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The Invention of Context:
Found Footage Filmmaking History and the Imitative Form

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Abstract

Faced with the issue of organizational type when conceptualizing the history and broad filmmaking practices that are recycled cinema, this research seeks to clarify, through application and elaboration, the filmmaking timeline forwarded by William Wees in his work *Recycled Images*. A chronological review of image recycling allows for the analysis of image as a mobile artifact, one that negotiates contextual rhetoric upon migration. This research subscribes to the belief that the organizational method applied by an author at the point of image reinsertion is indicative of revelatory critical and artistic temperament, and can be considered to be symptomatic of theorized cultural narrative. Beginning with Wees's proposed 'Recycled Cinema timeline,' additions can be made to contemporize the tradition of film *recyclage* to include the occurrence of imitation. This research suggests imitation found footage as an appropriate addition to the recycled cinema timeline, and reveals an aesthetic bias of virtual reality.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This research considers the social and cultural impulse toward quotation, the expression of our innate need to interpret and re-interpret meaning through repetition. Filmmaking that recycles imagery satisfies the need for re-interpretation while proving revelatory in its repetitious nature. Recycled cinema is the recruitment of fragmentary image from a pre-existing original composition followed by the re-positioning of said image into a new condition, essentially, a visual quote. In the act of filmic quotation formal elements making up the artifact: duration, format, and mise-en-scene, confine it to itself and serve as quotation marks distinguishing it as an independent image, one that is mobile and that can accommodate a migration across multiple contexts. The image as quotation inherently disallows for singular interpretation. Any original interpretive intention on the behalf of the author who composed the primary “spatial-temporal, narrative continuity” is pragmatically blocked or overridden with a new intention and as a result, a new meaning.¹ An image that is removed from its original text achieves the capacity for meta-representation, that is, it can take on new meaning in addition to, and beyond its own. It is precisely this polyvalent quality that gives recycled cinema its potency as a critical art form and means of social discourse.² In the history of American cinema, the impulse toward quotation has revealed itself most saliently in the techniques and practices associated with avant-garde films, documentaries, and music videos featuring imagery recycled from another source.

¹ William Wees, "The Ambiguous Aura of Hollywood Stars in Avant-Garde Found-Footage Films," *Cinema Journal*, 41, no. 2 (2002): 3-17.

² William Wees. "The Ambiguous Aura of Hollywood Stars in Avant-Garde Found-Footage Films, 3.

Image quotation comes in many forms, and films collected under this categorical assignment differ widely. Formal diversity complicates any ontological specification obscuring classification of films under the heading of ‘found footage’. My review of scholarly material has revealed some definitive inconsistencies among authors. Amidst a collection of authors, William Wees accounts for nuances in re-integration strategy. In his work, *Recycled Images*, he explains how images are recruited and submitted to either minor or rigorous treatments in order for fragmentary assimilation. He observes that these variations manifest along a methodological timeline, from the very birth of cinema to the late twentieth century. Wees confronts issues of how images are selected and used, how authorial treatment challenges the very integrity of originating context, how the image itself can either maintain fidelity or emancipate itself from its original context, and how meaning is made and unmade through image migration. The tendency to deviate, loosen or even “undo” the contextual integrity of the original image by quotation exists in, and therefore, explicitly links a vast collection of films through the strategic re-integration.³ Wees’s timeline facilitates the analysis of several films that have repurposed footage from variant sources in very dissimilar ways.

Despite its inclusivity, Wees’s timeline remains dated. This research would prove incomplete without attending to the current phenomenon of imitative found footage film, the very production of which employs and exploits formal aesthetics developed by previous recycling artists. The addition of imitative films to the Weesian timeline extends the meta-historical discourse to include the aesthetic virtues of new media and contemporary image consumption. This honors thesis seeks to extend Wees’s timeline

³ William Wees. “The Ambiguous Aura of Hollywood Stars in Avant-Garde Found-Footage Films, 3.

and complete the trajectory, elaborating the history of recycled cinema in its exemplary forms.

The first chapter introduces the topic of recycled cinema and analyzes the existing literature pertaining to the subject of 'found footage film', its meanings, its manifestations, its significance, and its formal characteristics. For this review, I have surveyed works to map out the history as well as current temperature of film discourse. I argue in this section that within the field of recycled cinema scholarship, there are disagreements and discontinuities when it comes to defining this type of film. While some authors rely upon broad categorical assumption, where films relate to one another by way of constructive process, others deduce an exclusive organization based on rhetoric and activist implication. The goal of this chapter is to provide a range of theoretical frameworks through which found footage films have been understood and organized in relation to other film types.

Chapter two provides the historical context and elaborative chronology of the films that William Wees includes in his timeline as ideal forms. A close look at aesthetic strategies of the American documentary, experimental, and avant-garde tradition is essential to understanding and familiarizing oneself with assembly and disruptive practices of the pre-and post- WWII era, as explained by Wees himself. In his book, William Wees distinguishes methods of integration, how images are organized and incorporated into new films. He demonstrates how found footage film forms aligned themselves with relevant critical discourses at particular moments of the twentieth century. Wees explores three facets of montage and their exemplary forms. The first is compilation, the collection and assembly of imagery into an informative text with an

aesthetic inclination toward realism. The second facet, collage, involves the rhetorical assembly of imagery into a modern and comprehensive critique of capitalist media. The third, appropriation, is the complete adoption of extant imagery; images serve as evidence for a new truth claim with inadequate reference to their source. His model eases the contextualization of these image artifacts as indicators of grand cultural narrative while articulating observable transitions in recycled film practice. Wees's examination and comparison of antecedent forms behooves an analysis of a technological dimension, how innovations have influenced filmmakers and their treatment of recycled images. The purpose is to reveal the greater implications of the films outside of an exclusive textual analysis. Moreover, using Wees's framework of varied insertion strategy clarifies the inconsistencies evidenced in the literature surveyed in chapter one. This Chapter will unite various found footage films into a broad collection based upon the rudimentary assemblage of quotation. Ultimately, I hope to equip readers with a comprehensive understanding of Wees's framework in preparation for the addition of imitated forms.

Chapter three proposes a timeline with the addition of imitative found footage, films that are produced and released under the pretext that they exhibit authentic imagery recruited from a pre-existent locale and context, then gathered to form new factual text. While this category features recently released horror films, it also includes films associated with other genres, all of which imitate a reconfiguration of found footage. An analysis of Barry Levinson's 2012 film *The Bay* helps to forward the discussion of imitative re-use and the consolidation of films under a comprehensive definition. This section also continues Wees's meta-historical discussion of relevant cultural theory; this means a post-post-modernist film theory consideration, as we move from the end of the

twentieth century to the present day. The main interest in this section is the exploitation of recycled film aesthetic through the use of automated video technology, and the resulting immersive interactivity that is experienced by its audience. I argue in this chapter that imitative films extend recycled cinema discourse of rhetoric, technological innovation and mediation, context, authorship, and spectatorship. By perforating the boundary between knowable reality and undetectable virtual reality the imitative form of recycled cinema upholds the interrogational tradition inherent in the three forms outlined by Wees in his work: compilation, collage, and appropriation. Because imitative recycled cinema is intended to signify reality, it is analyzed in this thesis as building off of the organizational principles that Wees associates with compilation.

1.1 Methodology

Beginning with a survey of literature, this research offers a brief review of relevant found footage film discourse. This collection includes the works of William Wees as well as other authors associated with the subject of recycled cinema. This research relies upon the close analysis of the theoretical framework forwarded by Wees in his book *Recycled Images*. In it he outlines a chronology of found footage film form throughout the twentieth century. While locating exemplary films along a progressive spectrum of aesthetic tendency, he simultaneously positions them as artifacts that arise symptomatically out of relevant artistic movements and critical theory.

While this research benefits from paralleling Wees's framework, a close analysis of it reveals some forms that are resistant to his classification. Wees's spectrum is interrogated with the aid of numerous and brief case studies. Drawing upon a collection of films, including Wees's own exemplary forms, one can determine the ultimate efficacy of his

theoretical framework and chronological mapping. Films of interest include: the films of Esther (Esfir) Schub, *Atomic Café* by Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, and Pierce Rafferty, the films of Arthur Lipsett, Bill Morrison's *Decasia*, Omer Fast's *CNN Concatenated*, Werner Herzog's *The Wild Blue Yonder*, and Barry Levinson's *The Bay*. In order to elaborate upon Wees's spectrum and include contemporary found footage film practice, this thesis draws upon the works of Caetlin Benson-Allot, David Bordwell, Norman Taylor, Jonathan Steuer, David W. Schloerb, Oliver Grau, and Kari Andén-Papadopoulos and Mervi Pantti. At most, Wees's framework functions as a general skeletal structure in the interrogation of recycled cinema as a varied film practice.

One feature of this research is the explanation of the key terms and concepts outlined by Wees, as they prove relevant to this exploration in recycled cinema. When discussing image integration, Wees makes frequent reference to a particular type of film editing and its function within critical representation. He notes,

To open the door is one thing; to go through it and confront the media on their own ground – the manipulation of images – is another thing, and the filmmakers most likely to take this further step are those who draw most heavily on the resources of montage.⁴

Wees refers to the Soviet tradition. Montage is a French import meaning 'to put together', editing in the general sense. However, as a refined method, primary interest lies in Soviet theory. As a school, the practice of Soviet montage was divided between filmmakers. Canonically, we can attribute widely accepted notions of montage to two of them, Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin. In his work *Film Technique and Film Acting*,

⁴ William Wees. *Recycled Images*. New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993,33.

