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## Eisenstein - Joyce- Marx; Cosmic, Comic

Esther Leslie

### Exchange: Eisenstein/Joyce

In 1927, Sergei Eisenstein started to plan a film of Marx's *Capital*. Eisenstein wanted to make of *Capital* a 'discursive film', ranging across topics in no particular order. It would reveal the workings of the economic system, rendering the secrets of the commodity's machinations. At the same time, it would 'teach the worker to think dialectically'.<sup>1</sup> The film was to continue Eisenstein's quest to refine the techniques of montage, as commenced in his theatrical work in 1922. Montage in Eisenstein's hands, was an objective and subjective monitor: it modelled processes of external historical movement and it mapped the internal processes of consciousness or thought.

In his film *October* Eisenstein had developed an 'intellectual montage' style, in which complex ideas – such as the existence of many gods all claiming to be the one God – found expression through the sequencing of images. Film's meanings emerge from chains of association, and cutting contributes to an undercutting of the screen image. One episode in *October* shows the raising of a bridge across the river, a key moment in which the authorities attempt to split the city, dividing it along class lines. In the film the bridge-raising is shown from multiple angles, as time is stretched and the significance of the moment is underlined and subjected to concentrated analysis. Seeing is re-invented, infused with reflection and analysis, as a result of the technological capabilities of cinema. Building on this, in his notes for a film of *Capital*, Eisenstein claims that it is the 'montage fragment' itself that assists in the formation of thoughts.<sup>2</sup> Eisenstein cited Pudovkin's favourable analysis of *October*, which noted its 'restructuring of ordinary perception'.<sup>3</sup> Through film, thought is rethought, locally, in relation to what is seen on screen, and more generally, in the sense that the method of montage demonstrates how motile thinking – or

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<sup>1</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', translated by Maciej Sliwowski, Jay Leyda and Annette Michelson, *October*, no. 2, Summer 1976 p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 6.

consciousness - might be or become.

In Eisenstein's hands, film can emulate the sublime flights of thinking itself, modelling abstraction and process. But sublimity is not enough for him. For the filming of *Capital*, Eisenstein's use of montage aimed to combine a serious social end with the seeding of his film of *Capital* with 'salvos of laughs'. Heady thought had to be dragged down to earth in a belly laugh. The film of *Capital*, he insisted, would be satirical and use elements of the grotesque and farce. Its irony would be 'bloody' and pathos would be expunged.

Eschewing a story-line, the film was to be composed of vignettes, or what Eisenstein termed '*historiettes*', or 'petty events'. Eisenstein noted, for example, that the Stock Exchange would be rendered as 'thousands of tiny details, like a genre painting'.<sup>4</sup> Other subjects in the film would include a day in the life of an average man, a sequence of events ranging from an analysis of one centimetre of silk stocking to the appearance of a bowl of soup to the sinking of a British ship. One day in a man's life, followed in minute detail, could be one organising theme. From such a fragment, torn out of everyday existence, chains of connection could be unfurled, much as Marx's cell-like commodity form was a tiny starting point that proved to reveal chains of connection and a weave of relations. In the film scenario, these chains linked the system of exploitation, commerce, competition, and even questions of morality in relation to the length of skirts, exposing thereby contradictions between the desires of clothing manufacturers, textile manufacturers and religious authorities.<sup>5</sup> Eisenstein's notes sketched out other patterns of connection from the production of one little button to systemic overproduction, or, from a little plate of food to ferocious global conflict, from the trivial to the world system in all its irrational super-productiveness and destructiveness. A note for the film project lists a sequence of connections:

Pepper. Cayenne. Devil's island. Dreyfus. French chauvinism. *Figaro* in Krupp's hands. War. Ships sunk in the port.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 17.

This methodology enabled a coherent view of the world made out of what might seem to be random fragments. It had implications for filmic form:

The ‘ancient’ cinema was shooting *one event from many points of view* –  
The new one assembles *one point of view from many events*.<sup>7</sup>

The crucial aspect of the film of Marx’s work was its presentation of a perspective, or rather *the* perspective of workers’ struggle and proletarian consciousness. In an ironic flourish, Eisenstein dedicated the film to the nineteenth-century Marxists who came after Marx and had formed the Second International. He noted that *Capital* was the refutation of all they thought, for these were the so-called international socialists who had voted for war credits, that is to say, for destruction of one nation’s working class by another in the interests of capital. The note also cited, however, a very different source for the film’s technique.

