

## EISENSTEIN'S *DAS KAPITAL*: ATTEMPTING A NEW GENRE

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The article focuses on the Russian film director Sergei M. Eisenstein's intention to make a film of Marx's *Das Kapital* according to its dialectical method, rather than its content. Eisenstein tried to find an appropriate method of visual expression with his own montage dialectics. The first part of the article analyzes Eisenstein's intention to make the adaptation, considered in the historical context of interpretations of Marx's main work. The second part of the article considers Eisenstein's plans for a cinematographic rendition of *Das Kapital* in an attempt to create a new, 'individual', historical style based on a single film. The visual realization of this work was meant as an attempt to transform Marx's ironic writing style as political expression into a film paradigm. Another pertinent point in this context is the contiguity of Eisenstein's intended approach to Marx's text using some Russian cinematographic styles of the time, especially comedy, satire and slapstick.

*Das Kapital* von Sergej M. Eizenštejn: Ein Versuch um ein neues Genre

Die Studie konzentriert sich auf Sergej M. Eizenštejns Absicht, *Das Kapital* von Karl Marx zu verfilmen. Der russische Regisseur wollte es nicht aufgrund des Textes selbst, sondern seiner dialektischen Methode zu tun. Er versuchte eine geeignete Weise des visuellen Ausdrucks mittels seiner dialektik den Montage zu finden. Der erste Teil der Studie analysiert Eizenštejns Adaptierungsabsicht im Zusammenhang mit historischen Interpretationen von Marx' Hauptwerk. Der zweite Teil untersucht seine Absicht als einen Versuch, einen neuen „individuellen“ historischen Stil aufgrund eines einzelnen Filmwerks zu bilden. Die visuelle Umsetzung dieses Werks strebte danach, Marx' ironische Schreibart als einen politischen Ausdruck in ein Filmparadigma zu transformieren. Ständige Aufmerksamkeit wird auch der Nähe zwischen Eizenštejns beabsichtigter Stellungnahme zu Marx' Text und den russischen Filmstilen der damaligen Zeit geschenkt, insbesondere der Komödie, Satire und Grotteske.

In his 1998 essay on *The Communist Manifesto*, which also considers the assimilation of Marxism into religion, the philosopher Václav Bělohradský, perceives the word 'manifesto' as a modern form of the word 'revelation'. This, he argues, is a new revolutionary genre, in which a new force created by history announces itself – namely, the publicizing of positions and methods.<sup>1</sup> In its rhetorical moralist core,

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<sup>1</sup> Bělohradský, Václav (1998). 'Vše trvalé se mění v páru, vše posvátné se znesvěcuje: 150 let od Komunistického manifestu.' *Salon – literární příloha Práva*, 12 March 1998, pp. 1, 3. Robert C. Tucker has a curious view of Marx as a representative of 'political religion'. Tucker defines Marxism as a structurally religious morality, which of its own normative essence says nothing about the social world! According to Tucker, in *Das Kapital* Marx shows himself to be not only an eschatological moralist, but also a divided personality who, in the allegorical form of his thinking, operates with the categories of political economy. See Tucker, Robert C. (1961). *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*.

*Das Kapital* (1867–94), consisting of three massive volumes, is not messianistically proclamatory like the slender *Communist Manifesto*. It is a manifesto 'of another genre' but of a similar tenor. The present article considers in detail Eisenstein's 'reading' of *Das Kapital* and seeks to demonstrate how he wanted to redefine the historical genre, that is, how he imagined transferring to the screen the logical structure and comical and social function of irony in Marx's fundamental work.

The filming of *Das Kapital* based on what Eisenstein perceived as Marx's 'screenplay' is one of the many projects that Eisenstein never carried out. He mentions it, for example, in his letters to Léon Moussinac. In 1928, he met Sigmund Freud and the Russian avant-garde architect and designer El Lissitzky in Vienna. El Lissitzky was considering applying Freud's psychoanalytical theories to architecture. Eisenstein acquainted them with his plan, and conceived the idea of interpreting *Das Kapital* cinematographically, employing Freud's ideas from *The Interpretation of Dreams*.<sup>2</sup> More fundamental information about this project is provided by two Soviet researchers, Naum Kleiman and Leonid Kozlov, who in the early 1970s compiled Eisenstein's scattered, often superficial, and stylistically unrefined notes, and also provided them with tendentious commentary.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1920s, Eisenstein was, in his conception of the 'intellectual film', confronted with the problem of putting dialectical structures into cinematographic terms. His intention to film *Das Kapital* was in that respect no exception. It was clear to him that he could independently 'cinematographize' a great number of ideas from *Das Kapital* (for example, use value, exchange value, and surplus value), which, however, thus separated, would tell us nothing about Marx's dialectics. Consequently, he accepted the filming of *Das Kapital* according to its method, not its content, as the sole formal starting point.<sup>4</sup> In his adaptation, the creative intention was not to transfer Marx's text or philosophical and

