Document Citation

Title	**Vision and violence : the rhetoric of Potemkin**
Author(s)	D. L. Selden
Source	*Quarterly Review of Film Studies*
Date	1982 Fall
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	308-329
No. of Pages	11
Subjects	Eisenstein, Sergei (1898-1948), Riga (formerly Russia), Latvia Symbolism
	Motion pictures -- Editing
	Motion pictures -- Aesthetics
Film Subjects	Bronenosets Potemkin (Battleship Potemkin), Eisenstein, Sergei, 1925

NOTES

1. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16:3, (Autumn 1975), pp. 6-18. Further references cited in text.

2. Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, Tome 1, Klincksieck, (Paris 1968), p. 27. The translation is our own.

3. Gerard Genette, "Frontières du récit," *Communications* 8 (1966), pp. 152-63.

4. Thierry Kuntzel, "The Défilement: A View in Close-Up," trans. by Bertrand Augst, *Camera Obscura* #2 (Fall 1977), pp. 51-65.

5. Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space," *Screen* 17:3 (Autumn 1976), pp. 68-112.

6. Nick Browne, "The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of *Stagecoach*," *Film Quarterly*, (Winter 1975/76), pp. 26-38.

7. This line of argument has been detailed by Stephen Heath in "Film Performance," *Cinetracts* 2 (Summer 1977), pp. 7-17.

8. This example is cited in a different context by Dana B. Polan. See "Image-Making and Image-Breaking: Studies in the Political Language of Film and the Avant-garde," Diss. (Stanford University, 1980), p. 79.

9. Raymond Bellour is provocative on this point. See "Hitchcock, the Enunciator," *Camera Obscura* 2 (Fall 1977), p. 80.

Vision and Violence:
The Rhetoric of *Potemkin*

D. L. SELDEN

Rhetoric may still seem a somewhat oblique means of access to *The Battleship Potemkin*. The study of figures and tropes[1] has not only remained fairly exclusively within the purview of literary analysis,[2] but its inherent theoretical complexity would seem antithetical to "mass movies" officially directed "towards...understanding by millions" and "calculated to electrify" viewers who were largely illiterate.[3] It is evident, however, that beyond these first mass audiences, Eisenstein envisioned for his work spectators who would participate in the rigors of close reading. The writings in aesthetics, which patiently explicate and reread passages from the films, testify loudly not only to the role which theory played in shaping Eisenstein's art in general, but to the importance careful theoretical analysis has for any full understanding of his work. "That is how my activity in art began," Eisenstein would reminisce at the end of his life. "It had two aspects, creative and analytical: now analysis would 'examine' creation, now creation would serve

to test certain theoretical premises."[4] This "strictly academic approach" not merely to film appreciation but to the creative process itself allowed Eisenstein to transfigure film from an "entertainment" (itself, the director realized, "not an entirely innocuous term"[5]) into an exploration of aesthetic principle. Poetics emerged not in dry exposition but as a "sensual" and emotional embodiment which compels the viewer "to proceed along that selfsame creative road that the author traveled in creating the image. The spectator not only sees the represented elements of the finished work, but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image just as it was experienced by the author."[6] The viewer's spectatorial stance, Eisenstein makes it clear, is in no way passive. The complement to the labor of artistic creation is on the part of the viewer "serious analytical work" which alone allows for a full recovery of meaning. The "deepest elements of compositional structure" are "strata that can be

uncovered only by the scalpel of the most pedantic and probing analysis."[7] To this "pedantic" analyst—and the irony here is deliberate—Eisenstein holds out a "pleasure of deciphering," a *jouissance* of textual engagement that climaxes in the revelation of "the fundamental laws of art." Above all, cinema represented for Eisenstein "an inexhaustible quarry for the definition of [these] general laws and conditions . . . as one of the most characteristic reflections of man's spiritual activity."[8]

The theoretical writings offer a number of models for the understanding of the films, two of which emerge repeatedly as central: formal analysis and rhetoric. While the former develops a descriptive vocabulary for the key compositional tensions within and between individual shots (graphic, rhythmic, ideational), rhetorical structure, whose principles Eisenstein borrowed directly from literary theory, coordinates the integration of cinematic form with thematics. Although the pair is by no means mutually exclusive, the connection is not always made clear in the essays, and it is formal analysis which tends in the published writings to emerge as the more striking. The exhaustive lists of montage principles, the many detailed graphic analyses which punctuate the essays, the dazzling reconstruction of the "vertical montage" from *Alexander Nevsky* published as part four of *The Film Sense* stand out from Eisenstein's otherwise turbid prose. It is the *tour de force* of this formal exegesis that continues to astonish readers and which has had the widest influence on Eisenstein criticism. For the last forty years, montage form has persistently dominated discussions of Eisenstein's achievement. While passages like the Odessa Steps sequence have become virtual textbooks for editing principles in film classes world-wide, rhetorical principles, expounded generally by Eisenstein in a manner less flashy, have received relatively little attention.[9] Major studies of Eisenstein's work still fail to mention rhetoric completely, or do so only in passing,

and in places his rhetorical theories have been greeted by outright contempt.[10]

Yet when Eisenstein came to reflect on the contribution which Soviet cinema had made to the development of film as an art form, it was above all a sophistication and heightened awareness of rhetoric that he identified as their central achievement. The artistic potential of the cinema, he argued, lay less in the possibility of an authentic transcription of the phenomenal world than in the structuring of images as a series of figures and tropes. As Eisenstein saw it, the style of the earlier cinema, exemplified principally in the films of D. W. Griffith, remained essentially "literal," at all times "on a level of *representation and objectivity.*"[11] His own work, however, began not only to develop montage as "a syntax for the correct construction of each particle of a film,"[12] but to conceive of a type of "literate montage speech" through which the image was to become "*supra*-representational." In Eisenstein's hands "montage . . . realized itself as a *montage trope,*"[13] and he names variously simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, allegory and symbol as rhetorical figures central to his work and to the cinema in general. Montage, he came to realize, represented the formal basis for an imagistic rhetoric, and it is largely towards reaffirming the relationship between montage and figuration that the late, seminal essay "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today" is devoted.

A concern with rhetoric can be documented from the very beginning of the director's artistic career. Eisenstein's first film, a brief pictorial segment incorporated into his spectacular adaptation of Ostrovsky's *Enough Simplicity in Every Wise Man* [1923], illustrated the protagonist's journal in radical similitudes. Glumov's film diary, Eisenstein recalls, "was a stream of metaphors and metamorphoses unfolding as metaphors: through a series of dissolves Glumov becomes in turn a gun, a tiny child, an ass."[14] While the first published essays evince

similar preoccupations with the problems of rhetorical composition,[15] a polemical response to Balázs' position on the future of the film, "Bela Forgets the Scissors" [1926], includes Eisenstein's earliest attempt to formulate explicitly a theory of rhetoric for the cinema.[16] With the achievements of *Strike* [1924] and of *Potemkin* [1925] behind him, Eisenstein attacks Balázs' proposal that in film the autonomous image constitutes the basis of signification. The first essays on montage had already argued that "it is not in the images that one should look for the essence of the cinema, but in the relations between images . . . [which] merely *treat* an object in order to utilize it interdependently with other *fragments.*" It is the "image-figure" resulting from this pictorial interdependence which represents, for Eisenstein, the authentic key to the future of the film:

> The concept of the cinema is now entering . . . the phase of its approach toward the symbolism of *language.* Of discourse. Of discourse which attributes a symbolic (that is, non-literal) sense . . . to an entirely concrete and material signification through the bias of what is improper to the literal, through the bias of *its relation to a context,* that is to say *through montage.*

Under the title of "symbolism" what Eisenstein in fact defines is the trope proper—a "mutation" of the ordinary "estranged from its literal sense"—and he devotes several paragraphs to the genesis of figures and tropes. Montage bends the autonomous and neutral image into a figurative language, and it is principally this imagistic rhetoric which transforms the objective world into discourse.

This immediate link between montage and rhetoric predates by more than two years the series of better-known essays which explore more particularly the mechanics of montage form.[17] It is, however, in a text of some ten years later, the notorious address to the 1935 All-Union Conference of Cinematographic Workers, that Eisenstein elaborates most com-

pletely the function of rhetoric and its importance to film composition.[18] He is laboring here, in the lean years of the mid-30s, to defend his work against the charges of excessive formalism and, behind the bitterly ironic feint of denouncing the "hypertrophy of the montage concept with which," he says, "film esthetics were permeated during the emergence of Soviet silent cinematography as a whole and my work in particular," he is in fact cautioning against the "dulling of . . . formal brilliance" and regressive "diversion" to a clarified thematics which tended to mar film produced under the aegis of Socialist Realism. Eisenstein hoped to "ensure that in its march towards new ideological depths . . . [Soviet film] does not lose the perfection of the achievements already attained" and in its "drive towards the thematic-logical side render . . . the work dry, logical, didactic." To the contrary he stressed that the "dialectic" of works of art arises neither to the exclusion of formal nor of ideological concerns, but from "a most curious 'dual-unity,' " the "true tension-laden unity of form and content" apart from which "there are no true art-works."[19] To elaborate this dialectic, Eisenstein returned to the "postulates" of his earlier work, his aim both to reassess and to reformulate their position within Stalinist aesthetics. As he would reiterate later in *The Film Sense,* what he hoped to show his critics was that in its formal principles "montage is actually a *large, developing thematic movement.*"[20] To witness this connection Eisenstein details a series of correspondences between what he calls primitive, "prelogical" forms of thinking, and the methods of artistic composition. The analogies disclose a consonance in the "technique of embodiment" proper to both, and, what is most striking, these "characteristic marks and forms of the construction of representations" are revealed as specifically rhetorical. Eisenstein begins with a discussion of synecdoche, "that most popular of artistic methods," as it appears

in primitive thought patterns, and from here, drawing on his readings in Lev Vygotsky, Lévy-Bruhl, Wilhelm Wundt and others, he moves through a colorful series of examples each of which specifies a different relationship between cinematic composition and "pre-logical" cognitive patterns. Although synecdoche is the only trope that Eisenstein names explicitly, each of the correspondences reveals a "construction of representation" which is essentially rhetorical in nature: metaphor, ethopoeia, enargia, asyndeton, enumeratio, and so forth. The interrelation exposes tropes as universal figures of cognition, and Eisenstein concludes that "we are dealing here not with specific methods, peculiar to this or that art-medium, but first and foremost with a specific course and condition of embodied thinking."[21] The rhetorically-based principles of film composition represent, then, less an abstract formalism than "a reprint of the structure and laws along which flow sensual thought-processes." As such they constitute a direct link between form and ideation. Rhetoric, in its potential to telescope form and content, emerges as the crucial mediator which ensures that "montage thinking is inseparable from the general content of thinking as a whole."[22] Ultimately, Eisenstein hyperbolizes, "we and the work are governed by one and the same canon."[23]

Later on Eisenstein would formulate explicitly the central assumption that underlies so many of his aesthetic writings: "At the threshold of the creation of language," artistic or otherwise, "stands the simile, the trope and the image."[24] Though rhetoric frequently surfaces under other names in the essays—and this fact is in part responsible for its wide neglect by Eisenstein's students and critics—rhetorical consideration shapes large portions of his thinking about film art.[25] Its key position in the aesthetic writings begs a rhetorically oriented reading of the films, and it is, in fact, here that we find his most rigorous exposition

of figurative interaction. A closer look at a specific cinematic passage will help to illuminate more distinctly the extent to which figural strategies not only inform imagistic order, but are equally definitive of the films' broader aesthetic and ideological claims.

