Drag Queens, Clowns, Slugs and Other Foreigners:

Eisenstein's Cosmopolitan Menagerie

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Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* has almost as many foreign as Russian characters and, while all everyone in this film acts in ways meant to seem *strange*, the foreigners are especially marked. Caricatured, parodied, and ridiculed; bisexual, hyper-heterosexual, and homoerotic; dehumanized, demonic, and animal-like, foreigners in *Ivan the Terrible* would seem to be the quintessential "other." But I want to argue here that this menagerie of exotic creatures shows Eisenstein at his silliest but also his slyest. The often juvenile, sometimes sadistic, vaudevillian humor has serious intent and more complex consequences than one might expect. Rather than depicting a binary world of Russians and others, Eisenstein's Muscovy is populated with people who are each complicated and contradictory, and all linked to one another by multiple webs of signification. Humor, parody and surprise subvert expectations, challenge monolithic interpretations and institutions, and question stereotypes. As with every other element of this film, things are not what they seem. (And right about now you might be thinking, "humor? *Ivan the Terrible?*" what humor?)

I will not have time to go into the complexities of all the images of *Ivan's* foreigners, but before looking in detail at a couple of examples, let's take a quick slide tour around Ivan's world, taking the biographical narrative chronologically.

The Prologue (Ivan's childhood[1]) features the sinister figure of the Livonian ambassador, [fig 1.] a "slimy" character, who turns out to be a slug [fig 2]. Other

[1] Until one month before the release of *Ivan the Terrible* Part I, the prologue appeared at the beginning of Part I; it was deleted by censors but Eisenstein inserted it as a flashback in Part II.

foreigners in this scene are mercenary European traders bent on exploiting Russia's weakness by imposing trade agreements that strip the country's natural wealth. [fig 3].

At Ivan's Coronation, foreign delegations include ruffed and bejeweled envoys from the Vatican [fig 4], the western powers, [fig 5], and our old friend the Livonian Ambassador, with savvy political advice and sans tail [fig 6].

Ivan's wedding and the rebellion that interrupts it are largely domestic affairs, though our Livonian friend stirs up trouble in the hallways and foreigners are implicated in the rebellion. But before the crowd is fully subdued a new threat appears in the form of a messenger from Kazan [fig 7] but Ivan makes quick work of him, with his famous rallying cry "To Kazan!"

Imperial expansion (east and west) is one of the major themes of the film. Russia's supremacy over the Tatars is a turning point in Russian history (establishing Russian power for the first time over another people, the conventional start date of Russia as an empire), it is a key ingredient in Stalin's resurrection of Ivan the Terrible as a Soviet hero, and as such it was supposed to be a key moment in Ivan's film biography: he conquers Kazan in the east and then sets out to conquer Livonia in the west and bring Muscovy to the Baltic Sea. There were some problems along the way, though, represented in unexpected ways in the film. These Tatar prisoners are treated with callous brutality by Andrei Kurbsky. [fig 8ab] Eisenstein lingered over the Tatar boys' beautiful bodies alive and dead.[2] In the west, the Livonian campaign, which ends

[2] Young, beautiful, naked chested young men, pierced by arrows or other implements are a feature in Eisenstein's earlier films as well. On St. Sebastian as a model for martyred young men including these Tatar captives, see Richard A. Kaye, "Losing his Religion: Saint Sebastian as Contemporary Gay Martyr,"

in triumph in Eisenstein's script (in the unfinished Part III) in fact ended in disaster for Ivan and Muscovite Rus.

Back in Moscow the rest of Part I proceeds without much foreign intervention, though there are foreigners hanging around at key moments, as during Ivan's illness. There were to be several scenes with Queen Elizabeth I of England, which were cut for reasons of national security during the second world war. But Eisenstein had cast his friend, the director Mikhail Romm [fig 9ab] in the part and the screen tests are extant and fascinating to watch. Ivan was to be shown outsmarting her politically, while she flirted and dallied with sexy young men.

Part II opens in the court of King Sigismund [fig 10], which is a hotbed of all kinds of sexual vamping. We have Sigismund himself [fig 11], his own courtiers [fig 12], his women [fig 13], and Andrei Kurbsky [fig 14], on his knees, kissing the king's --- sword. At this point, defeated by Ivan's return to Moscow and reassertion of his authority and ambition, the Poles are swept aside, while Ivan is challenged and betrayed by his own servitors, whose opposition he must neutralize before turning to conquer the territories to the west and reach the sea. Before that campaign, foreigners appear in one more scene in Part II, The Fiery Furnace. The Chaldean guards in the play-within-a-film which Filipp stages to shame Ivan into dropping his tyrannical and violent ways are represented as clowns [fig 15]. The Fiery Furnace tells the story of the martyrdom of three Jewish boys who refuse to pay homage to the tyrant Nebuchadnezzar, with obvious allusions to the Stalinist terror. That Eisenstein depicts

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Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures, ed Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (London, 1996)

the Chaldean guards as sinister clowns is an example of his dialectical use of grotesque and sinister humor.

