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**SERGEI EISENSTEIN: CONTRIBUTIONS TO MONTAGE  
THEORY AND CINEMA**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** In this paper, the author will be scrutinizing the theory of Montage, and the contribution of Sergei Eisenstein to it as well as his filmmaking career which he later proceeds after working as an engineer like his father, and as a theatre decorator for a long time before becoming a prominent director and theorist of all time in the world of Montage & Cinema. Eisenstein is known as one of the pioneers who developed the Montage Theory. Albeit, Eisenstein did not invent Montage, he elevated and changed the way film directors use the technique. The study analysed the various literature published by and about Sergei Eisenstein and Montage Theory.

**Conclusion:** In light of Eisenstein's montage theory, the study concludes that a number of montage techniques can be applied to the creation of motion pictures in various distinct ways like putting shots in quick sequential succession to increase the speed of time in a film advancing the plot and ensuring the audience is alert and aware of what is happening in the scene. Using the text primarily to give the audience information and updates about the characters and the narrative as well. Can be used for a purpose of raising the stakes and suspense in films. Montage can also serve the purpose of showing the transformation of the characters. It can help the viewer understand the film's psychological or mental dramatic shift which makes the audience feel from what they see. It can be used to combine two different scenes or stories in a film.

**Recommendations:** The study recommends that more study on Montage can be probed to understand how it relates with the cinematography and editing of animated films.

**Key words:** *Montage, Sergei Eisenstein, shot, cinema*

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## INTRODUCTION

Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein, in his memoir, starts with a short passage called prenatal experience and asserts that he entered the world at the allotted hour. Eisenstein was born in 1898 in Riga, Russia. In his passage, he avers that his father, Mikhail Osipovich Eisenstein, was a civil engineer. One evening before Eisenstein was born, a fight broke, and a man got killed after people had drunk so much that evening at Morskaya. His father grabbed his revolver and hurried across Morskaya Street to reinstate calmness. He adds that his mother, pregnant with him, got terrified close to death, and she almost prematurely gave birth to him. Then, after some days of possible miscarriage, which did not happen, he made his way into the world at the designated hour three weeks early.

Montage as a term is ordinarily used for film editing in French and Russian (montazh). Although the montage technique was developed early in cinema via the works of the American directors Edwin S. Porter (1870 to 1941) and D.W. Griffith (1870 to 1948), it is mostly associated with the Russian editing montage. Of course, I could be ignorant if I talk about montage theory and fail to acknowledge the famous theorist called Lev Kuleshov. The Soviet Montage theory was first laid out by Russian teacher Lev Kuleshov (1899-1970) from the 1910s to the early 1930s. Kuleshov, famously known for his prominent Montage coined after his name "Kuleshov Effect," was a lecturer at the Moscow Film School. He is considered one of the significant film theorists because of his work on Montage in the 1910s and 1920s. Kuleshov and other essential filmmakers like Dziga Vertov, V.I. Pudovkin, and Eisenstein identified the film as the most important art. Besides, they saw the film as a powerful social tool capable of changing the world's perception. Kuleshov's works from 1917-1935 bridge the transition from the silent era to the sound films era.

During this time, the questions of what the cinema or the cinematic specificity came about to show the impact of cinema on social & cultural values. In his essay *Film Form* (1949), Eisenstein also talks about the specificity of cinema where he points out two distinct features which he says are features of other forms of art as well, but his emphasis was that film is the most uncountable to them. The first one is primo: Which he depicts as the fragments of nature recorded. The second one is the secundo: Which he portrays as the fragments combined in various ways hence the shots or frame and thus montage. Kuleshov, in his writings on *The principle of Montage* (1935), talks about the specificity of the art of cinema. He avers that every art form has two technological elements: the material itself and the method of organizing that material which is the Montage (to assemble). He adds that no art form exists independently by the virtual itself alone. He says understanding the material and the organization in cinema is complex because the material of the cinema demands particular organization thus demanding an extensive cinematic treatment. Because of this Kuleshov expressed his subjective opinion that cinema is much more complicated than other forms of art, especially because the methods of organizing its material and the material itself are interdependent.

