

# Videoloop: A New Edition Form

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## Abstract

The development of a montage aesthetic of audiovisual language, as described by Sergei M. Eisenstein in *Film Form* (1949/1986), seems to have come to a standstill after the discovery of the formal properties of image and sound in the late 1920s with the “Manifesto of orchestral counterpoint” (1928/2014). What happened from the 1930s onwards were stylistic exercises drawing from different social and cultural trends like Italian Neo-Realism, English Free Cinema, American Independent Cinema, and Danish Dogme 95 (all forms of realism). Filmmakers based new formal approaches such as handheld and/or direct sound, the use of natural or amateur actors, daylight photography, and sequence shots, on ideological stances – rather than truly formal cinematographic ideas.

It is important to understand whether recent YouTube videos with a new and authentic form, like *Hyperactive* (Gjertsen, 2006) or *Bond TV* (Hideyuki/meganefc, 2005/2007) are a new montage form. Alternatively, they may be a contemporary review of an old concept like rhythmic montage. Perhaps, thanks to the 21st century’s audiovisual technologies, an old dream comes true with sound works that realise some of the ideas of these Russian filmmakers.

**Key words:** videoloop, montage, Eisenstein, Youtube, rhythmic, metric, music, filmmaking, video

## Hypothesis

The varieties of Russian and American montage described by Eisenstein (1949/1986) pointed to the narrative possibilities of cinema before the emergence of movies with sound. With the birth of sound cinema, Russian filmmakers writing the “Manifesto of orchestral counterpoint” (1949/1986) tried to give sound an important place among the elements of audiovisual language, rather than dismissing sound as merely a complement to the image. The addition of silent film concepts such as metric and rhythmic montage to concepts derived from the emergence of sound cinema gave birth to a new kind of montage closer to the field of music than literature. We can contrast the practice of Russian filmmakers with Edwin S. Porter or D. W. Griffith and their North American montage methods conceived at the beginning of the 20th Century. These documents provide background for the “videoloop” concept presented in this paper. Influenced by Russian approaches to rhythmic and metric montage, this concept is also closer to the field of music. The videoloop creates an illusion of meaning through reiteration in montage.

## Introduction

Certainly, the use of reiterations to create the illusion of rhythm, or the exploration of noise and voices to find tone did not start in the 1980s, let alone with the recent multimodal capabilities of the Internet. During the first three decades of the 20th Century, filmmakers who discovered the wonders of Georges Méliès’ screen works took this great discovery of the cut (edit) and explored its possibilities. They did this from narrative perspectives, as well as in terms of aesthetics, or even just for enjoyment. After trying to imitate Méliès and the Lumière brothers, American filmmakers led by Edwin S. Porter decided to give editing a distinctly narrative use. The Russians instead classified montage methods according to durations and musical concepts. Paths followed by mainstream cinema were more literary than the experimental work of Russian filmmakers taking inspiration from music. With the advent of YouTube and audiovisual democratization, experimentation and the search for musicality became available to more people.

## A Language in the Making: Film History and the Creation of Audiovisual Language

After Muybridge’s motion studies, Edison’s ingenious entrepreneurship, and the Lumière brothers’ assertiveness, it was Georges Méliès who set the course and destination for the discovery that shaped an emergent cinematographic language in the late 19th Century: the cut. Several accounts exist, some expressed in a historical way, others with a taste of myth. They all tell a story of Méliès accidental discovery of the interruption and resumption of an action while he was filming people and movement with his “theatrescope.” From that moment on, Méliès was inspired to distort space and time in his films. Starting from a simple cut he invented trick techniques later imitated by 20th Century filmmakers, thus redefining the boundaries to nascent montage methods. Méliès would not stop creating innovative short films. An example of this pioneering creativity was *Un Homme de Têtes* (1898), a short film that features Méliès taking his head off, and then multiplying the action four-fold.

Méliès wanted to explore the creation of the impossible, the illusory, through film editing. He was a devastating creative who, in his way and time, tested the limits of form. He wanted to learn and master a screen craft that enabled the alteration of space and time, showing a window to an imaginary world. Other producers, like Edwin S. Porter, would capitalise on Méliès' talent, using editing in ways that would strike and impress the screening room audiences.

