

baroque
dialectics
or dialectical
baroque

f i f t e e n

sergei

eisenstein

in/on mexico

m a s h a s a l a z k i n a

In this chapter, I shall address the use of the Baroque in Sergei Eisenstein's films and writings. This theme bears not only on Eisenstein's work but on the factors that formed the larger problematic of the function of the Baroque within the twentieth-century avant-garde for such diverse figures as Walter Benjamin and Severo Sarduy. First, I shall highlight explicit mentions of the Baroque in Eisenstein's writings and his observations about Mexico in *Que Viva Mexico!* (1930–31) and place them in the context of his film theories. Then I shall consider Walter Benjamin's use of the Baroque for the light it throws on Eisenstein's aesthetics, and in particular, his selection of representations of Mexico's visual culture. Finally, I shall examine the specific question of homoeroticism and bisexuality both in Eisenstein's film and in his theoretical work as an essential motif in (neo)Baroque aesthetics.

baroque imagery in eisenstein's films and his writings

Eisenstein's unfinished film *Que Viva Mexico!* stages the topic of the Baroque in some obvious ways, notably in capturing the Baroque architecture as

the embodiment of the colonial heritage of Mexico. This foregrounding of Baroque spaces has not been the focus of any scholars or critics writing about the film, who traditionally emphasize the treatment of Mexican indigenous culture and rituals. While being geographically and temporally removed from its European “origin,” Mexican Baroque became the embodiment of the Colonial era in the Americas as well as a belated culmination of the Baroque style itself. In the words of art historian Robert Harbison, “Mexican craftsmen caught the exuberance and the excess of Baroque even if the fine points . . . were lost or misunderstood. By this route and using this conception of the style’s essence, emphasizing its exuberance and incorrectness, one can say that Mexican Baroque is the most complete fulfillment of Baroque perception.”¹

Eisenstein not only captured this visual exuberance in the film, but he consistently turned to the Baroque in his writings. He furthermore identifies the visual aesthetic of the film itself as Baroque. In a passage from the notes written in the last year of his life about his experience in Mexico,² Eisenstein refers to the baroque qualities of the images in *Que Viva Mexico!* conflating both its “Spanish” and “Aztec aspects” under the “baroque” label. This equation of the stylistic qualities of pre-Hispanic Mexican art with the conventionally recognized historical Baroque in Mexico not only acknowledges the uniqueness of the “Indian baroque” as a hybrid form, but also reaffirms an understanding of the baroque not as a strictly historical phenomenon or even, to use Jose Antonio Maravall’s phrase, as an “historical epoch,”³ but as a distinct aesthetic mode. This notion prefigures such usage of the term in the twentieth century in general, where, in Gregg Lambert’s words,

the term ‘baroque’ has gradually come to designate, rather than a particular historical period in the European art history, an effect which results from the composition of specific traits around the adjectival terms *baroque*, *barroco* and *neo-barroco*. In other words, it designates less a particular historical duration than a manner of style of composition.⁴

What is even more characteristic of Eisenstein, however, is the way the Baroque moves from being a descriptive label (both in relation to Mexico and in relation to his film) to being a subjective attitude on the part of the director: “both [the ‘historical’ baroque and its pre-Columbian equivalent] were dear and resonant to me,” he wrote, “I resonated in both,”⁵ thus inserting himself, as a person, and not only his work, in this cultural field. The boundaries between historical phenomena (the historical Baroque), aesthetic mode (the Aztec monumentalism and ornamentation; the Mexican Baroque) and his own personality are forcefully blurred; an interchange takes place between the outer and the inner; Eisenstein’s discourse itself embodies the Baroque *furor* as estrangement and as ex-stasis.

