CRITICAL VISIONS
IN FILM THEORY

CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY READINGS

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Dreyer's film *Jeanne d'Arc* provided a convincing example of this in the powerful, lengthy, moving scene of the Maid's examination. Fifty men are sitting in the same place all the time in this scene. Several hundred feet of film show nothing but big close-ups of heads, of faces. We move in the spiritual dimension of facial expression alone. We neither see nor feel the space in which the scene is in reality enacted. Here no riders gallop, no boxers exchange blows. Fierce passions, thoughts, emotions, convictions battle here, but their struggle is not in space. Nevertheless this series of duels between looks and frowns, duels in which eyes clash instead of swords, can hold the attention of an audience for ninety minutes without flagging. We can follow every attack and riposte of these duels on the faces of the combatants; the play of their features indicates every stratagem, every sudden onslaught. The silent film has here brought an attempt to present a drama of the spirit closer to realization than any stage play has ever been able to do.

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LEV KULESHOV

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The Principles of Montage

Russian filmmaker and theorist Lev Kuleshov (1899–1970) is a major figure in the golden age of Soviet cinema that flourished during the 1920s. The Russian Revolution of 1917 signaled the beginning of this period: this Marxist-inspired class rebellion was the defining event for Kuleshov and other important filmmakers Dziga Vertov (p. 257), V. I. Pudovkin, and Sergei Eisenstein (p. 262), who studied with Kuleshov. They identified film as the most important art and a powerful social tool capable of changing perceptions of the

world. However, by the time Kuleshov wrote "The Principles of Montage" in 1935, the unbounded energy and optimism of the revolution had settled into the considerably more bureaucratic and repressive Soviet Union under Stalin. Some consider Kuleshov the first major film theorist because of his early work on montage in the 1910s and 1920s; he was also an active filmmaker directing numerous films between 1918 and 1943, including the satire *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924).

Kuleshov's work from 1917 to 1935 spans the dynamic transition from silent to sound films at a time when international cinema was establishing certain national traditions. America and Hollywood cinema emerged as the most dominant and pervasive presence and frequently became the background against which other national cinemas were defined. At the same time, pressing questions about cinematic specificity (such as "Is cinema an art?") gave way to arguments about the impact of film on social and cultural values. For example, Kuleshov's own famous experiment tested audience reactions by interspersing the image of an actor's face with various images with specific connotations (a bowl of soup, a coffin, etc.) to demonstrate that the facial expression acquired different meanings through the editing itself. While the growing awareness of the social and psychological power of the movies eventually led to tighter institutional control and even censorship in both the United States and the Soviet Union, many filmmakers embraced the revolutionary potential of film editing and its ability to communicate ideological correctness.

The retrospective look at his earlier theories of cinema in "The Principles of Montage" partly explains the somewhat revisionist tone of the essay. Kuleshov replaces his earlier concerns with the aesthetic and psychological power of editing with the more acceptable argument that editing is primarily about class relations. He does maintain his argument that editing reveals the "essence of the phenomena around us," and he underlines its ability to communicate an ideology or "world-view." Equally noteworthy is his distinction between American, European, and Russian films based largely on editing style and how their individual historical ideologies are reflected as a particular "semantics." Although faith in the political power of editing has waned, Kuleshov's legacy of the politics of film form remains. Editing may be only one formal element for communicating political or social perspectives, but filmmakers from Jean-Luc Godard to Michael Moore and theorists from Walter Benjamin (p. 229) to Trinh T. Minh-ha (p. 691) have continued to see film as a medium for creating and changing how audiences see and think about their society.

READING CUES & KEY CONCEPTS

▨ Kuleshov distinguishes three kinds of editing associated with American cinema, European cinema, and Russian cinema. Explain those differences and the cultural assumptions that, for Kuleshov, underlie them.

▨ Is, as Kuleshov claims, the cinema "more complicated than other forms of art"? In what ways does he mean this?

▨ Claiming that the close-up is the heart of editing, Kuleshov argues that montage makes the expressions of the actor "irrelevant." How does his notion of internal montage complicate this idea? Support or counter this claim with an example from a specific film.

