



Montage and Image as Paradigm

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ABSTRACT – Montage and Image as Paradigm – Thought as montage and image has become a revealing method in the practical and theoretical study processes of artists and researchers of the 20th and 21st centuries. This article aims to articulate three ways of thinking through montage in the works of Bertolt Brecht, Sergei Eisenstein e Georges Didi-Huberman. The philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman re-inaugurates the debate and exercise of thinking the anthropology of image and montage as a meta-language and a form of knowledge.

Keywords: **Montage. Image. Performance. Meta-language-s. Forms of Knowledge.**

RÉSUMÉ – Montage et Image comme Paradigme – La pensée comme montage et image est devenue une méthode révélatrice dans les processus d'études théoriques et pratiques des artistes et chercheurs des 20e et 21e siècles. Cet article vise à articuler trois formes de penser à travers le montage: dans les œuvres de Bertolt Brecht, Sergei Eisenstein et Georges Didi-Huberman. Le philosophe et historien de l'art Georges Didi-Huberman répond à ces questions en reprenant le débat et l'exercice de penser l'Anthropologie de l'image et le montage en tant que métalangages et formes de connaissance.

Mots-clés: **Montage. Image. Performance. Métalanguage. Formes de Connaissance.**

RESUMO – Montagem e Imagem como Paradigma – O pensar como montagem e imagem tornou-se um método revelador nos processos de estudos práticos e teóricos do artista e dos pesquisadores nos séculos XX e XXI. Este artigo procura articular três formas de pensar por montagem: nas obras de Bertolt Brecht, Sergei Eisenstein e Georges Didi-Huberman. O filósofo e historiador da arte Georges Didi-Huberman reinaugura o debate e o exercício de pensar a antropologia da imagem e a montagem como metalinguagem e forma de conhecimento.

Palavras-chave: **Montagem. Imagem. Performance. Metalinguagem. Forma de Conhecimento.**

How image and montage paradigms are used in the studies of the arts of performance, theater, ethnoscenology, philosophy and visual anthropology? Thinking as montage and image became, undeniably, a revealing method in the processes of practical and theoretical studies of artists and researchers in the 20th and 21st centuries. Would the montage concept be a critical form of dialectic thought? Or would it rather be only a form of thinking and showing with different points of view? How to present and to display an image in montage in the contemporary society and in the arts of performance, which were made hostages of the indigenist discourse of the stage and the arts, like human parks and zoos? Which are the methods of deconstruction of the clichés and stereotypes in the studies of the images in Brecht, Eisenstein and Didi-Huberman?

The philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman (2012) will answer to these questions inaugurating and instigating a way of thinking the anthropology of image and the montage as a meta-language and a form of knowledge. Similarly to Brecht and other researchers, he is going to find this answer in the deconstruction and the anachronism of thinking the image and montage within history and the artistic experiences of the performance. This new way to performatizing the world as montage-image becomes a methodological and theoretical practice in the academic and artistic environments. Georges Didi-Huberman questions what would be the true value of the images for the historic knowledge? How to elaborate knowledge in our history by studying the images?

The images about which we speak are not reduced to photographs or paintings only. The images would be all the acts of performance of man in space and time. All the contents, therefore, of an action presented in performance, architectures, cities, installations, digital images, movies, theater spectacles, dance, music, books, illustrations, atlases, visual poems, journals, *habitus*, forms of life etc.

According to Didi-Huberman (2003), Erwin Panofsky's iconography theory (1892-1968) reduced the images to mere illustrations of themes, forms and meanings. Didi-Huberman will review Walter Benjamin's concept of legibility, which showed how one can perceive in the images a dialectic point of view with multiple effects, of knowledge and utterances that are interweaved to the look. Seeing is knowing as well. For Didi-Huberman, an image

is never unique, they are always plural. In his process of work and studies, he claims that when we place different images – or different objects, like the cards of a deck of cards, for instance – on a table, we have constant freedom to modify their configuration: we can produce constellations. We can find new analogies, new paths of thought. Similarly to Brecht, he modifies the order, making the images to take a stand. A table is not used to establish a definitive classification nor an exhausting inventory, nor to catalog once and for all – as in a dictionary, a file or an encyclopedia –, but to collect segments, traces of the world fragmentation, respecting its multiplicity, its heterogeneity. How to understand and to learn with the image and montage were questions that were already posed in the 20th century. Georges Didi-Huberman claims that:

