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Eisenstein in America: The *Qué Viva México!* Debates and the Emergent Popular Front in U.S. Film Theory and Criticism

In the early 1930s a group of American film critics banked their hopes on the mass distribution of Sergei Eisenstein's *Qué Viva México!* within the United States to prove once and for all that modernism was not the sole province of cultural elites but could serve both political and aesthetic revolutionary ends for mainstream audiences. The film's use of radical montage to expose the relations between the political and the personal, the individual and his or her socioeconomic context served as a corrective to many Hollywood films' conservative ideology that reified individuals' relations to one another and their surroundings. Yet as these critics attempted to release Eisenstein's film, they became increasingly aware of Hollywood's stranglehold on all channels of mass distribution, which demanded that Eisenstein's film be reedited in a style that was more in accord with the forms of classical Hollywood cinema. Wide debates arose in the critical community about issues of mass distribution in America, the ability of montage to address both social issues and character psychology, and the need for film to either shock audiences into intellectual engagement or rely on emotional identification with characters in order to prevent complete alienation between spectator and film. By examining the influence of Eisenstein's theoretical articles upon leftist film critics and these critics' failed attempts to mass distribute *Qué Viva México!* we observe how their debates on politics, film form, and mass culture indicated a gradual shift from a radical stance on film that critiqued most Hollywood conventions to an emergent Popular Front attitude that realized the need to adopt some commercial styles within leftist films in order to gain accessibility to the mass audiences that Hollywood carefully guarded.

Not only was Eisenstein a prolific writer, but American critics of the period felt that much of his theory and film work represented the most advanced stage of leftist cultural work on and in film. The avant-garde journal *Close Up* published nine translations of Eisenstein essays between 1929 and 1933. The radical film journal *Experimental Cinema*, which only ran for five issues, published fifteen articles by or about Eisenstein from 1930 to 1934. The debates concerning his uncompleted film *Qué Viva México!*—perhaps the most written about film of the 1930s—forced leftist film critics like William Troy, Pare Lorentz, Leo Hurwitz, and Ralph Steiner to revise their beliefs that they could simply ignore Hollywood and its practices in order to promote an alternative independent and avant-garde cinema.[1] As a result of *Qué Viva México!*'s troubled production, most American leftist film critics began to abandon their defense of a radical film aesthetics and politics for a more accommodating and liberal film theory that examined both how Hollywood could be influenced in politically progressive directions and how commercial film approaches could be used within independent films in order to reach larger audiences.[2] By considering Eisenstein's importance to such debates, we can begin to see both the theoretical sophistication and blind spots of American leftist film theorists and critics of the late 1920s and early 1930s.[3]

By the early 1930s Eisenstein had significantly revised his filmic strategy of the early 1920s, which focused on portraying the masses as hero and forsaking any concern with character psychology. By 1929 he had gradually become more interested in the individual's relation to the masses, as seen in *The General Line*'s focus upon a peasant woman's struggle to form a cooperative

in her village. Furthermore, his experience reading James Joyce's *Ulysses* in early 1928 encouraged Eisenstein to contemplate using Joyce's notion of internal monologue within a Marxist cinema. By the time of his six-month stay at Paramount studios in the summer of 1930, Eisenstein finally had the opportunity to create a project that used internal monologue to develop character psychology while still situating individuals within broader socioeconomic contexts. His scenario for Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* provided a model for American leftist film critics on how to combine a political and experimental style within a conservative Hollywood filmic structure that emphasized linear narrative and individualized characterizations. Eisenstein used internal monologue to represent how the psychological state of his protagonist, Clyde Griffiths, was shaped by his surrounding culture in order to address how ideology affects the very structure of one's personality.

According to Eisenstein in a June 1933 article published in *Close Up*, film was the ideal medium to present internal monologue because of its visual and aural nature, "for only the sound film is capable of reconstructing all the phases and the specific essence of the process of thought" ("An American Tragedy" 121). In *An American Tragedy* Eisenstein was to use highly experimental forms to represent Griffiths's psychological state within a typical classical Hollywood narrative. By linking Joyce's internal monologue with a sociological theme, Eisenstein felt that the scenario "gathers greater psychological and tragic depth" ("An American Tragedy" 116), since it exposed the link between personal psychology and the social forces that push a character to a predestined position of failure. Unlike most Hollywood films, which emphasized the individual's separation from and triumph over his or her social surroundings, *An American Tragedy* was to show how the individual emerged from the social and the social from the individual.

Eisenstein's desire to fuse character psychology with social analysis served as a corrective to his earlier montage beliefs, which often resulted in objectifying individuals for the sake of representing collective action. As we will see later, Eisenstein's use of internal monologue anticipated some of the objections made by American film critics like Leo Hurwitz and Ralph Steiner to a depersonalized montage that objectified individuals in ways similar to those by which the forces of capitalism reified both laborer and consumer. This issue of the representations of individuals within the cinema becomes increasingly important as the decade progresses, since it signifies leftist critics' theoretical shift from a radical stance on montage that only sees characters as products of socioeconomic forces toward a greater concern with character psychology and classical Hollywood forms.

Even before Eisenstein published his own account of his experiences with *An American Tragedy* in 1933, a few leftist film critics noted in their columns the importance of Eisenstein's work in Hollywood, since it not only suggested the ways in which a Hollywood film could address the relationship between the psychological and social, but it also indicated Eisenstein's developing ability to address in his own works the individual's relation to social forces. American leftist film theorist Harry Alan Potamkin had often critiqued Eisenstein in the past for ignoring character psychology in his films. In an article for *Experimental Cinema* in 1930, Potamkin astutely claimed, "He [Eisenstein] does not penetrate the individual and there is a question in my mind whether he has penetrated the social inference contained in the mass-expression," which must take into account its effects on individuals' psyches ("Film Problems" 312). But in his December 1931 article for *Close Up*, "Novel into Film: A Case Study of Current Practice," Potamkin stated that Eisenstein's script work on *An American Tragedy* represented the first time Eisenstein revealed an ability to make both personal and political elements contribute to "the total structure of the film" (195). For Potamkin, internal monologue allowed Clyde to function dialectically between the sociological and psychological. Since this technique broke down the barriers between Clyde's surrounding social context and his subjective thoughts and feelings, viewers would experience the inextricable links between the political and personal. As a result, the Eisenstein script for *An American Tragedy* proved a pivotal text for American leftist film critics like Hurwitz and Steiner, who believed that montage must take into account character psychology if it is to remain a viable film style within mainstream cinema. The script for *An American Tragedy* represented the most explicit attempt by a leftist director to reconcile the political and experimental with the demands of a conservative Hollywood system that foregrounded conventional narrative and individual character psychology. Although the film was never shot, it provided a useful model for critics, as its script suggested what could be attempted in

Hollywood, encouraging them to demand that such projects actually get made.

