The Origins of Recycled Films: Archive Film Art Found Footage Created through Post-Production Strategies

TÜNDE BODONI-DOMBI

Affiliation:Partium Christian University, Oradea, Romania
Department of Arts
E-mail: bodonitunde@partium.ro

Abstract:

At the beginning of cinema, in his early twentieth-century research the Soviet director and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein developed his theory of associative montage "1+1=3." Nowadays, new methods have been added to this theory.

These variables include the creative re-use of allusions to film history. In contemporary cinema, when a new archive film uses sequences from cinema heritage, it quotes from the past and can activate visually and content-wise complex cultural memories. In these films, the successive placement of two sequences, beyond their association, creates new associative meaning, thus, it calls forth *metacinematic associations*. This additional meaning is the imprint of cinematic heritage. *Final Cut* by György Pálfi and Péter Lichter's works make use of the archives of cinematic heritage through a reinterpreted film language, attempting to create independent, innovative works of art. They use the same starting point, based on a directorial concept, but the two attempts resulted in completely different motion pictures. Due to the approach at the basis of their conception, these films illustrate both the linear, i.e., the archetypal narrative film representation and the nonlinear narration. However, these films are not only defined by the scenes they are compiled of, but also bear the particularities of the original motion pictures, referring to and going far beyond the individual characteristics of the scenes themselves. Despite being linear narrative films, the cinematic rhetoric of neither motion picture is continuous but associative - they bring into play layers of film culture. Overall, Eisenstein's formula can be extended in the following way: 1 afs (archive film sequence) + 1 afs (archive film sequence) = 3 mca (*metacinematic associations*).

Keywords: archive film art, found footage, *metacinematic association*

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> The most frightening experience I've ever had—and the most impossible to describe—is that of border crossings. I'm talking about the border between everyday life and various other conditions I'm acquainted with but that are as difficult to describe as death. (Ulickaja, 2008, p. 101)

The quotation became the motto of my research about *archive film art found footage productions* due to the feeling it suggests. Some cinematic works are highly interesting due to the criteria prevalent in post-production, namely in terms of editing. In this case–having stepped out of the box of imagistic thought–I also cross borders, those between the visual and verbal mode of creation. Thus, I do not wish to undertake the examination of the topic from the point of view of film theory, film aesthetics, or the history of film; instead, having experience in film editing and post-production work, I wish to focus on the technical side and on the layout of the films' visuals. The present paper is the forerunner of a motion picture experiment in progress. I hypothesize that on the one hand, the border crossing in *archive film art found footage productions* takes place due to the usage of works of film history; on the other hand, it is realized in the wide-ranged game of associations. This border lies between recognition of the archive film footage used in the new cinematic production and the realization of the new context. In order to know the origins of *archive film art found footage works* a brief overview about the beginnings of cinema is needed. However, for this, the ever-expanding collection of volumes written about the subject is available as teaching material as well. A general picture of the subgenre is offered through a range of samples of film history that are close to the above-mentioned border crossing and thus to the characteristics of the *archive film art found footage productions*. The most important criteria that I wish to keep in mind (in cinematic terms as well) are the following: leaving behind the comfort zone of cinematic paradigms, the extent to which the game of associations is realized in the new production, and the power of the imagistic line of thoughts. The selection of works under scrutiny is not made based on the scenes utilized; neither is it my goal to enumerate all productions concerned from the film archives, as if the latter were merely a databank. I am highlighting only the cinematic productions that contribute to the investigation of the notions of *archive film art found footage productions* and to that of *metacinematic association*, generated by the first one. The process of association starts when the first quoted frame from the film archive appears. Besides the recognition on a heuristic level, I find it even more important that an associative roaming in the film archives comes into existence, irrespective of any previous knowledge about the source productions, even beyond that, on the level of social history.

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The beginnings of *archive film art found footage productions* are as old as film. Imprints of our vast cinema heritage are strongly present in contemporary visual (mass)culture. Due to the quick diffusion of information, certain elements of cinematic rhetoric are activated as independent formulas, they become known to a wide range of receivers/ users who may not have any prior knowledge or experience in the field. The great number of digitalized images available nowadays evidently lends itself to recycling. Similar to *intertextuality* or *patch-work in literature* and *ready-made, post production* or *appropriation art* in visual art, recycling and reinterpretation such as *archival found footage* appears in cinema as well (Bourriaud, 2007).

