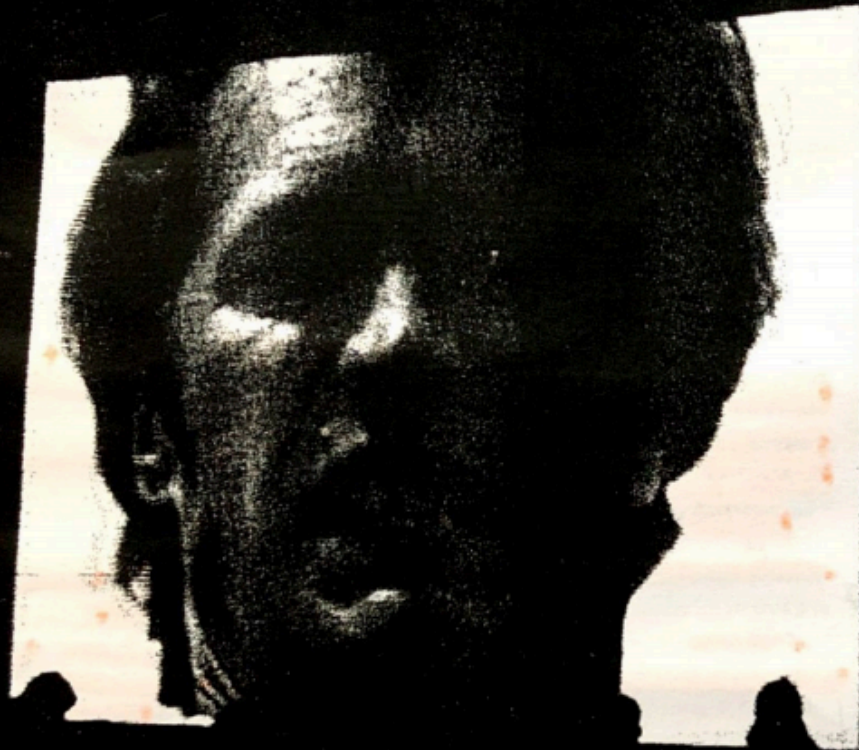


[Hello]



# The Editor

STEFANO BASILICO

In the history of film, the names we learn first are those of the directors: Jean Renoir, Sergei Eisenstein, Orson Welles, or Francis Ford Coppola, to name a few. While the importance of the film editor is more widely recognized today, the editor's role is still thought of as secondary—that of a valued assistant, rather than the shaping force behind the movie. The process of editing or cutting has been central to the work of many visual artists ever since, in May 1912, Pablo Picasso cut out some wallpaper printed with chair caning and attached it to a drawing of things found in a café, an act that transformed both the artwork and the medium.<sup>1</sup> In the same way that Picasso changed the medium of painting with this simple gesture—by introducing the real world, and not just a depiction of the real, into the space of pictorial illusion—the artists in this exhibition have used similar transgressive gestures to rend the space of illusion that much contemporary video prefers to mine.

The moving picture—film and to a great extent television—has been the medium of the twentieth century. Film has both documented and constructed our reality. The first movies date from the early 1890s, and its enduring public appeal and economic viability have made film the most pervasive and influential medium of our time. Films have told stories, recorded disasters (both natural and man-made), inspired political movements, and helped construct and disseminate a myth of America's past that has been crucial in forming the nation's self-image and the way others see it.<sup>2</sup> The artists in *Cut: Film as Found Object in Contemporary Video* have taken the material of their daily lives—the movie and the news program—and, through manipulation, revealed its power to communicate and shape reality.

This exhibition explores the use of preexisting film and recorded footage and the strategies of sampling and editing that a range of artists, working in different contexts, have used to create unique and highly complex works of art. Clearly indebted to the appropriation strategies of the 1980s, and to sampling in hip-hop and rap music in the 1990s,

American film director.

French film director

Soviet film director

American actor + director (film)

- ① Film editor
- ② Editor — "valued assistant"
  - ↓
  - Secondary in terms of importance.