But it was Eisenstein's next venture, *Qué Viva México!*, that truly excited American leftist film critics. Unlike *An American Tragedy*, which was rejected by Paramount in part because of its radical indictment of the American political and judicial system, the American-funded independent project seemed guaranteed to be completed because of its freedom from studio control. Most critics felt that Eisenstein could use the techniques he developed in his *An American Tragedy* script in this project. In a February 1931 issue of *Experimental Cinema* Seymour Stern wrote, "The picture that Eisenstein brings with him from Mexico will no doubt make history enough for our Hollywood-ridden Western hemisphere" ("Eisenstein in Mexico" 22), since the completed film would expose the genius Hollywood denied. Adolfo Best-Maugard wrote in *Theatre Arts Monthly* in 1932, "Modern cinema is *Viva Mexico!*, a new achievement of a new technique, a more amazing technique than that of *Potemkin*, perhaps most adequately described, I should say, as 'symphonic cinema'" (926–27). In part, such optimism on the part of leftist critics made them react so vehemently when everything about Eisenstein's "Mexican film" went wrong.

Unfortunately, Eisenstein never completed *Qué Viva México!* due to multiple factors: his political and aesthetic disagreements with Upton Sinclair (a key financial backer of the film) over the film's composition; the difficulty of gaining mass distribution for the film; and Stalin's demand that Eisenstein stop filming and immediately return home before being deemed a deserter to the Soviet Republic.[4] Eisenstein had only shot five out of the six episodes of *Qué Viva México!*, all of which he eventually shipped to Upton Sinclair. Despite Eisenstein's subsequent pleas to gain access to the footage in order to edit it, Sinclair refused, believing that Eisenstein might try to smuggle this footage abroad, never to be seen again. Instead, Sinclair hired Hollywood producer Sol Lesser to take Eisenstein's raw footage and condense it down to an hour and a half, resulting in the commercial film known as *Thunder over Mexico*.

Before the widespread release of *Thunder over Mexico* in September 1933, leftist film critics mounted one of the most organized campaigns against it and for *Qué Viva México!* For these leftists, the two main issues at stake were the following: (1) *Qué Viva México!* represented the potential to mass-distribute a radical film in America for the first time ever and thus to challenge the hegemonic hold Hollywood had upon theaters and audiences; and (2) *Qué Viva México!* demonstrated montage's superiority to the Hollywood cutting found in *Thunder over Mexico*. These two issues help illustrate a conflicting tendency within 1930s leftist film criticism on *Qué Viva México!*: while arguing for montage's superiority over Hollywood cutting as a means to reenvision the multiple relations between social and political processes, these critics grew more aware that they nonetheless had to work within a studio system that denied the radical merits of montage if they ever wanted progressive films to be widely distributed in America. Furthermore, as we will see, *Qué Viva México!* both held a radical critique of bourgeois institutions and recognized the need to work within them in order to realign their structures for the benefit of progressive political goals. *Qué Viva México!* and Eisenstein's later films and theories, in other words, emphasized the need for a more inclusive aesthetics that incorporated both classical cinematic styles like character development into more nuanced uses of "leftist" film techniques like montage within the shot than most American leftist film critics could recognize at the time as they defended the radical structure of *Qué Viva México!*

Montage served as a central term that structured the debates of emerging leftist film theory in the late 1920s, since it was a pliable concept that could be used to analyze Soviet, commercial, avant-garde, and independent cinema. It was also of central importance to the debates over *Qué Viva México!* Leftist film critics feared that Hollywood (continuity) editing of *Thunder over Mexico* would emphasize one-dimensional characters, melodramatic event, and visual eye candy over *Qué Viva México!*'s social content and themes. In the February 1933 issue of *Experimental Cinema*, Seymour Stern, who had once been a production assistant for Universal, wrote an article entitled "Hollywood and Montage." Using his insider knowledge of studio practices, Stern mapped out how the two practices of editing differed and what was at stake in those differences. Hollywood relied not only on the formulaic application of technical "tricks" such as wiping and the dissolve, which often took little or no account of the film's content, but also on spectacular mise-en-scène within a "realist" narrative in order to give audiences a familiar filmic structure that simplified content by making it both pleasing and "natural" to the

eye. Backgrounds must be scenic. Close-ups should highlight the actors' features. Above all else, strict continuity dictated that the narrative follow a progression that seemed to represent everyday temporal and spatial relations. So although the content of the film was often spectacularized for the audience through the mise-en-scène, the narrative flow of events was based upon a too rigid notion of "realism" that failed to acknowledge Stern's main contention that film "has its own reality. And the film has this autonomous filmic reality to the extent it departs from the norm of actual reality" ("Hollywood and Montage" 49).

On the other hand, montage, for Stern, acknowledged film's own intrinsic "reality" to disregard causal temporal links and spatial continuities for the sake of creating associational links between content. Despite Soviet directors' various theories of montage, Stern indicated that they all believed montage provided the central organizing principle for the film as a whole. They asserted the relation of content to film style by exploring how each shot was connected to another to reinforce the film's central theme or themes. As Stern observed: "[The Soviets] regarded the cutting-process rather as an *assembling-process*, and the division of the master scenes into long shots, close-ups, etc. not really as a division, but as a *geometric building-up* and unification of vital elements inherent in the scene" ("Hollywood and Montage" 52). Montage, as a result, challenged audience members' perceptions and thoughts not only by presenting radical content but by presenting it in a new way that suggested the limits and constructed nature of "realism" and the ability of individuals to alter it. Stern cited the opening sequence of *Katorga* (1928) by Yuli Raizman as an example that illustrates montage's radical re-visioning of "reality": "This *summation* montage . . . consists of elements (prisons, churches, facades, religious symbols, etc.) which have no geographical connection with each other or with the action projected, but which are co-ordinated as essential elements in the *explicit* symbol-relationship formulating the association of church and prison" ("Hollywood and Montage" 51).

Stern illustrated the two different approaches to film construction by showing how Hollywood defined "excess footage" as any shot that was not related directly to character or the film's narrative action ("Hollywood and Montage" 49). But footage that was "excess" to Hollywood was necessary for Soviet montage, since it was needed to create subtle associational links (as exemplified in the opening of *Katorga*) that built up the film's complex dynamic, which challenged spectators' naturalistic way of viewing the world.

