

Da montagem ao collage: found footage, voz-over e filme-ensaio

From montage to collage: found footage, voice-over and essay-film

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Resumo: *Objetiva-se investigar, à luz de Seams (Karim Aïnouz, 1993), como a voz-over, o found footage e o filme-ensaio são colocados em relação, bem como se comportam enquanto práticas criativas autônomas, em obras que reutilizem imagens de arquivo. Partimos da hipótese de que a aproximação entre esses elementos se dá, sobretudo, por meio do procedimento de montagem, encontrando-se frequentemente conectado com a noção de collage. Pretende-se analisar os procedimentos de montagem do filme, para por fim sinalizar que o collage é o responsável não apenas por colocar em relação criativa a voz-over, o found footage e o filme-ensaio, mas por garantir que esses elementos potencializem seus papéis narrativos diante da construção textual discursiva e crítica, sobre o machismo brasileiro, pretendida pelo curta-metragem.*

Palavras-chave: *found footage; voz-over metacrítica; filme-ensaio; collage; Seams (filme).*

Abstract: *The objective is to investigate, in the light of Seams (Karim Aïnouz, 1993), how voice-over, found footage and film-essay are put in relation as well as behave as autonomous creative practices in works that reuse archival footage. Our hypothesis is that the approximation between these elements occurs mainly through the editing procedure, being often connected with the notion of collage. We intend to analyze the editing procedures of the film, to finally signal that the collage is responsible not only for putting in a creative relation the voice-over, the found footage and the film-essay, but for ensuring that these elements enhance*

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their narrative roles before the discursive and critical textual construction, about Brazilian machismo, intended by the short film.

Keywords: *found footage; metacritical voice-over; essay-film; collage; Seams (film).*

Introduction

The reflection proposed here has the interest on the dialogue between voice over, found footage and film-essay as a form of widening our comprehension of the editing procedure in works that are based entirely or partially in archive material. Through *Seams* (Karim Ainouz, 1993), we intend to investigate the role operated by the editing process by putting these three elements in dialogue.

Seams is a short film-essay which, from a subjective perspective, reflects on the issue of female oppression in a Brazilian context. Conducted by a masculine and analytical voice over, the narrative mixes interviews, with acted sequences and a wide variety of archive footage, making use of the found footage technique. Thus, while the film proposes to perform an affectionate portrait of the director's grandmother and her four sisters, simultaneously brings up a reflection that transcends the universe of the enunciating subject and reaches the social world: the sexism in Brazilian society.

Through this perspective, the research issue we are dedicated to questions, through *Seams*, how do voice over, found footage and film-essay are put in relationship, as well as behave as autonomous creative practices, in works that reuse archive footage.

We come from the hypothesis that the approximation between these two elements is given, mainly, through the procedure of editing, finding -Itself frequently connected with the notion of collage, "a creative technique that is also a critical method" (WEES, 1993, p. 52, our translation). By being "ruled by the principles of decentralization and dispersion, collage 'is dominated by multiple positions of observation: each fragment is mobile and open to interaction with a multitude of semantic, symbolic, aesthetic contexts" (ELENA, 2009, p. 217, our translation). Through practices coinciding with voice over, found footage and film-essay, archive images seem to obtain a character of fragment which allows its articulation through the editing process understood as collage.

That is because we come from the understanding that the collage can be perceived as a compositive procedure in which the editing “transcends its purely technical dimension of juxtaposition of shots to reach an aesthetic dimension that presupposes an evident urge to emphasize the heterogeneity of the materials used, of making them come in conflict, of establishing between them a dialectic relationship (VAQUERO; LÓPEZ, 2009, p. 26, our translation). In other words, although we recognize that all editing presupposes a certain aesthetic dimension, generally it seeks to make invisible, rather than reinforcing, the connection between shots. Collage, as we will see, will go against that.

Interested in understanding the procedures of editing *Seams* through those three elements – the reflection around the found footage technique; the discussion around voice over; and the study on form and characteristics of film-essay – we will analyze the work through a formal and analytical investigation of certain sequences of the film, preceded from a decoupage. Through that, we intend to check how editing, understood by the perspective of collage, puts such elements in relation and contributes for the discursive construction of the film. We intend, in a first moment, to reflect on collage as one of the types of editing for found footage films. Then, we seek to perceive the use of voice over as an editing procedure, through the exploration of the concept of metacritical voice. With this background in sight, we will leave for a comprehension of *Seams* as a film-essay, constituted by verbal commentary and editing understood as collage.

