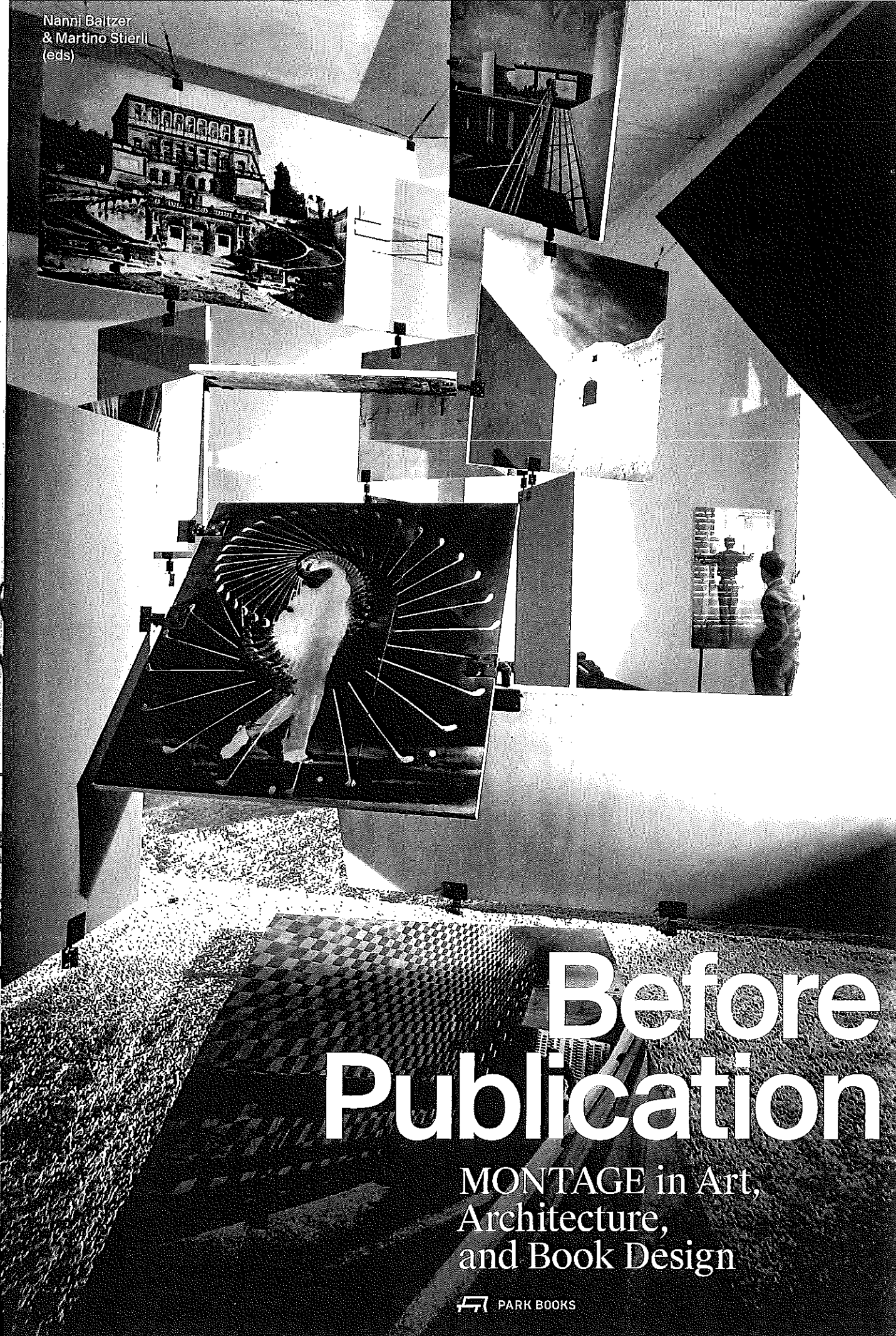


Nanni Baltzer  
& Martino Stierli  
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# Before Publication

MONTAGE in Art,  
Architecture,  
and Book Design

 PARK BOOKS

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MONTAGE in Art,  
Architecture,  
and Book Design

