Montage, Ethnography and Representations of Post-socialist Realities

An essay answering exam question no. 2:
“How appropriate is the cinematic principle of montage as a means of conveying the realities of post-socialism?”

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Method of this project: Literary montage. I needn't *say* anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse - these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: By making use of them.

– Fragment from Walter Benjamin: "The Arcades Project" (1999) p. 460 [1927-1940]

Montage as ethnographic representation

Through the 1980s and 1990s, the discipline of anthropology has suffered a crisis of representation. No longer can the anthropological subject be considered as premodern and easily definable as has been the case. Through a global market economy, constantly developing and changing migration patterns and cultural homogenization through mass consumption and media, western modernity has set its mark upon all parts of the world, making indigenous peoples hyperaware of their own culture and history, and leaving anthropological knowledge and authority more contested than ever before.

Coinciding with the rise of post-modernist thinking with its call for introspection and self-reflection in the process of gathering and interpreting scientific data, anthropologists have begun searching for new ways to present their data, treading a thin line to avoid either writing ethnography too focused on their own reflections, or merely focusing on the change towards modernity itself through an essentialising of their object of study in ord to recreate how it might have been "before the deluge" of modernity.

The American anthropologist George E. Marcus identifies this search as a shift within ethnographic representation away from the trope of scientific classification, fixing and describing each aspect of the relevant culture in a 19th century detached realist style, as inspired by Flaubert, resulting in a impression of a stable, cultural totality – pure and untouched by modernity (Marcus 1994: 38).

Some anthropologists have explored narrative as a means to convey this new anthropological reality, focusing on life stories, changing or limiting their scope to a diachronic narrative of few individuals, something that has been particularly evident in ethnographic filmmaking, but also in written ethnography such as Vincent Crapanzano's "Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan" (1980), rather than the classic synchronic account of a single tribe or "culture" of Bronislaw Malinowski's "Argonauts of the Pacific" (1922) or E.E. Evans-Pritchard's "The Nuer" (1940). But Marcus argues for the need for a further "modernizing" of ethnographic representation in order to move away from the limiting rhetorical apparatus of a social realist classification or narrative based on a omniscient authorial style inherently Western.

Marcus claims that recent critiques of and experiments in ethnographic writing are looking to modernist styles of writing for inspiration on how to present ethnographic data in a fragmented and increasingly complex world. Among these various literary styles of writing introduced by experimenting authors in the early 20th century, Marcus suggests the idea of montage as the one most useful for representation of the anthropological project (Ibid. 39-40).

Montage, the cinematic principle of juxtaposing different images to create new meaning, gives a way of defying a linear presentation, creating a sense of simultaneity through parallel editing that can problematize space, time and representation in ways not offered by realist writing. Marcus argues that using the alternative coherence offered by the montage style in both text and images, ethnographic representation can be developed beyond this current crisis to regain lost academic confidence, if not authority.

A montage in its own right, this essay attempts to explore the montage form while examining the possibilities and limits of ethnographic montage through a juxtaposition of the roots of montage in early modernist experiments in text and film with recent ethnographic representations of post-socialist Russia. Through this montage, I hope to not only expose an alternative coherence as suggested by Marcus, but also consider the possibilities of montage in conveying the realities of post-socialism.

– Scott McCloud: "Understanding Comics" (1993) p. 66.

Post-socialism and ethnographic representation

The so-called second world, the socialist bloc of the Cold War, crumbled much to the Western world's surprise in the years between 1989 and 1991, leaving huge state-led organisations leaderless, the dominant modernism of socialist ideology shattered and an uncontrolled transition from plan economy to market economy. This former second world, covering most of the continent of Eurasia from East Germany to China and Mongolia, are now known as post-socialist countries, having embraced capitalist economy and Western investments whilst still considering practices and ideals of socialism to give some degree of meaningful framework (cf. Hann 2002). Postsocialism is generally considered a period of transition, but even though the term is worn thin by 15 years of settling change no better term has yet risen. This new post-socialist reality has received great interest among Western anthropologists hithereto denied the opportunity to do fieldwork within this great region by an oppressive state that did not agree ideologically with the anthropological project of studying disappearing, primitive and premodern ways of life (Ibid. 2). With the end of socialist state regime, many ethnic groups of such areas as Siberia and Mongolia were able to return to their old shamanistic faiths and traditions unopposed, creating complex interwoven cultural patchworks of resumed old native traditions, continued socialist beliefs and social organisation and the influence of the emerging capitalist society with corruption, private property and market logic. Confronted with these wide changes, differences and surprising continuities, anthropologists are faced with the challenge of finding a form and style suitable to contain this intricate mess of relations – historical, social, cultural and economical – without reverting to the stereotypes and cultural essentialism of times past.

The following are examples of advertisements illustrating the range of [magical, shamanic] services [in Moscow], the strategies of legitimation, and the entanglement of moral problems that can be involved.

