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On the Integrity of the World of Sounds: Montage and Organic Unity

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to track the history of interaction of two fundamental principles of creating sounding musical texts: the organic unity, on the one hand, and the editing, on the other hand, in both composers' and performers' artwork. It is likely that the idea of organic unity reached the highest point of its development in Mozart's oeuvre; later, Beethoven and composers of the following generations started comprehending the idea of a process (or, in philosophical terms, "the becoming") as something organically integral. According to an opinion of musicians with a romantic way of thinking, sound engineers' work in general, in particular editing, tends to break an ideal view of integrity as the instantaneous and inimitable life of an artwork. At the same time, as will be presented, the principle of editing an artwork, from the motifs to the entire structure, also reached its highest, though often implicit, expression in the music of Romanticism (Schumann, Chopin). On the contrary, musicians of the post-Romantic era, such as Strawinsky or Gould, preferred the method of montage which can easily explain their general preference for the audio recording, with its almost unavoidable, merely "cinematographic," editing for the live sound. Having disavowed an idea of the process as a kind of organic development, both composers of the avant-garde and the following trends in new music have engaged a virtuosic playing with the very principle of editing, including the editing of every separate sound, as their most important creative method. Therefore, there are various ways of comprehending an idea of integrity at different time periods of art history as well as fundamentally different methods of implementing this idea in accordance with certain artistic purposes.

Schlagworte/Keywords: Montage; montage; Integrität; integrity; organic unity; Organizität; Stil; style; Technik; technique

It is generally accepted that unity is inherent to artistic statements, including artworks to a varying degree. The issue of unity of utterance becomes especially topical in temporal kinds of art as time is known to be able to negate relationships, to lose the thread of meaning, and just to prevent anything that has gone before from being forgotten. In fact, the very idea of montage historically emerged in temporal kinds of art and, importantly, was related to technical junctions of the temporal fragments of an artwork. Montage is both a creative and a technical process in cinematography, on TV, and in the recording studios, which allows one to obtain a compositionally integral artwork as a result of bringing the separate fragments of an initial recording together.

Montage in cinematography soon became an absolutely natural procedure that did not create the sense that violence was being done to the material. Moreover, practitioners and theorists of the art of cinema began to comprehend montage as a universal category for both an entire art and the artistic way of thinking in general, to which Sergei Eisenstein's work *Dickens, Griffith and Us* bears eloquent witness.[1] The Russian film maker considers in his text how Dickens' novels affected Griffith's devices of montage and shows that the latter used them in a completely deliberate manner.

The following questions then arise: Why does montage, represented in Eisenstein's text as such a universal device, need any justification or special pleading of any kind? What else exists besides montage? And what serves as its background? Usually, performers dislike being recorded in the studio, and this rather routine fact might help answer the first question best of all. A piece that is heard at a concert is the result of an integral creative process whose continuous sequence is under the performer's full control. And even though the same musician is free to vary his concept of interpretation from one performance to another, this concept of his is the result of an organically continuous becoming, which, in various artists' opinions, is inseparable from creative intuition and inspiration. It is precisely a rupture in the organic continuity of a creative process that may be accepted most painfully.

Consequently, one might suppose that organic continuity is the antithesis of montage. The organic is the antithesis of the mechanical; for this reason, it is montage, thanks to the technical conditions of its implementation (i.e., the connection of the fragments of not even the very text of an artwork but rather of its physical or electronic medium), that can be perceived as something extremely mechanical and thus may surely alarm adherents of the aesthetics of "organicity," which was characteristic of Romanticism.

Organic continuity in the art of performance is the continuity of the performance act itself, whereby the continuity in the art of composition should be comprehended as the organic integrity of the form of a composition. At this point, one must immediately note that both montage and organic continuity tend to act mainly as the two poles of the creative way of thinking and, in fact, are rarely manifest in a pure form.

Historically, the English words *composition* and *composer* as well as the German word *Komponist* are related precisely to the idea of montage. Yet, the Ger-

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1 Eisenstein 1968, Vol. 5, 129–180.

man language has a synonym, *Tondichter* (literally, *tone-poet*), which is closer to the perception of the creative process in newer European music, especially at the time of Romanticism. It was precisely the Romantics who finally established organic continuity of flowing as an ideal of the music they composed. This ideal reached its culmination in the idea of a through-composed formal structure and in Wagner's endless melody as well as in the idea of an integral and, up to a point, a "sacred" burst of a performing artist's inspiration.

Two kinds of montage with different artistic results may be highlighted. The process of film editing may deliberately emphasize a state of contrast, an incompatibility of the neighboring moments of meaning; however, the kind of montage with the purpose of replacing the unsuccessfully recorded fragments almost completely prevails in the recording studios. This kind of montage must not be detectable, and it must not breach the smoothness and continuity of the flow of the music. Let us call this the hidden montage. Yet, is it possible that the hidden montage is essentially one of the typical devices of composers', poets' and painters' works as well – whereas the organic continuity that we perceive as a result is an illusion created by this hidden (secret) montage?

