

**Alice's Adventures in Intermedia Collage:
Montage Theory in *Sight Sound Motion* Applied to Adaptation, Collage, and
Nonsense**

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Abstract

Sight Sound Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics by Herbert Zettl describes montage techniques used in film editing. This paper relates these techniques and devices of literary nonsense used in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*. Further, this paper describes how montage techniques could be extended for use in creating a multimedia collage adaptation of Alice's story.

Description

Zettl defines montage as "the juxtaposition of two or more separate event images that, when shown together, combine into a larger and more intense whole" (319). Zettl approaches the topic of montage twice within his text. First, he describes montage theory as applied to the visual aspect of film editing. Later, he describes the possibilities offered by the consideration of sound within film. Working purely in the visual domain, Zettl defines three primary categories of montage: metric montage, analytical montage, and idea-associative montage.

Metric montage involves flashing a series of images (film shots) in equally spaced time intervals. This technique creates what Zettl calls a *motion beat*, which may

entirely disregard any motion present in the original shots.

Analytical montage is divided into two categories. *Sequential analytical montage* "condenses an event into its key elements and presents these elements in their original cause-effect sequence" (Zettl 320). Often two events are displayed chronologically, to suggest a third intermediate event, while leaving the visual details to the viewer's imagination. *Sectional analytical montage* shows a single moment from various viewpoints, breaking a chronological progressing to explore the complexity of that moment.

Idea-associative montage is the juxtaposition of "two seemingly disassociated images in order to create a third principal idea or concept" (Zettl 324). This category is also split into two subcategories: *comparison montage* and *collision montage*. Comparison montage involves the use of events that are thematically related in order to reinforce this theme. Collision montage represents two opposing events to reveal a third concept through conflict. Zettl describes this technique as a film version of the Hegelian concept of dialectic (and the derived Marxist dialectic theory), with the thesis and antithesis provided by a pair of event images yielding a conceptual synthesis.

Zettl ends this section by pointing out the simultaneous strength and weakness of montage as being a synthetic, "medium-induced statement ... intended to

interrupt the natural flow of the event" (328). A later chapter revisits montage, incorporating the use of sound. In most cases Zettl suggests using the sound corresponding to the multiple visual events present in the montage. In the case of idea-associative montage, an additional possibility is presented through the juxtaposition of one visual event with an audio element occurring simultaneously.

Commentary

Montage and Nonsense

In his book *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature*, Jean-Jacques Lecercle states, "nonsense text requires to be read on two levels at once -- two incompatible levels: not 'x means A' but 'x is both A and, incoherently, B'. In other words, nonsense deals not in symbolism but in paradox" (20). This structural analysis of nonsense is very similar to that on film montage. In montage, event image A and event image B are presented simultaneously to evoke a third element, not present in either A or B. In nonsense writing, this third element is nonsense itself: the feeling of contradiction, the sense of unreality, and the question of structural rules.

The relationship between the two "events" in nonsense text has the greatest similarity with idea-associative montage, as a juxtaposition of two seemingly unrelated events. However, the nonsense associations differ from this category of montage as the derived concept is not found as a thematic consistency in the

original images as in comparison montage nor is it found in a thematic opposition as in collision montage. The connection is not in the images the texts creates at all but in the representation of those images within the medium: language.

In the realm of language, this type of relation is called “word play”. In its various forms, this is present throughout both Alice texts. The chapter “The Mock Turtle's Story” in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* provides a steady stream of puns, as the Mock Turtle (whose name is a pun itself) describes school as practiced under the sea (“school” being another pun):

‘And how many hours a day did you do lessons?’ said Alice, in a hurry to change the subject.

‘Ten hours the first day,’ said the Mock Turtle: ‘nine the next, and so on.’

‘What a curious plan!’ exclaimed Alice.

‘That's the reason they're called lessons,’ the Gryphon remarked: ‘because they lessen from day to day.’ (Carroll, “Alice's”)

Within this quote, the pun between “lesson” and “lessen” pairs the meanings of these terms, revealing the homophone present between the words.

A related word play technique used extensively in Carroll's works is the portmanteau. From the *Through the Looking-Glass* chapter entitled “Looking-Glass Insects”: “‘Crawling at your feet,’ said the Gnat (Alice drew her feet back in some alarm), ‘you may observe a Bread-and-Butterfly. Its wings are thin slices of

Bread-and-butter, its body is a crust, and its head is a lump of sugar'" (Carroll, "Through"). "Bread-and-butterfly" is a portmanteau of "bread-and-butter" and "butterfly," two objects which are literally combined to form a fantastic insect.

Montage and Intermedia

Likewise, film adaptations of the *Alice* books present similar methods of "play" that are not dependent on words. Jan Svankmajer's *Alice* presents "visual puns" throughout, such as the representation of caterpillars with socks and a mushroom with a drawer knob (Svankmajer). These visual puns function similarly to word puns, while using the additional cultural meaning of the socks and drawer knob to connect the fantastical Wonderland with everyday reality.

As shown in this example, the nonsense aspect of Carroll's books encourages an unfaithful, and therefore more creatively open, reinterpretation in different media, because literary nonsense is dependent on the medium of language. The question naturally arises: how would one adapt nonsense to music, video games, immersive environments?

The Alice Project aims to understand how various media have adapted nonsense. But more than providing a simple cataloguing of these techniques, The Alice Project will present the analysis in the form of a new adaptation, combining the original text and multiple existing adaptations into an visual and aural collage.

Considering this work as a film, this work would in fact be termed a “film montage.” In combining portions of film, the need to consider film montage theory clear.

However, a new situation arises, as the sources of our collage are not only film, but written text, audiobook, and video game. We will combine not only images or sound, but media itself. What will this juxtaposition evoke?

Resources

Carroll, Lewis (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Project Gutenberg. 20 February 2008 <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/11>>.

Carroll, Lewis (1871). *Through the Looking-Glass*. Project Gutenberg. 20 February 2008 <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/12>>.

Lecerle, Jean-Jacques. "Introduction: Reading Nonsense Reading." *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature*, 1-26. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Zettl, Herbert. "Structuring the Four-Dimensional Field: Editing" and "Structuring the Five-Dimensional Field: Sound Structures and Sound-Picture Combinations." *Sight Sound Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics*, 299-332 and 355-386. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990.