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**Found Footage and the Construction of the Self:
Dream English Kid 1964–1999 AD (Mark Leckey, 2015)
and *Just Don't Think I'll Scream* (Frank Beauvais, 2019)**

Abstract: When looking at some recent essay films exploring personal and family stories, one notices that it is quite common and even expected to include personal archives and historical material alongside the primary narration and original footage. What is less common is when the film does not appear to use any original and personal material, but seemingly constructs the entire (visual) narration with footage taken from films made by others. This is the case of my two prime examples: *Dream English Kid 1964–1999 AD* (2015) by the British artist Mark Leckey and *Just Don't Think I'll Scream / Ne croyez surtout pas que je hurle* (2019) by the French filmmaker Frank Beauvais. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's study of what he calls "The Practices of the Self", and more specifically the ancient Greek writing exercise, the *hupomnēmata*, my intention is to discuss and define the act of appropriation at work in these examples. How is found footage utilised to illustrate, practice or investigate the self? What kind of role does the sound, and the voice, have in this process? What does this mean in terms of the relationship between the self, the footage used, and the collective? Indeed, these essay films are at the intersection of two modes: first-person filmmaking and the found footage tradition. My aim in this article is to explore the tension created by these approaches and to attempt to define a self which is no longer based only on individual material, but rather is built up through a very intimate and original accumulation and assemblage of collective memories.

Keywords: First-person filmmaking, found footage, appropriation, individual and collective memories, personally constructed archive, voice-over, Michel Foucault.

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**THE ESSAY FILM
AS SELF-REPRESENTATIONAL MODE
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Introduction

When looking at some recent essay films exploring personal and family stories, one notices that it is quite common and even expected to include personal archives and historical material alongside the primary narration and original footage. For example, in *The Image You Missed* (2018) by Dónal Foreman or in *A Moon for My Father* (2019) by Mania Akbari and Douglas White, the personal voice and the original footage are supported by personal documents, letters, and archives, along with collective and historical material. As Timothy Corrigan explains, the essayistic form indicates thus “a kind of encounter between the self and the public domain” (6), in which the self is not necessarily pre-determined but “a figure *thinking* in and through a public domain in all its historical, social and cultural particulars”. (17). What is less common is when, in a film exploring the self, this figure seems absent and the film does not appear to use any original and personal material, but seemingly constructs the entire (visual) narration with footage taken from films made by others. This is the case of my two prime examples: *Dream English Kid 1964–1999 AD* (2015) by the British artist Mark Leckey, in which he reworks (and on one or two rare occasions fabricates) TV programmes, adverts and other footage he found online to explore his own memories from 1964 (when he was born) to 1999; and *Just Don't Think I'll Scream / Ne croyez surtout pas que je hurle*, 2019. by the French filmmaker Frank Beauvais, in which he recounts a moment of personal crisis through a continuous voice-over and a collection of short extracts from the numerous films he watched during that time. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's study of what he calls “The Practices of the Self”, and more specifically the ancient Greek writing exercise, the *hupomnèmata*, my intention is to discuss and define the act of appropriation at work in these examples. How is found footage utilised to illustrate, practice or investigate the self? What kind of role does the sound, and the voice, have in this process? What does this mean in terms of the relationship between the self, the footage used, and the collective? Indeed, these essay films are at the intersection of two modes: first-person filmmaking and the found footage tradition. My aim in this article is to explore the tension created by these approaches and to attempt to define a self which is no longer based only on individual material, or on a combination of personal and collective archives, but rather is built up through a very intimate and original accumulation and assemblage of collective memories.

Practices of the Self: the *hupomnèmata*

In the context of his lectures *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Michel Foucault undertakes an exploration of the history of the self in Hellenistic philosophy and describes, in an article first published in 1983, one particular writing exercise, the *hupomnèmata*, which, as we will see, resonates evocatively with my two examples. The *hupomnèmata* consists of individual

notebooks serving as memory aids and are made up of things read, heard or thought taking the form of a collage of quotations, experiences, impressions, images, etc., and establishing therefore an active framework and an important relay in the subjectivation of discourse. However, notes Foucault, these *hupomnèmata*, “as personal as they may be, they ought not to be understood as intimate journals or those accounts of spiritual experience [...] found in later Christian literature” (“Self-writing” 210). They are not introspective as such, they are not a “narrative of oneself”, and they do not have a purificatory value, but rather

the movement they seek to bring about is the reverse of that: the intent is not to pursue the unspeakable, not to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self. (“Self-writing” 211).

Two important elements need to be underlined in order to understand the context and the aims of the *hupomnèmata*. First, these notebooks, and any Hellenistic conception of the self, should be discussed within the general precept of *epimeleia heauton* (“care of oneself”), which was at the core of social and personal conduct in the ancient Greek society. This principle, historically supplanted by the *gnôti seauton* (“know thyself”), implied a conception of the self quite different from the modern one. It is based on the idea that the subject becomes itself only via constant practises, as a construction and a process; whereas the “know thyself”, which is at the foundation of the modern subject since Descartes, situates access to knowledge under the sign of the evidence, in an immediacy and sovereignty of consciousness. Foucault adds that one of the reasons why the “know thyself” took over is because “we inherited the tradition of Christian morality which makes self-renunciation the condition for salvation” (“Technologies of the Self” 228). The second element is the existing tension in Hellenistic society between a culture “strongly stamped by traditionality, by the recognized value of the already-said, by the recurrence of discourse, by ‘citational’ practice under the seal of antiquity and authority” and an “ethic oriented by concern of the self” with objectives such as “getting in touch with oneself, living with oneself, relying on oneself, benefiting from and enjoying oneself” (“Self-writing” 211). Indeed, the aim of the *hupomnèmata* is ‘to make one’s recollection of the fragmentary *logos* [...] a means of establishing a relationship of oneself with oneself [...]’ (“Self-writing” 211) — which, surprisingly enough, could also be seen as the purpose of *Just Don’t Think I’ll Cry* and, in a different way, of *Dream English Kid*. However, asks Foucault, “there is something paradoxical in all this for us: how could one be brought together with oneself with the help of a timeless discourse accepted almost everywhere?” (“Self-writing” 211). He answers:

