clarify the relations of workers with each other."

Epstein's view of cinema's critical function is, then, in a sense clearly evident by comparison with Vertov and Eisenstein, pre-materialist. It is the clearest and most sophisticated exposition of cinema's epistemological dimension developed prior to their own work, and it does appear, in relation to their thinking and their practice, to occupy, within the historical development of film theory, a place roughly analogous to that of Feuerbach, considered as pre-Marxist. The filmmaker who developed his prime strategy of intellectual montage as a "Dance of the Gods around Korniloff" was most certainly aware of Feuerbach's importance and his limitations, and of Marx's view expressed in the opening lines of the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: "The critique of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism. . . . The foundation of this critique is the following: man makes religion, religion does not make the man." We do not know if Eisenstein was familiar with Epstein's critical position as expressed in his

14. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, New York, International Publishers, 1970, p. 73.

theoretical writings.¹⁵ It is here, however, that we can grasp the sharpness of his hypothesis of a future bourgeois cinema in the discursively analytic mode, recapitulating the history of pre-Marxist criticism and producing, in the process, a work whose role in the development of theoretical practice will be analogous to that of *The Idea of Christianity*. The film theory and practice of the last decade do, in fact, demonstrate a development of this sort in which the critique of religion has naturally been replaced by the critique of illusionism.¹⁶ We can, at any rate, hypothesize Eisenstein's judgment of Epstein as having, in the terms of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, "only interpreted the world, in various ways," and going on to claim that "the point is to *change* it."¹⁷

The notes for *Capital*, then, are a program for the development of the cognitive instrument in the service of revolutionary change, for a film in which "the established place of the theme is taken by the subject of basic method." And the "leap," as Eisenstein likes to put it, "is made" into the materialist cinema for which *Strike* is the first exploratory preparation.

Strike was, as we know, the result of Eisenstein's propulsion from the space of theater into that of cinema, the direct consequence of his staging of Tretyakov's *Gas Masks* within the setting of a real factory. In a celebrated text¹⁸ he has described that movement of propulsion.

In *Gas Masks* we see all the elements of film tendencies meeting. The turbines, the factory background negated the last remnants of make-up and theatrical costumes, and all elements appeared as independently fused. Theater accessories in the midst of real factory plastics appeared ridiculous. The element of play was incompatible with the acrid smell of gas. The pitiful platform kept getting lost among the real platforms of labor activity. In short the production was a failure. And we found ourselves in the cinema.

And Eisenstein, whose cinema will become identified with the fixed shot as the

15. Eisenstein mentions Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher* in "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," *Film Form*, pp. 43-4. It is cited as a "commendable example" of the use of slow motion in contradistinction to the "formalist jackstraws and unmotivated camera mischief" of Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera*. Although he has evidently not seen the Epstein film, he remarks upon the way in which "in this film, normally acted emotions filmed with a speeded-up camera are said to give unusual emotional pressure by their unrealistic slowness on the screen." *Usher* is cited, together with Kabuki theatre, as an instance of intensified "perception of disintegrated action" in "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," *Film Form*, pp. 43-4. I have discussed the reasons for Eisenstein's use of Epstein in his onslaught against Vertov in "The Man with the Movie Camera: From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum X* (March, 1972), 60-72.

16. This development, in which I include my own published work, calls in turn for intensive critical analysis.

17. One recalls in this connection Eisenstein's early countering of the Vertovian notion of the "cine-eye" with that of the "cine-fist." Although apparently a response to a specifically polemical situation, it can be read as an earlier re-formulation of this thesis.

18. In "Through Theater to Cinema," *Film Form*, p. 16.

dominant component of the montage style, responded with his exquisitely vivid sense of the material and practical qualities of the immediate physical situation into which he had been thus propelled. *Strike* presents in its opening passage a sumptuous aerial crane shot which sweeps through the space of the assembly line—produced, of course, by using an industrial crane from the factory itself.¹⁹

This first film, commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the revolution of 1905 and planned as part of a series “Toward the Dictatorship (of the Proletariat),” has been described as the laboratory of Eisenstein’s cinematic *oeuvre*. In its deployment of cinematic processes, its use of superimposition, animation, masking, fades, split screen and even of reverse motion, in its metaphorical prodigality, it is, of all his films, the closest to those of Vertov. And it is therefore hardly surprising that he will, in a later Janovist era, speak of it with something of the severity with which he castigates Vertov, and particularly *The Man with the Movie Camera*, Vertov’s supreme achievement, contemporary with *October* and the notes for *Capital*. To these strictures we shall return as well.

In 1925 it is *Strike* which embodies Eisenstein’s developing vision of a materialist cinema. This very first film, dealing directly with the dynamics of labor-capital relationships while exploring the cinematic processes themselves in all their variety, must now be read as the direct anticipation of *Capital* developed through *October*. It is at the center of the significant early text, “On the Question of a Materialist Approach to Form.”²⁰ We are now in a position to read that text—and to re-read others, more familiar to us (among them, “A Dialectical Approach to Film Form” and “Filmic Fourth Dimension”²¹) written out of the intensive work on *October* and *The General Line*, just prior to the departure for Europe.