▨ **Key Concepts: Cinematic Specificity; Ideology; Internal Montage; Montage; Typage**

The Principles of Montage

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The theory of montage in the cinema is a very important and interesting theory. It has caused great concern even to me, as one who has occupied himself with this theory, as well as to critics and filmmakers. Extremely fiery disputes flared around the theory of montage from its very inception. The theory of montage demands a particularly attentive approach and study, because montage represents the essence of cinema technique, the essence of structuring a motion picture. Having worked a long time on the theory of montage, I committed a whole series of the crudest errors. Previously, I had both concluded and written that montage was so crucial to cinematography that everything else was secondary. Despite the fact that I had done much work on the very material of motion pictures, on the shots themselves, I still placed all my emphasis on montage, perfecting the entire conception of my theoretical work on it; and here lay my deepest mistake. The fact is that film material (the selection of which is determined by the ideological tendency of the artist) is the live person working on the screen, real life filmed for the screen. This material is so variegated, so significant, and so complex that to render it by mechanical juxtaposition through "film-specifics"—by means of montage—was utterly incorrect. It is here that the political and artistic error of my past years has been. But even these works contain their positive sides. From the viewpoint of these positive aspects we can also analyze the theory of montage, because it is extremely important in the work of the film director. Since the theme of this book is the practice of film direction, I shall touch upon the theory of montage as it concerns practical work, without going deeply into theoretical analyses. I shall, however, have to provide a few historical references so that the essence of the question is clear.

Montage first began in America. Prior to the Civil War and the Revolution, montage, as a consciously expressed artistic method, was virtually unused.

We are aware that the motion picture camera photographs its surrounding reality. By means of the cinema we can observe the world. Accordingly, the cinema shows us the conduct and activities of people, existing in the reality around us. The conduct of people principally results from their class interrelationships.

Thus, photographing separate actions and the various behavior of people on film, we record the real material which surrounds us. Having recorded this material, having shot it, we can show it on the screen. But this demonstration can be accomplished by various means. Before it is possible to show the different pieces photographed in reality, it is vital to edit them, to join them to each other so that the interrelationship demonstrates the essence of the phenomena around us.

The artist's relationship to his surrounding reality, his view of the world, is not merely expressed in the entire process of shooting, but in the montage as well, in the capacity to see and to present the world around him. A variety of social encounters, a class struggle takes place in reality, and the artist's existence within a particular social class influences his world-view. Artists with differing world-views each perceive the reality surrounding them differently; they see events differently, discuss them differently, show them, imagine them, and join them one to another differently.

Thus, film montage, as the entire work of filmmaking, is inextricably linked to the artist's world-view and his ideological purpose.

S. M. Eisenstein, during one of his lectures at the State Institute of Cinematography, presented a particularly vivid and interesting example of various different approaches to montage. Imagine that in a period of two or three days a series of events takes place throughout the entire world. These events are recorded by reporters, and news about them is published in various newspapers. We are aware that both capitalist and communist newspapers exist. The very same events that have taken place during the given three days are printed in both the capitalist and communist press. Even if these events are printed without commentaries, without editorial explanations and commentaries, but simply as a "dry chronicle," one's relationship to them, that is, the political world-view of the editor of the paper still determines the montage of one or another paper. In a capitalist paper all the events would be edited so that the bourgeois intention of the editor, and accordingly, of the paper, would be maximally expressed and emphasized through the character of the montage of the events, their arrangement on the newspaper page. The essential exploitativeness of the capitalist system would be clouded over in the bourgeois paper in every conceivable way, with the evils of the system concealed and the actuality embroidered. The Soviet paper is edited completely otherwise: the information about these very same events would be edited so as to illuminate the entire condition of things in the capitalist world, to reveal its essential exploitativeness, and the position of the workers as it is in reality. It can be proved, with the facts related to each other in this fashion, that the ideological sense of these facts would be differently apprehended by the reader of the paper. In the communist paper the class nature of the fact will be revealed, while in the bourgeois press this nature will be fogged over, perverted.

Thus, based on this example, it becomes clear that montage (the essence of all art) is inextricably tied to the world-view of the person who has the material at his disposal.