I find it of paramount importance in the case of *archive film art found footage productions* that they generate *metacinematic associations* the motion pictures that–due to the current digitalized online means–have become part of common knowledge. One of the footages that have become iconic is the Odessa steps scene. In the modern digitalized cinematic virtual world it appears in thousands of online image references, transcripts, and film clips. In 1925, Eisenstein produced one of the most well-known productions of film heritage, *Battleship Potemkin*, a black and white silent film. The production illustrates the basic tenets of the theory of montage. The most famous stairs scene expresses the emotional build-up in dramaturgy using cinematic rhetoric: dynamics, composition, change of shots. The stairs scene, which has become iconic in cinematography, expresses eternal brutality, cruelty. The dramatic extreme long shots, in which the soldiers march on the stairs against the fleeing crowd, alternate with close-up shots of suffering people. The baby carriage rolling down on the stairs has become so well-known that it is one of the school examples of illustrating montage (Bárdos, 1986). Through montage, Eisenstein explores the wide range of cinematic rhetoric, not resuming only to the employment of the continuity of action and chronological order, thus triggering intense emotional effects and associations.

> … no montage sequence exists in isolation but it is in the nature of a partial depiction of the single overall theme which in equal degree pervades all the sequences. The juxtaposition of other such partial details in a particular montage structure evokes in the spectator's perception that common essence which generated each separate element and binds them together into a whole, and specifically into that generalized image through which the author (and after him the spectator) has experienced the theme of the film in question. (Eisenstein, 1938, p. 299)

The stairs scene in *Potemkin* has been imprinted in the (sub)conscious cultural association that is being formed in our visually satiated world. The abundance of images

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nowadays makes iconic film images known to anyone. This apprehension sometimes lacks accurate knowledge, information. The superficial knowledge of the scene may trigger deep associations because the digital spread and use of sequences on the internet activates images from the early stages of film heritage in a wider group of viewers, not only in the devotees of cinematic art. The familiar feeling, the often-experienced image triggers certain additional information both in terms of content and form. For example, the technical parameters of film, such as the authentic format of the film and its aspect ratio are not the typical widescreen HD display we are accustomed to nowadays. The barely perceivable flicker is the particularity of the celluloid material the film is made of. The costumes, hair, and make-up of the actors on the screen reflect the period in which the film was produced. All these together, even without an in-depth insight concerning the film, carry the marks that rouse up layers of association of cultural film heritage to the contemporary viewer.

Similarly, another scene in the online visual material database that has also become iconic is the razor blade sequence in *An Andalusian Dog*. Salvador Dali, in collaboration with Luis Bunuel in 1928, creates the masterpiece of the Surrealist short film, *An Andalusian Dog.* In the opening sequence, an ideal associative version of montage is realized (Kiss, 2001). The shots of the opening scene introduce, suggest, and present the horror while alluding to the opening of the seeing eye, typical of Surrealism. The shots placed one after the other reflect upon each other, like the blade held in front of the wide-opened eye and the thin ribbon of cloud swimming in front of the moon. However, in the storyline, it also triggers layers of association, such as one of the most important aims of avant-garde art, the expanding of visual perception (Kiss, 2001). The specific frame becomes schematic, the blade held in front of the woman's eye in the close-up shot awakens associations, not only as memorabilia of film history, but it also pulls up memories of social history. The close-up on the actress shows the typical woman's face of the 1920s: the big, wide-open eyes are in contrast with the narrowed lips with lipstick. The entire make-up and the wavy hair parted to one side jointly conjure up the ideal woman of that era. The age-specific technical particularities of the shot, like black-and-white, silent; its texture shows the characteristics of celluloid, such as grains, dust, scratches, and the slight vibration of light, as well as the mild trembling are all signs indicating the beginning of cinema.

