

Montage

COMPETENCIES

After you have read this unit, you should be able to:

1. Discuss what is montage.
2. Find some movies use montage and make notes.

Text A

Montage (filmmaking)

For the use of montage in the 1920s Soviet Union, see Soviet montage theory. For other uses of the word montage, see Montage (See figure 5-1).



Figure 5-1 Space-time video montage

Montage is a technique in film editing in which a series of short shots are edited into a sequence to condense space, time, and information. The term has been used in various contexts. It was introduced to cinema primarily by Sergei Eisenstein, and early Soviet directors used it as a synonym for creative editing. In France the word “montage” simply denotes cutting. The term “montage sequence” has been used primarily by British and American studios, which refers to the common technique as outlined in this article.

The montage sequence is usually used to suggest the passage of time, rather than to

create symbolic meaning as it does in Soviet montage theory.

From the 1930s to the 1950s, montage sequences often combined numerous short shots with special optical effects (fades, dissolves, split screens, double and triple exposures) dance and music. They were usually assembled by someone other than the director or the editor of the movie.

Development

The word montage came to identify ... specifically the rapid, shock cutting that Eisenstein employed in his films. Its use survives to this day in the specially created “montage sequences” inserted into Hollywood films to suggest, in a blur of double exposures, the rise to fame of an opera singer or, in brief model shots, the destruction of an airplane, a city or a planet.

Two common montage sequence devices of the period are a newspaper one and a railroad one. In the newspaper one, there are multiple shots of newspapers being printed (multiple layered shots of papers moving between rollers, papers coming off the end of the press, a pressman looking at a paper) and headlines zooming on to the screen telling whatever needs to be told. There are two montages like this in *It Happened One Night*. In a typical railroad montage, the shots include engines racing toward the camera, giant engine wheels moving across the screen, and long trains racing past the camera as destination signs zoom into the screen.

“Scroll montage” is a form of multiple-screen montage developed specifically for the moving image in an internet browser. It plays with Italian theatre director Eugenio Barba’s “space river” montage in which the spectators’ attention is said to “[sail] on a tide of actions which their gaze [can never] fully encompass.” “Scroll montage” is usually used in online audio-visual works in which sound and the moving image are separated and can exist autonomously: audio in these works is usually streamed on internet radio and video is posted on a separate site.

Noted Directors

Film critic Ezra Goodman discusses the contributions of Slavko Vorkapič, who worked at MGM and was the best-known montage specialist of the 1930s:

He devised vivid montages for numerous pictures, mainly to get a point across economically or to bridge a time lapse. In a matter of moments, with images cascading across the screen, he was able to show Jeanette MacDonald’s rise to fame as an opera star in *Maytime* (1937), the outbreak of the revolution in *Viva Villa* (1934), the famine and exodus in the *Good Earth* (1937), and the plague in *Romeo and Juliet* (1936).

From 1933 to 1942, Don Siegel, later a noted feature film director, was the head of the montage department at Warner Brothers. He did montage sequences for hundreds of features, including *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*; *Knute Rockne*, *All American*; *Blues in the Night*; *Yankee Doodle Dandy*; *Casablanca*; *Action in the North Atlantic*; *Gentleman Jim*;

and *They Drive By Night*.

Siegel told Peter Bogdanovich how his montages differed from the usual ones:

Montages were done then as they're done now, oddly enough—very sloppily. The director casually shoots a few shots that he presumes will be used in the montage and the cutter grabs a few stock shots and walks down with them to the man who's operating the optical printer and tells him to make some sort of mishmash out of it. He does, and that's what's labeled montage.

In contrast, Siegel would read the motion picture's script to find out the story and action, then take the script's one line description of the montage and write his own five page script. The directors and the studio bosses left him alone because no one could figure out what he was doing. Left alone with his own crew, he constantly experimented to find out what he could do. He also tried to make the montage match the director's style, dull for a dull director, exciting for an exciting director.

Of course, it was a most marvelous way to learn about films, because I made endless mistakes just experimenting with no supervision. The result was that a great many of the montages were enormously effective.

Siegel selected the montages he did for *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942), *The Adventures of Mark Twain* (1944), and *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, as especially good ones. "I thought the montages were absolutely extraordinary in 'The Adventures of Mark Twain'—not a particularly good picture, by the way."

Analysis of Two Typical Examples

The two montage sequences in *Holiday Inn* (1942) show the two basic montage styles. The focus of the movie is an inn that presents elaborate nightclub shows only on the holidays. The film was in production when the United States entered World War II.

The first montage occurs during the Independence Day show, as Bing Crosby sings "Song of Freedom". The 50 second montage combines several single screen sequences of workers in an aircraft factory and various military units in motion (troops marching, planes flying, tanks driving) with multiple split screens, with up to six images in one shot. The penultimate shot shows a center screen head shot of General Douglas MacArthur in a large star with military images in the four corners.

