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Notes on Multimedia Montage

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I await the end of Cinema with optimism.
— Jean-Luc Godard, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1965

Introduction

When the editor of the *East European Film Bulletin*, Moritz Pfeifer, kindly invited me to contribute to the politics issue, he only heard my artist talk in which I used my work as a springboard for discussion, as if my short films and video games were made with the intent to serve as talking points.

Since my graduation from Columbia University in May 2011 and the decision not to continue down the MFA route, I have focused on making works and haven't written a paper since. I wanted to move away from academicism, which was a comfortable solution for my bookworm proclivities. Instead, I focused on my artistic voice, assuming I had one. Under the label of filmmaker or visual artist, here I have the liberty to share intuitive, half-baked, muddled, non-academic sparks, some brighter than others.

This text is not an academic paper, essay, or article, but a textual montage – a fancy way of saying I was short on time, so I offer an outline of montage in relation to new media. It is with hesitation that I decided to commit to paper a series of notes borne out of my working struggles.

A turning point

A social media feed is a montage of videos, photos and text. The daily intake of news, blogs, YouTube and television is a form of montage in the vertical wall of swiping images. A celebrity's ass is cut together with news about the conflict in Syria and a free university course. With no time to process, these images flash before our eyes. The computer desktop is a montage of windows, tabs, pop-ups

and infinite scrolls. A YouTube cat video has more views than a Tarkovsky film; they are both on the same platform, open, free in the same column created by the Algorithm. *Andrei Rublev* is equalized with the banal content out there, but we can also make the argument that it is amplified by being accessible in its own dignified opposition, with the power to move and with online video essayists making their analyses.

Unlike cinema montage, (multi)media montage has users (aka surfers, voyeurs, consumers, creators, corporations, intelligence agencies, algorithms, bots) who partake in this gargantuan montage by inserting their own clicks, ephemeral images, texts, reactions, and (mis)information. We inhabit the multimedia world and it lives inside of us. In turn, when I am directing on set, taking videos with my cellphone, adding CGI, working on a game in Unity, being quite similar conceptually, it all belongs to the same way of thinking, even though my feelings attached to each process differ.

The Soviet idea of a *general cineification* of society has come to pass, with the caveat that cinema is not the paradigm. As Anne Friedberg has argued, “a variety of screens […] compete for our attention without any arguments about hegemony.”[1]

We create media and in turn media shape us. We spend as much time in front of screens as in front of living people. Each person is simultaneously a living being, a political animal, a data point, a somnambulist, a digital apparition and an isolated atom. A hybrid of human and machine, a cyborg, as Donna Haraway puts it. If primitive tools made us human as it were, new media are molding us into whatever kind of humans we are today.

The space of a cut

Montage is the shifting of perspectives. The motivation for including perspectives can service storytelling, information, emotion or an intellectual concept. Eisenstein categorized each kind of montage technique and all of them apply to multimedia, however, there are also significant differences between them.

The space of the intersection in multimedia montage is not materially clear like the cut between two celluloid shots, it does not flicker because there are no physical 24 fps, instead it is a stream of fuzzy information, a kind of pixel fluid, which flows within the context of global media content amid awareness that there are billions of screens in living rooms, offices and pockets. This flow goes on when we are not looking, an infinite montage we occasionally unplug from.

Multimedia montage is not Eisenstein’s *1+1 =3*, which illustrates how two shots next to each other produce a third meaning, but is more like: *0,8 + 1,3 +*

*0,4 + …*until we click stop.

Instead of numbers, perhaps a diagram works better. In Eisenstein's case it is a dynamic triangle with the thesis, antithesis and, at the top, synthesis. Conflict results in sublation. This is for Eisenstein both a principle of cinema and a principle of reality.

In multimedia, it is not shots that are connected, but whole contexts that do not have Eisenstein's determinism, but are polyvalent and unpredictable. The synthesis is unclear and open. The multimedia cut is actually closer to an intersection. So my image would be a Venn Diagram intersection of tridimensional, virtual and semi-permeable bubbles existing in time.

Point 8 of Stephen Doesinger's *Bastard space manifesto*: "Bastard spaces arise where physical space merges with media space."[2] An intersection of two or more forms of media with reality, describes multimedia montage more accurately than the traditional film cut. In other words, instead of viewing films as individual works of art, today we should also see everything in the context of the multimedia ocean, which is a kind of collective, ever-changing composite artwork.

Mirroring the enthusiasm of cinema's inventors and early practitioners, the great French film theorist, André Bazin wrote about a mythical dream of "total cinema." Optimistically welcoming innovation like film sound, Bazin argued that cinema discovers itself through technical innovation, getting closer to reality in the way the great novel of the XIX century has.

