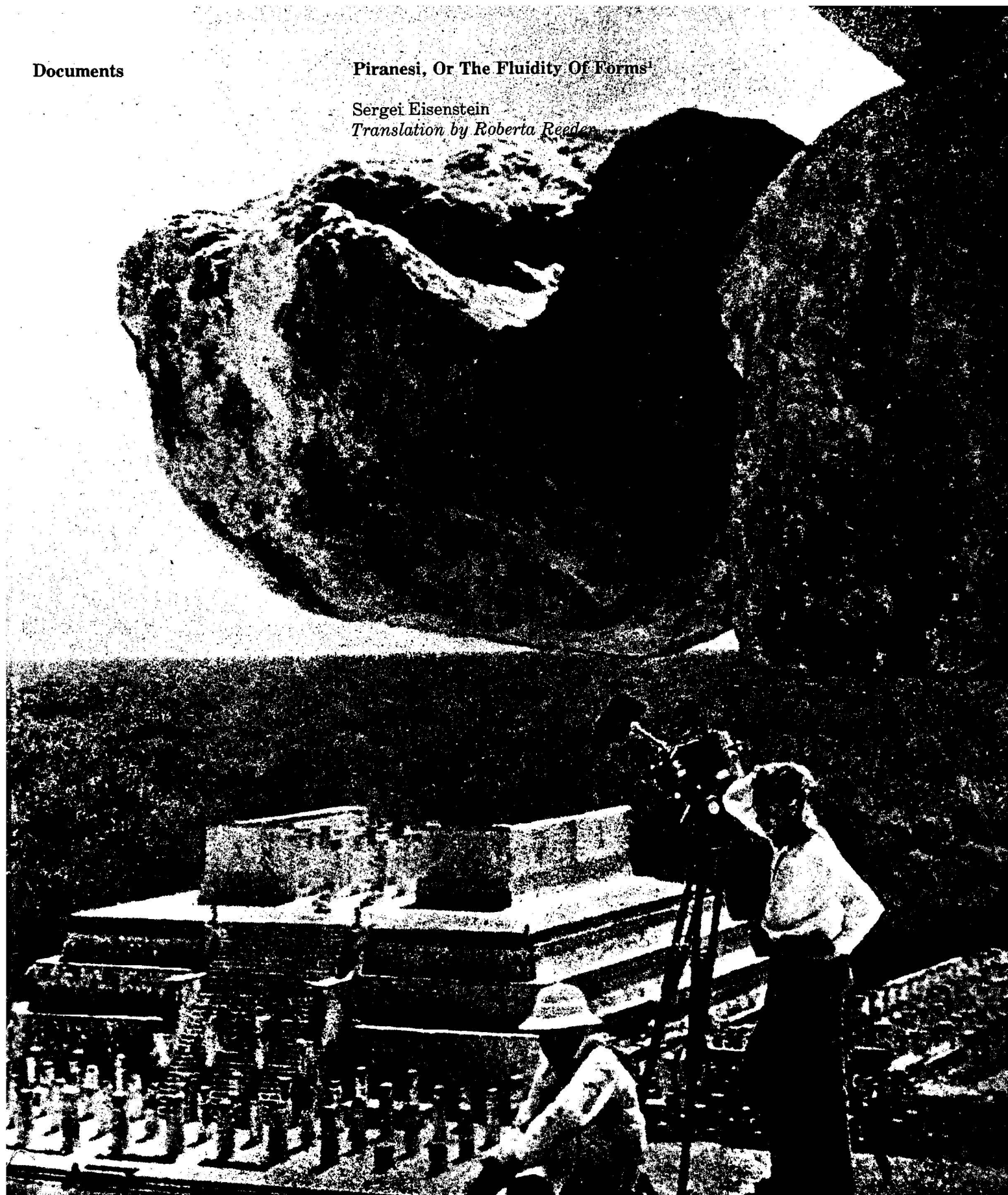


Documents

Piranesi, Or The Fluidity Of Forms¹

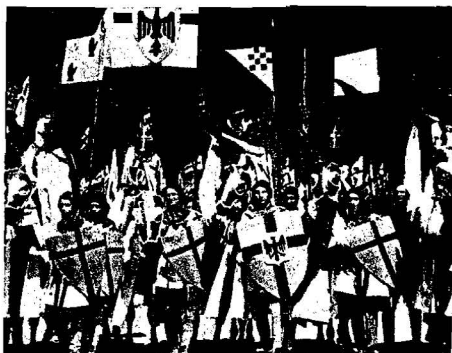
Sergei Eisenstein

Translation by Roberta Reeder



1 (frontispiece) Eisenstein filming
Que Viva Mexico (1931) in the
Yucatan.

2 The dog-knights of Eisenstein's
Alexander Nevsky, 1938.



2

I am sitting in a bright yellow room flooded with sunlight. It is the corner room of my apartment in Potylixa² and one of its windows looks out on the village of Troitskoe-Golenishchevo. From here partisans, attacking the French “on the flank,” once pursued the army of Napoleon’s invaders from Moscow. (This provided the name for the whole region.)

Another window looks out on an empty field.

This field was once an apple orchard.

I dug up the apple orchard—

in 1938.

I cleared this square of orchard to make the battlefield for “The Battle on the Ice.”

Here, that summer, after transforming the square into the ice-covered surface of Lake Chud, I went on recreating for a month, earlier hordes of invaders of the Russian land, the dog-knights of *Alexander Nevsky* (fig. 2).

Only recently the contour of the city of Moscow ended just beyond these windows,

And the house where I live was the last house inside the boundaries of the city of Moscow.

If a cucumber had dropped inadvertently out of the kitchen window, it might have dropped into . . . Moscow’s suburbs.

Now the edges of the city have expanded, and the space between suburbs and city has moved far beyond my windows.

In 1941 the German invader was not permitted to come as far as this line and was detained somewhere without having rolled up to my yellow room above the village of Troitska and the field of “The Battle on the Ice” looking with its windows in the direction of Mozhaisk and Minsk.

But finally in return this and one other etching by Piranesi 85
are now my property.

Neatly mounted, this property is separated from the ca-
nary-yellow walls by its expressive burnt sienna colored
coffee stains.

I am a long-standing admirer of the architectural frenzies
of Piranesi's *Prisons*.

But more of an enthusiast than a connoisseur.

Therefore I always assigned this etching which I like so
much to the series *Invenzioni capricciosi di carceri* ("Fan-
tasies on the Theme of Prisons") known in two variants,
1745 and 1761-1765, and not to the earlier series *Opere
varie*.⁸

I am now looking at this etching on my wall,

And for the first time I am struck, despite its amazing
perfection, by the degree of its balanced . . . gentleness.
Probably because the impressions produced by the originals
of the later *Carceri*, as I viewed them for the first time,
are still fresh, it seems unexpectedly harmless, with little
feeling.

Unecstatic . . .

And now, while looking at the etching and mentally ana-
lyzing the methods of producing "an ecstatic effect," I in-
voluntarily begin to apply them to this etching.

I ponder over what would happen to this etching if it were
brought to a state of ecstasy, if it were brought out of
itself.

As a whole. With all its elements . . .

I admit that this experiment on Piranesi preceded what
was similarly described above and performed on El Greco,⁹

And both experiments were presented here in "historical"

Between the windows in the corner is a section of wall.

On the wall—is it.

It is the object of an aggressive hunt that went on for
years.

I first saw it in the form of a reproduction in a small book
(thicker than it was wide) on the history of theater design:
Giulio Ferrari, *La Scenografia* (Milan, 1902) from the li-
brary of the former theater of S. I, Zimin.

It is a Piranesi etching.

It is part of the series *Opere varie di Architettura*,

And it is called *Carcere oscura* ("The Dark Prison," fig. 3).

It is thought to have been created under the influence of
the etching "Prison d'Amadis" of Daniel Marot.³ It far sur-
passes the prototype. And it is dated 1743.

Quite recently—only just now—I was able to acquire it.

As always—by means both strange and inscrutable.

By barter.

An exchange with a provincial museum.

The base of the museum's collection was an extravagant
and unsystematic assortment of rare pieces gathered by
some merchant who had often traveled abroad.

In his private residence a stuffed bear got along peacefully
with a serving dish, terrible carved "Moors" with candle-
sticks and pretty objects of very high quality: for example,
several etchings by Piranesi.

In exchange went one Edelinck,⁴ one Hogarth,⁵ one Nan-
teuil⁶ and a charming Claude Méllane . . .⁷

Perhaps it was too much.

3 Giovanni Batista Piranesi, *Carcere Oscura* ("The Dark Prison"), ca.1745.

4 Diagram by Eisenstein of Piranesi's *Carcere Oscura*.

5 "The etching . . . leaps out of the vertical format—into the horizontal." Diagram by Eisenstein.

6 sequence of their origin not merely with the aim of maintaining the progressive sequence (actor-painter-architect) according to the motives stated above.

