

# Dance of Values: Reading Eisenstein's *Capital*

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“The crisis of the democracy should be understood as crisis of the conditions of exposition of the political man.”<sup>1</sup> This is how Walter Benjamin, in 1935, describes the decisive political consequences of the new medial regime in the “age of technological reproducibility.” Henceforth, the political question of representation would be determined by aesthetic conditions of presentation.<sup>2</sup> In other words, what is at stake is the visibility of the political man, insofar as Benjamin argues that “radio and film are changing not only the function of the professional actor but, equally, the function of those who, like the politician, present themselves before these media.”<sup>3</sup> Benjamin’s text evokes a distorting mirror in which the political man appears all the smaller, the larger his image is projected. As a result, the contemporary capitalist conditions of reproduction bring forth “a new form of selection”—an apparatus before which “the champion, the star, and the dictator emerge as victors.”<sup>4</sup>

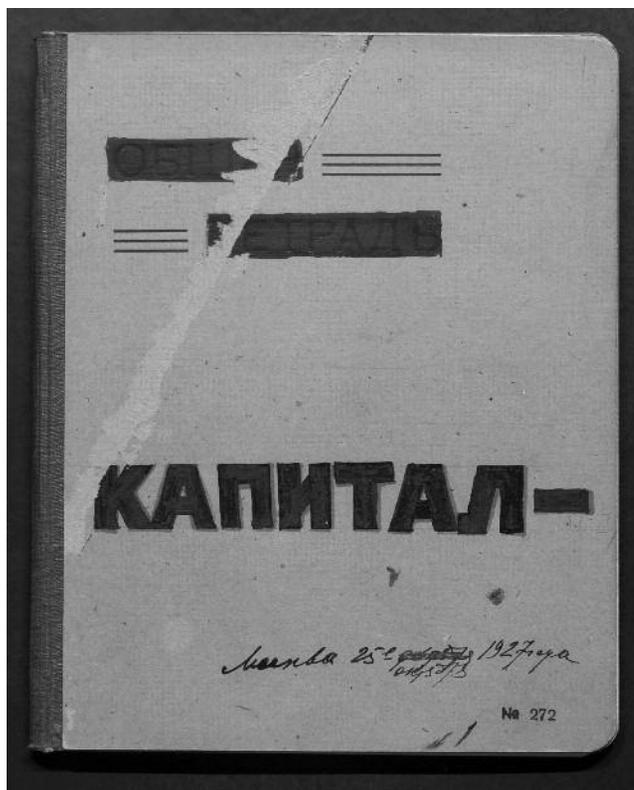
The same condition of technological reproduction that enables artistic and cultural transmission is inseparably tied to the conditions of capitalist production, on the one hand, and the rise of fascist regimes, on the other. Benjamin was not the first to draw an impetus for critical analysis from this relationship. Seven years before the “Work of Art” essay, Sergei Eisenstein assembled a composition in his journal—elements of which surprisingly echo in Benjamin’s thesis. Using montage as a morphological tool, Eisenstein constructs his argument out of three visual components: on the right, we see “Das Sportgesicht,” the masked face of an American baseball player, Miss Catcher. On the left appears an anticapitalist poster of the Russian International Red Aid (Mezhdunarodnaia Organizatsia Pomoshchi Bortsam Revolutsii; MOPR). Above them, Eisenstein places a cutout from the journal *Soviet Art* that addresses the interrelation of artistic techniques from different historical periods with their respective ideologies. This fragment calls forth the relation between the two heterogeneous images: “Not by chance did the artists of industrial capitalism work so passionately on landscape, then on still life, on the object, creating the style of the epoch and transforming commodity into fetish. One cannot separate formal innovation from the subject and the ideological content of art.”<sup>5</sup> The mask over the sportswoman’s face corresponds

with the swastika, forming a prison. “Help the prisoners of capital!” the poster implores. By showing, in all its screaming ambivalence, the same overexposition of the athlete that Benjamin describes, Eisenstein’s argument functions not as an eloquent explanation but as a concrete material construction: a selection of fragments brought into a constellation. Portrayed with the intensity of a close-up, the baseball player appears simultaneously as star and prisoner, a concrete consequence of mass mediatization and a singular agent of the mute and oppressed political man. The relationship between the experimental achievements of the new arts and their technical conditions is dialectical, inasmuch as the latter facilitates the growth of capital and, by way of the expanding exhibition value, reinforces the fetishism of commodities.

What can one gain from Eisenstein’s morphological juxtaposition? The interrelation between capital’s continuous expansion and exhibition value as mediated through technology constitutes the central matter of Eisenstein’s unfulfilled *Capital* project. The planned film adaptation of Karl Marx’s *Capital* stands as one of the most enigmatic and impactful projects in the history of cinema. The preparatory notes for the film, a ten-page excerpt of which was first published in 1974 by Naum Kleiman and Leonid Kozlov in *Iskusstvo kino*, are astonishing.<sup>6</sup> The director planned to use the Marxian *magnum opus* as a script while employing techniques inspired by James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. A look into Eisenstein’s Moscow archive and the more than five hundred diary pages he dedicated to the *Capital* project from October 1927 to November 1928 reveals the full scope of his plans.

“The setting of *Capital* develops as visual instruction in the dialectical method,” Eisenstein proclaimed.<sup>7</sup> The archival materials abound in images: richly collaged protocinematic sequences that reinvest Marx’s concepts of value-form, dialectics, commodities, and fetishism into a visual economy of thought.

In the following, I explore the internal logic of Eisenstein’s choices in the *Capital* project. This *protofilm*—materially defined through its thematic and formal heterogeneity as well as its nonlinear, provisory flow—functions as a visual theorization of value. In this way, Eisenstein’s *Capital* deals with a fundamental crisis of its political-medial situation, a present that extends



Grigori Aleksandrov and Sergei Eisenstein. Notebook on *Capital*, October 25, 1927. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art).

from its contemporary context to today. In its “diffuse” language—associated with the stream-of-consciousness of Joyce’s *Ulysses* or the gestural, archaic “linear speech” of Nikolai Marr’s linguistic paleontology—Eisenstein saw the strongest critical and affective potential for the future cinema.<sup>8</sup> The experimental research in sound film and the theory of “intellectual montage” he developed in these years echo the same audacious attempt not to separate bodily affect from the conception and structure of thought. In this context, my article explores how these levels of Eisenstein’s moving *visual morphology* intersect with Marx’s critique of political economy.<sup>9</sup>

This association is crucial. A close reading of archival materials, analyzed here for the first time, leads not only to a more concrete understanding of Eisenstein’s stake in *Capital* regarding Marx’s theory of value but allows for speculation on the morphological vocabulary present in Marx’s *Critique of Political Economy*.

After the drama, poem, ballad in film, *October* presents a new form of cinema: a collection of essays on a series of themes which constitute *October*. Assuming that in any film work, certain salient phrases are given importance, the form of a discursive film provides, apart from its unique renewal of strategies, their rationalization, which takes these strategies into account. Here’s a point of contact already with completely new film perspectives and with the glimmers of possibilities to be realized in *Capital*, a new work on a libretto by Karl Marx. A film treatise.<sup>10</sup>

The deliberately open and fragmentary form envisioned for *Capital* differs from Eisenstein’s previous films precisely in its “intellectual” focus: a visual “treatise” that would directly affect thought without any conceptual mediation, generalization, or *Begriff*. This is how Eisenstein imagined the new cinema in his 1928 text “I-A-28” (Intellectual attraction 1928).<sup>11</sup> Many parallels can be seen between the theses on intellectual attractions and his early aesthetic principles articulated in “Montage of Attractions” (published in the journal *LEF* in 1923).<sup>12</sup> These include the dialectic of physiological shock and intellectual impact and an emphasis both on overall structure (“montage”) and the autonomy of each singular element (“attraction”) within the chain. Eisenstein’s later concept of an isomorphic affinity between a sequence of images in a montage and the associative chain of thought appears astonishing in this regard. On March 8, 1928, he noted in his working diaries,

Yesterday thought a lot about *Capital*. About the structure of the work which will derive from the methodology of film-word, film-image, film-phrase, as now discovered (after the sequence of “the gods”).

The working draft.

Take a trivial progressive chain of development of some action. . . . For instance: one day in a man's life. *Minutiusement* set forth as an outline which makes us aware of departure from it. For that purpose, only. Only as the critique of the development of associative order of social conventions, generalizations and theses of *Capital*.

Generalizations, from given cases to ideas (this will be completely primitive, especially if we move in a line from bread shortages to the grain shortage [and] the mechanics of speculation. And here, from a button to the theme of overproduction, but more clearly and neatly.)

In Joyce's *Ulysses* there is a remarkable chapter of this kind, written in the manner of a scholastic catechism. Questions are asked and answers given. The subject of the questions is how to light a Bunsen burner. The answers, however, are metaphysical. (Read this chapter. It might be methodologically useful.) Thanks to Ivy Valterovna Litvinova<sup>13</sup>

Only the most precise—even “trivial”—concreteness of a certain case can serve as a point of departure for a philosophical critique in *Capital*. Joyce's *Ulysses* provides an illuminating example of how Eisenstein conceived of this concrete case.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, the case concerned its omnipresent recurrence—one day in Leopold Bloom's life, for example—and on the other, the “meticulous” attention of a close-up, where phenomenological details serve as departure for a transgressive chain of thought. Only in this way did Eisenstein envision the intimate proximity between the unique, individual perception and the political, economic event.

The approach undertaken in this article is to understand Eisenstein's passage less as a vision—even if a slightly obscure one—of a future film and more as a precise instruction for the analysis of his material: Only a close reading of an operational chain of heterogeneous elements provided in their formal concreteness and their singularity produces an adequate understanding of Eisenstein's *Capital* project. In this way, the focus on the potential of the working method in *Capital* (which does not exclude structural correspondences to Eisenstein's other theoretical and cinematic projects) resists direct comparisons with Eisenstein's “canonic” montage theory and its transformations over the course of his oeuvre. Such comparisons would likewise require microanalytical attention to the archival sources, without separating the theory from its form (montage, graphic insertions, lacunae, and shifts).<sup>15</sup>

To understand this dynamic relation between sources and their transformations, between concrete aesthetic choices and their theoretical and

political dimensions in *Capital*, this article is broken into six sections. The first attempts to map the remains of Eisenstein's project—the “loose-leaves of *Capital*”—while simultaneously alluding to the complexity of Eisenstein's archive, a consequence of his associative and dispersed montage and remontage of materials. Accordingly, the perception of these dispersed constellations requires the creation of a deeper association between the epistemic framework of the project (Marx's *Capital*) and its dynamic formal genesis (Eisenstein's *Capital*)—a move not undertaken in previous publications on the textual fragments of *Capital*. From this association of the unfinished and dynamic state of the archival material—its radically visual and relational logic—with the materialist approach of Marx's *Capital*, the subsequent arguments of my article emerge.