Earlier, it was not necessary to "combine" separate tones: composers of past centuries tended to use at least some shorter musical motifs, if not some preexistent melodic patterns. The fact that centos used to prevail in literature as well as quodlibets and, later, pastiches and potpourris in music on a permanent basis, together with a common practice of including rhetorical devices in the texts, shows that the idea of montage has been present within the creative way of thinking during all epochs since antiquity.

The idea of montage flourished by the time of the Baroque, when the whole was comprehended as the sum of its parts. This idea revealed itself quite openly when the contrasting parts in fantasias or toccatas were juxtaposed and when the numbers in operas were combined in a variable manner.

By the time of the Classical period, both poles had been topicalized in a newer way: the organic continuity of the form notably deepened the integrity of a piece of music, but never before had this kind of art reached such sophisticated and demonstratively theatrical oppositions, from the level of a motif up to that of a compositional section. It is known that, having created sonata allegros, composers of Classicism started inventing their themes, thinking particularly of how they would relate naturally to each other; thus, the idea of montage was balanced with the organicity of their entire conception.

The above-mentioned antinomy was intensified even more strongly in music of the Romantic period. On the one hand, the striving for the continuity and integrity of the developmental principle became as dominant as never before: the *Vorspiele* to Wagner's *Lohengrin* and *Tristan und Isolde* are among the most vivid examples. However, as the through-composed musical flow is based on a juxtaposition of several leitmotifs, some features of the half-hidden montage can be traced even there. On the other hand, the paradigm of a conscious playing with the integrity of an artwork, with the deliberate drawing of attention to the idea of montage in order to create the effect of both its "disrupted" form and randomness of interchanging its episodes, has also emerged.

The most striking example from literature could be E.T.A. Hoffmann's novel *Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr nebst fragmentarischer Biographie des Kapellmeisters Johannes Kreisler in zufälligen Makulaturblättern*, in which two manuscripts, Kreisler's biography and the tomcat's "autobiography," happened to get mixed up as though by accident. This novel served as a prototype for Robert Schumann, who liked to combine several narrative strands simultaneously, mainly in his cycles of miniatures (*Papillons*, *Carnaval*, *Davidsbündlertänze* and especially *Kreisleriana*). Thus, it is obviously not by accident that the name of Hoffmann's protagonist appears in Schumann's title. The idea of montage is carried out in them in the suite, composed from different pieces. Meanwhile, Schumann provides some impressive, really cinematographic examples of sudden cut-ins and shot changes in the middle of some pieces as well. The briefest shot changes (lasting just for one or two bars) are especially impressive. The natural flow of the music of a polonaise in Papillon No. 11 (Bars 42–43) is suddenly interrupted for a moment with a mysterious motif, which is completely incongruous with the character of this piece (its configuration recalls *Sphinxes* from *Carnaval*). Piece No. 10 provides another example: an intimately lyrical melody of a waltz, featuring its cantilena structure, is suddenly interrupted here ten bars before the end of the piece, and we hear an unexpected intrusion of the loud music of a ball (lasting just for four bars). Incidentally, the above-mentioned *Sphinxes* provide an extremely rare example in Romantic music of a motif being reassembled from separate tones that symbolize letters of the alphabet.

It was also at the time of Romanticism that compositions in the form of a potpourri started to gain popularity. For example, *Künstler-Quadrille nach Motiven berühmter Meister* by Johann Strauss, Junior [op. 201 (1858)] is fully based on quotations from the music by Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, Weber, Chopin and other popular composers of the time, and this is far from being the only example in nine-

teenth-century music. Is this not a postmodernist approach? It is likely that such phenomena indeed anticipated our time from the depths of the epoch of Romanticism (simply everything is there!); still, such potpourris used to be considered jokes that did not claim to be highly intellectual products in the good old days.

Chopin, whose ballades have exemplified the newer comprehension of form by the Romantics as an integral and continuous process – contrary to the very principle of montage – was Schumann's antipode. Nevertheless, it was Chopin who anticipated such cinematographic devices in the musical dramaturgy as "starting from the end" in the First Ballade or the cut-out of a large piece of the "tape" (in this case, meaning the score) in the recapitulation of the main subject in the Second Ballade.[2] Yet, even in Chopin's pieces where no traces of any montage-like joins can be found, the method of the composer's work recalls a recording session in the studio rather than a continuous and organically integral concert performance. It is known that Chopin introduced newer variants of some details in different editions of his text. How does it differ from the process of montage in the recording studio, with its botches and patches, when sound engineers select the most successful fragment to substitute for the less successful one?