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Cambridge: CUP. Against this interpretation one would mention the more realistic opinion of Franz Mehring from his now classic biographical work: '*Das Kapital* is not a Bible containing final, unalterable truths, but rather an inexhaustible source of stimulation for further study.' And: 'The real source of capitalist wealth was revealed for the first time in the first volume of *Das Kapital*, which wasted no time either in finding justifications for the capitalists or in reproaching them with their injustice. Marx showed for the first time how profit originated and how it flowed into the pockets of the capitalists.' Mehring, Franz (1936). *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*. London: George Allen & Unwin, pp. 371–2.

<sup>2</sup> Bulgakova, Olga (1988). 'Sergei Eisenshtein i ego "psikhologicheskii Berlin" – mezdu psikhoanalizom i strukturnoy psikhologiej.' *Kinovedcheskiye zapiski*, 1 (2), p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> Eisenstein, Sergei Mikhailovich (1973). 'Iz neosushchestvlenykh zamyslov – Kapital.' *Iskusstvo kino*, 42 (1). Czech translation: Ejzenštejn, Sergej Michajlovič (1986). 'Z nerealizovaných záměrů (Kapitál)' (Naum Klejman & Leonid Kozlov, eds). *Panorama*, No. 1, pp. 52–69. For *Das Kapital*, see also Eisenstein, Sergei Mikhailovich (1964). *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, Vol. 2. Moscow: Iskusstvo, pp. 120–21.

<sup>4</sup> Ejzenštejn (1986), 'Z nerealizovaných záměrů', pp. 58, 61.

economic categories directly onto film (as is usually assumed), but to find a method to express them visually. Eisenstein conceived the filming of Marx's chief work as a 'treatise in film', whose visual formal side would be based on James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). The film would have been dedicated to its author.<sup>5</sup> From the point of view of genre, this idea is quite incongruous, but in its own way justified. Both these maximalist works transpose myth. Joyce transposes the Homeric myth; Eisenstein intended to transpose the Marxist myth. Besides, as a 'system of principles' of their times, *Das Kapital* and *Ulysses* have each been numerous compared and likened, deservedly and undeservedly, to other influential creations of the human mind that have in common their attempts at being systematically truly comprehensive. One can view *Ulysses* as a cosmic *summa* or a comic *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Samuel Beckett, writing about Joyce, creates an analogy between his 'work in progress' and Giambattista Vico's *Scienza nuova*, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Giordano Bruno's scientific contributions.<sup>6</sup> Louis Althusser believed *Das Kapital* to be an historic event, a scientific discovery comparable to that of Euclid's *Elements*, Thales' discovery of mathematics, or Galileo's discovery of physics.<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Habermas includes *Das Kapital* in the critical tradition of

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> Beckett, Samuel (1995). 'Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce.' In Ruby Cohn (ed.), *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*. New York: Grove Press, pp. 19–34. Whereas Joyce's notes to *Ulysses* create a 'framework that enables the organization of the text as a careful and consequential construction of a system', as Hilský puts it, Eisenstein's notes to *Das Kapital*, apart from a private religiousness, lack this function. Hilský, Martin (1998), *Modernist*. Prague: Torst, p. 124. In *Das Kapital*, Eisenstein wanted to use other impetuses formally – puppet theatre, *belles-lettres* (Zola, Barbusse, Persian verse from twelfth-century Indian collections), the plastic arts (Daumier and Grosz), the Schüfftan process, glass and models, and considered shooting within the walls of the 'Third Factory'.