From found footage to collage

Black and white archive images. Scene 1: man leaving the woods. Scene 2: in American shot, a man on his back with a shotgun and a machete on his back. Scene 3: the man shoots an alligator, which falls in the water of a lake in front of him.

Image 1 - Frames from the film *Seams*



Source: Reproduction.

Scene 4: man poses for the camera with a proud image, crouched, holding the gun with the dead alligator ahead of him. Scene 5: professional old photograph, gathering seven men, all wearing formal attire and mustaches. Scene 6: two men cut a tree trunk with axes.

Image 2 - *Frames* from the film *Seams*



Source: Reproduction.

Scene 7: man breaks tree stub on the floor with an axe. Scene 8: agile panoramic scene from right to left of a man riding a horse trying to lasso a calf, running in front of him. Scene 9: three men holding guns, one of them shoots an alligator in front of him.

Image 3 - *Frames from the film Seams*

Source: Reproduction.

Scene 10: ceramic jars over a table in fast motion, the flowers are shaking. Scene 11: a two-year-old boy leans in a fence, stands, turns and points towards the camera. Scene 12: Small plane taxing.

Image 4 - *Frames from the film Seams*

Source: Reproduction.

Scene 13: 10-year-old boy showering naked in a big faucet, on the yard. Scene 14: general shot of a plane taking off.

Image 5 - *Frames from the film Seams*

Source: Reproduction.

Seams makes wide use of the found footage technique, here understood as a procedure that guarantees the performance to use “mass media with their infinite supply of images waiting to be ripped from their context and reinserted in collage films, where they will be recognized as fragments that still carry the marks of their mediatic reality” (WEES, 1993, p. 46, our translation). In this exercise of repossession, the stolen images – those extracted from their original place –, despite not abandoning completely their semantic contexts where they were generated, allow themselves to play other roles and generally gain new meanings. In other words, in a synthetic form, found footage is the name of the cinematographic technique that uses other materials, originally produced with other ends.

William Wees (1993) proposes a distinction between three types of found footage editing: compilation, collage and appropriation. With that, the author suggests that the different methodologies of using the technique of found footage are related with distinct paradigms of artistic practice. Even though the categorization proposed by the author runs the risk of being reductionist, it seems to us like an important starting point for indicating the predominant methodologies in the construction of films made partially or entirely with archive materials. Through Wees, we understand that:

1. With the compilation methodology, found footage would be seeking archive footage with strong factual character, capable of associating to reality and inducing a documentarizing ²reading as in conventional documentary films, supported by a realistic aesthetic tendency.
2. With the collage methodology, the found footage would manage the archives less by its character of document, rather than for their creative possibilities built by their understanding as image leading to an aesthetic reading, as avant-garde films, supported by a modern aesthetic.
3. With the methodology of appropriation, found footage would handle archive images due to their conditions of simulacrum, to its capability

2 For more information on modes of reading, we suggest “The issue of the audience: a semiopragmatic approach” by Roger Odin.

of falsely imitate the reality, directing to a simply artistic reading, as in music clips, sustained by a post-modern aesthetic.

Through what we exposed, it becomes evident that the collage is different from traditional editing because it is one of the specific methodologies of editing for films performed through the technique of found footage. Wees defends that the collage methodology “has the best potential to criticize, defy, and possibly subvert the power of the images produced, and distributed, through the corporative media (WEES, 1993, p. 33, our translation).

It is believed that all black and white images from Seams, shot in 1930, are part of the collection of the *Ford Motor Company*, incorporated by the American National Archive in 1963? (MACHADO; BLANK, 2015). The original intention of the images, therefore, was to make an advertisement of Henry Ford and his company in the context of the frustrated project of development in the city of Fordlandia, a company town in Pará, next to the Tapajós river, built to explore the rubber from the rubber tree.