## **Movies and Literature: A Forced or Convenient Relationship?**

At the dawn of the 20th Century, Edwin S. Porter started his own exploration of cinematographic form using editing techniques that sometimes imitated Méliès. With his first attempts, he sought novelty and surprise in very short narratives such as *What happened on Twenty Third Street, New York City* (1901). A film with a documentary sensibility that preceded "candid cameras." In 1900, Porter produced *Uncle Josh's Nightmare*, a short film that closely resembles Méliès' *Un Homme de Têtes*. It is through the editing, the interrupting and resuming of one continuous action shot with a still camera that Porter makes his characters appear and disappear against an unchangeable setting.

In 1903, Porter made two short films that would forever shape the destiny of North American cinema. They taught subsequent filmmakers like D. W. Griffith that the ultimate aim of cinema was to tell a story and make money through audiences. In *Life of an American Fireman* and *The Great Train Robbery*, Porter uses editing to make a story progress from beginning to end in a linear fashion, where the moment shown preceded the next in time and space until the story was over.

## **Montage, the Essence of Audiovisual Storytelling: A Classification**

In *Life of an American Fireman*, Porter tells the story of how a group of firemen put out a fire. Early in the film, he created one of the most memorable images of the birth of cinema story. The image of a woman and child in danger inside a bubble appears beside a sleeping fireman, suggesting that the character has a vision or some insightful dream. In *The Great Train Robbery*, Porter adopts a similar linear approach. The story moves from beginning to end with bandits robbing a train station, then a moving train. Finally, they are killed. Eisenstein, in *Film Form* (1949), theorises the narrative styles used in North America and Russia during those early days. He classified them according to narrative resources or communicational intent. Many Film Schools describe the American montage methods in terms of four techniques within a broader "narrative" group and the Russian montage methods of "film form," determined by criteria based on duration. The four American editing techniques, easily recognizable in a film are: Linear Montage, when actions occur one after the other until the end; Parallel Montage, when two narrative threads, occurring simultaneously in time, alternate on the screen; Inverted Montage (flashback, flash-forward), which does not adhere to the linearity of time and suggests a dream, memory or longing; and Alternate Montage, when two narrative lines alternate (in turn, each form a parallel montage).

When Eisenstein compares D. W. Griffith to Charles Dickens in *Film Form*, he wants to highlight the influence of the Victorian English novel on early 20th Century cinema. Certainly, if you watch *The Great Train Robbery* and then compare it to, for example, *In Cold Blood* (1965), by Truman Capote, you will immediately recognize

parallel montage. The classification Eisenstein suggests in his montage theory follows a different logic, resting on emotional grounds. It does not refer to the narrative structure, or how one storyline interacts with another, but to the duration of the shot.

Eisenstein's classifications included: a Metric Montage, that depends absolutely on the duration of fragments and correspondence to a musical time signature; a Rhythmic Montage, where the inner contents of each shot influences the intended rhythm, even if this means that the real length of each fragment is no longer accurate; a Tonal Montage, where the duration of fragments is determined by the tone of the scene, or the set of shots that are being cut (this imposes a higher emotional meaning than singular shots); an Overtonal or Harmonic Montage, referring to the tone of the whole work and the collisions that every scene or set of fragments poses, understood as a search for harmony; and an Intellectual Montage, when at first sight it seems a scene is cut according to one of the other methods but, because of the film's diegetic context, the viewer senses an inner process within the character who is seen on screen. This last example is similar to the concept of "subtext" in drama, when characters talk about something irrelevant, but the audience understands the real intention behind their words.

It is clear that understanding and recognizing the montage methods of North American cinema is easier than those of Russian filmmaking. The former remind ways of reading novels and short stories, as is the case of parallel montage. Russian montage methods deal with the duration of shots, with the sensation of rhythm and, from Eisenstein's description, a greater closeness to musical concepts like tone and duration. There are many recognizable examples of North American montage, from *Life of an American Fireman* onwards until the present day. A more reflexive and thorough review is required to identify recognisable and intelligible examples of Russian montage. In the video, *The Hardest Button to Button* (2003) by the White Stripes (Stiffkittens, 2008) it is very clear that the editing method is designed to replicate the background music. Directed by Michael Gondry, the video is a very precise example of Eisenstein's metric montage, but the connection with rhythmic montage is less clear.

In this White Stripes video, many of the shots are as long as each beat of the bass drum, which in turn coincides with each pulse of the bass. If Eisenstein's definition refers to the "absolute extent of the shots," this music video may be understood as a very specific example of the "metric montage" editing technique.

