

Time and Time Again: Temporality, Narrativity, and Spectatorship in Christian Marclay's *The Clock*

by JULIE LEVINSON

Abstract: *The Clock* (Christian Marclay, 2010) is a twenty-four-hour collage movie comprising thousands of film clips that collectively span a range of cinema history and genres. The excerpted scenes show timepieces that are precisely synchronized with the moment during which the audience sees them, thereby conflating cinematic and actual time. Beyond *The Clock*'s clever gimmick is a significant theoretical contemplation of the contingency of measured time, the power of film narrative, and the conventions and complexities of spectatorship. Using varied analytical frameworks, including the philosophies of Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, this article explores the ways in which *The Clock* both celebrates and subverts cinematic practice.

Since its 2010 debut in London, Christian Marclay's twenty-four-hour video loop *The Clock* has been acclaimed by critics, awarded the top prize at the 2011 Venice Biennale, and embraced by viewers, many of whom stand in line for hours so they can then sit for hours and enjoy its spellbinding charms. When the artist accepted the award at Venice, he wittily thanked the jury "for giving *The Clock* its fifteen minutes." But Marclay's epic creation seems to have staying power. The few available copies have been acquired by major museums for their permanent collections, and each time *The Clock* is screened, first-time attendees and repeat viewers endure long waits for the privilege of passing some time while musing on the passage of time.¹

Marclay made his name in the art world as a postmodern collagist, creating aural and visual mash-ups by appropriating, manipulating, and repurposing preexisting material. A tour de force of film assemblage, *The Clock* is a twenty-four-hour

1 By 2012, *The Clock* had been acquired for the permanent collections of the Israel Museum (Jerusalem), the Tate (London), the Pompidou Center (Paris), the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), the National Gallery of Canada (Toronto), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Kunsthau Zurich. Some of those institutions own it jointly. *The Clock* sells for approximately \$500,000.

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compilation comprising more than one thousand clips that span a range of film history and international cinema, with some television material included as well. Each clip refers to time passing, usually by showing a timepiece that is precisely synchronized with the moment during which the audience is watching. Cinematic and actual time are conflated, so if an on-screen clock reads 10:45 a.m., the audience sees it at precisely 10:45 a.m. From glockenspiels to digital clocks, from sundials to Seikos, each shot is perfectly calibrated to coincide with the time of viewing. The sheer accretion of movie moments in *The Clock* is, in itself, awe-inspiring, and much of that awe comes from marveling at the artist's ability to find twenty-four hours' worth of film clips that tell time.² The experience of viewing *The Clock* is a cinephile's delight: a riveting game of "name that movie" and a nostalgic trot through film history. Its initial allure might be compared to that of the old-movie montages that sometimes air at the Academy Awards ceremony or on classic-movie cable channels, and indeed, part of its appeal arises from viewers' pleasure in recognizing familiar scenes and actors or, when they cannot, in speculating about the source of the fleeting cavalcade of images.

But there is more to Marclay's creation than the pleasures of fetishistic cinephilia and the gimmick of synchronizing real and reel time. Although viewing *The Clock* is akin to staring at a clock and registering each successive moment, time flies when watching it as the hours go by without boredom or restlessness for successive roomfuls of rapt viewers. This paradox, which allows us to be simultaneously conscious of and oblivious to time passing, prompts a consideration of how symbolic time, as marked by clocks, is often out of sync with imaginary time: the subjective sense of how long things last. Time can move quickly or slowly, depending on one's absorption in, anticipation of, or anxiety about the events being experienced. Such thoughts about the contingent quality of time are among many that arise while watching *The Clock*. As audience members inevitably become alert to not just the on-screen characters' experience of temporality but also their own in the viewing room, the fun of fandom is joined by spectatorial self-awareness (Figure 1).

The longer one watches, the more *The Clock* reveals itself as a metafilm in which our attention is concurrently and reflexively pulled into the action on the screen and thrust back out onto our own experience of viewing.³ It is difficult to sit through a portion of *The Clock* without thinking about not just the experiential

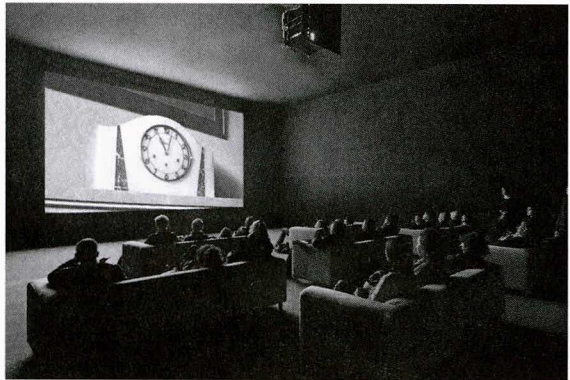


Figure 1. Viewers watching *The Clock* (Christian Marclay, 2010). Single channel video. Duration: twenty-four hours. © Christian Marclay. Photo: Ben Westoby. Courtesy White Cube, London.

2 Marclay had six assistants help him find the clips for *The Clock*. He edited the film himself.

3 Although *The Clock* is digital in format, I refer to it throughout this article as a film since its source material is filmic.

phenomenon of watching it but also about the theoretical, aesthetic, and philosophical matters that it evokes. Accompanying Marclay's clever premise and his remarkable achievement in culling, editing, and synchronizing thousands of moments from a vast variety of movies is a sophisticated engagement with some of the fundamental questions of film practice and perception. Beyond its popular appeal and alongside its ludic spirit, *The Clock* comprises a significant contemplation of the contingency of measured time, the power of film narrative, and the conventions and complexities of spectatorship.

Theories of film temporality are nearly as old as film itself. The advent of cinema followed by only a few years the standardization of world time in 1886 and coincided with modernity's emphasis on measuring, regularizing, and commodifying time.⁴ Several writers from Karl Marx onward have explored how modernity, capitalism, and urban life became defined by and reliant on uniform measurements of time divided into precise units. More than ever, time was viewed as a criterion of value; maximizing it was considered a moral and industrial imperative, and wasting it was an affront to modernity's insistence on progress and forward motion. The late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century ubiquity of public clocks and pocket watches altered the way that people engaged with time and corroborated the importance to modern life of visual representations of time that could be synchronized, consulted, and relied on to keep daily schedules predictable and precise.⁵

It was this sense of time as linear, measurable, and irreversible that philosopher Henri Bergson responded to around the turn of the twentieth century in his writings on time. Bergson found such a conception of time reductive and dehumanizing. In contrast, his notion of *durée* conceives of time not as mechanically measured, homogeneous intervals but as an ongoing and interpenetrating flux of past, present, and future. In *Creative Evolution*, he explains:

For our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but the present—no prolonging of the past into the actual, no evolution, no concrete duration. Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation.⁶

4 The impetus to standardize time came primarily from the telegraph and railroad industries. For social histories of time and clocks, see Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1998); Michael O'Malley, *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1996); Sean Carroll, *From Eternity to Here: The Quest for the Ultimate Theory of Time* (New York: Dutton, 2010).

5 Several scholars have written extensively about the intersection of modern time consciousness and early cinema. See Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and the Silent Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Helen Powell, *Stop the Clocks! Time and Narrative in Cinema* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012); Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Doane notes that "modernity was characterized by the impulse to wear time, to append it to the body so that the watch became a kind of prosthetic device extending the capacity of the body to measure time" (4).

6 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1910), 4.

