

**Hollywood on the Head of a Pin: Montage and Marketing at the Oscars®**  
by Lisa Kernan

“Hollywood,” an entity whose questionable geographic location has been increasingly problematized in the era of the global popular film market, is also a magic word. At once a place in Los Angeles, an industrial marker and a mythical land, it is emblematic of contemporary cinema’s contradictory urge both to escape the material constraints of a film-based culture industry and nostalgically to re-experience that same material culture. The floating signifier of “Hollywood” is essentially a magic carpet of nostalgia and marketing.

This essay explores one manifestation of the popular historicization of “Hollywood,” the historical film clip montages created—mostly—by former trailer producer Chuck Workman for the Academy Awards telecasts produced by Gil Cates during the 1990s. These brief pieces of (televised) film about film history participated strongly in the reconfiguring and marketing of the cinematic past in the popular imaginary during the nineties, pivotal years in the globalization of hegemonic American film culture. The Academy Awards telecast is a surprisingly under-examined televisual text, considering its longevity and international ubiquity, and deserves further work. But the montages have performed historically specific ideological operations within the telecast, and are worth examining on their own.

In order to historicize the Workman montages, I want to point first to the Oscars telecast for 2002, a year in which no Chuck Workman pieces appeared, and the first year the awards were held *in* Hollywood. This Oscars was different: the show was held in a theater that seated 1500 fewer guests than some previous venues (Anderton), but whose location within the new media complex and mall at Hollywood and Highland offered—for *virtual* guests—geographic cachet, ersatz *Intolerance* elephants, and big-screen video displays. As commentators and stars alike remarked, this was the year the Oscars “came home,” yet the “home” they came to, like other recent reconfigurations of heritage spaces into museums and theme parks, was an eviscerated (and re-commodified) shell of the place that once generated all the nostalgia.

The ABC TV network’s introduction to the time-honored star arrival sequence managed to stylishly evoke film history and simultaneously point to film’s future with an anticipatory nostalgia of *Blade Runner* proportions. The network coverage of the Academy Awards begins with black and white footage (scratched and aged to look like worn early film) of a curtain opening onto a silent film title that reads “Hollywood, California, 2002,” with John Leguizamo (in his *Moulin Rouge* persona and make-up) sitting on the edge of the proscenium stage. As he sings (borrowing from the *Moulin Rouge* opening’s rendition of “Nature Boy”): “There was a town, a very strange enchanted town, where stars shine up instead of down, what a town, built on fantasy...” the camera shows an aerial extreme long shot of Hollywood (akin to the one of Paris from *Moulin Rouge*), then zooms hyperbolically through and into the Hollywood space (again like the *Moulin Rouge* opening) and into the environs of the Hollywood and Highland mall complex housing the Kodak Theater, where we see that the shots of

buildings on Hollywood Boulevard have been digitally papered over with posters from classical Hollywood films. The sweeping camera eventually lands on the ABC commentator who introduces the star arrival sequence by waxing on about the show's new Hollywood location.

This hyperbolic collapsing of film-historical specificity within a spatially-based and marketing-driven, postmodern nostalgia bath on live TV is only possible in the digital media environment. The 2002 Oscar show introduction performs a mapping of first, a visual and aural take-off on a current film, and next, old movie posters, onto the contemporary Hollywood street, collapsing cinematic space onto at once marketing discourse and geographic space. Such "presti-digital" cinematic feats point to new geographies of movie marketing, and more precisely, movie heritage marketing, that have broader implications. As recent conjunctions of media studies and cultural geography have made clear, investigations of "MediaSpace" can yield "geographically informed and spatially sensitive" analytical techniques with the potential to shed new light on "forms of inequality and dominance, knowledge and practice." (Couldry and McCarthy, 4) Contemporary movie marketing is ripe for such analyses.

For some time now, movie marketing has expanded its boundaries beyond discrete paratexts such as posters, TV ads, trailers, or featurettes, and into such publicity-driven entities such as "Entertainment News" shows, actual news segments covering movie premieres or milestones, and other nebulous promotional venues. The digital environment accelerates such embedments and boundary-crossings. Marketing becomes an increasingly elusive and crucial subject for film historians interested in ecologies of cinematic knowledge. The current phenomenon of digital media about film history owes much to the Oscar show's use of montage, and particularly its use of Workman's series of film history montages of the 1990s.