<sup>7</sup> Althusser, Louis (1971). 'Lenin and Philosophy.' In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (pp. 23–70). New York and London: Monthly Review Press, pp. 38–9. Althusser's 'structuralist reading' of *Das Kapital* in the collection *Pour Marx* (1965), and in collaboration with Étienne Balibar, Jacques Rancière, Roger Establet, and Pierre Macherey in the essay volume *Lire le Capital* (1965) announces Marx's departure from all 'ideological' concepts of the philosophical tradition that preceded *Das Kapital*. Max Horkheimer referred to this departure as a 'total reconstruction'. Althusser, on the contrary, inspired by Gaston Bachelard, saw an even more radical 'epistemological brake' (*coupure épistémologique*), which once and for all cuts Marx's 'umbilical cord' with Hegel, Feuerbach and all the pre-Marxist empirical-idealist philosophy, in order to substantiate the unclear scientific value of *Das Kapital* and the importance of Marx's 'theoretical anti-humanism', which 'radically ends with any theory based on some human essence,' and defines humanism as 'ideology'. Althusser, Louis, & Balibar, Étienne (1970). *Reading Capital*. London: New Left Books. The validity of Lenin's well-known thesis, '[i]t is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*', was thus challenged. See Lenin, Vladimir I. (1976). *Collected Works*, Vol. 38, *Philosophical Notebooks*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, p. 180.

European culture and thought represented mainly by Kant's three *Critiques*. The Czech Marxist philosopher Karel Kosík points out that Marx called the structure of *Das Kapital* (created in a literary way by means of the dialectic method and the scientific revelation of the nature of reality) an 'artistic whole' (*ein artistisches Ganzes*),<sup>8</sup> and Kosík compares its central odyssey motif with Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Unlike *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* (which is a qualitative 'odyssey' of the spirit), however, *Das Kapital* is an 'odyssey' of commodity in capitalism as a form of a 'concrete historical praxis'. This 'odyssey' starts out in its elementary labour product, moves through a number of real forms in which it is objectified and fixed, and concludes not in the cognition of what it is in itself, as is the case with Hegel's Spirit, but in a 'revolutionary practical action based on this cognition'.<sup>9</sup>

The 'odyssey' motif, thus interpreted, in many ways provides the key to Eisenstein's innovatory approach to the historical genre with which he wanted to convey *Das Kapital's* dialectical logic, and to show Marx's understanding of the capitalist means of production, using the 'economic laws of the movement of modern society', that is, the process of the circulation of capital, which continuously valorizes itself by continuously expanding reproduction (the movement of value). In other words, he sought to demonstrate how capital '[i]n its reproduction [...] produces its own conditions',<sup>10</sup> and how it was possible, by analyzing commodities (which start the self-valorizing process of capital), to understand the unity and sense of the capitalist system of

<sup>8</sup> Kosík, Karel (1976). *Dialectics of the Concrete: A Study on Problems of Man and World*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, p. 107.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 111. Kosík rejects the view that the matter explicated by Marx in *Das Kapital* became obsolete because of the book's historical link to nineteenth-century society and capitalist industry. At the same time he stresses that not all 'interpreters' of *Das Kapital* could find an approach to its matter, that is, the relationship between economics and philosophy. Kosík presents the four most common misinterpretations of *Das Kapital*: (1) *Das Kapital* as applied logic – evidence to justify economic movement. (2) *Das Kapital* as economic content without philosophical justification (thus it needs to be provided with it, for example by phenomenology). (3) *Das Kapital* as existential metaphysics and not a real science. (4) *Das Kapital* as a purely economic work. Kosík (1976), *Dialectics*, pp. 97–99. His own interpretation comes from the 'homogeneous intellectual dynamics' of Marx's thought, which do not allow for the separation of *Das Kapital* from Marx's preceding works. He is chiefly interested in the connection between the beginning of *Das Kapital* (the analysis of commodities) and its unfinished end (the analysis of class). The literary elaboration and the dialectical method of *Das Kapital* are, according to Kosík, subordinated to the revealed nature of reality, since it arises from this. A similar aspect is considered in Zelený, Jindřich (1962). *O logické struktuře Marxova Kapitálu*. Prague: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, and Garaudy, Roger (1967). *Karl Marx: The Evolution of His Thought*. New York: International Publishers.

