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Film in the Advanced Composition Classroom: A Tapestry of Style

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Abstract: This article advances film as worthy of rhetorical inquiry and deserving of more sustained attention in the advanced composition classroom. The first section identifies various approaches to the "language" of film, which can be adopted to navigate the technical, rhetorical, and cultural concerns needed to compose informed multimodal compositions. The second section, montage style editing, as it appears in The Odessa Steps Sequence from *Battleship Potemkin* by Sergei Eisenstein, establishes that an awareness of "style" can bridge the gap between print and new media literacy. The third section outlines one advanced writing assignment called a "montage tap essay" in which students use a free online platform called Tapestry to create an interactive essay that ostensibly takes into consideration the particular cinematic affordances of editing, design, and writing.

Many students enter the composition classroom with a prior knowledge, interest, and experience in film that can be activated in the advanced composition classroom. Film is one example of a multimodal text that has the ability to "construct a world in which the reader can reside" and that must be attuned to audience and multiple perspectives. In this way it can become a "non-discursive text [that] is ideal for compositions that require multiple perspectives (exactly because they do not rely on sequence)" (Murray 181). In this sense, film is a resource that can allow writers to move from passive consumers of large amounts of visual information to active participants creating inspired multimodal texts. This practice of translating film to other modes is what Gunther Kress defines as transduction, which is "the process of moving meaning-material from one mode to another—from *speech* to *image*; from *writing* to *film* ... That process entails a (usually total) re-articulation of meaning from the entities of one mode into the entities of the new mode" (original emphasis 125). Through this process of transduction, film can serve as an effective pedagogical site in which to develop multimodal literacy in digital spaces.

My premise is that film should be elevated as more than a footnote to visual or non-discursive rhetoric, where it might merely be listed alongside advertisements or photographs or other forms of "old media." As a form of rhetoric, theatrical feature-length films surely share some qualities with YouTube videos or vlogs, but film remains a widespread and longstanding cultural currency that deserves more sustained attention. While introductory composition classes do not *need* film, I contend that advanced writing classrooms can greatly benefit from using film as an object of rhetorical inquiry—particularly those advanced writing classes focused on multiple literacies, multimodality, and the study of style.

The most general benefit of using film in the advanced writing classroom is that it allows for the identification of visual affordances unique to multimodal production. By identifying film as a language, or a unique symbol system, students can learn to translate its rhetorical affordances into digital media. This article begins by developing an understanding of film as a language, and then explores "style" as a recurring cinematic and rhetorical motif. These ideas coalesce into an exercise that aims to explore new media through the composition of montages in a free and relatively easy to use online application called Tapestry.

The Language of Film: The Technical as Rhetorical

A writing class should be concerned with the "language" of film because through transduction the semiotics of cinema can be put into practice through innovative uses of digital media. In film studies the traditional aim of this

language is a means in which to critique and explore the implications of cinematic techniques, which might include the use of photography, mise-en-scéne, editing, sound, or any number of other formalistic elements. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film Art,* Louis Giannetti's *Understanding Movies,* Timothy Corrigan's *A Short Guide to Writing about Film,* and other popular film studies textbooks are a testament to this specialized and highly developed discourse. While these textbooks surely acknowledge multiple aims of analysis or critique, their approach almost always requires writers to ground their analysis and insights in a set of formalistic terms.

I argue that this language of film is worth grafting into advanced writing courses. A good place to start is Christian Metz's *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema,* which applies a structural linguistics methodology to film. Much like Saussure's analogy that a chess piece's value is determined by its relationship to other pieces on the board, Metz theorizes about how images form the intelligibility of montage. In his view, a sequence is divided by shots (or cuts), which compose a small unit of meaning within the language of film. Therefore, "the 'shot'—an already complex unit, which must be studied—remains an indispensable reference for the time being, in somewhat the way that the 'word' was during a period of linguistic research" (106). This leads to the basic idea that cinema is a language and that a collection of shots and scenes work to create "a discourse or signifying practice characterized by specific codifications and ordering procedures" (Stam 38). Ultimately, the utility of Metz's approach is that he develops a film language for analyzing texts that might allow numerous cinematic techniques to be translated into new media. In other words, multimodal compositions might be produced and analyzed using the following language: scale (close-up, medium, and long shot), angle (low-angle, eye-level, and high-angle shot), shots (crane, tracking, and hand-held shots), transitions (dissolve, fade, and cut), and sound (diegetic and non-diegetic). There is a place for this language in composition classrooms interested in using digital media to make use of film's visual affordances.