Edited by Nanni Baltzer  
and Martino Stierli

 PARK BOOKS

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# MONTAGE READER

Montage has often been called a guiding structural principle of the age of modernity, even modernity's "symbolic form." Even though montage has been closely associated with aesthetic practices of the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, pertinent artistic practices such as photomontage were already in widespread use in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Since the 1960s, and especially at the height of postmodern theory in the 1980s, a great number of studies in disciplines such as art and architectural history, as well as the theory of photography and film, literature, theater, and music have addressed montage as a principle of avant-garde and/or modernist artistic production, based on the concept of juxtaposing or overlapping heterogeneous, pre-existing, and often industrially-processed materials. Two major publications from the early 1970s seem to have decidedly triggered this historicization and theorization of montage as a fundamental principle of twentieth-century artistic culture: the posthumous edition of Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* in 1970, and Peter Bürger's equally seminal *Theory of the Avant-garde* from 1974. For Adorno, montage was primarily a counter-concept to the unified and organic whole of the pre-modern, bourgeois work of art: "Montage is the inner-aesthetic capitulation of art to what stands heterogeneously opposed to it. The negation of synthesis becomes a principle of form."<sup>1</sup> Adorno's "negation of synthesis" is reiterated by Bürger as the "fragmentation of reality" in the creation of the avant-garde work of art.<sup>2</sup> Bürger's theory is informed by a fundamental (and problematic) distinction between (supposedly) genuine artistic representation on the one hand and elements of montage on the other. Bürger defines these as "reality fragments," elements inserted from an extra-artistic domain into a new artistic context that essentially remain foreign within their new environment. The works of art under examination (such as the Cubist *papiers collés* by Picasso or Braque) draw their meaning from the indexical relationship between these "reality fragments" and the reality of the world outside. While authors such as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh further elaborated on the key significance of the montage principle for avant-gardist, critical art (while

at the same taking a critical departure from Bürger's argument), subsequent discussions of montage as the foundational principle of deconstructivist philosophy ensued.<sup>3</sup>

*BEFORE PUBLICATION: Montage in Art, Architecture, and Book Design. A Reader* does not seek to readdress and recount the main tenets of a debate that has become widespread over the past few decades. Rather, we have decided to assemble in this volume a number of new and original contributions that deal as much with the theory of montage as with the material culture underlying the principle itself—from the photomontage to the exhibition. Many of the essays represented in this volume address montage from a specific point of view, namely that of the liminal status of the modern work of art between its private inception and its public presentation—even though a number of contributions take already published material as the point of departure for their investigation. Indeed, the individual essays share an overarching interest in analyzing and theorizing montage's critical position between privacy and publicity. At the moment of their going to press, publications irreversibly attain their definite form. At the same time, they also reach an audience, which alters their ontological status. Earlier studies dealing with montage have systematically overlooked that printing/publication is preceded by several complex steps toward the construction and montage of (visual) meaning. It is this process of complex artistic interventions that the present volume seeks to shed light on. Whereas individual montages and their various preliminary stages have been thoroughly researched (e. g., Margarita Tupitsyn [2004] regarding Gustav Klutsis's various preliminary stages of the posters *Let us fulfill the plan of great projects* and *Male and female workers all to the election of the Soviets*, both from 1930), the origin and creation of other montages lies completely in the dark. Reproductions of montages normally show the final product; the steps leading up to it have, in many cases, been lost—ultimately because circumstances *before* the reproduction or publication indicate an ephemeral state. In many cases, it is therefore impossible to retrospectively follow, step by step, the

different phases or attempts in the process of the creation of a montage. In photomontage, for instance, individual components, whether for a print template or for a single art photograph, are combined loosely on an underlay, to then be photographed. What remains is the reproduction of the mounted, final template, the only trace of an ephemeral piece. In exhibitions, on the other hand, objects, photographs, drawings, or paintings are re-hung until the definite form is found. Normally, the photograph only documents these final stages. The estate of the epoch-making exhibition *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista in Roma* (1932), for example, shows that the exhibited photographs were pinned to the wall or to the floor of the display case—an arrangement that was subject to constant changes up to the opening of the exhibition. Nevertheless, while these preliminary stages of a montage constitute a difficult situation in terms of archival documentation, it is exactly these intermediary steps that are of special interest to us. Thus, rather than looking at the

