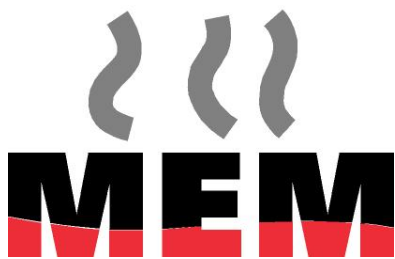


# **EXPERIMENTAL FILM WORKSHOP**

Run by  
**Collectif Négatif**

**3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2009.**  
**BilbaoArte**

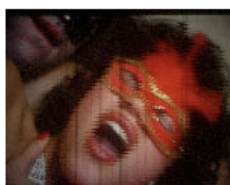


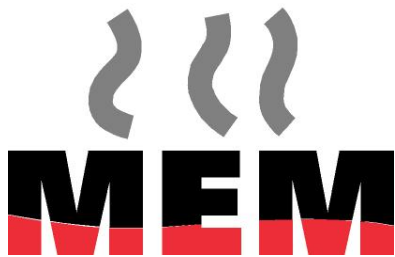
## EXPERIMENTAL FILM WORKSHOP

### COLLECTIF NÉGATIF

Collectif Négatif is a collective based in Paris made up of experimental film artists from various origins.

The members of the collective include: Yves-Marie Mahé, Derek Woolfenden, Boris Du Boullay, Tony Tonnerre, Vân Ta-Minh, Julien Bibard, François Rabet,...





### **Programme:**

October 2009. América. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Screening of the films made by the Collective and presentation of the book, "Found Footage", coordinated by Txema Agiriano and Noé Cornago. This book will be published in collaboration with MEM & América.

31<sup>st</sup> October 2009. Optica Festival. Gijón. Screening of films by the Collective in the MEM programme for this festival.

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2009. 11:00. Salón de Grados. Faculty of Fine Art. University of the Basque country, Leioa. Lecture to introduce the Collective and the workshop, and screening of films.

3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2009. 15:00-20:00. BilbaoArte. Experimental Cinema Workshop with Collectif Négatif.

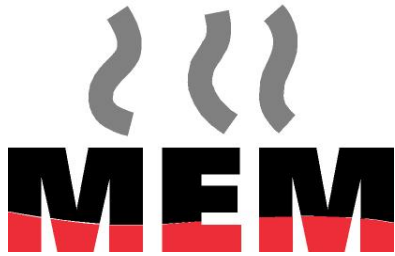
6<sup>th</sup> November 2009. 19:00. Performance and presentation of the work produced at the Workshop.

Devised and organised by: MEM.  
Curator: Txema Agiriano.

Collaborators:  
BilbaoArte.  
Faculty of Fine Art, University of the Basque Country (Kontxa Elorza).  
Faculty of Social Sciences & Information, University of the Basque Country (Noé Cornago).  
América.

Subsidised by:  
Department of Cooperation and Cultural Activity of the French Embassy in Spain,  
Department of Culture of the Basque Government,  
Department of Culture of Bizkaia Provincial Council,  
Department of Culture of Alava Provincial Council.  
Bilbao City Council Culture Section.

**MEM - COLLECTIF NÉGATIF - BILBAOARTE**



## REGARDING COLLECTIF NEGATIF

*"The personal is political."* (Slogan from the 1970s).

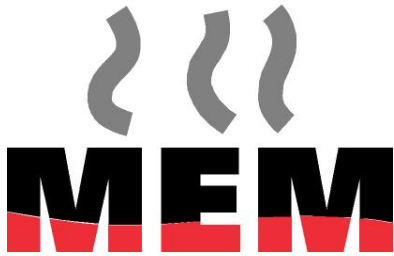
*"The huge majority of people have the courage to live their lives; very few have the courage to represent them."* Jean-Luc Godard.

From the subject we deal with to the finished cinematic object, our films are *"irretrievable"*. As a result, we go from our own clearly emotional and often depressive feelings, to an uncompromising social critique of political events and monolithic Judeo-Christian traditions.

This critique may be like an explosion, as in the case of Yves-Marie Mahé & Derek Woolfenden and so is expressed by a series of clearly recognisable motifs taken out of their mundane context. In the case of Borís Du Boullay & Tony Tonnerre it is concentrated and closed off in order to disturb the audience better who recognise a kind of violence that they generally conceal. For Vân Ta-Minh, it is a non-critique, that is even indifferent to the popular political questions that surround us, and is devoted to transforming the medium of the camera into a modest, valuable piece of craftwork; that is, to free it from all the moral and social contingencies that it is systematically associated with.