Time, for Bergson, is not a series of numerical points on a line but an indivisible whole. Its essence is qualitative rather than quantitative. Individual moments are not discrete; as experienced by human consciousness, they are tinged with memories and vestiges of the past as well as anticipation of potential futures. According to Bergson, time is a constant state of becoming: a continuous succession of new possibilities and contingencies coexisting with past moments and present happenings. He writes of past, present, and future states as “an organic whole” and explains why spatial representations of time are specious:

When I follow with my eyes on the dial of a clock the movement of the hand which corresponds to the oscillations of the pendulum, I do not measure duration. . . . I merely count simultaneities. . . . Outside of me, in space, there is never more than a single position of the hand and the pendulum, for nothing is left of the past positions. Within myself a process of organization or interpenetration of conscious states is going on, which constitutes true duration. It is because I endure in this way that I picture to myself what I call the past oscillations of the pendulum at the same time as I perceive the present oscillation.⁷

Phenomenologically, for Bergson, when we are in the present moment, we are simultaneously always aware of time passing even as we experience it. Past and present are contemporaneous and each moment is, therefore, temporally heterogeneous and qualitatively unique.

Writing when the cinema was in its fledgling years as an artistic, industrial, and technological apparatus, Bergson took a dim view of the nascent art form of film, comparing its frame-by-frame progression to a ticking clock, because each, in his view, renders duration as something to be experienced sequentially, moment by moment. Both, explains Bergson, measure the passage of time by spatial change: one by the progress of the clock's hand as it moves in a circle, and the other by the technological process of recording movement as individual frames and then reconstituting those frames into the illusion of motion in space. In both cases, the mechanical movement reduces time to a sequence of motions rather than expressing it as an intermingling of moments:

If movement is a series of positions and change a series of states, time is made up of distinct parts immediately adjacent to one another. No doubt we still say that they follow one another, but in that case this succession is similar to that of the images on a cinematographic film: the film could be run off ten, a hundred, even a thousand times faster without the slightest modification in what was being shown; if its speed were increased to infinity, if the unrolling (this time, away from the apparatus) became instantaneous, the pictures would still be the same. Succession thus understood, therefore, adds nothing; on the contrary, it takes something away; it marks a deficit; it reveals a weakness in our perception, which is forced by this weakness to divide up the film image by image instead of grasping it in the aggregate.⁸

7 Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 107–108.

8 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 17–18.

This spatialization of time is an affront to Bergson's notion of *durée* and to his conception of experience as dynamic and full of infinite possibility rather than as a mechanistic movement toward a preset end. Bergson mostly uses the new art of cinema as a metaphor to demonstrate his ideas about time and thought, equating what he refers to as "the contrivance of the cinematograph" to human perception and knowledge. His analogy focuses on the mechanical processes of the camera and the projector rather than on the content of the film. He does, however, point out that once the film is complete, its reality is already set because "everything is given at once," so it does not offer "something unforeseeable and new."⁹ A film's fixed essence marks it as determinist and, hence, counter to Bergson's insistence on the mutability and boundless possibility of temporality.

Considering *The Clock* through the lens of Bergson's thoughts on time, cinema, and modernity highlights its dualistic presentation of temporality. *The Clock* is premised on and veritably obsessed with the spatialization of time and the moment-by-moment atomization of daily life that Bergson railed against. Visual representations of time ticking away are its structuring conceit and *raison d'être*. Not incidentally, a vast number of the clips reveal the tyranny of modernity's sense of time. As characters compulsively check their watches, ask what time it is, rush to meet deadlines, and conduct their lives under the looming presence of public clocks, they are indeed beset by their compulsive fixation on telling time, being on time, and worrying about time running out. Doctors take pains to verify the time of death, Peter Falk's Detective Columbo obsesses about the precise time a crime occurred, and the teenagers in *The Breakfast Club* (John Hughes, 1985) synchronize their watches as they serve their sentence. The suspenseful tennis-match scene from *Strangers on a Train* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1951) hinges on a character beating the clock, as does Margo Channing's (Bette Davis) marriage and career as she races to a train station in *All About Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950). Multiple scenes focus on characters dashing along a railroad platform, either just making or just missing the train's departure. Marclay renders a world in which time is everywhere represented spatially by clocks and watches that tick off the characters' fates, moment by moment (Figure 2).

Yet in its status as an infinite loop and its complex interpenetration of pieces of film and moments in time, *The Clock* offers a cinematic analogue of Bergsonian duration. Unlike classic narrative movies, *The Clock* has no story chronology or teleology, let alone a finite running time. It has a beginning and ending only to the extent that individual spectators decide when to come and go; inevitably, both of those actions happen in medias res. We enter and exit not just *The Clock* in the middle but also, once we are watching, each of the thousands of scenes that constitute it, so we are never able to locate ourselves in any sort of narrative timeline or causal progression, nor do we have the gratification of knowing what actions have preceded and led to each scene or how it will play out in the future. This transcendence of temporal linearity releases the viewer into a pure state of experiencing each moment without regard to its status as a progressive piece of a narrative continuum. The spectator as time traveler is anchored by the

9 Ibid., 339–340.



Figure 2. One of thousands of clocks in *The Clock* (Christian Marclay, 2010). Courtesy of the artist, White Cube, London and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

clock but is continuously drifting among myriad cinemas, genres, nationalities, and time periods.¹⁰

Here, as in Bergson's notion of *durée*, time's arrow is an inapt metaphor; instead, time is a Möbius strip, endlessly recursive and continuous. The incessant unreeling of actions is a cinematic *durée* in which each moment bleeds into the next as past, present, and future meld into one undifferentiated tense: what Gilles Deleuze, in his book *Bergsonism*, calls the "virtual coexistence" of past and present.¹¹ Some of that virtual coexistence of past and present in *The Clock* comes from the spectators' prior knowledge of and exposure to the plots of the films from which these scenes emanate. As we watch the climactic scene from *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952), for example, we remember what has brought the characters to this point. Even if we cannot identify the provenance of a given scene, our familiarity with the conventions of genre movies and the codes of cinematic narratives provides an idea of what came before or a premonition of what is to come. The past that infuses the present is not just the prior events of the diegesis but also the spectators' own past experience of the particular movies shown in *The Clock* and their own personal histories with them.

In spite of its obsessive tally of time, *The Clock* is a time warp in which chronology ceases to matter, as the unreeling images fuse with one another and with recollected scenes in a jumble of imagery and memory. In *The Remembered Film*, Victor Burgin discusses a similar sensation, which is enabled by new technologies that allow viewers to detach images from their narrative context and create their own mental juxtapositions and chains of associations, thereby "dismantling and reconfiguring the once inviolable

10 In *Modular Narratives in Contemporary Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), Allan Cameron writes about temporal anchoring and temporal drift in recent movies that experiment with narrative linearity.