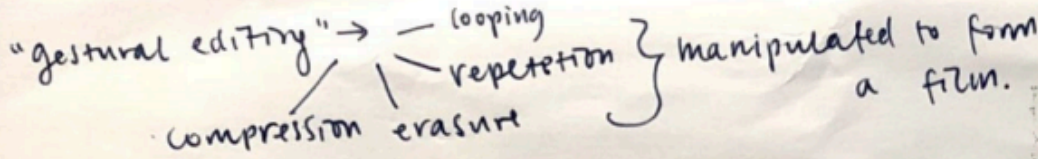
Theory & practice of montage.

Pablo Picasso cut wallpaper attached it to an drawing.

Pictorial illusion (through 'un-reality, convey a sense of reality').

- + light,
- + shadow,
- + perspective

Candice Breitz, *Soliloquy Trilogy (Clint)*, 2000



these artists are united by what might be called a **gestural use of editing**.<sup>3</sup> Whether through **looping, repetition, erasure, or compression**, they actively **manipulate their medium in a way that recalls the importance** that Richard Serra gave to action in 1967-68, when he composed "Verb List": a list of actions that a sculptor could use to create sculpture—"to roll, to crease, to fold, to cut," and so on.<sup>4</sup> In the same way, the emphasis here is not on the use of found footage, but on how it has been **manipulated**. By choosing to use preexisting films, these artists **supplant the typical authorial role of the director with that of the editor**. They don't need to shoot the film for they understand that the editing and shaping of what may already exist in the world is a more powerful and revealing act. Furthermore, by selecting what already exists, they **foreground the deconstructive nature of this act**, whose purpose is **to destroy illusion and reveal the inherent manipulative powers of the medium.**

**GESTURES**

TO STRETCH, TO REMOVE, TO ARRANGE, TO SYSTEMATIZE, TO ERASE, TO REPAIR, TO CONTINUE, TO MATCH

Today the typical well-made Hollywood movie is a seamless product with few rough edges. Since its early experimental beginnings, the craft of moviemaking has become **professionalized**, and the goal of most mainstream movies remains the same—to tell a story convincingly. To achieve this aim, all the tricks of the trade are brought to bear, possibly the most important one being **continuity editing**, a prevalent and fundamental technique that **privileges the narrative of the movie over the imagery or form that the filmmaker may create**. Continuity editing, as the name implies, makes different scenes come together smoothly, without calling undue attention to the process of fusion. (In this sense, its purpose is to make the transition look normal, even expected, and thereby propel the story along without causing the viewer to wonder why a character has behaved in a certain way.)

Leaps of logic, which good editors fool the viewer into making through their mastery of the editing process, are exposed by the artists in *Cut* for what they are: the purposeful elimination of choices meant to direct the viewer to accept certain conclusions without considering others. The editor is in control of what you see. These artists' gestural manipulation of the most familiar of media helps to **reveal the complete structuring of filmic reality**, which has achieved such a level of perfection that we fail to notice it. (Through such gestures as stretching, rearranging, erasing, and cutting, the familiar is rendered unfamiliar and, in that moment, a new layer of comprehension is born.)

"reveal the narrative and meaning it has"

TO STRETCH

**Douglas Gordon, 24-Hour Psycho**

stretching

- distortion of time
- extends playing time. (105 minutes → 24 hrs)
- simultaneously eliminating soundtrack.

Of the various editing gestures that the artists in *Cut* employ, the simplest and, at the same time, possibly the most disruptive to the narrative is to stretch it. Douglas Gordon's *24-Hour Psycho* (1993) uses the distortion of time to transform Alfred Hitchcock's seminal 1960 work of suspense and terror. Gordon extends the playing time of the original 105-minute movie to twenty-four hours while simultaneously eliminating the sound track. While this gesture seems remarkably simple, its effect on the movie and on our experience of it is unexpected but strikingly experiential. First of all, it implies that we will never see the complete work, as to see it from beginning to end would take all of twenty-four hours. While it's unlikely that any viewer will stay for the complete viewing, what is apparent, even if the work is seen briefly, is that what once took a moment to transpire—say, the famous shower scene—now takes one hour. Janet Leigh's violent death is drawn out and made to last an unendurable amount of time. In *24-Hour Psycho*, familiar scenes become unfamiliar and incomprehensible, since they operate outside the normal framework of time.