Making films that are *irretrievable* is also a way of protecting ourselves from critics seduced by the aesthetic side of cinema. We do not deny the aesthetic dimension of cinema, but we do not want to encourage "the good taste" that increasingly spoils the perception and critical vision of films. We want to make films that rebel against the very idea of comfort. We are not here to help the audience to escape from reality, nor do we want to fire any kind of message at them, but we are not against this either. We are really an instinctive, impulsive and raw step towards...

Escapism or providing a moral or educational expression in a film? Why not! Even though this is not the aim of the project. We don't want to form a mould or a compartment, prepared for the comfort of critics and audience. Our films contain violence. First of all especially against ourselves, and then because we publicly air our emotional problems that we shamelessly share with the audience.



*"Every fear conceals a desire, and the things that we are most afraid of secretly lie in wait to be made reality."* ("Edmond", a play by David Mamet transferred to the big screen by Stuart Gordon).

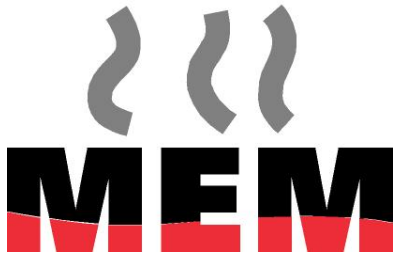
Our collective is not a series of dogmas. We don't write manifestos, but we do want to get rid of complexes and make cinema something that the audience can touch, and even make it organic. We don't want to isolate the audience and make them inferior, but make them identify with our films, and share their problems in them so they can expel them better thanks to our bodies, the grain of video, the skin of the film, our pixels, our mistakes, our imperfections, our orifices and our scars!

*"A film shouldn't be ashamed of its scars."* René Vautier.

### **Le Grand Détournement** (The great diversion)

*"Things exist only if something happens to them; if they are displaced from their usual framework and stop using the same words to define them. Out of this displacement emerges something real with a powerful meaning."* (André S. Labarthe, "Les Périphériques vous parlent", n°18, 2004, p.4).

However what basically unites all of us is this need to divert what we see and re-appropriate this not by following the opportunistic logic so typical of advertising agencies, but by using an inconsolably emotional logic. To strip the dominant form of cinema of all its standard moral or political discourse: so that we can transform the dominant cinema into playful, nihilist, intimist and sexual works.

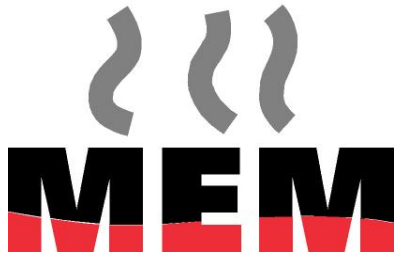


## Found Footage

By Maite Alberdi

The numerous images that are currently being created could become more valuable in the future if they were recovered by others. These new characters might wish to assemble a story of their own based on fragments from the past, or revise a culture and a method of producing images that you become aware of as time goes by. Old records usually arouse a certain degree of sociological historical nostalgia, and this feeling is what occurs when you watch found footage films. This "movement" takes the idea of thinking about cinema as an art of the present that recovers old material, and brings it up to date by basically improving its form and retaining its archive value- which does not mean that the images preserve their original meaning.

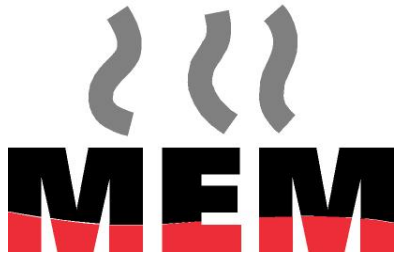
Found footage comes from various sources: historic, pornographic or family films, TV pictures, etc... regardless of their original classification, once they are discovered by the filmmaker they are all potentially usable materials. The places where they are recovered also vary; some are film library archives, family archives, libraries, markets and even films found in the rubbish. William Wees [1] thinks that to recycle found footage it is possible that all you need is to find it and show it to someone who appreciates it. From his point of view any material found and exhibited as such becomes part of what he understands to be found footage films, "many films are perfect as they are, and are perfectly revealing unconsciously or semi-consciously" [2].



