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Understanding Multiple Exposure Photographs
Analysing Multiple Exposure Photography through Filmic Montage

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Abstract

Multiple exposure photographs seem to be a forgotten aspect of photography theory, despite being a well-known technique. Although photography and film share common roots, the concept of filmic montage provides a useful starting point for understanding multiple exposure photographs, because the operation of montage editing is similar to the operation of multiple exposure photographs. This paper aims to examine whether the concept of filmic montage and multiple exposure photographs can be compared specifically through the works of American photographers, Harry Callahan, Jerry Uelsmann and Man Ray, and Soviet cinematographer, Dziga Vertov. With filmic montage, the third meaning created in the spectator's mind is a multiple exposure, whereas multiple exposure photographs achieve this effect through their layered structure, which evokes pensiveness in the viewer. The focus of the paper will be on perception and understanding of multiple exposure photographs, and whether they can be brought closer to the viewer in terms of comprehension. To understand the operation of multiple exposure, the theories of Roland Barthes and Jacques Rancière are also utilized.

Key words: multiple exposures, filmic montage, studium-punctum, third meaning, pensive image

Introduction

Multiple exposure is a common photographic technique but is underexplored in theoretical discussions. Inspired by the artistic nature of film montage and my experiments with double- and multiple-exposure photography, I noticed similarities in how they engage perception and mental processes. While film theory has extensively analyzed montage, the connection between filmic montage and photographic techniques like multiple exposures remains underexamined. This paper aims to explore these parallels, drawing on the ideas of Roland Barthes, David Campany, Jacques Rancière, and the principles of Soviet montage theory.

David Campany (2008, 32) suggests that multiple exposures can be considered a form of photographic montage, paralleling filmic montage. Both share a layered structure that sets them apart from traditional photographs, shaping how they are perceived. This structural complexity aligns multiple exposure photography more closely with filmic montage, emphasizing their shared impact on perception and mental engagement.”

Film and photography have long been intertwined, both born from the desire to capture reality and, at some point, shaped by similar technologies: film evolved from photography. This relationship can be highlighted by a well-known quote from Jean-Luc Godard: “Photography

is truth. The cinema is truth twenty-four times per second” (Slim 2010). Furthermore, the best and earliest examples of the relation to photography are the works of Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, whose contributions will be discussed later in this paper.

Although photography traditionally freezes a single moment and film unfolds over time, these two areas can still be connected because they share some similarities. Drawing a connection between these two areas and identifying their similarities—both at the beginnings of the history of film and in terms of their attributes—helps establish the link between filmic montage and multiple exposure photographs. Moreover, filmic montage may offer an effective framework for understanding multiple exposure photographs.

When I refer to layering, I mean the nature of how the images are put together: each layer represents one photograph. Therefore, layering is entirely different from the traditional idea associated with it, such as the distinction between foreground and background. The photographs included in this paper will not be analysed in detail, as their significance lies in illustrating the broad range of interpretive possibilities they offer. A detailed analysis of each image would fall within the scope of a more extensive study. Furthermore, I will not display the individual images that make up the multiple exposures, as separating the layers is both impossible and unnecessary.

One of the most significant aspects of multiple exposure photographs is that the images exposed on top of one another collectively create a single photograph: their sum constitutes the whole. The reason for the impossibility to separate the layers is due to technical constraints: regardless of whether the photographs were created using analogue or digital techniques, the images are exposed on top of each other. In analogue techniques, this is more evident: the photographs within a multiple exposure are exposed on the same part of the film, meaning they do not exist as separate entities.

This paper aims to approach the position of multiple exposure photographs from a filmic perspective, even though film and photography nowadays do not seem to be as close to each other as they used to be. I find the operation of these kinds of photographs similar to the concept of the filmic montage. Due to the juxtapositions appearing in both cases and to the fact that they both manipulate perception and memory, their operation might be similar to one another.

The highlighted connection between the multiple exposures and the filmic montage also appears in how they operate. In the case of filmic montage, the third meaning arising from two consecutive shots must be interpreted by the viewer almost instantaneously, as the sequence progresses with time and does not pause for reflection. In contrast, with multiple exposures, the "shots" or layers coexist simultaneously within a single frame, remaining static and available

for contemplation as long as the viewer engages with the image. This allows the spectator to reflect on the photograph, transforming it into what Jacques Rancière calls a ‘pensive image.’ According to Rancière, the ‘pensive image’ is one that “contains an unthought thought, that cannot be attributed to the intention of the person who produces it and which has an effect on the person who views it without linking it to a determinate object” (2009, 107). Such images incorporate the unintentional thoughts of both the photographer and the viewer, yet the meaning derived is predominantly shaped by the spectator. Jerry Uelsmann shared a similar perspective, often choosing not to title his photographs. This decision was motivated by his desire to leave the interpretation of meaning entirely to the viewer, free from the influence of his own explicit thoughts (Roland and Uelsmann 1993, 57). Therefore, due to the operation of filmic montage, the third meaning created in the spectator’s mind is a multiple exposure, while multiple exposure photographs operate in a different way because of their layered structure and the pensiveness they create.

