Eisenstein; Montage and Architecture; re-printed in Assemblage 10; 1940

... Painting has remained incapable of fixing the total representation of a phenomenon in its full visual multidimensionality. Only the film camera has solved the problem of doing this on a flat surface, but its undoubted ancestor in this capability is- architecture. The Greeks have left us the most perfect examples of shot design, change of shot, and shot length... I shall quote here in full from Coisy's Histoire d' Architecture... It is hard to imagine a montage sequence for an architectural ensemble more subtly composed, shot by shot, than the one that our legs create by walking among the buildings of the Acropolis.

"... View of the Propylaeum: we see the symmetrical central block and two noticeably different wings- the right-hand one broader and the left-hand one less so... At first sight, nothing could be more uneven than this plan, but in fact it constitutes a completely balanced whole in which the general symmetry of the masses is accompanied by a subtle diversity in the details... The optical symmetry is impeccable.

First view of the square, Athene Promakhos: in the foreground towers the statue of Athene Promakhos. The Erechtheion and the Parthenon are in the background, so that the whole of this first panorama is subordinated to the statue, which is its central point and which creates an impression of unity. The Parthenon only acquires its significance when the visitor loses sight of this gigantic piece of sculpture. Parthenon and its oblique perspectives: the Parthenon first of all faces the spectator obliquely. The ancients generally preferred oblique views: they are more picturesque.

First panorama from the Erechtheion: the Parthenon is still the primary structure in our field of vision, but if we move on, it will be so close to us that we shall be unable to encompass its shape; at that moment the Erechtheion becomes the center of the panorama. It is precisely from this point that it offers us one of its most graceful silhouettes. The bare wall is enlivened by the porch of the Caryatids, which stand out from it as though against a background specifically created for them."

... The calculation of a film shot is obvious, for there too the effect of the first impression from each new, emerging shot is enormous. Equally strong, however, is the calculation on a montage effect, that is, the sequential juxtaposition of those shots. Let us, in fact, draw up the general compositional schemes of these four successive 'picturesque shots.' It is hard to imagine a stricter, more elegant, and more triumphant construct than this sequence. Shots a and b are equal in symmetry and, at the same time, the opposites of each other in spatial extent. Shots c and d are in mirror symmetry, and function, as it were, as enlargements of the right-hand and left-hand wings of shot a, then reforming again into a single, balanced mass. The sculptural motif b is repeated through shot c, by the group of sculpture d, and so on.

... From a somewhat different aspect or point of view, we can find other elements of montage in Christian (Catholic) cathedrals. This occurs in one version of what is invariably found in any Catholic church: the so-called Stations of the Cross, that is, the twelve sculptural groups representing the twelve stopping places that legend ascribes to the procession to Golgotha. The twelve 'stations' are placed at certain distance from each other, usually around the outer ambulatory of the cathedral. That is how I have seen them in Chartres Cathedral and a number of others. But in places of pilgrimage, they may also be placed outside the cathedral....

I cannot help recalling another example of a montage structure standing in the center of the Catholic religion, in Rome, at its very heart: St, Peter's, and in the very heart of that cathedral, under the famous canopy with its
11.5-meters-high columns that tower above the high altar of the cathedral… I refer to the 8 representations in relief of the coat of arms of the Barberini pope, Urban VIII, adorning the two outer sides of the four plinths of those gigantic columns that support the canopy… These eight identical coats of arms, apparently meaningless, are in reality not only not identical, but far from devoid of significance.…..

The dimensions, design, and disposition of each coat of arms are identical. They display the heraldic device of the Barberini family to which Pope Urban VIII belonged: three bees. Above the shield, the conventional decorative curlicues are identical, in no way remarkable. If, however, we start to examine them more carefully, we shall see that, starting with the left-hand front plinth, the expression on the face of the female head above each shield changes sharply from shield to shield. From being calm and contented, it passes through all the stages of pain and terror, until above the eighth coat of arms it returns to an expression of tranquility. But that is not all. Above the sixth shield in the sequence, the woman's head suddenly disappears and is replaced by a no less traditional Renaissance ornament- a child's head with wings. Over the seventh and eighth shields, the woman's head returns with new and different facial expressions on the face… The deformation that occurs on the surface of the shield itself is the most curious of all. Flat at first, beginning with the second shield its lower part starts to bulge outward, until with the sixth shield it 'subsides' and remains flat on the last two shields.…..

What do these eight shields represent, taken in conjunction? The answer is given by, among others, Wotkowski [in L'Art Profane]:

"These eight shields are pictures that express, through the physiognomy of a woman, the various stages of childbirth. She relaxes as the womb releases its burden. The shield is topped by a life-sized woman's head, above which are the potential crossed keys surmounted by the tiara. At each crisis in labor, the expression of the face changes. The scene begins on the face of the left-hand front plinth; the woman's face begins to contract; on the second and following plinths the features pass through a series of increasingly violent convulsions. Simultaneously, the hair becomes increasingly dishevelled; the eyes, which at first express a bearable degree of suffering, take on a haggard look; the mouth, closed at first, opens, then screams with piercing realism… Calmness returns for a moment in between the pains, but the face still remains in pain, as though numbed, stupefied; then the pains come back with greater intensity, the features contract again, she looks terrifying… Finally, comes the delivery: the belly subsides and the mother's head disappears, to give way to a cherubic baby's head with curly hair, smiling beneath the unchanging pontifical insignia… But that is not all. Below the papal shield, which the artist has sculpted in the shape of the torso of a pregnant woman, there is the head of a satyr, whose lower part represents the external female genital organs, the anatomical details of which are quite complete and which undergo changes that occur throughout the stages of labor;"

… Popular legend has preserved an… account of this story… While Urban was commissioning the canopy from the great architect [Bernini], it happened that a nephew of the pope, probably Taddeo- later to be a cardinal, a generalissimo of the Church, and Prince of the Palatine- fell in love with a sister of one of Bernini's pupils and made her pregnant. As a result of this family's misfortune, the girl's brother could think of no other solution than to implore his Master to intercede with the pope and to save the situation by a marriage. Bernini, confident and sincere, believing that among the children of Christ differences of social class ought not to prevail, went to the pope to ask for justice. Urban not only rejected the request, he scolded the artist for his gross presumption… Indignant, his conscience affronted, the artist returned to his work, and when he witnessed the pain of the unhappy mother and heard the whimpering of the newborn infant, he swore this solemn oath: "The pope refuses to recognize his own flesh and blood- the son of a member of his family! Very well. For the rest of his life, around the altar at which he says Mass, in the midst of the church from whence goes forth the word of Christ, he shall have the innocent victims forever beneath his eyes: the mother and the child, nay the very act of their martyrdom."

….. In themselves, the pictures, the phases, the elements of the whole are innocent and indecipherable. The blow is struck only when the elements are juxtaposed into a sequential image. The placing of the shields- or rather their 'displacing'- around the four plinths, at right angles and at six meters distance from each other, together with the need to walk round the whole vast quadrilateral of the canopy and to begin from one particular corner - these are the factors that make up the cunning separation of the eight montage sequences. Such is the method by which, in the very heart of Catholicism, a most venomous satire on its triple-crowned head has managed to remain in encoded form for centuries…

Here I cannot help recalling an analogous instance. Admittedly it is to be found at the other end of the continent, almost three hundred years later, and in a totally different class context…. In 1905, it was strictly forbidden to make any reference to such events as the dispersal of a crowd by an armed force. How, then, could such a scene be conveyed in a magazine?… In one