Well, if they are advertisement images linked to the institutional image of a multinational company, in its original context, most of the shots described above would praise the image of the man as an explorer. The virile image of a man capable of exploring inhospitable paths within the woods, dealing with fierce animals and protect himself from them, extract natural resources from trees, handling firearms safely and domesticating field animals. However, Karim seem to make use of the methodology of collage from found footage, which subverts the originally planted meanings and promotes a critical and analytical posture in relation to images and their uses.

Even if we consider the primordial role operated by the voice over at this moment, it is perceptible that, by agglutinating in a dynamic montage, with short shots and straight cuts, visual signs that link the naturalized violence employed by a group of men, the collage brings a criticism to sexism in Brazil. That is reaffirmed when the contrast is generated with shots 11 and 13, in which boys – read as “projects of men”

– try to stand or take care of themselves with freedom in an oppressing environment. The methodology of collage on found footage reaffirms the character of editing as a violent operation, using that in their own favor.

We come from the presupposition that the essence of film has their roots based on fragmentation and heterogeneity. Editing is, therefore, a primordial tool to organize the discontinuity from which cinematographic narratives arise. However, “precisely the tradition of editing consisted in concealing the violence of its own operation, to offer an appearance without crashes in continuity (...)”. Editing, little by little, became invisible. “As they developed the codes of traditional editing that work in an opposed sense to collage: we can characterize them in this sense as an intention of dissimulate the surroundings and hide the disparity of elements” (WEIN- RICHTER, 2009, p. 54, our translation) By dissimulating the surroundings of the shots, the violence of the operation of editing is apparently reduced in favor of an acritical and submissive reception on the behalf of the viewer. Collage will take the opposite meaning of this movement.

Therefore, collage films dismount or remount their archive materials, in a way to make difficult a reception of images both as proof of reality (as foreseen by the compilation film³) as well as images that do not have any relationship with reality (as foreseen by the film of appropriation⁴). In essay-films that work with collage “there is a constant questioning, or skepticism, about the meaning of archive images” THUR, 2008, p. 171), in general, materialized by an analytical and critical voice over.

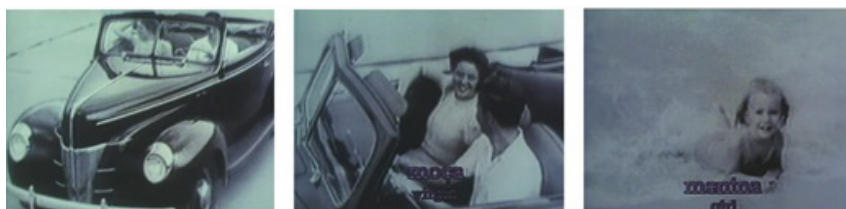
3 In the path of Wees (1993), we understand the compilation film as a product performed through the technique of found footage with editing through the methodology of compilation. In other words, what interests the movie of compilation is the research and the order of archive materials with an eminent documental value. In general, historic documentaries that handle an expressive amount of archive materials as discursive proof can be considered compilation movies.

4 Also through Wees (1993), we perceive the film of appropriation as a product made through the technique of found footage, with editing through the methodology of appropriation. In other words, what matters to the film of appropriation is the character of artifice of the image found and rearranged through editing. Normally, music videoclips that use a wide amount of archive material, as sensory images disconnected from its original semantic context, can be understood as appropriation films

Metacritic voice over and collage

Archive images in black and white. Scene 1: a young couple riding in a road with a convertible car. Scene 2: in a closer shot, they look at each other and smile, as the man drives. Scene 3: the sea waves touch the feet of a girl lying next to the sea, resting on her elbows and looking at the camera.

Image 6 - Frames from the film Seams



Source: Reproduction

Scene 4: in a slow panoramic from left to right, the camera reveals women with different ages sitting in the bleachers. One of them holds an umbrella. Scene 5: a man handles what it seems to be an old camera, in medium shot. Scene 6: a group of smiley women look at the camera.

Image 7 – Frames from the film Seams



Source: Reproduction

Scene 7: three women walk, arm in arm, showing their dresses and feathered hats. Scene 8: in a small group, women greet each other by

shaking hands. Scene 9: two women walk by the pool until both of them toss a piece of bread in the water.