In order to make a clearer exposition of what I worked out in my mind, let me introduce here a reproduction of the etching and put a diagram of it right next to it. I will number the basic elements and distinctive features of the etching in the diagram (figs. 3, 4).

Now—step by step, element by element—we will explode them one after another.

We have already done this once with El Greco's painting.

Therefore this operation is now simpler, more familiar and demands less time and space.

Ten explosions will be enough to "transform" ecstatically this diagram which has been drawn in front of our eyes.

However, it would be unfair to reject any type of emotional feeling in this initial etching.

Otherwise—what is the source of the great fascination this etching holds for me, an etching which I got to know before coming upon the savage exuberance of the *Prisons* of the principal series?

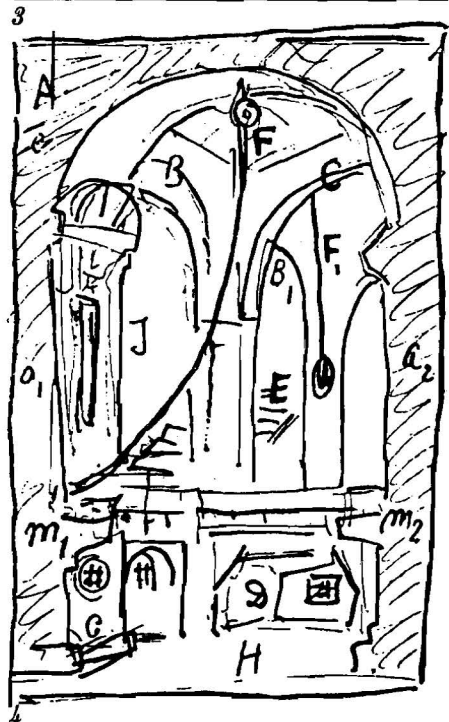
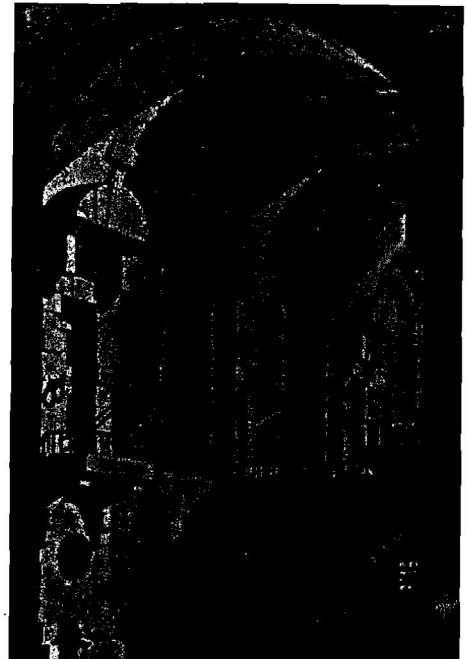
But if there is any "going out of oneself"¹⁰ here in this etching, it is realized not as an explosion, but as . . . dissolution,

And—not of forms, but only of the system of the expressive means,

And therefore instead of frenzy and a strong impression of fury, there is a flowing lyrical "mood."

It is in just this spirit, for example, that Giesecke writes about this etching in his work on Piranesi:¹¹

"The etching *Carcere oscura* is daring and yet restrained



6 "A leap from a semicircular arch—
into an arrow-shaped arch."

Diagram by Eisenstein.

7 "There is already the image of an
arrow-shaped upper arch N which
seems to have burst out of the bay
with the flat overhead M and the two-
cornered outline p-q which was
hurled into the triangle x-y-z. . . ."

(*befangen im Vortrag*) in its presentation of the material. . . .
The luminous and airy perspectives go even farther here
. . . (compared to the other etchings of the series) a soft,
silvery light, so much loved by the Venetians, streams
down from above into this airy chamber and is lost in the
gloomy distance; the forms are softened and are quite in-
distinct, as if they were in the process of self-dissolution
(*Auflösung*), and the picture itself spills over tenderly in
rivulets of separate strokes. . . ."

I would add to this that the vaults extend and stretch
upward to the degree that the dark mass at the bottom,
gradually becoming illuminated, flows into the vaulted
heights flooded with light . . .

But let us return to the technique of the explosion.

In order to do this let us enumerate the basic elements of
the etching:

A—the general arch enclosing the whole design.

a₁ and a₂—its side walls.

B and C—the arches that serve as the principal supports
of the architectural composition as a whole.

D—a system of angular arches which thrust into the
depths, a system which at its farthest point abuts the wall
with the barred window.

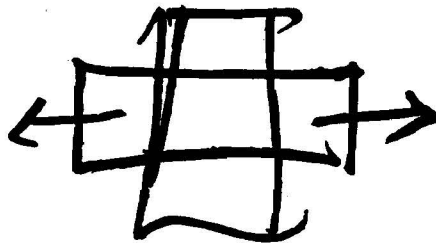
E—a staircase ascending into the depths of the columns.

F, F₁—ropes marking the center of the composition (F) and
emphasizing the composition's movement into the depths
(F₁).

G—the round window over the "zaválinka."¹²

H—the firmly placed stone tiles of the floor.

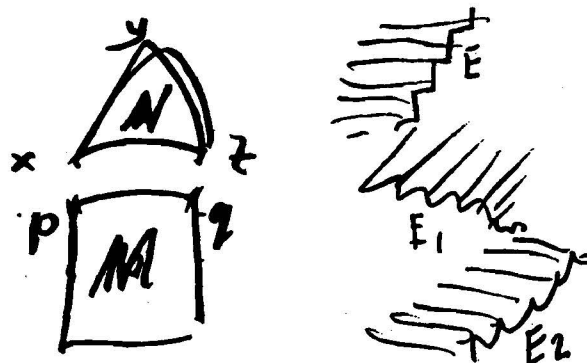
J—the heavy rise of stone blocks in the severe vertical
columns.



5



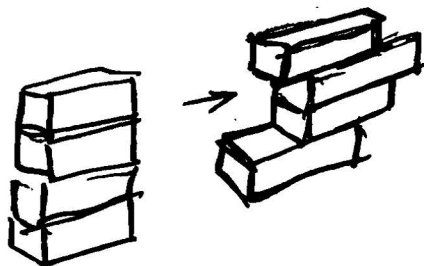
6



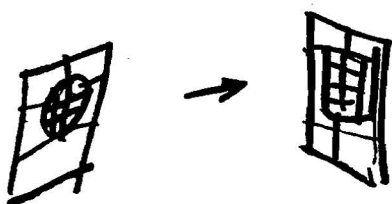
7

8 "The severe shape of the piled stones breaks apart." Diagram by Eisenstein.

9 "The round window c is transformed into a square and turns into a flat plane perpendicular to it." Diagram by Eisenstein.



8



9

m_1 — m_2 —little balconies to the right and left near the columns in the foreground.

Now let us attempt to give free reign to the ecstatic violence of the whole, and we will then see that what must occur—and would occur—for this to happen to all elements of the composition.

In the first place, of course, the arch A, enclosing the engraving, explodes.

Its upper semicircle of stone flies out beyond the borders of the etching.

If you like—from a semicircle it becomes . . . polygonal.

From stone—to wood.

The intersection of wooden rafters—replacing the stone arch—allows the arch to "leap" simultaneously out of material and form.

Under the pressure of temperament, the space of the etching included between the columns a_1 and a_2 "is hurled" beyond these limits.

Columns a_1 and a_2 , abandoning their framing role, "exploding" inside the etching, and the etching, after expanding beyond their limits, "leaps" out of the vertical format—into the horizontal (we can remember a similar leap of format into the opposite—but from the horizontal to the vertical—in the example of El Greco!) (fig. 5).

The arches B and B₁ are also not lacking in this tendency to explode. From the arches A and C which flew completely into bits, these arches can undergo an "explosion" *within their own form*; that is, having retained the "idea" of an arch, they can be modified into something opposite in character.

Under these conditions what will such a qualitative leap within the form of the arch be like?

A leap from a semicircular arch—into an arrow-shaped arch (fig. 6).

Moreover—this can be a leap from a single-bay arch into a two-bay arch of the vertical type.

Such a form would have been particularly appropriate, since in his actual design there is already the image of an arrow-shaped upper arch N which seems to have burst out of the bay with the flat overhead M and the two-cornered outline p-q which was hurled into the triangle x—y—z, as if in this drawing a trace of the process which occurred in the case of the entire arch A was retained (fig. 7).

