Montage

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Brief orientation

Montage refers on the one hand to the use of prefabricated or preformed parts in art and on the other hand to the resulting product. The assembled parts can be words, prints, notes, photos, objects, scenes, settings, etc. The term is used in various arts such as literature, painting, sculpture, photography, film, music, theater, and performative art. Especially in fine arts, the term *assemblage* is often used as a synonym to montage. In literature, the material can be taken from the press, advertising, everyday communication or, in the case of documentary montage, from various historical and contemporary sources.

The lexicographical origin of the term montage points to a craftsmanship meaning in the sense of mounting, assembling, putting together, composing, constructing. At the beginning of 20th century, the term has been transferred to cinema technology. In the arts, it means more a method than a device. In literature, montage is a form of *intertextuality.* In the montage, unlike in the *quotation*, it is not necessary to identify the source. Elements are taken from their original context of use and inserted into a new, foreign context. The individual elements thus acquire a new meaning, but still quote their old statements.

Montage is an aesthetic process in which "the particles are joined together without joints, remain heterogeneous and appear inhomogeneous as discernible fragments" (Voigts-Virchow 2004 : 472). The use of such materials leads to alienation effects but also to a stronger reference to reality. On the level of the production and organization of texts, montage as a juxtaposition of disparate fragments tends to shift the focus from genealogy to construction, from an organic to a technical paradigm, from a temporal to a spatial order. A paratactic order supersedes a hypotactic order. The individual parts of the text are not anchored in a homogeneous unity, but are interchangeable in their order. The coherence of the text is constituted more on a paradigmatic than on a syntagmatic level.

Historical aspects

Montage can be regarded as a genuinely modern technique, although the term has recently also been used in connection with medieval literature, for example for the construction principle of some heroic epics. Here, too, elements are taken from their original context of use or communication, more or less fragmented, deformed or destroyed - and in a second step reassembled with other parts of the same or different origin. But with this technique in medieval hero epics, unlike in literary modernism, the closed, organic work of art is not deconstructed (Miklautsch 2005 : 16). While the premodern forerunners of the

montage techniques give priority to the formal integration of different materials, in modern literature, montage interrupts the continuity of the text flow and can result in surprise effects, irritations and provocations. Contrasts are created and associations are evoked.

Several precursors can be identified for the modern montage method. The *Cento* – Latin for a dress patched together from rags, a patchwork – was already popular in ancient times: quotations (whole verses or fragments of verses, idioms, metaphors) from exemplary poets such as Homer or Vergil were combined to form a new poem. This tradition was continued in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque, the Classical, up to Expressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism, often in a witty or parodistic way. Unlike the *Cento*, the montage is not composed exclusively of literary texts, but draws its materials from extra-literary texts.

Similar to the Cento, the theatrical *Quodlibet* also is an early form of citation montage. As a baroque art form, it has been developed in literature, music and pictorial art. It allows opposites to collide and brings together what does not belong together. It was particularly popular in the Vienna *Volkstheater* of the 18th and 19th centuries; scenes from successful plays were arranged in loose succession. "The Quodlibet can be used as a *dispositif* that allows a great deal of different, even disparate, information to be organized, without having to deny the contingencies of the arrangement" (Haag 2013 : 103).

A later precursor of the montage was the technique of *Cross-reading* developed in English-language literature in 18th century. The lines of a newspaper are read directly across the page, instead of down the columns. The result is an incongruous, bizarre combination of fragments of sentences. In the newspaper, the unconnected is juxtaposed and nonetheless formally integrated within the framework of a unifying page (Te Heesen 2006 : 46). With its crisscross layout, the newspaper page itself points the way ahead in terms of modern montage. In 19th century, the montage technique was also used in historical dramas that integrated authentic speech parts into the plot. In most cases, however, the origin of the material was concealed.

