THE FLYING FISH:
SERGEI EISENSTEIN ABROAD, 1929–1932

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My dissertation project examines the journey of the Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein and his two collaborators, Eduard Tisse and Grigorii Aleksandrov to Europe, the United States, and Mexico during 1929–32. It argues that it was precisely that time when the director accumulated ideas that bridged his classical silent film theory with far-reaching aesthetic, anthropological, and cultural conceptions of his later life. His interactions with multiple cultural figures of Europe, the United States, and Mexico as well as his experience of working under various economic and political regimes around the world led Eisenstein to reevaluate the role of individual (especially creative individual) in contemporary society and in history.

Chapter One traces Eisenstein's interest in biographies and autobiographies, including his own, and shows how this interest was connected to his self-perception as an artist, on the one hand, and to his journey abroad, on the other. Chapters Two through Four trace three successive parts of the journey: the European one (from August 1929 to May 1930), the American one (from May to November 1930), and the Mexican one (from December 1930 to April 1932).

The dissertation shows Eisenstein's reevaluation of the position of a creative artist under various economic and political regimes, with the influence that the Soviet state production continued to exert on him even abroad, while he also tried to navigate the world of the Hollywood studio system and privately funded European and American "independent" productions. The dissertation also examines the ways in which Eisenstein negotiating his

national, social, and cultural identity (as an artist, a scholar, and a representative of the Soviet/communist system). It does so on the basis of such diverse examples as his and his companion's linguistic skills or their choice of clothing. I also argue that seemingly marginal or esoteric interests of Eisenstein, such as graphology and palmistry, that became manifest during this period, supply us with a means of accessing his own view of the circumstances of the journey and the evaluation and construction of his public image, as well as serve as important gateways into his later theoretical works.

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PREFACE

This project began for me long before its present form and it will hopefully continue evolving. For helping me steer it to this electronic haven I would like to thank members of my dissertation committee: Mark Lynn Anderson, William Chase, Nancy Condee, Randall Halle, and also John MacKay. I am especially grateful to my adviser, Vladimir Padunov, for being the good pirate of this tale. Or its Poseidon, if he likes that image better. Casting a wider net, I owe a debt of gratitude to my teachers, both within and outside of academic institutions, in Moscow (Nina Dymshits, Armen Medvedev, and Naum Kleiman) and Berlin (Matthias Hurst, Geoff Lehmann, Catherine Toal, and Dan Vyleta).

The 2010 conference on Eisenstein's "Notes for a General History of Cinema" at Columbia University and the resulting 2016 volume bookend the time of my graduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh. The scope and the challenges of the "Notes" project have provided a useful point of reference and its participants continue to provide inspiration. In particular, I am grateful to Luka Arsenjuk for alerting me to the heuristic value of fish metaphors.

The materials used in this dissertation come from various sources and by various means. The work that has been done in collecting materials relating to Eisenstein and to early Soviet cinema in general at RGALI, VGIK, and Eisenstein's Museum-Apartment in Moscow is really a lifeline. I am also extremely grateful to Professor Barbara Bowman, who generously provided me with materials of her late husband, Steven P. Hill, that I have not yet used to the extent that

they deserve. Fellow Eisenstein scholars, especially Joan Neuberger, Masha Salazkina, and Elena Vogman, have helped in various, innumerous, often intangible ways. Artem Sopin has remained the steadfast buoy in the deaths of the seas of information and self-doubt.

Ahoy! to my wonderful, talented, beautiful sisters-in-academia: Maria Vinogradova, Viktoria Paranyuk, Maria Corrigan, Oksana Chefranova, Raisa Sidenova, Anastasia Fedorova, Ana Hedberg Olenina, and Daria Ezerova. And to all the friends in Moscow who've loved me just enough to never miss a chance to make fun of my obsession with Eisenstein and who've never doubted that I could turn this obsession into something worthwhile. Most of all, my "mimimi" goes out to Zhanna Sinelnik and to Denis Viren for keeping me relatively sane and/or putting up with my insanity.

Finally, I'd like to thank Viktor Shklovsky for having written so many good phrases and to do what his friend Sergei Eisenstein might have done: steal a couple of them for myself.

> Если рассказ тебе не понравится, а он тебе не понравится, то я посвящаю тебе одно посвящение.
>
> Не похоже, что мы когда-нибудь сойдемся в литературе. Или встретимся.
>
> Будем думать отдельно, даже друг о друге отдельно будем думать.
>
> Мне грустно, друг, расставаться еще с одним.
>
> Это не значит, что мы ошибались. Мы ошибались не очень. В такую меру, в какую нужно ошибаться, чтобы думать. (В. Шкловский. «Поиски оптимизма». Москва: Федерация, 1931. С. 64).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In her 1999 article "What is film history? or, the riddle of the sphinxes," Vivian Sobchack summarized recent developments in the field, whose "focus has shifted from the much-noted deeds of elite and prominent white men to the less-documented actions and accomplishments of those previously marginalized in historical inquiry" (301). Recognizing the impossibility of getting at the "object" of history, at the "real" events of the past, and to provide an unambiguous empirical reconstruction of their causes and meanings, Sobchack was among those advocating for film history that would accept the irrecoverability of the past, would recognize its own nature as a self-reflexive "twice-told tale," and, no longer dependent on chronology and linearity, would embrace the ruins and the lacunas of history.

Over the past years this trend continued, bringing to light a number of previously marginalized groups and figures, such as early women filmmakers or German film theorists (Gledhill et al.; Kaes et al.). At the same time, the lens of historical inquiry was also turned back in order to recognize the lacunas in the lives of those "prominent white men" and to see the ruins behind their "much-noted deeds" that Sobchack's article encouraged scholars to forego. Areas of their work that have previously been marginalized as well as incorporation of new contexts can present a fresh way of looking at these canonical figures and at the film canon in general. I

have in mind, in the sphere of Russian film history in particular, John MacKay's multi-volume work-in-progress on Dziga Vertov.

My project is part of this recent trend of the recontextualization and historicization of classical film theory, also evident, for example, in discussions in *October*, *New German Critique*, and *Screen*. Among the most recent continuations of this trend is the special issue of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*: "Early Film Theory Revisited: Historical Perspectives" (36.2, Spring 2016). As the issue's editors remark,

> Revisiting [early film theory] means to rethink well-known mechanisms, patterns and key *personae*, but also to resituate them in relation to one another by taking into consideration the historical circumstances of their genesis, publication, reception, transformation and, if applicable, their legacy. Theories, in fact, appear in certain periods and places and they do not fall from the sky, and theoretical writing and consequently theoretical content cannot be separated from their specific conditions of production and reception. … [Film theories] emerge within concrete and complex technological, economic, social and cultural premises (Niemeyer and Hochscherf 130).

The dissertation is governed by certain other theoretical assumptions that I would briefly like to make explicit here. In the sphere of history proper, it is a reflection, in its emphasis on the way Eisenstein and his biographers structured his experiences in narratives, and in its attention to the relativity of these structures/narratives, of the narratology's belief (as exemplified first and foremost by Hayden White) in the essential similarity (or "isomorphism," as Eisenstein would say) of historical and fictional narratives through rhetorical devices and emplotment. This, of

course, is Sobchack's starting point as well, and I hope to preserve the tension between embracing the lacunas and succumbing to the pull of chronology and linearity in my discussion of the prominent man in question, Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein, by looking at his own practical but also theoretical interest in strategies of emplotment and at his usage of them. At the same time, I attempt to reflect on my own narrativizing work. One of the examples of this is the use of the concept of "nonlinear biography" in Chapter Four.

In so far as it relates to the field of modern Russian history, the dissertation is part of the revisionist historians' reconsideration of the relationship between the power and the intelligentsia in the Soviet Union, dealing in particular with the negotiation of private and public identity of a Soviet individual and with the questions of patronage. It also adds to the debates on the early transnationalism of Soviet culture, showing multiple points of contact between Soviet and international intellectuals in the 1920s through the early 1930s.

1.2 A "MAP" OF EISENSTEIN(S)

I will preface my work by a brief summary of Sergei Eisenstein's life and career as it relates to his place in the film canon, with particular emphasis on the period that will be further discussed in the dissertation. I will also delineate the discursive "images" or "versions" of Eisenstein as they emerge in works of biographers and scholars of Eisenstein.

Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein (1898–1948) became widely known as a film director after his second film, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), which depicted the revolt of an imperial Russian ship during the revolutionary events of 1905, became a surprise hit in Berlin in 1926. Even before that, Eisenstein had made a name for himself in Moscow's theater circles, as a

student of the renowned theater experimenter Vsevolod Meyerhold and as a designer and director at the Proletkult Theater.

From his very first professional steps, Eisenstein was also a vocal polemicist and a theoretician of new theater and, in his thinking, its newest stage, the cinema. His most famous article of the period, published in German and English in addition to Russian, was "The Statement" (1928) dealing with the practical and theoretical implications of the advent of sound cinema and co-signed by Eisenstein's co-writer and assistant, Grigorii Aleksandrov, and director Vsevolod Pudovkin. By the end of the 1920s, Eisenstein had started several larger theoretical projects but failed to complete or publish any of his longer works before his death in early 1948.

Battleship Potemkin, as well as Eisenstein's two subsequent projects, *October* (1927) and *The General Line* (*The Old and the New*, 1929), were all commissioned by the Communist Party; the first two as part of commemoration of the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and the last as part of the campaign for the forced collectivization and cotemporaneous industrialization of the country. Even though his aesthetics and theories (especially those connected with editing/montage) went over the heads of most spectators, Eisenstein the director was perceived by his superiors as one of the main assets of the Soviet cinema industry, in no small part because of his growing recognition in the West.

Since 1927, when the Hollywood stars and co-owners of the United Artists film company Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford traveled to Moscow after seeing *Battleship Potemkin* in Berlin, Eisenstein was trying to arrange for a trip to the United States. Fairbanks offered him a contract and that invitation was renewed a year later by the President of United Artists, Joseph Schenck, who also came to Moscow in person. Because during 1927–28 Eisenstein was working almost simultaneously on two films (*October* and *The General Line*) and because the production

of *The General Line* was prolonged until the summer of 1929, he was only able to leave the country in August of that year. He took with him two major members of his production team: the cameraman Eduard Tisse, and the assistant and co-writer and, lately, co-director Grigorii (also known as Grisha) Aleksandrov. Instead of immediately travelling to the United States, however, Eisenstein and his team stayed in Europe until May 1930.

They initially settled in Berlin with a short trip to Switzerland to the Congress of Independent Filmmakers in September 1929; then followed two trips to London and a longer sojourn in France, mostly in Paris, with several short trips to Belgium and Holland in between. Eventually, it was not United Artists but another major Hollywood player, Paramount, that signed a contract with Eisenstein. Despite several projects that were in the works, including the adaptation of *An American Tragedy* by Theodore Dreiser, Eisenstein's Hollywood contract was dissolved in October 1930 and he was supposed to return home. Instead, he went to Mexico with Aleksandrov and Tisse, accompanied by Hunter Kimbrough, brother-in-law of the progressive American author Upton Sinclair, whose family financed a Mexican film project for Eisenstein. The production was supposed to take only a few months but was eventually cut short by Sinclair (under direct pressure from Joseph Stalin) in January 1931, more than a year later. Eisenstein had been by then declared a defector by the Soviet state—a ruling that was later reversed. Since he was only granted a US transit visa, Eisenstein could not edit his Mexican film in Hollywood as he planned. After some further delays, he returned to Moscow in the spring of 1932 with the promise that the material of the unfinished film would follow him there, which it never did.

Back in the USSR, Eisenstein was not able to start shooting another film until 1934. The production of that film, *Bezhin Meadow*, was stopped twice, and the unfinished film was eventually almost entirely destroyed. Only in 1938 was Eisenstein able to complete his next

film, *Aleksander Nevsky*, about a medieval Russian prince and military leader, which put him back in favor with Stalin and the film administration. From 1941 to 1946, Eisenstein worked on a two-part (eventually envisioned as a three-part) project on the 16th century Russian tsar called *Ivan the Terrible*. Its first part again earned him honors, while the second one displeased Stalin and was suppressed until 1958. Throughout the 1930s and, to a lesser extent, the 1940s, Eisenstein was also active in teaching film direction at the State Film Institute (GIK, later VGIK) and he wrote several large theoretical texts and a book of memoirs, without finishing any of them. His first book, *Film Sense*, a collection of previously printed articles, came out only in 1942 in New York, in English translation. The second one, *Film Form*, appeared in 1949, shortly after Eisenstein's death of a heart attack.

Since the mid-1920s, his films have been part of both the national and the international canon while his theoretical writings, many of which were published after his death, have increasingly made him into one of the major theoreticians of cinema (and art in general). The most recent addition to the volumes of his writings and writings on him is the English-language version of *Notes for a General History of Cinema*, edited by Antonio Somaini and Naum Kleiman (a French version was published a few years prior to that).

The multiplicity of Eisensteins has become a sort of truism. He is so big a figure as to make focusing on some aspect or issue of his life and work almost a practical necessity. At the same time, it allows for multiple, often opposing interpretations of the same facts to coexist in scholarship. Here I trace and by necessity adopt a binary model of mapping out the "Eisenstein continent," although this is of course just a construct, and this model will be questioned by the dissertation itself.

One of the major divides that can be traced through multiple biographies is the balance between Eisenstein the director and Eisenstein the theorist. Since the majority of Eisenstein's larger theoretical works were not published until several decades after his death, the films themselves for a long time overshadowed his shorter theoretical pieces. Thus, even for Eisenstein's most comprehensive biographer in Russian, Rostislav Iurenev, Eisenstein is the great practitioner of the new art who sometimes got carried away with his too wild, ungrounded theories, but instinctively came to the "right" results in his finished films (while the unfinished ones remained in that state precisely when theory overpowered practice). For Viktor Shklovsky, on the other hand, Eisenstein was above all a theorist, almost a philosopher (Lary 122; see also Pozner for an attempt to trace the influence of Eisenstein's ideas on Shklovsky's own theories). Iurenev's position in many respects is simply a continuation of the attitude to Eisenstein's theory and practice during his own lifetime (emblematized, for example, by the speeches at the 1935 Conference of Soviet Filmmakers). Western scholars, unencumbered by the necessity to uphold the official Soviet view, have always been more attentive to Eisenstein's theories. Among the more recent biographies, Oksana Bulgakowa does the most consistent job of integrating the two aspects of Eisenstein's legacy.

Another line of division between "different Eisensteins" is, of course, Eisenstein the filmmaker vs. Eisenstein the man. This is especially true of Ivan Aksenov and Marie Seton, who both conducted interviews with Eisenstein in the early to mid-1930s (their work will be further discussed below in Chapter One). One of the consequences of Eisenstein's direct influence on the work of these two biographers is their psychoanalytical bend—explicit in the case of Seton and implicit in the case of Aksenov. It stands to reason that Seton and Aksenov might have picked up their ideas and formulations from Eisenstein's self-analyses in the early 1930s. Not all

of the biographers have the same interest at psychoanalyzing or psychologizing Eisenstein. Iurenev, for example, is singularly reticent in this respect. Dominique Fernandez's biography from 1977 is the most explicit example of psychoanalyzing Eisenstein, while the more recent texts by Oksana Bulgakowa and Valerii Podoroga are situated along different points within this spectrum. Podoroga calls the largest of his published studies of Eisenstein his "psychobiography" (something for which Fernandez also argued); while Bulgakowa puts her insights into Eisenstein's psychology in the context of his own interests and of his communications with "psychological Berlin." She is more interested in what previously remained unattested, namely Eisenstein's meetings with renowned figures in the field of psychoanalysis and analysis of sexuality (like the visit to Magnus Hirschfeld's institute), as well as his private analytical sessions. This aspect of Eisenstein's interests, however, is not fully integrated in the discussion of his film theory and practice.

Connected to this is the question of Eisenstein's personal life/sexuality. Marie Seton led the way in this respect, but later biographers have, for the most part, foregone her conclusion (that she claims to have gathered from Eisenstein's own words), about the purely "intellectual" nature of his bisexuality (134). Podoroga and Bulgakowa remain the most explicit here, with Podoroga exploring Eisenstein's sadistic and masochistic inclinations (again, following Fernandez). This is opposed to the attempts to "normalize" Eisenstein's sexuality made by another recent Russian biographer, Vladimir Zabrodin, who focuses instead on Eisenstein's relationships with women (from Vera Ianukova and Agniia Kasatkina to Elizaveta Telesheva).

Iurenev's two-volume biography also attempts the "normalization" of Eisenstein's image in various ways, including presenting him as essentially a Soviet realist artist (even though the first volume was published in 1985 and the second one in 1988, and thus theoretically was able

to benefit from the rethinking of the past that Perestroika offered). Bulgakowa's Eisenstein is constructed to a large extent simply in opposition to the previous "normalizing" discourses of his Soviet biographers. Apart from the above-mentioned psychologizing, she stresses his apolitical stance as opposed to Iurenev's persistence in painting him a (however unorthodox) Marxist, and emphasizes the formal experimentation and not the revolutionary goals even in his revolutionary films of the 1920s—*Strike*, *Battleship Potemkin*, and *October*. Contrary to Iurenev's charge of realism, Bulgakowa firmly insists on Eisenstein's "formalism." This even becomes one of her criticisms of Aksenov's "distortions" of Eisenstein's biography in the mid-1930s: "Formalists are completely absent as part of Eisenstein's life, and in the theory of montage Aksenov transposes linguistic categories into musical ones" (Bulgakova 184; my translation).

On a different plane lies the "break" between "early Eisenstein" and "later Eisenstein," with which my dissertation is also concerned. The discussion of this break initially depended on the above-mentioned privileging of Eisenstein's films over his theoretical work (as well as teaching). Since information about unfinished projects (except, perhaps, *An American Tragedy* and the Mexican film) was less accessible, Eisenstein's artistic output could clearly be seen as divided into the period of the 1920s and the period of the 1930s–1940s (exemplified, respectively, by *Battleship Potemkin* and *Ivan the Terrible*), with the two best-known unfinished films in the middle.

While the break in his film production has always been easy to notice—he was, after all, only able to complete four films in the 1920s, one film in the 1930s, and one (in two parts) in the 1940s,—a similar "schism" in Eisenstein's theoretical output had not been articulated until David Bordwell broached the subject in 1974. Bordwell is, more than anyone else, responsible for establishing this line between early, "mechanistic"/"constructivist" Eisenstein and later,

"organic" Eisenstein, first in the article "Eisenstein's Epistemological Shift" and the addendum to it in response to Ben Brewster's preface, and then in the book *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, which has continued to influence all subsequent scholarship. So far, Mikhail Iampolskii has been the main challenger to the idea of a "break" or "shift" in Eisenstein's work, seeing his "early poetics as a preparatory stage for the final synthesis" (Salazkina 10).

As a result, the period of 1929–32 has tended to be dismissed altogether in the major texts dealing with Eisenstein's films and theoretical legacy in general, despite several works dedicated to the Mexican project in particular. Both Bordwell's book and Anne Nesbet's *Savage Junctures: Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking* cite the virtual absence of any major practical or theoretical work as a reason for not discussing this period. Even when a scholar like Masha Salazkina, for example, writes about the period that falls "between" the "early" and the "later" one, she has to situate it vis-à-vis the two-partite schema of Eisenstein's life and career.

Other biographers have also found it difficult to treat the "intermediate period" in its entirety. Rostislav Iurenev, whose two-volume biography is broken down into "1898–1929" for the first volume and "1930–1948," does not really justify this particular point of break. Just like Shklovsky did before him, in this "middle" period he focuses primarily on Eisenstein's problems with censorship and police. Apart from that, confined to only the documents preserved in Eisenstein's Moscow archives (and Russian-language ones at that), they restrict their discussions to name dropping in the manner of some of Eisenstein's memoir notes. This route is too easy to follow. In addition to supplying his early biographers with information about his life and career and suggesting specific ways to make sense of it, Eisenstein left future scholars with a wealth of carefully preserved biographical materials such as letters, notebooks, booklets, and other mementos (as well as many still unpublished works of theory with their frequent

autobiographical digressions). As a result, his own versions of events continue to exert influence. For instance, the image of a bar- and salon-hopping Eisenstein of European and Hollywood days, present in every biography, has roots in the memoirs. One of the most vivid examples of this is a passage from the chapter "'Wie Sag' Ich's Meinem Kind?'":

> I have seen quite a few people in my time:
>
> Yvette Guilbert demonstrated her technique for me, for a whole *après-midi*. I have seen Chaplin filming. I have seen Chaliapin and Stanislavsky, Ziegfeld's shows and the Berlin Admiralspalast, Mistinguett in the Casino de Paris, Katherine Cornell and Lynn Fontanne with Lunt, Alla Nazimova in plays by O'Neill, and Mayakovsky rehearsing *Mystery Bouffe* … Al Jolson, and Gershwin playing *The Rhapsody in Blue*, the three rings of the Barnum & Bailey Circus, and flea circuses at fairs, Primo Carnera knocked out of the ring by Schmeling in the presence of the Prince of Wales, Utochkin's flights and a carnival in New Orleans… (Eisenstein, *Selected Works* 452 with some modifications from Eisenstein, *Immoral Memories* 78).

The list actually continues for another paragraph, and just the unpacking of all the names and events would provide a biographer with a solid chapter or two. Ivor Montagu was the most conscientious of the early ones, not just giving descriptions of some of these meetings, but providing a clue to their very multiplicity. He writes that in Hollywood, just as in Europe, Eisenstein behaved in the same way: "Invitations had to be accepted, parties attended, lectures to universities given. It was not the fleshpots that had to be tasted, so much as sights to be seen,

people met, ideas pursued" (81). Later biographers, who for the most part took Montagu's approach, dropped the second part of this argument and focused mostly on the "fleshpots" part.

Another way to somehow counteract Eisenstein's influence on the scope and choice of evidence was for his western biographers-memoirists to focus more on the "witnessed years," to borrow Jay Leyda's phrase from his book on Soviet film history, and therefore to provide a more comprehensive picture of these. Ivor Montagu himself was present during Eisenstein's lectures in England, and later became part of his Hollywood team and the co-writer of the script for *An American Tragedy*. Therefore, his book *With Eisenstein in Hollywood* is highly valuable as a source for writing about the Hollywood adventures of the director, but it does not, for example, address much of the European period (except for the Congress of Independent Cinema in Switzerland and Eisenstein's stay in England). Léon Moussinac, a French film historian and another personal friend, by contrast, provides in his biographical essay most of the information about Eisenstein's European travels that subsequent biographers have used, but he confines himself to the Swiss escapade at the Congress of Independent Cinema and to the journeys around France.

Other biographers also found it necessary to put emphasis on one or the other leg of the journey while trying to provide more sources for their information. Some parts of the journey have in this way become privileged simply because of a greater number of available sources for reconstructing Eisenstein's experiences. For example, earlier biographers only mention Eisenstein's stay in Berlin in passing, spending more pages on his detours to Switzerland and France (thus, Marie Seton wrote a whole chapter titled "A Russian in Paris," but dealt with several months spent in Berlin in the course of several paragraphs). Norman Swallow, who

conducted a number of interviews with people who had known Eisenstein for a British TV-documentary, was also interested mostly in the Paris and London chapters of the journey.

Oksana Bulgakowa in her book *Sergei Eisenstein: A Biography* finally provided some new information as well as deftly summarized existing accounts about the Berlin period of the journey. Bulgakowa used mostly unpublished materials from Moscow archives, but also conducted research abroad. She has also published a collection of documents dealing with Eisenstein's connections to German artists and culture (*Eisenstein und Deutschland. Texte. Dokumente. Briefe*). As a result, her emphasis on the German part of the journey confined its other parts to a more or less general summary of the rest of Eisenstein's European travels.

If I were to map out these and others, more recent, but less comprehensive views on Eisenstein according to the chronology of their development, it becomes clear that Sergei Eisenstein has been slowly emerging as a major international scholar, who, in his thinking, blended semiotics, psychoanalysis, cultural and anthropological studies, and Hegelian and Marxist dialectics. This new view on Eisenstein at an intersection of multiple contexts stands in opposition to the previous tradition that largely located him within the confines of Stalinism and the cultural discourse of Socialist Realism. Accordingly, the discussion of the crucial period of 1929–32 was also either limited to specific episodes or else included the journey itself in the larger biographical narrative of Eisenstein's life and career but never explored the multiple contexts of the journey itself.

Conversely, this dissertation isolates the trip as an event and leaves individual film projects in the background, and instead traces several various themes as they "dissect" the trip and extend beyond it. The temporal and geographical dimensions of the trip then serve as a sort of magnifying glass under which these themes become visible.

1.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Before I proceed to the summary of individual chapters, the title of the dissertation should be explained. Its second part, "Sergei Eisenstein Abroad," establishes the geographical as well as temporal boundaries of the project. The first part of the title, "The Flying Fish," however, points to its conceptual thrust. "Flying fish" was one of the images that Eisenstein picked up during the long journey and that became one of the metaphors he applied to himself as he tried to make sense of his experiences both as a filmmaker and as a thinking and feeling subject. The flying fish of the title, therefore, suggests the emotional image of the journey for Eisenstein: a creature at home both in the air and water and yet somehow out of place in either (not "a fish out of water," but rather, "neither fish nor fowl").

At the same time, its inclusion in the title emphasizes Eisenstein's need to use such metaphors, that is, to conceptualize his journey to himself and to others. The "governing metaphors," as literary biographer Leon Edel called them, in Eisenstein's case are quite explicit and are connected in my argument to his interest in biography and autobiography as narrative. Most often in the case of biographies and autobiographies that Eisenstein read, analyzed, and sometimes tried to emulate, it was a narrative of creativity and the creation, specifically of works of art. The title then hints at the more theoretical side of the present work: the exploration of Eisenstein as a student/reader of biographies, a subject of biographies, and as a biographer and autobiographer. This development, I argue, had its focal point precisely during the journey abroad, spurred on by the need to situate himself vis-à-vis the world and align his own self-image (which he was refining in the process) to the demands and representations the world had of him.

The interest in biography and autobiography becomes the theme of Chapter One, which provides an overview of Eisenstein's projects of that nature from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s. It also shows the intricate connections that formed between them and Eisenstein's theoretical and biographical projects prior to the trip abroad. In particular, the chapter traces Eisenstein's interest as a reader and potential writer of biographical and autobiographical works as it relates to the figure of his theater teacher, Vsevolod Meyerhold.

While the other three chapters include geographical and chronological boundaries in their titles, following the trajectory of Eisenstein's journey from Europe to the United States to Mexico, the issues raised in them are treated more in a manner of intellectual biography, crossing over to other periods both within and without the bounds of the dissertation's purview. The "chronological" chapters are therefore not meant to be exhaustive accounts of the corresponding legs of the journey. That is why, in addition to the brief summary of Eisenstein's "life and works" presented above, the "chronological" chapters (Two, Three, and Four) open with a short timeline of the corresponding periods that situate and ground the subsequent discussions of individual themes.

All the chapters are meant to be complementary, if not exactly operating as a "spherical book," the hypertext that Eisenstein dreamed of composing in the late 1920s (see Chapter Two). Therefore, the need to revisit certain themes made repetition unavoidable at times, since individual events or concepts had to be taken up in various contexts. It was also necessary to combine more descriptive passages and subchapters with more analytical ones; and each chapter is different in the way these two modes are combined.

Chapter Two, "Europe, August 1929–May 1930," starts with an exploration of the institutional context of Eisenstein's trip in order to delineate the conflicting forces that

constrained his freedom of movement and action. In particular, the chapter discusses the institute of patronage as it throws new light on the episodes of Eisenstein's Hollywood contracts (with United Artists and then Paramount), his participation at the Congress of Independent Filmmakers, and his attempt to add sound to *The Old and the New* before its European release. Moving to the more personal or individual level, the chapter then develops the overall theme of borders and boundaries more metaphorically and shows how Eisenstein's identity was negotiated through the mediums of appearance and language with their economic and class implications, which present two points of contact between "internal" and "external" world.

Chapter Three, "The United States, May–December 1930," takes as its main problem the "failure" of Eisenstein's Hollywood project in general through exploring the variety and the timelines of individual projects. Again, it raises the question of the Soviet context and the influence exercised upon Eisenstein by the political and economic situation in the USSR in the early stages of the First Five Year Plan, especially as it concerned the film industry. On a more personal level, the chapter brings up two spheres, through which Eisenstein attempted to deal with the conflicting pressures: humor and psychoanalysis.

Chapter Four, "Mexico, December 1930—February 1932," in opposition to Chapter Two, which presented "chance" as "necessity" in the narrative of the European part of the journey, emphasizes contingency behind seemingly deliberate actions such as the trip to Mexico itself. To do that, I use the concept of "nonlinear biography." Further, the chapter circles back to Chapter One, picking up the theme of the book project and explores one of its new facets, namely, Eisenstein's intensive engagement with modernist texts through a book by American critic Edmund Wilson. The attempt to deal with contingency, once again, as in Chapter Three, connects to more "esoteric" preoccupations of Eisenstein—here, graphology and palmistry.

They are treated as adjacent to his interest in psychoanalysis: all become methods of self-analysis and self-representation, and of representation of oneself to the outside world. This dichotomy of the internal and external world, which operated throughout the journey and throughout Eisenstein's life, is exemplified at the end of the chapter by another take on the question of artistic "failure" (or "experiment in failure") and its benefits as a "teachable moment" through its instantaneous or subsequent molding into a narrative. This brings the dissertation back to its beginning, and chronologically, forward again into the mid-1930s, when Eisenstein urged his students to read biographies in order to learn how to endure and overcome failure. I would even argue that, in itself, the turn to teaching (which was to become Eisenstein's main preoccupation in the early-to-mid-1930s) is predicated, on the personal level (as opposed to an economic necessity), not only on his own personal psychological coping with failure, but on turning it into a theoretical problem. Finally, the Conclusion continues some of the threads under discussion that go beyond 1932 and the return of Eisenstein and his team to the Soviet Union, and delineates future areas of research that are needed to supplement the preceding chapters for a more comprehensive (and perhaps less comprehensible) picture of this period in Eisenstein's intellectual and artistic development.

2.0 CHAPTER ONE: EISENSTEIN'S FIRST AUTO/BIOGRAPHY

> "Now, about you… This reminds me of a joke, popular here:
>
> a certain *he-Star* was having a dinner with a girl and spent hours telling her about himself and his pictures. Finally even he got embarrassed and said: 'Now, let us talk about you… What do you think of my new film?'"[1]

As much as the epigraph to the chapter sounds like a simple repetition of a trite joke, it occurs in the context of a highly personal letter, which Eisenstein, in one of his moments of tortured self-doubt, wrote to his friend Pera Atasheva, while in Hollywood. It is a self-reflexive joke on the part of Eisenstein: he has been talking about himself and he goes one talking about himself, but, in between, the joke is inserted by way of apology, perhaps, or at least by way of recognition of his own compulsion to unburden himself.

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[1] Letter to Pera Atasheva, 3 September 1930 in Eizenshtein, "Samoe uzhasnoe" 232. Translations from the Russian throughout the text are mine unless otherwise noted. Italics denote English in the original.

This meta-function of any biographical and autobiographical narrative, in which Eisenstein becomes involved, is followed though in the chapter. Its subheadings are meant to be polemical: from the outer, perhaps superficial recognition of the precedence of certain accounts of the "life and works" of Eisenstein ("The 'first' biographer(s) of Eisenstein), it proceeds backwards and inwards, to an overview of the history and the nature of Eisenstein's own interest in the biographies of others ("Why do Biographies Matter?"), from there – to the specific constellation of names and events that transformed the role in which Eisenstein saw himself in relation to the genre ("'Jean-Jacquerie' and 'Verwirrung der Gefühle': From Biographer to Biographee"), and then – to the figure of the true initial biographer, now without quotation marks ("The First Biographer") who preceded the traditionally recognized ones, and to his (or, rather, their) project, uncovered through the archival research carried out for this dissertation. This project is then woven into the story of the journey abroad and into Eisenstein's unfinished theoretical works of the time ("The First Auto/biography"). The conclusion, finally, bridges the pre- and post-journey biographical attempts.

2.1 THE "FIRST" BIOGRAPHER(S) OF EISENSTEIN

Soon after the return from the long trip abroad in the early 1930s, Sergei Eisenstein became involved in two biographical projects. The first biography was penned by his former professor at the Vsevolod Meyerhold theater school (GVYRM) and now a colleague at the Film Institute (GIK), poet and theater historian Ivan Aksenov. Its early short version, dated 23–29 December 1933, was published (in a slightly abridged form) for the first time in *Iskusstvo kino* in 1968; the long one, written in 1933–35, for which Eisenstein penned a preface in November 1935, soon

after Aksenov's death, had to wait until 1991.[2] The other biography was prepared by a new acquaintance, English critic and journalist Marie Seton. She talked to Eisenstein frequently around 1932–35, sometimes, according to her, even noting things down "at his request," but published her book only in1952, four years after Eisenstein's death (Seton 16).

Both books were if not fully written then at least begun in the early 1930s, so the title of Eisenstein's "first biographer" has been applied to both Marie Seton and Ivan Aksenov,[3] sometimes in the same breath. As Oksana Bulgakowa puts it, referring first to Aksenov, "To his first biographer the 32-year-old Eisenstein passed along a number of facts (his childhood, his adolescence, his *Wanderjahre*). At the same time he told the same facts to Marie Seton. It was she who became his first biographer who told a different story from Aksenov. … For Eisenstein the years of "return to Russia" (1932–33) after his 3-year absence became, it seems, the first approach to autobiography" (Bulgakova 173).

Bulgakowa's statement suggests that reliance of these first biographers mostly on the information provided to them by Eisenstein himself made them essentially their subject's mouthpieces, making their texts autobiographies posing as biographies, or, as I propose to call them, auto/biographies.[4] Even though professional historians accepted only recently that some

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[2] First publication: Aksenov, *Sergei Eizenshtein*. A fragment from it was published in the form of an essay "The Polyphony of *Battleship Potemkin*" in *Iskusstvo kino* 12 (1940): 19–23.

[3] On its application to Aksenov see, for example, Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka teatra* 204.

[4] I take this term from the field of historical studies, where it appeared in the 1970s and have come to mean that "the autobiography and biography were closely linked in form and implicitly

element of autobiography is present in all biography, "the idea that writing someone else's life could not be kept completely separate from writing one's own had certainly been raised before" (Caine 71). In this sense, one could view Eisenstein's later films, *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944–46), as auto/biographies.[5] The expanded reading of the term auto/biography that I propose here involves hybrid texts in which autobiography becomes one of the many elements, obstructing others or being hidden by them. That would include, on the one hand, autobiographies/fictional works posing as biographies—that is, for instance, at least portions of Seton's and Aksenov's books. On the other hand, auto/biography would mean

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also that the writing of a biography usually involved some form of autobiographical involvement on the part of the author" (Caine 66).

[5] Scholars have long been addressing autobiographical issues at play in *Ivan the Terrible*, especially as concerns the "revival" of the idea of a father, put forward by Freud. Leonid Kozlov was the first to trace the connection between the depiction of Ivan and the figure of someone he referred to as his "spiritual father," Vsevolod Meyerhold (another father figure behind Ivan being, of course, Joseph Stalin) (see Kozlov 109–130). Conversely, it is possible to see Eisenstein himself in the figure of the sacrificed/homosexual Vladimir, as Marie Seton and Herbert Marshall believed (Eisenstein, *Immoral Memories* xxv).

Eisenstein himself left detailed notes about the characters in *Ivan the Terrible*, pointing to some possible autobiographical connections, such as his "betrayal" by Grigorii Aleksandrov, reflected in the film as the betrayal of Ivan by his friend Kurbskii. He also admitted to having an autobiographical connection with the figure of Alexander Nevsky (Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 1, 379).

Eisenstein's own cultural, psychological, and anthropological studies pretending to be autobiographies or memoirs or, vice versa, using autobiographical elements but posing as theoretical texts. Both of these types of text often use fictionalization and narrativization to various degrees and make use of other biographies to illustrate certain points.[6]

Aksenov and Seton are prime examples of the first possibility, saturated with material provided by Eisenstein to the extent that they become his ghostwriters. And they were certainly not the last ones. To a large extent this also refers to Jay Leyda's texts about Eisenstein and to several of Eisenstein's acquaintances who wrote on the boundary between biography, memoirs, and film history, such as, in Russia, Viktor Shklovsky,[7] and abroad Léon Moussinac and Ivor Montagu. The latter admits this fact rather as a caveat: "In the months that followed [his acquaintance with the group], and years afterwards, I learned a good deal. Some of it on record, some things I judged from observation, some they told me, but Eduard was always reserved, Grisha moderate and modest, Eisenstein loved dramatizing and pulling everyone's leg" (Montagu 24). For Seton and Aksenov, conversely, having Eisenstein as the primary source of information seemed to be rather an asset than a drawback. Consequently, both were criticized by

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[6] A slightly different take on this term is represented in Valerii Podoroga's volume on auto-bio-graphy (*avto-bio-grafiia*) or psychobiograpy of Eisenstein (Podoroga 7–140) and Maria Malikova's *V. Nabokov. Avto-bio-grafiia.* Saint Petersburg: Akademicheskii poekt, 2002.

[7] On Shklovsky's approach to Eisenstein's biography or "bio-autobiography" (closer to the conventional meaning of auto/biography) see Oksana Bulgakova. "'Podrazhanie kak ovladenie': Shklovskii — Eizenshtein: bio-avtobiografiia." *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* 11 (1990): 220–230.

later Eisenstein scholars for either gullibly falling for his habit of "pulling everyone's leg" or for deliberately misleading readers.

The resulting texts have been said to conform rather to external narrative models (such as *Bildungsroman*) than to follow faithfully the events of Eisenstein's life. So, for instance, Georg Witte reminds readers that Shklovsky's biography of Eisenstein deliberately does not have a genre definition, while its German translation has a subtitle "A Novel-Biography." Witte points to its various possible interpretative models in the works of Dickens, Zola, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy (Vitte 329). A similar accusation of novelization has been recently leveled at Aksenov by Oksana Bulgakowa, who argues that some of his descriptions and definitions "were later taken up both by the biographical subject himself in his memoirs and by Viktor Shklovsky who repeated and 'perpetuated' them in his commissioned biography of Eisenstein" (Bulgakova 173). Among such episodes that have since been proven "novelizations" she mentions the circumstances of Eisenstein's joining the Red Army and of his leaving Meyerhold's GVYRM.