The verb ‘вгрызаться’—literally, “to get one’s teeth onto something,” used as a description of the camera work—suggests a cruel and sadistic quality to this act (properties Eisenstein identified with the Baroque). Even more importantly, this image suggests the provisional suspension of the boundaries between the subject and an object, between the art-work and the spectator’s physical body, and finally between the object, the spectator, and the author (with Eisenstein, here, acting as both a spectator of the baroque spectacle in Mexico and a creator of a Baroque work of art, his film). This physical impact of a Baroque work of art on the senses, this seduction of the mass audience, is certainly something Eisenstein shared with both Baroque architecture and spectacle. It has been noted elsewhere that the emergence of cultural spectacle characteristic of the historical baroque invites comparison to (if not designated as the originary impulse of) modern/contemporary spectacle, from advertisement to political propaganda.⁶ Never, perhaps, was this more striking than in the case of Soviet culture of the 1920s to 1930s, with its infamous blurring of the boundaries between “life and politics,” a culture of which Eisenstein was certainly a key ideologue as well as the most famous participant. Early Soviet cinema in particular had roots in the mass spectacles of the 1920s.⁷ Eisenstein’s theory of the montage of attractions, which is at the core of his film theory, and in particular the notion of the “cine-fist” as a mode of directly impacting the spectator, can be seen as a perfect baroque tool, “where the body of the spectator becomes the extension of the cultural work: The body of the spectator—meaning both the physical and emotional surfaces of the aesthetic representation—can be understood to comprise the extended materiality of the art-work itself.”⁸ In this sense, it is not merely a terminological coincidence that Eisenstein’s use of the term “montage of attractions” overlaps with the contemporary tendency to frame early (pre-narrative) cinema as a cinema of attractions. Tom Gunning analyzes the relationship between spectacle and the audience of early cinema, especially in the so-called “phantom rides,” films taken from trains and other moving vehicles:

As the phantom ride seemingly achieves a complete grasp and penetration of a landscape, this new technological sublime simultaneously encounters a sense of loss, of dissolution, a phantomization of the experience of self and world. Thus the dawn of cinema, rather than simply perfecting a new technology for the portrayal of landscapes, also inaugurates a new representation of loss in which the *pas de deux* of spectator and landscape becomes a ghostly dance of presence and absence, sensation and distance.⁹

In other words, the perceptual apparatus of the phantom rides constructs a double movement. First, there is the seeming intrusion of the (imagined)

physical body of the spectator into the landscape producing the imaginary collision between the diagesis and the spectator as a shock—or, to put it in Baroque terms, *furor*, what Eisenstein meant by the *cine-fist* and later by his insistence on pathos as the key aesthetic category in his film-making. But simultaneous with this projection is the actual impossibility of the spectator's participation, which is recorded by the consciousness of the spectator as well, underscoring the absence upon which the immateriality of the cinematic image rests; a metaphysical absence which emphasizes the sense of loss. It is an event that contains its absence as such. The worldview of a society and culture in/of crisis, which shaped the Baroque ethos of the seventeenth century, seems to have returned in the late nineteenth century as though history were cyclical, with the Baroque positioning itself in confrontation with modernity. The idea that “the cinema of attractions” was visually structured through the Baroque (rather than the Renaissance) perceptual apparatus further connects it to Eisenstein, whose aesthetic throughout his oeuvre was based on the rejection of realism in the sense of the optical reproduction of the Renaissance perspective. This is particularly obvious in the footage of *Que Viva Mexico!* with its distorted flattened surfaces and emphasis on ornamental detail tending towards haptical abstraction.¹⁰ It was this tendency in Eisenstein that a few years prior to the making of the Mexican film led Viktor Shklovsky to criticize *Oktjabr* (*October*, 1928) as “a catalogue of inventions arranged in some unknown order . . . an accumulation of bits and . . . close-up shots.” Shklovsky attacked Eisenstein for his “pettification of the Revolution” and for the creation of “the Soviet Baroque style of film” where “. . . beyond the objects one could not see the ‘insignificant’ event of the October Revolution,”¹¹ thus placing the Baroque on the opposite spectrum from the “true revolutionary” aesthetics.

