

Montage Theory

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will cover montage theory. Specifically, you will learn:

1. Montage History

The word *montage*, when translated from French to English, means "assembly." In the context of film, it means "editor/editing." During the 1920s, montage was very popular as a form of visual expression. It was pioneered by **Sergei Eisenstein**, who was a Russian filmmaker and director at the time.

If you've been exposed to any type of film history, you might be familiar with him and one of his most notable films, *Battleship Potemkin*.



TERM TO KNOW

Sergei Eisenstein

Russian film director who pioneered the use of montage in film in the 1920s.

2. Soviet Montage

Soviet montage is an approach to filmmaking that uses quick edits and the juxtaposition of unrelated and sometimes conflicting images in very rapid succession to impart some sort of meaning.

It was a very important movement in the history of filmmaking because it represented a new, experimental, and radical approach to editing. Additionally, it had a significant impact on audiences and how they perceived a film.

It's helpful to understand that this new type of cinema was occurring at the height of the Russian Revolution; therefore, a lot of the films that were released at the time had much different ideologies that they were attempting to convey.



TERM TO KNOW

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An approach to filmmaking which uses quick film editing and the juxtaposition of unrelated and sometimes conflicting images in rapid succession to impart meaning.

3. Kuleshov Effect

Also during this time period, a Russian psychologist by the name of Lev Kuleshov was experimenting with montage.

He discovered that when viewing a picture that followed another picture, it induced some sort of thought. This became known as the **Kuleshov effect**, and everyone today is exposed to this effect when watching commercials, movies, or TV.



TERM TO KNOW

Kuleshov Effect

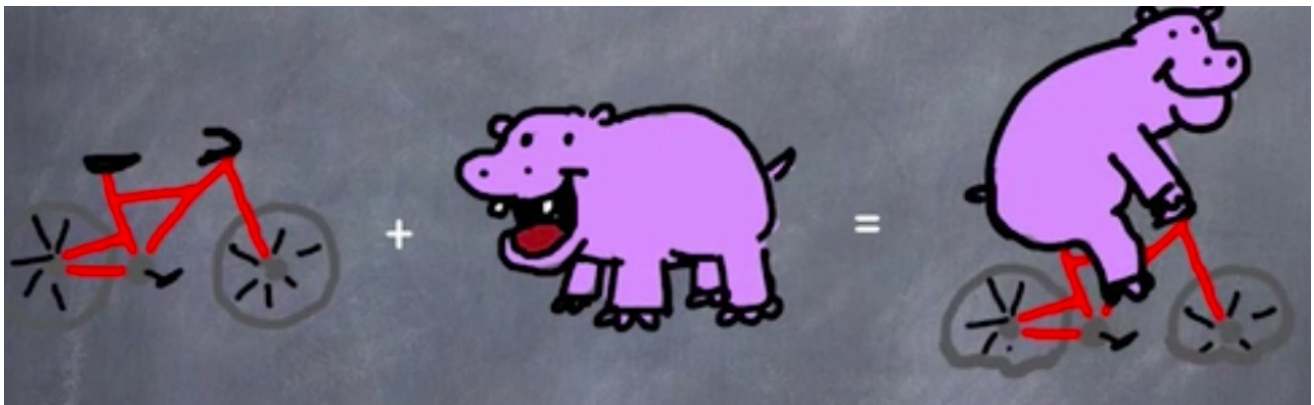
A film technique named after Russian psychologist Lev Kuleshov, who discovered that viewing a picture followed by another picture induces a thought.

4. Montage Overview

A montage uses a very basic equation to label images and define itself. This equation is known as **A plus B equals C**.

This is based on a theory that when you take two pieces of film or two images, and you play them side by side or one after another, the audience will draw a conclusion that they are somehow related. The audience will try and create meaning out of all the images that they've seen.

This isn't as obvious as it sounds because many people will think that A plus B actually equals AB instead of C. For instance, let's say you have two contrasting images, such as this hand-drawn bicycle and this hand-drawn hippo.



You might think that A plus B would equal a hippo riding a bicycle. But that's not the case at all.

In the example below, you have a woman juxtaposed with three different images.

