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FOUND FOOTAGE & COLLAGE FILMS: THE ARTIST'S VOICE.

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**Abstract:**

This volume, \*Found Footage & Collage Film\*, edited by César Ustarroz, explores the artistic practice and cultural significance of found footage filmmaking through over forty essays by international experimental filmmakers and scholars. The book presents found footage as a form of cultural and psychological inquiry, emphasizing its role in recontextualizing images to challenge historical power structures and archival violence. Contributors discuss found footage as both a material transformation and a process of translation, while also addressing ethical concerns around appropriation and ownership. The collection highlights the evolving politics of found footage, noting that its subversive potential now lies in reclamation and context rather than mere image appropriation. [Extracted from the article]

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# FOUND FOOTAGE & COLLAGE FILMS: THE ARTIST'S VOICE

## **FOUND FOOTAGE & COLLAGE FILMS: THE ARTIST'S VOICE**

**Edited by César Ustarroz, Found Footage Magazine (2025)**

Found Footage & Collage Film, edited by Found Footage Magazine founder César Ustarroz to mark the magazine's tenth anniversary, is as striking as it is substantial. Beautifully designed by Cristina Martínez, the book evokes the reverence of a sacred text; and for the devoted, it just might be. It gathers over forty writings from prominent figures-veteran artists whose practices span experimental film, supercuts, video essay, and essay film traditions. As with any anthology, there are notable absences, although many writers are quick to acknowledge their peers. In particular, Peggy Ahwesh offers a concise history of the form. That her piece appears first is incidental as the essays are arranged alphabetically; nonetheless, it provides a strong beginning.

Ustarroz describes found footage filmmaking as guided by a "weaver's purpose in sewing together a film with images from previous times" (8). Yet the book itself lacks a strong curatorial thread making it unlikely that anyone beyond a fanatic will approach it sequentially. Instead, it encourages random encounters and serendipitous juxtaposition. The contributors are impressively international and the book is the result of an editor who honours the artist's voice.

The book offers multiple definitions of found footage filmmaking. Abigail Child suggests found footage is a form of cultural DNA, "a cultural history, a cultural epigenetics even as it is a cultural critique" (41). Mike Hoolboom extends this DNA metaphor by stretching Blaine Allan's concept of "parent footage" (145). [ 1 ] Hoolboom employs a Freudian approach to examine the memories, ideologies, and bias of our parental inheritance, the psychological rough cut from which we're all assembled. Similarly, Matthias Müller also turns his attention inward to the emotional and psychological drives behind collecting and reworking found images. He asks, "What void is supposedly being filled here by a myriad of images, which trauma obscured by find after find? Is the motor the longing to simply lose oneself? Or possibly to find oneself in these fleeting moments?" (233). His questions suggest that the act of reassembling found material is a form of self-inquiry-an effort to navigate identity through dense layers of contemporary visual culture.

Alberte Pagán offers a more materialist analogy: "found footage is an existing manufactured product, transformed back into raw material" (239). Others frame it less as recycling and more as translation. Keith Sanborn likens it to "the process of translation from one language to another" (274). Jayce Salloum poses a polemical but provocative question, asking "isn't all footage found once it enters the lens and is spit out of the camera?" (266). We can push this concept further suggesting that the cameraperson found the composition, the moment in time, and the time required to create the image.

Soda Jerk's piece is both humorous and poignant, and will likely find a permanent place on many undergraduate media studies syllabi that address contemporary experimental cinema practices. They suggest that those working in the lineage of Jonas Mekas have lost, lost, lost, while mega-corporations and right-wing meme warriors-who now employ the techniques and philosophies pioneered by found footage artists-have won, won, won. Their central question is urgent: how is it rebellious to "steal images" when corporations like Google and OpenAI operate under the assumption that everything on the internet is fair game for commodification? Compare the audiences of most found footage films with the viral reach of Trump memes crafted from appropriated materials. Meme creators are rarely

asked the question that inevitably arises at underground screenings: "Did you get permission to use these images?"

The most powerful essays in the book are by artists directly confronting the politics of found footage filmmaking. While many contributors see themselves as aesthetic outlaws or image thieves, it seems clear that the use of found footage is no longer inherently subversive. As such, the politics seemingly lies in the act of reclamation and recontextualization. As Su Friedrich writes, "That's one of the wonderful (and dangerous?) things about using found footage: context is everything" (102).

Echoing this point, Pagán argues that "images mean nothing because they can mean anything, one thing and the opposite: only context can limit and define their meaning" (240). However, Soda Jerk complicates this further, arguing that "images are not just representations of pre-existing conditions; they're wildly complex semiotic terrains that condition perpetual, affective and behavioural responses" (293). While meanings may shift, images carry a residual force buried within them. Rania Stephan reinforces this with a poetic insight: "we watch these archival images with memories of their past viewings. These two temporalities are superimposed in the present" (301). Found footage carries within it affective histories which are placed into a new context.

Recontextualizing is a way of challenging the oppressive power structures and past violence hidden within the archives themselves. As Jyoti Mistry explains:

Recontextualization arguably is a procedure of unarchiving-if the characteristic of archives is inherently one of violence in which power affirms the rule of law. Working against the grain of these procedures is an opportunity to confront the historical violence inflicted and experienced. More significantly, it becomes the occasion to remember (the violence and its consequences) (218).

Consider Kamal Aljafari's *A Fidai Film* (2024), constructed from archival material housed in Israeli institutions-footage seized from Palestinian archives during the 1982 invasion of Beirut. Aljafari sees the project as "sabotaging the colonial gaze," (27) reclaiming not just the images, but the power over one's own histories. Hoolboom, riffing on Canadian author Marcus Boon's *In Praise of Copying*, reminds us that "most of what we call history is arguably the history of appropriation, and the history of one group stealing from another group" (147). Granted, this opens up many ethical considerations. As Richard Misek cautions, "all forms of found footage filmmaking and artistic appropriation are by their nature interventions into the institution of property" (209). He warns that artists must remain vigilant to ensure that their work doesn't replicate the same extractive logic that underpins capitalist appropriation.

This volume addresses a readership that extends beyond academia while simultaneously providing primary sources for scholars of experimental cinema. The collection exemplifies what many contributors describe as the inherently democratizing ethos of found footage: meaningful engagement with the images that saturate contemporary life requires neither academic training nor substantial financial resources.

1 *Hoolboom attributes the phrase to William Wees but it was more likely coined by Blaine Allan in "David Rimmer's Surfacing on the Thames," CineTracts, no. 9 (Winter 1980): 56-61.*

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