Stern's explanation of the function of montage was only one of many that critics offered during the late 1920s and early 1930s, but the central agreement in all criticism was that montage not only acknowledged the necessary links between form and content but also exposed how the medium of film was important in restructuring spectators' conceptions of the world. American critics' observations that montage could counter classical Hollywood cinema and challenge spectators' perceptions resonated with similar positions held by other contemporaneous international cultural critics like Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, who wrote about montage in their respective articles, "Film 1928" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In all these critics' accounts, montage's ability to alter spectators' perceptions allowed them to observe the socioeconomic processes that comprised their surrounding contexts and to recognize their ability to alter them for the better. Regardless of the different montage styles advocated by leftist critics, they all revealed the inextricable links between the aesthetic and political mission of radical film. As leftist film critic and producer Tom Brandon states in his unpublished manuscript on the 1930s leftist film movement: "Form and content were inseparable. For all their concern with technique and the need to innovate, to improve, to bring film nearer to the ideal of what the medium of our time ought to be, they never lost sight of the place of film in society, its role as a force for reform and revolution—film was to be a weapon in changing the world" (Manuscript 29).

But despite Stern's and other leftist film critics' organized campaign for montage as the organizing principle of *Qué Viva México!*, the producers of the film were unmoved. Eisenstein never regained control of the film. When initially released, *Thunder over Mexico* suffered from many of the structural problems leftist critics expected. In a manifesto defending the integrity of *Qué Viva México!* the editors of *Experimental Cinema* asserted that *Thunder over Mexico*'s formulaic structure reduced the complexity Eisenstein intended for *Qué Viva México!* into "a single unconnected romantic story which the backers of the picture are offering to please popular taste" (*Experimental Cinema* Editors 14).

Although *Qué Viva México!* was supposed to be comprised of six episodes, each chronicling a different historical epoch of Mexico, *Thunder over Mexico* mainly focuses on only one of the episodes, "Maguey," which takes place during prerevolutionary Mexico under the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. It depicts the oppression of a peasant, Sebastian, his wife, María, and their friends under the hacienda system. Porfiriato tradition dictated that after a couple was married the wife must be exhibited to the hacendado. As the hacienda's guards detain Sebastian, María is displayed before the hacendado, raped by one of his drunken men, and then imprisoned. Sebastian and his three friends attempt to free María by burning the hacienda down but are soon forced to flee by the hacendado's armed men. Pursued through the desert, the peasants are apprehended, buried in the sand up to their necks, and stamped to death by horses. María is freed and finds her beloved's disfigured body.

Describing *Thunder over Mexico* as a "romantic story" might seem like a strange description. A peon's bride is raped, and her avenging husband suffers a gruesome death. There is no vindication of justice as Hollywood would have: the rapist goes unpunished. There is no "happily ever after" for the couple. But if one considers "romantic story" to apply more to the stylistic conventions than the plot of *Thunder over Mexico*, one gains a sense of leftists' critique of the film for not using a radical montage structure. As previously mentioned, *Qué Viva México!* was supposed to be comprised of six episodes, each dealing with a different historic epoch of Mexican history. In particular, its fourth and fifth episodes, "Maguey" and "Soldadera," were concerned with the Mexican peasants' growing revolutionary consciousness and the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz's capitalist regime. Eisenstein intended "Maguey" to address the exploitation of the peons by the hacendados during the time of the Porfiriato (1876–1909). "Soldadera" takes place during the Revolution of 1910–11. Through its use of associational montage within and between all of its episodes, *Qué Viva México!* was to show how revolution depends upon the collective will of the people to join forces and transcend the constraining patriarchal, capitalist ideologies of modern Mexico. The individual, although an important factor for revolution, must unite himself or herself with collective action for any significant structural change to take place. But by isolating "Maguey" from the other five episodes, *Thunder over Mexico* individuates and dehistoricizes the entire Mexican Revolution, making it seem the result of personal grievances between individuals: an upper-class rapist, a peon, and his wife.

As a result of *Thunder over Mexico*'s conservative structure, leftist film critics were unconvinced of its supposed revolutionary impulse. Both Tom Brandon and Sam Brody could not believe that—as presented in *Thunder over Mexico*—María's rape would somehow lead to a revolution. They claimed, "This brand of cheap 'play,' unfit for a Coney Island sideshow, is palmed off on American movie audiences as the work of Eisenstein, creator of *Potemkin*!" (28). Because of the absence of associational montage, most of the political symbolism of the episode is lost—symbolism that exposed the rape of María and the death of Sebastian as representative of a larger oppression of the lower classes that pervades Mexico as a whole. *Thunder over Mexico* mainly operates at the level of individuals and contrived cause-effect constructions as a tale of horror inflicted upon a peon couple by some individual "bad apples" among the ruling class. And, as film critic William Troy wrote in the *Nation* in 1933, "what little of the celebrated Eisenstein symbolism [that] is retained appears totally disjointed and meaningless" ("The Eisenstein Muddle" 84). Because of such fragmented symbolism, *Thunder over Mexico* was for many critics like a Hollywood film that borrowed the worst aspects of abstract cinema in order to prioritize aesthetic beauty over thematic coherence. The Revolution is made more of a pictorial pageant than addressed as an event that resulted in a change in sociopolitical consciousness.

Yet more mainstream liberal film critics like William Troy of the *Nation* and Pare Lorentz of *Vanity Fair* did not find Brandon and Brody's argument entirely convincing, since it overlooked Eisenstein's own habit of creating disjointed symbolism within his earlier films like *October* (1927), over which he supposedly had full editing control.[5] As a result, Troy and Lorentz blamed Eisenstein himself rather than Sol Lesser for *Thunder over Mexico*'s fragmented symbolism and reliance upon abstraction. They believed that such abstraction was an inherent tendency found within all of Eisenstein's films. Most interestingly, these critics supported their charges against Eisenstein by citing more radical film critics' earlier critiques against Eisenstein's reliance upon abstraction. William Troy's October 4, 1933, article, "Selections from Eisenstein," is particularly interesting in

the way it reworked the charge made by radical critic Harry Alan Potamkin that Eisenstein's films were often abstract formalistic filmic exercises. Troy deployed Potamkin's argument found in his article "Eisenstein and the Theory of Cinema" from *Hound and Horn* in 1933. In this article Potamkin claimed that because Eisenstein had overdogmatized his belief in montage as conflict in his earlier writings, he overlooked aspects of film besides editing, like "the human actor as the material of experience" ("Eisenstein" 440). For Potamkin, the dialectical processes of film concern issues of both content and form, "and to eliminate the former is to go abstract, as Eisenstein most often does" ("Eisenstein" 440). However, instead of reinforcing Potamkin's belief that Eisenstein's past themes and films were only hampered by an overly reductive conception of montage, Troy posed the problem in more auteurist terms: Eisenstein's vision versus that of a universal social theme. Although Troy believed that Eisenstein's social commitment was genuine, he noted that "Eisenstein's technical virtuosity is so great that he does not always resist the impulse to play with pictorial effects that have nothing very definite to do with his theme or with anything else" ("Selections" 392). As a result, Eisenstein's films often turned completely abstract because of his unbridled enthusiasm for technical virtuosity. Troy concluded his article with the troubling question, "Is it possible that even Marxism will not save us for long from the perilous attractions of absolute art?" ("Selections" 392).