Producing an atlas is to reconfigure the space, to redistribute it, to disorient it at last: to displace it where we thought that it was continuous, re-gather it where we assumed there were borders. Arthur Rimbaud cut out a geographic atlas one day to assign his personal iconography with the obtained pieces. Aby Warburg had already understood that any image – any production of culture in general – is an encounter of multiple migrations. There are uncountable contemporary artists who do not accept a landscape only to tell us the history of a country: they are the reason why, in the same surface – or atlas page – different forms coexist to represent the space (Didi-Huberman, 2011, p. 88, our translation)¹.

Georges Didi-Huberman defines the atlas concept as a way of seeing the world and running through it according to heterogeneous points of view, associated one to the other. As we can observe in the works of Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990), Dennis Oppenheim (1938-2011) or, more generally, in the way by which the urban metropolis has been captured since *Man with a movie camera* of Dziga Vertov (1896-1954), until the current installations. Image in the space and in the performative fabric of the society is not neutral and harmonic. They contain an ideology and historical and anthropological contents of a civilization:

If the atlas looks like a ceaseless work of re-composition of the world, it is in first place because the world constantly suffers decompositions, one after the other. Bertolt Brecht said about 'displacement of the world' that it is 'the true subject of the art' (just think of 'Guernica' to be able to understand it). Aby Warburg, on his turn, saw cultural

history as a true field of conflicts (Didi-Huberman, 2009, p. 86, our translation).

Georges Didi-Huberman acknowledges that, historically speaking, this practice of montage in the arts and the human sciences as a form of knowledge began in Europe during the World Wars. We can find this form of thinking through montage in the works of Aby Warburg, Marc Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Sergei Eisenstein, Carl Einstein, Andres Malraux and Georges Bataille. The montage would be a modern method of knowledge and a formal process, originated during the war and in the disorder of the western world. All the generation that lived the period between the world wars – Bertolt Brecht, Georg Simmel, Aby Warburg, Marc Bloch, Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Igor Stravinsky, Walter Benjamin himself - created and thought through montage.

Many artists adapted this point of view of the montage as a way of reaction to the historical tragedies of their time, in which, increasingly, the montage played the central role: John Heartfield's photomontages in the 1930s, in Brecht's work journals and in Jean-Luc Godard's history of cinema. Didi-Huberman (2009) shows how time itself becomes visible in the montage of images. This fact induces the artist (or scholar, thinker or poet) to convert such visibility into the power of seeing times: a resource to observe history, to be able to manage the archaeology of knowledge. Georges Didi-Huberman and Brecht lead us to take a stand in face of the images, playing in an anachronistic way to dismount, mount and re-mount our images, therefore trying to experience the visibility, the temporality and the legibility of the workmanship. Images and montages are not seen as an illusion. They will be associated to imagination and history. Didi-Huberman quotes Brecht, who used the imagination in face of the war images, thus creating distancing with his epigraphs.

For Didi-Huberman, seeing (*to voir*) is the way of knowledge (*savoir*) and can also foresee (*prevoir*) *the historical and political moments that we live. The montages of the images are anthropological memories* (Didi-Huberman, 2009). A relationship with the past and the present. Underneath the conception of montage, we have the issues of the modern and the post-modern, with experiences of decline and chaos from the wars and economic crises. Similarly to Benjamin and Brecht, Didi-Huberman mentions the anachronism of the world

that takes us to the perception of fragmentation of man in the society. The montage is a way to think the world creating something different. The anachronism serves to understand the images and montages in the arts: from the point of view of the dialogue between memory, time and space. The anachronism places the image in the past, present and future. There is not a static time, such as the one of structuralism and the semiotics. The image overcomes time, and the anachronism created a new conception of history, in which the past becomes movement, according to the view of Walter Benjamin and Didi-Huberman.