Unlike many of the other artists in this exhibition, who reorganize the structure of an original film, Gordon simply reorganizes our experience of time, which is a fundamental aspect of the medium. As a result, the feeling of suspense, which is highly dependent on viewers' awareness that the event they are anticipating is coming soon, is dissipated. In Gordon's presentation of the shower scene, viewers can see every knife thrust, every disconnected close-up of Leigh's body, and so on. What we also perceive, possibly for the first time, is that the knife touches her body only once. Hitchcock's ability



Douglas Gordon, *24-Hour Psycho*, 1993

to control our experience of his images was dependent upon his control of time, allowing him to convince us that the knife was plunged repeatedly into Leigh's body. Our expectation that this act would produce a lot of blood is naturally supported by the last shot of the bathtub with the swirling blood and water going down the drain. Gordon's gesture exposes all of Hitchcock's cuts, rendering them conspicuous. What is normally hidden is revealed, including Hitchcock's trademark furtive appearance, and what is normally apparent is concealed. In this process all filmic devices break down. In the opening scene, for instance, the blades of a ceiling fan, which at normal speed spin so fast as to create a blur, are now clearly visible and rotate in a slowly monotonous rhythm. Furthermore, by eliminating the sound track and by projecting the movie onto a large screen suspended in the middle of a room—which allows the viewer to walk around the screen and see the movie from behind—Gordon transforms Hitchcock's story into a collection of images, many strikingly beautiful but effectively devoid of narrative continuity.

#### TO REMOVE

### Candice Breitz, *Soliloquy Trilogy*

Candice Breitz's *Soliloquy Trilogy* (2000) drastically alters specific movies through a selective removal of key components, while leaving much of their narrative surprisingly intact. In this work Breitz reduces an entire film to the perspective of a single character. She focuses on three of Hollywood's most iconic actors in roles that are among their best known—Clint Eastwood in *Dirty Harry* (1971), Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct* (1992), and Jack Nicholson in *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987)—and transforms the movies in which they appear by eliminating all but the words of their characters: their "soliloquies." Breitz's merciless cutting was dictated by each character's spoken words, which determined which scenes would remain. Her guide was not the image of the actor, but his or her speech. Therefore, while the assembled shots are all of this character, we are also occasionally presented with a black screen, while we hear, but do not see, the actor delivering a line. For example, when the camera was pointing at another character—say, Michael Douglas in *Basic Instinct*—but Sharon Stone was speaking, Breitz included her line but eliminated the reaction shot of Douglas. Like a fan who has lost all sense of boundaries, Breitz has eyes only for the image of her star, but it is the words that the star speaks that are the primary consideration.

In *Soliloquy Trilogy*, however, the star's words ultimately don't amount to much—literally. Stone speaks for seven minutes, eleven seconds; Eastwood for six minutes, fifty-seven seconds; and Nicholson—never at a loss for words—for fourteen minutes, six seconds. These soliloquies are taken from movies that are each more than two hours long. Clearly an actor's star status is not dependent on face time or screen time. While the movie industry privileges these actors

with outsize salaries for their work, it is the audience's need for larger-than-life idols that truly drives their celebrity. For when we realize that Sharon Stone is but a bit player in the total production that is *Basic Instinct*, then we start to unravel the importance of collaboration, cooperation, teamwork, and the other necessarily dialogical engagements that allow all works of art, even commercial movies, to be created. The making of a movie is the most obvious example of a shared labor that results in a possible work of art, despite our distressing tendency to credit all of the glory to one or two individuals. Ironically, in its single-minded focus on the individual star, Breitz's work forces us to recognize the importance of everything and everybody else.

