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OOTAGE

CHRISTIAN MARCLAY, TELEPHONES, 1995

CORDULA DITZ, FAINTING, 2017

LYNDA BENGLIS, FEMALE SENSIBILITY, 1973

SIMON LÄSSIG, 2:23 MINUTES FROM: ANYASÁG, 1974, AS I WATCH ANYASÁG (MOTHERHOOD) FROM 1974, I COME TO KNOW AGAIN HOW ONE LEARNS TO LOOK THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE, HOW WE TAKE IN, ADAPT, AND ALTER THEIR THOUGHTS, VIEWS, AND FEELINGS. AND IF THE REST OF THE FILM SPEAKS ABOUT HOW WE

MIMIC AND REPEAT—ABOUT HOW WE ARE CONDITIONED—THEN THESE STRETCHED 2 MINUTES AND 23 SECONDS REMIND US OF THE OPPOSITE: OF A MOMENT IN WHICH WE LOOK OUT INTO THE WORLD AND DO NOT SEE OURSELVES REFLECTED BACK. A REALITY COMES INTO BEING THAT IS CLOSED OFF AND

SOMETHING I'VE SEEN BEFORE REPEATS ITSELF., 2022

JAMES RICHARDS, RADIO AT NIGHT, 2015

COYOTE, NEW CENTURIES ARE RARE, 2023

(5)

TWENTYSIX

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E) (F) (G) (H) (I) (J) (K) (L) (M) (N) (O) (P) (Q) (R) (S) (T) (U) (V) (W) (X) (Y) (Z)

ARRANGED, STARCHED AND MATCHED
BY ROBERT BERGMANN

The screening *Twentysix: (F)ound (F)ootage* takes place on a Saturday evening in the former cinema hall of the Julia Stoschek Foundation, where Mark Leckey's current exhibition ENTER THRU MEDIEVAL WOUNDS is on view. Before and after the screening, the video work *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* will be shown in the cinema. "You wanna, you wanna, you wanna, you wanna, sweet, you wanna!!!" sings the sample at the beginning of the video. An evening sky, soft clouds lit by the setting sun, the horizon slowly fades into dancing bodies. Shortly after, the words "too late !!!!!!" vibrate over the images. Through the night and into dawn, the video material gathers dancing, sweating, spinning, and moving bodies from different eras of English club culture. The journey begins at the Wigan Casino, a legendary Northern Soul club. The circling Jazz Funk dancers are followed by Casuals wandering the streets in branded sportswear. The whole piece culminates in the late 1980's Acid House and early 1990's Hardcore. Two decades of English subculture merge into one rhythmic unity of lived time and shared memory.

First presented in 1999, the work reflects both the time of its creation and the transformation in our access to moving images, from analogue film to video technology to the digital image. The work thus expresses temporal relationships in a double sense: on the one hand, it reflects the technical and discursive changes behind the images and our way of engaging with them; on the other hand, it captures an era or subculture through those very images.

The usage of found material constitutes a practice situated between "accidental discovery" and "intentional searching", in which diverse materials are brought into relation. It can be anthological by collecting fragments, or it can disrupt dominant narratives and engage with them discursively. While in Leckey's work it is the different styles or subcultures that succeed one another in a chronology, in Maclay's *Telephones* (1995) the temporal sequence is suspended. The Video follows the logic of a telephone conversation – the phone rings, a woman picks up, someone speaks or dials numbers – yet the actors are detached from the narrative contexts of their respective films and speak from different realities and spaces. In a certain sense, time is reassembled. The familiar rhythm of a telephone conversation remains, but the closed circle of a dialogue between two figures is broken apart and transformed into a chain of gestures in which space and time are bridged and redefined. In a similar principle to *Telephones* (1995), Cordula Ditz arranges found images of the same subject in her work *Fainting* (2017). Again and again, women faint in the images: sometimes a body slowly collapses; in another image, only the feet are

visible while the rest of the body falls outside the frame. The video is accompanied by the sound of hypnosis videos that the artist found on YouTube. The sound is based on frequencies that are believed to trigger feelings such as "anxiety" or "overthinking". The images—which are composed of classic films, home videos, series, TV studios, and current cinema films—are dissociated from their original narrative. The context behind the images is emphasized, revealing a structure in which female bodies are staged in a state of radical passivity. At the same time, the different contexts of origin reject a simplistic standardization of a stereotype, instead highlighting the multiple contexts in which the gesture is used as a narrative device.