*Capital* will be dedicated – officially– to the Second International!  
They’re sure to be ‘overjoyed’! For it is hard to conceive of any more devastating attack against social democracy in all its aspects than *Capital*.  
The formal side is dedicated to Joyce.<sup>8</sup>

1928 was the year of the film’s conception. It was the same year in which Eisenstein had read Joyce’s *Ulysses*, with the help of an English-speaking friend. Eisenstein appreciated Joyce’s deployment of language and genre.<sup>9</sup> *Ulysses* offered Eisenstein a model for what he called his ‘de-anecdotalization principle’<sup>10</sup>, a film without a story, a film that worked rather with *historiettes* and scenes snatched from everyday life. Through these fragments, ‘the very principle of logical *reductum ad limitum* of one

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<sup>7</sup> Eisenstein, ‘Notes for a Film of *Capital*’, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Eisenstein, ‘Notes for a Film of *Capital*’, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> See James Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1993, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> Eisenstein, ‘Notes for a Film of *Capital*’, p. 5.

fundamental detail', the basic structure of the social world is established.<sup>11</sup>  
Eisenstein's notes observed

In Joyce's *Ulysses* there is a remarkable chapter of this kind, written in the manner of scholastic catechism. Questions are asked and answers given. The subject of the question is how to light a Bunsen burner. The answers, however, are metaphysical. (read this chapter. It might be methodologically useful.)<sup>12</sup>

Later in his notes Eisenstein indicates how the relay between abstractness and concreteness intensifies the impact of the former.

The maximum abstractness of an expanding idea appears particularly bold when presented as an offshoot from extreme concreteness – the banality of life. Something suggested in *Ulysses* provides additional support for the same formulation. 'Nicht genug! Ein anderen Kapitel ist im Stil der Bücher für junge Mädchen geschrieben, ein anderes besteht nach dem Vorbild der scholastischen Traktate, nur aus Frage und Antwort: Die Fragen beziehen sich auf die Art, wie man einen Teekessel zum kochen bringt und die Antworten schwiften ins grossen kosmische und philosophische ab ...' (Ivan Goll, 'Literarische Welt', prospectus for *Ulysses*)<sup>13</sup>

Joyce may be helpful for my purpose: from a bowl of soup to the British vessels sunk by England.<sup>14</sup>

The question and answer chapter, known as 'Ithaca', is a catechism of 309 questions

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<sup>11</sup> Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 7. 'Bunsen burner' would appear to be a poor translation of tea kettle.

<sup>13</sup> It translates as 'Not enough! Another chapter is written in the style of books for young girls, another one takes as template scholastic tractates, composed of question and answer. The questions relate to the way in which one brings a tea kettle to the boil and the answers veer off into the cosmic and philosophical ...'

<sup>14</sup> Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 15.

and 308 answers. It was Joyce's favourite in *Ulysses*, and he called it 'the ugly duckling of the book'.<sup>15</sup> Although its method came from a religious question and answer practice, its style is rather the polysyllabic impersonal language of science and technology. Most of the questions posed are answered in extraordinarily drawn-out detail. Through these questions and answers a work of re-threading is set in motion. All the parts of the world and the cosmos, the banal and the cosmic, are reconnected. Water supplies are traced back to source<sup>16</sup>, the day's budget is outlined<sup>17</sup>, a toenail shard is sniffed, insurance policies are described.<sup>18</sup> Everything from the biggest to the smallest is outlined, described, analysed. Joyce described it thus:

I am writing 'Ithaca' in the form of a mathematical catechism. All events are resolved into their cosmic physical, psychical etc. equivalents, e.g. Bloom jumping down the area, drawing water from the tap, the micturition in the garden, the cone of incense, lighted candle and statue so that not only will the reader know everything and know it in the baldest coldest way, but Bloom and Stephen thereby become heavenly bodies, wanderers like the stars at which they gaze.<sup>19</sup>

