



Christian Marclay, *48 War Movies* (2019), Single-channel video installation, color and stereo sound, Continuous loop, Dimensions variable. Installation view: Christian Marclay, Paula Cooper Gallery, 524 W 26th Street, New York, September 12 – October 19, 2019. © Christian Marclay. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Photo: Steven Probert.

SECOND NEGATION¹

Christian Marclay's *48 War Movies*
at Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
September 12 – October 19, 2019

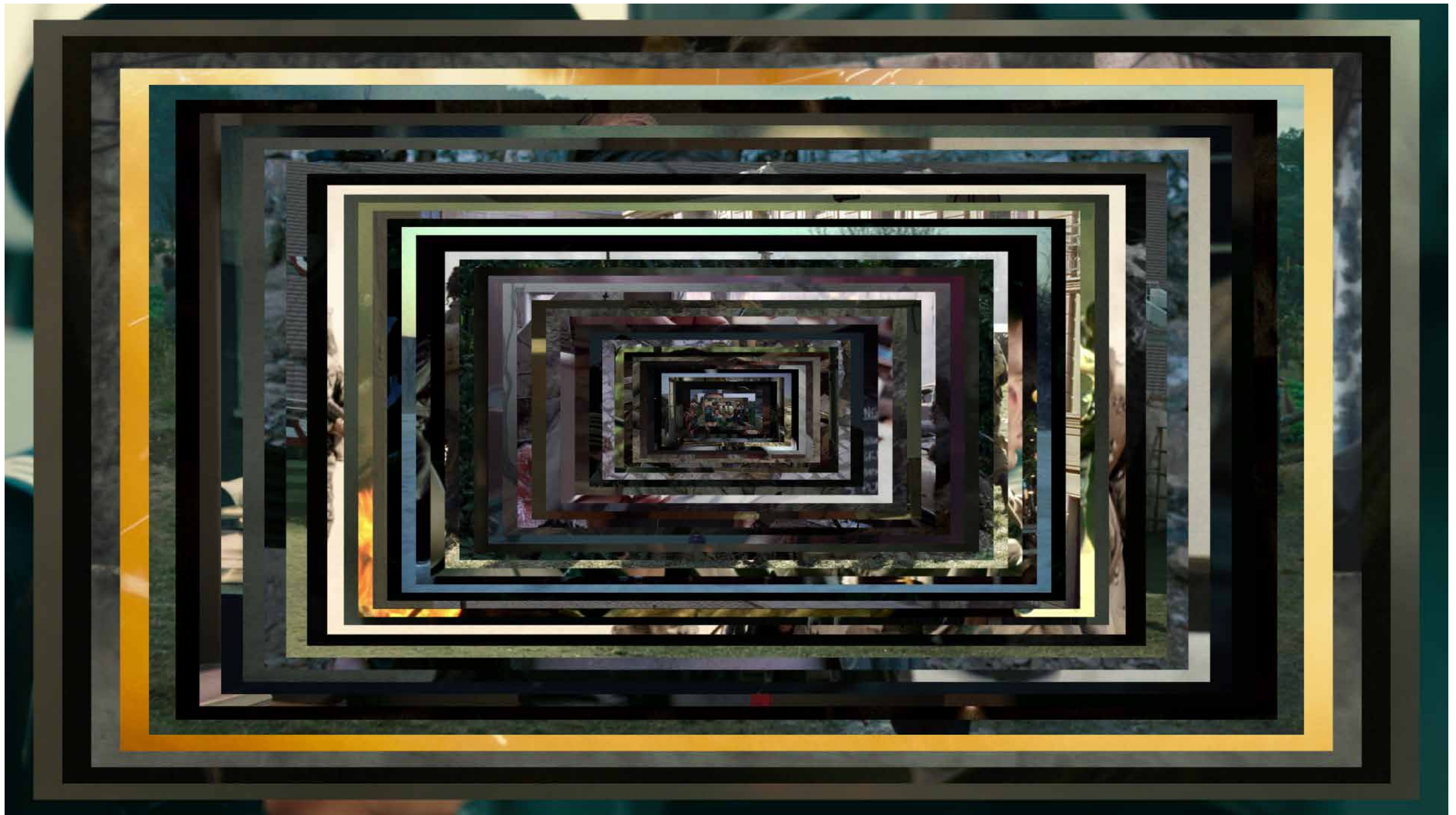
When I walk through the black passage into the video exhibit at Paula Cooper's brightly illuminated art gallery, I am momentarily blinded. Trying to find my way around the winding short corridor, I step into a cacophony of wild noises, into the overwhelming chaos of the frenzied images of the exhibition. I realize that I was not looking at, or listening to Christian Marclay's latest video work, *48 War Movies*, but rather that I am hijacked and enfolded by it.