<sup>10</sup> Marx, Karl (1993). *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*. London: Penguin Books, p. 675.

production or, expressed in a not particularly clever biological metaphor, to show how commodities are revealed to be the principal cells in the 'anatomy' of capitalism.

It is somewhat odd that Eisenstein found an analogous model of the solution to the circulation of capital as a film adaptation in Joyce's paradoxical literary method, which consists in the 'encyclopaedic, almost scholastically systematic comprehensiveness of a work built on banal, essentially empty, experience'.<sup>11</sup> Such is the case also with Eisenstein's search for a way to depict *Das Kapital's* dialectics visually. He bases his idea on the banal, gradual development of some event. For example, he takes an ordinary day, and uses it as a pretext to develop social formulae of an associative nature, in order to generalize the main theses of *Das Kapital*.<sup>12</sup> In the visual conception of the planned film it would have looked like this: simple thematic questions are asked (for example, how to light an oil lamp) and then a complex answer to these simple questions is found in metaphysics.<sup>13</sup> Eisenstein mentions that in terms of structure he arrived at the idea of the trivial plot, which serves to develop common facts in cosmic and philosophical questions, while reading Yvan Goll's analysis of *Ulysses*. Goll apparently suggested that Joyce elaborated the eighteen structurally complicated Homeric episodes of *Ulysses* from eighteen different points of view and in eighteen different styles. According to Eisenstein, the dialectic process should advance from the simple 'schematic mechanics of things' to more complex 'stimuli associations'. This denotes the construction of two intersecting plot lines. The film was supposed to have only two themes: a woman making soup and a man going home. These themes would have been juxtaposed by association into a third synthesizing theme, for example, the pepper with which the woman seasons the soup.<sup>14</sup> (According to Eisenstein it did not have to be pepper, but could instead be, say, the spirit for the spirit-stove. This would suitably express the capitalization of the technological transition to oil.) Eisenstein saw it as culminating in a triadically developing dialectical association: 'pepper–Cayenne–Devil's Island. Dreyfus, French chauvinism. A copy of *Le Figaro* in the hands of Krupp. War.'<sup>15</sup> The woman's silk stocking was meant to evoke a dialectical summary like the series 'pepper–Dreyfus–*Figaro*'. Eisenstein notes: 'First intact in a newspaper

<sup>11</sup> Hilský (1998), *Modernisté*, p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> Ejzenštejn (1986), 'Z nerealizovaných záměrů', p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 61. In this cross-cutting of the themes of the man and the woman, including their culmination in the 'pepper', Eisenstein is clearly conscious of the unintentional structural comicality. Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

advertisement, [the stocking] starts to tear itself apart, multiplying into fifty pairs of legs – the Revue. Silk. Art. The struggle for a centimetre of silk stocking. The aesthetes are in favour. The bishops and morality are against. But these puppets dance on the strings of the silk-factory owners, and the cloth-manufacturers who are fighting against them. Art, sacred art. Morality, sacred morality [...] one pair of stockings – art. One pair of stockings – morality. One pair of stockings – commerce and competition. One pair of stockings – Indian women are forced to carry silkworm cocoons in their armpits.<sup>16</sup>

This obligatory acquaintance with planned adaptation is important with regard to Eisenstein's innovation of the historical genre, because it indicates how he sought to pave the way for the ambitious marriage of irony and the historical genre on the basis of Marx's methods. This is evident in his attempt to film *Das Kapital* in such a way that he would free himself from the common typology of genres in favour of an individualized genre. The hypothetical stratification of the genre in which he sought to deal with *Das Kapital* leads to the highly moot assumption (also indirectly expressed by Vsevolod Pudovkin)<sup>17</sup> that he really wanted to create an independent genre on the basis of a single work. By creating a unique genre term with the title of his play *Mystery-Bouffe* (1918; first performed 1921), Vladimir Mayakovsky already achieved this in Soviet society in the 1920s. According to Kozlov, the term became emblematic of an artistic era.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, to counter this claim, one needs to consider the influence of the basic general symptoms of pre-revolutionary Russian cinema, which rested on three main genres – comedy (slapstick), melodrama, and adventure. These primary sources of visual aesthetics in the emotional functioning of the genre were not once and for all unconditionally denied by the young revolutionary cinema of the 1920s, but were, rather, integrated in various ways. For example, Kuleshov did so with the genres of adventure and satire, and Kozintsev and Trauberg in eccentric slapstick with elements of theatre and the circus.<sup>19</sup> Eisenstein's idea to film *Das Kapital*, as is evident from his notes, is not completely immune to this influence, to which was added the then strong