[...] if the writing of the *hupomnèmata* can contribute to the formation of the self through these scattered *logoi*, this is for three main reasons: the limiting effects

of the coupling of writing with reading, the regular practice of the disparate that determines choices, and the appropriation which that practice brings about (“Self-writing” 212).

In a previous work I quoted Foucault’s article to discuss and define the essayistic aspect of the filmic self-portrait, opposed to the autobiography and the diary’s linear narrative, defined in terms of “the analogic, the metaphoric and the poetic”, and constituted not only of personal recollections and anecdotes but also, and more importantly, of collective and shared memories (Tinel-Temple 24–28; Beaujour 8–9). Here, I wish to comment further on what Foucault calls “limitation”, the “practice of the disparate” and “appropriation”, within the context of the found footage, and in the autobiographical projects of Leckey and Beauvais. In the *hupomnèmata* practice as defined by Foucault, the “limitation” came from the indispensable association of reading and writing as exercises able to provide a “fixed” point for the mind, preventing it to be turned too much toward the future, which causes anxiety and agitation. Second, the practice should be regular and “deliberately disparate”, as, according to Foucault, there is no need to be exhaustive or complete; but one rather needs to select anything that seems useful: “The essential requirement is that [the subject] should be able to consider the selected sentence as a maxim that is true in what it asserts, suitable in what it prescribes, and useful in terms of one’s circumstances” (“Self-writing” 212). Finally, the idea of personal circumstances seems crucial and leads to the phase of “appropriation”, or “unification” in Foucault’s terms. The aim of the exercise, the “care of the self”, takes place here, when one needs to unify heterogeneous elements through “subjectivisation”. Foucault notes that different metaphors are used in Greek texts, notably the image of the digestion: “whatever we have absorbed should not be allowed to remain unchanged, or it will not be part of us” (“Self-writing” 213). So, the gathered elements have to be re-shaped and assembled to form a unity, but one in which all elements may be heard, like voices in a choir, to cite another metaphor used: “Through the interplay of selected readings and assimilative writing, one should be able to form an identity through which a whole spiritual genealogy can be read” (“Self-writing” 214). While remaining aware that Foucault was not talking about found footage and that his notion of *hupomnèmata* is a starting point for my reflection, what I find really interesting here is that this series of stages and recommendations concerning the construction of the self could also be read as definitions of found footage practices: watching and collecting elements from the past; selecting some in a disparate way; editing them into a new, homogeneous form, in which the original elements are still visible and/or audible. Nevertheless, the notion of appropriation, central to Foucault’s argument, is a complex one in found footage practices and is usually associated with questions of ethics, ownership, authorship and originality, and, in a wider context, with cultural (and political) identities.

In his book *Recycled Images*, William Wees identifies three forms of found footage: the compilation film, the collage, and the appropriation film (45). The first one is a way to quote and include found footage or archive material as a form of illustration in a constructed argument. The second one, derived from experimental tradition in general and the Dada and Surrealist movements in particular, is based on montage and reflection: the footage is in a sense deconstructed and analysed. The third one is for Wees the least interesting, and is seen in a post-modern context, in which quotations are taken from different media, ripped from their contexts and inserted into the work in a ‘superficial’ way. This is because, as Christa Blümlinger explains, Wees “makes the question of historicity the key point of his argument” (Blümlinger 67, my translation). Interestingly, Wees takes the example of music videos, which often use the super cut technique, to discuss appropriation: rapid editing of diverse and usually similar images, without their original sound, and glued together by a lively and rhythmic music.¹ So, for Wees, appropriation means losing the context, quoting without explaining and, in a sense, betraying the footage. This idea leads to Thomas Elsaesser’s discussion on the ethics of appropriation, in which he places the latter act as a form of ownership: purchasing the DVD of a film, sharing the knowledge one’s had of it (hence the production of video essays), and re-editing and interfering with it (“The Ethics of Appropriation”. Keynote speech, 2014). For me the term appropriation, and not compilation or collage, is important because it resonates with Foucault’s term and explains clearly the transformation, or “digestion”, at work in both my examples. Indeed, as I will explain in detail now, Leckey often reworks and manipulates his found footage, and Beauvais remotivates it using an omnipresent voice-over. As opposed to what usually happens in self-portrait films or other personal forms of essay films, both tend to hide the references, masking the context of the content to make it theirs, or, to put it in another way, they use the quotations as the very material of their subjectivity, and ‘betray’ the footage in the process. But, I will argue, they do this in a constructive way, in which the self is redefined within some form of personally constructed archive. It is this tension, ignited by the opposition of autobiography and borrowed (collective) material, that I would like to explore.

