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later years. For instance, in 1933 he noted: "A motif of the content may be played not only in the story but also in the law of construction or the structure of the thing" (1933c:308). As in most aspects of his 1920s work, practice preceded theory.

The innovations of Eisenstein's "plotless cinema"—the construction of the action around stages of a historical process, the radiating network of motifs binding the film together, the foregrounding of style in image and montage—were not simply onetime accomplishments. Every project pushed further. This effort is particularly apparent in his last two films, which react against what he perceived as a hardening of Soviet montage conventions. After seeing *October*, Shklovsky noted that the "logical" montage of psychological analysis practiced by Kuleshov and Pudovkin had "ceased to be felt." Eisenstein's intellectual montage responded to a need for even more "perceptible" methods (1930:111). *Old and New* sought to go still further, exploring "overtone montage" as a way of integrating intellectual stimuli with other aspects of the shots.

The urge to experiment drove him to surpass the norms of his own works. As Eisenstein repeatedly insisted, each of his silent films was an answer, a "dialectical" antithesis, to its predecessor. Each offers fresh stylistic experiments and new methods of plot construction, motivic organization, mise-en-scène, and montage. But each film can also be seen as pointing out one path for Soviet film. *Strike* borrows methods of Civil War art, using Eccentrism and mass spectacle to create an openly agitational appeal to the audience. *Potemkin* works within an epic mode, using carefully developed emotional progressions to carry away the spectator. *October*, more episodic than its predecessors, suggests that Left cinema could exploit a pluralistic "montage" of different types of filmic discourse. Finally, *Old and New* seeks not only to make the innovations of the earlier films "intelligible to the millions" but also to imbue Soviet myth with a spiritual fervor. Each film tries something strikingly new, and each offers a different model for heroic realism in Soviet cinema.

Strike (1925)

Strike sets the pattern for Eisenstein's silent features in several ways. It launches his chronicle-myth of revolutionary history; it establishes his mixture of naturalism and stylization; it initiates his research into "film language" and methods of montage. But *Strike* is unique in his oeuvre for its eclectic experimentation, its exuberant leaps of tones and style, its posterlike extremes of clownishness and romanticism. Rediscovered by Western cinéphiles in the mid-1960s, it looked far more vibrant and playful than the master's canonized classics. Its unremitting Eccentrism gives every reel a pursuit, fistfight, or gymnastic exhibition; each scene is enlivened by unexpected pictorial effects or performance flourishes. *Strike* constitutes what Eisenstein and Tretyakov called *Do You Hear, Moscow?*—an "agit-guignol."

The vibrant experiments, however, are held together by a fairly rigorous structure. *Strike* seems loose only in contrast with the extraordinary unity of *Potemkin*.

As in Eisenstein's next two films, the decision to create a mass historical drama impels him to devise a coherent structure and vivid motifs that will carry the propagandistic lesson.

Strike's theme is laid out in the opening quotation from Lenin: "The strength of the working class lies in its organization . . . Organization means unity of action, unity of practical operations." The film's plot traces how Bolshevik factory workers, after laying the groundwork through agitation, turn a spontaneous protest into a strike. At the moment when the strike is born, the factory workers reassert Lenin's lesson: they have power, they say in their meeting, "when we are united in the struggle against capital."

But solidarity loosens. The prolonged strike intensifies workers' family problems. A strike leader, acting in a moment of undisciplined violence, allows a spy to identify him. After police torture, he accepts a bribe to betray his comrades. At the same time, provocateurs from the lumpenproletariat provide the authorities with an occasion to attack the workers. The principal Bolshevik is captured, and the police launch a massacre that sweeps through the workers' quarters. *Strike* both pays homage to the struggles that preceded the October revolution and warns that class solidarity and Party unity must be maintained against enemies, both within and without.

The film insists on the generality of the lesson by presenting a composite of several historical strikes. The action is based upon the 1903 strikes at Rostov-on-the-Don, which spread to more than five hundred factories and involved almost a quarter of a million workers. But the film, shot in and around Moscow, makes no explicit reference to these events; indeed, Alexandrov claims that spectators did not recognize the historical source (1976:43). The film further generalizes the action with a concluding title that lists other strikes that were harshly repressed, ranging from a 1903 massacre of workers in the Urals to a 1915 strike in spinning factories. As the film's title suggests, *Strike* becomes an anatomy of the forces at work throughout several critical moments of Russian labor's struggle for socialism.

Eisenstein's habitual strategy of making every reel constitute a distinct "chapter" or "act" contributes to this generalizing quality.² Each part is presented as a phase through which a typical strike will pass. The first reel, starting with the title "All is quiet at the factory / BUT—" covers the agitational phase of activity. Reel two, labeled "The immediate cause of the strike," dramatizes the theft of a worker's micrometer, the harsh response of the management, and the worker's suicide. The death triggers an uprising that bursts into a full-blown strike. The third reel opens with the title "The factory stands idle" and portrays the effects of inactivity on both the capitalist owners and the workers. Reel four, "The strike is prolonged," traces the debilitating effect of the strike on the workers. Here the turning point comes with the strike leader's betrayal of his comrades. "Engineering a massacre,"

2. Most Soviet theatres and workers' clubs had only a single projector, so filmmakers began to construct their films in reel-length episodes. In *Strike* and *Potemkin* particularly, Eisenstein used this material constraint to demarcate stages of plot action.

the title of the next reel, becomes a parallel to the Bolsheviks' agitation in the factory: a police spy hires some provocateurs. They set fire to a vodka shop, and although the provocation fails, the firemen turn their hoses on the workers, enabling the police to seize the main leader.

Although a spy, the police chief, and the captured Bolshevik appear in the last reel, "Liquidation," the segment functions principally to expand the implications of the dramatic action. First comes a savage cossack assault on workers' tenements. Previously, the factory workers have been shown living in suburban cottages; this new locale becomes a more generalized representation of workers' homes. The tenement massacre is followed by the most abstract sequence of all, the intercutting of cossacks' firing upon an anonymous horde of fleeing workers with butchers' slaughter of a bull. The latter line of action is wholly nondiegetic, pushing the sequence into a realm of pure "attraction." The last reel is virtually a detachable short film, a showcase of Eisenstein's "free montage of attractions" that, operating independently of narrative, stimulate strong emotions and wide-ranging concepts.