Rushing down forward and moving off into the depths from column a_1 on downward, the staircase, in its increasing explosion, displaces column a_1 standing in its path, hurls forward, but now no longer by only the one flight of stairs E, but like a stroke of lightning in zigzag fashion—E, E_1 , E_2 —hurls *forward* to the maximum possible extent. And this maximum extent turns out to be a thrust beyond the limits of the contours of the etching. In exactly the same way, the system of arches D, while increasing its tendency to plunge *into the depths*, in the course of having changed the angular contour into a semi-circular one breaks with its thrust through this enclosing wall with the barred window and whirls off somewhere in the direction of a general point of descent, which in turn, in contrast to the way it appeared in the initial etching, turns out to be somewhere not between the upper and lower edge of the etching, but beyond its limits not only on the right, but also *downward*; and following this example the solid foundation of the floor (so clearly visible in the first state and which in the second disappears somewhere in the depths outside the frame in its new ecstatic form) vanishes with a roar.

The broken balconies m_1 and m_2 on the foreground columns a_1 and a_2 throw themselves toward each other, become a single bridge, and this bridge remains not as balconies in front of the arch encircling D, but undoubtedly rushes beyond it—into the depths and perhaps upward.

The severe shape of the piled stone breaks apart (fig. 8).

The round window c is transformed into a square and turns into a flat plane perpendicular to it (fig. 9),

And finally, breaking loose from the central line (which is drawn so distinctly), the ropes and blocks explode into those parts of the etching which in its vertical state were not even in the first version of the plate!

And as though picking up their signal, all the other elements are caught up by the whirlwind;

And “all swept up by the powerful hurricane” as though they resound from the etching which has lost its self-enclosed quality and “calm” in the name of a frenzied uproar . . .

And now in our imagination we have before us, in place of the modest, lyrically meek engraving *Carcere oscura*, a whirlwind, as in a hurricane, dashing in all directions: ropes, runaway staircases, exploding arches, stone blocks breaking away from each other . . .

The scheme of this new ecstatic form of the etching slips into your imagination before your very eyes. Our eyes now slide along the yellow wall.

Now they slip out beyond the limits of the margins of the first sheet.

Now they slip past the other example of uproar hanging between the window and the door—*The Temptation of St. Anthony* by Callot . . .¹³

And now they stop unexpectedly on the second etching of Piranesi which has come to me from that same remote source, the canopy formed from those carved figures of Moors with candlesticks, a bear with a tray, and the second-rate Japanese bronze bric-à-brac.

To where did the scheme which had just been before our eyes suddenly disappear?

I cannot understand it.

10 Giovanni Batista Piranesi,
Carcere, with a staircase ascending
to the left. *Second state, XIV,*
ca.1760.

11 *First state, XIV, ca.1745.*



10



11

Apparently the scheme . . . has now crept into this second etching of the incomparable Giovanni Batista,

And so it has!

The "miracle" of El Greco—has been repeated!

The scheme which we devised—turns out to actually exist.

Namely it lies at the basis of Piranesi's second etching (figs. 10, 11).

It was thus actually necessary that among everything else in the bundle, besides the *Carcere oscura*, of all the possible etchings by Piranesi the late merchant Maecenas brought this very one from Italy.

So that in the form of an exchange it would fall into my hands as the second etching.

So that framed, they would both hang on the yellow wall of my room,

And so that, having torn myself away from the first etching, my eyes, with the imagined scheme before me, would stop on this very one after having cast, like an invisible net, this imaginary scheme of the transformed first etching onto the second.

In any case, Piranesi's second etching is actually the first one exploding in ecstatic flight.

Here it is.

Try to dispute it!

Let us quickly review its devices.

They coincide down to the last detail with what we hypothetically sketched above.

After this we find we have little in common with the general remarks by Benois on the ecstasy of Piranesi.

(Moreover, we discovered Benois' words only many years after the spontaneous "illumination" which resulted from the comparison of the two etchings). 91

The dates of the etchings interest us.

The biographical continuity which links them.

The place of the *Prisons* in the general biography of Piranesi's work.

The stages of their creation.

The chorus of enthusiasm accompanying them.

The personality of the enthusiasts.

The nature of architectural fantasies in which one system of visions is transformed into others; where some planes, opening up to infinity behind each other, carry the eye into unknown depths, and the staircases, ledge by ledge, extend to the heavens, or in a reverse cascade of these same ledges, rush downward.

Actually the ecstatic image of a staircase hurling across from one world to the next, from heaven to earth, is already familiar to us from the Biblical legend of Jacob's dream, and the emotional image of the elemental headlong descent of human masses down the Odessa staircase, stretching to the sky, is familiar to us from our own *opus*.¹⁴

The *Carcere oscura* is known as the restrained forerunner of the most celebrated *Carceri* [. . .].

The *Carcere oscura* is only a distant peal of thunder, out of the entrails of the 1743 series, which have quite a different resonance.

Two years later this distant peal explodes with a real thunderbolt.

During those years there occurs in Piranesi's mind and feelings one of those explosions, one of those inner "cata-

32 clysms" which can transfigure man, shaking his spiritual structure, his world outlook and his attitude toward reality. One of those psychic leaps which "suddenly" "instantly," unexpected and unforeseen, raises man above his equals to the heights of a true creator capable of extracting from his soul images of unprecedented power, which with unremitting strength burn the hearts of men.

Some interpret the *Carceri* as visions of the delirium of an archaeologist who had imbibed too deeply the terrible romanticism of the gigantic ruins of Rome's former grandeur. Others have attempted to see in them the image of a persecution mania from which the artist began to suffer at this time.

But I think that during the interval transpiring during these several years, what happened to Piranesi is that same instantaneous illumination of "genius" which we noted above in Balzac and about which P. I. [Tchaikovsky] has written so clearly concerning another musical genius—Glinka.¹⁵

On June 27, 1888, Tchaikovsky notes in his diary: "An unprecedented, extraordinary phenomenon in the field of art.

"A dilettante who played now on the violin, now on the piano; having composed totally colorless quadrilles, fantasies on fashionable Italian themes, having tested himself both in serious forms (the quartet, sextet) and in romances, not having written anything except in the banal taste of the thirties, suddenly in his thirty-fourth year composes an opera which in genius, range, novelty, and irreproachable technique stands alongside the greatest and most profound that can only exist in art? . . . Sometimes I am alarmed simply to the point of a nightmare by the question of how such a colossal artistic force could coexist with such banality and in such a manner, that after having been a colorless dilettante for so long, Glinka suddenly in one step arrives at the level (yes! at the level!) of Mozart, Beethoven or whomever you please . . ."¹⁶

"And indeed there was no model of any kind; there were no precedents in Mozart or Gluck or in any of the masters. It is striking, amazing! . . .

"Yes! Glinka is a real creative genius . . ."¹⁷

One must realize, of course, that in this "sudden moment," everything immediately and instantaneously "burst out," everything which in bits and pieces had been accumulated and assembled grain by grain in the "banal," the insignificant, and the "dilettantish" so that in *Ruslan* it all burst out as a complete, organic unity of individual genius.

But what is particularly striking is its total correspondence with what happened to Piranesi between the series *Vedute varie* and the *Carceri*.

Actually the *Carceri* stand almost at the beginning of Piranesi's creative path.

Everything that had been done until then has almost no real independent value. (With the exception of two or three of the *Capricci*.)

And even those different groups of etchings which were created by Piranesi before *The Prisons* did not compose independent series; but later the majority of them became part of the series of architectural panoramas of 1750.

As we can see, the "divine word" of ecstasy touches Piranesi at a relatively early stage of his creative work,

And the blinding flash of the *Prisons* seems to retain its own reflection and transmit its beams, filling with poetic inspiration not only the picturesqueness of the ruins of former Rome, which in such inspired abundance emerge from under his stylus, but also the more prosaic *vedute* of the public constructions of his contemporary city.

Out of this flame which burns without extinction through all his work, fifteen or twenty years later there comes from his hand a new, more profound, even more perfect state of these same etchings, whose amplified redrawing reinforces their unrestrained, elemental grandeur. (We should recall how many times El Greco repainted one and the same theme in different variants, while continuing to perfect their inner spirituality!)

Even here there is a correspondence to El Greco!

But in El Greco it is more than that.

The year 1745, after the first rough draft of 1743, brings forth the series of *Carceri* in their first state.

Giesecke calls them, and correctly so, imitating Goethe's *Ur-Faust*—the "Ur-Carceri." (The earliest and original *Faust* is the first state of *Faust*; the earliest and original *Prisons* is the first state of the *Prisons* series.)

Correct and apropos because in the case of Goethe, at the same time as the *Ur-Faust* (1770–1775), comes the *Faust* proper (1770–1806) in its place,

And in its place, the second state of *Faust* (1773–1832).

In the same way, in place of the first state of the *Prisons*, fifteen to twenty years later there appears the second state, which is unchanged in composition but redrawn and re-touched and, from the technical point of view of "etchings," is unimproved; but from the point of view of figurative ecstatic revelation is even more profound and graphic. And this is followed by the third state of the *Prisons*, the inner self-explosion.

True . . . no longer the work of Piranesi himself.

Beyond the limits of his biography.

Even beyond the limits of his country and epoch.

One hundred years later.

And not on the soil of Italy, but of Spain.

But nevertheless along the same line.