II

The plate-breaking sequence which concludes the first reel of *Potemkin* is a relatively self-contained microtext which has long been famous for its formal brilliance. The passage (shots 227-48[26]) utilizes a scintillating display of montage to capture the first outburst of open rebellion on the battleship; hence, it marks a crucial turn in the film's dramatic action. A dishwasher, provoked by the quality of the mess on board, smashes in protest a plate inscribed with a verse from the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." To heighten the tension, Eisenstein reassembles the action abstractly as a collage of fragments which seem to rain down upon the eyes of the viewer. He distorts the time in a "cubist" reconstruction that shows, in fact, the sailor shattering the dish twice, first down over his left shoulder and then again over his right. The purely visceral force of the jagged composition provides the action with an immediacy which effectively implicates the viewer as it renders the emotive and psychological climax.

It is not, however, this highly foregrounded editing which in the first instance renders the sequence either diegetically or thematically intelligible. Within the wider scope of the *Potemkin* drama, what the plate-breaking episode indicates, beyond indignation, is the growing solidarity among the sailors that is ready to spring full-blown into open rebellion. This larger narrative thrust relies for its force on a more subdued, rhetorical strategy which organizes the passage as a series of symbolic signs that point both backward and forward along the narrative axis to unify the episode

with the swell of the revolution. This series of tropes overlaps and burgeons forth to encompass increasingly wider fields of reference. At the core of the sequence stands the verse from the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," in which "bread" not only functions within the Biblical text as a symbol for the gifts of God, but within the film refers us additionally to the conflict over the food around which the first segment of *Potemkin* revolves. This association, in turn, suggests to the sailor that further symbolic link between the plate as a whole and the hypocrisy of the tsarist regime, a connection which allows him to displace his anger onto the dish. Finally, the plate-breaking episode in its entirety comes to symbolize within the narrative the outbreak of the revolution; the destruction of the plate figures the impending fall of tsarist authority. This symbolic dilation is absolutely crucial to the effect of the passage. As a rhetorical strategy the *symbol* postulates an organic mode of representation in which the sign itself claims some real participation in the larger field of interest that it represents. As distinct from other tropes —allegory and irony come most readily to mind—the symbol intends an authentic and nonproblematic connection to its referent so that, for example, the plate is not put forth arbitrarily as a sign, but emerges "naturally" out of its context and, as an actual piece of the tsarist regime's property, does through its destruction participate in some small way in the toppling of the government.[27] The rhetorical organization of the text is thus far coextensive with its political content: the synthetic mode of composition allows the passage to argue thematically for just this type of nonproblematic identification, a united front among the factions of rising workers. This type of symbolic rhetoric is central to the whole of *Potemkin* and tends to come into play at crucial moments when identity is demanded.

The elated thematic of unification is, however, sharply at odds with the radical frag-

mentation which the plate-breaking sequence both portrays and enacts in its composition. The symbolic unity which the sequence postulates is realized through a process of disjunction where, instead of a unified presentation, everything is broken down into its parts. Here a second rhetorical strategy comes into play: the series of symbolic signs is itself organized figurally as a type of disjunctive *enumeratio* in which the fragmentation of the film text mirrors the shattering of the plate which it represents. As Eisenstein edits the gesture into its constituent parts, the passage explores breakage in a number of guises. Whereas initially the camera establishes the integrity of the plate as an object, as the sequence progresses the dish is increasingly fractured. At first the plate is centered within the frame (shot 227), and as the dishwasher turns it carefully in his hands, over and over again, the scrubbing motion emphasizes the circularity of the form (shots 227, 229, 231). Smashing comes as the climax to the sequence, but it is anticipated by a double fragmentation of the image of the object: increasingly portions of the plate are cut off by the edges of the frame, and its form is distorted optically through motion across the screen (shots 239, 242): the film medium itself begins to participate in the plate's destruction. Breaking the plate, the passage's principal disjunction, is accompanied by two more striking instances of fragmentation, the inscription and the dishwasher's body. We are not permitted to read the verse whole; rather, three discrete shots of the plate's rim, intercut with close-ups of the dishwasher's face, gradually reveal portions of the text as the sailor turns the dish in his hands.[28] In a like way Eisenstein's framing towards the end of the sequence (shots 243, 247) carves up the dishwasher's torso in an odd and irregular manner so that we see only portions of the head or neck, a single shoulder, or part of an arm. The distorted form of the body as photographed in these shots projects a rough, abstract pattern against the neutral

background, and there is a particularly harsh cut between the sharp, angular forms of shot 243 and, in shot 244, the soft contours of the face in extreme close-up. As this series of figural fragmentations is, once again, coextensive with the subject of the representation, we may wonder whether "form" in this passage is mirroring the diegetic "content", or whether it is not the diegesis which emerges as a thematic distillation of the text's rhetorical and imagistic structures. The priority would not be determinable within the text, but only by recourse to some extra-textual theory of artistic production.

The text, then, in paradox, moves simultaneously towards synthesis and dissolution, towards fragment and towards totalization. Nevertheless, with the episode's symbolic force predicated directly upon the act of breakage, these two antithetical rhetorical modes, symbol and enumeratio, engage and sustain one another. The pair intersect in their common interplay of parts and wholes which gives rise to a third, more comprehensive figural structure that coordinates the entire passage. Synecdoche, *pars pro toto* and *totum pro parte*, is the extensive rhetorical strategy which ultimately allows for the figural substitutions of both symbol and enumeratio. A closer look at the passage's symbolisms reveals that they are all organized synecdochically: the plate, "bread," the breaking action itself constitute actual parts of the larger wholes which they come to represent. Similarly, the smashing of the plate is edited as an elaborate synecdoche wherein a hail of fragmentary parts images a single, integrant action and, simultaneously, the distended doubling of the gesture forms a more embracing whole that is allowed to figure what is really only a portion of the action represented. The passage exploits a certain friction within synecdoche whose dialectical engagement of parts and wholes both tends toward identity and affirms disjunction. The tension arises out of the paradoxical claim to represent an organic totality through a frag-

ment, and this leads to conflict within a representation that seeks to present a whole yet seems to find at its disposal only splinters of that actuality. The smashing of the inscribed plate images the shattering of the film-text at large between these rival and fundamentally irreconcilable claims. It is in part this rhetorical conflict that is responsible for the tension which informs the passage and which erupts thematically on the surface of the text as emotional and physical violence.

The sequence suggests synecdoche as the master trope which constitutes the text of *Potemkin*, and a wider reading of the film bears this out. Eisenstein himself was acutely aware, at least retrospectively, of the importance of synecdochic figuration to his text. His own scattered exegeses of the film, still the strongest reading of *Potemkin* we possess, regularly return to the structural tension within the text, frequently in arguments whose very tendentiousness and elisions point most directly to the larger significance of the textual antithesis.[29] A late essay on the making of the film, "The Twelve Apostles" [1945],[30] discusses at length a number of the ways in which substitutions of *pars pro toto* shaped work on the production. The story is well known: after several weeks of shooting, the sweeping epic Goskino set out to make of *The Year 1905* was pared down by the director to a single of the best-known events, the Potemkin mutiny. Eisenstein reworked the scenario so "that one particular episode became the emotional embodiment of the whole" of the revolution. Similarly, details within the film served to represent larger social and political issues of the time. The mourning over the body of Vakulinchuk was to represent "the countless instances when funerals of revolutionary heroes became impassioned demonstrations and led to new uprisings followed by fierce reprisals"; the quarterdeck scene figured the "characteristic . . . cruelty with which tsarism crushed every attempt at protest"; the Odessa Steps sequence

emerged from "a synthesis of the slaughter in Baku and the January 9 Massacre." Through typage, more extensively developed here than in *Strike*, Eisenstein exploited the synecdochic relationship of a single individual to an entire physical type. With this same strategy in mind, he tailored the peculiar style of *Potemkin's* visuals: "A feature of this film was that close-ups, which usually served as explanatory details, became the parts capable of evoking the whole in the perception and feelings of the spectator." The director's own favorite among the film's synecdoches was shot 584. Here he photographed the pince-nez of the ship's surgeon Smirnov as it dangled from a hawser and substituted this image for a picture of the doctor.[31]

The examples isolated by Eisenstein already indicate that within *Potemkin* the integrative aspect of synecdoche is the more readily accessible of its textual strands. Most frequently in the essays he appropriates the trope to argue for the "organic unity" he liked so much to see in the film. In tones reminiscent of Coleridge and the German romantics, Eisenstein claimed for his text a flawless continuity, a "unified canon" piercing "the whole and each of its parts" such that "one and the same principle will feed any area."[32] The theme of solidarity, he writes, flows through the film "*for the whole exactly as it does for its fractional members*":[33]

