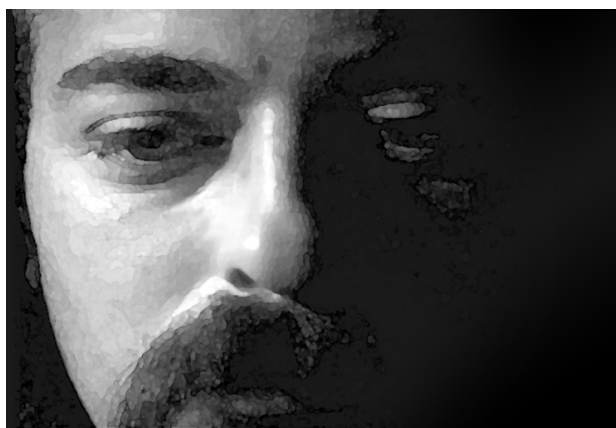


*Not a Tribute to Sergei*

Thoughts on the work of  
Sergei Eisenstein and  
corresponding 1982 video work by

Edward Boilini



## A Few Random Thoughts on: Not a Tribute to Sergei

In 1985, I wrote about early Russian film but that writing is dry and now unreadable to me. Someday I will edit and present that writing. For now, these notes specifically address the short piece Not a Tribute to Sergei.

The original work was created in 1982. I had the opportunity to remaster the work in 1998 and to reflect upon the my intentions for creating such a strange piece of video.

Many people in the film community understand the irony contained in Not a Tribute to Sergei. Indeed, when it was exhibited at The 6th Tokyo International Video Festival in Tokyo in 1983 no explanation was given. No doubt, at least at some level, the work can be considered an inside joke to those that have studied the history of cinema. However, since the work was on the World Wide Web for a time and during which time I received numerous comments and questions, I feel compelled to provide some context.

### Sergei Eisenstein

Sergei Eisenstein was a Russian film maker who was born in 1898 and died in 1948. His contributions to the development of expression through cinema are immeasurable. Many consider him to be the father of montage- an editing technique. His two published books, *The Film Form* and *The Film Sense*, explore his theories of montage. His most noted films are *Battleship Potemkin* and *Oktober*. Indeed, the Odessa steps sequence from *Potemkin* is one the most famous segments in the history of cinema and serves as a dynamic example of Eisenstein's theories of montage.

Eisenstein came of age as a civil engineer during the turbulent times of Bolshevik Revolution. He entered the Red Army and his father the White Guard. There is some evidence that he shot news-reel footage that served to educate and agitate the workers and

peasants. During the Civil War he gained insight into the power of cinema and art as a weapon.

By the end of the Civil War, revolution was everywhere, including the theater. After the Civil War he became a set designer and director for Meyerhold's Moscow Prolekult Theatre. He staged the play *Gas Masks* entirely in a gas factory. The ending of the play coincided with the arrival of the new shift coming to work. In the production of the play *Enough Simplicity in Every Wise Man* he incorporated film. He took many of the new approaches to theater along with extensive research in other fields, such as Renaissance Art, Japanese Kabuki, and ideograms and applied them to the development of his theories of montage.

One of the largest influences on the work of Eisenstein was his involvement with the State Film School. Here, he was exposed to the work of Lev Kuleshov. Specifically, the Kuleshov Experiments provided revelatory insight into the power of film editing. The examples that Kuleshov developed were simple dynamic illustrations of the new idea that the juxtaposition of imagery through editing could radically influence the perception of meaning by the audience. Kuleshov worked with a few separate simple shots and intercut them. The shots were silent, of course, because this was the well before the development of sound. The shots were: a close-up of a bowl of soup, a man's face devoid of all expression, a dead person in a coffin and a young girl playing with a doll. He edited several separate sequences of film. Each sequence was intercut with the emotionless face of a man with either a close-up of a bowl of soup or a dead person in a coffin or a young girl playing with a doll. He showed the edited segments of film to various audiences and asked them what they had seen. Consistently, they reported, (depending on the sequence shown) that the man was about to eat a bowl of soup, or the man was at a funeral, or the man was watching a child at play. This was a revelation and a most startling discovery. The meaning that the audience imposed on the segments was dependent on the editing. In other words, the viewer's response was not elicited not from the content of the shots but the

manner of the juxtaposition of the shots. Equally important were the responses of the audience that described the actor's abilities, even though the very same shot of the actor's face was used for all segments. The man was described as hungry or happy while watching a child at play or sad because he was at a funeral.

Vladimir Lenin understood the power of cinema to develop propaganda. Most of the Soviet filmmakers of this era were engaged in the cause to advance the revolution. As Stalin came to power he gained complete control over the Soviet film industry and Eisenstein was often at odds with the Soviet bureaucracy. He was ordered by Stalin to go abroad to research the new sound technology for film. His reception in the Europe and the U. S. was anything but expected. He was honored as both a radical and innovator in cinema. He lectured at universities and was invited to Hollywood. He mixed with notable intelligentsia of the times, such as Joyce, Cocteau, Martinetti and Stein. He became close friends with Charlie Chaplin. In 1930, with the support of Robert Flaherty, Diego Rivera and Upton Sinclair, he began a film about Mexico. Just as he was about to begin editing the work, Stalin derailed the production and ordered him back to Russia.