All of which poses the question—what is it about the Baroque that made it so vital to Eisenstein's work? As Shklovsky's quote makes apparent, Eisenstein's appropriation of the Baroque appears problematic given the Russian and Soviet context: the modernist reappraisal of Baroque architecture and art that took place in the late nineteenth century belonged to a cultural tradition specifically rejected by post-revolutionary Soviet avant-gardists such as Eisenstein. Unless one takes into account the post-revolutionary emphasis on public spectacles and, later on, the Stalinist emphasis on the aestheticization of the political as an extension of the Baroque tradition (a position which, although not impossible, would require a very complex and detailed analysis), the attribution of Eisenstein's work to the Baroque or neo-Baroque style is quite unique in Soviet cultural history and requires a more in-depth investigation that would go beyond a mere list of attributes. Outside of the Soviet Union, this claim would not be nearly as striking—as we know, the use and re-appropriation of the Baroque into the culture of modernity has become a sub-field of intellectual and art history, featuring figures as diverse as

Walter Benjamin, George Bataille, Severo Sarduy, and Octavio Paz, to name just a few. There are two distinct, although not unconnected paths, that will lead us to answering the question of why Eisenstein should be positioned in this already impressive line-up, as I shall attempt to do in this chapter. The first involves tracing the use of the Baroque ethos as an alternative to modernism's economic and symbolic productivity. This path takes us to Benjamin and other attempts to retrace the genealogy of modernity as a means to imagine a different future—an aesthetic and political project of which Eisenstein was very much a part. The other path is via Eisenstein's own theoretical apparatus and the role in it of the concepts of ex-stasis, bi-sex, and protoplasm—concepts which, as we shall see, unexpectedly connect him to Severo Sarduy and his notions of transvestism and simulacra as the foundations of the Neo-Baroque. Finally, Baroque excess and fetishism provide a paradigm for a new understanding of the making and unmaking of *Que Viva Mexico!*, as a result of which we can reconfigure Eisenstein's theoretical legacy as symptomatic of the trajectory of gender within modernity.

According to a position elaborated, for example, by Mexican cultural theorist Bolivar Echeverria in his volume *Modernidad, mestizaje cultural, ethos barroco*, the Baroque aesthetics and ideology, especially in its application to Latin America, can be read in the twentieth century as a form of cultural subversion of existing (capitalist) modernity.¹² Thus the renewed focus on the Baroque aesthetic can be understood as another way to subvert the reality of modernity and imagine it otherwise. Politically, this links such diverse thinkers as Eisenstein and Benjamin who were, albeit in different ways, engaged in this same project as part of their Modernist avant-garde ethos.¹³ In their attempt to break with the present, they turn to the past in order to formulate a possible future: Walter Benjamin's *Angelus Novus*, the Angel of History, is facing backwards, resisting the storm of progress; Eisenstein, in his 1935 Speech to the All-Soviet Creative Meeting of the Soviet Cinematographers, famously proposes “the way of regress” as the only way to achieve a break-through to the art of the future—a position which he began to formulate during his stay in Mexico.¹⁴ The Baroque as an artistic and ideological system provides a useful framework for such a “return.”

While any direct historical connection between Eisenstein and Benjamin is tenuous, there is a similarity between Benjamin's treatment of Baroque allegory, specifically the images of the skull and the dead, and Eisenstein's treatment of these same motifs in the “Epilogue” to *Que Viva Mexico!* Both thinkers use Baroque allegory to structure their on-going projects of a radically new construction of history and their theories of art (which in both cases are inseparable from their political projects). A closer look at Benjamin's formulation of the Baroque as a critical model, employed in the service of radical social transformation, can elucidate Eisenstein's treatment of the same thematic.