For these reasons and because of the similarities between the filmic montage and the multiple exposure photographs, I examine whether the concept of the filmic montage and the multiple exposure photographs can be compared in terms of perception and understanding and whether they can be brought closer to the viewer in terms of comprehension. In my attempt to understand multiple exposure photographs, I draw upon the works of American photographers: Harry Callahan, Jerry Uelsmann, and Man Ray, and also on Dziga Vertov’s influential film, ‘Man with a Movie Camera’ (1929).



*Figure 1: Jerry Uelsmann
Voyager (2008)*



*Figure2: Harry Callahan
Province (Shepherds) (ca.
1966)*



*Figure 3: Man Ray,
Rayograph, 1922*

The choice of topic was inspired by my interest in both cinema and photography as well as my fascination with the interplay between the two mediums. This led me to explore how multiple exposure photographs can be understood through the lens of filmic montage. This paper seeks to point out the similarities between multiple exposure photography and filmic

montage, primarily drawing on the ideas of Roland Barthes, David Company, and Jacques Rancière and the ones representing the Soviet montage technique. By elucidating these connections, this paper also hopes to offer new insights for both of those who are interested in film and in photography.

Historical background

Film theorist Christian Metz also sought to establish the fundamental connection between film and photography. He argued that, although photography and film share technical similarities, they differ significantly in their relationships to objecthood, time, and framing. Film is an immaterial, virtual projection that unfolds in the present as it is watched, whereas photography is a fixed, tangible object and image that belongs to the past (Company 2008, 11).

Apart from the fact that both photography and film share a photographic base, the link between them can be established through ‘chronophotographers’, particularly Etienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge (Company 2008, 22). Muybridge utilized banks of cameras to capture sequential moments of human and animal locomotion, while Marey employed multiple exposures on single photographic plates to record movement within a single frame (Company 2008, 22).

Muybridge recorded the movements of both animals and nudes of females and males. However, his most renowned work resolved the question of whether, during galloping, there is a moment when all four legs of a horse are in the air simultaneously. To create the photographs, Muybridge set up a racecourse lined with 15-foot-wide sheets, marked with lines at 21-inch intervals. As the horse galloped by, its hooves triggered cotton threads, activating shutters on twelve cameras positioned across from the sheets (Marien 2021).

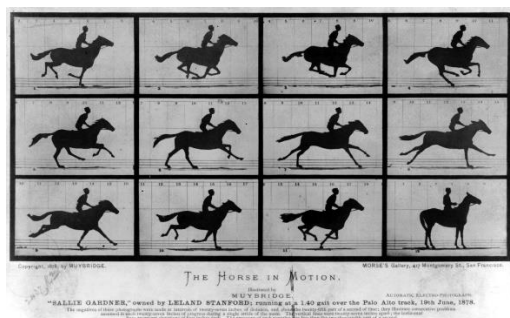


Figure 4: Eadweard Muybridge, *The Horse in Motion*, 1878



Figure 5: Etienne-Jules Marey, *Cheval au gallop* [Galloping Horse], 1886.

Marey was deeply interested in the phases of movement and extensively studied both animal and human locomotion (Marien 2021). He was also inspired by the work of Muybridge. In the early 1880s, Marey invented the gun camera, which allowed him to capture rapid

movements. The fast exposure time was facilitated by advancements in dry-plate technology. Improving his photographic tools, he designed a system in which the light-sensitive material moved with each exposure. A rotating disk with evenly spaced slots was positioned in front of the open camera lens and spun to control the exposure intervals. It was an addition to the camera that allowed the capture of motion on a single photographic plate (Marien 2021).

Both Muybridge and Marey focused on movement and Muybridge even created one way of animating his images, the zoopraxiscope (Campany 2008, 22). Muybridge's device was first demonstrated in 1879. He used the zoopraxiscope with his own photographs of motion, often heavily outlined or painted over, to create a form of motion (Marien 2021). There were other attempts to make the photographic stills move, such as the phenakistoscope and the praxinoscope. These techniques created the illusion of motion, tricking the eye into perceiving continuous movement (Marien 2021). In cinematic terms, Marey's images resembled translucent film frames layered on top of one another, while Muybridge's looked like waiting for animation and motion to come (Campany 2008, 22). Marey even produced a short film demonstrating the mechanics of the human hand in July 1889 (Marien 2021). All of this shows that multiple exposures, the desire to understand and capture movement, and the attempt to create moving images were present from an early moment of photography.