The by-now iconic sequences generate *metacinematic associations* both by themselves and put in a new context. Thus, their appearance in *archive film art found footage productions* entails far more than mere identification and euphoric recognition. Among the many exciting productions, I would like to highlight two illustrative examples–two

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pieces of film art that apply different cinematic rhetoric, these are two *archive film art found footage* that happen to have been produced using two different post-production procedures: *Final Cut* by György Pálfi and Péter Lichter's *The Rub*. Although the two productions were created using completely different cinematic rhetoric, they both invoke film heritage productions. In Pálfi's film classic cinematic productions in the film archives, heroes and scenes that have become iconic are used, while Lichter recycles scenes that have not become iconic.

It is important to understand in connection with *archive film art found footage productions* the contrast and the connection that lie behind the continuous narrative mode of films and nonlinear narrative. The application of the two procedures completely differentiates the productions, however, they are not mutually exclusive, either both or their combination can be seen in a given production. Pálfi's and Lichter's above-mentioned productions illustrate the differences between the two types. While *Final Cut* applies the method of linear film narrative, *The Rub* handles the visual tools in a more associative manner and realizes continuity by means of sound through narration, and the repetition and rhythmic dramaturgy of certain visual elements. Therefore, it may be asserted that due to Hollywood large-scale film productions, the linear narrative spreads, and the storytelling based on canonical patterns make up the story (Bordwell, 1996). My assumption is that this may also be an important particularity of *archive film art found footage productions* since this is the basic cinematic rhetoric applied in, as the director himself declares. At the same time, in the educational material that accompanied the film, Balázs Varga offers a comprehensive picture of the origins of film history relevant to the production and also provides a precise description of the rules and procedures at the basis of this production (Varga, 2014). According to Báron, the linear narrative means that every image conveys the amount of information that is needed to understand the previous and the next sequence. In this type of storytelling, the various shots are consequences of the previous ones and represent a transition to the following ones. The story, apart from the unambiguously marked flash-backs and the dream sequences, progresses in chronological order. It has a beginning and an end and there is an explanation of the reasons for the conflict unfolding before us, the emergence and denouement of which are presented. The viewers feel that they received all the necessary information and that nothing has been concealed from them (Báron 1999). The rules of editing that ensure linear storytelling in film, which triggers the sense of continuity, take concrete shape. What is primary in linear storytelling is creating the illusion of continuity; it is important to guide and steer the viewer's attention and to present the location. Continuity editing, in other words, match-cut, serves the clear interpretation of the story, it illustrates the plot

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in an understandable way (Smith, 2012). The stage of the action must become a genuine location so that the space visible in the shot and unperceivable outside the shot together should create the feeling of a three-dimensional real space. The Hollywood storytelling film creates this by employing tools of visual storytelling such as: framing/ the shots (the camera's distance from the objects in focus, their size on the screen, the compositions/ shots: extreme close-up, close-up, close, medium close, cowboy, full, long); camera focus (depth of field, that is what is in the camera's focus); spatial arrangement (depth of focus: how various objects relate in the shot). One of the most common tools of match-cut is the 180°-rule, according to which every shot of the same object must be filmed on the same side of the axis, but there must be at least 30° between the two cameras to avoid discontinuity. Match-action also serves continuity, this is when a certain movement, action begins in one shot and after editing ends in the following shot, thus, suggesting both spacial and temporal continuity (Vincze, 2010). Naturally, the broad interpretation of those rules and breaking them if deemed appropriate during post-production do occur as part of the creative process that goes along with artistic freedom. Thus, despite *Final Cut* being created along the lines of linear film narrative, it defies the rules of match-cut by interpreting them broadly. At the same time, due to triggering *metacinematic associations*, the nonlinear film narrative is an equally important cinematic rhetoric.

 Due to narration via sound, *The Rub* has a continuous narrative in some sense. However, the visual composition is far more associative; it is a visual experiment between abstract formal play and transcription of film archive. In this respect, in order to outline the sources of *archive film art found footage productions*, we must consider the experimental films as well that do not present action through the Hollywood pattern, the classical linear narrative. Although the experimental films mostly use the Hollywood narrative to a certain degree, beyond the process needed to ensure narrative continuity, they walk on the thin line between real and unreal. They are pushing the limits between real and surreal, thus, in many cases leaving the comfort zone, they create shocking images both in terms of form and content. Later, this tendency surfaces in the recycling of archive film productions. These employ an upgraded Hollywood narrative since they both present associative montage of the by-now iconic sequences. This tendency is present in both *Final Cut* and *The Rub*, albeit to a different degree and manner. The difference is due to Pálfi's objective as a director, which is to turn into one story the various sequences taken from film heritage, Lichter aims to be more adventurous and achieve more comprehensive productions using film archive. Naturally, both productions are preceded by numerous outstanding archive film art creations either in terms of narrative or experimental motion picture.