The second section explores the “moving values” in Eisenstein's project, analyzing how Eisenstein shaped his practice of montage around Marx's notion of value-form (*Wertform*). Montage allowed Eisenstein to inject movement into a staid propositional form of thought associated with symbolic and idealist order.

The third section connects this practice, undertaken in his film *October*, to the filmmaker's intense debates with the formalist school about the *symbolic value* of images—especially with *LEF* journal authors Osip Brik, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Viktor Shklovsky and their polemic against Eisenstein's aesthetic choices. Here again, parallels to Benjamin's concept of exhibition value (*Ausstellungswert*) show the contemporary political dimension of Eisenstein's project.

In the fourth section, these issues of value-form lead to a reconsideration of the concept of dialectics. Eisenstein's *Capital* sheds further light on Marx's own text by reinterpreting it according to a poetic process of revaluation in which economic and political critique continually mesh with anthropological and aesthetic issues. Eisenstein unearths this labile economy as a “sensuous thought” of images, presenting their concrete critical potential as a movement of singularization. This movement also characterizes the Joycean technique of stream-of-consciousness that Eisenstein imagined as the *Capital* project's inner voice. Employing an unambiguously *morphological* procedure, Eisenstein's montage sequences produce a kind of surplus value entirely on their own.

The fifth section takes up this semiotic excess, which stirs the various found materials and represented bodies into a dance analogous to Marx's “dance” of “petrified conditions.” Mirroring techniques of reproduction and fragmentation in the press clippings he included in his working diaries, Eisenstein, as an act of criticism, exceeds the capitalist logic of fetish production.

The sixth and final section considers Eisenstein's revolutionary

experiment in creating a new cinematographic language. What does it mean to reimagine Marx's *Capital* after the literary model of Joyce's *Ulysses*? This cinema would interweave the political-historical thrust of the former with the latter's intimate, unconscious inner monologue. Eisenstein's project also entailed a radical reevaluation of cinematic representation: the mass-mediated film-image in transition toward sound film and toward the concomitant ascension of the "great speaker" and the political system most commensurate to him: fascism.

### **"Primitive Accumulation" and Other Loose-Leafs of *Capital***

In tracing Eisenstein's work on *Capital*, one mainly refers to three unpublished primary sources from the Russian State Archive for Literature and Art.<sup>16</sup> Eisenstein's diaries from the years 1927–1928 provide the first and most considerable source. The second stems from Grigori Aleksandrov's forty-page notebook from October 1927, titled "Capital," which contains quotations and press excerpts related to politics, *faits divers*, and reflections on publicity. These were most probably collected under Eisenstein's close supervision. The third source is a letter by the Marxist historian, and later professor of American studies, Aleksei Efimov, titled "Primitive Accumulation." In this letter, addressed to the Soviet Directorate for Cinema (Sovkino) on March 23, 1928, Efimov offers to produce a "scientific film" based "mainly on Marx's *Capital*," written and conceived together with Eisenstein.<sup>17</sup> While the notebooks provide a patchwork of concrete and highly fragmentary elements, the letter reveals a more coherent summary of the planned film. It would consist of three parts, each corresponding to a different historical epoch: the period of colonial politics and serfdom, the debut of industrial capitalism, and the confrontation between Fordism and "socialist accumulation."<sup>18</sup> The only allusion to the film's visuals appears in the second part and involves an abstract remark on "a large range of everyday life materials from Russian history."<sup>19</sup> Although Sovkino probably never answered this letter, it provides evidence for Eisenstein's engagement with *Capital's* historical, political, and scientific dimensions.<sup>20</sup> The collaboration with Efimov reveals a further layer of complexity in Eisenstein's preliminary research, one that goes beyond transposing Marx's ideas into the contemporary context.

In their introduction to the first publication of a text excerpt from these materials, Kleiman and Kozlov mention Eisenstein's interest in *Capital* as aiming at producing a concrete relation between the social, the individual, ideology, and everyday life. Eisenstein's goal of "teaching the worker dialectical thinking" was to be achieved less through a cinematographic illustration of Marx's economic and political concepts and more through a "visual expression of dialectical interrelations."<sup>21</sup> He

planned to develop a radically new type of cinematographic narration: one in which “elementary connections were dissociated and—through rigorously selected successive chains—incorporated into the system of social and historical relations.”<sup>22</sup> This vertiginous montage was promising. In visually transmitting a powerful dialectics of class struggle, it aimed at opening fundamentally new horizons for political cinema. In this light, Eisenstein’s diaries appear so interesting precisely because they do not describe or explain the future film but instead bear its experimental visual expressions. His montages appear as dynamic, concrete traces of *Capital*.

The idea for the film resulted directly from the process of editing *October*. Nearly blind, overworked, and living on stimulants in order to finish the film on time to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the revolution, Eisenstein made the following notes in his diary for October 12, 1927: “It’s settled: we’re going to film ‘Capital,’ following Marx’s script—the only logical solution. N.B. Additions . . . those are clips pasted to the montage wall.”<sup>23</sup> In fact, Eisenstein partly pasted notes onto the montage wall and then back into his notebook, successively transforming it into an editing surface on which graphic elements, quotations, images, and text captions entered into manifold interrelations. He conceived the future film as a loose structure of “nonfigurative chapters” or “miniatures.” As a result, extant archival materials provide no narrative structure but reveal a process of becoming, unfolding precisely at the intersection of the material and aesthetic layers—where literary, private, political, historical, and economic issues intertwine. As such, “showing the method of the dialectic” means concretely exhibiting the maximum disparity of the material, which is not organized sequentially but through *durcheinander* (disarrangement).<sup>24</sup> Eisenstein did not shy away from using the German *durcheinander* in connection with the “continuity of series,” as he was concerned with an “associative unfolding” of heterogeneous elements that, in this way, would produce new interrelations.<sup>25</sup> In *Ulysses*, Joyce uses the German words *nacheinander* and *nebeneinander* to allude to a possible distinction between the spatial and temporal dimensions of sensorial experience.<sup>26</sup> Eisenstein’s use of *durcheinander* in *Capital* can be understood in proximity to the Joycean procedure of stream-of-consciousness: a zone of immanence of theoretical and poetic expression, of formless, diffuse fragments and rhythmic alteration, of affect and thought.

Why did the filming of *Capital*, this “Magnitogorsk of cinematography,” fail?<sup>27</sup> An apocryphal source refers to Eisenstein’s personal talk with Josef Stalin in 1929 and the latter’s single-sentence comment, “Eisenstein, are you insane?”<sup>28</sup> Even prior to the great waves of terror and the ban on formalism, this response functioned as an irrevocable judgment on the

*Capital* project. It widens the gap, as it were, between the Soviet Union's totalitarian course and Eisenstein's dialectical vision of a political cinema. At the same time, this judgment symptomatically points to a structural analogy: the parallel between Benjamin's diagnosis of the "crisis of the conditions of exposition" and Stalin's consolidating dictatorship, the latter of which paradigmatically condensed in a ban on political criticism through aesthetic means in the interdiction on the *Capital* project. Through *Capital*, Eisenstein was already theorizing the vehemently political meaning of the aesthetic condition that Benjamin, under the shadow of National Socialism, would conceptualize as "exhibition value."

For Eisenstein, the project's revolutionary thrust lay in its experimentation with a new cinematographic language, one that aimed at creating the closest possible relation between thought and perception, the conscious and the unconscious, and the social and the formal dimensions of the image. The emergence of this new cinematographic language can be observed in the structure of one of Eisenstein's precisely constructed collages. The page is structured by four red lines and fragments of notes pasted between them. The structure forms a square in which a man's patent-leather shoe is vertically placed. Two crosses can be seen on the page. One of them is placed horizontally on the shoe, while the other interrupts—literally crosses out—an inscription in German: "The end of tempered notation"—"blessedly deceased." Here, the "inner speech" of the new cinema is associated with the end of the composed music of the silent film era. The dates at the bottom of the page (from September 6 to September 13, 1928) correspond perfectly with Eisenstein's intense research on overtone montage, a concept inspired by Kabuki theater. According to Eisenstein, the classical model of musical composition is rendered obsolete upon its entrance into a dialectical relation with all the expressive elements of cinematographic image superposition. This does not imply an arbitrary or purely dissonant understanding of sound, as a first glance at the fragmented dynamic of the collage might suggest; to the contrary, the construction of cinematic expression as intended by Eisenstein should incorporate even higher levels of complexity in composition through the inclusion of a subtler counterpoint or conflict. In his September 1928 notes, Eisenstein



Sergei Eisenstein. Diary entry, September 13, 1928. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art).

invents a notation method of expressive movements that he calls a “spherical coordinate system,” based on deformation and polyphony of heterogeneous elements in time. Overtone montage was thus a concept for a continuous choreography of conflicting elements; it also evidences the impact of Joyce’s stream-of-consciousness, a form in which fragments of speech interact in the dynamic flow of an articulation process.<sup>29</sup>

Eisenstein’s decision to construct the future film using Marx’s *Capital* as script and Joyce’s *Ulysses* as literary method ensured that a conflict would develop at the intersection of the political and historical with the intimate and unconscious. Eisenstein described this intersection as “a vital power of symbolization,” which he also understood as an anthropological basis of emotional economy.<sup>30</sup> As he said in an interview on the project published in 1928, “from the fact that every human symbolizes unnoticeably, the film must draw consequences.”<sup>31</sup> He thereby revealed a crucial psychoanalytic ground of his aesthetics:

Not the having-become, but the becoming symbol interests me. For instance, I want to express the Marxian dialectic entirely visually. Every appearance lets itself be grasped dialectically: not how it is, but how it becomes. In natural science they admit it, in psychology they do as well, only in social science do they deny it.<sup>32</sup>

*Capital*’s critical gesture manifests through a double movement: first, the radical reevaluation of symbolic representation—that is, of the use value of the mass-mediated image on the edge of sound film—and, concomitantly, a preemptive confrontation with the rising fascisms and the ascension of the *great speaker*. In the purely “visual” (*bildhaft*) expression of this dialectic lies a crucial morphological operation of this Marxist odyssey. Conceptually in conversation with Goethe and Marx, Eisenstein’s project was to reveal the *Urphänomen* of the revolutionary mass film in the almost unconscious inner speech of a single mind. Filming *Capital* meant amplifying the life of an ordinary man, such as Leopold Bloom, to a measure of the collective history of social oppression.