Montage in Sergei Eisenstein

This practice of thinking as a montage is a tradition stemming from the cinema, also used in the 1930s by Eisenstein, Piscator and Brecht. The montage is a type of dramaturgy in which the textual or scenic sequences are mounted in a sequence of independent moments, having been discovered by the moviemakers (Eisenstein, Griffith, Pudovkin) to decoupage the sequential plans². Eisenstein, who studied with Meyerhold (1874-1940), proposed in the theater his theory of montage of attractions in 1923-24 (Pavis, 2007). For him, the montage was not a re-reading of the filming. He applied the theory of montage of attractions and the biomechanics of Meyerhold to the cinema, being, therefore, the basis of the conception of the movie, in which each plan is created as an element of the montage. Eisenstein created a system of *work in progress* (Prédal, 2007, p. 274): a work of constant evolution, Eisenstein's Vertical montage consisted of creating conflicts that led to a dynamics in which he created a re-composition of *emotional, intellectual and plastic* unit that would have a *metric, rhythm, tone, harmony* and an *intellectual practice*, creating a dialectic point of view of reading for the spectator. A new formula of construction and vision of the cinema and the society. We can examine Eisenstein's cinema poetics (cine-dialectic) in the following way:

1 - *Metricmontage*: length of the plans. *The montage ground zero*;

2 - *Rhythmicmontage*: *The important is not the metric length, but the length felt by the spectator (the sensed time)*. For Eisenstein, the form and length are going to establish the discourse of the movie. In the rhythmic montage, it is the movement in the frame that stimulates

the movement of the montage from one frame to another. Such movements in the frame can be of moving objects or the eye of the spectator covering the lines of some immovable object (Eisenstein, 2002, p. 142);

3 - *Tonality (tonal) montage*: collages according to the emotional sonority of the plans are going to act upon the spectator. Thinking a music for the whole scene. In the tonal montage, the movement is perceived in a wider sense. The concept of movement comprises all the sensations of the montage fragment. Here, the montage is based on the characteristic emotional sound of the fragment - of its dominant. The general tone of the fragment (Eisenstein, 2002, p. 143);

4 - *Harmonic(or atonal)montage*: from the visual details the montage will try to create a color for the scene. It would be the final aesthetics of the movie. While the *tonal* montage emerges from the conflict between rhythmic and *tonal* principles, the *atonal* montage emerges from the conflict between the main tone of the fragment (its dominant) and *atonality*. For Eisenstein the movement has something melodic. When he speaks of *atonal*, he refers, specifically, to Debussy's music;

5 - *Intellectual montage*: its aim is to show several points of view of the same scene, making the dimension of the previous scenes to intervene, creating, thus, an effect of critical distancing in the spectator. Similarly to Brecht, it causes the dimension of the previous scenes to intervene. For Eisenstein the montage generates conflict and collision. He says: Pudovkin advocates the idea according to which the montage would not be more than an association of plans, a succession of elements arranged in series, in order to expose an idea (Eisenstein, 2002, p. 76). For Eisenstein, the montage is a collision, and a concept emerges from the collision of two factors.

The merit of the montage consists of the emotion and the reasoning intervening with the process of intelligence, creation and sensitivity of the spectator. The individuality of the public-performer is the basic device in Eisenstein's concept of montage:

The power of the [montage] method also relies on the fact that the spectator is dragged to the creative act in which his individuality is not subordinated to the individuality of the author, but is manifested through the process of fusion with the intention of the author, exactly like the individuality of a great actor is merged with the individuality of a great

playwright in the creation of a classic scenic image. In fact, all spectators, in accordance with their individuality, their own way, and from their own experience - from the depths of their fantasy, from the warp and plot of their associations, all conditioned by the premises of their character, habits and social condition, create an image in accordance with the plastic orientation suggested by the author, leading them to understand and feel the author's theme. It is the same image conceived and created by the author, but this image, at the same time, is also created by the spectator himself (Eisenstein, 2002, p. 29, our translation).

Eisenstein used to place the spectator in the critical device of the montage, showing that he could be free to choose and think. The dramaturgy montage of the author, director and actor (Eugenio Barba) creates the dramaturgy of the spectator, in contrast to the Aristotelian catharsis. Gilles Deleuze saw in Eisenstein's montage an organic whole (Deleuze, 1983, p. 57)³, the organic and the *pathetic* interval used in the sense of affecting the soul, creating strong emotion with opposition of conflicts. What Eisenstein's revolution shows to us, according to Deleuze, is the dialectic conception of the organic and the montage. The Soviet school of cinema, with its conceptions of montage, introduces a dialectic way of thinking the man that goes beyond the socialist realism (Deleuze, 1983, p. 56).

