

9-25-2013

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Catherine Russell

*Concordia University, Montreal*

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### Recommended Citation

Russell, Catherine (2013) "Archival Cinephilia in *The Clock*," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*: Vol. 54: Iss. 2, Article 13.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/framework/vol54/iss2/13>

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# Archival Cinephilia in *The Clock*

Catherine Russell

This is how the accelerated tempo of technology appears in light of the primal history of the present. Awakening.

—Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

Art critic Rosalind Krauss called *The Clock* a “*tour de force*,”<sup>1</sup> and novelist Zadie Smith wrote enthusiastically about it in the *New York Review of Books*.<sup>2</sup> It is clearly an event, both a novelty event for the general public and an intellectual event; and yet film scholars don’t seem so sure. Thom Andersen sums up the grumbling cynicism that I’ve heard from several cinephiles when he asks, “Is the clock dumb enough?”<sup>3</sup> The problem for Andersen is primarily curatorial, as Marclay’s corpus of films is severely limited historically and geographically, fairly predictable, and not always accurate in terms of the actual synchronization of movie time and clock time. Marclay borrows heavily from film history, but the question of his own contribution to that history remains unresolved, perhaps because it is not precisely a film.

*The Clock* may be a video collage, but it is very much a cinematic experience, drawing the viewer into a hermetically sealed world of cinematic time and space. The continuity principles of editing, sound, and performance create a fluid, endless text that is at once seductive and engrossing. Marclay arguably invokes both forms of cinephilia as Thomas Elsaesser has described them: the older version of immersion in the spectacle and the more recent version of the collector and interactive user of digital cinema.<sup>4</sup> *The Clock* also invokes several principles of

collage-based film practice that have been a cornerstone of the avant-garde since the late 1950s. Marclay's techniques of appropriation and recombination are, however, neither challenging nor critical. *The Clock* begs the question, "Where is the *détournement*?" Instead of interrupting narrative flow, Marclay has successfully reconstructed a kind of narrative that seduces and entertains. Marclay has appropriated not only the film clips but something close to the mechanism of desire that interpellates the viewer into the flow of narrative film.

If *The Clock* challenges engrained notions of political modernism that are very much still at play in experimental film practice and criticism, it also opens up some key questions about cinematic representation in the digital age. Despite the viewing pleasure and critical rewards of identifying hundreds of movies and actors, *The Clock* is nevertheless an experimental work made by an artist and exhibited in museums and galleries. It might be best described as an essay on cinephilia, if that isn't too much of a backdoor way of talking about secondhand or borrowed pleasures. This is not to say that the work offers a coherent argument regarding cinephilia, or that Marclay intended it as an intervention into the ongoing scholarly debate regarding cinephilia. In fact, *The Clock* is not exemplary of the essay film as it has been defined either by Timothy Corrigan or Laura Roscaroli, who both stress the subjective aspects of a form that engages with the world through various creative modes of cinematic address.<sup>5</sup> *The Clock* offers no first-person reflexivity whatsoever, and arguably inverts all principles of cinematic subjectivity through the use of exclusively borrowed footage and its lack of voiceover—although there is definitely an authorial inscription registered in the montage and in the sound-image relations. However, if we consider *The Clock* in terms of its production of knowledge, it may nonetheless be aligned with the video essay as a genre of film studies practice.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, I want to argue here that whether one understands the piece as a good object or a bad object, it foregrounds a crucial tension in film aesthetics between genre cinema and the avant-garde and art cinemas. Rather than press the issue of the essay film, I will explore this treatise on cinephilia by way of key concepts in Walter Benjamin's thought. As a cult phenomenon, *The Clock* evokes the aura of the pre-cinematic artwork, and yet its strategies of sampling clearly embrace the reproducibility of the cinematic image that Benjamin endorsed for its potential engagement with progressive social politics. Going beyond the artwork essay, I will also argue that *The Clock* evokes the deeply ambivalent politics of representation that Benjamin ascribes to the phantasmagoria of the Paris Arcades.