Strike, then, presents an anatomy of a political process. It displays the techniques of the revolutionary underground, creating a film that, as Eisenstein somewhat obscurely suggested, paralleled the "production" of a strike with the process of industrial production itself (1925d:59–61). The plot also schematizes the typical stages, tests, and crises through which a strike must pass. In addition, the film diagnoses those forces with which the working class must contend. Seeking to dramatize the class struggle, Eisenstein builds up an enormous range of oppositions between the workers and their class enemies. And many of these call forth the sort of stylization that Eisenstein associated with "theatrical October," the stage pageants during and immediately after the Civil War.

On one side are the forces of capital, personified at the outset by the obese, top-hatted factory director, who leers out at the camera (2.17). He oversees scurrying clerks, disdainful typists, a straw-hatted factory manager, and an old foreman. The director in turn answers to the factory's owners. Aligned with the capitalist and their flunkies are the police, with their herd of spies, and the lumpenproletariat, recruited by the spies. All these forces are presented as a spectrum of stylized types, ranging from the most realistic (the police) through caricature (the capitalists and their staff) and theatrical grotesquerie (the animalistic spies) to circus eccentricism (the hobo king and his retinue). Eisenstein introduces a bizarre touch into even more naturalistic moments: the bribery of the captured Bolshevik by the police administrator is accompanied by a pair of midgets tangoing on the table, their seductive dance mocking the traitor's acquiescence (2.18).

The workers, by contrast, are idealized in a manner typical of "heroic realism," with none of the bourgeois forces' exaggeration of costume or demeanor. Moreover, they are far less individualized. The film's opening depersonalizes the agitators: after the director's frontal close-up, they are presented obliquely, as silhouettes and reflections (2.19). Later, the workers are characteristically shown en masse. Individuals are momentarily picked out, but none is portrayed in depth.

2.17 *Strike*.

2.18



2.19

Indeed, any worker developed as a distinct character is likely to die soon (the suicide) or to join the bourgeoisie (the traitor). And individualization itself is used to point up thematic oppositions. The capitalist's mistress, who frenziedly urges the police agents to beat the captured worker, contrasts with the more anonymous female Bolshevik leader who battles the police to get to the fire alarm.

The contrast between the caricature of class enemies and the romanticization of class allies will become central to Eisenstein's later films, but its sources lie in Civil War art. *Strike* is indebted to the *agitki*, propaganda vehicles that emerged in the wake of the October revolution, particularly the "epic" version seen in poster art and mass festivals, with their satirically individualized rulers pitted against a mass of workers. Mayakovsky's *Mystère-bouffe* and his emblematic designs for store windows had already shown that Left art could utilize such schematic material. The boss's sadistic mistress in Eisenstein's film has a parallel in Tretyakov's *Roar, China!* in which the merchant's daughter eagerly watches two men being strangled.

Strike finds vivid motifs to sharpen its conventional opposition. From the start the workers are associated with machines; when they go on strike, so does the equipment, so that the factory director's typewriter snaps itself away from his touch. The capitalists are associated with an intricate bureaucracy, in the factory and in the police force. One sequence uses reporting and phone calls to trace the chain of command running from foreman through managers to police officers.

This contrasts with the machine-centered production process in the agitators' printing shop, where a handwritten text becomes—without human intervention—a leaflet, copies of which shower down on a locomotive in the factory. Through the opposition of machines and bureaucracy, Eisenstein again moves to the abstract level, portraying the Marxist distinction between the forces and relations of production. He further shows, by the radicalization of the workers, that a revolutionary situation has come to pass. The progressive factors in the base have outstripped the institutions that they originally supported.

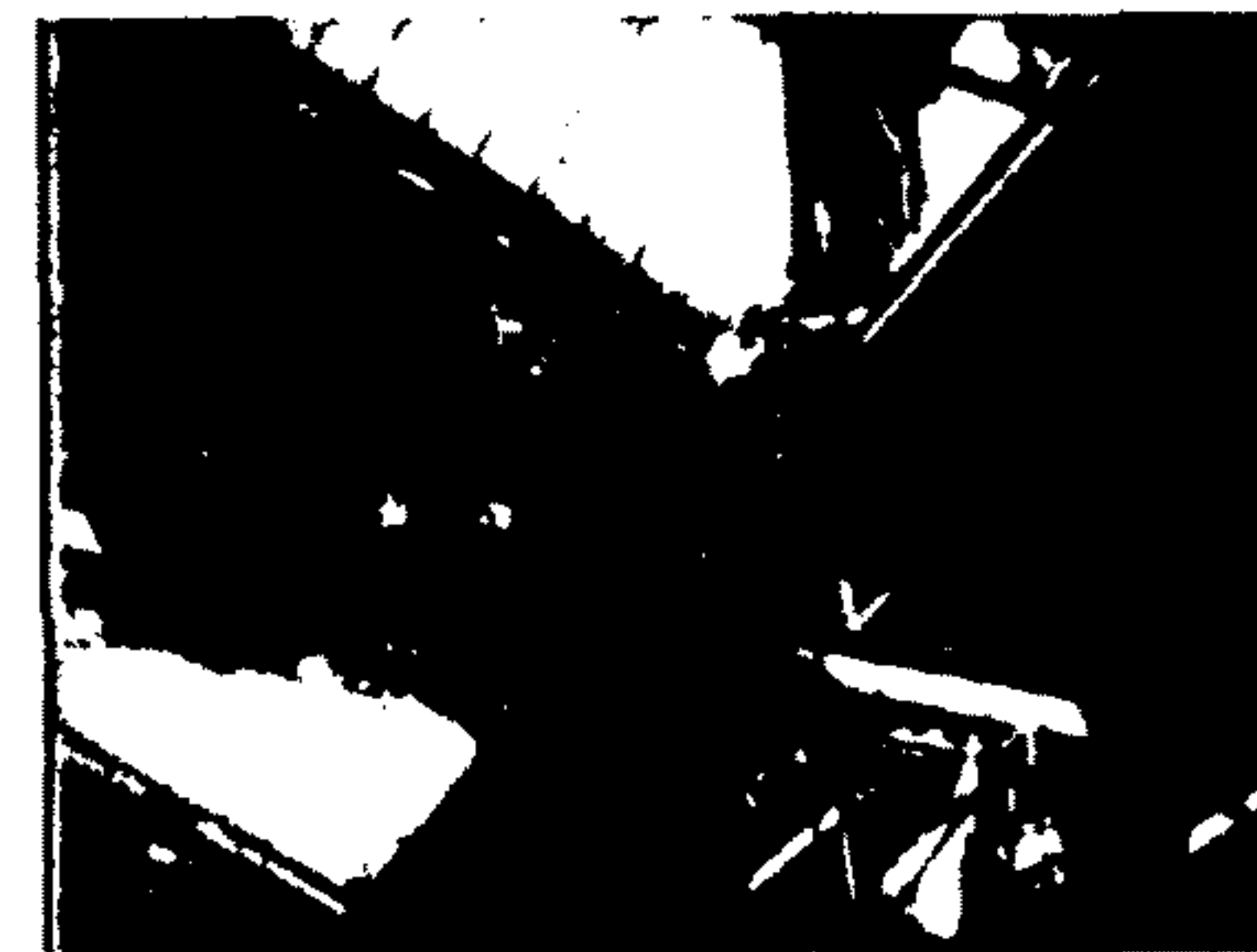
Such clusters of imagery are reversed in the course of the film. Initially the workers occupy the factory catwalks (2.20); but the brutal cossacks eventually take over the catwalks of the tenements (2.21). Whereas the workers are established as in the heights, the lumpenproletariat are introduced as living in huge underground barrels (2.22); soon the Bolshevik leader will be captured by being hosed into a hole and surrounded by barrels (2.23). The children associated with the strikers come to prominence in the last reel, when toddlers become victims of the cossacks' rampage (2.24).