One compelling use of this cinematic syntax in relation to the composition classroom is developed by Bonnie Kyburz. Part of her composition pedagogy relies on Jean Luc Goddard's jump-cuts, which are abrupt transitions from one scene to another that make it appear as if each shot is in fluid transition. Through Goddard's reliance on the jump-cut, her claim is that he "invented *an available means of persuasion in his given situation,* and it worked, magically, ambiguously so" (44, italics Kyburz's). Using Goddard as a muse, she notes his method of working "fast, cheap, and, for the most part, without studio intervention. The parallels to early Composition are striking, it seems to me" (52). One of these compelling parallels is that "Film's inherently 'anything goes' posture seemed/seems likely to jeopardize traditional acts of composing by suggesting that it is free (not without consequences but that it is unconstrained by generic conventions)" (51). Kyburz's approach is noteworthy because of how she develops a language from film in which to produce innovative texts. The significance of her approach to the advanced composition classroom is that she identifies the language of formalistic film techniques in order to create a means of invention that resists "traditional acts of composing."

Jump-cuts can serve as a syntactic touchstone for multimodal production and rhetorical analysis. This transition method is used in Kyburz's pedagogy that centers on the creation of short films by applying jump-cuts as a means of rhetorical invention. While some may find that creating a short film is an ambition that ultimately falls outside of students' abilities or institutional resources, the purpose of illustrating jump-cuts through Goddard is to explain a rhetorical means of invention that is applicable across mediums. It is an invention technique that can be used not only to create movies, but it can also be adopted as a term to analyze or create transitions and connections or disconnections between images or ideas.

The parallels between written and filmed composition is a familiar concept. Richard Williamson's The Case for Filmmaking as English Composition (*CCC,* 1971), for instance, uses this parallel in his writing classroom: "Outlining becomes script-writing. Research becomes shooting. Images and concrete details become shots and takes. Distance and points of view become camera-angles and close-ups. And revising becomes cutting" (136). While using the language of film metaphorically offers some benefits, it seems to me that today this language can be used more literally through current innovative practices. That is, it can be used to teach rhetorical analysis of a broad range of multimedia texts (such as videos, photographs, ads, etc.) by analyzing their rhetorical and linguistic features.

Whereas the approaches I have emphasized so far tend to focus on a single mode (film), the majority of contemporary approaches to composition are multimodal in scope. In this sense, film is just one of many "texts that exceed the alphabetic and may include still and moving images, animations, color, words, music and sound" (Takayoshi and Selfe 1). Of all the various approaches exceeding alphabetic literacy and falling within the broader spectrum of new media literacy, film proves especially promising. It is true that comics, or other discursive sites, provide a language that exceeds the alphabetic, but theatrical-length feature films are inherently multimodal and often contain all of the above modes that Takayoshi and Selfe identify.

I maintain that, due to its encompassing nature, the language of film proves especially beneficial in establishing a

means in which to negotiate the production and analysis of multimodal or "transmedia" texts and can inform current approaches to teaching writing that place greater emphasis on remixing, assemblage, and transmedia storytelling. While these methods avoid singling out one mode such as film—and emphasis is placed on creating a working fluidity between mediums, and not on defining the language of one medium—defining the language of film as a set of stable terms with normalized denotations helps authors to move with greater ease and understanding between mediums. In other words, film language can be used to support the possibilities of remixing, assemblage, or transmedia storytelling from the angle of both production and evaluation in the classroom.

Instead of isolating film from other modes, Henry Jenkins articulates "transmedia storytelling" as what occurs when stories are told across multiple media. He says that this approach "represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes it own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" ("Transmedia Storytelling 101"). Film is one of these "delivery channels" that might provide a method of teaching rhetorical analysis of multimedia. An illustration of this idea is *The Blair Witch Project.* While the film displays the main narrative, the franchise went on to create one of the most successful examples of transmedia storytelling. The low budget horror film was accompanied by a website, a book entitled *The Blair Witch Project: A Dossier,* a series of eight young adult books called *The Blair Witch Files,* four graphic novels called *The Blair Witch Chronicles,* and numerous computer games. In each iteration, the film narrative develops through different platforms, creating opportunities to analyze the various rhetorical effects across platform and medium.