> From a tiny cellular organism of the battleship to the organism of the entire battleship; from a tiny cellular organism of the fleet to the organism of the whole fleet—thus flies through the theme the revolutionary feeling of brotherhood. And this is repeated in the structure of the work containing this theme—brotherhood and revolution.[34]

The welling narrative and thematic unity dramatizes the text's dilative symbolism, and Eisenstein envisions that this integrative thrust "not only moves and expands throughout the film as a whole" but reaches out "far beyond

its physical limits" to engulf the public within its revolutionary spirit:[35] "Each spectator feels himself organically related, fused, united with a work of such a type, just as he senses himself united and fused with organic nature around him."[36] This is Eisenstein's most exorbitant hyperbole. The "organic-ness" of synecdochic symbolism is, he proclaims, "raised to the level of natural phenomena" so that ultimately it "answers the law of [their] structure."[37]

Eisenstein is arguing here for a synthetic so powerful that it would efface the difference not only between mass and individual, but between his text and historical actuality, the spectator and the natural world. The film's symbolic order, the alleges, realizes a genuine identity between art and nature, subject and object, signifier and signified. It is the authenticity of such a claim that the simultaneous and ineluctable fragmentation of the synecdochic strategy puts into question. For reasons that are largely political, Eisenstein in the essays has an interest in arguing the integrative side of *Potemkin's* thematics. Concurrently, however, his discussions of synecdoche betray much of that ambivalence which a close reading of passages like the plate breaking sequence already discloses. Eisenstein's illustrations themselves suggest a clear disharmony within the text. "Brotherhood" accompanies "revolution"; synecdochic synthesis issues from "characteristic cruelty", uprisings, slaughters and funerals. A passage from "The Twelve Apostles" is in this context particularly revealing:

> In one of my articles I compared this method of treat[ment] . . . with a figure of speech known as synecdoche.[38] I think both depend on the ability of our consciousness to reconstruct (mentally and emotionally) the whole from a part.
> But when can this phenomenon be relied on as an artistic method? When can a particular episode take the place of the whole logically and completely?
> Only in cases where the detail, the part, the particular episode is typical. In other words, when it reflects the whole like a piece of broken mirror.[39]

Eisenstein senses a certain threat that the rhetorical structure may pose to the "reliability" of his "artistic method," a threat of failure in the "logic" and "completeness" of the representation. Although these paragraphs argue overall for the viability of synecdoche as a means to symbolic unity, the final analogy to "a piece of broken mirror" is curiously ambivalent. Shards of a mirror will reconstruct details, but as anyone who has seen the end of *The Lady from Shanghai* knows, they in no way return a full picture. A mirror obscures as much of full reality as it reveals. The analogy suggests that the synecdochic text, however strongly it implies totality, never really moves beyond reflection, and a broken one at that. There is at some point always a gap in its completeness.[40]

The commentary on *Potemkin* recapitulates the identical textual configuration outlined in the plate-breaking sequence: dissociation counterweights the assertion of identity. Eisenstein's collateral attention to the problem of imagistic reflection suggests that the rift within the text is ultimately ontological. While the stylistic correlate to the film's symbolic strategy is a high realism, a mimetic mode of representation which intends that its photographic images coincide with reality,[41] the allied fragmentation of the film text suggests that the filmic signifier is concomitantly disjunctive. Whatever its claims to an authentic presence, to the possibility of reduplicating the fullness of actuality, the image is not a "redemption of physical reality," but ultimately incomplete, condemned to hover precariously between "the level of natural phenomena" and that "piece of broken mirror." This ontological tension not only generates the rhetorical conflict specifically within *Potemkin*, but is perpetuated generally in Eisenstein's insistence on montage as the basis for filmic composition. Eisenstein was fond of arguing that montage form, the reconstruction of a whole through the splicing together of bits of film,

represented a *creation* that was more than the sum of its parts, "a new unity on a new plane."[42] Again, however, as always with his claims to organicism, the assertion of montage as a "technique of unification" must be measured against his parallel claim that "montage is conflict,"[43] that "montage thinking" is "the height of *differentiatedly* sensing and resolving the 'organic' world."[44]

It would be more accurate to describe Eisenstein's texts as moving dialectically between versions of construction and of destruction, between "unity and diversity," "wielding" and "distintegration," a counterpoint crystallized in the trope synecdoche. At the most superficial level, the plot of *Potemkin* oscillates between moments of unification and moments of conflict: the solidarity among the sailors, the mutiny on board; the fraternization with the citizens of Odessa, the slaughter on the steps; the mutual sympathies of the squadron crews. This vacillatory movement appears as a narratival magnification of the text's deeper semiotic and rhetorical tensions, and precisely this same friction could be traced through a number of more specific thematic oppositions highlighted within the film. Although, as in the director's commentary, there is a recurrent effort to supplant or to veil disjunction with strategies of identification, this textual tension ultimately disrupts *Potemkin*'s patent ideology and puts into question the simplistic assertions of a story which glorifies "the revolutionary feeling of brotherhood." Here the rhetoric of tropes effectively demystifies the rhetoric of persuasion. If ideally *Potemkin* would have a unifying force of such proportion that its viewers were merely engulfed as a "collective and social unit, consciously participating in its development," the recourse to a strategy of persuasion itself belies an inherent inadequacy in the film's otherwise seductive images of identity. The need to propagandize can arise only within a certain space of difference. Propaganda,

couched as the expression of an irresistible unifying principle, emerges as the dynamic strategy of the film's expansive symbolism, aimed at glossing over and reducing a difference that it refuses to admit.[45] As figural disjunction shatters the film's seductive symbols, it exposes the fallacy of an identity whose realization is in fact no more than fragmentary. While this rhetorical disruption does not precisely invalidate such rallying points as worker solidarity or equality among the masses, it does call into question certain of the premises on which the revolutionary movement is based—the relationship of the individual to the collective, of brotherhood to revolution, and so forth.

The ambivalence inherent in these politics comes through most clearly in the film's final shot. The iron hulk of the Potemkin's prow seems to burst through the frame as it runs over the camera and the screen goes black. In what is the film's most blatant play to the audience, the battleship, victorious as it sails through the Russian fleet, is carrying the spirit of revolutionary brotherhood over to the spectator. However, to accept the implications of Eisenstein's conceit in full, the ship reaches out to include the viewer only by ramming right into him, and this final assault on his sensibilities delivers him over into darkness. This climactic gesture of unity, as it overwhelms the audience, ruptures the text of *Potemkin* and cuts it off entirely.

III

"Cinema," Eisenstein proclaimed in the year in which he made *Potemkin*, "is, like the theater, conceived purely as 'one form of violence.' "[47] If *Potemkin* thematizes revolution as a recurrent expedient to unification, the concluding shots of its final reel suggest that this political program may simply articulate dialectically a violence which is, in fact, inherent in the materialization of its ideology. We find that rupture and dislocation, recurrent

throughout the film, are directly consequent to pressure exerted by the text's seductive, yet illusory promise of authentic and unproblematic unity. Some years later, Pavlov would provide the director with a theoretical matrix within which to formulate this pressure more precisely as part of a programmatic *Rezeptionsästhetik*. As an assemblage of "artistic stimulants," Eisenstein's cinema aimed to "systematize" the spectator's response, to destroy the particularity of his impressions and "reduce [them] . . . to a common denominator."[48] The violence inherent in this reduction did not escape the director. Openly he characterized his cinema as a "series of blows" targeted directly to "the deep and slow drilling in of new conceptions or the transplanting of generally accepted notions into the consciousness of the audience."[49] Affective collectivization is possible only at the expense of the subject as individual, and *Potemkin*'s original epigraph alerts us from the outset of the film to the genuine hazards of that synthesis: "The individual was dissolving in the mass, and the mass was dissolving in the outburst."[50] The premonitory sense of Trotsky's text is double: solidarity engenders the revolution, yet there is simultaneously something fundamentally violent in the dissolution which this entails. As Eisenstein's dishwasher smashes the plate in sympathy with the "first lines of the revolution," his body is cut and distorted by the framing into an abstract grotesquerie. With the dissemination of socialist ideology dramatized in Part I of the film, with the accompanying growth in solidarity among the members of the crew, an initial affirmation of corporeal sanity (the hammock sequence [shots 11-49]) yields to the radical scission of the plate-breaking episode. Dismemberment, we see, stands at the source of unification, ideological identity emerges at the expense of the subject's integrity. The loss is played out unambiguously within the narrative: Vakulinchuk's death early in the film, a sacrifice which

exempts the plot from the "bourgeois individualism" of a central hero, immediately generates an extraordinary swell of revolutionary brotherhood.[51] Whatever the collective spirit instilled by mass movies, whatever the efficacy of that unity which the film so assiduously promotes, it is only at the price of violence that such identification is achieved.

We can trace this aggressivity more particularly within the architecture of the text. The plot of *Potemkin* informs us that the chief source of conflict within the film is the quarrel over the maggoty meat, and this episode, particularly the sequence of shots portraying Dr. Smirnov as he inspects the carcass (nos. 72-94), helps to clarify the nature of the violence which underpins the text's unific gestures. What Smirnov discovers here is a putrefaction which publicly, at least, he refuses to acknowledge. A superficial claim to wholeness again attempts to gloss over the dissolution of organic form, and the coordinate attempt to "drill in" a general acceptance of the physician's assertion is clearly less sanatory than potentially poisonous, effectively fatal. Specifically, it is the friction between an affirmation of integrity and the simultaneous disclosure of that insistence as a certain mystification which generates the film's ensuing violence. Most immediately, the episode articulates this disaccord in political and historical terms: tsarist authority would coincide with a spurious and tyrannizing mode of apprehension destined to capitulate before the more authentic and demystifying force of the revolution. The persuasiveness of this political proposition hinges on the temptation to identify the assertion with the demystified perspective which it designates. However, what the text here actually provides is not at all the sort of clarification which it dramatizes, but rather the exposition of an act of demystification. This expository gesture is itself highly tendentious, and, in keeping with the spirit of the text, the substance of its polemic merits closer scrutiny. In fact, the antagonists' coun-

terclaims to wholeness and to decomposition indicate that the sequence is rehearsing thematically a tension which is fundamental to its rhetorical preoccupations. However the text here may valuate this rhetorical tension, the political praxis remains essentially one performance of the figural rift among others, and of these not the least mystified. The violence thematized within the text does not, then, simply refract the frictional engagement of *pars pro toto*; the attempt to accommodate this disruption within a coherent political program is itself one of various attempts motivated by that trope's synthetic strategies to mystify the play of its own disharmony. Accordingly, the thematization of rhetoric here participates in the very aggressivity which it outlines.