In Part III (unfilmed, we have the screenplay, some stills, and a few minutes of extant footage), the foreign enemies are depicted as ridiculously incompetent, cowardly, and disloyal, and they are defeated with laughable ease in the final battle for the sea. One formidable foreigner appears however, Heinrich von Shtaden [fig 16], a historical figure, a German mercenary who joined the oprichniki and served under Ivan during some of the brutal campaigns of oprichnik terror. He wrote a book about his experiences which Eisenstein read with considerable interest in preparation for the film.[3] An entire scene featuring Shtaden in Part III survives (though without music or proper sound).[4]

For all their oddities, inversions, and alien, anti-normative dress and demeanor, the foreigners in the film are matched, in fact *paired* in many cases with Russians of equivalent strangeness. The Livonian ambassador skulks around the Kremlin with an eye open for intrigue [fig 17], that mirrors the stealthy Malyuta Skuratov's eye. [fig 18] This is, of course, melodramatic stealth: hidden in plain sight. It is also a fun-house mirror: the eyes of Livonian and Malyuta do not match exactly, but they suggest each other, remind us of each other, though at first their connection is unclear. The Chaldeans' clown outfits include straw beards, tall pointed caps, and caftans of fabric to resemble the fabric of boyar caftans. They are preceded by this boyar pair [fig 19] from

[3] Eisenstein's notes on this and the other subjects discussed in this article can be found in his personal archive at Rossisskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (RGALI), fond 1923. Eisenstein's reading notes on Shtaden are 1923////.

the prologue, whose clownish antithetical physical types and prancing and guffawing discredit them with the young Ivan and finally push him to assert his authority in the prologue. Sigismund's singular monarchical power, his theatricality, and excessive gestures, suggest Ivan, remind us of Ivan, mirror Ivan in some intriguing, indeterminate way.

These off-kilter pairings are typical of Eisenstein's method in *Ivan* and are crucial for understanding his positioning of the film's foreigners. Central to Eisenstein's aesthetic and philosophy in this period was a belief that all life and art was structured by the dialectical "unity of opposites." [единство противоположностей]. But while Eisenstein searched high and low for examples of the universal structures [закономерность] of dialectics, he was anything but rigid in his application of the unity of opposites in his film work and theory. In other words, the *unity* or *synthesis* of dialectical processes is always in creative tension with the dualistic, contradictory, centrifugal, varied nature of the binary conflict between *thesis* and *antithesis*. In regard to the tension between Russianness and foreignness in *Ivan the Terrible,* difference and synthesis (not however *sameness*) are in constant tension with one another, but the paired opposites are also always in progress towards an explosive, transformative, transcendent moment of synthesis, that Eisenstein called *ekstasis*. Foreigners and Russians are different from one another, opposites even, but they are clearly related to one another, they repeatedly mirror each other. Let us see how this creative tension is realized in the film, by examining three scenes.

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[4] *The Unknown 'Ivan the Terrible,'* compiled by Naum Kleiman, on *Eisenstein: The Sound Years* (New York: The Criterion Collection, 2002)

First, Sigismund's court. At first glance, everything in this scene seems designed to suggest an alternative to Moscow, and a parody at that. "Interesting that this scene repeats as parody … the coronation of Ivan the Terrible: here as farce."[5] Every physical detail of the set has a counterpart in the Kremlin depicted in Part I. The hall itself is spacious and uncrowded in contrast to the Kremlin's low arched ceilings and mousehole doorways. [figs 20ab]. Even where the Russian interiors are spacious as in the Dormition Cathedral, they are crowded with people and paintings, and they are rounded and sensuous compared to the geometric shape and decoration of the Polish court. The music at Sigismund's evokes Renaissance fanfare, in contrast to the liturgical and folk roots of the score for the Moscow scenes. And the enormous knights behind the throne [fig 21] are Renaissance Gobelin tapestries, secular warriors to the Kremlin's sacred icons and frescos.[6] The courtiers and attendants are arrayed in static, isolated, formal groups, and their interaction unfolds with a stiffness and rituality that contrasts with the more fluid and emotional relationships between Ivan and his court. Even in the most formal scene that takes place in the Russian court, the coronation, the Russian and foreign spectators and participants in the ceremony are crowded into the cathedral, occupying space at random; men and women mixed together, Russians and foreigners scattered around the hall [fig 22ab].