The Academy Awards have been broadcast on television since 1953, when the show was sponsored by RCA Victor and televised by NBC. (Levy, 24) The show is currently contracted to the ABC network and has consistently captured very large audiences. The impact of Academy Awards on films and their creators has been widely discussed. As Emanuel Levy notes,

[W]inning an Oscar means not only prestige but hard cash at the box office. Winning the Best Picture award can add up to twenty or thirty million dollars in movie ticket sales. ... Significantly, the Oscar's effects have been visible in both the domestic and international film markets: the box-office receipts of movies abroad at times amount to more than half of their overall profits. ... [W]inning artists also gain power in negotiating for better roles with better directors, and earn increased popularity outside the film industry and outside of the U.S. (Levy, 45)

The Academy Awards telecasts' preeminent figuration each year of a televisual discourse promoting popular American film culture to a global audience is characterized by Toby Miller et al., in *Global Hollywood* as "advocacy marketing." The Oscars, like other awards shows, film festivals and trade shows,

aim to build positive brand awareness, popular acclaim and formal political support for the major Hollywood distributors. The brand or trademark is a form of symbolic equity that can be accumulated

through regular advocacy, giving major distributors a ‘trademark advantage’ over newcomers. (Miller et al., 161)

The Oscar telecast is thus a crucial marketing tool for the consolidation of the globalized American film industry’s hegemony.

Aside from the promotional effects of specific film clips and star visibility, the Oscar show’s many paeans to Hollywood history over the years, of which the Workman montages are in the forefront, also contribute to an overall marketing of the activity of watching movies. In the process, ideological and even epistemological assumptions as to what that activity entails are marketed as well.

Like trailers for individual films, these “trailers” for film history (made by a former trailer-maker) use a montage structure which both elides and reconfigures the narrative they promote. When that “narrative” is the entire history of Hollywood cinema—indeed *world* cinema mapped onto Hollywood cinema under the rubric of “the movies”—as summed up within a brief montage of very short clips, the ideology of cinematic representation as a magic act is overdetermined and foregrounded, bringing it in line at once with other advertising rhetoric (Williamson 140-145) and with that of the circus sideshow. Much of the appeal of these montages is the impossible task they attempt: all of film history in four minutes! Like the pre-cinematic appeal of miniaturization-based attractions, such as the Declaration of Independence or Gettysburg Address on the head of a pin, they astound by condensing, rendering the texts of history—here, fragments of film history—available for inspection by an audience flattered with the illusion of a god-like, all-encompassing, and since temporality is also involved in this case, rapidly assimilating gaze.

Susan Stewart has argued that the appeal of miniature writing, specifically of the miniature book, coincided with the transition from one technology to another (with the invention of printing):

On the interface between the manuscript and printing, the miniature book is a celebration of a new technology, yet a nostalgic creation endowed with the significance the manuscript formerly possessed. (Stewart, 39)

The appeal of the excess rapidity of these montages likewise redoubles a nostalgic immersion in cinema’s past, by way of the new media discourses of the millennial globalized “Hollywood,” precisely at the interface between the cinematic and the post-cinematic eras. Examining the ways montage is called into service for such marketing purposes has the potential to contribute to current explorations of the role of film historiography in the information age.

The first credited Chuck Workman montage shown during an Oscar telecast was for the 62nd Academy Awards in 1990, not long after Workman won an Oscar and critical acclaim for his 1986 DGA-commissioned short, *Precious Images*, which pioneered the rapid-fire film history montage. Specially introduced and credited (“by Academy Award-winning filmmaker Chuck Workman”), the Oscar piece, entitled “100

Years at the Movies,” set the precedent for a number of similar celebrations throughout the nineties telecasts, usually presented early in the show. (Montages were rarely featured in earlier telecasts, and indeed the clips from nominated films were usually single extracts until the ‘90s.) 1991’s montage depicted stars remembering their first times at the movies. The following (64th) Oscars had a montage of “laughs... from movies that still bring joy to the world.” Both were announced as Workman films.