> The only master in Russia in possession of secret techniques of ancient Scandinavian eriles [this word, which I have never encountered elsewhere, is not explained in the advertisement]. Complete reprogramming of fate for success and luck. [...] We create the energy sketch of your future in a quantum field, after which we connect you to a certain archetype of being that corrects the inner structure of reality and alters events in the direction you need.
>
> * * *
>
> Gennadi Voronov [*the ad. is adorned with a big picture of the magus, a secularly looking man in a suit, with a prudish hair cut, with austere and piercing gaze, reminiscent of the portraits of the heroes of socialist labor displayed at workplaces in Soviet times at the so-called "[notice] boards of honor"* [doska pocheta]], patented method.
> Love magic – required result in the indicated time.
> Business and finances:
> – Increase your revenues by minimum 80 per cent.
> – Help in getting back loaned money
> – Help warding off creditors
>
> [...]
>
> We are ready to help you find a way out of the most stressful situation. We shall solve your family problems and those of your business. Psychological consultations. We give training in shamanic practices, and retrieve your guardian angel. Magic for women. Thai massage.

– Galina Lindquist: "Spirits and Souls of Business" (2002), pp. 332-334. The first two bracketed remarks and the cuts are mine. The rest of the remarks are Lindquist's.

Six requirements for montage ethnography

George Marcus offers six requirements for the descriptive and reflective elements of a modernist, montage-driven ethnographic form of representation, that ethnographers must strive to fulfull in order to break free from the limiting tropes of realist ethnography. The first three of these deal with the way that ethnographic subjects are created, the second three with how the ethnographer situates himself as an analytic presence within the text (Marcus 1994: 43-45):

- Spatial description – the need for a break with the trope of a settled community: the idea of one tribe, one place, one ethnographer. With increasing migration, telecommunications and air travel, multi-sited ethnography is becoming so basic that it imperative that it is incorporated as a layer into ethnographic representation.
- Temporal description – the need for a break with the dominating trope of history: The ethnography should not be shaped by apparent and unquestioned historical certainties which limit the understanding of how a society might develop in the future.
- Focus on perspective – the need for a break with the trope of structure: No longer can the anthropologist-author maintain an omniscient authorial voice, but should rather register polyphonical indigenous voices without colouring their accounts with settled notions of hierarchy and class.
- Dialogue of concepts and authority – Rather than building the entire analytic argument of the ethnographer on an authoritative exegesis of key elements which "unlock" the meaning of the ethnographic subject, the ethnographer should allow for the intellectual equivalence of the other, incorporating the discoursive framework of the other into his own.
- Bifocality – the need for reflection on the historical, personal or active connections in the already constituted relationship between ethnographer and other on which one creates difference, in order to construct a reflected difference rather that one based on us-them exoticism.
- Critical juxtapositions and alternative possibilities – the need for the ethnographer to consciously produce cultural critique not just of the studied culture, but of his own as well by reflectively and critically juxtaposing the culture studied with the ethnographer's own culture. This also involves contemplation of roads and approaches not taken in ones study.

In this way, ethnographic montage becomes a dialectic between the exposition of representations and the critical reflection on these representations. Any representation is no longer complete in itself, but is continually open for comparison to later representation and critical comment. Marcus argues that film is a medium better suited to fulfill these basically cinematic requirements than written text, and he laments the fact that ethnographic filmmakers still seem so loathe to experiment with the rhetoric of their medium (Ibid. 38 & 44).

Spirits and Souls of Business

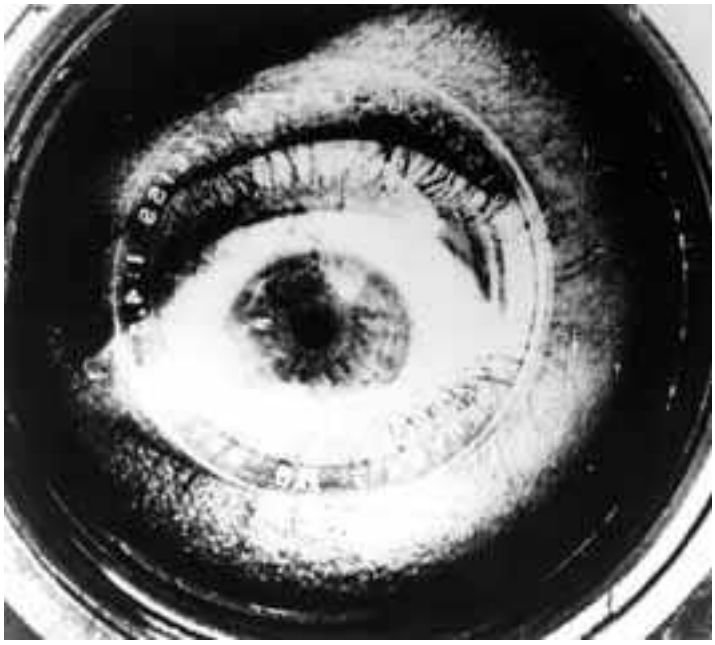
Studying the newly risen class of wealthy people in post-socialist Russia, the so-called New Russians, the Swedish anthropologist Galina Lindquist focuses on the material representations of their new-found wealth. The New Russians are, as she points out, identified by most culture bearers and observers by their visual and material representations alone (Lindquist 2002: 330). In her article “Spirits and Souls of Business”, Lindquist uses one case of a succesful Moscowite neo-shaman, Nora, who caters to the magical and shamanic needs of the New Russians, as an exemplary narrative for the entire market of magical services.