### ***The Clock* as Dispositif**

Adrian Martin has proposed a revival of the term *dispositif* to refer to a film that is “both a conceit . . . and a machine.” He cites examples from Greenaway, Frampton, and Kiarostami, and uses it precisely to address the movement of cinema out of the theater and into the gallery. The term *dispositif* invokes social flows and apparatus of heterogeneous elements, providing, he says, a “fruitful passage” from the vast social ensembles that Foucault and Agamben conjure to “those specific works that also internally construct a system of relations between thoroughly heterogeneous elements.”<sup>7</sup> If we can analyze *The Clock* as a *dispositif*, which is to say, a cinema-machine organized by its own internal set of rules that includes the social space of reception, it is one based specifically on the expressive aesthetics of narrative cinema.

This type of cinema-machine that literally works like clockwork can be compared to the formal experiments of structural filmmakers such as Hollis Frampton and Michael Snow. Like their films, *The Clock* has a set of internal rules that the viewer learns as they unfold. But unlike Frampton’s rules in a film like (*nostalgia*) (US, 1971) or Snow’s in a film like *Wavelength* (CA/US, 1967), Marclay’s rules are not of his own invention and don’t belong specifically to film or photography. The cycle of clock-time, with its regularity, fragmentation, and duration, is a phenomenon of everyday life in urban modernity. In this sense, the piece acquires a documentary validity through an observational rather than personal approach to the subject of clock-time in the cinema. The form is in itself, as one critic noted, a new kind of realism.<sup>8</sup>

Martin is careful to distinguish the *dispositif* as a *form* of cinema from the apparatus as the *system* of ideological positioning, with which the term is often confused. “It is not a mechanistic or rigid formal system: it is more like an aesthetic guide-track that is as open to variation, surprise or artful contradiction as the filmmaker decrees.”<sup>9</sup> *The Clock* deliberately invokes certain principles of the cinematic apparatus, including the seating arrangement and darkened room that Marclay has specified as part of the work.<sup>10</sup> Rosalind Krauss describes Marclay’s use of synchronization as a form of interpellation in which the alignment of screen time and real time incorporates the spectator into the flow of the work. The key difference, of course, is that the spectator on the white Ikea sofa is acutely aware of their own present-time, as their seat-mates come and go, and as they stifle hunger pains and wonder if they will catch the last train home or not.

So *The Clock* invokes the apparatus while also resisting it, insofar as the viewer remains self-conscious about the time of day, and insofar as the diegetic narrative space is so heterogeneous and lacking in any fixed subjectivity. Point-of-view editing and other principles of continuity are systematically used



Figure 1. Peter Sellers and Graham Stark in *A Shot in the Dark* (Blake Edwards, 1964).

throughout the work to link shots from different movies. Sometimes the results are jarringly obvious, as when someone in a black-and-white film from the 1940s dials a phone and someone in a color film from the 1970s appears to answer it. Marclay exploits this principle with a great sense of humor, as when crashes or explosions appear to be caused or triggered by actions in different films. There is a beautiful moment when a black-and-white car crash is followed by a gently falling pink petal. Often, though, the discrepancies are not as evident, as when a glance is followed by a tight close-up of a watch or clock that loosely matches the style of the previous shot. Music, too, is often used to seamlessly blend together disparate material.

Music and sound effects are, of course, Marclay's original *métier*, and his montage practice is more or less based on music sampling. It is through the sound editing that *The Clock* achieves its trance-like effect, engaging and seducing the viewer into spending time, passing time, and losing track of time, even while always insisting on the precise time of day. We are entranced but also not entranced. Is there any room for revelation in this kind of cinephilia? Has Marclay beaten us to every punch with his jokes and his beautiful juxtapositions? In his collection of clips, he has included an ongoing commentary on cinematic time and even the practice of quotation, which tends to elicit knowing laughter from audiences sitting there watching time go by. Phrases such as "your obsession with time" or "you often pick words for their sound rather than their meaning" are reflexive gestures that are as funny as Peter Sellers trying to repeatedly synchronize his watch with Leonard Rossiter in *The Pink Panther*. Marclay's extensive use of comedy on both levels is responsible for the work's high entertainment value, which is in turn responsible for its successful museum run and perhaps what lies behind the casual

scorn of cinephiles like Andersen. But the comedy is key to the work, which is devoted to genre cinema and not, in the end, to art cinema.