Figure 6: Eadweard Muybridge, Woman Opening Parasol, 1887

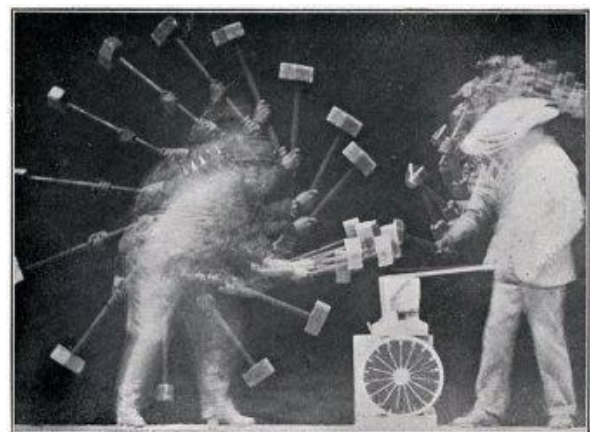


Figure 7: Etienne-Jules Marey, Chronophotograph, 1894.

The French Congress of Photographic Societies gathered in Lyon on 11 June 1895. At that time, photography had been around for approximately 60 years, while cinema was a recent invention (Campany 2008, 7). In 1895, Louis and Auguste Lumière patented the first projection system and movie camera, their Cinématographe. During filming, the Lumière brothers kept the camera stationary, and their films, lasting around 45-55 seconds, were unedited, as determined by the length of their film rolls. The term 'motion pictures' nicely captures the

nature of their films: they were “photographs that moved” (davidcampany, 2023). Although the first film screened publicly was the Lumière brothers’ *La Sortie des usines Lumière* [Workers Leaving a Factory] (1895), David Campany begins the shared history of photography and film with the Lumière brothers’ *Arrivée des congressistes à Neuville-sur-Saône* [The Photographic Congress Arrives in Neuville-sur-Saône]. This film, he argues, represents the first meeting of cinema and photography, especially in cinema’s terms (Campany 2008, 8).

Among the attempts to bring cinema and photography closer to each other was the *Film und Foto* exhibition in 1929, taking place in Stuttgart (Campany 2008, 9). The show drew together approximately one thousand photographic works and movie stills from the Soviet Union, Europe, and the United States. It demonstrated reciprocal uses of techniques that mainstream cinema took over from experimental photography and film. Among these techniques were montages, camera angles, and superimpositions (Marien 2021). In the exhibition, the interplay between photography and cinema was clearly demonstrated (Marien 2021). The show drew together a wide diversity of photographs and films, and some of the exhibitors represented both fields (Campany 2008, 9–10). Some of these works were created by reproducing their still photographs and transforming them into moving equivalents, resulting in multi-layered film essays (Marien 2021). The exhibition also featured works by Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Dziga Vertov, prominent representatives of Soviet montage. Man Ray was one of the key figures who made notable contributions to both photography and film (Campany 2008, 9). He also used photographic techniques in his films: he applied the rayograph in his film, *Le Retour à la Raison* (The Return to Reason)(1923) (Marien 2021).

The year 1929 marked significant milestones in the history of film and photography. It was not only the year when the strong connection between the two mediums broke following the exhibition *Film und Foto* due to the advent of sound in cinema (Campany 2008, 34; 2018, 35), but was also the year when Dziga Vertov’s influential film, ‘Man with a Movie Camera’ was created. Additionally, it was also the year when the standard frame rate for films was established at twenty-four frames per second (Marien 2021). These changes were closely linked to the introduction of sound, which indirectly enabled the emergence of filmmaking as a commercial industry and the rise of large studios. Furthermore, this period witnessed the transition of experimental film and photography into documentary forms (Marien 2021).

Multiple exposure photographs and filmic montage

This section will address in detail the two key concepts of the paper: photographic multiple exposure and filmic montage.

As discussed above, multiple exposure photographs are photographs exposed on top of each other. This can be achieved using both analogue and digital techniques. When created with analogue cameras, multiple exposures are made on the same section of film. The process is similar to that of digital cameras, where the number of exposures can be pre-selected and the camera combines them automatically. Additionally, these effects can be created during post-production, either in the darkroom using traditional techniques or through digital software.

How the shots are put together to create a film is referred to as editing (Hayward 2023, 154). According to Susan Hayward, there are four types of editing: continuity editing, cross cutting or parallel editing, deep focus, and montage (Hayward 2023, 154). The word ‘montage’ is created by the French word meaning “to edit”, which means how the pieces of footage are assembled to form a whole. In filmic terms, it usually refers to the fast editing style of the Soviet filmmakers from the 1920s (Nelmes 2012, 448). With the use of continuity editing, the transition between shots is invisible, ensuring that the events follow one another in chronological order; it “ensures narrative continuity” (Hayward 2023, 154). Parallel editing, in contrast, is used to depict two actions that occur at different times, but are related to each other (Hayward 2023, 155–156), while cross-cutting is used to connect two concurrent actions. These actions run independently within the narrative, and the aim of this editing style is to build suspense (Hayward 2023, 155). Deep focus is employed to reduce the manipulation of the spectator, because, with the use of this editing style, they are less tied to the narrative, allowing a freer interpretation of the sequence of shots (Hayward 2023, 156). The fourth type of editing, montage, is closely linked to Soviet cinema (Hayward 2023, 383).