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 202–203. 2 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 73. 3 See in particular Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "From Faktura to Faktography," *October* 30 (1984), pp. 82–119; Gregory L. Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," (1983) in Katherine Hoffman (ed.), *Collage: Critical Views* (Ann Arbor/London: UMI Research Press, 1989), pp. 383–412.

final result of artistic production, we are interested in analyzing and theorizing the processuality of the genesis of the work of art by referencing the concept of montage. The essays assembled in this volume share a preoccupation with the materials and processes involved before publication. The main focus of our inquiry is on concrete artistic and visual artifacts such as artistic notebooks, architectural drawings, book mock-ups, photographic archives, graphic design layouts, and exhibition displays. The essays assembled in this volume cover authors and artists from the fields of film, architecture, photography, caricature, cultural history and theory, graphic design, and exhibition design. They address case studies from the historical avant-gardes in the 1920s to postwar artistic experimentation and neo-avant-garde revisitation of the montage principle. While the individual contributions cover a wide range of vastly differing subject matters, we are convinced that the adjacency of these contributions profits from montage's structural principles in that this allows us to uncover unlikely connections, productive juxtapositions, and elements of a shared sensibility that would remain unnoticed in a more conventionally historiographical and single-disciplinary narrative.

Antonio Somaini's contribution "SERGEI M. EISENSTEIN: DRAWING AND/AS MONTAGE" examines the Soviet filmmaker's corpus of drawings that has so far received relatively little attention. The focus is not on Eisenstein's cinematic works in the sense of montages, but on montage as an open process, that is, the process leading to an opus (film, theater, text, etc.). Somaini analyzes the relationship between drawing and montage on the basis of Eisenstein's posthumously published project *Notes for a General History of Cinema*, thereby addressing a largely understudied and little-known body of work. <sup>PAGE</sup> **10**

Departing from El Lissitzky's battle for a modern architecture in the USSR in the 1920s, Richard Anderson discusses the manifold relationships between constructivist architecture and montage in "MONTAGE AND THE MEDIATION OF CONSTRUCTIVIST ARCHITECTURE." The letterpress was the most suitable platform for this battle of modern architecture; for this reason, Anderson's contribution starts out from an assessment of the role of print media on the basis of the journal *Sovremenniaia arkhitektura*. In the second part, the essay turns to cinematic montage against the background of constructivist urbanism. The last section is devoted to a case study, Ivan Leonidov's competition entry for the Cultural Palace in Moscow, as an example for the the inextricability of the cultural practices of montage and avant-garde architecture. <sup>PAGE</sup> **24**

Adrian Sudhalter's contribution presents texts from Tristan Tzara's *Dadaglobe*, a book project initiated by the Romanian poet. As a form of atlas including montages and texts by his Dada friends, Tzara had intended to publish *Dadaglobe* in 1921. Even the title, *Dada/Globe*, demonstrates the potential of language and the combinatory character of the project. Tzara planned an anthology that was going to transgress boundaries in various regards. Thanks to her precise reconstruction of the project, Sudhalter demonstrates how the layout of the book would have followed the same structural principles as Tzara's textual montages. She concludes her analysis with a survey of select double-page spreads from *Dadaglobe*, one of which "stands out as a commentary, a theorization, a meta-narrative on the montage principle that governs the whole—the book's visual equivalent, in other words." <sup>PAGE</sup> **44**

At the center of Jason Hill's contribution are the little-known montage-drawings of American painter Ad Reinhardt published in the popular press. Hill focuses on a drawing by Reinhardt, which is not explicitly clear or immediately understandable, and thus



runs counter to the common practice of depicting distinct and easily legible illustrations in newspapers and journals. In his detailed analysis of *Some Vacation*—Reinhardt's contribution to *PM* in 1944—Hill comes to the conclusion that the illustration stands outside the bounds of linear understanding. Hill frames Reinhardt's intention not to offer the readers of *PM* any clearly legible visual comments within a contemporary political context, as well as within Reinhardt's biography as an abstract painter. <sup>PAGE</sup> **57**