This *Gesamtkunstwerk* or "total cinema" has become total multimedia, it both captures reality (e.g. cellphone footage of police brutality) and radically shapes it (e.g. non-stop, non-transparent advertising verging on mass control).

It's worth mentioning Augmented Reality as a way of bringing moving images into a seemingly more direct relation to the physical environment. Unlike virtual reality, which is about immersion via escape, AR is about externalizing the virtual. Besides helping you envision a beige couch in your beige apartment, AR can become an unexpected edit within the real-virtual matrix.

Coercive vs. Persuasive Multimedia Montage

By way of illustration, let us return to the tongue-in-cheek equation, *0,8 + 1,3 + 0,4 + …* The sum of all of these audio-visual stimuli can produce constant *confusion*. In search of clarity there is a proliferation of simplified explanations, self-help books, mumbo-jumbo spiritualism, 12-step rules for life, inspirational marketing, power-point talks, or simplistic storylines in big budget films mimicking a watered-down "hero's journey" screenwriting algorithm. Although

the creators of all these products might be well-intentioned, the result is numbing or even coercive in affirming a ruling narrative that undermines the viewer's flourishing (Aristotle's *eudomania*), but is *existentially and ethically escapist*.

One of many reasons art cinema lost its appeal is that today viewers do not seek so much to be liberated from long-standing, stifling norms and outdated aesthetics by being provoked to interpret the auteur's take on reality. Instead, many viewers, including me, seek to get a handle on reality, which is crazier than any director's vision (exceptions withstanding).

The partner in crime of confusion is *coercion*. Multimedia montage, given the enormous economic power of the biggest players in the realm of the internet, is ripe for manipulating viewers. Following behavioral patterns and influencing dopamine levels of online users, corporations (and relevant political factors) do not inject the multimedia ocean with memes (like users do), but shape the navigation of the ocean itself. In this sense, the sum 0,8 + 1,3 + 0,4 + … can be whatever coerces the public into mental submission. In other words, the decision-makers – be it CEOs, algorithms or nefarious brain-washing organizations – can bracket elements that suit them, e.g. (0,8 + 1,3), leaving us in the dark about 0,4. This type of multimedia montage is widely used in television and news media, while journalists are instrumentalized for non-transparent interests. Helping the obfuscation of hidden agendas is in itself a form of coercion.

However, within the vast and still unregulated ocean of our multimedia reality, there is an increased chance of stumbling upon something original and pre-conception shattering, perhaps like *Andrei Rublev* on YouTube. Herein lies the subversive potential. Closer to the proclamations Eisenstein made, *persuasive montage* brings us to higher understanding and defends the autonomy both of the creator and the audience, based on the assumption that both sides are intelligent. However, the line between coercive and persuasive is very flimsy, but more on this a bit later.

Distant Montage and Bowie

A premonition of all-encompassing montage already exists, besides Dziga Vertov's kino-eye, in Artavazd Paleshyan's idea of a "montage of *contexts.*"

Paleshyan explains: "[M]ontage-at-a-distance can be built out of visual elements, and out of sonic elements, as well as from any assemblage of image and sound. By organizing my films around such connections of elements, I hope that my films themselves become similar to live organisms, supported by a system of complex inner links and interactions."[3] In his work, Paleshyan aims at a universalist cinema, showing humanity's movement through unexpected

links from the micro to the macro level.

Isn't multimedia today a living organism? A creative media intervention is like a surgical incision that adds to the monster. David Bowie said it in an interview with Jeremy Paxman: "[The internet] is an alien life form. […] The actual context and the state of content is going to be so different from anything we can envisage at the moment."[4] Bowie focuses on the space between the work and the audience doing the interpreting, "the XXI century will be about the gray space in the middle."

"Gray space," "bastard space" and "Venn diagram intersections" are terms I use clumsily to suggest that when we speak of montage in a thoroughly multimedia era, we need a new vocabulary.

Online vs. Cinema

The ubiquity of online videos affected the relevance of contemporary cinema within the multimedia mosaic. Digital content created by humans, corporations, algorithms, science, communities and intelligence agencies flows on blue screens. As a result of this oceanic media landscape, film's cultural place is shifting.

When I watch a film on my laptop, I might also be reading a text, watching an interview, reading bios of the cast, looking up terminology on *Wikipedia* (like for *The Big Short*), and then returning to the film. This distance to the viewing experience also existed in cinema: a visit to the cinema was also an opportunity to make out, eat popcorn and participate in a communal experience. However, for most of today's viewers, digital film is not projected in the sanctity of the cinema, dancing shadows on a wall (recall the magic of *Cinema Paradiso*), but is on your laptop among other content, without an "aura," accessible, literally under our fingers, together with a plethora of other content. It's not a rectangle of the big screen, but a web-filled cube, like the contemporary artist Tomás Saraceno's spider webs in transparent boxes.