The montage style became used in Soviet cinema between 1924 and 1930; the leading figures of this style were Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Dziga Vertov (Bordwell 1972, 9). It served as a tool to control rhythm, create rhetorical points and metaphors, and construct narrative by directing the viewer’s focus from one narrative element to another or creating an artificial sense of time and space (Bordwell 1972, 9). The Soviet montage is often associated with Sergei Eisenstein, although it was Lev Kuleshov, who first devised the idea (Hayward 2023, 156). In his films, Eisenstein built upon Kuleshov’s theory, which emphasized that all visual elements in film must embody conflict or collision (Hayward 2023, 156).

The Kuleshov effect illustrates that cinematic meaning emerges from the arrangement of shots in a sequence, rather than from an individual shot on its own. Therefore, visual meaning and content are created by the arrangement and combination of shots. The specific content of each shot is less crucial than how two shots with different content are linked and the way their transition is structured (Prince and Hensley 1992, 60). Changing the context of a shot by putting it in a different order changes the meaning of both the sequence and the shot. The meaning of a filmic shot is acquired by the shots coming before and after it (Hayward 2023, 386). For the spectator, the effect of the juxtaposition is that the expression on the actor's face (Ivan Mozzhukhin) in Kuleshov's experiment changes as a result of the shifting sequence of shots (Hayward 2023, 386). It was stated in the case of the experiment conducted by Kuleshov that editing has more power over acting (Prince and Hensley 1992, 61). This is also true to multiple exposure photographs: the arrangement of the layers, the different photographs exposed on top of each other, has more power than the individual photographs themselves would have, because of the effect they have on the spectator. Just as in the case of filmic montage, where rearranging the same shots in different order creates a completely new "montage context" (Prince and Hensley 1992, 61), when creating multiple exposure photographs, different meanings can be conveyed simply by combining the layers in different ways. A compelling example of this can be seen in the photographs of Jerry Uelsmann. Had he placed the different layers in alternate positions, the meaning and overall impact of the photographs would have been entirely different.

Eisenstein presented a more radical view on montage than Kuleshov (Hayward 2023, 387). In his perspective, montage is not based on mere juxtapositions, but rather on collision and conflict. This conflict arises both between the shots and within the individual shots themselves (Hayward 2023, 386). When one looks at a multiple exposure photograph, both collision and conflict are present. Eisenstein employed the montage technique with the intention of provoking thought in the spectator (Hayward 2023, 389). Eisenstein's montage theory is also very similar to what happens in the case of multiple exposure photographs, but an important difference is that superimpositions in photographs are present not only in the mind and during perception, but also in the photographs themselves. While in filmic montage, they are only present on the level of perception. Cinematic meaning is created only when the elements, the "cells" or "building blocks", are joined together, as these independent components "receive an animating principle" (Andrew 1976, 51-52). Since multiple exposure photographs lack a moving nature, the equivalent of the previously mentioned "cells" or building blocks" are the layers they contain. Eisenstein demonstrated this idea using the example of a bird, a child, and

a mouth. When the shots of the bird and the mouth are juxtaposed, they lead to the meaning of “to sing”, in contrast to the juxtaposition of the child and the mouth, which produces the meaning of “to scream” (Andrew 1976, 51).

Placing more layers of photographs on top of each other leads to a similar result. Meaning is produced by our minds based on the specific interactions between shots, which are connected through their contrast or similarity (Andrew 1976, 52). By placing shots side by side, their interaction creates a sense of collision, producing meaning from the contrast (Hayward 2023, 156). In the case of his montage works, it is important that the fast editing of the set of images, associated with Eisenstein, causes a collision. This collision creates a third meaning in the mind of the spectator, arising from the interaction of the two sets of images (Hayward 2023, 157). Therefore, the meaning of the sets of images is created by the spectator, requiring a creative response from them (Hayward 2023, 157). The importance of fast editing in montage appears when the collision occurs (Hayward 2023, 156). Additionally, Eisenstein’s editing style places the image over both characterization and narrative (Hayward 2023, 156).

The fact that a “third set of images” is constructed in the mind of a spectator (Hayward 2023, 157) might be also true for multiple exposure photographs due to their layered structure. Multiple exposure photographs contain several images, which are presented to the spectator more rapidly than in Eisenstein’s montages. While the shots of Eisenstein are moving, leaving little time for the spectator to think about them, the photographs are still allowing the viewer to examine them for a much longer period. Due to the continuous nature of the filmic montage, whether there will be a third meaning, a mental image of two occurring shots, is completely dependent on the spectator’s previous knowledge and how he or she perceives the information. Contrasted, in the case of the multiple exposures, this third meaning, this mental image is already there as the spectator looks at the photograph, since the “shots”, the layers are superimposed on one another due to the technical characteristics of the process.