Image 8 – Frames from the film Seams



Source: Reproduction

Scene 10: two women dance together in a saloon, holding hands. Scene 11: a girl smiles, taking her hand to her lips and taking it off afterwards. Scene 12: two teenagers, one beside the other, smile and hold flowers.

Image 9 – Frames from the film Seams



Source: Reproduction

Scene 13: two men in a stage. Scene 14: in a general shot, we see a ballet class for girls, while a nun watches them crossing the scene. Scene 15: a few boys having fun sitting in the stairs, while one of them kiss his friend on the cheek.

Image 10 - Frames from the film *Seams*

Source: Reproduction

In *Seams*, the archives are used less for their character of historic evidence rather than the capability of generating spaces of reflection and critic involvement in the relationship with the verbal commentary. Archives do not completely abandon their original meanings, but also obtain others in the new arrangement. While we see each one of the sequences shot described above, we see the following narration in voice over:

In Portuguese, *moça* means virgin. *Menina* means girl. *Mulher* means woman. *Coroa* means spinster, but it also means crown. *Veado* means deer, which also means faggot, which also means queer. *Sapatão* means big shoes, but it also means dyke, which means queer. In the northeast region of Brazil, the word lesbian is almost never used. *Puta* means whore. It is the worst thing anyone can say to a woman if they want to insult her. If anyone wants to insult a man, they call him a *veado*, which means faggot. Every girl is afraid to be called a whore (*puta*). I feared the word *veado* since I was little. (*Seams*, Karim Aïnouz, 1993)

Therefore, the voice over – understood as an extradiegetic voice belonging to the narrator – is allowed to work in an ironic sense, which also means sarcastic, which also means critic. The narration proposes a game between what's explicit and what's implicit, in a way that it does not necessarily say what they want to mean as a whole. That discursive capacity is the product of careful investigation of meanings permeated both by visual signs, which build something that is socially understood as acceptable masculinities and femininities in archive material, and

by words that have their multiple meanings dissected by the narrator, superposed to the images with the intention of generating collisions that will subvert their original meanings. Therefore, on one hand, we have that the technique of found footage, by incorporating previously filmed material in new works, “critically investigates the history behind the image, discursively incorporated in its story of production, circulation and consumption (ZRYD, 2003, p. 42, our translation). In other words, to Zryd, found footage is a meta-historic form that criticizes the narrative standards behind the story. On the other hand, the use of voice over guarantees to the creator the possibility of “commenting through a critical distancing, analyzing and interpreting visual resources (RASCAROLI, 2009, p. 52, our translation). Thus, the voice over behaves as a privileged channel so that a precise (re)exam of archive images employed is performed.

The scene 15 of the sequence described is followed by the narration: “I feared the word *vado* since I was little”. Considering the source of the images, the original intent of scene 15 was also to make an advertisement of Henry Ford and his company. When we take the scene from its original context and reintegrate it to a new semantic context, through the technique of found footage, Karim impedes us of linking such image to its original advertisement purposes.

Decontextualizing, the scene is similar to a domestic video, where we can imagine a father filming his son surrounded by friends, sitting in the school staircase. The camera influences the kiss between two boys: like a game, as something that cannot be done. as something that would “harm” the image of the one being kissed. When recycling this plan, Karim seems to bring up, therefore, a criticism to the way advertisement images materialize the demonstrations of affection between two boys. *Found footage*. Criticism.

Simultaneously, we hear a young male voice say: “I feared the word *vado* since I was little”. The voice over seems to lean over the picture we have before our eyes to take another look at it -reexamine it, re-evaluate it. The conclusion the director gets is shared with us through

verbal commentary. This exercise is evident to the enunciating subject that would not fit any display of affection between two boys, unless it is covered by the logic of the game and the unlikely. Especially if one of them imagined feeling sexually attracted by the same sex, as if it is the case of the subject narrating the film. Metacritic voice over. Criticism of the criticism.

In this context, the performance of a criticism of the criticism – verbal commentary of the voice over examining the visual archives of found footage, which depreciate the discursive standards of mass media – guarantees the conception of metacritic voice over (RASCAROLI, 2009). “This critical distance is frequently similar to this positioning of the filmmaker text, which distances from behind the camera, its creative function, and becomes a Metacritic – of images, of the society that produces it, of their own text and its role in it” (RASCAROLI, 2009, p. 52, our translation).

