

The Time of Montage

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ABSTRACT: In this lecture-conversation, Isabel de Naverán and Leire Vergara offer an array of readings, life experiences and descriptions of films in order to address the concept of montage as applied to contemporary choreography and curatorial work.

Taking the description of several scenes as a point of departure, the authors propose an understanding of montage (both in exhibits and in choreography) based on a specific temporality in which peripheral elements and everyday life lend intention and meaning to the work. In this partially scripted conversation the authors exchange their perspectives on the white cube and the black box, and question some of the dynamics of those two mechanisms.

The Time of Montage has been staged on three occasions. The first was in the Teatro Pradillo in Madrid, in the context of *Laboratorio 987* (2013) organized by Chus Domínguez, Nilo Gallego and Silvia Zayas and the cycle of exhibits *Form and Vouloir-dire* curated by Leire Vergara in 2012 at the MUSAC (Museum of Contemporary Art of Castille and Leon), the second was in the *Laboratorio 987* at MUSAC within the same initiative, and the third time in Sukaldea-Tabakalera in San Sebastián (2014) as part of the program *Paracinema* curated by Esperanza Collado. Each staging involved some changes to the text, the props and the dialogue conducted afterwards.

RE-VISIONES presents a new version of the lecture, including the transcription and translation into English of the first two points proposed by each author, and a video recording of the lecture as staged at the Teatro Pradillo.

A lecture in the form of a dialogue

1. Exercises

Through her artistic practice a woman investigates the relationship between space, time and movement. Influenced by her readings of Saint Augustine, Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, she begins a series of exercises in her own home.

First she must choose a simple action, like walking.

Exercise #1: At one end of the living room, she places a video camera on a tripod. The camera is filming. She walks backwards in a straight line, from the camera to the window on the other side of the room. She walks backwards at a normal speed. In her computer she edits the sequence in reverse, such that in the image we see a woman walking forwards from a window at the back of the room towards the camera. Everything seems normal, though her walk is slightly odd. Back in the real space of the living room, she tries to reproduce faithfully the movements of the strange walk that appears in the image. Everything appears normal, except that the alignment of weight in her body has changed. This exercise makes her perception of space and time shift slightly.

Henri Bergson, influenced by Saint Augustine's idea that time is above all a lived experience, an inner phenomenon, centuries later established the concept of "real duration" (Bergson, 2011). Time cannot be measured by reconstructing a series of positions in space, because time is never a correlation of successive or measurable states. Real duration, according to Bergson, is consciousness itself prior to any spatial construction, before it becomes an object. Duration is always indivisible and therefore cannot be turned back or reconstructed.

Exercise #2: The camera is placed at the same end of the living room. It is recording. The woman is at the back of the room, by the window, and very slowly walks towards the camera. In her computer she then edits the sequence, increasing the speed between each frame such that in the final image she appears to be walking at a normal speed. Everything appears normal, but the feel of her walk is a bit odd. Going back to the living room, she tries to copy as faithfully as possible the movement in the edited image. What we see is a person walking in a slightly strange way.

After a series of exercises, all variations upon the same idea, she edits a sequence using various takes. In the video we see a woman walking in a straight line towards the camera, though her movement is slightly odd. She walks towards the camera clip, clop, clip, clop. In the next shot we see her back at the window in the back of the room. Again she walks towards the camera clip, clop, clip, clop. This repeats again. This montage, a total of 10 minutes long, served as the score for a brief choreography shown at the Theatre L'L in Brussels in December of 2003.

The intention was to perform the edited sequence, shot by shot. But a problem arose: Between the last image of each take (a close up of the woman right in front of the camera) and the first image of the next take (the woman next to the window) there was a spatial leap, an ellipsis in time. How to recuperate this time (omitted in the edited video) in real space? It occurred to her to turn off all the lights in the theater and, in the dark, go back to the starting point. Thus every time the lights were turned on, she would be by the wall at the back of the stage, where the window would be. But the effect created on stage is inversely proportional to the effect created in the editing of the film. While in film the montage, whether by cutting, fading or dissolving, joins the shots of the film creating a whole, onstage the lighting transitions expand the sensation of time and produce a sense of fragmentation. Observing this, she became interested in what was happening when the lights were dimmed: her body moving through the dark space to the back wall, her quickened breath. What body is this that appears? What temporality is established in the spectator? What quality of image is generated?