11 Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 60.

objects offered by narrative cinema.”¹² His account of how memory rearranges film moments is a spot-on description of the effect of Marclay’s mash-up: “The narratives have dropped away. . . . Detached from their original settings, each scene is now the satellite of the other. Each echoes the other, increasingly merges with the other, and I experience a kind of fascinated incomprehension before the hybrid object they have become.”¹³ Earlier, Burgin explains how such image streams “emerge successively but not teleologically,” like the images in *The Clock* that follow one another but without a sense of direction or narrative function.¹⁴

The sense of past and present as contemporaneous also arises from the montage’s freewheeling juxtapositions, associations, and insinuations. Johnny Depp as Hunter S. Thompson murmurs, “I’m open to suggestion,” and the next shot shows Scarlett O’Hara stretching postcoitally in bed. Charlie Chaplin as a factory worker in *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin, 1936) is adjacent to Charles Durning in his corporate tower in *The Hudsucker Proxy* (Joel Coen, 1994). In a feat of unlikely casting, a shot of Audrey Hepburn at a party in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (Blake Edwards, 1961) is side by side with one of Dennis Hopper at an art opening in *Basquiat* (Julian Schnabel, 1996). An even more surreal set of costars appears at 7:45 p.m., when the montage casts Basil Rathbone, Ice Cube, and Peter Sellers in contiguous shots. *The Clock* achieves zero degrees of separation among actors and movies across the panoply of film history.

As Marclay plays fast and loose with images, characters, and narratives while gleefully leaping through time and space, viewers experience a temporal whiplash in which we are hurtled back and forth across the decades, centuries, and millennia of the films’ collective settings, not to mention the eras of the various movies’ production and the occasion of our own prior viewing. Each excerpt contains multiple temporalities: the time of the image’s inscription on film, the temporality of the narrative action, the period in history when the movie is set, the instant of viewer reception, our memory of previous viewings. Although Marclay has rendered all the clips in the same aspect ratio, other visual cues serve as time coordinates to help the viewer locate the clip in film history. Fashions in clothing, automobiles and other technology, social conventions, production values, black-and-white or color—all serve as markers of the date of production. But scenes unspool so quickly, alongside our memories of having seen them before or our perplexity about where they come from and who’s who on the screen, that we barely have time to process what we are seeing. In Bergson’s essay “The Memory of the Past and False Recognition,” he analyzes the phenomenon of *déjà vu*, when perception and memory merge into an interpenetrating mental state.¹⁵ As we bounce from wondering what happened before or what happens next to pondering when and whether we have seen this scene before, an onrush of thought thrusts viewers in and out of the diegesis and back to our own moviegoing past. All of these temporalities coalesce to become a Bergsonian *durée* in which our experience of each moment is filtered through a scrim

12 Victor Burgin, *The Remembered Film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 8.

13 Ibid., 59.

14 Ibid., 21.

15 Henry Bergson, “Memory of the Present and False Recognition,” in *Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920).

of time consciousness. Layers of images, memories, and speculations mingle and merge. In the spirit of Bergson's notion of temporality, each moment in *The Clock* is not a deterministic movement toward preset outcomes; it is, instead, laden with possibilities as to what may come next (Figure 3).

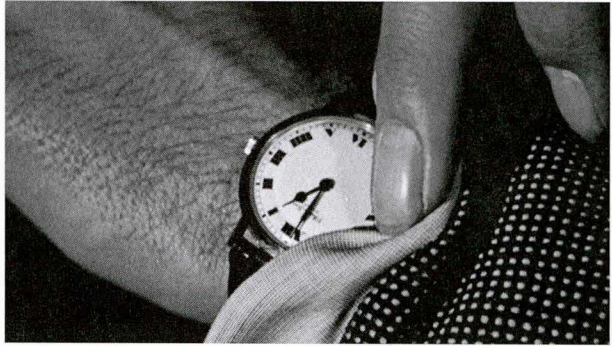


Figure 3. Checking the time in *The Clock* (Christian Marclay, 2010). Courtesy of the artist, White Cube, London and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

In the late twentieth century, Bergson's ideas were amplified by Deleuze, perhaps the foremost philosopher of cinematic time. In his two books on cinema published in the 1980s, Deleuze offers up an elaborate taxonomy of cinematic images as he parses the manifold ways that film conveys time. There are many intriguing applications of Deleuzian philosophy to *The Clock*, but his basic distinction between what he calls movement-images and time-images, as well as his thoughts about montage, are particularly pertinent to a discussion of the paradoxical coexistence of temporalities in Marclay's film. The movement-image, which Deleuze associates with pre-World War II classical cinema, involves a temporal continuum in which time is subordinated to movements in space. Although movies are a time-based medium, they usually succeed in taking us out of time; as we get caught up in the story's progress, we forget time's passage. The conventional chain of events in movement-images displays a causal and predictable linkage among shots: a situation inspires action that results in a changed situation. Deleuze calls this stimulus-and-response pattern the sensory-motor schema.¹⁶ Actions happen in sequence and are generally foreseeable, so cinemas based on movement-images tend to set up and then fulfill our expectations about what logically comes next. Continuity editing, grounded in rational connections between shots, tends to cut out anything that is extraneous to the forward motion of plot. To the extent that spectators perceive time in movement-images, they do so only in terms of the chronological, cause-and-effect progression of the actions in the movie, as past, present, and future are clearly delineated along a temporal line.

Time-images, the onset of which Deleuze ascribes to postwar Italian neorealism, are, unlike movement-images, intent on making the spectator aware of not just the action that is playing out in them but also of their time-based status and their sense of pending possibility. Instead of foregrounding narrative progression and absorption, time-images call attention to temporal duration and flux. They give viewers a direct experience of time as unforeseeable change: "creative evolution" to use Bergson's phrase. With time-images, the spectator's sense of what happens next is contingent

16 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 40.

rather than causal; instead of anticipating events that we have been conditioned to expect, we are made aware of time as the anticipation of plentiful possibilities—as a fertile garden of forking paths. Deleuze says that such images “break through the cliché” because they are not merely representational; rather, they are “pure optical and sound situations.”¹⁷ He explains how time-images in the cinema go beyond a simple sense of time as chronology to blur temporal distinctions:

The screen itself is the cerebral membrane where immediate and direct confrontations take place between the past and the future, the inside and the outside, at a distance impossible to determine, independent of any fixed point. The image no longer has space and movement as its primary characteristics but topology and time.¹⁸

Such time-images are largely created through montage, which Deleuze declares “the principal act of cinema.”¹⁹ In his discussion of various types of montage, he focuses, in particular, on the interval between shots. In movement-images, that interval is concealed by continuity editing that aims to divert our attention from the transition from one shot to the next: match cuts, cutaways, reaction shots, and insert shots all follow logically and indiscernibly from what has come before. Time-images, however, break the conventional progression from perception to action to reaction; as Deleuze explains, the sequence of images is not necessarily in service to the forward momentum of the narration. The sensorimotor schema is interrupted. In place of a horizontal progression where one action ineluctably leads to the next, time-images vertically plumb the moment, dislocating it from the spatial and temporal continuums and refocusing attention on a pluralist experience of time. In *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, D. N. Rodowick explains: “A new montage form emerges in the cinema of the time-image. Montage is based here on irrational intervals that ‘de-link’ images, as well as the relation between images and sounds, which are no longer limited by an image of the whole. . . . In this context, any-space-whatevers become disconnected, autonomous images.”²⁰ In his writings on literature, Deleuze proposes the notion of deterritorialization: disrupting established topographies and remapping familiar terrain.²¹ In the case of cinema, this involves decontextualizing conventional relations and coordinates among individual images by undoing their linkages. He writes of what he calls “hacked montage” (*montage haché*)—a process in which unexpected juxtapositions realign the characteristic topology of the image—and sums up the result as follows:

Ultimately, there are no longer any rational cuts, but only irrational ones. There is thus no longer association through metaphor or metonymy, but relinkage on the literal image; there is no longer linkage of associated images, but only relinkages of independent images. Instead of one image after the