### **Moving Values**

How did Eisenstein imagine visually expressing the dialectics of value? And what does it mean, concretely, to revalue and return the logic of representation by showing simultaneously the “method” of Marx’s *Capital*?

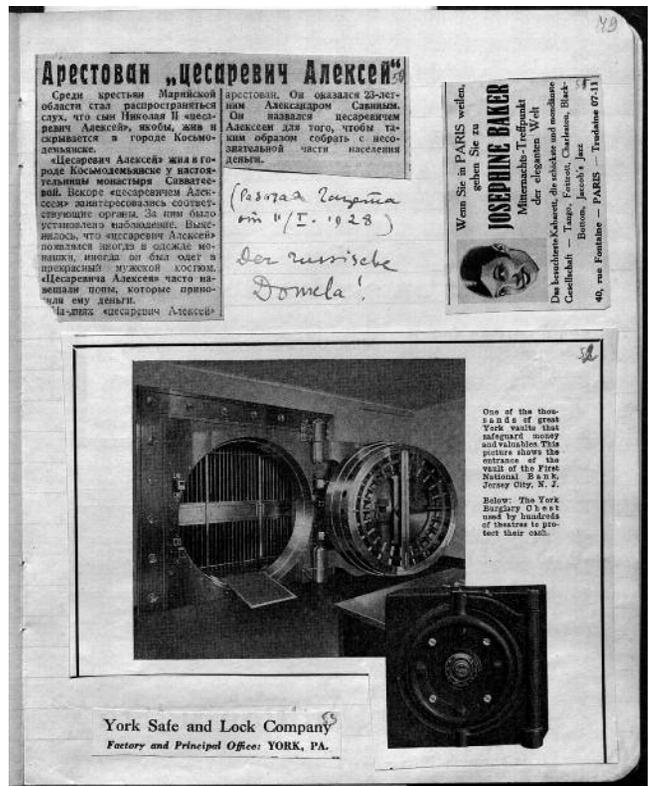
Eisenstein deals with this question by associating three elements on a single page of his diary. The press excerpts at the bottom center show the safes of the York Safe and Lock Company, which theaters once used to store their cash. An article on the “Arrest of ‘Tsarevich Alexei’” constitutes the second element:

Among peasants, gossip spread: namely, that the son of Nikolai II, “Tsarevich Aleksei” is allegedly still alive and hiding in Kosmodemiansk city. . . . Soon special organs were interested in Tsarevich Aleksei; he was put under surveillance and it turned out that he appeared sometimes disguised as a nun, sometimes dressed in a gorgeous suit.<sup>33</sup>

According to the article, this man, eventually revealed to be the twenty-three-year-old Aleksander Savin, had made a fortune in the monasteries of Russia by pretending to be the young Tsar Alexei. Having ostensibly survived the revolution, he represented a kind of false money or stock of a bankrupt monarchy. The montage’s third element is an advertisement in which the contemporary actress Josephine Baker invites the viewer to Paris to dance the tango, the Charleston, and “to jazz.” The detention of the false tsar usurping his identity and the stocking of values earned on a dance of false appearances provokes a critical play of different notions of value: exchange and monetary values as well as symbolic and “exhibition value” (later to be a crucial concept for Benjamin). Fragments of these visual elements begin to interact with one another, producing continuously new meanings; for instance, Baker’s head appears “arrested” in the Lock Company’s safe. Symmetrically, the false Tsarevich reveals himself to be of an actor’s quality rather than of a hustler’s.

The critical dismantling of static and petrified symbols is a project of Eisenstein’s well known from the “Sequence of the gods” in *October*. In his journal entry for March 14, 1928, Eisenstein states that the rhythmical sequence of heterogeneous gods and idols devalues the unique symbol of god (i.e., the crucifix), as well as its concept (*Begriff*). This happens in a morphological juxtaposition of unique images of divinities—incommensurable idols placed into a successive temporality through montage.

“God,’ ‘God,’ ‘God,’” read the notes to *Capital*, “and a semantic *diminuendo* in the material. Rows of meanings.”<sup>34</sup> The musical term for a reduction in loudness applies here to the gradual shutting-down of the traditional semantic field. This occurs through the excess of a visual *crescendo*: in this sequence, Eisenstein confronts the “term ‘God’” with a series of unique counterimages. The



Right: Sergei Eisenstein. Diary entry, September 13, 1928. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art).

Opposite: Sergei Eisenstein, dir. *October*, 1927. Sequence of the gods. Compiled by Naum Kleiman. From Sergei Eisenstein, *Montaż* (2000).

“pompous baroque-Christ”—the symbol of the general meaning of “God”—is followed by a dynamic montage of incommensurable idols. The excessive multiplication of *one* God disassembles its unitary conception in the modes of its material existence. This complex visual argument calls the monopolistic position of a Christian symbolization into doubt on an anthropological plane. This works because, in order to undertake his materialist critique of religion, Eisenstein exhibits the idols both in their respective cultural imprints—in their iridescent particularities—as well as in their ubiquity. In this way he makes a third point, one that reads a generally “in advance accepted term”—in this case, it itself is the paradigmatic idol of rational thought—as its linguistic fetish. “The montage pieces are here correlated on a downward curve,” Eisenstein wrote one year later, “and lead also the idea of God down to the wooden idol.”<sup>35</sup>

Eisenstein assumed a close proximity between the questions of value, fetish, and cult. His notes contain plans for a sequence devoted to the sale of cult objects. He comments, “from all of this one could make a film entitled ‘Death to the Easter Bunny’ [*Tod dem Osterhasen*].” The image of the gigantic bunny on the left comes from the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*, which John Heartfield also used in his montages. We read in a legend, “Easter Bunnies, Easter eggs, big business around Easter.” The commercial activity with Christian values associates the four Catholic clergymen beneath to the Easter Bunnies. “That’s how they look, the preachers of the ‘charity,’” reads the inscription that Eisenstein pasted below. This industrial reproduction and circulation of values through images reveals a crucial dialectic in these images, simultaneously showing in them an anthropological continuum within Christian culture and a transformation within new forms of industrial capitalism. Fetish and cult appear, not identified as such but precisely within the historical complexity of their perpetuation and metamorphosis. Another press clipping is located above and to the right: an image of “Bondu devils” from Sierra Leone who strongly resemble certain gods from the *October* sequence.<sup>36</sup>



Some pages further on, Eisenstein analyzes the phallic origin of the divinity images. He pastes a negative from *October's* sequence of gods into his notebook, addressing it to Bleiman (a critic of *October*): “To Bleiman,” he writes, “a portrait of a penis, from which came the semen of the new cinematography.”<sup>37</sup> In its sensuous and epistemic directness, this note reveals not the *logos* but the *eidos spermaticos*—a metaphor of desire, rather than reason, being the procreative and prolific image of what Eisenstein at the time called an “intellectual attraction.”<sup>38</sup>

## The Value of Lenin

Contemporary exchanges show, however, that Eisenstein’s colleagues and comrades did not share his understanding of intellectual montage. Formalists as well as authors from the journal of the *Left Front of the Arts (LEF)* accused Eisenstein of producing a historical lie and of committing treason against their historical and documentary principles. Eisenstein had used an amateur actor, Vasily Nikandrov, to play the role of Vladimir Lenin, and in a well-known sequence of *October* this “false” Lenin is seen on a tribune in the wind. This sequence provoked harsh reactions. Mayakovski menaced screenings of *October* for including the sequence. “No matter when, even in the most solemn moment,” he wrote in 1927, “I will throw rotten eggs at the head of this faked Lenin.”<sup>39</sup> For Mayakovski, an actor playing a role voids the sense of the historical figure. He complained that “Eisenstein is not able to create a symbol out of authentic material,” alluding to documentary footage of Lenin.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Brik argued that Eisenstein “is cheating on the real facts; in his formal experiments he produces schemas.”<sup>41</sup>

In his diaries, Eisenstein planned a response article titled “How to Film Lenin, Or: On the Rotten Eggs of Vladimir Mayakovski.” Here as elsewhere Eisenstein opposed a static and petrified symbol to a dynamic and vital sign. Prohibiting the representation of Lenin meant petrifying his personality, a process Eisenstein associated with the “nationalization of the Lenin figure.” He planned to illustrate the article with an unseen iconology of Lenin: “unknown and exotic images of Lenin” that would exceed or outpace the rising cult.<sup>42</sup>

“S.M. Eisenstein has found him-

Sergei Eisenstein. Diary entry, April 22, 1928. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art).



self in a most difficult and stupid situation,” Brik wrote in the April 1928 issue of *LEF*. “He was suddenly proclaimed as a world-level director, as a genius. . . . To [him] it seemed narrow-minded to undertake minor experiments, . . . he had to solve the world’s problems, . . . and nothing less than filming Marx’s *Capital*.”<sup>43</sup> From the perspective of the *LEF* authors, the task of *October* could have been solved entirely through the “montage of documentary footage.”<sup>44</sup> Instead, Eisenstein chose the path of “blunt stamps” that, on account of their deficient documentary authenticity, cheated the principles of the left’s chronicles.<sup>45</sup> The heaviest accusation from the *LEF* circle was that of the “historical lie.” Rather than executing a “symbolic elevation” of the material, Eisenstein dealt in scenes of shock value, as with the cruel-burlesque killing of a young Bolshevik with bourgeois ladies’ umbrellas.<sup>46</sup> “The umbrellas did not appear as a symbol, but rather as a worn-out prop.” The scene of destruction in the Winter Palace was neither a “symbol” nor a “poster” but a stark “lie.”<sup>47</sup>

Eisenstein comments on these accusations on various pages of his 1928 journals, transforming them into the *Capital* project’s theoretical groundwork. In an equal parts scathing and ironic—if unsent—reply, he pins Brik’s critique on an insufficiently advanced understanding of Marx’s account of the historical development of political economy. By drawing on the theoretical content of Marx’s magnum opus, he is moving into his intended film project’s conceptual territory. “That symbolism cannot be a characteristic of the working class was something that I already wrote as I sought to prove that the term of a *proletarian* art is unlimited. (‘The idolatrous thoughts’).”<sup>48</sup> Although Eisenstein’s concept of symbol resists precise definition, his use of it refers to a more static, unaffected, holistic entity. “Symbol” (*simvol*) implies a total that cannot be fragmented or separated. In contrast, the “sign” (*znak*) denotes a mobile constructive entity of montage, oscillating and demountable. While the meaning of a symbol appears determined, that of a sign is relational and dependent on context. The rest of Eisenstein’s unsent reply sketches a theory of symbolic value that builds on Marx’s development of the money form as the general form of value. “Nevertheless, Brik’s bad luck exists in the fact that ‘October’ does not produce *any* symbolism or symbolic language. This is because [*October*] pays a 1,500 ruble check rather than a herd of cows. And it is quite naive to consider a three-Ruble bill as being a ‘symbol’ for three rubles!”<sup>49</sup>