The dialogue makes the contrast even more explicit. King Sigismund declares that "God in his wisdom decreed that Lithuania, Poland and the Baltic States should

[5] 1923/2/1722/7 [April 3, 1942]. Ellipsis in original signifies Eisenstein's pleasure at the working out of the farce (underlined three times). See also 1923/1/569/72 [June 18, 1942] and for other details of the parody, see Tsivian, *Ivan the Terrible*, pp. 23-27.
[6] 1923//////E's note about the Gobelins???

serve as the outposts of Europe in order that the civilized nations of the west might be protected from the Muscovite barbarians." Then one of the ladies adds, "They say the Muscovites eat children alive," followed by much rolling of eyes [fig 23].

The same ladies, however, find one Muscovite extremely attractive. When Andrei Kurbsky announces that Ivan has retreated from Moscow in fear of the boyars, and that soon the throne will be free for a real man, (actually he says "for a tsar well-disposed towards Poland,") the ladies swoon and flirt and the camera zooms in on their heart-shaped headdresses (Kurbsky also wears his heart on his chest) [fig 24]. Kremlin sexuality is chaste and pure, Anastasia is more mother than lover to Ivan, and while she too loves Kurbsky, she denies herself in order to support her husband and his great cause. Whereas Sigismund's court is a hotbed of ripe even ribald sexuality.

These contrasts could hardly be more obvious. Russia is barbaric, backward, religious, straitlaced – and apparently weak but really strong, whereas Poland, a stand-in for Europe is civilized, secular, decadent, advanced, apparently strong, but really weak. The symbolism is over determined, the irony laid on with a thick brush. The apparent strength and confidence of Sigismund and Kurbsky will evaporate momentarily in response to one word from Moscow. A messenger enters shouting "Tsar Ivan is returning to Moscow," and the court scatters in all directions, like the insignificant pawns they are, in comparison with Ivan. Suddenly the purpose of the chessboard floor becomes apparent. Move, countermove, Checkmate. Moscow, Europe, Moscow.

In this kind of formulation, difference reigns: even when the hierarchy of power is overturned –Ivan is not weak after all, Kurbsky remains frustrated, Sigismund is

dethroned, -- Russia and Europe remain distinct. But such binary distinctions do not exhaust the meanings of the us/them mirroring in this scene. The errant sexuality at the Polish court contains important keys to the scene and Eisenstein's use of foreigners in *Ivan*.

Sigismund's grandiose claim to be the embodiment and protector of Western civilization is undermined by the ridiculousness of his costume and behavior. Decades before the appearance of gender theory, Eisenstein understood the place of gender images in asserting claims to civilization: his play with Sigismund's minimal markers of masculinity provides a counterpoint to the manly ideal of medieval knight looming large above him. [fig 25] The King is seen in one of two poses: lounging, slung across his throne, sinuous, louche, self-regarding, vain, pompous, while receiving homage or official news [fig 26]; alternatively, he is shown standing, in declamatory pose, bombastically proclaiming Poland a beacon of civilization. His dress is a hyper-effeminate version of common dress of the period [fig27]. Ruffled collar, earrings, pantaloons and tights, feathers, jewels, and lace were standard aristocratic male dress in early modern Europe [fig 28ab] On Sigismund however, the collar, lace, and jewels are flamboyantly ornate; the poses he effects are flirtatious and melodramatic unlike the somewhat more vigorous and powerful poses with which English aristocracy of the same period in the same costume are shown. When effecting power, Sigismund's posture seems designed to emphasize his theatricality and silliness. In contrast, Ivan's theatricality underscores the seriousness of his words and actions, even when highly melodramatic. Sigismund's melodrama ridicules and diminishes him.

The King is attended by two male courtiers, dressed in an effeminate and highly stylized, echo of the oprichnik's black costume. [fig 29ab] Eisenstein derived the somber black original from the dynastic double-headed eagle [fig 30] and provided the oprichniki with the accouterments of terror: black horses, brooms, and animal heads. Sigismund's courtiers high shoulders almost resemble angels – Eisenstein sometimes called his oprichniki "fallen angels." The oprichniki are also pretty boys in velvet and feathers but they affect vitality and power.

Kurbsky himself performs a frankly homoerotic ritual of exchange and obeisance as a sign of fealty to Sigismund (which is of course at the same time a sign of treason to Ivan). Kurbsky hands his sword to the king, who inspects it with supercilious desire and hands it back, at which Kurbsky kisses it—a Judas kiss, recalling of his disingenuous kiss of the cross on pledging loyalty to Ivan after his illness [figs 31ab].

First, I propose that this whole ensemble stands not only for the Polish court but for the west as a whole and is meant to evoke not only the specific foreigners in question but Europeans as a whole. The sexual innuendo of the scene is based not on Polish or Livonian sources but on Eisenstein's reading about Elizabeth's flirtations with younger men and a generally racy environment at her court.[7] A later production note equates "Bess and Sigismund" and chessboard floor of the hall recalls the chessboard Ivan sent to Elizabeth in Part I.[8] This guess is further supported by published images of

[7] 1923/1/561/5 [October 1, 1941]
[8] 1923/1/570?// Pink II

Elizabeth's court, especially this engraving of the Queen appearing before Parliament.[9] [fig 32].