The world and the meaning of different objects are created by our minds, while the placing and the sequence of the shots play an important role in the process of perceiving (Andrew 1976, 192). When Andrew discusses the ideas of Jean Mitry, he states that “[t]he editing process of the filmic analogue of this mental operation” (1976, 192). To be able to interpret two contrasting shots in the right way and to create a narrative, the spectator needs pre-existing knowledge (Andrew 1976, 197) which also applies to the interpretation of multiple exposure photographs, because, as referred to above, for example, in the case of Jerry Uelsmann’s photographs, the viewer is left without a title, which means that they can only rely on the previous knowledge and experiences they have (Roland and Uelsmann 2009, 57).

Montage techniques can also be applied not only in film, but also in painting, drama, sculpture, literature, and music (Bordwell 1972, 10). The logic behind the filmic montage techniques also seems to appear in photography, particularly through photographic montage, juxtapositions, photo series, and, importantly, in multiple exposure photographs. With the help of these photographs, the spectator can build narrative, recognise and connect metaphors.

Harry Callahan, Jerry Uelsmann, and Man Ray

Harry Callahan (1912-1999) was a self-thought photographer, who decided to take photography seriously under the influence of Ansel Adams. He was invited by László Moholy-Nagy to teach Chicago Institute of Design, and after leaving the institute, he joined the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, where he taught until his retirement (Loke 1999, 31). Until he was unable to do so, Callahan took photographs every day and developed films each night (Loke 1999, 30), which shows his deep dedication to the medium and the capturing of life around him. The main subjects of his photographs were the streets, his wife and his daughter. He was committed to capturing the everyday beauty around him, and he had a strong opinion on what art should represent. In one interview, he remarked, “I think that art has to tell you more than just making a beautiful photograph,” adding, “Art has to say something about the human life.” (Loke 1999, 31). This philosophy is reflected in his work, which often highlighted the beauty of ordinary life, even in vast and inhospitable urban environments (Marien 2021). His photographs were deeply influenced by his feelings and the world surrounding him (Loke 1999, 31). Callahan’s atmospheric street photographs are characterized by stark black-and-white contrasts, with minimal inclusion of middle grey tones (Marien 2021), making his style highly recognizable.



Figure 8: Harry Callahan Detroit (1943)



Figure 9: Harry Callahan Chicago (1948)

Jerry Uelsmann (1934-2022) entered the world of photography relatively early on. As a high school student, he began taking photographs with his brother and father, and he also

photographed for his school's newspaper (Roland and Uelsmann 1993, 56–57). Then he studied photography at Rochester Institute of Technology and later on at Indiana University (Roland and Uelsmann 1993, 56). At the Rochester Institute of Technology, he was a student of Minor White, whose influence can be seen in Uelsmann's photographs, especially through the printing techniques Uelsmann used (Marien, 2021).

Through his precise and meticulous combination-printing methods, Uelsmann created imaginative worlds, parallel realities, where nature operates in unusual ways on Earth (Marien 2021). He placed real objects and human forms in unreal, surreal, and dreamlike contexts. His work explores the unconscious mind by creating dreamlike imaginaries. Uelsmann's photographs challenge our sense of reality, and the plausibility of the images (Roland and Uelsmann 1933, 56). In 2012, in one of his interviews, he said that he liked the idea of being able to create a reality that is different from what is given to the eye, from the real world, but at the same time, this is the way he could connect with the world (Uelsmann, 2012).

Creating his haunting images, he combined different images from multiple negatives. Often, he chose not to title his photographs, leaving their interpretation entirely to the viewer. In addition to his artistic contributions, Uelsmann served as a university professor for nearly thirty years (Roland and Uelsmann 1993, 56).



Figure 10: Jerry Uelsmann, Forgotten Promise, 2012



Figure 11: Jerry Uelsmann, The Mind's Eye, 1969

Man Ray (Emmanuel Radnitzky, 1890-1976) began experimenting with camera-less photography in 1922, describing the process as “working directly with light itself” (MoMa). He is best known for these camera-less photographs, which he called rayographs—a term that combines the word “photograph” with his own name (MoMa). He worked in the age of

Surrealism, which was profoundly influenced by Sigmund Freud's theories, particularly those exploring unconscious desires, including the free association of words and ideas, and dream analysis. By fostering deeper contact with the inner world of imagination, Surrealists supported the transformation of human experience and perception (Marien 2021).

