

INTRODUCTION

This book aims to analyze the impact of video images on audiences through audiovisual productions. Our work focuses on the study of the “Kuleshov effect”, which is still considered today one of the most important editing concepts. It was introduced in 1919 by Lev Kuleshov, a leading personality of the Soviet cinema. The Kuleshov effect is based on the laws of the functioning of the human psyche, described by the Gestalt principles of visual perception. These Gestalt principles show that the perception of a part of the whole is determined by perceptions of the whole, or as Kurt Koffka put it – “The image composed of several component forms is different from the form of the components” (see <https://www.sincretix.com/2014/04/29/perceptia-vizuala-si-principiile-gestalt.html/>).

In literature, the Kuleshov effect is associated with the concept of “the third meaning”, which in this case involves the joining of two different frames, but which generate a different meaning in the viewer's mind. The concept was expressed by Roland Barthes for the first time in his essay published in 1970, *The third meaning. Research notes on some Eisenstein photographs*. At this last level of meaning, an additional, much more complex meaning specific to the language of cinema emerges, so that, at the limit, we can say that the meanings and contents of a film cannot be described or summarized in a verbal discourse, however expressive and scholarly it may be. Barthes analyzes three levels of meaning in a film: informational, symbolic and the emotion-value binomial. At the last level of meaning, Barthes says, is the filmic, the content of the movie that cannot be described verbally (see Oxman, 2010).

The experiment of the Russian filmmaker Kuleshov, over 100 years old, is the basis of the concept of storytelling, on which movie scripts are based. But television productions also use this technique, which we find in news reports, for example, and this is particularly noticeable in the coverage of media events that have marked the world, from royal weddings to terrorist attacks. In every such event presented by television, the image played an essential role, arousing strong emotions in the audience and creating a sense of authenticity. As television has borrowed key concepts from cinema, such as the elements of film grammar, which it has technically adapted to the style of each program and to the smaller television screen, it is no coincidence that when discussing the impact of images on the audience we can also talk about the concept of “television realism”. The

more realistic a television production is, i.e. the message conveyed by the content of the program presented to the viewing public has a high level of credibility, it is appropriate to reality and contains no elements of fiction, the more it will attract more viewers to the screen.

Realism and formalism are two notable aspects of Kuleshov's work, and he also made a number of documentaries. His experience in editing newsreels that ran in cinemas during the First World War helped him to take a more realistic and dynamic approach, in contrast to the films of the Tsarist era, which were more emotionally focused than story-driven, and the shots were static, simplistic and artificial, depicting the exuberant costumes and decor of the bourgeoisie. The Bolshevik Revolution fundamentally changed Russian society and, by extension, the art of cinema. During Lenin's regime and until Stalin came to power, young filmmakers rose to prominence in Russian cinema, and they have remained in the public consciousness and in the history of film. Among these true pioneers of European cinema were Lev Kuleshov, who was also the first theoretician of montage, Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov and Vsevolod Pudovkin.

The audience's relationship with the film and then the television is another very important aspect analyzed in this book. Starting from the media theories of paradigmatic authors, such as John B. Thompson (who developed, among others, the concepts of “mediated interaction” and “mediated quasi-interaction”), Marshall McLuhan (who proposed the theory of “hot” and “cool” media), Roger Silverstone (with an interesting and always topical study of television in everyday life), John Fiske, John Hartley, Jonathan Bignell (who have taken semiotic approaches to television), Rémy Rieffel (with a sociological approach to the media), Daniel Dayan, Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes (who brought new perspectives on the impact of media events on audiences), David Morley and Sonia Livingstone (with extensive research on audiences and viewership), Douglas Kellner (with a cultural perspective on television), we aim to adapt the concepts developed in those theories and apply them in our own sociological research, presented in the case study.

We also look at the connection between the Kuleshov effect and fake news. In the chapter entitled “The image trail – from the Kuleshov effect to fake news”, we present how fake news can be created and also concrete cases where fake images have been used. Authors consulted include Hegelich (2016), Niklewicz (2017), Bârgăoanu & Radu (2018), Vasu et al. (2018), Stavre & Puntí (2019), Steinebach et al. (2020), Watson (2022, 2023).

The overall objective was to analyze the role of montage in influencing audiences, considering key elements of constructing the message through montage and image. We adapted the Kuleshov effect to our own selection of images and showed how this experiment can be tested against modern-day examples.

A first objective of the book is to present the evolution of montage by combining images to illustrate media events.

The second objective is to highlight the role of images and montage in shaping and influencing people's perception of major media events.

Finally, another objective was to analyze the impact of the Kuleshov effect on the Romanian audience, highlighting the role of film and television images in creating ideas, opinions, feelings, people's perceptions about certain situations that are visible in images.

As for the content of the book, in the first phase, we studied the literature and focused on the fundamental concepts of the film and television image and the audience, studying the essential books and articles in the audiovisual field.