This critical answer to Brik’s objection establishes the new film project’s first priorities. Eisenstein speaks on a level immanent to his object—that is, *Capital*. Because Brik thinks in terms of “a herd of cows,” he does not grasp the contemporary extent of abstraction (evoked through

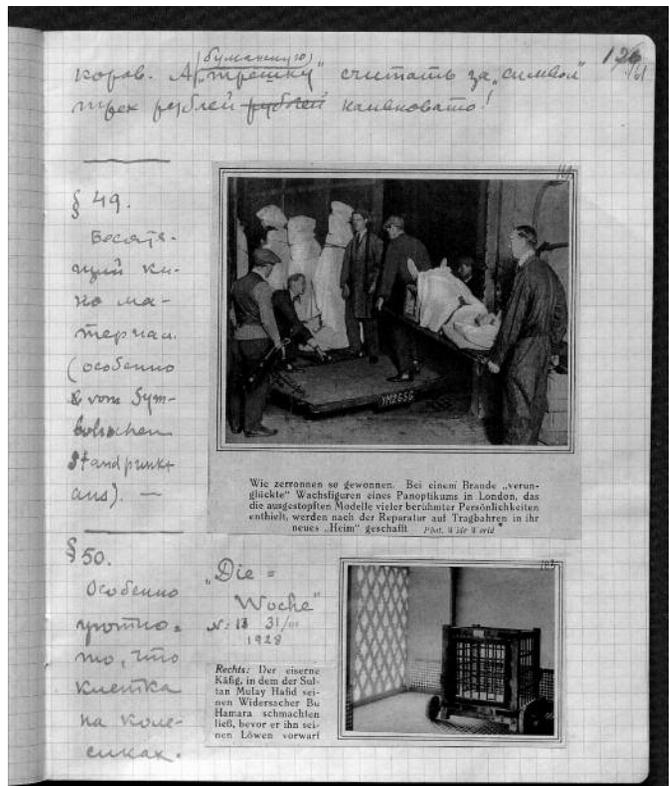
the form of the check) and, therefore, the dynamic nature of value itself. Instead, Eisenstein searches for an exchange currency that resides not on the symbol's static plane but rather on its dynamic plane: that of the "becoming symbol." In doing so, he makes the "sign" the central element of a visual economy.

In close proximity to this note, Eisenstein pasted an excerpt from *Die Woche* (The Week) with the label "As melted, so won. Figurine 'casualties' of a fire in a London wax museum."<sup>50</sup> Next to the excerpt, Eisenstein ironically comments, "brilliant film material (especially from a symbolic standpoint)."<sup>51</sup> That what melts away here are wax figures—symbols intimately involved in perpetuating personality cults—is no accident. The image's shrouded figures evoke both Christian and pagan rituals while also interlacing with cult and exhibition value in an exemplary way.

Against the backdrop of the Soviet Union's rising cult of personality and the monumentalization of political leaders, the question of representing the political and its concrete and dynamic figuration emerges as a leitmotif in Eisenstein's journals. This leitmotif reveals a critical position, one able to deconstruct both a fixed symbol and its *cult-value*. This paradoxical process of simultaneous construction and deconstruction occurs through Eisenstein's use of montage. In this way it mobilizes a dialectic—not as a three-step model (successive stages of theses, antitheses, and syntheses: the German *Aufhebung*) but as a more complex and conflict-laden polarity: an instrument for continuous revaluation.

In what way does Eisenstein's montage dialectic offer an immanent rhythmic pendulum of conflicts? Furthermore, how does this process become a constant morphological polarity? Eisenstein's discovery consists in an analogy between "Marx's method" and the principle of montage.

Marx traces the "exchange value" back to the existence of a common element "of identical magnitude in two different things": "Both are therefore equal to a third thing, which in itself is neither the one nor the other."<sup>52</sup> Montage, in turn, is a tool that produces a relation capable of showing a third property that two elements taken on their own cannot. In this regard, as a producer of equivalences, Eisenstein grasps the sign as a dynamic process of permanent revaluation.<sup>53</sup> The opposition between "sign" and



Sergei Eisenstein. Diary entry, March 31, 1928. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art).

“symbol” is not only demonstrated via the paradigm of money, since both a “three-ruble” bill and a “crucifix” can also appear as symbols. In question is the efficacy by which the first may appear as “living” and the second as “dead.”<sup>54</sup> Eisenstein follows this analogy on both a semiotic and an economic register. What dynamizes the banknote is not the fluctuations of the stock market or its market value but “the change of value in regard to the relations—the total extent of the cash at the disposition of the bearer.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Marx’s Metamorphosis**

In the *Capital* project, Eisenstein remotivates value theory at the level of the sign by opposing the static model of representation with an active, dynamic one: montage. Beyond simply adapting Marx’s method, the process of montage opens a structure in motion, a mode of sensuous filmic thought. In this rhythmic and ecstatic revaluation process, we can analyze how Eisenstein introduces Marx’s theory of value on the visual level of concrete forms, to make them circulate, decompose, and dismantle stable categories and symbols.

This process of transformation has a prehistory in German thought, precisely incorporated in the concept of *Metamorphose*. The dynamics of value as developed in Marx’s *Capital*, in all their crucial complexity, must be understood as a *relation* rather than as a *stable form*. Marx develops the notion of *Wertform* as a core part of his project in the first chapter of *Capital* while dealing with commodity and value. He begins with an organicist metaphor. “For bourgeois society,” he states, “the commodity-form of the product of labor, or the value-form of the commodity, is the economic cell-form.”<sup>56</sup> Marx explains that this economic germ cell is much more difficult to analyze than the entire organism. Later, he picks up the thread with perfectly morphological categories: “we perceive straight away the insufficiency of the simple form of value: it is an embryonic form which must undergo a series of metamorphoses before it can ripen into the price-form.”<sup>57</sup> Marx’s language should be heard in all its precision: the process he refers to here is neither a “development” nor even a “dialectic” of the value-form but, crucially, a “metamorphosis”—one that the abstract price-form is not excluded from, but in the chain of which it constitutes a kind of protean element.

“I do not proceed from ‘concepts,’ hence neither from the ‘concept of value,’” Marx writes; “what I proceed from is the simplest social form in which the labor product presents itself in contemporary society, and this is the ‘commodity.’”<sup>58</sup> In the ambivalence of this concreteness Marx points out not an abstract quantity but a quality of value. What does this mean? Value is, in fact, a mediated social relation that needs to be located and

analyzed not only in its condition as a quantity but in its phenomenological potentiality, as a form and its multiple transformations.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe showed how an authentic shape (*Gestalt*) can be conceived only by apprehending its simplest, irreducible principle, which he named the originary phenomenon (*Urphänomen*). He gained an insight central to his concept of metamorphosis while walking in the Sicilian gardens during his Italian journey (1786–1788). There he developed the picture of the plant as transformation of the leaf:

it came to me in a flash that in the organ of the plant which we are accustomed to call the leaf lies the true Proteus who can hide or reveal himself in all vegetal forms. From first to last, the plant is nothing but leaf, which is so inseparable from the future germ that one cannot think of one without the other.<sup>59</sup>

Goethe understood the process through which this dynamic “leaf” progressively assumes the form of its different parts (cotyledons, stem leaves, sepals, petals, pistils, stamens, and so on), as “the metamorphosis of plants.” Remarkably, in the first volume of Marx’s *Capital* the term *Metamorphose*, which Goethe named a “true Proteus,” appears nearly thirty times, including three in the table of contents. Likewise, he uses a synonym for *metamorphosis*, the German word *Verwandlung*, more than 130 times. The wider Marx reception seems not to have conceptualized this strong morphological imprint on his writings.<sup>60</sup> While the most relevant readings, such as Hans-Georg Backhaus’s monograph *Dialektik der Wertform*, agree on the insufficiency of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s teleological, three-step dialectic in understanding the concrete procedures of Marx’s critique of capitalism, no clear consensus exists on an alternative to the persistent reference to Hegel’s idealist model.<sup>61</sup>

Without explicitly entering into this debate, Eisenstein’s work on *Capital* undertakes precisely such a project. In visually realizing its source, Eisenstein develops a morphological undercurrent within Marx into a model of dialectics as metamorphosis. Marx shows the labile and dynamic qualities of value metamorphosing into different value-forms that engage social, anthropological, and aesthetic orders. Eisenstein reveals this labile and complex economy *within* the sensuous logic of images in order to present their active and critical potential as a movement of singularization. This excessive economy of revaluation produces a surplus value that must be understood as a *force* rather than as a *norm*. Eisenstein opposed this force to the static nature of the symbol by modifying the use values and meanings of images. The sensuous perceptibility of value that he ascribes to the irritant potential of the sign in its role as element of montage rests on an expressive and dynamic model of language: from

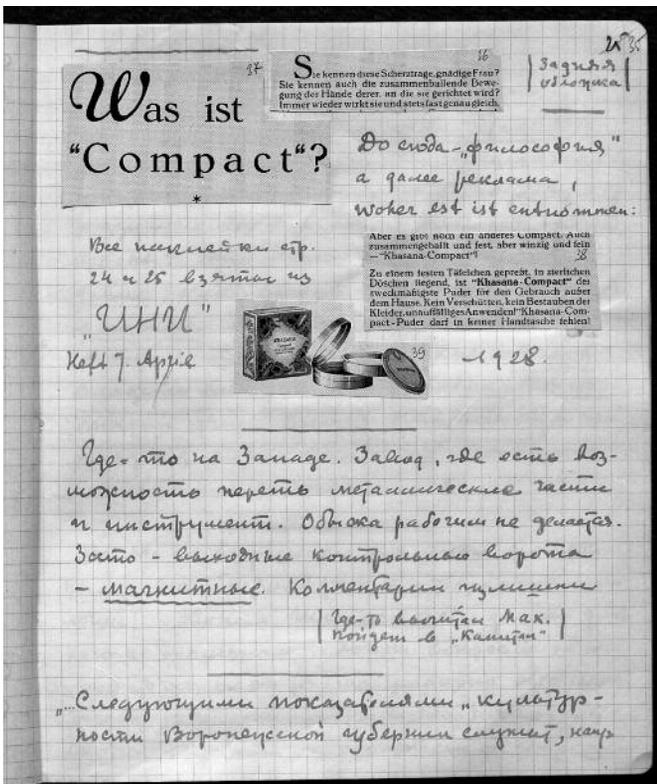
this perspective, “the word is not sign of the act, but act itself.”<sup>62</sup>

Remarkably, Eisenstein analyzes even the morphology of words, taking them as concrete phenomena cut from different sources. For instance, he searches for the origins of the French word *chauvinisme*, which is involved in his *Capital* project’s associative chain. In this context he asks his Parisian friend Henri Barbusse to send him the new dictionary of French argot. On a nearby page in his diary, dated April 7, 1928, he undertakes a “philosophical analysis” of publicity by placing an image of face powder from an advertisement found in the journal *UHU* next to the phrase, also from the advertisement, “What is ‘Compact’?” This perfectly marginal phenomenon appears important for Eisenstein’s philosophical analysis of the linguistic economy and the circulation of commodities. His research serves—entirely in the sense of Marr’s linguistic paleontology—as a reconstruction of a sensuous remainder even in abstract terms. These “survivals” allow for an opening of the political and social relations of the present. In the spirit of the overtermination that accrues from an excess of signs, Eisenstein allows the different meanings in his continuous montage and deconstruction to vary and transform.