Second, Eisenstein is doing much more here than making jokes about effeminate men, or even representing the west as effeminate and weak. Much has been made of images considered homophilic and homophobic *Ivan.* Some have seen this strain in the film as the return of the repressed—the self-hating homosexual unable to suppress his fear of his own homosexuality mocking homoeroticism on screen.[10] But Eisenstein was wise to Freud; if anything this scene (and others like it) should be read as a send-up of Freud's theory of sexual repression. That is not to say that we should read this scene alternatively as a celebration of male homoeroticism or homosexuality. Eisenstein was far too ambivalent about his own sexuality, but more to the point, bisexuality was for him a significant category of analysis, and a central issue in his investigation of the "unity of opposites" as an aesthetic and philosophical problem. The blurring or reversal of gender binaries is connected in Eisenstein's mind with the significance of other binaries, including the moral (good and evil) and the political (tsar and slave, master and dog), which can be applied to the nationalist binary (us and them).

Eisenstein believed that human nature was bifurcated in various ways, that all people contain contradictory elements that exist in dialectical relationship to one another—producing conflict and transformation. Reading in literature, myth, and

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[9] *Nobilitas Politica vel Civilis* (London, 1608). Reprinted in Robin Winks and Lee Palmer Wandel, *Europe in a Wider World, 1350-1650* (New York, 2003) p. 196.

[10] Marie Seton initiated this line of interpretation in her biography, *Eisenstein*, pp. 437. The opposing argument, that images of beautiful young men in Eisenstein's film represent a closeted homosexual's homoeroticism can be found in Thomas Waugh, "A Fag-Spotter's Guide to Eisenstein," *Body Politic*, 35

ethnography convinced him that, as Yuri Tsivian puts it, "bisexuality is wired deeply in the memory of everyone as a person, as a biological species, and as a member of the human race."[11] A fundamental structure of self, each individual contains biological and cultural elements of the opposite sex and this fact, our anxiety about it, and its transformative potential, can produce both euphoria, ecstasy and its opposite, monstrous tragedy. Hard-wired, universal bisexuality is responsible for rituals of exchange, especially in connection with marriage ceremonies, found in many cultures and throughout human history. Eisenstein found enough examples in ancient myth and modern ethnography to convince him that such an impulse is universal. Exchanges of clothing in wedding ceremonies (of which the exchange of rings today is a survival) is a symbolic form of sex reversal which captures both difference, anxiety about difference, and the synthesizing of difference in the "unity of opposites" that marriage and sexual unions of all kinds signify. Just as cultures strive to recreate a primordial state of tension-less bisexuality, or at least to recall our memory of that state in such rituals of exchange, so should art, according to Eisenstein, do the same.[12] The pattern of male/female conflict, exchange, and synthesis is one of the primary models of the "unity of opposites" that is at the heart of this film's structure. One of the reasons Eisenstein became intrigued with and so invested in this project, after initial dismay at

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(1977), pp. 14-17. For a more balanced view, Parker Tyler, *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York, 1972).

[11] Yuri Tsivian, *Ivan the Terrible* (London,2002), p. 65; see also Neuberger, *Ivan the Terrible: the Film Companion* (London 2003), pp. 93-95.

[12] 1923/2/1166/42-43 [November 14, 1943]; S. M. Eisenstein*, Selected Works,* vol 4, *Beyond the Stars: The Memoirs of Sergei Eisenstein*, ed Richard Taylor, trans William Powell*,* pp. 604-15; V.V. Ivanov, "Perevertysh i karnaval," *Izbrannye trudy po semiotike i istorii kul'tury* (Moscow, 1998), pp. 343-47.

the new state order to make a film about Ivan the Terrible, was that he realized he could apply his long-standing interest in the "unity of opposites" to Ivan's biography.