baroque motifs in walter benjamin's theory and eisenstein's aesthetics

Benjamin's interest in the Baroque *Trauerspiel*, the subject of his *Habilitationsschrift*, preceded his later explicit engagement with Marxism—but was consistent with his later critical stance towards capitalism. Benjamin's study of Baroque allegory is linked to his ambitious attempt to resurrect the historical path captured in particular objects and endow them once again with the life which had been taken away from them through capitalist commodification, the latter being the hallmark of modernity. The goal of the *Arcades Project* of the 1930s is to open a possibility for a utopian revolutionary future which is not historically pre-determined but a result of true radical historical change. Benjamin's trip to Russia in 1926–27 proved to him that the Soviet Revolution did not achieve that—what he saw in Moscow (aside from the growing political repression, of which he became keenly aware) was the same display of commodified objects, a “deadened” life. Benjamin's model for bringing out true change, as it emerges from his *Trauerspiel* book and the *Arcades Project*, depends on finding in everyday objects traces of their pre-history, which, like fossils, they contain. This pre-history is essentially utopian, but he contends that it is out of this utopian impulse that a true revolutionary change can emerge. As Benjamin outlines in the following quotation, it is through a dialectical shift that this potential is released:

These tendencies the image fantasy, that maintains its impulse from the new, back to the ur-past. In the dream in which every epoch sees in image the epoch that follows, the latter appears wedded to the elements of ur-history, that of a classless society. Its experiences, which have their storage place in the collective, produce, in their interpenetration with the new, the utopia that has left its trace behind in a thousand configurations of life. . . .¹⁵

For Benjamin, in Moscow, as in Paris or Berlin, everyday objects retain traces of “pre-history” out of which revolutionary potential could be resurrected.

Images of commodities for Benjamin, such as “folk art” sold everywhere in the stores in Russia—like religious symbols in an earlier era—store the potential for social transformation, but in their reified form. This formulation implies a certain trans-historical equation between the images of the various commodities of modernity (which Benjamin explores in his *Arcades Project*) and the “religious symbols” of the Baroque—specifically, the skulls. Benjamin uses the emblem of a skull as a way to decipher history:

History, in everything it displays that was from the beginning untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, expresses itself in

a face—no, in a skull. It articulates as a riddle the nature not only of human existence pure and simple, but of the biological historicity of an individual in this, the figure of its greatest natural decay.¹⁶

This artistic approach is comparable to Eisenstein's. The focus on the notion of pre-history, and on the dialectical shift that it has to undergo, are essential to Eisenstein's conception of art as it emerged from the time he spent in Mexico. He sees the dialectical shift as the only way to negotiate between the necessarily “regressive” (mythological, prelogical) and the modern, achieving thereby a leap to the progressive. This insistence on the dialectical method “with its constant regard to the innumerable actions and reactions of life and death, of progressive and regressive changes,”¹⁷ in that phrase of Engels that Eisenstein liked to quote, allows for the uncovering of “prelogical thinking” as pre-history. He sees images of Mexico—the pre-Columbian temples and the Baroque buildings alike—as retaining traces of this pre-history. But rejecting a linear evolutionary model of social development, Eisenstein insists that the way “forward” lies through regression:

The method of art as the model for the social ideal at all times (classlessness as the highest “forward” and the deepest “back”). The synthesis of the logical formula and the pre-logical form, in other words the highest point of the progress of consciousness—the reflection of contemporary (for each moment) stage of the social development, and pre-logic, reflecting always and in all cases the same—pre-class stage.¹⁸

In 1939 Eisenstein kept a separate folder with jottings regarding these ideas and entitled it “Utopia.”¹⁹ Hence, his artistic theories on which he was working so productively in Mexico both in theory and in practice (which is why his later writings take images from his Mexican film as key examples from his whole oeuvre) are inseparable from his vision of (progressive) history. For both Eisenstein and Benjamin, the “pre-history” contained in objects needs to be brought out through a dialectical strategy; as we might expect, then, both thinkers turn to a similar set of allegorical objects rooted in the Baroque. Benjamin's governing metaphor for the objects that he studied throughout his career, not only in the *Arcades project* but in essays on collecting, toys, photographs and panoramas, is that of a fossil, of life petrified. Likewise, in *Que Viva Mexico!* the interplay between life and the petrification or its reversal—stones coming to life—is crucial. The film begins with the Prologue, where images of stone Gods are juxtaposed with immobile contemporary Mexicans through a very static composition. The visual effect is that of the petrification of human flesh. These are both Gods