Seton's book has not been subjected to the same kind of scrutiny, although such a project may be even more interesting. It would be worthwhile to determine, for instance, where all the gross inaccuracies regarding Eisenstein's early years and his father's story come from: whether it was Seton's faulty memory or her subject's deliberate misinformation. She has, in the very least, already been found to be as liable as Aksenov in constructing more narratively pleasing versions of events and rounding off patchy accounts with fiction.[8]

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[8] George H. Scheetz, then a graduate student at the University of Illinois, in 1976 compared Seton's "postscript" to Eisenstein's short stay in Chicago in the late spring of 1930 ("…when Eisenstein was in great trouble, he wrote to Agnes and Lawrence Jacques. But they did not

The "novelization" and genre ambiguity of Eisenstein's biographies find their parallels in his own writing, the totality of which has been described as "auto-mystification" (Iangirov 327), and his ultimate project—as the creation of a "work of art *Eisenstein*" [*proizvedenie* "*Eizenshtein*"] (Podoroga 144). The genre identity of his *Memoirs*, for one, is highly debatable. Valerii Podoroga views the book as "pure cinema… something like mnemonic [*mnezicheskie*] attractions, albeit with an insufficient presence of montage" (144) or as a self-administered session of psychotherapy (171). Rashit Iangirov refers to the same book as a "hybrid-form or inter-genre simulacrum" [*mezhvidovyi simuliakr*]: "a peculiar "human document" that does not have genre analogues in Soviet practice, but whose templates should perhaps be searched for in Modernist egocentric prose (Andrey Bely, James Joyce) rather than in memoir literature" (329). Naum Kleiman remarks on the genesis of *Memoirs* proper from the more theoretical book *Method* that Eisenstein began in 1940 and that he then rewrote several years later, adding, among other things, autobiographical fragments and pages of self-analysis (Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 1, 368). Some texts that Eisenstein had initially intended for his textbook on film directing or for a treatise on color were later designated by him as parts of *Memoirs* and vice versa, since "…already in the introduction to his *Memoirs* he promised to display his creative process before the readers" (370).

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answer. 'At the time we couldn't understand why a man as great as Eisenstein should remember us,' they said") to his own 1973–74 interviews with the still living Agnes Chadwick (née Jacques): "Mrs. Seton—we could all have murdered her!... We didn't [receive that letter]… I know that was in [Seton's book], but I resent it" (qtd. in Scheetz 9).

Scholars mostly talk about the amalgamated style of Eisenstein's later writing, starting from the second half of the 1930s, and especially from 1940 on. This chapter, first of all, disputes that it was during the post-journey years that Eisenstein was initially put in mind of an auto/biography, both in the form of "authorized" biography and in the form of autobiography/theory book. Instead, it situates Eisenstein's first plans for creating interlocking biographical, autobiographical, and theoretical works in the 1920s, culminating in the years immediately prior and during his trip abroad. It was before the 1929–1932 journey that the first biography of Eisenstein was conceived, and the contender for the role of his first biographer is neither Seton nor Aksenov.

2.2 WHY DO BIOGRAPHIES MATTER?

Eisenstein's love of biographical and autobiographical texts is well-documented, as is the early beginning of his interest in them. In a letter to his mother from January 1920, for instance, he lists among the books he is reading at the moment a "monograph on [painter and theater designer] Sudeikin" in one of the issues of the *Apollon* journal (qtd. in Nikitin 106–107). He is reading the memoirs of Saint-Simone during the construction of trenches in 1918–19 (Eizenshtein, "Avtobiografiia" 12). Even Eisenstein's acquaintance with Freud's works begins, around the same time, because he is interested in da Vinci[9] and stumbled across a small book by

[9] One of the examples of Eisenstein's life-long fascination and only slightly ironic identification with Leonardo da Vinci is present in his recollections of his first "informal meeting" with Aleksandr Dovzhenko (in the company of Vsevolod Pudovkin): "We felt young and surging with

an author unknown to him, entitled *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 1, 276).

Sigmund Freud is named among several of the early 20th century biographers who were the precursors to auto/biographies of recent decades. The "father of psychoanalysis" "suggested early in the twentieth century that the emotional investment that biographers often had in their subjects limited their capacities to write critically about them" (Caine 71). According to Freud, "[i]n many cases they have chosen their hero as the subject of studies because—for reasons of their personal emotional life—they have felt a special affection for him from the very first. They then devote their energies to a task of idealization, aimed at enrolling the great man among the class of their infantile models—at reviving in him, perhaps, the child's idea of his father" (qtd. in Caine 71). This quotation is taken from Freud's own attempt at biography, the very same book that introduced him to Eisenstein, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*. Freud here talks about biography as a writing project. In Eisenstein's case, the choice of reading material was essentially governed by the same reason. About the time he started telling his life story to Aksenov and Seton, Eisenstein was also talking to his students about the importance for creative professionals of reading biographies:

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the creative energy of a new Renaissance… And just as people don masks at carnivals, so did we, the three young directors intoxicated with the wonders of their art, draw lots for the characters of three giants of the past. I was to impersonate Leonardo da Vinci, Dovzhenko—Michelangelo, and Pudovkin, gesticulating excitedly, proclaimed he wanted to be Raphael" (Eisenstein, *Notes* 144).

> ...a very important part is the organization of creative process and studying creative biographies. When you look at a completed work of art, you don't really know how it was done at all. In short, you will learn that, for instance, Joyce wrote *Ulysses* for ten years, that the whole novel was rewritten four times, there were several versions, etc. Usually you probably don't pay attention to such things; but it is very interesting to know that a person worked on one novel for several years. How did this man live throughout this period? It is very interesting to see what kinds of breaks and blocks happen, how the desired effect cannot for a while be reached, what a failure is. You have to familiarize yourselves with all these questions, because when you encounter your first failure you will decide that nothing is working out, you'll try to attempt something new, and something new again... You have to train yourself to be perseverant in achieving your goals. (Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye* 4, 25–26)[10]

This reason for the interest in both the achievements and the set-backs of famous people was always true for Eisenstein himself, even before he could formulate it that clearly. He seems to have been looking for encouragement, even for the confirmation that he was not the first one to attempt something.[11] He also picked examples, sometimes negative one, that would make him

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[10] The edited version of the stenographic record of Eisenstein's opening lecture for second-year students in the Directing Department (25 September 1933) that he included in his book *Direction* (*Rezhissura*). Translations from Russian throughout the text are mine unless otherwise noted.

[11] In 1929, drafting an introduction to his "spherical book" (see below), for instance, Eisenstein took courage from comparing his work with an already familiar task of preparing a stage version

believe that he could do something as well as (or better than) others. In 1927 one such negative example became for him Konstantin Stanislavsky's biographical book *My Life in Art*. Stanislavsky, who had been the teacher of Eisenstein's own teacher Meyerhold, represented in Eisenstein's mind the furthest opposite of what new modern theater and, by extension, film art had to be doing. So his book became the stimulus for Eisenstein's earliest project that was to combine theory and biography and was to be called *My Art in Life*. Naum Kleiman lists it as the earliest precursor to his *Memoirs* of the 1940s, but refers to it as more strictly biographical (in

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of a play and checking this in turn against what he had read of English theater director Gordon Craig's creating process:

> I work on materials and sources for the book a lot like a staging should be done.
>
> You breeze through the play.
>
> Step back from it for a while.
>
> Details disappear. Only a certain general idea remains.
>
> You compile a stage version. Create your own plan.
>
> Study the play in minute details. Your version <u>does not</u> correspond to the play. Your plan does not correspond to the author's plan. The conflict between these plans give you the right solution.
>
> This is how I work.
>
> This is roughly what Gordon Craig writes about himself, too. (The Eisenstein Collection at the Russian State Archive for Literature and the Arts, collection (*fond*) 1923, inventory list (*opis'*) 2, folder (*edinitsa khraneniia*) 796, list 3, hereafter shortened according to the following pattern: RGALI, 1923–2–796 l. 3. Emphasis in the original)

Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 1, 366). Eisenstein's note, however, point more towards a plan of using biographical elements as means for the easier absorption of the theory. In the early notes for the book he wrote:

> Autobiographical bend and examples from practice bring a grandiloquent theoretical abstraction closer to life. For it is clear that the young workers should find useful the experience of how one thinks and how one should think. A way of thinking and looking at things: this is what I would like to transmit. …Finally, the book as a whole, in its collection of articles in the form of asides, has to be perceived as a "human document." Something like "Tagebücher eines unreifen Mädchens" ["Diaries of an inexperienced girl"]. … So here, thanks to a heightened awareness, both theoretical, social, and individual/psychological at every step of creation, it is possible to use particular examples to unravel the interrelationship of processes of sublimation and social reflection; processes that shape the activity that we call artistic creation. (Eizenshtein, "My art in life" 16; note from the beginning of 1927)

Eisenstein continued to develop this idea for another couple of years. In the summer of 1929, right before leaving Russia, he wrote about the developing concept of the book, now in his mind taking the form of the "spherical book,"[12] and he paradoxically connected his desire to write a highly autobiographical theory book with his professed predilection for "mass cinema":

> Un peu risqué, mais pourquoi pas?[13] …

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[12] See Eizenshtein, *Montazh* 475.

[13] "A bit risky, but why not?" (in the original, this phrase is a mix of French and Russian).

> Being by my very nature an extreme individualist I could not help but build up the development of my art and theory, inseparable from it, under the sign of de-individualization.
>
> In using mass (collective) as foundation (primitives) and in the synthesis of science and art (in perspective).
>
> This is where I converge with Revolution, and the [results] are my works.
>
> Perhaps, "perspectives" are already an ambivalent synthesis of individuation and collectivization (intellectual cinema and so on)?? (1923–2–796 l. 4–4ob., draft of Introduction from 31 July 1929, emphasis in the original)

Recognition of his own worth as an autobiographical subject (if only as one of many possible examples) was accompanied by a concurrent recognition of his worth as a subject of proper biographies. This process took most of the decade and led to the development in 1929 of two simultaneous projects: of the "spherical book"[14] and of a biographical volume. Both of them were in turn connected to Eisenstein's trip abroad. Before getting to that, however, it is

[14] The form of a "revolving sphere," Eisenstein imagined, would allow the projected book, composed of individual essays (both written by the summer of 1929 and still remaining to be written), to guide the reader not from its beginning to its end, but in various ways back and forth between essays (via references and repeated concepts and ideas) as well as through the "center" of the sphere, its method. The book had to be eventually comprehended as a whole, in its immediate totality. Most of the articles intended for inclusion into the volume were eventually collected in the first part of *The Film Form* (1949) (Eizenshtein, *Montazh* 475, 569).

necessary to look at Eisenstein's transition from the position of a prospective biographer to a position of a prospective biographical subject.

2.3 "JEAN-JACQUERIE" AND "VERWIRRUNG DER GEFÜHLE": FROM BIOGRAPHER TO BIOGRAPHEE

Apart from cultivating and—to an extent—controlling his biographers, such as Aksenov and Seton, Eisenstein made a profound impression on his friends and collaborators abroad (such as Léon Moussinac, Ivor Montagu, and Jean Mitry), who wrote various memoirs and reminiscences of him. Back home, his long-time acquaintance Viktor Shklovsky wrote his biography in the early 1970s. Two of his students from VGIK, both foreigners (American Jay Leyda and Englishman Herbert Marshall), became if not strictly biographers, then at least "specialists on Eisenstein." Another one, Vladimir Nizhny, wrote a book that popularized Eisenstein's teaching method.

And yet, ultimately, Eisenstein himself had to become Eckermann to his own inner Goethe, Boswell to his own Dr. Johnson, and Jean-Jacques Brousson to his own Anatole France.[15] This last simile is, perhaps, the most important one, because its transformation within

[15] In December 1946 Eisenstein feels compelled to put it in the form of an imaginary conversation with an imaginary grandson, written from the point of view of this grandson, perversely stating that he, Eisenstein, does not deserve to have a real "Eckermann" to collect his witticisms:

Eisenstein's own thinking shows how during the 1920s he goes from identification with Brousson to identification with France, effectively promoting himself from a position of biographer to a position of one worthy of a biography.

In the early 1920s, Eisenstein went through a period of what he later termed his "Jean-Jacquerie." We know this primarily from his post-factum self-assessment dating from 1928, a year after his initial idea of the "anti-Stanislavsky" *My Art in Life* and two years after the Berlin success of *Battleship Potemkin* had validated his work as an artist in his own eyes. The pun refers to, on the one hand, Jean-Jacques Brousson who was at the time well-known for his two biographical volumes, *Anatole France en pantoufles* (1924, translated into English as *Anatole France himself, a Boswellian record*) and *Itinéraire de Paris à Buenos-Ayres* (1927, translated as *Anatole France abroad*) and, on the other hand, to Vsevolod Meyerhold's perpetual plans to stage Prosper Mérimée's *Jacquerie*.

> I did not manage to become a Goethe, so my position does not allow me to have a collector of my words and thoughts of the Eckermann type by my side. … You understand, of course, that it is also not my place to collect something like this about myself. It would not be appropriate at all.
>
> While you, being a youngster and having respect for your grandfather, a deference of a younger generation to the older one, should find it not only appropriate, but even honorable and commendable to do" (Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 2 435).

The imaginary grandson here is being designated here to the position of Brousson or Zweig's student (but the homosocial relationship is retained).

Eisenstein writes in his diary: "A sudden transition into "Broussonism" a year after meeting Meyerhold (*J'espère* with better results). And complete blasphemy towards any authority figures. I like J.-J. Brousson so much, perhaps, in the memory of my short-lived 'broussonnerie' at Meyerhold's side. The old man was strikingly like France in his everyday life! Cinema saved me from Jean-Jacquerie!" (1923–2–1109, l. 20; qtd. in Zabrodin, *Opyty* 32).[16]

Vladimir Zabrodin, who quotes this diary entry, dates the first meeting of Eisenstein and Meyerhold as no later than October 1921 and attributes the "short-lived 'broussonnerie'" to Eisenstein's editing his Master's lectures for a projected publication, therefore dating it the summer of 1922. He concludes therefore that already in 1928 Eisenstein tried to fictionalize his recent past, since, he says, "It was not cinema that 'saved' Eisenstein from 'Jean-Jacquerie': in the fall of 1922 he started his production of *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man*" (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Opyty* 32). Zabrodin understands the "Jean-Jacquerie"/"broussonnerie" of Eisenstein literally, as assistantship to a great master. The figure of Brousson, however, is the figure of both a student and a biographer; someone who overcomes the initial uncritical adoration of the master and is able to write down things that do not glorify (hence "absolute blasphemy towards all authority figures") but still help in immortalizing the older figure. In this sense, Eisenstein's "broussonnerie" was indeed overcome only by his going into cinema, moving to a territory

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[16] Later, in *Memoirs*, Eisenstein repeats: "The master in Brousson's first book was especially attractive for me, probably because, among other reasons, he was very similar in character to my own master, Vsevolod Meyerhold!" (Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 2 75). It is significant that he specifically mentions the first book by Brousson here that talks about the beginning of Brousson/France acquaintance.

where he felt he could, on the one hand, "dialectically" continue his teacher's work, and, on the other hand, compete with him and (at the same time) not compete, becoming the undisputed "Meyerhold of cinema."[17]

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[17] The fact that by the fall of 1928 Eisenstein was able to feel on equal footing with Meyerhold because, on the one hand, of his own firm position in cinema and, on the other, under the influence of the external (foreign) pressure and the necessity to present his position in a verbal text, is attested by the publication history of the book *Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia*, written by Joseph Freeman, Joshua Kunitz, and Louis Lozowick and published in New York in the summer of 1930. When the project was initially conceived by Freeman sometime in 1927, it was to be a collection of articles written by prominent Soviet artistic personalities, with Meyerhold giving a description of Russian theater from 1917 to 1928 and Eisenstein providing a corresponding account of cinema. Eventually, Eisenstein was the only one to fulfill his obligation (or at least three-thirds of it, in his own estimation), and his article was published within the chapter "The Soviet Cinema" authored by Freeman (pp. 217–264), taking up pp. 225–239. On the book project see Fleishman 148–52; 156; 220–222; 251, in particular pp. 149–150 for Meyerhold's letter to Freeman from 19 August 1928.

In his book *An American Testament*, Freeman also describes a scene set in the summer or fall of 1927 when he came to visit Eisenstein, who said to him: "I was just talking to the author of *Roar, China*. Tretyakov is writing a biography of me and I am telling him a few truths about myself" (qtd. in Freeman 589). If such a project really existed, there is no known trace of him left except for Freeman's testimony.

The spring of 1928 seems to be the start of Eisenstein's serious reassessment of his earlier relationship with Meyerhold with the help of several similes and analogies he borrowed from books (most of them biographical). With these similes, it is always necessary to keep in mind that one of Eisenstein's often repeated expressions, mentioned, for instance, in the plans for the "spherical book" of 1929, was "Si non e vero, e ben trovato": his comparisons might not always accurately describe the actual situations and relationships in his life, but they are important in elucidating his own perception of such situations and relationships. Throughout the 1920s, his gradual self-awareness and self-assessment were closely connected with the figure of Meyerhold through a system of mirrors, allusions, and analogies. His own position as an artist (and his position in the world of art) was developed in imaginary dialogue with Meyerhold and his position.

Apart from Brousson's biographies of France, another major text that Eisenstein relied on was Stefan Zweig's novella "Verwirrung der Gefühle" (translated as either "Confusion of Feelings" or "Confusion"). At roughly same time as the diary entry on "broussonnerie," while resting from the grueling shooting schedule of *October* at a Black Sea resort, Eisenstein began a letter to his friend, documentary filmmaker Esfir' Shub with a (mis)quotation from Zweig's novella "Downfall of the Heart": "It seemed to him as if his brain lay in front of him, bleeding, and red maggots were writhing in it."[18] He said he was "completely 'crazy'" about Zweig whose texts he was rereading at the moment and insisted that, by the time of his return to Moscow,

[18] The phrase, in Anthea Bell's translation, goes: "Every new idea deepened his wound and tore it open, as if his brain lay visibly bleeding, with red maggots writhing in it" (Zweig, *"The Governess"* 164).

Shub read if not all of Zweig, then at least his "Confusion": "Why? You will see for yourself as soon as you read it" (Qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 187–188).[19]

Several months later, on 14 September 1928, Eisenstein greeted Zweig when he came to his Moscow apartment "with a bombshell, an eruption of Vesuvius—at any rate with the unexpected:

'Confusion of Feelings'—was that autobiographical?

'Ah, no, it was about a childhood friend.'

It did not ring true.

I deeply regretted asking, and quickly helped him out of his embarrassment" (Eisenstein, *Selected Works* IV 104).

Before the meeting Eisenstein prepared a list of things he wanted to ask Zweig, which adds context to his main question about autobiographic undertones of the novella: "To ask him about 'Confusion'—he must be the young man. His attitude to Rolland, Verhaeren, the old people … Freud? Is the Professor not Freud?" (Qtd. in Bulgakowa, *Eisenstein und Deutschland* 46; my translation).

Zweig's novella talks about the confusion between "a passion of the mind, offered by one man to another and impossible to fulfil, even find complete satisfaction" and a sexual attraction of "the Professor" to the "young man," which remains hidden until the end of the novella and is

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[19] My translation. The English translation of the same letter published as part of "Correspondence with a Friend" in *Eisenstein 2. A Premature Celebration of Eisenstein's Centenary.* Ed. Jay Leyda. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1985. 32–58 is made from the abridged Russian version and does not contain this passage.

manifested through the Professor's "mysterious" behavior, alternating affection and coldness (*Confusion* 78).

Judging by Eisenstein's notes, he focused his attention on this vacillating behavior and built parallels between the relations of a young student and his overbearing teacher in Zweig's novella to the author's personal relations with the writers Emile Verhaeren and Romain Rolland, both of whom were subjects of Zweig's biographies, in 1910 and 1921, respectively. Even more significantly, he saw reflected in the novella perhaps not Zweig's personal relationship with Freud, but Freud's general pattern of dealing with his followers. In 1946 Eisenstein continued the account of the meeting with the Austrian writer:

> I knew he was close to Freud. … And I turned the conversation into an inquiry about the great man from Vienna. …
>
> He conveyed very vividly the particular patriarchal atmosphere that reigned over that oval table on Thursdays, bonding the idolized professor and his ardent disciples. …
>
> There was mutual suspicion and jealousy among the disciples. …
>
> And there was Freud's even greater suspicion of them.
>
> The suspicion and jealousy of a tyrant. (Eisenstein, *Selected Works* 104, translation modified).

Eisenstein proceeds to provide at least a partial answer to the long-ago imaginary question of Esfir' Shub about the particular fascination that "Confusion" held for him personally:

> But why do I grow so heated when I talk about the atmosphere within a group of scholars that broke up so long ago …

> Of course, my description of Freud's curia had switched subjects earlier: I am now describing the atmosphere in the school and theater of the grand old man of my youth, my leader in drama, my teacher.
>
> Meyerhold! (105–106)

He goes on to talk about his own and others' relationships with Meyerhold, and even Meyerhold's own relationship with Stanislavsky, with all of them in Eisenstein's description repeating the pattern of the "jealous master" and the "excommunicated student" that Zweig narrated so vividly in "Confusion," but not in his chapter on Freud in his later biographical book *Mental Healers*. The imaginary Freud here is a mediator between the figure of Meyerhold and the figure of Zweig's "Professor."

Eisenstein finds another metaphor for this bewildering behavior of beloved masters, somewhat defusing its sexual charge, explicit in Zweig's novella. His reported conversation with Zweig connects the Oedipal complex that preoccupied Freud with Freud's own Saturn-like figure, Saturn and Oedipus here being two sides of the same metaphor: "The Oedipus complex, standing out from Freud's teaching so disproportionately and exaggeratedly—in the play of passions within the school itself: the sons encroaching on the father. But rather in reaction to the father's tyrannical regime; a father more like Saturn devouring his children than like Oedipus' father, Laius, the unoffending spouse of Jocasta" (Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 1, 80).

In 1928, however, he is more interested in knowing (and seems to have already answered this question for himself) if Zweig's biographies were not indeed auto/biographies and whether his fictional works were not autobiographical either. There are also structural correspondences between Eisenstein's own "broussonnerie" as he describes it and the situation of the student-professor relationship in Zweig's "Confusion": in the novella the student wants to help his

brilliant but taciturn professor put his brilliant lectures on English literature on paper, since the professor seems to be incapable of doing it by himself (cf. Eisenstein's project of publishing Meyerhold's lectures, referred to by Zabrodin, above). What is also important in Zweig's novella is that it actually presents a post-factum account of the relationship, written by the former student of the now completely forgotten professor. He is a professor himself now, presented with a book describing his illustrious path. The book, however, has no information on the most important influence in his life— that of his master, "the professor." The novella then becomes a confession serving to disclose this hidden, secret influence.

Eisenstein's reading of "Confusion" then involves not only a projection of Zweig's relationships with Rolland, or Verhaeren, or Zweig, but more importantly, a projection of his own relationship with Meyerhold. This also partially explains why Eisenstein was sure that Shub specifically was in a position to understand why "Confusion" fascinated him: she had for a while been Meyerhold's secretary after the Revolution and even had in her possession the ring he had worn when he played Ivan the Terrible; Eisenstein borrowed this ring from her for the premiere of his production of *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man* in 1923 and would later borrow it for his main actor Nikolai Cherkasov on the first day of shooting *Ivan the Terrible*. In this reading of Eisenstein's interest in "Confusion," I concur with Vladimir Zabrodin, who put this theory forward in several of his works on Eisenstein (e.g., Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 195–226), although I cannot agree with his ultimate conclusion: that Eisenstein had been in love with Meyerhold's wife and leading actress Zinaida Raikh. As one of the hints, Zabrodin brings up the phrase, with which Eisenstein closes his memoir chapter on his two fathers—biological and spiritual: "And do you know that the best way to hide something is to disclose it fully?!"(*Memuary* 1, 358). It is possible, however, to add another quotation from the same book

that would provide a completely different answer to that of Zabrodin: "Of course, I have never loved anyone to such an extent, never adored and worshipped anyone as much as I did my teacher. … And it is impossible to live without loving, worshipping, being carried away by someone, and revering someone" (352–3).[20] Andrei Nikitin, who wrote extensively on the early period of Eisenstein's work in theater, mentioned in passing that 1922 for him, among other things, had been marked by "turbulent crush [burnoi vliublennost'iu] on Meyerhold and an infatuation [uvlechennost'iu] with his daughter" (182).

The question of Eisenstein's "secret/unnamed love" ("bezymennaia liubov'") and the way it influenced, for instance, his later biographical project on Aleksandr Pushkin, is a matter that has to be discussed separately and is outside of the scope of this chapter. The important common trait in both Brousson's "broussonnerie" and in "Confusion" is that both students themselves become masters; they use their imaginary or real sentimental and intellectual education received from an older male towards creating a work (biographical or fictional) of their own.[21] Perhaps

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[20] Eisenstein continues this thought in *Memoirs* with reference to his own position as a teacher now—a reversal, analogical to the situation in "Confession": "Will one of my students say that about me one day? No. And the matter lies not in my students and me, but in me and my teacher. For I am unworthy to undo the straps of his sandals (even though he wore felt boots in the unheated theater workshop on Novinsky Boulevard)…" (*Memuary* 352).

[21] In this regard it is worth noting that Eisenstein himself became one of Zweig's minor characters. Soon after the return from the Soviet Union the writer published his memoirs of the trip, immediately translated into Russian as well. In the chapter entitled "Heroism of the

this “working-through” of his past relationship with Meyerhold in 1928 helped Eisenstein by the middle of 1929 move in his mind from “student” to “master” (on the strictly biographical level, the fall of 1928 also marked his first time teaching film direction at the State Film Technicum [GTK]).

During the same time Eisenstein was able to move from Brousson to France in his imaginary reenactment of “broussonnerie.” Eisenstein read the first book in Brousson’s duology soon after it came out in French: he used a quotation from *Anatole France en pantoufles* as the epigraph to his article “Béla Forgets the Scissors” in the summer of 1926 (the article was published without the epigraph—see Eizenshtein, *Montazh* 569). When he was writing about his “broussonnerie” in 1928 he likely still only meant the first book. Right before the trip abroad in 1929, however, the second book became more important—now Eisenstein aspired to be France himself, not Brousson.[22] The specific aspect of the book that prompted Eisenstein’s habitual reaction “me too” (in the sense of “I can do that too”) was France’s ability to give lectures in different countries, always in the language of that country. Apparently, at about the same time, Eisenstein also heard someone give the same speech in several languages in succession at one of

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Intellectuals” he presented his own version of the meeting with the Russian film director (Zweig, “Reise” 224–25).

[22] All of this, of course, is known from Eisenstein post-factum self-analyses. But the two book titles are also scribbled down in one of the notebooks from the period of finishing *The General Line* and going abroad, in the spring–summer of 1929 (1923–1–1418 l. 57).

the Communist Congresses in Moscow.[23] He wrote later that he had actually been afraid of speaking in public, something that none of those listening to him would ever recognize: "…then, as now, public speaking was absolute torture for me and demanded an unbelievable effort if I were to overcome certain restraints. Of the many things I am no good at (and which I therefore hate doing), speaking in public is one of the most hated" (Eisenstein, *Immoral Memories* 146). In this instance, Eisenstein tried to model himself after France and it worked. He gave lectures with universal success in Europe and the United States, and was finally satisfied with himself, he said, when he received an actual invitation to lecture in Buenos Aires, Anatole France's final destination (147).

While Eisenstein was travelling, his idea for an auto/biography, which in its very first iteration was to be a reversal of Stanislavsky (and thus close to Meyerhold), began changing. In the summer of 1931, when he was waiting for the rainy season to pass to resume filming *¡Que Viva México!*, Eisenstein learnt of Meyerhold's death. The rumors proved false, but not before he drafted an obituary for his teacher.[24] The figure of Meyerhold presented in this obituary

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[23] Herbert Marshall, editor and translator of Eisenstein's memoirs, and his student at VGIK in 1932–35, speculates that this unnamed person was Karl Radek, journalist and politician of Jewish-Polish descent, purged in the late 1930s (Eisenstein, *Immoral Memories* 145–146 n. 3).

[24] There he for the first time explicitly connected Meyerhold to Saturn, eating his own children, and at the same time stressed the "squandering" of the "legacy," the knowledge of the older man, the motif of vital significance for "Confession" and the concept of "broussonnerie"; as well as something to which Eisenstein juxtaposed his own practice of "hoarding" his ideas:

became a stepping stone for Eisenstein's theory of an ideal artist-dialectician. The new plans for the autobiographical/theoretical book now included this obituary as a chapter (1923–2–1134 ll. 2–3).[25] The true importance of this inclusion can only be understood with the knowledge of Eisenstein's mental image of his relationship with Meyerhold *circa* 1928–1929. The dialectical theory of pathos and of "ex-stasis" ("going outside of oneself"), on which Eisenstein is working in Mexico, it seems, cannot proceed without first "going outside" of one's master, like Athena appearing out of Zeus's head (to follow Eisenstein in mixing mythological metaphors).

By the time of his return from abroad, Eisenstein had finally killed his artistic and spiritual father symbolically and even considered himself ready to return to theater (which before the trip he had considered to be Meyerhold's exclusive property where he, Eisenstein, could not or did not want to compete). I have suggested that even before the trip he was already thinking

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> There was no other theater where so many bitter tears were shed. But there were also few theaters with such readiness to sacrifice everything to art. … This loyalty was first of all conscious and unwavering until… the next "St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre" when the master, Saturn-like, eating his children, dealt with them by kicking out everyone who for some reason seemed to him to be standing in his way. People left. Meyerhold forever remained for them the only Master…
>
> But the master always remained lonely.
>
> The further, the lonelier he became.
>
> And nothing was done to preserve his legacy, his achievements. (Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 2 302)

[25] See Chapter Four.

of making his own life and career material for his writings. The history of his reading Brousson's and Zweig's books in 1928–29 also shows that Eisenstein was ready for his own Brousson. Very soon he found, perhaps, the perfect one.

2.4 THE FIRST BIOGRAPHER

Prior to 1929 Eisenstein had already had some experience with (mis)representation of his ideas to the public.[26] When he took steps to organize the writing of his first biography, its prospective

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[26] Scholars have, for instance, taken some time to decide whether the representation of Eisenstein's early theories in the book by Aleksandr Belenson, *The Cinema of Today* (*Kino segodnia. Ocherki sovetskogo kinoiskusstva (Kuleshov–Vertov–Eisenstein).* Moscow, 1925) is accurate and direct enough to include the chapter dealing with him in Eisenstein's own bibliography. The chapter on Eisenstein takes up pages 49–102 of the book, of which pages 53–62 and 81–100 are textually identical to Eisenstein's article from October 1924, "The Montage of Cinema Attractions" ("Montazh kinoattraktsionov"), which remained unpublished until 1985. See Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 237–238 for the initial letter from Belenson to Eisenstein from the fall of 1924 and Zabrodin, *Opyty* 100 on reasons for considering the chapter on the whole "falsified" or "genuine" Eisenstein, including the director's own references to the text while insisting that his ideas were disfigured by Belenson. Oksana Bulgakowa has pointed out repeatedly that Eisenstein was far more lenient towards foreign mouthpieces of his words, of which she names Joseph Freeman and Louis Fischer (Bulgakova 173; on Freeman and Eisenstein see also: Fleishman 220–62, specifically 220–22; 251)

author came with the best credentials, and the choice was logical, given Eisenstein's self-image of Brousson to Meyerhold's Anatole France and his multi-level identification with Zweig and his characters.

Nikolai Volkov was a film and theater critic, and, perhaps most importantly, was at the moment putting the final touches on his biography of Meyerhold. The biography, published in two small volumes in the fall of 1929, first began as a small brochure in 1923. With his own (even if half-imaginary) attempt at "Jean-Jacquerie," Eisenstein must have known of its existence. Moreover, Eisenstein and Volkov knew each other personally at least since the spring of 1923 when Volkov wrote a review of his theater production of *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man*. While being, in Volkov's own assessment, "ironic" and not entirely positive, the review praised Eisenstein's work: "A designer by education, Eisenstein turned out to be a very ingenious director. He studied circus and cinema tricks and arranged them in such a way that the end result is a funny kaleidoscope in the variety show/detective fiction vein" (Volkov, *Teatral'nye* 338), so the two became friendly. In late 1925 Eisenstein personally invited Volkov to one of the first screenings of *Battleship Potemkin* (342), and the latter wrote an enthusiastic review, saying, in part:

> We should not demand that *Battleship Potemkin* be correct in every minute historical detail. Perhaps the uprising at *Potemkin* did not correspond in details to the one shown on the screen.
>
> It does not matter because Eisenstein as the director in collaboration with his cameraman Tisse was able to express the very spirit of the revolution, its deep dynamics, its gigantic rhythm. … With astoundingly sharp eye, Eisenstein looks at nature, at the human face, at

> machines. He listens closely to the very breathing of deep sea waters; he loves things; he knows that the revolution is not an individual; it is the mass, and he is looking for a new language to express the emotions of the mass.
>
> And at the same time, everything has been thought of; everything has been arranged. Montage is like a steel carcass that powerfully and closely embraces every detail. And the viewer cannot resist the winning stream of impressions, because Eisenstein knows when and how to implement this and that means of effect. … Under our very eyes, Eisenstein confidently enters the circle of internationally-acclaimed directors. (343; first published in *Trud*, 1 January 1926)

Volkov also reviewed *October*. He was not uniformly positive ("We think that Eisenstein's taste was not always up to the mark and there are certain parts in which his irony is not fully convincing"), but benevolent and understanding of the director's goals and what was at stake in the project for him:

> The film *October* has "two souls." One is sarcastic, satirical, exposing the February regime and its actors; while the other one is full of pathos, glorifying the storm and thunder of October. … One can clearly see that Eisenstein managed to capture not only the exterior façade of events, but their psychology as well. …We have before us a monumental work of art that rises like a granite cliff above the swampy plain of contemporary run-of-the-mill productions. This is a work of real Soviet cinema, a new original art that does not resemble the West. (347)

It is not certain who initiated the biography project in 1929. Volkov, for one, writes in the 1960s that it was he who "decided to write a book about Eisenstein" (343). Still, if there was a choice (or at least an acquiescence) on Eisenstein's part, there could be not a little of nose-thumbing in the direction of Meyerhold in it. The triple line of descent (Stanislavsky begot Meyerhold; Meyerhold begot Eisenstein) connects this biographical project to the idea of *My Art in Life* and the number of similes Eisenstein tried to superimpose on his relationship with Meyerhold, described above.

From the first "synopsis" for Meyerhold's biography of 1923 the bulk of the book took about four years to write. After Volkov wrote in the Introduction (itself dated "26 February–28 June 1929") that the book was mostly finished by January 1927, he had to write another "4 [folio] sheets" in September 1929 to get the required wordage "at the last moment" (a letter to Eisenstein; 1923–1–1716 l. 3). Writing about Meyerhold, Volkov not only made extensive use of personal documents that his subject made available to him, but also conducted interviews with the director, as well with his colleagues and acquaintances. Meyerhold even wrote some short accounts specifically for the book. Volkov also had the advantage of having been born in Meyerhold's home town, Penza (albeit 20 years later) in a family of a theater entrepreneur acquainted with Meyerhold; he had gone to the same school in Penza and to the Law Department of the Moscow State University as well. Still, with all this contextual knowledge and Meyerhold's help it took him at least three years to write the two-volume biography with a combined length of some 900 pages that only came up to 1917. The first volume was dedicated to the events of 1874–1908 and the second to 1908–1917. The projected third volume was to cover Meyerhold's post-Revolution career, but it was never published. Of course, by 1929, Eisenstein's career had only spanned years, not decades, so both the author and the subject could

reasonably be sure the new book would be finished much faster. In fact it had to be, because the need to publish it was closely connected to Eisenstein's trip abroad.

2.5 THE FIRST AUTO/BIOGRAPHY

As mentioned in the Introduction, Eisenstein's trip had been in the works ever since Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks's visit to Moscow (in the summer of 1927) and especially since the following year's visit of the President of their film company *United Artists*, Joseph Schenck. Work on *October* and *The General Line/The Old and the New* delayed the trip several times. In April 1929 Stalin apparently finally agreed to let Eisenstein and his cameraman Eduard Tisse and assistant Grigorii Aleksandrov make a trip to Europe to get acquainted with the new sound technology and perhaps to shoot a film in Hollywood, as Fairbanks and Schenck had offered. After the meeting, the group spent the rest of April and all of May shooting additional footage for *The Old and the New* in the northern Caucuses and the Rostov-on-Don region, following Stalin's request.

As the projected date came closer and the trip more assured, Eisenstein made efforts to straighten out his own writings (several versions of the introduction to his "spherical" book, for instance, were written during the summer of 1929), as well as to arrange for the writing of his biography, both to be published abroad. The fact that even before the trip he was thinking of publishing his larger writing in Europe rather than in the Soviet Union is attested by the humorous aside in one of the drafts for the book's introduction:

> "NB. So far it's written "in German"—
>
> translate into French!

(faire la preface légère et étincelante! [make the introduction light and sparkling!] hehe)" (RGALI, 1923–2–796 l. 9, note from 5 August 1929).

He had voiced a similar perception of different styles suitable for different European and world audiences in the fall of 1928, sending Joseph Freeman an article on Soviet cinema for his *Voices of October*: "Try to arrange it so that this material is not translated into other languages. Because, for instance, for Germany one needs to write in a completely different style" (qtd. in Fleishman 221).

Eisenstein had, since the beginning of his theater career, been building ties with European and American journalists and publishers, often based on personal friendship.[27] The translation history (as yet unwritten) of his early articles shows that he was very much concerned with promoting his ideas outside of Russia. It stands to reason that Eisenstein would have wanted to use the opportunity for cross-promotion of his films and his writings while abroad. In fact, as soon as he arrived in Berlin Eisenstein wrote to the editor of the British film magazine *Close Up*, Kenneth McPherson: "PS.—I have a manuscript of a book written by me about film theory. We should discuss about it also…" (qtd. in Seton 127). In this effort of self-promotion he was encouraged by Lev Monosson, the then head of Amkino, US representative of Soviet film organizations based in New York (see Chapter Two). Monosson had started promoting Eisenstein's visit already in the fall of 1928, reporting to the director as well as to his head organization, Sovkino, on the steps he was taking. They included attempts to coincide the American release of first *October* and then *The Old and the New* with Eisenstein's projected

[27] See my introduction in "S. M. Eizenshtein v amerikanskoi presse" 135–142. See also Note 15, above.

arrival date in New York; translating and publishing in the US press and as leaflets Eisenstein's articles and his biographical information (as well as bios of his collaborators Aleksandrov and Tisse), etc. (1923–1–1983 ll. 1–3). Publishing a biography could smooth his way into European and Hollywood studios and lead, among other things, to more lecturing invitations. Tying it in with a theory book could give Eisenstein more exposure and therefore more money, surely to not be rejected.