Troy's disconcerting conclusion completely detached Eisenstein's abstract tendencies from their historical and political context. Potamkin, in his article, took pains to locate Eisenstein's concept of montage as conflict within the debates he had with other Soviet filmmakers like Vsevolod Pudovkin and Dziga Vertov in the 1920s. In order to distance himself from their theories, Eisenstein had taken an extreme approach that saw montage as based on conflict. But as these debates grew less strident, Eisenstein was better able to assess his own theories of montage in relation to other Soviet directors rather than against them. As a result, Potamkin believed that Eisenstein came to a better understanding of the relations between the human subject and montage in his later theoretical writings ("Eisenstein" 444). But Troy's article instead highlighted Eisenstein's individualistic artistic qualities, implying that they were an essential aspect of Eisenstein's creative personality rather than results of specific aesthetic and historical contexts. Troy assumed that Eisenstein's individual artistic vision was hopelessly at odds with his ideological beliefs and that this could be seen in *Thunder over Mexico* despite Eisenstein not actually editing the film. Unlike Potamkin, who saw Eisenstein learning from his ongoing experiences with Soviet and capitalist cinema, Troy naturalized Eisenstein's artistic vision as always in conflict with Marxist politics, since Troy could only envision the individual opposed to his or her social context rather than a product of it.

Troy's appropriation of Potamkin's earlier radical critique of Eisenstein to support his point opened up the possibility that the aesthetic and political problems with *Thunder over Mexico* might have been due at least in part to Eisenstein's own long-standing formalistic tendencies. Defenders of Eisenstein's original intentions for *Qué Viva México!*, therefore, emphasized its thematic coherence. They argued that the film's thematic unity would have organized such seemingly abstract elements into a cohesive structure. As we will see, those critics who defended *Qué Viva México!*'s thematic unity could not really effectively bolster their argument since their own understanding of the film was based on limited materials: random out-takes, a censored film script, and hearsay about the making of the film and Eisenstein's intentions for it. Because of an increasingly available amount of recent information on the film and greater accessibility to various prints of the film, a contemporary film theorist can more accurately assess *Qué Viva México!*'s ability to unify the seemingly fragmented, abstract elements of *Thunder over Mexico* within its themes—but the matter was far from clear in the 1930s.[6]

Although I do not have the necessary space to address most of the themes 1930s American leftist film critics addressed as being at work within *Qué Viva México!*, I want to allot some space to their focus on religion as an organizing strand within the film. By juxtaposing the critics' analysis with my own close readings of the film's religious themes, we will begin to see how *Qué Viva México!* offered a much more complex account of religion than most critics were able to identify. In particular, *Qué Viva México!*, despite its radical critique of religion, held a much more accommodating view toward religion than most early 1930s American leftist critics were able to notice. The film represents an emergent, politically moderate stance toward some bourgeois

institutions that most American leftist film critics did not similarly hold. In many ways, *Qué Viva México!*'s stance toward religion anticipates a political paradigm shift that will occur in the mid-1930s by many American leftist film critics who eventually adopted a more accommodating Popular Front attitude toward bourgeois institutions like Hollywood in place of their earlier radical rejection of all bourgeois ideology and institutions.

Most leftist critics highlighted in their articles *Qué Viva México!*'s critique of religion. In an October 1933 article written for the *Modern Monthly* Seymour Stern emphasized the way in which religion was linked to death throughout the out-takes of *Qué Viva México!* His article chronicled the countless ways in which religion was represented in the film as a life-denying force that subjugated the lower class to the oppression of the priests (529).

Stern's lack of concern with the positive aspects of religion in the film can partially be explained by his assumption that Soviet citizen Eisenstein was an antireligious director, as exhibited in Eisenstein's earlier films: *Battleship Potemkin*'s critique of the conservatism behind the priest who attempts to prevent a mutiny and *October*'s god sequence, which exposes the "primitive" and mystical origins of religion that oppose a revolutionary ideology. But, more importantly, Stern was one of many leftist film critics who were concerned with critiquing those bourgeois institutions that mainstream critics often celebrated no matter what the film or who the director. As radical filmmaker and critic Tom Brandon recounts in a 1974 interview, the function of leftist film criticism during the 1930s must always be read "against a backdrop that showed so much emphasis on the other side of all great qualities, all acceptance [of bourgeois institutions]; . . . and a good deal of left criticism was an attempt to bring into the forefront those aspects that were not being dealt with by other [bourgeois] criticism" ("Interview" 21–22). Stern's emphasis on the negative elements of religion was a part of this political agenda of leftist film analysis. Whether Stern couldn't see the film's positive representations of religion or whether he simply chose to ignore them remains unclear.

To take one example, on first viewing the "Fiesta" episode of *Qué Viva México!* certainly does seem to link religion with the oppression and death caused by the Spanish conquest. The episode concerns the festival of the Virgin of Guadalupe, during which the Catholic Church subjugates Aztec and Mayan cultures. The episode's critique of Catholicism is heightened by the way in which ritual functions throughout it as well as throughout the film. Although Eisenstein never mentions the importance of ritual in any of his articles, *Qué Viva México!* clearly shows that he valued ritual, since it provided a way for him to move easily from the literal to the abstract, a technique he endorsed in his theories of montage. One can observe Eisenstein's concern with the abstract and literal elements of cinema in his 1929 article "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," in which he theorized about the similarities between the operations of Japanese language and filmic montage. Just as two hieroglyphs taken separately have literal, distinct meanings but when combined produce a concept that transcends the literal meaning of each one, montage provides a dialectical conflict between a film's individual shots to create abstract associational concepts that transcend the literal aspects of each shot. As Eisenstein noted, "Each [hieroglyph or shot], separately, corresponds to an *object*, to a fact, but their combination corresponds to a *concept*" ("The Cinematographic Principle" 128). He elaborated even more explicitly the ramifications of montage's dialectic abilities in his article "Perspectives" from the same year:

> To restore to the intellectual process its fire and passion.
>
> To plunge the abstract reflective process into the fervor of practical action.
>
> To give back to emasculated theoretical *formulas* the rich exuberance of life-felt *forms*. (44)

Similarly, ritual, for Eisenstein, simultaneously operates on both immanent and abstract planes and allows him to highlight either or both of its tendencies whenever necessary.