Eisenstein conceptualized Ivan as a man torn by inner conflicts, political conflicts, and by conflicts between his public and private lives. The trick was to dramatize this dialectical "inner monologue" in film images.[13] Eisenstein structured Ivan's biography, the story of his inner contradictions, with a series of paired portraits – as doubling or "*dédoublement*" as he usually called it in his notes. Ivan's inner divisions are depicted on screen through his encounters and relationships with other characters each of whom represents some conflicted aspect of Ivan himself: Kurbsky, Efrosinia, Anastasia, Fedor, Malyuta, Vladimir Staritsky, Sigismund. Each of these portraits contained both stark contrasts and profound linkages with Ivan's character and visual image. Each character is positioned in specific, but unstable and reversible power relation to Ivan. Just as Sigismund asserts his power over Russia, but cannot sustain it, Malyuta accepts his position as the tsar's "dog" and "merry executioner" (весёлый палач), but by accepting responsibility for Ivan's murders, he also achieves a certain kind of (temporary) power over Ivan.[14] In another parody-reversal, this time of the both the prologue and the coronation, Ivan and Vladimir Staritsky reverse and then exchange positions, with horrifying, ironic, and tragic results. When Ivan discovers that Vladimir, his rival for the throne, is involved in a plot to assassinate him, Ivan has Vladimir dressed in the tsar's vestments, seats him on the tsar's throne, the tsar Ivan bows down to him, and sends

[13] 1923/2/128/31

[14] *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh* (Moscow, 1964-71) vol. 6, p.495, 513 (more in my notes on 2/128). This is symbolized in part when Ivan hands Malyuta his crozier.

him off to receive tsar's murder. When Ivan confronts the assassin, instead of arresting him, the tsar bows down to him too, and thanks him.

Eisenstein connected this kind of doubling and reversal with circus and carnival. Rituals of sex reversal have "social" implications, Eisenstein writes, because "the play of social categories (tsar-slave) [occurs] in the same forms as in biological (b.s.) cases, as carnival disguises, -- in the main to achieve a unity of the divided sexes (единства разобщения sex'ов)."[15] He goes on to quote from a history of Saturnalia carnival celebrations: "Reversals of sex are only another form of the inversion of rank and the debasement of religion," to which he adds "This is none other than the pathos of the transformation into the opposite."[16] In other words, social, cultural, political differences all function the same way sex role differences function—they differentiate but in a way that is problematized and subverted in order to resolve contradictory desires within ourselves. When faced with difference, people (as individuals and as cultures) find ways to both accentuate difference and transform themselves into their counterparts, rivals, mirror opposites, if only temporarily (at carnival) or symbolically (through ritual) or metaphorically (in myth, story, and now cinema). So, Eisenstein notes as an example, "Ivan's self-abasement in his confession (before the fresco of the Last Judgment) –' I am as if a worm' – is an internal problem of identity (проблема внутри себя)," meaning he turns himself into a worm to survive the trauma of being tsar.[17] The individual, sexual, social, political, and cultural all follow these patterns: conflict

[15] 1923/2/128/31.
[16] M. Willson Disher, *Clowns and Pantomimes* (London, 1925), p. 43; see also notes on 1923/2/128/31.
[17] 1923/2/128/31.

between binary oppositions, leads to reversal, merger, synthesis, and ultimately transformation into a higher synthesis which shortly breaks down into renewed conflict.

By representing the foreigners in Sigismund's court as men in drag, Eisenstein evokes that dialectical tension and resolution, the unity of opposites, by layering the sexual and the cultural. He positions *them* as the mirror image of *us*, (of Russians), while at the same time, by representing *them* as sexually ambiguous, and at the same time making them mirrors opposites of "us," he calls attention to the fact that such divisions, all divisions, are contained within everyone of us.

As overly complicated as it might seem, this is a typical device in *Ivan the Terrible* and is fundamental in Eisenstein's aesthetics, philosophy, and practice. Eisenstein strove to construct this entire unwieldy film on the basis of a single "principle," reiterated in infinite variations: the dialectical bisection and synthesis, conflict and transformation. In this context, Sigismund and his men represent a cultural difference (western vs Russian) and they contain within themselves the universal bisexual conflict and synthesis. The Polish men in drag signify conflict and synthesis twice. Their bisexuality is a projection of Ivan's inner divisions (sexual but not exclusively so) and they hold up a mirror to the film's Russians. Sigismund is a flirtatious lounge lizard to Ivan's solemn loneliness, but he completes Ivan, his mirror image, forming a unity of opposites. Sigismund's courtiers are a silly parody of Ivan's own oprichniki, themselves a sinister bisexual mix of male/female and bisected mix of loyal/traitorous, loving/murderous, but they complete each other as mirror images. I would argue that the prevalence of such structures connected with sex, power,

individual personality, morality, history, and so many other aspects of the film that it can be applied to understanding the function of foreigners in Eisenstein's film. Foreigners in *Ivan the Terrible* may be different but their difference isn't foreign. The values implied by the cultural conflict are contained within the Russians in the film and more important, it completes them, by providing synthesis. "Foreigners 'Я' us." In Eisenstein's thought and practice, difference, resolution, and conflict are natural and necessary. The foreigners here are both a ridiculous form of "them" and they are the feared contradictions within "us." In this way, Eisenstein manages to depict the Russians' ridicule of the western view of Russia as backward and barbaric, and expose Russians' fears of the truth of that view.