The piece has a grand narrative of rising, eating breakfast, working, eating again, being entertained in the evening, sleeping, and waking, forming a narrative that mimics the viewer's own routine. In this sense, *The Clock* invokes the rituals of everyday life that are familiar from the city film—another collage-based precedent for this work. And yet, while the viewer may share certain rituals of everyday life with the characters onscreen, we don't normally hold up banks, try to beat ticking time bombs, rendezvous under station clocks, appear dramatically late for appointments, or hang on to the hands of huge clock towers like Big Ben. These are things that people in movies do. We don't typically smash our clocks either, which happens a lot in *The Clock*.

### A Benjaminian Zone

By synchronizing screen time and real time, *The Clock* manages to entice the viewer into a cinematic world that we are free to leave at will but which, while inside, does seem like a kind of machine. The experiential dimension is exemplary of what Walter Benjamin describes as innervation: that property of cinema that harnesses the body through the senses, bringing the mechanical and the human into a very close encounter. In addition to his reliance on continuity editing and sound dissolves, Marclay exploits techniques of suspense and comedy as tropes of genre cinema to create this effect. For Benjamin, innervation was both the danger and the potential of cinema, which is one of the reasons why I find *The Clock* to be so Benjaminian. It at once exploits the entertainment value of commercial cinema by way of its unabashed appropriation and, at the same time, offers critical keys to its undoing through techniques of quotation and montage.

The Benjaminian element goes beyond techniques of quotation and collage to the concept of phantasmagoria, which he elaborates in *The Arcades Project*. The collector as allegorist is a key figure in that work, and if we can read Marclay's compilation of film clips as an essay on genre cinema, it is because he is an allegorist.<sup>11</sup> The phantasmagoria on display in *The Clock* is a very specific one. It can almost be described as a documentary on London in the 2000s, as the sources for the film clips came from the local video stores, and there is a surprisingly high quotient of British cinema. This is definitely not the cinema in any universal sense. The emphasis on American film, followed by British film, West European film, and a thin smattering of Asian cinema, is not only limited geographically and linguistically but is further weighted heavily towards postwar cinema and even post-1970s film after that. Although some art cinema is included, the emphasis on narrative feature films puts the emphasis on low-brow genre cinema, with a

few TV shows such as *Mission Impossible* (US, 1966–1973), *ER* (US, 1994–2009), and *The X-Files* (US, 1993–2002) thrown in, probably because that is what was found in the video store.

To criticize the work's lack of inclusivity is, however, to miss the point. As an essay on cinephilia, *The Clock* represents the phantasmagoria in ruins. The film archive, as produced by London video stores circa 2007 to 2010, is culled for content rather than its pedigree or representativeness. Visual style comes to stand in for historicity, ethnicity, and geography, with sound and montage functioning as the glue. In keeping with the mode of found-footage filmmaking, the images are wrested away from their narrative origins, stripped of aura, authorship, and narrative significance. On this level, the film opens itself up to the kind of *mise-en-scène* criticism that Adrian Martin claims returns with the form of the dispositif. He argues that a new *mise-en-scène* critical method is made possible in which “the integrated arrangement of form and content at all levels” is considered. For Martin, this is the failed promise of traditional *mise-en-scène* criticism.<sup>12</sup>

*The Clock* in many ways takes us back to the text of Hollywood, but it is a broken text, torn from its alibi as a storytelling medium. What this means for me is a reading of the work as a procession of movie stars subsisting within a world of things. We are returned to the profilmic documentary that lurks within every fiction film. Actors such as Nicholas Cage, John Malkovich, and Meryl Streep appear at various stages in their careers, producing a thematic thread of aging. The many names of clocks and watches—Bulova, Rolex, Casio, Gruen, Tisoo, and Caravelle automatic—are more than product placements, but underline the role of commodities in the phantasmagoria of Hollywood. When such details move into the foreground and out of the background of the image, they become the ruins of the original work, brought into legibility in a distant historical moment.

The stylistic variety of timepieces is in fact astonishing, and is deeply integrated into the way that *The Clock* represents time. Within the strict chronology of the time of day lies a nonlinear, heterogeneous temporality of historically specific design, not only of commodities and material culture but of film style itself. The cuts from black-and-white to color are only the most obvious juxtaposition of styles of dress, architecture, set design, and behavior. The illusion of continuity is constantly, if subtly, undermined by shifts in stock color palettes and lighting design; the game for the cinephile is not only to identify film titles and actors but also time periods.