In other words, the way we think is shaped by the material conditions we live in. For instance, we speak of folders for personal memories, to-do lists and memory folders for ex-loves, borrowing a way of thinking from our computers systems, just as Bruno Latour developed his Actor-network theory (ANT) in the era of telecommunications and the internet. Multimedia experiences reshape mental patters of viewers. Montage is about mental patterns.

Clips vs. Movies

Online videos steal from film, while film falters behind online videos. For instance, hip-hop videos have more verve, innovation and cultural relevancy than most films do. They are a hybrid of music, short film and video art, often by filmmakers who have previously done independent work such as Arthur Jaffa, Kahlil Joseph and Khalik Allah. Without passing judgement about artistic merit, it is interesting that Academy Award-winning *Moonlight* was seen by much less people than Childish Gambino's short music video *This is America* and Falz's *This is Nigeria* (note that Xbit did a conceptually similar video *What U See is What U Get* back in 1998).

In an interview, the filmmaker Ruben Östlund pointed out that nowadays the cinema experience is not simply tied to the film itself, but also to the "making-of" videos, interviews, bloopers, and festival conversations. Even scenes in his own films are meticulously recreated YouTube clips.

I am simply stating the obvious. The film industry seeks relevance through award shows and shallow politicking. American mainstream film by and large employs a narrow-minded, 12-step *Hero's Journey* program with audience targeting and fancy CGI. A peak into the backstage of European art house reveals an overwrought and bureaucratic process of public funding, pitching, script-doctoring and festival mingling that nurtures pseudo-intellectual cafe conformism.

This does not mean that great films are not made. On the contrary, the *New Yorker* critic and film writer, Richard Brody, writes: "Art […] is what concerns one person, intimately. Culture is a matter of power; art is a matter of beauty."[5] Yet the question remains: where does the general public seek answers, metaphysical experiences and entertainment?

Godard decoding reality in the XXI century

Jean-Luc Godard's 2018 press conference had more energy than any interview by young filmmakers. Over FaceTime, from an iPhone screen, Godard answered questions posed by journalists standing in line. In itself, this was an interactive media performance. The iPhone interview is an extended part of the found-footage montage in *The Image Book,* Godard's latest film.

Godard gave an interesting answer to the question "What is cinema?" He replied characteristically tongue-in-cheek: "The cinema should consist not so much in showing what's happening because that you can see around you every day. Films should show what's NOT happening, which you cannot see anywhere, including on Facebook."[6]

Cinema has shown stories from the past and visions of the future, now its role has to be reinvented, like Arthur Rimbaud wrote that love needs reinventing.

In *Cinema by Other Means*, Pavle Levi points out that Godard is exploring "an analysis of the epistemological functions of montage, understood as a general principle: montage as a procedure the logic of which firmly resides in the cinema, while its applications belong to the world at large."[7] Montage is a tool for revealing the world to itself.

Unlike mainstream media obfuscating the underlying principles through the "manufacture of consent" (Chomsky), an ethical approach is to employ montage to delve behind media appearances. You cannot get this on Facebook because Facebook hides its algorithms, manipulates and uses montage of attraction the same way Mark Zuckerberg hides his small stature by sitting on a pillow during the Senate hearing. It's as false as most mainstream montage.

Origins of decoding reality

Montage is broader than cinema, it is a way of thinking. It can be numbing, lulling and escapist or an antidote to the totalitarian overflow of media and physical reality, which is by nature totalitarian.

In *Cinema by Other Means*, Pavle Levi writes of the Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's attempt to put cinema in service of understanding: "Vertov put filmmaking in the service of the 'communist decoding of reality.'" Levi expands: "At the origin of his cinematic pursuit of social truths and political knowledge is the presupposition that montage is the underlying principle of reality itself."[8]

Montage is already embedded in reality's matrix in ungraspable ways, and this makes Vertov's montage a conceptual device for partial decoding, while the camera is the scalpel. Reality has an unimaginably complex matrix of interwoven blueprints, and montage is a way of tracing some blueprints in accordance with the director's intent and the filmed material.

Pavle Levi writes about Pasolini's take on decoding: "As the diagrammatic "code of reality," the Cinema, according to Pasolini, ciphers both a) our psycho-physiological experiences of reality; and b) the cinematographic capture of reality."[9]

Not only was the decoding strand of montage silenced in the Soviet Union, but later, in the mid-XX century it became clear in the West that images have invaded reality, turning into ruling mediators in a semi-awaken world. Today, the container of media, the container of capital and the container of planet Earth are almost identical.