1. A scene

This summer during the months of July and August I've barely consumed any moving images at all: I haven't

watched television, I haven't gone to the movies, I haven't played any of the videos stored on my computer. Thinking back, in these two months I saw exactly two films on DVD: *Barravento* (1962) and *Entranced Earth* (1967), both directed by Glauber Rocha. These two films are part of a collection published by Cameo in 2009 that I bought at least two years ago. I don't know why I hadn't felt like seeing any of the films in this collection until this summer. In August I decided to watch two of them: first *Barravento* and then *Entranced Earth*. It was upon seeing the second of these that something fired in my subconscious: a brief sequence = a movie.

41 minutes 38 seconds of *Entranced Earth*

The subtitles translate what a male voiceover is saying in Brazilian:

“When I returned to Eldorado
—I don't know if it was before or after—
when I saw that landscape again
unchanging, the nature,
the same people lost
in its impossible majesty.
I had been embittered
by missed encounters
and once again I lost myself
in the depths of my own feelings.
I didn't believe in dreams
or in anything else.
But my flesh burned
and that is where I found myself.”

The time that passes while these words are being pronounced is accompanied by a simple brief scene, recorded in black and white. A woman walks through a shopping gallery. Her back is to the camera, which uses the zoom to follow her movement. We only see the woman in silhouette, but we just can make out what she is wearing: a short-sleeved blouse, a straight skirt to just below the knee, shoes with a low heel and a small handbag which she holds by its strap in her left hand. Her long hair is gathered in a low ponytail. Halfway through the gallery the woman stops to look into one of the shop windows. We cannot see what she is looking at, the gallery is dim and the film quality blurs the image such that most of the details of the scene are lost, especially because the end of the passageway is backlit and begins to appear too close. The woman continues walking towards the street, towards the opposite end of the passageway from where the camera is placed. The action of the zoom follows her steps, lending movement to the scene as it gradually carries us towards the threshold where the dark gallery joins the sunlit street. The woman continues forward, leaving the darkness of the gallery behind her. The camera tries to follow her, but her image fades away due to the intense contrast of light. It becomes a ghost within the street scene burnt by the sun of Eldorado.

42 minutes 16 seconds

The previously described scene cuts out abruptly. Now various couples kiss feverishly while laughing and dancing

at a private party. This sequence has nothing to do with the previous one, but they share this fragment of time imposed by an exercise.

The sequence of the woman walking through the shopping gallery has strangely followed me to this day, the day I am reading this text.

(Cut film at minute 42 and 38 seconds)

2. Shot by shot

Leire,

when you told me about this invitation to dialogue about time in editing, or about time and editing, the first thing that came to my mind was the exhibit through which you and I met. You were the curator and I participated with “The Red Carpet”, a pretty weird choreographic project with a very specific methodology.

The idea was to transfer a 10 minute film sequence, shot by shot, into real space-time without making use of any film technology (no cameras or projections), while respecting the duration of each sequence.

By thinking abstractly about the effects produced by editing shots together, the goal was to understand how this apparently logical correlation is created in the spectators’ perception. The underlying goal, however, was to show cinematic temporality as the movement of thought. Understanding that this is what Deleuze called “thinking through time” (Deleuze, 1986), through cinema.

This precise and orderly trans-codification or trans-mediation brought together a choreographic constellation of directions, vectors, gestures and movements that spoke to a different internal logic, one that was neither entirely choreographic nor entirely cinematic, but rather the logic of impossible movement. No effect could be traced to any identifiable cause, such that on stage what was seen was the performance of apparently unrelated actions and shots, allowing a different temporal quality to emerge.