Pudovkin explains montage as a method for achieving “psychological guidance.”⁵ He notes, “Editing is in actual fact a compulsory and deliberate guidance of the thoughts and associations of the spectator.”⁶ For him, the basic aim of “construction” is to impress upon, and control the viewer.⁷ This is accomplished in various ways. First, by way of “contrast”, relating images to one another in a forced comparison. Second, “parallelism” in which two thematically unconnected incidents develop and become symbolically linked. Third, “symbolism” is the grouping of images to introduce an abstract concept into the consciousness of the viewer. Fourth, “simultaneity”, the development of two actions simultaneously, in which the outcome is interdependent, and fifth, “Leit-motif” or, the reiteration of the theme through repeated imagery. Pudovkin places an emphasis on visual refinement, referring to filmmaking as the act of “unrolling and event”, while stressing the fact of narrative economy and contiguity.⁸ Somewhat conversely, Eisenstein’s montage is far more dramatic. In “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” he rejects the constructionist approach assumed by Pudovkin, the serial exposition of a final idea, and instead emphasizes the need for a stronger catalyzed reaction. He opposes Pudovkin’s shot by shot assembly as simply one possibility in an infinitive number of

⁵ Vsevolod Illarionovich Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, (London: Vision Press Limited, 1954), 47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47-50.

combinations. He argues, “that the collision of two factors gives rise to an idea.”⁹ For him, images must “conflict” and “collide” in order to produce a transformative effect, giving way to a final pronounced metaphor.¹⁰

Wees’s examination of image re-use relies heavily on both Pudovkin’s notion of rhythmic idea construction, and Eisenstein’s collision as visual activator. Moreover, Wees identifies three distinct forms commonly employed by found footage artists: Compilation, Collage, and Appropriation. Each builds from, and exploits the virtues of Soviet montage. Wees organizes each one in accordance with historical popularity and aesthetic bias, as well as artistic and cultural significance. This research explicates Wees’s particular method of analysis to structure the study of contemporary found footage form in a similar fashion. In doing so, additional terminology becomes an essential component of discussion. The extension of Wees’s timeline approaches a type of found footage filmmaking that maintains the appearance of recycled montage, but is in fact the imitation of found footage aesthetic. At this point, the work of Jonathan Steuer enlightens this research, particularly his discussions of the virtual. Briefly, Steuer submits two relational terms as key components of his “virtual” definition: Presence (the sense of being in an environment), and telepresence (the experience of presence in an environment by means of communication medium). He concludes, “A virtual reality is defined as a

⁹ Sergei Eisenstein, "Beyond the Shot [The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram]," *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Open University Press, 2009), 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

real or simulated environment in which a perceiver experiences telepresence.”¹¹ David W. Schloerb breaks down the concept of telepresence further in his work, “A Quantitative Measure of Telepresence.” Schloerb distinguishes between the various types and degrees of telepresence. He observes the difference between an objective telepresence, in which an operator’s interaction is limited to task completion, and a subjective telepresence, which exists in degrees of perspective immersion, that is, the degree to which “a human operator perceives that he or she is physically present in a given remote environment.”¹² Schloerb’s discussion of a subjective immersion becomes applicable as we move toward imitative film form, as films that emulate recycled cinema work to signify a false reality, and ultimately heighten the degree of subjective telepresence. These two authors have proven revelatory to this research. Their works will receive closer evaluation and application in the chapters to come.

1.2 A Review of Recycled Image Film Discourse

A survey of the literature concerning recycled cinema yields an assortment of discussions. Generally, the academic community that has involved itself with the topic has approached the filmmaking strategy from a multitude of perspectives. Some assume an ontological approach, interrogating the criteria necessitated by a film for it to be inducted into a found footage catalogue. Other claims are more dialogical, arguing that the very purpose and intention with which filmmakers should concern themselves to be distinctly political. Each author partaking in the discourse is inclined to employ specific

¹¹ Jonathan Steuer, "Defining Virtual Reality: Dimensions Determining Telepresence," *Journal of Communication*, 42, no. 4 (1992): 73-93,

¹² David W. Schloerb, "A Quantitative Measure of Telepresence," *Presence*, 4, no.1 (1995): 64-80.

terminology to describe its use, its appearance, its function, and its cultural significance. Some authors reflect upon the inconsistencies that exist within film literature, but few can agree upon any clear or reliable criteria.

A consensus maintained throughout is that recycled cinema artists sustain a politically discursive preoccupation, a subversive representation of dominant ideology, and a poignant cultural commentary. Michael Atkinson, in his work "Collective Preconscious," articulates the notion of cultural critique describing the act of recycling as the ultimate evaluation of an "ephemeral culture" and its methods of disposal, a culture that is ill equipped to address its own scrap pile of visual representation.¹³ This argument is echoed by Michael Zryd in his work "Found Footage Film as Discursive Metahistory: Craig Baldwin's Tribulation 99." Zryd declares found footage film as a "specific subgenre of experimental (or avant-garde) cinema," one that functions primarily by integrating old material into new productions.¹⁴ Susan Jarosi also associates the use of interrogational technique strictly to the tradition of the avant-garde. In her work, "Recycled Cinema as Material Ecology: Raphael Montañez Ortiz's found-footage films and Computer-Laser-Videos," she argues that the purpose of image re-evaluation is that of social redemption taken up by the few members of a counter culture. Likewise, Paul Arthur attributes the repetitive occurrence of recycled cinema to a larger and collective need for historical and hierarchical contestation, a destabilization of dominant forms and

¹³ Michael Atkinson, "Collective Preconscious," *Film Comment*, 29, no. 6 (1993): 78-83,

¹⁴ Michael Zryd, "Found Footage as Discursive Metahistory: Craig Baldwin's Tribulation 99," *The Moving Image*, 3, no. 2 (2003): 40-61,

ideology.¹⁵ Julia Noordegraaf concurs, orienting her focus toward reception and the spectator's engagement with re-purposed image. She views compilation as a tool (a technology of memory) to mediate perception toward alternative interpretation.¹⁶ Guy Barefoot and William Wees appreciate the capacity for subversion inherent in the filmmaking strategy while distinguishing between two different types of filmic material commonly used in the act of *recyclage*, adjusting the discussion to include the consideration of source as either refuse or archival. From here, source criteria divide conceptual definitions of recycled cinema into two streams: that which depends upon an image's authentic quality of found-ness, or that that allows for source ambivalence and multi-purpose recycling.¹⁷ Regardless of the inconsistency in collection and integration method, these films find themselves categorized under the aura of the avant-garde, even as organizational strategy itself seeps into other genres creating porous hybrids. Roger Luckhurst explains a resulting phenomenon of "science fiction found footage."¹⁸ According to Luckhurst, these films resist sub-genre categorization due to their diverse political, aesthetic, and their cinematic treatments of image. Instead he offers these films as a new form of cinema, functioning within the Sci-fi genre while maintaining taut tradition with avant-garde film practice. Luckhurst outlines the diverse organizational

¹⁵ Paul Arthur, "The Status of Found Footage," *Spectator*, 20, no. 1 (2000): 57-69.

¹⁶ Julia Noordegraaf, "Facing Forward with Found Footage Film," *Technologies of Memory in the Arts* (2009): 172-187, Palgrave Macmillan

¹⁷ Pierre Rannou, "Reconfiguring Found Footage Film," *Dossier*, 64, <http://www.esse.ca/en/node/2076>,

¹⁸ Roger Luckhurst, "Found Footage Science Fiction: Five films by Craig Baldwin, Jonathan Weiss, Werner Herzog and Patrick Keller," *Science Fiction Film and Television*, I, no. 2 (2008): 193-214.

approaches taken up by their authors. Beginning with Craig Baldwin's "Punk Situationist" approach (productions rooted in the practice of *Détournement*), sourced illegally as result of Baldwin's impoverished working conditions, and commonly organized as "science-fictional counter histories," or "pseudo-documentaries."¹⁹ Then Luckhurst discusses Jonathan Weiss's violent collage, in which destructive technological infatuation is expressed through the juxtaposition of military footage with medical testing, and celebrity images with the Kennedy assassination. Luckhurst notes that Baldwin and Weiss are faithful to underground cinematic tactics in order to provide counter histories and political commentary. Next, Luckhurst examines Werner Herzog's fantasy fiction film *The Wild Blue Yonder*, in which freely inducted pre-existing footage supports a futuristic story line. Finally, Luckhurst studies Patrick Keiller's work, film essays on urban spaces. He points out that both Herzog and Keiller use recycled imagery to represent the future or "virtual time-travel."²⁰ Luckhurst notes,

The frenetic montage aesthetic that derives from Conner and comes down through Baldwin and Weiss manufactures some of the starkest disjuncture between commercial and avant-garde film materials any viewer might currently encounter. Whilst Herzog and Keiller establish a wholly different relation to Eisensteinian montage, the science-fictional still leaks through the horizontal and vertical disjuncture they install in their source material.²¹

Luckhurst categorizes these four films as multiple hybrid forms: found footage pseudo-documentaries, or found footage narrative films, all with science fictional dimensions. In

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 197-201.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

this way, the re-functioning of images is a mode that services the larger themes associated with the science fiction genre.

Notably, there is a major absence of chronological consideration in the majority of the aforementioned literature. Most discursive participants fail to distinguish between films made recently and films dating back to the early twentieth century. Additionally, comprehensive analysis of integration technique is lacking; organizational strategy is plagued by inconsistent terminology and reduced to a general and interchangeable montage methodology. Finally, the issue of source material remains unresolved, as the debate continues regarding the authenticity of image and the true nature of 'found.' These concerns along with broad artistic and critical considerations are what motivate the selection of William Wees's theoretical framework. Within my collection of relevant literature, only Wees offers a timeline spanning the twentieth century. Additionally, he refrains from imposing any pre-determined criteria of image source. Instead, Wees shifts the focus to the insertion process and how montage becomes indicative of authorial intention. He alone allows for a micro- and macro-analysis of films as individual texts as well as artifacts embedded in the accompanying artistic and critical theory.

Chapter 2: A Survey of Recycled Cinema: William Wees and Found Footage Film of the Twentieth Century

A fundamental accomplishment of quotation in general is the additional consideration that is hailed by an audience. That which is contained by quotation is relieved of its specific context and as such exists for itself and its own interpretation. In film, an image existing apart from its original context gains a widened presence simply by being removed, meaning that is not predicated by context gains connotative liberty. At this point, the image's capacity for meaning is compounded; it can serve as visual articulation for a new authorial intention while at the same time alluding to its text of origin. The way in which an image conveys meaning depends primarily on the way it is organized into a new film by an author. This chapter focuses on the moment when an isolated image is engaged by a new text. In the history of recycled cinema, the practice of image reinsertion has been greatly heterogeneous. Because meaning rests upon the complex relationship between image and context, analysis can seem daunting given the multiple ways in which an image can be organized. In his work *Recycled Images*, William Wees offers a helpful framework to productively survey the varied possibilities of image integration. In this chapter, I analyze and elaborate upon Wees's chronological framework. In it he places a collection of found footage films on a timeline. His method of empirical observation not only allows for nuances within the filmmaking practice, it is also indicative of the degree to which meaning can be made or unmade through image organization. For Wees the most important feature of the image insertion process is the work that is done by the filmmaker or recycling artist. When an image is integrated into a

new film, authorial treatment involves the pressures that are applied to the image, deletions or additions that can range from benign to severe. Wees notes,

As methods, of modifying found footage become more complex, the viewer's attention increasingly shifts from the photographic content of the found footage to the textures, colors and rhythms created by the filmmaker's methods of effacement and erasure.²²

It is during this process of authorial manipulation that reoccurrence becomes revelatory, where the reconfiguration of an image leads to the secondary consideration by audience. For Wees, this is exactly where meaning is broken down and rebuilt for the purpose of alternate reading. Whether critical, ambiguous, or evidentiary in new truth claim, the use of an image removed interrupts standard meaning. In itself, a visual quote is the forced exposure of textual construction and ideological function, and for Wees, it is the root of a potent gesture of protest.