Although the process of creating photograms has been present since the 1830s, and also László Moholy-Nagy had similar works, Man Ray wanted to highlight the abstraction of images by placing the objects in irrational combinations. He produced negative images by placing all kinds of materials, objects, or even parts of his or his model's body onto photosensitized paper, and then exposing them to light (MoMa). He also released a collection of these rayographs in a portfolio titled *Champs délicieux* in December 1922, and the following year he expanded the rayograph technique to moving images by creating his film *Le Retour à la raison* (Return to Reason) (MoMa). Man Ray is a key figure in both film and photography, as his contributions to these media were significant, and he also participated in the landmark *Film und Foto* exhibition in 1929 (Campany 2008, 9).

Although the styles and aesthetics of these three photographers are fundamentally different, I have chosen their works for this paper because their use of multiple exposures effectively highlights the conflicts that appear when viewing such images. Additionally, all three photographers engage with and challenge human perception through their art. The diversity in their photographs further supports the argument that the layered structure inherent in multiple exposures distinguishes them from traditional photographs.



Figure 12: Man Ray, Rayograph, 1924



Figure 13: Man Ray, Rayograph, 1920s

'Man with a Movie Camera'

Dziga Vertov (1896-1954), who was a cinematographer in the Soviet Union, employed rapidly montaged scenes, unusual camera angles, and superimpositions in his films (Marien 2021), and he was particularly interested in the link between communication and transport (Sergio 2009, 2). This interest is evident in one of his most renowned works, that is 'Man with a Movie Camera.' In this film, the spectator follows a cameraman as he captures modern life in the city (Marien 2021). His work in this film was influenced by the previously mentioned ideas of Lev Kuleshov (Hayward 2023, 386). In 'Man with a Movie Camera', Vertov ensured that the audience became aware of the editor, the cameraman and the entire process of filmmaking (Nelmes 2012, 469). In terms of comprehension, this film is a challenge for the audience, because of its complex chains on signification, created by the editing process (Nelmes 2012, 469, 471). Due to its aesthetic impact and motion effects, it is a cinematic landmark (Schrader 2015, 55).

Although Vertov emphasized making the audience aware of the deliberately constructed nature of his films, he also believed that much of cinema's power lies in its ability to mechanically capture events that occur in front of the camera (Nelmes 2012, 451). Thus, viewing the camera as a mechanical device, he was interested in capturing the 'truth' (Nelmes 2012, 468).



Figure 14: Still from Dziga Vertov, Man with a Movie Camera



Figure 15: Still from Dziga Vertov, Man with a Movie Camera

Man with a Movie Camera is not only interesting because of the montage technique and juxtapositions it used, but also because of the historical turning point that happened in the same year it was made: sound was introduced into the filmic world in 1929. The first Soviet sound films were released in 1929, and the introduction of sound made it impossible to create film with either rapid editing or complex camera movement, because for recording the sound, non-moveable cameras were needed (Nelmes 2012, 474).



Figure 16: Still from Dziga Vertov,
Man with a Movie Camera



Figure 17: Still from Dziga Vertov, Man with a
Movie Camera

While we can clearly distinguish the layers on the stills from ‘Man with a Movie Camera’, recognising the separate layers in multiple exposures are much harder.

Studium, punctum and the pensive image

The ideas of Roland Barthes can greatly enhance the understanding of multiple exposure photographs. Barthes introduces two key elements in his influential book, *Camera Lucida*, which are essential when discussing and interpreting photographs: the opposition of *studium* and *punctum*. According to him, the general interest, understanding, and cultural knowledge that a viewer brings to a photograph is referred to as *studium*. The other concept by which a photograph can be studied is the *punctum*, which, in contrast to the *studium*, is not a general understanding but an element in the photograph that is present yet cannot be explicitly named. The *punctum* “pricks” the viewer and captures their attention, although, as mentioned previously, the viewer cannot identify exactly what it is that draws their attention (Barthes 2010, 25–27). If they can name it, it is not the *punctum*, but rather the *studium*, because the *punctum* is never coded, whereas the *studium* is (Barthes 2010, 51).

Barthes made a similar distinction in his earlier essay, “The Photographic Message,” where he expressed a duality in photographs. In that study, he called the coded message the connoted message that can be understood by the general public, and the other one the denoted message (the analogon) (Barthes 1977, 17). In this sense, the analogon, or the denoted message, parallels the *punctum*, whereas the connoted message corresponds to the *studium*.

In the case of the multiple exposure photographs, the same structure, *studium* and *punctum*, can be identified. However, a key difference from the original *studium-punctum* theory is that in multiple exposure photographs, it is often the *punctum* that is recognized first due to the complexity and multi-layered nature of these images. It is the *studium* that is

connected to the *punctum* and not the other way around. As Barthes wrote, “[t]o recognise the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer’s intentions, to enter harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them, to argue them within myself” (2010, 27–28). With multiple exposure photographs, meaning and understanding do not come immediately because there are more layers and images present. It is a kind of disorientation, similar to the “prick” that is first noticed in these photographs, with the *studium* appearing individually at these levels. When these two levels come together, and the meaning is constructed by the viewer, is when we get to the *studium*, before that, it is only the *punctum*. Therefore, it remains true that “while remaining a ‘detail,’ it fills the whole picture” at first (Barthes 2010, 45). The layers cannot be named separately because they are inseparable from each other, meaning is formed by their co-existence.