The recognition of such historical detail potentially renders the viewer of *The Clock* as a materialist historian, in Benjamin's sense of the term, which is close to what we might now call a cultural anthropologist. Marclay in this sense is a rag-picker rather than a curator, and the randomness that seems to inform the





Figure 2. Christian Marclay, video still from *The Clock* (2010). Single-channel video with stereo sound; 24 hours, looped. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

selection of source material makes what Benjamin calls “science out of magic.” In “One-Way Street,” he describes the child looking for Easter eggs as an engineer disenchanting the gloomy parental apartment.<sup>13</sup> Fragments of narrative are stripped of their mystique in *The Clock* and rendered cogs in a machine, which are in turn pieces of historical time. The energy and momentum of narrative cinema, along with its rhythms of emotional ups and downs, are laid bare as a succession of temporal increments. In “Dream Kitsch: Gloss on Surrealism,” Benjamin argues that kitsch “catches hold of objects at their most threadbare and timeworn point.”<sup>14</sup>

*The Clock* may evoke the sense of a phantasmagoria in decay, but Marclay has eliminated the look of decay by evening out and homogenizing the image quality of his clips. Where Andersen in *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (US, 2003) endorsed the grain of poor VHS copies, Marclay has almost completely erased such signs of image degradation. There is very little “dust,” in other words, on his collection of cinematic artifacts, which renders them even more kitsch-like souvenirs of the past. Even so, the images are nevertheless “threadbare” and “timeworn” in their revelation of stylistic time. Each clip marks a certain point in film history, which also turns out to be cultural history—insofar as fashion, hairstyles, and even modes of behavior and gesture signal a moment in time and are read as indices and traces of the past. If, as Benjamin suggests, history decays into images, not stories,<sup>15</sup> *The Clock* helps us to better grasp the role of cinema in this process by immersing us in a non-linear cycle of the accumulated debris of the film industry.



Benjamin had nothing to say about cinephilia, of course, given that he seems not to have seen many movies. And yet his concept of profane illumination may be a useful means of grasping the critical potential of cinephilia as a category of cultural critique. Paul Willeman noted in 1994 that cinephilia has never been a coherent discourse, and, in my view, not much has changed since then. For Willeman, cinephilia designates “something which resists, which escapes existing networks.”<sup>16</sup> I agree with Willeman that cinephilia must be “a question of something being revealed in a social relationship, because the cinema is a social relationship. Something is being activated and revealed in that relationship.”<sup>17</sup> In *The Clock*, the “social” consists of the collective memory embedded in film history and, equally, the intensified experience of the present.

To return to the *dispositif* of *The Clock*, we need to note the omnipresence of the white Ikea sofas and the impossibility of transferring the work to a convenient format like the DVD that one could watch at home. The return to the theater, or its simulacrum in the gallery, is integral to the work. But as I have already noted, the viewing experience is nevertheless doubled and divided between one’s own body, routine, and schedule and the unrelenting momentum of the projection, a division that relates in turn to Benjamin’s distinction between human experience and the more regulated experience of modernity.<sup>18</sup> Benjamin understood film as a privileged medium where these two forms of experience potentially collide; it could thereby function as a therapeutic tool for the poverty of experience endemic to industrial modernity.

As Miriam Hansen has noted, Benjamin’s famous artwork essay underwent several revisions in which he finally ended up placing cinema on the side of “experiential poverty.” And yet it is clear that in the second version of that essay, he held out some hope for film as a space for “room for play,” “for trying out an alternative innervation of technology.”<sup>19</sup> In conjunction with his conception of the archive, the collector, and the allegorist, it may be that such a space remains possible, especially in the *dispositif* of expanded cinema, such as an installation like *The Clock*, which I have already referred to as a kind of game. Marclay’s project displays an ambivalence regarding the medium that runs parallel to Benjamin’s because it is a popular cinema and a mass aesthetic that is being both exploited and ruined.