Several Oscar shows during the decade presented themed montages by other filmmakers, on women in cinema (by Lynne Litman), the work of the cinematographer, and on the activity of going to the movies (by Mike Shapiro and John Bloom respectively, both uncredited). The 67th show (1995) presented a tribute to comedy that incorporated a credited Workman montage with a dance number where onstage stars interacted with the screen. And Workman montages were highlighted in the 70th through 72nd shows (1998-2000), on Oscar acceptances, “great moments,” and history in film. Interestingly, Jack Valenti and other “leaders of the Hollywood morale effort” also enlisted Workman into the industry’s post-September 11 war support when he created (for producer Michael Rhodes) a trailer for patriotism called “The Spirit of America,” that was shown on “one-fourth of the nation’s movie screens by Christmas day,” 2001, and for which he selected clips from “movies that had something to say about being an American” (Lyman).

I focus here on a description of the first, 1990 montage, which originates the format, utilizing many of the clips from *Precious Images* and establishing conventions for subsequent montages. It followed an almost giddy opening speech by Academy president Karl Malden emphasizing the newly global reach of the satellite-assisted Academy Awards telecast (the previous year was the first time it was seen in Russia): “How can you have a closed society when the skies are open from Moscow to Beijing to—you name it—Gary, Indiana?” In that context, Malden introduces Workman’s “special tribute” as a “magic look back at all the yesterdays that have brought us up to today.”

The “100 Years” montage, like its successors, is structured to flow from one loose category of filmic examples to another, assisted by musical cues, while continually rupturing the categories with clips that fit rhythmically but not thematically. The montage moves broadly from an introduction accompanied by the alien musical motif from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, to a focus on early cinema, to a survey of action genres accompanied by a familiar piano “chase” motif, to a horror and fantasy segment (set to the “Ghostbusters” theme), to a brief segment highlighting gender-bending, to one emphasizing musicals and slapstick comedy choreographed to a polka theme, to a romance-oriented segment set to the *Love Story* theme. It then moves into spectacles, such as explosions and death scenes from war films, set to a dramatic choral motif, with a highlight on Tom Joad’s “I’ll be there” speech followed by a string of images of heroes (mostly male) in action, then a string of women’s faces, then a climactic series of varied images which ends with the clinch scene from *Moonstruck* followed a shot of Peter O’Toole blowing out a match in *Lawrence of Arabia*, set to the “Close Encounters” theme. Workman’s compilation contains approximately 45 clips from non-Hollywood films, about a tenth of the total.

While this and the other Workman montages ultimately elude any causally or narratively-based rhetorical analysis as persuasive marketing devices, their very anti-causality within a broadly thematic framework is of interest in terms of what *is* and *isn't* valorized by these montages as constituting “the movies.” The montage’s argument could be summed up as: “Movies: there’s old ones, new ones, lots of kinds, lots of emotions, there are heroes and the women they fight for, and most of all, there’s love and light.” Again, the overarching rhetoric, mentioned by Malden himself, is magic. Judith Williamson comments about magic’s significance within other kinds of product advertising, that it “can ... be used to misrepresent any system of production” (141) and constitutes “a sort of black hole in both nature and time.” (144) Here, the magic of apparently watching all of film history in four minutes works also as a sort of narrative black box, wherein ordinary expectations that spectators follow a rational cinematic story or argument are suspended in a bath of spectacle and awe. Yet certain consistencies emerge in how cinema is represented within Workman’s montage.

The great majority of the clips in the “100 Years” montage comprise iconic moments from significant *performances*: Al Pacino shouting “Attica!” in *Dog Day Afternoon*; Sally Field holding up a “Union” sign in *Norma Rae*; Whoopi Goldberg’s body being “taken over” by Patrick Swayze in *Ghost*; Cagney and the *Public Enemy* grapefruit; Diane Keaton’s “La-di-dah” as *Annie Hall*. And while there is no coherent narrative per se, the montage does contain an overall structure guided by the music: there is a clear introduction, followed by a dramatic build-up, then a romantic interlude leading into a portentously dramatic climactic segment, and a meditative, romantic denouement. Cinema is thus boiled down to faces, gestures, and a simplistic rhythm of build-up and resolution that caricatures typical classical Hollywood narrative structure.