Appropriation as Transformation

Mark Leckey started to work on *Dream English Kid* when he found on YouTube an audio document of a Joy Division concert he attended on 11 August 1979. The show took place at Eric’s in Liverpool, where at the time there were matinee concerts at 5pm for under-18s. Leckey then tried to hear himself in the audience, looking for what he calls “a

1 Wees discusses Michael Jackson’s *The Man in the Mirror* (1988) music video directed by Don Wilson.

ghost of (my)himself” (“Masters lecture”), and one thing leading to another he decided to track himself down in the digital domain and put together his “found memories” or “false memoirs”, as he calls them, from 1964, when he was born, to 1999. 1999 is the turn of the century, but it is also the date of the solar eclipse cited at the end of the film, which happened on 11 August 1999, so twenty years exactly after the Joy Division concert. This is also the date of his first project, *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*, which retraces in 15 minutes the history of underground dance culture, from Northern Soul in the late 1960s to Rave Culture in the early 1990s, and is equally made of found footage. Seen as a portrait of British nightlife, Leckey explained that this debut was made as a kind of exorcism at a moment when he was “overwhelmed by nostalgia” (“Masters lecture”). Like *Dream English Kid*, *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* follows a chronological order, and stops around 1992–1993, when, explains Leckey, he was too old for the dancefloor. *Dream English Kid* is clearly situated in place and time, equally moved by nostalgia, but, like *Fiorucci*, is retrospective yet not directly introspective, at least because there is no additional voice or text saying “I”. Both films have been recently re-used and screened in Leckey’s installation *O’Magic Power of Bleakness* (2019) at the Tate Britain. The installation was a full-scale recreation of a portion of an M53 motorway bridge near Ellesmere Port, where Leckey grew up, and under which he spent time playing with his friends when he was about 8 or 9 years old. This bridge is also an omnipresent visual theme in *Dream English Kid*, reappearing several times and acting as a kind of symbol of reminiscences. Talking about *O’Magic Power of Bleakness*, Leckey realised afterwards that the piece was “about recollection and how things get recalled” (Brown). This could equally be said of *Dream English Kid*, since to make this piece Leckey collected all sorts of audio and visual documents, which he put together using repetition, altered motion, reframing, and sampled sounds, in order to create a particular and immersive rhythm, retracing moments of his life as he is able to remember and access them in the online domain through other people’s footage, rather than telling exactly what happened.

The film is roughly constructed around four different sections: childhood, nightlife and concerts, London and loneliness, and finally solar eclipse and ending. Some dates appear quite randomly, creating a sort of timeline, which is accentuated by recurring elements such as the motorway bridge already mentioned, images of the moon, and sounds and images of various countdowns. The first part, childhood, starts with The Beatles and the first guitar chord of “A Hard Day’s Night”, which was released in 1964, the year Leckey was born. In this first part are also included images of space, satellites, the moon, a floating bubble and a short extract of the “white heat of technology” speech by the Prime Minister Harold Wilson in 1963. Then, the motorway bridge emerges, beautifully lit and seen from afar, like in an Edward Hopper painting. After that, it seems to be about more specific childhood memories: a little boy in the field, the massive pylons making a menacing noise, children’s voices, drawings of machines, being in the backseat of a car, a frisbee, and the music of Joni

Mitchell. Still about childhood, Leckey inserts reworked images of Liz Fraser in *Carry on Cruising* (1962) to evoke his “trauma” of seeing one of his mother’s friends half-naked (“Masters Lecture”). Then, memories of the 1970s miners’ strikes are suggested through images of candles in a dark house; the bridge reappears, but this time seen from below, with the specific colour of sodium lamps, and the noise of the cars passing, as if Leckey was now older and spending time here on his own. The second part, about nightlife, starts with the 1979 Joy Division concert with extracts of Ian Curtis singing and dancing, a photo of the stage at Eric’s, and various shots of young people in the street, waiting or walking in groups. Then, in the 1980s, another group of young people are on the dancefloor in shots similar to those in *Fiorucci*, and they are listening to the radio when, on 1/09/1983, a Korean Air Line flight was shot down by the Soviet Union, threatening peace in the context of the Cold War. Different dates appear onscreen, and various distorted images of the bridge, other urban places, and footage of the moon are edited together. The third part, about London, starts at 16 minutes with the mention of the film *London Kills Me* (Hanif Kureshi, 1991), the date of 12/10/1992, and images of a body in a red sleeping bag, alone, in a rather sad bedroom. Images of London at night appear, a man alone walking in the street, a red bus, a music shop, VHS of porn films, and finally another countdown shows the last seconds before “time to totality”, as a title mentions. This reference, at 20 minutes, is the last part of the film and evokes the 11/8/1999 solar eclipse, which is seen several times. Mixed with the repeated shot of the eclipse are various shots of the bridge, which has by now been restored and painted in blue, and which Leckey has also copied and drawn digitally in 3D. We see the different stages of this work —which will lead to *O’Magic Power of Bleakness*—, through split screens on a computer’s desktop: the bridge is now integrated into Leckey’s work. Finally, the ending of the film shows the title *Dream English Kid*, via a montage of three references repeated four times: a reframed photo of the record sleeve for the French release of John Lennon’s song “N°9 Dream” (in 1975); a short extract of Marianne Faithful singing “Broken English” in 1979 and saying “English”; and a shot of the playing and rotating vinyl “Kid” by The Pretenders, also released in 1979.