Again and again, Eisenstein's motifs reflect the drama's progression. Three of these—animals, water, and circles—undergo particularly rich development. In each case, a motif initially associated with one side of the political struggle becomes transferred to the other.

In the early scenes the capitalist forces are likened to animals. As the factory sits idle, the factory director is intercut with a crow and a cat. More explicitly, each police spy is given an animal identity: Bulldog, Fox, Owl, and Monkey are visually linked with their counterparts and move in a roughly appropriate fashion. In the same portions of the film, the proletariat are established as being in control of animals: geese and other domestic animals are part of their milieu, and children run a goat in a wheelbarrow as their elders had turned out the factory manager. But at the film's end, it is the workers who are equated with an animal—the bull, slaughtered by a casually proficient butcher likened to the soldiers.

The motif of water develops in the same way. At the film's start, agitating workers are glimpsed in a reflecting puddle; later they plot their conspiracy while swimming. During the battle for the steam whistle during the factory uprising, workers spray water to knock the guard off balance, and a dripping worker joyously pulls the whistle cord. But as the workers' cause wanes, water turns against them. The first leader is captured in a soaking downpour. As the hobo king spruces himself up, he sprays water from his mouth onto his mirror.

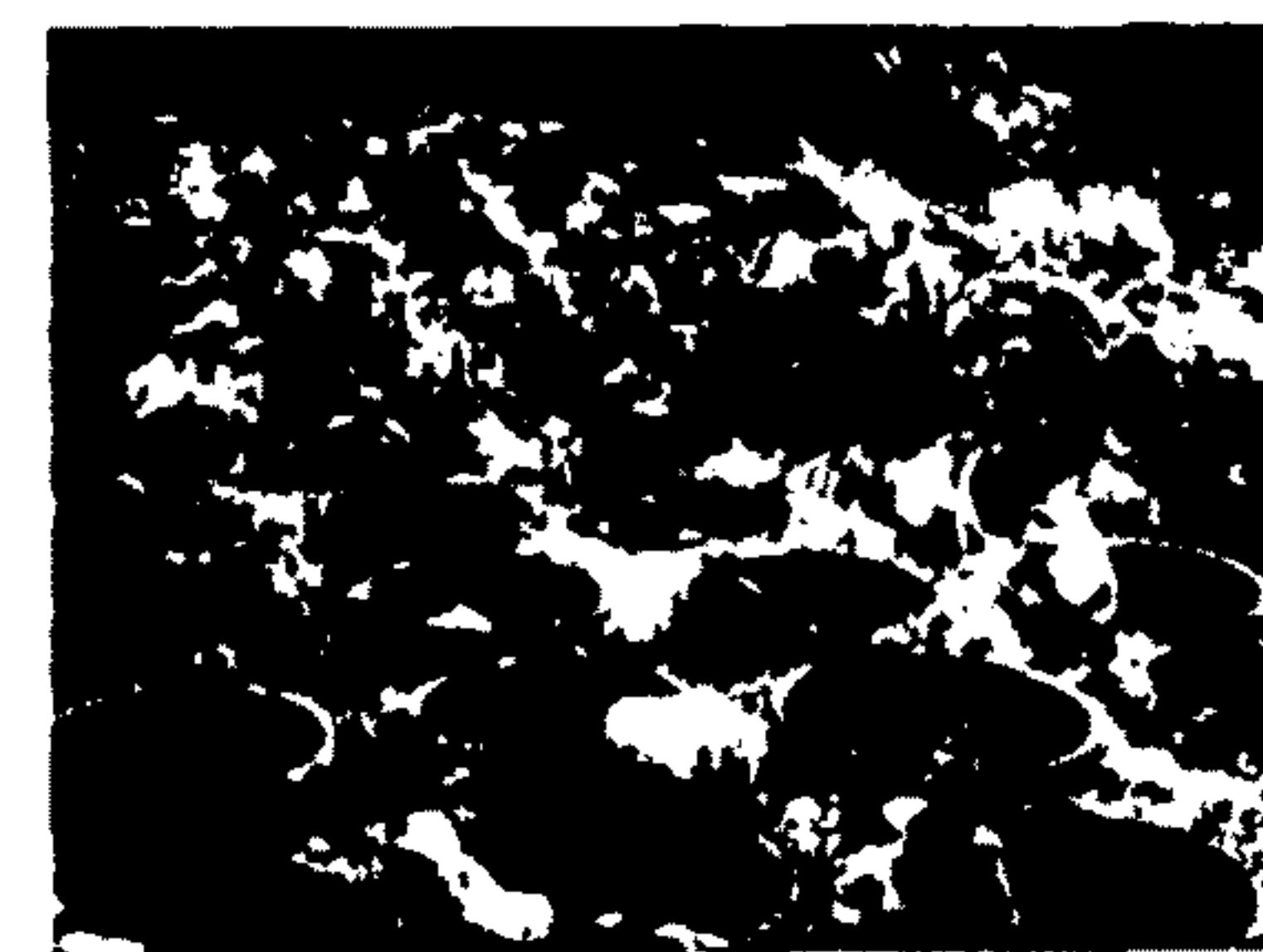
Perhaps the richest development of motifs involves a geometrical shape, the circle. Introduced in an intertitle ("HO," that is, "BO—"), the O takes on a life of its own by becoming a circle and then a rotating wheel in the factory. It is firmly associated with the workers: they run the wheel of a turbine; a wheel turns their printing press. The agitators meet in a scrap heap of wheels (2.25). A crane operator slams the foreman to earth with a suspended wheel, which at another point aggressively hurtles at the camera (2.26). During the strike uprising, wheelbarrows roll the manager and foreman into the runoff pit, while the stopping of