For example, throughout "Fiesta," we see three men who represent Christ and the two thieves carrying their crosses to their own crucifixions. These men are naked from the waist up and have saguaro trunks lashed to their outstretched arms and their backs. One shot is particularly revealing. It shows how the symbolic image of the Trinity accentuates the literal oppression of the peons by Catholicism. In a medium shot one of the men walks away from the foreground. In the background stands a large, white church. The shot is backlit by the

sun so that the man's body is shadowed. Yet as the man walks away from the foreground, the distant church's central doorway becomes visible—dead-center with the man's body. As his size diminishes, his shadowed body merges with the dark doorway. Only his arms extend against the church's white walls, making him into a walking crucifix, engulfed by the edifice. The image reminds the viewer how the abstract symbolism of the crucifix is connected with the actual suffering of Mexico's underprivileged population. It is not all that different from Eisenstein's earlier films, in which he employed Christian imagery of the martyr to depict the suffering of the lower class at the hands of the bourgeoisie, such as the Bolshevik who was stabbed to death by the parasols of the aristocratic women in *October*. The scene in *Qué Viva México!* emphasizes how such asceticism is not for the cross bearer's own benefit but to bulwark the strength of a church that remains indifferent to such suffering. Furthermore, within this shot we see Eisenstein employing the overtonal montage that he discovered while filming *The General Line* (1929) and theorized about in his article "The Fourth Dimension in Cinema" (1929). No longer is montage conceptualized only as dominant conflicts between shots but also between secondary stimuli like lighting, texture, spatial arrangements, and movement within the shot ("The Fourth Dimension" 112–13). Both spatial arrangements (the church's domination over the human form) and lighting (the individual's merging into the darkness of the door with shadowed arms forming a walking crucifix against the white edifice) allow Eisenstein's mise-en-scène to hold in tension the scene's literal meaning (a man serving penance) with its more abstract concept (the church's oppression of the peasants). Ritual, in other words, provides Eisenstein with one of the most effective methods to employ overtonal montage within *Qué Viva México!*

But to claim that the religious symbolism in the film is only negative, as Stern supposed, is to oversimplify matters. More liberal film critics who did not come to the film with the idea that Eisenstein was antireligious were better able to assess the film's positive religious overtones. In an article in *Theatre Arts Monthly* in 1932 Adolfo Best-Maugard, an official chaperon of Eisenstein in Mexico, observed Eisenstein's thrill in filming the fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which Best-Maugard felt was reflected in his footage of it (933). Pare Lorentz noted in a 1933 article for *Vanity Fair* that regardless of who cut *Thunder over Mexico*, the film exudes a religious quality, especially in its characters, "because he [Eisenstein] surrounds them with beauty and dignity; he chooses them for their native grace" (119). As many contemporary Eisenstein scholars like Rosamond Bartlett and Mikael Enckell observe, various religious imagery permeates all of Eisenstein's work, such as in *Potemkin* (1925), when Vakulinchuk's corpse symbolizes a resurrected image of working-class oppression as it is raised from the waters. Marie Seton similarly notes in her 1960 biography on Eisenstein, "Filled with hatred towards what he felt to be the false practices of the Church, he was yet irresistibly fascinated by the inner philosophic aspects of religion and the primary figures and symbols which men worshipped" (109). But unlike Eisenstein's earlier films, in which religious imagery was either cloaked or subsumed by revolutionary political messages, *Qué Viva México!* more explicitly addresses how religion, when in the hands of the people, could be harnessed for revolutionary purposes. In part because of his freedom from Soviet control, which demanded that religion be portrayed in a negative light, and in part because of his experiences in Mexico, where religion was central to peasant life, *Qué Viva México!* boldly examines the nuances of religion's relation to revolution, which his earlier films only implied.[7]

Pare Lorentz's observation that Eisenstein links a religious overtone with human dignity was perceptive in that it hinted at the way Eisenstein consciously or unconsciously believed that religious ritual could be as much used by Mexico's downtrodden population to assert and express itself as it could be used against them by the hierarchy of the church. This is seen in Eisenstein's representation of the festival of the Virgin of Guadalupe in "Fiesta." As Eisenstein himself realized, because the churches were built on old Aztec temples, the various Mayan, Aztec, and Catholic religions have actually merged in Mexico, making it unclear if the participants in the festival are actually worshiping Catholicism or a pagan religion. We see this fluidity among religions during a close-up of an Indian dancing in an Aztec costume. At the center of his headpiece is a tiny statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The image reverses the earlier representation of Catholicism imposing its religion on Mexico's natives by suggesting that the natives themselves have appropriated the Catholic imagery for their own religions and ceremonies. It exposes how the

natives' own religious culture allows them to maintain their traditions and cultures in spite of the cruelty and oppression of the conquest. But this subversion of the Virgin's use is masked by shots of the natives seeming to honor the Catholic holiday. The scene exemplifies both uses of religion that Eisenstein, respectively, loathes and celebrates: the religion of the elite Catholic minority imposed upon the lower class and the religion of the people who appropriate Catholic iconography for their own purposes.

Because of the multifarious ways in which religious ritual and symbolism are employed, *Qué Viva México!* does not simply oppose Catholicism to earlier native religions but shows how Catholicism itself is used by Mexico's underclass to enunciate its own oppression. This is particularly the case in the film's use of the Trinity. Although "Fiesta" represents the Trinity as oppressive with its images of the men tied to saguaros, a later episode, "Maguey," complicates the symbolism of the Trinity. After Sebastian and two other peons are rounded up, they stand in a shot similar to representations of Christ and the two thieves. While holes are dug for their execution, Sebastian stands in the center. Countless associations occur from this moment. The oppression that the peons suffer is linked to the similar religious oppression seen in "Fiesta." Yet the literal oppression that is visited upon Sebastian and the peons is also connected to the symbolic oppression visited upon Christ, showing how the imposed Catholic imagery supplied by the conquest can be used to speak to contemporary Mexico's socioeconomic conditions. *Qué Viva México!* draws parallels between the way in which the Mexican people and the film itself incorporate Catholic iconography for revolutionary purposes. Just as the Aztec appropriates the Virgin of Guadalupe in his headpiece, *Qué Viva México!* incorporates Catholic iconography into the execution scene to suggest how the symbolic suffering of Christ is made "real" in Sebastian's suffering, while Sebastian's suffering transcends its setting and is aggrandized by its connection to Christ's life. The literal and the abstract, as a result, are held in a tension that speaks both to a particular historical oppression and an oppression that transcends the moment. Ritual, in effect, allows both historicity and symbolic transcendence to occupy the same plane and suggests religion's potential link to revolution. Christ, after all, was a rebel in his own time. Just as Christ's death allows Catholics to enter the kingdom of heaven, the remembrance of the symbolic crucifixions visited upon Sebastian, María, and other peons allows for a revolutionary vision that will transcend their present historical oppression.