Kuleshov asserted that the organization of individual cinema materials like shots, also known as Montage, is what makes cinema or film stand apart from all other types of art forms. Kuleshov 1921 experimented with the reaction of the audience by interspersing one shot with different shots with specific connotation meanings. Kuleshov, in his experiments, projected the shot of a facial expression of a well-known actor, Ivan Mosjoukine, then placed a plate of soup next to it. He then showed another shot of Mosjoukine's face and then placed a lady in a coffin next to it. The final sequence was Mosjoukine's face shot, followed by a beautiful girl. He wanted to see how the

audience would react to the shots he demonstrated. The audiences responded that Mosjoukine seemed within the first sequence to be hungry, within the second, quite in grief or mournful and eventually appeared to evoke or arouse lust in reference to the last shot. All these three shots of Mosjoukine's facial expression were precisely the same. Mosjoukine's facial expression was interpreted differently, supported by what it had been put next to during the assembling or editing. Although there was no establishing shot of Mosjoukine alongside his facial expression shot, from the different shots, the audience perceived them as having proximity at least to each other. According to how the order of the shots was arranged during editing, the two separate settings concurred in a way like it was one whole continuous location to the audience who viewed the clips.

Space and time were manipulated through the assembling of shots when editing. He corroborated that a shot has two different values. The first value portrays it as a photographic image, and the second is the value of its relationship with the shots. These effects depicted that time and space are dependent on editing, which is the center of the Montage. Kuleshov used G.W Griffith's writing, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), to teach his students at the Film Institute of Moscow School. It is noted that he asked them to re-read them to the point that nothing was left when they were done. He focused on the rule of how the film communicates. This was an immense moment for cinema, with Kuleshov proclaiming Montage as the central principle that outlines film as an art on its own. Eisenstein was once Kuleshov's student who developed the five significant types of Montage within the soviet Montage theory.

In 1937 Eisenstein became a professor of Direction at VGIK, the Film Institute of Moscow and in his essay "*Towards a theory of Montage*" that was published in 1988 by BFI, it is noted that he never availed himself of the stenographic records of his lectures that were kept at the institute, relying instead on his memory. His original concept of Montage was that meaning in the cinema was not inherent in filmed objects but was created by the collision of two signifying elements where one comes after the other and through the juxtaposition which defined the meaning of the result of the whole (the sum of the two objects). He asserts that the vehicle for such a form of meaning construction is the shot which needs to be relatively a very simple element. He defines a shot as single celluloid, a tiny rectangular frame that contains an organized piece of the event. When these shots are put in an appropriate rhythm, they form a montage. In the essay *Film Form*, he reckons the notion of the old school filmmaking teaching, which sang screw by screw, brick by brick. Old filmmakers perceived Montage as a form of producing something in the way of describing it via adding individual shots like building blocks. He adds that a shot is an element of Montage and that Montage is the assembly of shots (the elements). Eisenstein brings out a perception in the *Film Form* essay, where he avers that the short is by no means the Montage. He asserts that a shot is a montage cell. The way the cells in their division form a phenomenon of another order like an embryo or an organism, there the same way the shot through the dialectical leap makes the Montage.

To explain the perception of the shot being the cell of a montage, he elucidates that it is through the collision of two opposing pieces or by conflict. He summarizes that Montage is a conflict. Conflict is the basis of all forms of art, the shot being the cell of the Montage; therefore, conflict should as well be regarded as a montage. In the essay *Film Form*, he clarifies that conflict may be within the frame, which varies in character or within the story. He corroborates that cinematography is foremost a montage since it has many corporations like the turnover of capital

and many stars and such dramas. He acknowledges that albeit Japanese cinema which is equipped with corporations, actors, and stories, is unaware of Montage. However, he concurs that the principles of Montage can be identified as the basic element of the representational culture of the Japanese. He asserts that there are conflicts that are cinematographic within the frame. Such conflicts are conflicts of graphics where pieces are graphically varied in directions such as static or dynamic lines. Conflict of scale, conflict of volume where pieces are resolved in volumes conflict of depth, conflict of masses and the conflict of objects and their dimensions as well as conflict of events and their durations. Conflict inside the shot is the potential of the montage pieces. He affirms that from the collision of two given factors arises a new concept.

Eisenstein elucidates that Montage exists in both time and space and not only in the object but in the perception of it as well. In the essay "*Towards the theory of Montage*", he avers that the montage principle is not limited to cinema alone but also literature, theatre, music, painting, and even architecture. He puts it clear that it is in cinema that Montage is highly expressed. Through Montage, cinema went beyond the painting, which is spatial or pertaining to space, and poetry, which is temporal or relating to time. He aimed to manipulate the shots' length and duration and how the movement and the cuts can be used to create effects that arouse emotions in the audience. Eisenstein tries to compare Montage with the Japanese hieroglyph writing, asserting that the copulation or the combination of two hieroglyphs of the sole sequence is not to be considered as their totality. Here he proposes that one hieroglyph on its own has no meaning, but when juxtaposed with another, they create a concept. However, he opines that their product is worth another dimension or another degree; each hieroglyph corresponds to an object or a fact separately. To explain further, he asserts that their combination corresponds to a thought or a new concept. The combination of the two depictive objects/ images achieves a representation of something new that is graphically un-depictive. Eisenstein uses an example to bring out his idea of Montage, where he compares different images. He affirms that if the image of an eye and the image of water is presented, it may signify weeping, the image of an ear and the drawing of a door are equal to listening. A dog and a mouth equal to barking. A mouth and a toddler equal a scream. A bird and a equal mouth singing and a knife and a equal heart sorrow. The term montage is used in cinema to assemble depictive and single shots, meaning-wise and neutral, and content-wise, into an intellectual context as well as a series.