We chose a fragment of the film *Opening Night* by John Cassavetes, featuring Gena Rowlands, in which — curiously enough — nearly all the action takes place in a theater (a filmed theater) during the rehearsal of a play. Digging around in my notes from that time to prepare this conference, I found this photo and these notes that I wrote then, and which I will read now:

This project that is still in process is a laboratory in which to test out certain ideas about the relationship between cinematic time and space and staged time and space as places for representation.

Practical experimentation permits me to confirm some of the concepts developed in theory and also to discover and arrive at conclusions that I could not have come to through theory alone, and which support, confirm or deny some of the ideas to which I refer in the thesis.

I began this project in 2003 in Brussels. I had gone to live in that city to attend the Intensive Workshop on Choreographic Composition organized by Marian del Valle and Monika Klingler through Contradanse.

I was interested in working on duration as a quality of movement, and relating my movement in space to the passing of time.

2. How do you live?

55 minutes, 8 seconds, *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) by Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch

A woman slowly approaches the camera. She walks along a wide street, the backlighting leaving her face and details of her body in shadow. Nevertheless, the outline of her silhouette is framed in a full shot which allows us to intuit what she is wearing: a trench coat that reaches below her knees, low heels and a large purse held by its strap in her left hand. Her short hair is mussed and frizzy. A motorcycle crosses the scene behind the woman, then a Renault mini-van passes, then three men, then one more man.

The subtitles translates what a female voiceover is singing softly in French:

“The great marshy
meadows...”

The woman continues along the street until turning into a passageway. “She speaks to herself, which bothers us because it is so personal, but on the other hand it completely captivates us.”(1) The camera moves backwards, entering the passageway, moving more and more quickly, abandoning the unhurried rhythm of the woman and creating a greater distance between her and the lens. This distance allows us to distinguish the specific place where she is walking: it is the entrance to a train station. The camera moves away from her more and more rapidly, reducing the size of her silhouette against the background.

56 minutes, 36 seconds

The previously described scene cuts off abruptly. Now various couples dance, embracing, in an open-air party at night. Some kiss, hidden among the crowd. This sequence has nothing to do with the previous one, although both share this fragment of time imposed by the exercise of taking a short sequence and treating as if it were a film in itself.

I hadn't seen the whole Morin and Rouch film until I started preparing this lecture. I had only seen fragments. I wanted to wait to see it for the first time in a movie theater, but I didn't manage to do so, and finally I couldn't resist watching a low quality copy. I knew about how it was made, its importance within the genre of *cinéma vérité*, and I had seen a few of its scenes, like the one I just described. I was even familiar with some of the methodological turns borrowed from ethnography, applying the same kind of inquiry to ourselves and our daily lives that we might apply to the Other. That said, I knew nothing about the film's plot. *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) is a film that is not acted by actors but rather lived by men and women. In the first scene Edgar Morin, a sociologist, and Jean Rouch, an anthropologist and filmmaker, invite a young sociologist working in the street doing questionnaires to sit down with them at a table in front of the camera. In a spontaneous manner they present their intentions: they want to make a film about how she lives her daily life. They will begin with her and then will continue on with other people. How do you live? How do you get by in life? Are you happy? These three questions run through the whole film, opening the way for reflections on the different forms of life taking place in the city of Paris in 1961. Within this framework, the Algerian War and French colonialism in the African

continent, appear as secondary narratives that act indirectly upon the representation of the Parisian contemporaneity of 1961.

In the context of this lecture, I became interested in the way in which *Chronicle of a Summer* tries to avoid the problem of representation through a self-reflexive exercise on the experience itself of filming and participating in a movie.

[Link a vídeos de la retransmisión en directo del paso de Laboratorio 987 por el Teatro Pradillo | Laboratorio 987](#)

Notes

1 From *Chronique d'un été*, Jean Rouch, 1961.

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