Lindquist introduces the market for magical services in Moscow through a clever textual montage of advertisements, ending with Nora's own, from back when she needed to advertise (now she is so popular that word of mouth is more than sufficient). Lindquist is obviously aware of the modern complexity of her object of study, very much confirmed by the fact that Nora herself with a university degree in Psychology and as a student of the anthropologist Michael Harner's “core shamanism” (which combines various techniques of shamanism into something that would a broad western audience) is her intellectual equal and certainly not limited to this specific time or locale (Ibid. 335). She aptly combines the perspective of Nora with that of her prospective customers who seek reassurance in the economically unstable environment of hyper-capitalist Russia through magical means. She attempts to introduce an element of bifocality by critically juxtaposing the New Russians' use of shamanic magic with their consumption of kitsch items, which is also an important part of the decoration of Nora's studio, showing how both magic and kitsch work to evoke simple, widely shared and unreflected emotions and experiences such as sentimentality. Both operating “with the building blocks picked up at the garbage bin of high culture and religiosity” (Ibid. 340) both indexically and iconically associating their users with these basic feelings.

While elegantly using montage elements, Lindquists article is still centered on the narrative of Nora, and the essayistic exposition required of an academic article. And as she uses ethnographic data gathered by herself, the line between montage exposition and reflection is further blurred. Yet, despite of these limits of form and presentation, Lindquist manages to fulfill the requirements set by George Marcus, mostly through excellent anthropological writing rather than actual montage. She uses the readers' knowledge or set preconceptions of kitsch and shamanic magic to describe and deliver her points, elements that could have been shown more easily and with less ambiguity through images. The article shows that a fair bit of textual experimentation is still possible within the academic style of writing, though this could have been more outspoken, for instance through the juxtaposition of Nora with another shaman or one of her customers or through the use of images to support her “thick description”.

I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it.
(...)
I am kino-eye. I am builder. I have placed you, whom I've created today, in an extraordinary room which did not exist until just now when I also created it. In this room there are twelve walls shot by me in various parts of the world. In bringing together shots of walls and details, I've managed to arrange them in an order that is pleasing and to construct with intervals, correctly, a film-phrase which is the room.

– Dziga Vertov: “Kinoks: A Revolution” (1923)



In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bring about an amazing change in our very notion of art.

– Paul Valéry: “La Conquète de l'ubiquité” (1934) – quoted in Walter Benjamin: “The Work of art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”(1936), p. 211.