When the Image Takes a Stand in Brecht according to Georges Didi-Huberman

Brecht, in his epic theater, created the distancing method or *Verfremdung* effect (Brecht, 1999), fighting the constant unit of the action in the workmanship. Breaking the Aristotelian unit of time and space, he is going to refuse the dramatic tension that was triggered in acts that worked the intrigues, avoiding the identification and catharsis of the spectator and the actor with the scene. In his concept of montage, he created the cut, the contrast and the discontinuity of the rhythm of the scene. The shock starts with the distancing and the fragmentation (see Pavis, 1996, p. 218), when the images and situations are seen through a critical point of view and lead the spectator to reflect and to inquire on the posed questions. Brecht, like Bourdieu, shows the symbolic violence of the bourgeois thought in the 20th century society. In order to know, it is necessary to take a stand. Nothing is simple in this gesture. Taking a stand is to locate

oneself twice on two front lines. Requiring anything is to locate oneself in the present aiming to a future⁴. The distancing leads the spectator to a critical attitude.

Brecht's language is firmly based on the main source of the European thought, which parted from the ballads of *moritat*, Büchner, Wedekind, Marx, Meyerhold, Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky. Brecht adapted Shklovsky's (1893-1984) literary theory of distancing⁵ to the theater. The path that Brecht covered to achieve his epic theater was a long path of experiences of fifteen years in exile, when he developed and wrote his great classics of theater. He is going to write his texts mounting, dismounting, cutting and decouping the visual and linguistic clichés in his work journals. The distancing can exist in a montage in several levels: in the fable, that is going to tell two different stories, one inspired in the real and the other one metaphoric; in the scene or scenic space as meta-language, showing all the tricks of the theater, the gestuality or *gestus* of the character, actor, director and spectator; in music and in sayings, as commentary and strangeness in the scenes; in the work of creation of the actor who does not represent the character, but *presents* and shows to the spectator, criticizing the attitudes and his way of acting. Didi-Huberman (2009) observes that the montage is the primary element in the poetics of Brecht's dialectic theater, in which the distancing functions as the art of expose the differences⁶. The exile (as Brecht's) leads the man to change his point of view of observation of the world. Brecht searched for the *legibility* of the images with his foreigner look. For him, the montage is a confrontation of fields, a historical reflection, with representations in social *gestus* by the actor, a dramaturgical mock-up (gestural sequences). Everything is esposed and attached in one same image.

Georges Didi-Huberman (2009) makes the following enumerations on Brecht's distancing: the montage is the images, the paradoxes and strangeness created by the actor in the scene. The framing, the anachronism and the epigraph are used as questioning elements. The displacement, the reframing, the delaying and the dismounting (time, action, drama, character and music); the interruption of the image (of image, episodes and actions); document gesture (epic sequence), are basic elements of the theory of the V effect. Dismounting the space and temporal order serves to

break with the Aristotelian argument and suspense. The dialectic disorder, the characters and their paradoxes, like love and war, help to compound the discourse of the montage. The scene of the suicide of the adolescent who hangs the bicycle and takes off the watch before dying, in the movie *KuhleWampe* (1932)⁷, written by Brecht, emphasizes the distancing with duality and contradiction. The watch and the bicycle are the salvation of the family in times of crisis, the camera in close reveals (*demonstrates*) the importance of the object in detriment of the life. Brecht, with his distancing, always showed black humor in his montages, images and texts, taking stands instead of constituting a simple discourse and taking sides.