The second montage occurs near the end of the film, showing the passage of time. Unlike the clarity of the "Song of Freedom" montage, this one layers multiple images in an indistinct and dream-like fashion. In the film, the character played by Fred Astaire has taken Crosby's partner, Marjorie Reynolds, to star in a motion picture based on the idea of the inn. The 60 second montage covers the time from Independence Day to Thanksgiving. It opens with a split screen showing three shots of Hollywood buildings and a zoom title, Hollywood. Then comes a zoom into a camera lens where Astaire and Reynolds are seen dancing to a medley of tunes already introduced in the film. The rest of the sequence continues to show them dancing, with multiple images of motion picture cameras,

cameramen, a director, musical instruments, single musical notes, sheet music and dancers' legs circle around them. Several times six images of themselves also circle the dancers. Only the opening shot uses a clearly defined split screen and only the second shot is a single shot.

Both of these styles of montage have fallen out of favor in the last 50 years. Today's montages avoid the use of multiple images in one shot, either through splits screens as in the first example or layering multiple images as in the second. Most recent examples use a simpler sequence of individual short, rapidly paced shots combined with a specially created background song to enhance the mood or reinforce the message being conveyed.

From: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

New Words

Montage *n.* 蒙太奇;(电影、电视的)镜头组接;合成画;叠化剪辑

Soviet *n.* 苏联;苏维埃;代表会议;劳工代表会议;*adj.* 苏联的,苏维埃的

Edit *vt.* 编辑;剪辑;(影片,录音)校订;主编;*n.* 编辑

Sequence *n.* 顺序;*vt.* 使按顺序排列,安排顺序

Hollywood *n.* 好莱坞

Multiple *adj.* 多重的;多个的;复杂的;多功能的

Revolution *n.* 革命;旋转;彻底改变;运行,公转

Sloppily *adv.* 马虎地,草率地

Exercises

Translation

1. Montage is a technique in film editing in which a series of short shots are edited into a sequence to condense space, time, and information.

2. "Scroll montage" is a form of multiple-screen montage developed specifically for the moving image in an internet browser.

3. Montages were done then as they're done now, oddly enough—very sloppily.

4. The first montage occurs during the Independence Day show, as Bing Crosby sings "Song of Freedom".

5. The second montage occurs near the end of the film, showing the passage of time. Unlike the clarity of the "Song of Freedom" montage, this one layers multiple images in an indistinct and dream-like fashion.

Definitions

Montage

Reading Material

Taxi Driver (1976)

Are you talking to me? Well, I'm the only one here. —Travis Bickle in “Taxi Driver”
(See figure 5-2)



Figure 5-2 Taxi Driver (1976)

It is the last line, “Well, I’m the only one here,” that never gets quoted. It is the truest line in the film. Travis Bickle exists in “Taxi Driver” as a character with a desperate need to make some kind of contact somehow—to share or mimic the effortless social interaction he sees all around him, but does not participate in.

The film can be seen as a series of his failed attempts to connect, every one of them hopelessly wrong. He asks a girl out on a date, and takes her to a porno movie. He sucks up to a political candidate, and ends by alarming him. He tries to make small talk with a Secret Service agent. He wants to befriend a child prostitute, but scares her away. He is so lonely that when he asks, “Who you talkin’ to?” he is addressing himself in a mirror.

This utter aloneness is at the center of “Taxi Driver,” one of the best and most powerful of all films, and perhaps it is why so many people connect with it even though Travis Bickle would seem to be the most alienating of movie heroes. We have all felt as alone as Travis. Most of us are better at dealing with it.

Martin Scorsese’s 1976 film (re-released in theaters and on video in 1996 in a restored color print, with a stereophonic version of the Bernard Herrmann score) is a film that does not grow dated, or over-familiar. I have seen it dozens of times. Every time I see it, it works; I am drawn into Travis’ underworld of alienation, loneliness, haplessness and anger.

It is a widely known item of cinematic lore that Paul Schrader’s screenplay for “Taxi Driver” was inspired by “The Searchers,” John Ford’s 1956 film. In both films, the heroes grow obsessed with “rescuing” women who may not, in fact, want to be rescued.

They are like the proverbial Boy Scout who helps the little old lady across the street whether or not she wants to go.

“The Searchers” has Civil War veteran John Wayne devoting years of his life to the search for his young niece Debbie (Natalie Wood), who has been kidnapped by Comanches. The thought of Debbie in the arms of an Indian grinds away at him. When he finally finds her, she tells him the Indians are her people now, and runs away. Wayne then plans to kill the girl, for the crime of having become a “squaw.” But at the end, finally capturing her, he lifts her up (in a famous shot) and says, “Let’s go home, Debbie.”