2.1 In the Realm of Montage

All image insertions rely on the author's precise placement of an image amongst a multitude of imagery. Wees specifies and elaborates on three main organizational trends of the twentieth century, all of which employ the virtues of montage. They are compilation, collage, and appropriation. He offers an explanatory diagram to accompany these terms. In it he outlines the three methods of image integration according to their exemplary film genres, and the respective signified that is implied by image (See Table 1). Wees also locates integration trends in relation to historically relevant critical and artistic schools of thought. By doing so he articulates a potentially collective

²² Wees, W. *Recycled images*.29.

temperament and mode of expression at the time when the films that he recognizes to be exemplary came to fruition.²³

Table 1 Recycled Cinema Conceptual Grid

Methodology	Signification	Exemplary Genre	Aesthetic Bias
Compilation	Reality	Documentary film	Realism
Collage	Image	Avant-garde film	Modernism
Appropriation	Simulacrum	Music video	Postmodernism

Wees argues that “different methods of using found footage are related to different paradigms of artistic practice and cultural theory.”²⁴ This means that an overarching cultural narrative is crucial in the governance of organizational methodology; Wees is identifying a direct correlation between different theoretical paradigms and film forms. By grouping films according to their use of montage, Wees not only canonizes films as ideal forms, but also reveals distinguishable time periods when different organizational trends culminated.

While Wees’s chronological demarcation of film form is convenient for the purposes of generalized study, it is not without its disadvantages. In film scholarship, relegating forms to time periods can lead to the marginalization of their existence outside of exemplary form and genre. Furthermore, placing films within strict parameters of genre can lead to a reductive consideration of hybrid film forms. Any films that present resistance to delimitation become discredited as significant examples. However,

²³ Ibid. 34.

²⁴ Ibid. 34.

chronology and genre can be helpful concepts when it comes to differentiating strategies of image organization. They offer constructive modes of comparison between variant forms. As we will see, Wees's framework moderates a historical survey of recycled cinema throughout the twentieth century. By mapping trends in montage, from compilation to collage to appropriation, we gain a broad sense of transition from one form to the next. Likewise, we can easily observe how film form correlates to shifting critical attitudes, from realism to modernism to postmodernism.

2.2 Compilation

Compilation involves the grouping of images according to their adherence or evidentiary potential to a theme, argument, or story. Often, a verbal accompaniment maintains the overall coherence of the author's claim. Images are re-contextualized but not entirely de-natured. Images compiled to support new claims can take on new meaning while maintaining strong historical reference to their original context. Like all recycled imagery, the very nature of their existence outside of primary text calls attention to a prior source and the original meaning is interrupted by a new authorial intent. Essentially, "compilation films are composed of visual quotations of history" and this history is exploited in support of new context.²⁵

Wees argues that compilation is a common practice exercised by documentary filmmakers. He elevates documentary as the exemplary genre for compilation film, as most films use images to signify a reality that is based on the credibility of the source. He lists a number of films articulating this aesthetic bias as follows: *The Dreyfus Case* (1898) compiled by a French distributor; the films of Esther (Esfir) Schub (by date), *Fall*

²⁵ Ibid.42.

of the Romanov Dynasty (1927), *The Great Road* (1927); *The Melody of the World* (1929) by Walter Ruttmann; the *Why We Fight* series (1944) by Frank Capra; *The World in Action* series (1945) by Stuart Legg; *The World is Rich* (1947) by Paul Rotha; and, the films of Emile De Antonio (by date), *Point of Order* (1964), and *Year of the Pig* (1969).²⁶ Wees observes compilation to have manifested in its exemplary form between 1898 and 1969. Accordingly, he correlates this manifestation to an artistic and cultural interest in the aesthetic of realism during this period of time as well. In his analysis, Wees references the film timeline put forth by Jay Leyda in his book *Film Beget Films* (1964). Leyda conducts a survey of compilative trends of the early to mid- twentieth century. His timeline begins with compiled show reels of news footage. Then he moves on to the 1920s with the films of Esfir (Esther) Schub (editing of newsreels according to the principles of Soviet Montage) and the film essays of Hans Richter. Leyda then observes the films produced around the period of the Second World War, where footage was compiled for the purposes of propaganda. For example, Frank Capra's 1944 film *Why We Fight*. This is followed by the post war period, where Holocaust footage was compiled and shown at the Nuremberg trials (1945-1946), followed by Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* which recruits Holocaust footage as well. Leyda concentrates heavily upon Schub and her application of compilation as a re-envisioning of collective memory.²⁷ Rob Yeo reflects on Leyda's observation in his work *Cutting Through History: Found Footage in Avant-garde Filmmaking*. He points out that Schub painstakingly recovered lost pre-

²⁶ Ibid., 35.

²⁷ Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964).

revolutionary Soviet Union newsreels shot between 1912 and 1917 to assemble *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927).²⁸ Yeo notes,

Through these productions, Schub set new standards for establishing and maintaining cinema archives, and she introduced compilation techniques for producing new analyses of historical events with archival material.²⁹

All three authors, Wees, Leyda, and Yeo look to Schub as *the* author for a definable compilation film. According to Wees's conceptual grid, Schub's film is a realist documentary edited according to the principles of Soviet Montage. The footage employed in Schub's film, as described by Wees, is the indexical signifier of reality, a representation in which the signified is the real and objective world.³⁰ Additionally, Wees draws upon the work of Allan Sekula and Émile Benveniste to determine the meaning making properties of archival film footage. Sekula discusses the authoritative property inherent in photographic archives, how ownership and authorship differ but ownership imposes unity upon a vast territory of extant imagery.³¹ He argues that, in archives, the possibilities of meaning are essentially up for grabs and are eventually subordinated to the logic of exchange. Ownership then, is an abstraction. However, the photograph itself still serves as the voice of authority in terms of the reality it depicts. Wees also gains

²⁸ Yeo, Rob. Cutpublication2, "Cutting through History: Found Footage in Avant-garde Filmmaking." Last modified June 10, 2004. https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/robby/www/index_folder/Cut_p13-27.pdf. 14.

²⁹ Rob Yeo citing Jay Leyda (Films Beget Films) Ibid., 14.

³⁰ Wees relies on Saussure's concept of the signified as part of a whole "lingual sign" outlined in his work *Nature of the Linguistic Sign*. Ferdinand Saussure, "Nature of the Linguistic Sign," *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1998), 832-835.

³¹ Allan Sekula, "Reading the Archive," in *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Contemporary Artists*. Ed. Brian Wallis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987): 444

insight from the structural linguistics of Benveniste. His monumental distinction between the “énoncé”(utterance, statement independent of context) and “énonciation”(statement, tied explicably to context) inform Wees’s discussion of the signified.³² Compilation, being the assemblage of imagery, remains merely a historical utterance or an anonymous event. According to Wees, “no one speaks here; the events seem to narrate themselves.”³³ The “speaker” or owner is the filmmaker when they engage in a discourse between utterance and statement through a compilative method.³⁴ Wees conclusively relies on Leyda’s definition of compilation,

Any means by which the spectator is compelled to look at familiar shots as if he had not seen them before, or by which the spectator’s mind is made more alert to the broader meanings of old materials.³⁵

Wees observes that interpretation is widened by organizational discourse, but it remains benign in its politicization of content. The re-purposing of reclaimed archival imagery sustains the original contextual integrity. It forever denotes the reality from which it originated.

Embedded within the semiotic discourse of Émile Benveniste and the idea of abstract ownership put forth by Leyda, Wees’s timeline strays from an American artistic perspective to include Soviet Montage theory as a major discourse influencing the recycling methods of Esfir (Esther) Schub. From an art history perspective, Schub’s documentary realism coincides with several movements mandated toward objective art

³² Emile Benveniste, “Man and Language,” in *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1976): 209.

³³ Wees, W. *Recycled images*.43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

creating new visual environments beyond autonomous art. An overall deconstructive narrative seems to align with the films of Esfir (Esther) Schub. The interrogation of source leading to the objective re-interpretation of industrial artifact fits nicely with Wees's conception of compilation film, what Leyda describes as "the manipulation of actuality."³⁶

Wees continues his analysis and provides some later examples of compilation films. Namely, *Why We Fight* (1944) by Frank Capra (one of seven documentary films commissioned by the United States Government), *The World in Action Series* (1945) by Stuart Legg (a National Film Board of Canada production), and Paul Rotha's *The World is Rich* (1947) (a British documentary tackling international poverty). However, these examples seem to resist Wees's counter-political compilation criteria. All three films were commissioned by governmental institutions, and produced as propaganda seeking the collective efforts and support of audiences during the end of the Second World War. These three films are highly charged documentations, persuading positive involvement in the war effort. In this way, Wees's examples seem to be more of a rhetorical vector on behalf of governmental institutions, rather than objective cultural paradigms.

Wees himself confronts the aforementioned disadvantages of chronological and genre categorization when he observes an anomalous form of compilation. He notes that *The Atomic Café* (1982) by Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, and Pierce Rafferty is "a film that comes close to crossing the border between compilation and collage."³⁷ Wees highlights this film as an untraditional compilation due in part to its lack of voice-over

³⁶ Ibid., 36.

³⁷ Wees, W. *Recycled images*. 36.

narrative, and its ironic use of music. He states that it *is* compilation, however, because of its linear development and unchallenging representation of imagery. Yet he observes that the film employs imagery of a nuclear explosion in a re-contextualized manner stating, “Its images of the actual explosion are presented as straight fact.”³⁸ It would seem that Wees’s timeline cannot completely account for hybrid forms. *The Atomic Café* does not fit into a definitive category, and as a result, does not explicitly articulate an associative artistic or cultural paradigm. This example challenges Wees’s chronological linkages in general. Though it is resistant to his framework, Wees’s acknowledgement of *The Atomic Café* as anomalous fails in deterring the usefulness of his timeline. Focusing on generalized trends, his conceptual grid remains relevant as a way of historicizing methodologies of image integration.

2.3 Collage

After compilation comes collage. As a general artistic practice, it gained momentum at the beginning of the twentieth century by synthetic Cubists such as Pablo Picasso and George Braque. Collage is the process of “dislodging” imagery while keeping the association with source intact and inserting it into new contextual arenas primarily to highlight “image-ness.”³⁹ Organizational method encourages a critical analysis and evaluation of the image itself, the image’s source, or the contextual reality within which the image was originally located. What differentiates collage from compilation is the authorial intent, which is revealed in the treatment given to the image when insertion takes place. Compilation uses imagery to persuade a cohesive

³⁸ Ibid., 38.