According to Didi-Huberman (2009, p. 171) and Brecht, the emotions and the memory are historical and political *gestus*. The montage is a re-composition of forces, of the domain of an ideological thought of a society in images and texts. The montage, for Brecht, is a political taking of stand and re-composition of forces of the image and the time. Also offering images and times that are going to make the historical questions and the social devices of the things to explode, the critical stands of the montage in Brecht (Didi-Huberman, 2009, p. 173) are shocks and photographic flashes. They offer to the spectator an image-time with subtitles, visibilities, documents, epigraphs, polarities and dialectics. The distancing emerges as knowledge, disarticulating the perception of the spectator. Distancing is to show and to dismount the look, making a decomposition and re-composition. The montage emerges as an act of pedagogical understanding. The specific and the general are the passages of the feeling to the opposite feeling. Brecht critiques the identification, not the feeling. Each part, scene or act will be developed in an epic form. See, concerning this, the effect of distancing of Chaplin, Joyce, Cézanne and Kafka.

Didi-Huberman's proposals are based on the hypothesis that thinking an image can help to know our history better. Unveiling and mounting with the image that reveals all the device and thought of a certain social group, interrogating on Walter Benjamin's image reception and imagination Hannah Arendt's ethical question, Didi-Huberman dives in the experience of the image as historical model of the present, past and future. Studying and quoting Aby Warburg (1866-1929), who created the paradox of the image with his atlas. An

atlas that, for Aby Warburg, would be a visual form of knowledge, a wisdom of the look. Knowledge in the dimension of the sensitive and the real, and the images of the past or pathetic (*pathosformeln*). The distended concept of present, where the past goes towards the future and the present, disclosing an anachronistic time. The image is revealed as montage in this theater that presents this present body in *visage* as knowledge of the world. Like in the Warburg project, Mnemosyne. The image, as the word in Didi-Huberman and Brecht, is like weapons in the fields of conflicts, carrying a device of violence when disclosing all the fascist ideology, or when it exhibits the people with their faces in the museums and photographs as human zoos of the holocaust.

The indigenist discourse of stage and arts, as human parks and zoos, adopted the primitivism and the *world music* as process of formatting (*formatage*) of a civilization (Bensa, 2010). The image of man as savage became an ideological spectacle, manipulated by the Europeans in the end of the 19th century. The critique to the anthropology of the primitive: the autochthonous, the exotic ones, as the exotization of the alterity in the 19th and 20th centuries, show that the looks of the colonial and romantic adventures remain in the memory of the dominant power and in the corporeal practices (Bazin, 2008). Didi-Huberman's studies, as well as Alban Bensa's (2006), disapprove the concepts of stage, montage, exotism and primitivism that are highlighted in the objects and images in the museums and the arts.

Anthropology and the contemporary arts live between these two dilemmas: against the end of the exotism and stage of the image of the primitivism in the museums and theaters, however understanding that the theater of representation of these conflicts, that were normalized and institutionalized, as Deleuze said, continue strong in the dominant media of the institutions that preview and control (Deleuze, 2010). In the theater, the characters and images of the woman, the black, the indigenous and the *nordestino* are seen within this perspective of human zoos, emerged in the 19th century. The object of anthropology and art departs from the question, between *us, civilized*, and the others: the traditional ones, the primitive, autochthonous and the exotic ones. Within the context of the 19th century, the exotization of the alterity was part



of this time dominated by slavery thought, violence and imagery of cruelty of the colonization. In the beginning of the 20th century, the functionalist and culturalist anthropology created an anthropology of field research. The proposal wanted to eradicate the ideal of exoticism. What happened was that this perspective ended up strengthening the colonial exotic ideals, which were impregnated in the western culture and in the social studies and arts. The structuralism itself made this exotism eternal with Claude Lévi-Strauss (Bensa, 2010).

Deconstructing the image and montage of the exhibition of a population or the artistic creation unveils a political paradigm and a new dramaturgy. A new stand taking by the artists in face of a world invaded by information and technologies.

Notes

¹ Georges Didi-Huberman's conference at the seminary of anthropology of the visual of Paris EHESS (INHA, auditorium, 2 rue Vivienne 75002, Paris. In 2010/2011). See Augé; Didi-Huberman; Eco, 2011, p. 88).

² See Pavis, 1996, p. 217. According to Pavis, montage is a term that came from the cinema, used in the 1930s by Piscator, Brecht and Eisenstein. The idea of montage in *performance* is going to deconstruct several concepts considered classical in the stage: the text, the concept of actor, scenic space. The anthropological stage inaugurates a new practice in theatrical making, creating theories as dramaturgy of the image, the actor, the director *performer*, the *performer* spectator, temporality, happenings, installation, pre-expressivity, ritual and virtual space.