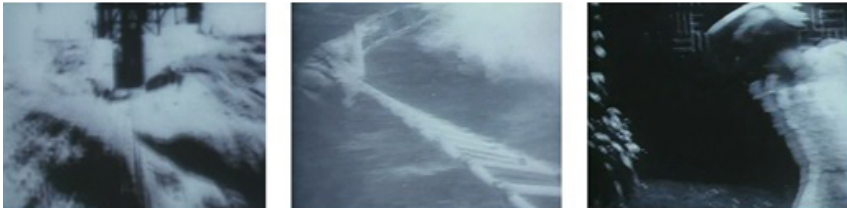
Thus, the Metacritic voice over analyzes “methodically without method” (ADORNO, 2003, p. 30) the structures of meaning that sustain the visual discourse of archive images of the found footage film. In other words, through Adorno’s perspective: on one hand, the essay must challenge the priority of method as essence of thought; on the other, the essay must not give up precise analytical procedures intrinsic to the reading performed along with the object analyzed, allowing it to be fertilized by it.

Therefore, performers, “when they superpose a commentary, they distance themselves from the images and examine them, almost ‘finding’ and presenting them again, as preexisting objects” (RASCAROLI, 2009, p. 52, our translation). Therefore, the Metacritic voice over is presented to us as a mechanism of editing, essentially. A mechanism that is capable of investigating images through peculiar procedures, which, although they are not supported by a specific method, work with a singular and analytical experience of filmmakers with their own images. Which orient the way critical thinking behaves and materializes through voice.

Seams: collage and film-essay

Archive images in black and white. Scene 1: subjective camera from a cable car approaching the station. Scene 2: subjective camera from a helicopter, in low-angle shot, of a man holding onto his ledge while the helicopter flies. Scene 3: a girl doing a cartwheel.

Image 11 - Frames from the film Seams



Source: Reproduction

Scene 4: a girl doing the cartwheel (repetition of scene 3). Scene 5: women with long white dresses and hats, running among the bushes towards the camera. Scene 6: the same women jump a fence and run.

Image 12 - Frames from the film Seams

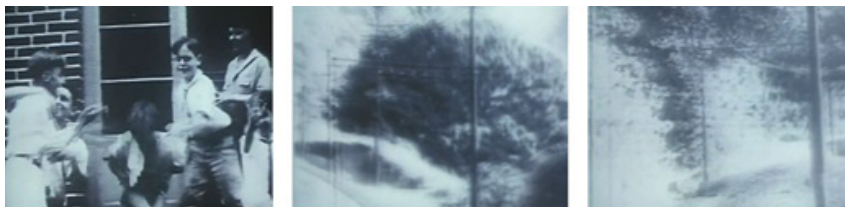


Source: Reproduction

Scene 7: 10-year-old children “playing” in a staircase; one of the boys lifts up the skirt of a girl that tries to stop him and runs, embarrassed; while she runs, she gets slapped in the bum by another boy. Scene 8: subjective camera from a train in movement registers the field ahead.

Scene 9: another scene of subjective camera from a moving train registering the path ahead.

Scene 13 - Frames from the film *Seams*



Source: Reproduction

Scene 10: 3-year-old boy, dressed as a prince with a cape, gives a kiss to someone off camera; the action repeats itself more than once. Scene 11: two men ballroom dancing together. Scene 12: explosion.

Image 14 - Frames from the film *Seams*



Source: Reproduction

As we see the scenes described above, we hear:

My nightmare: Zélia looks at me and asks: “You are 26 years old. Don’t you have a girlfriend?”. First, I lean over, look at her and say: “I can’t hear you”. When she asks the second time, I answer: “No, I don’t. Not exactly!”. I also say: “Life is so complicated”. (*Seams*, Karim Aïnouz, 1993, our translation).

As a film-essay, *Seams* fills the “gap understood between subjective speculation and social history” (ARTHUR, 2008, p. 171, our translation).

