Matthew A. Sheldon

History of Film Part One

Visual Research Project

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Intellectual Montage

The formal element that I have chosen for this essay is Intellectual Montage which is one of the more influential parts of Soviet Montage. Montage is a synonym for editing which was practiced by Soviet filmmakers around the 1920s. These montage shots were considered a form of editing which could form a relation or meaning between each other. The main creators of Soviet Montage were filmmakers Lev Kuleshov, Vesvolod Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein. Each filmmaker created their own ideas of montage and incorporated it in different ways into their films. Eisenstein called these different forms 'Cinema of Attractions' which is the conflict of two different shots side by side. The style of Soviet Montage's Cinema of Attractions has been influential for several future filmmakers' as you still see forms of Soviet Montage being used in many present films today.

Sergei Eisenstein's theory of montage is the most complex and most interesting of styles. Eisenstein went beyond what other filmmakers were doing and developed three different forms of Montage. The first was Perceptual Montage which is a way of editing that would shock and affect the viewer. The second was Associational Montage which were comparisons or

associations made through the sum of the shots. The last theory and the one I will focus on is Intellectual Montage. Intellectual Montage took montage to a whole different level and it would make the viewer think more deeply about the connection between two separate images having them form new ideas, metaphors or symbols to the shots. The general trajectory between Intellectual Montage is Perception, Emotion, and Cognition. Eisenstein's theory was based on a Japanese ideogram in which he created a third meaning within two separate shots which were the sum of all greater parts. For instance, a shot of a bird and a mouth would form a third meaning to the viewer which was to sing. The shots of an eye and water would form meanings of crying and the shots of a baby and a mouth would form the meaning of screaming.

Eisenstein's style of Intellectual Montage is very similar to the Kuleshov Effect which was an experiment where filmmaker's recutted old footage of a close-up of actor Ivan Mozhuchin and repeatedly cut shots of other material like a bowl of soup, a crying baby or a dead woman's body. Audiences would look at the same footage of Ivan Mozhuchin followed by a different shot and would bring a different conclusion to what they had to say about the scene. The argument I am debating is that Eisenstein's Intellectual Montage brought the power of editing to an even greater level and not only had the audience create different conclusions on what they saw on the screen, but they would create deeper symbolic meanings and metaphors that went outside the context of the film. The images I have used for examples begin from Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein's silent film Strike in 1925 and lead all the way through Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now in 1979.

In the film *Strike* for example there is parallel editing of the Soviet military shooting and killing civilians that are trying to retreat from them off-screen which is shown in Figure one. While this scene of violence is occurring the scene cuts back and forth to a slaughterhouse where

a butcher is holding a knife to a cow's throat right before slaughtering it which is shown in

Figure 2. Those two images don't really make much symbolic connection but when looking at

Figure 3 and Figure 4 the audience can now form a third meaning between the cow and the

civilians. In Figure 3 the Mise-en-Scene shows a pile of deceased bodies of the civilians

sprawled on the ground. In Figure 4 you see the cow throat being brutally slashed open with a

knife as the cow bled to death. Eisenstein's theory of Intellectual Montage has the viewer make a

connection between the murder of the civilians and the cow, which creates a third meaning for

the viewer suggesting that the massacre of the civilians was more like a helpless slaughter.

Intellectual Montage occurs also in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: Space Odyssey* near the

beginning of the film and yet the ideas formed between this and Strike are much different. In

Figure 5 it shows a shot of the Dawn of Man sequence in which a tribal ape after a murderous

victory against another tribe celebrates by throwing a bone into the air. The framing of the ape

with its back turned towards the camera gives a feeling of disconnection between the ape and the

viewer. The bone that is thrown in slow motion dissolves and is replaced by Figure 6. The image

of Figure 6 fades in as the viewer now sees the shape of an orbital satellite in space which is set

millions of years into the future. The theory of Intellectual Montage of the two shots can form a

third meaning which is more of a metaphor on the contrast from primal apes to the evolution of

man and science now voyaging the outer rims of the universe. This can also give the viewer a

more intellectual contrast to how humans have evolved from barbaric animals and into an

educated and civilized society who which are now exploring the universe.

In one of the classic scenes of Intellectual Montage is in Frances Ford Coppola's *The

Godfather* in 1972. There are two scenes of parallel editing which involve a shoot-up outside a

courthouse and a baptism inside a church. In Figure 7 it shows the baptism of Michael

Corleone's godson in the church as a priest is blessing the child with holy water. In Figure 8 it shows a hit-man removing a gun from a paper bag placing it on the table and loading it with bullets. Figure 7 and 8 give a clear juxtaposition to the audience of an image of the holy innocence and purity of the baby and the corrupt and unmoral shot of the loading of a gun. In Figure 9 it shows Michael Corleone in a Catholic church where a baptism is being said in Latin. The words in English and Latin of Michael denouncing sin and the devil for the love of his godson are juxtaposed in Figure 10 with hit-man carrying out his orders of murdering a man inside a courthouse. The combination of Figure 9 and 10 creates an interesting contrast of irony of the holy and sinful. As Michael Corleone renounces Satan from his life he simultaneously is having the orders of cold blooded murder being carried out. The baby's crying also underscores the symbolic contrast of the birth of innocence to the evil of murder as the baby is being washed clean of original sin with a powerful use of visuals, editing and music.

Like the Kuleshov Effect these shots of *The Godfather* can be edited in a way which can effect on how a viewer perceives a character and the story. For instance if Figure 7 and Figure 9 were edited together with Figure 8 and Figure 10 taken out, it would give the audience the impression that Michael Corleone is a holy man who is happy to baptize his godson in the eyes of God. And yet when inserting Figure 8 and Figure 10, it changes the audiences perspective on the character of Michael and the meaning of the scene. The audience would now view him less as a loving uncle and more of a hypocrite who is falsely pretending to be a religious man of God, secretly at the same time committing several acts of violence.

The last use of Intellectual Montage is in Frances Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. These series of montage shots are very similar to the themes of Sergei Eisenstein's Strike in which you notice the slaughter of a buffalo and the murder of a human happening

simultaneously. For instance in Figure 11 you see Captain Willard executing Colonel Kurtz, an American officer who in the jungles of Vietnam had recently went insane. The Mise-en-Scene is mostly shot in the dark with shadows and slight tints of hot orange in the background. In Figure 12 there is a shot of villagers ceremonially slaughtering a water buffalo as you see a disturbing shot of a villager repeatedly slaughtering the buffalo with a sword. Even though these two shots have no distinct link between one another, when editing them together they can for a third meaning. Both of these images can form symbolism for how civilized humans can still become uncivilized and barbaric similar to the native tribes when in the horrific face of war.

Sergei Eisenstein's Intellectual Montage is a creative way to create new emotional and intellectual visual meanings between two separate shots of a film. This 'Cinema of Attractions' can produce not just straight forward visuals to carry the viewer along with them for its story but can also have the audience create a third meaning with new ideas, metaphors and symbols which can be personal for that person alone. Because of that, Intellectual Montage can have a film mean different things for many different people in how each person perceives what they see. For two shots to be able to symbolically create a third meaning outside the context of the film gives the story of a film much more depth and a deeper artistic feel.