³ The perception in the arts, the cinema and the theater was linked to an organic (Socratic-Aristotelian) regimen. The modern cinema and theater break with the classic description and move towards a crystalline description. The scenic arts and the contemporary cinema will be, for Deleuze, a thought of the difference in all its expression. Deleuze displays two types of description and narration in the cinema and the arts: the organic and the crystalline. The organic regimen, in which the description is sensory-motor, having as a motor mode the real and the imagery. Both are poles in opposition. The current concatenations are from the point of view of the real and the actualizations in the conscience from the point of view of the imagery. In the classic cinema, as in the Aristotelian dramaturgy, the organic regimen stays in this dichotomy only: real and imagery, searching for the mimesis of the truth when speaking about the world. On its turn, in the crystalline regimen, the real and the imagery are gathered in one circle only, highlighting a new: the virtual. The current and the virtual real form two distinct images, however indiscernible, coalescent, closely united. The crystalline narration implies a collapse of the Aristotelian and sensory-motor schemes, leading to the emergence of new optical and sound situations. The anomalies of movements, the distortions of the face in Francis Bacon break with the narrative organic type and create a new narrative of open and borderless realisms, breaking with the traditional concept of mimesis, whose basis is Aristotle. Deleuze mixes the Nietzschean concept of truth and the Bergsonian theory of time. Narration in Deleuze is crystalline and virtual. Virtual and the actual form distinct and new images. What Deleuze challenges is the way of narration and description. The contemporary theater and cinema of the 1970s will adopt Deleuze's concepts (Virtual). The new theater, for Deleuze, will emerge as non-representation, a new way of making theater, with images, movements, voices, *gestus* and performance. This new *presentation* presents and constitutes awareness of a minority, as a universal becoming, that it is not made for solutions and interpretations. The new theater, for Deleuze, would be like Beckett's theater, which is a visual poem: *a theater of the spirit proposing not to narrate a story, but to construct an image*.

⁴ Didi-Huberman (2009, p. 11).

⁵ In his essay *Art as Device*, Shklovsky argues that the goal of art is to make the reader familiar with the reality: it must renew our perception. In his essay, he identified several methods of *strangeness*. The goal of art (poetry, specifically) is to represent things in a new

way. It has to remove a component of our surrounding, of the sphere of our automatized perception.

⁶ Didi-Huberman 2009, p.33. Georges Didi-Huberman in short sentences on Brecht: We do not mount, expose and dispose. Brecht creates the art to dispose the difference of the things and the conflicts. The montage is a knowledge method. A modern method used by Stravinsky in music, Walter Benjamin in the philosophy. Brecht and Piscator created the photomontage in the shape of a magazine. Documentary montage. Dialectics of disposing and exposing the truth. Disposing things is a way of understanding the world. Brecht refuses to separate art history from political history. Polarity and conflicts. Montage/strangeness/interruption. Dialectics of exposing the mounting. Disorder: *Gestus* of montage (open realism). Make the real problematic. Anachronism: mounting the conflicts; shocks etc. Mounting and dismounting. Temporal montage, position-transgression and anachronism. Montage reveals knowledge. Montage as productive force. Epigraph: Temporal distancing. Photo-epigraph. Each *gestus* becomes an anachronistic montage. Exhibition of the conflicts: past, future and memory. Allegory.

⁷ *KuhleWampe* is a real place, located close to the Müggelsee, a huge lake, east of Berlin. *KuhleWampe* translates literally as *belly*, but in the dialect of Berlin means *empty belly*. *KuhleWampe* was directed by Slatan Dudow (Bulgarian, pupil of Eisenstein) and written by Brecht in 1932. Brecht was the pioneer of a conception that the cinema, as well as the art, could be used in a revolutionary way. He worked the view that a movie was art and not only part of the cultural industry. This point takes us to the general context of a post-war Germany, which still was in economic and political crisis. To the left, there was a general impression that movie was not art and that it was not worthwhile investing in the cinema as such. The leadership of the Communist Party took a firm stand against the movie.

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