Eisenstein, like Meyerhold, helped in supplying materials for his own biography, meeting with Volkov regularly. The meetings must have started in the summer of 1929, since most of 1928 Volkov spent in Europe, where his actress wife, Bela Kazaroza, had killed herself on 2 March 1929 after he had returned to Moscow. Eisenstein meanwhile was busy filming, editing, and then again filming *The Old and the New*. Volkov and Eisenstein met at second-hand book shops where both were always searching for rare volumes (*Teatral'nye* 350-51). Sometimes they would also meet in Eisenstein's room at Chistye prudy in the apartment he shared with, among other people, his childhood friend, actor and one of his assistants during the filming of *Battleship Potemkin* and *October*, Maksim Shtraukh (*Teatral'nye* 350). Most often, Volkov says, Eisenstein went to his apartment at Krivoarbatskii pereulok 4, close to the Vakhtangov Theater. Sometimes they came together with Shtraukh (Letter from Shtraukh to his wife Iudif' Glizer from 3 August 1929 in 2758–1–1745 l. 3). They called such regular Friday meetings at Volkov's apartment their "vendredis."

Among the things they talked about were topics that formed the basis of Eisenstein's texts of the period, both more or less ready for immediate publication—such as "Cinema of Four

Dimensions" [*Kino chetyrekh izmerenii*], [28] as well as those still in draft or planning form, like "How Pathos is Done," which was based on materials from Eisenstein's seminars at the State Film Technicum.[29] After one of the "vendredis," Eisenstein wrote down, apparently pleased: "Volkov says that in my syntax I put stops before it is required by breathing. That means that my syntax is the syntax of anticipated syncopation: the beat (stop) comes before it is required by the rhythm (see the same thing in music: 'das Jazz Buch')" (Note from 4 August 1929 in 1923–2–1114, l. 48).

Volkov was also privy to Eisenstein's plans for his own theory book and for adding sound to *The Old and the New*—another reason to go abroad. The journal *Contemporary Theater* (*Sovremennyi teatr*) even announced on 27 August 1929 that "[t]heater critic N.D. Volkov has finished compiling a book about S.M. Eisenstein that includes analysis of his theater and cinema activity. The book uses unpublished manuscripts and materials from S.M. Eisenstein's archive as well as a number of conversations with him" (1923–1–2807 l. 61).

In fact, the book had not yet been begun. There was, however, a synopsis, written by Volkov on 18 August 1929, the day before Eisenstein's group boarded the train for Berlin. The "illustrated monograph" *Sergei Eisenstein* (or, alternatively, simply *Eisenstein*) was to include,

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[28] 1923–1–1716 l. 3ob. See Sudendorf 248 on the publication history of "Cinema of Four Dimensions" in Russian, German, and English. The first part of the article was originally published in Russian in the newspaper *Kino* on 27 August 1929.

[29] Sudendorf (93) dates both "Cinema of Four Dimensions" and "How Pathos is Done" July 1929, citing commentary by O. Aizenshtat, Anatolii Kariagin, Naum Kleiman, and Leonid Kozlov in Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* 3 617).

according to the projected table of contents:

1. The path to art—Pages from his life.

2. Work in theater.

A) *The Mexican—Wiseman—Do you hear, Moscow?—Gas Masks*.

B) Theater design work.

3. Films about the revolution.

Strike—Potemkin—October

4. *The General Line*.

5. Theoretical views.

(1923–1–1716 ll. 1–2).

Unlike the Meyerhold book, it was divided into larger chunks, not theatrical "seasons," although its first part was titled similarly: "The path to theater" for Meyerhold vs. "The path to art" in general for Eisenstein. The illustrations were to include Eisenstein's portraits, photos of his theatrical productions together with designs of costumes and sets, posters for both theater and film works, on-set photos and, finally, stills from the films.

Leaving for Europe and, he hoped, for the United States, Eisenstein took with him not only a copy of *The Old and the New*, his articles and plans for the "spherical book," about which he wrote to McPherson. He also brought the plan for Volkov's biography and an authorization written on the same day to sign contracts for a translation of the book on Volkov's behalf: "...based on our private negotiations, I hereby ask you and give you authorization to conduct negotiations and sign contracts with foreign publishers for the publication in all foreign languages of the illustrated monograph *Sergei Eisenstein* written by me..." (18 August 1929, 1923–1–1716 l. 2).

The interest in the book quickly manifested itself. On October 5 Volkov informed Eisenstein that "…a certain *Vestland-Verlag* sends me a request for selling it the right to translate into all world and non-world languages the book about you. In cases such as this, I invariably reply that my authorization letter is in the hands of the original, that is, you, and that I am not going to enter into any negotiations behind your back. However, after requesting more information from the Berlin representative of *Izvestiia* newspaper, I received a negative recommendation of this affair" (l. 3; italics denote German in the original). Volkov was specifically interested to know as soon as possible where exactly the book was to be published, because that would influence its construction: for instance, the German principle, Volkov wrote, was to include "more pictures and less text. Printed in a large font to boot" (l. 3 verso). This confirms that Volkov's book was also to be geared primarily to the foreign market, even if there were also plans to publish it in Russian later.

Publishing books to coincide with foreign "tour" was not uncommon; in fact, it was something like a part of the Soviet artists' "promotional campaigns," whether the books were commissioned by foreign publishing houses or were the artists' own idea. Stanislavsky wrote *My Life in Art* during the two-year European and American tour of the Moscow Art Theater and published the book first in Boston in 1924, in English translation (Stanislavskii 51). The much-revised Russian-language edition appeared in 1926. Eisenstein wrote his notes for *My Art in Life* in 1927, but used the English title for his pun.

In Paris the MKhT tour was accompanied by the publication of an album called *Faces of Russia*. Aleksei Granovskii (later known abroad as Alexis Granowsky), theater and, occasionally, film director (and an acquaintance of both Eisenstein and Volkov) during his efforts throughout the 1920s to get the troupe of his State Jewish Theater (GOSET) to Europe

and the States, planned to publish two books ("one Jewish and one English") about the theater (in addition to articles, handbills, and booklets, as well using a special English-language press agent for placing notices and photographs and perhaps soliciting reviews).[30]

Previous examples of Russian visual artists who published books abroad, however, were mostly theater workers. As a film director, Eisenstein really wanted to take the risky next step. It is true that Vsevolod Pudovkin's two brochures from 1926, *The Film Director and Film Material* (*Kinorezhisser i kinomaterial*) and *The Film Script* (*Kinostsenarii*) were published in Germany in 1928 by the film magazine *Lichtbildbuehne* as a single volume, and then in England in 1929 as *On Film Technique* (London: Victor Gollancz) in Ivor Montagu's translation. A big film theory book or a biography of major Russian film director published abroad first would still be a novelty.[31]

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[30] "Something like an almanac with many illustrations. Materials about the theater, its history, its meaning, its designers, composers, and productions. It needs to be written lightly, lucidly, in layman's terms—about 5–6 sheets and with 32–40 illustrations in a folder with a cover made by our best designers. It is very important that these books are released by *respected publishing houses*" (Letter to Mendel Elkin 6 January 1925, qtd. in Ivanov 402, emphasis in the original)

[31] Ivor Montagu's preface to the first edition of Pudovkin's book specifies that "the form" of the book, "as also its content and that of its appendices, has been discussed with and approved by the author" (Pudovkin x). In the preface to the second, enlarged edition of 1933 he laments that despite the growing number of film journals, at this point "there remains a sad dearth of studies by practitioners themselves," and, despite several of Eisenstein's articles available in translation (Montagu lists five), "his book still lacks and in its absence there is clearly the more place for the

Judging by Volkov's letters to Eisenstein from this period, initially the director did not put enough effort in "pitching" the biography. Although he asked Shtraukh to say hello to "the nice people" in Moscow, including Volkov (the letter from the first half of October 1929; Zabrodin dates it 12–16 October in *Eizenshtein: popytka* 264), he only sent his biographer a postcard from La Sarraz in Switzerland in early September (1923–1–1716 l. 3). At the same time Shtraukh, who meanwhile apparently had kept Volkov apprised of Eisenstein's adventures, writes to his friend to say that Volkov just called to ask why he hadn't received an answer to his letter: "He thinks of starting work on your book in November and asks to know his work perspectives" (letter from 13 October 1923 in 1923–1–2257 l. 8ob).

On October 5 Volkov confirms that he plans to start writing the "opus" about Eisenstein's "achievements and underachievements" (1923–1–1716 l. 3) on November 1 (because all of September was taken up by finishing the Meyerhold book). He inquires about Eisenstein's plans apart from "survey of surroundings," including the plans with the theory book, the "sonorisation" of *The Old and the New*, and the trip to the States: this he also needs to know in order to "construct" the book accordingly (ll. 3-3ob). Volkov writes to Eisenstein again in late October, now saying that he can start writing the book after coming back from Leningrad, around November 20 (l. 5). He feels confident that the work should take about two months and in the second half of January it can already be given to a translator. "The material for the book about you has *en general* been collected and I am thinking it over all the time. When I start working on it in earnest, there will only remain gaps [to fill in]. In Leningrad I will try to visit your

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reappearance of Pudovkin's" book (Pudovkin xi). "Raphael" had outpassed "Leonardo" yet again.

mother and interview her about your persona. …. The book about you is burning my fingers. I have to write—there is no getting around it!" (ll. 5–6ob; emphasis in the original).

At the same time, acting on Eisenstein's instructions, Volkov sends a letter with an "exposé" of the book to Dmitrii Mar'ianov (Dimitri Marianoff), an official of the Soviet Trade Mission in Berlin who was in charge of cinema there and was Eisenstein's general factotum at the time, from helping arranging film commissions to introducing him to his father-in-law—Albert Einstein. Volkov is still reluctant to commit to a particular style and general theme of the book until the real prospects of its publication are known (l. 5ob). He insists that Eisenstein deal with this immediately. In the next letter, sent exactly a month later, when Eisenstein had already left Berlin, Volkov is much less enthusiastic than before about Marianoff's ability to move the publication of the (yet unwritten) book along: "Do I believe in his busywork with my book? Honestly, not really. He always promises a lot of things. I would have preferred fewer!" (l. 8ob). Yet Volkov now insists that he wants to write the biography even without the assured plans of its publication at home or abroad.

He also tries to cheer Eisenstein up about *The Old and the New*, whose at best lukewarm reception after the general release on October 7 has already been reported to the director:

> The lack of box-office success of *The Old and the New* does not change anything in the law of large numbers. This law takes into account not the box-office and not the critical reception, but the internal rhythm of incremental progress. From this point of view, the film remains a pinnacle. I tested it once again in the First Sovkino theatre. But the film does not satisfy the perception capacity of the average viewer and the average critic, who is as shallow as the Volga river near Tver' in July. I think that in *Ausland* the film will have a

> triumph. … I am very happy that my article in *Izvestiia* appeared at the right moment and immediately countered [a number of negative] opinions about your film. This was necessary" (l. 5ob-6ob; emphasis in the original; "Ausland" in German in the original).

The article to which Volkov refers appeared soon after Eisenstein left the country, on 23 August 1929, in *Izvestiia*, together with another article by A. Agranovskii, "The Pathos of the non-party separator" ("Pafos bespartiinogo separatora"). Agranovskii's article is overwhelmingly negative (as can already be guessed by the choice of the adjective): he accuses the filmmakers of forgetting to include cooperation, the village soviet, the exploitation in the countryside, and the Party in the film while also showing the *kulaks* in the wrong way, too straightforwardly ("…the fattest peasant in the film. His mug looks as if taken straight from some *lubok*" (1923–1–183 l. 67).

Volkov's article, "A big victory at the front of cinematographic mastery" ("Bol'shaia pobeda na fronte kinematograficheskogo masterstva") can be considered the only material for Eisenstein's first biography that survives (it would have been part of Chapter Four). He shows an understanding of the film's position within Eisenstein's thinking of the time when he writes:

> In the emotional treatment of the village under transformation, Eisenstein reaches for some oldest, primordial layers of human psyche. He makes not only the conscious, but the primeval unconscious forces of man serve the Revolution as well. The story of the milk cooperative getting a breeding bull is suffused with real ecstasy. … In this storm cloud, like a mighty embodiment of strength and fertilization, a colossal bull appears. And then – a pouring, white, milky rain, the liquid of life. The bull and the separator, a machine made of meat and a machine

made of iron. (Qtd. in Volkov, *Teatral'nye* 347)

In his letters Volkov insists that his and Eisenstein's books should come out simultaneously, "in close formation," asking again how his subject's own book is going and whether he can possibly read the manuscript (1923–1–1716 l. 6). At the end of November he reiterates his readiness to write the book and projects that it will take up the next three months: "Today VOKS [The All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries] … summons me to a meeting about planning some collected volume on Soviet cinema for America. But I remain an incorrigible individualist. I want to write my books and my articles. I am interested in writing my book about Eisenstein, not in participating in someone else's. We'll see, though…" (l.8; emphasis in the original). At the end he repeats: "I hope that after getting my letter you will respond immediately and tell me how things are with the book."

After this November letter from Volkov, which reached him in London at the beginning of December, Eisenstein writes to his French friend, Léon Moussinac, a film critic and a journalist, who is working at the time in Albert Levy's small publishing company, producing luxury illustrated books and albums featuring interiors by French Art Deco designers, such as reproductions of architectural details of the Hotel Rambouille (Eizenshtein *Memuary* 1, 179). Eisenstein tries to gauge the interest that the book might have in France, informing Moussinac: "I have received here a letter from Mr. Volkov. … He wrote a big book about Meyerhold and now he is writing about me. Do you think there can be interest in a book like this in French translation?" (Letter of 7 December 1929, 1923–2–1770 l. 6; my translation back from the Russian translation from French).

There are no more letters from Volkov from this period (or from later, in fact) in Eisenstein's archive. The next telegram preserved there congratulates Eisenstein on the medal

awarded for *Alexander Nevsky* (1923–1–1716 l. 9). In his book *Evenings at the Theater* (*Teatral'nye vechera*) Volkov published a letter from Eisenstein, dating from summer 1930 when the director was already in Hollywood. It is full of various snippets of information but is completely silent on the main subject of their correspondence from the previous year:

> Dear Nikolai Dmitrievich!
>
> I have not written to you in ages and I am ashamed of it to the bottom of my soul (the existence of which I deny on account of my beliefs, but sometimes use as façon *de parler*). Still, it doesn't mean that this letter is going to rectify the matter: it is short because I am extremely busy. … I would like to write about a lot of things to you, because there is a lot to write about. I have not even truckloads of impressions, but a whole caravan of trucks. But it will have to wait until the return of our Krivoarbatskii Fridays, about which I keep warm memories even in these tropical surroundings. … We are at the beginning of another summer that never ends throughout the whole year! It is hot. Lemons are ripening, and it is nice and cool to be swimming with Greta Garbo in the Pacific Ocean… But such lyricism is unbecoming to a steely warrior and… an academic besides (I have been made a founding member (!) of the *Motion Picture Academy*). By the way, am I a member of the Academy of the Study of Arts?—otherwise it might be awkward?! Write to me often and at length, more often and at more length than I do…" (Qtd. in Volkov, *Teatral'nye* 351; italics denote French and English in the original)

2.6 CONCLUSION

Although Eisenstein implies that he would want to continue talking to Volkov regularly after his return, these conversations now are not explicitly connected to the biography. Somewhere between November 1929, when the book about Eisenstein was "burning" Volkov's hands, and July–August 1930, when Eisenstein was working on *An American Tragedy*, the project was dropped.

The plan to publish the book in Germany did not work out; the idea of publishing it in France also resulted in nothing. Was it because there was no interest at all from publishers in a book about Eisenstein? Apart from the dubious suggestion that Volkov received in the fall of 1929, Eisenstein's representative in New York Lev Monosson in late May 1930 got a letter from the Kenneday and Livingstone literary agency proposing that Eisenstein write a book on "The Modern Art of the Cinema" (1923–1–2854 l. 1). The interest in the figure of Eisenstein was definitely still there. Perhaps, with all the new impressions (and the various worries with film contracts and film projects, etc.), the biography was simply put on the back burner by Eisenstein while it was still "burning" Volkov's hands, the way Eisenstein's own "spherical" book was, so as to resurface in Mexico in 1931 in a completely different form.[32] Perhaps, the constant relocation within Europe during 1929–30 made it impossible for Eisenstein to settle on any one particular "language" in which his book had to be written, even though it was ostensibly planned to be written in Russian; and the same reason could operate for Volkov, similarly attuned to the need of tailoring the book to a particular foreign market. Perhaps the books could, indeed, only

[32] The most significant result of his plans for publishing his own book, shered with McPherson, was the translation of several of his articles in *Close Up* in 1930–31.

work in tandem and the delay of Eisenstein's own book necessitated the delay and eventual discarding of Volkov's biography of him.

Even without Volkov's biography of Eisenstein, his biography of Meyerhold continued to be an unacknowledged template for later Eisenstein's biographers, and most of all for Eisenstein himself. It is not at all clear if Eisenstein even received Volkov's biography of Meyerhold before he went to the US or even when he returned to Russia. The book was sent to him on 24 October 1929 (1923–1–1716 l. 5), but he certainly did not get it before he left Berlin and went to London and then Paris. Eisenstein almost always marked the date of a book's acquisition on the inside of its cover. The first volume of Meyerhold's biography preserved in his collection bears the author's inscription: "14/VIII–32. N.Volkov" and a stamp, indicating the number of the "author's copy" (87), but no marginalia.

The choice of Ivan Aksenov as another "first" biographer around 1933, however, can now be put into the context of Volkov's attempt. Aksenov was also connected with Meyerhold since at least the early 1920s. Aksenov, like Volkov, also wrote a review of Eisenstein's first independent theater directing project, *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man* / *Wiseman* (cf. Eisenstein's letter to his mother dated 30 June 1923: "The most valuable [review] is, of course, by Aksenov in *Zrelishcha*; this is our former dean of the Workshop, a very clever man" [Qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 155]).

Moreover, it seems plausible that Eisenstein found in Volkov's book an example of the narrative "disposing of" his father to use in his own memoirs. In Aksenov's biography the father simply disappears: "Eisenstein's father found himself in the zone of German occupation [in 1917] and since then disappeared completely from the future director's life" (17). In Seton's account he is most emphatically alive up until at least 1926: "He told me that his father was

working as an engineer in Berlin and that he died there later in 1926 or early 1927" (126). Finally, in his memoirs Eisenstein paints the following picture of his selection, around 1920, of theater over engineering, the career his father had projected for him:

> Students can return [from the front]. … Summons from my institute in Petrograd. And on the same day, permission from the superiors to go to… Moscow… The path that had been so carefully charted by my father's hand is destroyed.
>
> By the morning the decision is taken. … You can call it mysticism.
>
> But I break ties with my past when my father, unreachably far, dies of heart rupture.
>
> I learn about this coincidence two years later[,] when I learn about his death.
>
> At the end of the Civil War that[,] due to intervention and devastation[,] had sent us flying to the opposite ends of the Russian empire. (Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 1 108–109)

This account gave later historians and biographers, armed with the death certificate dated 1 July 1920 and the letter from Mikhail Eisenstein's companion Elizaveta Mikhel'son, informing Eisenstein of his father's death, reason for much consternation with Eisenstein for "mythologizing" his own biography, because, first of all, the date of death did not coincide with his decision to go to Moscow, and, second, Eisenstein learnt about the death at a different time, much earlier than 1922–23 as he implies. Meanwhile, just as Aksenov fictionalizes accounts of Eisenstein's career-related conversations with his mother on the steps of the Cathedral of Christ

the Savior (and the mirroring conversation with Meyerhold)[33] to achieve a "tighter" narrative, Eisenstein simply makes reality serve his own chronology. More specifically, he does it in the same way that Volkov clashes together the death of Meyerhold's father and Meyerhold's first public acting appearance: five days after the performance that led to the first newspaper review of Meyerhold's acting, the note about his father's death was published in a local newspaper. After describing these two events, Volkov sums them up in the following way: "And so, over the course of one week, the end of the businessman-father's life intersected with the son's entering the path to theater" (*Meierkhol'd* 1 32). In his introduction, Volkov describes his method as "using the principle of montage as a special form of organization of disparate material," employing "correlations" and "collisions" of facts "viewed from the point of view of a contemporary" with other facts, which give "unexpected relief [*rel'efnost'*] and new meaning" (VIII). Perhaps we have here an example of the mutual influence of Eisenstein's and Volkov's techniques.

Eisenstein's *Memoirs* finally achieved the goal he had set for himself in the late 1920s: using his own biography as a tool in explaining and propagating his theories. One of the testimonies of the success of this venture were the words of his first biographer Nikolai Volkov, who, another twenty years later, was able to read the first publication of a large part of the memoirs in Eisenstein's *Selected Works*. Volkov remarked: "…better than anyone, he subsequently wrote about himself in his autobiographical notes" (*Teatral'nye* 350), acknowledging Eisenstein's superiority to any possible biographer as his own "Eckermann," "Boswell," or "Brousson," let alone his own "Volkov."

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[33] See Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 204–208.

3.0 CHAPTER TWO: EUROPE, AUGUST 1929–MAY 1930

3.1 PATRONAGE AND PERFORMANCE

3.1.1 Patrons, Helpers, and Hinderers

This chapter looks at the European part of the journey that Eisenstein, Aleksandrov, and Tisse undertook, from their leaving the Soviet Union in late August 1929 to their departure to the United States in May (for Eisenstein and Tisse) and June (for Aleksandrov) of 1930. This part of the journey included crossing multiple borders and interaction with officials, businessmen, and public figures of a number of countries: Germany, Switzerland, France, Great Britain, The Netherlands, and Belgium. First, however, it is nessery to look at the preparations that preceded it. A major fact, without which the trajectory of the group's journey cannot be understood in its entirety, was that they did not go abroad as private citizens. As historian Michael David-Fox puts it, describing the situation in the1920s, "even those who in reality wished to go on holiday or travel for anything other than for the official rationale of a sponsored business trip often arranged travel 'at their own expense' … through a state institution" (16). David-Fox lists several levels through which such applications had to go:

> the first one was one's home institution and any additional sponsoring group (such as the special commission, institution, or group arranging the event);

> second was the commissariat (ministry) to which one's institution was subordinated (most artists, humanists and scholars had to go through the Commissariat of Enlightenment, Narkompros …); and finally there was the Central Committee's commission for verification of foreign travel for state institutions and social organizations," which was "made up of Central Committee, central control committee and OGPU [military secret service] representatives. (16–18)

VOKS, The All-Russian Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, with which David-Fox's research is primarily concerned, "could and did become involved at all three levels of the bureaucracy" involved in getting abroad. On the lowest level it was "a clearing house for invitations from abroad for Soviet citizens to participate in international exhibitions, conferences, exchanges, and projects of scientific co-operation" (20). On the second level, "it could intervene with Narkompros … commissions on foreign travel by forwarding its expressions of support" (21). The particular role VOKS played in organizing Eisenstein's trip will be discussed later in this chapter. What the above serves to show is that in order to go and stay and work abroad Eisenstein had to be in good standing with the authorities in Moscow, but this good standing was also predicated on his international reputation as the foremost director of new Soviet cinema. His international renown secured him an invitation from Joseph Schenck. But he had to rely on his reputation with his Soviet patrons, from Sovkino to Stalin, in order to accept this invitation and take steps towards fulfilling their agreement. This tension between Eisenstein's individual identity as a man, an artist, and a thinker, and his national, social, and political identity as a Soviet citizen would become more and more apparent over the course of the journey.

The concept of patronage also helps to make certain elements of Eisenstein's journey clear.[34] Recently, his later career has been discussed in relation to patronage, in particular by Joan Neuberger.[35] As I show here, Eisenstein's whole professional biography, both its ups and its downs, depended on his relationships with various patrons, from Shutko to Shumiatskii to Stalin (and, in the period under discussion, Upton Sinclair and Lev Monosson, to take two sides of the spectrum). While travelling abroad he especially had to appease the Soviet authorities on whom his ability to sign contracts and prolong his journey depended. As will be discussed later in the chapter, he, at the same time, had to construct his conduct vis-à-vis local authorities of all kinds, from ministers to local policemen, as well as various groups, such as Russian immigrants and also new Soviet ones (the so-called defectors or *nevozvrashchentsy*—to be discussed in Section Two).

The following is a necessarily incomplete list of organizations and people in the Soviet Union, with relation to whose opinion Eisenstein and his companions had to conduct themselves abroad—not all of them can be called patrons in the strict sense of the word, but facilitating or hindering the journey's progress could depend on any one of them. Eisenstein's position with VOKS was assured by the fact that Pera Atasheva, his faithful friend and helper, was working

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[34] The role of patronage in Soviet society has been researched by Sheila Fitzpatrick: *Everyday Stalinism* 109–14; "Intelligentsia and Power" 35–53. See also David-Fox 7–9. In the realm of Soviet Cinema, in his soon-to-be-published biography of Dziga Vertov, John MacKay describes party journalist Mikhail Kol'tsov as an early patron of Vertov.

[35] Presented as paper "Making *Ivan the Terrible*" at Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference in Seattle, 21 March 2014.

there at the time in the Cinema Section. The year 1929 was a period of fundamental change for VOKS, with Olga Kameneva removed from her position as the head of the organization and a purge of personnel undertaken (these were the early *chistki* that led mostly to removal from job and not to prison or death sentences of later years) (David-Fox, passim). Apparently, Atasheva wanted to leave her job, but in early January 1930 she wrote to Eisenstein that she decided to stay "in part" because of him (RGALI 1923–1–1621 ll. 42–43).

At the next level of authority (according to the scheme that David-Fox presents), there was Maxim Litvinov, deputy head of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, whose English wife, Ivy, had brought Eisenstein his coveted personal copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1928. Being personally acquainted with commissars and their deputies did not always help Soviet artists and could potentially hurt them if the acquaintance was too close and the fall of a particular commissar too swift, but that was still in the future, and Litvinov was if not exactly a patron, then at least a valuable resource. Finally, at the very top, Joseph Stalin at the meeting with Eisenstein and Aleksandrov in the spring of 1929 basically gave his blessing to the trip abroad with the stipulation that they redo *The General Line,* adding new footage and changing the title to *The Old and the New*. In this section, I will show how Eisenstein had to negotiate with his Soviet patrons at two junctures early in the trip and how this defined the choices he had and could make: the negotiations with Joseph Schenck of United Artists and the participation in the Congress of Independent Filmmakers in Switzerland.

3.1.2 Contract with Joseph Schenck

Lev Monosson, in 1929–1931 the head of Amkino, was a seemingly minor helper/parton in Eisenstein's career, if compared to Stalin or even Kirill Shutko, who was responsible for getting Eisenstein the *Potemkin* job. Archival documents, however, reveal him as a very important intermediary in Eisenstein's relations with both Hollywood and Moscow. His absence during the final acts of the *Que Viva Mexico!* calamity, I would argue, in no small part precipitated it (here I concur with Naum Kleiman's opinion in the notes to Eisenstein's memoir text that mentions Monosson.—Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 2, 490–91). This section shows his role in smoothing Eisenstein's way to Hollywood.

Upon arrival in Europe, Eisenstein had first of all to inform Joseph Schenck, President of United Artist Corporation, of his and his group's presence in Berlin, so that the Hollywood side of the deal could take steps to ensure that the Soviets received American visas. As mentioned in the Introduction, the history of the agreement between Eisenstein and Schenck dated back to, on the one hand, the visit of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford to the USSR in the summer of 1927 and, on the other hand, and more importantly, to Schenck's European and Russian trip in early August 1928. Unlike his nominal bosses, who had been forced to leave after only a couple of days (Iangirov, "V kadre" 332–33), Schenck stayed in Moscow for almost two weeks, 2–14 August. He visited the ceremony of laying the foundational stone of the future Mosfil'm studios, criticized its construction plan, and apparently signed some sort of preliminary agreement with Eisenstein (Aleksandrov, *Epokha* 116; Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 1, 248; Sudendorf 88).

On his way to Moscow, Schenck had stopped in Berlin and almost before he had time to reach Russia, the trade paper *Lichtbildbühne* printed an article with a succinct title: "Eisenstein für Hollywood. Joseph M. Schenk Pläne." The agreement that was reached in Moscow several

days later created a minor sensation in the German press, so that eventually in early November Eisenstein had to address the Commissar of Enlightenment Lunacharskii in an open letter in the second main Soviet newspaper, *Izvestiia*. On the one hand, Eisenstein stressed the fact that he was not thinking of emigrating. On the other, he insisted that the agreement with Schenck had not been his, Eisenstein's, personal decision:

> It is true, Joseph Schenck applied to Sovkino about sending our group to America for half a year–a year, to make 1–2 films. It is true, Sovkino gave permission for this business trip. Finally, it is true that Narkompros, represented by Comrade Lunacharskii, not only could find no objections to that, but completely and utterly supported such a trip, because such trips, personnel exchange, etc. are one of the elements of establishing regular commercial film industry relations with America that are equally interesting for both parties. (Qtd. in Iangirov, "V kadre II" 349–50)

Finally, Eisenstein emphasizes the "market value" of Soviet artists as something based on their originality, in turn dependent on "refracting mass aspirations, that collective drive that we to the best of our abilities and strength put into form in our works. … From the moment we separate from this [drive] we not only loose our strength, but also our… 'originality,' that is, the very thing that makes us goods desirable for export" (qtd. in Iangirov, "V kadre II" 349–50, the last ellipsis is Eisenstein's). Regardless of whether he truly believed in this last point, this was to be a constant argument in Eisenstein's self-representation in the West, addressed to his Moscow patrons as much as to his European and American audiences. Incidentally, the further West the journey progressed, the more rarely Eisenstein made use of this argument.

At this point, the figure of Lev Isaakovich Monosson (in English spelling—Leon J. Monosson; Monoszon in Russian transliteration; I adopt here an amalgam of the two) (1890–1938) appeared on the scene for the first time.[36] The first letter from Monosson preserved in Eisenstein's archive is dated 19 November 1928 when the news of Eisenstein's imminent departure for USA reached him. In it, he offered to send clippings of reviews of *October* (personally to Eisenstein, since they had already been sent to Sovkino) and he accompanied the citations that he sent immediately with context as to a general stand on Soviet cinema of these particular newspapers. He also passed on to Eisenstein an invitation to give a talk from the National Board of Review and its executive secretary Wilton A. Barrett, which he advised him to accept, asking at the same time for the exact date of Eisenstein's arrival in New York "for the final preparation of arrangements and itinerary" (RGALI 1923–1–1983 l. 4). From the very beginning Monosson showed himself as an extremely knowledgeable, courteous, and sympathetic facilitator of Eisenstein's trip to the States, ready to dispense help and advice, and going, it seems, even beyond professional duty—or at least performing it uncommonly well.

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[36] Monosson started working in Amtorg in either 1926 or 1927 (Iangirov, "V kadre III" 208); in 1931 he returned to the Soviet Union where from 1932 to 1936 (this time probably not without Eisenstein's patronage) he taught a course on "The Economics of the cinema industry in capitalist countries" at the State Institute of Cinematography (GIK, later VGIK). At VGIK he also headed the department (*kafedra*) of engineering and economics, later called Department of Film Organization and Economics, the equivalent of the modern day Film Production [продюсирования] department. Unlike most people with a similar employment record, Monosson had the dubious luck to die in May 1938 without having been arrested.

Eisenstein immediately took advantage of this, following Monosson's example of corresponding directly with him, in addition to (and sometimes over the head of) Sovkino's head office in Moscow, which was, it seems, very slow in responding if it responded at all. First of all, Monosson soon became an intermediary in negotiating not only Eisenstein's invitation to the States, but Tisse's as well, which Schenck, as becomes evident from the correspondence, repeatedly opposed, despite having agreed to it in Moscow (RGALI 1923–1–1568 l. 1). The inclusion of Tisse in the invitation had to be fought for, because it was essential for Eisenstein that his trusted cameraman went with him. There was no mention of Aleksandrov at this point in the negotiations. It needs to be remembered also that only Eisenstein and Tisse went to Berlin in 1926 to work on the European release of *Battleship Potemkin*. In late January 1929 the following telegram from Monosson reached Moscow: "Schenck finally agreed Tisse sends invitation stop arranges receiving visas Berlin when you leaving Moscow" (RGALI 1923–1–1983 l. 9). A letter followed, delineating Monosson's role in the negotiations, but there was still no mention of Aleksandrov. In January 1929 Monosson seemed to think that there would not be any problem with getting American visas for both Eisenstein and Tisse in Berlin. Moreover, the departure was taken to be imminent, so that he was not even sure that the letter would find Eisenstein in Moscow (RGALI 1923–1–1983 l. 11).

The 15 April 1929 letter from Monosson was sent in reply to Eisenstein notifying him of yet another delay in the trip, "to Europe until July and to the US, perhaps, even until fall" (1923–1–1983 l. 15). He, on the one hand, set Eisenstein's mind at ease about the multitude of various rumors circulating in the American press ("which is not useless from the point of view of American 'publicity'"), and, on the other hand, encouraged him to continue communicating directly with Schenck, especially about Eisenstein's interest in sound cinema (1923–1–1983 l.

15). He also informed Eisenstein about new and potential developments in the area of sound cinema in the States, the projected deal between United Artists and Warner Brothers that might threaten Schenck's own position at the head of United Artists (1923–1–1983 l. 16), and the differences between various European and American systems of sound synchronization, which could influence the fate of *The Old and the New*.

By the second half of May 1929, even the ever-optimistic Monosson began to despair of ever seeing Eisenstein in New York, or at least welcoming him there in the fall, for which the American premiere of *The Old and the New* was tentatively scheduled (1923–1–1983 l. 19). The departure date was finally more or less set only in the middle of the summer, and on 19 August the group, which now included Eisenstein, Tisse, and Aleksandrov, left for Berlin.

From the published accounts of Eisenstein's journey to the West and from his biographies, it is not exactly clear how and when Schenck rebuffed him and why the group decided to wait for another invitation—which came only 8 months later. It is, however, relevant for the expectations that the group and its leader had on their arrival to Europe, and for its influence on their morale, and, therefore, actions. Aleksandrov in his memoirs simply lets the matter slide, saying that the group's stay in Berlin "had no clearly defined time limit and definite goal—we were waiting for the American visas and the confirmation of the invitation from Schenck and Fairbanks…" (*Epokha* 117). In his retelling, after some time an invitation from Paramount simply arrives (122). Marie Seton mentions that Eisenstein cabled Schenck "immediately" (in late August) and that Schenck "alleged to have replied that his offer, made more than six months before, was off and that he could do nothing for Eisenstein. So Sergei Mikhailovich received his first rebuff in the city where his fame made Schenk's [sic] indifference look ridiculous" (126–127). Oksana Bulgakowa writes about a letter the group

received from Schenck after their return from Switzerland in the second half of September 1929, and implicitly attributes the refusal to the effects of the very recent stock market crash (99). In fact, United Artists, along with most Hollywood studios, did not feel the effects of the crash acutely at least for another year because of the success of talking pictures (Balio 96).

The reasons behind Schenck's refusal to honor the contract need to be investigated further. One contemporary version, from an immediate participant of these events, is available at this point. A week after the group's return from abroad, on 15 May 1932, Eduard Tisse gave a talk on the technical development of European and American cinema to his Soviet colleagues in ARRK (professional Association for Workers in Revolutionary Cinema): "When we came to Berlin there was a collapse with sound film [in the US]. This was a transitional moment from silent to sound film. The first sound film that had been released had been very successful, and then a collapse happened because after that a hundred film-revues followed. The public at first went to cinemas and then began to be interested in theaters more. There was a panic. 'What is the matter, why don't they watch sound films.' When we came [to Berlin], Un[ited Artists]'s production crashed. They started having doubts about us; that we would not be able to make a film they needed. We were told: in a year or half a year we will renew a contract with you" ([Tisse], "Doklad" 2).

Despite the indeterminate nature of its actual reasons and circumstances, Schenck's negative response is still presented as something of a "first blow" that Eisenstein experienced abroad, as something sudden, and, moreover, presenting a definite negative answer that unexpectedly slowed the Russians down. In fact, first of all, it can be inferred from his correspondence with Monosson that Eisenstein did not immediately intend to go to the States anyway: there was the matter of the European release of *The Old and the New*, which required,

according to his plans, a couple of months for creating its sound version—possibly in London, where *Potemkin*'s composer Edmund Meisel lived at the time. This is corroborated by Eisenstein's letters to Leon Moussinac and by Aleksandrov's memoirs cited above. Second, the cable to Schenck had been sent well before the journey began, from Moscow on 3 August 1929: "In three weeks are leaving Russia Eisenstein Alexandroff Tisse making sound version Generalline [sic] London After Berlin premiere are entirely free Cable Greetings Eisenstein" (1923–1–1539 l. 2).

The telegram was sent, again, at Monosson's urging. In early August 1929 Eisenstein sent him a telegram, informing him about the departure date (20 August), plans for synchronizing and premiering the film in Berlin, and then signing there "a preliminary agreement" with United Artists for making a sound film. The draft of the telegram also includes an important stipulation that was crossed out: the agreement has to be signed "after receiving a substantial advance payment," with the final contract to be signed in Hollywood (1923–1–1983 l. 2). Monosson immediately cabled back on 2 August: "Trip to America at present must contact Schenck directly getting his agreement" (RGALI 1923–1–1983 l. 23). As a result, Eisenstein cabled Schenck the next day, while Monossson at the same time sent Eisenstein a letter explaining that he was "not entirely sure of Mr. Schenck's positive attitude to your arrival at the present moment (after a year!) and of his thoughts about this matter" (1923–1–1983 l. 24). He explained that conversations with "one of United Artists' heads" gave him an impression they were not in the mood for guests at the present moment. Still, Schenck, according to Monosson, would be the one making the final decision, since the initial invitation had come from him personally, and not from the company. That is why it was imperative for Eisenstein to receive another confirmation from Schenck, "in order not to find oneself in an embarrassing situation.

The agreement with him was signed a year ago, and since then in American cinema (or, rather, the cinema industry) there has been not one revolution but at least a dozen!" (1923–1–1983 l. 24). There also seemed to be misunderstanding about the need to sign another "preliminary" agreement in Berlin, to which Eisenstein's telegram referred. According to Monosson, he had "already signed an agreement with Schenck, acting on behalf of Sovkino" after Shenck's return from the USSR. This arrangement should still be in effect if Schenck confirms his agreement to Eisenstein's arrival (1923–1–1983 l. 24).

Several things become clear from this letter. First, it supports the version that Eisenstein presented in his letter to Lunacharskii: that whatever agreement he might have signed with Schenck in Moscow, he did not have the authority to sign it on his own—Sovkino in the form of one of its representatives had that power. Second, even before the departure for Europe, Eisenstein was made aware of the fact that the agreement might very well not be honored by the American side. Moreover, he had already been prepared to stay in Europe for at least a couple of months. What the negative answer really changed was the money situation, since, as reflected in the draft of the telegram to Monosson, the group clearly hoped for an immediate money advance from Schenck. Still, in whichever way his half-expected refusal may have eventually been communicated, since the effects of the market crash were not yet fully felt in Europe and were mostly impossible to predict at this point, Eisenstein clearly saw it as a temporary hindrance and did not stop trying to contact United Artists—mostly through Fairbanks—throughout the following months. The transitory nature of the refusal is corroborated by Tisse's opinion of 1932, cited above. He also alleges that the decision to wait was also cleared with Moscow: "We decided, after negotiating the approval of our supervising [*otvetstvennye*] organizations, to hold out for that half a year and then to get to America" ([Tisse], "Doklad" 3).