Nevertheless, there are other options for this group of filmmakers: most of them reassemble the material they find, and create fresh content by editing or highlighting certain implications of the original film. Peter Delpout in "Lyrical Nitrate"- 1990- shows complete clips from films from the 1930s and alters them using images of the audience that attend film screenings in that period, and plays with their reactions when they watch these films; the alternating syntagms provide an interpretation that Delpout offers in the present of the results of these films on the audience of that period. The director idealises unknown members of the audience by playing at showing films in their own context; films that he himself has retrieved and that perhaps were never screened, but he takes the liberty of creating a production in which while we watch the footage, this is also viewed by the audience that it was intended for. "Lyrical Nitrate" preserves the contents of the original films; however, these form part of a new film that refers to cinema and its production and distribution processes.

The third kind of film are ones in which the material has been worked on, not just by editing it, but by intervening on it by radically changing its appearance by using various methods, for example: by scratching it, making holes in it, cutting it, painting it, etc... in this way the technique used can be seen. The influence on the audience will mainly depend on its new visual appearance; these alterations show the basic aim that these filmmakers are trying to achieve of taking possession of images that do not belong to them, and make them their own through recycling. "The visual effects added by filmmakers reassert their ability to recover the sphere of public images for personal use" [3].

Recycling is a basic feature of found footage; thanks to this the images are freed from any political, ideological and aesthetic functions that they had in their original context and they become part of a new context, in which the director imposes a different meaning on them. Although there will always be a degree of self-referentiality here, in found footage filmmakers have the capacity to ensure that these images that do not belong to them can be used for their purposes by editing them. This process becomes the recycling

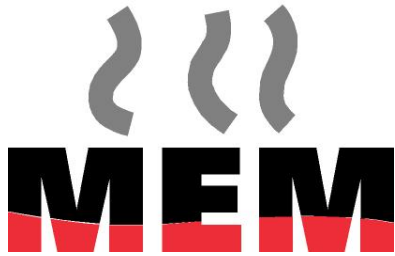


machine that totally or partially transforms the contents, while in most cases maintaining the form of the fragments. This recycling process is a result of the fascination that creators have for the materials that have been discovered; their intention is not to destroy them but to possess them in a certain way. Noel Burch refers to this sense of enchantment: "as filmmakers, we will retain the fascination that creators may feel when looking at and "revealing" objects and materials that have not been created by them, but which they think are even more beautiful insofar as they are not originally theirs..." [4]

We may be aware of the fact that the practice of making new films out of clips from others that already exist is very old; we could even consider the experimentation carried out by certain Russian formalists to form part of this kind of work. As a result it is difficult to define the origin of found footage. Despite the fact that this practice goes a long way back, it has never been established as a film genre recognised by audiences, and so the screening circuits for these films have been specialised film festivals such as the "Found footage film festival" in New York. This lack of an audience is perfectly in keeping with the political and ideological ideas put forward by this "movement". It can be pointed out that all found footage films include an implicit critique of the conventional film industry and media; this questioning process is linked to the standard forms of representation produced by the mass media, which provide images that destroy the audience's capacity to reflect on these. A lot of the materials retrieved by filmmakers have been produced by the film and television industries, and taking another look at these makes us note and question the meaning of the images shown in these media that we did not absorb the first time around. Found footage gives us a second chance to do this from a fresh perspective.

This kind of cinema constantly works with the concept of reflexivity, not just because of the characteristics of the material that it uses but also because it refers to how this material was found or to methods of distribution and exhibition, (as I already mentioned in "Lyrical Nitrate"). In "Decassia", by the British director, Bill Morrison, we can see a hand choosing a film in the middle of a lot of them, which shows the director's choice, although the material could have arrived by chance, as there is an element of appropriation here. Despite the fact that it is a commonly used practice, films within films were considered by the theory of the 1960s to be innovative: "the trend in

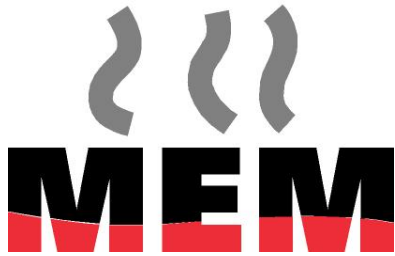




this period basically consisted of putting “realistic” on the same level as “bourgeois” and equating “reflective” with “revolutionary”. [5] It can be said that this implicit critique of the production system of images becomes symbolic through the use of reflexivity, as this requires the audience to be aware of the artifice that exists behind each image.