17 Ibid., 21, 40–41.

18 Ibid., 125.

19 Ibid., 34.

20 D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 80.

21 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “What Is a Minor Literature?,” in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

other, there is one image *plus* another, and each shot is deframed in relation to the framing of the following shot.²²

This could serve as an apt description of the editing principle of *The Clock*. Although Marclay's film is organized around the chronology of diurnal rhythms, it reveals in spatial incongruities and temporal leaps among clips that are set in—and produced in—different time periods. So, although *The Clock*'s sequential continuum is strictly linear as measured by clock time, the actions and spaces are discontinuous. The montage no longer coordinates moments in time. Instead, it unpacks cinematic syntax and repacks it into recognizable but altered form. Within a given moment of clock time, we see actions that are chronometrically simultaneous but wildly out of sync with one another in terms of the time of their production and the temporal schema of their respective narratives. Marclay accomplishes the neat trick of offering images that are, at once, both synchronic and diachronic. Shots are grouped by the coincidence of their contemporaneity across narratives, but those groupings are otherwise arbitrary and nonsensical, if also surprising and often delightful.²³

In describing how Deleuzian time-images function in Italian neorealist films, Rodowick explains, “[L]inear actions dissolve into the form of aleatory strolls.” He continues, “The relation between time and thought is imagined differently” because “pure description replaces referential anchoring.”²⁴ As scene after scene unfolds without narrative context, *The Clock*, too, gives the impression of being radically aleatory (although, in its pacing, it is more of a gallop than a stroll); it presents us with a succession of seemingly chance encounters among shots, anchored only by the fortuitous simultaneity of their diegetic moment.

The Clock can be viewed as a kind of Deleuzian jest: a playful display of the philosopher's ideas about time and montage and a realization of what he saw as the creative potential of cinema.²⁵ The ingenious twist is that, as a twenty-four-hour hacked montage of movement-images, Marclay's creation is one continuous time-image. By using movement-images to generate time-images, *The Clock* repurposes classical cinema to explore how time is perceived and how narrative is habitually constructed and experienced. It does so using the characteristically postmodern technique of poaching and regrouping images, thereby creating false continuities predicated on their coincidental temporal affinity. In Deleuze's terms, it deterritorializes these images without ever reterritorializing them, since we are repeatedly denied the sort of narrative closure and

22 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 120, 206.

23 A few recent narrative films (e.g., *Timecode* [Mike Figgis, 2000], *Code Unknown* [Michael Haneke, 2000], *Run Lola Run* [Tom Tykwer, 1998]) have also played with synchronicity. Rather than progressing diachronically and chronologically, such works may linger in a particular time frame to present simultaneous events or merge spatial collage with temporal unity, using split screens to create a visual patchwork. See Cameron, *Modular Narratives*.

24 Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 13.

25 In his writings on cinema, Deleuze focused primarily on narrative films, albeit ones that often strain against the strictures of conventional narrative. His ideas about time in cinema are nonetheless applicable to nonnarrative works such as Marclay's, which mixes narrative source material with collage and montage techniques found in many experimental films.

resolution of suspense or desire that we have come to expect of movies such as those that constitute *The Clock*.

In expounding on how montage functions vis-à-vis time-images, Deleuze focuses, in particular, on the intervals between images. Those intervals become a nexus of possibility in time-images: a moment suffused with the potential to lead the viewer anywhere. He distinguishes the selection and ordering of time-images from movement-images by explaining, "The question is no longer that of the association or attraction of images. What counts is on the contrary the *interstice* between images, between two images: a spacing which means that each image is plucked from the void and falls back into it."²⁶

The jarring juxtapositions that Marclay creates by plucking images from the vast cinematic cosmos inevitably call attention to the interval between shots and, in a larger sense, to the manipulations and implications of film editing in general. Marclay had six assistants spend two years watching movies and searching for images of clocks. Although the culling process was, no doubt, somewhat serendipitous, his editing is purposeful and witty. Uncoupling and regrouping scenes with abandon, Marclay turns the standard grammar of narrative film into a Dadaist poem. *The Clock* revels in sham continuity editing, fake eyeline matches, and bogus—if amusing—reverse angle cuts. Sean Connery as James Bond mixes himself a drink and looks toward a door; in the next shot, Daniel Craig as James Bond rushes through an open door. Marclay invokes the sensorimotor schema only to wantonly break it by interrupting the spectators' expectation of, if not our desire for, filmic continuity and narrative causality. He repeatedly indulges in creative geography and surrealist juxtapositions, merging spaces that span not just place but also time and film history. The *Pink Panther's* (Blake Edwards, 1963) Inspector Clouseau picks up the phone to find out what time it is and is answered, in the succeeding shot, by Agent Mulder from television's *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993–2002). David Niven as a man of the cloth in *The Bishop's Wife* (Henry Koster, 1947) makes a phone call, only to be answered by Lauren Hutton.²⁷ In this way, Marclay subverts the aim of continuity editing, which presumes to offer a seamless narrative that reflects unmediated reality. Here the seams are blatant and all-important. Our awareness of Marclay's careful selection and juxtaposition of images is accompanied by an acknowledgment of the arbitrariness of creative choices and the possibility of alternative narratives lurking behind each splice. The editing incongruities constantly remind viewers of the machinations of an organizing sensibility, which classical cinema masks and denies.

Marclay's sound editing is as evocative and provocative as his visual montage. In *The Clock*, music tracks are often separated from their source or overlapped across a succession of unrelated shots. Midmorning, the score from *The 400 Blows* (François Truffaut, 1959) runs across an assortment of scenes, but later, when Antoine Doinel finally reaches the beach, he does so accompanied by a music track from a different

26 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 179.

27 In 1995, Marclay created what, in retrospect, seems like a rehearsal for *The Clock*. His seven-and-a-half-minute video *Telephones* links shots from various movies to create a recombinant narrative of phone calls among characters from a variety of films.

movie. Clips from *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944) appear intermittently across a few hours of *The Clock*, but its haunting musical theme swells under several adjoining shots from a procession of other movies. Marclay's early career acclaim came from what composer John Oswald dubbed "plunderphonics": audio borrowings that are altered and/or recombined to create new compositions.²⁸ In *The Clock*, his musical montages and seepages underscore his visual principle, which is, improbably, both linear and disjunctive.

Although Marclay's source material is film, his editing ellipses and adjacencies, not to mention the scope and ambition of his project, are enabled by digital technologies. The counterpoint between the materiality and narrativity of classical cinema, from which most of his excerpts are taken, and the technical capabilities and postmodern proclivities of his digital media methods is central to the impact of *The Clock*. Anna Everett has coined the neologism "digitextuality" (extending Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality) to describe the "process, product, and discourse" of digitally rendered texts that allow for "infinite recombinant signifiers." She goes on to say, "What this means is that earlier practices of collage, bricolage and other modernist and postmodernist hybrid representational strategies and literary gestures of intertextual referentiality have been expanded for the new demands and technological wizardry of the digital age."²⁹ As Marclay's infinitely recombinant scenes leap cinematic eras, traditions, and genres in a single bound, the transitions *become* the narrative logic—such as it is. His series of digressions are, in essence, an extended hypertext made up of dubious, if ingenious, connections. Liminality is the defining principle of *The Clock*. It is a twenty-four-hour succession of thresholds leading into narrative structures that become, in Marclay's filmic architecture, mere facades: false fronts that welcome us into a story in progress only to eject us as soon as we settle in comfortably. As spectators we bring to each successive scene all of our deeply inscribed expectations of narrative pleasure, only to have them repeatedly thwarted by the rapid series of cuts that wrench us away from plot progression, characterization, causality, and all the other markers of linear narrative.