In the second phase, we developed a case study. The research methods we chose are the questionnaire-based survey, where the subjects were randomly selected individuals who responded to the online questionnaire, and the semi-structured interview, which we conducted with television professionals. In order to give a simple and straightforward example, the questionnaires were constructed based on current political news (war in Ukraine). We analyzed the impact of the images in a montage on the participants in the experiment, thus proving the validity of the Kuleshov effect and, implicitly, the theory of the power of image influence.

The last part of the book presents the conclusions of the research, and in the appendices we included the questionnaires and the interviews that were conducted.

FOREWORD

“The Kuleshov Effect - From Cinematography to Television News”

The proposed volume is divided into five chapters, following the use of the Kuleshov effect from cinematography to television and the Internet. The volume also includes research conducted on the Romanian public regarding the use of the Kuleshov effect and its ability to identify fake news or those that use images that are presented as authentic through the Kuleshov effect.

Lev Kuleshov, the Russian director and theorist, founder of the first school of cinematography in Tsarist and then Soviet Russia, accidentally discovered a phenomenon that underlies visual perception: two separate images each have their own meaning, together they acquire an additional meaning, different from the initial meanings. In American literature, this phenomenon is also called the third meaning.

Montage is how images, filmed separately, are transformed into the cinematic narrative, the narrative of a documentary film, or the story that we encounter on social networks, on the Internet. In the Gutenberg era, we were impressed by the writing talent of the writer or the journalist. Today, we are impressed by the expressiveness of the image and sound and the originality of the montage. Yesterday we wrote with words, today we write with images.

The first chapter contains one of the most complete analyses of the Kuleshov effect through the lens of the specialized literature currently available. The authors note the practice of some television stations to mix authentic images from the scene of certain news with images that are used to create a certain idea in the public's mind. In Romania, a television station is notorious for using a mix of real images and images from a very realistic computer game in a debate about a military conflict. Unfortunately, the result was a fake that ended abruptly with an apology to the public, with the motivation that it was a mistake due to the speed of events.

These situations raise some troubling questions, the most important of which is: how can we recognize such situations and avoid being manipulated?

The authors also touch on other sensitive aspects of using the Kuleshov effect, deepfakes, and artificial intelligence in the paper. The Kuleshov effect can improve the results of influencing and manipulating the public using artificial intelligence, images generated by software. The insertion of an artificially generated image between several images shot on the ground is almost imperceptible to the casual viewer.

Therefore, the public needs to be informed about these options and trained to quickly recognize most of these situations. Education is very important for the public, and this can start in middle school and then continue in high school. Equally important is the development of ethical, professional behavior among those who post audiovisual propaganda on the Internet. Finally, people must learn to verify those images that seem suspicious to them.

The three authors of the volume *The Kuleshov Effect - From Cinematography to Television News* have a rich activity in the Romanian audiovisual sector, have thousands of hours of production experience, and have decided to share this experience with the public.

The book is extremely useful for students of the faculties of cinematography, journalism, and communication, who can better understand the power of editing. The book is also useful for anyone who uses the Internet, and reading it can be considered a vaccine against disinformation.

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1. THE ART OF MONTAGE IN CINEMA.

THE KULESHOV EFFECT

1.1. Visual perception and Gestalt principles

Before analyzing the modern conceptions of how sensations, impressions and images are associated in the overall configuration of a visual perception, a mental operation on which the “Kuleshov effect” is based, it is worth recalling that even in ancient philosophical thought, sight was considered the most important and active sense, with a fundamental role in human cognitive processes. Alongside hearing, sight was praised for its ability to perceive and express both particular and common aspects of things. Thus, Aristotle, a disciple of Plato, argued that “of all the senses, trust only the sense of sight”, because “sight is the most prominent sense, and representation got its name from 'light' (phaos), for sight is not possible without light” (1996, p. 69). This superiority of sight is also explicitly affirmed by many modern thinkers, who have often associated thought processes with visual metaphors. Thus, observation is an activity that primarily engages visual perception.

We see the world differently – literally and metaphorically. Some humans can distinguish 250 colours. Whilst some mammals are colour-blind, birds probably see more colours than we do: “Animals differ in visual acuity. Insects are short-sighted whereas a kestrel can spot a mouse from 1.5 km up. Hawks can spot prey 8 times further away than human beings can. The range of distances that animals can focus on is measured in dioptres. We have a good focal range (or 'accommodation') compared with most mammals. A child's range is about 14 dioptres, though an old person's is about 1 dioptre” (Chandler, n.d., p. 3). Beyond the different visual perception, there are also optical illusions that can mislead us, such as the mirage or 'Fata Morgana', which is a phenomenon that is particularly visible in the desert and involves distant objects appearing as normal or inverted images of different sizes.

As a species, we are, above all, “Homo significans – meaning-makers” (Chandler, n.d., p. 4), as we seek to give meaning to everything around us. This fundamental concern underlies the process of human visual perception. Even when things are 'meaningless', our mind strives to give them meaning.