Among the many remarkable features of *The Clock* is the way that it creates a trance-like sense of continuity, holding the viewer hostage in an unrelenting unfolding of time. Unless the gallery closes and you get kicked out by the guards, the only way to end *The Clock* is to get up and leave. We may recall that for Roland Barthes, leaving the movie theater was akin to awakening from a hypnosis, which provoked him to inquire how one could “pry oneself away from the mirror?” He advocates going to the cinema in a state of detachment, to be hypnotized by “a distance, and this distance is not an intellectual one. It is, so to speak, an amorous

distance.”<sup>20</sup> He wants to be “*twice* fascinated” by the image and by its surroundings, including the darkness and “the obscure mass of other bodies.” Barthes’s version of cinephilia embraces the hypnotic effect of the ideological veil, but he also sees the social, public space and the architecture of the theater. Watching *The Clock*, we are always leaving the movie theater, or not. People constantly coming and going create an atmosphere of “mobile” viewing alongside the fixed gaze of cinematic spectatorship; both forms of viewing coexist.

The cinephiliac trance created by *The Clock*—its lure—is offset by its discontinuous, heterogeneous style of collage and in its predication on “now time,” or continuous present tense. We cannot really lose ourselves if we always know what time it is in the real world, and the only real “ending” is of our own contingent choosing. *The Clock* is thus an especially acute example of Benjamin’s notion of art that distracts (from everyday life) and is received in distraction, which is to say that it is received collectively, in public. Only in this manner could art become an instrument of social change. Through the “sociology of attention” a certain rhythm of temporal experience and historical imagination might be, literally, felt. Peter Osborne argues that, in light of the rhythmic complexity of moving images in the gallery space, “one criterion of judgement of a work . . . might be the extent to which it opens up this network of temporal connections (psychic, social, historical) to a reflective and transfigurative view.”<sup>21</sup>

I am not going to argue that *The Clock* corresponds to the Surrealists’ alarm clock that Benjamin claims to ring in the revolution by “ringing for sixty seconds every minute,”<sup>22</sup> and yet the work points in that direction. For Benjamin, “The collective is a body too. And the physis that is being organized for it in technology can, through all its political and factual reality, be produced only in that image space to which profane illumination initiates us.”<sup>23</sup> *The Clock* is one of many contemporary works in which film history becomes an archival collection, and it suggests that this archive can produce a complex, multi-layered experience of time and space. What Benjamin called “the long-sought image-space” is arguably being opened, providing affective, sensual access to material history.

Because *The Clock* is both continuous *and* discontinuous, and because it is both entrancing *and* distracting, it tends to echo Benjamin’s cultural theory. The actuality of the present is intensified by a correspondence with a collective memory of the past, and in this crystallization of time, this synch-event, is the potential for awakening from the dream of “the last century.” If for Benjamin this was the nineteenth century, *The Clock* offers a platform for an awakening from the twentieth century. Cinema is on the one hand a great tool for breaking up the phantasmagoria; on the other, it is the greatest manifestation of the dreamworld of commodity capitalism. *The Clock* foregrounds both properties of cinema at the same time. In light of Benjamin’s notion of history, it might provide a unique



Figure 3. *For a Few Dollars More* (Sergio Leone, 1965).

space for the film viewer to understand their experience as a mode of dialectical historiography.

### **Inventories and Productive Disorder**

The *mise-en-scène* of theatrical gesture, style, celebrity, genre, objects, and places constitute a phantasmagoria of material culture that articulates a dynamic anti-archival excess. As Paula Amad has argued, from its inception the film image challenged established principles of archival order. Sound and image files will always exceed their indices or labels, which will in turn always resort to alphanumeric codes for archival order. As Zadie Smith notes, “you can’t google for clocks.”<sup>24</sup> Well, you can, but you are not going to get the clocks that Marclay found. Marclay might have organized his folders of found material hour-by-hour,<sup>25</sup> but within those folders there is so much more than the time of day. In the end, the temporal marker is merely an artificial conceit for the organization of materials according to aesthetic principles of style, affect, and continuity. The cinephiliac excess is arguably built into *The Clock’s* playful use of montage, juxtaposition, and discontinuity. Productive disorder, a chaos that resists archival systems, is heightened by the lack of information. Without names or dates, or even subtitles, we see more than time, and are challenged to read the images according to our own codes of reference.