Reto Geiser's essay "VERBI-VOCO-VISUAL" undertakes a comparative analysis of the works and writings of Swiss art historian Sigfried Giedion and Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who shared an interest in an interdisciplinary methodology of knowledge and who intersected in various instances around the so-called "Explorations Group." Both Giedion's and McLuhan's seminal books and other publications fundamentally draw on avant-garde montage aesthetics and a strong interest in the visual as a means for the production and communication of meaning. As Geiser demonstrates, the thinking of both authors crystallized around the category of space, which, over time, shifted from a focus on visual to auditory space. Geiser's contribution indicates how avant-garde artistic practices such as montage, or McLuhan's closely related concept of "simultaneity," were increasingly appropriated by the mid-century as the basis for an interdisciplinary information age and cybernetics. <sup>PAGE</sup> **74**

In "LATTER-DAY BAUHAUS? MURIEL COOPER AND THE DIGITAL IMAGINARY," Robert Wiesenberger explores the groundbreaking and still relatively underappreciated work of graphic designer and media pioneer Muriel Cooper, the MIT Press' first design director. Starting out from an in-depth discussion of some of Cooper's most seminal book designs—including the 1969 tome *The Bauhaus* and the 1972 *Learning from Las Vegas*—Wiesenberger demonstrates this graphic designer's key role in the establishment of a graphic design culture in the postwar United States. Cooper initially drew heavily from the Bauhaus legacy,

László Moholy-Nagy, and traditional concepts of visual montage. However, in the dawning information age, she also increasingly explored the potential of visual communication in MIT's Visible Language Workshop, harboring a particular interest for the cinematic montage of images. Yet again, this case study underlines to what degree our present (visual) information age rests historically on avant-garde conceptions of montage. <sup>PAGE</sup> **93**

Doris Berger's essay "THE MAKING OF ED RUSCHA'S *EVERY BUILDING ON THE SUNSET STRIP*" recounts the history of one of the most influential artist books of Los Angeles-based artist Edward Ruscha. Like the preceding essay, it addresses the intersection of book design and a cinematic understanding of montage: as Berger illustrates, Ruscha's accordion foldout seamlessly documents both sides of the so-called Sunset Strip by means of continuous motorized photography. Importantly, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* was the product of an enormous photographic archive of Los Angeles streetscapes that Ruscha carefully established over several decades. Berger's contribution explores the paradoxical conceptual relationship between the moving image and the photograph in this artist's work. <sup>PAGE</sup> **108**

Finally, Olivier Lugon's contribution "PHOTOGRAPHIC HOUSES OF CARDS" shifts our attention to another iteration of montage in the visual culture of the twentieth century: within the space of the exhibition. Taking three exhibitions from the 1950s as his examples, Lugon is interested in how the medium of photography (and its montage in the space of the exhibition) is deployed in order to produce meaning. Underlying



Lugon's narrative is the assumption that, with avant-garde book design first developing the principle of montage, it later transformed as applied within the spatial medium of the exhibition. While much of this endeavor was for the sake of a "visual re-education" of mankind after the catastrophe of World War II, the respective efforts sought to establish a visual grammar based on the application of different forms of photographic imagery. As Lugon argues convincingly, the editorial regime of the pre-war period thus transformed into the structuring principle of visual communication in the contemporary condition. <sup>PAGE</sup> **123**

We would like to thank Philip Ursprung as well as the Hochschulstiftung of the University of Zurich for lending their support to an initial conference on the topic, as well as subsequently supporting this publication. Many thanks also go to Mathias Brühlmann for assisting us in preparing the conference, and for his graphic design. We offer our heartfelt thanks to Thomas Kramer from Park Books who has shared our enthusiasm for the project and made its publication possible, as well as to graphic designer Gregor Schreiter, who has given shape to the ideas and concepts explored in the following pages. Finally, we are indebted to our authors for their willingness to share their ideas, and their persistence in applying the intellectual concept of montage to the material culture of the twentieth century.

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and Martino Stierli