Perhaps a personal decoding solution is Godard's juxtaposition of footage borrowed from the multimedia world in contrast with his voice.

Perspective shifting

In *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, the physicist Carlo Rovelli succinctly guides us through different visions of our conception of the Earth's place in the cosmos:

> First we thought the sky was above, the Earth below. / Then Anaximander introduced the idea that sky is also below us, all around Earth. / Aristotle formulated the theory of the spherical nature of Earth and heavens with Earth in the center. / Copernicus moved Earth to the side and placed the Sun in the center. / Then we realized we are on the edge of our Galaxy, which is a tiny part in a universe filled with other galaxies. / Today we see the whole of space as elastic, "furrowed by great waves." Finally, we look at the universe historically, as expanding and contracting.[10]

Rovelli presents each of these points with a simple black-and-white illustration, thereby creating a kind of text-image-text montage, which elegantly leaps from perspective to perspective. I wonder why these kinds of explanations are missing from the school curriculum. This is a way of thinking that, like montage (and good storytelling in a more narrow sense), breaks the cocoon of narrow perspectives.

Rovelli's book decodes reality to the physics layperson through reasoning. Of course, the danger is to put the filmmaker in the position of educator, which is vain, artistically limiting, and an elitist dead-end. Unlike science, cinema does not argue, but it has the potential to enrich by delving into different perspectives, even if it is through characters or shots, and it can even be a singular auteur perspective pursued through a lifetime.

Multimedia is forcing us to be multi-perspectival. Non-linear narrative cinema is now the "foam" of virtual content.

Montage in books

In the spirit of *Cinema by other means* where Levi describes textual films, montage in books can also be a method of writing that playfully interprets and speculates in a philosophy-meets-story-meets-image way.

Alexander Kluge, the filmmaker and writer, co-wrote with philosopher Oskar Negt a fascinating and dense book *History and Obstinacy,* which is described by MIT press as a "groundbreaking archaeology of the labor power that has been cultivated in the human body over the last two thousand years." The

book deals with forces running historically through our species, some strong, others latent, but all manifesting themselves in unexpected ways in social configurations. Taking note from system theory, Kluge employs a gestalt-like explanation. A complex social system with “objective qualities” can arise from components that do not possess qualities of the whole. Isn’t this also a kind of montage?

It certainly is in Lev Kuleshov’s early-XX century example of shot and reverse shot producing a third meaning non-existent in each shot separately. In the McLuhan era of multimedia, any content we take in comes with embedded micro-edits, which are often unclear and fuzzy, making Kuleshov’s resultant image more difficult to discern.

Kluge and Negt work through the past of human traits and their effect on social relations in order to make us conscious of their workings. A banal example would be discipline, a trait that can become manifest as diligence or as the blind discipline of a death camp worker. The authors accomplish this subtlety by combining the main text, subtitles, digressions in black boxes, illustrations and a terminological glossary.

This is a way of A. elucidating though nuance and complexity; B. revealing our own ignorance.

Another contemporaneous example of “book montage” is Peter Sloterdijk’s trilogy *Bubbles, Globes and Foams*, which explores the history of metaphysics in relation to space from the intimate space of the womb to Earth, to the plurality of urban spaces and plurality of values. The book is an art project that inspires in the mind’s eye a vision of bubbles as immune enclosures. This approach promotes a philosophical way of thinking that is fuzzy (note fuzzy logic), fluid (note Zygmunt Bauman’s fluid modernity) and atmospheric (note the phrase “media bubble” used about Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign).

Yugoslav writer Danilo Kiš explained in an interview that he strived for a polyphonic form that combines the lyrical and essayistic, the philosophical and parodic, his “ideal has been, and remains until today, a book that can be read, not only as a book on first reading, but also as an encyclopedia.”[11] This technique would reveal some laws and analogies between historical figures, places and events. Burdened with the trauma of the holocaust, Kiš insisted on research because facts are far more fascinating and necessary than any writer’s imagination. Referring to Viktor Shklovsky, Kiš addresses documentary techniques and montage as writing tools.

While we are in the realm of books, I must touch upon the idea of *alienating* (*ostranenie or defamiliarizing*), which simply means creating an artificial (artful) perspective. According to Shklovsky, our perceptions are habituated, so making objects unfamiliar is the role of art implicitly present throughout art history: “art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make

one feel things, to make the stone stony."[12]

Intellectual montage makes ideas we are habituated to *unfamiliar*. The aim is to arrive at new understanding and this is only possible by making a preconception alien, seen and heard from a new perspective. Of course, as Kiš points out, the technique can also be used for unethical goals.