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 62 and 65. In the ironically exaggerated statement about Indian women and the silkworm, Eisenstein is apparently alluding to the economical and cultural ruthlessness of British colonization as described by Marx in his articles for *The New York Tribune*, 'The British Rule in India' and 'The Future Results of British Rule in India'. Marx, Karl, & Engels, Frederick (1979). *Collected Works*. Vol. 12. London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 125–33, 217–22.

<sup>17</sup> Pudovkin, Vsevolod (1982). 'Tvorba filmového režiséra.' In *Film, scénár, réžia, herec* (pp. 174–89). Bratislava: Tatran, pp. 175–6.

<sup>18</sup> Kozlov, Leonid (1980). 'O žánrových obecnostech a zvláštnostech.' *Panoráma*, No. 1, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

influence of the cult of Charlie Chaplin. Whereas Chaplin achieved organic unity in the ideal linking of the authorial approach and slapstick, Eisenstein achieved the same linking as a dialectician of the film form in the 1920s.

Eisenstein's preparatory notes regarding his plans for the film *Das Kapital* suggest that his intentions were to go beyond the categorical frameworks of film genres, which are defined in the extreme by the system of film distribution. Eisenstein wanted to constitute as a genre an independent cinematographic understanding of dialectical materialism. This genre was to abandon the traditional genre classifications, integrating itself into its own order, an order determined by the dialectical method: the new 'genre' is the dialectical method itself. This method, according to Eisenstein, is a picture of the reconstruction of the social status quo, an intellectual picture of a revolutionary change of reality in historical perspective. This would mean that, from the point of view of historical materialism, 'today's equivalents to moments of past watershed eras' would, in the spirit of his theory of dialectical montage, serve in *Das Kapital* point by point as a contrasting transitional surface to higher levels.<sup>20</sup> Eisenstein envisages their completion, a sort of 'final chapter', in the depiction of the class struggle, which he calls, somewhat high-flown and dogmatically, the 'dialectical decipherment of history itself'.<sup>21</sup> And, with regard to the 'maximum advantage', he wanted to set it up in such a way that it no longer had any relation to the actual theme. What is surprising about this, however, is the expansion of the author's ambition, at the level of style in the intended unique 'dialectical' genre of this planned film, to use montage to capture revolutionary movement, which for him represented the intellectual potential of both Marx's method and his ironic critique of history in *Das Kapital*.

In conclusion we shall therefore consider how Eisenstein intended to use his own new style to implant the ironic historicism of *Das Kapital* into the dialectal genre of his planned historical film, a historicism that in places diffidently touches the fringes of the comic genre. Before we do that, however, we first have to ask (as Eisenstein surely did) how it is even possible that irony and comic elements are present in Marx's nineteenth-century political economy, which forms the core of *Das Kapital*. The answer lies in Marx's style of writing history. Hayden White, in his 'metahistorical' investigation of nineteenth-century historical imagination, considers history one of several narrative genres

<sup>20</sup> Ejzenštejn (1986), 'Z nerealizovaných záměrů', pp. 61–2. The three thematic nuclei of *Das Kapital* corresponded to these questions in Eisenstein's notes. In relation to the genre of historical film, they are defined by Pietro Montani as ideological (what to interpret), technico-linguistic (how to interpret), and political (why to interpret).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