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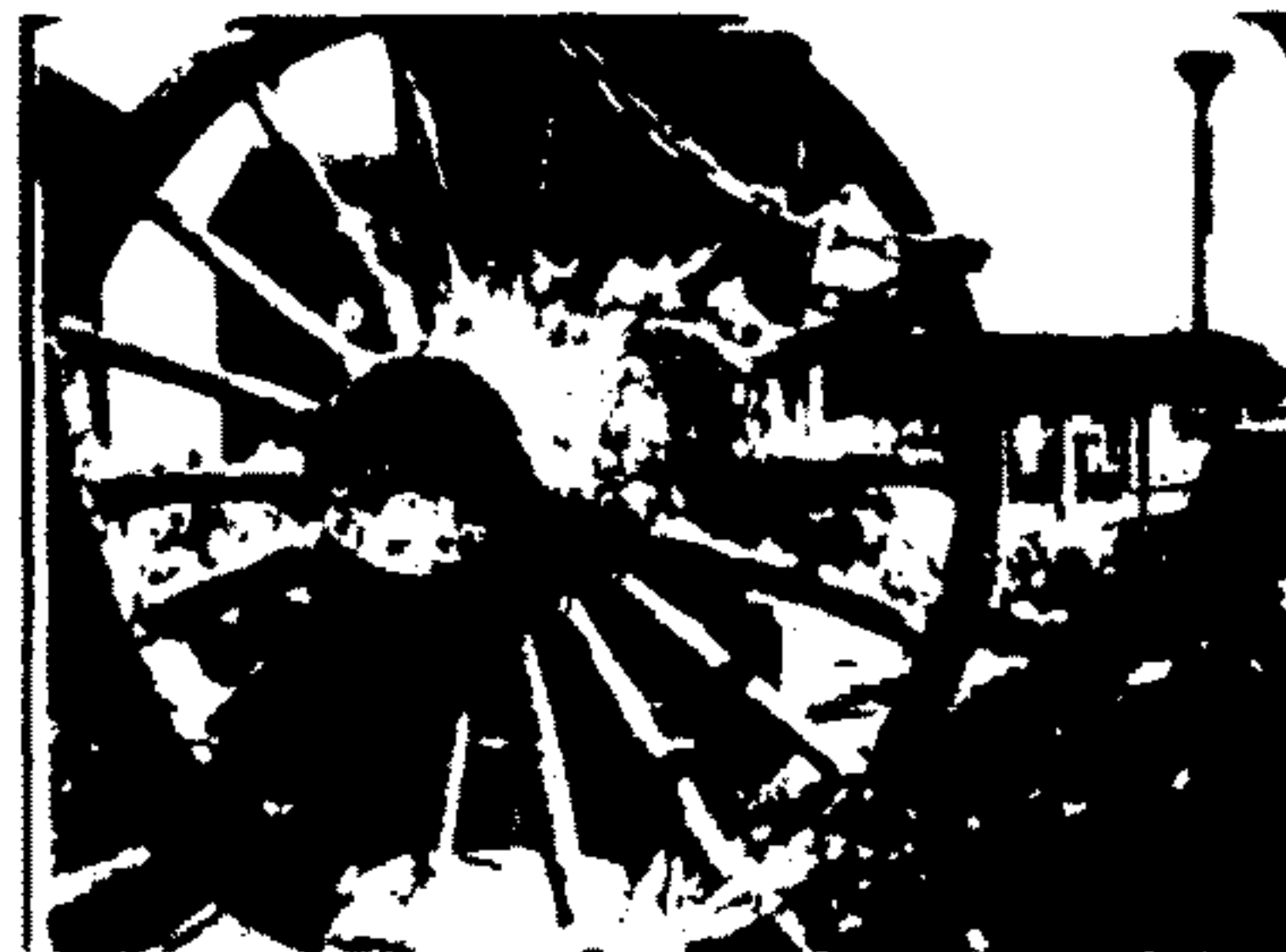
2.24

the factory is conveyed by a symbolic image showing workers folding their arms and a wheel ceasing to rotate (2.27). As the strike continues, Bolsheviks meet in huge pipes (2.28), another circular contrast with the barrels in which the lumpenproletariat live.