And by a step which begins from the point to which Piranesi's raging spirit propelled the volume and space of his conceptions.



12 El Greco, Purification of the Temple, ca. 1570–1575.

4 These three phases, continuously raising the intensity of their plastic conceptions, seem to repeat the development of the conception of Goethe's *Faust* by sudden jolts, from a sketchy beginning to its apocalyptic conclusion.

The *Carcere oscura* has here played a role similar to that of the medieval *Faust* (which also served Christopher Marlowe in 1588) as a purely thematic vehicle for Goethe's future philosophical conceptions.

They also repeat "literally" the same path taken by El Greco's *Purification of the Temple* (fig. 12) from the stage of depicting "an everyday Biblical scene"—which is the level of *Carcere oscura*—to the emotional dramatic effect of the intermediate variants of the composition—the "Ur-Carceri" (1745)—to the ecstatic last variant—the *Carceri* (1760–1766).

Is it possible to go even further?

And is it possible, after a relatively short first stage with its dissolution of forms, to foresee and discover through the second stage—which is already exploding the very objects of depiction, and this occurring in two jolts, increasing the disintegration of forms and thrust of elements both back into the depths as well as forward (by a method of extensions of the foreground)—one more "leap," one more "explosion," one more "spurt" beyond the limits and dimensions and thus, apparently, the "norm" which in the last variant of *Prisons* exploded completely?

Is this last leap possible?

And where, in what area of representation should one look for it?

In the *Carcere oscura* the concreteness is retained while the means of representation "fly apart": the line disintegrates into a cascade of tiny strokes;¹⁸ the flatness of form, softened by light, flows into space, the preciseness of facets is absorbed in the fluid contours of form.

In the *Invenzioni capricciosi* given these same means of

expression (true, at a somewhat higher level of intensity) the concreteness has also by this time "flown apart."

To put it more precisely—the objects as physical elements of the representation itself have flown apart.

But the represented concreteness of the elements has not been modified by this.

One stone may have "moved off" another stone, but it has retained its represented "stony" concreteness.

A stone vault has hurled itself across into angular wooden rafters, but the represented "concreteness" of both has been preserved untouched.

These were "in themselves" real stone arches, wooden beams realistic "in themselves."

The accumulation of perspective moves into the distance, borders on the madness of narcotic visions (about this, see below), but each link of these totally dizzy perspectives is "in itself" quite naturalistic.

The concrete reality of perspective, the real representational quality of the objects themselves, is not destroyed anywhere.

The madness consists only in the piling up, in the juxtapositions which explode the very foundation of the objects' customary "possibility," a madness which groups objects into a system of arches which "go out of themselves" in sequence, ejecting new arches from their bowels; a system of staircases exploding in a flight of new passages of staircases; a system of vaults which continue their leaps from each other into eternity.

Now it is clear what the next stage will (or should) be.

What is left to explode—is the concreteness. A stone is no longer a stone, but a system of intersecting angles and planes in whose play the geometrical basis of its forms explodes.

Out of the semicircular outlines of vaults and arches explode the semicircles of their structural design.

Complex columns disintegrate into primary cubes and cylinders, out of whose interdependence arises the concrete semblance of elements of architecture and nature.

The play of chiaroscuro—the collision of luminescent projections with the ruins of gaping darkness between them—changes into independent spots no longer of light and dark, but of corporeally applied dark and light colors (precise colors, and not a range of “tones”).

Can this all really be in Piranesi’s etchings?

No, not within the limits of the etchings.

But beyond them.

Not in the work of Piranesi.

But beyond their limits.

A leap beyond the limits of this *opus*.

And in the category of cannonades of directions and schools bursting out of each other.

And in the first place, beyond the canon of Realism in the form in which it is popularly interpreted.

A first leap—beyond the limits of the precise outline of objects engaged in the play of the geometrical forms composing them—and we have Cézanne.

A connection with the object is still perceptible.

Next—the young Picasso, Gleizes, Metzinger.¹⁹

A step further—and the blossoming of Picasso.

The object—“the pretext”—has now disappeared.

It has already dissolved and disappeared.

It exploded into lines and elements, which by fragments and “stage wings” (the legacy of Piranesi) construct a world of new spaces, volumes, and their interrelationships.

Leftists of the arts and . . . ecstasy?

Picasso and ecstasy?

Picasso and . . . pathos?

Whoever has seen *Guernica* would be less surprised at such an assertion.

The Germans, while looking at *Guernica*, asked its author: “You did this?”

And proudly the painter replied: “No—you did!”

And it would probably be difficult to find—with the exception of Goya’s *Horrors of War*—a more complete and more heartrending expression of the inner tragic dynamics of human destruction.

But it is interesting that even along the paths to what appear here as a burst of social indignation by the militant Spaniard—the connection between Picasso and ecstasy has been noted in relation to his actual method in even earlier stages of his work.

There the ecstatic explosion did not yet coincide with the revolutionary essence of the theme.

And it was not from the theme that the explosion was born.

There, like a single elephant in a china shop, Picasso trampled and smashed completely only the “cosmically established order of things so hateful to him” as such.

Not knowing where to strike out, who was guilty of the social disorder of the “order of things,” he struck at “the

96 things" and "the order" before "gaining sight" momentarily in *Guernica* and seeing where and in what lay the disharmony and the "initial cause."

Thus, curiously enough, even before *Guernica* Picasso was included in the category of "mystics" by, for example, Burger (*Cézanne and Hodler*).

And this was because of signs . . . of ecstasy.²⁰

But in Picasso's *Guernica* the leap is accomplished from an unconcretized, ecstatic "protest" into the emotion of a revolutionary challenge to the Fascism crushing Spain.

And Picasso himself—was in the ranks of the Communist Party.²¹

The fate of the majority of others—is different.

Their insides are not familiar with ecstatic explosions. For their insides have not been burned by passion.

Their insides were not scorched by the flame of an overwhelming idea.

And by the very loftiest of all possible ideas—the idea of social protest.

By the fire of battle.

By the flame of the re-creation of the world.

They are not shaken by inner thunderous peals of indignation.

In their souls there do not gleam serpentine thunderbolts of wrath.

They do not blaze with a white fire in which the service to an idea flares up in action.

And few are those who know ecstasy within their own creations.

An ideological impulse is lacking.

And there is no passion of creation.

And in the scheme of ecstasy they are like separate links of a single historical chain of the leaping movement of art as a whole, and there is lacking in their personal biographies those very grand leaps and bursts beyond the frame of the newer and newer limits which overflow in the life paths of El Greco and Piranesi, Zola and Whitman, Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.

Even if they no longer burn with a mere nuance of a flame.

Even if the fires of their burning do not reach the degree of the flame of social protest.

But they all are devoured by ideas more valuable for them than life itself.

And only such ideas.

Only the obsession of such ideas.

Only self-dissolution and self-immolation in the service of what is capable of engendering passion.

Only in such a degree of incandescent obsession is ecstasy possible through uninterrupted leaps, of the expressive means of the artist; who is embraced by ideas like flames, who erupts with images like lava, who with the blood of his own heart nourishes his own creations . . .

However, after this flight of one's own feelings, which is somewhat unexpected on the pages of research, let us return once again and look at the various aspects of the phenomenon which interests us—in the work of the very same Piranesi.

Perhaps this would be a most appropriate moment to pause briefly at a strange appearance of ecstasy which for some reason is very often connected with visions of architectural images.

One of the greatest merits of architectural constructions and ensembles is considered to be the harmonic transition of some of their forms into others, as if some "overflowed" into others.

This is immediately perceptible in the most perfect specimens of architecture.

And the dynamics of these elements of construction overflowing into each other arouse that feeling of emotional captivity, that "non-concrete," "non-representational" whole, that a truly harmonious building would represent for us.

The "non-concrete" and "non-representational" in the given case in no way removes from such an ensemble a very well-defined "figurative quality."

And in this sense architecture in various epochs is expressive in different ways, and moreover, expresses a definite thought or idea in the most concrete sense of the word.

And this is because the "image" is always socially and historically conditioned and expresses in itself a definite ideological content of a certain epoch.

The very rhythm (and melody) of forms harmoniously overflowing into each other is a reflection, through the interrelationship of volumes and spaces and the construction of materials, of a certain prevailing image of social conceptions, and a completed building thus expresses and embodies the spiritual content of a builder-nation at a definite stage of its social and historical development.

(The mistake of so-called Left architecture—especially Constructivist²²—consisted in the rejection of the "figurative" content of a building, which reduced it to a dependence on the utilitarian aims and the characteristics of the building materials.

No less repulsive in its ideology is the architecture which substitutes for [the figurative content of a building] an eclectic reconstruction "in fragments" of elements taken

from obsolete architectural epochs which, in their forms, express the ideology of other nations and social institutions of political varieties strange and alien to us.²³

If one compares the perfect transitions of architectural forms into each other in such different models as, let us say, the Hagia Sophia or Chartres Cathedral with a government building of the epoch of Nicholas I or with the façade of the Pitti Palace, then one is immediately struck by the basic difference of the rhythmic nature of both the forms themselves as well as the rhythmic passage of the transition of one into the other which occurs in the process of the formation of a complete organic architectural unity.