The lack of success in these attempts was perhaps at least partially due to that fact that, during the early period of the group's stay in Europe, Monosson was unable to facilitate negotiations with United Artists: in early September 1929 he arrived in Moscow, bringing sound equipment, sound films, and technical literature on sound. He met with Eisenstein in Berlin sometime later in the fall (RGALI 1923–1–1984 l. 1) and the written communications concerning the possibility of the Soviets' arrival in the United States resumed in the spring of 1930. Meanwhile, Eisenstein was able to use Monosson's temporary absence from his American office, on the one hand, and the major organizational changes in the Soviet cinema industry, on the other, to get the legal right to sign contracts on his own—so that his eventual agreement with Paramount was so swift it took both Moscow and New York by surprise.

3.1.3 The Congress of Independent Filmmakers

The fact of Eisenstein's presence at the Congress of Independent Filmmakers at La Sarraz in early September 1929 is usually taken as a matter of course, a happy coincidence that allowed the foremost Soviet director, who happened to be in Europe at the time, to complete the group of European film notables that included Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, Bela Balazs etc., "at once its highlight and its justification" (Montagu 15). The events of the Congress were described in detail (see Albéra; Buache), so I will focus here on the particular question of Eisenstein's and his team's "independence," namely, their freedom of movement and choice, including the decision to participate in the Congress at all.

Just as in the case of Eisenstein's communications with Schenck, biographers differ in their estimate of when exactly the trip to La Sarraz was first proposed and by whom. Rashit Iangirov, citing a contemporary article in the newspaper *Kino*, suggests that the invitation for all

three members of the group was extended after a successful evening of "friendship" (*sblizhenie*) of Soviet and German filmmakers in Berlin, and that they were to be a substitute for Dziga Vertov, who had been originally invited but had been recalled to Kiev (Iangirov, "V kadre II" 354).

Oksana Bulgakowa presents a different version of how the invitation was obtained:

> An employee of the Russian trade mission who tested films for future acquisition threw a party in the Hotel Esplanade for the Society of Friends of the New Russia. … Richter was just about to leave for La Sarraz in Switzerland... He was one of the meeting's organizers. Dziga Vertov had been invited to represent Soviet Russia, but he had decided that he would rather continue filming in the Don Basin. Richter invited the guests to take Vertov's place. However, they were unable to get Swiss visas, since Switzerland did not maintain diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. A coincidence came to the rescue. The Swiss entrepreneur Lazar Wechsler, son of Russian émigrés and owner of Praesens-Film (a *Potemkin* distributor), wanted to become known as the founder of Swiss national cinema. ... When Wechsler heard of the problems that the Russians faced coming to La Sarraz, he offered to smuggle them into Switzerland in his car. He expected them to make his film in return. They left at once. (94)

This all flows very nicely but mostly does not agree with the facts. Among other things, Richter was not one of the Congress's organizers nor did he invite either Vertov or Eisenstein to

attend. There was no invitation for the three Russians in Berlin. That is, three Russians were invited to the Congress, but it was not Eisenstein's team. As Léon Moussinac explained, the Congress had been envisioned by the French film journalists Robert Aron and Janine Bouissonouse,

> …in order to organize an international league of the film clubs which already existed in several countries. They hoped to set up an organization that could coordinate and smooth the way for struggling independent producers, and help develop wider distribution of their films … as well as to create an international cooperative, based in Paris, designed to produce films which would have to make no concessions to commercial demands; a cinema with no other allegiance than to its own lyrical and human values. (35–36)

Moussinac was one of the French participants of the Congress and at some point served as an intermediary between Eisenstein and its organizers. As for Hans Richter, he had met Vertov at the *Film und Foto* exhibition that had opened in Stuttgart in May 1929, but the invitations to Vertov were issued by Robert Aron and Madame de Mandrot, who hosted the Congress at her chateau La Sarraz (Tode, "Dziga Vertov" 110).[37] Even before that and before Vertov ever got to Stuttgart, Ol'ga Kameneva, the head of VOKS, asserted that a Soviet

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[37] On Richter, Vertov, and the Congress, see also: [Tode, Tomas], "'Protivopolozhnost' revoliutsionnomu'" 208–11; Tode, Thomas. "Trois Russes peuvent en cacher un autre: Dziga Vertov et le Congrès de La Sarraz. 1929" in Tode and Causandey, 2–10.

delegation would take part in the September gathering (109). As Thomas Tode notes, "in all other cases [the Congress] chose its participants," since it was promoted as a privately sponsored event, "independents from all cinema organizations, official and commercial" (109). It is not, as Tode mentions, that VOKS "had an opportunity to suggest 'delegates'" (109); it is that the invitation of Soviet filmmakers to an international gathering was not their private affair. They could not be entirely free (or independent) to choose whether they could go or not. The Soviet delegation was formed in the Soviet Union by their superiors in the cultural industry. This was normal practice at the time. Michael David-Fox gives an example from spring 1928 when "a special commission was formed by Orgburo [Organizational Bureau of the Central Party Committee] to approve the Soviet delegation for the international film exhibition in Holland. The commission met in the Kremlin, in the office of Lezhava, the deputy director of the Council of People's Commissars, and comprised Ol'ga Kameneva and three other members" (17). The process also involved the Kino-Section of VOKS, Uchraspred (The Registration and Distribution Department of the Central Committee) and the Kino-Section of the Central Committee's Agitprop Department, who called in "to approve the special commission's recommendations of travel" for one senior Sovkino administrator and ten film directors (David-Fox 17).

The reasons for Vertov's eventual absence from the Congress are beyond the scope of this chapter (for Tode's view, which diverges from Iangirov's and Bulgakowa's, see Tode, "Dziga Vertov" 111–12). In early July 1929, the Congress' organizers petitioned VOKS to include Vertov in the Soviet delegation (Tode, "Dziga Vertov" 110). Richter was still sure on 23 August that his Soviet friend would take part in the Congress, but even before 19 August, prior to Eisenstein's departure from the USSR, the secretary of VOKS's administrative board, Iurii Mal'tsev, had informed the head of the Russian Red Cross mission in Geneva, Sergei Bagotskii,

that the country would be represented at the Congress by Sergei Eisenstein, Aleksandr Dovzhenko, and Vladimir Erofeev.[38] Mal'tsev mentioned that the films for the Congress would be brought by Eisenstein and asked Bagotskii for help in obtaining a visa for Eisenstein and perhaps organizing his lecture in Switzerland (1923–1–2372 l. 12). At the same time, the film companies Sovkino and Mezhrabpom-Rus' wrote to the Trade Mission in Berlin signaling their permission for Eisenstein to choose films for demonstration at La Sarraz (1923–1–2430). It is quite possible that the decision by VOKS to include Eisenstein in the delegation served to facilitate his and his colleagues' departure— or it could be the other way around: since Eisenstein was going to Berlin anyway, why not include him in the Swiss trip as well. The secretary of the Congress, Robert Aron, wrote to Eisenstein in Berlin on 21 August, saying that Madame de Mandrot was trying to obtain visas for the three delegates (Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, and Erofeev). He wrote again several days later, saying that the Swiss authorities had denied visas for Dovzhenko and Erofeev (1923–1–2431). At the end of August, Eisenstein tried another tactic. He wrote to Moussinac in Paris, emphasizing that La Sarraz was the primary destination for him at the moment, but he still lacked an entrance visa to Switzerland:

> Tomorrow I will be speaking to Béla Balázs [another of the confirmed participants]. After that I will write about this to Mr. Robert Aron. It will also be nice if you would inform him about

[38] Film directors Dovzhenko and Erofeev already seem to have been in Berlin at the time. Dovzhenko had been in Berlin in early summer together with Vertov (Tode, "Vertov and La Sarraz" 110) and Erofeev's article from Berlin on new sound films was published in the newspaper *Kino* on 27 August 1929.

> my intentions. We want to go to Switzerland … as a group of four: Aleksandrov, Tisse, and Comrade Sukharebskii who is one of the editors of the journal *Film and Culture*. … These three friends of mine are not delegates, but they really want to accompany me to Switzerland … Two other delegates—Dovzhenko and another comrade whose name I do not know yet, will arrive in the next few days… (1923–2–1770 ll. 1–2; a version of the translation was published in Tode, "Dziga Vertov" 113 with Sukharebskii's name misread).

Next, the size of the Soviet delegation had grown to seven, and a certain Mr. Buyez telegraphed Eisenstein on 24 August from Geneva to say that it was not possible to obtain seven visas, but that he hoped to get a visa for Eisenstein (1923–1–1631 l. 1). Bagotskii could not offer much help either: "I only have information from Moscow about you, Dovzhenko, and Erofeev" (1923–1–2372 l. 11). He did, however, suggest possible venues for lectures: in Berne, Zurich, Basel, and Geneva. Four days later, on 30 August, Eisenstein received an official invitation from Welt-Film (the Swiss branch of the German pro-Soviet production and distribution company Prometheus) to give talks in Zurich, Berne, and Basel. This could strengthen Eisenstein's visa application, but still only took care of him and not his companions.

The intentions of VOKS, it appears, had in no way been checked against the desires of the Congress's organizers, who, instead, had to accommodate the Soviet cultural bureaucrats' decisions. And yet, they failed to do so. With visas denied for Dovzhenko, Erofeev, and everyone else, it seems, except Eisenstein, it is hardly surprising that on 31 August, two days before the Congress was scheduled to begin, Eisenstein received a laconic telegram from VOKS:

"Participation congress called off" (1923–1–2372 l. 14). On the same day, Grigorii Aleksandrov, whose participation had not been approved either on the Soviet or on the Swiss side, wrote to Pera Atasheva: "Tomorrow we are flying to Switzerland, to Zurich. We were invited by the Swiss Prometheus to give lectures in four cities. We will stop by Madame Mandrot's congress and if we receive directives not to take part in it, we are planning to leave it with an appropriate scandal" (qtd. in Saakov 193). Clearly, in Moscow, the Congress was viewed as a venue for political, not artistic, action, and while non-participation at this point was equally as plausible as participation, it was regarded as equally (and perhaps more) newsworthy and, therefore, desirable.

The Congress began on 3 September. At this point, its other participants knew that Eisenstein was likely to take part in it, but Vertov was still expected as well. One of the participants from Switzerland, Arnold Kohler, published daily reports on the proceedings of the Congress in the journal *La Suisse*. In his second report, printed on 4 September, he mentioned that "La delegation sovietique vient d'arriver; outre M. Eisenstein, elle comprend MM. Alexandroff, son operateur, et Dziga-Vertoff, le chef de l'ecole documentaire russe" (qtd. in Buache 9). On 4 September, the Soviet delegation finally arrived in the form of Eisenstein, Aleksandrov, and Tisse. Neither of these last two were considered official delegates, even after their arrival. After the Congress, Richter, writing to Vertov, again says that there was only one Soviet participant there: Eisenstein ([Tode], "'Protivopolozhnost' revoliutsionnomu'" 209).

It is instructive to note that Eisenstein got his way once again. He had managed to persuade Joseph Schenck to extend his invitation to Tisse and evidently hoped to add Aleksandrov into the final contract and now he managed to bring both Tisse and Aleksandrov with him to the Congress, despite the fact that neither VOKS nor the Congress's organizers

authorized it. Moreover, despite the explicit directives from VOKS not to take part in the Congress, the group did not leave with the intended "appropriate scandal" either. The impression they made instead serves as an example of the group's reception in the West, based on the image Eisenstein and his companions constructed and presented, often in striking opposition to their own self-perception.

3.1.4 Clothes

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Oscar Wilde observed: "It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible." Joseph Freeman recorded in his book *Voices of October* Eisenstein's statement that seemed to him paradoxical coming from a young Soviet intellectual: "Had it not been for Leonardo da Vinci, Marx, Lenin, Freud and the movies, I would in all probability have been another Oscar Wilde." Freeman continued this with a partial explanation from Eisenstein as well: "without Freud, no sublimation; without sublimation, a mere aesthete like Oscar Wilde" (589). The fact that Eisenstein paid extreme attention to appearances, both his own and others', is attested by many documents. In his memoirs, started in the early 1940s, Eisenstein described himself as "a boy from Riga" who one day woke up famous (*Immoral Memories* 8–9).

Most often, he saw himself as a version of a young David Copperfield or Little Lord Fauntleroy, a shy unhappy boy, and often remarked on the discrepancy between his self-perception and others' perception of him as a cruel, calculating, sarcastic genius. This last persona was, however, an image that Eisenstein also consciously cultivated. Another mask that related to his self-image was that of a clown. In the 1929 diary he writes: "My hair is not a copy of Beethoven's but a longing for a red, hair-standing-on-end wig. My pants; stripes and checks

in my use *as well*" (1923–2–1114 ll. 57–57ob; italics denote English in the original). Down to the cut of his clothes, Eisenstein's identity can only be understood as highly performative, posited in response to a question or to a demand.

Ivor Montagu, the group's future host in London and collaborator in Hollywood, years later tried to reproduce his impression of the new arrivals to Madame de Mandrot's chateau:

> At first all had gone fairly steadily and staidly, as had been planned. … The invasion of the three men in blue quickly put a stop to that. … The newcomers were Sergei Mikhailovich, Grisha and Eduard. Otherwise, S.M.Eisenstein, G.V.Alexandrov and their cameraman Tisse. The two last-named were slim, strong, handsome, fair-haired and golden-skinned. They wore their blue boiler-suits with an entirely appropriate engineering flavour.
>
> The third was shorter, a barrel-shaped torso, small limbs and tiny, delicate hands—surmounted by the gigantic head, the dominant forehead, the abundant quaff, the mischievous (and sometimes malicious) piercing eyes already familiar from his portraits. (14)

Despite the marked difference in address (Eisenstein is not Sergei but Sergei Mikhailovich, while Aleksandrov is not Grigorii but Grisha), this image of identical boiler suits is a vivid detail that stays with the reader of Montagu's memoirs for a while, even though it is

not corroborated by any of the multiple photographs from the Congress.[39] The Russians are shown wearing light shirts with ties and dark pants and an occasional dark jacket for Eisenstein—unless they are making a movie, when it is almost exclusively Tisse who wears the suit "with an entirely appropriate engineering flavour" (Montagu 14).[40] The description that Montagu provides, however, serves to clearly mark the three Soviets as outsiders in the mind of the Congress's participants. What most Soviets wanted to do in Europe, however, was to blend in. And one of the first things they invariably did when they arrived was buy clothes.

Eisenstein's group, however, was short of both time and available resources. Immediately after their initial arrival in Berlin in August, they were sweeped into a frenzy of meetings, dinners, interviews, receptions. Ten days later, Aleksandrov wrote to Pera Atasheva: "We are not living, we are running like hamsters in a spinning wheel. From one pair of arms we go into the next, from one house into the next, from one car into another, and in this manner, our day starts at 8 am and ends in 2–3 am the next night. We have dinner every other day; there is no time for it. We have lost weight" (qtd. in Saakov 193). Eisenstein's group had to look

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[39] In Oksana Bulgakowa's biography of Eisenstein, the boiler suits transform into "matching blue suits tailored just for the trip" for the whole trio (94).

[40] All three seem to wear boiler suits in a photo from the production of *Frauennot—Frauenglück (Women's Happiness—Women's Misery, 1930)* that the group started making in Switzerland later in September (published in Albéra 99). Tisse is seen wearing it in several photos taken during the production of *Tempêt sur La Sarraz* (21, 23) and there is also one photograph from La Sarraz, in which Aleksandrov can be seen wearing the lower half of the boiler suit, with the top rolled under the make-shift belt (21).

presentable to the European admirers who could not conceive of the best and the most popular Soviet film director to be short of money. The absence of that advance payment from the hoped-for Hollywood contract was felt immediately. Since all three officially were in Europe on a business trip from Sovkino, they were still receiving salaries. These were paid, however, to their families in the Soviet Union. This was especially relevant for Eisenstein (his mother remained in Saint Petersburg) and Aleksandrov (in Moscow he left a wife and a four-year-old son, named Douglas in honor of Fairbanks). Tisse's salary most probably went to his younger sister Liudmila, who also worked in the cinema industry (as well as to his mother). Pera Atasheva apparently oversaw the distribution of money: its transfer did not always go smoothly (Eisenstein's letter to Shtraukh from 14–16 October 1929 qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 263; Aleksandrov's letter from 20 December 1929 qtd. in Saakov 200).

Because of the impossibility for private Soviet citizens to exchange rubles for foreign currency, when they went abroad they were supplied with a standard sum by the Soviet authorities (this was not, however, mandatory). In 1928 Soviet citizens travelling on business were allowed to convert and carry abroad with them the equivalent of $150 (David-Fox 21). David-Fox does not specify whether these funds initially had to come from the travelers themselves or were to be provided by the Hard Currency Directorate.[41]

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[41] In early July 1929, the highly popular with the authorities poet and playright Dem'ian Bednyi was sent abroad for his health and given $1,500 (Artizov 114); in 1932, $1,500 equaled 3,000 rubles. That year the same sum was given to Vladimir Nemirovhich-Danchenko, also for health reasons (ibid. 756). Sometimes in Politbiuro documents, the sum was entered in rubles ("to be given in foreign currency"), more often in dollars, and occasionally in German marks.

How much hard currency Eisenstein's group actually had with them on arrival remains an open question. Ivor Montagu remembers years later that, right before their departure, they had been given twenty-five dollars each (28). This number is perpetuated in various biographies (Seton 126; Bulgakowa 93). The further back to the actual events one goes, however, the more variable the sum becomes. In a letter to Atasheva from Hollywood in August 1930, Aleksandrov explained the necessity to take up the making of *Romance Sentimentale* (an experimental sound film the made in France, 1930) by the fact that they were short of money because they each had only twelve dollars when they had left Moscow (qtd. in Saakov 214). And a year later, he again returns in his letter to the meagre sum they had been supplied with: "You are asking me what book I am writing… Haven't I told you about it? The book is called *20 dollars* in honor of that twenty that we received at the Hard Currency Directorate of USSR for our foreign trip and that necessitated our journey round the world [*po belu svetu*]" (letter from 13 May 1931, qtd. in Saakov 224). The indisputable fact was that the group had too little money and that many of the choices they made along the way were directly dependent on their lack of funds (Saakov 214; Eizenshtein, "Samoe uzhasnoe" 221–22).

They had to, for example, accept Lazar Wechsler's offer to make a film about abortion in Switzerland, and later the consulting and "doctoring" work on Mikhail Dubson's *Giftgas* in Berlin, and then *Romance Sentimenta*le in Paris, sponsored by the "Pearl king" of Paris, Leonard Rosenthal. They did not immediately grasp the value of money, it seems, or the amount of time they needed to stay in Europe. Wechsler recounted later that when he initially suggested the group finish his abortion film, they said they wanted to be paid 500 francs. When Wechsler confessed he could not possibly pay them so much per week, it turned out they expected to receive this sum for making the whole film (qtd. in Albéra 98). From the very beginning, the trio

apparently agreed to pool their resources. Eisenstein had some money saved from the articles he had published in Europe (see Chapter 1). Aleksandrov, on the other hand, had before the departure submitted his first major solo script, to be directed by the Vasil'ev brothers, the future authors of *Chapaev* (1934). The money arrived (it seems, again with Atasheva's assistance) at the very end of August 1929 (Saakov 192).[42] In Europe, Eisenstein received money for his lectures (a nice bonus to their propagandistic value, both in Europe and back home),[43] but most of the work on the film projects was done by Aleksandrov and Tisse, although all three of their names were credited (except for *Giftgas*, where their participation was anonymous, at least officially). In short, Eisenstein was not the only bread-winner in the group. Still, he was the main one, and in Europe, just as in the States later, he must have held the purse strings (Montagu 72), if Aleksandrov's regular pleas for money are any indication (Iangirov, "V kadre III" 195–96).

It is not surprising, then, that Montagu remembered that social faux-pas with the boiler suits. The group had to buy or have most of their attire made on credit. At the end of September, a month after arrival to Europe, Eisenstein answered a letter from his friend, former assistant and roommate Maksim Shtraukh, who had been asking to borrow Eisenstein's coat: "Of course you can take and wear my coat: it has especially been on my mind because I have a cold.

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[42] Vladimir Zabrodin reads this passage differently: as referring to the for the German translation of the script for *The Old and the New* ("Eizenshtein na randevu s Evropoi" 120).

[43] Aleksandrov also lectured in Russian at the Soviet Club in Berlin for the personnel of the Soviet Trade Mission about the group's work and their recent trip around the USSR (Saakov 197).

Our financial situation is far from dandy, we are going around in black dress suits… on credit, but there is enough to buy a coat!" (20 September 1929, qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 257). Since Eisenstein had known that adding a soundtrack to *The Old and the New* and getting it through German censorship would take more than a month, he must have left the coat in Moscow because he had been, once again, counting on that advance money from Schenck to get a new one in Berlin.

The suits on credit that Eisenstein mentions could be the same ones that Tisse was still trying to pay for in early December. He wrote to Eisenstein from Zurich where he was still working on *Frauennot—Frauenglück*, informing him of the effects that the American stock market crash had started to have on the European economy: "Yesterday I wanted to borrow some money from Wechsler—that is, to get paid 1,000 marks, in order to send 800 marks to the tailor. He could not give it to me and so he left for Bern this morning to borrow it from someone there" (Tisse, "Rabotali" 108–109). Tisse did not succeed in getting the money at the time. In the next letter, he continued: "Wechsler returned from Bern without the money, promising to certainly get it at the beginning of next week. So at the end of next week our tailor will get what we owe him" (110).

The coat that Eisenstein eventually bought must have been the checkered one that appears in his photographs from the trip to the Netherlands, the one that an almost-blind Joyce helped him to put on in Paris (Eizenshtein, *Memuary 1*, 486) and the one that he wore in London in November, still not quite blending in with the European crowd, but confirming Montagu's impression of an almost twin-like resemblance among the members of the group. Aleksandrov records in his diary:

> After the movies we walked with Eisen in the street and talked. …When we finished the conversation, we noticed our surroundings: groups of people looking at us with curiosity. We understood what the matter was. We had been keeping in step with one another, looking down and keeping our hands at our backs. We had been waking back and forth near one particular house. We were wearing heavy coats, and our hats were covering our eyes. In short, everyone was convinced, probably, that we were police detectives and were waiting to see whom we were going to catch. [Sydney] Bernstein had already told us before that the three of us resembled detectives (Aleksandrov's diary, 12 November 1929 in [Aleksandrov], "14 tetradei" 120).

This keeping up of appearances eventually led the group from taking cheaper and cheaper hotels (Bulgakowa 100) to giving their driver 30 or 50 franc tips and then dining on 40 francs ([Aleksandrov] 124) to borrowing from the hotel's owner, in true Montparnasse fashion, "500, 400, 200, 100 francs" (letter from Eisenstein to Atasheva in Eizenshtein, "Samoe uzhasnoe" 223). In early May 1930, looking back from the *S.S. Europa* taking him and Tisse to New York, Eisenstein continued: "Of course, in appearance everything was completely *convenable*, but the feeling of constant anxiety and uncertainty on the inside was all-consuming" (italics denote French in the original; 223).

3.1.5 Languages

If often the group was dressed in the same style, as soon as they opened their mouths, the differences became apparent. Again, Montagu provides the perfect summary:

> At the time Grisha and Eduard were deaf and dumb to our communication except by signs. They were almost exclusively limited to Russian. Quickly they picked up bits—Eduard in a restaurant could smile blandly and ask for "pineapple," the two cause consternation on a railway platform in England trying to enter a door whose legend they read as "Laddies." Later both managed fair English, Eduard German, Grisha good French and Italian. … But at La Sarraz and for long after they were wholly tongue-tied compared to Eisenstein, who scintillated polylingually, word-perfect in English, French and German, competent in Spanish; he could even manage something in Japanese. (15)

This reminiscence has several temporal layers superimposed on one another: previous to his Mexican sojourn, Eisenstein had had no opportunity or need to study Spanish. His knowledge of Japanese also mostly remained passive at 100 hieroglyphs and 100 words, which he, by his own later account, had crammed into his memory in order to transfer to Moscow from the Civil War front in 1920 (Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 1, 108). Tisse, on the other hand, must have known some German, having grown up in a mostly German-speaking Latvia. His confident letters to Eisenstein from Berlin in 1927 and from Switzerland in 1929 support this assumption as well. Aleksandrov, judging from the available sources, indeed did not know any languages at the beginning of the trip. Still, he half-jokingly remarked in a letter to Atasheva from September

1930: “You asked me with whom I’d been whoring around [*бляду́ю*] here and in what language? Firstly, for whoring I know enough of three languages by now: German, French, and English. But there is no whoring around” (qtd. in Saakov 219). In his diary he recorded a scene that, at that point in time, proved the contrary—at least as concerned his linguistic prowess. The episode dates from his temporary lonely sojourn in Paris in December 1929, while Eisenstein was in London, and Tisse in Switzerland, and puts together the question of both appearance and linguistic performance: “I was awakened early and for no good reason. They brought laundered female underwear and I, with no knowledge of French, had to spend a long time explaining that the underwear wasn’t mine” ([Aleksandrov], “14 tetradei” 122). In Hollywood Aleksandrov set himself a task—to learn English, and apparently succeeded (one can judge this, for instance, from Katherine Anne Porter’s report on the group in Mexico—see Chapter Four).

The “perfect knowledge” of several foreign languages quickly became an integral part of Eisenstein’s public image in the West after the success of *Potemkin*: a young militant Soviet filmmaker who to the surprise of foreign visitors and journalists could speak good German, English, and French. That, of course, gave him much more direct access to the foreign press and famous figures: Eisenstein became a mandatory Soviet celebrity to visit not only for Hollywood stars Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, but also for writers, such as the American Theodore Dreiser and the Austrian Stefan Zweig, or painters such as the Mexican artist Diego Rivera.

Naturally, most of the lectures that Eisenstein gave in Europe (and later in the States), were given in the language of the particular country: French for France and Belgium, German for Germany and the German-speaking parts of Switzerland, English for England and the United States. In Chapter One I mentioned the personal reasons for this particular “dare to himself.” The desire to be, on the one hand, like Anatole France, and, on the other hand, like someone like

Karl Radek, already contained double determination: one, political and relating to the Soviet Union as much as to its temporary internationalism, and the other—international, intellectual, and very personal. The subsequent discussion will show whether Eisenstein's public speaking skills in foreign languages were as universally successful as most memoirs make them out to be.

Soon after Eisenstein's Swiss talks, Grigorii Aleksandrov remarked on Eisenstein's abilities to speak publicly in a foreign language, noting that even his voice sounded different in German, deeper and more energetic (in his youth Eisenstein had to take special lessons to be able to manage his voice, which oscillated between low tones and a boy soprano). Aleksandrov would be in a perfect position to pay attention to that, not knowing the language and therefore focusing not on the content but more on the sounds themselves (letter to Pera Atasheva from 12 September 1929, qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 224).

Not only were Eisenstein's linguistic abilities remarked on, but also his interest in the finer points of languages. Léon Moussinac left the best description of Eisenstein's talk at the Sorbonne in the winter of 1931 and of his use of colloquialisms: "He was dazzling. When he could not think of the right word or the exact phrase, he made things up, displaying in the process great sensitivity to the French language, no subtlety of which escaped him … We were all delighted by the picturesque quality of some of his expressions. When he stumbled over a word, he would, with ingenuity, recover his verbal equilibrium at once" (41–42). The French commentators specifically noted Eisenstein's ability to use colloquial language, including "downright slang": "Eisenstein was to say that this slang sat as curiously in the mouth of its speaker as it was odd in its very-respectable setting, 'I am obliged for my choice vocabulary to my strolls through the city'" (Moussinac 42–43).

On a deeper level, language for Eisenstein was an important semiotic system, on a par with cinema itself, whose language he compared to hieroglyphics in the 1920s (see, for instance, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" in Eisenstein, *Film Form* 28–44). Since childhood, having read Balzac and Eugène Sue, he had been interested in argot and continued to collect materials on it in various languages for his etymological studies. He wrote to Moussinac in October 1928: "I am very interested in slang. Especially in the process by which these expressions are formed. I have five or six slang dictionaries and a book by Nicefore on the 'genius of slang!' But it is not enough. It would be very, very kind of you to have some specialist in the French language make up a descriptive bibliography of works on slang so I can choose the books on the theme I am interested in" (qtd. in Moussinac 26).

Apart from public speaking, Eisenstein was able to communicate privately with the majority of the people he met in their own languages, making him, it seems, at home everywhere. This was in marked contrast with his companions, as Montagu recorded. Importantly, this polylingualism, which was such an essential part of Eisenstein's public image, was also part of his personal history. It was a remnant and a reminder of his social status before the Revolution and, therefore, was another thing that distinguished him from his companions.

Eisenstein learned German, French, and English as a child, living in Riga, the capital of Latvia, then part of the Russian Empire. He knew no Latvian, however, as he was part of the upper-middle class Russian minority (his father was one of the last people to petition for and to receive nobility in the fall of 1917). He had gone to France with his parents and had been reading French books by the time he was 12. By the rigorous standards of Soviet "genealogy," then, Eisenstein was a former (petit)-bourgeois; he somewhat hid this fact by habitually writing in his autobiographies that he was a son of an "engineer." By contrast, Grigorii Aleksandrov

(born Grigorii Mormonenko) was from a miner's family in provincial Ekaterinburg (there is also information, however, that his father had owned a hotel and a restaurant, which again was something better left hidden in the 1920s). Tisse's background is almost unknown; according to official biographies and autobiographies he was born in Latvia, like Eisenstein, and claimed to be of Swedish descent (Montagu thought him to be the "son of a Swedish sea captain long settled and naturalized in Russia" [25]; this has again been disputed by most recent research). Still, while Eisenstein's family bordered on nobility (albeit nobility recent to the point of being made obsolete in the moment of its making), Tisse clearly belonged to the lower-middle class, while Aleksandrov's alleged parentage was the most impeccable in terms of the new revolutionary hierarchy.

The discrepancy in language proficiency became as much a factor as money problems in Eisenstein relationship with his companions, who apparently quite soon grew jealous of his constant lunches, dinners, outings, parties with artistic elites of various countries, in which they could not take part because of the language barrier—and, perhaps, because various "millionaires in Eisenstein's way" (to use the title of one of his memoir fragments) saw him as being closer to their own social strata. The following utterance of the owner of La Sarraz and the sponsor of the Congress, Madame de Mandrot, therefore, has to be taken ironically. In his memoirs Eisenstein remarked that Madame had been partial to the "Soviet delegation" and had "tragically sighed," saying goodbye to them, remarking: "Ah, the Bolsheviks are the only gentlemen!," which should

not be surprising at all if Eisenstein did indeed make a habit of calling her "la belle chatelaine" (Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 2, 331).[44]

Eisenstein's appearance and performance in Europe as an upper-middle-class cosmopolitan, in addition to his fame, helped him at certain times while hindering him at others. According to his memoirs, after the scandalous lecture at the Sorbonne in February 1931 that threatened to lead to his expulsion from France, Eisenstein was able to glance at his characterization at the Paris police department: it stated that Eisenstein had been recruiting supporters of the Soviet Union "par son charme personnel" (Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 1, 211). This same scandal, however, while putting his position in Europe in jeopardy, was beneficial for his reputation back home, as will be discussed in the next section.

[44] In his reminiscences Arnold Kohler moved this episode to the beginning of the Soviets' stay rather than to its end: "…we saw one day not three sinister-looking brigands, but three fine and distinguished men. Eisenstein especially had manners of most refined courtesy. Hélène de Mandrot threw us a look of triumphant irony: 'They are, she said, more civilized than all of us!'" (qtd. in Buache 22). Eisenstein and Kohler both remark on the discrepancy between expectation and reality, but while Kohler stresses the guests' personal appearance and behavior overriding their political affiliation, Eisenstein—for rhetorical reasons—subtly emphasizes the latter.

3.2 BOUNDARIES. LIMITS. LIMITATIONS. DEAD-ENDS

3.2.1 Borders

This section is concerned with boundaries, borders, and limits of various kinds: physical, linguistic, political, professional—but also with moving beyond limits, with transgression, and ex-stasis. The section itself moves beyond descriptive, empirical, and social level to a more metaphoric, theoretical, and abstract one level. In several senses, it starts out from the examples and arguments of the previous section, while also preparing the way for the next chapter. In this way, borders can already be seen as not only dividing, but also as connecting; they become a third, often porous, liminal space between two neighboring spaces. They also appear as the necessary prerequisite for the state or mode of being that Eisenstein began to value above all else, that became the central idea of his thinking at this time: "going outside of stasis" or any mode into another one, which he referred to as "ex-stasis."

Sometimes the walls that Eisenstein hit were impermanent: they were there at one point but disappeared at another, and vice versa. It seems quite straightforward in the case of national borders: one is either allowed to cross them—or not. But even Eisenstein's international reputation did not necessarily act as a proof/key to assure his admittance into particular countries. Neither was it always a hindrance. It is instructive to compare Eisenstein's position with that of his companions: from his correspondence with Lazar Wechsler, it appears that it was not the director himself with whom the Swiss authorities initially had problems, but Aleksandrov and Tisse, who were not official participants and, therefore, did not appear to have any legitimate reason to travel there (1923–1–1704 l. 3). When the trio wanted to go to Switzerland again, however, it was Eisenstein who was denied a visa to Switzerland. Tisse was already there, still

working with Wechsler on *Frauennot—Frauenglück*; Aleksandrov was waiting in Paris with a Swiss visa in his pocket. They were only waiting for Eisenstein, who was in London at the moment, to get one. The visa, however, was denied—to Eisenstein alone. With France it seemed the other way around. After Eisenstein's lecture at the Sorbonne led to a scandal with the police, it was only Eisenstein who apparently was threatened with expulsion, even though both Aleksandrov and Eisenstein later described a "spy" who quite openly followed Tisse and Aleksandrov around France as they were working on *Romance Sentimentale*.

The main border that would sometimes appear impenetrable was, perhaps paradoxically, the first one Eisenstein and his companions crossed. Defectors ("*nevozvrashchentsy*")—a term that would finally catch up with Eisenstein in Mexico in 1931—was different from emigrants proper (Genis). It referred to Soviet officials and personnel abroad (including people on business trips and vacations) who refused to return to the Soviet Union, as opposed to people who had left right after the Revolution or were sent out of the country by the state. The year 1929 was especially rich with cases of defection (like that of Grigorii Besedovskii, a Soviet diplomat in Paris), a fact that led to considerable concern in Moscow. The sometimes unfounded fears that a certain high-profile person was going to defect could even lead to a complete break between this individual and the Soviet authorities where one could have been avoided. This was apparently what happened to theater and film actor and director Aleksei Granovskii, who was practically pushed into emigration (Ivanov). Granovskii knew Eisenstein, Aleksandrov, and Tisse from Moscow; in 1924 Tisse could not start work on *Battleship Potemkin* because he had been working on Granovskii's film. At the time the trio arrived in Europe, Granovskii was working in Berlin.

The danger of being accused of defecting hung above the heads of anyone who would even try to ask for an extension of his stay abroad: precisely what Eisenstein needed to do in order to get a Hollywood contract. At the same time, he needed reassurance that he and his companions would be allowed to return to the Soviet Union. Already at sea in May 1930, he wrote to Atasheva that the scandal with the Sorbonne and the threat of expulsion from France could have "closed the door to America" ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 221). In the memoirs, however, he suggested that the scandal was "staged" in order to show people in Moscow that he was behaving in a true "Bolshevik," propagandistic fashion. However seriously one takes Eisenstein's later seemingly ironic version of it, there is no denying that the immediate fear of expulsion ultimately could serve to reassure Eisenstein's various superiors and patrons in Moscow that he could be trusted enough to be left abroad for a longer period of time.

3.2.2 Creative Dead-Ends

There were geographical and geopolitical boundaries that presented themselves on Eisenstein's way; there were also dead-ends that his various projects encountered. The first major dead-end (although not immediately understood as such or understood as a temporary hold-up) was with Schenck. The second—the "tragedy," as Eisenstein referred to it at the time, with the synchronization of *The Old and the New* ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 221). He again called it a tragedy in his creative diary notes in Mexico in 1931. The subsequent, much graver, situation with the Mexican project obscured the previous creative failure for both Eisenstein and his biographers and critics. At the time, however, it was at least one of the main reasons for his repeatedly expressed disillusionment with practical work in cinema in general, starting in the fall of 1929.

While Eisenstein and the team were in Switzerland, the work on the European version of *The Old and the New* was still going on in fits and starts in Berlin. Almost immediately upon arrival in August the group had started working on the German (and possibly also on the English) versions of the film, which involved cutting and making new intertitles in the target language. While still in Moscow Eisenstein had also planned to produce a post-synchronized version of the film. The "musical score" of *The Old and the New* that Eisenstein wrote required close collaboration between the director and a composer. For this reason Eisenstein kept in mind Edmund Meisel, who had written the score for *Battleship Potemkin*'s and *October*'s German release (initially at the request of the Soviet Trade Office in Berlin). But the work also depended on Eisenstein's access to sound recording equipment, something that was virtually absent in the Soviet Union at the moment of his departure. It was not readily accessible in Berlin either, but the equipment could be obtained from England. Meisel was also in England at the time and regularly asked Eisenstein throughout 1928–29 about the date of his arrival. It seemed that a trip to England was predetermined, and the meeting with Ivor Montagu in La Sarraz and his invitation for Eisenstein to give a series of lectures in London made it inevitable.

The plans for synchronization encountered an unforeseen obstacle when the whole export of Sovkino productions to Germany was put under question. A short detour into the history of Soviet film export, including Eisenstein's films, is in place here, since it explains the problems Sovkino and, by extension, Eisenstein, encountered in 1929.

The USSR's film organizations did not have regular and systematic film export in the 1920s; it mostly proceeded on a case-by-case basis. *Battleship Potemkin*, for instance, was distributed in Germany by Prometheus, a branch of pro-Soviet newspaper tycoon Willi Münzenberg's organization Workers International Relief, also supported financially by the

Communist Party of Germany. Prometheus was created in December 1925 specifically for the distribution of this film, "and, perhaps, other real revolutionary works that will follow it" (qtd. in Bulgakova 40). In March 1926 representatives of Prometheus and Sovkino signed a 3-year contract for the distribution of *Potemkin*, and the deal proved to be phenomenally lucrative for the German side. As Oksana Bulgakowa notes, "If before that Russian films were released in 5 copies at best, for *Potemkin* they initially had to print 45 copies, then 50, and then 67, in order to satisfy the demand" (41). With *Potemkin*, Prometheus received 1 million Reichsmarks, while its stated capital at the time of its organization had been only 10,000 marks. No wonder people were surprised that Eisenstein could not afford a decent suit.