The dynamic here is that Wayne has forgiven his niece, after having participated in the killing of the people who, for 15 years or so, had been her family. As the movie ends, the niece is reunited with her surviving biological family, and the last shot shows Wayne silhouetted in a doorway, drawn once again to the wide open spaces. There is, significantly, no scene showing us how the niece feels about what has happened to her.

In “Taxi Driver,” Travis Bickle also is a war veteran, horribly scarred in Vietnam. He encounters a 12-year-old prostitute named Iris (Jodie Foster), controlled by a pimp named Sport (Harvey Keitel). Sport wears an Indian headband. Travis determines to “rescue” Iris, and does so, in a bloodbath that is unsurpassed even in the films of Scorsese. A letter and clippings from the Steensmas, Iris’ parents, thank him for saving their girl. But a crucial earlier scene between Iris and Sport suggests that she was content to be with him, and the reasons why she ran away from home are not explored.

The buried message of both films is that an alienated man, unable to establish normal relationships, becomes a loner and wanderer, and assigns himself to rescue an innocent young girl from a life that offends his prejudices. In “Taxi Driver,” this central story is surrounded by many smaller ones, all building to the same theme. The story takes place during a political campaign, and Travis twice finds himself with the candidate, Palatine, in his cab. He goes through the motions of ingratiating flattery, but we, and Palatine, sense something wrong.

Shortly after that Travis tries to “free” one of Palatine’s campaign workers, a blonde he has idealized (Cybill Shepherd), from the Palatine campaign. That goes wrong with the goofy idea of a date at a porno movie. And then, after the fearsome rehearsal in the mirror, he becomes a walking arsenal and goes to assassinate Palatine. The Palatine scenes are like dress rehearsals for the ending of the film. With both Betsy and Iris, he has a friendly conversation in a coffee shop, followed by an aborted “date,” followed by attacks on the men he perceived as controlling them; he tries unsuccessfully to assassinate Palatine, and then goes gunning for Sport.

There are undercurrents in the film that you can sense without quite putting your finger on them. Travis’ implied feelings about blacks, for example, which emerge in two long shots in a taxi driver’s hangout, when he exchanges looks with a man who may be a

drug dealer. His ambivalent feelings about sex (he lives in a world of pornography, but the sexual activity he observes in the city fills him with loathing). His hatred for the city, inhabited by “scum.” His preference for working at night, and the way Scorsese’s cinematographer, Michael Chapman, makes the yellow cab into a vessel by which Travis journeys the underworld, as steam escapes from vents in the streets, and the cab splashes through water from hydrants—a Stygian passage.

The film has a certain stylistic resonance with “Mean Streets” (1973), the first Scorsese film in which Keitel and De Niro worked together. In the earlier film Scorsese uses varying speeds of slow-motion to suggest a level of heightened observation on the part of his characters, and here that technique is developed even more dramatically; as the taxi drives through Manhattan’s streets, we see it in ordinary time, but Travis’ point-of-view shots are slowed down: He sees hookers and pimps on the sidewalks, and his heightened awareness is made acute through slow motion.

The technique of slow motion is familiar to audiences, who usually see it in romantic scenes, or scenes in which regret and melancholy are expressed—or sometimes in scenes where a catastrophe looms, and cannot be avoided. But Scorsese was finding a personal use for it, a way to suggest a subjective state in a POV shot. And in scenes in a cab driver’s diner, he uses close-ups of observed details to show how Travis’s attention is apart from the conversation, is zeroing in on a black who might be a pimp. One of the hardest things for a director to do is to suggest a character’s interior state without using dialog; one of Scorsese’s greatest achievements in “Taxi Driver” (See figure 5-3) is to take us inside Travis Bickle’s point of view.

There are other links between “Mean Streets” and “Taxi Driver” that may go unnoticed. One is the “priest’s-eye-view” often used in overhead shots, which Scorsese has said are intended to reflect the priest looking down at the implements of the Mass on the altar. We see, through Travis’ eyes, the top of a taxi dispatcher’s desk, candy on a movie counter, guns on a bed, and finally, with the camera apparently seeing through the ceiling, an overhead shot of the massacre in the red-light building. This is, if you will, the final sacrifice of the Mass. And it was in “Mean Streets” that Keitel repeatedly put his finger in the flame of a candle or a match, testing the fires of hell: here De Niro’s taxi driver holds his fist above a gas flame.

There has been much discussion about the ending, in which we see newspaper clippings about Travis’ “heroism,” and then Betsy gets into his cab and seems to give him admiration instead of her earlier disgust. Is this a fantasy scene? Did Travis survive the



Figure 5-3 Taxi Driver (1976)

shoot-out? Are we experiencing his dying thoughts? Can the sequence be accepted as literally true?