At the same time, the montage emphasizes the sheer variety, quantity, and accumulation of images, which are endowed with apparent magical qualities by the rapid cutting and the introductory fanfare. It seems coherent, yet mysterious—why the “Rosebud” clip just *there*? It’s hardly a documentary about film history; it doesn’t create a new film out of these clips; yet even as its meanings are elusive, the audience is encouraged to congratulate itself for grasping them (indeed, just for *recognizing* individual images within the headlong rush of the montage). So, too, the Hollywood elite watching in the Academy Awards telecast theater congratulates itself during the montage with periodic bursts of appreciative applause for its members onscreen (notably in this Desert Storm-era 1990 telecast, Tom Cruise shouting “Stop the bombing!” in *Born on the Fourth of July*, as well as the more predictable longevity nods to Bette Davis, Henry Fonda, and Karl Malden). And since these magical beings are watching and clapping along with a (newly) global “us” in the virtual audience, all the more reason the montage must mean something. But despite appearances, the whole of this montage is less than the sum of its parts. One could ask, of course, why it’s necessary for a montage depicting film history to “mean” something in any kind of straightforward linear sense anyway. But more to the point, what Workman’s Oscar montages tend to communicate is a sort of cult of the cut, ultimately naturalizing quantity (the fast-paced abundance of images) as quality (by, moreover, an Academy-Award winning filmmaker).

Workman's background as a trailer-maker convinced him that "you could capture the essence of a memorable film in as little as a single shot—if you chose the shot carefully enough." (Birchard, 91) His assemblage of these "essences" places images together for broad generic or thematic reasons, as well as on the basis of simple physical resemblance (similar shots of darting eyes, people popping bubble-gum) or gag value (one clip finishing a sentence from another). But the only real meaning-based common denominator of the transitions throughout the montage is the fact that they place the individual clips within a discourse of accumulation. As images accumulate, our recognition of the movies they are taken from accumulates, and along with it, a recognition of our own cultural capital as cinema-literate spectators.

By the year of this Oscar montage, 1990, the cultures of home video viewing and movie taping had taken hold, and while the widespread development of the domestic cinephile would await the phenomenon of DVD collecting as characterized by Barbara Klinger, the accumulative spectatorial pleasures of the Workman montages foretell the dynamic of the contemporary movie collector. According to Klinger this is "a dynamic that occludes the relations the collection has to the outside world, particularly to the social and material conditions of mass production." (Klinger, 147) Like the collector, the spectator of the film history montage participates in "a chain of logic between property, passion and self-referentiality," (147) as the montage offers remembered and recognized cinematic images one by one for us to tick off on our cultural memory scorecards. An ideology of popular cinephilia as cultural capital is thus naturalized, whether in the form of viewing, repeat viewing, taping or collecting.

This discourse participates, in turn, in a broader discourse of accumulation, the irrevocable flow of advertisements interwoven with the Oscar show itself. While these high-priced advertisements—ads during Oscar telecasts, like Superbowl ads, are often themselves celebrated as elaborately produced showcases—are for a variety of products, their metonymic linkage to the film history montage overdetermines the montage's celebration of spectatorship as accumulation and consumption.

Accumulation is an endemic feature of the cultural landscape of the information society, according to Scott Lash, who characterizes it as "a society of the 'and,' not a society of 'the there.'" (Lash, 9) Lash's book, *Critique of Information*, sets itself the task of asking "is a critical theory possible in the contemporary information society?" (vii) A concern he addresses is the receding of causality in the flood of information:

In the older representational culture of the manufacturing society, the principle of causality predominates in the linking of objects and indeed subjects with one another. In the technological culture such causality is displaced by "additivity." Linear cause is displaced by non-linear adding on. (xii)

The Workman montages' delineation of film history can be viewed in this light as anti-montage. No tradition of cinematic montage, whether classical Hollywood, modernist, or the intellectual montage of the early Soviet era, incorporated a structural refusal of causality or narrative in favor of sheer additivity (omitting avant-garde cinema, the exception that proves the rule). But television's informational barrage and the

increase in fast-paced commercials of the post-MTV era make such moves seem natural and inevitable.