The motifs of water and circularity culminate in the sequence of the firemen's assault. One of the most sensuously arousing passages in Eisenstein's cinema, the hosing sequence uses rhythmic editing and diagonal compositions to create a pulsating movement. The water motif reaches its apogee as spray slashes across the frame in vectors that evoke El Lissitzky's Constructivist compositions (2.29). The firemen turn their hoses' punishing force on the workers. Now the wheel is



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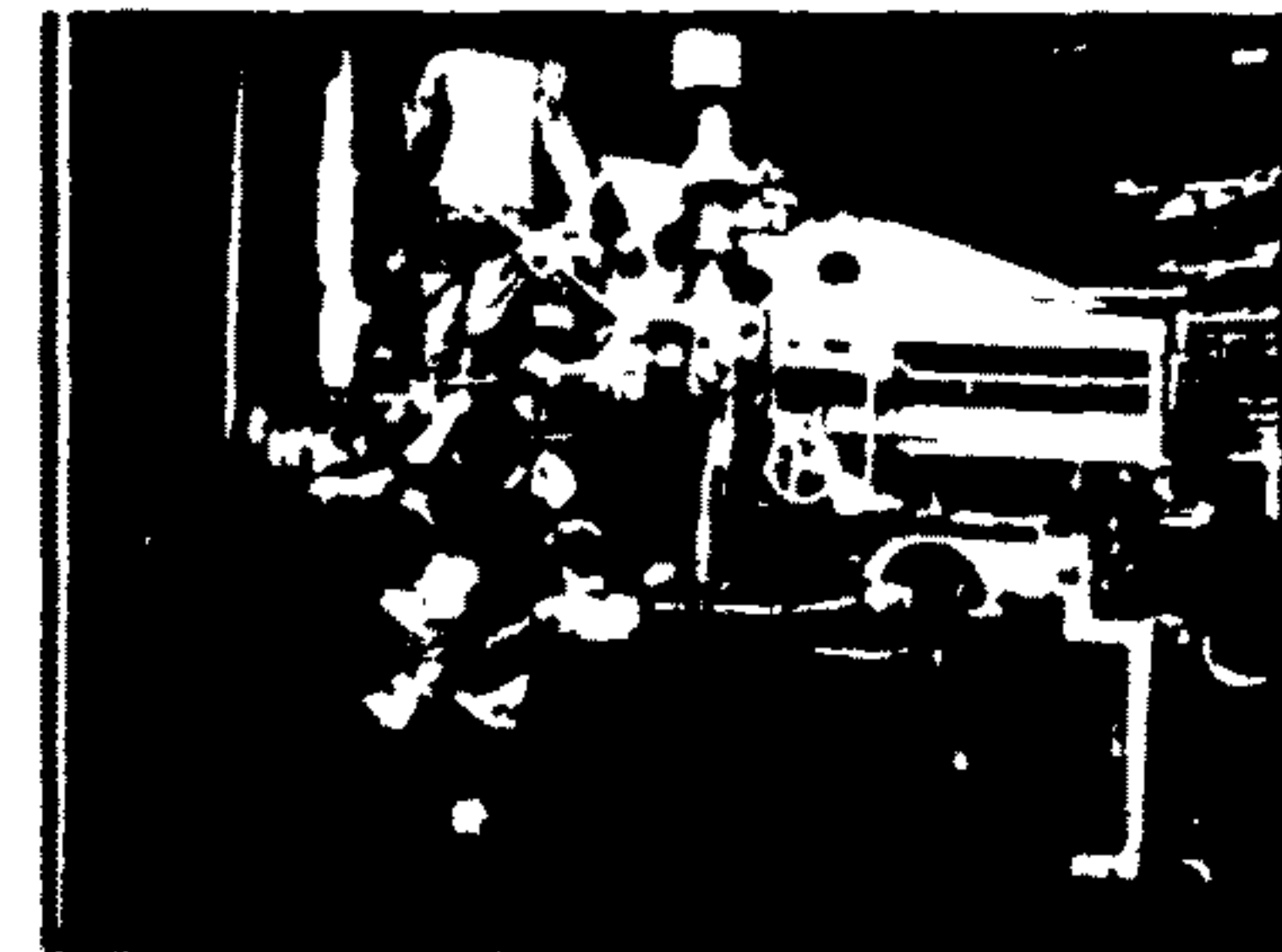
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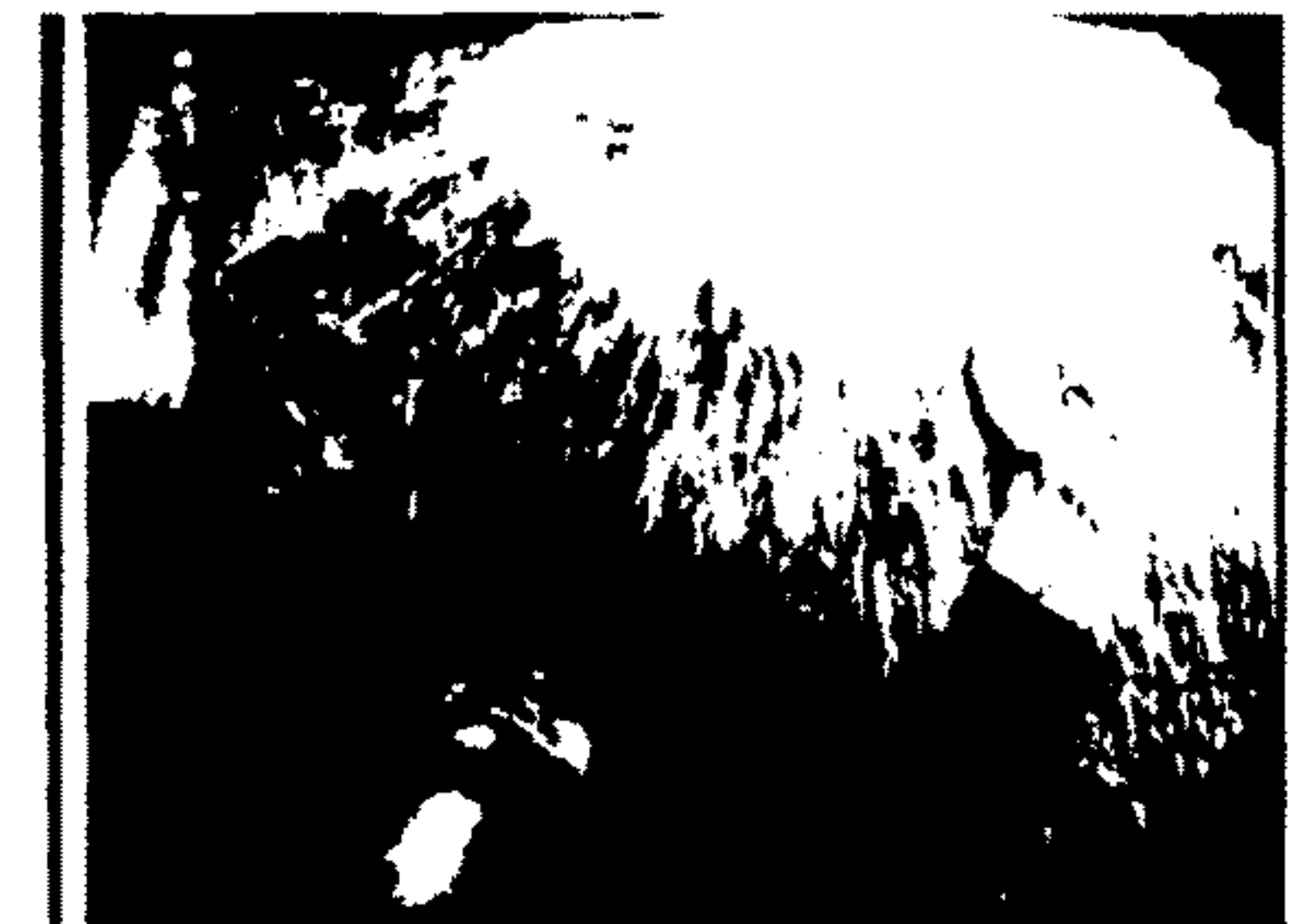
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on a fire truck, working against the strikers; the spume pins a worker helplessly to a cartwheel (2.30). In terms that Eisenstein would elaborate in his later theory, water and circles constitute image-based “lines” that weave through the film and “knot” in this climactic massacre.