And each of these models begins to speak with utmost figurative eloquence of its own epoch: of its system or its inner aspirations.

So expressive is the appearance of palaces of feudal lords who constructed a fortress in the center of the city—as a stronghold against a commune of too independent townspeople.

An image of absolutism frozen in its indestructible principles—is the structure of buildings of the Nicholas era. The terrestrial emperor is a concrete and tangible "Tsar and God," leaning on the bureaucrat and gendarme.

And on the other hand, the exalted "soaring" of the Middle Ages in Gothic churches which aspired to the abstract idealistic God of the mystics, for whom the Roman high priest—the Pope—did not succeed in substituting himself.

However, at the basis of all the historical differentiation of the architectural image in the composition of ensembles of various epochs, there always lies one and the same principle—the principle of the transition of separate parts of a work into one another, the principle of a harmony which resounds in different ways in different epochs.

It is on this second feature that we will now concentrate our attention.

98 On the various paths and crossroads of my journey toward cinematography I had to occupy myself for some time with architecture as well (at the Institute of Civil Engineers). I was just about to proceed with my projected work when the whirlwind of the Civil War swept me away and then did not return me to the drawing boards of architectural projects, but transferred me to the stage of the theater, first as a designer, then as a theater director, then—as a film director.

My experience as an architectural planner and theater designer did not last long.

But long enough to grasp one extremely important feature of the actual process of the “creation” of spatial-volume constructions.

There is a good reason for calling architecture “frozen music” (*gefrorene Musik*—Goethe).

At the basis of the composition of an architectural ensemble, at the basis of the harmony of the piling up of its masses, in the establishment of the melody of future overflowings of its forms and subdivisions of its rhythmic articulations which provide harmony to the minting of its ensembles, lies that same unique “dance” which is at the basis of the creation of works of music, painting, and film montage.

The masses and the spatial caesuras between them, the spots of light and the pits of darkness setting them off, the accumulation of forms growing out of each other and the definitions of the general contours which run off in trills of details are all preceded by a preliminary sketch of spots, lines, and intersections which attempt to make fast on paper that flight of spatial visions which is condemned to become embodied in brick or stone, in iron or concrete, in glass and in the textural treatment of the walls of the finished construction.

At the basis of the architectural projection is the same excitement which from the degree of inspired obsession now pours over into flames of ecstasy—and dithyrambs of

its visions are made secure in the choir of a cathedral frozen in stone, now by a sumptuous march step whose image for centuries has been embodied in the palatial and park structures of Versailles, and now, finally, is capable of dispersing itself in the artificial play of the pipes of porcelain shepherds and shepherdesses who through their coquettish playing revive the atmosphere of the Trianon . . .

We are interested in the first case.

A case of extreme obsession.

A case when architecture is not yet analogous to salon conversation in stone, but is a unique stone “symbol of faith”—a passionate expression conveyed in stone of its ideological credo, whose ardor forces stone upon stone to pile up and in their aspiration toward the sky, to forget about their own weight, to fly by means of arrow-shaped arches suspended in the air, and moving apart the piers between them, to return into them along the surface of the stained-glass windows burning with multicolored fires.

It is difficult to find structures which more distinctly represent the embodiment of ecstasy frozen in stone than Gothic churches.

It is difficult to find buildings which by their structure alone are more capable of being “in tune” with the ecstatic harmony of one entering beneath their vaults.

A separate chapter would be needed to analyze to what degree the structure and form of such a cathedral in all its features repeat that system of successive degrees of intensity erupting out of each other, the principle of going out of self and the transition into each other and the final merging into one of all the elements composing it when the vaults are shaken by the organ and the sun is streaming through the stained-glass window, etc., etc.

But we are also interested in the social-historical aspect of the form of a Gothic cathedral, about which a great deal has already been written, as well as in the internal prototype of it as an ecstatic vision.

13 Mexican ornament from
Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico*, 1931

14 Indian ornament.



13



14

And we are quite justified in suspecting such a psychological basis for it.

If at the initial source of this image there would have been no ecstatic state, then the image which had not been engendered by such a state would not be in a condition to function as a "prescription" which would induce the reader experiencing it to fall into a state of ecstasy by repeating it.

Tolstoy wrote about music in this way. (The shortest path of the direct transmission of the initial state of the author—to the listener.)

Thus waltz tempo is a copy of that state in which Johann Strauss' "soul danced," repeating in its movements the structure of this tempo in the finished waltz. One who is dancing participates in that same state in which the author was at the moment of the creation of the dance.

A rudimentary model of this same phenomenon can be found in the culture of ancient Mexico (fig. 13).

Here there are models not quite so grandiose and systematically developed by a system of canons as in the culture of the Gothic church. But it is just because of this, probably, that everything is even clearer and more perceptible. Chimeras are solemnly enthroned in these cathedrals like the frightening visions of delirium.

Frightening are the thousands of figures encircling like a forest the structures of the Mexican's Asiatic peers, the Indian "gopurahs" (fig. 14).²⁴

But they (basically composed of separate natural phenomena: the head of an eagle over the breasts of a woman, a human body crowned by an elephant's head) are nothing in the horror they inspire to the ornamental monsters of ancient Mexico.

And here the monstrosity and frightening unexpectedness derives not so much from the combination of various frightening details which actually belong to various animals (the

00 same way in which Leonardo da Vinci composed "real" stuffed animals from unreal creatures, and Barnum set up in the fair booths at the beginning of his career) so much as from . . . the ornamental decomposition of visible objects of nature.

Your head literally whirls when you look at the treatment of the corner of the Nunnery in Uxmal, which has the form of a decomposed human profile, or at the serpent heads disintegrating into unbelievable irreconcilable confusion on the galleries behind the pyramid in Teotihuacan.

How simply and clearly are the split details composed back again "in reverse" into a bear: muzzle, eyes, paws, its back on a light blue rug of North American Indians.

How easy it is to recover the whole from this ornamental distribution done "by montage." And what dizziness actually overcomes you when a stone hook, protruding diagonally from a corner of the building, begins to be read as a nose, and deformed stone eyes must be sought by a system of separate carved stones on both sides of the corner, and the teeth of the lower part of the decoration of the building suddenly appear to be a system of monstrously deformed jaws.

The dizziness is the result of the constant sliding from the prototype-face into this system of fragmented details which lose their human features, and back again into a face, in an anguished attempt to reproduce the *process* through which one becomes the other, the initial one becomes the monstrous result and the monstrous result—again—"in reverse"—becomes the initial one (without which it is impossible to "read" it, to understand, perceive, and include it into the system of representations peculiar to us),

And . . . dizziness—is not simply a turn of speech—it is what actually occurs.

For in the attempt to "enter" into the process of the genesis of these frenzied forms of ornamental arrangement of faces and heads (which actually become "frenzied" by the way the forms have been arranged), you enter into a system of

the normal, standard process which engendered these modes of arrangement of forms that are inaccessible to a normal state of consciousness [. . .]

De Quincey writes about the vision of similar architectural images found in states of exaltation and ecstasy in connection with . . . opium (*Confessions of an English Opium-eater*, 1821). (He calls his own addiction to opium a sickness.)

"In the early stage of my malady, the splendours of my dreams were indeed chiefly architectural: and I beheld such pomp of cities and palaces as was never yet beheld by the waking eye, unless in the clouds" (De Quincey, *Confessions* . . . , ed. Richard Garnett [New York: White and Allen, 1885], p. 135).

Later he quotes Wordsworth, "a passage which describes, as an appearance actually beheld in the clouds, what in many of its circumstances I saw frequently in sleep" (p.135).²⁵

In the same excerpt he pauses at the episode of the *uninterrupted* flow of architectural ensembles which piled up like thunder clouds:

"The sublime circumstance—'battlements that on their *restless* fronts bore stars'—might have been copied from my architectural dreams, for it often occurred" (p. 135).

What has already been said above would have been enough to compare Piranesi's amazing architectural visions which float into each other not only in terms of the uniqueness of their structure, but even their figurative system, to the reflection in concrete forms of the fantastic architecture of the ecstatic states of the author.