Intellectual montage

In his writing Sergei Eisenstein stresses: "*The shot is by no means an element of montage. The shot is a montage cell (or molecule).*"[13] This metaphor is perhaps most true in the digital era. However, Eisenstein's call for a "*synthesis of art and science*"[14] sounds reductive as is any application of science to social matters. A few months later in 1929, Eisenstein adds in an essay "class militancy"[15] to art and science.

Eisenstein claims that the aim of intellectual montage, unlike conventional film's manipulation of emotions is to "to encourage and direct the whole *thought process.*"[16] The most famous example is the juxtaposition of religious symbols in his film *October* to reveal religion's historical development. Of course, this expression of an ideological point of view can be framed as undermining social habituation and as propaganda.

However, I was always struck by the complexity and beauty of one single shot in *Battleship Potemkin:* the shot of the woman with smashed glasses on the Odessa steps. Noted many times, the shot is reminiscent of Francis Bacon paintings, a veritably uncanny image. Eisenstein's love of art, which will undergo transformations especially during his trip to Mexico, reveals a mind more complex and contradictory than the engineering montage blueprint he argues for. To illustrate this contradiction, one only needs to remember that Eisenstein approached the great writer of the unconscious James Joyce with the idea to make a film version of *Capital.*

When watching Elem Klimov's war film *Come and See*, I was completely drawn in by the realism and the immersive experience of the boy's trauma. But then I was struck in a different way by a montage sequence towards the end. The sequence shows documentary footage in reverse, a sped-up history of horrors of the Second World War, which ends on a shot of Adolf Hitler as a child. For the duration of the film we intensely felt the boy's terror amidst the slaughter. Suddenly, we see a bird's eye view of history.

This is a Brechtian, alienating moment, a shift in perspective, a move from emotion to reason, a defamiliarizing of history we just viscerally experienced in the very same movie.

The sequence decodes reality, but not in a programmatic way. Unlike Eisenstein's goal-driven intent to demonstrate the genealogy of religion as a class construct, Klimov's montage allows for interpretation, conveying something crucial, yet difficult to formulate. YouTuber Lewis Criswell offers one of many interpretations: "we all have the potential to become the victimized or the tyrannical, we are all a part of the same unremarkable species."[17]

Cinema is a mosaic

Russian cinema is often framed though the opposition between Eisenstein and Tarkovsky. Although the personal, aesthetic and ideological differences are evident, there are underlying links. Tarkovsky said that "cinema is a mosaic made of time,"[18] which is fundamentally an insight into the montage nature of his own films, especially clear in the *Mirror.*

The film writer András Bálint Kovács argues in *Screening Modernism* that Tarkovsky's *Mirror* marks the end of modernist cinema. Self-reflective and grappling with the auteur's crisis, like Fellini's *8 1/2*, *Mirror* is a serial mental journey. Tarkovsky's film has 600 shots, juxtaposing dream scenes with documentary war footage. The story is both linear and associative, all of which aims at the transcendental. Eisenstein aimed to transcend limitations of understanding within a materialistic framework, whereas Tarkovsky searched for truth spiritually, beyond the material.

Although Tarkovsky had firm convictions and values, which plainly reveal themselves in the actual script (which in turn mirrors his diaries), I stress here the word "search." Tarkovsky decoded reality by intuiting, not by conceptualizing, and the result suggests decoding is impossible. *Mirror* is an extended montage sequence with associative links, which hint at the unknown, the inexplicable, the mysterious in nature and in people.

Tarkovsky moved forward the language of cinema while looking back to his roots, beyond the Communist monolith, a kind of *in vivo* montage in opposition to the party's stance. On a practical level this meant filming long takes, difficult for censors to cut. The cumulative result is nuance, texture, "sculpting in time," and complexity, as Kovács writes: "The appearance and the success in the 1960s of Tarkovsky's multidimensional approach is a clear signal of the shifting of modernist taste that had handled multidimensional approaches only in the form of irony, self-reflection, or paradox, but in the form of transcendence."[19]

This multidimensionality is necessary for multimedia montage. Media are fluid. After all, Tarkovsky's films contain other mediums within themselves, such as the novel, poetry and painting, thereby anticipating multimedia montage. Tarkovsky's anticipation is two-fold: it is revolutionary in style, but it is also a container for traditional art forms (an anti-purism Bazin argued for in his essay

In Defense of Mixed Cinema). Moreover, in *Andrei Rublev* and *Mirror,* Tarkovsky grapples with the crisis of the auteur and the dissolution of the artist's authority, a premonition of our age when seemingly everyone is a creator and consumer.