The fragments of recycled narrative that constitute *The Clock* are subsumed by their cumulative status as a metafilm that comments on narrative construction and reception. Marclay's film collage is a narrative tease that engages in a sort of bait-and-switch tactic. Sitting in a dark room with strangers watching images on a large screen, we may initially feel as if we are engaging in familiar conventions of movie viewership. But this concatenation of story snippets is more aligned with postmodern commentary on the pull and power of narrative than with classical-Hollywood-movie fulfillment of our curiosity about what happens next and where the story will lead. Although *The Clock* uses mostly narrative, mostly mainstream films as its key ingredient, its historical antecedents and art-world affinities include avant-garde film and video art practices

28 John Oswald first presented "Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative" as a lecture at the Wired Society Electro-Acoustic Conference in Toronto in 1985. It is available online at <http://www.plunderphonics.com/xhtml/xplunder.xhtml>.

29 Anna Everett, "Digitextuality and Click Theory: Theses on Convergence Media in the Digital Age," in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, ed. Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2003), 7.

of appropriation as well as visual art repurposing of found objects.³⁰ In particular, Marclay's creation is part of a burgeoning tradition of new media that is enabled by digital technologies.

The accretion of imagery and the repeated disruption of narrative, temporal, and musical flows by the ruptures of Marclay's editing mark *The Clock* as a species of what Lev Manovich calls the database logic of new media—a logic that is accumulative and recursive rather than sequential and progressive.³¹ Database logic's incorporation into narrative is explained by Marsha Kinder:

Database narratives refers to narratives whose structure exposes or thematizes the dual processes of selection and combination that lie at the heart of all stories and that are crucial to language: the selection of particular data (characters, images, sounds, events) from a series of databases or paradigms, which are then combined to generate specific tales. . . . Such narratives reveal the arbitrariness of the particular choices made, and the possibility of making other combinations which would create alternative stories. By always suggesting virtuality and the wave of potentialities linked to the uncertainty principle, such narratives inevitably raise meta-narrative issues.³²

Such a database aesthetic is archival rather than story oriented. Because *The Clock* beguiles us with pieces of narrative, some of its charms may be story based, but its structural logic is not. Whereas classical Hollywood movies are predicated on the goals of fulfilling spectatorial desire and restoring narrative equilibrium, database narratives have another agenda and a different appeal. They reflexively flaunt their own constitutive process and thereby turn attention away from narrative anticipation and gratification and toward the more immediate, unfurling display of the procession of images.

In this, although *The Clock*'s digital editing process, database aesthetic, and post-modern reflexivity are up to the minute, its pleasures evoke what André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning labeled "the cinema of attractions" in their writings about early film history.³³ Counterposing the tendency of early cinema to foreground spectacle and display with Hollywood's subsequent embrace of narrative, Gunning says about the former, "It arouses a curiosity that is satisfied by surprise rather than narrative suspense."³⁴ Its pleasures derive not from narrative absorption but from serial appreciation of the on-screen spectacle. Once viewers of *The Clock* come to terms with the repeated frustration of narrative curiosity, their sense of wonder shifts to the jolt

30 Experimental filmmakers who have used excerpts from Hollywood movies include Bruce Connor, Ken Jacobs, Joseph Cornell, Mark Rappaport, Martin Arnold, Mathias Müller, and Peter Tscherkassky. For an overview of video art that repurposes movie footage, including earlier works by Marclay, see the catalog for a 2004 exhibition at the Milwaukee Art Museum: Candice Breitz, Omer Fast, Michael Joaquin Grey, and Jennifer McCoy, *Cut: Film as Found Object in Contemporary Video* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee Art Museum, 2004).

31 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

32 Marsha Kinder, "Hot Spots, Avatars, and Narrative Fields Forever—Buñuel's Legacy for New Digital Media and Interactive Database Narrative," *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2002): 6.

33 For a detailed discussion of the derivation of the term, see Wanda Strauven, ed., *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

34 Tom Gunning, "'Now You See It, Now You Don't': The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions," *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 32 (Fall 1993): 6.

of surprise that comes from Marclay's clever couplings, odd concurrences, and novel juxtapositions. This is a present-tense engagement; because *The Clock* proceeds in a plotless circle, spectators can enjoy only each successive moment and each sequential edit. Gunning writes that "rather than a development which links the past with the present in such a way as to define a specific anticipation of the future (as an unfolding narrative does), the attraction seems limited to a sudden burst of presence."³⁵ He calls this "a temporal irruption rather than a temporal development," and he goes on to explain that, "rather than a developing configuration of narrative, the attraction offers a jolt of pure presence, soliciting surprise, astonishment, or pure curiosity instead of following the enigmas on which narrative depends."³⁶ This is precisely how *The Clock* functions. Temporal and spatial irruptions are the sine qua non of Marclay's film. Instead of narrative signposts—"here is why you are seeing this and here is where this is going"—it says simply, "Here's a clip; now here's another." Instead of time as a process of development, time is simply an accumulation of layered instants, placed side by side only by the coincidence that they both contain timepieces showing the same moment.

This is not to say that *The Clock* does not offer up narrative pleasures. Part of its accomplishment is that it deftly juggles temporal, narrative, and spectatorial binaries, commingling seemingly contradictory sensations and predilections. Its paradoxical hybridity is evident on many fronts. The building blocks of *The Clock* are movement-images, but they add up to a continuous time-image. Clock time ticks by moment by moment on screen, but time flies by as spectators sit hour after hour, even as the cumulative time-images make us constantly aware of time's passage. Marclay's film is linear in terms of the clock but nonlinear in terms of narrative, since consecutive shots are temporally coincident but narratively irreconcilable. The array of scenes extracted from more than a century of celluloid film are created by postfilmic, digital editing technology. The database aesthetic and the temporality of a cinema of attractions defy and deny narrative logic, but here they also foreground fragments of narrative that reel us into their unfolding plots even though we know we cannot stay. Again and again, *The Clock* stymies then reengages the narrative impulse. In so doing, it simultaneously undermines and celebrates narrative enchantment, as Marclay's (and the audience's) postmodern knowingness exists side by side with the sheer joy of getting caught up in all sorts of movie moments.

Film spectators have been conditioned, over years of movie viewing, to read and respond to story cues and conventions; we are well versed in patterns of response to cinematic stimuli even when they lead, as they do here, to narrative cul-de-sacs. So although *The Clock* denies its viewers a conventional narrative through-line and the habitual gratification of following a movie plot from start to finish, it nonetheless is a vivid demonstration of the power of stories and the narrative instinct in humans.³⁷ Even as it atomizes narrative into bits and pieces of stories, the viewer's impulse nonetheless tries to make sense of each story morsel. Because of the eidetic power of film

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 7, 10.

37 For a wide-ranging discussion of the human instinct for storytelling, see Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

to revisit familiar images as if calling up old memories, viewers frequently recollect the original narrative significance of those scenes that we can identify. Inevitably, one's experience of *The Clock* is shot through with a strong sense of déjà vu, accompanied by memories of the pleasures yielded by the source film. But when we cannot recognize a scene (which is the case more often than not, even for proud cinephiles), spectators still seek their own narrative threads, trying to connect the disparate scenes that Marclay has strung together.