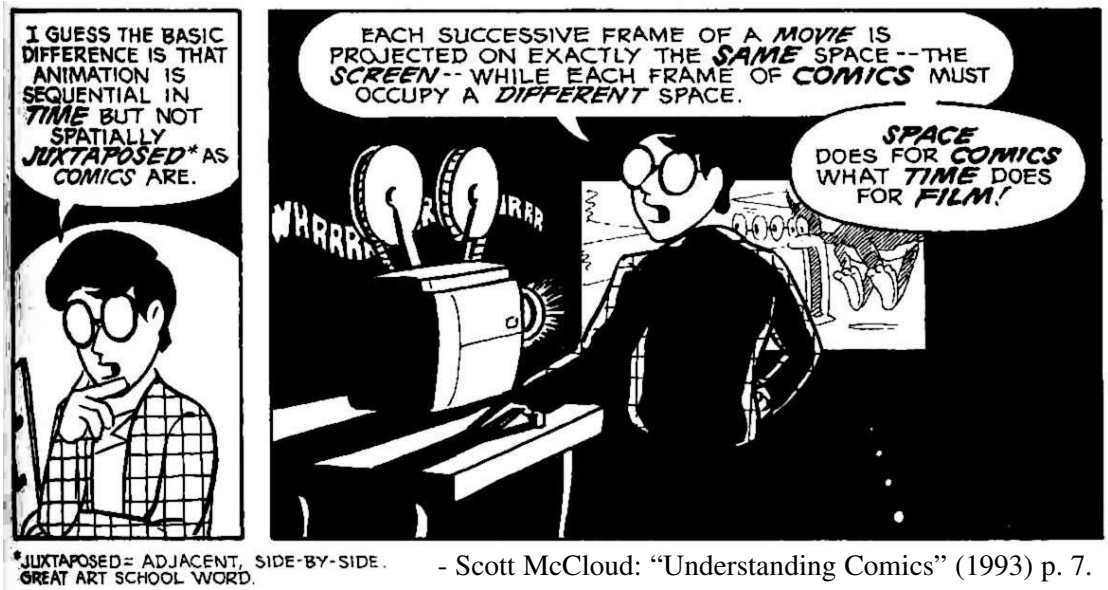
The cinematic concept of montage

In motion picture terminology, a montage (literally "putting together") is a form of film collage consisting of a series of short shots which are edited into a sequence to which the viewers infer meaning based on context. The father of Russian cinema, Lev Kuleshov, experimented with the montage technique, putting together sequences of unrelated shots in order to create new meaning. His most famous experiment consisted of connecting three identical “reaction shots” with three different objects:

A bowl of steaming soup sits on a table.	Alexy stares with his eyes wide open.
A woman is placed in a coffin.	Alexy stares with his eyes wide open.
A child is playing with a toy bear.	Alexy stares with his eyes wide open.

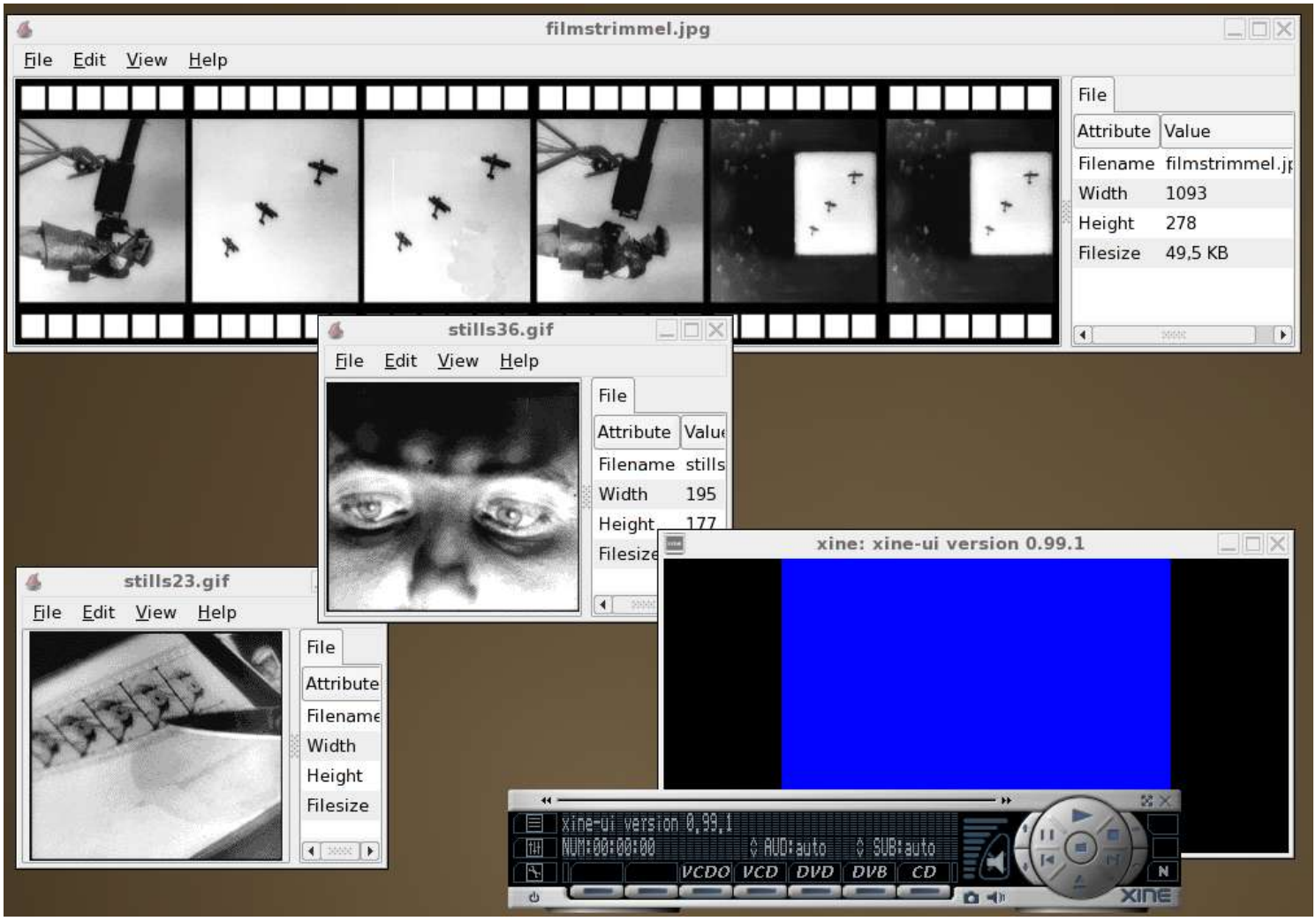
(Grauer 1982)

