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Montage

The term *montage* has three meanings: firstly, in film it denotes a way of sequencing exposed pictures. Secondly, in photography, art and literature it describes the use of pictures, texts and other elements for a new composition. And thirdly, in German, *Montage* is also used for ‘assembly’, in the sense of the industrial or technical process of fitting together prefabricated materials. Montage thus connects very diverse epistemic and media images. In the literature to date, aesthetics and technology are generally considered separate spheres. At the same time, film montage itself is often distinguished from aesthetic montage, even though it doubtlessly belongs to the realm of the aesthetic. We thus have three fields with different definitions and significant distinctions. Aesthetic montage – e. g. in the form of photo montage – has often been understood as criticism of industrial montage and capitalist rationalisation and the principle of artistic montage has been conceived as diametrically opposed to the technical process. A prime example is the work of John Heartfield (which has been discussed at length by, for instance, Siepmann 1997; Mülhaupt 2009; Zervigón 2012; Kriebel 2014). While the one process of montage “puts together pieces of similar material to form a functional whole”, the other tears heterogeneous materials “from their original and functional contexts in order to artistically work them into a new context” (Ott 1987, 732). The literature on the subject perpetuates this distinction between functional, technical and film montage and dysfunctional, aesthetic montage. On the one hand, theories originating from literary studies in particular emphasise the constitutive foreignness of the elements assembled in a montage. On the other hand, theories of montage in the field of film seek to develop narrative techniques to which this identification of ‘foreign material as a constitutive trait’ of montage does not apply, since it is a case of nothing other than cutting up and assembling filmic material – specifically, roles of exposed film. This double logic is characteristic of the theory of montage: on the one hand, Erika Billeter, drawing on Max Ernst, conceives of collage as the “meeting of realities of entirely different natures” (Kreuzer 1982, 9) and Hanno Möbius firmly rejects a “new unity in the sense of separateness” (Möbius 2000, 288). On the other hand, Russian montage theory in particular has developed diverse theories in order to employ montage as an aesthetic principle in the sense of having a deliberate and controlled impact on the viewer. The mid-1910s saw the Kuleshov effect (Kuleshov 1974), in which the director combined an identical shot of the famous actor Ivan Mozzhukhin with a number of very different motifs in such a way that the meaning of the first seemed to change, setting in motion a whole series of different theories and

practices of montage aiming to manipulate the audience's perception, association and thoughts. The technical and aesthetic techniques of montage were to be used to virtually create a calculated effect, a new attitude and political stance, thereby conditioning the viewer. Eisenstein (1998; 2008), Pudovkin (1949), Vertov (1984) and other directors developed different strategies and programmatic conceptualisations of montage, explicitly referring to Bekhterev's reflexological theory and Pavlov's conditioning (Vöhringer 2007). Only Eisenstein developed separate, independent methods, generally termed the montage of attractions, dialectical, tonal, metric, rhythmic, vertical and overtone montage, to which he devoted separate theoretical essays (Bordwell 2005; Lenz 2008). However, the same also holds for film in Western Europe and the USA (Dmytryk 1984), despite its different ideological precursors and different practices and theories. Eisenstein refers explicitly to the American film pioneer Griffith. As early as the 1910s, and to a greater extent in the 1920s, there developed filmic montage techniques that despite their many aesthetic and ideological differences all aimed to produce deliberate, calculated effects. If we are to do justice both historically and theoretically to the sudden emergence of theories of montage from the 1910s onwards, we must let go of this categorical distinction between technical, aesthetic and filmic montage. Rather, the fields overlap and are dependent on each other (Stiegler 2016). The same holds for the extremely potent concept of the 'New Man', who was to be technically constructed anew, as was the consensus among theorists and practitioners, especially in the 1920s: the psychotechnicians (from Münsterberg to Gastev) and writers (from Tret'iakov to Ėrenburg), engineers and film-makers, architects (from Gropius to Le Corbusier) and photographers, Taylorists (from Gilbreth to Schlesinger) and artists (from Rodchenko to van Doesburg). This idea was a key metaphor in cultural diagnoses, societal visions and media theories, and certainly in theories of montage too. Unlike in the traditional conceptions of man as a machine encountered in La Mettrie, for instance, the metaphor also extends to concrete social practice. It forms the background to the newly emerging filmic montage practices (and not only those of the Russian avant-garde films), the science of work and psychotechnology that were then spreading throughout the world, broad sections of the artistic movements of the age and not least to political theories between National Socialism and Stalinism.

Here, montage must be understood as a process not only encountered in and associated with different spheres, but also capable of neutralising political differences. Technology and montage form a purportedly neutral zone from which to tackle the eminently political agenda of reshaping society and man. Remarkably, this takes place in extremely different political camps, but also in a plethora of very heterogeneous epistemological fields. For instance, Taylorism and the German science of work (*Arbeitswissenschaft*) were broadly received and

implemented in Soviet Russia. Between the United States, Europe and Russia, technology formed a kind of zone of exchange that was thought to guarantee ideological and political neutrality. Montage and the imagined 'New Man' are almost global phenomena in which aesthetics and technology are systematically interconnected. Technology appears to be nothing more than mere construction and optimisation beyond political camps and montage seems to be its concrete realisation. If, however, we wish to understand montage historically, aesthetically and epistemologically, then we must conceive of it as a conscious and targeted construction. Even the ostensibly chaotic montage techniques of Dadaism and Surrealism are quite deliberately constructed. Moreover, the montage practices of art and aesthetics cannot be imagined without the assembly techniques of industry, just as, conversely, the Taylorist rationalisation processes of a Frank Bunker Gilbreth (2012) seek to devise a new, technical kind of art of living that is by no means limited to industrial production techniques. And in a different way, the filmic montage techniques developed in the 1910s and especially in the 1920s go back to theories of rationalisation and Taylorism, but also psychological conditioning. In particular, Hugo Münsterberg consistently combined them in his book *The Photoplay* (Münsterberg 1916).

The same holds for the aesthetic and political strategies of photo montage, which themselves aim to have calculated effects and without exception seek to propagate ideological convictions. Even the apparent anarchy of Dadaist photo montages (Adkins 2009; Hausmann 2016) is manifested against the backdrop of detailed theories of perception that seek to aesthetically realise and visually process the programme of a 'new seeing'. Raoul Hausmann spells them out in many of his texts. In Italian fascism (Baltzer 2015), Soviet Russia (Margolin 1997; Tupitsyn 2004) and in the field of advertising, to name just three very different areas, we encounter different montage techniques that seek to make reception aesthetically calculable. In montage, technology and aesthetics are necessarily combined.

Translated by John Heath

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