The way the title is constructed, like a moving puzzle made of reworked and reframed pieces, is symptomatic of Leckey’s working methods: using bits of various elements to write a new sentence, like in a collage, but each element has its own personal and collective connection. As he explains, he re-uses and “digests” disparate elements to recreate, and actually expulse his memories, or as he puts it “to purge [himself]” (“Masters Lecture”). As memories often are, the clues of the references are sometimes hidden, or anonymised, or so short and reworked that it is very difficult to recognise the extracts, thus blending facts, recollections, and mediated memories. However, even if the references are masked, they form an important underlay on which Leckey constructs his narrative: what seems important is not necessarily the collage, but how Leckey uses the disparate quotations to make them

‘his’, and in a sense to make them ‘him’, in other words to appropriate them, without losing the collective aspect. For example, one has to look carefully to recognise the “Dream” quotation of the title because the original image has been enlarged quite dramatically.² The reference to Lennon is important, however, especially because “N°9 Dream” is a song about ambiguity between memories and dreams, and about being touched by “a river of sound”—indeed this could be understood as the project of the film:

*So long ago,
Was it in a dream
Was it just a dream
I know, yes, I know
Seemed so very real to me, seemed so real to me [...]*

*On a river of sound
Through the mirror go around, around
I thought I could feel, feel
Feel, feel*

Music touching my soul ...

At the same time, the reference blends into the film and the title to form another sentence, “Dream English Kid”, which takes a new meaning and defines how Leckey positions himself and the film: he is not the English Kid, he is one English Kid, or maybe all of them, those who grew up listening to Lennon, Faithful and The Pretenders, and who are made of or formed by these songs.

Three moments can be discussed further to unfold this appropriation method, and the way Leckey *subjectifies*, transforms and manipulates the material he found, whilst drawing on collective references. The most significant one is not exactly a gesture of appropriation and is also the most hidden one. Superimposed on images of the Joy Division concert, there is a very faint and dissimulated reflected image of Leckey looking at the screen: he inserted a self-portrait showing the original moment of both the project of the film and, we guess, the discovery and importance of music. He personifies the “boy in the crowd”, the same boy he tried to hear in the audio document of the concert he discovered by chance on YouTube. This moment works more as a self-inscription, a hidden signature like many painters used to do, rather than the process of appropriation, which is actually more complex and visible in the two following moments.³

2 A thank you to Michael Temple who found this reference and other musical ones.

3 Like Jan Van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434; Abraham Van Beijeren, *Banquet Still Life*, 1667.

At 5 minutes into the film, there is a short black-and-white shot of a child in a field. He must be 4 or 5 years old, he looks at us and around, and up, as if he was making sense of the enormous pylons seen and heard in the previous shots; then he turns around, waves his arms and seems very excited. The shot is repeated four times, cut with shots of a Nagra and the sound of sampled extracts of the song “From Both Sides” by Joni Mitchell, repeating “Moon, Moon Moon, Junes...”. This song was released in 1969, the year of the first Moon landing, when Leckey was 5 years old, roughly the age of the boy in the found shot. This gives us a timeline, albeit disguised as one has to recognise the song, and a certain cultural context. The shot of the boy is finally slowed down, the child is looking at us again, then the images jump, as if it was the end of the reel, and disappear. The boy is not Leckey, but as he said himself, “this is more or less what I looked like at that time”, so this anonymous shot becomes a representation of Leckey’s childhood, and also of numerous others who were growing up at the same place and at the same time (“Masters Lecture”). Not a self-portrait or an autobiographical gesture, but clearly a self-appropriation of existing images, which again presents Leckey not as the English kid (this one seen in the shot), but as one English kid (looking like this one).

The third moment takes place at 7 minutes into the film and, according to Leckey, corresponds to a specific event. When he was 10 years old he and his mother visited one of his mother’s friends. There was a party, and whilst Leckey meant to be sleeping the friend came into the room to change her clothes: “this messed me up”, says Leckey (“Masters lecture”). To revive this trauma, Leckey uses a short extract of *Carry on Cruising* (1962), showing Liz Fraser, dressed in corset and stockings, retouching her make-up and her hair in front of a mirror. The original shot is very short and also features another character played by Jill Mai Meredith. Here, Leckey rotoscoped Fraser’s character, cutting her out, and then used CGI to design the background from various catalogues of the 1970s. He used repetition, altered motion, re-framing, and he also added close-ups of the stockings which he shot himself with an actress. Leckey changed drastically the original footage to resemble his faded memory, but he also keeps the reference intact. We can recognise Liz Fraser and the *Carry On* series, which was very popular at the time and was constantly broadcast on TV during the 1970s. So, by re-using this particular footage and the implied references, Leckey suggests how recollections of specific events actually become blurred with memories of films, both feeding each other as time goes by. This is a complex reconstruction, in which Leckey watches himself from a distance, not only through personal, intimate or reported memories like in an autobiography, but via a constructed but real cultural context of the 1970s. It is important to note that in this example the appropriation goes a step further with the added shots of the leg and stockings. Leckey adds something he remembers as having made an impression on him, but he carefully matches the lighting and the costume with the original footage: he includes his