With rhythmic montage, the sensation of rhythm is more important than the absolute length of the shots. In the introduction of a documentary *Surplus*, by Erik Gandini (Kuparanto, 2006), the background music guides the edits without necessarily determining the length of shots. At 00:02:15:00, viewers see the image of an Italian policeman firing a gas gun, and the sound of the shot accompanies the action. Then, four seconds later, the shot bangs again outside of the viewers' field of vision and then again and again every two-seconds. From 00:02:35:00 onwards, the background music starts to fade until only the noise of a mass protest is left, but the sound of the gas gun shooting is sustained every two seconds. From then on, sometimes the cut matches with the bang and sometimes it does not.

This excerpt provides a good example of rhythmic montage, where there is a clear sensation of rhythm, even though the length of fragments is not necessarily recurrently "metric." It is worthwhile pointing out a difference between the last two examples. In

Gondry's video, the surrounding noise is not used to create a sensation of rhythm, whereas *Surplus*' introduction does. The latter also uses the sound of a gunshot as the pulse of the rhythm.

While both can be considered examples of the two first montage methods described by Eisenstein, a question arises at this point. Can this editing form be used as a method to make films, musical videos, documentaries (e.g. Erik Gandini's work), or perhaps some other type of video-musical creation?

### **Videoloop: New, or Derived From Previous Narrative Concepts?**

This paper introduces the term "videoloop," defining it as the product of manipulating loops or cycles in video montage. This results in an evident musical disposition, both audibly and through the montage of moving images. Ever since Oskar Fischinger's experiments or Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940), film art has wanted to draw in music and its concepts. These engagements may involve recreating sounds with images or trying to imitate sound through montage and animation. Montage methods are valid conceptual tools that can be used to carry out such an approach, whether or not they are metric, rhythmic, tonal, or overtone. However, cinematographic works that truly capitalize on the musical dimension through montage are hard to find. In a movie that is closer to American editing forms, music is an emotional complement to the tone of a scene tone. A melody that accompanies images can act as a thematic motif through the entire movie. It reminds us of the methods of opera and the work of zarzuela centuries ago. Although certainly, 1930s Busby Berkeley film musicals were much closer to orchestrated staging. Thus, explorations of the musical dimensions of montage, such as Oskar Fischinger's work, have remained relatively experimental and distant from the mainstream. "Fischinger's experiments with film phonography (the manipulation of the optical portion of sound film to synthesize sounds) mirrored contemporaneous refinements in recording and synthesis technology of electron beam tubes for film and television" (Brown, 2012, p.83).

However, the search for montage of a musical dimension has not been the sole responsibility of either mainstream or experimental film. In music, German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen has made valuable and courageous experiments with electroacoustic, aleatory, and taped forms of music. Through his admirable experiments and creations, Stockhausen explores the limits of concepts of tone, rhythm, duration, harmony, and melody. Sometimes it seems that he is completely destroying such concepts, but in the end, his works stand as a search for new tones, rhythms, and harmonies. The aleatory character of his creations drives him away from rhythm. In this respect, Stockhausen carries out a pure and absolute musical search.

In the 1970s and 80s, with the incipient use of personal computers for multimedia creation, musicians and audiovisual creators integrated ICT into their working spaces, thus producing musical and audiovisual. In their music video *Halber Mensch* (1985/ SaintEuchid, 2006), the German group Einstürzende Neubauten tries to create music from noise, integrating it to a musical creation mixing bass, electric guitar, drums, and voice.

What is interesting about this piece is the use of noise captured through video to feed the final video-musical creation. Certainly, the best moments of the performance are

successfully compiled from editing, apparently without any clear metric or rhythmic criterion. It is a first attempt to integrate video and noise in montage, with musical intention.

Eighties pop music was influenced by electronic music and made loops or curls with surrounding noise and voices, trying to create the musicality from sound sequencing. The song *Rock me Amadeus: Salieri Mix* (1985), by Falco, uses conversational voice fragments to support and emphasize certain moments of the rhythmic pulse, which are reiterated to intensify the rhythmic sensation. These voices are not singing in tune. Rather, they repeat odd words to achieve a clear musicality. Similar to *Rock me Amadeus*, Paul Hardcastle's *19* (1985) uses voice repetition, this time from a newscast about the Vietnam War. These voices are repeated at fixed intervals to support percussion. We can also think of the video and song *Money* (1973), by Pink Floyd, mixing in a loop of coins and cash registers with Roger Waters' bass guitar.