William Wess distinguishes between three ways of assembling found footage, which he has called compilations, collage and appropriations. I'll just dwell on the first two. Compilations refer to specific historical quotes that have been taken out of their context and made to fit in with the authors aims. One of the emblematic films of found footage that uses this type of editing is “The atomic café”-1982- by Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loador & Pierce Rafferty. The film deals with the paranoia in the USA created by the possibility of a nuclear war, and is constructed from American governmental propaganda and films from the 1950s and 60s. The directors question the images used to construct a narrative that ends up ridiculing the general feeling among the American people during the Cold War, and this irony is unusual in editing compilations. For example: we see pictures of an atomic explosion from various angles, followed by a sequence in episodes in which they show the measures that American citizens should take in the event of a possible attack: the children at a school hide under their desks and a gentleman gets inside a box. These situations become absurd after seeing the size of the bomb. This is an extreme example of a compilation, as the irony breaks with the credibility of the basic story line that characterises this type of editing that is based on real discourses.

The compilation always bears in mind the original context, so it is not a novel structure: “for the avant-garde artist the material is just material; their activity merely consists of finishing off the life of materials by snatching them out of the context where they perform their function and receive their meaning” [6].

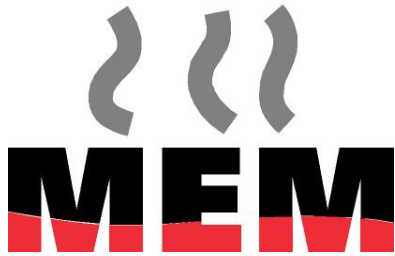


Collage, on the other hand stands out from the other editing processes used by found footage. To give an example of why this category of the "movement" is strictly avant-garde (and this is the one that I'm interested in working on) I'll use the film, "Decassia" by Bill Morrison. The clips that the director found were in poor condition; in each frame you can clearly see the time that has gone by since the images were recorded due to the stains produced by the deterioration of the chemical material. The decomposition process becomes part of the film like a repeated image that produces a degree of stylistic continuity. What lies behind the stain is the outline of a figure that you cannot quite make out, and in the midst of all this confusion from time to time we can see undamaged frames and the differences in what we can see causes pleasure, and gives a certain value to the image regardless of what is happening in it.

Throughout the film we can recognise circular movements; a dancer moves on his own axis; the 16-mm projectors run in the same direction; the nitrate stains are round; female spinners work with wheels. You can force a metaphor about fate out of this last shot: the spinners- who are "laconic"- direct fate. The director can create associations, but it is not entirely in his hands, as there is a random element that is inherent to the material that has been found. The stain doesn't belong to him.

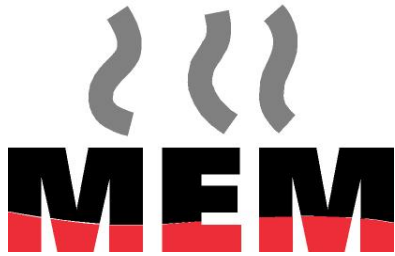
In this way, Morrison takes advantage of an accident; there is a programmatic insertion of the factor of chance, and he leaves the stains and lets them move and mix on their own. The element of chance is placed in the work itself and not in the artist's perception; there is an element of non-control that is intrinsic to the material that some directors of found footage work with. Morrison once again uses the same type of material in his short film, "The Mesmerit"-2003- and in "The light is calling"-2004-.

Another director who frees the original material by working on it as a collage is Bruce Conner. He inspired Bill Morrison's films and became well known with his film, "A movie"-1958- in which he retrieved material out of the rubbish thrown out by the American film studies in 1958. His latest film "Luke"-2004- is presented as a tribute to the



scratched, faded material from the film "Cool Hand Luke" from 1967. Morrison says that he likes working with archive material that has been "touched by time" [7]; he himself acknowledges the random factor in the material that he uses, nobody has transformed the films, they have changed by themselves. The decomposition of the material is even worked on in specific images, as there is a shot in which lots of ants eat something up and destroy it, and the insects are assimilated into the stains of the film and basically blend together into these.