At the beginning of the 20th century, film became a driving force behind montage technique. In film, montage refers to the process of seamlessly combining several independent shots as parts of a larger structure. In a narrower sense, montage in film is understood more as "editing" than as "cutting" (French: "découpage"). In this context, montage means both the craft dimension and the dimension of the selection and combination of image and sound parts into a film that has been discussed theoretically and aesthetically since the 1920s. In this discussion, Russian avant-garde directors such as Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, and Vsevolod Pudovkin played a crucial role. For Sergei Eisenstein, the montage, as "attraction montage" and "intellectual montage", "represented the dynamic elaboration or dialectical development of the narrative or conceptual content of the film" (Williams 2003/14 : 1), and became a means of agitation and enlightenment. The term collision montage was used for Eisenstein's films, while the term additive montage was used for E. S. Porter's films, and the term parallel montage for W. S. Griffith's films.

Also at the beginning of the 20th Century, the first *collages* were created in the visual arts. In their Cubist phase, artists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque used *papiers collés* (French for *pasted papers* or *paper cut outs*) to integrate prefabricated materials such as newspapers, wallpapers, prints, etc. with their special characteristics into the overall composition. This technique of producing works of art from prefabricated, heterogeneous materials was adopted from the fine arts into literature. Collage and montage are often used synonymously in this context.

The form innovative and documentary montage of quotations has played an important role in literature since 1900. Arno Holz (*The Tinsmiths,* 1902) and Karl Kraus (*The Last Days of Mankind,* 1918/19) used the montage of quotations for satirical purposes. Montage played a central role in *Dadaism, Surrealism,* and *Russian Constructivism*. For the Dadaists, it was a means of breaking down the autonomy of the

organic artwork. The breaks were displayed as clearly as possible. The heterogeneous, contradictory, and disparate experience of reality was to become as sharply visible as possible. The Dadaists used aleatoric methods in which the selection and order of the words were randomly determined. Such methods have been used since the Baroque period in the so-called cube texts. In the avant-garde, it was Stephane Mallarmé who first discussed the role of chance in art production with *A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance* (1897). In the neo-avant-garde, for example, Ferdinand Kriwet continued this tradition with his *Diced Texts* (1959).

Shortly before the First World War, the first photomontages were made (e.g. Karl Kraus, *The Winner*, 1911). In the interwar period, George Grosz, John Heartfield, Hannah Höch, and Kurt Tucholsky developed photomontage as a combination of several clips from different photos and their combination with texts from newspapers, prints, and colored paper as an instrument of political enlightenment and propaganda:

> **"the resulting images often included illogical juxtapositions and dramatic shifts of scale. In accounts of montage, these clashes have been described both in terms of the shock tactics of the avant-garde and as a form of allegory that applied new layers of meaning and new contexts to existing images" (Williams 2002/2014: 1-2).**

Unlike these politically committed artists, representatives of another Dadaist current more interested in aesthetic experiments, such as Hans Arp and Kurt Schwitters, tied in with the Cubist collage to create works that integrate foreign materials such as newspaper cuttings, tickets, poster texts, notes, and labels into an abstract composition. Instead of conveying clear political messages, these works preserved art's claim to autonomy.

The montage is essentially based on experiences of classical modernity such as mass media, big cities, industrialization, and mechanization. Especially the big city novel of an Andrei Bely (*Petersburg,* 1913), James Joyce (*Ulysses,* 1922), John Dos Passos (*Manhattan Transfer,* 1924), or Alfred Döblin (*Berlin Alexanderplatz,* 1929) used the montage technique to adequately depict the new metropolitan world, but without completely renouncing a narrative thread. Newspaper cuttings, book excerpts, legal texts, advertising, slogans, lyrics, sayings, mythology and the Bible are some of the manifold sources of the quoted material. "By combining or juxtaposing parts of texts of linguistic, stylistic, and content-wise heterogeneous origin, [these authors] believed they could literarily counter the permanent 'shock' (W. Benjamin) that the simultaneity and discontinuity of modern urban realities brings about" (Kaiser 2006 : 69). From an aesthetic point of view, the montage made the structure of the texts recognizable.