In each case, Alexy's reaction can be interpreted by the viewer as hunger, horror or amusement, depending on the context offered by the preceding shot, thus creating new meaning from seemingly unrelated images. The German film theorist Rudolf Arnheim has noted that it is the partial illusion of film that makes cinematic montage possible. Despite the sudden and violent change of images on the screen, these images do not give a strong spatial impression which could cause the viewer discomfort, but still enables him to perceive the happenings on the screen as living and real. The partial illusion of cinema lies in this double awareness of the viewer: That he is just watching images og light projected onto a screen, and that these images at the same time can form a impression of real life in which he can immerse himself (Arnheim 1957: 29-34). This impression is strengthened by the absence of other sensorial input, apart from the film's soundtrack of effects, authentic sounds and music which all are intended to strengthen this partial illusion. It is often the soundtrack that creates the necessary continuity for the viewer to make sense of a cinematic montage.
This cutting and juxtaposing of images can perhaps best be shown through a comparison to the less accepted art of comic books, which utilise the same abrupt cuts and juxtapositions to achieve its effects, but spatially rather than temporally:



- Scott McCloud: “Understanding Comics” (1993) p. 7.

Among the first filmmakers to embrace, explore and theorize on the concept of montage were Russian directors such as Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. While Eisenstein sought to use montage to tell stories and represent feelings, Vertov embraced the camera as something beyond the weaknesses of human perception. He sought to create images that would show the potential the Kino-eye, his concept of a mechanical eye that could see and create – through montage – images that no man could see with his mere eyes.



– GNOME Desktop Manager version 2.8 for Linux, 2005. Still frames from Dziga Vertov: “The Man with the Movie Camera” (1929)

The Man with the Movie Camera

The Russian film director Dziga Vertov used montage in his 1929 film “The Man with the Movie Camera” to experiment with how film could be used as a means of expression on its own without relying on text or narrative to convey meaning. Vertov sought to film “life unawares” without elements borrowed from other art forms such as the structure of script or actors. He filmed in the major Soviet urban centres of Moscow, Kiev and Odessa, portraying everyday urban life in the 1920s Soviet Union as though it was one city, unlimited by place and history sharing various everyday situations and characteristics – a birth, a wedding, an accident, people working, buildings, trams – and combining them in often startling ways, using multiple and unexpected perspectives and quick and disruptive montage with various film techniques such as the split screen, the superimposed image, the stop-motion animation and slow motion to showcase the power of the camera.

The montages are often deeply reflexive, showing both the camera man filming, the object that he is filming, the process of the film being edited and assembled and the audience watching this footage in the cinema, thus constantly reminding and revealing to the audience how the magic of cinema is created thus breaking the partial illusion usually offered by cinema by constantly shifting between exposition of fantastic imagery and self-reflexive contemplation of how these images came to be.

Though some of the montages are laden with Marxist symbolism, most of the imagery evoked by Vertov is open for the viewers' own interpretations. Using all the techniques at his disposal, Vertov wields a power that most of us tend to forget is possible, since most films are filmed from our own self-centered perspective where the camera merely is used as a (bad) substitute for our own vision instead of a mechanism that can create images of a reality more complex and fragmented that what we're capable of perceiving ourselves.

Unknowingly, Vertov fulfills most of George Marcus' requirements of ethnographic montage, while boldly experimenting with the possibilities of the medium, hinting at other ways of making ethnographic films than the typically accepted narrative or observational forms of ethnographic film seen today.

- Three pieces by early avantgarde master Marcel Duchamp. Top left: “L.H.O.O.Q.” (1919). As if the addition of mustache and beard weren't enough of a poke at this most famous of paintings, the letters Duchamp penciled -- L.H.O.O.Q. -- at the bottom of his altered image are meaningless in themselves, but when read aloud in French, make the sound of "Elle a chaud au cul," meaning, "She has a hot ass." Top right: “Nude Descending A Staircase” (1912). Bottom left: “Fountain” (1917). A urinal, purchased from "Mott Works" company in New York and signed "R. Mutt." The piece was suppressed by the hanging committee to which it was submitted. This is a photograph of either the second version of 1951 or the third of 1964.

Montage outside of the Cinema

The cinematic principle of montage had great effect on the artistic avantgarde of early 20th century Europe who saw the possibilities of montage in all kinds of artwork that could be reproduced through mechanical means. As the German critic Walter Benjamin noted, "technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself" (Benjamin 1992: 214), and with the photographs in glossy magazines, the ever-increasing amount of printed text in books and other publications, and of course cinema itself, these artists began combining these elements in ways that had been impossible until then. A plethora of art movements flowered - such as the surrealists, with their collages of photos and text, and films of dreamy non sequitur montage, the futurists, with their paintings of motion, machinery and speed celebrating the logic and precision of the new technology, the dadaists, with their nonsensical sculptures combined from various massproduced everyday objects.