I am not sure there can be an answer to these questions. The end sequence plays like music, not drama: It completes the story on an emotional, not a literal, level. We end not on carnage but on redemption, which is the goal of so many of Scorsese's characters. They despise themselves, they live in sin, they occupy mean streets, but they want to be forgiven and admired. Whether Travis gains that status in reality or only in his mind is not the point; throughout the film, his mental state has shaped his reality, and at last, in some way, it has brought him a kind of peace.

From: <http://www.rogerebert.com>

Author: Roger Ebert

Reading Material

Avatar 3D Film Employs Cutting Edge Visual Effects

The special effects created by artists for Avatar

"People ask things like 'will Avatar change cinema?' In many ways it already has and that has happened in production behind the camera," said James Dyer, editor in chief of Empire Digital.

Avatar is the new movie by Hollywood director James Cameron (See figure 5-4)—the 3D film is nearly 60% computer generated and is rumoured to have cost \$300m (£187m).

Much of the budget was spent on cutting-edge visual effects, and inventing entirely new technologies to produce what is a live action film set in a CG world.

"We have a brand spanking new stereoscopic 3D camera for the live action portion of the shoot which is separate from the virtual camera and the performance capture techniques," said Mr. Cameron. Performance capture was used to record real actors' movements which were then translated into animated CG aliens called Na'vi.

This action was recorded on a sound stage dubbed "the volume" which has already been used by directors Peter Jackson and Steven Spielberg.

"It's a motion capture stage where the sensors in the ceiling pick up absolutely everything that the actors do on the stage," said Mr. Dyer.

"The selling point is it renders the action in real time so as a director... you get on your monitor a rough rendering of what the finished film would look like," he added.

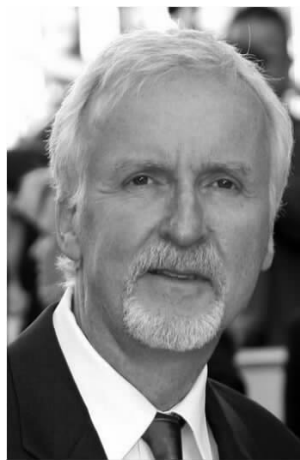


Figure 5-4 James Cameron

3D challenge

Filming and special effects work for the film spanned three continents, including countries such as the US, New Zealand, and England.

Visual effects company Framestore in London was hired to do some of the movie's CG work.

“So what we got from the production was literally an actor in a green background, and we were required to put everything else, including set material props and people,” said Jonathan Fawkner from Framestore.

Mr. Cameron maintained artistic control by giving Framestore a meticulous pre-visualisation video of how the finished shot should look.

He also created an additional challenge for the CG artists working on the project because all the images must work in a 3D format.

“On Avatar (See figure 5-5) we had an optical stereo image to deal with—that's two images, one for each eye... that's double the workload,” said Mr. Fawkner.



Figure 5-5 Avatar

Ocula software developed by visual effects firm The Foundry was used to complete the 3D work.

“So the live action sequences of Avatar have been shot with two cameras so you've got a left image and a right image to get the 3D effect,” explained Dr Bill Collis, chief executive of The Foundry.

“Ocula allows you to manipulate these images—for example, if the two cameras shooting the scene aren't quite aligned... will you feel possibly nauseous or a strain on your eyes,” he said.

Push boundaries

An abundance of cutting edge tech has been used to bring Avatar's alien world to life on the screen.

But the story itself sticks to a fairly traditional formula—alien creatures who live on

the distant world of Pandora are threatened by humans.

The blue-skinned and 10 feet tall Na'vi have to battle an exploitative human firm which is after a precious mineral.

Paraplegic ex-marine Jake Sully is hired to remotely control an Avatar to get to know the locals but it ends up falling in love with a local tribal princess.

Film reviews have been mostly positive, but Mr. Dyer believes the film was written to push technological boundaries rather than for the storyline.

James Dyer said Avatar was produced to push technological boundaries (See figure 5-6 and figure 5-7)



Figure 5-6 Avatar



Figure 5-7 Avatar

“Cameron wrote it fairly unapologetically as vehicle for his effects company Digital Domain,” he said.

“He wrote this to push digital boundaries so much so that when he went to people at Digital Domain and said I want to make this film they said it can’t be done we can’t convincingly bring this to the screen.”

“The story in itself is not a bad one. It’s an archetype Dances With Wolves, it’s Pocahontas, it’s that kind of thing,” he added.

Director Cameron said he decided to go ahead with the film rather than wait for the rest of the film industry to catch up.

“We took the bull by the horns and just got on with it ourselves. Through some time and energy, we came up with a tool set and a process that allowed us to create these alien creatures,” Mr. Cameron said.

The director took both a technological and financial gamble, but Avatar’s success now rest with audiences worldwide.