³⁹ Ibid., 47.

restructuring of meaning, whereas collage functions mainly on the basis of association. An image is uprooted to foreground not only its prior source, but also the author's motivation for selecting it. The audience is encouraged to deconstruct and critically examine imagery as cultural artifacts, in what Wees calls "media-reality."⁴⁰ He notes,

Collage politicizes art by confronting the viewer with actual pieces of reality within a "frame" that has traditionally signified the separation of art and reality, aesthetic immanence and life praxis.⁴¹

In film, collage is overtly interactive and challenging to viewers because it exhibits images in a somewhat raw state. In this way, Wees declares collage practice as the "basis of found footage function."⁴² Furthermore, an image inducted into a collage finds itself rhetorically organized in relation to other imagery. However, Wees emphasizes that this organization remains un-subscribed to a new persuasive argument. The purpose of insertion is to provoke a jarring interruption and an alternate reception on behalf of the viewer. The image must retain a tension within its new context. The image interacts and engages itself directly with other imagery. In his work *The Status of Found Footage*, Paul Arthur elaborates on the inherent tension of collage. He notes,

The organizing voice in collage film is decentered or split between an enunciative trace in the original footage encompassing stylistic features and material residues of production such as film stock, speed of shooting, and aspect ratio, and a second, overriding source of knowledge manifest by the collage work through editing, application of sound, new titles and so on.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁴¹ Ibid., 51.

⁴² Ibid., 51.

⁴³ Paul Arthur, "The Status of Found Footage," *Spectator*, 20, no. 1 (2000): 57-69, <http://cinema.usc.edu/assets/099/15897.pdf>.60.

As both Wees and Arthur describe, the very nature of collage relies on juxtaposition. An author retrieves footage according to its originating context, but remains unimposing when inserting it into a new film. Collage alludes to an alternate reading through associative organization.

Wees advances the subject of collage film in his essay “From Compilation to Collage: The Found-Footage Films of Arthur Lipsett.” Here he examines five short films by the Canadian NFB artist Arthur Lipsett: *Very Nice, Very Nice* (1961), *21-87* (1964), *Free Fall* (1964), *A Trip Down Memory Lane* (1965), and *Fluxes* (1968). Lipsett, a foremost “artist-archeologist,” spent much of his career rummaging through stock or discarded footage available at the NFB.⁴⁴ He recovered artifacts that had accumulated a significant amount of cultural recognition, for example, newsreel images from the twentieth century, involving pageants, scientific and mechanical innovation, and naval documentation from the Second World War. He brought them together through the use of collage in order to generate an associative and essentially alternate reading. Wees notes that the overriding characteristic of Lipsett’s selected footage was an already existent rhetoric. This rhetoric was maintained by imagery particularly because of its familiar presence in popular culture. It is precisely the lingering iconographic disposition that invites a critical analysis. An image steeped in symbolism becomes destabilized; its original claim is perforated and exposed as an ideological system.

For Wees, collage began in 1939 with Joseph Cornell’s seminal film *Rose Hobart*. The trend continued through to 1958 with Bruce Conner’s *A Movie*, and then spanned from roughly 1972 to 1990 in the form of epic collage. During his analysis of this time

⁴⁴ William Wees, “From Compilation to Collage: the Found-Footage Films of Arthur Lipsett,” 2-22.

period Wees draws upon the works of Max Ernst, Theodore Adorno, Peter Bürger, Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, and Roland Barthes. Additionally, Wees's exemplary forms are all derived from North American filmmakers. Notably, Joseph Cornell, Bruce Conner, Hollis Frampton, Al Razutis, Lewis Klahr, Keith Sanborn, Abigail Child, and Leslie Thornton. Wees aligns the aesthetic bias of collage films with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Avant-Garde Theory, Semiotics, and the Situationists Internationales. He declares collage as highly critical and politically charged. The films included in his collection repurpose imagery that had previously been produced and disseminated on a mass scale. The authorial intention is to highlight a homogenized aesthetic and to erode the idea of a unique existence. A critical attitude toward American capitalism and homogenized consumption is common in Wees's exemplary forms. Citing Adorno, he recognizes collage as the only art form to appropriately disrupt continuity in life and art.⁴⁵ He also includes Bürger's avant-garde theory, articulating the interrogation of status quo. In his work, Bürger takes issue with the normalizing effects of mass cultural production calling attention to Barthes's brand of semiotics and the disintegration of ideology through signification analysis. Wees describes Debord and Wolman's *Détournement* as "the juxtaposition of pre-existing elements extracted from their original contexts, diverted from their original, intended uses, and thereby made to yield previously unrecognized significance."⁴⁶ Wees's collection of exemplary forms coincide with the rise of several artistic movements all centered on the interrogational tactics. Though it is hardly helpful or even constructive to

⁴⁵ Wees, W. *Recycled images*. 51.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

generalize these movements in American modern art, there is a salient characteristic that unites them. It is the interrogational approach toward normalized systems of representation and institutional concepts, and a general skepticism toward representation itself as a means of valuation. Likewise, collage questions the authority of the author as well as the persistence of meaning in modes of mass communication. Collage clearly articulates the cultural and artistic discourse during the time period designated by Wees.

Associating collage with the ideas and movements of modernism, as Wees does, is accurate. However, to relegate the collage form to a specific artistic intention and time period is problematic. Wees's tight framework disallows the possibility for contemporary forms of collage falling outside of the "modernist" period, or filmmakers whose intentions involve a meditative repositioning of imagery as opposed to a "jarring" or "shocking" exposition. An example of which is Bill Morrison's 2002 assemblage *Decasia: The State of Decay*, a film that I believe to be a contemporary collage that resists Wees's highly political and institutionally critical criteria. Morrison collects and re-activates non-fiction and fiction footage, then organizes them around one essential theme: that of decay, in life and in art. Each segment in Morrison's film evidences a varied degree of decomposition, deterioration or damage motivating their precise organization in amongst each other. In an interview with Dave Heaton for *Erasing Clouds*, Morrison lists the number of sources for his film to be in the thousands, primarily from the Library of Congress, the MoMa, the George Eastman House, the Cinemathèque Suisse, and most importantly the University of South Carolina Newsfilm Library where he collected the first prints that would inspire the entire project. When discussing his selection process, Morrison describes the way that some images seem to "push back"

against the decay, gestures or formations that almost overcame their own deterioration.⁴⁷

Morrison linked the particulars of image to the content itself and then re-selected them on the basis of new categories such as: religion, athletics, disaster, love, and characters gesturing directly at the camera. As for order, Morrison chose to book end the film with the image of the Sufi Dancer to give the impression of a hallucinatory narrative. The traditional Sufi whirled in order to achieve an ecstatic state of devotion; in *Decasia* he achieves a dreamlike delirium of human evolution by way of images in decay. Morrison describes,

It is a creation story, as seen by a Japanese goddess. The earth and sea divide. Species form and migrate. Civilizations are established. Early societies adopt a circular view of life and death an eternity. Modern man is born as an Eisenstein baby. He grows up, explores the frontier, goes to school and develops a linear approach to the world.⁴⁸

His over-arching dream narrative and deterioration criteria guide the overall union of imagery, while the necessity to transfer the original images from nitrate to celluloid based film through optical printing slows the images considerably upon projection.⁴⁹

Additionally, Michael Gordon, a composer, was commissioned simultaneously with Morrison to align a symphonic accompaniment. In an audio interview with Kurt Anderson, Gordon recalls using an out of tune piano along with other out of tune or rusted instruments contributing to the sensation of decay and decomposition produced by the imagery. Because this is the extent of Morrison and Gordon's manipulation, it seems an appropriate example of hypo-manipulated collage, a collection of film fragments

⁴⁷ Bill Morrison, (Filmmaker), interview by Dave Heaton, "Portrait of Decay: Bill Morrison on Decasia," *Erasing Clouds*, Record, April 2003.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 2003.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 2003

united according to thematic and aesthetic principles, then further complimented with custom audio. This film, when compared to others employing collage stratagem, is interested in melancholic analogy through aesthetic grouping. Morrison's self-proclaimed intent is a dream narrative and is not primarily politically subversive, a characteristic commonly associated with collage 'found-footage' filmmaking. Extant footage is purposed according to a material curiosity, not that of ideological resistance or revelation. As he himself recalls, Morrison sought out footage in archives as well as private collections, there is no indication that any footage actually originated as refuse genuinely happened upon by the filmmaker. He allowed the images to maintain a fairly strong allegiance to their original presence in time and space by only performing alterations necessitated by the deteriorated state of the original celluloid. Though a form of collage, *Decasia* does not foreground or exploit the representational nature of the image through editing, therefore the original context and reference to context through image remains intact. Simultaneously, the images are activated to furnish and strengthen the thematic claim of the author. The Sufi, pre-documented as non-fictitious character, assumed an additional role as dreamscape activator, setting Morrison's narrative in motion. The footage that follows likewise adopts a representational position within this narrative while still operating along their original contextual frequencies. The function of quotation and the confirmation of a wider perspective work here to broaden the capacity for meaning in each image; they are old materials and have received consideration as such, but also new; compelling viewers to take a second look and see them as part of another concept.

Another example of contemporary collage is Omer Fast's 2002 film *CNN Concatenated*. Fast not only arranges previously aired CNN featured news broadcast imagery, but also dialogue delivered by the news anchors producing a singular stream of sutured word by word audio narration. The clips are deeply embedded with contextual information. News anchors emit reputable information as well-known television authorities, while stock exchange values and eye-catching headings like "Hunt for Bin Laden" and "Anthrax Investigation" frame the scene. The image is encapsulated within a specific timeframe of American social anxiety. The result is a disturbing and disruptive monologue punctuated by gasps of breath,

*listen to me I want to tell you something
 come closer don't be upset and don't get emotional
 get near me and pay attention
 look
 I know that you're scared I know what you're afraid of
 you mistrust your body lately it has been becoming more and more foreign...*⁵⁰

The audio-visual snippets come into their own as a desperately authoritative plea to viewers, throwing doubt upon the original broadcast and intention. The function of the new text relies completely upon the relationship between image and sound. Their combination and product give way to an alternate reading. The images are precisely juxtaposed while remaining thickly referential, collapsing the space between original and new context. The text re-writes numerous articulations of hypochondria, paranoia, and fear of death by re-arranging words already present in the original fragments. As a suggestive and prescriptive stream of dialogue plays out, the news anchors adopt a

⁵⁰ Fast, Omer. "CNN Concatenated." *Tate Recorded* 2002. Video

position of omnipotence directly addressing its viewers as the voices of health, and cultural authority. Throughout, the tone oscillates from protective, to fearful, to condemnation, and finally taunting toward its viewers. They become absurd, unreasonable and unrealistic, their claims are unfounded, irresponsible and cruel, but they are still operating as actual artifact previously naturalized and unquestioned. Fast sharply integrates a linguistic syntax in addition to the visual rhetoric of collage montage. Unlike *Decasia*, Fast's film is highly political. It casts doubt upon CNN's influence by exaggerating the association between visual and audible commentary. The film is a sum greater than its parts; it reveals and reverses the rhetoric held by audio-visual fragment. Fast achieves what Lipsett called "new awareness", the novel kind of reception made possible through organizational method.⁵¹ This is where footage exceeds its own qualities of image-ness and begins to do work for its new author.

Morrison's *Decasia* and Fast's *CNN Concatenated*, are two contemporary examples that complicate Wees's framework. Occurring long after the cultural and artistically consented period of modernism, they both embody the integrative technique that Wees associates with modernist art and critical theory. However, Wees's conceptual grid still proves helpful in tracing the collective rise of interrogational tendency in American art and culture in the immediate post-war period all the way up to the late 1980s.