After three years abroad, he returned home to find both his work and theories the target of vicious ideological attacks. He suffered a breakdown and it was years until he was allowed to make another film. The first film he chose to make, *Bezhin Meadow*, was banned. In 1938, he was commissioned to create *Alexander Nevsky*. This film was about Russian success in the 13th century against German invaders. It was a veiled response to the growing German threat of the times. As testimony to Eisenstein's abilities, the marriage of the Prokofiev score to the visual elements are extraordinary given this was one his first efforts to produce motion pictures with synchronized sound.

*Alexander Nevsky* was a huge success and served to reinvigorate Eisenstein's standing and allowed him to continue to work throughout the period of the Moscow Trials. During this time, Sta-

lin systematically eliminated many of the people that had advanced the revolution of the arts in Russia. Eisenstein international repute most certainly contributed to his survival. Many of his colleagues died at the hands of the state, including Meyerhold, who had been a mentor in his early days in theater.

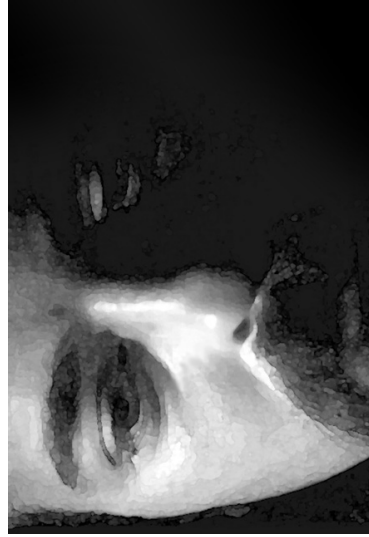
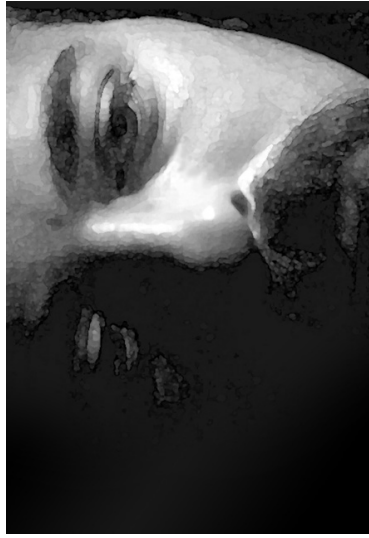
In 1941, Eisenstein began work on the monumental production of Ivan the Terrible. It was envisioned as a three part historical piece that addressed the Russian Czar of the 16th century that unified the nation. Released in 1945, Ivan the Terrible-Part One, was a triumph and reached the highest acclaim. For Part Two, Eisenstein courted disaster, for it amounted to an indictment of Stalin. Ivan the Terrible-Part Two, was banned and Stalin ordered that it be completely revised. Sergei Eisenstein died in 1948 without having completed the task of revision.

To some, Eisenstein is a tragic figure whose artist vision suffered at the hands of the state. To others, his advancement of Marxism have indelibly colored his work. I believe the truth is not so clear cut. From the Bolshevik Revolution to the psychopathic dictatorship of Stalin, the arc of his career is inextricably intertwined with the most turbulent period of Russian history. The body of his work not only serves to reflect the Russian Revolution but also serves as an example of the revolution in the arts that took place in Russia during the early days of the Revolution. Without question, his writing, theories and film production influenced the evolution of cinema around the globe.

Why is the piece titled NOT A Tribute To Sergei?

I had engaged a fellow artist, Mike Helbing, to play the one and only role. We had been up late the night before and the third floor studio of Wendy Richie where we had decided to shoot was already, to say the least, hot. While I set up the equipment, Helbing played with the sound of a spoon striking the soup bowl that he had created. The studio was located very close to the bell tower of the church next door. Since I was considering the use of sound within

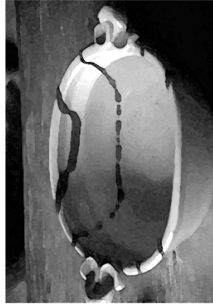
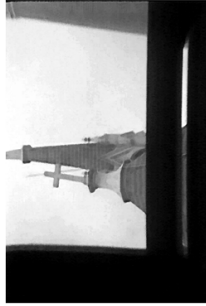
*Not a Tribute to Sergei*



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the piece, I knew at once that I would use both the sound of the spoon on the ceramic bowl and church bell.

In this version of Not a Tribute to Sergei, I had the opportunity to develop the soundtrack. The first part had to be silent. At the end, I distorted some of the sounds heard earlier in the piece. I made an effort to have one of the sounds evolve into that of a lion. At least, I hope you can hear a lion similar to that of the vintage opening of MGM movies.

