



A Critical Review on the Use of Montage Technique in Film and Television

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Abstract. Montage is one of the most basic and important aspects of film and television medium and it comprises the ability to edit and rearrange images and shots to create a story. Montage combines shots and juxtaposes images to tell a story or an impression or even illustrate an association of ideas to the viewer. Using montage, film and television editors can cut and fit each individual shot accordingly to the montage theory in aid of the director's vision. However, dividing the types of montage theory is technically more complicated and needs a deeper understanding for film studies. This paper critically reviews a journal article written by Xiaoshu Li, titled, *Research on the Montage Technique in The Film and Television* to find the partiality in the montage theories.

Keywords: Montage · Film · Television · Montage Technique

1 Introduction

Editing is the most basic and important aspect of filmmaking (MacCann, 1966). Simply, editing in film language is rearranging images and shots to create a story. However, editing a film is a big challenge because it has to make the viewer understand the story while also being completely engaged (DeGuzman, 2020). Montage is an important feature of film and television editing, and this paper will focus on the montage technique used in film and television.

The journal article, *Research on the Montage Technique in The Film and Television* by Xiaoshu Li appeared at the International Conference on Education, Language, Art and Intercultural Communication (ICELAIC 2014). Li determined how the montage allows a filmmaker to create their own idea for film and television. While the author has some insights on this matter, much of the reference for the film and television studies in China is based on bias and speculation rather than actual research.

2 What is Montage?

Montage is one of the most important key terms in film studies. The word montage originated from the French verb *monter*, which means “to mount” or “to assemble” (Kuhn & Westwell, 2012). According to the filmmaker's idea, montage in a film study refers to

“combining scenes together according to the original idea to make it produce comparison, association and foil back the scenes to complete works of film and television” (Li, 2014). But according to Ed Sikov (2020) stated that “montage describes the various ways in which filmmakers string individual shots together to form a series;” directly, this is a synonym for film editing, montage can help the filmmaker of a movie move forward the story quickly and effectively (Master Class, 2021).

3 Development of Montage

According to Li (2014) stated, montage has two types of theories:

- “The first one is Sergei Eisenstein’s montage theory, headed by the Soviet Union director and film theorist, who insisted that using the film editing technique to rearrange the cinema scenes will produce a new meaning”.
- “The second one is a French film theorist Andre Bazin’s long lens theory (also called paragraph lens), he considers that the montage techniques destroy a film’s truth and the new meanings that are produced by the montage combinations are a performance of behaviorism. However, the first theory has been used in real-life widely and is a cause to set up the film industry. The most famous representative can be seen in Hollywood.”.

(Li, 2014).

The first question is why Andre Bazin does not trust montage. Andre Bazin considers that montage ruins the essence of a film especially its dynamic juxtaposition of image hurtles the viewer along a prearranged path of attraction, and has seamless propaganda purpose; and Bazin believes in encouraging filmmakers who respected the mystery imbedded in creation in which montage defies the purpose (Matthews, 2018). Andre Bazin’s distrust of montage underlies his reasons that it is solely for propaganda purposes and limits the creation of filmmaking, but Li ignored it.

The second question is what is the long lens theory? In the early 1940s, Andre Bazin has written about a film’s unique ability to capture “reality” through shots with a long take and deep focus (The Columbia Film Language Glossary, n.d.). In fact, the long lens theory was misinterpreted by Li due to the translation error from her film studies reference in the Chinese language and she did not understand the accurate interpretation of the “long take” in English.

The last question is why Sergei Eisenstein’s montage theory is widely set up in Hollywood. Let us go back to the definition of montage. Montage has three different but related definitions; the first definition is from the French word, whereby montage simply means “editing”; the second definition is from the United States of America formally known as Hollywood that montage refers to “a film sequence that relies on editing to condense or expand action, space or time,” this is what is known as a montage sequence or American-style montage and is strongly associated with the classical Hollywood cinema; the third definition is from the Soviet Union, especially Sergei Eisenstein who considered that montage is “a kind of dynamic editing used to expose and explore the dialectics or oppositional conflict of a given situation and create in the mind of the viewer

a revolutionary synthesis”, it is called Soviet-style montage or Soviet montage theory, there is no doubt that Sergei Eisenstein is a master of montage in creating synthesis to make the viewer to think and see in a new and radical way (Sikov, 2020; Edgar et al., 2018; Kuhn & Westwell, 2012). I believe that Li understands Sergei Eisenstein’s montage theory and that his thought about the American-style montage sequence varies completely. Although Soviet-style montage is one of the most famous and important theories in film studies, American-style montage sequence is equally crucial as suppose because both theories are widely used in the film industry worldwide. Andre Bazin considers that he does not trust montage, but his theories are focused on long take and deep focus.