The account is evident to everyone. But in the beginning of my work in cinema the question of montage, the questions of aesthetic theory generally, were questions which were substantially murky for me, and I did not connect them with class interpretation, with the world-view of the artist.

In order that the development of my artistic direction, and the direction of my comrades who worked along with me, be clear, I shall describe my relationship to montage starting with the first steps on my work in film.

I began to work in the cinema in 1916. We were extremely helpless artistically at that time. The cinema was only halfway toward being an art form at that time, and, honestly speaking, it didn't really exist at all. We knew and heard nothing about montage. We only wondered about how to approach this new cinematographic art, so as to learn truly how to work with it artistically, so as to learn how to understand it seriously.

The war was still going on in 1916 and the international marketplaces were closed off to Russia. Because of this, Russian cinema began to develop quickly and independently. Swirling around the films were discussions, disputes, analyses; film gazettes and journals began to appear; in the pages of the theatrical journals a theoretical dispute emerged. The argument was whether film was an art form or not. We—the young generation of filmmakers—engaged in this dispute with the most active participation, despite the fact that we had no arguments, no evidence that film was an art. It was these disputes that led to the beginning of the genesis of the theory of montage. We developed a series of discussions and debates on the theme

of montage theory, and in a few years I began the book which is titled *Art of the Cinema*. It was published still later, in 1928, and subsequently it became an example of major arguments, major studies. Because of its foundation the book was deeply erroneous.

Since we ourselves did not know how to orient ourselves in the cinema, nor what cinema was—whether it was an art form or not—we decided to direct all our attention to motion picture production. We frequented motion picture theaters and looked at everything, whatever films were on the screen, and furthermore, we did not simply look at them, but we examined them with an eye toward their class appeal. Dividing the theaters into those in rich bourgeois neighborhoods and those of the working classes, we noticed that in the central theaters viewers' reactions to films were more reserved than in the working class theaters around the city's edge. And it was extremely important, during our investigation, for us to locate those isolated moments in a film which elicited a viewer's reactions to the particular action he is shown. It was important for us which films the viewer watched attentively, the particular moment the viewer would laugh, sigh, or groan. It was likewise important to us what was happening on the screen at that moment, how the film appeared to be made in that section, how it was constructed. Films made in different countries are differently perceived by the audience.

First of all, we divided the cinema into three basic types: the Russian film, the European, and the American. (In the European cinema at that time, films made by the Swedish firm, "Nordisk," were quite popular. This firm's films in no way resembled the European-type films, but resembled the American films much more.) When we began to compare the typically American, typically European, and typically Russian films, we noticed that they were distinctly different from one another in their construction. We noticed that in a particular sequence of a Russian film there were, say, ten to fifteen splices, ten to fifteen different set-ups. In the European film there might be twenty to thirty such set-ups (one must not forget that this description pertains to the year 1916), while in the American film there would be from eighty, sometimes upward to a hundred, separate shots.

The American films took first place in eliciting reactions from the audience; European films took second; and the Russian films, third. We became particularly intrigued by this, but in the beginning we did not understand it. Then we began to reason as follows: An argument ensues about cinema—is it or is it not an art? Let us set up a camera, actors, create decorations, play out a scene, and then let us examine the photographed segment from the viewpoint of the solution of this problem. If a good photograph results from the given piece—one which is well-shot, and beautifully and effectively conceived—then we can say: This is not cinematic art, this is merely an art of the photographer, the cameraman. If the actor performs well, we can say about the segment: Whatever the actor can do here, he also does in the theater. Where is the specificity of the cinema here? If the decor in the film is good, and the work of the designer good, then once more it can be said that there is not any cinema here: it is the work of the set designer.

However hard we tried, we could not find a fundamental, designative specificity of the art of cinema. What were we thinking about? We were thinking then about a very simple matter—every art form has two technological elements: material itself and the methods of organizing that material.

No art exists independently, by virtue of itself alone.

The problem of art is to reflect reality, to illuminate this reality with a particular idea, to prove something; and all this is only possible when one has something to evidence, and one knows how to go about it, that is, how to organize the material of the art form. Here the fact emerged that the artist, perceiving and generalizing reality, performs a definite, purposeful ideological work. Reflecting in his production an objective reality, the artist must express his ideas, demonstrate something, propagandize something: while all this is only possible when he has something to produce, and he knows how to work, that is, how the material of his art is to be organized.