Fragments not fitting the mosaic

Godard's fragmented, digressive, essayistic style evolved throughout his career and is still developing: from the jump-cuts, breaking of the fourth wall and big titles, to intertextuality. Quotes of other artworks evoke the age of multimedia like the scene when Anna Karina's character watches Carl Dreyer's film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* in *My Life to Live.*

Another technique is the use of music and sound, which obfuscates, counteracts or supports the main narrative. In *Weekend*, when the woman relates her *ménage à trois* experience, the music grows loud to the point that the audience cannot hear the juicy details anymore: sonic montage triggers the viewer to lean forward. The pimp's voice-over in *My Life to Live* contains statistics, health conditions, laws and references to the income of prostitutes, counteracting the brothel montage sequence. This adds a sociological, matter-of-fact angle. All of these montage tools are loose-end, personal, poetic, digressive, subversive, but insightful.

"The only follower of Godard who continued the fragmented forms and still became an original auteur in his own right was Makavejev. His particular version of the fragmented forms consists of putting two or more different and independent stories or even films in an association that exists only on a conceptual level,"[20] writes Kovács. Makavejev introduced his montage technique in *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* by mixing the main neorealist story line following the character played by Eva Ras with ironic, subversive quasi-documentary footage. Makavejev took this method to the next level in *W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism.*

In his essay from the collection *Dušan Makavejev: Eros, Ideology, Montage,* Steven Shapiro writes that Makavejev "is neither as didactic as Eisenstein, nor as contemplative as Godard. Rather, he pushes intellectual montage in the direction of what I can best call a kind of energizing of potentialities."[21] This statement mirrors another by Phillip Lopate: "Makavejev laid himself open like a sounding-board to vibrations in the air."[22] Makavejev is attuned to the atmosphere of contemporary culture at large in its multifaceted totalitarianism, either Communist or consumerist. He retains a melancholy skepticism towards sexual liberation. Richard Porton writes: "there is not a smidgen of agitprop in WR. This is not only because Makavejev, intimately familiar with the doublespeak of "actually existing socialism," rejects political bromides in an open-ended manner."[23]

In other words, Makavejev turned Eisenstein on his head. In Eisenstein's lingo, Makavejev's equation is: *(1+1) x bodily fluids = wtf* by way of ridiculing coercive methods. Makavejev is decoding through the amalgamation of sex and politics, which introduces a different epistemological take on tensions in political communities.

WR is anti-demagoguery. Most work, even well-intentioned, is made by unwitting demagogues.

Finally, Goran Gocić's contribution to the essay collection ties into our multimedia age: "WR was already prefiguring You Tube in the early 1970s. To achieve such a feat, one should first find some kitsch, something foreign, something domestic, & then customize, intersperse, glue it all together & present it."[24] Makavejev's work is a self-reflective slice out of multimedia montage of today.

Briefly about examples in my work: The Thinker in the Supermarket

The Thinker in the Supermarket transfers the stream of thought of Rodin's *The Thinker* to a supermarket shelf. Visually, the 7-minute film has 10 static shots, which gradually reveal the context: at first we have the impression we are in the interior of a stylized supermarket, but with the shift from detail to wide shot, we realize the scene is taking place on top of a mountain. This change of perspective has thematic implications. Contrasted with these static shots, the ultra-fast, Beckett-like, monologue tells a story about the history of packaging of ketchup, mustard, chips, African slaves, buildings, people, and nature. The stream of thought in itself is a textual montage that evokes a plethora of images mentally projected onto the blank surfaces of consumer products. In the end, fire unites these conceptual strands, scourging the shelf and the voice.

The voice-over was written in one night after a couple of years of mulling over the theme of packaging. The original impetus was to play with the history of packaging as a paradigm for the history of civilization. Over six years later it sounds a bit naive. Moreover, I didn't manage to situate the voice within the Thinker's head, it's just plastered on top of the video. In spite of this shortcoming, the genuinely energetic voice-over at odds with the image becomes a film that is entirely an intellectual montage. Of course, this was not really a conscious decision.

Spine 2.0

I employed similar methods in my following two works that complete the

stream-of-thought trilogy. But let me touch upon *Spine 2.0*, a video less than 2 minutes in length. With the aesthetic of a Silicon Valley commercial, this video presents an implant: a spine with wi-fi-, Bluetooth, chakra-alignment, health-monitoring and nano-morality-fibers for leaders without a backbone. A satire, *Spine 2.0* uses the pseudoscientific and overly optimistic salesman language of advertising and suggests that moral leadership, especially for politicians, can be bought (not unlike elections are bought).

