

**Christian Marclay :**

**The Clock** January 27 ————— April 7, 2013



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## Christian Marclay: The Clock

The  
Collector

Kris  
Paulsen



"What's remarkable about *The Clock* is the way that, from extreme fragmentation and multiplicity, Marclay has created a smooth continuity—or at least the illusion of one. That smoothness may seem at odds with the hyper-fragmentation that Marclay has celebrated in his work as an experimental turntablist, whether solo or collaborating with the likes of John Zorn, Elliott Sharp and Sonic Youth. But, he says, 'I've grown tired of the jump cut—the fast edit—that we see in everything. The false continuity that I was trying

to create [in *The Clock*] is, to me, more connected to the way time flows. There can be a seamless flow and momentum of a gesture from one film to the next, but it jumps from colour to black and white, and you know it's not true, but you still believe in it. It deconstructs cinema—you see all the tricks, and you understand the vocabulary.' "

—Jonathan Romney, "*The Clock*: What time is it where?," *Sight and Sound*, May 2011



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Christian Marclay is a collector of mass-produced items. His work testifies to a careful and compulsive hoarding of pop culture artifacts: records, tapes, musical instruments, comic books, digital files, and clips from Hollywood films. Through the labor of editing, remixing, collaging, and curating, Marclay reimagines new lives and destinies for his objects. But these objects are not simply *his*: their ubiquity makes them belong, in one way or another, to all of us. Mass-produced objects are individually owned but widely known and recognized; they are both private belongings and cultural touchstones. The whole of Marclay's work stages encounters between the viewer and his vast collection of mass-produced and mass-consumed artifacts of popular culture.

Marclay's artistic practice, which spans performance, collage, installation, video, and sculpture, hinges on the reuse and recirculation of certain kinds of collectible objects. In particular, the items that appear in his work

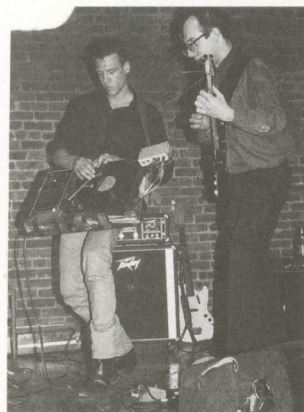
bring together several sensory modes to activate the cultural references and memories of the viewer. Vinyl records, for example, play a central role in his production. In the early 1980s, Marclay emerged on the New York art scene as a performer in a Duchamp-inspired musical duo, The Bachelors, Even. Rather than playing a traditional instrument, he took up the emerging practice of record scratching on a self-styled wearable turntable, the *Phonoguitar* (1982) [figure 1]. The practice of scratching, which would soon be popularized by hip-hop DJs, called attention to the record as a textured, physical object. When playing a record, the visual and tactile surface births a sonic element. Scratching the album literally rewrites the record by damaging grooves and creating new marks. The recognizable riffs on the album give way to an unfamiliar dissonance that is equally "there." This simple remaking and reimagining of the popular album soon led Marclay to make his own records, which played on the tension between the physical,



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1. *Phonoguitar*, 1982  
Performance with Elliott Sharp, Ski Lodge,  
New York, 1983  
Photo: Catherine Ceresole
2. *Record Without a Cover*, 1985  
Vinyl record, 12 inches in diameter
3. *Recycled Records*, 1985-86  
Installation with collaged records, turntable  
Dimensions variable  
Installation view at City Gallery, New York, 1986
4. *Telephones*, 1995  
Video, 7 minutes, 30 seconds

Artworks © Christian Marclay  
Courtesy White Cube, London

visual object and its aural component. In the 1980s, he pressed several of his own records, including *Record without a Cover* (1985) [figure 2]. Just as the title describes, this was a delicate, unprotected surface exposed to and affected by the other elements of the collection that surrounded it. Its placement in a collection—and the history of its insertions, removals, and reinsertions—left indelible marks. The owner's encounters with the object were permanently preserved and differentiate each individual copy from the other once-identical ones.

Marclay also subjected the delicate surfaces of vinyl albums to even more aggressive manhandling. His *Recycled Records* (1985-86) [figure 3] collage bits and pieces of different albums together into physically, if not sonically, cohesive wholes. By reimagining the records in accordance with a visual logic, rather than an auditory one, Marclay transforms the familiar into something strange and unknowable. Each bit of plastic culled from his collection remains

existentially tethered to its original source but becomes part of a new and original whole that is also distinctly Marclay's.

In the mid-1990s Marclay turned to video to extend his interest in audiovisual collage and the ways it could activate viewers' senses and memories. Pulling together clips from his vast collection of films, Marclay produced *Telephones* (1995) and *Video Quartet* (2002). *Telephones* [figure 4] is a tautly edited, seven-minute montage of characters in Hollywood films using telephones. By shuffling through his archive, Marclay unearthed this repeated trope and put it to work. The individual moments are recognizable fragments of well-known sources; freed from the movies' plots, they become a study in cinematic convention. The eager dialers, fretful callers, and one-sided conversationalists are cut out from the narratives to which they give tension, but they still catch the viewer in a snare of anxious anticipation. The logic is laid bare, but the effect





still holds sway. *Video Quartet* brings together musical moments from classic films to score a four-part ensemble performance. The musicians break loose from the separate films that previously held them captive to play together. Marclay's music video is visually disjunctive yet sonically unified and melodic. Performers flash across the four screens, but the sound binds them gracefully together. It is as if actors as diverse as Harpo Marx, Jane Fonda, and Jimmy Stewart had been patiently waiting for an opportunity to play together. Like *Recycled Records*, *Video Quartet* and *Telephones* bring together sound and image in collages that at once bear their seams and form cohesive, hermetic new wholes.