The two main characters, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, exist both in the domesticity of the kitchen and plotted on the celestial map. In 'Ithaca' the entire world is strung together, from the most banal human event to its cosmic-physical analogue. Through such objectivity, myth enters, as Bloom and Stephen become the very stars they observe. But this is not astrology – it is scientific in the most fantastical way, for it proposes an inkling of something that is about to become known. Just a couple of years after Joyce wrote *Ulysses*, Harlow Shapley, in January 1925, broadcast the discovery that we 'are made out of the same materials that constitute the stars'.<sup>20</sup> And

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<sup>15</sup> Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses'*, Grayson & Grayson, London 1934 p. 264.

<sup>16</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, The Bodley Head, London 1960 p. 782.

<sup>17</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 836.

<sup>18</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 852.

<sup>19</sup> See a letter from Joyce to Budgen, 1921, quoted in Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses'*, p. 263.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Holly Henry, *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science: The Aesthetics of*

again, in a *New York Times* magazine article under the headline ‘The Star Stuff that is Man’, Shapley reveals ‘We are made of the same stuff as the stars, so when we study astronomy we are in a way only investigating our remote ancestry and our place in the universe of star stuff. Our very bodies consist of the same chemical elements found in the most distant nebulae’.<sup>21</sup> There *is* a connection between us and the universe that contains us. Our bodily, material banality is of utterly cosmic significance. *Ulysses* is bursting with bathos, or what could be conceived as a rapid passage between the cosmic and the comic, the mythical and mirthful. Some moments include the ‘three smoking globes of turds’ plopping from the horse drawing a ‘scythed car’ in ‘Eumaeus’, the lists and catalogues in ‘Cyclops’, the headlines in ‘Aeolus’ or the back slang at the close of ‘Oxen of the Sun’.

The ‘Ithaca’ chapter takes its place next to Molly’s hyper-subjective stream of consciousness in the final chapter, which is one long unpunctuated monologue of desire. Objectivity turns on itself to produce its opposite, an absolutely subjective, streaming, unpunctuated monologue of *Penelope*. Sinking into the depths of the unconscious, Molly gets embroiled in a primal language of the body. Her bodily ejaculations present another perspective on high-flown language and rude ditties, Man and stars, tea kettles, sewers and oceans, rhymes and reasons. Joyce was keenly aware of the juxtaposition:

Struggling with the aridities of ‘Ithaca’ – a mathematico-astronomico-physico-mechanico – geometrico-chemico sublimation of Bloom and Stephen (devil take ‘em both) to prepare for the final amplitudinally curvilinear episode *Penelope*.<sup>22</sup>

In ‘Ithaca’, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom sit in Bloom’s kitchen and drink Epps cocoa, after a visit to the brothel. They talk about the Irish and Hebrew

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*Astronomy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Henry, *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science*, p.43. It stems from the *New York Times Magazine*, 11 August 1929.

<sup>22</sup> See a letter from Joyce to Claud W. Sykes, spring 1921, Stuart Gilbert, (ed): *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 1, Faber & Faber, London 1957 p. 164.

languages, ritual murder, previous encounters, mutual acquaintances. They look at the stars. They urinate. Bloom wants Stephen to be his lodger, and while living there it is proposed that he might coach Bloom's wife Molly in Italian to aid her operatic singing. Stephen has no such intention. He leaves, and Bloom potters around before going to bed. In bed, he kisses Molly's buttocks, and his sexual arousal is described:

The visible signs of antesatisfaction?

An approximate erection: a solicitous aversion: a gradual elevation: a tentative revelation; a silent contemplation.

Then?