2.4 Appropriation

Wees continues with appropriative montage, a significantly detached and impersonal use of imagery. The authorial tactic that characterizes this movement signals

⁵¹ William Wees, "From Compilation to Collage: the Found-Footage Films of Arthur Lipset," 19.

a complete departure from the deconstructive strategies associated with collage. Here an image is completely torn away from its now irrelevant source index. Appropriation involves the complete acclimatization of image into new and unrelated authorial claim. Wees is quick to identify the initial similarity of organizational principle to that of compilation, however, there is much difference. He notes,

Returning, then, to the crucial difference between representation in works of appropriation and in other methods of presenting found footage, I would begin by stressing the basic difference between compilation and appropriation. In compilation films, an archival shot is presumed to have concrete, historical referents that ground the film's discourse in reality, and lend credence to its overall argument.⁵²

In the case of appropriation, images still function as components of a new argument, but in an entirely different way, as non-referential and purely visual. For Wees, appropriation “capitalizes on the manipulations of montage,” as images taken from original context are inserted with significantly diminished attachment to their source.⁵³ The image is sutured into a film's narrative, and as naturalized incident it accommodates the truth claim of the author. Appropriation erases context by removing the signified altogether. As *the* primary example of this form, Wees describes the workings of appropriation in Michael Jackson's *Man in the Mirror*. He highlights the particular image of the Bikini test atomic experiments that occur in the compilation/collage film *The Atomic Café* and then re-occur in Jackson's video. As Wees observes, the treatment applied to the image differs immensely between the two films, in *The Atomic Café* the bomb signifies the bomb taken out of context, but in *Man in Mirror* the bomb signifies “hope” as it relates to lyrics in

⁵² Wees, W. *Recycled images*.44.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 40.

the song and the accompanying imagery of peace.⁵⁴ The overriding rhetoric is dictated by narrative, and non-committal imagery services not itself, but the “emotional appeal” elicited by the video.⁵⁵

Wees discusses appropriation as representational of postmodern cultural theory. He characterizes this period as the replacement of reality by constructed imagery, or the era of simulation. Appropriation exploits a media dependency that had come to define the end of the twentieth century. He notes, “the context is the media, from which the quotations have been ripped and into which they have been reinserted without regard for their “truth content.””⁵⁶ For his post-modern discourse, Wees draws upon work by Fredric Jameson and borrows terminology from Jean Baudrillard. Jameson’s approach considers the films of Hans Jürgen Syberberg and his re-contextualization of Hitler in an attempt for de-reification of cultural representation. Jameson describes the crisis of modernism as a promise of transition, “between the destruction of older systems of figuration (so many dead letters, empty icons, and old-fashioned art languages) and the freezing over of institutionalization of the new one.”⁵⁷ Jameson characterizes the culmination of this crisis as the “waning of historicity” and “the effortless media-exhaustion of even the immediate

⁵⁴ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁷ Fredric Jameson, "In the Destructive Element Immerse: Hans-Jürgen Syberberg and Cultural Revolution," *October*, 17, no. Summer (1981): 114.

past.”⁵⁸ For Jameson, representation had transcended the modernist narrative and become unconcerned with referentiality. He notes,

These are surely not attempts to settle accounts with the past and with its sedimented collective representation, but only to use its standard images for manipulative purposes.⁵⁹

Post-modernism means a complete disregard for a film’s capacity for authenticity altogether. It achieves an untethered condition in which the signified does not exist. Meaning isn’t simply re-assigned; it is invented as false nostalgia for a non-existent referent. Wees insists that signification of appropriation involves “simulacrum”, a simulation of the real as theorized by Jean Baudrillard.⁶⁰ Again, Wees resolves a strict time frame and genre. His exemplary genre is music video, locating the time period for appropriation as 1987. However, drawing upon Jameson’s and Baudrillard’s notions of simulated signifier, it is possible to locate appropriation in contemporary forms that use claimed footage in very different ways. For instance, Werner Herzog’s 2005 film *Wild Blue Yonder* profits from the workings of appropriation by contorting recycled imagery into evidentiary artifact to support a science fiction narrative. As one of three films in loose trilogy, *Wild Blue Yonder* mingles staged scenes of an alien monologue with excerpted NASA space exploration footage, scenes of deep sea diving in the Arctic, and early aeronautic experimentation. He claims overall ownership to forward a fictional narrative of space travel to an alien planet. The alien character narrates the story of his dying planet for most of the film, yoking imagery together as naturalized elements in the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁰ Wees, W. *Recycled images*. New York City: Anthology Film Archives. (1993).24.

story. He begins, “this is my story – where I come from *is* the Wild Blue Yonder,” this verbal declaration initiates the seamless incorporation of imagery to come.⁶¹ Imagery that follows this introduction immediately establishes the alien world (deep sea diving footage), and the astronauts preparing to embark on a journey there (underwater training footage courtesy of NASA). A continuous alternation between archival footage and prepared “alien” monologue effectively possesses imagery as increments in a long history of unsuccessful colonial attempts. An image-sound relationship plays out, not unlike a documentary organization where visual components unify in the service of a voice-over narrative. However, in this case the images are “re-signified” in a somewhat plagiaristic manner.⁶² The voice-over recounts human history in relation to alien encounter. He references shifts in anthropological history, like pig breeding, and various microbial pandemics as influenced by alien interference. In this way, Herzog furthers the discourse of appropriation montage by not only offering a sustained indifference to source and original context, but also by using imagery to re-write human history according to a science fiction fantasy. As R. Luckhurst observes, Herzog’s film broadens the capacity for appropriated images by transcending the mere unconcerned use of footage in a new context, he reintroduces them with a fresh critical attitude.⁶³ The near conclusion of the film is the arrival of human astronauts to the Andromeda planet. Herzog alludes to the extensive planet exploration by inserting sections of underwater diving footage. The voice-over continues saying, “what really makes me sad is that my planet started dying

⁶¹ Werner Herzog. "The Wild Blue Yonder" 2005. Werner Herzog.DVD

⁶² Luckhurst, R. *Found Footage Science Fiction*. 207.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 208.

hundreds of years ago, and here they are, seeing this as a potential replacement for earth?"⁶⁴ He goes on to describe the astronauts mapping out suitable locations for sewer pipes, and shopping malls. Herzog expands the use of footage to accommodate an allegorical critique of American colonialism, the unsympathetic seizure of territory in the spirit of human domestication and capitalism. The entire construction of the film, from parts stripped of context and re-signified, reiterates the critical message of the film in total. *Wild Blue Yonder*, like *Man in the Mirror*, utilizes imagery completely devoid of original context. However, Herzog enlarges the rhetorical implication of the appropriative form by formally and thematically emphasizing an overall commentary. Any historicity pertaining to the footage is disregarded completely and the imagery is completely subverted.⁶⁵ As such, it is an example of appropriation that resists Wees's historical specification.

In this chapter, we have seen that despite some exclusion, Wees's framework is an effective system of analysis. Throughout, he correlates integrative methodology with aesthetic bias and cultural theory. His framework is practical and easily applicable. In the next chapter I will follow Wees's system of analysis to tackle what I believe to be a new form in recycled cinema, one that surpasses appropriation and requires a descriptive study; that of imitation.

⁶⁴ Werner Herzog. "The Wild Blue Yonder" 2005. Werner Herzog.DVD

⁶⁵ Wees, W. *Recycled images*. 45.

Chapter 3: Virtual Realism and Imitative Found Footage Film

There are films today that imitate recycled cinema. These films confront a long tradition of image re-use and inherit its aesthetic apart from the literal form. The intention of this research is to extend Wees's theoretical framework to accommodate contemporary forms of found footage filmmaking, as his timeline halts at post-modern recycled cinema. Following Wees's theoretic trajectory from compilation realism, to collage modernism, to appropriation post-modernism, this contemporary film form can be thought of as an articulation of the aesthetic bias and critical temperament of the present. Recalling Wees's table (table 1.1) outlining the methodologies, signification, exemplary genre, and the aesthetic bias in association with montage form, he locates compilation, collage, and appropriation along a trajectory suggesting a chronological progression from compilation-recycled cinema, through to collage and then on to appropriation found footage aligned with post-modern discourse. This chapter proposes an extension that includes imitative forms. I argue that the imitation found footage film is what follows Wees's post-modern appropriation as the dominant contemporary form of recycled cinema. It is the imitation of the signified.

We can confidently locate the proliferation of exemplary forms in the late 1990s with the popularization of the film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), in which three actors employ VHS technology to film a horror narrative. The release of the film coincided with theatrics designed to suggest the realness of the incident portrayed in the film; the actors were reported as missing to promote the authenticity of the film's production. Since this time, there has been a steady rise in films featuring a similar narrative, and the majority can be associated with the horror genre. For example, Michael Costanza's *The*

Collingswood Story (2002) uses webcam exchanges between two people to further a horror narrative of an online psychic that results in murder; *The Zombie Diaries* (2006) shows footage of a zombie attack against the military shot on a handheld DV; *Paranormal activity* (2007) combines home video with surveillance footage to chronicle the gradual possession of a woman; *Cloverfield* (2008) is a found personal video of a monster attack; *Evil Things* (2009) uses home video to record murder; *V/H/S* (2012) separates various formats into horror vignettes including VHS, spycam, webcam, and DV; and, *The Bay* (2012) which combines surveillance, videophone, personal DV, and news coverage to explain a devastating infestation phenomenon resembling a personal interview and documentary. While this form is effectively used within the horror genre it extends well into others. For example, *Trash Humpers* (2009) by Harmony Korine employs VHS technology and VCR editing to follow three derelict characters and document their antics; *End of Watch* (2012) is partially filmed on a personal DV camera by a police officer; and, *Stories We Tell* (2012) by Sarah Polley recruits constructed sequences as stand-ins for the recollection of events.

Commonly, footage is declared as “found” following a recorded disaster, then pieced together in order to reveal the ephemerally documented incident. By exploiting the look of private recordings, imitation found footage aims to persuade the conviction that whomever made the film had believable access to video technology. Using one technology or a collection of many, these films feature various quotidian formats so as to justify the fact that the recording exists. In his work *Return to Paranormalcy*, David Bordwell looks closely at the techniques exercised in the *Paranormal Activity* series (2007-2011). He notes that the overuse of a fixed distant camera, handheld shakiness, and

quick panning motions work to imitate the amateur use or the amateur installation of surveillance technology solidifying the legitimacy of home made, and un-manipulated footage. Additionally, the spectator is forced to assume the position behind the recording device, heightened 'point of view' subjectivity from the perspective of the automated mechanism. This position is often occupied by a protagonist serving as surrogate camera operator for the audience, otherwise the recording is automatic and free from human control (e.g. nanny-cams or other unprofessional surveillance footage). Bordwell is also attentive to the effects of staging when it comes to surveillance footage, in which the film's subjects are positioned in the fringes of the frame disallowing full disclosure of a seemingly private event and adding to the suspense of scenes. In terms of organization, it resembles a realistic compilation of recordings starting and stopping as if the camera were being continuously turned off and then turned on again to resume action; this creates a discontinuous stream of events. Otherwise, with the use of multiple recording platforms, the organization exploits the associative virtues of montage, offering fragmentary but relevant viewpoints of the same event. Time, in either instance, is in constant flux; audience knowledge of the passage of time is completely subject to visual cues included in the image, or explanations offered by the characters in the recordings themselves.