This affects both the repetition as well as the transformation of motifs. Thus the cage that imprisons the pasted face of the American baseball player returns thematically: “The Iron cage, in which the Sultan Mulay Hafid let his adversary Bu Hamara languish before throwing him to the lions.”<sup>63</sup> Eisenstein’s laconic, sharp-witted comment—“especially comfortable, since the cage is on wheels”—produces a sudden connection to the next page, which shows an excerpt from the same German newspaper, *Die Woche*, with the architectonic cage of the capitalist exploitation of workers.<sup>64</sup>

The wheeled cage here appears

as the metaphoric imprisonment of two thousand “willing workers,” which an American transport company keeps in reserve in case of a strike.<sup>65</sup> The contextual and figurative disparity of such scattered visual elements functions to increase the contrast to the utmost: to realize, at once, association and dissociation in the sense of what Eisenstein refers to as the “gröbsten Spreizung” (the coarsest spread).<sup>66</sup>



Sergei Eisenstein. Diary entry, April 7, 1928. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art).

**“Values Resemble a Dance, Not a Statue”<sup>67</sup>**

Commodity and advertisement weave perhaps the longest thread through Eisenstein’s *Capital* project, creating affinities and conflicts with themes of war or capitalist exploitation. One of his diary pages presents a curiosum of “living legs in a vitrine dancing the Charleston for an advertisement for stockings.” A few pages farther we read a kind of “director’s note”:

Woman’s stocking full of holes and a silk one in a newspaper advertisement. It starts with a jerky movement, to multiply into 50 pairs of legs-*Revue*. Silk. Art. The fight for the centimeter of silk stocking. The aesthetes are for it. The Bishops and morality are against. *Mais ces pantins* dance on strings pulled by the silk manufacturers and the garment peddlers who fight each other. Art. Holy art. Morality. Holy morality.<sup>68</sup>

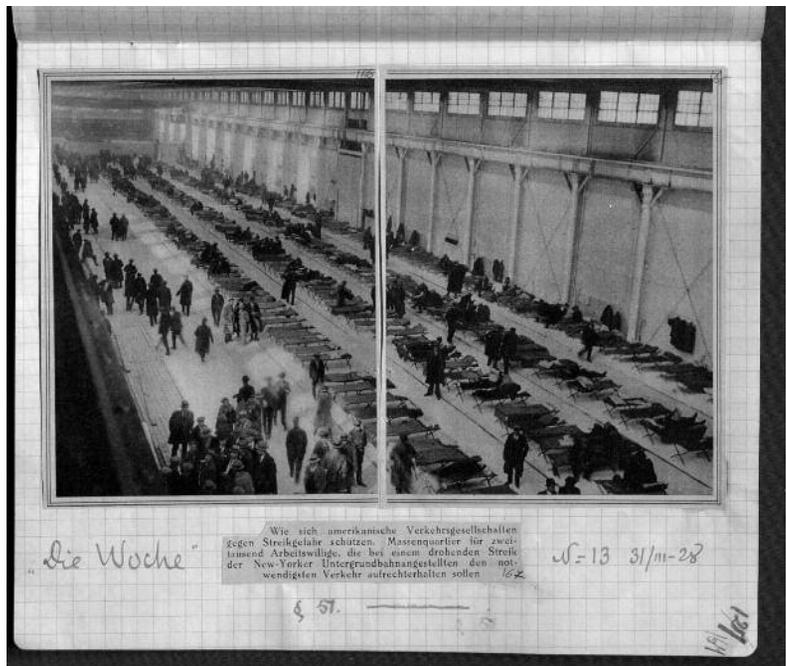
Frenetic dance and rhythmic repetition traverse the *revues*, the fetish of commodities, and the acceleration of industrial production. Eisenstein turns them into a kind of a critical method: a morphology in the age of technical reproducibility. “A series,” Eisenstein writes, “gives us a dialectical possibility to produce, again and again, a comparison.”<sup>69</sup>

As such, the repetitions place the disparate elements into a rhythm, thereby producing a structure—a critical structure that raises conflicts and breaks through to the level of thought. These series produce critical difference within repetition. The morphological chains create an excess value, an intensity (in the sense of a singular experience). The montage, as an operator of these associative arrangements, makes the conditions dance. This is the cut that takes the elements out of their context, that is, their usual conditions.

Repetition and animation, repetition and reproduction, repetition and suggestion, repetition and reflection: all are filmic elements of a process of association. What is under consideration here is not a film but a

Right: Sergei Eisenstein.  
Diary entry, March 31, 1928.  
Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi  
Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva  
(Russian State Archive for  
Literature and Art).

Opposite: Sergei Eisenstein.  
Diary entry, November 25, 1927.  
Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi  
Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva  
(Russian State Archive for  
Literature and Art).



“dancing” variation on its themes. In Eisenstein’s montage, sequences of elements—of capitalism’s industry and the commodity’s fetish—are subjected to a movement of revaluation. In this process Marx’s theory of value returns as a movement of perpetual singularization. For Marx, too, the intensification of conditions constituted an excess of thought. He conceived of this critical impulse in the categories of dance to show the intensity as a critical principle of estrangement (*Verfremdung*). In his Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, he states:

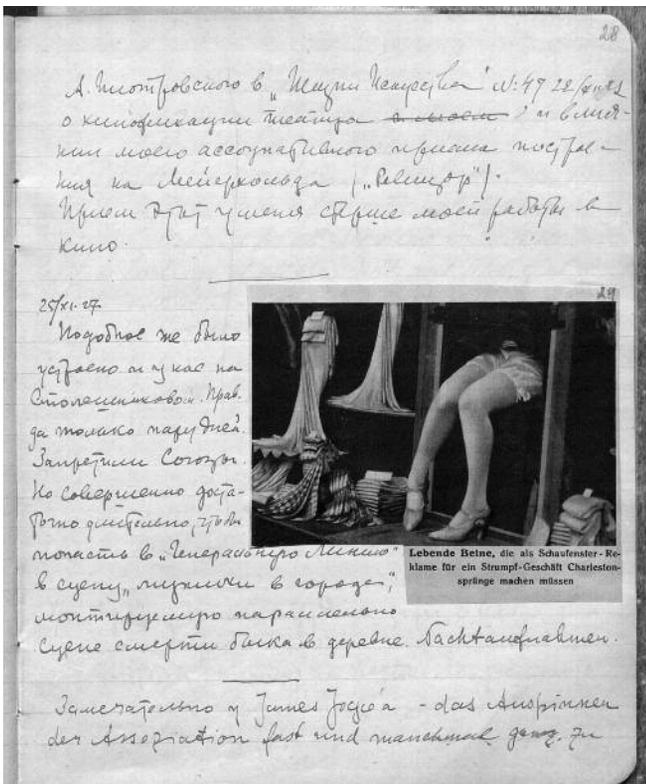
The actual pressure must be made more pressing by adding to it consciousness of pressure, the shame must be made more shameful by publicizing it. Every sphere of German society must be shown as the *partie honteuse* of German society: these petrified relations must be forced to dance by singing their own tune to them!<sup>70</sup>

Following the principle of this rhythmic intensification, Eisenstein takes up Marx’s critical project by concretizing the idea of the animation of political consciousness through the dance of “petrified relations” in the *Capital* project. In this way, Eisenstein also realizes a dance of values that Marx’s contemporary Friedrich Nietzsche formulates in terms of a new theory of cognition. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *The Gay Science* Nietzsche describes dance as an act of expenditure. This act lays claim to all affects in order to create new values: the gods of fertility. The dance is Dionysian; it demands a stepping outside of oneself—ecstasy.

The dancing constellations cross Eisenstein’s *Capital* notes in manifold ways. Some appear without commentary, purely as visual traces. In this way, the motifs of copying, exhibition, and commodity fetishism

return in a press excerpt from January 31, 1928, in which one sees “giant ears. A worktable with artificial ears for demonstration purposes in universities.”<sup>71</sup>

One month later Eisenstein assembled a collage that shows Vera Reynolds’s ear in close-up, adorned with an “ear clasp of pliable platinum set with diamonds.”<sup>72</sup> In these pages, the capitalist world of reproduction and duplication returns in the fragmentation of concrete particulars transformed into singularities. As in the case of the “living legs” in the