The idea came from a documentary about Thomas Sankara, the African revolutionary, who named his country Burkina Faso, which means *Land of Upright Men*. I was thinking of a way to make an homage to Sankara's short-lived political fight, but then realized that today we don't even use "uprightness" as a metaphor. So, I thought, perhaps the only way to reintroduce morality to leaders is to sell it as an update you can download, something that does not require suffering, but provides strength of character. Instead of Nike's "Just do it," we have "Get a backbone."

On its own, *Spine 2.0* is just a polished video, but within the external context of Silicon Valley ideology and aesthetics, it is an odd link, an inserted lump on the surface of the smooth video-wall of tech world's hippie self-love. The video doesn't really work in the cinema, but as an edit in a wider context. I have introduced the work through the context of the art world, where it has its own ironic intervention given the spineless nature of most art world people. The fake commercial is exhibited together with a 3D-printed model of the spine. However, this is not radical. Self-deprecating and collector-insulting works have been around since Marcel Duchamp and peaked with Maurizio Cattelan. After all, the art world is a boring bubble. In an interview on Serbian national television, I said we had pre-orders of Spine 2.0 for the Serbian government with the specially difficult case of prime minister Aleksandar Vučić. His predicament is so complex that NASA is working on his titanium Spine 2.0. This part of the interview was censored. Although quite benign, it was an illustration of how a dissonant idea, if delivered in a sly way as an interruption within the normal habitus, can be effective, potentially dangerous, and, of course, most likely completely ignored.

The work's place is on the internet and it will necessarily be ephemeral because of its dependence on contemporary culture's surface. It belongs in the open, cluttered and unjust world of the virtual, in Bowie's "gray space." It's a tiny snippet in the infinite multimedia montage.

Golf Club: Wasteland

With my collaborators at *Demagog Studio*, I've been working on a mobile game *Golf Club: Wasteland* with an accompanying soundtrack *Radio Nostalgia from Mars* and music videos. Within the game, each level is set in post-apocalyptic,

post-humanist urban rubble that contains references to contemporary culture. This is a kind of premonition that Silicon Valley ideology will finish like Communism. If ruins are a golf course for the elite, then the establishment is our gravedigger. Through the architecture of levels we have a kind of intellectual montage within levels, but with tentacles connected to the external political and cultural context. In the textual story of the game perspectives shift between two main characters. On the sonic level, the radio program for people who escaped Earth and live in Tesla City on Mars, is a juxtaposition of sound and image. We simultaneously mock Elon Musk, the 0,01 percent of the wealthiest and any kind of authoritarianism; reappropriate Yugoslav monuments; tell a story about a pilot and a mutant kid; and bring in music and personal memories. Defamilirization hopefully happens on multiple levels.

This game takes the position that climate change already made its devastating hit on humanity. In sheep's skin – as a casual game – the project contains multiple views and sentiments on the causes of humanity's supposed decline. The interplay hopefully adds to the multidimensionality of the project, so that it can be inserted as a tiny satirical virus within the web, game, art, music, film and political contexts. Perhaps this harkens back to a "montage of contexts."

The game was only released recently, and videos of other people playing the game, review texts, comments and debates keep springing up around the game, the soundtrack and the music videos. In other words, the project was conceived with multimedia in mind, where each strand is related to the other. Then again, if the observer, listener or gamer does not feel this, the result of our work would simply be a multi-platform publishing tactic, a marketing strategy. And this overlap of market and our work is a peculiar, tainted intersection in the Venn diagrams of art and commerce. Similarly to theater, there is an overarching influence of the public, where their reactions inform the way we develop and update the game.

For a short time span, by interacting with the touchscreen, the user creates a "bastard space," where the post-apocalyptic and the actual worlds meld. The performance is done by the user, whereas the creators provide the changing virtual sandbox. Without the grandeur of classical cinema, the user approaches this with a cool head and immediate distrust. As a work coming from an ostensibly artistic urge, the meditative game counteracts the addictive nature of most digital content. Note Abbas Kiarostami's insistence on slow, non-manipulative, even boring cinema and the advantage of camcorders. An independent undertaking, the project inserts itself awkwardly within the matrix of corporate multimedia (for better or for worse) with chutzpah.

Cost-Benefit-Love

Thinking is shaped by external influences, and then thought in turn shapes the

world through action. *Cost-Benefit-Love* is a 10 minute film about a couple kissing in a pose reminiscent of Rodin's *The Kiss*, while the male and female streams of thought engage in weighing the pros and cons of the other person. The culmination is confusion, frustration and eventually separation. It is the salesman's ethos internalized by lovers. Notwithstanding art history, literature, Marxism, evolutionary theory, eroticism, and other perspectives, hopefully the takeaway for observers is a wake-up call about their own love life.