point of view but does not completely disrupt the quotation. Here the transformation is a form of appropriation, a bit like Su Friedrich's *Sink or Swim* (1991), which uses found footage and original footage, but filmed and reworked as if it was found in an archive, blurring the boundaries of the autobiography and the individualist approach to place it in a more popular and collective context.⁴ In the same vein, there is another important shot, which surely has been added, and which also shows this “re-creation” of the found footage: the shot of the vinyls records being looked at in the music shop at 19 minutes. We have first a shot of the window of a music shop, saying BLACK MARKET RECORDS, people are entering the shop and then there is the close-up of a hand going through album covers. Again, it is filmed in a way to match the lighting, the colours and the setting, thus blending with the previous shot, and it goes unnoticed at first. However, when looking more closely, the shot is quite crucial as it reveals clues to the music quotations in *Dream English Kid* (even if I was not able to locate all references in the film): Soul II Soul, *Club Classics vol. One*; Crass, *Stations of the Crass*; Joy Division, *Unknown Pleasures*; Kraftwerk, *Trans-Europe Express*; Black Sabbath, *Technical Ecstasy*; Neil Diamond, *Touching You, Touching Me*; Joni Mitchell, *Blue*; the compilation *Cybernetic Serendipity Music*; Kenneth Williams, *On Pleasures Bent*; The Shadows, *Jigsaw*; The Beatles, *A Hard Day's Night*. Both gestures of the disparate and appropriation are summarised in this shot: various references put together in an act of construction of a specific unity and a specific voice, in which “all elements could be heard, like in a choir” (as Foucault would say); and a re-appropriation of the archive by adding a personal shot blended into it. Thus, Leckey's act of appropriation goes through a transformation of the footage used; both sounds and images are reworked through Leckey's memories, but he does not say “I” directly. As we shall now see, Beauvais, on the contrary, does not transform the footage, but adds his own voice to say “I” and to remotivate the meaning of the found images.

***Appropriation as détournement* [diversion]**

Just Don't Think I'll Scream by Frank Beauvais narrates a particular moment in his life, from April to October 2016 when, after a recent break-up, he was quite depressed, felt isolated living in a small village in Alsace (in the North East of France), and spent all his time watching hundreds of films. Knowing he was finally moving back to Paris, he decided to relate his experience in a film using extracts of the hundreds of films he was then watching.

4 See William Wees, “Carrying On: Leslie Thornton, Su Friedrich, Abigail Child and the US avant-garde film of the Eighties” (70–95) and Christa Blümlinger, *Cinéma de seconde main: Esthétique du remploi dans l'art du film et des nouveaux médias* (39).

As he says himself:

[...] it is a first-person film about events that I went through. More importantly, the images we see on screen were experienced at the time of the event related, so that's why the film really documents a personal story since the moments I evoke were displayed by all this imagery in front of my eyes at one point. (Soares, 115).

The film, which is 70 minutes long, is thus constructed visually from hundreds of shots borrowed from other films, in a gesture of collection of quotations; and narrated by a continuous voice-over, Beauvais's own voice saying "I", recounting key moments but above all detailing emotions, feelings, thoughts. The content is retrospective, clearly situated in time and space and much more introspective and intimate than is the case in *Dream English Kid*. Indeed, as I will discuss, the found images and their references are here completely anonymised and decentred: whereas Leckey was reworking the footage to inscribe himself within it, Beauvais uses isolated and decontextualised shots to translate his mood.

Beauvais's creative process consisted of first re-watching carefully the hundreds of films he had watched in that six-month period, and of selecting shots that moved him or resonated with feelings he had: "At some point an image, maybe only one shot, has that subliminal power you are looking for and you experience a kind of *déjà-vu* because the image in particular is the one you had in mind or it reflects a very concrete reality from the outside." (Soares, 116). He decided early on in the process to use only fictional films, which gives a sort of unity, even if they come from a wide range of genres, nationalities and periods. Doing this, Beauvais excludes documentaries, experimental films or any news or educational footage, thus avoiding any direct reference to historical events or archives, and creating a sort of distance with the reality of the world. This, of course, reflects the position in which he felt he was during this period. He then collated the shots and sorted them under such topics as "depression", "blood", "police", "locomotion", creating what he calls a "pictorial database" (Soares 116). In order to work on the narration, Beauvais was constantly going back and forth between the chosen shots—going through them again and again—and the text he was writing. In this aspect the working method is different from Beauvais's other found footage projects: the short films *Le soleil et la mort voyagent ensemble / The Sun and Death travel together*, (2006) and *Un 45 tour de Cheveu (ceci n'est pas un disque) / A Cheveu Single (this is not a record)*, (2010). For the first one, Beauvais worked with two texts already written: "Les Cabinets" by Georges Hyvernaud, set to music and sung by Serge Teyssot-Gay (2000), and *The Life and Death of a Photograph* (2006) by Gerard Malanga. "Les Cabinets" was first published in 1949 and relates Hyvernaud's recollections of his experience as a prisoner during World War II. The text is really harsh, full of uncomfortable details depicted in a very plain language, reflecting a terrible anger and "the irremediable absurdity of everything" (Hyvernaud, back cover). *The Life and Death of a Photograph*, read aloud by Malanga, describes and discusses