Soon Prometheus became the biggest distributor of Soviet film in Germany, while other branches of Workers International Relief (like Spartacus in France) released them in other European countries. Having started with the state-produced *Potemkin*, Prometheus, however, attached itself much closer to another Soviet film studio, the privately-owned Mezhrabpom-Rus'. Its production was oriented towards popular genres and traditional forms and enjoyed wider distribution and bigger commercial success in Germany and other countries than Sovkino's films. Therefore Sovkino sought its own exclusive partner for distribution and coproduction in the West, and it was found in the form of Derufa (Deutsch-Russische Film-Alliance), organized by the German company Filmwerke Staaken AG and Sovkino. Officially the company's capital was 200,000 marks and Sovkino was promised a percentage from the distribution profits and a say in scheduling and the organization of releases.

The first batch of films given to Derufa for export in 1927 numbered 19 and included such productions as Kozintsev and Trauberg's *SVD*, Boris Barnet's *Girl with a Hatbox*, Iakov Protazanov's *The Forty-First*, and Eisenstein's still unfinished *The General Line* (the original

title of *The Old and the New*).

In the Soviet press, the creation of the new company was criticized on several grounds, one of them being the fact that it was to be administered in part by the Film Section of the Soviet Trade Mission in Berlin. It was argued that the unwieldy apparatus of the Trade Mission was not the most dynamic or experienced organization to be entrusted with representing the interests of the "young, unique, and quickly developing film industry" (*Kino* 44 [216], 1 November 1927: 4). The Trade Mission's head Karl Begge himself was not sure that his personnel were up to the task, if the final goal of the new organization was to make Germany the hub for the distribution of Soviet films around the world. He suggested to Anastas Mikoian, the Commissar for External and Internal Trade, that an experienced film administrator of high rank from Moscow had to be brought to Berlin to avoid bureaucratic chicanery between the Film Section and Sovkino (letter from 26 March 1928; qtd. in *Istoriia otechestvennogo kino* 121–23). This, however, would never happen.

During the next couple of years, the company survived but by no means flourished. In the fall of 1929, according to the old agreement from late 1927, Derussa (as it had been renamed) was scheduled to release *The Old and the New* in Germany. Even though Prometheus was a more reliable distributor at the moment, they did not have sound equipment yet, while Derussa, at least according to the Soviet press, was about to buy some from England (*Kino* 36 [312], 10 September 1929: 1).

On 20 September, having returned from Switzerland, Eisenstein wrote to Maksim Shtraukh of the Berlin news: "You have probably already heard about Derussa's collapse [*razval*]. This slows down the release, makes the money situation more difficult, and in general fucks everything up [*kherovina*]" (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 257). The newspaper

Kino reported at length on Derussa's bankruptcy ten days later, when Prometheus's Willi Münzenberg came to Moscow and announced that the head of the competing company's German side, Georg Sklarz, had participated in the 1919 murder of German communists much revered in the Soviet Union—Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, and that his company had been led by "profiteers and crooks" (*Kino* 39 [315], 1 October 1929: 2). Münzenberg assured readers that Sovkino had acted foolishly, relying on Derussa despite the warnings from his own organization, Workers International Relief. He added that the misguided politics of Sovkino, naturally, in no way reflected the real politics of Soviet cinema, which had already come to its senses and was ready to pass all the Derussa deals to Prometheus. The same issue noted that head of Sovkino Konstantin Shvedchikov had flown off to Berlin immediately.

In Berlin Shvedchikov stayed in the same boarding house at Martin-Luther-Strasse where Eisenstein and other Soviet filmmakers lived at the time, so that Eisenstein was able to remark in his next letter to Shtraukh: "He is unspeakably gentle and very nice in everyday life. But not business-minded *whatsoever*! It is just horrid!!! And he's helpless in any matter here, like a child!" (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 262; emphasis in the original).[45] In mid-October he wrote to Shtraukh again about the prospects of releasing *The Old and the New*, which he preferred to call by the old title:

> Our affairs are not yet completely settled. For example, it is still uncertain, *who* will release *The General Line*. It has already

[45] Shvedchikov, although formally Eisenstein's "boss," the head of the company that employed him, was clearly not even in a position to provide patronage—and Eisenstein for the most part went over his head, although nominally deferring to him.

> been in contretemps with our arrival because of the delayed release [in Russia]. One has to arrange a film's release *very* carefully in terms of the film's quality and the local conditions in general. But so far there is no one who could take charge of it etc., etc. It seems the synchronization is *not* happening. There is no money. And our people treat others so badly; they cannot close a deal with anyone… (261–62; emphasis and underlining in the original)

Some possibility of a resolution appeared for a while in England, because at the beginning of November, Aleksandrov reported to Pera Atasheva that "in 3–4 days the dates of [their] work on *The General Line* will become clear" (qtd. in Saakov 91). Instead, a trip to France was planned with the hope that Gaumont might offer the Soviets a big project, possibly in coproduction with its British subsidiary. In mid-November, before leaving for Paris for a couple of weeks, Eisenstein confirmed this in a letter to Shtraukh (Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 268). A month later, after his return to England, he concluded: "It appears that not a fuck [*ni khuia*] will come out of the synchronization of *The General Line*. Sovkino insisted on conditions completely unfeasible for foreign companies. It is a great pity. Meisel and I have come up with a very interesting plan. Besides, a silent film will most likely not shine [*ne blesnet*] and it definitely will not sell to English-speaking countries: silent films are not released here. Oh well, to fucking hell with it [*nu i khui s nei*]" (270). *The Old and the New* was released in Germany in February 1930 by Prometheus as a silent film. At one point in the proceedings, exasperated by the incompetency of the Moscow film administration and the inefficiency of its European agents, he even asked Shtraukh, "I don't know, maybe I should have myself gone into film administration and distribution business?!" (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 262). Taking

into consideration Eisenstein's notorious unconcern for money matters, which had made him habitually exceed budgetary and time limits on his 1920s productions, this statement is striking indeed. It also reflects his disappointment in practical work as a film director, which also fueled his desire to write and teach, vividly expressed, for instance, in Cambridge in the fall of 1930 (Bulgakowa 101–2). One of the primary reasons for disillusionment was the resounding domestic flop of *The Old and the New*, in opposition to the success of such contemporaneous releases as Ol'ga Preobrazhenskaia and Ivan Pravov's *The Peasant Women of Riazan* (*Baby riazanskie*, 1927).

3.2.3 Limits of Understanding

The failure of *The Old and the New* with wide audiences and most of the critics that Eisenstein could only witness from a distance clearly showed him that the ideas he had put into the film were not appreciated and not even understood. Nikolai Volkov's review was an exception that only offset the general negative reaction. "Why has there been so much hype around this picture? … Why was it being made for three years? We have been waiting for an artistic picture of great significance, a blockbuster like *Battleship Potemkin*. Our expectations have not been satisfied. We saw a mediocre picture…",—so the newspapers reported what regular moviegoers (Red Army soldiers in this case) expressed (*Kino* 37 [313], 17 September 1929: 5). Sovkino officials present at screenings did not support Eisenstein. Professional critics agreed with the general public using almost the same words: "The film is too late. We grow very fast. … We have almost no one left to agitate, we have to explain something that is already common knowledge. If our viewers saw *The Old and the New* three years ago, they would have been amazed. The

film could have been explosive. And now for a lot of people it will only be an illustrated supplement to yesterday" (*Kino* 41 [317], 15 October 1929: 3).

The negative reaction at home, along with the problems with the German distributors and the changes within Sovkino itself, possibly influenced the ultimate decision of the company's authorities not to spend money on post-synchronization of *The Old and the New*. Still, it would be an overstatement to consider the Soviet reaction, as Seton does (130), the primary reason for the decision not to add a soundtrack to the film—after all, *Potemkin* also had to become a sensation in Germany before it was given a second chance at home.

Eisenstein's reaction was to focus even more on theoretical writings and teaching. But, despite the celebrated multilingualism discussed earlier, Eisenstein discovered he was not always understood in the West either. At La Sarraz Eisenstein's linguistic proficiency unexpectedly worked against him. This was the first big speech that he delivered on this trip. This part of the Swiss episode got obscured in most of the later reminiscences: while the three official languages of the Congress were French, German, and English, and the organizers particularly requested that participants from various countries knew at least one of them, the language that most of the participants spoke was French. Arnold Kohler reported later that Eisenstein had insisted that the topic he was going to talk about was better explained in German, as it was the most suited for "philosophical analysis" (qtd. in Albéra 91).[46] A young journalist writing for *Close Up*, Jean Lenauer, was employed to translate into French. But, according to Kohler, those few who could understand both German and French, saw immediately that Lenauer did not at all manage to

[46] One can remember here his deliberations on whether the planned book sounded too "German"—see Chapter One.

reproduce Eisenstein's argumentation and turns of phrase. It therefore did not have any effect on the discussions whatsoever—contrary to what Eisenstein imagined and Aleksandrov even reported.

The long awaited screening of *Potemkin* in London in November 1929 turned out to be disappointing for regular viewers and for Eisenstein himself. It already seemed obsolete, with Grierson's *Drifters* (1929), utilizing *Potemkin*'s innovations, shown right before. In the 1940s Eisenstein described in his memoirs how Meisel "ruined the public screening of *Potemkin*… by setting the speed of projection slightly slower than normal, without consulting with me. This destroyed the dynamic of rhythmic correspondences to the extent that for the first and only time in *Potemkin's* screen life the effect of the 'jumping lions' caused laughter. He violated the only length of time during which three different lions have time to merge into one while the viewers do not have time to apprehend the trick by which it had been achieved…" (Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye* 1, 320–21). Eisenstein said that the music for *Potemkin* had been good, but the music for *October* not so good (320).

In the winter of 1930 while speaking at the Sorbonne, Eisenstein was not yet as critical towards Meisel's work, which perhaps suggests that the eventual failure of the synchronization plan colored his experience of working with the composer. Answering a question about his attitude to Meisel's music, Eisenstein responded: "I consider Meisel's music very good; it is constructed according to the same principles, which I would like to use to synchronize these films [*Potemkin* and *October*]. It maintains the same character. But it is not synchronized as is music that is recorded on film together with the images, although it is close to that" (554).

While the screening of his early film, made four years previously, disappointed his viewers who had waited for too long, the lectures that Eisenstein gave in London equally baffled

his listeners. As Basil Wright remembered: "There we were, with notebooks and pencils, thinking passionately about Film, Film the great new art-form. … He talked about the Japanese Kabuki plays, about William James, Darwin, Toulouse-Lautrec, Daumier… about de Terrail's *Rocambole*, le Blanc's *Arsène Lupin*, about Stefan Zweig, Zola and James Joyce. It was at first a little disappointing, a little shocking" (qtd. in Seton 143).

The "spherical book" that he wanted to give to MacPherson for publication (see Chapter One) did not materialize, and neither did Volkov's biography. His new theoretical articles remained unfinished or unwritten. In a letter from Hollywood, Eisenstein blamed Pera Atasheva for not being there and gave her absence as the reason that he had produced no more articles (Eizenshtein, "Samoe uzhasnoe" 231). He was trying to persuade Atasheva to come to Hollywood at this point, so the accusation is not to be taken at face value, but she was indeed known for her ability to make Eisenstein finish writing articles and for arranging for their publication through her journalistic and VOKS connections. The translations of older articles, which were eventually published abroad, specifically in *Close Up*, took a lot of time and involved some arguments with Ivor Montagu. Montagu's limited knowledge of the Russian language and Soviet context could lead to such mistakes (recorded by Eisenstein) as translating the abbreviation MKKh (Moscow Communal Services) as "Materialistic Conception of History" (1923–2–1116 l. 3). There were things to gain in the process, however: Eisenstein also remarked that during the translation of his concept of "montage unit" [*iacheika montazha*] a "wonderful new parallel" was born, because Montagu used the word "cell," which also means organic cells (in Russian—*kletka*): "And the transition from shot into montage corresponds to cell division in embryology (from unicellular to bicellular—the path from a cell to an <u>organism</u>)" (1923–2–1116 l. 4, underlining in the original). Eisenstein made a note to amend the "reedition" (his English

word) of this article accordingly. This diary entry, incidentally, definitively puts a stop to the tired argument in Western film studies about early mechanistic/constructivist vs. later "organic" Eisenstein (emphasized especially by David Bordwell, first in this 1974 article "Eisenstein's Epistemological Shift" and the addendum to it in response to Ben Brewster's preface, and then in the book *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, which has continued to influence all subsequent scholarship).

One example of the limits of communication and the dangers of mis- and non-communication reached Eisenstein in April of 1930. The poet Vladimir Mayakovsky had just shot himself in Moscow. Shtraukh explained that it could only have happened because his closest friends, Lilya and Osip Brik, had been in Berlin instead of Moscow (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 275). Later Shklovsky told Eisenstein the rumor that right before his death Mayakovsky tried to call someone on the phone but the phone later turned out to be disconnected. Eisenstein must have heard the rumors even before that, because he wrote to Shtraukh from Mexico that, unlike the poet, he did not even have anyone to call (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 251). His letters to Shtraukh and Atasheva were regularly filled with passages in which he lamented his loneliness and insisted that only with these two interlocutors could he reveal his true thoughts and feelings.

3.2.4 Constraints and Limitations of Friendship

One of the confessions, with which his letters to Pera Atasheva are filled, refers back to the time spent in Europe from the vantage point on board the *S.S. Europa* taking Eisenstein and Tisse to New York: "I have only just unclenched or, rather, have started to unclench my teeth a little bit, which had been clenched so that my jaws had been crackling. So that I myself wouldn't crack! I

have a lot, it seems, given to me, but getting it is not easy! Add to that friends that always start hating [you] 15 minutes before it is time to do that" (Eizenshtein, "Samoe uzhasnoe" 221). It seems plausible that by "friends" here he specifically means Grigorii Aleksandrov who stayed in Paris for a while to finish editing *Romance Sentimentale* and was writing to Atasheva and his wife Ol'ga two weeks later: "…there has been arguing over telegraph with New York, that is, Eisen[stein]. Ship after ship depart every day, and I have not agreed to go yet. We are bargaining ferociously, it requires great obstinacy" (qtd. in Saakov 205).

Aleksandrov's letters from Europe to Atasheva and to his wife show that he saw a marked difference between his position and that of Eisenstein. One of the letters, written early on into the journey, when Aleksandrov and Tisse were shooting additional scenes for Mikhail Dubson's film *Giftgas* in Berlin, says: "We are working from 8 am to midnight; it is exhausting. Meanwhile, Eisenstein is enjoying himself at acquaintances' and celebrities' and gets money for the job [performed by Aleksandrov and Tisse]" (from October 1929, qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: Kino* 225). Moreover, whereas Tisse was a known entity at least in Berlin studios and his part in the creation of Eisenstein's films was easily definable, Aleksandrov's position was more precarious. Even though he was called the co-director and the co-author of the script of *The Old and the New* in Soviet newspapers,[47] articles and reviews abroad completely ignored him. In a diary entry from 26 December 1929 he remarks: "There is an article about *The General Line* in the newspapers. Enthusiastic about Eisenstein—not a word about me" ([Aleksandrov] 123). Aleksandrov's pride must have been hurt even more when the film that he

[47] See, for instance: Alpers, Boris. "Staroe i novoe." *Sovetskii ekran* 40 (7 October 1929), n. p.

directed on his own—*Romance Sentimentale*—was credited to both him and Eisenstein at the request of the film's producer (see Iangirov, "V kadre III" 218–220 for a dissenting view).

One of the reasons for Aleksandrov's unhappiness with his position was the language barrier, which forced him to the outer edges of Eisenstein's circle (as described above). Another reason, quite possibly, was the appearance of a doppelganger—a new assistant, who eventually even came with the group to the States. Ivor Montagu, referring to that later period, when he got to know him, observed: "This young man was almost the double to Grisha in height and build and colour, but of less prepossessing features" (72). The new team member's name was Boris Ingster. In Yiddish "Ingster" means younger or junior, and Boris was the younger brother of director Aleksei Granovskii (both pseudonyms hid the family name Azarkh). Ingster had been born in the same town as Eisenstein, Riga, in 1903. He had worked in his brother's Jewish theater in Moscow and had probably known Eisenstein's trio from the time Granovskii and Eisenstein almost shared a cameraman—Eduard Tisse—in Odessa in 1925. Ingster's name appears as "assistant [director]" in the credits of *Romance Sentimentale* (with the third—middle?—Azarkh brother, Leonid, serving as editor, or "régie"). He also went with Aleksandrov and Eisenstein to the Netherlands in the winter of 1930, where Eisenstein gave lectures. Aleksandrov wrote in his diary:

> We were shown a new film by Ivens, *We are Building* [1930] … After the screening I came into the room; Eisen[stein] shouted at me: "Why did you come?..." He was talking to Boris, shouted that I should go sit at a café. … Me, who has been unruffled for so many years, was agitated by this, so I had to sit in an armchair for some time thinking everything over. Eisen makes me angry. Silence,

> upstaging aggravate the situation. This is dangerous and can end badly. Eisen is so full of his fame that does not notice anything, including my existence. ([Aleksandrov] 124–25)

Why would Eisenstein want to talk to Ingster privately? One possibility, a theory of Vladimir Zabrodin, who obliquely hints at it in a number of his publications, is that Aleksandrov spied on Eisenstein for the authorities (the secret police?) in Moscow. The only evidence that Zabrodin has presented is a letter from Dimitri Marianoff urging Aleksandrov to write him fewer letters. So we shall await further research. The rift between Eisenstein and his assistant and co-author would continue through the summer of 1930 in Hollywood; the journey on the whole prepared Aleksandrov not only practically but emotionally for the break with his teacher and friend that would happen soon after the trio returned to the Soviet Union in 1932 and that Eisenstein in his bad moments would refer to as betrayal.

3.2.5 New Opportunities

The multitude of opportunities that Europe offered to Eisenstein and his team, and the freedom of movement and experience that it suggested at times, could turn into impenetrable walls and insurmountable obstacles. The opposite was true as well: something that seemed like a dead-end at first, would go on to become, or at least be regarded, as an opportunity. At this time Eisenstein formed a habit of narrativizing his experience: first in letters and diary notes, then—in articles and memoirs (as will be seen, for example, at the very end of this chapter).

Throughout the year there were further attempts at negotiating with United Artists. Aleksandrov in his diary mentioned that Schenck was in Paris in late December 1929, but at first Eisenstein refused to meet with him, and when he did agree to seek Schenck out, the group did

not manage to catch him at his hotel ([Aleksandrov] 123–24). Eisenstein, in his turn, wrote to Atasheva about some sort of contemporaneous "deception" with Schenck in London and another one with Fairbanks "in Shanghai"; perhaps, this happened in February 1930 when, according to Eisenstein, Fairbanks replied to his telegram that it was "not advisable" to go to the States at the time (Eizenshtein, "Samoe uzhasnoe" 221).

In March, Ivor Montagu sailed for the States and established himself in Hollywood where he also hoped to find people interested in offering the three Soviets a contract (Saakov 202). This eventually led to Paramount's Jesse Lasky signing with Eisenstein in Paris. Paramount was not the only company Montagu talked to, and the interest of one big company must have revived the interest of another one, on which Eisenstein had almost given up. In April, when Douglas Fairbanks was about to sail for Europe, all the papers could talk about, apart from his participation (as a spectator) in a golf competition in England, was his decision to invite Eisenstein to Hollywood again: "Fairbanks will discuss this new idea, which is said to mean an entirely new step in motion pictures, with Eisenstein, who had it forwarded to the screen star through Ivor Montagu, of London. While in Europe, Fairbanks will also discuss another suggestion for a picture made by H.G. Wells, before arranging to bring Eisenstein back with him" (*New York Telegraph*, 20 April 1930, 1923–1–2830 l. 12).

Meanwhile, Eisenstein was traveling around France and Aleksandrov was keeping watch in Paris. On 17 April, before Fairbanks stepped on board *S.S. Majestic* on his way to Europe, Aleksandrov had already informed Atasheva that Jesse Lasky was arriving to Paris the next day and that he "accepted all our suggestions, and our work in Hollywood will be with regular visits to Moscow" (qtd. in Saakov 205). The offer and the signing of the Hollywood contract was not as sudden as could have appeared from the newspapers and later accounts, which drew on them.

Still, it happened in the nick of time—at least with respect to staying abroad at all. First of all, Eisenstein still had the threat of expulsion from France hanging over his head, and several other countries had already refused him entrance or transit visas. Second, a day after the news that Eisenstein had signed a contract for six months with Jesse Lasky of Paramount was publicized in newspapers across Europe and United States, a telegram from Sovkino's Konstantin Shvedchikov arrived. It stated quite tersely: "The time of your stay abroad is running out. When are you thinking of coming back" (1923–1–2378 l. 15).

Neither he nor Lev Monosson in New York had apparently been informed by Eisenstein about the negotiations; it was presented to his nominal superiors as a done deed. Monosson learnt about the signing of the contract from the newspapers and sent Eisenstein a concerned telegram: "Today *[New York T]imes* cables from Paris you signed contract Lasky Paramount. Cable immediately details date departure New York. *Old New* premiere May second" (1923–1–1984 l. 8). Eisenstein even at this point, it seems, was reluctant to divulge information and apparently asked why Monosson even needed details, to which the Amkino representative replied, just as he had done in 1928, that it was necessary for organizing a proper PR campaign. The diligent Monosson must have also greatly surprised the Sovkino administration by his own telegram, the reply to which he passed on to Eisenstein: "Schwedtchikoff [*sic*] cables no knowledge your contract" (1923–1–1984 l. 10). This behind-the-scenes correspondence was in striking contrast to the rosy picture presented by the press: "Mr. Lasky, whose ability as a maker of film stars is probably unequaled, announced today that the famous Russian director, S.M. Eisenstein, has signed a contract to go to Hollywood for six months. The Soviet Government has granted him leave for this period, after which M[onsieur?]. Eisenstein must return to Moscow" (*New York Times*, 27 April 1930, 1923–1–2841 l. 33).

It could not have been a better moment to break free of Moscow's surveillance, even if it was only metaphorical. Less than a week later, on 5 May, Shvedchikov sent Eisenstein another telegram: "Sovkino liquidated merged with newly-formed All-Union Film and Photo Combine. Offers received coordinate with Bogdanov, Monoszon …" (1923–1–2378 l. 16). What this suggested was that, while there were such major administrative changes going on in Moscow, Eisenstein had only to clear his steps with the American representatives of Sovkino (which was now to become Soiuzkino): the head of Amtorg, Petr Bogdanov (an unknown quantity as yet), and his subordinate, the head of Amkino Monosson (a definite supporter). Eisenstein would try to use this leeway as much as he could over the next two and a half years.

On the last day before disembarking in New York, Eisenstein wrote three almost identical letters—to his mother, to Maksim Shtraukh, and to Pera Atasheva. Although the stylistics differed, the key theme was the same. On board the *S.S. Europa* Eisenstein seems to think that all had turned out for the better (this is a version sent to Atasheva):

> It is still impossible to believe, so you keep thinking: what if everything goes to the dickens again! But if it does not, then the whole American story is of such amazing clarity and logic of construction that one can only marvel: all the failures and hard times from the point of view of the result reached now seem to be the height of foresight and wisdom. Schenck in fact would have turned out to be a financial and production drudgery [*katorga*]. Films with Doug—a torture. The European delay gave a possibility to get to know Germany, Switzerland, France…, Belgium, Holland,

> England. (Eizenshtein, “Samoe uzhasnoe” 222, ellipsis in the original)

Eisenstein was already writing a happy-end story for that particular adventure—the attempt at narrative closure that he would repeat again six months later, leaving Hollywood behind. And yet, even at that confident moment, there lurked in his self-persuasion a feeling of doubt and the possibility of future failure (“what if!”).

4.0 CHAPTER THREE: THE UNITED STATES, MAY–DECEMBER 1930

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As was shown in the previous chapter, the whole European part of the journey abroad was viewed by Eisenstein and his team as an inevitable, almost compulsory obstacle before they could proceed onto their real destination—Hollywood. When they finally reached it, were they able to find what they had come for? Did they succeed? On the surface, these questions cannot be answered in any way but the negative. The contract that had promised a sequence of at least 3 films made in turn in the United States and the Soviet Union over the course of the next couple of years,[48] was dissolved after 6 months; there was no money saved, no films made, no books or even large articles written. The tangible results of the Hollywood part of Eisenstein's journey were two completed scripts (published by co-author Ivor Montagu almost 40 years later) and one article: "The Dynamic Square," which originated in a talk at a meeting of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers and was published in 1931. There was also the idea of "internal monologue," developed during work on *An American Tragedy* and expressed in the article "Help Yourself!" («Одолжайтесь!»), published in Russian in October 1932, after the team's return, but, in full

[48] Eisenstein's summary of the contract in a letter to his mother (Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 240).

accord with the title of the article, not utilized in practice by its author. No wonder that in subsequent descriptions the American part of the journey also became just a prelude to its real "nux" (as Eisenstein would say): the Mexican triumph/failure in the form of dozens of hours of material for *Que Viva Mexico*; of multiple documents pertaining to the relations with the film's backers represented by writer Upton Sinclair; several hundreds of drawings; and, finally, innumerable pages of diaries, notes, and drafts, laying the foundations of most of Eisenstein's subsequent theoretical writings and still unpublished in their majority.

Leaving the Mexican part aside for a while, the question still remains whether Eisenstein's stay in the United States could be considered a failure at the time of the contract's dissolution and then at the time of his return to the Soviet Union. To answer this, another question needs to be asked as well: "A failure in whose eyes?" In the eyes of American newspapers, Eisenstein was another European artist who failed to take root in Hollywood. In the not-a-little jealous eyes of recent Russian emigrants, who had chosen to leave the country for good (but had trouble taking root in Hollywood themselves), it was a failure as well. A case in point here is Sergei Bertenson, who had worked in the literary department of the Moscow Art Theater with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, stayed with him in Hollywood in the mid-1920s, and finally emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1928. In 1930 he was working as an assistant to director Lewis Milestone (a pre-revolutionary Russian Jewish émigré himself) and, on hearing of Eisenstein's arrival, recorded in his diary that "[i]t's hard to predict how this will end, but it seems like Paramount, which invited him with a [$]100 thousand a year contract, gives him free hand to do absolutely anything. Apparently, Americans are impressed with his youth, energy, complete lack of sentimentality, and perfect English" (qtd. in Arenskii 91). Bertenson then wrote on 23 October 1930: "Today the papers announce that Eisenstein is leaving, having made

nothing, and that his contact has been willfully annulled. All my predictions came true" (qtd. in Arenskii 115). And then, another two months later: "Eisenstein has left with his two aide-de-camps. At the time of his departure, everyone had forgotten about him; there was no publicity brouhaha" (qtd. in Arenskii 117).

The discussions of Eisenstein's failure could throw light on his various allegiances and personas. They also help to get at the discrepancy between a subject of (a potential) biography as opposed to a subject still in process of living and perhaps simultaneously creating this future biographical subject. For Bertenson, it was a failure of a Soviet artist, someone who had behind him the state-sponsored films and had to represent the country abroad. Ivor Montagu, asking much later: "Why did we fail in Hollywood?," meant his own and Eisenstein's failure as representatives of that European avant-garde that had gathered at La Sarraz only a year before (120). Montagu went back to England in the fall of 1930 just as Eisenstein was getting ready for Mexico. For Montagu, it was indeed the end of the Hollywood experiment—but he had only himself (and his wife) to consider, not the two assistants and all of their families back home. To go to the States, Montagu had borrowed money from his uncle and had to return it; luckily, his good friend Sidney Bernstein of the future Granada TV fame lent him the necessary sum, which, in turn, Montagu repaid back over the next year (128). Eisenstein had more than just his personal life or career to consider. Oksana Bulgakowa, who in her biography of Eisenstein followed Montagu very closely in her assessment of the Hollywood period, extended the failure to his self-image as an artist:

> …this affair was more than just a personal creative disaster. Hollywood had not merely crushed him (as it had Erich von Stroheim). Eisenstein felt that he had failed with his "mission to the

> world," of which he had been convinced when he was in Europe. He knew how to make films that were as effective as Hollywood pictures, but he could not use Hollywood recipes and did not fit into their commercial calculations. Eisenstein had finally reached the heart of the world's film production, he had worked three whole years to get there, and now he had failed. (*Sergei Eisenstein* 121)

In the USSR, the empty-handed nature of Eisenstein's departure from Hollywood was definitely considered the director's own failure as well—but at the same time, it was viewed as a part of Soviet film history, since Eisenstein was the primary representative of its montage period. Already in 1937 his story was part of the education of a new crop of filmmakers. Film historian Nikolai Iezuitov told students in the same Institute of Cinematography where Eisenstein was busy developing and implementing his comprehensive education program for future film directors:

> This is a very insightful chapter from the history of Soviet cinema. Over the course of several years, Eisenstein tried, quite painfully sometimes, to work in Hollywood, but nothing would come out of it. He wrote three scripts: *Gold* based on the novel of Blaise Cendrers, *The Black Consul* based on Vinogradov's text, and, finally, *An American Tragedy* by Dreiser.[49] Each of these scripts went through serious changes depending on the demands of [film]

[49] For a history of the Haitian Revolution project see: Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, "Sergei Eisenstein and the Haitian Revolution" 157–185, and Ryabchikova, "*The Black Consul*."

> companies and as a result there was a conflict between Eisenstein and the companies that led to the American press hunting Eisenstein. It succeeded in making the companies sever their relations with Eisenstein. (Lecture № 6 (11 May 1937), *Lektsii tov. Iezuitova, 1937–38, Aspirantura*, Archive of the Laboratory for the History of Russian Cinema, VGIK)

This narrative is riddled with anachronisms and errors: the "Hollywood" part took only 8 months at most; *The Black Consul* script was never actually written (and Vinogradov only wrote his first prose version by Eisenstein's return in 1932), but there was another partially developed project, called *Glass House*; the press was influenced by Major Frank Pease's denunciations of Eisenstein, and this in turn, perhaps, made relations with Paramount more difficult, not the other way around. The number of inaccuracies only grew as years passed by, but the general view of the trip as a failure was firmly settled. For Ivan Aksenov, working in the mid-1930s under the director's own guidance, Eisenstein's time in Hollywood paled in comparison to the Mexican project. The Mexican failure overshadowed the months in the States, just as in Eisenstein's mind it overshadowed the "tragedy" with the sound version of *The Old and the New*. What none of these accounts mentions (but Iezuitov's implies) is that, not even paradoxically, the Hollywood "failure" was necessary for Eisenstein's successful return: the conflict between a Soviet artist and a capitalist film industry in the early 1930s was read back home as proof of the incompatibility of the two systems, and hence Eisenstein's inability to make a film there could become a proof of his true nature as a Soviet artist. In the 1920s, in the hopes of an imminent world revolution, they would not have read it this way. Had he been able to succeed, in the

1930s the argument could dangerously veer both ways: either the Soviet triumphed over the capitalist, or the capitalist had corrupted the Soviet.[50]

The question that has not been asked is how Eisenstein himself perceived his experience in the United States, as an avant-garde artist, a Soviet artist, and a human being. Was this episode of any value for him? Did he see it as a failure—at the time or later? Could this outcome have been avoided? Could Eisenstein have made a Hollywood film or at least a film in Hollywood? This is what this chapter attempts to determine. My working hypothesis is this: for Eisenstein, the months in Hollywood and the United States in general were a personal, if not professional, success; a time of further widening his horizons and of intensive accumulation of knowledge and impressions that later, in Mexico, he was finally in a position to start thinking through and writing down. Professionally, just as he had done in Europe, Eisenstein again tried to navigate between the demands of Paramount and the demands of Moscow, and this conflict eventually made not making a film the best possible way out.

Eisenstein's own assessment of what led to the dissolution of the Paramount contract was that it had been the result of a combination of factors: the anti-Communist and anti-Semitic attacks of Major Pease; the economic and political consequences of the Great Depression; and the fight of the generations and cliques at Paramount and in Hollywood in general. Whether Eisenstein perceived it as a failure is a question that takes into account a larger context of the trip, larger forces at play, including, on the one hand, Eisenstein's continuing commitments to Sovkino and, on the other, his commitments to his own art and theory. Examining these two

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[50] Perceived corruption or downright treason in the 1930s served as formal reasons for a number of arrests and executions of people who had simply worked abroad in an official capacity.

commitments will also suggest an answer to the question of why Eisenstein did not return home immediately in the fall of 1930, but instead went on to Mexico and spent another year and a half abroad, this time with almost disastrous results.

4.2 "SEVEN FRIDAYS A WEEK": HOLLYWOOD PROJECTS

> I don't know what kind of work conditions we will have here. What kind of pressure we will have. But so far their line is super-liberal: "We are not going to make just any run-of-the-mill picture with you"—this is their formula. The caliber of production they talk about is on the level of Wells' *War of the Worlds*![51] Well, we'll see. I believe in one thing: the past has slapped my mug far too often. What matters is that the final *edition* is good!
>
> I feel very "small" again—entering "into life" again. Starting again. The position like before *Potemkin*. There is nowhere to retreat (it was the same then!). I don't know, but I think we will pull it off. This opportunity has cost too much nerves and blood. Too much self-restraint to break down now. And yet, it's never possible to know for sure. I just hope my old guts are strong enough to pull this through! (Eizenshtein, "Samoe uzhasnoe" 222; italics other than titles of works denote English-language words in the original)

[51] According to Montagu, that was indeed one of the Paramount initial suggestions.

This combination of bravado, insecurity, and fatalism is Eisenstein in a nutshell. And this is how this chapter will be structured: from bravado through insecurity and onto fatalism. First I will present "a snapshot" of the impression Eisenstein presented at the moment of his arrival to the United States and how he saw this moment and himself in it. I will then discuss the different perceptions of their circumstances within the now enlarged group, juxtaposing Eisenstein's perception with that of Montagu. I will also use the group's diverse impressions from the play *Once in a Lifetime* to tease out Montagu's, Aleksandrov's, and, most importantly, Eisenstein's impressions of Hollywood and their position within and in opposition to it at the end of their American adventures.

Eisenstein, Tisse, and Jesse Lasky disembarked in New York on May 12, 1930, around midday, and two days later Eisenstein was plunged into a PR campaign centered on him. On May 14 at 10:30 am he had an interview with *The New York Times* scheduled, then at 1 pm was present at a luncheon with Columbia University professors who were going to embark on a trip to the Soviet Union in the summer, and then at 3:30 pm the same day there was a press junket held for him at the Savoy Plaza with about sixty journalists present.

In the resulting pieces, one of the journalists compared him to a boxer, another to an oracle. They wanted to know what film he would make first. He refused to say. They wanted to know whether he would use stars. Eisenstein replied that he was not opposed to using stars as long as they were the right type for the role and could act as if they were not stars. The public-relations campaign was quite massive; several of the pieces were syndicated. Betty Ross, a journalist who had met Eisenstein in Moscow the previous year and therefore had the benefit of perspective, relayed the barrage of questions the director faced and described the effect they seemed to have on him:

> [t]wo deep furrows appeared in his unusually broad forehead as newspaper men and women clustered about him, eager to broadcast the plans, methods and ideas this celebrated director was bringing to his first American picture. … To all the questions[,] the man with the bewildered head of hair, light grey suit, striped grey tie, and bluish socks rising from his tan oxfords, listened intently. An extremely young man, very well set up, with keen, intelligent gaze and a fine, sensitive mouth. ("An Interview with Eisenstein," clipping from an unknown source in Eisenstein's collection at RGALI, 1923–1–2829 l. 171)

The newspapermen and women approved of Eisenstein's English; they were impressed by his youth; and they liked his enthusiasm. Mostly, as one journalist noted, he "performed well." Sometimes Eisenstein lied to make up a good story. He told interviewers, for instance, that he had learned English from the British troops stationed near his positions during the Civil War, which was very far from the truth: he had learned English as a good bourgeois child from his English governess in Riga and had spent the Civil War a considerable distance from the British troops, reading French and German books in the original and dabbling in theater. Sometimes Eisenstein joked, and his jokes were deemed good enough to be repeated. *Variety* first took notice of him when he was asked at a party soon after his arrival whether it was true that people in the Soviet Union did not laugh. "They will," replied Eisenstein, apparently deadpan, "when I tell them about this party." This joke he might have been perfecting since the winter lecture at the Sorbonne: "—French reporters who have been to Moscow, assure us that laughter has been killed there. Is that true?—There are still too many things that can be ridiculed,

and so, I assure you, people laugh in our country as well. I think they well laugh even more when I tell them about tonight's event" (Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye* 1, 559). At another party, he allegedly was the only person who refused to drink because, he explained, on entering the country he had sworn to uphold all its laws, including prohibition. This was also taken as a reason for a good laugh.[52] The question of humor will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

Eisenstein's letters present him as overwhelmed and very hopeful, which gave reason to his biographer Oksana Bulgakowa to claim that he took the professed adoration seriously: "The press ironically alluded to the 'newly-arrived Messiah,' and Eisenstein almost fell for the joke: the film star Rudolph Valentino … had died unexpectedly in 1926. They told me, Eisenstein wrote Pera [Atasheva], that he had just finished watching *Potemkin*" (*Sergei Eisenstein* 108–109). He was not that taken in, however. Three days after the arrival in Hollywood Eisenstein, describing his impression ("In general, everyone and everything is very nice and sweet. It seems I have a lot of *authority* here"), remarked that "the few unfriendly ones in the press are jeering about a 'Messiah'" (1923–1–1458 l. 12 verso; italics denotes English in the original).

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[52] The more serious, or perhaps simply older (or British), Ivor Montagu gave a description of the situation behind the joke that seemingly left no space for any humor: "…Hell and I insisted there must be no liquor in the house. It was sheer prudence. None of the three drank, but all were angry. Quite reasonably they felt we should be lacking in hospitality if our guests had to go dry. Everyone else kept liquor, prohibition or no prohibition. But I knew we should be vulnerable. Not only was there professional jealousy …but, and we were later proved right, sooner or later politics was bound to rear its ugly head" (79).

