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THE MONTAGE EFFECT

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Inlaid maps, acrylic, on wood panel
42 x 63 inches
"The model for the sciences of matter is the ‘origami,’ as the Japanese philosopher might say, or the art of folding."

(Deleuze 1993, 6)

“For a hinge-logic, a hinge-style.”

(Lyotard 1990, 123)

The words ‘montage’ and ‘geography’ are relatively unproblematic; unless, of course, one begins to give them a poke. Montage splices things together and geography splaces them apart (Doel 1999). But yoke them together—‘montage and geography’—and those pigs in a poke soon begin to look more like a lobster telephone or an Exquisite Corpse (Doel and Clarke 2007). What could it mean: montage and geography? What could it mean to cross cut and half together splicing and splacing? What could it mean to splice splace?

Geography is concerned with space and place, and the neologism ‘splace’ underscores the fact that space and place must be thought together—whether structurally (Deleuze 2004), dialectically (Doel 2008), deconstructively (Derrida 1981) or algebraically and topologically (Badiou 2009a). No place without space. No space without place. Space takes place and place takes space, and both of them necessarily take time (pace, lapse, elapse, duration, etc.). Splace is a space-maker/marker, a place-maker/marker, and a pace-maker/marker. Everything is splaced (out) and splayed (out), like an origami fortune-teller manipulated by the double pincers of a lobster God (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). This is why splace is both intensive, implicated in itself as a virtual power of differentiation (an enfolded splace), and extensive, explicated as an actual power of differentiation (an unfolded splace that will have been splaced out) (Deleuze 1994; Doel 2010). Splace opens up space, place, and time. It unfolds, refolds, and enfolds them (Deleuze 1995). Splace is neither static nor settled. It is mutable and adrift. It is set in motion. Space, place, and time are ineluctably out of joint and ceaselessly carried away. Splace does not so much consist as desist (Derrida 1989). For there is only ever a splace of disadjustment, disarticulation, and disjointure (Krell 1997).

“Ex-centric, dis-integrated, dis-located, dis-juncted, de-constructed, dis-mantled, dis-associated, discontinuous, deregulated ... de-,
dis-, ex-. These are the prefixes of today” (Tschumi 1994, 225). In other words, geography is not twofold because of the interminable machinations of place and space, but because splacing is displacing. “Any splace is ... the after-effect or après-coup of the destruction of another” splace (Badiou 2009a, 264). Hereinafter, geography is swept along by a hundred-thousand lines of flight: and ... and ... and ... (Doel 1996).

Montage is the technique of selecting and piecing together separate portions of visual, literary, aural or some other material to form a new composition that is more or less disjointed and dissonant to the eye or ear. Whether cinematic, photographic, literary or musical, montage invariably expresses a jolt and a shock through the combination of differentially charged materials (e.g. to express contrasts, conflicts, contradictions, oppositions or antagonisms) or the excision and condensation of duration and extension (e.g. to express all manner of lapses, elisions, breaks, and ruptures). Montage conveys a sur-plus of material, a sur-plus of articulation, and a sur-plus of sense. It always expresses ‘more than’ the mere summation of its parts: one and one, which, when halved together and spliced together, invariably make more. Montage is expansive, irruptive, and explosive. It bursts forth. Hence the fact that montage resists closure and remains open—to what, precisely? It remains open to difference and repetition; to the insurgent power of differential repetition (Deleuze 1994). To borrow a fine formulation from Giorgio Agamben (2002, 315), montage is characterized by a double movement of stoppage and repetition: stoppage “is the power to interrupt, the ‘revolutionary interruption’ of which Benjamin spoke;” and repetition is the power to render otherwise. Indeed, editing in general, and montage in particular, owe much to that ‘great machine’ of swift, inflexible, egalitarian, and Enlightened justice: Saint Guillotine. (For example, read Arasse (1991), Gerould (1992), and Wahnich (2012) against the grain.)

So, if montage were to have a maxim, I wager that it would be a revolutionary maxim: “Repeat to differ, to estrange, to problematize, to render otherwise;” rather than a slavish maxim:
“Repeat to return to the same, to return more of the same.” Hence the long-standing tendency for montage to be employed by those with a probing, critical, and radical disposition; as well as by those with a surrealist or irrealist bent. Montage is ideal for disturbing, shaking up, and overturning appearances. It cracks open the surface of things: sometimes to expose a hidden depth and the flash of a more or less repressed truth (e.g. ideological critique); and sometimes to return the semblance of sense to the superficial abyss whence it came (e.g. deconstruction). Montage, then, is differential. It differentiates differences (Deleuze 1986, 1989) and dissimilates the givens (Deleuze 1990; Lyotard 1990).