In a passage which turns explicitly on inspection, the question of perspicacity is something more than metaphorical. There is a component to the conflict within the text which is literally scopic. The montage features prominently both an eye and a lens (Dr. Smirnov's folded pince-nez), and in shot 81 the conflation of the two is conspicuous. Shot 82 sets Eisenstein's camera unmistakably in the position of Smirnov's eye as he examines the meat. A specifically cinematic gesture sparks the aggressivity within the text: the sequence, with its stress on the act of viewing through lenses, may be read as a paradigm for filmic vision. Even as the lens is pressed into the service of claims to the contrary, what it in fact manifests is disintegration and rancidity. The passage suggests not only that film, per nature, sets this opposition into play; the resolution of this tension would seem to remain materially beyond its means. Notably, demystification here fails to coincide with the reestablishment of an authentic solidarity. However patently the lens may disclose infirmity and decomposition, it lacks the power to restore integrity. "To know inauthenticity," Paul de Man reminds us, "is not the same as to be authentic."[52] What the film text offers is an initial deficiency which

is merely compounded with each fresh attempt to reaffirm unity. So long as there is a retreat from this insight, the text is fated to oscillate between a recognition of inauthenticity and moments of renewed blindness.

Violence, throughout *Potemkin*, is scopically linked. In the plate-breaking episode, the disruption follows immediately upon the act of reading. Nearly half of that sequence is devoted to shots alternating between the inscription and close-ups of the dishwasher's face as he scrutinizes the Biblical verse. Graphically, the plate is tied to a series of images scattered across the film that are all circles (or roughly so), generally shot in close-up and centered within the frame. Prominent among them are two sets of images, one related to sight, the other to violence: Gilyarovsky's eye (shot 601), Smirnov's eye and pince-nez (shots 80-82), the squinting eyes of a sailor in Part V (shot 1310); the muzzle of a cannon (shot 1298), an iris-in on the bloodied face of Vakulinchuk's corpse (shot 623), the large silver belt buckle of a woman writhing in agony (shot 693), the open mouth screaming (shot 982, for example), the wheels of the baby carriage, and so forth. Frequently the two themes are conflated. We see the close-up of Gilyarovsky's eye just at the moment when he fires on Vakulinchuk, and, in shot 1013, as David Mayer has noticed and no doubt other viewers as well, "The muzzles of two giant cannon stare straight at the camera like menacing eyes."[53] The configuration suggests an aggressivity intrinsic not just to the film medium, but to ocular perception itself. It follows that the violence of the cinema does not issue exclusively as a textual assault but is, rather, a phenomenon to which the spectator is complicit as well.

This interplay finds its most incisive articulation in the short sequence which closes the massacre on the Odessa Steps: the eye of a woman is slashed out by the steel saber of a Cossack. This justly famous segment is linked

by the woman's pince-nez to Dr. Smirnov's examination of the maggoty meat and to the plate-breaking by the shattering of the orb. The vignette reformulates the imagery of the earlier scenes, offering a more forthright exposition of the relationship between vision and violence. Essentially we see here two images: an extreme close-up of the soldier as he delivers the blow with his sword cuts immediately to a close-up of the woman's face, her glasses smashed and blood pouring from her eye. The lapidary diptych refigures the rhetorical structure of the plate-breaking episode by means of a new figure, *ellipsis*, which is related to synecdoche but exploits fragmentation without laying any claim to totalization. No attempt has been made here to reconstruct the action out of its pieces; rather, Eisenstein juxtaposes two disjunct images and blatantly omits the gesture that connects them. The violence is contained *in the omission*: not merely is the expression of violence made more compelling here through elision, but the figure exposes a violence that is already inherent in image-signs which are ontologically privative. The omission comes as a blinding, both in the sense that it veils the actual gesture and in that it invites the spectator's tenacious will to continuity to collect the pieces into a unified expression as if nothing were missing. André Bazin's objection that montage does not so much give us an event as allude to it, is less the withering remark he intended than a perceptive observation of the painful aesthetic universal which the film seeks to expose.[54] Whether at the level of the autonomous image or as a succession of such image-signs linked in series, the film text, whatever continuity the eye may impose, never really moves beyond allusion to real phenomena. The sequence thus suggests that the violence of filmic vision is double: it is both the violence of alienation from presence and the violence of a synthesizing consciousness which continually accepts the part for the whole. As the episode

indicates thematically, the net loss which accrues to the subject is cognitive. While a set of images such as those which the film offers up to the viewer will allow the subject to synthesize an integral and meaning-filled comprehension, apperception grounded on a series of discontinuous signs can ultimately provide only a factitious continuity. The integrity of a conscious so predicated, which relates to the originary only in terms of distance and fraction, ultimately dissolves in the void of a difference from which it can find no escape. The text, then, exposes its own figurative status as the source of its aggression. The bias of the figural, the rhetorical component thematized in the bias of the film's propaganda, spawns that dissociation of the subject enacted so persistently in divers forms within the film. The very images which constitute the text, signs and tropes already alienated from the actual, participate in a violence of signification which they compound and bequeath to the viewer in their recurrent and seductive compulsion towards an elusive identity.

Ellipsis emerges here as a demystified trope that, unlike synecdoche which courts a symbolic rhetoric, openly enacts its own inauthenticity. In this lies the scene's truly vertiginous power. The sequence may be taken as the director's definitive reading of the filmic topology developed by Griffith and confirmed by Kuleshov. Eisenstein abandons the nostalgia for presence to exploit a poetics of absence. Notwithstanding, this electrifying moment, the consummation of the Odessa massacre, remains the nadir of the text. The coda to Part IV, the disjoint segment which follows immediately on this scene, dramatizes the nihilism inherent in a poetics which heralds a rupture of discourse and an atrophy of consciousness. The mammoth guns of the battleship Potemkin turn on the city to raze the Odessa Theater. With the demolition of this delicate rococo stage, the artist accedes to self-negation.

The text, of course, does not collapse at this point. As expected, there is a regression in Part V to symbolic strategies of various sorts as the film retreats from its negative insight. The prospect which the text provides is not, however, entirely cynical. If inauthenticity is an ineluctable predicament, incessant evasion is not, and it is worth considering one final segment which moves from the unmitigated negation of the Odessa holocaust towards a more constructive understanding of the poetics of absence. The stone lion that appears to rise up amid the rubble as the world around it is leveled has proved to be one of the more controversial passages in Eisenstein's work (shots 1022-24). As is well known, the director edited together separate shots of three stone lions filmed at the Alupka Palace near Odessa, one sleeping on his paws, one with his head raised to attention and one alert standing on his forelegs. Spliced together a single beast appears to wake. As if it were precisely the shattering of the phenomenal world which permitted this cinematic *tour de force*, the passage, the most blatant piece of artifice in the film, occurs just at the moment of the greatest destruction. Paradoxically, the sequence has been condemned both for its unintelligibility and for its irrelevance.[55] Although it has been challenged on more than one occasion, Eisenstein's own reading of the segment proves to be more illuminating than is generally credited. The marble lion, he suggests, "leaps up in protest against the bloodshed on the Odessa Steps": the waking beast points to the rising strength of the revolutionary forces, roused to action by the slaughter.[56]

The precise significance which Eisenstein assigns to the passage is of less immediate interest than the general character of the hermeneutic gesture. Interrupting the flow of the narrative, the sequence has no diegetic connection to the action at hand other than a purely figural one. While the passage has frequently been labeled symbolic, the emphatic artificiality of the segment distinguishes it from the other configurations in the film that we have been calling symbols. The lion here claims no authentic connection to its context; it is presented arbitrarily as a sign imposed upon a text whose artifice, at this point, is fully transparent. As such the figure is closer to a rhetorical strategy that might be called *allegory* than it is to symbol.[57] This type of allegorical figuration, like ellipsis, openly acknowledges difference; additionally, however, it allows for a synthetic construction which, in distinction to the symbol, readily manifests its own inauthenticity as anything more than figural. Accordingly, this second demystified trope, propounded, as Eisenstein suggests, in reaction to the rhetorical violence that precedes it, attempts to resolve the tension inherent in the film's synecdochic figurations and to recuperate the negation of an ontic ellipsis. Grounded specifically in the dislocation and peremptory reconstruction of accepted spatio-temporal coordinates, Eisenstein's allegory taps that violence which, if not in its power to allay, it can at least master; the trope exploits the poetics of absence to work towards a demystified aesthetic and an ideology whose unique claim to countenance would be the brilliance of their own ideal order. The "revolution" in Eisenstein's work, aesthetic and ideological, is tied to this attempt to revaluate positively existential difference, a project incorporated textually in the asserted priority of allegory over other, mystified forms of synthetic composition.[58] The lion, whose birth presides over the devastation of the classic theater, the dissolution of traditional representation, heralds a new, "post-revolutionary" aesthetic which flowers in the "intellectual montage" of *October* and would presumably have borne fruit in the unrealized filming of *Das Kapital*. If within *Potemkin* the allegory is not sustained, the film's thematics indicate that the text treats conditions which are merely preparatory to revolution. However, the astonishing effect of this second-and-a-half of film and the affirmation with which the lion emerges as a sign of recuperation amid images of destruction already points towards a larger resolution of the film's recurrent conflict. The violence of vision is at least controllable—and constructively so—within a figural self-awareness.