Furthermore, he wrote about the *punctum* that “whether or not it triggers, it is an addition. It is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*” (Barthes 2010, 55). In the case of multiple exposure photographs, while previous knowledge is important, more layers are present, and already there, and they form the *punctum* together. They are part of the *punctum* because, as Barthes stated, “[w]hat I can name cannot really prick me” (2010, 51). If these layers could be named, they could be separated, their meaning would be obvious at first, they would be part of the *studium*. More layers are in themselves additions, because more photographs are present as one by having been exposed more times on the same part of a film. The viewer also has to add their own interpretations (as part of the *studium*). Therefore, the multiple layers in the case of multiple exposures are immediately part of the *punctum* because one cannot separate the two from each other at first and one cannot name the layers separately. They are present together and are inseparable from each other.

What Sally Miller says in her book, *Contemporary Photography and Theory*, about the operation of Lucas Blalock’s works, is similar to the operation of the multiple exposure photographs’. The concept of his photographs is similar to the perplexity that multiple exposure images bring with them. He is known for his “poor” digital editing techniques and meaning formation through them (Miller 2020, 109). As Sally Miller, in Blalock’s work repetition plays a crucial role: meaning arises as a result of the interaction of the signifiers. Thus, meaning is not given by the individual signifiers, but they all make up the signifying chain and it is the interaction of the whole that gives the meaning (Miller 2020, 110–111). The same is true for multiple exposure photographs in general. Even though multiple layers and the photographs could exist individually, one-by-one and give meaning as individual photographs, because they are photographed on top of each other, they produce meaning together, it is the whole that is

appearing. The layers could have their meaning(s) individually, but since they are inseparable from each other, they constitute the meaning together.

Moreover, due to this multi-layered nature, multiple meanings can emerge, arising across various levels. Even though the layers of the multiple exposure photographs cannot be separated, the individual layers bring possibly different meanings with themselves. All of these meanings are added together, which leads us back to the concept of addition by Barthes mentioned previously. In the case of multiple exposure photographs, while the separate meanings cannot always be explicitly identified or pointed out, two outcomes are possible. First, the meanings coexist: they may either compete with one another or peacefully complement each other; however, what remains crucial is their simultaneous presence. Second, these multiple layers and their meanings may cease to exist individually and merge instead. In this process, the meanings extinguish each other to some extent, and a third meaning emerges—similar to the Kuleshov effect. This newly formed meaning ultimately brings us back to Roland Barthes' concepts. The meaning, from the co-existence of these images, is created by the spectator.

In his essay "The Third Meaning," Roland Barthes introduced a third layer of understanding of images in film and photography. He demonstrates his ideas through examples from Eisenstein's films. The first level is the informational level, while the second is the symbolic level. Both levels are similar to the connoted message introduced in one of his previously mentioned essays, "The Photographic Message". The first, informational level is the level of communication: it contains everything that can be known about the setting of a film, the characters, their relations, the costumes and even about the story (Barthes 1977, 52). The second, symbolic level is a deeper level than the previous one, it contains different kinds of symbolism, for example, historical symbolism that can be connected to the scene, to the characters, to the historical period, etc. However, the third meaning is neither connoted nor denoted, but is rather similar to the *punctum*. This third level cannot be named, but holds the attention of the spectator as the *punctum* does. This level appears to go beyond the straightforward, structured path and both beyond the informational and symbolic levels with their connotations; instead, it seems to open up an endless field of meaning (Barthes 1977, 55). In the operation of the filmic montage, this third meaning is a multiple exposure created in the spectator's mind, while multiple exposure photographs have this characteristic due to their layered structure.

This level of meaning cannot be described, because it does not replicate anything (Barthes 1977, 61). It is also at this level that meaning emerges without directly addressing the

story (Barthes 1977, 64). As this level is similar to the *punctum*, it is composed of small things that gets the attention of the viewer, but cannot be explained.

In creating the meaning and the mental image both the *studium* and the *punctum* is important: the *punctum* gets the viewer's attention (unconsciously) and the *studium* in this case is the one that keeps their attention, because the pre-existing knowledge of the individual plays an important role in forming the meaning of multiple exposure photographs.

Moreover, because of these mental processes and the strong connection between the *studium* and *punctum*, these layers, both in the photographs and in the mind, are emerging. This leads us to the concept of the 'pensive image' by Jacques Rancière, which refers to a state, where the spectator is curious, but has thoughts that even he or she is unable to identify properly. This state is somewhere between being active and passive, meaning that the spectator is neither entirely active, nor passive (Rancière 2009, 107).