In literature, modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Thomas Mann and Walter Benjamin all tried to emulate the simultaneity and multi-perspectivity of cinema in writing, inventing such techniques as the stream-of-consciousness and the literary montage.

Since its avantgarde beginnings, montage has come to be a pervasive force throughout all kinds of modern artistic expression that can be reproduced mechanically, and appreciated visually: Films, collages, comic books, sculptures, t-shirts, even the digital computers with the World Wide Web can be seen as montages to some degree.

The Arcades Project

The German historian and art critic Walter Benjamin sought to use the fragmentation and layered complexity offered by montage to create an academic work of text carrying a multiplicity of meaning, all depending on the context into which it would be set. The work, left unfinished at his death in 1940, consists of a great number of illustrations, quotations, thoughts and commentaries about what Benjamin considered important for the social and cultural history of 19th century Paris. Known as the Arcades Project (a reference to the covered arcades of 19th century Paris which Benjamin saw as the passageway through which he proposed to advance into that past time), the work remains in fragments, and can be juxtaposed and connected as needed, never to be lodged in a set discurse or narrative, but rather a labyrinth of insights in which one can move along many different paths, highlighting any aspect of 19th century Paris.

As a work on a specific historical epoch, Benjamin could define his area of interest with the Arcades project quite precisely both spatially and temporally, focusing on the mental history of the rise of capitalism through a Marxist dialectic model of historical development. Benjamin's own reflections is just one among many, as he attempts to "develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks." (Benjamin 1999: 458). All of the gathered quotes present different perspectives, ideas and narratives that Benjamin proclaims he merely intends to show, rather than appropriating them for his own purposes. The quotes connect with Benjamin's own reflections to create a non-authoritative bifocality where the responsibility of unlocking the past is given to the reader who has to make sense of the patchwork of fragmentary texts in front of him.

Even so, Benjamin did make several sketches and attempts to connect some of his many fragments into a semi-coherent state that – as a filmmaker seeks to guide his audience through the narrative of a film – will guide the reader through 19th century Paris. Central to Benjamin's concept of literary montage was that it required a visual logic, rather than a linear one. The objects he presented in text and images were 'small, particular moments' in which the 'total historical event' of 19th century Paris was to be discovered (Holtorf 1998) – not unlike the various scenes of sequences of a film, though unhindered by the necessity of the partial illusion of that medium, leaving the reader with an even greater role as the director of this montage where every juxtaposition of images or text is creating a dialectic of meaning from which new insights or new critiques can be developed, depending on the connotations offered by the reader.

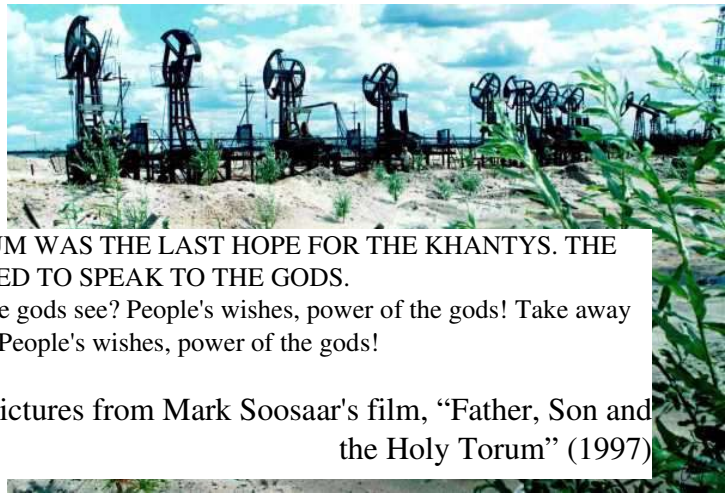
The Arcades Project fulfills all the reflexive and structural requirements posed by George Marcus, beautifully underpinning quotes and references telling of 19th century Paris with critical reflections upon the importance or relevance of the various elements described in the quotes. Still, it only indirectly overcomes the tropes of settled community and history by virtue of the completeness of its fragmentary condition. The bold experimentation of the Arcades project is accentuated by its unfinished state, which in a way is the perpetual state for any montage – always can something be added on or moved about to create new meanings.

[Intertitle]: THERE ONCE WAS A MAN CALLED SOSHO - WEASEL MAN. SOSHO WAS ONE OF THE LAST GREAT KHANTY SHAMAN.

[Sosho]: Torum, let life last long!
[...]

[Intertitle]:PETJA MOLDANOV WAS AN IMPORTANT MAN IN THE KINGDOM OF OIL AND GAS.
[Petja]:I'm not all that important. I am just the director of the oil company's department of indigenous peoples.
My position is for fooling the public.

[Intertitle]: SMOKE AND ASH FROM THE KINGDOM OF OIL COVERED THE MOSS, THE REINDEER FELL ILL AND DIED...
[...]