Motifs inevitably emerge, and Marclay's calculated editing encourages us to ferret them out. Rain, doors, dreams, beaches, bombs, and other recurring imagery thread together sundry shots. The impulse for narrative guideposts is particularly evident as the second hand approaches twelve, when the pace tends to quicken and circadian rhythms are marked by the tolling of the hour. The momentous events that happen at the moment the clock strikes the hour—crimes, executions, first dates, last rites—remind the viewer of the artificiality of measured time and the arbitrary assignation of importance attached to certain temporal coordinates (Figure 4). Particular hours are further privileged within the daily schedule. Alarms go off and characters stretch awake at 7:00 a.m. At 9:00 a.m., people arrive at their jobs and begin their workday. High noon is marked by an elaborate anticipatory montage of clocks and watches leading up to a series of shots that inevitably include the eponymous noontime movie showdown. As the clock strikes 3:00, schoolchildren bolt for the door. Likewise, at 4:59 p.m., workers—from Jack Nicholson's aging insurance salesman in *About Schmidt* (Alexander Payne, 2002) to the factory drones in *The Hudsucker Proxy* (Joel Coen, 1994)—anxiously await their release from vocational servitude at 5:00, when a quitting-time montage shows a series of time cards being punched. A succession of theater curtains goes up at 8:00 p.m. as chattering audiences settle in to be entertained. Not surprisingly, chimes at midnight give us particularly significant actions, including Orson Welles being run through by a clockwork soldier's sword in *The Stranger* (Orson Welles, 1946). There is an ethnographic element to some of these privileged moments, as Marclay's collection of concurrent shots tells us about cultural habits and values (or, at least, cultural habits and values as delineated by the movies). For example, the late-afternoon race for the elevators in a series of offices across a century of cinema speaks volumes about cultural attitudes that view work as an oppressive obligation from which characters long to be sprung. A supranarrative be-

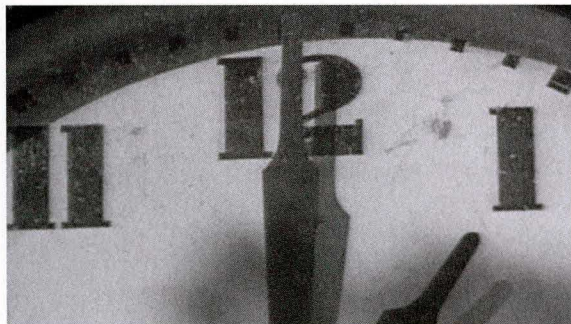


Figure 4. The top of the hour (Christian Marclay, *The Clock*, 2010). Courtesy of the artist, White Cube, London and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

gins to emerge in *The Clock* as viewers naturally piece together such observations to create our own leitmotifs and subtexts.

Although the top of the hour gets top billing, one of the interesting things about Marclay's creative method is the way he foregrounds what were often incidental images in their original movies. Whereas

conventional stories have narrative arcs with actions that rise to a climactic denouement, *The Clock*'s cyclical structure tends to endow most of its time-infused shots with equal claim on our attention. None moves us forward in the way that pivotal moments in linear narrative do, but each is vested with meaning and suspense. Throughout the diurnal cycle, many insert shots or cutaways of clocks and watches become, in a figure-ground shift, laden with consequence as the momentary focal point of audience attention. The undisputed star of *The Clock* is Big Ben, which appears time after time throughout the twenty-four-hour cycle; these establishing shots of the London landmark may initially have been peripheral to their source film, but here they take on a sense of foreboding significance. If classically structured narratives follow a pattern of crisis and resolution, here there is mostly crisis unaccompanied by the restoration of order. What were, in their original context, either decisive moments or quotidian moments are both now equally fraught.

What they are fraught with is the question that viewers keep trying to answer. If all narratives are detective stories, *The Clock* delivers one red herring after another. As soon as we get absorbed in—and, at least, minimally clued into—what is going on in each story fragment, we are thrown off the scent by the arrival of the next scene. Sometimes scenes do return, minutes or hours later, and pick up where they left off; when this happens, viewers feel anchored—and even hopeful—that we will stay grounded in the story. We return repeatedly to the desert in the spaghetti western *For a Few Dollars More* (Sergio Leone, 1965); to a bar in the corporate-workplace drama *Executive Suite* (Robert Wise, 1954); to a basement in the Hitchcock-directed television episode titled “Four O’Clock” of *Suspicion* (NBC, 1957), where Paul Steppe (E. G. Marshall), bound and gagged by burglars, is tormented by a ticking time bomb of his own devising. But, like all of *The Clock*, these recurring scenes are a tease that arouses and then goes on to frustrate narrative engagement. As the montage presents a vertiginous series of possible subject positions, we barely have time for identification with the characters’ plight. Nonetheless, because of our cinematic imprinting, we quickly graft our subjectivity onto that of the characters, even though we do not always know what causes their usually intense emotions. As David Bordwell says about conventional narratives, “A film cues the spectator to execute a definable variety of operations.”³⁸ *The Clock* makes viewers ponder those cues and operations and think about how our emotional responses and character identifications have been encoded, learned, and reinforced.

The impulse to make sense of random clues has the viewer trying to piece together chains of action, but even when we attempt to follow seemingly familiar narrative pathways, we are groping blindly because they end abruptly. *The Clock* is a series of detours that tease us with the promise of forward momentum only to thwart any sense of direction we might briefly achieve. Our conditioning as movie viewers makes us long for a narrative logic and causality that are not there. This is both frustrating and fun. We persist in trying to keep up with the ever-changing flow of images, story fragments, characters, and timepieces, but in *The Clock* it is impossible to predict what comes next. Despite the film’s perverse refusal to satisfy our curiosity and resolve the suspense, we

38 David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 29.

keep submitting to each new clip: a testament to how quickly movies cast a spell and how persistently spectators desire narrative satisfaction and resolution—even when we are seduced and abandoned over and over again.

Viewers' affective responses to *The Clock*—the identification with characters in extremis, the anxiety of unresolved suspense, the frustration of thwarted narrative desire—are interesting to consider in light of psychoanalytic theories regarding the masochism of film spectatorship.³⁹ Suspense is, in essence, masochistic, because we suffer when it is pending and often continue to suffer once it is resolved. It arouses contradictory desires in that we want to arrive at the end to know how things turn out, but we don't want to arrive at the end because that will definitively put a stop to the wonderment and sense of possibility about what could happen. Alfred Hitchcock's famous distinction between surprise and suspense suggests that the latter is effective and intense because of viewer apprehension about an imminent event and because we must wait for that event to occur and must suffer as it looms.⁴⁰ It is our experience of waiting—of time being palpable—that creates the intensity and the torment. Suspense puts us in thrall to time. *The Clock* presents the viewer with scene after scene of ticking clocks and impending doom, but few are ever brought to conclusion, so we suffer doubly. By cutting away from scenes before the narrative arc can play out, Marclay breaks the implicit contract movies make with spectators that calls for the eventual cessation of suspense. Here, each clip is a come-hither seduction, but every time we submit to its allure, we are thrown back into an anticipatory state in the film's ongoing pattern of catch and release. In toying with our desires and in denying us the satisfaction of narrative climax and closure, Marclay has created a sort of *cinephilia interruptus*. It is a perverse mix of pain and pleasure that we derive from submitting to the spell of repeated, unrelieved suspense (Figure 5).