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In the early period of film, when generally speaking, while the Soviet film theorists believe montage–the rapport between images, the relation between them–plays a decisive role, German theorists believe in the power of the image and simultaneity. In the same time, in Hollywood, the classical film narrative is being developed and besides filming new raw material, the recycling, re-cutting of previous productions also appeared. Thus, f*ound-footage*, *supercut films*, that is *archive film art* appeared in the early periods already. The latter is the term coined by Christa Blümlinger, which is applied mainly in the German experimental film theory (Cowan, 2013). In the US, it was in 1936 Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart*, a 20-minute long supercut film is a fan-made re-cut of East of Borneo produced in 1931. Even though this recycling was not done based on an artistic conception, as far as its genre and mode of production are concerned, it is a forerunner of experimental archive cinema because it recuts an already existing film. In 1958 Bruce Conner stitches together current and found sequences from a broad range of genres. The marks appearing on the frames, the subtitles function as raw material equivalent to parts from B-category and erotic films or even cuttings from newscasts. The 12-minute *A Movie* can be considered an early experimental found footage, which utilizes older films and offers an overall universal feeling of the world. Due to the spread of the super8, the 16-millimeter films, and that of video technique, numerous found-footage pieces are created with a similar technique. The already-produced found raw material is re-cut, but in many cases, they are parodies, not the representation of a comprehensive worldview. The works of art, which recycle through re-editing, put in a new context existing movie clips. Not only do they present the properties of found-footage or supercut, but also they are independent works of art as well. Thus, they can be considered found-footage archive cinema. There are several experiments within the genre, such as Arthur Lipsett's *21-87* production in 1963, which places in new context various previously produced movie clips both in terms of content and cutting. The widespread distribution of the amateur video technique generates the remix in the 1980s including the re-cut of found home videos as well (Konkol, 2018). Irrespective of the films' length, the challenge of reinterpretation lies in the re-editing and the artistic aim is to call forth new contents. Matthias Müller's *Home Stories* (1990) collects scenes of struggling housewives of the 1950s from Hollywood productions into one melodramatic continuous stream. Due to the dramatic musical underscore and the same chain of motions repeating over and over again, the production is a real feat. The plot can be considered a linear storyline, which the artist guides through from the lonely room scene through the open door until an outer sign comes from the non-diegetic world. The exaggerated emphasis is placed on the dramatic moments of the archetype of the American housewife fluctuating through several players. The typical

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Hollywood pattern, the linear storytelling technique is realized employing a common tool, that is, he uses the match-cut while repeating the shots. Therefore, some parts of the plot of various films are repeated once or even more. In the shot presenting classical continuity, even a few frames of repeated movement would be a mistake, but the pace of *Home Stories* is given by this cyclic repetition. Following a similar directorial concept dominates Christian Marclay's *Telephones* (1995). He links scenes from various Hollywood films into one telephone conversation. In this case, the linear storytelling starts from the ringing of the phone through picking the receiver up and talking on the phone to the receiver being hung up. The numerous actors, from different ages, differing locations, and in different visual settings react to the phone ring. Editing the reactions upon each other and upholding a silent moment from time to time heightens the tension in the film, creating a telephone conversation that has not been directed and pre-recorded and which does not even have a script written beforehand. The artist produces his grandiose found-footage archival film, *The Clock* in 2011 in the twenty-first-century digitalized post-production studio. The basic tenet of the film is putting film sequences in a new context, that is also (self-)reflection on time. In this 24-hour piece, the linear storyline is time itself because the scenes picked from film archive and put in chronological order make up and present an entire day. Besides signaling exactly the time in the current time zone, the scenes are linked to each other mostly based on the principle of continuity, more than a thousand films intertwine according to the rules of match-cut. The watch and the events taking place around it on the locations mentioned in the film, the performances of the actors taken from various other films, and the overarching soundtrack together result in a meditative piece, respectively, through cinema heritage a new work of art is created, which stands as an *archive film art found footage production* as well (King, 2015).