When working with found material, the role of editing and its possibilities for processing film material comes to the foreground. "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."¹ In the editing process, images are brought together, connected, or separated. Each image thus exists in relation to others. It is through this connection that the image is oriented toward a narrative or a specific purpose, guiding the viewer toward a certain conclusion. At the same time, however, this relation can also be disrupted or dissolved. In this sense, one could propose found-footage film rejects a linear representation and emphasizes a media reflective image of differences and contrasts that is conscious of the manipulative powers of the medium. The meaning of a shot or an image in relation to the surrounding images is crucial for moving images and narrative film, but the image can also be altered in itself, thereby reversing its meaning. Here, the creation of perception is not revealed in contrast of different image sources and the narrative development, but in the editing of a single film excerpt or picture. This is also the case in Simon Lässig's video work, whose title itself describes the use of the found material; *2:23 minutes from: Anyaság, 1974, As I watch Anyaság (Motherhood) from 1974, I come to know again how one learns to look through other people, how we take in, adapt, and alter their thoughts, views, and feelings. And if the rest of the film speaks about how we mimic and repeat—about how we are conditioned—then these stretched 2 minutes and 23 seconds remind us of the opposite: Of a moment in which we look out into the world and do not see ourselves reflected back. A reality comes into being that is closed off and something I've seen before repeats itself.* (2022). This stretching creates a moment in which the viewer's perception is disrupted, thereby revealing the construction of the gaze, which underlies every cinematic experience. Seeing is slowed down. Lässig himself describes this moment in his title, in which reality is repeated differently in front of the eye. This simple extension of the material creates a kind of

interspace: a moment in which the gaze is no longer bound to the immediate representation, but focuses on the conditions of the production of realities.

Although the image has a "Content" that is being realized, it cannot be defined as having a single meaning; it is the contextual framework that assigns significance to the image. Any manipulation, editing, or arrangement within the visual sequence constitutes an interpretation of the image's possible meanings. The questions become significant: Who created the image and with what intention? What pictures surround the image, and in what way does it become present to the viewer? Every visual representation contains a certain degree of malleability, through which action is inscribed into the image. Context and perspective are not neutrally embedded within the moving image simply because it appears to have been produced technically. To put it in Michael Zryd's words: "while all images are potentially polyvalent in meaning, the montage structures of found footage collage and the heterogeneity of image sources invited by collage encourage critical reflection on the discourses embedded in and behind images."² The complex interrelation of cultural imprints and narratives inscribed through dominant cinematic images becomes visible here as a mechanism. Through the rupture of cinematic continuity by Lässig or the discontinuous collection of moments by Ditz, the underlying structure itself is made perceptible.

Lynda Benglis's video *Female Sensibility* (1974) combines studio recordings with found audio material. On an image level, Benglis and the artist Marilyn Lenkowsky touch each other in an intimate play. The camera moves very close to them and focuses on individual movements. However, the bodies never appear in their entirety, remaining fragmented, and only brief moments of insight are revealed to the viewer. The images of the two women are overlaid with various found audio recordings. Excerpts from a radio show are particularly dominant. Between short music interludes, the radio presenter talks in a distinctly macho tone about cars, money, and success, and amuses himself with the violent tendencies of a caller who reports on his weekend brawls. In contrast to these audio recordings, Benglis is talking on the phone with an unknown person about using a photo from her childhood as the image for the poster for her upcoming exhibition. Unimpressed by the intrusive presence of the radio, the women appear absorbed in their performance, cut off from the outside world, fully engaged in their movements, suspended somewhere between self-confidence and indifference toward the camera. Their dreamy withdrawal becomes a quiet form of opposition to the viewer's gaze and the expectations embedded within it. They perform for the camera while simultaneously ignoring it. It is not simply something being shown; rather, it becomes apparent how images and sound interact to produce a particular way of seeing. In this context Laura Mulvey reminds us in her shapeshifting essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* from 1975, just a year later than *Female Sensibility*, that: "It is the place of the look that defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it. This is what makes cinema quite different in its voyeuristic potential from, say, strip-tease, theater, shows, etc. Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness,

cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself."³

Although the found audio material is an important aspect of Benglis' video, its use seems rather secondary to many other cinematic decisions, which is not unusual when working with found footage. It is often used in films and videos as a supplementary element to open up a temporal or historical framework or to introduce different perspectives. However, found footage is not the same as archive material. The archive⁴ is tied to operations such as organizing, storing, and excluding. Understood in this way, archiving relies on selective procedures that assign specific meaning to the material by making it retrievable in a register. The aim is therefore to arrange found or acquired objects so that certain qualities are highlighted. While archiving material is a mainly institutional concern and can be understood as official historical documentation, found footage is a term that comes with looser ends. It can be composed of a wide variety of sources—discarded, commercial, private, or from the internet—and can also consist of archival material. In this sense, found footage is rather a form of practice than a fixed term or genre. The word "found" in "found footage" already implies an active engagement with material rather than a classification. As such, it does not aim to establish a supposed historical veracity, but instead pursues a decontextualization toward the ambiguities in the interpretation of the material. What is seen becomes realized, yet it is enmeshed in a web of new questions that emerge. The found footage film is similarly attentive to the formal conditions of its source material. The characteristics or the technology used to capture the images become relevant. For example, a recording on a VHS recorder exhibits a different quality and temporality than an iPhone recording. The aesthetics of the formal appearance are often just as important as the narrative of the image. In the video work *New Centuries Are Rare* (2023) by coyote, various film documents are edited into a story of the former mining facilities in Norberg, Sweden. The area was the site of the miners' strikes of the 1890s. A hundred years later, it served as the venue for the electronic music festival 'Norbergfestival' in the 1990s. Archival footage of the miners' labor dispute is juxtaposed with VHS recordings of ravers dancing in the factory halls, which in turn are repeatedly interrupted by underwater footage from the today flooded mine tunnels, recorded by a drone. In addition to their different historical contents, the recordings also differ in their material conditions, thus introducing a further temporal level. This periodization becomes clear in the encounter between black-and-white images, VHS video technology, and digital drone footage. The images themselves express their temporality through their materiality. At the same time, they refer to the respective structural conditions of their creation. History thus appears not as a closed sequence, but as a field of connections and similarities between different forms of resistance and escapism. It feels as if one is floating through a history of fog: from the steam of the machines of the industrial age to the post-industrial dance floor with its fog machines to the dark water of the mine tunnels in a wounded landscape. The video does not establish a simple timeline in which events follow each other logically. Instead, it develops a conflictual,

multi-layered historical narrative through the collision of different material conditions and lived contexts. This is evident both in what the material depicts and in what is inscribed in its materiality.

A similar approach can be found in the work of James Richards, who often uses images and sound recordings from his own collection. He collects material from archives and other sources, which he then combines in montages. Images from earlier works are often reused in this process. In the video *Radio at Night*, the images seem less focused on a specific place or story than in coyote's work. At first glance, the video appears to collect material based on a mood or a kind of register. New aspects are introduced again and again which make it difficult for the viewer to clearly name or assign any contexts. The search for recognition is repeatedly interrupted. The eye is a central motif in the video—whether presented under a magnifying glass during a medical examination or in the form of Richards' own pair of eyes—repeatedly confronting the viewers from within the work. An eyeball lies centered in the frame; the eye moves from left to right, as if reading or looking. Images appear constantly framed, grid-like, or staged. "[...] in Richards's videos, we have no power to name anything. Sounds and images wash over us, and we are straddled between pleasure and powerlessness—a sensation that increasingly describes the uneasy yet seductive life of our digital age."⁵ The viewers look at the screens, and the screens look back at them. The subject as observer appears as a conditioned representation of a generalized gaze shaped by science, the media, and industry. Through the varied encounters and juxtapositions of the materials, the found footage becomes a dance of gazes and perspectives that does not simply represent seeing, but instead makes the viewer conscious of the act and conditions of perception.

How does meaning shift when images and sounds are removed from their original contexts and reassembled? What conditions of seeing emerge when temporality is stretched, fragmentation becomes visible, or the gaze itself is thematized? And how do new forms of history, memory, and experience arise through the materiality of images? In a sequence from *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*, a dancer's upper arm emerges from the bodies of the dancers. The skin is decorated with a bird tattoo. In the next moment, the bird takes off on its own, detaches itself from the skin of the upper arm, and flies over the other dancers into the next image. The different shots are not only strung together in sequence, they transfer and interlock with each other. They almost resemble a typological figure that folds into itself without allowing an outer or inner surface to be defined. Something from the movement or time of one fragment carries over to the next. This becomes particularly clear when time is frozen on one woman's face. The portrait frozen, the movement paused, she was carried into the next shot and back again. Different times meet in the same image. Material is extracted and placed in a new context, removed from its usual course — through a montage that associates, manipulates, stretches, rearranges, erases, and cuts. Rather than highlighting a fixed meaning in an image, it becomes evident how much our perception of what we "recognize" depends on how images are contextualized.

Similarly, the perception of what is seen depends on the complex interplay of the viewer's cultural influences and how these are technically staged.