The voice-over and the slow pace of the revolving camera dancing around the two bodies create an alienating effect, countering our habituation to our loved ones. As we observe the defamiliriazed kiss with fresh eyes, our emotional and intellectual point of view shifts. If montage is about patterns of thinking, then this single take also falls under that category because it employs an audio-visual conflict to bring the viewer to a new vantage point.

Challenging viewers works best if the filmmaker is challenged herself. Then it is earnest: neither persuasive nor coercive, but an investigation in creative leaps beyond the artist's own blind spots.

From decoding to creating reality

In the dreamlike ocean of multimedia, persuasive multimedia montage can have the effect of a brisk: "Wake up!" Of course, our influence over the outward resonance of the work is very limited, and like good journalism, it can quietly be stifled or politely ignored. This has to be faced with a mix of tenacity and Taoist equanimity. Perhaps the idea of a lone auteur is not viable anymore: to swim in the multimedia ocean, one needs others to create and gain recognition – again, we return to the theme of unity in multiplicity.

Multimedia montage happens within the overflowing frenzy of image-making, a historically unprecedented production, a glaring jump in comparison to the Renaissance, when human-created objects were still a rarity, a miracle of human effort and creativity. Now we have an abundance of short-lived, surface, vapid, narcissistic, derivative, kitsch, manipulative images, but we also have gems. Multimedia montage is a kind of seismograph, an externalization of the collective psychology of the global village. But do we know how to read it?

Fragmentation has been a theme in art for most of the past century. Today we are in a transitional period when expressing alienation, a sense of loss or being without a center, is derivative. Instead, people are trying to make sense of the world. For instance, in *The Tree of Life* Terrence Malick employs intellectual montage to juxtapose a family in Texas, childhood memories, fragments of a story, voice-overs, and footage of the cosmos, deep oceans, and dinosaurs – an all-encompassing breadth aimed at placing fragments into Malick's unified mosaic of the world. Malick's work is somewhat similar in style and opposed in

ideology to Paleshyan's films. Leos Carax's *Holy Motors* has the intensity and insanity of the media matrix, even the camera movement following Denis Lavant mimics the fluidity of the sublime and banal digital age after the end of celluloid. Godard recently premiered a found-footage film, weeding through material to create juxtapositions in a way that does not exist "even on Facebook." Adam Curtis' films, completely based on found footage juxtaposed with his own suggestive voice-over, employ a technique that walks the line between a persuasive and coercive account of how late capitalism shaped our inner world. Glossy media obfuscates – perhaps the human voice can illuminate more than the image. The animated series *Rick and Morty* uses tropes, references and ideas as absurdist building blocks for episodes, amounting to a bridge between entertainment and screenwriting as intellectual montage.

The multimedia ocean is a world made out of bubbles: some of them can burst with the aid of montage, while others can grow, sucking in smaller ones. One has to have in mind cinema's still very useful two-dimensional diagrams (scripts, storyboards, waveforms, timelines), but also networks and foamy Venn diagrams. To find common threads in the chaos is to bring clarity. Sometimes that requires walking forward while looking back, looking deeply at the surface, seeing the simple and the complex principle underwritten in reality. With Augmented Reality we might shift our terminology away from the film cut pervasive in screen-based media to a tridimensional language.

What is necessary for a new kind of inquisitive montage in the digital age is to burst bubbles of demagoguery and ignorance, while also creating new oxygen filled spaces. A timely example is the opposition between hypocritical liberals and conservative nationalists in the West (e.g. US) – a rift that was created and is still strongly sustained by social, economic and media bubbles. These bubbles are filled with short-term profit oxygen for the few on both sides, because capital unites that which morals cannot. Media outlets are the main mode of communication in large-scale political entities: ads, weather reports, the news, cinema, games, it all fills the atmosphere of a society and the global village. Paradoxically, they are structured in such a way that a group can remain in their own bubble without contact with the rest of the multimedia ocean in line with McLuhan's retribalization.

Instead of giving simplistic, coercive, escapist pseudo-answers or choosing libidinal lethargy, the "media person" has to accept that the loss of center is here to stay. Like the physicist's illustration of human perspective on Earth's place in the universe, we must engage and grow our tiny understanding. Visualization of ideas is a diagram of montage, which makes perspective visually concrete. To take political action on the basis of an outmoded worldview edited linearly is to ignore a multifaceted reality at our own peril. With multi-perspective awareness we are compelled to act with more care and nuance in the digital and physical worlds.

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