In the early days of the American trip, Eisenstein, at least for the benefit of his correspondents, appeared to take his success as his due. At the Paramount convention in Atlantic City, to which he had been whisked a mere three days after docking in Manhattan, he spoke and "had tremendous success"—as he reported to his mother (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 241). On the same day, he repeated this to Atasheva in some more detail, possibly trying out whether it would look good in print: "We are in Atlantic City now … At the annual *convention* (meeting) of Paramount. There are delegates from all corners of the world (Australia, Sumatra, Mexico, South America, Europe …). There around 700 delegates. … Today Lasky 'introduced' me terribly nicely and touchingly and then I made a speech and had enormous success. Afterwards, everyone came and shook my hand. … So far everything has been going well" ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 224; italics denotes English in the original). Eisenstein also began an article of his own, but stopped when it started to sound too glorifying an account of the capitalist film industry. It reproduced Eisenstein's excitement well: "The convention is very business-like and team-minded. Everyone is treating each other as friends. There are no 'ladies and gentlemen.' Just 'boys.' From the Vice President, the grey-haired Jesse Lasky, this appellation really sounds fatherly. Perhaps even grandfatherly" (1923–2–1118 l. 14).

In another two weeks he wrote more soberly and yet playfully to his friend, psychiatrist Aleksandr Luria: "My university career has been growing and expanding: so far *sind erledigt* [have been done]: *Columbia (New York), Yale (New Haven), Harvard (Boston)*; everywhere I have appeared with lectures and great success. Still ahead are Chicago, Pittsburgh, Princeton" (1923–2–1766 l. 5, italics denote German and English in the original). And again, on the same day, he wrote to his mother about the many demands on his time and attention: "I have been absolutely torn to pieces here" (1923–1–1551 l. 24).

The enthusiasm about university lectures was not just a means to show to his correspondents that he was more appreciated or treated more seriously abroad than at home. Giving lectures was for Eisenstein just another exercise in his "fake it till you make it" attitude, to which he referred sometimes as the "me too" complex (see Chapter One). He thought of himself as an imposter without a degree or a diploma: he had left the Institute of Civil Engineers, had never properly begun his Japanese studies, and had been kicked out of Meyerhold's theater school and therefore was eager to prove to anyone and everyone that he could indeed teach. And yet, the experience was always unnerving. The inevitable doubts that "those who can—do, those who can't—teach" entered his consciousness fully only next year in Mexico, when there had seemed to be precious little "doing" for too long (see Chapter Four).

In early August 1930, Eisenstein gave a lecture in the summer school of the University of California Los Angeles on "Cinema in Soviet Russia" (1923–1–2490 l. 1). They asked him for another lecture and he was already expressing hopes that he might read a whole course on cinema in the fall. On August 22, however, he was informed that the University did not consider his theme connected closely enough with academia. Associate Professor of Slavic Languages Alexander Kaun, a pre-1917 Jewish immigrant from Russia, a poetry scholar, who wrote to Eisenstein about the cancellation, expressed his personal opinion that "the new administration" was afraid of antagonizing conservatives in their midst (1923–1–1849 ll. 2–3).

In mid-September Eisenstein had his last public appearance: he gave a talk at a meeting of the Society of Motion Pictures Engineers. In the midst of the discussion of new standards and "methods of securing a large screen picture," to supplant the traditional 4:3 format, Eisenstein argued for a square screen with variable form within it, "[t]he one and only form equally fit by alternate suppression of right and left, or of up and down, to embrace all the multitude of

expressive rectangles of the world" (*Film Essays* 52). "The dynamic square" would be able to show not only the "infinite horizons, of fields, of plains and deserts," but, finally, and equally well, "[g]limpses through winding medieval streets or huge Gothic cathedrals overwhelming them," "decent shots of totem poles… or the profound and abysmal canyons of Wall Street in all their expressiveness" (Eisenstein, *Film Essays* 51, 53).[53] He then wrote in his notebook in a mix of Russian, French, and English:

> Yesterday spoke at the Academy in favor of the [square] screen.
>
> With my speech yesterday I had real, true, wide, and roaring success. The speech was the *star* of the evening. *Remarkable* though. I was brought to mind of [space left blank in the original] the black emperor—an idol *for a quarter of an hour—and how this quarter of an hour passes for the Negro left alone. This attitude towards us, 'red savages'… it persists. It was felt afterwards. Ostracized. Envy*.
>
> *Just remember*. (1923–2–1116 l. 30; italics denote English and French in the original; ellipsis in the original)

During this time Eisenstein was "MAD ABOUT" (the caps and English are his) the figure of Henri Christoph, a "king for a day" of the 18th century Haitian Revolution. The "black emperor" of the note combines his impressions from John Vandercook's 1928 novel *Black*

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[53] The expanded version of the speech was published twice in 1931 in slightly different versions: in *Hound and Horn* (April–June 1931) and *Close Up* 8.1 (March) and 8.2 (June).

Majesty and Eugene O'Neill's play *Emperor Jones*. Towards the end of his stay in Hollywood, Eisenstein identified with the "other," the black, the marginalized (not only when he frequented Harlem night clubs).

Did the change occur between September and May? In Europe, he had already started thinking of projects about the obverse of fame and fortune, and about fame that passes too fast. There was a project about the life of the mysterious arms dealer Basil Zaharoff (see Kleiman). There was Cendrars's novel *L'Or* that was picked up again in Hollywood and turned into the script called *Sutter's Gold*—the first one Eisenstein, Montagu, and Aleksandrov wrote for Paramount. It was about one of the California pioneers, John Augustus (Johann) Sutter, who had become a victim of the Gold Rush.[54] The project that Eisenstein had been developing on his own since 1926, *The Glass House*, in its later Hollywood iteration featured two artists, whose discoveries lead to their downfall.[55]

Later, on the way to Moscow in 1932, Eisenstein suggested in an interview to Lotte Eisner a possibility of making a film called *Twilight of the Gods* (*Götterdämmerung*): in addition to Zaharoff, its prototypes included Swedish financier Ivar Kreuger and Belgian tycoon Alfred Loewenstein (Kleiman). All of these projects he combined post factum under a unifying theme: the tragedy of the individual, as opposed to the victory of the masses of his 1920s films. These stories, however, were also about chance and fate, the past and posterity. The published version of *Sutter's Gold* ends with a voiceover declaring: "People die. Facts are covered in the dust of

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[54] See Richardson, 194–203.

[55] The genesis of this project is traced most fully in Bulgakowa, *Sergej Eisenstein* 109–123; its connections to contemporary practice and theory of architecture in Albera 123–142.

history. Legends are forgotten. … But songs—songs remain!" (qtd. in Montagu 206). This script proclaims its authors' preference for fictionalized accounts over factual or strictly historical, later in the 1930s evidenced in Eisenstein's choice of the story of Prince Alexander Nevsky over other possible subjects, reportedly, because so little was known of Nevsky's time and biography.

In his notes on O'Neill's play, Eisenstein emphasized the hypnotic sound of the tum-tum that draws the defeated "emperor" out of his hiding and leads him to his deserved death; its rhythm embodying the inexorable destiny, the dark future coming at him; the uncanny; the dark invisible fate.[56] The idea of fate that drags you with it was also behind Eisenstein's version of *An American Tragedy*: Clyde Griffith, "[g]uilty *only in the plan*, the intention, discarded later, he bears responsibility for the crime as if he had committed it and in this case his life ends *tragically* indeed in the electric chair. I was instantly captivated by the image of Destiny, the image of the implacable ancient Moiras that appears along with such a concept" (Eizenshtein, *Metod* 409; emphasis in the original). It is hard not to read Eisenstein's own circumstances into this interest in the workings of fate and chance, in the unforeseen consequences of one's decisions and even the consequences of the failure to make them.

The note about being "ostracized" gives a glimpse into Eisenstein's more "private" feelings towards the end of his stay in Hollywood. It presents an understanding of the situation, a self-portrait that he was ready to share only with himself. It is assumed, however, that at least in the beginning he "was welcomed like royalty and assumed that he was receiving the same treatment as Lubitsch and Sternberg" (Bulgakowa, *Sergei Eisenstein* 108). His early letters are

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[56] On the "rhythmic drum" (Eisenstein's term) see, for instance, Etkind 377–419.

indeed happy: he was met at the Hollywood train station by both Fairbanks and Sternberg; Maurice Chevalier was very apologetic that he couldn't be there as well (1923–1–1458 l. 12). Perhaps only later, but Eisenstein did realize that Fairbanks and Sternberg represented "different 'castes' of Hollywood society" (*Memuary* 1, 247; this memoir chapter was written in 1939). He did have an opportunity at the time to learn the true nature of the situation. In New York, Lev Monosson protected him and continued advising on whose acquaintance to cultivate. Montagu, who got detained in Los Angeles by his own work at Paramount and had been writing encouraging letters to Eisenstein in New York ("Be good. At least until I can once more protect you."—1923–1–1986 l. 34 verso), got on the train several stations before the journey's final point. He and Eisenstein had a long and intense conversation, barring entrance to their compartment to everyone else (according to Aleksandrov's diary note).

By midsummer, the disillusionment was already palpable in his correspondence: he did not find a company of like-minded artists in Hollywood as he seems to have expected. He wrote to one of his Moscow patrons Kirill Shutko at the end of September, after spending the whole summer in Hollywood:

> People here, just like buildings, are mostly made of papier-mâché.
>
> Flowers without smell, fruits without taste, women without morals, and men [sic]

> This is how Germans here are accustomed to describing the present situation. [57]
>
> Nevertheless, we are friends with a group of people: Sternberg, King Vidor, and Lubitsch are extremely nice, despite the difference in their artistic creations.
>
> Our most tender friendship is with the not-unknown-to-you Charlie Chaplin. (1923–1–1543 l. 1)

To his friend Léon Moussinac Eisenstein expressed his opinion even more forcibly in July: he felt that, apart from Chaplin, "Sternberg, and Lubitsch (this latter makes up for his faults by great personal charm), everyone is stupid or of mediocre interest. William de Mille is cretinous beyond belief. Vidor and Stroheim are not in Hollywood. … Gloria Swanson is in Europe. … Harold Lloyd is in Florida" (Moussinac 50).

It has been suggested that Eisenstein did not understand how to cultivate necessary connections, and instead praised people "at the bottom of the Hollywood hierarchy," like Sternberg, and spent time "with people who wielded absolutely no influence," like Seymour Stern of the journal *Experimental Cinema* and the Viertels, an immigrant couple from Europe, with the husband, Bertold, a theater and film director, and the wife, Salka, not yet the scriptwriter of *Queen Christina* and *Anna Karenina* (Bulgakowa, *Sergei Eisenstein* 113). It would be wiser to assume that Eisenstein was perfectly aware of the idiosyncrasy of his circle of acquaintances

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[57] This thought (perhaps initially expressed by "a German here") Eisenstein seems to have first jotted down in his notebook, in English and without a date: "Flowers in California do not smell. Just like the movies" (1923–2–1119 l. 1 verso).

and in fact deliberately cultivated it, especially its non-filmmaking part. He also frequented The Hollywood Bookstore, whose proprietor Stade used to serve in Pancho Villa's army (Eisenstein wrote about him in memoirs—*Memuary* 1, 291). He bought more books and wrote more letters than before.

Examining again Eisenstein's letter to Pera Atasheva that opened this section ("I don't know what kind of work conditions we will have here. … Well, we'll see. … I don't know, but I think we will pull it off. … And yet, it's never possible to know for sure"), it would suggest that he was quite prepared from the very start that things with Paramount might not work out. At least he both did and did not entertain hopes. What seemed like a new start, the promise of a new plane in his career, a much-needed solid ground, turned out to be more of the same.

Montagu in his memoirs asserted that, apart from the fact that he eventually had come to believe they had never stood a chance in Hollywood, they had failed "because of our delays, which gave the opportunity for the leadership conflict in Paramount to come into play" (140). His later narrative retains his long-ago impatience and blames the delays to a large extent on Eisenstein: "From the start, Sergei Mikhailich and I disagreed about one thing. I felt that we had no time to lose. … Six months seems a long time when you are young." Montagu insisted that they "must strike while the iron is hot," but everything "was against us acting on this precept" (80). He talked about Eisenstein's constant need for new impressions and his inability to move past his own idea, *The Glass House*, to a relatively more viable *Sutter's Gold*. At the same time, Montagu remembered that writing the scripts, even with multiple stages of transcribing and translating, "did not take very long overall" (107). His description of the events leading from the submission of the Dreiser script to the trip to New York to the final dismissal suggests swift progress from one to the other. As opposed to Montagu's claim that they did not use their time

wisely, Eisenstein's correspondence and notes show that, on the one hand, they did not waste much time at all, and, on the other, that waiting for Paramount decisions—especially the final one—was also part of the game.

The first suggestions for a possible film topic were exchanged already in Paris. Before Eisenstein left New York on June 5 (having waited for Aleksandrov's arrival for almost a month), he had meetings with Jesse Lasky and Walter Wanger, at which both had accepted the preliminary "type and storyline" of *The Glass House* (1923–2–1119 l. 55 verso; 1923–1–1551 l. 27). On June 19, three days after his arrival in Los Angeles, he also told the "story to Bachman and Schulberg" (1923–2–1119 l. 59).[58] On June 30 he discussed the project again with Lasky, who gave him "10–12 days for plan" (1923–2–1119 l. 62; the note in English). Two days later Eisenstein attended an "engineering conference about glass" (1923–2–1119 l. 62 verso). These two weeks in June are the only time that can be described as stalling on Eisenstein's part, the crucial weeks that he "lost," in Montagu's estimation. After spending several days on Chaplin's yacht near Catalina Island, Eisenstein complained to Atasheva:

> Actually I am very worried about the "*Story*" now. Whether I should make *Glasshouse* [sic] or another thing, also <u>very</u> fascinating.

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[58] "Schulberg, though he did not escape occasional arbitrariness and unpredictability—no man with such power as that exercised by a studio head in those days could avoid it—was able and intelligent and knew how to make his authority respected. And the Associate Producer, J.G. Bachmann—he had been a boyhood friend of Schulberg and his wife was a bosom friend of Mrs. Schulberg—was kind and intelligent too and extremely considerate" (Montagu 52).

> Chaplin thinks the idea outstanding and demands that we make only that! … But it's very difficult with the "*Story*", so that it corresponds to my *intention*[s] and at the same time suits… Mr Schulberg—he is the *production manager.*
>
> Quite a lot of *sufferings.*" ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 227; italics denote English in the original)

That "other thing" is apparently *Sutter's Gold*. Ten days later, after he had experienced an attack of depression and had employed the services of a psychoanalyst, Eisenstein wrote to Atasheva again: "*Glass House* will be not the first project. … At the moment we are preparing a different thing, no less exciting" (228; in the publication the letter is misdated). The next day, July 18, is the date noted on the treatment of *Sutter's Gold* (1923–1–103). On August 1 Eisenstein, Aleksandrov, and Montagu were in San Francisco on a short trip to see the locations and get more material for the script of *Sutter's Gold*, "upon which we have almost agreed" (letter to mother, 1923–1–1551 l. 38). To Pera Atasheva at the same time he reported that they were "relentlessly moving towards a script" (1923–1–1458 l. 19).

Montagu remembered the nature of their work on the scripts of both *Sutter's Gold* and *An American Tragedy*: "a cross between multiple chess and a conveyor belt system" that took "many hours, without sleep or rest" (342–43). Already in mid-August, 1930 Eisenstein composed a telegram to Atasheva: "Newest tempting suggestion Dreiser's *American Tragedy* wire immediately your advice" (1923–1–1458 l. 27). According to Montagu, Paramount's official reason for letting go of *Sutter's Gold* was that the film would be too expensive (109). About two weeks, it seems, were spent in negotiations, because the treatment of Dreiser's adaptation was submitted at the very end of August, and Eisenstein wrote to Atasheva during a

week-end at Tamarack Lodge: "It seems that our lives have reached a certain terra firma—yesterday it was decided that we will be shooting" (1923–2–1746 l. 11; underlining in the original). Four days later he explained more fully: "I have to confess this life is a mighty *hard job*. Only 4 days ago everything was hanging on a thread. … We have reached an arrangement at the last possible moment, outside the three-month 'arranging' period" (Eizenshtein, "Samoe uzhasnoe" 231; italics denote English in the original). It was at this point that he confessed (or perhaps bragged about) another attack of depression that had even led him to suicidal thoughts. It was also at that moment that Eisenstein wrote that Paramount was just like Moscow's Sovkino: they also had "seven Fridays a week"—a Russian expression meaning that nothing is permanent and everything can change, manifesting that peculiar relationship with time that Walter Benjamin in his Moscow diary referred to by the Russian word "*seichas,*"[59] and D.H. Lawrence in his *Mornings in Mexico* described as the "mañana" attitude. Suppposedly, the time in Europe also trained Eisenstein in the art of living in a situation of "precarious balance," as he wrote in his letters to friends at the time.

Another week later, in early September, Eisenstein wrote to Léon Moussinac in Paris: "I'm not sure that the Dreiser thing is what I'll end up doing. The script and everything else were just as ready for Cendrars' *L'Or*—an absolutely incomparable subject, which had been agreed upon from every point of view, and then, all of a sudden, they changed their minds. They may do the same thing with the new subject" (Moussinac 53).

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[59] "The real unit of time is the *seichas*. That means 'at once.' You can hear it ten, twenty, thirty times, and wait hours, days, or weeks until the promise is carried out" (Benjamin, 111).

The team, it seems, was reluctant to write a full treatment or a preliminary script, wary that *An American Tragedy* would suffer the fate of *Sutter's Gold*. But at the end of September Schulberg's personal assistant, the future legendary producer David O. Selznick informed Montagu: "Mr. Schulberg feels that he would rather consider Eisenstein's written treatment instead of having it told. I have advised him that Mr. Eisenstein and yourself feel you could have this ready by the end of next week" (1923–1–294 l. 2). The conveyor belt was on again, and on October 5 Eisenstein informed his mother that the script was turning out "great" (1923–1–1551 l. 43). The work on the script was finished around that date. On October 10 they paid for train tickets to New York, on October 13 they were in Chicago (1923–2–1884 l. 24). But on October 8, David Selznick had already sent one of his famous memos to Schulberg: "I have just finished reading the Eisenstein adaptation… the most moving script I have ever read. It was so effective, that it was positively torturing. When I had finished it, I was so depressed that I wanted to reach for the bourbon bottle. As entertainment, I don't think it has one chance in a hundred. …Is it too late to try to persuade the enthusiasts of the picture from making it?" (Selznick, 26–27).

Yet, after the team arrived to New York, they were made to wait, while the "enthusiasts of the picture" were being persuaded, perhaps. On October 20, only a couple of days left until the final "no," Eisenstein repeated the sentiment about his bosses having "seven Fridays a week" in a letter to Maksim Shtraukh in Moscow, summing up the experience of the previous year: "I have learned remarkably well … to live in conditions of 'unstable equilibrium.' It is worse here than back at home: seven Fridays in one week. 'Yes' today and 'no' tomorrow, etc." (qtd. in

Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 277).[60] He added that he "uses time to the full to watch all of Broadway productions as well as Harlem (the Negro neighborhood)—perhaps we will see each other soon!" (277). Indeed, no matter how much Eisenstein presented and justified his multiple trips around the US and within New York by the need to study the background and context for future films, these experiences had at least as much value on their own; whatever the outcome of the Hollywood adventure, they would remain a source of memories and inspiration.

On October 24 American newspapers reported that the contract between Eisenstein and Paramount had been dissolved. *Izvestiia* printed the news the next day.

4.3 "[K]NOWING OUR MANNERS AND THE [WAGGING] TONGUES OF YOUR 'FRIENDS'": BACK HOME

When in October 1930 Eisenstein wrote to Shtraukh that they might see each other soon, it is hard to tell whether he was not just saying it to make someone in Moscow believe he was coming back soon with no intention of actually doing it just yet. To be able to judge Eisenstein's

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[60] Note that initially Eisenstein equaled the "seven Fridays a week" attitude of Moscow and Hollywood; but later in his descriptions Hollywood becomes even worse than Moscow. Aleksandrov also felt that everything was happening very fast and that their position remained precarious. During the last train ride from Los Angeles to New York he wrote: "Days are running fast like a wheel… On the train again. I have travelled by train so much that I feel at home on a train and at home I always feel like on a train, uncertain and temporary" (*Moia zhena* 120–121).

intentions, it is necessary first to gauge the extent of his knowledge of what was going on back home, in the Russian film industry and in the country in general. The comparison of Paramount with Sovkino was not wistful or nostalgic: the demands of Moscow film officials had already been added, even before *Europa* rose anchor in Cherbourg, to the Americans' "seven Fridays." Adding to the contract's stipulation of making several films in succession, alternating Hollywood and Moscow, there was also Sovkino's desire to control Eisenstein's American films as well.

On 5 May 1930, as soon as Eisenstein informed Moscow about his successful negotiations with Paramount (see Chapter Two), he was sent the following telegram from Konstantin Shvedchikov: "Sovkino liquidated merged into newly-formed All-Union Film and Photo Combine. All received offers clear with Bogdanov, Monosson. A joint sound film is desirable here in the Soviet Union without need to put in foreign currency from our side. Participation in your work of people sent by us" (1923–1–2378 l. 16). Moscow also suggested their own themes. The most well-known of these Hollywood hopes and aspirations of the Soviet film officials was the idea of co-producing an adaptation of Aleksandr Serafimovich's Civil War novel *The Iron Stream* (first published in 1924). On 16 June 1930, Monosson informed Eisenstein that he had just received a telegram from Intorgkino (an organization just created to oversee all Soviet film import and export) that entrusted Eisenstein with researching the possibilities of a jointly produced adaptation of *The Iron Stream* (1923–1–1984 l. 11).[61]

[61] It has been said that it was Lev Monosson who pressed Serafimovich's novel on Eisenstein, but that of course was not so. Despite having had genuine interest in *The Iron Stream* in the mid-1920s, Eisenstein clearly recognized that this was neither the time nor the place for it, while

Eisenstein replied directly to Intorgkino almost a month later, on July 10, that Paramount was "sympathetic" towards the idea of collaboration. He asked for the book and the script. Subsequent correspondence makes it clear that the script was, in fact, nowhere near ready, was questionable in terms of its political "soundness," and its production was completely unimaginable in Hollywood—that is, could only be imagined by someone who had little understanding of the politics of American film production and could think that Eisenstein would continue making films on Soviet themes outside of the Soviet Union. After Monosson forwarded the book to Eisenstein in Hollywood on July 26, nothing more was heard of it (1923–1–1984 l. 24). Another "Soviet" idea for a Hollywood picture came apparently in Paris from scriptwriter and novelist Lev Nikulin: the only thing known about it so far is that it had something to do with robots. Perhaps the idea had only been expressed to Aleksandrov who replied honestly at the end of June 1930: "We can't yet think closely [sic] about the script before we take stock of our prospects: in terms of money, organization, and infrastructure. That is why at this moment I can't tell you what to do about the material on ROBOTS" (*Moia zhena* 88; emphasis in the original). He nevertheless suggested that the material should be reserved for them for the immediate future.

Nikulin's father, a theater actor and impresario, had immigrated to the United States after the October Revolution. Perhaps Nikulin, who in the mid-1920s switched from film scripts to novels and journalistic work, while keeping some ties to film administration, tried to get overseas as well. At least a number of people who wrote to Eisenstein clearly did. Even the most

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Monosson was never in a position to be so imperative in suggesting projects to him. His role was always that of an intermediary and a trusted advisor.

prominent Soviet directors tried to repeat Eisenstein's coup, follow in his footsteps, and exploit his position—which, as he reminded them, he barely occupied himself. The pleas, however, show that his position was indeed enviable to other Soviet filmmakers and was thought to be firm enough. Of the people already abroad, there was, first of all, Boris Ingster, who assisted with *Romance Sentimentale* and almost took Aleksandrov's position next to Eisenstein (see Chapter Two). He also made the trip to the United States, apparently under the promise of being made part of the team (indeed, Eisenstein noted down that on May 18 in New York he "arranged about Hell[,] Ingster" (1923–2–1119 l. 51)—that is, Boris Ingster and Montagu's wife Hell). Ingster arrived together with Aleksandrov and was also detained at Ellis Island. Eisenstein, however, bailed out only Aleksandrov, apparently because by this time there could be a place only for Hell or for Boris as the group's assistant, and Eisenstein owed Montagu for his efforts to bring about the team's Hollywood contract. It is unclear whether Eisenstein or Amkino had anything to do with Ingster's eventual release from Ellis Island—the information about it comes from Aleksandrov's diary notes: he evidently kept in touch with Boris but did not hurry to bring the question up before Eisenstein. Judging by Montagu's memoirs, Ingster ("almost the double of Grisha in height and build and colour, but of less prepossessing features") did make it out West to join them (72). Montagu suggests that Ingster "did not belong and soon he left us, to seek his own support" (77). His ingenuity and determination, however, allowed him to succeed where Eisenstein and Co. had failed: "I see his name now on my television set as producer of *The Man from Uncle*" (72). It was also possible that, unlike Eisenstein, he indeed had nothing to lose and nothing to go back to.[62]

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[62] I have not been able to trace fully whether any personal documents of Ingster, who died in

By those colleagues still in the Soviet Union, Eisenstein was seen as a touchstone.[63] His success would be more than just his own. His failure would almost automatically preclude any other future arrangement like this (which it did, albeit through no fault of Eisenstein, because so much was changing in both the Soviet Union and the United States). Il'ia Trauberg, a younger brother of Leonid Trauberg of the FEKS fame, a film journalist and a beginning director, had insinuated himself as an Assistant Director at the *October* shoot in Leningrad in the spring of 1927, and in 1929 directed a successful drama *The Blue Express*. In his letters to Eisenstein he was trying on the mantle of the next generation of an excommunicated student (Meyerhold–Stanislavsky, Eisenstein–Meyerhold, Trauberg–Eisenstein) and was quite persistent in his inquiries, even half-joking ones. In June of 1930 he wrote in reply to one of Eisenstein's letters:

> I shut my eyes and see you in Hollywood—among those people, those pavilions, those streets—almost cry with envy, truth be told…
>
> I won't hide from you that in my feverish dreams I sometimes see myself there as well—especially after reading reviews of *The Blue Express*—but here my madness ends and I return to reality. (1923–1–2151 l. 17)

A recent graduate of the cinematography department at the State Film Technikum (GTK), Sergei Strunnikov knew Eisenstein from the time he had run the directing workshop in 1928–29,

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1978, have been preserved.

[63] Much more so than the possibility of theater maître Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko "making it" in Hollywood in 1926–27.

and was at the moment working as a photographer in the magazine *Kino i Zhizn'* [*Cinema and Life*] and as an assistant cameraman on Pudovkin's *A Simple Case*/*Life's Very Good*. He showered Eisenstein with pleas since late 1929: "I have decided finally and irrevocably to go to America, no matter what it costs me"; "Write where necessary—or, rather, write for me as a representative of the young generation/the [film] school; I will do a lot for our cinema industry and will justify my trip; I know English; I will be able to greatly benefit my school; I will collect all the materials and all the data to improve the film school's condition" (1923–1–2133 l. 7). Despite claiming to also have the support of Nikolai Podvoiskii (who was one of Eisenstein and Aleksandrov's patrons), Strunnikov never did get the coveted invitation.

Well-established filmmakers, while not exhibiting the same eagerness, were interested nonetheless. Pudovkin was struggling with *A Simple Case* for a long time; first with its silent and then a sound version—and meanwhile was apparently probing the waters for a potential picture abroad. By the end of September 1930, Monosson had almost managed to secure an invitation for him and his cameraman Anatolii Golovnia from Universal (1923–1–1458 l. 28; "Samoe uzhasnoe" 233). At that time, however, Soiuzkino (the successor of Sovkino) was about to be rocked by yet another calamity, perhaps the gravest one to date: its new head Martem'ian Riutin, who had only been appointed to this post at the end of April (jointly with Konstantin Shvedchikov), was expelled from the Bolshevik Party for "treacherous and double-dealing behavior and attempt at underground propaganda of right-wing opportunistic views" and a month

later was dismissed from his post as Sovkino's chairman (Deriabin 53). Pudovkin eventually only went as far as Germany in 1931, filming part of his film in Berlin and Hamburg.[64]

In the summer of 1930, Eisenstein received a letter from Aleksandr Dovzhenko in Berlin where the Ukrainian director had come for the premiere of his *Earth*. Dovzhenko suggested a story to be filmed with Charlie Chaplin in the lead.[65] Eventually, from July to September 1930, Dovzhenko went also to Prague, Paris, and London, making plans for work in Paris that came to naught (Deriabin 48).[66] In this case, Eisenstein's help took the form of $250 (1923–1–1458 l. 11).[67] Even Fridrikh Ermler (to whom Trauberg referred in one of his letters as "our hope") tried to feel out the possibilities, perhaps goaded by Aleksandrov's letter from August 1930, telling him that Chaplin had liked *Fragment of an Empire*, and that the general interest about Soviet cinema was high: "We've heard that Pudovkin and Golovnia are coming to Hollywood in September. Perhaps you will as well?" (*Moia zhena* 112). A month later, in September, Eisenstein sent Ermler some American reviews of *Fragment of an Empire*, but was much more cautious with dealing out invitations: "Regarding working with us … the question is doubly difficult… [because of] the visa … Perhaps we will be able to do something when the question

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[64] Riutin was replaced in November 1930 by Boris Shumiatskii (see Miller 20), who would play an important role in Eisenstein's subsequent career until the late 1930s, when he in turn would be dismissed, arrested, and shot.

[65] See also: Shlegel' 144–145. The letter was published in *Iskusstvo kino* 5 (1958).

[66] In this, Dovzhenko apparently went over the head of the Soviet film officials who were none too happy about it (see 2496–2–3 l. 100).

[67] Not $100 as Montagu remembered it and not in October but in July–August (Montagu 123).

of our work becomes secured on all points" (1923–1–1553 l. 1). And that question never did become secure.

While it can be inferred from these letters that Eisenstein was not looking forward to seeing any of his colleagues in Hollywood, he did imply that Pera Atasheva's presence there could be crucial to his success. Just as in Europe, he wrote to her repeatedly, trying to make her join the team. Aleksandrov chimed in; they had tried to get both Pera and Aleksandrov's wife Ol'ga to Europe as well.[68] Five days after landing, basking in the attention of everyone at the Paramount convention in Atlantic City, Eisenstein asked: "By the way, *what about your coming?* Has the case been closed <u>completely</u> or *there's a possibility of the revival of the matter? If so,* do everything to come at least for 2 or 3 months" ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 225; italics denote English in the original; emphasis in the original). Pera's uncle lived in Los Angeles; Eisenstein, Tisse, and Aleksandrov visited him in early June, after which Eisenstein asked again: "What do you think about USA????" ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 228; English in the original). It seemed easier for the uncle to send a personal invitation instead of the group doing that, but the sensitive Pera questioned their need of her and did not want to simply be "a poor relative." Throughout the summer both Aleksandrov and Eisenstein admonished and pleaded with her (*Moia zhena* 106–107; "Samoe

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[68] It was mostly the team's female dependents who remained at home: Tisse's wife, sister, and mother are all in Moscow; Eisenstein's mother in Leningrad, Aleksandrov's wife and small son in Moscow. Both contemporaries and historians have traditionally understood such arrangements as protection of the state against the defection of its citizens, with families being held as "hostages."

uzhasnoe" 231).[69] Even in asking for Atasheva's support in Hollywood, Eisenstein presented a picture of an egoistic genius: "Please don't forget that since you have not been present next to me not one line of text has come out of me—and if *Rotha*[70] writes in *Close Up* about *Zola*, then... Incidentally, he listened to me for a long time in London (Maybe at least that will convince you!!!)" ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 231; italics denote English in the original; emphasis in the original).

That Eisenstein wanted Atasheva to come to Hollywood was common knowledge in Moscow. She told him so herself: "[Sergei] Tret'iakov says that if he were you, he would do everything to prevent me from leaving Moscow—this is how well, in his opinion, I place [chess] pieces for you on the board" (1923–1–1621 l. 80). Tret'iakov was right: she served as the team's liaison with the press, the film authorities, and the families. In the same letter, for instance, she told the group to send greetings to the upcoming conference on film sound in Moscow, because something was "very much (terribly!!) needed after all the rumors" (1923–1–1621 l. 80).[71]

The group discovered that rumors were easy to start and perpetuate, but harder to squash. The line between private and public information in the team's letters to Moscow was a fine one.

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[69] Aleksandrov was hoping to use that opportunity for getting his wife Ol'ga to Hollywood as well, with Atasheva's help: "Motivate this request saying that I want to meet her in order to go back together" (*Moia zhena* 106–107).

[70] Eisenstein means an article by Paul Rotha, who was among those attending his lectures in 1929.

[71] What the group sent was a warning: "If our films do not sound and talk, the American screen will be closed for them" (1923–1–2804 l. 65).

Letters could be used for official or unofficial exchange of information by their addressees. For example, a copy of Aleksandrov's letter to Ermler was given to or acquired by Soiuzkino's Informbureau, adding to their collection of materials concerning the trip, such as Eisenstein's interview with a Chicago newspaper or documents from the group used for a publication in the Moscow journal *Cinema and Life* (*Moia zhena* 117). Il'ia Trauberg confessed to Eisenstein that he was not happy with the tone of his letters to him, as opposed to letters to others, because he had had "occasion to read your—especially Grisha's—letters, to Pera, for instance" (1923–1–2151 l. 16). Eisenstein counted on that kind of dissemination to some extent; sometimes he confessed to describing events in a certain way, designed to "*à faire enrager les 'amis'*" ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 231).

Sometimes individual phrases from private letters keep being repeated and passed on beyond recognition: thus, half of one of Aleksandrov's letters to Atasheva was dedicated to his attempts to explain how a casual phrase from a previous missive to Moscow could have been taken for an indication of strained relationships between him and Eisenstein. The letter shows the mechanism of disseminating information about their trip and how easy it was for this information to slide into rumors—something that would finally lead to quite disastrous results during the Mexican part of the trip. In part in order to prevent slippage from private to public and vice versa, Eisenstein would specifically inform Atasheva about something: "very private"; or Aleksandrov, on the other hand, would implore her: "If a news piece can be made out of my incoherent stories, please do it, dear Pearl"—and she did (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 224). Sometimes, as in February 1930 after the team's lecture tour in the Netherlands, she took the decision of making certain information that was sent to her public and even edited it to Eisenstein's dissatisfaction. When Eisenstein complained about the results, she calmly

responded: "Your line has to be absolutely clear here. I did not need anything more. You can scold me however much you want; I did my part and nobody has any more ambiguities left" (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 222).[72]

Friends and patrons in Moscow and Leningrad, in return, tried to keep Eisenstein abreast of developments connected to him and the film industry in general. Not surprisingly, quite regularly they also asked to repudiate in writing some specific rumor (usually connected to Eisenstein's alleged desire to stay abroad). Once even Il'ia Trauberg reverted from jokes to seriousness. It was early on during the European part of the trip, in November 1929, but it was symptomatic of the whole almost three-year period of travels:

> You do not write anything concrete; newspapers have recently (after your journey around Switzerland) been quiet; meanwhile inexplicable, and at times even obscene rumors have been going around. These rumors go beyond being a personal matter and are turning into a matter of public interest. I hope that you, knowing our manners and the [wagging] tongues of your "friends," will understand the necessity to dispel these rumors with a letter (to me, for instance) that can be published or with an article or something like this. It would be very useful, in connection with rumors about Zarkhi and our "Molodtsov case," about which you have perhaps heard or read. So do this, it will be necessary and

[72] The resulting piece was published in *Kino* (Moscow) on 10 March 1930.

beneficial not only for you but for the whole "left front" as well.

(1923–1–2151 l. 13)

The "Molodtsov case" concerned a Leningrad scriptwriter, Nikolai Molodtsov, who in September 1929 attracted the wrath of his colleagues, because "having encountered certain ideological demands of our film production organizations, was not able to keep up with them and turned for help to capitalist film organizations of Germany and America, offering them his services. Moreover, it was done in such a groveling manner, with such spurning of our cinema industry that only a renegade could dare to do" (Podol'skii 1). Apparently, Molodtsov wrote to Paramount (it was never made clear in what language and how his letters had ended up in a Leningrad newspaper instead of Hollywood), offering them his scripts with such alleged remarks as: "Being of a not very high opinion about my nation, I presented Russians here without gloating over their national traits. These people and the Russian background are taken as exoticism, taking into account Western viewers' interest in them, but without their reevaluation" (Podol'skii 1). The article, where the quotations were printed, was named "Pil'niakitis in cinema," referring to the writer Boris Pil'niak—and recent accusations against him and Evgenii Zamiatin of publishing their works in the West.[73] Il'ia Trauberg was, incidentally, one of the first to condemn Molodtsov publicly in late September, saying that "molodtsovitis" (*molodtsovshchina*) "are those definitely anti-Soviet, emigrant tendencies that have started to seep through to the filmmaking community… certain workers of Soviet cinema, who are ready, using one or another pretext, to sell their services to foreign, capitalist organizations." The community needed to let them know, he concluded, "that the name of a Soviet film worker is

[73] See, for instance, Galushkin 89–146 and Reck, passim.

incompatible with double-dealing, with working 'for us' and 'for them' ("Delo Molodtsova v Lenarrke" 2). Molodtsov was voted out of all professional organizations, to which he had belonged. Meanwhile the "anti-pil'niakitis" movement in cinema grew and by mid-October included quite loud demands to know what, for instance, Natan Zarkhi, the scriptwriter of *Mother* and *The End of Saint Petersburg*, was doing in Berlin, since it was rumored that he was selling his scripts to "bourgeois" film companies (Rafalovich 1). It was during the month the film community in Moscow and Leningrad was waiting for a reply from Zarkhi that Trauberg wrote to Eisenstein. Perhaps not coincidentally, at the time Eisenstein, Tisse, and Aleksandrov were helping, at Zarkhi's request, with the filming and the editing of Mikhail Dubson's film *Giftgas* (*Poison Gas*). Zarkhi's letter to the Association of Workers in Revolutionary Cinema (ARRK) finally stated unequivocally that, far from working with some capitalists, he had been allowed to come to Berlin "with the agreement of the responsible authorities" to work at Derussa and after its bankruptcy—at Prometheus (see Chapter Two). The only film he worked on for these organizations was *Giftgas*.[74]

Zarkhi then presented three points in his defense: the script was based on a play that had been banned by the German censors for communist propaganda; the director Dubson was working in the Soviet Trade Mission in Berlin and had been presented to Zarkhi by a high-placed Sovkino official Trainin; and, finally, that other Soviet filmmakers were involved in the production: Aleksandrov and Tisse filmed the concluding scenes and Eisenstein helped the

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[74] Zarkhi's letter to Eisenstein asking him for help with the film was published in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 227–228. According to the letter, the company immediately responsible for the film was neither Derussa nor Prometheus but the private Löw & Co.

director with his advice: “Those are all of my crimes. I don’t think that they could be qualified as ‘prostituting to the capitalist world’!” (Zarkhi 3). The vigilant members of the Leningrad chapter of ARRK, who were in charge of the newspaper that fanned the scandal, were not impressed and ominously concluded that all the materials about Zarkhi’s activities abroad were continued to be collected by the Association and that the question remained open. The role of Trauberg, his LenARRK colleagues, and their newspaper in this story was thus two-faced: they were disseminating rumors and demanding their rebuttal at the same time. At the time Eisenstein managed to stay away from the debate, but similar tendencies simmered through the following months, as more Soviet citizens refused to return from abroad.