In the text of 1925, Eisenstein proposes *Strike* as revolutionary in terms not of its “content—the mass revolutionary movement” but rather in so far as

... it proposes a clearly determined formal procedure for approaching as a whole a large quantity of historically revolutionary material—a way of discovering the logic of production and revealing a technique of methods of struggle understood as a ‘vital’ and variable process, subject only to the conditions and power relationships of each phrase of its development. This required a montage construction

19. The history of the camera movement as generally presented in the standard texts urgently requires radical and extensive revision so as to take into account the enormous repertory developed in the films of Soviet Union’s economic reconstruction during the 1920’s. Vertov’s work (particularly in films such as *One Sixth of the World* (1926) and *The Eleventh Year* (1928)) are, of course, the richest in this respect, for in them the camera is mounted on every conceivable component of the industrial environment documented. The movements of varying direction and speed ingeniously constituted by Mikhail Kaufman and his co-workers are, moreover, frequently contrasted or counterpointed by use of split screen and superimposition.

20. Sergei Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, ed. S. Yutkevich, Moscow, Iskusstvo Editions, Volume I., pp. 109–16. A French translation by Bernard Eisenschitz and Jacques Aumont has been published in *Cahiers du Cinema*, nos. 220–21, May–June, 1970, pp. 32–6. I have retranslated this text.

21. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, pp. 45–63 and 64–71.

conceived according to the basic formal nature of the material. The new cinema is a consequence of a new type of social contract, an attempt to integrate, not the aesthetic revolution of the past twenty-five years, but immediately useful phenomena: in particular, the structural principle of presenting the processes of production within the film. This choice is important in that it transcends the limits of the aesthetic. . . . More important, from a materialist point of view, this sphere was explored. The principles of heavy industry, factory production and the forms of the process of production can alone determine the ideology of revolutionary art forms, just as they have determined revolutionary ideology in general.

Revolutionary form is the product of correct technical methods, which result in the concretization of a new vision and a new approach to things and to phenomena. The new class ideology is the authentic renewal, not only of social significance, but also of the material and technical nature of cinema, manifested in what is called 'our content.'

Eisenstein then proceeds in this text, which speaks the idiom of the *proletkult*, to point to a flaw in the "formal bolshevism" of *Strike*:

. . . the absence of material exhaustively illustrating the technique of the bolsheviks' clandestine action and the *economic premises* of the strike; this certainly does constitute a grave defect of content, a defect of both subject and ideology, although in this case it is all a question of incomplete exposition of the process of production.²²

Returning to the notes for *Capital*, we recognise in them a corrected and amplified development of a continuous project, integrating the lesson of *Strike's* most significant omission. The economic premises of class struggle are to be unpacked and integrated into the formal discourse of a *Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* in which the concrete, material premises and techniques of production and their consequences will be proposed through a structure of cinematic implications and inferences for which *October* provides basic strategies and a partial model. In the proposed key work of the philosophical cinema, the documentary footage is subjected to logical reduction of a rigor such that experiment "external to the thesis" is rendered "impossible." The film of *Capital*, building upon the techniques of "intellectual montage" will release cinema from its role of chronicle and of contemplation into that of an agent of revolutionary change. For this reason, it is a work with a "libretto" by Marx: that is to say, no cinematic rendering of a book but a filmic implementation of the structure and techniques of its analytic method. Eisenstein then casts about for solutions to the

22. Sergei Eisenstein, "On the Question of a Materialist Approach to Form," *Cahiers du Cinema*, nos. 220-221, May-June, 1970, p. 35.

complex structural problems posed. And it is at this point that he encounters Joyce.

We have always known that Eisenstein wished to make a film of *Ulysses*, but we do not know the status of this wish. We do not have evidence of it as a practical project, as a plan. We do, of course, have considerable, though fragmentary, evidence of the manner in which the impulse persisted into Eisenstein's later work. The project for *An American Tragedy* drawn up in Hollywood²⁵ and the continuing preoccupation with the psychology of inner speech²⁶ attest to that persistence.

Moreover, it has always appeared that *Capital* and *Ulysses*, must stand in inter-relation as the two central texts defining the outer limits of Eisenstein's enterprise—as if, perhaps, the analytic project of the 1920s was succeeded by the most radical of aesthetic syntheses in the rendering of the movement of consciousness itself. We know now that there was a pivotal period in which the planning of *Capital* and the reading of *Ulysses* were simultaneous. In the work note of April 8, 1928, which concludes with the realization that “there are endlessly possible themes for filming in *Capital* (price, income rent),” Eisenstein tells us that “the official dedication of *Capital* will be to the Second International (“they will be overjoyed”), while “the formal side is dedicated to Joyce.”

N. Y., 1976

(*This is the first section of an essay in three parts.*)

23. The incorporation of the inner monologue as derived from both Joyce and Dujardin is described by Eisenstein in “A Course in Treatment,” *Film Form*, pp. 103-107.

24. This interest is developed in numerous later texts, including “Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today,” *Film Form*, pp. 245-51.

The tragedy of today's 'leftists' consists in the fact that the still incomplete analytic process finds itself in a situation in which synthesis is demanded . . .

On new themes. It was actually important to show **tactics** in **OCTOBER**, and not the events. The most important tasks in a cultural revolution are not only **dialectical demonstrations but instruction in the dialectical method**, as well.

Given the available data on cinema, such tasks are not yet permissible. Cinema does not possess those means of expression, since there has been, until now, no demand for tasks of that sort; only now do they begin to be defined.

*Eisenstein with Le Corbusier and Andrei Burov,
Moscow, 1928*