All this, believe it or not, is meant to be funny. Eisenstein had at times a fairly puerile sense of humor (think: milk separator) and that comes into play here. But why make this portrait of sexual and cultural difference, conflict and merger ridiculous, satirical? Why make it funny? The satire hints at something unspeakable about the foreigners, and not only in the sex-play on the surface. The model for understanding Eisenstein's use of humor here is that same "unity of opposites" that structures the sexual, class, and cultural issues in the film. Eisenstein wrote several fragmentary pieces about humor and its functions in culture and art, including parts of his unfinished study of Walt Disney and a chapter of the unfinished book, *Method*, both written in Alma Ata during the 1940s while he was working on *Ivan*.[18] Though he partially rejects Freud's theory of humor as the "rebellion of the unconscious," preferring explanations

that emphasize formal structural elements,[19] in his work on Disney, form continually spills over into psychological and social significance There is an unresolved tension in the book on Disney between the form of humor and its social context.

Eisenstein defines humor as the introduction of the dynamic process of dialectical conflict and synthesis into a static situation: "…a picture, *formally* and *mechanically* in stasis, reproducing the *dialectical* idea of the unity of opposites, in which each individual opposition at the same time coexists in unity, which is possible only in a process, in movement, in dynamics."[20] The effect of this wrench in the works is, in substantive terms, to expose unarticulated, perhaps unarticulatable inner contradictions. This inner monologue, the tension between static norms and conflict over norms, is made external in a number of ways, ranging from the simple to the complex. A simple version comedy is produced by juxtaposing, "formulations of two different historical periods,"[21] for example. A more complex (but I hope still comprehensible) form of humor "results from the fact that any representation exists in two ways: as a set of lines, and as the image that arises from them."[22] The *image* is a complex concept in Eisenstein's thought, that means more than the simple visual object. The "image" is itself a dynamic process (rather than a "thing") of the emergence of significance from the juxtaposition of the visual stimulus, the emotional and intellectual response, processed through memory and active engagement with the

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[18] *Metod* , vol. 1, *Grundproblem,* ed. Naum Kleiman (Moscow, 2002), "Komicheskoe," pp. 420-431 and "Misteriia tsirka. Struktura kak siuzhet," pp. 431-440; *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed Jay Leyda, trans. Alan Upchurch, Intro. Naum Kleiman (Calcutta, 1986). See also, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 4, pp. 448-535.
[19] *Metod,* pp. 422-23.
[20] *E on Disney,* p. 58; see also *Metod*, p. 426ff.
[21] 1923/2/1165// Black [May 7, 1942]

visual.[23] Separating the image (or essential significance) from its conventional visual or physical characteristics, represents it as something it isn't, which has the paradoxical effect of emphasizing the very essence of the absent image, accentuating "the perception of them as independent of each other, and simultaneously as belonging together."[24] There is a stunning example of this in one of Eisenstein's essays on Disney, a gloss on a scene of Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*.

> On the little barber's storefront, Nazi storm troopers have written the terrible, damning word, 'Jew'. The shell-shocked (!) Chaplin … erases this word, taking it for a series of abstract white streaks, devoid of meaning. The comic mechanism is clear: essence and form are dissected. The effect results from the fact that we know them to be indissoluble and belonging to each other….The greatness of this comical number, of course, consists of the fact that in its essence, racism is nonsense, …And the comicality of the effect resides in the fact that their representational co-membership is persistently emphasized.[25]

This is funny because what might have been a "static" situation – prejudice, power, prescribed stereotype is given a dialectical treatment, which taps its way into the universal anxiety about the never-complete-synchronization of visual image and meaning, visual image and language, representation and meaning.

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[22] *E on Disney*, p. 57.
[23] On image and representation see Leonid Kozlov, *Obraz i izobrazhenie* //, David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Cambridge, MA, 173-95 Neuberger, "Eisenstein's Angel," *The Russian Review* 63:3 (July 2004), pp. //
[24] *E on Disney*, p. 58.
[25] *E on Disney*, p. 58.

One does not have to accept Eisenstein's theory of humor to follow his thinking into its implementation in the movie, and to see how he applied it to the us/them dyad. The insertion of a dialectical process into stasis has effects on a psychological level (moral conflict) and on a social level (cultural conflict). Eisenstein understood that humor could touch the nerve of our deepest taboos. His satisfaction with the character of Malyuta Skuratov was only complete when he decided to make him humorous.[26] Tsivian shows how Eisenstein made Malyuta "fearsome and likeable all at once," for practical reasons and as a reflection of Ivan's inner contradictions, but my point here is different. Eisenstein's pleasure with Malyuta was rooted in his blend of violence and humor and the effect that combination has on us, the viewers. By making Ivan's eager executioner funny and ridiculous, he gets us to laugh at the evil Malyuta represents. Exposing our ability to laugh at evil, reveals our own moral ambivalence and complicity. How can we laugh at something that evil? What does that say about us? The same principle operates in connection with Sigismund's court. When we laugh at their cultural difference, underscored by their gender reversal, the double distance, we expose our own identification with that difference and our anxiety about it at the same time. Just as we watch Chaplin wipe white streaks from the window in disbelief at his inability to link idea and representation, we watch Eisenstein's images of history, culture, gender which seem to be severed from the meanings we usually associate with history, culture, and gender. The effect is to deepen and complicate our emotional and intellectual