If it is perhaps no longer fashionable to depreciate Eisenstein's aesthetic theories or the formal rigor of his films, there are certainly many viewers who still see in his work what Robert Warshow termed the "triumph of art over humanity."[59] A reading of *Potemkin*, which offers as a recuperation of the film's tensions a mode of composition which succeeds specifically by asserting itself as a trope, might seem to confirm the criticism of Eisenstein's achievement. Figural discourse, however, understood as the formal expression of certain basic cognitive patterns, engages precisely the question of the nature of man's humanity and the ways it interacts with the world. The rhetoric of *Potemkin* argues not only for the importance which rhetorical structures play in shaping man's perception of his universe, but demonstrates the urgency of a recognition of this figural play. A more extended study of the film would want to show ways in which, in addition to ideology and poetics, the film's pathos or a psychoanalytical reading of the sort already undertaken by Dominique Fernandez also converge with the text's rhetorical movement.[60] Ultimately, *Potemkin* dissolves the distinction between artistic discourse and man's "spiritual activity", and it is more likely the often unappealing consequences of such a link that have made it seem preferable to the film's critics to dismiss Eisenstein's work as coldly formalistic. Ironically, however, the capitulation to a more seductive view of man's humanity merely reenacts the central rhetorical movement marked out by the text, and this willful blindness to the film's demystificatory gesture participates once more in the same figural violence.

Daniel L. Selden is currently completing his doctorate in Comparative Literature at Yale University. He has taught at Yale and at the New School for Social Research in New York.

NOTES

1. I use the term *rhetoric* in this primary sense, not to indicate ornament or the art of persuasion.

2. Several contemporary theorists have denied altogether a specifically rhetorical dimension to film texts. Christian Metz, for example, has argued that "the nature of the semiotics of film is that grammar and rhetoric are not separate in it" (*Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor [New York, 1974], p. 117), a confusion which is to some extent indicative of current French critical thinking in general. Similar equations underpin theoretical models advanced by Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette, among others. Such an identification effectively reduces rhetorical movement to a projection of certain logico-grammatical equations. The entire problem is outlined in detail by Paul de Man in his discussion of "Semiology and Rhetoric," now reprinted in *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, 1979), pp. 3ff. De Man argues persuasively not only that a distinction between grammar and rhetoric is highly desirable within critical discourse, but that a dialectical tension between the two is, in fact, absolutely crucial to the general possibility of textual composition itself. While de Man is concerned primarily with the constitution of literary texts, already the liberation of rhetorical strategies from a strict dependence upon the grammatical structure of language invites a consideration of rhetorical movement in texts which are, at least principally, extraverbal.

3. See Sergei M. Eisenstein, "Perspectives" [1929], trans. in *Film Essays, with a Lecture*, ed. Jay Leyda (London, 1968), p. 35, and "Mass Movies," *The Nation*, 9 Nov. 1927, p. 508. On the eve of the Russian Revolution, less than 25% of the general populace was literate, in the countryside less than 10%. Marcelin Pleynet discusses a number of ways in which the early Soviet cinema tailored itself to the special needs of such an audience and participated directly in the postrevolutionary drive to increase the rate of literacy nationwide ("Le front 'gauche' de l'art: Eisenstein et les vieux 'jeunes-hegeliens,' " *Cinéthique* 5 [Sept.-Oct. 1969], pp. 23ff.).

4. "About Myself and My Films" [1945], *Notes of a Film Director*, trans. X. Danko (New York, 1970), p. 17.

5. "A Course in Treatment" [1932], *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York, 1949), p. 84.

6. "Word and Image" [1939], *The Film Sense*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York, 1942), p. 32.

7. "The Structure of the Film" [1939], *Film Form*, p. 159.

8. "Achievement" [1939], *Film Form*, p. 193.

9. Of the criticism I know, only Jean Mitry's little book on *S. M. Eisenstein*, now in its third edition (Paris, 1978), provides a serviceable general discussion of rhetorical composition within the films. Although Mitry's polemical concern with correcting certain "abuses" in the director's style clouds his appreciation of several of the films' key rhetorical strategies—Mitry insists generally on tropes of contiguity (metonymy) over similitude (metaphor, allegory)—his exegesis of "Le 'montage des attractions' et les théories du montage" (Chapter 5) makes an excellent introduction to the problems of film rhetoric. Remarks scattered over the three-day Eisenstein conference held at Fiesole in the fall of 1974 indicate a wide recognition of the existence of figural strategies within the films; nevertheless, Massimo Vannucchi's plea for a more rhetorically-oriented reading of the films elicited no comment from any of the scholars in attendance (*Il cinema di S. M. Ejzenstejn: atti del convegno internazionale 'Premio città di Fiesole ai Maestri del Cinema' 1973*, ed. Piero Mechini and Roberto Salvadori [Florence, 1975], p. 101). In an extraordinarily suggestive treatment of "Ideogramma, monologo, e linguaggio interiore" appended to the published transactions of the conference, Vannucchi argues in general that for Eisenstein "La priorità teorica è accordata alla retorica" (ibid., p. 202). More specifically, Viatcheslav Ivanov draws on Roman Jakobson's celebrated distinction between metaphor and metonymy to argue the particular importance of this polarity to the whole of the director's work ("Eisenstein et la linguistique structurale moderne," trans. Andrée Robel, *Cahiers du cinéma*, No. 220-21 [1970], p. 49). The most extensive treatment of Eisenstein's rhetoric remains John B. Kuiper's "Analysis of the Four Silent Films of Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein" (Diss. University of Iowa, 1960). While Kuiper's study is considerably helpful as an index to a variety of figural patterns central to the silent films, his larger discussion of the function of these figural strategies suffers from a somewhat myopic view of rhetorical structure. A series of more suggestive approaches to the problem can be found in the collective study of *October* undertaken by Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, Pierre Sorlin, et al. who consider various concrete instances of rhetorical composition in passing (vol. 1: *Octobre: écriture et ideologie* [Paris, 1976]; vol. 2: *Octobre: la révolution figurée* [Paris, 1979]). J. Dudley Andrew, among many others, discusses rhetoric only as persuasion (*The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* [New York, 1976], p. 68ff.). Two new, major studies of Eisenstein's work, both touching

on questions of figuration, unfortunately came into my hands too late to use: Jacques Aumont's *Montage Eisenstein* (Paris, 1979) and Barthélemy Amengual's monumental *¡Que viva Eisenstein!* (Paris, 1980).

10. William S. Pechter is perhaps most caustic: "Eisenstein on *pars pro toto* is a hilarity too good to be missed." (*Twenty-four times a Second* [New York, 1971], p. 112).

11. "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today" [1944], *Film Form*, p. 240. Unless otherwise noted, emphases within quotations are reproduced from the original text. The rhetorical composition of Griffith's films is, of course, a good deal more complex than Eisenstein's polemical appraisal of his precursor might lead the reader to believe.

12. "Film Language" [1934], *Film Form*, p. 111.

13. "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today," *Film Form*, p. 251.

14. Ivanov, "Eisenstein et la linguistique structurale moderne," p. 49. For a fuller account of this first film, see Yon Barna's discussion of the play in *Eisenstein*, trans. Lise Hunter, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Bloomington, 1973), pp. 62ff.

15. See, in particular, the discussion of the efficacy of the photographic image in "The Montage of Attractions in the Cinema" [1924-25], and the definition of form offered in the essay "On the Question of a Materialist Approach to Form" [1925]. French translations of both these texts are available in the collection *Au-delà des étoiles*, ed. Jacques Aumont (Paris, 1974), pp. 127ff.

16. *Au-delà des étoiles*, pp. 157-67. Only a fragment of this important and widely neglected text is currently available in English: Herbert Marshall, *The Battleship Potemkin* (New York, 1978), p. 257.

17. For example, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" [1929]; "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form" [1929]; "The Filmic Fourth Dimension" [1929]; "Methods of Montage" [1929]; and "Film Language" [1934], all included in *Film Form*. Occasionally, it is suggested that the attention to tropes shown by Eisenstein and certain other early Soviet filmmakers is the result of contact with the Formalist movement. Although the nearly universal preoccupation with language in the leading literary, aesthetic and philosophical discussions of the period has left a readily identifiable mark on Eisenstein's work, it is not entirely clear that his interest in figurative discourse originates with the Formalist school. The Formalists' own response to traditional rhetoric is itself extraordinarily complicated and by no means of a piece. Viktor Shklovsky's programmatic manifesto, "Art as a Device" [1917], launched a vigorous attack on the prevailing claim that figurative language constitutes the distinctive feature of literary art. The trope, Shklovsky argued, is merely one of the

devices which the poet has at his disposal, and it is by and large to other aspects of "literariness" which the early Formalist texts turned their attention. This relative indifference to rhetoric was, at least partly, polemical, a response to the bare, mechanical inventorying of figures and tropes so characteristic of the older stylistics. It was not for another decade, at the close of the '20s, that the early Formalist position on figurative language was modified. The investigations of Viktor Zhirmunsky and, later, of Roman Jakobson into metaphor and metonymy as polar linguistic processes mark a renewed interest in the trope as a strategic, if not the prime, literary device, at least at the lexical level (Jakobson's "Randbemerkungen zur Prosa des Dichters Pasternak," *Slavische Rundschau* 7 [1935], is typical of the later Formalist position). Eisenstein's interest in rhetorical theory is both more pronounced and antedates by several years the shift in the Formalist position back towards rhetoric. It is more likely that amid the general de-emphasis of figurative language prevalent in contemporary literary theory, Eisenstein's return to traditional rhetoric is essentially conservative. His treatment of figuration is aligned much more closely to the work of earlier theorists such as Alexander Potebnia and his disciples. The shifting Formalist positions on rhetoric are summarized in Victor Erlich's *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine*, 2nd ed., rev. (The Hague, 1965), pp. 230-32 and passim. For Eisenstein's relationship to the Formalists, see particularly Pietro Montani, "L'ideologia che nasce dalla forma: il montaggio delle attrazioni," *Bianco e nero* 32, No. 7-8 (1971), 6-19; and the transactions of the 1974 Fiesole conference, *Il cinema di S. M. Ejzenstejn*, pp. 21ff.

18. A portion of the speech has been published in English as "Film Form: New Problems" in *Film Form*, pp. 122-78. A summary of the complete address in the context of its delivery is provided by Marie Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein* (New York, n.d.), pp. 329-50.