Such opposed and transformed motifs function as associations reinforcing the film’s agitational purpose. Eisenstein uses other means to drive home the lesson. To a greater degree than his contemporaries, he overtly acknowledges the audience. Most obviously, this direct address occurs in expository intertitles. Eisenstein has already perfected the ironically echoic intertitle: “Preparation” denotes the activities of the workers and the police agents; “Beat him!” recurs in scenes in



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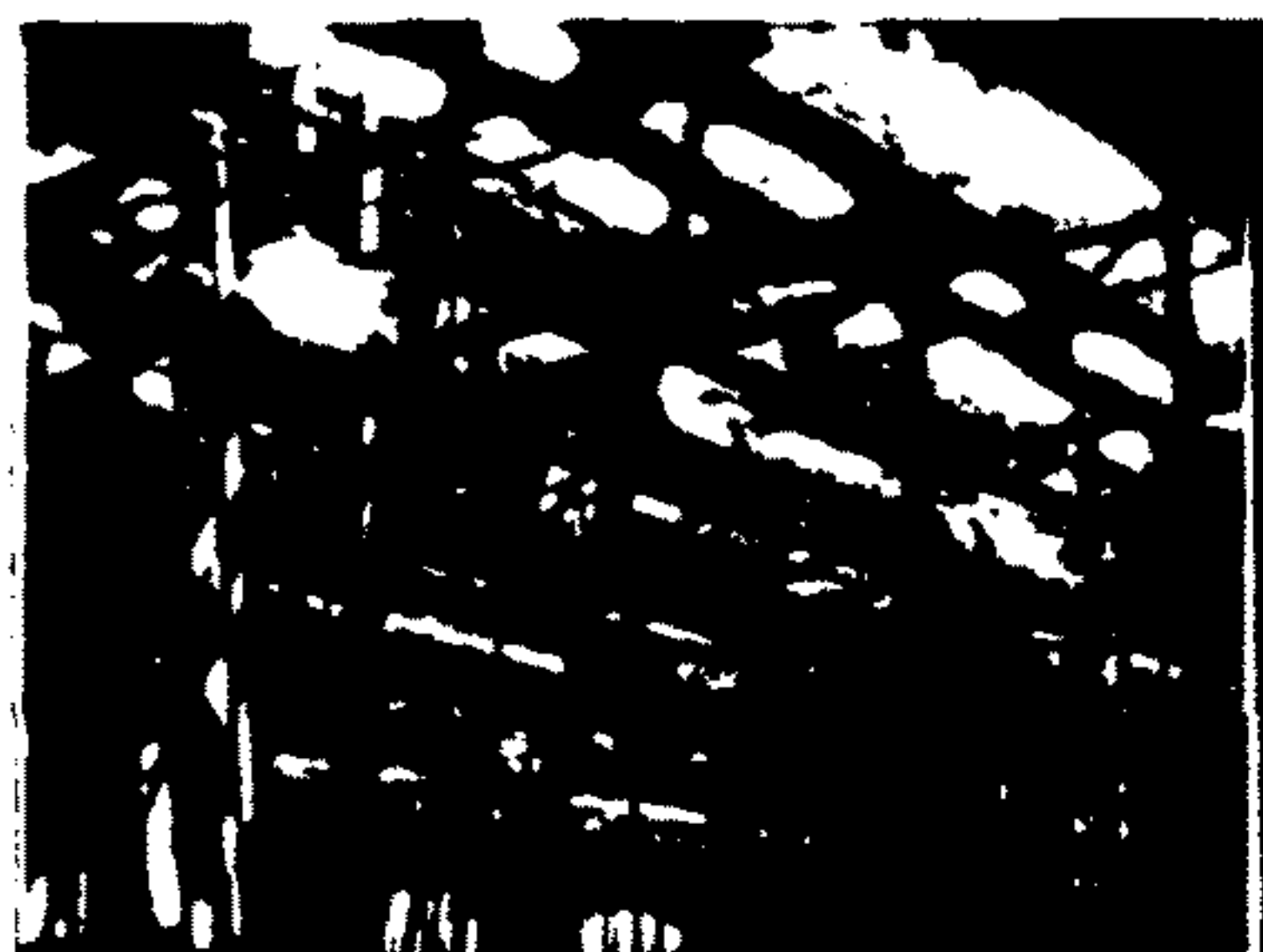
2.32

which the captured worker is thrashed. More daringly, Eisenstein creates “collective” intertitles. At the workers’ meeting in the factory, for instance, dialogue titles alternate with crowd shots, as if the words issue from the entire mass. Still other titles blur the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic sources. We must often ask if a line, such as “Thief!” when the worker is accused, comes from a character or the overarching narration itself. Meyerhold approved of Eisenstein’s use of such direct address: the intertitle acts directly on the viewer, he suggested, and “the director assumes the role of agitator” (Meyerhold 1925:160).