that differ only in their literary modes. We shall not concern ourselves here with problems that in White's postmodernist conception result in obliterating the difference between historical and fictional narration. Instead, we shall focus on his observations about Marx's historiographical style, which White calls 'the philosophical defence of history in the metonymical mode'.<sup>22</sup> In his theory of tropes, White argues that irony, metonymy, and the synecdoche differ at the literary level of meaning. The metaphor is essentially representative, the metonymy reductionist, the synecdoche integrative, and irony negational. Marx tries to combine Hegel's synecdochical strategy with the metonymic strategy of political economy, and thus create historical ideas that are consequently 'dialectical' and 'materialist'. They are, one could say, simultaneously 'historical' and 'mechanistic'.<sup>23</sup> White alleges that the aim of Marx's metonymic idiom is to show how the conflicts of history can be subordinated to such a method in the future development of humanity, a method that can be conceived as a field of all-embracing synecdochical unity. With this, allegedly, is linked Marx's intention to transfer irony to tragedy and tragedy to comedy, unlike Nietzsche, who sees tragedy and comedy as an 'ironic' aggregate.<sup>24</sup> Eventually, White argues, Marx and Nietzsche change the linguistic 'rules of the game' of historiographical thought: Marx, on the basis of a critique of the scientific components; Nietzsche, on the basis of a critique of the artistic components.<sup>25</sup> Apart from that, their main merits are that ironic implication achieved full recognition in the professional orthodoxy of historical thought (that of Ranke and his followers), and achieved the acceptance of various forms of deviations from fixed historiographical norms (those established by Michelet, Tocqueville, and Burckhardt).<sup>26</sup> Marx's unification of the theory and practice of historical reflection demands a realistic vision of the social world from which it originated. This conception of history is ironic because it successfully unmasks the ideological implications of other concepts, not only pre-Marxian but also post-Marxian. This is particularly evident in *Das Kapital*, whose historical materialism introduces a new conceptual structure of

<sup>22</sup> White, Hayden (1975). *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP. See Chapter 8, 'Marx: The Philosophical Defense of History in the Metonymical Mode', pp. 281–331. For a worthy complement to White's theory, see, for example, the sociologically inspired chapters 'Rhetoric and Dialectic in Marxism', 'Marxism Considered as a Rhetorical Critique', and 'The Social Function of Irony', by an advocate of 'symbolic interactionism', H. D. Duncan, in Duncan, Hugh Dalziel (1962). *Communication and Social Order*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

<sup>23</sup> White (1975), *Metahistory*, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 277–8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

the ideas of classic economics. According to White this achieves, and ensures, a wide range of hypotheses with which first to adopt the ironic perspective, which was characteristic of historical consciousness at the end of the nineteenth century,<sup>27</sup> the so-called 'crisis of historicism'. This manifested itself in the absolute relativity of historical judgements, to which leads the logic of the subjective epistemology of leading proponents of neo-idealism like Wilhelm Dilthey and Benedetto Croce.

In terms of form (that is, pictorially), Eisenstein wanted to transfer Marx's ironic style to his own dialectical theory of montage, which would result in a close bond with the comic genre. But he does not understand irony solely as a function of a formalized poetical trope. Rather, he sees it as a political attitude, which has several polarizing variants, from paradox and burlesque to satire and cynical humour. In *The French Revolution: A History* (1837), Thomas Carlyle describes how people happily parted with the *ancien régime*. It was in this spirit that Eisenstein adopted Marx's metaphor for removing the veils and guilt from the aureole of the old society, and in his film of *Das Kapital* he intended to depict the importance of laughter, satire, and the pamphlet in the revolutionary process.<sup>28</sup> It is fair to see this also as an argument against the frequent labelling of Marxism an 'ideology of social hope', because that

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 40. According to Marcuse, since Marx in *Das Kapital* worked out his socio-economic theory using suitably personal means of expression, he managed to free himself from philosophy in the classic sense. With his historical materialism, Marx is the first to distinguish ideological function from philosophical illusion. He equated the removal of that illusion with the removal of the conditions that allow the production of such illusions. The 'disruption of philosophy', according to Marcuse, was not achieved by Marx except by means of a 'metaphilosophical' transformation to a form of dialectic theory of society, where 'all the philosophical concepts of Marx's theory are social and economical categories, while Hegel's social and economical categories are all philosophical concepts'. Marcuse, Herbert (1954). *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. New York: The Humanities Press, p. 258.