Having first removed from these preexisting movies the parts that interested her, Breitz then took the next logical step and assembled her new characters into a different story. In *Soliloquy (Sharon)*, Sharon Stone's character is a foul-mouthed seductress, often dressed in white but ready to have sex with anybody who attracts her and especially someone who is useful to her. In *Soliloquy (Clint)*, Clint Eastwood is a taciturn man of force and strong convictions, who has no use for equivocation or debate. He is the archetypal man of action, ready to act even if his actions turn out to have been the wrong ones. And when you meet the final character in this trilogy, Jack Nicholson, in *Soliloquy (Jack)*, you are introduced to the greatest archetype of Western storytelling—the devil. By distilling the character and dramatic potential of each of their roles, Breitz has assembled a new story from the fragments of these films—a modern-day Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, with the serpent. In contrast to the original story of the Fall, however, in which Eve's weakness is the reason for our wandering in the wilderness and the cleverness of the devil serves as a warning for generations to come, in Breitz's version of the story, the devil is outwitted and domesticated by his three Eves (the witches of Eastwick), and woman (Stone) is rehabilitated by her love of a good man and her willingness to bear children, though with some reluctance.



Candice Breitz, *Soliloquy Trilogy (Sharon)*, 2000.

Omer Fast, *CNN Concatenated*  
 Christian Marclay, *Telephones* and *Video Quartet*

The ability to arrange and order information is perhaps the single most prevalent strategy for the creation of stories and histories. Although we all recognize that it is the victors who write the history, we need to remember that it is the victors who also rewrite and reorder the history of what we thought we knew and were certain about. Three works in this exhibition—Omer Fast's *CNN Concatenated* and Christian Marclay's *Telephones* and *Video Quartet*—explore the multiple opportunities that are available to artists, and therefore to other creative agents, to shape what we see, transform what we thought we knew, and create totally new stories or interpretations from fragments of what already exists and seems fixed.)

In *CNN Concatenated* (2002), Fast takes single words, along with images of a bevy of CNN talking heads who utter them, and arranges these spoken and visual fragments so that the news they deliver is the news he wants them to deliver. Mixing from a ten-thousand-word database, Fast makes the medium of television, as represented by the figures of the correspondents, reveal its need to communicate and its anxiety that it may not be appreciated or understood. Stringing together single words into long sentences, which then flow into long, loose paragraphs, we hear the anchors beseeching us, pleading with us, and, most importantly, justifying their role in America's current symbiotic dependence on real-time consumption of news. Recalling *Theme Song* (1973) by Vito Acconci, an early video work in which the artist directly addresses the viewer in a disturbingly intimate way, Fast supplants the figure of the artist with those of the correspondents. As a result, what is acknowledged is that the true master of the televisual medium is not the person in front of the camera, but the person who decides what the camera will reveal.<sup>6</sup>

Two video works by Christian Marclay, *Telephones* (1995) and *Video Quartet* (2002), rearrange cinematic sights and sounds to create startling new works of visual and aural interplay. *Telephones* consists of clips from a host of films in which men and women are talking on telephones, or in which telephones appear and make sounds. The resulting work juxtaposes a series of dialing phones, ringing phones, phones being answered, various hellos, snippets of conversation, good-byes, and hang-ups. A single conversation takes place and seems to make sense, as though one actor is speaking to another actor in a different movie, in a different reality, across time and logic. On occasion, the same actor will reappear, either in a different movie or in different scenes from the same movie, starting with a man dialing the phone in a telephone booth at night and ending with a woman hanging up the phone in a different phone booth during the day. The telephone is used as a wormhole, able to bridge different realities and time zones seamlessly.

Omer Fast, *CNN Concatenated*, 2002Christian Marclay, *Telephones*, 1995Christian Marclay, *Video Quartet*, 2002

