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A Montage Theory Analysis of the Training Sequence in *Rocky IV*

As a kid, *Rocky IV* was one of my favorite movies. I couldn't have explained it back then, but something about the training montage stuck with me. I used to get so fired up watching Rocky pull a sled through the snow, chop wood, and sprint up a mountain while the music blasted in the background. Now that I'm older and learning more about film editing, I realize that what made those scenes so powerful wasn't just the music or the visuals, it was the editing. The whole sequence is a great example of montage theory, especially Eisenstein's idea of creating meaning through contrast. And with what I've learned from Karen Pearlman's *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*, I can see how the editors also relied on rhythm and emotional pacing to make it so powerful.

The montage is more than just a hype reel. It builds character, tells a story, and sets the tone for the fight to come. The back-and-forth between Rocky's raw, nature based training and Drago's high-tech, machine-heavy routine shows more than just two fighters working out. It kind of creates a visual metaphor: Rocky represents grit and heart, while Drago is cold, mechanical power. The editing makes that contrast clear by constantly cutting between the two of them, which is Rocky out in the wild, and Drago surrounded by high-tech machines. You don't need anyone to explain it. You just get it.

That's where Eisenstein's theory comes in. He believed that meaning is created not within a single shot but in the way shots are put together. That's exactly what's happening here. The meaning comes from the collision of images, natural versus artificial, heart versus muscle, underdog versus machine. Each cut adds emotional weight. It's not just showing what's happening; it's telling you what it means.

Reading Pearlman's book helped me understand how the rhythm of the scene plays a huge role too. She talks a lot about how editors use rhythm to shape emotion. To make us feel tension, excitement, or release. Watching the training montage, you can feel the rhythm build. It starts slow and steady, then ramps up as Rocky pushes himself harder and harder. The shots get quicker, the cuts more intense, and the music follows that same arc. It creates this momentum that pulls you in and gets your heart pumping. Even if you've seen it a hundred times, it still hits. It did for me, anyway.

Pearlman also talks about cutting for emotion instead of logic. That's something that really stood out to me with this scene. Logically, we're watching a few weeks of training condensed into a couple of minutes. But it never feels rushed or confusing because the emotional beats are so clear. We don't need to know exactly how many days have passed but we can feel that Rocky is growing, struggling, and transforming. The editors chose the moments that mattered emotionally, and that's why it works.

Another thing I found interesting from Pearlman's book is the idea that editing is intuitive. She explains how editors often rely on feeling rather than fixed rules. That made me think about how this scene doesn't just follow a formula, it sort of feels alive. The choices aren't just technical, they are expressive in a way. With the timing of the

cuts, how they line up with the music, and the way the whole thing flows , it doesn't feel like it was built by following some strict formula. It feels like it came from the gut, like someone was cutting it based on their instinct and feeling. If this scene had been edited differently like in a straightforward, linear style, it wouldn't have the same impact. Showing each day of training in full would drag things down. The montage gives us the highlights, the turning points, the moments that are most important. It skips over time without losing meaning. In fact, I think it gains meaning by focusing on rhythm and contrast instead of strict chronology.

What's cool is how relevant this style of editing still is. You see it all the time in modern movies, music videos, sports promos, you name it. The influence of montage editing is everywhere. And even if today's editors aren't always thinking about Eisenstein or theory, they're still using those same ideas. Contrast, rhythm, emotion is all still part of the language of film.

Looking back, I think this montage stuck with me because it's more than just a workout scene. It's storytelling through editing. It shows Rocky's heart and determination without needing words. It makes you feel his struggle and his drive. And thanks to what I've learned from Pearlman's book, I can now appreciate how the editing, specifically the rhythm and contrast makes that feeling possible.


So yeah, *Rocky IV* may be an '80s classic with a killer soundtrack, but it's also a great example of montage editing. It takes the theories of Eisenstein and blends them with emotional intuition in a way that still resonates today. It's a perfect example of how

editing isn't just about putting shots together, it's about making the audience feel something. And in this case, it worked on me, even as a kid.

Works Cited

Pearlman, Karen. *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*.

Rocky IV. Directed by Sylvester Stallone, performances by Sylvester Stallone and Dolph Lundgren, United Artists, 1985.

 Rocky IV Training Montage | 720p HD