However this is also confirmed by that fact that De Quincey actually uses Piranesi's own *Prisons* as the most precise correspondence to those architectural visions which capture him in states of exaltation under the influence of opium:

"Many years ago, when I was looking over Piranesi's *Antiquities of Rome*, Mr. Coleridge, who was standing by, described to me a set of plates by that artist, called his

Dreams, and which record the scenery of his own visions during the delirium of a fever: Some of them (I describe only from memory of Mr. Coleridge's account) representing vast Gothic halls: on the floor of which stood all sorts of engines and machinery, wheels, cables, pulleys, levers, catapults, etc., etc., expressive of enormous power put forth, and resistance overcome. Creeping along the sides of the walls, you perceived a staircase; and upon it, groping his way upwards, was Piranesi himself: follow the stairs a little further, and you perceive it come to a sudden abrupt termination, without any balustrade, and allowing no step onwards to him who had reached the extremity, except into the depths below. Whatever is to become of poor Piranesi, you suppose, at least, that his labours must in some way terminate here. But raise your eyes, and behold a second flight of stairs still higher: on which again Piranesi is perceived, but this time standing on the very brink of the abyss. Again elevate your eye, and a still more aerial flight of stairs is beheld: and again is poor Piranesi busy on his aspiring labours: and so on, until the unfinished stairs and Piranesi both are lost in the upper gloom of the hall.—With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams" (p. 133).

We must not be disturbed by factual impreciseness of petty details.

The *Prisons* are called *Dreams*.

The movements of Piranesi himself along the staircases of his own fantasy—are invented.

An etching similar to the one described is not in the series *Prisons*.

But the fact that the flight of staircases reproduced the inner flight of the author himself is evident.

And it is not accidental that the mutual memory of the two poets—one about the etchings and the other the story about them—embodied this idea into a real image of the author of the etchings running along the staircases.



15

02 There is also no testimony of visions of any feverish delirium imprinted on these etchings. And the reflection in them of states of real exaltation—is nothing more than baseless conjecture. But even more basic is the mistaken definition of the halls as Gothic.

This is not so much a mistake as Piranesi's ecstasy caught very precisely, which through architectural form is expressed very fully in Gothic halls and cathedrals.

The scheme, the device, the formula or method is manifested very clearly when you see them applied not only in pure form, but in parody. Parody can be of two types.

Either what is parodied—"is raised to laughter"—is both the theme as well as its treatment. And then parody is an oblique attack on something.

Or parody is of method (device, formula, scheme). This arises when the object of scorn is not the "treatment," but the "theme." Then the means are in the hands of the author himself, and he applies them when, for example, in order to achieve persiflage, "the insignificant" is raised to heights of great emotion.

The application to "the insignificant" of a treatment normally applied to "the worthy and significant" in and of itself produces—by the lack of correspondence between the form and content of narration—a mocking and comic effect.

(Thus, for example, the comic "catalogues" of Rabelais, which "emotionalize" the trifles of everyday life in the childhood of the giant Gargantua, sound like a parody on Whitman.)

There is a similar case in my own practice.

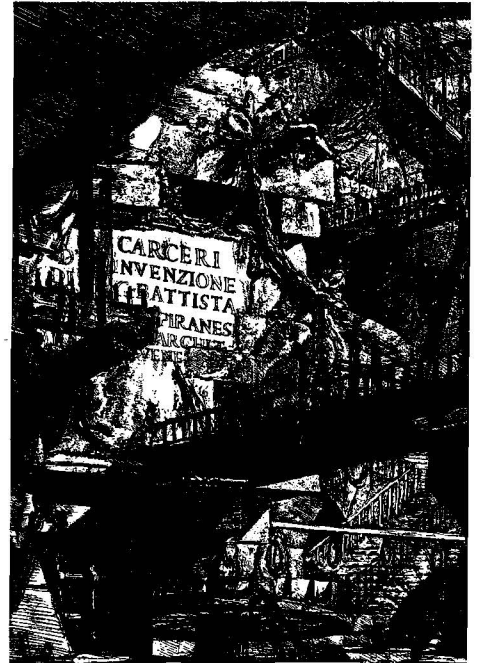
It is interesting to note that such an example was inserted productively into a series of shots (when the production of *Old and New* was suspended)—that is, in the middle of shots of the very film in which the problems of emotion were made more precise.

16 Giovanni Batista Piranesi, Title page to "Invenzioni Capric di Carceri." *First state, I, ca.1745.*
17 *Second state, I, ca.1760.*

18 Giovanni Batista Piranesi, Carcere, with a Staircase Flanked by Military Trophies. *First state, VIII, ca.1745.*
19 *Second state, VIII, ca.1760.*



16



17



18



19

This "case" is one of the scenes from the film *October* (produced in 1927).

The scene is the ascent of Kerensky, the head of the pre-October Provisional Government, up the Jordan Staircase of the Winter Palace, which is treated as an ironic symbol of his rise to the summit of power (fig. 15).

The "trick" of this scene (and its ironic effect) consists in the fact that *one and the same* piece showing the ascent of the head of state up the marble staircase of the Winter Palace has been cemented together in succession "ad infinitum." Of course, not really "ad infinitum," but in the course of the four or five variants in which this same scene was shot, which during the actual shooting was intended to be a very luxurious and ironic episode; however, the episode is solved simply and "in an everyday fashion"—after ascending the staircase, Kerensky "democratically" shakes the hands of former tsarist footmen lined up on the top landing of the staircase.

Already in the course of montage there arose the idea of solving the sequence as a parody through the repetition of the shot showing the ascent up the staircase.

In any case, the same fragment showing the ascent is repeated four to five times.

Besides "the insignificance" of the object, the ironic effect was helped by the fact that to achieve emotion in the scheme of construction—where to produce ecstasy the transference (leap) from dimension to dimension, from piece to piece is absolutely necessary—here not only are there no "leaps" in quality, but not even a change in the sequence itself.

In one piece Kerensky climbs from the bottom to the top.

In the second—from the bottom to the top—up that same staircase.

In the third—from the bottom to the top.

In the fourth.

In the fifth.

This lack of a qualitative *crescendo* from piece to piece was emphasized by the fact that into the cutting of these pieces was included a crescendo of titles which cited the ranks of ever increasing importance by which this pre-October toady of the bourgeoisie was so obligingly covered.

"Minister of this," "minister of that," "president of the Council of Ministers," "Chief of State."

And the repetition of one and the same path in the representation in its turn "decreased" the crescendo of titles and ranks—lowered them to the level of that absurdity in the ascent "to nowhere" which the little legs of the high commander-in-chief, fettered by English style leggings, beat up the marble stairs.

As we can see, through an essentially simple system of displacement the emotional rise of Piranesi from the visions of De Quincey-Coleridge was transformed into the ironic flight "in place" of Aleksander Fedorovich Kerensky.

"From the sublime to the ridiculous—in one step."

Just as in the essence of the phenomenon, so in the principles of its compositional embodiment!

In any case, this example provides us with the realization of our basic principle from one more angle of possible perspectives. From the position of a parody-ironic construction.

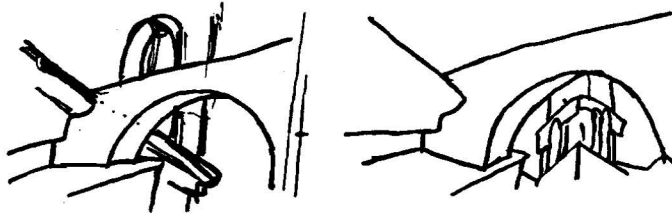
We have already spoken above about the "significance" and meaning of just those forms—architectural forms—pouring into each other, which belong to the system of the most stable objects of nature organized by man.

However let us turn back, for a moment, and once again compare what Piranesi does in his classical *Carceri* to what Giesecke calls the "Ur-Carceri."

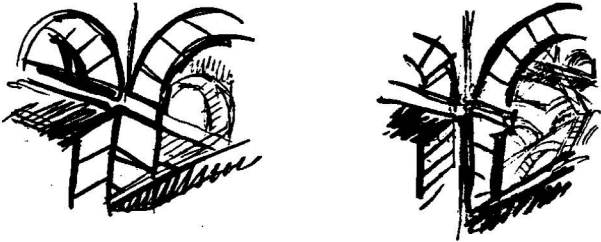
20 "Each time behind such a column or semicircle of an arch the perspective movement is caught up again." Diagram by Eisenstein.

21 "It is very curious that certain aspects of Piranesi's method correspond to the 'vertical' landscapes . . . of Chinese and Japanese painting (kakemono)." Diagram by Eisenstein.

104



not like this



but like this

20



The similarity of these two states is particularly notable. In them we see everywhere one and the same technically composed device.

To the already existing states (see, for example, in Giesecke the reproductions of both states of the title sheet [figs. 16, 17] or the sheet of the powerful monumental staircase with armor, helmets and standards at its feet [figs. 18, 19]) Piranesi invariably adds new foregrounds.

These new foregrounds in one step hurl ever deeper into the depths the spanning forms which thrust, plane after plane, ever backward.

Even without this, the actual composition of architectural ensembles is constructed on the basis of the uninterrupted reduction of repetitions of one and the same architectural motif, repetitions which seem to hurl out of each other (by perspective).