He kissed the plump mellow yellow smellow melons of her rump, on each plump melonious hemisphere, in their mellow yellow furrow, with obscure prolonged provocative mellonmellonous osculation.<sup>23</sup>

Bloom, star-traveller, is drawn back to the earth, to the fundament, to Molly's buttocks. He assumes the position of a foetus in the womb. The language gives way to a language of the body, a punning, crude, infantile, evocative language to describe Molly's rump. All of *Ulysses* is about the human body – indeed Joyce called the book 'the epic of the human body'.<sup>24</sup> Bloom is at rest, having travelled, a mythic journey completed. In bed, the remains of the day, the fragments of the workaday, batter between conscious and unconscious mind. His last waking thoughts before falling into dreamsleep are word and image coagulates designed to trip up an inhabitant of modern Dublin, especially one who works in the world of advertising. In 'Ithaca' the following is noted:

What were habitually his final meditations?

Of some one sole unique advertisement to cause passers to stop in wonder, a poster novelty, with all extraneous accretions excluded, reduced to its simplest and most efficient terms not exceeding the span of casual vision and congruous with the velocity of modern life.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 867.

<sup>24</sup> Budgen, *The Making of Ulysses*, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 848.

At the gateway to Bloom's unconscious is the advertisement. This is no surprise. The surrealists also discover the proximity of advertisement and unconscious soon after this. Bloom imagines a poster that would grab the attention, a piece of street debris, so meaningful and absolute it arrests the pedestrian, if only for a moment. Picture writing invades urban space. As if involved in an uprising, newly liberated from between the pages of a book, written words dance across the city skyline, screeching from posters, or flickering their neon messages above shops. Joyce's is a visual age where writing turns pictorial, becoming logos. The urban dweller must be able to read such a cityscape – its signs, its words, its images. This arrest must not last for longer than a second – in fact, mostly these signs crash into memory in an instant, stored there as traces to return in the night as dreams and nightmares. They are perceived in a fraction of a second, not a second longer than the busy pace of life in the city demands. (That moment, however, may be just like the moment that erupts into Eisenstein's montaged vision and after which things are re-ordered or re-conceived.)

The advertising poster has affinities with the cinematic image as it streams past the eye. Audiences learn to quickly absorb the speeding chains of data, and to extract significance from the smallest, momentary glance, the sudden pratfall or the shine on a car's bumper. Film even had an armory of technical devices to intensify its efficiently expressive language: slow-motion, speed-up close-up, montage of images, montage of image and sound. Such were the visual and sonic aids that were perceived by montage enthusiasts of the 1920s to reveal some new perception within the familiar aspects of reality, perhaps something hitherto unseen, and in film, as in a book such as *Ulysses*, held up for a moment for reflection.

#### Exchange: Joyce /Eisenstein

*Ulysses*, in its recognition of the fecundity and speed of city life and the significance of the detail, was quickly grasped as 'cinematic'. Warner Brothers considered turning *Ulysses* into a film and asked Joyce about the rights. Joyce dismissed the idea, claiming that it would be impossible to film *Ulysses* in any adequate way. But he did take up discussions elsewhere, with Sergei Eisenstein, thereby reciprocating the interest that Eisenstein had shown in him while working on a film treatment of

*Capital*. The two men met for discussions in Paris in 1930. They listened to Joyce's recording of 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' from *Finnegans Wake* and watched sequences from *Battleship Potemkin* and *October* that tried to develop 'inner film-monologue'<sup>26</sup>. An almost blind Joyce flailed around with his arms as he struggled to find Eisenstein's coat upon his departure.<sup>27</sup> According to Hans Richter, Eisenstein described the visit to Joyce's house as a 'ghost experience'. They met in a room so dark, it seemed as if two shadows conversed.<sup>28</sup>

In 1932, while travelling in California, Eisenstein remembered his desire to film *Ulysses*. For *Ulysses*, as with *Capital*, he conjures up a 'cinema of the mind, a film capable of reconstructing all phases and all specifics of the course of thought'. It would render 'interior monologue' – that is, thought itself. It would portray the dissolution of the 'distinction between subject and object', as in Joyce.<sup>29</sup> Film, far from being an objective recording mechanism, is the very tool to probe the imbrication of subject and object, inner and outer, the workings of the mind and the body, for all of these are co-joined.