A collage is characterised by being created from pictures that do not necessarily have a thematic links between them and are also isolated from their original purpose. It is a disjointed construction of elements that have no links between them and in which there is no attempt to impose any on them either. These directors work on the concept of the allegory: "Allegories tear an element out of its complete vital context, isolate it, and strip it of its function; the allegory is therefore essentially a fragment, unlike the organic symbol" [8]. Although all found footage uses fragments of material, only collages are able to completely de-contextualise this, to shatter the appearance of completeness that you find in conventional works. In "Decassia" we cannot interpret each of the parts because they are not subordinate to the aim of providing overall meaning, not just because Morrison didn't create the material or make it deteriorate, so that it is not a result of his subjectivity at all, but also because these films work as experiments which will attempt to play with the audience's levels of perception by using different techniques.



—

### **Bibliography.**

**Burch, Noël.** "Praxis del cine" Editorial Fundamentos. Sixth Edition. Spain. 1998.

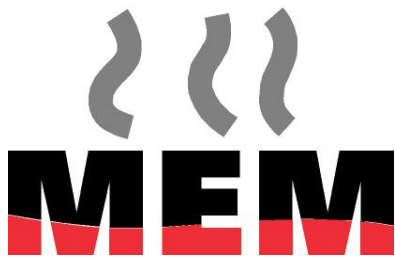
**Bürguer, Peter.** "Teoría de la vanguardia" Ediciones Península.

**Sanchez-Biosca, Vicente.** Article, "Lo encontrado, lo perdido". Published in the magazine, "Archivos de la filmoteca" Editorial Paidós. Valencia. 1998.

**Stam, Robert .** "Teorías del cine" Editorial Paidós. Spain. 2001.

**Wess, William.** "Recycled Images The arts and politics of found footage films" Anthology films Archives. New York. 1993.

**Wess, William.** Article: "Forma y sentido en las películas de found footage: una visión panorámica" Published in the magazine, "Archivos de la filmoteca" Editorial Paidós. Valencia. 1998.



—

## Notes.

[1] In his book: "Recycled Images. The arts and politics of found footage films" Anthology films Archives. New York. 1993.

[2] Jacobs, Ken. In the article by William Wess published in the magazine, "Archivos de la filmoteca" Op.cit. 125.

[3] Wess, William. "Recycled Images: the arts and politics of found footage films" Anthology films Archives. New York. 1993. Op.cit.31.

[4] Burch, Noël. "Praxis del cine" Editorial Fundamentos. Sixth Edition. Spain. 1998. Op.cit: 112.

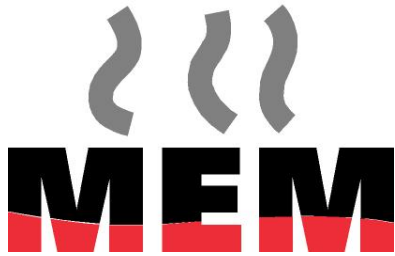
[5] Stam, Robert. "Teorías del cine" Editorial Paidós. Spain 2001. Op.cit: 182.

[6] Burguer, Peter. "Teoría de la vanguardia" Ediciones Península. Op.cit.133.

[7] Interview with Bill Morrison. In:

[www.horschamp.qc.ca/new\\_offscreen/interview\\_morrison.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/interview_morrison.html).

[8] Burguer, Peter. "Teoría de la vanguardia" Ediciones Península. Op.cit.131.



## **EXPERIMENTAL FILM WORKSHOP**

Places are very limited (10). All those interested in taking part must send a letter explaining why they want to take part in this workshop including personal details, e-mail and phone number where they can be contacted, to:

[bilbaoarte@ayto.bilbao.net](mailto:bilbaoarte@ayto.bilbao.net)

The workshop will be run by 3 members of the Collective. The workshop will be in English.

Taking part in the workshop is free.

Those students at the workshop who show they have made the most of it will receive a diploma certifying their progress that will also allow them to obtain 1 credit of their choice at the University of the Basque Country.

The workshop will be held in BilbaoArte, Urazurrutia 32, Bilbao, on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2009, from 15:00 to 20:00.

### Contents:

In the workshop we will be working with found footage, re-filming and editing.

We will be working by taking Alfred Hitchcock's films as a starting point, probably the most influential filmmaker in modern art. In his films he deals with themes like sexuality and fear of authority – subjects that the collective are interested in-.

The final aim is to create a new film, that will be premiered at BilbaoArte on Friday the 6<sup>th</sup> of November and combined with a performance.