Soviet Montage Theory is one influential film movement in the cinema world. Eisenstein developed five types of Montage within the Soviet Montage Theory; metric Montage, rhythmic Montage, tonal Montage, over tonal Montage, and intellectual Montage. A metric montage is where the shots are cut according to exact measurements regardless of the content in terms of feelings or emotional connection of the shot. A good example where the editor may decide to use many short shots showing the people running from the explosions, the burnings, fights, and children struggling as a way of creating a sense of chaos brought by the explosions themselves. The shortenings of the shots increase tension while at the same time preserving the original harmonious relation of parts to each other. This may translate mostly to how an editor may edit a montage in a non-linear editing platform such as Final cut, Adobe Premiere Pro, Vegas Pro, Davinci resolve, Avid Pro, etc.

A rhythmic montage is where the editor cuts the shots intending to preserve continuity. Here the relationship between each shot is considered within frames and the length of the shots as well. Sergei elucidates that the contents of the shots are dominant elements of the lengths of the shot.

Each shot's practical length drives from the same specifics of the piece, according to the structure of the sequence. Tonal Montage is where the editor cuts according to the emotional meanings of the shots. These shots may contain visuals and oral elements which they can share in common. Other elements like graphics may be used as well. Over-tonal Montage is where the tonal, metric, and rhythmic Montage combine to create an effect. Here cutting is done according to the main tones and overtones of the shots. Intellectual Montage is where the cutting of shots is done according to their relationships, it is mixing in shots that are unrelated to the film to make a statement.

An example is a movie where of rotating bone in the air, is connected with a satellite rotating in space. It needs the intellectual thing to connect the meaning. In the movie *Battleship Potemkin* directed by Sergei Eisenstein, he uses intellectual Montage on the *Odessa steps scene* to show how the victims are helpless and oppressed.

## CONCLUSION

In the current era, several montage film techniques are used in filmmaking in reference to Eisenstein's montage theory. One of these techniques is the use of quick shots, this feature of Montage involves the cutting of shots in tandem in a very quick sequential succession. This then allows the time to pass as well as advances the story ensuring the audience is alert and aware of what is happening in the scene. Another technique is the absence of dialogue. In many cases, my subjective opinion is that Montage is more of visuals as opposed to telling because it is not all about what you feel but rather what you see, which makes the audience feel. However, visuals and audio may combine to form a concept. The use of voice-over or (VO) – VO and narration during or as the Montage unfolds may help give the audience some extra information that will aid them in understanding the scene's context.

The use of music will also play a crucial role in underscoring the montage actions that quickly unfold. The other useful technique is the use of text, Montage uses the text primarily to give the audience information and updates about the characters and the story as well. Mostly at the end of the film, it can occur anywhere within the film. Eisenstein aimed to use the Montage, especially the intellectual Montage to create meanings out of what we see in the cinema. There are other purposes that the Montage can serve in the cinema today. Montage can be used to give too much information at a go. If the director does not want to give the whole background of a character in the film but still wants the viewers to catch up with the film, he/she can instruct the editor to use a montage to show the details of the character's information via metric Montage, in a way that the audience understands the story. In the movie *Rocky IV*, the intellectual Montage is used to show the training of the two main characters. Montage may also increase the speed of time in a film, and Montage can show years, months, weeks, days, and hours in a speedy way and still make the audience understand the story of the film. Montage can also combine dialogues, music, tracks, and sound effects to create an artistic expression. Montage will serve the purpose of raising the stakes and suspense. Just after the climax phase of the film, a montage can be used to create tension that may make the viewers anticipate or develop an interest in a character or a storyline while the film continues to create a denouement or a conclusion. Montage can also serve the purpose of showing the transformation of the characters. A good example is the hallucinations of a former drug addict or the killing of a former assassin. This helps the viewer understand the film's psychological or mental dramatic shift. Montage can help compare the characters in a film where the editor may use so many shots of distinct characters to bring out their differences in status, authority, class, and

even relationship to one another. The other purpose of Montage in films is to combine two different scenes or stories in a film. Intellectual Montage will serve this purpose effectively, making the audience aware of what is going on as the film unfolds.

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