[Intertitle]: THE SUPREME GOD TORUM WAS THE LAST HOPE FOR THE KHANTYS. THE BEAR HEAD OR THE DRUM WAS USED TO SPEAK TO THE GODS.
[Sosho]: What brings on this illness, do the gods see? People's wishes, power of the gods! Take away the dark powers, heal the painful hooves! People's wishes, power of the gods!

- Excerpts from the transcript and pictures from Mark Soosaar's film, “Father, Son and the Holy Torum” (1997)

Father, Son and the Holy Torum

The Estonian film director Mark Soosaar, like most other ethnographic filmmakers today, does not have any background within academic ethnography, but rather a degree in filmmaking. His film “Father, Son and the Holy Torum” (1997) is an account of the violent change post-socialism has introduced into the lives of the small Siberian ethnic group known as the Khantys. The narrative is based on the generational gap between the elder generation represented by the old shaman Sosho and his wife Tohe, living in the woods, praying to their holy spirit Torum, and their son, Petja Moldanov, who has left behind his ancestral religion and way of life to work as indigenous relations officer in a big Russian oil company, working to coerce the old indigenous peoples to sell their lands to be drilled for oil.

The film uses no voice-over or music, only a few, rather subjective, intertitles and the subtitled Russian and Khanty conversations of the informants themselves to help the viewer make sense of what he sees. The intertitles lead the narration of two generations estranged from one another, supported by the montage of two radically different realities and ways of life: the parents in the wilderness, hunting, performing shamanic rituals and growing very old, and the son with his family in the city, working, watching tv and getting drunk. After having established this dichotomy, Soosaar seeks to blur it by using montage juxtaposition to show the overlaps between the two generations: How both parents and son drink vodka, how both generations know and sing the same songs, how they all realize the destruction wrought by the Russian oil industry, despite their reasons and conclusions for doing these things differ wildly. By juxtaposing father and son in this way, Soosaar cleverly manages to break with usual spatial and temporal description, depicting the simultaneity, complexity and change in the informants' social relations. Soosaar makes his own position clear to this social change through the intertitles, though they rarely are adding relevant information that the images and dialogue couldn't reveal on their own. Instead, this scene-setting through intertitles add to the sordid fairytale feel of the film already heavily supported by the unbroken partial illusion of its narrative describing the broken family and the role of the holy spirit Torum in Khanty religion.

Soosaar uses the possibilities of montage very well to show the everyday lives of the Khanty, old and young, traditional and modernized, yet he fails to combine this with any critical reflection upon this exposition. The limited intertitles only link the story together and does not consider the limitations of the camera in its perceiving of the post-socialist realities of the Khanty nor does it offer alternative representations for the viewer to ponder. Its style is coherent, and despite the use of certain montage techniques, the film does not give up a central filmic narrative in order to explore the alternative coherence advocated by George Marcus.

"As I study this age which is so close to us and so remote, I compare myself to a surgeon operating with local anesthetic: I work in areas that are numb, dead - yet the patient is alive and can still talk." Paul Morand, 1900 Paris (Paris, 1931), pp. 6-7.

– Fragment from Walter Benjamin: “The Arcades Project”, pp. 460, 462. (1999) [1927-1940]

Franz Kafka always gave me a look of surprise when I told him I had been to the cinema. Once I reacted to this change of expression by asking:
'Don't you like the cinema?'
After a moment's thought Kafka replied:
'As a matter of fact I've never thought about it. Of course it is a marvellous toy. But I cannot bear it, because perhaps I am too "optical" by nature. I am an Eye-man. But the cinema disturbs one's vision. The speed of the movements and the rapid change of the images force men to look continually from one to another. Sight does not master the pictures, it is the pictures which master one's sight. They flood one's consciousness. The cinema involves putting the eye in uniform, when before it was naked.'
'That's a terrible statement,' I said. 'The eye is the window of the soul, a Czech proverb says.'
Kafka nodded.
'Films are iron shutters.'

– Gustav Janouch: "Conversations with Kafka" pp. 143-144 & 160. New Directions Paperback, New York, 1971.

On this montage

Constructing a montage requires deconstructing your own text, pulling the pieces apart and reconnecting them to create meaning. With this text, that procedure has become a deconstruction of the construction of montage – an ethnographic meta-montage. It is a construction made partly from illustrative images and quotes seeking to explore what comic book theorist Scott McCloud calls “the gutter” – the imaginary space between the lines or scenes in which the reader or viewer interprets and constructs the juxtapositions and possible meanings offered to him – and partly from my own writing, supposedly the critical reflections that knit the exposition of representations together.