Moreover, for cinephiles, *The Clock* is particularly frustrating because of the dispersion of the authorial work over a crew of assistants who sourced the clips. The work defies any attempt at interpretation or close analysis, because it lies so close to an entropic chaos of contingency. It challenges viewers into compiling

their own inventories (in lieu of analysis), and these can be quite varied. As an ephemeral object, it is not available for close viewing, and so all such inventories have to be reconstructed from scribbled notes and overloaded memories. Somebody started a crowdsourcing wiki page in an attempt to catalogue all the films that Marclay used, but, interestingly enough, it did not generate much activity, perhaps because of the futility of the exercise.<sup>26</sup> *Film Comment* ran a very cinephiliac dialogue between Chris Petit and Iain Sinclair in the form of an email exchange taking place over a few weeks during the initial run in the White Cube gallery in London in October and November 2010. Petit and Sinclair, two British writers and occasional filmmakers, want to see art cinema in *The Clock* so that's what they see, although they also provide a running commentary on various aspects of the piece, including the behavior of the audiences and the guards.

Petit and Sinclair see such things as a “snippet of Dryer,” and “a bit of Bresson for class,” and note such sightings as a Godard scene from *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (FR, 1980) and early Fassbinder. They see examples from Wenders, Haneke, Varda, and Fuller. Sinclair even provides a set of “time-brands” distilled from his viewing, including “Bergman clock-without-hands metaphor: mobility . . . Bressonian fate-time . . . Resnais boulevard cubist time . . . Chris Marker flicking the stills . . . TV time. Hung, drawn, and quartered.”<sup>27</sup> And yet, they also realize, somewhat disappointedly, that “it’s the more mechanical films that get used.” Indeed, if Charles Bronson dominates the morning, Nicholas Cage dominates the afternoon. While they longed for more Lang and Hitchcock, what they got—what makes *The Clock* literally tick—is genre cinema. *The Clock* may be one of the longest films ever made, but its construction of duration is made principally from Marclay’s use of what Petit and Sinclair call “mainstream cinema.”

The Petit-Sinclair piece is the most cinephiliac writing that I have yet seen on this work, and it is significant that they include an ongoing dialogue on the city and the central London neighbourhood in which the White Cube is situated. They describe coming and going to the gallery at odd hours, waiting outside, and spending the night there with other viewers/addicts in a basement “dormitory.” Sinclair, who also identifies himself as a psychogeographer, notes, “This is everything West End cinema used to be, in terms of coming off the street into the quilted half-dark.” He and Petit include in their commentary both personal memories of the urban space and literary references to the neighbourhood (J.G. Ballard, William Burroughs, Graham Greene). In fact, every installation of *The Clock* potentially defamiliarizes the urban space in which it is screened. It tends to spill out of the gallery into the city—physically in the form of long lineups and psychically in the form of the media attention it has drawn. But more than this, because the activity is synchronized with the real time of everyday life, the piece is incorporated into the viewer’s own urban time in an unfamiliar way.

The urban context of *The Clock* evokes the Surrealist practice of film viewing: “Dropping into a cinema when whatever was playing was playing, at any point in the show, and leaving at the first hint of boredom—of surfeit—to rush off to another cinema.”<sup>28</sup> As Robert Ray points out in his citation of Breton, this mode of dislocated filmgoing freed the details of decor and gesture, objects and architecture, from the linearity of narrative. “By extracting people and objects from the world at large, cinema made them more visible than ever before.”<sup>29</sup> The fragmentation of urban space was also central to Benjamin’s notion of the phantasmagoria in the Paris Arcades, and the kaleidoscopic vision it inspired for the flâneur. Marclay’s clips are mainly from films set in cities, where narratives involving deadlines and appointments are most likely to be set. It may thus be categorized, after all, as a city film; and the city, likewise, is a component of its *dispositif*. Another inventory may include all the cities in which the films are set.