and men cast in stone; the statues, ruins, and inhabitants alike convey a sense of their existence as prehistoric. In contrast to the static composition of the Prologue (based on Siqueiros' mural, which in itself is part of a stone wall), in the "Epilogue" the stones—and skulls—come to life. The "Epilogue," then, inverts the relation between life and stone in the "Prologue," tracing a movement that contains a dialectical shift. The ultimate goal of this "resurrection" is, as in Benjamin, the possibility of a true work of art, identified as a progressive work of art, which would be inseparable from a vision of a radical utopian future, a post-class society. Benjamin finds the model for such a strategy in the allegorical mode as it was employed by Baroque artists, giving prominence to the image of the skull in his writing to embody this principle. For similar strategic reasons, the image of the skull permeates Eisenstein's Mexican picture, culminating in the famous Epilogue, the celebration of the Day of the Dead in Mexico.

Although widely attributed to pre-Columbian culture, the Day of the Dead historically originates in Jesuit culture, in particular in the Baroque drama and *dance macabre*, and embraces some of the most important aspects of the Baroque iconography and worldview. The Baroque drama often presents what Lambert calls a "simulacrum of death," where, he argues, "only within this drama [is it possible] that the baroque appetite for novelty and change could be properly understood."²⁰ The drama of conversion (inseparable from the drama of death) is that of the transformation of the body becoming a stranger to all its attributes (race, nationality, sex) as a result of the conversion. Both death itself and its reenactment through the Baroque conversion are seen as "ex-static," the leaving of one's self behind, a total "estrangement" (which mirrors the stylistic and formal principle of such a work of art). This is also the "dialectical shift" implicit in the image of the allegory of face/skull for both Eisenstein and Benjamin. Because living in these terms means being aware of this ultimate transformation, the Baroque body then is highly sensitized to the fact that it is a body always in the state of becoming—endlessly transmutable, unstable and transgressive of any permanent identity.

"arms and legs (and something else!) don't lie": Eisenstein and bisexuality

This transmutability is what allows for an easy transition from the Baroque to the transvestite and from there even to camp sensibility. This may shed light on the persistence of a camp-like homoeroticism in Eisenstein's art. "To perceive Camp in its objects and persons," writes Susan Sontag, "is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater."²¹ As Vilashini Cooppan explains in her discussion of the Baroque in relation to Sarduy's 1982 essay on transvestism, "*La Simulacion*," behind the Baroque aesthetics, its artificiality,

its performativity, its tendency to negate, transgress and exceed all norms, whether of appearances, of desire or signification, there is a drive to be something other than the bounded self.²² Homoeroticism as well as any transgressive eroticism fits into this system of representation as it parodies the function of reproduction as transgression of the useful. In this sense it actively subverts the norm—that is the norm of production and reproduction. What is "normally" understood as essential, natural, and inevitable—specifically, biological gender and reproduction as its natural consequence—according to the Baroque system belongs merely to the world of appearances. What is expressed—and emphasized—can only exist on the metaphorical and figurative levels, and often manifests itself in the theatricality, the self-conscious artificiality, inherent in the excesses of the Baroque spectacle. Eisenstein was particularly invested in both the practice and theorization of the performativity of gender and of transvestism. In his writings he persistently links the idea of (in particular, ritual) transvestism to universal bi-sexuality, which, in turn, points, according to him, to some originary metamorphosis between humans, animals, and plants; the ultimate act of regress down the evolutionary ladder.²³ Eisenstein assigned transvestism and bi-sexuality to archaic "prelogical" times, which was retained in the modern world.²⁴ In his later essay "Сдвиг на биологический уровень" ("Shift onto the level of biology," 1944), Eisenstein gives his interpretation of it:

I think that this ritual belongs to the many beliefs which have to do with the study of the unified originary androgynous being, which was then divided into two types of essences—Male and Female, which then through marriage form a new restoration of this originary unified bisexual being. Through the situational reproduction of this originary nature, each becomes part of the super-human being when at the moment of the ritual it becomes identical to the originary idol, which in all cultures shares both male and female essences.²⁵