Like the tubes of a single telescope extending in length and diminishing in diameter, these diminishing arches engendered by the arches of a plane closer up, these flights of stairs ejecting progressively diminishing new flights of stairs upward, penetrate into the depths. Bridges engender new bridges. Columns new columns. And so on, *ad infinitum*. As far as the eye can follow.

In raising the intensity of the etchings from state to state, Piranesi, in establishing new foregrounds, seems to thrust once again into the depths one measure deeper the entire figure created by him of successively deepening volumes and spaces connected and intersected by staircases.

Plane bursts from plane and by a system of explosions plunges ever deeper into the depths.

Or through a system of new foregrounds continuously arising which by their displacement plunge forward from the etching, attacking the viewer.

Forward or into the depths?—Here is it not all the same? And in this simultaneity of opposite aspirations—forward

and into the depths—once again there is solemnly removed in ecstasy one more pair—a pair of opposites!

As we can see, this occurs not only in the scheme of a finished construction, but even in the method of the actual process of construction in which one plane “issues out of” another one.

One must pause for a moment here and say a few words about the significance of reduced perspective.

Their role in Piranesi is twofold.

In the first place, the usual role—illusory-spatial, that is, “drawing in” the eye into an imagined depth of space which is represented according to the rules of how one is used to seeing distances as they diminish in actual reality.

But there is another—“in the second place.”

Perspectives in Piranesi are constructed quite uniquely.

And the basis of their uniqueness is their constant interruption and image of “leaping.”

Nowhere in the *Prisons* do we find an uninterrupted perspective view into the depths.

But everywhere the initial movement of deepening perspective is interrupted by a bridge, a column, an arch, a passage.

Each time behind such a column or semicircle of an arch the perspective movement is caught up again (fig. 20).

However, it is not in the same perspective mode but in a new one—usually in a much more reduced scale of representation than you would expect or might suggest.

This produces a double effect.

The first is a direct effect which is expressed in the fact that such reduced representation through the breach of an

arch or from under a bridge, or between two columns, creates the illusion that what is represented in the depths is extremely remote.

But the other effect is even stronger.

We have already said that the scale of these new pieces of architectural space turns out to be different from the way the eye “expects” to see them.

In other words: the dimensions and movement of architectural elements which are directed, let us say, toward meeting an arch naturally define the scale of elements behind the arch while proceeding from the scale of elements in front of the arch. That is, the eye expects to see behind the arch a continuation of the architectural theme in front of the arch, reduced normally according to the laws of perspective.

Instead through this arch another architectural motif meets the eye, and moreover—a motif taken in reduced perspective, approximately twice as large as the eye would suggest.

And as a result one feels as if the suggested arched construction “is exploding” out of its naturally suggested scale into a qualitatively different scale—into a scale of higher intensity (in the given case—the normally proposed movement into space is exploding “out of itself”).

This is the source of the unexpected qualitative leap in scale and space.

And the series of spatial movements into the depths cut off from each other by columns and arches is constructed like a succession of broken links of independent spaces strung out not in terms of a single, uninterrupted perspective, but as a sequence of collisions of spaces whose depth is of a qualitatively different intensity. (This effect is constructed on the capacity of our eye to continue by inertia a movement once it has been given. The collision of this “suggested” path of movement with another path substituted for it also produces the effect of a jolt. It is on the analogous ability

22 "Here the new element turns out to be unexpectedly reduced, but at the same time unexpectedly increased (also approximately twice!)"
Diagram by Eisenstein.

06

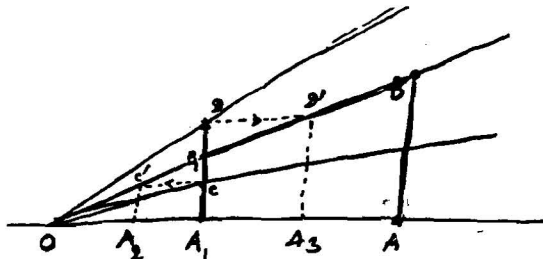


not



but

22



23



24

of retaining imprints of a visual impression that the phenomenon of cinematic movement is built.)

It is very curious that certain aspects of Piranesi's method correspond to the "vertical" landscapes . . . of Chinese and Japanese painting (kakemono).

Their scheme is like this (see fig. 21).

Here also a remarkable feeling of ascent is achieved.

But the character of this "ascent" is very different from Piranesi's models.

If in Piranesi everything is—dynamism, whirlwind, a furious tempo drawing one into the depths and inward, then here everything—is a serene, solemn ascent toward the enlightened heights.

But in their emotional effect both this and the other model exceed the limits of a common realistic effect.

The first does so—by passion.

The second—by enlightenment. It is as if the active aggressiveness of Western ecstasy were engraved in them (Spanish, Italian) in contrast to the ecstasy of the quietism of the East (India, China).

It is interesting to compare the difference in the means by which these effects are obtained, effects different in nature but equally ecstatic in regard to the "normal" order of things.

The attempt of the Italian is directed with all his might toward producing a three-dimensional body captured realistically from the flat surface of the plate.

The attempt of the Chinese is to make out of three-dimensional reality—a two-dimensional image of contemplation.

This is the source of the representational canons—the ex-

23 "The jump between AB and A_1D is less than the normal perspective interval $AB-A_1B_1$, and the eye, carrying A_1 to A_3 , extends it forward—to the flat plane." Diagram by Eisenstein.

24 Sketch for the scenery of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, 1944-1945.

cessive perspective of the one and . . . the reverse perspective of the other.

What is common to both is the exact same sequential explosion of the uninterrupted representation that occurs.

In Piranesi the continuity of perspective is smashed by columns, arches, and bridges.

In Chu Chi-Kuei and Buson Essa²⁶ the compactness of the representation simply explodes or "is motivated" by layers of clouds.

After each such explosion or letting in of a layer of clouds, the successive representation of an element of landscape (a mountain mass) is once again not given in the scale which would be dictated by an effect that would produce a sense of real distance.

However, in contrast to Piranesi, here the new element turns out to be unexpectedly reduced, but at the same time unexpectedly increased (also approximately twice! [fig. 22]):

The volume of the object (the mountain ridge) also "goes out of itself" in respect to the suggested scale.

But this leap is not for the purpose of increasing the range between the normal perspective dimensions of details, but on the contrary, for the purpose of reducing this range.

According to the scheme it is obvious what occurs in both cases.

Let the real perspective reduction of the object AB at point A_1 be expressed through A_1B_1 .

At this point Piranesi represents it in the dimension A_1C (thus $A_1C < A_1B_1$).

The jump between AB and A_1C is greater than the normal perspective interval $AB-A_1B_1$.

This is the reason the "bursts" are stronger, and the illusory feeling of depth greater, and the eye, carrying point A_1 to A_2 , explodes into the depths.

The Chinese painter at this same point A_1 represents the object in the dimension A_1D (thus $A_1D > A_1B_1$).

The jump between AB and A_1D is less than the normal perspective interval $AB-A_1B_1$, and the eye, carrying A_1 to A_3 , extends it forward—to the flat plane (fig. 23).

As a result both cases produce an ecstatic effect which goes beyond the limits of the simple actual reflection of the appearance of phenomena.

But their character is different (opposite): one serves as an expression of the pantheistic quietism characteristic of the ecstatic contemplation of the East; the other expresses the "explosiveness" typical of "active" ecstasy—one of the tendencies of "Western" ecstasy. (This certainly does not mean that the East is not familiar with the fanatic ecstasy of the dervish or the Shashsei-Vashei, and Spain—the mystical ecstasies of St. John of the Holy Cross, or that the creations of Fra Beato Angelico do not correspond to the Bodhisattvas of India or the Mongol demons to the works of El Greco. This division is, of course, quite "conventional.")

Quietism tries to reconcile the opposition by means of the *dissolution of one into the other*. This is why the reduced range of the difference in dimensions repeats this process, returning and bringing the explosive leaps into one smooth, single flow.

The other type of ecstasy acts in a different way: while sharpening each of the contrasts to the maximum, it tries at the highest point of this tension to force them to *penetrate each other*, and through this it raises their reduced dynamism to the highest limits.

The present section of this work has been basically devoted to this type. Attention is drawn to quietism in another work of this collection—in "Non-indifferent Nature."

08 This method of capturing depth of space is very close to me in my own work on the shot.

It is interesting that this method is formulated more clearly in *Old and New*, and it finds its most extensive application in the scenery of *Ivan the Terrible* where it also achieves the effect of the "enormity" of the chamber (fig. 24). I wrote about the meaning of these various scales in an extract of a paper on the Terrible in issues of *Izvestiia* [4 February 1945] in connection with the release of the first part of the film. And probably it is not accidental that I designated their size not by a static term, but by a dynamic one like "growing dimensions," vaults "rearing up," etc. Through this terminology I expressed the feeling created in them of the obsession and exaltation of the theme which the author achieved.

This method consists in the fact that "scenery as such" for my shots is never exhausted as a real "place of action."