The work was presented in a tight, pitch-dark space, along the entire wall, in an aspect ratio 16:9 suggesting standard movie projection, a rectangle of twenty-three by thirteen feet. But it was not by any means a movie or a video-art display. It was an abstract piece of forty-eight Hollywood-type blockbuster films superimposed one on top of another, so only their shrinking frame borders were visible.

Having the pleasure of talking with the artist, I learned that they were rendered into one continuously playing video projection from a single source, with stereo sound that the viewer could hear as gushing waves coming from the center of the screen, produced by four speakers positioned vertically and horizontally.

The Blu-ray copies of the original films were arranged chronologically according to their production year, starting from the center of the screen with the imperceptibly small rectangle of a movie from the 1950s and finishing with the largest, a release from 2017. There was minimal cropping to a few older productions as they were initially not in 16:9 format. And, as Blu-Ray discs were produced with varying volume levels, it was necessary to adjust the sound to obtain an overall homogeneous level. The title plates and credits were removed from each film, then the clips were layered by means of After Effects, the widely used Adobe post-production application. Without any additional sound, video, or color correction, they were put together, one clip after another, until they

¹ The Hegelian movement of contradicting or negating force, which is never reconciled by one side, overcoming the other, or through mutual cancellation, but is always an unfolding process of contradictory tension, open and free. See Andrzej Jachimczyk, *Reading Hegel After Nietzsche* (Dresden-New York: Atropos Press, 2013), 86.



Christian Marclay, *48 War Movies* (still), (2019). Single-channel video installation, color and stereo sound, Continuous loop, Dimensions variable. © Christian Marclay. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

reached a stack of forty-eight film strips of different lengths: a random number, though straightforwardly fitting the structural requirements of the work.

Even though it was impossible to recognize any of the movies, it became apparent that the films deal thematically with some kind of war or conflict, spanning the Civil War to the most recent interventions in Iraq. As the clips played, continuously looping, simultaneously and of different lengths, they became a kaleidoscopic abstraction of continuous motion of sounds and images. The video's incessant process suggests the flow of infinity, the ever-changing reality of our surroundings. A large motion painting, continuously providing a bombardment of audio-visual experiences, without a pause, refusing our inclination to grasp, label, understand... rejecting our always present attempt to conceptualize everything and anything in front of us.

If we look at it long enough, the pulsating depiction of descending rectangles will provide an illusion like the passageway through a covered bridge, which, radiating a mesmerizing effect, invites us inside. I cannot explain it, but there was an irrational joy in being surrounded by the indecipherable rush of sounds and images. It is a seduction by an abstraction, which doesn't provide knowledge, understanding, or exclusive enjoyment for art connoisseurs, but rather, inexplicably, the raw bliss of being with and within it.

The work, *48 War Movies*, could be looked upon through a moral prism of war criticism. But it could also be discussed as a probe into the hidden reality of the world: the long-forgotten task of the arts, especially of film art.

Marclay, through his work, achieved a miracle of transfiguration, where a finished product of the movie industry becomes artistic material. By stripping Hollywood pictures of their narrative content and transmuting them into an original work, and by utilizing a standard digital post-production tool in the process, Marclay protests (negates) the portrayals of the horrors of war produced by the film industry infused with sadistic delight in the blood soaked celebrations of violence, even if such productions are often presented as expressing the contrary position. The negation through lack of narrative, an illusion in itself, is a repudiation, not only of the original pictures glorifying war, but an overall rejection (second negation) of both: of the opportunistic relationship between the real conflicts and their illusions, and of the actual wars. *48 War Movies* exposes the dilemma of creative filmmaking: how to present the dark aspects of human existence without rendering them compulsively pleasurable.

However, Marclay's work reaches further, beyond the reality of permanent war. It creates a world of primeval Dionysian chaos, which, although inaccessible, is the actual base of our existence. It does not explain the ubiquitous presence of violence and indifference in the world. Nonetheless, it poses an ontological question concerning its becoming.

If a work of art is open and inviting enough as an ontological experiment, we can find ourselves in its space. Not surprisingly, only a handful of art works transgress beyond the beaten paths of entertainment, decoration, or pecuniary values. Marclay's work, via its quality of infinite becoming, without beginning or end, eternally recurring but never the same in its physicality—through its quantumness of being and not-being simultaneously—is the possibility of a gate to the core of existence.

ANDRZEJ JACHIMCZYK



Christian Marclay, *48 War Movies* (still), (2019). Single-channel video installation, color and stereo sound, Continuous loop, Dimensions variable. © Christian Marclay. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.