Thus identity, both gender and sexual, is just a matter of disguise, of clothing—and all of this is changing and interchangeable and acts as a manifestation of what Eisenstein in 1933 calls "plasmatic characteristics of primordial matter."²⁶ He links matter directly to libido, commenting on the theme of regression in Hegel which "could also refer to Freud: the libido theory . . . is the reproduction of the protoplasmic stage."²⁷ Libido, then, is the direct reflection of the essence in which life and death, male and female, are inseparable. In a dialectical reversal, this evolutionary regress away from normative heterosexuality, directed towards reproduction, turns out to be "progressive"—a movement away from the individual erotic and biological urges toward "the creation of progressive social phenomena"

which, according to Eisenstein, are collective in nature, transgressing the individual.²⁸ In the 1931 notes for Anita Brenner, who was interested in writing an article about Eisenstein's drawings for publication in the US journal *Creative Art*, Eisenstein explains his "dialectical method" and designates bisexuality (or a 'bisexual conflict,' or 'bi-sex' as he terms it) as the best example of the dialectical experience on the subjective level, before the possibility of this experience becoming social and collective: "Bisexual conflict, *le plus saillant* in a subject, becomes the main factor for observation and the main mechanism for the realization of a [dialectical] phenomenon."²⁹

What we know of Eisenstein's own personal sexual experiences in Mexico, to which he alludes in this passage as "the object of observation" on one's subjective personal level, comes from his letter to his wife, Pera Atasheva.³⁰ Eisenstein's subjective erotic experience is described by him as the first level of a "dialectical perception" (*'dialekticheskoi percepcii'*) and the point of connection between subjective perception and dialectical-materialism. Eisenstein analyzes his own subjective experience—and a neurosis associated with it, his inability to consummate sexual acts—as the dialectic between prelogical thinking, in this case associated with what he terms the "expressive movement," and the logic of the libidinal body: "Arms and legs (*and something else!*) don't lie and are not dependent on logic and its erroneous conclusions!" Here Eisenstein extends the logic of sensuous thinking, referred to in Cushing's and Levy-Bruhl's terms as "manual concepts," to the idea of the embodiment of the ever-present memory of the primitive consciousness, of the body itself as the main conduit of these ideas, mediated through the analysis of "rational" mind.³¹ While he analyzes his own sexual neurosis as "sickness of the will," this concept of the will itself acts as a link between the subjective erotic-ecstatic experience and dialectical phenomena in general: "The problem of expressive movement, as you remember, includes will as constituting the conflict. We should become clearer on this [issue] (pathological in so many ways—what great field for vivisection— auto-vivisection!)"³²

Here Eisenstein goes through a characteristic pattern, going from his sexual experience to universal will, and then back to his "auto vivisections," in other words to his own body. He then uses the same set of metaphors—not merely organic, as most Eisenstein scholars notice, but pathological—to linguistically erase the distinction between life and death, a recurring motif in the Mexican film. In his analysis of the "organic machinery" in Disney and Eisenstein, Mikhail Iampolskii remarks that Eisenstein seems to be unaware of the violence in the plasticity of Disney's characters, celebrated by Eisenstein and linked to the primordial protoplasmic state.³³ I would argue, however, that this violence and the brutality of the body as it is subjected to infinite mutations, mutilations, and dissections—the graphic sadism of Disney's elasticity and Eisenstein's protoplasm—are integral to Eisenstein's vision. While operating with the metaphors of

anatomical pathology, erasing the difference between living and dead organisms in some utopian synthesis (the "pulse of the dissected process"), in the same passages Eisenstein also insists on the synthesis of materialism and idealism. As he explains in the notes to Brenner:

Medically-through the anatomical scalpel of materialism directed at what seems to be the most esoteric spheres of human experience and "spirit". . . . One supposed that this would give him [is he speaking of himself in the third person?] some additional baggage of possibilities of understanding and epiphanies because the unity which inevitably links the two essences gives rise to the possibility for a certain orientation at the dark and inarticulate period of creative beginnings and a certain intuitive connection in the moments of the abstract analytical dismemberment, which keeps a connection to the pulse of the dissected process.³⁴