In Workman's montages, audiences are encouraged to congratulate themselves for recognition and apprehension of speed, quantity, hyperbolic gesture, as the important expertises of spectatorship (these are naturalized as cinema spectatorship). In a twist of postmodern irony, the perceptual learning that cinematic montage once contributed to modernism's upending of earlier representational forms is trivialized, and cinema itself becomes hidden behind (a TV-influenced version of) its own language. Scott Lash points out that television, with its real-time persistence and primarily informational content, "sets the paradigm" for the new media age, while cinema remains characterized by circumscribed narrative temporality and a re-presentational mode. (69) While cinematic in nature, the Chuck Workman film history montage (coming to us as a live television broadcast) can thus be viewed as paradigmatic television about cinema.

The appeal of the montages as marketing tools for global cinema has less to do with an internal persuasiveness than with a nostalgic reassurance that even in the midst of an information superhighway, the "precious moments" of love and light can still be possessed. Like the god-like appeal of reading miniature writing, the shiny new patina of media marketing with which cinema is endowed in these condensed montages serves to remind the global television viewer that in the information age, everyone can rapidly consume all of film history—collapsed, of course, into Hollywood film history.

The presentation of these montages *within* the Oscar show has further implications. Interestingly, the show as a whole, with its arrival sequence, frequent shots of stars in the audience, and of course speeches by award-winners who giddily run down aisles and mount steps to the Oscar podium, returns the cinema to the proscenium space of its early days (of which the 2002 show's quote of the *Moulin Rouge* opening provides a reminder). The proscenium space of the Awards show is full of stars and energy. It contains not only the obvious film workers and performers who are nominees, but also friends and family, Academy staff, seat-savers, and crew, in addition to the virtual presences of the fans pressing at the gates, the reporters lurking in the wings, and the implied global spectators watching the show, who are often referenced within speeches. The "magical" cinematic moments figured within the montage appear somehow empty by comparison—a black hole speeding through time and evacuated of space.

The montage's privileging of iconic performance moments thus de-emphasizes the representation of actual *cinematic* space and *mise-en-scène* (as do the now trailer-like assemblages of shots from nominated films), while papering the "MediaSpace" of advocacy marketing (the hallowed hall of the Academy Awards telecast venue itself) with a naturalization of cinema as performance—a move moreover appropriate to marketing a commodity that currently counts on a star's affiliation with a film package in order to secure funding. The grimacing faces and gesturing bodies offered up by the montage are marginalized onto a flat screen within the live and (televisually) three-dimensional space of the Awards show. And when the show cuts away from the montage to the proscenium stage, with the final montage image lingering on the in-house screen

(as in the 1990 montage's image of O'Toole's Lawrence blowing out a candle), the montage image is experienced as frozen and flat like a dead fish eye. In other words, the material of the cinematic image ultimately looks a lot less vivid than the pomp and pageantry of its televisual frame. The Workman montages within the Oscar shows of the 1990s thus work to encase the newly global cinematic space within its new virtual proscenium, literalizing the global expansion, yet signficatory contraction of moving image culture under globalization.

The Workman montages of the 1990s pave the way for the spatialized reconfiguration of Hollywood nostalgia into heightened mall spectacle exemplified by the 2002 Oscars opening clip. As television-about-cinema, they prefigure a trend within digital-media-about-cinema which spatializes film history onto a "strange, enchanted town" called Hollywood. This now virtual, global town, which exists wherever movie posters can be digitally pasted on walls or buildings (or indeed wherever dancers on an Oscar stage interact with cinematic clips) is an important subject for contemporary film studies. For as these montages about Hollywood point out, the texts of film history have begun to escape their narrative, and even two-dimensional confines in the digital age, confirming Lash's argument that the object of cultural studies itself changes along with the information age.