Eisenstein's exploration of the many uses of Catholicism in *Qué Viva México!* anticipates a general trend by many leftist film critics from 1934 to 1936 to reexamine what were generally considered conservative, bourgeois institutions to see how they might nonetheless be used to benefit a politically progressive agenda. In "Cinematography with Tears" (*Close Up,* March 1933) Eisenstein examined Alexander Dumas's bourgeois novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* not only to show how interpreting ideologically conservative works can benefit radical art but also to demand a more sophisticated leftist theoretical attitude toward bourgeois works of the past than a simple rejection of them. Similarly, a year later Robert Forsythe, film critic for *New Masses*, wrote that dogmatic Marxist film criticism was not useful in that it ignored a film's actual qualities by quickly associating the film with either the regressive products of Hollywood or the progressive films of the Soviet Union (30). In 1935 John Howard Lawson encouraged *Filmfront*'s Marxist film critics to incorporate a more popular and lively style that would appeal to a greater audience by not seeming so ideologically rote (16). Increasingly, other film critics like Lewis Jacobs, James Dugan, Peter Ellis, Kenneth Fearing, and Margaret Thorp would engage in analysis that investigated how Hollywood itself might be encouraged to produce more politically progressive and formally experimental films in the future.

Yet during the debates of 1932 and 1933 on *Qué Viva México!* and *Thunder over Mexico* leftist critics like Seymour Stern were too involved in defending Eisenstein's film according to certain preset ideas about the director and his work to notice how Eisenstein and film theory were changing. In some ways it is unfortunate that most leftist critics did not see *Qué Viva México!*'s reevaluation of traditional institutions like the church, since it provides an interesting analogy to the ways in which many of these critics were going to reinvestigate the potential of Hollywood after 1935. As Eisenstein saw that Catholicism is harmful when controlled by the few but potentially liberatory when used by the masses, American leftist film critics began reassessing Hollywood; left in the hands of Wall Street executives and studio heads, Hollywood would continue producing mediocre

films that supported the status quo, but under the pressure of audience groups, leftist film reviews, and progressive organizations within the studios, Hollywood films could begin to experiment and introduce styles and content that challenged their viewers' perceptions.

To be fair, since leftist film critics were working from scripts or accounts of the production and only had *Thunder over Mexico* and outtakes from *Qué Viva México!*, they could only offer a limited analysis of *Qué Viva México!*'s themes. Because of such limited access, they focused more of their discussions on the relation between *Qué Viva México!* and mass distribution. Initially, leftist film critics assumed that independent financing of *Qué Viva México!* freed the film's distribution from being ultimately determined by its potential box-office draw. But when push came to shove, the film's backers followed the mandates of capital rather than art.

Before this decision was made, however, the key point in the debate on distributing *Qué Viva México!* was if the film should be commercially or selectively distributed. Although the former option could offer potentially larger audiences, the film's structure would inevitably have to be altered into a more traditional, commercial form that would appeal to both exhibitors and general audiences. In a letter written to the *Modern Monthly* in July 1933 Herman Weinberg noted how *Qué Viva México!* was "suffering from a species of 'maladjustment' typical of all great films which find themselves at the mercy of the commercial channels of distribution—a necessary evil, we suppose, but one which should be definitely waived aside in this case because it means the artistic annihilation of the world's greatest film and the most resplendent artistic creation of the twentieth century" (373). Although Weinberg was generally dismayed by the commercial mandates imposed upon films by commercial distribution, he was not challenging commercial distribution altogether but merely suggesting that it recognize exceptional unconventional "art films" and ease its commercial requirements in these cases. For Weinberg, the problem with commercial distribution was that it prioritized sales over the inherent aesthetic quality of a film. With films that challenged conventional (genre) categories, mass distribution was only able to register them as a loss of sales.

Other critics noted how the compromises of mass distribution could have been ameliorated if the backers simply accepted limited distribution of *Qué Viva México!* Because the backers did not choose this option, critics questioned these backers' underlying motives, especially after the Soviet Union offered $60,000 for the rights to the film. In an October 1933 article for the *Modern Monthly* Seymour Stern mentioned how "Sinclair and Co. spurned this offer and held out for a flat cash sum of $100,000. They were not concerned over the artistic fate of *Qué Viva México!* and they apparently did not trust the Soviets on a percentage-arrangement" (331). Stern had a valid point: since Sinclair publicly wrote that he cared about the artistic integrity of the film, it was unclear why he did not accept the Soviets' initial offer and break even with the film. But the longer Sinclair and the backers waited to strike a better deal with the Soviets, the colder the Soviets became about buying the film. Eisenstein was becoming persona non grata in the Soviet Union over the supposed "decadent" formalism of his films (Goodwin 139–55). When Eisenstein's political enemy, Victor E. Smirnov, took control of Amkino, the Soviet film outlet in New York City that negotiated rights for the film, the Soviet government withdrew its offer to buy the film (Geduld and Gottesman 194, 211). Herman Weinberg in a 1933 article for the *Modern Monthly* quoted an unnamed speaker who indicated that the Soviet government was no longer interested in Eisenstein's film. Similar to many Hollywood executives' indifference to Eisenstein's originality, a significant number of Soviet bureaucrats also "dislike Eisenstein personally or have no understanding of the significance of his work" (Weinberg, "The 'Lesser'" 301). This change of attitude by the Soviets toward Eisenstein's film was disturbing to leftist film critics, since the Soviet Union was the one country that seemed to be free from commercial mandates in filmmaking. But now even the stronghold of experimental film—one that critics often used in challenging Hollywood to make more experimental and original films—showed its indifference to radical art. Not only were independent producers exposed as no different from commercial ones, but the Soviet film industry's bureaucracy seemed to resemble more and more that of Hollywood, with concerns about auteurist aesthetic flourishes and content censorship.[8] Suddenly, there seemed no place to turn to guarantee any type of distribution for a radical film.

An unforeseen issue that arose out of the release of *Thunder over Mexico* for leftist critics was that if an independent production went through the channels of mass

distribution, it could gain an unforeseen popularity. Despite all of the problems with the film, *Thunder over Mexico* played in more movie theaters across America than any Eisenstein film. Pare Lorentz saw such popularity as a positive indication that independent films "are improving and becoming more popular" (120). Although most leftist critics never wanted to see another flawed production like *Thunder over Mexico*, the fate of this film suggested that if leftist filmmakers carefully worked within certain prescribed commercial forms, they might be able to create films with progressive content that reached larger audiences.

