

Introduction

Expanding the Notion of Montage in Architecture

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Montage is an experimental methodological process and editing technique that comes into use as a creative practice and generates new narrative forms in visual arts, design, and communication. The process is characterized by the appropriation, combination, juxtaposition, and superimposition of heterogeneous sources, both material and immaterial, that are collected, assembled, arranged or inserted as fragments into an existing situation so that *something new* is created. The technique was originally developed in the fields of cinematography, literature, and photography, where it has set strong impulses for new ways of thinking in the early 20th century, such as in the works of the Dadaists and Constructivists. As a multi-sensory cultural technique and playful design methodology, it also became the focus of attention in architecture and urban design, and was adopted in projects such as Yona Friedman's *Ville Spatiale* (an ongoing project starting in 1959), Superstudio's Continuous Monument (1969) or as a theoretical endeavor in Oswald Mathias Unger's *City Metaphors* (1976/1982). Montages favor contradictory and irritating juxtapositions over a solely aesthetic presentation, which is rather characteristic of collages uniting heterogeneous elements on one level of meaning. Although in both methods of composition, collages and montages, the original properties of mounted fragments remain identifiable, the indexical quality of the imported elements is different. At the montage's heart lies the intellectual process of dialectics, serving didactic purposes, where the viewer takes an active role in the production of (new) meaning. This is where our epistemological interest stems from: Montage is a highly affective and effective medium in architecture and its significance in current architectural discourse should be emphasized and expanded, as will be demonstrated in this issue.

Historically, montage is typically identified as urban, visual, and spatial, as the art historian Martino Stierli explains in his seminal work *Montage and the Metropolis* (2018) where he provides us with:

»an understanding of montage as a wide-reaching cultural technique that evolved in an increasingly interdisciplinary era, but that is primarily urban in its subject matter and method and that therefore is preoccupied, across media, with coming to an understanding of modern metropolitan space through its architecture« (Stierli 2018: 27).

Here, the technique of montage is a perceptual phenomenon of the modern metropolis in its omnipresent multi-layered urban mobility and it is central to the avant-garde as *the* mode of artistic representation. According to Stierli, five critical features indicate the definition of the urban montage, in short: Montage is defined by the heterogeneity or plurality of the image; montage is a spatial constellation; montage is polyfocal and therefore posits a mobile and embodied viewer; montage is a consequence of industrialization and the age of technological reproducibility; montage is a consequence of the perceptual revolution brought about by the modern metropolis and seeks to visualize an (urban) reality not yet seen (Stierli 2018: 4–16). In this sense, Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (1927–1940) can be understood as a historiographic equivalent, while Le Corbusier's method of comparison in *Vers une architecture* (1923) and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's early photomontages can be understood as witnesses to this technique in the history of architecture.

For the development of his cinematographic montage theory, the filmmaker Sergei M. Eisenstein describes in his seminal text *Montage and Architecture* (1938) typical »montage structures« in which the perception of space and time is combined in sequential processes. For example, he refers to the architectural historian Auguste Choisy's description of the perception of the Athenian Acropolis while circumnavigating the Parthenon or the depiction of polyfocal pictorial spaces of underground architectural fantasies (*carceri d'invenzione*) by the Renaissance architect Giambattista Piranesi. He also turns his attention to the Catholic Church, especially to the Stations of the Cross, the twelve sculptural groups representing the places that Jesus stopped during his procession to Golgotha. Similarly, he describes a walk around the baldachin by the Baroque sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini in St. Peter's, particularly the plinths of its four gigantic columns that are decorated with the eight

coats of arms of the Barberini pope. In addition, some of Eisenstein's most famous contemporaries in the architectural field are mentioned because their specific working methods are particularly suited to cinematographic modes of representation, such as Le Corbusier's idea of the *promenade architecturale* and the axonometric drawings by Konstantin Melnikov or the Vkhutemas.