[26] *Izb. proiz.* Vol. 6 497,507-09, Tsivian, 53.

responses to the film, by visually dramatizing the overlap between difference and sameness.

Coming back to Sigismund again, humor gives the unity of opposites in this scene yet another layer of meaning. Social categories -- Russian/foreigners, hetero/homosexual-- usually treated in static, prescribed, normative form, which is to say with a rigid, unambiguous connection between image and meaning – but which in fact are associated with ambivalence and anxiety, are treated here as dialectical relationships "in a process, in movement, in dynamics." By representing the foreigners as sites of outrageous, startling, exaggerated dialectical conflict, where we expect to see predicable prescribed images, (the excess by itself and the unexpectedness by itself are not enough to explain the comic effect, according to Eisenstein), we laugh, but nervously.[27]

Eisenstein also uses comedy and satire in a more straightforwardly subversive way. To see how, we turn to the clowns that populate Ivan's universe. While recovering from his heart attack in April 1946 Eisenstein wrote, "Always funny –the one thing that dares to deny the leading philosophy of its time or the leading philosophical ideas of such and such a philosopher."[28] There are two pairs of clowns in *Ivan the Terrible*: the boyars Bel'skii and Shuiski in the prologue, and the Chaldeans guards in the Fiery Furnace.[29] While Bel'skii and Shuiski aren't foreigners, it is worth mentioning that if they

[27] *Metod*, pp. 421, 422.
[28] 123/2/1175/6-6ob [April 18, 1946].
[29] There is another set of clowns, a peasant comedy duo drawn from Russian folklore, called Foma and Erema, but they did not make it into the finished film. For a discussion of their role, see Neuberger, *Ivan the Terrible*, pp. 45-46, and L. M. Roshal', "'Ia uzhe ne mal'chik i na avantiuru ne poidu'"

are to be seen as "laughers" who might challenge the ruling ideology of the day, it is because they are entirely cynical, exploiting the youth of the tsar to fill their pockets and act at will. They reveal the corruption behind the scenes of the formal ritual of state business. But they are lightweights, even the corpulent Shuiski is no match for the young tsar when he finds his voice.

The Chaldeans are, however, rather more sinister, and not only as foreigners but as mirrors. It is reasonable to ask why Eisenstein decided to make the guards in this scene clowns, and not only clowns, but clowns dressed in parody of the boyars. Filipp staged the play to humiliate Ivan, to reflect God's judgment of Ivan's violent politics, but he finds the tables turned in more ways than one as the scene spirals from reversal to reversal. The clowns themselves are not particularly funny, but rather grimace and contort their faces as they jump and turn cartwheels around their captives. [fig 33]. When they affirm that they are to throw the boys into the fire for disobeying the "tsar" Nebuchadnezzar, Eisenstein cuts to the crowd, ghoulishly laughing anyway [fig 34]. And these are not just any shots of smiling boyars, these are exactly the same shots of women smiling in approval at Ivan's coronation – explicitly linking Ivan with Nebuchadnezzar and turning the Russian audience into Chaldeans celebrating the brutal fiery demise of the young boys. These identifications run counter to expectations: we assume the spectators will identify with the martyrs, but even if they don't, ecstatic pleasure at the thought of the procedure is creepy. And ecstatic pleasure that is visually identical to the ecstatic adulation of the tsar implicates Ivan directly in the boys'

Kinovedcheskie Zapiski 38 (1998), pp.142-67. The scenes are included in *The Unknown "Ivan the Terrible*.

victimization. The little boy in the audience who laughs so merrily, sitting on the men's shoulders, will make this clear by identifying Ivan, when he shows up (also laughing) as the lawless, Godless, pagan tyrant [fig 35]. This is another perfect example of the Chaplin scene. The little boy severs the link between specific rulers and their specific characteristics presented in the fictional context, shuffling and reassigning the fictional and the real, thereby destroying the illusion of fiction, and the line between the fictional and the real. The martyred boys will take this a step further --making the audience reversal explicit and linking the audience at the play-in-the-film with the audience in the movie theater, when they sing the question, "Why do you shameless Chaldeans serve a lawless tsar?" (Ivan turns and listens for the first time), "Why do you bewitched (бесовские) Chaldeans serve a demonic, blasphemous, and despotic (сатаническому, хутителю, мучителю) tsar?" Ivan turns to the stone-faced Filipp for blessing and Filipp refuses to bless the tsar while the boys sing, "Why do you torment us with fire? Why do you burn us."[30] In this clever set of reversals, Eisenstein, improving upon *Hamlet*, uses the foreigners in the fictional set up to identify Ivan as the tyrant he has become, to link his tyranny and popular adulation of that tyranny with the his own world -- daring to deny the leading philosophy of his own time.

