

Paul haggi's "crash" and the history of soveit montage film technique essay sampl...

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



ABSTRACT

Paul Haggis' *Crash* is reviewed and analyzed by the writer with the aid of existing movie reviews by reputable critics – Roger Ebert and Steve Sailer. The backbone of this review is by textual analysis – reading through the lines of the script. However, the visual style and techniques used by the filmmaker are also analyzed.

The Soviet Montage movement is related to the film. The history and relevance of this film movement is also explained.

Crash, written and directed by Paul Haggis, is a sad but accurate portrayal of racism and prejudice in the supposedly most open of societies. Los Angeles, melting pot of many cultures and races, is the ideal setting for foreigners and settlers because of the many dreams that could actually possibly come true – the American dream, the Hollywood dream.

To achieve the most dramatic effect possible, Haggis uses multiple characters of different ethnicities (African-American, white, Hispanic, Persian, Asian, Latino) and backgrounds. The reality of the big L. A. jungle is that their social statuses and positions would probably not allow them to interact with each other in that way, especially within a span of 48 hours. But that is the essence of movie magic – the willing suspension of disbelief. We excuse such reality lapses for a richer and more spectacular story.

Crash hints that people are actually innately good, and that prejudices are only created by the environment and society we grow up in. The story starts

out in a multi-vehicle accident that sets off to individuals' own dramas using an effective tool in manipulating plot - the flashback.

Time shapes our understanding of narrative action. As audiences, we are used to films that are in story order. Flashbacks are simply parts of the story that are not presented in chronological order. Using flashbacks, we see the lives of the different characters and what has happened to them during the day.

Movies that use multiple characters, sometimes referred to as 'ensemble dramas', do not usually have a single protagonist. More often than not, the realizations and fulfillment of the characters are collective.

Steve Sailer (2005) in his film review in *The American Conservative* points out two consistencies that Haggis imposes: 1) each character has clichéd good and bad qualities; and 2) each character states his most negative views about the race of his opponent. All conflicts are basically grounded upon racial intolerance. Whatever the issue, it goes back to the color of your skin.

"The result is a movie of intense fascination; we understand quickly enough who the characters are and what their lives are like, but we have no idea how they will behave, because so much depends on accident. Most movies enact rituals; we know the form and watch for variations. *Crash* is a movie with free will, and anything can happen. Because we care about the characters, the movie is uncanny in its ability to rope us in and get us involved."^[1]

The beauty of this particular film lies in unpredictability. The script is always the background of film. In this instance, the accuracy of the speech is the key. As Roger Ebert (2005) points out in his review of the film, "...these people say exactly what they are thinking, without the filters of political correctness."

The script comes to life in the masterful use of one of the most important film techniques - editing. Editing is the cutting of film and shots and piecing them back together to create a logical sequence. Basically it dictates the relation between shots.

Editing lets you manipulate time, space, characters, and thanks to the advent of digital technology, just about everything. Spatial, temporal, and rhythmic relations between shots are controlled. Trees can turn into pigeons and snow can fall during the hottest summer. The editor's power is so massive that he can turn the script around if he wanted to. Aside from cinematography and sound, it is one of the factors that combine to create and define a film's style.

There are several approaches to editing. One of these is used in some parts of Crash - the Soviet Montage, sometimes called discontinuity editing or intellectual editing. Random and seemingly unrelated shots are combined to extract a certain idea. It requires maturity from the audience to be able to understand such concepts or ideas.

The History of The Soviet Montage (or the Montage Style)

The montage is an approach to editing that emphasizes dynamic and discontinuous relationships between shots. Images are put side by side to create abstract ideas not necessarily present in either shots or images.

When the new Soviet government set out to monopolize and take control of all sectors of life in Russia after the victorious Russian Revolution of 1917, the private film companies that operated in Petersburg and Moscow resisted. The government wanted to nationalize all private property, so the private film companies stopped supplying films to government-run theaters. When the government's put strict controls on the existing supply of film stock, they hoarded their film stock. Most of these companies fled with their films stock and equipment.[2]

It was during these conditions that the likes of Dziga Vertov, Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Sergei Eisenstein - all young and with hardly pre-Revolutionary film backgrounds - made deliberate moves that eventually became the national cinema movement. [3]

Lenin himself considered film as an effective and powerful tool for education. In 1922, he declared cinema to be the most important of all the arts. The government encouraged documentaries and newsreels such as Vertov's Kino-Pravda, and eventually, fictional films as well. Kuleshov taught in the State School for Cinema Art and experimented with editing footage from various sources. The finished product would create an impression of continuity. Kuleshov and his students would write theoretical essays on film, and this theoretical backbone would be the basis of the Montage style.

The Soviet Montage style was exhibited in Kuleshov's *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* and *The Death Ray*. Eisenstein's *Strike* defined the movement proper and *Potemkin* drew worldwide attention to it. [4]

Everything is based on editing. Film is only relevant when individual shots are combined into a whole. Pudovkin likened shots to bricks that are stacked together to build a whole sequence.

Soviet narratives do not hold character psychology with great importance. Instead, social forces were the main instigators of conflicts. They do not have just one protagonist, but several characters that form a collective hero. They are concerned with the social issues that move their lives. They cease to be individual personalities. Typage, or the casting of nonactors over well-known actors, then became common practice during the time.

The movement declined when the government started discouraging the use of the Montage style. Vertov and all the rest were criticized for being too formal in their approach to filmmaking. Authorities encouraged filmmakers to create simplistic films that would be better understood by all audiences. [5]

Thus, the government's new artistic policy of Socialist Realism came about. It decreed all artworks to show revolutionary development and to be firmly grounded on realism.

There are some factors of the movement that relate to Crash. For instance, the movie uses of multiple characters as well as the collective realization of

things. Also, the main thing that makes Crash work is in the execution of the script through editing - the movement itself. Looking at it this way though, one would argue that every other film can be related to the Soviet Montage. But the essence of the Soviet Montage goes beyond its style. Its form and style has a purpose - and that is to make the audience understand or feel something, to create his own conclusion based on the images he sees. That requires intellect, maturity, depth. And these three factors are the essential tools the audience has to possess in able to truly understand the Crash.

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[1] Ebert 2005

[2] Taylor 1979

[3] Bordwell 2003

[4] Bordwell 1993

[5] Bordwell 2003