<sup>28</sup> Walter Benjamin demonstrates the importance of carnival and comedy as aspects of revolutionary laughter and humour. Terry Eagleton adjusts this view in a polemic with Jeffrey Mehlman. See Eagleton, Terry (1981). *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*. New York and London: Verso. Mehlman argues that Marx's rhetorical excesses overload the prerequisites of his thesis. Eagleton, considering the literary genre of 'dialectical analysis', objects to this, though he admits that in Marxism there are limits to the comic. Eagleton bases himself on Benjamin's argument that Marx's writings are 'symptomatically incoherent', full of 'semiotic disturbances'. Mainly, he shows that Marx's contradictory metaphors are the result of an unintentional linguistic loss of control, and together determine the masterful quality of his critical 'negation'. His well-known critique of ideology, for example, is an ironic critique of clichés and speech acts. With this critique all the fictions in the sphere of private ownership on which the idea of civil society is based are removed. Eagleton adds, this time with his own irony, that most contemporary Western post-Marxism has lost Marx's comic force.

ideology can be mediated also in a diametrically opposite genre, for example, melodrama.<sup>29</sup>

As we have noted, the initial idea for Eisenstein's innovative authorial approach to the genre is rooted in Marx's idea of circulation, the basic, most simple category of commodities. From the beginning this is analyzed as an abstract undeveloped form of capital, whose logical analysis overlaps with the theoretical reproduction of history, with the historical process in which the primitive modes of commodity production change into developed capitalist production.<sup>30</sup> Eisenstein wanted to capture this historical process of the circulation of commodities (from the point of view of the logical analysis of capital) by means of a visual montage in the new 'dialectical and ironic genre' of historical film. To help him to form a strong bond between genre and style he had at his disposal the works not only of Joyce but also of other writers. The principle of 'de-anecdotalization',<sup>31</sup> already used in *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1927), for example the ironic portrayal of Kerensky, was meant, in *Das Kapital*, to be a satire on the economical aspects of funerals, a criticism of the school system and the Church according to Henri Barbusse's short story 'L'Instituteur'; a derisive attack on the operation of the stock exchange based on Zola's *L'Argent*, where Eisenstein observed that the stock exchange had to be portrayed using hundreds of details in a genre different from that of Fritz Lang's *Doktor Mabuse, der Spieler* (1922), or Pudovkin's *The End of St Petersburg* (1927).<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the planned film would have included a whole series of ironical montage-like antitheses. For example, the factory from which the workers cannot take away metal objects without being checked, because the exit gate is magnetic (Marx allegedly read it somewhere), or the depiction of symbols of war as sweets that children eat, but which, when they drip from their mouths, dissolve the tablecloth.<sup>33</sup> We can only speculate whether

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>30</sup> Capital is understood by Marx not as a thing, but as 'a definite social relation of production pertaining to a particular historical social formation'. See Marx, Karl, & Engels, Frederick (1998). *Collected Works*, Vol. 37, *Capital*, Vol. III. London: Lawrence & Wishart, p. 801. For this reason Marx rebuked so-called classic bourgeois economics (particularly the economics of David Ricardo and Adam Smith) for not understanding that the commodity, the basic form of capital, is an historical form, seeing it instead as a natural form of social production. Consequently, according to Marx, logical development (also called conceptual or dialectic) comports with historical development – the historical is inherent in the logical. For a discussion of this see Richter, Gudrun (1985). *Gesetzmäßigkeiten und Geschichtsprozeß. Logisches und Historisches*. Berlin: Dietz.

<sup>31</sup> Ejenštejn (1986), 'Z nerealizovaných záměrů', p. 55.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 55–6.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 57–8.

Eisenstein's incorporating irony and comedy into the historical genre was not inspired by another process of circulation – namely, Hegelian dialectics, which, in the process of Spirit becoming self-conscious, sublates cultural utterances of the tragic and comic into a dialectical synthesis of humour.

In a similar way, Eisenstein situates the comic in the clash of shots resulting in a dialectical synthesis of irony, which, owing to its mocking of the fetishistic symbol of money, lays claim to revolutionarily ethical superiority. In connection with the film *Ten Days That Shook the World*, Eisenstein's notes on *Das Kapital* refer to the superiority of irony to pathos, something that the German Romantics had known. Eisenstein believed that to increase the pathos of the image it was necessary to make it fantastic and pompous. According to Eisenstein, however, the 'live history material' of *Ten Days* did not make this possible, so he prepared himself to compensate for it in *Das Kapital*, which would include the 'revision of the ideology of the unambiguous shot'.<sup>34</sup>