From the outset, I intended to parody the Kuleshov Effect. It is important to note that the content and shot structure of my work Not a Tribute to Sergei, mimic Kuleshov's most famous experiment rather than anything created by Sergei Eisenstein. For me, the Kuleshov Effect is single most important discovery in cinema. So, ultimately, this is not a tribute to Sergei Eisenstein but to Lev Kuleshov.

I had not read of Kuleshov until long after my initial exposure to Eisenstein. Much of the vintage literature that I read in the 1970's suffered from the hysterical anti-communist sentiment of the times. The groundbreaking work of revolutionary Russian film makers were begrudgingly given credit and often lumped together under the heading Eisenstein or Montage. A not too dissimilar situation existed for the history and development of television. It was entirely possible to read about the history of TV without running across the name Vladimir Zworykin.

In the earliest version of Not a Tribute to Sergei, I intentionally misspelled the name Sergei. As if, in some paranoid fit, someone might think that I was paying homage to a communist. In fact, for the time it was on the internet, many of the comments that I received pointed out what appeared to be a mistake. No one understood this joke, so I changed it.

In Kuleshov's original, the man remains motionless and devoid of emotion. In Not a Tribute to Sergei, he throws down his spoon



and moves away quickly. He goes out of focus simultaneously. He could be mad, angry or disgusted. It could be Eisenstein or Kuleshov reacting to what has evolved into 'the vast wasteland'. Or maybe he is just disturbed that his soup is cold.

In this most recent version of Not a Tribute to Sergei, I was able to turn the man as he throws down his spoon and goes out of focus into a ghost like figure. Most people are not familiar with words, "Kuleshov Effect" or montage, yet we are all manipulated by imagery. The new digital technologies have greatly expanded opportunities for communication but some of the fundamental principles outlined by Kuleshov and Eisenstien remain the same.

Edward Boilini  
2000



## Edward Boilini Selected Exhibitions

- ***Awakenings*** 25th Annual Juried Show, Pleiades Gallery 530 West 25th NYC, 2007
- ***Excevcutioner's Face*** Computer/Digital Video, CAM Biennial Juried Shorts, Creative Alliance, Baltimore 2005, Installation at Bodner Studios- Art for Political Change Show 2004, Klaas Vert Mem Show, Amsterdam 2005
- ***Shades of Sam*** projected animation and video elements for five short plays by Samuel Beckett, in collaboration with Butler University Theatre 2004
- ***The Dunes Project*** designed and created video elements in collaboration with Susurrus and Butler University Theater 2003
- ***Awakenings Project*** created imagery for projection in collaboration with Southold Dance Theatre, O'Laughlin Auditorium, Saint Mary's University, 2001
- ***Studies in 3 Dimensional Computer Animation*** 1994 Computer/Digital Video Individual Artist Fellowship Exhibition Indiana Government Center Rotunda
- ***MythoMorphosis*** 1993 Collaboration with Edward Kelly, Digital Video Faculty Show; Herron Gallery, Indianapolis
- ***Ballo Futuro*** 1992 Digital Video Best of Special Effects Category QuickTime Festival, San Francisco; 12th American Film Institute National Video Festival, Los Angeles
- ***There Is No Way to Where We Are*** 1990 Video/Computer/Film Producer/director/animator. Lucca 90 International Festival of Animation, Lucca, Italy; 1990 Fifth Australian International Video Festival; New Angle International Video Festival, New York; Dallas Video Festival, Dallas, Texas; European Media Arts Festival Osnabruck, Germany; Brave New Pixels, Siggraph at N.I U. Gallery, Chicago; Quick-Time Festival, ComputerMuseum, Boston; Indiana Film Society Video Festival,
- ***The Planets*** 1990 Projected images for collaboration with Butler Ballet, Clowes Memorial Hall, Indianapolis
- ***This Peace is War*** 1992 Video/Computer/Film Indiana Film Society Video Festival, Indianapolis, Indiana, Where My Family Stops, South Bend Art Center; WTBV-TV 69, and broadcast as part of Reel Time series on PBS stations throughout Indiana.
- ***Motion Language Assembly- Impressions of the 10th Pan American Games*** Video/Computer/Film, Producer/director 1988, 4th International Festival of Video and TV, Montbeliard, France; III Festival Internacional De Cine Deportivo, Jaca, Spain 1990; 1991 Zinekirolak II Festival Internacional De Cine Y Deporte, Bilbao, Spain; 13th Rassegna Di Palermo International SportsFilm Festival, Palermo Italy. PAXI 7 Exhibition, Herron Gallery, WFYI-Indianapolis, Indiana Film Society Video Festival and broadcast as part of Reel Time
- ***Dromos Indiana*** 40 monitor-3 channel Fransec Torres video installation, Director of Production, 1988/89, three-month exhibition at Indiana State Museum
- ***Motion Language Assembly "C"*** Video/Computer/Film, Producer/Director, Indiana Experience Theatre, Indianapolis Indiana
- ***(Have You) Ever Been...?*** Video/Computer, Producer/director 1986, 10th International Festival of 8mm Film and Video, Brussels, Belgium; Indianapolis Academy of Arts, Indianapolis; BlackBox Theatre, Bloomington Indiana