At the same time, György Pálfi's film the *Final Cut* is being made in Hungary. Based on a similar directorial concept, they combine an archetypical found-footage piece from hundreds of other films. The story is common, the timeless love story between a man and a woman is presented through numerous actors' performance and cinematic rhetoric. The action is presented in the vein of the canonical linear film narrative based on the rules of match-cut mostly. In connection with his film production *Final Cut*, György Pálfi claims that one of his principles is that there are no new stories only shifts of emphasis and slight formal changes in the archaic stories with the help of which these stories may be presented to the viewer (Kovács, 2012). The archetypal story is materialized, the linear plotline can be traced through the masterpieces of film history. In this case, the typical story is the pattern between man and woman. *Final Cut* is built without disturbing the source images through the wide range of post-production procedures. The colors,

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the contrast, the aspect ratio remain untouched. In the trailer, one can see scenes from several films (such as Avatar (2009), Hair (1979), Psycho (1960), and many others) with various technical and visual characteristics, with different color grading, some of them black and white, others colored.

The question occurs that unless the primary aim is not the creation of an educational resource, must creators adhere to the strict rules laid down by artists? Visual-wise, the film could have been unified on the level of style through simple post-production procedures, either by color grading or by reshaping the aspect ratio. Therefore, an experiment I performed—the alteration of the film's trailer—illustrated that synchronizing cinematic rhetoric (beyond editing) does not always benefit the film. I made the color correction scene by scene in the trailer, so that in the end they became black and white and I also fitted the picture size of the frames. Stylistic unity is created, but at the same time, it loses the extra layers of meaning present in *archive film art found footage productions*. In the visually unified material, the *metacinematic associations* are terminated, that is, the extra content carried by the films—such as the evocation of a given time or the actual presence of the atmosphere of the movie—gets obliterated. Without the colors and without the difference between frame sizes the extra content from the whole film is eliminated.

I hypothesize, since schematic stories are formulated by a motion picture using cinematic rhetoric, then the storytelling is archetypal. In other words, if the film narrative places the chain of events in a typical pattern, then we may call this archetypal film narrative. The definition of archetypal film narrative includes the linear, canonical storytelling and the film transcription of archetypes. According to Jung, the definition of archetypes is the symbolic formulae originating from the collective unconscious (Jung, 2010, p. 356). This definition is connected to types of psychological character, but in the case of *Final Cut* and of most archetypal films the story they present is archetypal. Thus they become symbolic stories inspired by the collective film heritage. Pálfi tells the story of everlasting love, selecting his material from a range of 500 films. The major stations of his story are the woman, the man, the first look, the acquaintance, shared adventures, the kiss, making love, misunderstanding, breaking up, sorrow, finding each other, and the final separation or death (Varga, 2014). Bordwell and Jung's common denominator is that the archetypal film consists of patterns that become a canonical story activated in the receiver's unconscious. If an archival film becomes a typical story, the archetypal film narrative is joined by the particularity of found-footages, the recycled raw material, and the recollection of parts of film heritage. Thus, the re-cycled archive films that have an archetypical narrative should be called archetypal *archive film art found footage*

