**Montage in Literature**

As a literary device practiced in avantgarde movements such as Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism, montage refers to the conjoining of heterogeneous discourses in a given text. Within the frame of the literary artwork, montage provokes unmediated clashes between genres and styles, often featuring non-narrative fragments from various sources such as newspaper clippings, slogans (commercial, political, religious), or popular songs. Literary montage, moreover, favors disembodied discourses that are linked to the impact of modernity: the languages on which it draws are those of bureaucratization, commercialization, and serialization, among others. Juxtaposed to more character driven narrative strands, these discursive montage elements question the agency of the modern subject. Montage literature also tends to playfully dissect language itself, breaking down traditional syntax and semantics in the process. It favors ambiguity, irony, and paradox over narrative unity or totality.

While montage theories in silent cinema took inspirations from literature, modernist literary montage derives from the visual montages of Futurism and Dadaism. From these artistic movements, montage literature adopts formal liberties such as syntactic contractions and breaks, or visualizations via an emphasis on typography and the exhibition of words as images and sound. Furthermore, it stresses intermediality by experimenting with discourses of modern communication technologies: newspaper, radio, film, agit-prop, and advertisement. Montage literature is decisively multilingual, orchestrating literary and vernacular voices and fostering clashes among sociolects, dialects, citations from popular culture, and the playful appropriation of non-native languages.

The historical trajectory of such literary experiments encompasses modern poetry from T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* with its citations and multilingual insertions to Gertrude Stein’s experimental prose, the deliberate contractions and visual form of Futurist poetry by Filippo Marinetti, and Dadaist collage and sound poetry.

Another group of avant-garde word artists indebted to montage favored the cut-up technique first promulgated by Tristan Tzara in 1920. In “How to make a Dadaist Poem” Tzara describes the transformation of a newspaper article into a poem as guided by chance and the unconscious. Other Dadaists, including collage artist Hans Arp, followed the technique as well. Brion Gysin revived cut-up poetry in the 1950s and inspired Beat poet William S. Burroughs to pursue this method in his own writings. Since 2005, Nobel laureate Herta Müller has created collage poems out of cut up words from various print media. Like earlier literary montages, her work explores the space between image and text.

Montage is also a central device in the modernist city novel’s attempt to capture the multilayered life-worlds of the twentieth century metropolis in Europe and the US. The cities in Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), Louis Aragon’s *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926), and *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) by Alfred Döblin emerge out of a cacophony of focalized voices and anonymous, disembodied discourses. The authors borrow from contemporary news media to break up their storylines with unrelated documents of public life. While fiction and documentation seem to clash, the authors also tend to draw the specific temporality of the document into their at times dreamlike and mythologizing narratives. The city novels’ montages thereby undermine the strict differentiation between the two realms, fiction and document, and open an epistemological space for language and ideology critique.

**References and further reading:**

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Image:

Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, handwritten manuscript (unpaginated), page with glued in newspaper article from the “Seventh Book.” Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach/ German Literary Archive Marbach.