Because of the many problems associated with mass-distributing *Qué Viva México!* and maintaining its radical form, leftist American film criticism on *Qué Viva México!* and *Thunder over Mexico* brought to the forefront issues that came to have increasing importance for a Popular Front stance on film that developed from the mid- to late 1930s. Fed by the Eisenstein debates of the early 1930s, later American leftist film theory and criticism emphasized progressive film's relation to Hollywood while suggesting that leftist critics and filmmakers move away from their earlier radical assumptions if they wanted their films and ideas to reach wider audiences. After the debates on *Qué Viva México!* one of the first and most significant groups to reevaluate its previous stance toward film was the New York Film and Photo League. This reexamination of its practices is somewhat surprising, since the League often prided itself as being the most radical of American film groups and critics. Yet by 1934 the League was beginning to publicly question the use of experimental techniques in its films and reconsidered audience reception of its work. One of the League's members, Leo Hurwitz, had already hinted at these concerns in a 1934 article for *New Theatre* when he suggested that the League problematically "presupposed on the part of the audience a knowledge and sympathy with our point of view" (27). By not taking into account a more diverse audience, the League failed to see how its approach to filmmaking could alienate potential audience members from its politically charged subjects. The implicit question was, Does the League want to keep preaching to the already politically converted or to reach a larger audience that might be led to a more progressive social view through the League's films? Undoubtedly, the problems with distributing *Qué Viva México!/ Thunder over Mexico* forced the League to recognize that if it truly desired a wider audience, it would have to drastically alter how its films were made, since their amateur style and lack of narrative were two major obstacles that prevented a larger distribution.

By 1935 some of the League's members like Leo Hurwitz and Ralph Steiner had become more vocal about how their films' reliance upon montage often led to films that were "depersonalized, inhuman" (22). Using arguments found in Harry Alan Potamkin's and William Troy's articles, Hurwitz and Steiner claimed that the depersonalization in films was often due to an overreliance on montage by some filmmakers who interpreted montage as an aesthetic end in itself rather than a means to further a film's content (22). As a result, since a film's characters were regarded only "externally" as formal properties of light, shape, and movement, they became "objects rather than . . . human beings" (Hurwitz and Steiner 22) and duplicated the very reification of humanity found in the Hollywood films they criticized.

Audience identification became the necessary corrective to such abstraction for some of the League's members. Hurwitz and Steiner acknowledged the importance of someone like Eisenstein because he investigated the links between film's dramatic elements and montage, but since there was no equivalent film director in America, they turned for inspiration to theater workers like Lee Strasberg who had thought deeply on the issues of film (22). Perhaps the most important concept they learned from Strasberg was to focus on a film's dramatic construction in order to ensure the audience's emotional involvement with the material, since without it, no matter how profound and socially important the film's themes, they "will be [regarded as] lifeless and socially ineffectual" (Hurwitz and Steiner 22). The issues of plot, character, dramatic re-creations, and professional acting were thus no longer considered by some members of the League as simply products of bourgeois art but elements that should be considered in relation to the developments of montage theory. Furthermore, film critics for *New Masses*, the *Daily Worker*, *New Theatre*, and other leftist journals were noticing the movement in Russian films toward a greater use of dramatic conventions. Georgy Vasiliev's *Chapayev* (1934) was praised by critics for its ability to address biographical material as well as mass historical issues. Similarly, Leonid Trauberg's *The Youth of Maxim* (1935) was noted for its development of psychologically subtle characterization.

Yet unlike the Soviet film industry under the direction of Boris Shumyatsky, who viewed Eisenstein's radical aesthetics as "formalist" and at odds with the precepts that dictated the construction of socialist realist films, most American critics felt that Eisenstein was still on the cutting edge by fusing leftist politics with a radical aesthetics. Although some American critics critiqued Eisenstein for his formalist tendencies, many recognized Eisenstein's ongoing development of his theories and film styles to serve as correctives to his earlier oversights. The *Qué Viva México!* debates suggest that the Americans still valued the importance of certain major Soviet avant-garde directors even though the Soviet film industry as a whole followed an alternative impulse to purge avant-garde aesthetics from its screens.

By 1935 leftist publications offered translations of Eisenstein's own accounts of the changes occurring within the Soviet film industry. In his article "The New Soviet Cinema" for *New Theatre* Eisenstein explained that Soviet "socialist realist" cinema was not simply emulating the styles of Western commercial cinema but fusing commercial styles with the radical discoveries of montage. He divided the Soviet cinema into four main periods: the first provided for the necessary economic stabilization of the cinema after the Revolution; the second manifested the silent avant-garde's challenge to all commercial styles and narrative; the third produced films that demanded "penetration into the inner problems of the individual, psychoanalytic treatment of the human material, and an integral plot, strictly confined to its story" (Eisenstein, "The New Soviet Cinema" 9); and the newly emergent fourth period fused both the avant-garde discoveries of the second period with the classical structures of the third. He believed that *Chapayev* was indicative of the ideal fourth period picture that "succeeded in achieving unforgettable portrayals of living human beings [the third period] and in presenting an unforgettable picture of the epoch [the second period]" (Eisenstein, "The New Soviet Cinema" 21). But Eisenstein wanted to remain clear that *Chapayev* was not indicative of a return to plot but instead was "a movement 'forward to a new form of plot'" (Eisenstein, "The New Soviet Cinema" 21). Mere emulation of Western commercial plots would not adequately allow Soviet films to dialectically address the individual's relation to his or her social context. Although one might rightfully debate if Soviet films ever successfully carried out this political and aesthetic mission during its fourth period, American critics could not help but notice the changes taking place in both Eisenstein and Soviet film as a whole during the mid-1930s.

By 1936 many American leftist filmmakers and critics had pursued the idea of creating progressive narrative films that focused mainly on individual characters while examining how Hollywood films might create a balance between character identification and social context. Leo Hurwitz and Ralph Steiner left the New York Film and Photo League to create NYKino and then Frontier Films, where they developed scenarios, hired professional actors, and used some Hollywood techniques along with experimental montage in various film shorts and their full-length film *Native Land* (1942).[9] Progressive dramatists and theater workers were moving in droves to Hollywood with the hope of infusing Hollywood films with some of their political visions and avant-garde techniques and reaching a larger audience than New York theater could provide. With people like Clifford Odets, Paul Muni, John Howard Lawson, Rouben Mamoulian, Paul Green, Ring Lardner Jr., Lester Cole, Dorothy Parker, John Bright, Paul Jarrico, and Dalton Trumbo moving to (or already in) Hollywood in the mid-1930s, American leftist film critics could not help but believe that Hollywood might become a more viable political and cultural force in leftist politics than they might have thought during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

In any case, Hollywood, by necessity, had to become a focus for American film critics by the mid-1930s. As tensions mounted in Europe and the Soviet Union, the distribution of foreign films lessened. Also, most of the important international film journals like *Close Up* and *Experimental Cinema* went under, making it less likely for Americans to encounter international artists and theorists discussing film. But by using the knowledge they had gained from such journals as *Close Up* and *Experimental Cinema*, American leftist film critics were ready to offer a more complex understanding of both independent/avant-garde and Hollywood films than they had been capable of doing prior to their introduction to these journals.