In the cinema the understanding of the material and the understanding of the organization of this material are particularly complex, because the material of the cinema itself demands particular organization, demands particularly extensive and specifically cinematic treatment. The cinema is much more complicated than other forms of art, because the method of organization of its material and the material itself are especially "interdependent." Let us say, in the case of sculpture—having the fact and phenomenal appearance of reality, as well as the artistic idea, illuminating this reality with a particular object—we take a piece of marble, give it that form which is necessary for the expression of that appearance of reality, and the result is the production of a piece of sculpture. For the expression of that phenomenon in painting we take pigments and begin to organize them according to the demands of the best and most vivid expression of that phenomenon, and we get the production of a painted art work.

In the cinema the question of the constitution of a film is a far more complicated one. In the cinema, being possessed of an idea, taking the material—actual life or actors—and organizing it all by one or another method, is insufficient.

But more about this later. Thus, finding nothing in any particular segment of the film material specific to our art, consistent with the views of the time, we decided that the specifics of cinema were contained in the organization of the cinematic material (which meant separate shots and scenes), in the joining and alternation of scenes among themselves, in other words, in montage. It seemed to us at that time absolutely apparent that the American films achieved the greatest audience reactions, because they contained the greatest number of shots, from the greatest number of separate scenes, and accordingly, that montage, as the source of expression, as the artistic organization of material, affected the viewer more strongly and vividly in American films.

At that time we regarded the artistic effect of American film on the viewer very naively. The real essence of the American cinema, the real reason for its specific influence on the audience, escaped us.

But the matter, from my viewpoint, lay in the following: The flowering of American cinema was the result of the development of American capitalism. Capitalist America was being constructed, capitalist America developed, because the American society needed strong, energetic builders, fighters for the strengthening of the relics of capitalism. The Americans needed to utilize human resources at their disposal for the creation of a mighty capitalist order. This society required people of a strong bourgeois psychological orientation and world-view. Thus what was completely clear was that the task of American cinema was the education of the particular

sort of person who, by virtue of his qualities, would fit in with the epoch of the development of capitalism.

At the same time capitalism inevitably nurtured the development of a proletarian class, and the consciousness of this class must have been awakening and developing; and it is utterly apparent that capitalism had to cloud this consciousness, to distract it, to weaken it. American art inevitably had to become a "consoling" art, an art that lacquered reality, an art that diverted the masses from the class struggle, from an awareness of their own class interests; and, on the other hand, it had to be an art that directed energy to competitiveness, to enterprise, larded with bourgeois morality and bourgeois psychology.

That is how the "American detective" was created—the American adventure films. From one point of view, they brought attention to energy, to competitiveness, to action; they attracted attention to the type of energetic and strong "heroes" of capitalism, in whom strength, resourcefulness, and courage were always victorious. On the other hand, these films accustomed one to bigotry, to the lacquering of reality, "consoling" and educating one to the fact that with corresponding energy a person can achieve individual fortune, can provide rent for himself, and can become a happy landowner.

The dramatic line of energy of the competition, the action and victory of those who found the strength in American films (to achieve their ends), created the rapid American montage of incidents. The American viewer demanded that directors pack the greatest amount of action into a given length of film, the greatest number of events, the greatest possible energy, pitted characters against each other more vigorously, and built the entire construction of the film more energetically and dynamically. From this point of view, from the viewpoint of the construction of rapid action montage, American cinema was a progressive "presence" at that time.

In European films, produced in those countries where the growth of capitalism was not so stormy as in America, where the American struggle for survival did not exist, there were no conditions for the genesis of a rapid, energetic montage.

Thus the structure of American films of that time, the method of their editing, was, to a certain extent, a progressive occurrence. That is how we perceived it at that particular time. We decided that the American system of montage would give us the opportunity in our Futuristic works "to create" havoc, to break with the old world, the old petty bourgeois morality. That is where our deepest mistake lay. Perceiving the petty bourgeois axioms of American montage and American morality in their entirety, we introduced elements of bourgeois art into our own films unintentionally—a "consoling," bourgeois morality, and so on; and that is why, along with a certain benefit derived from the uncritical study of American montage, came great harm.