To highlight the significance of these features, it is helpful to compare the framing, editing and duration to a more typical feature film (i.e. mainstream cinema) following a continuity editing system. Generally, the purpose of the continuity system is to alleviate the inherent discontinuity between separate shots and to ensure the conveyance of the utmost clarity to the viewer. In terms of framing, there are basic

guidelines for effective image composition, these are: simplicity, directing the focus of an image in order to elicit the most visual attention to the center; the rule of thirds, the off-center placement of subjects; lines, the use of diagonals for focus; and, balance to create visual unity.⁶⁶ Consistently in imitative found footage, as we will see in an analysis of *The Bay* (2012), these rules are broken to emphasize and extend the amateurish and ephemeral quality of the recordings. Likewise, a take, an uninterrupted shot, will serve the purpose of shuttling pertinent information and will generally be organized as a relatively short component of a series of shots. Of course, I am speaking in generalities about the representation of time in feature films as subjected to narrative progression. Comparatively, imitative found footage, because it is emulating the spontaneous recording of events, will often employ the long take as shots and shot organization is governed by the activation and deactivation of the recording device. However, recently, in films employing multiple platforms, shorter successive shots are required to move from one perspective to the next. Time then, is commonly defined by direct audio-visual markers, such as a date and time indicator within the image, inter-titling, or a character's statement. As for the organization of shots, a continuity system will rely on the alignment of elements (positioning, direction, temporal relations, action, etc.) for a seemingly continuous linear narrative. Imitative found footage on the other hand relies primarily upon the discontinuity of imagery and temporality, in which the legitimacy of "foundness" depends on the elaborated fragmentation of recordings and the ultimate incoherence of occurrences.

⁶⁶ Gustavo Mercado, *The filmmaker's eye: learning (and breaking) the rules of cinematic composition*, (San Diego: Elsevier, 2010).

In light of such noticeable departures from a standard shooting and editing system, the relationship between the film and its viewer becomes the primary interest when comparing continuity editing with non-continuity editing; specifically found footage film. Further in his analysis, David Bordwell observes this film form to be borrowing from the pseudo-documentary fiction film tradition.⁶⁷ Shying away from the ‘found footage’ association, Bordwell calls these films “discovered footage.”⁶⁸ Caetlin Benson-Allot in her book *Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens: Video Spectatorship from VHS to File Sharing* calls them “faux found footage.”⁶⁹ Her observation that various technologies and resulting media formats address viewers in different ways cues a discussion about the mimicry of those various formats. She notes, “the platform through which the viewer encounters a movie fundamentally changes how she understands it.”⁷⁰ This is an agreeable statement, however Benson-Allot insists that the apparatus constructs its viewer and ultimately instigates the interpretation of ideas. I argue that the “changed” viewership is not synonymous with the construction of a passive viewer; rather the viewer interacts with the material and the platform to the extent that their expectations of either are satisfied.

⁶⁷ Bordwell, David. David Bordwell's website on cinema, "Observations on film art: Return to Paranormalcy." Last modified November 13, 2012. <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2012/11/13/return-to-paranormalcy/>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Benson-Allot, Caetlin. *Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens: Video Spectatorship from VHS to File Sharing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. 167.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 167.

Similar to the various factors structuring Miriam Hansen's "horizon of experience" (class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, generation, etc.), the video platform calls upon a viewer's experiential history and admits itself into a lived context.⁷¹ For instance, a media text conveyed across a VHS platform will only be read as such if it meets the spectator's expectation of a VHS viewing experience, otherwise, it will not be understood to be a VHS platform. Simultaneously, this VHS viewing experience will quickly associate itself with other experiences related to VHS technology, possibly recording and viewing a home movie personally produced by the viewer. This can be conceptualized as a viewer initiated technological fluency. The platform provides the spectators with a personalized point of reference, solidified by their own use. In the case of VHS, a very popular personal technology, as the "video home system" dominated home video production and commercial video viewing (in the US) in the later part of the 1980s.⁷² Video formats, closely related to personal representation in the most recent era, like those of a digital culture; characterized by mobile aesthetics (videophone, Skype, portable DV cameras, news footage, etc.) offer a contemporary point of reference for the viewer. Because the format resonates with its viewers through familiarity, the characters on screen share their positioning with that regularly occupied by the spectators themselves. They imitate the self-representation played out in the personal use of the format in several ways making them into avatars in the film's narrative. Certain formats will have been used most widely during certain periods of time by people existing in that

⁷¹ Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema, late cinema: permutations of the public sphere," *Screen*, 34, no. 3 (1993): 197-210.

⁷² Benson-Allot, Caetlin. *Killer Tapes and Shattered Screams: Video Spectatorship from VHS to File Sharing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. 26.

time experiencing technology, and will ultimately be identified as belonging to, or originating from that time period. As such, an audience's history, and by result technological immersion, determines familiarity and legitimacy of content as truthful; the degree of verisimilitude experienced when viewing personal technology formats. The format not only contextualizes the content, but informs a technological mindset for its audience, a time and place where this technology would have been used.

3.1 Barry Levinson's *The Bay*, A case study

Barry Levinson's 2012 film *The Bay* is an exemplary illustration of imitation found footage. A rhetorical pseudo-documentary assemblage of newsreel, surveillance, webcam, videophone, and handheld DV camera recordings presumed to be 'found' and compiled, showing a steroid induced isopod infestation in a small town. The film, like many imitative found footage films, begins with a disclaimer introducing the footage to follow as rescued from a disaster causing its own loss in the first place. Donna, a survivor, narrates over webcam interview with a faceless voice asking her questions. Immediately, the audience assumes the position of the video feed receiver, and the spectator is drawn into an active role defined by POV subjectivity. As in any webcam conversation, Donna addresses the camera directly. She explains that all of the digital information resulting from an outbreak conspiracy that we are about to see has been found and collected in order for this story to be made public. Donna reminisces about her internship with a news station explaining the newsreel footage that becomes so apparent in the documentation of the chaotic events. The film continues this oscillation between media platforms while momentarily returning to Donna's webcam interview at times of emotional contemplation.

Following documentary convention, most surveillance footage is textually introduced accompanying Donna's narrated explanation. For example, Donna describes the "first signs of trouble" as the viewer is treated to night vision footage recouped from the "Maryland Department of Natural Resources" documenting the recovery of two bodies in the bay area.⁷³ The bodies are identified to be marine biologists prompting a transition to their own video research diary taken before they died. As the conspiracy develops, footage is collected from more sources like a shutdown "eco-spy" website, and home video camera footage organized into a montage of people exhibiting the horrific first symptoms of the outbreak. Then comes footage recovered from the town's emergency department at the time of the incident, which includes personal video taken by the head physician recording the initial triage of patients and video surveillance overlooking the entire waiting room. The combined hospital footage is anchored by a back and forth audio between the head ER physician and the Centre for Disease Control, which eventually matches up to a webcam conversation between the two, presented in a bisected frame to the audience. Donna's voice takes the audience on a tour of police car footage, 911 phone calls combined with home video with associative visual, mobile phone facetime applications, borescope video feed, and back to newsreels (online and offline) surveying a town and its inhabitants in crisis. It is precisely this variety in format and source that furnishes the truth-value and legitimacy of the "recovered" footage. As the conspiracy clarifies and CDC webcam conversations reveal high levels of pollutants, already shown footage is recalled in revelatory fashion revisiting the mysterious

⁷³ Barry Levinson. "The Bay." Automatik Entertainment 2012. DVD

happening with new information. Finally, the culprit is revealed to be chemically enhanced marine isopods originating as larvae when entering the body, then growing exponentially over the course of a day.

Recalling the aforementioned rubric, framing plays a key role in the film as it progresses quickly through formats while maintaining continuity of action. Characters remain in frame either completely or partially in long shots during fixed camera surveillance footage. Webcam conversations feature medium to close-up shots allowing for action to transpire in the background distracting the speakers. The majority of images feature uneven or incidental framing; action is either being uneasily contained within the frame or taking place in marginal view. Framing, or lack thereof, implies the unintentional and fleeting presentation of occurrence that one has come to expect from footage that has been recouped after the fact and assembled to show an event. In this case, the footage has been staged to appear coincidental and cursory, validating its own 'found-ness.' In terms of organization, this film presents a generally linear progression of events. However, unlike imitative films featuring one singular camera or media platform, *The Bay* presents sporadically documented imagery according to a timeline. The film opens with a montage of breaking news footage; a collage of news anchors delivering disturbing health and environmental updates while the accompanying audio densely layers itself producing a forecast of pollution and public health incident; then the film focuses on Donna commencing her interview. Throughout, Donna introduces vignettes by their time of day and relevance to overarching local disaster. However, as more information is divulged concerning the cause and nature of the event, old footage is recalled and enhanced, or new footage is introduced outside of this timeline revealing the

most informative and conclusive imagery. Here, imitative found footage is organized in a manner resembling documentary film, where the imagery services eco-horror rhetoric and collage sets a foreboding tone of collective anxiety. A multiplicity of recording formats permits the expansion of time as snippets of events implied to have occurred simultaneously are lined up and presented one after the other. In this way, a collection of imagery, all under a minute in duration, cumulates to shape an entire day. Like framing, duration is a key imitative factor; scraps of imagery are organized as tiny moments relevant to the truth claim of the film. The durative qualities of the momentary footage also imply ‘found-ness’, as if the fully documented version was destroyed, damaged, or unsalvageable. This is addressed several times in the film, as Donna provides several disclaimers for some footage, telling the audience “this is all that could be recovered.”⁷⁴

3.2 Imitative Found Footage

Following Wees’s inclination to identify an exemplary genre for each of his recycled cinema forms, I argue that imitative found footage finds its exemplary manifestations in the horror film genre. This is not to say that exemplary forms can not be found in association with other genres (listed prior), however, the use of discontinuity editing, framing, and duration seem to be articulated and function optimally within horror narratives. Together these three elements contribute efficiently to a generally constricted viewing experience. Images are cut short due to their degraded condition, framing is inadequate for the clarity of events and characters, and editing heightens the discontinuity of events creating suspense and anxiety. Essentially, imitative found footage exploits the

⁷⁴ Barry Levinson. "The Bay." Automatik Entertainment 2012. DVD

power of the “unseen,” and the unknown, two commonalities of the horror genre.⁷⁵

Additionally, these films feature subjective framing, a point of view shot positioning the spectator as active participant or recipient of the action in the film. It is precisely the use of personal video technologies in many imitative found footage films that demonstrates the point of view perspective characteristic of the horror genre. Subjective interactivity is compounded given the audience’s familiarity with personal technological platforms.