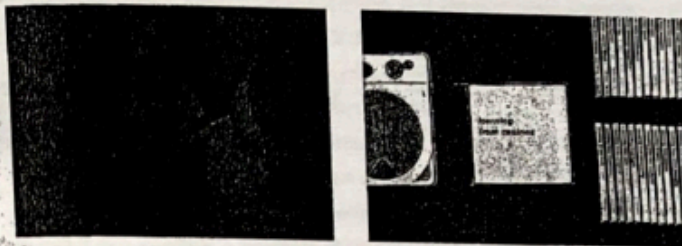
While *Telephones* uses a single image and sound track, in *Video Quartet*, his magnum opus, Marclay samples and arranges four images and audio tracks simultaneously, culminating in a sixteen-minute symphony that overwhelms our senses of both sight and sound. *Video Quartet* is presented in a theaterlike environment, its four contiguous, ten-foot-square screens filling the viewer's field of vision. In a darkened room, where everything except the screens is black, the only sounds and sights that we perceive are from the hundreds of sampled Hollywood movies that Marclay deftly arranged, synchronizing the "Image-sound from the films that your brain remembers," as he once remarked.<sup>7</sup> These images and sounds come together to create an original musical score made from preexisting musical notes and sounds isolated from their original sources through sampling. Not one sound was invented by Marclay for this work. It is the logic of sound that drives *Video Quartet*, although it is clearly a powerful visual experience too as the various scenes flash successively across the screen. Marclay emphasizes the importance of sound, stating: "Quartet reveals the way in which music is made out of a collection of fragments. The samples are visible. If you watch *Quartet* without the sound, the images are suggestive, but they don't add up to much in a narrative sense."<sup>8</sup>

As a culture, we tend to privilege the visual over the aural, yet the interconnectedness of sound and image that Marclay exploits—which is also important in Breitz's *Soliloquy Trilogy* and Fast's *CNN Concatenated*, not to mention Marclay's own *Telephones*—is powerfully revealed in this complex, layered work.

#### TO SYSTEMATIZE

### Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, *Learning from Las Vegas*

Working within our culture's acknowledged privileging of images over sounds, Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, in *Learning from Las Vegas* (2003), ask us to consider what images really tell us and what can be learned from them. Recalling Marclay's statement about what "your brain remembers," the McCoy's take a pseudoscientific approach and attempt to systematize what can be "learned" from Hollywood's various portrayals of Las Vegas.<sup>9</sup> Selecting twenty-one films that either feature the archetypal city of second chances, such as *Ocean's Eleven* (both 2001 remake and 1960 original), or simply use it as a backdrop, such as *Con Air* (1997); they divided each movie into scenes and organized each scene by subject.<sup>10</sup> With 120 categories of "learning," it seems that Las Vegas has much to teach us. To start our education, we may select one of the DVDs from the open suitcase—complete with mini DVD player and midsize flat screen, not to mention all 120 compiled DVDs—which functions both as display stand for the work and carrying case (so that you can take your lessons with you), and insert it in the player. We could start with "learning from sequins" or "learning to smoke." As we, the viewers, become more acculturated, we may want to approach "learning from art," "learning from signs," or "learning



Jennifer and Kevin McCoy  
*Learning from Las Vegas*, 2003

from showgirls." Here the act of editing has been used not to create a new whole from many disparate parts, as in *Video Quartet*, but as a means to assemble and systematize the spare parts and loose ends of many entities. This strategy enables us to see the repetitions and stock images and gestures that so many movies are made up of, which become a kind of cultural background noise. Neither original nor unique, they are necessary as placeholders, spacers, and bridges between the filmmakers' more inventive and particular additions. The McCoy's archiving and collecting of these lessons is in itself instructive as to the importance of understanding the past and present before one embarks on creating for the future.

#### TO ERASE

### Paul Pfeiffer, *The Long Count*

Another strategy for dealing with the past, although it is rarely a productive one, is to erase it. In Paul Pfeiffer's series of three videos from 2001 entitled *The Long Count*—subtitled *I Shook Up the World*, *Rumble in the Jungle*, and *Thrilla in Manila*—what was once the focus of each recording—the boxing matches between Muhammad Ali and three of his lumbering opponents, Sonny Liston, George Foreman, and Joe Frazier—has been erased, and in its place we are left with a shimmering shadow play of jabs and punches.<sup>11</sup> In all three works, the boxers are gone, and the audience has taken their place as the center of our attention.<sup>12</sup> Exploiting the full capabilities of digital technology to rewrite the truth—in a way that photography could only dream of—Pfeiffer erases the balletic movements of the most graceful of boxers.