### Criticisms

According to the new Soviet Stalinist orthodoxy, Eisenstein's interest in Joyce was wrong-headed. In 1934, at the Soviet Writers' Congress where the doctrine of Socialist Realism in culture was officially launched, Karl Radek championed the Realist novel. In order to elevate this essentially nineteenth-century form, he specifically trashed Joyce's 'cinematographic', approach to everyday life in a speech titled 'James Joyce or Socialist Realism'. For Radek, Joyce looks at the mucky business of the everyday, rather than the grand sweep of 'big events', 'big people', and 'big ideas'.<sup>30</sup> Radek attacks Joyce's *Ulysses*, which he calls:

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<sup>26</sup> See S.M. Eisenstein, 'A Course in Treatment' (1932), *Film Form*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, San Diego, 1977, p. 104.

<sup>27</sup> See S.M. Eisenstein, *Immoral Memories*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1983 p. 214.

<sup>28</sup> See Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1959, p. 666.

<sup>29</sup> See Annette Michelson, 'Reading Eisenstein, Reading Capital, October 1927–April 1928', *October*, no. 3, Spring 1977 p. 86.

<sup>30</sup> See Maxim Gorky et al, *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934; The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism in the Soviet Union*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1977 p. 153.

A heap of dung, crawling with worms, photographed by a cinema apparatus through a microscope – such is Joyce’s work.<sup>31</sup>

What is seen under the microscope? As Radek observed, it is the seething micro-lives of worms. The Stalinist apparatchik could not confront this reality, wanting instead the fantasy-scapes of class-warrior supermen and hard-working peasants. It is significant that Radek picks up on Joyce’s style as ‘cinematic’. He was using the term as an insult – the more ‘cinematic’ a novel the less ‘literary’ it must be. That a novel must be literary is, for Radek, an unquestionable fact. Contemporaries on the Left, however, motivated by new political, technological and aesthetic imperatives, made quite different claims about the relationship of film and literature. That literature might have a cinematic aspect was actively promoted by left-oriented modernists. Alfred Döblin, author of Berlin’s own city-based novel, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), had called for a cinema style in 1913. For Döblin, this meant writing characterized by urgency and precision, three-dimensionality and liveliness. Film sets the standard for a new aesthetic. In practice it meant a development of, on the one hand, montage methods and, on the other, the folding-in of non-literary, reproducible matter into the work of art. Literature imports such devices as scenic cutting or discontinuity, close-up and a play between internal and external perspectives. Filmic montage in literature consists of arranging snippets of external ‘reality’, just as film always bears some indexical relationship to a world out there, or external reality. ‘Authentic reality’, the stuff of life, is incorporated into the text. In Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, this is evident in the quoting from advertisements, official documents, bus timetables and tram routes, weather reports and stock exchange reports, radio broadcasts, mortality statistics, scientific treatises, wisps of street conversations, and so on. A new type of writing emerges, designed less for self-expression and more for the sampling of objective, social reality, though it never lets go of the possibility of flight into hyper-subjectivism, or even expressionistic distortion. The dominant normative criteria of an authorial concept of writing, which implies an integrated personalised vision, are deposed. In a 1930 review of Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Walter Benjamin argues that the novel can survive only if it adopts an

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<sup>31</sup> See Gorky et al, *Soviet Writers’ Congress 1934*. Radek’s condemnation of Joyce begins on p. 153.

epic, cinematic form.<sup>32</sup> Modern social experience, increasingly dependent on the mediations of impersonal social forms, demands a new art. In montage film, a documented banality is elevated into analytical form through filmic technique. Equally montage – as understood in the modernist literary sense as the folding in of lowly themes, everyday bric-a-brac, base and abject materials into artistic form - can be seen to drag down the sublime aspirations of art. But Radek noted the ‘cinematic’ nature of Joyce only to condemn it. The doctrine of socialist Realism insisted on maintaining traditional literary forms, and traditional literary relations, just as Stalin’s new Russia insisted on traditional institutions like patriotism, hard work and the family.

Despite the attacks from official state policy, Eisenstein stuck with Joyce, and a few months after Radek’s speech, in a lecture at the State Institute of Cinematography, in November 1934, he praised Joyce’s microscopic treatment of phenomena.<sup>33</sup> The word ‘microscope’ dominates this short lecture to students on the fourth year of a film directing course. What exactly did Joyce do, he asked.