The imitative platform in these films gradually progress from standard VHS technology to personal DV camera recordings, to phones, laptops, surveillance and other mobile video technologies. From the singular use of VHS technology in *Blair Witch* to the combination of mobile and stationary technologies in a film like *The Bay*, it would seem that the mode of representation is moving toward an anonymous or invisible state of visual representation; an imperceptible camera. Returning to David Bordwell’s discussion of *Paranormal Activity*, he notes a gradual move toward representational ubiquity, that is, an ever-present but invisible camera. The first film in the series, which exhausts privately installed surveillance footage, delays viewing of this footage until after events have already taken place. Later in the series, a variety of media platforms are introduced including laptops and video console motion detectors, increasing the omnipresence of the recording device. The spectator is offered a simultaneous and elaborative view of the family house as opposed to fixed cameras in certain rooms. At one point the daughter in the film even carries her laptop around while web-chatting to show her movement from room to room as action takes place. Similarly, in *The Bay* when patients start coming into the small towns emergency room, web-cam shots are aligned with surveillance footage,

⁷⁵ Bruce Kavin, *Horror and the Horror Film*, (London: Anthem Press, 2012) .2.

and additionally edited with the ER physician's own medical video documentation to offer a sweeping and continuous view of the events taking place. The result is a close to complete and multidimensional image of the ER waiting room, code rooms, doctor's office, and examination room. At no point does the recording device operation become a concern because the images are originating from technologies that a spectator has already come to expect as ever-present. A webcam is a common and familiar feature on most computers, likewise a videophone is a pervasive technology, those fluent with either take their presence for granted and assume that documentation is always taking place. Because of mobile devices, recording can happen anywhere, and imitative found footage film is able to exploit this ubiquity to create events from fragmentary footage.

As the unrestrictive camera gradually takes over, the spectator is engaged with directly, and forcefully positioned as the recipient of video feed, the web-chat, facetime, Skype, and DV. The audience assumes the role of "end-user" for the respective video technology. Bordwell observes, in his analysis of *Paranormal Activity 4*, this hailing of the spectator appears as a salient device in the entirety of the film. He writes,

In addition to recording the household's supernatural doings, the laptop device lets the teenage heroine Alex have video chats with her Boyfriend Ben. In the earlier films we get the occasional to-camera monologues, but here we watch Alex talk close to the lens, directly to us, and at length; we see what Ben sees, and sometimes we him from her screens vantage – a sort of virtual shot/ reverse shot.⁷⁶

The spectator is optically situated as recording device operator, a part of the narrative, and a "real" for the screen surrogate, who now embodies more of an avatar-like

⁷⁶ Bordwell, David. David Bordwell's website on cinema, "Observations on film art: Return to Paranormalcy." Last modified November 13, 2012. <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2012/11/13/return-to-paranormalcy/>.

representation. In the case of Ben and Alex, the spectator assumes the virtual position of Ben in conversation with Alex, Ben is simply a convenient manifestation of spectator as operator.

Norman Taylor furthers the discussion of mobile recording technologies in his book *Cinematic Perspectives on Digital Culture: Consorting with the Machine*. He conceptualizes our culture's digital fluency as one of technological bodily extension relating their invisible ever-presence and over-use to the idea of prosthesis. Taylor notes that the innovation and preference taking place presently in the development of new recording technologies is gradually moving toward a more imitative likeness to human consciousness, and that "real-time" duration and ubiquity of camera location is a close mimicry of the way the human brain interprets visual information. As a result the device is becoming less alien to the body in general. Such an intense merging with technology tends to normalize the virtual perspective; imitation found footage technology plays directly upon this involvement. Taylor notes,

self-referentiality turns in on itself to create a closed, endogenous system to deny the real. Yet in this virtual space the unreal is responded to 'as-if' real by a user-spectator whose immersion pays dividends.⁷⁷

If webcams, drones, Google Street, surveillance, and hidden cameras are the image markers of our time then authorship is autonomous, context is hypothetical and identification functions on the basis of virtual incarnation or avatar.

As Bordwell points out, the position of the viewer as a part of a "virtual" exchange is a significant factor determining the overall engagement with the film.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Taylor, Norman. *Cinematic Perspectives on Digital Culture: Consorting with the Machine*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.

Additionally, a position of surrogacy is compounded by a viewer's experiential context, or technological fluency, instantiating the use of various video platforms through the viewer's own lived experience. In total, it is a fictional environment promoted by technology that encourages interactive surrogacy, while remaining ultimately embedded in the experience of the real. Essentially, it is a virtual realism.

3.3 Virtual Realism

In order to elaborate upon the concept of virtual realism, as a condition of 'the virtual,' a brief history of invention and theorization is helpful. Jaron Lanier, the CEO of VPL manufacturing coined the term "Virtual Reality" in 1989.⁷⁹ The handy term came to encapsulate the entire concept of the interactive virtual environment. Though computers had long since been equipped to simulate realistic environments, it was not until the development of appropriate software programs and prosthetic technical devices that a user became an *actor* in the virtual environment. Participation was achieved through wearable equipment consisting of sensory gloves, eyewear, and even helmets all designed to respond to the natural cognitive, perceptive, and social processes of the participant. Throughout its early development as a definable technology, it maintained the sterile and mechanistic purpose associated with task-oriented participation. Philippe Fuchs and Pascal Guitton provide a definition of virtual reality wherein its purely functional dimensions can be observed. They state,

⁷⁸ Bordwell, David. David Bordwell's website on cinema, "Observations on film art: Return to Paranormalcy." Last modified November 13, 2012. <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2012/11/13/return-to-paranormalcy/>.

⁷⁹ Jonathan Steuer, "Defining Virtual Reality: Dimensions Determining Telepresence," *Journal of Communication*, 42, no. 4 (1992): 73-93,

Virtual reality is a scientific and technical domain that uses computer science and behavioural interfaces to simulate in a virtual world the behaviour of 3D entities, which interact in real time with each other and with one or more users in pseudo-natural immersion via sensorimotor channels.⁸⁰

The observable participation through the use of sensory interfaces remained purely physical and garnered attention as such.

In his work *Defining Virtual Realities: Dimensions Determining Telepresence*, Jonathan Steuer accommodates an effectual or aesthetic dimension of the virtual reality. He proposes a definition based upon the “human perception of surroundings as mediated by both automatic and controlled mental processes,” in other words, *presence*: the sense of being in an environment.⁸¹ Steuer distinguishes between factual and non-factual environments at the moment of mediation (when perception is interpreted by a communication technology); there is a split between the actual lived environment and the perceived environment presented by the medium. Apart from realistic *presence*, that is, being in the real world, there is *telepresence*, “the experience of presence in an environment by means of a communication medium.”⁸² Steuer’s distinction relies upon the distance between “natural” process, and “mediated” process. According to Steuer the individual is both the sender and the receiver of information contained within the virtual reality because manifestations are only instigated by the perceptual information of the sender. The example of infinite reproduction furnishes the idea of sender/receiver process as an unreal closed system; virtual realities are created and then experienced regardless of

⁸⁰ Phillippe Fuchs, Guillaume Moreau, and Pascal Guitton, *Virtual Reality: Concepts and Technologies*, (London: CRC Press, 2011) .8.

⁸¹ Jonathan Steuer, "Defining Virtual Reality: Dimensions Determining Telepresence," *Journal of Communication*, 42, no. 4 (1992): 75.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 76.

a ‘lived’ reality. Virtual reality then, refers to an experience rather than a technological development or function. Virtual realism is the effect of *telepresence*.

At this point, the concept of *telepresence* presents us with little distinction between a mediated reality and a film viewing experience in general; one could argue that the immersive effect of a feature narrative could compare to the definitive feeling of being in another environment. However, David W. Schloerb provides a distinctive and quantifiable consideration. In his work “A Quantitative Measure of Telepresence,” Schloerb argues that a feeling of presence can in fact be measured in various degrees depending upon the interactivity that is required by the participant. In his survey of virtual environments, Schloerb distinguishes between *objective telepresence*, when a participant’s interactivity is task oriented, and *subjective telepresence*, based on the probability that a person actually perceives his or herself to be physically present in the virtual environment. The critical point between objective and subjective interactivity is when a participant can no longer distinguish between reality and non-reality. He notes, “a person is subjectively present in some particular environment if and only if the person perceives that he or she is physically present in the environment.”⁸³ He continues, “If a person can not detect the difference - then they are subjectively telepresent in the given environment.”⁸⁴

I argue that imitative found footage invites the *subjective telepresence* of its viewers. Films of this type construct a mediated environment that resembles a viewer’s

⁸³ David W. Schloerb, “A Quantitative Measure of Telepresence,” *Presence*, 4, no.1 (1995): 70.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

customary visual experience. One that is transparent, it mimics prevalent technology so as to “naturalize” interaction, and seemingly autonomous or lacking in human agency.⁸⁵ Without rupture, this imagery initiates and is reflexively animated by a spectator’s familiarity with specific visual platforms, and these platforms originate from their own experiential context. This *telepresence*, or the perceptual presence mediated by technology is outside of, but not completely isolated from the lived experience depending upon how reality and unreality are considered in relation to one another. For Steuer, they are parallel, but separate. It is not simulative it is imitative.

Imitative found footage film articulates a virtual representation with an aesthetic bias toward realism. Much like Wees’s compilation recycled cinema, imitative found footage, in its production and organization, denotes or constructs its signified as the real world. Recalling Wees’s definition of compilation, involving the grouping of images according to their adherence or evidentiary potential to a theme, argument, or story. It would seem that the only difference between the two forms is the reality of the signified. Wees specifies that imagery is only physically alienated from its source, meaning that indexically it still points to the reality from which it came, it functions simply as a “quote” in its new locale. Imagery making up an imitative film resembles the aesthetic of a visual “quote”, and claims to signify reality, however, it originates from a non-existent

⁸⁵ The affects characteristically associated with Schloerb’s notion of *subjective telepresence*, the erasure of technological mediation and the abeyance of authorship, align quite closely to the “Logic of Transparent Immediacy” outlined in Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. However, the conviction of actual presence that is the fundamental quality differentiating Schloerb’s *subjective telepresence* from a non-committal *objective telepresence* is the same quality disqualifying “Transparent Immediacy” as the appropriate concept in this context. I argue that the difference in mediation is undetectable and therefore completely persuasive as an authentic representation.

occurrence. As an example we can recall Levinson's *The Bay*. There is an instance in the film when the small town ER physician is assessing his patients, he positions a tripod mounted camera in front of a patient, behind the patient there is a TV screen receiving and projecting the feed of the camera. The camera is positioned in front of the patient in such a way that the projected image is reproduced as part of the projected image. The result is an infinite reproduction of image. Because of the projection and reflection, the image is literally thrown into the representational abyss. It is notable in this instance that the recursive image is automated, unlike the "Droste Effect" produced by mirrors (reflective of real life), this is an apparatus of technologies feeding into and reproducing themselves into an infinite recursion of virtual reality; a world that has no attachment or connection to reality or the lived experience other than contextual referents.⁸⁶ For the purposes of this research, this is the key difference between Wees's postmodern appropriation and virtual realism. The act of appropriation could, and is by Wees, be characterized as an exact articulation of Baudrillard's "simulacra", the complete detachment of historicity, or a history that never was. For Baudrillard this is a false nostalgia experienced by individuals as a component of a lived reality, and it is specific to the 'lived' experience.