My own inventory of *The Clock* is based not on cities, directors, or film titles, but on actors’ names. My notes confirm that Charles Bronson does in fact appear quite a bit in the morning and Nicholas Cage quite a bit in the afternoon. I would also agree with Petit and Sinclair’s observation that “Marclay’s process reminds you that films are a masculine business.”<sup>30</sup> During the morning and afternoon I had only half the names of women as men, which doesn’t mean that women were not onscreen, but there were far fewer recognizable movie stars. A similar trend emerged from my colleague’s inventory. However, women did come on thick and fast in the evening. A remarkable sequence of dreaming, including the famous *Spellbound* (Hitchcock, US, 1945) scene, emerges around 3 A.M., and these were dominated by women. These passages featuring restless sleepers, occurring just when the viewer is trying hard to stay awake, make for an unusual viewing experience. (It also made an eerie parallel with Chantal Akerman’s *Toute une nuit* [BE, 1982], a feature film with a non-linear format featuring various men and women sleeplessly moving about in the night in Brussels.) The dream-state created by the real-time viewing of *The Clock* raises the critical question: can one be a judge of the aesthetics of a piece in a state of mind where you are unsure whose dream you are watching? Is it yours or is it the movie’s?

In my terminally incomplete inventory of names, I counted Humphrey Bogart, Matt Damon, and Tom Cruise as having the most appearances. Among the women, Joan Crawford emerges as the star of late night psychodramas, with Bette Davis a close second—although Davis also appears in many daylit scenes. Because Marclay’s process of selection was more or less random, based on available materials rather than scholarly research, we cannot take the gender schism of *The Clock* as evidence of anything. And yet, the piece does underline the different roles of time in masculine genres such as thrillers and heist movies, and in women’s films that are more psychological and dreamy.<sup>31</sup> In the latter, time is more fluid



Figure 4. Joan Crawford in *Sudden Fear* (David Miller, 1952).

and elastic. *The Clock* may say nothing about actual men and women, but it is very suggestive about men and women in the movies. Because the women are more deeply asleep, are they closer to the point of waking?

### **Conclusion: The Language of the Film Archive**

In *The Clock*, Christian Marclay has made a monument to the death of cinema and produced in its wake a new language of history. Cinema has already changed in its dispositif and even to some extent in its reliance on actors, who are now routinely transformed by CGI into effects of performance. The film archive is revealed in *The Clock* to be a very busy place with many famous and not-so-famous people subsisting in another world that we are invited to enter at our own risk and leave of our own volition. Because the auteur films are so thoroughly mixed with films from way beyond the canons of art cinema and classical Hollywood, the language of the archive becomes non-hierarchical, reduced to more basic units, beginning with time, but from there spiralling out to a larger vocabulary of images that are deeply familiar, readable and recognizable.



The revelation, if there is one, is in the shared space of the dreamworld phantasmagoria, in which historical moments rub up against each other and with our own moment in time. Movie stars of all generations pass by in fits and starts, returning from the past with their engaging, charming smiles. Individual spectators may have their private cinephiliac moments, but I would also propose that there is a kind of shared community of memory in the procession of stars and long-forgotten films. The movie stars are like friends who never knew us, friends residing in the second nature of the technological sphere of the movies. We know them, we can read their images, collected as they are into a grand collage of a land we can only dream of, broken down into temporal increments of the twenty-four-hour clock and also the last 100 years.

The question about *The Clock* that I have attempted to pose here is whether this dispositif is simply a pleasure machine or if the discourses of montage, artifice, style, and performance are effective strategies of critique. As an essay film, Marclay has posed the question of how to wake up from this world of commodities. If this is the deep heart of the phantasmagoria of modernity, by transforming a particular history of cinema into an archival cinema, Marclay has outlined the terms of a metacinema in which we can directly experience our loss of experience. We can indulge totally in that other world of the phantasmagoria, and it may only be by sinking into it that deeply that we may learn how to wake up and leave the work to continue without us watching.

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**Catherine Russell** is Professor of Film Studies at Concordia University, Montreal. She is the author of four books, including *Classical Japanese Cinema Revisited*, *The Cinema of Naruse Mikio: Women and Japanese Modernity*, *Narrative Mortality: Death, Closure and New Wave Cinemas*; and *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*. She has published extensively on Japanese cinema, experimental film, Canadian cinema, and Walter Benjamin. She is presently co-editor of the *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*.