But the question is: which video from the examples above makes the most out of the multiplexed material captured by the camera? Which video draws out both image and sound, without subordinating one to the other in any way?

It was not the aesthetic intentions of the creators of the above examples to meet the challenge of achieving musicality from a montage exercise. They did not intend to reiterate moments to create rhythm, or choose sounds from the video footage so that they acquire a meaning through reiteration. In practice, music is a separate process from the editing, and experimentation consists of adding and looping noise and voices in the search for tone and rhythm. The challenge of the videoloop is to create a musical piece, just with video and the noise captured by a video camera. The practice starts with an audiovisual process of creation and ends with a video-musical product.

Of course, making music is far from being an accidental activity. Making music has always been a vocation, a path that demands dedication, study, update, and reflection. On the other hand, since the appearance of the Sony Portapak in the late 60s, making video was synonymous with rebellion against television, technologic curiosity, and the spontaneous use of resources that were the exclusive property of TV channels, private enterprises, and governments. From the early works of Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell, to the convergence between film and high definition video today, video has been a kind of technological platform. Sometimes it is closer to television's modes of production and products, and sometimes closer to film's modes and products, eventually reaching its own modes and products through video art and the music video clip. The music industry in the late 1970s and early 80s found a platform in video technology that enabled the creation of a whole social movement, commercially promoting musicians and their discographies in a global market. However, because of the dynamics of dominant culture and its historical, technical, and economic advantages, the rock and roll and English-speaking pop industry benefited most from the social and cultural phenomenon of music video. In purely formal terms, a music video is the union of cinematographic narrative forms, sometimes strictly diegetic, sometimes experimental, with a song that has already established a formal mastery of music.

Thanks to video experiments available on YouTube by filmmakers like Hideyuki Tanaka and Lasse Gjertsen, we can see video creations that play with sounds and repetition to suggest a musical structure.

## Lasse Gjertsen & Hideyuki Tanaka

In *Hyperactive* (2006) and *Amateur* (2006), Lasse Gjertsen uses sounds from his mouth or musical instruments in order to create music with video material through precise editing. That is: a combination of material recorded with a video camcorder, and sound produces an audible illusion.

I have known about the videos of Hideyuki Tanaka since 2005. I was immediately excited by them and started making my first works for Nokia Colombia, for a party called Nokiatics, which had a Moby concert as the main event. The event's advertising agency (Grey and Partners, or G2) had hired another director, Fernando López, and myself to make video pieces for the concert and other events. I immediately decided to make a video like Hideyuki Tanaka's. Some weeks before, Fernando López had shown me a [Onedotzero](#) DVD of many works by video artists that displayed a real narrative and aesthetic avant-garde in montage. Hideyuki Tanaka was among them with a video called *Bond TV* (meganefc, 2007). We based the proposal for Nokia on what Tanaka had done, and the agency baptized the result *Stomp*. This was possibly because of the video's closeness to a North American stage show *Stomp Out Loud* (1997/[Tomáš Heřmanský](#), 2011), which in those days was available through cable TV. The show involved people on a stage, with sticks, buckets, trashcans and lids creating "virtuoso" music that emphasised accuracy. The big difference between the *Stomp Out Loud* musical creation and Hideyuki Tanaka was similar to the difference between theatre and cinema: montage. In the former, we can enjoy a live presentation, in the latter a film creation manipulating space and time through the edit. What makes them similar is that they are musical creations without conventional instruments, and they both explore the sounds of everyday life, while ignoring any known tonal scale.