The historical genre is not history; it is not a subject for which one could give bad grades to pupils. This is true of almost all Eisenstein's films, which structurally modify the 'revolutionary' genre of historical films in different ways, though collectively they symptomatically adhere to the monumental epic style. In the planned film, *Das Kapital*, Eisenstein was forced to allegorize Marx's dialectics, since he concluded that only thus would it be possible to put the allegory of logical ideas firmly into the pictorial order of things. This metaphorical invention, however, reveals its own weaknesses, which are not immune to normatively defined principles. Despite the intended formally dialectical complexity (in principle defined by Eisenstein's theory of 'intellectual' film), Eisenstein, by excessive insistence on the criterion of class struggle, weakened his intention by situating it in the context of the genre of the agit-film. Like the film *The General Line* (1929), *Das Kapital* was meant to be an 'experiment comprehensible to millions', that is, an agit-film intended also 'to

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. In his notes, Eisenstein still does not know how 'the ideology of the unambiguous image' was to be revised in *Das Kapital*. Nevertheless, he suspected that some experimental work was needed. He therefore considered it necessary first to film *Glass House*, where the '(conventional) idea about the shot crystallizes while the other conditions are left untouched.' Ibid., p. 65. *Glass House*, which he had planned to shoot in collaboration with Sinclair Lewis while in America, was another of Eisenstein's unrealized projects. The film was meant to be a 'satire on bourgeois society', and was to be set in a house made of glass. The management of a Pittsburgh glassworks believed the design was technically possible. Two years before he died Eisenstein uttered unusually grave words, which can reasonably be considered his personal confession regarding this project: 'Each person – once in his lifetime – writes his mystery. Mine was *Glass House*. Likewise my cosmogony – Que Viva Mexico! – philosophical – Glasshaus-Scheme [sic]'. Klejman, Naum (1980). 'Skleněný dům S. M. Ejzenštejna. K historii záměru.' *Panorama*, No. 1, p. 83.

teach the workers to think in dialectical terms'.<sup>35</sup> This mixed-genre dialectical idea of a pictorial adaptation consequently suffers considerably from the fact that it was, intentionally or not, reoriented to the didactical social technique of sensibility, a way to express by emotional cinematic means the problems of the intellect in an ideologically appellative insistence on the political and emotional consciousness of the masses. One doubts that the masses would have understood Eisenstein's dialectical educational film. After all, Engels, Marx's Dr Watson, urged him to make a popular summary of *Das Kapital* in the spirit of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*, which would be comprehensible to a far wider readership.<sup>36</sup> Eisenstein was clearly aware of the potential pitfalls of its comprehensibility, because in his planned film of *Das Kapital* he thought it necessary to insert a story with individual characters. This was obviously a concession not only to Marx's method, but also to his own previous films with collective heroes.

According to the German art theorist, Hans Belting, the demise of a genre is when it contains only kitsch.<sup>37</sup> Bělohradský supports this view in the introduction to his article. He himself affirms that the Modernist beauty of *The Communist Manifesto* is hopelessly kitschy when Marx starts to propose naïve, dogmatic, inconsistent solutions.<sup>38</sup> Marx's *Das Kapital*, especially if read through the lens of the naïve leftwing ideology of the 1920s, is also undermined by elements similar to the ones that Bělohradský calls kitsch. The concessions Eisenstein made to his idea of dialectical method as a film genre could be interpreted on similar lines. On the other hand, without such utopian experiments as the dialectical adventure to film *Das Kapital*, the road to a conception of the 'intellectual film' would hardly have been possible.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Engels in a letter to Marx, 16 June 1867. Marx, Karl, & Engels, Frederick (1987). *Collected Works*, Vol. 42. London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 381–2. See also Marx, Karl, & Engels, Frederick (1983). *Letters on 'Capital'*. London: New Park. The opinion of one of Marx's critics is particularly well suited to Eisenstein's dialectical acrobatics in his notes to *Das Kapital*: 'dialectics is based on logical concepts, employed by dialectics, applied in obscure meanings, metaphorically'. See Weinberger, Ota (1991). 'Dialektika a filosofická analýza'. *Filosofický časopis*, 39 (2), p. 270.

<sup>37</sup> Belting, Hans (2000). *Konec dějin umění*. Prague: Mladá fronta, p. 76.

<sup>38</sup> Bělohradský (1998), 'Vše trvalé', p. 1.

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