The short film presents a critical and personal reflection about a set of questions surrounding sexism in Brazilian society. This reflection does not propose to be “anonymous or collective”, but original from an authorial discourse, materialized on the Metacritic voice over of the narrating subject, which approaches the issue of the subject not to present an ostensive factual report (the field of traditional documentary), but to offer an openly personal reflection, profound and instigating”. Under this perspective, as a film-essay built through collage, “found footage played a decisive role in its development, since it created a visual platform establishing discursive connections between events which may seem disconnected (ARTHUR, 2008, p. 171, our translation)

Karim comes from his own personal universe and the subjective experience of his great-aunts to make a portrait of them and their affectionate relationships, marked by servility and by the abandonment of men that went through their lives. Even though he grew surrounded by women, the environment he lived in was marked by sexism and oppression. In an environment with such characteristics, there is no space for other types of masculinity, other than the man that naturally grows up to be the “alfa-male”.

The methodology of collage coming from found footage evidences that, when it contrasts unequal elements, there is no space for boys like the scene 10 of the sequence described: princes, delicate and affectionate, characteristics destined only to girls. Let alone men that dance together, wrapping their arms around the other’s waist, like on scene 11. There only seems to have space for those boys that, since childhood, deal with the opposite sex as a submissive body, even if by the logic of “play”, as we’ve seen on scene 7, where the girl is embarrassed. In order to survive an environment like that, the only thing left to the gay man is the denial of his own affection. And the men dance, while the narrator denies: “No, I don’t [have a girlfriend]. Not exactly!”. However, the desire may be to explode (himself or this universe), as represented by scene 12.

When reaching the essay aesthetic of cinema, through collage and voice over, Seams operates a reflective transit between the open homosexuality of the director, in relation to his family world of affection, and the social world, where there is possibility of identification and dialogue with equally oppressed viewers, in a large spectrum. Through collage, the images of Fordlandia are freed “from the logic of advertisement and industrial capitalism” and “presented through an intimate perspective that has nothing to do with the context of production, and, thus, gain a poetic and political dimension” (MACHADO; BLANK, 2015, p. 89). Through the voice over, the critical reflection gains a body through the possibility of returning to see and examine the images employed, as well as the collisions between the sound and image track, which do not dissimulate the outlines between these sounds and images.

It is tempting to quote the use of found footage and collage as endemic for the essay, given the great number of films that count with juxtapositions of archive images and verbal commentary in the present. However, if essays are invariably heterogeneous in materials, their segmented relations and sound-image tend to imply collision or dialectic criticism. (ARTHUR, 2003, p. 59, our translation)

The discursive critic of the film essay of collage is supported by the counterposition and contradiction of the heterogeneous materials used and the image-sound disfunction reinforced by the commentary in voice over. When dealing with the relationship between collage and film essay, Vaquero and Lopez point that, in this context, images are treated by their residual character, from which “it is possible to find traces of the uses that are given in the past, put in evidence and questioned through the present”. The intention of collage, therefore, is to “remark the edges, show from where the images can proceed, as well as the viewer with new positions that support unheard meanings, relativizing, thus, the function and position of the image in today’s society (facing the rule of the dominant discourse)” (VAQUERO; LÓPEZ, 2009, p. 29). If the collage of film-essay allows this recycling of images from past found footage, the

comment in voice over allows essentially the recontextualization and criticism of these images in the present.

Final Considerations

Through the path outlined so far, we think we have evidenced the approximation between voice over, found footage and film essay is given, mainly, through the editing procedure known as collage, in works that recycle archive images. In addition to that, we understand that, as autonomous creative practices: 1) collage can be understood as methodology of editing of the technique of found footage; 2) the Metacritic voiceover performs a criticism of the criticism when it reexamines the recycled archive images; 3) the film-essay of collage supports its critical reflection simultaneously in the contrast of found footage images collected and in the division between sound and image, reinforced by the presence of narration.

Therefore, collage is the responsible not only for putting in creative relation the voice over, found footage and film-essay, but for guaranteeing that these elements potentialize their narrative roles through a discursive and critic textual construction intended by the work, when they contrast archive images in their diversity. Images treated by the film essay through the perspective of a “fragmented aesthetic” (ALMEIDA, 2017), which understands not only as residual images from another time, marked by the semantic context in which they were created, however, free to criticize their original circumstance of production and consumption and generating new meanings in other contexts.

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