Decades later, the manifesto of media theory *avant la lettre*, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (1967) by Marshall McLuhan, and the hippies' self-published DIY manifestos such as the *Whole Earth Catalog* (since 1968) made use of the montage technique and modeled an alternative graphic art aesthetic and distinctive counterculture work ethic.

Furthermore, this also touches upon issues in the discussion about contemporary architectural research methodologies and the historiography of architecture. Considering the increased interest of architecture researchers in ethnographic and sociological research methods, the work of the anthropologist George E. Marcus is worth mentioning. In *The Modernist Sensibility in Recent Ethnographic Writing and the Cinematic Metaphor of Montage* (1990), Marcus proposes that the montage principle shall be applied to ethnographic writing in order to generate representations that consider the non-linear narration of ethnographic research and daily life. That means when introducing oral history or historical throwbacks to narrative timelines, a montage effect is created that interweaves the past and present and combines the differing views of individuals and academic discourse non-hierarchically.

Generally, the state of the art in media technology has had a great influence on the use of montage. While »photomontage [...] can be seen as a consequence of the development of a modern media society in the early twentieth century« (Stierli 2018: 14), with the rise of social media, montage has gained new momentum due to the development of the late-modern digital society in the early twenty-first century. Today, montage techniques have become an everyday practice for smart phone users, for example, internet memes usually function via amusing juxtapositions of text and image. This also impacts the sphere of architecture, such as on Instagram where The Queer Architect mounts humorous scenes in post-rendering aesthetics to depict the history of architecture in the light of shifting gender norms and roles. Architecture offices such as Lütjens Padmanabhan (Zurich) or Made in (Geneva) also appreciate the technique of montage for its ability to highlight the transition between two or more objects:

»In collage you see breaks. In montage, on the other hand, there are transitions – like in Beethoven; it's not the themes that are important, but the transitions. In montage, you have to work on these. No matter how foreign two objects are to each other: the task of an architect is to bring two or more worlds together. And there are other differences: In collage, you read everything on one level. A montage can be seen as an image on the one hand, but on the other hand it has another level of information. We want to create images – that is, to ensure readability from all sides« (Charbonnet 2017: 31; author's transl.).

Increasingly, fragmentary and disruptive forms of presentation provoke contemporary content, for example the latest developments in artificial intelligence (AI) technology use montage techniques as tools to bring together archived information under certain parameters and create new, albeit questionable, architectural future worlds. These are just a few examples of how montage techniques are used in the field of architecture, in addition to the contributions in this issue that broaden the spectrum as follows.

Structure of the Issue

The selection and compilation of textual and visual contributions address »Essentials of Montage in Architecture« from different perspectives: Theories, methods, and visions highlight the relevance of montage to communicating, designing, perceiving, and reflecting on visual and spatial practices, as well as knowledge production on the discipline of architecture. As editors of this issue, we believe that in the discipline of architecture, especially »the various strands of the meaning of montage — its technological, pictorial, spatial, and epistemological dimensions — are fused together« (Davide Deriu cited after Stierli 2018: 31). Our intention or motivation is to broaden and deepen insight into architectural subjects from an expanded notion of montage in architecture and in this way, we regard the contributions to this issue as laying the foundations for further discussions and research around, and beyond, »Essentials of Montage in Architecture«.

The three sections »Conception, Reception, and Perception« stand for different thematic aspects of the concept of montage in the context of architecture. The word stem *-ception* derives from the Latin *cipere* and translates as »to take up/grasp« or »to reassemble from the archives«. Here, we see a central gesture of the montage process as a basis and with the respective prefixes (con-, re-, per-) differentiating assignments are possible.

Conception refers to the traditional understanding of the term montage which is discussed on the basis of the themes: *cinematography*, *literature*, and *translation*. **Reception** refers to capturing and transforming reality through montage principles. This is discussed on the basis of the themes *experiment*, *performativity*, and *photography*. **Perception** refers to the recipient's active role in the montage process which is discussed on the basis of the themes: *interpretation*, *mental montage*, and *phenomenology*. On the one hand, this conceptual triad has resulted from the contributions submitted which we have accordingly allocated by theme; on the other hand, we as editors decided on this triad because we see various perspectives and narratives redeemed here and which offer themselves for further linking and processing. Each contribution is assigned to a specific thematic section, with the inevitable thematic overlaps and uncertainties included and briefly described as follows.