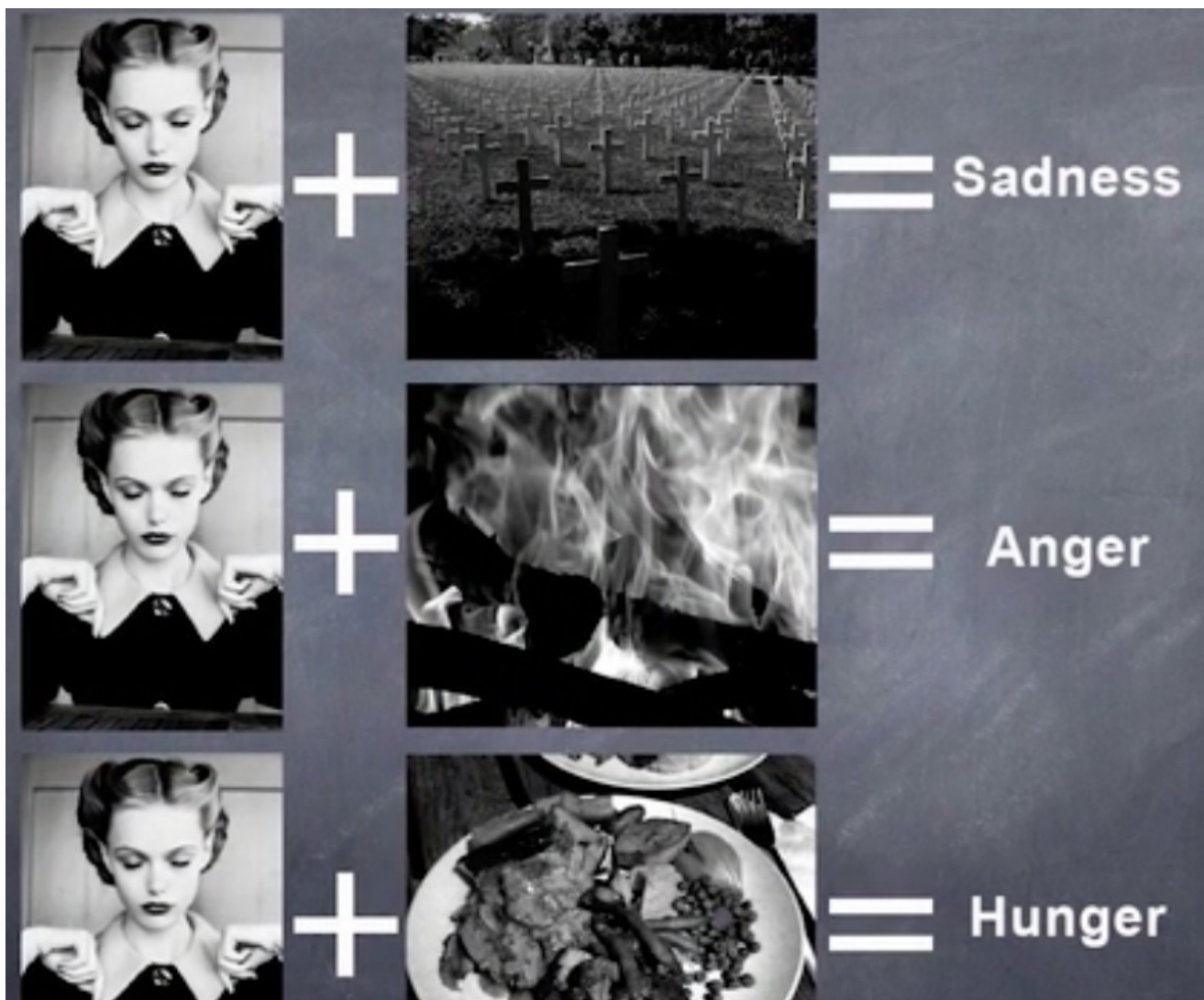


Image A is the woman, image B is the other image, and then image C would equal the conclusion that is drawn by an audience after viewing these images.

Sadness is the idea that's conveyed when the image of a woman is juxtaposed with a cemetery, while anger would be conveyed when the image is juxtaposed with a fire.

Likewise, if that image was cut with a picture of food, then the idea that is trying to be conveyed is hunger. At least, that is the idea that the audience will draw from these images.



TERM TO KNOW

A plus B equals C

Equation used to label images and define montage theory.

5. Modern Filmmakers Using Montage

A lot of very prolific filmmakers still use these techniques today. In addition to Soviet montage, there are other types of montage, such as **intellectual montage**, which uses the dynamics of colliding images to create a new abstract image or idea that wasn't necessarily related to the prior two images at all.

A very prolific filmmaker that made great use of montage was **Alfred Hitchcock**.

➔ **EXAMPLE** In the Hitchcock movie *Psycho*, there is a scene in which a man enters a woman's room and attempts to murder her while she's in the shower.

Alfred Hitchcock juxtaposed the killer's knife with the reaction shots of the woman in the shower. This is a very powerful use of montage theory because he took two completely separate images that are not necessarily even associated with one another and used them to effectively convey to the audience that this woman was being murdered. He did this without needing to show the killer, the knife, and the woman in the shower all at once in the same scene.



TERMS TO KNOW

Intellectual Montage

A system of editing that uses the dynamics of colliding images to create a new abstract image or idea not necessarily related to the previous two images.

Alfred Hitchcock

English film director noted for his suspenseful movies; Hitchcock often used montage to intensify the suspense and horror in his work.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **montage theory** is a film technique that involves the juxtaposition, or pairing, of different images. This theory is represented by the equation A plus B equals C. You also learned about specific applications of montage, such as **Soviet montage**, **the Kuleshov effect**, and **modern filmmakers who use montage**.

Keep up the learning and have a great day!

Source: THIS WORK IS ADAPTED FROM SOPHIA AUTHOR MARIO E. HERNANDEZ



TERMS TO KNOW

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