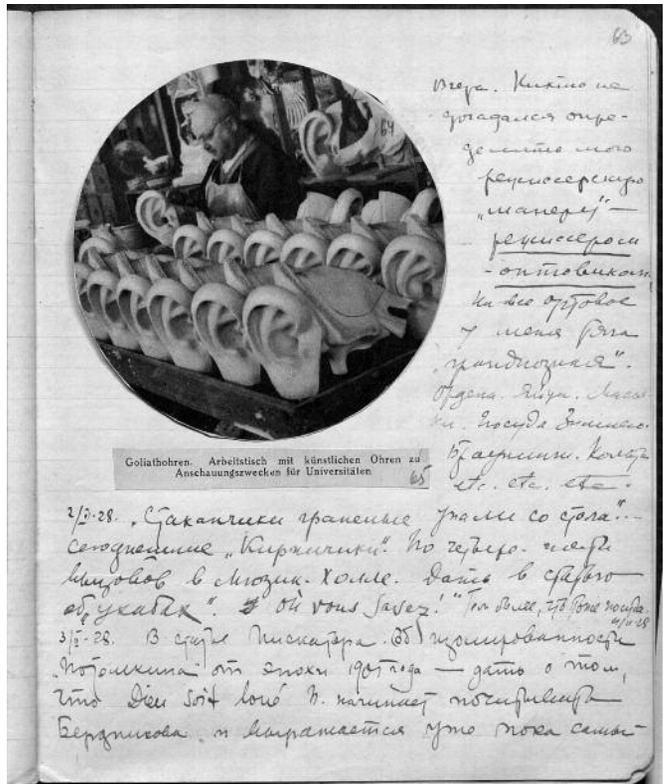
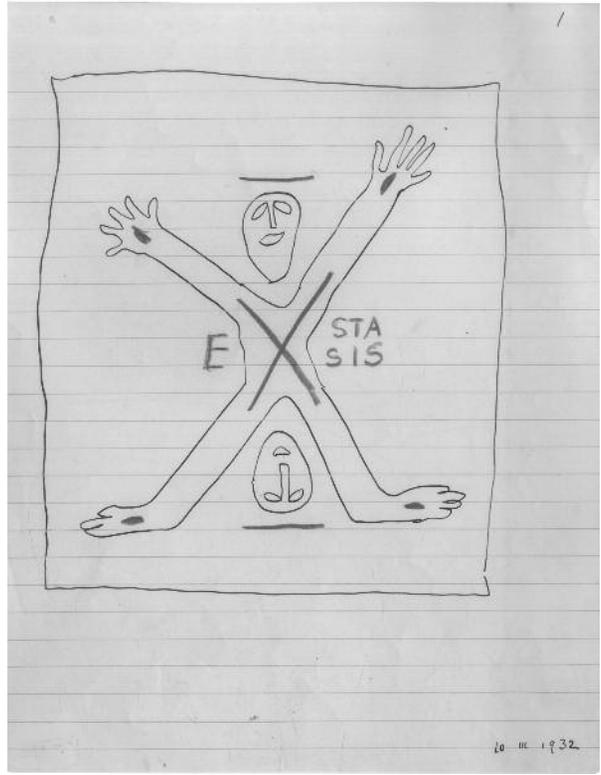
display window, body parts again occupy a central position. In this case, Eisenstein foregrounds Reynolds's ear with red ink. Advertisement, one of contemporary capitalism's core technologies, similarly produces close-ups and fetishizes details.

This parallel notwithstanding, however, Eisenstein's montages function entirely differently: They appeal to objects' inner qualities in order to bring them to oscillation and in this way ruin their accustomed similarities. Through such an alienation and deautomatization of objects, this form of montage can subject things to a fundamental revaluation.

### Cinema "Beyond the Stars"

"In Joyce's *Ulysses* there is a remarkable chapter of this kind, written in the manner of a scholastic catechism. Questions are asked and answers given. The subject of the questions is how to light a Bunsen burner. The answers, however, are metaphysical."<sup>73</sup> The immanent connection of theoretical approaches with aesthetic and sensuous formal elements, undergoing a continuous process of transformation within the *Capital* project, suggests a circular structure. The interconnection of the heterogeneous—set pieces of a fragmented and insecure world—would not be put to any "unitary thing" but instead be presented as the visual unfolding of "nonfigurative chapters" or "miniatures." The *cycle*, within which the model of the sphere announces itself, would aspire to a dynamic plane beyond hierarchy:

The miniature as such is surely the form with which we ally ourselves. In the place of a unitary object—a fan of cyclical minia-



Top: Sergei Eisenstein. Drawing made in Mexico from the series *Ex-stasis*, 1932. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literaturny i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art).

Bottom: Sergei Eisenstein. Diary entry, January 29, 1928. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literaturny i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art).

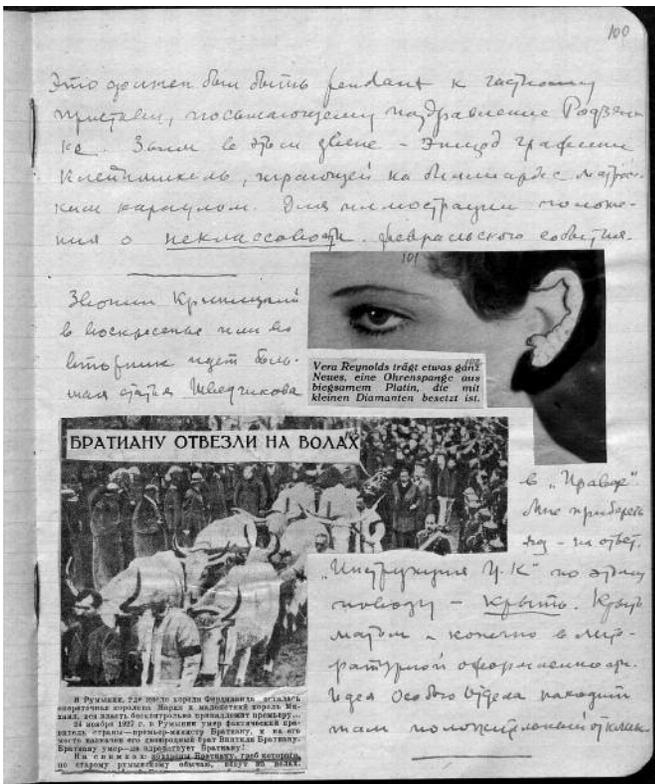
tures. *Capital* in its six (five) parts is, strictly speaking, conceived in 5–6 discrete pieces that are cyclically encompassed by one theme and one artificial frame and brought into a ring-shaped construction. A sort of Boccaccio! Or Ulysses, from Joyce!<sup>74</sup>

In Eisenstein's *Capital*, the cycle would correspond both to a category of time as well as to a form of narration—a spatial visualization, a “ring-shaped construction.” Although *Capital* was never filmed, this model lived on in a new medium. Starting in 1928, Eisenstein began to imagine a nonlinear theoretical work: a spherical book without beginning or end.<sup>75</sup> The idea resonates with Eisenstein's *Method*, an extensive theory project he worked on from 1932 until his death in 1948.<sup>76</sup> *Method* is dedicated to “sensuous” perception in art—opening an anthropological horizon of art history beyond names or stylistic tendencies and traversing history from cave painting to cinema. This correspondence announces itself in 1928 precisely as the question of the cycle shifts from *Capital* to a book project: “to construct the book (the volumes) analogically to the formulation of *Capital*.”<sup>77</sup> The way from the concrete to the abstract—from sensuous perception, “statistics,” and associations to philosophical conclusions—implies a heuristic that becomes possible within a cycle in which neither beginning nor end, neither static hierarchies nor standstill, exists.

In this context, the *Capital* project reveals a further characteristic of the dynamic sphere. Eisenstein's “spherical coordinate system,” described in September 1928, originated from “the necessity of recording something so difficult” as expressive bodily motion.<sup>78</sup> He therefore developed it into a notation system for physical expression.<sup>79</sup> How the idea of the

cyclical structure as presented in the projects for both *Capital* and *Method* relates to Eisenstein's ideas about the recording of bodily movements remains an open question. For Eisenstein, this theoretical coincidence is the “ecstasy of Zarathustra.” As he writes further on, “Zarathustra dances, now I can dance.”<sup>80</sup>

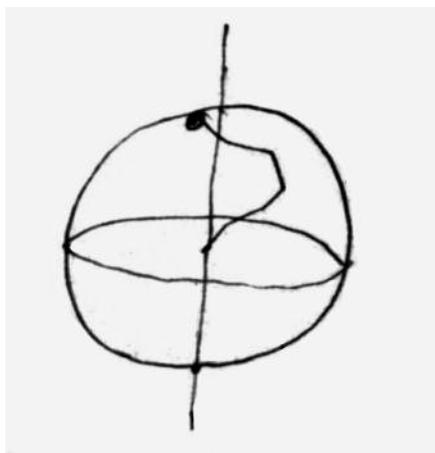
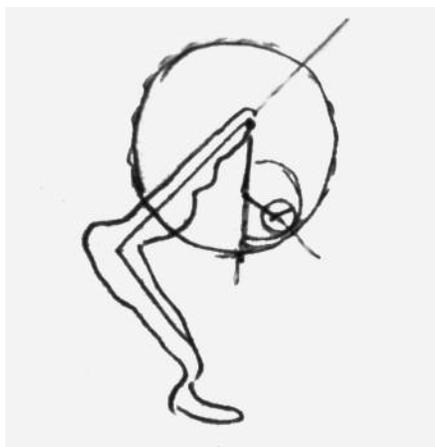
For Eisenstein, bodily movement and critical thought were never opposed. He conceives a graphic line as “a trace” left after a movement that affects thought. The thought, in turn, imprints itself onto forms, images, and words.



Sergei Eisenstein. Diary entry, March 24, 1928. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literaturny i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art).

Eisenstein's first "scenometrical" experiments date back to 1923, when he worked as theater director at Vsevolod Meyerhold's studio for bio-mechanics. Here he developed a notation system that allowed the recording of bodily movements of actors in space and time. Later, from June to October 1928, after having discovered Rudolf von Laban's dance movement notations in *Choreographie*, he made a series of notations for tracing cinematographic movements titled "Principles of dance notation and movement expression."<sup>81</sup> In an entry in his *Capital* notebook made the same day as the comment on Laban's book, he quotes Victor Shklovsky's remark calling Eisenstein a "producer of time and author of coordinates."<sup>82</sup> The director interpreted this as a "prophecy" regarding his graphic inventions, especially the one he titled "Graphic recording system of each spatial and mimic movement in time according to the Cartesian rectangular coordinate system and Eisenstein's spherical coordinates," a series of notes dating from the same year.<sup>83</sup> The sphere appears now as a potential space for bodily movement, orienting it from within in accordance with the coordinates' axes. Commenting on these drafts for the notation of the "vertical" and "horizontal" locomotion within the sphere, Eisenstein suddenly discovered that its "roots" rely on the "rotation axis" and enable the movement of the limbs.<sup>84</sup> The sphere as an epistemic model and a root of bodily movement provided Eisenstein with an *image of movement*, one capable of localization and metamorphosis, rotation and vertiginous displacement of any linear perspective.

A new circle appears in the *Capital* journal's last pages. This one is part of a series, elements of which consist of a star-watching scene taken from the journal *UHU*, followed by an illustration of the "archaic astrological-astronomical map" from the year 1609.<sup>85</sup> A photograph of a bull breaks the spherical star chart's bestiary. This rough incision references Eisenstein's film *The General Line*, which he had already commented on in the preceding pages. The collage breaks through both the cosmic order of astral constellations and the register of its possible meanings. The sensuous fragment set into the image deforms the scale of the map of the sky and challenges its legibility: "the entire sky rotates! Comets!!!"<sup>86</sup> Eisenstein adds, "The stars form themselves into bull pictures and walk through the circling sphere of the sky as bulls." One can read within this a suggestion of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's anthropological "law of participation."<sup>87</sup> As Eisenstein analyzed it in *Method*, this theoretical framework describes a form-immanent



Sergei Eisenstein. Drafts on "Principles of dance notation and movement expression," 1928. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art).

process that inverts causal relationships through a potency both concrete and mystical that he attributes to the mode of “sensuous thinking.”