4 Types of Montage

Li (2014) stated that montage has been divided into two types: the first is expression montage; the second is the narrative montage.

4.1 Question: What is Expression Montage

Li explained (2014) that “expression montage gives the viewer a chance to explore their imagination accordingly to each relationship between individual shots; then there is the sound and parallel montage, cross montage, comparison montage, symbol and metaphor montage which are parts of an expression montage.” However, according to the definition of expression montage from Li, I believe it’s the same as Soviet-style montage.

Parallel and cross montage/cutting are the same theory because they have the same definition (Kuhn & Westwell, 2012).

4.2 Question: What is Narrative Montage

Li (2014) stated that “narrative montage is referring to individual shots that rely on editing to condense the time and relationship between each shot.” However, I believe the definition of narrative montage by Li is the same as the American-style montage sequence; the parallel montage has become part of the narrative montage. But the question here is the relationship between the worlds of narrative and montage. David Bordwell (1972) determined that “montage is used to build a narrative (by formulating an artificial time and space or guiding the viewer’s attention from one narrative point to another), to control the rhythm, to create metaphors, and to make a rhetorical point.” It means that the montage is a part of a film narrative, serving as a technique for storytelling.

5 Alternative to Expression and Narrative Montage

The definition of expression montage is the same as the Soviet-style montage, and the definition of a narrative montage is explained in the American-style montage sequence.



Fig. 1. The Kuleshov Experiment Part One

5.1 American-Style Montage Sequence (Montage Sequence)

In simple terms, montage sequence relies upon editing to condense or expand action, space, or time (Sikov, 2022). According to the attribution of montage sequence in that manner, a filmmaker can expand an action that would take only a few seconds in real-time into a 60 s montage and reduce an action that would take a few days in real-time into a one-hour montage.

5.2 Soviet-Style Montage (Soviet Montage Theory)

There is no doubt that Serigei Eisenstein is the master of montage, especially the Soviet-style Montage. Eisenstein believed (1977) that montage is a “conflict of graphic directions, scales, volumes, masses, and depths.” This means that the mode of Soviet-style montage is dialectical or intellectual.

Eisenstein considered the conflict between the shots is resolved by higher truth, synthesis; he explains how the two different individual shots can create a new meaning: Shot A + Shot B = new meaning C, or Thesis + Antithesis = Synthesis (Edgar et al., 2018; Frierson, 2018).

Eisenstein explained that separate objects can be combined to become one concept and his examples are:

- A dog + A mouth = To bark
- A mouth + A child = To scream
- A mouth + A bird = To sing
- A knife + A heart = Sorrow

(Eisenstein, 1977).

Therefore, the Soviet-style montage when the concept is created through the conflict between two opposing ideas (Eisenstein, 1977; Edgar et al., 2018).

5.2.1 The Kuleshov Experiment

Soviet-style montage describes montage as imaginative and dynamic. The film director and theorist Lev Kuleshov experimented to study the effects of montage on viewers’ perception of emotion (Sikov, 2020). He shot a long take with a close-up of Ivan Mosjoukine’s neutral face without any expression, a bowl of soup, a girl inside the coffin, and a lady lying on a sofa (Frierson, 2018). Thus:

A man + A girl inside the coffin = The man who feels sad.

(See Fig. 1).

A man + A bowl of soup = The man who feels hungry.

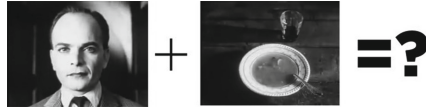


Fig. 2. The Kuleshov Experiment Part Two



Fig. 3. The Kuleshov Experiment Part Three)

(See Fig. 2).

A man + A lady lying on a sofa = The man who is a pervert (See Fig. 3).

This experiment is known as the Kuleshov effect (Frierson, 2018). It proposes that any given film will derive from the juxtaposition of individual shots from the result of the editing process (Kuhn & Westwell, 2012).

5.2.2 Methods of Montage

Sergei Eisenstein (1977) has categories of montage in five methods. These five methods highlight the aspects which uncover the essence of a montage.