The socially and media-critical montage was continued in the post-war period in the *Cut-ups.* In the US, William Burroughs, Brion Gysin and Mary Beach, in France Claude Pélieu, in England Jeff Nuttall, in Germany Carl Weissner, Jürgen Ploog, and Jörg Fauser used this technique. Original texts are cut into individual words, sequences or larger parts and then rearranged in more or less random order. Tristan Tzara already used the cut-up technique in 1920. Burroughs applied this technique not only to printed works, but also to visual material and audio recordings. The political function was combined with the intention of expanding consciousness. Subsequently, Beat Generation authors such as Allen Ginsberg or Rolf Dieter Brinkmann also experimented with this method of text production. From 1965, the British mathematician and computer scientist Ian Sommerville tested the cut-up method as a principle of mechanical text production.

The 1960s brought a boom in experimental techniques in the arts, especially in montage. Representatives of British and American *Pop-art* such as Richard Hamilton or Robert Rauschenberg integrated disperse materials from contemporary pop culture into their collages. In the *musique concrete* (French for *concrete*

music), recorded sounds are used as raw materials for composing. These recordings can contain recorded instruments, human voices and sounds from the natural environment. They can then be electronically alienated by montage, tape editing, changes in tape speed and tape-loops. Since the 1990s, sampling techniques have been further developing acoustic montage methods using the latest digital means. Acoustic montages have played an important role in the *New Radio Play* since the 1950s. This was also the starting point for the original audio plays, which for example use acoustic material from the environment (such as animal voices, subway noises, dialogues in the supermarket) and largely dispense with actor voices.

Hypertext methods already used by James Joyce, Thomas Mann (*Doctor Faustus,* 1947) or Andreas Okopenko (*Lexicon Novel,* 1970) became more dynamic through digital media. Freely selectable links allow text parts to be linked at will. In addition, Internet Art and Digital Image Editing have immensely expanded the possibilities of montage.

Theoretical aspects

From the point of view of how strongly the assembled texts appear discontinuous and fragmented, two poles can be distinguished: the *integrating* montage conceals the breaks between the preformed and the non-preformed parts whereas the *demonstrative* montage emphasizes the incongruities, breaks and incompatibilities of the assembled parts (Žmega? 1994 : 286-287). At one end of this scale is the perfect integration of the preformed parts and as a consequence their invisibility, at the other end is the complete splintering which makes the parts clearly recognizable. The latter type of irritating montage is a fundamental artistic procedure of the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde. Montage emphasizes fragmentation and thus undermines the concept of the organic work of art and art as mimesis, and questions the autonomy of art and the concept of the artist as a sovereign creator. In this sense, the function of montage can paradoxically be regarded as that of *de-montage* (Voigts-Virchow 2004 : 472). Depending on the relation between the individual elements, the following types of montage can be distinguished: addition, mosaic, parallel, contrast, crossover, and comment montage. While in addition, mosaic, and parallel montage the paradigmatic series dominates and a context of meaning is not obvious, in contrast and crossover montage the elements illuminate each other. In the commentary montage finally, the elements are organically integrated into the literary text and the seams tend to become invisible.

A significant effect of the literary montage technique is the revaluation of non-literary, functional texts. By placing functional texts in a poetic context, it makes them literary on the one hand, but on the other they acquire a new meaning independent of their literary context. "Their *need for interpretation* was recognized: that they too could be described and analytically examined by means of literary studies" (Jeßing, Köhnen 2017: 206).

Forms of montage can be fanned out under the aspect of the relationship between hypotext and hypertext. Following on from Gerard Genette's *Palimpsestes* (1982), we can distinguish different forms of transformation of hypotext in hypertext – playfully as pastiche, satirically as persiflage, seriously as imitation. These strategies can also be found in *Appropriation Art* that has developed since the 1970s as a method of conceptual art: artists consciously and strategically copy the works of other artists, whereby the act of copying is itself to be understood as art, unlike in the case of plagiarism or counterfeiting. In the broader sense Appropriation Art can be any art that deals with found aesthetic material, e.g. advertising photography, press photography, archive images, films, videos, etc. These can be exact, detailed copies; however, manipulations of size, color, material and medium of the original are also often carried out in the copy. Such appropriation can be both an homage and a criticism.