Also essential to the development of American leftist film critics, the debates surrounding *Qué Viva México!* forced them to acknowledge some of the troubling links between independent film production and Hollywood. These debates exposed the problems encountered

distributing a radical film on a mass scale in the United States while encouraging a more subtle analysis of montage that emphasized both its merits and disadvantages to leftist filmmaking. Although many leftist film critics recognized that classical Hollywood continuity editing paled in comparison to the sophistication of montage, Hollywood did assist Eisenstein in working out a more complex montage dynamic that addressed character psychology through funding his written scenario for *An American Tragedy*. Furthermore, despite the fact that *Thunder over Mexico* represented a gross commercialization of a radical film to many leftist critics, its wider-than-usual distribution suggested that some progressive content and experimental techniques might be smuggled into Hollywood films in order to reach larger audiences than hard-line experimental radical films could—and also that independent films might stand a dose of Hollywood "gloss" if it meant larger audiences. So, to repeat, the debates on *Qué Viva México!* prepared American leftist film critics for a Popular Front attitude toward film. These debates not only showed the extreme limits placed on radical film distribution in the United States but also compelled critics to examine how they might influence—or be influenced by—Hollywood because, like it or not, Hollywood provided the main access to the larger audiences that many progressive critics felt they needed to reach, even if it meant sacrificing some of their earlier, more radical positions in the process.

NOTES

1. William Dieterle's *Blockade* (1938) also drew a tremendous amount of film criticism in the 1930s.

2. My interpretation of the change in cultural outlook intentionally challenges the common belief that a more moderate aesthetic and political philosophy was adapted by American leftists simply because they were following Community Party doctrine. As Michael Denning notes in *The Cultural Front*, the international solidarity that many leftist critics felt to the Soviet Union "has led many historians to see the Popular Front, not as a social movement, but simply as a strategy of the Communist Party, a political line dictated by the Moscow-controlled Communist International to the various national Communist Parties to accommodate the foreign policy of Stalin's USSR" (11). Overlooked, however, is how most of these cultural critics did not belong to the Communist Party, and, even when they did, they most often did not dogmatically follow the party line. By investigating the relations between American leftist film critics and Eisenstein, we see a much more complex international cultural interaction at work than has often been suggested. One can see how American film theory had actually arrived at a Popular Front stance long before its official decree by the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935. To simply assume that American leftist film critics and theorists were following the Communist Party line is not only to disregard the diversity of their political and aesthetic stances but also to ignore the cultural work and theorization they had done that led them to a more complex understanding of film as a medium.

3. Before addressing Eisenstein's influence upon American leftist film critics, it is first necessary to define the terms "radical," "liberal/progressive," and "mainstream" that I use throughout the article. The political and aesthetic divisions between radical and liberal leftist film critics is often extremely difficult to chart, since many of them wrote for radical, liberal/progressive, and mainstream journals and periodicals. Even defining the politics of the journals and periodicals themselves is difficult, since their writers often took varying stances that created diverse outlooks within a single journal issue that both challenged and supported the journal's or periodical's mission. Nonetheless, I would tentatively classify such journals and periodicals like *New Masses* and the *Daily Worker* as "radical," since their writers often adopted Communist or radical Marxist positions that challenged the very premises of capitalism and its ideologies. Their film critics usually championed montage found in foreign and independent films as vital alternatives to classical Hollywood cinema, since such films not only exposed how experimental aesthetics were intimately tied to radical political change but also influenced some directors and producers within Hollywood to make more socially conscious films. Journals like the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, and the *Seven Arts* are instead "liberal" or "progressive." More moderate than *New Masses* and the *Daily Worker*, these journals' writers were mostly from an academic, middle-class background (Aaron 25–26). They considered a Socialist culture desirable but did not firmly attach themselves to any of the leftist movements that surrounded them. Although critical of Hollywood films, these critics shied away from class analysis and proselytizing about montage while still arguing for the need for commercial film to develop more sophisticated representations of individuals' relations to their historical contexts in order to offer audiences more subtle understandings of the inextricable links between personal and political processes. Finally, *Vanity Fair*, *Esquire*, and the *New Yorker* were "mainstream" publications that rarely, if ever, saw capitalism itself as a systemic problem. Their critics never explicitly allied themselves with any political movement and more often than not critiqued Hollywood films for their aesthetic problems rather than for their conservative or reactionary political content. But, as stated above, many of these journals fostered an interesting dialogue between critics. Not only did many of these critics personally know one another, but they wrote for each other's publications. Kyle S. Crichton, who wrote reviews for *Collier's*, used the pseudonym Robert Forsythe to write film reviews for *New Masses*. The radical Marxist film theorist Harry Alan Potamkin wrote for avant-garde cinema journals *Close Up* and *Hound and Horn*, Marxist journals *New Masses* and *Experimental Cinema*, and mainstream publications the *New York Times* and *Vanity Fair*. These writers held a rather sophisticated attitude toward the need to contribute both to independent, radical film journals that catered to a more selective audience and to mainstream publications that influenced larger readerships. But as the 1930s progressed, radical film stances were gradually usurped by more liberal interpretations of Hollywood, foreign, and independent cinema, thus pushing once

radical journals like *New Masses* and the *Daily Worker* into more moderately progressive stances. This paradigm shift in leftist film criticism and theory is indicative of the emergent Popular Front movement that occurred throughout many leftist cultural and political organizations within America during the mid- to late 1930s.

4. For further information about the problems with finishing *Qué Viva México!* see Seton; Geduld and Gottesman. Seton sides with Eisenstein, while Geduld and Gottesman sympathize more with Upton Sinclair.

5. Although all contemporary film historians on Soviet cinema note how Eisenstein was forced to recut *October* when Stalin took power in order to rid the film of all references to Trotsky, most 1930s leftist film critics had not heard of this detail or had only known it as a rumor.

6. For my scene analysis I am mainly using Grigori Aleksandrov's 1979 reconstruction of *Qué Viva México!* from Eisenstein's working script.

7. One could argue that Eisenstein's next film, *Bezhin Meadow*, was primarily rejected by Boris Shumyatsky, since the film employed blatant religious symbolism of Christ's suffering that Eisenstein began explicitly exploring in *Qué Viva México!* Gwen Seiler, who visited Eisenstein during the making of *Bezhin Meadow*, summarized the film as comprised of "the Christ story plus the religious ecstasy of the Mexicans [that Eisenstein experienced while filming *Qué Viva México!*]" (Seton 363).

8. This change in Soviet film production is most explicitly noted in Macdonald's three-part essay.

9. For a thorough development of the creation of NYKino and Frontier Films, see Alexander; Campbell.

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