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production. Examples for these would be the love story in *Final Cut*, the dialogues in Christian Marclay's *Telephones*, the linear passing of time in *The Clock*, as well as the melodrama of American housewives in Matthias Müller's *Home Stories*. Also, in Hungary, since 2000 Péter Lichter produces such pieces, most of his works are archetypal found-footage archive films, but he does not apply the linear film narrative either in the chain of events or as far as continuity is concerned. In the motion picture *The Rub* (2018), created together with Bori Máté, the relationships between images and content are abstract associations of ideas and, in many cases, carry open associations. Sound and image do not relate based on fixed rules, or direct connections, the distant coupling creates new meaning, new content, and associations. The film archive is quoted by showing the flaws of the raw material, by emphasizing the technical particularities of the film–such as the film perforations, footage numbers, and date–which constitute extra-information relevant from the point of view history of film technology. On the other hand, in the motion picture the actual film sequences from the archive material appear, not only from fictional feature films but also from old newscasts,–and in the opening and closing images the motion logos of American major film production companies come to life. The logos are iconic images that are easily recognizable and trigger associations related to watching film and film theatres. At the same time, the promise of quality by the sign of the brand are transcribed into images that appear accompanied by film noise, haltingly, unclear, or even upside down, thus, upsetting the stable, identifiable film period and the professional company's credit. Besides all these, through the entire film the animation drawn on the raw material appears, that is the scribble showing the characters and the emulsion-like abstract color patches. The plot of the action is discernable on the audio track, in the male voiceover narration, in a kind of linearity. However, the dramaturgy is realized through the alternation–rhythmic formation–of three different visual elements, triggering the *metacinematic association* through Hamlet. On the whole, the film creates a special film form language on the level of style without aestheticizing or using aimlessly using the visual marks. Thus, it does not reinterpret montage through stitching so-far untouched elements in the film archive; in other words, it does not recycle our film heritage through nonlinear narrative, but through images and sound, and thus by applying it, they reinterpret associative montage.

Based on the films mentioned above, I hypothesize that *archive film art found footage* pieces may display linearity in terms of action or time, these carry the canonical scheme, thus they are archetypal *archive film art found footage works*. Besides these, there are associative *archive film art found footage works* that do not present the narrative based on action or chronology, but suggest a global impression about the topic. In both cases,

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to the 1+1=3 formula, new content is added, which consists of the creative re-cycling of references to the history of film. If in contemporary cinema, a new *archive film art found footage* uses sequences from cinema heritage, it quotes from the past and can activate visually and content-wise complex cultural memories. In these films, the successive placement of two sequences, beyond the association it evokes, creates new associative meaning, thus, the film calls forth *metacinematic associations*. Therefore, in the re-cycled archive cinema works of art, the association evoked by the successive placement of two sequences draws a circle spiraling upwards because the same association takes place as in associative montage only with a surplus. This bonus is the imprint of cinematic heritage. The archive film art found-footage works are not only defined by the scenes they are compiled of, but also bear the particularities of the original motion pictures, referring to and going far beyond the individual characteristics of the scenes themselves. On the one hand, linear storytelling is created through cinematic rhetoric; however, the visual elements are not homogenous because every episode represents a different vision. The general effect in these cases brings into effect associative, collective even, layers of cinematic culture. Overall, Eisenstein's formula can be extended in the following way: 1 afs (archive film sequence) + 1 afs (archive film sequence) = 3 mca (*metacinematic associations*). The archive film section, on the one hand, reflects the physical particularities of the age the film was produced in; on the other hand, they suggest the social realities of the age as well as represent a kind of visual presence. All these pieces of information together trigger a certain association of ideas in the viewer, in various proportions and with varying content irrespective of the degree of familiarity with the topic. At the same time, perhaps the film from which the sequence is taken from may be known to the viewer. This variant is a kind of knowledge that depends on the previous cultural experience of the receiver, and it may influence the quality of the general effect triggered by the production but it does not question the formation of *metacinematic associations*. All in all, as far as impressions are concerned, there is no unity from the point of view of style because various visual sequences of film archive are built-in together. Besides the aesthetical pleasure and comprehension, deep cultural reception based on *metacinematic associations* also takes place.

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Filmography:

Eisenstein S. (Director). 1925 *Battleship Potemkin [Film]*
Bunuel L. & Dali S. (Directors). 1929 *An Andalusian Dog [Film]*
Recycled Films:
Cornell J. (Director). 1936 *Rose Hobart [Film]*.
Conner C. (Director). 1958 A Movie *[Film]*
Lipsett A. (Director). 1963 *21-87 [Film]*
Müller M. (Director). 1990 *Home Stories [Film]*
Marclay C. (Director). 1995 *Telephones [Film]*
Marclay C. (Director). 2010 *The Clock [Film]*
Pálfi Gy. (Director). 2012 *Final Cut*: *Ladies and Gentlemen[Film]*
Lichter P. & Máté B. (Directors). 2018 *The Rub [Film]*

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