The term montage can also be applied to styles and genres. In this context, montage appears as a technique of *hybridization*. It can produce hybrid texts in which the relationship between fact and fiction and, on a metapoetic level, the constructiveness of writing is reflected. For Theodor W. Adorno, who regarded genre montage as one of the most important strategies of aesthetic innovation, montage is a paradigm of modernity:

> **"All modem art after impressionism, probably including even the radical manifestations of expressionism, has abjured the semblance of a continuum grounded in the unity of subjective experience, in the 'stream of lived experience.' The intertwinement, the organic commingling, is severed, the faith destroyed that one thing merges wholly with the other […]. The idea of montage and that of technological construction, which is inseparable from it, becomes irreconcilable with the idea of the radical, fully formed artwork with which it was once recognized as being identical" (Adorno 2002 : 155).**

But Adorno already noticed that the shock for which the montage was intended had become blunted in the meantime. Whereas at the beginning of the 20th century and in the post-war period, montage was undoubtedly an innovative technique in the arts, today it can be considered routine practice and part of popular culture and commercial art. In video clips, advertising, or computer programs like photoshop it has become a conventional, ubiquitous method and has lost its provocative explosive force.

In contrast, Elaine Showalter (1991) asserts the subversive function of montage by emphasizing its special affinity to modern female writing. Metaphorically speaking, American female authors such as Margaret Fuller, Louisa May Alcott, Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton as well as female interwar writing and contemporary female Gothic quilted remnants, scraps and fragments together. According to Showalter, piecing together of snips is a counterstrategy to the male master narratives of autonomous creativity.

Cases

The montage as an artistic and especially literary technique plays a decisive role for the neo-avant-garde after 1945. In poetry, Gottfried Benn, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, representatives of Concrete Poetry, and the Vienna Group experimented with montage methods as a form of *intertextuality*. In his cycle of poems *Mausoleum* (1975), which presents portraits of personalities from the history of progress in ballad form, Enzensberger incorporated quotations from various sources into the poems and marked them with italics. The result was a new form of documentary poetry. In his *Head of Vitus Bering* (1965), Konrad Bayer applied the montage technique not only to text parts, but also to genres. This novel, for which Bayer coined the term "summary biography", experiments with new uses of montage techniques in order to break down traditional genre patterns and explore genre innovations.

Montage plays an important role on stage, especially in documentary theatre. In the 20th century, it was first developed in the early Soviet Union as agitation and propaganda theatre. In Germany it was Erwin Piscator (*In Spite of Everything,* 1925) who integrated factual material, such as documentary film excerpts, into his productions for the first time. The "Unity Theatre" in England and the "Federal Theatre Project" in the US were oriented towards the *living newspaper* practiced in the Soviet Union, although with different political intentions. Whereas the documentary theatre between the wars aimed to involve the audience, the post-war documentary theatre used techniques influenced by Bertolt Brecht to distance itself from the audience. In Germany, the main focus was on the processing of the Nazi period and the Holocaust. Peter Weiss, for example, used trial records in *The Investigation* (1965), and the piece was presented in the form

of a tribunal. Half a century later, Matthias Hartmann and Doron Rabinovici launched a new form of documentary theatre with the project *The Last Witnesses* (2013) at the Vienna Burgtheater: six contemporary witnesses of the Holocaust appeared on stage and their texts were read by actors from the Burgtheater.

The German author and filmmaker Alexander Kluge continues the socio-critical intention of the montage by constantly forming new constellations from images, films, texts and objects. Its aim is the organization of experience with the means of a transmedial test arrangement. It is a space of communication between times, an echo space in which voices from past epochs are not only echoed, but above all heard and incorporated into the current speech. The aim of Kluge's montage is to set subjective imaginative and expressive powers in motion and to oppose the belief in the fatality of individual life and general history. In contrast to documentary literature, Kluge is concerned with the artistic character of the documentary, with a "medium of representation" that is "oriented towards affects" (Kluge 1979: 31). E.g., for the film and the narrative *The Patriot* (1979), "montage principles that aim at an aesthetics of the 'gap'" (Vosskamp 2011: 364) are more important than coherence. According to Vosskamp,