19. Despite Eisenstein's repeated insistence to the contrary, numerous critics continue to suppose a form/content dichotomy of one sort or another throughout the director's work, particularly within the films. The assumption, which perpetuates in a disquieting way those first charges of the Stalinist censors, has allowed students in the West to disregard those aspects of Eisenstein's work which may be ideologically troubling in favor of the film's formal and technical achievements. Frequently, this has lead to the misunderstanding that Eisenstein was interested principally in the latter, even at the expense of ideology. For a useful overview of the form/content problem, see Francois Albera's *Notes sur l'esthetique d'Eisenstein* (Lyon, 1973), pp. 47-58. Albera suggestively situates Eisenstein's handling of the question within the Hegelian aesthetic tradition.

20. "Synchronization of the Senses [1940], *The Film Sense*, p. 81.

21. Although Eisenstein's interest in "inner speech" is well-known, generally students miss the point of his argument. Inner speech intersects with montage form because the two share a common set of structural principles, and these structures coincide with the figures and tropes of traditional rhetoric. For a fuller consideration of inner speech as it relates not only to rhetoric, but to other theoretical models explored by Eisenstein in the late '20s and early '30s, see Massimo Vannucchi's study of "Ideogramma, monologo e linguaggio interiore," loc. cit.

22. "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today," *Film Form*, p. 234.

23. "The Structure of the Film" *Film Form*, p. 162.

24. "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today," *Film Form*, p. 247.

25. While Eisenstein's theoretical vocabulary remains idiosyncratic throughout his career, his preoccupations are frequently identical to concerns of central importance within the rhetorical tradition. For example, the discussion of *representation* and *image* that runs through *The Film Sense* pertains largely to the nature and constitution of the trope as do the late theoretical models of *pathos* and *extasis*.

26. For convenience I follow the shot listing in David Mayer's cutting continuity, *Sergei M. Eisenstein's "Potemkin"* (New York, 1972). Mayer's transcription contains a number of minor inaccuracies, though not in any of the passages which I discuss in detail here. The textual history of *Potemkin* is distressingly complex, and no authoritative edition has yet been established. A different version of the film circulates today in almost every country. The most consistently accurate text, distributed by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, was pieced together by Jay Leyda in the late '30s from a partially recut German print and a very worn Soviet original. (For the textual history, see Kuiper, "An Analysis of the Four Silent Films," pp. 12 and 404.) Unfortunately, this edition of *Potemkin* does not, as Leyda has claimed, "reproduce exactly its original state" (*The Film Sense*, p. 220). Stephen P. Hill has shown that at least insofar as the intertitles are concerned, there are significant discrepancies between Leyda's version and Eisenstein's original cutting ("The Strange Case of the Vanishing Epigraphs," *The Battleship Potemkin*, ed. Herbert Marshall, pp. 74–85). While there seems little reason to believe that there are still major defects in the film's visuals, Leyda's restoration cannot be considered definitive. Mayer's transcription follows the Museum of Modern Art edition. The print I have used in examining the film is a 16mm duplicate of this version held in the Yale Film Collection (New Haven, Conn.).

27. This rhetorical taxonomy is generally consonant with Romantic usage, the aesthetic tradition to which Eisenstein was most immediately the heir. Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of a unity of experience, a state deeply-desired, tropes such as allegory and irony which engage two parallel yet separate sets of meanings exploit for their effect instead that ineluctable distance between the sign and its referent. Renouncing the desire for identification, allegory and irony establish within this difference a discourse which is definitely not organic and which allows for no totality. The common preference for symbol over allegory in particular, so prevalent in Romantic aesthetics since the late eighteenth century, is explained by this frequently painful assertion of existential difference. Of the vast literature on the question, Coleridge in *The Statesman's Manual* is unusually lucid and succinct:

... an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses.... On the other hand a symbol ... always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative. (*Complete Works* 1, ed. W. G. T. Shedd [New York, 1884], pp. 437-38.)

A more precise technical distinction between these tropes is given by Heinrich Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik* (Munich, 1963), § 423. For a full theoretical discussion of symbol and allegory, particularly illuminating in the present context, see Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles Singleton (Baltimore, 1969), pp. 173ff.

28. Leyda's English-language version substitutes intertitles after shots 232, 233, and 234 for the three close-ups of the plate seen in Russian prints of the film.

29. Partly for this reason the opinion still prevails in this country that reading Eisenstein makes "an interesting but tenuous business" (Andrew, *The Major Film Theories*, p. 43). An extended study of Eisenstein's prose will probably be necessary before most readers are convinced that contrary to received opinion, his writings are neither cluttered up with arcane and irrelevant matter nor flawed by contradictions and confusions which the director neglected to untangle; rather, as Jacques Aumont has suggested, the essays need to be read as prose poems, literary texts in their own right whose genuine difficulty should not be underestimated. Readers who approach the essays anticipating an entirely systematic and perspicuous exposition are bound to be disappointed. It is, for example, somewhat ingenuous to expect uniformity in the writings of an artist whose aesthetics are founded explicitly on principles of conflict and radical

juxtaposition. For the correlation between his prose style and montage form, see particularly Eisenstein's "Torito," *Bianco e nero* 32, No. 7-8 (1971), 60. Aumont's preface to the pieces collected in *Au-delà des étoiles* provides a useful introduction to close reading of the essays.

30. In *Notes of a Film Director*, pp. 18-31.

31. This synecdoche is also discussed in "Film Form: New Problems," *Film Form*, pp. 132ff.

32. "The Structure of the Film," *Film Form*, p. 160.

33. Ibid., p. 166.

34. Ibid., p. 163.

35. Ibid., p. 164.

36. Ibid., p. 161.

37. Ibid., pp. 160, 161.

38. The reference is probably to "Film Form: New Problems," *Film Form*, pp. 132ff.

39. *Notes of a Film Director*, p. 28.

40. This metaphor was, apparently, much in Eisenstein's mind as he filmed *Potemkin*. Originally he planned to represent the shattering of a mirror at the climax of the Odessa Steps sequence and to reveal in it the image of a man reflected variously in its broken pieces. These shots, whose metatextual reference should be clear, were not included in the final cutting. The motif, it seems, was reworked instead in the plate-breaking where the link to textual composition and the dialectic of reading is made more explicit. See the shooting script published by Jay Leyda in *Eisenstein: Three Films* (New York, 1974); the shots in question are 77a and 78 of "The Odessa Steps." Although this episode as a whole was suppressed, Eisenstein seems to have retained several of the shots in his final cut. See, in Mayer's listing, nos. 992, 995, 1001, and 1005 all of which show a young man reflected in a mirror.

41. Eisenstein exploited cameraman Edward Tissé's background in wartime newsreel photography to give *Potemkin* the look of a documentary (see "The Structure of the Film," *Film Form*, p. 162). Although today Eisenstein's name has become nearly synonymous with directorial manipulation, *Potemkin*'s first reviewers in both Europe and America testify almost universally to the film's "monumental realism." Wilton A. Barrett's acclaim for Eisenstein's achievement (*National Board of Review Magazine* 1, No. 6 [1926], 5-6) typifies the general astonishment of the art world: "*The Cruise of the Battleship Potemkin* [sic] ... bears the stamp of something that is actually occurring before our eyes, as if the screen on which it is projected were a square hole through which we looked at human events in the making." Of particular interest on the question of realism are the reviews of Herbert Jehring, *Berliner Börsen-courier*, 30 April 1926; Ernestine Evans, *The Nation*, 15 Sept. 1926; Evelyn Gerstein, *The New Republic*, 20 Oct. 1926; and John Grierson, *New York Herald Tribune*,

5 Dec. 1926. Most of these pieces have now been reprinted in Herbert Marshall's *Potemkin* anthology.

42. "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today," *Film Form*, p. 236.

43. "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," *Film Form*, p. 38.

44. "The Unexpected" [1928], *Film Form*, p. 27. Emphasis added. Recently, David Bordwell has argued that the antithetical understanding of montage dominates Eisenstein's early aesthetic; only after 1930, Bordwell alleges, do his writings stress organicism ("Eisenstein's Epistemological Shift," *Screen* 15, No. 4 [1975], 32ff.). Although it would be difficult to dispute Bordwell's conclusion that synthetic principles receive relatively more attention in the later essays, the contrast is, as Ben Brewster has cautioned, somewhat less stark than Bordwell suggests (see Brewster's editorial note appended to the published text of Bordwell's article). Bordwell himself points out that it is not difficult to cite synthetic models in the earlier texts nor conflictive principles in the later. While a more extensive study of Eisenstein's prose texts is required before questions of consistency and development can be adequately assessed, what a reading of *Potemkin* discloses—and consideration of the other silent films would bear this out—is that both synthesis and conflict are central to Eisenstein's work from the beginning of his artistic career. If unitarian models appear to displace an earlier concern with heterogeneity in the evolution of the aesthetic writings, the shift is more one of emphasis than of epistemology.

45. "The Structure of the Film," *Film Form*, p. 172.

46. Eisenstein makes the link between propaganda and synecdoche explicit in a later text, *La non-indifférente nature* 1, trans. Luda and Jean Schnitzler (Paris, 1976), pp. 48-49.

47. "The Montage of Attractions in the Cinema," *Au-delà des étoiles*, p. 128.

48. "How I Became a Film Director," *Notes of a Film Director*, p. 17.

49. "The New Language of Cinema" [1929], trans. Winifred Ray, *Film Essays*, p. 34.

50. The original epigraph was, in Eisenstein's final cutting, the film's first image. For a discussion of textual problems surrounding this intertitle, see Stephen P. Hill's "The Strange Case of the Vanishing Epigraphs," *The Battleship Potemkin*, ed. Marshall, pp. 74-86.

51. For the polemical basis to this gesture, see particularly "Through Theater to Cinema," *Film Form*, pp. 3ff.

52. "The Rhetoric of Temporality," *Interpretation: Theory and Pratice*, p. 197.

53. David Mayer, *Eisenstein's "Potemkin"*, p. 203.

54. André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," *What is Cinema?* 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, 1967), p. 25.