With mass media, mediation took place through a parallel realm, but one comprised of signs that were still one-dimensional or linear narrative, or two-dimensional (painted or photographic images). With digital media and the generalized brand environment, the signs become three-dimensional. ... They constitute and inhabit a space in which we orient ourselves. ... The implications of this for culture and perhaps cultural studies may be vast. The subject matter of cultural studies may change: it would no longer be texts or narratives, or even signs or audiences or authors. The subject matter of cultural studies would become objects. ... It would comprise a more architectonic, object like, yet bodily notion of culture: one in which bodies navigate through a sort of object space. The encounter with such cultural objects is neither semiotic nor iconic but indexical, tactile and haptic. (Lash 125)

The mapping of cinema onto the spaces of consumption by means of the magical floating signifier of "Hollywood"—whether in the sense of Workman's montages or the network Oscar coverage example—can thus be read as an expansion of promotional montage outside the film frame, even as it condenses film history into four minutes. Workman's montages during Oscar telecasts of the '90s thus prefigure a broader "trailerization" of Hollywood space, exemplified also by the featurettes and other paeans to film history that now constitute "added-value" elements of films on DVD. While trailers, featurettes, "making-ofs" and other promotional film paratexts have long participated in Hollywood's self-historicization (indeed Workman is also known as a producer and editor of "numerous 'behind-the-scenes' documentaries about filmmaking"—"ShowEast '96," 74), the implications for film history of these kinds of promotional signifiers shifts as they are spatialized in different ways in the digital media environment. As deep focus once came to be considered "montage within the frame," today's mapping of cinema images and "moments" onto broader spaces of consumption can be read as promotional montage *outside* the frame.

This kind of "media sprawl" will need to be addressed by film scholars, for just as critical theory must reconfigure itself with the information superhighway in mind, film



historiography must examine the ways in which the object of film history is transmogrified within the digital environment of an increasingly marketing-dominated popular culture. Jan-Christopher Horak's recent consideration of the Hollywood entertainment industry's forays into film history in the 1990s by way of studio-based film archives suggests that "[j]ust why the entertainment industry put film history on its agenda ... bears some theoretical analysis." His article's recounting of one studio's "economic imperative" posits a partial response, along with a general hypothesis that "the audience for film/TV history has grown." (Horak, 41) But I would suggest also that the newly global reach of Hollywood's "advocacy marketing" texts, such as the Oscars telecast during the 1990s, contributed to the industry's increased mandate to position its history (and its library) internationally during this decade. New technologies and the greater reach of all kinds of film texts in Global Hollywood offer studios multiple avenues through which film historical products such as behind-the-scenes or other historical documentary films, TV shows and theme park attractions can promote "magic look[s] back at all the yesterdays that have brought us up to today," in the process naturalizing Hollywood and the American film industry as the primary, if not sole, originator of movie "magic," as well as disguising the publicity imperative that is the *raison d'être* of industry-produced self-historicizations.

For the authors of *Global Hollywood*, it is important to remember the political economy that underpins the floating signifier. Their book characterizes the ways in which "global Hollywood is an institution of global capitalism that seeks to render bodies that are intelligible and responsive to the New International Division of Cultural Labor." (Miller et al, 42) Fortunately, alternatives to this economic imperative can be found within contemporary media culture. Public film archives can (and do) play a vital role in counterbalancing this overwhelmingly commercial media environment by offering collections and programs that celebrate other cinemas than Hollywood's. At their best, they exemplify a collecting paradigm based on democratic access rather than the vicissitudes of individualism and cultural capital, and introduce viewers to other modes of film-historical consciousness than publicity-based ones, such as a recent lecture and program by Bob Gitt exploring the outtakes from Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* at the UCLA Film and Television Archive. Likewise, film scholars with discipline-specific strengths in textual analysis and ideological critique can intervene in this "rendering" on some level by calling students' and audiences' attention to such often unexamined media meta-texts as Workman's montages, which with their emptied-out montage structures enabling a spatialized reconfiguration of film history as a realm of consumption, exemplify, naturalize and reinforce the experience of Global Hollywood as an increasingly impoverished cultural space. For perhaps the magic act that promotional film history montages do best is making cinematic diversity seem to disappear.

A German version of this paper first appeared as:

Lisa Kernan, Hollywood auf einem Stecknadelkopf. Filmhistorische Kompilationen bei Oscarverleihungen und der globale Konsumraum des Kinos, in Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau, eds. Demnächst in ihrem Kino. Grundlagen der Filmwerbung und Filmvermarktung. Marburg: Schüren, 2005

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