He took one character, one person, one event and he looked at it under an incredible microscope, that is, he completely unfurled everything that you see at that moment.<sup>34</sup>

The significance of this was that it compelled art to be science. It is not just events that are subjected to the microscope’s vision. The texture of the writing is also ‘under the microscope’. Eisenstein assimilated Joyce’s sense of language into a more general sense of language as consisting of ‘various genres: questions and answers, figurative definitions, enumeration of facts, and so on’

...what do we get with Joyce? He also enlarges each stylistic possibility to the size of a chapter and he has a chapter written in a different style. One

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<sup>32</sup> See Walter Benjamin’s ‘Krisis des Romans; Zu Döblins *Berlin Alexanderplatz*’ (1930) in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol.III, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt.Main, 1992, pp.230–6.

<sup>33</sup> See Sergei Eisenstein’s Lecture on James Joyce at the State University of Cinematography, November 1, 1934, in *James Joyce Quarterly* 24, no 2 (Winter 1987), pp. 133–42.

<sup>34</sup> Eisenstein’s Lecture on James Joyce, p. 135.

chapter is written in the form of catechism: the whole plot is laid out in the form of questions and answers. So what did Bloom and his companion do at such and such a time? They walked up to their house. And after that had walked up to the house what did they do? They looked for the key

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There is also, Eisenstein notes, a chapter on sound and onomatopoeia, and there is one composed of newspaper headlines. The point is that each of these chapters is not arbitrary in style. It finds a language and a genre appropriate to its subject matter and the specific nature of the plot. One chapter follows the development of language itself in analogy to the birth of a child. In terms of the understanding of language and human motivation, it constitutes:

A literary discovery of almost the same scope as the possibility of seeing the human texture under a microscope for the first time, which was of tremendous importance for physiologists.<sup>36</sup>

Eisenstein criticises Radek in the lecture – though he refuses to go public with his criticism. Radek’s main criticism, he notes, is that such microscopic detail of the outside world (specifically a world of ephemera, everyday activities and residues) is unnecessary. But, counters Eisenstein, would one say to a doctor that the microscopic view of microbes teaches us nothing? Of course not! In its enlargement of something subvisible, it reveals things unknown before and of crucial importance in the understanding of biology.

Joyce’s literary practice teaches Eisenstein how to make film politically and analytically significant. Something like a microscope is used in the filmic close-up. Walter Benjamin had asserted as much in his own researches into film aesthetics, motivated by Eisenstein as much as by slapstick American film. In 1927, in a defence of Eisenstein’s film *Battleship Potemkin*, Benjamin notes how, through film’s dealing with an objective world, ‘a new realm of consciousness comes into being’. This consciousness

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<sup>35</sup> Eisenstein’s Lecture on James Joyce, p. 135.

<sup>36</sup> Eisenstein’s Lecture on James Joyce, p. 137.

enables people get to grips with the banal disconsolate world:

To put it in a nutshell, film is the prism in which the spaces of the immediate environment – the spaces in which people live, pursue their avocations, and enjoy their leisure – are laid open before their eyes in a comprehensible, meaningful, and passionate way. In themselves these offices, furnished rooms, saloons, big-city streets, stations and factories are ugly, incomprehensible, and hopelessly sad. Or rather they were and seemed to be, until the advent of film.<sup>37</sup>

Film opens up the banal, uninteresting everyday spaces of the world to vision and analysis. Cinema blasts apart a ‘prison-world’, so that we, from the comfort of the cinema seat, may take extraordinary adventures in its widely scattered ruins. Film’s experience of the world extends our own. Film allows us to penetrate the secrets contained even in very ordinary reality. It is as if a microscope is held up to reality, allowing the structural forms, the interconnections, the molecular structure to be seen. We penetrate it through its mediation and through the opportunity given us for reflection. For Benjamin, filmic material captures something repressed, screened out by the regulative workings of consciousness.<sup>38</sup> The naked eye cannot penetrate all the constituents of a scene. Photography reveals these secrets invisible to the unaided eye. Photography and film employ a microscopic gaze and bring into view the unseen structural elements of the social world. This is a materialist analysis of actuality. Brought to light are things hitherto unseen but crucial. Benjamin assumes that the uses of photography – and by extension film – exist in the scientific realm. He dismisses soulful portraits and atmospheric landscapes, in favour of the structural analyses of microscopic photography. Film’s writing in light and its language of montage and technical tricks and Joyce’s modernist epic alike bare an underbelly of reality, pricking the pomposity of the repressed present, unmasking the resonant ambiguity of communication.