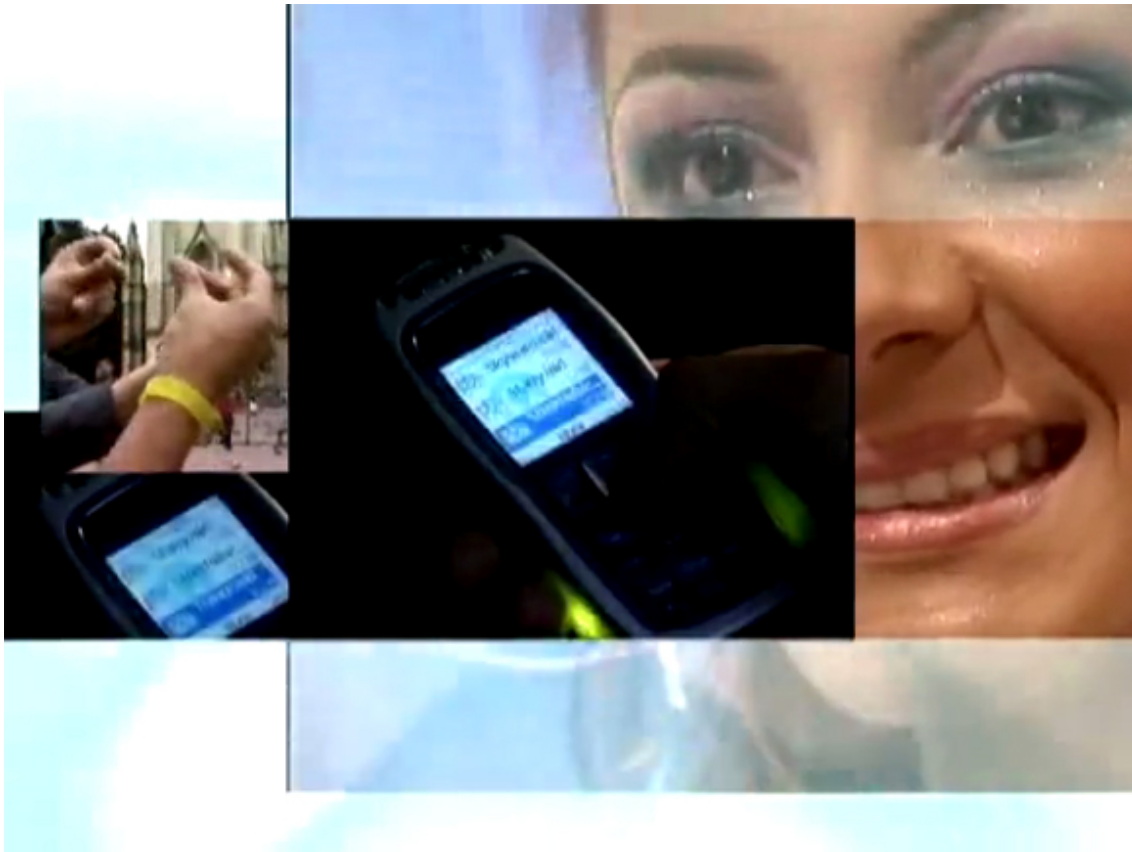


Figure 1. *Stomp* (2005), Felipe Cardona.

## Felipe Cardona

After completing the assignment for Nokia and the agency, I made other videos drawing from some of the resources I had used in *Stomp*. This technique had a lot of potential to explore different music concepts. Initially, I focused on the concept of rhythm, but I also had to look for opportunities around tone, timbre, melody, and harmony. The videos that followed *Stomp* were:

*éNfasis (Emphasis)* (2007) was a video-music creation. I shot it with a mobile phone, using only the noise and loops of the material recorded in video. It was a big challenge, but being certain about concepts such as rhythm and duration and searching for minimal tones (treble, middle, and bass sounds) was enough for editing. In *El Artista (The Artist)* (2007), the same challenge of *Énfasis* was assumed, but from a much more simple perspective, using the sounds that an actor produced in front of the camera. In *CU4TRO* (2007), music and noise blend into one unique creation. I used electronic loops from Drum 'n' Bass and noises from voices and ambient sound, making loops with a mix of these materials.





Figure 2. *éNfasis* (2007), Felipe Cardona.