However, this montage also refers to a poetic and political position; it effects a return of myth in the “age of technical reproducibility” in order to subject things to a dynamic reevaluation. The fragmentation of montage, which Eisenstein also understood as the “Osiris-Method” of an archaic division and animation, produces new values from that conflict.<sup>88</sup> The photograph of the bull comes from a dream sequence in *The General Line*; the dream shows the farmer Marfa Lapkina living a new life in the kolkhoz. It is a montage of heterogeneous times: the bull of the old star chart meets that of the new Soviet command economy. The dialectical images are like the “constellation” Benjamin describes as the place of awakening, as the “breach” that, in Eisenstein’s montage, literally emerges from the material breach in the celestial sphere. However, the images also suggest Aby Warburg’s “constellations,” in which the polarities between astronomy and astrology, between magic and logic, embody themselves in a “method” of the legibility (*Lesbarkeit*) of the world.<sup>89</sup>

Eisenstein’s short text “Beyond the Stars,” which ascribes its own meaning to this montage, stands in direct relation to these constellations.<sup>90</sup> This ironically promotional text recommends releasing *Battleship Potemkin* in America, describing it as a “film without stars”: “the absence of ‘stars’ was a reason why attention within this work turned to countless cinematographic problems that ordinarily, under the conditions of the protagonists’ ‘starlight’ in other productions, invariably remain in the shadows.”<sup>91</sup> That these “cinematographic problems” need to be thought in terms of their political consequences—as problems of aesthetic figuration of political subjects—was something Sergei Tret’iakov not only made the theme of his texts



on *The General Line* and Soviet montage technique, but incorporated into the praxis of a *literature of the fact*, which, in presenting facts, assumes a position with regard to reality.<sup>92</sup> Subsequent to the *Capital* project, Eisenstein’s *Method* made this relationship between fact and its presentability into the *Grundproblem*, the fundamental problem of an *anthropology of the political* that steps beyond the ideology of the center in favor of an aesthetic of singularities, an eccentric “aesthetic beyond the beautiful.”<sup>93</sup>

Sergei Eisenstein. Diary entry, September 6, 1928. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literaturny i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art).

**Старинная Астролого-Астроном. Карты Неба.**

(Воспроизведены из Манускрипта «Catalogus veteres affixarum longitudines cur...» 1609 года (Титус. обсерватория))



**Съверное Полушаріе.**

† фигуры являются здѣсь въ обратномъ видѣ сравнительно съ современными "сферами неба" и старались смотреть на нихъ въ обратномъ видѣ.

191  
192  
193

Астроном. Карты Неба.  
conferens.  
1609 года  
(Титус. обсерватория)

Изъ книги:  
Н. Морозов  
"Описание  
всѣхъ звездъ и  
супер."  
Исторія  
астрономіи  
восточнаго  
Кавказа.  
С.-Москв.  
1907. Изд.  
С.-Дмитрия.

(с. Кирине-  
ко вверху!)

Двадцать кон-  
центрическихъ  
окружностей  
своихъ изобразъ  
въ видѣ "у"  
трикратно  
изъ  
иной  
Ротен  
иуианъ  
суперномъ  
и астер-  
скадъ des-  
ending  
from the  
sky in  
spirals.



## Notes

This article is a fragment of a forthcoming book titled *Dance of Values: Eisenstein's Capital Project* (Zurich: Diaphanes). The book attempts a first close-reading of Eisenstein's archives of "Capital," tracing Eisenstein's interests through excursions into Marx's and Goethe's concept of "metamorphosis," Joyce's and Vygotskii's notion of "inner speech," Marr's theory of "survival," as well as other theoretical contexts. I thank Patrick Riechert for inspiring conversations and attentive reading of this essay.

1. The original version contains the following sentence: "Die Krise der Demokratien lässt sich als eine Krise der Ausstellungsbedingungen des politischen Menschen verstehen." Walter Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit (Erste Fassung)," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1.2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 454. The English translation renders this as follows: "The crisis of democracies can be understood as a crisis in the conditions governing the public presentation of politicians." Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 49. The translation loses some of the nuance and reach of "politischen Menschen," a phrase that approximately corresponds to "political human" and seems to suggest more expansive effects than "politician."

2. Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 50.

3. Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 50.

4. Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 50.

5. Sergei Eisenstein, diary, 23 February 1928, in Russian State Archive for Literature and Art (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva; RGALI), collection 1923, inventory 2, folder 1105 (hereinafter, locator information is abbreviated as follows: 1923-2-1105), p. 91. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

6. Naum Kleiman and Leonid Kozlov, "S.M. Eisenstein: Iz neosushchestvlenykh zamyslov [Kapital]" [S.M. Eisenstein: From the unfulfilled projects (Capital)], in *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 1 (1974): 56–67. Two years later Maciej Sliwowski, Jay Leyda, and Annette Michelson translated these notes from Eisenstein's "Working Diaries 1927–1928" for *October* magazine, albeit without referring to the first Russian publication. This obscured not only Kleiman's pioneering work, but also the fragmentary character of the materials, which were henceforth considered to be the sole remains of Eisenstein's *Capital* project. Sergei Eisenstein, "Notes for a Film of *Capital*," trans. Maciej Sliwowski, Jay Leyda, and Annette Michelson, *October*, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 3–26.

7. Eisenstein, "Notes for a Film of *Capital*," 16.

8. With his *Japhetic* theory of language, the philologist and paleolinguist Marr (1864–1934) produced a materialist theory of the bodily and gestural origins of language, important aspects of which were taken up by Eisenstein in *Method*, in *Non-indifferent Nature*, and in his lectures on directing (*Režissura*). "It is totally inconceivable that the hand, before tools replaced it as the producer of material goods, could be replaced as the producer of an intellectual value, namely language," Marr writes. See Nikolai Marr, "O proiskhozhdeniiazyka" [On the origin of language] (1926), in *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus/Pod znamenem Marksizma*, no. 3 (1926): 558–599. Marr's groundbreaking archaeological research in the Caucasus, which led right after the revolution to the estab-

lishment of the Academy of the History of Material Culture in Saint Petersburg in 1918, has fallen into oblivion today. He learned photography for his expeditions to the ancient Armenian city Ani in 1891. The archive of the archaeological section of the Historical Institute of Material Culture comprises Marr's photographic collection of more than 10,000 pieces. Eisenstein took a great interest in Marr's work. In *Montage*, he associates his visits to Marr's lectures in 1928 and 1933 with his own reading of *Ulysses*—with its multilingualism, its “polyphony of a single thought,” its “odyssey of a single word,” and ultimately a vertically arranged series of “heterogeneous contradictory and opposing phenomena.” Sergei Eisenstein, *Montaž*, ed. Naum Kleiman (Moscow: Muzei Kino, 2000), 363–365.

9. The concept of morphology referenced in this article mostly comes from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's research in *Metamorphosis of Plants* in which the principle of form is understood not as a given entity but as a protean relation: a perpetual transformation (*Verwandlung*). In the context of cinema, the idea of “morphology in movement” stems from Pier Paolo Pasolini's seminal essay “The Screenplay as a ‘Structure That Wants to Be Another Structure’” (*La sceneggiatura come ‘struttura che vuol essere altra struttura’*). Pasolini understood the film scenario as a crucial multiplicity of languages that produce “tensions,” gaps, and shifts: a dynamism of becoming “without departing and without arriving.” This movement makes visible through embodiment “a structure imbued with the will to become another structure.” An interesting parallel to Eisenstein's *Capital* project can be seen in the morphological constitution of this process's operating with heterogeneity; that is, with dynamic fragments from disparate orders. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico* (Milan: Garzanti, 1972), 199; translated in Naomi Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Cinema as Heresy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 124.

10. Eisenstein, “Notes for a Film of *Capital*,” 4.

11. The full version of the article “I-A-28” is still unpublished. See Sergei Eisenstein, “I-A-28,” 1928, in Gosfilmofond Archive, V/4-11-1.

12. Sergei Eisenstein, “Montažh attrakcionov” (The montage of attractions), *LEF* [Left Front of the Arts], no. 3 (1923): 70–75.

13. Eisenstein, “Notes for a Film of *Capital*,” 7.

14. Eisenstein heard about Joyce's novel in 1927, precisely when he was beginning his work on *Capital* and conceiving the “intellectual attraction.” He read the only copy of the novel then available in Moscow and later acquired a copy via the English wife of his friend Maxim Litvinov. In November 1929, Eisenstein met Joyce in Paris. The writer, almost blind, played a recording of himself reading from his work-in-progress *Finnegans Wake* (1939) and confessed to Eisenstein that he saw in him a potential cinematographic adapter of *Ulysses*. See Jacques Aumont's article on Joyce's *Ulysses* in *Reading with Eisenstein*, ed. Ada Ackerman and Luka Arsenjuk (Montreal: Caboose, forthcoming).

15. Cf. Elena Vogman, *Sinnliche Denken: Eisensteins exzentrische Methode* (Sensuous thinking: Eisenstein's eccentric method) (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2018), which analyzes Eisenstein's magnum opus *Method* (1932–1948). The multiple conceptual implications of “sensuous thinking” are discussed first and foremost within the evolution of Eisenstein's theoretical writings: their material and rhythmic compositions unfold dynamically from the early notebooks and working diaries in the 1920s through an intense practice of excerpts in the Mexican diaries (1931–1932), which strive at all times to establish the “connection of everything with everything”; that is, to the more system-

atic theory of montage in the later works. At the same time, the early *Capital* project bears the associative and rhizomatic character that runs through his entire late work, from 1932 to 1948, the year of his death. Among these complex theoretical projects, published by Kleiman in Russian within the series of Muzej Kino and Ėjzenstejn Centr, the following merit special mention: *Montage* (2000), *Method 1 and 2* (2002), and *The Non-indifferent Nature 1 and 2* (2004). Kleiman's most recent publication is *Eisenstein on Paper: Graphic Works by the Master of Film* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2017).

16. I thank RGALI, especially the director Tatiana Goryaeva and the head of the Department of Archive Communication Natalya Strizhkova, for generously making these materials available for the present publication.