### Eisenstein’s Critique of Joyce

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<sup>37</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* volume 2: 1927–1934, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1999), p.17.

<sup>38</sup> See Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, pp. 511–2.

According to Eisenstein, Joyce was pushing literature to the limits of what it could achieve. But there were still limits. Joyce was trapped within a bourgeois naturalist sense of things. Technically and ideologically, for Eisenstein, the next step was film, a more appropriate mode for revealing and analysing inner life and its embroilment in social contexts.

From Joyce the next leap is to film, where it's much easier ... In this respect film has many more possibilities than literature. Joyce and I talked about this in Paris and I explained to him the arsenal that we have. Take for example non-sequential action. Joyce has the following scene: a man is walking along the street thinking about something. Joyce has it written down almost stenographically. At the same time, it's on three levels. One, the man is thinking about something he has to do; two, the accumulation of what in psychology is called trauma. There you are walking down the street and thinking how to get to the cafeteria complex as soon as possible and your conscience is bothering you because you haven't finished your work. And the third thing is that you meet a street car, you meet some girl. And that is all mixed in with what you are thinking about. ... And Joyce manages in some parts of the novel to write this way. But here it is typical that Joyce, as a bourgeois artist, doesn't see beyond the surface of the phenomena ... he sees how external circumstances change a train of thought but he doesn't see the understanding of social phenomena which outgrow consciousness.<sup>39</sup>

Eisenstein's thought moves quickly. He begins by showing how film is more attuned to the non-linear, multi-activities present in any slice of everyday life. Joyce can achieve this in writing, but film's array of technical devices make it easier to access inner and outer realms, rapidly cutting between character and world. It conveys a visualisation of inner thought and the world outside crashing in. All the techniques of film allow an implied attitude towards what is seen and thought – perhaps attitude could be conveyed

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<sup>39</sup> Eisenstein's Lecture on James Joyce, pp. 140–1. Eisenstein discusses the same question in relation to Joyce and the proposed filming of Theodor Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* in S.M. Eisenstein, 'A Course in Treatment' (1932), *Film Form*, pp. 103-6.

through the distance or closeness of what is seen, its blurriness, sharpness, its stiffness or wobbliness, speed or languor. Eisenstein develops a criticism of Joyce. What he, as bourgeois, is unable to do is to convey the social mechanisms that contextualise all this activity. This is what Eisenstein as Marxist hopes to do – to make the unconscious impact of social relations conscious, and precisely through the mechanisms of film. Eisenstein's lecture finishes with an indication as to why Joyce's mode of writing has so much to offer film. It is because it is an anti-writing. It is closer to the workings of the self in dialogue with its self, via the body.

He uses the syntax and grammar not of emotional thought but of, so to speak, sensual thought. When you think to yourself, you don't use words, you have another system.<sup>40</sup>

Inner thought is imagetic and lingual. Such a mapping of inner thought was what Eisenstein hoped film could be formally.

Eisenstein's film of *Ulysses* was never made<sup>41</sup>, nor was his Joycean version of Marx's *Capital*. There was a greater, and certainly more serious (in the tedious sense) bathetic art of Socialist Realism to be made by others.

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<sup>40</sup> Eisenstein's Lecture on James Joyce, p. 141.

<sup>41</sup> A translation of *Ulysses* into Russian was begun in the Popular Front period of 1935–6, but after ten chapters it was abandoned, much to Eisenstein's dismay. See his comments in his lecture on Joyce, *James Joyce Quarterly* 24, no 2 (Winter 1987), pp. 133–42.