(Fig.01)

Christian Marclay, *Telephones*, 1995

Video, 7:30 min

- 1 Stefano Basilico, *The Editor*, in: *Cut: Film as Found Object*, Milwaukee Art Museum, 2004, p. 30
- 2 Michael Zryd, *Found Footage Film as Discursive Metahistory: Craig Baldwin's Tribulation 99*, *The Moving Image*, Volume 3, Number 2, Fall 2003, p.48
- 3 Laura Mulvey, *Laura Mulvey / Rachel Rose*, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, *Afterall Books: Two Works*, After all, London, 2016, p.26.
- 4 The various definitions and manifestations of the archive and its practices cannot be addressed here. It should merely be noted that other forms of archival work are practiced and conceptualized, beyond an institutional engagement with sources, materials, and their preservation.
- 5 Gilda Williams, *James Richards at ICA London*, *Review*, *Arforum*, VOL. 55, NO. 5, January 2017, <https://www.artforum.com/events/james-richards-226958/>



(Fig.02)

Cordula Ditz, *Fainting*, 2017

Video, 3:15 min



(Fig.03)

Lynda Benglis, *Female Sensibility*, 1973

Video, color, sound, 14 min



(Fig.04) Simon Lässig, 2:23 minutes from: *Anyaság*, 1974, As I watch *Anyaság (Motherhood)* from 1974, I come to know again how one learns to look through other people, how we take in, adapt, and alter their thoughts, views, and feelings. And if the rest of the film speaks about how we mimic and repeat—about how we are conditioned—then these stretched 2 minutes and 23 seconds remind us of the opposite: Of a moment in which we look out into the world and do not see ourselves reflected back. A reality comes into being that is closed off and something I've seen before repeats itself., 2022

Digital video, sound, 4:46 min

(Fig.05) James Richards, *Radio at Night*, 2015

Digital video with sound 08:10 min



(Fig.06)

coyote, *New Centuries Are Rare*, 2023

4:3 video, color, sound, 11:40 min

LOVE AND THEFT
BY JOSEFIN GRANETOFT

We expect images to do certain things, to hold specific values and relations to the world, anchored in memory or place. Which makes it all the more striking when they don't. "Found footage," despite what the term suggests, rarely involves discovery in the literal sense. It describes the process of working with existing video or film material—detaching footage from its original context and reassembling it into new configurations, meanings, and affects. By cutting, layering, looping, or reordering, familiar images are rendered unfamiliar, and a new layer of meaning appears. In the following, I look at three approaches to found-footage material that subverts or tenderly appropriates the original source.

Cordula Ditz's 3-minute video *Fainting* (2017) consists of short clips of women fainting – from early cinema to contemporary TV-series, reality shows, and news broadcasts. Each clip is no more than a few seconds long, creating a fast-paced stream of images replacing each other. Woman after woman visibly loses consciousness—eyes rolling back, bodies slackening, and finally collapsing to the floor. Ditz has turned to the motif of the fainting woman on several occasions, drawing on a long visual history of the "damsel in distress." As Britta Peters notes when discussing Ditz's work, the fainting woman belongs to a visual and cinematic repertoire—from 18th- and 19th-century painting to mid-century cinema—where it has long functioned as a sign of feminine fragility.⁶ In *Fainting*, Ditz isolates this gesture and repeats it to the point of absurdity. Stripped of storyline and context, the collapse becomes increasingly theatrical and strange, revealing itself less as an expressive moment than as a stylized convention; a trope. At the same time, there is an increasing sense of creepy eroticism to the piece—which Ditz clearly plays with, making the viewer uncomfortable in their seat—like we're watching some kind of soft-core fainting-porn compilation.

Needless to say, Ditz completely disregards the origin of the sourced footage. She appropriates the material for her own purposes and ignores the original plot, character, or, in the case of non-fictional material, original context. Incidentally, she asks us to view the presented footage precisely as such: as recycled, lifted, and appropriated images. This self-referential framing invites a particular mode of viewing that the original footage could not have prompted, and so, we may begin to see the "swooning woman" as a trope, a cultural tic.

Appropriation is a multi-layered concept. In the realm of visual arts and film, we often think of appropriation either as a conceptual matter—like the Duchampian found object—or in legal terms, when it comes to copyright or ownership rights. Film scholar Thomas Elsaesser once offered another way of understanding appropriation: as an act of cinephilic attachment, a gesture of "love

and theft."⁷ Appropriation, Elsaesser writes, can be "an intimate gesture of love and an act of devotion," a desire to repeat, prolong, and hold on to images. This kind of appropriation appears already in the process of spectatorship—when we watch, speak, and write about moving image works, participating in various discourses that add to their meaning, obsessing over them. But it can also entail more direct interventions: altering, re-editing or otherwise interfering with the original video or film material.