This attempt to bring together idealism and materialism takes a polemical, though indirect, stance against the positivists, opposition to whom informed many of Eisenstein's ideas about the parallel development of different societies and human organisms. On the one hand, he does follow the positivist model of evolution; yet, unlike most positivists, he finds value in the primitive, which holds no negative connotation for him—regress as progress, as long as it is mediated through the promise of revolution. The other difference with the positivists has to do with the issue of free will, with Eisenstein holding to a position that includes the unconscious and the individual will, unlike the mechanistic positivist model of the self. This becomes a way of mediating between the individual and the collective. The challenge of Baroque aesthetics to positivism (which historically can be seen as a reaction against the emergence of modern rationalist thinking) is codified in the figure of that which stands in opposition to rational thought—the subconscious. The subconscious, which is libidinally invested and prelogical, is theorized by Eisenstein as the primary state of things (the protoplasm), the fluid and the dynamic flow defying the logic and the economy of the evolutionary model.

conclusion

I read this development in Eisenstein as a move from the use of the neo-Baroque as a political and cultural rejection of modernity (and the historical evolution as a "straight line")—albeit contained in the modern perceptual experience of the cinema of attractions—via a return to forms of pre-modern perception. This "new/old" thinking is in turn associated with bi-sexuality, heterogeneity, and with "the feminine" as a rejection of

the rational, consequently severing the traditional association of culture with the male. Eisenstein is far from alone in suggesting this paradigm: around the same time Benjamin challenges the division of male and female in all people, taking *fin de siècle* themes explored by Simmel and Weinger in their schemas of femininity and bisexuality. As Buci-Glucksmann states:

It is as if, in crisis periods when the problem of modernity reappeared, it was impossible to approach the "woman question" without considering the "question of civilization" through a whole series of oppositions and myths. In such periods . . . a major effort takes place to deconstruct the frontier between male and female identities, thereby calling into question the pre-urban, natural differences ravaged by the developments of big cities, industrialization and the mass dimension of social phenomena. In the labour of writing, the metaphor of the feminine then rises up as an element in the break with a certain discredited rationality based upon the idea of a historical and symbolic continuum. It does this by designating a new heterogeneity, a new otherness.³⁵

In other words, this new otherness rejects the traditional gender divide but ultimately also rejects the existence of a woman; "the feminine" (which more and more begins to designate, in fact, "male in disguise") comes to replace "woman". The stronger this tendency in Eisenstein's writing, the more excessive and baroque his images become, manifested most clearly in *Ivan Groznyi/Ivan the Terrible* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1958), as Kristin Thompson's analysis (although done from a very different methodological position) shows.³⁶ The overflow of the visual excess there is accompanied by the process of the replacement and eventual eradication of the presence of women: thus for example, as both Yuri Tsivian and Joan Neuberger demonstrate, in the second part of the film Fedor Basmanov visually and structurally occupies the place of Ivan's deceased wife, Anastasia, becoming "Ersatz Anastasia."³⁷ This replacement reaches its culmination in the famous color sequence in part 2: a scene that mirrors that of Ivan's wedding and that Yuri Tsivian calls an "all-male revel."³⁸ Eisenstein's apparent repression of the structure of difference by means of presenting art as a unified totality results in a proliferation of excess—in his writings as well as in his cinematic work.³⁹ Thus the Baroque in Eisenstein functions simultaneously as a contestation of modernity (paradoxically perhaps, a challenge which is already contained within the modern experience itself, with the cinema of attractions and Eisenstein's "montage of attractions" both mirroring and constructing that experience) and as a symptom of the eradication of difference, in particular of sexual difference, resulting from this new neo-Baroque ethos.