Film can also help to impart transmedia literacy in the composition classroom through the concept of "remixing" content across media:

> [R]emixing directs our attention to the *kinds* of materials we use for teaching, including the readings we assign (and the material embodiment they take), from individual desktop-published handouts and print textbooks to digitized texts, from JSTOR to Library of Congress images, to curricular materials that we do *not* read, such as video and audio podcasts, to the kinds of texts we expect from students —from course assignments to dissertations. (original emphasis, Blake-Yancey 6)

The sources and the means through which we move between media become apparent when remixing, or creating narratives across media. Film is an effective starting point to analyze and invent composition strategies; for instance, students might take the rhetorical affordance offered by jump-cuts, or other film transitions—such as the iris, wipe, or dissolve—and apply these techniques across mediums. Particularly when applied to images or sounds in modes beyond film, the means of invention offered by film provides a discourse of editing, proximity and angle, sound, and other narrative techniques worth adopting.

More than relating the technical language of film to its rhetorical effects, film helps us to negotiate representations, icons, symbolism, and cultural and political myths. This motivates student writers to see that "the world of movies, constitutes a new frontier providing a sense of movement, of pulling away from the familiar and journeying into and beyond the world of the other" (hooks 2). In this way, films are more than a popular medium that students are eager to engage, but they can also serve as the catalyst for learning how to read, watch, and ultimately write from an awareness of pluralistic subject positions.

Similarly, James Berlin's *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Reconfiguring College English Studies* (1996) advocates a writing course that "focuses on reading and writing the daily experiences of culture, with culture considered in its broadest formulation. It thus involves encounters with a wide variety of texts, including advertising, television, and film" (124). Starting from these encounters, the basic reliance on culturally relevant media in advanced writing classrooms remains true for many instructors today. For example, and in chorus with Berlin, Richard Fehlman urges teaching film through cultural perspectives and viewer response. While he places greater weight on film literacy through introduction to technical vocabulary and viewing skills, like Berlin he sees film as a catalyst to explore "ideology and zeitgeist" (Fehlman 43).

Extending this idea further, John Heyda's article Challenging Antiwriting Biases in the Teaching of Film (1999) locates a series of textbooks for writing on film that, at the time, "resemble the current traditional rhetoric of writing themes about literature guides" (156). That is, these approaches emphasize authorial intention at the expense of audience response. While students might read these textbooks in order to be more critically aware of the ideologies underlying film-based pedagogies, Heyda specifically urges instructors to use film alongside a student-centered pedagogy, where attention is given to class size, and writing assignments are crafted to help students gain agency. More than developing a specialized vocabulary that is technical in its scope, film more fully urges instructors to negotiate the "sense of movement" inherent to its form.

The vast complexity of film that hooks, Berlin, Heyda, and others emphasize is worth continuing to explore as

more than a visual stimulant to jump-starting student writing. My contention is that film is equally encompassing of technical, rhetorical, and cultural concerns, which students need to negotiate in the process of analyzing and crafting informed multimodal compositions. For this reason, the language of film can provide a means in which to inform both the production and analysis of multimodal texts. With this in mind, I now would like to focus on how the discourse of "style" can further connect the technical with the rhetorical and can inform critical analysis of multimodal texts.

Montage Editing Style: Making the Invisible Visible

As a framework for exploring multimodality in an advanced composition classroom, cinematic style addresses the full spectrum of technical and rhetorical choices. Traditionally in film studies, cinematic style is understood as the technical choices made in relation to mise-en-scéne, cinematography, acting, plot structure, editing, sound, and other intentional artistic components of the finished film product. Style is usually distinguished from genre since style is used to identify the manner by which a genre is rendered for the screen. If there is one defining component, style in film is largely created through the art of editing. Film editing is a technique that habitually remains an invisible craft, and therefore an appreciation of this formalistic technique realizes the basic rhetorical insight that *how* something is seen is just as important as *what* is seen or heard or read. In this sense, cinematic editing style helps to unite the technical with the rhetorical.

To illustrate how style can create a conceptual bridge between the technical and rhetorical, consider how style manifests in the editing of a film montage. According to the *Observer* (1930), "Montage, or constructive cutting ... is simply the method of building up a film from broken and isolated strips of celluloid" (Montage def 1). Traced back to the early 20th century, at least in the context of film, montage is "The process or technique of selecting, editing, and piecing together separate sections of film to form a continuous whole" (Montage def. 1a). Due to its powerful rhetorical effects, the successful use of montage highlights the importance of technical decisions that often remain invisible or unpronounced by observers.