It seems to me that all the errors of my filmmaking during the ensuing years have their roots in this period—in the period of a blind acceptance of American film culture. This is explainable by the fact that, in our time, we were convinced that American montage invariably inculcated boldness and energy, indispensable to revolutionary struggle, to revolution.

We understood montage futuristically, but when it came to the negative aspects of its relationship to the bourgeois essence of American films, we were gulled.

I return to our "history." Studying montage we decided that in American films not only did the scenes change and alternate more rapidly than in European or

Russian films, but the majority of these scenes were likewise comprised of a whole order of elements, of separate pieces, separate compositions—that is, we classified the internal division of scenes into the now universally familiar close-up, medium-shot, long-shot, and the rest. At that time this convention was new to us, and it was most important for us to have discovered it in the American cinema. We could see that in individual scenes the Americans used so-called "close-ups"—that is, that at necessary, expressive moments, they showed things in large format, more distinctly, that in a given moment, they showed only what it was necessary to show. The close-up, the compositional expression of only the most important and necessary, proved to have a decided influence on our future work in montage.

The close-up established exceptionally broad possibilities for the future montage construction of motion pictures. By means of close-ups, we arrived at the study of the potentialities of montage, we determined what it was possible to achieve through montage, how expressive its artistic strengths were . . . and a whole order of other crucial and interesting moments for our work.

We ascertained what montage would permit while simultaneously depicting lines of action in different locations.

We likewise decided that montage had an enormous influence on the semantic comprehension of what is on the screen.

Let us say that an actor is performing some sort of dismal moment; you film his drawn face. The face is shot in a setting of "dismal context." But there are instances when this face within a "dismal" scene, by virtue of its compositional properties, is found to be suitable for a cheerful scene. With the help of montage, this face could be spliced into such a scene, and instances do occur when a particular performance by an actor is given a totally different meaning through montage. I recall, even in 1916–1917, how the then famous matinee idol, Vitold Polonsky, and I had an argument about this property of montage to override the actor's performance. Emphasizing that, however one edits, the actor's work will invariably be stronger than the montage, Polonsky asserted that there would be an enormous difference between an actor's face when portraying a man sitting in jail longing for freedom and seeing an open cell door, and the expression of a person sitting in different circumstances—say, the protagonist was starving and he was shown a bowl of soup. The reaction of the actor to the soup and to the open cell door would be completely different. We then performed an experiment. We shot two such scenes, exchanged the close-ups from one scene to the other, and it became obvious that the actor's performance, his reaction of joy at the soup and joy at freedom (the open cell door) were rendered completely unnoticeable by montage. We made use of this example to emphasize that, apart from montage, nothing exists in cinema, that the work of the actor is absolutely irrelevant, that with good montage it is immaterial how he works. This was incorrect because in a particular instance we have had dealings with the poor work of an actor; and, clearly, then, these two reactions are completely different, and it is not always possible to alter the semantic work of an actor. (In certain instances the cited property of montage can be used, say, to correct an error, to change a scene, to reconstruct the scenario. It is extremely important, however, that it be possible and necessary to use this property only if there is a shooting script, a specific purpose, not in the actor's

performance, but in the nature of the filming itself, in the type of face, or in the social concept.)

In this example, we taught that montage alternations are *not* only contained in the segments themselves, but in the very action that is being photographed. Imagine, if you will, that we have an alternation of segments through montage. I conceive them in terms of a line. (See below.)
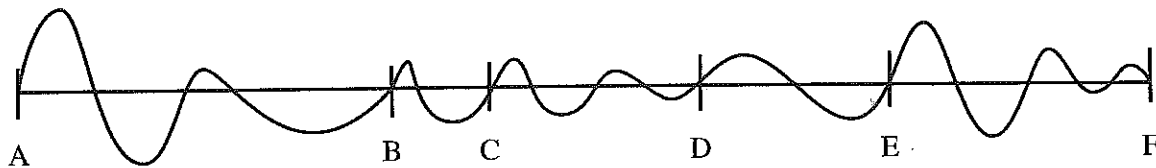
A diagram of montage segments and intra-shot montage.