About his video *Radio At Night* (2015), James Richards notes: "I wanted to create a sense of the material as something channeled rather than something taken."⁸ Richards often works with found footage and is noted for recycling material from a vast array of sources—from home movies to pornography, TV recordings, or instructional videos, mixed with his own self-shot footage—sometimes returning to the same stock material across multiple works. In this 8-minute piece, vastly different images are synthesized to a fluid transmission, fused by a hypnotic soundtrack: night shots of a Venetian costume party, inverted footage from a surgery room, close-ups of a pair of eyes and other body parts, trees and open skies, and images of pigs and fish being handled at an industrial food facility. In one section of the video, a series of vertical image-strips roll across the screen from left to right, like visual signals carried along a radio band. Despite their disparate origins, the images feel as if they belong to a single continuous stream, driven by the work's sonic and rhythmic logic.

Notably, Richards uses cropped fragments of the frame—rectangular, self-contained image units—and sets them against a black background or layers them onto other footage, creating a multi-layered image surface. The slicing, stitching, and processing of the video material gives it an almost physical quality, producing what is sometimes an intimate, bodily encounter (reflected in close-ups of eyes, skin, and hair), sometimes raw and dissecting (as in the footage of surgical procedures or animal processing). In this tactile handling of the imagery, one senses a mode of engagement that is both intimate and invasive—a cinephilic compulsion, perhaps. Or as Richards and fellow artist and collaborator Steve Reinke said in an interview: "In a sense, we don't select the material we use.... The material selects us, or compels us to select it, to engage with it."⁹

In *New Centuries Are Rare* (2023), the artist collective coyote works with found material that is selected for its ties to a specific time and place. The 12-minute work traces a span of local history in Norberg, central Sweden, beginning with the significant 1890s miners' strike in the region and reaching forward to the contemporary electronic music festival "Norbergfestivalen." Early in the

video, a submerged camera moves through muddy water, turning and zooming as if searching for something lost in the depths. This footage is interwoven with recordings of factory halls, 1990s rave scenes, and documentation and text fragments from *Spelet om Norbergsstrejken*, a 1977 stage play recounting the miners' strike. The compilation draws together different temporalities and collectives—miners, workers, ravers—to suggest a continuity of communal spaces and resistance in the wake of deindustrialization. The overlaps between these historical fragments are emphasized by the overlay of text and image—text lines describing the miners' patterned movements and an incessantly ringing bell linger over images of radiant spotlights and raving youths, creating a coherent grammar between industries and dance floors.

The piece may prompt questions on what kind of evidentiary logic we grant to "found" material, as opposed to recordings produced by artists and filmmakers. Can the archival recordings reveal something buried in the depths of the past? *New Centuries Are Rare* does not claim documentary truth or present an official, linear history. Instead, it combines material affectionately, embracing its gaps and open ends. What emerges is a speculative history, a love letter to Norberg, a revelation of cross-generational commons.

6 Britta Peters, in *OHNMACHT #1–60: Cordula Ditz* (Hamburg: Galerie Conradi, 2014).

7 Elsaesser refers to Eric Lott's study *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993), from which Bob Dylan borrowed the title of his studio album, "Love and Theft" (2001). Thomas Elsaesser, "The Ethics of Appropriation: Found Footage Between Archive and Internet," *Found Footage Magazine*, no. 1 (2015), accessed online.

8 Quoted in Mason Leaver-Yap, "James Richards: *Radio at Night*," *Walker Art Center Online*, June 1, 2015, <https://walkerart.org/magazine/flow-james-richards-radio-at-night>.

9 Gina Buenfeld-Murley, interview with James Richards and Steven Reinke, *Vdrome*, <https://www.vdrome.org/steve-reinke-james-richards/>.

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Lynda Benglis, *Female Sensibility* (1973) Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

Christian Marclay, *Telephones* (1995) © Christian Marclay.
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

James Richards, *Radio at Night* (2015) All images courtesy the artist and Cabinet, London

Cordula Ditz, *Fainting* (2017). Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Conradi

Simon Lässig, *2:23 minutes from: Anyaság, 1974, As I watch Anyaság (Motherhood) from 1974, I come to know again how one learns to look through other people, how we take in, adapt, and alter their thoughts, views, and feelings. And if the rest of the film speaks about how we mimic and repeat—about how we are conditioned—then these stretched 2 minutes and 23 seconds remind us of the opposite: Of a moment in which we look out into the world and do not see ourselves reflected back. A reality comes into being that is closed off and something I've seen before repeats itself.* (2022). Courtesy of the artist, FELIX GAUDLITZ, Vienna, LC Queisser, Tbilisi

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