17. Aleksei Efimov to Sovkino, 23 March 1928, in RGALI, 1923-1-293, pp. 1–2.

18. The first part was to include themes such as “the initial deprivation of peasants,” “the colonial politics of capitalism,” “forms of colonial exploitation,” “the role of slavery and serfdom in the primitive accumulation,” and so on. The second part would address primitive industrial capitalist accumulation, pointing at “the struggle of trading with the industrial capital in the sphere of production.” The third and last part would be based on the opposition between “socialist accumulation” and “accumulation at the edge of monopolist capitalism and Fordism,” highlighting the more recent “methods of the Czech entrepreneur Tomáš Baťa” and contemporary “colonial exploitation that is dependent on mandatory countries.” Efimov to Sovkino, 23 March 1928, pp. 1–2.

19. Efimov to Sovkino, 23 March 1928, p. 1.

20. In the 1930s, Efimov was a pioneer in Soviet research into American history. In his critical bestseller, *SShA: Puti razvitia kapitalizma* (USA: Ways of development of capitalism), he analyzes the Marxist concept of “primitive accumulation,” beginning with the seventeenth century, as a main “historical process of separation of the producer from the means of production.” Aleksei Efimov, “Ocherki istorii SShA ot otkrytiia Ameriki do okonchaniia Grazhdanskoi voiny” [An outline of the history of USA from the discovery of America to the end of the Civil War], in *SShA: Puti razvitia kapitalizma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), 35–36.

21. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1107, p. 68; and Kleiman and Kozlov, 56.

22. Kleiman and Kozlov, 56.

23. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1927, in RGALI, 1923-2-1105, pp. 2, 3.

24. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1107, pp. 67–68; and Eisenstein, diary, 8 April 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1107, p. 145.

25. Eisenstein, diary, 8 April 1928, p. 145.

26. Quoting in these terms Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, Joyce's text seems at the same time to question the sensorial separation provided by the German “Enlightenment” poet that opposes painting and sculpture to literary arts and poetry in the same way as the ordering of “side by side” stands opposed to “succession” and alteration.

27. This is how Eisenstein referred to his *Capital* project in a 1932 questionnaire on the topic, “What did V.I. Lenin give me?” See Naum Kleiman, “Neosushchestvlennye zamysly” [Uncompleted works], *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 6 (1992): 58. Magnitogorsk is an industrial city—partly constructed, partly left-as-utopian plan—that the Soviet Union massively expanded as part of a five-year plan.

28. According to screenwriter Michail Bleiman, Eisenstein told him of his meeting

with Stalin in 1929. See Kleiman, “Neosushchestvlennye zamysly,” 56.

29. Eisenstein, diary, 8 September 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-972, p. 88.

30. “Die Kraft zu Symbolisieren ist eine immer lebendige Kraft [. . .].” Bruno Frei, “Gespräch mit Eisenstein” [Conversation with Eisenstein], in *Die Weltbühne*, 1928.

31. Frei, “Gespräch mit Eisenstein.”

32. Frei, “Gespräch mit Eisenstein.”

33. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1105, p. 50.

34. Eisenstein, diary, 14 March 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1105, p. 130.

35. Sergei Eisenstein, “Die vierte Dimension im Film” (1929), in Sergej M. Eisenstein, *Jenseits der Einstellung: Schriften zur Filmtheorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006), 129.

36. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, pp. 44–54.

37. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 175.

38. The title “IA28” is an abbreviation of “intellectual attraction,” Eisenstein’s theoretical manifesto of a new cinema written in 1928 while conceiving his notes for *Capital* but never published. Distancing himself from the affective, reflex-based attractions of his 1923 theater period, Eisenstein here defines a mode of a new “conscious art” that comes closer to “scientific activity” and a “process of rationalized work.” Sergei Eisenstein, “IA-28,” in *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, no. 36/37 (1997–1998): 42.

39. Vladimir Mayakovski, “Ob Oktjabre” (On the film *October*, public talk, 15 October 1927), in *S.M. Ejzenštejn: Pro et contra, antologija* (Saint Petersburg, Russia: RChGA, 2015), 196. Originally published in *Novoe o Maiakovskom* [New on Mayakovski] (USSR, 1958), 77.

40. Mayakovski, “Ob Oktjabre,” 196.

41. Ossip Brik, “Ring Lefa,” *Novyj Lef*, no. 4 (1928), cited in *S.M. Ejzenštejn: Pro et contra*, 212.

42. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1105, pp. 68–69.

43. Brik, “Ring Lefa,” cited in *S.M. Ejzenštejn: Pro et contra*, 211.

44. Brik, “Ring Lefa,” cited in *S.M. Ejzenštejn*, 212.

45. Brik, “Ring Lefa,” cited in *S.M. Ejzenštejn*, 213.

46. Brik, “Ring Lefa,” cited in *S.M. Ejzenštejn*, 215.

47. Brik, “Ring Lefa,” cited in *S.M. Ejzenštejn*, 215.

48. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1107, p. 160.

49. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1107, pp. 160–161.

50. The original German, “Wie zerronnen so gewonnen,” idiomatically translates to “easy come, easy go.” *Zerronnen* also describes the state of being melted.

51. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI 1923-2-1107, pp. 162–163.

52. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Economy*, vol. 1 (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 127.

53. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 77.

54. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 77.

55. Eisenstein explains this through the example of three rubles: “With [a total of] 250 rubles, three are a trifle; with 2.50, an unattainable amount. The reciprocal relation of nominal value and exchange value make it [the bill] dynamic, not stone-like like a crucifix.” Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 77.

56. Marx, *Capital*, 90.

57. Marx, *Capital*, 154. Marx’s German vocabulary expresses the analogy to Goethe’s “morphology” particularly well: “Der erste Blick zeigt das Unzulängliche der einfachen

Wertform, dieser Keimform, die erst durch eine Reihe von Metamorphosen zur Preisform heranreift” (The first glance shows the insufficiency of the simple form of value, this *seed-form*, which only *ripens* into the price-form through a series of *metamorphoses*). Karl Marx, *Das Kapital, Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, vol. 10 (Berlin: Dietz, 1991), 62; my translation; emphasis added.

58. Karl Marx, “Notes on Adolph Wagner’s *Lehrbuch der politischen Oekonomie*” (1881), in *Collected Works*, vol. 24, *Marx and Engels: 1874–1883* (New York: International Publishers, 1989), 544.

59. Johann Wolfgang Goethe to Johann Gottfried von Herder, Naples, 17 May 1787, in Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Italienische Reise: Vollständige Ausgabe in zwei Bänden* (Berlin: Contumax, 2016), 255–256.

60. Research has been done on the inspiration Marx drew from Goethe’s *Faust*, focusing primarily on parallels in content.

61. The most pertinent work on this subject can be found in a recent essay by Andy Blunden, Marxist philosopher and cofounder of the Marxist Internet Archive Collection. In the essay, he discusses the adoption of Goethean *Urphänomen* through Hegel and its migration to Marx. Andy Blunden, “Goethe, Hegel and Marx,” *Science and Society* 82, no. 1 (May 2016): 11–37.

62. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 78.

63. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1105, pp. 161, 163.

64. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1105, pp. 161, 163.

65. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1105, p. 165.

66. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1107, p. 124.

67. “La valeur ressemble à une danse, et non à une statue.” Raymond Ruyer, *Philosophie de la valeur* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1952), 204. Brian Massumi refers to Ruyer in his essay on “Virtual Ecology and the Question of Value.” There Massumi, following Nietzsche, Raymond Ruyer, Alfred North Whitehead, and Félix Guattari, analyzes the philosophical and aesthetic foundations of value as potentiality. Massumi’s reading of value as “quality” was a significant inspiration for the present article. Brian Massumi, “Virtual Ecology and the Question of Value,” in *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm*, ed. Erich Hörl (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

68. Eisenstein, diary, 2 April 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1107, p. 26, 27.

69. Eisenstein, diary, 2 April 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1107, p. 177.

70. Karl Marx, introduction to the *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 178.

71. Eisenstein, diary, 31 January 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1105, pp. 64–65.

72. Eisenstein, diary, 24 February 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1105, p. 100.

73. Eisenstein, “Notes for a Film of *Capital*,” 7.

74. Sergei Eisenstein, diary, late April 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, pp. 66–67.

75. This spherical book without beginning or end may realize itself here, in the construction of a discursive milieu that challenges not only the borders between disciplines but the borders between that which can be thought on a shared ground.

76. Two Russian-language editions of this book have been published. See Sergei Eisenstein, *Metod/Die Methode*, ed. Oksana Bulgakowa, vols. 1–4 (Berlin: PotemkinPress, 2008); and Sergei Eisenstein, *Metod*, vols. 1–2, ed. Naum Kleiman (Moscow: Muzej Kino, 2002).

77. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 142.

78. "Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 142.
79. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-229, p. 4.
80. Eisenstein associates writing itself with "Zarathustra's Ecstasy." Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 141.
81. The diary entry with the comment on Rudolf von Laban's *Choreographie* (1926) dates to 5 September 1928. Sergei Eisenstein, Drafts on "Principles of dance notation and movement expression," in RGALI, 1923-2-972, pp. 1–53.
82. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 92.
83. Sergei Eisenstein, "K teorii virazitel'nosti" (On theory of expression), undated, 1928, in RGALI 1923-2-229, p. 1.
84. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 93.
85. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, pp. 191–193. Eisenstein's comment on the contemplative couple in the picture refers to *The General Line's* heroine, Marfa Lapkina ("Marthe"): "Notre boeuf passera *through the firmament* chercher s'il n'y a pas entre les âtres un 'boeuf.' Alors le fera voler envers Marthe! Toute le système céleste tourne! Comètes!!!" (Our Taurus runs *through the firmament* searching if there isn't between the stars a "Taurus." Thus making him fly toward Marthe! The entire celestial system turns! Comets!!!) Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 189.
86. Eisenstein, diary, undated, 1928, in RGALI, 1923-2-1108, p. 189.
87. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *La mentalité primitive* (1922; Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 119–120.
88. See Elena Vogman, "Osiris-Methode oder die Dialektik sinnlicher Formen nach S.M. Ejzenštejn," in *Erscheinen—Zur Praxis des Präsentativen* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2013), 39–67.
89. Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. Gertrud Bing (Leipzig: Teubner Verlag, 1932), 506.
90. Eisenstein, *Method*, ed. Kleiman, 1:33.
91. Eisenstein, *Method*, ed. Kleiman, 1:33.
92. Sergei Tret'iakov, *Kinematografičeskoe nasledie: Stat'i, očerki, stenogrammy, vystuplenija, doklady, scenarii* [Cinematographic inheritance: Essays, drafts, shorthand notes, reports, lectures, scripts] (Saint Petersburg, Russia: Nestor Istorija, 2010).
93. Eisenstein, *Method*, ed. Kleiman, 1:6.