Rancière stated in his book, *The Emancipated Spectator*, that the opposition of *punctum* and *studium* cannot be entirely applied to the photographs, because the *punctum* starts to act as the *studium* which can be seen and is connected to the viewer's previous knowledge. The concepts of the *studium* and the *punctum* become one by being blurred together (Rancière 2009, 109–111). In multiple exposure photographs, the layers containing the *studium* and the *punctum* also blur, emerge, because these layers are present together.

The concept of 'pensive image' is also in strong connection with Roland Barthes' 'third meaning', since none of them represents the concrete meaning, but the possibility of different meanings and interpretations. This pensiveness is also the result of a state in which the viewer is between the author's thought and his or her own interpretation (Rancière 2009, 122). It also pauses the action and keeps the moment alive but stops it from reaching a clear ending, leaving everything uncertain (Rancière 2009, 123). Let us look at this lack of a clear ending through Harry Callahan's photograph, *Province*. In Callahan's photograph, the viewer sees the women, the crowd and the shop window at the same time, which brings the pensiveness, when it is looked at for a bit longer, one starts to see them separately, but the separate meanings start to emerge, to form a completely different, yet there is no one exact conclusion and meaning that the viewer can reach. The pensiveness is present in multiple exposures, because by containing more layers, the spectator is constantly switching between them and spending more time with analysing multiple exposure photographs than with filmic montage, as the latter are going forward and changing with time.

With this pensiveness, the intention of the artist is present, but the meaning is created by the spectator (Rancière 2009, 128). This can be clearly seen in the works of Jerry Uelsmann.

As referred to above, he often did not title his photographs, leaving room for the spectator to interpret them and not giving them a meaning, that was created by the photographer.

Therefore, it can be said that the ‘pensive image’ evokes thoughts. These thoughts cannot be identified by the spectator, as in the case of Barthes’ ‘third meaning’ and *punctum*. Because these thoughts cannot be identified, the attention of the spectator is held by the pensiveness for much longer than in the case of filmic montage, where there is no time for thinking about the occurring shots, as they are changing over time.

For these particular photographs it is also true, as Barthes said, that when you distance yourself from the image only then you can see it really and this can only happen by closing your eyes or looking away (Barthes 2010, 53). The photograph can be understood most effectively when there is silence in terms of not looking at the photograph directly; only in this state of mind can the details reach consciousness (Barthes 2010, 55). This is similar to Descartes’ idea that one does not see with their eyes but with their mind (Crary 1998, 247). Only when you do not look at that photograph does the image of the boat so vivid that it is almost disturbing and one cannot think of anything else but the boat on that specific photograph.

The switching between the layers and the attention holding can be seen in the photographs above. On Man Ray’s Rayograph (Figure 13), the spectator is switching between the darker and the lighter objects, while in the case of Harry Callahan’s Detroit (Figure 9) switching is present between the roads, the buildings, the buses and the people.

Conclusion

In this paper I aimed to examine whether the multiple exposure photographs can be compared with the Soviet montage technique and can be brought closer to the spectators. For this, I used the works of three American photographers, Harry Callahan, Jerry Uelsmann and Man Ray, along with Dziga Vertov’s film, ‘Man with a Movie Camera’. The operation of montage editing is similar to the operation of multiple exposure photographs. Their shared history helped to establish the first connection between them, but the similar operation of them made it even stronger. Although a third meaning can be created from both two filmic shots and multiple exposures, the spectator’s previous knowledge plays an important role in creating them, in some terms multiple exposures and the filmic montage are different.

The meaning of a cinematic shot in montage technique is acquired by the shots that come before and after them, with multiple exposure, the “building blocks”, the layers are present at the same time and can be viewed for a longer period of time than the moving shots. Whether there will be a third meaning, a mental image of two occurring shots, is completely dependent

on the spectator's previous knowledge and how he or she perceives the information, due to the fast pace of the Soviet montage. Contrasted, in the case of the multiple exposures, this third meaning, this mental image is already there as the spectator looks at the photograph, since the "shots", the layers are superimposed on one another due to the technical characteristics of the process.

In getting closer to multiple exposure photographs, Roland Barthes's concepts of *studium* and *punctum* are also important terms. In their case, there is a key difference from the original *studium-punctum* theory. Due to the complexity of these photographs, it is often the *punctum* that is recognised first, and not the *studium*, and it is the *studium* that is connected to the *punctum*, not the other way around. Both in the case of Barthes's 'third meaning' and Rancière's 'pensive image' no concrete meaning is represented, but the possibility of different meanings and interpretations. During this pensiveness, the spectator is switching between the different layers.

In the operation of filmic montage, the third meaning created is akin to a multiple exposure, formed in the spectator's mind. In contrast, multiple exposure photographs achieve this nature due to their layered structure, which generates pensiveness in the viewer. While they share many similarities, they operate in different ways in the mental processes they evoke.

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