55. For a discussion of conflicting interpretations of the passage, see Herbert Marshall's "The Puzzle of the Three Stone Lions" in his *Potemkin* anthology, pp. 264ff.

56. "A Dialectical Approach to Film Form," *Film Form*, p. 56.

57. See note 27.

58. It is here that the director's work falls into an historical spectrum. The reassertion of allegory over the symbol is allied with the work of other contemporary artists in reversing the predominate Romantic valorization of symbolism over allegorical rhetoric.

59. *The Immediate Experience* (New York, 1946), p. 271. This line of criticism finds its fullest expression in Paul Seydor's remarkable attack, "Eisenstein's Aesthetics: a Dissenting View," *Sight and Sound*, (Winter 1973/74), pp. 38-43.

60. Dominique Fernandez, *Eisenstein: l'arbre jusqu'aux racines II* (Paris, 1975), pp. 100-30.
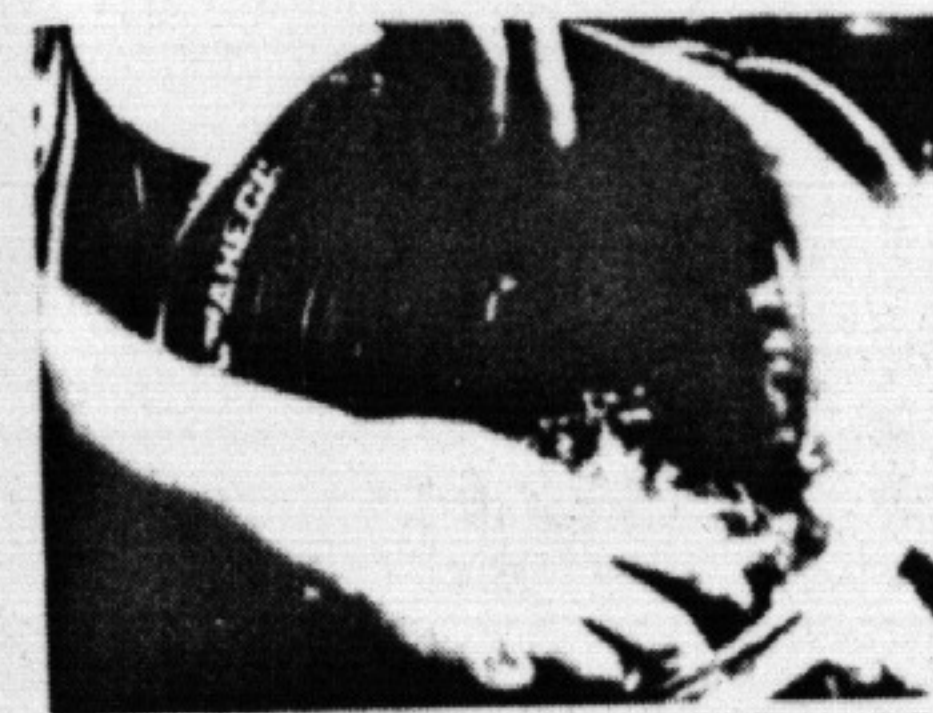
Shot 227   Shot 228   Shot 229
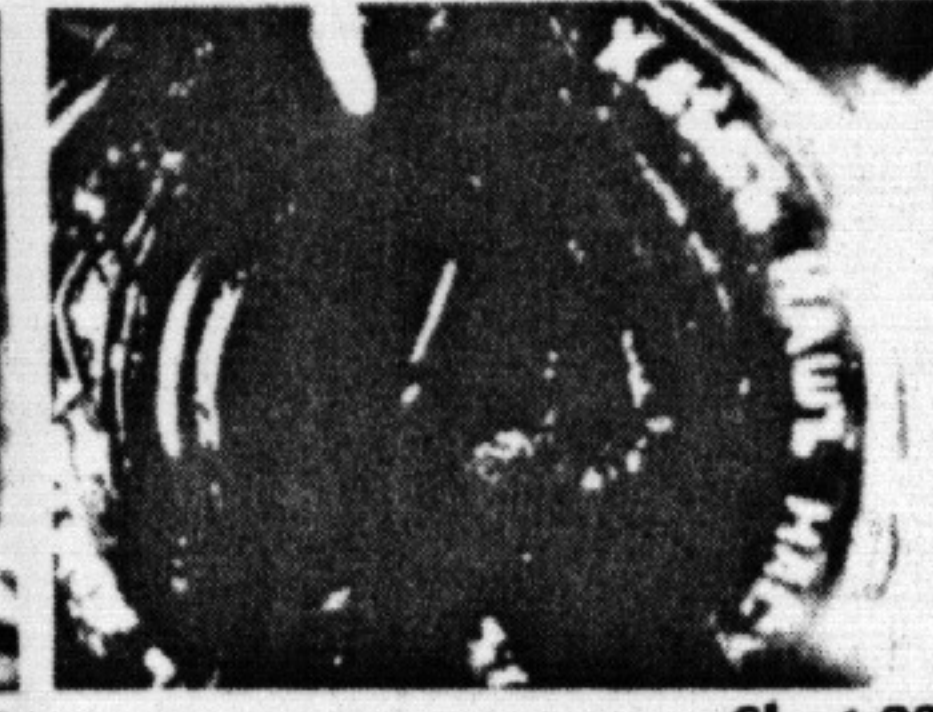
Shot 230   Shot 231   Shot 232

Shot 233
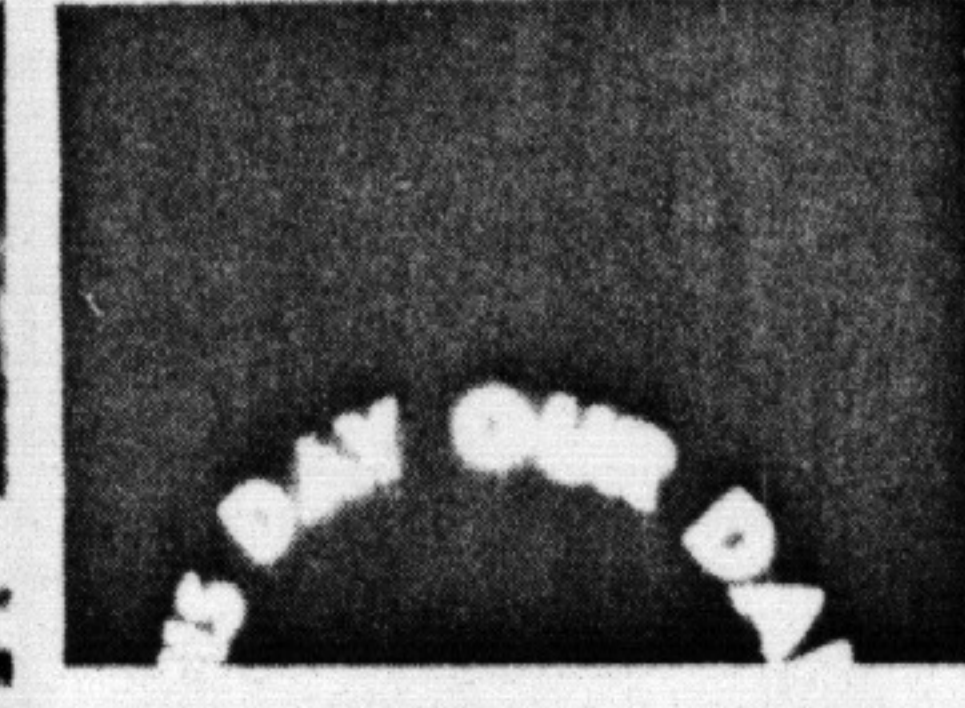
Shot 234   Shot 235
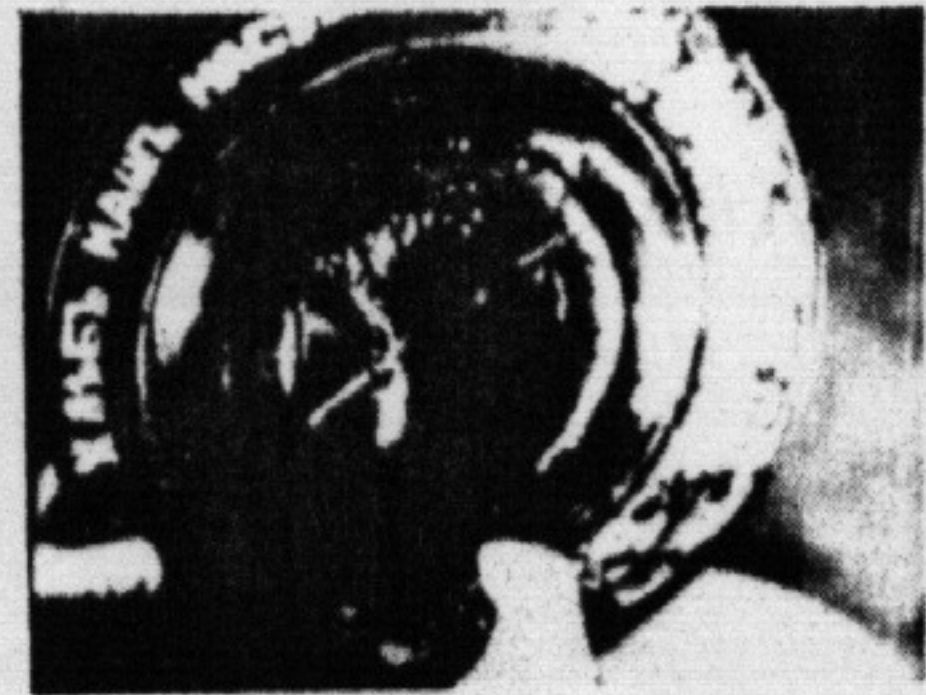
Shot 236