If *The Clock* withholds many of the basic pleasures of classical cinema—character exposition, stable subject positions, coherent and causal chains of events, resolution



Figure 5. Time and suspense (Christian Marclay, *The Clock*, 2010). Courtesy of the artist, White Cube, London and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

of suspense, restoration of order—it also offers, with characteristic doubleness, the possibility of active viewership. In some ways, it wrests interpretive power from spectators, in that we can barely keep up with the roller-coaster onrush of imagery, making

39 Early influential works on psychoanalytic theories of film spectatorship include Linda Williams, *Viewing Positions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Gaylyn Studier, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993).

40 François Truffaut and Helen Scott, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 73.

interpretation—or often even understanding—impossible. But because we can't simply lapse into conditioned responses to familiar narrative lines, we have to actively work to make sense of what we see. Marclay imposes a strict formal structure on his material, but he also cedes certain reactive capabilities to *The Clock's* viewers, because we are not bound by story logic to follow preset narrative pathways and can therefore stitch together our own motifs and through-lines. Spectators are thus doubly positioned, to be pulled along by the procession of decontextualized images but also to actively make of them what we will, to imagine their connotative significance, to construct our own connections and points of interest. Although we are not clued in to the original narrative function assigned to the various scenes, we instinctively try to devise associations and to imagine (or remember) their place in a larger narrative design. We are used to being carried along by the action, but here, even though we do not know where we have come from or where we are going, we are not merely passive passengers of *The Clock's* careening, high-speed ride. Inevitably, having been conditioned to make inferences in response to film conventions, the spectator tries to assert some interpretive control: to interact with familiar tropes on-screen and to re-create—or, along with Marclay, co-create—meaning and context for what we see.

To be sure, compared to the usual movie experience this is an atypical kind of pleasure, but it is a pleasure nonetheless and it partially explains why viewers subject themselves to the masochism of what is, in effect, a series of cliffhangers. The narrative dislocations encourage a different sort of viewer engagement and a different type of negotiation with what is on the screen. Spectatorship is a capacious concept in cinema; as many scholars have pointed out, there is a paradoxical tension between the encoded qualities of cinematic address and the possibility for spectatorial resistance. Judith Mayne notes that “address refers to the ways in which a text assumes certain responses, which may or may not be operative in different reception conditions.”⁴¹ *The Clock* creates markedly different reception conditions, so the source films' initial modes of address are dually subverted: first by Marclay, whose editing encourages responses that depart from (or, at least, go beyond) those that the original movies prompted, and then by the spectators, whose circumstances of reception and process of deciphering are qualitatively different from the moviegoing norm.

The agency that spectators exercise in deriving new meanings from old movies and in setting the temporal terms of their own experience of *The Clock* is aligned with both postmodern art practices and digitally enabled film processes. Digital technologies not only facilitate the artistic gesture of repurposing images; they also enable, and even encourage, viewers themselves to revisit or re-create familiar scenes and to make new connections between them. Among those who have written about what digitization means for not just the creation but also the consumption of movies, Laura Mulvey, in *Death 24x a Second*, explores the implications of empowered spectators who are no longer bound by the temporalities of film projection in public spaces.⁴² Mulvey

41 Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 79.

42 In addition to Mulvey's book, works that consider the impact of digital technologies on filmmaking, movie watching, and cinema temporality include Martin Reiser and Andrea Zapp, eds., *New Screen Media: Cinema/Art/Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 2002); Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell, *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Allan Cameron, *Modular Narratives in Contemporary Cinema*

distinguishes between “the pensive spectator [who] is more engaged with reflection on the visibility of time in the cinema” and “the possessive spectator [who] is more fetishistically absorbed by the image of the human body.”⁴³ Spectators of *The Clock* play both roles, reveling in images of recognizable actors from across film history but also registering the passage of time, not least when we see shots of stars—Vincent Price, Jack Lemmon, Ingrid Bergman, Mickey Rourke, Marlon Brando, Deborah Kerr, Michael Caine, Dirk Bogarde, and Gérard Depardieu—from across their long careers: now young, now old, now young again. As putatively immortal stars are revealed to be all too mortal, we are simultaneously dazzled by their aura of stardom and pensive about the ravages of time, the workings of cinematic temporality, and the effect of Marclay’s gleaning and editing of shots.

Mulvey’s book is primarily concerned with the newfound agency that digital technologies now offer at-home viewers, who can, with the touch of a finger, undermine the temporal flow of a movie, return to favorite moments, or even freeze the moment altogether. By sabotaging the forward motion of the plot, viewers interrupt the narrative’s temporal design: “To delay a fiction in full flow allows the changed mechanism of spectatorship to come into play and, with it, shifts of consciousness between temporalities.”⁴⁴ Such manipulative interventions remove us from the internal temporality of the story and remind us of the contingency of narrative duration, selection, and order. Mulvey further discusses how digital technology allows viewers to “detach a privileged sequence from its narrative armature. This is a gesture that dismisses narrative and context and brings the cinephile’s love of Hollywood movies into touch with the counter-cinema of the avant-garde.”⁴⁵ This is precisely what Marclay does in *The Clock*. Although viewers are not at the controls, the effect is the same. We get caught up in story after story, all the while being compelled to think about how stories cast their spell on us. By tapping into and then tampering with the essential satisfactions of narrative, Marclay offers up a metanarrative that muses on its own provenance and practices. In this way, *The Clock*’s remarkable juggling act both celebrates and subverts the pleasures of narrative.

In some sense, the experience of viewing *The Clock* is a performative one. The audience’s performance begins with an inevitably long wait for admission. Marclay’s film has been a cultural phenomenon among followers of film and of contemporary art, so at most of its screenings, audiences have had to endure long lines before being admitted to the theater (which, in each venue, holds fewer than one hundred seats, as per Marclay’s instructions).⁴⁶ In all of its New York appearances to date, waits of up

(Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Garrett Stewart, *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Todd McGowan, *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011).

43 Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 11.

44 Ibid., 184.

45 Ibid., 145.

46 *The Clock* has been exhibited mostly in art galleries and museums, although it did have a brief run at Lincoln Center in New York in the summer of 2012. The many blog posts written by viewers of *The Clock* suggest that there is an aura of cultural cachet attached to attending it. Several reviewers and online commentators engage in competitive fandom, writing about how many hours they lasted, whether they stayed awake in the wee hours, what their longest stint was, how many clips they could identify, and so on. There is a clear sense of *The Clock* not just as a movie screening but as an event involving audience interaction and performance.

to three hours were not unusual. This means that even before entering, viewers are compelled to contemplate their part in the cultural ritual of film viewership as well as their investment and subjective experience of time. Marclay has specified not just the number of seats but the material conditions for viewing *The Clock*, which include comfortable, widely spaced couches that evoke museum benches more than movie seating. Indeed, although the social practice of gathering with strangers to watch motion pictures in a public space is familiar, and the sensory experience involves the usual cinematic triad of projector, film, and audience, in some ways this is closer to a museum visit than a conventional movie outing. The major departure from the routines of public movie watching—and the major act of spectatorial volition—involves the constant coming and going of viewers. The spell that is repeatedly cast, broken, and recast by each successive on-screen clip is also repeatedly broken by the steady entrance and exit of audience members. Unlike a movie, which has a running time and a scheduled start and stop time, *The Clock* leaves those parameters up to the individual viewer. We set the temporal limits with our arrival and departure, and while we watch, we are constantly reminded of temporality and duration as other viewers come and go. Part of *The Clock*'s extradiegetic effect is regularly to call attention to our status and endurance as spectators who are not just aware of time passing for the characters on the screen but for ourselves as well (Figure 6).