Images also assault the audience. Sometimes characters face the camera, either in shot/reverse-shot confrontations with other characters or simply in direct address to the spectator. The film concludes with a pair of staring eyes in extreme close-up and the title, “Proletarians, remember!” This final appeal to the audience was a convention of Civil War drama; at the close of *Do You Hear, Moscow?* the protagonist shouted the title line at the audience.

The engagement of the spectator arises more indirectly from Eisenstein’s use of symbols and tropes. Like other art deriving from the Civil War tradition, *Strike* invokes religious iconography. The scene of the worker’s suicide becomes a proletarian Descent from the Cross (2.31), and the writhing figures of demonstrators under the firemen’s fusillade of hoses echo the postures of martyrs (2.32). *Strike* also shows a firm commitment to metaphorical filmmaking. Sometimes the intertitles create the linkage, as when, after the factory director petulantly kicks his wicker chair off his patio, a title remarks: “Their thrones rest on the labor of the workers.” Some titles are integrated with the visual motifs more dynamically. The title “Spreading ripple,” coming after the shot of workers reflected in a puddle, ties the agitational process to the water motif and suggests the expansion of the workers’ discontent. At the end of the firehose sequence, an abstract burst of spray introduces the final reel, punningly titled “Liquidation”: the literal “liquidation” has been a prelude to the massacre.

Eisenstein explores an assortment of purely visual metaphors as well. Most are firmly located within the story world and are brought to our attention by means of close-ups and editing. Through crosscutting, the capitalists’ squeezing juice out of a lemon becomes analogous to the harassment of strikers by the mounted



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police. Intercutting the machine belts with the worker's belt (2.33, 2.34) makes his suicide an ironic contrast to the machines' activity. The animal motifs we have already considered are largely metaphorical, rendering the police spies bestial through symbolic superimpositions (2.35).

In this connection, the last sequence is especially revelatory. Eisenstein has often been criticized for intercutting the final massacre with nondiegetic footage of the butchering of a bull. Kuleshov, for instance, objected that the slaughterhouse footage is "not prepared by a second, parallel line of action" (Kuleshov 1967:32). A more narratively motivated treatment would situate the slaughterhouse in the time and space of the story, as the pet shop contextualizes the animal imagery that characterizes the spies. But it is clear that after using so many diegetically motivated metaphors—beasts, belts, lemon-squeezer, and so on—Eisenstein experimented with a more conceptual possibility.

Eisenstein prepares for the leap into nondiegetic metaphor by a rapid series of more motivated ones. Confronted by the defiant Bolshevik leader, the raging police chief pounds his desk, knocking bottles of ink across the map of the workers' district. The shot literalizes the metaphor of "the streets running with blood" (2.36). The chief slaps his hand in the pool of ink, giving himself the gory hand of the executioner. Now comes the leap. Eisenstein cuts to connect the chief's pounding gesture (2.37) to that of the butcher coming down to stab the bull (2.38), and the nondiegetic metaphor emerges—a literal slaughter in an



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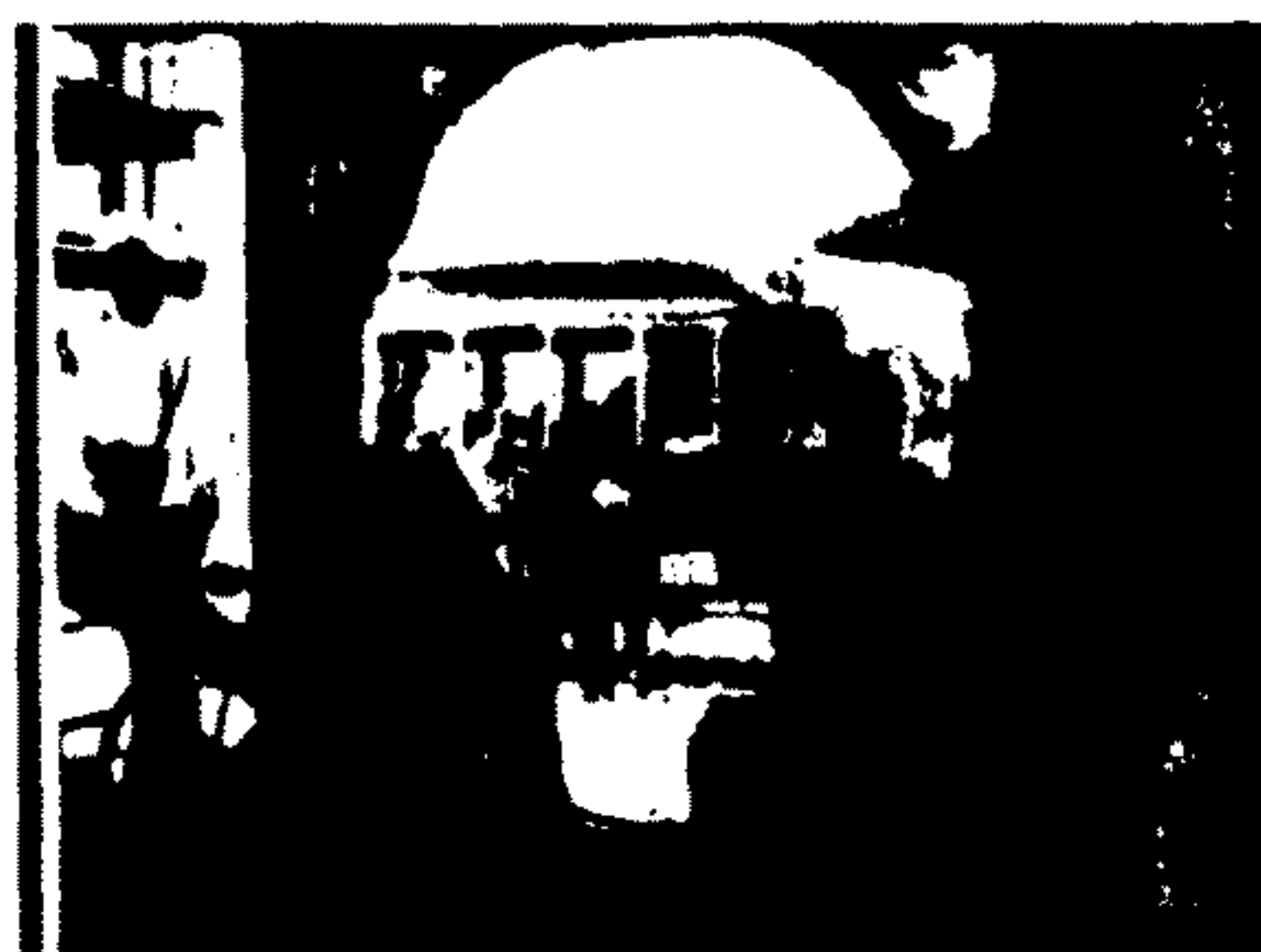