> **film and text *Die Patriotin* is not only made out of fragments, allusions, cuts, close-ups, inserts, images and montage but also uses intermedial techniques between film and text and emblematic combinations of image and text. These techniques open up an 'in-between' space for the viewer's and the reader's imagination (Vosskamp 2011: 361).**

In France, Michel Vinaver uses the montage technique as an instrument of social criticism. A central situation is assessed from different points of view, in a variety of different linguistic codes. For Vinaver, the "vehicle of meaning" is "the juxtaposition of elements that do not fit with one another, in other words, montage" (Vinaver 1982: 290). Through the montage and *de-montage* of linguistic set pieces, Vinaver wants to show, in plays such as *Dissident, Goes Without Saying* (1976) or *Nina, That's Something Else* (1976)*,* how the socio-economic constraints of the capitalist system condition people's behavior: "through the counterpoint, or montage of linguistic impulses, these plays reveal the ideological implications embedded in the most ordinary episodes of everyday life" (Bradby 2016: 70).

In England, Peter Cheeseman developed the "Stoke Local Documentary Method". In plays like *Hands Up, For You the War Is Over!* (1971) or *Fight for Shelton Bar* (1977), Cheeseman used tape-recorded testimony to generate script. With these plays, Cheeseman became a pioneer of *Verbatim Theatre* (Dawson 1999). One of many examples for plays using verbatim interviews is *The Laramie Project* (2000) by Moisés Kaufman and the US "Tectonic Theatre Project" that investigated the murder of a gay student in Wyoming. At present, the question of the relationship between reality and its representation in documentary theatre is being reflected through the increased inclusion of the latest media.

> **In the contemporary moment, when the blur between the real and the represented is daily, systemic, and overarching, companies such as *The Civilians*, which bills its work as 'investigatory theatre,' […] embraces theatrical devices such as music and dance to expose dimensions of absurdity, hyperbole, and non-linearity – essential tools to understand the complex social, political, and cultural forces that shape our daily life (Odendahl-James 2017: n. pag.).**

As these examples show, montage techniques are best suited to negotiate the relationship between the individual and society, and to play through models of shared agency. In Hungarian postmodern literature,

Péter Esterházy's opus magnum *Celestial Harmonies: A Novel* (2000) is an excellent example of the use of montage as a means of dealing with the interrelationship between the private and the political. In this family novel, the history and myth of the Esterházy family mix. The novel contains many original documents and sources (e.g. inventories and documents) as well as often literal quotations by other authors, such as Endre Ady, Dezs? Kosztolányi, Gábor Görgey, and Danilo Kiš. Consequently, the boundaries between fact and fiction are blurred. "This postmodern text montage based on paradoxes, which often strains the rhetorical meanings of language to the limit [...], achieves perfection of form and artistic persuasiveness" (Szirák 2013: 547). Soon after, Esterházy published the book *Improved Edition. Supplement to Celestial Harmonies* (2002). He had discovered that his father had regularly provided reports to the Hungarian State Protection Authority from 1957 to 1979. The book mixes excerpts from the agent reports and quotations from diary entries, reflections and feelings of the author. Also quotations from *Celestial Harmonies* are inserted and thus appear in a new light. Individual actions and collective processes combine to form a complex network of texts that not least addresses the question of the communicability of personal shock and historical experiences of pain.

Avenues for future research

Future research on the subject of montage will have to face the challenge posed by new, especially digital media. For example, text, data, images, sounds or videos are assembled and combined in *mashups* and *memes*. Montage is becoming more and more what it was from the very beginning: an intermedial technique. As a result, the boundary between montage and plagiarism is particularly fluid in the everyday use of foreign materials, for example from films, videos or television, in digital and social media, on blogs, youtube, reddit, twitter, instagram, or facebook. In view of the low-threshold availability of a wide variety of materials, the question arises, particularly in relation to literature: how can intertextuality, understood as a creative act in which a text, as Julia Kristeva (1967) claims, is built up as a mosaic of quotations, as absorption and transformation of other texts, be distinguished from pure reproduction? As far as the neo-avant-garde is concerned, it is not only the incorporation of modern techniques into commercial formats and everyday culture that needs to be analyzed, but also the repercussions and reappropriation of these popular montage practices in art production.

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