More specifically, the use of montage as a style of editing with technical and rhetorical implications can be illustrated through the Odessa Steps Sequence. In this sequence taken from *Battleship Potemkin* (1925, Sergei Eisenstein), soldiers are marching down a seemingly endless flight of steps while firing volleys into a crowd. A separate group of mounted Cossacks charges the crowd at the bottom of the stairs. As a result of this violence, there is an older woman, a young boy with his mother, a male student, and a teenage schoolgirl who are injured. Dramatically punctuating this scene is a mother pushing an infant in a carriage. She falls to the ground and dies as the carriage rolls down the steps amidst the fleeing crowd. What makes this frequently commented on scene so powerful is not just its dramatic content, but the means by which montage, as an editing style, makes its form visible. In this way, the use of montage helps "to build a narrative (by following an artificial time and space or guiding the viewer's attention from one narrative point to another), to control rhythm, to create metaphors, and to make rhetorical points" (Bordwell 9). More specifically, the technical elements worthy of consideration include its use of scale, camera angle, moving shots, and transitions. As a result of these choices, rhetorical and ideological commentary is allowed to come into focus.

The rhetorical implications of these technical choices relate to the socio-political conditions that gave rise to this revolutionary editing and artistic style (Soviet Montage), which is a brand of formalism that is counter to realism with left-wing orientations in the 1930s. It is important to note that over time "bureaucratic pressure drove out [this] experimental montage style" (Bordwell 16), and it was ultimately replaced by Eisenstein and others with a more "realistic" editing style that avoids drawing attention to itself. Therefore, this choice of editing style has ideological implications, which reveals the nature of how technical choices can never be separated from rhetorical implications.

Furthermore, the Odessa Steps sequence or montage is part of Eisenstein's earlier works, which are noted for their formalist, fictitious, and propagandist bent. In contrast, Eisenstein's later works were made under the explicit threat of Stalinist control and therefore appear similar to Hollywood movies in both form and content. In other words, his work can be identified as moving closer to a rhetoric of realism due to the technical shift in his editing style. To be clear, it is not just a formalistic manipulation of editing that appears most clearly in sequences like the Odessa Steps. Instead, such stylistic manipulation is present in the editing of even the most "realistic" films still today that resist drawing attention to their editing style. However, by turning a critical eye to the invisible art of editing *style*, the connection between technical and rhetorical choices can be identified in any mode of production.

This insight applies directly to the advanced composition classroom to the extent that it forces writers to consider how all technical choices have rhetorical implications. In this way, style not only applies to the editing technique of

Soviet Montage but infiltrates other technical elements such as scale, angle, shots, transitions, and other visual and auditory choices. By using this understanding of cinematic style, as seen in this example through montage editing, multimodal writers can learn to identify how technique and formal features map onto writing processes and function as rhetorical texts.

The previous discussion of cinematic style poses some interesting connections and disconnections to rhetorical style in printed texts. Schmertz and Trefzer posit that “film has its own rhetoric, similar to but different from the rhetoric of the printed text, a rhetoric executed through such mechanisms as camera placement and distance, editing, and so forth” (87). It is due to this similar yet different rhetoric that makes film effective at creating a space in which to consider the transition from print to new media literacy. In both cinematic and new media composition, style can no longer be identified as superficial ornamentation. It is a means of invention. Style is argument. It is a way to make visible the invisibility of form. It marks the convergence and inseparability of form and content, and ultimately identifies the convergence of technical and rhetorical affordances.

The previous insights apply as much to digital video editors as they do to student writers working as editors in numerous digital mediums. By assembling and juxtaposing images alongside sound, music, and visual effects, digital video editing allows for immersion into the process of multimodal composition. Perceiving the rhetorical implications of technical choices can be made unmistakably evident by studying film as a language, as I have illustrated through Eisenstein’s montage. Montage often creates unexpected visual associations through juxtapositions, similar to the post-literate encounters Marshall McLuhan inspires in *The Medium is the Message*. It provides a space for unconventional connections that William S. Burroughs popularized with his “cut-up” method of editing. By turning to cinema what becomes clear is that “there already exists a literacy of juxtaposition around us ... Our challenge is to work within that space and invent applications suitable for its placement within new media” (Rice 76). Cinema contains this “literacy of juxtaposition,” and in the next section I describe a multimodal assignment that enables students to draw on the technical and rhetorical affordances of film.