It is not surprising, then, that in the summer of 1930, together with various inquiries about the possibilities of working abroad, Eisenstein received several correspondences persuading him, on the contrary, to come back as soon as possible and informing him of the exciting difficulties of the new era of the Soviet Union, the era of industrialization. Esfir' Shub wrote expansively:

> I know that this year will join other years of your life because of your intellectual growth. I know that the main thing is not the film that you made in Paris and will make in America (although this is also somehow important for you). The main thing is what you will be like when you come back, what and how you will want to do and will do back home.
>
> And it is important that you have not lived this past year with us. … So many, many things have taken place this year. Or perhaps we experience time differently here. (384–385)

The opinion was not yet shared by everyone. When Sergei Vasil'ev, the future co-director of *Chapaev*, heard of the signing of the Paramount contract, he wrote that scriptwriter Aleksandr Rzheshevskii (who was then working with Pudovkin and was later to work with Eisenstein on the ill-fated *Bezhin Meadow*) considered it necessary for Eisenstein to return, while "George [sic] [Georgii Vasil'ev] and I maintain the opposite point of view" (1923–1–1702 ll. 1–2).

If Eisenstein's correspondents often had to be cryptic or were too caught up in domestic affairs and propaganda to speak plainly, he also received more candid reports about the current state of affairs in Soviet cinema. In the fall of 1930, while Eisenstein was awaiting Paramount's decision in New York, he got a chance to meet Joe Koffman, an American engineer who had just got back from Moscow where he had taken samples of sound equipment and had participated in the September conference on sound cinema (Miller 23 (he retranscribes Koffman's first name as "Joey"); "Na proizvodstvenno-tekhnicheskoi" 2). Perhaps the meeting happened in the days immediately following Paramount's final negative decision: in any case, Eisenstein possessed this information while he was trying to decide his next move: whether or not to go back to the Soviet Union. Koffman's impressions did not inspire much desire to return. Eisenstein remembered his stories half a year later, in the spring of 1931, when he wrote to Lev Monosson from Mexico that, according to new letters from Moscow, negative film was in shorter and shorter supply and the best directors and cameramen were being fired: "In short, the same atmosphere as Koffman described to us in New York back in the day, only much worse. Pictures are not being made and as always in periods like this there are only intrigues and squabbles" (2617–1–42 l. 13 verso). It seemed reasonable at the time, and it had seemed so before to wait out the lean years.

While vacationing on Charlie Chaplin's yacht near Catalina Island off the Pacific coast in early July, Eisenstein stumbled upon an image, which he immediately applied to his situation. His postcards to Lev Monosson in New York and Jean Painlevé in Paris bear the image of the flying fish. Perhaps the fish jumping and flying near Catalina reminded him of his contract with Paramount, with its stipulation of making one film here, the other there etc. In a postcard to Pera Atasheva he elaborated on this idea, comparing himself to the flying fish: at home everywhere and nowhere at the same time (1923–2–1746 l. 4).

As was mentioned above, soon after the return from Catalina Eisenstein confessed to Atasheva that he had been suffering from "hysterical depression." "In the most enviable of circumstances," he explained, he had an attack that almost took him by surprise and threatened to sabotage his efforts of reaching an agreement with Paramount about the first film he would make. A month and a half later the depression returned: "I am so lonely, Pearl, you can't even imagine! Anywhere, everywhere, and always (right now we are among the most gigantic trees, and yet I think just like among the lindens at Chistye Prudy. And this is horrible because both these sequoias … and Chistye Prudy's lindens … are not at all equally close to me, but on the contrary, equally infinitely distant" ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 230; emphasis in the original). He acknowledged that he really could not and should not have anything in common with the Hollywood crowd, and yet "this is not characteristic of my relationship with Hollywood in particular; these are my relationships anywhere, everywhere, and always" ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 230). After the first attack Eisenstein turned to psychoanalysis. Montagu and others after him saw in this a needless indulgence, an expenditure of "hours—and cash," both in short supply—or else the result of Eisenstein recognizing that he needed to prove himself to his Paramount bosses (105). In this section, I have presented a new factor of Eisenstein's unease and psychological

turmoil in Hollywood, unrecognized heretofore by Eisenstein scholars: the pressure that Moscow and everything connected to the Soviet Union and its cinema continued to excert on him. Again, as in Europe, Eisenstein tried to appease both masters at once, but the demands of Paramount and Sovkino were clearly incompatible and his efforts, just like in the classic Russian proverb of trying to catch two hares at once, were far from successful.

4.4 "I DID NOT CONSIDER IT AS A JOKE WHEN I FIRST SAW [IT]": HOLLYWOOD AND HUMOR

Apparently, no one could have foreseen exactly the kind of meeting the team eventually had with Paramount bosses in New York when they announced: "Gentlemen, it is over. Our agreement is at an end."[75] Still, Montagu remembered: "We were shocked, but not surprised" (120). I have described above how the timeline of the work with Paramount presented by Montagu in his memoirs differs from the picture reflected in Eisenstein's notes and correspondence. Having arrived in New York after the frienzied months of writing two scripts in succession,

[75] This is Montagu's version of the late 1960s—he names Lasky as their interlocutor (120). Eisenstein in a draft of the article "Help Yourself!" (October 1932) mentions a conversation with Schulberg after the first treatment was submitted and then says "…Mr. Schulberg B.P. together with Washington D.C. did not let 'the red dogs' (our official moniker in fascist circles) realize all of this on the screen …" (emphasis in the original; this passage was excluded from the published version of the article) (Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye* 2, 79; emphasis in the original). Perhaps Lasky, who had brought Eisenstein and his team from Europe, relayed Schulberg's decision.

accompanied on Eisenstein's part by preparatory sketches and preliminary treatments of individual scenes, they once again had to wait for a decision. There had already been themes and scripts that were "fixed and un-fixed," as Eisenstein wrote to his Paris friend Painlevé ("*Tout était fixé et tout c'est défixé*").[76] Almost a week passed since their arrival in New York until the final meeting that ended their association with Paramount. Almost two weeks passed after that before Eisenstein went back to Los Angeles. There was time to visit Theodore Dreiser at his ranch on Lake Adirondack; time to spend in New York's theaters and museums, to buy books and to gather autographs on books already bought (1923–2–1068 ll. 69–70). They were certainly not surprised. In fact, one could even doubt that Eisenstein and his companions were much shocked.

While they were waiting for the Paramount decision, a glimpse of what was to come was offered by the play by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman, *Once in a Lifetime.* In mid-October it had only been two weeks after the play's official New York premiere, but it was already much talked about. Montagu reported that he and the Russian trio had gone to see it "ostentatiously," but failed to express why exactly the play appealed to Eisenstein to make him do what Montagu referred to as one last "dig" at Hollywood society—announce to a journalist that he wanted to direct this play in Russia. Its "quite standard" theme, says Montagu, revolved around "a young man involved almost unintentionally in the crazy world of cinema, suddenly lifted to undeserved success and as unreasonably smashed down again" (122). The best that can be said for Montagu, it seems, is that he unconsciously drew a parallel between the main hero of *Once in a Lifetime*

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[76] Undated letter (summer 1930) kept in Jean Painlevé's archive in Paris; it can be seen as another version of the "seven Fridays a week" attitude.

being "unreasonably smashed down" and the impending "sudden death" of their *American Tragedy* project. However undeserved Eisenstein's initial success in securing the Paramount contract could seem to his enemies, no one could say that he lacked intentions. Also significantly, contrary to Montagu's memory, the main character in *Once in a Lifetime* (the hapless, almost brainless, and yet lovable George Lewis) does not actually end up "smashed down"—hence the more poignant irony of Hart and Kaufman: stupidity and happenstance win in Hollywood; intellect, hard work, and even perseverance do not.

Both Eisenstein and Aleksandrov left clearer indications of what they had seen in the play. First of all, they both recognized much of what they had witnessed in Hollywood. Aleksandrov noted that "[t]he comedy wonderfully makes fun of the idiotic part of Hollywood and hits all the spots of its absurdity" (*Moia zhena* 121). The parallels were thinly veiled indeed, especially with the "cameos"—like Helen Hobart, who, Eisenstein wrote to Shtraukh, was meant to be Louella Parsons (Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 280).

Aleksandrov thought that the model for the German director Rudolf Kammerling in the play was Ernst Lubitsch: "He is outraged by idiotic instructions, speaks an angry monologue, threatens to leave the shoot and, having reached frenzy, ends his speech with 'You'll see, I will drop everything and *will go with Eisenstein to Russia!*'" (*Moia zhena* 122; emphasis in the original). This line, remarked Aleksandrov, "causes a burst of applause. This is how popularity begins" (he also called it "Eisen's growing popularity in America"—*Moia zhena* 121).[77] The

[77] This is how this monologue by film director Rudolf Kammerling (played by Walter Dreher) looked on the page: "For two cents I would go back to Germany and Ufa! ... America! Reinhardt begged me not to come! On his knees in the Schauspielhaus he begged me!" The

added irony in Aleksandrov's reading of this scene was that all of them (about two dozen people in total, including Lubitsch), had just traveled from Los Angeles to New York together in two special Paramount train cars. During the trip, Lubitsch was the object of jokes—he had gotten into a fist fight with his ex-wife's lover and was taking with him to New York a personal trainer and a masseur in case of another skirmish ("Moia zhena" 120–121). Both Aleksandrov's and Eisenstein's amusement at this is recorded in their respective notes.

Contrary to what Montagu believed, Eisenstein was not at all joking when he announced that he wanted to direct the Russian version of the play. He was so impressed that he wrote to Maksim Shtraukh that he would be bringing the play with him to the Soviet Union and that it had roles for both Shtraukh and his wife, actress Iudif' Glizer. It seems he suggested for Shtraukh the part of George Lewis (the hapless actor from New York who rises to the top through no fault of his own), "as if written specifically with you in mind" (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 280). For Glizer, he suggested two parts to choose from: either May ("a 'third-rate' actress of Burlesque who goes to Hollywood 'to teach dialogue' to silent actresses") or the formidable gossip columnist Helen Hobart. The seriousness of Eisenstein's intentions may be judged from the fact that on November 1 he purchased the rights for staging the play in the USSR from Sam Harris, the show's producer and the owner of the Music Box Theater, where it had premiered (1923–2–1885 l. 1).

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publicity has already been sent out about a female star he has to use, but she is too bad for the role, so Kammerling shouts into a phone: "Tell him I take the next boat back to Germany! … I will not ruin my American career!" After this he hangs up, exclaims: "What a country! Oh[,] to be in Russia with Eisenstein!" and storms out (Hart and Kaufman, 117–118).

Among other well-known names mentioned in the play, there was Griffith ("[my grandfather] was in the Civil War, too.—*The Civil War*—didn't D.W. Griffith make that?"). During that visit to New York, Eisenstein finally met his long-time hero: the description of this chance encounter with Griffith is one of the longest entries in his notebooks for the American period, perhaps the longest one (1923–2–1116 ll. 53–55).

Eisenstein immediately created a scene that reads like a quotation from a detective novel or a film noir script; later he refined it in a letter to Shtraukh and, subsequently, in lectures and articles.[78] The play showed Eisenstein on that very same level with D.W. Griffith and the Barrymores; now truly part of the international cultural and intellectual elite, in the name of which Hart and Kaufman fought this light-hearted battle with the stupidity and the illogical demands of Hollywood. Moreover, the name of Eisenstein was not only part of film history books but part of a fictional world as well. For him to bring the play to the Soviet Union, to direct it himself, and to have his name mentioned in the text would be turning the fiction on its head; in our eyes—an almost postmodern gesture that, he felt, would enable him to direct theater again, which was something he had sworn to himself not do while his teacher Meyerhold was directing as well (See Chapter One). At the same time, Eisenstein could also use this play as a sign of some, however small, measure success in the United States—at least, if he did not have a

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[78] "Grey Broadway. Lights of advertisements have been switched off. A grey *Big House* on the corner. People with taxi badges and grey faces. … steps of the grey [Hotel] Astor. Spittle. Grey marble columns. They have already started cleaning up. A man by the *desk*. Grey. Eyes. Suit. Hat. Cheeks. It's getting close to morning and grey bristle has appeared. Griffith" (1923–2–1116 l. 53; italics denote English in the original).

film to show for himself, he could show what he had been against in Hollywood; what people thought of him, and that some of them, like himself, preferred making films in Moscow rather than in California. In his report on "Cinema and Theater in the West" at the Moscow Theater Workers Club in September 1932, without mentioning his plans to direct the play, he even expanded the irony to include early Soviet sound cinema as well: "You can't think of a better 'funhouse mirror.' Our dear Potylikha [film studio] might think that this is a parody of it" (Eizenshtein, "[Neskol'ko slov]" 133).

That Hart's and Kaufman's jokes reminded Eisenstein of something more serious is evident in a short draft, apparently for some possible talk or article, that was preserved in his American notebooks. The draft was written in English and can be dated between mid-October, when he saw *Once Upon a Time*, and 10 November:

> Everybody knows the current jokes of Hollywood. Recently there has been made even a play on the Hollywood jokes. I mean the grim naturalistic play *Once in a Lifetime*… But the great joke I mean [is] something very different.
>
> To say the truth[,] I did not consider it as a joke when I first saw [it].
>
> It is the thing that strikes you in whatever Studio you come. They begin to show you the engineering side and you are startled by the genius etc. … Then they propose to look at rushes… and there it starts.
>
> I exactly remember by […] (1923–2–1118 l. 25 verso)

The note breaks off here but description of this or a similar occasion is continued in Ivor Montagu's vignette, which, he suggested, contained the ultimate reason of their Hollywood "failure." The scene is set not in a screening room, but at an intimate party at Jesse Lasky's house, with the Schulbergs, the Montagus, and Eisenstein present. After dinner the four men

> …leaned back in the depths of our impossibly padded, doze-inducing, deep armchairs.
>
> It was then that we made our first and, I firmly believe, fatal mistake.
>
> Lasky spoke:
>
> "Mr. Eisenstein, Mr. Montagu, now that we are alone together—what do you think of our pictures?"
>
> Neither Sergei Mikhailovich nor I was foolish enough for either to look at the other. But we both hesitated a fraction too long. A fraction of a second was enough.
>
> It did not matter what we said after that. (80)

A variation on that also came in Eisenstein's speech at a banquet of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers held at the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York on October 22 (the note may have been a draft for this speech). Here is the core of the matter for Eisenstein:

> …You know, everybody asks the employees if they like the boss, "Hollywood." The joke of that boss is that it will not smile. When you visit Hollywood[,] you are shown the marvelous installations and the results of research, and at the end you are always invited to look at the pictures. The differences between the

> technical and artistic accomplishments are tremendous. I don't want to say that the pictures are not good, but behind the screen production, from the artistic point of view you feel the lack of reach such as is behind every engineering achievement. ("Banquet Speeches" 236–37)

Eisenstein's solution to that was film education: "…the greatest thing to be accomplished for the future of the motion picture business is the foundation of a high school or university for research on the artistic side" ("Banquet Speeches" 237). Herein lie the motives for his intensive solitary work in Mexico, his "laboratory of one," combining in himself both subject and object of research, and—after that—for the extent of his involvement with teaching for most of the 1930s. Research also became a way out of his depression and uncertainty about the future and about himself. In the same letter to Atasheva about difficulties in Hollywood and thoughts of suicide, Eisenstein reminded her and himself: "All told, one needs to live and write a book, of course. Everything that we do here or there or anywhere is only a loudspeaker, so that afterwards the book is read" ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 230).

These thoughts already germinated in Eisenstein's super-active mind while, flying back to Los Angeles, he wrote to his mother in early November 1930: "Under the pressure of the whole anti-Soviet campaign and other wonderful economic things they have to temporarily put *An American Tragedy* aside—especially if I am the one making it… The financial depression around the whole country is such that they cannot allow themselves to not take government pressure into consideration at the moment" (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 248). He insisted that they had "parted as friends" and that Paramount wanted to bring him back in nine months or a year, when the financial and political crisis would become less acute. He said that he was quite

happy with how they had lived and what they had seen and that Paramount was also very happy with his work, while other film companies wanted to work with him as well. This tactic seemed to have worked for him in Europe. This time, however, he doubted he would work with others, he said, since he had already seen everything he might have wanted to see in the States: "And it is highly questionable, what is worth more: to make a film and compromise (and there is no other way to do anything here) or to leave, keeping innocence intact. 'She had her cake and ate it too' [literally: 'both kept her virginity intact and acquired some capital']—only proverbs say that… In reality, the two can't go together!" (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 248–49). In reality, unlike the previous year in Europe, Eisenstein did not have time to wait for something else to work out in Hollywood: he had to leave the country. As was his custom, he proceded to assure himself and others, that this had been exactly what he wanted. In mid-December, two weeks after he left Hollywood, he repeated this sentiment, this time to Shtraukh:

> I think that there could not have been a better resolution of the Hollywood problem than what happened: I would have had to compromise as fuck [*do ebeni materi*] with the Fish Commission,[79] the "red danger," the commission "against the Soviets" etc.; not only

[79] The Fish Committee, which may be what Eisenstein also referred to under "government pressure," was a committee introduced by the New York Republican Congressman Hamilton Fish III just as Eisenstein in Paris was buying new clothes before the voyage to New York. The Committee was tasked with investigating communist activities in the United States and was one of the precursors of the HUAC.

> they would not have given me free reign, they would have nosed into everything. …
>
> I spent seven full months in America: saw a heap of things, didn't lose my innocence, have money for the trip back through Japan, China, and Siberia—what the fuck more can one ask for [*khuli eshche nado*]? (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 278; emphasis in the original)

The image of keeping his metaphoric virginity intact evidently seemed to Eisenstein an adequate reflection of his experience. On the one hand, this ironic expression simply meant that he did not compromise (that is, not compromised on the big scale, as opposed to various instances of European "khaltura," where he could and had to compromise). On the other hand, the sexual basis of this metaphor would perhaps find more expression in Mexico (see Chapter Four).

In late 1930, he wrote four postcards to Esfir' Shub, repeating the old thought in a new environment: "I think that my leaving Hollywood is the best thing I could have done there! With the political situation that had developed it would be completely impossible to do anything with those people" (Shub 138). Whether Eisenstein wanted to convince his correspondents or himself that leaving Hollywood with no film made was the best thing that could have happened is perhaps a moot point. It has to be noted that his position at the time was remarkably similar to the one expressed on the way from Europe to the United States ("Schenck in fact would have turned out to be financial and production drudgery. Films with Doug—a torture…"—Eizenshtein, "Samoe uzhasnoe" 222). Eisenstein employed the same psychological mechanism

over and over again, moving from something that did not quite work out the way he had hoped, to something new.

And yet, because of the pressure, both external and internal; because of his obligations to Moscow and to himself, and because there was nothing better to do in Moscow at the moment, Eisenstein could not go back empty-handed, with no films to his name. He could not even contemplate retracing the journey: to New York, then to France, then to Berlin and Moscow. He could only go forward on something like an around-the-world mission of Jules Verne's Fileas Fogg (he uses this comparison later in his memoirs). Hence, he focused on the idea that had been there for some time, at least since the crossing of the Atlantic: to return to Moscow via Japan and the Soviet Far East, which then gave way to the Mexican travelogue project.

5.0 CHAPTER FOUR: MEXICO, DECEMBER 1930—FEBRUARY 1932

5.1 MEXICO—OR JAPAN?

As mentioned in the Introduction, between December 1930 and March 1932 Eisenstein, Tisse, and Aleksandrov were in Mexico—the total of about 16 months (they crossed the border to Mexico in early December and had to wait for their visas to the United States from mid-February to almost the end of March of 1932). Eisenstein's work in Mexico has been in so many ways easier to research than other areas of his life and career, and therefore so well-known that eventually, in the work of biographers and scholars, the trip itself has come to be described as an inevitable event. Because so many possible reasons for his desire to go to Mexico have been named (and many of them Eisenstein first named himself for the benefit of his future biographers), the move from the contract with Paramount to the contract with Mary Craig Sinclair can look as simple as this: "Eisenstein quickly set his sights on greener pastures…: if they could not make movies in the USA, then perhaps they could finally travel to Mexico, the place he had been longing to see for so many years" (Nesbet 121–22).

Without putting into question the importance of the Mexican experience for Eisenstein's life, thinking, and practice, I want to first adopt a concept of the so-called "nonlinear biography," as understood by such representatives of the Annales School as Jacques le Goff and Giovanni Levi. "Nonlinear biography" explores unrealized variants of a person's life or competing

explanations of certain events. In Eisenstein's case, something that remains only in potentiality, the proverbial "road not taken" lets us access a much more complicated picture of the moments of choice that presented themselves to him throughout his life, and especially during his journey abroad in 1929–32. Looking at Eisenstein's biography as nonlinear also allows us to explore a synchronic cross-section of his thinking, which never ran along just one track. As a consequence, it helps redress some generalizations perpetuated in Eisensteinian scholarship that have perhaps unnecessarily constrained existing models of analysis. This is especially useful in the case of his decision to go to Mexico precisely because the various reasons for it have been researched so thoroughly.

What is usually put aside in talking about Eisenstein's journey to Mexico is that it was only one of several options on the table at the end of 1930, and not his primary option either. Oksana Bulgakowa's biography of Eisenstein provides some initial details of the range of possibilities:

> At Eisenstein's request, Paramount bought him a return ticket with a stop-over in Japan. The press announced his upcoming departure. Eisenstein fell into a deep depression. … A Japanese entrepreneur suggested that Eisenstein make a film in Japan, but Eisenstein did not want to leave Hollywood. Montagu advised Eisenstein to go home; at least Paramount had arranged for the ticket. But Eisenstein did not want to go home defeated. … Eisenstein did not know what to do next. In this moment of total uncertainty, someone suggested launching a film project about Mexico. (121–22)

In Chapter Three I proposed that, for Eisenstein, it was less a question of not leaving Hollywood or of going home defeated, but rather a question of prolonging the journey, the way he had done in Europe, in order to not have to return to the Soviet Union just yet. The option of going back to Moscow in the fall of 1930 was for Eisenstein the least desirable one, far from his Plan B or even C. As for the choice of Japan as his most plausible next destination after Hollywood, it could, first of all, be something of a pause and could work ideally towards lengthening the stay abroad. It presented a place to stay near Hollywood in the hope that the atmosphere at Paramount and the economic and political situation in the United States in general might change enough to invite Eisenstein back or that another invitation, from a different company, might come along. It was not a random choice either: Mexico, in this respect, was significantly harder to justify, from several points of view. Japan had much more claim to being the country Eisenstein "had been longing to see for so many years." In fact, he expressed that desire as early as 1920, when he studied Japanese for 4 months in the Red Army, in order to first get to Moscow, and then, he hoped, to Japan where he wanted to study traditional theater and other arts. He was especially interested in ideographic writing systems such as Chinese and Japanese characters, which he collectively called hieroglyphs. After he found himself in Moscow, however, he quickly saw an opportunity to switch to the study of and practical work in theater, but this earlier interest resurfaced when Eisenstein started working in cinema a couple of years later, and it became for him a useful model for explaining the process of the formation of meaning through editing. By the early 1930s, through translations into English and German, Eisenstein's thoughts on the subject had become a recognized part of his theory of cinema. In addition to his continuing interest in ideograms, as well as kabuki, Eisenstein planned in the mid-20s to take a trip to China to make a film with the writer Sergei Tret'iakov. An echo of this

project can be seen in his planned adaptation of André Malreaux's novel *Man's Fate* (*La condition humaine*) in the mid-1930s.[80] Neither of these Chinese projects materialized.

Instead, in 1929 Eisenstein, Aleksandrov, and Tisse were finally allowed to travel to the West. At the Congress of Independent Filmmakers in Switzerland in the fall of 1929 they met two Japanese distributors, and now Eisenstein had more direct contacts in the very country that interested him so much. The idea of going to Japan as an extension of their trip was something that Eisenstein already seriously contemplated on his way to the United States in the spring of 1930. Having just signed a contract with Paramount, in a letter to his mother from *S.S. Europa* he wrote: "If everything goes well, we will come back, having finished our film, in about 5 to 6 months. We want to travel via the Pacific Ocean, through Japan and China" (1923–2–1775 l. 16).

That summer in Hollywood Eisenstein discussed, among other things, Chinese tortures and Japanese theater with Charlie Chaplin. His idea of travelling to the Far East, meanwhile, received tangible outlines. When the Paramount contract was dissolved in October 1930, Eisenstein and his team still had their official leaves from Sovkino until the following February. That gave them plenty of time, and preparations for the trip East were quite serious and included not only getting the tickets to Japan, as mentioned by Bulgakowa, but also entry visas that were arranged with the help of Amkino's Lev Monosson.

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[80] A near-exhaustive account of this project has recently been published in: Jeannelle, Jean-Louis, *Films sans images: Une histoire des scénarios non réalisés de* La Condition humaine. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2015.

In early November 1930 Petr Bogdanov, the head of Amtorg, the Soviet trade organization in the United States, who had become another one of Eisenstein's patrons, received a cable from Aleksandr Troianovskii, the Soviet ambassador in Japan; the cable was then forwarded to Eisenstein: "Inform immediately when Eisenstein can leave for Japan, how long he can remain here, whether will be able to make a picture stop. Shochiku Cinema Company wants to invite him" (1923–1–1984 l. 31).[81]

Newspapers on several continents reported that Eisenstein was going to leave for Japan, and some even said that he had already done so. Then, suddenly, came the news of the group's crossing the Mexican border. In a letter to his mother, written after the fact, Eisenstein presented the decision as extremely last minute, almost an impulse. And yet, it was not conceived as a substitute for the Japanese trip. Mexico at this point, in Eisenstein's mind, was just another quick detour, with plans still in place to return to Moscow via the Far East. As mentioned at the end of Chapter Three, Eisenstein assured Maksim Shtraukh: "I … have money for the trip back through Japan, China, and Siberia…" (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: popytka* 278)

Several times throughout the next year Eisenstein's group had to ask for an extension of their leaves from Sovkino. It was repeatedly granted. Therefore, even amidst increasing pressure on them to return to the Soviet Union as soon as possible, Eisenstein still envisioned editing the Mexican picture in Hollywood, and planned to go to Japan from there. In September

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[81] Troianovskii's nephew, Mark Troianovskii, was a documentary filmmaker whom Eisenstein almost certainly knew, and who in 1933 shot a film called *The Big Tokyo* (*Bolshoi Tokio*), directed by Vladimir Shneiderov. Shochiku also attempted to invite Vsevolod Pudovkin in the summer of 1931—on both these topics, see Fedorova, 103–27.

1931, almost a year after leaving Hollywood, he thought it would be possible to arrive in Japan by 1 December, having by then completed editing of the Mexican film. So he asked Monosson to renew the group's passports for another 6 months (2617–1–42, l. 35ob). The passports had to be sent to the closest Soviet consulate—in Paris. Monosson, in turn, suggested that perhaps they could even manage to get to Japan before the passports expired and renew them in the Soviet embassy there.

The weather, however, was against Eisenstein, and the production was plagued with delays (see Salazkina, *passim*; Geduld and Gottesman, *passim*). Staying in Mexico, waiting for the sun, receiving visits from globetrotters, such as the French art historian Elie Faure (who stopped by on his way to China), Eisenstein could have repeated his cry of 1928: "Again my 'Japanese' wound has opened. I long, I long for Japan, for China…. The first longing… is 11 years long (1917), the second one is 8 years long (1920, the Academy), the last one is 2 years (1926, *Jungo*), and again I am 'powerfully drawn' to the East. *O! When! When! When? … When shall I go to China, to Japan??!!!*" (qtd. in Bohn 64; italics denote English in the original).

But why did Eisenstein persist in his desire to visit at least Japan? What in particular interested him in the Far East during that time? Like Mexico, China and Japan drew him in because of their closer, more obvious connection to what he referred to as early, pre-logical thinking. In particular, to his already substantial knowledge of Japanese traditional performances, in Mexico Eisenstein added explorations of ritual dances from the islands of Bali and Java. He looked at their rhythm as a means of returning to pre-logical thinking, to the unity with nature. To give just a sample of the expanse of his examples, the Bali dances in his thought were connected to the Upanishads, and then to James Joyce. In general, all of this was connected to the complex of problems related to ex-stasis—a major theme of his research, started at that

time and continued for the next two decades (see Bohn, *passim*). Yet another facet of his research involved using examples from Chinese and Japanese in his explorations of comparative linguistics and phonetics (1923–2–1127 l. 39).

Sometime in the fall of 1931 Eisenstein received a book on traditional kabuki make-up from Masaru Kobayashi in Kyoto. His response, written in mid-December 1931, still shows him planning to go to Japan in the immediate future—and this already after Stalin's telegram to Upton Sinclair pronouncing the group "defectors," while Sinclair was getting ready to pull the plug on the whole production and make Eisenstein go home directly, without having edited the film first.

Seemingly unaware of any of this, Eisenstein wrote to Kobayashi in English: "I hope to be in Japan in a couple of months on my way back to Russia—and expect to have the pleasure of meeting you and have a good talk about the Japanese theatre—the matter of my greatest enthusiasm for years and years. … I shall inform you about my arrival as soon as everything will be fixed, but still you can get all the details about that from mister I. Fukuro, 37 Mamiana-cho, Asabu-Ku, Tokyo, who is taking care of our trip" (*Eisenstein 2*, 11).[82] Just like a year before, the plans sounded very concrete and the trip quite imminent. Eisenstein's other preoccupations become apparent in connection to the kabuki make-up book and are reflected in his brief notes to himself upon receiving it. The book, written in Japanese (which Eisenstein, despite his early training in the basics of the language, confessed he could not read), was supplemented by notes in English about various colors carrying particular meanings in traditional

[82] Ippei Fukuro was a translator and a journalist who specialized in Soviet cinema and was connected with VOKS (Fedorova, *passim*.)

make-up, such as the warm red color being used for heroes and buffoons, and the cold blue color for villains. Questions of the various meanings and uses of color would be developed in Eisenstein's writings of the late 1930s–40s, but in Mexico he specifically connected them, again, to his study of ecstatic conditions (1923–2–1128 l. 12). In the letter, Eisenstein named several more topics of interest, some of them familiar from his previous research and published texts, such as "the question of actors[']s education in Japan (the classical schools)" (*Eisenstein 2*, 11). Finally, he mentioned something that has since received very little scholarly attention, yet was one of his main preoccupations in 1930–32:

> Besides all connected with kabuki, there is another subject which interests me very much according to the studies I am undertaking in the actual moment: and that is Japanese chiromancy—the science of the lines of the hand—which for me are the hyerogliphics [sic] of the expressive movements made by the hand. I made some very interesting discoveries in this field in the occidental documents and am very curious to know about oriental theories and practice in unwinding the lines of the hands into character, which is but a degree of the usual and habitual movements and attitudes of men. If you should happen to fall on some material in this line, you would oblige me very much in communicating them to me. (*Eisenstein 2*, 10–11)

Eisenstein's interest in palmistry will be addressed below. Meanwhile, in letters to Moscow he insisted that now he only needed a quick stop-over in Japan. To this, Pera Atasheva replied in late September 1931, advising him, first of all, to clear the date of his return with the

new head of the Soviet film industry, Boris Shumiatskii: "As for Japan—you always until the last minute believe in the last possible moment (or perhaps just pretend to believe!?). You must have really changed if Japan can only entice you for no more than 10 days now. Of course, the *knowledge* of whorehouses [бардаков] can be acquired fast. Anyway, it is Richter's private opinion that Yoshiwara will interest you; but he should know" (1923–1–1622 l. 9ob, italics denote English in the original).

This potential interest in Tokyo's red-light district, transmitted through the suggestion of Hans Richter (then working in Moscow) obviously reflects another line of inquiry running through Eisenstein's trip abroad, from visits to brothels in Paris, Marseille, and Tijuana to his well-known interest in various aspects of sexuality in general.[83] The mention of Yoshiwara allows us to correct an opinion of Eisenstein's scholars. Jacques Aumont, for example, remarks in his *Montage Eisenstein*: "Just as Mexico was a privileged geography of pleasure, China and Japan constitute a theoretico-philosophical image-repertoire, a kind of referent that is even more imaginary yet, and ought not to be scrutinized too closely" (20). I would not juxtapose the two regions in Eisenstein's mind that sharply. On the contrary, to a large extent everything he encountered, all the places he visited, he saw through the filter of his own interests. Just as Mexico was so much more than his "privileged geography of pleasure," so were Japan, China, and Indonesia not restricted for him to intellectual, spiritual, or philosophical problems.

The fact that up until early 1932 Eisenstein still planned his Asian trip, does not speak of his unawareness of the larger political situation as it related to him—indeed, he was by then quite used to sudden turns of his fortune, both for the worse and for the better. Rather, his writings

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[83] This topic has been addressed, among others, by Somaini, Salazkina, Bohn, and Nesbet.

and notes of the time show that he was cognizant of it but was more concerned with his theoretical studies, which by then had become so global in scope as to make any country he visited, any particular experience, simply additional material for them. As he expressed it early on in Mexico, the "benefit of visiting foreign countries" for him meant that he carried his preoccupations with him as a linchpin that governed and connected disparate impressions (1923–2–1122 ll. 23–24). And this potential for "intellectual" and "theoretical journeys" is something that has to be kept in mind while discussing his physical journeys.

Eisenstein's actual journeys in Mexico took up the first half of 1931; he spent most of the rest of the shooting period at hacienda Tetlapayac near Mexico, D.F. The group visited Yucatán, in the South-East, Jalisco in the West, and Oaxaca, in the South-West; they saw and filmed ancient Mayan temples and young crocodiles. A Mexican story, which was initially vaguely envisioned as a travelogue, was losing this form the more Eisenstein traveled around the country and the more his journeys turned into historical, cultural, and anthropological investigations. More than that: by mid-year he directly juxtaposed the shape of the future film with that of a travelogue. In a letter to Sinclair, Eisenstein wrote: "The film becomes a *real* film and no traces of travellogism in subject and technique. I have less and less fear for the marketing of it. And I think we ought to do everything possible to complete it in the same style" (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 81; emphasis in the original; English in the original). A couple of months later he used the same reasoning to convince his financial backer that it was impossible to release one of the film's "parts" on its own, precisely because "the picture is *not* a 'travellog'" … in which scenes, bits and episodes are following just the railroad order of stations" (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 132; emphasis in the original; English in the original). Several planned parts of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* also became associated with various epochs from Mexico's history, and at the

same time with various tendencies of its contemporary artists, such as Miguel Covarrubias, José Clemente Orozco, José Guadalupe Posada, and Diego Rivera (Reyes, *passim.*, Salazkina, *passim.*). In their books, Salazkina and Reyes pay specific attention to the artistic influences on the film's conception and to the textual sources that helped Eisenstein formulate his ideas (such as Anita Brenner's *Idols behind Altars*). Aurelio de los Reyes's *El Nacimiento de* ¡Que Viva México! is also full of technical details connected to the shooting (such as the tortuous censorship process and the continuing denunciations of Eisenstein and Co as highly dangerous communist propagandists), down to the not-so-straightforward story of the film's title itself (295–332). Anna Bohn, on the other hand, shows how Eisenstein's readings of James George Frazer, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and E.B. Taylor found reflection not only in his later theoretical works, but also in the conception and the details of the unfinished film (54–107).

Previous research, including the authors mentioned above, focused more on the new experiences and materials that influenced the conception of the film and Eisenstein's ideas about art in general. The invaluable source book edited by Harry M. Geduld and Ronald Gottesman from materials kept in Sinclair's archive, mostly presents the opposite, "bureaucratic" side of the endeavor, from the initial efforts of the Sinclairs to raise the money for the film and get a prolongation of American visas for the three Russians, through the reports of Hunter Kimbrough, Sinclair's brother-in-law, about various instances of red tape they had to overcome in Mexico, to the final, ever more desperate wrangling over the question of finishing the film and returning the group to the United States. Curiously, these sourses set aside the question of Eisenstein's experience of the film's production and of the adventures, misadventures, and tragedies connected to it.

These experiences and the work on the film, moreover, did not absorb all of Eisenstein's time or thoughts, especially as the start of the rainy season in the spring of 1931 fatally slowed down the production. There were certain threads of Eisenstein's thinking that the period of inactivity in Mexico almost forced him to pick up again. I will devote the rest of the chapter to some of these threads, weaving into them various external events that interfered with Eisenstein's creative process.

5.2 THE BOOK THAT IS NO LONGER SPHERICAL

In his notes, as I mentioned above, Eisenstein outlined three "benefits of visiting foreign countries." In the sequence he eventually gave them, benefit number one was getting rid of old heroes and old, second-hand memories. He called it the Oedipus complex, divided into two parts: "a) killing fathers; b) killing childhood stimuli: the Rheims Cathedral in an oleograph. Giant trees in Mariposa. Niagara [Falls], etc." The second benefit referred to the wealth of impressions: "finding pleasure in dialectics: the unity in diversity and diversity of unity. We have been used to wield it like a scalpel, use it like a recipe, like gas. Here it is like old good wine. To be intoxicated by dialectics." The third benefit was the one already referred to, "the influx of a large number of local phenomena threaded with <u>one</u> principle. <u>The principle that you carry with you</u>" (1923–2–1122 ll. 23–24; emphasis in the original).

Whereas his early book projects of 1928–29 seemed to him to require a "spherical" (or, in our contemporary terms, hyperlinked) form, the projects Eisenstein envisioned in Mexico were spreading in his mind like a rhizome. And yet, the book was internally connected throughout by

one principle, which lay in the eyes of the beholder—that is, Eisenstein's. One could even go as far as to say that Eisenstein *was* that principle, the man as the measure of all things.

Although concentration on his theoretical studies manifested itself most clearly in Mexico, it was evident throughout the journey. The fact that "failure" in Hollywood might have seemed the best possible option and the fact that the possibility of success was always under question did not, of course, mean that Eisenstein did not really want to make a film in Hollywood or that he did not want to succeed. He did suspect, however, that he was at times engaged in self-sabotage. He continued to experience doubts about the necessity of making films; moreover, the possibility of becoming a scholar, a teacher, tempted him more and more—perhaps as an escape or a respite from practical filmmaking. In Europe, Eisenstein had doubts about his future directing career because of the resounding failure of *The General Line* with critics and audiences at home, who preferred such, in his opinion, run-of-the-mill sentimental stuff as *Peasant Women of Ryazan* (*Baby riazanskie*, 1929), so he dreamed about staying in Cambridge and becoming a scholar (see Chapter Two). In Hollywood, having succumbed to a psychological crisis and depression at the very start of the promising Paramount contract, he shared his doubts with Pera Atasheva, listing his imaginary enemies in the field of film aesthetics both in Moscow and Hollywood: "Perhaps, all these Sutyrins, Pudovkins, Lubitches are right" ("Samoe uzhasnoe" 230). He also reaffirmed to Atasheva that everything he was doing he ultimately saw as material for the future theory book (see Chapter Three).