Most of the time this "scenery as such" is like a "spot on the background" which penetrates an applied system of foregrounds, which are distributed endlessly "like stage wings" in front of it, driving this "scenery as such" farther and farther into the depths.

In my work scenery is unavoidably accompanied by the unlimited surface of the floor *in front of it*, which allows an unlimited advancement of separate details of the foreground, and these details consist of the following: transferred columns, parts of vaults, stoves, piers, or objects of everyday use.

The last point on this path is usually a close-up of the actor carried beyond all conceivable limits, over whose shoulder is all the space which can be outlined by the scenery with various modes of application, and nape of whose neck conceals that part of the studio which no longer can be fettered by applied details of a "place of action."

This "ecstatic" method of constructing the scenery according to the scheme . . . of a telescope is not limited in my work to the area of the visual and the plastic.

As other "schemes" of ecstatic construction, this also finds a place in the dramatic composition of my work.

If in terms of *Potemkin* and *The General Line*²⁷ we have touched on the "transference into the opposite" in the course of the drama itself, and in *Old and New* the pivot of action consisted in a similar transport from "the old" into "the new," then in another case of epic-drama we are concerned with a pure scheme of the phases of the development of a historical subject hurling out of each other consecutively "like a crossbow."

It was exactly in this way that the scheme of the subject of the film about the Ferghana Canal was constructed, which Pyotr Pavlenko and I planned right after *Alexander Nevsky* but, unfortunately, was never realized.

I conceived it as a triptych of the fight of man for freedom.

Three phases:

Tamerlane,
tsarism,
the collective farm structure.

How should one get involved with the dynamic unity of three such epochs separated by centuries and decades from each other?

The device here was the "triple crossbow" taken at the tempo of narration—a double going out of self grouped in retrospective sequence.

The first generation.

What came was an epic interpretation of Tamerlane's campaign and the siege of Urgench.

And its tragic finale flowed into the image of the old narrator Toxtasyn who is singing about those long past times.

The figure of the old man indicates the end of the first generation.

And the singing old man begins

the second generation.

The narration, in every day terms rather than in strong, poetic form, is in tune with the battle for a centimeter of the irrigation ditch of impoverished Central Asia under the tsars; a battle replacing the grand dimensions of the campaigns of the titans of the Middle Ages, of hundreds of thousands of fighters pursuing each other, those from besieged cities fighting beside each other like currents of a river, and like the flow of water, drowning the army of besiegers.

In the unequal battle with the bey and the tsar's bureaucrat, the old singer abandoned his native Central Asia after having begun a sorrowful page of his history with his song.

The merchant and bey kidnaped his daughter "for a debt."

The son broke with his father, the contemplator and non-resister of evil, and went off to be free.

And the old man dragged himself to the Iranian foothills, far away from people . . .

But even this episode turns out to be narrative: not a song about the past, but a story around the bonfire.

The story of an engineer-constructor, one of the participants in the unprecedented construction of the Ferghana Canal.

The engineer was that same young man—the son of Toxtasyn, who left his father, and the "second generation" of the film was the story of how, after passing through the Revolution, he came to the Ferghana construction.

And his tale opens

the third generation of the epic narration.

The third generation, beginning with his story, unfolding

a new monumental fresco of new campaigns by many thousands; but no longer is it a battle of one man against another, but the one battle which remains the lot of a man free from exploitation, free from the chains of slavery, a man creating the Communist society—a battle with the elements, a victory over nature, the subjugation of natural forces to the creative genius of a free man.

The living Toxtasyn returns from the Iranian foothills to the storm of this construction and meets his son at the joyful moment when the water is freed. . . .

In the epic structure of this film, as if in slow motion, is slowly unfolded this same telescopic structure which, in the instantaneous leap from phase to phase, moving like a spring, was examined by us above when we observed the action of the ecstatic effect in the preceding examples.

- 10 *Figures 1, 2, 11, 12, 15-19, and 24 were added to this article by the Editors.*
1. Text from Sergei Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia, III* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), pp. 156-187—Ed.
 - The manuscript of the chapter has no title. It is given here according to a note dated July 4, 1947, in which Eisenstein specifically writes: "Properly speaking, the second theme in each little chapter is or should be distinguished: for example, 'Helena, or Saving Virtue': 'Piranesi, or the Fluidity of Forms'."—Ed. Russian edition.
 2. Potylixa was a village outside Moscow where the film studios of the capital are located.—Ed.
 3. Daniel Marot (c.1663-1752)—French engraver and theater designer.—Ed. Russian edition.
 4. Gerard Edelinck (1640-1707)—French engraver.—Ed. Russian edition.
 5. William Hogarth (1697-1794)—English painter, engraver and theoretician of art.—Ed. Russian edition.
 6. Robert Nanteuil (1623-1678)—French engraver.—Ed. Russian edition.
 7. Claude Méllane (1598-1688)—French engraver.—Ed. Russian edition.
 8. However, this same mistake was made by the Academy of Architecture of the USSR—which was far less permissible than for an individual who happened to be a mere admirer—in the album *Piranesi* (1939), including it with the same lack of foundation in a series to which it does not belong.—S.M.E.
 9. S. M. Eisenstein, "Vertikal'nyj montaz, stat'ja pervaja" (translated as Chap. 2 in *The Film Sense*, New York 1942); see also "El Greco," in *Eisenstein's Complete Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1964), pp. 145ff. and 156ff.—Ed.
 10. Eisenstein is referring here to the actual Greek root of "ecstasy," a synthesis of the words "ex" and "stasis."—Trans.
 11. Albert Geisecke, "Meister de Grafik, IV," *Giovanni Batista Piranesi*.—S.M.E.
 12. *Zaválinka*—small mound of earth along the outer walls of a Russian peasant's house.—Trans.
 13. Jacques Callot (c.1592-1688)—French engraver.—Ed. Russian edition.
 14. In *The Battleship Potemkin*.—Ed.
 15. Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857).—Ed. Russian edition.
 16. Tchaikovsky was referring to the opera *Ivan Soussamin* of 1836, which marked the birth of Russian classical music.—Ed. Russian edition.
 17. *P. I. Tchaikovsky's Diary* (Moscow-Petersburg: GIZ, Musical Sector, 1923), pp. 214-215.—S.M.E.
 18. Although they do not undergo that savage violence which the disintegrating (exploding) line possesses in, for example, the pen drawings of Van Gogh.—S.M.E.
 19. Paul Cézanne asserted, "Everything in nature is sculpted in the form of a sphere, cone, or cylinder; one must learn to paint in these simple figures and if you learn to master these forms, you will be able to produce whatever you wish." Cézanne's formula reflected one of the directions of painting in the twentieth century—Cubism, whose program was stated by the French artists Albert Gleizes (1881-1953) and Jean Metzinger (1883) in the book *On Cubism* (1912).—Ed. Russian edition.
 20. This citation was introduced by me on another occasion in a corresponding section of "Non-indifferent Nature."—S.M.E.
 21. We'll return to the problem of Picasso's ecstasy in a section of "Non-indifferent Nature."—S.M.E.
 22. In the 1920's Russian Constructivist architects employed rational-functionalism as representative of the new Socialist society.—Trans.
 23. At the beginning of the twentieth century Russian architects were continuing to apply eclectic styles to their buildings.—Trans.
 24. Portal tower of Indian temples richly decorated with sculpture.—Ed. Russian edition.
 25. The poem by Wordsworth quoted by De Quincey is as follows: "The appearance, instantaneously disclosed,
Was of a mighty city—boldly say
A wilderness of building, sinking far
And self-withdrawn into a wondrous depth,
Far sinking into splendor—without end!
Fabric it seem'd of diamond, and of gold,
With alabaster domes, and silver spires,
And blazing terrace upon terrace, high
Up lifted; here, serene pavilions bright
In avenues disposed; there towers begirt
With battlements that on their restless fronts
Bore stars—illumination of all gems!
By earthly nature had the effect been wrought
Upon the dark materials of the storm
Now pacified: on them, and on the coves,
And mountain-steeps and summits, whereunto
The vapors had receded,—taking there
Their station under a cerulean sky . . ."—Ed. Russian edition.
 26. Buson (1716-1783)—Japanese artist and poet.—Ed. Russian edition.
 27. *The General Line*—the name of the first variant of the film *Old and New*.—Ed. Russian edition.
- Figure Credits
- 1, 4-9, 13, 14, 20-23 Reprinted from Sergei Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia, III* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), pp. 156-187.
 - 2, 15 Reprinted from *The Complete Films of Eisenstein* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1974).
 - 3 Reprinted from Ian Jonathan Scott, *Piranesi* (London: Academy Editions, 1975).
 - 10, 11, 16-19 Reprinted from Giovanni Batista Piranesi, *The Prisons* (New York: Dover Publications, 1973).
 - 12 Reprinted from Harold E. Wethey, *El Greco and His School*, vol. I (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1962).
 - 24 Reprinted from *Ivan the Terrible* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963).