Since the very beginning of the twentieth century, music and art have been influenced by the idea of montage so deeply that there is no need to consider all of its aspects in detail: they are more than obvious. Let us just outline the main stages of its usage and concentrate on our aesthetic résumé. For example, the twelve-tone technique is based on the introduction of montage at all compositional levels, starting from the construction of the motif itself (which is analogous to the cinematographic montage of an integral shot).

The technique of total serialism went further than dodecaphony even though it seemed that there was no further way: after all, you would not "dismember" a single tone! However, it turned out that, yes, you *can* dismember the tone! The sound in pieces composed using such a technique was the result of a very specific kind of montage as the overlapping of separate parameters (namely, pitch, duration, volume and timbre). Hence there is a direct path to electronic synthesis of sound, which drew the attention of avant-gardists in the second half of the twentieth century. Here, as well as with sound recording, montage might become a big part of the creative process and not be detected directly as it is evident with the sound synthesis. Still, an intensified feeling of the mounted sound texture of some electronic pieces normally used to appear at both their syntactic and compositional

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2   Zenkin 2015, 269–270.

levels, as evidenced in pieces by Zimmermann (*Requiem für einen jungen Dichter*), Stockhausen (*Gesang der Jünglinge*, *Telemusik*, *Hymnen*), and others. Montage in *Hymnen* is used with permanent dissolves: they greatly recall cinematography and even more – the result of rotating the tuning handle of a radio receiver when one radio station or another randomly emerges from the welter of background noise. In the above-named pieces, both Zimmermann and Stockhausen applied some elements of the collage technique, which was later taken up by the followers of postmodernist aesthetics. The synthesis of stylistically contrasting quotations was applied in Berio's Sinfonia, in Zimmermann's ballet noir *Musique pour les soupers du Roi Ubu*, and in Schnittke's First Symphony. It is precisely the montage, rather than the synthesis, of styles, languages, worldviews and aesthetic paradigms that has become the sign of the postmodernist state of culture.

Montage in the twentieth century became so natural that its followers could be found even in the area of audio recording. One of the simplest examples of using montage with a clearly realized artistic purpose occurred when Glenn Gould was working on Bach's *Goldberg Variations,* and he recorded the theme after the variations. It was as late as the twentieth version when he was able to find the proper character, which would not anticipate what was going to sound after the theme. Gould used to make many different experiments with montage at his sound recording sessions.[3]

Besides, Gould used to enthusiastically state some heretical thoughts, one of which was that if concerts had ceased to be performed, the world of music would not have been impoverished. Conversely, the sound recording would have enriched it, as it could have helped listeners to attain closer contact with music and make them more active in view of their new opportunities to carry out montage of various performers' recordings independently, etc.[4]

Meanwhile, I should go back to my initial antithesis and raise the following question: what is, on the one hand, the idea of montage and, on the other hand, the organic continuity as its opposition? Any kind of montage in the traditional art of antiquity, medieval times and even Romanticism used to be balanced with the organic unity of the prototypical idea of a piece. However, as prototypes exist beyond time, they can be embodied quite freely in real time as well. The presence of the prototype (primordial idea) of a piece secures the unity of the latter even when the devices of montage are used in it deliberately (as in the cases of Hoff-

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3 Maikapar 1983, 17.

4 Gould 2006, Vol. 2, 96.

mann or Schumann), regardless of the unity of the temporal unfolding of its original idea.

Still, unity started to be perceived as a necessary feature with regard to the implementation of an idea as well, to its temporal unfolding. It was manifest in the strongest way within the context of certain artistic systems, most of all at the time of Classicism and especially Romanticism (which is provided by a more tangible reference of the world of art to the real world and its time). In fact, the idea of such a total unity is an assimilation of the artistic form to a human feeling, a human, nature, or the logic of real space–time continuum.

The idea of montage is to soar above time and common sense, to let the creative spirit play, considering that such a spirit can embrace anything with an integral thought. From this viewpoint, an artwork need not be created consequently from beginning to end but may rather be assembled in a free order. A composer often starts creating his piece with some key episode. For example, Tchaikovsky started composing *Eugene Onegin* with Tatiana's letter scene, and Wagner started *Der fliegende Holländer* with Senta's Ballad. Further on, during the process of composition, the rays spread out in opposite directions from such a pivotal scene and, as though illuminating all the other components, make the artwork be perceived as something integral and organically continuous so that in reality it may seem to be assembled from building blocks. In a majority of cases, after all, montage is a way to reconstruct (to restore) the integrity of the original idea whereas montage through a collage is likely to be nothing else but an effort to compensate the organic unity which has been lost.

Finally, another paradox may be stated – the capacity of montage to actualize both creative freedom and an opportunity to discover a certain lack of freedom within the organic continuity, which is, in its turn, an attachment to some particular material and temporal process developing in a linear manner.

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