5.2.2.1 Metric Montage

“The fundamental criterion for this construction is the absolute lengths of the pieces. The pieces are joined together according to their lengths, in a formula-scheme corresponding to a measure of music. Realization is in repetition for these “measures.”

(Eisenstein, 1977).

With metric montage, the content of the shot plays less of an important role than the duration of the shorts, but it does not mean that all the shots require the same or fixed length (Frierson, 2018).

5.2.2.2 Rhythmic Montage

“Abstract determination of the piece lengths gives way to a flexible relationship of the actual lengths. Here the actual length does not coincide with the mathematically determined length of the piece according to a metric formula. Its practical length derives from the specifics of the piece, and its planned length according to the structure of the sequence.”

(Eisenstein, 1977).

A rhythmic montage is similar to a metric montage, but the length is determined by the specific piece according to the structure of the sequence (Edgar et al., 2018).

5.2.2.3 Tonal Montage

“In a rhythmic montage, it is a movement within the frame that impels the montage’s movement from frame to frame. Such movements within the frame may be of objects

in motion, or the spectator's eye directed along the lines of some immobile object. In a tonal montage, movement is perceived in a wider sense. The concept of movement embraces all effects of the montage piece. Here the montage is based on the characteristic emotional 'sound' of the piece of its dominant. Meaning the general tone of the piece." (Eisenstein, 1977).

Tonal Montage is based on the emotion of the character in the shots (Edgar et al., 2018).

5.2.2.4 Overtonal Montage

"In my opinion, overtonal montage (as described in the preceding essay) is organically the furthest development along the line of tonal montage. As indicated, it is distinguishable from tonal montage by the collective calculation of all the piece's appeals. These characteristics step up the impression from a melodically emotional coloring to a directly physiological perception. This, too, represents a level related to the preceding levels. These four categories are methods of montage."

(Eisenstein, 1977).

Overtonal Montage is a sort of uniting all the different methods of montage from metric, rhythmic and tonal montage into one more complex montage to create abstract meaning (Eisenstein, 1977; Edgar et al., 2018).

5.2.2.5 Intellectual Montage

"Intellectual montage is a montage not of generally physiological overtonal sounds, but of sounds and overtones of an intellectual sort: i.e., conflict-juxtaposition of accompanying intellectual effects. The gradational quality is here determined by the fact that there is no difference in principle between the motion of a man rocking under the influence of elementary metric montage and the intellectual process within it, for the intellectual process is the same agitation, but in the dominion of the higher nerve-centers. And if, in the cited instance, under the influence of "jazz montage," one's hands and knees rhythmically tremble, in the second case such a trembling, under the influence of a different degree of intellectual appeal, occurs in identically the same way through the tissues of the higher nerve systems of the thought apparatus. Though judged as "phenomena" (appearances), they seem in fact different, yet from the point of view of "essence", they are undoubtedly identical. Applying the experience of work along lower lines to categories of a higher order, this affords the possibility of carrying the attack into the very heart of things and phenomena. Thus, the fifth category is the intellectual overtone."

(Eisenstein, 1977).

Eisenstein (1977) and Priest (2008) determined that Intellectual montage is created for a particular purpose through the "conflict-juxtaposition of accompanying intellectual effects" and resolves the "conflict-juxtaposition of the physiological and intellectual overtones."

In others words, different event put together can create new meaning though expressions to the viewer (Winchell, 2020).

6 Conclusion

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that montage has two different theories: Soviet-style montage and the American-style montage sequence; but Li is not sitting on the same page as to what they define as a montage sequence. The definition of expression and narrative montage is non-existing as Li states that the expression montage is similar to the Soviet-style montage. The narrative montage is the same as the American-style montage sequence.

To clarify, the American-style montage sequence focuses more on the narrative. Meanwhile, Soviet-style montage focuses on the effects of graphics and ideas for the viewer. In addition, there aren't many citations by Li to explain the different types of montages except parallel, expression, and narrative montages. Uncovering the article, Li has stated that parallel montage is a subdivide of expression and becomes part of a narrative montage. Finally, Li misunderstood that long take is the same as "long lens theory" due to a translation error from the Chinese reference studied. On the other hand, Andre Bazin has his own opinion behind his distrust of montage, so his film theory is not focused on the concept.

In a nutshell, montage is a basic and important creative act in the production of artistic decision-making for a film (Sikov, 2020). All montage combines a story chronologically or juxtaposes images to produce opinion, effect, or explain an association of ideas. In conclusion, Soviet-style montage and American-style montage sequences are the most important montage theories for film and television studies.

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