In *The Clock* (2010), Marclay again cobbles together a new film from a vast collection of clips. In *Video Quartet* and *Telephones*, he collected actors from films from different times into a single space and time in which they are suddenly engaging with each other. Here he

manages to collapse the separate and seemingly impenetrable spaces of the spectator and the screen by making a film that is exclusively about time. In doing so, Marclay places the viewer into a direct relationship with the events on the screen.

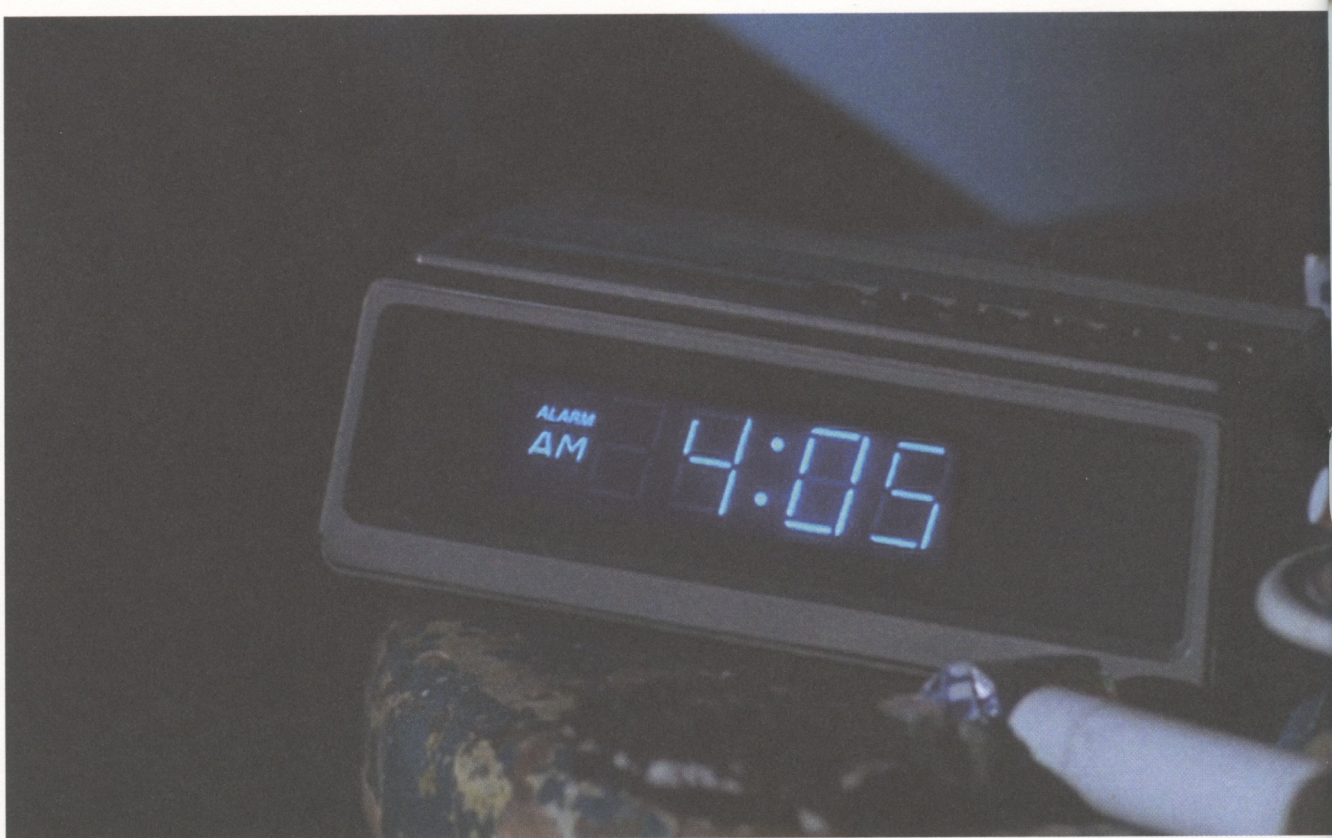
Composed entirely of brief clips (both image and sound) from feature films, *The Clock* is a 24-hour compilation of moments in which clocks appear in the movies. In cinema, time is often condensed—a lifetime or more might pass over the course of a single film, or a montage might represent hours rapidly passing in a few mere moments. In *The Clock*, Marclay equates the time of watching with the time represented. His viewers share time with the changing cast of characters, living out each minute as they do. He does this neither by filming in unedited real time nor by representing an hour of a character's life in an hour of film but rather by making film time conform to the clock time of the spectator: 11:50 AM or 2:25 PM



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for the characters on the screen is also the exact local time of the viewers. The video is of clocks and *it is a clock*. The time of the cinema and the lived time of the spectator become completely imbricated.

On the screen, Marclay cross-cuts between various films, employing an editing technique that implies that two events are happening in different places but at the same time. He bleeds the sound from one clip over others, stitching their narratives together and making it seem as if the characters are expectantly waiting for the same moment to arrive. The ambient sounds of the projection space, too, bleed over the images. Each glance that takes a viewer away from the screen acts as yet another cross-cut. A quick look at one's own watch or scan of the other members of the audience fits into the sequence of images as seamlessly as one of Marclay's edits. Marclay has appropriated and remixed the history of cinema in such a way that the viewers' own experiences are woven

into it. Viewers of *The Clock*, like the bare album of *Record without a Cover*, are marked by being repeatedly inserted into and pulled out of the collection. When they emerge from the gallery, the logic of *The Clock* follows them. They remain temporally in sync with the video, and each clock that appears in the visual landscape becomes an extended part of Marclay's collection.

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