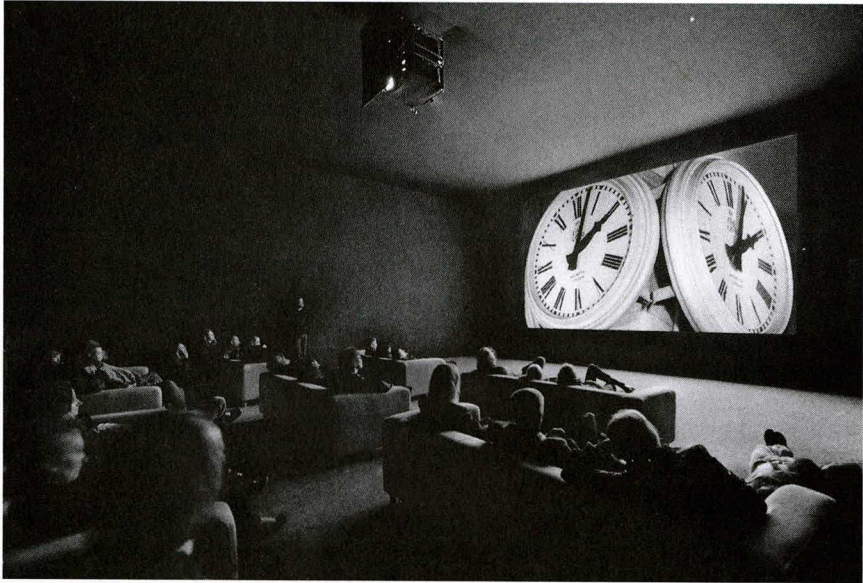


Figure 6. The audience settles in. Photo by Ben Westoby. Courtesy White Cube, London.

This vivid encounter with the heterogeneity of time—measured technologically by clocks, narrated by movies, and felt and remembered by those who are aware of it going by—is what ultimately unifies *The Clock*'s organizational principle, thematic focus, and spectator experience. Time is both the structural schema and the subject matter of *The Clock*. Marclay's epic creation is not simply successive shots of clocks selected for their place in the twenty-four-hour countdown. Indeed, many of the selected shots do not

show timepieces at all, but all of them show people beset by time. In scene after scene, time weighs heavily on the characters and, as the on-screen timepieces tick off every passing moment, on the audience as well. Some excerpts originate in movies in which the plot hinges on time; others are taken from movies in which the clock is incidental. But whatever their source, in most of the scenes in *The Clock*, there is a chronic feeling of anxiety: of time as tormenter. Because we enter narratives in progress, we do not know what is so pressing, but the sense of urgency is undeniable. Characters nervously ask, "What time is it?" They arrive breathlessly at a shop only to hear, "I'm sorry, sir, we're closed." In a race to beat the clock, they rush to an appointment or a date or a deadline. As they worry about what the next moment might bring, they regard with dread the second hand moving its way inexorably around the clock face.

Throughout the circadian cycle, characters repeatedly try to subvert the ceaseless march of time. In a series of shots mostly concentrated in the morning but seen occasionally throughout the day, people smash alarm clocks in an effort to stop time and to assert control over its relentless tyranny. At 11:38, Peter Fonda in *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) throws his watch on the ground and takes off on his motorcycle, as if casting aside his timepiece will free him from the onslaught of time. A minute later, a hapless Stan Laurel in *Dirty Work* (Tom Walls, 1934) inadvertently sets an alarm clock ringing and then, unable to stop the noise, beats it with a shovel as if to stop time dead in its tracks. At 1:00 p.m., the tiny protagonist of *The Tin Drum* (Volker Schlöndorff, 1979) does manage to stop time—and his own growth—in its tracks with a piercing scream. Late in the afternoon, Dennis Quaid, playing a professor in *Smart People* (Noam Murro, 2008), tries to dodge students by setting the clock ahead to after his office hours are supposed to end. In several clips, characters beg for a stay of execution as the hour of reckoning approaches. The sole survivor of nuclear war in an early *Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959–1964) episode victoriously proclaims, "Time, time, time . . . there's time enough at last." This is Marclay's best joke: as audience members while away the time watching *The Clock*, we are emphatically reminded of how precious and fleeting time is.

In several interviews, Marclay has described *The Clock* as "a giant memento mori."⁴⁷ Indeed, the undercurrent of time is death. Here death hovers not only in the palimpsest of the aging faces and bodies of actors viewed across the decades of their careers but also in the sense of urgency—the race against time—that permeates scene after scene. Every clock leads the characters, and those that gaze at them, toward a literal deadline. In an oft-quoted passage from *What Is Cinema?*,² André Bazin says that photographic recording "embalms time."⁴⁸ Speaking of cinema, he goes on to claim, "Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were."⁴⁹ The fixity of the film image freezes what is mutable even as it records and itself represents duration and change.

47 For example, see Reed Johnson, "For Christian Marclay, *The Clock* Continues to Tick," *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 2011.

48 André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 14.

49 *Ibid.*, 15.

Once again, Marclay revels in the odd tension between film's ability to be, at once, timeless and time infused: between its capacity to preserve images long after the moment of registration by the camera and its full-throttle temporal flux. In one more oxymoronic manifestation of seemingly opposed impulses, *The Clock* repeatedly evokes endings and death but defies both by looping back on itself. Its refusal to give closure to the narrative arcs that it visits as well as to the audience's round-the-clock experience marks the film as a sort of eternal return. By avoiding endings of both the films-within-the-film and the metafilm itself, *The Clock* destabilizes our habitual relation to narrative. The restoration of order, the consummation of desire, the causally reached resolution are missing here, but so, too, is the sense of eviction that viewers feel when they are thrust out of a concluded narrative. Unlike in conventional movies, there is no end-title scroll or movement from dark to light signaling the audience's delivery back to the extradiegetic world. Instead, we have to wrench ourselves away of our own volition. Given how engaging *The Clock* is and how conditioned we are to wait and see how everything turns out in movies, it takes an act of will to stand up and leave—to declare an end to the endless unfurling of images and timepieces. The clock and *The Clock* keep on ticking. As Rex Harrison, in a clip from *The Honey Pot* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1967) intones, "Whether we blow ourselves up or just end, there'll still be time." Time, Marclay reminds us, goes on even if movies and lives do not.

The foregoing discussion has aimed to unpack Marclay's crammed creation and to broach some of the many intriguing ideas about the properties and particularities of cinema that *The Clock* poses. By balancing seemingly contradictory impulses, Marclay manages to synthesize several key elements of film theory and to address them in a single—and singular—artistic creation. Any one of these elements is worthy of further exploration; in particular, there are many ways, beyond those suggested here, that Deleuze's writings might illuminate Marclay's film, and vice versa. In its status as a metafilm, *The Clock* will stand the test of time as a provocative contribution to ongoing discourses about cinematic temporality, narrativity, and spectatorship. *

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