Shot 237
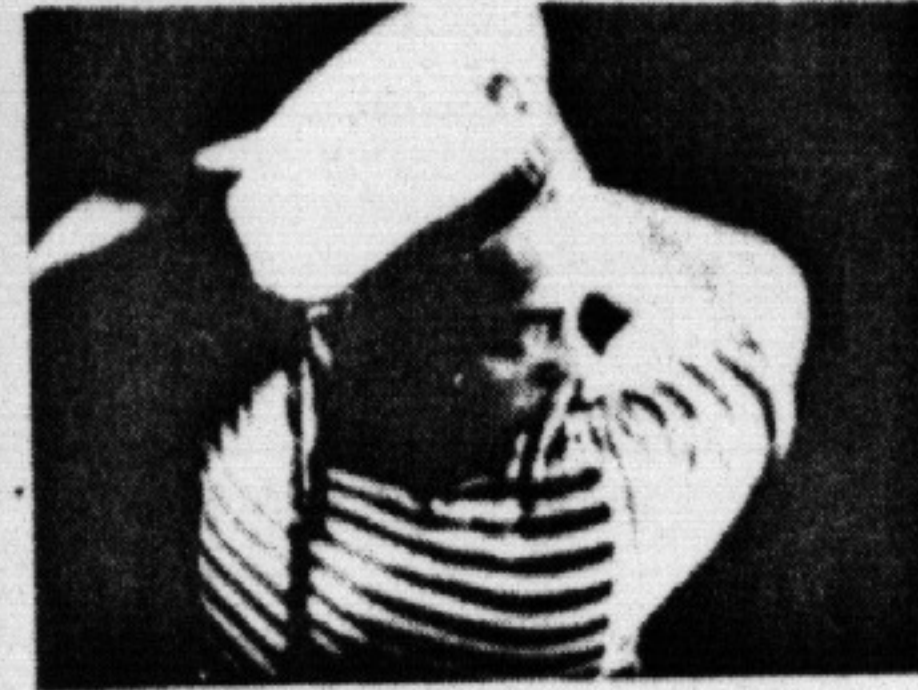

Shot 238

Shot 239

Shot 240

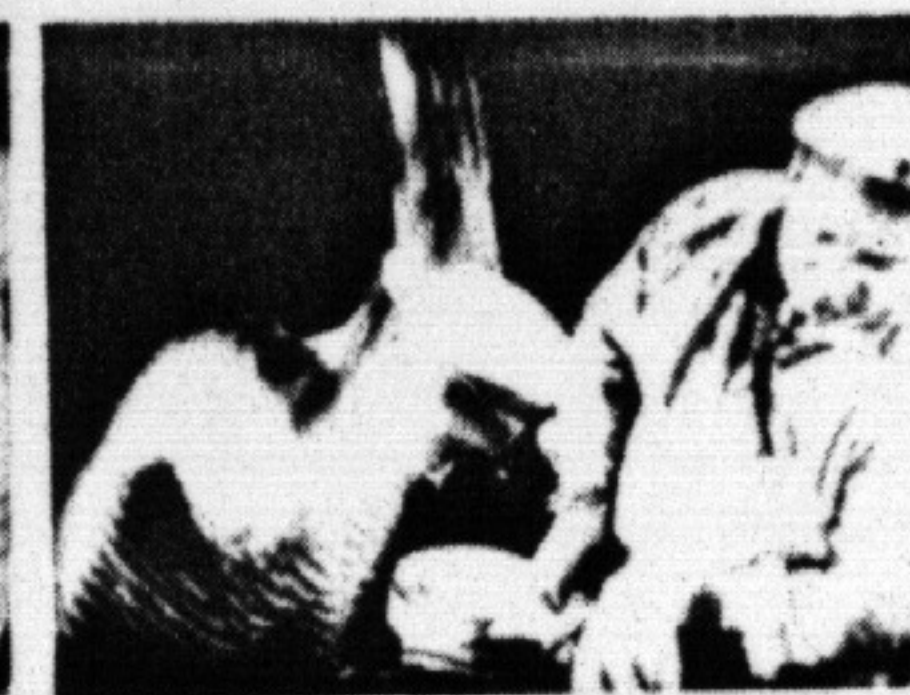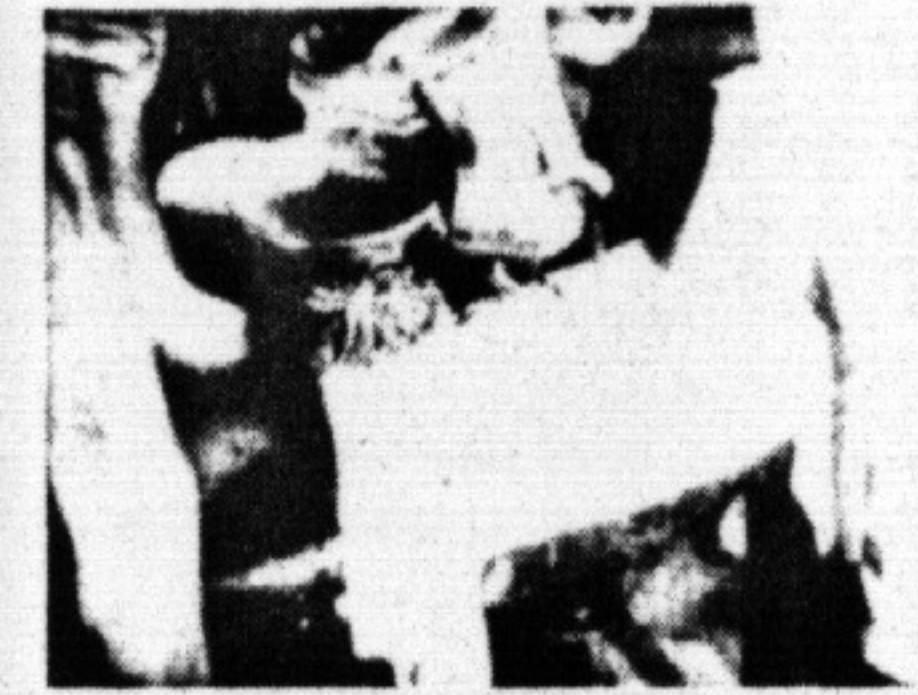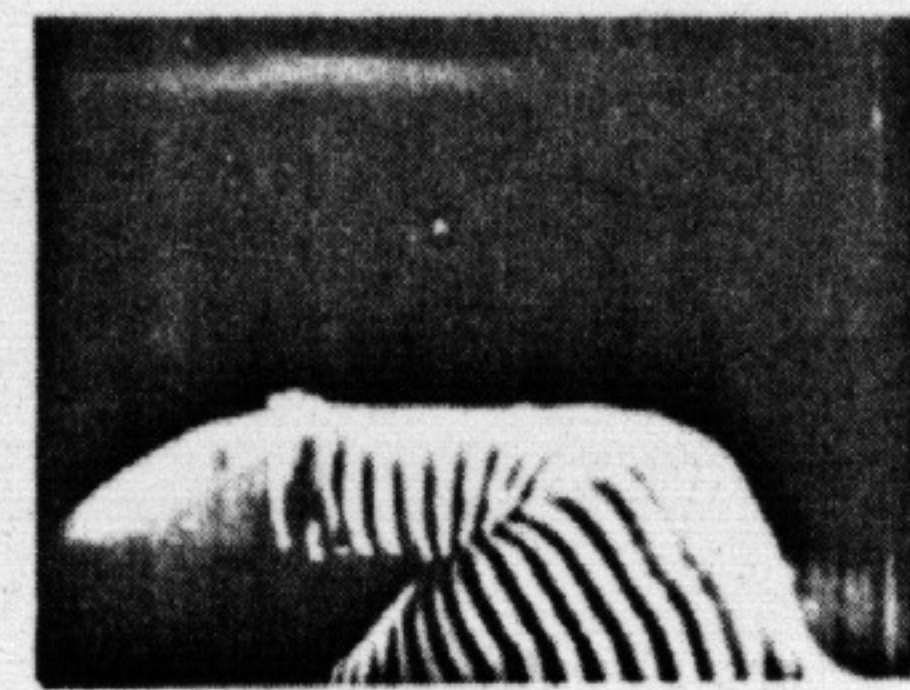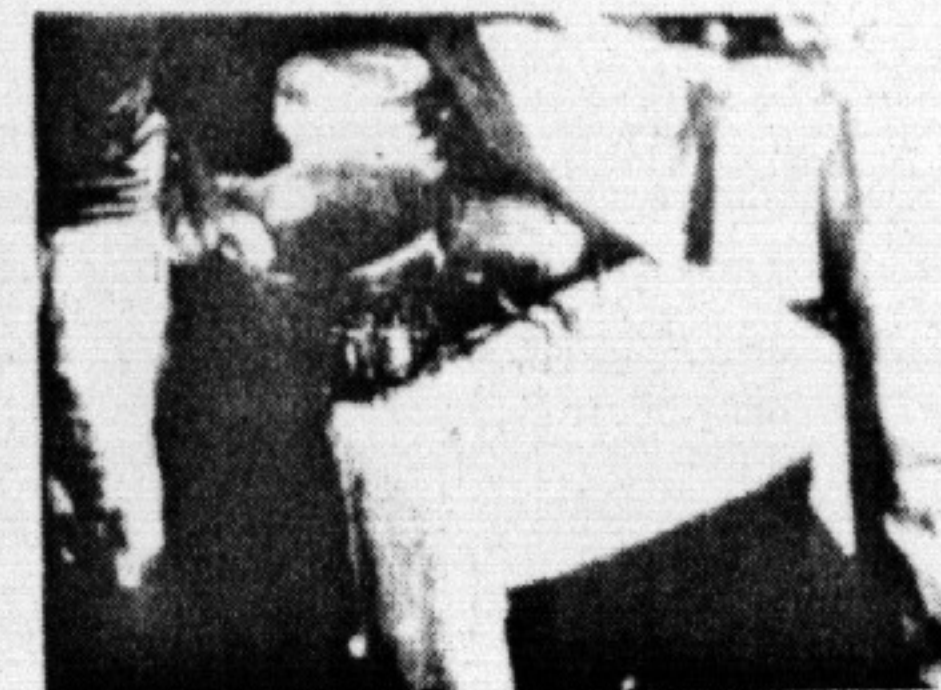

Shot 241

Shot 242

Shot 243

Shot 244

Shot 245 a

Shot 245 b

Shot 246

Shot 247

Shot 248