With or without the scar tissue that would mark out the forcibly detached and reattached pieces, montage never entirely forms a whole. “It’s still Frankenstein,” say Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1988, 171). Cut up and stitch up. These are the two gestures of montage: slice and stitch; deterritorialization and reterritorialization; slice and splice. In other words: splace. Montage is “dialectics at a standstill” (Benjamin 1999, 865). Its cut-up method eludes the present and endures in what Badiou (2009a) calls the ‘outplace,’ that a-spatial and an-algebraic void that perpetually threatens to deconstruct and shatter the order of things. If montage is indeed ‘dialectics at a standstill,’ then this dialectic takes the form of “the outplace against the splace” (Badiou 2009a, 11). It expresses the force of an Event from nowhere that compels the order of things to deconsist and desist. “The outplace includes itself destructively in the splace that excludes it” (Badiou 2009a, 89). What was nothing, what counted for nothing, will come to take all. This is the axiom on which both deconstruction and revolution pivot.

“The metaphysical error par excellence is to have identified the non-existent as nothingness. Because the point is that the non-existent is. That is why proletarians, who non-exist, can argue, on the basis of their being, that ‘We are nothing, let us be all.’ That is the very definition of Revolution: a non-existent uses its being-multiple in order to declare that it will exist in the absolute sense. ... To be nothing is to non-exist in a way specific to a determinate world or place.” (Badiou 2009b, 140–141)

If one were to ask, once again, what ‘montage and geography’ might mean, then we have sketched out the semblance of a answer. Since montage is the ‘and’ of splicing together, and geography is the ‘and’ of splacing out, then ‘montage and geography’ is simply ‘and ... and ... and ...’ (along with its diabolical echo: ‘but ... but ... but ...’). Their world is a special Kafkaesque effect of labyrinthine encounters, of disjunctive synthesis, of guillotine splicing, which is both smoothed and striated (Deleuze and Guattari 1988), and lent consistency, but only ever inconsistently (Badiou 2005, 2009c). It stutters
and stammers: and ... and ... and ... (Doel 2001). And the force of the encounter offers nothing but an aleatory drift. Hereinafter, the task is “[n]ot to maintain together the disparate, but to put ourselves there where the disparate itself holds together, without wounding the dis-jointure, the dispersion, or the difference, without effacing the heterogeneity of the other” (Derrida 1994, 29). For “it’s along this line of flight that things come to pass, becomings evolve, revolutions take place. ... An and, and, and which each time marks a new threshold, a new direction of the broken line, a new course for the border” (Deleuze 1995, 45). When all is said and done, then, ‘and’ and ‘but’ are the passwords and buzzwords of both montage and geography, of both splicing and splacing, of the splay of the world. Cast of the die. Each is “the crystal of the total event” through which one may glimpse “the cracking open of natural teleogy” (Benjamin 1999, 461 and xi, respectively).
Montage and geography. Splice and splace. Splicing splace: and ... and ... and ...; but ... but ... but ... This fractured, differential, and schizoid line cracks open and shatters the apparent order of things. But since both montage and geography are held under tension, they open up a spliced splacing that is twisted and tortuous. So, in the scrumpled splace of montage and geography, not only does one “indeed find folds everywhere” (Deleuze 1995, 156), but the imperative is to “never miss a twist or a fold” (Derrida 1989, 10).

Finally, if you want to catch sight of a spliced splace, then you need look no further than a dash around a street corner or a glance in a rear-view mirror (Doel and Clarke 2007). Or, perhaps look no further than my favourite spliced space of all: Robert Coover’s short story, ‘Playing House,’ which appears in the collection, A Child Again.

“Once there was a house, ... which was struck by a hurricane and turned inside out, the outside closed within it, its own dimensions infinite and unknowable at what was once the core, more like the edge. Those within moved out, which of course was further in, and there they built a new house looking out in all directions upon the inverted old. Over time, they enlarged the house and as they added rooms, the old house gradually backed away and faded out of sight.” (Coover 2005, 65)

... which reminds me of a beautiful lithograph by Ian Hamilton Finlay’s (1987, with Gary Hincks) entitled “Both the Garden Style ...” Cinematic geographers of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your guillotine splicers, swords of justice, and great portrait machines. Cast of the die. Fall of the blade. “‘Let us para-be,’ that is our war cry. And better yet: ‘We are nothing, let us para-be the Whole’” (Badiou 2009a, 124). Let us be terrible in deed.

REFERENCES