an iconic photograph by Darko Bandic showing the body of a 20-year-old woman who hangs herself out of despair near Tuzla.⁵ The texts are heard one after another, with a black screen in between, and on top of the grinding words Beauvais has edited various rapid shots of body parts, injuries, dark indoor spaces, machines, organisms, water, but also flowers, wind, empty fields, woods, and so on. The tone of the voices, the content of the texts and the chosen shots show obvious similarities here with *Just Don't Think I'll Scream*. For the second found footage project, the texts were also already there, as they consist of two songs by the group Cheveu: “Like a deer in the headlight” and “C'est ça l'amour [This is Love]”. Here again, the texts are cynical and pessimistic, the shots are short in duration, the editing fast and the sources quite varied: from porn to science-fiction, advertisements, news items, featuring maltreated bodies, angry and passive crowds, landscapes of rural France, ‘typical’ French faces, etc. It is easy to see the continuation of these two pieces of work in *Just Don't Think I'll Scream*, not only in the type of images selected, but also, and more importantly, in the way they illustrate, expand and ‘discuss’ the texts. The big difference, then, is how the text was written. *Just Don't Think I'll Scream* has been written in the first person, with the images in mind, and in a circular movement from “reading” to “writing”, similar to the “limitation” phase described by Foucault. Moreover, the rules were clearer and stricter than in the two short films. Indeed, on top of using only fictional film, Beauvais decided to never re-frame or rework the shots, never use any two consecutive shots, use only a few shots from each of the movies, eliminate the original sound, and never use shots with famous actors’ faces, as “it kills the poetry [and] brings the viewer back to something he already knows” (Soares, 118). Instead, Beauvais selected mostly inserts, transitions, usually close-ups and landscapes, with an insistence on empty spaces, dead or trapped animals, body parts such as hands, backs, feet, and all sorts of spilling liquids and spreading fluids. He talks willingly of “stolen or borrowed” footage, rather than “found”, using the metaphor of a mosaic, a pictorial database, chopping the selected shots like “cuttings from a plant” (Pettengill). The final film is composed of 1,700 cuts, with no additional sound except the voice-over and is thus organised in two parallel layers: the voice and the footage, constantly transforming each other in a complex act of appropriation.

As with Leckey’s example, the appropriation starts with the title: *Just Don't Think I'll Scream* (in French *Ne croyez surtout pas que je hurle*) is an allusion to an East German film by Frank Vogel, *Denk bloß nicht, ich heule*, made in 1965, released in Germany only in 1990, and in the USA under the title *Just Don't Think I'll Cry*. The verb *heulen* in German translates as “to cry” but also “to howl”, which, explains Beauvais, describes his state of mind at the time (Pettengill). Beauvais, via the reference, says indirectly “I” in the title and

5 The photograph is called *Sebrenica* (1995), we never see it in the film. The recorded text features in the album *Up from the Archives* (2006).

plays with the ambiguity of who is this “I”, the one of the cited title or himself, whereas Leckey avoided any article or personal pronouns. Beauvais uses some shots of Vogel’s film (the film is listed in the long credits), but, like all the other quotations, they are deliberately not recognisable and lost in the mosaic of the film, stripped of their references. However, each shot is there on purpose within the film and in relation to the voice creating a particular meaning and triggering connections. For example, the first shot is a close-up of a photograph showing what seems to be the face of a man, but the photograph is burning from the centre, making the face disappear into nothing, an effect reminiscent of *(nostalgia)* (1971) by Hollis Frampton, in which photographs are seen burning slowly on a stove, whilst the narration is commenting the following photo. This creates an interesting gap which the viewer needs to work out in a “cerebral gymnastics” (to quote Beauvais about his own work) (Soares, 116). The reference might be fortuitous, but it generates a context and an expectation, at least in my mind, of things not being what they seem to be. Over this very brief shot, the voice says “I am 45 years old”, so whilst saying “I” straight away, the film denies the access to any image of this “I”, but seems to point out a found “I”: here the man in the burning photograph, and subsequently any representation of male bodies. Moreover, the collection aspect prevents the viewer from completely settling into an act of identification, as each shot works as a kind of rupture, both in what it represents (they are fragments), and in the fast rhythm created by the editing. Hence the two levels of appropriation which I will discuss now: the gesture of collection (“the practice of the disparate”) and the *détournement* created by the voice.

The term “collection” is important because it has a strong connotation in the found footage tradition and in video essay practices, finding its root in two seminal films: *Rose Hobart* (1936) by Joseph Cornell and *A Movie* (1958) by Bruce Connor.⁶ Blümlinger discusses “collection” films by invoking Aby Warburg’s work and the notion of “correspondences” developed by Walter Benjamin, and, without going into details, two main arguments of Blümlinger’s are important to note here (40–49). First, that the film quotations put together are not only reflecting the artist’s “memorial topology”, but also the capacity of the viewer to recognise and remember. Second, that the “film-catalogues”, as Blümlinger calls them, “do not isolate gestures in a fetishist way, but constitute the condition of an aesthetic comparison, which designate cinema as a vehicle of social memory” (Blümlinger 40, my translation). These two elements are, for example, clearly visible in Christian Marclay’s film, *Telephones* (1995), which puts together shots of phones, and also in his famous 24-

6 Cornell assembled random shots of Rose Hobart found in *East of Borneo* (George Melford, 1931) to create a moving portrait of the star. Connor used various shots of explosion, film leaders, vehicles going fast, accidents, and women to deconstruct a type of cinematic language based on violence and voyeurism.