There are separate marks of A, B, C, D, E, F—places marking the splices of montage segments, establishing their interrelationships, their interactions. The rhythm and meaning of the montage is not only derived from the interaction and interrelationship of the given segments marked on the line, but the montage also resides within these shots, in the filmed action of the person, for example, in the actor's performance (this internal rhythm is also apparent in the drawing of the sinusoidal curve).

Within these segments, the actor somehow conveys himself, performs some sorts of emphases through movement; his work has its own montage curve, particularly in montage interactions and alternations. It is these very alternations, in meaning as in rhythm, which are inextricably connected with the alternation of the segments themselves—that is, the internal montage of the construction of the shot cannot be separated from the entire montage construction, from the montage of the shots. But at the same time, one must not forget that the location of the shot in a montage phrase is crucial, because it is the position that, more often than not, explains the essence of the meaning intended by the artist-editor, his purpose (often the position in the montage alters the content). Let us recall the example of the bourgeois and the Soviet newspapers about which Eisenstein spoke. The interaction of separate montage segments, their position, and likewise their rhythmic duration, become the contents of the production and world-view of the artist. The very same action, the very same event, set in different places with different comparisons, "works" differently ideologically. Accordingly, a montage of segments in its turn is related to an intra-shot montage, but at the same time, the shot position in the montage is inextricably tied to the ideological purpose of direction of the editor.

It is interesting that when the director does not know his work with actors well enough, when he does not have sufficient command of the technique of this work, he tries to rectify all his errors and tries to compensate for the inadequacies of his acting with montage; and when the director constructs the basis of his picture principally on montage, he gradually loses confidence in his work with the actor. This can be tested in a particularly vivid and revealing example. One of our distinguished directors—the director Pudovkin, working in his films principally on montage construction—loses his previous ability to work with actors more and more with each new film; and

Pudovkin generally always worked well with actors. In his own time he had command of acting technique, but because he often expressed ever more complex situations in his scenarios, not through the work of a living human being, but through various combinations of montage, it seems to me that gradually he began to lose the indispensable contact with the actor and the ability to direct him.

The director can always be put in a situation when it will be necessary for him to work with poor acting material, when it will be necessary to work with actor-mannequins in *typage*, when the person physically fits the role but is unable to perform as an actor. Furthermore, in films with large formats, in complex films, where there are many performing personnel, where *typage* is also important, it is inevitable that scenes are encountered in which one has to work with people who are unqualified as actors. Doubtless, the work of such an accidental actor (not an actor but a *type*) will be very poor in quality, and it is here that the role of montage, correcting and adjusting the actor's job, is highly significant. In the example of the selfsame Pudovkin, we can see how people who are utterly unable to work as actors, demonstrate what Pudovkin required, performing adequately in a whole host of scenarios and thematic situations.

We must remember once and for always that all artistic sources are fine for the achievement of a correct ideological position in a film, and that is why, when a vivid expression of an idea must be achieved through montage above all, one must work "on montage," and when an idea must be expressed through the actor's work above all, one must work "on the actor."

At all events, one must study montage, one must work on montage, because it has an extraordinary effect on the viewer.

In no case should one assume the entire matter of cinematography to be in montage. And when we conduct a brief survey of the material of cinema, because it is filmed in shots, we will see that film material is so varied, so complex, that the quality of films never depends entirely on montage. It is determined (by the way of the ideological purpose) by the material itself, especially since the material of cinema is reality itself, life itself, reflected and interpreted by the class consciousness of the artist.

MAYA DEREN

Cinematography:
The Creative Use of Reality

Born Eleanora Derenowsky in Kiev, Ukraine, Maya Deren (1917–1961) was a pioneer in American experimental cinema, a film theorist, and a key figure in the development of New American Cinema. In 1922, Deren's family fled growing anti-Semitism and political persecution, settling in Syracuse, New York. After obtaining a master's degree in English literature from Smith College, she became secretary to the great African American choreographer Katherine