

Acropolis Cinema
presents:



January 29 - February 4, 2021 - Acropolis Virtual Cinema

ABOUT THE FILM

Frank Beauvais's intimate essay film assembles excerpts from the 400-plus films the French director watched over a four-month period of seclusion in 2016. On the soundtrack, Beauvais speaks of the breakup that led to his retreat, the estranged father with whom he bonded over cinema just before his death, and the symptoms of our current cultural climate that make pressing on an act of resistance. Beauvais's montage—composed of both international classics and obscurities—alights upon small but specific details, reframing otherwise incidental images into an indelible and immensely moving reflection on life, love, and loss. (KimStim)

75 min. | France | 2019

Ne croyez surtout pas que je hurle by James Lattimer

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For a film that reveals its formal conceit from the outset and never deviates, *Ne croyez surtout pas que je hurle* is remarkably complicated. Frank Beauvais' first feature-length work opens with a simple intertitle, stating that he watched over 400 films between April and October 2016 and that the footage to be seen is taken from them. What follows is exactly that, with said footage shorn of its original sound and augmented only by a voiceover spoken by Beauvais and occasional pieces of black leader. Yet describing the combined effects of this unadorned set-up is exhilaratingly complicated. Essay film, documentary and collage; solitude, helplessness and anxiety: the personal and the collective; cinema itself—all are taken up, refracted, and bent back by the merciless flickering of the screen.

Beauvais quickly explains how he moved to rural Alsace from Paris seven years previously with his then-partner to be closer to nature and take better advantage of their income. But the relationship ended some seven months ago now, and, without a driver's license, he is effectively stranded there, with only his mother and stepfather on hand for fortnightly shopping trips and Sunday meals. In such social, cultural, political, and geographic isolation, cinema proves a most seductive companion, with Beauvais thus watching up to five films a day. Yet while all these moving pictures may distract, they do not ultimately soothe, even as he begins to make plans to return to Paris. For the images and impressions passing before his eyes are matched by the others that unfold in his mind, the unpleasant memories and horrific events occurring out in the world; panic and anxiety can strike at any time.

The images he saw in 2016 are also those seen by the viewer, albeit only partially. While

the films Beauvais watched during that period do indeed form the visual accompaniment to his account of it, each appears once and never in more than fleeting fashion, meaning that identifying any individual film is no small task, even after consulting the lengthy filmography which makes up the bulk of the end credits. With no single snippet lingering on the screen for more than a few seconds, the resulting flow of images invariably proceeds at such velocity that merely processing all the disparate scenes shown is a struggle, to say nothing of digesting them; it's an incessant stream of visual impressions that comes to feel increasingly like a bombardment.

A similarly unflagging forward motion is also employed by Beauvais' voiceover, whose soul-searching, self-reflective narrative contains enough nuance, digression, references, rhetorical figures, and wordplay that processing its full richness is equally impossible in one sitting, even for those not dependent on subtitles. If *Ne croyez surtout pas que je hurle* is an unusually writerly film as such (the voiceover has been published as a book in France), the full impact of its text primarily unfolds from how the viewer is made to consume it—less a collective act of listening (or reading) than a second exercise in deliberate overstimulation, this one verbal. Image and voice are thus tied together at a structural level first and foremost, two relentless delivery systems rattling along in parallel, with black leader as visual paragraph breaks.

The ways the image and voice interact provide a third, equally demanding channel to be tracked. A verbal idea can be directly taken up as an image, such as the two different shots of villages that flash up as Beauvais talks about the respective places he and his mother moved to; it can be linked to an image via some sort of established symbol, like the police truncheon being slapped against a hand that appears as Beauvais talks of those in power; or it can be accompanied by images that seem entirely unrelated, such as when news of his Portuguese friends' visit is paired with a shot of a man sitting in front of a gravestone. The porous boundaries of each of these categories and the sheer speed of verbal and visual delivery permits multiple connections to be made at any one time, keeping the connection between voice and image in constant, manic flux, dancing back and forth between the literal, the metaphorical, and the arbitrary.

Although some may resist or resent being made to feel so overwhelmed, there is considerable method behind Beauvais' decision to produce this state in the viewer, whether in terms of identification or broader spectatorial concerns. If Beauvais' state of mind in 2016 was marked by all the images bouncing through his head, unable to be properly processed, the act of watching his film mirrors this sensation, actively conjuring up the mental overload engendered by anxiety and depression in addition to narrating it. Parallels between the progression of Beauvais' story and the viewer's position also present themselves: just as he gradually finds ways of dealing with his situation, albeit with considerable ups and downs, before finally escaping to Paris, those watching must also find a way of coping with the audiovisual onslaught, a process that equally moves between helplessness, frustration, and eventual acceptance. And while the film already succeeds in immersing the viewer in a highly specific reality—the everyday life of a fortysomething gay man in the provinces is hardly standard cinematic fodder—parts of

Beauvais' musings and the mood the film crafts around them also forge links to the collective. For who hasn't felt dread and powerlessness at the same things happening in the world outside that Beauvais struggles with, whether large-scale migrations, political protests, or terrorist attacks, they too represented and received as unrelenting floods of images?

This push and pull between the individual and the collective is also taken up by the other key theme of *Ne croyez surtout pas que je hurle*: cinema. When Beauvais talks of losing all desire to do anything other than watching other people's films, it's also an accurate description of the general cinephile impulse, if perhaps an extreme manifestation of it. And when he goes on to say that he sees these films as mirrors rather than windows, it's hard to argue with him, given that their quantity alone is already a reflection of his mental state at that time. Yet the films which make up Beauvais' own one reflect much more than that, whether in terms of how he sees himself or the medium in general.

Beauvais' subjectivity informs both the choice of the films themselves, a personal canon which runs the gamut from the "classic" (Lubitsch, Renoir, De Sica) to the obscure (Dušan Hanák, Kurt Steinwendner, Patricio Kaulen) across various cinematographies and eras, and the scenes shown from them. With the fragmented state in which the films appear already serving to drain them of their normal distinguishing features, he smears them together further via the motifs he extracts or erases from them. For someone who equates his viewing with continually examining his reflection, Beauvais' film contains a striking lack of faces, as if his likeness were better represented through the blur of hands, feet, bodies, crowds, ornaments, and scenes of nature. If cinema is a mirror here, it is one of stubborn distortion.

And maybe the impossibility of finding your (an) image is what *Ne croyez surtout pas que je hurle* is ultimately about, for even the above motifs begin to become unstable the harder one looks at them and the more frequently they appear: a hand can cover a face, but also open a door or slice through a vein; people gather in fear, in joy, or just because others are doing the same; nature is solace, threat, as well as impassivity itself. There are images, there are words, there are the thoughts that connect them and all create meaning, but none are sufficient on their own, regardless of whether you're describing cinema or the mind. Perhaps the real assertion here is that they're one and the same. ♦



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