Assignment: Montage Tap Essay

In order to support the claim that advanced writing classrooms can greatly benefit from using film as a mode of rhetorical inquiry, in particular by adopting a rhetorical awareness of style, I will now provide one pedagogical consideration. In particular, I outline an in-depth assignment as well as a reflection on the assignment in order to better illustrate my argument. The assignment is called a “montage tap essay” and requires no special equipment beyond a computer and online access. Its purpose is to allow advanced writers the opportunity to engage film in a way that stylistically acknowledges the spectrum of discourses in film studies and new media literacy. In the assignment, students develop a tap essay that advances an idea, explains a complicated concept, or makes an argument pertaining to the work of one author or auteur.

A good place to start is Robin Sloan’s “Fish,” which was the first Tap Essay published. Following Sloan’s essay a company called Betaworks created a platform called Tapestry, which allows users to create their own tap essays and then share them through a mobile application. Most basically, the application allows users to touch or “tap” their way through—depending on whether the device has a touch-screen—a series of fixed screens that might contain colored and variously emphasized and positioned text, images, or looping gifs. Since students are familiar with PowerPoint presentations, I begin by making this comparison. From here, I go on to explain that the implications for Tapestry’s apparent simplicity are widespread. In fact, the rhetorical affordances resemble those of an editor in the process of making a film montage.

To illustrate the connection between technical and rhetorical affordances I have students watch and discuss the “Kuleshov Effect.” This is a common example used to explain the technique of editing but also lends to the rhetorical effects of juxtaposition. An early film director, Lev Kuleshov, explains his findings that occurred sometime around 1918: “I alternated the same shot of Mozzhukhin [Tsarist matinee star] with various other shots (a plate of soup, a girl, a child’s coffin), and these shots acquired a different meaning. The discovery stunned me - so convinced was I of the enormous power of montage” (Kuleshov 200). In other words, Kuleshov implies three different relationships by cutting together alternating images of an actor/soup, actor/girl, and actor/coffin. Through metaphor, or by an association of contextually related images, montage produces a profound rhetorical transformation by allowing new meaning to occur outside the image. Since meaning is only visually implied, it is the viewer who constructs the montage and adds new meaning to reality. By contextually implying a relationship between two or more images/ideas, the film editor is just like the tap essayist who stylistically assembles a montage by grafting new meanings onto reality.

Just like Kuleshov’s experiment, students find that in the creation of their montage, the tap essay format is very

particular and even constrained to the extent that authors must carefully consider every word, font, color, image, placement, and transition. Just as a film director must consider the time spent on each frame, students must think about pacing. Just as a film director must think about the power of montage, students must navigate these same decisions with careful consideration. Again, the simplicity of the platform calls on students to make important stylistic and rhetorical decisions that otherwise might be overlooked.

After introducing the idea behind this assignment, I ask students to consider how the Kuleshov Effect is practiced by nearly all contemporary filmmakers. I ask them to see it as a sort of rhetorical Rorschach test. To visualize this principle, I rely on the idea that "The 'Kuleshov Effect' becomes the film theorist's equivalent of a palimpsest, an ink-blot test out of which one can read almost any aesthetic position" (Polan 98). At the same time, and to move them more in the direction of active and conscious participants in their rhetorical choices, it is worth adding that "while the operations for the transformations [of montage] are systematic ... the application is not. The choices proceed from 'subjective moves' depending on the pleasure of the person making them" (Ulmer, *Heuretics* 200). This kind of commentary is important because in this assignment consideration is given not just to the formal and technical elements, but to the subjective and rhetorical readings that develop from their creation. It is worth acknowledging that the relationship between form and meaning is not new; however, this assignment further highlights how formal qualities are tied to meaning-making. In particular, with this assignment students might advance an idea (how digital film is revolutionizing the film industry), define and illustrate a concept (the technique of split-screen images), or argue for the importance of certain film movements (such as cinema verité or the Dogma 95 avant-garde film movement). While advancing an idea or illustrating a concept might open greater space for viewers' subjective interpretations, making arguments through montage might be a heavy-handed rhetorical and ideological imposition with one ideal interpretation. In either case, student are urged to negotiate subjective stylistic moves.