hour *tour de force*, *The Clock* (2010), made only of shots featuring a clock and following the 24 hours of a day. Or *Home Stories* (1990), in which Matthias Müller builds a narrative of the female character in classical Hollywood films through shots of women suddenly waking up, being scared, exposed and vulnerable. The repetitions and the mode of editing not only involve the viewer's participation in a kind of quiz for cinephiles, but also reveal a type of iconology. This is similar to the supercut genre of video essays analysing recurrent shots in a body of work (for example the hands in Bresson's cinema, the centred shots in Anderson's work, the surprised faces in Spielberg's films).⁷ Because of Beauvais's clear rules and the type of shots selected, it is quite tempting to see Beauvais's film as a study of inserts, and in a sense it is, as there is a certain iconology of the transitional shot, but for several reasons it is not only this. Indeed, there are similarities with Morgan Fisher's (*)* a.k.a *Parenthesis* (2003), which is a 20-minute film made entirely of inserts: lots of hands pouring drinks, pressing buttons, touching objects, being tense or relaxed, close-ups of written notes, objects such as photographs, weapons, phones, etc., yet Fisher's film works as a catalogue of the insert, showing the stunning similarities between all of them. In Beauvais's work, the mode of quotation goes further in a form of appropriation: he does not show recurrence of shots, as there are a wide range of them, but he blends them into the narrative, for his own purpose. For example, after the shot of the burning photograph, there is an empty road in the country side, a man seen from the back in the shower, the shelves of an Alsatian delicatessen, a model of human blood circulation, a hand marking lines on a wall (like in jail), a village house seen through a camera (or a gun), a woman going to clean liquid spilled on the floor, a childish model of a house. And then in the introduction only, we see: a 'breathing' Christ in a low angle shot, a crucifix, somebody being sick, hands scratching the wall, a trapped bird, a dead bird in its cage, a chicken's head, mincemeat pouring from a machine, a dog eating meat, a male body in front of a computer, a TV screen, a doll's eyes being crushed, bare trees, manure, dark sky, etc. The fact that I have to describe the shots by their content, and not their reference, proves that the viewer is not involved in the same way as with Marclay's installations: this is not about recognition (no cinephile quiz here), but about identification between Beauvais's mood and the films he watched, and between the viewer and Beauvais's narration. There are some obsessions, repeated themes, and an iconology of isolation and depression, but not a systematic or random repetition of the same type of shots, as they follow logics of narration, rather than collection. Beauvais unifies and literally "digests" them, using metaphorically lots of shots of food, meat, body parts and body fluids; and the most important element of this digestion, or appropriation, is the voice-over.

⁷ *Hands of Bresson* (kogonada, 2014); *Wes Anderson//Centered* (kogonada, 2014); *The Spielberg Face* (Kevin B. Lee, 2017).

As the visual is emptied of all outside and personal references (no personal archives, no obvious connections), it is the voice which includes all facts and elements of the narration: name of places (Strasbourg, Paris, Porto), mention of people (the mother, the friends), description of routine (watching films, selling online, going for a walk, sleeping), film references (Jean Grémillon, Blake Edwards, Cecil B. DeMille, Michael Cimino, Abbas Kiarostami), music references (Dooz Kawa, Francoiz Breut, Prince, Zippo, Bonnie Prince Billy), and any allusion to the news (attacks in Paris and Nice, Kabul, Lybia, the football World Cup). We do not hear any music except “I See a Darkness” by Bonnie Prince Billy at the end, on top of the long credits, and with rare exceptions, such as *La Nuit du Carrefour* (*Night at the Crossroads*, Jean Renoir, 1932), the mentioned films are not directly quoted. For example, at 7 minutes into the film, Beauvais tells the tragic events of his father’s death, which happened three years earlier, when they were watching Grémillon’s *The Woman Who Dares / Le Ciel est à vous* (1944) together. The film is just evoked through other footage (such as a toy plane crashing, a piano being played, a long black-and-white shot of birds flying in the sky), because this is not a film Beauvais watched between April and October 2016. The footage used at that moment rather illustrates his father’s personality and death via shots of an empty armchair, a chair falling, flashing lights, a body’s spasms, the movement of a hand losing life. This mode of ‘illustration’, based on synchronicity or what Michel Chion calls “synchresis”, is very effective, omnipresent and, throughout the film, it is very difficult not to *see* Beauvais and his surroundings. Synchresis, says Chion, is “the spontaneous and irresistible weld produced by a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time, [and] results independently of any rational logic.” (63). Indeed, the shots of the different male characters, always seen partially or from behind, personify Beauvais and each time the connection is really strong and impossible to un-see: we *see* him in the shower, at the desk, sleeping in the sofa, typing on a computer, etc. The same goes for the interior spaces, the furniture, the food, the domestic objects and the rural landscapes. However, other shots, like the animals, the rare faces of people, the trains, the injuries, the machines, the crowds, etc., work more as metaphors and symbols: for example, the dog eating a pile of raw meat when the election results in Alsace (heavily to the far-Right) are mentioned. Beauvais explains that he “tried to find a key, eventually playing on metaphors or totally subjective impressions of the pictures I used.” (Soares 116). The shots ‘show’ Beauvais’s life, but also incorporate Beauvais into the shots, i.e. the tone of his voice, the choice of words, the uncomfortable details, all change the images. This connection and constant transformation of the voice by the footage and *vice versa* is a system of appropriation not far from what the Situationists, and Guy Debord in particular, called *détournement*. The principle is to manipulate existing material by creating new and unexpected associations, and also by adding a commentary which is not at all related to the images but is there to critique the media and conventional representations. In *Mode d’emploi du détournement*, Debord

and Gil J. Wolman give the example of the “most revolutionary” way to denounce the Spanish Civil War by associating images of the war with a slogan from a lipstick campaign, “Beautiful lips are red” (23–26, my translation). The gap created by this montage desacralizes the discourse and gives the viewer an active role. Isidore Isou and the Lettrists called this type of collision a “discrepant montage”, and André Bazin used the word “horizontal montage” to define Chris Marker’s use of the voice-over. Talking about *Letter from Siberia* (*Lettre de Sibérie*, 1957), Bazin argues that Marker

brings to his films an absolutely new notion of montage that I will call horizontal, as opposed to traditional montage [...]. Here, a given image doesn’t refer to the one that preceded it or the one that will follow, but rather it refers laterally, in some way, to what is said. [...] The montage has been forged from ear to eye.