Montage is necessarily limited by the need for good “soundbites” – quotes or images considered especially potent or relevant – to be juxtaposed for best effect. Montage exists in the effect of the gutter, and especially in filmic montage where the partial illusion created by cinema leaves the viewer immersed in a different reality. Kafka's complaint of being overwhelmed, losing mastery over one's interpretation and construction of the film, rings true. Ethnographic montage should not attempt to mislead or take away mastery of the events from the reader or viewer, but rather empower him to make his own interpretations. I hope to have used the montage technique to surprise and disrupt the easy flow of reading to force the reader to dialectically combine the pieces on each side of the gutter (most often the page itself) to create his own alternative coherence and reflections on the idea of ethnographic montage in text or images. Indeed, to some degree, I think it possible for the reader to “reshuffle” the pages and read again, finding new angles and ideas hidden in the gutter.

In general it is difficult to use montage as something more and else than a means to propel a narrative as seen in film or comic books. Adopting this rhetoric as a means to present multi-perspectivity or simultaneity is not just difficult for the author constructing the montage, but also for the viewer or the reader attempting to make sense of the argument and the ideas presented between juxtapositions. It is not something that is easily adopted within academia since its openended structure and inventive use of the reader's participation is at odds with the academic norm of straight forward essayistic coherence and unambiguous point-by-point argumentation. Certainly, not all subjects and ideas will work well in a montage presentation, especially those that are focused in a “omniscient” author's reflections. But even limited use of the principle of montage will be able to give a sense of complex ambiguity that can convey the realities of globalized world better than any linear description ever could.

New digital technologies are offering new ways in which to represent the other by combining text and film in digital multimedia, further developing George Marcus' hope of an *ethnographics* combining text and images, showing and telling, exposition and reflection in wholly new ways. And even further through the use of hyperlinks, user navigation and interpretation offering digital interactivity to the reader in order to make sense of the montage. In that way, this text, with its analysis of juxtaposed text and film, might work better as a hypertext where the reader easily can access, juxtapose and reinterpret any part of the montage as he pleases. A few academic

pioneers have experimented with creating academic works as hypertext montage, such as the German archeologist Cornelius Holtorf's dissertation “Monumental Past” (Holtorf 1998), which breaks all tropes of traditional academic presentation in order to make it a true “living text” - always available and always to being changed to relate to the latest available information. Yet, despite it's revolutionary potential, digital and otherwise, ethnographic montage will be limited by whether its audience, as used to narrative and explanatory exposition as it is, will be able to appreciate or interpret too radical a montage.

Using montage in ethnography

Anthropology has, like most academic disciplines, proven reluctant to change in spite of radical changes in its field of study over the past 50 years. Especially in respect to anthropological means of representation. George Marcus has worked towards developing an ethnographic rhetoric of montage to help describe and reflect upon the rhetorical changes forced upon anthropology by a changing world. He has set down a list of requirements for 21st century ethnography based on modernist montage writing, seeking to break with the spatial, temporal and structural tropes of separated, cultural totalities that have dominated ethnographic discourse, and with the idea of the ethnographer as an omniscient author and interpreter of cultures without acknowledging the other as an intellectual equal which ever more often seems to be the case, using montage juxtaposition to allow for alternative perspectives beyond the usual us-them dichotomy.

As I hope to have shown here, Marcus' idea of ethnographic montage does bear some merit. By juxtaposing the extreme montage experimentation of Walter Benjamin or Dziga Vertov with ethnographic representations of post-socialist Russia, I hope to have shown not only similarities, but also how far it is possible to take the principle of montage within ethnographic representation. Both Galina Lindquist's article and Mark Soosaar's film show the potential for using ethnographic montage in both traditional writing or filmmaking by less imposing use of montage to achieve their effects of form. In both film – where the concept of montage is selfevident, supported by the partial illusion in which the viewer immerses himself – and text – where montage can force the reader's imagination or analytic powers to create coherence of what he reads – montage can be used quite appropriately for ethnographic representations of post-socialist realities. As they indeed are as complex and fragmented as any other part of this globalized homogenizing, yet continuously locally diverse world which is the basis for George Marcus' use of montage. Despite the fact that the post-socialist countries are still ethnographically virginal lands, having only been open to Western anthropologists since 1991, making the available material ethnographic material from which to compose any montage rather limited and often based on old Russian stereotypes of indigenous peoples, it can argued that those interested in this region always will base their perception on the material available, whether ethnographical or stereotypical or not. Incorporating and countering these stereotypes into a ethnographic montage of the post-socialist reality would be the obvious solution. Using Paul Morand's metaphor, the ethnographer is operating on the numb stereotypical past still connected to the new post-socialist present, trying to show and reflect upon how these elements are and will remain connected for a long time still. Montage better than any other form will be able to show and reflect upon these connections, even though its form may leave the reader with greater responsibility than they may want.

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Word Count: 4686 words are mine, 1479 words are quotations.
I am well aware that the total is well above the requested limit, yet, as Walter Benjamin noted, literary montages tend to be extensive and detailed, offering the reader enough pieces to lay out the montage as he pleases. This does not excuse the length, merely tell us that different writing styles require different modes of assessment. The montage text tends to be less dense than an essay of equal length would be.