Once students are fully conscious that montage, or the art of juxtaposition, is not isolated to cinema, then they can apply this powerful style of composing across new media. Montage should be defined as a style of editing characterized by either putting together images/text for meaning, or juxtaposing separate ideas to impart relational connotations. The effect of montage depends on contextual expectations that can be manipulated by cutting/pasting, copying, sorting, filtering, transcoding, or remixing material. Since many of the same insights apply to cinematic productions and their montage tap essays, we often examine several film montages. Some notable examples might be the shower scene from Hitchcock's *Psycho,* the yearbook montage from Wes Anderson's *Rushmore*, or the married life montage from Docter and Peterson's *UP*. Furthermore, and for the purpose of helping students become active viewers and editors, I rely on Michel Chion's masking method:

> In order to observe and analyze the sound-image structure of a film we may draw upon a procedure I call the masking method. Screen a given sequence several times, sometimes watching sound and image together, sometimes masking the image, sometimes cutting out the sound. This gives you the opportunity to hear the sound as it is, and not as the image transforms and disguises it; it also lets you see the image as it is, and not as sound recreates it. In order to do this, of course, you must train yourself to really see and really hear, without projecting what you already know onto these perceptions. (187)

The purpose of this method is to move students from passive to active film viewers. In other words, they are urged to take apart and then put back together the various modes of communication on which film depends. This helps to define montage in a way where meaning is created through the art of juxtaposition.

While assessment is built from our classroom conversations and examples, it generally includes at least these three basic criteria:

- Purpose: The affordances of Tapestry allow for a montage that in some way makes a compelling argument or successfully explains a complicated concept. With this in mind, consider your purpose and how best to stylistically achieve it.
- Assembly: A tap essay will lead readers from beginning to end in a seamless fashion. If this logic is manipulated, it should be done so consciously or in order to suit your purpose.
- Visual Rhetoric: Consider how to make an effective tap essay that seamlessly incorporate images, typography, and colors in ways that strengthen the written text.

When explaining to students how they will be assessed, many question whether the tone should be similar to that of an academic essay, and they wonder about whether their aim should be informational and rely heavily on sources. On the other hand, many question whether they should aim to attain a more playful aesthetic with greater entertainment value. To answer these questions I keep in mind that "The goal is not to adapt digital technology to literacy ... but to discover and create an institution and its practices capable of supporting the full potential of the

new technology" (Ulmer, *Internet Invention* 29). In other words, it depends on their identified purpose. As long as students keep in mind the affordances and constraints of the medium, and the Internet as an institutional space, then they can effectively respond to the prompt in various ways.

The aim of the montage tap essay is to allow advanced composition students to practically engage the theoretical components of film analysis alongside new media literacy for the purpose of rhetorical inquiry. This requires a consideration of the technical and rhetorical effects of montage. In closing, I will more directly reflect on the connections between this assignment and the previous research I provided on film in the composition classroom.

Conclusion: Credits

Film deserves an elevated position in rhetoric and composition scholarship, especially as it concerns visual and multimodal composition in digital spaces. While film continues to be a worthy artifact of rhetorical inquiry, it can also be used to create assignments that address the connection between technical and rhetorical concerns. Stylistically, students are urged to think not only about how Eisenstein's montage editing "works to create conflicts in the movement within each shot" (Corrigan 29), but also in terms of the visual literacy that Scott McCloud defines under montage, "where words are treated as integral *parts* of the picture" (original emphasis, 154). Since style is still emerging in various forms of electronic literacy as something distinct from how style is defined in print literacy, the montage tap essay provides students with a framework to ask and inventively answer questions regarding style in new media literacy.

From the perspective of a formal film analysis, the aim of the assignment is to demonstrate "a discourse or signifying practice characterized by specific codifications and ordering procedures" (Stam 112). As editors and designers, students learn that the logic of a visual montage can truly be as complex as a shot-by-shot analysis. It might be common within this kind of formalistic analysis to consider scale, angle, shots, and transitions; the same basic concerns come to light in Tapestry. While it is true that sound is no longer an issue since Tapestry does not allow this capability, the visual choices are enough to keep even the best directors and editors busy.

It is also important to note that students move beyond a strict concern for formal or technical design concerns. In other words, the tap essay can be made by those with little technical know-how or material resources—unlike the demands of having students create a short film. Moreover, by making a montage in Tapestry, it becomes equally about words as (moving) images, and therefore students become agents actively creating and reflecting on various new media practices.

The montage tap essay aligns with the "daily experiences of culture" (Berlin 124). That is, not only does it engage film, but it also urges students to negotiate the affordances and constraints of composing in new media. By having students and their peers interact with their essays on mobile devices, which is a distinct capability with Tapestry, they inevitably become aware of differences in style from print literacy. Most importantly, this assignment builds on the rhetorical power of film, and while it might be true that advanced writing classes do not need film, students undeniably benefit by using film as an object of rhetorical and stylistic inquiry.

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