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## NOTES

1. Rosalind E. Krauss, "Clock Time," *October* 136 (Spring 2011): 216.
2. Zadie Smith, "Killing Orson Welles at Midnight," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. VIII, no. 7 (April 28, 2011).
3. Thom Andersen, "Random Notes on a Projection of *The Clock* by Christian Marclay at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art," *Cinemascope* 48, <http://cinema-scope.com/features/random-notes-on-a-projection/>. See also David Edelstein in his debate with Jerry Saltz in *Vulture*, [www.vulture.com/2012/07/edelstein-saltz-on-christian-marclays-the-clock.html](http://www.vulture.com/2012/07/edelstein-saltz-on-christian-marclays-the-clock.html).
4. Thomas Elsaesser, "Cinephilia, or the Uses of Disenchantment," in *The Persistence of Hollywood*



- (London: Routledge, 2012), 63–72.
5. Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009).
  6. Matthias Stork, “In Touch with the Film Object: Cinephilia, the Video Essay, and Chaos Cinema,” *Frames*, no. 1 (July 2, 2012), <http://framescinemajournal.com/?issue=issue1>, <http://framescinemajournal.com/article/in-touch-with-the-film-object/>. Accessed April 29, 2013. See also Ursula Biemann, *Stuff It: The Video Essay in the Digital Age* (Zürich: Edition Voldemeer, 2003); and Eric Faden, “A Manifesto for Critical Media,” *Mediascape* (Fall 2009), [www.tft.ucla.edu/mediascape/Spring08\\_ManifestoForCriticalMedia.html](http://www.tft.ucla.edu/mediascape/Spring08_ManifestoForCriticalMedia.html). Accessed April 29, 2013.
  7. Adrian Martin, “Turn the Page: From Mise-en-scène to *Dispositif*,” in *Cinephilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Film Pleasure and Digital Culture*, Vol. 2, eds. Scott Balcerzak and Jason Sperb (New York: Wallflower Press, 2012), 223.
  8. David Velasco, “Borrowed Time,” *Artforum* 49.6 (Feb 2011): 200–201.
  9. Martin, 220.
  10. Daniel Zalewski, “The Hours,” *The New Yorker* (March 12, 2012): 60.
  11. In his Convolute on “The Collector,” Benjamin compares and contrasts the collector and the allegorist, although he finally states that “in every collector there hides an allegorist; and in every allegorist a collector.” For both there is a perpetual sense of incompleteness and openness, as neither the order nor the meaning of things/objects/images on display can be fixed. *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 211.
  12. Martin, 231.
  13. Walter Benjamin, “One-Way Street,” *Selected Writings Vol. 1: 1913–1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 466.
  14. Walter Benjamin, “Dream Kitsch: Gloss on Surrealism,” *Selected Writings Vol. 2: 1927–1934*, eds. Michael J. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Jonathan Livingstone and others (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.
  15. *Ibid.*, 476.
  16. Paul Willemsen, *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (London: BFI, 1994), 231.
  17. *Ibid.*, 232.
  18. The two forms of experience, *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*, are discussed most thoroughly in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” *Selected Writings Vol. 4: 1938–40*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 313–55, although they recur throughout *The Arcades Project* as well.
  19. Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Sigfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 103.
  20. Roland Barthes, “Upon Leaving the Movie Theatre,” trans. Bertrand Augst and Susan White,

- in *Apparatus: Selected Writings*, ed. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (New York: Tanam Press, 1980), 3–4.
21. Ibid., 73.
  22. Benjamin, “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” *Selected Works Vol. 2*, 218.
  23. Ibid., 217.
  24. Smith, 16.
  25. Zalewski, 55.
  26. The crowdsourcing wiki can be found at: <http://theclockmarclay.wikia.com/wiki/Crowdsourcing-The-Clock>. Accessed March 30, 2013.
  27. “Time Pieces,” email exchange between Chris Petit and Iain Sinclair, *Film Comment* (May–June 2011): 56.
  28. André Breton, “As in a Wood,” in *The Shadow and its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema*, ed. Paul Hammond (London: BFI, 1978), 42–44. Quoted in Robert Ray, *How a Film Theory got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 98.
  29. Ray, 98.
  30. Petit and Sinclair, 55.
  31. One of my personal cinephiliac moments comes at 1:30 A.M. when I noted a clip from *The Exiles* (Kent MacKenzie), a relatively obscure, independent 1961 film that was only rereleased in 2008. It was one of the few scenes from that film featuring only women characters, and it does include a clock.