notes

1. Robert Harbison, *Reflections on Baroque* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), 167.
2. Sergei Eizenshtein, *Metod*, vol. 1 (Moskva: Muzei kino, 2002), 242.
3. See José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
4. Gregg Lambert, *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture* (London & New York: Continuum Press, 2004), 9.
5. Eizenshtein, *Metod*, vol. 1, 242.
6. See Lambert, *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture*, 29.
7. These were celebratory reenactments of revolutionary events, usually set in public spaces and blurring the line between the participants and spectators in a conscious attempt to create a new form of social ritual in the post-revolutionary period in the Soviet Union. On the relationship between Eisenstein and the culture of mass spectacles, see Yuri Tsivian, "Eisenstein and Russian Symbolist Culture: An Unknown Script of *October*," in *Eisenstein Revisited*, ed. Ian Christie and Richard Taylor (New York: Routledge, 1993).
8. *Ibid.*, 33.
9. Tom Gunning, "Landscape and the Fantasy of Moving Pictures: Early Cinema's Phantom Rides," unpublished paper delivered at Hamilton College in November, 2006.
10. On the discourse on the haptic in relation to early cinema, see Antonia Lant, "Haptic Cinema," *October* 74 (Fall 1995): 45–73; Noël Burch, "Building a Haptic Space," in *Life to Those Shadows* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 162–85.
11. Cited in Nikita Lary, "Viktor Shklovsky: The Good and Awkward Friend," in *Eisenstein at 100: A Reconsideration*, ed. Al LaValley and Barry P. Scherr (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 124.
12. Bolivar Echeverria, *Modernidad, mestizaje cultural, ethos barroco* (Mexico: UNAM, 1994).
13. This understanding of the modernist project is theorized in T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
14. Eizenshtein, *Metod*, vol. 1, 141–69.
15. Walter Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk* expose, cited in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 114.
16. *Ibid.*, 161.
17. Quoted in Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: A Harvest Book, 1949), 144.
18. *Ibid.*,
19. See Naum Kleiman, Introduction to Sergei Eizenshtein, *Metod*, vol. 1, 25.
20. Lambert, *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture*, 35.
21. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1967), 280, cited in Vilashini Cooppan, *Inner Territories: Fictions and Fantasms of the Nation in Postcolonial Writing* (Stanford University Press, forthcoming 2008), 465.
22. Cooppan, *Inner Territories*, 465.
23. As is evident from Eisenstein's writings, the concepts of "the drive to transform and to be transformed," to "become," came to be of central importance to Eisenstein during his stay in Mexico.

24. Eisenstein read Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *La mentalité primitive* (originally published in English in 1922) in Paris before his trip to the United States and borrowed the terms "prelogical" and "sensuous thinking" from Lévy-Bruhl.
25. Eizenshtein, *Metod*, vol. 1, 285.
26. Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), F1923 op.2 d.231 l.17.
27. Cited in Anne Nesbet, "Ivan the Terrible and 'The Juncture of Beginning and End,'" in *Eisenstein at 100: A Reconsideration*, 292–304.
28. Sergei Eizenshtein, notes towards *Grundproblem*, quoted in V.V. Ivanov, *Ocherki po istorii semiotiki v SSSR*, (Moskva: 1976), 97.
29. *Metod*, vol. 2, 495.
30. *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* 36/37 (1997–98).
31. Franz Cushing was an American anthropologist, whose article "Manual Concepts" is quoted by Lévy-Bruhl, which prompted Eisenstein's engagement with both. See *Metod* vol. 1, 235–36, and *Metod* vol. 2, 620.
32. *Kinovedcheskie Zapiski* 36/37 (1997–98), 236.
33. Mikhail Iampolskii, "'Organicheskaiia mashina' u Eizenshteina i Disneia," in *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* 34 (1997).
34. Eizenshtein, *Metod*, vol. 2, 494.
35. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity* (London: Sage Books, 1994), 49.
36. Kristin Thompson uses *Ivan the Terrible* as an illustration of the concept of cinematic excess in Kristin Thompson, *Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
37. Joan Neuberger, *Ivan the Terrible* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 95.
38. Yuri Tsivian, *Ivan the Terrible* (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), 71.
39. See Salazkina, "Addressing the Dialectics of Sexual Difference in Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico!*" *Screen* (2007): 1–48.