Comparatively, imitative found footage has no realistic origins. The fictional environment produced is set in the sense that it can only produce and reproduce the features of its own fictional environment. On its own, it is an infinite recursion of entities. The virtual dimension relies upon the perception, cognition, and action of a user.

⁸⁶ Jos Leys, "The Droste effect image transformation," *Computers & Graphics*, 31, no. 3 (2007): 516-523.

Traditionally, within the functional definition of early virtual reality, this relationship is illustrated as the “perception, cognition, action loop.” This is where the user within the real world reacts with the mechanisms of the virtual world. Through the use of motor interfaces, the user perceives, makes decisions, and then acts, and then the mechanisms acquire actions, calculate reactions, and deliver them through “sensorial interfaces.”⁸⁷

When considering the virtual world offered by imitative found footage, we can begin to apply the “perception, cognition, action loop” to an interactive instance between viewer and film. Instead of a purely corporeal interaction mediated by sensorimotor equipment, the viewer perceives according to their previously acquired experiential and contextual knowledge, based on their own technological fluency, to participate with the imagery.

These forms take as their subject of investigation “the institution of the observer” and “the constitution of presence.”⁸⁸ They polarize the discussion of image, and transgress the boundaries of existence in reality. In his book *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, Oliver Grau explains that virtual reality, as defined in artistic terms, is “achieved through maximization of realism and illusionism in the service of an immersive effect.”⁸⁹ Like imitative found footage, realism is the format of choice for virtual artists in order for maximized immersion and suspension of factual reality. Recall the resemblance between Wees’s compilation recycled cinema and imitative found

⁸⁷ Phillippe Fuchs, Guillaume Moreau, and Pascal Guitton, *Virtual Reality: Concepts and Technologies*, (London: CRC Press, 2011) .9.

⁸⁸ Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, (Cambridge: MIT press, 2003) 15.

⁸⁹ Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, (Cambridge: MIT press, 2003) 15.

footage organization in general. Grau also notes that we must be careful to remember that there is no objective appropriation of reality; it is only the interpretation that is decisive.⁹⁰ With this in mind we are faced with the issue of media credibility in light of information accessibility and convincing imitative construction. Because imitative found footage has so successfully constructed the “real,” it has reflexively thrown suspicion toward the two foundational components of media credibility: source and medium. The guarantee of veracity becomes fickle as imitation directly engages the power and confidence that has been and is still invested in visual media.

Images that originate outside of the professional media have gained cultural significance since the rise of personal video technologies.⁹¹ In terms of efficiency, availability, and circulation, “citizen journalism” represents the dominant value of our time: trustworthy visual-ness.⁹² As images, amateur videos are more compelling as a source simply by way of their non-professional aesthetic. As such, news networks embrace and encourage the participation of citizen journalists.⁹³ In their work *Amateur Images and Global News*, Kari Andén-Papadopoulos and Mervi Pantti observe the ways in which “private” or “user generated” content shapes the way news audiences collectively interpret media. They note,

⁹⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁹¹ Kari Andén-Papadopoulos, and Mervi Pantti, *Amateur Images and Global News*, (Bristol: Intellect Ltd., 2011). 9.

⁹² Ibid., 10.

⁹³ Andy Williams, Claire Wardle, and Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, “Have they got news for us?": Audience revolution or business as usual at the BBC?," *Journalism Practice*, 5, no. 1 (2011): 85-99,

Journalists – as well as audiences – value amateur visuals for their perceived immediacy, authenticity and proximity. Amateur images are judged to be more ‘authentic’ because they typically are dim, grainy and shaky, but more importantly, because they constitute first hand recordings by individuals who witnessed or experienced an event as it was actually happening.⁹⁴

Typically, non-professional images are valued primarily because of their look and the assumed presence that comes from the perceived realism. Citizen journalism garners automatic credibility with an audience as a guaranteed objectivity.⁹⁵ However, it is common and even expected that private imagery inducted as evidential to large scale events is met with skepticism motivated by this un-manipulated aesthetic. For instance, Simon Shack’s documentary *September Clues* is a self-proclaimed debunk regarding a collection of official newsreel and amateur imagery of the September 11th World Trade Centre terrorist attacks. Throughout his ninety-one minute analysis, Shack replays, overlays, and re-creates versions of the professional and private footage provided by public broadcasters during and after the crash. Shack claims to have undeniable proof that the imagery was altered as part of a larger conspiracy in which missiles flew into the buildings instead of planes. Reflexively, Shack’s revelatory imagery spurred multiple responses and ongoing online debates about the validity of the original footage. Furthermore, those referring to themselves as “the truth movement” who are “debunking the debunker” take up a discourse, which circles continuously around the perceived glitches, jumpcuts, sound reoccurrences, and animation errors located in the footage that was distributed by media institutions on the day of the attack. Actual fact aside, it is the peripheral debate over authenticity that proves relevant to the aforementioned notion of a

⁹⁴ Kari Andén-Papadopoulos, and Mervi Pantti, *Amateur Images and Global News*, (Bristol: Intellect Ltd., 2011). 12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

telepresent audience. As Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti note, “we are thus at a moment in history in which images are at the forefront of efforts to negotiate, interrogate, memorialize and create the individual and collective experiences of social realities.”⁹⁶ We are also experiencing a time in which the proliferation of image technology has blurred the boundaries between reality and unreality, rendering the audience ultimately telepresent in a reality created by various visual formats.

Though this new mediated environment may be formally distinct, the resistant insightfulness observed by Wees earlier in his investigation of recycling, is consistent. Imitative found footage film interrogates the signified and loosens the authorial power associated with imagery. It is essentially, the successful polysensory mimicry of reality. In this way, virtual realism subverts the authority of the real by destabilizing the very boundaries distinguishing real from unreal. If mimicry is fundamentally undetectable when compared to faithful documentation, then the process of authentication requires continuous negotiation and calibration. Images circulating in our media landscape are hesitantly interpreted by an audience accustomed to imitation. Simply put, we cannot tell the difference anymore, and this complicates authorial and authoritative power. Authenticity then, becomes a known construct, one that can be freely attributed to materials irrespective of their actual origins.

This chapter seeks to incorporate the instance of imitation into the history of recycled cinema. In doing so, I have relied heavily upon William Wees’s method of film analysis; the chronological mapping of recycling practices in their exemplary forms. Recalling Wees’s table (table 1.1) that outlines the signification, exemplary genre, and

⁹⁶ Ibid., 10.

the aesthetic bias associated with each montage form, he notes that, compilation signifies reality, has an aesthetic bias toward realism and can be found predominantly in documentary film. Collage replaces the signifier, articulates a modern aesthetic, and is found in avant-garde film. Finally, appropriation simulates the signifier, has an aesthetic bias associated with the post-modernist tendency and can be seen in exemplary form in music videos. This trajectory suggests a chronological progression from compilation-recycled cinema, through to collage and then on to appropriation found footage aligned with post-modern discourse. Additionally, imitation mimics the signified by encouraging *telepresence*, has a aesthetic bias of virtual realism, the perceptual appropriation of reality into unreality where the viewer who is ultimately positioned as the end user can interact with it, and is found primarily in horror films.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This research has been motivated by a curiosity regarding varied organizational strategies of filmic *recyclage*; how and why filmmakers select and mobilize filmic artifacts, and a concern for the ambivalent uses of conceptual terminology employed in the discussion of re-contextualization. Variously known as ‘found footage film’, ‘archival film’, ‘recycled cinema’, ‘appropriation film’, etc., indeed the very terms “found” and “archive” carry with them historical, authentic, and authorial issue. Amid the vast collection of films collected under the heading of recycled cinema, clarity is attainable if considered historically, and within broader cultural and artistic context. William Wees suggests a twentieth century recycled cinema timeline divided into three organizational trends: compilation, collage, and appropriation. For Wees, these forms relate broadly to historically associative cultural and artistic temperament as potent socially and politically interpretive instruments. Relieved from the theoretical debate of source, Wees emphasizes the revelatory importance of recycled construction and montage, that is, image organization as an individual’s “conscious intention.”⁹⁷ This research aligns itself with Wees’s historical observation, advocating that artistic intention is expressive of socio-political implication.

In his work, Wees delineates relevant found footage strategy by offering exemplary forms, these serve as evidential artifacts for a definable historical period. Compilation, wherein non-relational images selected from a myriad of sources are grouped according to overarching theme, argument or story, occupied the majority of the early twentieth century. Collage, the purposeful juxtaposition of extant images previously

⁹⁷ Wees, W. *Recycled images*.7.

valuated through media institution, served as a potent modernist interpretive strategy in the late nineteen thirties all the way to the early nineteen nineties. Then finally, appropriation, the plagiaristic re-use of imagery as evidentiary in new truth claim, exemplifying post-modernist theoretical paradigms of the late nineteen eighties and early twenty first century.⁹⁸

Following Wees's chronology and contextual methodology, the study of current found footage form, imitative found footage, appears to be a credible addition. Popularized in the late nineteen nineties, films that mimic found footage film compilation have gained steady momentum as a notable indicator of broad cultural and artistic interpretive tendency. These films are illusively constructed as 'found', and feature an array of formats to solidify this conviction. As such, imitative imagery promotes a natural and undetectable mediated interaction, the *subjective telepresence* of its viewers. This virtual immediacy complicates the contemporary media landscape by perforating the boundary between authoritative and imitative imagery, prolonging the relentless and repetitive social and political interrogation that is inherent in previous forms. This research posits virtual realism as a subsequent form in a found footage chronological paradigm, informing and maintaining the representational tendencies that defined recycled cinema in the twentieth century.

Conclusively, what was forwarded by Wees in his conceptual grid of signification: modes of cultural production (exemplary genre), and broad sets of aesthetic

⁹⁸ Ibid., 36.

premises and practices embracing all the arts (aesthetic genre), can be restructured to include virtual realism (See Table 2).⁹⁹

Table 2. Virtual Realism Conceptual Grid

Methodology	Signification	Exemplary Genre	Aesthetic Bias
Compilation	Reality	Documentary film	Realism
Collage	Image	Avant-garde film	Modernism
Appropriation	Simulacrum	Music video	Postmodernism
Imitation	Telepresence	Found Footage Horror	Virtual Realism

⁹⁹ Ibid., 34.

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