There is also a sadistic streak to Eisenstein's humor, which we also need to address. We laugh at his foreigners because they are ridiculed, patronized, humiliated, contorted, diminished. Eisenstein's sadism, and the combination of sadism and humor are evident in all his films. In *Ivan* it works to depict a particularly insidious aspect of

[30] *Izb. proiz.,* vol. 6, p. 334.

Stalinism as well as a "unity of opposites" between Stalinism and Nazism. Heinrich von Shtaden, German mercenary, oprichnik, and author, was the very embodiment of heartless oprichnik cruelty, duly noted in Eisenstein's reading notes. [fig 36]. He only appears briefly in the completed film, but was slated to play a role in two key scenes of Part III. Eisenstein wrote a great deal about him in his production notes and while one of his scenes only exists in the screenplay and Eisenstein's notes, the other was shot and survives. In the surviving footage we see the "interrogation of Shtaden," when he shows up at Alexandrova Sloboda as a spy for Kurbsky and his Livonian masters to infiltrate Ivan's court. Ivan, it seems, suspects Shtaden is a spy and treats him to a kind of cat-and-mouse humiliation that replicates the treatment Ivan gave the rebellious crowd in Part I, and is familiar to all who know (and knew) Stalin's treatment of his enemies. Alternating jokes and threats, Ivan easily controls the crowd of oprichniki (the former rebels, by the way) egging them on to laugh at Shtaden as he becomes increasingly scared and sullen, before being accepted into the oprichnina. [fig 37]

Originally, Eisenstein wrote, he had introduced Shtaden purely for the "wolfish" atmosphere of the oprichnina, based in part on Shtaden's blood curdling memoir and in part on his role as an outsider and a spy inside the oprichnina.[31] But then it turned out that he made a good source of the evil that leads to the Basmanov's downfall and Ivan's lowest moment. When Ivan discovers that his oprichnik leader, Aleksei Basmanov, has been stealing from him, Ivan has Fedor kill his father as a display of loyalty to the tsar, and then has Fedor killed for his disloyalty to his father. Shtaden,

[31] *Izb. proiz.* Vol. 6, p. 504.

whom Eisenstein models on Nazi soldiers, [fig 38ab] sets off this horrifying chain of events by informing on Aleksei and then killing Fedor. "Shtaden," Eisenstein noted, was "the 'evil genius' of Basmanov family," he brought about their downfall and Ivan's as well:

> And it turns out very well that this is done by a German-Livonian – in typical German-fascist style --… that is, it is *typical* of the Germans to exploit every contradiction in the countries they invade…this would be great for contrasting … the theme of Ivan and the theme of the German *dictatorship*…Give the Germany *a bit* of prophesy about the unleashing of instincts and appetites –the dark element, the worst –while Ivan heeds the best in the people…. *Great* of course that Ivan's 'trick' at Alexandrova Sloboda [when Ivan 'tricks' the people into recalling him to Moscow to rule over them] here grows into tragic pathos.[32]

Shtaden is Ivan's 'evil genius" as well, it turns out. The Nazis may prey on the worst human instincts while the Russians (here I read: Soviets) prey on the best, but in the end, they are both predators, (it turns out that "Nazis 'Я' us" too). In the Russian case, however, tragic predators, given their utopian beginnings.

Eisenstein's portraits of foreigners – from the ridiculous to the sinister -- were not created in order to set off the superior moral or cultural qualities of Russians. On the contrary, Eisenstein's use of his dialectical "unity of opposites," turns *Ivan's* foreigners into mirrors who reflect (and cruelly at times) the variety of ambivalent

[32] *Izb. proiz.* Vol. 6: 505-06.

divisions and conflicts that Russians experienced. As necessary components of Russian identity, the foreigners in *Ivan* ironically and surreptitiously insist on and celebrate difference. This stance is deeply subversive but in a classic Eisensteinian through-the-looking-glass manner: by ridiculing the foreigners and then showing them to be necessary to us, he defies the pervading xenophobia and pays tribute to cultural diversity. In images of sadistic mockery and parody, *Ivan's* foreigners challenge the unitary cultural norms of Stalinist society, reject "static" Bolshevik nationalism, and embrace a thoroughly if creepily, cosmopolitan menagerie.