And yet, if Eisenstein could succeed in Hollywood, what a coup that would have been, what a glorious "new leaf," what a new life for the "boy from Riga," always suffering from self-doubt, always seeking confirmation of his abilities. Throughout the journey Eisenstein looked back at his career, calculating ten-year and five-year anniversaries and tried to see into the future

and imagine what it would bring. One of these anniversaries, ten years since the beginning of professional work in theater, fell, in his estimation, on the beginning of his stay in Mexico; he saw the path from Jack London's *The Mexican* at the Proletkult Theater in 1921 to real Mexico in 1931 as providential. This was similar to the impression, recorded in the notebook entry quoted above, of re-tracing, re-covering, and overcoming childhood, "received" memories with the help of the new, actual, personal ones. These impressions brought him eventually to the image of a spiral, which became highly important for his later theories of biological, historical, cultural, and aesthetic development.

Before the trip, in the summer of 1929, Eisenstein was reading *Philosophy of Invention, and Invention in Philosophy* by the Neo-Kantian Ivan Lapshin, the Russian translator of William James.[84] The book was published in 1922, when Lapshin became one of the intellectuals sent out of Russia aboard one of the notorious "philosophy steamships." Among the many things Lapshin writes about are the religious doubts that plague young philosophers—like Hegel or Rousseau. The latter, in particular, to assuage his fears of eternal damnation, "came up with such predictions to calm down my anxieties; I told myself—I will throw this stone at a tree and if I hit it, this is a sign of salvation; if I miss it, this is the sign of condemnation" (*Filosofiia izobreteniia* 66; my translation from Russian). Lapshin adds that the French psychologist and philosopher Pierre Janet "provides this confession of Rousseau as an illustration of that type of psychastenic doubts, which he calls the mania of prediction or begging destiny, when, under the weight of doubt, we give ourselves away to the power of chance" (*Filosofiia izobreteniia* 66). There is

[84] 1923–1–1418 l. 58.

much evidence to suggest that Eisenstein was also under the influence of this mania during his trip abroad (or saw it as a valid self-representational strategy).

Throughout his life, Eisenstein was known for his superstitions and his belief in signs. With so many things to consider, so precarious a balance of powers during his trip, it is not surprising that he came to rely especially heavily on seemingly unscientific methods in order to fully understand his position and to influence his future. He was looking for answers, turning more and more inwards, and this process truly blossomed in Mexico through self-observation and self-analysis.

In Paris, Eisenstein allegedly chose an unprepossessing little Montparnasse hotel because it was called *Les États-Unis*—The United States—to attract Hollywood luck. Eventually, either that or Ivor Montagu's reconnaissance in California seemed to help—and meanwhile the group could keep borrowing money from the hotel's owner. Getting close to American shores, he tried to read his future in the weather. To his mother he wrote (on 11 May 1930): "There is absolutely no rolling, and the sea has been like a mirror all these days. Perhaps it's a good omen?" (1923–2–1775 l. 14). To Pera Atasheva, the next day: "If it continues to be as beautifully cloudless and without any rolling, like our journey across the Atlantic, I couldn't wish for more" (1923–2–1745 ll. 2–3). To Esfir' Shub on the same day: "The Atlantic Ocean has been gentle to a fault: I hope it doesn't roll from now on either, so that we do not embarrass the Russian land in the American land" (*Zhizn' moia* 379). This is another instance of his narrativizing his experience at that point—see Chapter Two.

The remark to Shub, for all its repetitiveness, introduced a new development of this thought: to his fellow director Eisenstein was compelled to add that his journey was not only personal, and his future success would not be just his own, or his teammates: he represented the

whole of the Soviet film industry (see Chapter Three). Implied in his choice of words was a figure of an Old Russian warrior, *vitiaz'*, setting out to conquer foreign lands; this image expressed the pressure Eisenstein felt—or the image he performed, not for Shub's eyes only. This vision of himself vis-à-vis some other, historical or cultural, figure (thus therefore both self-modeling and self-distancing), was also something that became evident throughout the journey, not only in his interest in biographies. In his notes from 1929–32, he juxtaposed himself, among others, to Griffith (see Chapter Three), to Robert Flaherty (who Eisenstein also credited sometimes with getting him to Mexico), and to Meyerhold.

To the United States from his European days Eisenstein brought a habit of jotting down examples of his writing for Raphael Schermann, the Austrian graphologist, made famous (according to Eisenstein) by his accurate prediction of the imminent death of the German Foreign Minister and former Chancellor Gustav Stresemann. His death of a stroke occurred in the fall of 1929 while Eisenstein was in Berlin, and he visited Schermann there and then, either on recommendation of Einstein's son-in-law Dimitri Marianoff or of Béla Balázs and his wife (see 1923–2–1124 l. 75ff). Eisenstein had his signature read and apparently arranged to provide more material for analysis. In the summer of 1930, he already felt confident enough to try and analyze them on his own, using for his samples various languages: German, English, Russian, and French. He was especially interested in states of heightened emotional tension and perceived his writing to be almost a "cardiogram" of his mental state.[85] On 7 July, a couple of weeks after the Major Pease accusations had been disseminated for the first time, he wrote in German and

[85] Something that captured the imagination of scholars in his very last manuscripts, which recorded the next-to-last heart spasm on the night of 10 February 1948.

English on the letterhead of Paramount Publix Corporation: "Ich nervöser Zustand [I'm nervous]. Inspector Brown has rung five minutes ago. He is the man of the Police Service at Paramount Studios. What the devil wants he to know about me. What has happened?" and added: "Schriftprobe für Raphael Schermann" (1923–2–799 ll. 21–21ob; German and English in the original). He then repeated the same information in German. The police, he wrote down later, eventually proved to be very nice and quite apologetic, and they "parted as friends" (1923–1–1458 1. 11). But it was a harbinger of things to come.

For some people in Hollywood prognostic arts were something of a parlor trick. Not so for Eisenstein. Several times over the course of 1930–31 he wrote down his impressions from the meeting with King Vidor: the film director could guess with a certain success his interlocutor's month of birth (apparently, as he explained to Eisenstein, feeling affinity with people born in the same season as himself). In early October 1930 Eisenstein met Cheiro (who also called himself Count Hamon, but who was born as William John Warner), the famous palmist and author of the book *Cheiro's Language of the Hand* (1st ed. 1894). Having just completed the script of *An American Tragedy*, Eisenstein went to Hamon to get his palms read and apparently received the reading upon his return from New York after the "break-up" with Paramount. The reading was very flattering:

> …it is easy to observe how distinct and different are the lines marked on the right from those seen on the left, the deduction being that this subject has practically remade himself out of the experiences he has met with, and by the development of strong will and individuality.

> The left hand indicates that he commenced life with a strong artistic temperament and talents for making a name in some artistic career. At the same time the promises in this hand cannot be compared with those given on the right for success and fame in an artistic and creative direction. ("Eizenshtein glazami khiromanta," 329)

It also hit a lot of points that Eisenstein himself recognized in his character: "The multitude of fine lines shown on the left denote that he began life with great versatility, but inclined to suffer from lack of fixity of purpose" ("Eizenshtein glazami khiromanta," 329). Most interesting for Eisenstein were the predictions: the analysis insisted that his thirty-second year (that is, 1930) was the most noteworthy in his career, that it brought a change of place, plans, and methods of work, despite some resistance from people and circumstances, while 1931 would be quite successful from January to the first half of May. From that moment on, according to the reading, Eisenstein could expect big changes in his destiny, with a journey eastward in response to a summons, perhaps from his native country; and perhaps changes in his career were to have something to do with an important role he would play in politics. Count Hamon's report insisted that, while Eisenstein could travel far from Russia, he would always return there, to his base ("Eizenshtein glazami khiromanta," 330–32). The palmist also expressed fear that Eisenstein would not live to a long age because of "mental strain" that, in turn, affected his heart. His

thirty-second year and his forty-first year were especially not good for his health while his fiftieth year would be critical ("Eizenshtein glazami khiromanta," 330).[86]

In Mexico, having written down all the benefits of foreign travels, Eisenstein continued to reflect on another palm reading done, it seems, by a "Dr. Mario," an amateur "of [a] very low class" (1923–2–1122 l. 26, in English in the original). This palmist, as Eisenstein remarked, told him something that he had already known before about his "spasmodic self-consciousness" or inhibition that prevented him from achieving or finishing things. To change that, in Tehuantepec, while doing preliminary filming for what was still the Mexican travelogue, Eisenstein made "a big effort in 'creation' for about a week" (1923–2–1122 l. 26, in English in the original), and, lo and behold, the lines on his hand started changing overnight. He concluded: "If Tehuantepec will become a <u>something</u> it's thanks to my hands" (1923–2–1122 l. 26, English and emphasis in the original).

Similar to his experiments with graphology, Eisenstein became something of his own palm reader as well. Perhaps as a consequence, he also at times associated himself with Cheiro, citing the celebrated palmist's apparent inability to read his own left hand due to its long-ago paralysis. In this analogy Eisenstein saw himself as an artist and theorist unable to produce work or at least finish the work that he felt he was most equipped and perhaps destined to do. Quite what that work was, at least as concerned theory, he was also at that moment trying to define for himself.

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[86] Years later, Eisenstein's friends still acknowledged at least part of the (perhaps, self-fulfilling) prediction: that of the critical fiftieth year of his life: he died less than a month after turning 50, of a heart attack ("Eizenshtein glazami khiromanta," 325).

Both graphology and palmistry were connected to death—the ultimate point of prediction. Eisenstein's depression in the summer of 1930 led him to thoughts of suicide, recorded for the first time (perhaps influenced in part by his impressions from the rumors of Vladimir Mayakovsky's suicide just two months prior). His psychoanalytic treatment in the summer of 1930 can be read as another sign of the same uncertainty that was expressed simultaneously in his interest in prognostic arts, and as another instance of his "mania of prediction." Eisenstein also called this "lack of fixity of purpose," noted by Count Hamon, the "self-consciousness" that stopped him from achievement, his "obsession of doubt" in a letter to Atasheva, when he told her about the sessions with a psychoanalyst in Hollywood (see Chapter Three): "We have pried open about 50% of the '*doubt*' complex, which is, of course, my sorest spot. We are using the 'conscious' method and not the quack nonsense of the usual treatment. … The most amazing thing is how that '*obsession of doubt*' formed and who and how is responsible for it. THINK ABOUT IT, *PEARL*! WHAT IF I WILL NOT NEED ATTESTATIONS ANYMORE! In that case, damn it all, it would be possible to do anything!" ("Samoe uzhasnoe," 229; italics denote English in the original; emphasis in the original).

If the analysis did not help with the "obsession of doubt" on a permanent basis, it certainly gave Eisenstein more confidence in his own powers as an analyst: in the next year and a half he would be resorting to self-analysis both in his notes and in his letters to Atasheva. For instance, in a 1931 letter (dated November of that year in its published version) he talked freely and in psychoanalytical terms of his complexes and of overcoming them. In that particular case it was also connected to his sexual experience. Masha Salazkina and other scholars read this encounter as Eisenstein's first homosexual experience and connect it to the name of Jorge Palomino (*In Excess*, 128–30). Judging by Eisenstein's unpublished notes, however, the

Palomino episode occurred in the spring of 1931, and either he was talking about someone else in the letter or, what is at least equally possible, the letter was misdated during publication or archiving. Whatever the occasion behind the letter to Atasheva had been, the important thing is that Eisenstein felt he was overcoming his complexes at least in his personal life, and that was tightly connected in his mind to his prowess as a theoretician. During the time in Mexico questions of sexual experience and reproduction took one of the central roles in his theories, including the concept of ex-stasis. He was also able to look at himself even closer as an object of research, a theoretical object. This included reading his palms, his writing, and his drawings, which he attempted to make as automatic as possible, and which very often were explicitly sexual. Graphic lines, lines of the hand, and lines of psychoanalytic confessions were all symptoms, means of getting at some hidden truth, and signs of the correspondences that connected the physical and the psychic, the individual and the world, nature and culture. And all this could serve as material for a higher-order theory of his own. One example of this would be his note of 8 October 1931, comparing *Cheiro's Language of the Hand* with Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*: "I can see no difference between his book and Darwin's book on the expressive movement of man. The same recording of observations and the same meaningless interpretation of 'laws,' as in Charlie![87] But this is exactly what I need—a bunch of concrete observations" (1923–2–1116 l. 34). Moreover, in this personal predilection to combine disparate phenomena, threads of different philosophies, and facts used by various

[87] This could refer to Charlie Chaplin—or perhaps, to "Charlie" Darwin?

disciplines, Eisenstein in Mexico began to see his purpose and his strength as a theorist and scholar.[88]

5.3 BETWEEN MEXICO AND MOSCOW, BETWEEN MODERNISM AND SOCIALIST REALISM

This section uses one episode from the Mexican part of Eisenstein's journey to illustrate how political vicissitudes—with their external pressures and the internal line of Eisenstein's thinking and research—collided and intertwined, extending far outside this period. In early November 1931, an article appeared in the influential progressive magazine, *The New Republic,* delineating American and Mexican experiences of Eisenstein and his team, and giving the first extended description of the Mexican material. Its author was the well-known literary critic and writer Edmund Wilson, who intended to include the piece on Eisenstein and his treatment by Hollywood into a larger book project on the economic, social, and cultural situation in America during the Great Depression. By its release in 1932, the book received the title *The American Jitters: A Year of the Slump.* The article described how "Eisenstein in Mexico … was having a free hand for the first time in his life... Eisenstein, entranced with the Mexican scenery, so different from the bleak Gulf of Finland or the flat expanses of collective farms, seems to have

[88] The books by Salazkina and de los Reyes also provide larger context of the influence of Mexican and American modernists (including, for instance, mural painting) on Eisenstein's art at the time.

been carried away by an ambition to produce a perfect film, which should excel as both photography and drama" ("Eisenstein in Hollywood" 401).

When Eisenstein chanced upon the article later that month, he wrote an open letter to the magazine, in which tried to disprove Wilson's assertion that he was having "a free hand for the first time in his life," because it implied (to Eisenstein, or, rather, potentially to his Moscow patrons) that his work back in the Soviet Union had been (and would be) less free. He then addressed the financial backer of the Mexican project, the writer Upton Sinclair, demanding an explanation for showing the press the rushes before Eisenstein could make their selection:

> After all the ink and paper I have spent in explaining you the absolute impossibility to show the rushes to anyone, we get now a printed criticism of them (that it is favorable makes no difference!), which towards us is a direct insult and a violation of the author's primest [sic] rights. Even a Hollywood company would never put their director in such a situation! The man is probably somewhat close to you and I really do not see why you did not ask him to wait for our return-epoch when all the writing might start. (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 203)

What Eisenstein did not know was that it was Sinclair who had used the offending phrase before, for promotional purposes: "This will be the first time in Eisenstein's life that he has been entirely free to make a picture according to his own ideas" (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 33). To Eisenstein, Sinclair defended the necessity of showing the material by the need of searching for potential investors, since his and his wife's funds were no longer sufficient for finishing the mammoth project. He also tried to positively characterize the article's author: "Edmund Wilson is generally considered a leading literary critic. He was recently named by André Maurois as a

critic to whom France, or the entire European country would be proud, and for a Frenchman that is the height of praise… Wilson is a very influential man in New York and he is giving us his help in interesting the lady who for the past fifteen years financed the *New Republic*" (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 207).

A week later Eisenstein conceded that, perhaps, his response had been too rash: "A pity that you did not inform me about the thing and the why's and how's [sic] around it" (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 215). He then moved to a related topic that interested him much more:

> By the way, is E.W. author of a book called *Axel's Castle*?—a very remarkable book—remarkable by a profoundly wrong conception of James Joyce and Arthur Rimbaud. (Items in which I can make such an opinion—knowing less about the other material). (By God! do not tell him that … And what do you think for instance about his understanding Joyce and Rimbaud?) (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 216).

Eisenstein met the author of *Ulysses* in November 1929 in Paris. Joyce took a special place on the list of famous acquaintances that Eisenstein seems to have been collecting. As he recalled later, the meeting with the almost completely blind writer had not really added to his perception of Joyce's writing but it formed a part of his image or idea of Joyce.

Since 1928, when Eisenstein received a copy of *Ulysses* from Ivy Litvinov, the English-born wife of the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joyce was an integral part of his developing theory of intellectual cinema. The influence of Joyce can be seen, for example, in the 1929 article "The Fourth Dimension in Cinema," which Eisenstein wrote after editing *The General Line* and which he brought with him to Europe in the hope of publishing it separately or as part

of the projected "spherical book" (the English translation of this text first appeared in *Close Up* in March 1930 under the title "The Fourth Dimension in the Kino").

The fourth dimension in the article is time, that is, the cinematographic process, in which the "dialectical formation" of overtonal conflicts can manifest itself (Eisenstein, "The Fourth Dimension" 185). Eisenstein then takes one step further than Einstein and announces a fifth dimension—that of "intellectual montage." It was to combine physiological and intellectual overtones and thus could only benefit from the emerging sound cinema, which would make the total effect of such montage truly synesthetic. Already the silent version of *The General Line*, edited "on the principle of visual overtone," included sound associations: "For example, the 'diving under the icons' in the 'religious procession' or the grasshopper and the mowing-machine are edited *visually* according to their *sound* association with a deliberate revelation and their spatial similarity" (Eisenstein, "The Fourth Dimension" 183–84, emphasis in the original).

At the same time, the sound of bells, which Eisenstein planned to include in the film's score, was to be used for achieving "purely physical 'parallaxes' on the part of the perceiver" ("The Fourth Dimension," 192). They would therefore be used not as tones, but as overtones, that is, as vibrations affecting the viewer on the physiological level. This orientation on the "perceiver," and the fact that his perception depended on his position and other conditions of viewing, was in part influenced by the popular version of Einstein's theory of relativity.

Eisenstein's reading of Joyce, who privileged the highly individualized perception of his characters, became an integral, if latent, part of his argument in "The Fourth Dimension in Cinema." In the 1940s, he returned to this period in his memoirs, acknowledging the connection: "The year that gave birth to the idea of intellectual cinema was the year that I became acquainted with Joyce's *Ulysses*" (*Immoral Memories* 213). He further explained: "There is the

'asyntaxism' of Joyce's writing, overheard in the very origins of that internal speech which each of us speaks in his own way, and which only the literary genius of Joyce thought of as a possible foundation for the writing of literature. Indeed, in the linguistic kitchen of literature, Joyce occupies himself with the same thing I rave about in relation to laboratory researches on cinema language" (*Immoral Memories* 213).

The idea of internal monologue or internal speech, which Eisenstein continued to develop in Hollywood, became a further phase in the development of his theory of intellectual cinema. The nature of details in *Ulysses*, according to Eisenstein, had the effect of producing intellectual effect through physiology, just like overtonal montage (Eizenshtein, *Montazh* 252). He kept thinking about it after leaving Europe, adding bits from other theories and examples from other writers into the mix: "I come together closer than before with everyone who, just like me, had been thinking about internal speech—it has now acquired the name 'internal monologue'—that happens a bit later, when I am working in Hollywood on the script of Dreiser's *American Tragedy*" (Eizenshtein, "Avtobiograficheskie zapiski" 488[89]). The reading of *Axel's Castle* in Mexico was for Eisenstein the continuation of his theoretical and practical work of the previous three years.

On 23 November Sinclair rather stiffly responded: "Edmund Wilson is the author of *Axel's Castle*. I have not read the book, but I read parts of it in *The New Republic*. I could not express an opinion about his idea of Joyce, because I have not read Joyce except in his earlier writings" (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 218). During this time Sinclair might have been

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[89] The fragment is absent in the English translation done by Herbert Marshall in *Immoral Memories. An Autobiography by Sergei M. Eisenstein*.

especially disinclined to enter into literary discussion with his protégé. Two days before that letter, in response to his requests for Soviet financial support for Eisenstein's film, Sinclair received a telegram signed by Joseph Stalin himself: "EISENSTEIN LOOSE [sic] HIS COMRADES CONFIDENCE IN SOVIET UNION STOP HE IS THOUGHT TO BE DESERTER WHO BROKE OFF WITH HIS OWN CONTRY STOP…" (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 212). The telegram determined the film's fate. Although the Party's decision was reversed and Eisenstein was able to return to Moscow, he never got to edit his most personal project.

While Sinclair was corresponding with Stalin and other Communist Party officials and trying to raise money in Hollywood, Eisenstein, amidst increasingly more urgent pleas from his mother, his friends, and his Party-affiliated colleagues to return to the Soviet Union, was busy finishing shooting the largest episode of the film, "Maguey," at the hacienda Tetlapayac not far from Mexico City—and reading Edmund Wilson's book. At the end of December he filled several pages with notes referring to particular passages in *Axel's Castle*. The book, which came out in early 1931, was subtitled *A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930* and in addition to Joyce and Rimbaud, included chapters on W.B. Yates, Paul Valéry, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and Marcel Proust. The notes, which have been preserved between the pages of the book, as well as more detailed entries in his working notebooks/diaries, referred almost exclusively to the chapters on Proust and Joyce.

Wilson's ideas and Eisenstein's disagreement with them became one of the main sources that influenced his thoughts on Joyce, Proust, and Zola, and later found their way into his theories of pathos, montage, and his ideas about the form of a work of art. Eisenstein further developed some of the notes in such works as *Grundproblem* (1934), which later became part of

Method (1940–48), *Montage* (1936–37, the chapter "Montage in Joyce"), and *Pathos* (1946–47, the chapter "Twenty Supporting Columns" on Zola). The cryptic comment "Evreinov / before O'Neill / The Theater of the Soul / and other plays! / Joyce is formally one of the steps towards the marriage of science and art…" ("Eizenshtein—Uilson," 48), for instance, was developed in *Method* into a comparison of Nikolai Evreinov's technique of monodrama construction with Joyce's "stream of consciousness" (*Metod* Vol. 1, 128).The parallel of Daumier vs. Gavarni to Joyce vs. Proust was taken up several times in the 1930s (*Metod* Vol. 2, 352–53) and the 1940s (*Memuary* Vol. 1, 19–20), while the discussion of Joyce's "Naturalism" played a large part in Eisenstein's exegesis of realism during his lectures at VGIK.

As it often happened with Eisenstein, his marginalia for *Axel's Castle* soon stopped being simply commentary on the text, and quotations became starting points for his own thoughts that led him to stray from Wilson's text, into unexpected directions. He even remarked on this tendency in the notes themselves, written in English:

> NB. I like to combine quotations to make another trend of ideas of them—my trend where I use them as pieces of the film (shots)—definite—but in combining on this or that central idea—give entirely different trend of idea.
>
> Well, I <u>am</u> accustomed to montage—that is to combine not *primaire* [sic] sounds or colors but sentences or words-complexes—bit[s] of <u>pictures</u> in form of shots. The distortion of their real relations—gives an expression to the definite non-formulatable that is abstract idea—underlying as well my montage-conception as well [sic] as my theoretical [work]. ("Eizenshtein—Uilson," 40–41, English and emphasis in the original, italics denote French

in the original)

Unlike Stuart Gilbert's 1930 book *James Joyce's* Ulysses*: A Study*, which Eisenstein re-read and referenced several times in his published texts, he only mentioned Wilson's book in a passing disparaging enumeration of scholars of Joyce in a chapter on internal monologue in *Method*: "… all these wise gilberts, patriotic larbauds, curtiuses, budgens, and edmund wilsons, … who were compiling 'keys' to *Ulysses*, but never succeeded in fitting them to it" (Eizenshtein, *Metod* 110). Still, Wilson's book as a piece of critical writing offers insight into a crucial moment of Eisenstein's thinking, and also into a crucial moment of his professional and personal life—Moscow's ultimatum and the loss of the Mexican project.

Wilson's book as a physical object tells another story. The copy of *Axel's Castle* that is preserved in Eisenstein's library bears an inscription, "To Hart from Malcolm & Peggy Cowley. Bun [sic] Voyage." Annette Michelson was the first to realize, in the 1960s, that the original owner of the book was Hart Crane—an alcoholic, a homosexual, and a poet. It presented a tantalizing image of a possible meeting between a Soviet director and a classic American modernist. Crane regularly published in *The New Republic*, where in 1929 the critic Malcolm Cowley replaced Edmund Wilson as the head of the literature department. In March 1931, Crane received a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation, which required spending the year abroad. After talking to Cowley, who had just returned from Mexico, he also set out for South America, planning to write "a drama featuring Montezuma and Cortez" (qtd. in *O My Land*, 459–460). Before his departure from New York in early April 1931, the Cowleys presented Crane with Wilson's book.

Once in Mexico City, Crane made his home in the house of the writer Katherine Anne Porter. In early July, Crane's father died, and the poet traveled to the US. During this time,

Porter met Grigorii Aleksandrov in Mexico City and was invited to visit Tetlapayac, where Eisenstein's group was based at the time. In the short story "Hacienda," Porter later described the hacienda's inhabitants (picturing Eisenstein with a "face like a superhumanly enlightened monkey's"—Porter 255) and its gloomy atmosphere after one of the Mexican actors accidentally killed his sister.[90]

Sometime in late June–early July 1931, Eisenstein also met Crane's drinking buddy, Irish revolutionary Ernest O'Malley, who came to the hacienda with another group of intellectual "pilgrims" from Mexico City. In the diary, Eisenstein called O'Malley a friend of Ivor Montagu and noted that he had brought Wilson's book to Tetlapayac "completely by accident": "someone had given it to him for the road, it seems" (1923–2–1125 l. 11).

In any case, the book was never returned to Hart Crane, and it remains unclear whether Eisenstein had a chance to meet with him between July 1931 and March 1932 when the Russians left Mexico. On 27 April 1932, as Eisenstein and Tisse disembarked in Bremerhaven on the way to Moscow, Hart Crane committed suicide by jumping overboard from the steamship *Orizaba* on his return to the United States. A single book thus remains in the hub of a complex web of interconnections between Eisenstein and European, American, and Mexican Modernism, a testimony to his actual and "virtual" communications with its brightest representatives, and an example of the incorporation of their diverse ideas into his own thought.

The key question in this conjunction is Eisenstein's own relation to the face-off between modernism and realism (and Socialist Realism in particular). Annette Michelson, for instance, also traced the connection of Eisenstein's marginalia to *Axel's Castle* to his projects on *Capital*,

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[90] This phrase, however, does not appear in the story's first magazine publication in 1932.

as well as to his conception of the ecstatic (Michelson, *passim*.). She is among many others who have called Eisenstein "a modernist, one of the prime modernists in the history of the cinema, and the first … to theorize the conjunction of Marxism with modernism through a critique of cinematic representation" (Michelson 65). His attitude to Joyce expressed in the notes to the book and in and subsequent texts and lectures becomes crucial in understanding his view on modernism, realism, and his own position in both.

5.4 *¡QUE VIVA MEXICO!* AND THE RIGHT TO MAKE MISTAKES

In his article on *¡Que Viva Mexico!* Wilson was putting Eisenstein's project in opposition to his work both in the Soviet Union and in Hollywood. He referenced as much economic freedom as political and aesthetic freedoms. For Eisenstein, however, at least publicly, it was a question of politics more than of money. How serious or unique was Sinclair's violation of Eisenstein's rights as an artist, compared to the director's own experience in the Soviet Union and Hollywood? Telling Maksim Shtraukh of the dissolution of the Paramount contract, Eisenstein reminded his friend and assistant of his dislike of close supervision—citing the production of his 1920s films. There had also been the direct personal involvement of Stalin with the production of *The General Line* (including the change of the title to *The Old and the New*) and his reputed involvement with the reediting of *October*, which left Trotsky on the cutting-room floor (although we only have Grigorii Aleksandrov's accound of that) (Bulgakowa 75). The "privacy" of his creative process was later again trespassed most ruthlessly in the winter of 1936, when the unedited materials of *Bezhin Meadow* were watched by the head of Soviet film industry, Boris

Shumiatskii. Since at the time Eisenstein was convalescing after having contracted chicken pox and therefore could not defend himself or his film, the production was effectively stopped (and had to be resumed again later, which came to be known as "the second version" of the film) (Bulgakowa 180–81). And in the future there would also be Stalin's phrase "Such a good prince cannot die" that would cut off the projected finale of *Alexander Nevsky*; the non-inclusion of another scene in *Nevsky* (a fight on a Novgorod bridge), which accidentally was left off the test print; and, of course, the ban on the second part of *Ivan the Terrible* and another personal conversation with Stalin ("Stalin: 'Have you studied history?' Eisenstein: 'More or less'") (Dobrenko 25; Eisenstein, *Selected Works* 299). This list alone is enough not to treat the Sinclair episode as something singular or exceptional in Eisenstein's career.

There was, however, also the painful question of money and politics. One of the examples of this tangle is the above-mentioned article by Wilson (and the circumstances of its appearance). Sinclair defended the inclusion of Wilson in this small number of viewers, apart from giving his literary credentials, by saying that "Wilson is a very influential man in New York and he is giving us his help in interesting the lady who for the past fifteen years financed the *New Republic*" (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 207).

The image of a "free hand" that Eisenstein tries hard to contest is also present in a quite different account of his presence on the American continent. It comes from the diary of Sergei Bertenson (see Chapter Three). As he wrote in his diary on 31 May 1930 that "…it seems like Paramount, which invited him with a 100 thousand a year contract, gives him free hand to do absolutely anything…" (Arenskii 91). In that instance, however, this image of freedom was not juxtaposed with Eisenstein's "lack of freedom" back home.

The loss of his Mexican film remained a most painful episode for Eisenstein throughout his life (at least, the most painful of the ones to which he admitted in writing). All subsequent film tragedies he measured against the affair with the Mexican project. The most visceral testimony of this fact is, perhaps, a diary entry from the end of May 1932, soon after the return to Moscow. In three lines, Eisenstein brought together a dying cat in his kitchen, whose kitten "died inside her," a mention of Nikolai Erdman's play *The Suicide*, and Viktor Shklovsky's story about Mayakovsky who tried to place a phone call before killing himself—but the phone wasn't working. The note was punctuated with the phrase "Very similar…" (which can also be translated as "Just like [me]") (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 252). One is reminded of Jay Leyda's reporting Eisenstein's answer, late in 1933 or early in 1934, to his question about a possible new film: "He gave me the most genuinely anguished look I ever saw on his face and shouted at me: 'What do you expect me to do! How can there be a new film when I haven't given birth to the last one!' And he clutched his belly with an equally painful gesture" (*Kino* 302).

The diary entry came only two days after Eisenstein and Aleksandrov signed a letter to Stalin, unsuccessfully trying to persuade him that the political, and economic importance of the Mexican project demanded immediate actions, i.e. buying the materials (Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 252). Vladimir Zabrodin connects this diary entry to Eisenstein's feelings about the latest project; the rest of the note, however, deals more abstractly with the connection between comedy and violence, as if Eisenstein (who was offered to direct a comedy on his return) was trying to see something comic in what he could only see as violence done to his film and therefore to himself as an artist. One could also read into this note an attempt to survive violence by aestheticizing (or theorizing) it, since escaping it was quite beyond his power. What can be

glimpsed between the lines is the impossibility to change things but also, for the first time, the inability to let go—in direct opposition to the refrain "everything is for the best" at other times during the trip.

This diary entry reads to a large extent like a continuation of Eisenstein's thoughts from about a month prior, expressed in an interview for the *Los Angeles Times* and published after he had left; the difference being that in the interview Eisenstein refers specifically to the Hollywood experience:

> There's too much laughter, and burlesquing, and gagging about Hollywood… It is to laugh, people say. It should be the reverse; it is to weep. Because the most important cultural and art center in the world is being gagged to death. The word gag goes for both meanings.
>
> My experiences in Hollywood, working for an American company, may have been laughable to you. They are certainly amusing. But they are sad, very sad, when looked at as portraying a trend. (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 319)

The tragic end of the Mexico affair seems to have been a logical continuation of the trend, just when Eisenstein was expecting a new beginning. Retrospectively, it becomes an inevitable finale to the journey; the eruption of the tensions that were present from the start. But the tensions were not restricted to Eisenstein's experiences in the West either.

Just like the Hollywood "failure" can be best explained through a combination of various factors, several factors combined in the denouement to the Mexican project. Even if we bracket the personal circumstances, which played a significant part in the project's outcome (especially

the relationship between Eisenstein and Sinclair's brother-in-law, Hunter S. Kimbrough, who oversaw the project "on the ground"), the intersection of economic and political considerations is what puts *¡Que Viva Mexico!* in line with Eisenstein's other experiences abroad. Stalin's telegram was not the only reason that Sinclair decided to curtail the project. There was also Amkino's decision not to co-finance the production, influenced by the opinions of Moscow and at the same time precipitated by the departure of Monosson. In addition, the rumors about Eisenstein's alleged plans to defect influenced at least one of the film's American backers, S. Hillkowitz, who, according to Sinclair, invested in the project "for one reason only—a sympathy for Soviet Russia, and he would not consider the proposition unless Eisenstein were loyal" (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 211).

Eisenstein even tried to play the political strings in order to resolve the economic question of getting the Soviet Union to buy the Mexican footage. In the letter to Stalin referenced above, Eisenstein and Aleksandrov wrote, among other things: "The film that we created has international interest, from which it is important to gain as much political and economic effect for the Soviet Union as possible. The latter question in particular demands immediate resolving, which it unfortunately has not been getting" (qtd. in Zabrodin, *Eizenshtein: kino* 252). This time, unlike "the affair with Paramount," Eisenstein was a pawn in a much larger political game; Stalin was displeased, and the distant and unsure possibility of achieving some "political effect" and earning points for Soviet art and the regime by letting Eisenstein finish the film was easily traded for the sure effect of his presence in the Soviet Union.

The sacrifice of the project was even something that Eisenstein was almost prepared for, based on his previous experiences, but he was, perhaps, not prepared for the ultimate inability to see all of his material and to edit it, and the resulting feeling of helplessness. His description

from the 1932 speech about Hollywood—of an industry afraid of anything new because of economic and political considerations—finds another, more personal parallel in the *Los Angeles Times* interview: "People are told on all sides how hard it is to crash through, how almost impossible it is to make the grade [sic]. That's the mistake. Encourage them. Bring them on. What's the difference whether the result is a lot of broken hearts or not. It's broken hearts that make up a great art. It's the broken hearts that have failed as painters, or writers, or sculptors, that have made those three arts alive and vital, while and when they were" (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 320). In a sense, Eisenstein's Soviet, Hollywood, and Mexican experiences are situated along the same trajectory. But the ultimate artistic freedom, the freedom to make experiments and mistakes, was something that was denied to Eisenstein most forcibly with *Que Viva Mexico!*

Most importantly, at this point biography must have become for him not just an example of coping with success and with complex relationships, the way it was in the 1920s; it became a means of coping with that artistic failure he described to the *Los Angeles Times*. This seems to be the reason behind his insistence on including the study of biography in his program for future film directors: "You have to familiarize yourselves with all these questions, because when you encounter your first failure, you will decide that nothing is working out, you'll try to attempt something new, and something new again... You have to train yourself to be persevering in achieving your goals" (Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye* 4, 25–26; See Chapter One). Moreover, this new narrative of "failure" might have necessitated new biographical projects, which had to take into account Eisenstein's own autobiographical and memoir explorations during the intervening years. In the two years after Eisenstein's return to the Soviet Union, Ivan Aksenov and Marie Seton begin to work on their respective biographies under his direct guidance; while he also

wrote self-explanatory pieces relating directly to the Mexican experience in the context of his tug of war with Sinclair, sending them to Joseph Freeman and Seymour Stern.

Whether he called it a failure or a mistake, Eisenstein's experience abroad demanded assimilation and narrativization, and, most of all, distance to do that. Starting with the Teaching Program of 1933–34 and the speeches at the Conference of the Union of Soviet Filmmakers in 1935, and concluding with *Ivan the Terrible* and the return to memoir notes in the 1940s, that pivotal experience stayed with him.

6.0 CONCLUSION

A project that is concerned, in part, with contradicting some accepted narratives, dissecting the mechanisms of the construction of others, and with emphasizing the role of the contingent, cannot simply end with reiterating its findings, because, according to its own premises, these findings are always and necessarily provisional, and conclusions are drawn only to be immediately redrawn. This portion of the document will therefore attempt to present several other possible courses of inquiry, alternative points of focus and, perhaps, future avenues of research.

What this dissertation could have done is take up the concept of emotional geography and an adjacent one of flanerie. It could have also traced further the connection between *graph*ology and cinemato*graph*y.[91] Around 1918–19 Eisenstein already imagined a fictional world in which people's lives would be presented by geometrical shapes of their movement in a two-dimensional space. In this this imaginary world people woud be following simple square, or triangle, etc. trajectories, and only the main hero, a young man, would be for a while blissfully unaware that he follows a predetermined path as well, only to realise that his geometrical figure is simply slightly more complex than those of others. This early metaphor of destiny through geometry and movement prefigurs his work on recording theatrical mise-en-scenes as graphs in the 1920s and his employment of the construction of mise-en-scenes to create spatial

[91] I thank Professor Randall Halle for making this suggestion.

representations of plots in his teaching in the 1930s. By the early 1930s Eisenstein connects bodily movement to the movement of the hand, the eye, the mind—and by the 1940s creates a complex system of isomorphism between such things as soundtrack and the visuals in cinema (also represented as graphs using *Alexander Nevsky* as example), or as development of literary plot (in a detective novel, for instance) and the atavistic desire to "hunt" for meaning—or, indeed, conclusion.

Another major line of inquiry would have been (or would be) exploring the ways sexuality, violence, and humor operate in his theory and practice of the perios (as affects, for instance—something that scholars such as Karla Oeler and Luka Arsenjuk are working on at the moment). Yet another possibility that lies on a different plane and that soon will hopefully be more feasible in terms of research with the full publication of Aleksandrov's diaries, is delving deeper into the dynamics within Eisenstein's group; something that the present work by necessity only touches upon. A complementary way of describing and analyzing this period would be through focusing solely on Eisenstein's correspondence with people in Moscow, especially with Pera Atasheva (this was suggested by Professor Nancy Condee early on in the development of the dissertation). Finally, a way of incorporating detailed chronology of events could have been worked out—if it was not, it was mostly for reasons of space. A combination of these and others, at times apparently imcompatible approaches, would be the ideal book (not spherical, but of a more disordered shape) that this work could become.

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