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abstract time and space, a figurative slaughter in the story world. In context, the slaughter sequence climaxes the film's experimentation with metaphor by catapulting the event into a realm outside the time and space of the story. In *October* we will find that the nondiegetic metaphors dominate the first half of the film and become "narrativized" in the course of the action.

The wide-ranging exploration of cinema's metaphorical possibilities is typical of *Strike's* pluralistic approach. The performances, especially in the capitalist faction, constitute an anthology of contemporary theatrical styles. A similar breadth of experimentation characterizes the film's editing. At many points Eisenstein demonstrates his command of orthodox editing strategies: the breathless crosscutting between tumultuous strikers and the steam whistle, for instance, or the crisp shot/reverse shot when Monkey negotiates with the king. On the whole, however, the film moves a critical distance away from American-style editing and from Kuleshov's earliest work.

We have seen that Eisenstein's overlapping presentation of the wheel's assault on the foreman revises Kuleshov's reworking of American-style expansion of movement. This is only the extreme edge of a practice that pushes visual fragmentation to unprecedented limits. When Owl struggles into his pants, Eisenstein breaks the action into six shots, with slight overlaps and ellipses. As the strikers burst into the factory courtyard, seven shots of the swinging gates present graphically smooth but spatially inconsistent movement. Eisenstein often treats his



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sensational attractions less as discrete elements within the shot than as kinesthetic impulses to be connected by cutting. As the strikers dump the foreman and the manager into the muck, an old woman's fiercely pounding forearms continue the gesture of descent. The pulsating crowd in the hosing sequence becomes, thanks to editing, pure patterns of flowing or clashing movement.

Despite his eclecticism, Eisenstein is at pains to organize many of his editing techniques. He systematizes Kuleshov's manipulation of dissolves, superimpositions, and similar optical devices. He associates the police agents with irises and mirrors, as if to present visual analogues of their spying (2.39). He pushes such camera tricks further when he introduces the spies as a set of animated photos (2.40), a motif that finds its parallel when the clandestine photo of the strike leader comes furtively to life. Later, the agitators meet in a cemetery (itself a token of the strike's decline), and Eisenstein superimposes the fist of the police chief hovering over a pen (2.41), not only indicating his power over them but also foreshadowing the hand that will hammer the ink-bloodied map in the last sequence.

That sequence also exhibits the most elaborate of Eisenstein's "montage of attractions." The editing certainly has some linguistic and conceptual basis. The workers are figuratively "slaughtered," and the metaphor endows the soldiers' act with the connotations of impersonal, efficient butchery. The cutting works out the conceptual parallels: as the soldiers fire, blood pours out of the bull. But

Eisenstein's primary goal of provoking the spectators' emotions poses problems for the cinema. Whereas Grand Guignol theatre shocks its audience by portraying decapitations or electrocutions, the cinema, being a mediated presentation, must stir its audience to political consciousness through pictorial associations. The massacre scene can gain maximal intensity only if the filmmaker arouses the proper associations. Thus the documentary shots dwelling on the bull's torrential bloodletting and thrashing legs aim less to tease the mind than to arouse a revulsion that will take the massacre as its object. Eisenstein told a visitor that the bull's death should "stir the spectator to a state of pity and terror which would be unconsciously and automatically transferred to the shooting of the strikers" (Freeman 1930:222).

Looking back from 1934, Eisenstein reflected that *Strike* "floundered about in the flotsam of a rank theatricality" (1934i:16), perhaps tacitly acknowledging its mixture of Eccentric and epic tendencies. It seeks to create a heroic Soviet cinema by leavening the "monumental" aesthetic of the Civil War years with elements of theatrical grotesquerie. Nevertheless, *Strike* establishes Eisenstein's creative method as one of balancing set pieces and ornamental flourishes against a pervasive unity of theme, technique, and motif.

The Battleship Potemkin (1925)

The Battleship Potemkin was long considered the masterwork of the silent cinema. In 1958 an international critics' poll voted it the greatest film of all time. In later years, however, the film slipped into the shadows, an object of casual acceptance or debunking dismissal. Even for Eisensteinians the rediscovery of *Strike* and the reevaluation of *October* made *Potemkin* seem a tame official classic.

For our purposes, *Potemkin*'s importance is manifold. Within Eisenstein's career, its stringent unity represents an attempt to turn the experimentation of *Strike* to fresh purposes. With respect to film form, Eisenstein's subtleties run deeper than is generally supposed. The careful organization of the film's chapters and episodes is matched by rich development of visual motifs. Eisenstein also explores certain staging and editing options with an unprecedented rigor, a tendency that reaches its culmination in the Odessa Steps sequence. More generally, *Potemkin* can be seen as a synthesis and transcendence of contemporary tendencies in literature and theatre. Owing less to Constructivism than to NEP "heroic realism," *Potemkin* lays down one path for a distinctively Soviet cinema.

At the time, Eisenstein insisted that *Potemkin* was not simply the successor to *Strike* but a contemporary answer to it. As the NEP assimilated market economics, he claimed, so *Potemkin* deliberately adopts the "pathos" of "right art": sentiment, lyricism, psychological portrayal, and passionate fervor. And as NEP policy aimed to achieve socialism through a deliberate swerve in the *opposite* direction—that is, through capitalism—so *Potemkin* seeks to arouse emotion and partisanship by more traditional cinematic means. Putting aside the possibly disingenuous comparison with the NEP, we can see that Eisenstein considers *all* stimuli potentially