



THE MILCOM STILLS

INTRODUCTION

The evasive American scholiast and *sub-rosa* impresario, Learned “Hogfoot” Milcom (1928-1972), focused much of his attention on ATTENTION. Across decades of peripatetic bibliophilia, this metaphysical hoarder amassed an idiosyncratic collection of texts, objects, and documentation bearing on the history of “attentional practices”; much of this material sheds light on the so-called *Order of the Third Bird*, a community of persons known to engage in extreme forms of durational attention (often to works of art in a conventional sense). Milcom’s library, together with a portion of his personal papers and effects, are held in trust by ESTAR(SER), a body he did much to convene in its modern form. Since its installation at Mana Contemporary in 2018, the “Milcom Memorial Reading Room and Attention Library” has featured periodic exhibitions of notable holdings from the Milcom Archive.

THE STILLS

In 2019, while cataloging an accession of undeveloped Kodak “Super-8” film cassettes that appear to have belonged to Milcom, a researcher working in the Milcom Room discovered that a box previously thought to contain (undeveloped) photographic paper in fact secreted, in an opaque black plastic sleeve, a set of nine *film stills* — each depicting a cinematic moment of “encounter” between a person (or persons) and a sculpture or painting. Most of the images can be considered “classics” of pre-1972 cinema (including the celebrated “Legion of Honor” scene in Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* [1958], and a moment of Ingrid Bergman’s “museum awakening” in *Voyage to Italy* [1954]). One of them, from Jean Luc Goddard’s *Bande à part* (1964), can only be said to depict an “art-encounter” in a somewhat oblique sense — in that it captures three young people running at top speed through a gallery of the Louvre. The stills appear to have been printed at various times on different photo-paper stocks, and several show annotations or notes on the non-emulsion side. A few pages of loose-leaf documentation accompany the stills, and may bear on their interpretation.

INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

There are reasons to believe that “The Milcom Stills” represent a set of templates or schemas for *durational attentional exercises*. Which is to say, initial investigations suggest that the stills were part of a project undertaken by Milcom (and his associates) to “re-enact” cinematic set-pieces for the orientation of a viewer to a work of art. In this sense, we would seem to have stumbled on evidence a very peculiar (and hitherto unknown) point of *inversion* in the well known history of the “tableau vivant”: whereas it is traditional to conceive of the tableau vivant as an effort to “animate” a (static) painting or sculpture by rendering it *theatrical*; the Milcom Stills, by contrast, appear to document efforts to “freeze” moving pictures in order to reenact them as *motionless moments of meditative suspension*. A connection to the ritual activities of the “Birds” is suspected. Most surprising? Internal references point to the possibility that the Chilean filmmaker Raúl Ruiz may well have made his tableau-vivant thriller *L’hypothèse du tableau volé* (1978) in direct response to an encounter with Milcom’s experimental practices of art-object-oriented cinematic reenactment. A full research report will appear shortly in the *Proceedings of ESTAR(SER)*.