It is important to think of this as a two-way process: just as the voice often talks ‘over’ the image, the image can also determine how we listen to the voice. In *One Man’s War / La Guerre d’un seul homme* (1982), Edgardo Cozarinsky used historical archives of the period to comment upon Ernst Jünger’s first person text about his time in occupied France as a Nazi officer. As a viewer we are constantly *seeing* Jünger and the people he mentions, but the archives go beyond the anecdotes; they put the narrative in perspective, and also the voice gives life to the archives. Recently, Nuria Giménez Lorang did the opposite in *My Mexican Bretzel* (2019) by writing a fictional first-person text to accompany home movies filmed by her grandfather. She uses captions rather than a voice, but the same “gymnastics” is at work. The “I” is not hers, it is her fictional grandmother, but by working through this appropriation she says more about women in the 1950s than she would have done with a more traditional documentary. As already mentioned, in *Sink or Swim* Su Friedrich plays with the home movie aesthetic, mixing original footage, TV material and other archives. She then uses the third person to talk about herself, which participates in an ‘off-centered’ effect, which is not far from what Beauvais calls “a translation in images of an inner world [which] happens whenever you’re not sticking to what the dialogue says onscreen”. (Soares 115).⁸ He adds that “by working with found footage, you get more freedom given the polysemic nature of the image”, which means there are more choices and possibilities; but at the same time the ‘inner’ world or autobiographical gesture is disseminated in a deviated first-person, or a collective first-person (Soares 116). It is this tension, always moving, which actually constructs Beauvais’s specific self: he is the boy facing the screen (whereas Leckey is the boy in the crowd), lost in, but eventually built, on other people’s films.

8 About *Sink Or Swim*, see MacDonald, Scott “Su Friedrich: Reappropriation”, pp. 35–43.

Conclusion: the Self as Personally Constructed Archive

Talking about the personal and first-person films of Su Friedrich, Leslie Thornton and Abigail Child, Wees notes that, by using found footage, they were breaking with an individualist and male-dominated conception of artistic creation, as well as reflecting “post-modernist dissolutions of the traditional boundaries between high-art and popular art” (“Carrying On” 73). In this case, the introduction of found footage, mixed and blurred with original footage, was a way to “recast radical subjectivity as the interpenetration of public and private space”. (“Carrying On” 73). So, this was in a sense a collective and feminist way of engaging with the personal and the intimate, and one could argue that, to various degrees and with different purposes, Leckey and Beauvais are actually doing the opposite, via the appropriation gestures described above: theirs is an individual and intimate way of engaging with (collective) material coming from personally constructed archives.

This personal and intimate engagement is visible at different stages and denotes a specific “self” in construction. It is first interesting to note that both artists started to work with found footage in projects that were not directly personal. The “I” came later, when facing a moment of crisis (Beauvais’s depression) or with self-investigation (Leckey trying to hear or see himself in the online domain), and both projects saw the light of day with the purpose to recall the past in a kind of therapeutic act: for Beauvais it is a way to make sense of a dark but defined moment, and for Leckey it is an autobiographical quest. The two films refer to a solitary, obsessive and accumulative use of audio-visual material, especially Beauvais when he evokes his cinephagia; but Leckey too notes that he dived into YouTube and similar sources to access anything vaguely linked to his memories, or as Sarah Durcan puts it, he “trawled through the internet to find other people’s footage of his own memories” (208). They both, therefore, mention the material seen and used as “mirrors” and not as windows: “Other’s films are no more than mirrors, not windows”, says Beauvais’s voice, over a shot of multiple eyes looking through a black curtain.⁹

The purpose for both of them was to find themselves in their constructed archives, and by doing so they also built a peculiar self: one that is entirely contingent upon the material found and used. In the *hupomnèmata*, the act of appropriation leading to the “construction of the self” is also entirely built on the “practice of the disparate” and the art of coupling “reading” and “writing”, which means that the “I” does not precede the material (like on a Facebook wall), but actually the material precedes and is at the heart of the construction of the subject, through gestures of accumulation and collection. The collective material is integrated into a project and the “self” is a process in itself, so this is not just the self as a combination of

⁹ Seemingly quoting *Spellbound* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1945).

personal and collective, it is a collective that is personally constructed. However, as we saw above, the appropriation, crucial for the construction of the self, does not operate in the same way in both films, therefore the tension between “first-person” and “collective” is not the same, and maybe we could define different degrees of appropriation. Leckey inscribes himself in the footage by adding some original footage when needed, by hiding a self-portrait, and reworking heavily some of the material, but he constantly refers to collective memories, such as historical events, music, films, places, showing that he is also made up of them. On the contrary, Beauvais’s use of found films is entirely individual and personal, we can and yet we cannot recognise the sources, and we could say that the appropriation, the act of saying “I” over the collective, here literally, is at its highest level. The self at work in these two first-person, but collective, films, is complex and unique, but it denotes a tendency in essay films and video essays to draw upon personal experience of audio-visual material: the ‘found’ footage do not only represent the collective or shared memories as seen in the content and the context, but also the intimate, individual and personal way we now, more than ever, engage with films and media generally.

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