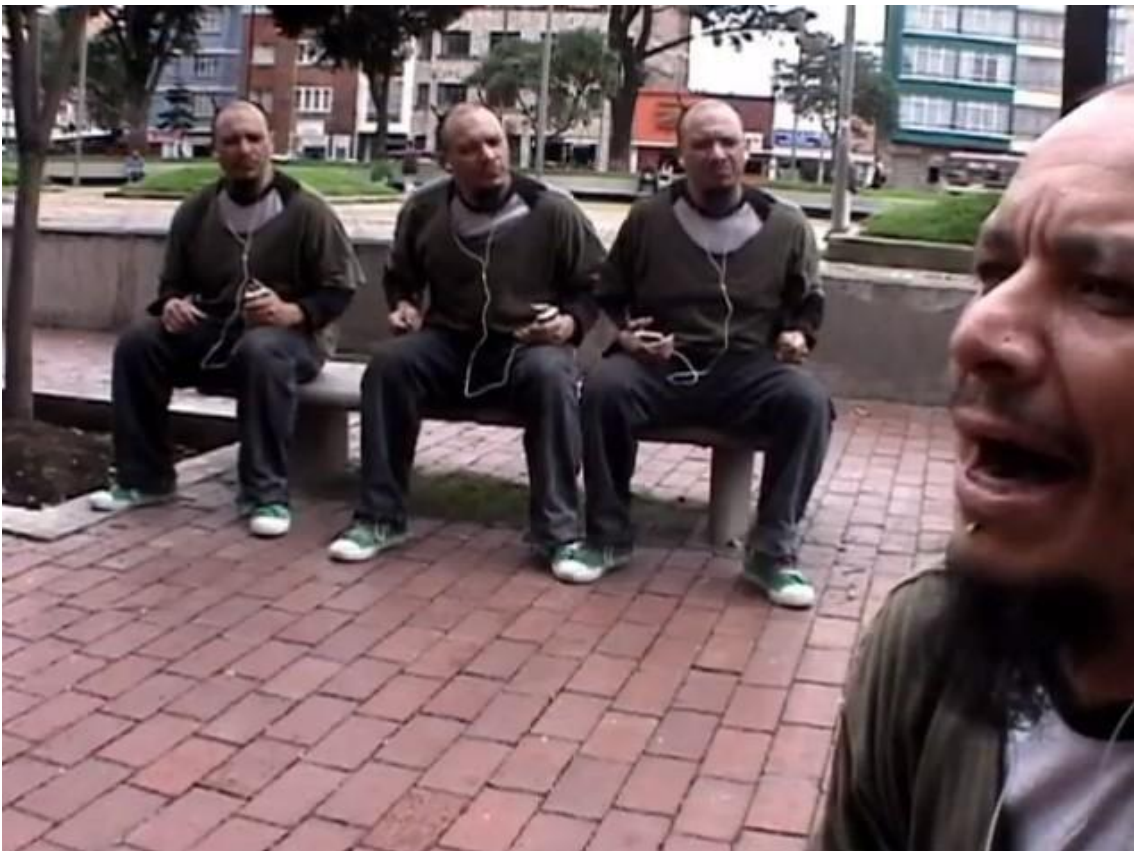


Figure 3. *El Artista* (2007), Felipe Cardona.



Figure 4. CU4TRO (2007), Felipe Cardona.

It is true that mentioning the origin of certain resources in the making of these videos is not enough to clearly understand the whole technique involved in their creation. The convergence of workflows, in this case video editing and music composition, deserves a more detailed description, so that anyone interested in making a videoloop can have a more accurate starting point.

## Conclusions

When Eisenstein described the rhythmic and metric montage methods, he speaks about durations and rhythm. The approach behind the classification of such methods came from music grounds, unlike North American film, whose montage methods came from literature. Eisenstein, Alexandrov, and Pudovkin pleaded for an innovative use of sound from their “Manifesto of orchestral counterpoint” at the same time as movies with sound appeared. They wanted future filmmakers to reflect on montage from that moment and explore the limits of the technique, extended through sound. With the advent of the legendary Sony Portapak, video and audio have come together in a single signal. Since then, users have believed the synchronisation of picture and sound is natural. Nothing could be more wrong! Nothing could be quite as illusory and harmful, given the original intentions of the “Manifesto of orchestral counterpoint.”

Today, when YouTube allows any user to upload and exhibit his or her videos to the world, there is the possibility that uninitiated users and producers of video material can dare to take montage to its limits. This opportunity has spawned video creations such as Lasse Gjertsen’s, challenging the domination of traditional North American montage

techniques and testing the limits that the mainstream global industry has placed on innovation.

While watching these new videoloops and their appetite for testing montage possibilities, the montage concepts of the 1920s Russian filmmakers come back to life. Creations that challenge the rules of fiction montage and music video standards bring theories into fruition. With simple reiterations that grow complicated at their creator's whim, illusions of meaning are created such as musical sensations with tones coming from noises, voices, and in general any surrounding sound. Noise becomes music as film montage serves composition. New technology and workflow democratisation allows end users, now prosumers, to teach television channels, film studios, and even mainstream record labels, the future course of music, film, and television.

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