Conception: In the text »Transmission of Knowledge: Eisenstein, Le Corbusier, and Montage as Image Practice in Film and Architecture«, **Ulrike Kuch** highlights the similarities between working with film and architecture that are exemplified in the works of Eisenstein and Le Corbusier, accumulated in their image practices, and whose ideas are linked by the machine (the camera and the house) as an ideological, formal, and aesthetic object. The gaps in a series of images or in the built environment, give rhythm and structure that are perceived as a whole by the moving body and reveal the relevance of time in the understanding of space. **Stefana Dilova**'s visual contribution »Montage of Memories: The Poetics of Home« is based on a self-created cinematographic interpretation of the Japanese novel *Territory of Light* that follows the lives of a single mother and her daughter over the course of a year. The family's apartment is the place where many pivotal moments take place and everyday life is described in a highly poetic style. Dilova combines fictional elements with personal experiences of her time in Japan in a dense atmospheric stop-motion montage technique. In the text »Montaged Gardens – On Paper: The Red Books by Landscape Designer Humphry Repton«, **Achim Reese** analyzes the *Red Books* as functioning as representational instruments to convey Humphry Repton's ideas for improved garden designs. Repton primarily operated as a consultant in the 18th century. The flaps can be read as a montage technique where two identical states are juxtaposed and create an illusion of movement in space and time; from the original to the improved, thus illuminating the difference between the old and the new.

Reception: Max Treiber's contribution »Realmontage: Photographic Readings of Everyday Spaces« reflects a series of seminars held at Technical University of Munich that dealt with spatial investigations through photography and which resulted in translations for architectural design. The investigations aimed to expand the students' understanding of the built environment and broaden the spectrum of their design methods. In the visual contribution »Montage: From Images to Narratives« Erieta Attali examines her own long-standing artistic photographic practice, focusing on architecture from multiple standpoints within the landscape. Layered transparent and reflective surfaces contribute to her approach of creating architectural walks or paths through nature by making use of image sequences that mount temporal and spatial impressions into new environmental narratives or hybrid realities. In the text »Artistic Practice as Preservation Process: The Performative Potential of Montage«, Katrine Majlund Jensen advocates for an expanded notion of preservation as a creative rather than a restorative field of practice, as exemplified in Alex Lehnerer's and Savvas Ciriacidis's spatial montage *Bungalow Germania* which was exhibited at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2014. Experimental preservation is regarded as a chance to widen the conventional frames and process of operational doubt.

Perception: Julian Franke describes processes of human perception in the text »Montages in Mind: On the Formative Role of Perceivers in Architecture« and reveals striking parallels with montaging as an artistic editing technique. Perceiving includes, besides the senses, the imaginative juxtaposition and superimposition of individual experiences, memories, desires, and expectations as a basis for the subjective and intersubjective construction of the built environment and world. In the visual contribution »Qualities of Space: Montage within Painting and Architecture«, Nils Fröhling tests the hypothesis that human spatial perception has changed with new media technologies and means of transportation. Boundaries dissolve and everyday dichotomies, such as private and public sphere, interior and exterior space, real and virtual events, collapse into an imaginary stream of accelerated travel through the urban space. Fröhling processes these observations in a series of photorealistic digital paintings that can be described as montages of contemporary spatial phenomena. In the text »Mind the Gaps: Brutalism, Montage, and Parkour«, Charles Engle highlights the particular movement and potential of *parkour* through the built environment as a montage technique that is intrinsic to this particular subcultural scene which combines the street with

media practices and where architecture, the body, and politics confront each other in performative sequences.

In the selection and compilation of textual and visual contributions according to the thematic triad: »conception, reception, perception« we ensured that content and form came together in a comprehensive way to relate all of these diverse perspectives and narratives of montage to each other, while also roaming through the issue.

References

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